

SPOOK HOLE

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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SPOOK HOLE

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. MYSTERY OF THE "HARPOON"

THE man had one arm. Hence, to load the revolver, he had to crouch and grip the barrel between his knees while he thumbed fresh cartridges into the cylinder. The gun had been fully loaded before, but he was replacing the cartridges, apparently fearing they had gotten wet. The night air was full of soaking mist. It was very dark down here by the New York water front. The one-armed man had been skulking, and doing it most furtively. He had made scarcely a sound. Once, more than five minutes ago, he had frightened an alley cat out of a rubbish can, but that had made only a slight noise.

"Devils!" the man gritted. "Almost twenty of us, they would kill!" He mumbled some more, unintelligibly, and finished up, "Damn 'em! They know I won't go to the law for protection!"

His mumbling was a mistake. A bare twenty feet away, the second skulker heard him. This man had two arms well filled with muscle, and his face was chiefly notable for the lack of space between the eyes, and an oversized jaw. This man gripped a two-foot length of heavy wire hawser which had been wrapped with adhesive tape. It was an instrument that could kill a man.

The one with the bludgeon waited. The one-armed man was coming straight toward him.

Uptown, an elevated train clanked south. Out on the harbor, a bell buoy clanged. Somewhere far above, thunder gave a great whoop, but there was no lightning.

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The man with the hawser lifted his weapon. He took his tongue between his teeth, as one who intends to strike hard.

The thunder gobbled and chuckled and went romping off into the infinite distances, while down among the water front warehouses, it left echoes not unlike that of a big metal barrel tumbling end over end. Large drops of rain began to splash the cobbles. They were very cold.

The man with the bludgeon took his teeth out of his tongue to suck in a breath, then set himself again, ready for the killing blow.

He got a surprise.

A noise sounded from ahead. There was also a sound as if some one had pushed down on a tire valve and let the air leak out for an instant.

The man with the taped hawser sprang forward. He whipped out a flashlight. He thought that his one-armed quarry had fallen. He wanted to take advantage of that fact.

The flashlight popped a white cone. The man with the hawser let out a loud grunt. He tried to stop, slipped on the wet cobbles, went down flat on his back, and the big raindrops wet his face. He turned over, got up, and without looking back, ran.

He had left his flashlight behind. It was still on, pointed so that the beam was on him. He wore oilskins and a seaman's sou'wester. He ran madly, with great leaps, and did not look back as long as he was in the flashlight's glow, which was for some distance. He had seen an apparition.

THE apparition was huge and black, shiny from the rain, and it crouched over the prone figure of the one-armed man. The latter was not entirely prone; his head and shoulders were off the cobbles, for the fabulous black figure had him by the neck.

An instant later there was a dragging noise, and a water puddle gurgled as if something had been hauled through it. The nearest warehouse was a score of yards distant. A plank squeaked inside of it.

The big raindrops fell like solid things on the warehouse roof. Thunder let loose another great bumping. The elevated train clanked on downtown.

Inside the warehouse, a thin rod of brilliant white light appeared. It undoubtedly came from a flashlight, but the beam was little thicker than a pencil, even at the end. It prowled over the one-armed man's figure.

The fellow was bound now, with lengths of that very stout-tarred cord known to sailors as Italian marline. Both his wrists and ankles were secured, and these were lashed together so that he was doubled over in such a manner as to discourage rolling. A sponge was held tightly in his mouth by a wire which could not be chewed through.

The one-armed man had changed. Changed in a startling way. He actually had two arms.

Obviously one of his arms had been confined tightly to his side by a long bandaging of canvas. The canvas had been stripped off. The thin flash beam picked up its snaky length on the floor.

Several times the flashlight prowled along the arm which had been strapped under the coat in such a manner as to be almost unnoticeable. It was as if the matter of the arm constituted some mystery which needed

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solving.

There was not enough of light from the thin flashlight to show the giant black apparition who was doing the examining. The light string collapsed. The squeak of a floorboard was the only sound as the big black figure departed.

It had not taken long. The slamming of the elevated train was still audible. An extremely keen ear might still have heard the running of the man with the hawser bludgeon – had there been no rain.

The man with the hawser bludgeon had suddenly acquired a great dislike for the wet night. He was making for the only spot of light visible among the piers. This was a single electric bulb, encased in a wire shield, which glowed above a gangplank that led, through a hull hatch, into the black innards of a ship.

The man crossed the gangplank without slackening speed. He brought up smack against the snout of a short rifle.

"Where's the fire?" growled a coarse voice back of the gun.

The man with the hawser countered, "Where's Captain Wapp?"

"You see a big bad spook?" grinned the rifleman.

"Where's Captain Wapp?" the other shrieked.

"In his cabin." The rifleman stepped aside. "What's wrong?"

The hawser carrier ran on without answering.

CAPTAIN WAPP had to pass sidewise through more than one door on his ship. He was big. But he never had to stoop, even for the low bulkhead doors down near the bilge. The shortest man in his crew was taller by a head. His belt was a cotton rope that had once been white. Maybe he could not get a leather one large enough. The rope belt fastened with a gold snap and ring, set with diamonds which could not be classed as small.

He was cleaning his finger nails with a big clasp knife. When the door exploded open, he twisted the knife in his hand, holding it so that the hilt pointed at the door. The knife hilt was one of those deadly little novelty weapons, chambered for a .22-caliber cartridge.

"You bane in big hurry," he said dryly.

The newcomer still carried his length of taped hawser.

"Something is screwy!" he gulped.

Captain Wapp absently uncocked the firing mechanism in the haft of the knife. This made a faint click.

"Dot be not so good," he grunted. "Tell us about it very snappylike."

The other held his hawser bludgeon with both hands and spoke with the mad speed of an auctioneer closing a brisk sale.

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"I'm standing watch on the dock, like you ordered, see," he said. "All of a sudden, I get a look at a man who heaves up between me and a distant light." The man hefted his hawser. "I get ready to pop him, see, because he's cruisin' around mighty snaky."

"You bane do right thing," advised Captain Wapp.

"Only I didn't do it," corrected the other. "I didn't get a chance to lay aboard this skulker with my little persuader, here. Something else got him."

Captain Wapp looked interested, "Something?"

"Well, it didn't look human," grumbled the man with the bit of wire hawser. "It was big and black. And I'll be damned if it made any sound at all. It wasn't none of Braski's crowd."

They were silent. The bell buoy gonged slowly out in the harbor. Thunder cascaded in hollow salvos high above in the leaking night sky. It sounded muffled in the cabin.

THAT thunder had a more robust quality at the gangplank where the watchman with the rifle was stationed. The latter was very much alert and somewhat puzzled; from time to time, he looked over his shoulder, as if expecting some one to come from the direction of Captain Wapp's cabin and tell him what had gone wrong.

The thunder chased itself away, and almost instantly a fresh burst crashed, accompanied by a flash of lightning across the whole southwestern part of the sky. Lightning glow showed the wet dock planking, the puddles, the big raindrops. It also illuminated the watchman faintly, so that he could be seen from the wharf, but he did not realize that.

"Dang that hog, Braski," the watchman muttered. "Dang old Hezemiah Law and his Spook Hole and the whole dizzy business. We gotta kill a lot of people, too."

He scowled, hefted his rifle and sighed loudly.

"But, blast it, a million bucks is a million bucks," he added. "And any part of it ain't to be sneezed at."

His own mumbling occupied his attention, and when a voice called from behind him, "Hey, you – look here a minute!" he gave a start. Wheeling, he peered into the ship. The voice had been strange, very faint.

"Whatcha want?" he growled.

The faint, strange voice came again.

"Look closely," it requested.

The watchman squinted, straining his eyes. He could see no one. He thought that strange. It was strange, but not so much so that it could not be explained. The man knew little about ventriloquism, hence did not dream that the small, weird voice did not come from within the ship, but from outside, on the dock.

Nor was the watchman aware that the author of the deceptive call, a giant form swathed in black, was gliding silently up the companionway.

The watchman's first inkling of danger was a terrible grasp which fell upon his neck. He tried to cry out. His vocal cords would not work.

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He tried to fire his rifle. But, strangely enough, the weapon fell from his fingers, and was caught by the dark assailant before it made a noise on the planking.

The watchman tried to get a look at the features of his assailant. He failed there, too. The huge one was shrouded completely in some black cloth, probably of silk, which seemed waterproof.

A mysterious listlessness began to come over the watchman. It seemed to come from the terrific pressure on a particular portion of his neck.

At first, that pressure had been painful, but now it was only a tingling. The man's whole body seemed to go to sleep. He could see, could hear, but could not move a muscle. Even his eyes could observe only what was immediately before them, for the watchman now possessed no power to roll his eyeballs.

The fantastic giant in black left the watchman lying in his queer helplessness and moved on into the interior of the ship.

The flashlight beam of remarkable thinness leaped out at intervals, roving. It picked up a ring life preserver which some one must have brought down from deck.

The life preserver bore the name of the ship, Harpoon.

IN the master's cabin of the Harpoon, short, broad Captain Wapp absently cocked and uncocked the pistol's mechanism in his big clasp knife.

"Somebody bane prowling around," he said slowly. "So vot? Some feller dot Braski sent, Aye bet."

The man with the taped length of hawser fingered his weapon. He batted it against one oilskinned leg.

"You don't worry enough, captain," he complained. "There was two of 'em. Maybe one was a Braski man, sure. We expected Braski to try to lay aboard us. But who was the other one?"

"Dot feller?" Captain Wapp held the knife with one hand, gave his rope belt a hitch with the other. "A cop, maybe."

"No." The hawser whacked oilskin. "There ain't no one-armed cops. And who ever heard of a cop working like that big black guy did?"

Captain Wapp looked pained.

"Dis business, Aye bane afraid she give me a headache," he complained.

"Listen," grunted the other. "Why can't we pull out of here? Let's head for Spook Hole and finish it up."

Captain Wapp shook his head. "She bane too risky."

"You mean the woman?"

Wapp's head shook again. "Woman, she bane easy to get rid of. It's dot monkeyshiner, Oliver Orman Braski."

The hawser length made two angry pops on the other's oilskins.

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"Braski knows enough to make trouble, eh?" he demanded.

"He could ruin the whole works," said Wapp. "He would, too."

"Scuttle him," the other suggested. "Bat his brains out and leave him in an alley. Hell! We gotta kill nearly twenty, anyway!"

Captain Wapp sighed mightily.

"For vun whole week, we have try to do dot very thing," he said. "And vot did it get us?"

The man with the hawser scowled uneasily.

"You think old Hezemiah Law smells anything?" he questioned anxiously.

"Law bane smart feller," Wapp mumbled. "But Aye not tank he smart enough."

The other frowned at his hawser length.

"Well, we gotta handle this right," he said. "With maybe a million dollars – "

"More dan dot," interposed Captain Wapp. "From what Aye laid eyes on, dot Spook Hole has enough of de stuff to pay each feller on my ship not less than – "

A gun banged loudly in the corridor outside. A man cursed, then began yelling a mad alarm.

CAPTAIN WAPP lunged to the door, wrenched it open. He had the little pistol knife almost hidden in one broad, red-furred hand. The man with the hawser trod his heels. They did not dive into the corridor, but put their heads out cautiously.

One of the crew was in the corridor, crouched back against a bulkhead, standing rigidly, not moving any part of his body other than his features as he screamed terribly. His arms were bent in a grotesque fashion.

"The blasted thing went aft," the man moaned, and tried to pick up his gun, which lay on the floor at his feet. His strangely bent arms refused to function.

Without coming from the shelter of his cabin, Captain Wapp swore at the man.

"Vot you say?" he roared.

"Outside your cabin," groaned the sailor. "It was black. Never had much shape. I thought it was a pile of clothes or something from the laundry. When I came up, it grabbed me."

He cried out wordlessly from the effort of trying to move his arms.

Captain Wapp yelled, "Which way?"

"Aft," whined the sailor. "I told you that."

Captain Wapp leaped forward, seized the sailor and gave each of the fellow's arms a rough, terrific yank. Pain caused the man to burst into tears. But his arms straightened. They had only been out of joint.

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"Get up and help hunt!" snapped Wapp.

They ran aft, yelling an alarm, turning on the excellent electric lighting system with which the vessel was equipped.

They found no one. They located no one who had seen anything suspicious, except the watchman at the gangplank, who was in no condition to say anything.

"Vot ails you?" Wapp asked him.

The watchman said nothing, did nothing, acting in all like a man alive and yet dead. More of amazement than rage on his features, Wapp turned upon the man who carried the taped bit of hawser. He asked no question with words, but the other read his expression.

"I dunno what it was," he disclaimed. "Same thing that grabbed the one-armed man on shore."

They hastily rigged big floodlights along the rail – lights which were undoubtedly ready at hand for night work at sea. The vast quantity of illumination showed the nature of the Harpoon. It was a whaling ship, one of the modern type, a gigantic pot-bellied thing, with a runway aft where the whales could be hauled up to the processing plant in the innards of the craft.

Captain Wapp and the others on the Harpoon, having found nothing, stood at the rail, muttered, and looked very puzzled indeed.

UNKNOWN to those aboard the Harpoon, a sinister, fantastic figure stood and watched. The form, huge and black, stood in the shadows of the pier, beyond the floodlight glare. The strange being had gotten off the whaling ship before the search was well under way.

Not for long did the personage of darkness linger to observe. He moved away, and the silence of his going was almost supernatural, eerie.

Some moments later, the giant of blackness stopped at the spot where the one-armed man – rather the man who had pretended to have only one arm – had been left, securely bound. The monster of the night paused there, rigidly, and there came into the darkness around him a fantastic sound.

It was low, that sound, and eerie, a note defying definition by word. It was not a whistle; it did not seem the product of vocal cords. It had the qualities of a trilling.

Probably most fantastic of all was the way the sound seemed to come from no definite source, but to come from the very air itself, as if it were the ventriloquial note of some exotic tropical bird. Certain it was that the note had a musical quality which was inspiring to an appreciable degree.

Certain also was the fact that the strange one of the darkness was making the sound. And undoubtedly the strange trilling denoted surprise over a discovery which had just been made.

The one-armed man was gone.

The lengths of very stout-tarred marline rope which had bound the one-armed man lay on the warehouse floor. Some had been untied. Most had been cut.

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The giant of darkness produced his flashlight which projected the thin, infinitely white beam. He searched. There was no visible sign to show whence the one-armed man had gone, or how he had managed to get free.

After a bit, the dark titan moved out of the warehouse and down a side street which was full of the thunder's muttering and occasional small drops of rain. It was very dark.

The giant of the night reached a parked car. No glimmer of light showed from the machine, but when he opened the door, light spilled out. It was a sedan, a very well-curtained car. Bathed in the illumination, the giant began changing his appearance.

He stripped off a dull-black rubber cape and hood combination which served the double purpose of keeping off the rain and making him almost invisible in the night. He removed black gloves.

It was an amazing individual who stood revealed, a giant man, a Herculean figure, whose remarkable body might have been cast from hard bronze.

The sedan was large, yet as the man stood beside it, the car seemed none too ample. The man was not fat. His body was a huge machine of sinew.

There was more of the unusual about the bronze man than his physique. His eyes, for instance, were like pools of flake gold always in motion, and possessed of a magnetic quality. His hair, a bronze hue but little darker than his skin, straight and fitted like a metal cap.

He got into the sedan.

Two men were already there. One of them spoke.

"Doc," he said. "What did you learn?"

Chapter II. THE "HARPOON" PRISONER

DOC SAVAGE, man of miracles and mystery, replied nothing. That was a peculiar habit he had, puzzling to strangers, but familiar to those who knew the bronze giant.

He was a character of international note, this man of bronze. He had done things which had startled the world. He had also done things even more startling, of which the world knew nothing. He was a man with a profession probably as unique as any one had ever followed. His profession was trouble. Other people's trouble.

Doc Savage's profession was helping others out of trouble, when in doing so, he was righting wrongs. He had been trained from childhood – until he was a remarkable combination of mental genius and physical strength – for his profession. Pursuit of it carried him to the ends of the earth.

Doc Savage was assisted by a group of five aides almost as unusual as himself. It was two of these who were in the car with him now.

Saying nothing, the bronze man drew from a pocket a telegram, which he unfolded. It was a local message, marked by the date line as having been sent here in New York City. It read:

SUGGEST WHALING SHIP HARPOON MIGHT INTEREST YOU STOP BETTER BE CAREFUL

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There was no signature.

One of the other two men leaned forward. He was hardly taller than a half grown boy, but he would have weighed well over two hundred and fifty pounds, and the hairs on his wrists were like rusty finishing nails.

He spoke, and his voice was very small and almost ridiculously like that of a child.

"We checked on that message while you were investigating the boat, Doc," he said. "A one-armed man seems to have sent it."

"No other information, Monk?" Doc queried.

"Nope," said the individual who bore more resemblance to a bull gorilla than to the human tribe.

"Monk" was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, whose accomplishments as an industrial chemist were known in many parts of the world.

The third occupant of the car leaned forward, resting his sharp chin on the thin black cane which he carried. He was a lean man with the large, mobile mouth of one given much to oratory, and his attire – full evening garb – was absolutely faultless.

"What did you learn on the Harpoon, Doc?" he questioned.

"I met a one-armed man," Doc said. "He really had two arms, however."

The man with the cane frowned. "I fail to understand."

"Disguise, Ham," Doc told him. "Possibly he was the one who sent that rather puzzling telegram. Possibly not."

"Ham" shifted his chin on his cane. He was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, conceded by many to be the most astute lawyer Harvard ever turned out, and he looked the part.

"And what about the Harpoon," he queried.

The bronze man shook his head slowly. "Something queer is underfoot there. It concerns some one named Braski, a man called old Hezemiah Law, and a place designated as Spook Hole. There also seems to be something involved worth some millions of dollars."

"That's vague," said small-voiced Monk.

"It was all very puzzling," Doc agreed. "I hoped to hear more, but a sailor came along the passage while I was listening and discovered me. Where is Johnny?"

"Eh?" Monk blinked.

"Johnny," Doc said. "Where is he?"

"Oh." Monk waved an arm vaguely. "He went over to help you look around. Guess he missed you. He'll be back soon, probably."

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Doc Savage got out of the car. His movements were fast without seeming unduly so.

"We had better look into that," he said. "Things seem to be tense around that whaling ship."

THE bronze man opened a compartment in the car. The machine seemed to be fitted with innumerable such recesses. The device which he brought out had somewhat the appearance of a small, old-fashioned magic lantern – one of the type which projected pictures from a postcard to a screen.

The large base obviously contained a strong battery. Doc switched it on. As far as the eyes were concerned, nothing happened. It did not project light.

Doc turned the lantern affair on the damp ground. Where nothing visible had been before, small, glowing patches appeared. The spots were something over two inches across and glowed like pale phosphorous, or smears of the stuff off of radium watch dials.

It was noticeable that where Doc Savage and the other two stepped, they left the round, glowing marks. Close examination would have shown that the heels of their shoes were not leather, but of a porous fibre impregnated with some chemical compound.

"Johnny started off this way," Monk said, and pointed.

They followed the marks left by "Johnny's" heels. None of the trio commented on the phenomena of the glowing tracks, for it was not strange to them.

The lantern was one projecting ultraviolet, or so-called "black light," and was not so intricate that it could not have been understood readily by the average electrical experimenter.

The composition of the shoe heels was more complex, being a compound developed by Monk, the master chemist, working with Doc Savage. It was simply a blending of certain of those chemical substances which fluoresce, or glow, when exposed to ultra-violet light – a property not especially remarkable, being shared by a substance as common as vaseline.

Johnny's tracks were spaced in a manner which showed he was a long-legged man indeed, and they progressed, after some meandering, to the vicinity of the warehouse where Doc Savage had left the bound form of the man who was pretending to have only one arm.

What had occurred was easily read. Johnny had heard some sound made by the bound man; possibly the fellow had beaten his heels against the floor.

"So Johnny turned him loose," Doc said dryly.

Monk chuckled. "Won't Johnny's face be red. For once, I'll bet he can't think of a big word."

"Johnny" was William Harper Littlejohn, a gentleman who had once held the chair of natural science research in a university which went in for deep learning rather than athletics. He was another member of Doc Savage's group of five assistants.

"Let's see where he went," Ham suggested.

Johnny's glowing prints were thick about the spot where the bound man had been released, but they finally led off through a side door. Soft mud outside still retained tracks, and these indicated that Johnny and the

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man he had freed were together.

The prints led to an alley, and in the dark recesses of the latter, mute evidence reposed. Doc Savage found it first and pointed it out.

Bits of thin, broken glass. Scuff marks on the concrete pavement.

Monk picked up the fragments of glass and inspected them, expression and manner remindful of a monkey examining a flea found upon its person.

"Johnny's monocle," he said. "Here's where he got what good Samaritans usually get. The fake one-armed guy crowned him."

"But where is Johnny?" Ham snapped.

That, it developed, was to be a mystery. Johnny's fiery trail ended in the alley.

"Knocked senseless and carried off," Monk hazarded.

Doc Savage issued quick orders.

"You two continue looking for Johnny," he directed. "Be careful."

Monk, as hurriedly as possible, demanded, "What're you gonna do, Doc?"

Then Monk made a disappointed grimace. He had not been quite soon enough with his question. Doc Savage was already gone, swallowed up, wraithlike, by the darkness. There was no sound to show the direction he had taken.

MONK sighed, grumbled, "I got a notion to get my pet pig Habeas. He's better'n a bloodhound."

The dapper Ham put out a sharp jaw. "That hog is useless, and you know it."

"You overdressed shyster!" Monk growled indignantly. "I'm gonna call my laboratory and have my secretary bring Habeas down."

They moved off in the darkness, insulting each other in a low, vehement fashion that would have led a stranger to think they were on the point of blows.

It was perpetually thus with Monk and Ham. Nobody could recall one having addressed a civil word to the other. Yet, conversely enough, they were as attached to each other as two men could be, each having risked his life on several occasions to save the other.

Habeas Corpus was Monk's pet pig, a porker of grotesque appearance and somewhat astounding intellect. Habeas was also the dapper Ham's pet hate.

Although wrangling, the two men were keeping a sharp look-out for some sign of Johnny. It was Monk who heard a small, foreign sound. He yanked Ham to a stop with more force than was necessary.

"You missing link!" Ham gritted.

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"Sh-h-h!" Monk admonished. "I think somebody is ahead of us!"

A new and totally strange voice spoke up from the darkness to their rear.

"There's somebody behind you," it said. "Turn around and have a look!"

Monk and Ham spun – not around, but to the sides, diving in opposite directions. They moved with the perfect coordination of men who had been in trouble before. Their separation was on the principle that two fires were harder to fight than one.

Back of them, a man swore, just as a flashlight came on. The one who cursed had no doubt intended to illuminate them with the flash.

"Quick!" the fellow barked. "Don't let them get away!"

It was suddenly apparent that numerous men were in the surrounding darkness. Monk bumped some one. He swung a furry fist. It landed solidly.

The one who had been hit skidded backward, feet making slitherings on the wet pavement, then fell down.

Over on the other side, Ham gave the handle of his immaculate black cane a twist. It separated, and from the dark shaft came a lean sword blade, the tip of which was coated with a chemical concoction, compounded by Doc Savage, which would produce abrupt unconsciousness once it entered a wound.

Ham flirted the blade about. He did it gently, his object to wound slightly rather than to wreak great damage.

A man came hard against Ham's back. The dapper lawyer tried to get his sword cane around, failed, was knocked off his feet. The attacker fell atop him, missing the chemical-coated blade by luck.

They were in a narrow alleyway, and it was suddenly full of quiet fight sounds – quiet until Monk began to roar and bellow as he always did when in combat. But he was not noisy for long. His roars muffled abruptly, as if a man had sat on his face. Soon after, silence came.

"Tie them," said the man who had spoken first.

Monk gulped a faint question past the hand which was over his mouth.

"You birds off the Harpoon?" he asked.

The leader of their captors laughed harshly, said in a glad voice, "We got a break, gang. They must be two sailors off the Harpoon."

ROLLS of black adhesive tape were produced and many turns taken about the wrists of Monk and Ham. They were not gagged.

"Let out a bleat, and you'll get muffled in a way you won't like," the man advised them.

Monk strained against the binding. His physical strength was tremendous. He did not free his hands from the swathing bundle of tape.

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The chief of the captors stepped back, and the flashlight he was holding chanced to illuminate his own person.

He was a lean man with almost incredibly black hair on his head, brows, chin and wrists. His eyes were round and brilliant. He made Monk think of a black tomcat.

"Yeah, they're sailors off the Harpoon," he decided again.

"What makes you think that, Braski?" one of his party queried.

Braski changed position. He handled himself like the black cat he resembled.

"Didn't they ask us if we were off the Harpoon?" he demanded. "They hoped we were some of their pals."

Monk growled, "You guys have made a mistake!"

Braski laughed. It was not a nice sound.

"Where's Spook Hole?" he asked.

"That place again?" Monk shrugged. "I wouldn't know, but you probably wouldn't believe that."

Braski stepped forward and calmly inserted a thumb in Monk's left eye. It was a cruel thing to do, and Monk writhed and groaned while four men wrestled him down.

"Where is Spook Hole?" Braski repeated.

"Blast you!" Monk snarled. "I don't know!"

Ham next received the eye treatment.

"I have no idea where Spook Hole is or what it is!" he gritted in an agonized voice.

"Maybe they don't know," suggested a man.

"Captain Wapp does know," Braski said dryly. "Well go ask him. We've got to get him out of the way, anyhow. The double-crosser!"

"What about the girl?" the man asked.

"We'll get her if we can't nab Captain Wapp," grunted Braski. "I'm almost sure Wapp is holding her so we couldn't find her and learn from her where this Spook Hole is."

The other looked dubious, queried, "How'll we get aboard? They'll have guards posted all over that whaling ship."

Braski laughed again, unpleasantly, and kicked Monk's shins briskly.

"Maybe they got a password or something," he said. "Our two pals, here, will know it. They'll get us through – if they know what's good for 'em."

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Monk growled, "Brother, you're steaming up a mess for yourself. We ain't off the Harpoon."

Braski said, "Don't lie to me!" and poked Monk's eye with a thumb.

They moved in the direction of the Harpoon. There seemed to be nearly a dozen men in the party, and all were armed.

THE floodlamps along the rail of the Harpoon had been turned off, but a single bulb made fitful glow above the gangway. Two men lounged there. They wore no weapons visibly, but their manner of keeping hands close to their raincoat pockets was understood by a close observer.

