

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Scanned and Proofed
by Tom Stephens

Chapter I. THE TOTTERING MAN

IT was spring. Spring, with sunlight soft and warm, with birds nest-building in Central Park, and an occasional colored butterfly astray among the skyscrapers of New York City. Flowers were never brighter in Bryant Park, adjacent to the grimy old tomb that was the public library. And if the air was ever wine for man to breathe, it was wine this day.

Perhaps that was why the cop was gentle with the old codger. The cop's name was Finnigan. He was Irish, bigger than men usually get; and he had a tongue like a blacksnake. He handled traffic at Forty-second and Fifth, a spot that would make any man tough. He was tough. He was very tough.

He came over to the old codger and said, "Look, Pop, you want to get run over?"

The old codger had been gandering along rather feebly.

"I I can't see very well, officer," he said.

It was pretty obvious that he couldn't see very well.

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"Pop, this is no place for you," said the policeman. "I'm gonna put you on the sidewalk, and sure you'd better stay on it."

The old fellow wore overalls which were that very pale hue that comes from much scrubbing. One knee of the overalls bore a patch. Over the denims the elderly man wore a clean but rather shabby coat of coarse stuff, and it became almost certain after a close look at the coat that its vintage was ancient enough that the pants which originally went with it were of the peg-top style.

His shoes were old-fashioned buttoned brogans, cracked under their polish; his tie was a shoe string that went out of style before the World War, and his hat was a genuine beaver, what there was left of it. He was thanking the officer.

"Thank thank you, officer," he wavered. "I I don't get down to town much any more. It it's changed a lot these days. And I can't hardly find my way around. I wonder would you could you help me?"

"Help you how?"

"I I'm trying to find a man."

"Well, Pop, there's a lot of men in New York. What does this man do? Where does he work?"

"I only know the man's name." The old fellow had a way of hesitating two or three times in each sentence. It added greatly to his impression of feebleness. "Doc Savage," went on the old codger, "is the man's name."

The name came within an ace of doing bodily damage to the traffic cop. That is, it surprised him and caused him to step back and a passing motor car just shaved him. He jerked the menaced part of his anatomy to safety, threw a profane opinion after the car, then wheeled on the old man.

"What's wrong, Pop?"

"Why officer nothing."

"Don't kid me, Pop. People who look for this Doc Savage have usually got trouble. Bad trouble. Because other persons' troubles happen to be Doc Savage's business."

The old codger fumbled uncertainly at the buttons of his worn coat.

"There is nothing wrong," he insisted.

"Yeah; I bet." The traffic policeman frowned at him. "O.K., Pop. It's your funeral. Forget it. You want to know where you can find Doc Savage, eh?" He slanted an arm up, as though pointing out the sun at ten o'clock. "See the top of that building? The eighty-sixth floor? They tell me Doc hangs out in a kind of special place he's got up there."

The old man thanked the lawman kindly and shuffled on toward the skyscraper which had been designated.

AND across the street, a discreet-looking limousine, which had been loitering at the curb, pulled out into the traffic, rolled down into the next block, and again loitered.

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The old codger made slow and wavering progress.

And the limousine loitering across the street moved on to keep abreast with him, while on the sidewalk near where the machine had tarried, a few pedestrians stared after the car in a surprised fashion. For, on chancing to look into the car, they had seen, alone in the rear seat, a Eurasian woman with a beauty that was almost breath-taking.

But no one noticed that the limousine was trailing the old codger.

The feeble ancient had his head down now, plodding purposefully for the skyscraper. Reaching the portals of the giant building, he entered and found himself on the glassy floor of a great, arching, modernistic lobby where there were shops and elevators and elevator starters in striking uniforms. The number of elevators seemed to confuse the old man. There were nearly a hundred elevators in the building.

Just as he had approached the cop for information, the old codger accosted a uniformed elevator starter. And as soon as he had asked for Doc Savage, he was shown to an elevator which stood apart from the others. Apparently a private elevator. The door closed and the cage went up but only one floor.

The elevator door opened, and stepping out, the old fellow found himself in a long, narrow hallway. He stood at one end of this hallway, and at his right hand, arranged along the wall, were comfortable chairs occupied by numerous types of people.

At the far end of the long room was a desk. In front of the desk was a large, solid-looking chair. Behind the desk sat a remarkable fellow who looked like a pleasant ape. Seated on the floor beside the desk was a pig a pig with remarkably large ears and four long legs. And with one of the legs, the pig was industriously kicking a spot behind one of its huge ears.

The old codger was shown to one of the chairs arranged along the wall.

The man who escorted the elderly fellow to the chair was a slenderish man with a lean waist, a sharply featured but not unhandsome face, and a large mobile mouth peculiar to orators the type of mouth frequently found on congressmen, senators and carnival barkers. At various times he was addressed by people in the room as Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, and once he was called "Ham." The homely fellow was called either Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, or "Monk," a nickname which certainly fitted him.

The old codger sat in the chair where he had been placed and watched the scene with his faded eyes. It became evident that this long room was in the nature of a receiving chamber. In fact, every occupant of the chairs was here to see Doc Savage about something, and these two unusual men, Monk and Ham, were interviewing the visitors.

Some of the visitors wanted gifts of money. These got rather short treatment, which included being handed a slip bearing an address where they could get a job of hard work with a living wage.

Others seemed to have an illness they wanted Doc Savage to treat, and these were also sent away with slips of paper bearing addresses where they could get treatment.

The interviewing proceeded, and finally came the old codger's turn.

The elderly man was escorted to the large chair in front of the desk, planted therein, and before he knew it, his sleeve was rolled up, and around his arm was placed a contrivance which somewhat resembled the device which doctors use to take a patient's blood pressure. The old man gaped at this. He didn't seem to know what

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it was.

The device was part of a "lie detector," and every other person who sat in that chair to be interviewed had sat with the contrivance strapped to his or her arm.

Monk glanced at the front of a drawer on his side of the desk. He was interested in a small meter located here. The needle of this stood at a point only a shade from zero, which meant the old fellow had metal buckles on his overalls, and possibly a little silver in his pockets.

If there had been any large piece of metal on his person, a gun or a knife, the needle would have registered well over on the dial.

"So you came to see Doc Savage?" Monk inquired.

"Yes yes; that's right," said the old fellow.

"What do you want with him?" Monk asked.

And as the old gentleman responded, Monk kept an eye cocked on the jiggling needle of another meter, attached to the lie detector.

The codger answered the other questions, slowly and haltingly, and Monk watched the lie detector, but the needle moved only slightly, only to the extent that was normal. Any undue activity on the part of the indicator when a question was put meant that, if a lie was being told, nervous excitement was generating minute electrical currents in the subject's body.

The device, an adaptation of the conventional type in use by some police centers, was, as Monk well knew, not entirely infallible; but it offered an excellent guide. And finally, Monk leaned back.

"Now," he said, "that you've told your story, Mister "

"Weaver," said the old man. "Tobias Weaver. I am Teddy's grandfather."

"Yeah; sure," Monk said. "What I started to say, Mister Weaver, is that it's very seldom any one gets to see Doc. Very seldom."

The elderly man quavered. "But I I so wanted to see Mister Savage. Teddy "

"You're going to see Doc," Monk said. "And you're the first man in three days we've thought worth while to send on up to Doc." Monk rose. "Follow me."

Chapter II. DEATH AND THE BOY

THEY took an elevator of breathless speed to the eighty-sixth floor, and stepped out into a plain corridor, then approached a bronze-hued door which bore simply a small-lettered legend:

CLARK SAVAGE, JR.

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Monk opened the door, which gave into a reception room floored with a deep rug, containing no furniture but an inlaid table of unusual size, and a large and strong-looking safe.

Crossing this, Monk and Weaver entered a vast library, filled almost to capacity with bookcases containing ponderous scientific tomes. Continuing on, they came to a laboratory which plainly occupied the remainder of the floor of the skyscraper and the building, at its base, occupied an entire block, and was only slightly smaller up here. The laboratory was a labyrinth of complicated scientific apparatus.

There was a figure at the far end of the great room.

Monk stopped. No doubt he had seen that figure at the opposite end of the laboratory thousands of times, yet for a moment a touch of something like awe seemed to hold him in a spell. A new respect seemed to come into his rather uncouth, boisterous manner.

"Doc," he said. "A man to see you."

The distant figure turned. It was a man whose figure seemed to be remarkably well proportioned. A man who was quietly attired in dark clothing. A man who seemed to be working at a table that was rather small; it appeared that if the table was a little smaller, it would be a toy piece.

Then the man came toward them, and it was evident why the table seemed small. The table had normal proportions. It was the man who was big. A giant of bronze. Tropical suns had darkened his skin. His hair, of a bronze hue only slightly darker than his skin, was straight and smooth as a metal skullcap. The sinews in his neck and on the backs of his hands indicated strength beyond the usual.

"Doc Savage," Monk said.

Then he left.

TOBIAS WEAVER, the old codger, was shown to a comfortable chair in the library. He, too, seemed in awe of the bronze giant, which was understandable because, beginning with the surprise of the traffic cop, the importance of the man had been indicated. The people downstairs, some of them plainly big shots. The impressive size of this library and laboratory. And the stature of Doc Savage himself. All contributed to the certainty that this man was out of the ordinary.

"I thank you for seeing me," said Tobias Weaver rather nervously.

"You are entirely welcome," replied the bronze man. "Just take your time and tell your story."

Doc Savage's voice was quiet, but there was a quality in it that suggested great power and facility under full control.

Tobias Weaver's hands were shod in cheap gloves. He clasped them around his cane.

"Teddy Teddy" he paused and looked at the floor, and his face looked miserable "Teddy is eight years old. He was a splendid little boy, and he has been with me four years, since his his mama and papa were killed in an automobile accident. I used to take him camping. He's small, but he liked to camp out, and we used to go into the woods and cook our dinners."

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Doc Savage asked, "And what happened?"

"You know how little boys play," Tobias Weaver said. "They they play at imitating famous figures. I remember in my day we played at imitating General Grant and Abraham Lincoln. Teddy's father, I remember, used to play like he was Buffalo Bill." Tobias Weaver's voice, with steady talking, became less hesitant, like a rusty piece of machinery that worked better after it was used a few times.

"Poor little Teddy," he murmured. "He was injured while at play. It was his back. He cannot be cured and he cannot live much longer. He just lies there, on his little cot just lies there "

Tobias Weaver stared at the floor, his hands clenched and his lips compressed, and Doc Savage, in a voice that somehow seemed to convey comfort and strength, said, "Is there something I can do?"

Tobias Weaver nodded slowly. "I have seen enough to-day to show me that you deal in large affairs. My little request is so insignificant in comparison. It concerns only an old man and a little boy who will not be in this world much longer. It may seem a small request. But to the little tike it would mean a lot. You see, he has read about you, and heard of you, young as he is."

The elderly man hesitated, staring at his hands, then added, "You see, Teddy was playing he was Doc Savage, and was climbing on the house as he heard you can climb; and he wasn't careful enough, and got his injury while imagining he was you."

Doc Savage's metallic features showed sincere regret, and a troubled expression came into his eyes the eyes that were probably the most remarkable of the bronze man's features. They were like pools of flake gold, always stirred by tiny, invisible winds. At times the eyes seemed to have a power, something compelling that was almost hypnotic.

"Would you visit Teddy?" asked Tobias Weaver. "It would make his end as happy as such a thing could be made."

"Of course," the bronze man said simply.

Tobias Weaver bowed his head, and for a moment bent his efforts toward controlling himself.

"Thank you," he said. "I know now that you are a truly great man. Poor Teddy will be delighted."

Doc Savage, obviously to get the old gentleman's mind out of its morbid channel, asked, "Where do you live?"

"In the little town of Stormington. You you drive through town on the main street, turn turn right and it is a large gray house on top of the hill. There there is an iron deer in the yard. But but could of course you are too busy to go with me now?"

Doc Savage arose. "No. We'll leave at once."

Tobias Weaver arose from the deep library chair. And in the laboratory, the great room beyond, a small indicator light in a large instrument panel went dark.

Down the street, the bronze man and Weaver entered a dark coupé, one of several cars which the bronze man owned, and drove away.

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There was a limousine parked across the street, a large discreet car, the rear seat occupied by an exotically exquisite woman with a slightly Asiatic cast to her features. The limousine did not follow Doc Savage's coupé but it did take another route for the same destination.

STORMINGTON was a bit of the old world set down close to New York City. An antique asleep in the hills. The streets were narrow, and some of the houses dated back to the Revolution. One main street ran through the center of the town, continued on, and passed around various hills, and atop one of these hills sprawled the house where Doc Savage stopped the coupé.

A winding lane led up from the road to the house, which was surrounded by a low stone fence. In the lawn, not too well tended, stood an iron deer.

"I want to apologize for my house," quavered Tobias Weaver. "It has been in my family for centuries and I do not have the finances to keep it in repair."

The house was of gray stone, outwardly ornate after the old way, which frescoes, tall, arching windows of stained glass, and a sharply gabled roof. The door creaked on its hinges and let them into an atmosphere of museum antiquity, uncarpeted floors and plain, stark old walls stamped infrequently with ancient oil paintings and prints.

In the vestibule stood a rickety table, on this an aged silver holder for four candles; and Tobias Weaver applied a match to the candles, then handed them to Doc Savage. It was gloomy in the old house.

"This is a queer old house," he said shakily. "It was built by an ancestor who was eccentric. Teddy Teddy will enjoy telling you about it, if you care to listen. And later, I will show you the strange place."

He advanced toward a door, and the door opened before he reached it, making a strange, low sigh as it did so.

"Teddy will be asleep," Tobias Weaver said, pointing through the portal, "and it would be wonderful if you would go to him alone and awaken him. Teddy will think it is a dream." He pointed again. "You just go straight ahead, through the doors."

Doc Savage nodded and passed through the door, leaving old Tobias Weaver behind. The bronze man's tread was easy for one of such physical build, and silent except for an occasional creak of old flooring underfoot. The flames of the four candles leaned backward slightly in the air as he moved forward and the tips of the flames gave off little yarns of smoke.

The first room through which Doc passed was narrow and long, made dark as a vault with drawn shades, and furnished only with a carved table at which stood two fragile chairs. There was no sign of the party who had caused the opening of the first door, and as the bronze man approached the door on the far side of the bare chamber, that also opened, making as it did so a low sound that was between sigh and groan.

And, stepping through that aperture, the bronze man lifted the candles; but there was no trace of human presence, except his own Gargantuan shadow leaping along the aged walls when he moved. Here, also, there was no furniture, but only plain floors, plainer walls, and antiquity everywhere.

Doc went on. The air was not dank, for dankness is moisture, humidity; and this air had the dryness of something shut up for a long time. The kind of air that would be expected in a desert tomb, where they find the mummies that have been there a half dozen thousand of years, and which collapse the instant there is a

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freshening of the air.

Even the wails of the boards underfoot were dry whinnies. And then the flooring changed to stone, and the walls, too, and there was another door which opened in the same uncanny fashion as the others, with no one to be seen; apparently no human agency was behind the phenomenon.

The giant bronze man, silent now, stepped through the opening, holding his candles out to one side, where the light would not get in his eyes. It was inevitable that the eerie, labyrinthian old house would create an effect on his mind, but his metallic features had not changed expression. But he came to a stop now, holding the four candles high.

This room was smaller. Of stone, too ceiling, walls and floor, all gray, flinty rock; while the door the one through which he had come was the only door was of wood on one side, and sheeted with steel on the inside.

The sheeting had the appearance of ancient doing. The stone walls here were marred with strange carvings; initials and hearts pierced with arrows, and one or two funny faces. There were dates on the walls, all old 1773, 1780, 1761. In another place, "Down with the Kind!" was cut in the stone. All which indicated this had been some kind of prison, probably, back in Revolutionary days.

It was a strange place for a boy to be.

THE little fellow lay on a bed directly in the center of the room in a great four-poster bed, the four legs extending up and meeting crossbars of an awning support. The awning was of old lace, and the sheets on the bed were heavy, very white, almost as substantial in appearance as canvas.

Swathed as it was under the sheets, not a great deal could be told about the boy's figure. There was a sleeping stocking, a kind of dunce cap, drawn over the small head almost to the brows; and the face, wasted until it looked aged, and very pale, was a sallow spot above the sheet.

The fixed eyes were open, dark pools, and Doc Savage went over to the bed, which was the only article of furniture in the room.

The dark eyes followed him, growing wider, and the wan lips parted, then warped up at the ends in an incredulous grin which spread over the whole of the tiny face.

"You you are Doc Savage!" chortled the figure on the bed, weak-voiced.

The bronze man was silent for a moment, as though embarrassed by the incredulous admiration of the wan form. Then the figure on the bed spoke.

"Could could I touch you?" the little form asked with pitiful eagerness.

The bronze man showed by his unease that he was in a situation with which his remarkable training had not prepared him to cope. Doc was a scientific product, in a sense; but science had failed to do one thing: it had failed to put a shell around his heart.

And so Doc brought a hand down to touch the little figure on the bed. And a hand that was not as tiny as it should have been, and certainly not as wasted, came darting out from under the covers with the speed of a rattlesnake.

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The fangs it held one fang, really, and that the drooling nozzle of a hypodermic needle hit the bronze man's arm accurately near the veins and emptied its contents into his life stream.

The hypodermic needle stabbed again. Doc shifted backward, evading it.

Out of the bed came the "boy." No boy at all. A grown man, with a tiny face which artful disguise had made into the visage of a dying tike. Where his body had lain in the bed, the mattress was hollowed out; and the form that had shown under the covers was only a dummy of the type which ventriloquists use. The man sprang away from the bed.

The trickster was fast on his feet. Even then, he had no need of the needle again, for Doc Savage, a strange expression on his features, seemed to comprehend that the stuff which had gone into his arm was quick-acting. He whipped toward the door.

That door closed, with an abrupt groan, and there were the muffled sounds of other doors closing, with groaning sounds noises made, it was now evident, by electrical mechanism which operated the doors.

The big bronze man bent at the knees and sank, swayed a little and upset on his side, and thereafter did not move.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and the day was Tuesday.

Chapter III. TWO MEN AND A TRAIL

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon, and the day was not Tuesday, but Wednesday. There were more visitors than ever in the office. Monk was paying no attention to them. As a matter of fact, Monk was busy. He was doing a crossword puzzle.

Right now he was stuck. Only one word was needed to complete the puzzle. And Monk, in vain it seemed, was scratching his furry head for the answer. Then, suddenly, he gave a loud "Whoop!" that startled every one and grinned as he put down the answer.

Monk looked as if he didn't even know the answer to what two and two added up to. Not that Monk didn't possess any brains. The fact was that Monk, whose low, apish forehead did not appear to hold room for a spoonful of brains, was one of the world's greatest chemists.

His laboratory was a penthouse affair down near Wall Street, and such was his ability that spending only a short time there at wide intervals, he was able to make all the money he needed. And having a great liking for excitement, Monk therefore spent most of his time as one of Doc Savage's small group of five assistants.

Monk had two other enjoyments of life: One was a great delight in pursuing every pretty girl that met his eye, an avocation at which he had remarkably good luck considering that he was as homely as the proverbial mud fence. His other joy was a never-ending battle, verbal and otherwise, with the dapper lawyer, Ham.

Monk pressed an interoffice communicating system which was connected with Doc's eighty-sixth floor headquarters, and got no answer. A worried expression came over his homely face, and he fell to frowning at the pig with the large ears and long legs, which sat beside the desk.

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"Wonder what's happened to Doc, Habeas Corpus?" Monk asked the pig seriously.

"I ain't studied mind-reading, Monk," the pig, Habeas Corpus apparently said.

Monk was a strange fellow. He liked to use a certain ability as a ventriloquist which he possessed to hold facetious discussions with his pet pig.

Abruptly, Monk announced that receptions were over for the day and shooed the aspirants out and locked up.

At this point, Ham, the dapper lawyer, put in an appearance. He wore this afternoon a completely new outfit which, if possible, was more immaculate than his sartorial splendor of the previous day.

"Task, task," Monk said sarcastically. "Gosh, but you're pretty this afternoon."

"It wouldn't hurt you to spruce up a little!" Ham snapped.

"But I've got me a suit of clothes for every day in the week," Monk snorted.

"And where are they?"

"This is it I've got on," Monk explained.

Ham scowled. He could scowl with a great deal of browbeating dignity, an art he had learned in becoming one of the most astute lawyers in the land.

"Here, Chemistry, old top," Ham called.

Chemistry appeared. Chemistry was Ham's pet anthropoid. Ham insisted Chemistry was a pure-blooded, blue-blooded member of, the strain anthropopithecus troglodyte. Monk's claim was that Chemistry was an ordinary mangy runt of a baboon. But regardless of who was right, Chemistry, the pet ape, bore a resemblance to the homely Monk that was distressing to the chemist.

Monk did not care for Chemistry. Ham did not care for Habeas Corpus. Monk did not care for Ham. It was a combination which never gave any one any peace.

"Doc," Monk said thoughtfully, "has been missing since yesterday."

"Yes," Ham said soberly, "he has."

It was a strange animosity these two had. They could drop it instantly if anything serious came up.

"We better go up and see what we can learn," Monk suggested.

MONK and Ham entered the great establishment on the eighty-sixth floor. There was no sign of Doc Savage. They went through the mail, and there was no note from the bronze man.

"The last seen of Doc, he went away with that old codger yesterday," Monk reminded. "Let's see what they talked about before they left."

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Ambling into the laboratory, Monk opened a section of the wall which looked quite solid, and worked over a complicated piece of apparatus contained in the niche thus revealed.

The apparatus, among other things, consisted of two large reels of fine steel wire. The reels were geared so that the wire passed slowly between the poles of a powerful electromagnet. The contrivance, in fact, was a device for magnetically recording sound on wire.

By running the wire through a playback, Monk reproduced through a loudspeaker all that had been said between Doc Savage and Tobias Weaver.

This apparatus, wired to hidden supersensitive microphones, reproduced all that was said in the bronze man's headquarters. The device, far from being an unnecessary crack pot scientific gadget, had done valuable service in the past.

Finally the talk between Doc and Tobias Weaver, as repeated by the wire recording, ended.

"Huh," Monk muttered, "nothing suspicious about that. The old fellow just came to get Doc to visit a little boy who was dying."

Ham snapped his fingers suddenly, "Monk! Do you know something?"

"Not to hear you tell it," Monk said suspiciously. "What you getting at, shyster?"

"Suppose some one wanted to trap Doc what kind of bait would be sure to get him?"

"There's been lots of baits tried."

"Exactly. That's what I mean."

"Explain," Monk requested, "exactly what do you mean."

"You and I know," Ham said grimly, "that Doc Savage, who strikes some people as being a scientific product who isn't exactly human, has a heart as big as a red sofa pillow, and as soft. This story about a dying kid is exactly the kind of thing he would fall for."

Monk squinted at Ham. "You know, much as I hate to admit you ever had a sensible idea, that sounds reasonable."

"The location of Tobias Weaver's house is given on that wire," Ham said. "I think we should go there and have a look around."

"Sure," Monk agreed. "And not because you suggested it, either. It's my idea, too."

THE two quarrelsome fellows went down to the street, and each took his own car for the drive to Stormington. The reason for this was that Ham had a new roadster, very expensive, very classy.

Monk, insisting at every opportunity that nobody but a snob could feel at home in such a chariot, insisted on taking his dilapidated old flivver, which rattled a great noise when moving, and for which he had paid a hundred dollars. Ham, on the other hand, had paid an even seven thousand dollars for his snappy job.

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They drove north, Monk deliberately menacing Ham's shiny fenders with his crumbled old ears of tin at intervals. Each man had his pet, and each gave voice to such insults as he could think of.

"Great grief, Monk," Ham yelled, drawing alongside Monk's old wreck, "what part of that car of yours makes such an awful noise?"

"That?" Monk grinned at Ham's seven-thousand-dollar vehicle. "Why, that's the six thousand nine hundred dollars jingling in my pocket!"

In their usual glaring fashion, the two arrived at a hill beyond Stormington. Alighting, they gazed at a low stone fence.

"There's the iron deer in the yard," Monk offered.

And so it was. An old-fashioned iron deer standing on the lawn.

The house beyond was a bungalow, small, neat, white, modern.

Monk and Ham strode up the sidewalk, casting glances about them as a matter of keeping a precautionary outlook for danger. But they saw nothing more alarming than the fact that the sun was setting behind a bank of clouds in the west, indicating it would soon be rather dark.

And, stepping upon the porch of the little bungalow, they naturally had no suspicion that this house was nothing like the one which Doc Savage had entered yesterday.

Monk rested a large, hairy forefinger on an electric bell-button. The door opened. Monk stepped back. His mouth fell open.

