THE THREE WILD MEN

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Table of Contents

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Chapter I. HONEY FOR BAIT

THE bright−eyed girl left the Fifth Avenue bus at Thirtieth Street and walked north one block and west one block. By that time three gentlemen, and they were really gentlemen, were trailing her hopefully, not because she looked like a girl who could be picked up, but because she really was such a wonderful−looking thing.

She sat at a table in a restaurant which served a three−dollar luncheon.

Eventually, the head waiter approached and asked her, “Miss Cushing?”

She nodded.

“A call for you,” said the head waiter. He carried a telephone which he plugged in at her table. Having done that, he bowed with the extra flourish that he reserved for customers like this one and departed.

“Yes,” the girl said into the telephone.

“Boy, oh, boy!” said a brash male voice in the receiver. “Cut off my tail and call me beautiful! Where did they dig up a gorgeous butterfly like you?”

The girl asked coolly, “Who is this, please?”

“This? Oh, this is poor, down−trodden Mr. Adam.”

“Adam looking for his Eve, I presume.”

“This Adam,” said the brash voice dryly, “happens to be looking for three wild men.”

The girl tightened noticeably. “Oh!” she said. Then: “You were to meet me here.”

“Sure. I'm meeting you now. This is it.”

The girl's eyebrows drew together slightly. “You mean that you are not going to join me?”

“Butterfly, joining you is what I'd like nothing better to do. But it might not be smart under the circumstances.”

“Are you sitting where you can see me?”

“Sure.”

The girl put the telephone down and casually lighted a cigarette. She turned slightly to the right to shake out the match and turned a little to the left to blow out smoke. She removed a fleck of tobacco from her lip with a fingernail, then picked up the receiver.

“Nice job of looking around,” said the brash man's voice. “But you didn't see me, did you? So now let's get down to business.”

The girl was slightly irritated. “First,” she said, “let's have an understanding.”

“With you, butterfly, I would like nothing better.”

“That,” the girl interrupted, “is exactly the point. I do not like you. I have not seen you, and I have no desire to do so, and I am sure I dislike you. I have no doubt, in view of what you are doing now, that you are a completely contemptible individual with no moral, social or other virtues.”

“Ouch!” said the voice.

“I, on the other hand, endeavor to be a lady,” the girl continued dryly. “Suppose we put it on that basis.”

The man's voice became a little ugly.

“Sure, I'm the stableboy. You're the queen,” he said. “But today, you take orders from me. You got that through your pretty noggin?”

“If I did not have it in my pretty noggin,” the girl snapped, “would I be here?”

“All right, all right. Have you ever met this guy you are to horn−swoggle?”

“Doc Savage?”

“Yeah. Clark Savage, Jr., or Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze, whatever you wanta call him. Ever met him?”

“No.”

“You got your work cut out for you, butterfly. You sure have.”

SUDDENLY, the brash male voice stopped being brash and was coldly emotionless, dictating details and instructions like a machine. The switch in manner of the man revealed something of his character. He had some qualities besides being a hand with the ladies. His impudent approach to the girl, for example, had some of the qualities of an animal playing with a mouse, as a cat would give a mouse a bat or two with its paw before getting down to serious business.

He said, “Savage is in town. My part of this job was to find that out. All right, he's here. If you've heard anything much about him, you know he has five men who are friends and assistants. I think the five are in town, too. You hearing me?”

“I'm hearing you,” the girl said.

“Doc Savage and one of the assistants, named Monk Mayfair, are having lunch in the Restaurant Manor, two doors west of here. They are lunching with a Turk named Mustaphet Kemel. Mustaphet is supposed to sell Turkish tobacco to American manufacturers, and he has occasion to travel around over the world a lot, selling tobacco, of course. But Mustaphet is also secret agent of the Turkish government−the Turkish government thinks. The Russians also think Mustaphet is their agent. So do the French. So do some others. Only Mustaphet isn't the pup of any of them. He's Doc Savage's pup, and nobody else's.”

The brash man chuckled.

“That has no bearing on our day's work,” he added. “It just goes to show you that Savage is not a minnow. He has lots of pups like Mustaphet. How many, nobody knows. Incidentally, he is no spy and no international schemer.”

“I know what Doc Savage is,” the girl snapped.

“All right, all right. I've told you where he is in the restaurant two doors from here. Go in and take him. He's a big bronze man, very handsome, who doesn't look so big until you get close−”

“I know what he looks like.”

“Hm−m−m!

I presume you also know what you are to do?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

The girl's face got suddenly white.

