

THE FIERY MENACE

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Table of Contents

<u>THE FIERY MENACE</u>	1
<u>A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson</u>	1
<u>Chapter I. THE MAN IN THE CHANDELIER</u>	1
<u>Chapter II. ALL VERY FUNNY</u>	6
<u>Chapter III. THE VAMPIRE LUNCH</u>	11
<u>Chapter IV. ADVANCE OPERATION</u>	15
<u>Chapter V. THE VAMPIRE</u>	20
<u>Chapter VI. WARNING FOR FOUR</u>	25
<u>Chapter VII. EYE WITNESS</u>	34
<u>Chapter VIII. SLIPS THAT ARE 'TWIXT</u>	39
<u>Chapter IX. THE SLIP THAT CUT A THROAT</u>	43
<u>Chapter X. THE SCARED MAN</u>	51
<u>Chapter XI. THE STAMPEDE</u>	58
<u>Chapter XII. DEATH HAS MANY FINGERS</u>	62
<u>Chapter XIII. HARBOR FOR TROUBLE</u>	66
<u>Chapter XIV. WEALTH OF THE DOMINO</u>	71
<u>Chapter XV. THE VAMPIRE'S BITE</u>	77

THE FIERY MENACE

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

Scanned and Proofed
by Tom Stephens

- [Chapter I. THE MAN IN THE CHANDELIER](#)
- [Chapter II. ALL VERY FUNNY](#)
- [Chapter III. THE VAMPIRE LUNCH](#)
- [Chapter IV. ADVANCE OPERATION](#)
- [Chapter V. THE VAMPIRE](#)
- [Chapter VI. WARNING FOR FOUR](#)
- [Chapter VII. EYE WITNESS](#)
- [Chapter VIII. SLIPS THAT ARE 'TWIXT](#)
- [Chapter IX. THE SLIP THAT CUT A THROAT](#)
- [Chapter X. THE SCARED MAN](#)
- [Chapter XI. THE STAMPEDE](#)
- [Chapter XII. DEATH HAS MANY FINGERS](#)
- [Chapter XIII. HARBOR FOR TROUBLE](#)
- [Chapter XIV. WEALTH OF THE DOMINO](#)
- [Chapter XV. THE VAMPIRE'S BITE](#)

Chapter I. THE MAN IN THE CHANDELIER

BETTY FREE, the stenographer for Best & Stone, the firm of architects on the forty-second floor, was subject to morning headaches. So she had a little habit. The habit was this: On the mornings when she had a headache she would buy an aspirin at the candy-cigar counter in the lobby and, at the same time, smile the clerk out of a large gumdrop. She would bury the aspirin tablet in the gumdrop, open her mouth wide, put her head back, pop the gumdrop in and swallow it. Aspirin seemed to be the only thing good for her headaches, but she didn't like aspirin. So this was the way she took aspirin.

On Wednesday morning she had the usual headache, so she proceeded according to schedule. She got along fine until she put her head back and opened her mouth to pop in the gumdrop.

Then Betty screamed. She almost tore the lining out of her throat. She had the most unearthly *yip-yip-yip* way of screeching.

She then fainted.

There was a lot of excitement.

Someone trickled ice water on Betty Free; then she got up and went to work in a nervous condition, made a mistake in typing a bid for her firm and was fired. So Betty married the boy she had been going with. The

THE FIERY MENACE

boy quit his job in the city and they went back to their home town where the boy took a job in the Farmers Exchange, and Betty made a great success of raising chickens and children, thereafter.

Therefore, Betty Free, the stenographer for Best & Stone, had no more than momentary—if noisy—importance in the matter.

The man in the chandelier was a different proposition. Much different.

His feet and one hand were sticking out of the thing. The chandelier was one of a battery of the elaborate affairs which supplied subdued light and decorative effect to the lobby of the building, which was the largest lobby in the largest building in the midtown section of the city. The building was eighty-six floors tall, with twenty-two elevators serving the tenants. Better than five thousand people worked in the building, and many more than that number passed in and out of the lobby daily. Although the hour was early, it was somewhat unusual that no one had happened to look up and see the two feet and the hand sticking out of the chandelier bowl. Particularly since blood from the hand had flowed down and stained the side of the bowl.

Someone called the building superintendent. The superintendent in a building of that size is a personage. He gets a salary of ten thousand dollars a year and has a mahogany desk to sit behind. This superintendent punched buttons, issued orders, and an extension ladder and a squad of agile janitors appeared on the scene.

A janitor climbed the ladder, examined the hand that was sticking out of the chandelier, felt of it. He climbed a step higher, looked into the bowl, did some poking around inside, then climbed down, looking as if it were a question of whether or not he would keep his breakfast.

“Dead,” he reported.

“From what?”

“From a little hole in his head.”

Everyone took it for granted that the man meant a bullet hole, which was an error that was not discovered immediately. There was an increase in the excitement, although now there was nothing to be excited about. The man was dead, so that whatever had happened had already happened.

But the crowd gathered and the excitement spread because part of a dead man was sticking out of the chandelier in the lobby of one of the half dozen largest buildings in the world. And a body in a chandelier was unusual, to say the least. Too, there was bad management in keeping the crowd back, first on the part of the superintendent and his janitors, and then on the part of the policemen who came sirening up to take charge. There was an error of judgment on the part of one of the cops, for he became enthusiastic and abusive and gave a citizen a shove. The citizen, being a free-born, profanity-speaking American, applied his fist to the cop's nose, flattening that organ somewhat. This did not add to peace and tranquillity.

Due to this boisterous foolishness, plus the failure of the janitor to elaborate on what he meant by a hole in the head, further truth about the man in the chandelier was delayed some thirty minutes.

NEXT data on the man in the chandelier came from a lady. “Lady” was what the newspapers called her. Some of the papers referred to her as “an old lady.” It was true—but it was not at all important in the chandelier matter, because it had no bearing that the persons who saw the old lady's picture and remembered her ten years back referred to her, most of them, in descriptive terms not ordinarily used in drawing-room

THE FIERY MENACE

conversation. However, the old girl was too shopworn for further mischief and was spending her days of decline as a scrubwoman in the skyscraper.

From the *Morning Eagle*:

HE WAS HUNTING VAMPIRE

Mrs. Lucille Murphy, who is employed nights in the building, shed the first light on the matter of the man in the chandelier. Mrs. Murphy completed her work the previous night and, while leaving the building, noticed a man apparently climbing into the chandelier. Thinking the man was an electrician, Mrs. Murphy called a facetious remark to the man.

The exact wording of the remark Mrs. Murphy had called to the man climbing into the chandelier was not given in any of the newspaper stories, but it was a ribald one. She told it to the newspaper reporters, and they split their sides laughing. She was quite an old rip, that Mrs. Murphy.

The man in the chandelier called down to Mrs. Murphy that he was seeking a vampire, Mrs. Murphy stated.

“I am sure that is what he said,” Mrs. Murphy declared, “because I hollered back and asked him if he meant like Dracula, and he said that was the general idea.”

It was added by Mrs. Murphy that the man sounded serious, although this did not strike her at the time. Mrs. Murphy states that she told the man she had a son-in-law who would fill the bill if he needed a he-vampire. Then she went on home.

The fact that the newspapers printed Mrs. Murphy's remark about her son-in-law making a good he-vampire indicated how the newspapers considered the matter. Not exactly as a joke, because murder is not a joke except on the stage. But they did not take it seriously, and they were pixyish enough about it to allow little notes like the crack about Mrs. Murphy's son-in-law to creep into the written versions.

This was not the first mistake American journalism had made. And time proved that it certainly was not one of their smaller errors.

The crack about the lost vampire gave a certain touch to the thing.

The hole in the man's head gave another touch to it. First, it gave an assistant coroner an ill spell when he saw it. It made the other coroners and hardened cops who handled dead bodies—fresh and not so fresh and in various mangled conditions—stand there with their jaws hanging in amazement.

The body was not brought down immediately, though. First, a medical examiner made sure the body actually had no life, then fingerprint men and photographers—police, of course—recorded the scene thoroughly.

Finally they got around to noticing that the hole in the man's head was a very neat affair. Possibly “neat” was not the word. It was a very precisely drilled thing.

“Made after death,” said the coroner in charge. He looked up at the chandelier. “Probably the work of some mechanism that is part of the chandelier.”

A policeman pointed out that a drill was not part of a chandelier or any other lighting fixture that he had ever heard of; then the officer climbed up to make sure that was also the case with this one.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Mechanism nothing,” the officer reported. “There's nothing up there that would do that kind of thing.”

The coroner pondered and came up with, “Well, I'll make another examination.” He did so, then straightened triumphantly. “The edges of the wound seem to be cauterized. No doubt, it was done by an electric short circuit after the man died. Or, possibly, it was an accidental death, with the shock causing the death and the cauterizing effect of the spark shutting off the flow of blood.”

It happened that the officer was no electrician, so he nodded. But they got an electrician on the job, and he assured them they were drawing on their imaginations fruitlessly. There was not enough current in the chandelier—one-hundred-and-ten-volt direct current was all that was in the circuit—to make such a burn, and that such a burn was an impossibility, even with a powerhouse full of volts and amperes on the job.

“But there was no blood at the wound,” said the coroner.

“There was blood on his hand and running down the chandelier, wasn't there?” countered the angry electrician. “Where'd that come from?”

The startled coroner made another investigation, in which he was joined by the police, and the net result was totally confusing.

Where *did* the blood come from?

MILLIE GROSS was the woman who saw the vampire.

Millie Gross was another person of no importance in the affair, other than the passing one of contributing a bit of information to the matter. The other two of none but passing importance, of course, being Betty Free, who discovered the body, and Mrs. Murphy, who had been told by the man that he was hunting a vampire.

Millie Gross really saw the vampire. But no one believed she had.

The disbelief hinged around the question of what a vampire looked like.

They dug up a dictionary and read the definition of a vampire, and the dictionary said that a vampire was a bloodsucking ghost. This was a definition that was indefinite when applied to actual reality in the city of New York, to say the least. The dictionary added that it was a reanimated body, believed to come from the grave at night and wander around sucking the blood from persons asleep, causing their death. This was not much help, because what Millie Gross saw was not a reanimated body.

Millie Gross was a “mux” operator by profession. She punched mux for an oil company that had offices in the building, and she worked second. She gave it to the police that way. Translated into English, it meant that she was an operator of one of those gadgets which sends printed messages over wires, and she did this from four in the afternoon until midnight. When she was off duty at that time, she went uptown to her room four nights a week, the other three nights going to meet her boy friend who was an operator in a theater. She had been leaving the building a little after midnight when she saw the vampire.

Millie Gross hardly saw a reanimated body. It could have been a ghost she saw. Just possibly. And, if so, it was a hell of a ghost—straight from Hades and still on fire.

She saw the story about the man in the chandelier in the early newspapers. The vampire she had seen had

THE FIERY MENACE

preyed on her mind until she could not sleep. So she came to the police immediately, and the police listened and were skeptical. They laughed only a little, although a little was enough to make Millie angry at them—and at herself for being so gullible as to think she had seen a vampire.

“Fire, eh?” said a policeman.

Millie nodded uncomfortably. “Yes. Kind of a streamlined thing, all red.”

“Fire?”

“Yes.”

“It went floating across the lobby of this building, ducked down and out of the door, eh?” asked the policeman.

“Yes.”

“Like a ball of fire, huh?”

“No, not like fire exactly. It was fire, and yet it wasn't. It was red and glowing, and not very bright. It was red. Maybe it was red smoke or something; but, on second thought, I'm not so sure.”

“Right out of the door it went?”

“Yes.”

“The door,” pointed out the officer triumphantly, “is a revolving door. Did this fiery vampire of yours revolve the door?”

“No,” said Millie, “I don't recall the door revolving. But there is a transom above the door, and I think the thing went out through that.”

“It didn't get down on the floor and walk out, then?”

“It didn't walk. It floated.”

“How big was it?”

“That would be hard to say.”

“As big as a man?”

“Part of the time it was smaller than a man, and part of the time it was bigger, about the size of a horse.”

The officer thought it all over deeply and gave his conclusion.

“This is getting to be a most unusual matter,” he said.

Chapter II. ALL VERY FUNNY

DOC SAVAGE happened to occupy the same building.

He occupied the top floor, which was the eighty-sixth. For a long time there had been an effort to keep a secret of this because of the plentiful assortment and, in some cases, the devilish cleverness of Doc Savage's enemies. But for a period there had been no secret about the headquarters upstairs. In fact, many of Doc Savage's clients had formed a habit of coming here with their troubles.

The troubles of his clients were actually Doc's troubles, because the business of the bronze man—as Doc was called—was taking the weight off other people's shoulders when it came to dangers and difficulties. This was the way a newspaper's feature writer had put it rather sarcastically. Doc Savage was not overly popular with the press, although he was an excellent source of news; rather, his activities were. The newspaper writer penned:

It is well known that Doc Savage makes a business of helping people out of trouble, provided the trouble is so unusual that the police are non-functioning, or so big that the party cannot help himself. Or so they report about Savage. They also report that he takes no pay; ever. Passing strange, to say the least. Savage has five somewhat eccentric associates who are leaders in their fields. These men help him. Together, they form a mysterious group—mysterious to this writer, at least. Danger is seemingly their only business, and their pay is not profit.

The mention that some of Doc Savage's aids were “somewhat eccentric” applied to Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. It applied to Monk Mayfair with bells on.

Monk Mayfair was about five feet two inches high and apparently about five feet nine inches wide. He had a quantity of hair seemingly made of rusty shingle nails, most of it growing where hair should grow. Inside his head, where apparently there was no room for anything, reposed as much knowledge about chemistry as any man had yet been able to gather.

Monk had a runt hog called Habeas Corpus.

Monk and his hog rushed into the reception room of the eighty-six-floor skyscraper, and Monk said, “Ham, is Doc in?” Monk wore a strange expression.

“Not right now,” Ham Brooks explained. “He is down in Washington again trying to persuade them that we should be in the front lines, fighting. I bet he gets the same answer—that the country needs our brains more than our brawn. He'll come back as mad as a hornet.”

“I wish he was here.” Monk rubbed his jaw. “A man was just found downstairs. You know those big modernistic ceiling chandeliers that light the lobby? He was in one of those. He was dead.”

Ham stared at Monk. “Is that mentality of yours reflecting again? This sounds like one of its reflections.”

Monk scowled. “I wish that Doc was here.”

“Why?”

“Because,” Monk said, “that man in the chandelier climbed into the chandelier hunting a vampire. I think Doc would be interested in a thing like that.”

THE FIERY MENACE

“Yes?” said Ham, who was an eminent graduate of Harvard Law School.

“I think,” said Monk, “that the vampire hunter came here to see Doc Savage and something bad happened to him just before he reached us. Things like that have happened to people who were coming to see us on other occasions.”

Ham was interested. “What makes you think that?”

“I just got an idea in my head.”

“A very strange place for an idea, your head, and I've found only strange ideas get in it,” Ham told him.

Monk said, “Some day I'm going to get tired of being insulted and tie a knot in your tail right up next to your ears. What do you say we go down and see what we can find out about the death of this man who was hunting a vampire?”

“Is that the idea in your head?” Ham asked.

“Yeah.”

“It's a good one. I don't see how it got there.”

HAM BROOKS got his pet chimpanzee and they rode down in the elevator. As the elevator passed lower floors it grew more crowded, and the passengers glanced at Monk and Ham with interest and—those who did not know who they were—some amusement. The latter possibly mistook them for a pair of down-at-the-heels vaudeville performers making the rounds with their trained animals. Monk, at least, looked down-at-the-heels, although Ham Brooks was his usual sartorial perfection. Ham was frequently listed as the best-dressed man in the city.

“Vampire, eh?” Ham pondered thoughtfully.

“Sure,” Monk agreed.

“There is no such thing.”

“No?”

“No. Vampires are just a superstition, old fellow,” Ham informed him.

The police were in the lobby, but they were not as co-operative as they would have been at another time. Doc Savage and his associates had long held honorary commissions, high ones, on the metropolitan police force. But last month an embarrassing affair had occurred where an enemy managed to point a finger of guilt—a big finger, in the opinion of the police—at them. They had extricated themselves somewhat, but the whole affair had been a fantastic one involving some allegedly wild men. So the police co-operation was still lukewarm, although, officially, the bronze man and his associates had been reinstated. (The Three Wild Men)

Monk and Ham asked a lot of questions. They got entirely civil answers and, although they were skeptical on this point at the time, all the facts the police had unearthed.

THE FIERY MENACE

Ham said, "Monk, the thing does look funny at that."

Monk jerked his head. "Come over here in the corner." They retired to the end of the lobby. Monk glanced upward thoughtfully. "Can that what-is-it you call your chimpanzee climb?"

"Climb?" Ham said. "Sure, he can climb! Haven't you seen chimpanzees swing from tree to tree? They even do it by their tails. The way your not-so-far-back ancestors did it."

"Can he climb up into those chandeliers?"

"Sure. Why?"

"I was just thinking."

Ham took another look at the chandeliers and said, "Wait a minute. Chemistry can climb into one of those chandeliers—the one where they found the body. There is no way of reaching the others without a ladder, unless you are a bird."

"That," Monk said, "is my point."

"You better be a little clearer."

"Suppose," Monk said, "somebody tossed something up into one of those chandeliers to get rid of it in a hurry; to hide it where it wouldn't be seen, but where he could come back and get it later."

Ham narrowed one eye thoughtfully. "Could be. Could be, at that."

"Would he be likely to toss it into the chandelier anybody could reach?"

"Not," said Ham, "if he was a foresighted fellow."

"But supposing," said Monk, "you were another fellow, and you came to look for the thing that had been tossed in one of the chandeliers, without knowing for sure which chandelier it was. Which one would you look into first?"

Ham gave the lobby an examination. "I would look into the one I figured I could see into. Then I would probably figure on coming back later with a ladder."

Monk nodded emphatically.

"There," he said, "you are."

"Where am I, exactly?"

"You are standing here," Monk told him, "and you have just listened to the way a great deductive mind works. I will deduct further. Suppose the someone, who knew the fellow was coming to look in the chandeliers, wanted to get rid of this fellow. Think of what the someone would do. He would fix his death trap in the chandelier that could be reached easily."

Ham endeavored, without success, to find a hole in this logic.

THE FIERY MENACE

“What,” he asked, “about the vampires?”

“There is no such thing as vampires,” Monk told him. “The thing we are going to do is get a long pole.”

THEY got a long pole finally. Getting a long pole in a hurry in downtown New York did not turn out to be a simple matter. They compromised on three of the poles used to raise and lower transom windows or high, sliding windows, which they located in an old-fashioned building in the neighborhood. They lashed these together.

“Now,” Monk said, “your chimp can climb the pole, while we hold it. He can reach the chandelier. Send Chemistry up and tell him to fetch what he finds.”

Ham looked uncomfortable. “You must think Chemistry is a porter.”

“I think he is worse than that,” Monk said. “I know you have taught him to go steal things for you, and you did it so he would steal things from me. I lost my little book with the addresses of my girl friends in it, and don't think I don't know where it went.”

“Oh, all right.” Ham grinned. “I'll return the little book. I haven't used it anyway.”

Monk said, “Somebody has been calling up my girls and telling them I am married. And don't think I don't know who did that, either.”

They began sending Chemistry up the pole. They encountered some difficulty, because the chimp kept bringing light bulbs down to them.

“It would have been a lot simpler for us to use a ladder ourselves,” Ham complained.

“Sure,” Monk said, “but it wouldn't have gotten into the newspapers.”

“Newspapers?”

“Sure,” Monk said. “That fellow over there is a reporter, and so are those two in the corner.” There was a bright flash of light. “A photographer, too. We'll get our pictures in the papers.”

“And catch a fine what-was-the-idea lecture from Doc. You know he likes publicity about the way a fat grasshopper likes a hen.”

“Not when he learns the reason.”

“Is

there a reason he can learn?”

“Oh, sure! Anybody connected with this thing—connected with it so they have something to fear, I mean—will read about it and know we are on the job. That will scare them. Doc Savage has a reputation that scares such people. And a scared person, particularly if he or she is a party of low character, is much easier to catch. When he is scared, he is less likely to watch his hat and one thing and another.”

THE FIERY MENACE

Ham was not convinced. "The strangest things crawl out of that brain of yours," he complained.

The newspaper reporters gathered around and made themselves known, Monk and Ham were both excellent copy. They were both famous men in their professions, having strong reputations. They were also colorful. The pig and the chimp pets, Monk's what-a-thing-to-meet-in-the-dark appearance, and Ham's fine clothing were riots in a photograph.

It was also true, as Ham muttered to Monk, that not many noted men went around making fools out of themselves.

To their astonishment—Monk admitted later that he was as astonished as Ham—the chimpanzee called Chemistry brought down a package which he found in the fourth chandelier from the west end of the building.

It was a greasy-looking package that might have contained somebody's lunch, except that a lunch probably would not be as hard as the contents of the package felt.

"Unless it might be a bride's biscuits," Monk grunted.

Monk pocketed the package hastily.

Two policemen saw that they had found something and headed for them.

"Let's make some tracks," Monk suggested.

They were called to, shouted at, then sworn at as they left. But they made it to an elevator, and the cage headed upward. They changed to another elevator on the fortieth floor, rode down to the second floor and left the building by another route which avoided the lobby.

"The police merely wanted us to co-operate with them," Ham pointed out.

"I don't feel co-operative," Monk explained, "after the unkind suspicions they entertained about us last month."

"Neither do I," Ham agreed. "But I think this is another of those things of which Doc Savage will not approve."

"He won't say anything."

"Probably not," Ham agreed. "He almost never does. But sometimes I think I can see him suffering in silence."

"What do you suppose is in this package?" Monk asked.

"I do not know. I hope it is not some bridegroom's undesired lunch."

"Speaking of lunch, let's find a restaurant and have ours while we open and examine this thing," Monk suggested. "On the way, though, we will stop at the office of a dentist friend of mine and have him try his X-ray machine out on it, just on the chance that it is something we would not wish to open."

