







Then the smeared path continued on to the clothes lying on the ground.

"It goes right to Sam Sand's duds!" Reservoir Hill dropped to a knee, explored briefly, then gulped, "Vida!"

"What?" asked the girl.

"The gooey stuff is all over Sam's clothes!"

There was rustling of leaves and crackling of dry twigs in the red oak thicket near by. This sound proved to be made by two men, who soon galloped up.

Reservoir Hill used his weak flashlight to identify the newcomers.

"Ah-h-h!" he grunted. "Andershott and Cugg! Practically nobody!"

## Chapter II THE MAN NEEDED

ENOCH ANDERSHOTT was a man who strove for the effect of a rugged pioneer. He was big. His ruggedness stuck out all over him. His clothes were calculated to enhance the rugged aspect. Tweeds. He had a small mouth wrapped around a big cigar. His red face was redder because of running, and his breathing was a *wish-wish-wish* series of noises.

"Give me those guns!" he yelled. "Your bullets almost hit our cabin! Such carelessness is inexcusable!"

Which was typical of Enoch Andershott, who was always trying to browbeat some one.

Alonzo Cugg had big eyes with a permanent scare deep in them, and a way of holding his hands as if ready to sprint. No one knew of any reason why he had ever been scared of any one or why he should be. He seemed about one hundred and thirty pounds of skin over wires, and was about two shades lighter than a khaki shirt.

A big black dog came out of the red oak brush, making no noise. The dog was nearly pony size and had bloodshot eyes. The canine lifted a whiskered black lip off nicotine yellow fangs that were more than an inch long.

"Heel, Whitey!" ordered Enoch Andershott arrogantly.

The black dog skulked to Andershott's heels. There was no white whatever on the dog.

Enoch Andershott and Alonzo Cugg owned an adjacent oil lease. They had scouted the Sam Sands-Vida Carlaw-Reservoir Hill drilling wildcat and a geologist had told them that the way the strata was running, there might be an oil dome under this region, a few thousand feet under the old production. So Andershott and Cugg were here in person, keeping an eye on things.

The oil blue book listed both as millionaires.

"You might have shot us!" Enoch Andershott yelled.

"You got a cellar over there you can get in?" suggested Reservoir Hill sourly.

No one said anything for a while.

"What was happening?" Andershott growled.

"At risk of being called crazy," said the girl, "I'm going to tell you.

"Our driller, Ben Hogan, disappeared last night. We'd shut down drilling when a broken gear we'd ordered hadn't come. Ben Hogan took a walk. We never saw him again. We found his clothes. There's no reason why he should walk off naked—"

"You're forgetting that gummy stuff!" interposed Reservoir Hill.

"We found some stuff that looked like jelly or lube or something on the ground," explained the girl. "Tonight, Reservoir Hill wanted to post a watch at the well. Sam Sands had first part of the night."

THE girl fell silent, looked at the dog. The dog's eyes were luminous green and almost awful in the weak flashlight's glow.

"We came out to relieve Sam Sands, found his clothing, saw a red object going into the oil well, and shot at it," the girl finished.

"We found another gob of that gummy stuff and it ain't lube oil!" added Reservoir Hill.

Enoch Andershott asked, "Miss Carlaw, were you here last night when your driller disappeared?"

"No."

"Then you just have this man Reservoir Hill's word for it?"

"Bless my children!" growled Reservoir Hill. "I'm gonna pat your wrist for that!"

Reservoir Hill started forward, and the big black dog came walking, stiff-legged,





Reservoir Hill said, as he and Vida went back to their own lease, "Fine thanks, we got!"

The girl went into a tiny room that evidently served the Sands-Hill-Carlaw partnership as an office. There was an old country-style telephone beside the desk. She gave the hand ringer a crank.

"Get me Doc Savage, in New York City," she said into the mouthpiece.

"Viddy!" Reservoir Hill yelled. "What crazy thing you gonna do?"

"It has suddenly dawned on me that this mystery is serious!" the girl said, grimly. "I am going to get it solved!"

"Wait a minute!" Reservoir Hill yelled. "I don't think—"

"I want to talk to Doc Savage," the girl said into the telephone.

She listened for a time, then said, "That's unfortunate. I'm coming to New York. I have to see Doc Savage. You try to find him in the meantime."

She hung up.

"Well?" asked Reservoir Hill.

"I TALKED to a man named Monk, who said he was one of Doc Savage's assistants," the girl explained. "He said Doc Savage was not in New York, that he was off at some place called a 'Fortress of Solitude.'"

"That," grunted Reservoir Hill, "let's Doc Savage out!"

"It does nothing of the kind!" said the girl, firmly. "I'll stop off and tell Andershott and Cugg that I'm on my way to New York to get Doc Savage. It may make them more comfortable if they know that."

"But why the heck go all the way to New York yourself? Telephoning will do just as good!"

"There's another reason."

"Huh?"

"Money."

"Oh!" Reservoir Hill pursed his lips out in the manner of a man who understands perfectly.

The girl said, "We're drilling this wildcat well on borrowed money. It's been an expensive well. We've already sunk over fifty thousand dollars. Our oil properties here in the Indian Dome Field are mortgaged heavily. Unless we can borrow more money on them, we may be sunk before long."

"Don't tell me about it!" groaned Reservoir. "I recite it in my sleep!"

"There's money in New York," said the girl. "I'm going after it! And after Doc Savage!"

### Chapter III MURDER IN THE AIR

THE plane was a big, low-winged cabin job, and probably one of the fastest and most comfortable commercial types of airliner in the world. It was one of hundreds of such planes flying regular schedules on Uncle Sam's air lines.

The plane was an hour out of Cleveland, Ohio, bound eastward, and flying high. Pilot and co-pilot were taking it easy. The hostess, having noted that it appeared no one was going to be sick on this flight, had stopped to talk to the fellow who wore pince-nez glasses.

The fellow was a wiry chap with a plain blue suit and a bright necktie. His face had a deep tan, and it was this tan which had moved the hostess to stop and talk to him, to permit herself to be talked to was more like it.

The man looked like a city grifter, except for the deep tan. Tans like that did not come from sunlamps. The pince-nez glasses made him look more gentlemanly, too.

The man had been trying outrageously to flirt with the hostess, and she had ignored him until this point.

As she halted beside his seat, the hostess noticed that the fellow wore plain black gloves of a very rich-looking leather.

Privately, the hostess wondered why the fellow had not tried to flirt with the girl in the adjacent compartment. This girl was as pretty as any young woman the hostess had ever seen on a plane. That was something, because chorus girls and millionaire's cuties are frequent travelers by plane. The girl in the next compartment was preoccupied, as if she had something on her mind.

The hostess happened to know that this pretty girl was down on the passenger list as Vida Carlaw, of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The hostess immediately wished she hadn't stopped to let the wiry fellow with the black gloves speak to her.

"Listen, baby," said the man. "How about you and me going places and doing





glasses fell off. She collapsed, not all at once, but slowly, with every muscle rigid, her eyelids doing a fast flutter.

The man leaned across her, grasped the window and raised it. The window was large enough to jump out of.

The wiry man replaced his glasses on his nose, then crossed to his own compartment and got a big bundle. Two parachutes! He put one on the girl, the other on himself, and cinched the harness tight.

He scooped up the girl and it was plain what he intended to do—jump with her, and open her chute, then his own.

An unbroken fastness of wooded hills lay below, offering no landing place for the plane.

The man picked up the girl. Her eyes had opened.

“Tough, ain’t you?” the man snorted, and raised his blackjack.

Instead of striking, the wiry man emitted a scream so full of agony that it made every occupant in the plane jerk erect. His glasses fell off again.

A NEWCOMER had seized the wiry fellow. The appearance of this new arrival was striking. He might have been sculptured out of hard bronze. The contour of his features, his mobile and muscular mouth, his ample forehead, his lean cheeks denoted a power of character beyond the ordinary.

The bronze of his hair was a little darker than the bronze of his features. The hair was straight and fitted so close as to give the appearance of a metal skullcap.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of all was the bronze man’s eyes—like pools of flake gold, glittering when reflected light reached them, so that they seemed to exert a hypnotic influence.

The wiry man struggled with the bronze giant. He had no luck at all, for his Herculean captor demonstrated strength far beyond the ordinary. Muscles in the bronze hands, the forearms, and up and down the metallic neck, were like bundles of piano wire. The spectacles were stepped on and broken.

Vida Carlaw, conscious but weak, endeavored to maintain her balance as the plane gave a lurch, the pilot’s attention having been distracted by the fight.

Confusion now seized the plane. Screams of the wiry man had been so agonizing as to arouse pity. Several passengers rushed to his aid.

The co-pilot charged to help. He saw the giant holding the smaller man, and made a mistake. It was natural that, not knowing the facts, his sympathy should be with the little fellow.

The co-pilot drew a revolver which regulations prescribed that he carry, and jabbed it against the giant’s back.

“Get your hands off that man!”

The giant freed the wiry man. The fellow scampered toward the rear of the plane, parachute flopping against his shanks.

The co-pilot started to give the bronze giant his fiercest stare. Then he got a look at the big fellow, and his jaw sagged; his eyes popped, and he dropped his gun.

“Oh, slay me for an idiot!” he gulped. “Honest, I didn’t know who it was! Didn’t recognize—”

The bronze giant ignored the co-pilot’s apologies, and sprang toward the rear of the plane. The baggage hatch door was open to the sky.

The wiry man was floating under an open parachute behind the passenger airliner.

The bronze giant seemed capable of instantaneous decisions. He rushed back to Vida Carlaw.