NO doubt the woman who opened the door had caused many gentlemen to let their mouths fall open. She was almost hypnotically beautiful. She was not tall, but rather gemlike in her exquisite shaping. She had large, liquid, fascinating eyes that were as dark as sloes; her lips were warm and inviting; and every other feature was calculated to upset male equilibrium.

The woman was a Eurasian the exotically beautiful type that sometimes results from the mingling of Asiatic and European.

She floored Monk, figuratively. He was speechless. To his disgust, Ham got off to a head start conversationally.

"I am Major General Theodore Marley Brooks," Ham explained. He jerked a thumb, half apologetically, at Monk, at whose heels was trailing the pig, Habeas Corpus. "This swineherd," Ham added, "is a fellow who does odd jobs for me."

Monk could not have turned more purple had he putrified on the spot. Before he was certain Monk was not going to drop dead of rage, Ham was inquiring about Doc Savage.

"I am Lo Lar," the stunning Eurasian woman smiled at Ham. "Tobias Weaver is my uncle my my father's brother. And Doc Savage was indeed here yesterday; although, of course, he has now gone."

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"Where'd he go to?" Monk asked.

"Doc Savage is a wonderful man," murmured the Eurasian woman. "He believed that, with facilities obtainable in Europe, little Teddy would be saved. So Doc Savage and Tobias Weaver took little Teddy away yesterday. I think they intended to sail on a liner which departed at midnight."

This explanation, given smilingly by the exquisite Lo Lar, sounded quite reasonable to Monk and Ham. That was the kind of thing Doc Savage might be expected to do, for the bronze man's lifework was helping others; and while he more often found himself in violence and trickery, fighting evildoers, he still found time to perform acts such as the one Lo Lar had just described.

What neither Monk nor Ham would have admitted was that Lo Lar was such a knock-out, and had such a disturbing smile, that she could have told them the world was a flat table held up by a green goblin, and they would almost believe it.

Ham happened to be as susceptible to femininity as Monk. They were usually great rivals, and this case proved no exception. Immediately they began outdoing each other to show attentions to the divine little Eurasian.

Lo Lar was surprisingly nice to the pair, showing them about the trim, modernistic little cottage, explaining things. Instead of treating them as a couple of fresh pups, which they undoubtedly were, she laughed at their witticisms and smiled at each impartially, but in such an exciting manner that it would be remarkable if there was not blood shed later as a result.

Monk made one faux pas. He noted a photograph of a wizened, homely gentleman standing on a piano.

"What an ugly bird that is," Monk remarked thoughtlessly.

"Isn't he?" said Lo Lar dryly. "That is my father."

"Gosh," said Monk quickly, "isn't it remarkable how the homely men always have the prettiest daughters?"

Monk was nothing if not quick in climbing out of a hole.

The two Doc Savage aides were completely sidetracked by the Eurasian woman's loveliness. Moreover, they were convinced that Doc Savage had come here and departed for Europe with the dying boy. It all seemed perfectly logical. Their heads were swimming in an amorous haze.

It was almost an hour before they reluctantly departed. Both had tried unsuccessfully to date Lo Lar, but they had her telephone number. Bowing themselves out, they stalked down the sidewalk toward the iron deer and the gate, each, in a scowling silence as he tried to think of something that would blister the other.

Monk had the greatest grievance. Ham had told the vision that Monk was a swineherd and Ham's lackey, and Monk was afraid he hadn't been able to dispel the impression. So, without the slightest warning, Monk hauled off and tried to belt Ham one on one ear by way of a lesson.

Ham evidently knew about what to expect. He was ready, dodged, and all Monk succeeded in doing was to knock Ham's natty pearl-gray derby over beside the iron deer.

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"Listen, my scullion," Ham said. "There is a strong possibility of your springing a leak."

And Ham twitched at the handle of his neat cane, thereby making it evident that the stick, instead of being a foppish affectation, was a sword cane.

"Come on down the road a piece where she can't see us," Monk invited, "and I'll tie a complicated Turks' head knot in each of your two legs, you over-dressed viper!"

"That's perfectly agreeable!" Ham snapped.

Ham stepped over to get his hat, which had fallen beside the iron deer. He did not locate it at first in the darkness, so he struck a match. And he was reaching for the hat when he saw something interesting.

"Monk!" he breathed.

"You polecat in ermine regalia!" Monk gritted. "Come on and "

"Sh-h-h, stupid!" Ham breathed. "There's something phony about this set-up!"

"Huh?"

"Come here! Look!"

Monk came over about the time Ham's match burned out. "I don't see nothin'," the homely chemist remarked.

Ham said, "Wait until I get a match No, wait! We better get away from this place."

"What "

"If that woman sees us acting suspicious around this deer, it will put her wise. Come on, Monk. We don't want her to know we found anything."

"And just what did you find, shyster?"

"Tell you later!" Ham snapped.

Monk, strangely enough, was not for an instant suspicious that Ham might be framing a practical joke on him. They frequently did pull practical jokes on each other. But there was a tone which appraised him now that Ham had discovered something, that Ham was in earnest.

They understood each other, did these two strange fellows. And remarkably enough, in view of their frequently avowed intention to rid humanity of each other, each had on past occasions risked his life to save the other. In their queer way, they were the best of friends.

So Monk followed Ham silently in the direction of their cars. They covered in excess of a score of yards, then Monk exploded a grunt and stopped.

"Ugh!" he said.

"What's wrong?" Ham whispered.

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"Feels like somebody threw a base, cowardly egg at me," Monk muttered.

"What "

"A base, cowardly egg," Monk muttered, "is one that hits you and then runs." He shook his clothing. "Phooey! Pho-o-o "

He went silent.

Ham said, "Monk! What is it?"

No answer.

"I say, Monk! Monk!"

Words gave no response, but there was a slumping sound, and something large and slack rolled against Ham's ankles; and, reaching down with exploring hands, Ham discovered it was Monk, quite limp.

Ham opened his mouth and took in breath to cry out a demand as to what was wrong, but there was a burning sensation in his lungs a burning that he knew was gas of some kind and he held his breath, making no sound.

He tried to bend over to shoulder Monk's limp form; then, realizing he could not make it with Monk, he tried to flee himself, but could do neither, because the vapor he had inhaled seemed to have struck with a sleepy paralysis that preceded unconsciousness.

For unconsciousness did come shortly, and Ham piled down on top of Monk, cutting one hand slightly on fragments of the thin bottle which stuck to Monk's clothing the bottle which, when it struck him, Monk had thought was an egg breaking.

That is, Ham thought it was a bottle. What he did not know was that it was an old-time electric light bulb which had been inserted in liquefied gas, and the nib then pinched off, so that the vacuum within drew in the liquid, after which a bit of adhesive tape was placed over the pinched-off nib.

SHORTLY afterward, Lo Lar, the Eurasian woman, came and stood pointing a flashlight beam down at them. She was joined by several men, shadowy figures who stood in silence awaiting her word.

"They discovered what was wrong at the last minute," Lo Lar said. "At least, the one called Ham discovered that something was amiss. What a break! Just because one of them knocked the hat of the other over by that iron deer. Those microphones hidden in the grass to pick up sounds was a clever idea."

"A happening may be small, like a mouse, but it is said that the mouse has always stampeded the elephant," murmured one of the bystanders.

Lo Lar seemed to be considering. Once her flashlight beam drifted across the faces of the waiting men. Some of them were Orientals, some white men, and one or two were strapping physical specimens of the Polynesian race inhabiting some islands of the South Seas.

Among the bystanders was Tobias Weaver. Only he did not look the feeble, old Tobias Weaver now, for his hair had become dark, and his carriage upright and wiry. He was just a man, aged thirty-five or so, who had a

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very wrinkled countenance, and also a great facility with acting.

Lo Lar pointed at the senseless men.

"Take them away," she directed. "Four of you are enough for that. The rest of you come with me to High Lar." She turned, then paused. "No, we must dispose of those cars. Take them and place them with the machine used by Doc Savage."

Two men departed to do this.

"There are three more members of Doc Savage's group," Lo Lar said. "That is, three men. There is the cousin, Pat Savage, who sometimes helps the bronze man. But she spends her time running a beauty shop on Park Avenue, and we'll not worry about her for the time being. It is only the three remaining men who help Doc Savage that we must take care of."

The strange group standing in the night on the hill melted away on their respective jobs.

Chapter IV. THREE MEN AND A BLANK

THE remarkable group assembled by Doc Savage at the inception of his career was unique in many respects.

Colonel John Renwick was tops in his line. "Renny" was a civil engineer, bridge-builder, mechanical genius. A tall, wide frame of bones and muscle, Renny had a long, puritanical face which had the peculiar habit of looking saddest when its owner was feeling his best.

Renny also had a pair of enormous, incredible fists, almost a quart of bone and gristle, which he liked to employ in a pleasant little pastime of knocking wooden panels out of doors. He had a voice like a political campaign loudspeaker.

William Harper Littlejohn was another man who was tops in his way. He was also pretty tall, and with it, thinner than it seemed any human could be and still go on living. "Johnny's" profession was archaeology and geology. His hobby, to the amazement of all who knew him, was his big words. His clothes never fitted him. He carried a monocle which was a magnifier that he frequently needed in his business.

Major Thomas J. Roberts, the remaining member of Doc's group of five male aides, was not much to look at. In fact, his appearance rated him as a liability. Undertakers often brightened when they saw "Long Tom." Major Roberts had acquired the name Long Tom after an unfortunate adventure with a cannon by the same name. He had acquired his ability as an electrical expert through years of study and experiment.

These three men, each strikingly successful in his line, were on a vacation. Closing a vacation, rather. They had been to Bimini, the tiny island fifty miles or so off the Florida coast, across the Gulf Stream, fishing for marlin. For giant blue marlin weigh often up into the hundreds of pounds, gun-metal gamesters of the salty deep, which drew sportsmen from all over the world.

A PLANE dropped down toward the Hudson River, made a splash, taxied to a large hangar which was ostensibly a warehouse, and was ensconced inside.

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Twenty minutes later, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny, laden with fishing gear and dark-skinned with tropical sunburn, and also bursting to tell lies about the big ones that got away all ruddy with health and eagerness entered Doc's skyscraper headquarters.

The day was Thursday. On Tuesday, Doc had disappeared. On Wednesday, Monk and Ham vanished. And this was Thursday.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "Wonder where everybody is?"

That expression, "Holy cow!" was Renny's trademark, through the frequency with which he used it.

"An enigmatical nullibiety," remarked tall, gaunt Johnny, who never used a small word when he had time to think of a large one.

Long Tom, the electrical wizard, tossed his fishing tackle aside he was never an enthusiastic sportsman and went to a cabinet in which Doc Savage usually filed data on his late electrical experiments.

Doc's custom was to give Long Tom the results of all electrical experiments. For the bronze man was probably more skilled in electrical research than Long Tom, who was widely noted just as the bronze man was a greater engineer than Renny and the possessor of a wider fund of knowledge concerning archaeology and geology than the big-worded Johnny.

"Doc has not been here since Tuesday," Long Tom decided after noting the entries.

"That's kind of unexpected," Renny remarked, examining his big fists thoughtfully. "Seems like he would have left some word around here."

The three aides were not particularly alarmed. They washed, then went down a few floors to a restaurant, ate a hot meal, then came back up. And by that time Renny had thought of something.

"Holy cow!" he boomed. "We might ask Iron Mary what has been going on around here!"

"Sure, ask Iron Mary," Long Tom agreed.

"Iron Mary" was the nickname they had applied to the mechanical device which recorded all conversation, stenographer fashion, on the wire. So they retired to the laboratory, still not at all concerned, and switched on the device.

They heard the recording through, including the voices of Monk and Ham as they decided something might be wrong with Doc.

"Holy cow!" Renny thumped.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" said Johnny.

"It looks like something fishy is going on, or Monk and Ham would have come back," Long Tom declared.

They stood there considering for a while.

"We know where they all went," Renny rumbled at last. "What are we waiting for?"

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TEN minutes later they were in one of Doc's cars, a long sedan, headed for Stormington. The sedan, outwardly notable for nothing except unusual size, had such hidden features as armor plate and bulletproof glass construction, oxygen apparatus so it could remain sealed for hours with men inside, if needed, as well as gas equipment of its own, including a form of gas which would choke and stall the motor of any pursuing machine.

Approximately two hours before sunset saw the three aides in Stormington. A quiet, pleasant afternoon, warm, still beautiful spring. And Stormington, unlike its name, was the kind of peaceful place where chickens scratched in the road.

Through the town, and up a hill, then Renny pointed and boomed, "There's a lawn with an iron deer. That's the place, on top of the hill."

They drove up, got out, and stood looking. They looked past the iron deer for some time, then they looked at each other.

"But where's the house?" Long Tom wanted to know.

A fitting question. For there seemed to be no house.

There was a low stone fence, an iron gate, ancient and rusty. Inside that stood the iron deer, head up as if startled by visitors to the quiet scene.

Renny vaulted over the low fence, walked across grass which needed trimming. His interest centered in a spot where it seemed a house might have stood. He reached the area and looked around. He kicked at the grass. He picked up a stick and poked around a moss-covered stone or two.

Finally he went back to the others.

"Been thirty years or so since there was any house here," he declared.

"That's kinda queer," Long Tom remarked. "This is the place that was described."

But it was Johnny, the gaunt archaeologist, who strode around the iron deer, eying it curiously, as though it were a relic of antiquity instead of a day only fifty or so years past, when iron deers on the lawn were the latest thing.

He picked up a natty pearl-gray derby from the opposite side of the iron deer. After a glance inside the headgear, he remarked, "An unanticipated eventuation."

"Yes, I think so, too," Long Tom agreed. "Looks a little like rain, though."

"Eh?"

"Put it in English. What'd you say?"

"This," said Johnny, "is Ham's hat."

"How do you know?"

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"Quite simple. Elementary. It says, 'Made expressly for Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks' in the crown of the hat."

The aides looked over the scene at some length, even making another visit to the spot where a house had stood once upon a time. But no dwelling, no structure of any kind, had bulked there for many years if appearances were any indication.

Riding back to the city, they were puzzled.

SOME one had been in the skyscraper headquarters since the three aides' previous visit. They noted that in the laboratory, where things were changed around a little. Long Tom made an examination and came up with some information.

"The portable chemical laboratory belonging to Monk is gone," he said. "And also some of the equipment Doc usually takes when he goes on a trip."

"Holy cow; let's see what Iron Mary says!" Renny boomed.

Iron Mary, when turned on, registered the opening of a door, then a small, squeaking voice.

"Looks like Renny, Long Tom and Johnny have gotten back," said the small, childlike voice.

"That's Monk's voice," Renny remarked.

Iron Mary, continuing to reproduce voices, said, "Pipe down, you accident that nature made! Get the stuff that Doc wants!"

"Don't order me around, you over-dressed shyster!"

"Go on about your business, lummo! I'll type out a note and leave it in the mail box for Johnny, Long Tom, and Renny."

There were other sounds from Iron Mary, noises indicating two men had assembled some equipment.

"Ham, you look funny without a hat," remarked one of the voices, the small one.

"That pig of yours carried my gray derby off," complained the other voice. "I know he did."

The pair evidently departed.

"That was Monk and Ham, quarreling as usual," Long Tom declared. "Let's see what Ham's note said."

The note, typewritten, even to the signature, said:

DOC IS MAKING A TRIP TO HIS FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE TO CONDUCT SOME EXPERIMENTS, AND MONK AND MYSELF ARE GOING ALONG. WE'LL BE BACK IN A FEW WEEKS. DON'T BOTHER ABOUT US.

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INCIDENTALLY, DOC HAD A FUNNY ONE HAPPEN TO HIM YESTERDAY. AN OLD MAN CAME TO GET DOC TO SEE A DYING BOY, BUT IT TURNED OUT THERE WASN'T ANY DYING BOY AND NO HOUSE WHERE THE OLD MAN TOOK DOC. THE OLD MAN, TOBIAS WEAVER BY NAME, WAS WACKY. STARK INSANE.

HAM.

Renny let out a long breath of relief. "Well, that explains it," he remarked. "We took a wild goose chase for nothing."

Both Renny and Long Tom knew that at times it was Doc Savage's habit to disappear without a word of explanation. Sometimes the bronze man was gone for months, completely shut off from the world in a far-off spot which he called his "Fortress of Solitude." There Doc Savage went to study and experiment.

Even the bronze man's five aides did not know where the exact location of this Fortress of Solitude was, though they presumed it was somewhere within the Arctic Circle. But the bronze man had many enemies, and it was always possible that some one had slipped over something. However, Iron Mary hadn't lied. Both Monk and Ham had been in the office. It looked as if Doc was, for the first time, revealing his Fortress of Solitude to others than himself. Doing so he must have a reason. Both aides wondered what it was.

Long Tom spoke soberly. "You know, a lot of queer things happen to Doc, don't they? Sometimes it's nuts who write fool letters or try to pull stuff. And sometimes it's a lot more sinister, some fellow with a diabolic scheme trying to accomplish an end in the most indirect manner."

There was a knock on the door.

"I'll get it," said Renny.

THE visitor was a portly gentleman, ample around the middle, and he wore eyeglasses attached to a ribbon. He had the self-important air of a rooster pigeon.

"For several days I have been endeavoring to see Doc Savage," said this gentleman. "I am S. Portsmouth Upstainbridge. The 'S' is for Shaughnessy. I demand to see Doc Savage."

"What about?" Renny asked.

"That will be private business between Doc Savage and myself," retorted the important man.

Renny took a quick dislike to the fellow. He rumbled, "Brother, Doc's business is all our business, and you can either give a civil answer to my question or get out. It's immaterial to me, I can tell you."

The newcomer purpled. "Such impertinence!"

"What's your business?"

"I wish to interest Doc Savage in becoming a member of our corporation," said the other grandly.

"So you can unload a lot of stock on the public?" Renny inquired, and added: "On the strength of Doc's name?"

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"Where is Doc Savage?" the other yelled.

"He's out of town and will be for weeks!" Renny thundered. "And don't yell at me!"

At this the visitor whirled in a grand dudgeon and stalked out, leading Renny to grin and muse that, "I probably hit the nail on the head about his having a stock promotion scheme, at that."

Long Tom rubbed his pale jaw. "Wait a minute! Did you notice something?"

"Eh?"

"That guy wasn't at all disappointed at not seeing Doc," Long Tom said. "I was watching him. He seemed to expect to learn exactly what he learned."

"Yeah? Which adds up to what?"

"I don't know," Long Tom said. "But suppose we give that guy a little attention just to keep in practice at finding out things."

Chapter V. THE VOICES

THE portly, self-important man, once he had stalked out of Doc Savage's headquarters and the presence of Doc's three aides, became as busy as a diplomat on the eve of a war. He scampered to the elevator, was whipped down to the street, and plunged into traffic.

The man went directly to a tall hotel uptown. The doorman bowed and said, "Good evening, Mr. Gundy."

The elevator boy said, "Good evening, Mr. Gundy," and let him out on one of the more richly decorated floors which was devoted to the expensive suites. Gundy went directly to a door, rapped a signal, and was admitted.

The fellow who opened the door was a Polynesian. He gave a greeting in his language and ended it by calling the man Mr. Gundy.

Gundy asked, "Anything requiring my attention?"

"Fella make talk all same wait 'long-side front room long time," said the Polynesian.

Gundy nodded impatiently.

"Any communication from High Lar?" he asked.

"No-no."

"Or Lo Lar?"

"No-no."

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Gundy gave a short nod and slipped out of his street coat, drew on a dressing gown, and entered what would probably be called the living room of the suite.

"Good work, boys," he said.

Among the men waiting in the room were three men of mixed Asiatic and European blood, two Polynesians, and the man who had played the part of feeble old Tobias Weaver.

"Yes," continued Gundy, "I took advantage of the fact that I have been haunting the vicinity of Doc Savage's headquarters for some days, ostensibly to interest the bronze man in a business venture. I went up to his headquarters again to-day. His remaining three men are unsuspicious. They do not dream that anything unusual is happening. So we can dismiss them as a menace."

The assembled men looked rather relieved, relaxing in their chairs. But there still remained around them an air of being out of place, the manner of men in a strange element.

Most of them were darkly tanned, as if they spent much of their time under tropical sun. And they wore their clothing as though unused to the garments.

Only one of the group, in fact, did not have an outdoor look. He was well-groomed, of past middle age, and with somewhat shifty eyes. An observer well posted in the theatrical profession would have recognized this man as a character actor specializing in voice parts on the radio and stage.

The fellow had the reputation of being very clever in his work, but of such low moral character and unreliability that no one who knew him would give him a job.

They called him "Shakespeare."

"Shakespeare," said Gundy, "that was a very good job you did of imitating the voices while we made the recordings." Gundy nodded, blowing out his lips with satisfaction. "Yes, from the very first, it was good. That first one was the imitating of Doc Savage's voice, wasn't it? That was when we made the recording with the fake address, the one which led Monk and Ham to the little bungalow on the hill near Stormington, instead of the spot where Doc had really gone."

Shakespeare said, "I was promised two hundred and fifty bucks for this job."

"And you'll get it. Yes, Shakespeare, you'll not only get it, but you rate a bonus. That second recording, the one which sent Johnny, Long Tom and Renny to a vacant lot, was extra work. And the third one, the conversation between Monk and Ham, leading Doc's three men to believe they had gone away to the Fortress of Solitude that also was extra work."

Shakespeare's shifty eyes were wide and greedy.

"Say, that's swell!" he said. He imitated Monk's small voice. It was so realistic that Gundy gave a nervous leap.

"Heh, heh!" mumbled Gundy, somewhat sheepishly. "You're sure good at your racket, Shakespeare. Without you, we might have had trouble in throwing Doc's men off the trail. We couldn't have faked the recording on that machine they call Iron Mary without a lot of trouble."

Gundy began to dip into his pockets in search of something.

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"How'd you learn so much about Doc Savage?" Shakespeare asked.

Gundy shrugged. "Been watching him for months from a distance. You can't, or couldn't, watch Doc Savage at too close range. But we've been checking on him and finally we had all the information we wanted, and we're going ahead."

"Going ahead at what?" Shakespeare asked.

"Eh?"

"What are you doing next?" asked Shakespeare.

Gundy frowned at him. "That's kind of a delicate question."

"Why so?"

"Because of what we know about you."

"This talk don't make sense to me," Shakespeare complained.

"Talk," said Gundy. "That's it. Talk. You drink, and you talk when you get drunk. You're very unreliable, Shakespeare. That is unfortunate, because you happened to be the only man who could do our job for us. So we had to use you. And now we are forced to take the only measure possible."

Shakespeare's eyes widened and popped like skinned grapes. The talk made sense to him now. Very suddenly it was clear. He had no gun. His eyes jerked, seeking a weapon. Nothing. Unless a chair would help. He whipped for the chair.

Shakespeare might have saved the effort. Two men got between him and the chair. A radio was playing softly in one corner. A man gave the volume knob a twist and syncopation crashed through the place loud enough to cover any shouts Shakespeare might emit.

Hands fell on Shakespeare's arms, fastened there. He yelled. Some one picked up a heavy glass ash tray and struck him in the mouth with it. He made blubbering noises, and some teeth came out of his mouth, along with scarlet.

"Get a rubber shower curtain out of the bathroom, and some towels," Gundy ordered.

An Eurasian glided to obey.

Gundy drew a knife, a creese with a blade as crooked as a snake crawling in a briar patch.

"You won't feel it," Gundy told Shakespeare. He flashed the knife. "With one of these, you either feel it or you don't. It depends on the way it's done."

When the man was coming out of the bathroom with shower curtain and big absorbent towels, knuckles rattled on the door.

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SHAKESPEARE tried to shout. They crushed one of the towels over his mouth. And the knock clattered on the door again.

"Yes?" called Gundy.

"Telegram," said a voice.

A man started to open the door.

"Wait, you sucker!" Gundy snapped. "In hotels like this, they don't deliver telegrams without first calling up from the desk."

He was as calm as the knife in his hand, except that his mouth twitched a little.

While the knock was rattling again, Gundy went over and called, "Shove it under the door."

Silence outside. Slightly tense. Gundy's hands flew around in a quick gesture to his men. They began acting in a way which showed rehearsal of what they were to do.

All put away their guns. Two whipped to suitcases, drew out metal devices about the size of condensed milk cans. Gas bombs and smoke grenades, these were.

Shakespeare was dragged into a bedroom, slugged, left to lie senseless with one man watching him. The other men arrayed themselves in chairs, reading newspapers, smoking, looking at ease.

Gundy opened the door.

Nothing happened. He looked out. No one there.

