

Red Snow

A Doc Savage Adventure
#38

Kenneth Robeson
[Lester Dent]
1935

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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.

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FIGHT ANYONE, DARE EVERYTHING—SEEKING
EXCITEMENT AND PERILOUS ADVENTURE!

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RED SNOW

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A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE

BY KENNETH ROBESON

RED SNOW

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Chapter 1

MYSTERY IN SCARLET

AS far as was ever learned, a Seminole Indian alligator hunter named Duck-With-No-Wings was the first to see the Red Snow. The first to see it, that is, and live to discuss it later.

The Red Snow had appeared before, and had been seen, it developed in the course of time, but the witnesses had been victims of the scarlet horror and had not been heard from again. Nor had their bodies been found. It was very fantastic and quite inexplicable.

In the case witnessed by Duck-With-No-Wings, the victims were riding in a canvas boat, one of the collapsible kind which hunters carry in their automobiles. Duck-With-No-Wings saw the boat pull across an open patch of water in the Everglades and into a black gullet of a creek which ran under the interlacing mass of swamp vegetation.

The Seminole alligator hunter admired the boat. Then he noted that the occupants—they numbered two—seemed to be in a great hurry. They were stripped to underwear shorts—except that one had a small package slung about his neck by a string. They were drenched with perspiration. They looked back often.

Duck-With-No-Wings knew the signs. He had seen before fugitives from the law flee into the swamp, and they had acted thus. The Seminole drew back out of sight and watched the boat vanish into the swamp.

Some five minutes later, Duck-With-No-Wings was looking at the muddy trail of a bull 'gator when he gave a start which was very violent, considering that he was a member of a people noted for their command of facial expression. He ensconced himself behind a cypress.

The two half-naked men had appeared again. They were running now, sloughing madly through the morass, struggling out their hearts in the hopeless tangle. Then Duck-With-No-Wings saw an interesting thing.

One of the fleeting men paused beside a tree which was dead, and from which the bark was peeling. He reached up and removed the small package which was slung around his neck. This, he shoved under a scab of bark, concealing it. Then they ran on.

Duck-With-No-Wings continued to watch. He saw no sign of pursuers. But, not long afterward, he saw something which caused him to drop his rifle, his dearest possession, into the slime underfoot. And that meant he was very surprised.

There was no cloud in the sky. It was a very warm December day in Florida. Yet snow had started falling.

This snow was not white. It was not even a dusty color. Its hue was as red as blood.

ALMOST any one would have been surprised, and Duck-With-No-Wings was no exception. He stared upward, his round copper face distorted with amazement. There was nothing at all to show from whence the Red Snow came. It seemed to materialize in the thin, warm air of the swamp.

The flakes were not falling on Duck-With-No-Wings, but they were descending close enough that he could clearly see that they were flakes. He had seen snow, of course, and he had not the slightest doubt that this stuff was red snow.

About that time, a series of awful screams began coming from the spot whence had gone the two nearly naked fugitives. Their squawling was extremely hideous.

The combination of red snow and fearful shrieks made Duck-With-No-Wings decide he would rather be elsewhere. But before he fled, he ran over to the tree, under the bark of which one of the men had thrust a package.

Duck-With-No-Wings was an acquisitive soul. He drew out the package. Then he ran with great speed and did not stop until he was far away in the swamp. After a due interval, he found time to examine the package. He expected to see money, or maybe jewelry. He was disappointed, no little disgusted.

There were many wrappings of oiled paper around the object in the package. Removed, these disclosed a cube, less than two inches in diameter, of a substance the nature of which defied Duck-With-No-Wings. It was red—a dull, unimpressive carmine.

Duck-With-No-Wings had seen the sealing wax which they sometimes put on letters at the Indian Agency, and he at first decided this stuff was sealing wax. Then he thought it over, and was not so sure. The man who had hidden the stuff had acted as if it were extremely valuable.

Duck-With-No-Wings decided to keep the red substance and, if it was valuable, market it. But he let the marketing endeavors wait. He was still a little terrified by the red snow which he had seen. He talked about it some, but after the other Seminoles began to ridicule him, he kept silent.

Duck-With-No-Wings sat much by himself, thinking of the day when he would go to one of the white man's towns and perhaps get much money from the red lump which he now carried in the pouch around his own neck. It was nice to think of such things.

THE police departments in various American cities were doing some thinking about this time, too. In Cleveland, they were thinking about what could have happened to Valdemar Svelaska.

Valdemar Svelaska was a plump, pleasant-looking man who, years ago, had designed war planes for Germany; but now he was an American citizen, and perhaps the greatest designer of aircraft, as well as the owner of a large plane factory.

He had disappeared, had Valdemar Svelaska. His family insisted he had gone rabbit hunting with his dog. He had simply not been heard from again.

There was a farmer who told of seeing a cloud of what looked like red snow fall upon the portion of his field where it was thought Valdemar Svelaska might have gone rabbit hunting. But this farmer was known to be something of a spiritualist, a fellow

who frequently claimed he had seen manifestations. No one gave his story a great deal of attention.

It was thought that the famous airplane designer might have suffered amnesia and wandered away.

H. U. Summervane Lawmer was the next one to disappear. Lawmer was a gentleman who had the right to place numerous letters designating university degrees after his name, and he had just been appointed to the chair of chemical research in one of the nations most erudite universities. He was visiting in South Carolina.

After taking off in his private plane, flying alone, H. U. Summervane Lawmer was not seen again.

A fisherman reported seeing a cloud of reddish substance in the sky, and said this seemed to fall toward the earth and disperse, as if it were snow melting.

Now it happened that this fisherman was a notorious liar who was always seeing things, usually sea serpents. No one credited his story.

This was unfortunate. The other witness had been a farmer who saw visions. The second witness was a confirmed liar. So the significance of their stories was entirely missed, and thereby was also missed a clue which might have saved the world much terror and grief.

In the next week, five more men vanished. All were, colloquially speaking, "big shots"; one was an international banker, another a famous mechanical engineer, the third a United States senator, the fourth a noted manufacturer of automobiles, and the fifth an extremely brilliant young undersecretary in the United States War Department.

Such is the phlegmatic nature of the American public that these disappearances did not gain a great deal of attention. No one had seen any more red snow.

No one suspected there was a connection between the disappearances. No one dreamed that the disappearances had a profound importance, that they were of a magnitude vital beyond any importance of the separate individuals themselves.

And then Doc Savage came to Florida.

Chapter 2

THE TRUNK SNATCHERS

DOC SAVAGE saw the two fruit peddlers when they first drove up and stopped before the Hotel Biscayneville, the conservative and not overly large hostelry where he had registered. It was some moments before he suspected anything. Then, when he did, it was just a little too late.

The peddlers and their one-horse wagons were very ordinary looking; scores like them ranged the streets of Miami, peddling cocoanuts, grapefruit, and oranges. Neither was it suspicious that the two drivers should advance and begin talking. They might have been disputing over routes.

They were not. But it was not immediately that Doc Savage became aware of that.

The two drivers were stocky black fellows. However, their lips were not thick and both wore colored sun glasses of the type not at all uncommon in Florida. These latter two facts were destined to take on much significance.

Doc Savage neglected to give the peddlers the attention they deserved, because he was interested in a group of half a dozen young men who stood in front of the hotel. Two of these carried large press cameras. The others had pads of copy paper stuffed in their pockets. They all looked indignant.

They were newspaper reporters and photographers. From where he stood in his room, behind a Venetian blind, Doc Savage could not be seen by the journalists. He did not want to be seen. He wished heartily that the newspaper reporters and photographers would go away. He wished that they were not even aware he was in Florida.

Doc had tried hard enough to arrive in Miami unobtrusively, but an attendant at the airport where he had left his plane had tipped off the gentlemen of the press, and they had descended like a locust swarm.

The fact that Doc had insisted he was in Miami for nothing more spectacular than to conduct scientific experiments whereby it might be possible to eliminate mosquitoes by spreading a peculiar insect disease fatal only to mosquitoes, had not satisfied the newspaper men.

Doc Savage, rumor had it, was a man who walked always in the shadow of peril and excitement, and the reporters refused to believe he was in Florida for anything so prosaic as scientific experiments.

Doc Savage, the reporters knew, was a man who was devoting his life to the often thankless, always dangerous, and sometimes seemingly mad, task of righting wrongs, of aiding the oppressed, and of—strangely enough—not exactly punishing evildoers, but of causing things to happen to them which not infrequently moved them to change their ways.

Furthermore, Doc Savage was supposed to be something of a miracle man, a muscular marvel and a mental wizard. Practically every act of Doc's was supposed to

be good newspaper copy. That was why the scribes were indignant. Doc had refused to interview them.

Doc Savage did not like publicity. It was distasteful, for he was a genuinely modest man. Sometimes, it was dangerous.

Doc Savage took his eyes from the newspaper men and glanced at the two peddlers. His gaze became fixed. Doc Savage had strange eyes that were like pools of flake-gold, and now tiny winds seemed to stir the flakes briskly. He whirled and leaped to his hand bag. He dug out a pair of binoculars. Back at the window, he focused the lenses on the conversing peddlers.

By intensive study, Doc Savage had learned to do so many things, that he was sometimes considered to have slightly supernatural capabilities. Among other things, he could read lips. He read them now through the powerful binoculars.

The two peddlers were not speaking English, but a foreign dialect. This tongue was one which required use of the lips in forming many words. Moreover, the language was one which Doc had studied.

“The bronze man’s baggage will be here soon,” said one peddler. “We will act then.”

DOC SAVAGE held no doubts about himself being the subject of conversation. He gave the focus screw of the binoculars a slight twist.

“There must be no slip,” said the second of the two peddlers, speaking the same foreign tongue. “Our own lives and the lives of many others depend on the outcome of the next five minutes.”

“It is true,” agreed the other. “It is even possible that the destiny of much of the world rests with our success or failure.”

Doc Savage did not move; his unusually regular bronze features did not alter expression, but into the hotel room there penetrated a weird sound, a not unmusical trilling which ran up and down a vagrant scale, a sound distinctly inspiring—unnatural, fantastic. It might have been the filtering of a wind through a denuded forest, or the call of an exotic tropical bird. Perhaps the most startling feature was the way the sound seemed to come from everywhere in the room, yet from no definite spot.

This sound was a peculiar characteristic of Doc Savage, a thing he did unconsciously when his thought processes were particularly agitated. Just now, it meant that he was surprised. He had encountered many fantastic situations. But this one was unique.

Two shabby fruit peddlers talking as if the destiny of a good part of the world depended on something they were going to do. They were quite sober about it, too. And they evidently thought no one was in earshot, so they could not be putting on a show.

A little over a score of yards distant from the peddlers, the party of newspaper men were still looking disappointed and disgusted and the cameramen were contenting themselves by taking pictures of the Hotel Biscayneville. Traffic muttered on the street; an airplane made a distant moan, and warm breezes rattled palm fronds outside the hotel window. It was a very peaceful scene.

A truck rounded the nearest corner. It was not a large truck, nor a rich-looking one. Doc Savage watched it closely. It was the vehicle which he had hired to bring his trunks, shipped ahead by several days, from the station to the hotel.

The truck pulled in to the curb and stopped, almost between the two fruit peddlers' carts. Inside its large van of a body, various suitcases and large trunks could be seen. All the pieces of luggage were plentifully smeared with hotel and steamship stickers.

Things began to happen.

ONE of the peddlers barked something in his native language. He and his fellow ran toward the truck. Both drew revolvers. There were two men in the truck, the driver and an assistant to help him wrestle baggage. Both looked at the two peddlers, then displayed excellent sense by putting their hands up as quickly and as high as they could.

"Sit very still," directed one of the peddlers.

Driver and assistant sat very still.

Doc Savage whipped away from the shuttered window, ran to his hand bag—the one from which he had taken the binoculars—and jerked up one of the flaps which separated the container into halves. This revealed five weapons which, one not knowing much about firearms, might have mistaken for automatic pistols.

Doc Savage removed one of these. Just ahead of the trigger guard, he clipped a magazine which resembled one of the reels on which film for home movie cameras is put up. Lying beside the unique weapons were five cylinders somewhat over an inch and a half thick and nearly a foot long. Doc affixed one of these to the muzzle of the oversized automatic device, by a patent coupling.

Going to the window, he lifted it without much noise. The two peddlers were searching truck driver and assistant for weapons. Doc Savage took a deliberate aim.

There was a sound as if some one had whistled and then clapped hands once in the distance. There was almost no report from the unusual gun; it was a machine pistol of Doc's own construction, the mechanism so fashioned that, unlike the ordinary type of automatic and submachine gun, it could be operated with a silencer. The whistle was made by the bullet; the clap was the sound of the slug hitting one of the peddlers.

The man who had been hit barked a surprise and jumped, slapping a hand to his thigh.

"What is it?" demanded his companion. Then there was another whistle and clap, and he, too, started and grabbed a portion of his anatomy.

The pair cackled at each other in their native speech. They stared at small holes in their clothing, where the bullets had entered. Apparently this was their first experience with a silenced gun.

Then they returned their attention to the truck driver and his assistant, finished searching the pair. Finding no weapons, they ran around to the rear of the truck to tug at the gate fastening.

They seemed to have a great deal of difficulty with the fastening. Fumbling with it appeared to make them tired. They leaned against the gate. Both brushed hands over their eyes. Then they sat down behind the truck. Both sighed. Both fell over and to all appearances went to sleep.

Doc Savage knocked the Venetian blind aside and threw a leg over the sill. His machine pistol was charged with mercy bullets, thin metal shells filled with a chemical concoction producing quick unconsciousness. They had been effective on the two strange peddlers.

Down the street, the group of newspaper men had vanished as if some one had waved a magic wand. They had seen the peddlers' guns. Now that the peddlers were down, the journalists thrust heads from behind palm boles and parked cars; one fat fellow ceased trying to make a fire hydrant serve as shelter.

Doc Savage swung out on the window sill and prepared to drop the two stories to the narrow lawn between the hotel front and the sidewalk.

The mounds of oranges, cocoanuts and grapefruit on the peddlers' carts erupted like volcanoes. From each cart, three men leaped. Their faces were black, but they were obviously not Negroes; the blackness had the shine of grease paint. Each held a sawed-off automatic shotgun.

As one man, all six leveled their shotguns at Doc Savage and began shooting.

ONCE each day since childhood, Doc Savage had forced himself to go through a routine of exercises lasting for two hours—exercises which had not only given him an amazing physique and unusually sharp senses, but had developed his thinking processes as well.

He had, for instance, made reels of motion pictures showing the encroachment of danger in all the manners he could conceive, as well as men attacking him in various fashions. He made a practice of viewing these frequently, giving himself split parts of seconds to think of a way out of whatever difficulty presented, and striving to think of a new way out each time he viewed the scenes.

He always witnessed these films in private, because the procedure usually struck others as somewhat silly. But by this device, he had schooled himself to think swiftly in pinches.

Doc was hanging from the window sill by his hands. There was not much room to swing back up. It would take a moment. Dropping to the ground would be even more foolhardy, for there was no shelter.

But there was another window below, with a window box holding flowering plants on the sill. Doc dropped.

The window box broke under his weight, fell free, spilling rich black dirt and plants. But it held the giant bronze man for an instant, long enough for him to bundle his arms about his face and dive through the glass panes into the hotel room. He landed ungracefully in a shower of glass.

Shotgun slugs clouted at what remained of the window panes. With a loud ripping, lead came completely through the thin wall of the hotel. It was a frame building, lightly

constructed, and the automatic shotguns seemed to be charged with two or three large lead slugs to the cartridge. The guns were making thunder in the street.

Doc Savage came to his feet, ran to the door, found it locked, and rammed it with a shoulder. The cheap wood panel fell off its hinges and let him through to his right. Outside, the shotguns still whooped.

From the stairway came another uproar, a grunting and squealing punctuated by irregular thumps and yells.

A pig appeared, tumbling headlong down the steps, squealing with every bump. This pig was a truly remarkable specimen of the *familia suidae*, having the legs of a dog, a scrawny body, a snout of incredible length, and a pair of ears which might well have been meant for wings.

A man followed the shote, head over heels, down the steps, yelling painfully each time he collided with a tread. The man had lean shoulders and thin hips which gave him a waspish contour, and he was attired in a fashion that was sartorially perfect—striped trousers, fawn vest and cutaway, and a dislodged silk hat kept pace with his progress down the stairs. Although it looked as if the man was being jarred hard enough to loosen his teeth, he still retained a tight grip on a slender black cane.

Pig and man slammed out on the floor at the bottom of the steps. The man sat up dazedly, then struck furiously at the pig with his cane. The shote jumped at just the right instant.

The dapper man got up, gave his cane a wrench, and it came apart, disclosing that it was a sword cane with a thin, flexible blade. He made purposefully for the strange-looking pig.

A voice bawled from up the stairs, “You touch Habeas Corpus and I’ll tear an arm off you, Ham!”

The dapper “Ham” yelled, “Monk, you come down here and you’ll get the same thing that your hog is going to get!”

This got a roar from upstairs.

“You heard me!” squawled “Monk.” “Lay off Habeas or I’ll tie knots in you!”

“The infernal hog tripped me!” Ham shouted back up the stairs. “I think my back is broken!”

“You’ll be positive it’s broken if you touch that hog!” Monk promised. “Anyhow, I saw what happened. You kicked at Habeas and fell down the stairs.”

Ham waved his sword cane and screamed, “Come down here, you missing link, you awful mistake of nature! I’ll hollow you out and stuff you with pork!”

“Just as you say, brother!” Monk bellowed, and came bounding down the stairs.

The man was a physical freak with all the characteristics of a bull ape, being hardly more than five feet in height, almost equally as wide, and with arms some inches longer than his legs. His pleasantly homely face was composed mostly of mouth.

The only stitch of clothing he wore was a sheet, out of which he had fashioned a loin cloth. Water dripped from the rusty bristles which studded his simian frame, indicating he had just jumped from a bathtub.

Both Monk and Ham seemed to see Doc Savage for the first time. They gaped at the bronze man.

“What’s the fireworks outside, Doc?” Monk demanded.

DOC SAVAGE said, “That remains to be learned,” and whipped toward the lobby and the street door.

Monk and Ham followed him, trailed by the pig, Habeas Corpus. Monk was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, and although there did not seem to be room for more than a spoonful of brains behind his low forehead, he was admittedly one of the greatest living industrial chemists. Ham was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, who was perhaps the most astute lawyer ever to pass through the portals of Harvard.

They were always quarreling, these two; no one could recall one having addressed a civil word to the other. One not knowing them could hardly conceive that they were the best of friends, that each had more than once risked his life to save the other.

Associated with Doc Savage as assistants, bound to the bronze man by a common love of excitement, was a group of five men. Monk and Ham were two members of that group.

Doc Savage, once inside the lobby, went flat on the floor as a shotgun burst slapped glass out of the large lobby window. Monk and Ham slammed down beside him. A shotgun roared again.

They took a chance and looked outside. Three of the men who had been under the fruit in the carts were using shotguns. The other three were clambering inside the baggage truck.

“They’re after your baggage, Doc!” Monk grunted.

“So it seems,” the bronze man admitted.

“Why?” asked Monk, whose voice, in repose, was small and childlike.

“I cannot imagine,” Doc replied.

Ham squinted at the bronze man. “You haven’t been cooking something up, Doc?”

“Certainly not,” Doc told him. “This came out of a clear sky. I haven’t the slightest idea of what it is about.”

Monk grunted noisily and fished inside the folds of the sheet from which he had made his breech cloth. He brought out two metallic eggs which he had grabbed when he first heard the shooting.

“I’ll lay one of these out there and see what effect it has,” he said, small-voiced.

He sailed the grenade through a window from which the glass had been shot; it hit a palm tree in just exactly such a way that it caromed under the rear of the baggage truck and burst.

The gunmen with the black grease paint on their features promptly whipped compact gas masks from under their coats and donned them.

“Hah!” Ham sneered at Monk. “A lot of good you did!”

“Hah!” Monk jeered back at him. “Watch and see!”

One of the truck attackers stepped boldly into the acrid cloud of gas fumes, seemingly confident that his mask would prove effective. He got a surprise. He seemed to double up with a great sneeze which blew the mask mouthpiece out of his teeth. An instant later—and the other two working in the truck rear began to sneeze and reel about. In their agony, they tore their masks off.

“Hah!” Monk nudged Ham. “What do you think of that? My own special product, that gas. There isn’t a mask made that is effective against it.”

“Rats,” Ham said. “Look!”

The truck attackers were running away.

THREE attackers that were blinded were helped by the three that were unaffected by Monk’s gas, and these six cooperated in carrying the two who had been dropped by Doc Savage’s mercy bullets.

Monk, greatly excited, bounded out with some idea of making an attack. The pig, Habeas Corpus, followed him.

The black-faced men whirled suddenly, firing, and Monk flopped back, but the pig, Habeas, was not so lucky. He spun over and over, obviously hit by a bullet, and began squealing.

Monk emitted an angry roar, but could do nothing, not even reach the pig. The black-faced men had a touring car waiting around the corner. They reached it, and the machine moaned away.

Still roaring, Monk lunged to his pig. He made a quick examination. Great relief came over his simian face.

“Leg nicked,” he said. “Let’s get them guys.”

Doc and his two men ran to the corner, stopped a car, ejected the surprised driver, and gave chase. But an old and entirely sufficient dodge defeated them; those in the fleeing car opened a large carton of big-headed roofing nails on the pavement, and these punctured all four tires of the pursuing machine.

Doc drove it to a service station to have the tires replaced, and they walked back to the hotel.

“One thing sure,” grumbled the small-voiced Monk, “whatever they were after, they didn’t get it.”

Ham eyed Doc Savage. “Were those fellows Negroes, Doc?”

“No,” said the bronze man. “Neither were they Americans.”

“No?” Ham fingered his sword cane.

“They all had high cheek bones and a certain set to their eyes,” Doc reminded. “That would indicate they were all of one nationality.”

The pig, Habeas Corpus, hobbled to meet them, and Monk, seizing upon his pet, bore him off for bandaging—also to dress himself, for, robed in the sheet, he was the center of all eyes.

The pig was trailed by a swarm of newspaper men and photographers, and for the next five minutes, Doc Savage was the center of a verbal mêlée as the journalists tried to get stories for their papers.

When Doc Savage explained that he had no idea who had made the attack on the baggage truck, or why it was made, they naturally did not believe him. He tried to tell them that he had come to Florida to perfect a disease fatal to mosquitoes; but this only got a laugh.

The police arrived, and Doc repeated to them the same story. He was asked if his baggage held anything of especial value, and he explained that it had been packed in New York with scientific equipment and shipped some days before, and had been lying in a Miami station since. He added that he was entirely at a loss to explain the affair.

This satisfied the police, for they had a healthy respect for the man of bronze and his methods.

The truck driver and his assistant, unharmed but shaky, carried the trunks and bags inside the Biscayneville, then departed, having had an experience which would doubtless furnish them conversation for a long time to come.

The newspaper men gave up questioning Doc Savage and went off to turn their stories in. It was a good yarn.

“There’ll be more hot stuff, as long as this Doc Savage is in town,” one scribe told his fellows. “Trouble and this Doc Savage have a way of finding each other.”

THE bronze man perched on one of the large trunks while a hotel maid swept up glass which had been shot out of the windows by the mysterious raiders. Monk and Ham waited until the maid departed, Monk had rigged his pet pig up with bandages and tied him to the bed. Then Doc Savage spoke.

“There is something behind this,” he said slowly. “Those men wanted my baggage. I do not know why. Perhaps, if we looked through the stuff, a reason might suggest itself.”

“An idea,” Monk grinned.

The bronze man began shifting the trunks about, handling their not inconsiderable weight with a casualness which gave indication of the tremendous strength in his great frame. He tipped one of the trunks on end. He became perfectly still, rigid.

His strange trilling note, the fantastic sound that ran up and down the musical scale without adhering to a tune or without seeming to come from any definite spot, came into being, persisted for a brief interval, then betook itself away into nothingness.

He put a finger on the trunk end and said, “Look!”

There was a round puncture through the metal case of the trunk, and through the wood reënforcing, a hole perhaps three-eighths of an inch across.

“Bullet!” Monk breathed.

“Must have been shot into the trunk when they were trying to get the baggage,” Ham added.

Doc Savage eased the trunk down and fitted a key in the lid.

“It is possible the raid was staged to fire this shot—rather than seize the baggage, as we concluded,” he said.

He opened the lid.

“Blazes!” Monk exploded.

There was a man inside the trunk—the body of a man, rather, for the bullet had made a wound in the center of the skull, which had not bled extensively.

Chapter 3

RED IN THE RING

THE dead man was tall—they removed him from the trunk to examine, that they might be sure he was dead—and he wore clothes which were wrinkled, yet tailored of expensive cloth and not badly worn. He had a bald spot on the top of his head, back of where the bullet had entered; there was a typical Florida tan on his face, the tan of a native, and over the bridge of his nose was a pale strip, while other pale streaks ran directly back from the corners of his eyes to his ears.

“Wore shell-rimmed glasses,” Monk said slowly. “Wonder where they are.”

The glasses, it developed, were inside the man’s coat. In one of his pockets was a small flashlight: in the other pocket was a flat bottle and an object wrapped in wax paper.

Doc Savage uncorked the bottle, tested it with his nostrils, and said, “Water.” He unwrapped the wax paper and found a peanut-butter sandwich. When they looked in the trunk under the body, they found other wax papers which had been around sandwiches.

“The fellow has been in the trunk some time,” Doc decided quietly. “He entered prepared for a considerable stay.”

The apish Monk scratched his bullet of a head. “But how did he get in there? The lock was not broken.”

“Almost anyone can pick a trunk lock such as this,” Doc reminded.

“But he was locked in,” Monk pointed out.

“Which means some one helped him,” Doc agreed.

They rolled the dead man over in order to get to his hip pockets, and as they did so, there was a clatter and an object rolled across the floor. Monk reached down to pick it up, then jerked his hand back hastily.

“His false teeth,” he muttered.

The dead man had worn a complete set of upper molars. Doc Savage dropped a handkerchief over them, lifted them, then indicated with a finger.

The portion of the plate fitting against the gums was covered with what looked like a layer of red wax. This did not cover the whole formation of the false teeth, and looked as if it had been molded in place with a finger.

“Guess they didn’t fit him and he built them with sealing wax,” Monk decided aloud.

Doc Savage tucked the false teeth in the upper outside pocket of the dead man’s coat, the pocket commonly reserved for ornamental handkerchiefs.

“Was he killed recently?” Ham asked.

“Within the last half hour,” Doc replied. “That means while the raid was in progress on the truck, he was shot.”

They continued examination of the dead man’s pockets, and came finally to the left hip pocket. It held a billfold, and this, opened, yielded one of the identification forms which are usually found in new billfolds. It had been filled out:

Prof. Casson Adams,
7242 Floral Cliff,
Miami, Florida.

Monk squinted small eyes at Doc Savage. “I’m going to ask a silly question. Do we look into this, or do we?”

“We do,” Doc told him.

Monk sighed, as if a great load had tumbled off his shoulders.

“I was afraid this Florida trip would really turn out with us spending all of our time trying to give mosquitoes the influenza or something,” he said. “Now it looks interesting!”

Ham scowled at him and snapped, “I wonder where this Floral Cliff is?”

“A city real-estate map should show us,” Doc said. “We will rent a car.”

“I guess I’ll leave the hog here to convalesce,” Monk decided.

HALF an hour later, Monk was looking at Floral Cliff and relieving himself of a loud snort.

“Floral Cliff!” he grimaced. “They should call the place Aroma Flats.”

He pinched his flattened, much-broken nose between a furry thumb and forefinger.

There was odor in the air. It was a very distinctive scent. It was remindful of a bonfire fed with old overshoes, rags, and now and then a fistful of sulphur. An added touch was a tang similar to cooking cabbage.

Sand was all about them, here and there looking as if it had been played on by a preposterously huge child with a shovel, for there were deep grooves, as well as mounds which bore no similarity in formation.

Almost the only vegetation growing on the dunes was palmetto, and this, in spots, was too thick to permit convenient passage. But more often, the sand was bare.

The fantastic and unpleasant odor, while it was not strong, seemed to have permeated everything in the vicinity.

The car which Doc Savage had rented, a small touring, attacked the sand which the wind had heaped across the beach trail. The exhaust alternately pounded and sagged as if engaged in a terrific struggle, then, with a few violent jerks, the machine came to a stop half across a sand drift.

Monk got out and looked under the car and saw radius rods and front axle buried in coral particles.

“Looks like we ride shank’s mare from here,” he grunted.

They got out and went on. There was a sharp wind off the sea; they could hear the noise of waves breaking and it was like a great mouse playing in a box of loosely wadded paper. The wind buffeted their ankles and occasionally their hands and faces, with sand particles; it pushed the weird odor into their nostrils, making the aroma seem doubly oppressive.

“Two bits says we’re on the wrong road,” Monk complained.

“Look!” Ham pointed.

Barren as was the waste of sand, rather ancient-looking signs, nailed to stakes, were sticking up at intervals. These bore the names of streets, streets which had existed only on the maps of imaginative real-estate dealers. The legend on one said:

7100 Block,
Floral Cliff.

“The number we’re hunting is 7242 Floral Cliff,” Ham added. “It is probably over that next dune.”

Monk looked at the next dune, which was thick with palmetto, and snorted, “A swell place for a house with a number!”

They continued advancing and Doc Savage, not speaking, however, pointed out the fact that the barren road had been used recently, for there were footprints in the sand. Most of them were obliterated by wind driftage, although here and there they stood out plainly. At points, there was evidence that wheeled conveyances used the trail, although infrequently.

The men topped the dune and stopped.

“What did I tell you?” Ham asked.

They had come to a wall. Once it had been an impressive, carefully constructed thing of stucco, but the stucco had fallen away and the bricks beneath had cracked their mortar and in places had fallen to the sand. The barrier had a height of eight or nine feet.

Standing atop the dune, they could see a thicket of scrawny palms inside the wall, and beyond that, what seemed to be a once prepossessing house which was now in a state of almost fantastic disrepair. Gaping holes, where the tiles of the roof had fallen in, were visible, and stucco had scabbed off such of the walls as they could see.

“Spooky-looking joint,” Monk muttered. “Built during the boom, then left to go to seed.”

The trail through the dunes angled around and led them to a gate. This was an affair of rusted iron bars which formed an ornamental grille that was not unimpressive, but boards had been nailed on the inside.

Monk tried to find a crack in the planking. He looked surprised.

“What d’you know!” he breathed.

Ham scowled at him. “What is it, you missing link?”

“Canvas nailed on the inside,” Monk muttered. “Looks as if we were not supposed to see in.”

There was a bell cord hanging beside the gate, an iron handle secured to its end, and Doc pulled this. The cord broke and the handle came away in his fingers; there was no sound but the rotten *chug* of the cord breaking.