Braski's party and their prisoners stopped well back in the darkness and conferred.

Monk, finding himself close to Ham, whispered, "This is a pickle. We're supposed to give a password, or get shot. And we don't know any password. Maybe we oughta tell 'em we're part of Doc Savage's crowd."

"No!" Ham breathed emphatically. "They haven't mentioned a thing to indicate they know that Doc is involved. We had best keep still about that. Might make it easier for Doc to work."

"Just the same – " Monk fell silent. He was thinking of various past occasions when a connection with Doc Savage had been the equal of a death sentence. Doc was automatically the mortal enemy of all who were outside of the law.

Braski stuck his black goatee out at them and grated, "What are you two whispering about?"

"The weather," Monk told him. "It looks like somebody is gonna get rained on plenty."

"Two clever boys, eh?" Braski snarled. "All right, do your stuff. Walk up to those two watchmen and get us aboard. And if you fail, you'll be the first to get shot."

Monk wailed, "Listen! I wouldn't try this!"

"Get moving," Braski directed.

"Our hands are tied," Monk pointed out.

"We'll fix that," Braski said, and proceeded to cut their hands free of the tape. "Now, put on your show."

They were urged toward the Harpoon gangway. Monk was in the lead, simply because a gun muzzle happened to gouge more firmly against his back. The gangway vibrated under their feet. The two watchmen became alert and put their hands in their raincoat pockets.

"Make it good!" Braski hissed into Monk's ear.

Monk pumped out his chest, strode boldly toward the first watchman and said, "Where's Captain Wapp. We got something important for him."

The watchman, to Monk's astonishment, grinned widely and said, "You're the captain's friend, ain't you? We been expectin' you and your crowd."

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"Uh—huh," Monk muttered, then, as gun pressure hardened against his back, added hastily, "Sure! We're friends of everybody!"

The watchmen stepped back, and one of them called loudly down a passage, "Here's the captain's friends."

"Bring them to the cabin," called a voice.

They entered the passage, one watchman leading the way. They progressed some two feet. A door clanked shut ahead. Another slammed behind. Their guide turned, and he had two guns out.

"You bums thought you were pullin' something!" he snarled. "We know you, Braski! Drop them guns and elevate!"

"Is this gonna be a party!" Monk breathed, and leaped straight up with considerable violence.

There was a passage light overhead, protected by a wire cage. Monk jammed both hands against it, mashing the wire, breaking the glass bulb, cutting his hands a little.

It was the only light in their section of the corridor. Intense darkness clapped down.

Bedlam erupted. A revolver made swift, ear-splitting noise. A man shrieked in agony. More guns whooped.

MONK slammed flat, reasoning that fewer bullets would find the floor regions. He groped for Ham's ankle. A foot kicked him solidly in the face.

He grabbed it, knew by the smallness of the shoe and the spats encasing the ankle that Ham kicked him, and yanked Ham down, giving the ankle a twist by way of reprisal.

A man fell on them. Monk grabbed his throat, felt warm wetness flood his hands and let go. The man had been shot in the neck and was already dead.

Monk barked loud words in a dialect which would have been intelligible to not more than a dozen men in the so-called civilized world.

It was the tongue of ancient Maya, a language Doc Savage and his men had learned on one of their numerous adventuring jaunts, and which they now used to communicate with each other when not wishing to be understood by outsiders.

Monk had simply advised Ham that he intended seeking the other end of the room.

"Me, too," Ham said in the Mayan tongue.

They scuttled along the wall and met at the other end of the passage. From the amount of shooting and yelling, it was obvious that large numbers of the Harpoon's crew had rushed to the attack.

"Let's let 'em fight it out," Monk suggested in Mayan. "Think they're coming in at a door over here. Let's clear out that way."

"One of the few good ideas you ever had," Ham agreed in the same dialect.

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They had little trouble locating the door. It was still dark, except for the flash of guns, an illumination by which little could be discerned. A sailor stumbled coming through the door and fell noisily.

Monk reached down, struck at the man's temple, hit the floor by accident the first time, then corrected his aim and knocked the fellow trembling and senseless.

Monk shoved Ham through ungently, then eased outside himself. They flattened to one side.

"Get der bummers!" a voice was bellowing from down the corridor.

The speaker charged into view an instant later – a man so huge that he had to come sidewise through the bulkhead doors Monk and Ham recognized him from Doc Savage's description. Captain Wapp.

Gloom enwrapped the passage, and Captain Wapp charged past without observing Monk and Ham. Straight into the fray, the squat giant slammed.

"Git dot Braski!" he bawled. "His neck, we will twist!"

Monk listened to the turmoil they had escaped. Men howled, guns crashed, and strings of profanity joined the whole in a violent syncopation.

"When they thin each other out, I'll go in and lick both crowds," Monk chuckled.

The homely chemist had no idea that he was bragging. He might have been able to do it. He certainly thought he could. He got to feeling that way in a fight.

But his hope did not materialize. Braski and his men apparently broke through the other end of the passage, for the fight sounds receded with a rapidity that indicated men in flight.

"Shall we follow them?" Ham suggested.

"Heck, no," Monk grunted. "Let's look this ark over."

ALL hands aboard the Harpoon must have been called to the fight, for Monk and Ham were not molested as they swung down the passage and up a companionway. They had no idea where they were going, having never been in closer contact with a whaling ship of this modern type than pictures in the Sunday newspapers. Shortly, they found themselves on deck. They looked over the rail.

Men were dashing madly down the gangplank. Captain Wapp stood under the gangway light and jumped up and down, waving his clasp knife which was also a pistol. He bellowed orders to his men.

"Braski and his crowd must have gotten away," Monk said regretfully.

"His attempt to find where the mysterious Spook Hole is did not get him far," Ham agreed dryly.

Monk moved along the deck. "Let's see what luck we can have in that direction."

The dark-haired Braski had permitted them to retain their flashlights, and they now employed these, opening doors and poking into the holds.

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They found numerous tanks, boilers and other blubber processing machinery. The blubber "trying works," this was, although they did not know the technical terminology. There was an odor present, ample and not exactly entrancing.

"Bet they don't live down here," Monk suggested wryly. "Let's try the upper decks, and forward."

They worked forward and up, getting away from the blubber vats, but not from the odor. Ham grimaced mightily and often. He was fastidious in senses as well as dress, and the physical aspects of the whaling ship did not appeal to him.

Ham probed into a room and found spare harpoons, guns and the explosive cartridges used in the killing harpoons.

"Nothing here," he decided.

Monk found another door, barred on the outside, but not locked.

"Wouldn't be anyone in here, probably," he grumbled, and unbarred the door and thrust his head and flashlight inside.

The next instant there was a sound such as a billiard ball might make if dropped on hard ground. Monk plopped down on all fours, shaking his head.

"I have a gun," a woman's voice said with brittle abruptness from within the room which had been locked. "I think I will use it."

Ham poised, on the horns of a dilemma. He could not see the speaker.

"Careful," Monk groaned from the floor. "She popped me with something, probably the gun she's talkin' about."

"Use your left hands and be very careful and toss me your guns," the feminine voice directed.

Monk and Ham hesitated.

"Haven't got any," Monk advised.

There was another pause. No one moved or said anything.

Still on the floor, Monk growled, "I don't believe any woman would shoot me." He got to his feet.

"You put a lot of reliance in your charms," Ham told him. Ham still kept his arms up.

There was another silence.

"Come out of there, lady," Monk suggested.

More waiting.

"I guess the bluff won't work," said the feminine voice.

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The woman came out. She wore a disgusted, defeated and slightly frightened look. She carried no gun, but she did carry a flexible bludgeon, an affair which looked as if it were made of silken hose stuffed with something hard. With this she had probably felled Monk.

MONK frowned at her. Ordinarily, he would have turned on the amiable grin which made his homely features surprisingly pleasant to look upon. But his head still ached.

The young woman was not hard to frown at. She was neither unusually tall nor especially short, nor was her figure especially striking, although it left little to be wished for. But she had hair the tint of dark honey, and her skin was almost exactly the same color. Eyes, lips, nose, were exquisite. Taken altogether, she was striking without being gaudy in any respect.

Monk reached out abruptly and grasped the weapon she carried. She surrendered it contemptuously.

Monk examined it. Inside the silk hose was cloth, and in that, fragments of heavy china dishes broken in small bits – cup, saucer, a plate.

"Your friends evidently did not think I had anything to make a weapon," she said dryly. "Do better, next time."

"Friends?" Monk grinned. "You got us wrong, miss – " He waited. She did not supply a name.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"You should know," she snapped.

"Nix," the homely chemist grinned. "We don't belong on the Harpoon. In fact, if the crew found us, they'd probably have a scalping party."

"Oh." The girl frowned. Then her expression changed. She seemed to jump at a conclusion. "I am Nancy Law."

"Nancy Law." Monk squinted. "So what?"

"Didn't Braski send you aboard to find me?" she countered.

Monk started to shake his head, but Ham interrupted hurriedly.

"You're friendly to Braski, aren't you?" asked the dapper lawyer.

"I'm the friend of anybody who will get me out of here," the girl said vehemently.

"Then let's get off of this boat," Ham smiled.

They worked toward the upper deck and the rail, using much more caution now that the young woman was along.

Ham asked Nancy Law, "Why were they holding you?"

"To keep Braski from getting hold of me, I heard them say," the girl replied. "But you should know that. Didn't Braski tell you?"

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"Indirectly, yes," Ham said hastily.

THEY reached the deck, and under the pretense of looking over the ground, Ham drew Monk aside.

"We'll let her think we're Braski's men," the barrister whispered. "I think it'll make it easier for us to find out what this is all about."

"I don't think the idea is so hot," muttered Monk, whose policy was to disagree with Ham whenever possible.

Excitement around the Harpoon had died, although Captain Wapp, a grotesquely broad and squat figure, still stood in the light near the gangplank. From all appearances, the dark-haired Braski and his gang had made a complete escape.

Monk and Ham worked forward with the girl and reached a mooring line as thick as Monk's ample leg. Monk went down this to the dock with simian ease. The girl came next, not having much difficulty, and Ham brought up the rear. It was as simple as that. They were not molested.

"Stands to reason they'll have guards around," Monk grunted. "Ham, you and me had better take a look."

They moved off, but in separate direction. Reconnoitering took them not more than three or four minutes. Monk, for his part, found no one, and decided the way was clear, by a roundabout route, to escape.

He returned to the spot where he had left the girl. Ham was there. Monk peered into the murk.

"Where's Nancy Law?" he demanded.

"That's what I'm wondering," Ham snapped.

"Huh?" Monk gulped.

"She cleared out," Ham said. "Gave us the slip."

Chapter III. SPOOK HOLE QUEST

MONK and Ham stood and glared at each other. There was much more thunder overhead now, and some lightning, so that they could see each other at fitful intervals.

"It was your bright idea, lettin' her think we were Braski's men," Monk accused. "Bet that's why she skipped out."

"It was your suggestion, leaving her alone!" Ham snapped angrily. "You have the same ideas as a baboon!"

They worked toward the shore end of the pier, going carefully, listening often, hoping to find some trace of the young woman. The only sounds, however, were those made by Captain Wapp and his men about the Harpoon's gangplank. Those noises were sufficient to urge Monk and Ham away from the vicinity.

Ham, lost without his sword cane, suggested, "I think my cane was left lying in that alley where we were grabbed. I'm going after it."

They sought Ham's cane, and found it without great difficulty. Ham flourished the unique weapon in an

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eminently satisfied manner.

"Wonder what became of Doc?" he pondered.

"Maybe he's back at the car," Monk suggested. "We'll go see. If he's not, we'll look around some more for Johnny, on our own hook."

They approached the sedan warily, lest it be watched, circling it completely twice. Satisfied no one was near, they strode up boldly in the intense blackness and opened the door. At that instant, lightning ripped above. Both distinctly saw an entirely unwelcome sight.

A hand was projecting from the car and holding a gun almost in their faces.

"Whew!" Monk exploded, and snapped to all fours on the moist pavement

There was absolute silence until the next jagged whip of lightning.

"Dubitation is now an evanescent quiety," said a dry, scholastic voice from within the car.

Monk bounded erect.

"Johnny!" he exploded. "You scared me out of ten years' growth."

Johnny got out of the car. He was very tall and thinner than it seemed any human frame could be and still retain life. His raincoat was ripped down the back, one eye was darkening, and he showed other evidences of rough handling.

Johnny stowed the gun under an armpit, in a specially designed holster which sat in padding so that its presence would not have been noticeable on a man of less skeletal build.

The weapon resembled an oversize automatic, except that it had a drum magazine. It was a machine-gun pistol, perfected by Doc Savage, and capable of a remarkable rate of fire.

"Consummate ischiagra, a bit of cephalalgia, and a touch of torticollis describes my condition," Johnny groaned.

"Put it in small words," Monk requested.

"I feel like hades," Johnny complied.

"What happened to you?" Monk asked.

"My noctambulation – "

"Little ones," Monk grunted. "I already got a headache."

"I found a man tied up in a warehouse," Johnny said, lapsing into words of fewer syllables than he usually affected. "I turned him loose. A bit later, he banged me over the head. I awakened, most ignominious of all, in an ash can, and came here, found no one and waited."

"That's all?" Monk asked.

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"All," Johnny agreed.

They stood there in silence while thunder made whooping echoes along the darkened streets and rain began to shoot down steadily in small drops.

"I think," Monk said suddenly, "that we're going to have trouble."

MONK was right. Four men came stepping out of the darkness, and when close, they projected flashlight beams. They held guns out in the light so that they could be distinguished.

"If you want trouble, we got plenty of it," one advised.

Johnny simply leaned backward and fell into the sedan. The car was bullet-proof. Johnny got his machine-gun pistol out as he fell. Monk and Ham dived after him. They slammed the doors.

Gun noise made competition for the thunder above as one of the men fired. His bullet struck a window glass, but only made a cobweb design of fine cracks and fell to the pavement, flattened. The man swore.

Johnny seized the window crank to raise the glass very high. This would expose small, shielded loopholes through which the muzzles of their machine-gun pistols could be shoved. They were in a rolling fortress only slightly less impregnable than a tank.

"We got 'em!" Monk rapped.

It was not the first time he had been wrong. The door on the opposite side of the car whipped open abruptly. It had a lock on the inside, but in the heat of the excitement, they had overlooked throwing this. The visible enemy was on the other side, anyway.

But some one of the gang had raced up, unseen, on the opposite side. Monk and the others found themselves staring at gun muzzles.

"You got just one chance," a man ripped.

Monk glared. It was suicide to try to bring his machine-gun pistol around. There was only one thing to do and he did it – put his hands up. Ham and Johnny followed suit.

A man looked them over closely with a flashlight. He jabbed a finger at Monk and Ham.

"These two are Braski's men and came aboard the Harpoon with him," he said. He scowled at Johnny. "I never saw this pile of bones before."

Another man walked around in front of the sedan and turned his light on the license plates. He bent almost double to stare. Then he jumped erect as if he had been kicked unexpectedly. He all but fell down getting around to the side of the machine.

"Damnation!" he squawled. "We're in a jam!"

"You gone nuts?" a man snorted.

"Them license plates!" the first man rapped. "Take a look!"

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The other went around with a flash and examined the tags. He came back unconcernedly.

"The number is DOC 3," he said. "So what? A low number, sure. But they don't mean anything special any more."

"For the love of mud!" the first man growled. "Mean to say you don't know about them license plates from reading about the guy in the newspapers?"

"What guy?"

"Doc Savage," said the first. "Them's special plates issued to him."

It was very quiet. The thunder romped in the sepia heavens and a flurry of rain came along with considerable gusto.

"Let's see Captain Wapp about this," a man suggested.

CAPTAIN Wapp was standing at the Harpoon's gangway, both hands plunged inside the rope that served him as a belt, when they came up. His expression showed that he had heard the shooting at the sedan and was anxious to know what had happened.

"Vot it is?" he growled.

They told him about the license plates. Captain Wapp scowled at Monk, Ham and Johnny, then, without a word, he went back into the innards of the whaling ship, probably to his cabin, to return shortly with an illustrated magazine which featured true detective mysteries. He had the periodical open at a story titled:

DOC SAVAGE – MAN OF MYSTERY

TERROR OF CROOKS

There was a picture on the opposite page, one of the rare shots of Doc Savage and his five aides ever to get publication.

Captain Wapp picked Monk, Ham and Johnny out of the group.

"Them, it is," he muttered. "Dot is no mistake."

"They are Doc Savage's men, then?" one fellow mumbled.

"Didn't I just say it?" Wapp retorted.

There was some muttering, as those few who knew little of Doc Savage received information from those who knew much, or thought they did. There was none of their usual boisterous profanity. They were sober, like men at a funeral.

"Doc Savage must be working with Braski," a man suggested.

"For a minute, don't you think it," Captain Wapp told the fellow. "Dot Savage, he would get on to a bumper like dot Braski, in a minute."

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"Then what's he doing around here?" the other countered.

Captain Wapp took his pistol knife out of one pocket and stowed it in another.

"Dot man Savage is after us all," he growled. "Braski. Us. Everybody. I am betting it."

A man swore.

"You mean Savage is helping old Hezemiah Law?" he suggested.

Captain Wapp shook his head. "Hezemiah Law know nothing of vot it is we are trying to do to him."

"Then it's the girl!" the man barked. "She rung Doc Savage in somehow!"

Wapp nodded heavily. "Dot must bane it."

The man with the unique weapon made of a length of hawser came up, curious to learn what lay behind the excitement. For the first time, he was addressed by a nickname.

"You been missin' things, Ropes," a man said.

"Ropes" frowned, heard the latest developments repeated, and said, smacking the hawser length into a palm, "I ain't liked a lot of things that've hove up tonight. This is mighty bad."

"Take der three of 'em aboard," Captain Wapp directed. "We'll put der screws to 'em and things we will learn."

"Acrimonious contumeliousness, I call it," Johnny said.

"Holy smoke!" gulped a sailor. "We have the dictionary along with us."

THEY were urged toward the gangplank, the gaunt Johnny leading, Ham at his heels, with Monk bringing up the rear. The tide was near high, and the gangplank sloped steeply. Monk kept his head down as he mounted.

In the distance somewhere, a police siren was mingling a puny wail with the thunder above, evidence that the shooting around the water front had drawn attention.

"Out of sight, get in a hurry," Captain Wapp directed. "We bane make things look innocent as your Aunt Olga's tea party."

A voice came out of the darkness suddenly. It might have been a reply to Wapp, but was not, for it spoke in Mayan, the dialect of Doc Savage and his group. It was a strange, ventriloquial voice, and not one in the party had the least idea from whence it came. The voice spoke one short sentence.

Monk and the other two betrayed by no sign that they had heard or understood. They stopped because their captors had halted, puzzled.

Unexpectedly, from the wharf, there came a fiendish cry, a screech of tremendous proportions. Startled, every one faced that direction, staring.

Monk, Ham and Johnny shut their eyes tightly, lifted their arms and buried their faces.

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The next instant, there was a hollow report and an incredible flash of light. It was as if a tremendous photographer's flashlight had gone off, except that the glare was longer in duration and infinitely more brilliant.

The light had other qualities besides an infernal brilliance. It reacted on the eyes, affecting them much as would an electric welding arc if stared at too long. Momentary blindness seized the Harpoon's crew. One or two squawked in agony.

Monk and his two comrades came to life, uncovering their eyes. The call in Mayan had warned them to protect the orbs. The second, unearthly screech had been to draw all eyes toward the spot where the flash was to be set off.

Jamming a shoulder out, Monk lunged, went down the steep gangplank like a bowling ball through an array of pins. Ham, Johnny trailed him. They did not strike blows, but shoved, tripped, ran past their captors. The blindness would not last many seconds.

They cleared the Harpoon's crew, veered toward the spot from which the flash had come.

"This way," said an unexcited but powerful voice.

Lightning sizzled, and they made out Doc Savage, a tower of bronze in the darkness. Doc led them along the wharf, past stacks of barrels which possibly held whale oil and which they certainly did not stop to examine.

Not until they were in the sedan and rolling away from the vicinity did they take time for conversation.

"BOY, we've been goin' around and around," Monk told Doc. He elaborated, explaining about the girl, Nancy Law, and described the manner in which she had evaded them after they had freed her.

"There's something mysterious behind this, a thing or a place known as Spook Hole," he finished. "But all we found out and all that happened don't leave us with any idea of what it's about than when we started."

Ham interposed, in the manner of a trial lawyer summarizing, "We know, or can deduce, that this Captain Wapp is seeking something in Spook Hole, something belonging to the man they call 'old Hezemiah Law.' Braski is after the same thing, but does not know where Spook Hole is, and is trying to secure the information from Wapp by force. Since Nancy Law bears the same name, she is probably a relative of old Hezemiah Law, who apparently is not on the scene, but is in Spook Hole. That explains things."

"Except the one-armed man who wasn't one-armed," Monk interposed. "And who called Doc on the job?"

The bronze man himself spoke up.

"I have a plan to try," he said quietly. "A plan which may get us information."

"Yeah?" Monk squinted, interested. "Shoot!"

"For the past hour, more or less, I have been following the man who carries a bit of taped wire rope for a club," Doc advised. "They called this man Ropes, I believe. Ropes proved to be an individual with remarkable angles."

Monk frowned. "Angles?"

"I will explain when we reach headquarters," Doc replied. "This Ropes is not exactly dumb."

Chapter IV. DOC SETS A TRAP

AT almost the same moment, Ropes was receiving oral corroboration of the fact that he was not exactly dumb. The statement came from bulky Captain Wapp of the Harpoon, and was delivered in the cabin of the whaling ship master.

"You bane good man," said Captain Wapp. "Aye do right by you, Ropes."

"Thanks," Ropes said.

"Vun of mine men, you will take," directed Wapp. "Look for dis bumner, Doc Savage. Maybe you find him."

"Sure," Ropes agreed.

Ropes closed the cabin door carefully behind him when he departed. The passage outside was gloomy. He stopped there and carefully examined the length of wire cable which he carried. He chuckled once, and not pleasantly, then went on, stowing his weapon.

The man Ropes selected to accompany him was the individual who bore the designation of third mate on the Harpoon. This worthy was weak-chinned, vacillating, and shy on nerve, a misfit as far as whaling went, except in one respect – he was a navigating wizard.

"I got work to do on board," he said uneasily when Ropes asked him to venture into the night.

"Captain Wapp's orders," Ropes growled.

The third mate, who had been dubbed, not unfittingly, "Sextant," signed tremulously and followed Ropes. The watchmen at the gangplank passed them. They entered the dark waterfront streets.

There, in a narrow, intensely black street, Ropes calmly whipped out his taped hawser length and stroked his companion over the temple with it.

Ropes had used his weapon a great deal. He knew just how hard he could hit and not crack a skull.

Picking up the senseless mate, Ropes carried him to the vicinity of a street light, deposited him there, produced a bottle of whisky with which he had thoughtfully provided himself, and sprinkled his victim with enough of it to give him a strong odor.

"My buddy's soused," Ropes then told the first taxi driver to cruise past.

The unsuspecting hack driver carried them to an address in the flashy uptown apartment district. Ropes hauled his victim into the hallway of a private dwelling, an ancient building sandwiched among new and modern apartment structures. Possibly a bell rang after Ropes pressed the button beside the door, but if so, it was so deep within the house that it could not be heard.

Ropes punched the button carefully, giving a signal which must have been agreed upon previously.

The dark-haired Braski himself opened the door.

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Not more than an hour ago, Captain Wapp's men had been doing their best to kill this same Braski. Wapp would no doubt have been surprised to witness the warmth with which Braski now greeted Wapp's own henchman, Ropes.

"I am delighted," Braski said. "Come in and we'll talk."

ROPES laughed. "You're lookin' at Santa Claus himself," he said, and stepped back so that Braski could see the third mate of the Harpoon.

Braski started, gulped, "Dead?"

"What kind of a dope do you think I am?" Ropes grinned.

"Who is he?" Braski demanded.

"Third mate and the bird who does most of Captain Wapp's navigating," Ropes explained. "In other words, he's the lad who should know where Spook Hole is."

An expression of infinite delight overspread Braski's swarthy features.

"It was a wise move when I decided to give you a third cut for throwing in with me, Ropes," he chuckled.

Ropes grinned appreciation of the compliment.

"Got any ice water?" he asked.

"In the refrigerator," Braski replied, and nodded toward the kitchen regions.

As Braski stepped back from the door, it was evident that he could not walk without limping. He gave slight aid in handling the senseless third mate.

"Bullet grooved my hip in that scrap in the Harpoon," he explained. "That wasn't such a bright move, tryin' to get aboard to grab Captain Wapp."

Ropes said nothing, but ambled off in the direction of the kitchen. The ease with which he found the culinary region showed that he had been in the house before. He ran faucet water over a tray of ice cubes until they were loose.

Replacing the empty tray in the refrigerator, he returned to the front room and rubbed ice on the mate until the latter awakened, moaning. Ropes gave the man no time to consider his situation.

"Where's Spook Hole?" he demanded.

The third mate, blinking, recognized Braski, then Ropes.

"Double-crosser!" he snarled at Ropes. "I had a feeling you were a crook!"

"Aren't we all?" Ropes chuckled. "Answer my question, you mug."

"I told Captain Wapp you could not be trusted!" yelled the third mate. "But he said he had known you in the old days and you were just the kind of a man we needed."

SPOOK HOLE

"Where's Spook Hole?" roared Ropes.

"Go bite a blubber spade!" gritted the other.

Ropes glowered, then fell upon the mate, wrestled with him a bit and succeeded in tying the fellow's wrists and ankles with the flexible wire ripped from a floor lamp. Then Ropes drew a bottle from his coat.

It was the one holding the liquor which he had previously sprinkled on the mate's clothing, and a quantity of the amber fluid still remained.

Ropes doused whisky on the man's hands. Then he struck a match and applied it. The alcohol in the liquor did not ignite immediately. Then it began to burn blue.

THE mate began to shriek. Three times he managed to thresh the flames out, and each time, Ropes ignited the liquor again.

Braski ran into a bedroom and came back with a pillow which he placed over the victim's face, muffling his agonized cries.

Within five minutes, they had the third mate talking freely.

"I don't know where Spook Hole is!" he moaned. "So help me, I don't."