“Equal to a parachute jump?”

Vida Carlaw made a smile with an effort.

“Anything,” she said, “to escape this ringing in my head!”

The bronze man nodded, then stooped, scooped tiny particles which glittered on the floor and dropped them into a pocket. The girl watched his actions without saying a word.

THE bronze man now whipped to the seat which he had been occupying and yanked open a bag. It held a parachute.

At this point the plane’s hostess suddenly realized this metallic giant was the mysterious fellow who had gotten aboard at Cleveland wearing tan combination coat, horn-rimmed glasses, and hat with brim yanked down.

The bronze man began donning his parachute.



"Stopped a motorist. Pointed a gun at the driver, probably."

Vida Carlaw decided she liked the bronze's man's voice, just as well as his looks. That voice properly belonged to an opera singer.

"I was coming to New York to see you," she said. "A fellow named Monk, who said he was one of your assistants, told me you were away at some place he called a Fortress of Solitude."

"My return occurred sooner than expected. Monk mentioned your telephone call—hence my being aboard the plane."

Vida Carlaw, being as inconsistent as any young woman with her looks might be expected to be, decided that this bronze fellow was short on chivalry. He hadn't even asked her how she felt after her first parachute jump. She decided to give him some frost.

"Why didn't you make yourself known in the plane?" she snapped.

"My life's work is the rather strange one, of helping those who are in trouble, and doing a bit toward dealing with those who are beyond the law. Enemies are the result. Their attacks come in queer ways. Safety demands caution in the case of a summons such as yours."

Vida Carlaw decided to feel insulted.

"I see! You thought I was a crook!"

"One cannot always tell."

Vida Carlaw felt herself getting angrier. Some thought might have convinced her that she was not getting anywhere. But this young bronze fellow—he was obviously young—was not acting as a young man should in the presence of a very pretty girl.

"So you think I'm a crook?" she snapped.

He did not help matters by inquiring, "Just what are you?"

"I'm an Oklahoma oil producer and wildcatter! My home is in Tulsa, and I'm putting down a wildcat well with two partners, Sam Sands and Reservoir Hill. Something has happened to our driller, and to Sam Sands!"

With the story all out, she waited to see what he would say.

"Give more details," he requested.

The bronze man's voice had not changed, but Vida Carlaw got the feeling that he was interested in the mystery—if not in herself.

The young woman told him what had happened; she even included the Indian legend which Reservoir Hill had told her about the papoose who had dug a hole in the tepee floor, only to have the spirit of an earth devil come up through the hole and consume him, all but his grease.

At the end, Doc Savage asked, "Have you any enemies?"

"Why, no!" The young woman registered surprise.

"Then how do you explain the attempt to kill you on the plane?"

Vida Carlaw studied a speck far away in the sky. It had not been there a moment before.

"I can't imagine! The whole thing completely mystifies me!"

There was silence for a few moments. The young woman became conscious of the droning noise, and decided the speck, now larger, was making it.

"A plane!" she said.

"Yes," Doc Savage said. "Probably a ship carrying some of my aids."

THE bronze man inserted a hand inside his shirt and brought out a round black bottle. Apparently he wore next to his skin some kind of a vest with pockets. He threw the round, black thing into near-by brush. It immediately gave off a prodigious quantity of smoke of strikingly brilliant, yellow hue. Such smoke would attract attention for miles.

The newcomer plane drew closer, proving to be no ordinary type of ship, but a gyro, a plane with the usual fuselage, but with whirling wings like big windmill blades. The craft demonstrated its ability to land in restricted areas by coming down on the near-by concrete highway.

The first man to alight was the answer to a tailor's dream. Sartorial perfection itself! Slender, with a wasp waist and good shoulders, he had the figure for wearing clothing, and he was togged out in correct afternoon dress from striped trousers to cutaway, tall silk hat and a slender black cane.

This man removed his topper and executed a smart bow. His not unhandsome face was characterized by the large, mobile mouth of an orator.

"This is Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks," Doc Savage explained to Vida Carlaw. "His friends call him 'Ham.'"

"And I hope I may include you instantly among those thus favored," "Ham" said, gallantly. "And especially do I pray you to accept my services at any time needed in a protective sense. There is, unfortunately, a low fellow with us who may annoy you, but I beg of you to overlook him, since the poor chap is actually believed not to be entirely—"

"Tellin' lies about me already, huh!" piped a squeaky, almost childlike voice from the plane.

The owner of the voice appeared—an individual who would block traffic almost anywhere. He nearly missed being as wide as tall, and his hands dangled well below his knees.

He had an incredibly homely face, and his hair, rusty upstanding bristles, was not confined alone to his head, but was distributed over his visible anatomy. General effect was that of an amiable gorilla.

"This is the man to whom you talked on the telephone," Doc Savage told Vida Carlaw. "Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, better known as 'Monk.'"

"Monk" gave the attractive young woman a grin which threatened to dislodge his ears. He pointed at the well-dressed man.

"Don't believe what this shyster, Ham, says," he advised. "Sometimes I wonder if that wife and thirteen children haven't kinda unhinged his mind."

The dapper gentleman in afternoon dress looked as if he were about to explode.

"I'm not married!" he yelled.

"Tsk, tsk!" Monk clucked.

"These two are really friends," Doc Savage told Vida Carlaw.

"Friends?" Monk sneered. "I'll tie knots in his neck!"

"You missing link!" Ham gritted. "I'll cut so many holes in you that they'll think the moths have been in a bearskin rug!"

THE hilly, wooded country was not thickly settled; this concrete road was the only one for miles, and other roads being mere trails. Automobiles were not thick.

There was still another man in the plane, doing the flying. This individual was extremely tall, and so thin that it often made people nervous to look at him. He had a

tremendous forehead. His suit did not fit him, and from the coat lapel, by a ribbon, dangled a monocle which seemed to have an unusually thick lens.

"William Harper Littlejohn," Doc Savage said, presenting this other man to Vida Carlaw.

"An hedonistic tympanum of concinnity," said "Johnny."

The girl looked stunned. "Johnny really knows little words," Monk explained, "but he saves 'em for birthdays!"

"Johnny said it was a pleasure to meet such a charming beauty," offered dapper Ham.

"We want to find a sedan," the bronze man explained. "Baby blue color faded out, model three years old, had a red-and-blue cover on spare advertising a swimming pool."

They took to the air in the gyro.

A bit later, Monk, in between staring at the ground, in search of the car, advised the young woman that Johnny was really one of the world's leading experts of geology and archaeology and that the monocle which dangled from Johnny's coat lapel was not a monocle at all, but a powerful magnifying glass.

He himself, Monk admitted, was a chemist whom every one but a few jealous contemporaries admitted was one of the greatest in the world.

Ham, the young woman pried out of Monk with difficulty, was a lawyer. "But he don't amount to anything in the opinion of anybody except Harvard Law School!" Monk added.

Five minutes later Doc Savage said, sharply, "There is a town ahead! It has a flying field! The sedan we are hunting appears to be parked on the field!"

Vida Carlaw strained her eyes in the direction of the town. She could see the town, and an open field which was probably the airport. How Doc Savage was able to spot the car was beyond her. He was not using binoculars, either!

And it was the car! They landed and inquired.

"There was a little, lean fellow came running in here and hired my pard and our plane to fly him to New York," explained a shabby fellow on the field.





















Doc worked into a position ahead of the other ship, but again the other craft dived. The pilot was wary, taking no chances whatever. The other ship leveled out several hundred feet below. Doc arched down toward it.

In the west, clouds hung in the sky, thick clouds, black, with occasionally a long, red lightning spark dropping from them to the earth.

“Look!” Reservoir Hill pointed.

The men below had opened the door of their plane and were hurling a figure bodily out of the ship.

“Viddy!” screamed Reservoir Hill. “They’re throwing her out!”

The falling, skirt-clad figure did not wear a parachute.

“WE gotta do something to save her!” Reservoir Hill screamed.

At the moment, that did not seem an entirely sane suggestion. The form was falling. In movie cartoons, they dive planes down and draw falling men and women aboard; but in actual life, it is not so easy.

Doc put the plane’s nose down. A falling human body does not acquire speed which cannot be bettered by a fast plane, due to the resistance of the air. There was a chance of the plane overtaking the falling body. Reservoir Hill did not know this.

“Don’t follow her!” he screamed. “I don’t wanta see her hit! I don’t wanta see Viddy die!”

Doc Savage knew, split seconds later, that he had wasted his time. The body was going to hit before he could possibly overtake it—was going to hit in the river.

“Maybe—hitting the water—won’t kill her!” Reservoir Hill croaked.

Doc Savage had no such illusion. Water, struck at the speed at which that body was falling, had the demolishing force of a solid wall.

The pitiful, twisting figure hit the muddy, flood-bloated river.

Doc Savage pulled his plane out of the dive so close to the surface that water splashed up from the falling body and actually slapped the plane’s body like so much shot.

He hung the plane’s nose in the sky until it lost momentum and was about to stall,

then arched off on a wingtip and came back, looking overside for any traces of the body.

They cruised for several minutes, and nothing came to the surface.

“We gotta land and see if we can find her!” Reservoir Hill yelled.

“There is no chance of any one surviving a fall like that,” Doc explained quietly, and pointed the bawling nose of the plane into the sky.

RESERVOIR HILL swore in the other seat. He made his fists into balls of hard gristle and reared up angrily.

“Viddy may not have died!” he screeched. “You’re gonna land and look for her! You’re gonna land—”

Doc Savage grasped the old man’s arm. He did not speak, but something—it might, of course, have been the evidence of terrific strength which his grip conveyed—caused Reservoir Hill to sink back, limp and defeated.