Monk took another look through the gate and added, “The canvas is not new. Looks as if it had been there a few weeks, anyway.”

Doc Savage called sharply, in a voice that carried far: “Hello inside!”

The silence which answered might have been that of death.

DOC SAVAGE moved to the right, sank a little and leaped upward, catching the crest of the wall. Bricks loosened in rotten mortar, gave way, and let him back to the sand. He tried again, and this time got on top of the wall.

He surveyed the interior for a moment, then helped Monk and Ham to clamber upon the wall. They all looked over the interior.

Palm trees and semitropical bushes had once been planted with some adherence to a landscaping plan, but had grown untended, interlacing into a miserly jungle which straggled like a green festering around the decrepit mansion, forming a setting which made the house somehow like an animal, once healthy, but which had strangled in the surrounding canker. They began lowering themselves inside.

There came a clatter from their left, near the foot of the wall. It was a tiny sound.

“Hey!” Monk grunted. “What was that?”

Doc Savage shifted to the left, strange flake-gold eyes downcast, searching. He came to a small depression in the soft sand. He hesitated. Then he dipped bronze fingers into the sand and sifted, exploring.

The object which he brought out gave off brilliant reflections in the Florida sunlight.

Monk peered closely, then let a long breath of surprise make a hissing through his teeth.

“Boy, oh boy!” he gasped. “Did somebody throw *that* at us?”

Doc Savage rolled the thing he had picked up in the cup of one bronze palm. It was a ring, delicately feminine. The band was of white gold, the portion around the setting of platinum, and the stone itself was a blue-white diamond something near the size of a pencil eraser.

“Where’d it come from?” Monk’s eyes started to range the decrepit mansion—then, as Doc Savage made a slight gesture, he fell to eying the diamond ring again.

Doc had turned the ring over so that the inner band, the portion under the setting, was visible.

The space between the gem and inner surface had been stuffed with a substance which resembled red sealing wax more than it resembled any other common substance. A bit of tissue paper immediately under the diamond kept the red material from showing through the facets of the stone.

“Hey!” Monk exploded. “That red stuff—remember the false teeth of the man who was killed in the trunk?”

“There was some of this red material sticking to the inside of the teeth!” Ham breathed.

“It looked like the same thing,” Monk amended.

Doc Savage made no comment. The bronze man’s weird flake-gold eyes were ranging over the pocked, shabby walls of the strange abandoned mansion in the sand dunes.

So unexpectedly that it was startling, Doc’s fantastic trilling came into being. It had a hastened, imperative quality, and might have been the product of the wind which was sucking at the sand under their feet. After an excited moment, the sound was gone.

“Get out of here!” Doc said grimly. “Do it as quickly as possible!”

Monk and Ham rolled their eyes to see what Doc had sighted. They discerned nothing.

“Run!” Doc said, and the word was an imperative command.

Monk and Ham both received an impatient shove. They began to run, not knowing why, but sure Doc had heard or seen something. They prepared to scramble wildly over the wall.

Then they stopped suddenly.

A MAN had appeared on the wall. He had come up from the other side, silently, with an almost uncanny ease and lack of noise. He was not especially tall, and he was lean-bodied, with thin arms and legs. His thinness was not that of emaciation, but rather that of a cat made lean by much hunting. He wore golf knickers which were very large and ballooned out above his knees, making him look somewhat ridiculous.

His striking characteristic, however, was his head. It was a head large beyond normal proportions, with no vestige of hair upon it—no mustache, eyebrows or lashes, the top entirely shiny and bald.

The eyes were bulging under their lids, somehow like halves of ripe blue plums stuck upon the face with a narrow knife slit in each so that the purplish meat of the fruit showed through beneath. The mouth was unnaturally small, its slit seeming scarcely larger than one of the eyes, and looking, too, a little like them.

His skin was jet, amazingly black, except for the back of one thin hand, where the black had been rubbed away, showing that it was grease paint covering skin of a definitely yellowish hue.

In both hands, the newcomer held large electric light globes. These were more than two-thirds full of a liquid which had the color and consistency of coffee. Over the bottoms of the bulbs where the glass point projected—they were of an old-fashioned type—adhesive tape had been plastered.

“You will each lie down on your backs,” he said quietly.

Monk dropped words from a corner of his oversize mouth. “Doc, this bird wasn’t with the gang who made the trunk raid, was he?”

“No,” Doc Savage said.

The weird-looking man on the wall held out his two light globes.

“Two of you understand something of chemistry,” he murmured. “Look at these closely.”

He spoke fluidly enough, but his voice was shrill, almost a flute piping.

Doc and his two companions eyed the liquid in the light bulbs. They said nothing.

“The bulbs are filled with chlorine,” offered the man on the wall. “Of course, you can see that it does not have the true greenish-yellow color of chlorine, but that is because certain other chemicals have been added to make it more effective.”

Ham breathed, “Will chlorine hurt a man?”

Monk said, “For a little while. Then you croak. Remember, they used it in the War.”

The man on the wall lifted his strange weapons. His weird, flute voice was grim.

“I trust you do not think I am being dramatic,” he piped. “I can hit you with these bulbs, and you will die. Or you can lie down on your backs.”

Monk began, “I can get to my machine pistol——”

“No,” Doc told him. “Do as this fellow says. He’s not bluffing.”

They lowered themselves to the sand, then lay down on their backs.

“Now,” piped the man on the wall, “you will each scoop up handfuls of sand and pour it over your eyes. You can shut your eyes first, of course. I merely do not wish you to see what I am doing.”

Reluctantly, Doc and his men scooped up sand.

DAME FORTUNE is a vagrant, unreliable hussy, and Doc Savage had long ago ceased to rely upon her entirely. But occasionally the wench did make an offering which was not to be spurned. She made one now. As Doc dug down for sand, his finger tips encountered half a brick which had evidently toppled from the wall months ago.

He dug up the brick, threw it. If he stopped to think, it was for no appreciable interval.

The black-faced man on the wall was on his guard, but it did him little good. The brick hit him in the face. In throwing, Doc had sacrificed force for accuracy, so the brick did not kill the man. It did bowl him off the wall, however.

The fellow showed a remarkable presence of mind and threw both his light bulbs inside the fence. Then he fell in the other direction.

The bulbs landed not more than a dozen feet from Doc and his two men. They burst with squishy noises. Greenish-yellow vapor spread, swirled in the wind, came toward Doc.

Ham had bounded up from the sand. Monk followed him. But Monk was howling angrily. He had piled sand on his eyes before Doc threw the brick fragment, and some of the particles had gotten under the lids.

Doc seized his two aides and rushed them away from the spreading chlorine. There was only one way for them to go—toward the house.

Ham started to bear toward the south end, the most convenient corner.

“The other one!” Doc rapped. “There is a man with a gun at one of the windows on that side. Saw him just before the other fellow appeared on top of the fence. That is why I was in such a hurry to get out of here.”

They sloped around the house corner—and were instantly the center of a swirl of striking, swearing men.

The attackers—they all had black grease paint on their faces—were coming out of a side door. Nearly half a dozen were at hand, and the door was spitting more of them. They seemed confident of their numbers, for they piled upon Doc and his men, bare-handed.

Nor was their confidence too greatly misplaced. Doc Savage went down; even his tremendous strength was not proof against four pairs of arms leeching to his ankles. He began to club with his fists. Men moaned, screamed, fell away.

The wind was carrying the cloud of chlorine toward them.

Beyond the chlorine menace, the man with the big black head climbed shakily back atop the wall. The half brick had started his face leaking red strings down over his shirt and golf trousers.

He screamed something. It was in a foreign language—the same tongue spoken by the two fruit peddlers who had led the raid upon the truck bearing Doc Savage’s baggage. Then the man changed to English.

“Get the thing they picked up from the sand inside the wall!” he fluted.

HIS words seemed to redouble the violence of the fight as the wearers of the black grease paint sought to overcome Doc Savage, Monk and Ham. Seven of them had set upon Doc now and, clawing and striking, sought to hold him, only to succumb, in rapid succession, to blows which they hardly saw at all, so swift was the delivery. In no case did the bronze giant hit a man twice. He picked his spots, and each terrific fist impact felled an assailant.

“Use knives!” shrieked the man on the wall. He was pawing scarlet off his hideous, hairless countenance. “Shoot them!”

One tried to take the leader’s advice, and with a thin splinter of steel in his fist, lunged in upon Doc Savage. The bronze man did not shift position, except to throw out an arm with a speed which made it appear to vanish in mid-air so that the hand, when it reappeared, was fixed upon the knife wielder’s wrist.

The bronze man moved casually and the knife wielder shrieked as if he were dying, instead of having his arm merely disjointed.

Ham still retained his sword cane, and was using it as briskly as close quarters permitted. He made no attempt to run his foes through, or induce fatal wounds by slashing and cutting. Instead, he merely pricked with the tip of the blade, which was coated with a sticky compound for the first six inches of its length. And after a few seconds, the men who had been pricked began to weave on their feet.

“The blade is poisoned!” a man screamed.

“Get the thing which they picked up inside the wall!” shrilled the bald black man who had been hit with the brick.

Three grease-painted fellows hit Doc simultaneously. The sand gave poor footing. He was upset. They clawed at him. One, purely by accident, tore open one of Doc’s coat pockets, and it chanced that into this same pocket he had dropped the ring. The ring fell out. A black-faced man seized it.

“It’s the Space girl’s diamond ring!” he yelled.

“Run!” piped the man on the fence. “The chlorine!”

The hideous chlorine was almost upon the men as they began to run. They left Doc Savage and his two aides, and seemed not to care what happened to their own fellows who had been overcome in the fight.

MONK, still quite blind from the sand in his eyes, had been lunging about, striking at random, and now he accidentally hit Ham, knocking the sword-cane-carrying lawyer sprawling.

“That was no accident!” Ham shrieked unreasonably.

Doc shoved Monk, getting him in motion, and Monk struggled and tried to strike back until it dawned on him that he was being manhandled by Doc. Ham also reared up on his feet.

They headed to the left, toward the wall. There was no shooting. For the moment, action had suspended while every one escaped the chlorine.

As it developed, the recess was hardly necessary, for an air current caught the chlorine as it piled along the side of the house, and the stuff backed up, was swept toward the roof and away, dissipating itself in the brilliant sunlight.

The man with the big, hairless head had vanished from the wall during the excitement. The others had doubled back and entered the house.

Doc Savage reached the wall, gave his two aides a hand over, then crossed over it himself.

“The man with the big head dropped outside the wall,” Ham rapped. “Let’s get him!”

But Doc Savage was already whipping along the wall toward the spot where the fellow in golf knickers must be lurking. Ham followed. Monk, eyes as yet not functioning properly, stumbled along clumsily. Ham came back, grabbed Monk by the short hair on top of his head and guided him roughly.

“Ouch!” Monk groaned.

“You will slough me by accident, will you!” Ham hissed.

Ahead, Doc had reached the corner. He thrust his head around, ready to draw back instantly; but the bald quarry was not in sight. Footprints in the sand showed where the fellow had run, in the opposite direction, along the wall.

Doc followed them. Ham came in his wake, still leading Monk urgently by the hair.

They stopped when they heard a voice. It was the flutelike tone of the bald man, calling to those inside the wall.

“Are you sure you got whatever it was they picked up?” he piped.

“Sure!” some one bawled. “The ring——”

“I do not think it was the ring,” called the shrill voice. “The ring has no importance
_____”

“There’s some stuff that looks like red wax under the diamond!” the man, inside yelled back.

The chief piped shrill curses in his foreign tongue.

“So *that* was it!” he trebled. “They have the secret and are trying to pass it on to this Doc Savage!”

“It must have been the girl!” yelled the man inside.

“Of course!” piped the other. “Go quickly and make sure she has not freed herself.”

Ham came up alongside Doc Savage where the bronze man crouched beside the wall.

“This is getting involved,” he breathed. “That red stuff seems to be the key to some mystery. And they’re holding a woman prisoner.”

Doc nodded slowly. “She must have seen us come over the wall and threw the ring at us to get it in our hands.”

Monk, making horrible grimaces, dug the last of the sand out of his eyes.

“Just what in blazes do you reckon we’re gettin’ into?” he asked mildly. Then he shot a startled look at Doc. “Say, that guy they killed in the trunk was——”

“Was evidently trying to get to us secretly,” Doc said, finishing Monk’s thought.

“But how’d he know about the baggage at the depot?” Monk pondered. “How’d he know about us at the hotel? And why didn’t he come himself, instead of hiding in a trunk so he would be carried there?”

“It looks as if some one has been keeping very close tab on our movements,” Doc said.

They were creeping forward now, seeking their hairless quarry.

Monk muttered, “Say, you remember that red stuff sticking to the false teeth of the guy in the trunk? It looked like the same material that was in the ring. Now, I wonder
_____”

Whatever Monk wondered, it never became clear. They heard a clatter, a scratching, and knew the man with the monstrous head had vaulted over the wall into the compound.

Chapter 4

THE FOUR PEDESTALS

DOC SAVAGE whipped into violent motion, lunging upward and over the wall, poisoning only an instant at the top to note the lean figure of the chief of the black-faced men racing for the ruined mansion. The bronze giant landed lightly on the other side of the wall.

Monk and Ham came to life. Frantic, thinking the bronze man had exposed himself to shots from the house, they jumped up wildly and hung half over the wall. Then they realized Doc had not acted without thought. There were scrubby palms near the wall here, and their oversize boles furnished a shelter into which the bronze giant had already flung himself.

“Cover me!” Doc called to Monk and Ham.

Monk grunted understandingly and pawed a machine pistol out of a special underarm holster which was padded so that its presence under his coat was hardly noticeable. He leveled the gun and pulled the trigger. It moaned; the ejector ran out brass empties. Bark and miserable palm fronds showered onto the sand as the mercy slugs searched for the hairless man.

But the fugitive had gained a little headway, and he flung himself prone, wriggled ahead, and was lost in the tangle of untended tropical shrubbery.

Ham, retaining his grip on his sword cane, got a second machine pistol into operation, directing the stream of slugs first at one of the mansion windows, then another. His gun, and the one wielded by Monk, were duplicates of the weapon to which Doc had attached a silencer and dropped the two fake peddlers back at the Hotel Biscayneville.

Doc Savage was working forward through the tangle of palms and thorny shrubs. He could hear the bald man ahead of him, scuttling fast.

“Ark!” a voice called from the mansion. “The basement window!”

“Those two devils on the fence?” questioned the flutelike voice of the hairless man.

“They can’t hit it, Ark,” said the voice. “But you better step!”

Doc Savage put on speed. He came in sight of the basement window just in time to see the golf-hosed legs of his quarry disappearing inside. Then, in the basement, a man saw Doc and bellowed profanely.

What might have been a thick-walled steel pipe of small diameter jutted out of the window. Its tip acquired a flickering red spear-point of flame. The weapon was an automatic rifle of military caliber and its roar volleyed through the compound.

Doc Savage had rolled behind a palm which, after the fashion of palms when stunted, was extremely wide near the ground. The tree shuddered, and dead leaves loosened and fluttered in the wind. A copro-nickel-jacketed slug came entirely through

the bole. More followed. The bole began to split. Sand gushed and stung. The racket was terrific.

Moving very carefully, because he had to keep thoroughly sheltered, Doc Savage removed a flat metal case from beneath his coat. The velvet interior of this was recessed for half a dozen objects which might have been pigeon eggs imitated in steel. Doc extracted an egg. There was a tiny lever projecting from it, and he shifted this with a thumb nail. Then he flung the egglike object—not directly at the basement window, but at a spot some twelve feet to the side.

There was a flash, brilliant even in the intense Florida sunlight, and a shock which convulsed the earth noticeably. Sand bloomed up in a vast mushroom. The near wall of the old mansion weaved. Great cracks ran up through the flying débris and sand. A portion of the wall fell outward, showing the interior of a room.

Fragments came showering down and the wind whipped the dust away; bricks clattered and settled; more of the house wall fell, together with a portion of the ancient roof tiles. Then there was silence, except for swearing of the men inside the house. The basement window was covered with a part of the ruptured brick wall.

Doc Savage ran forward, leaped mightily, and was inside the fantastic old mansion among the sand dunes.

PLASTER ground under the bronze man's feet as he lunged across the room. Dust swirled in a stifling pall. There had been an array of empty packing cases along the outer wall and the explosion of the violent little grenade had heaped them against the opposite side of the room.

Doc shoved some of them aside and tried the door. It was unlocked and he went through. There was a hallway beyond. Down it, a voice came.

"Get the damned girl!" said the voice. "Get them all together. If this Doc Savage talks to them, it'll be just too bad!"

"She's upstairs," said another voice. "I'll bring her down."

They were excited, maybe a little deafened by the explosion, and did not realize how loud they were speaking.

Feet pattered on steps; a man. He sounded as if he were in a hurry, and he was going up.

Doc went forward to intercept the footstep sounds. He came through a door into a hallway. Against a wall stood open boxes which bore the admonition, "Glass—Handle With Care," but which held military automatic rifles, fully assembled, and ammunition clips, loaded.

The bronze man's eyes roved over the weapons; his characteristic trilling came into being, ebbed and fell for an instant, then sank into inaudibility.

The guns were not of American manufacture.

There was a fumbling at a door to the rear. Doc managed to get behind it before it opened, and the panel shielded him as a man appeared. Beyond a doubt, it was the fellow who had been dispatched for the girl, and he was cautious. Instead of dashing

through the door, he cannily shifted to the side and looked through the crack by the hinges. He saw Doc.

“Look out!” he shrieked. “That bronze devil——”

Then Doc Savage got hold of the man’s neck, and the fellow’s voice ended in a strange fashion, as if his vocal apparatus were a loud-speaker, electrically controlled, on which the volume knob had been turned off suddenly. The man became limp, yet his eyes were widely open. He seemed to be paralyzed.

Doc leaned down the stairs, and from his lips came a remarkably perfect imitation of his victim’s voice.

“Look out!” he yelled. “That bronze devil is around somewhere!”

The voice characterization held all the perfection Doc Savage had been able to master by long and intensive study. It fooled those below.

“You’re tellin’ us he’s around?” snarled one. “Go on and get the girl, you dope!”

Doc lifted his captive and bore him toward a stairway which led upward. The size of the bronze man was made startlingly apparent by comparison with his prisoner. As he mounted the steps, he continued to grope at the back of the captive’s neck with corded bronze fingers.

He was doing something which had taken him, even with the profound knowledge of surgery and anatomy, a long time to perfect. He was completing the induction of a state of paralysis, merely by exerting pressure on certain upper spinal nerve centers.

The captive was entirely helpless, when Doc Savage lowered him to the second-floor corridor, and would remain so for some time. Doc listened.

Below, there was swearing, men moving about, and the flutelike voice of the chief giving orders. A section of wall, weakened by the bomb blast, fell noisily. Monk and Ham had silenced their machine pistols, and probably were watching for targets.

Doc began opening doors—and behind the third one, found the girl—the Space girl she had been called, when the black-faced men were shouting about the ring with the red substance under the diamond.

SHE was a small girl, so small that at first glance she seemed to be a child. It was not until she shifted position, and the shadow of the chain no longer fell across her face, that the maturity of her features was evident. At that, she could hardly be past twenty.

She was a doll, exquisitely proportioned, with hair that was like streaming honey, lips and eyes that would have delighted an artist, and a nose that had the slightest bit of retroussé. She moved again and the chain clinked metallically.

There were really two chains. One, the lighter, was padlocked around her slim waist, and its end was padlocked into a larger chain which ran up to a hole which had been torn in the ceiling, where it was secured around a beam. There was a window across the room, and by stretching, she might have reached that. It was open a trifle for ventilation, and was not boarded up on the outside, as were most of the windows.

She stared at Doc and words came past her lips like frightened things.

“You got the ring I threw?” she demanded.

Doc moved to her side, and so silent were his motions that it seemed he was not treading the floor at all. He grasped the chain. It was not a cheap chain, but an alloy, very strong.

“They got it away from me again,” he said.

“But how could they?” the girl murmured. “You are Doc Savage.”

“Do not be silly.” Doc began to tug on the chain, and his arms seemed to become tremendous beams, rigid and metallic. “You seem to have me overrated.”

The girl shuddered. “They are afraid of you, more afraid of you than of any living man. I have heard them talking. They have been keeping track of you. They were scared when you came to Florida. They did not believe you came to exterminate mosquitoes, or whatever it was. They were afraid that you had heard of them and their plan.”

She had spoken rapidly. Doc Savage ceased tugging on the chain and, reaching up, extracted a stiff steel bobbie pin from her hair. He inserted this in the padlock and began to probe.

“I saw you through the window,” the girl said. “I threw the ring. I was afraid to cry out. One of them was outside the door of this room.”

Doc said nothing. The bobbie pin gritted, scraped.

“Where is Cass?” asked the girl. “Didn’t he come with you?”

The pin rasped in the lock, seeking the tumblers.

“You mean Professor Casson Adams?” Doc asked.

“Yes,” she said. “He was going to try to reach you. He was going to hide himself in one of your trunks. It was the only way. They were watching you. They had bribed the telephone operator in your hotel to cut them in on all calls you made. Cass thought the trunk was the only way. He had heard that your trunks were here. They knew that. The only chance for a slip was that they might have been watching the trunks.”

The clipped rapidity of her speech made her long recitals seem short.

Doc withdrew the bobbie pin and carefully bent it. The padlock was no ordinary variety, but one using a machined key which entered from the bottom.

An automatic rifle racketed downstairs; the moan of one of the mercy-bullet-firing machine pistols sawed out like a titanic bullfiddle. A man downstairs swore, “Damned if they ain’t makin’ loopholes in the wall! Hey, you upstairs!”

Doc again imitated the voice of the man who had been sent for the girl, bellowing, “Aw, keep your shirt on!”

“Shake it up!” roared the one below, deceived again. “Get that twist down here!”

The girl looked at Doc Savage, slowly, as if noting the absence of wasteful gestures in his movements, and the metallic repose of his features. He had not looked at the door since entering and seemed concerned with but one thing: getting the padlock open.

“I guess they were justified in being scared of you,” she said. “But you can’t pick the padlock. It is pick proof. They told me so.”

With a snicking of tumblers, the lock came open. Doc caught the chain as it came loose from around her slender waist and lowered it to the floor so there was no rattle.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“Nona Space,” she said. “Didn’t Cass tell you?”

Doc guided her toward the window.

“We’ll drop to the ground and run for it,” he said. “I’ll carry you, because I am wearing a bulletproof vest and that will shield you somewhat. My two assistants will cover our break.”

She began struggling violently, not trying to get away so much as trying to stop him, to keep him from the vicinity of the window.

“But what about the other two?” she demanded.

ONE of her exquisitely small hands dipped toward the lower regions of the old mansion as she said, “other two”—and Doc Savage stopped suddenly.

“Who are they?” he asked.

Her small mouth came roundly open. It was one of the few feminine mouths which Doc had seen that retained its attractiveness when open.

“Didn’t Cass tell you?” she asked.

“Prisoners?” Doc questioned.

“But Cass should have——”

Doc grasped her arms above the elbows and lifted her until only her toes were on the floor, and the pressure of his grip caused her to grimace a little.

“Professor Casson Adams was killed,” he clipped. “They raided the baggage truck carrying the trunk in which he was hiding. They shot through the trunk. Professor Adams had identification in his billfold which gave this as his address, and we came out to investigate. We did not know what it was all about. We still do not know. Who are these other two persons you are talking about?”

The girl’s head went back and a stark whiteness crawled up from the crumpled collar of her frock and flooded her features; her lips moved, but no sound came, and the moving lips did not form words with sufficient clarity to permit reading.

There came a loud yell from below. It held impatience and rage.

“What the hell, up there!” it howled. “You dead, or something?”

Doc faked the voice of the man sent for the girl, and called, “Aw, I had trouble with the lock!”

But feet were *clump-clumping* the stair treads as one man came up to see what was causing the delay.

Doc Savage leaned close to the window. His lips moved, yet the words he spoke did not seem to come from his vocal cords, but rather from a spot below in the palms which thicketed the yard. It was good ventriloquism. The words were not English, but syllables of a guttural tongue which would have baffled an expert on languages.

It was Mayan which he spoke, language of a lost civilization of Central America which had rivaled that of Egypt. Doc and his aides had mastered the tongue for use in

situations such as this; as far as they knew, no other individual in the so-called civilized world could comprehend it.

Monk answered, also speaking Mayan.

Doc sent the girl toward the window.

“My two men will cover your flight,” he said. “Drop out of the window and get over the wall. I’ll find the other two prisoners.”

Doc did not wait to see what she did, but spun toward the door. The man coming up the stairs was near the top. Doc scooped up a chair, carried it with him. He reached the door and got it open just as the man on the stairs discovered the unconscious fellow who had been sent for the girl.

The man yelled. Doc threw the chair. The man’s yelling turned to screaming and he fell down the stairs, making a good deal of noise. From below, a bedlam of shouting went up. The man hit by the chair piled up on the first-floor landing and did not arise.

At Doc’s back, the girl cried out, “There’s a back stairway! Maybe we can reach the other two! I’ll show you where——”

Doc spun on her, and rapped, “I told you to——” Instead of finishing, he pitched back into the room.

The hairless chief of the black-faced men—the one addressed only as Ark—had come through a door in the rear of the room. He must have mounted the back stairway of which the girl, Nona Space, had spoken.

ARK was running a circle, so that he was between the girl and the window. He held a revolver, an extraordinary weapon with a remarkably large barrel. The snout of the gun seemed nearly as large as a .20-gauge shotgun.

He aimed the gun at Doc and it went off, making far less noise than might have been expected, and kicking so slightly that it barely jarred his hand.

There was a terrific crash against Doc’s chest, and his giant bronze frame was smashed backward as if it had become suddenly fragile. The simultaneous flash set his eyes aching. The concussion rendered his ears temporarily inactive. Coat and vest were torn completely from his chest, coat sleeves had ruptured, and the skin was slit. The underside of his jaws felt as if they had been wiped clean of skin. He hit the floor with stunning force.

Ark aimed again, deliberately. His gun was some special type not on the market, firing explosive slugs. Only the excellence of Doc’s bulletproof vest had saved him that first time. And now Ark was aiming at his head.

There was a worn rug underfoot. Doc clawed up bunches of it in his hands, pulled. It was an old gag, and Ark thwarted it by sprawling down deliberately on the rug so that he would not be upset. But his next shot was delayed a moment.

Doc lunged up with the rug and flung it forward like a sheet. At the same time, he sloped aside.

Ark fired. His slug blasted a hole in the wall that a man could have crawled through.

Ark was still between the girl and the window. She tried to run around him. It looked as if he saw her under the rug and threatened her. Frightened, she retreated. She dived through the rear door.

There was a descending flight of stairs, rather narrow and she ran down them, looking over her shoulder, calling out something. What she called, Doc could not tell. He was still deaf from the concussion of the explosive bullet against his chest.

The bronze man leaped for Ark, intending to trample him under the rug.

Men topped the main stairway, coming up from below. Ark started shrilling muffled commands under the rug. His satellites charged to his aid.

Doc Savage could hear only the loudest of sounds. He could barely see, and only when the newcomers actually appeared was he aware of their arrival. The bronze man was not unduly reckless; he took terrific chances, it might seem—although to him, they were not chances, for he knew his own ability, knew what he could accomplish in the face of a given set of circumstances.

Occasionally there was a slip—as in this instance when Ark had been wielding a pistol loaded with explosive slugs. Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of another thousand times it would have been an ordinary pistol, and Doc could have gotten to him before Ark learned of the bulletproof vest. A man shooting in haste rarely picks a head for a target.

Doc retreated. He was in no condition for a fight against such odds. He reached the rear door, got halfway down the stairs in an upright position, then because he was still dazed, upset and toppled the rest of the way.

At the foot of the stairs was a little square hallway with doors on three sides. As Doc was heaving dizzily erect, the farthest of these doors popped open.

Monk and Ham appeared. Each held his machine pistol with both hands. The guns had a good deal of recoil when firing freely.

“The girl?” Doc asked, and his voice was strange.

“Haven’t seen her,” Monk grunted.

Doc Savage seemed not to hear.

“The girl?” he repeated. “Where is she?”

Monk realized then that something was wrong with the bronze man’s hearing. He shook his head violently to indicate he had not seen a girl.

AN instant later, men began firing from the top of the stairs, and Doc, seeing splinters fly, shoved his two men outside into the brilliant sunlight, following after them.

Monk peered at Doc and muttered uneasily, “You hurt bad?”

Doc was watching his lips and read the query.

“Pain and shock is all,” he said. “I am deaf as a rock. Cannot tell how long it will last. The girl came down the stairs. She must have gone after the other two prisoners.”

“Other two?” Ham questioned.

Doc was not looking at Ham. He did not get the interrogation.

Ham got around in front of Doc, pointed at his lips and repeated, "What other two?"

"There seem to be two other prisoners," Doc advised.

Ham hosed a stream of mercy bullets up the stairway, his manner as casual as if he were presenting a point of evidence to a jury in a courtroom. He drew back and got Doc's attention to his lips again.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"That," Doc told him, "is still a puzzle."

Somewhere in the house, a woman began screaming. Monk and Ham, electrified, stared at Doc for commands, then realized the bronze man had not heard the shrieks.

"Girl—screaming!" Ham gasped.

"We will go in," Doc said. "But take it easy."

The bronze man got out one of the tiny grenades—no shock could explode them until the little detonating lever was actuated—and tossed one up the stairs. There was a roar—and plaster, lath and splintered timbers came plummeting down the steps.

"I didn't even hear that," Doc shouted. "Show me the spot where you heard the girl screaming."

"She's still screaming," Ham said, and plunged inside.

Doc and Monk trailed the dapper lawyer. They tried one of the doors at the left of the square rear hallway. It was locked. Doc caved it in by kicking it with one foot.

The girl stopped screaming suddenly, as if she had been gagged, or something worse.

Monk and Ham could hear many sounds of rapid movement. Strangely, the men with the black grease paint on their faces seemed to be concentrating in the basement.

Doc broke open another door. A flight of stairs gaped below. They were shot at. Monk and Ham streaked mercy bullets back. Then two explosive bullets from Ark's unusual gun ripped the stairs to fragments.

Doc Savage ran into another room and rolled one of his grenades out on the floor. It exploded and ripped a considerable cavity down into the basement. Much dust was stirred up. Doc waited until it settled. Then he dropped down into the basement.

The basement seemed to be divided off in rooms, and this one in which they stood was clean and white with new paint. But its neatness was not the only interesting feature.

There were four pedestals in the room, waist-high affairs rigged of stout timbers. There was something on these pedestals, something almost as large as small automobiles. The exact nature of the objects could not be ascertained, due to an enveloping canopy of canvas, which was tied down with thin manila ropes.

