

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter 1. THE BUTTERFLY DEATH

IT is somewhat ridiculous to say that a human hand can resemble a butterfly. Yet this particular hand did attain that similarity. Probably it was the way it moved, hovered, moved again, with something about it that was remindful of a slow-motion picture being shown on a screen.

The color had something to do with the impression. The hand was white, unnatural; it might have been fashioned of mother-of-pearl. There was something serpentine, hideous, about the way it strayed and hovered, yet was never still. It made one think of a venomous white moth.

It made Beery Hosner think of death. Only the expression on Beery Hosner's face told that, for he was not saying anything. But he was trying to. His lips shaped word syllables and the muscle strings in his scrawny throat jerked, but no sounds came out.

The horrible white hand floated up toward Beery Hosner's face. The side street was gloomy, deserted except for Beery Hosner and the man with the uncanny hand. The hand stood out in the murk almost as if it were a

thing of white paper with a light inside.

Beery Hosner went through a convulsion of fright. Beery was a rather unusual fellow. He was a crook who looked the part. At best, he was rather a sickening specimen, and now his aspect was doubly unwholesome. He managed to pump words out.

"Naw, naw, don't!" he choked. "I dunno where it is! So help me, I don't!"

The other man made no answer. His fantastic white hand -- the other one never moved, as if it were dead -- was not his only unusual characteristic. His eyes were unnaturally huge and so very pale as to be almost the color of water, and he had a thin face, a thin body. When occasional distant automobile headlights caused him to cast a shadow, the shadow was skeleton-thin.

Beery Hosmer broke out in gibberish.

"I don't know," he gulped. "I wouldn't kid you. I don't know anything about it!"

The other man's white hand kept moving.

"Where is it?" he asked. His voice was utterly flat; it held the mechanical quality found in the speech of persons so deaf that they can hardly hear themselves talk.

Beery Hosmer tried to back away. He was already pressed against the darkened window of a candy store.

"Wouldn't I tell you if I knew?" he whimpered. "Lookit, Ool -- "

The hand of the man called Ool seemed to move a little slower.

"You have it," he said tonelessly. "You were on your way to endeavor to sell it to this man Doc Savage. It is in the money belt which you carry around your waist."

Beery made choking sounds. He was almost sobbing.

"Take it easy!" he blubbered. "We can fix this tip. Gimme time! Lemme think!"

"You," said Ool, "will have all infinity in which to think." The white hand darted. There was no slow-motion effect this time. No onlooker could have told whether or not the hand actually touched Beery Hosner.

ALL of the pent-up terror of the last few moments burst from Beery Hosmer's slack lips in one animal scream. He wrenched violently backward. Head, shoulders and elbows rammed into the plate glass of the candy store.

The window collapsed. Glass crashed to the cement walk with a jangle.

Beery seemed to be trying to get a gun out of an armpit holster. But he thrashed about like one suddenly stricken mad. He kicked trays of chocolates and mints out on the sidewalk. Great shudders began to course over his scrawny body, but did not persist for long, because he gave a vast, wheezing sigh and slumped over, becoming as inert as the chocolate creams crushed beneath him.

Ool leaned into the window. His left hand remained at his side, as if lifeless. His right hand drifted to Beery Hosmer's shirt, wrenched. Two buttons flew and clicked far out in the street, then chamois of a money belt

tore with a rotten sound.

The object which Ool brought into view resembled a pair of goggles, more than anything else. But as goggles, they were peculiar, for the lenses were as large as small condensed milk cans, and their glass -- the stuff did not look like true glass -- was almost jet black.

One thing was striking. The workmanship was exquisite.

Ool put the goggles on, and they contrasted grotesquely with his chalky face. Then he made a disgusted sound, took them off hurriedly and pocketed them. A psychologist would have called the little incident strange. It was as if the donning of the goggles had been an instinctive action.

There was nothing hurried about the man's movements. He reached down, picked up a chocolate, tasted it and smacked lips. Then he took off his hat and scooped chocolates into it until it was nearly full.

Walking away, he ate the candy avidly, as if it were some exquisite delicacy with which he had just become acquainted.

At the corner, Ool passed under a streetlight, and a peculiarity about his hair became apparent. It was little more than a golden down, like the fine fur on a mouse.

One man saw Ool go under the streetlight. The man was a janitor in a near-by building.

It was inevitable that the breaking glass should have attracted attention, and within a few moments, a uniformed policeman came running. He stood looking at the candy strewn over the walk, at first not noticing the human form in the window. Then he saw it, swore, and leaned in to make an examination. When he backed away, he looked puzzled.

"Guy must've had a fit, fell in the window and died," he muttered.

That was the story the next editions of the newspapers carried, after a medical examiner had expressed the tentative opinion that death was due to natural causes.

Moreover, there had been over a thousand dollars in the chamois money belt, and since this was intact, it did not seem that the motive was robbery.

It was some hours before the police got a different slant on the story. It required that long for the janitor who had seen Ool go under the streetlight to make up his mind. The janitor was a timid soul. His story created quite a furor when he decided to talk.

The janitor had seen the whole thing.

Chapter 2. PLANS

EARL MAURICE "WATCHES" BOWEN stood in his modernistic Park Avenue apartment and poured eighty-year-old Napoleon brandy into a fragile glass, tested its bouquet long and pleasurably, then took a sip and blotted his lips with a silk handkerchief.

He was a big man, with some surplus around the waist. His dress was immaculate, his manner suave. He did not look the part of one of the smoothest crooks in the big time.

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Watches Bowen leaned back in the exquisitely moulded chair and absently fingered the thin yellow gold chain which connected the two lower pockets of his vest. There was a watch on either end of the chain. There was a jeweled timepiece on each of his slightly thick wrists.

Watches Bowen had two loves. One was his watches, of which he always carried four or more, and kept them perfectly in time. The other love was his Napoleon brandy.

It was possible also that he might be considered to have a third affection — his liking for other people's money.

Watches said, "And so Beery Hosner is dead?"

Ool sat a dozen feet away on another delicately modernistic chair, his hat held on his knees. From time to time his pearl-colored right hand drifted into the hat and transferred a chocolate cream to his forbidding slit of a mouth. The hat was almost empty, but he still ate avidly.

Ool swallowed, nodded, "That is what I came here to tell you."

"Unfortunate, very unfortunate," Watches said dryly. "What happened to the damned fool?"

Ool removed a chocolate from the hat and eyed it lovingly.

"These are delicious," he said. "What do you call them?"

"Candy," said Watches. "Chocolate creams. What about Beery?"

Ool ate the chocolate with much smacking of lips.

"No one will trace me here," he said. "I am sure of that."

Watches looked, acted as if he had been slapped. He had idly detached one of the watches from the gold chain and it all but slipped from his fingers; his mouth sagged roundly open.

"You!" he exploded. "You got Beery?"

"These chocolate creams, as you call them — I must have more of them," Ool said tonelessly. "Yes, I killed Beery."

Watches Bowen sagged back, reached for the brandy and did something which was very rare for him — he drank a slug without sampling its bouquet.

"Whew!" he muttered. "And you sit there gobbling down candy! Oh, I know you're only about half human, but—"

"My people had a civilization greater than yours some thousands of years ago!" Ool said. For the first time, there was some slight feeling in his voice.

"All right, all right." Watches spread his hands. "We won't go into that. Would you mind telling me why, particularly, you decided to scratch Beery off?"

"He knew our plans," Ool said.

Watches scowled. "Now look here, if you're gonna start bumping — "

"Beery Hosner knew our plans and he was greedy," Ool stated, interrupting. "He thought he saw a way to gather unto himself much money."

"This begins to make sense," Watches grunted. "What was Beery up to?"

"The device which you call my goggles — " Ool paused.

"Yeah?"

"Beery stole them," said Ool.

"The hell!" Watches polished the back of the timepiece he was holding. "But how in the devil did he plan to make a buck from that? He knew how things stack up. He knew — "

"He knew there was one man in your United States who might make use of the goggles," Ool interposed.

Watches shook his head slowly. "I don't get this. Who was Beery going to?"

Ool evidently knew something of dramatic effects. He allowed just the proper pause before answering.

"Doc Savage," he said.

"WHAT?"

Had some one shot him unexpectedly, Watches might have been more surprised, but only slightly more so. He whipped to his feet. He did something he had not done in years — he dropped one of his watches, the one he was fingering at the moment. And after his one blasting exclamation, he tried to speak and the words stuck somewhere down in his chest.

Ool ate chocolate peacefully. Electric lights were on in the apartment, and under their glow, several points about the man were noticeable which would have escaped casual observation. His white skin was given the mother-of-pearl appearance by an interlacing of fine blue veins. It somehow had the aspect of a tropical flower doomed to live its life among venomous insects and more venomous serpents, cut off from the sun in the depths of some swamp.

With a perceptibly shaking hand, Watches poured himself a hooker of the Napoleon brandy, downed it, once more without sampling its aroma and flavor. The rare liquor seemed to open a channel for his words.

"Did Beery get to Doc Savage?" he asked hoarsely.

"No," said Ool.

Watches let out a gusty sigh of relief.

"That's a break for us," he said fervently. "I'm telling you that I'd rather fight the United States army than this Doc Savage. A guy can at least run from the army."

"This Doc Savage must be a remarkable individual," Ool said, his dead voice making it seem that he had no interest in the matter.

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"Remarkable' is putting it mild," Watches snorted. "That bird Savage is a wizard! They say he knows all about electricity and chemistry and psychology and engineering and them things. They say he's a mental marvel. On top of that, he's supposed to be able to bend horseshoes in his hands, and things like that."

"Dangerous?" Ool murmured.

"You mean to guys like us?" countered Watches.

"Exactly."

"Poison!" Watches said vehemently. "Doc Savage makes a profession of mixing up in unusual things. He's what the newspapers call a big-time adventurer. He's supposed to travel around over the world, helping people out of trouble and punishing wrong-doers."

"That hardly applies to us," said Ool.

"Oh, yeah?" Watches grinned wryly. "From what I've heard, this thing is right up Doc Savage's alley."

Ool said nothing. He took the last chocolate out of his hat, ate it, licked his fingers, shook a few chocolate crumbs out in his hand, ate them, then stood up.

"You will get me more of those chocolate creams," he said.

Watches scowled as if he resented being given an order, then said hastily, "Sure! Sure!"

Ool went to one of the large windows and looked out upon the amazing display of lights which is New York City after nightfall.

Watches Bowen asked curiously, "How did you kill Beery?"

"I merely looked at him," said Ool, "and he dropped dead."

"O.K.," Watches growled, "if that's the way you feel about it."

Ool was looking steadily through the window, his head back as if he were eying the sky rather than the lights.

"How are our plans progressing?" he asked.

"Rotten," said Watches.

"WHAT do you mean?" Ool asked, not turning.

"I've canvassed all of the big airplane factories," Watches explained. "They can build us a true gyroplane, sure. This true gyro will rise straight up and hover. It can be controlled fairly well. But here's the rub. The damn things won't carry more than two men, and they won't lift hardly any fuel at all. The things are still in the experimental stage."

"Then you think we are doomed to failure?" Ool asked. He was still peering steadily at the sky.

"We're stumped," Watches said. He looked at the other curiously. "Say, what're you looking at?"

"Come here." Ool lifted an arm. "Look."

Watches Bowen came over and stared out of the window, not at the lights, but at the black abyss of the sky. A moment later, he saw that which Ool was indicating—a short string of lights suspended in the heavens. He watched these, and they came closer; and it became apparent that the lights were strings of luminous letters.

It was an advertisement, a flexible electric sign pulled behind a small dirigible.

Watches snorted. The thing was a common sight over New York City.

"What the hell?" he sniffed.

"An idea that I have," Ool said mechanically.

"Idea?"

"Which may enable us to quickly consummate our plans," Ool said. "We will make use of this Doc Savage."

Watches wet his lips, shuddered. "Don't crack wise."

"You think I am joking?" Ool asked.

"Either that, or you're crazy!"

Ool turned away from the window. "I know a great deal of this Doc Savage. I have studied him. I know his characteristics, and the characteristics of the five men who aid him. I even know that each of those five men is a specialist in some line. One is a chemist, one an electrical engineer, one a lawyer, another a civil engineer and the fifth a geologist and archaeologist. I know what mechanical equipment Doc Savage uses. I know —"

Watches gulped, "A minute ago, you acted as if you didn't know much about the guy!"

"I wanted to see if you were afraid of him," Ool said.

"I am afraid of him," Watches snapped. "I'm not ashamed of it, either. No man in his right sense will buck Doc Savage."

"Nevertheless," Ool murmured emotionlessly, "we are going to use him."

Watches all but yelled. "Don't! I tell you that Doc Savage and his five helpers are poison! We can find some way without mixing with them!"

But Ool wheeled and stalked out of the apartment.

HALF an hour later, Ool was on the Hudson River, in a small rowboat. He had the oarlocks muffled with rags, and the only sound penetrating the darkness was the occasional slap of a wave against the side of his boat. These small noises did not matter, being lost in the rhythmic lappings of waves among the pilings of the piers along the near-by water front.

Ool peered intently into the darkness. It was very black, yet the man with the strange mother-of-pearl complexion seemed to have some slight ability to see in the darkness, for he soon pulled in toward one particular pier.

This pier was roofed over, and it bulked large in the darkness. Across the outer end, after the fashion of piers, a name was lettered:

HIDALGO TRADING COMPANY

Most of the building was smoke-stained, old-looking, but there was a part, a higher addition to one side, which was obviously quite new. The end of this was closed with enormous doors.

Ool pulled his rowboat close to the pier warehouse and made the painter fast to a piling. For an instant, he stood looking up out of his flat, water-colored eyes at the blackly looming hulk of the structure. Then he grasped the nearest piling.

He did not look like a strong man, yet he shinned up the smooth timber with squirrel agility, and reaching the top of the piling, he continued his ascent up the warehouse wall, employing a steel girder, a number of which formed the outer structure of the wall.

A moment later, he squirmed over the top of the hangar.

He listened for a time. There was no sound, except small water noises. Ool crept forward, making for a large ventilator. He rounded this. Then things happened.

A squat, bulky form hurtled from behind the ventilator. Tremendous arms enwrapped Ool in a grip that forced air from his lung with a sharp roar. The stocky attacker wedged a head under Ool's chin, and Ool's stringy neck was bent until it creaked.

Ool tried desperately to bring his right hand into play, but it was pinned to his side. He lifted his feet in an attempt to overbalance his assailant. The apish attacker did not upset. Ool's mother-of-pearl face began to take on a purplish hue. He was entirely helpless.

Chapter 3. THE MAN WHO WAS NOT HUMAN

A FLASHLIGHT spiked a white beam out of the darkness and another man came from behind the ventilator.

"You do have your moments, eh, Monk?" he asked.

"Frisk 'im, Ham," grunted the apish man who had seized Ool. "See if he's got a gun."

The newcomer, "Ham," placed his flashlight on the roof, then stepped forward to search Ool. This put him in the flash glow. He was lean, of about average height, and attired in remarkably dapper fashion. He carried a slender black cane.

Ool stared at him.

"Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks," he said emotionlessly.

Ham did not look surprised. Courtroom training had taught him that, for Ham was one of the most astute lawyers ever to be matriculated from Harvard. He was also by way of being the male fashion plate for New York City. His other and major claim to distinction was that he was a member of Doc Savage's group of five remarkable aides.

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Ham tucked the cane under an arm and began searching Ool.

"Hurry up, you overdressed shyster!" "Monk" grunted. Monk had a small, childlike voice.

Ool tried to move his right arm. Monk put on pressure. A faint, strangely piteous cry came from Ool's lips and he subsided. Monk's strength was fabulous.

Monk had other abilities too, although a stranger would not have dreamed it after one look at his bullet of a head. There did not seem to be room for even an ample spoonful of brains above Monk's eyebrow line. Yet, as Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, he was among the half dozen greatest living chemists.

Monk was also a member of Doc Savage's group of five aides.

Ool revived slightly and spoke, his voice weaker, but still retaining its mechanical quality.

"How did you discover me?" he asked.

Monk grinned. The grin had the effect of making his incredibly homely face very pleasant to look at.

"A bird can't light on this building without us knowing it," he said. "Boy, you should see our alarm system."

"I see," Ool said. "I should have thought of photo–electric eyes and magnetic fields."

Ham, conducting his search leisurely, said, "The man seems to know something of electricity."

"Will you hurry up, you fashion plate?" Monk requested.

Ool lifted his left foot and stamped with all of his might on Monk's toes and instep. Monk bellowed -- he liked to yell at the top of his voice when he was getting hurt. He released Ool suddenly.

Ool, so unexpectedly released, staggered. Monk swung a fist. Ool had no time to dodge. The fist hit him and he slammed down on the roof. Almost instantly, he sat up, but did not try to get to his feet.

"Blazes!" Monk grunted. "He's tough. When I hit a guy like that, he generally sleeps."

HAM studied Ool's face. Ham had withdrawn a pace and tugged his black cane apart near the handle, disclosing that it was in reality a sword cane with a long, thin blade.

"He is a strange one," Ham said wonderingly. "Look at those eyes, and that mouse–fur hair on his head. And the color of his skin! Say, he's almost as funny–Looking as you!"

Monk scowled at Ham.

Ool chose that instant to lunge, and his right hand drifted out with a moccasin speed. Monk jumped. Only his agility, fabulous for one of such bulk, saved him.

"Watch it!" Ham yelled. "He's got something in that right hand!"

"You're telling me!" Monk circled warily.

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Ool was up on all fours now. He scuttled backward., spider fashion. Ham, circling swiftly, menaced the pale man with the tip of his sword cane.

Ool, staring at the cane, saw that the tip was coated for some inches with a sticky-looking substance.

"Poison?" he asked. His voice was still utterly flat.

Ham, startled by the calmness of the question, started to say something, then reconsidered and was silent.

"Shut up!" he snapped. "Show us the inside of that hand!" Ool hesitated. Then he turned the hand over, and both Monk and Ham bent over to examine it.

There was nothing in Ool's hand.

"You search him," Ham told Monk. "If he gets funny again, I'll tickle his ribs in a way he won't like."

While Ham threatened with the sword cane, Monk went through Ool's pockets.

"Nothing!" Monk said disgustedly. "No gun, no knife -- wait a minute. What's this?"

He pulled the strange goggles out of Ool's pocket and held them up to get better light on them.

Ool stared blankly, but his right hand, held high above his head, started wavering like a butterfly's feeble fluttering when it feels the first warm rays of the morning sun on its wings.

Monk pressed the goggles to his eyes.

"Can't see through 'em," he growled, then addressed Ool: "What are these things?"

Ool did not answer. His right hand kept up its weird shifting.

Monk pocketed the goggles.

"What did you come here for?" he asked Ool.

Ool said nothing, but his right hand continued its butterfly fluttering.

Ham watched the motion, frowned, then pressed the point of his sword against Ool's ribs. The chalk-faced assassin quieted his hand and kept it motionless.

"We'll take him to Doc," Ham said.

IN the center of New York City, the skyscrapers jut up like silver pines, each seemingly striving to overshadow the other; but there is one building taller and finer than all the rest, an astounding mass of polished granite and stainless steel towering nearly a hundred stories into the sky, a structure that is possibly man's proudest building triumph.

The entire eighty-sixth floor of this building was occupied by the man whose name was lettered in modest bronze on a door:

CLARK SAVAGE, JR.

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Monk and Ham took their captive to Doc Savage's headquarters by way of Doc's private speed elevator, a lift especially designed by Doc, one which swooped the eighty-six stories in about the time it took an ordinary express elevator to rise half a dozen floors. Almost invariably, a man, riding in the speed elevator for the first time, was forced to his knees by the shock of starting.

Monk and Ham watched Ool amusedly when the elevator started. But Ool's knees gave slightly, and that was all. At no time was he in danger of losing his balance.

"I told you he was tough," Monk grinned.

"And funny-looking," Ham reminded. "Funnier looking than you."

Monk ceased grinning. "Listen, shyster -- one of these days I'm gonna make you put on a sword-swallowing act with that trick cane!"

The pair glared at each other the rest of the way up. A stranger, from their manner, would have thought they were on the point of coming to blows, when, as a matter of truth, they were the best of friends.

They stepped out on the eighty-sixth floor, crossed the corridor and passed into a large room, plentifully furnished with huge, comfortable chairs. A deep-piled Oriental rug lay underfoot. Between the two great windows stood a solid-looking table inlaid with ivory of exquisite workmanship.

A short-wave radio receiving set squatted inconspicuously at the back of the table, and a voice was droning from the loud-speaker as the men entered with their captive. It was a police broadcast.

" -- all cars will be on the lookout for Dimiter Daikoff," the radio droned. "Daikoff is a very large man, with black hair and dark eyes. Officers will use care, since Daikoff is reported to be dangerous. Daikoff recently escaped from a Chicago jail and is reported to have been seen in New York -- "

Monk raised his voice over the drone of the radio.

"Doc!" he yelled. "We found a guy on top of the waterfront plane hangar! Thought you'd want to talk to him! He must've been up to something!"

Doc Savage came through a door into the room.

PERHAPS the reaction of Ool to the appearance of Doc Savage was the thing which best indicated what a remarkable physical specimen the bronze man presented. Ool, who had murdered a man that evening without showing the slightest excitement, stared and let his jaw down slightly; his watercolored eyes became quite wide.

Doc Savage was a giant of bronze. As he came through the door, his stature was tremendous, but when he was beyond the door and there was nothing by which to compare his size, he seemed to grow smaller in stature. That was because of the symmetry of his development; his corded muscles meshed under his skin in a manner which made their tremendous size scarcely noticeable, except for the tendons on his hands which were like cables.

But the compelling thing about the bronze man was his eyes. Strange eyes, they were, like pools of flake-gold, hypnotically compelling in their power, stirred continuously with a weird life.

Doc Savage was quietly dressed. The bronze of his hair was but little darker than the bronze of his skin.

"What's this?" he asked.

The bronze man had a voice of remarkable modulation, and his tone, while not loud, carried to the corners of the room.

Monk explained what had happened.

"The photo-electric alarms on the roof gave the guy away," he said.

Then he went on to tell of the capture, of the weird way in which Ool moved his hand—the hand in which they had found nothing. He finished up by producing the goggles with the black lenses as thick as condensed milk cans.

The bronze man eyed the goggles closely.

There came into existence an eerie trilling sound. It welled up and pervaded the room, tuneful yet tuneless, mellow and so soft that it might have been the whispering note of an evening wind seeping through palm fronds, or the distant murmur of glacial ice on its ponderous way to the sea.

Monk and Ham watched curiously. They knew that sound. It was part of Doc Savage, although they could not see his lips move as he made it. The note was a small, unconscious thing which he did in moments of stress, or when surprised, or puzzled.

Doc Savage asked Ool, "What are these?"

Ool replied promptly, tonelessly.

"Just a toy," he said. "They are of no value, no importance."

There was nothing in his voice to show that he had killed Beery Hosner earlier in the night because Beery had taken the strange goggles with the intention of selling them to this same remarkable bronze man.

DOC SAVAGE watched Ool intently.

"Why were you prowling over our water-front hangar?" he asked.

Ool smiled. It was the smile of a man not accustomed to showing emotion in that manner. The smile was slightly horrible.

"I went to the hangar for the purpose of contacting you," Ool said.

"Why did you not come to me here?" the bronze man asked.

"You are a busy man—I know your reputation—I despaired of being granted an interview." Ool spoke by spurts.

"The interview was an urgent matter?"

"Tremendously urgent."

"So you went prowling about the hangar, knowing it would be guarded, knowing you would be captured and brought to me?"

"Precisely."

Monk blurted: "Bunk! This lug was up to something."

Doc turned the curious goggles over slowly in his cabled hands. Again came his low trilling sound, more felt than heard, flooding the room with its tremulous quality.

Police broadcast continued to issue from the short-wave set, flooding the room with droning. "Calling all cars -- calling all cars -- "

Then the announcement concerning the Chicago criminal came through again:

" -- Dimiter Daikoff wanted for murder. A big man, walks with a limp; black hair; small, dark eyes; a scar that starts from the lobe of his right ear and slants across his neck -- "

Doc Savage's compelling voice broke in upon the radio droning.

"Who are you?" he questioned Ool.

"Gray Forestay is my name," Ool said promptly. "In Mongolia my name, as nearly as can be translated, was Lleigh Foor Saath."

Doc Savage's features remained undecipherable, but the flake-gold which seemed always alive in his eyes, swirled a bit faster.

Monk muttered: "The yahoo is lying, Doc."

Ool kept his flat-eyed stare centered upon Doc. "I am not lying," he said. "You are judging from my appearance that I am not a pure Mongol. You are correct. I am only part Chinese."

He paused. "My unnatural appearance is not entirely the result of a mixture of bloods. It is the result of hardships more grueling than you would believe a man could endure, and live."

"Go on," Doc said.

Ool spoke monotonously. "I hesitate to speak lest I be disbelieved, and yet I know you to be a man of such mature intellect as to realize that there are strange things in the world, things so strange as to be utterly discredited by the conventional mind."

Ool paused again. After fully half a minute, he continued:

"You have heard of the Lenderthorn Expedition, lost in the pack ice north of Canada? I, Gray Forestay, was the only member of the expedition to escape. In recent months, as perhaps you have read in the news, I headed a rescue expedition to search for the lost men. We found that airships were utterly impractical in that region. We could not effect a landing upon the rough ice. But where an airship has failed, a dirigible would succeed."

"So?"

"You have a dirigible. That is one reason why I have come to you. There is also another reason.

"And this other reason?" Doc queried.

"You control, so I understand, what is perhaps the most superior aggregation of brains and brawn in the world. I need your help."

Monk squinted at Doc. "Is this dope about a Lenderthorn Expedition straight stuff?"

"It is," Doc nodded slowly. "It was in the newspapers, but not prominently so. Lenderthorn was not a famous man."

Ool spoke suddenly, dramatically:

"The Lenderthorn Expedition was not lost through natural causes, as was reported."

Ool stared with his flat, water-colored eyes while he let an interval of silence pass.

"We encountered what I can only call mysterious 'things,'" he went on. "These came in the night, and I know only that they were black, shapeless and utterly horrible, and that they carried off members of our expedition one at a time, until only I escaped."

Chapter 4. THE MOCCASIN DEATH

OOL paused after making his unusual proclamation, and eyed Doc Savage and his two aides, as if endeavoring to learn how they took it.

Monk and Ham registered an admixture of doubt and surprise. Doc Savage's regular bronze features portrayed no emotion at all.

On the inlaid table, the radio droned on and on, the police announcer reciting descriptions of stolen cars, of lost persons, of petty crimes and emergency calls.

"Emergency call to all cars," the loud-speaker droned unexpectedly. "Pickup order for a tall, slender man with very pale skin. Man wanted for the murder of Beery Hosner, a man with a police record. Killer's most pronounced characteristic is his short, very fine hair, which looks from a distance somewhat like the fur on a mole. Man was wearing dark suit and dark hat and

Monk, watching Ool intently, breathed, "Blazes!" in soft comprehension.

Ool began to sidle toward the door.

Doc Savage ripped out a few words in a softly musical, but unintelligible, jargon—a language known only to himself and his aides. It was the language of ancient Maya, the speech of a civilization which had supposedly vanished from the earth centuries ago. Doc and his men used the tongue to communicate orders.

Monk and Ham, reacting to the order in Mayan, rushed on Ool. Things happened quickly. One moment, Ool was under their finger tips. It seemed impossible that they could miss seizing him. But the next instant, Ool eluded them, his speed blinding, and Monk and Ham found themselves clutching each other.

"You dumb fashion plate!" Monk choked.

"Ape!" Ham retorted.

Jerking around, Doc's aides charged Ool again. Carefully this time, with grim purpose. Doc was barring the door.

"That guy is greased lightning," Monk muttered.

Ool made a snarling sound and advanced on them. His right hand was weaving about in its peculiar weird fashion.

"Look out!" Doc called sharply. "Get back!"

Monk and Ham retreated, but in uncanny fashion Ool was within striking distance of them. His weird right hand floated out. There was no dilatory butterfly flutter about the motion this time.

Straight at Ham, the hand drove. The hand was bent at the wrist, the bony fingers extended.

Then, suddenly, Ool was off his feet, falling to the floor. Doc Savage had whipped out a foot to kick hard against the side of Ool's leg.

Ool should have been stunned by the shock as he struck the floor. But the white-faced murderer bounced up immediately. His moccasinlike hand drifted out viciously.

"Monk — get clear!" Doc Savage's voice was a crack 'of authority.

Monk hurled his simian bulk to one side. Ool's hand went short'. The hand jerked back. It was like a snake's head recoiling. It struck again, at Ham.

"Ham!" Doc Savage rapped. "Don't let him touch you!"

Ham, dropping to the floor, evaded the hand. He rolled to one side, got his feet under him, whipped upright.

Ool glared at them.

"The goggles," he said flatly. "Throw me the black goggles or I will kill you all!"

Doc Savage spoke in Mayan. His hands went into his pocket, came out and were clasped behind him. He took a single step backward. After that, he stood still. A surprising thing happened.

The long, skeletal frame of Ool went down like a bag of bones collapsing. His fiat eyes blinked shut; the gaunt head flopped forward on its stringy neck; the legs bent at the knees, and he lay as still as if in death.

DOC turned, walked over and hoisted a window. For a space of about forty seconds neither he nor his aides said anything, but simply stood and regarded each other.

Monk went over and, with a foot, reached out exploringly and stirred a few fine particles of glass on the floor where Doc Savage had been standing when Ool went down. There were crystal — glinting particles, such as might have been made by the shattering of a very small electric light bulb.

Doc said, "All right."

He, as well as Monk and Ham, breathed deeply; it became apparent that from the time Doc had uttered the words in Mayan, they had all three been holding their breath.

As a matter of fact, Doc's words had been a warning to Monk and Ham that he was going to break a tiny glass anaesthetic bomb on the floor. The anaesthetic was one developed by Monk, disseminating almost instantaneously into the air, and powerful enough to produce unconsciousness at the first whiff.

The gas became ineffective after mixing with fresh air, but the effect upon one who had already breathed it would not wear off for some time.

"Well, that's that," Ham said. He adjusted his necktie and brushed his trousers which had collected dust when he rolled on the floor to elude Ool's weird right hand.

Monk pawed his own jaw. "The guy sure wanted that black goggle doo-dad. He had a chance to get away, but he wouldn't leave without 'em."

Doc walked across and stood looking down at Ool's prostrate form. Monk and Ham pressed close at his side.

Ham remarked, in a voice heavy with disbelief: "Yes, sir, he's even uglier than you are, Monk. I don't know how it's possible, but he is!"

"You clothesrack!" Monk growled. "You don't know masculine beauty when you see some. I exude virility, I do! I'm an example of the dominant male."

As Doc leaned over Ool, that apparently senseless individual became charged with appalling vigor. Ool's knees doubled under him and he sprang furiously to his feet. At the same split-second his deadly right hand moccasined out toward Doc.

It was something absolutely new to the experience of Doc Savage and his aides. Never had a man who had gone down under the spell of the anaesthetic bombs, risen so soon.