"In a whale's eye," Ropes growled. "Captain Wapp has been there with the Harpoon. And you're his navigator."

"I wasn't on the Harpoon when she made the visit," the tortured man insisted desperately. "Captain Wapp recruited me, just like he did you, Ropes, after he decided to croak old Hezemiah Law and take over Spook Hole."

"Damn lie," Ropes opined.

"I got discharge papers off another ship, right in my pocket, to prove I wasn't on the Harpoon then," the other declared. "Look at 'em, Ropes. You know that Captain Wapp took the Harpoon to the place more than six months ago."

Glaring, Ropes found the papers in the man's pockets. He inspected the date. He swore, hurled the papers to the floor and jumped upon them.

"Five months ago you left the other ship!" he grated. "Blast it! You weren't with Wapp when he went to Spook Hole!"

Braski now scowled blackly at Ropes.

"A fine out!" he snapped. "Now what do we do with this third mate?"

"We damn sure can't turn him loose," Ropes said darkly. "He'd put Captain Wapp wise to me. We got our troubles without that, what with this Doc Savage monkeyin' around."

Braski suddenly looked somewhat as he might have had a bolt of the lightning crashed down upon his house unexpectedly.

SPOOK HOLE

"Doc Savage?" he echoed in a small voice.

"I FORGOT to tell you," said Ropes.

Speaking rapidly, he advised Braski of events at the wharf and aboard the Harpoon.

"So that's all you forgot to tell me!" Braski snarled. "That's all! Just nothing at all! I suppose you thought it didn't amount to anything?"

Ropes scowled, said, "You don't see me in any icebox just on account of Doc Savage."

Braski said dryly, "I'm beginning to wonder if you have good sense. That man Savage is compound poison. His appearance on the scene changes the whole complexion of things."

"Well?" Ropes demanded. "Do we give up the whole thing?"

"Give up – " Braski let his voice trail off. It was some seconds before he resumed. "There's millions at Spook Hole, if we can just get it. Millions, I tell you. I've seen the quality of the stuff, and have some idea of the quantity. I ought to know. I've been marketing it for old Hezemiah Law."

"Which adds up to what?" Ropes wanted to know.

"We stay in there and keep plugging," Braski decided.

"Swell!" Ropes reached down and got the bound third mate by the throat. "Now I get this guy out of our hair."

The mate must have been under the impression he was in no great danger, and now it suddenly dawned upon him that he was to be killed. At no time had his courage been great. Now he blanched.

"Don't!" he gulped. "Please don't."

Ropes said, "Believe it or not, I croaked a ten-ton whale with this thing once," and lifted the taped hawser length.

The mate gargled incoherently.

"Don't!" he choked. "Keep me here. Do anything. Only don't – " He seemed about to swallow his own tongue, so great was his horror. "I'll help you. I'll work for you."

"A lot of help you'd be to us," Ropes snorted.

He hefted the taped hawser once again, bringing it against his left palm with solid force. Then he lifted his arm for a longer swing and bent over the helpless mate.

There was no concern whatever on his features and there was not the slightest doubt but that he intended to kill.

There came a crashing knock from the street door.

"Police!" a voice bawled. "Open up!"

SPOOK HOLE

"Damn!" Ropes gritted, and prepared to swing his bludgeon.

Braski caught his arm, ripping, "You fool! Kill him, and if we got caught, we'd hang! Let him lay. We'll try to clear out."

They left the prisoner and raced for the rear of the house.

THE frightened third mate of the Harpoon obviously had no more desire to encounter the police than had Braski and Ropes.

He struggled desperately with the wires which held him, concentrating on the ankles. He could have freed himself earlier, if allowed to try, but his two captors had watched him closely. Now, it did not take him long to get loose.

The banging at the door had ceased. It now sounded as if some one were trying the lock with a skeleton key or a picking device.

The third mate raced toward the house rear. It was the same direction taken by Braski and Ropes, but the mate felt confident they were far ahead. The rear door was open. He peered out cautiously. Lightning showed him an alleyway. Empty. He scuttled out.

The man ran on his toes, so as to avoid making noise as much as possible. As it was, his feet slopped water a good deal. When the alley approached a street, he slowed his pace and swung along in a leisurely manner which would not attract attention.

Parked cars were gloomy humps along the darkened thoroughfare, and the street lamp made a pale zone at the corner, not unlike a ball of soiled yellow cotton.

The fleeing man had covered no more than forty feet when a door opened in one the parked machines. The car was a sedan. It had curtains of remarkable efficiency, for the interior was lighted and no hint of that had been evident until the door opened.

The third mate took one look at the individual revealed inside the machine and wrenched to a stop. He shifted from one foot to another, uncertain as to what he should do.

The mate had recognized the party in the car – a giant man of bronze whose flake–gold eyes seemed to hold a remarkable power.

"Get in the sedan," the bronze man commanded. "Your life is in danger."

The third mate hesitated, and that was his death.

Down the street, a gun whooped out six times. It was an automatic. No revolver could have been triggered that rapidly. Echoes were one big salvo.

The third mate of the Harpoon was standing in the light that knifed from the sedan, and he gave two or three violent leaps, then threw back his head as if trying to scream, but instead of words, his throat shot a stream of crimson which sloshed over the sedan side. He went down after one of his leaps, sliding on his face.

Doc Savage leaned back into the sedan and from some one of its numerous compartments, brought one of his machine–gun pistols.

SPOOK HOLE

He rarely carried one of the weapons on his person, being convinced that carrying a firearm led the bearer to depend too much upon it, thus being the more helpless if disarmed.

The superfirer sheeted flame and filled the street with a sound remindful of the moan of a titanic bullfiddle. Doc roved the barrel, hosing the vicinity from which the shots had come, striving to search out the killer whom he could not see.

The drum magazine ran empty. He clicked a new one in place instantly. Like the first, it was charged, not with mortal lead, but with so-called "mercy bullets," slugs which only brought unconsciousness.

There was no return fire, no sign that the mercy bullets had hit any one.

MONK came racing from the direction of Braski's house.

"I knocked on the door and yelled that I was a cop," he said rapidly. "What happened?"

"Get under cover," Doc directed, and when the homely chemist had complied, the bronze man added explanation. "Your knocking on the door frightened Braski and Ropes away and saved the third mate's life for a while. But when the mate came out, some one shot him from down the street. Probably it was Ropes. He and Braski ran in that direction."

Doc Savage eased away from the sedan, keeping behind other parked machines, and approached the spot from whence the killer had fired. He searched thoroughly. No empty automatic cartridges did he find. The slayer must have kept a hand over the ejector as he fired, catching them.

There was no sign of Ham and Johnny when Doc returned to the parked sedan.

"We got a tough break," Monk grumbled. "Here you had watched that guy Ropes and found he was two-timing with Braski, and we trail him and his prisoner to Braski's house and listen, hopin' we'll hear something. But they were gonna kill the third mate, and we have to pull that fake cop gag to save his no-good life. And even that didn't work. And now we've lost Braski and Ropes. And where's Ham and Johnny?"

"No sign of them yet?" Doc queried.

"Naw." Monk shook his bullet of a head. "What were they doin' while I was hammering that door and howlin' 'I'm a cop!'"

Instead of answering, Doc Savage got into the sedan. The street had been quiet for a few moments after the shooting, but suddenly a man had started bellowing for the police. He was some householder, no doubt, who had been looking out of his window and had seen the body in a lightning flash.

"No use moving the Harpoon's third mate," Monk said, and got into the sedan. "He's stone dead."

Doc Savage put the sedan in motion, driving without the headlights, so that no one would see the license plates.

Monk said, "No sign of Ham and Johnny, yet. I don't like that."

"On the contrary," Doc told him. "It is a very favorable sign."

"Yeah?" Monk blinked owlishly. "That sounds as if you had hatched some kind of a plan."

Lightning, the most tremendous burst of the night, raced blue, twisting fire across the heavens, and the thunder that followed seemed to be trying to shake down the buildings.

Chapter V. TWO HEADS

OLIVER ORMAN Braski ducked nervously at that infernal blast of lightning and thunder. For a moment, he seemed inclined to get down on the floorboards of the taxicab in which they were riding.

"I hope you ain't losin' your nerve on me," Ropes said in a low, sour voice.

"Your killing that third mate right under the noses of the police is enough to give anybody the jitters," Braski retorted nervously.

Ropes scowled. "This taxi driver might have ears, you know."

Both passengers now looked at the driver. The latter was a very swarthy fellow who wore a cap, had a lump in one cheek, and who smoked a strong-looking cigar. He seemed to be paying no attention to his fares.

"We'd better take some precautions," Ropes growled, and ordered their driver to stop.

A few moments later, a second cab went past and Ropes hailed it. The driver of this one was bundled in a very yellow raincoat, inside the neck of which a large towel was wrapped to absorb such rain water as tried to run down his neck.

"We'll change cabs just in case that other hackie might remember where he picked us up," Ropes whispered. "Where'll we go now?"

"My office," Braski declared.

Ropes looked dubious. "But the cops may have that covered."

"We'll have to take the chance," Braski said desperately. "There are records in my safe that must be destroyed."

"Stuff concerning old Hezemiah Law and the junk he brings from Spook Hole?" Ropes grinned.

"Not entirely," Braski sighed. "You see, this is not the first thing I have done which was – off color."

Ropes laughed. The fact that he had just killed a man seemed to affect him not at all. The taxi ran through a rain squall, and the driver drew his towel tighter around his neck.

Oliver Orman Braski's office proved to be in a skyscraper building down in the financial district. The marble corridors of the structure were peopled only by janitors and scrubwomen at this hour.

Braski and Ropes looked the place over thoroughly before they entered, or even left their cab. They pretended to have made a mistake in the address, and had the driver take them through the neighboring streets while they sought an imaginary building.

SPOOK HOLE

This was to make sure no police patrol cars were parked near by. They paid off their driver and entered Braski's office building by a back door.

The scheming pair prided themselves that they had done an excellent job of thwarting pursuit. It might have shocked more than their pride had they been able to watch their taxi driver. The latter drove to a near-by street, stopped, and used a telephone in an all-night drug store.

Some minutes later, he was joined by the driver of the first cab which Braski and Ropes had taken. The telephone call had plainly summoned the latter.

The fellow rubbed brown grease paint off his features, spat out a tremendous wad of gum, and discarded his atrocious cigar. He got a thin black cane off the cab floorboards. He had metamorphosed into Ham, the dapper lawyer.

The other driver did various things with his appearance and became the gaunt, bony Johnny. They grinned at each other.

"We got a break," said Ham.

"An irrefutable apothegm," agreed big-worded Johnny.

Ham suggested, "Now we'll call Doc."

"Propitious thought," said Johnny.

BRASKI and Ropes, blissfully unaware of the near-by happenings, proceeded past numerous scrubwomen polishing brass, and surveyed the corridor outside of Braski's office carefully, after which they entered, to breathe thanks when they found no one there.

With great haste, Braski began shuffling through personal papers which he drew from a large safe. From time to time he separated certain documents from the others and burned them in a large smoking stand. When the office became smoky he opened a window.

Ropes, for his part, stood near the door, which had a frosted glass panel. He inspected the legend thereon.

OLIVER ORMAN BRASKI

Foreign Sales Agent

Ropes grinned at Braski. "Your racket must have gotten plenty of graft, judging from the number of papers you are burning."

"It is not bad," Braski agreed. He had recovered some of his aplomb.

A moment later, Braski tossed a sheaf of papers to Ropes. The latter squinted at the designation typed on the front of the file.

HEZEMLAH LAW

With great interest, Ropes turned to the first page. He studied the principal entry thereon.

SPOOK HOLE

Sold to La Touls, Et Cie, Paris, \$53,000.00

He turned to the next page, dated only a few days later.

Sold to Carlo Bonhomme, Ltd., Antwerp, \$71,500.00

"The name of the stuff ain't down here," he pointed out.

Braski said dryly, "Old Hezemiah Law would have had a pup. Everything was secret. He didn't want any one to know what he had."

"Do you blame him?" Ropes chuckled.

"He wasn't afraid some one would take over Spook Hole, so much as he feared the market would go down if news of what he had got out," Braski explained.

"How soon are you gonna be through?" Ropes asked. "The cops may show up here any minute."

"Soon," Braski said.

IT was perhaps a minute later that the telephone rang. Brash and Ropes both started violently, then exchanged uneasy glances.

"Don't answer it," Ropes advised.

Braski hesitated. "Any one calling me this time of night has something important." He picked up the instrument. "Hello. ... Yes, speaking."

He listened intently. His mouth became round.

"Yes, yes, of course," he gasped once. "I'd be delighted to help you. No, we will mention no names. I can guess who you are from what you say. Now, tell me this. ... Can you furnish any information about Spook Hole? ... You can! Excellent! Be right up!"

He cracked the receiver on the hook and all but jumped up and down in his excitement.

"Who in blazes was that?" Ropes demanded.

"Nancy Law!" Braski shouted. "She didn't give me her name, but I know it was her."

Ropes scowled. "She didn't give you her – "

"Oh, she must have been calling from a public telephone where she didn't want to say too much," Braski retorted. "She was only a stenographer, you know. Probably lived in a rooming house and didn't have a telephone in her room."

"Funny she'd call you," Ropes said suspiciously.

"Not at all," Braski told him. "She knows Captain Wapp and myself are enemies, and Wapp is certainly no friend of hers. She undoubtedly wants to throw in with me."

SPOOK HOLE

"That's tough," Ropes grinned.

"Isn't it?" Braski laughed. "She knows the location of Spook Hole."

They hurried out.

THE address which the young woman had given over the telephone proved to be in the cheaper east side residential district.

Braski and Ropes entered and eyed the names above the array of call buttons.

NANCY LAW

"I told you," chuckled Braski, and rested a thumb on the button.

Three flights above, a hall door opened.

"Who is it?" a feminine voice called down.

"Oliver Orman Braski," said Ropes's companion.

"Will you come up, please?" the young woman invited. "First door on your right."

The two men mounted the stairway eagerly, noting by the pale light that the carpeting was worn. A pale red-shaded floor light glowed in the room behind a young woman who was holding a door open. Only her silhouette met their gaze.

"Come in," she invited. "You made enough noise on the stairs."

She closed the door behind them, then crossed to turn on a brighter light. At the click of the switch, intense white luminance gushed.

Braski and Ropes started violently, then looked about as chagrined as they could.

"I would advise you to be very careful," said the young woman.

She was not Nancy Law. She was holding a machine-gun pistol which looked very businesslike.

Braski and Ropes glanced at the door. The young woman had not only locked it, but taken the key. They stared at her.

She was tall and exquisitely beautiful. But what was more striking, she had a wealth of hair of a certain remarkable bronze hue. She was entirely too calm for their ease of mind.

A closet door opened. Doc Savage came out. Monk, Ham and Johnny appeared from a tiny kitchenette.

"Good work, Pat," Doc Savage told the young woman.

Braski snarled at the girl. "You framed me! Told me you were Nancy Law!"

SPOOK HOLE

"I did not," the young woman addressed as Pat retorted dryly. "I might have led you to believe that, but not once did I say outright that I was Nancy Law. Not that it matters."

Ropes was scowling at Ham and Johnny. He began to look slightly ill.

"You two mugs were the taxi drivers!" he croaked.

"Nice of you to take the first hacks that came along, wasn't it?" Ham asked dryly. "Bally convenient for us, I will say."

Doc Savage addressed the young woman. "Your job is finished, Pat."

Pat frowned at him. "Now look here! You rang me into this, and I stay. I'm dying for some excitement."

"I asked you to help us simply because I cannot imitate a woman's voice with any great success," Doc told her. "You promised faithfully to clear out after you did that. I'm holding you to that promise."

Pat looked chagrined, said, "I just love this!" sarcastically, and tapped high heels out of the room.

She was Patricia Savage, cousin of Doc Savage, and she operated one of the most sumptuous, efficient and costly combination beauty parlors and gymnasiums for women in the metropolis, and she had much of the bronze man's liking for excitement. She had aided him on more than one occasion.

ROPES muttered uneasily, "Why not let the dame stick around?"

Monk scowled blackly and lumbered over, a giant, apish figure. "So you've got a hunch what you're in for. You think we'd go easier if there was a woman around?"

Ropes was not without brute courage. He moved both hands suddenly. One went for his taped length of hawser. The other stabbed for the automatic with which he had killed the Harpoon's third mate.

Things happened with violent abruptness. Monk struck straight out with his left fist, hitting Ropes between the eyes and blinding him with pain.

The next instant, the burly Ropes draped his midriff over Monk's furry right fist. He was hardly on the floor before he was relieved of his weapons. Monk stepped on his chest and began to jounce up and down.

"You're – mashing – me!" Ropes gurgled.

Doc Savage advanced warily and relieved Braski of a small revolver. The black-haired man offered no resistance, nor did he speak.

Monk, still standing on Ropes's chest, teetered up and down. The victim's ribs gave forth ominous sounds.

Big-worded Johnny said, "You will induce disseverance of his virescible anatomy."

"I'll induce more than that," Monk growled, then roared at the man under his feet, "What is this Spook Hole? You know that, even if you don't know where it is."

Ropes gargled. Monk got off his chest so that he could talk. But Ropes only swore wrathfully.

SPOOK HOLE

Monk hopped back on his chest.

"Tell us what's behind all of this!" he ordered savagely.

Doc stood in the background and watched. He knew that Monk was running a bluff, although a somewhat rigorous one.

Ropes, the killer, was not entitled to gentle handling, and if he could be terrorized into talking, that would simplify matters. Furthermore, Monk was enjoying what he was now doing.

And if Ropes could not be frightened into speech, there were other expedients, for instance, a species of truth serum, similar to that tried often by police, but more refined, which Doc himself had developed, and which worked sometimes, although on some occasions it brought forth only a delirious jumble of statements, from which it was necessary to pick the truth largely by guesswork.

The room had a telephone. It rang. Doc scooped the instrument up.

Pat's voice, rapid, excited, said, "When I went out, I saw men acting suspiciously outside. I think – "

"Wait!" Doc stopped her.

He listened. Daily, he took a scientific exercise calculated to sharpen his sense of hearing. He caught sounds outside of the door.

"You're too late," he told Pat. "But thanks."

The lock slammed out of the door, propelled by a bullet fired from the hallway.

MONK was surprised into falling off Ropes. The latter tried to get up. Monk swung a terrific haymaker from a sitting position and knocked Ropes stiffly senseless.

Oliver Orman Braski jumped into a corner and got down on all fours, where random bullets were least likely to find him. He was scared, puzzled, but retained his wits.

The door came open. Men did not come in, but a shotgun muzzle did. It spouted noisily. Two revolvers followed it.

"I'll be superamalgamated," said the bony Johnny. He casually drew a machine-gun pistol from under his armpit and turned it loose on the door. Its roar rendered ears insensible to all other sound for the moment.

Then a small object came through the door, hopped to the middle of the floor and made a popping noise. It was tear gas. Doc retreated with the first smart of it in his eyes.

"Fire escape!" he rapped. "We have no masks."

The window was stuck. Doc knocked the glass out with a chair. Simultaneously, Ham extinguished the lights. They clambered out on the fire escape.

In the courtyard below a gun flashed, and lead gnashed dust off the bricks beside them.

"Whoever it is has the back covered," Monk growled. "Johnny, your noisemaker!"

SPOOK HOLE

Johnny wielded his machine-gun pistol. Apparently he hit no one, for he could not see a target in the night, but the gunman must have been scared off. He was not in the court when they swung down the fire-escape ladder.

Guns began to crash from the rooming house window. A bundle of flaming newspapers were tossed out, making dangerous light before they were extinguished by the slow rain.

Doc and his three aides found shelter in a back door entry. The exit from this was locked, stout. It resisted their efforts to get through for more than a minute – the time it took Johnny to find explosive bullets which he substituted for the mercy slugs in his rapid-firer. These ripped open the door.

Their passage through the house beyond was made exciting and hasty by an irate householder, who turned loose liberally with what sounded like an old-fashioned six-shooter.

Reaching the street, they found themselves on the opposite side of the block from the rooming house. They ran for the corner, rounded it, and sprinted.

They sighted the rooming house just in time to observe two large cars plunging in the opposite direction.

Doc's sedan was in an all-night garage two blocks distant. Their quarry was gone before they reached it.

"A fine mess," Monk said disgustedly.

A moment later, Patricia Savage came along, obviously searching for them.

"Are we having fun," she said cheerfully. "I suppose, by now, you boys know what it's all about."

"We don't," Monk growled. "We don't even know who pulled that raid."

"They got away while I was trying to find a cab to follow them," Pat said. "They had men in their waiting cars, so I couldn't hide in the machines, or anything like that. But I recognized them from what you had told me before."

"Is it a secret?" Monk asked.

"The raiders were Captain Wapp and his men," Pat advised.

AT about the time Pat made her statement, the identity of his captors was also dawning upon Oliver Orman Braski. He was just recovering from the effects of the tear gas sufficiently to see. He had not been quite sure before. His captors had spoken little.

Braski looked at the squat, bulky Captain Wapp, then shut his streaming eyes as if he had just glimpsed a horned devil.

"Greetings, vot," said Captain Wapp sourly. "Your neck, Aye should take in mine two hands and break."

Braski wet his lips, said nothing. His entire face was soaked with the tears which the gas had brought. Even his intensely black goatee was a soggy mass, and from time to time dripped salty water.

On the floorboards of the car, Ropes stirred and groaned, just recovering from the knock-out blow which Monk had administered.

SPOOK HOLE

Ropes's groan caused Braski to shiver.

Captain Wapp scowled at Ropes, then at Braski.

"You two bane together," he growled. "Vot for?"

Braski felt distinctly cold. Captain Wapp was known as a man of short temper, and violent when aroused. If learning his trusted henchman Ropes was working hand in hand with Braski did not arouse him, nothing would.

Braski held his tongue.

Ropes groaned again. Then, for some time, he was silent. He seemed still senseless. But actually he was doing what few men would have had the presence of mind to do – playing 'possum until he found out how things stood. He succeeded. Then he did some thinking.

Finally, Ropes emitted an unusually loud groan, put forth an exaggerated effort and managed to sit up. He pretended to see only Braski.

"Damn you!" he yelled. "Where are you taking me now?"

Then he glanced around and seemed profoundly surprised when he saw Captain Wapp.

"Gosh!" he exploded, pretending great relief. "So you rescued me!"

"Vot monkeyshines is this?" Captain Wapp grunted.

"Why," said Ropes, "this crook Braski captured me. Yes, sir, captain. He captured me and the third mate. We tried once to get away, and the third mate was killed in the fight and I was knocked senseless. I just now woke up."

Braski sank back on the car cushions and mumbled with simulated anger. That was to cover his immense relief. Mentally, he complimented himself on enlisting the aid of so clever an associate as Ropes.

"So Braski got you," Captain Wapp grunted, thoroughly deceived. "Spook Hole, he bane try to find, no?"

"Right," Ropes agreed.

Captain Wapp glared at Braski. "Them other bummers in dot house, who they was?"

"Doc Savage," Braski said.

Captain Wapp shut his eyes and grimaced as if he had tasted something very bitter.

"Aye not sure dot feller would work with bummers like you," he said.

"He wasn't," Braski said promptly. "Doc Savage raided my place and made me prisoner while I was preparing to question Ropes, here, when he regained consciousness. You showed up in the nick of time to save me. I am grateful for that."

"Keep der change," said Captain Wapp.

SPOOK HOLE

The cars rolled through the rain and the darkness.

It was Ropes's agile mind which spawned the next suggestion of importance.

"Look," Ropes said. "Spook Hole is rich enough for all of us, ain't it?"

"Braski not sure," said Captain Wapp.

"I know." Ropes passed over that. "With this Doc Savage fiddling around, ain't none of us gonna get nothing if we don't watch out."

"That's a fact," Braski declared.

He had gotten an inkling of what Ropes was approaching.

Ropes waited some moments before springing his big suggestion.

"Let's all kinda let bygones be bygones," he said slowly. "Pitch in together. Maybe we can arrange a different split. But we'll need all we've got to get rid of this Savage."

Captain Wapp did not favor that much. But Ropes was a good talker. He pointed out that Doc Savage was noted the world over as a Nemesis to evildoers, a species of superman who seldom failed. He was deftly throwing a scare. He got Captain Wapp worried. Then he clinched his argument.

"All right," Captain Wapp agreed finally. "But Aye watch Braski. One funny move he bane make, and Aye take with mine hands his neck and make with it a loud crack."

"I'm shooting square from now on," Braski promised fervently.

But a little later, Braski got Ropes aside and queried. "The old arrangement between us still goes, eh? We get Doc Savage. Then we find out where Spook Hole is, and we get rid of Captain Wapp?"

"O. K., by me," Ropes agreed.

"Swell," said Braski. "I'll give you better than a third of the take. I'll make it a half."

Ropes, off by himself a bit later, muttered over that last bit of generosity.

"A half!" he growled. "And me with a brain like mine."

"Vot say?" asked Captain Wapp, who had seen the lip movement.

"I was tryin' to tell myself some way we can dispose of Doc Savage," Ropes lied.

"Goot," said Wapp. "Aye bane hope you tell to yourself one goot scheme. Then tell her to me."

Ropes nodded, then continued talking to himself, this time without moving his lips.

"Half!" he sneered. "And me with my brains. I'll have the whole works – once we get this Doc Savage. I wonder where the heck that bronze guy is now?"

Chapter VI. THE ONE-ARMED ENIGMA

DOC SAVAGE was saying, "We will go to headquarters, get dry clothing, and work out some kind of a plan."

"And get my pet hog, Habeas," Monk added.

"Ugh!" Ham shuddered, as he always did when Habeas was mentioned.

"What about calling Long Tom?" Monk asked.

"Commendable advocacy," said big-worded Johnny.

Doc did not reply.

"Long Tom" was Major Thomas J. Roberts, electrical wizard extraordinary, and another of Doc Savage's aides. Long Tom had not yet appeared for the simple reason that he had been delivering, that night, an informative lecture to a Congressional committee in Washington.

The committee was one interested in the eradication of insects injurious to farm crops, and Long Tom believed he had perfected a device, utilizing ultra-short electro-sonic waves, which would kill insects without harming other living organisms.

"Long Tom is due back in New York about this time," Monk continued.

Doc still did not speak, and Monk, after waiting patiently for some comment, sighed and said, "Well, Renny is going to miss this. He'll hate that."