"Damn!" he said. "Nobody in sight."

He stepped out into the hall, rubbed his jaw, considered, then turned to enter the room.

"They must've left," he said. "Maybe it was a telegram after all."

The door across the hall popped open. Big-fisted Renny pitched out. Gundy leaped. He got inside his suite, banged the door shut. Renny hit the door. It grunted. It was a wooden sound, but heavy.

Renny used tremendous fists to dash out the panel as if he had been wielding an iron sledge. He reached in, opened the door. Some one stamped a foot against Renny's huge hand. Renny rumbled, grimacing.

Long Tom and Johnny piled into the room after Renny. The charge was unafraid. Not as reckless as it seemed, for they wore bulletproof armor of chain mesh under their garments. A defensive measure developed by Doc Savage in the past.

A gun burst out with much noise, firing three times. A chair bowled the gunner over. Gundy began screaming not to use guns, that the noise would arouse the hotel. And a smoke bomb fell, disgorged an infinitely black worm which began darkening the place. Gas mixed with the smoke. Men coughed, gagged. Some of them seemed to have masks available.

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The mêlée turned into mad, dark violence. The gun whooped again, in spite of Gundy's orders. Furniture skidded around, crashed together, upset.

Then men began diving out through the door. They went silently, for the most part, and they were terrified. Luck was with them, too, and an elevator answered their ring almost at once. They piled into the cage, coughing, angry, menacing the elevator boy with guns.

And down on the street level, they tore across the lobby, waving their weapons, and were in two large sedans, parked outside for such an emergency, before any one could do much except gape. The cars left in much haste.

Chapter VI. BUY ORDERS

RENNY and Johnny, reaching the street a full two minutes after the cars had departed, commandeered taxi-cabs, but it did no good, for they could find no trace of the fleeing Gundy and his strange crew of mixed Asiatics and whites.

Before returning to the hotel, big-fisted Renny and long, thin Johnny got in touch with the police by telephone, asking their assistance in apprehending Gundy's crew, a matter on which they were promised speedy coöperation, since Doc Savage had long been a power on the side of the law, and, in fact, held honorary commissions of high rank on the local police force.

Long Tom, the electrical wizard, met them when they got back to the hotel. He had just succeeded, with persuasion, in getting that floor isolated so they could investigate. That was another tribute to Doc's reputation.

"They got away slick," Renny complained. "That's a dickens of a note. Holy cow! I hoped we'd find out some inkling of what this is about."

Long Tom grinned. "We didn't do so bad."

"How could we have done worse? Who'd have thought those fellows were all primed with gas bombs and smoke grenades and the like?"

"We got Shakespeare," Long Tom advised.

"Who?"

"I'll show you."

Shakespeare, his wrists and ankles tied, lay in a bathtub full of cold water, where Long Tom had dumped him. The cold water had revived the man, and he scowled at them.

"Who are you?" Shakespeare demanded.

Renny said, "Brother, you know everything you need to know. What you do now is answer questions."

Shakespeare stuck out his lower lip. "Try and get any answers!"

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Renny looked surprised, then shook his long-faced head slowly. "Holy cow!" he rumbled. "I guess you don't know all you need to know, either. You don't, for instance, seem to get the point that Doc Savage is mixed up in this, and we're his men, and when we ask questions, we more often than not get answers. It makes no difference what you want or don't want, or whether you think you will or won't answer. We've got ways."

"Modestly speaking," interposed Long Tom, "I should say those are the facts, a trifle understated, perhaps."

"Nuts to you monkeys," said Shakespeare.

The man lost some of his insolence when Renny's big hand whanged him alongside the head. He lost his defiance as well when he was dragged into the other room, flung across a table, and Long Tom produced a phial and a hypodermic needle.

"What's that?" Shakespeare yelled.

"Truth serum," Long Tom explained.

"We dose you with that," added Renny, "and you become a combination of George Washington and a phonograph."

Strangely enough, that struck Shakespeare with a great terror. He squirmed and twisted and changed colors, getting a lighter shade each time, then made croaking noises.

"Whuh—what you wuh—want to know?" he groaned.

"Numbers of things," Renny responded grimly.

"I I am just an actor who was hired to impersonate voices on that recording machine in Doc Savage's office," Shakespeare wailed.

"So! You faked the voices?"

"Y—yes."

"Why?"

"I I was hired."

"By who?"

"Gundy."

Renny nodded sourly. "He's got a gang with him, too, eh?"

"Yes. Gundy has quite an organization."

"Any one behind Gundy?"

"I I think there is some one else. Some one called High Lar, whom I have never seen."

"High Lar who is he?"

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"The leader. Beyond that, I do not know."

"Know where we can grab any of these mugs?"

"No."

"What," asked Renny ominously, "are they up to?"

"The idea," said Shakespeare, "was simply to kidnap Doc Savage and hold him for ransom."

"A snatch?"

"Yes a snatch." The man looked at them earnestly. "That is all really."

Renny peered at Long Tom, then made a skeptical noise with his puritanical mouth. "What we've been hearing," he said, "is known in the lingo as the old oil."

"That's what I think," Long Tom said. "He turned loose his words too quick."

Renny picked up the hypodermic needle.

"We'll have to use this tune-changer," he rumbled.

They fell upon frightened Shakespeare and gave him a strong shot of the serum while he writhed and floundered and would have screamed bloody murder had they not held a wadded window curtain over his mouth.

The man continued to twist and squirm until the preliminary effects of the truth serum took hold and put him in a species of stupor. Then his speech became thick, distorted, something like the mouthing of a drunk.

The serum merely relaxed the man's conscious control over what he said. Naturally, what was uppermost in his mind came out.

"High Lar ordered me killed?" he muttered wildly.

Renny leaned forward, rumbled, "Why?"

"Too much at stake," the man mumbled thickly, "for him to take chances, I guess."

"What is this High Lar after?" Renny demanded. "Money?"

"He's going to kill Doc Savage." The man leaned back and gurgled foolishly. "There's millions of dollars involved in it."

The man went on mouthing in some kind of semiconscious moment over the act of his boss, High Lar, for ordering him killed. He mumbled and swore and repeated again and again that he had always held his tongue except for a few times when very drunk.

The man was afraid of High Lar, almost supernaturally afraid. He was so scared, Renny and Long Tom observed, that he did not even blame High Lar for ordering him disposed of. It was as though High Lar were an all-powerful jinn whose wishes could not be opposed.

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Such an attitude in a white man was startling.

Shakespeare, however, swore roundly at Gundy, and Renny and Long Tom gathered that Gundy was merely a lieutenant. They became tired of listening to meaningless curses directed at Gundy, and Long Tom shook Shakespeare.

"Who is this High Lar?" Long Tom demanded.

Shakespeare fell suddenly silent. He would not answer.

"Give him some more of the serum," Long Tom directed. "He's so awed by this High Lar that he freezes up when the name is put into a question."

Renny administered more serum.

"Shakespeare," Long Tom said firmly, "who is this High Lar?"

The drugged man tightened visibly.

"He is the Feathered Octopus," mumbled Shakespeare. "The whole Orient knows of him."

Renny shook their prisoner. "What's this High Lar's name? I don't care if he is called a Feathered Octopus or a ring-tailed canary. What I want is his name. Is he Chinese, American, or what?"

"No one can tell you that," the drugged man responded.

They questioned the man repeatedly, and that was all they got out of him concerning High Lar. That, and the increasing impression that the man was convinced that High Lar was not much short of a supernatural fiend.

Renny and Long Tom swapped looks.

"This begins to seem kinda bad," Renny rumbled. He yelled in Shakespeare's ear. "Where can we find High Lar?"

Shakespeare didn't know.

"Where is Doc Savage?" Renny boomed.

"At the spot where he is to be killed," the man mumbled.

He did not know where that was.

"Listen," Renny said patiently, "haven't you heard any names mentioned? Don't you know anything that might give a clue to the whereabouts of this High Lar, Gundy, or Doc Savage?"

"I I remember Benbow," gasped the voice imitator.

"Benbow? Who is Benbow?"

"Some one named Burke Benbow, who lives at the Ninetieth Avenue Hotel."

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"What about this Benbow?"

"I never saw him. I don't know what connection he has with them. I just remember Gundy saying he would have to see Benbow, or something like that."

Renny and Long Tom got nothing more out of Shakespeare. Not that they didn't continue to work on him. They did for almost an hour.

"I'm worried," Long Tom admitted gloomily. "They've got Doc, and they're going to kill him after pulling whatever they're up to." He scowled darkly. "I wonder just what they are doing, anyhow."

"About all we know," added Renny, "is that there's a few million dollars mixed up in it, according to what this Shakespeare said. And we've only got one clue that Benbow, at the Ninetieth Avenue Hotel."

"We'll look into that," Long Tom agreed.

THEY visited the Ninetieth Avenue Hotel, leaving Shakespeare behind, bound and gagged securely.

"Mr. Benbow is out," they were told at the Ninetieth Avenue Hotel.

"Recently?"

"No. Three or four hours ago," The Ninetieth Avenue Hotel clerk had recognized Doc's aide, and was free with information. No, the clerk had no idea what Burke Benbow's business might be, who he was, or where he had gone. He had been there about three weeks, and had led a discreet existence.

Doc's men went up to the Benbow suite living room and bedroom. Johnny picked the lock. Johnny was an excellent lock-picker for such a scholarly looking gentleman.

Burke Benbow was about five feet ten inches, weight around a hundred and seventy-five. He had a light, honey-colored growth of beard on his cheeks. His hair was an even lighter hue, almost blond. He was a little bow-legged, and he had a waxed mustache.

All this Doc's men learned by consulting, respectively, Benbow's suits, dried shave lather in the bathroom washbowl, the man's hairbrush, his slightly runover shoes, and a tube of mustache wax in the bathroom cabinet.

The man had come from the South Seas, via Tahiti, Honolulu and San Francisco, a month previously. The labels on his baggage showed that.

An envelope was tucked in one of the bags. Addressed to Burke Benbow, Tahiti, the note inside read:

ADVISE AGAINST THREATS OR ANY MOVE TOWARD REVENGE ON YOUR PART.

HIGH LAR

"Looks like this Benbow might be an enemy of High Lar," Long Tom remarked.

"At least he may give us a line on who High Lar is," Renny agreed.

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They conferred, and it was decided that Long Tom was to remain at the hotel, keeping a lookout for Burke Benbow.

Johnny and Renny left the hotel, taking Shakespeare. The crooked actor and voice mimic had served all the useful purpose he could, so they were consigning him to his fate. This was not the law, and jail, as Shakespeare apparently expected. It was Doc Savage's "college." A strange institution, this college.

Situated in upstate New York, maintained by Doc, operated by specialists trained by the bronze man's skill, criminals went there, had their brains operated on in such a manner that all memory of the past was wiped out; and then they underwent a course of training which turned them into upright, law-abiding citizens. An ambulance carried Shakespeare off to the institution an ambulance driven by an intern from the strange place.

JOHNNY and Renny then returned to Doc Savage's skyscraper headquarters, where they expected to receive reports from the police. But the reports, when they did come in, were not encouraging, for Gundy and his crew of mixed breeds had vanished successfully.

Their abandoned cars, found on the lower East Side, proved of no value, for they were rented machines, and there were no fingerprints.

Nor, for that matter, were any fingerprints found in the hotel room where Gundy and his men had escaped Doc's three aides. Gundy, as far as could be ascertained, had no police record. At least, he was not in the rogues' gallery.

As the night passed, and nothing more developed frequent calls from Long Tom explained that Burke Benbow had not put in an appearance at the Ninetieth Avenue Hotel the mystery seemed to deepen. It seemed to set, like concrete.

The bronze man's aides were accustomed to strange mysteries, through their long association with Doc Savage, but usually they had some head or some tail, some rhyme or reason. It was unique for some one to come along and carefully lay plans and seize Doc Savage they were sure by now that High Lar had planned carefully over a period of weeks in order to get the bronze man.

High Lar had taken an unusual approach to the problem of snatching the man of bronze. He or she, if High Lar was a woman had studied Doc's psychological make-up, thereby hitting on the only thing that would allay his suspicions an appeal to him to visit the dying boy.

Dawn came up like a prairie fire out of the east, and Johnny and Renny roused themselves from the chairs in which they had dozed, and made a number of telephone calls to police and other agencies, endeavoring to get information. They received none.

Long Tom advised that Burke Benbow had not put in his appearance as yet.

So Renny and Johnny entered a car and drove back to Stormington. They made a careful search of the vicinity and by noon they had learned some stuff that was of no value.

First, there were three hills on the road beyond Stormington. There were many hills, for that matter, but three of them were surrounded by stone fences, and behind each fence was an iron deer.

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One hill, the one they had visited the night before, was unoccupied by any house. The second hill was topped with a neat little bungalow. There was no one home there. The third hill had a rambling, ancient stone house; and nobody was home there, either.

The bronze man's aides did note, in the yard around the bungalow, that the iron deer had apparently been freshly placed there. But they had no means of knowing that Ham, a few nights previously, had observed the freshly planted deer, and had thereby become so suspicious that High Lar's men had seized him, at the behest of the beautiful Eurasian woman, Lo Lar.

In truth, Johnny and Renny had nothing to cast suspicion on either of the two hilltops which had houses, so they drove back to town in a blue humor, their trip fruitless.

A passenger plane droned overhead as they drove along.

Renny glanced up. "That's a World-Air ship," he remarked. "One of the new ones."

RENNY'S remark about World-Air came near being a stroke of extrasensory perception, or at least an eerie foresight of the future. For, on arriving back on the eighty-sixth floor of the tall headquarters building, Renny opened the morning paper, and since he was moderately wealthy himself, he had a natural interest in the financial pages; and he turned to this section of the paper.

"Holy cow!" he roared.

Renny pointed.

CONTROL OF WORLD-AIR GOES

TO DOC SAVAGE AGENT

Heavy buying of World-Air Air Lines stock featured the market for the past two days. World-Air is one of the largest air lines, and hitherto it has been almost impossible to buy its stock on the open market, since those who had it held on, figuring the stock was good on a long pull.

Buyers of the stock are understood to be representatives of Doc Savage, the rather mysterious figure who is such a financial power, and well known as the miracle man of industrial developments.

The Savage plan, according to reliable information, is to buy up World-Air control at a nominal price, then perform one of his expansion miracles. And later selling the stock back to the former owners for what they were paid for it. World-Air will not be the first concern which has felt the magic touch of the man of mystery.

Johnny scrutinized this newspaper item over Renny's shoulders. At first the item puzzled him, because he was of a scholarly nature which neglected keeping posted on financial methods.

Gradually, however, he understood. Doc Savage, who possessed a source of limitless wealth in a valley in the Central American wilds, frequently dabbled with high finance and industry. Often he had taken over decrepit steamship lines, factories, once even a railroad, and reorganized the systems, inaugurated higher wages, put the loafers to work, trimmed the deadwood, increased employment and profits together.

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To work with freedom, Doc had found it necessary to buy controlling amounts of the stock before beginning operations. He usually paid market price for the stock, and sold it back to the former owners those whom the bronze man felt were entitled to it at what he had paid for it originally. Of course, the stock was worth much more when Doc resold it.

It was this fact the greatly increased value of the stock of a concern after Doc had worked on it for a while that made stockholders so eager to sell to the bronze man. It was thus simple to see what had moved the World–Air stockholders to turn their holdings over to a "representative of Doc Savage."

They had visioned greatly increased value of their stock. But on the other hand, World–Air was far from a decrepit concern to start with. In fact, it was quite popular, profitable, and generally credited with a great future.

"That 'representatives of Doc Savage' thing kinda sticks in my craw," Renny rumbled.

The big–fisted engineer reached for the telephone. And shortly he was in touch with various brokers and observers of the Wall Street scene. What he learned confirmed the newspaper item, but did not add much information. Then he began asking questions.

"How much money is involved in this?" Renny wanted to know first.

"Several million dollars," the informant replied. "I can't give you the exact sum."

Renny considered. "Answer me this: If whoever bought this stock had bought it to keep, and had no connection with Doc Savage at all, would it be profitable?"

"Not Doc Savage you mean "

"I'm not sure what I mean. It's just an idea. Granting that some one did use Doc's reputation for taking over companies and then turning them back to their former owners worth a lot more, would there be anything to be made by it?"

"Just control of one of the best air lines on earth, is all."

"Much money?"

"At least two million."

"That," rumbled Renny thoughtfully, "is a stake worth finagling for."

"Great Scott!" yelled the informant. "Do you mean to say some one has double–crossed the stockholders?"

"I don't know," said Renny. "Suppose you tell me who these 'representatives' are who bought the stock for Doc."

Some delay ensued while the other looked up the information.

"It seems to be a company," he explained. "A little concern which operates an air line down in the South Pacific, among the islands. But, of course, that is just a blind to prevent a lot of publicity going to Doc Savage in the matter, and people knowing that Doc is behind it."

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"What makes them so sure Doc is behind it?"

"Why, the buy orders for World–Air stock were signed by Doc Savage."

"Signed " Renny was puzzled. "Of course."

"Not forged?"

"No chance of forgery of Doc's signature, you know."

Renny remarked that on the other hand it would be the simplest thing in the world to forge Doc's signature, since the bronze man used, not a written name, but a thumbprint. Wax imprints would easily be made. Then Renny thought for a moment.

"Who was the buyer of the stock?" he asked. "You didn't give me the name."

"The Benbow Inter–Island Air Lines," said the other.

"Holy cow!"

"A man named Burke Benbow founded the air line, I understand. Doc Savage must be working with him now."

"Burke Benbow," Renny remarked. "Well, thanks." Hanging up, he called Long Tom at the Ninetieth Avenue Hotel, but the electrical wizard reported no trace of Burke Benbow. The fellow had not come back to his hotel.

Renny voiced the personal opinion that Benbow would never show up at the hotel, because he must be certain they were wise to him. However, Long Tom concluded to remain on the lookout for the man. And, advising Renny of this intention, he hung up.

Long Tom conducted his end of the call from a telephone booth. At the finish, he backed out of the booth. Something touched his side. He glanced down and found himself looking at the wrong end of a small blue gun.

Chapter VII. TROUBLE FOR LONG TOM

LONG TOM continued to stare at the gun for a moment. He concluded that it was nothing to take chances with. An automatic, thick, short, large of bore, the kind of weapon that would make a tunnel.

Long Tom lifted his eyes to the gun wielder.

"Gosh!" he said.

She was a tall blond Viking of a girl, lithe and sturdy. Her eyes were as blue as a sea, and there was about her somehow the air of brash recklessness that sailors seem to have, and perhaps get from the sea.

"Great Danes!" Long Tom exploded.

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She was a head taller than Long Tom. She was the picture of health in contrast to his rather puny appearance. Her clothes, not too expensive, fitted her wonderfully, while Long Tom's garments never fitted him too well, nor were they kept unnecessarily impeccable.

"Whew!" said Long Tom.

The girl studied him. Her lips were nice, both as to shape and color. Her chin was squarish and firm, and there was nothing affected about the sweep of her hair, or the set of the headpiece she wore. Her air was competence. But back of that there was something else that looked like worry.

"Oh, boy!" said Long Tom.

Long Tom was usually very sparing of his superlatives. But for some reason this girl had hit him.

"You have a strange kind of vocabulary," the girl remarked.

"Swell!" gasped Long Tom.

"What is?"

"Your voice," said Long Tom.

The electrical wizard's circle of friends would have been astonished at what was happening, for Long Tom had never been susceptible to feminine wiles, and certainly he had never been a courteous gentleman given to gallant remarks.

As for Long Tom himself, if he was conscious of incongruity about his ogling admiration for a young woman who was gouging his lower right rib with a gun, he gave no sign.

"You've been watching for my brother," the girl said gravely.

"Huh?" Astonishment brought Long Tom back to earth.

"My brother. You've been waiting for him. The bell boy told me."

"Bell boy?"

"The bell boy," said the girl grimly, "that I have been paying to report my brother's comings and goings to me. You didn't think of that, did you?"

Long Tom wasn't quite sure what to think. He felt slightly confused.

"Brother?" he said vacantly.

"I am Lam Benbow," the girl supplied.

Her tone indicated the name might mean something to Long Tom, but it didn't; except that if this was the girl's name, he was glad to know it. And if she was named Lam Benbow, it followed reasonably that she was Burke Benbow's sister.

If she had been paying a bell boy to report her brother's comings and goings, that would mean

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"Been spying on your brother?" Long Tom asked.

"Get your hands up," said the girl, "while I search you."

Long Tom hoisted his hands, and her deft fingers went through his clothing. From an arm holster beneath his coat, padded so that its presence was hardly noticeable, she took a weapon something like an oversized automatic pistol a supermachine pistol, in fact, another remarkable gadget developed by Doc Savage.

Lam Benbow stared at this, wrinkling her forehead, and finally dropped it into a pocket of the dark gray spring coat which she wore. But the pocket was too small, and she finally compromised by holding it under her coat.

She did not examine Long Tom's bill fold, which would have given her his name. She did not ask him his name, nor did Long Tom volunteer it.

"Get going," the girl said, "I'm taking you to a place."

"But "

"You're one of the men menacing my brother!" the girl said grimly. "I don't know what you have done to him. But I intend to find out,"

"How "

"Don't ask questions!" snapped the tall young Norse woman. "You didn't know I was trying to help my brother, did you? You didn't know I was aware anything was wrong, did you?"

"Uh what is wrong?" Long Tom asked hopefully.

"I don't know," retorted Lam Benbow. "And you were probably aware of that."

"You're giving me too much credit," Long Tom advised.

"Walk," directed the girl, "and if you act suspicious, I'll call a cop. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

Up until that moment, Long Tom would have liked nothing better. But if the girl was willing to summon an officer herself, that put an entirely different complexion on the matter. She could not be so bad. Long Tom, as he realized that, felt a marked lift in spirit.

THE capable, blond young woman had an old car waiting outside. It was neat, and bore the sticker of an agency which made a business of renting cars. She made Long Tom get in behind the wheel.

"You'll drive where I tell you," she remarked calmly. "And no monkey business, either, if you know what's good for you."

To Long Tom's astonishment, the girl made him park the car near Doc Savage's headquarters. She got out first, covering the electrician with the supermachine pistol. Long Tom came out from behind the wheel.

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"I'm a good shot," Lam Benbow said, as though stating a fact. "I'll shoot a leg off you if you try running." And that sounded like a statement of fact, too.

Long Tom smiled pleasantly at her. This was something that he found very easy to do, and, moreover, the source of various little tickling sensations which he felt here and there, to his pleasant surprise.

She took him to Doc's headquarters.

Johnny and Renny gaped in amazement as Long Tom was marched into the reception room by a tall and striking blond girl who held a gun as though she knew how to use it.

They grinned at Long Tom, who looked somewhat embarrassed and would probably be a long time living down the fact that a young woman had brought him in at the point of a gun.

"Good morning," rumbled Renny, his long face looking sad as could be, a proof that he was tickled at the situation. "What can we do for you, young lady?"

"Yes, elucidate prerequisites," added Johnny.

The blond girl stared at Johnny for a moment as though trying to figure out what on earth he had said.

"You are Doc Savage's men?" she asked.

Johnny and Renny agreed that they were, and gave their names. The blond young woman was suspicious still, but more satisfied when they showed her various pictures of Doc's little group.

Long Tom, to his disgust, noted that Renny held a monstrous thumb over the electrical wizard's visage as it appeared in the pictures, thus keeping the girl in ignorance about his being a member of Doc's crowd. Obviously she did not yet realize that.

"Where did you pick up this?" Renny asked, pointing a derogatory thumb at Long Tom.

"I found it watching my brother's hotel," the young woman replied.

Long Tom looked injured.

"Your brother?" Renny exploded.

"I am Lam Benbow. Burke Benbow is my brother. He formerly owned an air line in the South Seas. Four months ago he lost his air line. I went to visit him about that time. I noticed something queer about his actions. He was sullen. He did not seem to want me around. And he disappeared for long periods and would not tell where he had been. And he was worried."

She gave these facts with crisp precision, waited just long enough for them to sink into her listeners, and then she went on:

"Three weeks ago my brother came to the United States, to New York City. I saw him again. He was even more worried. He refuses to tell me what is wrong. But I am very concerned over him. I started checking up on him. If he would not tell me what his trouble was, I intended to find out, anyway. All I have been able to learn so far is that this fellow has been watching my brother's hotel."

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

She nudged Long Tom with the muzzle of her gun, urging him to step forward.

"I caught him and brought him here," she finished.

Renny frowned at Long Tom as though he were a dangerous culprit.

"What do you want us to do with him?" asked Renny seriously.

"Make him tell the truth."

