

RED SNOW

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Doc Savage and his men walk in the balmy Florida sunshine and get caught in a snowstorm—Red Snow that leaves death and destruction behind its downy flakes!



Out of a brilliant Florida sky came a gentle fall of red snowflakes—and in its path, instead of ice and cold, came a terrible menace, so dangerous that even Doc Savage was appalled!

RED SNOW

A Complete Book-length Novel

By **KENNETH ROBESON**

Chapter I MYSTERY IN SCARLET

AS far as was ever learned, a Seminole Indian alligator hunter named Duck-With-No-

Wings was the first to see the Red Snow. The first to see it, that is, and live to discuss it later.

The Red Snow had appeared before, and had been seen, it developed in the course of time, but the witnesses had been victims of the

scarlet horror and had not been heard from again. Nor had their bodies been found. It was very fantastic and quite inexplicable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ALMOST any one would have been surprised, and Duck-With-No-Wings was no excep-

tion. He stared upward, his round copper face distorted with amazement. There was nothing at all to show from whence the Red Snow came. It seemed to materialize in the thin, warm air of the swamp.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE police departments in various American cities were doing some thinking about this time, too. In Cleveland, they were thinking about

tine of exercises lasting for two hours—exercises which had not only given him an amazing physique and unusually sharp senses, but had developed his thinking processes as well.

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

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

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

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

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

Shotgun slugs clouted at what remained of the window panes. With a loud ripping, lead came completely through the thin wall of the hotel. It was a frame building, lightly constructed, and the automatic shotguns seemed to be charged with two or three large lead slugs to the cartridge. The guns were making thunder in the street.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

This got a roar from upstairs. "You heard me!" squawled "Monk." "Lay off Habeas or I'll tie knots in you!"

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

"What's the fireworks outside, Doc?" Monk demanded.

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

Monk and Ham followed him, trailed by the pig, Habeas Corpus. Monk was Lieutenant

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

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

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

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

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

"They're after your baggage, Doc!" Monk grunted.

"So it seems," the bronze man admitted.

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

"I cannot imagine," Doc replied.

Ham squinted at the bronze man. "You haven't been cooking something up, Doc?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

downstairs swore, "Damned if they ain't makin' loopholes in the wall! Hey, you upstairs!"

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

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

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

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

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

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Nona Space," she said. "Didn't Cass tell you?"

Doc guided her toward the window.

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

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

"But what about the other two?" she demanded.

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

"Who are they?" he asked.

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

"Didn't Cass tell you?" she asked.

"Prisoners?" Doc questioned.

"But Cass should have—"

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

"Professor Casson Adams was killed," he clipped. "They raided the baggage truck carrying the trunk in which he was hiding. They shot through the trunk. Professor Adams had identification in his billfold which gave this as his ad-

dress, and we came out to investigate. We did not know what it was all about. We still do not know. Who are these other two persons you are talking about?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was Mayan which he spoke, language of a lost civilization of Central America which had rivaled that of Egypt. Doc and his aides had mastered the tongue for use in situations such as this; as far as they knew, no other individual in the so-called civilized world could comprehend it.

Monk answered, also speaking Mayan.

Doc sent the girl toward the window.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Haven't seen her," Monk grunted.

Doc Savage seemed not to hear.

"The girl?" he repeated. "Where is she?"

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

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

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

Doc was watching his lips and read the query.

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

"Other two?" Ham questioned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Girl—screaming!" Ham gasped.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'll bet this bus is breaking its own record," he grunted.

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

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

"A boat," Ham breathed.

"They're being picked up!" Monk yelled.

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

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

"Numbers been taken off," he said of the latter.

"Chemical treatment will bring them out again," Monk offered.

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

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

"Where are we going?" Monk demanded.

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

"Remember what the girl said?" Doc asked.

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

"Exactly," Doc said.

Chapter V THE SURPRISE IN SKIRTS

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

"What'll we look for first?" Monk wanted to know.

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

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

Monk nodded his small head. "I been wonderin' what them things were."

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

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

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

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

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

Above each of the pedestals, they now noted, there was a funnel-shaped affair of sheet

metal, and from each of these a pipe ran outdoors; they might have been installed to conduct away rising fumes.

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

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

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

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

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

"There *was* something on these supports," he said.

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

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

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

"Been to Hyman Space's place, I guess," the attendant hazarded genially.

"You mean the old house among the dunes? Monk asked.

The attendant nodded, grinning. "Not thinking of buying land out there, are you?"

Monk snorted. "In that goat pasture? Not us!"

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

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

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

"Who are Adams and Wood?" Monk put in.

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

"Ten," Monk told him. "What was Space's racket?"

The attendant began to run gasoline into the tank.

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

"There's a girl, isn't there?" Monk asked.

"Old man Space's daughter." The attendant grinned. "A pippin!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE Hotel Biscayneville had the air of a place where things were happening. Two police

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

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

Leslie Thorne had vanished.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Doc Savage looked at the front page.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Have you been following the newspapers lately?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Doc said nothing.

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

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

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

"A headache," Ham said.

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

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

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

Pat was voluble when he got her on the telephone.

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

"What's wrong?" Doc asked.

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

"Nothing doing," Doc told her. "I want you to visit my laboratory there in New York, and look through the storeroom until you find a large metal case marked AN-32. Send it by air express to the Magnolia Chemical Products Com-

pany in Miami. I am speaking from there now. See that it gets on a plane tonight."

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

"You will not," Doc told her.

"What a friend you are," Pat complained.

"All right. I'll see that it gets on a plane. What is it, anyway?"

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

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

Ham squinted at Doc Savage and Monk.

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

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

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

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

"There is little we can do until the analytical apparatus comes from New York and we find the nature of this red substance," Doc Savage explained. "No one knows we are here except the local head of the chemical concern, so we are comparatively safe from police interference. It is just as well for us to stay here."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Okay," the other mumbled.

"Everything is prepared?" Beech asked.

"Sure."

"Where?"

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

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

The two now began moving, walking almost side by side, and turned into the path,

which at this point was little more than a deep gash through luxurious tropical vegetation. It was somewhat gloomy on the path, but not so gloomy that both men failed to see the giant man of bronze who had unexpectedly confronted them.

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

BEECH reacted strangely. He began to talk.

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

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

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

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

"Get 'em up!" he gritted. "I'd hate to kill you!"

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

"You asked for it!" he shrilled, and slashed with his scythelike instrument.

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

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

Then Doc Savage got both hands on the black-faced man and yanked him forward. They came together with an impact that could have been heard hundreds of feet. The other was stunned. Doc put both hands behind the fellow's head. His corded bronze fingers convulsed.

The giant of metal was doing something he had done once the night before—inflicting a form of paralysis simply by exerting awful pressure on certain nerve centers. The victim's

Chapter VIII THE PATH TO MYSTERY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Doc Savage looked closely at his shoes. There was, as far as he could see, nothing

wrong with them. He stamped to see if they were solid. They were.

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

It was somewhat as if a monster blowtorch, one giving terrific heat, heat such as ætronomers say exists in the sun, had struck over the region. Yet it was not like that, either. A blowtorch, or terrific heat of any kind, would have charred, would have raised the temperature of the neighborhood.

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

Doc Savage listened. He was hoping for any sound that might indicate what really had happened, hoping, most of all, for some communication from Monk and Ham.