"Renny" was Colonel John Renwick, famous civil engineer, at present engaged in a railway building project in a remote Asian province. He was the fifth member of Doc's group.

Doc Savage stopped the sedan, and glanced at Pat. The bronze-haired young woman looked out. Then she made a belligerent jaw.

"Going to get rid of me after all?" she snapped.

She had discovered that they were in front of the beauty establishment which she operated. She frowned at the elaborately modernistic front of the place as if it were the last thing she had wanted to see.

There was some argument. There was always argument when any one tried to get Pat away from some excitement. But her present verbal tilt with Doc Savage terminated as they usually did. She lost, and they unloaded her.

DOC SAVAGE did not drive directly to his headquarters, but went first to the sumptuous bachelor quarters which Ham maintained in an exclusive club. Ham wanted to select fresh raiment from the astounding array of suits which he maintained. Then they drove to the headquarters structure.

Many persons knew that Doc Savage had some type of establishment on the eighty-sixth floor of what was certainly the most impressive skyscraper in the metropolis.

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Not so many knew, however, that the place held a laboratory which for completeness and modernity could be rivaled by only one other, this latter also the property of Doc Savage, but located in some remote corner of the globe which he called his "Fortress of Solitude," the whereabouts of which none but himself, not even his five aides, knew.

To this "Fortress of Solitude," Doc Savage retired at long intervals for study and experimentation, and on such occasions even his aides did not know where he was or how to reach him.

As for the New York skyscraper aerie, it also held a library of scientific volumes, a collection of tomes as nearly up-to-date as it could possibly be kept. The outer door bore the simple designation, in small bronze letters:

Clark Savage, Jr.

The door had no keyhole, knob, or other evidence of a lock. It was secured by a device actuated by a small radioactive token. These tokens were carried by Doc and his aides, and by Pat Savage, but by no one else.

They had but merely to approach the door, and the tokens reacted on a device similar to an ordinary electroscope, this apparatus opening the door mechanically.

The door opened, and Doc entered. He stopped and frowned at the occupant of the outer reception room.

"But we just got rid of you," he said dryly.

Pat Savage wrinkled an attractive nose at him. "I'm in on this, now."

"You are not," Doc told her. "We settled that."

"You're sunk," Pat retorted. "You have no idea what this is all about. You have no clues to go on. You don't even know what Spook Hole is. You're sunk."

"We'll start swimming again, directly," Doc told her.

"I have a life preserver," Pat said archly.

"Yes?" Doc studied her. "What is it?"

"Am I in on this excitement or not?" demanded Pat.

"You wouldn't hold information out on us," Doc queried.

"Wouldn't I!" Pat laughed sarcastically. "For ten cents, a thin dime, I'd take my life preserver and jump into this and try to clean it up myself. It sounds very interesting, with whaling ships, mysterious one-armed men who aren't one-armed, Spook Holes and something worth a lot of money, and what not."

Doc did not comment on that. He knew Pat. Possibly she was not bluffing. She was capable of starting her own campaign. The bronze man let out a long breath. In the final analysis, Pat was handy to have around.

"You're with us," he consented. "But I'll remember this coercion."

"Swell!" Pat opened the library door. "May I present my life preserver."

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Nancy Law came out of the library.

"She showed up at my beauty salon," Pat explained. "She was hunting you."

MONK, who had heard the whole exchange, grinned at Pat, and said, "Feminine guile, I calls it."

Nancy Law, for her part, was staring at Monk and Ham as if they were apparitions. Surprise detracted no whit from her unusual, blended beauty. More striking than ever was the combination of aureate honey tint of her skin and hair.

"You two were Doc Savage's men!" she gasped. "Why, back at the whaling ship, I thought you were working with Braski."

Monk jerked a contemptuous thumb at Ham. "That was a lie this shyster thought up. He ain't got any sense. Providing for his wife and thirteen children has made him half-witted."

"That's a lie!" Ham snapped indignantly. "All he said was a lie."

It was not the first time Monk had told an attractive young woman that Ham had the wife and offspring of unlucky numbers. Monk did that regularly. The fact that it was absolutely untrue, that Ham had never been married, seemed to concern Monk not at all.

"You mistake of nature!" Ham grated at Monk.

Doc Savage interrupted the beginning of a quarrel that might have continued for hours.

"Just how much do you know about this mystery?" he asked Nancy Law. "First, who is Hezemiah Law?"

"My only living relative," Nancy Law said promptly. "An uncle."

"You were seeking me for what reason?" Doc queried.

"I've heard about you," the girl replied. "You help people who are in trouble. I seem to be in trouble."

THE others gathered around, greatly interested in what Nancy Law had to reveal. Pat, however, remained in the background, and the expression on her features was the one commonly associated with Cheshire cats.

Doc asked Nancy Law, "Where is Spook Hole?"

"I don't know," said Nancy Law.

"What is it?" Doc queried.

"I don't know," replied Nancy Law.

"What is this mysterious thing that Braski, Captain Wapp and the others are after?"

"I don't know."

"Exacerbative sciolist in cognoscence," said Johnny.

SPOOK HOLE

"Eh?" Nancy Law eyed him. "Come again with that."

"He wants to know what you do know," Doc offered.

"Practically nothing," said Nancy Law. "I am – was – a stenographer. Probably I've had my pay stopped by now. A week ago, Captain Wapp came to my rooming house, pointed a gun at me, made me stick my face in a towel soaked with something that put me to sleep. I woke up on the whaling ship. I've been there since."

Doc questioned, "No idea why you were seized?"

"Oh, yes." She nodded vehemently. "That was to keep this man named Braski from getting in touch with me."

"How long since you have seen your uncle, Hezemiah Law?" Doc queried.

"Months," said the girl.

"What was his profession?"

"Ichthyology," the girl answered.

Monk glanced at Johnny. "Make little words out of that one," he requested.

"The man studied fishes," said Johnny.

"He was an expert on them." Nancy Law shook her head dubiously. "He must have made some money out of it, but I don't see how."

Doc demanded, "What makes you think that?"

"The last time Hezemiah came to see me, about seven months ago, he had a foreign car so long it could barely turn the corners," explained Nancy Law. "Moreover, he had a chauffeur and a flunky to open doors, both of them about seven feet tall with Indian faces and admirals' uniforms. He gave me five thousand dollars. He said the Indians were Patagonians."

She hesitated, studied Doc Savage, then took a breath.

"I thought he was crazy," she said. "I put the money in a bank. I am afraid something has happened to Uncle Hezemiah, or is about to happen. I'll pay you part of that five thousand, or all of it, to look into this."

Doc Savage shook his head slightly.

Nancy Law gasped, "You mean you won't help – "

"Doc never takes money for his services," Monk interposed. "That's what he meant."

Nancy Law looked at the giant bronze man. "You're a queer guy."

"You haven't started to find out the queer things about him," Pat told her dryly.

A sudden, arresting whining sound filled the room.

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WHEN the sound first came, Nancy Law started violently. It was nerve wracking, that note.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"Prowler alarm," Monk told her.

Doc Savage went to an apparently solid section of the paneled wall, did something to what seemed only a whorl in the wood, and a large cabinet opened.

This held the high-frequency buzzer which was making the noise, and numerous indicators, not unlike those used in large residences to show whether the front or back doorbell is ringing. One indicator was tripped. It bore a label.

Fire Escape Shaft

Doc, all of his aides, started for the doorway together.

"Watch the Law girl!" Doc told Pat.

"Aw," Pat said disgustedly, and turned back.

The skyscraper, in common with such structures, did not have an outside fire escape, but obtained the same effect by employing an enclosed shaft, fireproof, lined with steps.

Doc Savage was far in the lead of the others as they reached the shaft. Once inside, he whipped glances about and roved the beam of a flashlight. The place was white, immaculate.

The only thing unusual which his light picked up was a twisted pair of insulated copper wires. These led from above to some spot below.

Monk lunged up the stairs with ungainly speed. An instant later he was back. He covered ground with remarkable facility for such a clumsy-looking fellow.

"Wires run to a small parabolic microphone which some one put on the window sill outside of our reception room window," he barked.

"Eavesdropper!" Ham clipped.

They lunged down the fire escape stairway, seeking the spot to which the wires led.

"The guy, whoever he is, must have come up to look over the wire connections," Monk roared. "That set off our burglar alarm."

The twisted pair of wires could hardly have been said to be installed – they were merely draped down the stairway, secured here and there with a bit of black electrician's tape. They led out of the shaft and into the open door of a closet which held electric floor scrubbers and other cleaning paraphernalia.

There was no one in the little cubby-hole.

MONK eyed a very modern amplifier and headset which the eavesdropper had, in his haste, left in the place. This apparatus served the same purpose as the old style dictograph, but was more sensitive.

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"The bird heard us when the alarm went off," Monk said disgustedly. "He blew."

The find had taken only flash parts of seconds. Doc Savage seemed scarcely to interrupt his swift movement. He continued on and up the stairway.

When this extremely modern skyscraper had been erected, not many years before, Doc Savage had taken a considerable part in its design. As a matter of fact, the architectural drawings had been prepared by his colleague, Renny.

Numerous provisions for Doc Savage's special needs had been made, including a special elevator which operated at a speed that the building inspectors would have considered suicidal.

Doc and his aides entered the lift. So sudden was its drop when the control lever was thrown that they seemed to stand in thin air and fall for some sixty stories, after which the braking effect pulled two of the men, Ham and Johnny, to their hands and knees.

The lobby door of the elevator was a panel which, for convenience, and to prevent casual patrons of the building from trying to use it, presented the aspect of a mere wall panel.

Elevator operators were still on duty at this hour, since there was a night club on one of the upper floors. They recognized the bronze man and showed some excitement.

"Did any one just come down in a hurry?" Doc demanded.

"That way," said an operator, and pointed.

The bronze man flashed outside. To the right, he saw his quarry.

There was no mistake. The man was almost under a street light, just getting into a parked coupé. He was lean and had a weathered face. He wore colored glasses and his raincoat collar was turned up, making identification of his features almost impossible. But one characteristic was plain.

The man seemed to have only one arm.

A TAXICAB was cruising across the street, bound in a direction opposite that in which the one-armed man's roadster was headed. Doc lunged for the hack.

The one-armed man dived into his roadster. The engine was running already, judging from the abruptness of the take-off. The car took the first corner on two wheels, disappeared.

If the one-armed man's escape motions clicked perfectly, Doc Savage's efforts to commandeer the taxicab did not. The driver of the hack must have been a very suspicious soul indeed.

He saw Doc racing across the street, Monk, Ham and Johnny charging wildly at his heels. Possibly Monk's apish appearance frightened the driver.

The fellow knocked his hack out of gear, yanked on the emergency brake, and let the stopping swing of his hack pitch him through the door. He lit running.

"Hey, you!" Monk roared.

If it was possible, the driver ran faster.

"Blast him!" Monk snorted. "Well, we'll borrow his hack."

They plunged into the machine confidently. Doc started a hand for the switch, stopped it.

"Driver took the key," he said quietly.

"Wire around the switch!" Monk exploded.

Doc whipped out of the cab. "Take too long. That type of switch locks the transmission as well."

They spent two full minutes in a vain search for another cab. Then Doc turned back toward the skyscraper.

"No use," he advised. "That fellow got away."

Back in the reception room, the bronze man asked Nancy Law a question.

"Do you know anything about a mysterious one-armed man, who really has two arms?"

"Eh?" The young woman looked puzzled. "I don't get this."

"He wears one arm strapped to his side, probably for purposes of disguise," Doc explained.

She shook her head. "I never saw him. I never heard of him."

Monk said, "I guess the only thing for us to do is start snooping around that Harpoon ship again."

Chapter VII. THE PATAGONIA CABLE

MONK'S suggestion concerning the whaling ship Harpoon was an obvious one, so obvious that the possibility had occurred to Captain Wapp. That worthy was taking measures.

Captain Wapp sat in his cabin, played with his knife which was also a pistol, and from time to time gave his rope belt a hitch. He wore an intent expression.

Successively, men entered the cabin. Sharp questions were put to them. Frequently, Captain Wapp or Oliver Orman Braski stepped out to the pier head telephone to make a call. These calls, in a manner, were to check the credentials of the men being interviewed.

The men passing through Captain Wapp's cabin had hard faces and hard manners. Some of them were seafarers. Others did not know a scupper from a binnacle. But they all had one quality in common. They were hard and had no scruples.

Oliver Orman Braski and Captain Wapp had certain connections with the underworld, and they were recruiting fresh blood to their cause.

To each prospective addition to the gang, Captain Wapp made one statement. "We are going up against Doc Savage."

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Two out of every three of the prospects walked out of the cabin at that news, and left the Harpoon in great haste.

"Savage bane have big rep'," Captain Wapp said dryly.

"You can't blame those fellows for playing it safe," Braski mumbled. "They're only getting fifty dollars a day."

Not all of the recruits professed fear of the bronze man. A certain gentleman named simply, so he said, Sass, was a typical sample. He was asked his full name.

"Sass," he growled. "You want something to call me. Make it Sass. To hell with the rest. I heard you were payin' fifty a day for guns."

"Who bane tell you dot?" asked Captain Wapp.

Sass gave the names and telephone numbers of two men on the current list of public enemies, and Braski went out to check by telephone.

"You bane shoot a man, ever?" Captain Wapp asked.

"Hell of a question," Sass snorted. "I'm here, ain't I? I said I wasn't scared of Doc Savage, didn't I? Do I get on, or don't I?"

He was most uninviting to look at, this Sass. He did not have the height of an ordinary man, nor did he seem to have the muscular development of even an invalid.

His skin was yellowish, and his thin hair was entirely missing from a patch or two on his head, as if he were a victim of the mange. Two incredibly large and yellow gold teeth did not help his evil grin.

From time to time, he dipped a hand into a pocket and brought out dark brown flakes of something, which he popped into his mouth.

CAPTAIN Wapp surveyed the other's puny physique with some doubt.

"Don't think you could stand the gaff," he said. "We need men."

"Yeah?" Sass moved suddenly, and before Captain Wapp knew what was happening, he was yanked out of his chair, relieved of his gun knife, and slammed flat on the cabin floor.

Agony lashed through his frame as Sass tweaked muscles and yanked various joints. Captain Wapp was entirely helpless.

Then Sass stepped back and asked, "What do you think now?"

Captain Wapp got slowly to his feet, and said, "Dot wasn't so bad."

Then he drove out a fist which caught Sass squarely between the eyes. Sass all but went head over heels, and hit the floor heavily. He lay there, dazed.

"Vot you say now?" Captain Wapp asked sourly.

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Oliver Orman Braski came in.

"This man checks O. K.," he said. "He was a flyweight wrestler until he killed a man in a match and got sent to the penitentiary."

Captain Wapp eyed Sass. "Still want der job?"

"O. K. by me," Sass said from the floor.

He reached into his pocket, drew out some of the brown flakes, and flipped them inside his mouth. His face convulsed from pain as he started to chew, but he went through with it. He even added a fresh supply of the brown stuff.

Captain Wapp indicated the brown material and asked, "Vot it is?"

"Sassafras bark," said Sass. "I like it. That's why they call me Sass."

"Git out," directed Captain Wapp. "And one more time you lay a hand on me, and your neck Aye bane wring."

"Aye, Aye, sir," said Sass, with an exaggerated salute. He went out singing:

"I'm a sailor, by heckety–heck,

I'll swab yer bloomin' deck,

I'll climb yer blasted mast.

But show me, it might be best,

Which is the blasted mast,

And which is the bloomin' deck."

"Probably bane goot man," said Captain Wapp.

They called in the next prospect.

CAPTAIN WAPP and Oliver Orman Braski were not alone in their preparations for strife. Monk, in Doc Savage's skyscraper establishment, was assembling his portable chemical laboratory, a thing unique in its type, containing ingredients from which the homely chemist could concoct an amazing variety of surprises.

In odd moments, Monk was devoting attention to pretty Nancy Law. He had an eye for attractive young women, did Monk. He had also perfected a technique. This revolved around his pet pig, Habeas Corpus.

Like Monk, Habeas was about as homely as he could be. He had legs of amazing length and ears of fantastic size. In comparison with these parts, the rest of his anatomy was negligible.

Internally, he had a remarkable brain; and Habeas had been trained long and carefully by Monk. He knew innumerable tricks, including a special assortment Monk had taught him for getting the attention of attractive young women.

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Habeas would walk up to the young lady, stop, sit down, extend his huge ears and look intrigued.

"Oh, my," he would say. "I wish Santa Claus would leave something like you in my stocking."

It would not be Habeas speaking, of course, but it would sound so, for Monk was a skilled ventriloquist.

That usually broke the ice, and put Monk on the inside, invariably to the disgust of Ham, who was undeniably handsome, a remarkable dresser, and not without amorous leanings.

Monk and Habeas had just put on their act, and were progressing amazingly with Nancy Law. Ham tried to interrupt.

"Pardon me," he addressed Monk ironically. "But could you tell me where Doc went?"

"Away," Monk said airily. "Hence and maybe yon. He didn't tell me which, and that was some time ago. Can I be of further service, little Lord Fauntleroy?"

"You hairy baboon!" Ham gritted.

"Shyster!" Monk howled.

"I'll cut you open and stuff that hog in you!" Ham yelled.

"Try it!" Monk bawled. "I'll tie knots in your windpipe!"

"Oh, goodness!" Nancy Law glanced anxiously at Pat.

"Let 'em eat each other," Pat advised. "They've been at it for years."

Doc Savage came in, said, "At it again, eh?" without either humor or censure, and seated himself at the large inlaid table which was the principal article of furniture in the reception room.

"Have you accomplished anything?" Ham asked.

Doc shrugged. "Too early to tell." He nodded at Nancy Law. "I have something I want you to do."

She came over eagerly. "Of course."

"Have you any way of getting in touch with your uncle, Hezemiah Law?" the bronze man asked.

Nancy Law, after hesitating, nodded. "Well, yes. He told me that if I ever needed him, I was to send him a cable to Blanca Garde."

"Where's Blanca Garde?" Monk asked.

"Patagonia," the girl replied.

Ham told Monk nastily, "Patagonia is on the south end of South America."

"I know where it is," Monk retorted. "I been there. But I never heard of Blanca Garde."

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"It is not much of a town," Nancy Law interposed. "I looked it up on the map. It must be the jumping-off place for nowhere."

THERE was an all-night cable office adjacent to the skyscraper and they all went down while Nancy Law filed the cablegram which Doc Savage dictated.

"Just Blanca Garde is all the address he gave me," Nancy Law explained.

"Probably has arrangements there for delivery," Doc said. The bronze man seemed thoughtful, as if something had just occurred to him. It would have taken a close observer to note this. Doc rarely showed his thoughts, then only to a microscopic degree.

The filed message read:

HEZEMIAH LAW

BLANCA GARDE S A

AM BEING MOLESTED BY MEN NAMED CAPTAIN WAPP AND OLIVER ORMAN BRASKI STOP SURE THEY ARE PLOTTING AGAINST YOU STOP WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT AND CAN YOU HELP ME

NANCY

"Being molested' is a mild way of putting it," Monk said dryly.

"Why didn't you want me to say you were interested?" Nancy Law asked Doc Savage.

"There is something mysterious about the whole affair," Doc told her. "Hezemiah Law might not divulge information which he thought would get to me. You don't mind, do you?"

Nancy Law hesitated, then said "Not at all."

They left the cable office. The night was still very dark. It had stopped raining, but there was a dull fog in the air.

Possibly the fog accounted for Doc Savage failing to glimpse a man watching them with binoculars from an office window in the same block. It would almost have taken foreknowledge of the man's position to see him, anyway. He was very careful about his concealment.

Doc and his party returned to the eighty-sixth floor establishment. Doc entered the laboratory. Part of the unusual equipment there was a radio transmitter of great range and power.

He seated himself before its innumerable switches and dials and began calling one of the large South American relay stations.

"Huh?" Monk gulped. "What's the idea?"

"It was better to send the cablegram through the usual channels," Doc said. "It saved some argument, although I might have gotten it through personally. Too, I was not sure I could secure information this way."

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"What are you trying to do?" Monk wanted to know.

"Find out if Hezemiah Law is in Blanca Garde," Doc replied. "And if he is not, it might help to know how soon our cablegram can be delivered to him."

THE bronze man then spent fully half an hour in radiotelegraphic and telephonic communication with the South American relay stations. Some of the more distant work was conducted with the headphones, so that the others did not hear what was being received. All of Doc's aides were expert radiotelegraph operators.

Doc put down the headphones finally.

"Well?" Monk queried eagerly.

"Strange," Doc said.

"What is?"

"The method by which the Blanca Garde cable station is to deliver any messages to Hezemiah Law," said the bronze man.

"Yeah?" Monk waited, mouth open.

"The messages are simply to be rebroadcast by radio telephone at six o'clock each morning from Blanca Garde," Doc explained. "In other words, Hezemiah Law is a figure of mystery in Blanca Garde. He appears there frequently, always in an airplane. No one knows where he comes from, or where he goes to. The spot may be anywhere within five hundred miles of Blanca Garde. That is the range of the local radiophone transmitter."

"Anybody down there know anything about Spook Hole?" Monk asked.

"No one," Doc replied. "Spook Hole is still a puzzle."

"So Hezemiah Law gets his messages at six o'clock." Monk went to the window and stared out. "It's not far from that now. Sun is beginning to show."

MONK'S squat figure bulked large in the window. The man with the binoculars in the office window far below managed to make it out, although the angle was very steep. He scowled and stowed the binoculars in a pocket.

"Reckon I might as well be doing things," he grunted.

The office was dark, empty of furniture, and the door lock had obviously been broken open. Not until the man ventured out on the dim street was his identity discernible.

He wore a disguise of sorts, a tan waterproof topcoat, a trick mustache which stuck to his lip with adhesive, and a soft hat with the brim snapped low.

The disguise would hardly have fooled any one who knew him and gave him a second glance. It was Ropes, he of the hawser weapon.

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Ropes used more than his average amount of caution as he eased out into the street, sought a drug store which was open at this unearthly hour, and made a call. He got Captain Wapp on the wire.

"They went into a cable office and the girl sent a message," Ropes explained.

"You bane get copy of it," Wapp directed.

"Sure, I just walk in and the telegraph people will give it to me," Ropes growled. "They will, like hell!"

Captain Wapp thought that over. Then, speaking the singing tones peculiar to his accent, he began explaining a plan. It involved the aid of the girl friend of one of his men.

It was a good plan, so much better than anything that Ropes had been able to think up, that Ropes terminated the conversation with considerable new respect for bulky Captain Wapp.

The upshot of the scheme was that the telephone rang in the cable office some time later. The clerk answered it and heard a businesslike feminine voice speaking.

"This is Nancy Law, the young woman who just filed a cablegram there," said the voice. "I either forgot to keep a copy of the message, or I lost it somewhere. Will you please arrange to have a copy made for me."

The clerk had no way of knowing this was the voice of a woman enlisted for the moment by Captain Wapp. Cable attendants are ordinarily very careful about showing copies of telegrams filed with them, but this seemed entirely aboveboard.

"I will make a copy," said the clerk. "Shall I send it up to Doc Savage's office? I noticed you were with Doc Savage when you filed the message."

"Make the copy," requested the feminine voice. "I will send a man down for it, a man with a mustache and wearing a yellow waterproof topcoat."

A FEW minutes later, Ropes walked in and got a copy of Nancy Law's cablegram. He took it to Captain Wapp. Braski and Wapp held a discussion.

"Der milk bane spilled!" Captain Wapp groaned.

"No chance of taking old Hezemiah Law by surprise now," Braski wailed.

"It's a hell of a note," Ropes contributed.

They talked pro and con. Braski and Wapp talked, rather, while Ropes sat back and considered. Ropes's brain hatched a scheme.

"I got an idea," he said.

"Maybe we had better call the men in while we make plans," Braski suggested. "Things might go smoother."

"Not much," Ropes snorted. "We don't know yet just how straight these new guys are gonna shoot. There's one wise guy been giving everybody a lot of lip. He's the one that calls himself Sass."

Captain Wapp felt of the spots where Sass had taken hold of him. The spots still ached. He growled, "Yah!"

Ropes beckoned them together and began to talk.

"We'll keep an eye on this Doc Savage," he commenced.

Chapter VIII. NEWS FROM PATAGONIA

IT was nearly noon. Doc Savage was missing again. It worried Monk to the point where he was even neglecting to cultivate pretty Nancy Law. The homely chemist took turns about the skyscraper laboratory, weaving among stands holding intricate scientific apparatus.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, trailed Monk around, keeping not more than six inches from Monk's heels. Occasionally, Habeas grunted. Habeas knew when Monk was perturbed.

"This is the second time Doc has ducked out without tellin' anybody what he was up to," Monk complained.

Ham was taking advantage of Monk's neglect of Nancy Law to advance his own cause. He looked up from this agreeable occupation.

"Maybe Doc is hunting Long Tom," he suggested.

Monk shook his head doubtfully. A bit earlier, he had telephoned Long Tom's quarters – a miserly room off a gloomy basement laboratory where Long Tom conducted his experiments; an extremely lowly environment, considering that Long Tom was probably several times a millionaire in his own right.

There had been no answer from the electrical wizard who was a valued member of Doc's group.

"I'll try to phone Long Tom again," Monk said.

But before he had time to do this, Doc Savage appeared. The giant bronze man was immaculate and fresh, showing no traces of the previous night's violent activity.

"Where's Long Tom?" Monk demanded. "Have you seen him?"

"I have not seen him," Doc replied.

Monk groaned, "I hope nothin's happened to him. What've you been doing?"

Instead of answering that, Doc Savage went into the library, sought an open space among the shelves of books which he commonly used for the purpose, and opened a case of rather unusual devices. He began taking his exercises.

This exercise routine was one the bronze man took each twenty-four hours, without fail. He had been taking them since childhood, and each day, they ran approximately two hours.

The routine was scientific, intense, and accounted for the bronze man's unusual development of muscles and senses. There were contrivances, highly scientific in nature, calculated to develop ears, eyes, olfactory organs, even the sense of touch.

Monk watched Doc go into the routine. The homely chemist had seen it many scores of times, and it invariably made him perspire. Personally, Monk never took any exercises, depending on the rigorous life

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which he led to keep him in trim, which it did quite effectively.

"What've you been doing, Doc?" he asked again.

"Learning things," Doc told him.

"Yeah?" Monk looked interested. "What?"

"The Harpoon crowd has us covered," Doc advised.

