

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. DEVIL IN THE GROUND

DONKEY SAM DAVIS was not a handsome man. Indeed, his face frightened the babies on the street in the town of Mile High, Arizona. There was just one street in Mile High, and not many babies, and these babies were not easily frightened.

Donkey Sam Davis was a prospector; probably you could call him a full-fledged desert rat. However, he did not prospect all of the time, but only when he was broke, which was quite considerable of the time at that. He hunted gold, silver, copper, quicksilver, iron, lead, or what have you. Any old thing. Often a square meal would have been a godsend.

Two things about his character had an important bearing on what happened when the black devil went into the ground.

THE first of these things was the fact that Donkey Sam happened to have met Doc Savage one time. Met was not the exact word. They did not get acquainted, and Doc Savage possibly never knew that Donkey Sam existed—Doc was to become very much aware of it later, though—at the time. But Donkey Sam was

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permanently impressed.

On the occasion, Doc was in Mile High on business. The visit was no more than a passing through, and the only thing Doc did to arouse Donkey Sam's interest was a thing which Doc probably never knew he did. No less than seven gentlemen of shady reputation—the whole crop of local bad men, in fact—fled town the moment they heard Doc had arrived. The seven left in frantic haste, not even packing up.

Donkey Sam was impressed. He would have sworn not even the State militia could have run those seven sidewinders out of town. Donkey Sam was strictly against all forms of evil himself. He inquired around and learned that Doc Savage was a rather remarkable individual, a fellow with some unusual capabilities, and that Mile High was not the only place where crooks were afraid of him. Doc Savage, it seemed, made a profession of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth. This did not sound exactly sensible to Donkey Sam, but he checked it in the back of his mind and often thought about it.

He had not seen Doc Savage since, but he had not forgotten.

THE second characteristic of Donkey Sam's which was to affect the course of events was his phobia about whiskey. He was against it. He was somewhat of a Carrie Nation with whiskers. The demon rum—curse it! This was an unusual attitude in a country where the pioneers often hauled as much redeye as food into their towns. At one time there had been eleven saloons and one store in Mile High.

So Donkey Sam was a thorough rip—snorting fanatic on the subject of a wee nip to drink, and this had a great deal to do with the course of events after the black devil went into the ground. Donkey Sam did not become intoxicated and see this devil.

Intoxicated devils usually come out of the earth, not go into it. Also, one could see, hear, feel and experience this devil without being intoxicated. It was a most extraordinary devil.

ONE other thing happened before it all started. Donkey Sam went broke.

Going broke was a periodic misfortune with Donkey Sam, it having befallen him many times. It had happened often enough that he should have been used to it. But he had never become accustomed to the thing. Each time he fell prostrate financially, it was as great a shock as if it had never happened before, and invariably he was heartbroken and verging on the rim of nervous collapse. And always he threw his pack on the donkey, Myrtle, and lit out into the desert for a stretch of prospecting.

It was too bad, but Donkey Sam had no sense with money, and it was worse luck that losing his money always upset him so terribly.

When he lost a bank roll, his procedure was usually the same. He would begin by making a visit to Wickard Cole.

Wickard Cole was certainly no friend of Donkey Sam.

Wickard Cole was incredibly grasping and tight-fisted with money, and a clever man where a penny was concerned. Donkey Sam, now and then, danged well wished he had some of that eye for a dollar.

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So Donkey Sam always went to Wickard Cole and asked for the loan of a grubstake.

He always got the grubstake.

True, he always had to practically sign his life over to Wickard Cole. When you did business with Wickard Cole, you had better have your eyeteeth nailed down.

It was strange that Wickard Cole had not become a very rich man. The man acted as if he did not have much money, and particularly he had been acting that way for the past year. It was as if, about a year ago, Wickard Cole might have lost his life's savings. But he never mentioned anything of the kind to anyone.

So Donkey Sam went broke. He did it by investing in an invention which proved to be only good enough to get the loose cash out of Donkey Sam's sock.

Donkey Sam went to Wickard Cole and asked for the loan of enough beans and flour and lard for six weeks or so in the desert, prospecting.

He got them.

Now it happened that Wickard Cole had another trait. He liked a practical joke. Usually, it was an unkind joke that he liked.

Putting the bottle of whiskey in Donkey Sam's pack in place of a box of cigars was cruel. Donkey Sam's one luxury was his box of cigars which he took on each prospecting trip. The cigars meant a great deal.

You have to be out in the desert, hell from nowhere, in the heat and the glaring sand, the vastness of space and the loneliness—the loneliness worst of all—to appreciate what a little thing like a cigar now and then can mean.

So Wickard Cole swapped a bottle of cheap rotgut whiskey for Donkey Sam's cigars, and laughed and laughed over the joke.

FOR three weeks Donkey Sam prospected and found what prospectors usually find. Sidewinders, Gila monsters, red ants, sagebrush, greasewood, cactus and utter weariness.

On the twenty-second day, about noon, Donkey Sam decided he'd better have a cigar or he couldn't go on. That was how much the cigars meant. They were a symbol. You thought: Tomorrow afternoon at four o'clock I'll have a cigar. And, somehow, it buoyed you up until four o'clock came.

He had not yet found out that he had whiskey instead of cigars.

He saw the black rock about the time he thought of the cigars—or, rather, about the time he decided he would have a cigar.

There was not much of the black rock. Very little at all, in fact, and it caught his attention only because it was so very black, and also because the surrounding formation was obviously a deep upthrust. That is, some prehistoric upheaval had brought a strata of rock from deep within the earth and thrust it to the surface. Donkey Sam had his eyes open. You could never tell what you would find in such territory.

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The rock was very black, and yet it was not overly shiny. He noticed that it seemed to be in kind of a vein, and he picked up a loose fragment. He crumbled it in his hand, or endeavored to do so, without much success.

Harder than coal. Fully as black. Had a sheen something like a crocidolite, but of course it didn't have the tiger's eye coloring of crocidolite. It was a little like the black stuff of cassiterite, so-called tin stone, but then cassiterite with that formation was peculiar to regions around St. Agnes, Cornwall, England. Arizona was a smart piece from Cornwall, England, so no doubt it wasn't cassiterite.

Donkey Sam just automatically concluded that it had no value.

This conclusion was based on no knowledge of the stone on Donkey Sam's part. Everything he had found for years had been worthless, so he just automatically consigned this to the same category. Matter of truth, he had no idea what the black stuff was, and he didn't care. He was too tired, too disgusted with prospecting to care about anything.

He suddenly changed his mind when he found the whiskey in place of the cigars.

IT was an awful shock.

Donkey Sam had walked a few yards to the shade of a large boulder, and here he had unpacked the donkey, Myrtle, and opened what he thought would be his box of cigars. Behold! A bottle of rotgut! He was sick.

He was sick with rage. It was not insanity on Donkey Sam's part, that awful emotion he felt. It was simply the desert and loneliness and disappointment.

He stood there with the bottle in his hand and wanted to scream, cry, curse, rave, fall down, have convulsions, but could do nothing.

Myrtle, the donkey, ambled off.

Myrtle was an animal of fair disposition as jackasses went, but she had certain eccentricities, such as eating the sleeve out of your coat if you didn't watch her, and that had been getting on her owner's nerves.

"Come here," said Donkey Sam. "Come here, Myrtle."

Myrtle kept going.

So Donkey Sam up and let fly at her with the bottle of whiskey, and missed, and the whiskey bottle flew on, hit a rock so that the neck was broken off, and sailed on across the landscape, spilling the rotgut.

Myrtle kept going.

Donkey Sam's rage increased.

Donkey Sam was having himself what the people who live primitive, hard, lonely lives often have. It is a form of hysteria. It is sometimes the only kind of emotional relaxation in which they can indulge. They suddenly jump up, screaming, tearing off their clothes—in case of Eskimos, they rush out bellowing, and roll in the snow. Sometimes they solve the whole thing simply by just fainting. The Eskimos call this going *piblokto*.

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(Explorers often mention this phenomenon. It is probably no more mysterious than you and I getting mad and kicking the furniture.)

Donkey Sam went *piblokto* and grabbed up his prospector's rock hammer and did his best to brain Myrtle by hurling the hammer at her.

As far as he knew he missed Myrtle with the hammer.

Truthfully, he never was sure quite what did happen.

Except that the devil went into the ground.

It was terrific. The earth seemed to jump a foot under Donkey Sam. Ahead of him, beyond Myrtle, a great black monster of a thing sprang up. It had no shape, or rather it had a shape that changed so fast it was impossible to tell just what it was.

The monster of black stood on the earth like by far the most awful thing Donkey Sam Davis had ever seen. It stood there and seemed to shake.

There was noise, too. A fabulous amount of noise, part earthquake and part dynamite, and also as if something containing steam had burst. A hellishly conglomerate sound. Like nothing Donkey Sam had ever heard.

The black devil went into the ground.

Donkey Sam had always been very afraid of the devil—he was convinced there was such a fellow—and probably that was why he immediately thought of this thing as a black devil. It bore no shape of anything with which he was familiar, so devil was probably as good an appellation as any.

It went into the earth as if it was diving, and with a great rumbling roar, and kicking up a cloud of earth and stones as it dug itself into the ground.

Suddenly it was gone and there was only the shaking of the ground, which soon subsided, and the flying dust and rocks, and one scared jackass and an equally scared man, to show what had happened.

Donkey Sam had been knocked down. He picked himself up. Myrtle had also been knocked down, and when she got up she was scared. She ran, and it took Donkey Sam two days to catch her.

But before he began chasing Myrtle, he walked over and peered, with fearful caution, at the hole in the earth. He stood there looking blankly, unbelievably, at the hole in the earth, and growing more and more convinced that there actually was a hellish thing that had jumped up, frightened either by the bottle of whiskey or the hammer, and had dived into the earth with tremendous commotion. It was a hard thing to believe, of course, but Donkey Sam's hair began to stand on end.

“Goodness!” Donkey Sam said.

The day was the seventeenth of the month, which made it a year exactly to the day since Donkey Sam had happened to see Doc Savage in Mile High. Donkey Sam thought of this fact, or coincidence, or whatever it was, and remembered it.

Chapter II. WICKARD COLE VS. THE DEVIL

WICKARD COLE had very blue eyes and a pale face which was large-boned and freckled and homely. It was a face which people were always mistaking for honest because it was something like Abe Lincoln's face in the general impression it gave. As a matter of fact, there was nothing innately honest about it any more than there was anything generous about its owner.

But it was a face that could register disbelief very well.

He stared unbelievably at Donkey Sam.

"You mean to tell me," he said, "that there was a roar?"

"Yes, a great roar," said Donkey Sam.

"And a monster jumped up?"

"High," said Donkey Sam. "As high as a building in the city."

"Then," said Cole, "it dived into the ground?"

"Right into the ground."

"You're crazy," said Wickard Cole.

Donkey Sam shrugged. "Figured you'd think that."

"Absolutely nuts."

"Sounds as if, don't it?" Donkey Sam agreed.

"Or," said Wickard Cole, "you up and drank that pint of whiskey that I put in place of the cigars."

Donkey Sam Davis looked at Wickard Cole as if he was inspecting a toad.

"So you put that whiskey in my pack," said Donkey Sam. "Some day you will rue that, mister. You will sure rue it."

Wickard Cole grinned. There was one thing about Wickard Cole—he was not afraid. Not scary. It was said by the locals that Wickard Cole could walk across hell on a tight rope and not turn a hair.

"Just a joke," Wickard Cole said.

"Sure," agreed Donkey Sam. "Just a joke. Just funning. Like the boy who didn't know the gun was loaded."

Wickard Cole leaned forward. "Why are you telling me about this?"

Donkey Sam shrugged. "Myrtle, my donkey, ran off and lost her pack containing the supplies you had grubstaked me. I need another grubstake, and that's why I'm in here explaining."

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"I see." Wickard Cole leaned back, closed his eyes, and made a cigarette. He fashioned the cigarette with his eyes closed, a little feat of which he was proud, and liked to show off. He lit the cigarette still without opening his eyes. "You know something?" he said.

"What?" asked Donkey Sam.

"I think," said Wickard Cole, "that I'd like to look at where this monster of yours went into the ground."

"Think I'm a liar, eh?"

"Not necessarily."

"You do, don't you?" demanded Donkey Sam furiously.

Wickard Cole laughed. "I would like to know whether or not you have been nibbling loco weed."

"You want me to take you out in the desert to that place?"

"Yes."

"Well, come on, you practical joker," said Donkey Sam bitterly.

THEY packed their donkeys and saddled two saddle horses which Wickard Cole furnished, and went into the desert. They traveled five days and part of the next night, and at dawn they stood at the spot where Donkey Sam had seen the black devil.

"See!" he said. "Thought I was lying, didn't you?"

Wickard Cole said nothing. He was too impressed. He just stared.

There was no black devil around now, of course. But there was the hole which he had made, the way Donkey Sam explained it.

The hole was a considerable thing. It was large enough to take a good part of a freight train, standing the cars on end. It was so much more vast than Donkey Sam's excited explanations had made it seem that Wickard Cole was knocked speechless. It was incredible!

He could see that the hole seemed to have a branch that went off to the west, in a kind of subterranean tunnel.

"Get a rope," said Wickard Cole.

"You goin' down in there?"

"Yeah."

"Seems appropriate. Looks as if she might lead down to the hot place," said old Donkey Sam.

Wickard Cole scowled at him. "You don't like me, do you?"

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“Never pretended I did,” snapped Donkey Sam. “I’ll get the rope.”

Wickard Cole tied two long ropes together and went down into the hole. He went carefully, and there was no expression on his face. He disappeared into the depths. Old Donkey Sam leaned over the edge. He saw that Wickard Cole was being very cautious, moving about with care and examining everything.

One thing surprised him. He saw that Wickard Cole had brought a magnifying glass, with which he was scrutinizing practically everything. The man was thorough. Just the way he went around looking for pennies, Donkey Sam reflected. He half hoped the black devil would come back out of his hole and do for Mr. Wickard Cole. Wickard Cole seemed half afraid of the same thing, judging from the way he moved carefully in the hole.

“Leaping horned toads!” said Donkey Sam.

Because Wickard Cole was going into the hole that led off into the earth. He was going slowly, but going. That took courage. You had to admire the man.

Such courage almost made you fear the man a little. It was somehow abnormal. The average man would have said: “Well, here is the hole. It’s plain that *something* happened. But the thing has no sensible explanation, so what the hell! After all, it’s none of my business.” That is what the average man would have said. But Wickard Cole was investigating the thing to its very nerve ends.

Wickard Cole was gone into the hole for a long time.

There was no expression on his face when he returned.

“What’d you find?” asked Donkey Sam.

“Nothing,” said Wickard Cole. “Nothing at all.”

“You still think I’m nuts?”

“It’s a strange thing, this hole.”

“You still think I was nibbling loco weed?” asked Donkey Sam.

“Never mind,” said Wickard Cole. “Let’s forget the whole thing.”

They returned to the town of Mile High.

IN analyzing the thing later, Donkey Sam came to the conclusion that it was the very casual acceptance which Wickard Cole gave the thing which aroused his, Donkey Sam’s, suspicions. The man was too matter of fact after he came out of the hole. He was too calm.

If Wickard Cole had found nothing in the hole he should have acted foolish, as a man does when he finds nothing at the end of a wild–goose chase. But Wickard Cole was matter of fact. That meant he had found something. Something! What? What was he covering up?

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Unfortunately, Donkey Sam did not become really concerned about this point until they were back at Mile High.

Five days after they were back, in fact. Then he got to thinking about it. The thing got on his mind enough that he fell to watching Wickard Cole. He could see, he thought, something different in Wickard Cole's actions.

It ended up—or rather, did not end—by Donkey Sam slipping off to the local airport one morning and hiring a plane. It was a light plane, and the pilot was not enthusiastic about venturing out over the desert for the sum Donkey Sam was willing to pay. But he finally did it.

They landed near the hole.

Donkey Sam went over and looked at the hole, and he was astonished.

The hole had caved in. Dynamite had done the caving. Dynamite, nor any other kind of gunpowder, had not made the hole in the beginning. But dynamite had closed it. Donkey Sam had been a powder monkey in a mine too long not to recognize the work of dynamite when he saw it.

The closing, or filling, of the hole had been done expertly, and anyone venturing past now would not see anything to arouse curiosity.

Donkey Sam prowled the vicinity with care, using his eyes. He was not an Indian in tracking ability, but a man does not spend many years in the desert, about half of it trailing roaming pack donkeys, without learning to read sign a little better than average.

There was enough sign to fully convince Donkey Sam that Wickard Cole had come back here and blasted that hole shut. Moreover, he had come by plane.

Donkey Sam approached the pilot of the light plane he had come out in.

“You brought Wickard Cole and some dynamite out here,” said Donkey Sam.

The pilot was surprised.

“That was supposed to be a secret. I didn't know you knew it,” he said.

“Secret, huh?”

“That's right.”

“Wickard Cole paid you plenty to keep it quiet, huh?”

The pilot flushed. “That's right.”

“I ain't paying you nothing,” Donkey Sam said. He took a six-shooter out of his clothes and showed it to the young flier. “But you're not going to tell anybody you brought me here,” he added.

The pilot looked at the six-gun. It was the kind of a hogleg Bat Masterson and Calamity Jane probably had packed. It was ferocious. It looked at home in Donkey Sam's hand.

“For the love of little frogs!” said the pilot. “What is this?”

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“A matter of silence,” said Donkey Sam ominously.

“I—sure. Sure it is.”

“I don't know what else it is,” Donkey Sam added thoughtfully. “But you know something? I keep thinking of a fellow I once saw, and wondering if he wouldn't be kind of interested in this thing. His name is Doc Savage.”

Chapter III. THE BROTHER

IT was another of Donkey Sam's failings, one which fortunately he did not often exercise, that he liked to put his nose in other people's business. Or perhaps it would be more true to say that he became curious easily. Very curious at times.

Probably the whiskey—for—the—cigars joke had much to do with it. This still rankled with Donkey Sam, and he had taken a private and personal oath to damned well make Wickard Cole pay for that little gag.

Anyway, he took to shadowing Wickard Cole. For three days Wickard Cole did not eat, sleep, smoke, drink, or spit without Donkey Sam being aware.

When on the next day Wickard Cole got on the stagecoach—they called it a stagecoach in Mile High, but that was just a westernism, for it was an ordinary bus—and left town, Donkey Sam followed in a jellopy he owned. He stayed a mile back of the dust cloud the stage left all the way to Flagstaff.

And from Flagstaff, eventually and deviously, to the State penitentiary.

Donkey Sam of course did not hear exactly what Wickard Cole said, but he observed closely, and later developments gave him a clear picture, almost as clear as if he had overheard every word.

“I want to talk to Devlin Cole,” said Wickard Cole.

The prison official was regretful. “Devlin Cole is unfortunately not what we would call a model prisoner,” he explained. “Only relatives would be permitted to see him.”

“I am Devlin Cole's brother,” said Wickard Cole.

DEVLIN COLE did not look like Abraham Lincoln, whom his brother resembled, if you did not look too close. Devlin Cole looked like what he was, which was a human rat. Or a weasel.

He said to his brother, “If I had a knife I would cut your throat.”

“And if this wire partition wasn't between us,” said Wickard Cole dryly.

“What do you want, you stinker?” asked Devlin Cole.

“You might as well abandon ideas of revenge, you unmitigated cur,” Wickard Cole told his brother.

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They stared at each other in very unbrotherly fashion for a while.

Wickard Cole continued, "Would a hundred thousand dollars get you out of here, Devlin?"

The other man was very still. He became somewhat pale. With utter intensity he said, "Cut it out, Wick. Cut it out. I stole the money you had saved two years ago, and you put me here for ten years. Let's let it drop at that. Don't ride me. Don't come around talking money like that."

"But it would get you out?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. But it would make the next ten years a lot easier to serve. So what?" Suddenly he grabbed the wire and began to tremble.

"Wick, are you serious?"

"

Quite serious," said Wickard Cole calmly.

"You wouldn't give a hundred thousand for a ticket to paradise."

Wickard Cole shrugged. "I might give a nickel, though. A hundred thousand is going to be no more to me than a nickel, Devlin. Believe me, that is the truth."

The convict brother got control of himself with an effort. "I believe you mean it," he muttered. "What's the catch?"

"No catch."

"There has to be."

"I want some help," said Wickard Cole.

"Oh," said his brother. "Oh."

Wickard Cole eyed him thoughtfully. "You interested?"

"Don't be crazy. What's your proposition?"

Wickard Cole nodded. "You have some contacts. I need them."

His brother scowled. "My kind of contacts? You need them?"

"I need," said Wickard Cole, "an organization. I need about twenty-five of the toughest, meanest men running loose. I want men who will stop at nothing. I want men to whom a dollar means everything."