Renny scowled at Long Tom. "Fella, you tell the truth for the lady."

"Yes, confabulate," Johnny requested.

Long Tom, who hadn't been enjoying the affair, stuck out his jaw and said, "If you two ninnies don't want your ears knocked down, you'd better cut this out!"

Renny and Johnny sobered promptly. Long Tom was a peculiarly serious-minded runt, and it was not always good to rib him too much. A fact not to be overlooked was that Long Tom, who did not look a fit opponent for a fifteen-year-old boy, was a wild cat in a fight. Neither Johnny nor Renny cared to take him on. So they grinned sheepishly.

"Ah, we were just having a little fun," Renny explained.

"Yes," Johnny added.

The tall, blond girl stared at diminutive Long Tom with more respect, demanding, "Who on earth are you?"

"One of Doc Savage's five assistants," Long Tom explained.

The surprise silenced her for a time. Then she thought of something that made her lips part with shock.

"I came to get you to help my brother," she said, jerking the words out in bunches of three or four. "I have heard of the work that Doc Savage does. But but you are already after my brother."

Suddenly she lunged forward and seized Long Tom's coat lapels. "What has Burke done?" she cried. "Tell me! Why do you want him? What has he done?"

She shook Long Tom, and she was surprisingly strong. Long Tom reached up and got her gun with the expertness of a magician getting a half dollar out of an onlooker's ear. He did not fancy an hysterical girl waving a gun around.

"What has my brother done?" the girl was crying. "What have you got against Burke Benbow? Where is he? Where is he?"

Astonishing all of them, and knocking them from their feet as well, came a terrific explosion. The door of the reception room jumped inward, pursued by a gush of smoke and a sheet of flame.

Chapter VIII. THE OCTOPUS

THE impact of the blast was as though hands had smashed against their ears. They staggered back. Smoke enveloped them. It was an incredible thing to happen on the top floor of one of the city's most imposing buildings.

Long Tom, keeping his feet with considerable agility, got the girl's arm, swung her, and sent her diving into the safety of the library. He continued on through the library, into the laboratory, and across that, reached a panel, and began jerking switches.

As the switches were jerked, various whirrings came from machinery, and there were loud, hissing noises from the direction of the hall.

Long Tom looked pleased. He straightened his clothing, which had been disarranged in his haste, gave a glance at himself in the mirror over the workbench the mirror was there largely as a light reflector and carefully restored a lock of his hair, which was plentiful, although a pale color. Thus spruced up, he went back and rejoined Lam Benbow.

Renny and Johnny stood beside the young woman, just inside the library. The reception room was closed off by a bulletproof glass panel which Long Tom had caused to slide across the door. Inside the reception room, the smoke was boiling, being drawn away by the air-conditioning system.

Mixed with the smoke, yellowish traces here and there, was a gas, a vapor capable of producing unconsciousness, and which had the virtue of taking effect through the pores of the skin. No mask was defense against the stuff.

Renny and Johnny nodded at Long Tom. "Good work," Renny rumbled. And they waited patiently.

The girl cried, "But why don't you do something?"

"Whoever started that has been taken care of," Renny assured her. "When Long Tom, here, threw some switches, he closed off this whole part of the building with steel panels. You see, this place is literally a fortress."

Five minutes or so later, Long Tom went back and threw the switches again, and the panels opened quietly. The ventilating system had dispersed the gas. They walked out.

The door of the reception room had been blown loose, and the framing around it ripped and twisted. The whole affair was of steel, so the blast force had been terrific.

Lam Benbow stared at the man who lay in the hallway.

"My brother!" she choked.

BURKE BENBOW must have made the assault alone, and failed to anticipate the sliding panels and the gas. One of the panels had closed the route to the stairs; another closed the bottom of the stair flight, for that matter.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

Benbow lay against that panel. He had knocked hide off his knuckles and torn his finger nails trying to get through.

Renny gathered him up and carried him back into the reception room, now clear of gas, and laid him on the inlaid table, which had been damaged a little by flying steel.

"He's dead!" the girl wailed.

"No." Long Tom put a hand on her arm. "He'll come out of it shortly."

Burke Benbow was exactly like the three aides had pictured him from examining the man's room before.

Burke Benbow was about two inches under six feet, of good weight for his size. He was blond, like his sister, a little bow-legged, and he had a waxed mustache, quite light in hue. He was probably forty, looked younger until one got very close to him.

Johnny got a stimulant from the laboratory, administered it to the man who had been overcome by the vapor, and stood back.

Burke Benbow opened his eyes. He kept them open for some time. Then he closed them and relaxed. He seemed to stop breathing, as though something had happened to his heart.

Renny, anxious, stepped forward. Instantly, Benbow's two feet hit him in the midriff. Renny was as tough as iron. But he went "Oo-o-f!" and doubled.

Benbow came up. Johnny reached over and swung at Benbow. The man ducked. Johnny missed. He got a whack from Benbow's fist that sent him rolling.

Long Tom came in Long Tom, whose harmless appearance caused him to be elbowed about by almost any one on the street. Benbow drove a fist.

Long Tom weaved, let it go past. He hit Benbow and Benbow lay down, and Long Tom got on top of him; then they went over and over on the floor, making noises somewhat like a matched cat and dog.

Renny straightened up. Johnny got off the floor. They looked at the fight, glanced at each other, and grinned wryly.

"Stop it!" the girl cried. "Burke will hurt your friend!"

"Sh-h-h!" Renny said. "Watch!"

There was a good deal of blurred motion on the floor, punctuated with meaty fist smacks, the ripping noises of clothing being torn; and then Burke Benbow flew out of the mess, hit the wall, met Long Tom's fist when he bounced, went down with the deceptive-looking electrical wizard on top of him.

And Lam Benbow was yelling, "Stop it! You're hurting Burke!"

BURKE BENBOW, when they sat him in a chair, made no effort to arise, but stared in popeyed unbelief at his undersized Nemesis. Then he seemed to remember what he had come for.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

"Damn you!" he yelled hoarsely. "You won't get away with this! The police will get you!"

"Police?" Renny asked sourly, surprised. "What do you think the police would want us for?"

"

You devils!"

"Who? Us?"

"You're High Lar's men!" Benbow grated. "Don't think I don't know it!"

Doc Savage's three aides looked at the man intently, and he seemed earnest enough. Then the girl leaped forward and grasped her brother's arms.

"Burke!" she breathed. "These are Doc Savage's men!"

"Sure! I saw that on the door. So what? Who the hell is Doc Savage but one of High Lar's tools?"

Renny went over to the inlaid table, close to Burke Benbow's chair, and hung a leg over the corner of the table. His long, puritanical face was curious.

"How'd you get here?" he asked.

"Devil with you!"

"Burke, please answer him!" Lam said earnestly.

The brother stared at her. "All right, then. I got back to my hotel and saw you leaving with this this wild cat in lamb's wool."

He pointed at Long Tom. Then he yelled, "And don't think I didn't know he was taking you away, a prisoner! You two walked close together and acted queer!"

Lam said, "Burke, it was the other way around. I had a gun in Long Tom's back."

"Huh?"

Renny said, "What gave you the idea Doc Savage was working for High Lar?"

Burke Benbow glared at him, then said, "Maybe I haven't been able to read what's been happening down in Wall Street!"

"Eh?"

"High Lar has taken over World-Air Air Lines with the aid of Doc Savage, and using my old company as a blind!" Benbow shouted.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

BENBOW, angry and suspicious, proved a difficult subject for questioning. But his sister helped. And gradually they got the truth to him, so that he sat back in his chair and looked discomfitted.

He apologized, then, for crashing the place with the use of a hand grenade. And after that a strange story came out. It was, he said, the story of his life, and a tale of hardship and pioneering in aerial transport in the Far East.

By years of saving, careful work, and honest dealing, he had managed to establish the Benbow Inter-Island Air Lines. Not a terribly successful venture, but a sound one, and growing steadily, and with a future.

Burke Benbow suddenly broke his recital and swore deeply and angrily.

"But High Lar got my company away from me," he said miserably. "It started with a series of accidents. Too late, I found out they were not natural accidents. But by that time I was broke; and I had to sell out, at a loss. This High Lar bought my line, through go-betweens, for a song." And he swore again.

"Just who is this High Lar?" Long Tom inquired.

Burke Benbow looked at them.

"I don't know," he said.

"Make that a little clearer, Benbow."

"Oh, I can tell you plenty about High Lar!" snapped Benbow. "The creature is becoming a legend in the islands. He's supposed to be incredibly wealthy and powerful. There is one story that High Lar is an island rajah with a thirst for power.

"There's another story that the creature wears a robe woven from the feathers of rare birds, and another that the fellow is deformed, having two extra arms. And there's the tale about the thing having feathers instead of hair. That's crazy island talk, of course. High Lar is supposed to live on a remote island somewhere in the South Seas."

"Sounds kind of goofy," Long Tom remarked.

"Of course. It's just rumors, I'm telling you. But make no mistake about this: High Lar is a holder of more power than you think any one individual could have. His influence stretches everywhere. Oh, yes, I've heard High Lar called the Feathered Octopus."

"Feathered Octopus, eh?"

They discussed High Lar, the ethereal man of mystery, for a time, but brought out only one other fact:

"A man named Gundy is High Lar's lieutenant," Benbow advised.

"Gundy? We know him," Long Tom remarked.

Chapter IX. THE CAPTIVES

THE sun next morning brought up with it a veil of fog and a few clouds, dark, frowning a rain threat. Later there was a flurry or two of rain, not extensive, but only thin curtains which switched across the city slowly, dragging skirts of a Titan hag of mist.

Up the Hudson River, between the tall apartments of Manhattan to the right and the Palisades of Jersey to the left, ran these thin, wide brooms of rain. It was a dull day, dreary, and even the sun looked sodden.

A boat lay at anchor in the Hudson, well north of the George Washington Bridge. She was a long boat, a ketch with one tall mast and a short one. She was perhaps ninety feet long, had a steel hull, hollow masts, and was obviously the toy of some rich man, although she could have stood polish on her brass, the stone on her decks, and paint on her hull.

Gundy stood in a cabin of the ketch.

"They know me!" He said that angrily, then stamped over to a porthole and looked out. In front of the porthole was a vista of squirming waves, rather small waves, and beyond reared the Palisades, green and solid as all eternity. "I've got to keep out of sight," Gundy added.

He was speaking to Lo Lar. The exquisite Eurasian woman stood at the table, looking down at a newspaper.

"There is still nothing in print about the disappearance of Doc Savage," Lo Lar said.

She had a voice as liquid as olive oil, and each accent and tone fitted together to make each sentence as perfect a gem of vocal construction as a fine watch is flawless mechanically.

"There won't be, either," muttered Gundy. "Savage is no politician. He doesn't work out in the newspapers. So those three men of his won't make any publicity."

Lo Lar turned from the newspaper. Her movements had the grace of a lioness. She smiled slightly at the nervously pacing Gundy.

"We have them completely deceived," she said. "You are uneasy. Surely you are not losing confidence in High Lar?"

Gundy frowned. "I don't know. It's hard to put faith in some one you've never met. To me, you know, High Lar is only a name."

"You never have liked that, have you, Gundy?"

"Why should I? He might not even exist."

Lo Lar smiled queerly.

"High Lar exists," she said. "He is my husband."

Gundy nodded. "But, damn it, why the secrecy? Why all this melodramatic mystery? It's childish, if you ask me."

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

Lo Lar's lids veiled her expressive almond-shaped eyes.

"Time is only a name, and there is no other difference between man and child," she remarked, with the vagueness of the Orient. "Man is born with ten fingers, ten toes, two eyes, and he never gets more. When man a baby is born, he is frightened of the unknown. Take him into a dark room and he cries. He is wise who knows that man's emotions are as fixed in him as his fingers and toes are fixed on him."

"Eh?" Gundy said.

"The mystery surrounding High Lar enables him to work with greater ease," said Lo Lar. "It is also a convenience, because his enemies do not know whom to fight."

Having imparted that bit of wisdom to the uneasy Gundy, Lo Lar moved to a near-by cabin, where Monk and Ham were confined.

MONK was confined by simple but effective means: A large chain was padlocked around his right ankle, while the other end of the chain was padlocked around the mizzen mast, which ran down through this particular cabin. There was nothing whatever in Monk's reach. He had even torn up the carpet and hurled it at his captors.

Ham was remarking, "You're certainly a picture of a boat-footed ape."

Monk began taking off a shoe, evidently with the idea of throwing it at Ham. But he stopped when he saw Lo Lar.

"Where's my pig?" he demanded.

Monk had been separated from his pet upon being brought aboard the boat, and he was concerned.

"The cook," remarked Lo Lar, "is keeping him in the galley, and feeding him very well. Yes very well."

Monk didn't like the way she said that. The implication seemed to be that Habeas Corpus, the shote, was being fattened for the breakfast skillet.

"You touch that hog and I'll wring your neck!" Monk yelled.

"Yes," Ham shouted, "and I'll help!"

"Shut up," Monk roared at him. "Keep your help to yourself! I can take care of my own troubles!"

"You don't look it," Ham assured him. "The way you look now, if they were to use you for a scarecrow, the crows would bring back the corn they stole a year ago."

Monk howled and hopped out at the length of his chain, unable to quite reach Ham, who was chained to a wall.

Lo Lar passed a hand, supple and brilliant with jewels, over her brow, as if unable to comprehend two such fellows.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

THEN she moved on toward the main cabin, at the door of which stood two men with sawed-off shotguns. Inside the room were two more guards, one of them being the man with the tiny face who had played the part of a dying boy when Doc Savage was first trapped.

This man was just withdrawing from Doc Savage, and he held in his right hand a needle which he had just been using on the bronze man.

Doc Savage lay on the floor. His ankles were confined by chains, fastened to a beam under the floor which they reached through holes freshly bored in the planking. Above the hips, he was confined in a strange garment, a parka-like affair, but with very long sleeves which came down over the hands and were tied at the ends with stout cords.

The jacket itself was made of leather, in which were sewn stout steel chains, binding the chest and confining the arms. And the hood had only one small hole, for breathing and some slight vision.

As a whole, it was an unusually effective strait-jacket. And it helped none that the bronze man's legs were rendered temporarily useless by injections of a local anaesthetic.

Lo Lar went over and looked down at the bronze man. The guards became more alert with their guns. Helpless as the bronze man was, the glimpse of one of his flake-gold eyes through the hole in the hood seemed to worry them. And even Lo Lar took a changed attitude.

With Monk and Ham she had been careless, haughty. With the bronze man she was reserved, deferential, apparently a little awed.

"You are sure," she asked the guards uneasily, "that the drug has his legs helpless?"

They said they were sure. They sounded as though they weren't taking any chances on that point.

"Do not take any chances!" Lo Lar warned. "We will use him only a short time longer, after which measures will be taken to dispose of him and the other two."

Doc Savage, on the floor, made no sound; but his one flake-gold eye that was visible through the hole in the mask grew intense.

Lo Lar called sharply. A Polynesian entered the room, a smallish specimen of that stalwart race, and evidently one who did clerical work, for he carried a sheaf of papers.

"There is only one document necessary to complete the present operations," he remarked. "We have control of World-Air Air Lines. But there is another concern in no way connected with World-Air which we need. It is the Patrick Motor Works, and they control patents to types of Diesel engines which we should have."

"Yes," Lo Lar agreed, "I have been considering that, and we might as well proceed."

"There is a chance that Doc Savage's three men will be watching for us to make another move in the stock market," said the Polynesian, who could speak perfect English.

"Of course," Lo Lar said. "But they have no way of tracing us, and the more alert they become, the more certain we are of leading them into a trap if they become too troublesome."

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

Two of the guards now discarded all weapons which might be snatched from them by the bronze man and approached Doc Savage. They were very careful, walking around, and pouncing on Doc with dramatic suddenness. No one seemed to think such precaution with the man in a strait-jacket was funny. Obviously they had had a bad experience with the bronze man.

The sleeve at the end of Doc's right arm was now unbound and pulled back to expose the corded, metallic hand. The fingers of the hand, long and proportioned, showed some indication of their great strength only when they moved.

The Polynesian clerk produced an ink pad, and placed a sheet of paper on the floor beside Doc's hand. This document was a typewritten statement that the author intended to utilize and expand the Patrick Motor Works in an industrial operation which he contemplated; and the author desired to purchase a controlling interest of the stock, as was his custom, although the stock would later be transferred back to the original owners at the price for which they sold it to the bronze man.

This was typed with the signature of Doc Savage, and there was a spot for a fingerprint, the bronze man's real signature.

The Polynesian started to ink Doc's right thumb for the printing operator.

Came a flash of speed. The Polynesian yipped and flew through the air. The two guards went skidding across the floor. One sprung helplessly against Lo Lar and she sat down, looking strangely girlish and discomfited all of a sudden.

And the paper disappeared up Doc Savage's long straitjacket sleeve.

There was a startled recess of a moment or two while Lo Lar and her men got themselves back on their feet and got their minds recorded as to what had happened.

"Seize him!" Lo Lar said angrily.

Doc Savage's eye, the one flake-gold orb visible through the mask hole, regarded the men with a promise of violence. So they came in warily.

Although the bronze man's limbs were capable of only slight movement inside the garment, he still seemed to be able to accomplish remarkable violence. If they noticed that the paper was still out of sight up Doc's sleeve, they failed to attach importance to that.

The men fell upon the bronze man. There was some resistance; not as much as they had expected, though, and shortly they had him flattened out.

"Where is the paper?" Lo Lar asked.

"Under him, probably," said the Polynesian.

It was. They moved him, found it, picked it up, never imagining it had not been there all the time.

And they inked Doc's thumb, jammed it down in the place for a signature, and backed away, well pleased with themselves.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

LATER a messenger left the boat in the dinghy the yacht was anchored about twoscore yards offshore and landed on the river bank. Half an hour later he came out of a subway station in the financial district and entered a brokerage office.

The messenger was a white man, suave, prosperous-looking. The broker was honest. His firm was not large, and he was rather beside himself at the idea of getting an account from Doc Savage, the man who was a mystery and still a financial figure of legendary power.

In his excited condition, it never occurred to the broker to look for anything phony. For there was the signed announcement from Doc Savage, and the messenger, from a belt under his clothing, calmly removed an enormous amount of cash in bills of large denomination. This, he explained, was money with which to purchase Patrick Motor Works stock.

After the messenger departed, the broker did take one precaution: He himself went to the bank which he knew handled one of Doc Savage's larger accounts, and had the signature checked with the bronze man's fingerprint. Of course, the print was genuine, and that satisfied the broker.

He immediately began buying Patrick Motor Works voting stock, going at it quietly, for he did not want the price jacked too much on him.

This broker's firm had not bandied acquisition of the controlling shares of World-Air Air Lines, but he had heard about the operation, although he did not dream there was anything phony about it. In fact, he'd envied, the other brokerage firm the job.

So, by way of boosting his own prestige, he now let it be known around the Street that he was handling an operation for Doc Savage, a credit that was not to be overlooked, because the man of bronze dealt only with concerns of scrupulous honesty and considerable ability.

The broker was well pleased with himself the rest of that day and along until the middle of the afternoon, when he had a visitor.

"I am Patricia Savage," the newcomer explained.

THE broker had, of course, heard of Patricia Savage, who was Doc's cousin. He studied her with great interest. He saw a remarkably beautiful young woman, the kind of girl who causes men to bump into telephone poles and fall over fire hydrants when she walks down the street.

She had bronze hair and strange flake-gold eyes, two of the peculiar characteristics of Doc Savage himself. She was indeed snappy-looking, because it was her business to be so; she ran the most expensive beauty salon in the city, a place near Park Avenue where the rich went to be prettied and have cocktail and caviar poundage whacked and pummeled off them.

Pat smiled. When she smiled, any man's toes felt an absurd desire to curl.

"I've been keeping in close touch with Wall Street to-day," Patricia said sweetly. "I notice that your firm is buying Patrick Motor Works stock for Doc Savage, who is my cousin."

"Oh, yes, Miss Savage!" said the broker excitedly. "We're delighted to get the account, and we're going to do a very good job."

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

"Yes; I'm sure you will," Pat assured him. "And I wonder if you would do me a favor?"

The broker would have jumped through hoops, but he just said he would do a favor for her.

"Let me see whatever documents you received from Doc," Pat requested.

She saw them. After examining them closely, she seemed to consider, then gave the broker another of her best smiles. Pat, when she turned it on, could make them swoon.

"Could I take this with me?" she asked in honey tones. "Of course, I'll return it."

Could she? No need to ask. Tucking the paper into her purse, Pat entered a subway, rode uptown to the tall building which was Doc's headquarters, and since she was a frequent visitor, was promptly escorted to the eighty-sixth floor.

SOME men were repairing the door which the hand grenade used by Burke Benbow had demolished. Pat stepped around them and met big-fisted Renny in the reception room.

"Holy cow!" Renny said.

Renny then peered at her. He knew Pat very well, and he could read, from a certain glint in her eyes, a disquieting fact. Patricia Savage loved adventure. That was the great trouble with her.

She was not technically a member of their wrong-righting, trouble-hunting crew of adventurers. In fact, Doc had many a time cleverly outargued or tricked her into remaining behind. For Pat loved adventure and kept mixing into their Scrapes.

"Holy cow!" Renny said, much louder. "Now you've got mixed up in this mess!"

"Goodness!" said Pat. "Renwick, the mind reader!"

"Renwick, the gleam-in-the-eyes reader," Renny corrected, wearing a smile. Renny invariably smiled slightly when things were not going just to suit him. "What is it this time?"

"I think I've got a clue as to Doc's whereabouts," Pat said.

Renny's smile vanished. He looked very gloomy. This meant, contrarily as his emotions registered, that he was much pleased.

"Yes?" he said.

"I've been keeping my eyes open since I called and you told me Doc was missing. You remember you did tell me that this morning? Well, I found something."

Pat exhibited her document, secured from the broker. Renny seized it, ran with it into the laboratory, and put it under an ultra-violet lantern. He darkened that part of the laboratory slightly, then turned on the ultra-violet rays.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

Doc Savage had long employed, in communicating with his men, and they in turn with him, a chalk of chemical composition, invisible when deposited in lines on almost any substance; but it had the peculiarity of glowing, or phosphorescing, when subjected to ultra-violet rays, a property which it had in common with such ordinary materials as vaseline and aspirin.

There was writing on the document.

Renny let out a whoop. Long Tom came tearing in, his eyes wide and a machine pistol in his hands, for Renny's whoop was a thing only approximated by the foghorn on the Queen Mary. Johnny, the other member of Doc's gang, did not appear, because Johnny had slipped off with Burke Benbow and his attractive sister, Lam, to have a late afternoon snack of food, an action which Long Tom resented.

Long Tom had a suspicion that Johnny was also smitten with Lam's charms. Being of a volatile nature, and also jealous at the moment, he was in a temper.

He frowned at Pat.

"You get out of here!" Long Tom yelled. "When you show up, trouble always gets worse! Doc knows that. And hasn't he given you orders lots of times to quit monkeying around us? You'll get killed!"

"Gracious!" Pat murmured. "What's happened to our dry battery?"

"Who?" Long Tom demanded, puzzled.

"You," Pat said. "You're usually a dry battery. Didn't you know that? Something seems to have put some life into you."

"Our Long Tom is in love," Renny rumbled disgustedly. He could afford to sound disgusted, because pretty Lam hadn't upset him much as yet.

Pat threw up her hands. She looked utterly astounded.

"Oh oh oh-h-h!" she said. "Long Tom in love! To-morrow the world will get flat! I just know it will! The age of miracles is here!"

Long Tom scowled and his ears got red, the first time incidentally that any one had ever seen him blush.

POINTING to the invisible chalk writing on the note, Renny said, "Cut out the horseplay and look at this, will you?"

They read:

HELD IN BLACK SCHOONER DAVY JONES ON HUDSON RIVER

DOC

"Great day!" Pat said.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

"Yeo—o—o—w!" Renny howled, and pigeons flew off roofs for blocks around. "We've got Doc located!" he added more quietly.

"Let's go!" Pat said.

Renny grimaced, went over and took her by an arm.

"Patricia," he said in a fatherly way, "you're a lovely, invaluable girl, but Park Avenue needs you to beautify its rich females. And I wouldn't rob the hotsy-totsy set of your services for anything, so you will now act as though nothing had happened and go back to your mud packs and rowing machines and electric vibrators."

"Yes, I will," Pat said, "when the Sphinx turns a handspring."

Renny tightened his grip on her arm. He looked at Long Tom. "Thomas," he said, "get me a ball of Doc's anaesthetic gas."

Long Tom bobbed away.