"What do you mean?"

"Telephone wires tapped," Doc replied. "Men watching the entrances and exits of this building."

"The vipers!" Monk grinned wryly, and scratched his nubbin of a head. "Good thing I didn't get Long Tom on the wire and thus tip that Harpoon crowd off to where he was. But I do wish that electrical buzzsaw would show up." He paused, frowned. "What are we gonna do about them guys covering us downstairs?"

"We will let them alone for two hours or so, until they begin to feel they are undiscovered and quite clever," Doc said. "Taking them will then be more simple."

The bronze man went on with his exercises. He was now listening intently to a device which was not making any sounds that Monk could catch, but which was evidently putting out some which Doc could hear.

Monk knew the apparatus was one which emanated sound waves above and below the so-called audible spectrum. By practicing with it for years, Doc Savage had developed his ear mechanism to a remarkable degree.

The telephone rang. Doc Savage whipped to the instrument. The voice which came out of the receiver was drably businesslike, but utterly mechanical.

"We have a cable for Nancy Law," said the voice. "May we speak to her?"

DOC SAVAGE showed no visible excitement as he asked, "Who is calling, please?"

"The South American Cables Corporation," replied the emotionless voice. It was just such a tone and delivery as might have come from reading thousands of messages over a telephone.

Doc let a moment lapse, to give the impression that he might be consulting with Nancy Law.

"Miss Law will send a man down for the message," he said.

"The same man who came for the copy of the one she sent?" the voice asked.

For the briefest of moments, Doc Savage's strange trilling sound, the vague, unconscious note which was his characteristic reaction to mental stress, saturated the vicinity of the telephone.

"What was that?" he asked. "What other man?"

"Miss Law sent a man after a copy of the cable which she filed earlier," the voice explained.

SPOOK HOLE

"Describe the man," Doc requested.

The emotionless voice rattled off a fair enough description of the burly Ropes.

"Thank you," Doc Savage said. "And hold the cablegram which you now have for Nancy Law. Do not read it to any one over the telephone. I shall be down after it."

The bronze man pronged the receiver.

"They were clever enough to get a copy of the message we sent to Hezemiah Law," he told Nancy Law. "And an answer seems to have come from Hezemiah Law. I am going down after it. The rest of you stay here."

Monk promptly looked worried.

"They'll lay for you, Doc," he predicted. "You said they had the wire tapped. They'll have heard you say you were coming down after the message."

Doc Savage seemed not to have heard, although Monk knew very well that he had.

THE bronze man now left the eighty-sixth floor headquarters, but by a somewhat unusual route. He went into the laboratory room and approached a glass affair somewhat resembling an enormous goldfish bowl.

This held a number of extremely voracious-looking fish, finny specimens, several of which seemed composed mostly of teeth. There was a sign on the aquarium.

THESE FISH ARE POISONOUS

SPECIES. KEEP AWAY!

A peculiar thing about the bowl was that it appeared to be built up from the composition floor, the floor forming part of the bottom. Any one hunting a secret exit from the laboratory would not have given the thing a second glance.

Doc Savage touched a valve. Water level in the fish tank sank some six inches. Doc vaulted atop the rim and lifted a glass cover over a circular glass tube more than three feet in diameter which extended up in the middle, and due to the carefully designed optical illusion which had entered its construction, was almost impossible to detect when the tank was full.

Doc passed down the tube and into a metal shaft which had a ladder. The hole in the floor of the fish globe was concealed by a method known to most magicians, and involving the clever placing of mirrors.

The shaft gave admission to a tiny elevator, hardly accommodating more than one man. This sank soundlessly for many stories, stopping finally deep underground. Doc stepped into a narrow tunnel. He followed this some fifty yards.

Some moments later, an individual in greasy overalls and bent over from the weight of a grimy tool case, stepped from a tool locker in a near-by subway station. In appearance, he differed little from workmen commonly seen in subways, except that he was very large physically.

It would have taken a close observer to discover that the workman was Doc Savage.

SPOOK HOLE

STILL carrying his box of tools, Doc Savage mounted to the street, coming out only a block from the gigantic building which housed his headquarters. He stood on a corner, ostensibly waiting for a street car. His flake-gold eyes roved alertly.

The rain had turned to fine, shotty snow, and it was cold. Rain of the night before was freezing in the gutters, and the hard snow particles hit the metal tool box which Doc carried, making distinct sounds, tinny and metallic.

The bronze man changed his position, as if impatient, and walked to the other end of the block. This was so that he could survey the vicinity more thoroughly.

He saw no sign of men from the Harpoon. He showed no visible concern, but this was not what he had expected.

A few minutes later, Doc Savage, still the personification of a subway workman of somewhat sullen mien, walked into the cable office and asked for Nancy Law's message.

"No message for any Miss Law," said the clerk, somewhat sharply.

Doc, thinking the fellow might have some doubts about delivering the message to a person of his present disreputable appearance, disclosed his identity. The attitude of the clerk underwent a profound change. But he stuck to his previous story.

"No reply to Miss Law's cable," he insisted.

"But one of the clerks telephoned me," Doc said.

The attendant went back and questioned those on duty with him, only to return shaking his head.

"No one telephoned you," he said.

Doc Savage left the cable office with some haste. He was disgusted, puzzled, although it could not be told from his appearance. His life, entirely perilous, had led him to exercise great caution always, to suspect everything, to analyze every happening for traces of a plot.

It was not often that he was taken in. But he had been tricked this time – drawn out of his headquarters for some motive not yet apparent.

Since none of the Harpoon's crew were to be seen, Doc returned to the eighty-sixth floor of the skyscraper by the public elevators.

He approached the door which had the opening mechanism actuated by the radioactive disc which the bronze man carried. But this time, the door did not open. He tried it with pressure. Securely fastened!

Whipping around the corridor corner, Doc worked with the concealed fastening of the back door, a panel which was absolutely unnoticeable to the naked eye for the simple reason that, since it was rarely used, it was plastered over and painted as was the surrounding wall.

Plaster particles showered over the floor as the door broke open. Doc dived inside.

What he saw was not pleasant. Broken test tubes and retorts littered the laboratory on one side.

SPOOK HOLE

Beyond, in the library, a great bookcase was upset, and costly scientific volumes trampled and torn on the floor, and, scattered over the tomes, a freckling of red droplets that were still wet. The red fluid was puddled in one spot, as if the victim, whoever he was, had fallen here.

The reception room showed the greatest confusion. There was more scarlet there, and the walls were pocked where bullets had struck.

Racing eyes over the lead pits, not counting them, but estimating their number, Doc decided some forty or fifty shots had been fired. That they had not been heard from the street was simply explained. These rooms were as soundproof as modern science could make them.

Nowhere was there a sign of Pat, Nancy Law, Monk, Ham, or Johnny. Even the pig, Habeas Corpus, was missing.

DOC began going over the place. Near the door, he found an empty cablegram envelope. This probably explained how the enemy had gotten the door open – one had pretended to be a cable messenger.

Doc Savage summoned the elevators and questioned the operators. None had taken either prisoners or captors down, it developed. This puzzled Doc for a time, until he actuated the automatic control which brought his private speed elevator up, and glanced inside. The method of exodus became clear.

The captives had been taken down in the speed lift, existence of which the Harpoon gang had probably ferreted out with no great difficulty, since the door was prominent in the corridor, although masked down in the lobby.

There was a note in the cage – a soiled bit of paper weighted and held to the floor by an ugly gout of scarlet.

SAVAGE

THIS WHOLE THING IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS. LAY OFF AND YOUR FRIENDS WILL BE O.K.

There was no signature, nor did one seem necessary. The bronze man took the note into the laboratory and processed it for finger prints.

He got several. He did not photograph them, but simply eyed them steadily for a time, impressing them in his trained memory.

He burned the scrap of paper. An ordinary detective would not have done that, for it was evidence admissible in a court. But Doc Savage never took his difficulties to a court of law, but rather, was judge and jury – and executor of sentence – all in himself.

Next the bronze man employed his ultra-violet lantern which caused prints left by the shoe heels of his men to glow, or fluoresce. The device did not function so uncannily in daylight. Indeed, it was impossible to see the glowing prints with the naked eye. Doc had, however, perfected fluoroscopic eyeglasses which overcame this difficulty.

He trailed the captives to the street, but no farther. Evidently they had been loaded into cars.

Doc visited the cable office on the chance that an answer had come from mysterious Hezemiah Law. It had.

SPOOK HOLE

"Why, the cablegram arrived and was called for shortly after you were here," the attendant told him.

"Describe the person who called for it," Doc requested quietly.

The attendant described Captain Wapp himself.

"Give me a copy of the reply," Doc requested.

There was some argument over that. It ended when Doc put a call in to the cable company officials, and he got the copy. It read:

NANCY LAW

NEW YORK

LEAVING FOR NEW YORK BY PLANE STOP BE IN BLANCA GARDE IN MORNING STOP CABLE
NEW DEVELOPMENTS THERE

HEZEMIAH LAW

Doc Savage rarely talked to himself, but he did so now.

"That," he said, "does not help much."

Chapter IX. DEATH PLANS

IF Doc Savage was not satisfied with the way events were breaking, neither was Captain Wapp of the Harpoon. The burly skipper paraded the floor and fumbled with his pistol knife in a manner which made Oliver Orman Braski extremely nervous.

"Aye bane like it not a bit!" Captain Wapp growled, and gave his rope belt a hitch.

"Me, neither," said the burly Ropes, agreeing with Captain Wapp partially to keep on the good side of the latter.

Captain Wapp did not yet suspect that Ropes and Braski had been co-conspirators against him.

Braski said steadily and firmly, "It is not only that I am against wholesale murder. It is the fact that we have a club to hold over this Doc Savage. He will hesitate to endanger his friends, if he has any sense."

"Dot bronze feller hesitate for nothing," Captain Wapp said with firm conviction.

Braski squirmed. "All right, suppose we kill them and get caught?"

Captain Wapp snorted. "Suppose we get caught anyhow? We bane get a medal, you suppose?"

"Oh, use your head," Braski sighed wearily. "We've been over this. I left that note in Savage's elevator to warn him to keep away from us. I'm betting he will lay off. But let him find out that we killed the prisoners, if we do kill 'em, and Savage will turn loose with everything. And that's bad."

SPOOK HOLE

Ropes suddenly agreed with Braski. "That's a fact."

Wapp evidently held faith in Ropes's judgment.

"Vot about dot Nancy Law?" he demanded.

"Bait," Braski grinned.

Captain Wapp yelled suddenly, "Dommit! Don't talk to me with riddles! Vot you mean?"

"Keep her alive with the others," Braski advised. "We'll use her to pull old Hezemiah Law into our hands and get rid of him. Then we'll polish her off. We'll polish the other prisoners at the same time, if that'll make you feel better. Then we'll go on and clean out Spook Hole for ourselves."

"Vot about Hezemiah Law's men at Spook Hole?" Wapp grunted.

Ropes answered that, putting in, "Ain't it been agreed all along that they'd have to go? We can't have a lot of loose ends around to give us trouble."

"Twenty or thirty dead mans bane not so funny," Captain Wapp muttered

Braski asked, "Feet cold?"

Captain Wapp scowled and snarled, "Some day, Aye bane break dat neck for you."

The skipper of the Harpoon went to a window, lifted a corner of the blind and peered out cautiously. The street below was beginning to whiten with the hard, cold late spring snow, and was, under the whitening, altogether squalid and filthy, with almost no one in sight.

The deserted nature of the neighborhood seemed to reassure the big man, for he pocketed his pistol knife and waddled around, grinning wryly.

"Not so bad for ourselves, we have done," he chuckled.

He ambled into an adjacent room, walked straight to the bound and gagged frame of Monk, and kicked the homely chemist resoundingly in the side.

"You pull in dem big ears!" he growled. "Maybe something you hear, she not so good for you."

IT was entirely against Monk's nature to take any kind of abuse quietly, nor did he do so now. He reared up, tied as he was, and succeeded in flipping around, with lightning speed, and swiped Captain Wapp's ankles with his own bound legs. Wapp came down.

Monk rolled atop him, was butting with his nubbin of a head and delivering such blows as he could with elbows and knees when Ropes came running in and stopped the mêlée by the simple process of knocking Monk senseless.

The room was furnished with a bed, a dresser and what passed for a writing desk. There was also a carpet, so worn that it was nearly in two pieces.

SPOOK HOLE

Along the wall, the other captives were arrayed. The gaunt Johnny had been damaged to some degree, and seemed to have a bullet wound in some portion of his shoulder. Ham was disheveled, bruised. Pat and Nancy Law, outside of showing evidences of rough handling, were unharmed.

Captain Wapp looked them all over, frowning, then stalked back into the other room.

"Them peoples can hear all talk vot we make," he boomed.

"What the hell difference does it make?" Ropes queried. "They're goin' with us, ain't they?"

Captain Wapp mulled over that in silence.

"What about der airplanes?" he questioned.

"I have taken care of that," Braski advised. "We will get three very large ships. They will handle our entire party, including the prisoners."

"Dot costs money," said Captain Wapp doubtfully.

"I am paying for it myself," Braski offered generously. "The pay-off is big enough to warrant spending money."

Wapp grinned unpleasantly. "How you think maybe she be best to get old Hezemiah Law?"

"Cable him and sign the girl's name," Braski retorted. "Tell him the girl will meet him in – what's that town?"

"Blanca Garde in Patagonia," supplied Ropes.

"Tell him Nancy Law will meet him there, and that she's coming by plane." Braski finished. "That'll hold him until we get there."

"Goot," said Wapp. "Where bane paper, pencil."

They searched through their pockets, seeking writing equipment. Their movements were not unduly anxious or hasty.

In the adjacent room, however, there was one individual whose motions were at that moment anxious and hasty. It was Monk. He had revived and had been listening to the conversation in the next room, almost every word of which was understandable.

As silently as possible, and with as much haste, Monk had rolled to the writing desk. He could, by exercising tremendous effort, get erect on his feet.

He managed to paw the desk open. There was writing paper within – and a book of telegraph blanks. This must be a small hotel which catered to underworld gangs and their machinations.

Working frantically, Monk managed to wrench from his coat collar what might have been mistaken for one of the coarse hairs sometimes woven there to strengthen that part of the garment. With this, he made scraping movements over the blank.

He shut the drawer, lurched backward and managed to deposit himself on the floor without undue noise.

SPOOK HOLE

Monk had taken a chance that those in the next room would not have paper. Apparently they had, but there was some mild argument.

"Put the cable on a regular blank," Braski suggested. "Looks more fitting."

They came in and got the book of blanks with which Monk had fumbled.

HALF an hour later, the prisoners were seized by a number of men, who examined bindings and gags to make sure they were secure. Then each captive was made unconscious by having a towel soaked with an anaesthetic held tightly over his or her nostrils.

The senseless forms were then rolled in old rugs stripped off the floors, and carried outside. It chanced that only three pedestrians were abroad in the chill street, and these, chins buried in coat collars, were not interested in some shabby, hard-looking men loading old rug rolls into a dilapidated van. These people did not look closely enough to note that the rug bundles seemed extremely heavy.

During the aviation boom, airports mushroomed up with great frequency around New York, not a few of them being located in spots so unhandily located that only the enthusiastic promoters dreamed they would ever be useful in a practical way. The result is that at present many weed-grown flying fields are eyesores in the suburbs.

The Sunnydaze Flying Center was such a field, perhaps a bit better off than some because one dilapidated hangar still stood. There were woods all about and no houses near, hence no curious persons to remark upon the presence of three gleaming and extremely large tri-motored planes now at the airport.

Armed men were hidden in the woods, just on the chance that some one should come prying, but no one did.

The ancient van arrived, and the rugs were unrolled and the prisoners transferred to one of the planes.

Inconspicuously colored, but fast cars brought men to the field. Some were off the Harpoon. Others were the new recruits hired by Captain Wapp and Braski.

Among the latter was the cocky little thug who chewed sassafras bark. He carried a blanket under one arm, and the manner in which the blanket kicked and fluttered pointed to a lively contents.

"Vot it is?" Captain Wapp demanded, and pointed at the animated blanket.

"What is it to you?" Sass growled, and expectorated brown bark juice. "We're allowed so much baggage, ain't we? This thing in the blanket is my part."

"Vot it is?" Wapp yelled, angered by the evasion.

Sass put out a sallow jaw. "My new pet. And don't bawl at me like that!"

"Aye bawl at whoever Aye want!" Wapp advised him thunderously. "Open it up, that package!"

Scowling, Sass undid the blanket. The homely pig, Habeas Corpus, jumped out, and promptly took off for the nearest timber. But Sass had a stout cord tied to Habeas' leg, and the shote brought up forcibly at the end of that. Sass restored the squealing porker to the blanket.

Captain Wapp looked as if he were going to explode. "Dot ape's pig! Vare you get?"

SPOOK HOLE

"In the street close to that hotel where the prisoners were held for a while," Sass grunted.

Braski, attracted by the dispute, came up and eyed the pig.

"The pest managed to follow us out of Doc Savage's headquarters," he said. "Last I saw of the thing, it was following our cars like a dog. Wonder it kept up with us."

"Shoot him!" ordered Captain Wapp, indicating the pig.

Sass drove brown juice solidly against the freezing ground and put out his sallow jaw again.

"The pig's my new pet," he advised. "I keep 'im, see!"

"Aye bane wring your neck for dot back talk!" howled Captain Wapp.

But when the verbal sulphur cooled, Sass was in one of the planes with his pig, unharmed. Within the course of the next hour, Habeas was in imminent danger of being dropped overboard, having bitten, not only his new master, but three Harpoon sailors as well.

It is the duty of bookkeepers in cable offices to go over messages and list the charges in their ledgers. Usually, each day's business is handled on the morning following.

One particular clerk, listing cablegrams on the morning following, got a shock as he inspected a certain message. The original missive on this blank read:

HEZEMIAN LAW

ELANCA GARDE S A

COMING SOUTH BY PLANE STOP WILL MEET YOU AT BLANCA GARDE

NANCY

The bookkeeper, of course, did not know the message was the forgery sent by Captain Wapp. But the clerk did know that an astonishing thing had happened to the face of the blank since he had last seen it.

Letters, thin, stilted, somewhat erratic letters of a blood-red hue had appeared. In spite of their awkward construction, the message which they conveyed could be read.

GET THIS TO DOC SAVAGE

EVERYBODY OFF TO BLANCA GARDE

MONK

The cable clerk consulted his boss. Five minutes later, they were in communication with Doc Savage.

Few persons knew that Doc Savage maintained, in what was ostensibly a warehouse on the Hudson River water front, a modern hangar housing planes of various types.

Hence, every one was surprised, half an hour later, when a plane of great size and remarkable streamlined construction appeared suddenly upon the river, and with a ghostly quiet, zoomed up into the leaden clouds which were spilling snow. Like a spectre, the plane appeared, and as mysteriously, it was gone.

The motors of the ship were silenced with great efficiency.

Chapter X. SASS ERRS

So well were the motors of Doc Savage's big speed plane muffled that they produced no trace of what pilots sometimes call air deafness, even after they had been run wide open as far as Miami, Florida, when the bronze man landed for a fueling stop.

It was reasonable to expect the three planes that were his quarry might have taken this route. He made inquiries.

An attendant at the field advised that the three planes, their cabin windows curtained, had taken fuel nearly twenty hours previously. Description of the man paying for the gasoline – broad and powerful, wearing a rope for a belt. Captain Wapp, beyond a doubt.

But the field attendant contributed something else of no little interest.

"There a race on, or something?" he queried.

"Why?" Doc countered.

"The other guy was all hot to know how far they were ahead," replied the airport man.

"There was a plane other than myself and those three large ships?" Doc questioned.

"Sure," said the other. "A single-seater speed job came through about four hours behind the first three. Was he burning it up! A one-armed guy, to boot."

"One-armed man!" Doc Savage's strange trilling sound came for a moment, and puzzled the airport attendant; then the vague, strange note ebbed away into the nothingness from which it seemed to have come.

"Sure he had only one arm?" Doc asked.

The other thought, scratching his head. "Well, his coat did kinda bulge where his arm was supposed to be missing. Say, what kind of a gag is this?"

Doc Savage took off without relieving the fellow's curiosity.

Built into the instrument panel of the big speed ship was the equivalent of a common alarm clock, and the bronze man proceeded to employ the awakening effects of this at two-hour intervals, that he might check the course.

The rest of the time, a competent mechanical piloting device, one of the common commercial variety which he had refined, took care of the flying.

Doc picked up rain over the gulf, and in Colon, on the Panamanian isthmus, again got word that four planes

SPOOK HOLE

were ahead of him – three which were patently Wapp and Braski and their crowd, and the other plane, still behind, piloted by the man who was pretending to have only one arm.

There was nothing to show that the prisoners were still with Wapp's expedition, however. There was no indication that they even lived.

The nights were long, the days uneventful, until finally the forlorn-looking coast of South America had reeled nearly all of its length behind the bronze man's craft.

It had been cold spring in New York; it was sultry fall weather down here. The Andean mountain ranges were a hazy-blue parade off to the left.

Blanca Garde came into sight, with steamers, no doubt loading nitrates in the harbor, barely discernible. Doc Savage did not fly directly in, but circled, using powerful binoculars in an effort to pick up the three planes which were his quarry.

The sun was low. Perhaps that accounted in part for what he managed to pick up. There was coarse grass flooring a natural amphitheater surrounded by boulders and scrub trees, and the grass had been mashed down by wheels, making long depressions which the sloping rays of the sun filled with shadows. The width between the marks told Doc what they were – airplane wheel prints.

The bronze man circled. Five minutes, it took him to pick up the planes. Two of them in number. They had been covered with canvas, and green boughs plucked and tossed on top of the tarpaulin shrouds.

Doc landed his own ship approximately a mile distant and set out for the amphitheater afoot.

ABRUPT night clamped down before he reached the clearing. He did not mind, for it made chances of a trap more remote. The region was an outlying one. Beyond a single stone hut, the roof thatched, he saw no habitation.

Brush was thick about the amphitheater. Obsidian rocks towered. In the distance, a steamer whistle moaned, and a bell tolled in some Blanca Garde chapel.

When near the clearing, Doc listened for a long time. There was no sound. He advanced, reconnoitered a while, then examined the two planes.

One was the small-flying bullet in which the one-armed man who was not one-armed had trailed the Wapp crowd southward. Doc tested the motor for warmth. It had the coldness of hours of inactivity.

The other ship was an amphibian, built for landings on earth or sea. It was a foreign job, slow, but of enormous structural strength and probably of load-carrying ability that would furnish a surprise.

The after part of the craft was equipped with a bin, this with a lid and stout locks. It was unfastened. Doc opened it, and peered within, but found only emptiness and a very pronounced odor.

The bronze man tested the scent again and again. It was the aroma of something old, not a carrion tang, but very distinct. It was a smell not easily forgotten.

Exactly the same odor Doc Savage had found upon the hands and clothing of the mysterious man in New York – the man who had two good arms, but, who was pretending to possess only one.

SPOOK HOLE

Doc began going through the pockets in the forward part of the cabin. They were empty. He got out.

The canvas coverings on which the green boughs lay formed a canopy of sorts, and beneath these lay boxes. They were wooden, stout, and about them lay greasy wrapping paper and excelsior packing. Doc scrutinized the litter. It was not difficult to identify the nature of the former box contents.

Ammunition, rifles and machine guns.

All the boxes bore an address, a name, and the necessary permit stamps and seals.

HEZEMIAH LAW

BLANCA GARDE, SOUTH AMERICA

Doc Savage stood for a time, summarizing mentally. The foreign amphibian plane was probably the property of Hezemiah Law, and those who had flown it here had been joined by the mysterious "one-armed" man from New York. They had broken out a supply of weapons and left their ships.

Going back to his own plane, Doc Savage ran, covering the distance in time that would have surprised an expert on such matters, and reaching the ship with a remarkable control over his breathing.

He took off at once. Sent the plane directly over Blanca Garde, picked up the airport, and banked down, leveled.

Wind direction caused him to settle near the west edge of the dusty field, close to the single beacon. Floodlights on the wing tips were on; he left them blazing as he taxied toward the nearest hangar, a huge, corrugated iron structure.

He was fifty yards from the hangar when a flurry of hard rain seemed to strike the plane.

THE sound was loud for rain. It vibrated the big ship. It began in the central cabin, came forward and up, and when it touched the cockpit windows, the sound was as a riveter going to work upon iron.

Doc Savage whipped down from the cockpit seat, cutting the big motors simultaneously. He never did entirely trust the bulletproof glass in the plane, unless necessary, although he had superintended, personally, its moulding.

The armor alloy of the cabin walls, he knew, would stop anything less than a tank rifle. And this had the sound of an ordinary machine gun.

He chanced a glance. The rapid-firer was winking an ugly eye over in shrubs beyond the field edge.

Bullets knocked hungrily along the wings, and tried for one of the flood lamps, but that was bulletproof also. Doc clicked the lights out. That seemed to alarm the gunman. He stopped firing.

Doc Savage remained perfectly motionless in the plane, then eased a cabin door partially open and listened. Over where the shots had come from, he could hear a bull voice roaring.

The bull voice was Captain Wapp, and he was ready to strangle with his own anger. Choking profane expletives, he ran at the diminutive Sass and launched a terrific kick, which the target nimbly dodged.

SPOOK HOLE

"Dummo!" Wapp gritted. "Der plane had bulletproof sides!"

It was Sass who had opened up with the machine gun. He retreated warily.

"How was I to know?" he demanded angrily. "We were here to give that bronze guy a lead stitching, weren't we? And things looked set."

Captain Wapp worked big fingers and advised, "Aye tank Aye twist your neck!"

"That might not be so easy!" Sass snarled.

Oliver Orman Braski piped in nervously. "We'd better be getting away from here. It's dark, and that bronze man is probably out of his plane by now."

This apparently struck them all as an excellent idea, and they retreated – three others, besides Wapp, Braski and the hard little thug, Sass.

They had, it developed, a car parked down near the airport road. Into this, they piled.

An angry squealing greeted them.

"Dot hog!" Wapp howled.

Habeas was fastened by a small chain to the steering wheel. They lost moments while the driver tried to transfer the shote without getting bit. The car pounded into motion.

LITTLE was said for some time. Their pace was fast, the road was strange, and none too good a road at that. Too, they had not much faith in their car, which was a rented machine.

