

QUEST OF QUI

A Doc Savage Adventure, by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. THE DRAGON SHIP

THERE WAS no wind, and the authorities later decided this accounted for what occurred, for had there been a wind, many things would doubtlessly have been different.

Had there been a wind, a baffling mystery might never have come to the notice of the world, and to the attention of Doc Savage. A number of men might have gone on living. And a scheme of consummate horror would probably have been executed with success.

It was, however, dead calm on the Atlantic Ocean off the outer tip of Long Island. The calm had persisted since dawn, and it was aggravating weather for sailboats, and at the same time very nice weather for power boats.

The Sea Scream was a power boat, all eighty feet of her, mahogany, teak and brass, and she bowled along at almost twenty knots. The Sea Scream was a yacht, and she had cost somewhat less than a quarter of a million, which made her owner an important man, on the principle that any one who can pay nearly a quarter of a million for a plaything is important.

But neither the Sea Scream nor her wealthy owner nor her guests were of special importance to the world that

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day, as far as news was concerned. Millionaires and their yachts are a dime a dozen, as concerns news, around Long Island Sound.

What happened to those on the Sea Scream was important. It was also amazing, so much so that citizens in London, Paris, and elsewhere read about it in their newspapers that afternoon.

The Sea Scream was barely out of sight of land when the sailor at the wheel shaded his eyes, squinted, then picked up a pair of binoculars and focused them.

"Something dead ahead, sir," he called.

The Sea Scream lunged on, bows knocking up spray. Owner, guests and crew glanced idly ahead, not nearly so interested as they were going to be soon.

The helmsman used the binoculars again, staring very hard this time, after which a blankness came on his face.

"I hope to swab a deck!" he grunted. "Captain, sir. Have a look."

The snappily uniformed captain took the binoculars and stared through them.

"Bless me!" he said, and hastily went to the owner.

"Want to have a glance at an unusual vessel?" he asked, and presented the glasses.

The owner looked. So did the guests, one a lady. They murmured, interested.

"Strange-looking thing," said the owner.

"Never saw one like it," offered a guest.

"I have," said the lady. "A picture, I mean. In my history books, when I was a girl."

More to be polite than anything else, for his job depended on that to an extent, the skipper asked, "What would you call the craft, miss?"

"A Viking dragon ship," replied the woman.

THE MEN laughed, for the idea was, of course, a little preposterous, Viking dragon ships having gone out of style shortly after the days of Eric the Red and other noted Norsemen.

But the woman was correct. The Sea Scream swept up to the strange craft.

Double-ended, perhaps sixty feet long, the vessel had some of the aspects of a giant, fat canoe. Bow and stern reared up to support platforms, and amidships was deck planking, while along the rail, on the outside were fastened round things of rusty steel, objects which certainly resembled shields such as were carried by ancient warriors. There was a mast, and a sail draped around it, unfilled because there was no wind. The sail seemed to be made of animal skins from which the hair had been removed.

There was not a soul in sight on the decks of the weird craft. One of the yacht guests had an idea.

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"Bet it broke away from some water carnival," he laughed.

"Let's go aboard," suggested the lady.

"Of course," agreed the owner. "It should be interesting."

Interesting! So it was to be.

The Sea Scream captain shouted orders, and the yacht slowed her engines and nosed up alongside the Viking dragon ship, the sea being so calm that there was no necessity for going aboard in the tender.

Surprising aspects of the Viking craft became evident on closer inspection. For one thing, the vessel appeared very old, and it could be seen that the hull had been put together with thongs of hide. Some of the hide seemed new, as did the sail, but the shields along the rail were amazingly rusted.

The Viking ship had a smell, too, a very strong one. It was not a smell of death, but rather that distinctive aroma that arises where men live for a long time with no bathing facilities available.

"Take a line aboard," the Sea Scream captain ordered a sailor.

The sailor sprang aboard the dragon ship with the line, which he made fast around the mast. Then things happened.

The sailor thrust both arms high over his head and screamed most horribly, after which his head slued forward, hanging with a hideous slackness, and he fell to the deck.

Sticking in the man's back was a spear which had a thongwrapped haft no more than three feet long.

FANTASTIC FIGURES swarmed out of the dragon ship hold. They were men, but what men. They wore helmets of burnished steel, each helmet adorned with a fearsome pair of horns. The faces under the helmets might have been bearded visages of the very Norse freebooters of a day ten centuries past.

"Vikings!" the lady on the yacht gasped.

The whiskered horde on the dragon ship now boarded the Sea Scream. There was not a firearm among them, but they gripped spears and swords which were sharp, and which they showed no scruples about using.

The yacht captain tried to run to his cabin, where he had a gun, but a spear, ponderously cast, impaled one of his legs and he upset on the deck and lay there making faces.

The bearded raiders from the Viking ship began to bawl hoarsely. Not a word they said was understood by those on the yacht. But there were accompanying gestures which conveyed full meaning. The yachtsmen were being ordered to change ships.

There was some more fighting first, after which the yachtsmen, whipped, obeyed. They were ordered into a stuffy forward hold and the hatch slammed down on them.

The yachtsmen now heard sounds which were later the source of much newspaper conjecture – they heard some kind of a cargo being moved from one craft to the other. They never were able to decide what the cargo was, but some of them voiced the impression that it was something alive.

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When the yachtsmen were finally released, it was because the bearded freebooters could not get the yacht Sea Scream going. The whiskered ones made faces and bawled, and finally collared the engineer of the yacht – he wore greasy coveralls which indicated his profession – and hauled him onto the yacht. The frightened engineer put the engines in full speed ahead, and the yacht pulled away, leaving the former occupants on the dragon ship.

The bearded pirates now threw the engineer overboard, and he swam to the dragon ship.

The Sea Scream made several wild circles, while the hairy thieves danced and howled on deck, and apparently experimented with the modern steering apparatus.

It was during this that the golden-haired girl was glimpsed.

DESCRIPTIONS OF the fair companion of the bearded freebooters, as later given, varied greatly. The lady off the yacht declared she was a she-tigress with the devil written all over her, and as homely as sin. But most of the men turned in a favorable report on her charms. In fact, they agreed generally that she was very personable, entirely too sweet a thing for such company as she was keeping.

The engineer, who had been taken aboard to start the yacht, made a startling revelation. He had seen the girl at close range. She was a knock-out.

Furthermore, the young woman was an unwilling guest of the whiskered men. They were leading her about by a long thong tied to one of her ankles.

At any rate, the Sea Scream was soon lost to sight of her frightened owner, who with his guests had been left aboard the dragon ship. The yacht, all noted, was headed toward New York City.

About noon, a breeze came up. The yachtsmen sailed the dragon ship into a harbor near the tip of Long Island, finding in doing so that the ship was extremely seaworthy.

The yachting victims of this twentieth century Viking raid promptly found themselves, once they convinced their listeners they were not crazy or lying, objects of feverish interest, both to the Coast Guard, and the newspapers. A swarm of photographers and reporters arrived. A news reel cameraman came in a plane. He got shots of the dragon ship, and his plane flew them back to New York, where that very night they were shown in the movie theaters.

The news reel shots of the Viking dragon ship got William Harper Littlejohn interested. William Harper Littlejohn was a very erudite gentleman, but he occasionally attended the cinema for relaxation.

Johnny was archaeologist enough to recognize, even in the news reel shots, the undoubted genuineness of the Viking dragon ship. He left the theater in haste.

He called Doc Savage. Doc was out of town. Johnny took a plane, the next morning, for the harbor where the dragon ship lay.

THE ARRIVAL of Johnny on the scene created a furor among the newspapermen, who needed new angles for their stories, anyway, since absolutely no trace had been found of the yacht Sea Scream. The Sea Scream had vanished as completely as if sunken.

Appearance of Johnny, to the newspapermen, meant Doc Savage was on the job, for every one knew Johnny was associated with Doc. And Doc Savage, man of bronze, mental wizard, physical giant extraordinary, was

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big news, all the more so because Doc shunned publicity most effectively.

Johnny did not even bother to deny that Doc was interested in the Viking dragon ship. He went ahead and examined the craft. He used his monocle magnifier on the ponderous oars, almost too heavy for one man to lift, and on various hammered copper cooking utensils. He scrutinized the plank fastenings. He studied the stitching which held the skins composing the sail. Those watching him realized he was very interested indeed. A news reel cameraman took pictures of his every move.

Finally, Johnny secured from his plane several ponderous and rare volumes on history which he had brought along. He poured over these intently. He seemed to be learning things.

The news reel men asked him for a statement. They had asked numerous times, but on this occasion, Johnny consented.

"Oracular cognoscence of certain recondite aspects. I will hypothesize," said Johnny, who never used a small word where he could insert a big one.

The news reel man looked stunned by the verbal flow, but hastily got his camera and voice recorder going.

Johnny fingered his monocle and began.

"Disquisitional recapitulation of imperspicuous symptomatology tends to an unequivocal belief," he announced.

Twenty million movie-goers were destined to choke over those words. The news reel concern finally had to run a summary by a commentator at the end, translating the erudite Johnny's remarks for the American hoi polloi.

The gist of it was that Johnny was thoroughly convinced that the Viking dragon ship was genuine, and that it had been built many centuries ago and repaired more recently. Furthermore, certain markings, coats of arms, in effect, discernible on the craft proved it had belonged to the fleet of one certain ancient Viking freebooter, "Tarnjen," by name.

Tarnjen, stated Johnny, had been the bad boy of his day, so bad indeed that he had been chased out of Viking land with a number of ships and what loot he had amassed, which was probably considerable. A year or two later, Tarnjen had returned with only one ship, a vastly humiliated soul. His other ships and men had been taken by the Qui. Just who the Qui were, historians did not seem certain. Some history tomes suggested that Qui was a name Tarnjen had given to some savage tribe on some remote continent.

Whoever or whatever Qui was, they had taken most of Tarnjen's men and ships, all of his loot, and sent him back, thoroughly broken. Qui, then, was a mystery.

Such was the gist of Johnny's recital.

This was the beginning of the mystery of Qui, a mystery from which amazing things came.

JOHNNY RETURNED to New York, but he was still interested; and since Doc Savage was still out of town, overseeing the construction of a charity hospital somewhere, and since there was no excitement brewing. Johnny had nothing to do but dabble with the mystery of Qui and the Viking dragon ship and the vanished yacht, Sea Scream, which still had not been found.

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The raid of the Vikings was unusual news. It went far and wide. Reports came in. A liner captain had seen the dragon ship off Cape Cod, he reported. A fisherman claimed he had seen such a vessel in the Nova Scotia fog.

Johnny digested those two reports. They intrigued him. It seemed the dragon ship had come down from the north, had met the Sea Scream, and the freebooters had traded their craft for a more modern one which did not depend on the wind.

The upshot of it was that, some days later, Johnny was alone in a plane flying along the Labrador coast. Johnny had many accomplishments besides big words. Flying was one of them. Doc Savage had taught him, and Doc had an amazing faculty of transferring some of his own skill to those whom he instructed.

It was late afternoon. A snow blanket was beneath Johnny's plane. To the right lay a jagged, rock-fanged shore line. This was a wilderness, primeval, cold, unpopulated. A fishing village, passed hours ago, had been the last sign of human habitation on the bleak Labrador coast.

Johnny peered overside often. He used binoculars. His ship cruised along a bare five hundred feet above the white terrain.

An ice floe out at sea held his attention for a time, mainly because of its ominous aspect, and also because there was a school of seals on its edge. Natural life always interested Johnny.

Johnny was not quite sure what he was looking for, so he kept an eye open for anything of interest. That was why he went to investigate the smoke column.

The smoke was actually not a column. It was small, a gray yarn which whipped in the frigid Arctic gale. But it was the only trace of life the bony archaeologist and geologist had seen in hours. So he banked his plane over in that direction.

The fire was in the lee of a cathedral-like spire of stone. Snowdrifts were all about. The beach was close, a necklace of rocks, ice-crust, which rimmed the shore line.

Johnny was close overhead before he saw the man.

The man lay on his back and the snow was red beside him. His arms made feeble, horrible motions, movements that were not a supplication to the plane above, for the man seemed not to know that the ship was moaning over him.

The man on the snow was obviously in a bad way. The red patch was certainly leakage from a wound. No dogs, no sleeping roll, could be seen.

Johnny now made one of the biggest mistakes of his life. He landed his plane.

Chapter 2. THE DEVILS OF QUI

IT WAS a rocky region, but there were stretches free of boulders. The snow was deep, and obviously covered with a hard crust. The wind – it was a fair breeze – was picking the loose flakes up and carrying them along in small, detached clouds. Johnny looked at the plane thermometer and saw that it was very close to zero – cold for this time of year, even this far north, since down in New York, it was early summer.

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Johnny landed by the simple expedient of cranking the streamlined landing gear up. He absent-mindedly cranked it partially down before he thought and sat the plane down on its belly. The craft was designed for that, but the nose had to be kept up throughout to protect the propeller. Johnny had not landed on snow for a long time, and he miscalculated the distance the plane would slide, with the result that he almost, but not quite, coasted into a nest of boulders.

The minute the plane stopped, the crust on the snow collapsed, letting the ship sink down to its wings, and Johnny got out muttering big-worded imprecations. He foresaw some trouble in leaving the place.

Had he known exactly how much trouble he was going to have, the knowledge might conceivably have turned his hair white.

Johnny walked to the wounded man.

One peculiarity about the man's face struck Johnny distinctly. It was a full, crude face equipped with a horse's mouth, small bird eyes, and a nose of no consequence, but that was not what stood out distinctly. Many men have ugly faces. Not so many, however have their forehead, nose and eye area weather-beaten until the skin resembles the top of an old shoe, while the rest of their cheeks, jowls and neck remain the pale-blue color of skim milk.

Johnny absently decided this man had worn a very heavy beard for a long time, and had only recently shaved it off. Then Johnny began his examination.

The man had collapsed, and with good reason, for he had been shot three times. No, four. Johnny found the fourth through the man's foot, where he had not bled much. The other bullets were in his body, and they had bled plenty of scarlet blood.

The bullet victim's parka of fur, bearskin pants and big, pliable hightop moccasins looked extremely new, and Johnny, curious, twisted back the hood until he could see the collar band. Nothing there. He looked at the parka skirt. No Eskimo squaw had made these garments. They bore the label of a high-class sporting goods house on New York's Madison Avenue.

There was nothing else on the wounded man's person to give the slightest indication of who he was or what had befallen him.

Johnny ran back to the plane, saw it had sunken even deeper in the snow, expressed his opinion of that happening with several glossologic gems, and got a first-aid kit out of it.

The bullet victim was talking quite calmly when Johnny skittered across the snow crust to him.

"The secret of Qui is twelve hundred years old, Kettler," he said. "You got the breaks when you found the place the first time, but you'll never find it again without that goldenhaired girl."

IN A rational sounding, measured voice, the man talked to the one named Kettler, and he looked straight at bony Johnny as he talked, as if he had mistaken Johnny for the person, Kettler. But it was not that. The man was delirious, out of his head. He would talk for a while, then he would collapse. Johnny knew how it went.

"Kettler, I tell you I didn't let her go deliberately," the man said earnestly. "She banged me on the head with a rock. Look, you can see where she hit me."

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He did not point, but Johnny looked, then blinked, for there was a fearsome bruise on the man's forehead. But the wounded man was still talking.

"She ran away," the man said. "I don't know where she went. I think she went north, back toward Qui. She ain't normal, that dame. But what else can you expect from Qui?"

The man stopped and breathed a little deeper than usual, and the result was a gurgling explosion that shot a crimson spray through his teeth and over the surrounding snow. From the number of blood spots frozen in the snow, that must have happened before. It was more than a minute before he went on.

"Kettler, you can't find Qui again without the golden-haired dame."

He had said that before.

"I couldn't help her scrambling, Kettler," he said. "Don't shoot me."

He said that much too calmly.

"Damn you, Kettler," he said. "You've shot me. You left me here to croak. I hope you never get a smell of Qui again."

It was like listening to a story from fully conscious lips. But it was horrible, because of the dead quality of the tone. The man was dying, but dying so slowly that he might go on thus for hours, for days if he got proper treatment. He might not die, even.

"You won't find Qui, Kettler," said the man. "Don't like that, do you? Too bad, ain't it? Qui will go on like it is for maybe another twelve hundred years. Sure it will, when you don't get back to do your killing. Damn your killing, Kettler. I didn't like that part of the scheme."

Then, so suddenly that it surprised Johnny a little, the wounded man's mumbling became unintelligible. A gout of scarlet had worked up in the fellow's throat, and it bubbled there, making the words inarticulate.

Johnny turned him over, and as one would drain out a drowning man, cleared the victim's bronchial passages so more words could come.

"Newspapers full of stuff about that Viking ship," the man said. "Lot of guessing – nowhere near truth – never connect it with Qui."

Johnny again tried to clear his throat, but it was no go, for the internal wounds must have opened. With bandages and and opiate, Johnny went to work.

It was cold. He had some trouble keeping snow from blowing into the wounds while he bandaged them. The wind in the rocks sounded like violins playing far away.

Out of the fiddling of the wind in the rocks, the moan of the airplane motor came so gradually that it was quite loud before Johnny noticed it'

IT WAS a low-wing monoplane, fitted with pontoons for landing on water, and the pontoons in turn equipped with ski like runners. The ship had two engines, fitted with shutter cowls, and their exhausts must be carried through some cabinheating attachment, judging by their hissing quality. An all metal ship, Johnny concluded.

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The plane was coming down the wind, and Johnny, staring toward it, was bothered by snow which the wind swept into his eyes. He stepped backward to get in the lee of a boulder only somewhat smaller than a suburban garage, where there was some shelter. It chanced thus that he saw two grooves in the snow, deep grooves, and more than a dozen feet apart. There was one point where they had not filled with snow, although they must have been made hours ago. Johnny looked at them closely.

"I'll be superamalgamated," he murmured.

The grooves had been made by the landing gear of the plane above, or one amazingly like it. The particular marks of the ski runners attached under the pontoons could be picked out.

The other plane moaned overhead. Its color was the aluminum alloy of its natural metal, and it looked new. Men in the cabin – they numbered several – were all looking down,

The men all wore masks.

The instant he saw the masks, Johnny sprinted for his own plane. He had suddenly become in the greatest of hurries. He was in a jam. He did not need the twang of a bullet off a near-by rock – a sound he now heard – to tell him there was trouble.

Johnny reached his plane, which had broken through the soft crust. Its nose was almost against boulders. He grabbed the tail and tried to turn the ship around by main strength. No go. He only broke through the crust and floundered.

The aluminum ship had spun away, but now it came streaking back again, and men were cocked out of its windows, using high-powered rifles. Johnny could see their shoulders jerk as the rifles recoiled. He heard characteristic little patting noises of bullets into the snow about him.

Johnny crawled under the tail of his own ship, burrowing deep into the snow, got under the cabin, scrambled up, and was inside. Bullets hitting the cabin sounded like firecrackers exploding. The cabin was encased in a membrane of armor alloy which, due to the metallurgical genius of Doc Savage, was light and proof against ordinary missiles.

The aluminum plane went over with a gusty whoop, so low that its air disturbance rocked Johnny's plane a little, and sucked up a vortex of loose snow. Bullets came down like rain.

Johnny jacked the self-starters and got his engine going. His propeller was not only adjustable pitch, but could be reversed. He reversed it, not sure that it would do any good, but not wanting to be pulled forward into the rocks where the prop would club itself to pieces.

The aluminum ship was coming back. Johnny produced a weapon which resembled an oversized automatic pistol, with a big drum of a magazine. This was a supermachine pistol perfected by Doc Savage, and its chief wonder was not its incredible rapidity of fire, but the variety of bullets which it could discharge.

Johnny searched through a case which held ammunition drums, all neatly designated with numerals. He was hunting one which held bullets charged with a particular chemical that vaporized, even in air as cold as this, and gave off a gas that, when drawn into a carburetor, rendered the mixture unexplosive. The chemical was another of Doc Savage's gems.

Who-o-o-m! The plane jumped a full twenty feet in the air. Its back broke in the middle. It fell in two parts. Smoke and snow made a cloud all about it.

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Johnny was out of the plane. He was not sure how that had happened. Too much flame, smoke, noise. He was in snow up to his neck. Outflung arms supported him on the crust. The smoke fumes stung his nostrils.

"Dynamite!" he mumbled.

The other plane boomed off. Wind pulled the smoke away. Parts of the plane, its contents, were scattered about. The other ship stood on a wingtip, came about in a vertical bank, and started back.

Johnny hoisted himself out of the snow. Handfuls of snow jumped up around him. Bullets! He ran. He saw a metal case to the left. It had spilled out of the ruined plane. He recognized it, whipped to it, gathered it up with both arms, and sprinted.

A big rock lured him. Snow was encrusted near it. He went through, under. But the stones sheltered him. Plane, guns, bullets, made a hell of a noise. Then the plane went on.

Johnny burrowed deeper. Snow among the boulders, he discovered, ranged from six to fifteen feet in depth. It was soft, cold enough to be dry.

The metal box which Johnny carried was heavy. He used it to ram through the snow. That pleased him. He could make fair progress.

He heard the plane come back, picked out the ratty sounds which rifle slugs made running around from rock to rock in the snow drifts. Then came a great roar and the earth shimmied, as more dynamite was dumped out of the other plane.

Johnny kept going. Conditions were perfect for what he was doing. He encountered a rock, and worked around that. His flying suit was full of snow. So were his ears, nostrils. He stopped finally and listened.

The plane motor had dropped in volume of noise. At first, he thought it was far away. Then it blasted out. A grating and rasping, quite distinct, came through the snow. The ship had landed.

They would have trouble finding him, Johnny decided grimly. Why were they trying to kill him? Because he had found the wounded man, obviously. But what was behind their action? What were they up to? And could he, Johnny, finally escape? He thought so. But just in case, there was a precaution he could take.

Johnny worked himself from side to side in the snow, and made a small cave. There was not much light, but he did not need much. He opened the box. Some snow fell in. He brushed it out carefully.

The box held a radio outfit which transmitted and received on an extremely short-wave length. Despite its compactness, the apparatus had a range, under favorable conditions, of a good many hundreds of miles.

Johnny turned a switch. A generator, operated by a very sturdy, light storage battery, made some little noise. He fumbled with the microphone and head-set.

He set the dials to the wave length employed by Doc Savage and his men in their communications.

Then he heard about the most unpleasant sound possible under the circumstances. Dogs barking! The other men had landed their plane. They had unloaded dogs, probably sled dogs.

Johnny let out a long word expressive of disgust. The dogs would smell him out like a partridge under the snow.

Chapter 3. KILLERS ALL

NO ONE had ever honestly believed Johnny did not have an agile mind, and he used it now. He thought swiftly. His first conclusion was that it was just as well if these men seeking his life did not know about the radio transmitter and receiver. They would be certain to destroy that link with civilization.

Johnny, in common with some other scholarly men, was a bit absent-minded, however. When he left the radio set and burrowed away hurriedly under the snow, he overlooked something he might have done had he thought of it.

Johnny forgot to turn the radio transmitter off.

Men were shouting. They sounded angry. Dogs were barking, and they sounded joyful, as if they had been cooped up on the plane for some time.

Johnny found himself in snow which was particularly dark, decided that that meant the drift was deep and he was near the bottom, and concluded to lie still. The dogs at least would not hear him then. He might even get away entirely.

After he had stopped, Johnny heard a faint whine which puzzled him. It was almost two minutes before he abruptly remembered he had forgotten to turn off the radio, and this must be the generator he was hearing. It would run for hours. The generator, delivering high voltage, drew little current, and the special storage battery had a high ampere-hour capacity.

During the next few seconds, Johnny entertained ideas of burrowing back and turning the radio off, but put that out of his mind as being too risky. They might not hear it, anyway.

Johnny grinned once, but not joyfully. It was the kind of a grin put on by a man who has just been run over by a car and is too dazed to be sure how badly he is hurt, and Johnny employed the grin because he had thought of how unbelievable his present position was.

A Viking dragon ship filled with bearded freebooters had captured a yacht off Long Island, and that was somehow connected with a plane load of men who were now trying to kill Johnny. There was also something named Qui, of which no man had known for twelve hundred years. It did not quite make sense. Johnny had encountered some strange, unbelievable and mysterious things during his association with Doc Savage, but this one, thus far, made less sense than

A dog went "wur-r-r-o-o!" over Johnny's head. Another canine barked more sharply. They had sniffed him out. Johnny wished fervently that he had taken a bath more recently than the previous Saturday. It might have helped.

A copper-nickel slug came clubbing down through the snow, jarred the frozen ground close to Johnny's fingers, and the report of the gun which had fired it sounded far less muffled than Johnny had expected. The drift must not be as deep as he had thought.

Men were crunching up. Johnny had made himself a little cave. The weight of those above collapsed that. Snow got into his eyes, mouth. Only the most heroic effort kept him from sneezing.

"Where's that machine gun?" bawled a voice which reminded Johnny of the sound one got by pulling a resined string through a tight drumhead.

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"Comin', Kettler," called some one more distant.

Kettler rasped, "Hurry it up He's somewhere under here where the dogs are sniffin' and barkin'."

There was a pause. Feet crunched in the snow.

"Here's the gun," said a voice.

"Don't set it up on the tripod," directed Kettler. "Three of you hold the damned thing so the recoil won't knock you down. We'll get this guy under the snow, whoever he is."

Johnny reached a hurried decision.

"Hold it!" he shouted. "I am coming out."

HE HALF expected them to pay no attention, but thanked his stars when they did, and scrambled, not without difficulty, to the surface. Men grabbed him, yanked him, with the result that they all went through tile crust and there was much cursing and floundering around.

Johnny perceived that a large stone upthrust near by east a shadow, and it was this which had deceived him into thinking the snow was deep. Some one hit him with a fist, and that jarred snow out of his eyes, so that he got a good look at his captors.

He abruptly felt as if something colder than snow water were running down the back of his neck.

They were a hard, evil-looking crowd, and in size they averaged neither unusually large nor particularly small, but about what one might expect from a group assembled, not because of their size, but because their brains had the same twist, if it is a brain twist that makes a criminal.

One thing Johnny did note that all had in common. Their foreheads, noses and central cheek area was weather-beaten until it brought thoughts of the back of a toad. The rest of their visages, where a beard would have protected the skin, were quite pale. All of them, like the wounded man Johnny had found, had recently cut off heavy beards.

"Let 'im have it!" ordered Kettler.

Kettler was the tallest man in the crowd, and he had a doglike face. He was wearing a muskrat cap with earflaps that hung down and gave him a hound aspect. He bent forward, too, giving the impression that he might be more at home on all fours.

