

THE KING OF TERROR

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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THE KING OF TERROR

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. THE PICTURE OF DEATH

THEY killed Doc Savage on Saturday.

It was chilly that afternoon, with a little snow falling, and the snow as hard as salt particles. The wind had a hissing strength; it pounced on pedestrians and shook their overcoats and flapped their hat brims. Soldiers on the streets, and sailors in their winter-issue peajackets, blew steam on their fingers.

The man with the red hat and the blue armband with the yellow cross was not used to the cold, or to the bite that winter has in New York, close to the sea. He cursed the weather fluently, with the slightly accented voice of a man who can speak several languages.

His red hat and blue-yellow-cross armband, incidentally, was his own idea of a disguise. Dress in a bizarre outfit, he believed, and people wouldn't be able to recognize you when you dressed in ordinary clothes.

He crossed Fifth Avenue and went into a restaurant, one of those white-enamel-and-chrome quick-eat places.

"Mug one and save the cow," he told the waiter.

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He grinned a little when he said that, for he liked to show his acquaintance with the local vernacular, in any part of the world where he happened to be.

Soon after he got his coffee black another man came in. This fellow looked very much a gentleman. He could have been a clerk in one of the insurance offices in the neighborhood, or a floorwalker in one of the big department stores, or anything else genteel.

“Hello, Francis,” he said. He slid onto a stool beside the other. “Really, Francis, you look a holy horror in that red hat and with that idiotic armband.”

Francis sugared his coffee. “Percy,” he said, “I have argued psychology with you before, so I will not do so now. I will just ask you one question: Do you think you could tell a peacock from a chicken if they both had no feathers?”

Percy sneered. “Give me a glass of milk,” he told the waiter, “with just a touch of chocolate in it.” His sneer was polite. Everything he did was polite. He had a floorwalker's manner without ever having been a floorwalker.

“It is a bitter day,” Francis said. “I thoroughly detest a climate like this.”

“Yes, it is very unpleasant,” Percy agreed.

The waiter went to the other end of the counter.

Francis said, “The new guns are in a car I rented, at the end of this block.”

“Have you tested them, Francis?”

“Oh, naturally. They are very good weapons. Better, even, I think, than the Thompson submachine gun. They are of the same caliber as the Thompson, but I believe their reliability is greater since the mechanism is simpler. It follows that it would be, don't you think?”

“True,” Percy said. He consulted his wrist watch. He showed Francis the time. “I believe we should be going, don't you?” he asked.

“By all means,” Francis agreed.

THEY shot Doc Savage to pieces in the long narrow lobby hall of a midtown skyscraper.

The building was one of the tallest in the city, in the world in fact, and the decorative motif of its lobby was subdued modernistic. The main lobby was a great vaulted room where chandeliers hung and where dozens, actually dozens, of elevators operated for the benefit of the tenants.

But Doc Savage's private elevator was apart from the others. Once it had been in the same bank with the other elevators, but lately it had been changed, being now placed at the end of a small corridor that was a narrow thumb off the main lobby.

Percy and Francis took up a position at the mouth of this small blind hall, and there they waited.

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"I do hope our calculations are sufficiently accurate that this will not be embarrassing," Francis remarked.

"Yes, indeed," Percy agreed. "It would be such a bother."

They stood there, two fine, kind, polite, suave-looking gentlemen who wouldn't be thought to have an idea more violent than what kind of a present to take the baby at home this evening, or, maybe, when was the army going to get around to needing them.

"Oh, my, I feel conspicuous," Francis declared. "Suppose we seem to conduct a bit of a business transaction, by way of making ourselves less obvious."

So they acted like two gentlemen with a transaction. They made it good, actually, with Francis selling Percy an automobile which had three good tires, but one that unfortunately wasn't so good. They had a good deal of give-and-take over the condition of the fourth tire, and what brand it was, how many miles were in it, and then Doc Savage came out of the elevator.

It was very skillful the way neither Percy nor Francis seemed aware that Doc Savage was stepping out of the private elevator.

"Ah, the time is one thirty," said Francis.

"Mr. Savage's lunch hour," Percy agreed.

"With the Scientific Club?"

"Yes, with the Scientific Club," said Percy quietly. "'The Scientific Club members are going to be disappointed, aren't they?'"

Percy and Francis were dropping the innocent brown wrapping-paper sheaths off a pair of submachine guns.

"Probably they'll be disappointed," Francis agreed. "Am I right in believing Mr. Savage is president of the Scientific Club?"

They were ready now. "You shoot high."

"Right. You shoot low," Percy said.

THE roar of the guns in the small hall, in the great lobby of the building, was thunder a thousandfold.

First burst of the weapons seemed to take Doc Savage in the upper chest. His coat front and shirt and necktie got ragged, and his chest lost shape. The little machine guns could turn out seven or eight hundred bullets a minute. They fired at Doc Savage in bursts for fully half a minute. Maybe two hundred bullets from each gun. Four hundred in all. And not more than twenty-five or so missed his body.

Percy and Francis saw the bullets do to Doc Savage's body what that many .45-caliber bullets would do to a body. Any single .45-caliber slug would kill a man, which was why as far back as 1909 the army adopted the caliber as its official side arm.

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They saw Doc Savage's arms and legs get joints where there were no joints, even before he had folded to the floor. And after he was on the floor they saw the body kick and twitch as long as their guns roared.

It was a hideous transformation from life to death. Doc Savage, when he had stepped out of the elevator, had been before them as a fine physical specimen, a giant of a man bronzed by tropical suns, with strange eyes that were like pools of always–stirred flake gold, and hair that was a bronze only a little darker than his skin. Now he was something torn in a crimson puddle on the floor.

Francis and Percy stopped shooting.

They tossed their guns on the floor.

They noticed what seemed to be smoke around them. Percy fanned at this vapor.

“Bit of a fog,” he complained.

“Smoke, I imagine,” Francis agreed. “I don't recall smokeless powder making a smoke like that before. However, the job seems to have been done well enough.”

They turned and walked out of the building. Both of them had produced handkerchiefs, and were fastidiously wiping their hands.

The mangled figure of Doc Savage disappeared as soon as Francis and Percy were out of sight.

Literally and actually, the body disappeared.

A panel opened in the side of the hall; a panel which no casual observer would have noticed as a door, and Doc Savage came out. Doc Savage was personally unharmed.

“Monk, Ham, you clean up this mess,” he said. “And be ready for a call.”

Monk and Ham came out of the opening that had been concealed by the ingenious panel.

“We better go along,” Monk said. He sounded hopeful.

Doc said, “No, stay here.”

Monk nodded, but not with enthusiasm. Monk liked excitement, and standing around here after the excitement was over didn't appeal to him.

Monk's life was probably dedicated more to excitement than to any other one thing. Certainly he liked trouble more than his profession, which was chemistry. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, which was Monk's full name and title, was rated one of the great industrial chemists of the era. He didn't look it. He was a short man, very wide, as wide as tall almost, as hairy as a baboon with rusty red hair that resembled finishing nails, and with a face that would stop a clock if any face would.

Ham Brooks—who was, like Monk, one of a group of five men who worked closely with Doc Savage—also had a title. He was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks. He had fame in two lines—law and clothes. In law, he was good enough that Harvard Law School was always pointing him out as one of its better examples. And as for clothes, tailors who loved their work often followed him down the street just to watch clothes being worn as they should be worn.

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Doc was gone now. Presumably he was on the trail of Percy and Francis.

“Who were those two fellows?” Monk asked.

“The two with the machine guns?”

“Uh–huh.”

“I never saw them before in my life,” Ham declared.

“Then you wouldn't know what they wanted?”

“To anyone but you,” Ham said, “it would be fairly obvious what they wanted. But since it's you, I'll explain. They wanted to kill Doc.”

“Thank you,” Monk said sourly. “I wouldn't have dreamed, of course, that they wanted to kill Doc. I'm deaf, dumb, blind, and with my head cut off, so I wouldn't know.”

“Somebody must have given you that perfect description of yourself,” Ham remarked. “You surely didn't make that up all alone.”

Monk grinned at the lawyer. “Someday I'm going to show you what the words 'sudden destruction' mean.”

THEY examined the device, the gadget, by which Doc Savage had been able to make Percy and Francis think they had shot Doc into a pulp.

The trick was ingenious, but there was nothing particularly new about its conception. An experienced magician would have said, probably, that it was just so–so, good enough for its purpose. Good enough for its purpose was good enough, though.

It was a movie projector, color film. It was concealed well back in the corridor, in the ceiling, shooting from behind one of the light fixtures, so that it was hardly noticeable from direct inspection, and certainly not at all discoverable from where Percy and Francis had stood.

For a screen, a polished–brushed, rather–metal panel that was part of the decoration on either side of the elevator door. In fact the elevator door and the elevator interior were all the same material and would serve as a screen.

Monk and Ham examined the damage the bullets had done.

Monk asked, “Who figured this gimmick out, Ham? And don't tell me you did.”

“It was Doc's idea,” Ham said. “And he had Long Tom fix the thing up. Long Tom has become a home–movie fan recently, and spent a mint of money on equipment.”

Long Tom was Major Thomas J. Roberts, electrical wizard of the Doc Savage group of five associates.

Monk said, “Long Tom is in England, installing that new plane–detector system, isn't he?”

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Ham nodded. "He fixed this up before he left. Made the films for Doc, with Doc doing the acting, of course."

Having squinted at the projector overhead, Monk pondered aloud, "I don't see how Doc made it stick that way. That film he showed was a picture of him getting shot with a machine gun. Cut to pieces. I see how you could fake such a picture in taking it. That ain't no trouble for a good movie photographer. But suppose those guys would've had rifles, and just shot him once apiece, and ran."

Ham laughed. "There's more than one movie projector up there, Monk. Each one has a different film. There's one showing Doc getting shot once and falling dead. But you should see the one of him getting blown up with a bomb. That's a daisy! This one of his getting shot with a machine gun was nothing compared to it. All Doc had to do was take a look down the hall through the televisor, guess what was up, and turn on the right film. When the gunmen saw Doc opening the elevator door they opened fire—at nothing more than the clever motion picture."

Monk was satisfied.

The machine-gun bullets had done considerable damage to the metal trim at the end of the hall, and to the elevator-door jambs and even the elevator interior. An extended repair job would be necessary.

Then Monk stopped and clapped a hand to his forehead.

"That smoke!" he exclaimed. "What was it?"

"I'm surprised," Ham said, "that you ever thought of the smoke."

"It was something, then?"

"It was."

MONK waited for Ham to give more information, but Ham remained silent. Monk scowled darkly. His association with Ham Brooks was almost a continuous quarrel. Not that he didn't contribute his part to the fussing.

"All right, you overdressed shyster," Monk said. "I know that no machine gun shooting bullets loaded with smokeless powder makes that much smoke."

"It's the cartridges that are loaded with powder, not bullets—"

"Don't talk word technicality to me!" Monk yelled. "What made the smoke? If you know, tell me. If you don't, shut up!"

Ham grinned. One of the things he enjoyed most was Monk in a rage.

"That smoke wasn't smoke," he said. "It was some vapor, a chemical, which Doc discharged from vents in the wall. He has different vents on separate controls, so he can squirt the stuff on anybody standing in any part of the hall."

"How's it work?"

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“The vapor gets on the guys and enables Doc to trail them.”

“How?”

“I don't know just how.”

Monk said, “I'm surprised you'd admit not knowing everything.” The homely chemist gazed about the corridor. “Doc sure went to a lot of trouble on this gadget.”

Ham nodded.

“I'd say it might be worth it,” he remarked. “Look how it pans out: Doc apparently dead. Whoever shot him will go away satisfied. They won't be suspicious. And Doc is able to trail them. Makes a nice set-up when something like this happens.”

“And it happens,” Monk said, “a little too regular to suit me. Sometime, somebody is going to get Doc. But I wonder what kind of trouble has come looking for him this time?”

They pondered that mystery while they went hunting the head janitor in order to have a canvas screen erected, closing off the little private elevator hall, and getting repairs under way.

Chapter II. FRAULINO JONES

DOC SAVAGE had had an overcoat over his arm when he went out of the midtown skyscraper on the trail of Percy and Francis.

The overcoat was a flowing one which had pads to take the squareness out of the shoulders—instead of putting it in, as customary in coats—and another pad to give a roundness to the back of the wearer. Doc put it on. His character, as far as general appearance went, quickly underwent a considerable change. He drew one of those you-can-fold-it hats from the overcoat pocket and put this on. It looked about as neat as such hats generally look, and further helped change his usually neat appearance. He did not, then, look so much like Doc Savage.

The cane had been hooked over his arm under the overcoat.

He kept watching the cane as he walked. The cane was a pastel shade of yellow. Occasionally it underwent a quick change in hue, becoming blue. Whenever the cane started getting blue, Doc hastily changed his course; hunted around, in fact, until the cane went back to its yellow tint.

The litmus cane, Long Tom Roberts had called it when they developed it.

Actually, it was superlitmus in effect, if the effect was litmus at all. Litmus is the coloring matter employed by chemists for the detection of free acids and free alkalis. In true litmus, the coloring matter results from the action of air and ammonia on orcin during the preparation of litmus from the lichens from which it is made. Almost every high school and agricultural student has seen the action of litmus paper demonstrated. And the general operation of this stuff was the same.

A chemical coated on the cane changed color when in the presence of vapor, even the most minute quantity of vapor, of the type which had been released in the lobby corridor while Percy and Francis were using their machine guns.

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Enough of the vapor had clung to the clothing of Percy and Francis—they were actually sprayed with the stuff—to leave an aura that could be detected by the cane.

The whole idea of this method of trailing had seemed fantastic to Doc Savage when he first began working on it; but the thing had proved astonishingly feasible.

He found that Percy and Francis had entered a newsreel theater in the neighborhood. Doc took a back seat and, after a while, spotted the pair.

FRANCIS and Percy enjoyed the newsreel thoroughly, and particularly did they like a cartoon feature toward the end.

“That was good,” Percy said as they left the theater.

“It certainly was good,” Francis agreed heartily. “Beautiful and refined. The art of making animated films certainly has advanced.” He shivered and pulled a muffler tighter about his throat. “I emphatically cannot say the same for the weather.”

“I wonder if it would be advisable to take a taxi?” Percy pondered.

“That would be nice, wouldn't it? But don't you imagine that it might not be advisable? One of these uncouth oafs of taxi drivers might remember our faces.”

They agreed this was true, and walked on uptown. Francis, having gotten on the subject of taxi drivers, said some more on the point. He didn't seem to care for taxi drivers individually or as a class, in New York or in Cairo. It developed that one of the profession, in London, had whacked the daylights out of Francis in a dispute several years ago. Francis grimaced at the recollection. “And the police found his body before I had planned, and almost caught me,” he finished. “That would have been beastly, wouldn't it? Hanged for doing in a low fellow like a cabby.”

The hotel they entered was not the largest in the city, but it was one of the most expensive—and supposedly, ultra—genteel. Percy and Francis became part of the suave atmosphere of the lobby.

“Mr. Francis and Mr. Percy to see Fraulino Jones,” they told the desk clerk.

“Fraulino Jones, to be sure.” The clerk was back in a moment, saying, “She is expecting you. Boy! Boy, show Mr. Percy and Mr. Francis to the Fraulino Jones' suite.”

THE bellhop showed them to the seventh floor and rapped on the door for them. A maid opened the door, an utterly perfect—looking foreign maid. Not a European, but some type of Asiatic.

The maid looked at Percy and Francis and fear jumped into her eyes, but she hid it by doing a little bow.

“I will tell the Fraulino you are here,” she said in English.

She left them in a vaulted parlor, a magnificent chamber, the kind of room that would make a Hollywood interior decorator look around for the sound cameras. The furniture was fine, genuine, expensive.

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Francis and Percy expanded with appreciation of their surroundings.

“Lovely,” Francis breathed. “So much more than one comes to expect of hotels.”

“The Fraulino has excellent taste,” Percy agreed.

Francis nodded. “By the way, I think it would be a shame to disturb her unnecessarily in connection with the Doc Savage matter. The thought of deliberate, ruthless killing has a depressing effect on some people, and I believe the Fraulino Jones is one of those.”

Percy considered the point. “Self–defense might be less offensive.”

“Oh, indeed. Self–defense has a righteous ring even to sensitive ears,” Francis told him. “I am sure it would be a kindness to tell the Fraulino it was self–defense.”

Percy grinned. “And, of course, to speak bluntly, what she doesn't know won't hurt her.”

“Meaning that she needn't know Abraham Mawson gave us strict orders to kill Savage, regardless of what the Fraulino told us to do?”

Percy nodded, then said, “Ah, the Fraulino is coming.”

She was.

THE Fraulino Jones entered. And, immediately, everything else in the magnificent room seemed ordinary.

She had all the things that beauty has, height and blondness, grace and curves in the interesting places. But she had more than that, and some of what she had was not easy to define. It was a quality of the spectacular. Just a little extra of everything, so that you looked at her and thought: Great grief, she can't be *that* complete! And you looked for flaws, and did not find them.

Her frock was the kind of thing that would have come out of the Rue de la Paix, if the French had not lost a war.

“Ah, you are lovely, Fraulino,” Percy said.

“Thank you,” she told him.

“Comment allez vous, mademoiselle,”

Francis said.

She returned the greeting in French that was flawless, and Francis smiled approvingly. He had been testing her out on what foreign languages he knew, and so far he hadn't found a one which she could not speak better than he.

They took cigarettes. The Asiatic maid brought them drinks of good brandy in little glasses. A bit to warm them against the outer cold. They talked of the weather a little. Then Fraulino Jones confessed to being a little piqued with the weather, but after all it was childish to expect better in New York, at this season of the year.

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Spring, though, was lovely. For about six weeks it was lovely.

And finally she got around to saying, "By the way, you might wish to see the newspapers. Oga"—this to the Asiatic maid—"Oga, will you bring us the newspaper you purchased, please?"

The black type on the front page of the newspaper was so big that it looked as if a horse had stepped in black ink and then on the newspaper.

Doc Savage had been killed. Shot down in the lobby of the building which housed his headquarters.

The Fraulino waited until Percy and Francis had read the headlines.

"I think you had better visit an ear specialist tomorrow," she said. Her voice had turned grim.

Francis and Percy looked puzzled, the latter saying, "I do not believe we understand."

"Am I to take it you did not hear me say there was to be no killing?"

Percy and Francis now looked astonishingly distressed. They became so overwhelmed with regret that they were abject. Percy actually had tears in his eyes. They were wonderful actors.

"It was a horrible accident," Percy said in a low, emotion-ridden voice. "Mr. Savage grabbed my gun and it was discharged without any intention of mine."

Francis said, "No, Percy, tell her the truth. It was my gun he seized and which killed him. I will not have you taking the blame for me just because I am your friend."

THEIR argument was better than their acting.

Without lifting their voices, they reached pitches of emotional violence in telling each other that they shouldn't sacrifice each other on the altar of friendship. They developed the friendship theme. They made it sound like something lovely and sacred, a gentle treasure between them that was in danger of being destroyed.

It was a tear-fetching thing. A horrible mistake, an accident between two friends, and each trying to take the blame for it. Very touching, and all with a genuineness to it that was remarkable.

In five minutes Percy and Francis had the Fraulino Jones sympathizing with them and telling them that they shouldn't talk about the terrible thing.

Percy and Francis then fell into a remorseful silence.

The Fraulino Jones took out a handkerchief and dabbed it to her eyes. Her emotion, however, was genuine.

She took up the newspaper.

There was half a page of history of Doc Savage inside. Or, at least, as much of the history of the Man of Bronze as the newspapers knew, for Doc was not one who sought publicity.

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The item stated that Doc Savage was a remarkable individual who had been trained from childhood by scientists who specialized in various lines. This, said the newspaper, was probably part of a modernistic experiment in taking an ordinary baby and turning him into a superman. Actually, this guess was not entirely true as to motive; the training had been directed and financed by Doc Savage's father, and its sole purpose had been to fit Doc for a career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth.

The newspaper article mentioned the bronze man's strange career, and stated in broad terms that he was a man who'd had many fantastic adventures in his lifetime. It said that Doc Savage had contributed many new discoveries in the fields of surgery—his specialty—and in electricity, chemistry and other sciences.

It named Doc's group of five associates—Monk Mayfair, Ham Brooks, Johnny Littlejohn, Long Tom Roberts, and Renny Renwick. It gave these associates their full names and titles, so that just naming them completely took a whole paragraph.

Three of the associates were now in Europe, according to the paper, assisting in the war effort. Only Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were known to be in New York City, and these had not been reached for a statement.