The brother wiped his nose. He grinned without the least bit of humor. "With guys like that some are bound to be ambitious," he said. "There would be a couple who would cut your throat and take over whatever it is you've got."

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“When the throat-cutting starts, I'll hold my own,” said Wickard Cole dryly. “Can you fix me up with the contacts to assemble such an organization in a hell of a hurry?”

The convict eyed his brother. “What goes on?”

“That isn't part of my proposal to you, dear brother.”

“You won't tell me?”

“No.”

“But I get a hundred grand just for helping you?”

“Yes.”

The brother shook his head unbelievably. “You would choke a baby for its bottle. You would rob your own mother—God knows, you did it often enough. But you always kept your word.”

“You'll take me up?” demanded Wickard Cole.

“Sure,” said Devlin Cole. “Here's what you do: Go see San Diamont, the Palace Roadhouse, outskirts of town. Tell him what you want and tell him I sent you. He'll come and check with me to be sure you're O. K. Then he'll fix you up. But it'll take money.”

“I'm prepared to spend every cent I have in the world,” said Wickard Cole. He laughed. “A small investment for the returns it will pay, dear brother.”

“Don't you 'dear brother' me, you double-ended snake,” said his brother. “But I sure hope your stinking scheme pans out, whatever it is.”

“It will.”

“O. K. Go see San Diamont.”

DONKEY SAM DAVIS watched Wickard Cole go see San Diamont, and watched the machinery start operating, and soon it was rather evident what was happening. Donkey Sam studied the men who were assembling. His hair started to stand on end.

“As cultus a hatful of hombres as I ever saw together,” he told himself.

He redoubled his efforts to find out what was afoot. But he couldn't learn too much.

Wickard Cole had a meeting with his unholy confederates in the upper room of the Palace Roadhouse one night, and what was said there Donkey Sam did not find out. He was afraid to venture too close.

However, two of the hired rascals held a conference behind one of the outhouses after the main talkfest had ended. Donkey Sam was able to listen in.

“What do you make of it?” one of the unholy ones asked the other.

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“Sounds fantastic,” the other said.

“What does that word mean—fantastic?” asked the first, who seemed not to have a large vocabulary.

“It means that this is the kind of a thing you wouldn't think could be. You know, like a goofus bird, hair on a fish, or an honest politician.”

“That's what I thought, too,” agreed his companion. “But this guy seems willing to back it up with good round dollars.”

“We should kick.”

“Sure.”

“Might keep our eyes open, though, and if the thing is really good we might knock off this guy with the dollars and take over.”

“Sure. That's what I say.”

Which was about what Donkey Sam had expected of them.

However, the mystery was far from cleared up, and it got no better after he followed Wickard Cole back to Mile High. Wickard Cole began quietly and unostensibly to close out his holdings in and around Mile High. He caught a sucker and sold him the store at just about twice its true value, although he did not do quite as profitably on the rest of his closing—out.

On the third night, Wickard Cole went out alone into the desert. Donkey Sam followed him, but it was a very dark night, and, before long, he lost Cole. He was forced to wait until daylight and he could see the man's tracks. He followed these, but not far, and came upon Wickard Cole.

Through a piece of fortune, Wickard Cole did not see Donkey Sam. In fact, Cole seemed to have lost interest in Sam, to be unaware that he was on earth. And also Cole was preoccupied with something he was doing.

Wickard Cole seemed to be hiding from something. At least skulking something. He was moving behind rocks, cautiously, and the boulders he chose were apparently not satisfactory. He moved to the right, behind the solidness of a ridge of rock. He had a rifle. He seemed to be trying to get a shot at something on the other side of the ridge.

Donkey Sam Davis watched and he was puzzled. He suspected that Wickard Cole had been waiting for daylight, for dawn had broken only a few minutes ago, and now Cole was trying for a shot at his target. The exact nature of the target was not distinguishable, due to the intervening ridge of stone.

Wickard Cole finally got placed to his satisfaction, leveled his rifle and fired.

DONKEY SAM was not sure what he had been expecting, but it certainly was not what happened. . . . The black devil popped up out of the earth with a whoop and roar that rivaled an earthquake.

It was a cataclysmic thing. The first time it had happened—the time Donkey Sam threw the rock at Myrtle and frightened up the devil—he had been too surprised to really appreciate the monstrous aspect of the thing.

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Now, in the unreal light of very early dawn, he appreciated it fully. It scared him rigid. It put ice around his toes. It made him speechless for two hours. It also made the ground give such a heave and a bump that it actually tossed him a few inches into the air.

Donkey Sam Davis got the hell away from there.

There were two reasons for this. First, Sam, himself, was scared. Second, Wickard Cole got up and ran.

Sam stopped at a safe distance. Later, he went back. There was a hole. He examined it. It was enormous, and just like the other one that first time. It seemed to go deep in the earth, then off at an angle, as if it was a hole made by something fleeing into the earth.

Donkey Sam Davis made up his mind to descend into that hole and examine it. But he would need a long rope. He went back to Mile High and got rope. That took time. When he returned he stood on the edge of where the hole had been and swore.

The hole had been blasted shut with dynamite. Donkey Sam looked around. He knew Wickard Cole had done the blasting.

Donkey Sam went back to Mile High and watched Wickard Cole very closely. Wickard Cole began getting telegrams. Sam found out, by quizzing the telegraph operator, who was a friend, that the messages came from everywhere—New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Montreal, Los Angeles, New Orleans. They were innocent-looking messages wishing Wickard Cole a happy birthday.

Sam happened to know Cole's birthday was next December. It was plain what the messages were. They came from Cole's hired thugs. The man had formed an enormous organization and spread it over the country.

His purpose, whatever it was, was obviously not good.

Donkey Sam Davis concluded he had better call in Doc Savage.

THE prospector's decision to get in touch with Doc Savage was something that had been cooking in his mind. He had seen Savage only that once in Mile High, but he had heard things about the Man of Bronze—the newspapers called him that sometimes, it seemed—and, moreover, Donkey Sam had never forgotten how those seven local rascals fled town when Doc Savage arrived.

As far as Donkey Sam knew, Doc Savage had never been near Mile High again. That one visit had been for the purpose of inspecting a mining property.

(Doc Savage has numerous business interests in addition to his strange source of gold from a lost valley of Maya in Central America.)

Donkey Sam had made inquiries from time to time, and as far as he could learn, Doc Savage really did follow the strange profession, of helping people who were in trouble, providing it was the kind of trouble with which the law did not seem to be able to cope. Such a profession had struck Donkey Sam as ridiculous, idealistic, and probably unprofitable, all along. But now it hit him as not ridiculous at all.

He had heard that Doc Savage had an efficient organization for dealing with such things. This situation needed something like that.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

There was something sinister afoot here. Something big and menacing. Sam knew Wickard Cole, had seen him assemble the organization, and he was frightened. Sam also knew what the sheriff—or even the State police—would do if he went to them with this kind of a story. They would laugh their heads off. It was too goofy.

Donkey Sam Davis got on the telephone.

“Get me Clark Savage, Jr., in New York City,” he said. “And it's important.”

Soon, the telephone company informed him: “Doc Savage is out of the city.”

“Where?”

“His whereabouts are unknown.”

“All right,” said Donkey Sam, “I'll talk to any one of his five assistants.”

“Can you give us their names?” the operator asked.

“Ham Brooks, Monk Mayfair, Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts, and Johnny Littlejohn,” said Donkey Sam promptly. “That's their nicknames. Their full names and their addresses, you will have to get out of the phone book. Them New York operators will know.”

He waited patiently.

The telephone company reported, “All of Doc Savage's assistants are out of the city.”

“Where?”

“Their whereabouts, like the whereabouts of Mr. Savage, are unknown.”

Donkey Sam Davis hung up the telephone receiver with the grim expression of a man who has started something he is going to finish.

“I'll figure out a way of finding him,” he muttered.

He happened to notice a calendar as he went out of the telephone office. It was the tenth of October.

Chapter IV. THE REWARD

ON the nineteenth day of October, Doc Savage and his group of five associates returned to their headquarters in New York City. Their return was a very quiet affair which attracted no attention, because attention, for them, meant danger. They had too many worried enemies floating around. Nothing whatever appeared in the newspapers about the unusual matter which had taken them to Central America.

(See “They Died Twice.”)

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were having a fight.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

This was nothing unusual.

Subject of the fight was woman, which was not unusual either. No particular woman. As Ham Brooks, the very dapper lawyer member of Doc's group put it, "Just any woman. Any pretty one. You fall for any and all pretty ones, you lop-eared, hair-coated missing link. If a girl has a pretty face, she's honest as far as you are concerned, you fugitive from a banana tree."

This was addressed to Monk Mayfair, the eminent chemist.

"Cut it out, you overdressed shyster lawyer," Monk complained in the small-boy voice which was peculiar—also startling—from a man of his baboonlike construction. "You been harping on that just about long enough," he added. "Lay off. Or I'll stuff you up a chimney somewhere."

At this point, William Harper "Johnny" Littlejohn entered their headquarters, which was located on the eighty-sixth floor of the building that was central Manhattan's best bomb target. Johnny was very tall and very thin. He was two men high and a quarter of a man wide, Monk often claimed. His physical length, however, was nothing to the length of the words he liked to use.

"A metempirically acromatic eventuation," Johnny remarked.

He carried a newspaper.

"That refer to the paper you're carrying?" Monk asked.

Johnny nodded.

Monk asked, "Just what did you say about the newspaper? And if you use words like that again I'll push you under the next nice heavy truck I see."

Johnny indicated the newspaper.

"Blazes!" Monk said, staring.

The advertisement, filling half a page, had two headlines that stood out.

I WILL PAY A HALF-MILLION-DOLLAR REWARD TO ANYONE WHO FINDS DOC SAVAGE FOR ME.

I WILL PAY ANOTHER HALF-MILLION-DOLLAR REWARD TO DOC SAVAGE OR ANY CHARITY HE NAMES, IF DOC SAVAGE WILL DESTROY THE BLACK ROCK.

DONKEY SAM DAVIS.

They gathered around to study the advertisement. There was some smaller type, but it simply explained how the ad was to be answered—by writing to a box number, care of the newspaper.

Long Tom Roberts, a deceptively thin and emaciated-looking fellow who was the electrical expert of the group, joined them. He inspected the paper.

"Hey," Long Tom said. "That advertisement has been running three or four days. Remember I mentioned hearing a broadcast about it when we were still in the Valley of the Vanished?"

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

(The Valley of the Vanished, source of Doc Savage's unusual hoard of gold, was the scene of their last adventure.)

“

So you did,” Monk admitted. “I figured it was some nut.”

“What do you figure now?” Long Tom asked.

“This the only paper it's running in?”

“It is appearing in *all* the newspapers.”

“If he's a nut, he's a thorough nut,” Monk said thoughtfully. “Has Doc seen this?”

“We better check and see.”

HEADQUARTERS consisted of three rooms, one of which, the reception room, was quite small. The library was larger, and contained a remarkable collection of scientific books. The remainder of the eighty-sixth floor, more than two thirds of it, was given over to the experimental and manufacturing laboratory.

Doc Savage was standing at a retort table in the lab. The five men in his group had been associated with him a long time, yet they were still a little surprised whenever they had been away from him and came upon him unexpectedly. He was such a physical giant.

The startling thing about him was that, when you were not standing close to him he did not seem overly large. The symmetrical proportioning of his build made his size deceptive. At a distance only his other unusual characteristics—the deeply bronzed skin, the straight bronze hair just a shade darker, the strange eyes that were like pools of flake gold always stirred by tiny winds—made him striking.

Doc held a newspaper.

He looked up, then indicated the advertisement. “It seems worth investigating,” he said.

Monk suggested, “Might be the work of some nut. Or a gag of some kind.”

“We had best check on it,” Doc said. He folded the newspaper slowly, thoughtfully. “Contact the newspapers which carry the advertisement. Divide the job among you. Find out what you can about it.”

Monk and the others went back to the reception room where the telephones were located. They began to work with dispatch and efficiency.

Monk immediately got someone at a newspaper whom he began calling darling and angel.

“Hear that?” Ham said disgustedly. “Monk with women is just like a goat in a pasture. Can't tell the difference between grass and weeds.”

Long Tom laughed. “He doesn't try to.”

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

Monk snorted. "You're jealous."

"We wish," put in Johnny Littlejohn, "that you would learn discretion."

Monk stared at Johnny. "You and your big words keep out of this ribbing."

"We're not ribbing you," Johnny said. "We're getting damned tired of you falling for every pretty face that comes along, and, about half the time, getting us in dutch."

Monk's ears got red. He hung up the telephone and went in to report to Doc Savage.

"What did you find out," Doc asked.

"Young woman inserted the advertisements. Dark hair, brown eyes, pretty." Monk's neck got red. "Advertisements have been getting answers like a snowstorm."

Ham laughed and said, "Pretty girl, eh?"

"Can I help that?" Monk yelled indignantly.

Doc Savage said, quietly enough, "You fellows had better get hold of this young woman who inserted the advertisements and find out what it is all about."

They began collecting coats and hats. Monk Mayfair, the chemist, indignantly clucked to his pet pig, Habeas Corpus, and stalked out, ignoring everyone else. The pig was as ridiculous a specimen of pighood as Monk was of manhood—the pig had very long, rabbitlike legs and ears built on wing-sized proportions.

LONG TOM ROBERTS got Johnny Littlejohn and Ham Brooks to one side and lowered his voice. "You think Monk suspects there is a concentrated plot to razz him about girls?" he asked.

"He'll never guess it," Ham said.

"I hope he doesn't."

"Well, it seems to be working. Notice how mad he's getting?"

The door opened, and "Renny" Renwick entered. Renny was Colonel John Renwick, eminent engineer, possessor of the saddest-looking face extant, and a pair of fists which he could not possibly insert into quart pails. He was the fifth member of the group of Savage associates.

He examined Ham, Johnny and Long Tom.

"Holy cow!" he said. "Who you fellows framing up on?"

"Monk," Ham explained. "We're going to break him of the girl habit."

Renny laughed. He had a rumbling voice that was like Ferdinand the bull would sound if Ferdinand was in a deep hole. "I suppose you're going to push Pikes Peak around and maybe dry up an ocean or two."

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

“No, we're going to work on the theory that water dripping on a rock will eventually wear the rock away,” Ham explained.

Long Tom said, “Monk has got to be broken of chasing anything that goes past in skirts. He's too easily trapped.”

“Don't I know it,” Ham agreed violently. “Twice within the last few months he's almost gotten my neck broken by snorting around after the wrong girl.”

“You think ribbing him will work?”

“Sure it will,” Renny said.

“Monk can take ribbing from me,” Ham explained. “But from nobody else.”

They left the reception room in a group. The elevator was a private one which operated at high speed and would deposit them either in the lobby or in the private garage which Doc Savage maintained in the skyscraper basement. They got out in the lobby.

“Monk must have come down ahead of us,” Ham remarked. “But he should be waiting around here.”

“There he is,” Renny rumbled, pointing.

Monk was just getting in a cab. He ignored them. Renny laughed and said, “It's getting his goat all right. He—”

Another man, a complete stranger, walked up to them. “Mr. Renny Renwick?” he asked. He had a large handbag.

“Yes,” Renny said. “I'm Renwick.”

“Here.” The man handed him the bag. “Monk Mayfair said to give you this. He paid me for delivering it.”

The man turned quickly and walked away.

Renny held the bag and stared at it. He looked at Monk in the cab, then moved his eyes back to the bag. “Some kind of a gag, I bet,” he muttered.

Renny raised his voice and called, “Hey, Monk—what's the idea of the bag?”

Monk gaped at him. Suddenly Monk jumped out of the cab. “I didn't give you that thing!” he shouted.

Renny then did what he later considered to be one of the quickest and most sensible things he had ever done in his life. He ran with the bag into the street. There was a manhole cover off a manhole, and around this one of the little red warning fences made of pipe which they always put around uncovered manholes. There was no one in the manhole when Renny looked. He dropped the bag into the manhole.

He turned and ran.

“Stop traffic!” he yelled at the others.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

Then the bag exploded.

IT was a ripping, violent blast. The iron rim of the manhole jumped straight up many feet. The pavement crumpled and lifted and broke into many flying pieces.

A few windows broke in the high stories of the skyscrapers on both sides of the street. The breaking windows indicated the grisly contents of the bag. Shrapnel. Ball bearings and iron nuts, it proved later.

The explosion burst a steam main and a water main. And, abruptly, the street was a spouting, roaring torrent of steam and water.

Renny waved, yelled, "Come on! I think the guy who gave us the bag went this way!"

They ran. They took different sides of the street. Monk joined them.

"What made you think I gave you that bag?" Monk asked.

Long Tom Roberts told him, "Guy handed it to Renny. Said you paid him to deliver it."

"Oh," Monk said. "Slick trick. Guess he didn't see me come out just ahead of you. Thought I wasn't around. Just handed you the bag, and used the name of the one of us who wasn't along. That was slick."

Long Tom growled, "If Renny hadn't dumped the bag it would have been too bad for us."

Steam and water roared behind them. The crowd on the sidewalks ran, as one person, from the blast scene. They got out into the streets when the sidewalks became congested.

Renny and the others knew the neighborhood thoroughly. They spread instantly to cover the likely routes of escape—the subway, bus, cab stands, the side streets.

But the man who had handed them the bag got away in spite of that.

"Too much confusion," Ham said grimly.

Johnny Littlejohn, using small words—a sign he was very disturbed—said, "It looks like somebody tried to use mass methods on us."

Except for his small words, he did not seem excited—which did not mean that he wasn't. Danger was Johnny's specialty. It was the thing that kept him from being a very erudite professor of archaeology and geology, probably, in some dignified university.

Ham Brooks, the lawyer, posed a very apt question with two words.

"Who? Why?" he asked.

Monk said, "Let's get back and see what the pieces of that bomb will tell us."

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

DOC SAVAGE had been trained, in a manner of speaking, for a life of trouble. He had been placed in the hands of scientists in childhood and had been trained intensively for the career he was following; the strange profession of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth.

His training had given Doc Savage a remarkable command of facial expression. He sat in his headquarters, two hours after the explosion in the street, and listened with no more apparent excitement than he would have displayed at a discussion of the best time of the year to plant fruit trees.

“You found a good part of the handbag, Renny?” he asked.

Renny nodded. “That's right.”

“And what else?”

“Pieces of newspaper. The newspaper was part of the bomb packing, or something. It was packed tight, so it wasn't all destroyed. It was the *Weekly Miner*, a paper published in Mile High, Arizona.” Renny turned to Ham Brooks. “Ham had Mile High on the telephone. What did you find out, Ham?”

Ham said, “There are two general stores in Mile High—there was three until about two weeks ago, when one went out of business. The remaining two stores are the Emporium and the Miles General Store. The Emporium sold that handbag. They sold it to a man known locally as Donkey Sam Davis.”

“Did you try to locate Donkey Sam Davis?” Doc asked.

“Yes. He disappeared from Mile High on the tenth of October. Nine days ago. No sign of him since.”

Long Tom Roberts emitted a startled grunt. “Donkey Sam Davis!” he exclaimed. “That's the fellow who signed those advertisements in the newspapers!”

Doc Savage leaned back in his chair. For a moment there was a tiny, exotic trilling sound audible in the room. It was a very small sound, a thing which Doc Savage did unconsciously in moments of mental excitement.

“It seems we had better investigate those advertisements in earnest,” the bronze man said.

Chapter V. PARA

THE clerk at the advertising counter of the *Morning Tribune* got his orders from the advertising manager. “You do exactly what Savage asks and keep your mouth shut about it,” said the advertising manager. “Otherwise, neither one of us have got any more job than a rabbit. Savage happens to own a fat slice of this paper. And don't you ever tell anybody that, either!”

So the clerk went back to his counter and bowed rapidly to Doc Savage.

“Yes, indeed,” he said. “I will tip you off the moment the girl appears.”

“You are sure,” Doc asked quietly, “that you will recognize the girl who inserted those advertisements signed Donkey Sam Davis?”

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

“Yes, indeed,” the clerk insisted. “She was quite attractive.”

Doc Savage handed him an envelope. It was heavy. The contents felt like bundled letters. The envelope, the clerk noticed, was one bearing the letterhead of the *Morning Tribune*.

“

Give her this,” Doc said, “along with the other answers to the advertisements.”

“Yes, indeed, I will,” the clerk said.

“Thank you,” Doc Savage said.

Doc went outside. He walked to the corner, entered a subway station, walked the length of a block underground, and came out the other entrance of the subway station. He was now sure he was not being followed.

He climbed into the back of a laundry truck—at least the vehicle was marked as a laundry truck.