Sass, holding Habeas Corpus by both big ears so that the shote could not bite him, said finally, "What sticks in my craw is how you birds knew Doc Savage was coming."

Captain Wapp said, "Shut up!"

Braski said, "It was simple."

"Yeah?" Sass frowned. "Just how simple?"

"Twenty-dollar bills distributed among hangers-on around the airports where we refueled," Braski chuckled. "Not only one of them cabled us, but three. That gave us a good idea of when the bronze guy would show up and what kind of a plane he would be flying."

Sass swung Habeas by both ears. "You guys don't miss many bets, do you?"

"We get along."

"Shut up!" said Captain Wapp.

They were within the confines of Blanca Garde now, with neat-balconied structures on each side, an occasional plodding donkey, a few copper-tinted natives from the highlands in gaudy blanket ponchos, and numerous sandaled and straw-hatted local inhabitants.

SPOOK HOLE

Captain Wapp's driver tooted the car along with great regard for the local speed limits.

They got out in front of a quiet hotel, entered with the peaceful decorum of American tourists, and went to their suite of rooms.

Ropes was waiting there, with the other members of their gang.

Captain Wapp and Braski eyed Ropes.

"Any trace of old Hezemiah Law?" Braski demanded.

Ropes grinned unpleasantly. "It was a cinch!"

A look of unholy anticipation overspread Captain Wapp's features. He hitched at his rope belt.

"Well, spit it out!" he boomed.

"They're holed up in a hut out in the edge of the mountains," Ropes advised. "There's seven of 'em – all them big Patagonian natives that old Hezemiah Law keeps around Spook Hole. Tough customers, they'll be. Only the place is made to order for us."

"What you mean by dot?" Wapp demanded.

"The hut is in a canyon," Ropes explained. "Dynamite will do the trick."

"We get all our mans in here for to hear dis." Captain Wapp heaved up and looked around. "Where dat Sass bane go?"

"Out walking his hog," somebody stated.

CAPTAIN WAPP swore roundly and sent a man out, and the fellow returned shortly, accompanied by Sass and the pig, Habeas. Sass only sighed when Wapp cursed him. Then they began laying plans.

Ropes described the contour of the canyon. He even drew a crude map of the hut and its surroundings.

"Canyon is blasted narrow all of the way up," he said. "Tough goin', too. We'll have to walk and carry the dynamite. But it's a pipe. Plant the stuff with time fuses, clear out, and bingo! Just like that!"

Sass put in, "How about look-outs at the canyon mouth? From what you guys been saying, old Hezemiah Law wasn't exactly born last night."

Wapp frowned at Ropes. "How about dot?"

"No guards." Ropes spread his hands. "They don't suspect a thing. We clean 'em out. Then we go on to Spook Hole and give the works to the rest. Then – oh, man!" He rolled his eyes.

"Lots of killing connected with this," Sass said dryly.

Wapp growled, "Maybe you don't like?"

Sass said, "Oh, hell!" and grabbed Habeas by an ear just in time to keep from being bitten.

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"What about Doc Savage?" Braski asked uneasily. "My gag of threatening to croak some of his friends if he didn't lay off never worked so well. He's down here."

Wapp boomed, "We vill croak one. Maybe dot remind him we bane mean business."

"Swell," said Ropes.

"Hell will pop," predicted Braski.

Captain Wapp let out his rope belt a bit, mumbled, "Aye bane wonder how Doc Savage learn to here we have come."

Nobody seemed able to answer that one.

Ropes spoke up abruptly.

"That reminds me of something queer," he said. "I saw a one-armed guy go into that hut in the canyon. I'll swear I've seen the same one-armed bird poking around the whaling ship in New York a time or two the last few days."

"Who he bane?" Wapp roared.

"How would I know?" Ropes spread his hands. "He kept his mug covered up so I couldn't get a good look at him."

"Forget it." Sass stood up. "Let's percolate."

They hurriedly got their equipment together. Machine guns were wrapped in canvas, and several donned new laced boots and laced breeches, obviously purchased that afternoon, together with straight-brimmed campaign hats. One shouldered a surveying transit, also plainly a new buy. Others wrapped the dynamite.

Leaving their quarters, they might have been a party of American engineers. Indeed, this was what they had professed to be upon arrival. Engineers might carry packages around without exciting suspicion. This was Ropes's idea.

An armless beggar with a pitiful basket of flowers was seated beside the hotel door. Under pretense of fumbling for a coin for the mendicant, Captain Wapp paused to take a good look around. He saw nothing suspicious, and they went on.

It would have been better for the furtherance of his own shady schemes if Captain Wapp had taken more than a cursory glance at the miserable-looking peddler of flowers.

This worthy remained squatted by the hotel door only as long as Captain Wapp and his party were in sight. Then he arose and scurried down the street in the opposite direction.

The mendicant did not glance back. He seemed to have some important affairs to attend to in a hurry.

It was his misfortune that he did not give closer attention to his back trail. For he was not the only furtive watcher near the hotel. There was another, a shapeless shadow of a figure atop a near-by flat roof.

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This second watcher hastily stowed a small periscopic device which had been employed to peer over the roof edge, and followed the beggar.

The shabby purveyor of flowers dived into the first dark doorway, stripped off his rags, threw them away with a disgusted grunt, then rubbed his arms – he had two sound ones – which had been strapped to his side. He engaged in thought for a moment. Then he strapped one arm back.

When he walked out of the gloomy recess, the mendicant had become the one-armed man of mystery who was not one-armed. He evidently knew the town well, for he traveled fast.

He did not glance back. So he was unaware that he was being shadowed expertly.

The erstwhile mendicant soon joined several huge, swarthy fellows who were loitering before a drinking place. They all walked aside.

The one-armed man who was not one-armed began speaking in the tongue employed by the big, half-savage natives of Patagonia.

"Those who are our enemies have fallen into our trap," he said in the lingo. "They have found the hut in the canyon, and as we had hoped they would do, they have planned to dynamite the cliffs down upon it and crush us all to our deaths."

He used the English word for "dynamite," there apparently being no suitable equivalent in the Patagonian tongue, or if there was, he did not know it, and this caused some confusion until the man explained what dynamite was, and its probable effects. This elicited fierce grunts from the big natives.

"They're a lot of blasted murderers!" gritted the one-armed man of mystery. "Thieves, too!"

He translated that into Patagonian, and added, "Despite the fact that these men would kill us, we will give them a chance to surrender."

The tone of the replying grunts indicated that this met with no great approval from the listeners.

"They probably won't surrender." The one-armed man laughed sourly. "In fact, I know they won't. We'll have to give them the same dose they plan for us."

They moved off into the darkness, reached automobiles, entered them, and drove rapidly. Leaving the machines after a short time, they took an abbreviated route over the rough hills, a course which brought them to the canyon leading to Hezemiah Law's hut ahead of Wapp's party.

The men paid no attention to their back trail. That made it simpler for the shadowy figure which trailed them.

THE one-armed man who was not one-armed selected spots on the canyon sides which he must have decided upon previously. He unearthed wooden boxes which were concealed near-by, took out explosives and a battery-detonating apparatus, and went to work.

"We won't take a chance on fuses," he said grimly. "I'll stretch a fine wire, a hair wire, across the canyon, and when it is broken, a relay will be operated and set off the blast."

The Patagonians did not understand that. They had no ideas about electric wiring, either. So they were ordered to stand aside.

It did not take long for the trap to be set.

The man of mystery clambered to a rock pinnacle and listened. Some ten minutes later, he heard sounds down the canyon which indicated men were coming.

"This is just about your finish, Wapp," he grated savagely, and faded into the darkness with his huge, swarthy companions.

Chapter XI. DEATH IN THE NIGHT

CAPTAIN WAPP was in a growling good humor as he led the advance up the canyon. He rumbled and muttered and swore as if the entire world were wrong, his way of acting when he felt it was all to the right.

"You better shut that big trap," Sass told him.

"Aye tank Aye pull your head off some time," Captain Wapp replied with cordial ugliness.

"All right," Sass growled. "Let 'em know over in Buenos Aires that we're coming."

"This thing is going too smoothly," Braski mumbled. "I would feel more easy if something would happen."

He got his wish. The earth seemed to sink several inches under their feet, then fly upward, dislodging countless tons of stone from the canyon sides. Simultaneously, a flash as of a score of lightning bolts striking lashed upward in the darkness ahead.

Captain Wapp let out a bawl, spun and knocked down Ropes and Braski in his haste to quit the vicinity. The upset pair were up instantly and in wild flight with the others. Sass grabbed Habeas up by the ear and followed the rest.

They had guessed, by now, what had happened.

"A trap!" Wapp bellowed. "Ropes, you bane get us into this!"

Ropes made no retort. He was devoting all of his attention to running.

A man fell down. He emitted a scream of agony.

"Help me!" he shrieked. "My damned ankle is broke, or something!"

Captain Wapp yanked to a halt, but instead of aiding the unlucky one, wrenched his novelty pistol knife from a pocket.

It made a small report which came back from the canyon walls in a crisp echo over the noise of stone still falling behind them. The fallen man made no other sound.

"Run!" boomed Wapp. "No time to help anybody! Dot Hezemiah Law bane behind this!"

They were off again, making a good deal of noise, but not exchanging words. They were a terrified gang of thugs, interested only in quitting the treacherous vicinity.

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The man who had injured his ankle lay perfectly still. Once, he groaned a faint curse. His ankle was not broken badly, but the pain kept him from walking.

In addition, there was the sickening heaviness of the bullet from Captain Wapp's pistol knife somewhere inside his chest, and the awful smart of the hole it had made. The man had retained presence of mind enough to feign death after the shot.

The pain from his ankle became unbearable, and he changed position slightly. He regretted that, an instant later, for he suddenly knew that someone was near.

The beam from a flashlight, entirely blinding, smashed into his eyes. The man groveled, visioning himself being dispatched at the hand of Hezemiah Law's big, dark Patagonians.

"Don't!" he squawled. "Wapp shot me! I'll do anything you say! Only don't finish me!"

The glittering white beam of the flash shifted a little, permitting the man's frightened eyes to make out the figure which towered over him. He had seen that giant personage before.

"Doc Savage!" he choked.

THE bronze man said nothing, but searched the injured one, found a heavy automatic and a sheath knife, and tossed them both aside. Then he picked the fellow up, and when the man groaned in agony, relieved him of pain by pressing on certain nerve centers to induce a numbness.

Doc went down the canyon rapidly, following the fleeing Wapp party. He could still hear them, hence, certain they had not planted an ambush, he used his flashlight to illuminate the way. Thus he gained. But not enough.

Automobile engines moaned ahead; their roaring departed amid a hasty gnashing of gears.

Doc reached the canyon mouth in time to have dust smart his eyes, and to see a red tail-light bob out of sight in the distance.

"Get your car!" groaned the man on his shoulder. "Follow 'em!"

He was now anxious to see Wapp meet disaster.

"No chance," Doc told him. "My car is on the other side of the hills, where I left it when trailing the one-armed man here."

"Huh?" The wounded fellow was puzzled.

"He set the canyon trap," Doc explained. "Then he withdrew. I managed to set the explosion off ahead of you fellows."

The other swore hoarsely.

"You – saved our necks," he growled. "Why? Tell me that."

"You might be surprised," Doc told him dryly, and did not go into explanations. "You are willing to talk?"

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"Am I!" The injured man swore again. Then he added, fear abruptly in his voice, "But I ain't gonna be no information book, and that's a fact. Now don't think I'm holdin' out on you. I'd give my right arm to get that Captain Wapp. He's the blackest devil in sin!"

"You were not in on everything?" Doc prompted.

"I'll say not," the man snapped. "I'm one of the new guys they took on in the big burg, see. Me and that bird Sass and some others. We don't know what's back of the gag, see. We only know we're gettin' paid plenty to do as we're told and keep our mouths shut. But we do know we're after somethin' big, and somethin' a lot different from the ordinary swag. And we know a bunch of people are to be bumped off. But that's all I know. And that's a fact."

"You," Doc told him, "have not touched on the thing that interests me most of all."

"What?" The other was puzzled.

"The whereabouts of the prisoners, my friends," Doc replied.

"I know that, all right."

"Where are they?"

"Little dump opposite the Casa El Caballero, on that alley they call El Esteban," the other explained. "You can't miss the house. It's got one of them trick porches, and it's painted a lousy red. But watch out for guards. Two of Wapp's men there."

"Excellent," Doc Savage said grimly.

The quickest route back was via the short cut, over the hills, and since the hut where Hezemiah Law was supposed to have quartered himself was not out of the way much, Doc dropped in there, carrying the wounded man.

Search of the miserly stone place, however, turned up no one, and the bronze man went on to his car, still with the injured fellow.

ON the outskirts of town, Doc Savage brought the machine to a stop. He scribbled on a bit of paper, and gave it to his passenger, along with a small sheaf of greenbacks.

"Deliver that in New York," he requested. "The money will pay your fare back. And keep out of sight."

"Sure," said the other.

After he had been left in the night, the man immediately sought the illumination of a street light and read the note. It was addressed to a person who seemed to be a physician in New York, and read simply:

GIVE THIS MAN TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS.

DOC SAVAGE.

"Will I deliver this!" the man chuckled. "Boy, will I!"

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Within the hour, the fellow had been party to a murder plot, so he considered that he had gotten off easily indeed.

"The bronze guy is a sucker," he concluded.

He was a little premature in his conclusion. Doc Savage knew from experience that hardened crooks do reform voluntarily, but their numbers are in minority, so he had perfected a method of forced reform of his own.

There was a catch to that ten thousand dollars. The physician at the address in New York would take this man, by force if necessary, and it probably would be, and send him to a strange institution which the bronze man maintained in upstate New York.

At this place, trained surgeons would operate on the man's brain, causing a complete loss of memory of past events. Then the man would receive a course of training in the ways of honest citizenry, including a trade by which he could earn a good livelihood.

Upon discharge from the unique criminal-curing "college," the patient would have no memory of his past, and would have instilled into him a thorough abhorrence of crooks. In addition, he would receive a bank account of ten thousand dollars to facilitate his new start in life. This last was a late addition to the "course."

But the injured man in Blanca Garde had no idea of the strings attached to the ten thousand.

"The bronze guy's a sap," he chuckled, and vanished toward the steamship pier. He had decided to get a physician on shipboard to treat his injuries.

"I hope Doc does find his pals," he had the grace to mutter.

THE alley of El Esteban was a poverty-stricken thoroughfare named after some minor and almost forgotten local hero. Once it had been, as such streets so often were, an avenue of class distinction, but that had been years ago, and property goes to ruin fast in the rigorous climate of Blanca Garde.

The red house with the trick porch, as the wounded criminal had described it, stood out very distinctly, being the only structure of that color on the block.

Doc Savage entered it by climbing to adjacent roofs, moving over, then, after listening, dropping down into the central patio.

Almost at once, he heard feet scuffing in the street outside, and the lock on the barred outer door rattled. The bronze man glided toward the sound.

Two men came in from the street. They stood with the door open a little, watching to see if they had been followed. Satisfied on that point, they closed the door.

"I'll lock it," said one. "You go get set to do the job."

He worked with the lock, which was rusty, and once he cursed the pompous old Chilean who had rented them the building, with no questions asked, but with a guarantee that everything was in good shape.

The man left the door, took several paces, and it suddenly occurred to him that his companion had been remarkably silent.

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"Hey!" he called. "Where'd you go?"

The next instant, the man emitted an awful cry – tried to, rather, for a frightful constricting pressure had clamped upon his neck. As if he had been stricken with a fantastic malady, numbness ran through his limbs. He seemed to go to sleep all over.

Yet he was conscious, and realized he was being placed on the floor, and that, when a light came on, he was beside his companion, who was also motionless and helpless, yet alive. The light also revealed the giant bronze man who had overcome them.

Doc Savage tested certain muscular reflexes to be sure the paralysis he had induced by pressure on spinal nerve centers would continue for some time. Then he began to search the house. He did not have to look far.

MONK and Ham were spread-eagled in an adjacent room. There was a look of death about them. Thongs of raw, wet llama skin had been used to peg their wrists out to stakes driven into the hard dirt floor. Drying, the thongs had tightened, shrunk.

The pair were so smeared with gore as to be almost unrecognizable. The cuts were fresh. Crimson still ran.

Doc cut them loose, worked over them. Both had a spark of life still. It would have flickered in another hour, three at the most.

Producing a small case which held stimulants, Doc managed to get both awake. While strength was returning to them, he searched the rest of the house, but found no one.

Monk, with an animal stamina in his apish frame, was the first able to talk.

"Where are the other prisoners?" Doc asked him.

"Wapp took them away," Monk groaned. "He left me and Ham here. We were to be bumped off to remind you to keep out of the mess. Wapp beat us before he left. Two of his men were to come back and finish the job."

"They came," Doc advised.

Monk needed more time to gather strength, and Doc utilized the interval to drag the two prisoners into the room. Monk glared at them.

"That's the two cookies who were to come back," he growled. "Whew! Every joint I've got feels like it had been pulled apart."

"Know where the other prisoners were taken?" Doc asked.

"Nope," Monk said.

"What have you learned about the mystery behind this?" Doc queried.

"Not a whole lot," Monk replied. "They're after something that's being grown in this Spook Hole."

"Something being grown?"

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"Sure. I heard 'em say that." Monk groaned. "And this Spook Hole is an island."

"Spook Hole an island," Doc echoed slowly.

MONK changed his position. He was able to move a little, if he endured pain. He said, "That's all I know."

Doc stated, "We'll see what these two fellows can tell," and drifted a hand at the pair on the floor.

"That's no dice, either," Monk mumbled. "They're two of the gang of new hands that Wapp and Braski put on in New York. They haven't been told a thing."

"They may know where the prisoners were taken," Doc suggested.

"They'd better!" Monk gritted fiercely, and began to crawl toward the weirdly paralyzed pair.

The two retained full mental function, and were able to realize what it might mean if the homely chemist got his hands on them. Horror filled their eyes, and a few twitches ran over their features.

Doc went to them, relieved one of the pressure paralysis with a kneading of spinal nerve centers.

"You know what we want," he said. "You'd better talk."

"What do we got out of it if we talk?" one snarled.

"Your life," Doc said. "And there will be no bargains."

The man did not think it over for long. He must have heard a great deal of this bronze man.

"Wapp took the skinny guy, Johnny, and the two women," he gulped. "They were going to lay for old Hezemiah Law. Wapp found where Law's plane is hidden, with the plane of that one-armed guy – the bird nobody knows."

"Wapp will be at the hiding place with the prisoners?" Doc asked.

"Yeah."

Doc looked at Monk. "You know what to do with these two?"

"Yeah," Monk said grimly. "I know."

Doc bound the two prisoners, and when he left, they were screaming in terror, convinced they were to be killed, for they had no way of knowing they were to be put under the effects of a long-lasting anaesthetic and shipped to New York, ostensibly as victims of a strange disease going north for treatment. In New York, they would be committed to the criminal-curing "college" in upstate New York.

A plane was moaning overhead when Doc went out into the night. The throaty noise of the motor roar indicated powerful horsepower from a single engine.

The sound diminished rapidly in the south.

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It required almost an hour of wild driving for Doc Savage to reach the vicinity of the remote hill spot where he had, before landing at the Blanca Garde airport, located the big foreign amphibian and the little speed ship in which the one-armed mystery man had come from New York. Doc left his car and walked the final half mile.

Walking, he heard planes again. Two of them, this time, and their sound had that quality which indicated at least three motors apiece.

Those two planes also went away rapidly to the south. Doc put on speed, expectant of the worst.

What he found was up to expectations. He saw the flames long before he reached the hiding place of the planes. Gory and wild, the scarlet tongues were a bundle-shaped monster that lapped with frenzy at the underside of a pall of black and lemon smoke.

It was the big foreign plane burning, together with the canvas cover. The green camouflaging boughs which had been piled upon it added heat to the inferno. Too, the big plane had a lot of wood in its construction; it was the kind which burned well.

There was a small crowd about – blanketed natives, shivering in the chill of the night. They had been drawn by the fire, obviously.

Doc Savage addressed them in Spanish, one of innumerable languages which he had learned to speak fluently. He put questions.

Shots had been heard from this spot, it developed. Men had done no little shrieking. A plane had taken off toward the end of the fray.

Doc was particularly inquisitive on the point of the plane.

Afterward, there had been the fire. No one had been able to get close.

Doc Savage found a long, green bough, worked as close to the burning plane as he could, and poked about. There were bodies inside – what was left of bodies. There was no means of telling whether dark or light, large or small.

Doc managed to rake one out, and the covering had cooked away enough to show the neat drilling of bullets in the skull.

Captain Wapp and his gang had succeeded, to some extent at least. But some of their victims, one man at least, had escaped southward in the fast little plane.

Wapp's gang had followed south in two of their own large ships. Or had they? The bronze man was only recalling the plane sounds he had heard in the night sky.

They had. Doc learned that later in the night when he located the small flying field where Wapp had kept his planes. One of them was still there. Doc went over it.

Monk and Ham were with him. They could do little more than hobble about, so occupied with their own pains that they even forgot to quarrel with each other.

Doc gave up his examination of the deserted plane, having learned precisely nothing.

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"We're sunk now!" Monk groaned. "They've gotten clean away from us. We haven't the vaguest idea where Spook Hole is."

"We'll wait," Doc said.

"What for?" Monk countered.

"Something that I hope will turn up," Doc said dryly. "Things are not as hopeless as you might think."

Monk studied the bronze man for some moments.

"Just what have you got up your sleeve?" he demanded.

He got no answer, which did not surprise him. Doc kept many of his plans from his own aides, not because he did not trust them, but because they might fall into the hands of enemies, and there are methods of getting information from any man, no matter how determined he be not to talk.

DOC SAVAGE spent the remainder of the night and most of the ensuing morning at his portable radio receiver and transmitter. So far as Monk and Ham could tell, and they watched him closely, the bronze man neither sent nor received a single word. But he listened continuously.

"I don't think you'll have any luck," Monk told him. "You're listening for something from Spook Hole, ain't you?"

Doc was slow replying. "Yes."

"We know old Hezemiah Law got his cablegrams by having 'em broadcast from here, and he must have picked 'em up on a receiving set," Monk continued by way of argument. "But that don't mean he had a transmitter. And if he had one, would he summon help? He's went to a lot of trouble to cover up this secret of hisn."

Ham, feeling much more chipper, said, "We know this Spook Hole is an island. Suppose we fly up and down the coast –"

"One of your typical dumb ideas," Monk told him. "This island isn't on the map. That must be a name old Hezemiah Law gave it. Now, my idea –"

There was timid knock on the door. Monk opened it. There was a bare-legged native in a fantastically bright-hued blanket and a conical straw hat outside.

He extended a wad of paper, said something in Spanish. Monk replied in the same tongue, gave the native money, and took the paper.

"He said the noisy bird in the sky laid this egg in his yam patch," Monk told Doc, indicating the wad of paper. "He says it says something in it about being delivered to you. Let's see."

He spread the paper wad open and read it.

"Well, I'll be a jumpin' –" He shoved the missive at Doc. "Of all the breaks! Read this!" **FINDER WILL BE REWARDED FOR**

SPOOK HOLE

DELIVERING THIS TO DOC SAVAGE. SPOOK HOLE 49–32–15s and 75–12–02w.

(Signed) your ONE–ARMED ACQUAINTANCE.

"Latitude and longitude of Spook Hole!" Ham rapped.

"The one–armed guy with the two good arms threw it out of his plane after he got away from Wapp's crowd," Monk concluded.

A thought seemed to strike Monk. He frowned at Doc Savage.

"Look here – you were expecting a break!" he grinned. "Was this it?"

"This is not the one," Doc Savage said promptly. "But it will do."

Monk still looked puzzled, but he did not question the bronze man further. It would have done no good.

Chapter XII. THE TERROR IN THE LAGOON

DOC SAVAGE elected to get his plane on the longitude parallel of Spook Hole, and fly that line south. It was simpler, more certain, for when they crossed the correct latitude, there would be the island of mystery, with its broth of enigma and intrigue and death. It was night, and they flew by the stars.

It got colder rapidly. It was chill even in the big insulated cabin with the electric heaters going.

"If this is summer down here," Monk grumbled, "they must have some winter! I hope that snake Sass keeps a blanket on Habeas."

"He probably won't," Ham said cheerfully.

"Habeas is a hot country hog," Monk continued. "When it's cold, he likes his toddy. Do you know how to mix a hog toddy, Ham?"

"I bought a book the other day that tells how to make pork sausage," Ham snapped grimly.

"To make hog toddy, you take – " Monk stopped, eyed Doc Savage fixedly. "Oh, oh! Doc seems to have it spotted!"

The bronze man nodded, pointed, and the others got out binoculars with extremely wide illumination fields – the type sometimes called night glasses. It did not take them long to pick up Spook Hole.

It was an island of weird shape, being somewhat of the contour of a fat horseshoe, with here and there a jagged tentacle of stone ramming out into the sea.

Across its widest part, the distance could have been no more than two miles, and the lagoon in the center was at points over a mile across. Monk and Ham remarked on the peculiar aspects of the place.

"Not a tree on the blasted place," Monk grunted.

"Too dark to be sure," Ham corrected. "But look at the height of that rock! Bally poor place to attempt a

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landing from a boat."

Doc Savage sent the big ship lower, and cut in the excellent silencers. That along with the throttling of the motors, might help them not to be noticed. The ship skirted the island.

There was no beach on the outer shore. Too, a nasty swell was running. Breakers climbed and frothed over the rocky coast line, at times spraying considerably over three score feet upward.

The lagoon in the center, however, was only slightly rippled. Most of it lay in darkness, for the surrounding stone walls were precipitous.

The plane came opposite the lagoon mouth.

"Hey!" Monk exploded. "Lookit!"

There was a man-made barrier across this only opening which the central lake had to the sea. Part of its distance out from each shore, the construction was ordinary – a dike of piled stone.

It was the central portion of the barrier which caught their attention. At first glance, this resembled a picket fence, with the pickets closely spaced.

Doc Savage sent the plane very low, that they might examine. When the ship arose after their look, they were all thoughtful, silent.

"Did you notice the size of those pickets," Ham said at last. "Steel girders, most of them a foot thick."

"Like a blasted fence!" Monk scratched his bullet of a head, grimacing as his muscles complained. "Now why would anybody want a fence of that size across the mouth of that lagoon?"

Ham shook his own head. "Strange."