Then, so unexpectedly that their appearance was like a visual thunderclap, Monk and Ham walked out of the shrubbery. The wild expressions on their features showed that they had seen what had happened.

"We ran when we saw the stuff," Monk said hoarsely.

A GREAT weight seemed to have been lifted from Doc Savage. He went to work, scooping up samples of the soil—it was exposed down to the black loam—and stowing them in the envelopes which chanced to be in his inner coat pocket.

"Did you see what started that—that red snow falling?" he asked. "Was there anything in the air above you?"

Monk and Ham shook a negative simultaneously.

"If there was, we didn't see it."

Doc finished stowing away the envelopes of earth samples. "It may help us if we analyze it when the apparatus sent by Pat from New York gets here," he said.

Ham pointed with his sword cane. "Beech—where did he go?"

"He had more of his gang down the path," Doc said. "He yelled at them. I could not make out what he said. But we'll look for him now."

They broke into a trot down the path, but did not follow it very far, veering off into the shrubbery instead, so that they were concealed.

Doc went a little ahead, warily, his superior senses straining to detect any sounds of danger.

Monk and Ham said little. They did look back frequently, as if still in the spell of what they had seen back there when the Red Snow fell.

"In about an hour," Monk said thickly, "I'm goin' back there and have a look, to see if I really dreamed what happened."

They had covered about two hundred yards, and Doc Savage stopped abruptly; not turning, he motioned backward with his hands, then began to study the ground.

Monk and Ham looked closely, then understood, but knew they would have missed the faint sign had the bronze man not called their attention to it with his actions.

Several men had waited along the path. They had been on both sides of the path, it developed, when Doc Savage crossed over and found on the other side grass trampled down and dead leaves crushed where feet had pressed.

"Nine men," Doc Savage said.

Monk wet the edges of his big mouth. It could have been one man, or nineteen, who had trampled the grass and he could not have told, although his small eyes were as keen, his perception as acute, as that of any ordinary man. But there was no doubt in his mind that Doc was right. Doc could tell. The bronze man had powers which quite often struck Monk as being just a little beyond human.

"Beech joined them," Doc continued. "Then they all fled."

"We follow 'em, huh?" Monk asked.

Doc answered by going forward. Monk and Ham trailed him, keeping close to his heels, concentrating on making as little noise as possible, rather than looking about for danger. They depended on Doc's developed powers for that, knowing from past experience that they far exceeded their own.

Beech and his party had traveled at right angles from the trail and Doc Savage, studying the length of the footsteps, knew that they had been running. But before long, the footsteps shortened, indicating the men had slackened speed.

"Careful," Doc warned. "They may have stopped. They may be around here anywhere."

Monk complained, small-voiced, "I wish my pet pig, Habeas, hadn't got bunged up at the start of this, and the cops hadn't taken him along with our baggage. He could scout through this shrubbery. He's better than a dog at that."

Doc Savage had been to the left a few feet an instant before, and Monk looked in that direction, as if hoping the bronze man would agree. Monk drew up very straight, and his small eyes grew round as marbles, for Doc Savage had eased away silently, was gone.

Doc was a dozen yards away at the moment, bent over low, making no sound, taking infinite pains to keep himself hidden from a small, thick bush off to the north. He circled, getting behind the bush, but found it flanked by a flowering shrub, the leaves of which were quite thick.

He had seen movement in there, was convinced it harbored some one. He came very close, approaching from the rear, then tensed and shot forward. As he had expected, he found a form crouched in the leafage.

An instant later he dragged small, pretty Nona Space out of the foliage.

MONK and Ham had heard the flutter of the bush and came running up, machine pistols ready, safeties unlatched. They stopped, and had they seen the black-faced man who had turned so fantastically into dust after the fall of red snow, they could not have looked more surprised.

The girl struggled, not so much to get free as to slacken the bronze man's grip, which was unconsciously tight.

"After all, I'm not shatterproof!" she gasped.

Doc Savage looked at her, possibly surprised a little that she should have used those words instead of more prosaic ones although his bronze features gave absolutely no indication of what he thought.

Monk did his best to scowl darkly at her, then made a crooked grin, consciously trying to keep the ends of his mouth down while admiration pulled them up.

"You'll wish you were shatterproof before we get through with you," he advised. "Where's your pals?"

"Around somewhere," said the girl frankly. "You'd better be careful."

Monk blinked. "Any idea exactly where?"

"I haven't seen them." She shook her head. "I have an idea they were here somewhere, because they were shadowing those other men, the ones working with that talkative, man called O. Garfew Beech, or Fluency Beech."

Monk blinked again, incredulously.

"And you don't know who Beech is or what he is trying to do?"

"No."

"Blazes!" Monk groaned. "This is as black a mystery as it ever was."

Chapter IX MYSTERIOUS ISLE

DOC SAVAGE did not question the girl further at the moment, but moved away, searching, eyes alert, following the trail made by Fluency Beech and his party. This came to a disappointing end. It terminated at a curving concrete boulevard. There were fresh drops of grease on the cement, as if cars had stood there recently. The machines were now gone.

Returning to the vicinity of the fantastic bare place where the Red Snow had fallen, Doc Savage conducted an extensive search for tracks. He found some.

The footprints had been made by four men, and they did not approach within closer than a hundred feet of the place where the Red Snow had descended with such incredible results. The men who had made the tracks had retreated and had entered a car which had been pulled into a clump of bushes a considerable distance down the curving boulevard from where Fluency Beech's men had parked their machine.

Doc Savage read the slowly straight-entering grass stems, the drying juice which heavy feet had pressed from weeds, as if they had been lines on a printed page.

"They fled about the same time that Fluency Beech's men departed," he advised.

"Then we're stumped," Monk muttered.

Doc now devoted some time to questioning the young woman. She answered all of his queries directly, without hesitation, and not once did she alter her story in any detail. Nor was she able to reveal anything of more bearing on the mystery than that which she had already divulged.

Monk drew Doc aside. "Do you think she's lying?"

The bronze man said, "Monk, there is one subject which I gave up studying a long time ago, simply because it seemed impossible to get the thing down to a point where it could be understood with any reliability."

"Women?" Monk asked.

"Exactly," Doc told him "Personally, I never could even tell when one was lying to me."

The girl approached and said, "I haven't asked you many questions. Just how much do you know about this affair?"

"Not a whole lot," Doc admitted.

"Then you do not know how to get on the trail of the black-faced men?"

"There is one possible plan," Doc said.

"What is it?" she asked. "I thought of one, too. Maybe it is the same one."

"These fellows seem to know a great deal about what is going on," Doc told her. "They undoubtedly watch the newspapers. We can run an advertisement which will draw their attention, and possibly get in touch with them by that method."

"Yes," said the girl. "If we can just draw their attention to us in such a way that it will not be too dangerous. I did not think of the newspapers. What kind of an advertisement will you run?"

"We'll insert it now," Doc said. "We'll compose it on the way to a newspaper office."

It proved something of a task to get the advertisement in the first editions of the morning papers. The advertising forms were closed the day before, it was explained at the newspaper office. But Doc Savage, by taking half a page and paying a not unattractive bonus, overcame this routine obstacle.