Long Tom Roberts, the deceptively feeble-looking electrical expert, was sitting inside the truck. He looked up, then went back to adjusting a sensitive radio direction-finder. Doc closed the doors of the truck.

The driver of the machine was a young man who was a legitimate laundry-truck driver. He worked for the company which owned this truck, and normally made pick-ups and deliveries in this truck. He had been hired for the occasion.

Doc Savage spoke to Long Tom. “Pick up the little transmitter all right?” he asked.

Long Tom nodded. “It's working fine. You left it with the clerk in the newspaper to give to whoever gets the answers to the advertisements?”

“Yes,” Doc said. “It is disguised as a bundle of letters.”

At fifteen minutes past five o'clock that afternoon, Long Tom dropped the crossword puzzle he was working. “Doc!” he exclaimed. “The little transmitter is moving!”

“Follow it!” Doc directed.

He threw open the rear doors of the laundry truck.

“Where you going?” Long Tom demanded. “Aren't you riding with me?”

“Might be a good idea to talk with the clerk at the newspaper,” Doc explained. “I will keep in touch with you by radio. Keep our regular transmission transceiver turned on.”

The bronze man swung out of the truck. He took his subway-station route back to the newspaper, and killed a little time, before entering the office.

“She was here,” the clerk said breathlessly. “I gave her your package with the other letters. She just left!”

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

“Same girl?”

“The identical young woman who inserted the advertisements,” said the clerk.

“Anything out of the way happen?”

“Well, no. Except that she didn't have the slip she is supposed to have when she gets the answers to the advertisements. I let her have them anyway, because I remembered her positively. She came up to me and asked if I had anything on her advertisement yet. I told her we had a lot of stuff, and she said she would take it with her. I explained about the receipt, noticing that she seemed to have forgotten all about such a receipt. She said she had indeed forgotten. So after that I gave her the replies, your package among them, and she departed.”

“But she didn't seem to know she needed a receipt?”

“Yes. But she was the same girl. I couldn't be mistaken.”

“Thank you,” Doc Savage said.

He left the newspaper office and walked two blocks, turning into a side street. He got into a car. Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were seated in the car, and they were quarreling.

“You must conquer yourself,” Ham was telling Monk patiently. “I conquered myself a long time ago.”

“You were an easier man to lick than I am,” Monk said indignantly. “And if you don't lay off riding me about women I am going to knock you loose from your shadow.”

Doc Savage said, “Postpone that, will you, and get in touch with Long Tom by radio.”

IT was an apartment house on the upper west side. Not an expensive place, but a nice one with a good reputation. The place was yellow brick and there was a marquee awning and a placid old doorman.

“Girl lives on the sixth floor, apartment 6C,” Long Tom told Doc Savage.

“Any details?”

“Name is Para Summers. Been living here a week. Furnished apartment for which she pays sixty dollars a month. No telephone calls at all.”

“Pretty girl and no telephone calls,” Monk remarked. “Don't sound right.”

Ham eyed Monk and remarked, “They say that man developed from a monkey, but a pretty girl can sure reverse the process with some men I know.”

Renny laughed. “Don't have to be too pretty, at that.”

“Yah, you guys!” Monk grated. “Keep riding me and we're going to have a wreck.”

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

Doc Savage entered the building and rode the elevator to the sixth floor. As the elevator passed the third floor he chanced to hear a groaning noise and that gave him an idea. He went back to the third floor where a dark-skinned old fellow was operating a big apartment-house vacuum cleaner. "You use the vacuum on the furnished apartments, do you not?" Doc asked.

"Some—a da time," the vacuum man admitted.

A bank note changed hands. And, shortly, Doc Savage was on the sixth floor making a racket with the vacuum cleaner. He let the thing moan and buzz for a while. Then he knocked on 6C.

"Yes?" said a feminine voice.

"Vacuum man, miss," Doc said.

She opened the door. She was what they had said, quite attractive. Even a little breath taking. Her beauty was distinctive enough so that one would easily remember her and not confuse her readily with another. She was not gaudy.

"You will have to come back later," she said. "I am busy now."

"Have—a to vacuum da room," Doc said, acting the part of a knot-headed foreigner who did not understand English well.

He stalked into the apartment, dragging his vacuum hose and tank. The girl gave an impatient exclamation and stepped back. "Oh, darn!" she said. She went over to a table and began to gather up letters. The letters in answer to the advertisements offering a half million dollars for Doc Savage's whereabouts, and another half million if he would destroy the black rock.

Pretending to hunt an electrical outlet into which the vacuum could be plugged, Doc made a circuit of the small apartment. No one else was there.

Doc Savage walked over to the table, began picking up the letters and examined them.

The girl gasped, "How dare you—" She stopped. Her lips parted. Her eyes got large. Her breath seemed to stick in her throat.

"Oh!" she said. "You!"

She seemed to have recognized him.

She moved back a pace. Her hands gripped a chair. "What have I gotten into?" she added stiffly.

DOC SAVAGE divided his attention between the girl and the letters. He did not like to deal with hysterical, frightened women, and this one was looking for the moment as if she might become that way. He did not like to deal with women at all, in fact. He wasn't exactly afraid of them. He just couldn't make them out. He understood this was a common trouble with men, although he sometimes suspected he had more than his share of denseness on the point.

So he examined the letters to give her time to recover her balance. This she soon did.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

“You are really Doc Savage?” she said slowly.

“Are you surprised?” he countered.

She bit her lower lip, which was quite shapely. “Considering the nature of the advertisements, I guess not,” she admitted. “But to tell the truth, I—you walking in that way—yes, I am surprised.”

“So were we,” Doc Savage said frankly. “Or should we be surprised by combined reward offers of a million dollars?”

She eyed him.

“I was surprised,” she said.

“

You were?”

“Yes.”

“Your name is Para Summers?”

She nodded. “Yes. I am a private detective. My full first name—Paramount—is silly, it always seemed to me. So I use Para.”

Doc Savage's face was expressionless. “Private detective, eh?”

She nodded again. “Not very well known, I'm afraid. It does not offer the career for a woman I thought it would. And maybe I lack experience.”

“Would you,” the bronze man asked dryly, “be getting ready to fall back on professional ethics and the anonymity to which a client is entitled?”

Para Summers seemed startled. “To tell the truth I was.” She seemed confused. She examined him uneasily. “It would not do me much good, would it?”

“Very little, I am afraid. You see, the matter has gone too far for such niceties.”

Her eyes flew wide. “What do you mean, too far?”

“An attempt has been made to kill my associates.”

It had more effect on her than he had expected. She turned pale, so white it was frightening. And rigid from head to foot. Wordless. Horror all through her.

But when she spoke her voice was in command.

“A man hired me,” she said. “I was to put those advertisements in the newspapers. I was afraid then that the thing was strange. But I didn't know it would be—well, a murder attempt. That puts a different light on it.”

“It wouldn't,” Doc suggested, “move you to tell who had those ads inserted?”

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

“Judson Potter,” she said. “Jud Potter. That is all I know about him except that he insisted he had the money to pay the rewards.”

“You know his address?”

“No.”

“What were you to do about the reward replies?”

“I was to get them. He was to call.”

“But you don't know where he is?”

“No.”

“Nor who he is?”

“No.”

“Is his real name Donkey Sam Davis?”

She looked puzzled. “I don't know. He told me to sign that name to the advertisements.”

“Did he ever live in Mile High, Arizona?” Doc asked.

SHE did not reply for a while, although she shook her head slowly. After a while she said, “I do not know a thing about him. As a private detective, I am ashamed to say that. But, you see, he paid me a very handsome fee, and I guess greed made me not ask too many questions.”

Doc Savage seemed uninterested, silent, as if his mind was not even concerned with anything in the room, or with the girl. It was a deceptive manner which he had, and it meant nothing. He had found that he got the best grasp of things while keeping a detached attitude.

“The advertisements must have been expensive,” he said. “They cost all of two hundred dollars apiece, I imagine.”

“Two hundred and twenty-five dollars,” the girl said.

Doc said, “The fact that all the papers charge the same price makes it very expensive when you advertise in so many papers.”

“Yes,” the girl said. “That is true. Quite expensive.”

Doc Savage seemed lost in thought. “This is a serious matter. Since there was a murder attempt, your connection with it will cause you trouble with the police, I am afraid. Unless you care to avoid it by showing that you are willing to co-operate with us.”

She was scared, he saw. “You think that if I co-operate with you, the police wouldn't bother me?” she asked.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

He said, "It would help. It would save you trouble."

"I will do all I can," she said.

The bronze man nodded. "Wait here a few moments," he said. "My associates are posted around the building. I will go get them. Then we will try to work out some course of action."

DOC SAVAGE went downstairs to where Monk and the others waited in the laundry truck and the parked cars. "Monk," Doc said, "go to the telephone and check with the State department which licenses private detectives. Find out if there is a licensed private detective named Para Summers."

"Woman?" Monk asked hopefully.

"Yes."

"Pretty?" Monk inquired, with more hope.

"Fairly," Doc admitted. "Get going."

Ham said disgustedly, "We aren't accomplishing a thing by riding Monk about women."

"I believe we are," Renny disagreed. "We just keep at him and we'll break him of it."

Doc Savage got the others together.

"The girl," explained the bronze man, "says her name is Para Summers. She says she is a private detective. A man she knows only as Judson Potter hired her to insert the advertisements. She says that is all she knows about it."

Renny grunted. "How much of it is the truth?"

Doc Savage made a slight gesture.

"Very little," he said. "She said she paid two hundred and twenty-five dollars apiece for the advertisements. That proves simply that she has no idea what newspaper advertisements like that cost. The rate of the *Morning Tribune* alone is eleven hundred and fifty dollars for such an advertisement. She also agreed that all newspapers charged the same price for their advertisements. That is not true. They charge in proportion to their circulation."

"Then," said Renny, "she may be lying about Judson Potter, too."

"It is conceivable," Doc said dryly.

Later, Monk Mayfair returned. "Was lucky enough to get the information right away," he reported. "There is no licensed private detective named Para Summers. They never heard of the name."

"That makes her a hundred-percent liar," Renny announced.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

Doc Savage nodded. "Perhaps if we associated with her for a while we might get better results," he said grimly.

Monk grinned.

"I always like to associate with the pretty ones," he announced.

Chapter VI. BLACK DEVIL JUMPING

THE girl did not open the door for them. She called to them. Her voice was strange.

"Don't come in," she said. "You may get shot!"

They stood there. Doc was astonished. The others, who had not met the girl, were not as surprised.

The shot came then. The bullet made a noise on its arrival—*spee-whock!* as it came and hit the wall near the door.

Doc called, "Where they coming from?"

"Through the window," the girl said.

Doc grasped the knob, threw the door open. He got down on all fours. The roof across the street was about level with the window of this floor—they were five-story walk-ups across the street. So he was safe enough, crawling into the room.

"Monk, Ham, the rest of you," he said. "Wait a minute. But do not come into the room."

The bronze man went to the window, not directly to it, but to one side, where he could use a small periscope gadget with success. He peered through the magnifying lens of the device.

"Small man, white coveralls," he said. "He will probably get off the coveralls before he hits the street. There seems to be a gray suit inside the coveralls. Brown shoes, shiny and new. No hat. But he has been wearing a hat within the last few minutes, because the mark of it shows on his forehead. Dark face. Dark hair, gray at the temples. Blue necktie with red dots. Light-blue shirt. Can you pick him up from that?"

Monk asked, "You want him grabbed?"

"I want him followed," Doc said.

"O. K.," Monk agreed. "There should be enough of us to do the job."

He went away rapidly, trailed by Long Tom, Johnny, Ham and Renny. They made a noisy, determined group, pounding down the hall, then down the stairs.

The girl, Para Summers, was lying flat on the floor, on her arms, the arms doubled up so that palms were pressed to her cheeks.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

"Hit you?" Doc asked.

"No," she said. "No. But I'm awfully scared."

"So are the rest of us," Doc Savage said dryly.

Another bullet blasted into the room. This one cut splinters off the edge of the window sill and made a great racket smacking into the ceiling, and bringing down a long string of plaster. Evidently the marksman had imagined someone might be looking over the sill and had taken a chance. He was using a gun with a fairly efficient silencer. There had been some gun sound, but not much. No silencer had ever been made, of course, which was completely silent.

Doc said, "You heard me describe that fellow?"

"Yes."

"Know him?"

"No."

"He didn't sound like this Jud Potter?"

"No," she said. "No, not at all."

Doc Savage got out a pencil. He made a handkerchief into a shape on the end of the pencil. He let this appear, very briefly, at the edge of the window.

There was another bullet from the silenced gun, and the handkerchief went sailing across the room.

Doc Savage made a whistling mouth but no sound. He was genuinely astonished by the marksmanship.

He used his periscope again. The rifleman was crawling away across the rooftop. He was taking flight.

Doc asked, "Where were you standing when the first shot came?"

"In front of the window," the girl told him in a tremulous voice. "Right in front of it."

"But he missed you?"

"Yes," she said. "High over my head. Through the top of the window."

Doc Savage thought of the remarkable bit of marksmanship with which the man had hit the handkerchief. The man had a telescopic sight on the rifle; he had known it was a handkerchief.

"He was not trying to kill you," Doc told the girl. "But I think you had better come with us for protection."

"Thank you," she said eagerly. "Thank you very much."

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

DOC SAVAGE and his aides had, from the beginning of their association, made use of the most advanced discoveries in the fields of radio and television. Both Long Tom, the electrical expert, and Doc had experimented extensively with radio, both having designed equipment particularly fitting their unusual needs. The compact ultra-short-wave transceivers which they used were advanced far beyond the regular commercial models.

Para Summers watched with great interest as Doc produced a radio set that was not much larger than an overgrown cigar case.

"Long Tom," Doc said into the microphone.

Long Tom replied instantly, saying, "We got on his trail. He is carrying his rifle in a golf bag. Had a small car parked around the corner. He is heading north toward the George Washington Bridge."

"Any difficulty following him?"

"None at all," Long Tom said. "The laundry truck is ahead of him now. Monk and Ham are behind him. The others are paralleling us on a side street. Johnny has gone ahead and will cross George Washington Bridge, in case the fellow goes over into Jersey."

"All right," Doc Savage said. "Keep your eyes open."

The bronze man took the girl down to his own car, which had been left parked in the same block. The machine was a rather old-looking vehicle, its exterior giving no hint of the huge motor under the hood, or the armor plating in the body, or the innumerable gadgets built into it. He drove rapidly, but without ostentation.

Para Summers was silent for some time. She seemed to recover from her fright, but not from worry. She asked at last, "Why would that man try to kill me?"

"Apparently he did not try to kill you," Doc said.

"But he shot at me."

"The man was an expert marksman," Doc explained patiently. "Had he been trying to kill you he would not have missed."

"Then why did he fire those shots?"

Doc answered that by switching on the radio and calling, "Long Tom?"

"Yes?" said Long Tom's voice.

"There is a strong possibility," Doc said, "that the man fired those shots to draw our attention to him. If so, he knows he is being followed. That means he wants us to follow him."

"That makes it sound like a trap," Long Tom said grimly. "Right. We'll keep our eyes open."

"The rest of you come in," Doc Savage said into the radio, "and O. K. the warning."

The transceivers in the other cars were tuned to the same wave length. Monk, Johnny and the others came in rapidly with acknowledgments. "Be very careful," Doc warned again.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

DOC SAVAGE joined the others finally on a marsh road. The road, paved with blacktop, was cracked and rough. There had been no houses for some time. The smell of marsh mud and grass and salt water was strong. The grass was high, as high as a tall man, on either side of the road, and there was water around its roots.

Johnny was standing alone beside his car. He came to meet them. "The others have gone up ahead," he said. He never used his big words on Doc Savage.

Johnny got back in his car and drove. Doc followed. They pulled out on a side road that was solid enough and which led to a spot on the bank of a wide inlet where an old dock leaned crazily.

It was getting dark, but still was not gloomy enough that they had to use headlights.

Monk and the others were there with their parked cars.

Ham said, "About half a mile down the road, a shack on a point. Big shack. Evidently was once a fishing camp or a small plant of some kind. Man we followed went there."

"Drove into the place boldly?" Doc asked.

"That's right."

Doc Savage was silent for a while. He made his small trilling sound and it had a far-away, absent quality. Finally he spoke.

"Spread out," he said. "Take the whole countryside, but do not go near that shack. And keep a sharp watch."

"Holy cow!" said Renny Renwick. He eyed Doc. "You going to tackle the shack alone?"

"In a manner of speaking," Doc admitted.

"What about me?" asked Para Summers uneasily. "I am in your way, am I not?"

"Monk will watch out for you," Doc said.

Ham said, "I had better watch Monk then."

"Good idea," Doc agreed immediately and dryly.

Monk jumped, looked as if he had been kicked. He was startled, obviously, that Doc Savage was taking a part in the ribbing about his falling for women. Doc ordinarily never participated in such things. It seemed to bother Monk.

Doc Savage told Renny, "You might come along with me. I may need some help."

Renny nodded. Doc went to his car and got such equipment as he thought he might need. They moved into the high marsh grass. The going was extremely soft; they had to keep close to the road. They went carefully. The others were careful, too; Doc and Renny heard only faint sounds of their cars departing.

Renny soon pointed. "There it is," he said.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

THE shack was hardly a shack, being as large as a barn, and rambling. But it was a shack in appearance. About half of it was built on stilts, or piling, over the mud flat. It was not a beauty spot, certainly.

Renny said, "Guy drove his car right into the place. Other men were there. They opened the door up for him."

Doc Savage nodded. "We will keep away from the place," he said.

"Soon be dark," Renny warned.

"That," Doc said, "is what we will wait for."

The bronze man moved through the marsh grass. The water was cold, very cold. The mud seemed bottomless. But by getting down in the water and swim-crawling, they managed perfectly feasible, if uncomfortable, progress.

They reached the edge of the marsh grass a hundred and fifty yards from the shack. There was open water before them.

"They could have gotten away from there," Renny whispered. His whisper was big, like his voice, in spite of all he could do to quiet it.

Doc Savage had been examining the tall marsh grass. The tide was in now and it stood over knee-deep in much of the grass.

"Possible," he agreed. "Let me have your radio."

Renny turned over his portable radio. Doc fooled with the tuning adjustment of the receiver for a while, setting it to a different frequency.

"Stay here," he told Renny.

Doc then moved back into the grass, kept down, and began to approach the shack. He went carefully. About seventy-five feet from the place, still in the thick grass, he submerged completely and breathed through a hollow tube—part of his periscope gadget, which he dismantled of lenses. Progress was slow and difficult, but it brought him close to the shack.

He came up beside a piling.

A channel, dredged from the deeper water offshore, led to the shack, and the part of the structure which was supported on the piling served as a boathouse. This had been inclosed with planks. Doc moved close, with great caution, and put an eye to the cracks between the planks.

He saw two bright new canoes. They were equipped with huge outboard motors of the racing type. The brightness of the motors indicated they had hardly been used.

Soon two men came down a ladder which extended up into the shack. One got into the first canoe, the other into the second.

One of the pair was the rifleman who had put the bullets into Para Summers' apartment.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

The other man, shorter and quite blond, almost unhealthily blond, demanded, "You sure it's all set, Sad?"

Sad—the rifleman—said, "I can't tell when they'll close in. But they followed me out here. Wouldn't you say it was set?"

"I guess so. You think they'll just close in on the place, huh?"

"How would you do it?"

"I guess that is the way I would work it. Wait down the road until it was dark, then surround the place. Get all set, then bust in."

Sad laughed grimly. A scared, tense laugh. "Let's get out of here and get set for them," he said. "They'll probably yell for us to surrender before they bust in. That'll give us time to stir the devil up."

They moved away cautiously in the canoes, shoving into the tall grass, being careful not to show themselves.

Doc Savage placed his small radio on a piling stringer, wedging it there. He turned the volume up as high as it would go.

The bronze man then went back and joined Renny Renwick.

"Trap all right," he said.

"How they going to pull it?" Renny asked.

"That," Doc said, "is somewhat mystifying. They talked about turning a devil loose."

"Devil, huh?" Renny pondered. "Must have been just a figure of speech."

"It did not sound like a figure of speech," Doc said.

THEY waited for the rest of the darkness to come. There was a cloud bank, not one that promised a storm, but dark over a quarter of the heavens, creeping up from the west. They waited for that. It was logical for the two men, Sad and the other one, to expect them to wait for that, Doc explained.

There was little wind. The odor of marsh was heavy. A single seagull, lonely in the biting fall air, sailed and squawked forlornly.

It was very cold. Renny's teeth clicked when he chilled, and he grunted angrily, got out a handkerchief and bit on it. "Doc," he said later.

"Yes?"

"You said the girl doesn't know anything about the cost of the advertisements, and she thought all papers charged the same?"

"Right."