“It isn't good,” she said. “Are they going to kill him?”

The brash voice laughed, and there was something so fierce in the mirth that it sounded a little unbalanced.

“Three wild men,” he said. “It's all very remarkable, wouldn't you say?” And he laughed again like a skeleton rattling.

MUSTAPHET KEMEL was an innocent−looking piece of chocolate, as innocent in appearance as was, probably, the boy in the fable who rubbed the lamp and caused the jinni to pop out of nowhere. He was eating peas with his knife like a cowboy.

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Monk Mayfair was the fellow in the red shirt. Monk was a remarkable fellow who was half a man high and two men wide, with rusty−red hair that made his wrists look as if they had been sprinkled with shingle nails. His forehead did not appear high enough to contain one of the most complete assortments of knowledge about chemicals in the world. He was eating his third steak, to the horror of the waiter.

Doc Savage had not spoken a dozen words the past hour and had done it in a way that dominated the conversation entirely. He had, although he was not trying to exercise it, that power. It was a carefully developed power. He was a man, a giant bronze man, about whom almost everything was carefully developed. He was younger than either Monk Mayfair or Mustaphet.

The restaurant was a little like Doc Savage, very famous but making no show about it. It was on a street of notable and subdued restaurants.

Paul Wock was the head waiter. He was a good head waiter and had a knack of attracting large tips.

Still and all, fifty dollars was a large tip, even for Paul.

Fifty dollars was what the girl handed him. Five tens, crisply new.

She said, “Look, Paul, this is for not seeing me. I want to run to Mr. Savage's table. You are not to notice me in time to stop me. It is a joke. You understand, Paul. A gag. I am to throw my arms around Mr. Savage and kiss him. Embarrass him, you see.”

Paul tried to recall having seen her before. “I see,” he said, not seeing anything but the fifty. “Oh, yes, a gag, I'm sure. Yes, indeed, I'm sure.”

“You understand. All you have to do is not stop me until I kiss him,” the girl said.

The fifty was hypnotizing Paul. “I'm sure,” he said. “Yes, indeed, to be sure.”

“Then it's O. K.?”

Paul made the bills disappear with a neatness that only head waiters seem to master. “To be sure, Miss . . . Miss−”

“Smythe,” the girl said. “Johanna Smythe, to be sure.”

“To be sure,” Paul agreed.

So the very pretty girl whose name was not Johanna Smythe, or Joan Smith either, went to Doc Savage's table without being molested. She walked to the table quickly but not rapidly enough to draw the attention of

Doc Savage and his party, who were engrossed in conversation.

Only she did not kiss Doc Savage.

She jabbed him with a hypodermic needle! She had carried the needle completely concealed in a small, flexible purse, and she simply jammed the purse against Doc Savage and squeezed. The jamming was done against his back, on the left side below the shoulder blade.

Doc Savage gave a normal start and looked up. His flake−gold eyes−one of his unusual features, his eyes were like pools of loose flake gold, always stirred by tiny winds−were rather wide.

The girl calmly opened her purse, removed the emptied hypo needle and placed it on the table in front of Doc Savage.

“You would naturally know what that is,” she said. “However, it might make it a trifle more interesting if I told you that the needle was just filled with germs.”

Chapter II. THE SECOND FIDDLE

IT was dramatic. Probably, “melodramatic” was the word, and enough to be on the silly side. It made Mustaphet Kemel laugh. He threw back his head and smacked his knees and sounded like one of the donkeys the tourists used to ride out to see the Pyramids.

“You must be an Oriental,” he told the girl. “The women of the Orient are like that. Dramatic. Bizarre. Even a trifle ridiculous.”

She did not like that. She did not like Mustaphet.

She examined Mustaphet's ears. “If they were a little longer, you would *look* like a jackass, too,” she advised him.

Mustaphet's grin hung on his face like a dead duck.

Doc Savage had been contemplating the hypodermic needle with, considering the circumstances, a noteworthy lack of excitement. However, he was looking a little like a machine−if a man could look like one−which was the way he looked when he had gotten into trouble.

He also did another thing−a thing which only Monk Mayfair, who knew Doc better than Mustaphet, knew that Doc had done. It was a trilling sound. A low, exotic note, hardly noticeable, with an eerie quality of seeming to come from everywhere rather than from any particular spot. It was a thing that Doc Savage did absent−mindedly when under mental stress, so Monk knew that Doc was not quite as unconcerned as he looked.

“Germs?” Doc Savage remarked.

