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SAVAGE

MYSTERY—SCIENCE
and ADVENTURE

IN A GREAT NOVEL

THE MOTION MENACE
PLUS STORIES and FEATURES



Walt
C. Coy

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PAT SAVAGE JOINS THE GROUP
(TEMPORARILY)

Patricia Savage, better known as Pat, is the beautiful and talented cousin of Doc Savage, and is well known to the bronze man's aides, having accompanied them on several of their trips.

Trying to keep Pat from coming along on these expeditions and subjecting herself to dangers that might result in her death has long been Doc's aim—but all to no avail. For Pat, like the other members of Doc's little band, is instilled with the love of adventure.

When Pat isn't looking for excitement she's busy taking care of her beauty parlor and physical culture institutions, just off Park Avenue, where she caters to the "400" and charges them outrageous prices.

Pat's main ambition is to become a permanent member of Doc Savage's little group.

THE MOTION MENACE

THE MOTION MENACE
A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE
BY KENNETH ROBESON

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Text of this ebook from the 1971 Bantam edition.

Chapter I

MEN WITH BEARDS

The strange rumor that circulated when the *China Rocket* crashed did not get the attention it should have.

When aviation was new, airplane company press agents got the habit of breathing hints of sabotage every time there was a crack-up. Nothing definite. Just vagueness about Communists, terrorists, or some other nebulous enemy.

The idea was for these whisperings to prevent the public getting the thought that maybe airplanes were not as safe as they might be. This sort of thing eventually stopped, but the memory remained in the public mind as old stuff.

The *China Rocket* was a luxury clipper from San Francisco to Shanghai, China. Two pilots and a radio operator. Hot meals. Pretty hostesses whose smiles would take your mind off airsickness and the size of the Pacific Ocean, or who would hand you a paper bag if that didn't work.

Divers had to be used to get what was left of the *China Rocket* out of Hangchau Bay, just south of Shanghai. Fortunately, Europeans who had seen it happen could point out the spot. The observers just happened to be an American movie actor and his party aboard a small yacht. The story they told was so queer they were asked to repeat it quite a few times.

The *China Rocket* had come to a dead stop in the sky. Very suddenly. All its motors had halted. Then the plane had fallen into Hangchau Bay. That was the eyewitnesses' tale.

Authorities and newspapermen accounted for this remarkably unbelievable story with two explanations which they considered probable: The observers had either made it up to grab some publicity, or they had all been drunk. But some one had a more acceptable suggestion: An insane passenger had grabbed the controls.

Details of the extremely modern construction of the plane were reprinted in America and Europe.

It did not appear in print that Clark Savage, Jr., better known as Doc Savage, had designed the plane. Or, rather, the ship was an exact duplicate in shape and streamlining of two ships which Doc Savage had built for himself. Doc Savage was not an individual who got in print when it could be avoided.

This point, missed by all but one person, happened to explain why the *China Rocket* crashed.

A young lady was the one who did not miss the point. She went down to breakfast in the coffee shop of a Shanghai hotel the next morning, bought a newspaper as a matter of course, and naturally saw the story of the *China Rocket*, and pictures of the ill-fated ship. She looked sharply at the pictures.

The young lady was tall, but her figure did not have a very good shape. Her hair was blond, but the stringy kind of blond that does not interest any one. Horn-rimmed colored spectacles didn't help her looks any.

Her clothes were padded to give her a bad form, her hair was dyed, and the awful glasses hid the color of her eyes. None of this was very easily detected. Actually, she was a stunning beauty.

The dumpy-looking young woman hastily turned pages until she found another airplane picture. The legend under it said:

Miss Enola Emmel, of New York, lands her plane in Shanghai, bound on Orient tour.

The plane was outwardly a duplicate of the unlucky *China Rocket*.

The manager of the hotel happened to pass. He said, "I hope everything is satisfactory, Miss Emmel." He was an American, and the hotel was American-owned and managed.

The young lady who was on the register as Miss Enola Emmel said, "Yes, thank you," rather absently.

She was thinking. She turned back to the plane-wreck news, and her expression became grim. She got up and looked around until she found a telephone booth. It was a modern booth, just like those in New York hotel lobbies.

The girl called a number in New York City by transpacific telephone. The connection required about ten minutes.

A remarkable voice answered the telephone in New York. A male voice with depth, timbre and control. Not a radio announcer on any network had a voice the equal of it.

"This is Pat," the young woman in China said. "Listen, Doc, have you read about the *China Rocket*?"

"Naturally," said the unusual voice.

"A hunch just struck me, Doc. You know——"

"Pat," said the voice, "you are supposed to be taking a vacation. You claimed you were tired of running that beauty shop and ladies' gymnasium, where you charge such outrageous prices. You borrowed one of my planes, had it shipped to the Philippines, and started flying it yourself on a tour of the Orient. You disguised yourself. You insisted you were going to have one vacation where no one would bother you. Go ahead and take it."

The young woman said, "What I need is diversion, more than a vacation. I think I've found some excitement."

"It is to be hoped not." The New York voice sounded weary.

"I think whoever crashed the *China Rocket* was after me!"

The response this got from the New York end of the long wire was strange. It was not an exclamation, grunt or whistle. It was a fantastic sound. Probably the nearest description was trilling. It rose and fell, eerie, but without tune. It was such a sound as might have been made by a small breeze.

The young woman waited until the trilling sank into nothingness, then said, "My plane looked exactly like the *China Rocket*. I left Manila at the same time, but stopped off in South China to see if I could find any trace of Captain Cutting Wizer."

"You really went to China to find Captain Wizer, did you not?"

"Yes. He is an expert on electromagnetic dermatological science. When he visited New York some months ago, he made me a little contraption that cures blackheads like nobody's business. I want to hire him to build more apparatus. But I can't find him. Nobody knows where he went. Anyway, that could have no connection with this. No one knows me here in Shanghai."

"Are you using your own name?"

“Of course not. I’m Miss Enola Emmel, an air tourist.”

“Took the words ‘lemme alone’ and turned them around. Not especially good.”

“I thought,” Pat said, “it was right snitzy.”

The man in New York asked, “Why should any one try to kill you, Pat?”

“Now you’ve got me. I cannot think of an enemy in the world.”

There was a brief silence.

“The people on the boat who saw the *China Rocket* crash told a rather strange story, Pat. That is, their description of how the *China Rocket* crashed. It came to a sudden, dead stop in the air, they said, so you will recall. Of course, that is impossible. Planes do not come to sudden, dead stops in mid-air.”

“Yes, Doc. It struck me as wacky, too.”

“It might be advisable to look into the matter.”

Pat said cheerfully, “I’ll meet you on Hangchau Bay where the plane crashed.”

“You will not!”

“Please, Doc, I must——”

“This is one time you stay out of trouble, young lady. No more backtalk. Go on with your vacation.”

“I won’t!”

“You will!”

Pat Savage appeared to have been backed into a corner. She grimaced, started to say something two or three times, and finally emitted a dramatic groan.

“Oh, all right!” she snapped. “But I hope I run into a kidnaping or something up in these woods!”

Bang! went the receiver, and Pat stepped out of the phone booth.

“Miss Savage, I’m here to save you,” a voice said at Pat’s elbow.

Pat—or Enola Emmel, as she called herself—gave a start and eyed the speaker.

“Didn’t you stop to think,” she snapped, “that I might have a weak heart? And my name is Enola Emmel, not Savage!”

The young man was as tall as any young man should be, and he had blue eyes, blond hair, a pleasantly large mouth. His shirt and the handkerchief peeking from the breast pocket were a shade of light tan; his well-cut suit, tie and shoes, were different shades of brown.

“Your specialty is giving others heart trouble,” he said, cheerfully. “And I know you’re Pat Savage. I’ve seen you before. Say, did you know your life was in danger?”

“My life——” Pat stared at him.

“Well, maybe not that bad. But a man’s trailing you. Oh, yes, my name is Halloc. Ky Halloc. I was at the airport when you landed last night. An old man with whiskers was following you. Not to be outdone, I, in turn, followed him. He is now loitering in the street. I’ll show you.”

“I think you’re crazy, or else you’re kidding me,” Pat said. But nevertheless she followed him.

Out on the street there was no white-whiskered gentleman, and Pat asked, “How did you happen to be at the airport last night?”

Halloc grinned. “Just happened to be passing by and saw the plane land. I recognized you, then saw the old boy follow you. He’s around somewhere. We’ll take a ride in my car. He’ll follow us, and you can see him.”

Halloc was no millionaire, judging from his car. It had been washed recently, though, and the chromium—what there was—had been polished. It was a second-hand car shipped over from the United States. He held the door open.

Getting in, Pat showed him the business end of an enormous, single-action six-shooter.

“Swell!” Halloc grinned. “I always wanted to wed a real old-fashioned sheriff’s daughter.” He got in.

Pat kept the six-gun in her right hand, and kept her left hand on her left knee. That way, her arm would prevent his grabbing the gun if he felt so inclined.

They drove through narrow streets, scraped some paint off the fenders turning cramped corners, but saw no one. Then Ky Halloc gave Pat a surprise.

“Look here,” he said, “what got Doc Savage interested in the Elders?”

Pat took off her colored glasses. Her eyes narrowed at him.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” she said.

“Oh, don’t try to beat around the bush. Doc Savage started you investigating because you were least likely to be suspected. Anyway, you knew the man.”

It was with some difficulty that Pat managed to look composed.

“They tried to stop you yesterday, and got the *China Rocket* by mistake,” Halloc said. “The two planes looked alike. Instead of killing you, they killed those others by mistake.”

“You listened outside the telephone booth!” Pat snapped.

“Nope.”

“Then how did you—who are you, anyway?”

The young man took in a big breath.

“I’m a new pal of yours. Listen, does the name Viscount Herschel Penroff mean anything to you?”

It didn’t. Pat shook her head.

“Ever hear of Captain Cutting Wizer?” Ky Halloc asked.

“Captain Wizer?” Pat’s eyes widened. “You mean a nice old gentleman who is a surgeon experimenting with electrical treatments for skin disorders?”

“Captain Wizer—nice old gentleman?” Ky Halloc looked queer.

“A wonderful old fellow,” Pat said warmly. “I want to hire him to build skin-beautifying apparatus. Do you know where he is?”

“Did he have a white beard?”

“No.” Pat frowned. “Look here, what is this all about?”

The young man shook his head. “Either you’re fooling me and don’t know what a horrible fellow Captain Wizer is or—well, we’d better talk this over. Say, I’ve got to smoke while I talk. Have you got a cigarette? I’m out of them.”

“I don’t smoke,” Pat said.

Ky Halloc steered his car into the curb at a corner, stopped and shut off the engine. There was a tobacco shop on the corner.

Pat watched him get out and walk quickly into the tobacco store. He had a nice, swinging stride, with his shoulders held back. It was too early yet to tell whether he had any brains or not.

Pat was so interested in speculating about the young man that she did not observe a car until it stopped in the street beside Ky Halloc’s machine. She gripped her gun and eyed the newly arrived automobile. It looked harmless enough.

A smallish man, bundled to his ears in a gaberdine coat, was driving. Two persons were in the rear. All three seemed to be engaged in an animated discussion. It was the kind of conference any travelers might hold when puzzled about the road.

Then Pat gave a start. Beards! All three of them had white beards! The sight of so many beards startled Pat. When the car door opened, she thought it was Ky Halloc returning, and neglected to look around.

The next instant, her six-gun was wrenched out of her fingers.

When Pat looked around to see who had snatched her gun, she got one of the surprises of her life. There was not one man. There were two. They both had pistols. One was already starting the car.

They both had white beards!

Pat took a moment to get over being stunned; then she went into action.

The white whiskers of the nearest man were nice and long. Pat grabbed and yanked. The fellow hadn't expected that. She got him down across her lap. He couldn't very well shoot. Neither could his companion.

With her free hand, Pat aimed a dig at the driver's little pop eyes. He bleated and threw up his hands as if he had found a snake in his lap.

Pat reached for her big six-shooter. At the same time, she twisted the whiskers with all her might. She could feel some of them pulling out.

Then the curtain of unconsciousness fell down on things.

The bearded man from the other car hastily pocketed the gun with which he had clubbed Pat.

"Can you drive, General?" he asked.

"Yes," said the one whose eyes Pat had poked.

Both cars went down the street in a hurry. They did not, however, drive too fast. That might have interested some of the military guards stationed about this, the foreign quarter of the city.

Ky Halloc came out of the Chinese tobacco shop with a pack of American cigarettes on which he had paid an unearthly import duty. He looked about, and seemed surprised when he saw his car about four blocks distant, moving rapidly. It turned a corner and was lost to sight.

Ky Halloc, after he had rubbed his jaw, gave a queer, short laugh.

"This," he said, "is just the first chapter."

Chapter II

THE WALL OF TERROR

Pat Savage looked at some white whisker hairs in her fingers for a while after she awakened. They had tied her wrists with a necktie, but her fingers must have remained unconsciously clenched on the whiskers. She tried her strength. But the necktie was stronger.

Trees and brush were whisking past on either side. The woods did not look as if it had been farmed. Wild country.

Pat looked her captors over. They were a queer pair. They reminded her of old owls. Their hooked noses did that. The way they kept their lips tight made it look as if they had something in their mouths. They did speak good English, though.

As she finished her inspection, she nearly snorted. They were dressed like a vaudeville team. Each wore a gaberdine topcoat buttoned to the throat, and each head was topped by a hat shaped like a stewpan, and made of some white fur that might have been dyed-and-clipped rabbit, or ermine.

Pat looked around. The other car was following.

“Well,” Pat demanded, “what’s the meaning of this?”

“Quiet, madame,” said one of the old men. “His Highness will confer with you when the time comes.”

The time, it developed, was some distance off. The cars drove for half an hour—there was a clock on the dashboard. Then both machines pulled off the road and headed for the shore of a lake. They nearly got stuck. Every one alighted, and Pat was helped out.

Two canoes were cocked up on the lake shore. Every one got in them. Three of the men gave Pat every help possible. When one of them did her a service, he always prefaced it by a funny little bow. The canoes were of American make.

Pat wondered, as they paddled out in the lake, if they could swim. Two men were in her boat and three were in the other. She could make good time with her hands and feet tied. Pat became intrigued with the idea.

She upset the canoe.

The old men could swim. They were, in fact, a bunch of old Neptunes. Pat, swimming underwater, just started to vision escape—the water was loosening the necktie—when they caught her. She kicked around some, but they held her.

They righted the overturned canoe, with the help of the bearded gentlemen in the other canoe, and spilled the water out of it. Two of them gave their bows, then hauled Pat, dripping and madder than she could remember being, into the craft.

Not a word was said by anybody. But it took great control for Pat to keep silent.

They rounded a headland. A plane—a seaplane, two-motored, big and fast—stood on the lake. A man was inside, waiting.

More bows, and Pat was lifted into the plane cabin. The pilot—he had a helmet chin strap buckled under his whiskers—had the bowing habit, also. He made Pat comfortable in a seat, then backed away.

The old men then upset both canoes.

“If the trail comes this far, the upset canoes may mislead them with thoughts of drowning,” an old gentleman told Pat. He smiled widely, then closed his mouth and held it as if he had something in it.

The plane then took off. The ship climbed beautifully. It headed south.

“I’m sorry, madame,” one old man apologized. He bowed, then tied a scarf over Pat’s eyes; and Pat thereafter could not see where they were going.

The plane finally landed nicely on water, taxied a bit, then the floats ground against what sounded like rock; and other noises indicated the craft was being tied with ropes to the shore.

An old gentleman then removed Pat’s blindfold and bowed. “My arm, madame,” he said politely.

Pat tried to jump into the water as they helped her ashore. She wanted to leave wet tracks. They politely prevented this, then removed her high-heeled pumps, which might leave scratches on the stone.

The old men had also taken off their shoes. They all wore very woolly socks.

They walked in silence across the stone. Nowhere was there a blade of grass, although there were high, wooded slopes around the lake.

A cleft appeared ahead. They walked to it. As they walked in, it narrowed, and quickly became the mouth of a cave. The hole was not waist high, and only wide enough for one man at a time.

The old man in the lead stepped back, bowed, and said, “You first, madame.”

Pat glanced angrily at the surrounding rocks. There was not much she could do. She bent and dived into the hole. Straightening up, she looked around.

Pat’s career had not been entirely without scares. She had rather good self-control; but she suddenly emitted a startled screech.

She had crept into the den of an enormous bear. And the occupant was home!

Pat knew a good deal about bears. This one was the worst kind. A grizzly! Monstrous! The beast showed its fangs. A growl came from it. Then it started for her.

The grizzly was not a dozen feet distant, and grizzlies are not customers to meet at that range, even with the most high-powered rifle.

Pat whirled, hopped for the outlet. Her feet were not now lashed with the necktie, but she doubted very much if she could make it anyway.

One of the old men blocked the way.

The thoughts that lashed Pat’s brain the next instant were chaotic.

Shrill, chortling glee came from the old man’s lips. He had his head back. Laughing! Like a babe with a lollypop!

“Be calm, madame,” he said. “The bear is a pet. Perfectly gentle. Back, Moe!”

Moe stopped. He showed his teeth, lathered his gums with a red tongue, burped, then lurched around and retreated.

“You can’t tell me Moe is a pet!” Pat said shakily.

“His temper may not be the best,” the old man said sorrowfully. “You see, his stomach has been bothering him. He likes that strong brown Chinese beer, but we unfortunately ran out of it.”

One of the bearded men then stooped and began working on the floor. The interior of the cave was veined with cracks, that being the nature of the stone.

The man working on the floor lifted a slab of stone—a trapdoor.

“You see,” said Pat’s informant, “any one finding this place with Moe in it would think it a mere bear’s den.”

Pat almost remarked that as far as she was concerned it was anyway, but didn’t.

After several polite bows, Pat was guided into the hole in the floor. She expected steps. There were none here.

Pat discovered herself standing in what seemed to be a metal bucket about seven feet deep and three across. There were handholds around it, and the sides were padded.

Three of the old men got in with Pat. The bucket lacked the size to hold all of them. The others said they would wait for the second trip.

Some one operated a switch or a lever. The bucket sank. But the way did not lie downward much of the distance, either. Instead, the bucket traveled on one side. Pat appreciated the padded sides and the handles then. Because she had the sensation of standing on her head, she knew the bucket was being pulled upward.

They came out in a twilight, and Pat looked around. What she saw was amazing enough that she somewhat forgot about being mad.

She stood in a giant crack. There were walls of stone on each side, the natural rock sides of the crack, which Pat judged to be four hundred feet high, or more. The width at the bottom was nowhere more than two hundred feet. Strangely, the crack seemed narrower at the top. Pat decided this might be an optical illusion.

Suddenly Pat became so interested in listening that she forgot all else. There was a sound in the air. A weirdly fantastic sound. An orchestration. The vibrations did not rise and fall. They were steady.

Pat was escorted to a mass of stone which looked as if it had fallen into the crack, but hadn’t. It proved to be a box of a hut, carefully camouflaged. There was a door, but no lock on the door.

“Unfortunately, madame, we never prepared to keep prisoners,” an old man told Pat.

“Listen here, you old goats!” Pat snapped. “Why did you bring me here?”

“It is very simple, madame. You are associated with Doc Savage indirectly. You started to the Orient and began inquiring for Captain Wizer. Obviously, you knew something. So we set about apprehending you.”

“But,” Pat exclaimed, “I only wanted to hire Captain Wizer to build beauty apparatus!”

“In that case, we took some lives needlessly.”

Pat looked horrified. “Then you *did* wreck the *China Rocket*?” she gasped.

“That was an unfortunate bit of futility, it seems—if you only wanted Captain Wizer to build beauty machines,” the old fellow said calmly, and walked away.

Pat stood and stared after him. She turned away. Utter revulsion was on her features. All those innocent passengers aboard the *China Rocket*—

There was a noise at the door. Pat turned.

“Captain Wizer!” she gasped.

Captain Wizer was a tall affair of bones and wrinkled hide. He had no beard. He did have piercing eyes and a forehead of almost remarkable size. He wore big horn-rimmed spectacles and they had thick lenses which magnified his eyeballs, giving them a weird aspect. He wore a long white smock, very heavy rubber gloves and a strange sort of mask of some kind of metal that resembled lead was dangling around his neck.

“Ay yust bane learn ’bout you,” he said.

“You—you’re one of these butchers!” Pat snapped grimly.

The old man—Wizer was past sixty—blinked soberly.

“It vars too bad dis had to happen. Ay don’t vant to see you ha’ar.”

“Who are these old men?” Pat asked.

“Ve oll bane Elders,” said Wizer.

“So you old reprobates call yourselves the Elders, eh? I think murderers would be more apt.”

Old Wizer blinked owlshly at her behind his thick spectacles.

“It yust bane too bad,” he muttered. “Oll you can do bane to hope. Maybe——” He fell silent.

“What have I done?” Pat demanded angrily.

“You got yourself mixed up in somet’ings so big dot you can’t do anyt’ings ’bout her. Ay would not tell you any more.”

“But I only came to China to get you to design beauty apparatus!”

“Ay know. But ve make mistake. Ve bane tank Doc Savage send you to investigate us.”

Pat could think of nothing to say to that. Old Wizer stood there squirming.

“Ay don’t tank His Highness bane here now,” he said finally. “Vhen he come, Ay bane try to see you don’t die. You bane awful pretty girl to die.”

He shuffled away, head down, looking sorrowful.

Pat stood and thought. She had accidentally come upon something sinister. The old men thought she had been sent by Doc Savage. They were scared of Doc. That was not strange.

Doc Savage, the man of bronze, the man of mystery, the mental marvel, as the newspapers called him, had a reputation which was capable of frightening crooks. For evildoers were Doc’s specialty.

These Elders were taking no chances.

Pat snorted, and went back to the door. It did not have a lock, she had noted. She craned her neck and looked through the ventilating slit. Then she opened the door the merest crack. It did not make a noise.

An old man stood beside the door, on guard. The fellow must have been made a trifle deaf. He had not heard the door. No other Elders were in sight.

Pat was an impulsive young lady. She picked out a spot behind the old gentleman’s right ear and let him have it.

She grabbed, jerked him inside. No need to hit him again, though. He was out. She shook him out of his gaberdine and lifted off his fur cap, which had not been knocked off. Under the gaberdine he wore a rather startlingly brilliant uniform. There was much gold braid and many medals, some of them jeweled. She looked closely at the medals. Genuine!

Pat stepped out clad in the gaberdine and the white fur hat.

She had not taken a dozen steps when one of the old men saw her. He was the fellow guarding the tunnel mouth. But he did not give an alarm, and she went on, satisfied she had fooled him. She headed toward the upper end of the crack and quickly rounded the bend.

Pat would not have been as confident had she seen the expression on the wrinkled visage of the old owl at the tunnel mouth. He was smiling grimly, and talking to himself.

“It is best that she learn now how hopeless her position is,” he chuckled.

He waited. Obviously, he was expecting something to happen. It did.

There was a scream. Pat's voice! Tearing with horror! She screeched again, long, drawn-out, starting loud, and trailing off to an end that was almost a whimper.

The violinlike singing sounds kept on steadily. There was a definitely sinister quality about them.

Pat appeared. Running. Staggering, rather. She did not seem to be wounded. Yet she weaved and could hardly walk. And upon her face was an awful whiteness.

Men were appearing from whatever tasks had employed them. They ran until they saw Pat, after which they stopped and stared.

"Get the physician!" one of them called.

Pat weaved to the hut where she had been confined. She collapsed in the door, and began to wring her arms, to beat them against her sides and against the ground. Her eyes were almost glazed. She mumbled, delirious with agony.

The men gathered around her. With great solicitude, they clasped her wrists and arms and began to knead and pat them. They still didn't forget to bow before each small service.

Pat moaned, "Oh—that—that—horror——"

An old man in the background said solemnly, "She knows, now."