“Yeah, you’re right,” the old oil man muttered. “Viddy’s dead. The swellest little girl Oklahoma or any other durn place ever saw!”

Doc climbed his plane after the other craft, which had made good use of the delay. The other pilot had flown directly toward the immense mass of clouds that was the distant thunderstorm, and the ship had covered a good part of the distance.

“They’re gonna beat us to it!” Reservoir Hill groaned.

They did. The clouds, the thunder, the lightning and the rain swallowed the plainload of killers like some harridan, symbolic monster tossing in the sky.

## Chapter VII PREPARATION

THEY never found the plane carrying the killers. The craft vanished thoroughly, completely. Doc Savage and his aids even flew over the path covered by the thunderstorm, on the chance that the vanished plane had been struck by lightning and fallen in flames. They found nothing.

That afternoon, the air over the States of Kentucky, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Tennessee, as well as Illinois









automobile. Those in the motor boat hailed the others.

"Make it snappy!" they advised.

"Wait a minute," a man said. "It'll only take a second to see if our trick worked."

The fellow leaned into the car and examined the spot where Monk had been lying. He burst out in a harsh chuckle.

"It worked!" he said. "Here's what he wrote: 'Fake telephone company truck, Cleveland. Blackie's garage on Nineteenth.'" The man squinted more closely. "It's followed by some kind of mark. I guess it's this guy's private sign, or somethin'. It don't mean nothin' to me."

They all burst out laughing. Monk got a gleeful kick in the ribs.

"We foxed you," he was told. "We dropped that pencil on purpose. We fed you that dope. You threw Savage off the trail yourself, because we'll let him find these cars abandoned on the outskirts of Cleveland."

Monk made puppy noises around his gag. His eyes were rage filled.

THE men began climbing down into the boat. Monk was lowered. It seemed two of the crowd were going to drive the two cars to the outskirts of Cleveland and abandon them. Then old Reservoir Hill was lowered into the boat. Monk's little eyes popped.

Reservoir Hill was bound hand and foot!

"They got me, then laid for whoever followed my trail!" old Hill gritted.

The coats were yanked from under the automobile oil pans. Away went the cars.

The boat lifted its bow and began to travel.

Reservoir Hill told Monk, "I guess you can figure what they're gonna do?"

Monk nodded.

"They're gonna scrag us if Doc Savage don't forget all about this!" Hill growled.

## Chapter VIII THE HIGH EYE

DOC SAVAGE had done one thing daily since childhood. He had devoted a two-hour period to exercise. Not merely a flexing and strengthening of the muscles, but a

scientific system of actions designed to strengthen eyes, olfactory senses, vision, hearing, and the others.

Perhaps the most unusual, and no doubt the more important, was the set of mental exercises which quickened his wits, strengthened his memory, and otherwise had equipped him with the amazing physical and mental powers which he possessed.

His aids, while remarkable gentlemen, did not have the bronze man's powers. They did not need them, however, to read the story of what had happened where Monk had been seized. Monk's captors had made no effort to cover up sign, and the story was plain.

Ham, searching in the hay, came up with an object and gulped, genuine grief in his voice, "Monk had this in his pocket!"

The object was an ear of corn which Monk carried to feed his pet pig, Habeas Corpus.

Doc Savage made a quick circle, his flake gold eyes reading further sign.

"Reservoir Hill was seized first," the bronze man explained. "Monk was following Hill's trail and was seized also."

Big-fisted Renny rumbled angrily, "Doc! That writing in the plane, with engine oil, must have been done just to decoy us here!"

"It was," Doc agreed. "Here. The mob went this way."

They had no trouble following the trail to the gravel road. But not even a bloodhound could have followed it any farther.

THEY were back at the plane when the farm boy came running up.

"Somebody wants you on the telephone," he told Doc Savage. "He said to tell you that by now you probably know you had better talk to him."

The bronze man whipped to his own plane, entered the control cabin, and switched on the radio transmitter. Ordinarily, it operated on a short wave, but he lengthened the wave length to that of the police broadcast band. A number of police stations maintained both transmitting and receiving equipment

In not much more than a minute, police were tracing the telephone call to the farmhouse. This method of having the call







"I think you might go up and look around," he said. "It sounded as if that plane took off more than half an hour ago."

The man who had been grousing to Monk nodded and went out.

THE fellow obviously had no love for the job ahead. He picked up a diving contrivance consisting of a mouthpiece, a nose clip and a chemical purifier. One could buy them on the market for a little over three hundred dollars apiece. He adjusted it.

The men got in and out of the submarine by a simple method. There was a hole in the bottom, near the bow. Air pressure held the water out. There was a compressor aboard.

At night, when no one could observe, they extended the periscope—it had been elongated—to the surface and pumped air down it until the compression tanks were full.

The man pushed himself down into the hole, felt for the rope which led to the mooring chain, and worked along it. The men followed that route back and forth to the surface.

The man had hardly started when he seemed to step into a gigantic bear trap. The jaws closed about his waist. Air left the man's lungs so fast that it blew the mouthpiece from his teeth. He wrenched at what was around his waist. Legs! He twisted his head.

When he saw the individual who held him, the rest of the air left his lungs.

The man was almost drowned when Doc Savage got him up on the deck of the houseboat. It took time for him to speak.

"How many men are down there?" Doc asked.

"You—you're Savage!" the other gulped. "Damn us! I knew we shouldn't have taken this job! But the blamed submarine hide-out ain't been payin' a profit like we figured it would! Guys just seem to rather take a chance with the law than live down—"

"How many?" Doc repeated.

The bronze man's tone made the prisoner gulp.

"Keepin' my trap shut won't help us now," he said. "there's a dozen. But, listen, we ain't nothin' but hired men! We took a job! It was to grab your man, or as many of 'em as we could! The guys who hired us, all left! They took a canoe off the houseboat, a

folding canoe they could hide on shore, and—"

He broke off to emit squeaks of pain as Doc tied him. He stopped everything but nose sounds when the bronze man installed a gag in his mouth. When the prisoner could neither move nor talk, Doc went out on deck.

He donned his transparent hood again. The device was a good diving rig as well as a gas mask. He had flown only a short distance in the plane, then returned, entered the water furtively, and found the submarine.

Doc had not been sure it would be there, had acted on the theory that there must be some good reason for the houseboat having a permanent mooring in this out-of-the-way place. The muddy water had been a hint, too. It was not such a spot as a houseboat party would seek for pleasure.

The bronze man lowered himself down the mooring chain. A weighted belt about his waist evened his weight with the water he displaced. He worked outside the submarine until he reached the stern.

Ham, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny were waiting there. They had their feet dug into the muddy bottom to maintain their position. Mud on their hoods kept them from seeing much.

Doc went to each. By pressing with his fingers—long and short for dash and dot—he conveyed enough Morse Code words to apprise them of the situation.

"We will depend on a surprise attack," he finished.

Single file, they worked to the hole in the underside of the derelict sub's bow.

DOC went in first. Two of the mob were standing inside, waiting the return of their comrade. Doc's glasslike helmet, rising out of the opening, must have given them a shock. They gaped just a moment too long. Doc got hold of them.

They evidently didn't have guns. They tried to use their fists. That was a mistake. They only hurt their knuckles on the alloy mail.

Doc pushed one man violently in the face. The fellow went back readily with the blow, not realizing the steel wall was behind him. His head hit. He fell.











"There are men," said Andershott, "who control, at least to some extent, those red things!"

IT must have been a thought that rendered every one in the room silent for a moment.

"Men!" Monk exploded. "Guiding that jelly thing!"

"Those jelly things," Andershott corrected. "There was more than one! And I saw them—the men, I mean!"

"What'd these guys look like?" Monk yelled.

"Their faces were vaguely familiar," Andershott explained. "But it was a long time before I kinda remembered where I had seen their pictures."

Andershott had been speaking fast, and he paused to catch a breath.

"They were outlaw Tomahawk Tant's men!" he gulped. "I had seen their pictures in the newspapers!"

"Tant's men?" echoed Ham in a surprised voice.

Old Reservoir Hill reacted instantly to that.

"You're crazy!" he howled. "They couldn't have been Tant's men!"

Every one looked at Reservoir Hill. The old man glared, then apparently realized his howled statement had sounded queer, and looked confused.

"What I mean is that this dang gollywobbler, Andershott, couldn't tell the truth if he wanted to!" he yelled. "He's a natural-born liar. He's lying now for some reason!"

Enoch Andershott drew himself up with some dignity, looked slightly angry for a moment, then shrugged.

"This old man," he said, "has held a fancied grudge against me for years. He is an old man with bile in his soul, and some persons hold the opinion that he is not quite responsible."

"Not respon—crazy, huh!" Reservoir Hill actually jumped up and down in his rage. "I'll wring your neck, or I hope to be put on a diet of carrots, than which there's nothing I like less!"

Monk told Andershott, "We were told you headed the mob of men who tried to prevent us reaching Oklahoma."

Andershott started. He opened and shut his mouth.

"Why—I don't—maybe—I've got it! That is why they tried to kill me! They used my name to guide suspicion from themselves, whoever they are! They wanted to prevent me telling different!"

Doc queried, "If you had pictures of the Tomahawk Tant mob, could you identify the men you saw here, guiding these red mobsters?"

"I could try," said Andershott.

Ham interposed. "How were they—the monsters—guided?"

"I don't know!" snapped Andershott. "I didn't see!"