A bronze flash, Doc backed to avoid the mysterious touch of Ool's mother-of-pearl fingers. He succeeded in hurtling clear, and in doing so, his corded arms, sweeping out, thrust Monk and Ham behind him to temporary safety.

"Get in the other room," Doc ordered Monk and Ham, his flake-gold eyes remaining fixed on the crouching Ool.

"Aw, Doc — " Monk started a protest.

"Get in there and shut the door," Doc repeated; and when his aides did not move fast enough, he lunged, using both mighty arms to shove them through into the next room.

He tossed Ool's strange goggles in after them. Then he slammed the door behind them.

INSIDE the other room, cut off from Doc, Ham and Monk reared to their feet and tried the door. The force of their combined body-jolts shuddered, but did not open the chromium-ribbed door in its steel frame.

"He's locked us in here!" Monk bellowed. "Hey, Doc!"

He banged his gnarled fists against the unyielding door.

"He's in there alone!" Ham shouted.

"That white-skinned, mouse-haired guy ain't human!" Monk roared. "The anaesthetic gas never even fazed him!"

From the outer room, Ool's flat voice came clearly.

"One man already to-night I have killed for these goggles," he intoned. "Now I kill another."

Ham and Monk quit pounding, numbed momentarily by a flesh-crawling dread.

Following Ool's pronouncement, muffled sounds came under the door. Feet padded. A body thudded. A chair overturned. Then there was a chilling sound, unnamable a dry clacking more than anything else.

Ham clutched Monk by the arm. "That sound It's that -- that ghoul -- laughing!"

"Yeah," Monk said thickly. "Yeah."

The eerie clacking laugh faded away. Feet pattered. The patterings grew quickly fainter. The hall door slammed.

Ham and Monk commenced furious fist-batterings against their own door.

"Doc!" Their voices crashed together. "Doc! Are you there?"

The only sound now was the interminable police broadcast coming in over the short-wave set. The announcer was repeating an earlier broadcast.

" -- Dimiter Daikoff, murderer, escaped from Chicago jail, believed to be in hiding in Manhattan. His description: A big man, walks with a limp, a scar slanting downward across his neck from the lobe of his right ear -- "

The radio voice crackled on and on, while Monk and Ham endeavored to get out of the room.

Chapter 5. THE MYSTERIOUS MURDERER

SIXTH AVENUE by day is a working man's street. The children who scamper there between the wheels of automobile traffic, the men and women who swarm over its grimy sidewalks, give it a degree of friendly warmth.

But late at night, denuded of its human adornments, the avenue lies stark and ugly. Occasional rats haunt its sidewalk garbage cans. And another breed of rodent, more vicious, comes to life in curtain-drawn back rooms.

Ool was the only human figure in sight on the dim street. A lean cat, dirty-furred, claw-scarred and with most of one ear missing, leaped down to the sidewalk from a sour smelling garbage can and slunk into shadows at Ool's approach.

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The cat was hardly more sinister than Ool as the whitefaced assassin moved along through the night with his characteristic animal prowl, gaunt head hunched far forward, spidery arms dangling.

He slowed his pace as he came to a spot where a sickly glow of light seeped over the sidewalk from the half-curtained windows of a barroom. Dingy yellow lettering on the window glass proclaimed the place to be "Bill Noonan's Tavern." Ool paused long enough at the door to flash covert glances in both directions, then entered, scuffed through gray sawdust covering the floor and approached the bar.

A fat Negro, his head seemingly a ball perched on his multiplicity of chins, dozed on a stool near the cash register. He opened one red-rimmed eye as Ool approached.

"Are you Ham-hock Piney?" Ool questioned.

The Negro betrayed no surprise at Ool's appearance or voice.

"Dat's right, boss," he said. "Ham-hock Piney, dat's me."

"I want to see Watches Bowen," Ool stated.

The Negro yawned cavernously, said nothing.

"Did you understand me?" Ool snapped.

"Cou'se I understand," the Negro grinned. "What you want me to do about it—put a fly in your beer?"

Ool expressed quick anger. As though propelled without volition, his right hand started drifting about.

The Negro laughed sleepily, said softly, "All right. Ah see yo' knows de pass sign. Yo' can go on up. Take dat door in de back. Go up de only steps yo'll see."

A MINUTE later, facing Watches Bowen in the mobster's top-floor hideout, Ool said, "You had better give your watchdogs more explicit instructions concerning me."

"Ham-hock?" Watches laughed, and his thick hand hovered near the gold watch chain which sprawled across his vest. "He's all right. Slicker than you'd think."

A man hunched in a near-by chair, rattled the pages of a racing form which draped across his lap. He was a mouse of a man, small. He seemed intent on doping out a possible track winner, when, in reality, his ferret eyes never left Ool. Concealed by the form sheet, his right hand gripped a flat automatic.

At an oilcloth-covered table on the opposite side of the room, three men killed time with cards. Occasionally, they flashed curious glances at Ool and Watches. These men were all young, sleek, barber-shop groomed. Each smoked, and there was a hard calmness in their manner.

Watches jerked his head at Ool. "Let's talk private," he said.

The suave mobster moved to the far corner of the room, Ool following closely.

Ool questioned blankly, "Are you not afraid he might miss me at this distance?"

"Who?"

"The little man in the chair."

Watches' bleak eyes slitted, and his hand swerved instinctively back to his watch chain.

"You don't miss much, do you?" he grunted.

"Not much," Ool said. "You do not trust me?"

"It's not that," Watches said. "We were afraid a cop might tag you in. I don't take chances."

"Who is the man with the racing form and the gun?" Ool asked.

"Honey Hamilton," Watches said proudly. "He can shoot fly specks off a hundred-watt bulb."

"That is an exaggeration?"

"A little, maybe." Watches grinned. "What've you been up to?"

"I have," said Ool, "suffered a misfortune."

"Didn't I tell you not to monkey with Doc Savage." Watches unclipped a timepiece and fumbled it. "Just how had is the situation?"

Ool began to speak. His voice was like the intonation of a phonograph which possessed no qualities of tone whatever; his words were so flat that at times they were hardly understandable. He told of his going to the water-front warehouse-hanger, of his capture, of exactly what had happened thereafter.

"This Doc Savage locked his two men in an inner room in his headquarters," he finished. "The bronze man and I fought. For a time, he evaded my right hand. He pursued me down to the street. His speed is almost unbelievable."

"You sure? You'd have to be good to shake those men who work with Savage."

From the hall, behind the closed door, sounded the scrape of numerous feet. A single fist pounded heavily on the door.

"Open up!" a voice bawled. Honey Hamilton had been stationed at a cleverly concealed loophole in the wall. The loophole looked out upon the hallway and was of a size to permit insertion of a gun snout.

The mouselike little man cupped his hand to his mouth and hissed back to Watches, "It's coppers!"

"JOHN LAWS!" Watches mumbled incredulously, then wheeled upon Ool. "This is your doing! They've got you tagged for the Beery Hosner job! You let them see you come in here!"

Ool shrugged. "That is impossible."

"Then some stool tipped them." Watches shook his head violently. "Nix. No pigeons get a line on me. I'm careful about that. How in the devil did they know you're here?"

The pounding on the door continued. The hollow, metallic quality of the sounds was an indication that the door was in reality an armored panel.

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"Let's blow," Honey Hamilton suggested uneasily. Watches nodded, and leaped to a side door. This gave into a narrow hall which in turn led to a flight of steps angling downward. They started to descend these steps.

"Shure; and you can come r-right down," said a strong Irish voice from below. "But it'd be healthiest if you'd throw your guns down first."

"Damn!" Watches gritted. "They've got the back way blocked. Now we are in a jam!"

The men retreated to the room and closed both doors. Honey Hamilton pried up a cleverly hinged floor board and lifted out a submachine gun. He posted himself at the loophole.

Watches ran over to the window and looked out. There was another building some thirty feet distant. There were windows in the wall. But no man could jump that distance.

Then Watches snapped back hastily. He had glimpsed a uniformed policeman in the court below. The officer was looking up, balancing a heavy service revolver suggestively in one hand.

"You birds had better get wise to yourselves," the cop called. "We've got you surrounded!"

Watches looked at Ool speculatively. Then I touched him and he staggered back and collapsed. I came here."

Watches swallowed twice. "Doc Savage is dead?"

"He is," Ool said, emphatically.

WATCHES seemed to be thinking deeply. His breathing was heavy. He polished the watches on both ends of the chain, then compared their time with that shown by his two wrist watches, found one of the wrist watches a few seconds off, and made a correction.

"What was the idea of the song and dance about the Lenderthorn Expedition?" he asked.

Ool shrugged. "It is part of my plan."

Watches put out a disgusted jaw. "Your plan! Say, don't I rate on this? You go ahead with a scheme that's as wild as hell, and you don't give me a gander at it. I don't like it! Who's running this, anyway?"

"You," said Ool, "and I."

Watches put the timepieces back in his pockets and began to curse. He swore in a low voice, but venomously and without repeating himself.

"What a sweet mess," he finished. "Doc Savage has those goggles?"

Ool began, "I have a plan -- "

Somewhere in the room a buzzer whizzed twice, loudly and jarringly.

Watches stiffened. The three men playing cards pushed back from the table with such quick violence that the stacked chips washed over the oilcloth and spilled on the floor. Even mouselike "Honey" Hamilton snapped from his tilted chair, forgetting to keep his gun concealed beneath the form sheet.

Ool, alone, showed no perturbation.

"What is it?" he asked.

"That buzzer's never been rung before," Watches clipped. "It's an emergency -- worked from a button behind the bar where Ham-hock can reach it with his toe."

"Maybe," Ool ventu red, "Ham-hock went to sleep and kicked it accidentally."

"Not a chance! That fat devil is never sleepy, and not as harmless as he looks."

Then color faded out of Watches' florid face.

"What is the matter?" Ool asked. "You look sick."

"Listen," Watches Bowen demanded hoarsely, "did you go dumb and leave Doc Savage's men trail you down here?"

"I did not. I was careful to come in a roundabout way."

Ool seemed to read his mind.

"You can turn me over to the police," he said slowly. "No doubt they will then hold you on no charge more serious than that of possessing weapons."

Watches shook his head. "I'm not that kind of a guy. Anyhow, think I wanta lose my cut in a few millions?"

Ool shrugged. "It seems there is nothing for us to do but fight."

Honey Hamilton said nervously, "They're gonna use torches on that door, Watches."

Watches yelled, "Well, are you gonna stand there and let them?"

Honey Hamilton spread a benign look over his face as he shoved the submachine gun snout through the loophole and his finger sought the trigger. But he never discharged bullets.

There was an ear-splitting crack. Steel splinters flew like shrapnel over the room. A screaming fragment crashed a bottle of whisky, went entirely through the tabletop and sank into the floor. Another ripped Watches' coat sleeve from wrist to elbow.

Honey Hamilton tumbled backward off his chair; blood began to well from gashes on his face and shoulders. He lay prone, pawing at his bloody face.

Watches squawled at him, "What happened?"

"They cut loose at the loophole from outside!" Honey gulped. "A bullet must have walked into the muzzle of my typewriter. Jammed in the barrel. Blew the breech all to hell!"

He slumped down on the floor. Watches let him lie, and glared wildly at the loophole. Then he scuttled to one side. One of the policemen in the hall had thrust a gun barrel through the loophole from the outside. He could not fire and do any damage, because the angle was not right, but the loophole was effectively plugged.

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Watches pulled helplessly at his gold vest chain. "What a lulu we're in," he groaned.

They stood there, nerve-taut, anxious. Outside in the hall, a soft roaring began and grew louder, and after a bit, the inside of the door started smoking. The police were using a cutting torch on the armor plate panel.

Watches groaned, "We ain't got a chance to fight — "

"Hey, there!" called an entirely new voice.

FOR a moment, they could not locate the voice; then they spun, and after that they stared unbelievably.

Across the thirty-foot space between the two buildings, a window was open. A man leaned from that window. He was a dark-skinned man, very big, smooth-shaven, with very dark eyes, black hair and a scar which started at the lobe of his right ear and slanted down across his neck. His appearance was utterly villainous.

In his hands, the man held a coil of fire hose of the type often affixed to reels inside office buildings.

Watches ran to the window, looked out and down cautiously. He could see the policeman in the alley below. The bluecoat was sprawled out, motionless on the grimy concrete.

"Get a move on, you birds," snapped the big, scarred man across the alley. "Or are you interested?"

"Hell, yes!" Watches exploded. "Toss us the end of that hose!"

The big man hurled the hose, missed the first time, but on the second try, Watches seized it, drew it inside and knotted it to a radiator.

Hand over hand, the men started coming across. They were not interrupted. The policeman below in the alley did not stir. The large, dark man with the scar voiced only a single word.

"Hurry," he said, and led the flight. The swarthy fellow had a pronounced limp.

Like rats deserting a sinking ship, Watches Bowen's gang swung gingerly across the hose span and through the window. Honey Hamilton, the last to attempt the crossing, suddenly discovered that, due to his wounds, he was incapable of making it.

"Go on," he growled. "I'll keep the cops entertained."

"Don't be a fool!" snapped the big, dark man.

He swung out over the span, grunting and straining with the effort, and got his legs around Honey Hamilton. Then began the return journey.

It was a remarkable feat, for the dark man held Honey gripped in his legs, suspended in the air above the alley. The hose sagged and groaned as, hand over hand, the dark man pitted his gigantic strength against the swaying. But slowly, like a cable car over a quarry, he finally made the other side with his wounded burden.

Honey Hamilton, weak with relief now that the trip was over, made a wry grin. "Thanks, guy. Remind me, if I should happen to forget that sometime."

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AN hour or more later, Watches Bowen was relaxing in another of his numerous hangouts—a fifty-foot cabin cruiser tied up at a City Island dock. A bottle of Watches' eighty-year-old Napoleon brandy contributed substantially to his relaxing; by the time he had drained a third glass, he had recovered much of his old suave manner.

Slumped near Watches, on an over-stuffed berth, the three sleek, hard, young gunmen were engaged with a fresh deck of cards.

In the same room, the big, dark stranger who had come so mysteriously to their rescue was doing an excellent job of bandaging Honey Hamilton's wounds.

Ool sat on another berth, as motionless as if he were dead, except for an occasional twitch from his weird right hand.

From forward in another cabin came the soft drone of a short-wave radio loud-speaker. It was giving police broadcasts.

"— repeating pickup order number one, naught, naught, seven, two," said the radio. "Dimiter Daikoff, who escaped two days ago from a Chicago jail and is believed to be in New York. Daikoff is a large man with a limp. Has dark skin and eyes, and a scar on his neck, on the right side. Reported to be dangerous."

Watches Bowen, in the act of drinking more brandy, made an explosive sound and shot a fine spray of the stuff through his teeth. He choked and coughed.

"So that's who you are!" he gulped, eyeing the dark, bulky man who had saved them from the police trap.

The stranger looked up from his bandaging.

"Right," he said quietly.

Then the man stood up. He held his head proudly. His black eyes flashed with an almost fanatical glitter. The light from the overhead electric bulb glowed on the smooth skin covering his high cheek bones. Like many of his race, this man's cheek bones were so prominent that his cheeks looked hollow. They were thrown into shadow.

"I am no murderer!" he proclaimed tragically. "I simply liquidate one who was traitor to our party. I, Dimiter Daikoff, am no criminal. In my country, I would be honored, receive a medal. But here, they hunt me like animal."

Watches shrugged tolerantly. "That's all right by me, brother. One turn rates another. You can hang around if you want to."

"Thank you." The big man bent again to his task of mercy. "I am no killer. I am a patriot."

"One thing I'd like to know, though," Watches continued, "is how in the hell did you happen to show up just when we needed you."

Dimiter Daikoff smiled gravely. "That is simple. I was hiding next door. When I heard the shots, I thought it was myself that the police were after. I struck unconscious the officer who was on guard in the alley. Then I saw it was you that they sought. I do not like policemen. They do not know the difference between a patriot who came here to the United States and eliminated one who had been a thieving government official of his

own country—the police do not know such a patriot from a common murderer. I hate them for it. So I help you."

Watches stretched luxuriantly and grinned.

"What a swell thing hate can be sometimes," he said.

DURING the course of the next several hours, the men loitered aboard the boat. Dimiter Daikoff fitted into the situation as naturally as a big house dog. He came and went about the boat, administering to Honey Hamilton and preparing drinks and sandwiches.

Eventually Watches and Ool went into a huddle in the forecandle.

Honey and the two younger gunmen were sleeping and Dimiter Daikoff, the self-claimed patriot, was washing dishes in the galley. so there did not seem to be reason for undue secrecy, but Watches and Ool, nevertheless, kept their voices lowered.

Several times the name of Doc Savage, —and the phrase "black goggles," was audible, however. It would have been apparent to any one interested that they were carefully planning a move against Doc Savage's men, believing Doc to be dead.

When they finished their conference, they awakened the others and departed. Honey Hamilton could walk.

"You can stay here and play admiral until we get back," Watches told Daikoff.

The instant the gunmen were out of sight, Daikoff strode to the forecandle where Watches and Ool had held their whispered conversation, and from the ventilator removed a small compact dictograph device which had been lowered there. Then he proceeded to wind up a length of fine wire attached to the dictograph, wire as fine as hair, and hence practically unnoticeable. It ran back to where Daikoff had been dishwashing in the galley.

Watches and Ool might have been worried, certainly they would have been surprised, if they had known that their whispered plotting against Doc Savage's men had been overheard by the big man.

Stowing the dictaphone device away in his pocket, Dimiter Daikoff hurriedly left the boat.

Chapter 6. THE SCARED EXPLORER

FIVE men stood in the early morning sun which streamed through the "health glass" windows of Doc Savage's eighty-sixth floor headquarters. Two of the five were Monk and Ham. And for once in their lives, the hairy chemist and the dapper lawyer were finding themselves aligned on the same side of the argument.

The men on the other Side of the argument were Doc Savage's other three aides, familiarly known as "Johnny," "Long Tom" and "Renny."

"Holy cow!" Renny roared. "You mean to stand there and tell us Doc may be dead?"

Renny, or Colonel John Renwick, as his engineering associates knew him, had a long, puritanical face. He was inches over six feet tall, and weighed in the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty pounds. His great frame gave the appearance of being composed mostly of bone. But the really remarkable thing about him

were his fists. Each was composed of fully, a quart of bone and gristle.

"Locked in a room while Doc went up against this guy with the funny white hand, were you!" Renny boomed. "Why didn't you bust out?"

He swung one of his huge fists as if by way of demonstration. It was Renny's boast that no wooden door was made with a panel so strong that he could not shatter it with one blow of those fists.

Monk and Ham squirmed.

"Blast it, we did!" Monk groaned. "It took time. When we got out, both Doc and this guy were gone!"

A mildly scholastic voice put in, "Not an empyrean collocation of circumstances."

The speaker was Johnny, or William Harper Littlejohn, a man who never used a small word when he had time to think of a large one, and also a man who was one of the greatest living archaeologists and geologists. Johnny was very tall, and thin as Old Man Death himself, and he carried, on a ribbon, a monocle which was in actuality a powerful magnifier.

The fifth of Doc Savage's aides was a thin man with a skin the color of a mushroom. He looked about as unhealthy as a man could look. As a matter of fact, he had never been ill in his life, and could, if occasion called for it, whip nine out of every ten men he chanced to meet on a street.

He was Major Thomas J. Roberts, electrical wizard extraordinary. He was more often known simply as "Long Tom," a name he had annexed long ago after a disastrous experience in trying to make use of a rusted "long tom" cannon of buccaneer vintage.

Long Tom shook his head. "This strange white-skinned man you caught at the warehouse-hanger, he claimed to be Gray Forestay, a member of the Lenderthom Exploration party?"

"Exactly," Monk agreed.

"He gave no logical explanation of why he was prowling around the hangar?" Long Tom persisted.

"He said he knew he'd get caught and brought to Doc, if you call that logical," Monk snorted.

"That man," Long Tom pointed out, "answers the description of a fellow who murdered a gangster named Beery Hosner last night. He is supposed to have waved his right hand at Beery Hosner, and the man dropped dead."

"He was great at waving that right hand," Monk agreed gloomily. "I dunno just what kind of devilment was connected with the way he did it."

Suddenly, from somewhere outside the reception room door, came a burst of scuffling. Then a long, drawn screech of terror reached them. There was something about the screech which put a strange feeling around the roots of their hair.

"I'll be guperamalgamated!" exploded big-worded Johnny.

"Holy cow!" echoed Renny.

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Each had used his pet exclamation for moments of great excitement.

ALL lunged for the door. Ham, with his sword cane, was first outside, with big-fisted Renny and the others crowding him close. The corridor was empty. All elevator doors were closed, and the indicators showed that no cages were on that floor. They ran for the stairs.

Halfway down, at the turn of the flight, they encountered a man who was scuttling upward.

"Help!" the man screeched. "Help!"

The fleeing man had no hat. His thick gray hair flopped over his forehead. He had a close-cropped gray mustache, and was wearing smoked glasses.

To all appearances panic-stricken, he flung himself upon Ham, who was still leading. The man was larger than Ham, but he cringed close to the lawyer, like a whipped dog.

"Who's after you?" Renny swung his huge fists.

He did not have long to wait for an answer. Men charged around the corner of the stair landing, coming from below with such speed that they piled up the first few steps before they noticed Doc's aides.

The speed with which they stopped was ludicrous. Evidently they had expected to find one fear-crazed man. Now they were confronted by five men, not at all scared.

Wheeling back without warning, those in front collided with those who pushed close from behind. Three of the men fell, sprawling in fantastic fashion.

"Keep them away!" the fleeing man pleaded. "They'll kill me!"

Renny bellowed, and pitched his two hundred and fifty pounds of brawn down the steps.

His fists flailed. One man went back under his pile-driver blows. His sheer hurtling weight downed another. Renny bored on. A man on his back drove a vicious kick at the inside of Renny's knee. Renny fell heavily, adding his own thrashing limbs to the writhing tangle already on the floor.

Doc's other four aides, lunging after Renny, smacked blows in all directions. They did not, however, do all the battering. They took terrific jolts from fists. The foes knew how to fight.

But they had been taken at a disadvantage. They were forced back along the corridor -- all except one bent-eared man who was rolling on the floor, locked in a gorilla-grip with Renny.

When the fighting reached the region of the elevator shaft, one of the men swerved, jammed a thumb against the button which brought Doc Savage's speed elevator up.

"Back of me, men!" he yelled. "Lemme take 'em!"

The other men quit fighting, leaped back.

The man who had pressed the buzzer wrenched a revolver out of his pocket and leveled down at his crowding enemies. His fellows were out of the way, backed tip against the elevator door, so the gun could cover Doc's aides.

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"Stand back!" the gunman yelled, "or I'll blast the pack of you!"

Doc's aides stood tense and glaring. There was nothing they could do. Any move might draw bullets from that menacing revolver. It would be hard for the gunman to miss.

A soft click announced the arrival of the elevator. The doors fanned open.

"Inside!" the man with the gun ordered his men.

But the men did not get inside.

A BRONZE cyclone seemed to boil out of the elevator. The man nearest the door was engulfed. Yanked shoulder-high, he was hurled shrieking, upon his companions. He crashed into the gun wielder, knocked him down.

The bronze cyclone moved on. There was blurred motion. Men went down like shingles wind-whipped from a barn.

Doc Savage, who had been riding the elevator up, waded through them with his cable-corded fists.

Sprawled on the floor, the gun-toter jerked up his revolver an instant before the bronze man crashed through to reach him. The gun belched thunder. The slug creased an ugly red furrow along Doc's muscle-rippled neck, slammed on to his over Monk's rusty nubbin of a head and spanged into the corridor wall.

Doc froze in his tracks.

"All right," he said quietly. "Don't shoot again. You win.

Doc's self-possessed manner seemed to have a miraculously quieting effect on the gunman. He held his fire and threw an order to his men.

"In the elevator — quickly!"

He saw them all inside while he held Doc and his five aides off with the gun. With a last menacing flourish of the weapon, he leaped inside himself. The door slid shut. The elevator sucked, swishing, downward.

Monk leaped to ring the buzzer for one of the regular elevators.

"We'll ride this down," he roared.

Doc waved him away. "Let them go, Monk."

Doc's aides stared, completely mystified. It had baffled them enough when Doc quit fighting, and now for him to calmly allow the assailants to get away was

Renny cracked his huge fists together.

"Holy cow!" he boomed. "What's the idea? Where you been, Doc? We thought you were dead."

The bronze man answered with a question. "What started this?"

"A fellow let out a bellow and came charging up the steps," Monk explained.

"Where is he now?"

"Hiding in your office, Doc," Long Tom volunteered.

"We will talk to him," Doc said. "Ham, you stay behind here and tell a straight-sounding story to any office workers who might investigate the shots."

"That shyster," Monk grunted, "can talk fast enough to make any one believe them shots was just a stenographer popping her chewing gum."

Ham flourished his sword cane and glared at Monk.

THE bronze man and his four aides filed into the eighty-sixth floor headquarters. They looked around.

Carefully calculated training had rendered Doc Savage capable of concealing all emotion. He showed no emotion now. That was not true of the others. They showed a Vast surprise.

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny gasped.

"Where is your stranger?" Doc questioned.

Monk blinked small eyes. "He was here!"

"He must be here!" Johnny put in.

The only time Johnny used little words was when he was excited.

Doc strode across the deep-piled Oriental rug and threw open the door to the adjoining room. It was spacious, lined from floor to ceiling with crammed bookshelves. It was Doc Savage's scientific library, a collection of tomes almost without equal.

Beyond was another room, larger, a room of fantastically shaped glass flasks and beakers, banked test tubes, brightly colored chemicals in bottles. Massive electric furnaces, testing machines, and chemical apparatus crowded the floor space. It was the bronze man's workshop-laboratory.

Doc and his men entered quietly. Their feet on the acid-resisting composition floor gave off no sound. This fact enabled them to make a discovery.

Beside an opened glass case, his broad back toward them, stood the man who had fled from the thugs. He was bent over, examining something.

"Find something interesting?" Doc questioned, in a quiet tone.

The man whirled so quickly that a shock of his gray hair cascaded down over the smoked glasses which he wore. His left hand went behind him.

Doc Savage strode forward. He did not seem to walk with undue speed, yet so perfectly did his huge muscles coordinate that he reached the man's side with startling suddenness. The gray-haired man was heavily built, but Doc brushed him aside with one movement of his hand.

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The stranger was holding at his back the goggles which Ham and Monk had taken from Ool, the skeleton-thin prowler on the hangar roof the night before.

Doc held the goggles loosely.

"Were you interested in these?" he asked.

"Yes -- no!" the man stammered.

"You will notice that they are unusual," Doc went on. "The lenses are fully two inches in thickness, and black -- so black that no light penetrates them."

"I -- I picked them up by mistake," the man said, a little hoarsely. "My own smoked glasses fell off. I don't see well without them. The light hurts my eyes -- snow blindness. I picked these of yours up by mistake. For a minute I thought they were mine."

Doc turned the black-lensed goggles over in his great sensitive hand.

"This flexible material in which the lenses are imbedded -- can you identify it?" he asked the stranger.

"I don't know anything about them," the man declared. "I picked them up by mistake -- "

"The material seems to be fish skin," Doc said. "It somewhat resembles the skin of a species of deep-sea fish with a habitat in the Arctic Ocean."

"I'm not interested in the goggles," the man reiterated earnestly. "I'm only interested in my life. I came here to get away from men who would have killed me."

He peered intently through his own smoked glasses at the faces of Doc's men. "Are they gone now -- those men in the hall? Are they gone?"

"They decamped," Renny boomed sourly.

"Your perambulations are imperspicuous," said big-worded Johnny.

"He means," said Monk, who could seldom resist interpreting Johnny's verbiage, "that we want to know what you were snooping around in here for?"

"Please don't mistake my intentions, gentlemen," the man said earnestly. He steadied his nervous gaze on Doc. "I confess I was terror-stricken. When I ran in here, my only idea was to get as far as possible from those thugs. When they attacked me, I was on my way to see Doc Savage. You are Doc Savage?"

"Right," Doc said. He replaced the black goggles on the shelf and closed the glass door.

The stranger cast one brief glance at the goggles. His thick hand waved out toward them.

"If they're so valuable," he said, "I should think you'd put them in a safe place."

Doc shrugged. "They do not look valuable. Who would want them? They are safe here. Come on."

Through the impressive laboratory, through the library with its smell of paper, Doc led the way.

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The stranger settled back in a comfortable chair in the outer office.

"YOU may have heard of me," he suggested. "I am an explorer, Gray Forestay — "

"Gray Forestay!" Long Tom ejaculated.

"Now don't tell us," Monk cut in sarcastically, "that you are the sole survivor of an attack by black things!"

The gray-haired stranger stared blankly.

"Now how did you know that?" he exploded.

Now that the man had control of himself, his voice was '10 longer hoarse, but softly resonant, smooth.

Doc explained. "Last night a man came here who represented himself as Gray Forestay, only surviving member of the Lenderthorn Expedition. He stated that his party, on the pack ice north of Canada, had been set upon by weird shapeless things—black things."

"But I am Gray Forestay!" the other wailed. "I accompanied the Lenderthorn Expedition! And that is precisely what happened!"

"Black things and all?" Monk demanded skeptically. A shudder coursed over the man's sturdy bulk. "The mysterious black assailants, I assure you, gentlemen, are very real and no joking matter."

"You saw them yourself?" Monk demanded.

"I saw them." The man gripped the arms of his chair. His tone was rather desperately defiant.

"What did they look like?"

The man seemed to be searching for words. He spoke finally. "They were—shapeless, black, like ghosts. There is no other way to say it. There is nothing to compare them with. They are not real. And yet they are real. I saw them. They came from nowhere."

"From nowhere?" Monk scoffed.

"They just appeared. They stayed only for a moment. Then they disappeared. Maybe I went out of my head. I don't know. The first thing I realized was my comrades were gone. All of them gone. And no trace — "

The man reached up to clutch fiercely at his thick mop of gray hair. His pudgy fingers brushed over his gray mustache.

"I am not old — only thirty-six. I got like this all in a single day—in a single hour!"

A tense silence followed the impassioned account. Even Monk was impressed.

The man reached in his inside coat pocket. There was a crinkling sound as he drew out a sheaf of papers. He got up, walked across and handed the papers to Doc Savage.

"Here are some letters — documents," he said. "They establish my identity."

The bronze man examined the papers.

His expression remained enigmatic. But his decision was apparent when he looked up and said:

"Forestay, do you know who it was that came here last night representing himself to be you?"

The man shook his head. "I haven't an idea in the world who it could have been."

"Who were your attackers in the hallway?"

"The man turned up the palms of his hands in an instinctive gesture of helplessness. "I haven't an idea in the world about that either. The attack came as a complete surprise."

"Somebody, obviously, who sought to keep you from seeing me."

"Obviously. But who, I do not know. They attacked me first in the lobby of the building. I got away and ducked into an elevator. They took another elevator. I got out two flights below this floor, thinking to elude them. They got out after me. I finally escaped them again when your men came to my rescue."

Doc asked, "You can add nothing more that might be of help?"

"Nothing -- except, now that I have collected my wits, I do not believe they meant to kill me," the man said slowly. "Not then, at any rate. They had chances to kill me. But they seemed to be trying to take me alive."