A man lifted a rifle, he looked closely at Johnny over its sights.

"Unconscionable intempestivity!" Johnny said hastily.

The man with the rifle all but dropped the weapon.

"Oh, hell!" he choked. "Oh, hell!"

Kettler put out his doglike jaw and said, "Go ahead! Pop 'im off."

A man began, "Maybe we better – "

"Better what?"

"Better find another way."

"What other way is there?" Kettler rasped. "He talked to that fool we shot, didn't he? And the fool was talking his head off, wasn't he? This guy is sure to have heard plenty, wasn't he? Now ask me, what can we do but butter him up and put him away?"

"Aw, O. K.," said the voice.

"Whew!" gulped the man with the gun. "Whew!"

"What's eating you?" gritted Kettler.

"This guy – " The rifleman jabbed his gun muzzle at Johnny. "This pile of bones – "

"An uncomplaisant appellation," snapped Johnny.

"That's it!" exploded the rifleman. "That's what I remembered. I mean, I thought there was something familiar about this pile of bones, on account of me having seen his picture somewhere. Then he sprung that word, that jawbreaker, and I remembered."

"Remembered what?" yelled Kettler.

"This guy is William Harper Littlejohn," said the other.

That apparently meant nothing to Kettler.

"And who," he queried, "might William Harper Littlejohn be?"

"One of Doc Savage's five right-hand men," announced the other. "Glory be! And I almost shot him!"

JOHNNY, WHO really had no slightest idea of capitalizing on the suggestion, ventured, "Now, perhaps you will turn me loose."

"Sure!" grated Kettler. "I'll turn you loose from this earth!"

He hooked a bony hand down inside the waistband of his trousers, got a revolver, pointed it at Johnny's stomach.

Johnny shifted an eye at the machine gun. He was wearing a bulletproof vest which would protect him momentarily, and there was a bare chance that he might reach the rapid-firer. It was one of the big, heavy, old-fashioned type developed and manufactured during the Great War.

"Wait!" a man exploded.

"And why should I?" Kettler rasped.

More than ever, Kettler's voice reminded Johnny of a resined cord on a drumhead. He seemed to recall that in radio sound effects men used such a device to imitate roaring lions and such.

QUEST OF QUI

"This guy!" The objector jerked a frantic thumb at Johnny. "This guy – how'd he get up here? How'd he find the guy we bumped for letting that yellow-haired dame blow? I think we might ask the guy some questions."

Kettler mulled that over. He uncocked his revolver.

"Yeah," he said. "I've heard of this Doc Savage. If he's on the job, it might help if we knew about it."

"Help!" exploded a man in the background. "When Doc Savage comes in, I go out!"

"None of that damned talk," Kettler growled. He stared at Johnny with small eyes. "How much does Doc Savage know?"

"Doc Savage's knowledge is indeterminable, magnitudinous," said Johnny.

Kettler shot his jaw out. "You mean he knows about the whole caper? How'd he get wise?"

"That guy's kiddin' you, Kettler," advised some one who knew the meaning of the words Johnny had used.

Kettler instantly knocked Johnny down. The man could move with shocking speed. Johnny could recall but few times when he had been hit so suddenly and with such blinding force.

Johnny buried head and shoulders in the snow when he fell, and lying there, was conscious of a whining in his ears. He thought it was aftermath of the blow, then remembered the radio transmitter he had abandoned.

He got up hastily and staggered away from the spot until they cornered him.

"Look!" said a man, and pointed.

Twenty-five yards away, the man who had been shot, the fellow whose presence had drawn Johnny to a landing, was sitting up. He was talking loudly and coherently to no one.

"That bird is tough!" some one muttered.

Kettler, saying nothing, took a deliberate aim with his revolver. The gun let out noise, fire, and jumped. A hole, round and blue, appeared in the wounded man's forehead and started leaking red. The victim fell back, silent, unmoving.

"He ain't tough enough to stand that, I betcha," said Kettler.

Johnny nearly shuddered himself off his feet. It was the coldest kind of a murder.

KETTLER EMITTED a stream of profanity. He sprang to Johnny, jabbed him in the stomach with the murder gun.

"What's Doc Savage know about this?" he gritted.

Breath steam – it stood out very distinctly in the cold air – ran a long plume out of Johnny's mouth, and then there was no more breath steam for so long a time that it seemed certain he must collapse from want of breathing.

"Out with it!" Kettler roared.

QUEST OF QUI

"Doc Savage – don't know – anything," Johnny said, his words small, halting.

It was the truth. Kettler did not believe it.

"Don't lie to me!" he yelled. "Has Savage figured out about them Vikings in that dragon ship?"

"Figured what out about them?" Johnny queried.

"Figured what they were – "

"Ps–s–t, Kettler!" a man hissed. "He's pumping you!"

"Uhm!" Kettler scowled and shifted his gun from Johnny's stomach to his mouth, with the result that the gaunt geologist's moist, tender mouth tissues clung to the gun steel most agonizingly, and tore when Kettler yanked the weapon.

"Hah!" Kettler leered. "Does Doc Savage know about Qui?"

Johnny spat crimson, said nothing.

"Damn, I'm gonna shoot him!" Kettler proclaimed.

"Wait a minute," grunted a man. "I ain't so anxious to stir this Doc Savage up. We'd be prize suckers to get him on our necks by croakin' this bony guy."

"We may have already gotten him on our necks," grunted Kettler in reply. "How we gonna know? This mug won't talk. I know mugs who won't talk when I see one."

"Listen," said the other.

They drew aside, where Johnny could not hear their "Ps–s–s–t" of whispering, then both departed, shuffling carefully over the snow crust. Those behind guarded Johnny with careless efficiency. When he tried to talk, they kicked him and used their fists. He fell silent. He heard distant chopping noises.

Some fifteen minutes later a shout came from Kettler, and Johnny was hauled over the snow crust.

Kettler stood beside a stream. This was frozen over, but there was running water under the ice. It could be heard. The ice had cracked during the intense cold of winter, and pressure had shoved it up at the edges, causing a number of larger cracks. Johnny was hauled over the rugged ice to the middle of the stream.

The ice was thick, and they had chopped a trench in it, seven feet long, three wide, and almost three deep.

Johnny was now bound hand and foot. Wrists and ankles were lashed together so that he could not stand erect. He was thrown into the bottom of the trench. Chunks of chopped ice which had not been scooped out gouged his bony frame.

Some one brought a heavy rock, which had been pried from its frozen bed with difficulty. The rock was so heavy that they rolled it into the pit instead of lifting it and lowering it. It knocked air out of Johnny's lungs with such violence that almost a minute elapsed before he could start breathing again.

"What's – idea?" he managed to gulp.

QUEST OF QUI

"You're gonna tell us where Doc Savage hooks into this," he was informed.

Johnny only glared.

HE COULD hear them chopping the ice near by. Their axes, no doubt, had been brought from their plane. The chopping sounded hurried. The men appeared to be no great lovers of physical labor, because there was plenty of grumbling.

Dogs – they were big sled huskies – bounded about, barked and chased rabbits. Wind whined in the cold stunted trees along the creek bank. Listening to it, Johnny thought of the distant violins again. The sound struck him as funeral music. Snow sifted in on him. It was covering him like a shroud. A funeral shroud. He shivered.

"What are you doing with me?" he yelled, a little uneasily, unsteadily.

A man leered down at him. "The guy is forgettin' his big words."

Kettler came and looked down. The man had a face like a devil, Johnny thought, a canine sort of a devil. It was altogether the most unlovely face the lank geologist and archaeologist could recall.

Johnny glared up, at the devil-like face. The glaring was a measure to preserve his own control. A man does not get scared so badly if he can keep his mind on doing something else.

"Gonna spill it?" asked Kettler.

Johnny said, "No!"

Men appeared. They carried folding canvas buckets, no doubt also gotten from their plane. Water was in the buckets. They must have dipped it up from a hole they had chopped through the ice.

"Pour it in," directed Kettler.

The water splashed down the sides of the ice pit. It seemed warm at first, but that was some misinterpretation by Johnny's nerves. It became cold. It bit through his garments, soaked him. It mixed with the snow and became a slush that began to freeze instantly.

Johnny floundered about. The rock on his chest did not allow much of that, and what motion he did manage did not help much. His legs began to feel pleasantly warm. That seared him. Horror frosted his brain. That warmth – he was freezing.

"What do you want to know?" he gasped hastily.

Kettler leered down in the pit.

"Not a damn thing," he rasped. "I've decided we'll just put you in the ice here. Hell with what you know. Maybe they'll find you next spring, maybe not."

Johnny writhed, knowing it would not help. Blood rammed at his eardrums. He could hear a singing. It was his own horror, of course, but it made him think of the radio transmitter that he had left switched on. The transmitter was strong enough to reach Doc Savage's New York headquarters. If there had just been time to use it –

"More water!" Kettler called harshly. "Let's get this guy out of the way and get at the job of finding that golden-haired dame."

Johnny's head throbbed. The radio – the radio –

Chapter 4. THE KNIFE THAT THREW ITSELF

THE RADIO is undoubtedly a remarkable invention, with many possibilities. And probably no one individual knew more about radio, or employed it more assiduously, than did Doc Savage, man of miracles, mystery and adventure.

Doc Savage stood beside the complex radio equipment in his New York headquarters and listened to a steady hissing note which came from a loud-speaker.

"This is strange," he said. His voice was a remarkable one – controlled, a voice that had undergone much training.

Unusual as it was, the voice was hardly as remarkable as the man. Doc Savage was a giant. One did not realize that until comparison with ordinary objects, for his muscles were evenly developed; he did not have the knotted shoulders of a wrestler or the overdeveloped legs of a runner. Rather, his whole great frame was swathed in sinews that were remindful of bundled wires.

More striking was the bronze of his skin, a hue which might have come from many tropical suns, and the slightly darker bronze of his straight, tight-lying hair. His eyes were a little weird, being like pools of fine gold flakes being always stirred by tiny, invisible gales.

The loud-speaker hissed steadily.

"Renny!" Doc called.

There were windows on three sides of the laboratory which held the radio equipment, windows which looked down from a height of eighty-six stories up in central New York City. At one end was a door, which opened, revealing a library, a room with floor space taken up by bookcases.

The door was high, but the man who came through ducked a little so that its top would clear his head. He was broad, too, with arms that were beams. Yet somehow he looked lean, gaunt, hungry. Maybe it was his hands that made him look that way. They were fantastic hinds Huge. He could hardly have put either of them in a gallon pail.

"Yes," he said, and his voice somehow brought thoughts of a lion which had jumped out of its cave and roared.

"Listen to that, Renny," Doc Savage said, and indicated the hissing radio.

"Renny" came forward. He was Colonel John Renwick, M. S., C. E., D. S. C., C. M. H., and a lot of other things. He was a civil engineer noted over most of the world for his ability and those fists.

He cocked an ear to the hissing from the radio. He walked over and eyed the dials, noting their setting. It was obvious that he was quite familiar with the apparatus.

QUEST OF QUI

"A transmitter sending on our wave length – the wave length we use for intercommunication," he said. "Sounds weak. Must be some amateur with a little transmitter."

"This station is hundreds of miles distant," Doc Savage said.

"Sure?"

"Fairly. You can tell, after you have played with radio for a long time. This is one of our sets, the one Johnny had."

"You can tell that, too?" Renny rumbled.

"The particular quality of the carrier wave," Doc imparted. "There is hardly another transmitter that would emit the specific type of wave associated with our newly developed short-wave V. U. X. type tube."

Renny used an enormous forefinger to scratch his head. "But what would Johnny be keeping that transmitter turned on for. Running down his battery, isn't it?"

"Look here," Doc Savage said.

He pressed a button, which lighted a ground-glass compass rose, over which was mounted a pointer actuated by a loop aerial through remote control. The loop was situated on the skyscraper roof for better functioning.

Doc Savage moved the loop in the regulation radio compass manner, not getting the signals to their loudest, but to their weakest point, which was more easily detected.

Renny read the compass indicator.

"North by east, a quarter east," he said. "Holy cow! He's somewhere on a line drawn approximately between here and Greenland, or maybe on the same line if extended south through New York City."

"Exactly," Doc said. "It is very strange, this continuous operation of Johnny's transmitter."

RENNY EXTRACTED a newspaper from a coat pocket which looked as if it had been especially tailored with sufficient capacity to hold his enormous fists. He tapped the headlines.

"That business of the Viking pirates who took over that yacht is getting a big play," he said. "There is a story in here to the effect that Johnny examined the Viking dragon ship and declared it to be genuine and some hundreds of years old. Funny, eh?"

"Unusual, to say the least," Doc Savage agreed.

"And Johnny is supposed to have chased off somewhere investigating the mystery," Renny boomed.

Doc Savage was still in front of the radio. There now came into being a sound so soft and eerie that its presence was at first unnoticeable. It was a trilling, low, indescribably mellow, a sound so fantastic that it defied description. The fantastic note seemed to filter from everywhere; it was as if the very air were saturated with it.

The trilling was the sound of Doc Savage, a small, unconscious thing which he did in moments of mental stress. He did not do it willfully. He had made it always, since he could remember. And now he seemed to

QUEST OF QUI

realize what he was doing, and the unearthly note ebbed away.

Renny eyed the bronze man sharply. That sound always meant something was up.

"Strange, that business of the radio transmitter going steady," he said, echoing Doc's earlier statement. "It's got some queer angles."

Queer angles, it did have. They found out just how queer an instant later.

Something that glinted whipped through the air. Renny had a flash realization of what it was. A knife! It flashed directly for Doc Savage's back.

The knife struck Doc in the back, point-first, and with ugly force.

An alarm clock began ringing deliriously.

RENNY REACTED with the abruptness of a man who had been in danger before. He slammed down and to one side, getting behind a case which held storage batteries.

The steadily ringing alarm clock seemed very loud.

Doc Savage had taken a headlong dive and was lying behind the battery case also. The bronze man's back was to Renny.

Doc's coat was ripped, displaying the fine chain mail undergarment which Doc habitually wore. The knife still stuck in the cloth of the bronze man's coat.

Renny pulled the knife out and looked at it briefly. Short as his inspection was, he noted that the knife was extremely unusual.

Doc Savage had dug a thin tube, as long as a pencil and not much larger than a match, from his clothing somewhere, and he elongated this somewhat, then projected the tip over the battery case. It was a tiny periscope.

The alarm clock jangled steadily.

"Watch it, Doc!" Renny croaked in sudden apprehension. Doc Savage had stood erect. He was staring steadily. There was, for the bronze man, an unusual tenseness about his posture. It was rarely that he showed excitement.

"Look out!" Renny boomed. "Whoever threw that knife may have a gun!"

"There is no one," Doc Savage said.

Their voices sounded eerie over the frantic clangor of the clock.

Renny heaved erect. His eyes roved, as did the machine-gun pistol, which looked small in his enormous fist. He had dropped the strange knife on the floor. He walked forward, searching.

"Holy cow!" he rumbled.

QUEST OF QUI

There was no one but themselves. The windows were all closed, because it was windy, a trifle chilly this far up. The windows were hardly ever opened anyway, for air conditioning kept the laboratory at an even temperature that was necessary in some chemical experiments.

There was one door. This was almost at their elbow. No one could have passed through it without being seen.

The thrown knife had come from the other end of the room. There were no doors down there. It was a "cul-de-sac."

Doc Savage was moving about, searching, flake gold eyes roving intently. Renny trailed him. They opened a few cabinets which were large enough to hold a man. These were few in number, since most of the cabinets had transparent glass doors. There was no man in them.

The alarm clock stopped ringing. Doc Savage picked it up with the end of a long pole that had a grabber hook on the end of it and which was ordinarily used for taking bottles off the high chemical shelves.

The bronze man put the clock under an X-ray and examined the fluorescent screen. It was not an infernal machine.

"Ever see that clock before?" Renny asked.

"No," Doc told him.

"Any finger prints?"

Doc used a vapor method of his own in searching the cheap tin alarm clock for prints. He held it in a chemical vapor which would mingle with the microscopic, oily deposit left by the human hand and cause a color change, together with a thickening of the oily deposit due to precipitation. The method would bring out the most infinitesimal print.

"No finger prints," he said.

Renny knotted his big fists and knocked them together. Their hard bone and gristle made sounds reminiscent of bricks colliding. It was a small habit he had.

"Holy cow!" he growled. "If you ask me, it couldn't have happened!"

DOC SAVAGE said, "There was apparently no one in the room. Yet the knife was thrown."

"You got secret trapdoors and things in this place," Renny reminded. "Maybe the guy got in and got away through them."

Doc Savage moved about the room. He touched innocent-looking bits of wall, floor and cases, and in the most unexpected places, tiny lids flew up to expose dials. It became evident that his skyscraper aerie was one incredible maze of mechanical devices. He came back and stood by the radio.

The hissing note still came from the radio receiver.

"All of the concealed doors have indicators on them which show when they have been used, and the indicators cannot be put out of commission without evidence of it showing," Doc said. "They show that none of the secret entrances or exits have been used."

QUEST OF QUI

"But why the alarm clock?" Renny scratched his head. "Say, that knife maybe – "

Doc Savage picked the knife up, turned it in his hands. He abruptly put it under a magnifying glass.

"Unusual thing, eh?" Renny commented.

Doc Savage lifted a glance. "Have you guessed just how unusual, Renny?"

"I can build a bridge or a skyscraper," Renny said. "I don't know a heck of a lot about knives. The one you've got in your hand looks as if some amateur had hammered it out of a piece of iron. As a knife, it don't look so hot."

"The knife is probably more than a thousand years old, Renny."

Renny showed interest. He knew this was one of the things on which Doc was an authority.

"Yeah," he said.

"It is a genuine old Viking knife," Doc said. "A collector of such things might be willing to pay five hundred dollars for it."

"A Viking knife," Renny said. "Holy cow!"

The telephone buzzer whined.

DOC SAVAGE went over and picked up one of several telephones, each of which was connected, instead of a bell, to a buzzer which had a distinctive note.

"Yes," he said.

The voice which began talking to him was Monk's.

"What goes on, if anything?" Monk asked.

"An alarm clock just rang in my laboratory," Doc told him. "About the same time, a knife struck my back with force enough to make the discomfort of wearing a bulletproof jacket all the time seem a good investment."

Monk was silent a moment. He must have been digesting that and trying to make something out of it. Then he asked, "Who threw the knife?"

"No one, so far as we can find."

"Then what kind of a gadget done it?"

"No gadget, that we have seen," Doc told him. "The alarm clock did not, obviously."

"Alarm clock – " Monk made a mumbling noise. "Say, what is this?"

"A mystery," Doc replied. "It seems to have to do with ancient Vikings and – "

"Ow-w-w!" Monk bawled.

Monk's roar out of the receiver was ear-splitting. It made Renny, standing across the laboratory, jump.

Silence followed. Utter silence. Either Monk's receiver had been hung up, or the telephone had been torn from its cord socket.

"Something's happened!" big Renny barked, charging across the laboratory. "Monk don't squall like that without reasons!"

Chapter 5. MYSTERIOUS CAMPAIGN

MONK, like most extremely homely men, was ordinarily a peaceful, quiet, small-voiced soul. The only time he was noisy was in a fight. Then he was a bedlam, all by himself.

Monk was putting on one of his best bedlams now. He howled and roared and floundered about. Although there was daylight outside, the room wherein Monk was having his troubles was in the blackest darkness. This was because special shutters on the windows were closed. Monk had been engaged in an experiment with chemicals sensitive to light.

There had been a red light burning. That had gone out very mysteriously. Something had fastened itself around Monk's feet unexpectedly. In his excitement, he had tried to jump, howling at the same time, and had gone down. Absent-mindedly keeping a clutch on the telephone, he had torn it loose from its wires.

"Ye-o-o-w!" Monk roared. "Leggo me!"

He struck savagely with the telephone, hit nothing, and suddenly discovered the thing around his ankles was a cord. It was hard, stiff, slick. A thong of some kind of hide.

Monk suddenly stopped making a noise and tried to change his position. The thing around his ankles hampered him. He got around that by the – for him – simple expedient of rearing up and walking on his hands. He settled down behind a steel desk and listened intently.

An alarm clock started ringing.

The thing sounded louder than any alarm clock Monk had ever heard. Probably surprise had something to do with that. He tried to listen harder. His ears could not penetrate the din.

He did not move. He was thinking of what he had just been told over the telephone – the alarm clock which had accompanied the attempt on Doc Savage's life.

Trying to make no noise, Monk worked at the thong securing his ankles. The knot was the kind that supped only one way. It would not loosen. Monk got out his pocketknife.

Fists were beating rapidly on the dark room door.

"Monk!" cried the one who was doing the belaboring. "Mr. Mayfair! What has happened?"

It was Monk's secretary. Obviously, she had found the door locked. That surprised Monk no end. He had not locked it. The thong defied his pocketknife blade.

QUEST OF QUI

Zun–n–g! The sound came from the spot Monk had left. He knew something had hit the wall near the telephone stand, hit it very hard. The sound was loud over the alarm clock bell.

Monk felt under his left arm, then grimaced. The holster was there, but the machine–gun pistol was not. Monk was a careless soul, and he had lain the gun aside while he worked.

Moments dragged. The alarm clock rang on. Monk began to wonder if it would ever run down. The secretary was still attacking the door. It sounded as if she had gotten the fire axe out of the penthouse vestibule.

Monk got up on his hands again, walked himself toward where he had lain his gun. He got it, one of the machine pistols which Doc Savage had perfected. He held it by the trigger guard with his teeth, and hind–walked to a light switch. He set himself. Then he turned the switch on, bringing a blaze of white light which hopelessly ruined the chemical project under way at the moment.

Monk's hair all but stood on end.

It was not what he saw. It was what he did not see. There was apparently no one but himself in the dark room.

AT LEAST half a dozen times, Monk ran an intent scrutiny over the dark room. There were many stands of apparatus, cases, metal boxes, jugs and a few packing boxes. None of these were of sufficient size to harbor a man.

Devoting one eye to the job, Monk discovered he had been using the dull blade in his pocketknife to saw at the thong. He opened a sharp blade, and finally sawed through it. He laid the thong aside for future examination. It was the toughest piece of leather he had ever seen.

Monk made a complete circle of the room. He saw no attacker. He went over and gaped at the thing sticking in the wall beside the telephone stand.

It was a bobtailed spear, a thing with a heavy, razor–sharp head, and a shaft less than three feet long, very heavy. A tassel of flexible thongs on the end of the shaft evidently served the same purpose as feathers on the extremity of an Indian's arrow.

Monk left it sticking, and went to the alarm clock. It ran down just as he reached it. The thing was cheap, the type sold by most drug stores for less than a dollar.

A volley of loud blows on the door reminded Monk that his secretary was still trying to get in. He went over.

The key had been turned in the lock. He was positive of that. He turned the key back and opened the door.

The secretary who came in was as near being the prettiest secretary in New York as Monk had been able to achieve after interviewing some hundreds of applicants. She was excited, but that only made her prettier.

It was obvious that she had not the least idea of what had happened, so Monk told her.

"Now, what do you make of it?" he finished.

"No one came in or left, I'm positive," said the young woman, who had brains as well as beauty.

Monk took another tour of inspection around the dark room, which was a part of the penthouse chemical laboratory which he maintained down here a stone's throw from Wall Street. Monk was by way of being one

QUEST OF QUI

of the nation's leading chemists. He came back and eyed his secretary foolishly.

"Do I look all right?" he demanded.

"No worse than usual," the young woman replied. "Why?"

"I thought maybe I had an attack of the jimjams and imagined what happened," Monk said.

"Don't be silly."

Monk suddenly handed the young woman his machine-gun pistol.

"Guard the door with that," he commanded. "I'm gonna go get Habeas Corpus."

"That hog?"

"Sure," said Monk. "He's part bloodhound, that hog is."

Monk walked rapidly along a corridor which had cost a great deal to decorate. After a single look at Monk, one knew where he got his nickname. He would not have to be met in a very dark alley to be mistaken for an overgrown ape. His face was composed mostly of mouth. His nose had been pounded almost entirely back into his face in the past, and he had small eyes, practically no forehead. Strangely enough, people who met him for the first time usually smiled at him.

Monk opened a mahogany door and entered a room which was no doubt the most expensive pigpen in the world. The floor was marble covered with mats, and there was a trough of chromium, and various chromium self-feeders holding viands dear to the porker family. There was a stack of clean straw at one end. In the middle was a wallowing box perhaps ten feet square. The mud in this wallow was perfumed.

Out of the mud stuck two ears of enormous size. "Habeas!" Monk called. The ears twitched.

"Get outta there or I'll kick your ribs in!" Monk yelled.

The big ears arose. Judging from their size, the hog in the mud should have been only slightly smaller than a hippopotamus. He proved to be about the size of a good jack rabbit. He was composed, other than ears, of snout and long legs, with very little left over for other necessary portions.

Habeas followed Monk back into the dark room.

"There's a mystery in here, Habeas," Monk said. "Find 'im? Sic!"

Habeas seemed to get the idea. He advanced. Then a very peculiar thing happened. The big ears shot up straight. Habeas stiffened. Then, very slowly, he retreated to the door.

"Good night!" Monk breathed. "Only other time I ever seen Habeas act that scared was when he happened on a lion unexpected like down in –"

Feet clattered furiously outside. Doors banged. Monk spun, whipped the machine-gun out of his secretary's hands, faced the door.

QUEST OF QUI

DOC SAVAGE and Renny came in. Renny was blowing. Doc's bronze was a little darker, as if he had been moving fast.

"All of this excitement over me?" Monk grinned.

"What happened?" Doc asked quietly.

Monk told them, ending, "Something in here gave Habeas the big jitters. Must be something he smells. You can see there ain't no place big enough for a man to hide."

Renny picked up the alarm clock.

"Different brand than the one in Doc's office," he said. "That's easy to understand. Anybody who bought two alarm clocks might be suspected."

"He dang thing sure raised the roof," Monk stated.

Doc Savage was examining the stubby spear. He pulled it out of the wall, after giving it a yank to demonstrate how forcibly it had been driven in. He turned it over and examined it for finger prints, but found none.

"Viking," he said.

"What?" Renny boomed.

"A type of short club spear carried by ancient Vikings," Doc elaborated. "There is a historical reference to them. You will notice it is heavy enough for a club, and at the same time the leather tassel on the end makes it go straight if thrown."

Monk got the thong which had been about his ankles. The thong had a length of some fifteen feet beyond the loop.

Doc looked at it.

"Walrus hide," he said.

He scrutinized the knot.

"A rare knot," he continued. "Whoever tied it knew a great deal about them. Sailors sometimes use this knot."