The Fraulino Jones was very pensive when she finished reading. “This makes me very sad,” she said. “It was a sickening thing to have happen.”

“Very, very sad,” Francis agreed. “All that we needed to do was take him alive.”

The Fraulino nodded. “Taking him alive, and holding him a prisoner for a few weeks, or until our affair was completed, would have been sufficient.”

“We are so sorry,” Francis said.

The Fraulino Jones looked at the newspaper a long time. Her voice was sad when she said, “A man cannot take the chances Doc Savage has taken and expect to live forever. The law of averages has got to come in somewhere.”

THEY sat in silence for a time. Then the Fraulino Jones arose and excused herself, and went away, obviously to bathe her reddened eyes in cold water.

While she was gone, Percy and Francis gave each other little glances of approval. They had put it over nicely.

Fraulino Jones came back. She had control of herself.

“Gentlemen,” she said, “we have one other thing to do, then we can leave this winter climate.”

Percy and Francis sat up. They were the soul of eagerness to oblige.

The Fraulino said, “We want some more good men. Four or five or more. But they must be good men, suitable for work with our organization.”

“What, Fraulino, would you say constituted a good man?” Percy asked.

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Enumerating on her fingers, the Fraulino said, "Efficiency, a lack of squeamishness, a certain amount of dash to them. I would say the important quality, the really important one, was a command of equilibrium where material things are concerned. In other words, men who will not be awed by the largeness of things."

Francis smiled at that. "A very desirable quality, Fraulino. Not being awed by the largeness of things. We need that."

The Fraulino nodded. "This matter is so big that it will scare the wits out of the average man," she said. "What we want is men who won't get stage fright."

"Men," said Percy, "with the confidence of Napoleon and Caesar."

"And the qualities of Captain Kidd and Adolf Hitler," the Fraulino said dryly.

Percy and Francis nodded.

She added, "More good men like yourselves."

Percy and Francis looked pleased.

Chapter III. TWO GOOD MEN

DOC SAVAGE took the little loud-speaker affair away from his ear and tugged at the wire which connected it to a small contact microphone that was held to the windowpane of Fraulino Jones's living room with rubber suction cups. The microphone had picked up all that had been said without much trouble, although it was true the howling of the cold wind was somewhat of a nuisance.

The cold on the decorative ledge of the hotel building was more of a problem, though. Now in particular when Doc was ready to leave the ledge. But he managed, sliding down a knotted cord attached to a grapple, and getting in the window of a room on the floor below, which he had rented under the imaginary name of Herman Woods.

Doc got in the room, closed the window, and yanked a chair close to the radiator. He had not actually suffered from the cold outside as much as another man, probably, but that was because of his training in mind control. He had gotten just as cold as the next fellow.

When the stiffness was out of his fingers he unlimbered a small portable-pocket size-radio transmitter-receiver apparatus.

"Monk," he said. "Monk or Ham. Come in."

The apparatus picked up an answer immediately-two answers, for both Monk and Ham responded on their portable outfits.

Doc said, "The two men seem to be hired killers. They go under the names of Mr. Percy and Mr. Francis. In one sense the names are very appropriate, so no doubt they are false names adopted for the effect. In another sense the two men are as clever and conscienceless a pair of killers as I ever saw."

Monk said, "That's making quite a statement, considering how many killers you've seen in your time, Doc."

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"These are bad. Make no mistake." Doc Savage was silent a moment.

The Fraulino Jones' apartment was above, and now Doc got on a chair and clamped the contact microphone against the ceiling. It would pick up any walking around done in the apartment above in spite of the excellence of the soundproofing.

Back at the radio, Doc said, "The two reported to a woman. They call her the Fraulino Jones. I have not seen her, but she sounds like a very capable article. Percy and Francis told her I was killed accidentally. They lied to her because they had received orders from someone named Abraham Mawson to kill me, whereas the Fraulino Jones wanted me merely seized and held prisoner for a few months or weeks."

"You say she's a good-looking wench?" Monk asked hopefully.

Doc said, "I have not seen her, as I told you."

Ham Brooks said, "Doc, any indication what is behind this sudden attack on you?"

"Nothing but the one obvious fact that something is afoot and they want to keep us from interfering," Doc replied.

"Any hint of what it is?"

"No, but they seem quite impressed with the size of the undertaking. They are now desirous of obtaining assistants. They particularly want assistants who are not susceptible to being awed by the size of this undertaking."

"Gosh!" Monk said.

"Monk," Doc said, "do you awe easily?"

Monk was silent a moment. "Boy, oh, boy!" he said.

"How about you, Ham?" Doc inquired. "Do you awe easily?"

Ham laughed. "Lead us to it," he said.

PERCY and Francis had cocktails with the Fraulino Jones. Then the three went out to the Maison Malacia, a restaurant where the check took your hat off, and dined. They had squab under glass, *apetits Norvegien*, and some other stuff. They took in a theater, arriving late in the second act, too late for the plot of the play to make any sense to them. Then Percy and Francis left the Fraulino at her hotel, tucked their mufflers around their necks and set out on their business.

"A pleasant young woman," remarked Percy.

His companion nodded agreement and added, "One of the most beautiful, I think, that I have ever seen."

They took their private car, which had been parked in a nearby lot. They shivered and swore at the cold until the heater began warming the interior.

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“A young woman with a cause,” Percy continued, speaking of the Fraulino. “I do not believe you have heard her story, have you, Francis?”

Francis shook his head. “I understand the Japanese did something rather unpleasant to her family.”

“To her father and mother. And to the family funds, I believe also. It was rather gory. You know how the peasant soldiery of any country become when aroused and maddened by killing and bloodshed and hate. Others are as bad as the Japanese, probably, but this was one of those particularly atrocious cases.”

Francis frowned daintily. “Oh, do we have to discuss unpleasant things? I’m sorry, Percy, but we’ve had a trying day, and couldn’t we discuss more cheering matters?”

“An excellent idea,” said his companion. “The Fraulino’s hatred of the Japanese, and her general attitude, which is a trifle exotic you’ll notice, toward humanity—all that is the result of what happened to her parents. She is, as I said—or was it you said that—a young woman with a cause. It is good for young women to have causes. Makes them interesting. And useful.”

Francis nodded. “But I do wish we could discuss more cheering matters.”

A stranger suddenly jerked open the car door and put his head, arm, and a pistol inside, and said, “I got a cheering matter to discuss with you.”

PERCY and Francis sat very still. They acted like men who had learned it wasn’t wise to make sudden moves without knowing what was what.

The door on the other side of the car was yanked open. The car had stopped for a traffic light at the beginning of all this.

This second stranger grinned at them.

“Devil to the left of you, and deep blue sea to the right of you,” he said. “Jump, brother. Or don’t you want to?”

Percy and Francis didn’t want to.

One newcomer was squat and very wide, and very dark-skinned. The other was a lean man, also dark-skinned. Both had remarkable red hair.

Both spoke good English, but it was English with an effort. Now they gave up the effort of speaking such English.

“Keel them, Cuerpo,” said the lean man.

“Si,

brother Cabeza,” said the other. “*Si*. I keel them and dump them in the back seat. You can sit on them and warm your feet, which you say are *mucho frio*.”

“Si,

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good.”

“But do not forget to search them, Cuerpo.”

“Si,

Cabeza.”

This discussion and decision to kill Percy and Francis and then use their bodies for foot warmers was carried out in a casual tone. But it was still full of purpose. Percy and Francis were impressed.

“Damn!” Percy said. This was a very violent word for him.

“Keel them, Cuerpo,” said Cabeza.

“Keel them what with, Cabeza? Keel them weeth the knife? The rope? The gun? The hand around the throat? The leetle capsule with the poison in it? What with, Cabeza?”

Cabeza seemed discouraged. “They weel die with old age if you do not get busy,” he said.

Cuerpo pondered. “The hand around the throat weel be best,” he said.

He looked capable of it, too. He went to work on Percy and Francis, picking them up bodily, both at once, and hurling them into the back seat. It was a remarkable display of strength on Cuerpo's part. Meantime, Cabeza got in the car and drove it up a deserted side street.

Percy and Francis found their voices. They didn't howl for help, possibly because the only kind of help available would be a policeman, and they didn't care for policemen.

“Wait!” Percy gurgled. “Hell, wait! Don't be a fool! You'll only get a few dollars this way. We can tell you how to make a lot of money.”

“Money. Ah, *dinero*,” Cuerpo said. “You hear that, brother Cabeza? *Dinero*.”

Cabeza registered interest. “Ask them to talk more about it.”

“Talk more pleasant words,” Cuerpo ordered.

PERCY and Francis were frankly and unblushingly scared. Their two assailants were obviously a pair of freaks, but that didn't make them harmless.

“Come to our hotel, you two,” Percy said. “And we will talk this over.”

“Una arana,”

said Cabeza.

“What?” asked Percy.

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“That is the Spanish word for spider—*arana*,” Francis told him.

It had puzzled Cuerdo, too. He looked enlightened. “*Si*, the spider,” he said. “Come into my house, thees spider say to the fly. He mean hees web. Where you pick up these wisdom, Cabeza?”

Cabeza said to shut up and let him think. He looked pop-eyed for a moment, which seemed to be his way of thinking. Good, they would go to the hotel of Percy and Francis, he said.

“Thees probably trap, Cabeza,” said Cuerdo.

“You bet,” Cabeza agreed. “If so, we keel them, so they die in their own trap.”

They drove to a subdued, expensive hotel off Park Avenue, parked the car and gave the doorman the keys, and entered the hostelry.

Cabeza and Cuerdo made a conspicuous pair crossing the lobby. The colors in their clothes looked somewhat as if a rainbow had had a bad night out. But they seemed to be completely unafraid and unconcerned.

An elevator took them upstairs and they inspected the suite of rooms which Percy and Francis occupied. It was an elegant suite, and they approved.

“Ah, maybe thees talk about *dinero* no joke,” Cuerdo said.

Percy took off his hat and started to place it on a small stand on which lay a telephone book and nothing else. Cuerdo promptly kicked Percy where his pants were tightest, sending him flying into a corner. Cuerdo then inspected the telephone book, finding it was hollow, and contained a formidable automatic pistol in its hollowed-out interior.

“Thees feller full of tricks,” he told Cabeza. “Shall we keel heem both now?”

“Shut up, Cuerdo,” Cabeza said. “Shut up and stay shut up. I will talk to them about the *dinero*.”

Percy rubbed the kicked area of his anatomy and favored that portion when he took a chair. Francis also seated himself.

“This is a job,” Percy told Cuerdo and Cabeza.

“Carramba!”

Cuerdo said.

“We ees not friends with no job,” Cabeza explained. “All our lives we have trouble with heem.”

“Now wait a minute,” Percy said, holding up a hand. “This is not the kind of a job people generally mean when they talk about a job. This is different. This is a little like the work you are doing tonight, or were doing.”

“Work,” Cuerdo said disgustedly. “She ees no friend of mine, that word.”

“We are independent businessmen, señor,” Cabeza said. “We ees never work.”

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“Once, Cabeza, only once,” Cuerdo corrected him. “Once, in a place called Georgia, when they ees put us on that theeng called chain gang.”

PERCY and Francis smiled pleasantly. They were beginning to enjoy their two strange companions. Cabeza and Cuerdo were as queer as baked ducks, but there was a fresh, uncaring deviltry about them that was appealing to both Francis and Percy.

“By the way, gentlemen,” Francis said. “You speak English with a very strange Spanish accent. That is, sometimes you have the accent, and other times you do not.”

“What's matter with thees accent?” Cuerdo demanded.

“Oh, nothing. It's a delicious accent,” Francis said hastily. “The only thing is, you put it on and off like you would a coat.”

Cabeza shrugged elaborately. “She ees our great burden, that accent,” he said. “We can speak the most perfect English, like this. But the execution of such impeccable phraseology requires studious application to the task of speaking. This is naturally annoying. She ees easier to do her like this. Just say the hell with thees accent.”

“Where are you from?” Percy asked.

“Rivadavia.”

“Where is that?”

“In Salta.”

“Now,” said Percy patiently, “where is *that*?”

Cabeza told him, “Rivadavia is town. Salta is province. Both of them ees in Argentina.”

“Oh, I see, you are Argentina natives,” Percy said.

“Not any more,” Cabeza replied hastily.

“Thees sheriff there ees like see us,” Cuerdo explained. “Maybe he ees like run us ragged again.”

Percy leaned back in his chair. “Your name, in Spanish, means 'head', doesn't it?” he asked Cabeza.

Cabeza nodded. “Sure. I'm the head.” He indicated Cuerdo. “Hees name mean 'body.' I am the head, he ees the body. I do thees thinking, he do thees acting.”

Cuerdo complained cheerfully, “Cabeza's thinking ees give me headache now and then, damn often.”

“What are your actual names?” Percy asked.

“Juan and Carlos,” Cabeza said promptly.

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Percy laughed. The names were as common in the Spanish as any other, and meant about the same thing as John Doe in American. "I like Cabeza and Cuerpo better," Percy told the pair. "Would you fellows really like to make a lot of money easy?"

"How many feller we have to keel, señor?" Cabeza asked.

"Not too many," Percy told him.

"Carramba,

what do we care?" said Cuerpo grandly.

Percy and Francis retired to another room in order to discuss the two prospective recruits. Cabeza and Cuerpo were so remarkable that they quite possibly belonged in a zoo. And yet there was a kind of deadly, careless efficiency about them. The consultation became favorable to introducing Cabeza and Cuerpo to the Fraulino Jones.

In the other room, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks exchanged winks. Monk was Cuerpo, the body. Ham was Cabeza, the brain. When Doc Savage had suggested this grotesque characterization of two clowns from South America, two bad men who were so bad they weren't believable, neither Monk nor Ham had thought, secretly, that it would work. Doc Savage had explained that the very hooligan nature of the characters Cabeza and Cuerpo might make them workable. And, apparently, he was right.

Monk and Ham were enjoying the roles, anyway. It was their second nature to act like clowns.

Percy and Francis came back from the other room and Percy said, "All right, we are going to give you the jobs. But first, we will have to introduce you to the Fraulino Jones, who will have to O. K. you."

"Ah, so you two hombres ees not your own boss," Cuerpo said.

"Anybody could see they ees not have sense to be own boss," Cabeza said.

"Thees señorita, I hope she ees easy to look at," said Cuerpo.

"Cuerpo can't bear to look at homely girls," Cabeza explained. "It affect hees appetite."

Percy laughed and said, "Cuerpo doesn't need to worry about his appetite."

Before they left the hotel, Francis gave Cabeza and Cuerpo a word of warning.

"The Fraulino Jones is not the real boss," Francis said. "She only thinks she has equal say in what goes on." Francis frowned impressively. "But neither of you are to tell her that. She isn't supposed to know it."

Cabeza squinted at them. "She ees sound like thees double cross."

Cuerpo grinned. "What ees difference? Double cross ees make things interesting."

Chapter IV. SLIP OF THE FOOT

THE Fraulino Jones was not particularly disturbed at being rooted out of bed at an ungodly hour in the morning. She met them in an enveloping robe that concealed everything except the beauty of her face and ankles, although these by themselves were enough to impress Cabeza and Cuerpo.

Percy and Francis explained what had happened, covering the events fully up to the warning that the Fraulino was not the actual boss, which they carefully omitted.

The Fraulino Jones looked at Cabeza and Cuerpo and listened to them talk. She became angry. She called Percy and Francis into an adjoining room. She wasn't very polite to them.

"This is idiotic," said the Fraulino. "I thought you two men had good sense. You had orders to find suave, competent men who were not overawed by anything. And what do you do? Where did you find these two? In a circus?"

"We told you that they found us," Percy explained patiently. "I will admit they are not suave. But they are competent and I doubt if six spike-tailed devils would overawe them."

"Bosh!" The Fraulino stamped a foot. "Get them out of here. They will not do."

"But—"

"Get them out!"

Percy and Francis and the Fraulino Jones went back into the other room. Percy and Francis looked somewhat uneasy.

"She can't use you," Percy told Cabeza and Cuerpo. "I'm sorry. You have just made the trip over here for nothing."

Percy and Francis had expected some kind of a reaction to this. They hardly recognized it when it came, though. It was a little too fast. Cuerpo knocked them flat on the floor with what seemed like one big whoop and jump. And Cabeza grabbed the Fraulino Jones, shook her loose from a small pistol, and yanked her down on his lap in a chair. The Fraulino struggled, but had no luck. Cabeza held her tightly.

Cuerpo became alarmed. "Hey, thees muscle stuff not your job," he told Cabeza.

"You handle the men," said Cabeza, "and I'll take care of thees señoritas."

"Like fon," said Cuerpo. He went over and gave Cabeza a shove. "If thees señorita need holding, Cuerpo is one to do that. Go away, Cabeza, you are only brains of us."

The Fraulino Jones recovered her breath and demanded, "What are you going to do, you two fugitives from good sense?"

"Keel Señores Percy and Francis," Cabeza said, "and rob them good, too."

"And lov' you to deat'," Cuerpo told the Fraulino.

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The Fraulino Jones now did what she should have done earlier. She gave Cabeza and Cuerpo more than a superficial examination. And she saw qualities in them that impressed her. Generally speaking, the impression was a chilly one along her backbone.

She said, "Look here, I think I was a bit too hasty. How would you like those jobs after all?"

Not much impressed, Cabeza replied, "Ten chances out of nine you ees not mean it."

"Me, I ees rather lov' you to deat'," announced Cuerpo.

The Fraulino Jones became eloquent and finally persuaded Cabeza and Cuerpo to become employees. The five hundred dollars a week apiece was the deciding point for them.

"Bueno!"

Cabeza said. "She be jus' like rob thees bank every Saturday night."

MONK and Ham were taken to Percy and Francis' hotel for the night and secured a room. This gave them a chance to be alone, something they needed, because playing the parts of Cabeza and Cuerpo was something that took great concentration.

It also gave them an opportunity to contact Doc Savage on the telephone.

"Boy, boy, oh, boy," Monk told Doc. "That Fraulino Jones is prettier than a barrel of chorus girls."

"In addition to that, what have you discovered?" Doc asked dryly.

"Well, we've got jobs with the gang. We're not in too solid, but we're in. And Percy and Francis are going to look around tomorrow for some more good tough thugs to hire. The Fraulino Jones is going to do some shopping on Fifth Avenue, and is going to take me along to carry the packages, and hear me talk my Spanish-English vernacular. I think she is entertained by this accent me and Ham have been using, although of course Ham doesn't entertain her as much as I do."

"To put it in somewhat fewer words, you haven't learned anything," Doc said.

"Yeah, I guess that's right," Monk admitted.

"Keep trying."

"Sure."

"Particularly try to find out what is behind this."

"Sure."

Monk and Ham slept very well, overslept in fact, and it was the Fraulino Jones' calling on the telephone which awakened them. She was ready to go shopping. Monk rushed off without his breakfast in order to be on hand to carry her packages. Ham was somewhat disgusted that Monk had gotten the job.

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Ham informed Monk that he was a freak to begin with, which accounted for his success with the Fraulino so far. Monk sneered cheerfully at him.

They learned nothing whatever that day about what kind of a scheme was afoot. The newspapers were full of stuff about Doc Savage, so obviously Doc had done nothing to dispel the impression that he was dead. Monk and Ham would have been afraid to do a thing like that because the newspapers were not going to be happy when they learned that Doc wasn't dead at all. But then, Doc had never been on particularly good terms with several newspapers. The really funny thing about this last was that the bronze man actually owned a controlling interest in one of the newspapers which pounced on him with the most regularity and violence. No one, hardly, was aware of this fact.

Percy and Francis turned up that afternoon with two more hired bad men. Monk and Ham looked them over and they were impressed. The gentry were named Carlson and Duane. They were two fellows who had smelled gun smoke before. They sized up Monk and Ham—Cabeza and Cuerdo—and immediately recognized two kindred spirits. So they were experienced.

They all went to the Fraulino Jones' hotel. Cabeza and Cuerdo thought they were going to have dinner.

It developed, though, that they were going to take an airplane ride.

“We will be in California by morning,” said the Fraulino.

Cuerdo swallowed his astonishment and said, “*Bueno!* But thees hell of a sudden notice not to give a man. What about my Sunday pants?”

“You can go by your hotel and get your Sunday pants,” the Fraulino told him.

They did this and Monk got a chance to telephone Doc Savage and tell him they were off for California.

“Where in California?” Doc asked.

“We have no more idea than rabbits,” Monk said.