"You wouldn't!" Pat yelled. "You you vipers! After what I just did, you wouldn't dare! Why you " Long Tom came back with a little glass globule, which he broke under her nose.

"Don't! Why blast your infernal black, measly hides!"

Pat then tried to hold her breath. She knew how the gas worked. If you breathed, it would knock you out; if you held your breath it became safe to breathe in about half a minute.

But Renny squeezed her, and she had to breathe. As she went to sleep, she was kicking desperately at them, trying to make them breathe the stuff, too. Pat went to sleep.

"What else could you do with a girl like that?" Renny complained. "Always wanting to mix in trouble with us."

They took her down to the street.

"Reckon we better call Johnny?" Renny asked.

"Let him miss it the woman-chaser!" snapped Long Tom. "Somebody has to watch Burke Benbow and his sister, anyway."

They put Pat in the rear seat of a cab piloted by an honest fellow they knew, a chap who would see her safely to her Park Avenue ménage.

"Gosh!" said the taxi driver, staring at Pat. "Is she er, did she have one too many to drink?"

"She's positively polluted," said Renny.

And the hack rolled away across town with Pat.

Renny and Long Tom got some equipment; then they took the opposite direction.

Chapter X. PRISONER FOR EXCHANGE

The sun had swung enough now so that its rays slanted on bright chromium letters on the stern of the long iron ketch which lay anchored in the Hudson River, with Doc Savage a prisoner aboard.

DAVY JONES

The chromium letters spelled this name. The craft, with her peeling paint, might have vaguely suggested that name, the common appellation applied by sailors to the watery grave which now and then one of them finds; but the vessel still had speedy lines and a certain trim rake to her masts which moved old salts and an occasional yachtsman, men who knew the sea and what belonged on it, to glance at the sheer and freeboard of the ketch and remark that "there's a real vessel." Than which there is no higher tribute paid by sailor to a ship, large or small.

The passing of tugs was a frequent matter. New York Harbor is supposed to be the busiest in the world, and this part of the Hudson was only an arm of the Harbor, and the activity reached that far.

The tugs, for the most part, were black, stubby things, like dark hogs that rooted up the water with their blunt bows. And one of these tugs that passed was outwardly little different from any of the others. The only difference and there was a slight one was that this work boat kept pulling an unusual amount of black smoke.

The breeze, not especially strong now, had swung to the north, so that it came sweeping down the Hudson. The tug was churning along in the teeth of the zephyr, and after it had passed the Davy Jones, the workboat turned inshore.

This was a perfectly natural thing for the craft to do, because the tide was going out, and the tug would naturally take advantage of the slower-moving water close inshore.

But the black worm of smoke squirming out of the old ark's funnels rolled back and over the big ketch and kept rolling over it.

In fact, the tug came to a dead stop, lay there chugging, and continued to pour out smoke.

Inside the tug, Renny and Long Tom kept opening the firebox door this was a steam tug and pitching in gallon-sized cans of chemical. A chemical mixture, rather, which formed a gas mixing with the smoke a vapor that would put any one so unfortunate as to stand in it to sleep. They didn't even need to breathe it. Unless they were wearing an air-tight suit, they would go to sleep. Not seriously injured. Just asleep.

"Well," Long Tom remarked finally, "if that didn't do the job, nothing will."

After five minutes more of it, just for good measure, Renny and Long Tom turned the tug around they had rented the old hooker on short notice from an acquaintance and steamed back to the ketch. They kept under cover, but no one shot at them.

Doc's aides tossed a grappling hook modern craft still carry grappling hooks to pick up dropped anchor lines and such and caught the ketch rail. Soon they were lashed alongside. And a minute later they were aboard.

They looked around.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

"This," Renny said proudly, "is a clean sweep."

"Yes," Long Tom remarked happily. "Pat didn't miss a thing."

Pat might not have missed anything, but no one would have guessed it when she came out from under the effects of her dose of anaesthetic. She felt no discomfort, except from her rage. That was about to make her blow up.

PAT looked around. She was in the sumptuous lounge of her beautifying establishment, which was not on Park Avenue proper, but just off it on a side street, which was even more fashionable. Some of the very beautiful and competent young women who worked for Pat were gathered around.

"Where am I?" Pat asked before she thought.

"You shouldn't drink so much next time," remarked one of the girls.

"Who said that?"

"The taxi driver who brought you."

"Oh."

Pat thought. It was exactly like awakening from a deep sleep, and in a few moments it was all perfectly clear in her mind. She got off the divan where she had been lying, straightened her frock, and blew into the palm of her other hand and made that into a fist, also.

"Where are you going?" a girl asked anxiously.

"To skin a man!" Pat said grimly. "I don't know for sure yet, but I think that I shall present his fists to a museum."

Renny's huge fists might not be museum pieces, but they would certainly be a wonder in some collection of anthropological members in any medical college. And a recording of the innocence in his great voice, when he answered the telephone at Doc's headquarters, would have been interesting as well.

"All right," Pat said. "I just wanted to know if you were there. In exactly eleven minutes, plus the time it takes a taxi to make the trip, I'll be over."

"What's the eleven minutes for?" Renny wanted to know.

"To sharpen my knife."

"Listen, Pat "

"Don't Pat me, you clown!"

"But, Pat, we got Doc!" Renny rumbled.

"And I missed the excitement, you monstrosity, you fisted freak, you "

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

"You sound like Ham turning loose on Monk!" Renny laughed. "Listen, Pat, they're all here. Monk, Ham, Doc, everybody. We even got a Eurasian woman. We don't know who she is or what she is except she's not hard to look at. And we got some other fellows. They look like Asiatics and Eurasians, and there's two white men."

"Don't count yourself among the white men," Pat advised.

"Ha, hah!" Renny said. "You know that Doc has told you time and again to stay out of our affairs, where you'll be safe. And, if you come over here, Doc will be recovering from the effects of that gas, which he got along with the rest of them, and he'll fan you right back where you came from."

"Maybe," Pat said, "but you'll be among the missing before he does. Give me anaesthetic will you, you " Pat couldn't think of anything that would blister big Renny properly, so she banged the receiver down on the hook with such violence that the telephone bounced across the room.

She rushed out and flung into a taxicab. As a second thought, Pat peered at the driver, but it wasn't the fellow who had brought her. True, she didn't know who had brought her, but it would, of course, be some one Renny knew, because he wouldn't trust her to a stranger. Renny was thoughtful, of course.

This driver was a lean fellow who looked rather young and characterless.

No, Pat thought as the taxi got in motion, Renny wouldn't take any chances with her. To tell the truth, she wouldn't do anything violent to Renny, except with her tongue.

She was not, when it came right down to it, surprised at what he had done. No one knew better than Pat how Doc Savage disliked having her take part in their adventures. And no one was more determined than Pat to go right ahead and enjoy the excitement.

The cab stopped for a traffic light.

Pat stamped her foot. She'd join them in this, or know the reason why! It was more than a month since she had been in any kind of adventure, and she had gotten a great kick out of the last one. Yes, she'd insist

The cab door opened. Rather, both doors opened. A man got in from each side. Rather husky men with slant eyes. Asiatics.

"Say, who "

Pat never got farther than that, because the men knew what they were doing, and proceeded to do it. They seized her, clapped something over her mouth, wrestled her down on the cab floor, kept her out of sight, and the hack rolled away as if nothing had happened.

And no one had noticed the incident.

The cab did not go toward Doc's headquarters.

THE gas which Long Tom and Renny had used did not have as mild an effect as the anaesthetic which Renny had used on Pat. In fact, after two hours, Doc Savage and the others showed few signs of reviving.

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

This did not alarm Johnny, Long Tom and Renny. They knew the properties of the stuff, and felt sure consciousness would shortly return to the victims.

Johnny, he was present with Lam and Burke Benbow did not feel kindly over being left out of the rescue. They had gone off and left him, and he didn't like it; furthermore, he suspected Long Tom of authoring the idea in the first place.

Johnny had said as much.

"A perfidious artifice," he remarked.

"Huh?" Long Tom asked.

Johnny merely put his thin nose in the air.

Long Tom, who had no idea what the last word of the remark meant, walked into the library and consulted a dictionary. He found that Johnny had accused him of perpetrating a low deceit. A rascally trick.

And Long Tom was about to take the bony Johnny aside and tell him, among other things, to quit making goo-goo eyes at pretty Lam Benbow, when Doc sighed and turned over. The advent of the bronze man's consciousness shoved everything else aside.

DOC, with physical powers scientifically cultivated since childhood by a daily two-hour routine of exercises which he never neglected, came out of it far ahead of his men.

He reacted calmly, saying nothing for some moments, then inquiring about how they had managed to locate him. Renny explained that Pat had the brilliant idea of watching Wall Street happenings, and from that faint clue, had brought about the result.

"That was excellent work on Pat's part," Doc said quietly. "But I do hope she has not joined in this mess."

"She's trying to," Renny grinned, "But we outsmarted her the first time. However, though, she talked to me on the telephone a while ago, and said she was coming over. I guess she'll be here soon."

Doc Savage, they discovered, knew that he had been seized in order that his name might be employed in securing financial control of World-Air Air Lines.

Renny, Long Tom and Johnny learned, also, that the bronze man knew there was a mysterious power, High Lar by name, behind the rather incredible procession of events.

But if Doc Savage knew what High Lar's main purpose was, he did not mention the fact, nor hint in any way that he might have the explanation. The bronze man simply went into the laboratory and got a drink of water, then stood looking at the unusual view which the windows afforded.

Once, however, he did betray some sign of activity; not with movement, however, but with a sound, a tiny, weird, trilling note that rose and fell. This sound had utter strangeness of quality, and might have been the note of some exotic tropical bird. It was the small, unconscious thing which Doc Savage did in moments of stress, mental and physical.

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Burke Benbow and his sister, Lam, sat silent in the library. This was their first contact with the giant man of bronze, the being of mystery, as much of the world knew him. There was expression enough on their faces to show that their first opinions were undergoing a marked change.

When they had come into this, Doc Savage was already a prisoner of the mysterious High Lar, and this had created the impression that he might not be, along with his little group, what he was cracked up to be.

But that idea had faded, as Lam and Burke Benbow's faces showed, and they were experiencing the wonder, the awe, that invariably came to those who had first contact with Doc Savage. They had nothing to say.

Monk, when he awakened, had plenty to say.

"WHERE'S my hog?" he yelled.

"He's over in the corner," Renny explained.

Ham, reviving then, muttered, "I was in hopes I'd never see that hog again. But where's Chemistry?"

"In the corner, too."

Monk groaned. Then he turned his head and stared at Ham.

"Every time I look around," Monk said, "I think I'm having a bad dream, because I'm startled by the apparition of a jackass."

"Well," Ham came back, "it's perfectly natural for a man to see his shadow."

Monk winced, glared, and tried unsuccessfully to think of something withering.

Long Tom, laughing, remarked that, "Well, you two eggs are right in form, I see."

Then they tied the other prisoners securely. These numbered nine, four pure Asiatics, three Polynesians, and two whites. Lashed securely, they were arrayed in the laboratory where, in their awakening, they would be presented with a view of the vast quantity of gleaming, intricate chemical and scientific apparatus.

As Renny remarked, "Holy cow, there's no place quite the equal of this for an impressive awakening! It gives you a complex of science over matter. I know, because I went to sleep in here once and woke up, and that's how I felt."

Lo Lar, the exotic and ravishing Eurasian woman, they did not bind with cords. They decorated her wrists and ankles with shiny handcuffs and sat her in the privacy of the library where Renny, who was not susceptible to feminine beauty to-day, apparently, placed a medical skeleton in front of her, where she could see it when first awakening.

"The shock may do her good," he declared.

"I don't like that trick," Monk declared.

"I don't, either!" Ham snapped, for once agreeing with the homely chemist.

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Renny squinted at them. "I'll bet her good looks had something to do with you getting into a jam. Did that happen?"

Monk and Ham subsided.

The hour was six o'clock in the evening.

At nine o'clock, three hours later, Doc and his aides were exactly where they had been at six. Excepting that all the prisoners had awakened. They were very much alive. And also enthusiastically imitating clams.

No word of information had they divulged.

Doc Savage's metallic features showed no impatience at the lack of results, nor any other emotion. The bronze man had a remarkable coordination of nerves and musculature which enabled him to confine within himself, as far as appearances went, what he was thinking or feeling.

Yet he was intensely anxious to learn who High Lar was, what he was, what he was trying to accomplish. They had, of course, such information as Burke Benbow had given them, which was little beyond generality.

What Doc Savage wanted to know, and his questions had shown it, was the other name of High Lar, if any, and where he could be found here in New York. For they had reason to know the mystery foe was in Gotham.

Doc had overheard Lo Lar, the fellow's wife, say as much while he had been her prisoner. They knew, also, likewise from what Doc had overheard, that High Lar contemplated something beyond the mere acquisition of World-Air Air Lines and a motor company. But what that further aim was, they found themselves blocked at learning.

Big-fisted Renny looked at Doc Savage.

"The truth serum," he rumbled. "We haven't tried that."

Doc said, "Get it."

But before they could administer the truth serum, the telephone rang, and that seemed to remind Doc of something, which was in itself an indication of how he had been concentrating on the prisoners, and how concerned over what they might reveal he had been.

For he had forgotten Renny's remark that Pat Savage had been en route to headquarters. And he rarely forgot things, or overlooked them.

"It may be Pat," the bronze man said, and went to the telephone.

It was not Pat.

It was about Pat.

"She will be killed unless you release Lo Lar," a grinding voice assured him. "Think it over and we will turn Pat loose when Lo Lar joins us."

The speaker promptly hung up.

Chapter XI. THE SPARRING

DOC SAVAGE did not hang up. To do so would have caused the mechanical connectors of the dialing system to break the circuit. He placed the receiver on the inlaid table beside the instrument, got on another telephone and had the call traced.

A pay booth in Grand Central station. Empty, of course. Doc himself went and searched, and found nothing. He came back.

"The truth serum," he said grimly.

Monk, Ham and the others did not ask him if he was going to release Lo Lar. They knew that would accomplish little, it being hardly likely that Pat would be turned loose. Men with their future at stake, men of the character of this High Lar, did not endanger themselves. And Pat might have information that would give them trouble if they turned her loose. Pat was clever.

Pat was also the cousin of Doc Savage, and his one living relative, as far as the bronze man knew. Beyond himself, she was the one survivor of the remarkable Savage strain, and he wanted it to go on. That was why Doc always tried to protect Pat from danger. He did not belittle her ability to aid him and his strange group of aides. The contrary.

Pat was invaluable in her way. But Doc did not want her to face the dangers which threatened himself and his men. He did not want her life to end. And now, when Pat was in undoubted danger, he was taking the course which seemed best to guarantee her safety.

The Eurasian woman was not the first on whom the truth serum did not work. Doc did not explain why, but Monk, the chemist who knew much about the peculiarities of the serum, had a suspicion of the reason.

People with extreme will power sometimes do not react to the stuff. That had happened before. And Lo Lar seemed to be a woman of great control, along with her other misdirected abilities.

But the other prisoners the three Polynesians, the two whites, the four Asiatics were a disappointment. Not that they didn't talk. They did. Freely. But they had come from the China branch of High Lar's organization.

Doc's men, hearing them mumble meaningless snatches, began to realize fully the vast power of this High Lar, the scope of the creature's sway and operations.

They listened to things; awful, chilling recitals which for complex cruelty and heartlessness they had not heard an equal; but nothing that told them what they wanted to know. These men did not know High Lar, except as a power. The being might not have existed, for all they could tell.

"Well," Renny rumbled grimly at last, "there's just the woman left."

Monk, entering the chemical laboratory, redoubled the potency of the truth serum. And even then they worked in vain, getting only an incoherent mutter from the woman, until Monk groaned, "If we make it stronger, it'll kill her!"

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As though his worried tone had penetrated some inner door, wedging it open a crack, a few broken words came from the Eurasian woman.

"Lar get way from the *Oahu*," she said.

It was a warning, it seemed, from her subconscious self, directed in her senselessness at her spouse, High Lar.

"We'll have a look at the *Oahu*," Doc stated quietly.

"But what on earth is the *Oahu*?" Monk gasped.

DOC SAVAGE found that out by glancing through the back files of the newspapers at the shipping news.

The *Oahu*, white, measured about half the length of the Queen Mary. She was still a sizeable boat, for a freighter. Her funnels were striped, her brass shone, and from her flagstaff trailed gaudily the colors of an Asiatic nation. The fact that she flew such colors meant nothing as regards that nation; there have been crooked ships under the United States flag.

A closed truck drove out on the wharf against which the *Oahu* lay. It was a closed truck, but the rear door gaped open. The pier was situated, fittingly enough, in the black moon shadows cast by the movements of Wall Street.

The truck moved out on the pier, which was large and solid, turned, backed up to the gangplank of the freighter, and stood there a moment.

Nothing happened for a few moments. Then there was a faint noise, as though an egg had broken.

Two guards, men with revolvers, standing inside the freighter at the end of the gangplank, fell on their faces, making, however, no sound.

Out of the truck came men, five of them. Doc Savage first, then Monk, Ham, Johnny and Renny. Long Tom, the electrical wizard, had remained back at headquarters to watch the prisoners and keep an eye on Lam and Burke Benbow. Not that the Benbows had done anything to make them seem other than they claimed to be, but it was Doc's policy, that of his men, also, to take no chances.

Gliding up the gangplank into the *Oahu*, Doc and his men were bulky of figure. For they were incased in body armor, including helmets which protected even their heads. Nothing less than high-powered rifle bullets would damage them.

And slung over their shoulders were canvas sacks containing gas and explosive grenades, while in their hands were machine pistols, the ammo drums charged with so-called "mercy" bullets which would produce unconsciousness instead of death.

THE freighter lay silent, the crew asleep apparently, although on each wing of the bridge, lookouts stood. There was another in the bow, one in the stern. The one on the pier side of the bridge leaned over, staring at the truck.

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He had seen the men leave it and come aboard the boat, but for some moments he did nothing, because he knew there were two lookouts at the gangplank. And it did not occur to him that they might have been gassed without really knowing what had happened to them.

But abruptly the bridge lookout was worried. He ran to the wheelhouse, picked up the ship telephone and spoke quickly into it.

Shortly, as Monk and Ham crept down a corridor, there was a loud report ahead. Flame licked. Monk whopped, sat down. A heavy bullet from a revolver packs a wallop. Monk's chest armor stopped the slug, but the shock floored him. And Ham leveled his machine pistol.

It sounded an ear-splitting, bullfiddle moan. The man who fired on them was hit, he turned and ran a few paces, then bundled himself up on the floor and became senseless.

After that, shooting became general.

Doc Savage took one route to the deck house. Johnny and Renny took another. The cabins would be in the deck house; they always were on freighters. And if Pat was aboard, she might be there, it seemed logical to think.

Doc's aides dropped gas grenades as they went. These opened and filled the corridors with vapor from which they were protected by masks.

Doc lifted silently up a companionway. The rungs were iron, rubber-treaded, the rail of brass, and there was another shiny brass rail around the top. A man leaned over this. He had a sawed-off shotgun. It threw a great noise, a charge of shot. Another.

Doc's clothing turned ragged in strips. The mesh armor, with a covering of protective scales, showed shiny, metallic, where the shot scraped. He kept going up.

The man clubbed the shotgun. Doc got close, set himself. The gun swung. Doc jumped, and a metallic hand grasped the gun before it got great momentum. The man of bronze jerked. The other man was strong. He had the brass rail to anchor himself to.

They fought, the fellow was dragged half over the rail. He let go of the gun, turned, ran half a dozen paces and the gun, thrown by the bronze man, knocked him down.

The fellow squirmed to get up, and Doc reached him, hammered once with a mailed fist, after which the man pushed his face against the steel floor-plates and was still.

More shots crashed. Men yelled. There was much running. Sailors came out of the forecastle. Their shouts indicated they had no idea what it was all about. A few of them ran down the deck, encountered some of the gas, and collapsed.

The others promptly raced for the bow springline a six-inch hawser and began monkeying down it to the deck. They were innocent and wanted none of this strange combat.

DOC, in the meantime, was finding fire doors closed. They were of steel, almost vault strong. The bronze man had to withdraw, roll an explosive grenade against each door, set himself against the blast. Sometimes it

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took more than one grenade. He was not pleased. They were losing time.

The loss of time accounted for what happened, he realized later. There was shooting near the stern. Doc listened. A fight. He suddenly changed his course, racing out on deck.

Near the stern, men were going over the side, sliding down the rope.

On the dock, Patricia Savage struggled in the grip of two men. She was bound hand and foot, gagged, and not making much headway with her resistance.

Nearer, on the *Oahu's* deck, was the fight which Doc had heard. Renny and Johnny. Men must have come upon them suddenly. Several men, and they had Renny and Johnny down in a dogfight.

Doc ran to them, and on past them, but in passing, he let a single gas grenade roll and burst on the deck, and it broke up that mêlée.

Then, whipping along beside the rail, the bronze man threw another grenade with all his great strength, and it bounced to a stop beside Pat's captors. One of them kicked it into the Harbor water, where it sizzled and sank, making many bubbles.

The men ran with Pat. There was a compact group of them, and they worked together. Reaching the end of the dock, they turned right.

Doc vaulted the *Oahu* rail, hooked an arm over the stern springline, slid. He hit the dock. The men who had Pat were out of sight in the darkness.

Johnny and Renny started down the springline, arrived safely on the pier. Then Monk and Ham appeared. Ham got down all right. Monk slipped, lost his grip, went plummeting between ship and piling; water shot up and Monk shot out of sight.

Ham wrenched off his helmet.

"Let him drown, the clumsy hooligan," Ham rapped.

Then, contrarily, Ham was the maddest in a search for a heavy wire hawser which could be lowered into the water, at least thirty feet deep there, for Monk to grasp. Monk's heavy armor would, of course, keep him on the bottom.

Doc flung back his own helmet.

"Renny, Johnny help Ham!" he ordered.

The other aides pitched into the job of saving Monk before he drowned. Doc Savage raced after Pat's captors.

It was very dark near the end of the pier and on shore. The bronze man moved silently, pausing to listen. His quarry was using silence.

Then a plane motor started. Loudly, it banged and backfired, and echoes came rolling back from the skyscraper windows, only a few of which were lighted.

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DOC made instantly for the noise. He knew its source. There was, had been for years, an airport in the shadow of Wall Street. Wealthy financiers used it for the planes in which they commuted from Long Island and Connecticut estates.

The plane, a large cabin job, was standing out in the open water before the airdrome, moving slowly, when Doc distinguished it. But the craft was gathering speed.

The distance was too great. The man of bronze had no chance whatever of overhauling it. He tried. And was left standing on the dock.

The plane lifted off the river and droned away, but as that happened, a white searchlight beam leaped from the *Oahu* and impaled the aircraft. The light was powerful, and it enabled the bronze man to distinguish the features of the craft, even to the registration numbers painted on it.

He discerned the latter with the aid of a powerful monocular which he always carried in his clothing. And he committed the number, the distinguishing characteristics of the plane, to memory.

It was Monk who had turned on the searchlight, thus redeeming his clumsiness to an extent. The aides had hauled Monk out, and he had shucked off his weighty armor, and being in an agitated frame of mind, his brain must have worked more quickly than the others.

Then police arrived, drawn by the uproar, and a Harbor patrol boat. The confusion took order, with all personnel of the freighter being herded together in the large dining room.

Doc, ranging his eyes over them, saw that none were men whom he had seen before. All, examination of the ship's papers developed, were signed on as crew, and had been for some time.

Those who had been gassed revived, more than a little dazed by their experience. No one had been killed. There were a few broken bones.

The *Oahu's* skipper, a red-faced hippopotamus named Tanzas, was at first raging angry, then amenable, realizing he was in a tight place. Finally he gave an explanation of why High Lar's men could hide out aboard his ship.

High Lar, it seemed, owned the *Oahu*. Owned the stock of the company to which she belonged. But Captain Tanzas insisted he had not known there was a kidnapped woman aboard.

The police bundled him and his officers off to jail, along with such crew members as didn't look right.

"So now we're back where they started," Renny rumbled. "They've still got Pat."

But it was even worse.

LONG TOM met them when they entered the establishment on the eighty-sixth floor of the high building.

"I'm kinda worried," Long Tom said.

"Eh?" Monk squinted at him.

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"It's Burke Benbow."

"What about him?"

"He went out to get some coffee and sandwiches, and hasn't come back," explained the electrical wizard.

Johnny said, "I thought you were supposed to keep an eye on him?"

Doc Savage, interposing quietly, said, "We all have work to do. Get on the telephones and start spreading an alarm for that plane."