"The Vikings were mostly sailors," Renny said slowly. Monk scratched his nubbin of a head. "But why should a Viking – and if you find a Viking in here, I'll eat him – try to croak me?"

Doc Savage wheeled and started for the door.

Renny banged his two great fists together, boomed, "Doc!"

The bronze man seemed not to hear and went through the door.

"Doc was attacked, then Monk," Renny rumbled. "Only one thing can explain that."

Doc was out of sight now.

"What?" Monk barked at Renny.

"Somebody is tryin' to wipe our crowd out," Renny explained his sudden suspicion. "Holy cow! Next, they may try to get Ham. He's the only other one of our gang in town."

"Yeah," Monk mumbled. "Long Tom, the other one of our outfit is down in South America superintending some kind of an electrical project. But Ham is here in town, working on a brief."

"We'd better get hold of Ham!" thumped Renny. They charged into the outer room, which Monk had decorated especially as a background for his pretty secretary.

Doc Savage was speaking over the second of Monk's telephones.

"I am calling the apartment of Ham of Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks," the bronze man was saying. "Yes, I know this is the office of the building manager. I have called Ham's quarters, and he does not answer. What is that? . . . You have called the police? . . . You haven't? . . . Do not, then. I shall be up immediately."

Doc clicked up the receiver He addressed the others.

"Something terrible has happened to Ham," he said. "Come on."

PARK AVENUE, the swanky part of it, is noted for the manner in which its buildings succeed in being imposing without being flashy. Park Avenue has class.

The club where Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks – "Ham" – had his bachelor quarters was a building with one of the plainest fronts on Park Avenue. It was so exclusive that a great many Park Avenue residents did not themselves know that it existed.

An imposing gentleman in afternoon attire met them. He was, although he would have thrown up his hands in horror at the suggestion, the head janitor.

He was quite rattled.

"Most regrettable," he murmured.

"Tell us about it," Doc requested.

"There was a most terrible uproar in Brigadier General Brooks's quarters," he said. "One of the other tenants complained, and I went up with the fourth assistant building superintendent. From what we found, I fear there has been – ah, violence."

Just what had given the man that idea was apparent when Doc Savage and his two companions entered the sumptuous quarters which Ham maintained. The first thing they saw was an expensive vase lying in fragments over the floor. Chairs were upset. Small scatter-rugs were wadded together as if by struggling feet.

Almost exactly in the center of the study, which was lined with easels holding law books, a knife was sticking upright in the floor. Monk ambled over to it, trailed by the shote, Habeas. He eyed the knife.

QUEST OF QUI

"Another one?" he grunted, and looked at Doc Savage questioningly.

"Viking," Doc Savage agreed. "Very similar to the one which struck my back, except that it is lighter."

They made a quick search of the apartment and it was painfully evident that the place did not harbor Ham.

"What became of him?" Doc asked the superintendent or thus the head janitor permitted himself to be designated. "You say you came up and heard sounds of an uproar. Did you enter immediately?"

"Not immediately," replied the other. "You see, it was necessary to send for the master key. I – I had forgotten it, I regret to say."

"Did any one remain behind and watch the door?"

"Oh, yes," affirmed the flunky. "The fourth–assistant building superintendent did that."

Renny boomed, "Then how in blazes did Ham disappear from his quarters?"

RENNY FROWNED darkly when no one seemed to have a suitable answer to his demand. He stamped around the apartment and yanked open closet doors which they had opened before. He even examined the interior of cabinets in the tiny kitchenette which was almost entirely electrical in equipment.

He stopped for a moment in front of a tall case which held nearly two dozen rich–looking black canes, each almost identical! in appearance with the others. A casual inspection failed entirely to identify the canes for what they were–sword canes.

At the bottom of the case was a niche holding a bottle, and a tiny bejeweled pocket flask with a large opening. The bottle and the flask were for the peculiar chemical concoction with which Ham was wont to daub the tips of his sword Cane blades. The chemical was one which produced quick, harmless unconsciousness in a victim.

Renny noted that there were twenty–four niches for canes, and twenty–four canes in the niches.

"Ham sure left here unwillingly," Renny boomed thoughtfully. "He never goes out, if only downstairs to the barber shop, without one of those sword canes."

"This has got me worried," Monk said gloomily.

Monk's gloom was somewhat out of line with his unusual manner with Ham. The two were probably as quarrelsome a pair as ever got together. No one who knew Monk and Ham could recall either having addressed a civil word to the other. But Monk's present worried look indicated plainly that he had a genuine affection for the missing lawyer.

Doc Savage was examining the windows. He tried each, then inspected the locks closely. Every window was locked.

"There are no secret passages or doors in this apartment, I happen to know," the bronze man said.

Monk waved an arm. "No place in here Ham could be hidden. No place big enough for a man."

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny. "Where'd he go?"

QUEST OF QUI

Doc Savage was unlocking the windows. He raised them, one after another, inspected the ledges outside, then leaned out and looked down. At the third window, he apparently made a discovery, because his weird trilling sound was audible for the briefest of moments, a nebulous tremolo so faint that it certainly would have escaped any ear less than normal.

"Come on," he said abruptly.

The bronze man's flake gold eyes whipped about, as if searching for some one and not finding whoever they sought.

"Where is the building superintendent?" Doc asked.

"He went downstairs to ask if any one had seen suspicious-looking persons about," a flunky reported. "He was very worried about this mess."

Doc Savage studied the flunky, who was standing watch at the door.

"Between the time the door was unlocked and the time I arrived, was the door left unwatched?" Doc asked.

"I think so," said the other. "But there was no one in the apartment. We looked. I looked thoroughly. Since there was no one in the apartment, there was no sense in guarding the door."

"Come on," Doc repeated to his men.

THE CLUB building had an ample concrete-floored court to the rear, with a narrow passage leading between two other structures to a back street. This was to pick up package deliveries without lowering the dignity of the place by having tradespeople scampering in and out of the front door.

This court was directly below tile window of Ham's quarters. Doc Savage led Renny and Monk into the cement enclosure and pointed at a spot under Ham's window.

There were wet red spots on the concrete. It looked as if some one had shaken out a brush which had been dipped in scarlet paint.

Monk tried to speak and his first effort was a wordless croak, but on his second try, he asked in an agonized voice, "Is that Ham's blood?"

"Very likely," Doc Savage said.

"But his windows were locked!" Monk exploded. "How did he get out?"

Doc Savage studied them both thoughtfully. It was rarely that he did this, and it was even more rarely that he showed any emotion. But now he looked as if his remarkably trained brain had just seized upon an idea too preposterous for belief.

Monk squinted at the bronze man.

"Doc!" he exploded. "You've solved the mystery!"

"You bet!" Renny boomed. "I can tell the way you look. Just what happened up there?"

QUEST OF QUI

Doc Savage walked off without appearing to have heard either of them.

Monk and Renny exchanged disappointed, but knowing, looks.

"He's got it," Monk said with certainty.

"Yeah," Renny agreed. "But what he's got is only a theory as yet. He is not ready to prove it."

"Right," Monk finished. "He always acts like that when he's got a good idea, but not enough proof. He pretends he can't hear anybody who asks what his suspicions are."

Then both of them jumped. They had caught the vague trilling sound which was characteristic of Doc Savage. The sound was coming from the narrow alleyway that led from the court to the hack street. The bronze man had walked down this. The trilling died away as Monk and Renny ran down the alley.

Doc Savage was standing beside a dead man.

Doc Savage said, "This poor fellow must have come down to search, and happened upon something, and he was killed."

The dead man was the dapper building superintendent, the very much dressed-up gentleman who had admitted them to the club. They had seen him alive only a few moments ago and it was quite horrible now, seeing him again with his mouth open and a little wormlet of his life's blood crawling out of it.

Monk bent over and peered at the unusual shape of the knife hilt which protruded from the dead man's chest. The homely chemist looked at Doc questioningly.

"Viking," Doc said simply.

Renny knocked his big fists together with quick, jerky swings, and seemed to want to say something, without knowing what.

"Say," Renny mumbled. "Don't forget that mysterious business about Johnny's radio transmitter being on. Johnny may be in trouble."

"We will get the police on this murder," Doc Savage said.

The bronze man walked on out of the alley. He reached the sidewalk, looked up and down the street, and saw a uniformed policeman two blocks distant. He walked toward the cop.

Renny, Monk and the pig, Habeas Corpus, came out of the alley and followed him. They were a remarkable procession. Every one on the street stopped to stare.

Doc reached the policeman. The other was very absorbed in examining a dark cutaway coat, which he turned curiously in his hands. The tailoring of the garment was exquisite.

Monk goggled at the coat.

"That's Ham's!" he barked.

Chapter 6. THE SECRET IN THE RIVER

THE POLICEMAN started when he heard Monk's strangled croak at his elbow. He looked at them blankly. Then he gave another start and saluted smartly. He had recognized Doc Savage.

Doc Savage had often served as a consulting expert for the police department; the present radio system was his design, as was the teletype hook-up between the various stations. As a gesture of appreciation for that and other services, he had been given a high honorary commission on the police force, and every policeman was given a look at the bronze man's picture and received orders to render Doc every cooperation.

"Where did you get the coat?" Doc asked the patrolman.

"Twas thrown out of a car," replied the officer. "Some one told me about it, and I just went out and picked it up."

"Description of the car?" Doc queried.

"Sedan," said the cop. "Black. That's all I know about it."

Doc took the coat, gave it a closer glance, and said, "It is certainly Ham's." He brought letters out of the inside pocket. "These are addressed to Ham. Pockets have not been disturbed."

Renny grumbled, "I don't get this."

Without saying anything, Doc Savage walked on down the street.

On the third block, they found Ham's natty gray waistcoat. Some one had evidently found it in the street and laid it on top of a parked car, where they found it.

They went on down the street. They found a shoe, two socks, a shirt. A stray dog was playing with the shirt.

Some blocks farther on, a street sweeper was wheeling his can down a side street. It was Doc Savage who thought of looking into the can. They found Ham's pants there.

A billfold containing two hundred and sixty-three dollars was in the pants. The street cleaner nearly fell over when he saw that. He had not searched them, because the pants were soiled, having been run over by several cars.

They found no more garments.

Doc Savage carried the clothing back to the spot where he had left his car near Ham's club. There was a crowd and much excitement over on the side street. The body of the murdered building superintendent had been found.

Newspaper reporters were already trying vainly to get into the exclusive club. If one did manage to get in, he would probably be the first of his kind ever to enter the place.

On the corner, a newsboy, unfazed by the excitement, was crying a headline stating that no trace had been found of the mysterious freebooting Vikings who had stolen a yacht.

QUEST OF QUI

The words of the noisy newsboy seemed to remind Renny of something.

"That radio of Johnny's," he rumbled. "I hope it turns out Johnny ain't in trouble."

Doc Savage was in his car. He pulled special blinds. There was even one over the windshield. It became surprisingly dark in the car.

Doc Savage got a box-shaped apparatus out of a door pocket and turned a switch on the side of the mechanism. It was a portable ultra-violet lantern. He began going over Ham's clothing. He was using the same method employed by police in examining for secret inks. Ultra-violet light, through a fluorescing phenomenon, causes many substances, ordinarily invisible to the human eye, to glow.

Coat, waistcoat, shirt, shoes, socks, offered nothing of value. Nor did the first examination of the pants. Then Doc turned the pockets inside out.

Doc had been hunting one very definite thing. All of his men carried tiny particles of a chemical compound, a chalk for writing, which left a mark entirely invisible to the unaided eye, but which the ultra-violet light brought out.

Ham had used his piece of chalk to write on the inside of a pants pocket. The inside of a pocket is a poor writing surface. They had great difficulty distinguishing the fines at all.

It certainly was not a written message.

Monk scowled at it.

"Looks like he drew a square, kinda catawampus, and put a letter 'V' on its side after that," he said. "I'd think he had started to write something beginning with 'OC,' only the 'V' is laying on the wrong side, with the point away from the kinda squashed-out square."

Doc Savage suddenly started the car. He raised the curtains.

Monk, climbing in hastily, gulped, "Where we going?"

"After Ham," Doc said.

"You mean them funny marks gave you an idea of where he is?" Monk countered, hauling Habeas Corpus into the car by an ear.

"An idea," Doc agreed.

THE CAR gathered speed. The newsboy at the corner yelling about the Viking freebooters and the yacht craned his neck, recognized Doc Savage, probably from some newspaper picture he had seen, and waved at them. Their car skidded a little on the corner, and the conductor of a street car dropped a handful of nickels when they shaved his conveyance.

Monk settled back, holding his pig by an ear, and even managed a faint grin. He liked these hair-raising rides with Doc Savage. He remembered some of the past ones quite distinctly.

"I don't see where a lopsided square and a letter 'V' lying on its side tells you anything, Doc," he said.

QUEST OF QUI

Doc Savage touched a button. A regulation police siren began wailing under the hood, and for blocks ahead, policemen started halting traffic.

"The lopsided square, as you call it, was meant to depict a diamond, unless I am mistaken," Doc said.

"Yeah." Monk blinked. "It did, at that. What about the 'V' on its side?"

"Meant to indicate the word 'point,'" Doc suggested.

"Point—point," Monk muttered. "I don't get it."

"Diamond Point," Doc Savage told him. "It is north of the city a short distance."

The car hit a raised street railway crossing, was thrown up, and seemed to travel half a block before it was on the ground again.

Monk recovered his hat and his pig.

"You think Ham got a chance to get a finger into his pockets, or maybe a hand, and drew that design right quick," the homely chemist said. "Yep. Ham is smart enough to think of something like that."

"First time I heard you admit Ham had anything on the ball," Renny boomed.

"That overdressed little shyster ... !" Monk began belligerently, then colored and sighed. "I hope he's all right. If he's gotta die, I want the pleasure of killin' him."

"You'd be lost without him," Renny said.

They swept under an elevated. The motor's roar was like the sound of a train, for Doc had opened the muffler cutouts. Steel elevated pillars went past like pickets. They slid a hundred feet with all four wheels locked and got their speed down enough to take a corner.

Monk grinned. It was uncanny, the way Doc handled the machine.

Renny, noting the grin, spoke with a sober face, saying, "Want me to drive, Doc?"

Monk blanched.

"You drive," he promised, "and I walk."

A motorcycle policeman, out of courtesy, tried to fall in ahead of them to clear the way, but his speed was inadequate and he fell behind.

DIAMOND POINT was really not a point, but a ridge of rocky, rough land along the Hudson river. Just why it had ever been called Diamond Point, no one probably knew, because it did not bear the remotest resemblance to the shape of a diamond, and there was certainly nothing valuable about its appearance. Being too rocky for agricultural value, the region had been permitted to grow up in scrub brush and stunted trees. No doubt due to the extreme number and steepness of the hills, the State had never found it profitable to build a paved road into the region, and this lack of thoroughfare, although there was a rutted dirt road of sorts, added to the remote nature and inaccessibility of the spot.

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The single road which did penetrate the vicinity was rough to an extreme. It was also very muddy; this despite the fact that in New York City the streets had been dry and the skies rather pleasantly clear. It had rained the night before and the roads had not yet dried out, despite the strong wind blowing.

Pools of dirty water stood in the ruts. Renny rode the running board and used a big handkerchief steadily, keeping mud wiped off the wind shield. The mud had proved too much for the mechanical wiper.

Monk hung to the edge of the window tightly to combat the bouncing of the car over a somewhat more than ordinary number of rocks. The wind made whinings around the open window.

"Road ain't used much," Monk gasped. "But there's been cars along since the rain.

"Within the last hour," Doc told him.

"Huh?"

"The water in the ruts is very muddy," Doc pointed out. "That means recent passage of a car has stirred it up."

Monk nodded, drew out his machine-gun pistol and scrutinized the drum to make sure it was ready to feed cartridges properly. The bullets in the drum looked vicious, but they were actually mercy slugs – shells filled with a chemical which produced senselessness, without hardly breaking the skin of a victim.

Doc Savage cut the mufflers in and the big motor became surprisingly silent, after which Doc Savage turned on a radio receiver which was almost unnoticeable under the dash. It was an shortwave outfit. He adjusted the dials.

Johnny's far-away transmitter was still sending its hissing carrier wave steadily.

"I'm gettin' more and more worried about Johnny," Monk grumbled. "I got sort of a feeling in my bones."

Their car topped a ridge abruptly, and before them, through scrubby trees, they could see the blue and cream of water, which the wind was lashing into a foam.

"The Hudson river," Renny said.

The road angled over to the river, descending the while, until it was very near the water. Unexpectedly, car tracks turned off. Doc stopped his machine, got out, followed the tracks. They led directly to the water, which was a lather of waves.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled.

The car was a black sedan, and it stood running board deep in the river. All the doors were open. Doc Savage advanced and looked inside. The waves whipped his ankles.

The interior of the sedan was splattered with red, moist droplets.

Doc Savage stood back; his gaze absently swept the river and he suddenly began stripping off his outer clothing.

"Hey!" Monk exploded. "What's the idea?"

QUEST OF QUI

Doc Savage waved a hand at the surface of the river. "See anything?"

Monk squinted. "No. Nothing but a heck of a lot of waves."

Renny got binoculars and swept the river with them. "I see it. Looks like an oil patch."

Doc Savage, clad only in shorts, entered the water. He did not seem to exert himself unduly, but his speed through the water was amazing. Out where the oil was a multicolored film on the river, he dived. He was down an incredible length of time. Then he came up and swam back. At times, the river waves hid him.

"That yacht seized by the Vikings," he said, "is lying out there. It has been scuttled."

MONK AND Renny exchanged startled glances, then both eyed Doc Savage. "Sure there's no mistake?"

"It is the Sea Scream," Doc said. "The masts had been chopped off before she was scuttled, and she is not far beneath the surface. I felt out the raised lettering of the name on the wheelhouse."

Monk indicated the abandoned car. "But what does this mean? Where's Ham? What'd they drive it in the water for?"

Doc Savage scrutinized the bottom about the car closely. The water was clear enough for that. He found enough marks to tell him what had happened.

"They loaded into a boat," he said. "No doubt they drove the car into the river so there would be no tracks."

The bronze man now shifted his attention to the car itself, especially the rear where the spots of blood were. He used the small ultra-violet lantern which he had employed on Ham's clothing. Renny and Monk spread their coats to darken the car interior. It was not necessary to have absolute gloom for efficient working of the ultra-violet lantern, due to the power of the little instrument, but murkiness helped.

On the floorboards, the black light brought out words written with the strange secret chalk.

CARLETH, A. L.

"Blast it!" Monk complained. "Another darn puzzle. Hey, Doc! What the dickens –"

The bronze man was running back toward their car.

Monk and Renny followed him. Doc had the motor running when they got to the machine; he began turning around.

"A. L. Carleth," said Monk. "Who's he?"

"It is not A. L. Carleth," Doc corrected. "It is Carleth Air Lines. You've heard of them."

"Heck, yes," Monk said.

The car picked up speed. Renny leaned out and began wiping fresh splatters of mud off the wind shield.

DURING THE period when aviation took an unprecedented boom, almost every American town of more than village proportions found itself with from one to half a dozen airports. Most of these unfortunately

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proved to be mushroom projects started by gentlemen who had more than one rattletrap plane, and sometimes not that. Collapse of the aviation boom in its wilder aspects saw a high mortality rate among such aviation projects, until in most cases, it was only the sturdy, organized air lines with mail contracts that survived. Carleth Air Lines was an exception. It had no air mail contracts. It did not even fly passengers over a regular route. Yet it survived.

The Carleth Air Lines' flying field was situated well out of New York City, and it was marked by a rotating beacon, just as were the commercial airports.

"We do an awful lot of flying," Monk said when they came in sight of the beacon – plainly visible some miles away, because it was now past sundown and becoming rather dark. "Yet we've no more than barely heard of this Carleth Air Lines. Or at least I haven't. That's funny."

Doc Savage switched off the headlights. They were on pavement and Renny had long since gotten most of the mud off the wind shield.

"That may be because the concern is owned by Thorpe Carleth," Doc said.

"How do you figure that?" Monk asked.

The car engine did not make much noise now, and off to the side, they distinctly heard the moan of a steamboat whistle. The craft was on the Hudson, which ran parallel to the road, not far distant.

"The Carleth Air Lines seems to be a rich man's plaything," Doc Savage explained. "Thorpe Carleth is a wealthy man, or has the name of being one. His air line is not really an air line at all, but consists merely of a flying field, some hangars and several planes. He formerly made a specialty of giving flying instruction to young society bloods."

"Uh–huh," said Monk. "I remember now. He sponsored one of them attempts to fly nonstop from California to Rome, Italy, last summer. It flivvered out and they lost their plane, a ship that must have cost a quarter of a million.

The car headlights seemed to be becoming brighter, but that was only because the night was growing darker. There were sudsy clouds overhead, racing with the wind. The wind was blowing with the ear, so that it was not particularly noticeable, except that shrubbery along the road was bobbing and writhing and jumping.

They reached a gravel drive which must lead to the airport. Doc went on a short distance and stopped the car. He had to lock the brake to keep the wind from carrying the machine along. It was blowing a great deal harder since sunset.

DOC SAVAGE switched off the car headlights, then punched various switches on the instrument dial, a procedure which, as far as the naked eye could tell, caused nothing to happen.

Out of a locker, beneath the seats, Doc produced devices which fitted the face in the fashion of goggles, but had lenses more nearly the size and shape of condensed milk cans. The lenses were connected by wires, and conductors ran to a tiny battery box which could be carried in a pocket.

Viewed through the goggles, the night–wrapped world underwent a peculiar change. Ahead of the car, there was light, a peculiar hard light which showed things in a colorless black and white, like a photographic print. The distance values were somewhat unnatural, too. It was as if one were looking at the world through two long black tubes, to the end of which developed camera negatives were affixed.

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There was a projector of infra-red light on the front of the car – it might have been mistaken for a black siren of large size. These goggles were far more intricate than they seemed, being electro-mechanical devices which rendered light that was ordinarily invisible, effective upon the optical nerves.

Doc Savage delved into the baggage compartment at the rear of the car and brought out a portable projector of the infra-red light. Monk shouldered the thing. It was larger than a suitcase and by no means featherweight

"Take it easy," Doc Savage directed. "The apparatus is delicate." He closed the car carefully, after working under the dash,

They swung wide to approach the airport from the side. This swing carried them down near the edge of the river.

Monk, roving the infra-red beam, said, "A boat tied to a wharf down there."

Doc Savage and the other two clambered down to the boat. It was a fast, expensive little craft about eighteen feet long, of the type sometimes used as tenders on more expensive yachts. It was black and shiny.

Doc Savage scratched the paint. It rolled and scooped off under his nails.

"Paint is green," he said. "It has been put on within the last two days."

The bronze man used a pocketknife at the bow, and the stern, scraping off the new paint. He uncovered an original name which had been painted over. It read:

SEA SCREAM

"Tender off the yacht the Vikings grabbed – the boat that is lying scuttled back up the river there," Monk muttered.

Doc Savage lifted the hood over the powerful motor and put a bronze hand on the cylinders. They were warm, very warm.

"Come on," he said, and moved toward the airport.

It was a grotesque world through which they moved, this one lighted by the infra-red beam. It was as if they were part of a pale motion picture, a picture filtered through off focus lenses, or through a heavy cheesecloth, for the infra-red light did not by any means furnish an illumination that could compete with the sun.

Strangely enough, the beacon, a bright light when viewed with the naked eye, was hardly discernible through the filtering goggles. But there were two hangars, rather sturdy-looking structures of stucco.

It abruptly became apparent that the flying field might be considered only a back yard to a house that was rather a surprising structure. The mansion might have been lifted out of the North Africa desert country. There was a wall of stucco, fitted with little imitation embrasures and turrets, and inside that a rambling, flat-roofed house of the same material.

"That where Carleth lives?" Monk breathed.

"It would seem likely," Doc replied, low-voiced. "This is my first time here, you know."

They listened. The wind whooped, moaned, slapped their clothing against their limbs. The shrubbery, and there was a good deal of it about, threshed and fluttered. An army could have been marching near, and they might not have heard.

Monk muttered, "If this wind gets any stronger, it's gonna blow the clothes right off our backs."

Doc Savage said, "Wait here, you two."

The bronze man reached over and switched off the infrared light projector which Monk carried. Darkness which followed was abysmal. He took off the filter goggles. It was almost as dark, but above, occasional stars peeped from between madly racing clouds.

Doc Savage advanced toward the house. Silence was not difficult. A man would have had to run for his footsteps to be heard.

There was a lighted window in the house. It had not been visible before. The filter goggles cut out ordinary light.

Somewhere near, a branch broke out of a tree, and the wind ran it, like a flailing monster, through the treetops.

Then Monk's voice bawled out in one of his ear-splitting combat howls.

"Doc!" he squalled. "Hell's broke loose!"

Chapter 7. WIND AND TERROR

DOC SAVAGE spun, put out both hands before him, and lunged back toward the spot where he had left his two aides.

Monk was still howling. Renny was roaring something which rage and frantic movements made inarticulate. One of them cut loose with a machine-gun pistol. Its bullfiddle moan was terrific, even above the howl of the wind. But there was no muzzle flame. Carefully designed flame digesters fitted to the ends of the barrels took care of that.

Doc hit a tree. Even his scientifically trained eyes could not penetrate the darkness. Strength in his mighty arms cushioned the collision, and he veered to the left. He was close to Monk and Renny now.

Then his feet hit something. It felt like something alive. It jerked. He went down.

Something struck at him. Twice. Three times. He could bear the ugly thuds, the jarring of the earth. He rolled to one side.

There was a hiss. Up from the earth came a stream of something that resembled pale liquid fire. It splattered over him. It felt wet. And it continued glowing.

The bronze man charged the spot from which the weird luminance had come. His kicking, his threshing of arms, encountered nothing. There seemed to be sounds all about. But it might have been the wind.

He did not stop to listen, for the glowing stuff that had drenched him marked his giant figure with a pale

QUEST OF QUI

luminance.

He ran toward his two aides, hauling out a flashlight. He came upon them.

They were grotesque, dancing satans of pale flame. Like Doc, they had been drenched by the glowing stuff, whatever it was.

Doc got his flashlight on. He fanned the beam. Everywhere, shrubbery danced, shook. But that was the wind. Other than his two men, there was no living being in sight.

Doc shifted the light back to Monk and Renny. When the electric beam was upon them, they ceased to glow. The fluid which had splattered them was a bluish-gray substance, something like pale, but thick skim milk. Both wore expressions of men who had just met ghosts.

Monk had a gash over one ear. Coat sleeve, shirt, and some flesh was torn from Renny's right arm.