THE plane which they took was a very fast one, a seaplane. There was a military no-flying zone for civilians all along the Atlantic coast at the time. The plane was parked on a sandbar in the Hudson River in brazen defiance of this ruling.

The flight to the Pacific coast was fast and without incident. They did not even have to refuel but once, and a furtive gentleman with a tank truck performed this function for them when they landed in a pasture near Tulsa, Oklahoma. It seemed he was an old acquaintance of Percy's.

Cabeza and Cuerdo pretended to know nothing about flying an airplane. As a matter of fact, Monk and Ham were excellent fliers. But they thought Cabeza and Cuerdo had better not know anything about it.

They were bothered, too. Instead of becoming more confident about the situation, they grew increasingly uneasy. They had astonished themselves in putting over the madcap personalities of the two South American hooligans. Privately, they were sure no one of the character of Cabeza and Cuerdo had ever come out of South America. Probably the novelty was what had put them across. But they had no confidence that novelty would last.

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They landed near Los Angeles and slept all day.

They got a chance to contact Doc Savage early in the morning, and he said he would be in California by afternoon and told them where to reach him by telephone.

The Fraulino Jones bought everyone a good dinner.

Then she took them riding in a car she had rented.

“Do you awe easily?” she asked.

Doc Savage had asked Monk and Ham almost those identical words, and they jumped guiltily.

“Si, señorita,”

Cuerpo told the Fraulino. “Thees *caballero* is awed all to goose pimples by your beauty.”

“I don't think anything would awe you,” the Fraulino told him. “And that is good. Because tonight we are going to steal a United States navy flying boat.”

Carlson and Duane, the two newly hired men, looked somewhat ill. Cabeza and Cuerpo recovered from a natural amount of astonishment and grinned. Percy and Francis just looked suave and pleased. They were certainly two heartless eggs.

The Fraulino gave them particulars. The plane was anchored in a nearby harbor and they were simply to creep aboard and dispose of the guard.

It sounded risky, but the Fraulino seemed to know what she was doing. Monk and Ham began to be impressed by the young woman. They had wondered if she could be as genuinely ruthless as she had been acting. Apparently she could. Apparently, too, she had been around the military forces of some country enough that she was not inclined to be impressed.

The event would occur at ten minutes past midnight. In the meantime they might get a little sleep if they wished. The Fraulino would call for them.

CABEZA and Cuerpo went to the bungalow court where they had rented a place, but not to sleep. They became Monk and Ham and very busy trying to locate Doc Savage. They contacted the bronze man and he soon joined them. They met under a palm tree on a nearby lawn. It was quite dark.

“They're cookies with imagination,” Monk told Doc. “Now they're going to steal a navy plane.”

“Why?” Doc asked.

“Once more, we have no more idea than rabbits what goes on,” Monk explained.

Doc Savage surmised aloud, “The logical reason for needing such a plane would be for a long sea trip. It would not be to Alaska or South America, because they would have taken a land plane from New York, or used the ship they flew out here in. That leaves the South Seas, or Japan.”

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Monk contributed, "There has been a remark or two made about Japan. I think the Fraulino has a great big peeve against Japan. Something the Japanese did to her folks."

Doc Savage was thoughtful. "I had hoped," he said, "to get you two fellows into their gang so you could find out what it was all about."

"We're not doing bad," Monk said. "But we're not learning anything."

"What we need is more time," Ham contributed.

"But," Doc said, "we cannot stand by and let them steal a navy plane and possibly kill a sailor or two doing it."

Monk and Ham nodded. "I suppose that's right," Monk agreed. "But I'll sure hate to stop playing Cuerpo. I think the Fraulino is beginning to admire Cuerpo. But I doubt if she'll admire Monk Mayfair."

"We might as well grab all of them now," Doc Savage said. "If they will not talk willingly, we will have to try truth serum on them, although the information we get from truth serum is not always dependable."

"We better watch our steps when we grab Percy and Francis," Ham Brooks said. "Or we'll find ourselves grabbed."

"I'll grab the Fraulino," Monk said.

"Where is she staying?" Doc asked.

"Gosh, I don't know," Monk said in a disappointed voice. "As a matter of fact, Ham and I don't know where any of them are staying."

"Then how," Doc asked patiently, "are we going to find them?"

Monk scratched his nubbin-shaped head. "Search me. They'll all get together when they get ready to seize the plane. Maybe we'll have to wait until then. I guess we will."

It was arranged that Doc was to appear at the critical moment at the point of plane seizing, and Monk and Ham were then to join him, and together they would take over the Fraulino Jones, Percy and Francis, Carlson and Duane. It sounded simple.

PROMPTLY at the designated hour of ten past midnight, the Fraulino Jones came. She was alone, a silent and shapely figure in the semi-moonlight, with a tear-gas gun in her hands. The weapon was an ordinary repeating shotgun, the barrel sawed off, and loaded with shotgun-type tear-gas shells.

"I hope you have your Sunday pants this time, Cuerpo," she said.

Her voice was so calm it scared Monk.

"I'm fine," he said. "Uh—I ees *bueno*, I mean."

"You have trouble with that accent, don't you?" the Fraulino said.

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“Si,”

Monk agreed. “She sleeps up on me like the greased peeg.”

The Fraulino Jones laughed heartily, but in a low, noiseless fashion. Monk saw nothing to laugh at under the circumstances.

Monk wondered where Doc was. He supposed Ham was wondering, too. Doc should be somewhere around them, because the arrangement was that Doc was to attack at this spot. Monk and Ham would then shed the disguises of Cuerpo and Cabeza and do their stuff. It should work. Monk didn't see why it wouldn't work. But he could not get rid of an uneasy impression that all was not well, and that there was something in the air that shouldn't be there.

There was nothing Monk could do but decide everything had better be all right, and that Doc was there in the darkness, waiting for the appearance of Percy and Francis, Carlson and Duane.

It was a stilly kind of night. There were clouds in the sky. They marched majestically across the heavens like big black bears, hiding moon and stars and other lesser silver clouds that were higher up. Out at sea, around the harbor mouth somewhere, a hooting buoy was making a sound like a cow. There was, nearer on the anchored naval boats, the sounds of ships at night. Laughter and music. And here and there, blinker signals from one destroyer or cruiser to another.

Then it happened and it happened suddenly.

Carlson and Duane, the new men, came strolling up. They did not seem happy, but they were going through with it.

There was a blow nearby in the darkness.

Just one blow.

Following which, Percy and Francis came dragging Doc Savage out of the murk. Doc was unconscious.

Chapter V. THE MASTER OF MEN'S DESTINIES

MONK and Ham, or Cabeza and Cuerpo, were unable to find any words for longer than would have been expected. They were numbed, nerve-frozen, cold all over, and then hot. It was not quite a believable thing.

Then the reaction came, almost causing them to give themselves away. They snatched out their guns. Their idea was to rescue Doc.

But Percy and Francis already had guns. And Carlson and Duane drew theirs.

Monk and Ham stopped.

For years Monk was proud of the quick thinking he now did.

He flourished his gun.

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“Get away from heem!” Monk howled, pointing his gun at Doc Savage. “I am going to keel heem. That ees Doc Savage. For years, I have want to keel heem!”

Ham caught the idea. “Me, too!” he said.

“Shut up!” ordered the Fraulino Jones.

“He ees my meat!” Monk bellowed. “For years, my beeg wish—”

The Fraulino dashed over and kicked Monk on the shin. “Shut up!” she said. “You're louder than that buoy out at the harbor mouth. Now what's the matter with you?”

Monk gyrated on one foot and said, “I want to keel thees Savage.”

“So I gathered,” the Fraulino said disgustedly. “But what have you got against him?”

Ham said, “Of me and Cuerdo thees Savage ees old friend—not.”

“Once he almost catch us,” Monk explained.

The Fraulino Jones became astonishingly emphatic. “Shut up, you two,” she snapped. “I'm not going to fool around with you. You're a pair of clowns. You're obviously no more South Americans than I am. What you are isn't my business, but don't start upsetting my plans!”

Monk and Ham went silent. They had been wondering how an intelligent woman like the Fraulino Jones could be fooled into thinking that they were South Americans. Here was the answer: She wasn't fooled.

They hoped it wouldn't occur to her just exactly who they might be. The hope kept them silent.

In passing, the Fraulino Jones now disclosed how she had come to locate Doc Savage in the first place. She exhibited a case containing some electrical apparatus. It was a capacity-operated burglar alarm, a portable one.

You attached an antenna, a long wire, to the burglar alarm, and when anyone came close, within several feet of the wire which could be stretched around almost anywhere, as long as it was not grounded, a small light on the apparatus glowed. That was how the Fraulino had learned that Doc Savage was in the vicinity.

She had known it was not one of her men. Therefore it had to be an enemy. So she had dispatched Percy and Francis—this was before Monk and Ham arrived on the scene—to hunt for the prowler, after whispering the facts in their ears.

Doc Savage recovered consciousness during the recital, and Monk and Ham were too uncomfortable to meet his gaze. They hadn't expected the Fraulino to have around such an electrical gadget.

The Fraulino leaned over casually and knocked Doc Savage senseless again.

NOW they captured the airplane.

THE KING OF TERROR

The Fraulino Jones had a rubber boat. She also had two self-contained diving “lungs” of the type used by submarine crewmen in emergency escapes. Where she got all the equipment, Monk and Ham could not imagine. Probably had it waiting for her here in California. She seemed to be a person who planned ahead, to say the least.

Percy and Francis, who also had assorted abilities, put on the diving suits and submerged in the bay. There was a period of bated-breath waiting.

The noises of a fight, when they came, were hardly loud enough to be identified as such.

“All right,” said the Fraulino.

They launched the rubber boat. Doc Savage was dumped in the bottom, everyone else climbed aboard, and they paddled out to the plane. The plane hull looked nearly as big as an ocean freighter when they got alongside it. She was one of the big long-distance reconnaissance bombers.

“Is it all right?” the Fraulino called softly.

“Quite,” said Percy's voice. “Everything is satisfactory.”

The two new men, Carlson and Duane, heaved Doc Savage from the rubber boat to the plane cabin. Monk and Ham followed, wondering how many of the plane guards had been killed.

The Fraulino, sounding concerned about the same thing, demanded, “Did you have to kill any of them?”

Percy and Francis assured her they hadn't. They sounded as if they were trying to convince the Fraulino that they had taken great pains, especially for her, not to kill any of the United States sailors guarding the plane.

Monk caught Ham's eye and winked. Percy and Francis hadn't killed anybody because they were worried. Discovering Doc Savage was still alive must have been quite a shock to them, considering how sure they had been that they had shot him to pieces.

“Pile them in the rubber boat and cast them adrift,” the Fraulino said, meaning the unconscious sailors. “The wind will drive them up on shore where they will be found, or will recover their senses.”

She stood there, thoughtful, for a moment, examining Doc Savage. “Has anyone a flashlight?” she requested. Carlson produced one. She played its beam on Doc's figure. She seemed impressed. “He looks fully as remarkable as his reputation,” she said.

Percy made a little speech.

“I am so sorry that he came back to plague you, Fraulino,” Percy said. “I cannot explain it. Neither can Francis. In some fashion we made a mistake. It is beyond question the greatest mistake we have made in our lives. I assure you we are fully impressed on that point.”

He then produced a knife.

“If the Fraulino will go forward, we will—Francis and I—do our best to remedy the error,” he finished.

Fraulino Jones stared at them.

THE KING OF TERROR

“So you really killed him—or thought you did—deliberately the first time,” she said. “I was convinced you did after I had time to think about it.”

The Fraulino did some producing of her own. It was a small automatic with a thin snout and pearl handle. She held it as if she knew what it was used for.

“If Doc Savage is killed,” she said, “I am going to shoot you exactly between the eyes.”

FLYING a plane the size of this one was not a job for a fellow with a thirty-five-hour private license and some experience hopping light planes on Sunday afternoons. The hair stood on end, figuratively, on the heads of Monk and Ham when they saw the Fraulino Jones take the controls.

But the plane took off across the harbor without incident, dodging the mast of a destroyer with as neat a side slip as anyone could have executed. Convinced the Fraulino could fly as well as they could, Monk and Ham smoothed their hair down and turned their attention to seeing that no one shot or stabbed Doc Savage.

Duane had tied Doc Savage with webbing straps off the seats—the safety belts—so that there was no chance of the bronze man freeing himself.

Doc was either still unconscious or pretending to be so.

Monk and Ham sauntered the length of the cabin and looked into the control cockpit where the Fraulino was handling the big plane.

“There ees more gadgets than on six radios,” Monk remarked, as Cuerpo.

The Fraulino turned her head. “Listen, you two, watch Percy and Francis. See that they do not kill Mr. Savage.”

“Si, señorita,”

Monk said. “They weel keel heem over our dead body.”

She frowned. “Why so emphatic?”

“We want to keel heem ourself,” Monk told her. “He ees great enemy, that hombre.”

“If he's not kept alive there'll be more than one funeral,” the Fraulino said.

She sounded extremely violent. Also a little scared.

Monk and Ham went back into the cabin. They were pleased. “It'll help, her not wanting Doc knocked off,” Monk whispered to Ham. “But we gotta watch them two politeness twins.”

“We'll watch them, all right,” Ham agreed.

The plane flew for three or four hours without anything more happening that was unusual, except that Percy and Francis calmly tried to talk Monk and Ham into killing Doc.

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“He is your enemy, and here is your chance,” Percy said. “Francis and I, we will say he got loose, and you did it in self-defense.”

Monk and Ham looked intrigued with the idea. Then they both shook their heads. “She ees no good, señor,” Monk said.

“But he's your enemy, you say.”

“We ees got good job,” Monk pointed out. “Thees boss say don' keel heem. We don' want to get can tied to us.”

“We weel talk the boss into giving us O. K. to keel heem eventually,” Ham said.

Percy snorted violently. “O. K., then. Francis and I will have to do it ourselves.”

“Over our dead bodies you weel do it,” Ham said. “We want to do heem ourselves.”

THE argument was so complicated it disgusted Percy and Francis. Everybody professed to want Doc Savage dead, but Monk and Ham—Cuerpo and Cabeza—wouldn't kill him because they had been ordered not to by the boss, and they were afraid of losing their jobs. And they wouldn't let anyone else do it because they wanted the job themselves, when it was done.

Doc Savage was conscious now and he lay on the cabin floor and listened, apparently without emotion, to the debate about when and who would be in charge of his demise.

Duane and Carlson kept out of the word sparring. They seemed to be bothered still about seizing a navy plane.

Francis tried a trick. The radio equipment was located in the cabin. He crouched before it, working with the dials and knobs and wearing a set of earphones.

He wrote out a message.

Monk watched this with suspicious interest.

“He's faking something,” Monk told Ham. “That receiver isn't working. He's just pretending it is. Apparently he doesn't know how to turn it on.”

Francis came back and showed them his message. It said:

DISPOSE OF SAVAGE AT ONCE. DUMPING HIM OUT OF THE PLANE IS AS GOOD A METHOD AS ANY.

ABRAHAM MAWSON

“You see,” Francis said. “Mawson is the real boss. There! You see his orders.”

Monk sneered at him.

“You should learn how to operate that radio before you start faking messages,” Monk said.

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Monk had expected this to floor Francis and shut him up, but it had the opposite effect. Francis became enraged. He tried to draw a gun. Monk took the weapon away from him. Percy showed signs of joining the brawl, and Ham proceeded to show a gun of his own.

Francis then dashed forward to the pilot's compartment. He showed the Fraulino Jones the faked message, demanding the right to kill Savage. Monk bellowed that the message was a fake, that the radio wasn't functioning when Francis pretended to copy it.

The Fraulino Jones looked desperately weary and still more frightened.

"Get back in the cabin," she snapped. "I have enough trouble flying this thing without quarreling with all of you."

Monk walked back into the cabin.

And then Monk got up off the floor and walked back into the cabin again.

Chapter VI. REPEAT PERFORMANCE

HAVING walked back into the cabin a second time, Monk became amazed at himself. He flopped on a hard crew seat. He stared. His eyes began to pop.

"Blazes!" he muttered. "What the heck? I did that twice! I got up off the floor and did it again. How'd I get on the floor?"

He realized then that this didn't sound much like Cuerpo and he looked about hastily. But no one was paying him any attention. "Ham," Monk whispered. "Cabeza, I mean. Cabeza, did you just do something twice?"

Ham was pop-eyed. "How'd you know that?"

"I did it myself," Monk said. "What was the idea. What—"

The Fraulino Jones now called out to them, startling them.

"Fasten your safety belts for landing," she said.

She had weaned the big motors down to minimum speed, bringing quiet to the cabin so that they could hear their voices.

Monk blurted, "Hey, we're hundreds of miles from land!" He sprang to the plane window.

There was a large island below, and Monk looked extremely foolish. "How'd that get there?" he asked Ham.

Ham's own eyes were popping at the island. "I guess you just push a button," he said. "Monk, did you find yourself on the floor a minute ago?"

"Before I repeated?" Monk said. "Yes. What's it mean?"

"It means this thing is getting kind of fancy," Ham mumbled.

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Monk and Ham scrambled forward, thrusting their heads into the pilot compartment.

“What island is that?” Ham asked the Fraulino Jones excitedly.

She gave them a sweet smile. The last time they had looked at her she had seemed quite frightened, but now she was serene.

“Tahiti,” she said. “Or, at least, the town is on Tahiti.”

“All right,” Monk complained, “if you ees want to keed us.”

He went back into the cabin. Ham trailed him. They didn't consider that they had gotten any information, because Tahiti was in the South Seas, and they hadn't flown long enough or far enough to reach Honolulu, much less Tahiti, which was some thousands of miles more distant.

Monk took another look through the plane cabin windows. He almost jumped through the roof.

“Ham!” he squawked. “That *is* Tahiti down there!”

Ham hit him in the ribs with a fist and snarled, “You headless wonder, you called me by my real name.”

“Cabeza!” Monk bellowed. “Hah, Cabeza! Hah, look!” He hoped this would correct the slip of the tongue, and apparently it did. “Thees Tahiti down there!”

This was so manifestly impossible that neither of them actually believed the evidence of their eyes.

“This plane *could* fly to Tahiti non–stop,” Ham whispered. “It had the gasoline.”

“Don't be silly,” Monk said.

The Fraulino evidently knew the island well because she brought the plane down in a long, purposeful glide, put it on the water and taxied it up hard on the beach.

“Now we had better get out and run,” she said. “Bring Mr. Savage.”

Because they were concerned about Doc Savage's safety—and also desirous of keeping up their pretense of wanting to be the ones to murder Doc—Monk and Ham carried the bronze man.

Landing on a Tahiti beach in a stolen United States navy bomber was a bold matter. Ham told the Fraulino Jones so. She laughed.

“The Chinese have a saying that a bold fox would have gotten the grapes,” she said.

“Foxes don't like grapes,” Ham said, wishing she would let slip some inkling of what was behind this affair.

“A fox would like the grapes we're after,” she said. And let it go at that.

THEY plunged into a luxuriant tropical jungle which lived up to the reputation travel folders had for years tried to give Tahiti.

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“There's bound to be some of the American navy here,” Monk said. “When they find that plane, or when anybody finds it, there's going to be more fuss than there was when the horse stepped into the bumblebee nest.”

Ham told him, “She seems to know what she is doing. And you better stick to that accent, Cuerpo.”

Suddenly they came out on a road and there was an automobile waiting. They climbed into the machine.

“Good afternoon, Fraulino,” the driver said.

They traveled fast, much too fast to enjoy the scenery, for a while. Then the car pulled into a thatched garage.

Now they loaded into carts with covered sides. They remained in these half an hour, and when they got out it was on the black-topped driveway of a carefully attended lawn. It was all a carefully planned method of getting them from one part of the island to another. Monk began to see where they might not get caught.

“Wait here,” the Fraulino told all of them, and went away.

She was gone five minutes, possibly, and a servant appeared. “Abraham Mawson wishes to see all of you,” he said. “He requests you to bring Mr. Savage.”

They followed the lackey—Monk and Ham still carrying Doc—into a fine, pleasant bungalow. The furniture was Chinese modern, swank and expensive because it was probably designed for the place.

Abraham Mawson met them.

The fellow gave Monk a cold chill. Not many things had given Monk cold chills in his day.

The man was neither tall, wide, thin nor fat. His dimensions were just those of a man. But each of his features seemed to have something extra, or something missing.

His left hand, for instance, had a finger missing. His nose was too large, but not a nose identified with any race; just a big hawk nose. He had too much mouth, but the mouth did not have enough lips. There did not seem to be enough teeth in his mouth, and they were too big and perfect. His eyes were large and as magnetic as the eyes of a snake. His voice was big and strong and influential.

