

THE AWFUL EGG

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I MEN FLEEING

THE thing that ailed the doctor was not a fainting spell.

It was around ten o'clock when Dr. Samuel Harmony alighted from his limousine and instructed his chauffeur to return at twelve with the car. Doctor Samuel Harmony entered his office, spoke cheerfully to the receptionist, after noticing there were no patients waiting. He entered

his private office and sat down at his desk, where the morning newspaper was spread out for his perusal.

Ten minutes or so later, the receptionist entered to say there was a patient, and saw Dr. Samuel Harmony sitting there at his desk, practically as white as a sheet of typewriter paper.

"Doctor!" gasped the receptionist. "What's wrong?"

For a while Dr. Harmony's mouth acted like that of a fish out of water.

It was an ice cave. This did not mean that the cavern simply blew full of snow and ice during the winter time, and that this frigid deposit failed to melt. The ice was a natural phenomenon, no more remarkable than the geysers which spout hundreds of thousands of gallons of boiling water from the depths of the earth in Yellowstone Park, Iceland, and other parts of the earth.

The heat which causes boiling water to hurtle from the depths of the earth is attributed to natural causes, either due to chemical heat generation, or heat created by pressure. The frigidity of the depths of this cave, Johnny concluded, was due to the chemical nature of the underlying strata. The place, in one sense of the word, was a natural refrigerator. He knew of other instances where ice caves existed, so the phenomenon was neither astounding nor unusual.

(Author's Note: The phenomenon of ice caves is not unusual. Near Vesoul, France, for instance, there is a cave containing a stream which is frozen throughout the summer. Other noted ice caves are in the steppes of the Kirghis, south of Orinburg, in Asia. There is the Surtshcllir cave of Iceland, and the Schafloch near Thun, Switzerland. There are others. Some of these ice caves depend upon the natural refrigeration caused by evaporation—the same basic theory which is responsible for the efficiency of modern electrical refrigerators—for their low temperatures. It is a peculiar fact about most ice caves that they are colder in the summer than in the winter.)

Because the cave was, in effect, a big refrigerator, there was the ever-present danger from gas exuding from the depths of the earth, the gas which was responsible for the formation of the ice. The ice was everywhere about them now, great masses of it, sheets that coated the floor, walls, ceiling.

As protection against the gas, one or the other of them would go well ahead with the tin can containing the mice and leave the small animals for a few moments, then return to inspect them. Since the mice

showed no distress, they continued their investigation.

The temperature was well below freezing.

"Do you reckon," Johnny remarked suddenly, "that it's been this cold for—well—"

A strangeness in the long, bony man's tone caused Sam Harmony to stare at him suddenly.

"What do you mean?" Sam Harmony demanded.

Johnny pointed at the nearby ice. "Shine your light just right," he said, "and I think you'll see something."

Sam Harmony maneuvered his flashlight and stared.

"Damn!" he exploded.

HALF an hour later, Sam Harmony dragged a fragment of what they had found to the outer sunlight. He was almost hysterically excited. His attempts at speech were stutterings.

"Imagine this!" he exploded. "Just imagine!"

Johnny, little less wrought up himself, contemplated the object they had so carefully hauled out for inspection. It resembled nothing so much as a large and overripe hunk of beef, except that the meat was a great deal more coarse, possessing less texture.

"Is it . . . is it—" Sam Harmony stared, speechless, at Johnny.

Johnny nodded.

"A part of a leg of a dinosaur," he agreed. "But . . . but . . . dinosaurs became extinct millions of years ago!"

"I know." Johnny grinned suddenly, rather hysterically. "That's what makes this good. Boy, I never dreamed I'd be lugging around a piece of dinosaur meat! I knew they found a mammoth one time that was fit to eat, but—"

"Mammoth?" he asked. "What do you mean—mammoth?"

"You've heard of that mammoth they found in Siberia back in 1901," Johnny said. "It fell off a cliff and was frozen in a glacier, or something."

(Author's Note: Johnny's reference was to the incident which came to the attention of the Imperial Academy of

"I don't know whether dinosaurs made their nests in caves. But I'd be willing to bet they didn't make them in ice caves." He scowled and pulled at his lower lip. "However," he added, "I'll admit the flesh of this danged thing looks awful funny. But still, flesh might get that way after it had laid in ice for a few hundred million years, or however long this has been here."

Johnny snapped. "Well, there's nothing strange about the egg being here even if the dinosaur did run inside when it was scared."

"Why not?"

"Haven't you ever seen an old hen lay an egg when she was scared?"

"Do they do that?" Sam Harmony demanded, and started laughing again.

Johnny sniffed, and began carefully chipping toward the large, dark, elongated object which he had discovered under the ice, but which he hardly believed could be an egg. Johnny was level-headed and this whole thing was already impressing him as fantastic. A dinosaur preserved in a natural icebox! That was goofy, wasn't it?

"Damn it, be careful!" urged Sam Harmony. "If that thing's an egg, we don't want to break it."

"If it's an egg, I'll eat it," Johnny said suddenly. "And I don't believe this thing's a dinosaur. I'll bet you a buck it's somebody's old horse that wandered in here and died."

However—it was well past noon when they completed the task—an egg was the object which they finally managed to bring to the outer sunlight. They placed it back in the shade, just inside the cavern mouth, and stood there gazing at it. An egg, undoubtedly.

"How big do you suppose the thing was?" Sam Harmony asked. "A man might be able to judge from the different size eggs things hatch out of."

"How big is an ostrich egg?" Johnny inquired.

"I've been trying to think." The other scowled. "Dammit, I saw an ostrich egg one time, but I can't remember how big it was. Big as your hat, maybe. No, I don't guess it was that big, either."