Monk tried to talk, made only gargling noises in his excitement, swallowed and tried again.

"There was somethin' here!" he gulped. "Where'd it go?"

Renny was holding his machine pistol in his left hand. He waved it.

"Holy cow!" he boomed. "I threw bullets around here like water out of a hose. Sure thought I'd hit it."

"It?" Doc said. "Wasn't it a man, or men?"

Monk scratched his nubbin of a head, looked foolish, and said, "I wouldn't bet too much on that."

"What do you mean?" Doc demanded.

"We began hearing noises like things hitting the ground bard," Monk said. "Then this flaming stuff, phosphorescent juice of some kind, I think it is, got spouted on us. It seemed to come right up out of the ground. Renny turned loose his machinegun pistol. Then you came."

"Turn your flashlights on," Doc directed.

They complied.

Doc Savage turned his flash beam on the ground. He held it there some moments. Then he lifted the beam to the faces of Monk and Renny. Their hair was not exactly standing on end, but that was only because nature did not equip the human scalp to perform that phenomenon successfully.

There were indentations in the ground, perhaps sixteen inches long, wider than a human foot at one end, and tapering. They were deepest at the wide end.

The hair-raising part, though, was the gashes edging the marks. Gashes which might have been made by enormous, razor-sharp claws.

MONK SAID hoarsely, "I'm doggonned if I get this at all."

QUEST OF QUI

Doc Savage went ahead and studied the spot where he had been attacked. There, where he had heard the ugly blows hit the ground, he found more of the weird, horrible indentations.

He was bending over them when Monk and Renny, looking as if they wanted company, joined him.

Renny began, in the same voice a man might use to talk to himself when going through a graveyard, "Monk and me don't know exactly what to make of this – "

He choked off.

"Holy cow!" he howled. "Look at that!"

That was a ghostly thing of phosphorescence that danced, like a will-o'-the-wisp, through the trees ahead. It was small, rather shapeless. It poised, as if it knew it had been discovered.

"I'm gonna get that thing, whatever it is!" Monk yelled, and was off like a shot.

Doc and Renny followed him. Monk had the awkward appearance of a bull ape, but he could run. Doc gained. Renny, who could do a hundred in close to ten seconds, fell behind.

The glowing will-o'-the-wisp spot was in flight now. It traveled with giddy speed, often lost in the shrubbery. It seemed to be making toward the hangars. It was. It rounded the hangars.

Monk and Doc Savage rounded the first hangar structure side by side. They stopped. The glowing spot was gone.

"I'm gonna find that thing!" Monk gritted. "Bet it'll explain that mystery attack back there."

The homely chemist yanked at the sliding hangar door. It was unlocked, and caved open. Monk dashed his flashlight aside. He stared for some seconds, held almost breathless by what he saw.

It was a plane. An ultramodern job of chromium and stainless steel and masterly streamlining. There were two enormous motors, and streamlined bulks virtually a part of the cabin. The ship was almost a perfect flying wing.

"Boy!" Monk breathed. "A guy could go places in that. Bet it's almost as fast as that new speed job of yours, Doc. Notice the shape of the hull for landing on water or snow, and how the landing gear cranks down – "

"We were hunting something," Doc put in. "Obviously it did not go – "

Renny's great, roaring voice reached their ears. "I've got it! I got it!"

They whipped out of the hangar and around to the other side. They saw Renny before their lights bore upon him. Renny, with the phosphorescence smearing him, was a gargoyle of greenish flame, struggling with a smaller gargoyle.

They got their lights on the object which Renny had captured.

It was the pig, Habeas Corpus, who had been smeared with the phosphorescent juice.

QUEST OF QUI

RENNY MADE disgusted noises and released his captive, which he must have surprised by rounding the other side of the hangar.

"I'm beginning to string with Ham's ideas," Renny grumbled. "That hog ain't good for nothing but breakfast bacon." Monk squinted at Habeas. The pig had a gashed flank.

"So you run into the big mystery, too, Habeas?" Monk grunted.

Habeas, the pig, looked as if he did not care greatly for the whole procedure.

Doc Savage said, "We have made enough noise to arouse this end of the county, in spite of the wind. We might as well walk right up to the house."

The Moorish castle of a house was some hundreds of feet distant, its presence marked by the one lighted window, and the fleeting, ghostly luminance cast on its walls by the distant, rotating airport beacon.

The three men kept close together. From time to time they used the infra-red light projector, which had not been smashed in the excitement. But neither with that nor their unaided eyes did they see anything out of the way.

When using the infra-red light, they turned their flashlights off, and the pig, Habeas, seeing their glowing forms in the darkness, emitted a series of disapproving grunts and drew away.

"That's why he ran from us," Monk decided. "Saw this shining stuff on us and decided we were spooks or somethin'."

"Well," Renny began. "I can't for my life figure –"

It sounded like overdry sticks breaking – many of them breaking in measure, staccato procession. The sounds had an uneven loudness, but that was due to the wind.

"Gun!" Renny boomed. "Sounded like an automatic pistol."

"From the house," Doc Savage said, and they ran forward. The wind was screaming now. Leaves carried by the gale smacked their faces. Occasionally there were small branches. They reached the wall, and a gate of metal openwork. The wind made low, awful whinings around the gate.

Doc Savage tried it. It was latched, but not locked. Doc unlatched it and the wind tore it open with a rush and a bang. They went through.

"Holy cow!" Renny muttered. "Look!"

The wall inside the gate was pocked where bullets had hit. There were a few smashed bullets on the walk.

They kept the flashlights on, and walked toward the house. The wind did not blow straight inside the wall, but in little spiral tornadoes. The air was full of dust, leaves, twigs. The house door was under a little balcony. Doc Savage went to it while the other two stood back, their machine-gun pistols alert. Doc banged on the door. It opened.

"Before you come in, gentlemen," said a voice from inside the house, "I must warn you that at present it does not seem likely you will ever leave the place alive."

QUEST OF QUI

DOC SAVAGE turned his flashlight on the speaker.

The man was five feet five, rotund and pink. He wore plush knee breeches, long stockings, shoes with buckles of silver or an imitation that looked like silver. One sleeve of his brocaded tail coat was split from shoulder to wrist; his tie and stock were askew. His hair was down over his blue eyes.

"I suppose you heard us shooting, sir," he said. "I dare say the master will be delighted, sir. We have been trying to get attention for two days."

Doc Savage asked, "Who are you?"

"Peabody, sir," said the man. "Mister Carleth's manservant. If you think it's safe, you might come inside, gentlemen."

Without moving, Doc queried, "And why should it be dangerous?"

Peabody, the manservant, bowed in the slightly stiff manner common to fat men.

"It might be more fitting for the master to say, sir," he murmured. "Shall I take you to him?"

Doc nodded. Peabody turned, led the way to a stairs, and upward. Doc Savage was close on his heels. Monk and Renny dragged a little farther back.

"Keep your glims open," Monk breathed to Renny. "I don't like this screwy set-up."

At the top of the stairs there was a trapdoor framing darkness and the banshee moan of wind.

Peabody put his head out and asked the darkness, "Have you see anything more, sir?"

"No," said a shrill, nervous voice.

"I admitted the gentlemen, sir," said Peabody.

"Who are they?" asked the voice.

"They have not told me, sir."

"Damn it, you should not have let them in until you knew who they were," snapped the voice. "Wait a minute."

A man appeared on the roof. His hair was long, white, and flying like a rag from his head. His face was younger than his hair, and his lean brown body looked sturdy enough. He wore pajamas, a dressing gown, carpet slippers, and he carried a 12-gauge pumpgun.

Peabody introduced him.

"The master, Thorpe Carleth," he said.

Thorpe Carleth looked intently at Doc Savage. A pair of rimless spectacles dangled from Carleth's dressing gown by a ribbon. He absently put the glasses on his nose. They fell off. The nose clip seemed to be broken.

"It seems I should know you," he murmured.

Monk said, "This is Doc Savage."

"Oh-h-h," Carleth said without particular excitement. "The gentleman who is reputedly the world's eighth wonder."

Monk scowled at that, thinking it a flippancy. Carleth saw, when he had balanced the glasses on his nose, and apologized hastily.

"Don't mind me," he said. "I'm rattled. I'm liable to say anything. You see, I am not accustomed to being held a prisoner in my own house by an infernal hoodoo."

"Hoodoo?" Monk frowned.

Carleth murmured, "How else can you describe a blasted thing you haven't seen and which throws the queerest sort of knives and spears at you?"

"Old Viking knives and spears?" Monk exploded.

"I'm sure I don't know about that," said Carleth.

CARLETH DESCENDED the steps, walked into another room, and waved at an array of crude, heavy knives and short, vicious spears which reposed on a table. Doc Savage glanced at them.

"Viking weapons, all right," he said.

Carleth asked, "May I inquire what brought you here?"

"Search for a friend of General Theodore Marley Brooks," Doc replied. "He was carried off rather mysteriously."

Carleth's glasses fell off and he replaced them.

"I say, did the captors of this fellow Ham throw bally knives and spears and things without ever being seen?" he asked.

Monk looked at him closely, growled, "So you've been up against 'em, too?"

"Oh, rather." Carleth looked at Peabody. "Haven't we, Peabody?"

"It has been very unpleasant, sir," Peabody said correctly.

Carleth's glasses fell, and he let them hang.

"First, they took one of my two new planes at least somebody took it," he said. "We heard the motor as it left the hangar, and we naturally ran out. That was at night. We were set upon in the darkness. We had quite a tussle, and got some kind of glowing stuff on us somehow. We, ah, funk'd it and ran back into the house. Never did know exactly what we were fighting. Dare say you don't believe me."

"That ain't hard to believe," Monk muttered. "We went through about the same thing."

Carleth fingered his glasses.

"The deuced telephone wire was cut," he said. "We could not call for help. I heard my plane leave, and after that, I went out. But the moment my nose was past the door, a blasted knife hit right beside me. Here, I'll show you the mark."

He led them to the front door, stuck his head out gingerly, as if he considered himself to be running something of a risk, and pointed at a deep gash in the door jamb.

"Well, we've been here two days, afraid to leave," Carleth said. "A few times, I've shot at things. I guess they were shadows, or my imagination. Last time was a while ago. I know what the last one was. The infernal wind had blown a paper onto a bush."

Carleth was facing the door.

"Watch it!" Doc Savage ripped suddenly, and shoved him. The two of them landed heavily on the floor to one side.

Monk, Renny, had their flashlights on. They doused the beams instinctively, not wanting to be targets, forgetting they were covered with the phosphorescent substance.

Plunk! It was something hitting the rear of the hallway.

Monk turned his flash on the sound. One of the heavy Viking knives was sticking in the wall, still humming from the force with which it had struck.

"THAT WAS thrown from outside!" Monk bawled. He lunged to one side, yanked down a thick velvet drapery, and enveloped himself in it. He resembled an Arab in a dark burnoose as he charged out through the door, flashlight in one hand, machine-gun pistol in the other.

Renny followed after Monk, roaring irately. Peabody, the manservant, bounced up and down as if he did not know what to do, then followed the others.

"Better watch yourself," Doc Savage told Carleth.

The bronze man then followed Monk's example in enveloping himself in a drapery, and eased out into the darkness.

Strangely enough, Doc Savage did not head for where Monk, Renny and Peabody were threshing about, searching the shrubbery inside the wall. The bronze man eased along the wall until he was at the rear of the house. He tried windows as he went. All were locked.

Doc drew a hank of silken cord from his clothing. To the end of this was affixed a folding grapple. He tossed it up, snared the roof edge – there was a wall around the roof, after the Moorish fashion – and he climbed. He made no sound that could have been heard above the wind.

He was banking on there being more than one trapdoor to the roof. There was. He got it open – it was not locked – and descended. From the odors, he was in the kitchen regions. He used his flashlight. It showed only the conventional things.

He found stairs, descended them into a basement. it was large, divided into rooms. He explored these. The second chamber he entered had something that interested him greatly. He walked around and around the thing several times, using his flashlight.

It was a radio outfit, transmitter and receiver for both short and long wave length. It was not a portable set, and it was very powerful.

Extinguishing his flashlight abruptly, Doc listened. He had heard something – not the wind or the searchers. It was inside, near the door. He moved over there, put a hand against the door, very lightly.

The panel was opening.

DOC SET himself. The door opened wider, and he let it swing, and when it was far ajar, and he could hear the vague efforts of some one who was excited, but trying to breathe without noise, the bronze man stepped forward. His movements were uncannily quiet.

He got a thumb between his fingers. Squeezing it, he shut off all outcry, and when he was sure he had the captive secure, he ran fingers over a face, exploring the features in the intense darkness. There might be others, and he did not want to use his light.

Doc continued to examine the face with his sensitive finger tips. He was good at that, a relic of the weeks he had once spent in a school for the blind, eyes bandaged except for daily exercise periods.

"Ah," he said finally, and his voice was filled with surprise.

The victim seemed to be trying to speak. Doc slackened his grip a little. A small, shrill whisper came from the captive's lips.

"Let me," the whisper said, "tell you something."

It was strange, that whisper. It might have been a man or a woman.

Chapter 8. PHANTOM ENEMY

CARLETH, PEABODY, Renny and Monk were in the hallway when Doc Savage joined them. The bronze man came in from the outdoors, having gone out by the roof trapdoor and dropped to the earth.

"Find anything?" he asked, and his manner was entirely casual.

"Not a blamed thing," said Monk. "This is givin' me the willies. I even had Habeas snoop, and he's as good as a bloodhound. He didn't find anything."

"The pig never even acted queer, like he did in Monk's penthouse," Renny added, booming.

Carleth perched his glasses on his nose and held his head back so that they would stay there.

"Now you begin to understand what I am up against," he said nervously. "We seem to be hounded by a – phantom enemy."

"We might search the house," Doc Savage said.

QUEST OF QUI

"Of course," Carleth agreed readily.

They found nothing, and eventually, they came to the radio room.

Doc Savage glanced at the apparatus and seemed surprised. "Why did you not use this to summon help?" he asked.

"I know nothing of radio," Carleth said. "But Peabody here, is an operator. Picked it up in the war, you know."

"The apparatus has been out of order," Peabody said, without changing a face muscle. "Something burned out. I do not know how it happened."

"I installed the deuced radio a long time ago, when I had visions of starting a regular air line, you know," said Carleth.

They continued their search of the house, poking into closets, coal bins, chests. They tried window after window and found them all locked on the inside.

"We were very careful about that," said Carleth.

"Indeed we were," Peabody agreed in the manner of a perfect servant.

They completed their search, and there was nothing amiss.

They wound up in the hallway again, where Monk walked over to the knife that was sticking in the wall. Monk pulled the knife out. He looked at it, and amazement rushed over his homely features.

"Doc!" he gulped. "This knife – "

Doc Savage made a small gesture admonishing silence. Monk swallowed the rest of his bewildered exclamation, and made sure neither Carleth or Peabody had noticed; then, at the first opportunity, he cornered Doc alone.

"That knife," he muttered.

"What about it?" Doc asked.

"It's the same one that was thrown at you in your office," Monk grunted. "I'm dead sure, because it's got some of that finger print vapor coloring on it. You know, the same stuff you said you used on it."

"It is the same knife," Doc told him. "I was carrying it around with me."

Monk choked, "Then you – "

"Threw it myself," Doc admitted.

"But why?"

"To start some excitement, and give me an opportunity to look around without any one knowing," Doc replied.

QUEST OF QUI

"Blazes!" Monk breathed. "What'd you find?"

Doc Savage seemed not to hear that.

PEABODY, THE manservant, came up to them and murmured politely, "The master has a suggestion."

"Can't he talk himself?" growled Monk, who was disappointed because he had not gotten the information he hoped for out of Doc.

Carleth, smiling wryly, approached and said, "I should like to visit my hangars and see if they damaged my other new plane. You see, I have only two ships of any value, and I must confess they represent the investment of my last cent in the world. If you gentlemen had the idea I am wealthy, you were mistaken. You are looking at a gentleman who should like very much to make a few dollars."

They left the house. Carleth produced strong electric hand lanterns, and they carried these. When they reached the hangars, he turned on the field floodlights, and thereafter there was light aplenty.

With more than average anxiety apparent in his manner, Carleth went over the big speed plane which Doc and the others had seen earlier.

Monk stood back and admired the remarkable plane again.

"Some job," he breathed. "Some job."

Carleth stood back.

"I bought the two of them for a round-the-world record attempt," he said. "Yes, they are unusual ships. They cost almost two hundred thousand apiece."

He tried to make his spectacles stick, failed, and held them on his nose with one hand.

"I do wish I knew whether the other ship went," he said grimly. "It was not insured. Upon finding it depends my immediate financial future. In fact, if I do not get it back, I am ruined."

Carleth paced about nervously, eventually wandering into the office which adjoined one end of the hangar. The instant he was in there, he stared at the large map cases arrayed along one wall. One of the cases was open.

"Datted queer," he said, and went to the open case.

He riffled through the charts within for some moments.

"I say!" he exploded in a surprised voice.

Doc came over. "What is it?"

"Ordinarily, I do a business of renting out ships for long, dangerous flights which the regular air lines and barnstorming pilots will not attempt," Carleth explained. "For that reason, I have complete charts for most of North America. The men who took the plane seem to have made off with some of my charts as well."

"What charts?" Doc queried.

QUEST OF QUI

"Those covering a line drawn generally from here to Greenland," Carleth elaborated.

Renny blinked, rumbled, "That radio of Johnny's!"

CARLETH, LOOKING very interested, demanded, "Would you mind telling me why you seem so surprised?"

Renny eyed Doc. "Any objection?"

"None," Doc told him.

Renny told about the radio transmitter of Johnny's which was in such mysterious, continual operation, without any actual transmitting being done. He told what the direction finder had revealed about the whereabouts of the transmitter.

"Very puzzling," Carleth murmured. "But it hooks up. The stolen charts cover the same direction from which the transmitter wave is coming."

"There's a connection," Renny agreed, and knocked his big, hard fists together.

Peabody advanced and said something to Carleth in a voice so low that none of the others caught it. Peabody used a tiny whisper. Anyway, the wind outside was making cyclone noises. The hangar squeaked, moaned steadily.

Doc Savage, was watching Peabody intently as he spoke. Doc had first learned to read lips when he was very young.

"Peabody has an excellent suggestion," Carleth murmured. "It is his thought that we might join forces. You are interested in finding your colleague, Johnny. I am interested, very interested, in recovering my stolen plane. So may I offer you use of my other ship, here, in pursuing your enemies more correctly, I should say, our joint enemies?"

It was earnestly put, convincing. Monk and Renny glanced at Doc Savage, plainly wondering what his reaction would be. Doc had a speed plane of his own, but it was only a little faster than this amazing supership.

Doc said, "You forget, Carleth, that we have to find our man, Ham, who is missing here in the vicinity of New York."

Carleth nodded. "True. May I offer you every assistance."

Doc Savage seemed to consider briefly.

"I will get in touch with you," he advised.

Carleth, if he felt disappointment, did not show it. He was still holding his spectacles on his nose with one hand.

"What do you suggest I do?" he asked. "Call the police?"

"Are you willing to stay in your house for a while?" Doc asked.

QUEST OF QUI

Carleth smiled wryly. "We managed for two days. Nothing seemed to menace us as long as we remained inside. Yes. I will try it – "

FIVE MINUTES later, Doc Savage, Monk, Renny and the pig, Habeas, were headed for the spot where they had left the bronze man's car. They had left Carleth and his servant, the perfectly mannered Peabody, in Carleth's stucco home.

Monk grumbled, "If I didn't know enough about your ideas to be sure they're better than any I'd have, Doc, I'd make a suggestion."

"What?" Doc asked.

"Hang over that place back there like a cloud," Monk said. "I got a hunch we might turn up something."

"Ham," Doc Savage replied, "is not around there."

"Huh!" Monk exploded. "You're sure?"

"Positive."

Renny emitted an astounded rumble, then pointed a huge hand. "I'll say he's not there. Look!"

They had come close enough so that their flashlight beams had picked up their car.

Ham was lying motionless beside it.

HAM – BRIGADIER General Theodore Marley Brooks – was a noted lawyer, but he was probably better known for something else. His clothes. He was the Beau Brummell of New York, if not of the twentieth century. He was a tailor's dream. Tailors had been known to follow him down the street, just to see clothes being worn as they should be.

Ham's garb just now would have been a disappointment, however. It consisted entirely of a gunnysack, none too clean. Two holes had been torn in the bottom for Ham's legs, and he filled the rest of the sack – it was not a very large one snugly indeed.

There was a cut on his shoulder. It was not serious, and had long since stopped bleeding.

They stood over him. He snored. It was a very loud, peaceful snore; it had to be to arise above the gale.

Monk frowned blackly and drew back a foot, preparatory to kicking the snoring, gunnysack-clad Ham in the ribs.

Renny pushed the homely chemist off balance. "What's the idea?"

"I'll teach 'im to lay down and go to sleep when we're sweatin' blood tryin' to find 'im!" Monk gurgled. "I'll kick his innards all over that car!"

"Wait," Doc Savage said. "He was caught in a trap of mine."

"Huh?" said Monk.

QUEST OF QUI

Doc demonstrated an ingenious mechanical device which had completely escaped discovery by Monk and Renny in their previous use of the car.

"When the switch hidden under the dash is thrown, it completes a connection so that, when the car doors are disturbed, an odorless, colorless gas is released from a container under the chassis," Doc explained. "The gas produces unconsciousness. Thinking that some one might visit the car while we were gone, I turned it on."

Monk looked Ham over, grinned widely, and said, "I oughta kick his sides in anyway. Don't he look pretty ill, that oat sack?"

Doc Savage got a medical case from the car and went to work on the recumbent, snoring, Ham.

"Ham should have an interesting story to tell," said the bronze man.

"Bet he don't know a thing," Monk grunted. "He's the kind that wouldn't."

MONK CAME near being right.

Ham came out under the urging of a combined stimulant and nullifier for the affects of the anaesthetic gas, which was harmless and a type Doc Savage frequently used.

Dazed, Ham murmured, "What – where – "

"Don't tell him," Monk said sourly. "Let him guess where he is."

Ham said nothing more until he had full control of his faculties. Then he addressed Monk clearly and with a great deal of feeling.

"You bug-faced ape," he said.

Monk glowered in a manner which was in marked contrast to his earlier expressions of concern over Ham's welfare.

"What happened to you?" Doc Savage asked Ham. "Start explanations with your apartment."

"I heard a vase break," Ham said. "I turned toward the sound. I did not see anything. Then something whacked me on the head. I went down. I was stunned, but not out. Before I could see what had hit me, a black cloth of some kind was thrown over my head and held there. I fought. It was funny – "

"Ha, ha!" said Monk. "I'd like to have seen it."

Ham said, "I'll poison you some day!" and went on with his story.

"By funny, I mean it was strange," Ham continued. "During the fight, I did not have the impression of battling human beings. There were real things there, all right, but – I don't know. I was dazed. I did get my hand on what felt like a knife, and struck, but the knife point stuck in the floor and I lost it. Then I was knocked out completely, slammed entirely cuckoo."

"Cuckoo is right," Monk said unkindly. "But I think you got it earlier than that."

Ham ignored him.

QUEST OF QUI

"I came to being lowered from the window by a rope," Ham said. "At least, I suppose it was the window. Anyway, I was dragged across a cement pavement, an alley, it smelled like, and dumped into a car."

"Men dragged you?" Doc asked.

"I don't – know," Ham said earnestly. "It was a very bad dream. But of course, it must have been men."

"Of course," leered Monk. "Or maybe it was little birds." Ham, pretending not to hear, continued, "In the car, I heard a sound as if some one had come up and discovered what was going on. I think I recognized the voice as belonging to the superintendent of my club building. There was a horrible sound later, as if – did they kill him?"

"They did," Doc said soberly.

"He was a decent fellow," Ham said gently.

They were all silent.

MONK WAS first to speak, and he left the quarrelsomeness out of his voice now. "The chalk message we found in your trousers?"

"Oh, yes," Ham said. "I got a hand in my pocket, after they began yanking my clothing off. There was a man driving the car. I am sure of that. I heard him say something about Diamond Point, so there must have been another man, too. I managed to leave the message in my pocket. Then they knocked me out again. They must have thought I was fishing in the pocket for a weapon."

"And what else?" Doc asked.

"Oh, they kept knocking me over the head when I woke up," Ham said. "It was very tough to keep them from knowing when I was reviving. In fact, I did not do it. Did you ever see a man regain his senses without some subconscious stirring about?"

"You got a chance to write on the floorboards!" Doc pointed out.

"Yes," Ham admitted. "I caught something about the Carleth Air Lines. I got that on the floorboards. Had the chalk for that invisible writing in my hair. Stuff is a little sticky, you know. You can put it in your hair and it'll stay there."

"Continue," Monk suggested.

"The next thing I knew, I was fifty feet or so from this car," Ham said. "I had regained my senses. I was in this – this gunnysack."

"It becomes you," Monk told him.

Ham glared, said, "That's all I know. And before I do anything about it, I'm going to get some clothes."

Monk seemed to think of something that made him chuckle.

Ham glowered, "Now what?"

QUEST OF QUI

"I just thought," Monk said, "of what a picture you'll make going into your club in that gunnysack."

Doc got the car headed toward New York. Doc did not drive as rapidly as he had coming out, by a good deal. Especially was he careful on the hills which were exposed to the full force of the wind.

At one point, there was a tree down across the road, but their machine crashed around it, although afterward Renny got out and disengaged a branch from the underside of the chassis.

"Now that we've got Ham, we're heading north to see what's wrong with Johnny?" Monk asked.

"We are," Doc Savage agreed.

"But what about, all of this mysterious business, the Viking freebooters and the Viking weapons and the mysterious attackers and the rest of it?" Monk queried.

"Johnny's safety comes above all of it," Doc replied.

After a time, when they headed into metropolitan New York, Monk knew by the route that Doc Savage was driving that the bronze man was heading for the airplane hangar which he maintained, disguised as a huge warehouse, on the Hudson River water front.

The wind seemed to be getting worse. Women walked bent over, holding skirts below their knees. Men held their hats, or carried them under their arms. Paper, leaves, trash was all over the streets.

They passed a big sign which had blown down. Farther on, workmen were boarding up a glass window which had collapsed.

"Merry old springtime," Renny rumbled gloomily.

"It's things like this that makes sailors quit the sea," Monk grinned.

Ham started, pointed ahead. "Look. Isn't that a fire?"

Four blocks more, and they saw it was a fire. They were on the elevated speedway along the Hudson. Doc Savage drove, more rapidly.