Doc telephoned the police, and they promised to come at once, bringing such pictures as they had of known Tant badmen. While the officers were on their way, Doc and his men went over the grounds and the Andershott-Cugg mansion. They found no monsters. They found no Cugg, nor no pile of strange-looking grease which might have been a Cugg.

The police spread their pictures on a porch table.

"There," said Andershott, pointing. "And there, and there. That's four of them."

"Have you a picture of Outlaw Tant?" Doc asked the policemen.

"Tant is sort of a spook among badmen," one cop replied. "To tell the truth, we haven't a picture we're sure is him. But we have his finger prints."

"Mind letting me have the finger prints?" Doc requested.

They didn't mind. The bronze man pocketed the print card which they gave him.

The police heard the story of the attack of the red, jellylike things.

"Queer," they said. "Tant's men controlling the things! And this morning, two of Tant's outlaws were found dead, half consumed!"

"Probably they were carrying some of the red monsters and the things got loose on them," suggested Andershott.

THE police gave the premises a thorough going over, and it developed that they were more modern than usual, to the extent that they had an expert chemical analyst who went over the slime on the rugs and on window sills, and even on the lawn

grass outside. The chemist tested this slime to learn what composed it.

"Whew!" he gulped, on finishing. "Whew!"

"What is it?" Long Tom asked, curiosity on his face.

"Digestive juices!"

"What?"

"Digestive juices!" repeated the police chemist. "Of course, these are infinitely more powerful than those in the human body. But, nevertheless, I can best explain them to the layman by saying they are powerful digestive juices. Of course, to any one with a technical knowledge, I could say they are composed of—"

Doc Savage interposed. "There's no need of going into a lengthy discussion. Digestive juices does cover the stuff."

"Thank you," said the police chemist, flattered.

Long Tom, face bewildered, said, "You mean to stand there and tell us this thing oozes digestive juices through its hide?"

No one answered.

A policeman, who had been telephoning headquarters, came into the room wearing the look of a man who has just been convinced there really are such things as ghosts.

"Listen," he said, hoarsely. "This thing is getting worse! The jelly devils have been down in the Seminole Field. That's about forty or fifty miles from Indian Dome Field. They've been seen up near Bartlesville, during the night. Somebody near Cushing saw 'em, or one of 'em. But that ain't the worst thing!"

He paused and wet his lips. Nobody spoke.

"The jelly devils got a drilling crew in the Indian Dome Field," he said. "It was at a well about three miles from the Sands-Carlaw-Hill lease, where the things were first reported. Some men on a near-by lease heard the drilling crew shouting and screaming and came over to investigate. They found a bunch of bodies! It musta been pretty bad!"

"What do you mean?" Doc asked.

"The bodies were only partly consumed," said the policeman. "The report said there was that grease stuff where the arms and legs and like were missing, and some of the men were—well, skeletons!"

"Were any of the monsters seen?" Doc asked.

"Yes," said the policeman. "But they went away, apparently because of the lights the approaching men carried."

The police left after a time, promising to have a general search made for Alonzo Cugg.

Long Tom said, "If you ask me, we'd better find out some way of detecting the presence of these red devil things. I think I can do the job easily with a magnetic capacity balance hook-up."

Enoch Andershott looked at Long Tom, surprised, and demanded, "Who is this chap?"

"Major Thomas J. Roberts, one of my aids," Doc explained.

The telephone rang. Doc Savage, happening to be nearest the instrument, lifted the receiver. "Yes?"

"This is a filling station attendant on the Sand Sprints road," said a voice. "Something queer just happened here."

ENOCH ANDERSHOTT came over. He made no effort to take the receiver from Doc Savage, but put his head close to Doc's head so that he could hear. Over the wire came three pops, a louder pop.

"Go ahead," Doc directed the station attendant.

"All right," the fellow said. "A coupé just drove into my station for a fill-up and a quart of lube. It had a bit rack on the back, and this bit rack was full of what looked like canvas, maybe an old tent. I thought once I saw the canvas move.

"I never said nothing, on account of they might have had a dog or something in there, and anyway, one time last spring I almost got my puss shot off for sticking my nose into a car where some Tant bad boys were ridin'. Them boys just ups with a sawed-off pumpgun and—"

"Just what are you trying to tell us?" Doc interposed.

"That I found a note on the filling station drive after this coupé with the bit rack went on," said the attendant. "It was wrapped up in a ten-spot, which is probably the reason I'm callin' you so quicklike."

"Read the note!" The three pops, the louder pop, came again.

"It says, 'Tant behind whole thing. It's worse than anybody thinks yet. They're taking me to Tant hide-out, thirty miles due north of One Road Cut.' And it's signed, 'Lonny.' It's addressed to be telephoned to Mister Enoch Andershott. There's a postscript on the address which says Mister Andershott will give me another fifty dollars."

"Damned if I will!" growled Andershott.

"Then hell with you!" said the attendant. "I always heard you were so stingy you pluck the feathers off the Indians on your pennies before you spend 'em! I've earned the ten-spot, way I figure, so hell with you!"

He banged the receiver up, just before the loud pop that was to be expected on the tail end of three lesser popping noises.

"Impertinent nobody!" yelled Enoch Andershott. Then, in the same breath, "Come on! We've got to save my partner, Alonzo Cugg! He signed that note! Lonny! That's Cugg!"

"Right!" Doc Savage scooped up the telephone book, looked up the number of the afternoon newspaper and put in a call. "A man named Renwick around there?"

"Prying around in the morgue, over by the oil editor's desk," a voice replied.

A moment later, Doc had Renny on the phone and was asking, "Find anything? You've been looking up recent developments in the oil fields."

"Well," replied Renny, slowly, "only thing I've seen concerning anybody involved in this is that Enoch Andershott and Alonzo Cugg have been selling their holdings over the period of the last year until now they own hardly anything except the lease in the Indian Dome Field adjoining the Sands-Carlaw-Hill lease."

Enoch Andershott roared, "And why the thunder shouldn't we conduct our business any way we please?"

He had come up behind Doc, and the bronze man had known he was there, but had not given any sign.

"Meet us as we pass the newspaper office on the way to Sand Springs road," Doc directed.

Renny met them.

bungalow, stood a filling station. It was green, and like thousands of other filling stations owned by a great corporation.

Doc drove in, saying, "This is where the call came from."

Monk exploded, "How'd you know?"

Doc pointed at a near-by oil well which was pumping. The gasoline engine operating the bullwheel walking beam pump device was one which sputtered three times, then back-fired loudly. Three regular exhausts, then a back-fire, as regular as clockwork.

"The sound of that pump came over the telephone," Doc said. "Driving along the road, I have been listening for it."

The attendant was a lean young man, with a good forehead, eyes and jaw. He peered at them, evidently decided they looked like trouble, and his hands blurred in movement—and were suddenly holding a six-gun.

"Since them bad Tant boys got tough last spring, I been practicing the draw and also how to shoot," he said. "Maybe you'd be so kind as to tell me whatcha want?"

"The note," Doc said.

The attendant squinted into the car and seemed to recognize Enoch Andershott, for he said, "Is it a fact that you're an old meanie to the Indians on your pennies?"

Andershott yelled, "I'll have you fired! You menial!"

"If you asked my boss to fire me, he'd laugh so hard they'd have to bandage his ribs," said the attendant. "My boss knows you."

"The note!" Doc repeated.

The attendant snapped, "Ask for it like a gentleman—" and got a look at Doc Savage. He undoubtedly recognized the bronze man, but he did not look abashed.

"O. K. My mistake. I've heard of you, and I'm for you in a big way."

He handed over the note, and Doc glanced at it. The attendant had read it exactly as it was over the telephone.

Doc produced a bill and passed it to the attendant.

"I don't want *your* money." The attendant passed the bill back and nodded at Enoch Andershott. "But I'd take his right eye if I got a chance!"

WELL out of Tulsa, past the little city park and the swimming pool and the small

THEY drove on, leaving the attendant with his six-gun in his hands and a big grin on his face.

Old Reservoir Hill fell to chuckling, and finally to laughing, and finally he said, "I think I'll go to Timbuktu some day!"

"Why?" snarled Enoch Andershott.

"To see if there's anybody there who likes you!"

Big-fisted Renny got between them, with his extremely long face more dour and sorrowful-looking than usual, as it became when he was secretly tickled.

They passed one of the big refineries in Sand Springs, heading for the canyon known as One Road Cut, in the wilder section of the Osage Hills. They were almost abreast of the big refinery gate when old Reservoir Hill barked out a demand.

"Stop here!" he shouted. "I got a friend in there who has a dang good repeating rifle in his office all the time. During his spare minutes, he goes over on the bank of the river and practices popping at floating junk."

Doc stopped. Reservoir Hill got out, went through the refinery gate, and out of sight, and the others waited in the car.

They waited a long time.

Doc sent Monk in to investigate. The homely chemist came back traveling at a wild run, and with an incredulous look in his homely face.

"Reservoir Hill skipped!" Monk squeaked excitedly. "He never went in there to borrow no rifle! He just walked through and out the other side!"

**Chapter XII**  
**BLAST TRAP**

IF Doc Savage was amazed by the unexpected flight of old Reservoir Hill, he gave no sign of it, although it was a striking trait of the bronze man that only on the most unusual occasions did he show any emotion at all.

Doc put the car in motion.

Andershott yelled, "Ain't we gonna hunt the old reprobate?"

Doc said, "We are hunting your partner, Cugg."

"Of course!" Andershott nodded violently. "Let's go! To thunder with that stringy old goat, Hill!"