Chapter III. THE VAMPIRE LUNCH

THE small man stepped up and showed Monk Mayfair a badge. It was totally unexpected. Monk gave the shield a glance and thought it was the badge of a private detective.

The small man said, "I am a private shamus. Mickey Stool by name. I have accosted you because I wish to discuss with you a matter of a man who was hunting a vampire. I have for you information of utmost value concerning same."

Monk scratched his head and examined the small man. The small man had bright eyes and large buckteeth. All of his features seemed to recede from these, so that the first general impression his face gave was that of a skeleton's head, with the bright little eyes substituted for empty sockets commonly found in a skull.

"Concerning same, eh?" Monk said thoughtfully.

"Would you be interested?"

"Maybe."

The small man shook his head. "Maybe is not enough. You should be positive. Believe me when I tell you I am taking my life in my hands, or worse, just by standing here talking to you about it."

Monk frowned. "All right, all right! Do we need to approach the subject as if we were going to sink a battleship. Out with what you know, small fry, and let's get the kettle boiling."

Once more the small man shook his head. "Do not treat this thing facetiously. My name is Mickey Stool, and I am the same as a corpse complete with tombstone if I am seen standing here chinning with you. I suggest we retire to more secretive surroundings."

"Where," Monk asked, "would be such a retiring spot?"

"My car." The small man pointed with his head. "It's right down the street here. Come on."

The car was large, black, and had been a very impressive machine in its day. The small man held the rear door open for them. The upholstery had been expensive material, some kind of silk brocade. Monk got in.

Ham started to get in after Monk, then he hesitated, said, "One of us can ride in front."

"Oh, get in the back. It's more comfortable," said the small man.

Ham gave the matter brief thought, then reached for the small man's neck. The small man moved very fast, kicked Ham in the spot where Ham's breakfast reposed by now. Ham sat down. He made as loud a noise as he could to warn Monk, who was examining the rich upholstery fabric with interest.

Monk started to get out of the car.

The small man fell against an ornamental stripe which ran around the car. This stripe budged somewhat, and the man's pressure caused the car door to slam shut. Monk caught the door before it was quite closed and endeavored to hold it open. He slowed its closing somewhat, but that was all. Muscles and veins stood out on Monk as he strained against the closing door; but the door shut tightly, and a lock gnashed its tumblers. Thereafter, Monk was as soundly imprisoned as if he had been in a vault.

THE FIERY MENACE

Even Monk's voice, as he said loud, violent things, was muffled.

Ham started to get to his feet. The small man kicked him in the face. The small man was as agile with his feet as a boxer is with his fists. Ham fell on the sidewalk again. His first yell was nothing compared with his second, for he figured his handsome face had been ruined. It had not been helped any, either.

The small man rounded the front of the car like a rabbit circling a brush pile, popped behind the wheel, and the motor burst into life. The motor sounded as if it belonged in a tank. The car drifted away from the curb and down the street, taking on speed as if it was going to leave the pavement and fly.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, endeavored to pursue the car. In the way of speed, Habeas did very well for a hog, or even for a rheumatic rabbit. But he was left behind, and nothing remained in the street but the echoes of the big car motor and Ham's noisy, enraged breathing.

MONK MAYFAIR did his best to kick the sides, windows and floor boards out of the car. These seemed to have been built to resist just such a performance. He had no success. He did some of his best yelling, putting full volume into it.

The small man became irritated and turned his head.

“Look here,” he said. “Really, we shouldn't have that volume of yelling. They never figured Mussolini could yell that loud when they built the car.”

Encouraged, Monk got out an even louder howl.

The small man said, “There is a canister of gas here which squirts into the rear when I turn a valve. Unfortunately it is poison gas.”

Monk was silent, eyeing the back of the small man's head reflectively. The bulletproof glass between the rear and the driver's compartment seemed to be two inches thick, so there was no reaching the man's scrawny neck. The speaking arrangement between front and rear was some kind of an electrical gadget similar to an interoffice communicator. A unique car, Monk decided. Possibly, Doc Savage, even, did not have one to equal it.

“Did you,” asked Monk, “say something about Mussolini?”

“Sure.”

“The big one in Italy?”

“Sure thing. That'sa da bimbo. This car was built special for a syndicate that had taken a job to kidnap and kill Mussolini. The deal fell through when some of the syndicate woke up one morning and found some of the others dead from knives. After that, this car was for sale cheap to the right parties. For a long time it had to be the right parties because the state department did not approve of such things before the war. We got the heap for a song. A song!”

“We?” Monk said. “Who's we?”

The small man laughed grimly. “Me and the other fellow in the grave,” he said.

THE FIERY MENACE

Which was all Monk got out of him until the end of their ride.

HAM BROOKS actually thought a great deal of Monk Mayfair. There was a strong masculine bond between them. It was a violent friendship. A time or two it had come to blows, and never had it been polite and never had it been referred to as a friendship. Each of them had risked his life to save the other, but they always disclaimed any finer instincts in this and claimed it was either an accident or a mistake that such a thing should happen.

Ham Brooks was now distraught over the seizing of Monk Mayfair.

He was distraught for eight hours, and then he was horrified. Because Monk was found.

He was found in a state of gibbering terror. He was hiding under a parked car on a dark street in a residential section of Brooklyn. There may be parts of Brooklyn which should scare a man, but this was not one of them. A cop heard mewing sounds and thought it was a kitten, and looked under the parked car, thus finding Monk Mayfair.

The cop was surprised when Monk grabbed his legs and held on to them. The cop dragged out his sap and gave Monk a tap on the head before he discovered that all that was wrong with the poor fellow was an abject terror.

The cop identified Monk from stuff in his pockets and took him to a hospital.

The hospital sent for Ham.

“Pronounced shock, coupled with complete fear of something,” was the verdict they gave Ham downstairs before he went up to see Monk.

“That can't be!” Ham said wildly. “That's not like Monk. He doesn't scare. He even isn't afraid of Satan.”

“Right now,” the doctor said, “he is scared of his shadow”

“Why?”

The medico took off his glasses and polished them thoughtfully. “He hasn't said anything coherent. He is in very bad shape.”

“Hysterical, you mean?”

“Completely. A complete collapse, I am afraid. I must warn you, it is a very sad case, so you will know what to expect.”

“I'm going up and see him now,” Ham said. “What room?”

“Room 413,” the doctor said. “By the way, Mr. Mayfair has a small package which he refuses to give to anyone.”

“Package?” Ham stared.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Yes.”

“A rather small package that looks as if it might have a lunch inside, with the paper rather greasy?”

“Yes.”

“I’m going up right now,” Ham said excitedly.

The small man was in the elevator with Ham, who was too perturbed to notice this until the small man pulled out a revolver and knocked the elevator operator senseless with it. Then the man pointed the gun at Ham and said, “Here I am again. And this time I am an impatient fellow.”

Ham said, “Uh–h–h!” and had an absurd sensation around his ears, as if they wanted to wiggle like those of a jackass. He had certainly been taken off guard and made a fool of.

“Fourth floor, I believe you said,” the little man remarked.

Ham demanded, “What is this?”

“Kidnaping and armed robbery,” said the small man. “But not murder, let us hope.” He moved his gun meaningfully. “Let us hope,” he repeated.

Ham was puzzled. “You mean you’re going to grab me?”

“Sure!” the small man confided. “And I’m going to do a second grabbing of this Monk person. The first one did not take too well. To tell the bitter truth, he up and gave me the slip at the most unexpected time. But this is another occasion, and I now have a more careful opinion of Mr. Mayfair’s foxy qualities.”

“That would be the kidnaping,” Ham hazarded. “Now, where does the robbery come in?”

“Oh, that.” The elevator stopped, and the small man shortened his grip on his gun. He pushed back the elevator doors, then indicated that Ham was to step out into the hall and he would follow. “There is a matter of a picnic lunch,” he added.

“Picnic lunch!” Ham stared. “You mean there’s actually a lunch in that package?”

“Actually,” said the small man. “You will walk down this corridor to Mr. Mayfair’s room with great care, Mr. Brooks, because I feel an attack of nervous palsy coming on in my trigger finger.”

“Picnic lunch?” Ham repeated.

“Yes.”

“What,” blurted Ham, “is so important about a picnic lunch?”

“This one”—the small man’s small eyes were bright with intensity—“was the vampire’s lunch.”

Chapter IV. ADVANCE OPERATION

DOC SAVAGE had lunched sparingly but well at the White House, dined sufficiently at the restaurant adjacent to the Army War College and breakfasted nicely with the secretary of the navy.

Now he felt well fed, but disgusted. He understood the arguments presented to him, for these had been made with great clarity and conviction. Understanding meant no pleasure to him.

One of the officers at the War College had said, "The methods of war have changed. The day of winning warriors having the biggest muscles and the quickest reflexes is past. Scientific machines, foresighted planning win wars today. This makes it difficult for a man like you, Mr. Savage. It is hard to fight with your mind because, for generations, men have fought with their muscles. Naturally, you want to join this war with your physical equipment, which is the impulse of every man."

"The point," said Doc Savage sourly, "is that I am not in the army at all, except in an advisory capacity. I am not taking part in military operations in any way."

"Quite the contrary."

"How do you figure?"

"To win a war, one needs a healthy body. I am talking of the body of the nation as a whole. To maintain health we need a very strong medicine to fight the bad germs. You are such a medicine. Frankly, you and your organization release a hundred times your number in physical brawn, a thousand times your number, I would say, for the hand-to-hand conflict which you seem to regret missing. You are a better medicine for the country at home than you are out fighting on the war front personally."

"May I disagree?"

"Certainly. Not, however, with any success. I am sorry. This subject has been discussed by the president, myself and the secretaries, following receipt of your requests for active service. When you are needed in the actual physical conflict, when anything unusual turns up that causes your services to be essential, you will be given a crack at it. And don't think you won't!"

Doc Savage went back to his hotel and met the little colored person.

The fellow was a handful of dark meat with a large smile which, however, did not display any teeth. Equipment in the way of clothing consisted of overalls with holes, blue shirt buttoned tight at the neck, blue denim jumper, also buttoned, and stocking cap yanked down over ears, forehead and even part of cheeks.

The small colored person said, "Is you-all Mistuh Doctuh Savage? If you is, Ah got somethin' foah you in the way of words."

Doc admitted his identity. He was somewhat surprised. He was in Washington incognito as far as possible; and while a determined person could have found him without extreme difficulty, it would be quite a feat for this person.

The dark mite showed signs of excitement.

"This is 'bout a man in a chandelier," said the dark one.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Chandelier?” Doc Savage said.

During the past twenty–four hours he had read no newspapers and had received no communications from his aids.

“An' de lost vampire,” added the other.

Doc Savage contemplated the small one. And while he was doing the contemplating there came into existence in the hotel lobby, seeming to grow out of nowhere like a disembodied materialization, a trilling sound. It was a small, exotic sound, one that might have been the work of a vagrant wind, except that the air was still—or of some strange tropical songbird, of which there were, of course, none around. The small sound was an unconscious habit of Doc Savage in moments of mental stress, excitement or surprise.

However, his voice was entirely without expression when he spoke.

“Go ahead and talk,” he said.

“Oh, it's mah boss who wants to talk to you 'bout chandeliers an' vampires,” said the small dark one.

“I see.”

“Can you—all come?”

“Probably.”

“Ah was given enough money to hiah a taxicab,” said the mite.

They went outside and climbed into a taxicab—not the first cab, because Doc Savage had a suspicious nature that had become a habit. There was a line of cabs in front of the hotel, and he selected one well back in the line, where it was not likely to have been planted there for any ill purpose.

The cab rolled away smoothly with them, and Doc Savage leaned back on the cushions and brought up the subject of the thing he had discovered which had startled him into making the trilling noise.

He addressed the dark small one.

“You,” he said, “are not a Negro.”

“What?” asked the startled mite. “Great grief, didn't my black makeup fool you? I paid ten dollars to have it put on. Jacques said it would fool anyone. Jacques is my beauty operator and he was make–up artist with one of the big Hollywood studios for years.”

Doc Savage watched the small, smooth dark hands on the chance that they might start for a gun.

“You do not seem to be a boy, either,” he said.

There was a silence.

“That's right,” she agreed.

THE FIERY MENACE

THE cab driver, Doc Savage had noticed, had been given an address, the address of a tourist camp, well out on the edge of the city in the direction of New York. The machine rolled ahead, joined heavier traffic, making steady, undisturbed progress.

Doc Savage said, "Your age might be an interesting point."

"Twenty-two," the girl said.

She had enough size to be about fourteen, although it might be a well-grown fourteen.

"And a name?" Doc asked.

"Mrs. Abbett," she said. "Mrs. Alonzo Abbett."

Doc Savage glanced sidewise at her. He was a little uncomfortable, displeased with his own judgment, for he had thought she was probably lying about her age. If she was a married woman, he had certainly missed his guess. She did not sound as if she was lying to him.

Finally he ventured, "Does an explanation go with this?"

"Probably it should," she admitted. "You see, I want you to investigate my husband, but I do not want my husband to know about my interest. I would not care if he knew, provided I was in a place where I would be safe from him. You see, I am afraid of my husband."

"The darky disguise," suggested Doc Savage, "had something to do with being afraid of your husband?"

She nodded. "Right. I followed him here from New York. The disguise was so he wouldn't know me."

"Did he know you?"

"I think not."

Doc Savage seemed interested in nothing but the buildings moving past. Actually, his eyes—his eyes were one of his most peculiar characteristics; they were like pools of flake gold, always animated by tiny winds—were keeping a check on the rear-view mirror and also on the traffic about them. Probably, he decided, there was no one following them.

He said, "We seem to be starting in the middle of the book on this thing. Is there a first page?"

She asked, "You mean you want the whole story?"

"So that it makes some kind of sense—yes."

She was silent. Doc continued to watch the mirror, the traffic. He leaned forward and changed the address to one in a different part of the city. After the cab left the route it had been following, there seemed to be no trace of a tailing machine, or machines. Doc changed the address again, puzzling the cab driver, although the latter did nothing but frown.

The young woman began speaking.

"I don't suppose I was the first girl who was ever roped in by a fine blond physique, gallant manners and

THE FIERY MENACE

plenty of spending money,” she said. “Anyway, Alonzo Abbett had all of those, and I fell. We were married a month ago, and it took me a week to find out I had committed matrimony with a combination of Tartar, tyrant, and fourteen-carat devil. Twenty-four carat would be pure devil, but Alonzo was only about fourteen. That was too much for me. Before marriage he had been Donald Duck, and money meant nothing to him, and I liked that. Not the money part as much as the Donald Duck part.” She sighed. “There was a black cat in our closet, too.”

“The black cat,” Doc Savage asked, “would be what?”

“I wish I knew.” She sighed. “Something mysterious. Something he is mixed up in. Something my brother Fred is mixed in, too.

“Fred is a greedy egg,” she continued grimly. “He has his faults, even if he is my own brother. He likes excitement and is always gadding around hunting it. Disappears for months at a time, then turns up with no explanations or with explanations that are so wild nobody believes them, although probably they're true. Sometimes he has money, and other times he obviously hasn't eaten for a while.”

DOC SAVAGE said, with impatience in the text of his words rather than in his expression or manner, “You have a husband you do not like and a brother who is an adventurer. Now, what next?”

“My husband and my brother,” she said, “are involved in trouble.”

“Yes?”

“I have had suspicions for some time,” she explained. “But a few hours ago a man was found dead in a chandelier in the lobby of your office building in New York. A scrubwoman said the man told her he was hunting a lost vampire.” She paused and frowned. “That's silly, isn't it?” she asked.

“Silly things often have a sound, if not an invariably sensible, explanation.”

“I guess you're right. Anyway, this story about the man in the chandelier naturally came out in the newspapers. There was something peculiar about his manner of death: a strange hole in his head. My husband and my brother got excited. I overheard them talking that they had to keep an eye on you. They found out you were in Washington. They found that out by telephoning a newspaper about you, pretending they were police detectives, and asking where you were. Then they came to Washington.”

“Why?”

She became serious. “I don't think they meant you any good.”

“No?”

“I do not, however, know exactly what they planned. But if my husband planned it, it wasn't anything good.”

“You followed them?”

“Yes. They drove out from the airport in a cab to this tourist camp. For some reason they were going to wait there until night.”

THE FIERY MENACE

“And you came to get me?”

“Yes. I want you to investigate. I've heard of you, and your reputation is enough to make me trust you. I want you to get to the bottom of this. If my brother is in serious trouble, I want you to get him out. If my husband got him into it, I want him punished.”

Doc Savage considered the tale.

“How long has your brother known your husband?” he asked.

“Oh, a long time. A year, anyway, I think. I'm not sure. You see, my brother introduced me to my husband.”

The cab was getting near the tourist camp.

“Your brother,” Doc Savage asked, “is an adventurer?”

“Yes. A chronic danger hunter.”

“Has he engaged in any particular adventure recently?”

“Yes.”

“What nature?”

“That, I don't know. He turned up about six weeks ago.”

“This time, did he come back with an explanation, or with money?” Doc asked.

She shook her head.

“Neither,” she said. “But he had a one-hundred-percent case of worry. I never saw him so worried. You don't know Fred, but it takes a lot to worry him. I think he had just gotten off the ocean, because there was salt caked in his hair and in his clothes. His clothes were all wrinkled, too, as if he hadn't had them off his back in days.”

“Then you presume this last adventure of Fred's was at sea?”

“It would be a reasonable guess,” said Mrs. Alonzo Abbett.

ONE of Doc Savage's most valuable possessions, in his own opinion, was a modest idea of his own judgment. He never trusted himself fully and felt that he thus avoided mistakes. The part of his judgment which he trusted the least was the part which concerned women.

He had not the least idea, for certain, whether Mrs. Alonzo Abbett had been telling him the truth.

It did seem strange that she would go to all of the trouble of having her face blacked by a beauty expert named Jacques—who had not been quite as expert as she had hoped—just to fool her husband.

“Just what made you think your brother was worried after he came back from the sea?” Doc asked.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Oh, I just knew it!” she said promptly.

A little too promptly. She had not, the bronze man reflected, given an illustration of an incident that would show her brother was worried. People who tell true stories do not, as a rule, confine themselves to general facts but tend to the contrary, to relating only details.

She added, “One gets to know one's brother rather well, you know.”

That was true, too, but it did not prove anything.

Doc told the cab driver, “Stop here.”

“It's only a little way on to the camp,” the driver said.

“Stop here anyway,” Doc Savage directed.

They got out. It was an outlying section along the highway. Most of the establishments were devoted to taverns, dance halls, skating rinks, hot-dog emporiums and the inevitable tourist camps. It was a section where not too many questions were asked.

They walked a short distance. The tourist camp appeared. It was just another tourist camp in the two-dollar-and-a-half class. Yellow-painted stucco. The signs said air-conditioned, which probably meant fans.

Mrs. Abbett pointed. “They are in that cabin. They came down from New York by plane and hurried out here, as I told you before.”

Doc Savage gave the situation some thought as he moved forward. Something about the young woman was not right. Or maybe it was right. At any rate, he could not tell.

If not right, the thing this was most likely to be was a trap. He had an attitude of his own toward traps. He avoided a few; he knowingly walked straight into more of them. So if he was walking into one now it would be all right; at least, it would not catch him unprepared. He wore a bulletproof undergarment of a special-alloy mesh which he had developed. And on his person were a few gadgets which were no more bulky than cigarette cases and fountain pens, but which were dependable. He had walked into traps before with less equipment and had come out—sometimes not unscratched, and sometimes badly scarred—almost invariably knowing more than when he stepped in.

This time it was not a trap.

It was a man dead with the most remarkable round hole in his head, a hole that was round and without blood and large enough to take a broomstick. It was not pleasant. The expression on his face was seemingly of a kind of utterless emotion that he was feeling when he died.

Chapter V. THE VAMPIRE

DOC SAVAGE turned quickly to keep the girl in blackface out of the tourist cabin, but she was already inside, hands jammed against her cheeks.

THE FIERY MENACE

She said, "It isn't . . . it isn't—" and the words made a cork in her throat.

"Isn't who?" Doc Savage prompted.

"Either . . . one . . . of them."

"Not your husband?"

"No."

"Nor your brother?"

"No, not Fred either."

"Do you," asked Doc Savage patiently, "know him?"

She hesitated. She was a good actress, but not quite good enough to convince him that she was telling the truth, which was what she tried to do.

Her untruth was: "I never saw him before in my life!"

Doc Savage accepted this without a change of expression.

"You stay in here," he said, "while I take a look around."

She nodded dumbly.

Doc Savage stepped to the door, and stood there with it partly open, listening and watching. The tourist camp was quiet. A dog was prowling around a garbage can across the street, and an old hen was scratching industriously in the dust beside the highway, paying no attention to the cars which rushed past.

"Stay here," he warned the girl again. She nodded a second time.

Doc Savage stepped outside, moved casually until he was near a car parked at an adjacent cabin. He stopped there, stood so that the reflection in the car windows showed him the window of the cabin he had just left.

He studied the reflection with interest. The young woman was at the window, watching him. The expression on her face was even more stark than it had been when she discovered the body. She watched Doc Savage intently for a moment, then whirled furtively.

Doc ducked behind the car, made a quick and fast circle, and reached a side window of the cabin, where he looked in.

Mrs. Abbett was searching the dead man. Not joyfully, though. She was holding, somehow, both lips with her teeth. She seemed on the point of being sick. It was taking a great and horrible determination to drive her to search the dead man. She was conducting the search with frenzied haste, obviously hoping to end it before Doc Savage got back. Doc watched her long enough to see that she was taking everything that she found in the dead man's pockets, putting the stuff in a towel.

When she appeared at the cabin door—what she had found in the dead man's pockets had been tied in the towel—Doc Savage was out of sight behind some shrubbery that needed trimming.