THE ship lifted and spun over the island, angling at times to the right and to the left as those aboard sought a spot which looked level enough for a landing.

"That begins to look like the roughest blasted place I ever saw," Monk grunted.

Their search carried them back to the mouth of the gigantic cove, or lagoon – or whatever it could be classed – and they scrutinized the fencelike barrier of enormous steel bars again.

"Lookit!" Monk yelled. "There's kind of a gate affair, swung on pontoons. That must be to let boats in and out."

Doc Savage sent the plane into the lagoon. The sides of the thing shoved up on them, darksome and forbidding. There was only a patch in the middle where the moonbeams touched. It was smooth water, however.

"We gonna land in here?" Monk demanded.

"Have to," Doc told him. "It's blowing outside, and that swell is terrific. Even if we did get the plane down safely, we would stand no chance of landing."

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With easy precision, the bronze man settled the big ship lower, at the same time cranking up the streamlined struts which supported the landing wheels. Struts and wheels became flush parts of the hull itself, leaving a perfect surface for water landing. The design of the huge craft permitted the hull to be used as a pontoon.

Spray sheeted outward, the plane bounced a little, and the small waves made rattlings underneath. Then, so suddenly that it was almost startling, they were in intense darkness. They had run out of the zone of moonlight.

"Landing flood lamps?" Monk suggested.

"They make too good a target," Doc told him.

The bronze man cut the motors entirely. Nothing is quite as cranky of management as a seaplane in the water, but the speed ship was equipped with a simple solution for that difficulty.

Doc leaned out and clamped an outboard motor to fittings which hinged outward from the hull. The outboard, light, easily stowed, did not make much noise, and it pushed the big ship in toward the invisible beach.

"We will anchor a short distance from the shore until morning," Doc announced. "That will make it easier to discover any attack which may be attempted."

The outboard muttered gently. The water seemed like ink below. Occasionally, a ripple caught some faint gleam of light behind them. All about, the rim of the island was outlined jaggedly against the sky, which seemed to have acquired an unwholesome steel-blue hue. Monk voiced his impression of the spot.

"Kinda like I figured the mouth of Hades would look," he chuckled.

Ham got a sounding line and climbed out, hanging by a leg from the door. He lobbed the lead ahead and down.

"No bottom at ten fathoms," he called.

The outboard drove the plane on.

"By the mark, nine fathoms," Ham reported, calling the depth after the seafaring fashion.

"Plenty of water," Doc remarked.

"And a quarter, nine," Ham called.

The plane gave a slight lurch.

"Hey!" Monk barked. "We hit bottom."

"In nine fathoms?" Doc said dryly. "You know better than that."

Something began to happen to the plane under their feet. It lurched, lifted. A great commotion arose in the water below.

"Blazes!" Monk howled. "A sea monster or something's got us!"

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THE homely chemist tore all of the buttons off the front of his coat getting a machine-gun pistol out of its underarm holster. The plane gave a great lurch, and upset him.

Lying flat on the floor, Monk shoved an arm over the door-sill and released a stream of bullets into the water. The roar of the gun was ear-splitting, even over the commotion in the water.

Ham promptly stamped on Monk's wrist.

"Puddinghead!" the dapper lawyer barked. "Want to stir the thing up more than it is?"

Monk, enraged by the stamping of his wrist, struck fiercely at Ham's shin, and Ham began to hop on one leg and relieve himself of choice opinions of Monk in parlor Harvard language.

For a moment, it seemed that the ship was going to capsize. Monk afterward declared that half of one wing did go under. Then, with a tremendous gurgling, the ship settled level.

Light gushed out, so white it was eye-hurting. It was Doc Savage at the plane door with a strong searchlight. He turned the rays downward. Monk and Ham shoved their heads out to look.

What they saw was calculated to complete the standing of their hair on end. The water, green, ominous, held something of fabulous size, a thing that was sinking rapidly into the depths, causing a swirl that seemed for a moment about to pull the ship under. The eddy turned the big craft around twice.

"Sea monster!" Monk gulped again.

"Idiot," said Ham. "There are no such things."

"Sure, it was only my imagination!" Monk grated. "I got a notion to throw you over and see if the thing is a maneater. Stamp on my wrist, will you! Right where them guys had me tied up last night!"

"The outboard has stopped," Doc Savage said.

It had been stopped some moments – since the fantastic thing had come up under the plane. Leaning out, Doc Savage fought to free the motor from its brackets. It was jammed, twisted. Finally, he got it loose, hauled it inside.

The shaft, the tubing in which it turned, was bent into an elbow. And the blades of the propeller were a gnarled tuft. There was some substance entangled with the propeller. Monk took hold of it gingerly and wrenched it free. He turned it slowly. The stuff was raw, dark and tough.

"Hide," Monk said.

"Don't be silly," Ham jeered, but in an uncertain voice. "That stuff is more than an inch thick."

Doc Savage took the leathery piece, examined it.

"What's your verdict?" Monk questioned.

"The same as yours," Doc told him.

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THERE was a somewhat uneasy silence as Doc Savage started the plane motors and sent the big craft toward shore.

"Any objections if we spend the night ashore instead of anchored, as we had planned?" he queried.

Monk said fervently, "Fifty million dollars wouldn't keep me out here all night."

Since there had been enough noise to advertise their presence to any one within miles, they turned on the floodlights in the wings. These picked up – across an entirely peaceful stretch of water – an inviting hard sand beach.

Doc cranked the landing wheels down and they rolled the plane up on the beach. It was not extensive enough for a take-off, so they turned the nose of the plane toward the water, so that if the worst came, they would have a chance to get into the air from the lagoon surface.

They doused the lights and unloaded.

"You should get some sleep," Doc warned. "You fellows are still pretty well under the weather."

"I never felt less sleepy," Monk announced. "In fact, after what just happened, I'll have nightmares for a month."

Doc considered.

"If you fellows want to guard the plane, I will scout a bit," he suggested.

Monk agreed, "O. K. by me."

DOC SAVAGE moved away from the plane, but did not quit the vicinity immediately. Instead, he walked in a slow circle, depositing on the sand and among the rocks small, dark balls approximately the size of bird eggs. These he had gotten from the plane before starting.

When he was done, he had distributed a semicircle of the balls around the plane, covering approaches to it from the land. Satisfied, he moved off into the night.

He kept to the beach. It was as likely a place as any for his night prowling, and more easily traversed.

It was a forlorn, spooky place. The wind which was stirring the sea outside whooped like distant banshees among the rocky pinnacles of the island. The small lagoon waves made rapid lappings on the beach.

Once, out in the lagoon, there was a terrific tumult of watery noises, coupled with a tremendous snuffling and snorting, as if some aquatic titan were disporting playfully. Doc listened for a long time, but the noise did not come again.

Shortly after that, the bronze man's trained nostrils caught an odor, vague at first, then, as he advanced, more distinct. It was a very civilized smell. Gasoline.

He advanced. Changed nature of the wave lappings told him there was something in the water near shore. He waded out.

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He found two planes – mangled as he had never seen planes mangled before. Falling into the lagoon had not done the damage. Rather, they seemed to have been pummeled about. Wings were knocked into the fuselages. Hulls were caved in, pontoons crushed – not from the top, but from the bottom.

Doc did not use a light, but went over them by hand. Gasoline still leaking from a slightly punctured tank, ran cold on his hands.

The bronze man knew planes. He identified the type of these, and by that knew they were the two crafts flown by Wapp and his gang. Hopeless wrecks, both.

He found no bodies inside.

But farther along the beach, there was a dead man. He had been crushed from the waist up, every major bone in that portion of his anatomy broken. He was one of Wapp's crowd.

Doc Savage turned back toward his plane.

He was looking toward the spot where it lay when there was a loud report, somewhat hollow, followed instantly by a tremendous blaze of white light. The light continued its brilliant glare steadily.

Chapter XIII. WAR IN SPOOK HOLE

DOC SAVAGE ran toward the light. The illumination did not surprise him. It was the work of one of the small balls he had distributed so carefully. They were filled with a chemical which ignited and burned brightly when the thin-shelled container was broken – as it would break if stepped upon by a prowler.

Another of the lights whitened out. Either Monk and Ham had stepped upon them by mistake, or there was an attack.

It was the latter. Two pistol shots banged out. One of the machine-gun pistols turned loose an unholy moaning. Doc put on more speed.

Out in the lagoon, there was a great splashing. It went almost unnoticed in the new uproar.

Doc came to a point where he could see the plane more distinctly. It was being attacked. Men were running toward it, firing as they came. The bulky squatness of Captain Wapp was prominent in the foreground.

Wapp dived to one side, slammed down behind a small boulder, and proceeded to roll the rock ahead of him as a shield. This perhaps looked easy to Wapp, but in execution, it proved to be difficult. He fell behind the others.

The superfirers were taking their toll. One man went down, then another. The rest wavered. The sudden bursting of light from the little chemical balls had already upset their nerves.

Wapp had one quality of a leader. He knew when to retreat.

"We bane licked!" he howled. "Run, you fellers."

Obedience could not have been more prompt. With great leaps, the attackers sailed back into the night.

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"Dummers!" roared Wapp. "Take der two dot got hit! Doc Savage's fellers bane shoot a bullet dot only puts you to sleep."

This moved the fleeing ones to pause and gather up the pair who had fallen. Staggering, swearing, they plunged away. Captain Wapp got up and followed them.

MONK bounced out of Doc's speed plane, doing some howling on his own account, eager to push an offensive. The homely chemist was exhibiting an agility not much less than incredible, considering his condition the night before.

Captain Wapp, bringing up the tail end of the retreat, paused to empty a revolver at Monk, and the latter hastily dived back into the plane. He loosened another burst from his machine-gun pistol.

Doc Savage came up, asking Monk and Ham, "You hit?"

"Heck, no!" Monk grunted.

"I'll see what I can do to hasten their retreat," Doc said.

The bronze man ran toward the edge of the beach. Monk and Ham raced after him, the stiffness of their muscles slowing them up somewhat.

Doc threw over his shoulders, "It's not good for you fellows to exert yourselves too –"

Ham said, "I would not miss this for anything!" and tried to put on more speed.

They could hear their quarry ahead, retreating fast. Twice, Monk tried bursts from the machine-gun pistol. They seemed to do nothing but bring back stray bullets which sizzled noisily among the rocks.

Wapp's crowd must have been familiar with the terrain, probably having seen it during the day. They made better speed than Doc's trio – perhaps not better speed than the bronze man could have made alone, but he did not leave Monk and Ham, who were very slow and tired quickly.

It was fantastically difficult going. Time after time, a sheer height of stone barred their way. Once, Monk would have tumbled into a gaping chasm had Ham not gripped his coattails. They did not show lights. It would have drawn bullets.

Doc came to a decision.

"Back we go," he said. "Daylight is the time for this. And they may flank us and get to our plane."

They turned back, moving more slowly, stopping often to listen. Perhaps a hundred yards from their plane, Doc Savage exploded into abrupt movement.

"Some one at the ship!" he rapped, and plunged into the night.

THE chemical ball flares had burned themselves out around the plane, leaving a darkness that was like solidified ink.

Doc's ears had caught small sounds in the sepia abyss. They were water noises, splashes, the rasp of something, probably a boat keel, on sand. There had been another note too – a clinking, as of wrenches

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working on metal.

Not wishing to charge into an ambush, the bronze man produced a flashlight, twisted the focusing head so that it would throw a wide beam, and crouched behind a boulder. He thumbed the light on.

There was no one around the plane.

But fifty feet from the shore, there was a strange, flat little boat. It was very shallow of draft, and driven by an outboard motor. The motor was not running.

A man, standing erect, was poling the craft along silently in the shallows, leaving the vicinity of the plane.

It was the man of mystery, the fellow who had pretended to be one-armed.

He flopped flat in the boat and gave the starting cord of his outboard a yank. He must have primed the little motor ahead of time, for it caught instantly.

Lying flat in his speeding shell, the man yelled. His words could be understood distinctly.

"I've got the carburetors off your plane motors!" he shouted. "You can't get away. There's no food on this island. And I've got the only water protected so you can't get to it."

"What are you trying to do?" Doc's powerful voice was a crashing to reach the man above the outboard moan.

"Hit a bargain with you," the man bellowed back. "Get Wapp and his crowd out of the way for me, and I'll give you your motor parts so you can get away from here. You'll have to leave without asking too many questions, too!"

The outboard was powerful and the little craft receded swiftly. It was almost out of the flashlight beam range when Monk and Ham came staggering up.

Doc seized Monk's rapid-firer and drove a stream of mercy slugs toward the fleeing boat. But the occupant slammed down flat, and turned the craft so that the bulk of the motor protected him. He got away.

They listened to the moan of the outboard betaking itself away. One thing was noticeable. The little boat clung very closely to the shore, where the water was shallow. Not once did it venture out in the depths.

"Looks kinda like that guy was leery of them monsters, or whatever they are, in the lagoon," Monk remarked.

DOC SAVAGE made a hasty examination of the plane, and it was as the mysterious one-armed man had said; he had taken off all the carburetors. This had not been difficult, since the carburetors, for ease in cleaning, were fitted with quick-detachable lugs.

"Any spares aboard?" Monk asked.

"No," Doc told him. "Only those minor parts which commonly get out of order."

"I think we will put the plane in the water and anchor it," Doc said.

Ham began doubtfully, "But those things, whatever they are, in the water --"

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"I believe we will be safe enough where the water is shallow," Doc told him. "At least, it is a choice between two evils – the lagoon, or Wapp's gang – and I do not think Wapp's crowd will be eager to venture into the water."

Doc told of the smashed planes he had found on the beach, and of the crushed human body near by.

"Whew!" Monk breathed, after the recital. "Some hole, this!"

He glanced about, small eyes striving to pierce the intense darkness. He listened to the mournful, sepulchral howl of the wind among the rock spires. It was not an inspiringly cheerful sound at the best, and even less in view of what the night had so far produced.

"The Spook part of the name fits, too," Monk added.

They shifted the position of the plane, managing to roll it by hand down the hard sand until it floated, then guiding it, at times fighting the strong wind gusts, until they were some hundreds of yards from their previous position. They anchored in water not much more than knee deep.

"The tide is coming in," Doc said. "That means there will be more water here soon. If it becomes too deep, we will move toward the shore."

An hour later, the moon shifted its position enough to disclose, quite near, a cove with high rocky sides. Inside this, the plane would be concealed from view, except to an observer across the lagoon.

Monk said, "I still can't sleep. What do you say we leave the crate and scout around?"

Doc agreed. He was anxious to find the prisoners, Pat, Nancy Law and Johnny, if they were still alive.

Before leaving the plane, they did a number of things calculated to entertain any prowler. Small bombs containing an anaesthetic gas which produced harmless unconsciousness were hooked up to detonate if the doors were opened.

Monk, with some difficulty, rigged electrical shocking devices which would all but render senseless any one touching certain parts of the fuselage.

"Long Tom would be the guy to do this," Monk remarked as he worked. "Wonder what happened to him in New York? He never did show up from that engagement he had in Washington."

Doc said, "Let us get going."

THE night was cold. Moisture in the sand had frozen, so that the brittle crust crunched under their feet until they moved in close against the wall of cliffs, where the sand was more dry.

The wind made strange sounds. Out in the lagoon, there was an outburst of the elephantine splashing.

"A plugged nickel would buy my share of this place," Monk stated.

Doc drove a bronze hand against Monk's arm, stopping him. Ham was brought up likewise. The three of them stood, ears hunting sounds until their drums ached. Monk and Ham caught only the ghostly orchestration of the island.

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Then the bronze man eased away in the darkness. He was gone fully five minutes, and at no time did he make a perceptible sound. Then he materialized beside Monk and Ham.

"What was it?" Ham breathed.

Doc Savage was slow speaking. When he did voice words, they were abrupt, imperative, excited.

"There he is!" Doc ripped. "Get him!"

The bronze man made rapid slappings with his feet – but did not change position. Monk and Ham likewise stood rigid. They did not know which way to move.

Silence followed, absolute except for the island noises.

Monk, very small of voice, queried, "Just what was the idea?"

"Thought I heard some one near," Doc said dryly. "I could not locate anybody by searching. I tried that trick, hoping that the skulker would move and betray his position. I guess there was no one. The wind must have moved a rock."

They went on slowly.

There was a skulker. Had he been a white man, Doc would probably have found him. But this fellow was half a thing of the wild, versed in ways of the stalk, and sly.

He had stood perfectly still since inadvertently making the small noise, nor did he stir until Doc Savage and his two companions had moved on a good distance.

The aboriginal fellow wore no stitch of clothing, for garments have a way of rubbing together and making small noises. Too, he had done what for him was an unusual thing – he had taken a bath recently, to rid himself of any body odors that might reach a keen nostril.

The skulker eased away. His big, calloused feet made no noticeable sounds. He seemed impervious to the chill, in spite of his nakedness, and did not shiver.

He quickened his pace when he was out of earshot, beginning to run with great strides. A time or two, he fell over rocks, but on the whole, he got along surprisingly well.

His course led him around the edge of the lagoon. Then he turned toward the shore and began to climb. He seemed, as far as the moonlight permitted vision, to be surmounting a sheer crag which poked upward like a gigantic thumb.

There was a path of sorts, a series of exposed steps. They led to a timber which bridged an expanse of space with a straight drop of fully two hundred feet directly below. Beyond the timber was a ladder which led up to a round hole in the stone. There was a stir at the hole.

A swarthy giant with a knife of immense size looked out, then grunted wordlessly and permitted the naked one to enter.

THE native without clothes went directly to a stone chamber in which a very modern electric light burned. The subterranean chamber was large, and its depth in the stone pinnacle was indicated by the fact that no

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sound of the noisy night penetrated, not even the hollow roar of surf on the outer coast of the island.

The place was not especially tidy, but it held a tremendous array of chemical equipment. It was not a laboratory, one versed in such matters would have realized at a glance, but rather an installation designed for the manufacture of some special product. Just what that product was, it might have taken even an experienced chemist some time to discover.

The one-armed man of mystery was working in the center of the room, plunging an electric stirring device into an enormous vat under which electric heating apparatus functioned.

There was a concoction being mixed in the vat. Three glass tubes ran steady streams of ingredients, and from time to time the man turned the contents of the jars.

He was using both his arms, and his face wore a grim expression. He might have been a sorcerer concocting some witch's brew.

He looked at the big native and said, "Who do you think you are – Adam? Go put on some clothes."

The Patagonian tied a cloth about himself. When he spoke, his English was fair enough.

"Doc Savage and his two men have changed the location of their plane," he said. "They have anchored –"

"The fools did not get out in the lagoon?" the other snapped.

"No, no," the native explained hastily. "They are in a small cove, in shallow water, exploring the vicinity."

"How much have they learned?"

"Very little," said the aborigine.

"Wait a minute," the white man grunted. "I've got to finish this stuff. Our project cannot stop."

"The vats are low," agreed the other.

"Didn't leave enough before I went to New York," grumbled the man mixing the strange brew. "But this is about done. It will be administered as usual. You understand?"

"I understand – mixed with the food before it is thrown into the lagoon," the swarthy giant agreed.

NEARLY half an hour was expended in the completing of the mixing process. Not until the final product was dished out into glass jars did the man who was preparing it seem satisfied.

"That will carry us a week," he said, stepping back.

"Shall I return to watch the bronze man?" asked the big native.

"No." The fake one-armed man seemed weary, desperate. "This fellow Wapp got ashore with all of his men but one, although he was fool enough to make the mistake of landing his planes in the lagoon. He is dangerous, for his party outnumbers us, and is a well-armed party. Too, I think he brought a small field gun and explosive shells. I believe I saw them dragging it out of the wreck of their planes."

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"We fight them," said the dark Indian.

"And get licked," grunted the other. "No. We've got to use our heads. I've got a plan. I hate to use it, because it means one of us will have to let ourselves be captured by Wapp."

"I do that," offered the Patagonian.

The white man smiled, and clapped the other on the shoulder.

"With luck, you can persuade them not to kill you," he said. "And I think it will be worth the risk." He frowned blackly. "Spook Hole, here, is the product of my life's work and study. I worked on this for years. And I've got it, something that will make us all wealthy. And damned if I turn it loose."

"What you want do?" queried the native.

"Poke around Wapp's camp," directed the other. "Let yourself be caught. Pretend to be scared into talking when they try to question you. Tell them where Doc Savage is."

"Then they make another try and maybe kill this Savage man," said the native.

The other shook his head. "Oh, no. Because, in the meantime, I'll warn Savage. The idea, you see, is to keep these two outfits scrapping each other until Savage finally licks Wapp. Then we –"

"Suppose Wapp win?"

"He won't," the white man said with conviction. "I'm betting on that. And when Savage comes out on top, we've got the parts of his plane to bargain with him. We can force him to leave without asking too many questions."

They talked it over. It was a simple plan, to play each side against the other, retaining a club over the combatant which they thought would win.

"Wapp will keep you unharmed," the one-armed man assured the Patagonian. "Let Wapp think you know how this place may be taken. And, if you can, aid those prisoners of Wapp's to escape. One of them is my niece, Nancy Law. The other two are Doc Savage's friends, one his aide, Johnny, and the other his cousin, Patricia Savage. No telling when Wapp, the fool, will decide to kill them."

They went out, and at the exit, found a very puzzled guard.

THE baffled expression which the door guard wore caught the attention of the one-armed man instantly.

"What is it?" he asked in Patagonian dialect.

"Strange cries from below." The aborigine pointed downward vaguely. "They have the sound of one of my people in distress. They are in my language. I go down. But there is no one."

"It has the mark of a trick," the white man said slowly. "But it could not be Wapp. None of his crowd speak the Patagonian language. You, guard, use much care in investigating these sounds if you hear them again."

"I have used care," the look-out said. "I will continue to do so."

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The big Patagonian who had come from the cove where Doc's plane lay, and the white man, the latter fastening one arm inside his coat so that it would appear he was one-armed, took their slow departure down the sheer face of the stone spire.

The guard at the entrance watched them go, then listened after the night swallowed them. The spot which he guarded was one almost entirely inaccessible, except for this one route, and a single man could stand off an army from that point.

There is one gesture which seems to indicate puzzlement the world over – the simple, absent scratching of the head with a finger.

The Patagonian look-out did this as he peered downward. He was puzzled over those cries he had heard. Intently, he watched the darkness below.

From time to time, sounds came from the series of rooms carved out of the rock behind him, but he paid no attention. Some of his fellow aborigines were quartered there.

There was, however, a figure stirring in the stone chambers which was not one of the Patagonians, although in physique, the prowler considerably surpassed even the largest of the enormous natives.

DOC SAVAGE was in the room which held the chemical apparatus, and he was very interested in the brew which the one-armed man of mystery had so painstakingly concocted.

The Patagonian who had come from the cove where the plane was hidden, so blithely sure he had evaded the bronze man, had been markedly less clever than he imagined.

Doc, after pretending to depart with Monk and Ham, had simply circled back and waited until the man did move. Following the fellow had been difficult, but certainly not impossibly so.

Entering the stronghold within the stone peak had been more difficult. Solution of that finally had been the decoying of the look-out with faint cries in his own tongue. Doc had entered, unseen, while the man investigated.

The bronze man went over the chemical array a second time, now inspecting the ingredients of the strange brew. These were in bottles, phials, cartons, and all bore labels. None of them were especially rare – practically all could be purchased from a large pharmical supply house.

Any one watching the bronze man's features would have, for once, seen expression. Comprehension! Satisfaction!

For a moment, the strange, low trilling sound, the exotic note peculiar to Doc's moments of mental excitement, came into existence, ranging not unmelodiously.

It carried, and back in the recesses of the stone labyrinth, a coarse aboriginal voice rumbled out in puzzlement, causing Doc's sound to come to an abrupt end. He had not realized he was making it, which was not uncommonly the case.

Always, that sound had a distinct significance. And just now it meant that the bronze man had completed links in his chain of theory which made the whole thing become an array of convincing fact.

He had a good line on the secret of Spook Hole.

Chapter XIV. MAN TRAP

DOC SAVAGE eased out of the chamber, and headed toward the exit. Once, when he heard a man stirring somewhere, he whipped into a room which seemed empty.

It was evidently a study of some sort, for a number of bookracks stood well away from the walls, and there was a chair, ponderous, poorly stuffed, apparently made by a man who was no especially skilled carpenter.

On the walls and in home-made exhibit cases were mounted marine specimens. Doc Savage examined one by the light that filtered in from the corridor. It was a rare asterozoa type.

It was no assortment which would be kept by the ordinary amateur, but rather was one which showed Hezemiah Law – and probably he had made the collection – was no ordinary authority on marine life.

There was a large case along one wall, covered with canvas. Doc lifted the canvas covering. Inside were jars which held a colorless liquid, possibly a preservative, and dark, tumorish-looking growths in various stages of development.

It was such an exhibit as might have been found on the shelves of a physician specializing in cancer or some like growth, except that these exhibits were huge. Some of the growths were fully as large as bushel baskets.

Since he hoped to create for himself the opportunity of examining all of this later, at his leisure, Doc Savage moved out of the study and down the corridor. There was a soft pad of sand underfoot. This stone pinnacle was of soft formation, not difficult to excavate.

The guard at the entrance came into view. He was still leaning downward, listening, hoping to hear the strange cries which had so puzzled him.

Doc satisfied the watchman. The bronze man moved his head back, tensed throat muscles, and there issued from him a ventriloquial imitation of a man calling out in the Patagonian tongue in the infinite distance.

The guard started violently, decided the call came from below – whence it did seem to emanate – and picked up a powerful hand light and began to descend the precarious path. By tossing his light ahead, he could illuminate every foot of the path. He knew no one could get up past him.

The man made one mistake. He neglected to look behind him. Had he done so, he might have seen a giant bronze man, larger by far than himself, sliding down a thin silken cord, one end of which was secured to a collapsible grapple which had caught in a crevice in the stone.

But the watchman did not look back, and spent the next half hour in a vain search for the voice he thought he had heard calling from below.

Doc Savage made an attempt to pick up the trail of the mysterious one-armed man and his big Patagonian. He had no luck. They had too much of a start.

The bronze man headed for the little cove which harbored his plane and Monk and Ham.

THE one-armed man of mystery and his Patagonian had traveled fast since leaving their stronghold. But, nearing the spot where Wapp and his gang were encamped, they came to a halt.

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The white man climbed atop a jutting of rock and surveyed Wapp's camp. Evidently, he had spotted it during the previous day, or some of his Patagonians had watched Wapp's crowd take up a position there.