The bronze man, without saying so in as many words, gave the idea that he did not want Johnny and Long Tom exchanging sharp words. With Monk and Ham it was different. They always quarreled and didn't mean a bit of it.

But Johnny and Long Tom were of different types, and if they got to exchanging digs, irked at each other because both had an eye on the entrancing Lam Benbow, something difficult might develop. The association of these five men and their bronze chief was not one that would stand dissension.

As the next few hours passed, however, it developed that Johnny and Long Tom, if they were concerned over Lam Benbow's affections, would have to worry about Doc Savage. Not that the bronze man gave the girl any particular attention.

The opposite, rather, because it was his policy to eschew feminine entanglements which might cramp the alert freedom of his own mind, and also give his enemies a medium through which they might strike at him. But the young woman herself, from time to time, could be observed watching the bronze man.

Lam Benbow was reserved, as well-mannered as she was beautiful; and, of course, she made nothing in the nature of advances. But Johnny and Long Tom, observing certain small things about her actions, exchanged glum looks.

Doc Savage was very busy. On the telephone he connected the broadcasting systems. Not only the two large networks, but a smaller one that covered the Eastern coast, one which was prominent in the Midwest, and a Pacific coast auxiliary hook-up.

At eight o'clock the next morning the bronze man, speaking from a velocity microphone standing on the inlaid table in the reception room, addressed a hook-up which comprised almost every major station in the country.

He explained that Pat Savage was missing. He described Pat. He offered twenty-five thousand dollars' reward for any information leading to her whereabouts. Doc offered to pay for any collect messages containing any kind of clue which any one might care to send him.

He described the plane which had taken Pat away, gave the number, repeated it several times; and he talked about the historical source of each number in order to fix it in the minds of his listeners.

Downstairs, in the rooms which were usually employed to interview those who had troubles for Doc Savage's attention, Monk and Ham assembled a corps of experienced policemen, private detectives and Federal agents to sift clues.

Chapter XII. THE ISLAND

THERE had been no word whatever from Burke Benbow. Inquiry disclosed nothing to indicate what had happened. He had simply disappeared. His sister plainly looked more worried, and also looked to Doc Savage for comfort.

At noon, Doc Savage went on the air again. He was on for five minutes, repeating substantially what he had said at the morning broadcast.

Downstairs, the first wave of a flood of telegrams had arrived. Many were inquiries for more information. Some were obviously impossible the women seen did not look like Pat, or the planes were different kind of planes. But if the remotest possibility was attached to a message, it was immediately checked by long distance. A corps of telephone operators were at work.

So far the afternoon had brought no word of Burke Benbow, and no development of any other kind.

Renny, Johnny and Long Tom tried the truth serum once more on Lo Lar, but had no results. She simply sat mute, refusing to talk. Evidently some stoical power of her mind, essentially Oriental like herself, kept her silent under the effects of the serum.

High Lar's men, the fellows from the China branch of his organization, were dispatched to Doc Savage's strange hospital upstate.

AT five o'clock that afternoon, the telephone rang, Monk answered, then looked startled and handed the instrument to Doc.

Burke Benbow's voice said, "Doc Savage?"

"Yes."

"Say, I went out last night to get some coffee and sandwiches, and I saw a fellow I recognized as belonging to High Lar's gang."

"You did?"

"Yes; I was sure lucky. I followed the fellow. I've got High Lar's hideout spotted. The man led me to it. I think High Lar is there."

"Good."

"Get down here in a hurry, Savage. We can grab 'em. Another thing I think I've found out High Lar's motive. I think I know what he's trying to accomplish with all this crooked work. It's an infernal thing."

"What is it?"

"It's quite a story. I can't tell it over the telephone, because I don't dare talk from here for too long. They may spot me. I'm talking from a filling station near a farmhouse on the Boston Post Road. There's a milepost in front of the filling station that is numbered 64. The farmhouse is out on the road a piece. A yellow building.

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You can't miss it. Come on out, and hurry."

Burke Benbow had been speaking in a level voice, as though he were holding his tone down, keeping excitement out, only with great effort.

"What about the farmhouse?" Doc asked.

"That's where High Lar is hiding."

"So."

Burke Benbow said, in a tone even more strained. "Bring only a few men. This farmhouse commands a view of the surrounding country, and they can see a crowd coming. I think they have an airplane ready to make a get-away."

"Anything else?"

There was a long pause. So tense that the wire seemed to strain. Then a verbal explosion came from the other end.

"Don't!" Benbow screamed. "It's all lies!"

After that there came struggling noises, but over them, Benbow was shrieking, "They're making me tell you that! It's a trap! Don't come! Don't get "

And something happened to the telephone at the other end.

DOC SAVAGE, when he dropped his gyro, one of the several he used, down toward a filling station on the Boston Post Road not much more than half an hour later, wore an expression of Sphinx imperturbability. Beyond the filling station was a yellow farmhouse such as Burke Benbow had described,

"And this is about sixty-four miles out on the Post Road," Renny rumbled soberly.

The gyro was a craft made for landing on a handkerchief. It hit in a small pasture back of the filling station, bounced, rolled a few feet, and stopped.

Doc and the four with him Monk, Ham and Johnny, in addition to big-fisted Renny did not leave the craft immediately. The cabin was armored, and it might be an ambush, even yet. Long Tom was not with the group, had remained behind to watch over Lam Benbow and to answer any calls.

The bronze man and his aides found only a filling station attendant lying senseless across his cold-drink cooler inside the station building when they investigated. He was a knobby young man with freckles. A rent in his scalp leaked slow crimson.

"Dead!" Monk breathed.

Monk, jumping at conclusions, was wrong. But it required fifteen minutes to bring the attendant out of it, and in the meantime they looked around and found, among other things, that the telephone had been torn off the wall. Also, several cans of grease were scattered around, and two were splashed over the walls, while one

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window was broken.

"Benbow put up quite a fight!" Renny boomed.

"Indubitably manifested," Johnny agreed.

"Oh-h-h-h!" said the attendant when he awakened.

"Where's Benbow?" Ham asked him.

"Where's OO ouch who?" The attendant felt of his head. "If you mean the little slant-eyed guy who came in here and cracked me, how the hell would I know?"

That was all the filling station attendant knew. Benbow obviously had not hit him, for Benbow was not a little slant-eyed guy.

The bronze man and his aides left the filling station flunko to nurse his headache and wonder what on earth had happened, and also to stare in growing wonder at Doc Savage, of whom he apparently had heard. There was a lot of brass went with his knobs and freckles, for the flunko tried to embellish his first story and mumble something about a girl held prisoner by the slant-eyed assailant.

And when he saw that wasn't sticking, he added a few assailants, claiming his mind was clearing. Obviously, he'd heard the broadcast.

"You scamp!" Monk told him. "We ought to send you to a place where we cure lads like you of crookedness. You're a potential crook."

DOC SAVAGE approached the yellow farmhouse. He did so warily, carrying a sensitive device, brought from the gyro, which would detect the presence of any wire carrying even a minute electrical charge.

Doc used this to spot wires of burglar-alarm systems. In this case he was looking for any wires that might be connected to a death-dealing charge of explosives. But there was no explosive.

There was only an old farmhouse, the haunt of rats and spiders. Plaster was loose on the floor, and old newspapers, empty tin cans and bottles were scattered around; in corners were piles of straw, put there by tramps who had used the place for a shelter. Yet there had been recent visitors.

Cigarette stubs on the floor were still wet. The dusty planks were freshly tracked.

Renny delved into the piles of straw in the corners.

"Holy cow!" he exploded, and came erect.

He held a slipper, feminine, expensively made. This he turned in his hands; then, with an enormous finger, he indicated a label inside:

MADE EXPRESSLY FOR

PATRICIA SAVAGE

THE FEATHERED OCTOPUS

"They were holding her here!" Monk yelled. "Damn that Benbow for a fool!"

"Why damn Benbow?" Johnny demanded indignantly, using small words.

"If he'd have kept his mouth shut, they might have been here when we arrived."

"But he got himself in a jam warning us of a trap," Ham reminded.

"More the sucker he is," Monk grumbled. "We'd have taken our chances on a trap to get this close to Pat."

Which was true. But Johnny frowned.

"Lay off Benbow," he suggested. "He did his best. He's all right."

Monk opened his mouth to say that it was probably Benbow's sister who Johnny really thought was all right, but he reconsidered and held his peace. Johnny did not fall in love very often, and it was not safe to kid inexperienced fellows, especially long professorial knowledge tanks like Johnny, about their affections.

In the rear of the farmhouse the bronze man's aides found car tracks, and from them Doc Savage determined the make of the tires, the probable size of the car, including its wheelbase ordinary detective work which might or might not help them.

After there was nothing else that could be done, they walked back to the plane, opened the cabin door, and climbed inside.

Burke Benbow sprawled in one of the cabin seats. And he was something of a mess.

"I BEGAN to think you'd never come back." He shifted slightly, grimaced, and added: "I saw this plane land, and came here. After a look inside, I could tell it was yours. I saw some of the equipment from your headquarters in it."

Benbow was dirty. He was also a little bloody, with torn clothing, bruises, a fought-out look.

"You see," he said, "I got away from them."

Doc Savage and the others stared at him. Doc apparently did not see fit to say anything, and the rest were too astonished to remark. This was about the last thing they had expected.

"I got away," Benbow repeated. "I was lucky." He rubbed his knuckles, which were skinned, and felt of his arms, which were muscular. "Those little runts can't fight, if they haven't got a knife in their hands." He sighed and grinned thinly. "Is my sister all right?"

"She's all right," Johnny said. "Why?"

"Well, I was afraid. They're dangerous, High Lar's men are. Make no mistake. That fellow is more powerful than we ever dreamed."

"Did you see him?" Ham asked.

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"No. He's probably in San Francisco by now."

"What?"

"With your friend, Pat."

"What?"

"Fact." Benbow nodded. "I heard them talking. High Lar left only a few of his men here, to keep Doc occupied and make him think the big action was still around here. But it isn't."

"But we found Pat's slipper back in that house," Johnny cut in, using small words in his excitement. "And cigarette stubs so wet that they could only have been smoked an hour or so ago."

"Gag."

"Eh?"

"Trickery. Hocus—pocus. Flimflam to fool you." Benbow scowled darkly. "You see, they wanted you to think Pat was still around here. It's like I said. High Lar has skipped with her."

"Skipped, eh?" Johnny seemed to have trouble digesting that.

"Scared." Benbow laughed. Violently and in an ugly tone. "The chief devil is scared. His messing around with Doc Savage got him in bad, and he knows it. So he's flown for his hangout on the island."

"What island?" Monk demanded.

"I don't know," Benbow shook his head. "I told you once before that this High Lar is supposed to have his lair on an island in the South Seas. I don't know where."

AN air of dejection, of up-against-the-blank-wall-again feeling seemed to settle over Doc's five men as they climbed into the gyro.

The bronze man himself was expressionless, but that was his usual manner, except under the most terrific strain; or, of course, when he wanted to show emotion. Doc started the silenced motor.

"Didn't you find any of High Lar's men unconscious in that filling station?" Benbow asked the man of bronze.

"No."

"Aw, hell," Benbow muttered. "I thought I knocked at least two of those lads into the middle of next week." He frowned at his fists, as though they had failed him.

Doc Savage put the gyro in the air and flew back to New York, dropped the craft on the Hudson it was fitted with retractable wheels, and the cabin had a fat stomach so that it could land on earth or water and taxied to his private hangar, the great building which masqueraded as a warehouse. The aides helped put the gyro inside, and went to the headquarters layout.

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Long Tom said, "Progress, Doc."

A faint flicker leaped into the bronze man's pale-gold eyes. "Yes?"

"The High Lar plane was found near San Francisco. Boy coming home from school ran across it, jammed into some trees at the side of a pasture. Nobody around. We have private detectives checking it for fingerprints, also checking for some trace of the fellows who brought it there."

"They sure made a quick cross-country trip," Renny rumbled.

"It was a fast plane," Ham recalled.

"That bears out what I said," Burke Benbow reminded. "They're headed for that South Seas island."

"And there's only a few dozen thousands of islands in the South Seas!" Monk groaned.

Burke Benbow clasped his sister, Lam, in his arms at their reunion, and the girl sobbed once, deeply, then got control of her emotions. She had courage, admiring the lithe blond lines of the girl. And when Lam looked around for Doc Savage, probably with some idea of thanking him for helping her brother, the bronze man was not in sight.

Doc had gone down to the telephone room to look over any new messages from the Pacific coast. There was one a telephone report from the San Francisco sheriff's office, stating that spectators had climbed around and over the plane, covering it with their fingerprints before the officers arrived, so nothing of value had been found.

There were four telegrams claiming the twenty-five thousand for finding the plane. None of them honest, of course. A boy had found the craft. Doc turned the messages over to Ham, who sent them down to the legal department of a law firm with which he was affiliated, with instructions to throw a scare into the chiselers, so that they might learn the mistake of trying such tactics.

"Makes a man think every one is crooked, by Jove!" Ham complained. "And to make it worse, Monk is up there making goo-goo eyes at that Lo Lar."

"How is she?" Doc asked.

"Quite safe in handcuffs," Ham said. "But you'd think that Monk would know a she-cobra when he sees one. That ignoramus certainly makes me mad."

A telephone operator looked up, saying, "Frisco on the wire."

"I'll take it. Probably from the sheriff." Ham lifted the receiver. "Hello, sheriff . . . Oh, it's not? Who is it, then? . . . You won't eh? . . . Yes, he's here. But you'll have to give your name. . . What? Oh! Oh!" Ham looked at Doc. His face was startled as he said. "High Lar!"

THE ugly, rushing voice that came to Doc Savage over the miles of wire was one that he had heard once before. And the gist of its first remark was about the same as what had been said to him on the other occasion.

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"High Lar speaking. Don't interrupt. This is your last chance to turn my wife loose. Otherwise we are going to dispose of Pat Savage."

Doc said promptly. "Turn Pat loose. When she telephones me from San Francisco police headquarters, and the police chief verifies her presence, Lo Lar will be released."

"Do you think I'm crazy?"

"Meaning you won't trust me?"

"Naturally."

"Then there is nothing you can do," Doc Savage said quietly.

Around the bronze man there was intense activity as Ham got the San Francisco police on another wire in a frantic effort to have the call traced.

High Lar's voice said, "You are mistaken about there being nothing I can do. I have Pat Savage here with me and "

"You touch her and you will not see your wife, Lo Lar again," the bronze man interrupted. "Do not make the mistake of doubting me. You have my word on that."

A brittle arrogance which the distant voice had carried now collapsed somewhat.

"I know enough about you, Savage," High Lar said, "to know you would not kill a woman."

"Who said anything about killing? Lo Lar will undergo a brain operation which will wipe out every memory of you. Then she will be taught to hate you and everything you represent."

There was a long silence.

"Then we shall have to see what develops," the voice said.

The receiver went down at the other end.

TWENTY minutes later, dapper Ham put down the telephone and swore. It was not often that Ham swore, but lack of practice plainly did not cramp his vocabulary.

"Call wasn't even made from a regular instrument," he complained. "Line was tapped outside San Francisco somewhere. They can't locate the exact spot."

By that time Doc Savage's big plane, a huge tri-motored job, was ready for the air. And every one was aboard Doc's five men, Lo Lar, and the two Benbows. Burke Benbow had asked to go, and Doc had not demurred; the sister, Lam, had pleaded to accompany them, and again Doc had not dissented.

They were all involved in this, the Benbows apparently only because High Lar had taken Burke Benbow's air line in the South Seas from him, and Lam because she had been trying to learn from her brother what was wrong with him, why he was worrying.

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The great plane droned out of the water-front hangar under its own power, and the hangar doors, radio-controlled, were closed behind it. The craft lunged forward. Its hull was as large as some of the yachts lying in the river, but amazingly streamlined, and the wingspread was in proportion.

The ship, designed by Doc Savage himself, was capable of exceeding by scores of miles an hour the very fast transcontinental airliners, and its fuel capacity exceeded that of the Clipper ships on the Pacific run. Mechanical aids, a robot pilot of special design, simplified the handling of the craft.

And once Doc put it upon the radio beams of the overland routes and set the robot, little in the line of navigation remained to be done. Renny, who served as mechanic, could reach the big motors through passages in the wings.

When the plane had flown for a while, Burke Benbow abruptly explained why he had not told his sister, long before, that High Lar had robbed him of his air line in the South Seas. It was simple, but Benbow seemed reluctant to confess it.

He had merely been afraid that, since he had been determined to fight High Lar, his sister would be in danger. He had thought, if he tried to make her think nothing was wrong that she would leave him, thus be clear of danger. Of course, she hadn't.

Dawn caught up with the plane as it dropped down beyond the Rockies. The group had not stopped for fuel; there was no need.

LANDING on San Francisco Harbor, with the great span of the Golden Gate bridge off one wingtip, Doc taxied the craft to a steamship pier. He swung the plane in the middle of a liner slip by springlines, watched by a crowd which gathered to observe their arrival. The newspapers had carried word of their coming.

When Doc and his group set foot on the pier, the crowds surged around them. Newsreel cameras ground, and the cameramen swore at everybody, demanding a clear scene to photograph, as though they had some divine right to it.

Reporters scrambled around. People tried to reach the bronze man, to introduce themselves. Some seemed to want no more than touch him. Things to be autographed envelopes, books, cards, hats, shirt cuffs, the lining of women's purses were as thick as leaves in a fall forest.

A nut or two shouted that they had located Pat. It was mad confusion, silly in a way, hardly understandable of a race that called itself civilized.

"A sample of the reason Lindbergh left the country," Monk muttered.

And finally they reached the police station, the main one, where they ran a barrage of more reporters. Doc Savage rarely gave out press interviews, but he was making an exception on the present occasion; and the men of the press were taking advantage of it.

The bronze man spent nearly thirty minutes answering questions, many of them not at all sensible, before he got into the police station.

The quiet behind locked doors seemed almost tomblike in comparison to what they had been through.

"A gentleman waiting to see you," explained a police officer. "We've had a lot of nuts, but I don't think this one is. He's in the next room."

They went in to see him.

Gundy, whom they knew as the lieutenant of High Lar, came uneasily to meet them.

Chapter XIII. GUIDE

GUNDY had the jitters. His pompous air, the attitude he had worn while playing the part of a rich man trying to see Doc Savage they knew he had merely been spying on Doc at the time was gone.

He looked much less plump. His clothing was wrinkled. His celluloid collar had been sweated down and was as wrinkled as a tea leaf. The ruddy tint was gone from his jowls. And as he stared at them, his fat fingers twitched with his spectacles, which were attached to a black ribbon that was twisted and awry around his neck.

"I uh ah good morning," Gundy said uncertainly.

"That depends," Monk muttered. Then, before Gundy said a thing, Monk turned around and addressed Doc Savage. "This looks like the beginning of something queer, Doc."

Gundy swallowed, then stood shaking his head and staring at the bronze man in fascination.

"Well," Ham said, "what's up."

"Not me not me," Gundy said shakily. "I am down. Very much so. Frankly, the events of the last day or two have have terrified me. I've lost my nerve."

"Mean you're giving yourself up?" Renny boomed.

"That is it."

The police chief, who was an accommodating soul, and a personal acquaintance of Doc Savage as well, herded his men out of the room and left Doc Savage and his group alone with Gundy.

Gundy drew a handkerchief and wiped prodigious quantities of perspiration from his fat face.

"Believe me, this is a trying decision on my part," he groaned. "If High Lar gets hold of me, my life insurance companies will certainly get a nasty shock!" He stared at Doc Savage. "I had all planned an elaborate speech about throwing myself on your mercy. After looking at you, I do not believe it would have any effect at all on what you will do to me."

Doc Savage said nothing.

Gundy muttered, "I want protection. I do not want to die. I became convinced that if I remained with High Lar, it was only a question of time until I met a violent end. So I quit him. I am appealing to you for protection. In return, I can tell you what I know."

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"Which is?" Doc asked quietly.

"That High Lar and the surviving members of his gang have taken off across the Pacific in a large plane. They have Pat with them. They are headed for High Lar's island in the South Seas. I can give you the location of that island."

Monk grunted, "Whew!"

"Holy cow!" Renny said. "This is a break!"

TALL, bony Johnny was dispatched to the nearest ship chandlers, and he returned in time with detailed charts of the region of the Pacific known as the South Seas.

Without hesitation, Gundy indicated an island. It was a remote spot, with a short name Ral. Turn the name around, as they did instantly in their minds, and it became Lar. And without glancing at the meridians on the side of the chart, Gundy gave the latitude and longitude. When checked with the chart, these figures proved correct. The man did not seem to be lying, so far.

"Who is High Lar?" Doc asked.

Burke Benbow crowded close to hear that, and glared at Gundy. Benbow's fists were hard and his jaw was out, and he muttered, "I've been trying to find this out for months."

Gundy looked at them steadily.

"High Lar is High Lar," he said. "There is no mystery about that. His family name is Lar. He was once a pirate. Got his start in the Bias Bay pirate hang-out on the China Coast. He developed, and when the British warships made piracy difficult, he shifted to this island. The name of the place was really Ral. The backward spelling of his name probably attracted Lar to the island."

"What does High Lar look like?"

Gundy shrugged. "Like an Oriental, as much as all Orientals look alike. He's old. Thin. Hideous. You know how Orientals get when they grow old and have led a hard life. He's just a skinny old devil, with a monster's brain. Likes weird stuff.

"He has a robe woven out of brightly colored feathers of jungle birds. Gorgeous thing. And he goes in for queer things, such as an enormous pet octopus. That is, the thing is not a pet. He just keeps it." Gundy stopped, seemed to think of the past, and shuddered.

Doc and his aides talked with Gundy for some time, but the only additional bit of information was the name of the spot from which High Lar's plane had taken off a tiny fishing village down the coast. They checked and found that true.

"It looks like Gundy had really double-crossed High Lar," Long Tom said in satisfaction.

The group went back to their big plane, all of them. Doc Savage opened an equipment case and got out the truth serum.

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Seizing Gundy suddenly, the bronze man administered the serum by force, not telling the man what it was for Gundy, if he knew, might in some subconscious fashion prevent his mind giving up, in coma, its secrets.

While Gundy groaned and struggled in growing drowsiness, Doc herded the others out of the plane. His five men, Burke Benbow, his sister Lam, and their prisoner, Lo Lar.

Doc's five aides did not seem as astonished at the sudden act as did the others. Burke Benbow remarked grumpily that it didn't appear that Doc trusted any of them, to which Monk explained that the bronze man had his own way of doing things; and, anyhow the truth serum had been a flop on Lo Lar, which might be because too many of them had tried to question her.

The serum was temperamental stuff at best, relying on the ability of chemicals to suspend the subject's conscious control over speech a reaction which, as they had demonstrated in the present affair, varied with different people.

"All right," Doc called.

They went back aboard the plane, Renny asking, "What luck, Doc?"

The bronze man's head bent slightly in the direction of Lo Lar.

"Almost as stubborn a subject as that woman," he replied. "But a few facts came out. First, Gundy did not double-cross High Lar."

A bark of astonishment came from Burke Benbow, and blank looks overspread the faces of the others.

"High Lar has gone to the island with Pat," Doc continued. "Lar is retreating to his hide-out. We've whipped him out here in the States. He wants us on his own ground for the finish scrap. It's an old trick. It has happened to us before, you know."

Ham muttered, "But I do not see why Gundy "

"High Lar wants us to be sure to find the island," Doc said. "Gundy was to guide us."

Monk's big mouth warped. His small, squeaky voice came explosively, asking, "Then what in blazes are we going to do?"

"Go right ahead to the island, as though we didn't know that it was intended to be a trap."

Burke Benbow, whose mouth was wide open, stared at Doc Savage and the five assistants as though he suddenly doubted that they had much common sense.

Doc went forward, opened the control compartment hatch and swung out on the wings to inspect the final loading of gasoline from a fuel boat which they had signalled alongside.

He made, as a matter of course, a short chemical test of the gasoline, not only to ascertain that it was of a quality to serve best in the motors, but to make sure there was nothing in it that would give them trouble far at sea.

In the meantime, Benbow cornered Monk. Benbow's face was flushed.

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"This is the craziest thing I ever heard of," he growled. "Haven't you fellows any brains at all? This High Lar is dangerous, I tell you. And you're doing exactly what he expects you to do!"

Monk, who was never particularly modest, said, "Brother, you're doing some underestimating yourself. You underestimate us. We're kind of dangerous ourselves. Listen, you haven't really seen Doc in action yet. This won't be the first time we've walked into a trap and made it back—fire on the guy who set it."

Benbow snorted.

"I'm not sure I want to take part in such insanity," he growled.