"Maybe we had better put it back in there where it will stay frozen," Johnny suggested.

Sam Harmony shook his head and remarked that it wouldn't do any harm to

leave the egg outside until it warmed up sufficiently for the ice to melt off, after which they might be able to secure some idea of what the shell was like. So they stopped there watching, and even shifted the egg out into the sunlight so that it would warm a little faster. Finally, Johnny got down on all fours, brushed the melting ice from the shell, and peered at the thing.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" he ejaculated.

Johnny made the big-worded exclamation because the perfect condition of the shell astounded him.

An abrupt, tight silence fell. It was broken explosively.

"Damn you!" Sam Harmony snarled.

Johnny stared at him blankly. "What on earth ails you?"

"I remember that a Doc Savage aid uses that exclamation—I'll be superamalgamated." Sam Harmony got slowly to his feet. His face was ugly. "Brother, you been pullin' somethin' on me!"

Johnny knew what was good for his health. He made a dive, got hold of Sam Harmony's knife, and straightened with it. Sam Harmony made a yelling, inarticulate sound of rage. He whirled, dashed away.

Johnny was a little slow realizing that Sam Harmony was racing for his rifle.

When the understanding did dawn, Johnny knew it was too late to catch the fellow. The long, bony archaeologist and geologist made a running leap and pitched his body over a small ridge. A bullet hit a moment after he disappeared, knocking up a spray of dirt and rock particles.

JOHNNY was capable of remarkable agility when necessity demanded, and it demanded now. He kept going, hit the bottom of a gully, put his head down and churned his long legs. He could hear, in that moment of running on the comparative level floor of the gully, Sam Harmony making cursing and snarling sounds.



Johnny maneuvered to get hold of Harmony's knife!

Rounding an angle, Johnny got out of sight before Sam Harmony had the opportunity to take another shot at him. He

kept going. In running, he was trying to do more than escape; he was endeavoring to reach the camp. He made it, too—he

Chapter VIII

THE MYSTERIOUS CHICK

WILLIAM HARPER JOHNNY LITTLEJOHN was something of a psychologist, as well as being a noted geologist and archaeologist and an eminent user of big words. His psychology led him to suspect that Sam Harmony would keep a gimlet-eyed watch throughout the first night, and so therefore any attempt to sneak up on the fellow could readily result in someone getting shot. Since Harmony had all the guns, probably it would not be he who got shot.

So Johnny stretched out in a remote spot and prepared to get an excellent night's sleep. He lay on his face, so that he wouldn't start snoring. He didn't know whether he snored or not, but he understood that the chances of nasal bugling were smaller if one kept off the back when slumbering, and he was taking no chances.

He failed to sleep, however. There had been too much excitement.

"A discommodious pervigilium," he remarked.

It gave him a great deal of satisfaction to be able to wrap his tongue around a big word, after being forced to refrain from the use of them over a period. Big words were his vice, his hobby and his source of secret amusement. Early in his career, when he was very young, he had realized that a man should have something to tag himself, something that others will remember, and he had started using big words to draw attention to himself. Later, when he had become the recognized greatest in his line, he had retained the habit for purposes of amusement.

The result of Johnny's wakefulness was that he decided to contact Doc Savage. He unlimbered his little radio outfit.

He got a break. It proved to be a phenomenally good night for radio transmission, and it was not necessary to have his message relayed to Doc Savage. He contacted the bronze man direct.

Johnny told Doc exactly what had happened.

Doc considered the matter.

"I will fly out there immediately myself," the bronze man said. "Monk and

Ham and Long Tom and Renny can handle things at this end. There seems to be nothing to do but watch Calico Parks and his men on the chance that something will break."

That decision did not surprise Johnny. He knew that Doc was archaeologist enough to be intrigued by the part about the ice cave.

"What have you learned about the situation between Parks and Sam Harmony?" Johnny asked.

"Nothing more."

"No idea why the two hate each other so completely, and why Parks is trying to catch Harmony?"

"No."

"Any sign of the girl, Nancy?"

"None," Doc said. "Is it possible for a plane to land in that place?"

"Not a chance."

"A gyroplane?"

"That," said Johnny, "might be different."

Doc Savage directed, "Give me about twelve hours, because a gyro is slow, then switch on your radio and send some kind of a signal at fifteen-minute intervals, so that a radio compass can be used to locate you."

"Right," Johnny agreed, and after that he slept very soundly, awakening only once, when he thought he heard it thunder.

THE following afternoon, Johnny stood on a flat patch of ground—it was the only level spot he had been able to find in half a day of hunting—and waved his coat.

Overhead, Doc Savage made a brief gesture from the cockpit of the gyro. The plane—it was a small one—differed from the conventional type of ship in that it was equipped with a very large six-bladed rotor instead of wings. The rotors, mechanically driven and equipped with an arrangement of vanes which was the bronze man's design, enabled the craft to arise and descend almost vertically. The ship, as far as vertical ascension and descension were concerned, was several steps more efficient than the autogyro type of plane.

The rotors turned slowly, the gyro came down and eventually landed with a

grunting sound. Doc cut the motor. The bronze man, Johnny saw, had come alone.

“Where is Sam Harmony?” Doc asked quietly.

“I haven’t seen him,” Johnny explained, “since he sent me fogging off into the canyons with a rifle. I didn’t feel like fooling around where he could see me and take a pot shot. The guy isn’t a bad marksman. I saw him hit a jackrabbit at a hundred yards one day.”

Doc Savage nodded. The bronze man wore light but strong grayish clothing of outdoors type and hobnailed climbing shoes. Johnny had wished a number of times that he had shoes of that type.