It was a big fire. The wind snapped off pieces of flame and carried it hundreds of feet. The blaze flickered red against the clouds. There was a fire apparatus, a crowd, policemen, excitement.

Renny reared up abruptly to get a closer look.

"Holy cow!" he boomed.

The burning structure was Doc Savage's warehouse hangar.

THEY FOUND a policeman who told them, in two sentences, all that they learned, even by questioning all others who had seen the thing start.

"A guy backed a truck loaded with oil drums, and probably a few cases of dynamite, up against the place, then got out and ran," said the cop. "Pretty soon the truck went flooey!"

QUEST OF QUI

Doc Savage and his aides were very busy during the next hour. There was much to be done. There was valuable equipment other than planes stored in the great building – a submarine of a new and amazing type upon which Doc Savage was experimenting, and adjacent to that, a small dirigible which the bronze man had developed to a point where it could make stratosphere flights.

They saved the dirigible, the submarine, and some other stuff. The fire did not even get through the partitions to them. Police lines – and the wind – kept the crowd back.

Not one of Doc Savage's planes survived the fire. The hangar wall had been blown in on them, accompanied by a flood of flaming gasoline – it had been gasoline in the barrels on the truck.

"Don't nobody need to tell me what was behind this," Monk growled when they finally got a breathing spell. "Somebody don't want us to go hunting Johnny."

"Simple reasoning," Renny agreed.

"What other kind of reasoning could you expect from Monk?" Ham asked.

HAM WAS feeling more chipper. He had borrowed a long rubber coat from a fireman, but not before he had provoked much astonishment and mirth by tearing about clad only in a gunnysack.

"I'm going to get some clothes from the club," Ham said in a determined voice. "I can't understand why they threw my other garments away after they seized me."

"Whoever, or whatever, your captors were, they must have heard of the gadgets Doc and ourselves use," Renny reminded him. "They were afraid you would have some of the things in your clothing. Getting rid of the garments was easier than searching you."

Ham said, "Well, I'm off to get some decent clothes on."

"You have a cold country outfit, have you not?" Doc asked.

"Brand new," Ham admitted. "Made by the best fur house in the city. No crude Eskimo work on them."

"Better bring them," Doc said. "Monk, Renny, better get your own, too. You have them, haven't you?"

"Sure," Monk grunted. "I got some left from that last dizzy trip we took up there, that time we found that fantastic place underground."

Renny queried abruptly, "Just how are we going up there, Doc?"

"The fastest way," the bronze man told him. "By plane. We'll install a radio compass and run down Johnny's transmitter. We've got to get to it before the batteries give out, too."

"And where will we get a suitable plane?" Renny demanded. "A trip like that will take more than an ordinary ship."

"We are going to accept Thorpe Carleth's kind offer of cooperation," Doc Savage said.

Chapter 9. TERROR IN THE NORTH

IT was cold over that part of Canada lying to the south and west of Greenland. Most of the inhabited world called this season spring. But there it was bitter. The thermometer on the strut outside the window of the plane read forty-eight below zero. No doubt it was a little warmer down below.

"Darned cold snap, even for up here," Monk grumbled.

The homely chemist was mixing chemicals. He was concocting a bitter mixture to put on the small overall jacket of fur which he had fashioned for the pig. Habeas, his purpose being to discourage Habeas's inclination to chew the legs off the garment.

Thorpe Carleth had been studying the rugged terrain below with binoculars. He shuddered, put the binoculars down. He fished out his spectacles and sat them on his nose. He had not gotten the nose clip repaired, and had to keep his head tilted back to balance the spectacles in place.

"I hate to think of what would happen to my ship if they had a forced landing down there," he murmured. "You know, I'm rather out of luck if I find they've crashed the bus somewhere."

Renny rumbled, "What we're interested in is what happened to Johnny."

Peabody, the perfect manservant, sat in the rear, taking no part in the conversation.

Ham watched Peabody from time to time with something bordering on admiration. It had long been Ham's ambition to acquire for himself a manservant who left nothing to be desired. In Peabody, Ham believed he saw the fulfillment of all his dreams. Earlier in the long flight from New York, Ham had spoken with Peabody, and discovered that the efficient Peabody knew his business.

Peabody was the sort of a valet who would be horrified at wearing a black bow tie with full dress, the black bow being reserved for tux. Ham was half inclined to entice Peabody from his master by offering a larger salary.

Doc Savage had spoken little for a long time. The bronze man was at the rear, working over a sensitive radio direction finder. He had arranged the loop so that it was outside the plane.

They were heading straight for Johnny's radio transmitter. They had been heading straight for it for a long time. The hissing still emanated from the loud-speaker.

Monk came back and listened to the hissing.

"Blazes!" he muttered. "You got the volume control cut down?"

"It is on more than it was," Doc said.

"Then the signal is getting weaker," Monk muttered. "The batteries on the transmitter are running down."

Doc Savage nodded.

"Change the course to northwest a half west," Doc Savage directed.

QUEST OF QUI

Renny was piloting. Surprise came over his long, puritanical-looking face. But he made the course shift, after which they were flying almost at right angles to their previous route.

Doc Savage offered no explanation. They held that course for something near forty-five minutes.

Doc Savage worked over the radio compass the while. The most effective method was to get the signal to the weakest point on the rotation loop dial, and read the bearing at right angles to that, but this was no longer possible. Only when the loop was directly upon the signal could it be picked up at all.

Doc Savage read the bearing carefully, then turned to the sextant, leaned out of a window and hurriedly took a sight for position. He worked the sight, spotted it on the chart, and drew a line, with protractor, in the direction indicated by the bearing.

Monk saw, then, what the bronze man had done in changing course. He had gotten two bearing lines on Johnny's transmitter; where they crossed would be the approximate of the transmitter.

Doc put the plane back toward the weak radio signal. Twenty minutes later, the signal was not audible at all. The transmitter batteries had given out entirely.

"Boy, it's lucky you got that cross bearing," Monk grunted.

"In three hours and twenty minutes, we should pick up the transmitter," Doc Savage said, after calculations.

The three hours and twenty minutes passed without incident.

The chart was of little use to them now. This was a British Admiralty chart, and it bore only surveys actually made. These were surprisingly few; they gave an idea of the character of the coastline, not much more.

"This country is pretty much unknown," Renny offered. He frowned at the terrain below. "I wouldn't give thirty cents for all of it."

Doc Savage took over the controls. The sky above was mottled. Ahead was a gray haze – snow. They reached the snow area soon. It screamed against the propeller blades and, driven against the fuselage, sounded like sand from a blasting blower.

The bronze man sank the ship lower and lower. There was unpleasantly little visibility. Long minutes passed.

"We've gone over the spot," he decided.

He turned back, but instead of wasting time hunting, climbed until he found the top of the clouds at fourteen thousand feet, took an astronomical sight.

When he had worked out the position, he put the plane down again. Less than two hundred feet above the snow, he flattened out and began flying back and forth, searching.

The other men used binoculars. Yet it was the bronze man's trained flake-gold eyes which picked up first evidence of what they sought.

"Wrecked plane," he said grimly, and bent off in a sharp bank to the right.

QUEST OF QUI

The others saw the ship, practically buried in the drifts adjacent to a forest of huge boulders. It was only scattered bits.

"Johnny's ship," Doc announced. "From the looks of the thing, it was blown up."

A moment later Doc executed a landing in the snow. Carleth became pale during the landing; Peabody moistened his lips several times. Monk, Ham and Renny showed no concern. They knew from the past what Doc could do with a plane.

The bronze man clambered out. There was a foot or two of loose snow on the level, a crust beneath, and it was blowing, but not hard.

They searched the wreckage of Johnny's plane, combed the immediate vicinity. Time after time they kicked through the drifts, searching.

They found no trace of Johnny.

The snow was cold, and it squealed under their moosehide footgear as they moved about.

Doc Savage moved back into the clearing, scrutinizing this level place in the wilderness of stone and snow. He was drawn by what at first appeared to be a snowdrift of unusual formation. He approached it. The certainty grew that it was snow drifted over a human body.

"Johnny!" Monk exploded in horror.

But it was not the gaunt geologist whom they were bunting. It was the man Johnny had found dying, and who had been killed by Kettler, although Doc and the others, now, had no way of knowing that.

Doc brushed snow away from the stonily frozen cadaver. The fact that the man had worn a heavy beard until a short time before his death stood out even more distinctly in his present condition.

Thorpe Carleth fished his glasses out of his parka, held them on his nose, and peered at the dead man.

"I say!" he exploded. "I remember this chap."

Doc Savage watched Carleth intently. "Yes?"

Carleth glanced at the correct Peabody. "Am I right, Peabody? Isn't this a mechanic whom I employed about two years ago?"

"Yes, sir," said Peabody. "You discharged him for undue intoxication, sir."

"Know anything more about him?" Doc asked.

"No," said Carleth.

"I never did like the gentleman," said Peabody. "No reason for that, sir."

Doc Savage announced, "We will look for some trace of Johnny."

QUEST OF QUI

They spread out in a line, each separated from the other by a few yards, and began combing the vicinity. They found enough traces to show them two planes had landed in the clearing – Johnny's and another. They found where the other ship had taken off.

Carleth measured the marks of the latter ship carefully, then nodded vehemently.

"This was my stolen ship!" he declared. "Barring, of course, the presence of another ship with similar measurements, which is not likely."

They came upon the stream, frozen over, but the gurgle of running water – when an ear was placed close to the ice – was audible.

Doc Savage located the frozen litter where a pit had been chopped in the thick-crustured ice. Snow had drifted over it. He kicked the white flakes away.

A bit of cloth projected from the ice. It was part of a garment, the rest of which was frozen deep. Doc Savage studied the cloth closely. Renny came up and stared with him.

"Holy cow!" Renny yelled out. "That's Johnny's woolen blouse that he always wore under his parka!"

MONK AND Renny raced back to the plane and returned with light axes. They hacked furiously at the ice. It was brittle, came up in showers. Sharp fragments punished their faces. The ice was clearer near the bottom. Renny broke out a chunk which broke clear, so that he could see down into the ice.

He made out a shapeless blob of fur, an elongated blob.

"Johnny's body!" he moaned.

A split-second later, Doc Savage straightened. He listened intently, dropped his axe, and raced toward their plane.

Then the others heard what he had heard. A plane motor! It was in the distance, but becoming louder in a way which showed it was headed toward them. Then its fainter sound was lost in the blasting whoop as Doc got the engine of their own plane going.

"He's leaving without us!" Thorpe Carleth screamed, and raced madly for their plane.

He did not make it. The engine was still warm, and Doc Savage got the tail of the ship up. Snow climbed up in a great funnel around the plane. The ship climbed a drift, bounced, climbed another, did not settle, knocked the top off a third mound of snow, and was in the air.

Carleth stood watching it, wringing his hands. Apparently he found much in the prospect of being left behind on the snow to horrify him. Doc banked away.

The other ship appeared. It was almost identical with the one Doc was piloting.

"My other ship!" Carleth howled.

A man leaned from the plane. He had a rifle. It began to lip flame.

"They're trying to kill us!" Carleth shrieked, and ran, arms thrashing the air as he fought the snow.

QUEST OF QUI

"Dive into a drift!" Renny boomed. "Cover yourself up with snow. They can't pick you out from up there."

Suiting action to his words, Renny shot into a drift headfirst. Such was his momentum that he buried himself completely in the soft flakes. He stamped through the crust and got down deeper.

Renny could hear noises in the snow which told him the others were doing the same thing. The noise of the attacking plane went away

The ship arched off, obviously intending to come back. Then the pilot discovered Doc Savage's ship. He twisted thin lips in a snarling grimace of confidence.

"This is gonna be easy," he gritted. "I cut my teeth on combat stuff, back in the war."

Doc Savage, if he felt apprehensions, did not show them. The other ship was loaded with men and guns. The two planes were no doubt alike in speed, maneuverability, with the other possibly a shade slower because of its load.

Doc slammed head-on at the other craft. Its prop was big, and they had no gun synchronized to shoot through it. The propeller blades prevented them firing at him.

The bronze man dug into a metal duffel box which he had dragged forward before taking off. It held extra machine-gun pistols and some of the marked ammunition drums. There was a sliding window over the pilot's seat. Doc intended to fly under the other ship and try to get its propeller in passing.

But the other pilot was no tyro. He nosed down, almost against the snow-sheathed earth. Because there was nothing else to do, Doc went over him.

The bronze man's plane trembled as a lead storm swept it. A cockpit window acquired a round bullet hole. Back in the cabin, equipment jumped about. One box upset, began to give out smoke and fumes. That was Monk's tiny portable chemical laboratory, which he always took with him. Lead must have broken some of the bottles.

Doc arched around. He began to cough violently. His eyes ran. He swayed, all but fell out of the cockpit seat.

It was the chemical fumes overcoming him.

ASPHYXIATION HAS a queer way with a man. It upsets his mental balance, causes him to do the unexpected, and it enwraps him in a grisly lethargy of uncare for what happens. Such was the affect of the fumes from the broken chemical bottles. Doc fought it with a great mental effort.

Probably the bullet hole in the window helped more than anything. It let in screaming fresh air that pushed the fumes back. Doc struck the window with a fist, knocking out the glass, cutting his metallic knuckles a little.

He pumped air into his lungs and that cleared his head. He was flying level. The other plane pursued. Occasional bullets hit Doc's ship.

The bronze man held his breath, heaved out of the cockpit, ran back, and wrenched open a window in the rear of the cabin. The draft cleared out the fumes. He tugged at the metal case from which the fumes came. It was lashed down.

QUEST OF QUI

Before Doc could free it to throw it overboard, the plane, disturbed by his shifting weight, was moaning toward a crash, and he had to get to the controls. Not much vapor was coming from the box now, anyway.

The bronze man was still groggy. He put the plane into a climbing spiral, sparring for time, for a clearer head. The other ship followed him up, striving to rake him with lead, always just failing, and unable to climb quite as fast as Doc's bus.

The altimeter needle marched to eighteen thousand, where the thermometer said it was fifty below, and there they fought, above the clouds, jockeying, diving, zooming. Time was interminable. They paid no attention to where they were carried, for all of their thoughts were on saving their lives.

It was Doc Savage who triumphed, and he did it by strategy, getting in front of the other plane and fleeing. Then he clipped a certain special ammo drum in his machine-gun pistol, leaned out and fired steadily and long at the other ship.

Doc was aiming at the motor, and he was using bullets charged with the chemical which formed a vapor that, drawn into a carburetor, made the mixture noninflammable.

It had effect, just as his drum ran empty, and there were no more of the special bullets aboard. The motor of the other ship stopped.

Surprise caused the pilot to fall into a spin after he had stalled, but he centered his controls and pulled out, then went into a vertical dive and vanished, with the speed of a dropping stone, into the clouds.

Doc followed them down. He kept track of them in the clouds for a time. But the clouds thickened. He lost track of his quarry.

He hunted for a long time. He floated down close to earth, and arched back and forth, seeking the other ship, or the wreck of it, if it had crashed in landing.

He saw numerous spots at which a good pilot could have landed. He did not see the other ship.

RENNY AND Monk were excited when Doc Savage came back to them. It was a glad excitement, not caused entirely by his safe return.

"Johnny!" Renny bawled, his great roaring voice on full power.

"What about him?" Doc asked.

"We dug out the hole in the ice," Renny whooped. "That thing we thought was his body wasn't! It was his parka!"

"Then Johnny must be alive," Doc Savage said grimly.

Chapter 10. THE GOLDEN-HAIRED GIRL

JOHNNY WAS alive. He did, however, hold more than a sneaking suspicion that he was going to freeze to death. He shivered more violently than he would have believed possible, and his teeth rattled like several dice receiving a hard shaking in a glass.

QUEST OF QUI

A stocky, bulb-nosed man looked at Johnny and said, "My gosh, you rattle all over, don't you?"

"Facetious assertions are an infelicitous necessitarianism," Johnny remarked gloomily.

"My gosh," gasped the bulb-nosed man. "Does cold always bring words like that out of you?"

Johnny said nothing and devoted himself to a shiver of extraordinary violence, after which he made a mental decision that the person who had advanced the theory that shivering helps keep one warm had either been perpetrating a joke, or had been badly mistaken.

Johnny's present garb consisted of red-flannel underwear, which he had prudently donned in New York, and two blankets, neither comfortably heavy. This was no equipment with which to sit in a cave hollowed out of snow, with the thermometer well below zero. His wrists were tied with rope.

Some moments ago, Johnny had heard a plane overhead. Previous to that, the plane of his captors, which had gone away for a time, had returned in what seemed to be a great hurry, and there had ensued some noise and excitement. Johnny had not been able to figure out what this last had meant.

"What chicanery is eventuating?" he demanded.

The bulb-nosed man had a rifle, which he kept tucked in his armpit – the breech mechanism portion – where the cold would not affect it. There were two other riflemen outside.

"Translate that," the guard requested.

"What is going on?" Johnny asked.

"Shut up," said the guard.

The other two guards came crawling in from a snow tunnel which led out of the hastily improvised prison cell. They demanded to know what was the meaning of the conversation which they had just heard.

"Just this bag of bones and his words," said the bulb-nosed one.

"We oughta let him freeze in that ice pit full of water," growled another. "Wonder what made Kettler decide to keep him alive all of a sudden."

"Search me," said the first. "Some big idea, I guess."

To their ears came sounds of a man expressing himself roundly and violently in profanity.

"That must be Kettler," a man chuckled. "He's kinda peeved. That Doc Savage almost plucked his tail feathers a while ago."

Johnny, who had found the most comfortable position to be one of reclining, sat up after the fashion of a jumping jack.

"Doc Savage – up here?" he barked.

"Sure," grinned the bulb-nosed man.

QUEST OF QUI

"How'd he happen to come?" Johnny demanded, forgetting his usual large words.

"Came lookin' for Qui, reckon," said the other.

"Shut up, you blasted fool!" gritted another guard. "This mug don't know what the Qui business is all about. Doc Savage has never heard of it. Want to tip 'em off?"

AT THAT point, Kettler came stamping in, rage all over his doglike face. He yanked the flaps of his muskrat cap loose as if to hear himself better.

"We can't find out what that bronze guy done to the damn motor," he growled. "Not a thing wrong with it. But it sure conked out on us, and we can't get it started."

Johnny kept an expression of gloom on his gaunt features. He could guess what had happened to the motor. The stuff which mixed with the gasoline vapor would congeal on the walls of the carburetors, cylinders and intake manifolds, and it would be several hours before the engine would start, unless the affected parts were taken out and wiped carefully.

"That was Doc Savage flyin' over after you landed, wasn't it?" asked a man. "Sounded like he was lookin' for you." Kettler swore. He kicked cold snow on Johnny, who hastily brushed the damp flakes off his bare skin and wrapped himself protectingly in the blanket.

"We spread that white canvas tent over part of the plane, and kicked snow over the rest," Kettler gritted. "That, and the fact it was snowin', kept him from seem' us."

"An execrable circumstantiality," murmured Johnny.

"Another gob of them words and I'll cut your throat!" Kettler screamed.

Johnny looked at the speaker, and was surprised to feel his spine grow colder than the rest of his body, an occurrence which surprised him infinitely. Kettler had meant it.

Satisfied with Johnny's sudden silence – if one did not consider sporadic involuntary teeth chatterings – Kettler took several turns stamping around the snow room. Breath came out of his nostrils in angry snorts of steam. Suddenly he stopped in front of Johnny.

"You're an archy–archy –"

"An archaeologist," Johnny supplied.

"Yeah." Kettler glared. "That means you know all about old–time things, don't I? And if you spring a big word answering me, I'll stomp your brains into the snow."

"Yes," Johnny said.

"You know a lot of old–time languages, don't you?"

"Yes," said Johnny.

"Could you understand an old–time Viking if you heard him?" Kettler demanded.

QUEST OF QUI

"Yes."

"Could you talk to him?" Kettler growled.

"Yes."

"By gosh," exclaimed the bulb-nosed guard. "He spoke four little words, one right after the other."

Johnny said nothing. He sat and shivered, thought about the Viking business – and wondered how long it would actually be before he froze stiff.

Kettler continued to stomp anxious circles in the snow. Some one came in with a gasoline lantern, pumped it up and got it going after some difficulty. The lantern gave off a little warmth. Johnny tried to edge over to it, but Kettler kicked him away.

"As long as you're half frozen, you can't run out on us," he growled.

Kettler consulted an old-fashioned silver turnip of a watch, scowled, and took up his pacing again.

"The party we sent out oughta be back by now," he snapped angrily. "And, damn it, they'd better have found that golden-haired dame."

Johnny had been thinking. Now he voiced a conclusion he had reached.

"You men," he said, "were the bearded Vikings who were on the dragon ship and captured that yacht in Long Island Sound."

KETTLER STOPPED and assumed the expression of a man who had just stepped in something nasty.

"So you knew that all the time!" he barked.

"No," Johnny corrected. "But I drew some conclusions from the fact that the faces of all of you show you have recently shaven off heavy beards. The Vikings had beards. They weren't really Vikings at all. They were your crowd."

Kettler put his doglike face forward.

"And what else has that great brain of yours told you?" he demanded.

"The golden-haired girl you are hunting now is the one who was on the dragon ship," Johnny guessed aloud. "You captured that yacht because it was faster, and you were in a hurry to get somewhere, probably to get a plane. You got the plane and came up here, bringing the girl. Then what happened? Did the man you killed let her escape?"

Kettler swore.

"He's a regular mind reader, Kettler," said the bulb-nosed man.

"What was the mysterious cargo you had on the dragon ship?" Johnny asked. "The objects the people on the yacht heard you transferring after you made them go below."

Kettler roared, "For a plugged nickel I'd fix you."

A man put his head in from the tunnel.

"They got her, Kettler," he yelled.

Kettler underwent an amazing change. A smile wreathed his doglike face, and he seemed to grow two inches in height. He rubbed his veined hands delightedly.

"Bring her nibs in here!" he directed.

Very shortly afterward, the golden-haired girl was shoved inside.

Johnny looked at her, widened his eyes and made a silent whistle of amazed appreciation. This came, despite the fact that Johnny was about as impervious to feminine charms as they came. The exaggerated newspaper stories, growing out of the glimpse those on the yacht had had of her aboard the Viking dragon ship, did not even do her justice.

She was not the tall, slim type. She was rather husky, in fact, but her curves were entirely pleasing to the eye, and she had features that were a pleasant relief from the doll-faced types popular in the motion pictures at the moment.

Kettler executed a deep bow and said, "Welcome, my dear Ingra."

So Ingra was her name. Johnny reflected that it was fitting. She was the kind of a Viking girl who must have mothered fellows like Eric the Red.

The girl spoke. She spoke rapidly. Her tone indicated plainly she was saying what she thought of Kettler, and it must be a low opinion that she held.

The words! Johnny's mouth sagged open. She was speaking ancient Viking! Johnny had never heard it before, except the few halting efforts of students. But he had studied such records of it as existed. He caught some of her words, even as rapidly as she spoke.

Kettler whirled on Johnny.

"Get on the job!" he gritted. "You are going to translate for us. That's what we kept you alive for."

Johnny swallowed. He had already realized that.

"She is talking too rapidly," he said. "I cannot get all she says."

"Tell her to slow up!" Kettler rapped. "Then ask her questions."

"Ask her what?" Johnny countered.

"Ask her where Qui is," Kettler directed.

UNDER PRETENSE of rising from a sitting position, Johnny thought rapidly. As he moved, his bound wrists hampered him, but for the moment he did not notice. Kettler, of course, had no way of knowing Johnny would translate the girl's remarks correctly. But Kettler was taking that chance. This meant he was getting

QUEST OF QUI

desperate. Then Johnny's bound wrists suggested something.

"It will be more convenient if my wrists are untied," he said. "Making gestures will help."

He neglected to mention what kind of gestures, or how he hoped they would help.

Scowling blackly, Kettler untied the rope.

"Now, ask her," he directed.

Johnny racked his brains for old Norse words. Up until now, he had considered himself an expert on the subject, but he suddenly realized he was going to have trouble making himself understood at all. He addressed Ingra.

"These men want me to question you, after which they will probably kill me," was the substance of Johnny's labors with the Viking tongue. "If you have any ideas about how we may escape, please tell them to me."

The girl spoke too rapidly and vehemently for Johnny to get it all. The gist was that if she had had any ideas, she would have used them herself before now.

"They are hunting Qui," Johnny labored, making some gestures.

At the word, "Qui," Kettler and his men showed great interest.

"I know that is what they seek," the girl said. Her voice was pleasant, even if it was angry.

"What is Qui?" Johnny asked. "And where is it? I never heard of the place. Or is it a place?"

The girl answered with a tirade, the substance of which was that she saw no reason for telling Johnny anything, because Kettler would get it out of him, willing or no, and be hanged if she would tell anything.

"What's the girl jabberin'?" Kettler yelled.

"Shut up," Johnny said. "I'm trying to pump her." Telling Kettler to shut up was an unthinking slip on Johnny's part, but the bony archaeologist was angry, excited.

Kettler swung a fist and knocked Johnny down. He jumped over to add a kick for good measure.

Johnny had wangled the freeing of his wrists in hopes of getting a break. He took his break now, even if it was a long chance. He whipped doubled, grabbed at Kettler's ankles, got them.

OUTWARDLY, JOHNNY looked only little less helpless than the wired skeletons they keep in medical schools. But that was deceptive.

Gripping Kettler's ankles, Johnny stood erect. Kettler waved his arms wildly, trying to keep upright. This was just what Johnny had hoped for.

Johnny jammed Kettler's head and shoulders into the snow ceiling. Kettler's waving arms helped. The entire ceiling of the snow room suddenly came down.

Johnny racked his brain for the old Viking word for "run," but could not think of it.

"Vamoose!" he shrieked for Ingra's benefit. "Clear out! Beat it!"

Then he did his best to follow his own advice. First, however, he dived accurately for the spot where his two blankets lay. This was no country for a garb of red-flannel underwear alone. He got the blankets.

A gun went off in the snow. There was much cursing.

Johnny waded, flailed with his arms, seeking the open air. This, he knew, must be a drift, probably behind a boulder.

Johnny choked on the snow. It was almost impossible to breathe. His underwear was full of snow. Remarkably enough, though, he was warmer than he had been for hours.

With shocking suddenness, Johnny encountered a man. The fellow hit him. Johnny hit back. The man did not seem to have a gun.

The man tried to butt Johnny, and the gaunt geologist grabbed the fellow's parka, and partly by accident, peeled the garment off the wearer. He kept a grip on it. Johnny slugged furiously, and got the man down.