THE FIERY MENACE

Mrs. Abbett went to the office of the tourist camp and entered. The place was administered by a middle-aged fat man who seemed to resent the daylight. He sat tilted back in a chair, head to one side, eyes partly closed.

To Mrs. Abbett's elaborately casual, "Will you call me a taxi, please," he replied with a muttered, "Phone's over there," and nodded.

The telephone which Mrs. Abbett used was near a wall, and the wall was thin enough for her words to carry through it to Doc Savage's ear, pressed against a crack. She called something named City Transportation Corp., and apparently got promise of a cab in ten minutes or so.

She seemed to be intending to run away.

TRAFFIC stoplights are not particularly technical things; neither are they very burglar proof. Furthermore, some of them are equipped with a keyhole switch so that the neighborhood police patrolman can, if necessary, take over the manual function of directing traffic. Doc Savage stood beside the traffic stanchion a quarter of a mile down the road in the direction of town. He waited idly until he discovered an approaching City Transportation cab in the traffic, upon which he did what was necessary to the traffic signal to make its lights turn to red. He went to the cab.

"Tourist camp up the road?" he asked.

"No," said the driver.

Doc Savage went back and tried again. He was at the light two or three minutes, caught another cab, and this one said, "Sure. Rush call, somebody phoned in. Woman."

"Good," Doc said. "I see this cab has a large baggage trunk on the back."

He proceeded to arrange with the cab driver to ride, without his presence being advertised, in the trunk. Many cabs do not have trunks these days, and it had been his initial intention to have the cab driver arrange to make himself easily followed. The large trunk simplified matters, though.

With Doc in the trunk, the driver went on to pick up Mrs. Abbett. Doc did not hear what address she gave the driver. The motor was too noisy.

It was a long ride, taking more than half an hour. The young woman got out; then the driver piloted his cab a short distance, got out and lifted the trunk lid, saying, "Your little woman went in that tourist cabin. I hope you catch her with the blankety-blank so-and-so, buddy, and get enough evidence for your divorce. We married men have to stick together."

"Thanks," Doc said, without changing expression.

He walked away wondering if he had exactly lied to the cab driver. Technically, he had not thought he had done so. He had tried to give the man the impression that things were a certain way, which was not how they were, and in doing this he had not told a single untruth—he hoped. It had been his policy always—whether sensible or not was a matter of opinion, but it was his policy—to tell no direct falsehood under any circumstance.

The tourist cabin stood off by itself. It was part of a camp, a vastly better and more impressive type of camp

THE FIERY MENACE

than the other had been. The cabin was as impressive as a bungalow, the shrubbery around it elaborate enough for a good residence.

Mrs. Abbett lost some time by creeping up on the front porch and putting an ear to the door and listening. So Doc reached the place at about the time she walked inside. He kept out of sight and put his own ear against the door, which proved an excellent sounding board for what went on within.

Mrs. Abbett had somehow removed her blackface make-up. Her sudden and somewhat dramatic entrance got at least two barks of astonishment.

Mrs. Abbett said, "Sit down, my dear brother and my good husband."

She did not sound as if she hated either of them.

One of the astonished men yelled, "Thyra, how in the devil did you get here?"

"I'm not deaf, Fred," said Mrs. Abbett. "And neither are the police—or people who might call the police."

There was the kind of silence that follows the dropping of a sackful of eggs.

"Police, eh?" muttered the other man, who evidently was Mr. Abbett.

Mrs. Abbett made a long speech which the other two tried to interrupt.

She said, "You two are in something up to your ears, and it isn't anything the least bit safe. You haven't told me anything, but I know you both, and I can see. I know it's trouble, and it wouldn't surprise me if it was outside the law. Jail trouble."

Here, both men tried to interrupt her but failed.

Ignoring them, she continued, "The kind of trouble you two get into scares me. So when you acted excited over that business of a vampire and a man found dead in a chandelier, when that other man came to see you and you all came to Washington in such a hurry, I was worried plenty. I followed you. I got down here, saw you split up, with you fellows locating here and that other man in the tourist camp, and I knew something was going to break. So I went to see Doc Savage, because I knew you were scared of him. I heard you say you were scared of him. I told him the story."

Here, they again tried to interrupt.

She talked them down with, "I told him everything except about the other man, this fellow who came down with you. I figured that Savage would get on him, and that would scare you two into behaving yourselves." She eyed them grimly. "After all, you two are my brother and my husband, the only people I love."

The two men stood there, both digesting what she had said and getting control of their tempers.

"Fred," said Abbett grimly, "some sister you've got."

Fred nodded sadly. "A very affectionate sister. I should have warned you, maybe, before you married her. She has done things like this before."

"Actually? And you didn't wring her neck? I wonder at your restraint!"

THE FIERY MENACE

“There was the time,” Fred said thoughtfully, “when my dear sister 'accidentally' shot me in the leg while we were hunting. She had the impression I was going to throw a baseball game I was pitching, so a lot of gamblers could clean up.”

In a hurt voice Mrs. Abbett said, “Fred, that's not a fair example. You were innocent, only I didn't know it at the time.”

“Sure,” Fred said, “and I've been innocent of most of the things you suspected.”

“But not all of them,” she snapped. “Anyway, you haven't let me tell you the rest of this.”

“What is the rest?”

“Your friend is lying back in that other tourist cabin with a round hole in his head—one of those holes that seem to alarm you so.”

FOR at least thirty seconds—a long thirty seconds—no one said a word.

“Fred,” gasped Abbett finally.

“Yes?”

“Fred, our worst suspicions were true.”

“Yes,” Fred muttered. “And it's gone too far now to stop it.”

“We can warn the others.”

“Sure. We've got to do that. Fast, too.”

“You can fly a plane, Fred. Can you get hold of one in a hurry?”

“We can't use a plane, now,” Fred explained. “You've got to get all kinds of papers and clearances before you can use a private plane. The thing for us to do is try to grab seats on the first New York-bound passenger ship. If we can't get reservations we'll use the car and hope we make it in time.”

“I guess that's right,” Abbett said.

There was scuffling around. Evidently, they were dumping stuff in a suitcase.

There was a sharp thump, as if Mrs. Abbett had stamped a foot angrily.

“Look here!” she snapped. “I want an explanation. I want to know what is going on.”

Her brother said, “When you were a kid you wanted to marry a movie star, but you didn't get that either.”

“I'll find Doc Savage and tell him the rest of this!” the young woman threatened.

“Where did you leave him?”

“Back at the other tourist camp with that . . . that body.”

“How did you get away from him?”

“I just skipped out.”

“Why?”

She must have stamped a foot again.

“Oh, darn it! I wanted to tip you and Fred off so you could get out of trouble,” she snapped.

Fred said, “Let's get going. We haven't any time to kill.”

Chapter VI. WARNING FOR FOUR

THEY got seats in the 4:12 passenger plane, which was nonstop from Washington to New York. That made it simple. Doc Savage's private ship had a top speed between a hundred and a hundred and fifty miles an hour faster than the passenger craft. He was able to follow them to the Washington airport, make a quick shift to get his own plane out, have an argument with the military aeronautic authority about a permit and clearance for civilian flying, fly to New York, get his plane out of sight and telephone his headquarters. There was no one at headquarters.

While the airport loud-speaker was announcing the approach of Flight 6 from Washington, Doc Savage telephoned Patricia Savage, his cousin.

“Sorry to bother you, but there are some people who need trailing. Another car will be handy,” he said. “Can you contribute?”

Pat was a young woman who liked action. But she was astonished. “The sun must be getting ready to rise in the West,” she said. “What is wrong? Have you been hit over the head?”

“Will you get in your car and head for the airport?” Doc asked. “And turn the short-wave radio on so I can get in touch with you.”

“What ails you?” demanded Pat. “You usually do everything in the world to keep me from getting mixed up in one of your parties. Or is this something with no danger connected to it?”

“Are you going to waste time being amazed?” Doc asked. “Or are you going to help?”

“I'll help. You know me.”

“Good.”

“What is it all about?”

Doc said, “It seems to concern a lost vampire, a dead man in a chandelier, a dead man in a tourist cabin, a sister concerned about her brother and her husband, and a death which consists of a remarkable hole in the victim's head. Outside of that, it is rather confused, apparently.”

THE FIERY MENACE

“If that is the part that is clear, the rest must be really confused,” Pat said. “I’m on my way now. I’ll turn on the radio in my car and set it on your wave length.”

Doc hung up and left the phone booth.

The Washington plane came drifting in at the far end of the field, put its tail wheel on the ground and approached. Mrs. Abbett, her husband and her brother crowded off the plane immediately, acting like people with somewhere to go.

They took a cab and Doc Savage followed in another cab. Before they reached Triborough Bridge, leading to Manhattan Island, Doc used his tiny portable radio. The bridge was long and the steel in it had enough absorptive power to interfere seriously with the somewhat weak performance of his very tiny set, which was about the size of a miniature camera without a case.

“Pat,” he said.

Patricia’s well–modulated voice replied immediately, “I am in my car headed across town. Which bridge do you want me to take toward the airport?”

“Park near the Manhattan end of the Triborough,” Doc directed. “Park in a side street with your car headed so that you can pull into the traffic at once. I will watch for you and tell you when to pull into traffic, then tell you what car to follow. Which one of your machines are you driving?”

“I’m driving Clarence,” Patricia explained.

Doc clicked off the microphone and leaned back. His cab was now on Triborough Bridge, sweeping up the long white approach arch, the cab swaying as it took the turns. It had to wait for the machine Doc was following to pay the toll.

The bronze man began to watch for the meek–looking dark coupé which Pat called “Clarence.” Clarence was a car devoid of personality, or that was the way Pat explained the name she had given the machine. She had another one named “Tarzan,” one named “Adolf Hitler,” and a truck which she called “Churchill.”

Doc Savage saw Clarence, inconspicuous in a side street.

Into the radio, he said, “The blue–checked cab, Pat. Do not lose them if you can help it.”

Pat said, “Right–o!” Clarence left the side street and began following the cab containing the Abbetts and Mrs. Abbett’s brother Fred. Pat began talking into her radio transmitter as she drove. “Doc, there must be more to this than a murder and a mystery, or you would have turned it over to the police. Your jobs are generally those where people are in trouble.”

Doc had his cab drop back some distance and turn off into a side street.

He told Pat, “The impression seems to be that a number of people are in danger.”

“Who are they?”

“That is what we are trying to find out.”

THE FIERY MENACE

SAMUEL H. B. STOVER was the first man in danger.

Samuel H. B. Stover was a short, extremely wide man, with small eyes and a big, smiling mouth. His face looked as if it were covered with a fairly good grade of leather.

He was standing, hands on hips, admiring the results in a small store which he seemed to be furnishing and decorating. The store was going to sell luggage, and it was stocked with high-class merchandise.

Samuel H. B. Stover jumped not quite a foot off the floor when he saw the Abbetts and Mrs. Abbett's brother, Fred.

He also looked longingly at the back door. Then he shrugged, came toward them, putting out a hand. He gave them a big grin and a greeting that was loud and—he seemed to hope—joyous.

“Freddy Clevenger, as I live and breathe!” he said.

Fred Clevenger said something.

The grin and the joy came loose from Stover's leathery face. “But that ain't possible!” he exclaimed.

Fred Clevenger evidently said it was possible, and added some explanation which showed why it was.

Stover said, “Sure, I know what to do.”

The Abbetts and Clevenger then left.

Doc Savage took out his pair of binoculars and got himself out of sight in time. The binoculars were extremely powerful and he had been able to tell what was being said by H. B. Stover by watching the man's lips—Doc had more than a slight skill at lip reading—but he had no idea what the others had said. Their backs had been to him.

Doc used the little radio.

“Pat,” he said.

“Yes?”

“Watch this fellow to whom they just talked. Keep close tab on him.”

“You mean stay right here and watch?” Pat asked.

“Right.”

“O. K.,” Pat said. “But the little guy looks harmless to me.”

BULLYHIDE JONES was the second man in danger, although Bullyhide was in no condition to know it—or give a damn if he did understand it, probably. Bullyhide was intoxicated. He was not in the gutter only because no gutter ran through the Three Sheets Bar & Grill, where Bullyhide had installed himself.

THE FIERY MENACE

The Abbetts went to Bullyhide's rooming house first. It developed later that they knew they could trace Bullyhide from there because he owned the place. The landlady evidently directed them unerringly to the Three Sheets Bar & Grill.

"Huh?" said Bullyhide vaguely. "Shay, if it ain't my old pal Joey!"

"It's not Joey," said Mrs. Abbett's brother Fred patiently.

"Shello, Joey!" insisted Bullyhide.

"It's Fred—Fred Clevenger. Do you understand, Bullyhide? Fred Clevenger, off the *Domino*."

Bullyhide said in a lolly-tongued way, "Sure, old Fred offish the *Domino*—"

Bullyhide then jumped as if someone had given him a hard kick in the rear part of his anatomy. For thirty seconds he stood there trying to get hold of himself, trying so hard that it was like lifting weights.

"Domino?"

he said distinctly.

"Yes. You understand now, Bullyhide?"

Bullyhide acted as if he was lifting weights for a while longer. Then he gave it up, and his alcohol-soaked mind flopped back into its original muddle like a fish that had gotten off the hook.

"Shello, Joey," he said. "Have one on me. Have one on the house. I'm shinkin' of buyin' the place, anyway."

Fred Clevenger glanced at his sister, then beckoned the bartender. "Got a pencil and paper?" The bartender had. Fred wrote a note. "Can you get him sober?" he asked the bartender.

"I dunno," the bartender said. "I've known him a month, and he hasn't had a sober minute in that time. I'll try if it's important."

"It's important." Fred Clevenger's face was pale. "It's so important that you have no idea."

"O. K., I'll give him the treatment," the bartender said. "Then I'll hand him this note. You can depend on me, brother."

Fred Clevenger, his sister and her husband left the bar, nearly discovering Doc Savage in the process.

The bartender stood looking after them, then spat behind the bar and swore. "Sober him up hell!" he said. "He stays drunk two more days, and I'll have this bar sold to him. Sober him up hell!"

Doc Savage said, "The note, please."

The bartender jumped off the floor, came down, got organized, and said, "What note?" innocently.

Doc Savage, who was in no mood for delay, took hold of the tip of the man's nose with thumb and forefinger of his left hand. He held the nose while using his right hand to get the note out of the man's vest pocket. During the nose holding, the bartender did a little dance with tears coming to his eyes.

THE FIERY MENACE

Doc released him and read the note:

We have lost the vampire. It had the luncheon package. Elmer the Great went hunting it, and the vampire got him in Doc Savage's building. Oscar and Abbett and I went to Washington to watch Savage and keep him from getting his nose in it. Oscar was caught by the vampire in Washington. Savage knows about that and my sister told him names of Abbett and myself, which was all she knew about affair. We have got to do something fast! Stay sober, you damned fool.

Fred Clevenger.

This was longer than Doc Savage had expected. It also explained more than he had expected. Likewise, it left him more confused than before.

He handed the note back to the bartender. The bartender, when his nose was released, had jumped back, shot a hand under the bar and brought out a piece of billiard cue suitably padded with adhesive tape. He had stood there with his eyes slowly protruding, then had put the billiard cue back. He took the note.

“Sober Bullyhide,” Doc directed. “And keep him here for an hour. Then give him this note.”

“Yes, sir,” said the man meekly.

He watched Doc Savage leave. He was wearing an enormously impressed expression. After Doc had gone, the bartender touched his nose thoughtfully where it had been tweaked.

“Nose,” he said, “you're lucky to be there. That guy was Doc Savage. Nose, you're a celebrity.”

Back in the taxicab—the driver was beginning to become very curious about what was going on—Doc used his small portable radio again. He called headquarters. There was no answer.

Pat put in, “I have no idea what has happened to Monk and Ham. They do not seem to be at headquarters.”

Doc Savage changed the transmitter wave length slightly and said, “Long Tom—Long Tom Roberts.”

A voice answered, “Yeah, Doc?” It was a rather sour voice.

“Have Monk and Ham contacted you recently?”

“No,” said Long Tom. “Are they in trouble?”

“There has been no time to check and see,” Doc Savage explained. “But for some reason they are out of contact.”

“Want me to check on them?”

“No,” Doc told him, “but I would like for you to go to the Three Sheets Bar & Grill on Seventy-second Street and watch a man named Bullyhide Jones. Report on what he does.”

“Right away,” Long Tom agreed.

Long Tom Roberts was a member of Doc Savage's group of five associates. A rather small man with a very unhealthy complexion and a sour disposition, he was eminent in his profession of electrical engineering,

THE FIERY MENACE

knowing at least as much about electricity as any other living man. He liked adventure and excitement the way some men like women or liquor.

It was now obvious that Fred Clevenger, Thyra Abbett and her husband were warning a group of people in great haste. Just why they were so frenziedly doing this was not exactly clear to Doc Savage.

They seemed to take seriously the matter of a lost vampire, which was as ridiculous as it was interesting. There was, in the face of reason, no such thing as a vampire. Vampires have always been nonexistent, like witches and werewolves, and belonged to the same period of human mentality. All had gone out of fashion a hundred years ago to a large extent, except possibly in parts of France and a few backward areas of the world.

As far as Doc Savage was concerned, there was surely no such thing as a vampire. But it was equally certain that as far as Fred Clevenger and Mr. and Mrs. Abbett were concerned, there was a vampire, now lost. There was also a luncheon package, whatever that was. Whether it was the vampire's lunch had not been made clear, as yet.

There was terror for the people concerned in the affair; that was certain. Also violent death!

Doc Savage was working shorthanded. He now had his entire available force on the job, because the other two members of his group of assistants—William Harper Johnny Littlejohn and Colonel John Renny Renwick—were in Europe. They were doing a little in the current war, something Doc Savage would have liked to do and would be doing, if it were not for the ideas of Washington. Monk Mayfair, Ham Brooks, Long Tom Roberts and Patricia Savage—Pat was not actually a member of their organization, but she was efficient, and lately Doc had taken to pressing her into service—were the only available assistants. Since Monk and Ham seemed to have vanished without explanation, the assisting was up to Pat and Long Tom.

If there proved to be other individuals whom it might be interesting to have shadowed, there would be no one available to shadow them.

ALBERT LEE did not need shadowing. What he needed was something in the way of a strait jacket, or maybe a vault in a well-defended fort, a place where he would feel safe.

He was in a state of hysterical terror.

Lee lived in a house on the outskirts of the city. It was a small stone house, and Fred Clevenger knocked on the door without results.

“Maybe Al isn't home,” suggested Mr. Abbett.

“He's home all right,” said Clevenger grimly. “I saw his face at the window when we drove up.” He lifted his voice. “Al! Al Lee! It's Fred and Abbett. Open the door, damn it! We want to tell you something.”

No answer.

Fred Clevenger became very angry.

“We can't waste time,” he said, and began kicking the door.

“Fred, it's against the law to break into a man's house,” his sister warned.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Shut up!” Fred told her. He kicked until the door burst open. Then he strode inside.

Immediately, a man screamed! The man's cry was brimming with terror and was followed by the sound of running feet.

“Hell, there's something wrong with Al!” shouted Fred Clevenger. “Help me catch him, Abbett. There he goes!”

While they were chasing Albert Lee from one room to another, endeavoring to corner him, there was enough confusion and excitement for Doc Savage to get into the house himself. He stepped in through the front door. When they caught Lee, Doc stood outside the door of the room and listened.

Albert Lee had fled to a corner of the room and now stood with his back to the wall, facing them. His eyes were as wide as they possibly could get. His lips were off his teeth, animallike.

Lee had not, up to this point, spoken a word.

“Al,” said Fred Clevenger, “what the hell is wrong with you?”

The man pressed back against the wall in a kind of paralysis of terror.

“Fred, he's scared,” said Abbett.

Fred Clevenger had lost all patience. He shouted, “I'll knock that out of him!” and started forward with his fists.

Albert Lee responded simply by shaking from head to foot, turning whiter and closing his eyes tightly, then sliding to the floor. He sat against the wall for a moment with his head tilted forward, then slumped down on his face.

Abbett jumped forward and grabbed Lee's wrist, which he held for a few seconds. “He's only fainted,” he said with relief. “I thought his heart had stopped or something.”

“Scared senseless!” Fred said, disgustedly.

Abbett said, “He already knows about the vampire. That's why he's scared.”

“How do you suppose he found out?”

“I don't know. He already has found it out, though. That's what we came to tell him, so we're wasting our time.”

Thyra Abbett had watched what had happened with a horrified fascination. “Fred,” she said.

“Yeah?” her brother grunted.

“What are you two mixed up in? What is it? It is so bad that it almost scares men to death, and I want to know what it is.”

“Nothing,” said her brother.

THE FIERY MENACE

Thyra Abbett said, "I have met this Albert Lee. You had him out to the house for dinner one night, about three weeks ago."

"You didn't know him well enough to know anything about him," snapped her brother.

"Don't lie to me, Fred. Albert Lee was an officer on a submarine in the first World War, and he was a captain in the Spanish Revolution. You, yourself, told me about some of his exploits and said he had a trunkful of medals for bravery."

She rushed to her brother and clutched his arm.

"Fred, what is this thing that will reduce a man with a trunkful of medals for bravery to a stark, fainting fear?" she demanded.

Fred Clevenger stared over his sister's head at her husband. "As her husband, what would you suggest doing with my sister?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Abbett grimly. "If we could find a plane bound for Timbuktu, I would suggest putting her on it. Come on. Let's go see Buck Stevens. He is one man who will keep his head."

"Do you know Buck's address?"

"Sure. The *Four Winds*. She's tied up at a pier on City Island."

"Come on."

DOC SAVAGE tiptoed away and got out of sight through a door that led to a bedroom. He remained there until Fred Clevenger and the Abbetts departed hurriedly through the front door.

The bronze man then went to Albert Lee and slapped the fellow, pinched him—not violently, but hard enough to make sure the man had genuinely fainted.

Doc carried Lee outside. The Abbetts and Clevenger were out of sight, and Doc Savage's cab driver was standing outside his machine frowning and holding a match to a cigarette. Doc put Lee in the cab and said, "City Island, where the yachts tie up."