"A kidnaping?"

"So it would appear."

Doc Savage fixed his gaze upon the man. "And you came to see me, Mr. Forestay -- why?"

"To get your aid in a search for my comrades of the vanished Lenderthorn Expedition," the man said. "To solve the mystery of the black assailants in the Arctic, whatever they were. With your dirigible, it would be possible to land on the ice pack and make an extended search."

"You know I have a dirigible?" Doc asked.

"It was in the newspapers," the other replied. "It is a new and quite remarkable ship, only recently delivered to you."

Doc was silent a moment. "You think your fellows on the expedition still live?"

"I am not sure," the other said soberly. "But there is a chance. Something happened to them. I do not know what. A search should be made. I owe them that."

"I see," Doc said slowly.

The gray-haired man became very earnest.

"I am only doing what any other man would do," he said levelly. "If such a thing as I have described happened to your own comrades, you would leave nothing undone to find out what occurred, and to help them, if possible. Is that not true?" "It is," Doc admitted.

"Will you help me?" the other asked bluntly.

"We will help you," Doc said just as promptly.

The man rushed across to seize Doc Savage's hand.

"Thank you!" he exploded fervently. "Thank you!"

He wrung the bronze man's hand.

"My men and I — the six of us," Doc stated, "are having lunch this morning at eleven o'clock in the Cafe Oriental downstairs. We would be glad to have you join us. We can go over the details."

The man bowed respectfully. "I appreciate the honor. I regret I cannot be there. Later

"If you change your mind," Doc said, "you'll find us at a table near the door."

After the man had gone Monk blurted, "Hey, Doc, what's the idea? You know I don't like chop-suey?"

"I doubt that we will do much eating," Doc told him

WATCHES BOWEN and his men had returned to the cruiser moored at a City Island wharf.

They went into a huddle. Watches included them all — Ool, Honey Hamilton, the three sleek, hard young men, the obese Negro "Hamhock" Piney, and several newcomers, members of the organization.

The tragic-faced dark giant, Dimiter Daikoff, was back aboard.

Watches, when he came in, greeted Daikoff with loud good humor, an indication that things had gone well.

"You're good luck for me, my patriotic friend," Watches said, and gave Daikoff a friendly slap on the back.

Daikoff's tragic black eyes rolled their gratefulness for this comradely consideration; in the manner of a dog delightedly fetching its master's slippers, he eased swiftly around the place, repeatedly filling glasses for everybody from Watches' supply of Napoleon brandy.

This conference was not quite so secretive as that held earlier in the night. Snatches of conversation had to deal with "Doc Savage" — "black goggles" — "laboratory" — "glass case."

Dimiter Daikoff, easing around unobtrusively, filling glasses, emptying ash trays, heard much.

Chapter 7. BLUE LIGHTNING

TWO hours following the boat conference, a hard-lipped, ferret-eyed young man stood on a busy New York street corner in front of the Cafe Oriental. He casually stretched his arms and allowed the five fingers of one hand to stand out, widespread. The other hand he kept closed, except for a single finger. It was a cautious signal.

A black sedan which was rolling along through the traffic, angled to the curb. The man next the driver was a husky Negro, whose chunk of a head seemed perched atop his numerous chins.

The sedan driver said, "O.K.?"

Ham-hock Piney muttered softly: "Dat Doc Savage and all five o' his outfit must be in de eatin' house. Swell -- elegant, Ah calls it."

Ham-hock got out. Three other men piled out of the rear. The driver wheeled hack into the traffic stream. The overdressed young man who had stood in front of the restaurant joined them as they walked briskly along the pavement and turned into the impressive skyscraper of gleaming metal and granite, which towered nearly a hundred stories into the air, and which housed Doc Savage's headquarters.

They entered the express elevator.

"Eighty-six," Ham-hock said.

"Doc Savage's floor?" the elevator operator queried by way of verification.

"Dat's right."

At the eighty-sixth floor stop, one of the men shoved an automatic in the operator's ribs and said, "We stay here and wait, you and me, with the elevator."

Ham-hock led the other men across the corridor. They stopped in front of the door to Doc Savage's office. There was a note pinched in the door. It read:

"Lunching downstairs in the Cafe Oriental."

Doc's visitors stared at each other.

Ham-hock shrugged ponderously. "Come on."

They opened the door and pushed inside. Ham-hock led the way over the deep carpet to the library door. He pushed experimentally on the chrome-steel panels.

"Here's where trouble starts," he grunted. "Ease that soup and soap out your pocket, Squirrel, and we'll get busy."

"Squirrel" Dorgan -- so-called because of his long, pointed frontal teeth--took a phial of nitroglycerine and a piece of yellow laundry soap out of his pocket. He went to work expertly preparing to blow the door.

Just before he was ready to pour the nitroglycerine, he tried the doorknob with more force.

The door swung open.

Squirrel stared stupidly. One of the others cursed softly. Ham-hock thoughtfully massaged his many chins.

"Hell! Looks like a plant!" Squirrel Dorgan breathed.

"Somethin' fishy about it," another agreed. "This Doc Savage ain't sap enough to go way and leave a setup like this open to the public."

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SQUIRREL DORGAN peered inside the library. The utter silence of the place, the thousands of solidly shelved books, seemed to oppress him. His pointed teeth nipped his slack lips.

"I'm for blowin'," he said nervously.

Ham-hock growled. "We come heah to get dem black goggles, an' we gwine get 'em. Come on."

He heaved his fat bulk through the doorway. Across the ominously silent library they trailed, moving wanly, guns out, fingers close to triggers. Ham-hock himself turned the knob of the door which led on into the laboratory. This panel opened as readily as the others.

The Negro stared inside. The array of fantastically shaped glass tubes and retorts, the chemical and scientific devices, invested the place with an air more sinister than that of the library.

"How Ah figures it," Ham-hock muttered, as though to convince himself by the sound of his own words, "is dat dis Doc Savage, hem' a big shot, can't imagine anybody am gwine come triflin' 'round. Dat's why he don't bothah 'bout lockin' no doahs."

One of the hard-faced young men blinked furtive eyes. "Well, let's get this thing over."

"Yeah," another rasped. "The things I've heard about this guy, Savage!"

Squirrel Dorgan's teeth chattered. "Brother, what I could do with a bottle of the chief's brandy!"

"You-all shut up," Ham-hock grunted. "Come on."

Through the doorway he eased his fat frame. The others followed, single file. Down the long aisle they trailed, between ceiling-high scientific equipment which mushroomed weirdly from the floor, and which seemed to exude a ghostly aura of unreality.

"Right ahead theah," Ham-hock whispered, and indicated by pointing his gun muzzle at a tall glass case.

"Look!" Squirrel Dorgan gulped when they had approached a few steps closer. "There's the goggles! This ain't gonna be tough after alt!"

They stopped in front of the case. Ham-hock, with a gloating in his eyes, sent a sepia paw toward the goggles which lay unprotected on a glass shelf.

His hand passed through the goggles. Through them, as though they were air. His clawing finger nails scraped the glass of the shelf.

Ham-hock jerked his hand back as if it had touched flame. His hand had not been able to grasp the goggles, yet he could see them clearly, still lying on the shelf. An uneasy rumbling sounded from deep within his throat. His chins shook as he tried to swallow.

"What in hell's the matter?" one of the hard-eyed young men asked, in a voice suddenly gone shaky.

"How de hell does Ah know!" Ham-hock gulped. His hand snatched out again toward the black goggles so plainly visible on the shelf.

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As before, he could not clutch them. He could not even feel them. His fingers seemed to pass through them as easily as they would pass through thin air. His nails scraped, grating, on the glass of the shelf.

Ham-hock's whitish eyes rolled. His breath came faster. Sweat oozed from the creases of his many chins.

"What the hell, Ham-hock?" Squirrel Dorgan gritted. "Have you got butter fingers?"

Squirrel shoved forward and snatched out his own hand for the goggles. He had no more success than had Ham-hock. His hand seemed to pass through the goggles as though they were of no substance. His finger nails scraped futilely on the glass shelf. His face blanched. His rodent teeth started chattering.

"They're there," he grated. "But they ain't there! Hell! I've got enough of this place."

He wheeled to start for the door. Cursing, clutching their guns tightly, the others turned also. They stopped as suddenly as they had turned, then cringed back in slack-lipped terror.

DIRECTLY in front of them, beside the door and barring their path to it, a weird blue flame, pencil-thin, had leaped from a shiny plate embedded in one wall, across the door opening to another plate.

The flame remained suspended, a lance of crackling, hissing blue. It rippled up and down. Other blue lances zigzagged like chain lightning until there was a whole pattern of blue flame leaping and rattling, barring an exit from the door.

"We all goin' be electrocuted!" Ham-hock bawled fearfully. He recoiled, swerved, started to run in the opposite direction. The others, shaking off the paralysis which held them, turned with him — only to stop again, so fear-struck that one of them dropped his gun.

Grimly barring their way down the narrow aisle in that direction, stood Doc Savage and his five men.

They held strange-looking weapons which, in appearance, resembled overgrown automatics.

Ham-hock was the first to recover his wits.

"Don't shoot!" he croaked, raising his voice to make it sound above the crackling roar of the blue lightning which continued to feed out of the machine behind them. In token of submission, he allowed his gun to sag until it pointed at the floor.

One of the hard young men at Ham-hock's elbow went haywire and tried to level his automatic.

Doc Savage's finger tightened on the trigger of his weapon. The gun emitted a single ear-splitting hoot. It was a machine pistol with a tremendously fast rate of fire.

The hard young man's automatic dropped from his hand. He pitched forward and lay huddled on the floor.

"Don' shoot no moah!" Ham-hock pleaded.

"Take their guns, Monk," Doc directed.

Monk went forward and relieved the prisoners of weapons.

"Long Tom, turn off the high-frequency current," Doc directed.

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The thin electrical wizard pressed a button on a near wall board. The blue electrical display subsided.

"NOW," Doc said, "talk is in order."

His flake-gold eyes bored into the faces of the prisoners. "The first question," he said slowly. "Why are you here?" None of the captives answered. They were trying hard to look ugly.

"You can imagine the effect," Doc said dryly, "if you were to be tied to a chair which happened to stand between those door plates. That high-frequency current would do some remarkable things to you."

Squirrel Dorgan's pointed teeth had sunk into his lip, drawing a little scarlet. But he remained silent with the others.

Monk, a great grin on his simian features, suggested, "They all gotta be electrocuted anyway, judging by their looks. Whatcha say we save the State some money? We've got an electric furnace over there big enough to cremate their bodies, and we can scatter the ashes out of a window."

Monk looked utterly earnest as he made this callous suggestion; no one, watching him, would have dreamed but that he meant it, unless they had known Monk, in which case they would have recognized the bluff.

The captives took it in Various fashions. Ham-hock Piney remained rigidly silent, too scared to even tremble as lustily as he would have liked. The matter of the goggles which he had reached for repeatedly had upset his superstitious soul, and the display of high-frequency electricity had finished the demoralization.

Doc gestured at Squirrel Dorgan. "Put him in a chair in the door, Monk."

Squirrel Dorgan was not without nerve. He bit holes in his lips with his long teeth as they seized him and tied him in a chair, but he did not talk. Monk positioned the chair in the door.

"Wanta talk?" the homely chemist demanded.

"Go to hell!" Dorgan gritted.

"After you, my friend," Monk said, his small voice utterly unconcerned. He reached up and turned on the current.

There was a terrific burst of blue flame, a sheeting, blinding mass of it-ahead of Squirrel Dorgan. It did not quite touch him. But it ripped horribly in front of his face.

"Just a slight error," Monk said cheerfully. "I'll slide the chair up a little."

He moved the chair, stood back, studied its position, then moved it again. Then he leered at the sword-cane-carrying Ham.

"I'll bet you five bucks that his hair bursts into flame when the sparks touch him," he offered.

"Nothing doing," Ham refused. "I know how that current works." Monk shrugged and ambled for the switch.

Squirrel Dorgan broke down.

"Whatcha wanna know?" he screamed.

"Shut up, you yellow fool!" one of the hard young men grated.

Dorgan snarled at him: "If you think this bronze guy is kidding, you're nuts! I've heard of guys who went up against him and were never heard from again."

Ham-hock Piney bawled out, "I tell you—all, dis place am got a hoodoo. Ah could see dem goggles, but dey wasn't dar!"

"Who sent you here?" Doc asked Squirrel Dorgan.

"Watches Bowen," Squirrel snarled.

"What did he want?"

"The "goggles," Dorgan mumbled.

"Why?"

Dorgan blew scarlet off his lips. "I don't know."

"That high-frequency current," Monk suggested. "All I know," Squirrel said shrilly, "is that the black goggles have something to do with black things in the Arctic. That sounds goofy, but it's all I know."

"What are the black things?" the bronze man queried. "I don't know," Dorgan insisted. "I heard Watches and — and Ool mention them. They're supposed to be somewhere in the Arctic. That's all I know. That's all any of us know. Watches and Ool didn't spill their plans to us."

"Who is this Ool?" Doc questioned.

Squirrel's teeth started chattering. "He ain't quite human."

"What do you mean?"

"He can kill you without even touching you! I ain't makin' this up. It's the truth!"

The bronze man frowned. "This Ool is very tall and very thin and he has a skin which somewhat resembles mother-of-pearl. Is that right?"

"That's the guy," Dorgan agreed.

MONK grunted loudly in comprehension. "That's the egg we caught on top of the hangar — the bird who claimed to be Gray Forestay, survivor of that Lenderthorn Arctic Expedition."

Doc Savage asked Squirrel Dorgan, "Where did this Ool come from?"

"He showed up one day with Watches Bowen. That's all I know."

"Is he the one who brought the news of the black-things?"

"I guess so," Dorgan mumbled. "They didn't tell us much."

"Is Watches Bowen planning a trip with Ool to the Arctic?"

Dorgan squirmed. "Yeah."

"Where?" Doc demanded. "Name the exact spot."

"Can't!" Dorgan shook his head. "Watches don't talk to us, I tell you."

"How soon is he leaving?"

"Just as soon as — " He did not finish.

"Spill it, guy!" Monk rumbled.

"As soon as he — he makes arrangements about using your dirigible," Squirrel wailed fearfully. "And he'll croak me for spillin' that!"

Doc Savage said dryly, "He intends to arrange, I presume, in the same raggedly individualistic manner in which he went about securing the goggles."

Squirrel ran the tip of his tongue along his sharp teeth. "I — I wouldn't know about that."

"Think carefully and do not lie," Doc said. "Who was the second Gray Forestay?"

Squirrel fidgeted, but did not answer.

"You know who he was?" Doc persisted.

Squirrel was silent.

The bronze man leaned forward and his eyes, gold pools, seemed alive, possessed of a weird power.

"Who was the second Gray Forestay?" he asked. Squirrel Dorgan suddenly gave in.

"Watches Bowen himself!" he wailed.

Monk started and exploded, "Blazes!"

Ham flourished his sword cane.

"We want a description of that Watches Bowen!" he snapped. "Was he wearing a disguise when he played the part of Forestay?"

"He grayed his hair and put on a pair of smoked spectacles and a trick mustache," Dorgan mumbled.

Doc Savage had shown no perceptible surprise at the revelation. His bronze features seemed incapable of showing emotion.

"What was Watches Bowen's purpose in pretending to be a man named Forestay?" he asked.

"Ool tried it first," Dorgan muttered. "Then Watches gave it a whirl. They wanted to trick you into taking them north in that airship of yours."

"But the attack here in the corridor?" Ham put in. "Was that genuine? I mean, when the men attacked this Watches Bowen while he was pretending to be Forestay?"

"A play put on by some of Watches' boys to make it look good," Dorgan said.

Doc Savage said, "I am to gather that you men do not know more than you have told me, because your chief failed to take you into his confidence?"

"That's it," Dorgan gasped.

At this point, big, fat Ham-hock Piney spoke up. He had been staring at the case which held the goggles.

"Dem black specs," he mumbled, eyes rolling. "Why couldn't I pick 'em up? Dat's what Ah wants to know."

Doc did not answer.

Monk snorted mirthfully. A series of mirrors had been employed to cast a lifelike reflection of the goggles — a trick magicians sometimes use to make an article seem where it is not.

But Hamhock Piney remained in the dark about the phenomena which had so baffled him.

THE victim of the machine-pistol blast suddenly got to his feet. The slugs which the weapon discharged were so-called "mercy" bullets, pellets which were merely composition shells filled with a chemical concoction which produced almost instant unconsciousness. The period of insensibility thus induced would last only a short time.

"What are we gonna do with these birds?" Monk asked.

"The usual thing," Doc said.

That statement, to Monk, was explanation sufficient; for it concerned the strange institution which Doc maintained in upstate New York.

Grinning widely, Monk went forward to take his victims in charge.

Ham-hock Piney, who had been standing in stupefied silence, spun suddenly and lunged to get past the plates from which the sparks had jumped. The other criminals, seizing that bare chance, and moved more by animal instinct than anything else, leaped after him.

"They're getting away!" Renny yelled.

Ham-hock and the others were charging wildly across the laboratory. They were in such a mental state that only physical violence sufficient to incapacitate would stop them.

Doc Savage, strangely enough, was making no move to halt the exodus.

As the frenziedly fleeing men lurched through the doorway into the library, Ham clipped: "We can go down on the speed lift. Beat them to the bottom!"

"Let them go," Doc Savage said.

That stunned Monk. His large mouth hung open.

Big-worded Johnny was the first to find speech. The lack of big words indicated how surprised he was.

"You let them escape!" he murmured. "But why?"

"Yeah," Monk gulped. "Explain that."

Doc Savage said, "It is a rather long story and, unfortunately, there is not time for it right now."

Chapter 8. DEATH IN A TELEPHONE

AFTER scuttling breathlessly out of the skyscraper which housed Doc Savage's headquarters, Ham-hock Piney, Squirrel Dorgan and the others walked more slowly down the street. They would have preferred to run, but that would have attracted attention.

Within a block, they sighted their sedan. It was circling the block to pick them up. The driver pulled into the curb near the corner and waited for them.

Watches Bowen and Ool were now in the machine.

Ham-hock Piney eyed Squirrel Dorgan.

"Ah sho' hates to think what de boss am gonna do when he finds out what yo' done tell dat Doc Savage," he muttered.

Squirrel Dorgan stopped.

"Lookit, you guys," he said grimly. "We know how Watches cuts up when something goes wrong. He's liable to throw sonic lead into somebody. We'd better oil this up a little."

"What yo'-all mean?" Ham-hock questioned.

"Tell Watches we didn't get in, and got chased out," Dorgan suggested. "Let it go at that. What he don't know won't hurt him."

"Ah favors dat idea," said Ham-hock.

The hard young men nodded.

"We got trouble enough without Watches ridin' us" one of them said.

Their story agreed upon, they advanced and entered the sedan.

Watches Bowen extended a hand.

"The goggles," he requested.

Ool, awaiting the answer, fixed his water-colored eyes on Ham-hock. The fat Negro was stilt wheezing from the exertions of his escape; sweat had flooded his banked chins. And now Ool's appraisal threw him into a fresh perspiration.

"We didn't get the goggles," Squirrel Dorgan told Watches Bowen.

"What the hell?" Watches snarled.

"We was lucky to get out of there alive," Dorgan continued. "Say, I thought you had things fixed! We walk into that place and there was Doc Savage!"

Watches Bowen scowled blackly. "You are crazy," he snapped. "Doc Savage is in that restaurant right now and has been for the past thirty minutes."

Squirrel Dorgan gaped. The hard young men looked surprised. Ham-hock Piney breathed noisily and watched Ool as if he were looking at a spike-tailed devil.

Watches Bowen snapped a command, and the car swerved back and passed the Cafe Oriental. They all peered into the restaurant. Plainly visible inside, six men sat around a table, dining in leisurely fashion.

"Doc Savage and his five aides!" Dorgan exploded. "But, bell, it can't be! Them guys in the restaurant must be actors that bird Savage fixed up."

Ham-hock rolled his eyes.

"Ah tells yo' dat bronze man am more'n half spook," he declared.

Squirrel Dorgan was obviously doing some fast thinking in an effort to make their defeat seem logical.

"Doc Savage knew that bird Forestay was you in disguise," he told Watches Bowen.

Bowen yelled, "What?"

"That probably explains it," Squirrel said, with the air of a mastermind. "Doc Savage told you when he was gonna be out of his place in the restaurant, figuring you would take a whirl at getting the goggles. Then he arranged some actors or somebody down there eating to look like himself and his men."

Bowen swore fervently and fumbled with the two watches on the gold chain.

"Maybe that explains it," he admitted.

"Ah still claims dat Savage man is worse dan voodoo," proclaimed Ham-hock Piney.

ARRIVING at their yacht alongside the City Island dock, the gang trooped aboard in surly silence.

Dimiter Daikoff came out of the galley to meet them, bringing coffee and some of Watches Bowen's favorite brandy.

His ministrations were not received kindly. Watches gave him a round cursing on general principles, and the big, dark, scarred man who claimed he was a patriot instead of a murderer, retired to a corner of the cabin and sat with his arms folded, a look of utter tragedy on his swarthy face.

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

Watches Bowen kept pulling one timepiece after another out of his pockets, and juggling them in his hand.

"We've got to rub this Doc Savage out," he growled.

"It is true," Ool agreed. "And we must have that dirigible. We must get those goggles also."

Watches nodded. "It's a job I hate to tackle, but it's got to be done."

"It is more dangerous trying to trick that man than to kill him," Ool said. "We will kill him."

"Ah ain't cravin' no prominent part in the killin'," Hamhock put in.

Ool's cold glance fixed upon Ham-hock.

The fat Negro's temerity oozed. "Dat is," he qualified weakly, "Ah hopes us can dope out some shoah-fire scheme."

Watches restored his timepieces to his pockets, and his thick hand slid up and down the gold vest chain;

"I've got an idea," he purred. Turning, he walked to the far corner of the room, nodding for Ool to accompany him.

The two talked together earnestly for several minutes. They were careful to keep their voices lowered. No word reached other ears than their own.

Dimiter Daikoff remained glowering in the opposite corner of the room, entirely out of earshot.

Dimiter Daikoff was not out of eye-shot, however, and both Watches Bowen and Ool would have been vastly surprised had they known that the big man whose dark eyes watched them so intently, was making those eyes serve as ears.

Dimiter Daikoff was reading lips as Bowen and Ool talked.

SOME three hours later, in Doc Savage's fabulous library of scientific tomes, Monk was pacing as restlessly as a newly caged ape.

Ham sat watching him, an overdone expression of pity on his handsome face. He made clucking noises of pity with his tongue.

"No imagination," he said. "He just don't know what to do with himself."

Monk snorted, seemed to try to think of a suitable retort, gave it up and turned to watch Doc Savage, who stood before a large globe of the world.

Doc was studying the Arctic regions, and drawing a line with a colored pencil. Near by was a stack of newspapers dating some months back. They carried stories of the lost Lenderthorn Expedition. The mark on the globe indicated the route of the Lenderthorn Expedition, as given by the newspaper accounts.

"Doc," Monk said.

The bronze man looked up. "Yes?"

"Where were you the past couple of hours? Getting those papers?" Monk asked.

Doc nodded. "That, and otherwise trying to find out what this is all about."

"You got any idea what those goggles are?" Monk asked.

"The lenses are very peculiar," the bronze giant stated. "They seem to be composed of a material similar to quartz. Yet this quartz — and I am not quite sure it is quartz — is not of natural formation. The crystalline structure indicates an artificial source."

Monk scratched the bristles atop his bullet of a head.

"At least, we know they're after our dirigible," he said, "even if we don't know why those goggles are so valuable and what is behind all this phenagling."

Doc turned back to the globe.

Monk grinned as he watched the bronze man concentrate on the Arctic longitudes. The apish chemist pulled his coat collar tight about his chin and executed an elaborate shiver.

"I feel in my bones," he said, "that we're due to shove off for the land of the midnight sun."

A buzzer sounded faintly. It was one which warned of approaching visitors — a contact was closed automatically when an elevator stopped at the eighty-sixth floor level.

The bronze man pressed a button. Electrical mechanism whirred, and on one wall of the room, an inset television scanning panel of frosted glass was suddenly flooded with light. A picture appeared of the corridor outside. A uniformed policeman was stepping from an elevator.

"Now what?" muttered Monk. "Have we got the police after us, too?"

"I hope this isn't another Gray Forestay," pale Long Tom put in.

The door buzzer rang.

"I'll let him in," Monk said.

THE policeman whom Monk ushered into the room removed his cap when Doc Savage nodded in greeting. The officer seemed to have an instinctive feeling that the giant bronze man was entitled to special respect. It was not an unnatural feeling shared by every one who met Doc Savage.

"I'm Lieutenant O'Malley," the uniformed man said. "I am on detached service working out of the chief's office. I'm here to interview Doc Savage."

"This is Doc Savage," Monk said, nodding in the direction of the world-renowned man.

"I know." O'Malley's eyes showed open admiration as they rested upon the bronze giant.

"Brother," he said, hesitating as if doubtful of the propriety of the term of address, but unable to resist its honest expression, "I'd sure feel safe with a man like you walking a beat with me."

Doc Savage turned the conversation away from himself.

"What can we do for you?" he questioned.

"It's a routine matter," the policeman said. "The office is checking up on the murder of a Watches Bowen mobster

Beery Hosmer. The suspected murderer seems to be a sideshow freak, if the descriptions that have come in are any good. White-faced, watercolored eyes, gold mustache, and a fine fuzz on his head. That's the way the description -- "

"And why are you interviewing me?" Doc interposed.

"This man was reported seen around your office," the officer said.

Doc nodded. "Such a man did come to see me."

"When?"

"Late last night."

"What did he want?" O'Malley asked excitedly.

"There is more to this than shows on the surface," Doc said. "You make an appointment with your chief and we'll go over the matter together."

O'Malley's face clouded. Plainly he disliked the idea. But the bronze man's words had held a note of quiet finality.

O'Malley shrugged. "O. K.," he said. He turned, started for the door, then stopped and looked back.

"Say," he grinned, "mind if I use your telephone to call my wife? She's got corned beef and cabbage cooking tonight. It looks like I'm going to be late. I want her to keep it hot."

Doc waved at the desk phone. "Help yourself."

O'Malley spun the dial and got a number. He talked briefly regarding the conservation of corned beef and cabbage.

After he had spoken, he listened. He listened a much longer time than he had spoken. The sound of a highpitched, querulous voice could be heard from the receiver. O'Malley squirmed; looked sheepish. His free hand went into his side pants pocket and out again.

Finally, he banged the receiver in a show of temper. The receiver missed the prongs, struck the phone, rocked it on the desk top. His right hand reached out to steady the instrument. With the right hand gripping the inside of the mouthpiece, he hooked the receiver on the fork and stepped back.

"There's a woman for you," he muttered, flushed. "She says if I don't get home on time I can eat it cold."

After the policeman had left, Doc said: "Monk, follow him."

"Tail that cop?" Monk asked, surprised.

"Right. Report all he does."

BY riding Doc's speed elevator down, Monk reached the lobby before the policeman arrived on a slower cage. Monk trailed O'Malley down the crowded avenue.

O'Malley walked fast, almost ran. He 'vent only half a block, then turned into a cigar store and walked to the hack where phone booths were arrayed. He paused in front of one of the booths.

A man came out of the booth. O'Malley crowded in.

Monk started violently when he saw the man who had come out. The man was Watches Bowen.

Monk recognized him, although he had seen Watches only in the characterization of Gray Forestay.

Monk's hand dipped into his pocket, came out with small change. He dropped a coin on the news counter and grabbed a newspaper, jerked it open, held it before his face, and advanced on the phone booths in the manner of a man absorbed in the day's news.

He stopped at the phone booth adjacent to the one the policeman had entered. But the booth was occupied. He caught a glimpse of the occupant through the glass window. It was the strangely white-skinned man who carried death in his right hand—Ool.

It had been Monk's intention to ease into the booth and listen in on O'Malley's telephone conversation. Occupied as the booth was, Monk pushed ahead to the booth on the other side of the policeman's. He had to pass so close to Watches Bowen that he almost scraped elbows with the gangster.

Monk grimaced as he saw his plan of overhearing the policeman's conversation going to smash. The booth on the opposite side was occupied also.

Monk got a quick look at the occupant. The man was small, inoffensive appearing; mouselike, in fact. A wide bandage swathing his head made him look more harmless than ever. It was Honey Hamilton, although Monk had no way of knowing that.

Monk started on, intending to enter one of the other booths and put a call through to Doc Savage for reinforcements. But he never made the call.

A sudden sharp pressure came against the small of his back. A voice purred, "Take it easy. You sure have pushed yourself into bad company."

MONK stood unmoving, saying nothing, a policy he considered excellent when the muzzle of an automatic was gouging into his back.

"So you tailed our fake copper here," Watches Bowen purred. "You boys are very, very bright, aren't you?"

Monk said nothing.

Watches Bowen laughed with an oily softness, and said, "All right, you wanted to know things. Get your ear against that booth."

Monk retreated, the muzzle of the gun barrel making steady pressure against his back.

Watches laughed unnaturally. "This is too good to keep," he said. "I'm going to let you in. Our fake copper is going to call Savage. And when Savage answers his phone it'll be his last minute on earth."

"Huh?" Monk grunted, startled by the cold confidence of Watches' tone.

"Were you in Savage's office when 'Officer' O'Malley was fumbling around with the telephone?"

"Sure." Monk growled.

Watches grinned. "'Officer' O'Malley's thumb smeared poison in the telephone mouthpiece in Doc Savage's office."

"Huh?" Monk said again.

"A very unusual poison," Watches elaborated. "One which vaporized when moistened by the breath. The gas kills!"

"Hey, listen --" Monk growled, suddenly alarmed.

The gun barrel jabbed into his back. "You listen, ape! That's all! You're just in time!"

Monk listened, suffering all the tortures of the damned. A whirring and clicking could he heard from within the booth as the fake policeman dialed Doc Savage's number. Doc. Monk knew, would be called to the telephone in case he did not answer himself. There could hardly be a slip-up.

There was an interval of silence inside the booth, then the fake policeman spoke: "Hello . . . Doc Savage?"

Monk, the homely, loyal Monk, did a magnificent thing. It was not his fault that it was a useless thing.

It has been long accepted that. "greater love hath no man --" Monk did the best he could to lay down his life for his brother.

There was only one way he could have managed it. With that automatic nosed into his back, he could only yell, warn Doc Savage of the poison danger by the roar of his great voice -- and by the roar of the gangster's gun as it blared its lead through flesh and bone.

Monk opened his cavernous mouth to yell. It was not his fault that no sound came.

Before he could utter so much as a murmur, the barrel of a submachine gun crashed against his temple and felled him to the floor.

"HONEY" HAMILTON, anticipating the hairy chemist's intention of shouting a warning, had stepped out of the door of his telephone booth and struck the blow. The mouselike fellow eased back inside the folding doors of the booth like a snail writhing into its shell. He pretended to be talking into the phone.

Monk's collapsing bulk could not help but attract attention. Several men raced back from the cigar counter.

Watches thrust his flat automatic into a coat pocket and bent over Monk with an appearance of solicitude.