Astonished, Monk and Ham watched Percy and Francis sink to their knees before the fellow.

Carlson and Duane looked puzzled, then followed suit, getting down on their knees. They looked, however, anything but worshipful.

Monk and Ham stood there. Monk said out of the corner of his mouth to Ham, “Damned if I'm going to get down on my knees to anybody if that's what this is.”

Abraham Mawson did not say anything to them.

But he did pop the palms of his hands together.

This brought a great tower of a black man into the room. This fellow wore a pair of ample, very ample, red trousers, but otherwise he was naked, unless the whip he carried was counted as an accouterment. The whip was one of the very few genuine cat-o'-nine-tails which Monk and Ham had ever seen. Each prong of the

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whip ended in a little metal spike. The whip prongs looked as if they had been salted so that they would sting more; at least there was a white coating on them that looked like the result of brine soaking. It was quite an article, that whip.

The big black took Monk and Ham by the shoulder. He was gentle but firm, and pressed them to their knees.

On his knees, Monk looked sheepishly at Ham. To submit felt foolish, and a little humiliating, but it was smart. They looked out of the corners of their eyes at the colored gentleman's whip, and they knew it was smart.

The stage was set, and Abraham Mawson made a pronouncement.

“Make no mistake,” he said solemnly. “I was put on earth to become the master of men's destinies.”

WHEN Monk and Ham remembered the words later, and spoke them to each other to see how they sounded, the result was not the same by a long shot. It sounded silly then. It didn't sound lightly put when Abraham Mawson said it. On the contrary, they actually believed him for a minute.

“You are Cabeza?” Abraham Mawson said.

“Si, señor,”

Ham said.

“And you are Cuerpo?”

“Si, señor.”

“The Fraulino Jones has recommended you. See that you live up to her recommendations.”

“Si, señor,”

Monk and Ham said together.

“That is all.”

Monk said, “Wait, señor, we ees wish to—”

“That is all,” said Abraham Mawson sharply. “You will go.”

Monk said, “If Doc Savage ees to be keel, we weesh that pleasure—”

“Get out of here,” roared Abraham Mawson. “Get out before I have you whipped.”

Monk and Ham got out of there in a hurry and willingly. They didn't need the grip of the black giant on their coat collars, although they received this extra service.

The black abandoned them in what seemed to be a lesser parlor and went back to the master of men's destinies.

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“Ham,” Monk said. “Ham, for a long time you've been threatening to give me a good kick in the pants. O. K., you can do it right now.”

Ham shook his head. “The feeling is mutual,” he said.

“We stood in there and acted as if that guy was a king, or something.”

“For a minute, when he said it, I believed it,” Ham said ruefully.

“You know something?”

“What?”

“That guy Abraham Mawson ain't just a fish out of any puddle. He is something a man could get scared of.”

“That's mildly put,” Ham agreed.

“I wonder what he's going to do to Doc?” Monk pondered anxiously.

The Fraulino Jones answered this by coming out smiling and telling them, “I am sorry. I should have told you two boys about Abraham Mawson's ideas of discipline.”

“Is that what they were?” Monk asked. “They looked to me like delusions of grandeur.”

The Fraulino's face was grim for a moment. “They are not delusions,” she said. “Better get that through your head now. Abraham Mawson never has any delusions.”

“What about thees Doc Savage?” Ham asked.

The Fraulino's grimness changed back to a smile. Obviously she had put over something that made her pleased with herself.

“You two fellows will have to forgo the pleasure of killing Doc Savage,” she said. “Abraham Mawson has ordered him kept alive.”

“At your suggestion?” Monk asked, making a guess.

She looked a little confused.

“That's right,” she said.

MONK watched the Fraulino walk away—smiling to herself—and then he looked at Ham and closed one eye deliberately. “You know something?” Monk asked Ham.

Ham grinned. “Sure,” he said. “But why do the pretty ones always have to fall for Doc, when as we well know, Doc steers clear of them, pretty or otherwise.”

“Whereas,” said Monk, “it is equally well known that you and I don't steer clear of them.”

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“That's the idea,” Ham said.

They were rather pleased over the situation, but the pleasure did not last long.

Percy and Francis came out of the conference room. Carlson and Duane were with them. Percy immediately made Monk a business proposal.

“How much,” he asked, “will you give me for the privilege of killing Doc Savage?”

Monk was not struck entirely speechless. The best he could do was gurgle.

“We've got an O. K. from Abraham Mawson,” said Percy, “to kill Savage. He told me I could do it.”

Monk tried to control himself and think of something to say.

“I'll sell you the privilege,” said Percy, “for two thousand dollars.”

Monk got words to come out. “*Dos mils pesos!*” he screamed. “Where you get such ideas about money?”

The other man shrugged and grinned. “It's a bargain at two thousand.”

“Where ees bargain?” Monk demanded.

“Prestige. Don't you see the reputation you will have as the man who killed Doc Savage? Savage is known all over the world, and everybody is afraid of him. Killing him would make you as well known as Columbus.”

The statement had probably made Columbus turn over in his grave, Monk reflected. Which was not the kind of a thought he wanted to have. What he urgently desired was some answer to the problem.

“Geeve me time,” he said, “to think thees over. Two thousand *pesos ees muchos pesos*. How much time you geeve me to think about her?”

“Four hours, no more,” Percy said.

“I have to theenk fast,” Monk muttered.

Chapter VII. IMPOSTOR

MONK and Ham got by themselves and discussed the undeniably serious situation. Their conference, which had to do with ways and means of handling the situation, was not very fruitful. It was sure that they would have to notify Doc Savage of the problem, however.

Monk kept a lookout, while Ham crept in, intending to have conference with Doc. The bronze man was lying on a hard stone floor in a basement room which had no means of egress or ingress except one steel door, barred, at which a guard stood. The guard was a big Polynesian with a scarred face. Monk had noticed that the people working for Abraham Mawson made quite an assortment of races.

Ham came back to Monk and said, “Cuerpo, you are a guitar player.”

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“What is this?” Monk demanded. “I never had hold of a guitar in my life.”

“All South Americans can play guitars,” Ham said. “And I saw a guitar in one of the rooms. Get it and play it.”

Monk scowled. “You ain't gonna make a bigger ass out of me than nature made. But tell you what I'll do—I'll play it if you will sing.”

“That's exactly what I am going to do,” Ham said.

Monk's eyes popped. “Huh?”

“Only I am going to sing Mayan,” Ham said. “Somebody has got to get word to Doc some way, and they've got him locked up so a mouse couldn't get in there without being seen. And we can't just walk up and start talking to him. That would be too suspicious. It'd get somebody shot.”

Monk got the guitar and Ham sang. They sat in a room near the doorway to the basement, but not too suspiciously near it. Their singing and playing was extraordinary, but not for its quality.

Ham sang lustily in Mayan. Mayan was the language of a lost tribe of ancient Mayans in a hidden valley in a remote mountain section of Hidalgo, a lesser Central American republic. As far as they knew, the only persons in the world who spoke or understood this particular Mayan tongue were Doc and his group, and members of the lost clan of Maya in Hidalgo. Most of these Mayans were in the hidden valley, although a few were to be found in the capital city of Hidalgo and scattered over the republic.

Ham sang in Mayan: “Doc, this Abraham Mawson has ordered you killed. We do not know what is behind this thing yet. But we've got to do something. We can make a break and probably get you loose, but if your idea was to play along with this crowd until we found out what it was about, that will ruin the plan. Have you a suggestion?”

Ham continued to sing, giving general information about the house, about the evidence of an extended organization, until he thought of something else that was, to his mind, possibly important and at least very puzzling.

“That repeating spell everybody but Fraulino Jones seems to have had on the plane has us puzzled. We are going to talk to some of them about it. We don't understand it and we don't understand, either, how that plane happened to fly from California to Tahiti as quickly as it seemed to.”

Doc Savage now broke in with a reply.

The bronze man made a great uproar. It was an excellent imitation of a howling rage. He banged the iron door of his basement cell.

At the same time Doc howled out instructions in Mayan. His tone, his banging of the cell bars, made it seem like an enraged imitation of Ham's caterwauling.

“Fake proof that I am not Doc Savage,” Doc said. “Make them think I am an impostor, put on the job by the real Doc Savage to spy on them. Make them think I know where the real Doc can be found, and what he knows about them. Make them think they can get this information out of me if they keep me alive. That will give us more time, and maybe the truth will crop up.”

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Doc then banged the cell bars some more.

“Is that singing, I ask you!” he bellowed. “If that idiot has to sing, make him sing something sensible!”

The basement guard laughed.

“He ees not appreciate real music,” Monk said happily.

MONK and Ham went off, sat down on a veranda, and racked their brains for a way of proving Doc was not Doc. There was a pleasant view from where they sat, a vista of jungle and the blue of the sea beyond, but the scenery did not appeal to them.

Twenty minutes later the solution practically slapped them in the face.

They were fingerprinted. A man who was about five feet of bones and hide that looked like old cardboard did this service for them. The fingerprint man was a cockney with a very heavy accent in his speech.

“Everybody gets their blarsted fingerprints took,” he told them. “Ain't no favorites played.”

Monk's eyes popped when he saw a sizable collection of filing cabinets which were fitted in neat canvas cases with handles for quick transportation. He looked around. There were portable typewriters and a portable dictaphone. A whole portable office.

But the thing that brought Monk's eyes out of his head was a sheaf of papers fastened together with a clip, lying on the desk. He was close enough to see the notation on the cover paper. This was:

REPORT OF AGENTS ON:

SAVAGE, DOC.

Clipped to the sheaf was a fingerprint card bearing Doc's fingerprints and data on his bodily measurements.

Straightening out his face, Monk pretended no interest in anything much until they were outside. Then he yanked Ham into a corner.

“Ham!” he blurted. “There was a sheaf of reports from agents about Doc Savage lying on that desk in there. Clipped to it was a card with Doc's fingerprints.”

“Great grief!” Ham gasped.

“Fingerprint card, you hear!”

Ham had a moment of skepticism. “Where would they get Doc's fingerprints on a card? Doc don't go around putting his fingerprints on cards for people.”

“This was a regulation police-record card. They stole it somewhere. One of the agents stole it for this guy Abraham Mawson, probably. Copped it out of a police file somewhere. But the point is—Doc's fingerprints. We can change them. Then we can get Doc's fingerprints compared with the fakes, and—presto! There you are. Doc a fake.”

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Ham was again skeptical. "You can't forge that card. It's printed. And how are you going to erase those fingerprints? Can you do it?"

"You leave that to me," Monk said.

Monk found the big black who had made Ham and himself bow to Abraham Mawson or, rather, get on their knees. Ham asked the dark tower if it was O. K. to take a little walk in the jungle to see what it was like. The black man said sure, go ahead, but dinner would be served at seven, and to be back by then if Monk wanted any dinner, because the cook was the crankiest one yet born.

MONK came back from his walk equipped with a bleaching agent which he had manufactured out of jungle products. As Monk told Ham, he was more proud of the bleach than he had been of any other chemical mixture he had concocted to date. Considering by what primitive means he had made the stuff, and how quickly he had made it, it was visible proof that he was one of the world's outstanding chemists.

"The only thing that stands out about you is your ears and your asininity," Ham told him. "Let's get to doing our dirty work."

They got into the room which held the portable office with such ease that they were at once afraid that the records would contain nothing of great value. And the fears proved correct. The filing cases were full of new cards that had not been used. The stuff was a shipment of fresh supplies just received, and nothing else.

However, the dossier of reports about Doc Savage was still on the desk. Monk went to work on the fingerprints with his bleach.

Ham inspected the dossier. It was as complete a file on Doc Savage as he had ever seen. There were things in it about Doc's early history that even he didn't know. He thought some of the stuff might be incorrect.

He made a note of the firm of private detectives which had assembled the report. It was a New York concern.

"I'll break these guys of working for crooks if I ever get back to New York," he said.

At last Monk said, "How's it look?" He passed over the revised fingerprint card.

It looked fine to Ham.

"Whose fingerprints are on it now?" he asked.

"Mine," Monk said. "They'll have no reason to think they're anybody else's but Doc's—and when they compare Doc's prints with them, they'll be sure Doc is a fake."

"They look remarkably like the footprints of an ape," Ham declared. "Let's get out of here."

AT first the big black brought word to them that Abraham Mawson would not see them. But they sent him back with the information that they had some important new matters to discuss about Doc Savage. That got them in.

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Abraham Mawson was sitting on his throne, but they didn't realize it for a minute. The chair was a large golden affair that was not massive, but delicate and finely constructed, with a plush cushion of green. Their first impression was that it was an unusually comfortable chair for such a bric-a-brac affair. Then, after another look at the chair, Ham nearly fell over. He'd thought the chair was gilt. But it was gold.

"A gold chair!" Monk blurted.

"Only a small one," Abraham Mawson said, obviously pleased by how much they were impressed. "Later, though, I shall have a large one. And perhaps a palace of gold. There has never been a golden palace, has there? Gold is the proper medium for money, and I shall bring back gold money, too."

As talk, this sounded a little crazy.

Monk cleared his throat and got going in the character of Cuerdo.

He explained that Percy had offered to sell him the privilege of killing Doc Savage for two thousand dollars. This, Monk explained, had actually impressed him as a bargain, but that he hadn't told Percy so, and they had agreed on four hours in which Monk could think the proposition over.

Monk, doing the vernacular of Cuerdo with a flourish, announced that he was a cautious gentleman at heart, although now and then he would take a chance. But he hated to get gypped. Most particularly he would hate to get gypped out of two thousand dollars, and it would also break his heart if he found out that he had thought he had killed Doc Savage, and hadn't.

"We ees catch that hombre too easy een California," Monk said. "Señor, that make me suspicious. So I am remember thees Savage ees have one small scar on left shoulder. I see thees scar one time. So I look for heem now. *Carramba!* Scar ees not there. Thees not genuine Doc Savage."

Abraham Mawson sat in his gold chair with a blank expression, as if a bomb fuse had been lighted and he was waiting for it to explode. Then he shot out of the chair.

"What's that?" he bellowed. "What the hell you say? No scar! Not Savage!"

"She ees not heem, as sure as you ees shouting," Monk said.

Abraham Mawson dashed for the door, screaming, "Percy! Fraulino Jones! Francis! Hell and damnation! Didn't you check this fellow's fingerprints to make sure he was Doc Savage?"

Percy came running. He turned white. "He *looked* like Doc Savage," he said.

Abraham Mawson's face was getting purple. "Bring the fingerprints of Savage. Somebody should be shot for this!"

There was a frightened scurrying about and a rush toward the basement prison cell, during which Monk got a chance to whisper to Ham, "Wouldn't it be swell if his nibs stood Percy and Francis against a stone wall?"

"Don't hope for too much," Ham muttered. "If we get Doc kept alive we'll be doing fine. His nibs, as you call him, is more likely to get so mad that he'll order Doc shot at once."

While the cadaverous cockney was taking Doc Savage's fingerprints, Abraham Mawson himself—well protected by guns in the hands of his men—ripped Doc Savage's shirt off his shoulder and hunted for a scar. He

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found none because there had never been one. The scar was entirely a product of Monk's active imagination, a little touch he had put in extemporaneously.

The cockney scrutinized the fingerprints.

"There ain't a bloomin' bit of resemblance," he said.

Abraham Mawson bellowed, "He isn't Savage?"

"No."

Abraham Mawson clenched his fists and shook them at the ceiling. Then he recovered himself and looked so completely composed that it was a little startling.

"We will take him to *Po Piki*," he said. "There we will find out who he *is*."

WHEN Doc Savage had been dumped back into the basement cell, from which there was practically no possibility of his escaping unaided, for all his assorted skills, Monk and Ham went down to the beach, not far distant, ostensibly to take a swim, but actually to pat each other on the back for the success of their conniving.

"Ham," Monk said.

"Yes."

"What's *Po Piki*?"

"Why," said Ham airily, "it's an imperspicuity."

"What's that?"

"A complete damned mystery to me," Ham said. "Why don't you think up some easy questions?"

The water was fine. It had a blue clarity that was remarkable. They swam with their faces under the surface, looking down at a wonderland of multicolored sea growth and wondrous caverns and spires of coral. Monk investigated what he thought was a long shadow in the lee of a coral ledge, after which he headed for shore so fast that he practically got up on top of the water and ran.

Ham swam in more leisurely and asked, "What made you hurry?"

Monk felt of his hair to see if it was actually standing on end. "Oh, I saw a shadow, but it turned out to be a shark," he said, "about forty feet long."

Ham began dressing. "That's fine," he said. "Now I know how much you value my life. I'll remember that."

"How could I yell a warning?" Monk asked him. "When I had lost my voice."

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ABRAHAM MAWSON did not dine with them, but the Fraulino Jones did, which was much better. The Fraulino's conversational ability was excellent. Monk and Ham would have preferred to talk to her continuously, but they were growing distrustful of their atrocious accents. Also, everyone laughed at them almost every time they said anything as Cabeza and Cuerpo, and this was discouraging. It is hard to make progress with a young woman when she is laughing at you.

They laid the Fraulino's good spirits to her relief that Doc Savage—or the fake Doc Savage, as everyone but Monk and Ham now thought him to be—had not been executed. This bore out Monk and Ham's opinion, privately formed earlier, that the Fraulino was interested in Doc rather substantially.

Monk and Ham beamed at her. She had good qualities. Also, she was one of the prettiest things they had ever seen.

The meal was a great success.

Percy and Francis excused themselves politely, having dipped their fingers in the finger bowls, and arose to leave.

“By the way,” the Fraulino Jones said to them. “What news of Bill Adams and Handsome Mayfair?”

Percy shrugged. “They are still stationed in town. But they have done nothing more that seems suspicious.”

“The American navy unit with which they are connected has not been transferred?”

“No.”

“I wish it would be,” the Fraulino said. “I cannot make up my mind whether they are harmless.”

Monk had been sitting there stiffly, hoping no one had noticed that he was astonished.

Ham collared Monk when they were walking down a hall and whispered, “What made you look that way?”

“I've got a relative called Handsome Mayfair,” Monk, whispered back.

“What kind of a relative?”

“Mighty distant. I've never seen him. Sixteenth cousin or something.”

Ham rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. “I think we'd better take a look at this sixteenth Mayfair and see if it does any good.”

“I hate to agree with you,” Monk said. “But I think so, too.”

Chapter VIII. THE HANDSOME MAYFAIR

THE big black assured them there was no objection to them paying the town a visit, but that they should be back by midnight, and that they would be expected not to complain about any loss of sleep that was their own fault. From this they gathered that the entire group was going somewhere before long. To make sure, they checked with the Fraulino Jones, and she O. K.'d the visit to town. As motive for the trip, Monk and Ham used the simplest one: They wanted to see what a South Sea island metropolis was like.

THE KING OF TERROR

The Fraulino astonished them, before they left for town, by presenting them with passport and military identification papers which they might need to prove they had business, or at least a right to be on the island. The documents were forged, and cleverly so, and bore the pictures and fingerprints of Monk and Ham which had been made by the little cockney earlier in the day.

“That ees queek and good job,” Monk said.

“Abraham Mawson will tolerate nothing but efficiency,” the Fraulino said. “You will find that out.”

“We ees not know exactly what ees afoot,” Monk said. “She ees mystery which I wish you would lift.”

“Instructions and information are issued to the men only at Abraham Mawson's direction,” the Fraulino said.

They found that they would be supplied a car in which to ride into town. They drove it themselves, following directions as to the route.

“Where do you suppose we'll find this Bill Adams and Handsome Mayfair?” Ham asked.

“Just have to inquire around,” Monk said. “I tell you, we'll try the local equivalent of the chamber of commerce.”

They made several inquiries, including the local equal of the chamber of commerce, without results. It seemed there were a number of American sailors and soldiers in Tahiti, and they changed too frequently for anyone to keep track of them.

“I got a better idea,” Ham said.

He approached the next pretty girl they saw. She was not a native, but French. Ham asked her if she could tell them anything about a gentleman named Handsome Mayfair.

“Que c'est beau!”

she exclaimed. “Ah, monsieur, do I know him! You will find him at the Poodle Stew.”

She looked as if she was about to jump up and down with pleasure.

They walked down the street toward the Poodle Stew Cafe, Monk wearing a thoughtful expression.

Ham said, “You see! We should have inquired about him of the first girl to begin with.”

“How you figure that?” Monk Mayfair asked.

“He's a Mayfair, isn't he, even if only a sixteenth one.”

Monk Mayfair snorted.

They found Bill Adams and Handsome Mayfair in a corner of the Poodle Stew.