The next edition carried the display:

\$1,000 REWARD

FOR THE RETURN OF A SMALL ENVELOPE
HOLDING SEVERAL FRAGMENTS OF A
SUBSTANCE WHICH MIGHT BE MISTAKEN
FOR RED SEALING WAX.

PHONE BEACH 0071.

Monk narrowed his small eyes as he appraised the advertisement, then demanded, "That should do the trick."

He did not remark on the telephone number. He had seen Doc Savage, enroute to the newspaper office, stop at a small all-night drug store and enter the one telephone booth.

THEY went to the drug store, and the dapper Ham, at Doc's request, entered and waited to take calls. To account for his waiting in the store, Ham used a simple ruse. He entered the booth, ostensibly telephoned, then came out and told the clerk that he was waiting for a call,

and that it might be some time. He made himself agreeable with the attendant, from time to time purchasing soft drinks.

Ham was not entirely cheerful about his task. He had two reasons. The first, it cut him off from possible excitement, this serving as bait. Secondly, he had discovered that he liked the diminutive Nona Space. He found talking to her a pleasure, and he resented leaving her in the company of the homely Monk, who, despite his amazing homeliness, had the knack of charming women.

Times without number, Ham had wondered just how Monk got by with it. Ham himself was more than ordinarily handsome, he was the suavest of talkers and he had a remarkable line of conversation. Yet he found Monk an aggravating competitor. Ham sometimes wondered if young women, especially attractive young women, did not feel sorry for Monk because he was so utterly homely.

The street fronting the drug store, like most of Miami's thoroughfares, was bordered with shrubbery. A block distant was a small park.

It was in the park that Doc Savage left Monk and Nona Space, an arrangement entirely to Monk's satisfaction. They were seated on a bench, surrounded by dense shrubbery, and Doc advised them not to show themselves for any reason, but to keep an eye open to see that they, themselves, were not discovered.

Doc Savage himself departed without advising just what he intended to do.

Telephone wires along this thoroughfare were on poles, not in underground conduits.

A man in greasy coveralls, carrying a metal case, wearing a floppy straw hat appeared shortly. He wore lineman's climbing spurs. Around his middle was one of the wide belts commonly worn by linemen, and from it dangled the usual profusion of tools.

This man did not seem large—except when he was near some object to which his size could be compared. His skin was a pasty, rather unhealthy hue.

He climbed a pole near the drug store and busied himself with pliers, wire and the inevitable test set. A moment later, he was clipped in on the line which led into the drug store.

He heard a call from a housewife who wanted a quart of ice cream delivered. He got off that wire, and clipped onto another. There were only two leading into the store. The second would be the one to the booth.

The man on the telephone pole seemed to be having a great deal of difficulty. Finally, a call

came to the booth. The man on the pole listened in. It was from a newspaper reporter who wanted to know what kind of a story was behind the want-ad.

Ham told the journalist that he would call him back later, then hung up. The reporter called again immediately and demanded the story at once. Ham hung up again.

A car passed on the street. The man on the telephone pole could not see into the machine, but he kept an eye on it and saw it swing around the next block, turn in the middle of the street when it was out of sight. It repeated this after it had passed the drug store.

The man on the pole rang the booth. Ham answered.

"Get out of the store, Ham," the man on the pole said. "There is a car acting suspiciously. I think it is our game."

"Very well, Doc" Ham said.

DOC SAVAGE waited until the car was out of sight again, then climbed down from the telephone pole and walked into a yard, then stepped behind a shrub. He saw the car come back and stop a little distance from the drug store.

A man got out. He had a black face and wore shabby clothes, but his features were not those of a Negro.

He entered the drug store, removing his hat as he did so. His hair was black, curly, but the curls looked as if they had been put in with a waving iron. They were too regular, not kinky, artificial.

Doc Savage crouched behind the shrubbery and removed his coveralls, tools, the old hat, the spurs, and made a bundle of them. Finding them had been a lucky break. They had been in a lineman's car down the street and the bronze man had simply borrowed them.

The black-faced man came out of the drug store, looking disappointed.

Ham had not come into Doc Savage's range of vision, evidently having left the drug store by a rear door.

The man with the grease paint on his face—it was undoubtedly grease paint, although proof of the fact could not be detected from that distance—went to the car. Three other men, disguised like himself waited there. They spoke and Doc, wrenching out his peculiar telescope, got it in action in time to catch the conversation by reading their lips.

"Okay." Monk grinned. Andy Blodge was a contraction of his own name, Andrew Blodgett Mayfair.

Doc Savage ran toward the spot where they had parked their car—it was another rented machine. He started it, headed in the direction taken by the machine bearing the one black-faced man, and drove fast.

The road was straight and wide, with only smaller residential side streets cutting in. Most of these were short, for this boulevard thrust out into swampland which had been but partially developed—it was in fact, almost a narrow neck of dry land, with low ground and some water on either side.

Doc had known that. He had been fairly confident he would overhaul the other machine.

His confidence was justified when he caught sight of the vehicle far ahead. He drove more slowly, and began to shadow the other car.

FORTY-FIVE minutes later, Doc Savage was crawling through palmettoes and sand. He had left the car almost a quarter of a mile back, having rolled it off the road where it would not be noticed. The sand through which he crawled was of peculiar formation, being composed largely of very small sea-shells of an innumerable variety of shapes. The palmettoes were scrawny, the pointed leaves being particularly vicious.

Doc Savage knew his quarry was ahead somewhere. The man had parked his car in an ancient shed beside the road, closed the shed door and walked around behind the building. Doc had been able to see that much from up the road.

So far as he had been able to ascertain, the bronze man had himself not been seen.

With infinite caution, Doc lifted his head. He had heard a rasping sound, as if some one had drawn a difficult breath. He saw the source of the sound. It was not anything as sinister as it had sounded. It was simply the scrape of a small dory keel on the sand as the black-faced man shoved the boat down toward the water.

The craft had evidently been moored afloat by a long painter, but the tide had gone out, leaving it high and dry.

The man got the dory into the water, sprang aboard, and standing erect and using one oar, paddled away in a manner which showed he had not handled boats to any extent.

Perhaps two or three hundred yards distant, there was an island. It lay parallel with the shore, and was nearly a quarter of a mile long.

There was nothing to indicate how wide it might be.

In contrast to most low islands in the vicinity of Miami, this one was covered by a luxuriant tangle of tropical vegetation, literally a jungle. There was no beach on the island, the mangroves growing out into the water itself, so that it seemed there was no land, only vegetation.

The man in the dory was paddling for the island.

Doc Savage studied the shell beach on which the boat had been lying. Crossing it without being observed was a chance too great to take, especially if there were unseen watchers on the island.

The bronze man squirmed backward through the sand and palmettoes and turned north. Within a hundred feet, he came upon a salt water creek. The bank of this was steep, hard to climb, which perhaps explained why the dory had not been moored there.

Doc selected the most advantageous spot, one where the bank would slide less voluminously; he stripped off his garments until he was clad only in his silk shorts. He slid down the bank, a giant of a man with muscles and sinews which would have thrown a physical culture fan into ecstasies, and entered the water. He carried the tube of his periscope device.

He lengthened out and whipped soundlessly along the surface until, he reached the mouth of the creek, then went under without any of the elaborate somersaulting usually resorted to. He had made no splashing.