Doc Savage, crossing the room, veered toward the nearest of the pedestals, as if to ascertain what the covered objects were. But the girl began to scream again, her voice farther away now, and Monk and Ham grasped Doc's arm and pointed imperatively.

They ran on and shoved open a door. Ahead of them was an arched opening which gave into a tiled passage that sloped downward for a short distance, then ran level.

They followed it.

The passage had been constructed a long time ago. It was not a secret tunnel, or anything of the sort. Rather, it was an idea of the original builder of the strange mansion, a method of gaining easy access to the beach for swimming purposes, for they came out along the water's edge, after following the mad clatter of fleeing feet ahead for some hundreds of feet. Brilliant sunlight and the moaning of two automobile motors met them.

The machines had been in a stuccoed structure once a bathing house, as ancient as the mansion inshore among the sand dunes. But both cars had been pushed out of the building; one was just clearing the structure, and the men were piling in it, as well as loading their casualties of the recent fighting, who had been carried along.

"Hey!" Monk rapped. "There's the two prisoners!"

ONE of the captives was a lean tower of a man with flaming red hair and an unnaturally pale face—unnaturally pale for one dwelling in Florida. He had, moreover, one distinguishing mark: a patch over one eye, a black flap held in place by a string or an elastic.

The other man was young, light-haired, robust; he had the appearance of a college boy. He wore shell-rimmed spectacles and a grimy polo shirt, slacks which had once been white.

That the pair were captives was indicated positively by the handcuffs which linked their wrists and by the manner in which they were hustled about.

The girl was with them. In the fast-moving group, she appeared smaller than ever. One of the black-faced men picked her up bodily and hurtled her into the car. She struggled. Then she caught sight of Doc Savage and his two companions.

She lifted her voice in a frantic call.

"Go back and search the house!" she called. "You will find their secret."

A man struck her. Then he yanked off his felt hat and jammed it between her jaws. The man's hair, when he took off the hat, was straight and not kinky.

The cars began to move. The last of the men was hauled inside.

Monk and Ham knew the mercy bullet in their machine pistols would not penetrate the bodies of the cars, for the mercy bullets were fragile shells loaded with the sleep-inducing chemical. They dug into their pockets and brought out other ammo drums. These bore designating marks. They selected drums holding solid metal slugs, clipped them into their machine pistols, and concentrated on the car tires.

Bullets dug up sand, made dents in the cars, and tore the tires visibly; but nothing happened to stem the mad flight of the cars.

"Their tires are filled with sponge rubber or something!" Monk yelled.

"The sedan bodies are bulletproofed, too!" Ham added.

Doc Savage was running toward the converted bathing house. He had sighted another car inside. It was a shabby-looking machine, a roadster of a vintage six years back, fitted with a truck body.

They piled in and Doc trod the starter. The engine stuttered, died, and finally fired with some semblance of regularity.

The beach was a white floor, packed by the waves, a miniature of Daytona, Mecca of the automobile speed kings. The delivery car sloughed through the first few yards of soft sand, then got on the strip of hard-packed sand. It began to travel.

Monk looked at the speedometer and grinned doubtfully. It was calibrated to sixty, and the need was clear over the mark.

“I’ll bet this bus is breaking its own record,” he grunted.

Fast as they traveled, however, the two cars ahead were leaving them. They were black dots by now, at times almost lost in the dancing heat from the beach.

Then the distant cars seemed to stop receding, and a third dot appeared, this one on the sea, a short distance offshore.

“A boat,” Ham breathed.

“They’re being picked up!” Monk yelled.

The two sedans became more distinct. The boat took on shape—it was a lean black speedster, and it got up on top of the water and ran away across the sea almost as fast as the delivery truck was traveling on the beach.

Doc and his two men reached the sedans, which had been abandoned near a mooring at which the speedboat had been secured. Monk stood on the beach and made growling noises while Doc examined the cars, noting license numbers, then inspecting the engines and frames for numeral identification.

“Numbers been taken off,” he said of the latter.

“Chemical treatment will bring them out again,” Monk offered.

Doc shook a negative. “These fellows were clever. They used a twist drill to take the numbers off, and the drill probably disturbed the metal fibers until a chemical treatment will have no effect in bringing the numbers back.”

The bronze man left the sedans and moved toward the delivery truck, the engine of which was still running.

“Where are we going?” Monk demanded.

Doc, not looking for Monk’s lips at the moment, failed to catch the query and Monk got around in front of him and repeated it.

“Remember what the girl said?” Doc asked.

Monk blinked. “Sure—about going back and searching the house? She said something about finding their secret.”

“Exactly,” Doc said.

Chapter 5

THE SURPRISE IN SKIRTS

THEY did not return by way of the tunnel to the dilapidated mansion among the dunes, but left the truck on the beach and walked over the sand, wedged through palmetto clumps, and came out near the wall. They scrambled over the barrier without much difficulty.

“What’ll we look for first?” Monk wanted to know.

Doc Savage caught the words; his ears seemed to be recovering from the temporary deafness inflicted by the explosion.

“Remember those pedestals in the basement room?” he asked. “They supported bulky objects covered with canvas. We might as well examine them first.”

Monk nodded his small head. “I been wonderin’ what them things were.”

They made a circuit of the mansion, hoping to find some of the black-faced men who had been overcome in the fight, and who might have been left behind. But they located no one. There was profound silence from within the house.

They entered the building from the rear, coming into a kitchen. Adjoining was a pantry, stocked with food. Beyond was a larger room, with an array of folding canvas cots and plain, coarse blankets.

Ham counted the cots, absently numbering them off with his sword cane.

“More than a dozen men have been quartered here,” he decided. “I wonder what they’ve been up to.”

They found the basement stairs and went down. A moment later, they were face to face with the stout timbered pedestals which supported the mysterious objects covered by canvas. There were electric lights in the cellar. Doc found a button, thumbed it, and the globes whitened.

Above each of the pedestals, they now noted, there was a funnel-shaped affair of sheet metal, and from each of these a pipe ran outdoors; they might have been installed to conduct away rising fumes.

Doc Savage stepped forward, untied the ropes securing one of the canvas covers, and wrenched it clear. Then he stood stock-still and eyed what was revealed. His trilling came into existence momentarily, but it had a disgusted quality.

He had uncovered nothing at all except a wood frame hastily thrown together from shaggy, unplanted timbers—a frame obviously designed to support only the canvas and make it seem that something was beneath.

They examined the other three pedestals hurriedly. All were duds.

“Jove!” Ham murmured. “Looks as if they were trying to fool somebody!”

Doc Savage pointed out certain bolt holes in the pedestal framework, together with indentations which had obviously been made by weighty machinery.

“There *was* something on these supports,” he said.

AN hour later, they neared a filling station on the sandy, little-used road which led toward the house among the dunes. They had searched the old mansion completely, but futilely, finding nothing, not even an indication of the name of those occupying the place.

Doc Savage had repaired his own appearance to some extent, having discarded his torn coat and shirt and washed the gore from his features. He was, however, still disheveled in appearance, and to avoid arousing unnecessary curiosity, he rode in the rear of the touring car they had rented to drive out to the old mansion, and which they had picked up again after searching the house.

Monk, at the wheel, pulled into the filling station and a pleasant-faced young man began filling the tank. He proved to be a conversational soul, either because he was lonesome, or because the homely-faced Monk was an individual to whom people seemed to want to talk.

“Been to Hyman Space’s place, I guess,” the attendant hazarded genially.

“You mean the old house among the dunes?” Monk asked. The attendant nodded, grinning. “Not thinking of buying land out there, are you?”

Monk snorted. “In that goat pasture? Not us!”

The attendant laughed. “So you got a whiff of the smell! That’s lucky! Some days, the smell ain’t around.”

“Smell——” Monk squinted, realizing he was uncovering something by pure accident. “What do you figure it is?”

“Search me,” said the filling station man. “But you see old Hyman Space, Professor Casson Adams and Ray Wood——”

“Who are Adams and Wood?” Monk put in.

“Hyman Space’s hired men,” the attendant replied. “They’re all doing some kind of work down there. Nobody knows what it is. You see, that old place in the sand dunes was built during the boom and the fellow who built it died and nobody ever took it over until Hyman Space bought it a couple of years ago. He told somebody he wanted to work where he wouldn’t bother anybody. . . . How many gallons?”

“Ten,” Monk told him. “What was Space’s racket?”

The attendant began to run gasoline into the tank.

“Search me,” he said. “Hyman Space and the others are queer ducks. Don’t mix much. Lately, they’ve had a lot of Negroes workin’ around there. They don’t use this road since the sand drifted over it. They drive along the beach. So I don’t know much about ’em.”

“There’s a girl, isn’t there?” Monk asked.

“Old man Space’s daughter.” The attendant grinned. “A pippin!”

Monk put more questions, but the attendant seemed to have told all he knew. Monk drove out and headed the truck toward Miami.

Ham juggled his sword cane absently and complained. "We seem to be stuck. There's something queer going on, and we should do something about it. That man in the trunk was murdered because he was trying to reach us, unless I miss my guess. But we're stuck."

Monk started to nod in gloomy agreement, then started violently and looked back at Doc Savage.

"Blazes!" he grunted. "Did I just have an original thought, or did you think of it first?"

"You mean about examining that red material on the false teeth of the man who was killed in the trunk?" Doc asked.

Monk sighed. "I knew I hadn't thought of it first."

THE HOTEL BISCAYNEVILLE had the air of a place where things were happening. Two police cars stood in front of the hostelry, along with other machines bearing placards with the word, "Press."

Uniformed policemen stood about, along with other individuals who were unmistakably officers, although not in uniform.

Doc Savage, seeing evidence of excitement as Monk started to wheel their rented car around the corner, snapped orders to continue straight ahead. Monk pulled in to the curb and parked near an alley which ran past the rear of the hotel.

Doc got out, directed his two men to wait, and drifted down the alley, concealed by a stuccoed fence and numerous grapefruit and orange trees.

A policeman and a newspaperman were talking on the other side of the fence. Doc got close enough to catch their words. The bronze man's ears were rapidly returning to normal.

"—it here from New York," the officer was saying. "It was a break that we found it in his baggage, what I mean. He probably figured on getting rid of it to-night. But it just happened that the maid came in to tidy up the room and was moving the trunk and let it drop, and it came open and she saw the body.

"Boy, did she let out a bleat! She scared an old guy in the next room who was shaving, and they had to take him to the hospital to sew up the cut he gave himself. How's that last for human-interest angle, huh?"

"You think Doc Savage brought this boy from New York in the trunk?" asked the newspaper reporter.

"Sure!" said, the cop. "But we'll know for certain when we find out how long the guy had been dead!"

"You are going to arrest Doc Savage?" questioned the journalist.

"Boy—watch us!"

"Doc Savage has a reputation."

"So what?" The officer laughed. "Doc Savage picked a wrong town to pull something like this in. His rep will make it just that much tougher on him."

"Meaning what?"

“The chief of police is out for another term, and the district attorney wants to build himself a name, so he can take a whirl at the governorship,” the policeman explained. “They’ve both been looking for something big. They’ll land on this Doc Savage hard. Orders are already out to arrest him on sight. Why, we’ve got enough evidence to hang the guy right now.”

“Where is the body that was in the trunk?” the reporter asked.

“Down at the morgue,” said the other.

Doc Savage, not waiting to hear more, eased back to the car and entered the driver’s seat. He got the car in motion before he spoke to his two companions. Then he explained tersely what had happened.

“So we’re jammed up with the police here!” Monk groaned. “But they’ll find out the fellow was killed only recently, and not in New York.”

“Which will not clear us, necessarily,” Doc replied. “We’ve got to help ourselves.”

“Where is the body?” Ham asked.

“In the morgue,” Doc told him.

“We’d better go there and see if we can get the false teeth with that red stuff on them,” Ham said.

“That is our next move,” Doc agreed.

THE morgue, in keeping with the majority of Miami municipal buildings, was a new structure, neat and with just the proper touch of architectural sobriety. It stood on a street which was comparatively free of traffic.

Doc Savage parked near the middle of the block, leaving the front wheels of the touring car just the legal distance from a fire hydrant, a simple precaution for making sure the space ahead of the car would remain clear for a quick getaway.

Before they got out of the machine they noted two policemen idling in front of the morgue.

“They’ll recognize us if we try to walk in,” Monk grumbled.

“Wait here,” Doc said, and got out of the machine.

The bronze man kept parked cars between himself and the two policemen on the morgue steps, and worked down the street; then, when the two officers were not looking in his direction, he angled swiftly across the sidewalk. The lee of a flowering hedge received him. There was no activity around the rear of the morgue, no sound except the distant traffic noises and the nearer sound of insects.

The rear windows of the morgue were tall, and barred, prison fashion, with stout upright rods. Doc Savage looked through the window. Inside were portable slabs on rolling tables, around the wall an array of cubbyholes for the storage of bodies. There was no sign of life in the room.

Doc Savage brought a small metal tube from his pocket and unscrewed the cap. There was a glass phial inside. This was glass-stoppered, and to the stopper was affixed a glass rod. When he pulled the rod out, the contents of the bottle—a viscous, vile-colored liquid clung to the rod.

The bronze man smeared the stuff in a ring around the bases of two of the bars, making a thick deposit. Clambering up on the sill as quietly as possible, he coated a section near the tops of the same two bars. After that, he waited, listening.

The stuff he had put on the bars was turning an intense black, and giving off bilious-looking vapor.

Doc Savage's ears had regained most of their normal sensitivity, and he could catch sounds inside the morgue. They were small noises—voices, the click of instruments. No doubt the autopsy was in progress.

After waiting some moments, Doc Savage gripped one of the two bars he had treated and gave it a yank. It seemed to have rotted magically where he had applied the stuff from the bottle. The bar broke with a grating noise.

Doc listened intently, heard no indications of alarm, then yanked the second bar. When both were broken off, he dropped them on the ground. The substance in the bottle had been a special acid preparation of great strength.

The building was new and the window came up easily, noiselessly, at his tugging. He dropped inside. The composition floor made quiet easily attained. Beyond was a corridor with doors opening off. It was from one of these that came the voices, the sounds of instruments.

Doc used a small periscope device, the barrel of which was somewhat smaller than a lead pencil, and which was not likely to be noticed.

The body of Professor Casson Adams, entirely nude, was on an operating table under the scrutiny of a medical examiner and an assistant. Three other bulky fellows standing by were evidently policemen in plain clothes.

The dead man's garments were arrayed on a table near by, each identified by a neat tag.

DOC SAVAGE drew back and produced a flat case almost identical with the one which had held the explosive grenades. This one contained what at first glance might have been mistaken for rather yellowish glass marbles; but these, closer inspection would have shown, were glass bulbs filled with a liquid.

Doc tossed two of them into the room where the examination was taking place.

The medical examiner heard the bulb strike and shatter. A dropped bird's egg would have made a similar noise. The man squinted, saw the tiny cluster of gossamery glass, noted the liquid about it that seemed to be vanishing magically, and took a step forward.

He seemed to become tired; he emitted a loud sigh and lay down heavily on the floor. He began to snore.

The other men in the room stared. Then they also laid down and appeared to go soundly to sleep.

The glass containers had held an anæsthetic gas which produced quick but harmless unconsciousness. The men would awaken in the course of time, none the worse for their experience.

Doc Savage entered the room hastily. He found the false teeth and pocketed them. He found the bullet which had killed Professor Adams. He pocketed that, too, after the briefest of hesitations. Then he wheeled and started for the door.

A telephone on a small desk to one side of the room began ringing.

Doc Savage veered for the instrument. If it kept on ringing, some one might come to see why it was not answered. He picked up the receiver and said, "Yes?"

"Is the medical examiner there?" asked a harsh voice.

"He is out for the moment," Doc said—very truthfully.

"Okay," said the voice. "This is the skipper. We just found a gun under the mattress in Doc Savage's hotel room. We want to check it with the bullet that killed that guy. We think it's the murder gun, and if it is, we've got Doc Savage clinched with this."

"Did you look for Doc Savage's finger prints on the gun?" Doc asked.

"They had been wiped off," said the other. "And who the hell are you to start telling the homicide bureau how to run its business?"

"I will take care of the bullet which killed the man," Doc said, and hung up.

THE bronze man removed the bullet from his coat pocket and carefully inserted it in the watch pocket of his trousers, where it was not as likely to become lost. Then he eased out of the rear window of the morgue, pausing to dampen a cloth with chemical and remove his finger prints from everything he had touched.

The two policemen were matching pennies. Doc got into the car without their taking note of it. Monk and Ham looked questioningly.

"Our black-faced friends have been working," Doc advised.

Monk wet the edges of his large mouth. "Yeah?"

Doc told them about the gun.

"Framing us!" Monk gritted. "They sent one of their gang back to hide the murder gun in your room."

"Obviously," Doc agreed. "But we have the murder bullet, so their trickery will not do them much good."

The bronze man leaned over to loosen the emergency brake. He rarely showed surprise, but now he straightened suddenly, and a strange expression came over his metallic features.

Monk let his jaw down until it threatened to come off his face. Ham all but dropped his sword cane.

A young woman was walking rapidly toward their car. When she saw that they observed her, she made a small gesture with one hand, requesting that they wait.

"*Whew!*" Monk breathed. "The last person I expected to see!"

Without another word, he glanced at the policemen, saw they were concerned only with each other's pennies, then slid over into the rear seat, making a place in the front seat beside Doc for the girl.

The young woman got into the car.

“Hurry!” she said. “I’ll tell you where to drive.”

“Miss Space!” Monk exploded. “How did you get away from them?”

The girl seemed smaller than ever. She wrung her hands nervously, her eyes remained widely open when they were not blinking, and her whole figure seemed drawn, tense.

She did not answer, and Monk questioned her again: “That gang with the black grease paint on their faces—how did you escape?”

The girl had a small hand bag. She held it tightly.

“I jumped out of their car in front of a bank, and they were afraid of the bank guard,” she said rapidly. “Turn to the right here. And drive faster.”

Doc Savage looked at the clock on the instrument panel. Then he absently dropped a hand into the pocket where he had placed the false teeth.

“How did you know we were here?” he asked.

“I did not know it,” she said. “I came there to give the alarm to the police. You see, the body of Professor Adams”—she paused, shuddered, whitened a little—“the body was to be taken from the police.”

“Why?” Doc asked.

“He is the third man who tried to get to you,” the girl said swiftly. “The other two tried it from the swamp. They failed. They had with them a small lump of substance which looks like red sealing wax. They were trying to get it to you. Professor Adams had some of the same substance.”

“Huh!” Monk exploded. “The red stuff sticking to his false teeth!”

“Then you got it!” gasped the girl.

“Sure!” Monk told her. “Doc’s got it in his pocket.”

DOC SAVAGE asked, “What is the red substance?”

“Turn to the left here,” directed the girl. “When you see a large sandwich stand on the left, turn into the next road branching off to the north.”

Doc swung the car around the corner, said, “Answer my question, please.”

“I do not know what the red material is,” said the girl.

Ham, his sword cane across his knees, rapped, “Young lady, you will have to clarify that statement.”

The girl went through the gestures of wringing her hands, but still kept a tight grip on the hand bag.

“It’s so fantastic,” she said wildly. “You’ll understand it all as soon as I can get you to where my father and Ray Wood are being held. They’ll explain. You see, if you have the red material, you’ll have something that will enable you to solve the whole problem. They knew that. That’s why they’ve been trying to get it to you. We all carry some of it on our persons. I had some in my ring. Remember when I threw the ring at you?”

“Yes,” Doc said. “Your father and Ray Wood are the other two prisoners you were talking about? Your father has the patch over an eye.”

She nodded emphatically. “Of course. I tried to get to them back at that house in the sand dunes, and I was seized.”

“How many men holding them?” Monk asked.

The girl seemed to hesitate. “Several,” she admitted. “Have you got guns with you?”

Monk exhibited his superfirer. “Sure.”

“Oh!” The girl stared at the gun. “Those men who have the black paint on their faces have been keeping close check on you. I heard them say they had doctored the ammunition drums in your baggage. You had better examine your guns.”

Monk frowned and clipped the magazine drum out of his supermachine pistol. Ham, his expression worried, followed suit. An instant later, both were examining the cartridges.

The girl slid over to the far side of the seat, away from Doc Savage. She opened her bag with a snaky swiftness and flashed a flat automatic pistol into view.

“Pull over to the side of the road and stop the car,” she gritted. “And don’t make any funny moves!”

Doc, his metallic features inscrutable, did as she directed.

IN the rear, Monk and Ham showed the girl open, startled mouths, then expressions of great disgust. In their hands, the unloaded superfirers were quite useless.

“The hussy!” Monk growled. “She worked that like a charm.”

“Sit very still,” the girl directed Doc Savage.

Then she reached over and with great care, keeping the gun pointed directly at his head, inserted a hand in his coat pocket. She brought out the false teeth in their wrapping of handkerchief, and unwound enough of the cloth to see the white artificial molars glinting through a crack in the fabric.

Doc moved slightly.

“Don’t make the mistake of thinking I won’t shoot!” the girl said wildly, and jutted her gun.

“Careful, Doc!” Ham gasped.

The girl, without looking closer at the false teeth, but feeling the outlines to make sure she had them, backed out of the car, keeping her gun ready, menacing.

Down the road, several men had appeared. They were fellows of average size, dressed in a manner designed not to attract attention. There was one exception—the man who led the party. He wore golf knickers which were tremendously full for his lean shanks, and he had a head which was huge and entirely bare of hair.

All of the men had black faces and hands.

With her automatic, the girl shot holes in the rear tires of the car. They were standing on a dirt road, and the bursting of the tires stirred up clouds of dust. The girl

whirled and ran, going to meet the approaching party.

Down the road, the black-faced individuals were shouting. One voice stood out: that of the leader. It was a fluted piping.

“The lying wench!” Monk rasped. “She was working with them all of the time!”

He clipped the ammo drum into his machine pistol, leaned out of the car, but failed to shoot when a bullet, fired by the black-faced man, ripped past his head. He blasted the car door open and landed in the ditch, where there was partial shelter. Doc Savage and Ham joined him almost simultaneously.

They could distinguish the words of the shrill-voiced, hairless man—Ark, if that was his name. He was criticizing the girl.

“Why didn’t you hold them until we got there, you fool?” he shrilled.

“I was afraid!” she shrieked back.

Monk opened up with his machine pistol. Its bullfiddle blast brought down two of the attacking party, and the rest hastily took to the ditch on the opposite side of the road.

Not far away, down an adjacent road, a siren began wailing. Its nature was unmistakable. A police car. A prowling patrol car must have heard the uproar and was coming to investigate.

The black-faced men showed no desire to mix it with the police. They got out of their ditch, scuttled over and got the two who had been dropped by the mercy bullets, and retreated. Doc and his men tried to delay them. They could do little against the menace of bullets.

The black-faced ones had a car hidden down the road, in a clump of trees. They got to it, and the machine leaped away.

An instant later, the patrol car, siren wailing, hove in sight and coasted forward, the two occupants, guns in hand, intent on learning what had happened.

“It’s in the can for us if they pick us up,” Monk muttered.

“Exactly,” Doc agreed, and led their retreat. Crawling through weeds until they reached a grapefruit orchard, then running.

The two patrolmen in the car did not catch sight of them, and after a quarter of an hour of running, they slackened their pace slightly.

“Is my face red!” Monk complained. “Think of that little doll of a dame putting it over on us and getting the teeth and that red stuff away from us!”

Doc Savage halted and began carefully turning his coat pocket inside out. Before long, flakes of reddish substance began coming to light.

“Blazes!” Monk exploded. “How did——”

“Remember when she said she escaped from them by jumping out of their car in front of a bank guard?” Doc asked.

“Sure. But what——”

“A little matter of time,” Doc explained. “The banks closed about the time we were at that old mansion among the sand dunes. She could not have found a bank open, and

that made me suspicious. There was a coin in my pocket. I used it to scrape the red stuff, or rather, part of it, off the teeth, just on the chance that she was up to something.”

Monk grinned. “Then our next move is to analyze that stuff?”

“It is.”

“How long do you think it’ll take?” Monk asked.

“Depends on just how simple a compound it is,” Doc told him.

Chapter 6

RED FLAKES AND DEATH

ON his person, Doc Savage had only such unusual gadgets as he always carried when in action—numerous small contrivances which had gotten him out of many jams, and enabled him to accomplish remarkable results. He also carried a respectable sum of money.

Ham for his part, had only his supermachine pistol, his sword cane, and a phial of the drug which he put on the tip of the sword cane to make its touch conducive to instant unconsciousness. He had, too, a small amount of money.

Monk had his machine pistol, but no money, for he discovered he had lost his billfold somewhere.

This comprised the extent of their equipment.

“What’re we gonna do for instruments to analyze this red stuff with?” Monk pondered aloud.

That proved to be a problem. They visited furtively, the vicinity of the Hotel Biscayneville and found that their baggage had been removed by the police to some unknown storage. Asking its return would be futile and foolhardy. They would be arrested on sight.

Copies of the afternoon papers told them that. It was in two-inch boldface on the front pages: “DOC SAVAGE WANTED!” The famous man of bronze, adventurer and philanthropist from New York had been accused of murdering Professor Casson Adams, noted physicist.

Included in the story was a notation to the effect that Professor Casson Adams, the murdered man, had been a friend of H. U. Summervane Lawmer, who had recently vanished after taking off in his private plane in South Carolina.

The South Carolina police had been telegraphed to check up on the possibility that Doc Savage might have had a hand in the death of H. U. Summervane Lawmer, too.

“They’re not overlooking any bets to get publicity,” Ham said grimly.

“What’re we gonna do for a laboratory to analyze this red stuff?” Monk demanded. “Dang it! The cops have got Habeas, I’ll bet.”

Doc Savage called, by telephone, the head of a concern engaged in the manufacture of certain chemical products. The concern was actually one of a chain scattered over the country, and differed from most industrial corporations in that the employees worked for a share in the profits, rather than on salaries.

The concern was owned by an individual who took as his return only a share equal to the salary of the local head. It chanced that the owner had never visited the plant, but his identity was naturally not unknown.

Doc Savage requested use of the plant laboratory, and gave his name. He received permission with alacrity, a fact which did not come entirely as a surprise, because it

happened that he was the silent owner. The public did not know this fact.

Doc and Monk went to work in the chemical concern laboratory. Monk, although those who knew him freely admitted he was one of the greatest of industrial chemists, knew quite positively that he was not Doc Savage's equal, Doc had a manner of studying with incredible concentration. And he had spent most of his life in studying different subjects.

Ham stood by. He could do little more than go out occasionally, taking care that he was not seen by policemen, and get newspapers. Thus the night progressed.

THE nine o'clock editions of the newspapers that evening came out with a new development. The story about Doc Savage occupied first place, but the other ran it a close second.

Leslie Thorne had vanished.

That was what the headlines said. At first glance, the name of Leslie Thorne probably meant no more than any other twelve letters in boldface type to the majority of the citizens of Miami, and the winter visitors. Neither did it mean much to the newspaper editors and writers, but it was featured because the police seemed to be making an effort to keep it quiet, and, furthermore, high government officials were on their way from Washington to investigate. No one, stated the newspapers, would say who Leslie Thorne was.

Leslie Thorne had been taking a walk just before sundown, and several persons had seen something which looked like a mild fall of red snow down the beach. This was highly unusual. Many had hurried to investigate. It was then that it had come out that Leslie Thorne had walked behind a sand dune, and it was behind this dune that the red snowfall had centered. The red snow had melted almost instantly.

Leslie Thorne had vanished. He was not behind the dune. Where he had gone, no one knew. He had melted into the air, it seemed.

Leslie Thorne, according to the newspapers, had registered at a Miami hotel, giving Kirksville, Missouri, as his home, and had remarked to various individuals, including the hotel clerk, that he kept a shoe store in the Missouri town.

Long distance calls by the newspapers had developed that Leslie Thorne did have a shoe store in Kirksville, but peculiarly enough, he had been in Kirksville for only short intervals during the past few years. A hired manager ran the store.

Ham read this through, then went into the room where Doc Savage and Monk were working with grim-eyed concentration among test tubes and other analyzing apparatus.

"Know any one by the name of Leslie Thorne?" he asked.

Doc Savage looked at the front page.

"No," he said, "I never heard of Leslie Thorne."

"He must be some one of importance," Ham hazarded. "It says in the papers that the government is sending special investigators down from Washington. And what about that red snow?"

"Snow—as hot as it has been here?" Monk snorted. "Don't be a problem child."

But Doc Savage said, "There was red snow, and Leslie Thorne disappeared?"

"Exactly," Ham said dryly. "Doc, do you suppose red snow has anything to do with this red stuff you and Monk are endeavoring to analyze?"

Doc Savage did not answer. Instead, he asked a question.

"Have you been following the newspapers lately?"

"No," said Ham. "I used to read the comic strips, but that was before Monk came along."

"Several prominent men have disappeared," Doc stated. "Their disappearances were in widely separated sections of the country. Two of the stories, if I recall correctly, contained small references to persons who claimed they had seen red snow. These red snow stories were not believed because those who saw them were not persons noted for their veracity."

"Queer," Ham murmured. "Were these prominent men engaged in the same lines?"

"No," Doc replied. "And as far as is known, they were not even acquainted with each other."

The midnight papers came out with a startling development on the Leslie Thorne case. Leslie Thorne, official Washington had admitted, somewhat reluctantly, was just one of the names which the man used. Furthermore, Leslie Thorne was one of the most dramatic figures on the American scene, and at the same time one of the least known.

There was a story in itself back of the publishing of the story of who Leslie Thorne was. It seemed a congressman, a confirmed pacifist, and a fellow who liked to see his name in print, knew who Leslie Thorne was and had chosen this moment to spring it, along with some other startling information.

It had been long maintained that the United States had no organized spy corps, or intelligence service, in operation. The congressman declared such a group had been in operation for some time.

Leslie Thorne was the chief of this new United States intelligence unit.

DOC SAVAGE and Monk were still working when Ham brought in the newspapers containing that story, and they paused only to go over the yarn briefly.

"Looks like something big was underfoot," Ham offered.

Doc said nothing.

Monk growled, "But what's behind these killings? The victims have no connection with each other."

"One was a United States senator, one an undersecretary in the war department, and this Leslie Thorne was the chief of an intelligence unit for the government," Doc said. "That makes the three of the men connected with the government."

"Uh-huh." Monk scratched his bullet of a head. "But take the others. One was an airplane manufacturer, one a college professor, one a banker, one a mechanical engineer. What do you make out of that list?"

"A headache," Ham said.

An hour later, Doc Savage went to the telephone and put in a long distance call to New York City, requesting the number which was listed in the name of Patricia Savage, his cousin.