Wapp had used judgment in the selection of a camp site. Atop a steep hill, there was a pile of weathered stone blocks of tremendous size, probably once a part of a great boulder which the ice of many winters had split into fragments.

This formed excellent shelter, and since the sides of the steep hill were without cover, and rather well-illuminated by moonlight, it was a retreat very difficult to take by surprise. A fire smouldered among the boulders and cast weird, bloody flickerings.

The one-armed man climbed down and talked to his Patagonian.

"You will advance and let yourself be caught," he said. "Tell them, after a time, where Doc Savage can be found. It is a risky thing you are doing, my friend, and I shall not forget it. Your house will forever be a rich one."

"It is all I ask," said the big Patagonian in his native tongue.

The aboriginal went forward, skulking in the moon shadows. He seemed to have a good idea of where Wapp's watchmen were stationed.

He managed his own capture in a simple manner. He simply stumbled, as if he had fallen accidentally while prowling, and fell out in plain sight.

"Hold it!" ripped a voice from above.

The Patagonian simulated terror and lay perfectly still. The man above did not take chances.

"Get up and come here!" he grated. "And no funny business!"

It was the small, tough-looking fellow, Sass, and he had the pig, Habeas, anchored to a near-by boulder.

The Patagonian advanced, making his big limbs tremble as if scared half out of his wits. He permitted himself to be taken a prisoner. Very shortly, he was before Wapp.

Wapp used no gentle method of questioning. He kicked and beat the big native, all the while bellowing demands. He wanted to know how to get into the veritable fortress excavated in the spire of stone.

"There be no way," insisted the Patagonian. He was crying like a child now. His act was very good.

Wapp wanted to know where Hezemiah Law could be found. Was Hezemiah Law dead, among the slain in the burned plane at Blanca Garde? It seemed that Wapp did not know.

Wapp finally got around to asking questions about Doc Savage.

The big Patagonian could have shown even the wily Ropes, who was standing near by with Braski, fine points in the art of deceit.

Apparently in great fear, the native admitted that he had been scouting for Doc Savage, had found his camp, and was returning with the information when he had, oh, so unfortunately, been captured.

SPOOK HOLE

"Where bane dot Savage feller?" Wapp howled.

The Patagonian described the cove.

Wapp roared orders. A great bustle of activity seized the camp as an expedition prepared to get under way to wipe out the bronze man – or at least, try it again.

OUT in the darkness, the one-armed man of mystery had watched until he saw that surge of motion as men got ready to go forth. He had wanted to be certain Wapp would fall into the trap before he went to warn Doc.

While waiting, the man had freed the arm which he had been keeping fastened under his coat. But now, before leaving his vantage point, he replaced the arm in its covering. He muttered his dislike of this.

"I hope it don't go on forever," he grumbled.

The man clambered down from the rocky prominence, sighed his relief when he reached smoother going, and stepped out swiftly. He would have to move fast, if Doc Savage was to be warned, and tipped of a method by which he might set a trap for Wapp's crowd.

The one-armed man took no more than half a dozen steps. He heard a slight sound, stopped. The next instant, there was a louder noise, a whistling, at his back. His brain seemed to fly to pieces. He started falling, it appeared, an infinite, black distance.

He fell, actually, only as far as the ground.

A man who had struck him down pounced upon him, fearing resistance. But the one-armed fellow was senseless.

The attacker chuckled once, gleefully, then picked up his victim and bore him toward Wapp's stronghold. He hailed the guard at the top, and was told to advance. He did so, carrying his prize.

"I guess I didn't do so bad, eh?" he chuckled.

The watchman stared.

"For the love of a blubber spade!" he gulped. "The one-armed guy who's had everybody guessin'! Where'd you annex him?"

The proud captor conveyed that information to Wapp an instant later.

"I was scoutin' around, like you told me," he advised Wapp. "I hear two birds moseyin' around. I sneak up close, but can't crack down on 'em on account of there ain't no chance. But I hear 'em gabbin'."

"Vot dey done said?" Wapp demanded.

"They had a scheme," replied the other. "That big wild man was to kid you into jumping Doc Savage. This other bird was to tip Savage so he'd have a party all ready for you."

"Der bummers!" roared Captain Wapp.

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LUNGING over, Captain Wapp performed his favorite operation on prisoners. He gave the one-armed man of mystery a terrific kick in the side – and thus discovered that the prisoner really had two good arms. They freed the hidden arm, swearing their amazement.

The surly Ropes had been standing back with Braski, watching. Now they both leaped in and went to work on the captive.

The man of mystery was relieved of a set of false teeth, and a certain amount of grease paint was rubbed off his features, leaving a visage which was certainly not that of a young man. Vigorous rubbing also disclosed that his hair was covered with some greasy darkening substance. Actually, he was nearly white-headed.

Braski and Ropes stood back triumphantly and looked at Captain Wapp.

"Recognize him?" Braski asked.

"I'm telling a man," Wapp leered. He leaned close to the prisoner. "Vot was der idea?"

The captive looked incredibly old and beaten.

"Oh, I suspected Braski from the first," he said wearily.

"Me!" Braski exploded. "You suspected me?"

"You had been selling my product and keeping part of the proceeds," said the man on the floor. "I checked up on you and learned that. I assumed the disguise of a one-armed man and went to New York to get back at you, somehow. It was then that I learned you and Captain Wapp and Ropes were all working together, and that you planned to kill me and take everything. Not satisfied with what you could steal, were you?"

Braski swore.

Wapp looked at him and gibed, "Not bane so smart as you think, eh?"

The man on the floor added another bit of information.

"It was me who called in Doc Savage," he said. "I sent him an unsigned telegram telling him to investigate the whaling ship Harpoon. That was after you grabbed my niece, Nancy Law. I wanted Savage to rescue her. I didn't think he would learn anything. The girl knew nothing."

Captain Wapp jumped up and down like an enraged animal and bawled profanity which carried fully a mile, even over the wail of the ghostly wind.

"You bane pay for trouble you cause!" he shrieked.

"You'll never take my headquarters," the man on the floor said grimly. "My Patagonians will fight you to the end."

"About dot, we will see," Wapp told him ominously.

The small, pale thug, Sass, had been standing in the background. Now he shoved forward, pointing at the man who was being questioned.

"Just who is this?" he demanded.

Wapp swore.

"That," he said, "is Hezemiah Law."

Chapter XV. WAPP CLOSES IN

SASS absently nudged the pig, Habeas, with a toe, as he stared at the recumbent form of the man identified as Hezemiah Law. Then Sass scratched his head.

"But the dame, Nancy Law, cabled down here when this guy was in New York, and got an answer," he said.

Braski glared at Hezemiah Law. "How about that?"

Sass popped brown sassafras bark between his jaws and echoed, "Yeah? How about it?"

"I was watching Doc Savage's office," Hezemiah Law said drearily. "They caught me snooping, but I got away. Anyway, I knew the girl had sent the cable. So I simply cabled my men here to answer it as if I were still in Patagonia. I had some of my natives waiting in Blanca Garde with a plane, as you well know."

"But why all the phenagling?" Braski persisted.

"Yeah," Sass agreed. "Why the fiddle-faddle?"

"To keep every one thinking I was in Patagonia," Hezemiah Law snapped peevishly. "I didn't want Doc Savage to know I was in New York. He would have asked questions about this place, and I wanted its secret kept. And naturally, I didn't want you crooks to know."

"Smile when you say dot!" Captain Wapp boomed with coarse pleasantry, and delivered a kick which must certainly have cracked one of old Hezemiah Law's ribs.

Law writhed some, moaned, but said nothing with words.

Wapp teetered back on his heels and eyed Braski.

Braski said, "This is about cleaned up. We got Law. We got his niece. We got Doc Savage's cousin and one of his men, and we got Doc Savage himself spotted, and the two men with him ain't in such hot shape for a fight."

"Dot's a mouthful," Wapp agreed. "Me, Aye say get rid of them dot we've got here."

Braski nodded. "All but Hezemiah Law."

"Why not him?" Wapp wanted to know.

"We must know the ingredients of that stuff Hezemiah Law mixes up for feeding purposes," Braski pointed out. "Without it, we can't go ahead and operate this place for ourselves."

"Dot's a fact," Wapp nodded. "We keep Hezemiah alive. We put kibosh on rest, eh?"

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"O.K.," said Braski.

They finished getting their weapons together, Wapp giving the orders. A close observer might have noticed that Braski and his crony, Ropes, were trying to get together without being observed. But they did not succeed.

Wapp separated one man from the expedition and told him to stay behind.

"How much nerve bane you got?" Wapp asked.

The selected thug was a scarred, weazened rodent with the marks of his trade all over him, and he said, "I got plenty. All it takes. Try me."

"When Aye get back, Aye might not find nobody but Hezemiah Law alive, eh?" Captain Wapp said meaningly.

"I get you," said the man. "The others might have bullet trouble."

Thus were the orders for murder given,

CAPTAIN WAPP formed his expedition into a tight group, and they set forth down the side of the hill, moving alertly, and vanished into the darkness.

They did not make much noise, for soon the whoop and moan of the wind was all that could be heard. A thin cloud scud had appeared and was racing in detached fragments, like badly scared animals, across the moon's face, making eerie intervals of murk.

The man left behind to do murder handled his gun, then pocketed it and drew out a knife, which he seemed to have decided to use. He began whetting the knife.

He was testing the edge on a hair plucked from his own head when he heard a sound and stared, to see the diminutive Sass coming up the hill.

"What'd you come back for?" asked the appointed killer.

Sass swore.

"That fool, Wapp," he growled. "He changed his mind. Sent me back to tell you."

"Tell what?"

"You're not to kill the prisoners," said Sass. "And brother, you'd better not, because I'm going back and tell Wapp they're alive, and he'll skin you if you croak 'em. He's decided –"

"Aw, hell!" growled the other.

Sass betook himself away in the noisy night.

The man left behind to do the killing had much of the satanic in his make-up. He moved around to where the prisoners lay – the long, bony Johnny; Pat, looking very bronze-haired and trim; and attractive Nancy Law, who did not seem unduly frightened.

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The man knew the prisoners had heard that they were to be slain, all but old Hezemiah Law, who lay, bound and gagged, in a crevice. But the man did not think they had heard Sass come back and countermand the order. So he thought he would have some of his brand of fun.

He whetted his knife visibly for a time, then walked over, tangled fingers in Pat's hair, and lifted her head, baring her throat, as if for a cut.

"If I was a gentleman, I might leave you until the last, baby," he said. "But I ain't no gentleman."

With dryness in her throat, Pat said, "Anybody could see that."

The man snarled, grabbed her hair again – and something happened. Something whizzed out of the surrounding night, went clank! on his head, then bounced off. It was a rock the size of a baseball. The man fell flat on his face and only the tips of his fingers moved.

All of the prisoners lay still, stunned with surprise. Pat's lips were parted slightly. They separated more as a knife came sailing out of the darkness, from the spot where the thrown rock had materialized. It skittered almost to her.

Pat lost no time looking the gift over. She rolled, got her fingers on the knife, and cut herself free. She sliced through the ropes which held the others.

Johnny heaved up, gulping, "I'll be superamalgamated," and ran and searched where the knife and rock had come from.

"Uncomeatable eventuation," he murmured.

"We weren't all born with a dictionary in our mouths," Pat told him.

"An incredible happening," Johnny said with smaller words. "I cannot find any one."

They all looked about. But there was no sign of their mysterious benefactor.

WHILE they were tying up their late captor, who was only senseless, Pat said, "We've got to help Doc. Warn him!" She turned on old Hezemiah Law. "You know where Doc is. Show us the place."

"I will that!" Hezemiah Law said with alacrity. He got up, groaned. "That Wapp broke one of my ribs when he kicked me."

They took the pistol they found on the person of the senseless guard. It was the only weapon they had. They left the hill and stumbled through the darkness, traversing the incredible forest of stone in the direction of the lagoon cove.

Johnny came closer to Hezemiah Law.

"Consummate exergesis, a recapitulation, is mandatory," he said.

Hezemiah Law grunted.

Pat came over. "Maybe he doesn't speak your language, Johnny." She addressed Hezemiah Law. "What we want to know is what is behind all of this. What is there on Spook Hole that everybody wants?"

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"I was afraid you would ask that," Hezemiah Law grumbled.

"Afraid!" Pat wrinkled her nose, "I'll bet you were sure of it. Out with the answer."

"No," said Hezemiah Law.

"What an egg you are!" Pat observed.

Hezemiah Law had enough of pride to think that some kind of an explanation was necessary.

"The thing I have here is the product of a lifetime of work," he said. "From the time I was a boy, I dreamed of the possibilities of accomplishing it. I worked and studied. All of my career was aimed toward its eventual accomplishment. Now, I have it."

"And you're set on keeping it," Pat said sarcastically.

"It's not that, alone," Hezemiah Law told her. "It is the fact that if the world got word of what I have here, it would do no good, and it would create infinite harm. For one thing, the price of what I have to sell would drop, once the market learned there was a method of producing great quantities of it."

"So," said Pat.

Hezemiah Law defended, "You know what happened to the price of pearls when science learned how to grow culture pearls by introducing grains of foreign substance into oysters?"

"It's not pearls you have here?" Pat questioned.

"Of course not," said Hezemiah Law.

"Pipe down," said Pat. "Wapp might hear us."

They fell silent and used much more caution, for now they were drawing near the lagoon shore and the cove. They could hear the rustle of the lagoon waves above the rumble of distant-breaking surf on the outer shores. They descended sharply. Sand was underfoot.

"Here is the cove," Hezemiah Law breathed.

They used so much caution that it was boring, and they searched the dreary little cove from end to end. Johnny, with his extreme tallness, even waded across the middle.

They found neither Doc, his men, nor the plane.

IT was old Hezemiah Law who caused the next excitement. His niece, Nancy Law, rather.

The two of them had gotten apart in the darkness.

"I will not!" Nancy Law cried out suddenly, vehemently. "Either they go too, or I don't!"

Pat swung over, saying, "Pipe down, you two! Want the world to come to an end? What's going on here?"

"I can't say that I care a lot for this uncle of mine," Nancy Law said angrily.

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"I only hoped – " Hezemiah Law did not finish.

"He only hoped he and I could sneak off together and reach his fort, or whatever he calls it," Nancy Law snapped. "He wanted to desert the rest of you here."

Hezemiah Law mumbled, "I am trying to keep Doc Savage from learning my secret."

"If I know anything about Doc, he's already solved your secret," Pat said grimly.

Hezemiah Law was silent for some moments, and when he did speak, it was slowly, apologetically.

"I will take you all with me," he said, as if resigning himself to something he had hoped to avoid.

Anger moved Johnny, for once, to use small words.

"Very kind of you," he said.

They now set a course toward Hezemiah Law's stronghold. Johnny, using small words and his best persuasive personality, attempted to pump Hezemiah Law, but learned exactly nothing.

"It is very baffling, this secret," Johnny told Pat. "I do not believe I ever went through so much trouble before and learned so little. Frankly, it gives me a headache."

"Me, too," Pat agreed.

As they drew near the stony prominence in which Hezemiah Law had excavated his stronghold, they increased their pace. Johnny and Pat kept a close watch on Hezemiah Law, also, lest he give them the slip as they were about to enter the unusual retreat.

"You seem to suspect me," Hezemiah Law grumbled.

"We are taking no chances," Johnny told him.

"Neither are we," said Captain Wapp, and stepped out of the darkness holding a submachine gun tightly against his hip.

AWFUL silence held Johnny's party for a long minute. They made no sudden moves, but looked around thoroughly. It was well that they did. Captain Wapp's men were all about them, and their ugly grimness indicated an entire willingness to use the firearms which they held.

Captain Wapp stated, "Myself and three of my men will walk up that path with you. Law, you will tell your damned Patagonians to admit us."

Hezemiah Law grated, "I am very likely to do that."

Wapp said, "I will kill you all right here."

He made that statement neither loudly nor with more than usual vehemence, but there was in his voice a cold finality, an utter resolution. He clicked off the safety of his machine gun and pointed it at Nancy Law.

He was going to kill. There was not the slightest doubt of it.

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"I will do as you say," Hezemiah Law said in a sick voice.

What followed was very simple in its grisly significance. Hezemiah Law led the way up the precarious path, the path which not even an army could have taken, and because he had to, the defeated old man called out to his Patagonians, so that they let the Wapp crowd get close.

The latter leaped upon the unsuspecting aboriginals, beating them down with guns, firing a few shots.

There was some fighting in the inner rooms. Then it was all over. Captain Wapp had possession. He was joyful. He had reason to be. In the excitement of a few minutes ago, he had spoken clearer English than was his wont, but now he relapsed into his strange dialect.

"Aye bane happy man," he said. "Aye bane so happy dot Aye want to do good things for other fellers."

He told this to Hezemiah Law. The latter only stared dully.

"Aye turn you all loose," said Captain Wapp. "Aye know leetle island where Aye bane take you and you can live. Maybe you don't get off. But dot not so bad as dead, eh?"

Hezemiah Law mumbled, "I don't believe you."

Wapp grinned. "Of course, you bane do one thing to pay me back for mine gift."

"What is it?" Law asked.

"Tell me vot you put into dot mixture dot you feed to your pets in the lagoon," said Captain Wapp.

"No!" Law snarled. "I won't!"

"Aye bane see about dot," said Captain Wapp, and grasping the bound form of Hezemiah Law, he dragged the man into an adjacent chamber, from whence grisly sounds of beating and torture began to emerge.

Braski and Ropes took advantage of this to edge together.

IT was the first opportunity Braski and Ropes had taken to confer in some time. They had been cautious.

Ropes leered and said, "We're about ready, eh?"

Braski chuckled. "When Wapp gets the ingredients of the feeding mixture, we will learn what it is. Then we will take care of Mister Wapp."

"Shoot him?" Ropes queried.

"Together," Braski agreed.

"What about the others?" Ropes asked doubtfully.

"They don't give a damn who is chief," said Braski. "When we point out that they'll get a bigger split, they'll side in with us. I know my crooks."

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"I think the same way," Ropes agreed. "O. K. When Wapp gets the dope, we won't waste time. We'll cut into him."

They moved away from the darkened recess where they had held their conference.

An instant afterward, another figure appeared from farther back in the darkness. It was the lean, unhealthy-looking Sass. He had heard every word the two plotters had exchanged.

Sass's features wore a devilish expression. He went straight to Captain Wapp, interrupting that worthy in the act of hammering Hezemiah Law's skull with the butt of a revolver.

"Vot you want?" Captain Wapp snarled.

Sass told him. He told him every word he had overheard, and he even embellished a little to make it especially good.

Captain Wapp all but had a spasm. He did it silently, though, and when he had calmed down a little, he said simply, "Aye bane see!"

Sass wandered off. The entrance to the high retreat was being guarded, of course, but there were small windows to the rear, observation points giving out upon another part of the island.

Sass produced a flashlight, made sure he was alone, then blinked a signal from one of the windows.

He got an answering flash of light almost immediately.

A thin rope came out of Sass's clothing. He lowered this through the opening. Shortly, there was a pronounced tug, after which a considerable weight bore on the rope as a man climbed.

It was Doc Savage. He had some difficulty wiggling through the aperture.

Below, Monk and Ham were climbing the rope.

Doc addressed Sass. "Your part didn't pan out so well. I was expecting you to radio me back at Blanca Garde."

"Didn't have a chance," said Sass. "Boy, that Wapp is careful. I did manage to see that Johnny, Pat and Nancy Law were not harmed, however. A while ago, I countermanded Wapp's order to kill them, then managed to conk the guard with a rock and throw Pat a knife. They got caught again, however, so that was wasted effort."

Ham clambered inside. Monk was below, mounting. He appeared a moment later. It took two of them to get him through the small aperture.

Monk bewildered, grasped Sass and stared at him with great intentness.

"For the love of mud!" he gulped. "This is our pal – Long Tom!"

Chapter XVI. MÊLÉE

HAM pumped Long Tom's arm up and down vigorously, gasping, "Sass and Long Tom the same! Man,

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how'd you work it? Why, this is unbelievable."

"Doc's idea," Long Tom chuckled. "He got wise that Wapp was adding thugs to his crew. We scared a crook chief into recommending me to Wapp. It was that simple. I've been sort of standing by in the gang, helping when I could."

"Simple," Monk muttered, and rolled his eyes. "What a man!"

Long Tom – he did nothing to remove his Sass disguise – told them how things stood.

"Wapp is going to tie into Braski and Ropes," he finished. "That will be our cue to cut loose."

"Good," Doc said. "We will wait. Where are the rest of the prisoners?"

"The Patagonians, Johnny, Pat and Nancy Law are in a side room," explained Long Tom, unconsciously speaking as Sass would have spoken. "Wapp is questioning old Hezemiah Law."

They could hear Wapp yelling as he quizzed Law. The words were almost mad with rage, and sprinkled with profanity.

Old Hezemiah Law's refusing whine was growing less and less vehement. Finally, his voice sank to a mumble that was not intelligible beyond the confines of the room.

Shortly after that, Captain Wapp could be heard laughing triumphantly.

This might have been a signal, for certain of Wapp's old sailors from the Harpoon gathered in the room where stood Braski and Ropes. There was nothing peculiar about this, except that the men held their guns in their hands.

Wapp came out of the room where he had been questioning Hezemiah Law. He stood in the stone arch, a bulky, evil, gloating figure.

He waved a sheet of paper.

"I got it," he said. "It's all written down here, together with directions of how to mix the stuff."

Braski looked at Ropes. Ropes nodded. They reached for their guns. This was the moment to kill Captain Wapp.

In that underground labyrinth, things happened. Event followed event with such grisly speed that it was doubtful if any of the participants were ever quite sure of all that did occur.

CAPTAIN WAPP had set a trap for Braski and Ropes. The instant they reached for their weapons to commit murder on their chief, the sailors of the Harpoon flashed their own guns into action.

Braski and Ropes died almost instantly. Captain Wapp probably thought that would settle it. He was mistaken.

There came through the nearest door a giant Nemesis of bronze, a fighting fury of skill and ingenuity. On his heels crowded Monk and Ham, and from another door came Johnny and the giant, dark natives of Patagonia, ferocious killers with a cause to avenge. Some of them had died that night.

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There was Long Tom, the electrical wizard, also – he who Wapp knew as Sass, the cocky thug. Long Tom chanced to be standing close to Wapp, and he swung a haymaker, hoping and indeed mightily endeavoring, to knock Wapp's head from his shoulders.

He did not succeed entirely, but he jarred Captain Wapp until that worthy dropped his gun and fell flat on the floor, only to get up and plunge into the fight with his two bare hands.

Some one began shooting the lights out, and the chambers hollowed in rock became a bedlam in black. Men fought for their lives and many died.

The deaths were not to Doc Savage's liking, for he had a set policy never to take human life, even under the most rigorous provocation. He had requested the Patagonians to restrain from killing, but they were natural fighters, and in the heat of conflict, forgot everything.

Within three minutes, Captain Wapp was retreating toward the exit, bawling at the survivors of his party to do likewise.

CAPTAIN WAPP did reach the exit, did manage to descend the path, but when he reached the bottom, only four of his men were with him, and the big Patagonians were hot after them.

It was partially daylight now, and the men fought in sort of a lurid glow that somehow was hellishly befitting events.

The Patagonians closed in, and Wapp retreated. It was only a question of moments until he would be beaten down with his followers. And the aboriginals had taken to dispatching those who fell.

"Surrender!" Doc Savage yelled. "We can make the natives let you live!"

Captain Wapp was in no mind to reason. Too, he had a cunning plan. He had glimpsed a small boat on the beach, the same shell which Hezemiah Law had used to relieve Doc's plane motors of their carburetors earlier in the night.

Wapp led the retreat toward the boat. He and his men reached it. With frantic haste, they shoved off, clubbing at the big Patagonians.

They got clear.

Captain Wapp bawled in triumph, seized a gun from one of his men, and tried to shoot down Doc Savage. The bronze man, however, reached cover in safety.

Wapp did not get clear. He had forgotten the monsters in the lagoon.

He was far out in the little boat when disaster came. The tiny shell lifted, borne upward by a darksome, gleaming body of enormous proportions. The boat upset, and as it did so, a huge tail slashed out of the water, came down, and a vast cloud of spray arose.

The boat and the men clinging to it disappeared utterly. The craft happened to be of collapsible metal construction.

It was fully a minute later that Ham looked at Monk.

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"Monsters!" he snorted.

"How were we to know, in the night?" Monk demanded sheepishly.

"Plain whales," Ham grumbled. "That's what they are. Plain whales."

THE whales were not exactly plain whales, they learned in the course of the next few days. They were ordinary whales, but in a sense, they were all ill – ill because Hezemiah Law had been feeding them a chemical compound which he had spent most of his life in concocting.

The sick whales, thanks to Hezemiah Law's feeding, produced that marine treasure known as ambergris. Ambergris! Product of fabulous value on American and European markets, because of its use in the perfume-making business.

The whales had long haunted this cove, Hezemiah Law explained, appearing there at times in small schools. He had managed to pen one of these schools in the cove, some years before.

The ingredients of his mixture which provoked the growth of ambergris, Hezemiah Law refused to reveal – until Doc Savage, after a chemical analysis of the batch Law had mixed, told him what it held.

Hezemiah Law had changed a little. The horror of the last few days had pretty well broken him in spirit. He had lost, too, his greed.

Law offered Doc Savage a half interest in the treasure of Spook Hole.

It was against the bronze man's policy to accept monetary remuneration. He deliberated. And he made certain researches, which proved that the production of ambergris by Hezemiah Law's method was no cruel process. After that, Doc broached a proposition. Hezemiah Law accepted.

Proceeds from the sale of ambergris were to be divided four ways. A fourth to Hezemiah Law, and another fourth to Nancy Law. The remaining quarters went, one to the Patagonians, and the last to certain charities which were agreed upon.

That cleaned up the matter of Spook Hole.

Hezemiah Law produced the missing parts of the bronze man's plane, but Doc Savage and his aides did not leave immediately. Hezemiah Law, Doc discovered, possessed probably more knowledge than did any other living man concerning fish and their food, life and habits.

Doc spent some time on Spook Hole for the deliberate purpose of adding to his own store of knowledge what he could learn from Hezemiah Law.

Altogether, they had a pleasant vacation after the hectic matter of Captain Wapp.

THE END 1