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

“So it is logical to decide she did not insert the advertisements?”

“That part of it is a logical guess,” Doc said.

“But the clerk at the newspaper insisted this was the girl who inserted the advertisements,” Renny pointed out.

“That,” Doc said, “is the part that is not so logical. We will take that up in due time.”

Renny nodded. “Think it's about time we visited that shack?”

“Yes,” Doc agreed. “But we are going to visit it by radio.”

The bronze man then took his own transceiver and worked on the transmitter adjustment. The apparatus was calibrated so that micromatically exact settings of wave length could be made. He set the transmitter to the wave of the receiver tuning to which he had adjusted the set he had left at the shack. He gave the transmitter full power.

He spoke loudly close to the mike.

“All right, in the shack!” he called. “You fellows are surrounded! Come out with your hands up!”

Complete silence followed.

Renny whispered, “The receiver worked fine. I could hear it from here, even over your voice.”

Doc said into the radio, “All right, men! Get ready to break in!”

Silence again.

Renny muttered, “Maybe it's just a bomb they've got fixed to blow up when we opened the door or something.”

The silence lasted for some seconds more.

Then the black devil stood suddenly on the earth.

IT was dark, but not too dark to see the thing. Moreover, the devil was suffused with a kind of reddish glare that made it clearly distinguishable.

It was a hundred feet high, maybe two. The earth seemed to sink and leap. The noise was terrific. It was not an explosion.

Not an explosion! Renny was positive of that. It was a ripping roaring, as if a great mass of glass was breaking and shattering. No explosion ever sounded like that. And the earth sank, as if from the weight of the thing, and then jumped up as if the weight was gone. And as the earth jumped, the black devil began shrinking.

Likeness to the shape of Satan was not great, but there was some monster-human resemblance, and two things that might have been horns on its head. It was dark, of course. Devil was the only thing of which Renny Renwick could think. Actually, he wondered that he was capable of thinking at all.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

It was there. Then it was gone. For a second or two it existed. Maybe for four or five seconds. It was hard to be sure. Certainly the thing came instantly.

But just how long it was there was uncertain, because water flew up in a great, sheeting wave over them. Solid water, not spray. It had a tangible force, like a headlong truck. They were bowled end over end, and for a while they saw nothing but the mud and the water.

However, Renny managed to get the impression that the black monster devil did a kind of shrinking plunge into the bowels of the earth. And that it was like a gigantic mole going into the earth, throwing up the earth to make its hole.

After that there was silence. Except for a noise like a river.

RENNY was on his feet, but trembling from head to foot when Doc Savage spoke.

“Come on,” Doc Savage said. “We will take a look at the results.”

Renny had no lack of courage. But he said, “Not me! I never saw such a thing!”

He did follow Doc Savage, though. He was scared from toenails to hair as he floundered through the water after Doc. The water and the mud came to their necks. There was no grass now. The mud had been thrown up covering it; thrown up as if a monster had stamped on the soft marsh, driving it aside.

They came to the hole where the shack had been.

Doc Savage put the thin white rod of a powerful flashlight beam down into the hole.

The hole seemed to have no bottom except water. The marsh water was pouring over the edges into the hole in a flood. That was the source of the sound like a river.

A kind of completely utter horror got hold of Renny Renwick as he saw that the hole was indeed the kind of a hole a great, burrowing, impossible monstrosity would have made had it plunged into the earth in fright and made away in some fantastic subterranean fashion. For the hole turned far underground and led off like a tunnel as far as the beam of the flashlight, which was quite strong, would reach. Of the shack, of course, there was no slightest trace remaining.

“Holy cow!” Renny said. “Holy cow!”

Chapter VII. QUIZ SHOW

THE man called Sad was not a lover of canoes. They were a mode of transportation worse than a locoed mule, in his opinion, and he said so profanely. “Hank!” he yelled. “Hank! Come here and give me a tow! This blankety-blank-blank motor won't start!” He could hear the other canoe, containing Hank, nearby in the darkness. The motor was operating, and he was afraid Hank would not hear him, but Hank did hear. Soon he appeared.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

Hank was so scared he was a little sick. "You think it got all of them?" he demanded.

"If it didn't," Sad said, "there is no use trying."

"That thing scares me," Hank said shrilly. "I always thought I could stand in the hot door of hell and spit in the proprietor's eye. But now I know I can't."

Sad looked at him. Sad was suddenly sober. "I feel the same way," he muttered. "Here, give me a rope and tow this canoe."

"Why not just abandon the canoe here?" Hank demanded uneasily.

"And maybe have the cops pick it up and trace it and the motor?" Sad snorted. "You know what trouble we had getting these motors on short notice."

Hank gave him a line. Soon they were kiting across the water, the big outboard motor making a frightened howl in the darkness.

There was only one logical spot for them to leave the boats, and that was upriver, near the first bridge. They turned inshore near the arching steel shape of the bridge and hauled their canoes out of the water, detached the motors and placed them, after considerable wedging, in the baggage compartment of a coupé which was already parked in the vicinity.

They managed, with considerable trouble, to lash both canoes to the top of the coupé, but it was not a satisfactory arrangement, and after one canoe fell off they stopped at a garage and rented storage space for the canoes, leaving them.

"Good way to get rid of them," Sad remarked as they drove away. "Be weeks before they see we're not coming back for the canoes and get to snooping."

"Sure," Hank agreed. "Where do we go now?"

"Let's get into town and stick this car in a garage somewhere," Sad told him. "Then we'll roam around Broadway for a while, mixing with the crowds, to make sure we're not being followed, before we go to report."

"That the orders?"

"That's the orders."

THEY left their coupé in a one-dollar-for-twenty-four-hours transient garage on Fifty-fourth Street just west of Broadway and walked over to Broadway.

As soon as they caught sight of the theatres of Broadway they perked up. "Right smart place, eh, Hank?" said Sad admiringly. "How about you buying us a drink." To which Hank said, "Sure." They had a drink, and another drink, then set out on Broadway again.

The gaudy Coney Island character of the place fascinated them. They thought it was wonderful. The very down-at-the-heel carnival tinsel hit Sad and Hank as the real thing.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

“Class, eh?” said Hank. “Quite a change from them main drags in them Arizona whistle stops.”

Sad nodded. He pointed at a high building. “When this is wound up,” he said, “I’m gonna get me a penthouse up there in that place.”

“A little ranch in the clouds, eh?” said Hank. He leered at a pair of passing girls in theatrical make-up. “I think I’ll stock mine with some of them fillies, too.”

Sad laughed approvingly.

A dime-a-dance place hypnotized them for a while, but they resisted, making, however, a note of the place so they could return. They visited another bar. “Might as well have a little fun while we’re makin’ sure we’re not bein’ followed,” Hank said. A shooting gallery caught their attention. They were excellent shots and tried out their luck with the guns. To the gallery proprietor’s inquiry of where they learned to shoot like that, Hank said, “You pop enough jackrabbits hopping through Arizona cactus, and you get good.” Sad disapproved of this, and warned, “You better not tell strangers too much about yourself.” To which Hank shrugged and said, “Nobody knows us here.”

Next, they discovered a crowd congregated on the sidewalk in front of them. “Maybe it’s a fight,” Hank muttered, and they crowded in to see.

It was a not a fight. Instead, Sad suddenly found himself gripped by the arm and a package placed in his hands. The package, he saw, was a box of cigars. A young man with a very fluent gift of gab said, “Step this way, sir. Right up to the microphone. That’s it. Thank you.”

Another man with even more gift of gab said, “Will you give us your name and address, please.”

The confused Sad was not too confused to answer, “William Jones, Paducah, Kentucky.” He winked at Hank.

The glib man said, “Right into the microphone, please. Now, here is your question. Five people have missed it. If you give the correct answer you take the grand prize. Here is the question: I carry a running iron with me. It is the tool of my profession. What is my profession?”

“A cowboy,” Sad said instantly. “A running iron is a kind of a branding iron carried by cowboys to make any brand they want to make.”

“A branding iron sometimes carried by a cow rustler, is that right?”

Sad looked extremely guilty. “Maybe,” he said.

“That’s wonderful,” said the glib man. “You’ll never rustle up a better smoke than Billie’s Cigars, a box of which you have in your hand. But by correctly answering the question, you win the grand prize. Here it is: A brand-new, sixty-five-dollar Consolidated portable radio. Here is your radio, sir. And thank you.”

Sad found himself pushed away from the microphone and out of the crowd. Hank joined him.

“Gosh!” Hank said. “You got on one of them radio quiz shows.”

Sad looked at the radio. “Sixty-five dollars, eh?” he said. He was pleased. “I can use it until I’m tired of it, then hock it.”

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

THE quiz-show affair had taken place under a theater marquee which was lighted with mercury vapor lights that made faces look unnatural. The microphones were not on stands; they were portable box affairs held in the hands of the two glib men. Cords from these extended into the theater cashier's booth.

The mike cords ended there. They were not attached to anything.

As soon as Sad and Hank were lost in the crowd the announcer hurriedly concluded his program by saying, "And now we conclude this final program for Billie's Cigars, the smoke with the personality. This is Bob Blab signing off for Billie's Cigars. Toodle-oo, everybody."

He grabbed the mikes and he and his assistant merged with the crowd.

The announcer said anxiously, "You think we put it over, Long Tom?"

"Far as I could tell, Ham," the assistant agreed.

"He'll soon find out the radio won't play," Ham said. "What if he stops in at a radio repair shop to have it fixed, and finds out what it really is?"

"No radio repair shops open this time of night," Long Tom reminded.

Ham smiled. "Good. They didn't recognize us. It was smart, staging the thing under that mercury light where our faces didn't look natural."

"That," Long Tom reminded, "was Doc's idea."

"Let's join the others in trailing those two."

"Sure."

SAD and Hank were quite happy, Sad about his radio. They visited another bar and Sad tried to get some music out of his radio. He was unsuccessful.

"The darn thing won't work," he said, alarmed.

Hank suggested, "Maybe if you'd look at one of them tags tied to it. Maybe it'd say something."

Sad thereupon found a tag that said:

BATTERIES HAVE NOT BEEN SUPPLIED WITH THIS SET. YOU WILL HAVE TO INSTALL YOUR OWN BATTERIES, TYPE 3-B MONARCH SPECIAL.

“

Can you beat that!" Sad yelled. "The cheapskates! They oughta put in batteries. Remind me never to buy no Billie's Cigars."

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

“There ain't no radio store open this time of night,” Hank complained.

“Hell, I know it. We might as well report. There ain't nobody following us is there?”

“Not that I've seen,” Hank said. “What about us reporting right now?”

“Good enough.”

They made their way, asking directions boldly of a policeman—they got a kick out of that—and finally entering a hotel on the east side. It was a large hotel, impressive and expensive.

An elevator let them out on the twenty-third floor. They waited until the elevator had departed, then Sad took a small metal “cricket” out of his pocket—a toy for children which made a clicking sound when a tongue of metal was depressed. Sad used the “cricket” to make a series of clickings that was part of a signal code as they walked down the corridor past a door. Then they came back, opened the door, and entered.

“You hear me on the radio, Cole?” Sad demanded hilariously. “Look, I answered the jackpot question and won me a radio.”

Wickard Cole cursed him violently.

“I'm Delbert Heyer, you fool!” snarled Wickard Cole. “Call me that! Don't ever call me Cole again!”

Sad wet his lips and looked at Cole. There was more than a hint that he was scared of Wickard Cole. He said, “I couldn't help that radio thing. The announcer just grabbed me and hauled me up to the microphone. Getting away from him would have created a bigger disturbance than going through with it. I gave him a fake name and address.”

Wickard Cole said bitterly, “That's what I get for bringing a bunch of cactus jumpers into this thing.”

“I'm sorry, Mr. Heyer,” Sad said.

“Did you get Savage and his men out of the way?”

“Yes.”

“Positive?”

“Absolutely,” said Sad emphatically. “The thing got them. It jumped up in the sky as if all hell had opened, and then it went into the ground, and there wasn't nothing where the shack had been but a great hole.”

Wickard Cole looked grimly pleased.

“Are you sure nobody followed you, or checked on you?” he asked.

“We're in the clear.”

“What did you do with the canoes?”

“Put them in a garage for storage.”

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

Wickard Cole was thoughtful. "Was that girl, that Para Summers, with Doc Savage and his men when you got them?"

"I imagine so. She was with them when they trailed us out to the shack."

"That's good," Cole said. "She won't give us any trouble, either."

WICKARD COLE asked for and received some descriptive details about the incident on the edge of the marsh. He wanted particularly to know what the devil—the two men called it a black devil, and Cole called it a devil—which had stood in the sky, had looked like, and exactly how it had behaved. They told him how it had come, what it had sounded like, how it had looked, how long it had existed, and about the general circumstances concerning its departure into the earth. It was clear from the way Sad and Hank talked that they did not know what the black devil was, and that they were terribly in awe of the thing.

"Good, now we won't talk about that any more," Wickard Cole said.

He consulted his watch.

"Sad," he said, "I have an errand for you."

"Yes?" Sad looked uneasy. Evidently Wickard Cole's errands were not always simple things.

Wickard Cole said, "Go down to the bar at the corner of the block. Cedar Bar, I think it's called. Walk in and—wait a minute. You know Big Colt, don't you?"

"Big Colt? Sure, I know him."

"Big Colt will be there. He will give you a package. Bring it here."

"Sure," Sad said.

A hard quality came into Wickard Cole's voice. "Don't lose that package and don't drop it. And don't waste time."

Sad stared at him uneasily. "Sure. It's important, eh?"

"Very important."

Sad left, not putting on his hat until he was out of the room. Wickard Cole showed no inclination to talk to Hank, and Hank became uncomfortable. Hank sat in a chair. Wickard Cole moved to the window and stood there, hands knotted behind his back.

It was a rich neighborhood, and even the rumble of the traffic had a prosperous, heavy quality that was soothing and comfortable.

Hank sat there and apparently thought of many things, none of them cheering. Because he squirmed and smoked cigarettes, which he rolled himself with more and more difficulty. Finally he began to perspire a little. "Ahem," he said, clearing his throat.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

Wickard Cole turned. "Yes?"

"I was just wondering," ventured Hank apologetically, "if you could give us some idea of what that black devil is?"

"A black devil," said Wickard Cole.

"I mean—well—it scared the devil out of me tonight," Hank explained. "I was just thinking if we knew more about the thing, and how it's controlled, and stirred up like that, we would be safer around it."

"You won't be around it very often," snapped Wickard Cole.

"Oh." Hank subsided.

SAD came back. He put a small packet on the table as if he was glad to get rid of it. "There it is," he said.

"You talk to Big Colt?" demanded Wickard Cole harshly.

"Uh—huh."

"He give you any message for me?"

Sad nodded. "Big Colt said to tell you that tomorrow afternoon would be all right." Sad pointed at the package. "He said you would know what this meant, and that you would know what was meant by tomorrow afternoon being all right. He also said that only about forty people would die, which ought to be a weight off your mind."

Wickard Cole jumped and glared at Sad. "A weight off my mind, eh?" he snarled. "Was Big Colt being sarcastic when he said that?"

Sad considered.

"I don't know what Big Colt was being," he said. "He didn't look too happy to me."

Wickard Cole was in a bad mood. He seemed to be wondering if his men were lilies. He snarled, "What would you say about killing forty people?"

Sad gave this thought. "I would say it should pay pretty well."

The answer was one Wickard Cole found pleasing. It wiped out his anger. "We might as well have a drink to the future," he said. He went to the telephone and called room service and ordered a bottle of their best champagne.

Hank whistled appreciatively at the mention of champagne.

Sad asked, "What about old Donkey Sam Davis?"

Wickard Cole lost his good cheer. He cursed bitterly. He did nothing but curse and made no other answer.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

To break the angry tension in the room, Sad began fooling with his radio. He complained, "No batteries, the cheap mavericks! I got a notion to take it apart. Maybe there's a wire in it you can plug in on the lights. Don't these things work off the lights, too?"

Chapter VIII. OLD MAN WITH A GUN

LONG TOM ROBERTS became excited and jerked the telephone headset off his ears. "He's gonna take the radio apart!" he said.

"He won't know what it is after he does," Monk said.

Long Tom was not convinced. "You can't tell. That thing is a supersensitive microphone pickup and a radio transmitter that sends out what the mike picks up. It doesn't look anything like a radio on the inside. He may be smart enough to see that."

Ham said, "Maybe we had better close in on them now. That fellow Delbert Heyer, or Wickard Cole if that's his name, seems to be the ringleader of the thing."

They looked to Doc Savage for a decision.

"The only safe way," Doc Savage said, "is to close in."

Doc Savage, Monk, Ham and Long Tom were in a parked car. The machine was a limousine, because they had decided it wise to get rid of the other cars they had used, including the laundry truck. These had been seen. Renny and Johnny were up the street a short distance in another parked car.

Doc went to Renny and Johnny and told them, "You fellows watch the street. We are going up."

Renny and Johnny nodded unhappily. "And miss the excitement," Renny muttered. "O. K."

"Life can't be all cherries," Monk told them cheerfully. Monk then looked into the back of Renny and Johnny's car, where Para Summers was sitting.

"These two lugs cannot be very gallant, wanting to go off and leave you that way," Monk said.

He got a smile for this.

They entered the hotel, passing a doorman who looked as if he were dressed up like a captain of a yacht.

Ham told Monk, "Not learning a thing, are you?"

"About what?" Monk demanded.

"Chasing."

"I'm not chasing," Monk snapped. "I'm serious. Some day I'll make some girl very happy."

"She'll always have something to laugh at, anyway," Ham assured him.

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Monk said, "You guys keep riding me about this woman proposition and something is going to happen."

They entered the hotel lobby in silence—Monk in indignant silence—and Doc spoke to the desk clerk, soon obtaining the information that a Mr. Delbert Heyer was registered in twenty-three—o—five, one of the better suites.

"I will go up alone first," Doc Savage said. "Rest of you wait, and follow in a second elevator." He glanced at the red light indicator on the elevator starter's control panel. "The letters O and K spelled out by flashing the light will be your signal to come up," he said.

He left them in the lobby, rode alone to the twenty-third floor. He moved quietly in the hall to the door of the suite, where he listened. He heard a low sound that might have been a man humming, heard also the clink of glasses, or a bottle against a glass.

He went back and punched an O. K. on the elevator button.

Soon he could hear the elevator cage coming up, the serpentine hissing sound its cables made, and the fainter sound of the mechanism which was at the top of the shaft, evidently only one or two floors above.

A man stepped out of a room with a blanket over an arm and approached Doc Savage. When he was close he took the blanket off his arm, uncovering a large revolver. He pointed this at Doc.

Then the elevator stopped. It stopped suddenly, with a grinding jar. The cage was between the floor on which Doc stood and the one below. In the elevator, Monk Mayfair emitted a howl of alarm, his voice a baying warning.

The man with the gun shot at Doc.

DOC SAVAGE was moving toward the man, hard and fast. He did that as soon as he saw the man was going to hip shoot. Or rather, thrust the gun out and fire without directly aiming. Men shooting that way, if they know guns—and this man obviously knew guns—try for the body. So Doc went forward, rushing. He got his arms up over his head.

He had plenty of faith in the bulletproof vest he was wearing. And getting his arms up kept them away from the bullets.

Impact of bullets against the alloy—mesh vest was not something to ignore. The terrific blows took the air out of his lungs, staggered him, turned him half to the right, then partly to the left. But he reached the man.

He brought a hand chopping down on the gun. The gun hit the floor, caromed to the wall, where it exploded, the muzzle partly against the wall and the blast knocking it back across the floor like a rocket.

The man went half to a knee, turned and tried to escape. Doc got him, gripped him with both hands, crushed the man close. He turned, using the man as a shield. He expected other men with guns to appear.

The man Doc held shrieked, "Watch *ah-h-h-h!*" The *ah-h-h-h* part was as Doc crushed him.

Down the hall another door opened. A man came out. He had a cage, a thing made of a pair of carrying cases for dogs, lashed together. He opened these. Apparently he was afraid of the contents, for he sprang back

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through the door and slammed it.

The thing was ridiculous, unreal. Two animals came out of the cages. They took a moment to orient themselves. Then they made for Doc Savage.

The thing was so absurd and unexpected that Doc did not move as fast as he would have otherwise. He lost time staring at the animals. Wondering what they were.

Dogs, he saw. Two devilishly mean little cross-breeds. Starved, and obviously doped with something to further madden them. His first reaction was pity for the animals, and curiosity about just why they had been released.

Then he saw the devices fixed to their jaws and understood. Wicked-looking sharp spikes were held with clamps fastened back to the collar. The spikes were razor-edged and green with chemical. Poison. Surely poison.

Doc involuntarily slackened his grip on the man he held. As soon as the man saw the dogs he began screaming.