There were three other members of the group of five remarkable assistants which Doc Savage maintained, but they were abroad at the moment. All of the five were men famous in their particular lines. One of the missing trio was an electrical engineer, one a civil engineer, and the third a famed archæologist and geologist. Their work often took them abroad.

Patricia Savage was not exactly a member of Doc's group of five aides. She would have liked to have been. Pat loved excitement, danger and the thrills attendant to an association with Doc Savage. But Doc had turned a thumb down on her joining his crew, maintaining the life was too dangerous. However, when occasion demanded, he did employ Pat's efficient aid.

Pat was voluble when he got her on the telephone.

"I'm having my private plane tuned up at the airport," she said. "I'll be down there before morning."

"What's wrong?" Doc asked.

"I've been reading the newspapers," Pat told him. "You're in a mess, as usual. And I want some of it."

"Nothing doing," Doc told her. "I want you to visit my laboratory there in New York, and look through the storeroom until you find a large metal case marked AN-32. Send it by air express to the Magnolia Chemical Products Company in Miami. I am speaking from there now. See that it gets on a plane to-night."

"I'll bring it down," Pat said.

"You will not," Doc told her.

"What a friend you are," Pat complained. "All right. I'll see that it gets on a plane. What is it, anyway?"

"Apparatus for advanced analysis," Doc said. "We have a substance here and we want to know what it is. With the apparatus here in the chemical company laboratory, we cannot make sufficiently comprehensive tests."

"Behave yourself," Pat said, and that ended the conversation.

Ham squinted at Doc Savage and Monk.

"So you can't find out what that red stuff is?" he asked.

"Not with the apparatus available here," Doc said. "The compound seems to be something of a highly unusual nature."

DOC SAVAGE and Monk busied themselves straightening out the apparatus which they had used, and in cleaning tubes and retorts.

"What are we going to do now?" Ham wanted to know.

"There is little we can do until the analytical apparatus comes from New York and we find the nature of this red substance," Doc Savage explained. "No one knows we are

here except the local head of the chemical concern, so we are comparatively safe from police interference. It is just as well for us to stay here.”

They had not used more than a third of the red substance which had been on Professor Casson Adams’s artificial teeth. That portion which remained, Doc Savage inserted in a small glass bottle, which was in turn padded with cotton and encased in a wooden cylinder of the type which sometimes encloses pill bottles. Doc pocketed this.

After that, they slept a little—Doc Savage soundly, Monk and Ham not so soundly. There was a lagoon somewhere near by, and frogs and water insects kept up something of a clamor. It was very warm. For perhaps an hour, thunder whooped and gobbled in the distance, far out over the Atlantic, and at one time distant lightning was prominent enough to flicker redly on the laboratory walls. But the storm receded without coming close enough to even affect the strong breeze which had blown the day before and continued to blow throughout the night.

At dawn, Doc Savage arose, and without speaking, began to go through the amazing routine of exercises which he had not neglected since childhood. The exercises were responsible for his amazing physical development and the sharpness of his senses. They consisted of rituals for development of muscles, these not differing greatly from the accepted methods of physical culturists, except that they were done without apparatus, by a conscious tensing of one set of sinews against another.

Doc was near the end of his routine when he broke it off abruptly. He listened.

“A visitor,” he said.

He whipped toward the door. But before he reached it, the panel smacked open.

A portly, red-faced man came inside with dramatic abruptness. He had an upstanding shock of gray hair, a smoothly shaven face. His mouth was large, flexible, his eyes large and merry. His suit was gray, neatly pressed, and there were lodge buttons on both lapels. A large gold chain spanned his vest, which was of a lighter color than the gray suit, and from it dangled three other lodge emblems.

He held a gray derby in front of his round stomach with one hand. He lowered the derby. It had concealed a nickeled revolver. He wagged the gun playfully.

“The top of the morning, gentlemen, the top of the morning,” he said bombastically. “I trust you would not be too surprised if you found yourselves put under arrest.”

Chapter 7

THE CORPSE OF DUST

MONK said no word, but glided sidewise, making almost no noise for all of his apish bulk, and looked through the window. Then he turned around.

“Noisy, here, seems to have come alone,” he said.

“A hundred and twenty million people dwell in these United States, if we are to believe the estimate of statisticians,” murmured the portly man who wore all of the lodge emblems. “A number of people so vast as to be almost beyond the grasp of any mind but one trained to figures, a truly gargantuan population, living in a civilization of infinite complexity.

“Yes, a remarkable hodgepodge, if I may say so. Aren’t we like ants in a hill so fast that it defies the imagination—big ants and little ants, all engaged in tasks which seem to us important, but which, after all, may be of no more importance, as far as the fate of the universe is concerned, than the machinations of the *formicadae*, of which I just spoke. Amazing, isn’t it?”

“What is remarkable?” Ham asked.

“The fact that I was able to find you,” smiled the newcomer. “But, believe me, it was a task not without its difficulties. But, you see, I had my sources. Yes, my sources. It required some hours on the long distance telephone—which, by the way, is a truly remarkable invention, if I may say so. But, by telephoning, I learned Doc Savage was the angel, so to speak, behind this chemical company, and so I thought it might be well if I came out here. And it was well, as it has developed.”

Monk rolled his small eyes and said, “Johnny Windbag is the name, huh?”

The other smiled, shook his head above the shiny revolver.

“O. Garfew Beech is the name,” he said with machine gun rapidity. “Of the Arkansas Beeches, it gives me no great pride to admit. You see, my grandfather was hanged for, let us say, purloining a span of mules which were the legal appurtenances of a neighbor by the name of——”

“Cut it out!” Monk yelled suddenly. “You give me the big jeebies!”

“O. Garfew Beech is the name,” repeated the vociferous stranger. “Call me Fluency Beech. My friends do.”

Ham asked, “Cop?”

“Oh, no!” “Fluency” Beech lifted his brows and shook his head violently. “My affiliations with the law are spiritual only, as becomes a righteous citizen who abides, or tries to abide with all of the statutes which our good, if sometimes impetuous legislators——”

“All right.” Monk rolled his eyes again. “What do you want?”

“Succor,” said Fluency Beech.

Monk misunderstood. “Who’s a sucker, you bag of wind?”

“S-u-c-c-o-r,” Beech spelled. “Aid, assistance, help, support, coadjuvancy, defense _____”

“Okay.” Monk looked pained. “Then why the gun?”

“Precaution only, my good fellow.” Fluency Beech stowed his shiny revolver in a pocket. “I did not know who I would find here, you understand.”

“And why that crack about an arrest, when you came through the door?” Monk growled.

“A joke, merely,” smirked Beech. “I am a great jokester. You will have to get used to that, my good fellow.”

Doc Savage had taken no part in the conversation—it was habitual with the bronze man that he said little, for he had long ago learned that more information could be gained about an individual by observation. Words in the mouth of an expert liar can be very convincing. But Doc spoke now.

“What kind of help do you want from us?” he asked.

“Help of the most personal kind,” said Fluency Beech. “I do not want to die. Indeed, I abhor the thought of death. I hope you will make it unnecessary for me to die.”

MONK frowned at Beech and said, “See if you can put it in small words, minus the lectures.”

Fluency Beech smiled. “Words are my weakness, my love, my dissipation. If they gall you, I am sorry. You see, words are also my profession. I am a politician, although at present I might be considered a benedict, being divorced from the major parties of Florida politics. To be more detailed, I have started my own party—the National Providence and Level Deal Party, the platform of which——”

“All right, all right!” Monk growled. “I’m sorry I mentioned it. Go ahead.”

Fluency Beech whipped an envelope from inside his coat.

“Here,” he said. “Read.”

Doc Savage took the envelope, extracted a card which had been folded once, so as to cover the writing inside. There were only a few words:

My Dear Beech:

You know what happened to Leslie Thorne. We want to talk to you about that. You will meet our agent at the corner of Little Palm Street and Cuba Boulevard at seven o’clock in the morning. Or would you rather experience the same thing that Leslie Thorne experienced? You will rub a finger over the black skin of our agent and make sure the black grease paint smells of roses.

Another Black Face.

“Melodramatic and slightly ridiculous, don’t you think?” Fluency Beech asked dryly. “Black paint that smells of roses. Can you imagine? Why, even the imagination of——”

“What do you know about Leslie Thorne’s death?” Doc asked.

Beech shivered. He took his gun out of his pocket again.

“It was horrible,” he said. “It was also impossible. I thought I was going crazy.”

“Explain,” Doc requested, and only the imperative rap of his unusual voice conveyed his impatience.

“I chanced to be near this Leslie Thorne when the Red Snow fell,” explained Beech. “After——”

“It was actually red snow?” Doc put in.

“That describes it more accurately than anything else,” said Beech. “The stuff fell in flakes. I was not close enough to touch any of the flakes. But they melted when they hit the hot sand, or seemed to. Of course, there were queer aspects. The flakes did make a reddish liquid, but that evaporated and did not leave the sand stained. That is, this is what happened as nearly as I could——”

“What about Leslie Thorne?” Doc interposed.

“I heard him screaming,” Beech elaborated. “You see, he was on the other side of the dune, where the Red Snow was falling thickest. And he shrieked. He shrieked terribly. I was scared at first, but mustering my courage, I dashed over the dune, and what do you think I saw?”

“Will you get to the point, guy?” Monk growled.

“I saw Leslie Thorne, or it must have been Leslie Thorne,” Beech went on, as long-windedly as before. “He was standing there. Just standing there. He was perfectly rigid. Then—you may not believe this, but I swear I saw it; yes, sir, I swear I saw it—one of Leslie Thorne’s arms fell off!”

Fluency Beech paused for effect.

“Then Leslie Thorne himself fell over,” he continued. “The man just upset, as if he were a stiff statue which some one had given a shove. And there was a puff of reddish material. It looked like dust, but I don’t really know what it was. Well, believe me, I stood there, half paralyzed with surprise, and stared. I believe any other man would have done the same thing in my shoes.”

“You took a good look,” Monk said sourly. “Then what?”

“I went, naturally, to investigate,” Beech advised. “I must confess that I did not rush in wildly. I was a bit, let us say, jittery. All of the time I was approaching, this reddish dust was blowing away. It seemed to mix with the air and vanish completely. And when I got to where Leslie Thorne had fallen—you see, he was down behind a small ridge of sand where I could not see him after he fell—what do you think?”

No one said anything.

Beech shrugged. “Leslie Thorne was gone! There was nothing there. Nothing! Absolutely nothing!”

DOC SAVAGE said no word to that—and Monk and Ham, looking as if they half expected the bronze man’s unusual trilling sound to come into being, seemed disappointed and a little surprised when it did not.

Monk moved a little, putting himself slightly behind Fluency Beech, then lifted a hand as if to stroke the short bristles on his head, but instead, tapped his forehead significantly.

“You told this to the newspapers?” Doc Savage asked Beech.

“No,” said the talkative man. “I did not. I am a student of human nature, and a politician as well, and a politician does not wish to be ridiculed. I knew my story would be laughed at. I have been laughed at before in print, and I do not find the sensation pleasant. I simply went home. An hour or two later, I found the letter I have just shown you. It was thrust under my door.”

“Did you see the messenger?” Doc questioned.

“Unfortunately, no.” Beech looked from Doc’s bronze face, which he had apparently despaired of reading, to Ham’s features, then the simian countenance of Monk. On the latter two, expression was more pronounced.

“I see you think I am insane,” Beech said.

“Or you may be lying,” Monk grunted.

“I am not offended,” Beech said dryly. “In fact, I don’t blame you a bit. I’ll wager I do sound like an unmitigated liar.”

“And so you want us to investigate?” Doc asked.

“Exactly!” Beech nodded. “I saw the story of your troubles in the newspapers and that gave me the idea of locating you.”

“You thought this Red Snow thing might be connected with my difficulties?” the bronze man questioned.

“The thought entered my mind, naturally, but I had no proof,” Beech explained. “It is only because you are a man noted for investigating strange things which moved me to think the Red Snow and your presence here might be connected. If I may ask, is it?”

Doc Savage did not answer.

“We will look into this meeting at Little Palm Street and Cuba Boulevard,” he said. “It is now twenty minutes until seven. The meeting was to be at seven, was it not?”

“Seven, yes,” said Fluency Beech.

A CLOCK bell struck six times in a peculiar fashion—the strokes were in pairs, with a short interval between, six strokes all told.

“That clock is off,” Ham mumbled, eyeing his own plainly expensive wrist watch. “It’s seven, not six.”

“Ship’s bell, you dope,” Monk said unkindly. “It starts with one stroke at four-thirty, and strikes two at five o’clock, strikes three at five-thirty, strikes four at six o’clock, strikes——”

“Shut up!” Ham said. “You’re getting as bad as that windbag, Beech.”

They fell silent. Doc Savage was a few yards away. A thicket of shrubbery concealed them from the intersection of Little Palm Street and Cuba Boulevard, where

Fluency Beech loitered, awaiting the appearance of a man who would have black grease paint on his face, paint which was to smell of roses.

Doc Savage and his two men did not part the shrubbery to watch Beech. Nothing so reckless as that. The bronze man was using his tiny periscope.

Behind them, across a narrow parkway, was a narrow lagoon which opened into Biscayne Bay, the harbor of Miami, and in it were anchored numerous yachts. The ship's bell had struck aboard one of these. They could hear others striking from time to time, their varied notes making soft, not unappealing sounds.

Monk and Ham fell to watching Doc Savage; they saw the bronze man make a small gesture, and moved to his side. He turned the eyepiece of the periscope over to them in turn.

A figure had approached Beech, a stooped, black-faced man carrying a short, curved knife. They conversed. Beech was a good actor. He did not look in the direction of Doc Savage.

A moment later, both turned their backs to the spot where Doc and his two men lurked.

"Clever of Beech," Monk grunted. "Now that guy won't be so likely to notice us."

It was clever of Beech, all right. But the black-faced man who had met him did not seem to appreciate it.

"What the hell is the idea of askin' me to turn around?" he demanded.

"Doc Savage is, among other things, an expert lip reader," said Fluency Beech. "He is among those bushes, watching us."

"Yeah?" growled the other. "Does he smell a rat?"

"Not a very large one, at any rate," said Beech. "If he has some slight aroma of rodent in his olfactory organs, however, it is extremely doubtful if he surmises anything near the truth, although it might be——"

"You talk too much," snapped the black-faced man. "Let's get this over with."

"Wait a moment," Beech told him. "That black paint is supposed to smell of roses. I must rub some of it off and smell of it."

Beech now proceeded to stroke a finger over his companion's cheek, and to make an elaborate pretense of testing the grease paint thus removed. He nodded as if well satisfied.

"It was fortunate that Doc Savage had no opportunity to see a sample of my handwriting," he said dryly. "Otherwise, he might have realized that the note which I showed him was my own handiwork. Very careless, that. It should have occurred to me to have some one else do the writing—you for instance, my good fellow, which would have been——"

"Let's get it over with!" the other gritted. "This Doc Savage guy ain't small-time stuff."

"Patience is one of the great virtues," Fluency Beech informed his companion. "I might even say——"

"That gift of gab you've got ain't no virtue," snapped the black-faced man. "Get movin', before I bop you one!"

“Watch your tongue, fellow!” Beech’s voice went suddenly hard. “I take no such talk as that.”

“Okay,” the other mumbled.

“Everything is prepared?” Beech asked.

“Sure.”

“Where?”

“We follow the path through the shrubbery along the edge of the lagoon,” said the black-faced one. “It’s early, and there won’t be anybody on the path. Everything is set about two hundred yards down the path. This Doc Savage will follow us, won’t he?”

“It is to be hoped that he will,” said Beech. “His two men will accompany him, as well, if we are as fortunate as I have reason to believe we will be.”

The two now began moving, walking almost side by side, and turned into the path, which at this point was little more than a deep gash through luxurious tropical vegetation. It was somewhat gloomy on the path, but not so gloomy that both men failed to see the giant man of bronze who had unexpectedly confronted them.

“Turning your backs was a little suspicious,” Doc Savage said dryly. “I moved around until I could see your lips. Quite interesting, that conversation.”

BEECH reacted strangely. He began to talk.

“My dear man,” he said, “a regrettable thing has happened, which no doubt will require patient elaboration and most profound——”

He was only talking. Making words. He acted while he talked. His fat hand moved; it lashed for his pocket. It got his shiny gun. He yanked. Coat fabric tore. The whole pocket ripped, came loose, and the gun appeared.

Doc Savage was lunging in. He struck once, openhanded. The blow took Beech in the face. The man upset, became an animated ball of arms and legs. His gun flew away, hit the top of a palm, stayed there among the bright green coconuts. Beech made bleatings.

The other man began to hiss. He was like a snake. Rushing in close to Doc Savage, he drew the curved knife back.

“Get ’em up!” he gritted. “I’d hate to kill you!”

He must have read the flake-gold eyes of the bronze man. Probably he saw there no sign of surrender.

“You asked for it!” he shrilled, and slashed with his scythe-like instrument.

He did not stab, or try to get to the bronze man’s throat. Instead, he slashed downward, hooking, trying to get the blade behind Doc’s heels. He wanted to hamstring the bronze man.

Doc left the ground. He seemed to put forth no effort. The curved blade went under his feet. It cut off the tops of grass blades as if it were a razor.

Then Doc Savage got both hands on the black-faced man and yanked him forward. They came together with an impact that could have been heard hundreds of feet. The

other was stunned. Doc put both hands behind the fellow's head. His corded bronze fingers convulsed.

The giant of metal was doing something he had done once the night before—inflicting a form of paralysis simply by exerting awful pressure on certain nerve centers. The victim's struggles became weaker. His mouth fell open, as if the muscles operating it had been cut.

Beech, when he had stopped rolling, had landed flat on his back, and for a moment he lay there grotesquely, looking very silly, with his legs making running gestures in the air, and his arms paddling about. Then the glaze went out of his eyes and he got up and ran down the path as if his very life depended on his leaving the vicinity at once.

Doc's captive was now breathing noisily and staring straight ahead, utter vacantness in his eyes.

Monk and Ham came rushing up, excited, anxious for a fight, not knowing what it was all about.

“Watch this man!” Doc rapped, and dropped the black-faced fellow.

Beech was out of sight. Doc loped after him. Fleetness of the wind was in the bronze man's legs. He angled around a turn in the path, gravel rolling a little under his feet.

He saw Beech. The man was a good two hundred feet ahead. His head was back, elbows close in, and he did not wobble. In his youth, he must have been a sprinter. He was not doing badly now.

Doc had cut half of Beech's lead when he heard Monk roar out behind him. There was something about that roar. Monk's fighting roars were different. They were joyful, excited, reckless. There was surprise in this one, amazement, and maybe a measure of fear.

Doc stopped, spun about. His gaze lanced above the path, fixed there.

The brilliant morning sunlight seemed to have turned red in the one spot he could see through the trees—red because scarlet flakes were sifting down.

It was the Red Snow!

DOC heard a man scream. It was not Monk; not Ham. It must have been the man with the black grease paint on his face. Other sounds seemed to indicate two men were running. Monk and Ham were fleeing, possibly.

The sounds came as a type of muted accompaniment to the weird, amazing phenomena of the Red Snow falling in brilliant sunlight.

Doc Savage stood with his attention riveted. Behind him, he heard the fleeing Beech cry out something that was not distinguishable. The bronze man stepped to one side, getting a tree between himself and Beech without, however, looking around to see what Beech was doing, but apprehensive lest the plump, talkative man or some of his comrades waiting down the trail, would use a gun.

The Red Snow—the flakes certainly looked like snow—ceased to sift down; and only then did Doc Savage desert the shelter of the tree. He looked back.

Beech was not in sight.

Doc went toward the Red Snow, went slowly, keeping under cover, not knowing exactly what he would find, guarding against all possible contingencies.

He could see the Red Snow through the trees, now. It was vanishing, literally melting into nothingness—at least, it seemed to make liquid stains, and these faded away, leaving the fresh green of the foliage. The red flakes seemed to recede before him, and they were all gone when he came in sight of the black-faced man who had met Beech.

Monk and Ham were nowhere to be seen.

The black-faced man had managed, by some overpowering of the paralytic spell which had been laid upon him, to regain his feet. He stood rigidly, propped against a wooden frame which was around a small, freshly planted tree. There was an expression of hideous immobility on his face.

Doc stood there. Nothing moved. Even the wind seemed to have stopped. That, of course, was only a freakish coincidence.

Monk and Ham, wherever they had gone, whatever had become of them, gave no sign, made no sound.

The bronze man advanced. He moved slowly, and his strange flake-gold eyes probed everywhere, missing little. He came close to the black-faced man, kept his eyes fixed on the hideously upright figure, and when he was close, reached out a hand and put it on the man's shoulders.

There was a little weight in the hand. Not much. But it went down, sinking into the shoulder of the upright man, and a reddish powder puffed, arose and spread in the air. The entire shoulder of the man turned to the reddish powder.

Then a thing of seeming incredibility occurred, for the man seemed to fall to pieces. His figure was like a dried toadstool filled with red spores, the retaining film of which had been broken, so that the whole form disintegrated into powder. He upset.

The frame around the small tree, the diminutive tree itself, also upset, and all, hitting the ground, exploded into the carmine powder. No piece of metal, not even the man's belt buckle or the nails in the frame around the tree, resisted the fabulous phenomenon.

A small breeze came sucking through the tropical vegetation and picked up the powder, wafting it, lifting it; and the vermilion stuff, after it intermingled with the air, seemed to become one with the air itself, merging, vanishing completely, so that it could no longer be seen.

In a space of time unbelievably short, the pile that had been the body and the tree and its retaining guard were all but gone, literally vanishing into nothingness.

From Monk and Ham, there came no sound, no indication to show that they had not met a fate—fantastic though it appeared—similar to the one which had come upon the man with the black face.

Chapter 8

THE PATH TO MYSTERY

DOC SAVAGE had pursued his strange and perilous career for a long time, and because he was often subjected to danger, to sudden surprises, to inexplicable mysteries, to hideous happenings for which there was, at the moment, no explanation, he had become schooled and hardened until he was rarely taken greatly aback.

Yet he stood now as if mesmerized; without knowing it, he hardly breathed, and his eyes were pulled wide with incredulity. He was probably as surprised, as puzzled, as he had been in his eventful life.

The air about him seemed to change vaguely, and he wheeled, not sure there was danger, but fearing there might be, and started to flee. It was then that he saw his footsteps in the gravel walk. They were pits from which the fabulous reddish powder was blowing.

The pits spread, the powder caught up by the wind, and the whole sidewalk to a depth of four or five inches, well below the foundation of coarser stones, was pulled away in dust before Doc's eyes. Grass and turf followed, then limbs began to fall off the trees, to turn into cerise particles.

Doc Savage ran. He did not often run, even when the course seemed the better part of valor, but he was retreating now from something that even he, with his fabulous knowledge, his wizardry of mind, did not understand.

He stopped some fifty yards distant, got hold of himself, came back a little, and stood there. The wind was stronger. It came in puffs, rather violently. Great changing bulbs of red dust squirted up and faded into nothingness.

Doc saw a limb fall off another tree; the top of a palm came down with its load of green coconuts. Yet there was no noise of falling, not even the *sluffing* sound which might have been expected, seemingly, if the red stuff were actually so much dust—which it did not seem to be.

Over toward the basin where the yachts were anchored, some sailor or yachtsman, probably up early washing down a deck, was calling out loudly to know what was wrong. He must have heard Monk yell, or possibly had caught the scream of the man with the black face, the man who was now dissolved into nothingness.

Doc Savage looked closely at his shoes. There was, as far as he could see, nothing wrong with them. He stamped to see if they were solid. They were.

The bronze man went forward, returning to the spot where the Red Snow had fallen. In a moment, he could view it fully. It was a strange scene. There was a great spot, absolutely bare, where trees and sidewalk had been.

It was somewhat as if a monster blowtorch, one giving terrific heat, heat such as astronomers say exists in the sun, had struck over the region. Yet it was not like that,

either. A blowtorch, or terrific heat of any kind, would have charred, would have raised the temperature of the neighborhood.

The calling of the sailor had subsided on the yacht, and silence fell, broken at intervals by the calls of birds, seemingly undisturbed by the sinister and eerie descent of the Red Snow.

Doc Savage listened. He was hoping for any sound that might indicate what really had happened, hoping, most of all, for some communication from Monk and Ham.

Then, so unexpectedly that their appearance was like a visual thunderclap, Monk and Ham walked out of the shrubbery. The wild expressions on their features showed that they had seen what had happened.

“We ran when we saw the stuff,” Monk said hoarsely.

A GREAT weight seemed to have been lifted from Doc Savage. He went to work, scooping up samples of the soil—it was exposed down to the black loam—and stowing them in the envelopes which chanced to be in his inner coat pocket.

“Did you see what started that—that red snow falling?” he asked. “Was there anything in the air above you?”

Monk and Ham shook a negative simultaneously.

“If there was, we didn’t see it.”

Doc finished stowing away the envelopes of earth samples. “It may help us if we analyze it when the apparatus sent by Pat from New York gets here,” he said.

Ham pointed with his sword cane. “Beech—where did he go?”

“He had more of his gang down the path,” Doc said. “He yelled at them. I could not make out what he said. But we’ll look for him now.”

They broke into a trot down the path, but did not follow it very far, veering off into the shrubbery instead, so that they were concealed. Doc went a little ahead, warily, his superior senses straining to detect any sounds of danger.

Monk and Ham said little. They did look back frequently, as if still in the spell of what they had seen back there when the Red Snow fell.

“In about an hour,” Monk said thickly, “I’m goin’ back there and have a look, to see if I really dreamed what happened.”

They had covered about two hundred yards, and Doc Savage stopped abruptly; not turning, he motioned backward with his hands, then began to study the ground.

Monk and Ham looked closely, then understood, but knew they would have missed the faint sign had the bronze man not called their attention to it with his actions.

Several men had waited along the path. They had been on both sides of the path, it developed, when Doc Savage crossed over and found on the other side grass trampled down and dead leaves crushed where feet had pressed.

“Nine men,” Doc Savage said.

Monk wet the edges of his big mouth. It could have been one man, or nineteen, who had trampled the grass and he could not have told, although his small eyes were as

keen, his perception as acute, as that of any ordinary man. But there was no doubt in his mind that Doc was right. Doc could tell. The bronze man had powers which quite often struck Monk as being just a little beyond human.

“Beech joined them,” Doc continued. “Then they all fled.”

“We follow ’em, huh?” Monk asked.

Doc answered by going forward. Monk and Ham trailed him, keeping close to his heels, concentrating on making as little noise as possible, rather than looking about for danger. They depended on Doc’s developed powers for that, knowing from past experience that they far exceeded their own.

Beech and his party had traveled at right angles from the trail and Doc Savage, studying the length of the footsteps, knew that they had been running. But before long, the footsteps shortened, indicating the men had slackened speed.

“Careful,” Doc warned. “They may have stopped. They may be around here anywhere.”

Monk complained, small-voiced, “I wish my pet pig, Habeas, hadn’t got bunged up at the start of this, and the cops hadn’t taken him along with our baggage. He could scout through this shrubbery. He’s better than a dog at that.”

Doc Savage had been to the left a few feet an instant before, and Monk looked in that direction, as if hoping the bronze man would agree. Monk drew up very straight, and his small eyes grew round as marbles, for Doc Savage had eased away silently, was gone.

Doc was a dozen yards away at the moment, bent over low, making no sound, taking infinite pains to keep himself hidden from a small, thick bush off to the north. He circled, getting behind the bush, but found it flanked by a flowering shrub, the leaves of which were quite thick.

He had seen movement in there, was convinced it harbored some one. He came very close, approaching from the rear, then tensed and shot forward. As he had expected, he found a form crouched in the leafage.

An instant later he dragged small, pretty Nona Space out of the foliage.

MONK and Ham had heard the flutter of the bush and came running up, machine pistols ready, safeties unlatched. They stopped, and had they seen the black-faced man who had turned so fantastically into dust after the fall of red snow, they could not have looked more surprised.

The girl struggled, not so much to get free as to slacken the bronze man’s grip, which was unconsciously tight.

“After all, I’m not shatterproof!” she gasped.

Doc Savage looked at her, possibly surprised a little that she should have used those words instead of more prosaic ones, although his bronze features gave absolutely no indication of what he thought.

Monk did his best to scowl darkly at her, then made a crooked grin, consciously trying to keep the ends of his mouth down while admiration pulled them up.

“You’ll wish you were shatterproof before we get through with you,” he advised. “Where’s your pals?”

“Around somewhere,” said the girl frankly. “You’d better be careful.”

Monk blinked. “Any idea exactly where?”

“I haven’t seen them.” She shook her head. “I have an idea they were here somewhere, because they were shadowing those other men, the ones working with that talkative man called O. Garfew Beech, or Fluency Beech.”

Monk blinked again, incredulously.

“I did not see them—honestly,” the girl repeated. “I followed Beech’s men here, but I did not see the others, the ones who wear black grease paint on their faces.”

Monk rolled his eyes skyward.

“This is making me very, very dizzy,” he said. “To be quite frank, I wouldn’t be surprised if you were pulling another fast one.”

“Listen to me,” said the girl. “I’ll go back to the very beginning.”

“Then it has a beginning,” Monk said dryly.

“Don’t mind the ape,” Ham put in. “Go ahead, young lady. We are anxious to hear anything that will make heads or tails of this. We’re even willing to hear lies, if they’ll make the thing sound like there was some logic to it.”

“UP until two months ago, I lived in Atlanta, Georgia,” said Nona Space. “I worked in a lawyer’s office. One evening I was walking home from work and four men with black grease paint on their faces pointed guns at me and got me in a car. I was forced to drink something bitter. I awakened in Florida, out there in that old house among the sand dunes where you were yesterday afternoon.”

“It gets wilder and wilder,” Monk grinned. “But go on.”

Doc Savage had moved a little away, where he could hear the girl’s story, and still keep his keen senses focused on the more important, for the moment, business of making sure they would not be taken by surprise.

“My stepfather, Hyman Space, was there,” said the girl. “I was permitted to——”

“Thought he was your father?” Monk interjected.

“Stepfather,” corrected the girl. “But I think just as much of him as I would my father; I really do. Anyway, I was permitted to see him and was told he would be killed if I tried to escape, or tried to notify the police. My stepfather seemed very worried when they brought him in to see me. I distinctly saw tears in his eyes, and his face was horrible.”

“What did you gather from the situation?” Doc Savage put in.

“That they were using my welfare as a club to make my stepfather do something for them,” said the girl. “That was borne out later, when they kept me prisoner, and by the things I overheard.”

“What was their game?” Monk asked.

“I don’t know.”

Monk looked incredulous. “Yeah?”

“I don’t, really.” She looked from one of their faces to another. “I never got to talk to my stepfather, or he would have told me, if he knew. A week ago, my stepfather did manage to toss me some flexible red substance like gum or wax, and told me to hide it in my ring, and if I got a chance, to get it to you, Doc Savage.