Renny, after keeping his chin in his palm for a time, pulled a paper out of his pocket. He tapped it.

"Editorial writer in here suggests that some nest of infernal creatures, previously unknown to man, was tapped a mile below the surface of the earth by that drilling oil well," he said.

No one spoke. The car followed the road around steep bluffs, with a river and a railroad below. Doc drove fast when he had a view of the road ahead, but slowed to an ample safety margin on the bad curves. Once they met a huge truck loaded with oil field pipe in the middle of the road. The slow speed saved them.

"That nest of strange creatures, a mile-underground theory, was advanced by somebody last night," Monk said at last.

The bluffs became very high over them. Below, fifty feet or so straight down, was the railroad, and running beside that, a giant concrete pipe running part of the time on top of the ground, sometimes on blocks, and sometimes half underground. It was a water main leading from a reservoir somewhere in the Osage.

The cliff slid down in the road ahead of the car.

The happening was so casual at first as to be ordinary. A huge mass simply settled. Then it fell to pieces, and there was noise, the roar of breaking rock, and the whoop of some kind of explosive.

As the stone mass fell to pieces, there was a great gushing of rock dust, and fragments came flying out of the mass, some hopping along the road, playful, innocent-looking things until one hit the car, which Doc had almost stopped, and completely wrecked the right-hand front wheel.

Andershott made a howling noise. Doc Savage and his aids gave almost no sign, scarcely changing their positions in the crowded sedan. But they knew what had happened.

The roar of rock subsided after a moment, although the dust continued to surge in a great gray pall over the mass of stone which had been blasted across the road.

"Listen to this!"









SNOOK had something wrong with one side, it appeared from the way he walked. He swung along in particularly grotesque fashion, with his left side seemingly almost inoperative. Yet he managed to travel at a good speed.

He was bowed over to one side by his trouble, with his face twisted out of shape, and he was a particularly uninviting specimen as a whole.

He had a skin the color of a pine plank that had lain for years in the weather, and his mouth seemed full of gold teeth. His eyes rarely met any one's but when they did, there was something about them that made the other Individual turn his own gaze aside.

Snook lurched in to the bar, where stood half a dozen men who looked as if they were waiting for something and didn't know what—or such best described their perpetual alertness and nervousness. Out of Snook's pocket came a big bill off a bigger roll.

"It's all on me again!" he shouted, boastfully. "Best the house has got!"

The proprietor picked up the bill, eyed it, and blinked. It was a century.

"This hot?" he asked, sharply.

"Not by a damn sight!" growled Snook. "Say—you too good to take my money? Maybe you'd like to do somethin' about it, huh?"

The proprietor leaned casually against the bar. This put his hand on a sawed-off shotgun lying there.

On the other side of the bar, a man known as "Cackle," a lean fellow with a face remarkably like that of a chicken, slapped the bar and said loudly:

"What the hell! This is too early in the morning to get all het up! Bartender, I think I heard the hen cackle. Will you see if she didn't lay me an eggnog?"

That eased the friction, and every one drank, and the talk turned to horse racing. It seemed there was a track wire upstairs, which accounted for the presence of the men this early in the morning.

A bit later, the man called Cackle drew the proprietor aside.

"What was that telephone call to him?" he asked, furtively. "You listened in on the extension, didn't you?"

"Yeah," said the proprietor. "The hombre who called him was some bird tipping him off that the law wanted him bad in

St. Louis, and he'd better stay clear of that burg."

"You think he's O. K.?" demanded Cackle.

"Maybe. But I don't like his snotty manner, and if he gets tough with me again, I'll fix him up. The first shell in that shotgun is tear gas, and the second is rock salt, and when I give 'em both, they remember—"

"Did you notice his left hand when you put your hand on that shotgun?" Cackle asked casually.

"Hell, no! I was watching his snaky eyes. You can tell from a man's eyes when—"

"You better watch his hand," Cackle chuckled. "He had it full of as mean a looking derringer as I've seen in years. Keeps it up his sleeve, on that bad side, and gets it out by drawing his arm up inside in a way you don't hardly notice."

Cackle left a deeply thoughtful roadhouse proprietor, and went over to the side of Snook.

"I think you and me has got some business," Cackle said.

THE two men retired to a corner of the room where no one was near, and they could be sure no one came near, and put their heads together. They made a perfect-looking pair of villains.

No one, least of all the erudite college professors with whom he had once worked, would have recognized the mean-mannered, boastful, vicious-looking Snook as the eminent archaeologist and geologist and Doc Savage aid, William Harper Littlejohn.

Cackle certainly had no suspicion.

"You're Snook Loggard from St. Louis, ain't you?" asked Cackle.

Johnny, playing the tough Snook to perfection, leaned back. He happened to know the real Snook Loggard was in an Ohio penitentiary, under an assumed name. Snook didn't know the authorities knew his identity, but he would find it out when they got ready to release him, for a policeman would be waiting to arrest him and take him back to St. Louis, where he probably would be hanged.

"I ain't sayin' who I am and who I ain't," Johnny said. "Why?"

"I got a connection you might be interested in."







became positioned. A ventriloquist would have known what was going to happen.

“Hands up!” yelled a voice from the road. “You men are covered!”

It was doubtful if a single one of the men suspected that the voice was not coming from the road. As ventriloquism, it was very good, and it should have been, considering the hundreds of hours which the bronze man had practiced under some of the most skilled of living ventriloquists.

They knew something was wrong when Doc hit them.

DOC SAVAGE’S father, in training him from childhood for his unique career, had taken into account the fact that he would many times have to fight empty-handed against odds. For years, even as a small child, he had been put through a daily rough-and-tumble brawl with larger opponents, several of them, with the penalty for inefficiency a severe lacing.

The men Doc had been pitted against in these practice bouts had been paid a bonus for any blows they could land. Naturally, they had waded in.

The result of the training was now evident, as Doc whipped to the attack. The first two were easy. They weren’t expecting anything. Two fist blows disposed of them.

Doc reached for another one. He ducked, got clear. Not so good. The man at the machine gun was trying to swivel its muzzle around. Doc jumped, tripped him.

In an instant, the bronze giant and the four men were a tangled, boiling mass of arms and legs, out of which came such words as “Hep!” “Now!” “No, hell!” and “Get ‘im!” This was followed with some cusswords, indicating what the four of them thought of the big one they were fighting.

Johnny was acting. He flailed into the mêlée. Bound and gagged, he could not do much, except trip combatants. He did that. A man got out a gun. Johnny kicked with both bound feet. The gun sailed away.

Doc was fighting three now. One had had his stomach stepped on. Then it was two. The remaining pair were easy, compared to what the first of the fight had been. Johnny, meanwhile, had banged the other man senseless against a rock.

Doc Savage went around and whacked each of the six men on the jaw to

make sure he would remain unconscious for some time.

Johnny, when he was ungagged and untied, gulped, “I’ll be superamalgamated. Is my physiognomy rubescent! In other words, is my face red!”

“They would have killed you eventually,” Doc told him dryly.

“Which is no doubt what I deserved for letting myself get taken by a trick as simple as they used!” Johnny groaned. “Doc, they kidded me along! I’ll never live *this* down!”

The bronze man asked, “Have they really a headquarters up here?”

Johnny shook his head. “That was all a trick to kid me, and to trap you. The only headquarters, and it’s not their main one, that I heard about, is that Fujiyama Roadhouse, near Tulsa.”

“We’ll try that,” Doc said.

“They named the place after the Japanese volcano,” Johnny said. “It sure lives up to its name!”

Doc Savage now went to the prisoners and administered to each a drug mixture which would extend their unconsciousness indefinitely—until they were given an antidote chemical to awaken them.

“Don’t you want to question them?” Johnny demanded, forgetting his big words in his surprise.

“No,” Doc said. “We’ll start them East immediately.”

Johnny swallowed several times. A tremendous truth had hit him.

Doc Savage already knew all he needed to know about the mystery of the weird monsters from the depths of the earth!

THE six men had had a car concealed near by. Doc and Johnny used it to carry the six men to a Tulsa hospital, where they were placed in a ward to be left alone. Then Doc sent a telegram to an address in New York.

The telegram merely stated that half a dozen patients were in the hospital for treatment, but it would have strange results. Shortly, a solemn-faced man would be flying to take the six East by air.

In New York they would drop from sight, eventually to wind up in a fantastic place, the unique “criminal-curing college” which Doc Savage maintained in up-State

New York. This amazing institution, its existence entirely unknown to the outside world, was operated by surgeons and psychologists whom Doc had trained.

A criminal, on entering, first had his brain operated upon, so that his past memory was completely wiped out, after which he underwent a course of training calculated to instill in him the ideals of an upright citizen; but perhaps more important, he was taught how to make a good living, so that there would be no pressing temptation later.

No criminal who had ever graduated from this "college" had ever returned to crime.

The Fujiyama Roadhouse was impressive by night, with a lot of neon lights around it. The front was fixed up with neon light tubes to represent a volcano, and every few minutes the volcano erupted.

There were Negroes in white coats to open the doors of cars and hold their hands out for tips. Gambling was wide open in the place, and the dance floor was popular with a certain class.

DOC SAVAGE and Johnny looked the scene over from a brush clump, a hundred yards distant.

"If this was a roadhouse in the East, we could walk right in and nobody would have nerve enough to start anything," Johnny said. "But some of these Oklahoma lads don't know when to behave!"

Johnny habitually used small words when in the company of Doc Savage. Probably that, more than anything, indicated the gaunt archaeologist and geologist's admiration for the bronze giant.