“What is the heaviest caliber rifle he has?” Doc asked.

“A thirty-thirty.”

Doc nodded again, and indicated the plane. “There is armor-plating on the bottom and sides of the cockpit. It’s alloy stuff, and it’s supposed to stop anything up to a thirty-nought-six, or army rifle bullet.”

“Then it should stop a thirty-thirty.”

“Get in,” Doc said, “and we will look over the situation from the air.”

They climbed into the plane. The motor labored, and the whirling rotors made the sounds of great beating wings, after which the ship lifted slowly. It skittered unsteadily from side to side as the vagrant air currents glanced off surrounding pinnacles and ridges and struck it, then straightened out and moved forward.

Johnny got his bearings and pointed. “Over there,” he said. “The cave is in that circular ridge of very old formation.”

The plane circled several times cautiously. Johnny peered downward.

“Where is the camp?” Doc asked.

“Well, I’ll be superamalgamated!” Johnny said.

“What?”

“It’s gone!”

“Gone?”

“Hide, hair, tooth and nail, guts and feathers,” Johnny said grimly. “Gone. Sam Harmony broke camp, took everything and disappeared. Wait a minute! Maybe he moved the stuff to the cave. That’s a logical thing for him to do.”

Doc Savage shifted the gyro over cautiously toward the camp, and Johnny used binoculars on the spot where the cave

mouth had been. Had been—that was exactly right.

Johnny made excited noises and jabbed a pointing arm.

“Gone!” he howled.

Doc Savage’s flake-gold eyes steadied upon him. “Now, wait a minute,” the bronze man said. “If the camp and the cave are both gone, there must be some mistake. Maybe you have your directions—”

“Gone!” Johnny yelled. “I mean it’s been blown up. The whole thing was destroyed!” He fell silent. He was thinking back to last night, remembering something.

“What have you got on your mind?” Doc inquired.

“I guess I know when the thing was blown up,” Johnny said grimly. “Last night sometime, something awakened me, and I thought it was thunder.”

Doc Savage took the binoculars and carefully scanned the surrounding Bad Lands, after which he flew two slow circles of wide radius, giving the terrain another scrutiny, but detecting no sign of Sam Harmony.

“We will land,” Doc decided.

THE job of destroying the cavern entrance—Sam Harmony obviously had used the dynamite which they had packed along for use in blasting should they do any extensive excavating for fossils—was thoroughly complete. It had removed every chance of getting into the cave without the expending of thousands of hours of labor. The force of the blast had tossed the stone upward; then it had collapsed, and the whole outward portion of the ridge, splitting loose, had slipped down and effectively sealed the cavity for many yards back from its outer opening.

Johnny said, “It would take a big crew of men working for weeks to get into the cave. The only feasible way would be to drive a shaft, like a mine.”

Doc Savage nodded, but made no other comment. Johnny’s statement was true. It would be impossible to gain access to the cavern. The thing that puzzled him, however, was the reason for blowing up the cavern mouth.

They moved about, searching the vicinity.

Johnny was rubbing his long jaw and staring glumly at the mass of tumbled stone when he heard a trilling sound—the low, fantastic note which had a pervading quality that was close to ventriloquism, the strange sound which was the small unconscious thing that Doc Savage did in moments of mental excitement.

“Doc!” Johnny barked. “What is it?”

“Over here,” the bronze man said.

Doc was standing, looking down at the split fragments, black in color, that was like huge coconut shells. He glanced at Johnny questioningly.

“Must be the shell of that egg,” Johnny said.

The bronze man stared at Johnny so strangely that the gaunt archaeologist and geologist became red-faced.

“I tell you there was a dinosaur egg!” Johnny exclaimed.

“You’re sure it was a dinosaur egg?”

“Well, it was the egg of some big prehistoric thing,” Johnny said. “When something happens that is as crazy as finding a fresh dinosaur egg that has been in cold storage, I don’t guarantee any of my deductions.”

Doc Savage sank to his knees and examined the egg fragments. He paid particular attention to the sun-dried traces on the internal sections of the shell, to the edges where the shell had broken.

“It seems to have hatched,” he said.

Johnny gave a start. “Now, wait a minute, Doc! There’s things that are reasonable, and other things that aren’t.”

“Meaning?”

“I have every respect for your ability,” Johnny said, “but if you tell me a dinosaur hatched out of that egg, I’m going to have a hard time believing it.”

“Something hatched out,” Doc said.

“Uh—well—”

“But just what you could call it—whether you would name it a dinosaur or not—” The bronze man did not finish his statement, but began to search in circles in the vicinity.

He pointed out quietly that the sand had been carefully smoothed over, apparently by dragging a saddle, then a saddle-blanket, around the vicinity, in order to wipe out any traces of tracks.

“The horses were led to the spot where the shell fragments lie,” he pointed out. “Then they were led away.”

Johnny said, “We can follow the trail, at least.”

This was obvious. Horses and a man could not travel through the Bad Lands, where the earth was as dry and packed as a country road, without leaving prints.

Doc Savage said, “You can fly the gyro.”

“But—”

“Stay with the ship,” the bronze man directed Johnny. “I have a signal pistol in the plane, one which fires either a smoke or a light signal into the air. Keep a lookout and when you see my signal, take off in the gyro and fly to the spot. Use your own discretion about what to do.”

Johnny nodded. A few minutes later, he watched Doc Savage disappear into the waste of eroded stone and earth. Johnny examined the gyroplane, making sure it was ready for the air, then clambered to the top of a pinnacle which gave the best view in the vicinity, and settled down to wait and watch.

He understood the logic of Doc Savage following Sam Harmony. Doc was skilled at tracking, and moreover he possessed a reserve of strength and agility that far exceeded anything Johnny would have been able to muster.