Johnny dived – came out of the drift, almost unexpectedly. No foes were in sight. They must have tried to crawl into the tunnel when they had heard the uproar. Johnny could see their plane, camouflaged with the white canvas tent and the snow.

No use trying to get away in it, he realized. It would take minutes to clear it, to warm the motors, to turn it around.

Ingra came out of the drift. Almost simultaneously, Kettler appeared, back to Johnny, not a yard distant. Johnny hit him behind the ear before Kettler got snow out of his eyes. Kettler went down.

Johnny began wrenching madly at Kettler's moosehide moccasins.

"Fool!" shouted Ingra. "Flee!"

Johnny understood her Viking. It was a good suggestion. She was already fleeing. He loped after her.

Chapter 11. DEATH FALL

BOULDERS AND huge masses of stones were all about, along with some scrubby bushes, many of which were buried in the soft snow. They were very thorny bushes, Johnny's bare feet soon told him, and that reminded him that his feet were already becoming numb. He should, he reflected, have tarried for Kettler's moccasins. He was even tempted to go back.

A wild shouting from behind encouraged him to go on. Johnny's foes were now out of the snow. He ran. Ingra was an agile young woman. He had difficulty in overhauling her.

"Where will we head for?" Johnny demanded.

She seemed to be too busy running to answer.

Johnny attempted drawing on the captured parka as he sprinted, fell headlong once, but managed. The

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blankets would do for leggings and a foot covering – if he ever got time to apply them to his extremities.

There was some shooting behind. Probably that was for effect. Then there arose a human baying. The men were following their footprints in the snow.

Johnny cast about desperately. The snow was everywhere, except for a few bare rocks.

Ingra called something over her shoulder. Johnny did not get it and demanded a repeat.

"We will separate," the young woman said more slowly in the Viking tongue. "In that manner, maybe they will not catch us both."

Johnny resented the idea of a woman telling him what they should do. Anyway, he did not want to lose track of Ingra. He wanted to ask her many things, among which was how on earth she happened to speak ancient Viking so fluently, and just what the mysterious Qui was. He had enough of other questions, too, to fill up hours of interrogation.

"No," he said to her suggestion.

She promptly demonstrated that she was a young woman who would not brook argument. To their right was a patch of the thorny bushes, speckled with jagged rocks. She plunged into these. Her north country garments – they were new and looked as if they had been purchased in New York – protected her from the thorns.

Johnny tried to follow. He negotiated fifty feet, and practically no skin remained on his bony shanks. Rags of red underwear dotted the bushes behind. He would never make it.

Johnny backed out, and of necessity, took up his flight in the opposite direction. When he looked back, Ingra had vanished.

He ran furiously, for only violent motion would keep him from freezing. He heard shouting behind. The pursuers apparently delayed briefly, arguing, then split in two bands, one following each fugitive.

A rocky stretch bare of snow shortly answered Johnny's prayers, and he altered his course on this, after which he believed he had gained a few minutes.

He paused, tore up one blanket and bound his feet. Then he ran on. The improvised footgear, barring the necessity of retying at intervals, was not bad.

Kettler's men were still following him. He could hear their angry shouts. Once, they shot at him when he topped a ridge.

Granting that the wind had not changed direction, Johnny decided he was headed north. His plane had been wrecked far to the south. No need of going back there. Later, perhaps, he could do so, and employ the wreckage to make skis or snowshoes. The thing now was to outstrip his pursuers.

He settled to a long-legged, distance-eating run.

JOHNNY'S YOUTH had been scholastic, but he had found time for athletics, and his specialty had been distance running. He had never set any world records, but that was possibly because he had never taken the time out for the intensive training necessary. On an occasion or two, however, he had delivered some surprising upsets in track meets.

QUEST OF QUI

Unlike most college athletes, Johnny was now in better condition than during his scholastic days; some freak in his make-up – Doc Savage had diagnosed it as an unusual glandular condition – had endowed him with muscles that were more like violin strings than those an ordinary man would have. The bony archaeologist's endurance was fabulous.

He was going to need all he had. The men behind were fresh, but what was worse, from the way they held their own, they must be wearing snowshoes. Johnny's extremely long legs were a help in the snow, but they did not overcome the snowshoe advantage.

The nearness of his pursuers drove him to more and more frantic efforts. His position was almost hopeless. Doc Savage was somewhere about, from what Kettler's men had said, but the chance of attracting the bronze man's attention was not even worth trying. It was still snowing. A signal could not be seen at any distance.

A faint roaring reached Johnny's ears. He stopped, listening, straining. He thought, hoped, it was a plane – Doc's ship. But no. It was the sea, waves breaking on an icy shore. Three or four miles distant, he concluded.

Johnny ran on. The fact that he could hear waves did not surprise him. Tidal currents were reputedly terrific off these shores, and portions of the sea never froze.

A bullet climbed, whining, off a stone near by. A moment later the crash of the rifle firing it arrived.

Johnny observed a defile, a rounded gully, to the left. The wind seemed to sweep straight up it, and it was as free of snow as the rest of the country. Johnny loped into it. The going – he thanked his stars – was easier. He put on more speed. He slithered, time and again, almost fell, for the terrific exertion was making him a little blind. The cold was helping, too.

Snow had melted in his red-flannel underwear, and he knew the garment would eventually freeze. Once clear – and he began to hold a horrible doubt that he would get clear – he would have to get the underwear off. He still carried the other blanket. That would help.

Another bullet searched for him. Johnny doubled low. The gully seemed to turn ahead. If he could but reach that angle. He looked back, to see how close pursuit was. He was running in shallow snow.

Suddenly, horribly, Johnny was running in mid-air.

THERE IS in the human category of experiences nothing quite so shocking as to have solidness drop abruptly from underfoot.

Johnny fanned his arms, tried to turn in the air like a cat and grab solid rock. He knew he had run into some kind of a crevasse which had been bridged over by snow.

He knew, too, that he was lost, and it was numbing, but no great surprise, when his fingers failed to reach a hold and he plummeted down into a grisly infinity that was made gray and hideous by the snow that fell with him, and awful to the ear because there came faintly the shouts of men who wanted to kill him.

Kettler's men had been close. They had seen him fall. They had taken off their snowshoes, were carrying them as they ran.

The bulb-nosed man was in charge of the pursuit detail.

"Careful!" he warned. "The bag of bones fell into a crack of some kind."

QUEST OF QUI

The men slowed their pace. The respite was welcome. All were drinking in air with frenzied gulps, and the cold stuff burned their lungs like fire.

Nearer the crevasse, they went even more gingerly. Two of them, exhausted completely, lay down where they were and rolled in agony, hands clamped over mouths and nostrils to shut out the air which they must have, yet which was so cold it was almost impossible to breathe.

They linked hands together, the bulb-nosed man foremost, and edged to the crevasse. It was a canyon into which the gully emptied, they could see. Nor was it so very narrow.

The bulb-nosed man looked down. Below, snow eddied like smoke. His eyes could not penetrate it.

"One of you guys got a flashlight?" he demanded.

None of them had. They argued, swore, and rested. The snow haze settled. Then it was too gloomy to see the bottom. They solved that problem when one of them produced a fistful of letters, complained loudly that they were from his best girl friend, and therefore more valuable than gems, and surrendered them.

The bulb-nosed man struck matches. The wind gave him trouble. But finally he got a wad of the letters burning, and dropped it into the chasm. There was a considerable draft coming up from the stone rent, and this tossed the makeshift torch about, but finally it sank low enough to disclose what they had expressed themselves profanely as hoping to see.

Johnny's purloined parka projected out of the fallen snow, hunched grotesquely, as if the body within were twisted and broken.

Suddenly, before the letters burned themselves out, the bulb-nosed man whipped up his rifle. It was a big-game automatic. He emptied it into the still form below, and the roar of the shots thundered weirdly in the recesses of the crevasse.

The bulb-nosed man drew back, moistening his lips, not looking particularly glad over what he had done.

"That," he said hoarsely, "fixes that guy."

He led the others back up the gully as if he wanted to quit the vicinity in a hurry.

"I hope that Doc Savage don't make us any more trouble than this guy," he muttered.

Chapter 12. A FIND AND A LOSS

DOC SAVAGE was at that moment planning trouble. The bronze man was at the controls of Thorpe Carleth's plane, and in the cabin were Carleth, the perfect Peabody, Renny, Monk, and Ham – and Habeas Corpus. Savage had picked out a spot suitable for a landing. It was some two miles from the level space where Johnny's wrecked plane lay.

Doc landed. Carleth and Peabody did not look so worried over this landing, although it was as difficult as the one back at the other clearing.

The big motors lipped flame and noise as Doc gunned the ship in close to a drift, then up the sloping side of the drift until it collapsed, and the ship was all but half buried. With superb judgment, Doc cut the motors just

QUEST OF QUI

as the snow crust gave, saving the propellers.

"How shall we get out of here?" Carleth wailed, trying to keep his glasses on his nose.

"Dig out," Doc told him. "It will not be difficult."

The bronze man stepped out, gave orders, and they got snowshoes out of the cabin. These served as snow shovels, and they began banking and covering the plane.

"I have a hunch this is what that other crowd did," Doc said. "That would explain why their plane could not be located."

Carleth got his glasses to stick. "What are you going to do?"

The bronze man did not answer that directly.

"You fellows will remain here," he suggested. "We do not want to take chances of losing this ship."

"It would not," Carleth agreed fervently, "be pleasant to be marooned up here."

Doc Savage made up a small pack consisting of a silken air-tight sleeping bag which rolled into a pack no larger than Renny's fist, and which could be kept warm by a tiny fireless chemical heater which was situated in a bag in the foot, and which was put in operation by filling the bag with water – snow would do – then pouring in a spoonful of a chemical which was contained in a flask.

Doc also took a box containing a number of small cakes of stuff resembling candy, cakes which were really concentrated food that could be prepared by mixing with water, or in an emergency, taken without preparation.

The bronze man added to the pack such chemicals and gadgets as he believed might be convenient. Monk's chemical laboratory, he had discovered, was not greatly damaged.

One piece of equipment which another would certainly not have neglected, Doc Savage did not carry. He took no gun. This was in keeping with a policy which he had long ago formulated, that of having nothing to do with firearms. For this he had a reason, the thorough conviction that one who comes to depend upon a gun is the more helpless than without the weapon.

Without saying where he was bound, or what he intended to do, Doc Savage struck out over the snow. He handled the snowshoes with the precise ease that comes of careful practice devoted solely to learning how to do a thing, coupled with the advice of experts.

Doc's skill in almost all lines, which seemed amazing, was in the last analysis simply explained – when he wanted to master a thing, he went to those who were already masters of the subject, and learned from them.

Unexpectedly, it stopped snowing. The clouds were still matted above, but they no longer leaked flakes. The wind, too, dropped until it was scarcely perceptible, and in the calm that followed, the myriad noises of the northland, previously unnoticeable, became apparent – rocks which occasionally cracked from the awful cold, twigs complaining, the sandy crunch of dry snow under the snowshoe webs. The boom of the sea was audible now, as well.

QUEST OF QUI

Doc Savage was alert, using eyes, ears. Not much missed him. He was crossing a particularly rocky region when he halted abruptly. His eyes were fixed on a drift a score of yards distant.

Plumes of steam, so faint as to be virtually nonexistent, arose at intervals from the drift. Breath steam, undoubtedly.

DOC SAVAGE advanced warily. Something was under the snow, breathing through a small hole in the flakes. The hole might be for listening purposes as well. It might be an animal in the drift.

Doc Savage freed a small rock from an icy anchorage, hefted it at the drift. It sank into the snow not six inches from the hole. The breath steam stopped coming.

"You might as well show yourself," Doc Savage said quietly.

No response.

The bronze man listened. Sounds were faint, but he could hear them. Whatever was in the drift was working deeper into the snow.

Doc lunged forward. He was cautious. He had no ambition to kick a bear in the ribs.

"Come out of that!" he snapped.

A form – human – popped out of the drift, ran madly. At first, it appeared to be a man. Doc pursued. The instant he caught the fugitive, he discovered it was a young woman with remarkable golden hair.

She was no clinging vine. She sent a fist at him. He parried it, caught her wrists. She jumped up and slammed both moccasined feet to his chest. But even a professional wrestler could hardly have downed him that way.

Doc laughed. He released her. The laugh was not because there was anything funny. It was to reassure the young woman.

Once loose, she ran a few feet, turned her head, saw he was not following, and stopped. She said something. Doc Savage recognized the words as old Viking, but her rapid breathing made the syllables unintelligible.

Doc Savage put his right hand against his chest.

"Doc Savage," he said.

That did not seem to mean the slightest thing to her.

Doc Savage watched her, and there were vague eddies in his flake-gold eyes.

No small part of his remarkable training had been devoted to languages, ancient and modern, and he probably knew more about tongues long since lost in history than did gaunt Johnny, who made that sort of thing his profession.

He assembled words of Viking, and was foresighted enough to repeat them under his breath, to accustom his tongue to the strange syllables.

"You can see that I have no designs upon you," Doc said in Viking. "Will you talk to me?"

QUEST OF QUI

The girl started.

"You look much as my forefathers must have looked," she said. "You are from across the sea?"

Doc presumed she must mean the home of the ancient Vikings in northern Europe. He could understand her fairly well.

"No," Doc said.

She looked puzzled. "But you cannot be one of those slaves of the Qui who escaped. I have seen them all."

"Who," the bronze man queried quietly, "are you?"

"I am Ingra," she said. "I am one of the slaves of the Qui."

SHE DID not call it "slave," but a combination of Viking terminology meaning one who is forced to row at the sweeps of dragon ships and do menial tasks, which meant the same thing.

"The escaping slaves took me from Qui on the dragon ship which they stole from the sacred shrine of the Qui," the girl Ingra went on abruptly. "I did not want to go. They took me against my will. I did not know why, then, but I have since learned. I have the knowledge of my ancestors, the knowledge of how to tell the whereabouts of a place by the position of the stars. I knew where Qui was in relation to the position of the stars, and I could guide them back."

She was talking about astronomical navigation, Doc knew, some knowledge of the science which had been handed down from the past.

Ancient navigators had been able to read their position from the stars, at an earlier age than most persons, convinced all scientific learning was of a recent date, would have guessed. Some ancient Vikings might have known it. Doc was not sure. The old freebooters had made some remarkable voyages in their dragon ships.

Ingra was still talking.

"The men, the slaves of Qui, who escaped in the dragon ship from the shrine, wanted to get their modern weapons from your strange world and come back," she said. "They desired to take things from Qui."

Doc became slightly tense. Not because he was learning things that tended to solve the mystery. He had heard a sound, a plane. The motor noise was coming up out of the south. He groped for Viking words, found them.

"Quick!" he rasped. "We had better get out of sight."

They moved swiftly, running for the drift. And possibly that was their mistake. Moving objects are easily seen. The other plane was closer than it had seemed. It popped up over a near-by ridge. Those aboard must have been keeping an alert watch.

The plane veered toward Doc and the girl, just as they dived into the drift. It moaned overhead, very low. It turned, came back. Time and again, it passed.

There was no spot near by suitable for a landing.

QUEST OF QUI

DOC POKED a hole in the snow, a hole small enough that it could not be seen from above, and studied the plane. He had never seen the ship before. It was a big trimotored biplane, capable of carrying almost a score of passengers, and it looked like an old job gotten second-hand from some air line. It bore the United States markings.

There was no way of telling whether those aboard were friends.

Doc decided to test. He stepped out of the snow, and shucked back the hood of the parka so that his features showed plainly.

Results amply demonstrated what he wanted to know.

Men in the plane above all but fell overboard in their haste to get guns out of the windows. When he saw the first rifle barrel appear, Doc Savage whipped for shelter.

Bullets thumped around him. He got into the snow, burrowed, changed this course, and snuggled under a boulder. There, he could only be hit from one direction, and the men in the plane, not knowing where he was, were not likely to get the correct angle.

The plane moaned above, its exhaust syncopation punctuated with gun sound. The lead accomplished nothing. The plane went away.

Doc Savage shoved out of the drift hastily. He glanced up. He had guessed correctly. Two parachutes were lowering men who had leaped from the other plane.

"Stay here," the bronze man shouted in Viking.

"Very well," the girl agreed from under the snow.

Doc ran toward the spots where the parachutes would drop. They were big, slow lobes of silk. But it was impossible to travel swiftly through the snow.

He saw he would not be able to reach a position near the parachutes before the men harnessed in them were down.

THE BIG, shabby biplane came storming back, but Doc was among high boulders, and paid it little attention, beyond dodging and favoring shelter.

One parachute came down on a spot where stones were huge and rugged. The man in the harness took a nasty fall, lost the rifle which he was carrying, and Doc made for him.

The other parachute was higher. The occupant began shooting from the air. His marksmanship was hair-raising. Doc heard that peculiar popping noise which a high-velocity bullet makes close to an ear. He slapped behind a rock ledge.

The plane came back, men in it shooting. Doc was forced to change position. The man in the parachute shot at him again. The fellow who had fallen recovered and began firing.

Doc began to need all the eyes with which a fly is equipped. He settled himself in the most convenient shelter, half buried in the snow that filled a crack in the rock, and explored his clothing.

QUEST OF QUI

Over his light, strong chain mail undershirt, Doc wore a vest which consisted almost entirely of pockets that held containers designed for flatness, so that they fitted into the pockets without special bulk. He extracted one of these, twisted off the lid, and it instantly began pouring out a dense, thick black smoke.

He tossed the smoke bomb behind him. The black cloud it poured out was prodigious. Monk had spent months perfecting that particular chemical concoction. The pall covered Doc, hid him, and went on to envelop the other two who had come down in their parachutes.

Doc reared up and started through the black smudge. Three paces, and he stopped.

He could hear shouting. It was off to the left quite a distance.

Doc Savage had no way of knowing he was listening to the party of Kettler's men who had been hunting the strange girl, Ingra, and who had been drawn by the uproar. But he did guess that they were new foes.

The bronze man continued with the job at hand. He located one of the parachuters, crept upon the fellow and had the man by the neck before the fellow dreamed that he was in imminent danger.

The man tried to use his rifle. Instead of twisting it out of his hand, Doc simply exerted sudden, terrific pressure on certain vulnerable spinal nerve centers. The victim let his gun go, went limp. Doc dropped him. The pressure had the same effect, generally, as a knockout blow, and it would be some time before the fellow aroused.

The distant new arrivals were still shouting. And now they began shooting. Doc caught some of their words.

"There's the girl!" one of them was bawling.

Ingra, the remarkable young woman who spoke old Viking must have ventured from concealment, and been discovered.

A MOMENT later, Doc heard the young woman shrieking. The plane whooped, moaned above. Some one in it was using a machine gun which jammed frequently.

Doc violated a principle of never using firearms. The plane above was the big handicap. He scooped up the rifle of the man he had just overcome and ran out of the smoke pall.

The other fellow who had come down by parachute had been canny enough to get out of the smoke also. He saw Doc, lifted his rifle.

The bronze man snapped a shot. An onlooker would have sworn he could not possibly have aimed. But the man with the rifle let out a squawk and tried to stand on one leg. The bullet had shattered the bone in the other. He soon fell down.

Doc got behind a rock and waited for the plane to come back. He aimed with great care. Twice, he seemed on the point of firing, only to be dissatisfied with his aim. He fired one shot.

The starboard motor of the plane stopped.

There must have been consternation on the ship. A landing here would be suicide. The craft limped away, two motors keeping it up, but not much more.

QUEST OF QUI

DOC SAVAGE ran toward the spot where Ingra had been left. Coming in sight of her, he saw that she had been taken by the other raiding party. Three of them were holding her. The others saw Doc, and began shooting.

Doc drifted back, that being the only sane thing to do. They pursued him, but warily, obviously afraid of him, but intent on killing.

Off to the east, the crippled plane was coming down, level snow evidently having been discovered. Doc listened for the results of their descent. Bloopings of the motors, undoubtedly as the craft taxied in the snow, told him they were down safely.

Unexpectedly, those pursuing Doc veered over toward where the ship had landed. They went swiftly, and were well on their way before the bronze man comprehended their intention to join those in the plane.

Doc made a barren effort to cut them off. But the distance was too great. They reached the other ship well ahead of him.

The craft had been idling with its two motors, but now the third broke out noisily. They must have found the wiring which the bronze man's bullet had cut – he had done some careful calculating on that shot – and had repaired it.

The plane took the air before he was near enough to do anything toward preventing it.

Doc promptly took shelter in a snowdrift, with a peephole at hand and the rifle ready.

But the plane – all the men and the girl must have loaded aboard – did not take chances. They made two or three halfhearted circles of the vicinity, saw no one, did not get close enough for Doc to use the rifle, then angled off to the north. They evidently had a healthy respect for the rifle. And they seemed to have something else on their collective minds.

Doc Savage got out of the snow and hurried toward the spot where he had left his aides, Monk and the others.

Chapter 13. "HE'D MAKE A SWELL VALET!"

MONK WAS excited. He had his bullet of a head out of the snowdrift beside the plane, where they were hidden. A cupped hand back of a scarred ear endeavored to catch the sounds of the distant plane, which had departed.

They had heard, far away, the fighting.

Monk floundered out of the drift.

"Danged if I stick here any longer," he growled. "Something's happened to Doc. I'm goin' over there and pick up the pieces or something."

Ham said, "Try not to be the numskull nature made you!"

Sarcasm did not conceal the anxiety in Ham's voice.

Monk scowled and routed Carleth and Peabody out of the snow. "What do you birds think about going over

there?"

Peabody looked at Carleth and said, "My wishes are yours, sir."

Carleth shivered. He seemed to have acquired a dislike for the whole thing.

"My wishes are that we were back in New York," he muttered. "But since that is out of the question, I believe we should see what has happened to Doc Savage."

Monk told Ham, "You're outnumbered, shyster."

Ham shrugged. "We were told to stay here. But let's go."

They buckled on snowshoes. Monk, Ham and Renny could use them, having learned in the past. But Carleth and Peabody proved to be aggravating dubs. They dug the toes of their webs in, and fell down on an average of once every fifty feet.

Carleth was profane, peevish about it. But Peabody was composed, accepting things as they were.

Ham, walking ahead with Monk, voiced an opinion.

"That Peabody would make me a superb valet," he said. "When this is all over, I'm going to offer him more money than Carleth is paying."

"That trick is about your caliber," Monk said sourly.

They began to quarrel, perhaps in part to take their minds off thoughts of what might have happened to Doc. The squabbling went on until it was interrupted by a startled outcry from behind.

They whirled. Peabody stood a few yards back, panting, working with a snowshoe strap. Renny and Carleth were not in sight.

"What's wrong?" Monk demanded.

Peabody gasped, "I think Renny is helping Carleth. The master fell, or something."

Monk and Ham walked past Peabody, going back. Monk came in sight of Renny and Carleth. He exploded a gasp.

Renny was lying prone. Carleth stood over him. In Carleth's hands was a rock, with which he had obviously just struck Renny down, probably as the latter endeavored to assist him.

A cry, a thump, sounded behind Monk. He spun.

Ham was down, patently senseless.

Peabody stood over the prone lawyer. A big, heavy automatic was in each of Peabody's hands.

"You will stand damn still," Peabody stated.

QUEST OF QUI

The two guns looked big and ugly enough to hold Monk still, wordless. Peabody came up to him. He jabbed one gun into Monk's stomach. He swung the other to Monk's head.

The homely chemist had an impression of diving into snow that was a thousand miles deep.

MONK CAME out of it with a roaring in his ears, the roaring of their plane motor. He was lying in the cabin, and he was bound tighter than he believed he had ever been bound before. It was a lot of trouble to roll over.

Ham was conscious. He glared at Monk.

"So Peabody would make a good valet," Monk sneered.

"Oh, shut up," Ham said. "I wonder if Doc suspected them?"

"Don't talk to me," Monk growled. "My head aches. Why didn't they kill us?"

"I don't know," Renny snapped from behind Monk. "Chicken-hearted, I guess."

Peabody came back, scowling, and kicked Monk several times as if he enjoyed it.

"Chicken-hearted, eh?" he snarled. "Why, you damn fools, we're going to kill you. Carleth and myself don't do work like that. We have hired men for it."

"And you're taking us to the hired men?" Renny boomed.

"Exactly," Peabody said, and added, sarcastically, "sir."

"Where did you learn to be a valet?" Ham asked abruptly.

Peabody spat.

"I was once a very rich man," he said. "I had two valets, three chauffeurs and thirty-six other servants at my town and country places. I have been valeted enough to know how to valet."

"I think you're lying," said Ham.

"I am not," said Peabody, as if it were a point of honor with him to convince the dapper Ham he was not valet caliber. "Why, at one time, I had –"

"That man is pumping you," shouted Carleth, who was flying the plane.

"Dry up," Peabody snapped, then added for Ham's benefit, "Carleth has worked for me for years. People think he's a millionaire playboy with an air line, but hell, he's just one of my flunkies. Ain't you, Carleth?"

"You don't need to rub it in!" Carleth clipped.

"Carleth's air line don't belong to Carleth," Peabody said gloatingly. "It belongs to me. I own a lot of other guys, too. I'm a big shot, still, even if I been having my troubles like everybody else."

"Just what is your profession?" Ham demanded curiously.

QUEST OF QUI

"Smuggler and rum runner," said Peabody.

"Now tell me what this is all about," Ham requested.

"Nerts to you," said Peabody.

Peabody leaned very close to Ham's face, glaring with exaggerated, yet very real ferocity. He seemed to have a particular hate for Ham.

"Gonna gimme a job as your valet, huh!" he snarled, and slapped Ham as hard as he could.

Then he went back and sat down.

Monk squinted and saw Ham had not been knocked entirely senseless by the blow, but only dizzy, after which Monk rolled his small eyes and added insult to injury.

"I wish you did have a valet with manners like that," he said.

CARLETH SPENT some time looking down out of the cockpit window, then angled the plane over, and it tilted steeply and centrifugal pull told them the craft was spiraling down sharply. Once they even got a glimpse of a misplaced earth through one of the cabin windows.

The ship landed. It was a very bumpy landing which scared Monk, Renny and Ham badly, and caused Peabody to curse Carleth.

Peabody got out and yelled, "Kettler! You old bucket of sin! How do things stack up?"

There was much conversation, which the three prisoners in the plane could not quite overhear, and numerous men came up to the ship, looked inside, and made insulting remarks to the captives.

Monk, listening carefully, overheard enough casual remarks to tell him several things, namely:

Kettler was the leader of the party they had joined, but he was working under Peabody's orders. Kettler had, it seemed, once been a captain of a smuggling ship operated by Peabody.

Kettler's plane was here, where it had been hidden after escaping from its unsuccessful attack on Doc's ship.