"Help me with him, will you?" he asked the first clerk who came up.

The man bent to help Watches lift Monk. "What's the matter?" he wanted to know.

"Fainted," Watches said briskly. "He gets these spells."

"Look at the blood!" the clerk gasped. "He's hit his head."

"Afraid so." Watches made a tsk-tsk sound and looked concerned.

"We better get a doctor."

"I," Watches said in a suavely authoritative voice, "am his doctor. Help me with him, some of you fellows. We'll put him in my car."

They carried Monk outside to the car. Watches drove away with him.

At the telephone booth inside the cigar store the fake policeman's conversation with Doc Savage had proceeded according to plan.

"I'm O'Malley," he had said.

"I recognize your voice," Doc Savage had replied over the wire.

"Will you speak a little closer to the mouthpiece, please?" the gangster requested. "This connection is not good."

Doc Savage raised his voice.

"I still can't hear you," the gangster lied. "Maybe if you'd talk a little closer still -- "

"How is this?" Doc Savage's words were blurred, as if his lips were against the mouthpiece.

"That's better," said the fake officer. "Now, about this Beery Hosmer killing -- there is a point or two that I forgot -- "

He talked on, making conversation concerning the murder of Hosmer, going over some of the points which he had already discussed with Doc Savage.

He heard a crash. It was loud, brittle, such a sound as the telephone at the other end might have made if dropped. The man in the blue uniform broke up his monologue and called sharply, "Doc Savage!"

There was no answer.

"Doc Savage!" the man repeated.

Silence replied. Then there were excited shouts coming over the wire, the noise of men moving about rapidly in Doc Savage's office. Finally, there was a cry, hoarse and filled with horror.

"He's dead!" a voice shrieked. "Doc Savage is dead!"

The fake policeman hung up hastily and left the booth. Ool came out of the adjacent booth.

"Did it succeed?" Ool asked.

"It did," the other grinned.

Chapter 9. FROSTED DEATH

WITHIN the hour Watches Bowen, transporting the unconscious Monk, was back at the boat at the City Island dock. He looked around irritably for Dimiter Daikoff.

"Where is the patriot?" he asked of Ham-hock Piney.

The fat Negro shrugged ponderous shoulders. "I donno, chief."

The big, dark, scarred man came in a few minutes later.

"Where were you?" Watches snarled.

"Out for some air," Daikoff said gloomily.

"Well, see if you can start some air circulating in this." Watches indicated the still unconscious figure of Monk.

The big, dark man scowled ferociously. When he did this, the scar on his neck tightened like something alive.

He said, "Violence I do not like, except to traitors and political foes."

Watches regarded him bleakly. "You might call this guy a political foe of ours. You did a good repair job on Honey Hamilton. See if you can fix this one up, too."

Daikoff clicked his heels, bowed, then commenced expert ministrations to Monk.

Watches produced his eighty-year-old brandy and poured his own drinks. Ool and Honey Hamilton, and the fake policeman, O'Malley, came in a few minutes later. Ool's face was as dispassionate as usual, but Honey Hamilton's cherubic features were beaming.

"What's the dope?" Watches asked. "Did it work?"

"You tell it, Ool," Honey sighed.

"Doc Savage," Ool announced, "is dead."

"You sure?" Watches frowned.

"I know my poisons," Ool said flatly. "This one, in my land, is known as ssl-yto-mng. That name means 'the poison that can not fail.'"

"He's dead, all right," said O'Malley. "I heard his men howling that he had croaked."

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Watches breathed heavily and reached for the brandy. "So Savage is out of the way. Maybe that ain't a load off my chest! Ool, you're smart enough to be president of these United States!"

Ool nodded. "I have thought of that. Perhaps I shall be."

Watches stared. "Well, for

"What," Ool questioned, "is to prevent me?"

"Sure," Watches muttered, a strange gleam coming into his bleak eyes. "You took me off my feet for a minute by being so casual."

"It is not too much to hope for," Ool said.

"Sure. Why, sure," Watches said slowly, "if we put this deal across --- hell, anything is possible!"

Watches gulped his drink and his hand trembled on his glass.

"Your hand," Ool said, "is not steady."

Watches cursed softly. "You'd shake too, if you were half human. When I think about what we can do if this goes through " He reached for another drink.

"Now that Doc Savage is out of the way," Ool said, "we have only to appropriate his dirigible --- and the goggles --- and leave. Right?" He made a gesture indicating simplicity, with his pale hands.

THERE was a series of five sharp raps at the door. They were insistent.

"That's Squirrel's signal," Watches said. "Sounds as if something is on him. Let him in, Ham-hock."

The corpulent Negro waddled over and opened the door, and Squirrel landed inside like one of his furry namesakes tumbling out of a tree.

"Watches!" he jabbered, "I seen Doc Savage and --- "

"When?" Watches cut.

"Since that poison was supposed to have got him!"

"Where?" the crook leader's word was a crash.

"I been shadowin' his place like you told me. He come out and I followed him. He turns in at a cable office and sends some radiograms --- "

"Radiograms?"

"Yeah --- "

"Who to?"

"How would I know?" Squirrel asked in an injured tone. "I couldn't walk in and look."

Watches jerked savagely at his watch chain.

"Get me a copy of those radiograms. Stick up the place, or blow the safe, or anything. But get 'em!"

Ool's right hand floated out in Squirrel's direction in a loathsome moccasin motion. His flat voice said ominously:

"If you do not manage better with the radiograms than you did with the goggles — "

He left it unfinished for effect.

Squirrel Dorgan shuddered, mumbled, "Aw, I done my best." Then he went out hastily.

Watches turned, frowning, on Ool.

"The poison which never fails — " he began with biting sarcasm.

Ool silenced him with a fluttering of his right hand.

"It was not the poison which failed," he said. "It is your stupid men."

The fake policeman, O'Malley, protested desperately: "I smeared that poison in the telephone mouthpiece!"

Watches rasped, "There was a slip somewhere."

Ham-hock rolled his whitish eyes. "Yassuh, an' de way things turned out when we all went foah dem goggles — Ah done mah best to pick 'em up, but dey just wahn't dere, even if'n Ah could see 'em."

Ool's voice crashed flatly. "There is another poison from my land, a sister poison to this one which has failed. We call these poisons the 'twin sisters.' The one which has failed is volatized by moisture. The other one is turned into a deadly gas by the application of heat. I shall prepare the heat poison."

The golden-fuzzed assassin paused. "I suggest you, Watches, yourself, arrange that Doc Savage meet the other of the twin sisters. We do not want another failure."

Watches glowered. "I'll arrange the introduction, all right."

Watches absent-mindedly pulled a timepiece from his coat sleeve. There was evidently a special pocket in the sleeve. The watch was very large, of silver, and looked ancient.

Watches looked at it, appeared to see it for the first time, seemed startled, and hastily returned it to its concealed sleeve pouch.

A DEEP and melancholy voice at Ool's elbow asked: "What is the time, please, Mr. Bowen?"

Watches looked around, startled. He had not heard big Dimiter Daikoff approach.

"Damn it!" he snapped. "That's a good way to get yourself a lead vaccination — slipping up behind me like that!"

"What is the time?" Daikoff asked again, unperturbed.

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

"That watch doesn't tell time," the mob chief growled. "Some of my watches tell time — some of 'em I carry for other reasons." He held out his wrist where Daikoff could see the minute and hour. "That one keeps time."

"Thank you," Daikoff said. He turned and started away. Even bent over, and limping as he did, he looked enormous. There was an aura of quiet power about him.

"How's the patient?" Watches called after him.

Daikoff paused. "You mean the man who resembles a huge monkey? The one who seems to have been hit over the head?"

"Sure." Watches nodded. "Is he gonna croak?"

"It is too soon to tell," Daikoff's deep voice boomed. "He must remain quiet for a while."

EARLY that evening, Squirrel Dorgan returned to the moored yacht and put copies of four radiograms in Watches' hands.

"They're the ones Doc Savage sent," he said. "I just walked into the cable office, showed a clerk the noisy end of my gun, and he coughed up."

Watches scanned the radiograms quickly, then cursed with soft deadliness and called Ool.

Ool's hand, after he had read the radiograms, crept out instinctively in a butterfly movement. But all he said was, "We have no time to lose."

"We'll finish him to-night!" Watches rasped. "That's no pipe-dream, either!"

One of the radiograms was addressed to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment at Aklavik, at the head of the Mackenzie River on the Arctic coast. The other three were addressed to United States government authorities in settlements on the mainland of Alaska and on the Aleutian Islands. The text of all four radiograms was the same:

PLEASE SEND AVAILABLE INFORMATION REGARDING GRAY FORESTAY EXPEDITION OR ANY OTHER EXPEDITION OPERATING THROUGH YOUR TERRITORY WITHIN LAST SIX MONTHS STOP HAVE YOU ANY RECORD OF SHRUNKEN-FACED ABNORMALLY WHITE-SKINNED MAN FINE GOLDEN HAIR TALL BONY REMARKABLY STRONG FLAT UNNATURAL VOICE WHEN SPEAKING ENGLISH KNOWN PERHAPS AS OOL STOP THIS INFORMATION OF UTMOST URGENCY.

CLARK SAVAGE, JR.

"Yeah," Watches growled, after reading the messages again. "We've got to nail him before he gets a line on you, Ool."

SHORTLY before ten o'clock that night, Doc Savage and his four aides were gathered in the reception room of the bronze man's eighty-sixth floor headquarters. Talking little, they were waiting with some impatience—except for big-fisted Renny, who frowned at the telephone from time to time.

"How'd you ever get wise to that trick poison, Doc?" he boomed. "The stuff was colorless, and it didn't look wet like a liquid."

"Did you watch that fake policeman, O'Malley, when he was here?" Doc asked.

Renny nodded. "Sure."

"He was not very clever in fumbling the telephone," the bronze man said dryly. "That made me suspicious. There was only about one thing he could have been doing. So, immediately after the man who called himself O'Malley had departed, I disconnected that instrument and substituted another."

Johnny, the big-worded archaeologist and geologist, fumbled his monocle and murmured, "I wonder if your chicane histrionics were consummative?"

"He means that he wonders if that was a successful act that you put on over the telephone, when you had one of us yell that you were dead," Renny rumbled.

Doc evidently intended to answer, but there was an interruption. The telephone rang. The bronze man got up and swung toward the instrument.

"Holy cow!" Renny thumped uneasily. "Watch it! Maybe there's been some more poison smeared in that mouthpiece!"

It was noticeable that the bronze man stood well away from the instrument as he answered it. A shrill, whining voice came from the receiver.

"Listen, guy," it said, "I know who I'm talkin' to, see. I know your voice. That ain't all I know, either."

"Interesting," Doc said without emotion.

"Beery Hosmer was my pal," the voice whined. "He got it dirty, see? He didn't have it comin'. So I'm layin' a finger on the guy that done it."

"All right," Doc Savage said sharply. "Who are you and what do you know?"

The voice quickened over the telephone.

"Think I'm a sap?" it demanded. "All kinds of troubles have a way of lightin' on guys like me, so I ain't tellin' no names. But you go to that warehouse thing owned by the Hidalgo Tradin' Company down on the Hudson River water front. Look for a green coupe, see?"

"How did you get this information?" Doc asked.

The other hung up.

IT was half past ten that night when Doc Savage and his four aides approached the great warehouse hangar. The car in which they rode eased along with the silence of an electric lift. The bronze man was at the wheel.

Tam, Renny, Long Tom, and Johnny were all a little glum because of the absence of Monk. The fact that Doc did not appear worried did not cheer them much, because the bronze man rarely showed the emotions which he felt.

Ham tried to cheer himself. "After all, Monk don't often get into a spot that he can't get out of."

"Yeah," Renny said. "Monk'll come through all right. What I'm worried about is this call from the party who claims to be a friend of Beery Hosmer."

"Right," Long Tom concurred. "It's got some of the earmarks of a phony."

The car rolled silently, a perfectly balanced motor virtually eliminating vibration, expert filling of the heavy body and chassis parts assuring no creakings. One of the individual features of the car was the fenders of chrome construction, able to withstand a terrific collision.

Long Tom's voice cracked, "There's a green coupe!"

The green coupe, a large one, was a block distant and under a streetlight.

A man leaned out, looked behind, then turned swiftly and seemed to be giving directions to the driver.

"It's that white-skinned scamp, Ool!" Long Tom barked.

"We'll pull alongside," Renny began, "and — no, we won't." The green coupe, with a throaty snarl from its exhaust, leaped from the curb, gathered speed. Within a very few seconds it was breaking speed limits.

Doc fed more gas. His own car eased silently up to keep pace with the other. It began to close the gap between the two machines.

The green coupe began to rocket through night traffic. The car needed no warning siren to secure a right-of-way. Its exhaust roar was ample. It cannoned the night with a pounding thunder which would have drowned out a fire siren. Taxis scurried to the curb. Pedestrians flattened back against shop windows.

Holding close behind the roaring green coupe, Doc's low sedan was still almost silent.

Renny flourished his supermachine pistol.

"Shall I let 'em have a dose?"

Doc shook his head. "Traveling too fast!"

Doc fed more gas — and more. His car drew up alongside the other. His intention was obviously to get around the green coupe, cut in front, and force the machine to the curb.

But the other car also had speed. The driver circumvented Doc's maneuver by putting on a burst of speed as great as the bronze man had managed. White lights, green lights, red lights streaked past, blurred.

Doc commented, "They have quite a motor under that hood."

"Wait until we get on an open road!" clipped Johnny, reverting to few syllable words in the excitement of the pursuit.

In anticipation of violent action, he took his monocle from his pocket, wrapped it in his handkerchief to protect it from breakage, and thrust it back in his pocket. The monocle was not an affectation with him. In the past, before Doc Savage had exercised his surgical skill to restore complete sight to the wiry geologist's left eye, injured in the World War, Johnny had worn eyeglasses, the left eyepiece carrying the magnifying glass. Needing eyeglasses no longer, he insisted that he needed the magnifier in his work, so he still carried it in the

monocle.

SUDDENLY the air in front of Doc Savage's hurtling car was choked with smoke. Beams from the powerful lamps were absorbed as completely as the sun's rays behind storm clouds.

The driver of the green coupe was spreading a smoke screen from his exhaust in the fashion devised long ago by ingenious criminals. Doc's car was coursing blindly at nearly a hundred miles an hour.

The bronze man drove a hand under the instrument panel and touched one of an array of switches concealed there. Then he wrenched out large, somewhat clumsy eyepieces. He peered through one of these.

A fantastic change was wrought. A weird light seemed to have suffused the pall of black smoke. To a layman, it would have smacked of black magic, but an electrical engineer would not have been more than surprised at the efficiency of the apparatus for projecting invisible infra-red light rays, which have the faculty of penetrating smoke and fog to a great degree.

The eyepieces, highly ingenious, for making the infra-light visible would have been even more interesting to an electrical expert.

"Watch out!" Renny shouted suddenly.

Directly ahead, crosswise of the street, loomed an abandoned truck. Some one, working in collusion with the driver of the green coupe, had driven the truck out of a side street and left it, anticipating that Doc would crash into it, head on, in the smoke.

Tires squalled on pavement as Doc swerved the sedan in an attempt to clear the obstruction. No ordinary car could have made it.

There was a sickening skid. They vaulted the curb. Metal crashed, rasped. They had glanced off a wall. Brick dust cascaded. The machine rocked, nearly went over. Then it jarred back on the street, beyond the truck.

"Holy cow!" Renny gasped.

Long-winded Johnny blinked his eyes. "I vouchsafe a kindred articulation!"

The speeding ears were beyond the region of traffic lights now and streaking on open boulevards. Doc's sedan crawled up immediately behind the other ear. At their terrific speed, telephone poles were almost like pickets in a fence. The green coupe lurched a good deal, but Doc's scientifically weighted ear held the road smoothly.

Doc's cabled bronze hands eased the wheel over. The ear swung around the green coupe, came up abreast. Plainly, Doc meant to wedge the other car in, force it to stop.

A submachine gun nosed out of the green coupe and a burst of bullets flattened harmlessly against the steel plating and bulletproofed glass of Doc's vehicle.

With the speeding cars side by side, Doc and his men could get a look at their adversaries in the coupe.

"Hey, that's not Ool!" Long Tom said tersely. "They've chalked somebody's face up to make him look like Ool!"

"Ool would hardly risk his neck with a driver like that one," Doc said.

"Well then, what — " Long Tom never finished his sentence.

THERE was a bump, a terrifying swerve, a crash, a crazy sword-slashing of lights in the night as the two cars collided and one of them turned up end for end and rolled like a barrel off the road, over a ditch, through a hedge of trees and far into a plowed field.

The insanely reckless driver of the green coupe had tried to shove the other car off the road.

The trick backfired. The other driver had not calculated on Doc's reinforced fenders. It was his own ear which went over.

Doc's machine held the road. It weaved, but not dangerously. Doc eased down on the brakes, cut the lights, and brought the car to an abrupt stop.

What he did then was a surprise.

"Slide over here in the driver's seat, Ham," he directed. "Take the ear hack to town. You will hear from me at the office."

He opened the door, swung out, glided across the road and disappeared in the shadow of a high hedge.

Ham hesitated, then drove away, carrying with him a puzzled and disgusted Long Tomn, Johnny, and Renny.

At the scene of the disaster, Doc Savage ascertained that both the driver and gunner were dead, killed instantly.

He was examining the bodies, when a peculiar rhythmic drone of a sound assailed his ears. Doc looked up.

Clearly against the star-lit sky he could see a huge shape poised against the night, resembling, at first, a bird with grotesquely whirling wings. Even as he looked, the object settled lower. It was a plane, an autogyro.

Doc exploded in a burst of furious energy, and barely reached the shadows of a grove of trees as a sharp clatter sounded from above and machine gun bullets rapped the ground.

Doc was not carrying one of the machine pistols so much relied upon by his men; he preferred to depend for defense on ingenuity and various scientific devices carried in pockets of specially constructed vest.

Since the autogyro was not flying low enough for him to take any effective measures against it, he contented himself with outguessing the machine gun bursts. Repeatedly, bullets snarled through the massed leaves, tracing patterns of death. But the bronze man kept clear.

After a few minutes of ineffectual firing, the autogyro lifted and skimmed away to the west, still flying low.

Not more than two minutes later, Doc saw it poise, then drop lazily to the earth in almost vertical decent.

Leaving his evergreen shelter, Doc ran for the spot where the autogyro had landed. The distance was not great and, eventually, he located the windmill plane.

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The craft had settled in a farm lot, in a shallow valley not far off the road. There was a house close by. Doc approached cautiously. The moon added to the brilliance of the stars.

He heard a man curse, then heard his own name spoken --"Doc Savage!" -- in evident alarm. A window went black in the farmhouse. A man ran out and was joined by another outside. The two started racing across the farm lot in the direction of the autogyro.

Then one of them stopped, caught the other by the arm and pulled him in the opposite direction.

"Nix!" The arm-puller's words wafted clearly to Doc. "We can't land in the gyro where we wanta go! The hell with it! We'll take the car!"

THE men ran, stumbling, to the road. Doc following them, heard the whine of a starter, then the silence-wrecking roar of a motor and a clashing of gears as a car got under way.

The headlights switched on. Doc was able to recognize the two men. Ool and Watches Bowen!

The car droned away, blurring into black distance.

After satisfying himself that he was alone, Doc Savage ran toward the autogyro. He examined it carefully. He devoted particular attention to the controls.

He found a bomb attached to the starter in such a way that it would have exploded at the first revolution. The bomb explained the "act" which Watches Bowen and Ool had put on in the farm lot. The performance had been calculated to decoy the bronze man into following the fleeing car with the autogyro. It was just one more murder attempt.

Doc Savage entered the house and began a searching examination of the rooms. It seemed to be a small tenant farmer's house, deserted now, used, judging from the litter about, as an occasional hide-out by Watches Bowen.

The white beam of his flashlight poked everywhere. In the room where he had seen the light go out, papers on the floor and more papers on a time-scarred desk made it look as if the criminals, in their haste to clear out, had been forced to leave documents behind.

Doc picked one of the papers from the floor. Light from the hand flash washed over it, revealing a maze of handwriting and figures apparently some of Watches Bowen's calculations.

Doc gathered all papers on the floor and carried them to the desk. There was a lamp on the desk, with an electric bulb in it. Evidently there was an electric plant on the farm.

For greater convenience, Doc laid down his flash and turned on the electric light. It was a dim bulb, heavily frosted.

Doc bent close to the light while sorting over the papers. So intent was he upon the documents that he did not see the faint vapor which crept out from the frosted bulb as it warmed.

He did notice it, finally. His arm slashed out. He smashed the bulb in his bare hand. But the vapor was already in the air.

The bronze man took two staggering steps, then keeled over, to lie inert on the floor.

Chapter 10. THE PATRIOT UNMASKED

OOL and Watches Bowen did not drive into town when they fled the farmhouse, but turned into a near-by side road, from where, after parking their machine, they circled back to the farmhouse on foot, arriving in time to watch from a distance as Doc Savage turned on the lamp at the desk.

When they heard the solid thump of his body as it struck the floor, they came charging in. They stared triumphantly at the bronze man's prostrate form.

"The second of the twin sisters got him," Ool spoke tonelessly.

Watches' voice had a rasp in it. "After this, Ool, I vote for you and your fancy poisons every time. When that fool coupe driver got himself wrecked, I was ready to quit."

Watches collected his personal papers which had formed the fire. Then he approached the body of Doc Savage.

"Let's lug it out to the car," he suggested.

Tot ether the two bent over Doc's heavy frame.

What happened next neither Ool nor Watches could have correctly detailed. There was a nightmare sensation, as though the roof had fallen on them and a tornado had funneled its way into the room.

Vaguely, of course, they knew that Doc Savage was not dead. The corded muscles of the bronze man, which had been slacked in apparent helplessness as he lay upon the floor, had suddenly become galvanized with uncalculable force.

Both Ool and Watches Bowen were strong men. But they were helpless the instant a metallic hand closed over the throat of each. Their blood seemed to turn to water, their muscles got limp as rags, their eyes bulged in purpling faces, their tongues ran out.

Doc, with an unexpected movement, cracked their heads together. They lost consciousness.

Searching the pair, Doc relieved them of weapons. Then he devoted much time to an examination of Ool's right hand, the hand which the thin, strangely white-skinned man seemed never to keep still.

He found nothing peculiar about the hand.

The bronze man dragged the two senseless forms to the autogyro and calmly detached the bomb from the starting mechanism.

He flew his two captives back to the city, landing in a vacant lot conveniently near his own water-front warehouse hangar. He took a closed car from the big building and loaded the captives aboard.

IN the skyscraper headquarters, Ham, Johnny, Long Tom, and Renny stared as Doc issued from his private elevator with his two prisoners in tow. Doc slumped the pair of limp forms on the floor.

Long Tom, the electrical wizard, was first to speak. "You sure did a heavy night's work, Doc," he said.

"Let us hope it is all over but the questioning," Doc said.

Big-fisted Renny handed over a sheaf of radiograms.

"These came in answer to the radiograms you sent up North," he told the bronze man. "They give us something to go on when we start questioning these two."

The messages were all very long, and all alike in one respect -- they all conveyed the information that no expedition other than the Lenderthorn party had left the Arctic-American coast in recent months.

One message carried a surprise. It described the members of the Lenderthorn party. The descriptions were unmistakable.

Lenderthorn, the explorer, had been no other person than Watches Bowen himself. Assisting him had been a lieutenant who resembled Ool to perfection.

The expedition had taken off by plane and had not been heard from since, the message stated.

One radiogram, from Point Barrow, on the north Alaskan coast, contained additional information regarding Ool.

The weirdly white-skinned man, so the radiogram informed, had arrived miseriously into the settlement some months ago.

Ool had carried a strange pair of black goggles. He had been acting strangely seeming to have not the slightest idea of what modern life was like, and being unable to speak any intelligible language. But during the short time he had remained there, he had learned language and customs with amazing rapidity.

He had refused to divulge much information about himself except to infer vaguely that he had come from off the Arctic ice pack, which obviously was a lie, it being regarded as an impossibility. He had disappeared from the settlement as mysteriously as he had come.

Several strange deaths among the Eskimo population had been credited by them to Ool, but this was thought to be superstitious fancy on their part, since no direct evidence of Ool's guilt could be obtained and fatalities in each case having been attended by severe local inflammation and swelling, and no autopsies having been performed, death had been credited by settlement authorities to pernicious infection, or simple blood poisoning.

Renny jarred his huge fists together restlessly. "What say we take a trip, Doc, over -- "

" -- over the Arctic ice pack," Long Tom supplied. "We can use -- "

" -- the new dirigible." Ham added.

"For the specific purposes," Johnny finished grandly, "of investigating the mysterious origin of one malicious malefactor having golden hirsute adornment, not to mention delving into the mystery of a certain pair of goggles -- and alleged mysterious things."

"HAM -- jump!" Doc's voice was a crash of sound.

Ham jumped, suddenly, without question. The dapper lawyer leaped a yard in the air.

Ool clutched his ankle at about the half-yard level.

Ham fell violently, sprawling his full length on the floor, his sword cane clattering out of his hand. He kicked, but he could not shake Ool's relentless grip from his ankle.

"Hold it, Ham!" Doc rasped. "Do not move!"

Ham lay still.

Ool spoke.

"You have done well to order him to lie still," he droned. "Now listen to me. You have witnessed my strength. I did not stay long unconscious, like this other one." He indicated Watches Bowen's limp form.

"I could give you," he continued, speaking with his sepulchral lack of tone, "a more deadly exhibition of my powers. If I had reached for your man with my right hand, instead of my left, he would now be dead. So try no tricks on me, bronze man. You could kill me—yes; but not before I could kill this man of yours."

"What do you want?" Doc asked quietly.

"First, the goggles."

Without further argument, Doc went into the laboratory and returned with the goggles. He tossed them to Ool.

"You have discrimination," Ool said, flatly. "I could wish I had you for a partner instead of Watches Bowen."

"What else do you want?"

"Escape — that is all." Ool spoke like an inefficient phonograph. "I am not greedy. I might bargain with you for your dirigible. But that would incur complications. I prefer to consolidate my gains, and strike another time."

"You propose to do what now?" Doc asked.

"I am going to move back and enter your elevator," Ool said. "I shall drag Watches Bowen, and I shall drag your man also. My right hand is death. Understand! But you have my word that it will function only if you interfere with my escape."

"What do you intend doing with Ham?" Doc demanded.

"I do not want him. Nor do I wish to encourage reprisals from you by killing him. If you do not interfere with my escape, I shall leave him at the bottom of the elevator shaft unhurt. Is it agreed?"

Above everything else, Doc Savage was solicitous about the safety of his aides.

"It is agreed," he said.

Without further words, Ool backed out of the door with his human burdens, entered an elevator, and sank the eighty-six stories to the ground.

Eventually the elevator came back to the eighty-sixth floor. Ham was in it, lashed with his back to the handrail.

"Let's go after that scut!" Renny roared, crowding into the elevator.

Doc vetoed the proposal. "Not now. I have other plans. You men wait."

The bronze man got them out, then went down alone in the cage.

Doc's aides crowded about Ham, firing queries.

"That while-faced, death-fingered fellow isn't human!" Ham shuddered.

ABOARD Watches Bowen's moored yacht, Dimiter Daikoff, the big, dark, scarred patriot, moved swiftly to bring out more eighty-year-old brandy as Watches Bowen and Ool tramped aboard and shoved noisily through the door.

Watches was in a savage mood. His neck was swelling from Doc Savage's choking, and his head felt like a thousand steel mallets were knocking on it. He gulped the brandy greedily.

"Some stuff, them twin sisters of yours," he snarled at Ool.

"There is no known poison in your world more deadly than the twin sisters," Ool replied.

"Then how conic Savage snapped out of it so quick?" Watches demanded.

"He did not come out of it."

"What do you mean?"

"He never was under the influence of it. No man can embrace either of the twin sisters and live."

"You mean he faked it — pretended to be knocked out in order to get us in there and nab us?"

"Obviously."

"Then something's gone screwy as hell!" Watches snarled. "There's a leak somewhere. Savage has been tipped off to every plan we've made." The mob leader's hand clawed at the front of his vest, jerked fiercely at his gold watch chain.

Dimiter Daikoff came forward silently, proffering cigarettes, but Watches knocked the package out of his hand.

"You're beginning to get under my skin!" he rasped.

"Hold onto your nerves," Ool cautioned. He produced the goggles from his pocket. "We have these — that is one important thing."

Watches continued to stare malevolently at Dimiter Daikoff, at the scar on his neck, the tragically-glowing dark eyes, the high cheek bones, hollow cheeks, the superb muscular power that even the swarthy man's ill-fitting suit could not hide.

Shortly afterward, Dimiter Daikoff found occasion to leave the cabin.

Watches Bowen jerked a thumb after him.

"Savage knows too much; he evidently finds out our plans," he said. "I wonder if the leak could be that damned patriot?"

Ool showed no emotion, but asked, "Need we take chances?"

"Hell, no!" Watches growled.

"I will shake hands with him when he returns," Ool said emotionlessly. "I will use my right hand."

Dimiter Daikoff came back after a time and Ool stood up.

"I wish to compliment you on the excellent serving of the brandy," he said. "Shake hands with me, if you will."

Dimiter Daikoff was standing very close. He reached out readily to take Ool's proffered hand.

But at the last instant the big patriot's forward-reaching hand swerved, but down toward the goggles in Ool's left hand. His flashing grab was accurately directed. He got the goggles.

All in the same motion, it seemed, he lunged to one side and his other hand clawed out and caught Watches by the throat. He jerked the thick-waisted gangster clear of the floor.

For the second time that evening, Watches Bowen thought a tornado had funneled into the room and was stirring splintered timbers about his head.

The big, dark man's throat grip tightened until the room was a red blur in Watches' bulging eyes. Then Ool sliced toward Dimiter Daikoff with his right hand fluttering. Watches felt himself lifted, hurled. He crashed against Ool, knocked him down.

Watches worked his jaw spasmodically, trying to talk. When he wrenched words out, they came in a hoarse rasp.

"it's Doc Savage!" he choked.

"Yes," came the tragic-voiced patriot's affirmation. "It is Doc Savage."

UPON hearing the struggle, Monk came charging in from the other cabin where he had been lying on a bed in pretended convalescence.

"Grab a chair, Monk," Doc called out. "Hold it in front of you. Ool's touch is death!"

Ool scrambled to his feet ahead of Watches. Crouching, he sidled in toward Doc, with his right hand weaving like the head of a coiled moccasin.

Doc did not wait for an attack. He hurled forward, avoided the moccasin thrust of the assassin, and thudded bronze knuckles on Ool's jaw.

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Ool reeled back, collapsed against the wall. But he sprang up. cat-quick, and sidled in again. Had Doc been able to throw more weight into the jaw punch, Doc, unnaturally strong though he was, would have caved in then.

As Ool slunk in for a second attack, Doc drew out one of the small glass bulbs which were his anesthetic bombs. He snapped it to the floor. It shattered. Doc held his breath.

"Hold your breath!" Ool yelled at Watches Bowen.