Some hours passed. During the interval, Johnny gave no inconsiderable thought to the mystery of why Sam Harmony had blasted the mouth of the cavern. And the puzzling fact that they had found the shell of the dinosaur egg. Johnny was inclined to believe that the logical conclusion they should have reached was that Sam Harmony had broken open the egg and found the remains of an embryonic dinosaur inside, which he had taken along as a specimen. But—and this was something that would have puzzled any archaeologist—why had he left the eggshell? The eggshell, as far as being a part of the specimen went, was definitely a part of the specimen. But the man hadn’t taken the shell.

The sun sank, dropping into a rather ominous bank of black clouds which were piling up on the horizon, so that the

crawling along behind the Parks limousine. "There's one of our private detectives now, still trailing Parks."

Doc asked "What about the telephone line into Parks' place?"

"Long Tom tapped that and put a recorder on it," Monk explained.

The Parks home proved to be an impressive mansion of dark stone planted in the middle of a forest of shrubbery. It was, on the whole, something like an ancient castle, except that there was no moat or drawbridge, but instead a wide, graveled drive which swung up to the entrance, stopping before a stone marquee, from beneath which sprang butlers and footmen.

Hickey Older seemed impressed by the place.

"Gee whizz!" he said.

Doc Savage spoke quietly to Ham. "Get on the telephone," he said, "and see if the South American office of the steamship line has the passenger list of the *South Orion* on its last voyage."

Ham nodded. "O. K. You told me to do that earlier, but I didn't have time."

Doc Savage signaled to Monk, and the two of them left the Parks mansion. They moved through brush and down a hill, following the road, until, turning sharply to the right, Monk dug into a pile of leaves and uncovered a concealed box of apparatus.

"The recorder attached to Parks' telephone line," Monk explained. "We can soon tell whether Parks got that threatening phone call."

The apparatus was so constructed that it began recording whenever a call was made over the wire, shut itself off when the call ended. The time of each call was also recorded by a series of clicking noises which, when counted, gave the hour and the minute.

They listened to the threatening call.

The voice sounded very much like Sam Harmony's, as Johnny had described it. The text of the malevolent threat was very much as Calico Parks had said it had been. The voice told about the egg from the ice cave, conveyed the idea that something hideous had hatched out of it, without exactly describing the thing itself.

Monk rubbed his jaw.

"It looks like Parks told the truth about the threat," he said.

HAM met them when they returned.

"I got it," he said.

"The passenger list of the *South Orion*?" Doc asked.

"Yes." The dapper lawyer looked elated. "Both of them were aboard."

"Calico Parks and Sam Harmony were on the *South Orion* on her last trip?"

"Both of 'em," Ham nodded. "That fellow, Nick Hostelli, who got killed in Miami, was on board, too. The whole gang of them seems to have been aboard. There was this butler of Parks'—the one called Leo. There was another man whose first name was Ben. You remember that Parks talked to a guy named Ben, when this thing first developed, and told him to try to find Sam Harmony?"

"I remember," Monk said. "I'll bet the whole crowd was on that steamship. But what in the dickens has that got to do with it?"

Doc Savage said, "We will give Parks the truth serum, first chance we get."

Ham looked grim. "That should help," he said.

They had an excellent dinner that evening—Monk, who was always a suspicious soul, remained in the kitchen during its preparation to make sure nothing was put in the food that shouldn't have been—and there was no opportunity to administer the truth serum to Parks.

Shortly after dinner, Doc Savage drew Monk aside, and issued a few low-voiced directions. Monk nodded, then he went to their car, opened a compartment in which they kept equipment and located several metal boxes.

The boxes were an unobtrusive black hue, slightly smaller than shoe boxes, and were fitted with clamps which could be tightened with wing nuts, then locked.

Monk attached those boxes to the underside of every car on the place.

The opportunity to administer truth serum to Calico Parks came about ten o'clock that night when they were in the library, and Parks was having a liqueur. Doc got the serum into Parks' drink, and the man consumed it at a gulp, apparently noticing nothing wrong.

sideboard over on me. That’s the last I remember.”

Suddenly Hickey Older drew back in a feeble rage and kicked the sideboard.

“That thing must weigh a ton,” he snarled. He whirled on Monk, shook his fists weakly and yelled, “Why don’t you do something? What in the devil is finally going to happen? You haven’t learned *anything* yet and you’ve been working on this for days.”

Monk winced. Monk was very worried about Ham, or he would never have put up a defensive argument.

“Oh, we know quite a lot,” he said. “More than you think we know.”

“Yeah,” sneered Hickey Older. He grimaced and tried to think of a word to express his feelings, and finally he said, “Nuts!”

Monk said, “We know that everybody concerned was on the German steamship *South Orion*, which was chased and sunk by an English cruiser near the outbreak of the war. We know that’s behind the affair.”

Hickey Older’s mouth fell open. “You . . . uh,” he said, and closed his mouth.

Doc said, “Leo, the butler, was working for Sam Harmony in this thing.”

Again Hickey Older’s mouth fell open. “I thought . . . thought he was one of Calico Park’s men,” he muttered.

“We will probably find,” Doc said, “that each of the three gangs who are fighting have spies in each other’s organization.”

“Three gangs!” Hickey Older blurted.

Doc Savage did not elaborate on the point, or explain what reasons had led him to the conviction that there were three gangs involved.

Monk rubbed the side of his homely face gloomily. “You know,” he said, “it was a hell of a coincidence, wasn’t it?”

“What was?” Doc asked.

“That raid,” Monk said. “It came just as we were about to get Parks under the influence of the truth serum, so he would talk.”