Once beneath the surface, he threw himself over and over several times with quick gestures of his hands. He had a deliberate reason for that. Air bubbles might have remained in his ears, his nostrils, or even in his shorts, and coming up later and breaking on the surface, would attract attention. He swam with long strokes, in each of which his muscles got full play.

When his trained lungs felt the strain—Doc had learned the trick of staying under water from the pearl divers of the South Seas—he ceased striking and worked with the periscope device.

The lenses came off easily, and were stowed in the little clip-box for that purpose, affixed to the side of the telescoping tube. Then he ran the tube up, fitted it between his teeth and arose until, with eyes wide open, he felt that it projected above water. He drank out the salt water which filled it, then began to breathe easily through the tube.

wise. The bullet slashed grass where he had reposed.

The rifleman swore, took a second deliberate aim. As his finger flexed, Doc leaped, this time not quite sure that he would get clear, but striving, as wild instinct dictated, to maintain his life thread unbroken as long as possible. But nothing happened. The automatic rifle was empty.

Then Ark ran into the clearing. He was a grotesque figure with his spindling limbs; he still wore golf knickers, but they were a different pair, these of an abominably green color. His hairless head resembled a dark billiard ball. Branches had scraped the grease paint off in long streaks.

Ark took in the situation. He began to shriek in his native tongue.

"Do not kill him!" he yelled. "There are things we should, ask him!"

By now, they had observed that Doc Savage was hampered by the handcuffs, and two men ran up boldly. They pounced on the bronze man. There was a sudden struggle. Blows whacked. Both attackers came flying out of the mêlée—and one, hitting the ground hard, got up screaming and drawing a knife. He rushed in again.

"No, no!" Ark bawled; "He is handcuffed, you fools! Take him alive!"

Doc Savage suddenly ceased fighting. It was futile, dangerous. It would only arouse his foes, and there was no chance of his escaping, anyway.

He was seized unceremoniously. More men came running. The little island seemed to be alive with them.

Ark indicated Doc Savage. "Carry him inside. We will question him."

"But what about the other one who ran?" asked one of the men.

"Perhaps he will come to rescue his chief," Ark chuckled. "We will search for him, too."

"But the one who ran was not one of Doc Savage's men," corrected the other.

"What?" Ark made it shriek.

"The other was a man whom none of us had ever seen before," said one of the men.

The words seemed to release an emotional brake in Ark. He bounced around, spouting orders. Men ran off to push a search.

Another pair of handcuffs were brought and clipped to Doc Savage's ankles, reënforcing those which were already there, and a pair was added to his wrists. Then he was carried into the building of coral and mortar.

There was no roof over the room where he was deposited, and grass and weeds grew from the stone floor.

After a time, Ark came in.

"At no time have we been introduced with the formality befitting individuals of distinction," Ark said. He clicked his heels, bobbed his round, hairless head in a brisk bow. "I am the Baron Lang Ark. You have heard of me?"

Doc Savage did not speak immediately, but studied the features of the man before him, sometimes shifting his gaze to two bodyguards who had accompanied Ark into the roofless room. They were foreigners, aliens who might smuggle themselves into the United States. Immigration officials were on the lookout for such. Florida was one of the great centers of the alien smuggling trade. Hence these men, noticed too frequently, would have attracted attention.

Negroes were plentiful in Florida. These men could pass as such with their skins properly darkened. Few observers would note that they lacked the lip contour, or observe their other tiny faults.

The Baron Lang Ark looked impatient and repeated, "You have heard of me?"

"No," Doc told him.

"Excellent!" The other laughed. "That is not my true name. Now, you will answer my questions. First, who was the other man?"

"I do not know," Doc told him.

"Who put the handcuffs on you?"

"He did."

Ark bowed shortly. "Then he is not a foe to be ignored. I gather that you followed my man here?"

Doc said nothing.

"Did you?" Ark snapped.

Doc held silence.

"The man was killed by the one with the shotgun, so you need not withhold the truth to prevent him being punished," said the hairless man.

Doc said, "I followed him here."

"How many came with you?"

"No answer I could give to that would be believed," Doc stated without emotion.

"True." Ark showed perfect white teeth in a smile. "We will go back to that question later. Did this man with the shotgun follow you here?"

Doc said in entire truth, "I have not the slightest idea."

"Why did he take you prisoner?"

"That seems to be part of the mystery."

all the legs but one, that one serving as a neck. The body was a little bloated, too.

"I have various methods for making one talk," Ark said. "We will try them."

THEY lifted Doc Savage bodily and carried him through an arch in the wall, an arch which looked as if it were in constant danger of falling down. They passed through a room where the floor had been grubbed free of grass and weeds. Beyond was an open court—this ruin of coral had once been a dwelling of the Spanish type, with a courtyard in the center.

In the court was a pit which had once been a fountain or a swimming pool—probably the latter, because it was deep, although the dimensions were not large.

Doc Savage was lowered to the bottom. One of the men brought a coil of wire, and this was employed in binding the bronze man, although there was no likelihood of his breaking the handcuffs.

When the wire was all used, he was little more than an elongated bundle of gleaming metal. Some one brought two iron rods, longer than Doc was high, and immensely stiff, and these were wired to him, or he was wired to the rods, so that he could not bend or flop about.

Several sheet-metal drums were rolled up. These were larger than ordinary barrels. They were arrayed around the edge of the swimming pool so that they projected slightly over the rim.

A lighted lantern arrived. Ark himself removed the globe and placed it, still burning, on the floor near Doc Savage. In order to make sure that he could not reach it, a stout iron pipe was driven through the cracked floor of the pool—the latter was of concrete—and he was wired to it.

With a hammer and a pointed punch, Ark drove a hole in the lower edges of each of the drums. A dark fluid ran out, splattered on the pool floor, spread. Its odor identified it. Crude oil.

"It is not highly explosive or extremely inflammable," Ark told Doc Savage quietly. "But it will burn. It is the same oil which is used in Diesel engines. It makes a very hot fire."

Doc said nothing.

"This may seem like good old melodrama," Ark said, still without particular emotion. "But I am not doing this because I desire you to meet a particularly horrible form of death. I want you to think. By thinking, you may conclude to answer my questions. You can watch the level of the oil come up on the base of that burning

light. I do not know just how high it will come before it does take fire. Perhaps it will be soon, perhaps late. That is for you to wonder about."

Doc's interest seemed far away, where the sun was a brazen disk high overhead.

"In the meantime, my men may find your two aides, Monk and Ham," Ark said.

Then he went away.

Chapter XI THE MEN OF DUST

MONK and Ham were having their troubles.

Their car—they had rented a machine—was traveling something near seventy-five miles an hour. The car had a cut out; this was open. Monk drove. Ham kept the tip of his sword cane on the horn button. It was a special type of horn, one which played cornetlike musical tones, and its uproar added a unique touch to the general bedlam of their hasty progress.

Nona Space rode in the back. She held a wrench which had been taped, not too generously, with bicycle adhesive, and from time to time she discouraged their three prisoners by tapping them ungently over the head. They were bound tightly and gagged, but they seemed anxious to throw themselves out of the car, despite the fact that, even lying on the floorboards as they were, they should have been able to tell that the machine was traveling at a tremendous rate of speed.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, was in the rear—Ham positively refused to sit in the front seat with him. Dog fashion, the homely pig had his head hanging out of a window. The rush of air kept his oversize ears distended like wings.