"Yes," said another, with equal solemnity. "And she is a nice young woman, with courage. It is sad."

Pat, in her delirium of pain, rolled and mumbled. In her blankness, she seemed to be trying to convey a warning.

"Doc!" she moaned incoherently. "You won't guess—you'll never have—a chance!"

Her mumblings became weaker and weaker and her movements less and less, as if an unseen beast of silence were slowly swallowing her.

Chapter III

DEATH FANTASTIC

There were occasions when Doc Savage would have better been a more ordinary-looking individual. As it was, his appearance was so striking that he could hardly put a foot on the street without being recognized. Almost all New York knew him.

He towered in any crowd. His skin had a distinctive bronze tint. His hair was an unusual bronze hue, only a bit darker than his skin. His eyes were striking, like pools of flake gold always stirred. And the eyes possessed something magnetic.

For the last few weeks, Doc had been molested. People were spying on him. Doormen, clerks, newsboys, taxi drivers. When asked the idea, they freely admitted they were gathering information for a series of articles on the bronze man by a newspaper syndicate. They got paid for each tip they turned in about him.

Doc never gave interviews, so the syndicate seemed to be using this other method. There was no law against it.

So Doc at the moment was using obscure routes to his headquarters on the eighty-sixth floor of the city's most prominent skyscraper. He came out in the skyscraper lobby and beat three autograph-seekers to an elevator.

The elevator operator immediately whisked his passenger upward. He did not say anything.

Doc Savage said, "You are new here, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," the operator replied as tonelessly as a machine.

"Whose place did you take?"

"Walter's, sir."

"Walter is a nice boy," Doc Savage said.

"Yes, sir."

The elevator reached the eighty-sixth floor. The operator opened the door.

Doc Savage stepped out. Then he reached back into the elevator, grasped the operator and pulled him out. The fellow made noises like a tomcat. He kicked, struck and even spat.

Doc Savage gripped a handful of the left breast of the operator's coat. The coat fabric was a stout weave. Yet it tore away as if it were ancient cheesecloth. Altogether, Doc's fingers got coat, shirt, undershirt—and a flat pistol and its holster.

The operator continued to fight. He hung limp finally, not because he had given up, but because his strength was gone.

"How—how'd you fall to me?" he asked thickly.

"It came out as a matter of routine checking, a safety-first check, we call it," the bronze man said without emotion. "Walter's parents were called. It developed he has not been home for a week. Each day or so, he telephones to say he is all right, and merely not coming home because he is working overtime."

The operator said nothing.

"Where is the other operator—Walter?" Doc Savage asked.

"You won't get nothin' outta me!" the other snarled. "And if you're wise, you'll let me go and forget about it!"

"And why?"

“Because you’re stickin’ your nose into somethin’ a lot bigger than you dream!”

Doc Savage did not look particularly alarmed. He propelled the prisoner to the door of his headquarters suite—a bronze-colored panel which bore his name in letters so small as to be hardly noticeable. Inside, there was an impressive anteroom. Beyond was another room, much more vast, which was a library. One of the world’s greatest collections of scientific tomes was there.

There was a third room, also huge. The laboratory. The chamber of magic where the man of bronze concocted some of his amazing scientific gadgets.

Doc Savage stopped on the threshold of the laboratory. Something had arrested him. His trilling noise came into being briefly.

The bronze man stepped swiftly to a panel in the wall which looked innocent enough, but which, when opened by some undetected catch, disclosed a number of recording instruments similar to inking barometers. Each was glass-enclosed. They were attached to the establishment’s remarkable system of burglar alarms, and registered any furtive entrance into the place.

Every one of the devices had stopped working.

The bronze man whipped a quick gaze over the laboratory. There was just one thing there that should not have been. Stillness! Utter silence.

Doc Savage was carrying on experiments with the effect of electrochemical stimulation on musculature, and he had a number of guinea pigs, parrots, pigeons, in the place. They should have been moving about.

Every one of the live things was dead!

The captive elevator operator looked around. He was scared. He had seen the dead things.

“It’s been—they——” He threw back his head and blared out a howl of utter fright. “If it comes back and catches us here, we’ll die!”

Doc Savage said quietly, “This place is literally a fortress. It would take a small army to break in.”

The prisoner shook and bubbled.

“You c-can’t s-stop it!” he gurgled.

The prisoner did not stop shaking until Doc Savage had him down on the street, in a taxicab. The fellow was still scared, but he had been overjoyed at getting out of the skyscraper.

“You do not think that your employers would kill you in an effort at my life?” Doc asked.

The man shivered. “Brother, them old guys with the whiskers ain’t like nobody you ever went up against before.”

Doc Savage said quietly, “You are going to have some interesting things to tell me, it would seem, especially since an attempt on my life has just been made.”

“Not me!”

A line of taxicabs were drawn up before the Pennsylvania Station, awaiting fares as the bronze man’s car neared it.

“Pull in there,” Doc directed.

The driver pulled in. The bronze man got out, and went to eight different cabs which were operated by the same concern and therefore looked alike. He gave each of the eight drivers a bill and explained briefly what he wanted. He got in one of the cabs with his prisoner.

What happened next was intended to confuse any one who might have been following. The eight cabs which all looked alike drove in a compact group. They shifted about, one taking the lead, another dropping back. In and out of traffic, they dodged. Doc and his prisoner got down on the floorboards.

“Slick,” the prisoner muttered. “I’ve been making tails for years, and I’d never be able to follow a guy through this.”

“So you are an expert?” Doc queried.

“I’m a private detective,” the man said.

Their cab stopped suddenly.

“Hey!” the driver squawled. “What—what——”

There was a series of deafening crashes. Yells. Curses. Breaking glass. Doc lifted for a look.

A strange thing had happened in the street ahead. Several cars appeared to have come to a dead stop. Other cars had smashed into them. Two had upset.

Doc moved rapidly. He whipped out of the rear, got into the front seat, shoved the driver over. The driver was agog. Doc meshed gears, backed, and with expert speed, got out of the jam. Then he stopped the machine, thrust his head out and scrutinized the buildings on each side of the street.

The glance which he gave each side was fleeting, but enough. Doc took two hours of intensive exercise daily. A part of it was devoted to strengthening observation powers.

He saw a man with a beard standing at a fourth-story window of a building on the right side of the street.

Doc got the cab rolling. He took the first corner—turning right—on two wheels. An alley appeared. The taxi slid into that, stopped.

“Run!” Doc told the driver, and the fellow ran.

The bronze man’s fingers then did something to the captive’s neck. The fellow became strangely rigid. He seemed fully conscious, but unable to move. Doc heaved him into the cab.

Fire escapes came down the backs of the buildings to the alley. They were supposed to end high enough so that no one could reach them from the alley. Doc ran, jumped, got hold of the fire escape landing. An instant later, he was gliding up the steps.

The fourth-story window was locked on the inside. The bronze man bumped the sash with a palm, and got to the lock. It made some noise, so he did not lose time. The corridor, after the daylight outside, was dark. It smelled of furs. This was the fur district. A bulb on a dropcord made some light at the other end.

Doc had covered about fifteen feet when the light went out.

The bronze man whipped to one side, waited.

A minute passed.

There were cautious footsteps. Some one moving.

Doc eased out into the hall, made for the footsteps. He made no sound. He could hear the other. One man, apparently. The fellow was descending stairs.

Because it was very dark in the old corridor, once he had rounded a corner, Doc kept an arm out ahead, feeling the way.

He reached the stairway. But he never went down it. Something incredible took hold of his arm.

Pain was the first thing. Stinging pain, the kind that comes from a healing wound when it is hurt. It was so agonizing that it put strange lights in front of Doc's eyes. It started at the end of his extended arm, and flooded back. He wrenched to get the arm free.

The arm would not come back! An irresistible force had gripped it! His muscles—gigantic sinews—stretched, and the joints seemed to give, but he could not free his hand.

Doc kicked with terrific force. His foot hit something. It felt as hard as bone. The impact stung all the way up to the hip. And the thing grabbed the foot. Held it! No amount of yanking freed the leg.

Then, without warning, and before he could get a light going—the bronze man carried a tiny flashlight—to tell what the thing was, it released him.

There was no sound, no noise of breathing, no odor of anything. It just released him. And when Doc lunged, kicked and struck, there was nothing.

Silence, except for the patter of footsteps retreating down the steps, now far below. A moment after he had been released, the footsteps paused.

A cackle of laughter came up the stairs. Then an ancient, gleeful voice came gurgling up. It was hollow, as if spoken back of a hand.

"You have been treated gently this time, Savage," the croak said. "You probably do not understand what has happened. Unfortunately, if your curiosity persists, you will not learn much more."

The footsteps hurried on downward.

Doc Savage, instead of going down the stairs—even his speed would not catch the one who had fled—went toward the front of the building.

The room he entered was grimy, had no furniture. On the floor lay cigarette stubs and a small bottle. The window was open. Doc went to it.

He was in time to see two old men with white beards get into a new, expensive sedan. The car left in a great hurry.

Doc leaned out of the window and called, "Stop that sedan!"

The bronze man's voice was a powerful crash that caused every one within blocks to look up. But it did no good. There was too much excitement where the cars had smashed together.

The sedan got away.

Doc then made an investigation. But his search netted him nothing.

He went down into the street. A policeman was questioning the drivers of the cars which had stopped so suddenly and caused all the mixup. All the men were drivers of the taxicabs which Doc had hired. They were being raked over the coals.

"How the hell do I know what happened, I tell you!" one driver yelled irately. "My hack musta locked gears or somethin'. It just up and stopped!"

"Same here," said another driver earnestly.

"Fishy," grumbled the cop. "Very fishy!"

Several persons recognized Doc Savage and started asking him questions. Doc escaped and went back to the alley. The prisoner was still in the cab, still in the strangely rigid condition.

Doc got into the cab and drove it down to a thoroughfare very near Wall Street. He picked the prisoner up and carried him into a towering office building.

A private elevator served the penthouse. Doc walked in, the rigid man over one shoulder, and said, "Andrew Blodgett Mayfair's laboratory."

The gaping elevator operator let the bronze man and his burden out in an ultra-modernistic hallway. It was doubtful if there was a more flamboyant-looking hall in the city.

Doc stopped and listened.

A man was groaning. Swearing, rather, but he was doing it in a tone so low and full of horror that it sounded as if he were groaning.

Doc Savage lunged for a chromium slab of a door, shouldered it open, and halted.

There was a dazzling, modernistic table of glass and chromium in the center of the room. On the table lay a pig.

The pig was quite a specimen of the genus porker. It had long ears, no body worth mentioning, a tremendous snout, and wing-sized ears. It seemed to be dead.

“Doc!” squeaked a tiny, boylike voice. “Quick! I’ve been tryin’ to locate you! Habeas! He’s dead! Can’t you do somethin’? You gotta! Here! Look! Oh, hurry!”

The author of this machine gun volley of pleas was as unusual-looking in his race as the hog he was so anxious about was in his.

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Boldgett Mayfair was, as might be expected, called “Monk.” His resemblance to an ape would not permit anything else. Back of his forehead, which was not an inch wide, was a brain that had gotten him the repute of being one of the greatest living industrial chemists.

“I was out!” he wailed. “I came back. Somethin’ had happened! My clocks had stopped. So had a generator. So had my air-conditioning machine. And Habeas was dead! Doc, do somethin’!”

The bronze man lowered his burden and went to the pig. The shote was Habeas Corpus, and he was no ordinary hog. He was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair’s pet, and if not the only trained hog in captivity, he was surely the most adept.

“Adrenaline!” Doc said abruptly.

Monk ran into his laboratory. He knew what the adrenaline was going to be used for, so he brought a syringe with a long needle.

Doc Savage ran the needle of the hypodermic into the pig’s heart and squirted in the adrenaline. Then he worked over the shote with skilled fingers.

Monk danced about. He would rather have parted with his right arm than lose the hog.

Doc did not seem to be having much luck. He himself whipped into the laboratory, to come back soon with more chemicals. He began mixing them, administering them, experimenting.

Monk wailed, “I don’t savvy what’s happenin’!”

“This same thing occurred at my place,” Doc told him. “The animals and birds on hand for scientific experimental purposes were all killed. None had a mark on them. You notice that Habeas is unmarked.”

“That’s what gets my goat!” Monk groaned. “What’s done it?”

Doc Savage said quietly, “It is something a good deal more dangerous than anything we ever ran across before.”

Monk’s small, boylike voice was thoughtful as he said, “That takes in a lot of territory.”

Chapter IV

WHISKERED TROUBLE

Monk, unable to stand still, took a stamping turn and almost fell over Doc's prisoner.

"Who's this?" the apish chemist howled.

"Spy," Doc said. "Have not questioned him."

Monk popped his hands together, grimaced.

"Unjinx 'im, Doc," he requested. "I'll make 'im recite for us!"

Doc came over to the prisoner and relieved that strange paralysis by a pressure on the nerve centers.

The prisoner groaned and felt of his neck.

Monk yelled, "Tell us everything you know!"

"Hell with you!" the captive snarled.

The man probably expected a third degree. It was doubtful if his worst fears approached what he did get. Monk picked him up bodily, slammed him against a wall, caught him on the bounce, crashed him to the floor, then picked him up by the ears alone. Monk let loose, hit him in the middle, straightened the fellow with a smash under the jaw.

Monk gloried in trouble. Doc had a policy of never doing any more physical damage to an enemy than could be helped, but Monk had never thought much of the policy.

"Monk!" Doc admonished.

"I know," Monk said. "No unnecessary violence. Right now, my hog has been killed. Why, blast my hide, if this guy——"

Thump! Monk knocked the prisoner against the wall again with a blow, let him fall, then jumped onto him. Sitting on the fellow's middle, Monk grabbed an arm and calmly began to pull the fingers out of joint.

The man, screaming, blubbered, "I'll tell you!"

The man wailed and stuttered in his haste to get information out.

He was a private detective. Not of the good class. Divorce evidence, bodyguards, strike-breaking, maybe a framing now and then.

An old man with a beard had hired him to watch Doc Savage. The old man with the beard had paid plenty. The elevator operator had been kidnaped but was alive and well, and would be released. He was in a house on West Sixteenth Street. Alone. If the police went there, they could free him.

Monk took off at this point to call the police and tell them to raid the house.

The private detective went on to say there had been several of the old men. All of them had white beards. They wore a uniform of some kind when they were not on the street. A gaberdine coat and a queer white hat. He had written out all he had been able to learn about Doc Savage, and they had called for the information at his office.

"How'd they kill my hog, if they did?" Monk growled.

"I don't know, mister, so help me," the sleuth wailed. "One old man told another one day he could kill anything anywhere any time he wanted. He acted so earnest I believed 'im."

"What else d'you know?"

"The old men call themselves the Elders. And they mutter all the time about some Great Plan. Oh, yes, I found this out over a dictograph I rigged in my reception room. I always

check on what my clients say behind my back. These old men told me all the time that they represented a newspaper syndicate doing a story on you.”

That seemed to be all he knew. Monk ambled over anxiously to see how Doc was getting along with Habeas. The homely chemist saw the bronze man’s hands. His eyes popped.

“Blazes, Doc! What’s wrong with your right hand?”

The bronze man’s usually metallic-looking right hand was now a bruised-looking purple, and was obviously swollen somewhat. The skin was not broken.

Doc began to talk as he worked. He told what had happened in the street, and left out no details about the mysterious seizure in the darkness of the hallway.

“My foot is in the same condition as the hand, from the way it feels,” he finished.

“Bones broken?”

“No, Monk.”

“Flesh crushed?”

“Strangely, no.”

“Skinned anywhere?”

“No.”

“Then how the heck does it feel?”

“As if it had been frozen and was thawing out.”

“I’ll be switched!” Monk said.

Doc continued to work over the pig. Most of his movements were made with his left hand. He seemed to be using a series of chemical injections, coupled with massage intended to restore heart action.

Fifteen minutes later, Habeas Corpus kicked both rear legs and flopped his enormous ears slightly.

“He gonna make it?” Monk breathed.

“He will,” Doc replied.

“*Yeo-w-w!*” Monk squawled. “Hurrah! *Yeo-w-w!*”

The telephone started ringing.

“That’ll be the cops to tell us they did or didn’t find the elevator operator,” Monk said.

He started for the telephone. It stopped ringing—stopped queerly in the middle of one of its ringing bursts.

Doc got between Monk and the room where the telephone was.

“Watch out,” Doc said.

Monk, puzzled, eyed the bronze man, saw he was watching the telephone room. Monk looked in that direction also. Nothing happened.

Monk began to have a creepy feeling. Was he wrong, or had two of the flies, on the far side of the room, fallen to the floor?

They had! There went another! That one was closer.

Doc scooped up the pig. “Run!”

“Help!” screamed the prisoner, “Don’t leave me!”

Monk grabbed him by the collar and dragged him along toward the elevator, grumbling, “I don’t know why I’m doin’ this!”

They reached the elevator. It was waiting. They piled in. Doc seemed in a wild haste. He himself grasped the control and clamped it over to full speed descent.

Despite the fact that rarely did the bronze man's features show any expression, they registered something during the next few moments. Tension. Expectancy. Grimness.

But nothing happened, and they dashed out on the street. Doc hailed a taxi.

A cab came rolling up. They got in. The driver was a tall fellow with blond hair, and a cleanly shaven nape.

"Get away from here," Doc directed. "Use speed."

"Speed may not be enough," the driver said calmly. "They may kill us anyway."

Monk stiffened, yelled, "May kill—hey, driver, how the blazes do you know so much?"

The driver got the cab off fast.

"I should know something about it," he said. "They've been trying to kill *me* for over a month."

Doc reacted quickly to that. He leaned forward through the sliding window, gripped the driver and held him helpless, using one hand. With the other hand, he made a quick search.

He found a gun.

He also found something that the driver did not observe that he found—a tiny, triangular badge of gold with enamel on it. The inscription on it was not English, and it was not the badge of any American organization.

Monk had produced a weapon which resembled an oversize automatic and which was a machine-pistol of Doc's invention. He held it ready.

"I flew all the way from Manchuria," the driver said quietly enough. "Came over on one of the Clipper planes. Hired a fast ship and flew nonstop to New York. I was hanging around trying to see you secretly. You knew they were watching you?"

"Rather thoroughly, it would appear," Doc agreed.

"You said it. They've got money and they spend it. Private detective agencies, telephone company employees, newsboys, soda jerkers, waitresses, doormen, elevator operators. You know what they told all those people they wanted information on you for?"

"A newspaper syndicate gathering story material," Doc suggested.

"Huh! Yeah, that was the gag."

"Clever," the bronze man said dryly. "We naturally called the syndicate when we learned I was being watched. They said they had an European client who wanted the stuff."

"That was another gag," said the young man.

The driver then got the taxicab on South Street, which was inhabited mostly by trucks. He was skillful. The cab left a wake of squealing truck brakes and water-front profanity. They went through the smell around Fulton Fish Market so swiftly that they barely got a whiff.

The taxicab frightened a cop entirely off the street, careened around a corner, did a perfect racing car skid, and took the Brooklyn Bridge ramp.

"Hey, driver!" Monk roared. "Where you goin'?"

"Airport!" barked the taxi driver. "I got a fast plane there!"

"What's the idea, dang you?"

"I'm Ky Halloc!" said the driver. "I came to New York from China to see you fellows!"

"What's that supposed to explain?"

Ky Halloc yelled, "You don't want Pat Savage to die, do you?"

"Pat!" Monk squawled. "What's happened to Pat?"

"She tried to find Captain Wizer. So the old men thought she had stumbled onto the fact that their world headquarters is in Manchuria," Halloc barked. "New York is only a branch of

the devilish organization. To fight it, you've got to go to Manchuria. My plane can catch the next *China Clipper* in Frisco, and the *Clipper* I'll put you in the Orient without delay."

Doc Savage heard this without visible display. He had not spoken, which was characteristic of him. Moreover, Monk was doing a good enough job of questioning.

The flake gold eyes drifted a glance over the rear-view mirror.

"Several policemen following," Doc said. "A patrol car and three motor cycles."

"I guess," shouted Ky Halloc, "they figure we're speeding!"

Three motor cycles whined up alongside. The uniformed men on them looked angry. The patrol car stuck close behind the motor cycles.

"Pull over, you!" a cop bawled. "Whatcha think these streets are for, anyhow?"

Doc Savage leaned out a window.

"Is Captain Thorn still leader of this district?" the bronze man asked.

Sight of Doc Savage had a remarkable effect upon the uniformed man on the motor cycle. He threw up an arm in salute.

"Sure," he shouted, "Captain Thorn's our skipper."

He screwed around on his bouncing seat to howl at his companions, "It's Doc Savage!" Then he guided his popping steed close to the window. "Where you wanta go, Savage? We'll clear the way for you."

"Roosevelt Field!" shouted Ky Halloc.

The bluecoat pitched up an arm in salute. "I know a short-cut. All new, smooth pavement. Follow us!"

Two of the motor cycles hooted ahead. The third and the car followed a hundred feet back.

"Boy!" yelled Ky Halloc. "Boy!"

Doc opened the door on the driver's side and swung out on the running board.

"Swell idea!" Ky Halloc shouted. "Get up here, and I'll tell you what it's all about while you drive!"

Doc swung in under the wheel. The speedometer slowed ten miles, from eighty back to seventy, while they changed.

Ky Halloc said, "Now, I'll explain fully——"

"Hold it," Doc Savage said. "We've got something more important to do first." He turned his head. "Hang on, Monk."

"But, what——" The apish chemist looked confused.

"We've got to do something quickly," said the bronze man, "or we're going to be in a bad jam."

Chapter V

MYSTERIOUS MASTER

Doc tramped heavily on the brake. The car skipped about a bit, then bumped up onto a sidewalk; under Doc's expert hands, the machine skidded just enough, straightened at the crucial instant, and banged to a stop against the front of a store—across the store door, which was caved in by the impact.

"Into this building," Doc said. "I'll take the prisoner."

Monk dived into the building, pet pig under an arm. Habeas had completely recovered by now.

Ky Halloc, dazed by things happening too fast, yelled, "But these cops will——"

"They're not cops!" Monk threw back.

Monk had caught on by now.

Guns began banging. The fake cops were opening fire. Bullets spanked the sheet iron of the taxi. Glass started caving out of the store and car windows.

"Oh!" gasped Ky Halloc. He dived out of the car into the store. "They looked like cops!"

"There is no Captain Thorn in the police department," Doc Savage said, and glided toward the rear of the store building.

It was a store building, not a store. Rear windows were boarded up. There was a door in the rear. It appeared solid as they ran toward it. And it was locked with a bolt-and-chain combination.

Doc said, "Coöperation, Monk!"

Monk got in step with the bronze man. One, two, three and jump! They hit the door together, each planting both feet solidly near the lock. Almost a quarter of a ton, moving fast. Coöperation. The next instant, they were sitting out in the sunlight, in the wreckage of the door.

The apish chemist looked around.

"Aw, heck!" he complained.

There was open country behind the store. Or it would have been called open country around New York. There was two or three blocks of it, entirely bare of buildings.

The bronze man rose to his feet and reentered the store. Another door inside led to what had once been a kitchen.

"That way!" Doc said, and gave Monk and Ky Halloc a shove toward the door. "Take the prisoner, Monk. I'll take care of the cops."

The bronze man then wheeled and ran out the rear door.

Ky Halloc recovered from the shove, wheeled, and showed he had ideas about following Doc.

Monk collared him. The chemist also carried the senseless captive.

"Mitt me, my friend!" Monk grunted.

"But——"

"Nix!" the apish chemist said. A queer warp got on his mouth. "It just couldn't be that maybe you led us into this trap, eh?"

Monk shoved Ky Halloc into the room, followed.

Almost immediately the pursuers came into the store. They got a glimpse of the bronze man in the rear doorway, standing still. And then he was gone. They started shooting and falling over boxes. Ky Halloc looked strange.