"Queer!" Johnny remarked. "I thought that was Tant's outlaw crowd hang-out! Now it turns out it's some band trying to frame something on Tant!"

Johnny eyed Doc. He hoped the bronze man would volunteer his opinion of the solution of the mystery. Doc didn't.

**Chapter XV  
RAID**

THERE was a great deal of bright light around the Fujiyama, and one had to know that the place was a hangout for men

who preferred to see the law coming, to realize the purpose of so much light.

Half an hour had passed when a plain-looking car, of a make noted for its speed, drove into the grounds and to the rear, where it parked. It was a coupé, and the door opened just as a Negro attendant arrived.

Bound hand and foot, a gag in his mouth, tall and bony Johnny was shoved out of the coupé. Another man in a tan topcoat and a low-yanked hat was behind Johnny, carrying him with one arm and holding a revolver with the other.

"Things have gone wrong!" the man with the gun said, sharply. "Help me get 'im out of sight! And I wanta talk to the big boss right away!"

The white-coated Negro had evidently encountered such incidents as this before, because he lent an immediate hand. Johnny was dragged into a side door, and up a flight of wooden stairs, dimly lighted. A man with a rifle appeared at the top.

"What's goin' on?"

"I'm bringin' in one of Doc Savage's men," said the fellow in the tan topcoat who was carrying Johnny. "Some things have gone wrong. Ginime a hand!"

THEY got Johnny up the stairs and into a bare room fitted with a canvas cot and two hard chairs. On the floor stood an open grip containing the latest in tear gas grenades and guns.

"We're gonna need some help!" gritted the man in the topcoat. "Where's the chief?"

"He ain't here!"

"Well, get in touch with 'im! I got some important dope for 'im!"

"He's movin' around, tryin' to get this Doc Savage out of our hair. I dunno where to find 'im."

"We're gonna need some help, I told you!" snapped the one who had brought Johnny. "How many of the boys are here?"

"I'm the only one," said the other man.

"That," said the man in the topcoat, "helps!"

And he hit the other man on the jaw, then turned and hit the Negro also, doing it so swiftly that they both fell almost together; and were caught almost simultaneously and





said, “No, Tant isn’t behind this. Tant is just being framed with the blame. The real schemer is clever enough to make it look as if Tant is behind the whole affair.”

The girl tried to speak, and had difficulty until Johnny gave her some wine, a bottle of which he found among the food supplies in the room.

“Who is the leader?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Johnny replied. “But Doc does. Who is he, Doc?”

The bronze man apparently did not hear the question, which was strange, considering the acuteness of his auditory equipment on ordinary occasions. Doc merely gazed out of a window at the lighted grounds of the Fujiyama.

When Vida Carlaw started to repeat the question about the mastermind’s identity, Johnny stopped her with a slight pressure on one of her hands.

Johnny, the bony gentleman who ordinarily evidenced no interest whatever in the sometimes mistakenly identified gentler sex, had been holding the entrancing Vida’s slender hand unashamedly for the past few moments. He continued to hold it.

“Vida,” he said, gently. “Just what have you decided is behind this affair?”

“It’s simple—and horrible,” said the girl. “Our wildcat oil well in the Indian Dome Field drilled into a nest of strange monsters over a mile underground. These monsters are something like—well—like—”

“Amoebas,” Johnny suggested.

“What?”

“Amoebas, one of the most primary forms of life, literally a mass of protoplasm without eyes, ears or skeletal framework,” Johnny replied. “They secure and digest their food simply by flowing around it and covering it and absorbing the nutriment from the substance thus attacked.”

For Johnny, these were very small words. And he was still holding the young woman’s hand, and not in an entirely fatherly manner.

VIDA continued, “These men are using the monsters to start a reign of terror. They are going to stop work in the oil fields of the midcontinent. They are going to force oil operators to sell out their holdings.”

“And the mob will take them over!” Johnny exclaimed.

“Exactly! Legally, of course. For instance, as a price for my life, I was to sign a legal transfer of our lease in the Indian Dome Field. It was to be transferred to the Best Bet Oil Corporation.”

“What’s the Best Bet?”

“The company controlled by the crowd.”

Johnny indulged in what passed for some deep thought, at the same time eyeing the attractive hand he was holding.

“Er—ah—you say this mob can control the earth monsters?” he said, vaguely. “That means they can make them attack whoever they want, or get rid of them when they want to, or are through with them?”

The girl nodded, started to speak.

“Here it comes!” Doc Savage rapped, sharply.

## **Chapter XVI** **CAPTIVES**

JOHNNY was in something resembling a hypnotic state, a condition brought on by the electric quality of the young woman’s exquisite hand. Doc Savage’s words had the same effect as being dunked in ice water. The gaunt archaeologist sprang to the narrow porthole of a window.

From their height, it was possible to observe the surroundings effectively. They could see men, there seemed to be several of them, spreading to surround the place.

The imitation volcano of neon lights erupted on the Fujiyama, throwing a brighter glow over the region, and it was evident that the furtive men creeping upon the place had rifles and shotguns.

“Indications,” said Johnny, forgetting and using big words, “point to collucative escalade—”

He did not finish his remark about it looking as if a fight were about to start. It started. A rifle whanged. It was a good shot, and it must have cut the power line supplying the Fujiyama with juice. Every light in and around the place went out.

Powerful hand searchlights began to flash on and off. They were carried by the charging men. A few shots whanged. The attacking men did most of the firing. A Negro

ran screaming away from the darkened Fujiyama.

"Run, you Negro rascals!" an attacker yelled.

The parking lot boys, along with a few waiters, scattered like quail. The attackers turned lights on them, identifying them. One of the orchestra, a drummer, tried to run, carrying his drum. They shot the heads of his drum full of holes, but he did not drop the drum.

Women were screaming down below.

"It's the law!" somebody shouted.

"It ain't the law!" yelled an attacker. "It's Tant's boys!"

At that, the women screamed louder, and the men fell to muttering. The attackers came in, making things bright with their hand searchlights.

Doc Savage breathed to Johnny and the girl, "They've got the place surrounded!" Then he eased through doors and reached a stairway which led down to the main dance hall.

The patrons of the roadhouse were lined up along the walls, and men with shotguns and rifles menaced them. One, a burly fellow, stamped forward.

"Where's the proprietor?" he yelled.

No one answered. The burly fellow had his gun, an automatic rifle, pointed at a waiter. He calmly pulled the trigger. The scream of the waiter, shot through the stomach, drowned out the roar of the shot, almost.

"I asked you where's the proprietor?" the burly man said.

The waiter made gargling noises and pointed at the proprietor. "That's him!"

The burly leader of the Tant outlaw raiders shot the wounded waiter between the eyes.

"That," he announced, loudly, "is for not answering the question the first time!"

Two women fainted. A man began to hold his hands over his heart and to grow horribly blue in the face. His face grew more and more turgid, and suddenly he slammed down on the floor, gave a kick or two and lay very still.

A man leaned over and held his wrist. It was evident from this man's manner that he was a physician. He straightened and said, "This man is dead!"

"Damned if I ain't a tough hombre!" said the burly fellow casually. "I shoot one guy and scare another one to death!"

DOC SAVAGE, unobserved, noted all of this from the top of the stairs. This was something of an accomplishment, because one raider had his eye and his rifle trained on the stairs, just on the chance that some one might appear there. But he did not see the tiny periscope, the little portable instrument, which Doc Savage always carried and which he was now using.

The burly man threw out his chest and stamped across the floor, manner reminiscent of the fierceness attributed to the pirates of olden days. He confronted the proprietor.

"This is my day to kill men!" he yelled. "Where's your chief?"

"He ain't here!" gulped the proprietor.

"I didn't ask you that!" The burly man lifted his rifle.

The other man sank to the floor.

"Don't—don't!" he screamed. "I don't know where the boss is! But I can take you to the girl, Vida Carlaw!"

The burly man shoved his head forward and roared, "What was that last you said?"

"I can take you to Vida Carlaw!"

"Well, damn me!" howled the Tant outlaw. "Won't Tant be tickled to see her! He thinks she's dead! He's been madder'n a skinned cat over it!"

"She's upstairs!" gulped the frightened proprietor.