But he did not broach the idea of backing out to Doc Savage, nor did he suggest it might be safer to leave his sister behind. And Doc Savage himself did not mention leaving Lam, but assigned her, instead, the task of caring for Lo Lar; she was to see that the remarkable Eurasian woman did not suffer, and did not get an opportunity to damage the plane.

FOOD supplies and equipment were already aboard Doc had loaded necessities in New York. And when the fuel tanks were brimming, the aids cast off the springlines and the craft was maneuvered out into the harbor. The plane sat with idling motors for a while, until two ferryboats and a string of fishing craft no longer barred the take-off lane; then Doc sent the air giant off the water.

Renny and Johnny stationed themselves at the port windows, Long Tom, Monk, and Ham at the starboard windows, for planes were circling Doc's big craft. Newsreel ships, apparently, but there was no telling. These craft were left behind without anything happening, however.

Gundy came out of the coma which was a part of the truth serum after-effects. Peculiarly enough, and conveniently, he did not know what had happened to him. His mind held no recollection of being questioned by the bronze man. That, too, was a characteristic of the truth serum.

"Sorry," Monk took it on himself to tell Gundy. "You see, Doc made you unconscious while we took off, just to play safe. We didn't want anybody tipped about the route we were going to take."

Whether Gundy believed this, he did not say. But he seemed reconciled to his fate, whatever it was to be. He was even moderately cheerful, a mood which was common to the others as well, since they felt they were finally making progress. That feeling was probably produced by the physical motion over the Pacific, but nevertheless it was appreciable.

Monk, taking it on himself to keep an eye on Gundy, got the man in a poker game in the rear of the cabin. They tried to inveigle Ham into the game, but failed, Ham sensing a frame-up of some kind to relieve him of his cash. Monk came forward finally, looking wiser.

"That Gundy is sure a card sharp," he muttered. "The guy cleaned me."

"How much did he clean you of?" Ham asked.

"Forty—two cents."

"You weren't very dirty, were you?" Ham inquired.

"This is Sunday," Monk said grimly, "which is all that keeps me from knocking you loose from your teeth."

Chapter XIV. YELLOW PARADISE

MONDAY saw the airship beyond Honolulu, still on the route followed by the Clipper ships, and utilizing the radio facilities of that transpacific concern. A little better than twenty-four hundred miles was the jump to Honolulu, and from there to Midway Island a little less than fourteen hundred.

A storm center was beyond Midway, and the harbor at Midway was rough, gave the group a tremendous shaking up when the plane landed. They were all rather quiet while gasoline was being put aboard, wondering if they would make the take-off again. The waves seemed a dozen feet high, and not much more than that apart. But the plane made it.

Long Tom, the electrical wizard, turned radioman on trips such as these, and he had been checking with ships, with commercial stations, with amateurs. And he had sifted out one bit of valuable information: the big plane which was carrying Pat Savage to Ral was ahead of them. More than a dozen hours, Doc judged.

For the craft had landed in the lagoon of an island, where it had been met and refueled by a boat obviously summoned there by radio. It had gone on. Long Tom got this report from a fishing craft which happened to witness the landing of the ship.

Twelve hundred and fifty miles to Wake Island. Fifteen hundred and sixty to Guam. And at Guam the plane took on the final load of fuel, full tanks, and left the transpacific radio navigational aids, striking out on the long hop for the chart dot that was Ral.

Life aboard the big plane was not much different than that on a small yacht sailing a calm sea. Water, sky and clouds became deadly monotonous after a while. There was never anything else.

Monk, by way of breaking the monotony, indulged in long conversations with Lo Lar, the Eurasian woman. She seemed to fascinate the homely chemist. He discovered she was highly educated, clever, but with practically no ability to distinguish between right and wrong. She had, she explained, been born among the China pirates, and reared there.

Monk claimed Lo Lar was an interesting psychological case and worthy of study. Ham maintained belittlingly that it was a fact that Monk found any pretty woman an interesting psychological study. But it was noticed that Ham did as much talking to Lo Lar as Monk.

Renny remarked grimly that if Lo Lar bit either Monk or Ham, he'd give odds that they would have hydrophobia. As far as Renny was concerned this trip, all women had the evil eye. He even distrusted Lam Benbow, and was heard expressing himself feelingly about the way Johnny and Long Tom were competing for that young lady's favors.

"You'd think," Renny rumbled to Doc, "that those two would know better. Look at Johnny, skinny as a fence rail and using such words that the girl don't know half the time what he's talking about. And Long Tom! Alongside Long Tom, for health, a mushroom would look like a red apple."

Doc Savage said nothing. He had, throughout the trip, said little. He disconnected the controls from the robot and flew himself whenever the air was rough, to increase their speed. He slept less than the others.

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And once each twenty-four hours he took the two-hour routine of exercises which, with scientific living, were responsible for the remarkable mental and physical abilities which he possessed.

RENNY, drawing a red line on the chart to mark their progress, watched the line get closer to the island destination. They were going to arrive, if they were fortunate, not more than an hour before dawn.

Drawing close to the island, the craft ran into rain.

Clouds piled up first on the horizon, a long line from east to west, rolling along like smoke from a burning crude-oil tank on a day when the smoke remained close to the earth. The cloud strata extended almost to ten thousand feet, an unusual depth. Lightning jumped raggedly among the masses of vapor.

Doc flew over the storm, and it seemed to stretch onward around the globe. He watched the flying instruments, and kept glancing downward. So did his aides. They were experienced fliers and so had a good idea of the storm violence below.

Renny's red line reached the island.

Ral Island, according to the charts and to Gundy, was atoll-shaped, like coral islands, similar to a letter "C." Ral, however, was not coral formation, but volcanic, the tip of a submerged cone.

"The storm will help us avoid discovery," Doc suggested.

Burke Benbow dashed forward. He was pale, frightened.

"You're not going to try to land?" he gasped. "It's suicide! I'm a flier. I know!"

Doc Savage indicated a device on the highly complex instrument panel. Briefly he explained what it was a sonic height-above-the-earth recorder, working on the same principle as the sounding devices used on seagoing ships. A sound was sent to the bottom, was reflected back, and the interval measured electrically.

"But no sound will penetrate that storm," Benbow growled. "And if one did, it would be heard down there on the island."

Doc enlightened him on that point. The sound used was one outside the frequency to which the human ear is sensitive. Some animals might hear it, but no human ear, as far as science could determine, would register it.

THE big plane dropped down into the storm. Great hands covered with rasping claws seemed to take hold of the craft, tumble it about, strive to rend it to bits. Lightning gushed and ripped.

Long Tom scrambled away from his radio equipment. The cabin was supposedly not only rainproof, but airtight, yet rain began to string in through unexpected cracks.

Doc flew a north-and-south line, watching the recorder, while Renny traced the performance of the needle on a graph. He got two distinct highs in the line which indicated the ring-shaped island.

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Doc guided the plane in a quarter circle and cut an east to west line; again the line recorded two humps. With the lagoon located, the plane slanted down in the blinding storm.

It was a beautiful job of instrument flying. The airship was on the water before the aides ever saw it. The shock knocked them about. Doc lifted up in the control seat, fighting the wheel. Traveling into the teeth of the wind, the plane soon balked, swung slightly and rocked madly on the short waves, dipping each wingtip beneath the surface.

"Get anchors out," Doc directed.

Monk and Ham, handiest to the anchor locker, sprang to seize the folding kedge anchors. Each with an anchor, they scrambled out on the pitching snout of the aircraft.

"Be careful!" Doc warned. "If you go overboard, there may be sharks."

Monk and Ham heaved their anchors. The anchor lines paid out to the bitter ends, which they made fast to cleats. But nothing happened.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled inside the ship. "No bottom! Reckon we hit the lagoon after all?"

It was impossible to tell about that. Only at long intervals, when lightning gushed its brightest, was it possible to see even as far as the ends of the wide wings.

Monk and Ham tested the anchor lines from time to time. Slack, except for anchor weight. "No bottom" was right. Monk braced himself beside Ham, and both wondered what they could do.

THE storm lashed the ship. Spray picked up in sheets and went twisting past. There was a shock, the anchor lines came taut; the nose of the plane dipped, and a great wave broke over it.

Ham was caught unawares. The water smashed him loose from his grip. Going overboard, he clutched wildly at the only thing handy Monk. Result was that they both went overboard.

In an instant they were swept beyond the plane. Waves broke steadily, deluging them. The wind had stirred a froth up over the surface which made it almost impossible to breathe, and certainly impossible to shout.

Once, Monk did manage to tread water, but could see no sign of the plane. Of all the infernal breaks, he thought. And all Ham's fault for grabbing him, too.

Monk was beginning to entertain visions of drowning when he was rolled up on a sharply sloping coral beach.

Gaining his feet, Monk turned and discovered Ham being tumbled in behind him. Deliberately, Monk stuck out a foot and shoved Ham back under the surface.

"Be careful who you grab next time, you overdressed shyster!" he grumbled.

Ham, despite the long trip, had been dapperly clad when they landed. Since the flight had been across the sea, he wore a natty yachtsman's outfit. Ham always dressed to fit the occasion. But he had lost the yachting cap, and the water had pushed his coat up over his head; his shirt tail was out, and his aspect generally was that of a wet hen.

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The two waded up the sharply slanting beach. Water ran ankle deep, and the rain roared down. In the fitful flashing of lightning they saw palms, and, crowding under these, made the discovery that a palm tree furnished practically no shelter from the rain.

"So this is the sunny South Seas," Ham muttered. "A pox on it."

"Look, fancy and witty," Monk said bitingly, "it might be a good idea for us to keep quiet. You wouldn't realize that, of course."

Both stood there listening. But there was only the hosing of the rain and the heavy lathering of waves on the sand beach. They moved a few more paces, and Monk, spying a brownish mass in a lightning flash, leaped backward warily, but it was only a mass of hard lava.

"Danged if I ain't jittery," Monk complained.

"Quiet, ignorant," Ham advised.

They found a stick and went back and thrust it in the beach sand, deeply enough that it would not wash out. They slanted it in the direction of the plane, as nearly as they could guess. This was to enable them to find the craft.

"We'll scout around before we swim back to the plane," Ham decided. "We couldn't make it in the face of this storm, anyway. The tide must be rushing out of the lagoon to carry us away from the plane like it did, too."

Monk had thought of that while swimming, had feared it would carry them out to sea. He thought of remarking on the fact, just by way of reminding Ham he was not the first one the presence of a tide had occurred to, but there was enough else on his mind to keep him quiet.

For one thing, he was wondering if it was the wise thing for him to prowl around the island. Suppose High Lar had guards posted? Still, the storm noise was such that the landing of the plane surely had not been heard. What better time would there be to scout the place?

Monk mentioned that to Ham, who snorted and said it was so obvious that he hadn't thought it worth mentioning, which meant that he believed they might as well reconnoiter.

So they went forward.

Jungle covered the island, Monk and Ham discovered. Jungle so thick that travel was practically impossible for them. They returned to the beach, and moved along, close to the undergrowth, straining eyes, listening.

Monk went to his knees close to the jungle.

"Psst!" he hissed. "What's this?"

Ham dropped beside him. It was impossible to see anything, Ham's hands explored.

"Stone, or concrete," he muttered. "Feels like a sidewalk, or a narrow, paved road."

They were silent for a moment, considering; then, as though by mutual consent, they crept along the sidewalk. For that was what it proved to be. Or at least a walk, there being nothing on either side but jungle.

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Shortly, the two aides came to steps, and mounted these, noting that they were new, as if built not long ago. There were only about half a score of steps, then the walk was level again.

Monk, by now, had concluded that they must be moving toward some kind of habitation. An idea occurred to him, and he stopped close to the undergrowth and waited for a lightning flash. It came. Right! This foliage looked as though it had been trimmed.

"Ham!" he called softly. "We'd better be careful. We're getting close to something."

There was no response; but there was also no special reason for Ham to reply, and Monk stood listening to the rain and hoping lightning would flash. Then he thought it queer Ham had not touched him, or said something.

"Ham!"

No answer.

Monk opened his mouth to call more loudly. The lightning came, very bright, with a great roar of thunder. Monk's mouth remained open. And his eyes protruded.

Ham, a few feet away on the walk, was twisting and groveling, lying on his side. There was no one else in sight.

"Ham!"

Monk sprang forward. The homely chemist reached the lawyer, started to stoop and jerked up rigidly straight. A ghastly twist seized his big mouth. His knees buckled. But as he sank down he threw back his head and did what Ham had not succeeded in doing. He sent out an ear-splitting yell.

"Keep away from this place!" he squawled.

Monk half turned his head toward the plane, as if hoping his agonized bellow would carry to the craft.

Chapter XV. THE VICTIMS

THE wind blew a little less violently, but the rain still came down with a Niagara rush, while thunder ran back and forth in the sky like square packing cases tumbling in an empty warehouse.

Monk's voice, ordinarily small and childlike, could attain a bellow of extraordinary violence. It did so now, and the bawl, with some of the qualities of a trumpeting elephant, drove through the wind and rain. But there was no possibility of its reaching the plane, for that was against the wind, such as still blew.

But the cry did reach Doc Savage, who was not aboard the plane, but was on the beach. The bronze man, without knowing it, was some distance from Monk and Ham at the moment. In fact, Doc as yet had no idea of what had become of Monk and Ham.

He had flung life preservers after the chemist and lawyer when they had first disappeared; the life rings had long lines attached, and he had hoped the two would find them. They hadn't. Doc himself had then gone

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overboard.

Swimming powerfully and searching, he had been carried out through the mouth of the lagoon and a short distance to sea by the rushing tide. Thus he had learned what Monk and Ham did not know: that their escape had been narrower than they had thought.

Finding no sign of Monk or Ham in the water, Doc had plowed ashore. The turbulence of the water, the stinging spray driven by the wind, seemed to affect him very little.

Monk's cry came to Doc very faintly; it might have been the plaint of a tropical bird beaten down by the storm. But Doc recognized a human quality in it. Unfortunately, the direction defeated him, for, contrary to belief, it is almost impossible to tell with accuracy the source of sound unless the agent causing it is in plain sight.

Doc listened. The cry did not come again. So the bronze man moved rapidly along the beach, at the same time opening a water-tight container which was slung to his chest, life-preserver fashion. Most of the container space was occupied by a device, an invention of the bronze man for seeing in the dark with the aid of infra-rays invisible to the unaided eye.

The apparatus was in two parts. First, a lantern to project the infra beam without giving any visible illumination. Second, a complicated mechanical goggle, utilizing the theory of conversion rather than filtration, which rendered outlines of objects visible.

The image seen was harsh, and the rain caused much disturbance, but Doc could see about as effectively as a man can see in a daytime rainstorm.

Soon he found the stick which Monk and Ham had thrust in the sand. The fact that it was slanted toward the plane told the bronze man its purpose. From that point he followed the trail of his two men.

It was not difficult, because he was able to see their footprints in the sand, close to the wall of jungle where the downpour had not yet erased them.

DOC came to the sidewalk. Here he saw what Monk and Ham had been unable to observe because of the darkness. At the end of the sidewalk, thrust out into the waters of the lagoon, was a wharf, substantial enough, and moored to this was a small island schooner and a speedboat. They were held away from the dock by buffer poles.

A few grains of sand, not yet washed away, indicated the route up the sidewalk taken by Monk and Ham. Doc did not follow the walk, but moved into the jungle at the side. He seemed to progress through the tangle without much difficulty.

Reaching the steps, he climbed a short lava ledge, and beyond the growth was less of a labyrinth. He noted, also, that the larger trees had been trimmed down; in fact, there was no growth with thick stems or any considerable height.

That suggested the possibility that the jungle was being kept down to permit a view of the lagoon and beach from some spot higher up; and also that the growth was thinned out so that bullets would penetrate it.

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Then Doc found a shelter covered with vines. It was of sheet iron. From the sidewalk it would be unnoticeable. The bronze man listened, decided it was empty, and eased inside. The odor of tobacco smoke was recent.

There was a wide slit from which the trail could be commanded, and on a shelf beside it lay a strange kind of pistol. Doc lifted the weapon. An airgun. But with a special barrel, larger than the usual .177 or .22 caliber.

The bronze man pointed it at the floor and pulled the trigger. There was a cough, and sticking in the packed earth floor suddenly was a small dart. Doc picked it up. The end was coated with some kind of chemical, a sticky stuff.

Doc examined the sidewalk and found faint marks where a shoe had scuffed, and where a hand had clawed the soft muck at the side of the walk.

Straightening, listening, the bronze man heard and saw nothing. He left the sidewalk quickly, advancing along it a few yards, and gliding into the jungle. Nothing as yet could be seen of what lay ahead, due to the violence of the rain.

Out of the back pack, Doc drew a compact micro-wave radio transmitter and receiver, one of the type of portable outfits which broadcasting companies use for so-called man-on-the-street programs, only a great deal more compact. Earphone and transmitter were one piece, like European style telephones. The rest of the instrument was, in fact, a part of this headpiece.

"Renny," Doc said softly.

Renny answered. He was waiting, tuned in on the plane's portable outfit.

Doc Savage explained, "Monk and Ham ran into some trouble."

"Holy cow! You mean they've been killed?"

"It is impossible to tell yet. They were winged by drugged darts fired from an air pistol. And they've evidently been carried off."

Renny's voice in the tiny radio rumbled, "I'll come right ashore and "

"On the contrary," Doc directed, "you will take the plane into the air. High Lar by now knows we are on the island. Until we have some idea of the layout, no telling what kind of trap we can fall into."

Renny was silent after he got his orders. They did not appeal to him at first, then he saw the sensible angle. He pondered.

"Where do you want us to go with the plane?" he asked.

"Get up high and fly at idling speed. We have enough fuel. But keep out of sight of the island."

"Want us to keep in touch with you by radio? That the idea?"

"That's it."

"And you will scout around?"

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"Yes."

"That don't seem to me to be the safest thing in the world," Renny remarked. "But if it's your idea, it goes."

THAT ended the conversation, and Renny stared at the radiophone thoughtfully. Part of the successful coöperation which existed between Doc Savage and his five men was due to the freedom with which it was understood they could express opinions.

If they didn't like a plan of Doc's, they said so. And if they didn't want to follow his commands, they were free to say so, although the latter rarely happened. They were men with intelligence to think for themselves. That accounted for their success.

Renny shouted, "I guess we stand by! Long Tom, you and Johnny get ready to cast off. I'll run up on the anchors with the motors and we'll try to pull them aboard. No use cutting them loose. They cost almost a hundred apiece."

He reached forward and cut the ignition switches on, touched the starter buttons, and the big motors began turning over slowly. They made very little noise, thanks to the silencing system attached to the exhaust stacks.

By now Long Tom and Johnny should have appeared at his side to climb out on the nose and wrestle with the anchors. They hadn't. Renny turned his head impatiently.

He came up bolt upright in the pilot's seat.

"Hey hey holy cow!" Renny charged aft.

Every one in the plane cabin was sitting slumped in his seat.

Lo Lar, the Eurasian woman, was farthest toward the stern, and she was handcuffed to a brace. Gundy, their tricky guide, sat across from Lo Lar, likewise handcuffed. Near the front of the cabin sat pretty Lam Benbow, and across the aisle, Long Tom, and in front of him, Johnny. Burke Benbow occupied a seat in about the middle of the cabin.

All this Renny saw as he rushed aft. And something else as well. Long Tom's coat pocket it gaped open. And in it, weighting it down, were grenades filled with Doc's anaesthetic gas. Lam across from Long Tom. Her hand hanging over the seat, in easy reach of Long Tom's pocketful of grenades. All the other arms were locked up, against a break by Lo Lar and Gundy.

Queer. The girl's hand. Renny's mind seemed to be getting disconnected from his body. He staggered, hit the edge of a seat, turned sidewise, tried to catch himself. He fell.

Sensation in his mind was of a soft, velvet darkness traveling in a wave, dragging sepia behind it. It was pleasant. Almost a welcome relief from the strain he was under.

Renny turned slowly onto his back, but did not know that he did so, and because it is somehow natural for men on their backs to snore, he snored.

There was no movement inside the plane. The big motors turned over, but slowly, so that the anchor lines were barely slackened. Raindrops spanged on the propellers. The plane rocked, sawing back and forth at the

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end of the lines which held it.

On the plane floor, almost under Lam Benbow's fingers, bits of glass glistened faintly in the glare from an occasional lightning flash. The shell of the anaesthetic bomb which had put them all out.

FIFTEEN minutes or so later, a stout launch came cruising slowly across the turbulent, dark, rain-swept lagoon. The craft was decked over; but near the bow, clinging to the rail, stood four men with a machine gun.

They peered into the wet maelstrom of the night as the launch moved back and forth, raking the lagoon in a search for the plane.

One man barked. They lifted the machine gun. Other men aft got another gun ready, and grenades. Then, warily, on the upwind side so gas would not reach them, they approached the big plane. They seemed to expect resistance, but, encountering none, climbed aboard.

They left the cabin door open for some time before they dared get inside. They could see the motionless figures, and couldn't understand until they discovered the shell of the broken anaesthetic bomb.

One of the men he was mostly white picked up Lam Benbow's sleeping hand and gravely shook it.

"Nice job," he said.

They loaded the sleeping forms into the launch, binding Long Tom, Johnny and Renny. Then they removed enough of the mechanism from each motor of the plane to make certain the craft could not be put into the air.

The launch ran through the short, chopping waves and the rain, which was growing less violent. One man stood at the bilge pump and kept it going. It was necessary to shade eyes with hands to keep the stinging drops from hindering vision. The rain washed the faces of the sleeping prisoners.

The launch bumped into the dock alongside which the schooner lay. There was a great deal of wrestling with boat hooks and straining with fenders, but the craft was made fast and the captives heaved onto the pier. A man went to the schooner and stamped twice on the deck. Men came out to help with the captives.

The prisoners were carried up the sidewalk, up the sharp flight of steps. The men moved quietly in the intense darkness. Armed men skirted the group, with flashlights ready.

But they did not turn the beams on, for nothing happened to break the monotony, except that once a man stumbled, as he carried the bulky form of Renny, to his knees, and growled, "Who tripped me?" But another voice muttered, "Sorry. I'll help you carry the big lug." And after that they went easily until they reached a stone wall.

The wall was perfectly smooth, not of natural rock, nor of concrete, either, but of some artificial obsidian that was white and polished, like marble.

There was a doorway in this wall, perfectly round, rimmed with a shiny, black border about a foot wide. The prisoner caravan passed through. The door closed behind them.

They were in a perfectly round passage, dimly lighted. A strange kind of passage, walled with stuff that looked like the blue mirrors sometimes used in stores. It progressed straight for thirty feet, dimly lighted, then

met a cross passage in a T.

"Right," a man said.

As the cavalcade rounded the corner, there was a slight stir. A shadow, barely distinguishable in the dim light, seemed to detach itself and take to the other passage. This was such a soundless phenomenon that one of the men, noticing, hesitated, thinking he might be mistaken. He looked back. The outer door of the round tunnel had closed. It was of steel.

After a moment, the man who had noted the shadow decided to investigate. He moved to the mouth of the cross passage, and cast his flashlight down it. There was nothing, as far as the beam reached.

The man kept the light on a moment only, then extinguished it and got back in line. He hadn't much faith that he had seen anything, so he was careless.

The carelessness prevented his noticing damp footprints on the passage floor, leaving the column and turning down the other tunnel. The prints were far apart, as though the one who made them had literally bounded.

As a matter of fact, Doc Savage had traveled fast when he left the column.

Chapter XVI. THE OCTOPUS, AND FEATHERS

THE bronze man, despite his muscular control, held himself rigid for some seconds after the flashlight beam went off. He was crouched in a niche, behind a heavy blue velvet drapery. He felt behind him. A window, all right; but outside, limned by the departed lightning, he saw heavy steel shutters, a grating affair fastened with a padlock.

Doc's fingers explored the padlock; he had studied locks and could pick almost any of them. But this one was possibly the only type that would defeat him, a good combination type; instead of opening with a key, one made a combination with a knob.

The drapes were heavy in his fingers. He started to tear a strip from one side, with the idea of wiping up his damp footprints before they were discovered and

Footsteps! Some one returning! The man who had seen the bronze man leave the caravan, suspicious, was coming back. A flashlight dabbed white.

"Hey!" the man barked. "Hey hey! You fella come chop-chop! Some fella foot makee all same wet step 'longside floor!"

That was the tip-off that the bronze man was discovered. Or would be, in a moment. Doc glanced from behind the drapes.

The column with the prisoners had come back to the intersection and was standing staring. Now they advanced. They were interested in the tracks, and gave little attention to the captives, who still slept.