Habeas was the cause of their present jam—Habeas, and Monk's impetuosity.

They had been driving sedately through Miami, after renting the car, hunting a secluded spot where they could question their prisoners without a likelihood of being interfered with. Monk had sighted Habeas Corpus on a Miami street.

"Lookout, you ape!" Ham shrieked.

Monk gave the wheel a frantic twist, rubber shrieked, the machine keeled up on two wheels without slackening pace, and they rocketed out into the highway again. Monk had mistaken a wide driveway for a side road.

The car went on, its worn engine making a great uproar and giving off an ominous smell of

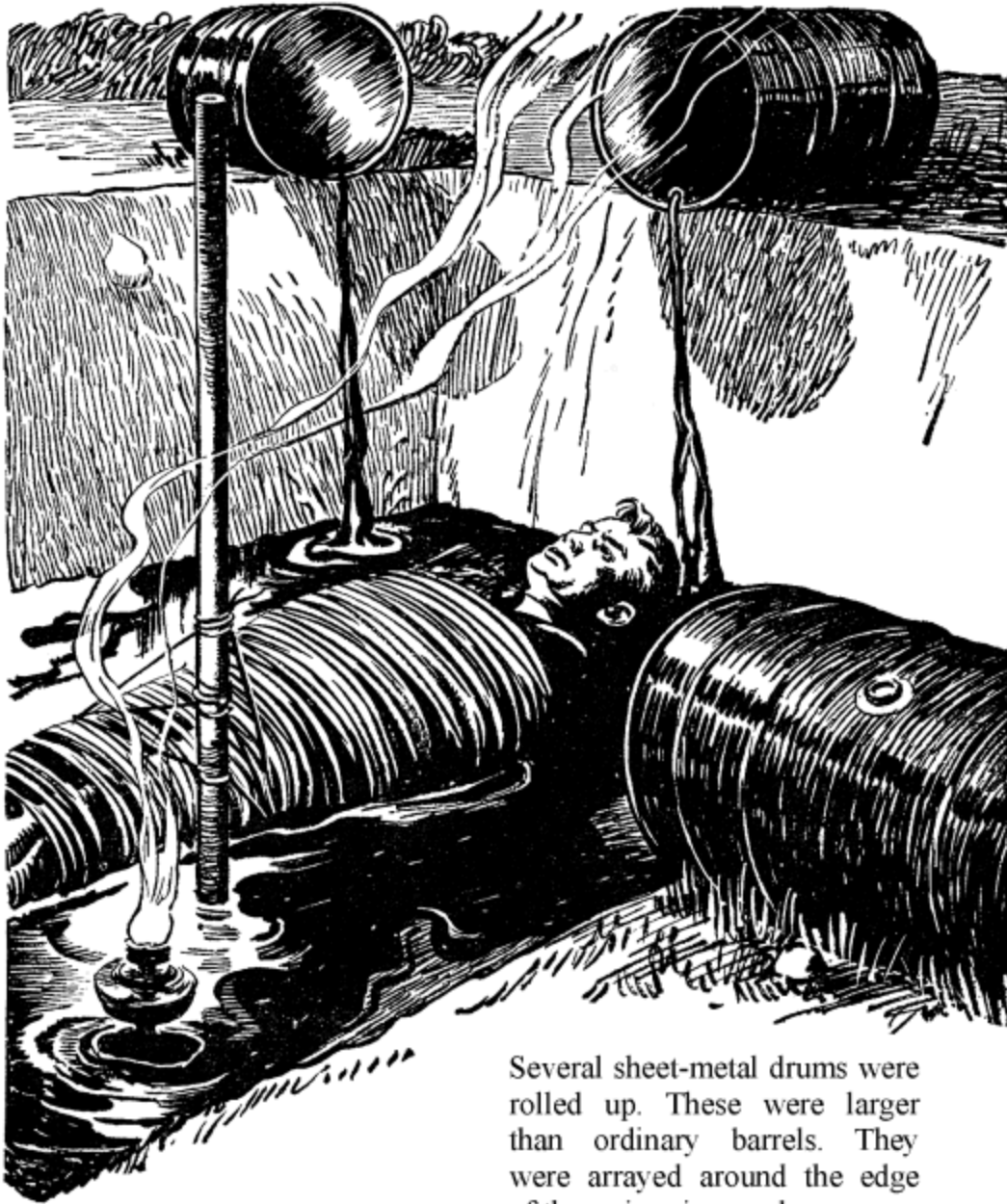


It was the dapper Ham who had a remedy for that. Ham was something of a linguist. He addressed the three earnestly and to the point in their native tongue, after which the trio exchanged furtive, uneasy glances, a tribute to the convincingness of what Ham had told them concerning their future prospects.

But the three still gave no signs of intending to talk.

Monk leered fiercely, leaned down, picked one up, and calmly began to bend the fellow double. There was an awful strength in Monk's simian arms—bending silver half dollars between thumb and forefinger and tearing books of fair thickness across with his naked hands were among his parlor tricks.

His victim began to scream. Monk desisted long enough to gather a fistful of moss and employ it as a gag.



Several sheet-metal drums were rolled up. These were larger than ordinary barrels. They were arrayed around the edge of the swimming pool. . . .

Monk's first manipulations were executed with gusto. Then they became more systematic. And Monk used a beautiful judgment. Bones, he did not quite break. Muscles, just on the point of tearing from their moorings, were eased of strain.

The prisoner became so wet with perspiration that almost a steady thread of drops ran from whatever portion of his features that was lowermost.

Nona Space gasped and moved away, where she would not have the spectacle before

her eyes. From time to time, Monk removed the moss gag to give the man a chance to talk, but without results.

Cars passed on the road. Ham, posting himself where he could watch, observed that two of them were police machines. In the brilliant sky to the southward, an airplane droned.

"You'd better cough up, guy," Monk told, his victim. "I want to know what's behind all of this. But first and foremost, I wanta know what that red snow stuff was, and what actually happened to the guy who was caught in it."

He got no answer. One of the other captives hissed something, evidently an admonition to Monk's prisoner not to talk.

Monk scowled over at the one who had given a warning. "Save that! When this guy wears out, it'll be your turn!"

The sound of the plane was coming closer.

Monk discovered unexpectedly that his victim was thrown into paroxysms by having the bottoms of his feet tickled, and the homely chemist fell to work with a coarse blade of grass.

"Monk!" Ham yelled suddenly. "That plane!"

Monk peered upward. "Police ship!" He flung off his prisoner. "Help me yank off green branches and put 'em over the top of the car, so they can't see it."

But it was apparent, even as they started, that they were too late. The pilot of the plane saw them. He sent his craft circling low.

THE car which Monk and Ham had rented was a fairly distinctive, light-gray machine. This had not been to their liking, but it had been the only fast vehicle available. The police plane, circling two hundred feet up, recognized the car. It was doubtful if those aboard saw Monk, Ham, the girl or the prisoners. They were all out of sight beneath foliage.

The ship swung away, and Monk had a false moment of relief in which he muttered, "Well, they missed us."

Then the plane came swinging back.

"You were too optimistic," Ham growled.

The ship was directly above. Suddenly, one of the captives cried out, and all three began to thresh about violently, trying to get into the open where they would be seen. One succeeded. The police plane arched down so close that its propeller blast stirred the leaves on the trees.