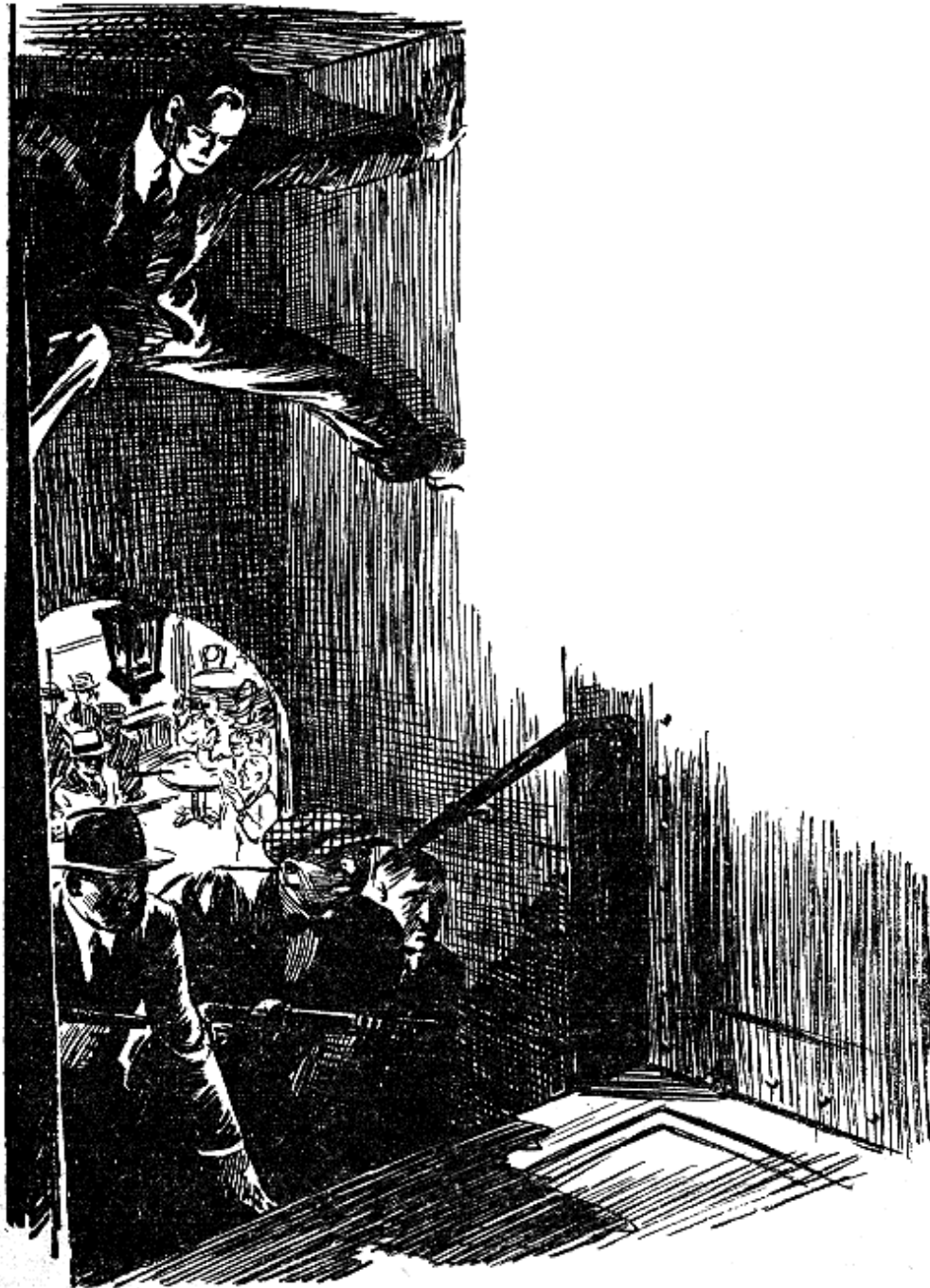
The man led the way to the stairs at the top of which Doc Savage stood. The proprietor's knees quaked, until he had to hold onto things as he passed them to keep from falling down.

Any one who had observed the entire fight would not have blamed him for his fear, either. He was in the clutches of men so calloused that they would kill for no more reason than to be doing something dramatic.

Doc Savage backed away—and things went wrong. There was a sliding noise and a *click*, and there was across the head of the stairs, with embarrassing suddenness, a panel of steel.

Attached in some way to the steps, no doubt, it closed automatically when the wrong stair tread was stepped upon. Doc





By a series of gymnastic efforts, Doc climbed upward and forward until he was close to the roof of the hallway.

"Johnny does not believe you did not want to catch me," Doc said.

"And why the hell should we want you?" roared the burly man. "You're after the guy who's trying to pull this big oil field steal, ain't you? So're we! Why? Because the mug is tryin' to frame the blame onto Tant! We're fightin' the same mug!"

Doc said, "I am also after Tant."

"Yeah, that's the trouble!" The man eyed Doc hopefully. "Why don't you just concentrate first on catchin' this other guy?"

Doc did not reply.

Johnny said, "We're ambidexterous!"

"I'll look that one up," said the burly man, "if Tant's got a dictionary around."















“Indian Dome Field,” the soldier driving the truck called back. “Governor has ordered all oil wells in the Indian Dome Field plugged with concrete or lead, so these monsters can’t keep coming out.”

“The oil operators in Indian Dome won’t like that.”

“They’ll have to like it!” the soldier said, grimly. “The governor has declared martial law to stop the wild confusion!”

The Tant outlaw drove on, covered nearly a mile in silent thought, then said over his shoulder, “The governor is playin’ into the hands of this other crowd!”

Doc replied nothing.

“The idea of the whole thing is to get the fields shut down so the poorer operators will get hard up and have to sell cheap,” the driver added. “Somebody oughta tell the governor that.”

“Why doesn’t Tant do it?”

“Who’d believe Tant?”

As the car continued its course, their exact destination became evident.

“We’re going to the Indian Dome Field!” Vida Carlaw exclaimed.

THE girl’s obvious astonishment seemed to tickle the driver, for he chuckled, then offered, “This is one of Tant’s best hang-outs!”

“But it’s so public!” the girl exclaimed. “And there’s thousands of soldiers around! Probably the place is flooded with State police, too!”

The driver laughed again. “Would you know the famous outlaw, Tomahaw Tant, if you saw him face to face?”

The girl considered.

“No.”

“Neither would a lot of other people,” said the driver.

They drove on some distance, and the scattered derricks of the oil wells in the southern end of Indian Dome Field came into view. The Sands-Carlaw-Hill lease was located near the northern end, in what was considered unproven territory, as far as oil at the deeper levels was concerned.

Vida Carlaw asked, “Will we get to see Tant? I’d rather like to have a look at him.”

The driver snorted.

“Tant won’t show himself. He’ll talk to you from another room, or somehow.”

The girl shivered. “You’re sure we’ll be turned loose?”

“Tant said so,” replied the man.

Doc Savage interposed dryly, “If you were an enemy of Tant’s, as I might be considered to be, since anyone outside the law is my natural enemy, would you take the bare word, relayed, that you would be turned loose. In other words, would you do what we’re doing?”

“Hell, no!” the driver said, promptly.

Then he pulled his car up before an ordinary galvanized tin pumphouse building. It was an unromantic-looking place.

The building evidently housed one of those central pumping plants for shallow oil wells—the plant inside would consist of an engine, turning a great wheel to which was attached the ends of numerous steel rods, extending away over the top of the earth, running through guides. A rotation of the wheel gave each of these rods a push and a pull, actuating the pumps attached to the other ends.

The contraption was pumping as the car drove up, but some one inside immediately shut it down.

“C’mon in,” invited the driver.

Doc and Vida Carlaw got out of the car.

“If anybody had told me I would ever walk into Outlaw Tant’s hide-out of my own accord, almost, I’d have said they were crazy!” declared the girl.

She and Doc Savage walked into the pumphouse.

It was a bare, cold-looking place with the smell of crude oil strong.

The girl peered about, then gave a violent shriek and whirled.

“Run!” she screamed. “Somebody’s aiming a rifle through that door!”

DOC SAVAGE, flashing out a bronze hand, stopped her flight.

“You’re on edge,” he said. “Take another look at it.”

The girl peered, and did not seem relieved. She could plainly see the pipe pointing at them from the small hole in the door which led into the room housing the pump.

“It’s not a rifle barrel,” Doc explained.

“It’s a piece of gas pipe.”





explosive. A slight compression will set them off."

"In other words, if they are stepped upon, they will explode," the girl said.

"Right."

They lay there and waited. Bullets continued to open rents in the roof, the walls. The attackers seemed to be creeping closer.

"In a minute, they'll charge," Doc offered. "We will see what happens."

He had scarcely spoken when the charge started. With a howling uproar, the men rushed. Gun reports were a mad rattle.

Came a louder explosion. A man screamed. There was a second blast. The chemical pellets were exploding.

Doc heaved up, ran toward the door. He had left the submachine gun lying there, and it was his intention to pick it up and perhaps hurry the retreat of the attackers somewhat.

But Outlaw Tomahawk Tant—Reservoir Hill—came charging out of the engine room, swinging a heavy wrench. He leaped upon Doc Savage, striking madly.

"I'll teach you to monkey with Tomahawk Tant!" he squawled.

He was still dizzy from the effects of the anaesthetic gas, and did not know that his mortal enemy was staging an attack.

Doc sparred warily with him. The tough old fellow was fast on his feet, a dangerous customer.

Then the door suddenly filled with men. They had circled the grenades of chemicals, and were charging in. Like an avalanche, they came.

The fight that was waged in the confines of the pumphouse was a classic. Man after man dropped, and Doc seemed to become a phantom which neither lead nor human hands could touch.

How that scrap would have terminated, had the bronze man gone on with his fighting, never was determined. Something happened that stopped him.

"Get the bronze guy alive, if you can!" a voice howled.

"The chief will want to talk to 'im!"

Instantly upon hearing that, Doc Savage stopped fighting.

The men rushed in, and seized Doc Savage, all of them that could lay hands upon him. Some one brought a gunny sack, and they dragged this over the bronze man's head, then tied it.

His easy surrender hadn't fooled them.

"He figures we'll take 'im to the chief, and he'll then bust loose and mop up on the chief," a man said. "Won't he be fooled!"

They took Doc, the girl, Tomahawk Tant, and Tant's men, put them all in cars and drove away. After about an hour and a half of driving, Doc Savage's sensitive nostrils caught the odor of crude oil. The car stopped while some one got out and opened a gate, and when the machine went on, grass could be heard dragging against the underside.

"Bring them into the room where the others are!" said the voice of the black-gloved man.

Doc was shoved through a door, and the door then slammed, making such a sound as to indicate it was a heavy and strong door.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" said the voice of big-worded Johnny.

DOC SAVAGE stood perfectly still.