Doc Savage whirled from his position and ran along the rear of the building. He had cleverly led the enemy after him. As he ran, his right hand got an object out of a pocket.

The object out of his pocket proved to be a silk line with a collapsible grappling hook spliced to one end.

Doc threw the hook upward. There was, fortunately, a coaming along the edge of the building. The grapple hooked. Doc went up. There were no knots in the silk cord, but he had practiced until his remarkably muscular hands could grasp and throw half twists which were much more effective.

All this happened quickly. Yet the pursuers could easily have come through the store before he had mounted more than half the distance. They didn't, however. Not a man put his head out the rear door. They stood inside and swore profanely that their quarry probably waited with guns trained on the door.

Gaining the top of the building, Doc let the silk cord hang. A chimney reared out of the roof a few feet distant, and the top bricks were loose, as they somehow usually are on old chimneys. Doc took two bricks back to the roof edge and waited. He removed his coat.

Two of the fake cops popped out of the rear door together, one facing each way to take no more chances than necessary.

Monk and Ky Halloc were out of sight by now.

The men below looked around. They swore. Their companions came out. In a moment, they would see the open door Monk and Ky Halloc had gone through.

Doc leaned over and launched the first brick. Since a brick can do damage to a human skull that no surgeon can repair, Doc aimed for the thickest part of the fattest man. That part of Brooklyn probably never heard a louder yell than the fat man gave.

Doc did not throw the second brick. He used it to weight a bundle he had made of his coat. He put the bundle on the coping, but held it so it would seem from below that he was wearing the coat. The men saw him. They lifted guns. Doc ducked.

Bullets began knocking brick dust off the coping. Doc held the coat bundle on the little wall, moving it about to make the business seem real. He carried his fountain pens in his vest pockets, and he drew out the one which held red ink and emptied it so the ink would flow down the outside of the wall. Not much ink. But he was lucky, and the men saw it.

"Did I make a darb of a shot!" somebody boasted.

The men kept on shooting. The coat bundle was still visible, but it would soon get knocked off. There would only be a moment.

The bronze man ran across the rooftops.

The men continued to shoot at the coat.

"He's dead up there!" one yelled. "Some of you find a way up and throw his body down."

Two ran back inside.

"He may be only wounded!" the man in charge shouted. "Keep shooting!"

Monk, crouched inside the other door with Ky Halloc, heard all this. And it had about the effect that might have been expected. The homely chemist looked around. Some one had been

living in the place, but was not home now. There was a stove. There were some rickety kitchen chairs. The senseless prisoner breathed noisily.

Monk picked up one of the chairs. Then he picked up the stove. It was not very large. The stovepipe made a racket and a cloud of soot fell down. Monk put his machine-pistol in his belt.

“Don’t be a fool!” Ky Halloc gulped.

Monk swung around and came close to Halloc.

“I still think there’s somethin’ phony about you!” Monk said.

Halloc snarled, “I tell you——”

He did not finish. Monk’s fist stopped him. He was senseless when he hit the floor.

“Anyhow, you won’t be shootin’ me in the back!” Monk gritted. Then to his pig: “Stay here, Habeas.”

The apish chemist ran out, carrying the stove in front of his face. He held it by the iron legs, so his hands were fairly sheltered.

Bullets began hitting his body. They hurt. They slowed him. But their pain and shock was no more than light sledge blows, for the light alloy mesh armor he wore was the product of a great deal of experimental research by Doc Savage. A bullet hit the stove and all but deafened him.

Monk got a man with the chair, but broke it. He picked the machine-pistol out of his belt, balancing the little stove as a head shield. He aimed low, and put pressure on the trigger. There were penetrating bullets in the weapon instead of the usual “mercy” slugs.

The gun made a moan and a vibration which Monk felt from head to foot.

A man ran in from the side, jumped, and bore the stove down. Monk’s gun hand was caught under the shield, and he dropped his gun. Men piled on him.

A man began to beat Monk’s bullet head with a pistol gun. He beat enthusiastically. The blows sounded as if he were chopping wood. Other men held Monk’s arms and his legs. His gun arm was held out straight, and convulsive muscular effort was keeping his finger tight on the trigger. The bawl of the weapon was so earsplitting that the screams of the men seemed like small mice squeaking.

The man clubbing Monk’s head swung and swung. He used both hands. Monk’s eyes stayed open, small and enraged.

The machine-pistol went silent. It had emptied itself. The slugs had dug a hole in the brick wall of the store, large enough for a calf to crawl through.

The man clubbing Monk stopped, gasped, “He’s dead—by now!”

“Then why don’t he close his eyes?”

“Hell, a corpse don’t——”

Monk hit his torturer in the mouth. Hit him awfully. The man bounced back into the arms of a fellow, doubled over, and gargled up teeth and blood.

The rest of the men fell on Monk and managed to get two pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

“He may be some help to us if the bronze guy gets away,” one growled.

Two of them ran to the door from which Monk had started his charge. They came back carrying two senseless forms. That of Ky Halloc and Doc’s prisoner.

“Into the cars with ’em!” the leader ordered. “And see if there’s a stairway to the roof in the store where you found Halloc.”

A man limped into the store. He came hopping out an instant afterward, carrying the pig, Habeas, by one ear.

“There’s no stair,” he said. “What in thunder is this thing?”

Habeas kicked and squealed feebly.

“Don’t you hurt that hog!” Monk squawled.

“So it’s a hog, eh?” grunted the leader. “Bring it along.” He looked knowing. “Maybe we can use it.”

The fake cops flocked back into the street where the car and motor cycles stood. They had some difficulty climbing through the wrecked taxi.

The uproar had been under way long enough now for curious persons to begin to arrive. The raiders fired some shots which hit no one, but made the spectators run.

Monk and Halloc were flung into a car along with the shote. The senseless detective was placed in another automobile.

“Hold them there!” the chief snapped. “We’ll go make sure that Savage——”

He stopped. His eyes came out a little. He opened and shut his mouth. Monk craned his neck to see what had so affected the rascal.

The cause of the shock seemed to be a stranger who had approached. This individual was tall, rather skinny, and very neatly dressed in dark garments. But he had a hat yanked down, wore dark glasses, had his coat collar turned up, and a handkerchief covered the lower part of his face as far up as his nose.

“Something wrong?” he asked, and the handkerchief changed his voice. Then he added: “I followed you in case of trouble.”

“Savage is on the roof!” gulped the other. “We think he’s dead, but we ain’t sure——”

The tall man with the hidden features smiled quietly. It was the same kind of smile a fisherman would bestow on a landed bass just before he knocked it over the head.

“Take the three prisoners to Preparation Area Headquarters,” he said. “I will handle Savage.”

Without another word, he turned and walked down the street. He saw some spectators staring timidly out a window and called to them.

“The police have cornered a dangerous criminal,” he said. “Keep out of sight, or you may get shot. Cover your faces against tear gas.”

Monk was somewhat stunned by the change which now occurred in his captors. They exchanged glances, stared after the tall stranger, looked at each other again. There was no mistaking what had come over them: They were scared.

They ran to their motor cycles. Others jumped into the car. The machines moved. The sirens whined at first, making an uproar.

“Better shut them off,” a man suggested.

The sirens became silent. Twice, they passed patrolmen. When they saluted, the patrolmen did the same. The motor cycles and the cars moved at no more than twenty miles an hour. They went north, then east, then back south again, doubling and turning. They soon came to the water front. It was out toward Gravesend Bay.

They drove into a weedy lot with a sign supported on leaning posts:

SUNRISE BOATYARD

There were some boats hauled out around the place, but they were not the kind any one with a normal mind would venture to sea in. They were small boats. No one was in sight. The one big shed was not quite falling down, thanks to the braces propped against one side.

The gang drove into the shed.

The tall, masked man who had said he would take care of Doc Savage was already there. He must have taken a shortcut.

“You will not be troubled by Savage,” he said.

“Yes, Viscount Penroff,” a man said inanely.

The men lined the car up before two timbers that formed a runway up onto more timbers laid across the cradle of a marine railway. They drove the car up on the railway. The motor cycles were placed beside it.

A man cut a restraining rope, and the cradle coasted down the rails and disappeared into the water. It was harbor water, full of trash, and dark enough so that the sunken machines would never be seen.

A man rolled an old oil barrel into the water, letting it spill oil as it rolled. That was to take care of any oil that floated to the top from the car motors. Another man went down the rails with a tumbler of acid and a brush, treating the rails so that they would shortly rust as if they had not been used in months.

The men changed their clothes, donning garments which they took out of very swanky town cars. The cars had been hidden behind some old pieces of canvas. There were three of the town cars altogether. Three of the men became dapper chauffeurs.

Ky Halloc was still senseless. It seemed to worry them.

“It looks,” one of them said, examining Halloc’s jaw, “as if he had been kicked by a donkey.”

“I resent that!” growled Monk, who right then was resenting everything.

The men tied Monk, gagged him and tossed him in one of the town cars. They tossed his pig, Habeas, in on top of him. Halloc was put in another car.

The three town cars took separate ways.

After a time, they blindfolded Monk.

Chapter VI

THE WORLD NET

The town cars had prepared Monk a little. They had not stuffed his ears, either, and after they had carried him out of what was a private garage into a house which opened off a street that was probably residential and lined with high buildings—the traffic had been light and had boomed and echoed as it would from big structures—Monk had heard the telegraph sounders, the tickers, the telephones and the tiny whistling of radios receiving code.

They had said something about taking him to their Preparation Area Headquarters, Monk remembered. He hadn't thought much about that when he heard it.

A flunky removed Monk's blindfold and gag. At least, he bowed and clicked his heels as if he were a flunky. His kowowing was directed at the man behind the desk.

The desk was as an impressive mahogany affair as Monk had ever seen. The gentleman with the neatly waxed white mustache and the dab of a snowy Vandyke was almost hidden by the desk.

Another flunky came in. Young and neat. He saluted, popped his heels together like tiny gunshots, and addressed the elderly gentleman.

"Berlin Preparation Area Headquarters reports four thousand sixty-three men on assigned positions. No trace of suspicion."

"Excellent!" replied the elderly gentleman.

"Tokyo Preparation Area reports fourteen submarines have our men aboard in strategic positions. One man captured. He confessed to being a foreign spy. He was shot. No suspicion as to his real identity."

The old gentleman bowed his head a moment.

"An example of the supreme loyalty inspired by the Elders," he said. "See that his name is placed on the honor rolls, and see, also, that his family is placed on the List of Extra Privilege."

"Yes, sir. It will be done. There is one thing more."

"Well?"

"His Highness radios congratulations to you, Viscount Herschel Penroff, for your quick disposal of the Doc Savage menace."

The elderly gentleman—Viscount Herschel Penroff—bowed again, humbly.

"Reply to His Highness that I have taken steps to completely dispose of the Savage affair. The other members of Savage's group of aids who happen to be in New York have been seized and are being brought here."

"How many of them?" the flunky queried, after hesitating a moment.

The old man smiled.

"Savage has five assistants, all told. We have one of them here in the room." He glanced at the pop-eyed Monk. "Of Savage's group, two are now abroad and know nothing of this matter. Those two are Colonel John Renwick, who is on an engineering project in South Africa, and William Harper Littlejohn, the archæologist, who is in the South Seas conducting research into the historical past of certain mystifying stone statues on some remote island.

"That leaves only three here in New York. We have Monk. The remaining pair, Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, the lawyer, and Major Thomas J. Roberts, a fellow who

knows something of electricity, are being brought here.”

“Yes, sir,” said the flunky. “I shall radio His Highness to that effect.”

He popped his heels, saluted and minced out.

The elderly Viscount Herschel Penroff looked at Monk, and acted as if he had just discovered him there. He bowed as politely as if Monk were a pretty girl.

“My apologies for not putting myself at your service earlier,” he said.

“Nuts!” Monk said, which was neither an original nor a witty crack, but the best he could think of. “You’re that guy in the mask!”

Monk was flabbergasted by what he had been hearing. If he had not known better, he would have thought he had awakened on the stage of a comic opera. Talk of thousands of men, submarines, and self-sacrifice! The kind of hokum comedies are made of! But the same kind of stuff that sent innumerable thousands of men to their death, in great wars, when one stopped to think.

Monk looked around. The telegraph instruments, tickers and radios were in another room, but he could hear them. Monk could read both the telegraph and radio code. He had been picking up snatches of the stuff the wires were handling. It sounded innocent enough.

Messages about the prices on foreign exchanges. Quotations on the franc, the lire, the yen. Orders to buy and sell. Orders to transfer bullion, instructions about earmarking——

Monk gave a violent start. He had remembered something. He knew who Viscount Herschel Penroff was!

The international banker! Not a famous name. International bankers seem to be retiring souls where publicity is concerned. Monk was no dabbler in international finance, but he did happen to know the House of Penroff had a name, and it was big.

New York headquarters of the House of Penroff was an unostentatious, massive, dignified building on Park Avenue, and the name of the firm was not even on the door. The House of Penroff did not do business with the man on the street. Monk mentally laid a bet with himself that he was in the bank building now. He strained, but the cuffs on his ankles and wrists held.

“Well,” Monk growled, “what’s the dizzy idea?”

Viscount Herschel Penroff opened a drawer and took out two ritzy-looking cigars, each of which was sealed in an air-tight, transparent container.

“Smoke, sir?” he queried.

Monk started to shake his head, then nodded instead. An idea had hit him. Penroff came over, clipped the end of one cigar, inserted it between Monk’s teeth, and bent forward to hold a jeweled lighter to the weed. Monk hurriedly puffed the cigar hot.

As soon as it was very hot, Monk lunged forward, trying to stick the heated end in one of his captor’s eyes. Monk had no idea what he would do next, if it worked. But it didn’t work. The old gentleman dodged aside easily.

Without saying anything, Penroff stepped back and inspected Monk. He smiled slightly.

“It is strange that a reputation can kill a man,” he said.

“Huh?” That was over Monk’s head.

“I refer to Doc Savage,” Penroff said. “Had he been an ordinary fellow, we would simply have gone to him and warned him not to mingle in this matter if he heard of it. We might even have paid him a sum of money, perhaps a small fortune if he were capable of making us enough trouble, to refrain from becoming involved.”

The old gentleman bowed his head solemnly.

“Savage was a remarkable man, an amazing man. He had dedicated his life to helping mankind, and it is unfortunate that such an illustrious career had to end because he interfered with our plans. Especially sad because the end came before this surprising man of bronze had even reached his prime. The remarkable training that made up his youth had given him the wisdom of a sage, but, after all, he was but a young man. It is very sad.”

He sounded very sad. He was probably acting.

Monk was not acting. Veins stood out on the homely chemist’s forehead, and he looked as if something terrible inside him was about to burst out. The hoarse, inarticulate sounds he made were not speech.

Viscount Herschel Penroff waited, head bowed. It was close to five minutes before Monk spoke. He did not rave, because it would have done no good.

“What kind of dang scheme were you afraid Doc would spoil?” Monk asked thickly.

The old man smiled suddenly, brightly. “It pleases me to have you say that.”

“You old bat!” Monk gritted.

“Just how much do you know about the Great Plan of the Elders?”

“Nothing!”

“Certain?”

“We didn’t have time to find out anything!” Monk snapped.

The old fellow laughed. “You would probably lie. As a matter of fact, we brought you here to learn if Doc Savage left any written or other information about us. Did he?”

“Not that I know of,” Monk said thickly.

“We’ll see about that.” The ancient man snapped his fingers.

Five men came in. Four of them were squat and ran more to biceps and shoulders than to foreheads. The fifth was thin, bald, and carried the pig, Habeas.

“Get the truth out of him,” directed Viscount Herschel Penroff. “Take him to the room which we so thoughtfully equipped in the penthouse.”

Monk had thought his own penthouse about as elaborate as could be found. Now he changed his mind. True, there was a difference in architectural style. This one was an exact duplicate of some ancient medieval castle. From the worn condition of the stones, Monk was even sure they were the original article. It seemed very much as if a small castle had been transported bodily from abroad.

The chamber they finally reached was dark like a dungeon. There were no lights, so pine-knot torches were lighted to give light.

Monk, glancing about, felt the hairs on his nape rise. The chamber he was in stood a good chance of being soundproof. The walls looked thick enough. But what had made his neck crawl was the collection of ancient, torturing devices in the room. None had been overlooked.

“Put him on the rack,” the man with the pig said. “We’ll see how much rubber he’s got in his system.”

The men fastened the homely chemist in the torture device.

“The viscount’s guests thought this was merely a museum,” a man said dryly.

The torturers put on pressure until Monk could feel a distinct, pain-filled gap between each point. The homely chemist howled at the top of his voice. There was no Indian stoicism in him. It was harder to keep quiet, and there was no object in it, anyway.

As Monk expected, his uproar kidded his captors into thinking he was more badly hurt than he was. He went limp and mumbled and sobbed, mentally deciding that next time he

would stage a faint.

“Come on!” a man snarled. “Did Savage leave any record of us?”

“N-no!” Monk wailed. “H-honest!”

“Hell!” said the man in charge of the torturing. “He’s a funny kind of ape. I’ve heard he’s as tough as a mule. I think he’s shamming. Give him the works this time.”

“How about pouring some hot lead on that pig?” a man suggested. “He acts as if he thought more of the hog than he does of himself.”

“I think he does. I told you he’s a goofy duck. We’ll work on the hog.”

“Hah!” Monk snorted. “If you think you can hurt me by hurtin’ my hog, you’re nuts!”

The man peered closely at Monk.

“Yeah,” he said softly, “we’re nuts, then.”

“Somebody’s comin’,” the man at the door grunted.

Noise was coming up the stairs. From the sounds, a free-for-all fight. Blows, profanity and scuffing feet. The men drew guns, leaped to the door and looked down the corkscrew stairs. Then they stepped back.

A wad of men tumbled into the room. Only two of them had most of their clothes left. They were scratched, bruised and sweating. Six of them altogether. Four captors with two prisoners.

The men surrendered their two prisoners with great willingness.

“Whew!” one puffed. “Talk about trouble!”

Both prisoners were much smaller men than their captors. One had an extremely thin waist, a very high forehead, and the large, mobile mouth of a man who did a lot of talking.

The second prisoner looked as if he had grown up in a mushroom cave, with frequent lapses into hospitals. Perfect picture of an invalid, and did not look as if he had strength for anything more strenuous than putting a lump of sugar in his coffee. He promptly belied his looks by giving a flounce which knocked his two captors staggering.

“But they’re tied hand and foot!” a man exploded. “How’d they do so much damage?”

“Now that they’re here, you’ll find out,” said one of the wrecks grimly.

The man with the thin waist and the talker’s mouth scowled at Monk. The fact that Monk hung on a medieval torture instrument seemed to bother Ham not at all. The contrary, if anything.

“You evolution mishap!” he gritted. “What is this mess you’ve got Long Tom and me into?”

Monk shouted irately, “Don’t you grind your teeth at me, you overgrown lawbook! Doc and me have been charging around all day, one jump ahead of sudden death. And I still don’t know why!”

“Ham” was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, Harvard’s finest law product. He didn’t like the nickname Ham. To hear and watch him, the impression was that he liked Monk even less. Monk apparently shared the feeling. Neither had ever spoken a civil word to the other, which was somewhat strange, since each occasionally risked his life to save the other.

The mushroom-cellar-and-hospital product was Major Thomas J. Roberts, remarkable electrical wizard. Despite his invalid looks, he could probably take the first hundred men he would meet on the street and whip ninety of them.

Came a bedlam on the stairs. One man seemed to be making it, swearing, moving fast, falling occasionally. He piled into the tower torture room one jump ahead of his troubles.

His troubles had two legs, two arms that occasionally doubled as legs, was a little over two feet high, had rusty-looking hair, and a face amazingly like Monk's. Scientists had disagreed over just what the animal was. Some insisted it was a baboon, with one or more doubtful ancestors. Others were less certain.

"My pet, Chemistry!" Ham shouted.

The man who had brought the what-is-it glared about. He was scratched, bitten, and out of breath.

"Who the hell's idea was it for me to bring that thing along?" he demanded. "Man, it dang near eat me up!"

"Get them in the torture machines," the man in charge ordered. "The chief wanted their pets brought. He figured maybe if they saw some things happen to the animals, it would give them something to think about."

"I think that's a goofy idea," snorted one.

No one else commented. They laid hold of their prisoners. The fireworks started. Ham and Long Tom, tied hand and foot, managed to navigate with the agility of fish out of water. Once they knocked their captors onto the floor, they were not so handicapped.

The what-is-it, Chemistry, sank teeth in a leg and held on. Habeas, the pig, got up and took hold of the same fellow's other leg. Monk, floundering madly, unwound the windlass of the rack and got into the fight. He rolled over, managed to get erect, and hit a man. The fellow fell through the door and part way down the stone steps. If profanity was color, the air would have been blue.

"What the hell's going on up there?" a voice yelled.

"We're torturing the prisoners!"

"So you say!" snarled a man who had just lost two teeth.

But the prisoners had little chance. They were soon subdued, and jammed into the torture devices. Their torturers sat down to rest, and get their breath.

Ham glowered at Monk. "You Darwin inspiration, you say you don't know why we're here?"

"No, I told you once!" Monk yelled.

"I want to know!"

"Ask our friends then! They think Doc may have gotten an idea about them, and they're going to work us over to find out. That's all I know."

"You're right up to form then," Ham sniffed. "You never did know anything."

"You've got a tongue that's fast in the middle and loose at both ends!" Monk snarled. "First chance, I'm gonna take you by the neck and shake you so hard your legs'll tie knots!"

Long Tom put in grimly, "Where's Doc?"

Monk stiffened, opened his mouth, shut it, and looked at the stone floor.

"Look here!" Long Tom yelled. "Doc—he—he ain't——"

A new voice spoke helpfully from the door.

"Savage is dead, if that is what you mean," the speaker offered.

The courtly old gentleman, Viscount Herschel Penroff, had come up to the tower dungeon. He stood just inside the door, absently buttoning his dark feltish-looking frock coat, which he had apparently unbuttoned for the climb.

"Word has come from His Highness," he said slowly. "All is in readiness for our operations."

Ham and Long Tom apparently had not seen Viscount Herschel Penroff before.

"Who's this old goat?" Long Tom asked.

"Penroff, the international banker, and one of the straw bosses in the organization," Monk growled.

Viscount Herschel Penroff finished buttoning his frock coat. He adjusted his tie and cleared his throat.

"I was listening outside for a moment," he said. "I do not think, from what the prisoners said, that they have the slightest idea of what kind of organization we are."

"Now you're gettin' some sense!" Monk squeaked angrily. "I told you we didn't know the first thing!"

"Excellent!" Viscount Herschel Penroff brushed his palms together briskly. "In that case, there is no reason why you should not be executed immediately."

The prisoners failed for a moment to credit what they had heard, it being hardly an ordinary thing for a man to order other men shot in the highly civilized center of New York City.

"Hey!" Monk exploded. "You can't do that to——"

"Give them hydrocyanic," the elderly viscount ordered, "then lower the bodies in the acid vat we ordinarily use for the disposal of cancelled bonds."

"With pleasure, sir," said a man who had lost two teeth.

"Then prepare to board the *Munchen*."

"The *Munchen*? Yes, sir."

Everybody saluted everybody else, and Viscount Penroff left, unbuttoning his coat again before he started down the steep stairs.

The men looked at each other.

"I'll get the hydrocyanic," one said.

The fellow was gone some time. Long enough for the men to become impatient. One of the pine-knot torches burned out, and they had to nurse the other.

Flickering red light finally appeared deep in the winding stairway, and footsteps clumped upward. When the fellow appeared on the steps, he was holding his torch downward so that his upper portions were bathed in reddish gloom. He made a devil figure.

"You guys better get out," he said. "I'll dump the hydrocyanic on them and follow you. The stuff may fix you up if it gets in your lungs. I don't know."