Then Monk and Ham gave tremendous starts as a thunderous voice crashed out.

"You are under arrest!" It said. "You will come out into the road with your hands up and await the arrival of squad cars!"

The underportion of the plane was fitted with one of the huge loud-speakers of the type sometimes used for advertising from the skies.

"Sure, watch us do that," Monk gritted.

"Ham, we'd better load everybody in the car and make a run for it."

"But they can follow us," Ham objected.

"Yeah." Monk scratched in the short bristles atop his nubbin of a head. "Well, I'll take the car by myself. They'll think we're all in it. I'll decoy 'em away and ditch 'em somehow. You take the three prisoners and the girl and skip out while they're shaggin' it after me."

The loud-speaker on the police plane thundered "Get out into the road, you fellows! You are charged with the murder of Professor Casson Adams!"

Monk got into the car, tramped the starter and backed the machine, turning around.

Those in the plane saw it move. The aircraft swooped. A uniformed officer leaned over the side and tossed out three objects nearly as large as one-gallon thermos jugs, and of somewhat the same shape. These hit the ground and began to spew vapor. All three landed close to Monk and Ham and their companions.

"Tear gas!" Monk howled. He tried wildly to get the car out of the little patch of timber, but it was too late. He crashed into a tree, caromed off, and got the machine wedged where it would not move any direction under its own power.

Monk scrambled out blindly, making disgusted noises.

MONK was still making disgusted noises when police patrol cars, half an hour later, arrived with sirens wailing and radio loud-speakers making uproar. The officers alighted and took charge of the prisoners.

The captives were placed in two large phaetons, which started for the Miami metropolitan district, running one behind the other. Several officers, using their strength, got Monk's rented car free of the trees, and another officer drove it in.

Monk and Ham sat in gloomy silence. But the young woman was more vociferous. She seemed to think she could convince the police that they had made a mistake.

"I should have gone to the police before with the truth," she said wildly "But I was afraid they could not find my father—my stepfather—and Ray Wood, and I feared activity of the police would hurry the slaying of the two. I thought Doc Savage would be my best chance."

"Doc is probably doing all right," Monk muttered.

The police were letting them talk, and listening with interest for what information they could pick up.

That was all of that. The policemen were brave enough, but none of them had a great desire to commit suicide, and that was what resistance would have meant.

A black-faced man slid behind the wheel of each police car, let in the clutch and backed away from the machines with which they had collided. Other sepia attackers clambered into the back and freed the three whom Doc Savage had captured, and whom the police, disgusted because the trio would not talk, had also taken into custody.

There was a delighted reunion, until some one remarked about what Ark would probably have to say about them letting themselves be captured.

The two police cars, trailed by the big truck, turned right at the intersection. There was much excitement, the shooting having attracted many cars. The street, in fact, was blocked for a short distance, but the obstacle was overcome by driving up on the most convenient lawn, smashing down flower beds.

A woman, evidently the owner of the flower beds, came screeching from her home; she ran up to the car, still shrieking because her flowers were being ruined.

One of the black-faced men laughed and, opening the phaeton door, gave the cop who had been shot—he was dead now—a shove. The body, with its hideous drenching of red, landed at the angry woman's feet. She took one good look at it and fell over in a faint.

The two phaetons and the truck turned again, and came into a narrow lane which crossed an orchard. The cavalcade stopped. The fellow who seemed in charge of things gave orders in his foreign tongue.

Monk, Ham and the girl were hauled out of the car. They were already handcuffed. Without ceremony, they were shoved into the truck. The work was done with smooth precision, as if it were all something of no great magnitude, but merely a task to be gotten out of the way quickly in order to reach more pleasant tasks.

The policemen were ordered out. They were disarmed. One was knocked unconscious when he tried to resist. His senseless form was dumped back into the phaeton. Once they were disarmed, the policemen were ordered to get into the cars and lie down on the floorboards, and not to stir for five minutes.

Even the black-faced men smiled when this last order was given. There was nothing pleasant about the smiles.

The truck now rumbled and jolted along the road. A policeman stuck his head out of one of the phaetons. A rifle snapped. The policeman seemed not to move; he remained with his head hung over the door, staring wide-eyed, and a red ribbon seemed to well mysteriously out of the middle of his forehead and spread downward until it became a slow scarlet flood.

The truck stopped. There was a pause. Then more of the black-featured men scrambled inside. There was controlled excitement in their manner.

Monk listened intently. He could hear shouting in the distance. There seemed to be a tremendous uproar at the crossroads. It was only a question of moments until pursuers caught up with the truck. A swarm of police cars, directed by radio, were almost sure to be on their way to the spot, despite the few minutes which had elapsed.

Then Monk reared up and got a look through the back of the truck, and he understood why the captors did not seem to be greatly worried.

Red snow was falling on the two police phaetons.

THE snow was a roseate pall, like a great veil of red gauze. It did not spread over a great area, nor did its greatest height reach more than two hundred feet above the tops of the orange trees in the orchard. But it was an awesome thing to watch, for the flakes seemed to spawn suddenly out of nothing more substantial than the brilliant Florida sunlight.

They materialized by the millions, small and red and scintillating, and fell much as if they were spray of some fantastic kind thrown up from a titanic fountain. The effect of the whole was soon that of a spongy red dome towering two hundred feet in the air, a dome that was alive and shifting continuously, a thing that appeared from a distance to be solid, yet which was composed only of red snow.

The truck drove away, and the two phaetons and the uncanny horror which had enveloped them were lost to sight before their fate became evident.

The truck evaded the police. The surprise caused by the Red Snow made it easy. A canvas cover was stretched over the vanlike body of the machine, and the motor hood was tied open, changing the character of the truck a treat deal. That helped, too.

"Be looking at a cold lifeless corpse who was the late Baron Lang Ark," Beech finished. "That is, unless you do as you are told. Another thing—you have a man of mine, one who was so unlucky as to permit himself to be captured. I want him. Where is he?"

"I have seen no one," Lang Ark lied.

"In that case, we'll take a look in that locker room," Beech told him.

There was cold fury in the portly man's tone; he was hardly the bombastic soul he had been when Doc first met him, although he still talked much more than another would have under the same circumstances.

Baron Lang Ark and the others backed into view, menaced by Beech's submachine gun. They moved toward the door which Doc had tried to open by picking the padlock with stiff weed stems. Doc Savage watched them, parted lips as if to speak to Beech—and did not.

Loose bricks had been shoved to one side of the corridor floor. Doc swooped, picked one of these up and threw it hard without straightening.

The brick whizzed through a window and struck a man who was in the act of leveling an automatic rifle. The fellow had crept up, unnoticed by Beech.

THE rifle went off. The man yelled.

Beech showed presence of mind. Without whirling, he leaped forward, bowled Ark aside, and got Ark and the others between himself and the spot from which yell and shot had come. Then he looked. At first, he saw only Doc Savage.

"Nitwit!" he yelled. "Why give an alarm?"

Doc waved at the window. "If you have to wear a bullet proof vest, put it under your clothes. That fellow was aiming at the back of your neck."

Then Beech heard the man outside the window moaning. He kept Ark and the others covered, ran to the aperture and looked out. He drew back, grinned.