The man was too full of horror for his screaming to be words. It was screaming of a man who saw death.

The unexpectedness and the fantastic appearance of the animals held Doc riveted almost too long.

DOC swung, throwing the man he held behind him so that the fellow skidded along the floor. Then Doc jumped forward and to the left, waving his arms and yelling, distracting the dogs and drawing their attention to him. They sprang at him with long arching leaps, snarling.

He dodged the first leaps. The little curs were quick. They had been trained for this sort of thing. Also maddened by whatever they had been fed, probably spasmotoxine or some similar spastic.

(Spasmotoxine is a bacterial poison of uncertain nature resulting from tetanus cultures on meat broth, producing in animals violent irrational behavior.)

He tried to back away from them. They were too fast for that.

In the shaft where the elevator was stalled there was the sound of a shot. Three loud reports. A man, Johnny probably, said something that could hardly be repeated in church. He sounded scared. He sounded a little as if he, too, was seeing death.

Doc Savage felt that way himself. The maddened dogs were quick. His tremendous agility had saved him the first time.

He got hold of his coat by the bottom, literally tearing the coat off his body, ripping it apart in the back, across the shoulders and off the arms. He dropped a coat fragment over the muzzle of the next dog that leaped. The cloth, impaled on the deadly grooved needles, covered the animal's eyes for the moment. The creature fought it, snarling and throwing slaver.

The one remaining dog was easier to dodge. Doc kept out of its way, working back toward the door through which the cages had been shoved.

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In the elevator, more shots. And a bang–bang–bang of a big hammer on heavy steel. This came from up the shaft.

Monk yelled, “They're smashing the mechanism! They're going to drop the cage!”

Doc reached the door through which the dogs had been shoved. The door was closed, indicating the owner had a respect for his pets.

The second animal got the cloth off its muzzle. It looked around. Doc Savage was the only moving thing. It made for Doc.

The bronze man surmised the door would not be locked. He seized the knob and twisted. The door came open. Doc Savage shoved it.

Both dogs made for him.

Doc followed the opening door into the room. Followed it hard. He expected a man to be hiding behind the door. There was, and the fellow squawked as the door smacked against him.

The two mad dogs came through the door like bullets. One of them tumbled over and over trying to stop.

Across the room, a second man stood trying to shoot Doc with an automatic. Apparently he had forgotten to take the thumb safety off the automatic.

Doc jumped out of the room into the hall and yanked the door shut again. In the room the men began to make terror–stricken noises. The dogs made sounds, too.

THE man who had shot bullets into Doc's bulletproof vest had arisen from the corridor floor where he had been dropped. Seeing the dogs had taken all fight out of him, and he was running. He made the stairway down.

The big hammer was still going bang–bang–bang on steel at the top of the elevator shaft.

Ham's voice had joined Monk's and they were roaring violent threats up the shaft. Their anxiety indicated they were not getting results.

Doc reached the shaft, changed his mind and headed for the stairway door. He burst through it, went up steps, found another door closed but not locked, and was out on the roof.

The elevator mechanism was inclosed in a box–shaped penthouse affair on the roof. This was reached by a short flight of steps and through another door.

That door was locked. Doc rattled it. He imitated the voice of Wickard Cole as they had heard it over the radio pickup and said, “Open up, quick! I'll help you!” Doc was an excellent voice mimic. But it did not work.

The hammering stopped. A man cursed. A bullet came through the thin steel door.

Doc Savage backed down the steps. He took from a special vest which he wore an object the size of a large marble of metal. He flipped a small lever on this and tossed it against the door.

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The door, the steps and about half the side of the penthouse flew around in the air with fire and noise.

Doc immediately vaulted the spot where the steps had been and entered the penthouse. The elevator machinery had not been damaged by the blast. The man who had been wielding the sledge hammer had not been hurt too much, either. He picked himself up off the floor and grabbed his sledge.

He had been smashing the safety apparatus of the elevator, endeavoring to make the cage drop the twenty-two floors to the street level, a drop that would assuredly kill the occupants of the cage.

That had been his idea, and he was not a man who got rid of an idea easily. He tossed his sledge down the shaft, then dived down past the gears himself, grabbed the cables and descended hand over hand. The cables were greasy. He went much faster than he intended, yelling in fright.

But he landed on top of the cage without damage.

He picked up the big sledge, began striking blows. There was no question but that he could quickly loosen the fastenings. Apparently they had been previously prepared for a thing like this.

Doc Savage went down after the man, first tearing sleeves out of his shirt and using them for hand pads. He went fast at first, but braked easily to a stop.

The man, across the cage from him, had tried to give last desperate blows to the cable fastenings. He had waited too long. Now, when he tried to get the sledge up as a weapon—the fellow seemed to have no gun—he was too late. Doc grasped the sledge, wrenched and got it.

The man wheeled, took a flying leap for the cables in the adjacent shaft. In doing that, his theory was excellent. He could slide down them to safety. His theory was indeed excellent.

Practical execution of the hair-raising thing was something else. He got the cables all right. Both arms, both legs around them. He went down.

By the time he got to the bottom he was doing a good hundred and fifty miles an hour. He screamed horribly during at least half of the fall.

THE hatch for emergency escapes in the top of the elevator cage had been bolted shut. Doc loosened it. Monk and Ham trampled on each other in their haste to get out.

“Where are they?” Monk yelled. “Let me at them!”

He sounded funny, but he did not feel funny.

“Bellowing like a little red bull,” Ham said disgustedly. “If you would keep your eyes open, things like this might not happen.”

Monk fought to get open the elevator door—the one on the twenty-third floor, just above them—and climb out.

“How was I to guess we'd run into such a thing in a hotel like this,” Monk grated. “Why, this is one of the snazziest hotels in town.”

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“They sure gave us service,” Ham agreed. He helped Monk get the door open.

Doc picked up the sledge and knocked one of the fastener pins back into its socket. Another blow or two and the elevator cage would have dropped.

He climbed out into the hall.

“The birds have flown!” Monk roared as they pushed open the door of twenty–three–o–five. Ham agreed, “Birds—buzzards!”

By the time—five or ten seconds—that they had decided everyone had fled the place, shots came to them faintly from the street.

“Good,” said Monk explosively. “They've run into Renny and Johnny.”

“Who were afraid they'd miss the fight!” Long Tom Roberts agreed.

Twenty–three floors was too many flights of stairs for foot descent. They punched angrily for an elevator. None responded.

Doc Savage dashed back to the penthouse control room and discovered that their foes had tripped emergency controls on all but one elevator, shutting off the power. That had been a part of their plan. Doc turned the power on and they finally got a cage. But it took several minutes, and they seemed like years.

“Poor Renny and Johnny!” Long Tom wailed angrily. “They were outnumbered!”

“It takes a lot of guys to outnumber Renny,” Monk said with optimism.

They reached the lobby. The elegant place was in a turmoil. A doorman and two bellboys were spread on the floor. Two clerks were still hiding behind their desks; they lifted their heads then ducked back when Doc and his men appeared.

“The street!” Monk gasped.

On the street they found Renny Renwick lying at the foot of the flight of two steps that led up into the hotel. He was lying on his side, doing his best to tie himself in a hard knot.

Johnny Littlejohn, as long–legged and long–armed as a grasshopper, was crawling out from under a parked car. Fenders and body of the car were sieved with bullet holes.

Johnny stood up and said sheepishly, “I forgot to wear my bulletproof vest today.”

The girl, Para Summers, got out of another car nearby. “Mr. Renwick and Mr. Littlejohn asked me to hide there,” she said. “Those men went that way.” She pointed south. “They seemed to have taxicabs hired and waiting for them.”

Ham and Long Tom dashed for a car, piled into it, and drove off in search of the enemy.

Monk walked over to Renny Renwick, said, “Where'd they get you, Renny?”

Renny straightened out with great difficulty.

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There were half a dozen bullet holes which could have been covered with the palm of a hand placed over his belt buckle.

“One kicked me,” he said. “He kicked me in the belly like a two-ton mule. I fell down on my back. Then he emptied his gun into my bulletproof vest. I tell you, we’ve got to strengthen those damn vests or something.”

“Why didn't you hold them until we got here?” Monk demanded.

Renny looked at him bitterly. “We did our best, rainbow.”

“Where do you get that rainbow stuff?” Monk asked.

“Rainbow—never around until the storm is over,” Renny said, still bitter.

DOC SAVAGE bent over Renny. He took from the engineer's big fist, the left one, a wad of cloth.

“Part of one of them's coat,” Renny said ungrammatically. “I got hold and tore it off.”

Doc Savage pulled the bunch of cloth into shape and it proved to be a pocket and part of a coat hem. The pocket contained something. A package.

Monk looked at the package, said, “This is the package the head guy had delivered to him, just before we went up. The package he said was so important.”

Doc unwrapped the package.

It contained a bottle of perfume.

Monk, nervous, said, “Nitroglycerin, acid, gas—watch out!”

Doc Savage examined it. He looked particularly at the label. It seemed all right. He held it to the light. He tested it with his nostrils.

He opened it finally and it was perfume, a very good perfume.

“Perfume!” Monk said. “I don't get it. Very important, that guy Wickard Cole said. Perfume! Why?”

Johnny Littlejohn had brushed dust off his clothing, examined himself and found no bullet holes. “An uncoadunative vicinism,” he said, indicating the perfume.

“That's right, whatever it is,” Monk agreed.

Doc Savage turned to Para Summers. “Para, did you see any of those men as they came out of the hotel?”

She nodded. “Yes, I got a look at them.”

“Know them?”

“One,” she said. “I had seen one before.”

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“Which one?”

“The one who had the perfume.”

Renny nodded. “That one was Wickard Cole,” he said. “I heard his voice, and it was the same voice we listened to over the radio.”

Para stared at him.

“Judson Potter,” she argued.

“Holy cow! You mean the same guy who hired you to put the advertisements in the newspapers—”

“Yes,” she said.

“Then Wickard Cole and Judson Potter are one and the same man!”

“Yes,” she said.

“Which gets us where?” Monk wanted to know.

“It gets us a bottle of perfume, if you want to exercise that master mind,” Renny told him gloomily.

LONG TOM ROBERTS and Ham Brooks returned from the chase. Having seen no sign of Wickard Cole or anyone else, they were crestfallen.

“We nearly get killed,” Ham complained, “and get nothing for it.”

“I’ve got a stomach-ache,” Renny told him bitterly.

The police had arrived by now. Also the indignant manager of the hotel, who had been rudely shocked by the violence and uproar in his hostelry. He was a nose-in-the-air individual and soon had trouble with Monk. Words led to words. The manager announced that he was going to give Monk a piece of his mind, and Monk asked him if he was sure he could spare it. Ham chimed in and explained to the manager that anything he said to Monk would go in one ear and out the other; there was nothing in Monk's head to stop it. Monk announced he was preparing to whip them both. Quite a crowd gathered.

A policeman arrived, announced excitedly, “Two dead men upstairs!”

That stopped the quarrel. Two dead men! The hotel manager looked as if he was going to faint.

“They seem to have been bitten by something,” the policeman added.

It developed that the two corpses belonged to the men who had turned the trained, poison-carrying, devilish little dogs loose on Doc Savage. Victims of their own bizarre weapon.

“Whew!” Long Tom said. “What became of the dogs?”

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“The men were carrying two cages when they left the hotel,” Para Summers said. “The dogs must have been inside.”

Explanations to the police filled more than an hour. The others noticed that Doc Savage did not mention the bottle of perfume. They were somewhat puzzled when he asked them not to mention it also.

“But won't that be obstructing justice?” Para asked anxiously.

“Doc has a special police commission,” Monk told her. “So you're not obstructing anything.”

Monk expanded when he talked to Para. He beamed, smiled, squirmed and smirked.

“Acts as if he was about to burst into bloom!” Long Tom said disgustedly. “He never will learn!”

Doc Savage seemed concerned about Monk's susceptibility, for he assigned big-fisted Renny the job of taking Para to headquarters at once. Renny was not a romantic fellow. Particularly not with the tremendous stomach-ache with which he was beset. Monk first looked hurt, then thoughtful. For the first time it seemed to dawn on him that Doc Savage was taking a part in the business of trying to cure him of his interest in femininity. Monk became more thoughtful, even gloomy. The shock appeared to grow on him.

Finishing with the police, Doc and the others entered their cars and drove to the midtown building which housed their headquarters. They crowded into the elevator in a group.

Their recent experience with an elevator caused them to look at this one dubiously, although the mechanism was completely guarded by alarms, so that there was no possibility of it having been tampered with.

But in their absorption they did not notice the homely—the utterly homely—little old brown horned toad of a man who got in the elevator with them at the last minute and slid the doors shut.

Monk looked at the little man and jumped a foot.

The little man was homely enough to startle a tree stump.

But the gun in his fist, which was what Monk had seen, was large enough to have even more effect. The gun had no trigger guard, no front sight, nothing to hamper its rapid withdrawal from a holster. A fanning hammer, a long horn of metal, had been welded to the hammer.

The little brown, utterly homely man let them inspect the very large speaking end of his weapon.

“I'm Donkey Sam Davis,” he said. “I can shoot either eye out of a rattlesnake at fifty feet. But let's not have a demonstration.”

Chapter IX. TALE WITHOUT END

NO one said anything for a while, although there seemed to be plenty that could be said. The cocksureness of the toad-homely little brown man was breathtaking. Doc Savage and his associates—there were only four of them in the elevator, of course—had a world-wide reputation as tough fellows to tackle. They were in such repute as antagonists that on at least one occasion, an army had been assigned the job of cornering and taking

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them, and had not been successful. But the little man was as sure of himself as if he had stepped into a pen of rabbits.

He said, "There is a bank in the building."

They looked at him in silence.

He added, "I talked to the banker. We walk in there and he looks you over. If he says you are Doc Savage and outfit, I am going to be happier than a dickey bird in a worm barrel."

Then he opened the elevator doors. With a flourish he whipped a very large handkerchief out of a coat pocket, knotted in at opposite corners to make a sling, and inserted his hand and antiquated pistol in this, hiding it from view.

"Mosey along," he said.

The banker was Mr. Bankstop, and he had known Doc Savage and the others for a long time.

He told Donkey Sam Davis, "This is undoubtedly Doc Savage and these are his associates."

"Ask 'em some questions to be sure," said Donkey Sam. "I don't want no wolves in sheep clothes roped in on me."

The banker put some intelligent queries to the bronze man, going back into the past. Doc Savage gave his answers quietly.

"I am positive," the banker assured Donkey Sam Davis.

Donkey Sam stuck his hardware in his belt and untied the sling. "Now we can start brandin' stock," he said.

"You might start talkin' English," Monk suggested. Monk seemed a little jealous of the small man's homeliness. Donkey Sam was even a greater baby–frightener than Monk.

"Speak your English right out," Donkey Sam retorted.

"Did you put the advertisements in the papers?" Monk demanded.

"I did," said Donkey Sam.

"A half million dollars to find Doc?"

"Right."

"Another half million if Doc would destroy a black rock?"

"Right as a bug's eye. Should have said black devil instead of black rock, maybe. Technicality there. Can use your own judgment."

"That's a total of a million dollars."

"Yep," said Donkey Sam. "Good at addin', ain't ye?"

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“Have you got a million dollars?”

“Nope.”

Monk frowned. “Just how much money have you got?”

“Three dollars and forty–six cents,” said Donkey Sam Davis. “And I ain't lyin'.” He grimaced at Monk. “That plain enough English for you?”

THEY returned to the elevator and entered. Doc Savage moved the control to slow position—the cage was capable of terrific speed at high control—and they lifted quietly.

Doc Savage asked, “Know a girl named Para Summers?”

Donkey Sam said, “Ain't no hand for girls. Face scares 'em away.”

“Ever hear the name?”

“Para, you say? Para Summers? Nope.”

“Ever hire a private detective?”

“Nope. Do my own snoopin'. Sure like it, too.” Donkey Sam grinned.

“Didn't hire a private detective to put those advertisements in the newspapers for you?” Doc persisted.

“Hell, no! What give you such a idea?” Donkey Sam lost his grin. “Now look here, you rannies. Don't get no cultus ideas about me because I only got three–forty–six left.”

“You advertised to pay a million in rewards,” said Monk pointedly. “How can—”

“Found you myself,” said Donkey Sam. “So I owe myself half million dollars.”

Monk scratched his head. “All right. But what about the other half million?”

“The reward to Mr. Savage, here?”

“That's it.”

Donkey Sam Davis turned quickly to Doc. “You take money for doin' the things you do?”

“No, we never work for pay,” Doc Savage said quietly.

“See!” Donkey Sam told Monk in triumph. “I don't owe nobody—”

“The half million,” Doc Savage interrupted, “will go to a charity. We often accept money that way.”

“Oh.” Donkey Sam was not taken aback. “Then we'll pay it to charity.”

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Monk yelled, "Pay what? Pay three–forty–six? You haven't got a half million."

"Listen, sonny boy," Donkey Sam said, "you get that black devil thing disposed of and there'll be umpteen times half a million, I've no doubt."

Monk frowned at him. "You're crazy."

"I like an outspoken feller," said Donkey Sam ominously. "Although they ain't a long–lived species out in my neck of the woods."

Monk swallowed. He didn't know exactly what to make of the unusual little man.

Donkey Sam told them solemnly, "Keep your shirts on, you fellers. Shirts on and minds open. That's the way you learn. Be a rich man today if I'd do it myself. Feller should take his own advice. Wait until you hear my story. Make your hair curl. You'll understand everything. Sure curl your hair, it will."

The very, very slow–traveling elevator had reached the top. They stepped out into the eighty–sixth–floor hall, entered the reception room.

Renny was there with Para Summers.

Donkey Sam Davis stared at Para.

"Hello, there," Donkey Sam said.

The girl looked very strange and speechless.

Donkey Sam frowned.

"Hello there, Mrs. Potter," he said. "Don't you know me?"

Monk seemed to rise off the floor and stay there. "Mrs. Potter?" he said.

"Sure, she's Mrs. Judson Potter," said old Donkey Sam Davis. "Don't you know her name?"

THE girl stood there in that strange speechlessness. She was losing color, they saw. Losing it slowly, growing leaden at first, then more pale. Finally her lips moved, but no sound came, and she looked as if she was going to faint.

Doc Savage went to her quickly. He took her arm and escorted her into the library to a chair.

"Wait here," he told her.

She nodded.

He indicated the construction of the chair and advised, "The chair is wired with a capacity alarm. If you leave it, a bell will ring in the other room."

She nodded again, speechlessly.

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Doc went back into the reception room. Old Donkey Sam Davis was scratching his head, looking puzzled. "Why'd she act so queer?" he demanded. "Never said a word. Why, she's usually a talkative girl."

Monk Mayfair stood in the background, his homely face covered with a blankly startled expression. The others, noting how Monk was feeling, pretended to ignore it. They could see that Monk was realizing that here again was a girl with a pretty face. But trouble.

"I hope it soaks into him," Long Tom whispered.

"Too much to hope for," Ham said.

Donkey Sam Davis continued to stare at the door through which Para had been taken. Then he shrugged violently, threw his hands palms up.

"I don't get it," the old Westerner said. "But I'll tell you gents the straight of it, and we can see what you think."

"The straight of it," Renny said vehemently, "is what we want badly."

Donkey Sam nodded. He took a comfortable chair. He endeavored to roll a cigarette casually, using one hand, and failed. "Wickard Cole can do that," he muttered disgustedly. "Seems I can't get the hang of it." He leaned back and lighted a cigar instead.

"IT all begins," Donkey Sam said, "with me bein' a unreliable magnet for dollars. I attract 'em, all right. But they don't stick to me. I had me a stake. I invested in an invention. It looked good to me. But, like somebody said, the invention was just good enough to get my money, and no better. Anyway, I was broke."

Johnny Littlejohn, who was not a patient soul, said, "Is divagation prerequisite?"

"Huh?" said Donkey Sam. "Fire again. That'n missed."

"He means," translated Renny, "do you have to put in the full history of Adam's off ox? Isn't there a way of shortening your story?"

Donkey Sam snorted.

"Hell with you both," he said. "Tell it my own way, I will. I can be led, not pushed. Like my donkey, Myrtle, that way, I am."

"You went broke," Renny said disgustedly. "Go on from there."

Donkey Sam nodded. "That's what I did. Went on from there. Went right out into the desert, prospecting. Twenty-two days I paraded the desert and found nothin'." He became silent. He scowled. "Durn bottle of whiskey!" he exploded.

"Whiskey is all right in its place," Ham said.

"Sure. Place is poured down the sewer."

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"I meant," Ham said patiently, "do you have to bring it in here?"