The cab driver said, "Look here, Jack, I'm not going to be the monkey on the stick for you. Something goes on here, and you can count me out." He scowled. "Get yourself another cab."

The cab was one of a company fleet. There was a drugstore on the corner. In the drugstore was a telephone booth. Doc took the cab driver to the drugstore. Lee remained in the cab, which had been left where they could watch it.

Doc told the hackman, "Call your boss." The puzzled driver did that. Doc said, "Now, let me talk to him." The bronze man spoke for a short time over the telephone, then returned the receiver to the cab driver, suggesting, "He wants to speak to you."

When the cab driver had listened and hung up, he was astounded. He said, "Go ahead and take my cab without me. That's what the boss said for me to let you do." His voice became complaining. "Why didn't you

THE FIERY MENACE

tell me you had that kind of a drag with the company? I wouldn't have kicked about hauling you. Now, you've probably got me in bad."

"You are not in bad with the company," Doc told him. "Just go home or go to a show or something. You'll get your cab back tomorrow and be reimbursed for whatever you would have made today."

"All right," agreed the mollified driver, "if you're sure I'm not in bad with the company. I need this job."

"You are not in bad," Doc assured him, "because I happen to own a controlling interest in the concern."

The bronze man tucked Albert Lee in the front seat, got behind the wheel and headed for City Island to investigate the matter of Buck Stevens, the fourth man who was to be warned.

While he was driving north and east toward City Island, Doc used his small radio to contact Pat Savage, who reported that Samuel H. B. Stover, who operated the furniture establishment, had, as yet, done nothing of interest except to fall into a growing state of fear.

Pat was impressed. "There must be something amazing mixed up in this, the way these people get scared. You take this Samuel H. B. Stover, now. He has barred the door of his store and is sitting in the middle of the place with a rifle and a shotgun."

"Have you obtained any information about Stover?" Doc asked.

"I wanted to tell you about that. He's just setting up this office-furniture business. Seems to have a lot of money. The only strange thing about that is that he does not act like a man who ever had a lot of money before. He is throwing it away right and left and acting as if there was plenty more money where this came from."

"What about his past?"

"I haven't got much on that," Pat explained. "Except that he is an ex-navy man-but in the German navy. He was in the German navy during the last war, not this one. Since then he has become an American citizen. He used to be a prize fighter, too. Rather a zestful, adventurous fellow, but that is all I have been able to dig up so far. I dug that up by using the telephone in a place across the street."

Doc Savage got in touch with Long Tom Roberts, the electrical wizard, who had been assigned to watch Bullyhide Jones, the drunkard.

LONG TOM reported that Bullyhide had not yet been sobered up, although the bartender of the Three Sheets Bar & Grill was pouring hot coffee into him.

Doc said, "Long Tom, since this Bullyhide is in an intoxicated condition, we might get away with something that otherwise would hardly work."

"What would that something be, Doc?"

"Walk into the Three Sheets Bar & Grill," Doc Savage directed, "and give the impression you are an associate of Fred Clevenger and Mr. and Mrs. Abbott. Go as far as you feel safe in giving the impression you know what it is all about. Better be careful about it."

THE FIERY MENACE

"I'll not go far in giving any impressions," Long Tom said, "because I have no idea what it is about. But I may be able to fool this Bullyhide. Fool him and get all I can out of him, is that the idea?"

"That," Doc said, "is the idea."

The bronze man wheeled his cab into the curving road that led to the highway bridge to City Island. Albert Lee had not yet opened his eyes. The man's condition was unusual, but it was medically explainable as a kind of cataleptic condition brought on by extreme hysteria.

As an afterthought, Doc used the radio again, said, "Long Tom?"

"Yes? I was just getting ready to go into the bar."

"Find out whether this Bullyhide Jones is an ex-submarine man."

"Right-o."

Doc Savage headed for the pier where a boat named the *Four Winds* was supposed to be lying. And on the boat was supposed to be a man named Buck Stevens, who was to be warned, probably, by Fred Clevenger and the Abbetts.

Doc was not pleased by the way things were going. He was learning a little, not much, although enough to show that it was not a small affair and not an ordinary one.

But Doc liked more action. Following suspects and eavesdropping was not his specialty. Except for the man dead in Washington, there was not much feeling of excitement. Probably because the thing had started off as a poor story does, with the climax in the beginning—the death in Washington—the affair still was not going as he liked.

It was now late enough in the evening to be growing dark.

Chapter VII. EYE WITNESS

THE small man ran screaming across the boat yard and out of the gate.

He actually screamed while he ran, which was something of a feat by itself. He did not yelp at every jump, but made a continuous squalling noise in which there did not seem to be a pause for breath. Since his howl had the volume of the whistling buoy out in the Sound, his performance created a commotion.

He encountered Doc Savage at the gate. Doc did two things. He looked toward the pier and saw that the taxicab occupied by Fred Clevenger and Mr. and Mrs. Abbett had already arrived. He had expected—without being positive, though—that he would reach the boat yard first. The second thing the bronze man did was reach out and seize the small, yelling man.

"What is it?" Doc demanded.

The small man ogled Doc Savage, seemed to grow weak in the knees and gasped, "Great grief and judgment day!"

THE FIERY MENACE

“Why the yelling?” Doc Savage repeated patiently.

“They weren't crazy!” The small man jerked a pointing thumb toward the dock. “There's actually a vampire after all. It's down there!”

“Where?”

“That boat.” The small man's lips were off his teeth in his excitement. The teeth were large. “Boat at the dock. The *Four Winds*.”

“Come on,” Doc Savage said.

“Not me, brother.”

The small man gave a violent jump, hoping to escape. He failed. “Now, look,” he protested. “After all, I'm just a badly scared man.”

“Which boat is the *Four Winds*?”

The small man indicated a two-masted schooner of some proportions, one that had the lines of a fisherman.

Doc Savage then took the small man by the neck. The small man realized that something unpleasant was going to happen to him, and his earlier yelling was nothing to the howl he now emitted. But Doc worked on the nerve centers in the man's neck for a while, after which he exerted steady and very hard pressure.

The effect on the small man was similar to that of an anaesthetic of the so-called “general” type. At the end he was completely limp, eyes open but partly out of control. He had no conscious control over his breathing so that it was deep and violent, after the fashion of a soundly sleeping man.

Doc turned quickly, ran to the cab with the small man and dumped him inside with Albert Lee.

The bronze man then headed for the *Four Winds*.

It was now quite dark.

The two masts of the *Four Winds*, and the rigging that draped from them, could be distinguished against the background of the bay, which was somewhat like a dark mirror.

Doc Savage followed shadows. He became a shadow that blended with the other shadows, and he made no noise.

The dock was a fairly long one, with only the one boat tied to it. Across the shore end was a wooden fence which bore some kind of a sign on a swinging gate, the sign probably being a notice that it was private property and to keep off.

There was a complete silence.

It was broken by a man who came scrambling and yelling out of the schooner *Four Winds*. The man was not yelling loud, because he was not wasting breath. His noises were more like mewings, and they were the product of terror, apparently. The voice belonged to Mr. Abbett, although it was not much like Mr. Abbett's voice.

THE FIERY MENACE

He fell, getting from boat to dock, tripping over the boat rail. A man would normally have lain there for a moment after a fall that hard, but Abbett was up instantly and running.

He ran straight toward the end of the dock.

DOC SAVAGE stepped out of the shadows and stood in his path.

Abbett seemed not to see Doc. When it appeared certain that he did not see the bronze man he showed that he had by yelling, "Run! Run for your life! That damned thing is loose!"

He went straight past Doc in a flying leap that took him over the fence across the end of the dock. He went on up the path, still running madly.

Doc Savage did not run. He began to advance cautiously toward the schooner, keeping in a crouching position and staying behind the shelter of the large dock piling which projected above the dock level.

He had covered about half the distance from the shore end of the dock to the schooner when Abbett began shrieking. Doc turned his head and saw the fiery thing pursuing Abbett.

The thing was as impossible as the rabbit a magician takes out of a hat.

It was a ball of flames—or, roughly, a ball of a thing which had a tail of bundling red tongues. The flames, however, were not completely like flames in that they did not give off much light and no visible smoke.

This apparition pursued Mr. Abbett!

Mr. Abbett put on speed and noise. He had been traveling fast before, but now he practically stopped touching the ground. His howls, punctuated for breath, were somewhat like the uproar of a large dog getting a thrashing.

The apparition gained on Mr. Abbett, but not very rapidly. The thing also changed shape somewhat, so that, for a while, it resembled a bat of an affair—if you could use your imagination when looking at it—with one wing smaller than the other. Then it took on a vaguely female outline, but this did not last long. As a whole its outline was intangible.

Doc Savage was now pursuing the thing. He was gaining on both the object and Mr. Abbett, which was a sprinting feat.

Mr. Abbett reached the street, and on that level going he did better. He was not howling, now; he was saving his breath. Escape seemed to be his only thought. He saw Doc Savage's parked cab and set a course for it.

Doc knew what would happen then, and knew he could not prevent it. So he was not surprised when he heard the cab door slam and the engine come to life.

Abbett's departure with the cab containing the small man and Albert Lee was violent and fast.

Doc Savage stopped running. There was no sense chasing the cab. He watched the apparition of flame.

The shape of fire did not pursue the car at all. It slackened speed, seemed to hang undecided in the air, then

THE FIERY MENACE

began to drift up and away. It got as high as the treetops and kept rising slowly.

THE yelling and bellowing had attracted attention. A number of people were in the shabby street, and they began ogling the thing which was floating away in the night sky.

A man arrived who was obviously—he wore a large badge and time clock—the night watchman in the boat yard.

Doc said, “Give me your gun.”

The watchman handed over a weapon that was almost of Jesse James vintage. Doc cocked the ancient revolver and aimed at the object of fire floating away.

“Shoots low and to the left, last time I tried her,” said the watchman.

The gun bellowed out fire, smoke and noise that sent the spectators scapering for cover. The apparition continued to float upward undisturbed.

“You try it,” Doc told the watchman, disgusted. “It is your gun.”

“I never could hit anything with it, either.” The watchman took the pistol and made some more fire, smoke and noise with it. “See?” he said. “Hell, you couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with this thing!”

The reddish apparition in the sky slowly faded away and disappeared. It did not become invisible because of height or distance. It simply faded out and could no longer be distinguished in the night heavens.

“Maybe I hit it after all,” suggested the watchman optimistically.

Doc made no comment.

The watchman asked, “What was it—one of them Fourth-of-July balloons with a candle in it, or something?”

“Did you see it chase that man?” Doc asked.

The watchman gave that a moment of silent consideration.

“Who are you kidding?” he asked. “Chase him, hell!”

“Then you did not see it?”

“If you want a sensible answer,” said the watchman, after more thought, “no, I didn't see anything of the kind, because I got here too late. And if that thing chased a man, I'm damned glad I got here too late because I wouldn't want to see anything like that.”

Doc Savage went to a telephone and enlisted the aid of the State police in seeking persons who answered the descriptions of, respectively, Mr. Abbett, Albert Lee, and the small man, name unknown. The only explanation he gave the State police was that he was Doc Savage. Normally, this explanation would have been sufficient, but it did not seem quite so this time. However, they promised to put out a teletype pickup order, and Doc Savage did not press the point.

THE FIERY MENACE

DOC then searched the schooner *Four Winds*, finding her to be a vessel of good hull, well found, but not a craft of luxury. In fact, the odor of fish cargoes was noxiously apparent below her decks. If she was as seaworthy as her smell, remarked the cannon-bearing watchman, she was very seaworthy indeed.

“Brother, I don't know whether I should let you search her this way,” said the watchman, but indecisively.

Doc's search turned up:

Papers showing Buck Stevens had bought the boat three weeks previously for eleven thousand nine hundred seventy dollars.

No trace of Buck Stevens. Not at first.

A photograph of Buck Stevens—large, burly, freckled, much-toothed of grin and wearing a new suit. Stevens' arms were around three girls—two of them blondes—who looked somewhat water front, even in the photograph.

A well-stocked food locker, which included stores of caviar and champagne.

A clipping from a newspaper, a photograph of several men standing on a ship deck. Buck Stevens was second from the left, grinning. The printed caption read:

Survivors of the torpedoed *Astriatic* who were landed in Boston today.

A money belt containing sixteen thousand dollars in cash.

No sign of Mrs. Abbett.

No trace of her brother, Fred Clevenger.

Clippings from all the newspapers about the body that had been found in the chandelier in Doc Savage's headquarters building. Clippings of the statements of Mrs. Murphy and mux-operator Millie Gross' statement about seeing the fiery thing float out of the lobby.

Clippings from a scientific surgical journal about Doc Savage developing a new method of short-wave therapy.

Clipping from a fact-picture magazine, showing Doc Savage and labeling him a man of mystery.

Ditto from an editorial page, labeling Doc a possible potential menace to society—a maniac who had smashed a camera of one of the newspaper's photographers when the latter had snapped a picture after being requested not to do so.

A button off the vest of Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Monk Mayfair.

One dead man.

The latter was floating under the dock, and came to their attention when the tide started to ebb and carried the corpse into view. Cause of death seemed to be a remarkable hole in the mans head.

THE FIERY MENACE

Doc Savage, having recognized the man from the pictures he had found on the schooner, asked the watchman, "Know him?"

"Sure. Cap."

"Cap who?"

"The captain of this boat. Skipper of the *Four Winds*. Buck Stevens."

"Have you any idea why he should be involved with a vampire?"

"Vampire?"

"Did he ever discuss a vampire with you?"

"He never discussed anything with me except a blonde who lives around the corner. It was the blonde's mother he discussed, rather. She ran him off."

"Have you any idea why he should be found like this?"

"The only idea I've got," said the watchman, "is the one that tells me I had better be calling the police."

The button off Monk's vest was lying on the galley floor, which was covered with battleship linoleum. Doc Savage contemplated the floor for a while, then his trilling sound—the small, exotic note that was an unconscious thing he did in moments of mental stress—game into existence and lasted long enough to make the watchman look puzzled.

Doc took out a knife, made some long cuts in the linoleum and began tearing it up. He tore carefully, touching the surface as little as possible, and made rolls of the stuff which he tied with marlin twine.

He carried the linoleum with him when he left the boat.

"Hey, that's thievery," said the watchman.

"So it is, and there has been murder, too," Doc Savage said dryly. "You had better tell the police about it."

The bronze man walked half a mile to a cab stand, got in a cab and gave his midtown address.

Chapter VIII. SLIPS THAT ARE 'TWIXT

AS the taxi rolled across the causeway and past the end-of-the-line subway station, Doc switched on the portable radio and said, "Pat, are you there?"

He got no response from the radio and said, "Pat, come in please."

Later, he examined the set, and it seemed to be functioning.

Shortly, Long Tom Roberts' voice said, "Doc!" He sounded sheepish.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Yes?”

“If we had a barrel,” Long Tom said, “and if I lay over the barrel, it would be a great favor if you would wear out some shoe leather on the part of my anatomy that would be uppermost.”

“What happened?” Doc asked.

“I did about the most stupid thing a man can do; I underestimated another man's intelligence,” Long Tom explained.

“Yes?”

“That souse, Bullyhide Jones, was not the souse I figured him to be. He gave me the slip. Just walked out on me as slick as you could imagine, and I have no more idea than a rabbit where he went.”

“Where are you now?”

“Lost-souling it around the street near the bar and grill where Bullyhide gave me the ghost act.”

Long Tom sounded utterly put out with himself.

Doc asked, “Long Tom, have you heard Pat on the air?”

“No. Doesn't she answer?”

Doc said, “No, she does not come in. And, under the circumstances, she should have her set cut in. She was watching a man named Samuel H. B. Stover, who is involved in this.”

“Involved in what?” Long Tom asked. “You found out anything, yet?”

Doc Savage gave a terse description of what had happened at the boat yard on City Island, furnishing enough facts to paint the picture, but giving no deductions and no possible conclusions.

When he finished, Long Tom said, “Wait a minute! A button off Monk's coat, you say?”

“His vest.”

“Oh, oh! That isn't good. What do you want me to do?”

“Go to headquarters,” Doc Savage directed, “and find out what has happened to Monk and Ham. I will be there shortly.”

WHEN Doc Savage walked into the reception room of his headquarters on the eighty-sixth floor of the midtown skyscraper, he found Long Tom Roberts sitting stiff and straight in a chair and picking a wooden pencil apart with a fingernail, a small fragment of wood at a time.

“They seem to be in a mess,” he told Doc. “It seems Monk and Ham got some kind of a package out of a chandelier in the lobby downstairs. It was not out of the chandelier the dead man was found in, however. They did not let the police see what they got—a rather greasy-looking package, according to reports—and the

THE FIERY MENACE

police are somewhat irritated about it.”

“Irritated?” Doc Savage said thoughtfully.

“The police claim Monk and Ham concealed evidence in connection with a murder when they made off with the package,” Long Tom explained. “You can't blame the cops much, at that. But to get on with what seems to have happened: Monk and Ham had some kind of fight on the street near here, and Monk was seized. A clerk saw the affair and has since reported it to the police, something Ham did not do. The police are unhappy about that, too.

“Then Monk was found. He was in a hysterical condition, hiding under a parked car in Brooklyn. They brought him to a Manhattan hospital, found out who he was from stuff in his pockets and notified Ham. Incidentally, Monk did not seem to have been able to tell them at the hospital who he was. His condition was very strange. A state of hysteria caused by fear, the hospital people claim. Ham naturally rushed out to the hospital.”

Long Tom suddenly broke the pencil, what was left of it, in two parts and hurled the portions on the floor. He was a thin, unhealthy-looking man who would be considered a good business prospect by an undertaker who judged from appearances. But Long Tom's looks were deceptive; no one could recall his ever having been ill, and usually his nerves were about as stable as a rock. He was jittery now, however.

“At the hospital,” he said, “something happened.”

“What?”

“The hospital people aren't too sure, themselves,” Long Tom said. “Oh, they know what it resulted in. Both Monk and Ham were spirited out of the hospital, somehow. There was a fight in Monk's room, but not a very violent one, and no one knows who fought or whether anyone was hurt. The fight caused an investigation, and they found that Monk was gone. Later, they checked up, found that Ham had entered the hospital a little before the fight occurred, and that he had not checked out again and therefore he was missing, too. But who got Monk and Ham—if anyone got them—is not known, except that there are reports of a small, strange man having been seen around the place.”

“Small man?” Doc Savage said sharply.

“Yes.”

“Bright eyes, buckteeth, features receding from his teeth and eyes so that his face has somewhat the aspect of a skeleton?”

“Oh, you've seen him!” Long Tom frowned. “Wait a minute! You said something about a small man who came running and howling across that boat yard on City Island.”

Doc Savage's metallic features were expressionless.

“Same one,” he said.

“He was in the cab this Abbett fled in?”

“Yes.”

THE FIERY MENACE

DOC SAVAGE unrolled his linoleum from the galley of the *Four Winds*, spreading the pieces out on the laboratory floor and fitting them together in the same position they had occupied on the galley floor. The laboratory was the largest of the suite of three rooms which comprised their headquarters. It had enough floor space for a factory and contained enough intricate apparatus to confuse a layman completely.

Doc switched off the lights and turned ultraviolet light on the linoleum. There was nothing remarkable about the ultraviolet projector; it simply gave out light wave lengths outside the visible spectrum. Nor was there anything particularly amazing about the button off Monk's vest, which was composed of a chemical that would leave a mark that was unnoticeable to the unaided eye, but which stood out vividly under the black light. The ultraviolet-lamp filter was a common one treated with oxide of nickel, and the buttons were an improved alkaline salt of fluorescein coupled with anthracene. Other substances which would fluoresce under the black light were common aspirin, many minerals, and even the pupil of the human eye. Though Monk's vest button had been used, it happened that Ham had written the message.

(It has been, and still is, the policy of Doc Savage Magazine not to disclose the nature of chemical formulae used by Doc Savage because of the fact that some of the mixtures are extremely dangerous in the mixing process, and also because many of them would be possible of misuse in the hands of the wrong individuals. The matter of ultraviolet light and fluorescing materials has become common enough, however, that such censorship is hardly necessary. The use of "black" light has become common in testing fabrics and materials, in verifying documents, and so on.—The Editors.)

The message:

If you ever get this, Doc, be more careful than you have ever been. Have not found what happened to Monk. It must have been terrible. He is still unable to talk coherently. He is with me. This affair devilish thing involving—

Long Tom said, "Ham didn't get to finish."

Doc Savage did not comment, and Long Tom rubbed his jaw angrily. "If Ham hadn't been so damned long-winded in writing that stuff on the linoleum, he might have got more information down," he complained. "That's what comes from being a lawyer. Can't say anything without using so many words it can't be understood."

Doc Savage changed the subject by asking, "Going back to Bullyhide Jones—did you learn anything at all about him?"

Long Tom nodded.

"He was *not* a submarine man," he said. "He was a radio operator. Been on commercial vessels all his life, the way I understood it. I got that much out of him."

"Did you learn anything else?"

"Nothing that seemed to amount to anything. When he was still half cocked, he mumbled something about a game of dominoes, but—"

"Dominoes," Doc Savage said. "Are you sure he mentioned a game of dominoes? He could not have mentioned just the *Domino*?"

Long Tom frowned. "Well—say! He could have, at that."

"On second thought," Doc suggested, "would you say there was a chance he just mentioned the *Domino*?"

"On second thought, I'd say there was a darned good chance."

"Then suppose you see what you can dig up about the *Domino*?"

"Fish, food, fowl or game?"

"A boat," Doc Savage said. "A freighter, American registry, small."

Long Tom nodded and muttered, "It's about time we got a break in this thing. After all, there should be a limit to the slips that come 'twixt cup and lip."

Chapter IX. THE SLIP THAT CUT A THROAT

PATRICIA SAVAGE said in a disgusted voice over the radio, "They talk about wild—goose chases and I never chased a wild goose, but I think I know what it's like—now."