“He said he and his two assistants were going to try to get to you with some of the stuff—one of the assistants, Professor Casson Adams, was going to hide himself in one of your trunks. You see, my father had comparative liberty—my stepfather, I mean. These men had simply threatened to kill me if he did not do as he was told.”

Monk began to look slightly less unbelieving.

“Yesterday afternoon, you came,” continued Nona Space. “The rescue attempt did not turn out so well. The men who wear black grease paint on their faces went to the morgue to search the body of Professor Casson Adams. They must have scared my stepfather into telling them Adams had taken some of the red material. They saw you. I was in the car. They threatened to kill my stepfather if I did not approach you and lead you into their trap, so they could get the red material. They reasoned you had gone to the morgue to get it.”

“And you succeeded pretty well,” Monk grinned. “What next? How come you’re here?”

“I overheard some talk which indicated my stepfather and his assistant, Ray Wood, are to be killed very soon,” she explained, her voice suddenly shriller. “It seems that whatever they have been doing is completed. They are to be killed. I was to be killed, too. So I escaped.

“I had overheard them talking about this man Fluency Beech, and knew where his man could be found. They knew Beech was working on you, or with you, or something. They weren’t quite sure. But I thought Beech’s men would lead me to you. So I followed you and here I am.”

She stopped suddenly and pointed back in the direction of the spot where the Red Snow had appeared.

“What was that red material which looked like snow?” she asked.

Monk gulped, “You don’t know?”

“I’ve told you everything I know,” the girl said emphatically.

“You don’t know what these black-faced birds are up to?” Monk asked hopefully.

“No.”

“And you don’t know who Beech is or what he is trying to do?”

“No.”

“Blazes!” Monk groaned. “This is as black a mystery as it ever was.”

Chapter 9

MYSTERIOUS ISLE

DOC SAVAGE did not question the girl further at the moment, but moved away, searching, eyes alert, following the trail made by Fluency Beech and his party. This came to a disappointing end. It terminated at a curving concrete boulevard. There were fresh drops of grease on the cement, as if cars had stood there recently. The machines were now gone.

Returning to the vicinity of the fantastic bare place where the Red Snow had fallen, Doc Savage conducted an extensive search for tracks. He found some.

The footprints had been made by four men, and they did not approach within closer than a hundred feet of the place where the Red Snow had descended with such incredible results. The men who had made the tracks had retreated and had entered a car which had been pulled into a clump of bushes a considerable distance down the curving boulevard from where Fluency Beech's men had parked their machine.

Doc Savage read the slowly straightening grass stems, the drying juice which heavy feet had pressed from weeds, as if they had been lines on a printed page.

"They fled about the same time that Fluency Beech's men departed," he advised.

"Then we're stumped," Monk muttered.

Doc now devoted some time to questioning the young woman. She answered all of his queries directly, without hesitation, and not once did she alter her story in any detail. Nor was she able to reveal anything of more bearing on the mystery than that which she had already divulged.

Monk drew Doc aside. "Do you think she's lying?"

The bronze man said, "Monk, there is one subject which I gave up studying a long time ago, simply because it seemed impossible to get the thing down to a point where it could be understood with any reliability."

"Women?" Monk asked.

"Exactly," Doc told him. "Personally, I never could even tell when one was lying to me."

The girl approached and said, "I haven't asked you many questions. Just how much do you know about this affair?"

"Not a whole lot," Doc admitted.

"Then you do not know how to get on the trail of the black-faced men?"

"There is one possible plan," Doc said.

"What is it?" she asked. "I thought of one, too. Maybe it is the same one."

"These fellows seem to know a great deal about what is going on," Doc told her. "They undoubtedly watch the newspapers. We can run an advertisement which will draw their attention, and possibly get in touch with them by that method."

“Yes,” said the girl. “If we can just draw their attention to us in such a way that it will not be too dangerous. I did not think of the newspapers. What kind of an advertisement will you run?”

“We’ll insert it now,” Doc said. “We’ll compose it on the way to a newspaper office.”

It proved something of a task to get the advertisement in the first editions of the morning papers. The advertising forms were closed the day before, it was explained at the newspaper office. But Doc Savage, by taking half a page and paying a not unattractive bonus, overcame this routine obstacle.

The next edition carried the display:

\$1,000 REWARD

FOR THE RETURN OF A SMALL ENVELOPE HOLDING SEVERAL
FRAGMENTS OF A SUBSTANCE WHICH MIGHT BE MISTAKEN FOR
RED SEALING WAX.

PHONE BEACH 0071.

Monk narrowed his small eyes as he appraised the advertisement, then demanded, “That should do the trick.”

He did not remark on the telephone number. He had seen Doc Savage, enroute to the newspaper office, stop at a small all-night drug store and enter the one telephone booth.

THEY went to the drug store, and the dapper Ham, at Doc’s request, entered and waited to take calls. To account for his waiting in the store, Ham used a simple ruse. He entered the booth, ostensibly telephoned, then came out and told the clerk that he was waiting for a call, and that it might be some time. He made himself agreeable with the attendant, from time to time purchasing soft drinks.

Ham was not entirely cheerful about his task. He had two reasons. The first, it cut him off from possible excitement, this serving as bait. Secondly, he had discovered that he liked the diminutive Nona Space. He found talking to her a pleasure, and he resented leaving her in the company of the homely Monk, who, despite his amazing homeliness, had the knack of charming women.

Times without number, Ham had wondered just how Monk got by with it. Ham himself was more than ordinarily handsome, he was the suavest of talkers and he had a remarkable line of conversation. Yet he found Monk an aggravating competitor. Ham sometimes wondered if young women, especially attractive young women, did not feel sorry for Monk because he was so utterly homely.

The street fronting the drug store, like most of Miami’s thoroughfares, was bordered with shrubbery. A block distant was a small park.

It was in the park that Doc Savage left Monk and Nona Space, an arrangement entirely to Monk’s satisfaction. They were seated on a bench, surrounded by dense

shrubbery, and Doc advised them not to show themselves for any reason, but to keep an eye open to see that they, themselves, were not discovered.

Doc Savage himself departed without advising just what he intended to do.

Telephone wires along this thoroughfare were on poles, not in underground conduits.

A man in greasy coveralls, carrying a metal case, wearing a floppy straw hat appeared shortly. He wore lineman's climbing spurs. Around his middle was one of the wide belts commonly worn by linemen, and from it dangled the usual profusion of tools.

This man did not seem large—except when he was near some object to which his size could be compared. His skin was a pasty, rather unhealthy hue.

He climbed a pole near the drug store and busied himself with pliers, wire and the inevitable test set. A moment later, he was clipped in on the line which led into the drug store.

He heard a call from a housewife who wanted a quart of ice cream delivered. He got off that wire, and clipped onto another. There were only two leading into the store. The second would be the one to the booth.

The man on the telephone pole seemed to be having a great deal of difficulty. Finally, a call came to the booth. The man on the pole listened in. It was from a newspaper reporter who wanted to know what kind of a story was behind the want-ad.

Ham told the journalist that he would call him back later, then hung up. The reporter called again immediately and demanded the story at once. Ham hung up again.

A car passed on the street. The man on the telephone pole could not see into the machine, but he kept an eye on it and saw it swing around the next block, turn in the middle of the street when it was out of sight. It repeated this after it had passed the drug store.

The man on the pole rang the booth. Ham answered.

“Get out of the store, Ham,” the man on the pole said. “There is a car acting suspiciously. I think it is our game.”

“Very well, Doc,” Ham said.

DOC SAVAGE waited until the car was out of sight again, then climbed down from the telephone pole and walked into a yard, then stepped behind a shrub. He saw the car come back and stop a little distance from the drug store.

A man got out. He had a black face and wore shabby clothes, but his features were not those of a Negro.

He entered the drug store, removing his hat as he did so. His hair was black, curly, but the curls looked as if they had been put in with a waving iron. They were too regular, not kinky, artificial.

Doc Savage crouched behind the shrubbery and removed his coveralls, tools, the old hat, the spurs, and made a bundle of them. Finding them had been a lucky break.

They had been in a lineman's car down the street and the bronze man had simply borrowed them.

The black-faced man came out of the drug store, looking disappointed.

Ham had not come into Doc Savage's range of vision, evidently having left the drug store by a rear door.

The man with the grease paint on his face—it was undoubtedly grease paint, although proof of the fact could not be detected from that distance—went to the car. Three other men, disguised like himself, waited there. They spoke and Doc, wrenching out his peculiar telescope, got it in action in time to catch the conversation by reading their lips.

The talk was not in English, but in the same foreign tongue which had been spoken by the two peddlers before Doc Savage's hotel.

"There is no one but an attendant in the shop which sells drugs," he advised.

One of those in the car must have asked a question, but Doc did not see his lips move because the fellow had his face averted.

"I questioned the attendant," said the one who had visited the drug store. "He answered me that a man had been there, greatly interested in the telephone, but had lately left. He described this man as a slender fellow who carried a black cane."

"The one of Doc Savage's men called Ham," said another of the trio in the car.

"Assuredly," agreed the first. "I questioned the attendant further, and it seems that this Ham, before taking his departure, requested that the attendant answer the telephone—and if any one spoke concerning red material in an envelope, they were to be asked to call again, for this Ham would return."

They seemed to talk this over. Part of the conversation Doc Savage did not get, because they shifted about, seeming nervous.

"You will remain here on guard," the man who had entered the drug store was told. "Two of us will remain with you. Together, we should be able to get this red material in the envelope when it is delivered—if it is delivered. And at the least, we should be able to dispose of this Ham; and if we are fortunate, of Doc Savage, and the other, Monk."

"And of the girl," added some one.

"Yes, the girl," the man said, and swore.

Three of the party remained behind. One man drove the car away.

AS DOC SAVAGE suspected they would do, the three black-faced men chose the most convenient shelter, which was the same yard in which he himself crouched. They entered the shrubbery boldly, conversing in low voices, and their fate, when it overtook them, came as a complete surprise.

One man made a squawking sound and dropped. The heavy pliers which Doc had thrown at his head glanced from their mark and struck another fellow, and he dodged so wildly that he fell down.

Doc pitched out of concealment. The man on his feet saw the bronze giant. He yelled something in his own speech. His hand raced pocketward. Too late, he saw it

was hopeless. He tried to twist. Doc's fist arched in. It was like a maul of bronze. It slammed the man's jaw.

The fellow's arms shot straight out, he lifted on tiptoe, his knees bent forward, and his stomach went in and he collapsed downward, accordion fashion.

The fellow who had been startled by the glancing pliers squared off with a knife in his hands. He was scared of the bronze man. It was in his eyes. He slashed wildly, in great arcs; it was as if he wanted to keep Doc off, rather than do him actual damage.

But the man might have been striking at a particularly agile fly with a baseball bat. He seemed to have no chance. Doc drifted in, got the knife arm and bent it. The man tried to scream, but Doc got a hand over his mouth and the fellow only made noise through his nose. Then Doc hit him carefully, on the very tip of the jaw, and the man went to sleep.

Ham came running, crashed through the shrubbery, his sword cane unsheathed and out before him.

"Well, well, well!" he said delightedly. "We now have us some sources of information!"

Doc bent over the man hit by the pliers. The fellow had been knocked out.

Doc began picking up the lineman's tools and restoring them inside the coveralls.

"Wait here," he advised Ham. "I'll send Monk and the girl."

He drifted away, walking slowly when he was on the street, and came to the park. He worked through the green foliage until he found the homely chemist and the attractive young woman.

"Ham is watching three of the black-faced gang," he advised. "He is across from the drug store. Go and help him take the prisoners to a safe place. Bind and gag them; then question them, one at a time. Try to find out——"

"What it's all about," Monk finished. "Sure, I know."

Doc moved away, his motions swift.

"What are you gonna do?" Monk called.

"Try to follow that car with the other man in it," Doc replied.

Monk's voice lifted. "But how are we gonna get in touch with you if you follow that car?"

"Call the information operator at the telephone company and tell her to direct any calls that may come for Andy Blodge to a telephone where you can hear them," Doc said.

"Okay." Monk grinned. Andy Blodge was a contraction of his own name, Andrew Blodgett Mayfair.

Doc Savage ran toward the spot where they had parked their car—it was another rented machine. He started it, headed in the direction taken by the machine bearing the one black-faced man, and drove fast.

The road was straight and wide, with only smaller residential side streets cutting in. Most of these were short, for this boulevard thrust out into swampland which had been

but partially developed—it was in fact, almost a narrow neck of dry land, with low ground and some water on either side.

Doc had known that. He had been fairly confident he would overhaul the other machine.

His confidence was justified when he caught sight of the vehicle far ahead. He drove more slowly, and began to shadow the other car.

FORTY-FIVE minutes later, Doc Savage was crawling through palmettoes and sand. He had left the car almost a quarter of a mile back, having rolled it off the road where it would not be noticed. The sand through which he crawled was of peculiar formation, being composed largely of very small sea-shells of an innumerable variety of shapes. The palmettoes were scrawny, the pointed leaves being particularly vicious.

Doc Savage knew his quarry was ahead somewhere. The man had parked his car in an ancient shed beside the road, closed the shed door and walked around behind the building. Doc had been able to see that much from up the road.

So far as he had been able to ascertain, the bronze man had himself not been seen.

With infinite caution, Doc lifted his head. He had heard a rasping sound, as if some one had drawn a difficult breath. He saw the source of the sound. It was not anything as sinister as it had sounded. It was simply the scrape of a small dory keel on the sand as the black-faced man shoved the boat down toward the water.

The craft had evidently been moored afloat by a long painter, but the tide had gone out, leaving it high and dry.

The man got the dory into the water, sprang aboard, and standing erect and using one oar, paddled away in a manner which showed he had not handled boats to any extent.

Perhaps two or three hundred yards distant, there was an island. It lay parallel with the shore, and was nearly a quarter of a mile long. There was nothing to indicate how wide it might be.

In contrast to most low islands in the vicinity of Miami, this one was covered by a luxuriant tangle of tropical vegetation, literally a jungle. There was no beach on the island, the mangroves growing out into the water itself, so that it seemed there was no land, only vegetation.

The man in the dory was paddling for the island.

Doc Savage studied the shell beach on which the boat had been lying. Crossing it without being observed was a chance too great to take, especially if there were unseen watchers on the island.

The bronze man squirmed backward through the sand and palmettoes and turned north. Within a hundred feet, he came upon a salt water creek. The bank of this was steep, hard to climb, which perhaps explained why the dory had not been moored there.

Doc selected the most advantageous spot, one where the bank would slide less voluminously; he stripped off his garments until he was clad only in his silk shorts. He slid down the bank, a giant of a man with muscles and sinews which would have

thrown a physical culture fan into ecstasies, and entered the water. He carried the tube of his periscope device.

He lengthened out and whipped soundlessly along the surface until he reached the mouth of the creek, then went under without any of the elaborate somersaulting usually resorted to. He had made no splashing.

Once beneath the surface, he threw himself over and over several times with quick gestures of his hands. He had a deliberate reason for that. Air bubbles might have remained in his ears, his nostrils, or even in his shorts, and coming up later and breaking on the surface, would attract attention. He swam with long strokes, in each of which his muscles got full play.

When his trained lungs felt the strain—Doc had learned the trick of staying under water from the pearl divers of the South Seas—he ceased striking and worked with the periscope device.

The lenses came off easily, and were stowed in the little clip-box for that purpose, affixed to the side of the telescoping tube. Then he ran the tube up, fitted it between his teeth and arose until, with eyes wide open, he felt that it projected above water. He drank out the salt water which filled it, then began to breathe easily through the tube.

He did not hurry the breathing. When he was about ready to go on, he inhaled and exhaled several tremendous breaths. This charged his lungs with fresh oxygen. Then he took a normal breath, one which could be held without continual strain.

This latter process was one of the South Seas tricks. The amateur adds to his exhaustion by filling his lungs to capacity, so that there is a muscular strain from the expanded ribs.

Doc Savage repeated this process a number of times. Then the water seemed to grow dark, indicating the mangrove branches were above him. The next instant, he felt the tangled roots. With infinite caution, he eased up among the stems.

The dory was not in sight. Evidently it had been drawn in among the mangroves.

Doc crawled up out of the water. He stood for some moments on a submerged root, with only his feet in the water, letting his giant frame drain so that there would be no splashing. Then he went forward.

Almost at once, he heard voices.

ONE of the speakers had a flutelike tone, and was unmistakably the chief of the black-faced men, the one who had been called by the somewhat strange cognomen of Ark.

“You fool,” he was saying. “You drove out without changing cars?”

“Why change cars?” questioned another voice. “Nothing happened. No one would have reason to trail me.”

The second speaker was undoubtedly the man Doc Savage had trailed to the little islet.

“No one would have reason——” Ark broke off and swore expressively in his native tongue. “We have been entirely too careless. First, it was Doc Savage. Then it

was this noise box, Beech. Next, it will be the firing squad for us.”

“They do not use firing squads in this country,” murmured the other.

“What they do use will be just as effective,” Ark snapped. “Use more care hereafter.”

“I will,” said the second man. “Are things progressing satisfactorily here?”

“They are,” said Ark. “Come. I will show you.”

The two moved away, and Doc Savage trailed them, but not by sight. He followed by sound. It was well that he did, for he discovered there were other of the black-faced men, who had not spoken, and who had not followed Ark and the newcomer. These were lookouts, posted at intervals along the jungle-matted rim of the island.

Ark and his companion moved directly across the island, where the growth was less thick and where a small inlet seemed to snag into the land in such a manner that its presence was hardly noticeable from the seaward side.

There was a speedboat moored in the rather shapeless harbor, the same craft in which the black-faced men had escaped when Doc and his two companions pursued them from the old mansion among the sand dunes.

Tied securely to the mangroves along the shore was a large, dilapidated barge. The craft had seen much usage. Yet closer inspection showed that it was still usable, providing it was not subjected to seas too rigorous. Timbers slanted from the barge to the shore, and the manner in which the jungle was broken down around the spot showed some heavy work had been done there.

Ark and his companion passed the barge, went on.

Doc Savage studied the marks where the craft had been unloaded. Whatever had been taken off had been heavy. The moving had been done by rollers.

ADVANCING, the bronze man came to a spot where one of the burdens had slipped over a small embankment and had been hoisted back, probably by the use of a block and tackle. The foot of the embankment still held a fair impression of the base of the object. Doc surveyed the impression closely.

In size, in shape, it about coincided with the dimensions of the pedestals erected in the basement of the house among the sand dunes—the pedestals which had been covered over with canvas, yet which had held nothing.

There seemed to be no lookouts along this side of the island. Doc quickened his pace, coming up to where he could hear Ark and his follower talking as they moved along.

“If any one should land on the island and see the trail made by the moving,” the follower was saying in the foreign tongue, “they will be suspicious. The island is supposed to be deserted.”

“We will make it seem that nothing has been moved,” advised Ark.

“That will take much work.”

“We will do the work,” Ark snapped.

“It is safe here?” the other muttered uneasily.

Ark said, "It is not all that we might desire, but we will use care. Anyway, the major part of our work is done."

"The odors—they may reach the shore," suggested the first.

"We will work only when there is an offshore wind," Ark told him. "When boats come near, fishing, we will shut down. This is not a populous spot. It will not be difficult."

"Let us hope that is true," his companion murmured.

Doc Savage had discarded much of his caution. They were near the center of the island, and it seemed a reasonable supposition that no lookout would be posted here—and if there were any, they would speak to Ark and his companion in passing, thus disclosing their location to Doc.

So, when a man eased around a tree within a dozen feet of Doc Savage, the bronze man was, to his infinite disgust, caught flat-footed.

The man was burly. His clothing was fairly new and not cheap, but it was wrinkled and there was mud to his hips. His face was squarish, grim.

He gestured slightly with the sawed-off shotgun which he held. The gesture ordered Doc to stop.

The man did not speak.

Chapter 10

IN AND OUT

DOC SAVAGE stood perfectly still, so tense that the amazing cables of muscle sheathing his great frame ridged out distinctly. He put his hands up slowly. It was the wise thing to do. He carried no weapon, no gadget—he was clad only in shorts.

The square-faced man made a gesture with his shotgun again, and Doc advanced slowly. He could hear Ark and the other walking on; their noise became fainter.

Doc parted his lips as if to say something.

“*Sh-h-h!*” admonished the man with the shotgun.

Doc made his voice very low. “Why the quiet? Who are you, anyway?”

“Pipe down,” the fellow said. He shifted the shotgun meaningly. “Play safe and come along with me. I’m taking you to the boss. Me, myself, I don’t know what to do with you. So I’ll take you to him.”

“Who is your boss?” Doc demanded.

The man said, “Don’t ask goofy questions!” and nudged Doc with the shotgun.

Doc began to walk. He had been guided to the right, so he went that way.

“If you’ve got sense, you won’t make any noise,” whispered the man.

“Why not?” Doc questioned.

“Oh, hell,” said the other. “If you want to make a noise, go ahead and make it, and the whole gang will be down on our necks.”

Doc Savage surrendered for the moment, and went on, changing his course as he was urged, crawling through tangles of foliage, easing around the boles of the palms, occasionally walking over tangled mangrove roots. There were insects in the jungle, hordes of them, and they began to make existence miserable.

The shotgun kept always against his back, or close to it, and the square-faced man seemed to be experienced in this sort of thing, for not once did Doc get an opportunity to turn upon him.

They reached a particularly thick bit of growth, worked their way inside, and found tracks in the soft muck where one or more men had stood. These prints, due to the dusk beneath the thick canopy of leafage, were indistinct.

Doc Savage, who could look at footprints, and, because he had studied the varied character of feet and manners of walking, could not infrequently tell whether he had seen them before, endeavored to inspect the prints, but the light was insufficient. He bent down with the idea of getting a closer look, but the shotgun muzzle urged him up again.

“Guess the boss moved,” said the gun wielder. “He was here not long ago. Well, we’ll look around some.”

He had spoken in a very low voice and Doc Savage answered in the same manner. His captor seemed to have no desire that they be discovered, and with this, Doc was in hearty accord.

They headed toward the lower end of the island, which seemed to be wider, somewhat higher, and even more densely jungled. Eventually, they heard sounds. They approached with great care. Doc's captor seemed to want to hear what was going on. The bronze man was equally curious.

Men, they discovered, were at work obliterating the marks made by the heavy machinery. Doc's captor lifted up and had a long look, then lowered himself and would not let the bronze man make an inspection.

"We've been wondering what they hauled ashore here," the fellow breathed. "Danged if I don't find out."

At the point of his gun, he guided Doc in a circle. They came to a building, made of blocks of coral and mortar and obviously built a long time ago. The stocky man studied the place.

"That's where they took whatever it was," he whispered. "Brother, you're stayin' here while I have a look."

"That may be dangerous," Doc warned.

The other eyed the bronze man intently.

"I wonder if we ain't made a mistake about you," he grunted. Then he shrugged. "Well, I'll settle that later."

He produced two pairs of handcuffs. They had been wrapped in cloth so that they would not clink together and make a noise. He applied one set of manacles to Doc's wrists, the other set to the bronze man's ankles.

"You just play like you were petrified, and I'll be back," he whispered.

"Careful," Doc repeated his admonition.

"That's my middle name," grinned the other.

He crawled through the high grass and covered fifty feet. Then a bell rang loudly. From half a dozen points, armed men popped into view.

THERE must have been hair-thin wires stretched through the grass, wires painted green so that they would not be noticed against the verdant background, or gray so that they would be mistaken for cobwebs. Breaking them must have set off the alarm bell.

The men who appeared were all armed. Some of them had the inevitable black grease paint on their faces. Others did not.

Yelling gutturally, they charged the burly man who had been so unfortunate as to set off the alarm. He reared up on his feet, surveyed the situation with one glance, and picked the nearest shelter. This took him away from Doc. Perhaps he was trying to distract attention from the bronze man, as well as escape himself.

A rifle whacked. The blocky man ducked slightly. He was not hit. The bullet must have come close. He half turned his body above the hips as he ran. His shotgun

launched thunder into the clearing. He aimed without using the sights; it was a pump gun and he jacked the slide with his left hand.

The shooting was little short of miraculous. Had the blocky man been a trap-shooting expert on an easy range, breaking targets for the sport of it, he could not have been more deadly. He did not shoot twice at any one man. He did not need to. Every one of his charges dropped a foe.

More rifles were adding their vicious snap to the uproar. Pistols made more hollow smashes. Men cursed, screamed. One of the wounded was crying out awfully.

The blocky man with the shotgun went down. For an instant, he was lost in the grass. Doc could hear him swearing. The man's profanity was like a pack of firecrackers going off—explosive, vituperative.

He must have reloaded his shotgun while he lay there, for when he got up, he was shooting again. Doc saw one of the shotgun charges strike an attacker full in the face. It made three round, distinct holes. That explained why the charges were so deadly. The cartridges were loaded with big buckshots, slugs perhaps as large as a woman's finger nail.

The fugitive dived into the growth. He had evidently not been damaged badly by the bullet which had forced him down. He disappeared. His flight was a loud crashing.

Doc Savage had not been lying quiescent. He was fighting the handcuffs. It would have been simpler had he possessed padding to shove inside the rings. But there was nothing that would serve. He worked with his ankles, straining. The steel cut in. Crimson came. With his hands, he added what strain he could.

He had tried this thing of breaking handcuff lines before. Sometimes he succeeded. Sometimes he did not. There were handcuffs so strong that it was a physical impossibility to break them. Those which he wore now seemed to belong to the latter class.

He had been seen. Men ran toward him. The foremost identified him, whipped up an automatic rifle, took a deliberate aim and fired.

THE coördination of muscles and nerves with which nature has endowed living creatures is a fabulous thing when developed to its fullest. It is said that the bird which hunters contemptuously call the helldiver can, and does, see the flash of the gun and dive before the bullet arrives—at least, such is the explanation often brought forward to account for the difficulty in shooting the ungainly bird.

What Doc Savage did was a shade less spectacular. He watched the trigger finger of the gunman, saw it flex, and whipped madly sidewise. The bullet slashed grass where he had reposed.

The rifleman swore, took a second deliberate aim. As his finger flexed, Doc leaped, this time not quite sure that he would get clear, but striving, as wild instinct dictated, to maintain his life thread unbroken as long as possible. But nothing happened. The automatic rifle was empty.

Then Ark ran into the clearing. He was a grotesque figure with his spindling limbs; he still wore golf knickers, but they were a different pair, these of an abominably green

color. His hairless head resembled a dark billiard ball. Branches had scraped the grease paint off in long streaks.

Ark took in the situation. He began to shriek in his native tongue.

“Do not kill him!” he yelled. “There are things we should ask him!”

By now, they had observed that Doc Savage was hampered by the handcuffs, and two men ran up boldly. They pounced on the bronze man. There was a sudden struggle. Blows whacked. Both attackers came flying out of the *mêlée*—and one, hitting the ground hard, got up screaming and drawing a knife. He rushed in again.

“No, no!” Ark bawled. “He is handcuffed, you fools! Take him alive!”

Doc Savage suddenly ceased fighting. It was futile, dangerous. It would only arouse his foes, and there was no chance of his escaping, anyway.

He was seized unceremoniously. More men came running. The little island seemed to be alive with them.

Ark indicated Doc Savage. “Carry him inside. We will question him.”

“But what about the other one who ran?” asked one of the men.

“Perhaps he will come to rescue his chief,” Ark chuckled. “We will search for him, too.”

“But the one who ran was not one of Doc Savage’s men,” corrected the other.

“*What?*” Ark made it shriek.

“The other was a man whom none of us had ever seen before,” said one of the men.

The words seemed to release an emotional brake in Ark. He bounced around, spouting orders. Men ran off to push a search.

Another pair of handcuffs were brought and clipped to Doc Savage’s ankles, reënforcing those which were already there, and a pair was added to his wrists. Then he was carried into the building of coral and mortar.

There was no roof over the room where he was deposited, and grass and weeds grew from the stone floor.

After a time, Ark came in.

“At no time have we been introduced with the formality befitting individuals of distinction,” Ark said. He clicked his heels, bobbed his round, hairless head in a brisk bow. “I am the Baron Lang Ark. You have heard of me?”

Doc Savage did not speak immediately, but studied the features of the man before him, sometimes shifting his gaze to two bodyguards who had accompanied Ark into the roofless room. They were foreigners, aliens who might smuggle themselves into the United States. Immigration officials were on the lookout for such. Florida was one of the great centers of the alien smuggling trade. Hence these men, noticed too frequently, would have attracted attention.

Negroes were plentiful in Florida. These men could pass as such with their skins properly darkened. Few observers would note that they lacked the lip contour, or observe their other tiny faults.

The Baron Lang Ark looked impatient and repeated, “You have heard of me?”

“No,” Doc told him.

“Excellent!” The other laughed. “That is not my true name. Now, you will answer my questions. First, who was the other man?”

“I do not know,” Doc told him.

“Who put the handcuffs on you?”

“He did.”

Ark bowed shortly. “Then he is not a foe to be ignored. I gather that you followed my man here?”

Doc said nothing.

“Did you?” Ark snapped.

Doc held silence.

“The man was killed by the one with the shotgun, so you need not withhold the truth to prevent him being punished,” said the hairless man.

Doc said, “I followed him here.”

“How many came with you?”

“No answer I could give to that would be believed,” Doc stated without emotion.

“True.” Ark showed perfect white teeth in a smile. “We will go back to that question later. Did this man with the shotgun follow you here?”

Doc said in entire truth, “I have not the slightest idea.”

“Why did he take you prisoner?”

“That seems to be part of the mystery.”

Ark stood and thought that over. He produced cigarettes—long, thin, blue cylinders with gold tips, and stuck one in his small mouth. Both his bodyguards hastened to strike matches.

“This fellow with the shotgun must have followed some of my men here,” he said finally. “That is the only way he could have found the spot. None of my men have been seized and tortured. This man trailed some one. That means my men have been careless. Entirely too careless.”

There seemed to be no call for a reply, and Doc Savage said nothing.

“My men need an example to show that such carelessness is not wise,” Ark murmured. “I shall make one of the fool who permitted you to trail him here.”

Doc Savage showed no emotion. “You said that one was dead.”

“I am a famous man, not a gentleman nor a man with any honor,” Ark replied. “I lied to you.”

Doc Savage made no answer. He was disgusted. Not often did he fail to sift truth from untruth in a man’s speech. And this Lang Ark had deceived him completely. The fellow was an accomplished hypocrite.

ARK now cracked a command in his native tongue—he had been speaking English of fair quality—and the man whom Doc Savage had trailed to the island was brought into the roofless enclosure.

The fellow was scared; much of the black paint on his features had been rubbed off, and his skin, thus exposed, had a stark color. His eyes were steadily wide, unblinking, as if the lids were permanently wedged apart. But there was no shaking in his limbs.