“That's right,” the girl said.

Doc considered her statement. “What is right about it?”

“Eh?”

It was evident that she had expected more of a reaction out of this. His unconcern was getting her rattled.

“Germs,” she snapped, “are what make people ill. Or did you know?” She told Doc Savage, “The germs in that hypodermic needle were a very special germ. They are now in your body. By now they are circulating all through your body, so it is too late to do anything about that part of it.”

“Then I am to assume,” said Doc Savage, “that there is another part of it?”

“Right as rain,” said the girl.

“What is the other part?”

“The part,” she told him, “where you find out how to kill the germs.”

“Why kill them?”

“Because it's a case of kill or cure. You want to cure yourself, don't you?”

Monk whistled. “Brothers, this rates a brass medal or something. She shot a bunch of germs into Doc so he will have to find the cure to save himself.”

Doc Savage contemplated the girl, who was extremely easy contemplating.

“Is that the general idea?” he asked.

She nodded. “It's the specific idea. It's the nail hit right on the head. Your assumption is correct.”

“What,” he asked, “do I do about it?”

“You get busy finding the cure,” she advised, “if you know what is good for you. In about three days you will be very ill. In about another three days there will be slow music and flowers which you will not smell−unless you get busy.”

Doc Savage looked faintly pensive. “Three days is not much time to work on a thing like this. Finding cures is something doctors spend years doing.”

She compressed her lips.

“You better do it in three days,” she advised.

Doc Savage shook his head. “I might prefer the preventative,” he said.

“Preventative?” She frowned. “You mean a vaccine? There isn't any.” She shook her head. “Anyway, you couldn't vaccinate yourself because you've already got the germs.”

She took a deep breath and a step forward.

“I'll tell you what I'll do,” she added. “I'll take you to a place where you can see more of the germs. Maybe that will help.”

“Take me where?”

“I'll show you.”

“Is it near, this place where we can see the germs?”

“I'll show you,” she said.

Doc Savage shook his head again. “No, thanks. I prefer the preventative.”

“Preventative?”

Doc Savage unbuttoned coat, vest, shirt, and showed her what was underneath−a bulletproof vest with a mesh fine enough that the needle could not have penetrated.

“A nice preventative, wouldn't you say?” he suggested.

The girl then turned and ran.

MONK MAYFAIR popped his eyes at the girl.

Mustaphet Kemel, on the other hand, popped his eyes at the bulletproof vest. They had been discussing the subject of such vests when the girl interrupted them. Mustaphet was reporting to Doc Savage that a certain extremely competent and unscrupulous scientist in a Baltic country had developed a bulletproof fabric. Mustaphet had wanted to ascertain if Doc would be interested if he, Mustaphet, should produce, say in a convenient interval of two months or so, a sample of the new alloy fabric and the formula for its production. Mustaphet's business was supplying such items; it was his real business, that is. But it was not a question of money for Mustaphet when he was dealing with Doc Savage. Mustaphet owed Doc Savage a great many things, including his life, which he would repay if necessity required. Also, he owed to Doc the life of his small son, which was the greater debt by far of the two. Mustaphet felt that even a lifetime of little services−such as this one about the Baltic scientist's bulletproof vest−would be but a small down payment.

Mustaphet had not known that Doc Savage had already developed such a bulletproof fabric.

Monk Mayfair stood up. Monk did not have bulletproof vests on his mind. He was thinking about a pretty girl.

“You going to let her run off like that?” he asked Doc.

“With pleasure,” Doc Savage admitted.

“There's no pleasure in that for me,” Monk announced. “Anybody object to my catching up with her and sort of broadening our acquaintance?”

“You'll be sorry,” Mustaphet predicted.

“A girl as pretty as that one. Sorry?” Monk snorted.

“No objections,” Doc Savage said.

Monk was off. He was full of enthusiasm.

Mustaphet watched Monk depart, and sighed. “Shake a skirt in front of Monk, and he is off.”

“A pretty skirt,” Doc corrected.

Mustaphet chuckled. “And if the skirt contains danger, it is further to Monk's liking.” He laughed. “What a combination, that Monk. As homely as a mud fence around an African cannibal village; yet women are fascinated by his ugliness. A forehead that does not look as if it could contain a spoonful of brains; yet great chemists all over the world consider him a genius. A paradox, that fellow. And when he has his pet pig with him, he becomes something of a circus side show. Monk and his pig named Habeas Corpus. What a pair!”

Doc Savage made no comment.