Doc withdrew, watched his chance, and managed to leave the window recess. He whipped down the passage, around an angle, and brought up against a solid door. He tried it. Locked. Rather, fastened securely on the

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other side there was not even a keyhole on this side.

The bronze man tested the material on the door with the point of his belt buckle. Steel. No chance of breaking through bare-handed. And the High Lar men were getting closer

Doc dipped a hand inside his clothing. He carried very little equipment, other than the life-preserver pack which had held the apparatus for seeing in the dark. Nothing not a thing that could be used as a weapon. Not even gas or smoke bombs. No gun He never carried a gun.

Doc's flake-gold eyes fixed on the source of the indirect lighting. The bulbs glowed faint behind colored glass. Lights There would be fuses. All lights had fuses. The bronze man got the belt buckle ready.

A quick fist blow shattered a glass panel. And it was the work of fractional seconds to spin the bulb out of its socket and insert the point of the belt buckle it was the old-fashioned kind of buckle with a point and a series of perforated holes.

With a cat-spit sputter, colored sparks that foamed out of the socket, the lights went out. Fuse blown! Doc went back along the passage. He traveled quickly, clamping the infra-light goggles to his eyes.

The men stood around the angle in the hall. One was swearing, fumbling in his soaked clothing for a light. They had dropped the prisoners. The man seeking the flashlight started to draw it out.

Doc went silently, reached the man, wrenched the light out of his fingers, crashed it against the floor. They could not see him, but he could see them, thanks to the infra-light contrivance. That simplified his next moves. He swerved through the group to the prisoners.

Doc passed up his own aides.

He picked up Burke Benbow, and raced, carrying the man, toward the exit.

ESCAPE proved simple. The door guards were standing in the blackness, not aware what was happening, but not leaving their job of guarding the exit. It was a simple matter to stride silently to them and drop them with fist blows. As easy as fighting blind men.

The door had a simple bar, modernistic. Doc opened the panel and passed out, carrying Burke Benbow.

Rain washed against the bronze man's giant, metallic figure as he whipped down the sidewalk to the beach. He turned right, went down the beach. He did not keep close to the jungle, as Monk and Ham had done earlier. He got out in the edge of the water, where the pounding waves would speedily wipe his tracks out of the sand.

Two hundred yards Doc covered. By that time he seemed to have reached some kind of plan, because at one point there came into existence for a brief moment the small, strange, exotic trilling sound which was the bronze man's unconscious habit in moments of intense mental activity, or when he surmounted a culminating obstacle, usually of mental character.

Doc went into the jungle, lowered Burke Benbow and examined the man. Doc knew the symptoms of the coma which came from the anaesthetic gas, although he had no means of knowing that it was the gas which had overcome Burke Benbow. The man, Doc concluded, would regain his senses in fifteen minutes or so.

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Doc gave the man's jaw a fist crack of enough force to insure his remaining senseless at least half an hour.

Then the bronze man climbed a convenient tree not a palm, but a tree which had a great number of concealing leaves. Doc strapped Benbow there, in a crotch, by his own belt. He was careful that the man's head did not hang back so he would make a noise with his breathing.

Doc left Burke Benbow there. Plunging into the lagoon he left the black-light apparatus concealed ashore the bronze man swam in the direction of the plane.

THE wind and rain still lashed the lagoon, so it was easier to take great breaths at intervals, and swim the rest of the time beneath the surface where there was not so much turbulence.

The first time out the bronze man missed the plane. He turned left, and came back parallel to his route. Again a miss. The third time, however, he found it. All of fifteen minutes were required in this operation, although the plane was not many hundred feet offshore.

Climbing aboard, Doc went immediately to the kits of equipment. The men had not bothered these, nor had they left a man aboard. Doubtless they intended to send some one back to strip the plane.

Doc's goal was the portable chemical laboratory without which Monk never set off on a trip, if he could help it. Doc opened the box with its array of chemicals, surprisingly complete in view of its compactness.

The bronze man worked over the chemicals for some minutes. Apparently the operation was taking more time than he anticipated, because he kept consulting his watch, waterproof enough to survive so far with the correct time.

Finally the bronze man had two bottles of chemicals which he had mixed, and with these in his clothing he swam ashore.

Burke Benbow was awake. In another few minutes he would have succeeded in extricating himself and descending the tree. But he still seemed confused when Doc arrived with the strange ease which his remarkable muscles permitted on the limb beside Benbow.

"What who " Benbow fumbled his words.

"Doc Savage," Doc enlightened him.

"I oh you " Benbow fell silent a moment, getting himself organized. "The let's see last I remember, we were sitting in the plane, getting ready to take off. And my sister my " He paused and was queerly quiet for a few seconds.

"Something happened," he finished. "It felt like I was going to sleep."

Doc Savage said calmly, "The High Lar men seem to have raided the plane and succeeded in taking you off."

"But my sister " Benbow paused.

"She is still alive, but in High Lar's hands," Doc said.

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"Er yes; that was what I was going to ask you," Benbow said. But he didn't sound as though that was what he had intended to ask.

Doc said, "We might as well get down out of the tree. You see, I managed to get you away from the others in a fight. They still have my men, and Pat."

Benbow gritted his teeth with a noise audible over the storm.

"I'd give my life to free that sister of mine!" he said, somewhat too violently.

They started to get down out of the tree. It was very dark, and before they descended far they had an accident. Burke Benbow slipped out of Doc's hands, apparently, and the bronze man, seizing wildly for him, struck Benbow's head and caused it to crash against the tree. Benbow was knocked senseless.

Doc lowered him quickly to the ground. Then he poured the contents of one of the bottles, which he had mixed and filled from Monk's chemical case, over Benbow.

When Benbow awakened he groaned.

"I'm sorry," Doc Savage said calmly.

"Yean uh-huh," Benbow mumbled. He touched his jaw. "Say, you didn't hit me on the jaw up there in the tree. Wonder where I got this lump."

"There was quite a bit of excitement," Doc said. Which was the truth, but not the correct explanation of the sock on the jaw.

"Well, what shall we do?" Benbow asked.

"You stay here," Doc said. "I am going out to see what can be done." He seemed to muse in silence a moment. "It may be difficult finding the plane," he said.

"So you're going to the plane," Benbow remarked.

"You stay here," Doc repeated, giving the impression he was going to the plane.

The bronze man moved away, and was lost in the darkness.

BENBOW stood rubbing his jaw, then his head, and finally he grinned thinly, wolfishly. He moved away. His manner showed an entire familiarity with the jungle. He went directly to the circular door in the strange, smooth wall. He was, of course, confronted by armed guards.

He spoke to the guards sharply, and they admitted him, showing him a great deal of deference.

"Show me to the prisoners," Benbow directed. "I want to look them over."

He was escorted to a door which had a narrow ventilating slit. He turned off the light in the hall so those within the room could not identify any one looking in through the slit. Burke Benbow put an eye to the slit.

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He could see Monk, Ham, Long Tom, Johnny, Renny and his own sister, Lam. These six captives were handcuffed to a long chain which was fastened at each end to pillars supporting the ceiling. They sat in disconsolate silence.

Benbow chuckled at the sight. Then he drew back from the slit so those inside could not identify his voice.

"Take me to my wife," he directed.

He was shown to Lo Lar.

Lo Lar, the Eurasian woman, sprang up when she saw Burke Benbow. A remarkable change came over the strange Oriental features of Lo, and she rushed forward with a small sound. She kissed Burke Benbow ecstatically.

"You've done wonderful work, darling!" She kissed him again. "Such acting! I was afraid you couldn't carry it on for days. But you did."

Burke Benbow nodded, then passed a palm over his forehead as though memory was bringing out perspiration.

"Don't think I wasn't worried several times," he muttered. "Take back there in New York. When I left Doc Savage that time to get the flight here to the island with Pat Savage organized take that time. I sure figured Savage would get wise. He would have too, if I hadn't pulled that fake about being a prisoner, and escaping at that filling station."

"That was clever, my sweet," Lo Lar told him admiringly.

"Yeah; I got away with it." Benbow licked his lips. "When you put anything over on this Doc Savage, you've got to be good."

He went to the door, rang a bell, and Gundy appeared.

"Nice work, Gundy," Benbow said. "Doc Savage is swimming out to the plane. Take the powerboats out there and take plenty of poison gas. Lay a gas barrage across the lagoon. Let the wind carry it over the plane. Then go into it with masks and try to get this Savage."

"If that doesn't work?"

"He still doesn't suspect me of being High Lar," Burke Benbow said.

Gundy took his departure to carry out the orders, and Burke Benbow turned again to Lo Lar.

"You are sure," asked Lo Lar with abrupt uneasiness, "that Savage does not suspect you?"

"Of course not." Benbow felt of his clothing. "I feel sticky, for some reason or other. Wait a minute, while I change."

HE went into another room and was gone some ten minutes. When Benbow reappeared, he was a strange figure, suddenly exotic. He had put several jeweled rings on his fingers, and he was wearing a dressing gown

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which was a regal flowing robe of a fabric composed of woven, tinted feathers of tropical birds. It was not gaudy, aboriginal. It was rich. Sumptuous. Like kingly ermine.

And an unpleasant kind of change had come over Benbow himself, as if donning the garments had altered his inner character, or at least brought it out

"We got World–Air Air Lines, at least," he told Lo Lar arrogantly.

"Yes," murmured Lo Lar, "we did. And you are one step nearer the goal you desire."

The exotically beautiful Lo Lar was nearer the true Oriental than ever. Obedience of their men, admiration for them, is a characteristic of the Oriental woman. And Lo Lar was nothing if not admiring of Burke Benbow.

Burke Benbow took a seat on a modernistic, weird–looking green leather chair. He seemed to be deep in thought.

"With World–Air as a start, we can gradually take over the other United States lines," he said confidently. "The other lines will begin having accidents, and their passenger traffic will drop off and drop off."

"When the time is right, we will parallel all their lines with our own, and make a great patriotic display in the newspapers of losing money to give Americans safe transportation in the air. That will finish off competition."

"Then," Lo Lar said, plainly telling Benbow what he wanted to hear, "we will work the same method on European air lines."

That obviously pleased Benbow. His head went back, his chest out, and suddenly he arose and struck a head pose which has become popular with dictators.

"I shall control the aerial industry of the world," he said. "Control it, you hear!"

It must have been all of an hour afterward, and the rain had ceased entirely, although it was still dark. Gundy came into the room.

"No trace of Doc Savage," he said.

Burke Benbow swore so violently that Gundy looked very ill at ease.

"We will dispose of those prisoners," Benbow said.

Gundy grinned, nodded then his face straightened out "Your your sister?" he gasped. "What about her?"

Benbow scowled. "She has caused no end of trouble. When she first began bothering me, weeks ago, I thought I could get rid of her by telling her I was worried over losing my air line. But it didn't work. She followed me to New York. She didn't know I was going there to work this trick with Doc Savage to get hold of World–Air. She doesn't suspect yet that I am High Lar."

"Will I shall we " Even Gundy could not conceive that Burke Benbow might be intending to execute his own sister.

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"We may have to," Burke Benbow said, and there was something fanatic about his face.

Lo Lar looked at him strangely.

"High Lar" she seemed to have trouble with her words "your sister your own sister?"

Benbow looked at her. "Well," he said. "We'll see. We'll see." And he fumbled with one of his finger rings.

"You have to trap Doc Savage," Lo Lar reminded him.

Profanity came from Benbow. "Of course. But that will not be difficult. One man against all of us? We have him here on this island where we decoyed him all the way from New York."

Lo Lar's exquisitely shaped face was thoughtful. "I have thought at times that Savage knew who you were," she said.

"Impossible. Why would he ever come here from New York, bringing me?"

"Because you sent Pat Savage here."

"Incidentally," said Benbow, "put Pat Savage with the other prisoners. She doesn't know who I am, of course?"

"She does not know."

Benbow nodded, then fumbled with the ring on his finger once more. He looked down.

There was a strange red patch on the finger.

"Must have got against some kind of poisonous plant," he said. "Oh, well, there's nothing dangerous on this island." He dismissed the red spot on his finger.

"Just what do you want me to do to the prisoners?" Gundy asked.

"Put them in with the octopus," Benbow said.

"Eh?"

"You heard me."

Gundy nodded. "I have the men hunting Savage," he said uneasily.

"We'll get Savage," Benbow declared.

Lo Lar said again, "I still cannot help thinking that Doc Savage knows who you are, Burke."

"Impossible, I tell you!" Benbow snorted. "Knowing my identity, do you think he would have taken the chance of having me along?"

"I noticed," Lo Lar remarked, "that there was never a weapon where you could get at it. Not until you crept forward and got one of those anaesthetic bombs from Long Tom's pocket and broke it beside your sister's

hand did you have a chance to resist if you had wanted to."

"Doc Savage," said Benbow, "is not that clever."

Chapter XVII. MALADY

DOC SAVAGE had a great deal of physical endurance. He clung to a thin silk cord against the side of High Lar's strange, modernistic castle on the island increasing moonlight showed that the place was literally a great box of a castle.

The silk cord ran up to a padded grapple which was hooked over the edge of the roof. Doc had tossed it up there. He had also quietly broken the glass in a narrow window, after climbing to it.

Now he was pouring through the window a quantity of liquid from the second of the bottles which he had mixed and filled from Monk's chemical case on the plane.

This emptied the bottle. The bronze man had already poured some of the stuff through two other windows.

Doc descended the cord, retreated into the jungle cautiously, and calmly sat down to wait. Through the thick foliage he could see the castle. It was all white, like Moorish structures, but without their ornate lines. Painfully extreme modernism was everywhere.

The bronze man noted that the breeze, while not the gale which had blown earlier, was still strong. And it blew in through the windows which he had opened to deposit the contents of his bottle.

He seemed satisfied.

Later, when he heard a scream, a sharp, agonized shriek, from inside the modernistic building, Doc looked even more pleased. Which meant that he must have been delighted indeed, since he so rarely showed emotion.

THE howl came again.

It was Burke Benbow's voice. Benbow was rubbing his eyes digging at them, rather, with his fingers.

Lo Lar sprang to his side, seizing his hands, dragging them by main strength away from his eyes.

"What what is it?" she gasped.

Benbow groaned. "I just rubbed my eyes " He stared at his fingers, his orbs watering. Suddenly he screeched, "My hands! Look!"

The hands had turned red and boiled—looking up into his sleeves.

Gundy came leaping into the room, wanting to know what had happened.

Benbow swore at him.

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"Get out of here!" he ordered. "It's just some kind of poisoned plant I got against in the jungle. Go and get rid of those prisoners!"

"Your sister too?" Gundy asked hesitantly.

"Of course!"

Gundy backed out of the room, looking queer. He was followed by Lo Lar, who stopped him in the hallway out of earshot of Burke Benbow.

"Keep the sister alive," Lo Lar said in a low voice.

"But "

Lo Lar frowned. "You know that my word is final here. It was I who married High Lar and guided him until he is what he is to-day. He even bears my name, as is the custom of my people. Go do as I tell you."

Gundy nodded and shuffled off, squinting at a reddish patch on his own arm, but without much interest. He knew that Lo Lar, the Eurasian woman, was really the guiding genius of High Lar, his brains, his balance wheel. And if she said spare Lam Benbow, spare Lam it was. Gundy rather preferred it that way. A man who would murder his own sister

Lam Benbow was unfastened from the other captives and led away.

Then nearly a score of men fell upon the chained prisoners. They were held while the chain was unfastened from the columns, and then chain, captives, and all were dragged into a huge, round chamber, a kind of theater situated in the very center of the building.

The vast room was a theater only in that there was a balcony up near the roof from which observers could look down. Somehow it had always reminded Gundy of the Aquarium in New York City, but without the glass fish tanks around the sides. There was a pool of water, very shallow, in the middle, like the New York Aquarium.

The octopus remained in the pool most of the time, although it sometimes retired to a dark, artificial cave at one end, where the water was deeper. But the octopus was out in the center of the pool now.

It was one of the giant deep-water type. Gundy happened to know there were records of much bigger octopuses, but he had never seen them. This one, measuring something near thirty feet when fully spanned, was violent-looking enough.

It was shaded, being the color of a rifle barrel on top, and more or less the hue of an elephant's skin underneath, where the suckers were. The hide was puckered, unbelievably wrinkled around the sucker cups that were like little volcanic craters, thousands of them stretched in lines along the under side of the numerous arms. The arms converged in a vile sack of a body that was remindful of the bloated milk udder of a cow, but roughly egg-shaped; and the two eyes stood up above the surface of the body in a fashion that was chilling, especially when the two incredible orbs moved in a queerly human fashion to observe anything near.

The octopus was ugly. It came up on its arms like a pugnacious bulldog when the men and the prisoners appeared.

"Use the rods!" Gundy roared.

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Instantly men sprang forward with extremely long bamboo poles which were wound with separated strands of bare copper wire that were charged with high-frequency current from a battery and coils attached to the heavy end of the rods.

The octopus, with a remarkable show of intelligence for such a thing, seemed to know and remember the shocking power of the rods. It withdrew, sidewise, its two eyes like hard-boiled eggs without their shells, and blackened in two spots.

The ends of the prisoners' chain were made fast to two separated rings in the floor.

The captives were then ungagged.

"Yell," Gundy said, "Yell like hell, boys" he looked at Pat and girl. Yes, yell your heads off. It will keep the thing scared off for a while. And anyway, it only takes one of you at a time."

Big-fisted Renny stared at the man. "It's inconceivable to me that you or anybody else would pull something as crazy as this."

Gundy hesitated. He looked at his arm. The red had spread and covered most of his forearm. That seemed to worry him.

"It's not crazy!" he snapped. "It's an idea Lo Lar got from the pirates who raised her. You see, we want information from you fellows. You know very well we're going to kill you, so we couldn't very well get information out of you by ordinary means. This is an extraordinary means."

"What do you want to know?"

"Doc Savage happens to be very wealthy," Gundy said. "High Lar could use that money. Doc, I understand, also has a secret source of gold somewhere. We could use that, too."

"Go to blazes!" Renny said.

"Of course. You would say that. We'll see if the tune changes."

Gundy now looked at his arm; then he glanced at his men, and for the first time noticed some of them were showing reddish patches.

THEN there was a shout ringing through the great building.

"Doc Savage!" the voice cried. "The guards saw him in the jungle!"

Gundy rapped at his men, "Get out there and help hunt!"

The men raced through the building, got their weapons, and charged out into the open air. Dawn had come suddenly, as it does in the tropics, and they peered about. It seemed very hazy.

"He was seen over here!" a voice shouted.

The men ran toward the sound.

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Doc Savage watched them run. The bronze man had showed himself deliberately, then dodged back into the jungle, circled, and was watching the round door. There seemed to be no other entrance to the place.

Doc did not seem particularly concerned, nor in any great hurry. Rather, he was waiting for something and watching the hunters. He saw one of them run headlong into a tree, and nodded slightly, as though he had expected that.

The man who had crashed into the tree recoiled and rubbed his eyes. Suddenly he emitted a groan of pain. This drew another man, who said, "Damn this haze! What's wrong?"

"I hit a tree."

"Where are you?" called another voice. "What's wrong?"

This speaker was no more than fifteen feet away.

"Over here," the tree hitter gulped.

"Damn this haze!" said the other. "I can't see half a dozen feet in front of my face."

There was no haze whatever in the air. It was a bright sunlight morning, very clear after the rain of the night before.

Doc Savage left the jungle and walked calmly to the round door. Two guards stood there, shading their eyes and peering about.

Doc changed his voice, made it an almost perfect imitation of Gundy's tone.

"Watch the door closely," he said.

"Yes, sir," muttered one of the guards. "Isn't this haze thick, though? Kind of a fog, I reckon."

"All same plentee fog come 'longside this place," said the other, who was Polynesian.

Doc Savage walked into the building. They had not recognized him. He took his time until a sharp bawl sent him plunging forward. The bawl was Renny's voice, and when Renny howled in fright it was bad.

Doc had the bad luck to come out, drawn by Renny's roars, on the balcony above the pool, instead of down below. And he had the worse luck to crash headlong into Burke Benbow and two of his men. Instantly they seized the bronze man.

Lo Lar, behind the men, cried out wildly. She ran closer and peered, as if a haze prevented her seeing properly. Then she recognized Doc and sprang to one side.

A small metal chair stood there. She seemed to find it largely by touch, picked it up, ran forward, located Doc struggling with the three men, and struck.

The first time, the bronze man dodged successfully. He had a vast advantage. Obviously his foes could hardly see. But the chair hit him as Lo Lar swung again.

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Trying to get away, Doc dragged himself and his men foes, by main strength, across the balcony. Then they were against the rail above the pool, which was a spidery affair of shiny metal and colored wool. Lo Lar was stumbling blindly about behind them.

TWENTY feet or so below, another grim tableau was being enacted. The octopus, advancing on the chain of prisoners, had unfortunately selected Renny as its first victim. It had all its long arms wrapped around Renny. But it was holding its ugly body well clear of Renny's big fists.

Renny had evidently connected a good one to one eye of the thing, because the eyelids, like inch-thick curtains of slime, were blinking rapidly over the orb.

Renny tore at the tentacles, but helplessly. His flesh split at times before one of the suckers would come loose.

And abruptly, up above, the rail broke. The four struggling men came down end over end, squarely on the tangled great dark splotch that was the octopus. The thing let out a sound at the impact, one of the weird noises that the creatures make.

Then the octopus gave Renny up as a bad job, and industriously wrapped itself around the cluster of men which had fallen upon it. For moments there was a boil of octopus, men's arms, legs, faces; there was screaming and grunting and cursing. And suddenly the octopus made off into the water with four victims Burke Benbow, Doc, and two others. It went into the deep water, for it was the habit of the thing to take live prey below, like an alligator, and drown it.

Doc by now had a knife out. It had a small blade, but he slashed and dug, perforating the wall of the suckers which held him something that took a great deal of calmness under the circumstances. And suddenly he was free. He swam to the surface, scrambled out of the pit, and ran to the prisoners.

The man of bronze saw that the chain would defeat him.

"Where are the keys?"

"Gundy's got them," Monk said. "Say, I can't see anything."

Doc went in search of Gundy. He found the man feeling his way along a wall, almost blind.

TWO days later, Ham got around to telling Monk, "You never could see much, anyway."

For once Monk felt too pleased generally to answer. The aides were working on their big plane, replacing the parts which had been removed. And a test had shown the big ship ready for the air, prepared to take them back to America.

On shore, all was settled. The High Lar men were to be returned to Doc Savage's institution for curing criminals. That might take time, but a tramp steamer, summoned by radio, was on its way to get them.

Lo Lar herself seemed to have changed. The death of High Lar Burke Benbow had broken something within her. She had collapsed, lain silent and hardly breathing for hours.

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During the period when the woman was in a coma, Doc had administered antidotes for the blindness which had afflicted every one but himself. The cause, as he had explained, was the fumes of the acid which he had poured on Burke Benbow, and also emptied through the windows of the building. A concoction of acids, rather, which he had mixed from Monk's chemical laboratory.

At first, as the bronze man explained, he had intended trying to make Burke Benbow think he had given them all the germs of an imaginary tropical disease to which only he himself knew the cure. That had not proved necessary, though.

Then Lo Lar recovered and showed just how changed she was. She called Doc to her and explained that, as High Lar's widow, she had inherited the man's vast personal possessions. And High Lar, as the bronze man and his aides discovered by examining his records, was even more powerful financially than they had realized.

But Lo Lar, his widow, broken in spirit, stated that she wanted to turn everything over to the bronze man to be returned to the former owners.

That startling act on the part of Lo Lar had changed Doc's aides' attitude toward her somewhat. And she had made it easier by volunteering, once she heard about Doc's "criminal curing" institution, to become a patient. That was rather desirable, Doc admitted.

High Lar, of course, had died. Doc and his men disposed of the octopus, but it had been too late.

Lam Benbow did not know her brother was High Lar. She never knew it. She had been rescued from her cell and led to believe that her brother had died in helping Doc.

Protecting Lam was partially Johnny's idea. The gaunt archaeologist and geologist seemed to be getting the edge on Long Tom in the competition for the young woman's affections.

MONK and Ham, having finished with the plane, paddled ashore in a dinghy.

They met tall, bony Johnny, taking a constitutional along the beach. Johnny's head was back, and he was wearing a big, boyish grin.

"You old goat!" Ham said to Johnny. "You and your big words have that girl dazzled. You should be ashamed!"

"What's the matter with my marrying Lam?" demanded Johnny.

"You're too old," said Ham.

"I'll be superamalgamated if I am!" snapped Johnny. "I'm still in the prime of life! Why, I feel like a two-year-old!"

"A two-year-old?" said Monk.

"Yes."

"Horse or egg?" inquired the homely Monk unkindly.

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THE END