“Maybe,” Doc said dryly, “that might have had something to do with the raid.”

LEAVING a puzzled Monk and a worried Hickey Older in the library, Doc Savage went out to quiet the servants. The majority of the Parks’ retinue, he imagined, were honest. He got the servants together—those who had retired for the night had naturally been routed out of bed by the uproar—and studied them for a moment. None of them struck him as obviously being crooks.

He suggested quietly that those who had been on the *South Orion* should step forward. But nothing happened. None of the servants, it seemed, had been on the steamship.

Doc explained that the servants should remain together until the arrival of the police. He gave them a rough summary of what had happened, directed that the story should be told to the police when they arrived.

Then the bronze man went back to the library.

Monk was describing the monster to Hickey Older, and laying it on rather thick. According to Monk, the thing had done everything but sprout fire.

“I tell you it ain’t nothin’ like has been on the earth for many a million years,” Monk insisted. “I shot enough explosive into it to sink a steamship, and all I did was knock it back on the ground. The thing must have galloped away while all them guys was shooting at me.”

“The men who shot at you brought the monster?” Hickey Older asked.

“Sure.”

“And you think it’s the same monster that hatched out of the egg they found in the ice cave?”

“It’s obvious, ain’t it?” Monk asked.

“Well,” said Hickey Older, “it was quite a thing, whatever it was. It probably ate your friend, Ham.”

Monk paled.

“Will you stop sayin’ that!” he yelled.

Hickey Older stated at him. “Say, you like that overdressed shyster lawyer, don’t you?”

“Ah—” Monk scowled. “You call him a shyster again, and I’ll push your teeth in.”

Doc Savage spoke in a low voice, motioned, and the two followed him outside. The bronze man led the way to his car, the one which had been driven out from headquarters when they came to

guard Parks. The machine stood in a side driveway in front of the garages, and it had not been disturbed. The bronze man unlocked it, got in, and gestured for the other two to do likewise. Habeas Corpus, the pet pig, and Chemistry, Ham's pet chimp, had been locked in the car, and the two animals made noises.

Hickey Older said, "Say, we ain't skippin' out, are we?"

Doc said, "We are leaving."

"But will the cops like that?"

"The servants know the story, and they can tell it to the police."

Hickey Older shook his head and settled back. Apparently he didn't approve of the idea, but did not think it worth objecting. He did mutter, "Next thing, we'll probably all be in the bastille. Then a fine chance we'll have of finding Nancy!"

Doc Savage drove the car out of the grounds, and the machine crawled along a road, following the white flare of its headlights. After a moment, the bronze man asked Monk if he would drive; the homely chemist nodded, and the two men changed places. Doc switched on the radio—all of the cars used by himself and his men were equipped with transmitting-and-receiving apparatus.

Picking up the microphone, Doc said, "Johnny."

Almost instantly, the voice of the gaunt archaeologist and geologist responded from the skyscraper headquarters. "I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny said. "I was wondering what had happened to you!"

"Any word from Renny and Long Tom?"

"No," Johnny reported gloomily.

Hickey Older, who was riding in the back seat, made a snorting sound of disgust. "Nothing," he said. "That's all the progress we ever make."

Doc Savage, ignoring him, said, "Keep the radio tuned in, Johnny. We are on our way to try to contact Ham and Calico Parks, who have been carried off."

The bronze man continued, speaking quietly, and told about the raid on the Parks estate.

"There is a chance," he said, "that Ham and Parks were carried off by the same gang who got Renny and Long Tom."

"What about Nancy?" Johnny asked. "Did the same outfit get her?"

Doc Savage hesitated. "Well—maybe," he said. His voice, however, held a strange quality, and no conviction.

"I'll keep tuned in," Johnny said. "Holler if there's anything I can do."

As soon as Doc replaced the microphone, Hickey Older leaned forward and clutched the bronze man's shoulder.

"Listen!" Hickey barked. "I heard you say you might be able to find them guys. How the hell you gonna do it?"

"Monk, do you want to explain it to him?" Doc asked. "I am going to be busy."

Monk watched the dials on the radio apparatus which the bronze man was manipulating, then nodded.

"Listen close, you knot-headed bag of noise," Monk said over his shoulder to Hickey Older, "and I'll try to get it through that skull of yours."

AN hour later, Monk brought the car to a stop—Doc Savage had been directing his course—in a side street near the ocean front on City Island. The smell of the sea was in their nostrils and they could hear, very faintly, the whispering of surf.

Monk turned to look back at Hickey Older. "You got it all clear?"

Hickey Older nodded. "One of the first things you done when you got to Calico Parks' place," he said, "was attach a little radio transmitter to the underside of every car on the Parks estate. The radio gives out a steady signal. You have been using a direction-finder to track down that signal. That right?"

"It's an old gag," Monk said. "We use it regular."

"Where are they at?" demanded Hickey Older.

Doc pointed. "In that direction, apparently."

He was indicating one of two objects, the first being a house, large, rather ancient, like the majority of dwellings on City Island, which—the place was not properly an island, being connected to the mainland by a bridge—was a popular rendezvous for yachtsmen, and the site of numerous shipyards specializing in the construction of small pleasure craft. They

"My plan," Doc explained patiently, "is to be taken prisoner by the third gang and carried to their hide-out."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Trail along. Be ready to help us make the big break, once we find Renny, Long Tom and Ham."

Johnny said, "I come out there and stand by. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"Right."

Doc Savage dropped the microphone on its fork and clicked off transmitter and receiver switches.

Monk had his head thrust into the car. "Doc," he said, "did I hear that right? You think that Sam Harmony didn't seize either Renny or Long Tom or Ham or Calico Parks."