A second plane – the old biplane which had attacked Doc – had just arrived from New York, bearing more members of the gang.

The biplane also had carried something else which had an important connection with Qui. Monk did not catch what it was.

The girl, Ingra was here. They were trying to make her direct them to Qui – Monk was still straining his ears for information when several men came, seized him, along with Ham and Renny, and hauled them out of the plane cabin.

Monk looked at the biplane, hoping to see what its mysterious unidentified cargo was. Numerous men were standing around the ship, looking in the cabin windows. They reminded Monk of spectators at a sideshow.

QUEST OF QUI

Before he got any information, Monk and those with him were hauled over to Kettler's big plane – the ship which Carleth had insisted had been stolen from him.

Kettler, Peabody and Carleth were there, alternately shouting "Qui!" at a very attractive young golden-haired woman. They also made fierce faces, pinched her cruelly, and twisted her arms. In the course of this, the three men had collected a few bruises which Ingra had managed to inflict.

Peabody scowled at Ham.

"Valet material am I!" he gritted. "Well, let's see what you think in a minute."

"What are you going to do?" Ham demanded anxiously.

"This damn girl won't do what we want," said Peabody. "So we're gonna cut your throat and let you bleed on her feet or something to kinda remind her we mean business."

Ham blinked, swallowed. Peabody was utterly serious about it.

Peabody called one of his men and demanded the loan of a knife. Ham noted that the blade was one of the Viking weapons which had cropped up so mysteriously in New York.

That reminded Ham that the mystery attacks in New York never had been explained satisfactorily. But he did not devote that angle much thought. Peabody had come up to him and had made a preparatory flourish with the knife to get Ingra's eye.

The young woman realized what he was about to do. She, to Ham's everlasting thankfulness, did not hesitate. She shrieked a conglomeration of words in Viking.

No one present understood her. But her meaning was plain. "She's gonna take us to Qui!" Peabody barked. Peabody glowered, fingered his knife, seeming happy and at the same time disappointed.

"Reckon I gotta keep you and your two pals around until this dame does her stuff," he said. "But buddy, after that I'll do you up like no valet you never saw."

THE THREE prisoners were hauled back to the plane, along with the girl, and loaded inside. There was much turmoil. Plane motors howled, stirring up choking clouds of snow. All three ships were going to take the air.

There was some parceling out of rifles and ammunition, particularly ammunition.

Watching the preparations, Monk gathered that these men contemplated a fight. From their numbers and the quantity of arms, they must expect the fray to amount to a battle.

Try as he would, Monk could not see what was in the old biplane which had moved men to gather around and stare.

The ships took the air amid terrific straining of motors and shouted profane advice between the pilot and his passengers. Peabody, Ingra and some others were with Monk and his two companions. Carleth was flying.

Peabody shouted, "We might as well look for that Doc Savage a little, before we go to Qui."

The plane headed south, taking swings of two or three miles to each side.

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"I think I saw him over there!" a man shouted and pointed.

The plane angled over sharply. It came down close to earth. Everyone but the prisoners used field glasses. Results were nil.

"Musta been mistaken," said the man who had shouted discovery.

"We'll give it up," Peabody growled. "Head north, while I start this dame doin' her stuff."

The three ships trailed each other noisily through a sky that was leaden, in the direction of Qui.

Chapter 14. QUI

DOC SAVAGE came out of the snow after the planes had gone – for it was the bronze man whom they had seen, and he had taken shelter – and standing in the snow, Doc stared into the north, listening to the final diminishing of sound which the bevy of motors had made and left.

It was getting dark, and the borealis was prominent, making somewhat weird patterns as seen through the fine snow, which was coming, not from the sky, but from a small breeze which had arisen and was kicking it up.

Doc shifted position. The squall of his snowshoes in the cold–dry snow was almost frightening. The fantastic vastness of the snow country seemed to press in like a gobbling monster.

The bronze man snowshoed north. He had been back, already, to where he had left Monk and the others, and had found them and the plane gone. He had found one other thing, too.

"Habeas," Doc called.

The grotesque pig came out of a drift, where he had taken shelter after the fashion of sled dogs. The little porker's appearance was made more incredible, if that was really possible, by the fur jacket affair with which Monk had equipped him, and a part of which Habeas had already eaten. Habeas had some of the manners of a goat in the matter of diet.

Doc had seen the three planes take the air. He made for the spot of their take–off, apprehensive of what he might find.

It took him three hours to reach the camp. He searched for bodies, and there were none.

Mushing a hundred yards from the deserted camp, Doc began a circle of the spot. He found tracks, for the snow had no more than half filled them. He located where Johnny and the girl had fled. He came to the spot where the girl had separated her trail from Johnny's.

Doc knew what had happened to the girl. So he set out on Johnny's trail.

The chasm into which Johnny had fallen was dark, ominous, when he came to it. He used a pocket flashlight which was small, but gave a strong, thin white beam. He rested the light for a long time on the bullet–perforated parka visible in the fallen snow.

Doc studied the icy surface around the crack edge. It was treacherous, the cracks filled with ice which had doubtless come from some sunshiny day. He used a knife to gouge ice out of a crack, then wedged his

QUEST OF QUI

grapple, the one with the silken cord attached, therein.

Habeas, the pig, stood well back and grunted uneasily as the bronze man went down the thin cord. His bronze hands were ungloved, but they seemed stiffened not at all by the intense cold.

Reaching the bottom, Doc went at once to the parka, picked it up, and shook out the snow which had been stuffed inside the fur garment.

Johnny was not there. Soft snow that padded the bottom of the canyon to a considerable depth had cushioned his fall, no doubt, and he had used this snow-in-the-parka ruse to fool his pursuers.

"Johnny!" Doc called.

There was no answer.

A SCRATCHING and frantic squealing above wrenched Doc's gaze upward, but it was only Habeas, the pig, who had come investigating and had slipped over the edge. He came sailing down, and Doc did not even bother to catch him, because the snow was very soft. The pig climbed out, grunting.

Doc Savage used his flashlight and worked up the canyon. He saw enough to tell him that Johnny had not gone in that direction. Doc turned back and went down.

The canyon, very narrow, extremely deep, was by no means entirely bridged over by snow. It was just in the narrow places that the drifts had built out until they had formed a complete arch.

Where the crack was arched over, however, the darkness was intense. Once, Doc Savage disturbed a mass of snow, and the whole arch came down, hundreds of pounds of it, but light, flaky stuff which did no more damage than to bury them. Doc got himself out, and excavated for Habeas.

Johnny had gone this way. The gaunt archaeologist's tracks showed at times.

The canyon widened. The sides remained steep, seldom less than straight up and down. There had been no point at which Johnny could have left it.

Doc Savage came to a spot where the canyon bed dropped suddenly for at least thirty feet. No doubt during the season when the snow melted, the spot was a waterfall of some consequence.

Johnny, his marks indicated, had dropped a rock or two to see how deep the snow was below, then had jumped. Doc tossed Habeas down, then followed himself.

The canyon abruptly ended, and the bronze man found himself in level country, where there was quite a bit of stunted shrubbery and some trees.

He glanced backward, then to the right and left, and observed a rather remarkable fact. In descending the canyon, he had penetrated down through a line of cliffs.

Ages ago, the sea must have beaten here and worn a line of cliffs, after which some convulsion of earth forces had lifted the coast line, leaving the cliffs, a sheer, unscalable wall, almost, high and dry.

The throb and roll of the sea was stronger now. Too, there was the faint tang of salt air. Doc judged the ocean to be no more than a mile ahead.

QUEST OF QUI

Johnny's tracks – almost lost in the snow – indicated he had started running again. Probably that meant he was trying to keep off the bitter cold. He was heading west, and in that direction Doc could see larger trees and a number of rocky peaks which seemed to be surrounded by masses of boulders. No doubt Johnny was visioning shelter from the elements when he headed for that point. Doc Savage gathered up the pig, Habeas, and quickened his pace.

He worked through brush, came out on the south slope of a hill – and was suddenly face to face with the last thing he had expected to see.

A cultivated field! Nothing, of course, was growing now, but the marks of agricultural efforts were evident. It was a crude kind of farming, however. The earth must have been spaded instead of plowed.

Farther on, there were trees of a variety not often seen this far north. Doc inspected them. New England maples, of the type from which is drawn the sap for maple syrup. In New England, they would not have been considered much as maple trees, being stunted and gnarled. But they were maples. More surprisingly, the trunks bore marks indicating they had been tapped.

There were a few other trees of a hardy fruiting variety grown in Canada and the northern United States, and some berry bushes, obviously cultivated.

Doc Savage made his small trilling sound as he considered all of this. The Canadian Indians did not go in for this sort of thing. Eskimos certainly did not.

Moreover, there was no record of civilization on this coast.

IT WAS also true that this part of the coast had never been explored thoroughly for the simple but adequate reason that there was nothing to indicate the region held anything to make it worth exploring. British Admiralty expeditions had, of course, charted the coast generally. But the shore could have held a great deal that they missed. Apparently, it did.

Doc advanced through the cultivated section, topped the hill, and was no little surprised to discover himself standing on the shore of a small bay. The entrance to this was narrow, and had the shape of a letter "S."

Doc frowned at the ocean, which was plentifully sprinkled with ice cakes. From out there, it would be almost impossible to discover the bay entrance. Not, of course, if a ship came in close. But there were ugly rocks here and there. No sane skipper, even an explorer, would venture close to a shore like that.

The west side of the bay was against a high cliff. Doc Savage at first had no intention of going near the cliff, but on closer inspection, he saw something which drew him toward the spot.

Wave action in some distant age when the water was higher, had hollowed out the base of the cliff. A wall had been thrown up in front of the hollow, a wall that reached up to the cliff. It was a man-made wall, neatly mortared. No telling how big the cavity behind was.

Intrigued, Doc searched for a hole through the wall. Toward the opposite end, the wall arose sheer from the water, and there, judging from appearances, a sizeable portion of the wall had been torn down, and rebuilt. The mortar there was new, and looked as if it were frozen, rather than dry. Doc decided the hole had been filled in within the last month.

Doc Savage worked toward the other end of the wall. The cliff towered above, overhanging. The sky was murky. An unusual play of borealis furnished much of what light there was.

QUEST OF QUI

Doc came upon a path. It was about three feet wide, cut neatly through the drifts, the excavated snow piled on either side. There was soft snow in the path, but it had not been disturbed by tracks.

The path terminated against the artificial wall. Doc Savage bent low and inspected. There seemed to be a loose block of stone, perhaps eighteen inches in each dimension, which was designed to come out. He worked at it. The rock came out. It was only a plate standing on edge.

He threw his flash beam inside. He saw nothing but a bleak stone cavern, the opposite wall formed by the side of the wave-worn cliff. The wall was too thick for him to see in either direction.

Doc worked at the mortared rocks. His strength was enormous, the construction of the wall none too stable. That combination enabled him to free some of the rocks. He made an opening which would permit him, with difficulty, to squeeze through. He wormed in.

He was not quite through when something grabbed his wrist.

Chapter 15. MEN OF QUI

IT FELT like a wire at first, a cable. It hauled with terrific force. Doc was snapped completely out of the hole, hauled into the air.

He heard a rattle and squeak back in the cavern as this happened. He knew then that it was a snare, some crude affair of pulleys and a weight.

He did not thrash about needlessly, but merely kicked out with his feet, found the wall was not in reach, then pulled himself up. The agony was tremendous. He got hold of the wire – it was a wire – above the loop which imprisoned his wrist.

His next feat taxed even his remarkable muscles. He gripped the wire high, did not try the entirely hopeless task of trying to climb it, but brought his imprisoned wrist up and got a loop around the other hand. Then he worked at the slip knot with his teeth. It was tight, but it slid.

He dropped to the sandy floor, free.

Instantly, he whipped to one side. There was good reason for that. He did not believe he had been careless enough to fall into any ordinary snare. He was convinced that some one had dropped the loop over his wrist.

He was right. A squeaking ejaculation came from almost underfoot. A hard blow struck his right leg, above the knee. Sharp agony accompanied the blow.

The bronze man whipped to one side. He could feel wet warmth on his leg. A wound. It did not seem to be bad.

A small, guttural voice squawked at his side. Then there was a drumming sound in the darkness, a sound which might have been made by scores of dogs running.

Something fastened to the bronze man's legs. Another. He reached down, grasping, slapping. A small body fastened to his neck. More descended upon his back.

He got hold of one of his assailants, and gripping the fellow, heaved toward the hole. He fell, but he was near

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enough to get his captive in the light that came from outside.

At first glance, the being which Doc held looked like a small boy. But the fellow was broader, heavier, and his face was seamed, that of an old man.

Dozens of them were in the fight. One got around in front of Doc, in the light. The little fellow had a club, a hideous thing, studded with sharp iron spikes. He did his best to brain the bronze man with it. Doc grasped at the club, got it and threw it out of the hole.

The bronze man was under a self-imposed handicap. He had no desire to damage the little fellows. He had forced himself into some private sanctuary of theirs, and he was getting, literally, not much worse than his just deserts. He decided to crawl out through the hole.

That was a decision easier reached than accomplished. They grabbed his legs, held on despite his violent kicking, and hauled him back.

The small men shouted from time to time. Their words were an admixture of Viking dialect, coupled with an Indian lingo spoken by some Canadian redmen. The combination was almost unintelligible to Doc. But they might understand old Viking. He tried it.

"I am a stranger who means no harm," he said sharply in the Norse tongue.

They understood. The striking and clubbing ceased, but they retained a tight grip.

"Only fools fight," Doc told them. "Wise men talk. Let us talk."

There was some muttering in their vernacular, after which three went back into the cavern and could be heard hitting flints with steel. They finally got torches ignited. The torches consisted of pans made of slabs of rock laboriously hollowed out and filled with oil, in which a tall wick was floated through a bit of wood.

Light from the torches disclosed an amazing scene.

The cavern was of some size, and it was literally gorged with the wrecks of ships, some dismantled and others almost intact. None of the vessels were large.

Close at hand was the bowsprit and stem of what had probably been a fishing schooner. Farther on was a whaleboat, some of the planking stove in. There were numerous portions of keels, frames, and even part of a deck house, with the portholes intact.

Looming huge in the darkness was a modern-looking craft which looked enormously stout. Its hull was steel, and it was motor driven. The superstructure apparently had been swiped off by a sea, and the hulk was otherwise battered. It had been floated into the cavern – there was water at the other end. Superhuman labor must have gone into hauling out the hull.

There were hatches, wooden belaying pins, blocks, lines, spars, masts, oars, and sails which had fallen to pieces. The place seemed to be well ventilated, for most of the stuff was in an excellent state of preservation. There is little rot in the Northland, anyway.

Occupying a place of honor – and Doc stared at it a long time – was a Viking dragon ship which might have been a double for the one which had put in such an amazing appearance in Long Island sound, except that the bow of the craft was pretty much of a wreck, as if it had gone on a rock before being hauled into this queer

place.

Doc's attention returned to his captors. They were amazing little fellows, possibly not as small as it had seemed at first.

Doc had once visited pygmies in Africa. These fellows were about the same size, although a bit broader and with round, butterball faces – the young ones. The old ones were walking masses of wrinkles.

Doc decided they were ordinary North American aboriginal stock, who had been stunted by some freak of heredity or environment.

"Who," Doc asked in Viking, "are you?"

"The medicine men of Qui," replied the most wrinkled of the lot. "Why were you breaking into our sacred place, where only the medicine men are permitted to come?"

It did not seem exactly suitable to explain that he had just been curious, so Doc countered with a question.

"Is this," he demanded, "the way that well-meaning visitors should be treated?"

"We will show you how we treat visitors," the medicine man chief said calmly.

They closed in on him. Doc let them seize him and the leading thongs to his wrists. He was curious to see what they intended doing.

THE SMALL men of Qui led the bronze giant out of their queer sacred place, as they called it, and marched him down the trail scooped in the snowdrifts.

Doc Savage did some thinking. The Viking dragon ship of Long Island Sound had undoubtedly come from here. That meant the bearded crew who had captured the yacht had sailed the dragon ship down from here.

This was something of a feat, considering the season of the year, but not impossible. Had the Vikings not crossed the Atlantic, the northern, dangerous part, too, according to wellfounded historical opinion, using exactly such ships. Perhaps these identical ships.

Becalmed on Long Island Sound, the bearded crew of the Viking dragon ship had taken the yacht to complete their voyage. They had shaved off their beards, enlisted the aid of Peabody and Carleth, taken a plane and come north – for what? That still remained a mystery.

Further recapitulation was interrupted by appearance of one of the most primitive, striking settlements Doc had ever seen.

It looked as if some one with only a hazy idea of how to go about it had attempted to construct a village patterned after those of northern Europe in the tenth century. There was a wall, quite substantial, but not overly high. Inside, there were several large buildings which resembled big stone blocks.

Adding an almost laughable touch were several common Eskimo igloos, and a few Indian wikiups of poles and animal skins. There were some sod huts.

Plump little pygmy people were everywhere, swathed in fur garments which did not differ greatly from the ordinary Eskimo type. They swarmed out and surrounded Doc and the capturing party of medicine men.

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Doc expected his size to excite some astonishment it did, but not as much as he had anticipated. The little fellows seemed fully aware that the world held bigger mortals than themselves. A few minutes later, Doc saw the reason.

A group of four normal-sized men appeared. They were clad warmly in furs. But each man carried a long length of what must be ordinary ship's anchor chain. The ends of these chains were fastened about the men's ankles. It was an improvised and no doubt effective variation of the ball-and-chain.

The wrinkled little chief medicine man prodded Doc and indicated the four men with the chains, at least one of whom was white, the other three apparently being ordinary Eskimos.

"They," said the medicine man in bad Viking, "were visitors like yourself."

That did not sound so good.

Doc was led to a square block of a house. There was no door, no windows. A pole was leaned against the wall and Doc was persuaded to climb to the roof.

The roof had two holes. Out of one, smoke came. The other was larger. Doc was shoved down it, into a black, rather chilly and smelly interior.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" a scholastic voice greeted him.

THERE WAS an extremely large blubber lamp – possibly the local version of a heating stove – burning under the small hole, and it gave off some light and heat, in addition to much smoke. By that fitful gleam, Doc discerned the bony Johnny.

The gaunt geologist and archaeologist was hugging the blubber heater. He still wore nothing but his red underwear.

"It is a wonder you don't freeze to death," Doc told him.

"I am convinced I have," said Johnny, who made it a point not to use his big words when talking to Doc Savage. "I have been running all over the North Pole dressed like this. Why I am not dead, I don't know. It is really remarkable."

Not when you considered John's whalebone constitution, Doc reflected.

"What happened to you?" Doc asked.

Johnny told him. The recital missed no details, consequently required some time.

"I eventually wandered to a spot where these little fellows saw me," Johnny finished. "We had a bit of a battle, but I was almost frozen. They threw me in here. I gather that they are going to tie a piece of anchor chain to me and use me to perform useful tasks."

"They seem to have the same ideas about me," Doc admitted quietly.

"It appears they keep slaves," Johnny said. "Every one who drifts in here winds up doing that. I believe they have some sailors, quite a few Eskimos who got inquisitive and poked their kayaks in here. There are also some Indians and a hunter and prospector or so who ventured down over the cliffs."

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"You seem to have gotten quite a bit of information," Doc said.

"Oh, they're willing enough to talk. They're not bad fellows, in spite of that slave business. They're even rather proud of their small size. Seem to think it makes them superior."

Doc Savage looked up. A ring of faces was around the roof hole, watching.

"Their small size is due to diet, probably," Doc said.

"They're thin-boned," Johnny admitted. "I found out that they get their water from a spring. There is only the one spring. They brought me some of the water."

He nodded at a bucket made of sealskin stretched over a wooden framework. Doc went over and tasted some of the water.

"This probably explains it," he said. "The stuff seems to have a mineral content, which might easily stunt growth."

"It's their private, sacred spring, thank goodness," Johnny grunted. "They gave me that water as a special favor. Their slaves get melted snow to drink. During the summer, there's a rivulet or two over the cliffs. That explains why the Vikings weren't stunted."

"Vikings?"

"This is amazing," Johnny murmured. "Hard to believe. It seems that, centuries ago, a colonizing expedition of Vikings in two dragon ships came in here and were captured. They're here yet, their descendants. I gather there is not over half a dozen of them now, however. They must have been sturdy lads. The little fellows even speak their language, and they can't speak any other tongue, except that gibberish of their own."

Doc Savage said suddenly, "Kettler's crowd captured Monk, Ham and Renny."

THAT STUNNED Johnny. He groped for words and found none.

"They were in three planes," Doc said. "Any sign of them?"

"I heard planes," Johnny said hoarsely. "That was while it was snowing. They went on north. Must have missed this place."

"We must get out of here," Doc said.

He stood up, eyed the hole in the roof. The little men there seemed to fathom his thoughts, for they made angry, admonishing noises and shook knives, short spears and clubs, all Viking weapons.

"They still have a lot of the weapons brought here by those shipwrecked Norsemen," Johnny said quietly.

Doc paced the dank, smoky chamber.

"What about Kettler?" he demanded.

"Kettler and his gang were shipwrecked here," Johnny said. "The little fellows told me that. Kettler was a bad actor and a talker. He got some of the little fellows, a few bad ones, to help him. They stole a Viking ship and

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got away. They took one of the Viking girls. She knew astronomical navigation. Those Norsemen were clever. The girl was to be used to guide them back to this place. There is something here that Kettler wants, and can only get with an armed force."

"So Kettler had some little men with him," Doc said grimly. "That explains some queer things that happened in New York."

"You mean the attacks you mentioned, and the alarm clocks?" Johnny queried.

"Yes," Doc said. "The little men got into my quarters, and into Monk's laboratory. They used the alarm clocks to make a noise that covered their movements while they hid after throwing the knives and short spears. Probably Peabody put them up to that."

Johnny squinted at Doc Savage through the smoke from the big blubber lamp.

"Just when did you suspect Peabody and Carleth?" he asked.

Doc Savage did not answer immediately.

"In New York," Doc Savage said. "At Carleth's house. We had gone there hunting Ham. I used a trick to get a chance to search the house. In the basement was a radio set, and while I was examining it, a man came in, and I caught him. I have not told this to any one, for the simple reason that –"

An excited outcry from the small men on the roof interrupted him.

"Listen!" Johnny exploded.

The moan of airplane engines sounded in the distance.

Chapter 16. DEATH IN QUI

DOC SAVAGE whipped quickly to a position under the roof hole. None of the little men were looking down now, but were staring upward into the gaudy display of the borealis. The aerial pyrotechnics made an amazing background for the three dark noisy planes. To the midget men, who had patently never seen a plane before, the scene was highly dramatic.

The three planes swooped low, heading for the little village of conglomerate Norse, Indian and Eskimo architecture. The small men on the roof broke and fled, shouting.

Doc Savage glanced at Johnny, as if to point out the inadequateness of the red-flannel underwear, sadly torn, as an Arctic garb.

"I know what you're thinking," Johnny stood up. "I didn't freeze before, so why should I now?"

Doc Savage stripped off his parka, tossed it to Johnny. The strips of blanket which Johnny had tied about his feet and legs were still in place, furnishing some protection for those members.

"Thanks," said Johnny.

Doc Savage sank under the roof hole, then shot upward, and his hands clamped the edge. He was outside with

flashing speed.

The three planes were off in the north again, apparently trying to select a spot for a landing, and none of the small men were on the roof. Johnny having pulled the parka on, clambered up to Doc's side.

"What is the program?" he asked.

"Monk, Ham and Renny are aboard those planes," Doc said. "We've got to do something about that if it is not too late."

The bronze man surveyed the village. As he had expected, the populace, even the slaves, had gathered outside the wall where a better view could be had of the planes.

Doc and Johnny dropped off the roof and ran in the opposite direction. A few dogs barked at them, but that did not draw attention. They clambered over the wall and dived into brush and stones.

"They are rather careless with their prisoners," Doc said.

Johnny, running easily, replied, "They do not have to worry. Those cliffs are a rather effective barrier, to prevent escape. And no one is going to tackle the sea in a small boat at this time of year."

"The cliffs supposed to be unscalable?" Doc queried. They angled to the left, circling back around the village.

"Not exactly," said Johnny. "I understand that the midgets have climbed them, and a few slaves have escaped. But I imagine it did not do them much good. Civilization is hundreds of miles away, over frightfully barren country."

They were past the village, now, undiscovered, and heading for the cultivated area. It was probably there that the planes would attempt to land.

Johnny, who had the peculiar ability to carry on a conversation in an almost perfectly normal voice while running at top speed, continued imparting what he had learned.

"The little fellows used to send out hunting parties beyond the cliffs," he said. "But they were no match for the Indians, who seem to be rather fierce. The small chaps concluded they would be better off if they kept to themselves and did not let the outer world know they were here. That, you know, is not an uncommon attitude among primitive people."

Doc said, "You learned a great deal."

"Oh, they're little windbags," said Johnny. "Those Vikings they captured centuries ago proved to be their all-time prize capture of slaves. They have legends about it. They thought I was another Viking, because I could speak a little of the tongue. They were glad to get me, I suspect."

"Look," Doc said.

The planes were coming down.

THE THREE crafts had selected, as Doc had anticipated, the comparatively level cultivated area, which was under a smooth blanket of snow. It was the only available spot, the little bay being full of floating ice and partially frozen over, and the beach entirely too rocky.

QUEST OF QUI

Doc and Johnny were well to one side. They could hear sounds which indicated the little men were working through the snow toward the ships.

A shot cracked. A ragged fusillade followed. There were small screams, angry shrieks.

"Devils!" Johnny gritted. "Kettler and his crowd have started killing."

Doc Savage kept on for some hundreds of yards, then veered to approach the planes from behind.

Fight noises had increased. Gunfire was almost continuous. The small men, after the fashion of primitives, were doing much shouting as they fought.

"There are the planes," Doc breathed finally.

The ships had been landed into the wind, but had then been taxied back to the other side of the field on the chance that a hurried take-off might be necessary. Doc had foreseen this. He and Johnny were not fifty yards from the craft.

Kettler, Peabody and Carleth, along with most of their crowd, were on the opposite side of the field, fighting. The small men had prudently taken to the brush and boulders, where their primitive weapons had a slight chance. They did not seem to be doing as badly for themselves as might be expected.

"Because they are small does not mean they are weaklings," Johnny muttered. "But they haven't got a chance."

Peabody had left guards at the planes. Obviously, these were both watching the ships and guarding the prisoners.

There arose much shouting from across the field, where the fight was in progress. Kettler and Peabody were squawling at those left behind with the planes. Doc distinguished their words.