The men—they were sobered by the imminence of death, but tried not to show it—crowded to the stair opening. The fellow with the hydrocyanic stepped to one side to let them pass. When the last was out, he tugged the ponderous wooden door around until it was almost closed.

"Want it ready to shut in a hurry when I come out," he growled in explanation.

He came over to Monk and Ham and Long Tom. A blue bottle reflected the torchlight from his hand. He bent over Monk in the indistinct light.

He untied Monk's hands.

"Easy does it," he said softly. "We are far from being out of this."

Chapter VII

THE TOWER ESCAPE

Monk had never been struck by lightning. But if he ever was in the future, he would already know how it felt. He made gurgling sounds and would have yelled in spite of himself. But an amazingly muscular hand clamped his mouth. The other muscular hand freed his ankles. Then, when Monk had time to compose himself, his mouth was released.

“Doc!” Monk breathed. “But how in the——”

“Trick on the house roof,” Doc Savage breathed quietly. “Got off the roof after I was left for dead. Picked the lock on a parked car. Followed you here.”

Cryptic, that. Made it sound easy. Monk, knowing Doc, understood there was a lot of clever work between the lines. Of course, thinking Doc was dead, the men had been easier to trail. They had not bothered to look behind much.

Ham and Long Tom were free now. They stood up, then did squatting exercises and windmilled their arms, getting ready for action.

“This is that bank, the House of Penroff, ain’t it?” Monk whispered.

“Right,” agreed the bronze man.

“Can we get out the way you got in?”

“It’s hardly feasible.”

“Why?”

“It entailed some wall climbing.”

Monk swallowed. The House of Penroff was in a building with sides discreetly bare of the ornamentation that makes the work of a human fly simple, sometimes.

“We will have to fight for it,” the bronze man said. “Once we take this place, we will have to stop the *Munchen*.”

“*Munchen!*” Ham exclaimed softly. “So you heard that old bird, Penroff, mention the *Munchen*?”

“The steps are stone and did not creak,” the bronze man replied dryly. “And sounds carry well in this place. Come. We are going to have our hands full.”

The bronze man led them down the stone steps. He wore no shoes, and was quiet. In the lighted room at the bottom—lighted from windows, this room—the torturers stood waiting.

“The door does not fit tightly,” Doc called. “You had better get out in the open air.”

His voice was a perfect imitation of the fellow who had gone to get the hydrocyanic.

It fooled the torturers. They scuttled out into the open court of the penthouse castle, which was a perfectly natural thing to do.

Monk ran over, slammed the door through which they had stepped, and locked it. They would have become alarmed outside in a moment, anyway.

“This way!” Doc rapped.

The bronze man whipped to a niche in the entrance hall. It resembled a closet. In the days of chivalry, it had probably been used by the knights to park the heavier parts of their armor. There were some pieces of armor in it now, along with a senseless man.

The unconscious one was Viscount Herschel Penroff.

“Blazes!” Monk gasped, and stared at Doc. “So you nailed him on his way out?”

The bronze man did not answer. It was obvious what he had done, anyway. He hauled the viscount out, tossed him to Monk.

“Take care of him,” Doc suggested quietly.

“With pleasure!” Monk growled, and all but yanked one of the viscount’s ears off to see if he was conscious. He wasn’t.

The man who had gone after the hydrocyanic was also in the place, minus his clothing. They left him. He was only a minor rogue in this thing.

The men locked out in the court began shooting.

“Quick!” Doc said. His voice did not sound as if he were in a hurry.

There was only one modern touch in the entry hall. An elevator button. Doc put a metallic finger against it. When the cage arrived in response, it came so silently that only Doc heard it. The doors were opened. The bronze man flashed inside.

“Hey!” the amazed voice of the operator said. “Who are you?”

There was a grunt, a falling noise.

“Come on in,” Doc suggested.

Ham and Long Tom dived into the cage. Monk followed, with the viscount. The operator was senseless on the floor. Doc grasped the control and sank the cage.

Monk inflated his chest and grinned. “Simple. This elevator probably lets us out in the lobby.” He bent over and searched the elevator operator, straightened with a gun. “This helps. We can charge out of the lobby, then cover the doors from the street until the cops get there.”

Ham sneered, “You make it sound easy, you ape.”

The descending elevator was making a faint sighing.

“Well,” Monk demanded, “is there anything wrong with my logic?”

The elevator stopped with a grinding shock. Bells rang. A faint hissing started.

“Well,” Ham jeered, “what do you think now, Monk?”

Monk opened his mouth. Then he shut his eyes, grabbed his throat.

“Tear gas!” Doc said crisply. “Close your eyes! Don’t breathe! Get down on the floor!”

He said it so fast that the words were a rattle. Then he jumped. The cage had a grilled top. But it was a fake grille, covered by a steel plating. He smashed against the doors. They were heavy steel.

They had a minute at the most. As soon as they opened their eyes or breathed, the tear gas would get them.

The bronze man’s sensitive finger tips explored along the junction of the two sliding halves of the elevator doors. There is invariably a small round hole there, its purpose being to afford a method of opening the doors with a key rod, from the outside, should they close accidentally.

Doc found the hole. Into it he dropped one of the tiny, high-explosive grenades which he invariably carried. The grenade was not half an inch in diameter, but it was probably as powerful a thing for its size as man had yet been able to create.

The explosion that followed deafened them and tore the doors apart. They were halfway between floors. They could climb out.

Doc helped his men out into a corridor which was like any other, except for the richness of the carpeting. They ran clear of the tear gas.

“They sure prepared things around here!” Monk exploded. “Fixin’ that elevator for a gas trap!”

“That is a common precaution in banks which keep sums of money on their upper floors,” Doc said.

The group turned into a room furnished with a long table, straight, uncomfortable chairs, and a water cooler. No one was there. A telephone stood on a tabouret in a corner, almost hidden.

Monk dumped Viscount Herschel Penroff on the table.

Doc looked out a window.

“Stay here with the prisoner,” the bronze man directed.

He whipped out of the room, for it offered nothing that would aid them. He ran through the corridor toward the rear. His flake gold eyes were busy. The other elevators seemed not to be running. There was a fire hydrant and its rack of hose in the hall. Doc turned the electric light on. That seemed strange.

The rear windows were frosted. Doc snapped the sash of one up. On a level with the window, fully thirty feet away, was a rooftop. It was evidently the back of a theater, because there was not a window.

There were no ventilators. There was only a water tank, situated near the middle of the roof, high on stilts, supported by iron guy wires which ran to steel rods set in the walls.

Feet rattled on the stairway. Men coming up from below. Two men, the sounds indicated.

“They’ll be in the elevator!” one gasped. “Be careful!”

“Don’t worry,” grunted the second. “The tear gas will discourage ’em some.”

Doc was waiting. The men came out of the stairway much too carelessly. The bronze man’s fist floored the first. The second aimed his gun, but Doc got hold of gun and hand. The weapon spouted three times, its bullets tore three pits in the ceiling, and the bronze man had the weapon.

The man had glittering black eyes and big white teeth. He showed them both.

“This thing is too much for you ever to stop!” he snarled.

His jawbone must have been brittle because of some affliction. It broke when Doc hit. The bronze man hadn’t expected that.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom came charging up, stopped, and looked disappointed.

“We thought you might be able to use a little coöperation,” Long Tom explained.

Doc said quietly and sharply, “Stay with Penroff! He is our key to this wild affair!”

“Blazes!” Monk gulped. “I left ’im lyin’ on that table!”

The homely chemist spun, raced down the corridor.

The electric light went out. It was the one Doc had turned on. Simultaneously, the air seemed to become quieter.

“Monk!” the bronze man rapped. “Stop!”

Monk halted, half wheeled. “Huh?”

The lean, gentlemanly—he still looked gentlemanly in spite of his manhandling—figure of Viscount Herschel Penroff appeared in the doorway at the end of the hall.

He stepped out boldly. A queer, sneering smile rode his features. He opened the window at that end of the hall. It was obvious he was going to shout down to some one in the street.

“Stop that!” Monk bawled. He drew the revolver which he had secured from the elevator operator. “Stay away from that window!”

Penroff ignored him and leaned out the window.

“For that, you’ll walk on one leg for a while!” Monk gritted.

He fired. Then he looked, grunted, “This dang thing must not shoot straight,” and fired again. Then he stared, and his small eyes came bulging out of their little gristle pits.

Both his bullets had stopped about halfway down the room, in mid-air. They had hung there for a moment. Now, they were falling, with an incredibly exaggerated slow motion, to the floor.

Penroff seemed to be shouting. They could see his chest pump the yells out—but they could not hear a word.

“He’s telling his men exactly where to locate us,” Doc said. “We’ll have to move fast, but carefully.”

Monk, his big mouth open, his little eyes still popping a little, was beyond saying anything. He kept glancing at the gun in his hand, then at the bullets down the corridor. By now, the lead pellets had fallen to the carpet.

“It must be that lick they gave my head!” he muttered once. “That would make anybody go nuts and see things that couldn’t happen. That’s it. The lick jarred my imagination loose.”

Ham and Long Tom were not much less baffled.

Doc Savage moved down the corridor. He went in a strange way, holding a fountain pen out ahead of himself and moving it about continually, as if trying to feel something. He progressed thus until he reached the rack of hose. He unscrewed the connection and came back quickly with the coil of hose. He tossed it to Long Tom.

“Loop in the end,” he said crisply.

Then Doc picked the revolver out of Monk’s limp fingers. He aimed briefly through the rear window, and the gun exploded.

The bullet parted the guy wire which was one of the tank supports. The separation was just above the rod to which it was attached.

“Here’s the loop,” Long Tom said.

It was no place from which to throw a lasso, and the heavy fire hose had never been intended for rodeo stunts. Doc leaned out the window, and began having his difficulties. The distance was fully thirty feet, more than any man could broadjump from a window take-off. Three times he missed. Then he ringed the upright rod.

The window had a steel sash. The bronze man knocked the glass out and tied the end of the hose.

“Monk,” he said quietly.

He held the sash end of the hose while Monk swung across.

Viscount Herschel Penroff had turned, and was watching them. He looked surprised, cheated. He wheeled and began to shout further instructions from the window.

Ham went over. He wore only a rag of his trousers, and they fell off during the gyrations of his legs. He cut a grotesque figure in his shorts. Long Tom scampered across with the agility of a monkey. That seemed to remind Monk of something.

“Habeas Corpus!” he yelled, and Ham echoed, “Chemistry!”

Doc Savage whipped across the swaying hose.

“The pets will probably be safe in the penthouse where we left them,” he said.

The group then ran across the roof. Behind them, the fire hose was swaying from the last kick which Doc had given it.

Mysteriously, the hose stopped swaying. The stoppage was abrupt, as if an invisible hand had arrested it.

Chapter VIII SKY YACHT

The room in which Doc Savage sat was light enough, but it had the smell of a cave. Concrete floor, walls and ceiling were damp and cavernish-looking. From one spot in the ceiling, a drop of water fell occasionally. The place was full of electrical gadgets. The sole light came from electric bulbs.

It had been an old wine cellar, but Long Tom had bought it cheap and turned it into his experimental laboratory.

Doc held a cablegram. It was from Leningrad, U.S.S.R., and said:

INDIVIDUAL ABOUT WHOM YOU HAVE CABLED US IS NOT MEMBER
OF OGPU STOP PENROFF WAS NOBLEMAN IN DAYS OF CZAR
GOVERNMENT STOP WE KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE REST

OGPU CHIEF

Doc burned the cablegram carefully.

Ham sat on an uncomfortable iron stool, and was just finishing explaining how he had been captured. "Two of them stepped up and prodded my ribs with a gun as I left my hotel. They took me directly to the penthouse. I think we are up against some kind of gigantic organization which is planning some huge crime. They were afraid we would interfere with their plans."

There was a stir at the door and a stooped old man with a mustache, a scar on his cheek, dark-colored glasses, and an "I Am Blind" sign around his neck hobbled in, struggling with two very large suitcases.

He pulled off his false mustache, plucked the scar loose, removed his glasses and became Long Tom, the electrical genius. He glanced around.

"Where's Monk?" he asked.

"He should be back shortly," Doc replied. "He is out getting some information for us."

Ham spoke up, "Sure you were not followed here, Long Tom?"

Long Tom glanced at him, sniffed, and said, "I did my best." He opened the large suitcases, adding, "I got Monk's hog and your what-is-it."

Ham sprang up, and looked very pleased. Chemistry sidled out of the suitcase, then turned around and looked it over gloomily.

The pig, Habeas, came out of the other case, also looked around, and showed his temper by making an abrupt rush at Chemistry, which the latter avoided with the agility of long practice. Habeas sat down and showed long, white tusks indignantly.

Ham complained, "Monk has been sharpening that hog's teeth again! Where's a hammer?" He got up and walked off, looking.

Long Tom told Doc, "The pets were in the penthouse. The police were all over the House of Penroff building. They had found three dead men. Physicians declare each of the three dead men died in a most remarkable way—complete stoppage of all internal functions. Heart, lungs, everything, simply ceased working."

Long Tom paused, eyed Doc, and asked, "That's queer, isn't it?"

Instead of answering, the bronze man said, "Penroff and his men were not there?"

"Every one of them got away," Long Tom admitted. "And what's more, they took their private records. They must have had everything set for a sudden flight. They left the radios, the tickers and the telegraph apparatus, of course. The stuff didn't prove anything. Lots of banks have their private communication systems."

"Nothing to indicate what this organization which calls itself the Elders is up to?" Doc queried.

"Not a thing."

"What are the police going to do?"

Long Tom shrugged. "They're stumped."

Ham called from somewhere, "Say, where d'you keep your carpenter tools?"

"Get out of there!" Long Tom yelled. "I got a lot of delicate apparatus in there, and I don't want you upsetting it!"

Ham muttered something.

There came footsteps; then Monk appeared. Monk had a large ear of corn in each hand. He waved the ears.

"What a town!" the homely chemist complained. "Where do you think I finally found some corn? In the Museum of Natural History! And dang near got caught stealing it!"

Long Tom snapped. "I thought you went out to gather information?"

"And vittles for my hog," Monk added. "With them Elders watchin' my laboratory, probably, Habeas's food supply is kinda tied up. I hadda find——"

He stopped and scowled at Ham, who had come in with a hammer. "Whatcha gonna do with that, shyster?"

"I intend to perform a dental operation on that hog," Ham said grimly.

Monk's howl would have done credit to a lion which had been stepped on by an elephant. "I'll hit you so hard you'll have to pull down your socks to pick your teeth! I'll——"

Doc Savage put in quietly, "What about the *Munchen*?"

When Monk and Ham started to quarrel, it went on for days.

"The *Munchen*," Monk said, "is due in Lakehurst in two hours."

"Did you book us on her?" Doc asked.

"Nope," Monk said. "The *Munchen* is taking no outside bookings, because she is under private charter."

Doc Savage was silent. Outwardly, at least. But his strange, small trilling noise was briefly audible.

"In two hours it will be dark," he said.

"It sure will. It's raining now."

"We'll have to move rather quickly," Doc said.

In two hours, it was dark, and it was still raining. It was a warm kind of rain, seeming a bit sticky, somewhat remindful of clam juice. There was no thunder or lightning. The rain came out of clouds which were just high enough to clear the sleek back of the *Munchen*.

The *Munchen* was nine hundred and sixty feet of proof that somebody besides the Germans could build lighter-than-air craft. She was a hundred and eighty feet thick. She had been launched some six months previously, and had immediately assumed a schedule of regular flights around the world.

Her specialty was passengers who wanted to take a trip around the world by air. So far, there seemed to be quite a supply of them.

Besides Diesel motors and noninflammable gas, private cabins and a promenade deck, the *Munchen* had a billiard room, a dance orchestra, a floor show with some very snappy lady numbers, and a swimming pool. The swimming pool was not as nutty an idea as it appeared at first inspection. The water in it was really the supply of water ballast which all airships carry.

The *Munchen* also carried two airplanes in underside hangars, to be launched from the air and received back in the same manner. The planes delivered mail and picked it up from places where there were no facilities for handling a thing like the *Munchen*.

A factory nobody had ever heard of in a Balkan country which not many more had heard about had produced the *Munchen*.

The *Munchen* had arrived from Kansas City an hour ago. All the passengers had been put off, some of them indignantly. The new passengers—all men—were aboard. But one of the four radio operators had not returned.

“Where is the radio operator?” Penroff demanded.

“The fool rushed out to see his girl who sent a note saying she was at the field!” complained the commander of the *Munchen*. “He has been gone an hour.”

“Wait a few minutes,” directed Viscount Herschel Penroff. “Then depart, leaving the idiot behind.”

Viscount Herschel Penroff now had red hair, a nose the tint of a ripe apple, and a beer drinker’s circumference. This disguise was for the benefit of the police, who were looking for him.

The commander of the airship saluted briskly at the command to give the radio man ten minutes.

“Every man of the crew is one of us,” he said. “We have bomb technicians and gas experts. We can install the bomb racks once we pick them up at the Manchurian Preparation Area headquarters. It will require no alterations.”

“Of course!” snapped Penroff, who seemed to be in a bad temper. “When the Elders had this craft built, all that was prepared for!”

A shout advised them that the radio man was coming. A moment later, two men helped the missing radio operator up the companion, not very gently.

The knight of the wireless key carried under each arm a brown bottle with a long neck, and the corks were loose in the necks of the bottles. The radio man had a duck gait, a breath which would have exploded.

“Good olsh palshy-walshy,” he hiccupped.

“Dump the fool in his cabin!” screamed the commander.

A couple of the crew carried the intoxicated radio operator, who was a meek-looking, entirely bald-headed old gaffer, called “Sparks” in honor of his trade, into his cabin and stuffed him in his bunk.

The two men emptied the two bottles, then thoughtfully returned them to their owner. Chuckling, they departed.

They had no more than gone when a miracle occurred. Sparks got up out of his bunk, and with the gait of a cold sober man, headed for the stern of the *Munchen*. He took his bottles.

Construction of the *Munchen* was really marvelous. The big main girders, which ran from bow to stern, were hollow and equipped with catwalks on which a man could stride along

erect.

The Diesels were already warming up. There was some preliminary shouting at the ground crew. There was also some loud cursing by some newspapermen who had not been allowed near the ship, much to their astonishment.

The miraculously sober Sparks, pausing, drew a blueprint of the airship from inside his clothing. It was a blueprint on silk, which would not crackle. He examined it, and located the electrical circuit to the rear floodlights.

A moment later, the rear vicinity of the airship went unexpectedly dark. This period of gloom lasted only two or three minutes, then the lights came on again.

Sparks had been standing beside a hatch in the hull. He was alone when the lights went off. When they came on, he had five companions.

Doc Savage, Monk, Ham, Habeas and Chemistry were the newcomers.

“Greetings, Pappy Long Tom,” Monk grinned at Sparks.

Long Tom looked at Habeas and Chemistry and grumbled, “We’re gettin’ to be a travelin’ zoo!”

Ham said righteously, “I did advise leaving that worthless hog. Now, my Chemistry can climb around it here and be a——”

Long Tom growled, “That was a heck of a haircut you give me! The hide on my head hurts!”

Doc Savage coiled the line which Long Tom had lowered while he had darkened the vicinity below that part of the dirigible. Long Tom had carried the line aboard stuffed in the bottles. Fortunately, he had also provided the bottles with some alcoholic contents to hide presence of the line.

“Have any trouble?” Doc asked.

“Nope,” Long Tom said. “Lucky I remembered I’d met the radio operator on this airship once when I inspected its radio installation on its first trip around the world. When I recalled I looked like one of the operators, and remembered he’d told me he had a girl friend here in Lakehurst, it was simple.

“I just wrote a note in a girl’s handwriting, asking him to come to a dark part of the field. When he got there, I knocked him cold and tied him up. That’s all there was to it.”

Monk pulled out a machine-pistol, patted it, and remarked, “I’m ready to start operations. Viscount Penroff and all his gang are aboard, ain’t they?”

“They’re aboard,” Long Tom admitted. “The commander is hand in hand with Penroff. Say, Doc, this business gets more incredible every minute. This airship seems to belong to them.”

Doc Savage said quietly, “You will probably discover the thing is much larger than you even imagine now. We will tackle the affair cautiously from now on. Cautiously, remember. Our object is not to capture Penroff.”

“Sure,” Monk agreed. “The object is to find Pat.”

“Yes,” Doc added, “and to get control of the method by which these men wrecked the *China Rocket*, and made some other seemingly incredible things happen.”

Monk gulped, “I’ll never forget them bullets of mine stoppin’ in the air, then failin’ slowlike. Dang! It was as if an invisible spook had grabbed ’em and was puttin’ them on the floor!”

Doc’s flake gold eyes rested on Monk. “Remember, we go cautiously now.”

“Now, Doc,” Monk grinned, “you know I’m the soul of caution.”

There was a vague unsteadiness. The *Munchen* was taking off. Ham said, abruptly, as if he had just thought of it: “Darn that crook, Ky Halloc!”

Chapter IX

HIGH HORROR

There may be something in mental telepathy. About ten seconds after Ham mentioned Ky Halloc in their hiding place far back in the dirigible's innards, Viscount Herschel Penroff turned to the *Munchen* commander in the control room with a query:

"Is Ky Halloc aboard safely?"

"In my cabin," the skipper replied.

"Excellent."

They watched the take-off. There was not much wind with the rain, so it was not ticklish. A paid civilian crew was handling the ground lines. In the old days, the U.S. government had generously donated sailors to handle every airship which landed at Lakehurst, but somebody economized, and that stopped.

Rain ran off the great bag in strings, and the Diesels purred. A few newspaper flashlights blinked. Airships were not the big news they had been.

When the altimeter said three thousand, the inclinometer zero, the airspeed ninety, the commander seemed satisfied.

"We will head out to sea, climb to the stratosphere, and change our course," he said. "Weather reports indicate a cloudy zone general over southern Canada. We will take that route to the Pacific coast. Once we are over the Pacific, we are unlikely to be spotted."

Viscount Herschel Penroff nodded. "Excellent. I am going to have a word with Ky Halloc."

Ky Halloc sat on the edge of the berth in the commander's cabin. He was dangling his legs idly and smoking. He smoked rapidly, and had almost emptied a pack recently, judging from the number of damp and smoking butts in the tray. He was knocking the cigarette ashes in one tray, and grinding the butts out in another.

Ky was looking rather happy and contemplating the ceiling. He drew in a sigh.

"What a girl!" he breathed ecstatically. "I hope she'll be glad to see me!"

"I presume you refer to Patricia Savage," chuckled Viscount Penroff, who had arrived and stopped just inside the door.

Ky Halloc nodded. "You said it."

"I doubt if she will be very glad to see you."

"Why not?"

"She is of the opinion that you decoyed her into the hands of the Elders."

"Oh, I'll soon fix that," Ky Halloc said airily.

"I don't know."

"Eh?"

"I don't know," said Viscount Penroff, "whether you will live long enough."

Ky Halloc said, "So you are really going to finish me?" He did not sound surprised.

Viscount Penroff drew some papers from inside his clothing and began to riffle through them in search of a particular document.

Ky Halloc stirred slightly. This caused the handcuffs decorating his wrists and ankles to clink gently.

Viscount Penroff found what he was hunting: a radiogram on the private form of his banking establishment.

"Doubtless you can guess the contents of this?" he said, waving the missive.

"I can!" Ky Halloc snapped.

Penroff studied the prisoner. Neither of them looked very happy.

"You have quite a reputation, Halloc."

"I've put in quite a few years trying to get one," Ky Halloc grinned wryly.

"Why didn't you cable Doc Savage that his cousin had been seized, instead of coming to New York?"

"Simple. I knew your men had the cables watched. I had to come in person."

"Very foolish."

"The only thing I could do. I knew what I was up against."