THE KING OF TERROR

BILL ADAMS was a lean, grinning, sun-browned young man with large hands and plenty of shoulders. He proved to be a man who had very little to say, and when he did have something to say it was either a gag or a ridiculous remark. In the time that Monk and Ham were to know Bill Adams they didn't hear him make a single solemn statement, or a sensible one.

Handsome Mayfair lived up to the first part of his name, but not the second. He was very handsome. Handsome the way a bomber is handsome, for he was big and wide and streamlined. He certainly had none of the Mayfair homeliness. He had sandy hair, a nose that turned up when he grinned, which was most of the time, and lots of white teeth for smiling.

Both Bill Adams and Handsome Mayfair wore the uniforms of naval fliers and lieutenants' bars.

Monk introduced himself.

"Hell's fire, are you my sixteenth cousin, Monk Mayfair?" demanded Handsome Mayfair.

Monk, not flattered by his relative's tone, said, "Yes, but I'm disguised somewhat right now."

Handsome Mayfair examined Monk intently. He shuddered. He held up his right hand.

"I take an oath," he said. "I do hereby and herewith disown any membership in the Mayfair clan, forever and from now on."

"That's all right with me," Monk said indignantly.

"Don't take your disguise off," Handsome said. "I shudder to think what the real article must be like."

Monk scowled. "That's a fine family remark to make. You're a relative, all right. Nobody but the Mayfairs have such bad manners."

Handsome grinned. "Sit down. You know something? I wrote you a letter about three weeks ago."

Monk and Ham pulled chairs to the table. "Letter?" Monk said.

"Sure," Handsome Mayfair explained. "I met a little girl who said she used to know you. She said you'd be a good one to look up if I ever went through New York, and I thought at the time I was going to be transferred to New York, so I wrote you this letter. Then I didn't mail it, and I'm still carrying it around with me, come to think of it. This girl said you were a cute guy." Handsome peered at Monk. He slapped his knee and let out a roar of laughter. "You, a cute guy! The girl was kidding me. That face of yours would make clocks run backward!"

Monk said angrily, "You wait until you see me in action, you imitation of a Mayfair! I'll show you what they mean by cute!"

Ham Brooks sighed wearily. "Is this meeting to prove who is the great Cassanova?" he demanded. "Or have we got other business on the calendar?"

Monk controlled himself. "Look, we're fishing for information," he said.

"What kind of information?"

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“Do you fellows know a man named Abraham Mawson?”

“No.”

“A young woman called the Fraulino Jones?”

“No,” said Handsome Mayfair. “But I thought I knew them all.”

“Know two guys called Percy and Francis?”

“Oh, my, my. No.”

“If you ever meet Percy and Francis,” Monk said, “don't be fooled by the fact that they look like their names sound.”

Ham and Monk fell silent. They didn't know just how Bill Adams and Handsome Mayfair were involved in the mystery. They were, however, convinced that the two fliers were telling them the truth.

AN idea hit Ham and he said, “Look, has anything strange happened to you two recently? By that I mean—have you run into anything that looked a little queer?”

Bill Adams held up both hands. “Mamma, here's that boogie woogie again,” he said.

“It wasn't a *little* queer,” Handsome Mayfair said. “It was just as queer as all get out.”

Ham nodded. “Now we may be getting someplace.”

“You want to know about it?”

“Yes.”

“Well, we found an island. The island disappeared.” Handsome Mayfair took a deep breath and winked at a girl across the room. “It was like this: We are out on submarine patrol in a two-place reconnaissance ship, and we get a radio from a steamer that is being bothered by an enemy submarine. It is a long flight off our course, and we won't have too much gasoline if we go down there, but we go. We find the submarine, all right, and he takes a couple of shots at us, and we drop some boom-boom on him by returning the favor.

“After that we don't see anything more of him but some oil that floats up to the top of the water. Maybe we get him I don't know. But it's a sure thing he don't do us any good because a piece off one of them shells he throws up at us opens a hole in our main gas tank, and we fly like heck for home, but we're way off our course and not exactly sure where we are, on account of it being very cloudy and us being excited. The whole thing adds up to us being very glad when we see an island. We land on the island. We look around. Pretty soon we see a beautiful doll. Such a beautiful doll you never saw. And then we start repeating what we're doing. And when we stop repeating, were on a different island.”

Monk and Ham looked at Handsome Mayfair intently, and Ham turned to Bill Adams and asked, “You were along on this thing he's telling about?”

“I hold his hat for him,” Bill Adams said.

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“He was along,” Handsome Mayfair said. “Bill is my pal. When we meet two girls he always likes the one I don't. It's a wonderful thing in Bill.”

Monk snorted.

“What was the name of the island you landed on?” he asked.

“The one that disappeared?”

“Yes.”

“We don't know. We were lost at the time, sort of. You got no idea how lost you can get in one of these bombers busting along at two hundred fifty miles an hour.”

“Describe this girl you saw,” Monk suggested.

“Now there,” said Handsome Mayfair enthusiastically, “is something I can do. Boy, oh, boy! I won't use words like blond, blue eyes, nice shape, although those words belong. Here is the way she hits you: We were standing in a beautiful tropical jungle, see. Orchids and these wonderful flowers all around. You'd swear nothing could be more beautiful. And then, lo and behold! There she is. And the jungle is just nothing, just a background, something that's kind of ordinary, compared to her.”

Monk sighed. It sounded like Fraulino Jones. He tried to think of some definite thing about the Fraulino that would identify her. He thought of something.

“Did this girl,” he asked, “wear a gold ring in the shape of a monkey wrapped around her finger?”

Handsome Mayfair closed his eyes.

“Cousin Monk, you know her!” he gasped. “Think of it! A homely jackanapes like you looking on such beauty.”

“That's the Fraulino Jones,” Monk declared.

HANDSOME MAYFAIR opened his eyes and leaped to his feet. “Come on, Cousin Monk,” he said. “Where is she? I've got to meet that girl again. Where is she? Come on. Take me to her, or I shall have to break your body in six pieces.”

“Sit down,” Monk said, “before you talk yourself into some bruises. What about this repeating?”

“Repeating?” Handsome Mayfair sighed ecstatically. “Who wouldn't repeat himself after seeing such beauty. It was a madness that came over us, suitable for such an occasion.”

“What did you repeat?”

“What? Oh, just whatever it was we'd been doing a minute before.”

“You get up off the ground to do it?”

THE KING OF TERROR

Handsome Mayfair stared. "How'd you know that?"

"And," said Monk, "were you in a different place when you picked yourself up?"

"You," said Handsome Mayfair, "must be a clairvoyant. Yes, we were on a different island. Also, the fuel tanks of our plane, which had been empty, were now half full of gas. And the bullet hole in the tank had been repaired."

"Where was the second island?"

"This one. Tahiti island."

"Was the first island—the one that disappeared—a large one?"

"Not very."

"Volcanic or coral?"

"Volcanic. All up and down. One of those things that look like a black walnut from the air."

"The island," said Monk, "vanished from under you, and then you got off the sand on a new island and repeated what you just did on the other island. Rather remarkable, don't you think?"

"I think it's crazy as hell," said Handsome.

Monk nodded. "All right, now, there's one more thing: That letter you wrote me. You say you carried it around with you?"

"Yes. Sure. Carried it around waiting to see for sure where I was being transferred. I haven't found out yet, so I'm still carrying it."

"Got it now?"

"Yes. Here." The letter read:

Dear Cousin Monk:

I just met a little number named Finetta, and she says you and I should get together. She says we have the same ideas. I think we should look into that further.

The looking is pretty good here, though. I'll bet you would find it interesting.

Be seeing you soon, eh?

Handsome Mayfair

Handsome Mayfair waved an arm and said, "It's just a note I was going to drop you. There isn't anything of importance in it."

"Oh, isn't there," Monk said. "Take that last paragraph. About the looking being good, and I would find it interesting, and you'll see me soon—"

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“I meant I would see you in New York,” Handsome Mayfair explained.

“Sure, but did they know that? Suppose they found you on an island where you didn't belong, and with a letter like that—”

“You mean that beautiful doll—the Fraulino Jones, didn't you call her—frisked my pockets?”

“If she did,” Monk said, “she would sure think you were going to tip me off to come down here.”

“Oh!” Handsome Mayfair grinned. “Maybe you're right.”

“And that,” Monk said, “would lead them to think that Doc Savage was on their trail. So what would be more natural than that they should send an expedition to New York to get rid of Doc Savage.”

“Is that what happened?”

“My guess says it is,” Monk told him.

Handsome Mayfair looked interested. “Hey, they wouldn't kill Doc Savage for marbles.”

Ham said, “Monk, that's how we got in this. That letter made them think Doc was investigating them, so they set out to get Doc off the job.”

BILL ADAMS was watching them sleepily, but Handsome Mayfair was grinning. “Is that dream girl in this?” he asked.

“Yes,” Monk admitted.

“Then I'm in it, too,” Handsome Mayfair said. “I want to meet that babe again. I want to just stand and look at her. And when I do that I'll have seen all there is to be seen, and sunsets in the mountains and the sea in a storm and nothing else will quite be the same again.”

Bill Adams said, “And the little pig said rooty-toot, and into the thorn bushes he ran.”

Handsome Mayfair laughed.

Monk exchanged glances with Ham. The same thought was in both their heads. They could use any help that floated along, and Bill Adams and Handsome Mayfair looked like a pair who would be as handy as crutches to a one-legged man if a fight came along.

“You two fellows are in the navy,” Monk pointed out. “You have duties to perform. What are you going to do about that?”

“Oh, we got leaves coming,” Handsome said. “We can get off any time we want to—for two weeks. And if I can't whip the dragon and win the girl in two weeks, the clan of Mayfair isn't worth its salt.”

Monk nodded. “Here,” he said, “is the complete story.”

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He told it all as it had happened, forgetting a detail or two, but going back and putting them in. And at the end he summarized it with, "This Abraham Mawson has some big scheme afoot. He found that letter on you and thought Doc Savage was wise to his scheme. So he sent some of his gang to New York to dispose of Doc. The Fraulino Jones thought they were just going to grab Doc and hold him until their trick was pulled. But Percy and Francis went along to kill Doc. It didn't pan out, and Doc planted us as members of the gang. I don't know how we put that over. I guess we're such clowns that we fascinate 'em into keeping us around. Doc tried to stop them stealing a navy plane and got caught. He's been a prisoner since."

Handsome Mayfair frowned. "If what I've heard of Doc Savage is two percent true, what's he doing staying a prisoner? I've heard he just lifts his voice and lightning strikes out of the sky, and elephants gallop out of the jungles, just like in the moving pictures. How they keep a guy like that a prisoner?"

"If you're poking fun at Doc," Monk said, "you're in for a surprise. I'm quite sure he could have gotten away any of the time since they caught him."

"Now *you're* kidding about him," Handsome said.

"No. What Doc wants is to keep track of the gang until he finds out what is going on. The minute he does find out, all we have to do is cut loose and put a stop to it. In the meantime, how you gonna stop something when you don't know what it is?"

Handsome Mayfair rubbed his jaw. "All right, it makes sense. How are we going to help you?"

"We'll get in contact with you," Monk said. "You keep an eye open. I think we're going to *Po Piki*."

"What's *Po Piki*?"

"We don't know," Monk said.

MONK and Ham, after some difficulty in persuading Handsome Mayfair that he should wait for developments, returned to the bungalow occupied by Abraham Mawson and his retinue. Handsome Mayfair was all for charging into the thing barehanded, having a housecleaning, and carrying off the Fraulino Jones as the prize. They dissuaded him finally.

The house was quiet and dark when Monk and Ham approached it, until the big black was suddenly in front of them with a small machine gun. He passed them and told them where they were to sleep.

Their beds were comfortable, but they were routed out before daylight. Dressing and going outside, they found the Fraulino Jones, Abraham Mawson, Percy and Francis, Carlson and Duane, the big black, and four other men who looked like unpleasant fellows to have mad at you.

"We're off to *Po Piki*," the Fraulino said.

Monk and Ham thought of Bill Adams and Handsome Mayfair. They wouldn't like this being left behind, particularly Handsome. But there was no help for it.

Doc Savage was brought from the basement cell. The bronze man looked fit, alert, and emotionless. The Fraulino Jones looked him over anxiously for damage and was relieved.

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They traveled several miles and waited on a beach. In the eastern sky crimson evidences of dawn appeared. Then there was a drumming sound.

A plane came slanting out of the eastern dawn, landed on the bay, and taxied close enough inshore that they could wade out and climb aboard. The big black carried Abraham Mawson out to the plane, but the others had to wade.

The plane took off.

It flew straight into the rising sun, climbing, then banked in a slow turn of sixty degrees, made another turn later to get into some clouds, turned in the clouds, ran out of them, and after that flew steadily as if the pilot knew exactly where he was going.

Chapter IX. PO PIKI

THE description of the island which Handsome Mayfair had given was a good one. It did look like a floating black walnut from the air. Almost every one of the little wrinkles, where they entered the sea, was a harbor. But they were vicious little harbors in which the sea churned and frothed.

There was only one large wrinkle and that seemed to be the only harbor with a beach, the only place fit for boat or plane. The pilot put the big seaplane down on the harbor, then picked up an anchor buoy and they tied up. A rowboat came out from shore for them.

Doc Savage, when they carried him from the plane, turned his head and examined the craft with interest. It was a Japanese ship. Someone had painted out all insignia and identification, but it was still Japanese.

Doc was treated with kindness. They handled him as gently as they could, considering that he was tied hand and foot. The tying, even, had been redone, so that it was not too uncomfortable.

He suspected they were trying to make him feel good, hoping he would decide to answer questions.

They were convinced he wasn't Doc Savage. He could tell. The reputation he had had helped the trick he had pulled on them. He had been caught too easily in California. They didn't believe they could have caught the genuine Doc Savage so readily. This embarrassed him and bothered him, too, because he had been dumb to get caught that way.

Mistakes like that—lapses into stupidity, he could see no other words for them—were something he couldn't afford. It would only take one of them to make a man dead.

The beach was a dark one of volcanic sand. When they stood on it, Abraham Mawson made a little speech.

He pointed upward. "See the rim of those cliffs?" he said.

The rim of the cliffs was the most conspicuous thing when one looked upward.

"That," said Abraham Mawson, "is an invisible fence, or so you can consider it. No one goes beyond it. That is the only rule on this island. That, and your certain knowledge that I am your master. And if that last sounds foolish to you, do not make the mistake of questioning it."

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Doc Savage watched Monk and Ham. It was obvious they had trouble taking the man's bombastic statements about his being master.

They went up to the fort then.

FIRST, there were half a dozen machine-gun emplacements to cover the beach. Behind these, in concrete and steel turrets, were ten of the latest model anti-aircraft guns, the muzzles of which could be depressed so as to cover any ships which came into the harbor, and any tanks which might try to maneuver on the beach. Everything was expertly camouflaged.

The luxurious cavern came next. It was really a natural cave which had been elaborated upon. It was perfectly bombproof.

The place was not exceptionally large as caverns go, and not large for a cave in these islands, in which there were many caves. The place had been divided off with partitions, which were about ten feet high, with doors, but without windows or roofs.

Everything was neat, clean. Illumination came from powerful banks of very modern fluorescent lights which hung in clusters from the cavern ceiling. These apparently burned steadily day and night because the room into which they put Doc Savage had a bunk with upright posts supporting a canopy of light-proof black-out cloth which could be rolled down to get some darkness for sleeping.

During the short time they were taking him to a prison room, Doc Savage saw other people, perhaps ten in all, in addition to their party.

One of these was a Japanese.

Abraham Mawson spoke sharply to this Japanese, saying, "You idiot! You were told to stay in bed and rest!" The man's tone was one of rage at the Japanese showing himself, Doc Savage was convinced, rather than concern for the fellow's well-being.

The lower part of the Japanese's face was swathed in bandages, though.

The room where they confined Doc was four walls without a roof, as were the others. It had two doors, one being the entrance, and another leading into a bathroom equipped with a new tub, bowl and stool which had come from a large United States mail-order house.

They put extra-strength manacles on his ankles, and to these fastened a long chain of unquestionably good steel. The other end of the chain was tethered to a concrete block weighing, at a conservative estimate, half a ton. Nothing to go dragging around over the scenery.

Abraham Mawson had hardly deigned to speak to Doc.

The big black man, however, was more friendly. He directed Doc to take a bath in the bathroom, and stood by with a revolver while the bronze man did so.

The black man's name was Robin around here, he explained. Big Black Robin, he said, and he was just something for people to look at and be afraid. He grinned wryly. Sure, there was good reason for them to be afraid of him, too. For a thousand generations, his people had been making other people afraid of them. A

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thousand generations, understand. He wasn't fooling.

He was from Africa, and his real name was Goeie Maart, or that was his Afrikaans language name. The Afrikaans language was an offshoot of the Dutch, and Goeie Maart meant Good March, which was the correct translation of his name. The family name wasn't Maart, or March, but it was a native word that meant that season of the year. He traced his ancestry back to Cleopatra, and far back beyond. Very far beyond. Cleopatra was just a recent branch of his family tree.

"You know something?" he said. He sounded as if he would beat his chest. "You know something? Kings. Kings, all of us. I am the only first son of my family in a thousand generations that has not been a king. Some of them you might try to call chiefs, but they were kings."

He stood tall and dark and statuesque. And suddenly it was plain that he was not lying.

"I will be a king," he said, quietly and with conviction.

"King of what?" Doc asked.

"Over men of my race. I will make them a good king. We always do. It will come to pass. You remember this, and watch."

DOC finished his bath. They took his clothes. They gave him a suit of white coveralls to wear. No belts, no suspenders, nothing for a weapon; the coveralls closed with a zipper.

"We are afraid your own clothing might be saturated with rare and strange chemicals," Robin said frankly. "So we will remove them, naturally. It should have been done before."

Doc Savage had studied the big black. He had decided there was not a more intelligent man in the group, not one with more solid nerve.

Doc said, "Money would not interest you?"

"Money?"

"It is possible," Doc Savage said, "that Doc Savage would pay a large sum were you to extend to me certain help."

Robin laughed. "Listen," he said. "You are Doc Savage. You are not an imitation. You have them fooled, but you do not have me fooled. Money? Money does not arouse me at all. To be a king? Ah, that is different. But you would not make me a king. You are Doc Savage. Doc Savage does not make kings." He was silent. He seemed sad. "You could, though. I am sorry, very sorry, you are against us. To tell the truth, I have thought of killing you myself, but I am afraid."

Doc said, and meant it, "I am glad you are afraid."

Robin looked at him steadily. "Understand me, not afraid of the physical act of killing you. But afraid of living with the memory of the crime afterward. You are cursed with such fears when you come from a thousand generations of kings."

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Doc Savage extended a hand. "It is a good thing to feel the way you feel."

They shook hands. And Doc Savage laid a hand on the black's shoulder in a touch that might have meant good fellowship. As he dropped the hand, Doc got a handkerchief which he had planted in Robin's ample red trousers. The trousers, fortunately, had pockets as any other trousers, and Doc had placed the handkerchief tightly folded, therein, hiding it there before they had made him take the bath and had taken the clothes.

Doc palmed the handkerchief and got it into the pocket of his coveralls.

"I am sleepy," Doc Savage said. "I think I will sleep now."

Robin shrugged. "You might as well. *Ek is baie jammer.*"

The last sentence, in Afrikaans, meant more than all Robin had said, probably. In simple translation it was the statement that he was sorry. But it meant more; it was a promise, an uneasiness, a dislike for the fate that lay in wait for Doc Savage.

DOC did sleep. But they brought food, and he awakened then. The food was on paper plates and the water in paper cups and the knife and fork were the cardboard picnic kind. They were not taking chances.

Robin, he saw, had also been brought food. Evidently the big black was to be on continuous guard outside the barred door.

The door bars were not bars, really, but a grille made of iron straps riveted together.

Doc dipped the handkerchief—the handkerchief he had planted, then obtained—in the paper cup of water, after he had consumed about half the water. He let it soak for not more than sixty seconds. Then he wrung the handkerchief as nearly dry as possible, letting the drops fall in the cup.

Next, he exercised what should have been, considering the time he had put in mastering it, a very superior ability as a ventriloquist. He imitated Abraham Mawson's voice.

"Robin, come here at once," he said.

He made Abraham Mawson's voice seem to come from some distance away.

Robin hastily placed his dinner plate and cup on the floor near the door, called, "Yes, master, coming!" and galloped down the corridor.

When Robin was out of sight, Doc reached through the bars and emptied the contents of his water cup—about half of it only—into Robin's water cup.