The fighters wanted ammunition. It seemed they had charged with only what they had in their pockets, and that was running low.

The men at the planes became very busy hauling out ammunition boxes.

"We'll try it now!" Doc said, and his voice was almost a chill nothingness.

They crawled through the shrubbery, the bushes. The men about the plane were entirely preoccupied with what they were doing. Frenzied squawks from Peabody and Kettler, across the clearing, hurried them. Peabody and Kettler were fighting in the open, taking their chances. Carleth was in the rear, crouching behind a rock, looking at the planes frequently, as if he would like to come back.

Some small men were fighting other small men. They were the little fellows who had thrown in with Kettler.

Doc Savage had one of the men at the planes down before he was seen. He laid the victim up with that peculiar pressure on the spinal nerve centers, at which he was so adept.

There were three others. Doc rushed, caught one, then got another, who had fallen over an ammunition case. Neither was a weakling. They went over and over in a cloud of snow. Johnny wrapped his bony length about the survivor.

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In one of the planes, Monk began to flounder about and howl, delighted at what was happening, angry because he was missing a fight.

Doc had trouble getting his foes by the neck. He changed tactics and banged their heads together. They went limp. When he stood up, Johnny had strangled his man into insensibility.

"TURN MONK and the others loose!" Doc rapped.

Without a word, Johnny dived into the ship which held the prisoners.

Doc Savage lunged to the nearest motor, ripped up the hood, and began tearing at the ignition system. He loosened certain very essential parts, carried them with him, took the second motor, a third, removing parts from each.

It would have been better if there had been more time. But Kettler's men were already shooting, yelling and running back across the clearing.

Monk fell out of the plane, limbs stiffened by being long bound. Renny followed him. Then Ham.

"Gather up the ammunition!" Doc shouted.

Without asking questions, they started shouldering the heavy ammo boxes. It was easy to pick them out. They were plainly marked.

Doc Savage finished with the last of the motors, and had a tangle of ignition parts in his hands. It was hardly likely they could be replaced. He seized the last of the ammo cases. They ran.

Kettler and his crowd kept up a rattling fire, but were having their troubles with the deep snow. A bullet lodged in the ammo box Monk carried, and several cartridges exploded, blowing the lid off the box.

Monk, startled, dropped the box and ran, but when all the cartridges did not go, ran back and got the case, slapping his side where a bullet had grooved.

That was the only difficulty they suffered before reaching shelter.

The girl, Ingra, had one of the heavy cases, and she began to fall behind. Doc relieved her of the case, which somehow seemed to pique her.

They ran with deadly earnestness. The cold air was agony in their lungs.

Sounds indicated the small men were pursuing Kettler's crowd, hampering them. Shooting was steady. There were more than a few mortal screams.

Kettler's gang reached the plane. Monk grinned all over his homely face at the burst of profanity that arose, as if it were a beautiful sound.

Kettler tried to follow them to get his ammunition back. But the small men had surged down the side of the clearing, and cut him off. They fought among the trees and rocks.

Then Kettler, growing suddenly cautious, ordered his men to form a compact group, and tried to return to the planes. They found a swarm of little men about the ships, fired a few shots, then angled off to the right and

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took up a position atop a hillock which had been swept bare of snow.

They stopped there, ringed in by small foes who, after some of them had been shot, were not idiotic enough to try a charge.

Doc and his party got to another high spot, where they could see what was going on, and stopped to breathe, to watch. They were rather pleased with themselves. That feeling evaporated when they saw what was happening to the planes.

THE LITTLE men were tearing the ships to pieces. They were using clubs, rocks, to beat in the wings and fuselage coverings. They were like small ants dismembering a trio of captured hornets many times their size.

Doc shouted. The girl, Ingra, yelled. It had no effect. A horde of the little men climbed on the plane wings and jumped up and down until the wings buckled.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "We gotta stop that."

He started forward. Doc stopped him.

"The little men are maddened," the bronze man said. "You cannot blame them. Keep away from them. They might kill you."

Renny scowled at the distant planes, not one of which was intact.

"Maybe we can put 'em together later," he muttered. "If we can't, we're in a pickle, what I mean. How we gonna get out of this place?"

Renny's worst apprehensions were exceeded. The small men, having dismembered the planes by sheer force of numbers, now began hauling the parts toward the sea. They even took the motors, tying lines to the heavy things and a score or more of them seizing each line.

They dumped the parts over a small cliff, into swift-moving tidal current. The motors, of course, sank. But the wing assemblies floated away before they filled and disappeared.

Renny groaned, "Now, we are up against it!"

Chapter 17. ULTIMATUM

THE DEMOLITION and disposition of the planes, which the primitive little dwarf men seemed to consider devil birds in part responsible for their woes, had the effect of dispelling some of the mad rage. The small fellows stopped their insensate screeching, and in grim silence gathered up their dead.

This quiet fooled Kettler and his men into trying to make a break from their knoll, which was a bad move indeed, for they were set upon fiercely, lost two men, and were glad to get back in the open where their guns could be used most effectively. Shooting during this fray was not nearly as free as during the previous scrap.

Complete silence fell when Kettler's crowd were back on their prominence. No bullets were being wasted.

Doc Savage and his group, fully rested now, worked cautiously in the direction of the village. They still carried the ammunition boxes. When they were within half a mile of the settlement, still undiscovered, Doc

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called a halt, and directed all to conceal themselves in the drifted snow, but, however, to keep a sharp look-out.

"You," Doc told Ingra in halting Viking, "will accompany me."

"What are you going to do?" she demanded.

"Attempt to enlist ourselves on the side of the small men," Doc explained.

"You will probably not have any luck," the young woman surmised. "The little men are very proud. They will resent the idea that they need help."

But Doc Savage had a system for getting around that. He advanced, with no show of hostility, until he and Ingra were surrounded and taken into the village.

They were led past a group of the normal-sized slaves who wore chains, and one of these shouted gladly at Doc. The individual was a French-Canadian trapper, and he did not seem as gloomy as one might expect.

"They keep me by thees places maybe ten year, oui," he shouted. "She not so bad as maybe yo' t'ink. They tak' off the chains when we 'ave not the work to do. She not worth get killed for to try to get away, lak' some do."

"Thanks," Doc told him.

Doc and Ingra were brought before the medicine men, who seemed to be the chiefs as well. They wore sour expressions when he started talking.

Ingra stood back and listened. Her features radiated skepticism as Doc began, but that faded to admiration. The bronze man had wisely taken a meek attitude, his manner indicating that the small men were his masters, as they indeed were at the moment.

Doc pointed out quietly that he had stolen the ammunition of Kettler's gang – he had to explain what ammunition was, and did it in a subtle fashion which gave the impression that the small men not knowing that it was not ignorance, but really a matter hardly worth the notice of such remarkable fellows.

His oration was long, and probably as psychologically clever as any talk he had ever made, and he wound up by stating that he could plainly see the small men did not need his help, but that he would consider it a great favor on their part if he would be permitted to help fight their enemies, who were also his foes.

It was blarney, pure and simple, but it worked. Doc was informed he had permission to bring his friends to the village, and that, if they behaved themselves, they would be allowed to fight.

After hostilities were over, and these enemies of Qui settled with, Doc was further advised that he would be given the great privilege of becoming a slave of the Qul.

He thanked Thera with a straight face.

INGRA WENT back with Doc to get his friends. The young woman was impressed.

"Your tongue is the mightiest of your weapons," she informed him.

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Doc reached his group, and explained the situation. Particularly did he explain it to Monk, who was a bluff soul and liable to fly off the handle at the idea of being treated as an inferior by ignorant and somewhat smelly little men whose average weight was probably a fifth of his own.

"O. K.," Monk grumbled. "But it's against my principles."

"You haven't got any principles," Ham told him.

"And you haven't got a valet," Monk sneered.

Ham shut up.

The small men took the boxes of ammunition away, and Doc, after some round-about inquiring, learned they intended to store it in a house where it would be safe.

To the disgust of Doc and the others' disgust which they did not voice, lest they offend their hosts, the bronze man and his aides were bundled into the establishment where the slaves were kept.

This was a walled enclosure, constructed of stones and mortar, with needle-pointed hardwood thorns inserted in the mortar, points downward, the thorns being stout enough to afford a grip, but sharp enough and plentiful enough to make climbing the wall a horrible job.

Inside the pen, the enforced laborers had been permitted to build huts to suit their fancy. The Eskimos tended to ice igloos for the winter and sod huts for the summer, the Indians had wikiups, tepee affairs, and the French-Canadian had built himself a little stone house that might have been transplanted from his fatherland.

The other slaves were sociable souls, anxious to talk. They were surprisingly resigned to their lot, and did not seem unhappy. The descendants of the Vikings, in particular, were full of boyish good humor.

Doc was introduced, if that was what it could be termed, to Ingra's father, a strapping brother, and another stalwart young Norseman who bent many a fond gaze on the young woman. This last came to the attention of Monk.

"Competition," he said gloomily. "Well, I'll give him a run for his money. That young lady would make a swell partner if we had the bad luck of being stuck here for good."

Ham overheard that, looked wise, and a bit later was discovered presenting Ingra with his wrist watch, a very fine jeweled gaudy which Ham had preserved from Kettler's men by dropping it inside his tall moccasins.

Monk was not the only aggravated observer. The young Norseman suitor looked daggers. That gave Monk an idea, and he singled out Johnny.

"Teach me the Viking words for, 'He has a wife and thirteen children,'" Monk requested.

Johnny innocently complied. Monk repeated them several times, got the words down pat, then went over to the strapping Norseman lad, pointed at Ham, and laboriously recited the words.

The Norseman lost no time. He strode toward Ham, collared him, and shoved him away from Ingra. Ham resented this, took a poke at the Norseman – and was knocked head over heels. Monk went off into a corner with his mirth.

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Ingra, with feminine contrariness, made a bigger fuss than ever over Ham.

Shots banked frequently in the distance. There was not enough of them to indicate an engagement of consequence. Every one seemed to be marking time.

Doc Savage talked to the French-Canadian.

"Kettler ver' bad, m'sieu'," said the trapper. "Me, I 'ave only hope he ees get wheep."

Doc Savage held the same views. He was becoming somewhat impatient, having hoped that the small men would deign to accept his aid before this, but it seemed that the little fellows were blissfully confident of taking care of matters themselves. They might, too, if there was not an upset.

THERE WAS an upset. It came hours later, when the occupants of the slave compound had settled down to get some very necessary sleep. It started with an uproar.

Shots ripped out. Screams! A machine gun gobbled – and gobbled and gobbled.

Doc Savage scrambled out of the French-Canadian's rock house, hospitality of which he had accepted, and sprinted for the wall. He began breaking off the thorns.

The uproar in the village was blood-curdling. The crash of rifle fire was ear-splitting, and the shrieks not pleasant listening. Bullets whined, spanged rocks, ricocheted everywhere.

Doc got the thorns broken off nearly to the wall top, then leaped, and managed to grab an outthrust of stone, from which he broke off more thorns, then grasped the top of the wall.

A small man came rushing up, clubbed his hands before he could hoist himself to the top, and forced him to drop back.

The fighting continued. Those in the compound were helpless to take part.

Able-bodied guards on the wall were soon replaced with others who had been wounded, and were unfit for the more fierce fighting.

"That looks bad!" Monk muttered.

Ingra shouted questions at the new guards, and the answers she received explained what had happened.

"Some of the little men fighting with Kettler's gang had friends in the village," she said. "They tipped the others off to where the ammunition was hidden. Peabody and Kettler and Carleth got it. Now they're slaughtering the little men."

There was only one point where the compound wall could be scaled – the spot where Doc had broken off the thorns. They tried again and again to get out there. The little men, from the secure footing of the wall top, beat them back.

The captives tried making living pyramids at other parts of the wall. That did not work, either. They decided to try several points at once.

Then, unexpectedly, the fighting ended.

A GRISLY sort of quiet followed, lasting some thirty minutes, during which every one in the compound felt that something ominous was gathering. Even the natural surroundings seemed to partake of the evil air, for the sound of the sea was not as loud as usual, except to the south, where it pounded hollowly against the cliffs.

Then small men came marching to the compound. They shouted commands that made the Viking girl, Ingra, gasp out in horror.

"What is it?" Monk exploded.

"Peabody's crowd has come out on top," Doc Savage said grimly. "They have made the little men of Qui agree to let them take what they came here for, repair the dragon ship in the shrine cavern, and sail it away."

Monk moistened his lips. "That's not so terrible."

"That is not all of it" Doc told him.

Monk swallowed and looked a question.

"Kettler and Peabody have been given the privilege of killing us," Doc said.

Chapter 18. THE DOUBLE-CROSSER

IF DOC Savage seized upon any momentary hopes of escaping before Peabody's gang arrived to gather the fruits of their victory, the bronze man was thwarted, because normal-sized men, carrying rifles and machine guns, appeared outside the compound. Peabody, rotund, pink and happy, led them, and coarse-voiced Kettler at his heels.

Because there was no other sane course, Doc and his aides stepped out when they were ordered to do so.

"Let 'em have it here," Kettler suggested.

Peabody hesitated, then shook his head. "Might stir these little runts up again. Let's get 'em away from the village."

Kettler was suddenly smitten with an idea. He snapped his fingers.

"Have the runts show us where they keep those special offerings to their great spirit," he said. "We'll get the stuff, and leave this bronze guy and his pals there. Sort of a trade."

"It's damn foolishness," said the practical Peabody. "But all right."

Doc Savage and the others were formed in a line. They were not bound, although they were searched very thoroughly.

"Run, if you wanta," said Kettler. "That'd make it easier on our consciences."

Doc did not run. Neither did his men. They were marched out of the village, thence southward, guided by sullen medicine men who did not come above any one's belt.

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They walked for so long that Peabody and Kettler began to hear complaints from their followers, who loudly declared they were tired, what with the fighting and all, and anyway, they had a hunch the medicine men were misleading them. Kettler, largely by signs, let the medicine men understand they would not live long once trickery was evident.

Monk, shuffling along with Doc, remarked, "I don't see that guy Carleth. Wonder if he got killed in the fighting?"

They trod through brush thickets, shuffled among boulders, wallowed in snow. Not once did a chance for escape present, although they watched assiduously for one, however small.

Monk grumbled, "Wonder what they're going after?"

The way turned wilder. They were entering a wedge bounded on one side by the sea, turbulent and ice caked, and on the other side by the cliffs, sheer, unclimbable.

Peabody became more ugly in his signaling to the medicine men; they, in turn, put more vehemence into their attempts to indicate everything was all right. They smiled – forced, horrible smiles, for all of them had seen these fiends shoot down friends and relatives – and ran on ahead, pointing.

The spot they indicated was a small, round clearing among naked trees and evergreen brush. In the center of this was erected a circular stone platform, on which stood a carved totem of wood.

The medicine men pointed at the totem, jabbered.

"Hell!" Peabody gritted. "They don't know what we want!"

"Wait," growled Kettler. "Let's look around. Try moving the totem."

There was a stir in the brush near by, causing several guns to shift in that direction.

Thorpe Carleth stumbled out and confronted them. He sat his glasses on his nose and looked at them foolishly.

"I got lost," said Carleth, "during the fighting."

Peabody cursed him.

"You've got lost in all of our fights," he said. "I'm gonna have things to say about that."

Kettler let out a yell. He had shoved the totem, and it had moved, lifting also the rock in which it was set.

THE MEN ran forward with excited cries – but not all of them. Enough kept their guns alert to hold Doc and his aides in their tracks.

Kettler and the others were levering up the stones. This uncovered dry leaves, and they dug in furiously, tearing the leaves aside, scattering them over the snow. Kettler emitted a new bawl of joy, and struggled with something that was heavy.

It was an old ship's safe, complete with the straps with which it had once been fastened to a bullhead. They worked at the door, got it open, and dug out some fistfuls of coins, packets of ancient paper money.

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A copper-bound chest followed next. It fell to pieces while they were trying to get it out, and some of the contents spilled. There were jewels, some unmounted, the majority in knife and sword hilts, and inset in various pieces of armor.

"The stuff those old Viking freebooters had on their dragon ships when they were wrecked here!" Peabody chortled. "Boy, is this something! As antiques, the junk is worth no telling how much its value as metal and jewels."

They continued to dig in the leaves. They excavated a shower of small skeletons, and heaved them away into the snow.

The medicine men shifted and muttered at the desecration, and Doc caught enough of their mumbling to understand that this was the burying place of the medicine men of the past.

Kettler's crowd was not satisfied with all they brought up. There was, for instance, much copper, which of course was hardly worth packing back to civilization, and which was the more aggravating because Kettler's men had difficulty telling it from the gold in some cases. There were old ship's kettles, binnacles, railings, mostly of copper, but some of brass.

It was obvious that the small men of Qui, having learned yellow metal was prized by men of the outer world, had failed to distinguish between gold and brass and copper. Also between silver and lead, it developed, for they found a number of tons of ballast lead taken from some ship.

Kettler finally stood back.

"This is it," he said. "Now, let's get this Doc Savage out of the way for good."

He waved at men he must have selected previously as executioners. They lifted their weapons.

A grim, wildly determined voice shrieked, "Don't do that, Kettler!"

Kettler spun. So did every one else.

Carleth stood at the clearing edge, whence he had retreated to produce, from where he had hidden it, no doubt, before he showed himself a few minutes ago, a machine gun. Carleth had the machine gun trained on Kettler and the others.

"Stand still, all of you!" Carleth screamed.

Vehemence of his yell shook Carleth, and his glasses fell off.

DOC SAVAGE moved like he never had before. Carleth's glasses falling off decided him. Carleth was so nearsighted he could not tell friend from foe at twenty feet.

Doc whipped at Peabody, hit the man and knocked him into the loose leaves that filled the pit under the shrine. Monk and the others exploded, making for the gang who had been on the point of executing them.

A gun went off. That was Renny's victim, who fired in the air, convulsively.

The machine gun let out a stuttering uproar. Men shrieked and cursed and some fell. The others recoiled wildly, and dived for the spot where they had put their arms aside while they unearthed the wealth under the

shrine.

It was an unfortunate move for them, putting their guns aside, for it enabled Doc Savage and his men, in the final analysis, to make their escape.

The only ones with guns were the executioners, and Doc's first wild charge, with his men, put these out of commission. The bronze man went on and reached Carleth's side.

About the same moment, the machine gun stopped.

"Ammunition out!" Carleth shrieked. "I only had part of a drum."

"Run for it," Doc directed, and pitched out of the clearing.

The bronze man's aides followed him. There was only a fractional moment in which to act, for Kettler's crowd were falling upon their weapons. Doc and his aides did, however, succeed in getting into the boulders before shooting really started. "Let's go!" the bronze man commanded grimly. "If they overhaul us now, we're in a pickle."

They had started south, toward the narrowing "V" of the cliffs, and they kept going in that direction, knowing that to veer to either side would mean they would be cut off but aware also of a horrible certainty of being trapped ahead. Surprise, fortunately, had given them a little advantage.

The cliffs were close now – their shadow made almost darkness about them, and this handicapped them a bit, but handicapped also their pursuers, who were now following by vision – their footprints – rather than sound.

They came, shortly, to the spot where the cliff breasted the sea, and waves smashed with appalling force against stone.

The tide was out, but coming in with the amazing speed characteristic of this region. The tides here were not as great as in the Bay of Fundy, to the south, where the rise and fall is often twoscore feet, but it was considerable.

There was, they saw, a strip of sand along the foot of the cliff, as yet uncovered by water. Waves, however, crawled up fearsomely to the stone wall.

"Come on," Doc directed.

He ran into the water. It was very cold. When it was up around his knees, he turned to the left, as if heading back along the beach in the direction they had come.

"We won't make it!" Monk exploded. "They'll see us!"

"Trick," Doc said, and waded out deeper.

Then he turned sharply back and headed for the line of cliffs.

"We may be able to locate a ledge above the level of high tide," he explained. "That's our only chance. They've got guns.

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The sand was hard – it had frozen while the tide was out and it was slick going. Time after time, they fell. The strip of sand, welcomingly wide at first, rapidly narrowed but that was because the tide was coming in fast.

"We're liable to be cut off," Monk groaned. "Fact is, I don't believe we could make it back. This water is too darn cold for anybody to swim in."

They had gone fully half a mile, without a sign of a break in the cliffs. Waves were breaking over them now, smashing them about, soaking them.

"There!" Doc rapped, and pointed.

It was a ledge, amply wide, but some fifty feet up. The surface of the cliff sloped, was rugged, and could be climbed.

Doc mounted, assisting the others to go up as he did. They dropped on the ledge, soaked, breathless, and looked back.

Peabody, Kettler and their men must have been taken in by the fake tracks, which they had no doubt seen in the knee-deep water. They could be heard shouting.

"In another ten minutes, the tide will have that strip of land covered," Monk grunted. "That means we'll be safe for at least several hours."

CARLETH WAS by far the most exhausted man in the group. The cold air had burned his lung tissue and he hacked and strangled several times.

"Breathe inside your parka," Monk suggested.

Carleth did that, and caught his breath.

"Guy, you sure done us a turn back there," Monk told Carleth. "Just what made you do it?"

Carleth seemed vastly surprised. He looked at Doc Savage.

"I did not tell them, Carleth," the bronze man said.

"Huh!" Monk exploded. "Tell us what?"

"Remember when we were at Carleth's house, and I faked the thrown knife gag to give me a chance to search the premises?" Doc queried.

"Sure."

"I caught Carleth in the basement, putting the radio out of commission," Doc said. "That proved absolutely that he was one of the gang."

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny, who had overheard. "You got wise that early in the game?"

"Carleth was sick of the whole thing," Doc said. "The killing of Ham's apartment house superintendent had decided Carleth to quit the game. He told me this there in the basement of the house, and I believed him. He

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told me the whole story. He offered to string along and help me. I took him up."

"And I must confess I was not a great deal of use," Carleth muttered.

Monk looked somewhat injured.

"But why didn't you tell us, Doc?" he demanded.

"Carleth's life was at stake, and more," the bronze man said quietly. "The slightest hint of what he was doing, and he would have been killed."

Monk grumbled, "But we could have kept it quiet."

Doc smiled. It was rarely that he did that.

"It was much more convincing as it was," he said.

Monk finally grinned. "Yeah, Doc. You're right, at that." The homely chemist eyed Carleth. "Say, that long yarn about you and Peabody bein' held prisoners in your house was a lie, eh?"

"Of course," said Carleth.

Monk waved his arms, so that circulation would not slacken too much. It was not so cold but that they could stand it, with precautions.

Monk also did some thinking. It was rarely that Doc Savage did as he had done with this man Carleth. It was a risk, the bronze man staking so much on character judgment. Or had it been a risk? Carleth would hardly have dared tell his fellows what he had done.

But, studying Carleth, Monk abruptly decided Carleth was sincere. Right now, the man looked happy, as if he were helping do the world a good turn.

A roaming bullet distracted Monk's attention. The bit of lead glanced off the cliff above them, went singing nastily out to sea.

Kettler's crowd had discovered them.

KETTLER BELLOWED great oaths which reached entirely to where Doc and his aides crouched. Peabody came running, and waved his arms, beckoning, urging every one forward. They charged onto the narrow ribbon of beach under the cliffs.

Traversing approximately a hundred yards, Peabody, Kettler and their crowd had to cross a low spot where the tide had already covered the sand and was smashing against the beach. They splashed through. The water was nearly to their waists.

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "That was dry when we went through."

Johnny said, "Tides usually do not come in steadily, but in three surges, during which the water rises much more."

Doc Savage was shouting. He had made a funnel of his metallic hands, and he lifted his remarkable voice to its greatest volume. He was directing a warning at Peabody and Kettler.

"Go back!" he called. "You can't make it."

"Hell we can't!" Peabody bellowed.

He thought Doc was threatening him, whereas the bronze man, in accordance with his policy of seeing no lives taken that might be saved, was conveying a warning.

Peabody himself fired a shot. The others with him did likewise, and the storm of lead thus unleashed drove Doc and those with him flat on the ledge.

There they lay, not even lifting their heads until a man shrieked on the tiny beach, not far away. Then they chanced a glance.

There was no beach now. Waves were piling in. Offshore, there was a tide rip, and this tossed up waves that came lunging in furiously. The man who had shrieked was in the water, being lifted, battered against the stone, carried back, flung against the cliff again.

A moment later, another man was off his feet. Then Peabody and Kettler went almost together, as they turned and tried to fight their way back.

The water was cold enough to chill the strongest swim men into a near paralysis, and even had any of them been able to keep afloat, the waves would have driven them against the rocks. It became certain that they were to drown, to the last man.

"If we could save them," Doc Savage said slowly, "we would."

Monk looked at Carleth.

"Doc would," Monk said. "He's funny that way."

Chapter 19. WAR CLOUDS

FOUR MONTHS, New York City was treated to a little mystery which, for a few days, got a good deal of newspaper attention.

A Viking dragon ship was discovered tied to a Brooklyn dock one morning. The craft undoubtedly had been rebuilt in part within recent months, and bore evidences of a long, rough sea voyage. Searchers found no one aboard.

Nor did any one ever appear to state where the unique craft had come from, nor was there a claim of ownership made.

The services of that learned and big-worded archaeologist, William Harper Littlejohn, were solicited, and he, after due examination, declared the dragon ship a genuine Viking product, most of it hundreds of years old, but some of it modern repair work.

As on another occasion, the more playful tabloids translated Johnny's big words for their readers. The dragon

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ship was taken to a museum and placed beside that other dragon ship which had appeared so mysteriously in Long Island Sound.

Johnny had a very good reason for not telling all he knew.

The little men of Qui had, of course, elected to stay in their retreat.

Most of the "slaves" had elected to remain, also, among them – this to Monk's chagrin – Ingra. Doc Savage had been the guiding medium in a mutual understanding between the men of Qui and their "slaves" before he left. He had, in fact, succeeded in carrying out a Lincolnesque role in that the servitors had been emancipated for the future. This arrangement had seemed eminently satisfactory to every one.

Some of the impressed servitors, among them the French–Canadian trapper, had returned with Doc. Some Eskimos and Indians had been returned to their tribes, to tell tales which no one believed.

The men of Qui would benefit little if civilization did know of them, and certainly, unknown, they would not be exploited by smooth talking go–getters. They were happiest where they were, as they were.

THERE WAS some talk in antique circles during the next few months about certain very valuable and undoubtedly genuine Viking items which had come on the market.

The money from the antiques, Doc Savage employed to purchase a shipload of commoner conveniences of civilization, and this was delivered to Qui by men who knew how to keep their mouths shut. The first shipped did not take all of the money; there was more for the years following.

THE END