Doc Savage jumped to the more powerful headquarters radio and said, "Pat, has anything happened to you?"

"Sure, the worst thing that could happen; nothing!"

"You are all right?"

"Yes. Bored, is all."

"Where is Samuel H. B. Stover, the man with the new furniture store?"

"He is now with fear," Pat said. "And what I mean, he has a scare with bells on. However, he seems to be a fellow who has been scared before, because he is not making any wild moves. Right now he is holed up in a bungalow which he just rented across the river in New Jersey."

"Have you any way of telling how long he plans to be there?"

"Some time, I'd say. He bought a stock of canned goods at a grocery store and took it in with him. My idea is that he has holed up and has no idea of stirring. I had a dickens of a time following him here, and I don't think he was expecting a woman to be following him, or I wouldn't have been able to do it."

"Keep an eye on him," Doc said, "and wait for us."

The west—central section of the laboratory floor space was crowded with metal cases containing chemicals, metals and other lab supplies. Doc Savage went to these cases, began searching, inspecting the contents and selecting certain objects.

Long Tom finished talking over the telephone, dropped the receiver on the hook, and approached Doc, beginning, "Well, that seems to be about all I can dig up—"

THE FIERY MENACE

Doc Savage said, "Long Tom, can you help assemble the following objects? First, we want a thin-rubber balloon of the type sent aloft by weather stations to show wind direction at various altitudes. Second, we need helium for inflating the balloon. Then some tissue paper, red. A very light battery—a radio type will do—and some wire and some light bulbs which the battery will operate."

Long Tom was puzzled for a moment, then understanding made his eyebrows go up.

"You're going to make a vampire!" he said.

"We are going to try," Doc agreed. "What did you find out about the *Domino*?"

"She was a ship, all right. Freighter," he explained. "That was what I started to tell you. I think I've got about all the dope on her I can jar loose right now. The shipping company that owns her said they were not at liberty to divulge her whereabouts. That means she is carrying troops or war supplies or something."

"By any chance," Doc said, "did you get the idea she has been sunk?"

Long Tom nodded quickly.

"That was exactly the idea I got," he said. "You know there is a practice of not revealing such information now."

IT was a hilly suburban section where the streets were winding lanes paved with blacktop. The trees were large and pleasant lumps in the darkness, and the wind was crisp and clean off the New Jersey hills. The houses stood far apart and they were neatly precise, each dwelling fitting into its surroundings.

Doc Savage drove slowly and watched the pavement. When he saw four sticks, twigs off trees, arranged at the side of the pavement where they were conspicuous, yet not in a spot where they would likely be disturbed by passing cars, he said, "This is the place."

Long Tom Roberts saw the sticks and nodded. They were arranged in a Mayan symbol meaning, "I am close by, and there is danger."

The Mayan tongue was the ancient one, and Doc and his aids had learned it long ago in an adventure in Central America. Since then they had used it, and the primitive sign language, for communication when they did not wish to be understood by others. So far as they knew, they were the only persons in the so-called civilized world who understood it.

Doc parked and Pat came out of the shadows.

"Next house. About two hundred yards," she said. "Samuel H. B. Stover is still there. What have you got?"

Doc began assembling the contrivance he and Long Tom had made out of the balloon and the rest of the stuff. He had attached streamers of tissue paper to the balloon with rubber cement so that they would flutter and give the thing the aspect of changing shape. Inside the balloon was the affair of the batteries and the electric bulb, these light enough in weight that the inflated balloon would carry them upward.

"What is that thing?" Pat repeated.

THE FIERY MENACE

Long Tom answered her, explaining, "Oh, that! It's a vampire. We couldn't get hold of a battery light enough, though, as we had to substitute hydrogen gas for helium. The hydrogen is inflammable, but it will lift more than the helium."

Pat frowned. "Look here—do you think this vampire thing is something like that?"

Long Tom looked at Doc Savage for an answer, but the bronze man made no comment. Long Tom shrugged. "Search me," he said. "All I know is that this one is a fair imitation."

"I don't believe it is," Pat said.

"Is what?"

"Something like this. The real vampire, I mean." Pat was thoughtful a moment. "None of the people involved in this strike me as fools. Maybe there are one or two who do not have the mentality of Einstein, but I don't think they are frightened by a hoax. Have you noticed that they all have something in common?"

Long Tom said, "They're all scared, if that is what you mean."

"They have something else in common," Pat pointed out. "All of them have led adventuresome lives, possibly with the exception of Mrs. Abbett. Although the way she blacked up as a Negro boy and involved Doc in the thing shows she isn't adverse to a little adventure herself."

"Yes," agreed Long Tom, "and all of the men have, at one time or another, followed the sea as sailors."

"And all of them have been in one war or another, at some time or other."

"That's right."

"I don't think," Pat said, "that such people are frightened by anything so simple as a toy balloon with a light in it."

THEIR quarry was in a small house made of red brick, with two windows facing the street and a small, uncovered porch at the east corner. At the sides and back was some shrubbery, but none of it was more than waist high. One window showed a faint light behind Venetian blinds, and Pat indicated this, said, "Stover is in there."

Doc Savage explained the plan.

"Fear," Doc said, "is a wild horse. A scared man exaggerates the size and probable consequences of the new fears which assail him. A little added worry piled on a man in such a condition is like pulling the trigger on a gun. You get results out of all proportion to what you put into it."

"This"—Pat indicated the balloon gadget "is the trigger on your gun?"

"Let us hope."

Pat nodded thoughtfully. "You know, considering the way these people have been acting, it may not be such a small trigger at that."

THE FIERY MENACE

Long Tom asked, "How do we work it?"

"You do the manipulating," Doc told him. "Come around to the back. Here is a fishing pole with a casting reel attached, and plenty of line on the reel. Pat will get well away from the house with the gadget, which she will release fully lighted at a signal. You will be close to the house, but hidden from view, with the reel and the end of the line attached to the gadget. You will reel it in, causing it to come toward the house. It will be my job to make sure that Samuel H. B. Stover sees it and becomes thoroughly scared. At a crucial moment I will go through the motions of destroying or driving away the thing, in order to persuade him to take me into his confidence."

"What will be your signal to start all that?" Pat asked.

"Two quick flashes of light thrown against one of the windows from the inside of the house."

Pat nodded. "At least, I don't see where this can get us in any trouble," she said.

Doc Savage walked openly to the front door of the house and knocked. He did not expect an answer, but he got one, a man's perfectly controlled voice saying, "Yes, who is it?"

"Looking for Stover—Samuel H. B. Stover," Doc Savage said.

"This is Stover. What do you want?"

"I wish to speak to you."

"About what?"

"A matter of a vampire," Doc Savage said.

There was a silence. Just enough of a silence, Doc Savage reflected afterward, to seem right.

"Come in," the voice said, and the door opened.

Doc Savage—suddenly suspicious—did not go in. But it was not necessary. The man who had opened the door hit him in the chest with a bottle, hit him very hard so that the bottle broke and its contents, liquid, gushed over Doc's shoulders and face. Instantly, he began having plenty of trouble with his eyes. The stuff was xylyl bromide in some solution.

(One of the early forms of lachrymators, or tear gas.)

The man turned and, not hurrying, switched on the lights. He switched them off, switched them on again, then off.

"This," he told Doc Savage, "is what a long nose gets you."

The man went away. He went silently, on tiptoes. Doc Savage, knowing he was in no shape to do so, did not try to follow him.

Doc got down beside the door and began getting coat and shirt off. He was also trying to rid his eyes of the stinging, blinding, tear-rushing effect of the gas.

THE FIERY MENACE

Suddenly remembering the light signal—two flashes—that the man had given, Doc shouted, “Do not do that! Keep the thing under cover! Pat, Long Tom—you hear me?”

They heard him, but it was too late to do much about it, because Pat had already switched on the light in the balloon gadget, and Long Tom was reeling it toward the house.

THAT was the situation the police found. They were New Jersey State troopers and New York City detectives and men from the sheriff’s office of Westchester County.

Some of the officers grabbed hold of Doc Savage.

Others grabbed Long Tom and Pat.

They got the balloon gadget.

Four of them went into the house. They were inside four or five minutes without a sound. Then two of them came out, and one of the pair was somewhat greenish.

“One body,” said the officer who was not ill.

“Anybody else?” he was asked.

“Just the one body.” The officer looked at the other policeman who was ill.

“One of those holes in the head. It’s enough to make anybody sick.”

They put handcuffs on Doc Savage, Long Tom and Pat. They were grim about the way they did it.

A police official confronted Doc Savage. The man was Chapman, head of the homicide squad.

Chapman shook his head slowly. “I was afraid this would happen sometime.”

“You think we came here and murdered a man?” Doc Savage asked, and kept the strain out of his voice.

“What do you say about it?”

Doc said, “We were outsmarted.”

Chapman indicated the balloon gadget. “Anyone can see what that would look like in the air. A man was found dead today at City Island, and there was a report of a thing like that traveling through the air. A man was found dead in a chandelier in your office building, and there was a report of a thing like that balloon being seen. There is a man dead in Washington—but no report yet of the thing being seen in the air. However, all three men, and this man here, died from rather fantastic holes in their heads.”

Doc Savage did not reply immediately. This man Chapman was not awed, and he could not be bluffed. Chapman had been demoted at least twice in his career for handling important people without gloves, and he was not a man who changed his ways. An honest man, and one who would go ahead on an idea.

“We came here working on those murders,” Doc Savage said. “It is a strange affair. The lives of other people

THE FIERY MENACE

are in danger.”

Chapman contemplated the bronze man. “You claim you were framed.”

Doc Savage said, “What is more unpleasant for us to admit, we were outguessed.”

“You know how the police happened to be here?” Chapman asked.

“There can only be one answer to that,” Doc told him. “You got a tip.”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“The usual way—telephone.”

Doc Savage said nothing.

Chapman added, “This one wasn't anonymous. She gave her name.”

Doc Savage, no change in his voice, said, “A woman, eh?”

Chapman nodded.

Pat said grimly, “That Mrs. Abbett, bless her thoughtful heart.”

“Mrs. Abbett?” said Chapman, puzzled.

“You should get acquainted with her,” Pat told him. “You might find her interesting.”

Chapman eyed Pat strangely. “It wasn't any Mrs. Abbett who told us to come here and we would find Doc Savage and Long Tom Roberts murdering a man.”

“No?”

“It was you!”

PAT did not jump. She did move back a step. She said something that was more sound than word, or words, then stood there with her mouth a tightly compressed thing, as if no words would ever come out.

“What's the idea?” Chapman asked her. “Changed your mind about working with the police for some reason?”

Police detectives and photographers had been working inside the house. One of them came out of the back room, saying quickly, “Hey, the guy was writing a letter. He said he was going to have to skip the country because Doc Savage was after him and his life was in danger. Letter was to a friend. It ain't finished.”

Patricia Savage was staring at Chapman as if she was not hearing or seeing anything.

Long Tom Roberts said, “Chapman, what gave you the idea the tip came from Pat?”

THE FIERY MENACE

“Her voice,” Chapman said. “A voice like hers, you would recognize anywhere. And she said she was Pat Savage.”

“Somebody imitated her voice!” Long Tom snapped.

Chapman shook his head. “I don't think so. I mulled that possibility around in my head, too. But you see it was what she said—not the tip, but the explanation she gave for what she was doing—that makes me think it was she.”

Doc Savage put in calmly enough, “Mind giving us that explanation?”

Chapman looked at the bronze man steadily.

“I don't remember it word for word, of course,” he said. “But it went like this: She said you were a fine man in the beginning of your career, and that you accomplished what amounted to miracles for the good of humanity and the suppression of crime. She said you had been trained for that kind of a career; trained by scientists so that you had a lot more ability than a man ordinarily has. She said that for a long time you were a fine man, and then you began to change.”

Another policeman came out of the back room and said, “We seem to have identified him.”

“Who is he?” Chapman asked.

“Guy by the name of Samuel H. B. Stover.”

Chapman nodded and looked at Pat, said, “That is who you said it would be.”

Pat was still wordless.

Chapman turned back to Doc Savage and continued, “She said over the telephone that she could see you changing slowly. She believed the way you lived—few friends, no recreation to speak of, continuous and concentrated study—had caused your sense of values to change. You were beginning to take things from people, things that did not belong to you, and that lately it was murder. She explained it that way. It sounded reasonable.”

Doc made no comment.

Chapman frowned. “I say reasonable, but maybe that isn't it, after all. Anyway, it is possible. Murder is never reasonable. But a man like you—I've often wondered if you would ever turn crooked, and I've been afraid of the day when you would. You working against the law, Mr. Savage—that would be something. Really something!”

Doc said nothing to that.

Chapman spread his hands as if he had summed it all up and was ready to finish. “Don't think I accepted that telephone explanation right off the bat. I gave it some serious thought. I did some investigating and found that, during the past few months you have had some trouble with the police. You never had any serious trouble with the police before. There never was a hint of suspicion pointing toward you.”

With a shade of metal in his voice to show how serious he considered the situation, Doc Savage said, “Chapman, you are unquestionably one of the most efficient and determined police officials in the country.”

THE FIERY MENACE

“Thank you,” Chapman said. “But what is the object of telling me that?”

“There would not be, under the circumstances, much use arguing with you, would there?” Doc asked.

Chapman considered. “Not a bit,” he said. “We are going to lock you up. The district attorney will place charges against you at once. You and the others.” He turned to Pat. “Since you have changed your mind since telephoning me, I will have to include you in the jail party.”

Pat relaxed slowly and rubbed a hand over her eyes. She did not speak.

Doc Savage said, “Mind if we have a look at the dead man?”

Chapman surprised Doc by saying, “I don't see why not.”

Chapman's willingness had a reason. The man was a clever detective for all of his words. There was perfect deceit in his manner, which meant no visible deceit at all, as he said, “Just a moment,” and stepped outside. He returned in a moment, remarking, “Might as well have our cars brought up, you know.”

What he had done was step outside and tell the police photographers to take photographs of Doc Savage the moment he saw the dead man, in order to record his facial expressions at that critical instant. Photographs normally would be impressive evidence in a trial court.

The photographers got the pictures, using “magic-eye” cameras which took pictures in quick succession by photo-flash bulbs. The bulbs were in new-style rotating holders so that they could be fired rapidly one after another. Three photographers got pictures, and the glare was blinding.

There was expression on Doc Savage's face. Quick astonishment. Then there was sound—his low, trilling note, with a sharp surprise in it.

Pat Savage straightened a pointing arm at the body and opened her mouth. Then Doc made a clucking sound which was “No” in the Mayan language, and she went silent. She did not tell them that the man dead on the floor with the weird hole in his head was not Samuel H. B. Stover.

The dead man was small, with buckteeth and prominent eyes and features which receded from teeth and eyes so that his face had been skeletonlike before death. He was the small man who had run away from the schooner *Four Winds* at City Island.

A policeman said, “We found a driver's license in his pockets and some other stuff that says his name is Samuel H. B. Stover. A guy by that name rented the house, too.”

Chapman asked for the driver's license, took it and examined it, nodded his head with satisfaction. “Description of his personal appearance checks with the license.”

Long Tom Roberts gave Doc Savage and Pat a look of horror. “This is *something!*” he said hoarsely. “They even fixed up a license to show it is Stover. I've seen some careful plans in my time, but this one skins them all!”

Chapter X. THE SCARED MAN

DOC SAVAGE said low words that sounded as if he was muttering. The words were Mayan, and they advised Long Tom to “Start a commotion, Long Tom, and pay no attention to me when I order you to stop it.”

Taking the instructions at face value, not asking any questions, Long Tom stood up and calmly kicked a policeman in the shins and, when the officer was up on one leg, booted that leg out from under him so that he went flat on the floor.

Pat helped things along by jumping at Chapman, who obviously was the most important policeman there.

“Stop it!” Doc shouted.

Paying no attention, Pat threw her handcuffed wrists over Chapman, making a loop about the man's chest which restrained his arms. She then tripped Chapman and bit him. Chapman made no sounds, but became very active trying to get away.

“Stop that!” ordered Doc Savage in a loud voice. “You idiots are just making it worse!”

The bronze man sounded very concerned and emphatic. He continued to insist in a loud voice that the fight stop.

His insisting did, after a few moments, exactly what he wanted it to do. It misled the police to the belief that he had no intention of putting up any resistance. Half a dozen men had started for him as a precaution the moment the fight began. But now they joined the Long Tom and Pat trouble, leaving two men holding Doc's elbows.

“Stop that!” Doc kept ordering.

As many men as could get hold of Long Tom were trying to hold him. Long Tom, who looked as feeble as an invalid, was giving all of them trouble. He became the kernel in a tangle of arms and legs on the floor which looked as involved as several enraged octopi tied in a bundle.

Chapman was shouting for somebody, anybody, to haul Pat off him and, for the love of mud, to be careful how they took her loose from his ear.

Over in a corner, a New Jersey trooper decided the affair had its comical angles and began laughing.

Doc Savage took a sudden step backward, a longer step to the left, a short step forward, which put him on the other side of the two men who had been holding his elbows, but who, in the excitement, had released their grip. Doc shouldered hard against the guard as if he was rooster fighting, and knocked the guard against the second guard. The two guards held to each other and danced across the floor, trying to keep their balance. They fell against the laughing trooper, upset him, and walked on him helplessly while the trooper cursed fire, brimstone and sparks.

Because the house was full of policemen, the only logical escape was through the window. There was only one window, and it had sash and storm sash. Enough glass to cut a man to ribbons, Doc knew from past experience. He had dived headfirst through a window just once in his life.

The police had removed stuff from his pockets and placed it on a table. While the two guards were walking on the trooper, Doc reached the table. He knew what he wanted, a flat metal case which contained several

THE FIERY MENACE

objects which could be steel marbles, but were grenades. He got one of the grenades out, threw it against the window.

The grenade deafened everyone and took glass, storm glass, frames and part of the trim out of the window. Resistance of compressing air in the room caused the glass to fly outward into the night, and Doc followed it.

HE hit the ground in a rosebush that was like being bitten by a thousand snakes. He went on, veered to the right, and started shouting.

He had spent innumerable hours learning to imitate voices as a part of his training, and now he did a fair job with Chapman's rather distinctive bull voice.

“Get to a telephone and spread an alarm!” he bellowed. “Savage is escaping!”

He shouted the same thing three more times while running toward a parked police car in which a driver was sitting, popeyed and gandering his neck out of a window. It was a sedan. It was also quite dark in the vicinity. Doc yanked the back door open, piled in. Still using Chapman's voice, he shouted, “Get going! We've got to call more men!”

The startled driver, confused in the darkness, put the car in motion.

“We need ambulances, too!” Doc shouted for the effect.

The car rolled into the highway. The driver switched on his lights.

It was going to be a matter of seconds before he turned and saw, in the reflected glare of the headlights, that his passenger was not Chapman.

Doc shouted out once more.

“Hold it—let me out!” he bellowed, as excitedly as he could manage. “You can call reserves and an ambulance. I'll stay here. Let me out! Get going!” When the police machine slowed, he piled out while it was still in motion and slammed the door hard enough to further confuse the driver. “Get going!” he bellowed.

The driver went off down the road.

Doc took to the adjacent brush.

Two police cars pulled out of the yard of the murdered Samuel H. B. Stover's house and began pursuit, sirens making them sound like shrill-voiced foxhounds.

Lights had come on in houses in the neighborhood as householders, aroused by the explosion and uproar, piled out of bed. Human curiosity being what it was, they would soon be prowling the vicinity to learn what had happened.

The police cars went baying past the spot where Doc Savage was concealed. The headlights of the machine they were pursuing came to a halt far down the road. The driver had heard the sirens and stopped, so this was about the end of the diversion.

THE FIERY MENACE

Doc Savage went back to the house to get Long Tom and Pat.

DURING the excitement when he had blown the window out of the room, he had—it was not accidental—pocketed the small metal case containing the assortment of grenades. He used one of these now, one which contained a gas which Doc Savage had developed. The gas had a secret formula—secret, except that it was lying in the war department's vaults in Washington, ready for use should the use of gas in warfare be revived. The gas was one which produced a harmless and very temporary unconsciousness. It had one other quality which led Doc Savage to use it more than he employed any other gas: the stuff was only effective for somewhat less than a minute after it was released. Mixing with the air nullified the stuff.

A policeman jumped nervously when one of the gas globules hit him, then stared down foolishly at the front of his vest where the fragments of glass clung and the liquid was rapidly vaporizing. He went to sleep almost at once, slowly lying down. The stuff did not take hold instantly, and there was an irresistible impulse on the part of the victim to lie down.

The other officers in the room went down shortly afterward.

Considering the circumstances, Doc Savage's statement that, "It might be a good idea to leave now," was remarkably calm. It was much more placid than the departure from the room made by Long Tom and Pat, who, upon the collapse of the first officer, had immediately held their breaths.

When they were all outside in the night, and running, Doc Savage caught the arms of Long Tom and Pat and began guiding them to the left, then in a circular route until it was evident that he was heading for the spot where they had stood when they planned their invasion of the house. This meant that they were remaining in the vicinity of the house instead of getting away. In the distance, along the road, the sirens had gone silent. But now they had started up again and were sounding like tomcats on their way back.

Pat was apprehensive. "They catch us again and they'll put us in strait jackets," she warned.

"But if we merely take flight and escape," Doc Savage reminded her, "we are practically without a clue. With a murder charge against us, and Monk and Ham in trouble, it would be no time to be in a helpless position."

"If you see any clues lying around loose here," Pat said, "you see more than I see."

Doc Savage said nothing until a moment later, when he halted them and said, "All right. Here is what we will do: We will separate and meet at the road corner, a mile south, the corner we passed on the way in. Meet in the woods on the northwest quarter of the crossroads."

"Doc, it's a wonder the police haven't heard us," Pat said uneasily.