"I think not."

"But Sam Harmony made a raid on the Parks place with his—monster—whatever it is."

"And you drove him off with your machine pistol," Doc pointed out.

Monk snorted.

"Yeah," he agreed. "But while that was going on, the monster got around to the house, somehow, busted in and nabbed Parks and Ham, after knocking Hickey Older cuckoo. How do you explain *that*? There ain't two monsters, is there? That one that got into the library wasn't directed by this third gang, was it?"

Doc didn't answer. He listened for a moment. Then he said, "Hickey Older is coming back. Don't alarm him with our theories. He's already distraught over not being able to find Nancy."

Chapter XIV RAIDERS

HICKEY OLDER loomed up in the darkness, stopped beside the car and volunteered no explanation until Doc asked where he had been, after which he growled, "I been lookin' around."

"You were told to wait here," Doc said.

"I been told a lot of things, and I been taking your orders," Hickey retorted. "Where's it got me?"

Monk said, "Before this is over, you'll probably get half smart and learn that it's a good thing to do exactly what Doc says to do."

"Let it go," Doc Savage said quietly. "Hickey is worried about Nancy, which is reasonable. What did you find, Hickey? Where do you think they are?"

"In the house, or on the boat," Hickey said. "I ain't sure."

"You learned a lot, I see," Monk told him.

Doc Savage gave instructions in a low voice. Monk and Hickey Older were to wait on shore, near the end of the rickety dock—and not to stir from there under any conditions until the bronze man signaled them. The pair nodded understanding.

At the edge of the water, some distance from the wharf, Doc Savage stripped off his clothing down to shorts, which would serve as swimming trunks. Invariably when working upon a case, Doc Savage wore a vest of his own design which contained numerous pockets in which he could carry gadgets without the presence of the things being conspicuous. The bronze man removed a few devices from this, and left it on the shore with his clothing.

He waded in, making scarcely a ripple, and swam silently. He kept below the surface most of the time, until he reached the side of the schooner, near the stern.

One of the devices from the vest was a folding grapple-iron to which was attached silken cord, looped at intervals so that it could be climbed. He unfolded the grapple, made sure the rubber coverings—bits of rubber tubing—were in place over the hooklike tips so as to muffle sound. He made one toss, a cautious one, and hooked the grapple over the railing with practically no sound. On the chance that it might have been heard, he waited for a while. Then he climbed on board the boat.

The deck planking was old, rough, under his bare feet; the calking had worked partially out of the cracks and it was like walking on parallel lines of quarter-inch rope. Doc could hear voices below, the words being indistinguishable, but with an angry tone.

Leo sat on the old anchor winch in the bow. He was humped forward, palms

Evidently one or more men remained on guard outside, because they called down that it was all right, that no one was coming.

Hickey Older was staring at Doc Savage. "Who are these guys?" he demanded.

"That third gang we were talking about," Doc said.

"You mean—"

"Yes," Doc said. "These are the men who carried off Ham and Calico Parks tonight."

Hickey Older asked blankly, "Say, you don't think they got Renny and Long Tom too, do you?"

Doc nodded.

The first man to enter, the one who carried the shotgun, came over and struck at Doc Savage's face with the barrel of the weapon. Doc rolled with the blow, so that it was not much harder than a normal punch from a fist, but he made it seem more damaging by falling to the floor. He sat there, acting dazed.

"Search them," ordered the man with the shotgun.

Hickey Older, Doc Savage and Monk were gone over thoroughly. The man searching Monk made a grunting noise of surprise, and tore open the homely chemist's shirt. "Look," he said. "This guy is wearing a kind of chain-mail armor under his shirt!"

"Get that armor off," ordered their leader.

Monk stared at Doc, said, "Listen, if Johnny—"

Doc Savage glanced at the homely chemist sharply, and the look caused Monk to fall silent.

The boss of their captors scowled. "We got all you guys except that one—Johnny," he said. "Where's he?"

Doc said nothing. Neither did Monk.

Their captor glowered at them, said finally, "I know you guys are tough." He turned to Hickey Older. "But maybe this one is softer." He struck Hickey Older, who fell to the floor.

"Come on," the man said. "Where's this guy Johnny? You've been working with Savage, so you know where he is."

"You," said Hickey Older, "can go to hell!"

The man kicked Hickey Older twice in the side, then got down and put his knee on Hickey Older's stomach. Hickey struck at him. The man got up quickly, resumed his kicking.

"Just a minute," Doc Savage said.

They stared at the bronze man.

Doc continued, "Tell them where Johnny is, Hickey. There is no need of getting beaten to death."

Hickey eyed Doc. "You really want me to tell?"

"Yes," Doc said.

Hickey said, "I can hold out. The guy don't live who can beat anything out of me."

"No, tell him."

Hickey Older pulled in a deep breath.

"Johnny," he said, "is waiting at Doc Savage's headquarters on the top floor of that midtown skyscraper."

The man with the shotgun nodded. He lifted his weapon, said, "All of you better start shooting at once. We'll want to get this over with and scam out of here fast."

A man said, "What about that monster? The thing that hatched out of the egg?"

"Let the police take care of it. They'll find it. The thing is probably on this boat somewhere."

Monk, remembering how they had prowled around over the deck of the boat, and recollecting the proportions of the monstrosity he had seen floating above the trees at the Parks estate, felt that his hair was standing on end.

"I'd like to see that thing," a man said.

The leader shook his head. "The hell with it. The thing might get loose, then we'd be in a jam."

"Yeah, but Sam Harmony may have a man guarding it. We wanta be sure we clean up Harmony and all his men when we finish this thing."

That apparently seemed logical to the leader, because he hesitated. Then he shrugged.