Doc had half expected this, recalling that in his office Ool had survived one of the bombs in similar fashion.

Doc made a pass at Ool, dodged the assassin's finger thrust as before, and planted a clean blow to the face.

An ordinary man would have been knocked out. Ool was only flung back against the wall, badly shaken. His endurance was tremendous.

At the same instant Monk, with his chair, rushed Watches. The gangster had gained his feet and was whirling the watch which had been in the secret pocket up his sleeve. Since escaping with Ool from Doc Savage's office, Watches had not re-armed himself with an automatic. He did not appear to be concerned about it. His lips writhed in a killer's snarl as he opened his hand and let the watch fly.

The watch was one of Bowen's pet weapons. The mechanism had been removed from the case and a quantity of molten lead inserted. Bowen could hurl the watch as accurately as he could aim a revolver.

The leaded watch plummeted toward Monk with the speed of a projectile. Monk ducked as the missile struck his chair. The watch splintered entirely through the thin wicker of the boat chair and struck Monk lightly on the chest.

Monk bellowed, came in with the chair as a battering-ram. The gangster lurched to one side. The chair scraped his shoulder and went into the wall with such force that the legs splintered the cabin sheathing.

The gangster's hand dipped to his wide coat pocket. It whipped out clutching another leaded watch. There was a chain attached. It was the gangster's habit to use the weighted timepiece as a substitute for a blackjack. He swung the unique weapon at Monk's head.

Jerking the chair around, Monk sideswiped the clumsy weapon in a vicious swing at the gangster. The chair knocked the leaded timepiece from Watches Bowen's fist, and went on to thud heavily against his shoulder.

The gangster reeled back. There was a jangle of breaking glass as his heavy bulk crashed into a porthole.

At the same moment, Doc Savage, eluding Ool's fourth successive moccasin jab, sent the tall pale man crashing to the wall. Ool struggled up again, but now noticeably weakened.

Watches Bowen's voice roared in savage desperation. "The hell with the goggles, Ool! Let's get out of here!"

The gang chief hurled his heavy bulk backward out the broken, oversize porthole, jangling the rest of the glass pane to the floor. Ool made a gangling lunge to the door.

Outside, they tumbled head-first into a speedboat which was moored under the stern.

"Give her the gun!" Watches yelled frantically.

There was a sudden roar as the speedboat engine came to life. A machine gun stuttered out. It must have been lying in the boat. The rain of slugs drove Doc and Monk flat on the deck.

The speedboat, running without lights, roared swiftly away with water piling up in its wake. Doc and Monk stood on the deck and stared after it.

Before Monk's admiring eyes, Doc Savage obliterated the Dimiter Daikoff disguise. He gouged from his mouth the wadding which had produced the effect of high cheek bones. A deft movement of his thumb and finger removed a pair of dark glass cuplike lenses which had fitted snugly over his eyeballs. A chemical paste cleared the last trace of blackness from his bronze hair. He peeled off the collodion-manufactured scar which slanted from the lobe of his ear down across his neck.

Monk grinned. "The patriot unmasked," he said. "I didn't know you myself at first as Dimiter Daikoff. Say, was there sure enough a Dimiter Daikoff?"

"The police radio calls were legitimate," Doc supplied. "I merely took advantage of them to gain Watches Bowen's confidence."

AN hour later, from an obscure Long Island airport, there sounded the multiple drone of airplane engines as a big ship, massive of hull and with a wide wing spread, barely cleared the twinkling line of lights marking the edge of the landing field.

Under its heavy weight of men and fuel, the ship rose sluggishly, circling the field and gaining altitude, then it put on speed and throbbed away into the northwest.

For passengers, the ship carried Watches Bowen, Ool, Ham-hock Piney, Honey Hamilton, Squirrel Dorgan, and four other men. Nine of them, and a pilot. As vicious an assortment of criminals as had ever disgraced a good plane.

It was some hours before Johnny, checking the airports and railway stations at Doc's suggestion, learned of the plane's departure.

Chapter 11. ARCTIC PROCESSION

LIKE a moonbeam caught up, congealed, and set adrift again, a cruising dirigible, a silver sliver against the bleak, sub-Arctic sky, droned over the Canadian northwest at a rate of speed highly unusual for such ships. The speed of the dirigible -- almost two hundred miles an hour -- was achieved through improved propulsion power and lessened wind resistance.

Doc Savage had personally developed the alloy motors, and Doc, with help from Monk, had succeeded in synthesizing an inflating gas, noninflammable, with substantially greater lifting power than helium or hydrogen.

At the settlement of Resolution, on Great Slave Lake, the silver dirigible nosed down for refueling. Doc and his five inquiring aides learned there that a two-motored transport plane carrying ten men had touched for gas and oil two hours before them.

"Ool and Watches Bowen," Monk muttered.

"Deduction corroborated," Johnny agreed.

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In the air again, boring into the northwest, the slender dirigible was like a bright needle threading together a thousand-mile line of tall spruces and black monzonite ridges. Hour after hour, the craft drilled over the great, lonely land, rising higher as it approached the Alaskan border, in order to clear the Yukon Rockies.

In the cabin, enclosed in the hull, Doc and his aides were comfortable. Ham was at the controls. Long Tom, in charge of radio communications, kept in regular contact with ground stations for the purpose of determining weather conditions over their intended line of flight.

There was no great need for this however, since the streamlined bag cut down wind resistance greatly over conventional designs, rendering the craft easily manageable in any wind less than a hurricane.

Appointed by Doc as navigator for the trip, Renny spent much time looking over charts.

Monk did nothing more creative than to recline in his bunk and tickle the ear of his pet pig with his toe.

The pig, Habeas Corpus by name, had missed the hostilities in New York. The reason was unusual. A certain famous psychologist, amazed at the intelligence which the porker seemed to possess, had requested, in all seriousness, permission to seclude the pig for study.

Not less than fifty times, Monk had told all who would listen of the learned man's findings.

"The guy said Habeas was a wizard of a hog," Monk repeated. "He said that Habeas

Ham snarled, "Will you shut up about that porky freak, you missing link!"

Monk only grinned.

Habeas Corpus was a remarkable sight to behold. He was a runty razorback, with the snout of a possum, legs of a stag, and great flapping ears that took the wind when he ran and looked like they were going to fly away with him.

Habeas Corpus, reacting contentedly to Monk's foot massaging, emitted soft grunts.

Whenever Monk went on a trip, he took Habeas. Habeas Corpus was an intelligent porker; Monk had trained him until he could perform things which amazed those whose acquaintance with porkers had been limited to a slab of bacon.

MONK shifted his administrations from Habeas Corpus's left ear to the right, then asked, "Doc, have you any idea where we're gonna run into that gang?"

"Yes," Doc answered, "I have."

"Huh?" Monk squirmed. "After we leave Point Barrow, I thought we were going to run blind."

"We will cruise over the ice pack, using our radio direction finder in an attempt to locate specific static disturbances," Doc said.

"Where in blazes did you get onto that hunch?"

"The information," Doc supplied, "was contained on some papers of Watches Bowen's which I examined while playing the part of Dimiter Daikoff. It was not a clear clue exactly. The paper was a bill for such a

direction finder that had been built for Watches Bowen."

"Maybe it's a phony?"

"Maybe." The bronze man made a slight gesture. "We have no better clue."

"Learn anything else?" Monk asked.

"Very little as applies to this case."

"You didn't find out what the goggles were for?"

"Regrettably, no."

Habeas Corpus made insistent gruntings. Monk resumed his lazy rubbing of the porker's ear.

"I'd give the curl out of Habeas's tail," the homely chemist declaimed, "to know what those goggles are good for."

Big-fisted Renny looked up from his charts.

"Listen, Doc," he said, "have you the slightest idea of what is behind all of this?"

The bronze man shook his head slowly.

"That is not yet clear," he said.

AT Point Barrow, on the north Alaskan Coast, the silver dirigible settled down for its last refueling. As in Resolution, Doc learned here that Watches Bowen's plane had preceded him by a short time.

And, since it was from Point Barrow that the radiogram had been transmitted to Doc concerning the original appearance into civilization of Ool, Doc made further inquiries. In particular he contacted an old Scotch fur trader, who had harbored Ool for a time in his cabin, and who knew the North Alaskan coast as few men did.

"I understand," Doc said, "that it is considered an impossibility for Ool to have come off the ice pack, as he claimed."

"Aye, 'tis that," the rosy-checked old Scot replied, pleased to have the famous bronze man coming to him for information.

"Why?"

"On account of nae mon could wi'hstand the exposure," explained the trader.

Doc nodded. "I know. No food, no fuel, chunked-up ice to make hard traveling, open leads where a man might slip into the water, a wind like rawhide — it would be beyond human endurance for a man to make the trip, you think."

"Aye. 'Tis self-evident, mon. The Arctic pack lies unexplored tae this day, a dead white space on the map."

Doc nodded again. "What is your idea about it? Where do you think Ool came from?"

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The old Scot shrugged gnarled shoulders. "In my life, I ha' seen strange things, but Ool be the strangest."

Doc held up the goggles. "Have you seen these?"

The old Scot's face lighted with recognition. "Ool had such things. The sun, he said, hurt his eyes. He lay in my cabin for a solid week, not Venturing out. That was when first he came off the ice pack

"But I thought you said it was impossible for him to have come off the pack."

"Aye," the old Scot replied imperturbably, "but where else could he ha' come from?"

Doc, looking intently at the man, said nothing.

The trader met Doc's gold-flecked eyes without flinching. He said: "I know not. Certain 'tis, there be more of the devil to Ool than of mon or the heavenly speerit. At first, this Ool were not like a human being."

"What do you mean?" Doc asked.

"There were such things like this: Fire — Ool tried to catch it in his hand, as though it were a bird. When he got so's he could talk a bit, he said he had never before seen fire! Such things as that."

"Why did he leave you?"

The old Scot's face grimaced. "I drove him out at the end o' my shotgun."

"Why?"

"I was afeered a' him. One day I picked up his goggles, hem' curious. Worthless things they be. You canna see through them. But he came at me wi' sech a unholy look in his flat eyes, and his hand—the right hand, I mind 'twas reachin' out for me somehow like a snake. It gave me the shudders. I tossed him the goggles and drove him out."

TAKING the air again, Doc headed his silver dirigible out over the sea at Point Barrow in a northerly direction. After a few hours above the desolate Arctic pack, which looked, from their great height, like a sink full of chipped ice, he turned on his radio direction finder.

A hodge-podge of noises, conventional static disturbances, came through the loud-speaker. There were buzzes and burrs and whines and crackles. But they could have been duplicated at almost any point on the earth.

Suddenly, the dirigible filled with a soft low note which throbbed and ran high up the musical scale and back again; the sound was not new static disturbance, but Doc Savage's trilling, that weird sound, so unconsciously a part of him, which he made in moments of surprise or puzzlement.

The bronze man's inordinately sensitive ears, conditioned by intensive training to catch sounds above and below the usual range considered possible for human reception, had identified a peculiar static sound coming from the finder.

To Doc's aides, the finder continued to pour out the usual din of static. But Doc, turning the loop device, gave steering directions to Johnny at the controls. Johnny swung the dirigible in a more westerly direction.

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

Within an hour the eerie static disturbance, which at first only Doc had heard, was audible to all. It came over the loud-speaker in a high, rhythmic thrumming, each note being throttled off in an entirely unearthly manner, only to swell again in a fashion even more unearthly.

As Johnny drove the dirigible toward the sound, the noise grew louder, filling the gondola with its strange pulsing clamor. It grew so insistent that Doc cut down the loudspeaker volume control to almost the absolute minimum.

There came a moment when Monk let out an excited bellow. Standing in the rear of the gondola, looking out behind, the pleasantly ugly chemist had been experimenting with the strange goggles, trying them on his eyes, squinting, ogling, attempting in every way possible to see through the thick lenses of obsidian-like blackness.

"What's eating you?" Ham clipped, startled at Monk's show of excitement.

"Down here -- everybody -- look!" Monk clamored without turning around.

"Look where?" Renny complained. "I don't see anything."

"Are you blind?" Monk blared. "Right below us!"

"You're crazy!" Long Tom put in. "There's nothing there but ice."

"Don't kid me at a time like this!" Monk howled. "See that pillar of fire? It must be a hundred feet high! What is it?"

"Fire! Fire on the ice?"

"Yeah! Comin' out of the ice. It's kind of weaving -- not like regular flame -- more like liquid fire!"

Ham laughed derisively. "A column of liquid fire a hundred feet high coming out of the ice! Nuts! There's nothing there at all -- only ice and some fog."

Monk turned around angrily to face Ham in the gondola. He could not see Ham. He became conscious then, that he was wearing the black goggles. He pawed off the goggles and pointed downward.

"Right down there -- look." He stared himself. His jaw fell.

"Blazes!" he ejaculated. "Gone now!"

DOC'S compelling voice broke in. "Let me have those goggles, Monk."

Monk handed them over. Doc adjusted them quickly to his eyes, looked down. His weird trilling note throbbled through the gondola. One after another, the bronze man had his aides look down through the goggles. Expressions of confused surprise and awe came from each.

"Well, I'll be a pork chop off Monk's pig!" Ham exclaimed.

Each man, when he looked through the goggles, saw precisely what Monk had seen -- a tall writhing column of what was apparently liquid fire issuing from the ice. When the goggles were removed from the eyes, the column of fire disappeared.

"What is it?" Monk gasped.

"I do not know," Doc said flatly. "It certainly is not a gas flame." He continued studying the phenomenon through the black goggles. "Nose the dirigible down, Johnny. Slack speed and float in as close as you can."

"It looks like this clears up the mystery of the black goggles," Renny said excitedly. "Ool needed them to locate this place."

"I think there is more to it than that, Renny," Doc answered.

At closer range, the thing which seemed to be fire took on more detail. There seemed to be a living, liquid, white-hot core swelling out smoothly in a golden blush, tinged with flashes of opalescence—glazed yellows, purples, reds, greens, and blues. The predominating tone, however, was golden; not so much the gold of solid flame, but as of a thick fog in which every separate particle of moisture was a floating globule of gold.

At about the hundred-foot level, the writhing pillar, in a thinning golden haze, blurred into nothingness.

Johnny had nosed down to a hundred feet and drifted in as close as he dared. From the low height it was apparent that the pillar — whatever it was — issued from a rock crevice. A long, black rent in the dismal welter of pack ice was clearly identifiable as rock.

"Work the dirigible in closer," Doc directed. He adjusted the black goggles to Johnny's eyes to make the mysterious flame visible to him.

"Yeah, but Doc, we'll burn!" Johnny objected in quick dismay.

But he did as Doc suggested. Closer and closer the silver dirigible floated until, in Johnny's eyes, it was very close to the weirdly writhing flame.

With motors idling, and the dirigible's silver sides bathed in the living golden glow, Doc pointed to the sensitized thermometer visible on the outside of the gondola wall.

"Heat!" Monk squalled. "Then it is a fire!"

"It is only up to room temperature," Doc corrected. "There is no flame, as we know it."

"Enough to give a guy the jitters!" Monk grunted. "A flame a hundred feet high, making no noise, giving off no more heat than a hot-air register, and not even visible unless you're looking at it through black goggles."

Johnny lost his trepidation and sent the dirigible directly into the mysterious light which was visible only through the goggles. Nothing happened. They flew down lower, seeking to examine the cleft in the ice from which the thing came. This, it developed, was larger than had at first appeared. It was many feet wide more than a half a mile long.

So interested were the occupants of the dirigible in examining the source of the fiery plume that the new development all but took them by surprise.

"Here!" Doc Savage said sharply, and lunged for the controls. "Let me have them!"

"What's wrong?" Johnny demanded.

Doc pointed. "Look!"

The big-worded geologist stared.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" he exploded.

A PLANE was hurtling toward them. It was a gray machine, hard to distinguish against the leaden sky. It came on swiftly. Details became distinguishable.

"Watches Bowen," Doc decided. "It answers the description of the craft in which he came from New York."

"Holy cow!" Renny exploded. "It's gonna be tough if they're carrying much artillery."

"they will be careful not to cripple the dirigible," Doc said positively. "Remember, they have wanted this ship from the first.

"And the only way they can get it," gaunt Long Tom said, "is to cripple us."

Renny bounced his big fists together. "That's a job they won't find easy."

Doc settled the dirigible downward.

"Hey!" Johnny gulped. "You're going down into the crack that flame is comin' out of!"

But to all except Johnny, the landing process appeared to be merely an expert maneuvering job in clear air. To the electrical wizard, wearing the black goggles, the silver sliver carrying its freight of human lives was nesting down in a bath of fire.

As softly as a leaf falling through a golden autumn haze, the dirigible came to rest on the crevice floor.

Chapter 12. THE GOLDEN GODDESS

THE CREVICE made a snug shelter for the dirigible. They tied down the bag. Doc, with Long Tom's assistance, removed a few delicate parts from the silver craft's ignition system, parts necessary for the operation of the dirigible; since there were no other similar motors in the world, the removal of these key parts rendered the dirigible positively theftproof.

Overhead, Watches Bowen's plane wheeled slowly, like a huge buzzard hung between the pale glaze of the sky and the leaden gray of the far-stretching ice pack.

"They must be waiting for us to move away from the dirigible," Monk decided.

Johnny had been busy studying the rock formation with his monocle magnifier. The wiry geologist was an expert field man as well as a theoretician. His geological experience now bore fruit.

"The configuration of this rock cleft indicates a substantial cavern opening may be expected at about that point." His lean hand indicated.

Doc agreed. "We seem to be on an uncharted island or rocky reef thrust up through the ice pack. The steady current of warm air along this crevice is of sufficient volume to indicate the presence of an underground

labyrinth."

Doc's gold-flecked eyes squinted up at Watches Bowen's circling craft. Now and again the plane, wheeling above, was momentarily obscured.

Doc eyed his men. "You have your emergency packs?"

They nodded.

Monk said, "I'll put Habeas Corpus under my coat."

"The next time their plane is out of sight," Doc warned, "we will make a break. We might as well look this place over while we are here."

They watched tensely. The plane drifted out of sight.

Doc said, "All right!"

They made their dash. The plane sliced into view before Doc and his aides quite reached their objective. They were sighted by the flying crooks. Machine guns from above with a macabre cackle; gun sound pummeled against the sides of the rocky crevasse.

Rock chips mingled with spattering lead as Doc and his men lunged for the safety of a great overhang. They made it safely, but at the last instant a flying rock chip struck sharply against Monk's coat. Habeas Corpus was on that side. The ungainly shoat squealed in pain, flounced and fell out, landing heavily. He roiled about, squealing under the leaden hail.

MONK, from his position of safety within the cavern entrance, called frantically, and when the animal, dazed, did not respond, Monk leaped out like an anthropoid ape springing from a tree.

Bullets slashed around him. One went through his coat. He paid no heed. With the ease of an anthropoid picking up a coconut, the homely chemist swept up the pig and lunged back for the cavern mouth. He made it.

Ham groaned in pretended disappointment. "For a minute," he said, "I thought we were going to have pork chops for supper."

Monk glared, breathing heavily. "Some day, you two-bit shyster, you'll make one crack too many against this hog!" Above them, the noisy airplane motors cut out. The sudden stillness seemed to press down like something tangible, alive. The Arctic hush, which lay interminable over the desert of ice, was broken only by the soft complaining whine of wind in struts and wires as the huge plane dipped down and leveled off.

"They're going to crash!" Ham exclaimed.

"Yeah!" Monk growled. "But they're comin' down in the cleft."

There was a cracking as the undercarriage of Watches Bowen's plane was wrenched from the fuselage by contact with up-rearing ice cakes frozen into position as solidly as though they were cement.

The plane nosed half over, poised like an off-balanced bird, then flopped back, tilting on one crumpled wing.

The door in the side of the cabin burst open. The mobsters spilled out, half leaping, half falling. All carried submachine guns.

"It's dog eat dog now," Renny rumbled, and his long puritanical face grew more mournful than ever in anticipation of the fight.

"Yeah," Monk agreed. "Notice where they landed? We gotta smear 'em to get back to our ship."

"They would not have risked landing if we had not come down first," Doc said. "They probably have been aware that we were trailing them across Canada."

Long Tom nodded. "Their radio receiving set could have picked up our communications with ground stations."

Doc whipped out his flashlight and turned it on the darker recess below the ledge.

"Hey!" Renny boomed. "That looks like that cavern Johnny was predicting!"

THAT Watches Bowen had not acted without forethought, soon became evident. One of the men was carrying a wooden case. He opened this and produced a weapon resembling a shotgun. He charged the barrel with a slender rod to which was attached a cylinder resembling that on a skyrocket. He aimed at the ledge and fired.

The results were cataclysmic, for the man had shot a rifle grenade. There was a tremendous concussion. Rock fell. Frozen ice and some snow clouded up.

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "We'd better get back inside. They've got us in a spot!"

"We'll see how far back this goes," Doc agreed. "But wait. We'll insure that they don't entomb us in here."

In a loud voice, the bronze man now yelled at Watches Bowen and his followers, conveying the information that important parts had been removed from the dirigible.

"They won't blast the roof down on us now for fear of damaging the parts," he said.

They moved back into the cavern. It was small at first, and gave indications of playing out.

"I sure hate to leave that dirigible," Ham said anxiously.

"It is perfectly safe," Doc assured. "Since they expect to be the ones to ride back in it, they will be careful not to cripple it."

"Doc," Monk said, "let's stay here and fight it out."

"Nothing would be gained by making a stand," Doc pointed out. "They would use those grenades, if they could do so without burying us."

"O. K., Doc," Monk said, resignedly, "but I'm craving heavy action."

"You may get it," Ham reminded, "if we run into a pack of the black things back in here."

Ham spoke half jokingly, with no inkling that the time was close when he was to take the black things in anything but a joking way.

THE relatively narrow granite cleft which they had entered led into a limestone labyrinth. They produced flashlights. The caverns progressed down at a sharp angle, and widened out into rooms of awe-inspiring proportions.

It was suddenly not at all cold.

Stalactites and stalagmites looked like massive ivory columns. There were whole domes of crystalline formation which glittered like massed diamonds under the prying glare of the flashlight beams. Some of the rooms were cathedral arched, and so high that the white pencil paths of light from the hand flashes could not delineate them.

Monk craned his hull neck in rapt admiration.

"King Solomon's temple must of been like this," he said, and turned to call to Habeus Corpus, who was lagging behind. "Yeah," he continued soulfully, "this sure would be a swell setup for a harem."

"You would think of that," Ham said dryly, aware of Monk's weakness for women, singly or in numbers.

Echoes bounded back and forth between the cavern walls in a bewildering and oftentimes frightening manner, foot scufflings and voices going out into the air and being wafted back in distorted sound splashes.

Doc, in a low voice, called a halt.

"Nobody talk," he ordered.

No one did talk and no one moved; yet, disturbingly, the echoes of foot scufflings and garbled conversation did not cease. In fact, as they waited there, listening, the echoes grew alarmingly. They welled to a veritable clamor.

"I thought so," Doc said guardedly. "The echoes are not all our own."

"From the sound of them," Long Tom whispered, "Watches Bowen and his gang must have stumbled onto a shortcut. They sound close."

"They are close," Doc affirmed.

The bronze man conferred for a moment under his breath with Johnny on a question of geology. Although Doc, as a result of his exhaustive studies, his self-imposed mental, physical, and emotional discipline, had accumulated a store of knowledge greater in every case than that of his five aides, he nevertheless consulted frequently with them on questions involving their specialty.

He did this because he was a thorough man who preferred to check his reasonings. On the present geological question, Doc and Johnny came to quick agreement.

"Come on," Doc called out, and whipped his light ahead as he led off into a cavern which narrowed rapidly as they hurried along.

Renny, casting backward glances in the darkness, caught a glimpse of a flashlight carried by one of the pursuing gangsters.

"They are close," he rapped. "Look behind!"

THE others looked. They were not quick enough to see the white beam of the flashlight, but were quick enough to see the saffron flare which coughed from the muzzle of an automatic.

Pursued by roaring echoes, the bullet slammed down the narrow entry past the heads of Doc and his aides, making musical sounds against hanging stalactites.

"Down on the floor!" Doc ordered. "Douse the lights!"

More saffron flashes bloomed at gun tips and more bullets slammed with echoing thunder down the narrow stone corridor.

"Back up," Doc called to his men, "around the bend here! Find cover before you open with your superfirers!"

As they felt around in the dark and flopped behind protecting rocks, the saffron blobs which marked the exploding pistols of their enemies became obscured by slow angry streaks of red, as the gangsters opened up with their machine guns. Lead and flying rock chips sprayed the rock tunnel. Echoes resembled close thunder.

Loud above everything else sounded the bullfiddle bellow of Doc's supermachine pistols, as his aides returned the fire. Pale greenish-gold flares fanned out from the heavy snouts of the strange mercy weapons. The efficient superfirers, manned expertly by Doc's men, were having an effect.

Back at the crooks' end of the rock corridor. Watches Bowen cursed savagely and gave his men word to hold up their fire until they could determine the extent of their injuries. His words were plainly audible.

Doc's men quit firing, also. Slamming echoes settled down like thunder rolling away.

The attackers counted up their losses.

"Three men knocked out by their damned mercy bullets!" Watches Bowen grated. "Find better cover, you birds — no, wait!" His voice stabbed with soft intensity.

Speech echoes of Doc and his men were wafting clearly to the attackers from down the tunnel. They were echoes of alarm.

Long Tom was talking.

"I've been back a few rods with Doc," he barked. "We examined the rock walls — and this is a dead-end tunnel!"

"You mean it don't lead nowhere?" Monk demanded loudly.

"Right!" Long Tom agreed. "The only way we can get out is the way we came in."

"And that gang has that opening blocked with machine guns!" Ham clipped.

"Holy cow!" Renny's huge voice roared. "Ain't there no way out back here at all?"

Even Doc's cautioning voice was picked up by the malicious echoes and carried back clearly to Watches' avidly listening mob.

"Do not speak so loud!" Doc warned. "They will hear us. We will have to keep them from knowing the jam we are in."

Back at the open end of the tunnel Watches Bowen became galvanized in action.

"THIS is our chance," Watches purred. "Ham-hock, you're carrying that grenade gun. We'll blow this opening shut."

The fat Negro's appreciative voice echoed back.

"Lock dem in dar foah a hundred yeahs, huh?"

"Lock 'em in, hell!" Watches whispered. "We'll close it up, then give 'em a day or two to think it over. They'll be ready to say 'uncle,' when we blast it open again."

Watches selected a crack, rupture of which would cave in the entry. Ham-hock took careful aim.

Careful though Watches and his men had been to speak in undertones, the cavern echoes had carried their voices.

Monk's reckless voice sounded. "Let's charge 'em, Doc. I ain't cravin' to be locked in here."

"Do not be a fool, Monk," echoed Doc's chastising voice. "We could never get through in the face of half a dozen machine guns."

"We could clip some of 'em with our superfirers!" Monk pleaded desperately.

"What good would that do," Doc reasoned logically. "In the end, they'd wipe us all out."

"What are we gonna do then?" Renny bawled.

"Do nothing. We will stay here and take our chances with the explosion. It is the only thing we can do."

Watches Bowen's malignant voice crashed loud in the tunnel. He was not speaking to his men this time. He was speaking to Doc.

"This is the payoff!" he yelled. "Savage, you can come out, or stay there! Take your choice!"

Doc made no reply.

A thundering detonation came as Ham-hock used the grenade gun. There was a blaze of flame. Tunnel ceiling came down. The walls heaved.

All the way to the far back end of the tunnel the rock crashed down, choking the passage so completely that an object so small as a rat could not have escaped crushing destruction. The cataclysm was far greater than Watches Bowen had expected.

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

Watches Bowen and his men were thrown off their feet by the terrific forces of the explosion. Sound throbs assailed their ears with a force almost strong enough to crack their eardrums. White limestone dust billowed.

The sound salvos wafted away finally. Dust settled. The crooks' flashlights streamed over the piled rock wreckage.

"Choked from floor to roof," Watches shrieked. "Those dirigible parts — they're buried!"

Ool spoke up quietly, "We are dumb fools, if, given sufficient time, we cannot fashion new parts. But it would be much better if we had the black goggles."

"We'll get by," Watches muttered. "Let's get away from this dust. We might as well go in it, Ool?"

"Yes," Ool said. "We will go in now."

GUIDED by Ool, Watches and his men, carrying the three men made temporarily unconscious by the mercy slugs, turned into another of the caverns and stumbled hastily along the rock-strewn floor. Their flashlights cut fantastic white swaths in the Stygian gloom.

Ool was following certain trail marks, vague scratches, a pile of rocks here and there. His manner, his sureness, indicated he himself had placed the guiding marks.

The labyrinthian chambers were empty, dead, devoid of all life or living matter. Everywhere, under the flashlight glare, the walls, floor and roof showed coldly with a kind of leaden glaze.

"Dis heah place give a man creeps," Ham-hock Piney asserted, rolling his eyes uneasily. "Dat's accordin' to any man's figurin'!"

"These particular caverns," Ool said enigmatically, "are known as the Land of the Lost. No man penetrates them far and comes out alive."

"But yo'—all done dat very t'ing," Ham-hock insinuated plaintively.

"I did," Ool agreed. "I was the first to do so." The crook party continued onward for hours.

SUDDENLY, Ool paused in mid stride. He stood looking down. Watches Bowen, coming close behind, bumped into him before he could stop.

"What's the matter?" the crook leader asked.

Ool's long arm pointed to the floor.

Watches looked, then cursed nervously. The others crowded about, staring.

Clearly defined in white rock dust on the floor were footprints. Small footprints, delicately formed. The maker of the prints had apparently been wearing skin-tight moccasins. The indentations showed a firmly modeled heel, high arch, and five toes as uncramped and rounded as a child's. But the mature spacing of the footprints as they led off into one of the side chambers, revealed clearly they were not the prints of a child.

"What could Sona be doing here?" The white-faced man's flat voice actually carried a modicum of emotion.

"Sona?" Watches questioned.

Ool indicated barely discernible webbed markings in the footprints.

"It is Sona," he stated positively. "She, and she only, is privileged to wear footgear with the imperial design in the weaving."

"Who in the hell is Sona?" Watches wanted to know.

Ool, flashing his light in the direction of the disappearing footprints, did not answer. Instead, he said, "She passed a few minutes ago."

His arm waved out to call attention ahead, to a fine haze of rock dust which hung in the air with a crystalline glitter.

"Yes, she was here very recently. Come. We will get her."

He turned in the direction taken by the footprints. He loped along in an ungainly manner. The others followed closely.

It was a mere matter of minutes before they sighted their quarry—a girl.

She ran at their approach. She had long flowing hair, gold in hue, and she was clothed in some sort of gossamery stuff which clung close, moulding lithesome curves as she ran. She wore goggles with enormously thick lenses.

At Watches' direction, Honey Hamilton chopped a few machine gun bullet over the girl's head. The caverns had narrowed down at this place; the gun thunder was terrific.

The girl did not stop, and it was evident that bullets and gun thunder were something strange in her experience.

"Outrun her!" Watches rapped.

Eventually, they did that. They seized her, held her.

Ool approached with his deadly right hand fluttering in butterfly-like motion. The girl recoiled. It was evident that the butterfly gesture was not new to her.