The bronze man had been speaking rather loudly, and now, as if he realized this, he lowered his voice, said, "In case the police get you, tell them who we know are the principals in the case—the brains behind it. If we can keep clear of the police, we will try to follow up that information ourselves and see that justice is done. But if the police catch us, there is nothing to do but tell the police who is behind it."

Pat didn't get this. Neither did Long Tom. Doc Savage might have some idea of who was master-minding the series of hole-in-the-head murders, but if he did, he was the only one.

"Come on," Doc Savage said. "We will scatter down the road a short distance."

THE FIERY MENACE

He got them in motion. The sirens, very close now, made enough racket that they could travel at a run without much danger of being overheard.

They ran some distance.

Pat said, "When do we divide, like you said?"

"We do not," Doc Savage said. "Come on. Run for it!"

THEY continued running. They were able to run for some time, because a policeman carelessly left the siren moaning on one of the cars that had come back. Eventually, someone called the police driver an assortment of names and got the siren cut off.

"Sh-h-h!"

Long Tom warned, and they slowed their pace to a careful creeping.

"I hope," Pat said in a low voice, "we have our clue. But I wish somebody would show it to me."

"We opened the sack for it," Doc said, unconcerned.

Pat plodded ahead, digesting this. She became involved with a thorn bush, valiantly refrained from making any remarks about the bush and extricated herself.

"I don't even see the sack," she said suddenly.

Doc said, "Be patient."

"I'm never patient when I'm scared," Pat informed him. "You lead us back to where we started to that house, then you say to meet a mile down the road. You talk about telling the police who is masterminding the thing, if we're caught. If I knew who was head hyena, I would sure have told the police when they had us. And to cap it, you keep us from scattering, which is what you'd just said to do."

They came to a pasture that was fairly open. Close to the fence was a path made by cattle following the fence, and they were able to run on this.

Doc said, as he galloped along, "Do you remember the two flashes of light?"

"The signal? Sure," Pat said. "I let the balloon gadget loose and Long Tom started reeling it in. That was the idea, wasn't it?"

Doc said, "You saw a signal from the house."

"Yes, of course—"

"But I did not give it," Doc said.

"You—uh—" Pat said.

THE FIERY MENACE

Long Tom then fell down. He did a rather agile job of it, taking a header and landing on his hands and going on over in a cartwheel which would have been very impressive if he had not ended up on the flat of his back, which he did. He got up ruefully, muttering, "Hell, I can't think of but one thing at a time."

"What else were you thinking of?" Pat asked.

"I was thinking that we're pretty dumb not to see why Doc said that stuff back there about meeting at the corner—and about tipping off the police to the head weasel, if they caught us," Long Tom explained.

"Oh, you mean they must have been listening? The men who framed us, I mean?"

"Sure."

"Listen, they couldn't have," Pat said. "We talked in low voices."

Long Tom snorted. "Listen, I can build you an amplifier and make you a microphone that will make a humming mosquito sound like a bomber. We could have been overheard all right."

"Oh, I see!" Pat said. She was beginning to pant from the running. "And that talk about telling the police—that was to convince them they'd better not just tip off the police that they could pick us up a mile down the road."

Long Tom said, "Doc, you figure they'll be down there and try to take care of us themselves?"

"That is a possibility we can hope for," Doc admitted.

THERE were four of them. Three low-talking fellows in dark suits, with shiny black cloth masks in the shape of hoods which they at once pulled over their heads. The fourth man was in the middle of some kind of a nervous seizure growing out of fear, and they left him in their car.

The car was black and fairly new and very silent. It came from the west, which was the direction opposite the house where the murder had occurred. It was evident that they had used back roads and circled at high speed to reach the vicinity.

The man who remained in the car was called Gibney. The other three cursed him, or insulted him, while they were getting out of the car.

Gibney said, "All right, damn your souls! I can't help it any more than I could help a bellyache."

"It's your guts all right," said one of the men.

"Sure, who says it ain't?" Gibney's voice was a thing that was being held tightly. "I tell you I stood a yard from him and let him have that gas, and my hair turned white. There's something about the guy."

The other men sobered somewhat.

One said, "There'll be something about us if we don't get him, his friend and the girl. It'll be iron bars."

"And later an electric chair, probably," said one dryly. "They say those chairs sit hard as hell."

THE FIERY MENACE

They took a metal case out of the car. It was about the size of a steamer trunk—the height and depth of a steamer trunk, but not as long—and they separated it in two halves, the contrivance bearing some outward resemblance to a portable public-address system.

They set up the contrivance, one man donned a headset, and they operated switches and knobs. After that was a period of listening.

“Hear any sign of ‘em, Ted?” one asked. And Ted said, “No! Shut up and let me listen!”

In the car, the man named Gibney sat very still and rigid, with both hands fast to the edge of a door.

Ted took the receivers off his ears and said, “Damn blast it! Not a sign. I’ve turned the danged thing up until you can hear Hitler walking the floor in Berlin, almost.”

“They ain’t coming, you think?”

“This contraption should pick up some noise if they were, and I don’t care how quietly they tried to sneak up.”

“Maybe they got here before we did and left.”

“What do you think they have—wings? By running all the way, they could’ve done it, maybe. But the cops are after them, and they wouldn’t have run and made a noise.”

“What’ll we do?”

“Stick around. Shut our mouths. Maybe they’ll show.”

For a long ten minutes they were perfectly silent.

Then Gibney fainted.

Gibney had been sitting in the car, on the outer edge of the seat with the door open—watchful, tight, poised for flight. When he collapsed it was forward, shoving the car door open and tumbling out on the earth. His body made some noise in bumping the car and in crushing the dry weeds on which he fell. The violence of the noise as it was magnified by the sound pickup caused the man wearing the headset to grab the phones away from his ears. They ran to Gibney.

Finding Gibney alive when they examined him relieved them. The one called Ted burst into low laughter. “Scared into a fit,” he said. “Savage has an effect on them, doesn’t he?”

Ted growled disapprovingly, “Savage has an effect on me as far as that goes. Come on, he’s just fainted. Let’s slide him back into the car. Put him in the back seat in case we have to make a quick getaway.”

“He ain’t dead?”

“No. Just passed out. I heard him say he has high blood pressure or something that makes his nerves go haywire easy.”

They loaded the unconscious Gibney into the back seat of the car and returned to their unproductive listening over the sound-pickup apparatus. Four or five minutes passed. “We ain’t getting nothing,” one man said. “Something has happened.”

THE FIERY MENACE

“Say, we may be overlooking something,” said one of the others.

“Such as what?”

“The Jersey law. They'll give this country a raking in hopes of finding Savage, Roberts and the girl. Maybe it would be as good if they didn't find us sitting here acting like this.”

“They wouldn't have anything on us.”

“Maybe. But Jersey cops get suspicious kind of easy.”

There was some more discussion about this, the upshot of which was that they climbed in their car and drove away to the northward. One of them explained—it was Ted—that he knew exactly where the Jersey troopers had doubtlessly blocked the road, because that was where they were in the habit of blocking it. Ted said that he knew a little lane which led over the ridge and through a couple of fields and evaded the spot which the police would be watching.

“Keep Gibney covered with that damned robe,” Ted warned.

LONG TOM ROBERTS got up out of the weeds and stretched with relief. “Gosh! I must have been half holding my breath, the way my chest aches,” he said. “I was afraid that listener contraption would pick up my breathing.”

Pat began stamping the ground to restore circulation in a foot that had gone to sleep. “Where do you suppose they got a listening device like that? Made it themselves?”

“I doubt that,” Long Tom said. “I didn't get much of a look at it, but I think it is a commercial type of sound detector, made small so that it is portable. It is supplied to cargo ships and army units for airplane detection. How they got hold of it, I wouldn't know.”

The explanation satisfied Pat, because Long Tom was an expert about such things and his guess was undoubtedly close to the facts.

“Such sound detectors supplied to ships,” she said; “all these men—at least Clevenger, Stover, Jones and Lee—having been to sea recently. There might be a connection there.”

“Might be,” Long Tom admitted.

They listened. There was no longer sound of the car bearing Gibney, Ted and the other two men. In the opposite direction, but far off, there was a whimpering noise that was the siren of a police car. Otherwise, the sounds were the normal sounds of the night in that part of New Jersey.

Long Tom began laughing. His normal manner was sobriety. So his laughter was a startling thing in the darkness.

“Talk about our luck changing for the better!” he chortled gleefully. “We're sure riding the white horse, now.”

“If they don't find out it's Doc and not Gibney in the back of their car,” Pat ventured uneasily.

Long Tom sobered. He squatted beside Gibney and examined the man. Gibney was still unconscious.

“I wish he would wake up,” the electrical expert complained. “Packing him out of this woods is not my idea of entertainment for the rest of the night.”

Chapter XI. THE STAMPEDE

TED stopped the car in darkness, which was fortunate. Doc Savage judged from the sounds of stuff dragging against the under side of the machine that they had driven into a weed-grown lane or off the side of a road. They acted as if they knew where they were and felt perfectly safe here.

Ted said, “Get the sleeping wonder out of the car, and let's see what is really wrong with him.”

What came next was going to be critical.

Doc Savage used Gibney's voice. He had paid particular attention to Gibney's voice with using it in mind.

He said, as Gibney, “Never mind, I feel better.” He began to squirm around and get out of the car.

It was a piece of luck that they had switched off the car lights and it was dark in the neighborhood. The whole drive had been painted with luck, because they had been too concerned watching for State troopers—probably too calloused, also—to concern themselves about what they thought was one of their confederates lying on the floor of their car.

Doc got out of the car and sat on the running board.

“Go on, lemme alone a minute,” he said. “I'll be all right.” He was silent a minute. “I'm just sick. Must be something I ate.”

“It ain't nothing you ate,” said Ted. “It's something they didn't put in you when they made you.”

“You mean I've got no guts?”

“That's it.”

Using a low, guttural, Gibney voice, and putting hate and feeling into it, Doc Savage called Ted the thing that Gibney probably would have called him.

Insulted and ugly, Ted said, “Brother, later on, if you still feel that way, we better talk it over.” To the other two, Ted snarled, “Come on! Let him stay here and rot!”

They went away, Ted stamping his feet on the ground in a rage, the other two walking silently as if they were a little worried.

Doc Savage got off the running board of the car and followed them silently. The silent part of it was hard for a few yards while the weeds were underfoot; then there were no more weeds. Instead, there was a sandy beach. The sand was soft and came up into Doc's shoes. High trees threw black shadows over part of the sand, but part of it was lighted faintly by a moon that was behind thin clouds. Beyond the distinguishable sand was water creased with very small waves.

THE FIERY MENACE

A big dog, a monster of noise and motion, was suddenly upon the three men ahead. They evidently knew and respected the dog because they were quickly in low trees and cursing the animal and its ancestors and someone called Charlie, who owned the dog. Charlie came out of a low building and laughed at them and called off the dog, which paid no attention to Charlie.

Charlie had to catch the dog and hold it, and while he was holding it, Doc Savage got ahead of the party and crouched close to a window which was open and through which he could see and hear what went on.

The shack was a cabin at the end of a dock.

There was a schooner tied to the dock. It was a slightly larger boat than the *Four Winds*, on which Buck Stevens had died.

In the shack, on a table, stood two telephones and a small radio outfit—transmitting and receiving. There were half a dozen men in the shack in addition to the three who had just arrived. They looked nervous.

“It was just Ted and the others,” explained Charlie, the man who owned the dog. “Rover was about to eat a leg off them.”

“Where's Gibney?” someone asked.

“Back at the car. He's kind of sick.”

“What made him sick?”

“He got a close look at Doc Savage. I guess he took six or seven drinks to get himself pepped up to tackling Savage, and seeing the bronze guy that close knocked the liquor out of him or something.”

“Did you get Savage out of the way?”

“Well, now, that's a long story,” Ted said. “We framed him, and the cops got him. But then he turned around and got away from the cops. You see—”

“It's a long story, you say?”

“Well, yes.”

“Save it, then,” the man said, “and give it to the boss.”

Ted scowled and snarled, “All right if you're too damned busy—”

“You're damned right we're too busy,” said the other. “We've got more troubles than a centipede has legs.”

Ted stared at him uneasily. “What do you mean?”

“You know what's happening? They've all made a break for Desmodus Island.” He shot out a worried arm at the telephones. “Reports have been coming in all night. Both Abbetts and that Fred Clevenger hit it for the island first. Then Bullyhide Jones struck out. The others, too. All of them.”

Ted rubbed his jaw. “I think maybe we better get up there ourselves, hadn't we?”

THE FIERY MENACE

“We figure we'll get orders to do that, any minute now.”

That seemed to conclude the conversational possibilities of the situation. They stood and looked at each other. One of them got a cigarette out of a package. The crinkling of the Cellophane wrapper was loud.

The man called Charlie said, “Hadn't we better bring Gibney in and see how he is feeling?”

“Go get him,” someone said.

Charlie went out.

The big dog did not follow Charlie. The animal had smelled Doc Savage. It approached him. It was a very large animal, a cross between a Dane and possibly a wolf.

Doc Savage stood very still and hoped the chemical treatment he and his five assistants gave their clothing would serve its purpose. The treatment consisted of a chemical mixture which had no noticeable odor to humans, but one which animals found extremely obnoxious. The stuff had been worked out by Monk, the chemist. He was marketing it under a trade name, selling it as a preparation for people to use to keep their pets off furniture. The stuff had a peculiar, partly terrorizing effect on animals, and a dog would never bark at it, once he caught the smell. In developing the stuff Monk had touched on something that seemed to arouse a prehistoric fear in the beasts, causing them to creep away in silence.

The big dog went away from the bronze man, cowering. If it had seen him before catching the odor, it would have barked. But now it was silent.

Charlie came galloping back. “Gibney ain't there.”

“Maybe he went down to the beach to slop cold water on his face.”

“Thought of that. He ain't there.”

Ted said, “I told you he had a big case of knee-knocking. The guy has scrambled. Cleared out.”

“What if he talks to somebody?”

“Gibney talk? He won't.” Ted leered. “He knows how real the vampire is!”

LATER, the telephone rang, and Charlie listened, said a few words that were inaudible to Doc Savage's ears, listened some more, then clapped the receiver down on the hook. “What'd I tell you?” he said. “That was our orders. We head for Desmodus Island.”

“Say—it's a long drive,” a man complained.

“We don't drive. We sail.”

The man who had complained emitted a howl of anguish. “Sail! On that boat? I get seasick easy.” He did some more complaining to which no one paid attention.

Doc Savage remained at the window but turned his head and examined the dock that led to the schooner. He

THE FIERY MENACE

decided that there was too much chance of a guard being on the deck of the schooner. The guard might see him if he tried to get out to the craft via the dock. The water would be better.

He waited at the window because he was interested in the radio transmitter–receiver on the table, curious about whether they would leave it or take it. And their further conversation was of interest, too.

“You figure we can wind the thing up at Desmodus island?” one man asked.

The one who had talked over the telephone shrugged and said, “I don't figure. That's one thing I learned in the navy. Let the head guy do the worrying. He's the monkey who gets paid for it.”

“You think that'll get us clear of Savage?”

“Sure! And what if it doesn't?”

“It might make a lot of difference,” the other said dubiously.

“Yeah, and maybe not.”

“You mean because we got that pair, Monk and Ham?”

“You said it.”

The other was skeptical. “We've had that pair some time now. I haven't noticed it slowing Savage up any.”

“It will when he finds Monk Mayfair and takes a look at what has happened to him.”

“How's he going to find Monk Mayfair?”

“We'll let him. Or the boss will.”

“Oh,” said the other, “so that's the idea!”

“What do you think of it?”

“Finding a friend of mine in that condition would scare hell out of me,” the man admitted.

They looked around the cabin for objects they might be overlooking, then left the place. The planks of the dock were springy and went up and down enough to make them walk in a cautious, straddle–legged way as they went out to the schooner.

They had left the radio behind.

Doc Savage got the radio out of the shack. It was a battery outfit, and the batteries in the case made it heavy. It was with great difficulty that he managed to get it out to the schooner, by swimming under the dock, and on the deck of the craft.

The schooner was quite large and it was very dark. They were puttering with the Diesel motor, having trouble getting it going. Two of the men had loosened the hawsers and were standing by.

The man working on the motor cursed the machinery at great length and with infinite feeling. “No use trying

THE FIERY MENACE

to use sails," he said. "There's a spanking head wind. We'd spend all night beating back and forth across the Sound."

Having heard this news, Doc Savage climbed in a furling sail with the radio. It was the foresail and was carelessly furling, bagging down on the cabin top at points. It was in one of these bagging folds that the bronze man incased himself. The canvas was heavy, uncared for and as hard as a shingle.

Soon, they got the Diesel banging like a Gatling gun that was misfiring, and there was a scramble to cast off the lines. The schooner took on the vague strange feeling of life that a vessel has in motion, and put out of the harbor. Later, it began to roll slowly, like a log in a sluggish current.

Doc Savage waited until he was sure they were not going to raise the sails, then he arranged the radio for operation, unsnapping the fasteners and getting out the headset, clamping it to his ears. The radio was a marine portable, naval, a type developed for naval landing parties, light and powerful, efficient.

He explored the dials with his fingertips, the dial markings, taking his time. What he was seeking was the transmitter wave-length setting used by Long Tom and Pat. It was his hope that he could contact them. Setting the wave length was difficult. Finally, he had to take a chance and strike a match. Everything seemed to be in order. The set would function on that short a wave length.

He waited patiently. The breeze was freshening as the boat worked out into the Sound, and soon there would be enough noise of wind and wave to cover any sounds he made in calling over the radio.

Doc waited with a finger on the power switch.

BACK in the stern, the man called Charlie got his dog by the scruff of the neck and forced the animal to lie down. He said, "I hope Gibney doesn't double-cross us."

"He won't," a man muttered. "He's just scared."

"Suppose he should come back and try to contact us with that radio you left behind?"

The other snorted. "Good-by, Gibney, in that case."

"Doesn't he know the radio is a bomb trap for Savage or any of his gang if they should show up?"

"Hell, no!" the man said. "Let Gibney get blown out of his clothes. What do we care?"

The wind increased in force as they rounded a headland. It made the boat lean and brought waves rushing at them to pound against the hull and toss spray like cold broken glass across the decks. The two men were forced to lean toward each other to talk, and the last of what they had said had hardly been audible.

Chapter XII. DEATH HAS MANY FINGERS

PATRICIA SAVAGE stopped saying, "Hello, Doc," and "Come in, Doc," into the microphone of the radio transmitter in Long Tom Roberts' laboratory. She switched off the power. Her face was pale.

THE FIERY MENACE

“No dice,” she said.

Long Tom muttered, “The police searched him and took his pocket radio before he escaped, so that's probably why he has not contacted us. But I wish I knew what had happened to him. I wish I knew where he was.”

Pat nodded. “If we could only contact him and tell him we escaped from the police and got back to the city.”

“He knows where to find us.”

Pat looked sharply at Long Tom. “You think he'd know we would come here?”

“Yes, I do. For the sake of privacy, I have not advertised that I have this laboratory. Doc knows where it is. You didn't know, did you? And the police certainly do not know, nor are they likely to find it right away.”

“What we've got to do,” Pat said, “is contact Doc.”

Gibney said, “He's dead!”

Long Tom whirled on Gibney, snarled, “That's the fourth time you've said that! Cut it out!”

“All right,” Gibney said uneasily. “Only you claimed you wanted the truth.”

Pat walked over to Gibney. Her face was becoming whiter and whiter. She said, “What makes you so sure, Gibney?”

Gibney shrugged. “I know some of the preparations they have made. Traps everywhere for Savage. Not ordinary traps, either. That business of framing him for the murder of Stover over in Jersey was an example. That wouldn't be called a usual kind of trap, do you think?”

Long Tom, nervously anxious to change the subject from danger to Doc Savage, pounced on the statement about Stover. “The dead man wasn't Stover!” he snapped.

Gibney spread his hands. “You couldn't prove it by me. I didn't know Stover by sight.”

“Did you kill the man found dead in the Jersey house, where the police were planted?” demanded Long Tom.

“I did not! The vampire did that!”

“Vampire?”

“Yeah, and don't start telling me I'm nuts and that there ain't no such thing as vampires. Personally, I don't think there is either. Or at least, I didn't. But how else do you explain that hole in dead people's heads?”

Long Tom said, “We explained the fiery thing floating through the air pretty well when we rigged that balloon affair with the electric lights inside it.”

“Maybe.” Gibney eyed him. “I guess maybe you guys could imitate almost anything if you wanted to. You guys can do things, from what I hear.”

“What is this vampire?” Long Tom asked.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Just that—a vampire.”

“You're lying!”

“Look,” said Gibney with a kind of frightened patience, “I'm just telling you what I've heard them say: They say there's a vampire, and that satisfied me. They weren't the kind of crowd where you let your nose grow too long.”

Long Tom examined him grimly. “An actual vampire, you mean?”

Gibney groaned. “You think I'm kidding you. I'm not. I know it sounds goofy. I told you they just talked about a vampire, and they didn't say nothing about it not being real, or about it being real. They just mentioned that it was going to kill certain people—like Elmer the Great, Oscar in Washington, Buck Stevens and Stover, or whoever it was instead of Stover. They would mention it, and it would happen. Like I say, I tried to keep my nose short. Too many questions got you too much attention.”

Long Tom gave his belt a hitch. “That's a long—worded way of saying nothing much.”

Long Tom's tone was not pleasant. He picked up a length of wire attached to an insulated handle, and Gibney turned a shade of green. Horror made his mouth move with the motions of a fish mouth.

“Don't!” Gibney gasped.

LONG TOM flourished his simple—looking electrical gadget grimly. The thing was an affair of a high—frequency coil, similar to an old—fashioned flivver spark coil, coupled with an interrupter to make the current more agonizing. He had used the gadget to scare—or torture—the man into talking. The only lie he had told Gibney was that the rheostat control could be stepped up so that the thing would put out a current that would electrocute a man.

“Don't!” Gibney gasped a second time.

Long Tom kept an ominous expression on his face. He had used the thing on Gibney—it had not taken much using—to persuade the man to talk.