“The bronze man followed you here,” Ark told him.

“If that is true,” the man said hoarsely, “I deserve a great punishment.”

Ark eyed him. “I am going to be very generous.”

The man seemed to know his chief very well. He did not appear greatly relieved. He said nothing.

“Release him,” Ark commanded.

The man was freed. Those who had brought him in stood aside. Still the accused did not speak.

“You may go,” Ark told him.

The man’s mouth sagged. He seemed unable to believe what he heard.

“You—you mean I can—walk out of here?” he stumbled.

“Exactly,” Ark said.

A great gladness came over the man’s face. The startling change in his features was an indication of the nature of punishment he had expected. He seemed overjoyed at the leniency.

“Go!” Ark directed.

The man bowed deeply to Ark, then turned and walked toward the door.

Ark drew an automatic pistol and without displaying particular emotion, shot the man in the back of the head.

“He died happy,” he said dryly, as the body was carried out.

Doc Savage watched the man steadily. He knew that the slaying had been, in part, to impress him, to weaken his self control. But he had schooled himself to keep such things from affecting him as they might affect another. There was a way of doing it. Concentration played a large part.

But the bronze man had seen blood shed in a cold fashion on other occasions, yet never quite so callously as this. He was seeing in this Lang Ark a foe of more dangerous calibre than he had expected, or thought. The fellow seemed to have absolutely no nerves; he could tell untruths as convincingly as he recited facts; he was undoubtedly ingenious as well as cold-blooded, and, not the least important, there was a certain something about his manner, an air, in a sense, which meant that he was motivated by some great purpose. It was the same manner that drives a painter to do a great canvas, or a writer to turn out a classic.

The Baron Lang Ark was out to accomplish something, and would stop at nothing to succeed.

Ark came over to Doc and said, “You will tell me where your two men and the girl, Nona Space, can be found.”

“Then what?” Doc asked.

“They will be taken prisoner,” Ark said. “They will be held, unharmed, until certain things happen.”

“What things?” Doc asked.

Ark laughed, and entirely ignored the last question.

“Where are the two men and the girl?” he repeated.

Doc replied, truthfully, “I do not know.”

Ark studied him for a long time. There was something hideous, repulsive about Ark’s hairless head. It was somehow like the shiny body of a spider, a body which had been stripped of all the legs but one, that one serving as a neck. The body was a little bloated, too.

“I have various methods for making one talk,” Ark said. “We will try them.”

THEY lifted Doc Savage bodily and carried him through an arch in the wall, an arch which looked as if it were in constant danger of falling down. They passed through a room where the floor had been grubbed free of grass and weeds. Beyond was an open court—this ruin of coral had once been a dwelling of the Spanish type, with a courtyard in the center.

In the court was a pit which had once been a fountain or a swimming pool—probably the latter, because it was deep, although the dimensions were not large.

Doc Savage was lowered to the bottom. One of the men brought a coil of wire, and this was employed in binding the bronze man, although there was no likelihood of his breaking the handcuffs.

When the wire was all used, he was little more than an elongated bundle of gleaming metal. Some one brought two iron rods, longer than Doc was high, and immensely stiff, and these were wired to him, or he was wired to the rods, so that he could not bend or flop about.

Several sheet-metal drums were rolled up. These were larger than ordinary barrels. They were arrayed around the edge of the swimming pool so that they projected slightly over the rim.

A lighted lantern arrived. Ark himself removed the globe and placed it, still burning, on the floor near Doc Savage. In order to make sure that he could not reach it, a stout iron pipe was driven through the cracked floor of the pool—the latter was of concrete—and he was wired to it.

With a hammer and a pointed punch, Ark drove a hole in the lower edges of each of the drums. A dark fluid ran out, splattered on the pool floor, spread. Its odor identified it. Crude oil.

“It is not highly explosive or extremely inflammable,” Ark told Doc Savage quietly. “But it will burn. It is the same oil which is used in Diesel engines. It makes a very hot fire.”

Doc said nothing.

“This may seem like good old melodrama,” Ark said, still without particular emotion. “But I am not doing this because I desire you to meet a particularly horrible form of death. I want you to think. By thinking, you may conclude to answer my questions. You can watch the level of the oil come up on the base of that burning light.

I do not know just how high it will come before it does take fire. Perhaps it will be soon, perhaps late. That is for you to wonder about.”

Doc’s interest seemed far away, where the sun was a brazen disk high overhead.

“In the meantime, my men may find your two aides, Monk and Ham,” Ark said.

Then he went away.

Chapter 11

THE MEN OF DUST

MONK and Ham were having their troubles.

Their car—they had rented a machine—was traveling something near seventy-five miles an hour. The car had a cut-out; this was open. Monk drove. Ham kept the tip of his sword-cane on the horn button. It was a special type of horn, one which played cornetlike musical tones, and its uproar added a unique touch to the general bedlam of their hasty progress.

Nona Space rode in the back. She held a wrench which had been taped, not too generously, with bicycle adhesive, and from time to time she discouraged their three prisoners by tapping them ungently over the head. They were bound tightly and gagged, but they seemed anxious to throw themselves out of the car, despite the fact that, even lying on the floorboards as they were, they should have been able to tell that the machine was traveling at a tremendous rate of speed.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, was in the rear—Ham positively refused to sit in the front seat with him. Dog fashion, the homely pig had his head hanging out of a window. The rush of air kept his oversize ears distended like wings.

Habeas was the cause of their present jam—Habeas, and Monk's impetuosity.

They had been driving sedately through Miami, after renting the car, hunting a secluded spot where they could question their prisoners without a likelihood of being interfered with. Monk had sighted Habeas Corpus on a Miami street.

"Look out, you ape!" Ham shrieked.

Monk gave the wheel a frantic twist, rubber shrieked, the machine keeled up on two wheels without slackening pace, and they rocketed out into the highway again. Monk had mistaken a wide driveway for a side road.

The car went on, its worn engine making a great uproar and giving off an ominous smell of something burning. Ham looked back anxiously, diverting his attention only when jarring of the car as they crossed bumps caused his sword cane to slide off the horn button.

"You awful mistake!" he told Monk sourly. "You got us into this!"

Ham gave thought to the immediate past. When Habeas Corpus had been sighted sitting forlornly on the sidewalk, Monk, in his excitement, had not stopped to survey the surroundings closely. He had jumped out and run to get the pig. That action might have been very well in its place, but Habeas chanced at the moment to be in front of the Miami police headquarters. A cop had sighted Monk, recognized him from the description which had no doubt been broadcast. Monk was an individual easily described.

A squad car, loaded with policemen had taken after them. It was still on their trail.

“You missing link!” Ham howled. “Why don’t you pick another road, one that’s crooked, and got trees along it? They can see us for two miles on this one!”

The road they were traversing followed the bank of a river passing frequent side roads which branched off and crossed, via the inevitable drawbridge, the river.

Monk half lifted in his seat, squinting far ahead. There was a bridge a quarter of a mile distant—no other as far as the eye could see.

“What I been lookin’ for!” Monk grunted.

He swung onto the bridge in a manner which caused Ham, whose nerves were ordinarily excellent, to make choking sounds and throw up his arms as if expecting a crash. Halfway across the bridge, Monk put the brakes on, and the car did everything but swap ends or blow out tires.

The square shack of the drawbridge operator stood on the opposite side. The car stopped before that. Monk piled out, dived for the shack.

A sleepy, mustached attendant appeared in the shack door. His mouth hung open.

“Can you swim?” Monk demanded.

“Sure,” said the attendant. “I’m a durn good swimmer, but what has that got——”

He did not finish, because Monk had him by the shirt collar and trousers seat. The homely chemist ran his captive to the rail, lifted him and calmly plunged him into the water a dozen feet below. The fellow came up and began to swim about, still not knowing what it was all about.

Monk was inside the shack. He found the levers which set the drawbridge to lifting, and operated them. Machinery started grinding.

Ham stared in exaggerated amazement at Monk when the apish chemist popped back into the car.

“Could it be,” he gasped, “that you have really got a brain?”

The car rocketed on. Behind them, the drawbridge came up in time to block the pursuing squad car. It would take some minutes at the least for a policeman to swim across, settle the span back in place, and then get the pursuit resumed. By that time, it was fairly certain to be too late.

MONK turned off into a side road through a series of neat grapefruit groves, when the police car was out of sight. He drove at a more decorous pace, one which would not arouse suspicion.

“That was what I call quick thinking,” pretty Nona Space complimented Monk.

“Rats!” Ham told her. “He had read about that stunt somewhere. He never had an original thought in his life.”

Which was hardly a statement to be construed as fact, since Monk was rated, by those who should know, as one of the brainiest and most skilled chemists actively engaged in that profession.

Their car came to a stretch of uncultivated land which was covered by a growth of trees and brush. An ancient lane penetrated this tangle. Monk got out, made an examination to be sure the lane did not lead to a house, then drove in until the car was

out of sight. He went back with a bough and switched out the car tracks as best he could, especially in the dust near the edge of the road.

The three prisoners were now hauled out and, as a preliminary, the black grease paint was removed from their features. It was obvious that all three belonged to the same foreign nationality.

Monk frowned. "These eggs all comin' from one place—what d'you figure that means?"

"It simply means that crows associate with crows and vultures with vultures," Ham snapped.

They now began to question the three prisoners. They had expected to learn nothing at first, or without taking drastic measures, but they were a little surprised when all three of the captives professed not to understand English.

It was the dapper Ham who had a remedy for that. Ham was something of a linguist. He addressed the three earnestly and to the point in their native tongue, after which the trio exchanged furtive, uneasy glances, a tribute to the convincingness of what Ham had told them concerning their future prospects.

But the three still gave no signs of intending to talk.

Monk leered fiercely, leaned down, picked one up, and calmly began to bend the fellow double. There was an awful strength in Monk's simian arms—bending silver half dollars between thumb and forefinger and tearing books of fair thickness across with his naked hands were among his parlor tricks.

His victim began to scream. Monk desisted long enough to gather a fistful of moss and employ it as a gag.

Monk's first manipulations were executed with gusto. Then they became more systematic. And Monk used a beautiful judgment. Bones, he did not quite break. Muscles, just on the point of tearing from their moorings, were eased of strain.

The prisoner became so wet with perspiration that almost a steady thread of drops ran from whatever portion of his features that was lowermost.

Nona Space gasped and moved away, where she would not have the spectacle before her eyes. From time to time, Monk removed the moss gag to give the man a chance to talk, but without results.

Cars passed on the road. Ham, posting himself where he could watch, observed that two of them were police machines. In the brilliant sky to the southward, an airplane droned.

"You'd better cough up, guy," Monk told his victim. "I want to know what's behind all of this. But first and foremost, I wanta know what that red snow stuff was, and what actually happened to the guy who was caught in it."

He got no answer. One of the other captives hissed something, evidently an admonition to Monk's prisoner not to talk.

Monk scowled over at the one who had given a warning. "Save that! When this guy wears out, it'll be your turn!"

The sound of the plane was coming closer.

Monk discovered unexpectedly that his victim was thrown into paroxysms by having the bottoms of his feet tickled, and the homely chemist fell to work with a coarse blade of grass.

“Monk!” Ham yelled suddenly. “That plane!”

Monk peered upward. “Police ship!” He flung off his prisoner. “Help me yank off green branches and put ’em over the top of the car, so they can’t see it.”

But it was apparent, even as they started, that they were too late. The pilot of the plane saw them. He sent his craft circling low.

THE car which Monk and Ham had rented was a fairly distinctive light-gray machine. This had not been to their liking, but it had been the only fast vehicle available. The police plane, circling two hundred feet up, recognized the car. It was doubtful if those aboard saw Monk, Ham, the girl or the prisoners. They were all out of sight beneath foliage.

The ship swung away, and Monk had a false moment of relief in which he muttered, “Well, they missed us.”

Then the plane came swinging back.

“You were too optimistic,” Ham growled.

The ship was directly above. Suddenly, one of the captives cried out, and all three began to thrash about violently, trying to get into the open where they would be seen. One succeeded. The police plane arched down so close that its propeller blast stirred the leaves on the trees.

Then Monk and Ham gave tremendous starts as a thunderous voice crashed out.

“You are under arrest!” it said. “You will come out into the road with your hands up and await the arrival of squad cars!”

The underportion of the plane was fitted with one of the huge loud-speakers of the type sometimes used for advertising from the skies.

“Sure, watch us do that,” Monk gritted. “Ham, we’d better load everybody in the car and make a run for it.”

“But they can follow us,” Ham objected.

“Yeah.” Monk scratched in the short bristles atop his nubbin of a head. “Well, I’ll take the car by myself. They’ll think we’re all in it. I’ll decoy ’em away and ditch ’em somehow. You take the three prisoners and the girl and skip out while they’re shaggin’ it after me.”

The loud-speaker on the police plane thundered, “Get out into the road, you fellows! You are charged with the murder of Professor Casson Adams!”

Monk got into the car, tramped the starter and backed the machine, turning around.

Those in the plane saw it move. The aircraft swooped. A uniformed officer leaned over the side and tossed out three objects nearly as large as one-gallon thermos jugs, and of somewhat the same shape. These hit the ground and began to spew vapor. All three landed close to Monk and Ham and their companions.

“Tear gas!” Monk howled. He tried wildly to get the car out of the little patch of timber, but it was too late. He crashed into a tree, caromed off, and got the machine wedged where it would not move any direction under its own power.

Monk scrambled out blindly, making disgusted noises.

MONK was still making disgusted noises when police patrol cars, half an hour later, arrived with sirens wailing and radio loud-speakers making uproar. The officers alighted and took charge of the prisoners.

The captives were placed in two large phaetons, which started for the Miami metropolitan district, running one behind the other. Several officers, using their strength, got Monk’s rented car free of the trees, and another officer drove it in.

Monk and Ham sat in gloomy silence. But the young woman was more vociferous. She seemed to think she could convince the police that they had made a mistake.

“I should have gone to the police before with the truth,” she said wildly. “But I was afraid they could not find my father—my stepfather—and Ray Wood, and I feared activity of the police would hurry the slaying of the two. I thought Doc Savage would be my best chance.”

“Doc is probably doing all right,” Monk muttered.

The police were letting them talk, and listening with interest for what information they could pick up.

“I can prove to the police that you did not murder Professor Casson Adams,” Nona Space said eagerly.

Ham, whose knowledge of the intricacies of the law was exceeded by very few individuals, asked, “How can you prove it?”

“Why, I can tell them Adams went to see you, and that the black-faced men must have killed him,” she exclaimed.

Ham shook his head wearily.

“Policemen are very nice gentlemen who have long ago learned to believe very little that they are told,” he assured her. “I am afraid they will laugh at you.”

“I’m going to try it, anyway,” the girl said firmly.

“By all means,” Ham agreed. “But save it for the chief of detectives and the district attorney. Telling these patrolmen will not do much good.”

The police cars—the two phaetons were alone now—stopped for a traffic light on the outskirts of Miami, and an ambitious newsboy approached the car, waving his wares and crying the headlines.

“Naval admiral lost in red snowstorm!” he yelled.

“Huh!” grunted one of the cops. “What’s this?”

They bought several editions of the papers, and as the two phaetons rolled along, read the story.

Monk and Ham were both in a position where they could observe the headlines and the story beneath.

ADMIRAL MARVIN FOOTE SAMPSON
LOST

RED SNOW MYSTERY GROWS

The Red Snow has struck again. At approximately eight o'clock this morning, a heavy fall was observed to descend upon the yacht *Voyager*, anchored off Miami Beach. The yacht was lost to view in the thick of the red flakes, and has not been found since. Police tend toward the belief that the boat sank, but dragging parties have not yet located the craft.

Aboard the yacht *Voyager* was Admiral Marvin Foote Sampson of the United States navy, grand old tactician and dean of instructors at the U. S. War College. Admiral Sampson was vacationing in Florida. Also aboard the yacht were members of the crew and Admiral Sampson's secretary.

Police are also investigating another red snowfall which was reported to have occurred early in the morning near a lagoon, close to the intersection of Little Palm Street and Cuba Boulevard.

There was more of it. But a policeman noted Monk's intense interest in the story and shoved out a jaw at the homely chemist.

"You know anything about that?" he demanded.

"Can't a guy read the news?" Monk countered.

The cop put his jaw out farther. "You might be mixed up in this Red Snow stuff, at that. Doc Savage is noted for some queer things he's done, ain't he?"

"Search me," Monk said evasively.

A moment later, he got time to slip a word in an aside to the dapper Ham.

"If they connect us with the Red Snow, they'll be putting up ice in Hades before they turn us loose," he muttered.

What happened next came with entire unexpectedness. There was considerable traffic on the boulevard. They slowed up for an intersection. Two cars which had been following from behind swung out as if to pass them. Both machines pulled in front of the police cars.

There was crashing and rending of metal. Only one driver was in each of the collision cars. One of these was thrown completely out of his machine. They saw him distinctly. He had a black face, but not the features of a Negro.

POLICEMEN were yelling profanely. Then one turned his yell into a howl of warning.

"Lookit!" he squawled. "Damn it! Watch out!"

A heavy truck had hauled out alongside the four smashed-up cars. It stopped, sliding on all four wheels. Men dropped out, men with the inevitable black-face disguise. They held automatic rifles. All wore gas masks. Two carried gas bombs.

Occupants of the two police phaetons were caught flat-footed. One cop shoved a riot gun across a door of the phaeton. A greasy, black-painted finger snugged a trigger and an automatic rifle made a hideous cackle. The cop's blue coat became ragged and began to leak crimson in half a dozen places, and he laid down on the floorboards and began to scream.

That was all of that. The policemen were brave enough, but none of them had a great desire to commit suicide, and that was what resistance would have meant.

A black-faced man slid behind the wheel of each police car, let in the clutch and backed away from the machines with which they had collided. Other sepia attackers clambered into the back and freed the three whom Doc Savage had captured, and whom the police, disgusted because the trio would not talk, had also taken into custody.

There was a delighted reunion, until some one remarked about what Ark would probably have to say about them letting themselves be captured.

The two police cars, trailed by the big truck, turned right at the intersection. There was much excitement, the shooting having attracted many cars. The street, in fact, was blocked for a short distance, but the obstacle was overcome by driving up on the most convenient lawn, smashing down flower beds.

A woman, evidently the owner of the flower beds, came screeching from her home; she ran up to the car, still shrieking because her flowers were being ruined.

One of the black-faced men laughed and, opening the phaeton door, gave the cop who had been shot—he was dead now—a shove. The body, with its hideous drenching of red, landed at the angry woman's feet. She took one good look at it and fell over in a faint.

The two phaetons and the truck turned again, and came into a narrow lane which crossed an orchard. The cavalcade stopped. The fellow who seemed in charge of things gave orders in his foreign tongue.

Monk, Ham and the girl were hauled out of the car. They were already handcuffed. Without ceremony, they were shoved into the truck. The work was done with smooth precision, as if it were all something of no great magnitude, but merely a task to be gotten out of the way quickly in order to reach more pleasant tasks.

The policemen were ordered out. They were disarmed. One was knocked unconscious when he tried to resist. His senseless form was dumped back into the phaeton. Once they were disarmed, the policemen were ordered to get into the cars and lie down on the floorboards, and not to stir for five minutes.

Even the black-faced men smiled when this last order was given. There was nothing pleasant about the smiles.

The truck now rumbled and jolted along the road. A policeman stuck his head out of one of the phaetons. A rifle snapped. The policeman seemed not to move; he remained with his head hung over the door, staring wide-eyed, and a red ribbon seemed to well mysteriously out of the middle of his forehead and spread downward until it became a slow scarlet flood.

The truck stopped. There was a pause. Then more of the black-featured men scrambled inside. There was controlled excitement in their manner.

Monk listened intently. He could hear shouting in the distance. There seemed to be a tremendous uproar at the crossroads. It was only a question of moments until pursuers caught up with the truck. A swarm of police cars, directed by radio, were almost sure to be on their way to the spot, despite the few minutes which had elapsed.

Then Monk reared up and got a look through the back of the truck, and he understood why the captors did not seem to be greatly worried.

Red snow was falling on the two police phaetons.

THE snow was a roseate pall, like a great veil of red gauze. It did not spread over a great area, nor did its greatest height reach more than two hundred feet above the tops of the orange trees in the orchard. But it was an awesome thing to watch, for the flakes seemed to spawn suddenly out of nothing more substantial than the brilliant Florida sunlight.

They materialized by the millions, small and red and scintillating, and fell much as if they were spray of some fantastic kind thrown up from a titanic fountain. The effect of the whole was soon that of a spongy red dome towering two hundred feet in the air, a dome that was alive and shifting continuously, a thing that appeared from a distance to be solid, yet which was composed only of red snow.

The truck drove away, and the two phaetons and the uncanny horror which had enveloped them were lost to sight before their fate became evident.

The truck evaded the police. The surprise caused by the Red Snow made it easy. A canvas cover was stretched over the vanlike body of the machine, and the motor hood was tied open, changing the character of the truck a great deal. That helped, too.

But what had happened to the two phaetons and the police they held was told by the next extra editions of the Miami newspapers. The extras hit the streets in less than an hour.

The driver of the van rubbed the black grease paint off his face. It was startling what a difference this made. He pulled up and bought a newspaper from a vendor. This drew no suspicion. Every one was buying them.

RED SNOW KILLS COPS

It was black and staring, that headline, and it crossed the entire top of the page. The story was beneath, and like many news yarns hastily assembled about startling things, this one was amazingly garbled. But it conveyed in substance that the Red Snow had fallen, had ceased to fall and had melted magically. Some one had gone forward, noting the policemen weirdly rigid in their cars, and the instant the cars had been disturbed, they had begun falling away in powder.

So skeptical was the newspaper editorial force of this last that they had a note parenthetically below:

(There is some doubt about this falling away in dust, at least until it is verified. We are merely giving our readers the most authentic reports we have available.)

One of the black-faced men laughed and said, "They do not believe it did happen."

"Before we are through, many things will have happened which they probably would not have believed possible," said another of the gang.

The story of the Red Snow which had accompanied the disappearance of the yacht *Voyager* with Admiral Marvin Foote Sampson on board, was at the bottom of the column. The men read that. One of them smiled and tapped the story with a finger.

"That one was prominent on the list," he said. "Our men are doing well."

Monk heard that.

"What's this list?" he demanded. "Say, what're you guys up to, anyway?"

One of the men slapped Monk casually with the newspaper, saying "Shut up!"

Instead of complying, Monk demanded, "What are you gonna do with us?"

"You interest us," said the other. "We are going to keep you around for entertainment."

"You are not fooling any one," the dapper Ham put in. "You are planning to hold us, hoping you can use us in some way to get Doc Savage."

That brought a round gust of harsh laughter.

Ham, red-faced, snapped, "Doc will do all right for himself!"

"I wish you could see him just now," the other said dryly.

"So do I!" Monk grunted.

Chapter 12

THE TALKING BENEFIT

MONK would have been shocked, had he, by some legerdemain, been granted his vehement wish.

Doc Savage, by an infinite amount of muscular exertion, managed to lift his head slightly, so that the oil did not quite reach the corners of his mouth. The liquid—it was ordinary fuel oil—was inches deep over the center of the pool, which was lower than the edges.

The bronze man lay in the center. Some ten feet away, the chimneyless lantern still burned. It was due only to the safety nature of the fuel oil that there had not been an explosion and fire. The flash-point of the stuff was all that had saved him thus far.

At first, the guards had paced along the pool rim. But now they had withdrawn, and only occasionally did one dart forward, take a brief look, then retreat. They were, obviously, momentarily expecting the oil to take fire.

Unexpectedly, Ark himself put in an appearance. He rattled orders. Men came to the pit edge. Ark ordered them down into the oil—but they hesitated, horrified, until the hairless man drew his gun and rapped threats. Then they sprang down, and one, with trembling haste, extinguished the burning lantern.

Doc Savage was not untied. They lifted him bodily and tossed him, with the iron rods to which he was bound, up on the pool edge. He landed almost beside a bound figure of another captive.

Doc eyed the strange prisoner. The fellow was not exactly a stranger. He was the same individual who had made Doc a prisoner when the bronze man first landed on the island, the fellow whom Ark's men had been seeking. He was not gagged.

"They finally tracked me down," he said wryly. "Like a sap, I used up all my shotgun shells when I was getting away from them."

"Who are you?" Doc asked him.

"One of Fluency Beech's men," said the other. "I should've given you the lowdown earlier, but you see, we figured you might be working with this crowd. We made that mistake from the first. When Beech trailed you down and found you in that chemical laboratory, he wanted to seize you, but knew he couldn't manage it single-handed. So he rigged up that gag about somebody threatening him. There wasn't anything to that. All he wanted to do was get you where he could have a gang tie into you. He'd heard about your tough reputation."

Ark discovered them talking, began cursing and hurried toward them.

"What is Fluency Beech's connection with this?" Doc demanded.

"Well, believe it or not, we are——"

Ark, lunging, kicked the man in the face, stopping whatever he had intended to say. The man tried to speak again, and was once more kicked terribly. Then, at Ark's orders,

he was lifted and borne down into the old swimming pool.

Ark ordered him tied, directed the chimneyless lantern to be lighted again; then the men climbed hastily out of the pit.

“When you decide to tell us the whereabouts of this man Beech, you can call out,” Ark yelled down at the captive. “And I would advise you not to debate the matter too long. That oil is already quite high.”

Doc Savage was now picked up and carried away.

Ark, walking alongside of him, said, “You will go back into that pool later. At the moment, it is most urgent that we find this man Beech.”

DOC SAVAGE was deposited in a room of the old building—rather, ruin of a building. Its presence here was not unduly strange, for there were many such places in Florida, mansions built years before prior to the great hurricane and which, being destroyed, had not been rebuilt.

That this was such a place, the bronze man did not doubt, but neither did he give it more than passing thought; he lay helpless, and began to watch the single guard who was left with him.

After a moment, when the guard was looking, Doc twisted his features into a peculiar and terrible grimace; he made a visage so remarkable that the attention of the guard was seized, held. The fellow opened his mouth as if to ask what was wrong, but said nothing. He sat there, not closing his mouth, his jaw hanging down, his expression one of vacant amazement.

Doc did not hold the same hideous mask on his face. He changed it, so slowly that it was a great labor which brought perspiration out on his features. This moistness added to the effect of grotesque torment. The emotion he put upon his face was something unearthly. It appalled.

The guard closed his mouth, but it sagged open again as if the muscles were loose, but he seemed not to notice, all of his attention being concentrated in watching.

At first, it had been the bronze man’s face alone which drew his attention; but now Doc’s eyes acquired a growing quality of power. They widened, and the flake-gold pools seemed to stir madly. Stronger and stronger became the strange influence of the eyes, and the guard looked and looked and did not pull up his jaw.

“Put the gun on the floor,” Doc told him.

The man did nothing, did not pull up his dangling jaw.

“Put the gun down,” Doc repeated.

The man did it this time, not looking at the weapon and not taking his eyes from Doc’s features.

“Untie me,” Doc said.

That order did not require repeating, and the man started plucking at the wire which secured the bronze man. It was slow work. Pliers had been used to tie some of the wires.

Finally, Doc was free, but he managed only the most awkward of movements, his limbs being no more proof against stiffness than those of another. He kept moving, however, and flexibility came into his muscles.

The guard was standing immobile, a peculiar staring expression in his eyes.

Doc Savage pointed toward the south end of the island.

“You are seeing the bronze man running in that direction,” he said firmly. “He had gotten away. He is running swiftly. You are after him. You will call out for help. You will tell where the bronze man went. You saw him go south. You will hunt for him on the south end of the island. From time to time, you will see him and yell out an alarm.”

If he heard, or understood, the guard gave no sign, but Doc seemed to expect no response. He knew the man’s condition. The fellow was hypnotized. Inducing the hypnotic spell had been difficult, even with what Doc knew of the subject from months of study with men who were peers at such—the fakirs of India.

With greater firmness, Doc Savage repeated the instructions. The guard wheeled. Such were the peculiarities of the hypnotic spell which had been laid upon him that he would do exactly as he had been told—and lead pursuit away from Doc Savage.

Doc went in the opposite direction—north.

THE guard began to cry out. Instantly, there was an uproar, the hairless Ark and his followers racing to the spot.

Doc Savage ran only a short distance, then took to a tree, climbed swiftly and waited, hidden in the branches. The men ran on. The shouting of the hypnotized guard led them toward the other end of the island.

Doc Savage descended from the tree. He worked toward the ruins of the house, gained the edge of the clearing and sank prone. The grass was high enough to conceal him.

A guard at the entrance made himself known by stepping outside and cupping a hand to an ear, listening to the noises the men were making down on the south end of the island. Then he went back inside.

Doc Savage shifted to the right, reached the crumbling wall, and stood erect.

From the bronze man’s lips came a perfect imitation of Ark’s shrill voice. He spoke the foreign tongue.

“You, guard—do not stay in the house!” he said. “Walk out to the edge of the clearing on the south side and stand guard there.”

The voice was ventriloquial in quality; it seemed to come from a considerable distance.

The guard hesitated, then called, “Very well!” and walked around the house, heading for the south side of the clearing.

The instant he was out of sight, Doc Savage heaved up and raced inside. He made straight for the old swimming pool. The reek of oil was strong. He looked into the pool.

The burly man who had admitted he was working with talkative O. Garfew Beech, was gone. The burning oil lantern had been extinguished.

Doc retreated from the pool, went to a gaping aperture which had once been a window, and eased inside. The room was full of débris, was overgrown with vegetation. No vestige of the roof remained.

The bronze man made a little noise crossing the rubble. It was impossible to go with absolute silence. He came to a hallway—it had no roof—and began inspecting the penlike rooms. Somewhere in this structure would be the machinery—or whatever it was—which had been brought from the old mansion among the sand dunes, the devices which had stood on the pedestals.

Doc rounded a corner, stopped, eyed the floor. There were marks as if heavy machinery had been moved. The marks led to a door—an opening in the wall, rather, now boarded up with two-inch planks and the small, stout doorway in the center. The door was secured with a padlock.

Doc whipped to the door.

The cracks had been battened on the inside. He could see nothing. He grasped the padlock, picked up various dried weed stems and tried to pick it. He leaped up and saw that there was a roof over the room into which the machinery had been taken. He began trying more stiff weeds on the lock. It was a task almost hopeless.

A voice behind him said, “You will put your hands up!”

THE bronze man lifted his hands, then turned, coming around slowly, so as not to excite the other.

Looking for the source of the unexpected command, he discerned only a squarish aperture in the opposite wall, a hole left when bricks had fallen away. From the shadowy cavity beyond this, a metal tube—undoubtedly a rifle barrel—projected.

“Doc Savage!” a voice exploded beyond his hole.