Viscount Penroff rubbed his jaw in a puzzled manner.

"Halloc, why didn't you tell Doc Savage what you were?"

"I'm not in the habit of going around putting that information out!" Halloc snapped.

"And why not?"

"I wouldn't live long if I did!"

Viscount Penroff fluttered the radiogram again. "This unfortunately arrived just an hour or so too late to apprise me of your true identity. It came, in fact, just after my men had taken you prisoner."

"*Tsk tsk*," said Ky Halloc. "That was inefficiency."

"You are not a very talkative individual, are you?"

"Oh, but I am. I talk all the time. In the presence of a pretty lady, I am especially loquacious. Why——"

"But you don't talk about your rather strange business much?"

"Business is a dull subject, viscount."

"Yours wouldn't be."

"Matter of opinion."

Viscount Penroff looked suddenly grim.

"What I am getting at is this: Who, besides yourself, knows what you have discovered?"

Ky Halloc laughed. It was a loud, contemptuous blare of mirth.

"You can go to hell!" he said.

"I thought so," Viscount Penroff said grimly. "Well, we'll see. If you have advised any one what you have discovered, we will expect you to radio them saying you had made a mistake, and that there was nothing to it."

"Well, well."

"You will also radio them that you are taking a vacation trip," continued Penroff.

"And where would I be going on a vacation?"

"That depends on how good a life you have been leading. I trust it won't be the spot you consigned me to a moment ago."

An orderly—or the airship equivalent of an orderly—came in. He extended a message of some kind.

Viscount Herschel Penroff read the missive, started, read it again. He began to wear a grin so big that it threatened to skin the entire front of his face.

"Pardon my sorrow!" he chortled at Ky Halloc.

Ky Halloc ignored him.

“Doc Savage and his three aids,” said Penroff, “have been captured.”

Ky Halloc had been traveling on his nerve. This was evident now in the way he reacted. His body became tense, but the muscles on his face relaxed. He became a beaten young man.

The orderly went out.

Viscount Penroff teetered on his heels, smiling widely. “Another menace removed from the path of righteous progress. A great cause, a wonderful good, will go forward. Millions of people can be free to receive a supreme benefit that——”

Ky Halloc spat. “You aren’t kidding me, polite boy! The fact that you’re playing for billions doesn’t change the fact that you’re a bunch of thieves.”

Halloc lit a cigarette and reached over to put the match in the ash tray.

Viscount Penroff continued teetering on his heels and smiling slightly.

Halloc picked up the tray of cigarette ashes, flung them in Penroff’s face. He lunged. Both his fists came up and Penroff went down.

Penroff had age against him. Yet, in his prime, he must have been formidable. He knew all the tricks of jujitsu, and some of his own. Since Halloc was manacled wrist and ankle, they were about an even match.

They wound up in a knot in the corner, straining at each other, not doing much damage.

“You fool!” Penroff gritted. “You can’t escape!”

“There’s parachutes!” Halloc puffed. “And by now—back over land—hell, I won’t make —it!”

They reared up, striking, poking, even doing some biting. An instant later, men came rushing in. They fell upon Ky Halloc, hauled him back, and slammed him down in one of the modernistic chairs which was very strong and light.

Viscount Penroff used delicate, dabbing gestures with a handkerchief to remove ashes from his eyes. Ky Halloc glared around and wondered what had summoned the enemy, until he discovered the receiver off the hook of the intership telephone instrument. Penroff must have managed to knock it off during the fight.

Penroff put his handkerchief away. His reddened eyes were ugly.

“I have heard that a man falling through the air does not lose consciousness,” he said. “I hope that is the case.”

The crew men began removing Ky Halloc’s clothing. Evidently the idea was to take no chances on his being identified through the garments.

The message-carrying flunky appeared again in the midst of these preparations. He handed the radiogram which he carried to Penroff.

The latter read it. He looked like a man who had just found a “no-longer-need-your-services” slip in his pay envelope.

“From His Highness,” he told the men. “An order to keep Ky Halloc alive.”

Nobody in the room looked more surprised than did Ky Halloc. He swallowed several times, and when he did speak, it was to ask a question on a different subject.

“Where was Doc Savage taken?” he queried.

“In San Francisco,” explained Viscount Penroff. “The radiogram was from the chief of our West Coast Preparation Area Headquarters, stating that Savage and his three aids had been taken.”

Long Tom, electrical wizard and radio man of abilities, was at about this moment holding a consultation with Doc Savage.

“The fake radiogram to keep Ky Halloc alive worked,” Long Tom was chuckling. “They swallowed it.”

“You sure?” Monk asked uneasily.

“As sure as I am that they were taken in by the other fake message which said Doc and the rest of us had been captured,” Long Tom retorted.

Ham chuckled dryly. “That was a neat trick to keep them from suspecting we might be aboard, even if we did figure it out.”

Long Tom turned away. “I gotta get back to the radio shack. If they happen to send a message asking for details about keeping Halloc alive, or our being captured, I’ll have to be there to frame an answer.”

Long Tom crept down a girder, and eased through an opening in a curtainlike affair of silk. Doc, Monk and Ham were hidden in the safety envelope which surrounded each of the big gas cells.

Once on the keel catwalk, the electrical wizard hurried to the radio shack. When he entered, his heart tried to get out of his throat.

Viscount Herschel Penroff and the commander stood in the radio shack.

“So you have sobered?” the commander snapped.

Long Tom, not trusting his voice imitative ability, merely saluted and looked apprehensive of punishment for drinking. The business of looking scared was no trouble at all.

Viscount Herschel Penroff and the dirigible commander seemed to be unsuspecting.

“You will not operate your transmitter until further orders,” directed the airship skipper. “Some one with a direction-finder might spot us. There is no need of taking chances.”

Long Tom saluted again briskly. He had noted the little kowtow and salute which the Elders used, and he had it down pat.

Viscount Penroff and the captain went out.

Long Tom looked relieved, happy.

He naturally didn’t hear what Viscount Penroff had to say when they were out of earshot.

“We are apparently being duped,” Viscount Penroff muttered. “That radio man is the Doc Savage aid known as Long Tom.”

The commander was startled, and asked wonderingly, “How did you know?”

“Simple,” Viscount Penroff said. “Sparks has a scar on his left hand. This one didn’t.”

Chapter X

AIR ACTION

Long Tom Roberts was a quick thinker. Indeed, it had been an occasion of slightly too much quick-thinking which had earned him his nickname. Years earlier, he had once hit upon the bright idea of defending a certain military position by loading an old-time cannon of the type known as Long Toms, and having no regulation shot and ball, had employed a collection of rocks, broken beer bottles, jackknives and beltbuckles.

That it hadn't worked was probably the cannon's fault. He had come out of the resultant misadventure with his life and the nickname Long Tom.

But quick thinking and iron-nerve control are two different things.

Viscount Herschel Penroff came into the radio cabin, put a message in front of Long Tom, and spoke.

"Disregard the earlier order about silence, and send that," Penroff said.

Long Tom read the body of the message:

DOC SAVAGE WAS DISCOVERED ABOARD AND HAS BEEN TAKEN
PENROFF

Long Tom looked stark for an instant. Then he reached for the transmitter key.

"I'll send the message, sir," he said.

Viscount Penroff put the cold end of a gun against that part of Long Tom's neck which got hottest when he was mad.

"So Savage is aboard!" Penroff snarled.

Long Tom gulped twice.

"Huh? What—say—there's some mistake——"

"No use lying, Long Tom Roberts."

Long Tom sat perfectly still. The gun muzzle was cold.

"Savage is aboard," said Penroff. "You gave it away by your start."

More men came in. Determined fellows with guns. Long Tom could have saved his fight, and with it some of his own skin. They bounced him on the floor a few times to celebrate, then tied him.

Ky Halloc rattled his handcuffs in surprise when they threw Long Tom into a cabin with him.

"Greetings, fellow unfortunate," Ky Halloc grinned wryly.

"You'd better start worryin'!" Long Tom snapped.

"Oh, they got a radiogram from His Highness not to kill me," said Halloc.

"That's what you think," Long Tom grunted. "By now, they probably know that was a fake and——"

Two men came in with gags and silenced both Ky Halloc and Long Tom. That, strangely enough, disgusted Long Tom more than getting caught. He had expected to get from Halloc the nature of the Elders' scheme—what they were after.

Long Tom had been glaring indignantly for at least an hour before Viscount Penroff came stamping back. He hadn't found Doc, obviously. He unagaged Long Tom.

"Where is Savage?" he yelled.

"I don't know," Long Tom said truthfully. "But if you would turn on the broadcast radio receiver, you might get an idea."

The last was no lie either, technically.

Viscount Penroff, old face screwed up in a puzzled scowl, stamped over to the radio, turned it on, and got a backwoods comedian telling stale jokes.

"Try to find a news broadcast," Long Tom suggested.

Penroff fiddled with the dial, got a commentator's rattling voice:

"The stock market staged another of its calm days to-day. ... The president went fishing to-day at his country estate. ... Doc Savage, America's man of mystery, is reported to have refueled his plane on a mysterious flight across the United States. In Seattle, he refused to interview reporters. His plane left in the direction of the Pacific Ocean. ... Little Sweetie Adkins, the latest child movie sensation——"

"Gr-r-r!" Penroff gritted, and shut off the radio.

Long Tom tried not to look as uneasy as he felt. Penroff was glaring at him, and the elderly gentleman's hands were opening and closing as if he wanted to pick something apart.

"I certainly thought Savage was aboard!" Penroff snarled.

"Do you think I would lie to you?" Long Tom asked righteously.

Penroff snapped, "Separate these two prisoners!" and stamped out.

Long Tom was taken to another cabin, dumped on the bunk, lashed there, and left to meditate. Principally, he reflected on what lengths Doc Savage went to leave no possible precaution untaken.

For instance, it had cost Doc an enormous sum to have two national network news commentators spread false reports that the bronze man was on his way across the continent by plane. Doc had not overlooked the long chance that the broadcasts might convince Penroff's crowd that he was not on the airship.

It was lucky he hadn't.

Long Tom had no real certainty about the intentions of his captors where he was concerned. Except, of course, that they would eventually try to dispose of him. But they were keeping him alive for some reason. They were also keeping Ky Halloc alive. Or were they? They would have no trouble learning the order to keep Halloc alive was a fake.

Long Tom lay back and did some fast thinking, trying to figure out what part Halloc played, and in general, just what was up.

He could have spread his thinking out a little. He had close to five days in which to do it. Five eternal years during which the big airship droned steadily through the sky. That they went far north, Long Tom knew, because he almost froze.

Had he put in the five days puzzling over the mystery of the Elders, their gigantic organization, and what they were trying to accomplish, he was pretty sure he would have turned into a lunatic. He did not have enough clues to base any real guess on.

The airship hit one stormy area, during which it went high; and there was a long period during which the air in the sealed cabins was chemically purified. Long Tom, who had done

some high flying at times, decided they were probably up in the stratosphere as far as the dirigible would go.

Long Tom spent a great deal of time trying to figure out the nature of the mysterious thing which had stopped Monk's bullets in the bank building.

Some kind of new and absolutely invisible glass? That was possible. Yet it had gripped Doc Savage's hand when he touched it earlier, and it had temporarily killed Habeas, the hog.

It could still be glass of some kind. Just coat it with a chemical, itself invisible, which induced shock or death on contact. That was not so harebrained. Consider the strange marine creatures called "man o' wars," which are found in tropical waters. Merely touching them causes awful agony.

But what had stopped the telephone bells ringing, and had extinguished the lights? What had prevented Viscount Penroff's voice, when he had stood in the bank building and shouted down into the street, from being heard?

Long Tom assembled all these questions and some others. He had plenty of time. The answers he conjured up did not satisfy him. They only made his head ache.

His captors fed him once a day, and he complained bitterly over the meals, claiming he was no canary.

On the fifth day—Long Tom had been permitted to keep his watch, and had kept it wound—the electrical wizard received a message. He was lying with his head against a girder, and he heard a tapping.

"L-o-n-g T-o-m," it spelled out in telegraph code.

Long Tom got his handcuffs—he was handcuffed now—around where he could tap a message back with the wristlets.

"W-h-o?" he asked.

"D-o-c. A-r-r-e y-o-u s-a-f-e?"

"Y-e-s," Long Tom tapped back. *"Y-o-u-r i-d-e-a o-f u-s-i-n-g g-a-s m-a-s-k-s a-n-d h-i-d-i-n-g o-u-t i-n t-h-e g-a-s b-a-g-s w-a-s a g-o-o-d o-n-e."*

Long Tom had known all along that this method of hiding out accounted for the gang not finding Doc, Monk and Ham and the two pets. They had prepared for it in advance, even to Monk and Ham bringing along air-tight bags containing oxygen apparatus. They could put their pets in the bags.

Long Tom waited for the tapping to continue. Instead, Viscount Penroff strode in, followed by two of the crew. Penroff wore a big grin.

"It seems the possibility of trickery with messages was not entirely exhausted," he said.

"Huh?" Long Tom got cold all over.

"So Doc Savage is aboard after all?" Penroff smiled.

Long Tom wet his lips, said nothing.

"It was not Doc Savage sending to you a moment ago," Penroff said. "It was I."

Chapter XI

THE INVISIBLE WALL

Long Tom suddenly started wondering how any one with as few brains as he had just demonstrated he possessed had managed to live as long as he had.

His longevity was not going to extend much more, it seemed.

Viscount Penroff drew a gun from his waistcoat pocket. It was a little gun with two barrels and some gold filigree. It cocked with a sound as if some one had cracked a peanut.

"You have just accomplished the thing for which you were kept alive," Penroff said dryly. "We are now over Manchuria, and your body, if found, is not likely to be identified, and it would not make much difference if it was. The Elders will soon be in a position where nothing so small as a murder will trouble them."

Two men who had come in with Penroff put their finger tips in their ears. Little short-barreled guns like Penroff's made a large noise.

There was a loud noise. But it was not from Penroff's gun. It came from the ceiling. Penroff's gun hit the floor, and the man's hand turned red and ragged.

The two aids of Penroff spun and fled. Penroff started to follow. But two steps put him down on his face. He seemed to sleep. Long Tom knew he had been felled by a "mercy" bullet such as Doc's supermachine pistols used.

The two men who had fled reached back in, got Penroff and dragged him out into the runway.

Ripping noises came from the ceiling. A sheet metal plate split, and peeled back, and Doc Savage dropped down. Monk, Ham, their pets, followed.

"We've been layin' up there keepin' an eye on you for days!" Monk threw at Long Tom.

Long Tom heaved erect, rattled his handcuffs. "Get me outta these!"

A man put a head, hand and revolver in the door. Monk's supermachine pistol spanked. The head vanished, untouched.

"Durn!" Monk complained. "Missed him!"

Doc said, "We only have a moment!"

The bronze man whipped to the passage. The two men were scampering away with Penroff.

"Where is Halloc?" Doc asked.

"This way," Long Tom said, and pointed. "They were holding him prisoner, if they haven't killed him."

The bronze man ran to the indicated door. The room beyond was empty.

The dirigible motors were surprisingly silent. Excited shouts, which were ringing through the catwalks and passages of the giant airship, could be plainly heard.

Ham carried his favorite weapon, his sword cane. It had a blade of rare steel, and the tip was coated with a chemical which produced quick, harmless unconsciousness.

"Four of us," he snapped. "Sixty or seventy of them. Rather bad odds, eh?"

Doc said, "We may be able to reach the planes."

The planes, low-wing combination sea-and-land ships, each with a single motor, were racked in the underside of the dirigible. Hatches slid back, and the mechanical holders

lowered the planes, then released them. They could be picked up by a hook arrangement while in flight, but Doc and his men were not concerned particularly about that.

They did not have much trouble reaching the planes. Doc and his men had brought along some of the innumerable gadgets which they used, and which frequently kept them alive when the odds seemed fantastic. They flipped a few tiny smoke bombs behind them. The pall from these helped.

The interior hangars of the two planes were located one ahead of the other. The group clattered down a metal ladder which had rungs no thicker than lead pencils. There was light enough to look the planes over.

One ship was smaller, and its motor cowling was off, the propeller dismantled.

"They been workin' on that one!" Monk exploded.

The other ship, the larger one, seemed intact. They dived into it. The pilot cockpit had a hatch on top, and by standing erect in this, one could jerk the levers which opened the sliding doors and lowered the supporting clamp.

Electric motors operated the doors and big clamp. The doors opened when Doc operated the lever, but the clamp barely started down with the plane when it stopped.

"Dang 'em!" Monk gulped. "They shut off the current!"

"We will take a chance on dropping free," Doc said.

There was a safety catch intended to prevent the plane being dropped before the supporting clamp and its big retractible arms were fully lowered.

Doc broke the clamp with a wrench. He touched the starter, got it whirring, and the motor banged over. Doc jerked the last lever. The whole mechanism was not much different from one he had observed in the U.S. navy dirigibles. He was familiar with it.

The plane reeled rather crazily out of the pocket in the dirigible underside. One wingtip scraped the side of the opening, caught, and the plane tilted and spilled out one wing first, but no great harm was done.

"Demolition cartridges!" Doc called.

Then the bronze man jacked the throttle back, did the same with the stick, and the ship went up. Men leaned out of the promenade deck windows of the *Munchen*. They had machine guns, the hand type, and the ends of the barrels got red.

Only a few bullets hit the outer wingtips of the plane.

"I'm surprised at such lousy shooting," said Long Tom, who had removed his wrist watch, smashed it, and was trying to pick his handcuff lock with the end of the mainspring.

Monk was changing ammo drums in his supermachine pistol; latching a drum of demolitions into the mechanism.

Doc did more things with the plane controls. The craft skidded to a position over the dirigible. It was a silver monster under them.

"Now," Doc said.

"This is gonna demonstrate why airships ain't no special good in a war," Monk grinned.

The homely chemist leaned out, aimed, and his machine pistol strummed. An enormously louder roar came from below. The plane bucked, pitched, and Monk had to stop shooting and grab a hold.

Doc glanced downward. Not for nothing were those demolition slugs the compressed essence of the highest explosive. In half a dozen places, the *Munchen's* back was broken. It was as if a devouring monster had taken great bites out of her. She was rolling slightly, and sinking.

Below, there was an area of rolling country, densely wooded, with a lake to the east—opposite the setting sun. Around the lake, there was rocky, intensely rough mountain country.

Ham snapped grimly, “I’d hate to think about making a forced landing down there!”

The plane motor stopped.

“Now see what you done?” yelled Monk, who could always find words.

Ham, looking startled, stared at the gasoline gauges. “The tanks register full!”

“Sound them,” requested Doc, who had flattened the plane out and was feeling for its best gliding angle.

Ham shouldered the cabin door open, and leaned out. He could reach the gas tank caps in the low type wings. Unscrewing them, he plumbed with the end of his sword cane.

“Empty!” he yelled.

“They did not miss much,” Doc said without emotion.

Monk yelled, “Blazes! You figure they emptied the gas tanks and wedged the indicator needle to show full? And the motor only ran until it used up the fuel in the carburetors?”

The bronze man did not answer. There were binoculars in a rack beside the control stick. He used them on the terrain below. They were not particularly good glasses. The prospects of making a landing were not good, either.

Doc pointed. “Our best chance is there.”

The indicated area was a patch, forty acres or so in extent, where small, soft shrubbery, peculiar to that part of Asia, grew.

Monk nodded, muttered, “Only I don’t like them kinda landings.”

Air made sound around wings and struts. It was as if two or three men were whistling softly and steadily. Otherwise, there was silence. Doc had slanted the plane at the patch of cushion growth. They could make it without difficulty, would even have altitude for a circle or two of inspection.

The dirigible, falling more slowly, was now higher than they. The ends were cocked up. Loose skin covering fluttered around the holes amidships. A gas bag had bulged out like an entail.

Men were beginning to appear on the topsides. They carried lines and knives. They would slash through the skin to get at girders, then lash themselves to the beams with the lines.

“You gotta give ’em credit,” Monk said. “They know what to do.”

He meant that the dirigible crew had been quick to realize the undersides of the air monster would probably be crushed when it hit. Lashed to the topsides, the men stood a better chance.

The volplaning plane hit a down current, rocked out of its gliding angle. Doc nosed down to regain speed, angled to the left to get over an area of bare rock. Sun heat on the rock would warm the air; expansion would cause the air to rise, causing an up current that would assist the plane in maintaining altitude.

“This is not going to be so bad,” Long Tom said. “That brush is soft stuff——”

The plane stopped descending.

Ham pitched forward very hard. He happened to be holding his sword cane so that he fell against it, and the cane sheath broke, the fine blade bent almost double. Had it not been Damascus, it would have snapped. Monk, who was craning his neck out a window, came near being beheaded as the shock snapped his body forward. Long Tom dived at the instrument

panel, and thereafter wore the imprint of an inclinometer on his forehead. The two pets skidded forward, tangled, and began to fight.

Doc Savage arose. The control stick had bent under the impact of his weight.

They all stared around in astonishment.

What had happened, was happening, was incredible. There was nothing in the air. Not even a cloud in the sky. Nothing they could have hit. The air was almost unnaturally transparent.

“That—that—*it's* got us!” Monk gulped, holding his bruised neck.

They were not falling. Not perceptibly. But the tail of the plane was tilting downward slowly. It was as if something had taken hold of the nose of the plane, but lacked the strength to hold it extended level.

Ham glanced at his sword cane, saw the blade was intact, and scrambled to the cockpit. He dashed out what was left of the cockpit window, and stabbed viciously with the sword into the thin air ahead of the ship.

The blade bent almost double. It had hit something. Ham yanked. The blade would not come out of whatever it had penetrated. Yet there was nothing visible.

Ham Brooks was a man with more than what could be considered an ordinary nerve control. At times he even had more nerve than was good for him, since it made him less cautious. But now his mouth opened round, his face got gray and his breathing became noisy.

Ham yanked madly at the cane. It did not come free.

“Try pulling slowly,” Doc suggested.

The bronze man sounded more interested than concerned, as if they were conducting some intriguing scientific experiment.

Ham, for once frightened out of his wits, yelled, “What—what—*what is it?*”

“Pull *slowly*,” Doc requested.

It was to Ham's credit that he did stop his frantic yanking and exert a slow pull. The sword cane blade began to come free. By microscopic degrees at first, then more swiftly—and Ham was suddenly sprawling back in the cabin, the blade in his hand.

The plane had now slanted downward enough so that the group had to hang on to keep from sliding into the back of the cabin.

“It will probably pull free shortly,” Doc said.

That was not a pleasant thought. When the plane did start falling free, their troubles would be much more dangerous. For the entire forward edge of both wings were crumpled so that it was entirely impossible to control the craft.

Long Tom yelled, “If we only had parachutes!”

The plane began to sag more swiftly. It was going to fall.

Ky Halloc appeared in the rear of the plane cabin.

“Greetings,” he said calmly, “from a gentleman who has some parachutes.”

Chapter XII

MANCHU MENACE

It was instantly evident, of course, that Ky Halloc had been in the rear of the plane—there must have been a baggage compartment back there—all the time. That was quite possible. There had been no time to look the plane over.

Halloc spun, reached back into the compartment, and began digging out parachute packs. The plane was hanging by its nose, practically, and he had to hurl the chute packs up to them.

“They were holding me under guard,” he yelled, “when you started the trouble. It took my guard’s mind off his job long enough for me to pop him over the head with one of them little alloy chairs. I didn’t know what to do. I got to thinking.”

He heaved more parachutes.

“It occurred to me that you would maybe try to get away in the planes,” he said, “so I charged down there. I passed the parachute locker and brought an armload of them, figuring they might come in handy.”

Long Tom yelled, “Why didn’t you come out earlier?”

Ky Halloc grimaced. “Spring lock on the locker door. The shock when we hit whatever we did broke it.” He peered about. “Just what did we hit—oh, I see. So that’s it!”