"No," he said. "We go ahead and get these guys. Then we go back to the hide-out and do the same thing for Renny, Long Tom, Ham, Calico Parks and that girl. That way, everybody who knows anything about the mess is dead."

"Three of you go to the hide-out," he ordered. "Get those prisoners and a bar of gold and bring 'em here."

"All the prisoners?"

"Sure. Ham, Renny, Long Tom, Calico Parks, the girl—the whole gang." The man waved his arms. "Get a move on."

Three of the men departed hurriedly.

Monk rolled over until he was close to Doc Savage and said, in a voice which only Doc could hear, "We're doin' all right, ain't we? But what'll happen when they get the other prisoners here? How we gonna tip Johnny off to help us? And can he help us? Heck, there must be a dozen guys in this third gang." The homely chemist closed his eyes a moment. "And to think—I didn't believe there was a third gang!"

The man with the shotgun said, "Speed."

"Yeah, boss," replied one of his men.

"You've got an army rifle there. Let me have it, and you take this shotgun."

"What you gonna do, boss?"

"While they're gone, I'm going to look around for this monster thing."

The man walked out.

Sam Harmony and his men—Doc Savage, Monk and Hickey Older had tied them before they were themselves captured—were now reviving. Harmony was the last one to regain consciousness. He tried several times, finally managed to sit up with his back against a cabin bulkhead. He frowned around at them. He seemed particularly interested in the faces of some of the captors.

"Hey!" he exploded. "Some of you guys were on the *South Orion!*"

One of the men laughed. "You never saw *all* of us who were aboard." The man then doubled over with mirth, as if his remark was a very good joke, in his opinion.

Doc Savage's attention seemed to sharpen on the man and the tiny stirring phenomenon in his flake-gold eyes grew more active. But he said nothing.

When the man in charge of the captors came back into the cabin, he was laughing. He fell into a chair, held his sides and cackled in mirth.

"What's the matter?" one of his helpers asked him uneasily.

"That monster!" The man doubled over and beat his chest, then realizing his laughter was very loud, he tried to muffle it with his fingers, the result being a series of explosive sounds somewhat like those made by a one-lung engine when not firing properly.

"Well, what's funny about it?" demanded his helper.

"It's so . . . damned . . . horrible!" the other said, and went off into laughter again.

SAM HARMONY rolled his eyes and looked at Doc Savage. Evidently the sight of the bronze man did not appeal to him, for he shuddered, and looked back at his captors.

"How about makin' a trade?" he asked.

The man laughed again, got up, came over and kicked Sam Harmony in the face, not very hard. "What have you got to trade?" he asked. "Not that monster, I hope?"

The man then ambled over to Doc Savage and stood scowling down at the bronze man.

"As for you," he said, "you had better have something to trade, what I mean."

Doc Savage kicked suddenly at the man. As he expected, he was promptly kicked in the midriff for his pains.

Doc reacted strangely to the kick. He doubled over, acted as if something had been smashed inside him by the blow. He made sounds, unintelligible sounds which lifted to a screech. The volume of the bronze man's voice became such that it must have carried for some distance, at least a block or two.

Then Doc fell silent.

Monk used great care to keep his face expressionless. Because Monk had recognized the hoax which Doc had perpetrated. Doc's yelling had not been the unintelligible gibberish which it had seemed. It was words—words spoken in the ancient Mayan tongue, a language which the bronze man and his aids understood, a tongue which, because few people in the civilized world understood it other than themselves, they used for personal communication, when they did not wish to be understood.

Doc had yelled at Johnny:

“After the other prisoners are brought here, wait five minutes, then come in and start fighting. Use anaesthetic gas.”

That made Monk feel somewhat better, although it did not eradicate his worry. Johnny was one man, although a competent one. There were a dozen of their foes, all heavily armed. Monk did not consider the prospects particularly bright.

The man with the shotgun was laughing again. He looked at his companions, said finally, “Oh, hell, I’ll let you guys in on the joke.”

He went out. Later he came back dragging a steamer trunk. He opened this, said, “There’s your monster.”

Monk hastily craned his neck—and felt foolish. There was, he saw, two cylinders inside the trunk, which evidently contained compressed hydrogen or some similar lighter-than-air gas.

Also, there was a torn collection of thin rubber, stuff out of which a balloon might have been made. There was a reel, a large fishing reel which had a multiplying spool and contained a considerable length of stout line. There was a short, blunt fishing rod of the type used for catching the very largest big-game fish, a rod that was equipped with a shoulder harness and cup arrangement so that the thing could be manipulated with great force.

Monk groaned.

“That monster was a balloon of a thing!” he muttered.

Doc Savage turned to Sam Harmony.

“Was there a monster?” the bronze man demanded.

Sam Harmony winced. “What do you think?”

“There wasn’t?”

Sam Harmony shook his head. “There was—but it was never alive. There was an embryonic thing, almost completely formed, in that awful egg,” he said. “I thought, for a minute when the egg first burst open, that the thing was alive. It scared me.”

Doc said, “You deliberately built up the idea that there was a monster chick of the dinosaur age?”

“Yes.” Sam Harmony seemed a little proud of his deceit. “I . . . er . . . killed a horse, and later a calf,” he admitted. “That

was to make it seem like there was some kind of awful thing from the egg. I blew up the cave to make the scheme look better, to add mystery to it. The chick from the egg—I threw that back in the cave before I blew it up. I left the shell outside.”

“What about the two murdered men?”

“I had to kill them,” Sam admitted. “I . . . the tramp on the train tried to rob me. I . . . er . . . knifed him in self-defense. Then I thought of making the body look as if a—something horrible—had killed the man. It was the same way with the man at the airport. He tried to shoot me. The fellow must have been crazy, or something. Without warning, he tried to kill me, and I had to knife him, also in self-defense.”