Relief in the tone told Doc that the speaker was no enemy.

The bronze man lowered his hands, saying, “Come on out.”

“We cannot,” gasped the other. “There is a chain and we are fastened to it with handcuffs.”

Doc Savage whipped forward, rounded the angle in the corridor and came upon a crude door. This was not even locked. It squeaked tremendously when he opened it. The room into which it gave still had most of its roof, upheld with great cypress beams, more than a foot square. A chain had been linked around one of the beams, the ends padlocked together so that it dangled down in a loop. To this loop, two men were manacled.

The first was a lean tower of a man with flaming red hair and an abnormally pale face, a face which was almost untouched by sunburn—a face which was also set off strikingly by a black patch over one eye, a flap held there by an elastic.

The other man was young and hearty, with the appearance of a college boy. He still wore shell-rimmed glasses, grimy polo shirt and soiled slacks.

These two were the same pair which Doc Savage had seen being forced into the escape cars of the black-faced men back at the old mansion among the sand dunes. The

girl had identified them as her stepfather, Hyman Space, and his assistant, Ray Wood.

There was a man on the floor, one of the black-faced men, but without the black grease paint on his features. He lay against one wall, sprawled out grotesquely, and the side of his head was leaking scarlet.

Hyman Space gestured. It was he who held the rifle. He indicated the unconscious man.

“Guard,” he explained cryptically. “The fellow miscalculated the length of our chain and we got him. Took his rifle. But that did not help us much. He did not have the handcuff keys.”

Doc Savage—he still wore no garment but the shorts—bent over and examined Ray Wood’s shell-rimmed spectacles closely. The rims alone were shell; the hooks which ran back over the ears were of metal.

“Have to wear the glasses?” Doc asked.

“I can get along without them,” Ray Wood replied.

He had a robust voice in keeping with his appearance. It was not an unpleasant voice.

Doc Savage, took the spectacles, broke off one of the ear hooks, and used it to pick the handcuff locks. It required him no more than three minutes to free them both. Then he went over and examined the unconscious guard. The fellow was giving signs of reviving. Doc adjusted his jaw to the proper position and swung a fist against it. The man quivered, went back into deeper senselessness.

Hyman Space said urgently, “Doc Savage!”

Doc eyed him. “Yes?”

“Somewhere in this place, there are four large mechanical devices,” Space said grimly. “We must destroy them. Otherwise, the whole of America is in danger.”

Doc moved for the door. “They are in a locked room opening off the hall. We can pick the lock.”

But they had hardly stepped into the hallway when there was a clatter of footsteps and men came into the passage. Ark and some of his companions! They had come back.

DOC SAVAGE eased back into the chamber in which Hyman Space and Ray Wood had been imprisoned. There was nothing else to do.

Ark stopped in the hallway. They could hear him distinctly. He was angry, and berating the guard who had moved away from the ruin, tricked by Doc’s ventriloquism.

“You fool, you were told to stay inside!” Ark snarled.

The guard, puzzled, muttered, “But I heard you call to me, telling me to take the edge of the clearing.”

Ark swore in his native tongue.

“That is impossible,” he gritted. “I did *not* call. It must have been some trickery on the part of that bronze man. I cannot understand how he escaped.”

“I thought he was somewhere at the south end of the island,” grunted the guard.

“Three times, one of my men called out that he had seen the bronze fellow,” Ark rasped shrilly. “It was the same man each time.”

“Which one?”

“The one who was watching him when he escaped,” Ark piped. “And that is strange. There seems to be something wrong with that man. He acts strangely.”

“Perhaps he was bought off.”

Ark made a sound of disgust. “None of my men could be bought off. I am sure of that.”

The other man said, “All of this trouble is interfering with our plans.”

“It is,” Ark agreed. “Let us tune in the news report on the radio and see what we can pick up. One of the Miami stations gives the news at this time.”

The men changed their position, but did not go out of earshot, and a moment later a radio speaker began to rasp static. A station was tuned in; the final jangle of an orchestra whooped out. Then there was a station announcement, and the preliminary announcement for a news report sponsored by an afternoon newspaper.

“Good afternoon,” the news commentator came in. “We have a lot of news to-day, folks. The whole town is in an uproar. The police are going around in circles. And the cause of it all is the mysterious Red Snow. Just what the Red Snow is, no one seems to know. But that it is something utterly mysterious, every one will agree. And it is further apparent that some mysterious purpose is behind the affair, for the appearance of the Red Snow has usually marked the vanishing of some prominent individual.”

A tremendous burst of static temporarily interrupted the flow of words.

“—latest appearance of the Red Snow was not more than an hour ago, on the outskirts of Miami,” the commentator’s voice resumed after the static faded. “Two police phaetons were held up by armed, black-faced men in a truck and taken into an orchard, where the Red Snow fell, and the cars, as well as the policemen, disappeared. There is some uncertainty as to whether the truck itself also vanished.”

There was a pause, while the commentator spoke in an aside to some one.

“Here is the latest,” he continued. “Police have just released the information that two aides of the famous Doc Savage were in the police phaetons which vanished. They are Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett ‘Monk’ Mayfair and Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, better known as ‘Ham.’ With these two, and also a police prisoner, was an unidentified young woman and some mysterious black-faced men.”

The talk continued, elaborating on the Red Snow development; Ark and his comrades listened with interest, chuckling among themselves occasionally. It was fully ten minutes before the commentator got onto other subjects.

“More details about the Red Snow later,” the commentator said. “Here is a bit of news of interest to Floridians. The secretary of state of the United States will arrive in Miami to-night for a short vacation and some deep-sea fishing. His special train is due in Miami shortly after ten o’clock. And now, time is up. Good afternoon.”

Some one switched off the radio. There was silence.

“You got that last information?” Ark asked suddenly, shrilly.

One of the men spoke in a hoarse voice, "You mean—we shall use the Red Snow—on the secretary of state's special?"

"We have been leading up to that," Ark piped. "It is an opportunity we should not let pass."

Then there were shocked grunts. Some one exploded a curse. There was silence. Then came a new voice.

"Well, well, well!" it said. "You boys are ambitious, are you not? Yes, indeed! Much more ambitious than I gave you credit for being."

DOC SAVAGE looked at Hyman Space, at Ray Wood. Both wore blank expressions. It was evident they had never heard the new voice before.

"Who is it?" Hyman Space breathed.

"A gentleman who prefers to be called Fluency Beech," Doc whispered back. Then he went silent.

Fluency Beech was talking.

"I find it extremely difficult to believe the evidence given me by my ears," he said elaborately. "And I do not often doubt my ears. No, sir. Tell me, that I may be sure. Is it true that you gentlemen hold designs on the secretary of state?"

Ark said something profane in his foreign tongue.

"It must be true, incredible as it seems," Beech said rapidly. "And I will admit that I had held suspicions as to your true purpose, suspicions which are now verified to a great extent. May I compliment you gentlemen. You are as black a gang of devils as history ever saw, and the fact that you may think you have a justification for what you are doing, that you may consider you are fulfilling an ordained task, does not, as far as I am concerned, and as far as the rest of the world is concerned, I will wager, too—the fact that you may consider yourselves honorable men does not lift you in my estimation."

Doc Savage eased out of his concealment, advanced, and a moment later caught sight of Fluency Beech. The portly man stood easily, a submachine gun balanced in his hands. His head was capped by a steel military helmet. A bulky bulletproof vest had been strapped on the outside of his clothing. A gas mask dangled around his neck, ready for quick use.

Fluency Beech might have been standing before a drawing-room gathering in the regalia, giving a lecture. There was entire calmness in his manner.

"I am a man of curiosity," Beech announced further. "For instance, I wonder greatly what this red snow is, and I am curious to know if the secret cannot be found in this place. As I approached, I noted a door with a padlock on it. Suppose we start our manipulations by examining that room."

Ark snarled, "You fat fool, my men will——"

"Be looking at a cold lifeless corpse who was the late Baron Lang Ark," Beech finished. "That is, unless you do as you are told. Another thing—you have a man of

mine, one who was so unlucky as to permit himself to be captured. I want him. Where is he?"

"I have seen no one," Lang Ark lied.

"In that case, we'll take a look in that locker room," Beech told him.

There was cold fury in the portly man's tone; he was hardly the bombastic soul he had been when Doc first met him, although he still talked much more than another would have under the same circumstances.

Baron Lang Ark and the others backed into view, menaced by Beech's submachine gun. They moved toward the door which Doc had tried to open by picking the padlock with stiff weed stems. Doc Savage watched them, parted lips as if to speak to Beech—and did not.

Loose bricks had been shoved to one side of the corridor floor. Doc swooped, picked one of these up and threw it hard without straightening.

The brick whizzed through a window and struck a man who was in the act of leveling an automatic rifle. The fellow had crept up, unnoticed by Beech.

THE rifle went off. The man yelled.

Beech showed presence of mind. Without whirling, he leaped forward, bowled Ark aside, and got Ark and the others between himself and the spot from which yell and shot had come. Then he looked. At first, he saw only Doc Savage.

"Nitwit!" he yelled. "Why give an alarm?"

Doc waved at the window. "If you have to wear a bulletproof vest, put it under your clothes. That fellow was aiming at the back of your neck."

Then Beech heard the man outside the window moaning. He kept Ark and the others covered, ran to the aperture and looked out. He drew back, grinned.

"That one won't bother us for a while," he said rapidly. "You certainly damaged his face. You certainly did!"

Doc said, "I want a look into that room," and whipped forward. He still held the spectacle ear hook with which he had picked the handcuff locks. He went to work on the big padlock. It was modern. Picking it would not be easy.

Hyman Space and Ray Wood had come into sight by now, and Beech stared at them intently.

"Space and Wood?" he demanded.

The pair nodded together.

"Why in the hell didn't you two go to the United States government with this in the first place?" Beech demanded angrily.

Space shrugged wearily. "We were afraid. We did try to send two men out of the swamp, where these men have——"

Ark screamed, "You speak another word and you will die instantly!"

"The same goes for you!" Beech yelled at him.

Doc Savage got the padlock open.

Ray Wood pointed at Beech and demanded, "Who are you, anyhow?"

But Beech was looking at the door which Doc Savage was opening.

"Let's have a look in there," he said. "Everything else can wait."

Doc Savage looked into the room. He saw four machines, four intricate masses of machinery, no one of which resembled the other, except that all were about equal in bulk. Two seemed to be electrical in nature, with many bulbs and glass tubes, but the other pair were composed more of metal, with here and there a curved glass tube or a glass-walled tank. There were dozens of gauges.

About the machines clung a strangely cloying odor, a scent which was hardly pleasant.

Beech eyed the devices, then glanced at Doc Savage.

"What in Hades are they?" he demanded.

Doc Savage advanced into the room.

Outside, Hyman Space bawled shrilly, "Watch out! Here come Ark's men! They heard that rifle!"

Chapter 13

RED ISLAND

PORTLY FLUENCY BEECH stuttered something profane and unintelligible and back-pedaled out of the room. An instant later, his submachine gun made a gobbling uproar.

Shots answered him. High-powered bullets began to snap and scream in reply.

Ark began to edge toward the nearest door.

Beech hauled a pistol out of his hip pocket, flung it to Ray Wood, and snapped, "Watch Ark!"

Ray Wood caught the pistol. Before he could get it ready in his hands, Ark had leaped upon him. They struggled madly. Ark's men ran in to help.

Beech started to wheel, saw a man crossing the clearing, and turned back to cut the fellow down with his rapidfirer. Then there were two sounds, one following the other, as if some one had whistled and struck a blow with a hammer. Beech fell over backward, losing his machine gun.

Doc Savage was delaying to examine the machinery, his strange flake-gold eyes taking lightning glances of appraisal. But he saw what was happening outside in the hallway. He spun, sloped through the door.

One-eyed Hyman Space was racing for the fallen submachine gun. One of Ark's men tripped him, jumped on his back, then went on toward the gun.

Doc Savage, lunging with lightning speed, got to the submachine gun first. Ark's man back-pedaled. He was not swift enough. Doc's fist caught him, changed the lines of his jaw, and the man went walking backward, stiffly, as if he were a big marionette with his legs worked by strings.

Ray Wood and his foes were still fighting over the pistol. Doc ran over, clutched the gun, twisted it out of the tangle of hands and struck twice.

Wood landed blows of his own. Then he got to his feet, leaving his opponents sprawled out on the floor.

In the clearing, men were yelling and shooting.

Ark began piping shrilly. He used his native tongue, and his words came with spouting rapidity. Doc ran at him. Ark retreated madly, heedless of the revolver which Doc held. He reached the door of the room which held the machinery, leaped inside and slammed the panel. His movements were fast.

Doc hit the door. It resisted. He knew why. There was a bar inside, a ponderous affair, and Ark had been fast enough to throw that.

The bronze man wheeled back to the nearest opening from which he could survey the clearing. Three men were in sight, running forward grimly. In the fashion of soldiers, they held their automatic rifles level at their hips.

Doc hefted the gun briefly. It was a good weapon. He fired. The right leg of one of the charging men broke over between ankle and knee and he went down. Doc shot again; once more. The other two fell, also shot in the legs.

Beech was weaving up from the floor. He beat his chest, grimaced.

“Bulletproof vest—stopped bullet!” he gulped. “But man, oh man, I would—rather be kicked by a mule!”

He picked up his steel helmet, which had fallen off, and put it on.

They could hear Ark’s flutelike voice. He was piping frantically.

“What’s he saying?” Beech demanded. “I don’t understand his language.”

Doc Savage listened for a moment to Ark’s shrilling.

“He is telling his men to use the Red Snow,” he said grimly.

Shooting had stopped in the clearing. A man called out hoarsely, answering Ark.

Beech stared at Doc. “What are they talking about?”

“The men object to taking Ark’s life,” Doc said. “They say Ark’s life is very valuable.”

Ark shouted some more. Doc translated.

“Ark says that, although he invented the Red Snow, his men now know how it is made, and that therefore his life is not so important,” the bronze man said. “He says for them to go ahead.”

“He has nerve,” Beech said.

HYMAN SPACE had heard, and now he yelled frantically, “We’ve got to get out of here! That infernal red horror will kill us all! Nothing is proof against it.”

Doc rapped, “You know what it is?”

Space shook a vehement negative. “The compound is too intricate for my understanding. It works on the molecular structure of matter, changing its nature. I think it reduces or almost stops molecular motion, thus completely changing the nature of matter.”

“But the red material you tried to get to me?” Doc demanded.

“It is an ingredient of the Red Snow—the stuff itself near the completed stage,” Space said. “At least, that is what I think. I hoped that, by getting it to you, you could tell what the Red Snow is.”

Beech put in, “How did you learn that much?”

Space shrugged. “I am a chemist interested in the production of new types of radioactive paints. I use considerable quantities of radium in experimenting. Somehow, these men found this out. They needed radium. So they seized me, got their supply through me.”

Doc waved an arm at the closed room. “What are those machines?”

“Devices for making the Red Snow preparation,” said Space.

Beech roared, “Then we’ve got to destroy them!”

“There is another set of machines,” Space interjected.

“Where?”

“In the swamp.”

“The Everglades? Where?”

Space shook his head so vehemently that the black eye patch flapped.

“I do not know,” he said. “They took me there blindfolded, by plane.”

Doc Savage peered through a window. There were no men in the clearing. The silence was ominous. He waited.

Then he heard a sound. It was a strange sound, somewhat as if a man had coughed, only deeper, more penetrating. It came from the opposite side of the ruins.

Beech lunged to a door, took a chance and leaped through. He looked upward.

“The Red Snow!” he bawled.

Doc Savage reached his side, glanced above. The sun was past meridian, and it seemed to have taken on the hue of blood, for a great ball had appeared in the heavens—or so it seemed, although it was not more than two hundred feet above. It spread, flowering. It seemed something solid at first, then it took on a more nebulous appearance. Red flakes appeared and began showering slowly downward.

“We’ve got to make a run for it!” Doc rapped.

Hyman Space and Ray Wood reached the bronze man’s side. Doc wheeled back, got the guns of the men they had overpowered, and distributed them. In a compact group, they pitched through the door. The lowermost of the red flakes was but a few feet above them.

They ran furiously. Rifles began cracking. Beech lifted his submachine gun as he ran, wiping the clearing edge with a hail of lead. He was either fortunate or an excellent shot, for two men, hit by the bullets, collapsed and threshed about.

Others of the attackers were shrieking at Ark, yelling for him to get out of the house, to make a break for his life before the Red Snow fell.

Ark took the advice. He popped through the door.

Ark himself was undoubtedly responsible for the saving of the life of Doc Savage and those with him. The attackers were not present in great numbers, and they had scattered themselves around the clearing. Beech, with his submachine gun, had eliminated two directly ahead and to the left. The ruin itself cut off the aims of those behind.

Ark, running wildly, thinking only of his own life, cut in between the riflemen on the right. They could not fire without danger of wounding their chief.

Beech half turned, as if to use his machine gun on Ark, but he saw the red flakes sifting down overhead, changed his mind, and gave all of his attention to getting out from under.

Ray Wood ran like an athlete. Space was less agile. He was not strong. His one eye must have been none too efficient, for he almost fell. Doc picked him up, carried him bodily.

Beech went down, cursing, as rifles rattled. He got up, leaking a little red from the left side, and ran as fast as before.

They reached the shelter of the jungle.

THERE was a fascination about the Red Snow, which was now descending upon the ruin. Beech paused, wheeled, as if to watch it. He saw Ark had reached safety. Then Doc Savage gave him a shove.

“Our chance to get away from here!” the bronze man rapped.

They ran on through the thick growth, and their enemies, a baying pack, took up the pursuit. Doc set a course for the spot where the speedboat and the barge lay.

Space, jouncing across Doc’s shoulders, gasped, “My stepdaughter—Nona—do you think she is safe?”

The bronze man did not answer. The girl had been safe for a time in the hands of Monk and Ham. But something had happened. The snatch given by the news commentator over the radio indicated that. What had become of Monk, Ham and the girl was problematical.

The ruined house was not far from the little harbor on the seaward side of the isle. They came out on the shore. There was a dory tied up to the barge. They piled in.

By the time Doc Savage had the oars in the water, Beech had untied the painter. They shoved off, and the little craft lunged under the bronze man’s strokes.

“I had a man with me,” Beech grumbled. “They got him. I hate to leave him, because he was a good man, an excellent man, one who was”—he paused to drive a burst from the rapidfirer and drop a man who had appeared down the shore—“one who was always willing to obey orders. I wonder if he is still alive?”

“Hard to tell,” Doc said shortly, and whipped the dory alongside the speedboat. They scrambled aboard.

Rifles were stabbing from the shore. Splinters climbed off the mahogany coaming of the boat.

“All get in the front seat,” Doc directed. “That way, when we are going away from them, the engine will be aft and shelter us somewhat.”

There was a starter button. Doc jammed weight on that, heard a whine of gears from the mechanism; then the motor howled out. Beech leaned over and shot the mooring cable apart with his machine gun, then looked anxiously at the ammo drum, for it was almost empty.

The speedboat heaved up, began to pound over the waves. Rifle bullets were striking the craft, but the engine was large and those aboard were down low, and the mass of metal protected them.

“It looks like we are clear,” Beech chuckled. “And I do not mind telling you that was as brisk a bit of action as I have taken part in in some time. Yes, sir, it was brisk. But it looks as if we no longer had a great deal to worry about, because I will get in touch with my men and we will enlist the aid of the militia, or even the army and navy if necessary; and clean out this nest of infernal——”

He had started talking too soon. The engine stuttered, coughed. They plainly felt the terrific speed slacken. Then the engine died completely and they were rolling

helplessly.

Doc Savage held the speed as best they could, and swung around the end of the island, so that the shore was to the left, but fully three hundred yards distant.

“One of their bullets must have cut the fuel line,” Beech groaned.

But Doc, scrambling back, got the cap off the gas tank and used the barrel of the submachine gun as a measuring stick. The tank was shallow. The barrel touched bottom, came out perfectly dry.

“No gas,” Doc said. “Tank was empty when we got aboard.”

THE speedboat had turned broadside to the island, and rifle bullets began to strike, passing completely through the hull, opening small, ugly rents.

“Terrible!” Beech groaned. “We cannot remain aboard.” He massaged his side, where he had been hit by the bullet. Evidently the wound was slight.

“Over the side,” Doc directed. “We’ll keep the motor between ourselves and the island and try to paddle to the mainland.”

They popped overside as hurriedly as possible, Beech first snapping a burst with his machine gun to drive their foes under cover. The water was chill at first contact, but seemed to become warm after they were in for a time. That was because they were hot from the action.

Swimming and guiding the speedboat, they found, was going to be a stiff task. There was a tide. It ripped along between the island and the shore and made a strong current fanning outward toward the open sea. They struggled furiously, and barely made headway.

Beech, working forward, peered around the bows, then called unpleasant news.

“They had rowboats on shore,” he barked. “Here they come.”

Doc said nothing. He had heard the boats being put into the water.

Beech had placed his submachine gun atop the cowling. He got it, and fired it around the stern of the craft, then swam forward and shot around the bows. He growled disgustedly when the gun clicked empty.

“But I got one boat,” he muttered.

The shore still looked an infinite distance away. There was nothing they could do to bring it closer more swiftly. They had been swimming with all of their strength before.

They used the pistols as the rowboats came closer, and succeeded in stopping one craft by putting the crew out of commission. But there was a third and it came on swiftly.

Beech gripped Doc Savage’s arm. “Listen, I’ve heard a lot about the things you can do. Can you reach shore? If you can, leave us. We’re sunk anyway.”

The bronze man nodded, said, “It is not a bad idea.”

Then he sank beneath the surface.

It was only a moment later that the rowboat rounded the bow of the speedboat. Ark himself was standing erect in the stern, waving a rifle.

“Where is Doc Savage?” he yelled, after staring at those in the water.

Beech stared levelly. “Gone,” he said. “Drowned.”

Ark piped, “That would be too good to be true.”

He juggled his rifle absently, as if contemplating shooting those in the water. He even lifted the gun to his shoulder and rocked it from side to side, as if trying to select the first to go. Then he hesitated.

“Have you made a report about what you have learned of me?” he asked Beech.

The portly man tried to grin. It was more of a grimace. He said nothing.

“It is likely that you have made a report,” Ark told him savagely. “It is essential, or at least convenient, that your superiors receive no information about me for a time. I will make you a bargain.”

Beech wet his lips. “Shoot.”

“Your life,” Ark said, “in return for telling me how this report can be intercepted before it reaches Washington.”

Beech hesitated. He nodded at his two companions, Space and Wood.

“How about these two?” he asked.

“I will be generous,” Ark told him. “I will lock them up with you until this affair is settled. You will be prisoners, honorable captives. My word of honor on that.”

“Your word is worth about as much as a lead nickel,” Beech growled.

“At present, your life is worth less than that,” Ark pointed out. “What is your decision.”

“No,” Beech said hesitantly. “I do not trust——”

Ark leaned forward abruptly, aimed the rifle and pulled the trigger. Beech screeched an instant before the weapon exploded. He thought he was going to be shot between the eyes. Actually, Ark was firing a fraction of an inch over his head, by way of scaring him.

Whatever results Ark had expected, they were far different from those the shot got. The dory in which he stood was small and light. A moment after the shot exploded, bronze hands appeared on the boat’s gunwale. They yanked. The boat heeled, hesitated, and when Ark, off balance and striving to stay aboard, stepped on the gunwale, the craft went completely over, precipitating those aboard into the sea.

Beech stared. Then the truth dawned.

“Savage!” he roared. “You didn’t swim for it!”

Doc Savage did not answer, being engaged in wrenching the rifle out of Ark’s hands. The bronze man had been concealed under the stern of the speedboat, hanging to the propellers, projecting his nostrils above the water to breathe. He had swum underwater to the dory an instant before the shot.

Hyman Space and Ray Wood came to life and joined the combat. There were only four unwounded men in the dory. Even numbers. Or hardly even, considering the tremendous strength and agility of the man of bronze.

The water around the boat foamed under the beat of arms. Blows smashed. A man yelled out in terror; the yelling turned to hideous bubbling as he was forced under. Doc struck Ark, and the man with the hairless head became limp. Doc lifted him, threw him across the launch coaming. Men were shooting from shore, but it was doing little good.

Within the space of three or four minutes, Doc and the others had overcome the occupants of the dory.

“We certainly have our ups and downs,” Beech grinned.

Then he listened. There was motor sound in the air. Beech glanced upward, thinking it was a plane, then looked along the water and saw a fast boat coming toward them, its bows a welter of foam.

“Some yachtsman who happened along,” Beech grinned. “Now I guess we’ll get some help.”

He changed his mind when two men stood on the pitching forward deck of the approaching boat and began to shoot slowly and deliberately with rifles.

THAT the newcomers were more of Ark’s crew was evident. Their boat was fast.

“We can’t pull that upsetting gag again,” Beech wailed. “Savage, you’d better sure enough swim for it this time.”

Doc said nothing. But, once more, he sank beneath the surface. This time he did not remain, but stroked with all of his power, seeking to cover as much distance as possible before he came up.

When he did top the surface, it was suddenly, in the manner in which a porpoise breaks, and he filled his lungs with air—not slowly, with several deep breaths and a normal one at the last, as he would have desired, but all at once, in a convulsive pump.

After he was down again, he heard rifle bullets seeking him. They made *plunging* noises in the water. He swam for a long time, at an angle, then broke water again, got down once more, then changed his course, so that they would not be able to calculate exactly where he would appear.

Fortune had been against him, but now it shifted a little, and he came to the shore near the small creek on the mainland by which he had entered the water in swimming to the island. He broke the surface and scrambled madly up the steep bank.

The men on the boat saw him. They were still offshore, having tarried to pick up Ark and the others. They fired hasty bullets, but the pitching craft was no fit shooting platform, and the slugs did nothing but throw sand and cut weeds and brush.

Doc Savage let them see him start running to the right, then doubled back and sought the concealment of a palmetto cluster, from which he could survey the boat, and where he could get the clothing which he had stripped off before he swam to the island.

It was not a large craft, despite its speed, and he could see into the cockpit. He stood looking for a long time, until the men saw him and began shooting at his giant bronze form. Then he retreated, but not far.

He crouched in the beach growth, waiting for those in the boat to land, hoping they would run the craft close inshore. But they did neither, and the little vessel swung away,

ran out to the island and vanished behind the headland.

Doc Savage moved away then. His metallic features rarely showed expression, but they were grim now, immobile.

There had been prisoners in the boat—three of them. Monk, Ham and the girl, Nona Space. They had been bound and gagged, and that alone was an indication that they were alive.

Doc Savage reached the road and ran steadily; his stride did not look particularly labored, but he covered ground at a rate which would have amazed a professional runner. He came finally to a house, was permitted use of a telephone. He got in touch with the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard was efficient enough. But before they reached the island, the birds had flown. There was no sign of Ark and his men—or of Monk, Ham and Nona Space. Where the ruined house had been, there was only an empty space, slightly depressed, with the bare coral formation of the island showing.

Doc Savage did not show himself to the Coast Guardsmen, nor tell them anything except that the creators of the Red Snow had been there, for he was still wanted by the police for the charge of murdering, or having something to do with the murder of Professor Casson Adams, the man who had been shot in the trunk.

The Coast Guardsmen, knowing no more than they did, were vastly puzzled by the bare pit on the island, and only one officer hazarded a guess which hit upon the true cause, and he was shrugged down.

It was mid-afternoon when Doc Savage got a telephone connection by long distance to Washington, D. C. The bronze man had friends in official circles, individuals who in many instances owed him a debt of gratitude, and he eventually got a connection with the central office of the secret service, the body responsible for guarding the life of the president.

“I want,” the bronze man said, “to speak to the chief.”

“He is not here,” the voice from Washington replied.

“Who is he?” Doc questioned. “Where can I get in touch with him.”

“He is in Florida,” said the other. “His name is O. Garfew Beech. He likes to be called Fluency Beech.”

Chapter 14

DUCK-WITH-NO-WINGS

DOC SAVAGE spoke for a long time with Washington.

An hour later, he was at the offices of the chemical company of which he was silent owner. He made inquiries and received four metal cases which had just arrived from New York by the fastest air express. He carried these to the laboratory and proceeded to open them, bringing out a marvellously compact analytical kit.

The chemical company laboratory was complete as such installations went, but it lacked certain highly modern bits of apparatus which Doc, through his cousin Pat Savage, had obtained from New York. There was one device in particular, by which an analysis of matter could be obtained in a few moments, even more accurately than by hours of working with ordinary laboratory methods.

Doc produced the bits of the red compound which had been in his clothing, and set about ascertaining its nature. He had more to go on than before—Hyman Space had said one of the important basic ingredients was radium, or radioactive substances.

Doc was locked in the laboratory as he worked. Only a few officials in charge of the plant knew his identity, or were aware of his presence. These men saw that he received latest copies of the afternoon newspapers. One brought in a midget radio which would pick up, not only the news broadcasts, but would get down on the police station wave lengths.

With the radio and the newspapers, Doc Savage kept in touch with developments in the matter of the Red Snow. Most of what he heard and read was a rehash of what had already happened, with here and there a wild rumor, or a guess made by some imaginative reporter.

There was a story to the effect that the party of the secretary of state had changed plans and, instead of arriving in Miami that night, as expected, would be delayed until the following day. There was no explanation for the interruption. For that matter, probably no more than a half dozen persons knew the real reason for the delay—a mysterious telephone call to Washington made by Doc Savage.

Doc Savage seemed to complete his analysis about four o'clock. But he did not leave the laboratory then. Instead, he called the chemical company officials into conference and made long explanations, the result of which was a hurried assembling of chemical ingredients, some of them extremely rare. Fast planes were dispatched to Atlanta, New Orleans, Jacksonville and other southern cities.

Borrowing two of the most skilled chemical engineers from the laboratory force, Doc Savage went to work. He was busy steadily through the night. Food was sent in. The two assistants seemed vastly puzzled at what they were being directed to do, their features wearing the expressions of men who are beyond their depth in a morass of formulæ and details.

DAWN came. There had been no word from Monk, Ham, Nona Space, or the others. However, police had found a cabin cruiser which had been scuttled, and a newspaper carried a picture of it. Doc recognized the boat as the one used by Ark's men—the craft in which he had seen Monk, Ham and Nona Space.

The day passed without particular event. Doc Savage and his two chemists still worked furiously. The assistants were becoming tired, but there was something about the compelling power of Doc Savage which kept them working on.

The special train bearing the secretary of state and party was on its way to Miami, the newspaper stated. It would arrive that night.

The late afternoon edition of the *Globe* came forth with an item which interested Doc Savage.