“That’s what?”

“We’re dang lucky we’re not all dead,” said Ky Halloc.

Monk growled, “Say, just what——”

He did not finish because the plane had suddenly pulled free. It fell, and because the wings were mangled, it began to twist and flutter in a most sickening fashion.

There was no more talk. The men whipped into the web harness of the parachutes. The outer doors, fortunately, were not sprung. Doc shouldered one open.

“Let the chute open and pull you off,” he warned. “It’s just possible they split the chutes or something and left them where we might get hold of them.”

It was with a dubious expression that Monk climbed out and yanked the ripcord. But the big silk mushroom was intact.

A half minute later, the wildly gyrating plane had scattered them through the sky. They sank swiftly, and did not land far apart. Doc called out sharply and got them together. Monk and Ham were carrying their pets.

The dirigible hit. Girders buckled and fabric and gas bags split with a sound remindful of a handful of great eggs being crushed. Men screeched, cursed. Firmer voices yelled orders.

The wreck did not catch fire. Over the treetops, Doc and his aids could see men working down the mangled sides of the ship, ripping through the skin fabric with knives to get at the girders for handholds.

Doc Savage’s flake gold eyes came to rest on Ky Halloc.

“Explain all you can in two or three minutes,” Doc directed, and began picking Long Tom’s handcuffs.

Ky Halloc hesitated, looked uneasy. “Well, after all, I hate to—well, almost no one knows my profession.”

“The Elders know,” Doc reminded.

“Yeah,” admitted Halloc. “I guess it don’t matter then. Here’s what I know. That thing we just hit is something that *lives*.”

Monk exploded, “That’s what I expected all along!”

Halloc said, “This story is going to sound pretty fantastic, but before you dismiss it as utterly insane, stop and think of some of the things that have happened.”

“Hurry it up,” Doc requested. He had gotten Long Tom free.

“Where these things came from, nobody knows,” Halloc said. “The exact nature of the things is also unknown to me. They make no sound. Yet they have a definite intelligence. They can, in fact, communicate with man and be communicated with.”

Halloc stopped and shuddered. “It is my guess that these embodiments, congregations of force, or whatever they are, came to the earth from outer space.”

He looked at them. “Does that sound reasonable?”

“We have not much time,” Doc reminded.

“Sure. Those birds in the dirigible will be after us. Well, a small group of queer old crackpot bearded hermits who called themselves the Elders lived up here in Manchuria. They were scientists and professors from Russia, exiled by the Soviets. They are embittered old devils, down on the world. Their leader is a man named Captain Cutting Wizer. I believe you know him?”

“An acquaintance only, in a professional sense,” Doc Savage said. “He visited New York some time ago, and spoke upon some theories concerning treatment of skin disorders by the use of electromagnetic fields of unusual types. He became well acquainted with Pat Savage, my cousin, because she was interested in dermatology in connection with her beauty parlor.”

Ky Halloc took a deep breath. “I think Pat is the loveliest creature I ever met. And those devils are holding her!”

“If she is still alive,” Doc said quietly. “Go on.”

“Oh, she’s alive. I heard them say so.” Halloc nodded. “Well, to get back at the story, these Elders managed to communicate with these strange things that we can’t see. They evolved a terrible scheme. They are going to use the creatures to commit wholesale robberies all over the world. You see, the creatures, or whatever they are, being invisible, can walk in anywhere and carry away loot.

“The Elders were clever. They first got together an international organization, and charted the places to strike. They have an enormous number of men to handle disposition of the loot. They have——”

“Where do you come in on this?” Doc asked.

“Me?” Ky Halloc sighed reluctantly. “You will understand my unwillingness to speak when I tell you I am a criminal wanted by the law. I was once convicted of a crime which I did not commit. I will not go into that now. I was not guilty. I have never been a criminal. But I never have been able to prove my innocence. I——”

“What we are more interested in,” Doc reminded, “is your connection with this.”

“I was approached to become a member of the Elders,” Ky Halloc said. “Not being a criminal, I turned it down.”

“Why did you come to New York?”

“Believe it or not, simply because I knew Pat Savage was in danger. Frankly, I fell hopelessly in love with her the instant I saw her. It will never do me any good. I know that. But at least I can do my bit to help her.”

Monk grinned, slapped him on the back. "You're a guy after my own heart," the homely chemist said.

There was a whistle and a *clip-clip-clip* noise in the brush near by. A bullet made it.

"They have started to hunt us," Doc said. He indicated Monk, Ham and Long Tom. "You three will set out north. The dirigible was flying in that direction."

Monk invariably objected when he saw a chance of missing out on a fight. That the group had been for five days in imminent danger of death seemed not to have dulled his love of excitement.

"Aw, Doc," he grumbled, "there must be fifty or sixty of them guys, and——"

"The more the reason for using caution," the bronze man said. "They will follow you. Halloc and myself will trail along and wage a guerrilla war."

Monk eyed Doc, saw argument would do no good, and picked his hog up by an ear.

"Come on, you funny Harvard thing," he told Ham.

They galloped off, Long Tom bringing up the rear, Monk and Ham snarling at each other with the start of a quarrel that would probably continue until something drastic broke it up.

Doc glided into the brush, and was followed more clumsily by Ky Halloc.

"Great fellows, those men of yours," Halloc said heartily. "Most remarkable chaps I ever saw. I like them."

Doc Savage's reply to that put into words something that was usually taken for granted.

"If the necessity arose, I would lay down my life to save them," he said.

Ky Halloc squinted at him. "You mean, if they were caught, and the fellows who held them offered to turn them loose if you gave yourself up, you would do it?"

"Without hesitation."

"But you as an individual are more valuable to the world than any one or all of them, and I say that with all due respect to them."

Doc did not make a reply to that.

"Keep under cover," the bronze man suggested. "We do not want them to know we have remained behind."

When they had found a thick copse of growth, they crouched there. The earth was the red soil peculiar to that part of Manchuria. It was rather hard-packed and dry. This country was evidently on the edge of the great bare wastes which, farther west, became an endless desert, and to the north, vast tundra.

Doc and Ky Halloc heard, after a short time, the sound of many men running. They traveled swiftly. Short, barking shouts showed they had found the trail. There were yelled orders to spread out, to miss nothing, and to make no mistakes.

Through all that, Ky Halloc was strangely silent, as if his mind were occupied with something else. And he was watching Doc Savage most of the time.

"You are an unusual one," he said unexpectedly.

If the remark meant anything to him, Doc gave no sign. He gestured, and they set off parallel with the gang trailing Monk, Ham and Long Tom and the two pets.

The bronze man set a course far to one side. Ky Halloc remarked on this.

"I thought we were gonna knock 'em off one at a time?"

Doc Savage produced from inside his clothing one of the machine-pistols.

"You have a weapon?" he asked.

“No. Of course not.”

“Take this, then.”

Ky Halloc looked the superfirer over. “I never was very good at puzzles.”

Doc gave brief instructions. The machine-pistol was not a simple weapon. There were, moreover, two different secret safeties, which only the closest examination would disclose. There had been occasions when enemies had captured one of the guns, only to spend hours in a futile effort to make it function.

“I see, now,” Halloc said at last. “Does it kick much?”

“The compensator takes care of that,” Doc said. “Just point and pull the trigger.”

“O.K. Now, what do you want me to do?”

“Watch the airship wreck,” Doc said.

“Darn it, I can’t do any good there!”

“Keep under cover,” the bronze man directed. “The men—some of them—are bound to return. For that matter, they probably left a few of their number behind. Some of them must have been injured in the crash.”

“I’m to watch ’em?”

“Exactly. Trail them.”

“I don’t get this!”

“We have reason to believe they have some kind of headquarters near here. In Manchuria, at least. You will find out where it is—if you can. For they may be holding Pat there.”

Ky Halloc looked grim and sober, and said, “Poor kid! I’d give my right arm to save Pat. I only talked to her for a short time, but I never met any one I liked better. Believe me, I mean that.”

“Do your best,” Doc said.

“Wait a minute! How are you going to know if I do find Pat?”

Doc passed over a bit of substance which resembled a lump of alum.

“Rub lightly on the trees and rocks you pass with that,” he said.

“What is it?”

“A chalk which leaves no visible mark, but which will glow under the rays of an ultra-violet lantern. I have a tiny ultra-violet projector.”

“Oh,” said Halloc wonderingly. “I’ll be darned! Well, you can depend on me doing my best.”

“No one can do more,” Doc said.

The bronze man walked a few paces—and was gone. It was almost magical, the silence with which he disappeared.

Ky Halloc, surprise and incredulity on his rather handsome face, walked quickly to the spot where he had last seen Doc Savage, and looked around. He saw no sign of the bronze man, although he looked for footprints and even bent blades of grass which might be straightening. He shook his head wonderingly.

“I’ll be damned!” he said. “That big bronze guy is sure the spookiest lad I ever met.”

Halloc next examined the lump of chalk for leaving invisible marks, and scrutinized the machine-pistol. He managed to get the ammo drum out, extracted one of the cartridges. It was not much larger than a .22.

He wedged the bullet in the end of the gun barrel, bent downward, and managed to pry the slug out of the chamber of the cartridge. There was an almost white powder inside.

“High-powered stuff,” he said, talking to himself. “Well, I better got on the job.”

Halloc set out toward the dirigible wreck. He went slowly, and used much care, stopping often to listen. There was shouting from the men following Monk, Ham and Long Tom, but it was getting far away.

The wrecked mass of the airship loomed ahead. It got larger. Never did the air monster seem more huge than it did now in its wrecked condition. Ky Halloc stared at it when he was close enough that it almost overshadowed him.

“Criminy!” he muttered. “Five million smackers’ worth of sky limousine gone to pot!”

He crawled closer. Inadvertently, he made a slight noise.

Almost immediately, a dark man with the slightest slant to his eyes came out of the brush and pointed a rifle at Ky Halloc.

“You fella velly welcome,” he said.

Ky Halloc turned slowly. He did not try to use the machine-pistol. It would have been inviting suicide, anyway.

“All right,” he growled. “You got me a prisoner!”

“Make tracks,” the captor directed, and waved at the dirigible.

They made tracks, and reached the control cabin. The control area of the air craft had been damaged very little, and the air giant was tilted enough on its side so that they could walk almost to the hatch.

Two guards stood before the hatch. They had automatic rifles. Both started to salute Ky Halloc.

“You damned fools!” Ky Halloc snarled in a low voice. “Doc Savage may be watching us!”

Chapter XIII

THE TRICKSTER

Instead of saluting, the two guards pointed their rifles at Ky Halloc.

"I think I'll shoot you now!" one yelled loudly.

"That's better," Halloc growled in a low voice. "This other fellow knew Savage might be watching me, and he had sense enough to pretend to take me prisoner."

"Does Savage suspect you?" one of the guards asked uneasily.

"I don't think so," Halloc replied grimly. "But you can't tell about that big bronze guy. He does one thing, and you suddenly discover he did it to accomplish something entirely different. He is a very tough customer."

"It is incredible he should have survived this long," one mumbled.

Ky Halloc sighed deeply and wiped perspiration off his forehead.

"I've been under a strain, I have. I intended all along to shoot Savage in the back the first chance I got."

One of the guards asked dryly, "Why did you not do so before this?"

Halloc scowled at the man, trying to ascertain if any insult was intended. He could detect none.

"The bronze guy has got eyes like a fly," Ky Halloc snapped. "And he never turned his back to me."

"Then he suspects you?"

"Not necessarily." Ky Halloc sighed again. "That bronze fellow is like nobody I ever saw. He overlooks nothing. He's just instinctively cautious. I can see why he has lived so long and is such a holy terror. Believe me, you know something?"

The guards waited expectantly.

"As long as I was around Savage, I never saw him turn his back to anybody," Halloc snapped. "Not *anybody*, mind you, except his five aids. Man, is he cautious!"

The others moistened dry lips and glanced about uneasily.

"Does he—suspect—the truth?" one asked hesitantly.

Ky Halloc snorted softly.

"Not a thing," he declared. "I fed him a story."

"What kind of story?"

"Oh, a cock-and-bull yarn about mysterious, invisible beasts out of the stratosphere or somewhere working in coöperation with some guys who intended to conduct a lot of wholesale robberies." Halloc chuckled again. "That was something, eh?"

The men smiled admiringly.

"That, truly, is about as far from the real truth as one could possibly get," they agreed.

Halloc jerked his head. "Were the radios jimmied?"

"One of them still functions."

"That's enough. Take me inside, you fellows. There is a lot to be done."

The guards pointed their automatic rifles at Ky Halloc, and he entered the dirigible.

The smashed *Munchen* was draped across a clump of small trees, many of which had punctured the outer skin of thin metal and the delicate inner gas chambers of special

cellophanelike material—goldbeater’s skin had been found inferior of late for gas bag linings. There was not much undergrowth, although the trees themselves were not large. There were no birds close by; all had been frightened away by the strange wrecked air Titan. Some buzzards circled far away, and in the woods the only creature that stirred was a big woods rat; and it was leaving the vicinity furtively. Altogether, there was a great stillness.

Perhaps the most still form was the giant man of bronze. He occupied a bough of a tree from which a view could be had of the control cabin of the *Munchen*. Held fixedly to his right eye was a small but very strong telescope.

The glass was powerful enough so that the hammer marks on the tiny rivets which held the dirgible skin to the girders could be discerned plainly.

Doc Savage was a skilled lip-reader.

The bronze man pocketed the telescope, after collapsing it to fountain-pen size. He swung down out of the tree with ghostly stealth, and advanced on the wrecked airship.

He circled the entire craft carefully. There was a lookout in the bow, another in the stern. The two were back at the control cabin door.

Doc broke a leafy bush large enough to cover him. It was exactly like the others. He crept forward, holding it over him, moving only when the lookouts were not glancing in his direction. It was a simple trick, but it took time; and he finally reached the underside of the airship.

There was no danger of suffocating from the gas leaking out of the ballonets. The gas, being light, went up.

Doc found a rip, tested to make sure no squeakage came from the girders, and swung inside. He reached the control room, but worked into the catwalk above instead of entering, and went on forward to the radio room.

There was no guard at the radio room door.

Ky Halloc had a scrambler attached to the radio telephone. This was a device in common use by transatlantic and other commercial companies, and simply mixed up the voice so that it meant nothing until unscrambled by a key machine in exact synchronism at the other set.

Ky Halloc was speaking.

“—and then the plane with Savage, Monk, Ham, Long Tom, them two damned animals, and myself, flew into the protective screen,” he said, and stopped for breath.

When he had his breath, Ky Halloc began laughing.

“They had no idea what it was,” he said. “A little later, I kidded them into thinking it was an invisible monster or something. They ate it up. You can’t blame them. To some one who doesn’t know what it is, it is sure baffling enough.”

A replying voice came out of a loudspeaker on the radio room table.

“*But Savage is still alive and free?*” it demanded peevishly.

It sounded as if it were an old man’s voice.

“We’ve got him in our own territory now,” Halloc said. “He has no idea what it is all about, and taking care of him will be gravy.”

“*You do not really think it will be easy?*” demanded the loud-speaker voice sarcastically.

Ky Halloc hesitated.

“We can do it,” he said, and he suddenly sounded more desperate than confident.

“*What about the others?*”

“Savage’s three men? He sent them on ahead, to decoy our men. Savage will try and pick our men off one at a time. Guerrilla stuff.”

“*That should make it easier.*”

“Sure it will. You just get him located, lay down walls around him, and take him.” Ky Halloc began to laugh. “He’ll think the invisible monsters have him!”

Halloc’s laughter was not very hearty, and it ended on a false note. It was the kind of laugh a bad ham actor would put out when he had stage fright.

The radio room was quiet, except for the singing of an efficient motor generator unit. Somewhere, a marine clock struck five bells. Just why marine clocks were used on the *Munchen* was one of those things.

Ky Halloc thought of something to say, leaned forward, but did not say it.

Doc Savage had come forward and taken him by the neck and around the body. Sinews stood out a little in the metallic arms and hands, and pressure pain so paralyzed Halloc that he could not make sound.

Doc leaned close to the microphone.

“Stand by a moment,” he said.

His voice was a perfect imitation of Ky Halloc’s lusty tones. The mimicry was not difficult. The bronze man had been around Halloc a good deal now.

Doc cut the mike out of circuit.

“You did a good acting job,” the bronze man told Ky Halloc quietly. “It was necessary to watch you in an actual double-cross to be certain. Suspicion that you were not what you claimed, however, existed from the first.”

Doc then searched Halloc. He found a tiny, triangular badge of enamel and gold.

The bronze man’s hand shifted to Halloc’s neck nerve centers, preparatory to exerting the skilled pressure which would bring the fantastic, semiconscious paralysis.

“Don’t!” Halloc croaked. “You did that to one of our men in New York! We ain’t—ain’t been able to wake him up—since!”

His eyes filled with horror as he knew that his plea was not going to have any effect.

A man appeared in the door, leveled his rifle and fired.

The man with the rifle was the fellow who had tried to kill Doc Savage with the mysterious method of invisible attack in New York, on the string of Brooklyn houses which looked just alike. He was also one of the guards who had just stood at the entrance to the control room and heard Ky Halloc declare Doc Savage had more eyes than a fly. He got a demonstration of that now.

The bullet missed. Doc had moved. He flung Halloc aside. The man was too heavy a missile to throw quickly. A modernistic portable loud-speaker wasn’t. He batted that at the rifleman.

The fellow jumped aside. His second bullet missed. He did not fire a third. Instead, he squawked, grabbed at his middle, and put his jaw in the way of Doc’s right fist. He had a strong jaw. At least, it did not break.

Ky Halloc got up off the floor. Doc gave him a shove. Halloc butted a metal wall and sagged down, stunned.

Doc cut the radio mike in.

“Take Savage’s men alive,” he said in Halloc’s voice.

“That is the plan,” the loud-speaker voice said. *“As long as they are alive, we have something with which to bargain.”*

“That’s right. Anything else?”

“Nothing. Except I thought you might like to know that Captain Cutting Wizer is doing good work.”

The bronze man hesitated briefly.

“Just how much has he accomplished since the last time?” he asked, still using Halloc’s tone.

“The whole job is done.”

Doc waited. To probe further for information would only arouse suspicion. Anyway, the other men were coming.

“That’s good,” he said. “Well, seventy-threes.”

He cut the mike off.

Men were running down the catwalk from the bow, and up it from the control room. They had heard the shots. Doc cut the radio carrier wave off the air. Then he reached into the set, got a fistful of its vitals, and ripped them out. The apparatus would not work for a while.

He gathered up Ky Halloc, clipped him on a temple.

There was a hatch in the radio room roof. The bronze man sprang up with his burden, knocked the hatch open, and found one of the vertical inspection tunnels that ran up through the big gas bag. It was badly bent, squeezed in some places, but would pass him.

Doc went up. His method was unusual, hardly feasible if he had lacked much of his tremendous strength. He held Ky Halloc with his legs and mounted the inspection shaft ladder rungs with the strength of his arms alone. He made fair time.

Gas got stronger. It was escaping from ruptured ballonets. Down below, it was not bad, but up here—— He wouldn’t be able to breathe along the ridge of the airship. The gas was not poisonous itself, but it displaced the air necessary for breathing.

Doc drew in some of the bad air, held his breath, and knocked a hole in the thin side of the inspection shaft. There was a gas ballonet beyond. It had ruptured, and was almost empty of gas. Supporting wires crisscrossed it. Doc swung onto these, still carrying his burden with his legs.

A fall alone would have meant a bad mauling, perhaps mangling, on the network of thin, strong wires. There was almost no light. Yet the bronze man seemed to have no great difficulty. Reaching the other side, he broke through, wedged upward, got on a side catwalk, and raced toward the stern.

When he came to a rip in the airship’s side, he looked out.

A man was standing on each side of the dirigible, well away, rifle held ready.

Ky Halloc stirred.

Doc bent close to Halloc’s ear.

“This raid was largely to help you along with your work of deceiving the Elders,” Doc said.

Ky Halloc squinted his eyes several times, as if he had not heard aright. Then he swallowed incredulously.

“I’ll be damned! So you know what I am?”

The bronze man said, “In your pockets in New York was a badge which indicated you were a secret agent of the great Soviet secret service, the Ogpu.”

Halloc swallowed.

“On your person a moment ago was a small badge also indicating you were an Ogpu,” Doc told him.

Halloc grinned, and suddenly looked greatly relieved.

“You know the Ogpu,” he said. “Members remain unknown when they’re ordered to do so, or they receive a very serious punishment. That is why I have been keeping quiet.”

Doc nodded. “There is one thing, though: Why did you trap Pat?”

“What was the difference?” Ky Halloc countered. “They were going to seize her, anyway. If I hadn’t volunteered, some one else would have decoyed her, and maybe she would have been killed.”

Doc asked, “Have you learned enough to satisfy the Ogpu of what is going on?”

Halloc gave a violent start.

“So you *do* know!” he exploded. “Hell! I don’t see how you figured—it took me weeks—look here! I’ve held out on you because the Ogpu will raise the devil if I reveal what I have learned. They’re cranks on secrecy. But now I’ll tell you——”

“Save your breath,” Doc advised.

“You mean you know the whole thing?”

The bronze man’s nod was almost imperceptible.

“What you said over the radio a few minutes ago was the final explanation,” he said.

Ky Halloc grinned thinly, extended a hand. “Any hard feelings? I had my reasons for not telling you who I was or what my angle was. You seem to know them.”

Doc clasped the hand.

“Forget it,” he said. “Want me to leave you here?”

Halloc nodded. “I think I can do more from this side.”

“Right,” the bronze man agreed. “It would be better if you were left unconscious.”

“Sure.”

Doc knocked him out with a quick blow.

The bronze man dropped three smoke bombs on the ground. They bloomed out a black pall. The riflemen ran to it, watching intently, guns held ready.

Doc studied the riflemen. One of them was large, almost as big as the bronze man himself. Doc seemed particularly interested in the size of the fellow.

The bronze man’s strange, trilling melody was existent for a brief moment, but not in a loudness sufficient to carry to the watchers.

Doc dropped into the brush at the far end of the wrecked airship. But the bronze man did not leave the vicinity. Instead, he crept back, approaching the riflemen. And when he was very near flung a small rock which he had picked up enroute. The smaller of the two riflemen collapsed.

The other gunman whirled. He was not fast enough. There was the impact of two giant forms colliding, and the gunman went down. Doc was upon him, and his metallic fingers got to the sensitive spinal nerve centers.

Doc had the victim over a shoulder and had faded into the brush before any one came out of the airship wreck.

Chapter XIV TROUBLE PILED UP

Long Tom was lagging behind. Not because he was tired, but because Monk and Ham were making so much noise squabbling that he could not hear an enemy if one got close. Not that there was much likelihood of that.

Monk and Ham had, long ago, trained their pets, Habeas and Chemistry, to range away in the manner of hunting dogs and signal the presence of any one. The animals were doing so now.

Monk and Ham were belaboring each other ferociously—until they ran into a thorny bush. A wild dog, a scrawny creature resembling a jackal, was frightened out of the bush and fled, yipping.

Monk looked around, and started with exaggerated surprise when he saw Ham beside him.

“Goodness!” he said. “I thought that was you ran away, sound and all!”

Ham opened his mouth to bite out a retort, but held it. Something about the noise of the wild dog had interested him.

The wild dog had stopped in the middle of a yowl. Broken it off with an almost impossible abruptness.

Long Tom came running up. “There was something queer about that!”

Monk and Ham thought so, too. They ran forward. Twenty paces brought them to the what-is-it, Chemistry.

Chemistry was balanced strangely, nape erect, little eyes fixed on the shrubbery ahead. The men advanced.

“Blazes!” Monk breathed.

The wild dog was balanced as if starting a leap, forefeet off the ground. The position was unnatural. And the animal was as rigid as if turned to stone.