He said, “I don't think you have given us the truth.”

Gibney began shaking again. He had trembled a lot while they were forcing him to talk. “I . . . I know it don't sound like it,” he said. “But look, I'm just a guy they hired. Like you would hire a guy to come in to do a special job.”

“Humph!”

“A specialist, see,” Gibney insisted. “You know how it is. You make things for electricity, don't you? You have guys make you a certain kind of a coil or something, but the guys that make it don't know what the completed machine is going to be like. They may not even know what you're working on if you don't tell them. That's the way it was with me. They just hired me and didn't tell me nothing.”

“Nothing?” Long Tom frowned. “What about this Desmodus place?”

THE FIERY MENACE

“Desmodus.” Gibney nodded eagerly. “Sure. An island.”

“What makes you so sure it's an island?”

“Oh, I'm sure.”

“Ever been there?”

“Why, no,” Gibney said, puzzled.

“Listen!” Long Tom took an ominous step toward Gibney. “Do you know what Desmodus means?”

Gibney, now that he was caught, was a man of remarkably small courage. He made vague hand gestures. “Mean?”

“The word,” Long Tom explained patiently. “The word 'Desmodus.’”

“Huh?”

“It's a type of vampire,” Long Tom said. “Look it up sometime.”

White-faced, Gibney said, “You mean it's a kind of vampire that makes holes in people's heads?”

Nothing on record would make a hole similar to those that had been found in the heads of the dead men so far, but Long Tom did not dwell upon the point.

He looked at Pat, said, “We don't seem to be able to contact Doc. I suggest we head for Desmodus Island.” He whirled on Gibney. “You're sure you got the location right?”

“Positive,” Gibney said eagerly. “Plumb positive. I had it pointed out to me on a map. They said if anything ever happened that I got separated from them, I should go to the island, and there I would be able to make contact again. It's headquarters—the center of the affair.”

Long Tom studied the man thoughtfully. He believed Gibney was telling the truth.

“But you don't know what is behind it?” he demanded.

“No, I really don't. Really!”

“All of them seem to have been sailors at one time or another,” Long Tom pointed out.

“All of them do that know what it's about,” Gibney admitted. “There's several guys just working for them, like I was. They ain't been told what's what. They just get paid.”

Long Tom went to a desk and dug around in an incredible mixture of magazines, documents, personal letters and notes. He came up with an Atlantic-coast chart.

“Show us where it is,” he said.

Gibney came over and indicated the island.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Blazes, it's remote enough!” Long Tom said. He bent closer, examining the chart. “It doesn't have a name, on the chart. You sure this is the one?” And, when Gibney had nodded vehemently, Long Tom decided, “Probably no bigger than your hat.” He turned to Pat. “You ready to head for it? Seems only thing for us to do.”

Gibney said, “They were going to take your two friends, Monk and Ham, to the place.”

Long Tom scowled at him. “You better not be fooling us.”

“I'll go with you,” Gibney said. “You'll see.”

“No, you won't.” Long Tom was decisive. “I've had that done to me before.”

Gibney began losing more color. “You . . . you won't—”

“Don't get excited,” Long Tom advised. “We'll just send you to college.”

(Doc Savage's “college” is an unusual institution. Its actual existence, as well as its whereabouts, has been kept a secret, as far as possible. There, specialists trained by Doc perform an involved brain operation which wipes out memory of past. Following this, the “student” receives a course of training, fitting him to earn a good living, and he is taught, incidentally, to hate crime and criminals.)

Pat said, “They may know what Doc's plane looks like. Let's use mine.

Chapter XIII. HARBOR FOR TROUBLE

THE schooner plowed through a chopping sea, floundering and stubbing its nose against the waves, digging itself under some of the waves like a hog wetting itself in a mud puddle. Only one man was on deck, and he was wrestling the wheel.

They were very much outside now. “Outside” meant out in the sea, in the hard, blustering breath of the North Atlantic. The waves were short—half as long as the schooner—and deck—high. The craft was pitching and rolling, the rigging whacking the masts, the blocks rattling.

The perfectly natural thing happened.

“Damn you down there!” the helmsman yelled down the after hatch. “Get up here and set some canvas before this thing rolls her sticks out.”

They came up from below—men in oilskins, men who did not know much about a sailing vessel, most of them. They decided to set the foresail first, because it was smaller than the main. They undid the stops and cursed and wallowed and skidded around, hauling the halliards. The big, stiff foresail bellied out with a sound like an awakening thing.

A small object that had been in the paunched folds of the sail rattled along the deck.

A man picked it up, looked at it idly, then tossed it overboard.

“What was that?” another man asked him.

THE FIERY MENACE

"I dunno. Knob off a radio set, looked like. I guess somebody tossed it into the fold of the sail."

The set sail steadied the boat and nearly doubled its speed. The wind was a prop against the craft each time it tried to roll.

"What time do we get to the island?" a man asked.

"Might make it by dark, if we're lucky."

The other swore. "The main cabin is sure crowded. Hell, some of us could sleep in the fo'c's'le if the hatch hadn't come off during the night and let all that water in there."

"Damp in the fo'c's'le, is it?"

"Damp? Wet as it is outside."

"Well, somebody's got to dump these sail covers in there." The sail cover was off the staysail, which was a new sail and therefore had been covered. They gathered it up, worked forward, and one of them held up the fo'c's'le hatch while the other dumped the cover inside. They let it lay where it had fallen, battened the hatch, and went back along the deck, sliding and in a hurry to get to the warmth of the main cabin.

Doc Savage was very still and watchful for a while after the sail cover landed in the fo'c's'le. The cover fell a few feet from where he was concealed. Then finally he relaxed.

It was indeed damp in the fo'c's'le. But he was glad of it. He had loosened the hatch himself during the night, so that the fo'c's'le would get drenched. Being a damp, chilly place, none of the men would stay there. That was the method he had taken of preparing a hiding place.

Because these men were sailors, it had been perfectly plain from the first that they would lift the sails when they got out to sea in order to steady the craft.

Doc went back to the fairly simple, but far from safe, job of removing the explosive from the radio. The explosive was in a glass fruit jar, and it was undoubtedly a mixture of nitric and sulphuric acid, with a touch of oleum, plus toluene. If not, it was something equally violent, and the quantity was probably enough to demolish the schooner.

It still gave Doc a cold feeling to touch the radio. He had come so close to turning the apparatus on, without investigating its innards. The explosive was connected to the receiver switch. Only the strangeness of the radio apparatus having been left behind had led him to investigate.

He got the explosive out safely and kept it for future eventualities. It was the only weapon he had. The rest of the day was a long wait.

THE island was somewhere off the Maine coast. It was not far off; less than half a mile.

It was early night, and black, when they got there.

Doc Savage remained in the fo'c's'le and listened to profanity and grunting as they fought with the schooner, taking down the sails, and later using the winch. Judging from the sounds, they were warping the craft into

THE FIERY MENACE

some sort of berth by main strength. Once, the boat hit something solid underneath, and there was a great grinding of wood on rock and some splintering. But, eventually, the schooner stopped going up and down and rolling and was on still smooth water that was made to pulse only a little by the swell on the sea outside.

The men left the schooner. They left with great alacrity, shouting gleefully at other men on shore. They were glad to get off the boat. They were as full of spirits as chickens let out of a henhouse on a spring morning.

Doc Savage remained concealed until he was sure there was no one left aboard. Then he worked cautiously at the fo'c's'le hatch, found it fastened outside, and moved aft. There was a hold that smelled of past cargoes of fish, and a cabin rank with liquor and tobacco odors. The outdoors air was crisp and moist against Doc's face when he stepped on deck.

He looked around.

He was startled!

It was as if the schooner lay in a crack in a child's wooden play block, except that the block was made of stone and was three or four hundred feet high. After he had studied the place for a while he could see the uneven formation of the cliff top against what light came from the cloudy night sky.

The island was obviously mostly stone, rugged and sheer, typical of the Maine coast. That much was clear. The cove where the schooner was moored was small, probably facing the Maine shore, which could not be far away or the water would have been more turbulent.

He could hear voices somewhere. But there was no light.

He explored one side of the schooner and found mooring lines that were tight, then a gangplank. Not a regular gangplank, but a long, heavy board that was being used as one.

He did not use the gangplank. If there were a posted guard, he would be there. The bronze man went back to one of the hawsers which ran ashore. It was as tight as a fiddle string, and he stood on it, balancing with his outstretched arms, and walked it slowly, listening.

The hard stone island was finally under his feet, and then, almost simultaneously, a man had a gun against him! Other men with guns were very close and menacing, grim in the glow from a flashlight which someone switched on.

Someone stepped close to Doc Savage, took the package Doc was carrying, then searched him.

"Not a gun or a knife or anything," the searcher said, surprised. Then the man opened the package. "Blast his soul! This is the TNT out of the radio!" The man sounded shocked.

"Damn lucky we caught him," someone muttered.

"Lucky, hell." The searcher stepped back. "It was planting that capacity alarm at the gangplank and the hawsers that did it."

(The term "capacity alarm" was explanatory to Doc Savage, and would arouse no particular surprise. Doc Savage has made use of these capacity devices in one form or another in many of the Doc Savage novels. They are neither unusual nor a laboratory device. In their usual form, they utilize the same aggravating feature which caused old-time radios to howl at inopportune moments when the hand was brought near them.

THE FIERY MENACE

This squalling was due to body capacity upsetting the tuning balance. A device specifically for alarm purposes has been on the market for some time, utilizing a capacity bridge which, when unbalanced by the approach of a body, actuates a relay which will ring a bell, turn on lights, or even discharge a gun. This device, incidentally, is one of many of Doc Savage's gadgets which have been developed for common use since the bronze man began using them in fiction. In the instance given in this yarn, the aërial of the capacity alarm, which could be wire almost too small for the unaided eye to notice, could have been stretched near the hawsers and the gangplank, or even placed a few inches above the earth on twigs. It is not necessary to touch the aërial; merely coming into its neighborhood will actuate the capacity-bridge device.)

He gestured with a hand. "Take him up on the hill and hold him for five minutes," he said. "Then bring him inside."

THE hill was a bleak, rocky height, and there was nothing there except a spanking, frigid wind and silence. One of the men threw light on a watch to mark the beginning of the five minutes.

Although no one spoke, Doc Savage felt reasonably sure of what they were doing. They were rigging a reception for him down below.

Another look at the watch, and the man said, "All right. Time's up."

They went down the stone cliff again. It was not difficult going. They had tied four lines to Doc Savage's wrists and ankles and were holding the ends of these, ready to spread-eagle him if he tried to escape. He did not try. He was curious about what went on here.

They descended into a cleft of stone. A hole that was like a well going straight into the earth. There were steps in the stone at first, then a wooden staircase that resounded with ghostly hollowness to the tramp of their feet.

Doc asked, "What is this?"

"It used to be the only way of getting to the top of the rock, before they had a landslide," a man told him frankly enough. "Ted's old man built it."

Ted growled, somewhere near, "Wasn't my old man. Was my great-grandfather, the old reprobate."

"He was a pirate or something," the man said.

"He was no such thing!" Ted said. "He was a wrecker. Nobody used to think anybody could climb to the top of this rock, or even land on it, but my great-grandfather figured a way and built these stairs. He used to climb up here and light a light at nights."

"And wreck ships," the other man said.

Ted cursed him. "All right, wise guy—you know more about it than I do. So shut up about it."

The stairway was indeed very old, Doc Savage saw, being constructed of very substantial beams that had held their strength down through the years.

"It is remarkably strong," he remarked.

THE FIERY MENACE

“Sure,” the man said. “Ted's great-grandfather carried his loot up and hid it on top of the rock. It had to be strong.”

They reached the bottom. It was not exactly a cave, although it had some of the characteristics of one. The sea sloshing against an entrance which was above water made a grunting and slaving noise, as of something large and hungry.

A man came and met them. “Boss says we may have to get the schooner the hell away from here before daylight. Take it over to a harbor on the mainland somewhere and anchor it.”

“Why's that?” Ted demanded.

“Can be seen from shore.”

“Well, hell—I thought we would have this thing all in the pot and cooked before morning,” Ted growled.

“Maybe. If we do, we can leave in the schooner. If we don't, the schooner will have to be taken away.”

“O. K., O. K.!”

Ted was out of humor. Sailing the schooner came under the head of labor, and he was not pleased. He gave Doc Savage a shove.

“Climb on that submarine,” he ordered.

There was undoubtedly—astonishment brought the small, trilling sound from Doc Savage—a submarine. It was not a large one, and a hole through which a horse could have been lowered had been opened in the forward deck, about twenty feet from the conning tower. The work of a high-explosive shell. A flash of light from an electric lantern in one of the men's hands showed the German markings on the underseas craft.

Inside the submarine there were certainly no Germans, however.

Doc was jammed down in what had been the crew space.

Other prisoners already there included Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks. Also Thyra Abbett and her husband, Alonzo Abbett, Thyra's brother, Fred Clevenger, and Bullyhide Jones. Final prisoner was the scared man, Albert Lee, who looked more scared than ever.

The prisoners were fastened to stanchions in what had been the crew space, an area beginning immediately forward of the control room, with the battery space underneath. It extended to the torpedo-room bulkhead, part of which had been ripped open by the shell which had opened the hole in the deck.

Ham Brooks gasped, “Doc, I'm sure glad to see you!”

The captors seemed to think that was funny, and three of them laughed.

Monk Mayfair sat on the floor, one arm held up above his head by the manacle that clamped it to a berth stanchion. His face, when Doc first came in, was utterly blank, a silly blankness. Then, after the other men had finished laughing, Monk laughed, too. His laughter was horrible and unnatural, somewhat like a turkey gobbling.

Chapter XIV. WEALTH OF THE *DOMINO*

THE sound Monk had made was hideous enough to shock everyone into silence. There were exchanged glances, and someone cocked a revolver uneasily, then let it off cock. The sound was a loud one in the stillness.

The man named Ted took the floor. His mouth was ugly, and he held an automatic pistol in his hand, keeping it on safety and twirling it around a forefinger in a rather dramatic fashion which he obviously had practiced.

He told Doc Savage, "You want to know why you're alive? Why the others are alive?"

Doc Savage's response was instant. "Presumably you want something you do not have."

"That's the idea," Ted said.

"The object," Doc Savage suggested, "has been referred to as the vampire's lunch?"

"Yeah. Only that was just a way of referring to it. It ain't no lunch. It was just wrapped up in a greasy paper, and people got to calling it that. Where is it?"

"Should we know?"

"One of you has it," Ted growled. "That guy called Elmer the Great went to your building with it. When . . . er . . . when the vampire got after him, he hid it by tossing it in one of the chandeliers. He went back to get it, and—well, the vampire got him."

Doc said, "The vampire got him when it seemed he had led the way back to the package, eh?"

"I—sure. Sure. What of it?"

"You killed him too quick."

Ted scowled. "We didn't kill him. The vampire did."

"Same thing."

"It's a hell of a long way from the same thing."

"There was no package in the chandelier where the body was found," Doc said.

"O. K., there wasn't. We know that. We also know that Elmer the Great must have known he was being followed by the vampire. He climbed into the wrong chandelier to fool—the thing."

Doc Savage seemed to be giving the affair some thought.

"I was in Washington," he said finally.

Ted twirled the automatic pistol dramatically. None of the other prisoners had spoken. The big dog belonging to Charlie had come along and was crouched on the floor, eyeing Doc Savage with a kind of malevolent fear.

THE FIERY MENACE

Ted said, "We know you were in Washington." He indicated Monk and Ham with the muzzle of the automatic. "These two guys got smart and took the package out of the chandelier."

He pointed the gun at Ham. "This one says"—he swung to point at Monk—"this one got it." Ted scowled. "But this guy Monk is nuts. We gave him a scare, trying to make him cough up the thing, and he blew his top."

Doc said, "You must have scared him badly."

"I'll say we did. But that ain't exactly right," said Ted sourly. "The vampire did it. I guess he did too good a job. Anyway, this Monk is simple. And I mean *simple!* He got away from us—"

"The escape was in Brooklyn, and occurred while I was still in Washington?" Doc interrupted.

"That's it. He got away, and they found him and took him to a hospital. We got to him again there. We also got his pal, Ham Brooks. We carried them both out of the hospital. But we didn't find that package—the lunch. We brought them here because it's safe. Nobody knows about this place." He turned his head to scowl at almost everyone in the room. "Nobody who ain't here now, at any rate."

Doc Savage said, "Then Monk Mayfair is the only one who knows the whereabouts of this lunch?"

"We figure you know," Ted said grimly.

"I do not."

"O. K. You find out then. Find out, or you get knocked off." He waved his gun dramatically. "Find out, or everybody gets knocked off. And I mean it!"

"That," Doc said, "explains why you have not killed any of us?"

"That's right."

DOC SAVAGE watched Monk for a while, but his face was without expression. Then he glanced at Ham, and Ham shrugged slightly, helplessly. Doc Savage did not acknowledge the shrug or acknowledge in any way that he saw Ham. The bronze man turned back to Ted.

"You took the middle link out of the chain, did you not?" Doc asked.

"Huh?"

"The story did not begin when the vampire killed Elmer the Great in the chandelier in my office building."

"Oh!" said Ted. "No, it didn't. Not that the other part need bother you."

"It might be better if we went over it."

"I don't see why."

Charlie, the man with the dog, snapped, "Look here, Ted, you're wasting time and telling stuff that may hang us."

THE FIERY MENACE

“Nobody's going to hang,” Ted growled. “And I ain't going to tell him any more.”

Doc shrugged. “Very well, I cannot help you with the matter of the package in that case.”

“Huh?”

Doc said, “In the beginning, all of you were on a ship named the *Domino*, were you not?”

Ted frowned. He glanced at Alonzo Abbett and scowled. He told Doc, “I figured you knew more than the rest of us thought you did.”

“When was the *Domino* torpedoed?” Doc asked.

“What makes you think it was torpedoed?”

“The fact that the naval authorities would not give out any information concerning the ship. They would not tell me it was safe. If it had been safe, they would have said so.”

Ted considered that, his expression saying that he couldn't see how that proved anything. “Three months and two days ago, I think it was. It happened south of Greenland, where it usually happens.”

“You were torpedoed by this submarine.”

“Yeah. The *Domino* was, anyway.”

Charlie snarled, “You ain't telling him nothing—not much. Hell love a goose!”

It was chilly in the crew space of the submarine. The whole end of the bow bulkhead seemed open where the shell had ripped. The clouds must have thinned out overhead, because there was a trace of silver moonlight around the hole.

The submarine was full of the odors that submarines have—greases, gas, oil, acid, rubber, sweat, food. But all of the smells were vague, as if the sub had not been used for a long time. Doc noted that the steelwork was quite rusty in places, and the brass had a thick coat of corrosion.

Doc asked, “How on earth did you capture the submarine? Did the *Domino* have a gun? Was that the way you did it?”

“It was the way the navy gun crew did it,” Ted said. “We didn't have anything to do with it.”

“Did you have much of a fight taking over the submarine?”

“Hell, no!” Ted said, and chuckled. “The Germans had a folding boat, and some of them got in that. The rest jumped overboard in life preservers. We just rowed up and climbed on board.”

Doc nodded. “You found the sub was not going to sink, so you navigated it to the United States.”

“That's it.”

“But first you got something off the *Domino*.”

THE FIERY MENACE

Ted stared at him. "So you know that, too?"

It had been a guess. Under the strange circumstances, it had been a logical guess, though.

Doc did not say anything.

"We knew what the *Domino* was carrying," Ted said finally. "She didn't sink right away. It was foggy and we abandoned her. She acted as if she was going right down, so everybody got the hell off in a hurry. Then, after we had captured the submarine, here came the *Domino* drifting down on us. She was still sinking, but not fast, and we saw we could board her. What the hell would you have done?"

"How much did you get?" Doc asked.

"We figured around a million," Ted said. "It was gold, and we ain't sure how much those Turkish and Greek coins are worth. That was where most of it had come from."

THE bronze man was silent, visualizing the scene that had happened in the sea off Greenland. In peace times it would have been a fantasy and impossible. But more hair-raising things than this had occurred during the war.

He said, "What about the other people off the *Domino*?"

There was enough accusation in the bronze man's voice to hurt even a man like Ted. Ted looked down at the gun for a while, then put it in his pocket as if he was ashamed of it.

"I told you it was foggy," he said.

"Did you try to pick them up?"

"Sure, we tried. Hell, there wasn't nothing wrong with what we were doing. We were just saving the *Domino's* cargo. We had gone over the submarine, by then, and knew she wouldn't sink. Those Germans just got scared and abandoned the sub. There were some torpedoes on board and some mines, and I guess they were scared the thing would blow up. We were scared, too, until we got rid of the torpedoes and mines."

"You were all quite honest up to then," Doc said.

"Sure!"

Doc said, "How long did the honesty last?"

"Long enough for everybody to have a good think about the million in gold."

"How long was that?"

"Few days."

"So then you came to the island, here, and hid it," Doc said.

"Sure! Say, who told you all this?"

THE FIERY MENACE

It was just coming out. But Doc did not tell him so. “You hid it here,” he said.

Ted nodded sourly. “Yeah, but we don't know where.”

“You do not know?” There was noticeable surprise in Docs voice.

“Yeah.”

Charlie snarled, “Go ahead, tell him every little thing, you dumb toad.”

“Shut up!” Ted told him. To Doc, Ted said, “We had Elmer the Great hide it for us.”

“By that time you evidently were not trusting each other?” Doc suggested.

“I'll say! We drew lots. Elmer the Great got the short straw. So he hid it. And after that we took turns watching.”

At this point Charlie emitted a grunt. He sounded as if he had reached the end of his patience. He wheeled and went out. He came back almost immediately with a pair of pliers, which he at once began employing to pull the lead out of revolver cartridges.

“What are you doing?” asked Ted.