Doc then went back and acted innocent. He was eating heartily when Robin, vastly puzzled, put an eye against the bars and stared at him.

"Did you hear Abraham Mawson call to me?" Robin asked.

Doc said, "I heard a call. It was not Abraham Mawson's voice, though."

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“Oh,” Robin said. “That explains why I did not find him.” He sat down, picked up his plate, and took a long drink of water. He ate heartily.

Afterward, Robin lay back and slept.

The drug with which the handkerchief was saturated would keep him unconscious probably an hour at the most. A longer soaking of the handkerchief, however, would produce a liquid which would knock a man out for days.

Doc worked on the locks of his leg manacles. The manacles were ordinary handcuffs, extra heavy, so that the locks were not particularly mysterious. It took, however, more than a strong wish to get them open. Doc Savage used a tiny steel saw blade—similar to a scroll-saw blade, about four inches long—which had been coiled into a tiny cap which fitted over one of his wisdom teeth, very innocently. He did not saw the manacles; he used the saw blade as a lock pick, and got both of them open, unharmed, so that they could be used again.

Then he stood close to the wall, jumped, hooked his fingers over the edge, and went up and over. He dropped beside Robin, and there was no alarm, nothing to indicate that any mechanical device had betrayed his escape.

Not that he could get out of the cave, however. That was practically impossible, he was convinced. Unless he thought of some very good device.

Chapter X. THE FRIGHTENING FACES

THERE was nothing in the least satisfactory to Doc Savage in the progress he had made so far in the matter of Abraham Mawson, the Fraulino Jones, and the attempt to kill him which had been made in New York City to start all this. Progress, in his opinion, was not the word to apply. There had been practically no progress. Oh, they had learned that the gang had added members such as Abraham Mawson, Carlson and Duane, and Robin, and that it was big.

Big was hardly a word for the Abraham Mawson organization either. There was a complex thoroughness about the situation that was unnerving. The things they had done—stealing the navy plane, calmly, for a trip across a part of the Pacific was an example—were startling, but executed with a brazen competency that took them out of the category of the fantastic.

There was a certain hair-raising dash about the whole thing. It was not a quality that Doc admired. Rather, it worried him a great deal, because there was an air of evil genius about it. The same kind of driving genius that got the world into such messes as were made of it by Genghis Khan, Napoleon and Adolf Hitler.

So Doc Savage walked the roofless passages with great caution.

He made two discoveries.

First, there was another section to the cave, a section which was closed by a thick concrete wall and a single steel door. The door was heavily guarded, both by photoelectric eyes and capacity alarm aërials, these being in plain sight. There were also armed guards, and they were alert.

Second, there was a marvelously equipped hospital. The hospital was for some special purpose. Doc knew this as soon as he found the place. It was deserted when he came upon it, and he stepped inside for a close look.

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It was equipped for surgery, but more than that, for a special type of surgery. The instruments did not tell him as much—although they told him a great deal—as various chemicals, a set of photographs and photographic apparatus, and several wax models. The place was arranged for plastic operations. Plastic operations on faces.

The wax models held the bronze man's interest.

After he had stared at the models for a while, Doc was astonished enough to make, unconsciously, a small trilling sound which was his habit when shocked unexpectedly. The trilling was low, exotic, as subtly weird as the coursing of a small wind through a forest of naked trees in winter, and it had a quality of ventriloquism which made it seem to come from everywhere rather than from any definite spot. Doc made the sound seldom; never unless he was deeply gripped. Always he was unaware that he had made it, and a little embarrassed about it if others happened to be present, so that he never admitted making the trilling.

The wax faces were quite familiar. There was, for instance, a wonderfully executed head of De Gaulle, the Free French leader who, following the war, would probably be the leader of France. There was one of Winston Churchill, of Joseph Stalin, of Franklin D. Roosevelt. And there were others.

There were wax likenesses, Doc Savage discovered, of most of the leaders of the great nations, and of some of the smaller ones.

There was a large filing cabinet. It contained charts, measurement charts, giving the body proportions of each man of which there was a wax face. Every detail, every small scar, was listed. There were photographs of the individuals, hundreds of them.

There were phonograph recordings by the thousands, all of them carefully labeled, in another cabinet. Voice records of the men whose faces were in wax. Some labeled as speeches. Some as private conversation—normal conversation, most of these were designated.

The bronze man stood there in the midst of the stuff and he looked worried and dumfounded.

Then he went outside. And almost at once he met Monk Mayfair.

“Doc!” Monk blurted. “I just met Winston Churchill!”

MONK MAYFAIR was a man of rather unorthodox composition. Ordinarily his emotions did not get the best of him unless he wanted them to do so. His rages were tremendous things, but that was because he enjoyed tremendous rages. His fights were howling, plunging bedlams of excitement, but that was because he enjoyed a whooping fight. But now he was stupefied with amazement, and obviously he did not want to be stupefied.

“Churchill!” he croaked. “You know, the guy with the cigar, who runs England.”

He was talking loudly.

Doc Savage reached out and gripped Monk's arm. “Calm down,” Doc said. “Where did you meet him?”

“Just now,” Monk wiped sweat off his forehead. “I just walked along and bumped into him.” Monk's eyes popped. “*Doc, it was Winston Churchill.*”

“You speak to him?”

THE KING OF TERROR

“Sure.”

“No mistake?”

Monk had dropped his voice somewhat, but his eyes again went around and around. “Look, Doc—you know that time in England, four months ago, when I was over there with the chemical warfare mission?”

“Yes?”

“Well, when the chemical warfare mission was in England I met Churchill. I talked to him quite a lot, and he gave me one of those cigars. I got to know the guy. I know Churchill! And I just met him.”

“What did he have to say?”

“Why,” Monk said, “he stopped when I spoke to him. He said it was unfortunate we had met, and that his presence here was supposed to be a secret, and that he hoped I would keep the secret.”

“His voice?”

“Huh? Oh, you mean how it sounded. It was Churchill's voice all right.”

Doc Savage was silent for a time.

Overhead, the banks of fluorescent lights spread clear illumination that was like daylight except that, when one moved a hand quickly, there was an impression of many separate images, the result of the frequency of the alternating current which operated the lights. Somewhere someone was playing a radio, getting war news over short wave, from the way it sounded. And a cook was rattling dishes and pans.

Doc said, “Monk, you are likely to meet other famous politicians here.”

Monk swallowed. “Yeah?” he said. “I don't get it.”

Doc Savage pointed in the direction of the concrete wall and the steel door that barred off an arm of the cave. “Do you know what is behind there?”

“No,” Monk said. “I was told not to fool around in there.”

“Find out, if you can,” Doc said.

Monk said he would try, and muttered, “I hope I don't meet Napoleon next.”

“Napoleon is dead enough that you are not likely to meet him,” Doc Savage said.

DOC got back into his roofless prison without too much trouble. He replaced the leg manacles. The tiny saw blade which he had used for a pick he had put back in the tooth cap where it was least likely to be found. They had already opened his mouth and looked inside, and the tooth cap had been natural enough not to arouse suspicions.

THE KING OF TERROR

Robin awakened finally. His awakening was quick, like that of an animal, and he was on his feet, peering inside at Doc Savage. Doc pretended to be asleep.

“Hoe jammer tog!”

Robin exclaimed. It was an Afrikaans expression of puzzled emotion.

Doc slept well and soundly.

Twelve hours or more later he was unchained and taken to a bleak, empty room where half a dozen particularly ugly men surrounded him. The ugliness of the men indicated they had been selected for that purpose, and the fact that Monk was one of them was no flattery for Monk, or Cuerdo's, looks.

Abraham Mawson did not appear.

Doc was told Abraham Mawson wished a full-written-report of his entire association with Doc Savage, and the exact whereabouts of Doc Savage.

Doc refused.

He was then beaten. They used a whip, a cat-o'-nine-tails similar to the implement carried by Robin, although Robin did not take part in the flogging. It was not a particularly serious beating.

Gradually, and systematically enough to show that it was part of a planned doing, the ugly men worked themselves into what was designed to impress Doc as a hysteria. The lashing climax of this was when one of the men, foaming with rage at Doc, drew a knife and lunged at the bronze man, only to be intercepted by one of the others.

A man dashed off excitedly to talk to Abraham Mawson, and returned with word that Doc Savage would be questioned again tomorrow, when everyone was more calm, and if he did not give information, he would be killed.

So they threw Doc back into his prison.

It had been a show to impress Doc with their determination. Doc knew this. It had not been necessary, because he'd had no delusions about their determination. He ached from the beating.

About two hours later, Monk began singing. Singing in Mayan.

Doc listened intently. The Mayan tongue was a musical one, although guttural and full of sounds that could not be expressed with English letters with any degree of accuracy. With the words sung it could be understood clearly.

Monk said in Mayan: “About that secret room: It's a factory of some kind. They are manufacturing something. They use a raw material supplied by Abraham Mawson. Abraham Mawson goes out with large aluminum balls and goes alone. He leaves the inlet and is gone four or five hours usually. Sometimes not that long. No one goes with him. No one is permitted to go outside the rim wall of this inlet, in fact. Abraham Mawson comes back with the aluminum balls and takes them into the locked room. I do not know what goes on then. But Mawson is going out this morning. In about two hours. Ham and I cannot follow him. We do not dare.”

THE KING OF TERROR

Someone, in a loud voice, gave a profane and candid opinion of Monk's singing. Monk swore back, then switched over and did a ribald song in English, the brand of English which Monk had been speaking as Cuerpo. It was very funny.

DOC SAVAGE had saved his paper cup. He got water in it and put his chemical-saturated handkerchief to soak. This time he made a more powerful solution of the drug.

Breakfast was served. They brought Doc coffee in paper cups, as usual. Two of them. And Robin was served his breakfast at the same time.

Doc did not give Robin time to start eating. He used the ventriloquism trick again. Percy's voice, this time.

“Hey, Robin, come here quick!” he called, making it from a distance.

Doc was close to the door, acting innocent, and he watched Robin wheel and start down the corridor.

He reached through the bar and dumped some of the concentrate from the paper cup into Robin's coffee.

He used ventriloquism again, in Percy's voice.

“Never mind,” he called. “Let it go, Robin. Never mind.”

Robin stopped, looked disgusted, and came back. There had been nothing this time to arouse his suspicions.

He sat down and ate and drank and went to sleep.

Doc picked the manacle locks again. This time he went over the edge of the wall and did not stop at Robin's side. Instead, he made for the hospital room that was equipped for plastic facial work.

What he wanted was coloring material which they had used in making the wax face likenesses. The stuff was nothing but grease paint of the theatrical variety, stuff that could be applied and removed quickly in experimenting with different skin and hair colorings on the wax.

Doc used the stuff on his face, thinly. It did not take a great deal, on top of the already dark bronze of his skin.

He went back to Robin. The black man was heavy when Doc lifted him, but he got the colored man over the wall. Doc then appropriated the voluminous red trousers and substituted his own white coveralls for them.

Now he looked like Robin in little more than size. They were both big men. But it might do. He took along Robin's spectacular whip, the cat-o'-nine-tails which was such a terrible-looking thing.

He walked toward the entrance of the cave. The guards there were having breakfast, and as Doc approached he stretched and yawned.

“How is the weather this morning?” he asked.

He used Robin's deep voice, and it was a better imitation of Robin, by far, than the job he had done on his appearance. It got him past. The guards waved, and one of them said that it was a fine morning.

THE KING OF TERROR

Doc went outside, followed a path a few yards, and turned abruptly aside into the jungle. He waited there where he could watch the cave mouth for Abraham Mawson's appearance.

Below him, the cove surface was bright-blue corduroy in the sunlight, with waves creaming on the beaches. Sea birds and island birds circled slowly over the blue water.

There was no sign of the plane. But after he had eyed the scene for a while he thought he knew where the ship was hidden and camouflaged. He was not sure. Good camouflage is a tricky thing, and this was good.

Furthermore, he began to suspect that there were at least four planes down there. He could not be sure, but he thought he saw what was probably camouflaging over four spots, close to the beach where the big amphibians could be rolled up from the water.

Then Abraham Mawson appeared.

ABRAHAM MAWSON carried four of the aluminum balls which Monk Mayfair had mentioned. How Monk had known Mawson was taking this trip, Doc was not sure. But evidently Monk had kept his ears open.

The balls were large, three to four feet in diameter, and made of two halves welded together. They were attached to a wooden rack for convenient carrying.

Abraham Mawson climbed a path that led up toward the rim of the gash which formed the harbor. Doc followed, moving silently, losing sight of the man ahead, but not for long at a time.

The rim of the canyon was surrounded by a capacity prowler alarm.

Doc realized this when Abraham Mawson examined the trail ahead, then stopped. He drew a pistol, turned and looked down toward the harbor, and fired the pistol into the air. He waited, apparently for an answer.

Doc surmised then that there was a capacity alarm. His guess was not clairvoyant. He'd noticed how often the capacity type of alarm had been used before by the gang.

Whacking echoes of a reply shot came up from the bay.

Abraham Mawson looked satisfied.

Doc was already moving forward. He could tell about where the wire of the capacity alarm would be stretched. A moment later he saw it. A copper strand. He located where it crossed the trail.

He timed himself carefully and went under the wire in the jungle at the same moment as Abraham Mawson crossed under it on the trail.

Nothing happened, so he must have succeeded. The capacity alarm, which probably registered down in the cave, or near it, would not indicate the size of a body approaching it, or how many men had gone under it, providing all them passed under it together. Doc was quite familiar with the device. There was an adjustment for sensitivity—you set the thing so that birds and small animals coming near would not actuate the relays, but at the same time a body as large as a man would set the thing off.

THE KING OF TERROR

Doc followed Abraham Mawson onward. The interior of the island was extremely rugged, but no more so than most of these South Sea islands of volcanic formation. The trail was a dim one, but any trail not used by many feet would become dim in this luxuriant jungle.

They had walked for nearly an hour when the peculiar thing happened.

Chapter XI. THE UNDECIDED WOMAN

DOC SAVAGE had lost sight of Abraham Mawson for the moment, although he could hear the man moving ahead on the trail.

Doc sank to all fours to get under a thorn bush, then grasped a low bough to climb a tree and make a survey of the route ahead. He went up a few feet, then had to descend and go to another tree a few feet away, which he climbed. He looked out over the jungle.

As far as he could tell he never saw the jungle.

There was no consciousness of an interval elapsed.

But he was back on the ground, on all fours, going under a thorn bush, then grasping a low bough to climb a tree and finding that tree didn't offer the vantage he wanted, and going to another tree a few feet away, which he started climbing. He was well up that tree before he got himself stopped doing what he was doing.

He had been repeating what he had, seemingly, done a moment before.

There was no recollection of climbing down out of the tree after he had climbed it in the first place.

As far as his mind told him, at least that much time was missing. He had been up the tree—then he was on the ground, doing again what he had done to get into the tree.

He got down out of the tree in a hurry.

He stood there near the path, concentrating. He was startled enough to make the small trilling sound, the tiny, unconscious thing that astonishment sometimes shocked out of him.

Doc ran. He ran back the way he had come, and he took long, hasty strides. He stopped on a hill, where the sea breeze was cool against his face, and the sound of jungle birds was around him.

He realized something else then. Down below, down there where he had done his strange repeat act, there were no birds. The jungle had been very still, without life.

Curious, puzzled, he retraced his steps. That was right. There were no birds. They were thick in the jungle back yonder, but there seemed to be a point beyond which they did not venture.

When he looked for insects, there were no insects, either. Growing more agitated, he paid closer attention to the nature of the jungle.

The jungle was different, too. There was still thick growth, but some of the plants which were so profuse on the rest of the island were not to be found here.

THE KING OF TERROR

The missing plants were those that depended on insects for pollination. Which meant for a long time, years probably, there had been no insects here.

Now the sun interested Doc Savage. He studied the position of it, the length of the shadows. And again he made his trilling.

It was an unnerving certainty that at least two hours had gotten away from him in some fashion.

He went back to the trail and studied it. In spots where the ground was soft he found what he wanted—proof that Abraham Mawson had not yet returned.

DOC did one more thing before Abraham Mawson came back. He climbed the tallest tree on the highest hill in the neighborhood and decided that there was a narrow canyon ahead. Mawson had gone into that canyon, but there was nothing to show why. Very little of the canyon was visible from the tree, and Doc did not go near the place.

Abraham Mawson came back carrying, on the wooden frame, the four big aluminum balls. These were, of course, hollow. But whether or not he had anything in them it was impossible to say. He did not walk as if the contents weighed much, if there was a contents.

When they came near the burglar-guard wire, Doc circled abreast so as to be on hand to go under the wire at the same time as Mawson.

He managed to get under the wire again all right. Mawson fired his gun as a signal and got an answer from the harbor as before.

Doc Savage dashed ahead now. He wanted to get into the cave and back in his prison cell, before his absence was discovered. If it hadn't been found out already.

He strode past the guards. They said nothing. It was a hot morning, and the guards at the cave mouth had sought the shade. They heard Doc and popped out guiltily.

Doc, using Robin's deep voice, said, "It's just me. But I think Abraham Mawson is coming."

A guard grinned, and said, "Thanks, boy."

Doc hurried. He got cold cream from the hospital stores to remove the dark grease paint from his skin. And, as he was coming out of the hospital, he passed Dr. Fuquet.

It was an effort to pass up Dr. Fuquet without speaking. Or, in fact, without striking the man. But it was Fuquet, obviously.

Doc had never met the surgeon, Fuquet, in person during the man's ill-starred reign as a plastic expert specializing in faces. But he had followed the case in the newspapers, and remembered when Dr. Fuquet had killed a guard and escaped from the penitentiary.

Dr. Ernestine Fuquet was one of the great plastic-surgery wizards of the day. Probably there was not a better man in the world. Certainly there was no one who had done the wonders of molding which Dr. Fuquet had done.

THE KING OF TERROR

But, unfortunately, Dr. Fuquet was as crazy as a March hare. A lunatic, pure and simple. Cyclic insanity, it was called, which meant that sometimes he was sane and at other times he was anything but. When the spell was on him he liked to do little things like cutting throats or taking hearts out of people, cutting a hole and taking out the heart and holding it in his hand to feel the beat of it.

Dr. Ernestine Fuquet, then, was the man in the plastic–surgery operating room. That made the place a miracle room, because Dr. Fuquet, when sane, could do things that would defeat nature.

Doc went on. He was in a hurry to get back to his cell, remove the grease paint, get Robin back outside, and generally act as if everything had been very innocent.

He hoped there would be no trouble, and he was hoping this when the Fraulino Jones stepped out of a doorway—they were in the corridor to Doc's cell—and showed Doc the muzzle of a revolver.

“YOU would be a dead goose,” she said, “if Abraham Mawson caught you.”

Doc Savage watched her tensely. The one subject about which Doc knew the least was women. Doc was perfectly sure of this. She might shoot him or kiss him, and neither would surprise him. As a matter of fact, she might do both. You never could tell.

Sometimes Doc was convinced that he certainly must meet nothing but a freak kind of femininity in the course of his life and work. It was hard to think that all of them could be as unpredictable as those he had met.

“Abraham Mawson,” he said, “isn't the one who caught me.”

The Fraulino was pale.

“You shouldn't prowl,” she said.

“Or, even better,” Doc said, “I shouldn't get caught.”

“Why didn't you?”

“They thought I was Robin, I suppose.”

She nodded. “You look a little like Robin. He is big, too. But he no more has your build than a duck resembles a hawk.” She frowned at him. “I don't know what I'm going to do if you don't stop taking such risks.”

Doc was startled. “You—uh—risks,” he said. He looked at her gun.

She moved the gun a little. “I'll keep it pointed at you in case anyone shows up,” she said. “And in case they do, remember, I just caught you escaping.”

Doc swallowed.

He was astounded.

“You don't,” he said, “sound so mad.”

THE KING OF TERROR

“You,” she said, “picked a fine time to skip out. Here I’ve been trying to get a chance to talk to you alone, when Robin was not around. And a half-hour ago, I found Robin absent, and then discovered you had drugged him, or something, and put him in your place.”

Doc swallowed again.

Her attitude puzzled him.

He almost wished he could think this friendliness of hers was a trick, but he knew it wasn’t.

She said, “I suggest we get you back in your cell.”

Doc nodded.

“I’ll wait outside,” she said, “until you exchange clothes again with Robin, and put Robin outside. Then I want to talk with you.”

Doc broke some speed records getting the clothes exchanged, and getting the black grease paint off his features, and putting Robin out in the hall again. Robin still slumbered from the effects of the drug. Doc wanted to hear what the Fraulino Jones had to say. Her change of attitude was amazing.