"That one won't bother us for a while," he said rapidly. "You certainly damaged his face. You certainly did!"

Doc said, "I want a look into that room," and whipped forward. He still held the spectacle ear hook with which he had picked the handcuff locks. He went to work on the big padlock. It was modern. Picking it would not be easy.

Hyman Space and Ray Wood had come into sight by now, and Beech stared at them intently.

"Space and Wood?" he demanded.

The pair nodded together.

"Why in the hell didn't you two go to the United States government with this in the first place?" Beech demanded angrily.

Space shrugged wearily. "We were afraid. We did try to send two men out of the swamp, where these men have—"

Ark screamed, "You speak another word and you will die instantly!"

"The same goes for you!" Beech yelled at him.

Doc Savage got the padlock open.

Ray Wood pointed at Beech and demanded, "Who are you, anyhow?"

But Beech was looking at the door which Doc Savage was opening.

"Let's have a look in there," he said. "Everything else can wait."

Doc Savage looked into the room. He saw four machines, four intricate masses of machinery, no one of which resembled the other, except that all were about equal in bulk. Two seemed to be electrical in nature, with many bulbs and glass tubes, but the other pair were composed more of metal, with here and there a curved glass tube or a glass-walled tank. There were dozens of gauges.

About the machines clung a strangely cloying odor, a scent which was hardly pleasant.

Beech eyed the devices, then glanced at Doc Savage.

"What in Hades are they?" he demanded.

Doc Savage advanced into the room.

Outside, Hyman Space bawled shrilly, "Watch out! Here come Ark's men! They heard that rifle!"

Chapter XIII RED ISLAND

PORTLY Fluency Beech stuttered something profane and unintelligible and backed out of the room. An instant later, his submachine gun made a gobbling uproar.

Shots answered him. High-powered bullets began to snap and scream in reply.

Ark began to edge toward the nearest door.

Beech hauled a pistol out of his hip pocket, flung it to Ray Wood, and snapped, "Watch Ark!"

Ray Wood caught the pistol. Before he could get it ready in his hands, Ark had leaped

upon him. They struggled madly. Ark's men ran in to help.

Beech started to wheel, saw a man crossing the clearing, and turned back to cut the fellow down with his rapid-firer. Then there were two sounds, one following the other, as if some one had whistled and struck a blow with a hammer. Beech fell over backward, losing his machine gun.

Doc Savage was delaying to examine the machinery, his strange flake-gold eyes taking lightning glances of appraisal. But he saw what was happening outside in the hallway. He spun, sloped through the door.

One-eyed Hyman Space was racing for the fallen submachine gun. One of Ark's men tripped him, jumped on his back, then went on toward the gun.

Doc Savage, lunging with lightning speed, got to the submachine gun first. Ark's man backpedaled. He was not swift enough. Doc's fist caught him, changed the lines of his jaw, and the man went walking backward, stiffly, as if he were a big marionette with his legs worked by strings.

Ray Wood and his foes were still fighting over the pistol. Doc ran over, clutched the gun, twisted it out of the tangle of hands and struck twice.

Wood landed blows of his own. Then he got to his feet, leaving his opponents sprawled out on the floor.

In the clearing, men were yelling and shooting.

Ark began piping shrilly. He used his rative tongue, and his words came with spouting rapidity. Doc ran at him. Ark retreated madly, heedless of the revolver which Doc held. He reached the door of the room which held the machinery, leaped inside and slammed the pane. His movements were fast.

Doc hit the door. It resisted. He knew why. There was a bar inside, a ponderous affair, and Ark had been fast enough to throw that.

The bronze man wheeled back to the nearest opening from which he could survey the clearing. Three men were in sight, running forward grimly. In the fashion of soldiers, they held their automatic rifles level at their hips.

Doc hefted the gun briefly. It was a good weapon. He fired. The right leg of one of the charging men broke over between ankle and knee and he went down. Doc shot again; once more. The other two fell, also shot in the legs.

Beech was weaving up from the floor. He beat his chest, grimaced.

"Bulletproof vest—stopped bullet!" he gulped. "But man, oh man, I would—rather be kicked by a mule!"

He picked up his steel helmet, which had fallen off, and put it on.

They could hear Ark's flutelike voice. He was piping frantically.

"What's he saying?" Beech demanded. "I don't understand his language."

Doc Savage listened for a moment to Ark's shrilling.

"He is telling his men to use the Red Snow," he said grimly.

Shooting had stopped in the clearing. A man called out hoarsely, answering Ark.

Beech stared at Doc. "What are they talking about?"

"The men object to taking Ark's life," Doc said. "They say Ark's life is very valuable."

Ark shouted some more. Doc translated.

"Ark says that, although he invented, the Red Snow, his men now know how it is made, and that therefore his life is not so important," the bronze man said. "He says for them to go ahead."

"He has nerve," Beech said.

HYMAN SPACE had heard, and now he yelled frantically, "We've got to get out of here! That infernal red horror will kill us all! Nothing is proof against it."

Doc rapped, "You know what it is?"

Space shook a vehement negative. "The compound is too intricate for my understanding. It works on the molecular structure of matter, changing its nature. I think it reduces or almost stops molecular motion, thus completely changing the nature of matter."

"But the red material you tried to get to me?" Doc Demanded.

"It is an ingredient of the Red Snow—the stuff itself near the completed stage," Space said. "At least, that is what I think. I hoped that, by getting it to you, you could tell what the Red Snow is."

Beech put in, "How did you learn that much?"

Space shrugged. "I am a chemist interested in the production of new types of radioactive paints. I use considerable quantities of radium in experimenting. Somehow, these men found this out. They needed radium. So they seized me, got their supply through me."

Doc waved an arm at the closed room. "What are those machines?"

He juggled his rifle absently, as if contemplating shooting those in the water. He even lifted the gun to his shoulder and rocked it from side to side, as if trying to select the first to go. Then he hesitated.

"Have you made a report about what you have learned of me?" he asked Beech.

The portly man tried to grin. It was more of a grimace. He said nothing.

"It is likely that you have made a report," Ark told him savagely. "It is essential, or at least convenient, that your superiors receive no information about me for a time. I will make you a bargain."

Beech wet his lips. "Shoot."

"Your life," Ark said, in return for telling me how this report can be intercepted before it reaches Washington."

Beech hesitated. He nodded at his two companions, Space and Wood.

"How about these two?" he asked.

"I will be generous," Ark told him. "I will lock them up with you until this affair is settled. You will be prisoners, honorable captives. My word of honor on that."

"Your word is worth about as much as a lead nickel," Beech growled.

"At present, your life is worth less than that," Ark pointed out. "What is your decision?"

"No," Beech said hesitantly. "I do not trust—"

Ark leaned forward abruptly, aimed the rifle and pulled the trigger. Beech screeched an instant before the weapon exploded. He thought he was going to be shot between the eyes. Actually, Ark was firing a fraction of an inch over his head, by way of scaring him.

Whatever results Ark had expected, they were far different from those the shot got. The dory in which he stood was small and light. A moment after the shot exploded, bronze hands appeared on the boat's gunwale. They yanked. The boat heeled, hesitated, and when Ark, off balance and striving to stay aboard, stepped on the gunwale, the craft went completely over, precipitating those aboard into the sea.