Monk, listening to the recital, got rid of an opinion.

“You’re probably a liar,” the homely chemist said. “You killed both those guys deliberately.”

Sam Harmony shook his head. He was shaking his head when there was noise on the wharf, then louder noise on the deck, and the prisoners began filing down into the cabin, menaced by guns.

RENNY came first. He stared at Doc Savage and made a noise around his gag, and in spite of the gag, it sounded as if he said, “Holy cow!”

Nancy came next. She did not appear greatly harmed, except emotionally. She looked as if she had been about as scared as a girl could get for a number of days.

Long Tom and Ham were more emotionless. Their eyes sharpened when they saw Doc Savage; then when they discovered that the bronze man was obviously a prisoner, they seemed more downcast.

Calico Parks glared at Sam Harmony, tried to get at him, swearing.

“Parks!” Harmony said wildly. “Don’t you know the truth yet! These fellows are the ones who got that gold. They beat us to it. They were on the *South Orion*, too.”

Two men bearing a bar of metal came next. They had rigged a sling out of a pole, a rope and blankets, in order to carry the thing more easily.

The man with the shotgun—he had exchanged the army rifle back for his shotgun—gave an order.

“Line the prisoners up,” he said.

This was done, the captives being aligned against the bulkhead of the cabin.

“Now,” said the man, moving his shotgun briefly, “unwrap that gold bar, and put some of this on it.” He drew a vial of acid from his pocket, handed it to one of the men.

Renny, watching the bottle of acid, felt of his chest and winced painfully. He glanced at Doc.

“Doc, we had a hell of a time for a while,” the big-fisted engineer rumbled. “They was gonna put that acid in our eyes if we didn’t talk. They did put some of it on me, and it burned like hell. But they finally decided we didn’t know anything.”

“Why did they keep you alive?” Doc asked.

“So as to use us for hostages if you happened to get too clever and catch one of their gang.”

Doc nodded. He asked a question.

“Can you find the place where they have the gold hidden?” he inquired.

“Holy cow, sure,” Renny rumbled. “It’s in a house on Sands Street in Brooklyn. I could go right to the place. They didn’t trouble to blindfold us when they brought us away. They kept us in the basement.”

The man with the shotgun swore at Renny. “Knowin’ that won’t do you any good,” he said. “If this proves—wait a minute!” The fellow swore again, explosively. He stared at Doc Savage. “You said *where we have the gold hidden!*” he yelled. “That means you know very well it is gold! You haven’t stolen the stuff!”

Doc Savage said, “I never came out and said I stole it.”

“You gave that idea!”

“There is a slight difference between giving the idea, and actually making the statement,” the bronze man suggested.

The man whirled. “All right! Give it to ‘em! Save the girl until the last!”

Doc spoke suddenly, urgently.

“We’ve made some mistakes in this,” the bronze man said, “but we’re not completely uninformed. For instance, we know who your boss is.”

“My boss?” The man with the shotgun snorted. “I’m the boss!”

Doc shook his head. “Your boss,” he said, “is a very good actor. When he called Renny and Long Tom into that trap, he managed to cover it up, and he did it so brazenly that he had me fooled for a time. It was hard for me to believe that, if he was guilty, he would dare pull such a trick. Then, later, when he manipulated the capture of Ham and Parks in the Parks home, and pretended that he had been knocked out, it was a little too obvious.”

“What you talkin’ about?” demanded the man with the shotgun.

“Your boss,” Doc said. “A short while ago, he made another slip. That was just after he slipped away to the telephone to call you and tell you to get over here and seize us. Your boss said that the gold was buried in a coral cave on the island. No one had mentioned the fact, so it seemed a little strange he should know it.”

Hickey Older came to life.

Hickey held out his bound wrists.

“Untie me, Speedy,” he ordered.

Everyone stared at Hickey.

“I guess the jig is up,” Hickey said dryly. “I thought I would carry this thing all the way through, and nobody would be the wiser.”

Nancy made a bleating sound of anguish and astonishment. “Hickey!” she cried. “You’re not . . . not—”

Doc Savage answered her with a question. “How long have you known Hickey?”

“Suh—several weeks,” said Nancy.

“He probably got acquainted with you because you were Sam Harmony’s office girl, as a part of the job of watching Harmony,” the bronze man said. “Then it seems he got to liking you.”

Hickey Older showed his teeth unpleasantly.

“I didn’t get to liking her too much,” he said. He reached out and jerked a rifle from the hands of one of the men. “Gimme that gun,” he said. He scowled at Monk. “You homely lug, I’m gonna shoot you myself, personal. You been riding me all along.”

Monk gathered himself. The homely chemist’s intentions were obvious. He was going to go down fighting.

over to war relief hospital funds, which they really did.

However, they soon lost their interest in Nancy. She was several things, a gold digger and nitwit being among them.

Monk, hoping to discourage her, took Nancy to a restaurant noted for the birdlike size of its meals.

"That Monk," remarked Ham to Nancy that evening, "is quite a lady-killer."

"Yes," Nancy agreed grimly. "He starves them to death."

She neglected to add that Monk had told her that Ham had received the lion's share of the two millions—stealing it, lawyer fashion, Monk had added, in embellishing his lie.

"We gotta get rid of that girl," Ham complained to Monk a few days later. "Why, she's—she seems to think she's got me sewed up. She's even trying to make me stop smoking."

"Good idea," Monk said.

"I won't," said Ham indignantly, "stop smoking until I die."

"What," inquired Monk, "makes you think you'll stop then?"

THE END

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