"Pipe down, Johnny!" advised Monk's small voice. "We were so sure you were dead that when you talk, it still seems to me like your spook had come back!"

Doc Savage worked at the sack over his head. He got it off just in time to see Vida Carlaw, Tant—or Reservoir Hill—and the other Tant followers shoved into a great room which had concrete walls and no windows.

Glancing about, Doc saw just about every one concerned in the mystery of the red, jellylike devils from the depth of the earth. His five aids were there, all very much alive.

Long Tom, the electrical wizard, said, "They just finished giving us a heck of a scare, Doc! They took each one of us out and rigged up a fake business so that we thought they were feeding us to the red devils! The idea was to make us talk!"

Ham put in, "Monk actually fainted, he got so scared when his turn came!"

"That's a lie!" Monk yelled.

Big-fisted Renny rumbled at Monk and Ham, "Don't you two japes ever get tired of fighting with one another?"

Alonzo Cugg, sitting in a corner with no expression except the usual fear in his eyes, said, "Gentlemen, are you thinking



gonna—well, you know what he was gonna do. He was starting in the Indian Dome Field. And that was the catch!”

“Your oil property was in the Indian Dome Field,” Doc said. “That was the reason. The first victim was to be the Sands-Carlaw-Hill lease?”

“Listen, I got more property than my share of that lease in the Indian Dome Field! I own a dozen leases under different names! I’ll have you know I’m a millionaire, I am! And nobody concerned suspected me of being Tant!”

“So you refused to take part in this other man’s plot, because your own holdings were to be the first one’s stolen?”

“That’s the idea. Anyhow, I ain’t a guy who likes to take orders from nobody. This other mug was pushing in on my territory, I figured. That kinda helped me decide to tie into ‘im.”

“Which was *your* mistake,” some one said, dryly.

The door opened again, and the men with rifles came in. They came over and prodded Doc Savage.

“You better say good-by this time,” one of the riflemen growled, “because you ain’t comin’ back!”

## Chapter XX THE BLAZE OF GLORY

MONK and Ham got up from the floor, where they had been sitting, and the bronze man’s other aids grew tense. They were fully intent on starting to fight, despite the muzzles of guns menacing them.

“No!” Doc said sharply.

“Listen, Doc!” Monk growled. “You’ve been searched! I’ve seen you do some impossible things, but you won’t make it this time! These cookies are tough, and they’re gonna finish you off!”

“Keep your heads!” Doc said, again sharply.

Then he added five words in a tongue which himself and his five aids used when they did not want to be understood by listeners. It was Mayan, an ancient language, lost to the so-called civilized world.

“And be ready to help,” Doc said in Mayan.

Monk and the others were good actors. They showed no sign that the words meant anything favorable. Instead, they looked more worried than before, if possible, and clenched their fists and surged forward threateningly.

“Keep back!” Doc yelled at them, keeping up the deception.

Doc Savage was now hauled out of the room, the door of which was then slammed.

In the big room into which the bronze man was dragged, a number of heavily armed men stood about. They all stared at the bronze giant with great interest, and since he was weaponless and they had firearms, and also since they outnumbered him a score or more to one, they were not afraid.

On the table, far to one side, lay the stuff, which had been taken from Doc. They took pains that he did not walk near it as they marched him across the chamber and to a door which probably led to what had been a small storeroom. Several men sneered. One or two laughed jeeringly.

Doc Savage stopped. The men leading him tried to yank him on, but suddenly found themselves almost helpless. The bronze man did not attempt to escape; he merely turned slowly. It was strange, the effect this had. Every man in the room became silent.

Doc allowed them about ten seconds—long enough for the silence to have its effect, but not long enough for it to wear off.

“You men,” Doc Savage said, “are doomed!”

His flexible voice had become deep-timbered and sonorous, and in it was a quality of sepulchral unreality. It was as if a ghostly apparition had spoken.

“Before many minutes pass, you will feel the first clutches of death!” Doc said, solemnly.

After that, he began to make his weird, trilling noise. He could, if he desired, make this consciously, although on ordinary occasions the sound came without thought. Indeed, it was sometimes a cause of embarrassment.

The trilling sound mounted and mounted, and from its usual resemblance to a wayward breeze trickling through the naked boughs of some thick forest, arose and arose





been scarred terribly by some accident in the past. They could be recognized instantly.

"Do something about this!" he roared at Doc.

The bronze man, showing no sign that he considered the request strange, considering that they had been on the point of killing him, said, "Monk can help you. This stuff is merely burns caused by an acid which was in my carry-all vest. The acid must have been spilled. It is really a gas with some of the burning properties of mustard gas."

Doc did not add another fact which would have astounded the man with the scarred hands—that the acid had been in tiny glass containers which could be broken by certain frequencies of sound waves.

The glass containers had a certain vibrating point; and a sound of that frequency would start them vibrating in sympathy, with the result that they shattered themselves when a certain strength of sympathetic vibration was reached.

It was the same method by which the famous singer, Caruso, was able to break wine glasses, except that in this case it had been Doc's trilling sound, lifted to great volume, which had done the job.

"Monk can fix an antidote!" Doc yelled. Then, as if he were angry, and expressing his rage in the imprecations of a foreign tongue, he said loudly in Mayan, "Monk, the rest of you, be ready to make a break for it when they unlock the door!"

Doc's aids heard, and acted on the suggestion, it seemed, for the next instant the pump station became filled with shouting and yelling and uproar.

THE sudden burst of fighting distracted the men in the big room. Doc, lunging sidewise, smashed a fist at the man who wore black gloves to hide his scarred hands. The fellow dropped.

Doc yelled in Mayan, "Don't fight them! Run for it!"

The bronze man knew the foes, once they discovered there was nothing more serious than a bad acid vapor burn wrong with them, would fight with a will.

Doc himself dived for a door, got through it.

Glass broke to the left. It was a windowpane crashing out. Monk came into view, whirled and caught Vida Carlaw as

some one heaved her out. Renny, Long Tom, Johnny and Ham followed. All were burned by the fumes.

An armed man came charging out of the big room after Doc. The acid vapor had affected his eyes, and he could see not too well. Doc hit him. The man, in falling, chanced to throw his gun in the direction of Monk and the others.

Alonzo Cugg, fright still in his eyes, was climbing through the window out of the pumphouse. He hit the ground, saw the fallen gun, and sprang for it. He got it.

"I'll finish you, anyhow!" he shrieked.

He pointed the gun at Doc Savage.

Probably he wouldn't have hit Doc, because the bronze man was weaving forward, and Cugg could see none too well. But Monk was closer, hauled off, and kicked Alonzo Cugg in the temple, then expertly caught Cugg's gun as it flew out of the man's senseless fingers.

"First I knowed Cugg was one of the crooks!" Monk gulped.

Doc's aids ran away from the pumphouse, helping Vida Carlaw to make speed.

Doc waited. Tant—Reservoir Hill—did not appear.

"Tant!" Doc called, sharply. "Come on!"

"Hell with you!" roared the old reprobate's voice. "As Reservoir Hill, I might run, but as Tomahawk Tant, me and my hombres is gonna clean house here! Then we're gonna get you yourself!"

Doc did not argue. He spun and drifted away from the pumping station with the speed of a hard-driven cloud.

HIS aids and Vida Carlaw had already reached the dike around an oil tank, and they tucked behind this barricade.

Bullets began to pass close to Doc, making whistling *snick!* noises, but he reached the bank and dived over it.

"Boy, oh, boy!" Monk groaned. "Does that acid vapor burn! I feel like I'd been skinned alive!"

"You look as if you were made for skinning!" Ham said, referring slightly to Monk's furry hide.

Doc said, "Whichever side wins that fight, it makes no difference to us. They'll be after us. Come on!"



no time in fleeing Oklahoma. At least, they were never heard from again, nor could a trace be found of them, although Doc Savage had his five aids looking about for them.

DOC SAVAGE, while his aids sought outlaws and Andershott followers, attended to the final details of getting the earth monster scare quieted. It was not hard. Oil men are quick to adapt themselves.

There was one more surprising development. Tomahawk Tant's will—to be more exact, Reservoir Hill's will.

He had left everything—including the properties he owned under other names—to Vida Carlaw.

Vida refused to have anything to do with the legacy. Doc discussed the matter with her. There was no reason why she did not have a legal right to the wealth. She was adamant, didn't want anything to do with it. They compromised by establishing with the funds one of the largest free hospitals in the world in Oklahoma.

Renny, the big-fisted engineer, went over the preliminary plans with Vida Carlaw. Renny was also something of an architect, and he had also become somewhat enamored of pretty Vida Carlaw, and volunteered his services.

In fact, he gave the young lady quite a rush—and Monk and Ham learned

something. Monk and Ham had long considered themselves the lady-killers of Doc's little group. But in the present instance, big-fisted Renny left them at the post. They didn't have a chance.

Monk and Ham took their disgust out on each other. It got to a point where it really did look as if they would murder each other. Even their pets, Habeas and Chemistry, which had been in the Tulsa hotel throughout, took to eating each other at every chance.

The coming of THE MENTAL WIZARD might have kept them from actual mayhem. Certainly, the mystery of THE MENTAL WIZARD was a thing so astounding, and so startling in its possibilities that it completely occupied their attention—to say nothing of nearly costing them their lives.

It was strange, the beginning of the mystery of THE MENTAL WIZARD. A plane, a plane long believed to be lost, came flying out of the South American jungles. In it was a young man, the pilot, whom the world had given up hope of seeing alive again, years before. Riding beside him was a young woman, a young woman dressed in fantastic garments, speaking a language none could understand.

THE END

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