Beech stared. Then the truth dawned.

"Savage!" he roared. "You didn't swim for it!"

Doc Savage did not answer, being engaged in wrenching the rifle out of Ark's hands. The bronze man had been concealed under the stern of the speedboat, hanging to the propellers, projecting his nostrils above the water to breathe. He had swum underwater to the dory an instant before the shot.

Hyman Space and Ray Wood came to life and joined the combat. There were only four unwounded men in the dory. Even numbers. Or hardly even, considering the tremendous strength and agility of the man of bronze.

The water around the boat foamed under the beat of arms. Blows smashed. A man yelled out in terror; the yelling turned to hideous bubbling as he was forced under. Doc struck Ark, and the man with the hairless head became limp. Doc lifted him, threw him across the launch coaming. Men were shooting from shore, but it was doing little good.

Within the space of three or four minutes, Doc and the others had overcome the occupants of the dory.

"We certainly have our ups and downs," Beech grinned.

Then he listened. There was motor sound in the air. Beech glanced upward, thinking it was a plane, then looked along the water and saw a fast boat coming toward them, its bows a welter of foam.

"Some yachtsman who happened along," Beech grinned. "Now I guess we'll get some help."

He changed his mind when two men stood on the pitching forward deck of the approaching boat and began to shoot slowly and deliberately with rifles.

THAT the newcomers were more of Ark's crew was evident. Their boat was fast.

"We can't pull that upsetting gag again," Beech wailed. "Savage, you'd better sure enough swim for it this time."

Doc said nothing. But once more, he sank beneath the surface. This time he did not remain, but stroked with all of his power, seeking to cover as much distance as possible before he came up.

When he did top the surface, it was suddenly, in the manner in which a porpoise breaks, and he filled his lungs with air—not slowly, with several deep breaths and a normal one at the last, as he would have desired, but all at once, in a convulsive pump.

After he was down again, he heard rifle bullets seeking him. They made *plunging* noises in the water. He swam for a long time, at an angle, then broke water again, got down once more, then changed his course, so that they would not be able to calculate exactly where he would appear.

Doc Savage knew planes. He realized that he was not going to get clear. The ship was too sluggish on the controls.

Doc dived over the cockpit rim into space. He let himself fall, not counting, but kicking his legs to prevent any tendency to spin. He ran his hands over the straps of his parachute—he never went aloft without one, if it could be helped—to make sure the straps were sitting properly.

Looking up, he saw the plane cleave into the cloud of red snow. It went straight through, stirring up the flakes, and came out on the opposite side, apparently unharmed. The controls were not centralized, so that it reeled over and over in the sky, and traveled some distance.

Then a wing fell off; the undercarriage came loose; the tail detached itself. These parts did not fall far before they themselves disintegrated, turning into a grayish-red powder which sifted down a short distance and seemed to be absorbed magically by the very air itself.

Doc glanced downward, saw the swamp close below, and gave the ripcord of his chute a yank. The silk blossomed out, yanked his fall short, and let him down in a puddle beside a thicket of cypress. Water birds, frightened up, made a great roaring by beating their wings and taking the air.

The other plane came moaning down from above. The man in the cabin had exchanged his flashlight for an automatic rifle. He began shooting. The bullets knocked drops of water high into the air.

Doc shed the 'chute harness and sprinted. He reached the edge of the water. The mud was deep, impending. Lead knocked the filth up into his face. Then he got under the trees, ran a few yards, changed his course, and was temporarily safe.

Crouching there, Doc Savage watched the Red Snow sift on downward. It never reached the swamp, but dissipated itself in the sunlight, an indication that the stuff had to be released near the ground, or its effects would not touch the earth.

The plane had not been disintegrated entirely by the Red Snow. The central section of the motor and certain cabin fittings had fallen into the swamp. But the rest of the ship had disintegrated in the weird fashion peculiar to the Red Snow.

Bullets began cutting into the scrawny foliage. Those in the plane had seen the bronze man.

Doc shifted his position. Thicker shelter lay to the south, but he did not go in that direction. He went north, carefully noting his position by such dead trees as served as landmarks. He seemed to be seeking something.

The plane dived overhead. The staccato rap of the automatic rifle was vicious over the motor rumble. The sounds the bullets made hitting into the swamp terrain, were infinitely more violent.

Doc got under a mass of creepers, and the bullets failed to search him out before the plane had to pull up and circle for another attack. By the time it got back, he had changed his position and the craft failed to find him.

A moment later, he found what he was seeking—what remained of the motor of the plane, and certain objects which had been in the cabin. The stuff was scattered over a radius of no great area. He searched carefully.

Not until he had found the metal case which had been in the cabin, did he seem satisfied.

THE case was bulky, unhandy to carry and at the same time remain hidden from the plane above. The ship circled, dived, and buzzed like an angry hornet. The automatic rifle stuttered at intervals.

Suddenly, those aboard the plane saw Doc Savage. With wild haste, the pilot banked and came downward. The bronze man was, for the moment, in the open in tall grass which offered poor concealment. He got boldly to his feet, ran and dived into a clump of brush, then carefully writhed to one side, losing himself.

In the plane above, the rifleman fired deliberately, raking the brush clump from end to end. His lips writhed as he cursed. Then he stopped shooting and slid forward to bellow in the pilot's ear.

"We will use the Red Snow again!" he shouted. "It is the only way!"

"It would be better if we did not!" the pilot bellowed back. "We have no great supply of the stuff, either aboard or at the headquarters! Ark's orders were to save it for emergencies, or to eliminate those whom we have listed to die!"

"This" grated the other, "is an emergency! Fly close above the brush."

The pilot shrugged, banked his plane again and sent it back. Back in the cabin, the passenger fumbled with a long case and brought out what resembled a grotesque air rifle. This had a barrel of moderate size, but below that

From the Arctic wastes, the next call would come. But it was not from the Arctic as civilized man knew it, but from a fabulous domain in the depths of the earth—the *Land of Always Night*—a spot unknown to civilization, yet populated by a race so advanced that the intricacies of radio, of television, of surgery and medicine, of electro-chemistry, were little more complicated than the problems which confront a small child.

A strange man covered with a growth of golden fur, a man of mystery, of untold learning, was to be the harbinger of the next amazing adventure of this bronze man and his companions.

Most remarkable of all would be the nature of the clue on which the mystery seemed to hinge—a pair of goggles with lenses so black that no man could see through them. Goggles with a fantastic purpose! Goggles, war for the

possession of which launched a stream of horror such as Doc Savage and his men had never before encountered.

But Doc Savage, having no inkling of all of that, set himself to work trying to create a parasite which would exterminate mosquitoes and nothing else.

Monk had a suggestion to offer, should they need a laboratory subject, bearing similarity to a mosquito, upon which to test the efficacy of such an evolved parasite.

"If we find the bug," he grinned, "we can try it out on Ham."

THE END

Strange things happen in a strange land,

LAND OF ALWAYS NIGHT

to which Doc Savage and his fighting pals are called by adventure and the cry for aid. People who know nothing of our civilization, yet have one of their own far superior to ours, living happily under conditions which we would think unlivable.

What is the secret which they hide, and who wants to take it from them? That is the story you'll read in the next issue of Doc Savage Magazine—a story in which the fantastic, the scientific, and the criminal are all embroiled in one battle.

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