"Sure," said Donkey Sam. "Was the whiskey made me mad. Wickard Cole, who grubstaked me, had hid it in my pack for a joke. Made me tootin' mad. Myrtle, my donkey, was misbehavin' at the time. So I threw the whiskey bottle at Myrtle. Missed. Made me madder. So I threw my rock hammer at Myrtle. Missed Myrtle—but sure scared up that black devil."

"Black devil!" Renny exclaimed.

"Now we're getting somewhere," Ham agreed.

DONKEY SAM DAVIS was silent again. But his expression was changed. His lips compressed, his jaw hardened, and fear came into his eyes and remained. He moistened his lips.

"That black critter was the awfulest thing I think I ever saw," he said. "It just popped up out of the desert rock, out of that black rock—"

Renny, in a rumbling voice with no humor, said, "You do not need to tell us anything about that black devil unless you can tell us what it is."

"I can tell you what it is," Donkey Sam said. "Keep your bustle buttoned."

"Can you tell us about the black rock?" Doc put in.

"Sure. That's important, too. Mighty important. Most important of all, I guess."

He became silent, gloomy. He seemed to be involved with distressed thoughts. Moments dragged.

"Whip up your mule," Renny said finally. "We don't want to die of old age before you finish the story."

Donkey Sam shrugged. "Well, the devil jumped up and my donkey, Myrtle, ran like hell. That's what I felt like doing, too, and I guess I did it. But I should have stuck around and gone down into the hole where the devil went."

He made his palms-up gesture of resignation again. "But I didn't. I followed Myrtle around until I caught her. She had lost her pack, along with all them beans and flour and baking powder that Wickard Cole had grubstaked me to. There wasn't nothin' to do but go back and promote another grubstake off Cole. He wanted an explanation of what had happened to the other grubstake and so I told him. I told him about the big black devil that was like nothing anybody ever saw."

Donkey Sam Davis looked at the floor and swore. He had a strange way of swearing, but using very nice, sweet, delicate words and saying them so that they sounded like ripping profanity.

"The little, tender, lovely, gentle rosebud," he said, making it sound as if he was tearing a throat out. He looked up. "Wickard Cole, I mean."

Doc said, "You told him about the black thing that came out of the earth and went back in?"

"Yes."

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“What did he do?”

“Suggested we go back. We did. He crawled down in the hole with a rope. Was gone quite awhile. Came out. Wouldn't say what he saw. We went back to town.”

He sucked smoke out of his cigar and blew it away with an angry puff.

“I saw Wickard Cole was actin' loco,” he continued, “and so I checked up on him. I found out he'd blowed in the hole with dynamite. Filled it up.”

He bit his lips. He shuddered.

“Next, I found Wickard Cole could make the devil appear at will,” he said. “I found that out by trailin' him out onto the desert one night. He made the devil come. It was right at dawn.”

“How?” Renny demanded.

“How what?”

“How did he make the devil come?”

Donkey Sam scowled. “That sure puzzled me at the time, too. Frightened it up with a rifle shot, looked as if.”

RENNY RENWICK glowered at the old prospector. To Renny's notion, the situation was tense, and the old man was wasting time with his long-winded style of narration. However, Renny decided not to try to hurry him again. Hurrying Donkey Sam seemed to have the opposite effect.

“Then,” continued Donkey Sam Davis, “I really took to watching Wickard Cole, what I mean. He went to the State penitentiary. Too bad they didn't keep him there.”

“State penitentiary?” Doc asked.

“Yes. His brother was there. Devlin Cole. First time I knew Wickard had a brother. But he went to see his brother to get lined up on how to assemble a gang of cutthroat hombres. I figured that much out.”

Old Donkey Sam paused to stare at them earnestly. “You got no idea,” he said, “what a mean bunch of jaspers Wickard Cole proceeded to get together. Cold-blooded sidewinders, every one of 'em. They come from all over the country. Murderers and thieves, you can tell by lookin' at them.”

“Like the pair called Sad and Hank?” Renny suggested.

“Sure. There's a pair for you.”

Doc Savage put in, “You seem to be well acquainted with the gang.” The quietness of the remark made it have no accusing quality, although it was definitely a suspicious question.

“I oughta,” snapped Donkey Sam, not fooled by the quietness. “I watched 'em live, eat, breathe and drink. Awful whiskey-heads. Going to hell, all of them. Be a great day in the hot place when they get there, too.”

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Doc said, "You saw by now that something was afoot?"

Donkey Sam nodded.

"Big," he said. "Mighty big. I saw that. Wickard Cole was closin' out his business. Sellin' everything, lock, stock and barrel, and losing money at times. Wasn't like Wickard to lose money. I knew he was getting his capital together to swing this thing." He stared at Doc Savage. "I thought of you," he said.

No one spoke.

"I thought of you," Donkey Sam told Doc Savage, "because I had met you just once. That was years ago, or not so many years at that. But you didn't know my name at the time. Anyhow, I was impressed. I knew about the business you make of helping other people out of trouble, if their trouble is unusual enough, and if the law don't seem to be able to do anything about them. This was one of them cases. The law would have laughed at me if I had went to them with the story about a black devil coming out of the earth—which was all I knew about it then. Worse, the law probably would have locked me up in their loco house. Couldn't blame them, either."

Still no one said anything.

"I found out you wasn't to be found," Donkey Sam said.

Renny put in, "So you hit on the idea of those reward advertisements?"

"Not then," said Donkey Sam. "That was later. The next thing I found out was that Wickard Cole had a wife."

"Wife?" Renny said. "Wasn't he married in Mile High?"

"Nope. Bachelor, everybody thought."

"What has his being married got to do with it?"

"Plenty," said Donkey Sam seriously. "You see, three or four years ago, Wickard Cole got up and left Mile High. He was gone about a year. He came back a changed man. Different than he used to be. Something had happened to him, but nobody knew what. I don't mean that he had gotten more mean, or anything like that. He was mean enough to begin with, which ain't no foolin'. But he came back a man with more of a deep purpose to his viciousness, if you get what I mean. He acted as if he had been out and had failed at something, but instead of the failure teaching him anything he had resolved to do the same thing again, but better this time, so he wouldn't be a failure. Get what I mean?"

Renny said that he didn't, and that he did not see where it mattered.

"Is that girl in the next room Wickard Cole's wife?" Renny demanded.

Donkey Sam nodded. He seemed puzzled. "Yes," he said. "But why didn't she recognize me?"

"Should she?"

"Of course," said the old prospector. "She put the advertisements in the newspapers for me."

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Renny, repressing excitement and interest with difficulty, said in an artificially calm voice that he could see that the story was making progress and that by next March the fifteenth they might have it all.

While he was saying that there was a sound as if a hammer had hit one of the windows.

Monk jumped, wheeled, and looked at the window.

“A bullet,” Monk said.

Chapter X. BID FOR SILENCE

ANOTHER bullet hit the window, sounding louder than the first, although it probably made exactly the same amount of noise.

It also made a little web design, as if a small spider had spun a web, about two feet from a web which the first bullet had made.

There was a silence.

“Bulletproof glass,” Monk said. It was an unnecessary statement, but it broke the startled quiet, and big-fisted Renny boomed out, “Holy cow! Been a long time since anybody tried to shoot us through those windows!”

They walked over, everyone but Donkey Sam Davis, to the window and stood looking out. Donkey Sam got down on the floor, clear of anything that might come through the window. He watched, dumfounded, as Monk got a pair of strong binoculars and began to rake the rooftops and windows of adjacent skyscrapers.

“Ain't you fellows afraid of gettin' salivated with lead?” demanded Donkey Sam.

Ham Brooks told him, “This is special glass in these windows. Even a cannonball wouldn't come through.”

The telephone rang then. It piped out repeatedly with a dull note—there was a buzzer ringer, not a bell—that cut into the air of the room. Johnny Littlejohn, the stiffness of excitement making his lanky body seem more lanky, moved over and picked up the telephone.

“Polycousticate,” he said into the transmitter.

The word must have startled whoever was at the other end of the connection because there was a pause.

Then Johnny's intent expression indicated words were coming over the wire. It was not a long speech to which he listened.

He put the mouthpiece against his chest and looked at Doc Savage.

Johnny was startled enough to use small words.

“Man's voice. Ugly. Perfume bottle. Says throw it out of window, this side of building. Says to do it right now.”

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Doc said, "Give him the right answer."

Johnny nodded and said into the telephone, "Go chase yourself, whoever you are. And be careful who you threaten—"

He stopped and listened. He looked at Doc.

"He asks us," he said, "how we'd like to have the top blown off this building and us with it? He sounds like he meant it. You want me to give the right answer to that?"

"Yes," Doc said.

Into the telephone, Johnny said, "Listen, pal, we'll like anything you try to do. We'll like it a lot more than you will, let me tell—"

The cannon shell came through the big bulletproof windows with a great racket and buried itself in the ceiling of the room, exploding there without much force. The wall jumped inward where it was not anchored by the steel girders which constituted the framework of the skyscraper. All of it made an uproar not soon forgotten.

"Holy cow!" Renny said. "First dogs. Now a cannon!"

He sounded as if the thing was about as crazy as he could stand for it to become.

DOC SAVAGE and Monk both whirled, dashed into the laboratory, and came back with rifles which had telescopic sights. Passing through the library, they noted that Para Summers was still in her chair, although she was gripping the arms of the chair tightly.

Doc asked, "You get the flash of the cannon?"

"Sure," Monk said. "Not on a rooftop. Out of a window."

"Gray building," Doc agreed. "Third window from the right."

The bronze man adjusted his telescopic sight. "Gas bullets in this gun," he said. "Break the window for me, Monk."

The window of the room from which the cannon had fired had been lowered, probably in the hope of keeping them from spotting it.

"Sure," Monk said. He aimed and fired. The upper sash did not break, but the lower one did. Doc, watching through the strong 'scope of his own rifle, saw a shadowy figure inside the room reel back and grab at his side.

Doc, in a cold voice, said, "Try not to shoot the next man deliberately, Monk."

"He got in the way," Monk said, telling a poor lie.

"They're always getting in your way," Ham interposed, speaking to Monk.

Monk broke the upper panel of the window, the one he should have shattered with his first bullet.

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Doc Savage then emptied the magazine of his rifle into the opening. The bullets—shells containing liquified gas—would shatter and splatter when they hit floors and walls of the room in the other building.

They watched frenzied movement in the room and saw the movement stop.

“Put the brakes on that,” Monk said.

It was then that they noticed Johnny Littlejohn was still holding the telephone. He had the instrument to his ear. He grinned at them.

“They were telephoning from the room where they had the cannon,” he said. “I could hear them running around, and could hear the gas pellets smash. I think we've got at least one of them.”

Doc Savage turned to Monk. “You stay here,” the bronze man said, “and watch Miss Summers. When you get into a fight lately you seem to forget our policy of never killing anybody.”

Monk was sheepish. He said nothing. He remained behind.

ALL of them but Monk and Para Summers raced into the corridor, climbing over the wreckage of the wall, and piled into the elevator. Old Donkey Sam Davis did not look at all frightened, although he was excited.

“Nice peaceful life you gents lead,” he remarked.

“Thanks to people from Arizona,” Ham commented. “Do you think it's safe to leave Monk with that girl?”

“If he isn't cured now,” Renny rumbled, “he won't be.”

“Cured of what?” asked Donkey Sam.

“Women.”

“Women and whiskey,” Donkey Sam said, “are pitfalls in the path of man.”

The building in which the cannon had been placed was not far. They ran to it. There was a little delay waiting for an elevator. Ham and Long Tom spread cautiously to the ends of the lobby, took up positions of guard. In their hands they held machine pistols, weapons slightly larger than automatic pistols, but equipped with drum magazines containing bullets of the type commonly called mercy. Doc advised them to remain there on guard while he, Renny, Johnny and Donkey Sam went upstairs.

“What gets me,” said Renny as they waited for the elevator, “is the cannon. What are they, an army? How'd they get that cannon up there?”

Doc Savage glanced at Donkey Sam. “How long have the reward advertisements been running in the newspapers?”

“You've got the answer,” said Donkey Sam gloomily. “Several days, the ads have been running. That means that for several days they have known you were sure to be involved in this. And that gave them time to get set. Doubtless they have had that cannon all rigged for hours, maybe days.”

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“Yes, but where in blazes would they get a cannon?” Renny rumbled. “Holy cow!”

“The canines are edemateously metempirical,” Johnny remarked.

Donkey Sam looked at Johnny and said, “Whew! It's a wonder them things don't make your head fly off.”

Renny said, “I think he means that the dogs have him puzzled.”

“The dogs with the poisoned spikes?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, them. They ain't no mystery. One of the crooks Wickard Cole hired brought them along from California. This fellow said he bought them from an animal trainer out there, and he had trained them to tackle anything that moves. If you don't move, the dogs won't bother you. This guy made the poison-carrying spikes himself and the poison he uses is a mixture of potassium cyanide and something else.” Old Donkey Sam eyed them. “That explain that?”

“It's a goofy way to try to kill somebody,” Renny said.

“To kill anybody is goofy to begin with, ain't it?” Donkey Sam countered.

The elevator came. They entered. They rode up three floors and got out. They changed to another cage.

“In case they had somebody watching,” Doc explained, “and try to repeat the reception they gave us at the hotel.”

Nothing alarming happened and they reached the floor where they had spotted the cannon. They skulked in the corridor for a while, hearing and seeing nothing out of the way, then went into the room.

Besides the cannon there was a dead man and an unconscious man in the room.

THE skyscraper which housed Doc Savage's headquarters was a prominent mass in front of the window. Doc Savage located Monk standing in their reception room and made a semaphore question mark with his arms. Monk flip-flopped his own arms in response to indicate everything was all right.

Renny Renwick was looking at the cannon with an engineer's interest.

“Heck, it's the barrel off an obsolete French 75, which they must have stole out of a park somewhere. That explains that. There are enough shells for French 75s being shipped around as part of this war that they wouldn't have any trouble stealing a couple.” He picked up a crate in which two more shells reposed. “Export stuff,” he said. “They hired some stevedore to get them, no doubt.”

Doc Savage noted that the dead man was assuredly dead, and examined the unconscious one. The latter had succumbed to the gas which they had put into the room with the aid of the rifle. He would awaken, but not soon.

The gas in the rifle bullets was not Doc's quick-acting anaesthetic because the latter had proved inefficient in rifle bullets. It was impossible to concentrate enough of it in a bullet to get results. The gas that Doc was using

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was enormously more potent, produced effects lasting for several hours—in contrast to the anaesthetic gas revival in a few minutes or so—and left the victim very woozy, as woozy as hospital ether.

Renny examined the dead man.

“Monk killed him,” Renny said. “He shouldn't have done that, although you can't blame him much.”

Doc said, “See if there is not a second bullet in his head, behind the ear.”

Renny looked. He was surprised. “Shot twice,” he said. “Monk only fired once. That means Monk wounded him, and the fellow's pals shot him because they didn't want a wounded man on their hands.”

Renny went over suddenly and moved the unconscious man. There was a gun under the fellow, a revolver. Renny broke it open and saw that one cartridge had been discharged.

“This seems to be the guy who killed him,” he rumbled.

“Sure bloodthirsty hombres,” muttered old Donkey Sam Davis.

Renny wheeled on the old prospector. “Ready to go on with that story of yours?”

“Sure,” said Donkey Sam. “Only where was I? The part about Wickard Cole being married and nobody knowing it?”

“No,” Renny told him. “It was the part about the girl who claims she is Para Summers, but who you say is Mrs. Wickard Cole, inserting the advertisements—”

Doc Savage said, “Hold that a moment.” His voice was quiet. He added, “There must have been more than two of them here in the building. We better check on that.”

Renny and Johnny and the old prospector remained in the hall.

Doc Savage climbed the stairway cautiously until he was one floor from the rooftop and, by using his periscope gadget, discovered there was a man waiting at the rooftop door with a revolver in one hand and what seemed to be a homemade grenade in the other hand. The grenade had a fuse and the man was smoking a cigar.

THE bronze man retreated from the stairway door into the hallway. He found an office door unlocked, entered. It proved to be an empty office. He opened one of the windows, leaned out and examined the prospects above.

He removed from his clothing a hank of stout silken cord, equipped with knots so it could be climbed, and the end attached to an alloy metal grapple which unfolded. He uncoiled the cord, set the grapple, made the cords into loops lasso rope fashion, and executed an outward swing and toss upward. He had practiced the move a great deal. The grapple took hold on the roof ledge at the first attempt.

He tested it with plenty of pull, then went up the cord.

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They were not expecting him to come over the roof edge, so they were not watching. The penthouse arrangement containing the elevator mechanism stood open, the door lock shattered, and a man was waiting inside, a sledge hammer poised.

All his attention was devoted to peering down the elevator shaft, watching the elevators below.

Doc moved around to the other side of the elevator house and waited.

After not more than five minutes had passed, the man who was watching the stairway came up on the roof. He was puzzled. "What the hell goes on?" he asked. "What happened?"

"That damned Slim," snarled the man at the elevator, "must have made a bobble. He said they took No. 6 elevator. They didn't. No. 6 only came up to the twelfth floor."

"Maybe they changed elevators?"

"They could have got smarted up at the hotel," the man agreed, "and done that."

"I don't like it."

"You said a mouthful."

The stair watcher went back to his job. But he did not stick it out long. He became frightened and rejoined his partner peering down the elevator shafts. "We better do something," he said.

"What do you suggest?" asked the other bitterly.

"We are supposed to get rid of that old goat, Donkey Sam Davis."

"And Doc Savage, too."

"Yes, but Donkey Sam was our particular meat."

"He's with Doc Savage now."

The stair watcher became bitter. "Don't be so damned stupid," he snarled. "Donkey Sam hasn't been with Doc Savage long enough to give him the whole story. And furthermore, Donkey Sam is the only living witness who can actually connect Wickard Cole with the black devil. So Donkey Sam has got to be shut up permanently."

"What about Savage?"

The angry man said, "Wickard Cole isn't going to try to lick Savage! That's where guys in the past have fell down in dealing with Savage."

"You mean he takes after them and they neglect their business to fight him?"

"That's it. And don't lick him. And when they don't lick him they're washed up. Whereas, if they had stuck with the job they were trying to pull, they might have at least got the job pulled and cleared out."

"Oh," said the other. "We go ahead and finish this job and forget about Doc Savage."

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“Not forget about him—keep out of his way.”

THEY growled at each other in growing concern for a while longer, then decided to go downstairs and have a cautious look. They seemed to think that, if they were intercepted, they could pass themselves off as insurance salesmen. It seemed that both of them, Doc Savage concluded as he listened, had had the foresight to get themselves jobs selling insurance, on commission basis, for a firm in the building.

The stair watcher picked up two cases containing small animals. The trained dogs which had been used against Doc Savage at the hotel.

Alarmed, the other demanded, “What the hell you going to do with those?”

“Use them,” the man said, “if I get a chance.”

His companion cursed him. “Why not carry a sign sayin' who you are?” he snarled. “Everybody in town will have heard about the poison-dog gag by now.”

The other hadn't thought of that. “Sure, that's right, ain't it?” he said.

He put the two cages in the elevator house.

“We can come back and get 'em,” he said, “if we need 'em.”

“Sure. Good idea.”

The two went down the stairs cautiously.

DOWNSTAIRS, Renny had gone back into the office to have a look at the barrel mechanism of the French 75 with which the grotesque attack had been made on Doc Savage's office. Or so he announced when he returned to the hall.

“They didn't know much about artillery,” he said, “or they would have blown us to small pieces at that range.”

Johnny and Donkey Sam had been waiting impatiently in the hall.

“What has happened to Doc?” Johnny demanded, using small words in his anxiety.

While Johnny and Donkey Sam were looking as if they wished they had an answer to the question, one of the men from the roof came into the hall. He walked boldly past them, lifted an arm in casual salute, said, “Hello,” and went on to the elevators.

He stood in front of the elevators, then turned and presented them with the end of a gun.

He talked in a loud voice.

“Take your time and don't make any sudden moves,” he said. He lifted his voice to a shout. “I don't know what is going on here, but there was an explosion some time ago on this floor, and I was sent up here to

investigate.”

He talked fast and ran his words together so that his shouting was as nearly a continuous noise as he could make it.

Under cover of the noise, his companion returned for the poisoned animals and turned the two strange, ferocious dogs out of their cages. The animals came down the hall fast and silent—they seemed never to bark or snarl—with lights glinting from the steel-needle devices clamped to their muzzles.

Neither Renny, Johnny or Donkey Sam Davis seemed to see or hear the animals until they were being bitten.

Chapter XI. MONK AND THE REFORM

MONK MAYFAIR had kept a pair of strong binoculars focused on the window of the office from which the cannon shot had come. He was worried. “Somethin's happening over there!” he muttered. “I can't tell—”

He whirled.

Para Summers was trying to climb silently over the rubble that had been the hall partition.