“Robin,” Doc said, “is going to do some tall wondering about the nap he just had. It’s the second time. I do not think it safe to pull the same trick a third time.”

The Fraulino Jones—she had remained outside—leaned against the door bars and lowered her voice. “What did you find on your other trip outside?”

“A finely equipped room for plastic surgery, presided over by a clever maniac named Dr. Ernestine Fuquet,” Doc replied. “Also, a wealth of reference data designed to assist Dr. Fuquet in duplicating the faces of such prominent men as Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, and others.”

The Fraulino nodded. “Think back,” she said. “Remember when we brought you here? Remember the man you saw with a bandaged face?”

“The Japanese?”

“That Japanese,” the Fraulino said, “is the spitting image of the Emperor of Japan. Spitting and talking, I should say.”

Doc eyed her face and saw a great deal of earnestness. “What about Winston?”

“Winston Churchill?”

“The head man over in England. Yes.”

“Winston,” said the Fraulino, “needs some more work done on him. He’s good. But he isn’t perfect yet.”

“He fooled Mon—” Doc said, and stopped. Doc’s hair stood on end. He was slipping. He’d almost betrayed the fact that Monk Mayfair was here with him.

THE KING OF TERROR

Doc looked at the Fraulino with considerable alarm. She was a young woman with such a magnetic personality, to say nothing of her looks, that she had practically hypnotized him into talking to her as if she was a partner.

“What,” asked the Fraulino, “put that look on your face?”

Doc swallowed.

“Nothing,” he said.

THE Fraulino Jones studied him as if she was slightly puzzled, then put a question. “You just got back from following Abraham Mawson?”

“Yes,” Doc said, and wondered why he was being so free with information.

“What did you find?”

“He apparently went into a valley with four hollow aluminum balls,” Doc replied. “I did not follow him into the valley because something strange happened to me. It was a small incident. I merely repeated a few acts which I had just performed, without knowing why, or being able to help myself. This was mystifying. I associated it with the valley. So I did not enter the valley.”

The Fraulino Jones nodded vehemently. “You were wise,” she said. “Now, look. I want you to listen.”

“Listening is something I am certainly willing to do,” Doc told her.

“First,” the Fraulino said, “I am going to explain why I am acting this way. It will take a little time, but I want you to know about it, so don't interrupt.”

She paused to listen, but there was no indication that they were going to be interrupted.

She said, “My parents were competent people. They were competent enough to become quite wealthy. Dad began as an importer of merchandise from the Orient, and his holdings in Japan became enormous, and his property in China almost as extensive. I was educated in America and Europe, then taken to Shanghai to live in our Shanghai home. I want you to understand that we were quite wealthy, with town and country places, a large yacht and a small one, and a private plane and pilot for each member of the family.”

She listened alertly again.

“The Japanese,” she said, “changed all that. They ruined our business. They killed my father and my mother, executing them quite callously before my eyes.”

She tried to say this with the same tone that she had used to impart the other information but she failed. Bitter horror got into her voice.

“I got away from them,” she said. “And they didn't get all of our money.”

The bitterness was still in her voice, on her face.

THE KING OF TERROR

“That,” she continued, “is why I helped Abraham Mawson start this thing. It is my money which financed him. I thought at first that it was only against Japan that we were to work. But now I know better.”

Doc Savage was patiently silent. She was giving information rapidly and, while the mystery wasn't explained as yet, the background for it was shaping up. Motives were probably important to the understanding of a thing like this.

“ABRAHAM MAWSON,” continued the Fraulino Jones, “is an assumed name. His real name is Walton Stagg.”

The name Walton Stagg meant something to Doc Savage.

He said, “Walton Stagg was the name of an explorer and adventurer whose ideas were always fantastic and bizarre. In 1936, Walton Stagg was disgraced over a lost-land-of-Atlantis hoax which he tried to perpetrate on his scientific associates. He was banished from respectable scientific circles for this.”

“That,” said the Fraulino, “is our Walton Stagg, or Abraham Mawson as he calls himself.”

“And so?”

“He came to the South Seas following that trouble about the lost land of Atlantis which he pretended he found but hadn't,” the Fraulino explained. “And here on *Po Piki* island, he found that valley. You know what the name *Po Piki* translates into?”

“Po Piki

means High Devil, does it not?”

“That's right. High Devil. Island of mystery. And the mystery because of the valley. And Abraham Mawson heard about it and realized that—”

She went silent. She pointed her gun at Doc Savage. Three men came walking down the corridor. Francis and two others. They saw Robin prone and unconscious on the passage floor and broke into a run.

The Fraulino told them calmly, “Robin has passed out, or something. I happened to notice. I have been guarding this man who pretends to be Doc Savage. Will you take over that job, please?”

Chapter XII. TWO TO HELP

MONK MAYFAIR and Ham Brooks took a walk for the benefit of their nerves, which were getting tight. They walked down toward the harbor beach.

“She ees make my head ache, thees whole theeng,” Monk complained.

“Blast you, cut out that Cuerdo talk!” Ham snarled at him. “I'm getting blamed tired of it.”

THE KING OF TERROR

“Listen, you overdressed shyster, you're no more tired of it than I am,” Monk told him. “How they stand it is beyond me. And it's getting me scared. I'm afraid I'll bust right out and cuss in English in a wild moment.”

They broke into a trot for a while, by way of getting exercise. Then they stood and tossed pebbles out into the water.

“Winston Churchill,” Monk said, “is what gets me.”

“It couldn't have been Churchill, not really,” Ham told him.

“Well, I wish you had seen him, and you would be as bumfoozled about it as I am,” Monk complained.

A new voice addressed them and said, “All right, say your prayers, you two double-crossers!”

Monk nearly jumped into the bay, proving the state of his nerves was very bad. He and Ham whirled. “Handsome Mayfair!” Ham blurted. “And Bill Adams!”

“Where'd you two guys come from?” Monk demanded.

“Airplane,” said Handsome Mayfair.

“Of iron and steel, a ship that's real,” Bill Adams said. “Oh, give me a home on the bounding waves.”

Monk grinned at the pair. He was overjoyed to see them. They were reinforcements when reinforcements were badly needed.

“We didn't have a chance to notify you we were coming here,” Monk explained.

“I'll bet that's a lie,” Handsome Mayfair said. “It couldn't be you wanted that marvelous beauty, that wondrous creation of femininity, the Fraulino, all alone. Or could it?”

“Don't be silly,” Monk said.

“I'm silly about the Fraulino,” Handsome Mayfair said. “But not silly enough to believe that one Mayfair would hesitate a minute to cut another Mayfair's throat where a woman was concerned, if she was pretty.”

“Where'd you get your airplane?” Monk demanded.

“Stolen navy ship. The one you came over from California in.”

“Huh?”

“We,” said Handsome Mayfair, “got leave to fly the crate back to California. A bit irregular, but we wangled her. You see, we had leave coming, like I told you. And they were glad to ship us back with the ship and get rid of us.” He grinned. “So we detoured.”

“You followed us here?”

“Sure,” said Handsome Mayfair. “And maybe you think it didn't take a bloodhound of the air to do that.”

THE KING OF TERROR

Bill Adams had been looking around the cove, peering up at the towering walls and the mountainous hills of the island interior.

He said, "All that happens is as usual and familiar as the rose in spring and the crop in summer. Meditations, by Marcus Aurelius, forty-fourth verse."

"Huh?" Monk said.

"He means," explained Handsome Mayfair, "that this is the island we landed on the first time. He recognizes it as the same."

"The place is called *Po Piki*," Monk explained. "That means High Devil, somebody told me. But why they called it that, I dunno."

"Where are our friends?"

Monk told him. He explained the layout of the cave, and the number of men here. There were at least thirty-five men, in Monk's opinion. There were four planes of which he knew, and there might be others.

"Whew!" said Handsome Mayfair. "Some organization."

"Yes," Monk said, "and you haven't heard about Winston Churchill yet."

Monk told him about Churchill.

"And don't call me crazy, either," Monk advised him. "The whole thing is a cuckoo bird without wings, and I know it."

Handsome Mayfair sighed. "I wish," he said, "that I could just kidnap the Fraulino Jones, and let the rest go, Gallagher, as the saying is."

"The Fraulino," Monk said, "wouldn't kidnap easy. Moreover, she sort of has an eye for Doc."

Handsome snorted. "Doc, eh? That's just because she hasn't realized my possibilities yet."

"Where is your plane?"

"Around the other side of the island. And that isn't any place for it to be, just between you and me. This is a calm day, but any kind of a wind would make all of these coves but this one too tough for a boat, much less a plane."

"The barometer," Monk said, "indicates fair weather for a while. Did you hide the plane?"

"It's camouflaged to begin with. And we hung some vines and bushes over it. They won't see it unless they just happen to fall onto it."

Handsome Mayfair sighed. He looked like a defeated but eager pirate.

"You sure this Fraulino Jones doesn't need rescuing?" he demanded.

"It's the exact opposite," Monk assured him. "Or will be, if she catches you."

THE KING OF TERROR

“Have you,” asked Handsome reluctantly, “got any suggestions?”

Monk shook his head. “Stick around,” he said. “That's all I can say. Something is bound to break.”

“Is Doc Savage making any progress?” demanded Handsome Mayfair.

“I haven't seen any,” Monk said. “Which probably means he's about got the whole thing under his thumb, and is ready to start housecleaning.”

Handsome Mayfair and Bill Adams both grinned. “Call on us when that housecleaning starts,” Handsome said.

Monk and Ham promised them they would.

Chapter XIII. TERROR FOR HIDALGO

IT had developed that Francis and the other two men had not happened past Doc Savage's prison cell by accident. They had been sent there to get Doc, and they did this, taking the bronze man to a more luxuriously furnished cubicle, where they waited for some time.

Then a man appeared and said, “All right. Bring him in.”

Doc was taken into the presence of Abraham Mawson. Mawson was showing a different facet of his character. Now he was the executive of big deeds and efficiency. He wore a business suit, an expensive one, and three medals which apparently were of his own design. His desk was a large mahogany one, and there was an intercommunicator on it, a radio–telephone handset, and a block of push buttons.

“Sit down,” he said.

Doc took a chair. Francis and the others withdrew at a signal. Abraham Mawson leaned back and tapped his fingers on the arms of his swivel chair. Doc could see a revolver holstered on the chair close to the arm. And Abraham Mawson did not take his hand six inches from the gun butt at any time during their conversation.

“At times it seems that I am a man of rather small perception,” said Abraham Mawson. “For instance, it dawned on me only this morning why you were refusing to talk.”

Doc Savage looked interested.

“You are, of course, not Doc Savage, but an imitation,” Mawson said.

Doc registered blankness.

“You know you do not dare tell the truth—that Doc Savage was killed by Percy and Francis in New York,” Mawson continued. “As soon as I was sure of that I would no longer have any reason for keeping you alive.”

Doc deliberately began to look alarmed. He had a hunch now that something was going to develop out of this conversation.

Abraham Mawson smiled. “I know Doc Savage is dead,” he said. “So where does that leave you?”

THE KING OF TERROR

Doc shook his head. "No comment," he said.

The other man contemplated Doc thoughtfully. He seemed in no hurry to continue. In fact, he seemed a little uncertain of himself, as if he was getting ready to cross a bridge, and wasn't sure the bridge would support him, or whether it led where he wished to go. At last, he said, "No man wants death."

"No man wants death," Doc agreed.

Abraham Mawson nodded. "So far," he said, "you could not talk or co-operate with me, because it would have meant your death. That is right, no?"

"No comment again," Doc said.

"And none necessary," Mawson said. "But here is one you had better answer, and answer the right way. Will you work for me?"

"Work for you?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"Six days, probably."

"What do you mean by 'probably'?"

"I mean," the other said, "that I am not putting a time limit on the job. But you can be quite sure that two weeks will clean it up."

"And then?" asked Doc.

The other grinned. "Then," he said, "you will be free. Or you can stick around and enjoy your part of the results."

"And just what," Doc persisted, "would be those results?"

"We would take over Hidalgo," Abraham Mawson said. "If you know what Hidalgo is, you know your own answer."

"You mean Hidalgo, the Central American republic?"

"Right."

"But—"

Abraham Mawson leered at him. "You are an imitation Doc Savage for Hidalgo. We already have an imitation Churchill for England, an imitation Hirohito for Japan, an imitation De Gaulle for France and, finally, our great ultimate, an imitation Roosevelt for the United States."

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DOC hadn't thought he would be surprised. Actually, his hat was blown off.

He'd known this was about what it would be, because all the different pieces wouldn't fit anything else. The men—the imitations; the Churchill whom Monk had seen, for example—could fit but one pattern of devilry.

The bigness of the matter had really kept it from entering his mind as a fact. He hadn't believed it, subconsciously. He had told himself it would be something like this, but he hadn't believed it. It hadn't come into his mind, really; it had stuck in the mouth of the bottle. It was too big.

Yet the theory of it was possibly sound. And particularly reasonable at the present day. Five years ago it wouldn't have worked in France, but now more and more power was centered in one individual, not only in France but in England and the rest of the world. The United States was no exception. It was the result of conditions, of the madness of mankind.

One man a key. A man in power. There were two kinds of power in a thing like this. One was the kind of power that Hitler had. One man the fountain of all orders and all instructions and policy and even thought. That was physical power, the power of fear usually, but not always the power of fear. It could be the power that sprang out of people getting an amazing case of admiration and hero worship for one man and gladly doing everything that man told them to do. The other power was found very seldom, for it was the admiration that sheer goodness inspires, and gratitude for favors received, and also and probably the greatest power of all in a ruler was the knowledge of his people and their sureness that he was governing them the way they wanted to be governed.

Abraham Mawson, then, was going to take over a nation or two by substituting a phony, an imitation, of the man currently in power.

Work? It could. Mawson was no fool, so he would not expect such a deceit to last for any length of time. Possibly if he got his imitation into the seat of power and kept him there for a few hours or a few days at the most, the damage would be done. A thing like that, to present-day, one-man governments, would be like cutting the head off the rooster.

“Hidalgo,” Doc Savage said, pretending ignorance. “Why Hidalgo?”

ABRAHAM MAWSON laughed. “That proves,” he said, “that you are not a very good imitation Doc Savage. What do you know about Hidalgo, anyway?”

It was plain that it was not wise to be too ignorant, so Doc said, “Hidalgo, Central American republic of small size and not widely known. Over seventy percent a primitive tropical jungle, and at least half of that practically unexplored. The unexplored portion is incredibly mountainous. A republican form of government. The present incumbent is named Juan Doyle, and he has not been in power very long.”

Abraham Mawson smiled, and said, “But you surely know more about it than that? For instance, how did Juan Doyle get to be president?”

Doc felt genuinely uncomfortable.

“The man Doyle was indorsed for the presidency of Hidalgo by Doc Savage,” he said. “Savage has a great deal of influence in Hidalgo. He has a great deal of power over the descendants of the Mayan Indians, who are scattered all over Hidalgo. It is thought that he was once made a leader of the Mayan tribe, or something like

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that.”

Mawson stared intently at Doc.

“You haven't,” he said, “heard anything of Savage having a secret treasure in Hidalgo?”

Doc said, “I would not say about that.”

(Notice Doc's use of the word would, instead of could not say. He could say plenty. Because a lost valley in the wild inner unexplored mountainous region of Hidalgo is the location of a vast hoard of gold. This valley is presided over by descendants of the ancient tribe of Maya, and because of a great favor which Doc did them, he is supplied with as much gold as he desires. He can get on a radio transmitter at noon on any seventh day, and speak a few words in the Mayan tongue and the result will be a pack train of burros laden with gold coming out of the jungle in a few days. No living person is more important to these descendants of ancient Maya than is Doc Savage. And because these Mayans have relatives and friends living throughout Hidalgo, Doc's importance and influence through the republic is enormous. The valley—called the Valley of the Vanished—is a secret as far as the outside world is concerned, but its existence is known to many Mayans who do not live there. To these Mayans, the Valley of the Vanished is a sacred spot, a shrine of enormous importance. And because the valley is in existence only because of the tremendous efforts of Doc Savage and his associates on at least three occasions in the past, Doc is greatly honored outside the Valley of the Vanished. Any Mayan, any individual of Mayan blood in Hidalgo, would do anything in the name of reason for Doc Savage. Which means that Doc is a revered individual throughout Hidalgo, for Doc has three times been the savior of what they hold most sacred.)

Mawson seemed inclined to pursue the treasure inquiry further, but did not, after tugging thoughtfully at his jaw. He said, “Doc Savage is an important man in Hidalgo. Therefore, you will be Savage. You are able to guess, by now, what you are expected to do?”

Doc could guess. He said, “I am to tell everyone it is all right for you and your men to take over the government of the country. I am to make them believe that—until it is too late for them to help themselves. That the idea?”

“That,” Mawson said, “is the idea.”

“This is a rehearsal?”

“Exactly.”

“You are going to give your organization some practice taking over governments by taking over the little country of Hidalgo?”

“Yes.”

“And then you'll go out for bigger game? For England?”

Mawson grinned. “Maybe not England. You see, I'm not sure England will be the first one to crack. But as the war ends, countries are going to pieces. And we will step in and take them over. The unsettled times, the wildness of uncertainty, will help us. We are going to have the right kind of promises.”

“What do you mean—right kind of promises?”

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Mawson spread his hands.

“What the people of this world will want to hear after this vast war is over. Return of the people's rights. No more wars. Stable currency—nobody is going to lose any money as a result of inflation. Jobs for everybody.”

“Promises you cannot keep.”

“Of course not,” Mawson said. “But since when has a dictator kept his promises? I wouldn't want to set a bad example.”

DOC SAVAGE considered what had been said. He believed Mawson had spoken the truth, or rather, that as much as he had said had been the truth. With the exception, naturally, of the promise that Doc would be kept alive if he complied with orders and even rewarded. Although Mawson might mean that, too.

But there was something missing. A feeling of incompleteness about the affair. The thing as a whole was too big to be accomplished by ordinary means.

That was it. There was more. A means, a method, a device by which Abraham Mawson was going to do this. No man would tackle a thing so fantastic without a tool.

Doc said, “I am thinking of something.”

“Yes?”

“On the plane, coming here from California, I repeated myself. That is, I was doing a certain series of things in a certain way, and then I did them over again without being able to help myself. And, apparently, a great deal of time passed—”

Abraham Mawson came to his feet. There was nothing pleasant in his manner.

“You,” he said, “will not concern yourself about that. Understand?”

Doc knew then that he had hit on the key to the mystery. This was the tool.

He said, “I am to concern myself only with doing what you wish in Hidalgo?”

Abraham Mawson nodded. “We will leave for Hidalgo at once.”

Chapter XIV. THE REPEAT DEVIL

BLANCO GRANDE, the capital city of Hidalgo, in Central America, was a spectacular city from the air. There was no building in town over two stories in height, a fact that was due either to the earthquakes or the unwillingness of any true Hidalgoan to climb more than one flight of stairs to get anywhere. But everything was painted with colors out of the rainbow. There were palm trees. There were *maima* trees, *lemonillos* and *chaca* and *zapotes*. There was a lake at the center of the town, fringed with glossy hyacinths, and with the bright-blue blossoms of *lirio* around its water.

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Percy and Francis were in the forward part of the plane. The Fraulino Jones sat immediately behind them. And Doc Savage was lashed to a rear seat. The other chairs were occupied by other men who were run-of-the-mill thugs in the gang. As a class, though, they were a very genteel type of thug.

Monk and Ham had gone in another plane.

In all, four planes had lifted from the little harbor in *Po Piki* Island and made the long flight to Hidalgo. There had been stops for refueling, and these without incident, the fuel bases having been prepared well in advance, obviously.

The plane flew on beyond Blanco Grande, circled, came down on a neat little airport.

“The other ships are going to land elsewhere,” Francis told them dryly. “We are to go to a hotel and wait for radio word.”

They rented a car. Open cars were the rule in Hidalgo, and they were unable to find a sedan. So Doc pulled a hat down over his eyes and turned his coat collar up, and the others crowded close around him. He was not handcuffed or tied now. But Percy and Francis were close with guns, which they kept out of sight most of the time.

It was not a prepossessing hotel to which they went. The proprietor was evidently a fellow who asked no questions. If there were other guests, these kept out of sight.

They waited in a large room. Percy and Francis played a word game, a very complicated thing which required, and displayed, an astounding vocabulary. The lowbrows shot craps.

The Fraulino was very nervous by now. Her eyes kept returning to Doc Savage, although she was trying to act as if she was not particularly concerned. Doc, in order to make it easier on her, pretended to doze.