Ool said something to the girl in an unintelligible gibberish. The goggles which she wore were similar to the ones which Ool had possessed. Their grotesqueness contrasted oddly with the softly exquisite curve of her cheeks, with her natural blond complexion.

Ool snatched the goggles from her eyes with such ferocity that he left a red scratch on her smooth cheek.

Then Ool turned to Watches. "To have run across her is such luck as I could never have hoped for," he said.

"It's as clear as Manhattan mud to me," Watches growled. "Who the hell is she?"

"She is Sona," Ool said. "In your so-called civilization, she would be called Princess Sona."

The gang chief's mind began to work along his conventionally lawless pattern.

"Say!" he exploded. "Somebody oughta — "

"Exactly!" Ool interrupted. "We will hold her hostage to guarantee our own safety, and to bargain for that which we want."

"Sure," Watches emphasized, tugging at the gold chain which sprawled across his vest. "That which may make you boss of the U. S. A., in a manner of speakin'."

Ool turned to Sona with a harsh order.

Then suddenly a vast roaring filled the tunnel with so terrific a noise as to make past sounds seem, in comparison, a feeble murmur.

Watches cursed.

"An attack from some of your blasted countrymen, Ool!" he rasped.

But Ham-hock Piney had another idea.

"Dat's Doc Savage's spooks a-shootin'!" he wailed.

Chapter 13. FLASHLIGHT TERROR

HAM-HOCK PINEY was correct, but only partially so. The bludgeoning sound echoes could be identified as they crashed closer.

They were the hooting sounds of Doc Savage's superma chine pistols.

"Dat Doc Savage dead!" screamed Ham-hock. "Dey got to be his ghosts firing dem hoot guns!"

As the crooks doused their lights and scattered, leveling automatics and machine guns in confused haste, one of them dropped his gun and crumpled to the ground, a victim of one of the machine pistol mercy slugs.

Ham-hock stooped and dragged the unconscious man around a right angle turn into a blind-end tunnel. The other crooks made a desperate stand. Their thundering guns stabbed wild flame spurts.

The attack, coming unexpectedly and from such an unexplainable source, had disorganized them and they did not even realize for several moments that their guns were the only ones roaring; that, after the first bullfiddle fusillade, the superfirers of Doc Savage and his men had stopped firing.

Then, swooping from out of the darkness, a giant of bronze by this time a familiar phenomenon to Watches Bowen, invaded the cavern. Doc's aides were close behind. Frenzied yells mixed with gunfire. Fist blows thudded. The last flashlight went out. Darkness was intense.

"Don't shoot!" Watches screamed to his men. "You'll kill each other!"

The gang chief's hand, wielding his leaded watch by the end of its stout chain, chopped down, swinging the deadly weapon against a human bulk which thrust up close against him in the dark.

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

"Hey, don't do dat to me," bleated Ham-hock's aggrieved voice.

Ool, throughout the fighting had remained silent, holding Onto Sona with one hand, and with the other trying to adjust her goggles to his eyes. Suddenly a flashlight blazed not six inches from his face. Before his right arm could moccasin out, the light disappeared and a metallic fist crashed into his face, knocking him down.

He lurched to his feet again and pawed frenziedly for the girl, Sona. She was gone.

Doc Savage had developed a faculty of judging distance almost to the inch. As the last of the flashlights had blacked out, Doc had fixed Ool's position in his mind. Flattened close against the side wall of the tunnel, the bronze man had worked forward.

Then he battered his way through Watches' men. When he flashed his light, he was close upon Ool. His fist blow had followed. At the same instant his other arm streaked out to catch the girl around the waist.

HOLDING her firmly, Doc leaped to one side in the dark and deposited the girl in a position of safety behind a pile of rock fragments which in some past age had fallen from the roof.

By giving a sibilant signal in the Mayan tongue, Doc indicated to his men that the girl was safe. His aides responded by unleashing new blasts from their superfirers.

This new attack demoralized Watches Bowen's crew completely. They broke and ran, slamming against each other in the dark. They got around the right-angle turn into the blind-end tunnel. Here, Watches and Ool, screaming orders, managed to rally them.

Doc directed a cessation of fire. Quiet settled down except for the wrangling of Watches Bowen's mobsters as the gang chief verbally beat them into line. A horrified silence followed.

Then a new voice sounded. It was Monk's hoarse bellow.

"So long, Bowen!" he taunted. "I'll tell 'em you died brave! We got you right where we want you now!"

Desperate as was their situation, Ham-hock Piney could not throttle a natural curiosity.

"How yo'-all done come to life?" he shouted. "We done dynamite a million tons of rock on yo'-all!"

"You never dynamited any rock on us!" Monk bellowed down the entry.

"We did so!" the Negro yelled back.

Monk's laughter rolled down the black passageway.

"That wasn't a dead-end passage you blew down," he advised. "We went out through the back of that tunnel. All our talk took place a block away. You can't tell about voices in this place."

"All right, Monk," Doc called tolerantly. "Let's get stationed. We have these plotters bottled up. Our next job is to smoke them out."

Doc flashed on his light and wandered the white beam quickly about, seeking good vantage points for his men to crouch behind in a super-machine pistol bombardment of the dead-end tunnel.

There was no danger of the light attracting enemy bullets, since Watches Bowen's men were around an angle. Doc's aides added to the single searching beam by switching their own lights on. Monk curiously turned his beam on Doc. What Monk saw in the glare caused him to drop Habeas Corpus from under his arms and stare. He sighed.

"I ask you," he said at large, "ain't it perfect?"

He was referring to the picture which the bronze giant made, standing beside the golden-haired girl Sona — she whom Ool had called princess. The girl clung to Doc with the instinctive trust of a child.

"Do you," Doc asked, "want to get us shot at?"

The homely chemist grinned and removed the light from them. Doc stepped to one side to examine the tunnel opening.

"Who is she?" Monk called after him.

"She has not offered that information," Doc replied. "She responds to none of the languages I have spoken with her. Nor can I understand a word of hers."

Monk suggested, "As soon as you find how to talk to her, put in a good word for me, will you?"

From somewhere in the darkness, Ham snorted loudly.

Monk said angrily, "What'd you mean by that hoot?"

THE two growled at each other, warming up for a battle which never extended beyond the verbal stage, no matter what the provocation.

Monk came over and thrust his face close to Ham's. Then, suddenly, Monk's flashlight was knocked from his hand. The knocking was done with deftness. It went out from the impact.

"You lowlife!" Monk gritted at Ham. "Pick up my flashlight."

"Pick it up yourself," Ham retorted. "You dropped it."

"You're a liar!" Monk bellowed. "You knocked it out of my hand!"

"Who's a liar, you hairy —" Ham broke off as his own flashlight was knocked to the ground and extinguished.

"You bush-ape," he began again, with new vehemence, "pick up my flashlight!"

"Pick it up yourself!" Monk blustered. "You dropped it."

"Dropped it nothing! You knocked it out of my hand!"

"Hey, one of us is nuts!" Monk said.

Both were silent. Ham's grip tightened spasmodically on his sword cane. Monk clawed absently at his bristling red hair.

Then the cavern resounded with Renny's great bellow.

"Something got my flashlight!" he howled.

The cavern was now absolutely dark.

Doc had felt the golden-haired girl, Sona, leave his side. She went suddenly, as if torn away by a terrific force. Doc reached out for her in the blackness. His metallic hands closed only on air. He leaped to one side, then the other, groping furiously. He found no trace of the girl.

He paused to pull out an emergency flashlight. But it was smashed from his hand by a terrific blow. Its mechanism was shattered.

Doc called a sharp warning to his men.

"Hold onto your machine pistols," he rapped. "Do not shoot until we get light. You might hit each other."

"It's the things!" Ham yelled shrilly. "What in the devil are they?"

"We'd better get together," Doc advised. "Come over here, all of you!"

The bronze man's aides never reached him. There, in the cavern of unknown horror, something soft and slimy enveloped them, an odious material at which they tore helplessly, accomplishing nothing by their most desperate efforts. They could not use the machine pistols.

The material, whatever it was, pressed closer and closer to their faces with a softly insidious force which burned their eyes, seared their throats, and imparted weakness to their limbs.

One by one, they fell to the floor of the cavern, tumbling down and squirming grotesquely, to grow weaker and weaker and eventually became slack.

Doc Savage himself did not escape the fantastic terror, although the bronze man did last longer than the others. He held his breath for minutes in an attempt to escape the noxious substance which, he believed, exerted its effect by suffocation, and, during those minutes he rammed about, straining his cabled muscles to their utmost capacity, seeking to free himself from the slimy encompass. But the material molded about him, hemming in his movements and, in the end, utterly restraining them.

He had to breathe finally. And when he did, he crumpled to the floor, as completely overcome as the others.

Chapter 14. BLACK TIDINGS

DOC SAVAGE and his five aides, reviving, found themselves lying on a smooth, hard floor in utter darkness. Doc, first to recover, called the roll of his men, finding them all to be with him, with no one seriously damaged.

"Ugh!" gasped the fastidious Ham. "When I think of that slimy stuff -- "

"Save it," Monk growled. "We know all about it. Boy, I'd trade Habeas's left ear for some good daylight."

"Where do you figure we are, Doc?" Ham questioned.

"Judging from the pressure against my drums, and from the change in the temperature, we are a great deal farther down in the earth than when we were captured."

"We're not even tied," Long Tom remarked, hope in his voice.

"That is not necessarily a good sign," Doc reminded.

"Why not?"

"It probably means that whoever or whatever is responsible for bringing us here considers escape so impossible that binding us would be a needless precaution."

"They frisked our clothes," Renny rumbled. "My pockets are as bare as the Arctic ice pack."

"And our machine pistols are gone," Renny clipped.

"Did they get the goggles, too, Doc?" Ham asked.

"Yes," Doc said thoughtfully.

"I wonder what happened to Watches Bowen?" Renny rumbled.

"Hey!" Monk howled suddenly. "Where you suppose my pig is?" He pursed his lips and whistled, then called: "Habeas! Habeas!"

There was a squeal and a pattering rush in the darkness, and the pet pig, answering Monk's call, rammed against his legs. Monk was sitting up on the floor. The pig climbed over him like an excited terrier. Then the pig romped in the darkness, his sensitive snout feeling out the others of the party.

"Stay away from me, hog!" Ham warned in a positive manner. The only way I'd welcome you is on a platter with an apple in your mouth. And brown gravy over you, and maybe mashed potatoes."

Doc had been feeling over the floor. Now he stood up, groped out, contacted a wall and started feeling along it.

"We are in an artificially constructed room," he decided aloud. "The floor and walls are tiled. And not a bad job. The surface is very level."

Ham, feeling a light jar against his back, as if Habeas Corpus had touched him, struck out behind him. He hit nothing, but there was a squealing sound.

"Ham! You hurting my pig?" Monk yelled ominously.

"No, but I will if I get hold of him!" Ham promised enthusiastically.

Ham, sitting in the dark, next felt a cold, wet contact against the back of his neck, the kind of touch that the pig's inquisitive snout might have made.

Ham struck out again, felt nothing, but as before the quick action of his hand evoked from out of the darkness a strange, small squeal.

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"Monk!" the fastidious lawyer rapped angrily. "Get your hog away from me!"

"Nuts!" Monk called inelegantly. "Habeas is over here."

SOMETHING tweaked Monk's ear. He slapped at what he thought to be Ham's offending fingers; his slapping hand sliced empty air. then, suddenly, Habeas was lifted away.

Monk reached for his pet; his hand encountered nothing, but he could hear the pig's frantic squealing. Monk pushed his simian bulk up from the floor and lunged forward in the darkness, groping. The pig's squeals sounded apparently at his finger tips, as though some one held the animal shoulder-high.

"Ham!" Monk grated. "Dang your soul! Put that pig down!" Stumbling about, Monk fell over Ham who barked wrathfully at him.

"Gimme my pig!" Monk thundered in Ham's ear.

Ham jerked away. "I haven't got your pig! I don't want your pig! I hate your pig! Can you get that through your' dumb skull?"

"Yeah," Monk said in a voice suddenly gone very small, "I think I get it. Ham --- you other guys --- " He did not finish.

"Elucidate specifically --- " Johnny began, then dropped his big words. "Which one of you just now grabbed my monocle? I call that carrying a joke too far."

"Johnny," Monk questioned, in a voice ominously calm, "how could anybody see to take it?"

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny exploded. "It's the things!"

Some distance away in the jet blackness, Habeas Corpus commenced squealing again.

"They took my pig!" Monk bellowed, his voice welling up.

"Something tried to yank a ring off my finger!" Ham shouted. There was the sound of his furious groping. "I can't get hold of anything!"

Suddenly bedlam broke out among Doc's men. From all sides their clothing was plucked as though by tiny pinchers, and tiny, hammerlike blows rained on their faces and bodies. New sounds broke through the blackness, strange, unintelligible sounds --- squeaks, hushed whistlings, harsh clackings.

Doc's men fought, shouting, groping and clawing. Each time they collided or got their hands on a moving object, it turned out to be one of their own number.

"If I could only hit something," big-fisted Renny boomed.

Monk, hearing renewed squealing, clearly recognizable as coming from Habeas Corpus, appointed himself a one-man rescue party and plunged forward. With his second step he rammed solidly against the wall. A shock sent him back to the floor, stunned.

"Doc!" he called.

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"He was over here, the last I knew," Long Tom jerked out. "Ouch!"

The thin electrical genius had been probed sharply by an invisible bedeviler.

"TAKE it easy!" the bronze man's voice was a welcome sound.

"They're like air!" Renny roared. "You can't hit 'em. You can poke your fist clear through 'em, and you can't even feel 'em!"

"Utterly denuded of tangibility!" Johnny concurred.

"I doubt it," Doc answered. "More likely they are creatures with strong muscle reflexes. They can quickly dodge out of our way."

"But how can they see?" Ham demanded. "This darkness is absolute."

"It is a puzzle," Doc said.

From out of the terror-taut darkness the protesting squeal of Monk's pig sounded again.

"They're devilin' Habeas!" Monk raved.

"Maybe," Ham said, sarcastically, "they're human, after all. I've had the same itch for a long time."

Doc's voice issuing crisp orders. "Over here with me, everybody! There is a corner here. It marks one end of a long, narrow room."

Doc's aides came jostling toward him in the darkness.

"String out," the bronze man directed. "You will be close enough together that you can touch hands on either side."

They lined up at the end of the room with their backs against the wall.

"All right -- now forward, slowly," Doc commanded. "I will keep talking. Keep pace with my voice and with each other. Bend low. Keep sweeping your fists to each side. Do not let anything get behind you!"

Under Doc's guidance they started grimly forward, a human broom that started at one end of the dark room and swept forward. Just as it is the function of a broom to keep all debris in front of it, so this human broom strove to push ahead of it the mysterious inhabitants of the darkness.

Forward they moved, slowly, fists swinging fast. Nothing opposed their progress; it was as if the weird bedevilers were falling silently back before them, impressed by the cooperative attack.

But suddenly there was a thup of a fist against some substance.

"They're real!" Renny boomed. "I hit one!"

"Good!" Doc said. "Pick up whatever you hit and keep moving ahead."

"There's nothing to pick up," Renny complained. "But I sure slugged something."

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Thup! Thup! Johnny and Long Tom connected simultaneously with solid objects.

"Grab hold of anything you can!" Doc directed.

Then his own metallic fist hit a soft, yielding object. He grasped with lightning speed, but found nothing to pick up.

"They are fast," he said grimly. "Try to catch one. Concentrate on forcing them back."

Ham's sweeping fist was the next to find a target.

"Hey!" he called excitedly. "I got hold of this one!"

"Stand in your places!" Doc ordered. "Do not let anything pass us! Can you handle it alone, Ham?"

"I — think so! Ouch, it bites!"

There were brief and furious struggle sounds. Then came taut silence.

Ham's disgusted voice said, "It's that damn pig!"

Then they were assailed with a furious battering.

From out of the dark, high and low the blows drove. All in the advancing line were subjected to the same violent treatment.

"Hold your positions!" Doc's voice called sternly. "Keep driving. We are nearly at the end of the room."

THEY fought stubbornly on, pummeling, kicking, sometimes butting with their heads. Not once did their fingers clutch on an assailant.

But all at once the darkness emptied before them. They bumped heavily against a wall.

There was a loud grating sound.

"A door!" Doc rapped. "Here! They got out and are trying to close it!"

"Wonder where they got wood down here for a door?" Renny muttered, doors being one of the heavy-fisted engineer's interests in life, since it was his boast that one did not exist that he could not break down with his fists.

"It is not wood." Doc informed. "It is some unfamiliar substance, apparently of artificial composition."

They managed to force the door open and get through. Once outside the room, they were not, for a time, molested. They felt their way forward carefully in the darkness, and their feet found well-formed steps, while exploring hands located walls which were intricately ornamented in places, and perforated by man-size openings shaped in accurate geometric designs.

They found other geometric objects which rested solidly on the floor—evidently articles of furniture, and all in the shape of circles, oblongs, squares, and triangles.

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The articles were strongly made, but out of extremely light materials. Monk, lumbering around, knocked over one object that seemed as big as a piano. It did not break, and he righted it with one hand.

"What a life!" he groaned.

Doc Savage said, "One peculiar feature is that everything seems to be constructed of the same unfamiliar substance as that door. If these people — or things — have learned the art of synthesizing building materials, we are pitted against no mean intellects."

"What have they got down here to make anything out of?" Ham wondered.

Doc pushed at a triangular-shaped panel which he encountered. It was a ponderous door, but it opened readily. A dank, near-suffocating smell came through, engulfing them.

Doc slammed the door. He hesitated. Then he opened the door again, stepped through and called his aides.

"Use your hands," he told them. "I think you will find answers to several puzzles."

They explored, and their hands came in contact with a satiny object—smooth, curved, cool to the touch, and soft.

"Now do you recognize the odor?" Doc questioned.

"Mushrooms!" Monk exploded.

"Cultivated fungi of a gigantic and unknown variety," Johnny seconded. "I'll be superamalgamated!"

"I guess this must be what the — the things eat," Long Tom commented.

Doc said, "The fungi may be the basis for the lightweight composition material out of which everything here seems to be constructed."

As they turned to go back to the door, something slapped their faces wetly, and they recoiled; then their heads were enveloped in a soft, slimy grip.

"Throw it off before it gets a firm hold!" Doc shouted. "And hold your breaths! I think this is the same thing which got the best of us the other time."

Doc rammed forward to the door. The door was closed. All the bronze man's prodigious strength could not bulge it. Renny came lunging alongside in the dark, but the combined battering of their four fists evoked only sodden echoes.

The insidious stuff which wrapped their heads pressed softly tighter. They tore at it frenziedly. Then, from all sides, Doc and his aides were assailed by battering blows.

Clawing at the unseen enemy, they could find nothing to seize except the slimy horror. Their enemies were as elusive as they had been in the long prison room.

Reacting to a sharp blow against his face, Doc finally grabbed something. His great hand clutched a moving object. His cabled fingers closed down with the precision of a steel trap.

His fingers got it. A small, hard article of peculiar shape. Doc's inordinately developed sense of touch made him instantly aware of what he had snatched from the dark.

A pair of goggles with amazingly thick lenses.

Backing up, pawing at the mysterious substance which sought to envelop his head, Doc fitted the goggles to his eyes.

Instantly, to his gaze, the air became filled with a weird, golden yellow haze. The blackness vanished! In its place there was the fantastic golden aura, shot through and through with a faint opalescence.

After the first moment or two, Doc began to identify objects in the uncanny light. He saw the ghost-stuff which his aides were fighting. He recognized it for what it was -- a gigantic species of the fungus growth which dangles like soft moss from decaying overhead timbers in coal mines. This fungus, Doc knew, thrives on a total absence of light.

This particular growth, revealed to Doc through the black goggles, had obviously been cultivated in the exotic cavern, and had attained gigantic proportions, reaching tensile strength.

Doc's aides were dimly revealed to him through the golden haze. They were black forms, seen through the goggles. They were engaged in a terrific grapple with the enveloping fungus.

Doc leaped to aid them, but from all sides shapeless forms converged toward him. In the uncanny yellow light, the figures stood out in vague black. The black things!

The black creatures were about the height of men. Some of them clutched long poles with which they were jabbing the noxious fungus into the faces of Doc's men. Others moved as free agents. Rushing Doc, they pummeled him from all sides.

The bronze man's scientific paraphernalia had been taken from him at the time of his first capture; he had no means of defense now, except his superb fists, and these he used with all the effect possible, causing the black assailants to fall in rows under the flailing of his fists. But always, new rows took their places.

From front, back, and from the sides they hurled upon him, and in the end, the bronze man fell. The fantastic attackers piled over his prone body like ants onto a stricken beetle.

Chapter 15. GOLDEN BLACKNESS

THE sound of a compelling voice of pleasing musical quality caused the black assailants to stop their attack. The voice sounded again, apparently issuing an order, and the foes withdrew from Doc, standing back around him in a thick ring. Then, at another order from the haunting Voice, the cotton fungus was removed.

Doc's five men each felt deft fingers about their eyes; when the fingers were removed, they discovered they had each been equipped with strange goggles.

They were slower than Doc had been in accustoming their eyes to the weird golden light, but gradually, through the all-pervading golden shimmer, they were able to make out hazy outlines in black.

"You see what I see?" Monk gasped.

Doc Savage's voice sounded: "Focus your eyes steadily on the object. They will soon take on detail."

They did this, and the black monsters stood out as individuals.

"They're men!" Renny boomed.

"Keep looking," Doc advised. "You'll develop a color sense."

"Sure," Long Tom gasped. "I'm getting it. I can see the mushrooms. They look pinkish."

"Look behind you," Doc requested.

They turned their goggled eyes. There, standing a pace in advance of the black monsters, was the girl, the Princess Sona.

She stood there like a fairy-book figure seen through a golden autumn haze. The curves of her youthful body were alluring, revealed by a clinging robe. Her golden hair, silken heaps of it, hung down to her waist and seemed a part of her diaphanous garb.

Her lips were perfect, her features exquisitely chiseled. Her appearance was marred only by the presence of a pair of the grotesque goggles.

In pardonable feminine vanity she removed the goggles for a moment while she flicked imaginary dust from their thick lenses. The effect to the battery of admiring masculine eyes was annihilating.

"Holy cow!" Renny breathed.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny intoned.

"I'm in love," Monk advised.

Doc Savage's calmly analytical words brought them back to earth.

"You are witnessing an amazing phenomenon," he expounded. "You are seeing where there is no light, as we know light. Air particles have apparently been treated in a way to make them luminous when viewed through the black-leased spectacles. Objects, which first appeared black to our unadjusted vision, now stand out in something near natural colors, tempered slightly by the effect of the golden haze."

Monk said dreamily, "It's like when the sun is slanting rays over the earth in the autumn. You know, just before twilight, how it is, with the sun's rays filtering through the trees in a kind of soft golden blush —"

"What are you doing?" Ham cut in sourly. "Waxing poetical?"

"Nuts to you, you shyster," Monk suggested.

DOC SAVAGE was not unaffected by the charms of the girl. But the bronze man, in his inflexible resolve to spend his life helping those who needed help, punishing those who deserved punishing, had made bitter enemies, unscrupulous foes who would stop at nothing to end his career.

The bronze man was able to care for himself, but if adversaries struck at him through some one he loved, his hands would be tied, and hence he had steeled himself against thought of attachment with one of the opposite

sex.

"Can you talk to them, Doc?" Renny asked.

"I'll try," Doc said.

As a linguist, the bronze man was probably unsurpassed. He now spoke rapidly, using different languages. But to every tongue he articulated the girl only stared, smiling, and replied in soft tremulous tones, as stirring to the senses as violin music -- and as analytically unintelligible.

She came forward finally and took the bronze man by the hand, indicating that he and his aides were to accompany her. She then led the way through the ponderous triangular door--and her followers, now revealed clearly as goggled men, closed in behind.

Immediately outside the door two goggled men, apparently guards, made gestures -- their right hands drifted up from their sides with an eerie movement, like the flutterings of crippled butterflies.

At a sharp word from Sona, the hands subsided.

"Get that!" Johnny said excitedly.

"Ool had that habit!" Ham gasped.

Monk came close to the two whose hands moved so peculiarly.

"These even look like Ool," he decided aloud. "Not so shriveled up and flat-eyed, maybe."

He scanned the faces of the other male members of the escort. "These others don't look so bad."

"This seems to solve the identity mystery of Ool," Doc said. "He came from this underground world. But why he returned and brought Watches Bowen with him is still something we do not know."

Long Tom took a deep breath which expanded his deceptively hollow chest to an amazing extent. "I'm sure glad to get out of that mushroom house and get some fresh air."

"Judging from the way the place is guarded," Doc offered, "we were probably correct in assuming that the mushrooms are of vast importance to both the economic and physical life of these people."

"I wonder what they eat?" Monk pondered.

"We can try to find out," the bronze man said.

IN the spacious outer room, Doc made motions indicating hunger to which the girl, Sona, gave understanding smiles and nods, and clapped her hands sharply. Then she motioned Doc and his aides to be seated.

They reclined on geometric-shaped, padded divans, not uncomfortable, they discovered, with a yielding fiber remindful of sponge rubber.

Monk's small eyes popped when he saw the array of dishes set before him, an amazing assortment, artistically prepared. The food was as tasty as attractive.

All. ate lustily. But Monk, in particular, gorged himself.

"I don't know what I'm eating," he said, "but I can take more of the same for supper." ',

Doc waited until Monk had finished, then he said, "You were eating only one thing, Monk."

"Yeah? What?"

"Mushrooms."

"Holy cow!" Renny grunted.

"They have devised ways of disguising appearance and flavor in order to avoid monotony, I presume," Johnny commented.

"But how can you live on mushrooms alone?" Monk demanded.

"Undoubtedly these people have had to build up a unique economy," Doc suggested. "Probably they have plants other than mushrooms, but of a kindred nature. Chemicals from these and from natural deposits, perhaps, furnish fertilizer for their specialized culture. Since these people are living, and with rather astonishing vitality, it is safe to assume they are able to extract from their surroundings all the elements necessary to sustain life."

"This air smells funny," Renny added.

"I think we will find out they manufacture, or at least purify their air, too, possibly out of oxygen extracted from water."

Monk blinked. "These birds are not dumb. They seem to take things which we can accomplish only as laboratory experiments, and employ them in everyday use."

The girl, Sona, had waited patiently, but now she came close, plucked at Doc's sleeve and led the way out of that cavernous room.

Outside, Doc's men stood and stared. Doc himself gazed intently. On all sides, bathed in the soft golden haze, smooth walls towered. They were white, and shimmered in the golden atmosphere. Just as inside the room they had left, everything was laid out in strict geometrical conformity — here straight lines and broad sweeping curves were beautiful in their gaunt simplicity.

"It — it's plenty modernistic!" Monk stammered.

"The most striking example of functional architecture I have ever seen," Renny, the civil engineer, said in admiration.

Doc said, "They had to build within the limited confines of this underground cavern. Also, being cramped as to quantity of building materials, they have abandoned all frills and false fronts. In every instance, they have used the least amount of material possible for the purpose."

AS THEY stood there, they became aware of a faint, steady clicking sound. It was very regular.

"What's that noise I keep hearing?" Long Tom questioned.

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Monk looked around, puzzled. "Yeah, I been noticing that. It sounds like a big clock ticking."

"The kind of a noise you wouldn't notice after you got used to it," Renny offered.

They were quiet for a time, listening to the sound which tremored in the golden haze with a muffled cadence like the beating of a slow pulse.

Then between smoothly-rearing walk, along a lane spotless and clean, Sona guided them.

They began to see the living apartments of the weird metropolis. These towered through the golden air to the dome of the arched cavern, each separate apartment set back from the one below, in the fashion of skyscrapers. The quarters looked as efficient as an electrical switchboard in a dynamo room.

Monk pointed out a many-windowed structure, obviously a manufacturing plant of some type, built over a rushing stream.

"What's that?" he asked. "Looks like a modernistic fish design over the door."

"It is," Doc said dryly. "Here, probably, they process fish taken from the river. They evidently have something besides mushrooms."

Long Tom also pointed. "That building over there with what appear to be modernistic mushrooms on it, must be the fungus processing plant."

"Some factories!" Renny boomed in appreciation. "No smoke, no dust, no smell!"

"There is no waste anywhere, apparently," Doc commented. "Factories as efficient and scientific as a technocrat's dream."

They moved on and their group was joined by more goggled figures who dribbled in from all sides, attracted by the amazing spectacle of men from another world. Women, too, dressed in robes only slightly less lustrous and diaphanous than Sona's, joined the throng.

Long Tom called attention to a set of structures built in a large open court. These he inferred to be government buildings. The structures were as rigidly functional in design as the others.

The most spacious structure of all was one in the heart of the metropolis, and which seemed to contain scientific laboratories, and possibly housed machinery for processing air for breathing and illuminating purposes. At least, the air was fresher, brighter near here. It was a high, circular building, topped with a complicated array of weirdly curved pipes and conduits. This was called in the local language, they learned later, the equivalent of "Central Mechanical Plant."

"Hey," Monk called out, "that pulse beat that keeps ringing in our ears — doesn't it sound louder here?"

"Yes," Doc answered, "that is undoubtedly the source of the noise."

They stood listening. Like the muffled beatings of a giant heart, the sound permeated the golden air.

Doc decided, "The noise must be in some way incidental to the manufacture of the luminous air. The sound might truly be called the heart beat of the metropolis."

Without warning, yells ripped out; a loud, malignant clatter burst on the air. Echoes rebounded fearfully under the vast cavern dome.

"Hey," Monk shouted, "that ain't no heart beat!"

"Machine guns!" Ham ejaculated.

Sona recoiled close to Doc Savage in quick dread of the unaccustomed noise. Her escort, their strange, loose garments fluttering, commenced milling about in panic.

"Sounds like an attack on the Central Mechanical Plant," Doc said quickly.

Gently and firmly, Doc removed himself from Sona's vicinity, then made signs to the milling underground men that they should surround her with a protective guard.

"Come on!" He called to his five aides.

Chapter 16. COLD LIGHT

AT the Central Mechanical Plant, machine gun bullets mauled the smooth, rounded surface of the walls, making a flat drumming noise. The gunners were bunched — and working toward the structure, endeavored to get to the big doors.

The latter had closed at the first outburst of firing. The doors were enormous, clumsy appearing, but they had operated smoothly.

Doc Savage caught sight of the gunners.

"Watches Bowen and his gang!" he said grimly.

In front of the Central Mechanical Plant, perhaps half a dozen limp bodies were sprawled — cavern men who had no doubt discovered Watches Bowen and his gang approaching the plant, and had given an alarm that had cost them their lives.

These slain cavern men were without their goggles.

Doc Savage veered to one side, toward what was apparently a storehouse for a type of pressed fibre tile. The tiles were in squares measuring some six inches across and an inch thick. The bronze man picked up several of these and tossed them to his aides.

"Hold them as you would guns!" he ordered. "This yellow light is tricky. We may fool them into thinking we have our machine pistols."

The ruse was more successful than they had expected. Watches Bowen and his men, already unnerved by the failure of what must have been intended as a surprise attack, saw Doc and his five approaching.