“Hey, where you going?” Monk yelled.

The young woman ran. Monk dropped the glasses, raced after her and caught her. She picked up a piece of lumber and tried for his head, swinging as if his head was a golf ball. “Sportswoman, eh?” Monk said indignantly.

“Let me go!” Para snapped.

Monk disarmed her. He tossed the club back on the pile of wreckage. Then he dodged wildly as she kicked at him. She missed the kick and sat down. Monk laughed, said, “Like a cucumber, you do your best fighting after you're down.” That made her very angry. She sprang to her feet.

“Now wait a minute,” Monk said. “We could keep this up all day.”

She glared at him in what seemed to be a trembling rage. Then suddenly tears came to her eyes and she began to shake with sobs. A moment later she was sobbing on Monk's shoulder.

“Do you have to be so mean to me?” she gasped pitifully.

Monk was moved. He was so moved that his toes curled. Little red devils ran up and down his backbone.

“Gosh!” he said.

She was pretty. She was little. She was helpless. She smelled like the clover in June. She was as nice as the blossoms on the apple trees.

“Poor kid,” Monk said. “You poor kid.”

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"I'm so scared," Para sobbed.

"You poor thing," Monk said. "You just stop worrying."

She looked at him. Monk gazed into her face. He did not have to look down at her because Monk was as short as a tree stump himself. She was wonderful.

"I can stop worrying?" she asked tearfully.

"You sure can," Monk said.

"You're so nice."

It occurred to Monk that she was beautiful enough to be a composite of all the other troubles which he had had with womankind.

"Yes, you can stop worrying," Monk said gently. "Because I am going to see you in a safe place."

"Where?" she asked.

"In jail," Monk said. "In a nice jail made out of rock and steel."

WITH the air of a man who had conquered a mountain, Monk seized the extremely attractive young woman by the wrist and hauled her back into the partially wrecked reception room. Monk felt fine. He threw out his chest. He thought he felt like Napoleon must have felt.

"This means," he informed her, "that I've reformed. A sucker for the last time, that's me!"

He scooped up a telephone, said, "Police headquarters."

The girl stared at him, speechless.

A voice told Monk out of the telephone, "Police headquarters. Sergeant Stover speaking."

"Send a couple of officers up to Doc Savage's headquarters," Monk said. "We have a girl here who needs locking up. This is Monk Mayfair speaking."

"Right away," the voice said.

Monk hung up. He eyed Para Summers triumphantly and said, "Those guys have been razzing me about falling on my face every time a pretty leg went by. I'll show them."

"But if you would help—" Para began.

"Why does a pretty girl always ask a sucker to help her?" Monk demanded. "Help you nothing! Sister, you have told us more lies than a fish has scales."

Para stared at him. "I have told you only one falsehood!"

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Monk threw up his hands. "Sure! Just one great big one, from beginning to end!"

She shook her head.

"The only lie I told you," she said, "is that I inserted those advertisements in the newspapers. I did not do that."

Monk peered at her, startled. "You didn't put the advertisements in the newspapers? Come to think of it, Doc said you didn't. He said you didn't know what newspapers charged for ads like that, and thought they all charged the same price, which proved you hadn't inserted the ads."

"That is right," Para said.

Monk snorted. "Doc was mistaken," he said. "You probably lied about not knowing the prices to give you an out now."

"I didn't insert the ads," Para said.

Monk shook his head. "Donkey Sam Davis says you did."

"Donkey Sam Davis does not know me."

"He sure acted like he did."

Para said, "Everything but that is the truth."

"Oh, cut it out," Monk advised her. "You said you were a detective and we checked on that. A license as a private detective has never been issued to you."

Para shook her head at him. "I did not claim I was a licensed detective. I am not. But I am a detective, and I was doing detective work—"

The elevator door opened and two men in police-patrolmen uniforms came out.

"There's two cops who *are* genuine," Monk said.

"You Monk Mayfair?" asked one of the uniformed men. "This the prisoner?"

"Take her," Monk said triumphantly. "And don't ever say that the Mayfairs can't pass up a lady in distress."

The blue-clad pair laid hands on Para Summers. They led her out. They rode down in the elevator. They seemed to be having trouble with their faces.

They got into a taxicab in the street. Then the trouble with their faces got the best of them and they burst into whooping mirth.

"What was it that homely ape said?" one chortled.

"He said, 'There's two cops who are genuine,'" the other gasped.

Para stared at them in horror. "You're not policemen!"

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BOTH of them immediately showed her guns, one of them a knife also, and the one with the knife murmured, in a way that was frighteningly terrible, "You wouldn't want your pretty self found in different sacks in the river, would you?"

After that they rode for a long time in the cab. When they went into a building—an abandoned commercial garage it seemed—on the north outskirts of the city, the man who had driven the taxi came along. He was one of them.

Wickard Cole was there. He looked as if he had had a hard night, or several of them.

He saw the girl.

"You caught her!" he yelled. He dashed forward. Then he stopped. "Oh!" He was sickly disappointed. "It's *you!*"

Para Summers examined him with contempt.

"So your name is really Wickard Cole," she said. "And not Judson Potter or Delbert Heyer. You have more names than the sidewinder, which is also a snake."

Wickard Cole was bitter. "It was a laughing day in hell when I met your family," he said. "It has been nothing but bad luck to me."

"

We have been bad luck to *you!*" Para shuddered. "How funny!"

Wickard Cole stood scowling at her, and finally a smile warped his hard mouth, but it was a thing that had no humor.

"At least we save ourselves by catching you," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Your sister loves you as much as you love her, I imagine," Cole said.

Para jerked tense. Color washed out of her face. Then the color and excitement came back with a glad rush.

"Nora got away from you!" she gasped.

Wickard Cole nodded grimly. "Two hours ago. She will go to Savage, of course. But by then they will know that you are with me and she will dare not talk."

He wheeled to a man. "Get the crew moving!" he snapped. "We leave here right away. We pull out."

The man looked at Cole uneasily. "We're going ahead and pull the big finish to the thing?"

"That's right," Cole said. "Get going."

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The man did not look happy. He went away, was not gone long, and looked less delighted with things when he returned.

“We got complications,” he said.

Wickard Cole scowled. “What on earth you talking about?”

“Four of them,” the man said, “have turned lily.”

“Scared?” Cole asked.

“That's what I asked them,” the man explained. He shrugged. “They said you could call it what you damned pleased. They said they were washing out, taking a powder, putting the lid on it. They said forty people were too many to murder at one lick.”

Cole said, “I'll talk to them.”

WICKARD COLE made a bundle of a newspaper, some cotton and a pistol, arranging the bundle so that he could carry it with a seeming air of casualness, but actually with his finger on the trigger, ready to shoot.

Then he left the old garage and walked around the corner to a house which had a residential garage attached, and enough tall weeds around it to make it an easy place from which to take flight.

A number of men were there, but four of them stood apart from the others. These four were uncomfortable but determined.

“You guys,” Cole said coldly. “What's the beef?”

“No beef,” one man said quietly. “We're just taking a walk.”

“Quitting?”

“That's it.”

“You won't get paid a cent.”

“So we figured. It's not all right but we won't try to do anything about it.”

Wickard Cole stood glaring at them.

“What,” he demanded, “has gotten into you idiots?”

One of the men said coldly, “Let's not start calling names.”

The other three nodded.

“What is wrong with you?” Cole repeated.

One of the men wet his lips, said, “Women. We find out there are women working in that place.”

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Cole's face tightened. "So what?"

"You said men only," said the man who had wet his lips. "You said about forty of them would be working in there and would die. But you said forty men."

Cole shrugged deliberately. "Forty men—what the hell? You say forty men and you mean just forty people. Men or women, what difference?"

"You are going to kill the women along with the men?"

"Have to." Cole suddenly cursed. "You expect me to go in there, say to the women: Step outside, darling, because everybody in here is going to get deader than hell, but it's for men only." He sneered. "Men or women, what's the difference?"

The four men did not seem surprised. This appeared to be about what they had expected to hear. They shook their heads.

"I guess we didn't crawl out from under the same log," one said with contempt.

"You quit?" Wickard Cole demanded.

"That's right."

"All right," Cole said coldly. "The four of you stick here, until the rest of us get away."

One of the men sneered. "Sure. Don't worry about us turning you in to the police."

"I'm not," Cole said coldly.

TWO trucks, machines with covered bodies, had been moved up in front of the garage, and the men were loading inside. Wickard Cole stood by and watched them, counting them, studying their faces. Some of them looked scared but he made no comment.

Para Summers was led out and put into one of the trucks, to the enthusiastic and vulgar appreciation of the men who were riding in the same machine. The occupants of the other truck offered to buy the privilege of her presence. They were laughed down. But there was a cold background of horror to their laughter. All of them were under a strain.

A hill sloped up beyond the garage and the house, and a road climbed this. Wickard Cole told both truck drivers to drive to the top of the hill and stop, and they agreed, although they seemed surprised.

Wickard Cole followed in a passenger car, a sedan, and stopped beside the trucks. He got out.

He took from the car a large rifle case. From this he removed a rifle fitted with a telescopic sight.

Cole aimed and fired. He did it with the casual care of an expert rifleman.

Where the garage had been, and the house close to it, there suddenly stood on the earth a gibbous monster of dark, changing shape. A thing titanic in its satanlike hugeness, in the violence of its coming, for it convulsed

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the earth and air with frightening force. The impact of the sudden coming of the thing was sufficient to knock out of shape the houses nearest the thing, and to push windows out of other houses for a great distance surrounding.

Garage and house vanished as if stamped out of existence by the monstrous thing, or absorbed by its very harridan body. For, when it departed—and it seemed to dig feet—first into the earth and make itself a hole into which it sank—there was nothing where garage and house had been but a gaping cavity.

Deep into the earth the thing went, not straight down, but to the west like a mole, burrowing under the earth, and the earth heaved up over this burrow for a distance of a quarter of a mile at least. Houses standing on this heaved-up section canted strangely on their foundations, long ones breaking in parts, and the inhabitants ran shrieking into the streets and yards.

There was noise also, noise too great for ears to really register its complete hissing force. After the black devil of a thing had gone into the earth, the sound remained as echoes bouncing from clouds in the sky, exactly like thunder.

Wickard Cole's men stood white and frightened.

But Wickard Cole was satisfied.

“Four tender birds won't sing,” he said.

Chapter XII. DISASTER BY ARRANGEMENT

HAVING made the remark, Wickard Cole turned—and jumped violently. He ogled a man who had joined them.

“You!” he gasped.

The man had a ramrod straightness of back and the hard, man-eating quality of a mastiff dog. He wore expensive clothing with an unnatural neatness.

“Not expected, I see,” he said.

Wickard Cole swallowed twice. “You certainly surprised me, Gauleit,” he said. “I didn't know you were aware we were using this place as a hide-out.”

Gauleit—it was obvious the man had spent most of his life as a soldier in a land where the soldiers had iron discipline—nodded. “I have been watching you, naturally.”

“Why?”

“We must know the men with whom we deal,” Gauleit said.

Cole wet his lips. “I guess that's right,” he said. “I hope you are satisfied.”

Gauleit looked down at the gaping hole where the garage and the house had been. He smiled. It was a

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cut–your–heart–out smile.

“I am wonderfully satisfied,” he said. “It is too bad the others could not have seen the demonstration.”

Cole scowled. “It wasn't a demonstration. There were four guys down there who were trying to walk out on me.”

“Trouble?”

“Just chicken hearts. They objected to wiping out the women with the others in that thing we're going to stage this afternoon.”

“And you disposed of them?”

“They were in the house next to the garage. What would you say?”

Gauleit smiled. “I approve of your methods. I am glad we are doing business.”

Wickard Cole looked at the man with greedy intentness. “If you are satisfied the thing is what I say it is—and you should be, after what you just saw—maybe you can persuade the others. Tell them it's what I say. I hand over the thing and they pay off, and we've closed the deal.”

Gauleit said dryly, “And then you can leave for the Hudson Bay, or some other far place.”

“Why would I do that?”

“To avoid the necessity of associating with Doc Savage, shall we say?”

Wickard Cole winced. “All right,” he muttered. “You're correct. I'm afraid of him.”

“Understandable,” Gauleit said gravely. “But you will have to go ahead with the demonstration. You will destroy that perfume factory, and my superiors will witness it.”

Cole looked disappointed. “I don't see why I need to destroy a perfume factory,” he said. “Why couldn't we just go out and wipe out a small mountain, or something. That seems to me to be a more convincing demonstration.”

Gauleit lit a cigarette. He did it with precise rhythm as if following a manual–of–arms routine.

“The perfume factory puzzles you,” he remarked.

“I'll say it does.”

“My nation,” Gauleit said, “wishes it destroyed.”

“Why?”

“The perfume factory,” Gauleit explained, “happens to be no perfume factory at all since America became involved in the war. Instead it is manufacturing a new and very deadly poison gas, and we know it happens to be the only factory producing this gas, so we want it destroyed.”

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Cole nodded. He wet his lips. "We better get out of here," he said.

THEY drove south, because the traffic was the thickest to the south and the presence of the trucks, or their passing, were less likely to be noticed at this time of day.

Shortly a car passed them, but turned and followed, and gave them cause for considerable alarm.

Then Wickard Cole said, "It's the men who were going to try to get Doc Savage with that cannon."

"Two of them aren't there," one of his companions reported.

Later the trucks turned to the right and headed across the suburban section toward the Hudson River and the mountain section to the northwest.

They began to follow remote country roads.

Wickard Cole stopped his car and the machine which had overtaken them drew up alongside.

"What happened to the other two of you?" Cole demanded.

The men looked uncomfortable. One said, "I had good luck with the dogs. They bit Renny Renwick, Johnny Littlejohn, and that old Donkey Sam Davis."

"Kill them?"

"The dogs bit them, I said," the man replied. "What chance would they have?"

Wickard Cole frowned. "What about Savage?"

"We didn't get him."

"And what about the other two of you?"

They squirmed. "Well, Savage fired some kind of gas bullets into the room where we had the cannon. The bullets got two men. We shot one of them, the one who was wounded, because we couldn't be bothered with him. We were going to take the other man out, but didn't get to do it."

"Then Savage got the other man?"

"He might have."

"The man wasn't dead?"

"No."

Wickard Cole seemed to not entirely disapprove of the results as a whole. At least there was no expression on his face.

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There was still no approval or disapproval on Cole's features when he removed a gun from his pocket and shot the man to whom he had been talking. He shot the man precisely between the eyes and instantly covered the fellow's companions.

"I am getting tired of these damned failures," Cole said. "From now on I am going to shoot every man who makes a mistake."

He stood glaring at them in a rage that was mad, deadly, but without expression.

"And I'll bet Doc Savage followed you here!" he said.

THE man Gauleit, who had the back of a ramrod and eyes with no soul back of them, stood and watched approvingly. He approved as Wickard Cole ordered the car in which the men had been riding overturned in the roadside ditch, and the body of the shot man spread out conspicuously in the center of the road.

"Ten of you stay here with me," Cole ordered his men. "Rest of you drive on. You know where we're to meet."

Cole placed the ten men, heavily armed, in the surrounding brush.

"Nice," Gauleit said.

For five minutes there was silence, and no stir of movement, except the lazy flapping of a black bird—either crow or some other scavenger—which appeared and circled very high above the motionless body of the man lying in the road.

Then a coupé appeared. Ham Brooks was driving. Long Tom was beside him. There was no one else in the machine.

They saw the body in the road and the overturned automobile. They stopped. They did not get out of their machine. Then, driving slowly, they approached.

Wickard Cole whispered, "They are sure of themselves. Their car must be armored."

"Exactly," agreed Gauleit, also whispering.

Ham and Long Tom jockeyed their machine around the body, then moved back and forth examining the overturned automobile, the surrounding woods.

Finally Ham ventured out, bent over the body.

"This is one of the men who pulled that cannon attack," he called.

"You see any signs of the others?" Long Tom asked uneasily.

"No."

Long Tom got out.

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Wickard Cole stepped into view, shouted, "Take them alive—if they don't move!"

Ham and Long Tom stood quite still. There was not much else they could do, since the shock of finding a body in the road had caused them to be incautious.

Gauleit watched Cole's men disarm them.

"Very nice," Gauleit said.

Two men went over and looked in the coupé in which Ham and Long Tom had arrived, then began with their gun barrels and with a rock which one of them picked up, to smash the radio apparatus under the dashboard of the car.

Chapter XIII. PERFUME AND DEATH

MONK MAYFAIR said in a thin, sick, tight voice, "I decided this girl was a crook and that jail was the place for her, so I called for the police to come and get her. The phone wire must have been tapped. The two cops who came were fakes. I didn't find it out until two genuine cops came later for the girl."

Doc Savage was silent. His metallic features were expressionless. He was giving a stimulant to the man who had been overcome by the gas cartridges which they had fired into the room.

Renny, Johnny and Donkey Sam Davis had their trouser legs rolled up and were applying antiseptic to the marks on their legs where the dogs had bitten them.

"I sure hope Mr. Savage got all the poison off them needles," Donkey Sam muttered.

To ease their minds, Doc Savage repeated an explanation he had given them before, saying, "The two men left the cage containing the dogs behind when they went downstairs, to reconnoiter. They were afraid someone would see them with the dogs. While they were gone it was a simple matter to remove the poison from the spikes, and remove it thoroughly. Then the two men came back and got the animals and turned them loose on you. They saw you had been bitten and decided you would die."

"They didn't have anything on me," said Donkey Sam Davis wryly. "I thought I was going to die, too."

Doc said, "It was rough on you fellows, but it satisfied those two men that they had killed you. It gave them something to take back to their boss and report. They were scared. Without something to report they would have been afraid to go back to their chief."

Donkey Sam scratched his head. "You tipped off Ham and Long Tom to follow them?"

"With a pocket radio. Yes."

"And Long Tom and Ham have been trailing them since?"

"Yes."

Big-fisted Renny finished putting antiseptic on a bite. He replaced the cork in the antiseptic bottle, rolled

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down his trouser legs, and glanced at Donkey Sam Davis. "While we're waiting for Long Tom and Ham to report in," he suggested, "it might be a good idea if you went ahead and finished your story of what led up to this thing."

Donkey Sam was agreeable. "How far did I get with the story?" he asked.

"You told us about Wickard Cole selling out all his property to get money to pull this thing," Renny reminded. "Then Cole got together a gang. And you decided to call on Doc for help because you had heard about him. But you couldn't find him, so you had the advertisements put in the newspapers by Para Summers—"

"By Wickard Cole's wife," Donkey Sam corrected. "Wickard Cole's wife put the advertisements in the papers for me."

Renny frowned. "Had you ever met Mrs. Cole before?"

"No."

"Then why did she help you?"

"Because she knew what was going on," Donkey Sam explained. "You see, Mrs. Cole worked for the German consulate before the war started. She was working there while she was married to Wickard Cole. That's how Cole happened to meet some of the members of the Nazi consulate. That's how he met Wermann Gauleit."

Monk interrupted. He said, "Listen!"

He meant the radio receiver. Sounds coming from it. Rending, grinding sounds. Poppings and crackings. Finally a very loud snap. After that, nothing.

Monk swung to Doc Savage. "Sounded like somebody smashing the transmitter."

Doc Savage nodded grimly. "They have caught Ham and Long Tom, I am afraid."

THE bronze man then ordered activity. They should get weapons together, he directed, and load them into one of the planes down at the water-front hangar-warehouse. They had better take the gyro-plane, which was capable of making a landing on any spot large enough to accommodate its tricycle gear and its large whirling wings. "Take the large gyro-ship," he directed.

"But where are we going?" Monk demanded. "We are without a clue."

Doc answered by producing the perfume bottle, which he handed to Monk. Monk eyed the bottle, recognized it as the one which had been sent to Wickard Cole in the hotel room, but the thing meant nothing more to Monk.

"What does it mean?" Monk asked, waving the perfume bottle.

"Look at the label," Doc said.

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"I did. It's just the name of the company and the perfume. Stuff that's always printed on labels." He was bewildered.

Doc Savage said, "Suppose you do what I did—telephone one of your friends in the chemical division of the war department and ask for a confidential report on just what that perfume factory is doing."

Monk immediately got on the telephone. It did not take him long. He had completed his call by the time the others had their equipment ready to go.

"Poison gas!" Monk said, excited. "That perfume factory has been converted to a plant for manufacturing a new type of gas."

Donkey Sam Davis suddenly popped his hands together. "That explains it!" he shouted. "The Nazis are going to kill two birds with one stone! They are going to have Wickard Cole demonstrate the black devil by using it to destroy the gas plant. That way they'll see how effective the devil is and at the same time the plant will be destroyed. They'll have accomplished as much as a lucky bombing raid would have done!"