Later, the Fraulino went out for sandwiches and coffee, and got a chance to speak to Doc Savage while they were eating.

“You do not have much time.” She looked around to make sure no one was listening. “What are you going to do?”

Doc spoke with hardly a movement of his lips.

“You going to help me?” he asked.

“Yes.” She looked uncomfortable. “I told you how it is with me. I financed Abraham Mawson, furnished the money to get this organization together. But I thought it was only going to be against Japan.”

“And now that there is more than Japan involved?”

She shuddered. “I want to stop it all.”

“Then I’ll depend on you,” Doc said.

She nodded. She seemed grateful.

“For your own safety,” Doc said, “you had better follow my orders when the trouble starts.”

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She was startled. "You have a plan? You really have?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" she asked eagerly. "And how soon?"

"You will be better off not knowing anything about it," Doc told her.

She became angry. "You don't trust me?"

"I told you I had a plan, didn't I?" he countered.

She studied him, crowding her eyebrows together, thinking deeply.

You *are* Doc Savage," she said. "You're not fooling me."

ABRAHAM MAWSON'S voice, when it finally came over their radio, was pleased with itself. He gave some crisp explanation and followed it with orders.

"I have rented the country estate of Señor Metale Orejoras," he said. "Get that name. Señor M-e-t-a-l-e O-r-e-j-o-r-a-s." He spelled it out. "The fellow is prominent, so anybody can tell you where to find the estate. The place will be headquarters. So come out at once. Is Savage there?"

Francis said smugly, "The one who calls himself Savage is—"

"He is Doc Savage from here on out!" Abraham Mawson snapped. "Don't you ever let anybody get the idea for a minute that he is not Savage. That is important."

"Yes, sir," said Francis uncomfortably.

"Put Savage on the air."

Doc picked up the microphone and said, "Yes, Mr. Mawson."

Abraham Mawson told him, "You will come with the others. We will start this at once. Twelve hours, not more. That will be time enough. You will come here for instructions."

The radio was switched off. Someone had rented cars. They got in these, big open machines of good quality. They rolled through the streets.

Doc glanced at the Fraulino, who rode beside him. Tension was a gray color on her face. She looked at Doc Savage and in a low voice, said, "This is like a fire. Like watching a fire you helped start. Did you ever do that?"

What she meant was a frightening thing. A little fire, burning trash in the back yard, perhaps. And the flames leaping and growing, and perhaps a little wind, and the thing getting out of control, the fire becoming a roaring animal of terror.

Francis, in the front seat, looked around, and demanded, "Are you unhappy, Fraulino?"

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He sounded suspicious.

Doc Savage laughed. He laughed loudly and happily.

The sidewalks were crowded. In Blanco Grande, the sidewalks were no more than two feet wide almost everywhere, and the streets narrow in proportion, so that the pedestrians were almost in the cars with them.

The pedestrians looked at the car, their attention arrested by Doc's thunderous laughter.

“Good!” Doc said. *“Mucho bueno!”*

And he began to sing. He sang with roaring volume, but words that were completely unintelligible to those in the car.

On the sidewalks there were some who just stared and smiled. But there were some who stared, then turned and bolted wildly away.

“Hey!” yelled Percy. “What in the hell is that you're singing?”

Doc looked gleeful.

“Cuerpo's song,” he said. “Don't you like it? You heard it enough that you should remember it.”

“Cut it out,” Percy said irritably. “It was bad enough when that Cuerpo sang it. What language is it, anyway? It's not Spanish, or Portuguese, or Arabic or Tamil or Hindustani or Russian or Italian. I know all those.”

Doc Savage got out of answering by shrugging and spreading his hands. He settled back in the seat.

But the Fraulino Jones was eyeing him strangely. “Cuerpo,” she said. “That accent! Cuerpo and Cabeza!” She smiled suddenly. “I was never before so glad that I was so stupid,” she said.

Doc Savage was uneasily silent. She had, of course, realized that Cabeza and Cuerpo were Ham and Monk.

AT the country estate of Señor Metale Orejoras, they found some unexpected excitement. Robin, the big black man who wanted to be a king because all his ancestors had been kings, galloped to meet them.

“Trouble,” he said. “Trouble from the most unexpected source.” He pointed at the house. “His Majesty—Abraham Mawson—wants you immediately.”

Doc demanded, “Is everyone here?”

Robin was startled enough, or sufficiently wrought up by whatever it was that had happened, to answer. “Yes,” he said.

Señor Metale Orejoras, if he had built the estate, was a man of money. At least he had been a man of money when he started, but unless he had a great deal of money, he was not prosperous when he finished. The place was sumptuous on an impressive scale. There was stucco and stone, paths and manicured gardens, and a patio floored with inlay of mother of pearl, and overhung with orchids and rare blossoms.

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It was in the patio that a meeting was being held.

There were two prisoners.

Handsome Mayfair and Bill Adams. Doc had not seen them before, but he recognized them from the descriptions which Monk and Ham had passed him.

Monk and Ham—Cuerpo and Cabeza—stood to one side and looked very concerned.

The thirty—odd remaining members of Abraham Mawson's gang were scattered around the patio. They carried more weapons than commando raiders.

Abraham Mawson stood up, pointed at Handsome Mayfair and Bill Adams, and yelled at Doc, “Have you seen these two before?”

“No,” Doc said truthfully.

Abraham Mawson was in a rage that was nearly hysterical. Apparently these sudden transitions from placidity to gibbering wrath was one of his characteristics.

“These two,” he shouted, “landed on *Po Piki* Island weeks ago. We gave them the arrestor. While they were under the influence of the arrestor we took them to another island. But we searched their pockets, too, and found one of them was named Handsome Mayfair, and that he was a cousin to Monk Mayfair, aide of Doc Savage. We came across a letter he had written Monk Mayfair. The letter sounded suspicious. So, to be on the safe side, I sent Percy and Francis and the Fraulino Jones to New York to get rid of Doc Savage. At the same time we kept a close watch on Handsome Mayfair and Bill Adams, but found no indication they were really agents of Doc Savage. I half decided the whole thing was a false alarm on my part. But here they are!”

He glared around at everybody.

“Here they are!” he screamed.

“ARRESTOR,” Doc Savage said. “Would you mind explaining what you meant by the word 'arrestor'?”

No one paid the least attention to him.

The Fraulino Jones, staring at Handsome Mayfair and Bill Adams, cried, “Where did these two men come from?”

“We caught them,” said Abraham Mawson, “prowling around the place.”

“What did they want?”

Handsome Mayfair gave the Fraulino the biggest of grins and said, “I can tell you what one half of us wanted—you!”

The Fraulino jumped. “Eh?”

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Bill Adams said, “At last he set her both his eyes: She won, and Cupid blind did rise. O Love! has she done this to thee? What shall, alas! become of me? Act three of Cupid and Campaspe, by John Lyly.”

The Fraulino gave another jump. “Says which?”

Handsome Mayfair grinned. It took much courage, or some kindred possession, to grin under such circumstances. He indicated Bill Adams. “My bard,” Handsome said. “My poetic soul. For a guy who never says anything that makes sense, you'd be surprised how much sense he does make.”

“You're trying to say,” asked the Fraulino, “that you are here because of me?”

“Yes,” said Handsome Mayfair. “I can say so coherently.”

“Why?”

“Because I'm utterly fascinated by you,” Handsome told her.

The Fraulino looked very impressed.

Monk Mayfair looked disgusted. Handsome was making the kind of an impression that Monk had been hoping to make, and Monk wasn't very well in a position to do anything about it. As Cuerpo, the eccentric Latin, he was a figure to inspire anything but amour.

Abraham Mawson had been listening. He swore.

“All that mess over a lovesick idiot!” he yelled.

“Lovesick nothing!” Handsome Mayfair bellowed back at him. “I'm not sick. Love never made me sick in my life.”

Abraham Mawson turned purple. Then the situation hit him as funny and he blared out laughter. After he had cackled, he told Handsome Mayfair and Bill Adams, “It is too bad you two fellows have to be honest. I could use reckless brains like those you have. But, unfortunately, I am forced to assume you are honest, and so you must be shot. Percy, Francis, shoot them. Shoot them now, here.”

Percy and Francis instantly produced guns. There was a coldly unexpected drama about shooting down Handsome Mayfair and Bill Adams, apparently, which appealed to them.

Monk said, “Doc, this is where we pull the switch, isn't it?”

“Pull it,” Doc said.

Chapter XV. AGAIN AND AGAIN

DOC SAVAGE was not tied. He had been acting unobtrusively mild. And he had put himself near a man who was holding a hand machine gun with a full drum. He said, “Pull it!” and got the machine gun, or at least got control of the gun. The weapon was strapped to the holder in the regulation fashion, and the man kept a clutch on it. But Doc got the firing lever back, and the gun gobbled deafeningly. Doc kept the gun firing, putting the bullets into the ceiling, and now and then into a leg.

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Handsome Mayfair howled like a warpathing red Indian, and knocked two men down simultaneously. It looked like an impossible feat, but he floored two enemies with what seemed to be the same blow. He howled more loudly and headed for another foe.

Monk Mayfair shed the character of Cuerpo forever and kicked a man in the jaw. The man was taller than Monk, and Monk kicked him in the jaw with perfect ease, then made a run for another victim. Monk was bellowing also.

Doc still had the gun roaring. About two hundred bullets had come out of it, and the big magazine was about empty. The barrel was red-hot almost to the compensator on the snout. Then it jammed.

“Out!” Doc shouted. “Out! They are too many for us!”

The two Mayfairs, Handsome and Monk, were making a squalling uproar. Handsome scooped up the Fraulino and went through a window, jumping backward, glass showering.

Ham Brooks and Monk went out of the window after Handsome.

Bill Adams had gotten two pistols. He was calmly shooting men and shooting them only between the eyes, the latter necessitating some unusual technique. Without acting flustered, he strolled out of the window. It was about a yard to the ground. Doc landed beside him.

They had been in the patio. So now they were in a room. They ran across it, following Handsome and Monk, the Fraulino and Ham.

Doc said, “Adams, no killing!”

Bill Adams nodded. “Not with these.” He threw down his two pistols, left them lying on the floor. “Those were empty,” he explained. “But wait until I get hold of another loaded gun.”

They came into another room, a much larger one. Handsome Mayfair was dashing about, hammering the doors and bellowing, “Everything is locked! As tight as a drum!”

The only windows were outside ones, and barred heavily. But there was a square wooden hatch in the ceiling. Doc jumped, knocked the hatch back. Bright sunlight was above. Doc swung up.

The others gave him their hands rapidly, and he hauled them out on the roof.

It was a pleasant roof, reached by a stairway on the far side, with wicker furniture standing about, and large, wonderfully colored parasols.

The Fraulino Jones was pointing. “The plane,” she said. “If we can just reach that.”

“Who wants to leave here?” asked Handsome Mayfair. “This fight has just started.”

Doc asked, “Is Mawson's supply of the 'arrestor,' as he calls it, in the plane?”

“Yes,” said the Fraulino. “In the plane.”

“What the heck's this 'arrestor'?” Handsome demanded.

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Doc Savage had located the plane. It was no more than a hundred yards distant, standing in the open. There was a landing field, a private one, but with a long runway, northeast by southwest to get the prevailing Blanco Grande wind.

“Come on,” Doc said.

THEY did not make it to the plane. They ran wildly for seventy-five yards and there was a guttural hell-speech by a machine gun, and Bill Adams turned a neat and complete handspring and ran another half dozen yards hopping on one leg, and flopped into a trench.

It was a drainage trench for the flying field, not one built for fighting, but it was good enough for that. They piled into it. Bill Adams was already in it on his back.

“Hurt bad, Bill?” yelled Handsome Mayfair.

“Put a tongue, in every wound of Caesar that should move the stones of Rome to rise and mutiny,” Bill Adams said. “That’s Shakespeare.”

The Fraulino sank beside Bill Adams. “I think it’s wonderful, too,” she said. “But it’d help, Mr. Adams, if you’d tell us if it hurts.”

Bill Adams said, “They just winged me in the leg. Forget it, kid.”

The dilapidated hat Monk had been wearing as Cuerpo had stuck to his head. He removed it, found a long weed, put the hat on the end of the weed and experimented with it at the ditch edge.

The hat was shot to pieces suddenly and thoroughly.

“Enthusiastic guys,” Monk said.

Doc Savage said, “Keep down, everybody. We can hold out for a few minutes and that may be long enough.”

Ham crawled away on a scouting expedition. When he came back he did not look happy. “The way this ditch turns,” he reported, “they can rake it from the house. We’re stuck here.”

“How many guns have we?” Doc asked.

Monk had a pair of revolvers. Handsome Mayfair had a submachine gun. That constituted their armament.

“We can hold them with these,” Doc said. “Keep down. Save your fire. And wait.”

The Fraulino Jones stared at Doc Savage. “Wait? What for?”

“Help.”

“Where on earth would we get any help?”

Doc asked, “You remember on our way here, through the streets. My singing.”

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“Your singing,” said the Fraulino, “was terrible. But was it anything but that?”

Doc looked uncomfortable. “It was ancient Mayan,” he said.

“Mayan? Who would understand Mayan?”

“About every fourth native on the street seemed to understand,” Doc told her. “Naturally, my words did not sound much like a song. I was telling them, in Mayan, who I was and that I was in trouble, and that they should get help—all the help and quick—and follow us here.”

The Fraulino was puzzled. “But why should they do that?”

Monk said, “Young lady, that would be a long story. But if any Mayan native in Hidalgo heard what Doc was singing, they'll do plenty.”

The machine gun erupted again from the house. But this time there was no ripping of bullets into the other wall of the trench.

“That's funny,” Monk said. “They're shooting at the plane. Must be trying to put it out of commission in case we try to reach it.”

The Fraulino made a gasping sound of horror.

“That isn't what they're trying to do,” she said. “And it isn't funny. There's a dozen canisters of the 'arrestor' gas in the plane. And the wind is blowing this way.”

DOC SAVAGE had found a stick about eighteen inches long, thick and solid. He pounded this into the soft earth of the ditch, then put an ear against it and listened. He seemed satisfied.

“This 'arrestor' gas,” he said, “comes from a canyon on *Po Piki* Island. That right?”

(The artificial induction of anaesthesia has had a foremost place in modern medicine, one of the first great advances being made in 1800 by Sir Humphry Davy, who discovered the anaesthetic properties of nitrous oxide, or so-called “laughing” gas. In 1818, Faraday proved that ether vapor produced anaesthetic effects of similar nature, and this was also further developed by an American named John D. Godman in 1822. But the effects of these, and more modern anaesthetics of the ethyl chloride type, have been accepted by physicians and surgeons, rather than experimented upon with a view to ascertaining the cause of chemicals upon the mental reactions of the patient. The surgeon is, of course, only interested in the physical results—the eliminating of sensation of pain—for operating purposes. As long as the mental responses of the patient are not harmful, the subject is not one of concern to surgical science. This has led to neglect. Psychologists, however, have examined the phenomena with interest, and some experiments have been conducted toward examining and rationalizing the conduct of patients during anaesthesia, to the extent of developing indications that certain definite results can be expected consistently. The subject, however, is far from fully explored—THE AUTHOR.)

“Yes,” the Fraulino said. “Yes, that is the gas. I do not know what its formula is, chemically. Only the effect. But there is a seepage from underground in that canyon on *Po Piki*. The gas has been seeping for years, and it gave *Po Piki* its name. The name *Po Piki* means High Devil, as you know.”

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“When did Abraham Mawson find it?” Doc asked.

“Four years ago,” she told him. “He didn't know what to do with it. Then he evolved this plan. The gas can be compressed and stored. Its effects are fantastic, although I suppose an analysis would show that it isn't so amazing. Just a gas which produces unconsciousness. And some other ingredient which causes the victim to repeat, immediately upon regaining consciousness, what was being done when unconsciousness came.”

The machine gun was still cackling. Another joined it. They could hear the slugs battering the plane.

Monk, in an astonished voice, said, “Hey! On that flight from California—you used that gas on us!”

“Yes,” admitted the Fraulino.

Handsome Mayfair said, “I see now what happened to me and Bill Adams on our landing on *Po Piki*. We were given the stuff and taken to another island while we were unconscious.”

One of the machine guns went silent, evidently out of ammunition. The other kept roaring.

Doc put his ear against the stick he had driven in the ground and listened. He scowled in the direction of the machine gun.

He said, “Miss Jones, how did Abraham Mawson happen to contact you?”

“In the beginning, you mean? Oh, he heard about what the Japanese had done to my family. So he came to me with this fantastic gas, and told me he thought we could take over Japan by taking over the government. He planned to use a double for the Japanese emperor, and he had other doubles for high Japanese army men. He made it sound very simple, incredible as it was. But he needed money. My money. My money to get together an organization. Well, I financed him. And then I found out what he really intended and I balked.”

Ham picked up a handful of dust and threw it high overhead. The wind caught the dust and carried it, an impressive demonstration of how the wind must be bringing the gas toward them.

“We're in a hell of a spot,” Ham said grimly.

“Let's get the blazes out of here and fight,” said Bill Adams.

“You've only got one leg,” Monk told him.

“I can run like hell on one leg if I have to,” Bill Adams said.

“Stay here,” Doc told them.

Bill Adams was not satisfied. “Don't kill anybody! Stay here and get gassed and shot!” he said. He sounded disgusted. He got up on his one leg. “I'm going to show you people how to run like hell and fight like hell on one leg.”

Handsome Mayfair snorted.

“Sit down, Bill,” Handsome said. “You're getting delirious.”

Bill Adams looked very mad for a moment, then laughed and sat down.

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HANDSOME MAYFAIR listened to the machine gun for a while. It stopped.

“Look,” Handsome said. “I guess I’m thick. This gas—it makes you senseless.”

“Yes,” said the Fraulino. “It’s a wonderful anaesthetic. No sensation at all, before or after. Or almost none.”

“I still guess I’m thick,” said Handsome. “When you wake up you do over what you were just doing. That right?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Doc Savage said, “We will find that it is due to a nerve influence, probably.”

“Has anyone got a match?” the Fraulino asked.

Monk yelled, “You mean that gas is explosive?”

She shook her head soberly. “No. No, but it burns faintly green in the flame of a match. That is, the match flame turns slightly green—”

She went silent because Monk had struck a match and the flame was a shade of green.

Doc Savage put his ear to the stake. The machine gun had stopped.

Bill Adams got up on his one leg. “Damn me, I’m going to run and fight on one leg—”

Doc stopped him and pointed at the stake. “Ever do this? Set something solidly into the ground, then put an ear to it? You can hear sound—earth—carried sounds such as footsteps—a long distance. Old Indian device.”

Bill Adams stared at him. “Huh?”

“Our Mayan Indian friends are coming,” Doc said. “A lot of them; judging by the sound. So sit down.”

Bill Adams sat down.

Monk struck another match. It burned very green.

“That gas will get us in a moment,” the Fraulino said.

Handsome Mayfair was beside the Fraulino Jones. “What we do now—we’ll repeat?” he demanded.

“If they don’t kill us first,” she said.

Handsome grinned. “I can’t think of anything better to repeat than this—or a better last act,” he said.

He kissed the Fraulino Jones.

THE KING OF TERROR

Monk wished he had thought of that.

And then Handsome Mayfair was kissing the Fraulino Jones again and Monk was thinking for the second time that he sure wished he had thought of doing what Cousin Handsome was doing right now!

“Blazes!” Monk bellowed. “We’re out from under the effects of the stuff?”

They looked up. The ditch edge was lined with grinning Mayan Indians. Doc spoke in the Mayan dialect. He was answered by a man, and another native added more information.

Doc Savage said, “It is over. Abraham Mawson is dead. The others are prisoners. But Mawson made the mistake of shooting a native.”

Handsome Mayfair was grinning a grin that pushed back both ears. He looked at the Fraulino Jones.

“Is there any of that gas left?” he demanded.

The Fraulino looked as if she wouldn’t mind. Doc looked relieved. Monk looked about as happy as a toad in a vinegar jug.

THE END

DOC SAVAGE MADE A MISTAKE!

It was a mistake that he should not have made, even though a half dozen medical authorities had agreed with him in the diagnosis he had made. But it was a mistake that was made to order for his enemies; a mistake that put “The Talking Devil” on the way to almost successfully carry out his plan of evil. You’ll find this next novel coming in the May issue, one of the best ever. You’ll see how human Doc Savage can be, just as we all are. And you’ll see him in blazing action, conquering the evil genius that plotted the whole thing!