SEMINOLE INDIAN SAW RED SNOW

Reports have reached the *Globe* which indicate that a Seminole Indian alligator hunter named Duck-With-No-Wings was first to see the Red Snow, several days ago. A good deal of mystery attaches to the matter, the Seminole having been afraid to talk. It is understood by the *Globe*, however, that this Indian secured a lump of strange red material at the time he saw the Red Snow, and that he has been trying to sell this.

The *Globe* is sending a reporter to the village of Duck-With-No-Wings, which is situated in the Everglades thirty miles southeast of Chokoloskee. The *Globe* is making every endeavor to solve the Red Snow mystery.

There was more, having to do with generalities—the nature of the swamp where the village of Duck-With-No-Wings lay, and the probable character of the Seminole alligator hunter himself. This stuff has no doubt been dashed off by a rewrite man to give the item body, since it was an exclusive story, carried by none of the other newspapers.

Indeed, the other newspapers completely ignored it. Rumors about the Red Snow were coming from all over the nation, and some of them seemed more reasonable than the tale of the alligator hunter.

But, within an hour, Doc Savage was in a plane. The craft had been rented for him by one of the officials of the chemical company.

Doc flew out over the Everglades, toward the village of Duck-With-No-Wings. In the cabin behind him was a metal case painted a peculiar color, a case he had prepared in the laboratory.

The bronze man was not interested alone in the lump of mysterious red substance which had come into the possession of Duck-With-No-Wings.

Hyman Space had said Ark and his men had another headquarters out here in the swamp.

FROM a height of two thousand feet, Doc Savage looked down on the Everglades. He flew with the ease of an accomplished pilot, and from time to time used binoculars to bring the terrain closer.

The Everglades presented a vista that might have been disappointing to one seeing them for the first time and expecting a swamp in the general sense—a mat of luxuriant vegetation, of lianas and creepers, of interlacing trees draped with hanging moss. It was nothing like that.

For miles, there stretched what, at first glance, might have been mistaken for green meadow, absolutely level, with here and there an irregularly shaped pond or a wide, meandering creek. But seen through the glasses, the grass was rank, and rooted in shallow water more often than in soil. Rarely was there a patch of dry ground.

The plane was fast. As Doc drove it onward, the expanse below changed a little. Clumps of gnarled jungle appeared, marked by the great, uprearing skeletons of trees which were dead, or nearly so. Off to the north stretched the dismal expanse of the Great Cypress Swamp, with its occasional sawmill.

It was a waste, this melancholy expanse below, a stretch of country as impenetrable, to a man on foot, as any in the country. It had, of course, been seen from the air, but there were undoubtedly stretches, by no means small, which had been trod by no foot other than that of the strange race which had sought sanctuary there—the Seminoles.

The Seminole villages themselves were picturesque. Doc picked up a few along the gray ribbon of concrete which was the Tamiami trail, then left them behind as he swung southward. Consisting of thatched huts inside a stockade, these villages might have been transplanted from darkest Africa.

The bronze man dropped the plane a little lower, and it, or its shadow, frightened up clouds of birds. Buzzards took flight from the naked arms of dying trees and sailed up to hang motionless black specks in the late afternoon sunlight.

Another plane ahead in the sky, looked like one of the buzzards at first. It was a monoplane, a high-wing job, and it came out of the infinite distance, a speck at first, then growing. It was single-motored and painted brown.

Doc Savage watched it closely. It altered its course slightly, coming toward him, then swung to draw alongside, as if to give those aboard a chance to stare. On the flanks of the ship, a single word was painted in big letters:

GLOBE

This, then, would be the newspaper plane which the Miami newspaper had dispatched into the swamp.

The pilot, helmeted and goggled, gave close attention to his flying. But in the passenger cabin, a man wrenched one of the sliding windows open, thrust his head outside and waved his arms wildly. He seemed to be trying to signal. From time to time, he pointed downward.

Doc looked below. His flake-gold eyes distinguished nothing.

The man in the plane cabin produced a flashlight from somewhere. He began blinking it. Despite the brilliant sunlight the faint wink of the eye was discernible. It

was a large light, of the searchlight type. Letters came in halting Morse.

“M-a-n g-i-v-i-n-g n-a-m-e M-o-n-k s-i-g-n-a-l-e-d u-s f-o-r h-e-l-p,” the light spelled out. “W-e a-r-e u-n-a-r-m-e-d. C-a-n y-o-u d-o a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g?”

Doc Savage stood up in the cockpit and gave a vehement nod. That seemed to be all the answer required.

The man in the other plane cabin nodded also, and blinked his flashlight again.

“W-e w-i-l-l s-h-o-w y-o-u s-p-o-t,” he signaled.

The other plane drew ahead, and Doc Savage fell in behind. It seemed logical Monk might have been brought into the swamp, to Ark’s other headquarters, and might have managed to free himself, to give a signal. Possibly he had used the same blinker code which this man was employing. Doc followed close on the tail of the other plane. From time to time he shifted his glance downward, studying the swamp. That trifle of incaution was nearly responsible for his finish.

He looked up, almost in front of the plane’s snout, a great scarlet mass was materializing. It was the Red Snow. The other plane had released the stuff.

DOC stamped the rudder, rocked the stick. The plane reeled over. Braces squealed, flying wires strummed and struts groaned in their sockets.

With infinite slowness, it seemed, the ship banked over and down. The screaming propeller seemed reluctant to pull away from the red horror that had bloomed out in the sun-whitened sky.

Doc Savage knew planes. He realized that he was not going to get clear. The ship was too sluggish on the controls.

Doc dived over the cockpit rim into space. He let himself fall, not counting, but kicking his legs to prevent any tendency to spin. He ran his hands over the straps of his parachute—he never went aloft without one, if it could be helped—to make sure the straps were sitting properly.

Looking up, he saw the plane cleave into the cloud of red snow. It went straight through, stirring up the flakes, and came out on the opposite side, apparently unharmed. The controls were not centralized, so that it reeled over and over in the sky, and traveled some distance.

Then a wing fell off; the undercarriage came loose; the tail detached itself. These parts did not fall far before they themselves disintegrated, turning into a grayish-red powder which sifted down a short distance and seemed to be absorbed magically by the very air itself.

Doc glanced downward, saw the swamp close below, and gave the ripcord of his chute a yank. The silk blossomed out, yanked his fall short, and let him down in a puddle beside a thicket of cypress. Water birds, frightened up, made a great roaring by beating their wings and taking the air.

The other plane came moaning down from above. The man in the cabin had exchanged his flashlight for an automatic rifle. He began shooting. The bullets knocked drops of water high into the air.

Doc shed the chute harness and sprinted. He reached the edge of the water. The mud was deep, impending. Lead knocked the filth up into his face. Then he got under the trees, ran a few yards, changed his course, and was temporarily safe.

Crouching there, Doc Savage watched the Red Snow sift on downward. It never reached the swamp, but dissipated itself in the sunlight, an indication that the stuff had to be released near the ground, or its effects would not touch the earth.

The plane had not been disintegrated entirely by the Red Snow. The central section of the motor and certain cabin fittings had fallen into the swamp. But the rest of the ship had disintegrated in the weird fashion peculiar to the Red Snow.

Bullets began cutting into the scrawny foliage. Those in the plane had seen the bronze man.

Doc shifted his position. Thicker shelter lay to the south, but he did not go in that direction. He went north, carefully noting his position by such dead trees as served as landmarks. He seemed to be seeking something.

The plane dived overhead. The staccato rap of the automatic rifle was vicious over the motor rumble. The sounds the bullets made hitting into the swamp terrain, were infinitely more violent.

Doc got under a mass of creepers, and the bullets failed to search him out before the plane had to pull up and circle for another attack. By the time it got back, he had changed his position and the craft failed to find him.

A moment later, he found what he was seeking—what remained of the motor of the plane, and certain objects which had been in the cabin. The stuff was scattered over a radius of no great area. He searched carefully.

Not until he had found the metal case which had been in the cabin, did he seem satisfied.

THE case was bulky, unhandy to carry and at the same time remain hidden from the plane above. The ship circled, dived, and buzzed like an angry hornet. The automatic rifle stuttered at intervals.

Suddenly, those aboard the plane saw Doc Savage. With wild haste, the pilot banked and came downward. The bronze man was, for the moment, in the open, in tall grass which offered poor concealment. He got boldly to his feet, ran and dived into a clump of brush, then carefully writhed to one side, losing himself.

In the plane above, the rifleman fired deliberately, raking the brush clump from end to end. His lips writhed as he cursed. Then he stopped shooting and slid forward to bellow in the pilot's ear.

"We will use the Red Snow again!" he shouted. "It is the only way!"

"It would be better if we did not!" the pilot bellowed back. "We have no great supply of the stuff, either aboard or at the headquarters! Ark's orders were to save it for emergencies, or to eliminate those whom we have listed to die!"

"This," grated the other, "is an emergency! Fly close above the brush!"

The pilot shrugged, banked his plane again and sent it back. Back in the cabin, the passenger fumbled with a long case and brought out what resembled a grotesque air rifle. This had a barrel of moderate size, but below that was another cylinder of much greater diameter, the latter fastened in place with set-screws and clamps.

The man removed a second of these cylinders from the case, and with hasty fingers, began substituting it for the first.

“Circle once more,” he howled at the pilot. “I have to put a fresh charge of compressed air in this air gun!”

Obediently, the pilot arched the craft around.

The man preparing the Red Snow for discharge opened a second box, one which was carefully padded, and extracted what appeared to be an ordinary rifle grenade, with a cylinder perhaps a bit larger than ordinary. The nose of this was tapered; to the other end was attached a rod which exactly fitted the interior of the air gun barrel. There was a timing device to regulate detonation.

The plane came back over the brush clump in which Doc Savage had taken shelter. The pilot stared downward.

“There he is!” he bawled, and pointed.

He had sighted Doc Savage.

The man in the cabin leaned out, aimed and jerked the trigger of the air gun. The device made a gusty grunt of a noise. The grenade portion was discharged, arched outward and exploded directly over the brush. If there was any noise, it was not audible over the moan of the motor. Rather, the container of the Red Snow seemed to disintegrate and free the stuff.

The red material boiled out, gaseous in nature at first, it seemed, then crystallizing into flakes which fell downward, directly upon the brush patch.

“That’ll get him,” the pilot yelled gleefully.

THE flier was a cautious soul, and he did not venture too near the Red Snow. He kept the plane in a gentle bank, circling the vicinity at a distance varying from one to three hundred yards.

The man in the cabin discarded his air gun and clamped a pair of glasses to his eyes. He studied the swamp around the spot where the Red Snow was falling.

The red horror was down, now. It was going through its uncanny melting process, being absorbed into the air. And a moment later a swamp breeze stirred the grass, the brush, and this vegetation began to fall to pieces, to crumble into powder. The wind swept up the powder, seemed to swallow it, and a moment later, naked earth became visible. The denuded space increased in area, and a shallow depression appeared as if by magic.

Although the whole phenomenon appeared to take but short moments, considerable time had actually elapsed, as indicated by the number of times the plane circled.

Water began to run into the hollow where the brush had been, and after a time—possibly half an hour—there was only a small lake to show where the growth had

stood. During all of that time, the plane either circled, or swept back and forth in slow swings while those aboard studied the surrounding swamp. The two in the ship reached a conclusion.

“The bronze man could not have escaped,” said the man in the cabin. “I released the Red Snow directly upon him.”

“That,” said the pilot, “is what these Americans call O.K.”

Chapter 15

THE CONQUEST PLAN

THE plane swung away, but flew just fast enough to keep its altitude while those aboard studied the sky in search of any other ships which might be in sight. There were none. They circled, and came down upon a small lake in the swamp.

The edges of this patch of water were studded with bare-looking trees, and to the right was a bit of high ground—high only in comparison to the rest of the swamp, for it was merely prominent enough to offer dry footing.

On the dry ground, almost hidden in a small jungle of trees, was a Seminole village. A very small settlement, it consisted of half a dozen thatched huts erected on stilts and a stockade of stout sticks, thatched with palm fronds. There was no sign of life.

The plane landed on the lake. The pilot used great care in taxiing inshore, to a spot where trees—very sizable trees for this swamp district—overhung the water. The boughs of these, draped with moss, hung down like a curtain.

When the plane was close in, what had seemed to be branches and moss lifted like a curtain, disclosing a long, camouflaged hangar. Some of the boughs and moss was genuine, but most of it was cleverly done in paint on canvas.

There were two planes already in the hidden recess. Both were small, but overmotored and capable of carrying a heavy load at high speed.

Ark himself appeared. The black grease paint was gone from his face, revealing a countenance of olive hue. He looked considerably the worse for wear. There was a purple splotch where Doc Savage's fist had hit him.

"Well?" he snapped. "Who was in that plane? You took long enough to find out!"

"Doc Savage," said the pilot.

Ark blinked. He wet his lips, swallowed.

"What did you do?" he asked.

"We used the Red Snow," explained the other. "We had to employ it twice. Once on the plane, when Doc Savage escaped. The second time, we got him."

Ark made fists of his bony hands. "You are sure?"

"Positive!" said the flier.

"You used two charges of the Red Snow?" Ark asked.

The man who had been in the plane cabin put in hastily, "It was necessary. We tried to get him with the rifle, but it was hopeless. We had to use a second charge."

"That was undesirable," Ark said slowly. "We have no great quantity of the Red Snow on hand. All of our supply is here, and it may be some time before we get more. The available quantity of the material is limited by the amount of radium which we can get, to work into the ingredients." He fell silent, then shook his head. "But it was worth it. Come."

They shoved the plane into the concealed recess behind the boughs, and lowered the curtain. The latter was a clumsy affair, and they had to push outside afterward in a folding canvas boat and replace branches and pennants of moss which had fallen off during the lifting of the curtain.

They went, then, to the stockade, entered it and moved to one of the larger huts. It was near sundown. Ark ordered a gasoline lantern lighted. Carrying it, he went inside the hut.

THE structure was erected on stilts, the floor being of poles laid upon stringers. These poles were stout and furnished excellent anchorage for the prisoners which the shack held.

The captives numbered ten. Their sprawled forms covered most of the floor space.

Monk, Ham and portly Fluency Beech were together at one side, fastened more securely than the rest. Nona Space and her stepfather, Hyman Space, were near Ray Wood; and a few feet from them lay Beech's aide, the man who had seized Doc Savage on the island, only to himself be captured later by Ark's crew.

Off in a corner by themselves lay two strangers. One of them was a young man in a baggy suit, who lay so that his coat was open, disclosing a bundle of rough copy paper in the pocket, the type of paper used by newspaper reporters. His companion still wore a flying helmet, minus the goggles, and had the weathered features of an airman.

"What's this all about?" the young man in the baggy suit demanded angrily. "I land a dozen miles from here and ask for Duck-With-No-Wings, and you birds grab me and bring me here. You take my plane. What's the idea?"

Ark told him, "You ask too many questions."

"Listen," the young man gritted. "I'm a newspaper reporter and the *Globe* will have some one out looking for me before long."

Ark leered at him. "My dear friend, they will find you."

The journalist did not like the tone. He moistened his lips.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It will be very simple," Ark advised. "We will send the plane up. You two had no parachutes. My man will be aboard, but with a parachute. He will step overboard, after breaking a control wire."

The reporter tried to stutter something, failed and fell into a horrified silence.

Ark now gave his attention to Monk, Ham and the others.

"I was keeping you alive, thinking you might be of some service to me in trapping Doc Savage," he said. "Doc Savage is now dead, which eliminates my reasons for permitting you to exist longer." His strange voice became even shriller. "It will give me much satisfaction to eliminate you."

There was an interruption, the guard at the door calling out softly that men were approaching. A moment later, these entered the stockade. There were three of them. They had a captive, a bulky, sullen Seminole clad in a brilliant skirt affair and a gaudy shirt. They ushered him into the large hut.

“Duck-With-No-Wings,” one announced.

Ark piped, “Did you find the lump of basic ingredient?”

“We did,” one of the men said, and tossed a package wrapped in moss to Ark. “We got the story out of this guy, too. He saw two men running through the swamp, and saw one of them hide something. He got it, after he saw the Red Snow get the two men.”

Ark eyed Hyman Space. “The two men were your assistants who tried to escape from here and get to Doc Savage.”

Space said nothing. His one eye was hollow, staring. The black patch had been shoved aside from the other, revealing a gnarled cavity.

A voice called from outside, “Radio message for you, chief.”

Ark went out.

HE was back within less than five minutes, and there was a twisted smile on his hairless face. He teetered on his heels and scowled at Monk and Ham.

“That radio message was from one of my spies watching the secretary of state’s special train,” he advised. “It seems that your Doc Savage was clever enough to learn that we planned a reception for the government official, and managed to convey a warning.”

Ark paused. Ham said a tight-lipped nothing. For once he was without his sword cane. Monk lay beside him, tilted over on one side, an eye pressed absently to one of the cracks in the pole floor.

Monk could see his pig, Habeas Corpus, prowling around under the shack. Ark’s men had brought the pig along, intrigued perhaps by his intelligence and his unusual appearance; perhaps also they had wanted the pleasure of deviling Monk by promising to make bacon out of Habeas, they having discovered that the suggestion was the one thing which would throw Monk into a futile rage.

Ark continued, “It is indeed lucky that we had spies watching the special train. They learned that the secretary of state is not aboard. He transferred, in imagined secrecy, to a plane, and will arrive in Miami within the next four hours.”

Ark paused, leered. “Correctly, I should say, he is *expected* to arrive in Miami in the next four hours. Nothing of the sort will happen. I fear, instead, that his plane will be lost. Perhaps it will be one of the great mysteries of all time. But again, the Red Snow may be seen, in which case the world will know the truth.”

Ham said quietly, “Will you answer one question?”

Ark shrugged. “It depends.”

“You have killed a number of persons,” Ham said. “One was an airplane designer _____”

“A designer of war planes,” Ark elaborated.

“Yes,” Ham growled. “Another was a professor in the chemical research department of a famous university_____”

“Your nation’s greatest expert on poison gases,” said Ark.

Ham blinked. He seemed to begin to comprehend.

“There was a mechanical engineer who——”

Ark interrupted him. “The mechanical engineer was the inventor of remarkable war machines. There was a United States senator who possessed military information about my country. There was also an automobile manufacturer whose factories could be converted to hasty manufacture of tanks. And another was an undersecretary in your war department, a man who was a master of military strategy. Do you begin to understand?”

“I get it,” Ham mumbled.

“Of course you do,” Ark piped gleefully.

“So your country is getting ready to start something?” Ham surmised.

Ark nodded. “Our fleet is not many hundreds of miles from your coast, ostensibly holding maneuvers. The assassination of your secretary of state is the signal for a sudden declaration of war. Other of your national leaders are to be killed with the Red Snow. Your country will be temporarily paralyzed. Before it can get organized, it will be too late.”

He paused, as if to hear Ham’s reaction, but the dapper lawyer—he was not so dapper now—said nothing, and Ark continued:

“It is unfortunate that we do not have more of the Red Snow,” he said. “It is a weapon such as mankind never before saw. It is my own product, an electro-chemical solution which completely disrupts the molecular characteristics of matter. You know that radium has the property of disintegrating, although the process is infinitely slow? Well, I discovered that, by employing this phenomena of radium and adding certain chemical and radioactive substances, treated in a certain manner, I could cause almost instantaneous disintegration of practically all known substances.

“I do not destroy them. Nothing so drastic as that. I merely change their nature, as water is turned into steam, as wood is burned and turned into smoke and ashes. In this case, there is no resulting heat. The whole affair is carried out through the medium of atomic bombardment, secured through the medium of these radioactive compounds in combination with——”

A man outside emitted a terrific yell.

“Doc Savage!” he bawled. “The bronze man is here!”

Chapter 16

DEATH IN RED

HAD the world unexpectedly started coming to an end, the surprise could not have been more complete. Ark stopped his boastful explanations and dived for the door, knocking a man spinning out of his path.

Monk came to life, reared up and tried to trip Ark.

“Shoot him!” Ark yelled, and pointed at Monk.

The guard lifted his gun, aimed it at Monk, but another cry—a shriek of awful pain this time—caused him to change his mind. He followed Ark out through the door.

There was a porchlike platform before the door, and the men stood upon that, staring. They could see that the stockade gate was open. They saw a man sprawled in front of it. The fellow seemed to be alive, but unable to move—gripped by a strange paralysis. There was no one else in sight.

Then men came running. They popped from the other huts. They came from the direction of the hangar hidden on the lake edge. All were excited, puzzled.

“Who saw Doc Savage?” Ark piped. “Who shouted?”

At first no one answered, then a man said, “It must have been the guard at the gate.”

“Scatter,” Ark directed. “Hunt the bronze man.”

The Seminole village must have been abandoned when Ark and his men took it over. The clearing was overgrown with brush and grass. This had not been cut, but was trampled down in spots. Elsewhere, it was high enough to offer shelter.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, appeared suddenly from under the shack where Ark stood on the porchlike projection. The shote began grunting loudly and trotted across the compound, eyes fixed on some distant spot.

“Follow the pig!” Ark shrilled. “He sees the bronze man!”

The men converged on the spot for which Habeas Corpus was heading.

For a moment, the rear of the prison hut was unwatched, and there came a soft crunching and rattling as the thatching was torn aside. The men were shouting. That covered the noise.

Monk heard the first sound from the hut side. He stared, waiting. His homely features were wet with perspiration. The nearness, a moment before, to death by shooting, had given him a sweating spell.

An aperture opened in the thatched wall. A pair of bronze hands appeared, enlarging the opening.

“Doc!” Monk breathed.

The bronze giant was inside an instant later. He carried in his arms a large mass of what resembled a yellow-red cloth of considerable weight. This, he deposited on the floor. He began freeing the captives. Some of them were tied. He loosened those first.

Others were handcuffed. Doc examined the linkage. These were cheaper handcuffs, not like those which Fluency Beech's aide had used the day before.

Doc grasped the leg manacles. He had purchase, for they were linked around the floor poles. He yanked, and the links snapped as if they had become suddenly rotten. The depth to which they cut into the floor poles, however, showed the amount of strain which the bronze man's muscles put upon them before they gave.

The men were shouting more loudly in the clearing. They were angry now.

"The infernal pig saw nothing!" one screeched.

Monk squinted at Doc. "What'd you do? Send Habeas away to draw their attention?"

Doc nodded.

"I am going to draw their attention," he said swiftly. "When they are concentrating on me, you make a break. Do not try to escape through the swamp. They would overhaul you. Get to their planes and take off."

"What about you?" Monk demanded.

The bronze man did not answer. He gathered up the bundle of yellow-red cloth and eased out through the hole by which he had entered the hut.

DOC SAVAGE worked close to the stockade edge. The construction of this had once been secure enough, but age had made it decrepit. He found a spot where there was room to crawl through, to get outside into the jungle growth. Once concealed therein, he circled, using all of the caution possible, until he had reached the opposite end of the clearing.

Then he tried the stockade, found another opening—it was not difficult—it and crawled inside. Making his way to the nearest hut, he picked his chance and dived inside.

The structure had been a living quarters. There were hammocks slung from the roof poles, and various suitcases. Too, there were cases holding automatic rifles and ammunition. Doc dipped into one of these, got a gun and charged it with ammunition.

He advanced to the door, aimed deliberately, and fired. Ark screamed and leaped a foot into the air, fell flat, then got up and hopped to cover. He had been shot through one leg.

Doc showed himself. He used nice judgment, giving the men long enough to see him, but not long enough to target him on their gun sights. Then he lunged from the door, slammed flat and writhed through the grass until he was lying prone in a small ditch which had been dug to drain the vicinity of the hut.

He pulled up a large fistful of the rank swamp grass and held it so as to mask his features while he looked around. The grass, being of a nature blending with the surroundings, made him less likely to be seen, although a sharp eye would soon detect him.

The bronze man had depended on the men pursuing him. Thus, they would be drawn away from the hut where the prisoners were, allowing the latter a chance to

escape.

But nothing of the sort happened. The men were in a tight group around Ark.

One of them held an air rifle similar to the one employed by the man in the plane. He was fitting one of the Red Snow grenades into the gun.

“Use it!” Ark yelled. “We’ve got to get that infernal bronze devil this time!”

Doc Savage hastily lowered himself. He did not try to retreat. It was not feasible. If he got erect, they would see him and use their rifles. If he crawled, he could not make sufficient time.

He still carried the bundle of peculiar yellow-red material. He opened it now. It proved to be a sack of an affair with a drawstring opening. It was almost six feet long, wide enough to contain his giant frame when he eased inside. He drew in the mouth of the bag.

The last glance he threw overhead showed the arching grenade, showed it bloom suddenly into a spreading shroud of red flakes which sifted downward upon the spot where he lay.

The bronze man worked frantically at the mouth of the container. It must be more than airtight. It must be sealed completely. In one of his pockets was a case containing some of the peculiar metallic substance with which the cloth was impregnated, but it was in a paste state. He smeared it on the bag mouth, clamped the cloth together in his corded hands. Then he waited.

There was a peculiar hissing sound as the Red Snow descended—a sound not loud, but distinctive. Doc showed no particular interest. He had heard it thus once before—out in the swamp, when he had used this bag to escape the grenade fired from the plane. In that instance, he had floundered clear in the bag, once he thought the Red Snow had dissipated its weird strength.

The bag was the only defense he had been able to devise against the Red Snow. He had analyzed the stuff in the laboratory, secured a fair knowledge of its nature, and made up this bag of metal which would not be affected by the stuff. The Red Snow was far from universally effective. Many materials would resist it partially or completely.

When he guessed that the fall of Red Snow was at its height, he drew himself up and began to roll backward, so that he would leave the cloud of red flakes on the side opposite Ark and his men. It was a ticklish task. The opening of even a single seam in the bag—they were quadruple stitched and filled with the flexible sealing cement—would mean instant death, complete disintegration.

Finally, when he was sure he was clear, and certain the Red Snow would have dissipated, he freed himself of the bag.

What he saw was not pleasant.

MONK, HAM and the others, true to orders, had sought to make a break during the excitement. They had been discovered, and had sheltered themselves by flopping down inside the compound.

Ark and his men were advancing on them, rifles ready.

The man with the air rifle had fitted a second grenade into the barrel of the pneumatic weapon.

Doc stood up, shouted. He made no words, merely yelled.

Ark and his men spun around, bewildered, stunned. Ark had seized a stick and was employing it as a crutch. He waved the one arm with which he was not holding the crutch.

“Use the Red Snow on him again!” he shrilled. “Then keep shooting with rifles! Some of you have hand grenades. Use them!”

The man with the pneumatic rifle lifted his weapon.

Over by the stockade gate, Monk stood up suddenly. He must have crawled over there to get the weapon of the guard whom Doc Savage had knocked out in entering the compound. He held the weapon now. He whipped it up, snapped a shot.

The man with the pneumatic rifle screeched and fell down. He floundered about.

Ark leaped for the fallen one, his idea obviously being to get the air gun. But Ark was not accustomed to using one leg, and he fell down.

The wounded man—he might have been dying—pulled the trigger of the air gun and the grenade hit the ground, disintegrated. There was a spout of red flakes.

Ark began screaming and tried to crawl away. He was not fast enough, and the red particles enveloped him. The breeze stirred them a little, but not much, and they spread in all directions.

There was a hut near by. The Red Snow reached that. The thatching offered no resistance.

Ark’s men began running for safety. Monk howled at them, shot in the air, but they paid no attention.

The hut which the Red Snow had penetrated must have held the supply of the stuff, and the disintegrating effect actuated the detonating devices, for there was a sudden, vast puff of the red stuff, and it spread with tremendous speed.

One of Ark’s men was overtaken, then another. Some of them, though, must have gotten away, although as far as Doc Savage was concerned, there was never evidence of that. The men were not heard from again.

Doc and his own party were running. They had a start on the red terror, enough headway to get clear.

Monk’s pig, Habeas Corpus, appeared and showed an inclination to go back and investigate the strange red pall. Monk caught him, scooped him up by one oversized ear and bore him away.

“You must be losing your good judgment,” Monk told the shote.

THAT, as far as actual events were concerned, was the end of the menace of the Red Snow. The entire supply of the stuff had been destroyed, and along with it, as far as any one knew, the man who knew the secret of its compounding.

The building housing the equipment to make the Red Snow was completely disintegrated by the Red Snow itself. The other machinery—the pedestals removed

from the house on the dunes to the island—had been previously destroyed on the island.

Duck-With-No-Wings went back to his alligator hunting, still not knowing exactly what it was all about. The *Globe* reporter made all haste to his newspaper, and wrote a story which he visioned as putting him in the front rank of journalists. He got quite a shock. It was not published.

The reporter roared his disappointment. The editor explained simply that he had been requested to put the lid on the affair, since it would only stir up international complications, and possibly—indeed, quite probably—precipitate a war.

There was no war. The battle fleet of a certain foreign power, holding maneuvers near the American coast, discovered itself virtually surrounded by American warships, also using the all-sufficient excuse of battle maneuvers. The foreign force betook itself home after a decent interval.

The secretary of state and party reached Miami. The newspapers said the government executive had had an excellent fishing trip.

O. Garfew Beech was not heard from again. In his capacity as head of the secret service, he slid quietly out of the picture, not wanting publicity, and returned to Washington. His work was completed when the plot of the foreign power was nipped in the bud.

Doc Savage faded out of the picture also, and the Miami police dropped the murder charge against him as if it were something hot. This was after they had heard testimony offered by Hyman Space and others.

It was to Doc Savage's liking, the manner in which he eased into the background. There were plenty of others who liked publicity, and he was willing they should have it. He had come to Florida to work on a method of eradicating the mosquito pest. He went to work on that.

He was not destined to finish the task, although that was a fact he had no means of knowing. Trouble, danger, excitement, had a way of hunting the bronze man out. His reputation as a trouble smasher had spread to the corners of the earth, and it brought him strange problems.

From the Arctic wastes, the next call would come. But it was not from the Arctic as civilized man knew it, but from a fabulous domain in the depths of the earth—the *Land of Always Night*—a spot unknown to civilization, yet populated by a race so advanced that the intricacies of radio, of television, of surgery and medicine, of electro-chemistry, were little more complicated than the problems which confront a small child.

A strange man covered with a growth of golden fur, a man of mystery, of untold learning, was to be the harbinger of the next amazing adventure of this bronze man and his companions.

Most remarkable of all would be the nature of the clue on which the mystery seemed to hinge—a pair of goggles with lenses so black that no man could see through them. Goggles with a fantastic purpose! Goggles, war for the possession of which launched a stream of horror such as Doc Savage and his men had never before encountered.

But Doc Savage, having no inkling of all of that, set himself to work trying to create a parasite which would exterminate mosquitoes and nothing else.

Monk had a suggestion to offer, should they need a laboratory subject, bearing similarity to a mosquito, upon which to test the efficacy of such an evolved parasite.

“If we find the bug,” he grinned, “we can try it out on Ham.”

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 *Red Snow* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]