Chemistry emitted a sound that was probably profanity in the what-is-it tongue, and started for the dog.

“Chemistry, stop!” Ham rapped.

“Sic ’em!” Monk said hopefully.

Chemistry paid no attention to Monk.

Ham snarled, “You know what’s got that dog! You wanted Chemistry to get caught, too, you awful accident of nature!”

Long Tom rapped, “I’m in favor of backing a bit. That’s one of them invisible things that’s got the dog.”

They retreated cautiously, supermachine pistols in hand. The wild dog continued to stand queerly. The brush hid the creature.

“Watch for the leaves to move if that thing comes through after us!” Monk breathed. “It’ll make some kind of sound, maybe, and if it don’t, it’ll sure stir the leaves.”

This was a somewhat difficult order, since there was a slight breeze and it waved the larger leaves gently.

Monk had hardly spoken when his little eyes bugged, and the hair on the back of his neck actually upended. It was a peculiarity of Monk that he had this animal characteristic of hair standing on end at his nape when he was mad or startled.

“Look!” he squalled. “The leaves have stopped movin’!”

This was true. The leaves behind them were becoming perfectly still.

They all saw what happened to a bee. It was a large, fuzzy bee, of a kind to stand this somewhat rigorous climate. The bee was cruising, making a small airplane noise, and suddenly came to a stop in the air. The bee hung there, then began to sink with an exaggerated slow motion toward the ground.

“That thing’s followin’ us!” Monk roared.

The group of bronze man’s aids had not been moving slowly in retreat. But now they began to set speed records. They came upon the pig, Habeas Corpus. The animal had been bringing up the rear.

Habeas was facing the back trail, hackles up, one forefoot hoisted startingly like a pointed dog. And the shote was rigidly motionless.

“It’s got Habeas!” Monk breathed in horror.

Habeas demonstrated he was wrong by turning tail suddenly and rushing back to them.

Then they could see what had alarmed the shote. The leaves in a narrow swath across the back trail were not moving!

“Let’s try the left,” Long Tom said grimly.

They knew the truth an instant later. The fantastic monster of stillness had entirely surrounded them.

Monk growled, “Here’s somethin’ we haven’t tried yet!” and changed ammo drums in his supermachine pistol. The weapons were ordinarily kept charged with so-called mercy bullets to cause unconsciousness without great damage. Monk clipped in some of the demolition slugs.

He lifted the weapon.

Ham and Long Tom got down on the ground quickly. The invisible walls, monsters, masses or whatever they were, were not far distant. The force of those demolition bullets exploding would knock them off their feet.

Monk fired. The demolition slug made a sound no louder than a cork coming out of a wine bottle, although it opened less than a hundred feet distant.

“Blazes!” Monk lifted the superfirer again. “First time I ever knew one of them demolitions to turn out a dud!”

The machine-pistol hooted. A number of corks seemed to come out of bottles. Monk looked starkly incredulous.

“The demolitions ain’t hurtin’ the things a bit!” he yelled.

Long Tom peered about angrily.

“Not an enemy in sight,” he growled, “and me, I’m scared stiff!”

The group of Doc’s aids turned squarely around and tried to go in that direction. But they were blocked there, too.

The next five minutes were an epic. They sought desperately to find a loophole in the invisible, encircling ring. Their method was simple. They picked up rocks and threw them. Always, the rocks hit in mid-air, and stopped. There was no hole. The rocks fell to earth with comical slowness.

Through it all, the sun was bright above, and the birds circled peacefully in the sky. Buzzards, they were, and the fleet-winged Mongol variety of hawk. The woodland looked peaceful, and boughs stirred gently with the breeze.

There was no air movement where Monk, Ham and Long Tom fought the fiendish unknown. They became terribly unaware of that. Ham, who had an imagination, began to gasp, as if he were choking, and driven desperate, turned loose a blast from his machine-pistol.

They were almost deafened. The gun sound roared as if in an enclosed room. The slugs exploding against the unseen wall, however, made little ineffectual noises.

“It’s *over* us, too!” Ham croaked.

Then they saw the man.

He was a long, old string of wrinkled hide. He did have a big head—a head that could be said resembled a spider’s body, if one exaggerated. And he had piercing eyes. They could tell that even from the distance. Or it might have been the magnifying quality of the horn-rimmed spectacles he wore.

He began making gestures with his arms.

“Lookit!” Ham breathed. “Old octopus eyes! Who is he?”

Long Tom snapped, “Don’t you remember him?”

“No. Should I?”

Their conversation was rational enough, even if their faces were pale and their eyes protuberant.

“That is Captain Cutting Wizer, the old lad who built that remarkable device Pat used in her beauty shop for eradicating blackheads and skin disorders by the use of unusual electromagnetic fields.”

“Pipe down, fellows!” Monk ordered. “He’s trying to signal us with semaphore code.”

They strained their eyes, and each called out letters as the old man made them. It was not easy. Captain Wizer had a sketchy idea of the regulation semaphore code. Some of the letters which he didn’t remember, he transmitted by forming them roughly with his arms.

“He wants us to surrender!” Monk exclaimed.

They watched some more. They missed some of it, not being mind readers. He seemed to be promising them that they would not live long unless they gave up their guns.

“He wants the guns thrown high in the air and as far as we can,” Ham decided.

“It’ll be a hot day when anybody licks me this easy!” Monk gritted.

He discharged high explosive bullets ineffectually in the direction of the spectacled old man.

Captain Wizer waved his arms. His gestures seemed to be directed at some one back of him. Nothing happened for a moment.

Then the pig, Habeas, began to squeal, flail around, seemingly held fast by one leg to an invisible something.

Long Tom took a step backward. He cried out, as an elbow, extended inadvertently, seemed to be seized by an awful-burning, invisible thing. He struggled. It was as if his elbow were embedded in hot stone.

“It’s closin’ in on us!” he gulped.

Ham snapped, “We’re fools to fight something we’re helpless against!”

He waved his arms furiously, then pointed to himself, his two companions, and put his arms above his head in token of surrender. He threw his gun away.

Captain Wizer stuck his stem arms out straight and made flying motions with them, the signal which a surveyor uses to indicate everything is all right.

Men stood up in the undergrowth all around. They walked straight to Monk, Ham and Long Tom, slapped them over for weapons, then started them walking.

“The trap for Savage is next,” one said.

Old Captain Cutting Wizer shuffled up. A man with a rifle walked at his elbow.

“Ay began to tank you would be fules,” he said. “In another minute, you would have been dead yiggers.” He paused, then said, “Do you tank Doc Savage could be persuade to forget all vorks? It would be better. Yah. Ve might save your lives.”

Monk shrugged. “You would have to talk to Doc about that.”

One of the gang tried to catch Habeas by the tail, and was bitten. The fellow jumped back, whipped out a revolver and aimed at the pig.

The hog said, “Two bits says you miss me.”

The man almost dropped his gun. He popped his eyes in amazement. He pulled his mouth shut with difficulty.

“Jiminy crickets!” he exploded. “That damn hog spoke to me! Or am I crazy?”

Habeas, the shote, said, “All crooks are crazy, the way I figure.”

The man with the gun walked around and around Habeas. He scratched his head.

“Bless my soul!” he said. “A talking hog!”

“Get under way!” some one snapped. “We’ve got more than talking hogs to think about. Grab hold of that ape pet there and let’s get going.”

The march, which the incident had interrupted, resumed.

“Ay tank dot vars smart as ha’al,” said Captain Wizer to Monk.

Monk knew then that the old man had a quick wit. Of course, the others would realize in a moment what had happened. Monk was a ventriloquist of sorts, and he frequently had his pet pig make unexpected remarks.

In this instance, Monk had taken the only possible means of saving Habeas from getting shot.

Long Tom muttered out of a mouth corner, “Wonder what they’re cooking up for Doc, Monk?”

Monk shook his head. As a matter of fact, he was not as concerned, nearly, as he would have been had he known Doc Savage had not followed them, but had gone back to the airship.

Chapter XV

TRAPS AND BAIT

Any time between four and five minutes is good for a runner traveling a mile. In fact, for generations the world has waited in vain for a runner who could even do it in four minutes. And that on a smooth cinder track.

Doc Savage had not run the last three miles in anything like four minutes to the mile. But the going was no cinder track. It was rock, gullied red earth, and plenty of scrubby trees. Furthermore, he had more than two hundred pounds of limp human over a shoulder.

The prisoner he had taken at the dirigible wreck was still in the grip of the strange paralysis. Only manipulation to relieve the segmental spinal pressure on the nerve centers would permit him to move.

The bronze man kept a sharp watch on his surroundings. Now he stopped, lowered the prisoner, and climbed the boughs of a tree that was taller and situated on a hill. He was careful to keep inside the foliage. He used the little telescope.

With the telescope, Doc employed certain small filters, and a complex mechanical device which made some light wave lengths visible that were ordinarily above or below the visible spectrum. He simply surveyed the surroundings utilizing light which the unaided eye did not ordinarily register.

Military and naval observers have used the same system. Painted surfaces may be made to look like stone, or trees, or water, to the unaided eye. But such surfaces do not have the same reflecting quality for invisible light wave lengths.

Doc located two large boulders which were canvas or metal over a frame, painted to resemble stone. They were so cleverly done that he had some difficulty locating them with the naked eye, even after his device selected them.

He marked their position carefully.

Before he left the tree, he saw something else. Far ahead, a file of men, crossing a ridge.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom were in the file, prisoners.

Doc Savage made again, very briefly as usual, his trilling. But now, it had a brisk, urgent quality of enraged grimness.

He dropped quickly out of the tree.

Very cautiously, he moved forward—until he reached the edge of a small glade. From it, the nearer of the camouflaged stone sentry huts—which they undoubtedly were—could be seen.

The bronze man began to do some rather peculiar things. He felt through his pockets and brought out one of the silk cords with a grappling hook affixed to the end. He measured this off, almost absent-mindedly, it seemed, and his flake gold eyes surveyed the vicinity. The cord did not appear to be long enough for his needs.

He removed the prisoner's rather long coat, and with a knife, began to cut it into thin strips and tie the strips together in a long line.

When Doc had the longest line possible, he tied one end of it to a bush which was visible from the camouflaged huts.

Next, Doc removed his coat and vest. This disclosed an article of clothing, or utility, which he always wore. It was a vest. The underside was a bullet-proof chain mail of great thinness

but surprising invulnerability. Attached to the mail was a layer of padded pockets, tiny containers which held, in total, an astounding variety of chemicals, gadgets and instruments.

Chemicals from two bottles, when mixed, became a bronze-colored mixture.

The prisoner still wore his hat. It was jammed tightly on his head. Doc removed the hat. He dyed the crown with the bronze.

He worked painstakingly, without any great attempt at haste.

It must have been nearly an hour later when there was a stir around one camouflaged sentry hut. Two men were located there, one inside, the other outside, crouching in a bush. It was possible to see better from the outside, and the watcher there had a pair of glasses with an extremely wide field.

The outside watcher stiffened. His glasses were fixed on the little valley below. He changed the focusing screw slightly.

He saw a bush sway. Behind it, he saw distinctly a bronze-colored object which resembled a face.

“Karl!” the watcher exploded. “Directly below! You see it?”

There was a gasp inside the little hut.

“I see him! Quick! Signal! Give directions!”

The man outside stood up quickly. His arms waved. It was much the same kind of gesturing with which a herder would direct his sheep dog.

Down in the valley, the leaves stopped moving in the breeze. A bird flying suddenly became rigid and motionless in the air, then sank slowly earthward.

The man watching, who had just signaled, wet his lips. For a moment, he looked somewhat frightened at what he had caused.

“Better send it up and down the valley a little!” suggested the voice inside. “We don’t want to take any chances this time!”

The man waved his arms, transmitting that signal.

The area where the leaves did not move became larger. Some small animal screeched awfully, and was silent.

It was very quiet for a while.

“That should have done it,” the man said hoarsely.

“Righto!”

The fellow outside waved his arms briefly. The wind began to stir the leaves. The bird, which had fallen part of the way to earth, fell the rest of the way naturally, and knocked off feathers on the branches of a tree when it hit.

A man came out of the camouflaged hut. He looked at the other.

“Let’s see,” he said.

Two men came out of the hut on the distant prominence. They exchanged signals. Then all four worked down and met on the floor of the valley. They had revolvers ready, and crept toward the spot where the stirring bush had been seen. They reached the spot. All four swore softly.

“Tricked!” one snarled.

They had discovered the bronze-dyed hat which resembled, from a distance, a face. Also, the bush with the string tied to it.

They lunged forward, following the string. A hundred feet. Almost another hundred.

“Look!”

Fear dropped off their faces. Big grins came.

“What a break for us!” one breathed.

They had come upon a giant bronze figure lying on the ground. The form was quite motionless, the unusually regular features composed.

One of them picked up a metallic wrist, held it carelessly at first, then with a surprised clutch.

“Alive!” the fellow exploded. “It’s unbelievable! He wasn’t entirely killed!”

The others seemed equally startled.

“If we hadn’t covered a wider swath than at first, we wouldn’t have got him at all,” a man explained. “He was trying to work that moving bush trick to see what would happen. But he was caught when we took no chances and spread the effects.”

“What’re we gonna do with him?”

“Finish him off.”

“Wait a minute! I think we’d get quite an effect if we carried him in and let His Highness have a look at him.”

That seemed to be an idea that they all thought was good. The men picked up the motionless bronze form and carried it toward the north.

Chapter XVI

LAIR

Monk and Ham did some of their quarreling to take their minds off more sinister things, it was to be suspected. Ham had started it off this time by suggesting to their captors that they go ahead and shoot Habeas, the hog.

Monk probably knew that this, if anything, would make them less likely to shoot Habeas. But he did not show that he harbored any such idea.

“You tort!” he howled at Ham. Then he addressed their captors: “When you guys get ready to eliminate this shyster, let me do the job. Then I’ll let you shoot me. I’ll do it happily! Only let me have this Harvard lawyer!”

The captors looked somewhat surprised. Monk was registering such fierceness that most of them promptly believed he actually did want to slaughter Ham.

“Yes, give him a chance at me!” Ham gritted. “I’ll turn him hairy side in!”

“Yeah? You’ll need a horse when I get through.”

“Horse?”

“Yeah. To ride around on lookin’ for your head!”

Ham sneered. “I’ll reduce your size until your handkerchief will make two bed sheets when you——”

“If you can’t at least think of somethin’ halfway bright to insult each other with, cut it out!” Long Tom snapped.

“Yumpin’ Yiminy!” said Captain Cutting Wizer. “Ay have never seen two such yiggers!”

The small group had been moving along the shore of the lake. They had kept close to the water. The beach was either solid rock or big pebbles which would not take tracks. Now they turned away from the water.

They crossed an expanse of solid rock, and entered a crack which terminated in what seemed to be the mouth of a den of some kind.

“What’s that?” Monk demanded suspiciously.

“Yust a place var you go in,” said Captain Wizer. “Go on.”

Monk apparently saw no reason why he should not enter. But a moment after he had stooped and gone in, he seemed to find a reason. His howl did everything but make the earth shake. He came flying out of the hole, minus some skin which he had left en route.

“Blazes!” he squalled. “Blazes!”

“What is it, you clown?” Ham snapped.

“Ay forgot to tell you dot Moe vars harmless,” said Captain Wizer.

Monk cocked a thumb at the hole. “Is that Moe in there?”

“Moe. Sure. He’s a ba’ar.”

“I know a bear when I see one!” Monk replied.

“Dot ba’ar Moe likes beer,” Wizer explained. “He is tame ba’ar.”

“Listen,” Monk said. “I drink beer occasionally, and if it’s all the same, let’s let Ham go in first.”

“You missing link!” Ham yelled.

“Ay go vorst,” said Captain Wizer, settling that.

Moe seemed tame in a doubtful way as the party worked past him. He burped in a friendly fashion, but he also lathered long teeth with his tongue.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom were taken into the fantastic crack in the stone in the same manner in which Pat Savage had entered.

Immediately, they heard the same steady sound that Pat had heard: a strange orchestration that was like several violins, each with one high string being sawed steadily.

Long Tom frowned, listening. "That noise! Say, I'll bet it is——"

He looked at his captors and fell silent.

"Ay wouldn't know too much if Ay vars you," said Captain Wizer.

Monk and Ham exchanged looks. They didn't know what the sound was. While it was plainly perceptible down here, it was not loud enough to be heard at any distance, which accounted for its escaping their notice outside.

"Was Pat brought to this place?" Monk demanded.

"Pat vars de pretty gal?" Captain Wizer asked.

"You know who Pat is, you comic-talking, octopus-eyed old duffer!" Monk retorted.

"Ay don't like your yumpin' on me," said Captain Wizer.

"Ay don't—I don't like bein' here!" yelled Monk, not unreasonably.

"Shut up, you man-toad!" Ham grated. "You'll get us all shot right away!"

There was some sense in that, Monk realized. He held his tongue while they were escorted toward a region where a number of boulders lay on the floor of the crack.

Men were moving about. They were quiet, grim men, and they seemed to have something resembling a fanatical determination on their faces. They all wore the same rig: gaberdine coats and white fur hats. Some of them had beards. The ones with the beards seemed to be the leaders, although this was not always the case.

Pat Savage appeared around one of the rocks. She was accompanied by Viscount Herschel Penroff, whom Monk had not seen lately, and who must have hurried on ahead. There were some other men.

"Pat!" Monk exclaimed joyfully.

Pat looked Monk and the other two bronze man's aids over without particular expression. Her shapely lips took on a strange twist. But what struck them was that she did not seem particularly overjoyed to see them.

"Pat!" Monk exclaimed. "What's wrong?"

Pat's eyebrows lifted. Those eyebrows had been envied by many a movie queen, and they were real.

"Take them away," she said. "His Highness will decide what is to be done with them. That will depend on whether Doc Savage is taken or not."

If Monk had been at all susceptible to heart failure, he would have had it then.

"Pat!" he gasped. "What kind of crazy talk is that?"

"Ay yust hate to tell you," said Captain Wizer, "but de yong lady had decided to yoin us."

Monk goggled unbelievably.

"Pull in your eyes," Pat told him callously. "I have found out what this is all about, and it appeals to me." Her voice lifted slightly, became more excited. "This is the biggest thing that ever happened! Those on the inside will have power such as no one ever dreamed of. It's too good to pass up."

Monk swallowed several times.

"I'll be danged!" he said hoarsely.

“Take them away,” Pat directed. “Place their pets somewhere so that they can’t cause trouble.” Then as an afterthought she said archly, “His Highness is quite nice.”

Monk could not get another word out until they were incarcerated in a hollow boulder which apparently was going to serve as a prison. The boulder was really an affair of stout timbers with colored papier-mâché. The door had a long slit through which they could breathe and look out.

“Pat!” Monk said hollowly at last. “Pat would do a thing like that!”

“Don’t start talking about it!” Ham snapped.

“Yes,” Long Tom echoed. “Look here, let’s pool our ideas on what is going on here.”

Monk nodded. “First, I don’t believe that tale Ky Halloc told us about invisible monsters from the sky. I didn’t believe it from the first.”

“You’re probably lying,” Ham said. “But I don’t believe it now, either.”

“The men on that dirigible were Americans,” Monk said, ignoring the insult. “But these lads in this crack, while they speak fair English, are foreigners. And not Mongolians, either.”

“They’re all one nationality,” Long Tom agreed.

“All right,” Monk said. “The fellows on the dirigible were Americans because they were the New York gang. These others are probably the main guys. Therefore, it is a foreign plot.”

“Oh, darn!” Ham snapped. “What does that childish conclusion prove?”

“I’m going to see what a fist on you will prove in a minute,” Monk told him. “What I’m getting at is that these birds are all white men, if they are foreigners. They are well educated, and the leaders are all elderly fellows. I should judge none of the leaders are under forty. The younger men are of the same nationality, but are not the leaders. Now——”

Long Tom said, “Look!”

He was at the crack. The others crowded to look, also.

Four men were entering via the secret way. They carried a crude litter made of two poles and their coats.

On the litter lay a bronze form.

“Doc!” Monk croaked.

Chapter XVII

THE TRICK THAT DIDN'T WORK

A great hubbub of shouting arose, and men ran from all directions, coming from up and down the floor of the stone crack.

By the time the litter had been carried to a spot a score of feet from where Monk, Ham and Long Tom were incarcerated—a gesture of sadistic cruelty, that—there was a crowd around.

Ky Halloc had appeared from somewhere. With him were Viscount Penroff, Captain Wizer, and Pat. They inspected the bronze man. Viscount Penroff bent over the metallic form.

“He is not dead, you say?” he demanded.

“Only stunned, sir,” said one of the quartet who had carried the litter. He also saluted.

“He sure one tough yigger,” said Captain Wizer.

Viscount Penroff ordered, “Get back, some of you, and keep your guns pointed at him.”

This was done, after which Penroff had courage enough to bend closer to the bronze figure and examine the clothing. Captain Wizer also looked closely.

“Vot de ha'al is dot dufunny he's got around his middle?” Wizer demanded.

“It's a carry-all vest of some kind,” one of the men explained.

“Ay be son of gun,” said Wizer. “He vars sure loaded for ba'ar.”

Viscount Penroff suddenly began poking at the bronze face with a stiff forefinger. He emitted a shocked wail.

“Something's wrongsky!” he shouted, in his excitement tacking on a trace of his mother tongue accent.

Captain Wizer bent closer and peered.

“Oll Ay can say is Ay'll be yiggered!” he declared.

Penroff's poking finger had disarranged part of the unconscious victim's nose. The nose had been a remarkably straight and handsome one. But with the dislodging of the bit of plastic, theatrical mold, the nose was not as straight.

Penroff suddenly peeled the senseless man's eyelids back.

“Damnation!” Penroff snarled. “This isn't Savage!”

The eyes were not flake gold.

Penroff wrung his hands in his rage. His lashing eyes fell on the unlucky four who had brought the stretcher burden.

“Shoot those four men immediately!” Penroff yelled.

That caused a brief, but violent fight. The four did not want to be shot, and tried to unlimber their guns. They were swarmed over, however, flattened out and held. Penroff was yelling and cursing now, and it looked as if the four would be shot on the spot.

“Wait a minute,” Pat Savage suggested calmly. “Suppose you use your head.”

Penroff stopped emoting. “What do you mean?”

“Doc was always a man who had a lot of enemies,” Pat said. “It is really remarkable that he has lived this long.”

“What has that got to do with it?”

“Suppose,” Pat said, “that Doc was never the bronze man he appeared to be. You must admit that big bronze characterization stands out in a crowd. Almost any enemy would

recognize him instantly. Think what it would mean if he was never really this bronze man? Suppose he was a totally different individual?"

Penroff rubbed his jaw. The idea plainly intrigued him. He probably thought it would explain a lot of his own difficulties with Doc Savage.

"But the eyes?" he demanded.

"Simple," said Pat. "Glass caps of a kind that fit right on the eyeballs. You know that some spectacles have been made that way. Almost impossible to detect."

"Oh!" exclaimed Captain Wizer. "Ay always thought he vars a queer-lookin' Yohnny."

"This is really Savage, then!" Penroff chortled.

That appeared to settle that. The senseless prisoner was lifted, and placed in the lock-up with Monk, Ham and Long Tom. The door was then closed, and two men with automatic rifles took up a guarding position.

The door did not have a lock, so they did not stand close, but some distance away, where they would have a chance to use their guns on anybody who tried to get out.

Ky Halloc had a last word for the prisoners.

"You bright lads are not going to live another hour," he said, through the crack in the door.

Monk tried to expectorate on him, but did not quite succeed.

"So you were a dirty crook after all," the homely chemist said. "I kinda felt sure of it all along."

"Ha, ha, don't make me laugh!" Halloc retorted. "I had you fooled right along!"

"What are you murderers up to?" Monk asked.

"You'll probably never find out!" grinned Halloc.