Monk, with the look of a man who understood a great deal, said, "Wickard Cole is trying to sell the black devil to the Nazis?"

"That's exactly what he's trying to do," said Donkey Sam Davis.

"Come on," Doc said. "The plant is to be destroyed this afternoon. We have not much time."

THEY collected a new member for the party en route.

The information desk downstairs was connected with a direct office intercommunicator, and this informed them there was a young lady to see them. They dropped off on the way to the water-front plane hangar to have a look at her.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled, after one look.

"Para Summers!" Monk exclaimed.

"Mrs. Wickard Cole," Donkey Sam corrected him.

Donkey Sam was the one who was right. The young lady, who bore a startling resemblance to Para Summers, ran to the old prospector. "I escaped from them," she said, almost in tears.

Monk stopped and studied this girl. He could see a difference. She was the same age as Para, but there were small things about her that were different.

He asked, "Who's the other girl?"

"My sister," said Mrs. Cole. "Para Summers. I was a Summers before I was married. We were twins."

Donkey Sam asked the girl, "You say you got away from them? They have been holding you prisoner?"

She nodded. "They found out I put those advertisements in the newspapers for you."

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"I was afraid that would be risky," Donkey Sam said grimly.

Monk asked, "Why did you have a girl put the advertisements in the papers?"

Donkey Sam looked uncomfortable. "I was out of money," he said. "She paid for them herself."

Doc Savage said, "Come on. Quickly."

They went down to the river and boarded the plane.

THE plane cabin was crowded when they were all inside with their equipment. But the ship was powerful and lifted them off the water. The engine was not noisy and they could carry on a conversation. Doc headed the craft north and west. The perfume plant was upstate in the Catskill Mountains.

Doc Savage spoke to Mrs. Cole. "You once worked for the Nazi embassy?"

She nodded. "Yes, during the time of my—unfortunate—marriage to Wickard Cole."

"That is where Cole first met Gauleit?"

She nodded.

Donkey Sam leaned forward. "Let me finish my story of the thing first!" he shouted.

Doc nodded.

Renny muttered, "Here we go, into the woods again."

But Donkey Sam surprised him by taking very few words.

"I trailed Wickard Cole and his gang from Arizona to New York," said Donkey Sam Davis. "I saw them meet with this Wermann Gauleit. I got a general idea of what was going to happen, but without being able to prove it."

"Wickard Cole was going to sell the black devil thing to Wermann Gauleit?" Renny interrupted.

"To the Nazis," the prospector corrected. "Wermann Gauleit isn't the big-shot Nazi. He's just the one Wickard Cole happened to know. He met him through his wife."

Donkey Sam grinned at the young woman.

"I met Mrs. Cole by accident," he said. "She found out her husband was meeting Wermann Gauleit."

"I had been trying to find Wickard Cole a long time," the young woman said grimly.

"For why?" asked Renny.

"Alimony."

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“Oh—you're not married to him now?”

“No.”

Donkey Sam Davis said, “Mrs. Cole and I got together. I told her who I was and she told me who she was. We decided to pool forces and make it hot for her husband.”

The plane hit a bumpy stretch of air. It lurched up and down aggravatingly. They looked over the side and saw the beginnings of hills which comprised the mountains.

Renny summarized the situation. “Donkey Sam came to New York on the trail of Wickard Cole and ran into Mrs. Cole, who didn't like her husband, and they pooled forces.”

“That's it,” said Donkey Sam. “She had some money, so she put the advertisements in the newspapers.”

Doc Savage suddenly sent the plane downward. He flew thereafter at a height of not more than two hundred feet. This made it necessary for the bronze man to keep his eyes continuously on the business of flying, and of following canyons wherever possible.

Flying so low was not easy on their nerves, but it was a wise tactic to prevent discovery; the thickly forested hills would absorb the motor noise, and of course would keep them from being visible any great distance.

Monk turned to look at Mrs. Cole.

“What about your sister?” he demanded.

“How do you mean—what about Para?” Mrs. Cole countered.

“How did she get involved?”

“Trying to help me.”

Monk frowned. “I don't get it.”

Mrs. Cole shook her head miserably. “Poor kid,” she said. “Para persisted in thinking Wickard Cole had a kind of fascination for me. I guess he had. He was big and very Western, and he did look like Abraham Lincoln, you know. I have always been a push-over for homely men.”

Monk, who was no beauty himself, looked quite interested.

“Para noticed I was acting strangely, and then she found out Wickard had returned,” Mrs. Cole continued. “She asked me about it and I—well—I didn't give her much satisfaction.”

“You didn't tell her the truth?” Monk asked.

“I didn't tell her anything.”

“Why not?”

Mrs. Cole became uncomfortable. “I was ashamed,” she snapped, “to have my sister know I was an alimony chaser. But I needed that alimony and I felt I was entitled to it. If Wickard Cole hadn't been such a devil I

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would not have tried to make him pay. Or I hope I wouldn't have."

Monk grinned. "So your sister was snooping around trying to get some answers from the advertisement and find out what the whole thing was about when we caught her."

Mrs. Cole nodded. "If she wouldn't tell you anything, it was because she was trying to protect me."

"That's it," Monk agreed. "When Donkey Sam, here, mistook her for you, and gave the impression that you were involved in the thing, Para turned as white as a sheet. That is why she was acting so strangely."

"Poor Para," said Mrs. Cole tightly.

WHEN Doc Savage brought the plane down it was late enough in the afternoon that the mountains were thrusting up into the sunlight and making long, creeping shadows.

He sank the ship into a glade, not far from a concrete highway.

Monk got out of the gyro-plane and pointed at a building in the distance, across the valley.

"That the perfume plant?" he asked.

Distance did not hide the fact that the building was a pleasant rambling affair of native stone, with more of southern France in it than of Catskill American.

"That is it," Doc said.

"Why'd they build a perfume factory way out here?" Monk asked.

Doc Savage had the answer to that. "Because the soil in this valley seems to be the one place in the United States fitted to the growing of the particular flower from which this concern makes perfume."

"Oh, like wine districts," Monk said.

Doc Savage indicated a field of delicate gold in the distance. "Those are some of the flowers," he said. "They rarely bloom this late; in fact, that golden color is merely the color of the leaves at this season of the year."

"But the plant is making poison gas now," Monk said.

"Right," Doc agreed.

It was evident that the bronze man was waiting for something. He had made no move to leave the spot or to unload their equipment. But he was getting impatient.

Then a man appeared.

Monk jumped and snatched out a machine pistol.

But the man came closer and Monk stared, muttered, "Say, I seem to know that guy—" He frowned. "Doc, isn't that the head of army intelligence for this district?"

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Doc nodded.

“Sorry, we expected you would come by a regular plane and use that meadow down there,” the army man apologized for his lateness.

He was a lean and powerful man who looked as if more than his hide was made of tanned leather.

Doc asked, “Everything set?”

The army man nodded. “Everything.”

Doc said, “We will lead the attack ourselves. Wickard Cole may have two of our men and a girl—”

“He has them,” the army man said. “They are in the car which is leading the party. The group consists of a car and two trucks containing Wickard Cole's men, and two sedans containing the Nazi representatives.”

Monk recovered from his astonishment.

He shouted at Doc Savage, “You realized the meaning of that perfume bottle in time to get the army up here and set a trap for Cole?”

“That is what happened,” the army man told Monk. “But do you have to yell it out so they can hear it in Baltimore?”

Chapter XIV. THE CLOSING OF A NET

WHEN the cavalcade—sedan, two trucks, two more sedans—came into view, Renny Renwick eyed them anxiously through a pair of glasses. He discovered that Ham and Long Tom, with Para Summers, were in the lead car with Wickard Cole.

Renny turned, took a rolled white cloth from the ground—there was a red cloth also, but that meant the prisoners were not in the lead machine—and spread it out with a rapid whipping motion.

Doc Savage let the gyro-plane drop a few yards by way of signal.

Doc told Monk, “Everything is set.”

Monk, looking as if his hair wanted to stand on end, said, “Set for us to get our necks broke, probably,” he said.

Doc warned, “All you have to do is fly the gyro.”

Monk nodded. “I know what I'm to do.”

He took over the controls. He sent the plane up a small canyon then high along a ridge.

The road ran around the end of this ridge, at the foot of a cliff perhaps a hundred feet in height. From the road, which was cut into the sheer slope of the mountain, there was another drop, but a less steep one, of several

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hundred more feet to the floor of the valley.

Monk followed the ridge carefully.

“Better let me do the dropping,” he suggested hopefully.

Doc shook his head.

Down in the valley a fisherman on the banks of the small stream began to act as if he was going to catch a fish. The fisherman was Johnny, and he had a long pole, and there was a white rag shaped like a fish on the end of his line instead of a fish. When he hauled it out—he could see the road from where he was fishing—the leading car would be coming to the spot where they had decided to attack.

“It's fantastic,” the army man had argued. “We can stop them with a barricade and have machineguns and everything all placed.”

Doc had said, “And have them kill my two assistants and Miss Summers? They will do that. Or worse, they will hold them as hostages and escape, then kill them.”

” You think Cole would kill them?”

“Unless he is prevented.”

So they were trying this wild plan.

Then Johnny, on the stream bank, suddenly caught his fish—the white rag.

“Now!” Doc said.

“I see him,” Monk replied.

Monk yanked the gyro, which had been concealed behind the shoulder of the mountain, out over the road. Their timing was a little slow—Wickard Cole's car had passed ahead a few yards. But Monk overtook it.

Doc Savage opened a hatch in the floor of the gyro.

Monk put the ship above the leading car. Speed of gyro and car were about the same.

Doc Savage went through the floor hatch and landed on top of the car.

The bronze man had a short, pointed steel rod. He drove this into the top of the car as he landed. Not to damage anyone inside; the rod was too short for that. But to give himself a handhold.

Doc swung over, smashed out the glass at the driver's elbow and put a smoke bomb inside.

THE two trucks, the two touring cars, had naturally discovered the gyro. Brakes howled. Men leaned out of windows, fired with small arms.

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Monk was supposed to fly the gyro and himself away to safety. He did nothing of the kind. He performed a rather remarkable feat whereby he also landed on the car top with Doc Savage—and with another sharp iron rod for a handhold. And the gyro, abandoned, the motor off and the controls set, crashed into the road behind the sedan.

The gyro blocked the road. The lead truck crashed into it with considerable noise. The following truck piled into that one with less but more disastrous noise, because it glanced sidewise and stopped with the front wheels over the brink of the cliff.

Doc had let go his smoke bomb. It spread out loudly in the sedan.

Doc then clubbed the driver with his fist, grabbed the steering wheel rim and shoved hard. The car rooted into the cliff face.

Doc managed to keep his hold on the car. He fought the rear door open.

Monk suffered—considering how he wanted to be in that fight—a disastrous accident. Impact of the car pitched him against the stone cliff and stunned him, so that he neither saw nor took part in any of the rest of the fight.

Doc got Para Summers and hauled her out into the road. Ham and Long Tom were easier. They co-operated.

“Run!” Doc said.

He was under the impression their legs were not tied. But they were. They were lashed wrist and ankle, all of them.

Doc jammed them under the car.

Then he got into the machine, which was full of smoke, and thrust an arm under the dash, got hold of as many wires as possible and tore them out. Someone got him by the hair and tried to beat his head against the side of the car.

The smoke made it impossible to see anything, either in the car or for a distance of several feet around it.

Someone seemed to be getting out of the other door of the car. More than one, judging from the sounds.

Doc rolled out, got down beneath the car and cut the ropes away from Para's ankles. Then he freed Ham and Long Tom.

“Run,” he repeated.

They set off.

Shooting was now general. It came from the two trucks and the two sedans. But also from the surrounding cliffs, where the army man had planted his ambush.

Doc Savage backed away from the car, out of the smoke.

He was in time to see a man—Wickard Cole—vault the low protective fence that separated the edge of the road from the cliff. Cole went down the cliff face.

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Cole descended fast, and with agility. He did not fall. The cliff—perhaps cliff was not the proper word for it, it was far from vertical—could be descended if a man was careful. And Wickard Cole was very careful in spite of his terror.

Doc started to pursue Cole. Then he stopped.

The man was not carrying anything in the shape of bag, package, parcel, and his pockets did not bulge.

Doc went back to the sedan.

The odor of alcohol was very strong and getting stronger.

FULL of horror himself now, Doc Savage lunged around to the other side of the machine. He collided with two men who tried to fight him in the pall of smoke. He did not fight. He backed away and vaulted the hood of the car.

He had surmised what had happened to Monk because Monk obviously was not in the fight. Any fight which Monk entered became noisy with the homely chemist's howling.

He found Monk, picked him up and ran.

He got out of the smoke. Someone from the cliff shot at him. One of the army men. The rifleman saw his mistake, yelled an apology that seemed unnecessary politeness under the circumstances.

Doc Savage himself began to shout. He made his voice as great as he could make it.

“Get back off the cliff!” he shouted. “Stop shooting!”

He repeated this three times and then the army man stood up to yell, demanding what he meant by such an order.

“Get back!” Doc roared. “Stop shooting! Tell the men in the trucks and the two cars to stop shooting!”

The army man ordered his own men to stop firing and to run. He added that it would take more than his advice and a miracle to make the occupants of the two trucks and the two passenger cars stop shooting.

He was right. They did not stop shooting. They were trying to turn the two passenger cars around. The road was too narrow. They got a wheel of one of the passenger cars off the cliff edge. Some of them ran around and cursed. The others ran around and fired pistols and rifles at the army men above.

The army men were retreating very fast.

Doc rounded a corner with Monk.

He found Ham, Long Tom, Para Summers waiting there. With them were Donkey Sam Davis and several of the army agents.

“Run!” Doc said. “We are not far enough away!”

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Donkey Sam Davis popped his eyes. He demanded, “Wickard Cole didn't take the black rock with him?”

“No,” Doc said. “And the odor of alcohol is strong back there at the car.”

“Whew!” Donkey Sam gasped. “Run, everybody!”

They ran, but they had not run far when the black devil came thunderously to stand on the road, then dive into the earth and run off down the cliff face. The black devil was much as it had been before, except for size, the size being much greater, and its coming and going correspondingly more violent.

Beginning where the leading car had been, there was a hole which extended back as far as the first of the two trucks. But the disaster did not end there, for the shock loosened the cliff face, and it slid down, wiping out the other truck and one of the cars, and tumbling an avalanche of stone and débris down the face of the slope.

The avalanche overtook and submerged the running figure of Wickard Cole. There was no chance at that moment or afterward that he lived, and when they did find his body, more than a week later, it was under sixty-odd feet of rock.

The avalanche scared Johnny into jumping into the creek, fishpole and all. How he expected to escape the avalanche by doing that, had it reached that far, which it didn't, was something Johnny never was able to explain.

Chapter XV. BLACK ROCK

THE following morning in Doc's office was a pleasant thing of sunshine with just enough bite to the autumn air to give it zest. Workmen had cleared away the wreckage of the hall partition, and a temporary patch had been placed over the hole the French 75 shell had knocked in one of the big windows.

The army man—his name was Saunders—arrived looking as if he needed sleep. He had Donkey Sam Davis in tow. He dropped in a chair.

“What an afternoon and night!” he complained. “We finally caught all those Nazi agents. Part of them, those in the first car—the first of the two cars following the trucks—were killed. But we rounded up the rest.”

Doc Savage nodded. “Good. But what about the deposit of black rock in Arizona?”

The army man groaned. “We've got a fast bomber waiting. Donkey Sam, here, is going to fly out with me and show me the deposit. We're going to put a guard over that stuff like the guard over the gold at Fort Knox.”

“You better,” Donkey Sam said grimly.

The army man looked at Doc Savage. “What I came up here for, Mr. Savage,” he said, “was to get the story straight in my mind. I've got to make a report, you know, now that it's all wound up.”

Doc Savage was silent a moment. “The black rock—the black devil isn't a bad name for it, either—will be the hard part to explain.”

The army man nodded. “What would you say it is?”

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"A new element, or a hitherto unknown combination of old elements," Doc Savage hazarded.

"Occurring naturally, eh?"

"Yes."

Donkey Sam Davis said, "This place in Arizona where I found it was an upthrust. You know—some prehistoric upheaval had brought deep subterranean formations to the surface. You find very rare minerals in such places. That's where I found the black rock. It may be the only deposit in the world. I don't know."

"I hope it is," the army man said fervently.

Doc Savage agreed, "It would be bad stuff in the wrong hands—an explosive so powerful that it does not even act like an explosive."

"Harmless," Donkey Sam reminded, "until alcohol gets on it. In some fashion, alcohol makes it explosive."

The army man shuddered. "Very explosive. The concussion of the shooting being done by those men in the trucks and cars set it off yesterday. I hate to think what would have happened if you had not ordered my men back."

"The explosive," Doc Savage said thoughtfully, "seems to be one that does what explosive chemists have been trying to do for a long time. That is, set off such a violent impact that the atomic structure of matter is affected. In other words, the explosive is so violent that it completely pulverizes matter, and the pulverized matter in turn smashes other matter, setting off a great chainlike explosion that penetrates deep into the earth, like the root of a tree, heading off in whatever direction it happens to take."

"So that's why the explosive gave the effect of something burrowing off underground?"

"Yes."

"Alcohol," said Donkey Sam Davis, "is needed to make it ticklish. I threw a bottle of whiskey at my donkey Myrtle, and it broke over the black rock. Then I threw a hammer at Myrtle and that set off the stuff." He groaned. "Too bad I was so dumb. Didn't realize what the stuff was until Wickard Cole started trying to sell it to the Nazis."

THE army man stood up. "I'll just say in my report that this old prospector accidentally discovered a new and terrific kind of explosive in natural ore form," he said. "I'll say the explosive was stolen from him by Wickard Cole, and that Cole tried to sell it to the Nazis. The prospector called on you for help, inserting the advertisements in the newspapers to locate you. The advertisements warned Wickard Cole that you would be interested in the thing and that gave him time to prepare plenty of trouble for you. But you finally solved the mystery and overcame it with the aid of"—the army man smiled—"Donkey Sam Davis, Mrs. Cole, and Miss Para Summers."

"That seems to cover it," Doc admitted.

IT was nearly three weeks later when Doc Savage had trouble with his news-gathering service.

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The trouble with this trouble was that it looked a little too innocent. He came near not noticing this in time.

The news service was an elaborate thing whereby the press-wire items from all parts of the world were gathered daily, then condensed and presented for his inspection. The service served two purposes. It kept him up on current events. But more important, it frequently furnished him with items which needed investigation. Trouble—strange trouble, unusual trouble—was his specialty.

That morning, Monk said, “Guess we'll have no news report today. Had wire trouble. And a lot of little pieces of bad luck caught up with our news-gatherers this morning. Two of them are sick. The girl of another one suddenly decided she had to marry him today and no other day. One had an aunt get sick. That kind of stuff. Little things.”

It looked natural enough to Doc Savage.

Later, he wondered if he was slipping. Because it wasn't natural at all.

“Funny thing,” Monk said that afternoon. “You remember our news-gatherer whose girl insisted on getting married today? Well, he just called up to say that his girl confessed a man paid her five hundred dollars to insist on getting married today. Perfect stranger paid her the money, too.”

Doc Savage was suddenly alarmed.

“Start investigating this thing!” he ordered.

THE END

(In this innocent fashion began the strange adventure of “The Time Terror,” the book-length novel to appear next month in this magazine. A fantastic adventure that was to take Doc Savage and his men into a land where time had stopped, a lost world where the brontosaur and the tyrannosaurus, the largest and most ferocious monsters produced by evolution since time began, were the only kings. Read “The Time Terror”, next month.)

DOC SAVAGE AND HIS PALS

Beyond any doubt, you'll never again meet a group like Doc Savage and his five companions. Doc—Clark Savage, Jr.—travels from one end of the earth to the other, righting wrongs, helping the oppressed, giving good guys the break, always, and often punishing evildoers, but never taking a life, if there's any other way out. Doc's “college,” for in stance, is a scientific institution in upper New York where he sends all captured crooks, who, through expert treatment, and sometimes involved operations—for Doc Savage is one of the world's most skilled surgeons—are made to for get all their vicious past and start life anew as useful and decent citizens.

THE DEVIL'S BLACK ROCK

Doc's companions couldn't be better if they'd been made to order. HAM—Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, the shrewdest lawyer Harvard ever turned out, a faultless dresser, and an efficient fighter with his unusual drug-tipped sword cane. MONK—Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, one of the world's foremost chemists, and tougher than tough in a scrap. RENNY—Colonel John Renwick, at the top of the engineering profession. LONG TOM—Major Thomas J. Roberts, a veritable wizard in the field of electricity. JOHNNY—William Harper Littlejohn, renowned geologist and archaeologist.

They're the perfect group of altruistic adventurers. You'll never meet their like, ever again!