“You must be nuts if you think you're getting anywhere,” Charlie told him. “When you get done, and maybe before, if you ain't done damned quick, I'm going to show him what burning powder will do to his eyes if he don't talk.”

Monk looked at Charlie, and for a moment his eyes were very direct. Then Monk became silly-looking again.

Doc asked Ted, “Why was Elmer the Great coming to see me?”

Ted shrugged. “Oh, he was never in favor of the whole thing in the first place! And he saw that we were splitting up and that part of us were going to get rid of the other half. There were a dozen of us to begin with. Splitting a million dollars a dozen ways ain't as good as splitting it half as many ways. Elmer the Great decided there would be killing before it was over, so he lit out for you.”

“Which caused Elmer the Great to be the first one killed?” Doc asked.

“Uh-huh. The vampire got him!”

Doc said, “Which brings us once more to the vampire.”

Ted ignored that and said, “Clevenger, here, and Abbett and Lee threw in with Oscar and Buck Stevens. They were after it for themselves. They thought Bullyhide was with them, but he wasn't. That damned Mickey Stool was with them, too, but we didn't know that at first. We got wise to him later on. And we—the vampire, that is—fixed his clock for him.”

“Which again brings us to the vampire,” Doc said.

Ted scowled. “Nuts!” he said.

THE FIERY MENACE

Charlie snorted. He had found a candle somewhere, and now he applied a match to the wick. He had a handful of dark-gray powder in his left palm.

Charlie said, "You know what the most sensitive part of the body is? It's the nose. You hold him and pour some powder in his nose and put a match to it. He'll talk, don't think he won't!"

Doc said, "You fellows went to a lot of trouble to build up the legend about a vampire. That was to confuse the police, was it not?"

"You're plumb wrong about that vampire thing," Ted told him.

Charlie cursed loudly and started forward. He said, "This is enough of this. I'm going to work on him!"

Doc changed to the Mayan language, understood by only himself and his men. He said, "Does anyone know where this map or chart or whatever was in the package is to be found?"

Ham answered in Mayan, "Nobody has the slightest idea. Monk had it, and you can see the way he is."

THEY caught Pat and Long Tom, then! The capture took place on the lip of the rock, high above the semicave crack in the stone in which the submarine had been beached. It was a noisy affair, what with shooting and a guard or two bellowing down for assistance.

In the course of the disturbance a bullet came down the stone crack and hit the submarine a resounding *clank* directly over the crew space. Almost immediately, another bullet splattered into the opening which the cannon shell from the *Domino* had made. It ricocheted with a racket like two or three big bumblebees.

Doc Savage emitted a gulp and fell on his face.

He hoped the men holding the ropes attached to his wrists and ankles would think he had been shot.

They did not think so, at first; but later, they did. They jumped around, fascinated by the excitement above. Finally, two of them handed their ropes to the other two and dashed away.

Doc waited until the two who held the ropes lost their first flush of caution. Then he doubled violently, yanking on the ropes and pulling the men to him. He got hold of the pair and they began howling as he hurt them.

Ham did his best to lunge to the end of his manacle and get at a foe. He did not succeed. The foe kicked him in the stomach. Ham hung from the handcuff that secured his wrist to the bunks, and turned a mild shade of green.

Monk Mayfair was affected strangely by the fight.

His facial expression got more wild than it had been, which anyone would have said was an impossibility.

He said, "Fish in the pot. Too many fish in the pot. *Ha, ha, ha!*" He said some more, but only that part of it was understandable.

THE FIERY MENACE

Doc Savage disposed of his two foes by whacking their heads against the deck, then made for the control-room-bulkhead door. The bulkhead door was closed and rusted in place, but the manhole in the center of the door was open. He got half through this when someone behind him grasped one of the ropes, and tripped him. Other men sprang upon him, and still more rushed to join the affair.

He saw there were too many for him. As soon as he discovered this he changed his tactics, becoming very weak in his fighting. Whenever he matched strength directly with a man, he let the man overpower him. The result was that the men soon got him down on the floor.

They were proud of themselves.

“Did you see me hold him?” a man said importantly. “I always heard he was as strong as an ox.”

Up above, they seemed to have caught Pat and Long Tom.

Chapter XV. THE VAMPIRE'S BITE

LONG TOM'S pride was more battered than his body when they dragged him in, so it was pretty battered. He tried to get a wrist back in joint, stared at Doc Savage and groaned. He said, “I don't see how they caught us. We were being very careful.”

Two men were holding Pat, and they were trying to be fairly polite to her. Pat was not returning the favor at all. She made a lunge, and almost succeeded in biting the end off the ear of one of her captors.

“I'll say we were being careful,” she said. “We didn't make a peep of noise. We didn't bump into anybody. All of a sudden there they were, thicker than fleas.”

Ted expanded his chest.

“We did it scientific,” he said. “We got one of those capacity burglar alarms. We got six or seven of them. They were everywhere.”

“Who figured that out?” Pat asked.

“I did,” Ted told her. “Who else but me?”

Doc Savage studied the small space between Ted's eyebrows and his hairline. “What were your duties on the *Domino*?” he asked.

“I was an oiler. I oiled the engines. I've been an oiler for ten years. What about it?”

“Nothing,” Doc said.

After looking blankly puzzled for a moment, Ted wheeled and yelled, “Line the two new prisoners up with the others. We'll get going again.”

Alonzo Abbett said, “You won't have a chance. The people Mr. Roberts and Miss Savage brought with them will have you surrounded in no time.” It was the first time he had spoken.

THE FIERY MENACE

His wife stared at him. "Shut up!" she said. "Shut up! What are you trying to do?"

Ted turned to them. He growled, "Look—I've got men out watching, and don't think I haven't. We won't get sneaked up on."

But the worry had been planted in his mind, and the growth of it was almost visible in his brain. The state of his mind was illustrated more than anything else by the shapes which his mouth made—fierce shapes at first, then defiant ones, then unsure, and finally, desperation. The last shape was one of resolution to do something.

"Divide the prisoners," he barked.

"How you mean?" asked one of his men.

"Take Savage and his four friends into the aft crew space," Ted ordered. "Keep the others here."

"But—"

"The vampire may want to work on them," Ted snapped. "Get going!"

"Oh!" a man said most expressively.

The aft crew space was located above the motor room, so there was not much head clearance. The ventilation was not good, either. Water which had entered the hull had risen high enough to cover about half of the floor, from the stern bulkhead forward. There were signs that the water had risen somewhat higher, although no more than three or four feet higher, during other tides. Doc Savage reflected mentally that this was about the hour of high tide here, and so the water probably would rise no higher this time.

The illumination was very poor, being furnished by an electric lantern outside the bulkhead door.

Ted was advancing into a hysterical excitement. "Hold them," he warned his men, "until we get the handcuffs in here."

There was no foolishness about the handcuffs with which they were fastened to the stanchions. The manacles were good police equipment, solidly efficient, secured with locks.

Ted was trembling now. A man told him, "You better take it easy, boss. This thing is hard on the nerves."

But he withdrew from the crew space. The others, having handcuffed Doc, Long Tom, Monk, Ham and Pat securely, also withdrew. The crew space had an odor that was not pleasant. A past tide had deposited a dead fish, or some similarly scented article, under the floor grille.

There followed a general pause, a wait for whatever was to happen.

Ham said, "This is about the end of it. If we're going to do anything, we better do it now."

Pat asked, "What will they do?"

"Turn their vampire loose on us."

"Complete with strange reddish *thing* floating in air?" Pat asked, trying to sound light.

THE FIERY MENACE

Doc said, "They may try that. There is no telling."

The bronze man looked at the door thoughtfully.

THEY did try it! But Ted scrambled into the compartment first and snarled, "All right. Here it comes! I can shut that bulkhead door and keep it out, but you gotta talk. Tell us where the stuff is hidden."

No one said anything.

To impress them, Ted pointed at Monk. "You see the way he is? Well, he got that way from watching the vampire get rid of Buck Stevens on the *Four Winds*."

Doc said skeptically, "But Buck Stevens was supposed to have been killed long after Monk was affected. When I visited the *Four Winds* tied to the dock in City Island, the vampire—"

"That was just a show for you," Ted growled. "Buck Stevens was dead before that. We let Monk watch what happened to Buck. We figured Monk would talk after that. But the guy went nuts and has been nuts ever since."

There was a sound forward. One of the men barked out in fear, or what sounded like fear. There was a general scramble to get away from the bulkhead door.

Ted barked, "You've waited too long! It's too late, now!" He made a dash for the bulkhead.

There was a kind of hideous red luminance outlined by the door, and Ted seemed to decide he was too late. He dodged to the right and flattened against the bulkhead as if he hoped the thing that was coming would not see him.

The object appeared in the bulkhead opening. They had extinguished the lights—or the man who had held the light had fled with it—and there was no illumination except that which came from the object itself. This was pale.

The object was large enough that it had difficulty getting in through the bulkhead opening. Its movements seemed somewhat without purpose, much as if the thing was guided by a mind, but a mind which was not at all times connected with its body and its purpose. It finally managed to get through the door.

Light from the object was pale, weird in quality, and was an emanation from the thing rather than a reflected light, or a light from within. It was a phosphorescent type of light, and doubtlessly came from chemicals smeared on the garment, which seemed to be a robe. The luminous chemical was applied only in spots, so that the weird effect was enhanced.

But the whole effect was impressive enough that Doc Savage's voice, when he spoke, was a startling break.

Doc spoke in Mayan.

He said, "Monk, you had better stop playing crazy and co-operate."

Monk, in a perfectly rational Mayan, said, "So I was thinking. What'll I do, though?"

THE FIERY MENACE

Doc said, "Say something rational in English. Something that will decoy the thing to you. Then try to kick it toward me. We may be able to surprise it."

"Sure!" Monk agreed.

In an utterly astonished tone—it was a wonder she remembered to speak in Mayan—Pat said, "Since when wasn't Monk crazy?"

Monk answered that himself in Mayan.

"Since all the time," he said.

"What was the idea?"

"Do you think I wanted that blasted Charlie burning gunpowder in my nose?" Monk demanded. "As long as they figured I was a crazy man they didn't torture me. In fact, they treated me swell and tried to cure me of being crazy, so they could torture me."

Monk changed to English. He had been mumbling the Mayan so that it sounded more or less a gibberish. But now he recoiled from the luminous thing that had come into the room and spoke.

"Keep away from me!" Monk bleated.

It was a perfectly sane request, and normal under the circumstances.

The luminous object went and stood in front of Monk. It bent forward to ascertain whether Monk had been scared back into a normal condition.

Monk convulsed like an acrobat doing a shoulder stand and kicked the thing with both feet!

THE thing gave a perfectly human squawk and floundered backward. It was good cue work on Monk's part; the kicked man landed in Doc's possession. Doc caught him between his knees—his wrists and ankles were both handcuffed—and twisted. He banged the victim against the steel floor, hauled him close and managed to get his hands on an object beneath the chemically treated robe.

Doc obtained possession of the object. Doc seemed to know exactly what he would find, and when he had his hands on it he ended the fight. He gave his victim an extra-hard rap against the floor. The man inside the vampire robe became senseless.

"Let him lie there," Doc said. "We can't bother dragging him around with us. We can come back for him."

This remark seemed premature, to say the least, because they were all manacled with steel, hand and foot.

The object Doc had taken from the man in the robe was a complicated contrivance with some of the appearance of a blow torch, but far from being as simple.

He turned the thing on his leg manacles.

Heat came out of it. Terrific heat. Tiny globules of chemical so hot that they burned through his leg manacles

THE FIERY MENACE

instantly, separating the links.

The noise had attracted attention. Ted was trying to come in through the door. Doc flicked the device at him, and the incredibly hot chemical globules sailed through the air, landing on steel and melting through the metal as if hot lead were being dropped on thin ice. Ted howled and fled.

Doc used the thing on his wrists. It was a little difficult.

Then he went to Monk, Long Tom and Pat and released them.

Pat watched the device melt through her manacles in startled fascination.

“What is that thing?” she demanded.

Monk, the chemist, said, “It’s a thermite torch.”

“Thermite torch?” Pat said. “Oh!”

(Thermite is one of the scientific discoveries which received its impetus in wartime. It was discovered by Dr. Hans Goldschmidt, of Essen, Germany, about 1895, during experiments with chromium and manganese. He found how to ignite a mixture of aluminum powder and iron oxide, using a barium–peroxide fuse which could be ignited with a match. Later magnesium powder or ribbons were used for ignition.

Three common varieties of thermite used are called plain thermite, railroad thermite and cast–iron thermite, which contain small percentages of nickel, manganese and mild steel punchings, or ferrosilicon.

In burning, these mixtures generate the incredible heat of 2,300 degrees to 2,700 degrees. The stuff was used in incendiary bombs during World War I, and has since been developed to a great degree.

The great peacetime use of thermite is in welding, and it was a simple form of thermite welding outfit which Doc had found.)

Long Tom growled, “So that’s the way they made those holes in the heads of the men they killed.”

Doc said, “Come on.” He lunged toward the stern, seized the fastener dogs of the hatch that led to the torpedo room and, from there, scrambled out on deck.

It was very dark outside, except for a flashlight beam which someone near the bow was waving around like a great white stick.

Monk crawled out on deck behind Doc. He said, “Watch!” He had found a wrench somewhere. He threw it. The flashlight jumped high in the air, and the man who was holding it shrieked as he fell off the beached bow of the submarine.

Doc ran forward, scrambled up to the main hatch, boosted it shut, and put a drop of thermite on the edge. The fabulously hot stuff effectively welded the hatch shut.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom were fighting the forward hatches, getting them shut. Doc followed them up, using the thermite sparingly. The stuff had not run out by the time he got the last hatch sealed.

He said, “There is one hatch to the rear—the one we came through. See if you can go in through it, and get

THE FIERY MENACE

hold of the fellow who was playing vampire.”

Monk growled, “With much pleasure!”

He went away.

A shot came down from above. It was quite accurate. The bronze man and his aids could be distinguished by the glow from the white-hot welds on the hatch rims. Doc, Pat and Long Tom scrambled hastily to the shelter of the conning tower, such as it was.

Doc said, “Long Tom, can you work out to the shore and do some yelling? Make them think you are an attacking party?”

“I’ll try.”

Long Tom crawled away. They could hear sounds that were evidently made by Monk. They came from inside the submarine, and they were fight sounds.

Pat exclaimed, “They’ve caught Monk!”

Doc hurried aft, Pat galloping after him. The fight sounds inside the sub grew louder.

It did not sound as if anyone had caught Monk. The contrary, rather. The yells of pain were not in Monk’s voice.

“The big dope!” Pat gasped. “He’s started a fight. He’d rather fight than eat. But he hasn’t a chance.”

Immediately, there were shots below deck. They sounded hollow, as if someone was coughing into a jug. Five of the blasts. Someone had emptied a revolver.

Monk was crawling out of the hatch when they reached him. He got out, sprawled on the steel plates.

“Help me . . . close . . . the hatch,” he gasped.

They got the hatch shut.

FROM far away in the darkness came a voice that was the best Long Tom could do at disguising his shout.

“Savage, where do you want these coast-guard men?” Long Tom bellowed.

“Get them around to the other side,” Doc shouted. Echoes thumped ominously from the big voice he was using. “There is a schooner around there. Watch it.”

Long Tom said, “Damn it, we haven’t any men around there!” He shouted to imaginary helpers to get the hell around and watch that schooner. He was giving the men above a chance to flee.

Almost immediately, there were flight noises from above. No more shots came down.

Pat said, “He scared them off. They’re running!”

THE FIERY MENACE

Monk made a wheezing noise.

“Monk!” Pat gasped. “You're hurt!”

“It don't hurt so much yet,” Monk said with difficulty. “But it sure makes a funny–shaped wart.”

“You're shot?”

“Lightly, yes.”

“What do you mean, lightly?”

“The danged bullet just stuck in my hide.”

Ham sprang forward and ran his fingers over Monk. He struck a match.

Relief made Ham burst into laughter.

“I always knew you had a thick hide,” Ham chortled. “Look here, Doc. Believe it or not, the bullet stuck in Monk's hide. It didn't even go through.”

There was pounding on the underside of the deck.

Doc hammered an answer with a heel, then asked, “What do you want?”

They wanted out, they said, and they were willing to come out minus their weapons.

Pat said, “We better let them think it over until daylight.”

Monk grunted quickly. “No! Let them out now.”

“Why?”

Monk said, “Alonzo Abbett is dead, and I don't see any sense of letting those fellows give Mrs. Abbett their version of the thing.”

Alonzo Abbett was, as Monk had said, dead. He was dead in the stern crew space. There was no trace of the robe affair that had been treated with chemicals, the thing which had formed part of the vampire disguise.

Pat said, “Straighten this whole thing out for me, somebody. Just what happened? How did it all come about? I'm confused.”

Monk took a deep breath. “I think I got most of the details,” he said.

“Go ahead and summarize it,” Pat said.

“THERE was a cargo ship named the *Domino*,” Monk said. “The *Domino* was torpedoed by an enemy submarine. But the *Domino* had a deck gun, and she put a shell in the submarine. The submarine was loaded with mines and torpedoes, so the crew got scared and abandoned her. But the sub didn't blow up or sink.

THE FIERY MENACE

Some of the *Domino's* crew boarded the submarine, then went back and got a lot of gold off the *Domino* before she sank.”

Monk paused and grimaced. The spot where he had been shot was hurting him.

“They transferred a million dollars' worth of gold from the *Domino* to the submarine,” the chemist continued. “They decided to steal it. So they came to this island and hid the gold. They didn't trust each other. So it was agreed that one man would hide the gold. He would be the only man who knew where it was. The others would watch him. The man who hid it was Elmer the Great, and he was an awful coward. I guess the others figured he wouldn't have the nerve to steal the gold himself.

“The thing you would expect happened: Elmer the Great made a map. Everybody started trying to steal it from him, or take it by force. The map was very small. But Elmer the Great had sealed it inside four different wrappers. On these wrappers were seals of wax with the fingerprints of all the men who had their greedy hands in the thing. That way, you see, no one man or combination of men would secretly open the package, they figured. It made the map a bulky thing, though.

“Elmer the Great got afraid,” Monk continued, “and he came to Doc Savage. He was killed by this vampire thing; but before that happened, he managed to hide the map in the chandelier. You know how that happened.”

Pat said, “The *vampire*—it was silly. Why use such a goofy murder method?”

Monk shrugged. “You had to know Elmer the Great to understand how that began. He had a horror of vampires. They used to kid him by telling awful, bloody stories about vampires—the ones in South America that you can't feel and which suck the blood out of you. Once, Elmer the Great fainted after one of the stories. So this mastermind started out by scaring Elmer with the vampire stuff. Elmer really knew it was a fake, but that didn't keep it from scaring him. He couldn't help it.”

“But they kept on with the vampire stuff after Elmer the Great was dead,” Pat said.

“Sure! It was a disguise, then. All these men were fighting to get that gold, you understand. One of them was playing vampire, and he didn't want the others to know his identity. A disguise, see?”

“Strange,” Pat said thoughtfully. “But I guess it happened that way.”

Monk grimaced violently.

“It ain't as strange,” the homely chemist said uneasily, “as I'm going to feel if my stomach is able to digest rubber.”

Ham stared at Monk. “I believe our good and homely friend is nuts after all.” Ham shook his head. “Digesting rubber! What the dickens!”

“That map of theirs,” Monk said. “That's where I hid it.”

“Where?”

“In my fountain pen. I mean in the little rubber sack that holds the ink in a fountain pen.”

“Huh?”

THE FIERY MENACE

“I put the map in it—it's a very small map—and tied a knot in the end of the sack, then swallowed it,” Monk explained. “Heck, it wasn't very sanitary. But it was the best I could think of under the circumstances.”

Ham began laughing again. “You had better cough it up,” he said.

DOC SAVAGE was not laughing, later in the day, after Monk had produced the tiny chart by the judicious use of a forefinger down his throat and they had finally spotted the money. It was in wooden boxes and did not have the bulk one would expect of that much money.

“Monk,” Doc said, “your plan is to keep Mrs. Abbett from knowing her husband was the vampire killer?”

“Er . . . sure!” Monk said uneasily.

“Exactly how did Abbett happen to get killed?”

Monk was uncomfortable. “Well . . . er . . . they started shooting at me, and I . . . er . . . Abbett happened to be between me and them.”

“You were holding him there, of course.”

“I guess maybe I was,” Monk admitted. He tried to change the subject by touching the spot where Doc had extracted the bullet from his hide. “Who would have thought a revolver bullet would go clear through Abbett? I didn't know those guns shot that hard.”

This was an untruth. Monk knew a great deal about what bullets would do.

Doc said, “You did not, by chance, go to all that trouble to get Abbett killed.”

“Why should I do such a thing?” Monk asked innocently.

“So his wife would not know he was a killer.”

Monk could tell an excellent lie on occasions. “The very idea!” he said. “Why would I do that?”

Ham Brooks had been listening. “You might have thought she would make a very attractive widow,” he said.

Monk grinned. “Why, a thing like that would never enter my head!” he said.

“Naturally,” Ham said. “Naturally—you liar!”

Monk tried to change the subject. He cast around for something to distract them and picked up a newspaper. It was a paper someone had brought from the village.

Monk tapped the paper, said, “Look here, fellows. Here's a strange story about a bank robbery. In Mexico. Old Mexico. A town north of Mexico City. Big bank there, robbed. A lot of dough taken. And there was the strangest kind of a laughing noise that seemed to make a lot of people frightened and unconscious.”

Ham snorted. Then he laughed. “Nobody blames you for what you did to Abbett,” he said.

THE FIERY MENACE

Monk grinned. "She does make a pretty widow, doesn't she?"

Ham Brooks made a mistake when he casually passed up the item about the weird laughter and the robbed bank in Mexico. Because the fantastic thing was soon to become very important to them. It was to smash down on them with death and destruction, with the most incredibly unsolvable—and frightening—mystery. It was to lead to "The Laugh of Death," which is the thrilling adventure novel in next month's Doc Savage Magazine.

THE END