"Dey got dem hoot guns!" Ham-hock Piney bawled.

Yelling loudly, Watches ordered a retreat into one of the near-by, tall habitation buildings. There was much uproar and more shooting inside, but soon Watches and his gang appeared on top of the structure.

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From the roof, they could direct an uninterrupted stream of machine gun slugs at the Central Mechanical Plant and at the same time be immune to attack from above.

Machine gun lead drove Doc and his party to shelter; more bullets hammered at the walls of the Mechanical Plant, making a patter like the insistent chatter of hail.

"The slugs don't seem to be penetrating the Plant walls!" Long Tom shouted as they ran along, keeping under cover and heading for the circular plant itself.

They were running alone, the inhabitants of the vast underground domain of weird yellow light having sought cover because of the uproar. There were, it was later ascertained, strong, buried chambers to which the populace fled on the rare occasions when there were roof cave-ins — although the latter had become rare through the last few centuries, due to the strengthening, by scientific means, of the populated portions of the subterranean labyrinth.

"What is their idea of the attack on that Mechanical Plant?" Monk pondered aloud.

"Some scheme of Watches Bowen," Renny rumbled. "Guess they must've got goggles through Ool."

They were fired at by the machine gunners. The distance was too great for effective shooting. A few moments later Doc Savage, in the fantastic golden light, issued orders.

"We'll try this," he said quietly. "You five men endeavor to gain entrance through the rear door of the Mechanical Plant and organize those inside into an emergency defense unit."

Monk exploded. "But we can't talk their lingo!"

"Make signs," Doc said. "They are adept at understanding gestures."

"What you gonna do, Doc?"

Doc said grimly: "I will see what I can do about stopping the machine guns."

DOC glided away, and before his aides could protest had disappeared among the modernistic maze of unusual buildings.

"Watches Bowen has nine men with machine guns," Long Tom muttered doubtfully. "Doc is unarmed. He may have some trouble."

"Don't sweat about that!" Monk snorted. "My bet is that he'll stop 'em."

At the door of the Central Mechanical Plant on the opposite side of the bombardment, Doc's aides pounded for admittance.

A black-caped observer from a position in a pill-box turret on top of the plant had obviously noted their approach, and had seen that they came from the Princess Sona's party. He evidently thought they must be all right, for he signaled that the door be opened for them.

Silently, the door opened wide enough for them to squeeze in, and one by one they crowded through, Ham being the last to enter.

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As the door was closing upon the heels of the dapper lawyer, a black-caped figure charged frantically to the plant building, shouting something in flat-voiced gibberish unintelligible to Doc's aides, but not, however, meaningless to the cavern men controlling the door to the Mechanical Plant.

The door slid shut with a silent fury that caught the always impeccably dressed Ham and ripped off the entire rear of his coat.

The one who had raced up was left outside.

Remarkably enough, Ham was not in the least concerned about his wrecked appearance. Just before the door closed, a backward glance had disclosed something which concerned him infinitely more.

"Ool!" he barked. "That was Ool who just came running up. He was dressed in the garb of these cavern people. Bet they didn't recognize him!"

Figures began to close in on Doc Savage's men. Their attitude was anything but friendly.

"Now what's eatin' these birds?" Monk muttered uneasily.

"It must have been what Ool shouted," Ham said.

The dapper lawyer's fears were justified, for inside the gleaming plant harsh orders were shouted in the same unfamiliar language Ool had used. Unexcited orders, they seemed. Like Ool, all these other cavern people seemed to have achieved a high state of emotional control.

"Betcha," Monk barked, "Ool told these boys we were in with Watches Bowen!"

Renny knocked his big fists together. "Yeah, he probably told 'em we were trying to bluff our way in here and take the place."

The next instant, the cavern men had stalked forward and surrounded Doc's aides in a tight ring. They made a grim appearing circle with their dark capes, black goggles, and white, emotionless faces that, because of the mother-of-pearl texture, did not seem quite human.

"Now what?" Long Tom grunted.

His answer came soon. The right hands of the cavern men began drifting out from their sides in a vague butterfly-like fluttering.

"Blazes!" Renny gasped. "I wish Doc was here to help out!"

AFTER Doc Savage dispatched his men toward the Central Mechanical Plant, he himself hurried through a maze of modernistic passageways and circled to reach the rear of the fantastic home-cell house on top of which Watches Bowen and his men were ensconced with their machine guns.

He looked up through the shimmering golden haze. The bronze man could catch glimpses of the mobster men as they chopped bullets in the direction of the Central Mechanical Plant.

The home-cell house, which Watches Bowen had chosen as his machine gun nest, was high, pressing its roof close to the arching dome of the gigantic cavern. There were no fire escapes on the building, such as a dweller in American cities might have expected, for the reason that the construction was probably absolutely

fireproof.

Due to the lack of fire escapes, Watches Bowen and his men seemingly believed themselves secure from a rear attack, and therefore concentrated all their attention on firing at the Central Mechanical Plant.

A professional human fly, accustomed to scanning the walls, would no doubt have eyed the sheer surface lifting upward story after story to the cavern dome, and would not have attempted the climb. According to the discussions which took place later, not even the cavern people, for all their strength and agility, thought it possible of accomplishment.

But Doc Savage ascended the first hundred feet in a flat two minutes. After that, his pace was considerably slowed. The structural indentations which marked the lower part of the building became less pronounced as the height became greater. But although the bronze man's pace was slowed, it was not stopped; up and up he climbed, depending entirely on precarious finger-holds that at times seemed non-existent.

The windows were not closed by glass, since there was no rain or cold to keep out of the building; there were only shutters for privacy, hinged in the window frames.

The bronze man might have made better time if he had used the window ledges for extra purchase, but not wishing to attract attention to himself, he scrupulously avoided the windows. As things turned out, he might as well have used them.

A cavern dweller, looking out, sighted the bronze man. The observer was a woman, a housewifely sort of person who looked as if her life might be devoted to the care of her man and her children. The spectacle of the great bronze man mounting the side of the building unnerved her, and she clutched her children closely and screamed shrilly and repeatedly. This occurred only a few stories from the top of the building.

One of Watches Bowen's crew, attracted by the screams, looked over the edge. He wore goggles. He sighted Doc, yelled.

Ham-hock, also wearing goggles, dived swiftly to the mobster's side. The latter pointed.

"Dat's ol' bad luck hisself!" the big Negro stuttered.

He seemed too paralyzed to swing down his submachine gun. The other man leaned over with his and bore down grimly on the trigger. A leaden thread of death streamed downward.

Then a startling thing occurred. The golden haze went out of the air. Utter blackness clamped down on the cavern metropolis.

"Mah goggles done gone bad on me!" Ham-hock shouted.

"Hell," rasped the other. "Something's happened!"

The man did not let the darkness interfere with his job at hand. He hosed machine gun lead along the side of the building where last he had seen Doc, using an entire drum of ammunition to make a thorough job out of it.

"HE'S gone now!" the gunner shouted loudly in the darkness.

"Sure he doan swing himself in t'rough a window?" Hamhock mumbled.

"There wasn't a window in thirty feet of him."

"Good work, you two," Watches Bowen called. "That's a load off my chest, and I don't mean maybe!"

"You won't be havin' no use now for that special gold watch, chief."

The special gold watch Ham-hock referred to was a new addition to the mob chief's collection, one especially reserved for the annihilation of Doc Savage. Bowen had even indulged in a whim, and had engraved Doc Savage's name on the case.

He had not revealed wherein lay the deadly nature of the watch, boasting only that this watch would finish Savage off if the proper chance came.

"She sho am dahk," Ham-hock mumbled. "Ah done think my trick specks done gone wrong. Only Ah guess dey ain't. Dat yaller light done just plumb gone out'n de sky, ain't it?"

Watches Bowen's curse rasped through the pitch blackness. "This wasn't on the program. Ool's bungled down below, or this couldn't have happened. They've done something at the Central Mechanical Plant. That's where their cold light comes from."

"Ah don' lak (dis place," Ham-hock grumbled. "Dis heah dahk — it don't seem like regular dahk. Dis dahk — it sorta jams down on yo', if yo' know what Ah mean?"

Came a sharp, chattering noise in the blackness near by. Watches cursed.

"Squirrel," he snarled, "keep them teeth still, or I'll knock 'em down your throat."

A certain quaver in the mob chief's voice showed he was more than a little jittery himself.

"I ain't scared!" Squirrel Dorgan insisted in a false voice. "It's just a habit."

"Break the habit, or I'll break your neck!" Watches promised.

In spite of Watches' warning, Squirrel's teeth kept chattering. Then suddenly they quit chattering. There was something unnatural about the way they stopped.

"Squirrel!" Watches Bowen called sharply. There was no answer. The darkness seemed to press closer, so blackly intense that it appeared thick enough to handle. Watches cursed nervously and called again. When there was no answer, his hands pawed out, feeling in the darkness.

They found Squirrel Dorgan, found him slumped over the rooftop railing — dead.

Watches Bowen cursed savagely, and Ham-hock mumbled some vague incantation to his personal mistress of luck, this being the way each had of keeping his courage up. The other mobsters crowded close together.

"It must've been heart failure," one of them growled. "Squirrel always had a chicken heart."

His voice broke off sharply, and there was a soft thump in the darkness, as of a body striking the rooftop. Watches and his men hurriedly groped, and encountered a silently huddled body.

"Dis am Joe!" Ham-hock wailed, naming a member of the

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"Joe never had a weak heart!" Watches rasped. "Say, what the hell's goin' on

THERE was taut silence, graveyard silence, while the gangsters huddled closer together, as though, in the darkness, an unseen menace was tightening an invisible noose about them.

"I found something!" Honey Hamilton's mild voice stated. "What is it?" Watches exploded. "Where?"

"Sticking in Joe's neck. It pulls out hard. Feels like a little weighted ball, with a kind of webbed thorn stuck through it -- "

"Drop it, Honey!" the mob leader's voice slashed. "Don't scratch yourself on it! Whatever it is, it must be poisoned to kill Joe like it did."

There was a noise in the darkness behind Watches, a sound not unlike a load of rock unloaded suddenly and heavily.

The gang chief whirled.

"Ham-hock!" he yelled, "has it got you?"

There was no answer.

"Ham-hock!"

This time there was an answer. "Ah -- Ah'in all right, chief!" the big Negro stuttered the words out. "But-but Ah wouldn't ub been if it had come any closer."

"If what had come closer?" Watches demanded.

"One uh dern things lak what Honey pulled outa Joe's neck, Ah reckons," said the Negro. "Ah could feel it come past mab face in de dahk."

"Why in the hell didn't you say so?" Watches snapped, unreasonably.

There was a faint hiss in the air above Watches' head. He ducked instinctively, cursed, and followed Ham-hock to the floor to get the protection afforded by the low parapet.

"Flatten out!" he ordered. "They're filling the air with poison darts. Shootin' 'em up with air guns or sling shots or something, I guess."

Flat on their stomachs on the roof, the men listened in near-panic as the air above them was filled with the whirring of the death missiles, many of which struck with sharp clicks against the protecting parapet.

Ham-hock Piney howled dolefully, "What Ah wants to know is why we done mess wit' dat Meck-a-nickel Plant foah, anyhow?"

"It was Ool's idea," Watches snapped. "If we get that Plant, we can take over this place. It's the heart of their existence down here. The roof above is reenforced so it cannot come down. It's the strongest place in the cavern."

"Ah wishes we had nevah come up heah," Ham-hock stated.

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"Well, what could we do?" Watches yelled angrily. "Doc Savage 5 men cut us off. Say, you rascal, are you criticizing my way of running this?"

"No, suh," Ham-hock denied. "Ah thinks things am goin' jes' fine."

THROUGH it all, the "heart beat" of the processing machine at the Central Mechanical Plant had been throbbing through the blackness, a slow, muffled cadence which impinged on their ear drums with ominous insistence.

Ham-hock breathed heavily, taking three quick inhalations in succession. Then he gasped, "Don' it seem like dat tickin' am slowin' down?"

Watches listened.

"Yeah, it is," he agreed. "And they're not shooting up so many of those darts. They probably figure they've rubbed us out. Wait'll they turn on their screwy yellow light again. We'll fog somebody plenty with lead."

Ham-hock's ponderous wheezes were getting so loud now that they even drowned out the insistent clicking emanating from the air machine in the Central Mechanical Plant. Nor was the fat Negro the only one who was breathing hard. All were wheezing. It began to sound like a contest.

Honey Hamilton's mild voice inquired between gaspings: "Doesn't it seem -- to anybody else -- like it's getting hard to breathe?"

Honey got an emphatic agreement from everything on the roof.

Ham-hock gasped, "Could dis have -- somethin' to do with dat clock-tick business? Dem ticks am soundin' -- mighty slow now."

Watches Bowen ripped out short volleys of profanity. He seemed to lack the breath for as extended profanity as he would have liked.

"You hit it, Ham-hock," he gasped. "That clock-tick controls the air down here. What they're doing is -- thinning it out on us -- high up here under the dome where we are -- It's worse than -- below -- "

He gagged, made awful hacking noises.

"Takin' de bref right out our mouths," Ham-hock's frightened voice sounded. "What kind people is these? Le's get out'n heah."

They pulled off their black goggles -- they had taken them from the cavern men they had shot down near the Mechanical Plant -- and used their flashlights. Access to the lower level of the great house-cell was by a moving stairway similar to an escalator, and riding down on this, they kept their flashlight beams playing, and several times shot at inquisitive heads.

REACHING the floor level of the cavern, they set off swiftly, using their guns freely. Ham-hock Piney, more courageous now, fired the grenade rifle several times.

The air was better down here.

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Watches Bowen seemed to have a very definite idea of where he was going. He veered sharply to the right and came to a very steep wall. He stopped and called upward.

"Lower away!" he shouted. "And don't show a light!" An answer wafted from above. "O. K.!"

Watches moved about, groped, got his fingers on the rung of a rope ladder which had been lowered. He tried his weight on it, then swung on and started climbing up.

"Come on," he hurled back to the others. "Don't forget to bring Joe's and Squirrel's machine guns."

Twenty feet up, Watches squirmed through a narrow rock opening in the cavern. He stood by at the aperture while the others climbed, one after the other, up the twisting, dangling ladder. He counted the men as they arrived at the top and scraped past him in the darkness, puffing and blowing.

"What the hell!" he exploded. "I counted one too many!"

He ordered the ladder hauled up. Then he flashed his light, slithering the white beam around in the low limestone passage.

"Where's Ool?" he asked.

"Not back yet," said the man who lowered the ladder. "Say, what went wrong?"

"Everything!" Watches snarled.

This natural passageway led around some distance in an indirect connection with that labyrinth of tunnels, the so-called Land of the Lost, which straggled underground for miles to the surface cleft where the dirigible was moored.

This passage was fed by the same sluggish current of air as circulated through the Land of the Lost—in a sense, exhaust air from the city in the domed cavern.

Watches' flashlight revealed the faces of his men. MI were here except Ool and the two who had been killed on the roof top. The nervously poking light revealed no one else.

"My mistake," Watches muttered. "I'd have sworn I counted one too many."

But Watches Bowen's first hunch was right, for he had counted one too many men in his outfit. The third to mount the ladder behind the mob chief had been the 'extra man.

It was Doc Savage. Doc had not been shot off the side of the building by machine gun fire. When darkness clamped over the cavern, and the bullets sliced toward him in a leaden stream, he had let go his finger hold, leaped twenty feet down and ten feet to one side and landed on a thick conduit pipe which entered the building from another across the way.

Out of the tail of his eye he had photographed the position of that aerial conduit in the last glimmer of the failing golden light.

His leap was gauged precisely. In utter darkness, he caught the conduit against his steel-thewed thighs, breaking his fall sufficiently for his cabled arms to wrap around and drag up his dangling legs.

In silence, he had recommenced his climb up the side of the building, and eased over the parapet in the darkness. He had been present, lurking below the roof opening, when Watches' two men were killed by the poisonous darts hurled up by the outraged cavern inhabitants.

He had followed the gang chief to the dangling rope ladder. And he was present now, in the passageway, crouched behind a pile of broken rock fragments just outside the range of flashlight beams.

Chapter 17. RENDEZVOUS TRAP

UTTERLY unaware of the crouching presence of Doc Savage in the passageway, Watches Bowen brought out a flask of the eighty-year old Napoleon brandy which he had brought along; he killed half the flask in two greedy swigs, then passed the rest to his men.

The slow fire of the liquor did little to sweeten the mob chief's temper. His pudgy hand tugged continually at his watch chain, and he prowled about, cursing everything in sight, and many things not in sight. Most particularly he cursed Ool.

Honey Hamilton put up a mild defense of the maligned assassin.

"It wasn't Ool's fault that we bumped into them men near the Central Mechanical Plant, chief," he pointed out.

"Yeah, I know," Watches growled, "but he might've stuck around and helped us out."

One of the mobsters, a man with small, overly bright eyes, scowled and muttered, "There's a lotta screwy things about this place."

Honey Hamilton cleared his throat gently.

"Watches, the boys been wantin' me to ask somethin' for 'em," he said.

"Yeah?" Watches growled. "Shoot! Who's stopping you?"

"It's only that this is working up into a plenty bloody business," Honey Hamilton said apologetically. "That's all right. We ain't backin' out. But we figure it's time we know exactly what we're takin' the risks for."

"Didn't I tell you we come after a treasure that will set the richest guy in the country way over the other side the tracks?" Watches demanded.

"Yeah, you told us that," the other agreed. "But it don't mean a hell of a lot to us."

Watches laughed harshly. "So you want details?"

"That's right," Honey said in his mouselike voice.

Watches shrugged. "All right We came after light."

There was a stir among the men.

"Light -- hell!" some one snorted.

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Watches continued, "The yellow light that's in this air down here — to be more specific."

"Dis golden stuff what we see with dem goggles?" Hamhock questioned. "Yo' wouldn't fool us, boss man!"

"Go on, Watches," Honey Hamilton urged. "You're still way ahead of us. Where does that stuff make us a buck?"

"You dope!" the mob chief retorted. "Don't you see that the formula for this golden air is worth more than all the heavy gold that ever came out of the ground?"

"No," Honey's gentle voice stated. "Damned if I do!"

"THE way I get it from Ool," Watches continued. "His ancestors came underground here thousands of years ago, to get away from the cold. It used to be hot country up here a few hundred thousand years ago or so. Then everything started freezing up, like it is now. It didn't happen overnight. Took thousands of years, I guess.

"Anyhow, the ancestors of these people developed ways of takin' care of themselves," Watches continued. "They had to make their light to see by. But by the time the ice closed in for good, they were all set. They had learned to make their air, too. Ool says they've got tanks of liquid air at the Central Mechanical Plant that would refrigerate all of New York City."

"What do they do with it?" Honey questioned. "I've read about that stuff. It'll freeze a rubber ball so bad that it'll break like glass," Watches said. "They use it to make breathing air out of — something like we do in submarines, I guess."

"Yassuh!" Ham-hock interrupted. "Dey put me in one of dem submarine things in de war. Ah know about submarines."

"Shut up," Watches growled. "The yellow, or golden color in the air down here is nothing more than a kind of phosphorescence. It's caused by treating the air somehow, then turning a form of X ray, or something on it. In other words, these cavern dwellers have realized a dream of modern science. They have perfected a method of getting so-called 'cold light' on a practical basis.

"At their Central Mechanical Plant they treat the air particles in a way to make them luminous when seen through specially devised goggles. That's the long and short of it."

One of the men stirred restlessly. "It's a nice history lesson. But where does the treasure come in?"

"You mug!" Watches rasped. "You haven't got the imagination to dodge a bullet! Don't you see what it would do hack in America, in Europe — everywhere — if we showed up with a formula for making cold light? It would put every electric light company in the world out of business. We'd make them power pirates pay plenty! I mean plenty!"

Honey Hamilton's awed voice sounded insistently.

"Ool, according to the way I been hearing him talk, has got even bigger ideas than that," he said.

"Nothing the matter with Ool's imagination," the mob chief chuckled.

He pulled a watch out of his pocket by the end of the chain and started swinging it around unconsciously.

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"There's nothing the matter with my imagination either," he said. "I'm stringing along with Ool. We'll go just as far as money will take us. And that's plenty far."

"Yo' sho' nuff goin' have a knob on somebody's head, too," Ham-hock protested, "if'n yo' don' quit swinging dat watch so wild."

Watches quit spinning the watch. His thick fingers shoved it back in his pocket. "You're right, Ham-hock. We're a little ahead of ourselves. We've got to make a successful raid on the Central Mechanical Plant, first."

Honey Hamilton, lost in a mental consideration of what he had just heard, had wandered off to one side humming to himself. He was not sure that they could hold up the electric power companies — either in selling them the secret, or by getting them to pay to keep it from being used, and thus damaging great utilities investments. But Watches must be right. Watches had a business head.

Watches turned a flashlight on one of his timepieces. Then Honey Hamilton stopped dreaming. He kept humming, however, and continued on a few steps farther, then turned and walked slowly back to the group. He said something to Watches Bowen out of the corner of his mouth, barely opening his lips. But Watches heard him.

The crook chiefs face went plaster-white, but there was no illumination on his face, so no one noticed. He did not answer Honey, but kept on talking to Ham-hock.

He paused, looked at his wrist watch for the time.

"I'm supposed to meet Ool in an hour and a quarter, down the passage here, in that little room off to the right," he said. "I'm going to sit down and rest."

He sat down. The others sat down also. At his order they crowded together in a close circle with their flashlights ready and machine guns across their knees.

"You never know when somebody may come snooping around," Watches growled in explanation.

Ham-hock's mountainous bulk shivered. "Do way dem fellers move them hands of their'n makes dis baby t'ink of dem ol' cottonmouth snakes dot used to go fo' mah bare feet when Ah was a boy down in Gawgia. Ah wonder how Ool kills by touchin' you?"

"I'd give plenty to know that myself," Watches admitted sourly. "He never has explained it."

They talked on. Then Honey Hamilton, at a nudge from Watches, got up and wandered a short distance away. He was humming to himself again as he retraced the course he had taken before.

He came back, and said in a voice audible to all this time: "O. K."

"What's O. K.?" Ham-hock demanded. "What yo'-all talkin' about?"

Watches Bowen turned on the fat Negro viciously. "Not you, Ham-hock! You told me you'd bumped Savage, didn't you?"

"Ah sho did not! Dat was Joe, de boy dat got hisself killed."

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"Doc Savage was right here, listening to everything we said!" Watches grated. "Honey saw him a little while ago when one of the flashes went on. He came back and whispered the dope to me."

NOBODY said anything. Their tongues were frozen, for they held the bronze man in greater dread than they did the dart killers of the cold-light cavern. Watches laughed grimly.

"Take it easy," he purred. "That appointment I claimed I had with Ool was faked."

"Lawsy me!" Ham-hock moaned.

"Savage doesn't know it's faked," Watches went on. "He thinks he's got straight dope. He's on his way now to trip up Ool. But Ool will be here soon. We'll fix it for Ool to get Savage. And no guesswork about it this time."

One of them said sullenly, "Watches, I don't want no part in it. This bronze guy is a jinx for us. Hell! We've tried to kill him twenty times."

"Going canary?" Watches sneered.

"Yeah, when it comes to him, I am. And I ain't ashamed to admit it."

"Me neither," another sullenly defiant voice agreed.

Watches Bowen did not get angry. He did not even swear. He surprised everybody by laughing quietly.

"That's all right, boys," he said. "I know how you feel. We won't any of us take any more chances with this baby. We'll leave all the dirty work to Ool and any of these cavern guys he can get to take a risk."

He paused.

"You see, Ool has some friends down here," he said.

IN the small rendezvous room, Doc Savage waited. Watches Bowen's act had been convincing; the bronze man held no suspicion of the trap which had been set. He stood silently in a man-sized niche in the rock-cluttered cavity.

He did not have long to wait, for the little room soon caught up the shuffle of approaching feet on the rocky tunnel floor. The sound came closer, and Doc flexed great muscles and waited.

He tried his goggles, found them ineffective still, and pushed them up on his forehead. No doubt the ray device which caused the air to become luminous was still shut off.

As the steps came closer, a sudden aura of light danced on the roof a stone's throw distant, such a display on the pitted roof as might have been the work of a flashlight beam. The person who approached had rounded one of the final curves in the crooked passage.

The next instant the flash beam was spurting into the rendezvous room itself. The one who carried the light approached within a few feet of Doc, stopped, shook the flash, pounded it with a hand as though he thought a jolting would make it function better, and finally turned the white rays toward his face while he examined the reflector.

It was Ool's face that was revealed in the flashlight glare.

Doc sprang.

With the precision of a leaping puma, the bronze man's hurtling weight landed immediately behind Ool. His hands clamped Ool's arms just below the shoulder joints; his thumbs dug into the flesh. Ool became helpless; the whole maneuver having taken the bronze man only split-seconds.

Adjusting the flashlight in a wall niche, Doc Savage examined Ool's hands, particularly the right one. He found nothing. Ool spoke, and in spite of the pain he must be suffering, his tone had changed little from its normal expressionlessness.

"My right hand interests you, does it not, bronze man?" he asked.

Doc Savage did not answer.

"You are due for a surprise," Ool said quietly. "You were interested in capturing Tile, so interested that you did not hear my men come close."

Doc Savage became slightly tense. The other felt the stiffening.

"There are at present a vaex of men surrounding you," Ool said. "In your language, that number is equal to the total of all the toes and fingers which a normal man has. Twenty!"

The bronze man suddenly picked up his light and streamed it about, cutting a white path in the close-pressing blackness. It was true. The mouth of the room was literally packed with white-faced, dark-caped figures.

THESE newcomers moved forward slowly, purposefully, closing in on Doc and his prisoner. And as they approached closer, their right hands drifted up from their sides in vague butterfly gestures which seemed as natural as nature itself.

"You had best not resist," Ool warned. "You are not, at this time, to be killed."

There was a cold certainty about Ool's actions which said he was not bluffing, and Doc Savage did the only thing left to do -- he allowed himself to be taken.

Ool stood clear and worked his arms experimentally. In his long black cape he looked very grotesque. He gibbered an order to the cavern men, and they moved down the passage, conducting Doc Savage in their midst, until they came to a smooth wall completely blocking the passage. Here, one of the men gave signal knocks on the wall, and a wide door slid slowly open..

Doc and his captors passed through. The door closed softly behind them. That he might walk more easily, the bronze man was given goggles--for the cold light was working again -- and donning them, found himself once more in the metropolis of fantastic buildings.

The throbbing which was the heart beat of this city under the dome, permeated the "cold light" realm more strongly, and the place seemed to have settled back to its accustomed routine.

Many of the populace came to stare at the bronze man. They did not seem friendly.

Doc was conducted to a chamber in one of the government buildings, a room that was obviously a prison cell; he was left alone with the door locked behind him, and was allowed to keep the black goggles.

The room was large, with a wall-like partition at the opposite end. Beyond the partition, he discovered other prisoners—his five aides.

"And Habeas Corpus," Monk muttered, after the first excited greetings were over. "They put him in their dang jail, too."

THE meeting of Doc Savage and his men would have been considerably dampened in spirit could they have listened to another meeting which was taking place in the executive palace. There, Ool faced the dictator, Anos.

Anos, father of the girl Sona, wore a red cape as mark of high position. The girl, Sona, had acquired her name by a simple reversal of the letters of the male parent's name, a custom in all father-and-daughter relationships in the cavern metropolis.

Anos, the dictator, occupied a low, thronelike affair which stood near a design on the throne-room floor, a mammoth fourteen-pointed star inlaid with an opalescent substance. Around the points of the star were arrayed the chairs of the government council, the Nonverid, the members of which wore slightly less gaudy capes.

Ool stood in the middle of the star and faced the dictator.

"My repentance is great," he said.

"That is fitting," the dictator replied slowly. "You have been noted in the past for your greed and treachery, and for your insane thirst to take over the government here. It was for attempting to take over the government that you were banished to the Stor, the working squadrons. When you tried to lead the Star in revolt, you were sent to the Land of the Lost."

Ool spoke contritely.

"I have repented," he said. "And I have proved it by bringing you the giant man and the other five, and the strange insect with fur upon it which they call a 'hog.'"

"You say these five are allied with the others who attacked us with their carrying-rods which roar and kill?" the dictator asked.

"They are," Ool lied solemnly. "I saw them together in the Land of the Lost. I joined them and learned their language, which is simple. And for days, I tried to keep them lost in the desert caverns. But finally, they no longer heeded my counsel, and found this place."

At that point the girl, Sona, spoke up vehemently.

"Those are not true words," she said. "This man Ool, who has always caused trouble, is one of the leaders of the men with the carrying-rods that make noise and death. The six whom we now have prisoners — the big man with the strange skin and the other five — are not our enemies, but foes of Ool and the others."

OoI said in an injured manner, "It is true that I was with these men when you were seized in the outer caverns, and acted as one of them. But have I not told you that I was deceiving them."

Anos, the dictator, said, "We will deliberate over the matter of the truth of your statements."

Ool threw his head far back and became rigid for a moment, eyes upcast. This seemed to be the local method of kowtowing.

"I wish a boon, a favor, for my services," he said.

The dictator did not seem very enthusiastic.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The formula for the 'cold light,' which only your scientific men know," Ool said.

"You could not understand it," Anos pointed out. "You were not trained in that branch of science. In fact, I recall you as a very stupid, unruly youth who learned little."

Ool made a faint scowl under tile rebuke. "What about doing me the honor of giving me the formula?"

"Why do you wish it?" the other countered.

"I thirst for knowledge," was the best excuse Ool could offer.

"It is a strange thirst, considering your record," he was told. "Your request is denied. We suspect a trick, to speak without falseness."

Ool did not have much success masking his disappointment. He bowed.

"I have another boon to ask," he said.

"What is this one?"

"The giant bronze man and his five companions," Ool said. "They are dangerous. For the common good of my people, I ask that they be put to death. That is the boon I ask." Anos, the dictator, considered.

"It is a matter for the Nonverid to deliberate and pass judgment upon," he said.

Ool had brought one bad habit back with him from the outer world. He swore a good mule-skinner oath, one he must have picked up among Watches Bowen's men.

Then Anos, the dictator, added something which made Ool feel much better.

"It would appear that this giant of a man and his five companions are our enemies," Anos said. "It is equally probable that the Nonverid will decree their death."

Ool, to hide his delight, put back his head in the strange kowtow, for his deadpan features were showing more emotion than usual.

"How will death be decreed?" he asked.

"In the traditional manner," said Anos.

"It is well," Ool said, and walked backward from the audience chamber with his head bent stiffly, eyes upturned.

Chapter 18. TERROR IN GOLD

BACK again in the desert labyrinth of the Land of the Lost, Ool conferred with Watches Bowen and his gang.

"We will have to fight," Ool said. Watches objected. "But you said their whatcha-call-it, Nouverid, could be persuaded — "

"That old fool, Anos, put his foot down," Ool said. "They will not give up the formula without a fight."

Watches Bowen jerked nervously at his watch chain. "Our guns didn't do much good last time."

"We will plan more carefully," Ool stated. "We will capture the Central Mechanical Plant with the help of the Stor."