Monk said, "When you die, your spirit had better have on his runnin' shoes. Because we're gonna chase 'im around somethin' scandalous on the other side."

Ky Halloc skipped off looking very happy.

"What gripes me in particular," Monk complained, "is that jacksnipe gettin' away with it."

Ham, who had been examining their bronze companion, spoke up.

"Shut up, you anthropoid, and look at this fellow," the lawyer suggested. "Who is he?"

"He ain't Doc?"

"Not by a darn sight! But Doc made him up with this skin dye and plastic mold. Nobody but Doc can do work like that around here."

Monk scrutinized the senseless form more closely. "I think he's one of their own men. And look here! There ain't nothin' wrong with 'im except that paralysis Doc makes with a pressure on the nerve centers."

Long Tom suddenly began to laugh softly.

"You goop!" Ham said. "There's nothing funny in this. They're going to shoot us!"

"Pat!" Long Tom chortled. "Don't you get it? She's stringing 'em along. She knew very well this wasn't Doc. Remember how slick she steered 'em around to thinking it was Doc when they found the face make-up?"

Monk grinned widely.

"Pat," he said, "sure has a lot of Doc's qualities."

Ham, who had taken another look through the crack, said grimly, "And we're going to need some qualities that'll make us bulletproof. Here they come!"

Their captors had apparently made up their minds that they were not going to fool around any more. There was a dozen or more of them in the party, all armed. Pat and Viscount

Penroff led the crowd and Captain Wizer brought up the rear. There was no sign of Ky Halloc.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom were permitted to look into gun muzzles, and invited outside. They accepted, there being nothing else to do.

“His Highness will speak a few words to you, then you will be shot,” Viscount Penroff advised them.

“Yah,” said Captain Wizer. “Ay guess he wants to bless you and send you on your way happy.”

The three prisoners were marched toward the north end of the canyon. It was from this direction that the small, weird orchestration that might have been several fiddles came so steadily.

Habeas, the pig, and Chemistry, the what-is-it, appeared and followed their respective masters joyfully.

“Ay just made up my mind to have de hog for breakfast,” said Captain Wizer.

Monk growled, “Did you know that an animal can be fed poison in amounts so small that it won’t hurt him, but his flesh will gradually become impregnated with the poison until he will kill anything that eats part of him?”

“Dot’s a ha’al of a yoke!” snorted Captain Wizer.

“I hope you keep on thinking so,” Monk said.

Ham looked startled. “Is Habeas like that?”

“Yeah,” Monk growled. “I didn’t know but what you might make bacon out of him some day, and I had him all ready for you.”

Doc’s aids rounded an angle in the stone crack, and used their eyes. They expected to see what was causing the whining orchestration.

They were thwarted. There was just an ordinary-looking canyon ahead. Whatever was making the noise was evidently hidden in rooms cut in the rock sides of the crack.

“There’s been a lot of work put in on this place,” Monk muttered.

“Veil, ve has been vorkin’ like ha’al ha’ar for two year,” said Captain Wizer.

The prisoners were escorted to a door in the rock. From a distance—the rim of the rocky crack, for instance—it would be hard to see the door. There was a room of some size beyond. This was poorly lighted by two oil lanterns. The place was empty.

There was a door at the opposite end. A curtain hung in front of this door, or rather, two men were standing there holding it up with their arms.

Monk looked at the curtain. He could not understand, at first, why it was there.

He knew the reason, though, when a voice came from behind the curtain. The speaker did not want to be seen.

“Tie them and place them in the middle of the floor,” said the voice. “Put them on the cross mark. The machines are aligned at the cross mark, and the men will die there. We wish to make further scientific observations of the death process.”

There was something familiar about the voice, although whoever was talking made it hoarse and snarling. Monk decided it must be familiar because it was the same voice which had threatened Doc in New York City, back near the beginning of the affair.

The prisoners were dragged to a chalked cross on the floor. Some one produced a rope.

Pat took her gigantic single-action six-shooter out of her frock and pointed it at the curtain, then at the man with the rope.

“I was afraid it would come to this,” she said.

Some one wore a wrist watch which ran with a loud clicking. They could all hear it in the silence which followed. It seemed to be racing to keep time with some hearts.

“Careful!” Pat said.

The voice behind the curtain, the voice of the fellow who didn’t want to be seen, snarled. “So you are double-crossing me!”

“If you thought I would do anything else, you were a sucker,” Pat said.

“You will regret this!”

“You might as well drop that curtain,” Pat said. “You let me know a long time ago who you are!”

“Who is it?” Monk exploded.

“That’s His Highness behind that curtain,” Pat said sarcastically. Then, at the curtain: “Come on! Drop it!”

The curtain remained up.

Pat said, “I’m going to start shooting holes in that thing in a minute! Lower it!”

The voice behind the curtain said, “I wasn’t a sucker, young lady!”

Pat rapped, “You hurry and lower that——”

“I figured you would double-cross me!” chuckled His Highness. “So I had the powder taken out of the shells for that cannon you pack!”

Pat promptly pulled the trigger of her six-shooter. It made about the same noise as a mousetrap when the hammer fell, but nothing else happened.

“You see, I overlook no bets,” said His Highness.

Captain Wizer yelled, “Yah, but you did!”

Captain Wizer jumping quickly, grabbed an automatic from one of the men. He pointed this at almost everybody.

“Ay had a bellyful of de shebang for long tam!” he shouted.

“You fool!” screamed the man behind the curtain. “You are in this too deep to back out!”

“Oll Ay can say is Ay’m gonna try!” said Wizer.

“You old dear!” Pat exclaimed. “I didn’t think you were bad.”

“Ay been played for a sucker,” Wizer growled. “Vell, dem yiggers ain’t gonna drop de curtain, so——”

He pointed the gun at the curtain. He was going to start shooting. The man behind the curtain knew it, and so did the two holding up the drape.

As one man, they yelled, whirled and dived for the door behind the curtain.

Monk could not make out the identity of His Highness. Men’s backs look pretty much alike when they move fast enough.

Captain Wizer shot. He did not stop any one.

The shot acted like a starting gun. Monk had a hunch it would. He jumped and came down with both feet on one of the two oil lanterns that furnished light. Ham, teamworking perfectly, jumped at the other lantern, got it out.

It became satisfyingly dark.

Long Tom dived, had luck, and got a gun from some one. He shot at the ceiling for effect. Other guns went off.

“Run like ha’al!” yelled Captain Wizer. “Ay show you var!”

It sounded like an excellent idea. They raced out of the room, gaining the outer sunlight. Monk was first out. He watched. Captain Wizer, Pat, Ham and Long Tom appeared. Behind

them came the pets. Captain Wizer set out up the canyon. Every one followed him.

Long Tom did an excellent job of running backward, and when a man jumped out of the rock wall after them, the electrical wizard fired quickly. The gunman bleated and lost interest in everything but the bullet hole in his shoulder.

The whining noise got louder, and Captain Wizer turned sharply to the left, rounded a rocky promontory, and dived into a rock door which was open.

“Yump in ha’ar!” he shouted.

The others jumped, but Monk stopped outside and peered at the face of the cliff. There was a silk line hanging down the face of the cliff. It stirred slightly in the breeze.

Monk jumped into the hole after the others.

He promptly fell over two senseless men whom he had never seen before, but who wore the gaberdine-coat-and-fur-cap uniform.

Captain Wizer and the others were staring at the senseless men.

“Vot in ha’al done happen to dem yiggers?” Wizer shouted.

“Who are they?” Monk asked.

“Guards,” retorted Wizer. “Ay vonder vot beat us to dem?”

Monk thought the silk cord hanging down the cliff face gave him a good idea of who was responsible.

Chapter XVIII

INERTIA

Captain Wizer wasted no time, but ran on, and clattered up a stone stairs. The whining noise was extremely loud now. Monk knew machinery must be making it.

The group entered a long room which held more machinery than Monk had ever seen in such a small space before, unless it was aboard a submarine.

Captain Wizer caught a flash of movement near the rear, gasped, and lifted his gun. Monk leaped, grabbed the gun arm and forced it down.

“Not that you would have hit him!” Monk said.

The individual Wizer had seen, and who had prudently taken shelter behind a huge iron generator until he could be identified, appeared again.

“Doc!” Ham yelled. “How’d you get here?”

Monk explained that. “Down the cliff, with one of them silk cords.”

The machinery was running, and making the noise. Looking around, Monk found two unconscious men lying on the floor. The fact that they were victims of Doc’s unique paralysis indicated the bronze man had taken them.

Doc Savage came up.

“You took too much of a chance, making a break for it,” he said. “It was not necessary.”

Monk exploded, “Huh—what—why should we——”

The bronze man advised, “Get into the back of the room, here. It will be safe.”

Doc then went to what seemed to be a control position of some kind. At least, it was surrounded by switches, small wheels and many dials. He began to make adjustments.

Captain Wizer came up and looked over Doc’s shoulder.

Doc said, “This thing is somewhat complicated, but the theory of gyroscopic interatomic behavior is almost perfectly worked out.”

Captain Wizer blinked two or three times.

“You bane figger it out already?”

Doc said, “Only to a partial extent.”

“Ay be yiggered!” said Wizer. “Ay not figger anybody could see how it vorked in less than a veek or two of study.”

Monk was looking around. He had observed, stacked in the rear of the room, a number of boxes equipped with carrying straps. He started fumbling with one of these.

“Better not,” Doc called.

“Eh?”

“They are portable transmitters to set up complicated opposed magnetic fields in narrow panels to accelerate the inherent interatomic stability ratio of matter. Not understanding them, you might damage yourself or us.”

“Well, what they do sounds bad enough, even if I don’t know exactly what it means,” Monk said, and left them alone.

“Ay turn it on,” said Captain Wizer.

He threw a lever. Then he grasped the wheels, and began to turn them, and to move rheostat knobs and throw switches.

“Ay could stop a battleship in her tracks vith dis ha’ar thing,” he said.

Doc Savage said, "Cut down the strength as much as possible."

Captain Wizer looked at the bronze man in amazement.

"You tank Ay am goin' to let dem yiggers get away with vat dey have tried?" he demanded.

Doc Savage did not answer that. He reached forward, grasped a rheostat and moved it.

Wizer sighed. "Ay vasn't goin' to be tender-hearted."

Monk, beside himself with curiosity, squeaked, "Hey, what's that thing doing?"

Doc Savage asked quietly, "Do you know what inertia is?"

"Sure," Monk retorted. "When you start your car, it's harder to get it started moving than it is to keep it going. The thing that makes it want to stand still. That's inertia."

"But exactly, what is inertia?"

"Why, it's—well—heck! I read a scientific theory once that——"

"Oll scientific theories vars crazy!" exclaimed Captain Wizer. "Ay bane find de truth!"

Doc Savage took up the explanation. "Captain Wizer has discovered that inertia is the result of a gyroscopic effect arising out of the orbits of electrons inside the atoms that compose the molecules that make up all matter. This gyroscopic stability, or reluctance to change, can be greatly enhanced by a certain electromagnetic field. In other words, the force of inertia can be instantaneously increased to such an extent that nothing will move."

Monk thought of something. "But inertia is also the thing that keeps the car rolling after the power is cut off."

Captain Wizer was working with the levers. Apparently, his apparatus was not functioning properly.

"Inertia bane have not'in' to do vith prolongation of motion," he said. "Dat vars yust some yigger's bum idea."

"It's a scientific theory."

"Yah. Who make scientific theories? Yust Yohnnys like me."

Wizer gave more attention to what he was doing. He began to look worried.

"Ay afraid ve're in a ha'al of a shape!" he shouted suddenly.

Doc said, "It seemed to me that something was missing."

"She von't vork!" yelled Captain Wizer. "Dem fellers took away a leetle tube vich ve can't get along vitout!"

A bullet came through the door. It made an ugly whistling and hammering through the machinery.

Doc Savage sprang to the cases which Monk had been examining. He began opening them. One, a second, a third, a fourth.

"Inertia," Monk muttered. "Increase inertia by magnetic fields. That means all motion stops in the area. Even the air that conducts sound waves would quit moving. And gravity would still exert a force, and things would gradually sink to the ground. Daggone! That explains everything that has happened!"

Doc Savage said abruptly, "Look here, Wizer!"

Captain Wizer came over, looked at the portable devices for setting up electromagnetic fields, and his eyes got bigger than ever behind his thick spectacles.

"Yee!" he said. "Ve in a yam!"

"What does he mean?" Monk demanded.

“Our enemies took no chances with these machines,” Doc said. “They removed a small vacuum exciter tube from each device. The tube is no larger than your finger, but it is vitally necessary, and without it, the devices are useless.”

Long Tom waved his pistol. “There seems to be only that one door. We can hold the place against them.”

“Yah!” Captain Wizer jerked a finger upward. “She bane fix to blow oop!”

“What?”

“Dynamite. A mine. Dey figger maybe somebody vould find de place, in vich case dey blow her up.”

It took a minute to get the full effect of that. Not only were they besieged without arms, or at least with only two pistols and the shells they held, but they were under a mined area of the cliff.

A voice called from outside. The harsh, disguised voice of the one known as His Highness.

“Wizer knows that we have explosive planted,” he said. “You have no choice but to come out.”

Monk growled, “Fat lot of good it’d do us to come out. Me, I’d as soon be both dead and buried at the same time.” He did not speak loud enough to be heard outside.

Doc called, “Give us a moment to think it over.”

There was a pause. “We are not going to waste much time on you,” the voice called.

Captain Wizer yanked his own hair in his anxiety. “Yee!” he said. “Ve sure bane fixed!”

Monk demanded, “You developed these contraptions?”

“Yah.” Captain Wizer nodded vehemently. “Ay am vorkin’ on electromagnetic germ eradication, and Ay vind dis other by accident.”

“But how did the rest of this come about?” Monk queried.

Wizer shrugged. “Ay am yust a poor yigger. Ay vent to a banker, dot Viscount Herschel Penroff. He ask me questions. He vars werry interested. He put up de money.”

Wizer shrugged again and looked disgusted.

“Too late, Ay find out vot vars planned,” he growled. “Penroff vars old Russian aristocrat. De yigger had a lot of other Russians, and dey vars goin’ to overthrow the Soviets.”

“What?” Monk exploded.

“Yah.” Wizer nodded. “It vars ambitious idea.”

Monk digested that with his mouth open. Penroff was a Russian, and so were many of the others. So they were an organization of revolutionists!

Pat Savage put in grimly, “I wouldn’t call it a revolution. That devil they call His Highness told me what he really planned. He was the real leader. Penroff was only a lieutenant and financier. He was their bank roll.”

“What was behind it, Pat?”

“Robbery, Monk. Nothing less. They were going to seize the Soviet republic and set up a puppet empire, then loot the public. Take all the taxes they could raise. Then they would do the same with other countries. Oh, it was big. And they would have made it, too. That inertia machine makes all modern weapons worthless.”

The voice of His Highness roared from outside. “Well, what are you going to do?”

Doc Savage moved toward the opening. The bronze man showed no particular hurry or excitement.

He had taken from within his clothing a small box of a device that might have been one of the so-called candid cameras, although a bit larger, and with a lens that looked black. There were small switches and dials on this.

“They’ll start shooting the minute they see you, Doc!” Monk warned.

The bronze man seemed not to hear. He was careful, however, when he came near the door, and stood inside a few seconds, apparently searching the floor of the canyon outside.

“Get ready to get into the open,” he warned.

He lifted the cameralike device to an eye, sighted exactly as if he were going to take a picture, and pressed a button.

Out in the stone crack, there was a crash and a terrific roar. The stone room in which they stood shook, and great cracks appeared in the walls and ceiling.

“Out!” Doc rapped.

The bronze man went out ahead of the others, still holding the device. He pointed it at another spot, and pressed the button again.

The results were exactly as if an artillery shell had hit and exploded. Flame spouted. Rock jumped upward. The roar was earsplitting. And when dust cleared, there was a gaping hole.

The enemy had positioned themselves at a distance from the door, not wanting to be too close to hostilities if the bronze man tried a break.

Some of them were running.

With his instrument—a powerful atomic gun—Doc caused two more terrific explosions. The last one was almost in front of a small group manning a machine gun. Most of them were knocked off their feet. None of them were seriously injured, for they all got up and ran.

The force of the blasts had thrown up a great deal of dust-fine shattered rock and this obscured vision somewhat. Through it, the men ran wildly. Penroff, in charge of a small group, stood his ground until a blast tumbled them, after which that party also fled.

Doc and his group were fired upon. That was to be expected. But they took shelter in the holes which the earlier explosions had made.

The routed enemy were pouring into the tunnel that led to the outer world. But there seemed to be a hitch. They jammed up in the tunnel. Cursed, shouted. A number could not even get in.

Monk took a chance, sprinted, and reached the machine gun, which had been upset on its tripod but not otherwise damaged. He got the gun upright, straightened out the ammo belt, and turned loose.

It was to Monk’s credit that he fired his first burst above the men fighting about the tunnel mouth.

The burst of lead was more potent than words. Arms went up. Guns were thrown down.

Doc, Ham and Long Tom ran forward, alert. They gathered up more of the fallen guns.

A single threat to blow up the tunnel brought those inside scuttling out. Only one tried to use his gun, and Long Tom shattered the man’s arm before he did any damage.

When they had disarmed the prisoners, Doc lined them against a stone wall. His flake gold eyes searched for Viscount Herschel Penroff. He was not present.

“Where are your chiefs?” the bronze man demanded.

A man swore bitterly.

“They reached the tunnel car first and fled,” he said. “That is why the rest of us could not escape.”

Doc Savage went into the tunnel and listened. There was no sound. That was proof enough that the car had reached the other end.

Monk lumbered into the passage. “They get away?”

“We’ll follow them,” Doc said quietly.

The bronze man dropped into the shaftway. There was an assortment of cables on which the bucketlike car operated, but no track. Probably there were wheels or rollers on the sides of the bucket.

The reason for such a conveyance was speedily evident. The route was straight down for some distance, then turned sharply and ran level.

Doc and Monk had reached this turn when they were abruptly upset. It was as if a giant had suddenly blown his breath at them. Immediately following was a booming roar, then some dust.

“Grenade or something!” Monk gulped. “They closed the shaft!”

The group scrambled ahead, holding their breath in the dust, and soon knew Monk had guessed rightly. There was no way they could get through without hours of work.

Nor was there, they discovered when they returned to the big rock crack, any simple method of getting out any other way. The walls were sheer. This was no water-made aperture in the earth, but the crack made by some earthquake long ago.

“Ay sure hope it don’t take a notion to rain,” Wizer muttered.

“But how did rainwater get out before?” Long Tom asked him.

“Through de tunnel,” the old scientist replied.

Doc Savage immediately set the prisoners to work cutting handholds in the sheer stone walls in an effort to get outside.

There were plenty of tools, they discovered, for the room where the generators—generators and motors made the violinlike orchestration—were installed was also the workshop where the inertia-increasers, as Monk started calling them, were built.

When the steps got up high, and the other workmen became afraid, Doc and Monk took turns at chiseling the handholds.

In the meantime, old Captain Wizer disconnected the firing mechanism of the mine over the workroom. He had, he explained, witnessed the installation of the mine.

Wizer explained further that he had been unaware of the purpose for which his machines were intended until he had discovered he was to build much larger outfits than were necessary, to serve as demonstrators.

From the first, he admitted, it had been planned to sell the devices to various governments. Not to any one government, but to all who would pay a moderate price. That, at least, had been his plan.

It would have stopped war, he maintained. His ideas on that subject had not changed a great deal. He still maintained that the devices, since they would keep airplanes from bombing cities—it was only necessary to throw up a protective wall—would stop wars.

Wizer found, at the other end of the canyon, a hidden box containing the missing gadgets so essential to the operation of his contrivances.

By now, the ladder of chiseled steps was very near the top. Monk, working his shift, had only a few feet to go.

Doc listened to Captain Wizer expound his ideas about his machines stopping war.

“Did you stop to think about human nature, and especially the nature of some of the present military leaders in Europe?” Doc asked.

“Ay don’t tank a ha’al of a lot ’bout it,” Wizer admitted.

“When your devices were handed over to these governments, there would be an immediate wild rush on the part of one or two to build thousands of the things, then seize their neighbors before the latter could get prepared,” the bronze man suggested.

Wizer scratched his head while he thought that over.

“Yah,” he said. “Ay bat you’re right.”

He scratched his head some more. “But vot ve gonna do vith dem?”

“You are American, aren’t you?”

“Yah. Ay ban Minnesota Svede. Ay tank my old man must have ban a horse t’ief and change his name.”

“The American war department has an archive where they keep some things that are a little too terrible to let the rest of the world know about,” Doc said. “Poison gasses of particular frightful variety. That kind of thing. How about adding these inertia-increasers to the collection, unless we find they are of some surgical value, which is hardly likely?”

Wizer scratched his head again.

“A very good idea, by Yiminy!” he said.

Doc glanced up at the cliff. Monk was not on the line of chiseled steps. The bronze man whipped a glance at the bottom of the cliff. Monk was not there, either.

The homely chemist had reached the top and gone over.

Doc ran to the steps and climbed. Wizer followed him.

They heard yells when they approached the shore of the lake where the mouth of the tunnel was situated. They were the lusty yells which squeaky-voiced Monk could emit when he was in trouble.

“Help!” Monk howled. “Bring a gun, somebody!”

Doc began running. Wizer, for an old man, showed amazing speed, and kept up.

“He ban found dot Halloc yigger, Ay bat!” Wizer gasped.

Doc said nothing.

“Halloc vars big man behind de vorks,” Wizer added. “Did you know that?”

“Yes,” Doc Savage said. “Halloc tried repeatedly to trap us. He thought he had me believing he was a secret agent for the Soviet government, assigned to tracking down you and Penroff. He even permitted me to find credentials on him identifying him as a U.S.S.R. agent—a high Ogpu official, in fact.”

“How you bane check on him?” Wizer puffed. “The Ogpu don’t tell anybody where their agents vars and ain’t.”

“Fortunately, I have a connection with them,” Doc replied. “Did them a favor once, and they reciprocate when they can. They explained that they had no Ky Halloc agent, and further, knew nothing about the plans of Penroff or you. They had no suspicions. That gave Halloc away. I let him play along because, by following him, we were eventually led to the headquarters.”

Wizer gasped, “Ay guess you have done dem Ogpu another favor!”

Then his breath and strength gave out and he dropped behind.

“Help!” Monk was yelling ahead. “Shoot this critter!”

Monk was up a tree. Not, it appeared, nearly as large a tree as he would have preferred to be up.

Moe, the bear, was seated at the bottom of the tree. Monk's shouting had attracted Doc and Pat, who came running up.

Doc halted. Monk was in no immediate danger. Pat was smiling.

Wizer came up, and as soon as he could control his panting, yelled, "Moe bane a tame ba'ar!"

"Yeah, I know," Monk shouted. "And he likes beer. Pat told me all about him. But as far as I'm concerned, he's a wild bruin."

"Yah!" snorted Wizer. "Ay show you!"

He picked up a small stick, advanced, waved the stick and shouted, "Shoo! Shoo, you berry-eating animal. Shoo!"

Moe got up amiably and shuffled out of sight into the brush.

Monk slid out of the tree, but not very confidently. "Nobody can tell me that bear is a pet," he declared.

"Sure he bane pet," declared Wizer. "Moe vars eat out of my hand lots of time."

"You didn't set off any hand grenades around him first, did you?" Monk demanded.

"Huh? Why you bane ask such silly question?"

"Because," Monk said, "Halloc and Penroff are over there in Moe's den. I'll admit Moe didn't eat them. But he sure tasted them all over. They're plenty dead. Moe, your pet bear, killed Halloc and Penroff. Maybe Moe is tame, and the exploding grenade just riled him. But it'll be a hot day before Moe gets a chance to eat out of my hand."

[The end of *The Motion Menace* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]