"Stor?" Watches grunted. "What's that?"

"Workers," Ool explained.

"Ah didn't see nobody workin' much," Ham-hock Piney put in. "Most of 'em was jus' restin' around. Ah would like a job like dey-all got."

"The Stor are not great in number, but bitter, vicious," Ool explained. "We will use them. It is what I had in mind."

"Just who are these birds in the Stor?" Watches persisted.

"In your country, they would be called criminals," Ool told him.

"When do we start this?" Watches Bowen questioned.

"Savage is to be sentenced to death by the Nonverid, I hope," Ool said bluntly. "That will make it simple. We will wait until Savage has been disposed of."

"I hope it ain't long," Watches offered.

"It will not be," said Ool. "It is probable that the bronze man is being sentenced now."

IN the prison cell where Doc Savage and his five aides were confined, gloom was thick, both physically and spiritually. The gaunt Johnny paced steadily as Monk had expressed it a moment before, "Like somebody's lost skeleton." The fact that they were listening to a dire pronouncement did not deter him, for he could understand no word.

Anos, the dictator, was speaking.

"And so our ruling council, the Nouverid, has deliberated fairly and found you to be enemies of ours," he was saying. "It is further considered that you were responsible in whole or in part for the deaths of certain of our

population and that, as is customary only in cases of murderers, you shall receive the death penalty, wielded in public, for all to witness and be warned."

With that, he turned and walked out.

Anos had spoken the local language, of which Doc Savage and his aides understood nothing. The bronze man, usually able to acquire a smattering of strange tongues within a short time, had found this one especially obtuse. But he hazarded a guess.

"It was something serious," he said. "The man's expression showed that."

Monk said, "That pretty girl we helped out, the one they call Sona, or some thing — you'd think maybe she'd help us out. I think she took a fancy to Doc."

"I guess there's nothing she can do about it," Ham said shortly.

There was a ventilating opening to one side of the room, a large square, closed by a stout lattice of pressed fibre. Doc and the others now cooperated in trying to break the lattice down, but with no perceptible success.

They were straining at it when, as though wafted in on the soft, aureate air, the girl, Sona, appeared noiselessly on the other side of the lattice, then went to the door.

"Am I a prophet!" Monk grinned.

The girl's voice made music as she spoke in low tones to the guard, who answered in brief gutturals, occasionally shaking his head vigorously, but finally nodding, mumbling under his breath. He opened the door. The girl entered.

She went directly to Doc, hesitated, then rested a hand on his arm. Her exquisite face was serious. She took the bronze man's right hand and made motions as though she were attaching something to the hand. She went through the same motions with each of Doc's aides.

"It feels swell when she holds my hand," Monk chuckled. "But what in the devil is she trying to show us?"

The girl now seized Doc's right hand and moved it in the butterfly manner characteristic of Ool.

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed.

Without a word, the girl left their cell.

DOC SAVAGE stood up suddenly. "I think the girl was trying to tell us how we would be killed," he said. "But that suggests an idea."

He drew his men together. They whispered.

Doc Savage approached the lattice. He made gestures for the guard to come close. The latter did so, having no idea of how far Doc could leap. When the bronze man's left hand streaked through the grating to pin the guard's arm, the guard's eyes bulged with fear. When Doc made a butterfly motion with his right hand, the guard's capitulation was sudden, complete. He opened the lattice.

Doc and his aides, swarming out, were sighted almost immediately by cavern men down the shimmering golden corridor. These rushed forward to cut off escape, but Doc and his men, pushing the mysterious power of the right-hand phenomena to its utmost, made horrible grimaces as they hurtled forward.

Their right hands they held out in a manner dreadfully familiar to the "cold-light" people. These gave way.

Back in the prison building, a penetrating gong started clanging, apparently an emergency signal audible far out in the fantastic cavern. People began filling the streets.

"We can't make it into the outer caverns," Doc said suddenly. "We'll try for the Central Mechanical Plant."

They made it nearly all of the way to the Central Mechanical Plant without their progress being seriously threatened, but were sighted by many persons. Occasional poisonous darts, of the type which had brought death to two of Watches Bowen's mobsters, were sent against them, the lethal bolts being fired from peculiar compressed air tubes.

Nearing the Central Mechanical Plant, Doc's aides fell in on each side of him to form a flying wedge. On they hurtled, with Monk slightly behind the others, carrying his pet pig.

Those in the Plant apparently considered it impossible that six men could make it to the doors, and they had not closed the panels.

Before they awakened to the possibilities, Doc was almost in tile aperture. He lunged, drove a fist out and knocked a foe away.

If Monk had been satisfied with Doc's blow, the thing which happened next might never have occurred. The homely chemist, fired with fighting fever, expressed himself by shoving the stunned victim out of the way. This occupied a fractional moment — long enough to allow another enemy to lunge in with one of the deadly darts held knife-fashion.

Monk swerved toward the open door. The dart raked along his arm, barely missed it.

It did not miss Habeas Corpus, gripped securely under Monk's arm. Before Monk's horrified gaze, the poisonous dart sank deep into the pig's neck.

Habeas Corpus emitted a shrill squeal. Almost instantly, the porker became limp.

DOC dragged the raging Monk inside, then got the door closed. With his right hand, he kept a grip on Monk. The few cavern men inside the plant offered only shouts by way of resistance.

They mounted steps. Monk still carried the limp pig. They came to large rooms which seemed to be laboratories.

"Lookit!" Renny boomed.

Through the welter of strange scientific apparatus. Renny had sighted various articles of equipment which they had brought along from the dirigible. Obviously the equipment had been brought here by the cavern men for analyzing and study, some of the things no doubt being as strange as implements from another world.

Gathering their duffel, gripping their recovered supermachine pistols, they left the laboratory. Doc rested a hand on Monk's shoulder.

"Better leave Habeas," he advised. "You'll need both hands for fighting."

"Leave Habeas for these heathens to dissect?" Monk snorted. "Nix!"

Doc said no more about that.

"Get set," he told his aides.

He opened the door a crack, looking out into the corridor which led to another part of the plant. Instantly, a sizzling jet of something streamed inside. Doc slammed the door, leaping far back inside the laboratory and dragging the others with him. The air seemed to be filled with a sudden, bitter cold. Gray stains appeared on the fiber door and spread outward over the surface.

"Br-r-r!" Renny exploded. "What's happened to the heat?"

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny barked. "Liquid air!"

"Huh?" Renny ejaculated.

"Air compressed to a liquefied state," Johnny said seriously. "Permitted to vaporize, it has the effect of producing terrific cold."

Long Tom looked toward Monk. "Bad?" he questioned.

"Liquid air is cold enough to freeze dang near anything," Monk muttered. "They probably use it in their air-conditioning system, and have pipes close to this door."

Doc Savage's strange flake-gold eyes roved the room. The door was the only exit. The windows gave on a sheer surface that even the bronze man himself could not climb. This wall was not like that of the home-cell structure, being of infinitely finer workmanship.

Ham went over to Monk, who still clutched the form of the pet pig. Monk was hit harder by what had befallen Habeas than by any misfortune he had encountered in a long time.

Ham dropped a hand on Monk's arm.

"Monk," he said slowly, "I'm damned sorry. Guess I never really meant all I said about that hog."

"Sure," Monk muttered. "I know."

Ham reached out a hand and ruffled the stiff bristles on Habeas's back. And then an unexpected thing happened. A shudder coursed over the body of Habeas Corpus. His big ears flapped feebly; from his long snout came a faint grunt.

Doc and the others crowded about. Monk's eyes were staring in disbelief. Habeas Corpus shook his head, commenced to kick ungainly legs.

"He's comin' to life!" Monk said hoarsely.

WITHIN a few minutes, Habeas Corpus was able to stand alone on the floor. His little eyes in their fat pockets sighted Ham. He grunted a friendly recognition and trotted toward him.

The dapper lawyer glared. "Monk, keep that strip of bacon away from me!"

"You said you liked Habeas!" Monk snorted.

"When did I ever say that?" Ham questioned belligerently. "Keep this flea garage away from me!"

Doc Savage had been keenly observant of Habeas Corpus's revival, and now he commented on the phenomenon.

"Break out your chemical pack, Monk," he suggested. "Let's do some experimenting."

While the others stood guard at the doors and windows, Doc and Monk worked over Habeas Corpus. They worked for a long time, surrounded by an array of tiny test tubes and extremely small phials of chemicals which had come from Monk's chemical pack, which was in itself a marvelously compact and remarkably complete analytical laboratory.

There was much angry shouting from the cavern people, and this kept up steadily, but nothing drastic was done.

Doc Savage worked steadily. Needing certain chemicals, he surveyed the big laboratory, noting the multiplicity of apparatus in view. The purpose of many of the devices, he recognized; although they differed greatly in appearance from those, for instance, to be found in Doc's New York City headquarters laboratory, their functional process was similar.

Other devices baffled him in the brief moments he devoted to examination, and carried conviction that in many respects these strange cavern people were far ahead, scientifically, of the so-called civilizations on the outside of the globe.

The cavern people apparently had no system of writing, or if they had, did not use it, for there were great filing bins to one side, and these held spools of stiff, thin, bright wire; while near-by were apparatus resembling phonographs. The bronze man recognized this as mechanism for recording speech magnetically on wire.

As time passed, the cavern men became more impatient. The violence of their assaults increased. They drilled holes in the walls; and although Doc and his men fired mercy bullets through some of the apertures, the cavern men eventually managed to insert nozzles which began spraying liquid air.

Vaporizing, the stuff condensed the moisture in the air, causing clouds of steam.

Most of the liquefied air was forced in through holes in the ceiling. Sonic of it fell on a large wad of soft cottonlike fibre which Doc had used in his ministrations to Habeas Corpus.

The fibre was knocked off the table, struck the floor with a sharp rap and, frozen incredibly solid, broke into a myriad of particles.

"I'll say that's potent stuff!" Ham said grimly.

Doc tried the doors. These were locked from the outside now, it developed.

"Br-r-r!" Monk shivered. "Surrendering means they'll probably croak us."

Doc's face was bleak and he continued to pound on the door, signifying their readiness to surrender.

"We cannot stay here," he pointed out.

THE bronze man produced a bottle of fair size and banded it about, ordering each of his men to drink. They did so, making faces over the vile green contents; then Doc drank some himself.

The men did not ask questions. They knew that the bottle was filled with some substance which the bronze man had mixed in the laboratory. It was awful stuff to the taste.

The door was opened shortly, but only wide enough to let them out one at a time, and they were seized by a number of cavern men, which made resistance futile. They were disarmed, searched thoroughly.

Their captors spent much time examining their right hands and seemed puzzled when they found nothing.

"They really thought we could kill people by waving our right hands like that bird Ool," Monk muttered.

Ham said, "What worries me is what they'll do with us now."

There was a great multitude in the streets, a throng which was ominously uneasy, and it spread around Doc Savage and his aides in waves as they were conducted toward the executive buildings.

They did not enter the buildings, but circled to a vast amphitheater in the rear, the center of which held a platform of considerable area. This was raised just sufficiently to be in view of the throng.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "Kinda looks like they're gonna make a public example of us!"

Chapter 19. EXECUTION

THE ceremonies following were unpleasantly meaningful. Unbound, but ludicrously helpless simply because they were held and led by leashlike cords attached to their necks, wrists and ankles, Doc Savage and his five men were hauled ignominiously to the rostrum and boosted upon it.

As they were thus put within view of every one, an insistent drone went up to the high roof of the weird cavern, the multitude calling out in their unintelligible tongue and, judging from the insistent tone, demanding the events be hurried.

The babble of talk drowned out completely the throbbing of the processing machine from the Central Mechanical Plant, which ticked so interminably through the golden haze; but as the time for the climax came close, the hubbub of talk quieted, although for another few seconds, echoes haunted the luminous cavern. Then these, too, sank into nothingness, so that silence settled, broken only by the throbbing from the Central Mechanical Plant, which was now audible and accentuated the grisly quiet.

Six cavern men, stalwart, half a head taller than the average of the "cold-light" people, stepped out, one beside Doc Savage and one beside each of the bronze man's five aides. Attired in hooded capes, and with their black-goggled white faces grimly emotionless, they looked the very personification of death itself.

Each of these six gripped a flat fibre case in one hand.

Anos, the dictator, came on the scene at the head of a procession which included his own daughter, Sona, the

members of the Nonverid, or governing council, and various minor functionaries. These took up a position on the rostrum.

"Damn it!" Monk growled. "If we could only talk to these people!"

The dictator, attired in a blood-red cape, stood facing the prisoners, the Nonverid flanking him on either side, and the girl, Sona, standing directly behind the father.

The young woman seemed to be arguing. She had been arguing as they entered. Her speech was vehement, but to it the dictator returned only a gesture which seemed to be the local equivalent of a handshake. This was a quick convulsing of the shoulders.

Then the girl tried to move forward to Doc and the five others, crying out loudly, angrily. She was grasped and drawn back.

"Good kid," Renny rumbled. "She's doing her bit."

Anos, the dictator, shouted out, and the six large men grasping the fibre cases stepped even closer, opened the cases and took out slender, shining objects. These were poison darts.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" gulped Johnny. "The executioners!"

ANOS cried out again. The executioners leaped suddenly.

Doc and his men were taken, in a way, by surprise. They had expected more preliminaries. They struggled, struck, wrenched about. But several men were on each leash, and they were spread-eagled in a trice, helpless.

The darts were plunged into their flesh.

The results which followed were much like those that had accompanied the death of Beery Hosmer, long ago, in front of the candy store in New York. Doc and his men flounced about, struggling feebly, and their movements became weaker, less violent, so that, finally, when the leashes which held them were slackened, they did not move at all.

Anos, the dictator, said in his native tongue, "Justice is done."

The girl, Sona, wailed shrilly.

On the outskirts of the multitude, a man detached himself and scuttled away. So great was the interest in the execution that his action was not noticed.

THE man who had departed so furtively went by devious ways to a spot where he encountered Ool, Watches Bowen and his men, who were gathered with a considerable number of vicious-looking members of the Stor, or forced labor squadrons.

"The giant man and his five are dead," advised the messenger, addressing Ool.

"It is good," said Ool. Then Ool spoke his stilted English to Watches Bowen.

"The bronze man has been executed," he said. "We will rush the Central Mechanical Plant now. Once we reach it, members of the Stor, who are working with us, will admit us. The plant is strong; we can hold it."

And by cutting off the warmth from the air, and the 'cold light,' as you call it, we can make our own terms."

"Let's go," said Watches.

They advanced. Showing no scruples, no human feeling, they cut down the first cavern man to discover them, using a blast from a submachine gun. At the terrifying roar of the gun, bedlam broke loose in the multitude gathered to witness the execution.

Anos, the dictator, kept his head, and dispatched squadrons of men to take up positions in various buildings commanding approaches to the Central Mechanical Plant. These were equipped with the little air tubes launching the poisoned darts.

Watches Bowen defeated the menace of the darts by a simple device. He and his men, according to a prearranged plan, rushed a certain building and got large sheets of the compressed building fibre. This material was light, and the darts would not penetrate it. They served as shields. The advance on the Central Mechanical Plant began.

Complications developed to aid them, complications which they had planned. Members of the Stor, who were at work -- not having been permitted to witness the execution--began revolting. Somehow they had gotten darts and the air guns, and they proceeded to wreak destruction of their own.

From the fabrication plants, they ran along ramps toward the home-cells, or habitation structures. On top of one of these, Honey Hamilton had established a machine gun nest.

The cavern men released repeated barrages of poisoned darts, but these had little effect, since the ramps were protected by waist-high walls, and Honey Hamilton was sheltered by a parapet.

Closer and closer, the raiders came to the Central Mechanical Plant. Honey Hamilton, shooting expertly, kept down the worst of the opposition.

Those of the Stor in the Central Mechanical Plant, having overcome their guards, got the doors open and stood in the apertures, howling a welcome, as well as advice.

It seemed that Watches Bowen and Ills crew would soon enter.

But there was an interruption.

ANOS, the dictator, had himself taken charge of a picked squad in a desperate effort to stem the raid. He had bunched his men, and they rushed in a body, striving by superior force to beat down Watches Bowen and his shielded party.

Honey Hamilton, that he might not be cut off on top of the home-cell, had descended, and with his guard was rushing along the street. Fortune brought him in directly behind the dictator's squad. The next instant, they were embroiled in a hand-to-hand fight.

Yelling, Honey Hamilton managed to fight clear of the fray. He jacked a fresh ammo drum into his machine gun, and, in order that its recoil would not get the instrument away from his control, he snapped it to a large belt which encircled his middle. The bit of delay was his undoing.

Anos, the dictator, himself, rushed Honey Hamilton. Anos gripped one of the darts, and was endeavoring to get it into a pneumatic tube. He gave that up as being too slow, and hurled it, spear fashion, at the mouselike

killer.

Honey Hamilton dodged, but just a little too late, for the dart caught him in the face and clung there, flipping up and down as he jumped about.

But he did not jump for long. His eyes lost their glitter; for a fleeting instant, they held a bewildered expression as if the brain behind them were groping for something. Then the eyes blinked shut. The machine gun fell and hung by the belt fastenings. Honey Hamilton upset on the smooth stone.

Anos, the dictator, lunged and tried to pick up the machine gun, but the belt fastenings, being unfamiliar, baffled him, and instead, he lifted the dead thug up bodily, using the lifeless form as a shield. Anos had some luck then, or perhaps it was not luck, for he had observed closely the position of the hands when the gun wrought its havoc. He found the trigger.

The weapon's bawl wrought havoc on friend and foe alike. Shrieks arose. Men went down. Misdirected slugs streamed up to the roof, flattened, and came back like slow leaden rain. Cries from both sides pierced the uproar.

The effect of having one of the guns turned on them was unnerving to the rebelling Stor members. They wavered, milled. Then they began to retreat.

"Hold it!" Watches squawled, forgetting his command could not be understood.

Ool put the same orders into the cavern dialect, but without perceptible results. The Stor men fell back. The matter of personal safety dictated that Watches, Ool and the others keep in their midst, for men of the Stor were being used as human shields to a degree.

The dictator's seized machine gun stuttered to emptiness.

That changed the situation. Watches Bowen roared and rushed forward. He had his peculiar watch out, whirling it on the end of its stout chain. With hoarse cries, the Stor lunged to help him. The end came quickly, for the darts were no match for the machine guns.

Anos, the dictator, was taken prisoner, and along with him, various members of the ruling Nonverid, who had been with him. This had the effect of breaking the backbone of the entire defense. These cavern people were not a fighting race, and with their leadership shattered, were virtually helpless.

The raiders went on and took the Central Mechanical Plant.

TWENTY minutes later, in a latticed chamber of the executive building, Anos, the dictator, his daughter Sona, the entire membership of the Nouverid, and certain other dignitaries, stood prisoners.

"They must be executed," said Ool. "That will insure us having no more trouble."

Members of the Stor, who packed the room, roared their approval of that suggestion.

"Sure," said Watches Bowen. "It's jake by me."

Ool translated, and the roars of fierce approval from the Stor echoed to the cavern roof.

"I got an idea," Watches said. "Get the bodies of Doc Savage and his men and bring 'em here. We'll bury the whole crowd together."

Ool agreed, and dispatched men to bring the bodies.

"We will hold off the execution for a time," he said.

"Why?" Watches wanted to know.

"The secret of the 'cold light' may not be on the Voice wires in the laboratory file bins," Ool explained. "We can get the secret by studying the machinery, of course, but that will take much time. We may find it convenient to make some of these prisoners tell us, that we may be saved the labor of a search."

The men sent to bring the bodies of Doc Savage and his five aides, returned unexpectedly soon. They were excited, and stuttered out excitedly to Ool.

Ool swore one of the oaths he had picked up in association with Watches Bowen.

"What's wrong?" Watches demanded.

"The bodies have disappeared!" Ool explained gloomily.

Chapter 20. COLD FATE

THE failure to find the bodies of Doc Savage and his aides worried Watches Bowen and the others, but they did not let it interfere with their desires. They left the prisoners under guard and headed for the Central Mechanical Plant and its laboratories to search the voice wires in the file bins in an endeavor to locate the formula for the making of the "cold light."

"The absence of the bodies means nothing," Watches snorted. "Somebody took 'em away. That's all."

"Ah done feel bettah if Ah see dat bronze man put in de ground wit' mah own eyes," Ham-hock Piney advised. He shook his knob of a head on its many chins. "Ah don' know if Ah would feel plumb safe even den."

"Nuts!" said Watches.

Ham-hock moistened thick lips. "Watches, yo'-all nevah did get to give dat Doc Savage man de special watch what yo'-all been carryin' foah him."

"I'll bury it with him," Watches said.

The mechanism of the Central Mechanical Plant was throbbing steadily, monotonously, as they approached the wide doors. Although the excitement was seemingly over, Watches and his party had brought along a group of the Stor, in the center of whom they walked, in order to be safe from an unexpected attack.

They had sought to gather up the poison darts and the pneumatic tubes used to discharge them, but many of the darts, they knew, were still at large.

When they were very close to the Mechanical Plant entrance, things happened. There was a sudden hooting

roar, a tremendous sound that blasted up a million echoes.

Watches and his men had heard it before.

"Ol' bronze bad luck ag'in!" Ham-hock Piney wailed. "Ah knowed he wasn't dead!"

The outer fringe of Stor was collapsing, mowed down by mercy bullets from the rapidfirers.

"Back!" Watches roared. "Get under cover!"

In the uproar, it was impossible that many could have heard, but hearing was not necessary. shrinking instinctively before the devastating hail of chemical-charged lead slugs, the men poured backward around the nearest corner. Not all made it. Fully a score of the Stor had gone down.

While Ool was getting some sort of organization, Hamhock muttered to Watches, "Ah reckons yo'-al goin' have a chance to use dat special watch, huh?"

Watches could only moan, "But I thought he was dead!" They retreated on around to the other side of the building, a home-cell habitation structure, and took up positions behind a low ramp where they could not be reached by the supermachine pistols.

Ool and Watches conferred earnestly; then Ool, who knew the metropolis well, pointed out a route whereby they could gain the nearest door of the Central Mechanical Plant.

Watches ordered fresh drums in the submachine guns. He planted himself and his men in the midst of the remaining Stor, and the charge started.

They reached the door of the Mechanical Plant with no losses in Watches' group, and with only a loss of about a third of the Stor allies. This was because the hooting of the supermachine pistols ceased when it was evident Watches and his party could not be kept out of the Plant.

The reason for that interruption in firing was soon evident. Doc Savage and his men had retreated and also entered the Central Mechanical Plant, but by another door.

Shots began to crash in the confines of the great plant.

Over and over, Ham-hock Piney muttered, "Dat bronze boy jes' ain't human."

ACTUAL explanation of how Doc Savage had maneuvered the escape from the dart death would probably have been incomprehensible to Ham-hock, for it entailed the use of numerous chemicals—the concocting, in short, of an antidote.

The fact that Habeas Corpus had not perished from the dart venom had indicated it was not necessarily as fatal as they had at first thought. The survival of Habeas was simple — hogs are frequently immune to snake bites, due possibly to their fatty structure. Doc's work in the laboratory, while besieged, had been for the purpose of concocting the antidote which he had persuaded his men to drink just before their capture.

As a matter of fact, the inoculation had not been as effective as was hoped, Doc and his aides all having lost consciousness at the execution. But the serum had prevented death, and they had revived after a time. The confusion during the thick of the fighting, had covered their escape.

"Ah wishes Ah was back home!" Ham-hock Piney was wailing somewhere.

Big-fisted Renny rumbled, "He'll wish it even more if I can get hold of him!"

The Watches Bowen party were below, behind a fabulous tier of pipes which seemed to be heavily insulated and very strong.

"We will try to get above them," Doc said grimly.

There was a series of rungs, hardly a stairway, but intended as such, to the right. It worked up through more tubes, past tanks. The ticking of the plant was a sound of enormous volume here. They reached a spot where they could look down in a machine room, and there they saw the source of the ticking.

It was a huge compressor which worked with rhythmic strokes, actuating tremendous pistons.

They went on. Twice, Watches Bowen's party saw them. Bullets rained. Doc got a bad scratch over one leg. Then Watches Bowen and Ool whipped their Stor allies into a compact group and forced them to charge forward.

Up the stairs, the Stor men came, realizing they were being used simply as shields, but more afraid of the raging threats behind than the possible death in front.

"Holy cow!" Renny stuttered. "They're liable to head us off!"

The crash of shots inside the Plant was terrific. In various spots, cavern men not engaged in the fighting were yelling out. Some seemed to be battling scattered members of the Stor.

Doc Savage and his men reached a narrow ledge which had a parapet that offered some shelter. They crouched behind it, unlimbered their machine pistols. The hooting blasts brought Watches Bowen's gang up sharp.

The Stor shields were more reluctant now. They milled about, hung back. Watches cursed them. Ham-hock Piney was too seared to be of much aid. Ool was making fierce darting gestures with his mysterious right hand, menacing the Stor men.

Watches Bowen fell to glaring at the ledge where Doc Savage and his men lay. Below the ledge was a sheer drop of fully fifty feet, and then moving machinery.

"Here's where I deliver that special watch!" Bowen gritted.

He dived a hand into a pocket.

THE timepiece which Watches Bowen brought out was the one which he had repeatedly assured members of his gang was a special gift destined for Doc Savage. The watch was unusually large. Bowen drew back an arm to throw it.

Doc Savage saw the move.

"Don't!" His remarkable voice was a crash of sound.

"Sure!" Watches yelled. "I'll do that!"

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

With a quick twist of thumb and forefinger, the mob chief turned the stem of the watch as if he were winding it. There started a faintly audible whirl. His arm arched back, and he prepared to throw.

It was doubtful if Watches Bowen ever fully comprehended what happened next. Ool, apparently sensing Watches' intention, clawed out desperately to stop the throw. Their arms collided.

The watch flew forward and upward and landed in a maze of pipes almost over their heads.

Watches screamed, "Damn you! What -- "

"Fool!" Ool said. "The pipes are carrying what you call liquid air

Who--o--m! The watch was a small, violent grenade, and it let go. Steel fragments rained from above. There was a shrill roar, not of powder unleashed, but of something else -- something gray and smoking that boiled down in great sheets from rent pipes.

"The liquid air!" Ool screamed. "Run!"

His words were in the cavern language. Watches and the other thugs did not understand, at first -- and when they did, it was too late, for the liquid air was spilling upon them and vaporizing, causing unearthly cold.

It engulfed Ool and Watches Bowen, and seemed to congeal them where they stood, for the insidious stuff came down in tremendous quantities, by hundreds of gallons.

Ool, having brief advance knowledge of what was going to happen, leaped and gained a little distance, but he fell down trying to wedge between pipes, and he lay there, his right arm outstretched through the pipes so that it was visible to Doc Savage and his men where they stood on the balcony. Doc had a pistol which he had seized, intending to shoot down the watch grenade in the air, were it thrown, a trick he could have accomplished, having done so on other occasions.

Ool's hideous right hand weaved, twisted for a time, then became still, for he was in the path of the flood of liquid air.

Vapor, like steam, was coming from the flood of liquid air in tremendous quantities, filling all of the Mechanical Plant.

Doc Savage and his men, able to see nothing, retreated, taking up positions at the doors, lest Watches Bowen or some of the others come out.

None came.

SOMETHING like ten hours saw the end of the Stor revolt which Watches Bowen and Ool had fostered -- the men of the Stor did not stand up for long against the machine pistols of Doc Savage and his aides.

Anos, the dictator, Sona, his daughter, and members of the council were released, unharmed.

Since sufficient time had elapsed for the liquid air to vaporize in the Central Mechanical Plant, Doc Savage and his party entered to examine the remains of Watches Bowen, Ool and the others. The sight was not pleasant. The incredibly low temperatures of the liquid air had done strange things to the bodies; one, apparently freezing while sprawled over a pipe, had later upset, and being brittle, had broken as if it were glass.

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

It was Monk who first made an examination of Ool's right hand, which had not been affected greatly by the liquid air, projecting as it did through the pipes.

"The light dawns!" he exploded. "Lookit!"

The secret of Ool's hand-waving death was a bit complicated, but simply understood. It was a tiny pneumatic cylinder, discharging a dart, and this, being of a color almost identical with his hands, would escape ordinary eyes. It was held in place by a particularly strong adhesive which did not harden, and thus being quickly detachable, could be removed and hidden quickly.

That last, it was evident, accounted for Doc Savage not finding it on the occasions when he had searched Ool.

Ool's particular dart was very small, and driven with such force that it entered, bulletlike, entirely under the skin, leaving a wound that was perceptible to no ordinary examination.

Although Doc Savage and his men had not been equipped with the minute hand darts when they escaped from the latticed-windowed jail, it was evident that the guard, after seeing Doc's hand wave in butterfly fashion, had surmised the girl Sona had given Doc one of the small hand darts. It was this ruse which had caused his fright and allowed Doc and his aides to escape.

THE final fight in the Central Mechanical Plant marked the end of Doc Savage's trouble with the cavern people, it being demonstrated that he was a friend.

Learning their language, so that he could speak it even passably, required the expenditure of nearly a month. Not the entire time was spent learning the speech, however. There were other things -- experiments with the strange "cold light," for instance. Those were not so encouraging.

It developed that the manner of illuminating the cavern air was not efficient where there was any considerable amount of moisture in suspension. That made it virtually useless for the outer world. The cavern air was fully as dry as that over the Sahara, and even it was a bit damp for efficiency at times.

"It works nicely here," Long Tom expressed it. "But it's no good outside."

Monk snorted. "Too bad we didn't know that. Watches Bowen and Ool could have had it."

The question of the population of the cavern came up. Doc offered them transportation to the outer world. It was feasible, using the dirigible.

The cavern people asked many questions about the outer world. Doc told them. They learned of blizzards, of summer heat, tornadoes, snowstorms, of modern transportation. Then they talked it over.

"We stay here," Anos, the dictator, advised Doc Savage. "Yours does, not sound like such an attractive world. But we do have one boon to ask."

"What is it?" Doc questioned.

"Keep the existence of this place secret," said the other. "Revealing its existence can accomplish naught but trouble for us."

Doc Savage agreed. It was not the only fantastic secret he was keeping. Fantastic things had a way of coming in his direction, he reflected.

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

IT was not true that the departure of Doc Savage from the cavern land was unmarked by regret. The remarkable bronze man had made an impression, especially among the members of the scientific groups, who found his knowledge surprising.

The girl, Sona, was reluctant to see him go. That was evident. And out of that, there grew a parting complication as Doc Savage and his aides, having been guided to the outer cleft where their dirigible still rested, and having gotten it ready for the air, prepared to take off.

Habeas Corpus could not be found.

There was an uproar. Departure was delayed while Monk charged about, hunting his porker. Eventually, he appeared with Habeas.

"Where's Ham?" he howled. "I'll wring that shyster's neck!"

Ham was, prudently, not in sight.

"The princess wanted a souvenir of our visit," Monk roared angrily. "What did this Ham do? I ask you? The shyster up and gave her Habeas!"

The homely chemist grinned.

"Now, if she had wanted me for a souvenir, I might have stayed," he chuckled. "But leave this hog? Nix!"

THE END