Mustaphet changed the subject, asked, “What about that bulletproof vest I mentioned? The one that Baltic fellow has developed?” Mustaphet leaned forward. “You want a sample of the mesh and the formula?”

Doc Savage nodded slightly. “Get it.”

“It might *not* be superior to your own,” Mustaphet pointed out.

“True. But again it might, and that would be unfortunate. The Baltic fellow, as you call him, happens to be a genius of an ilk, and he is tied up with a war−mongering clique. If he has something definitely superior, it will do no one any good.”

Mustaphet nodded. “And if he does have something, you will then take measures to see that the secret does not reach the wrong hands?” he hazarded.

“Right.”

Mustaphet leaned back. He studied Doc Savage, then shook his head slowly, approvingly. “They call you the world's trouble−shooter, the man who rights wrongs and punishes evildoers in the far corners of the world. That is, those who know you well call you that. But they are somewhat wrong. You prevent a great many unpleasant things before they happen. I doubt if you get proper credit for that.”

“Credit,” Doc Savage said quietly, “is not important. I do not run an advertising agency.”

“Just what it is that you do run,” muttered Mustaphet, “is a thing that puzzles a lot of people.” He beckoned the waiter and called for the check. “In six weeks, not more than two months, you will see me again, and I will have visited the Baltic fellow,” he said.

“I would *not* like it,” Doc Savage said slowly, “if you should accidentally happen to kill the fellow.”

Mustaphet smiled slightly. “Do not worry. I know your rules against such things.”

MONK MAYFAIR caught the girl as she was walking south on Fifth Avenue. Monk overhauled her and touched her arm. She whirled nervously, her lips parted slightly and she seemed undecided whether to run or scream.

“With your mouth open like that,” Monk told her with all the gallantry of Sir Galahad on a Sunday, “you are the most beautiful of all.”

From rage and fright the girl began to look as if she wanted to screech with mirth. This was one of Monk's secrets in his way with women.

Monk affected them the way finding a toad in their slipper would affect them. First impulse was a howl of fright; second one was mirth. The next stage was amused and interested toleration, like keeping a toad around to study such a homely thing. From this stage, Monk had others which he developed, the success of which invariably amazed the beholders.

“You're not angry?” the girl asked incredulously.

“Me? Why should I be?” Monk chuckled expansively. “This is a great day for my tribe. It's the day I met you, in case I'm too subtle for you.”

“You didn't come to take me back to Doc Savage?” the girl demanded.

“Of course not,” said Monk gallantly.

“Then,” said the girl, “why did you follow me?”

Monk looked as if she was very obtuse, indeed. “Haven't you been followed before?”

She studied him, trying to decide just where to peg him. “Not,” she said, “by one of the world's leading chemists.”

“Ah, you've heard of me.” Monk was pleased.

“Yes, and I've heard you have quite a touch for female hearts,” she informed him.

“It's a lie!” said Monk. “It sounds like that low−life, Ham Brooks, the lawyer. You don't, by chance, know him?”

“No.”

“Good,” said Monk. “Not knowing him, you rank that much higher in my estimation. Were there really germs in that hypodermic needle?”

“Germs?” For a moment the girl did not seem to know what he was talking about. “Oh, germs. To be sure, the germs.”

“Were there?”

“Were there what?”

“In the hypo needle. Germs. Like you said.”

She looked confused.

“No, there were no germs,” she admitted. “That was just a lie. A trick.”

Monk gazed at her approvingly. “That is just what I would have told Doc,” he said, “if there had been time.”

LATER they were in a shooting gallery, shooting at little white ducks, and the girl seemed puzzled as to just how she had gotten there. Puzzled, but more at ease. That was Monk's technique. Put them at ease.

Monk said, examining a rifle, “I knew the minute I saw you, and heard you say, 'That needle is filled with germs,' or whatever it was you said−I knew right then that you were all right. I knew the wolf wasn't a wolf at all.”

“How did you know that?”

Monk aimed at a duck. “You see that little white duck. It is moving, and it is one of a chain of little white ducks. As sure as you see that little duck, you know another one will pop up. And just as sure as you see a girl like you, you know she is all right.”

The girl touched Monk's arm. “Thank you,” she said.

“She may be as unexpected as fleas,” Monk added, “and she may blow your hat off. But she will be all right.”

The girl picked up one of the small−caliber rifles. She aimed casually and knocked over a duck. She shifted to a smaller duck, and knocked that one over. Monk's eyes got round. She was a good shot.

She asked, “What do you know about Doc Savage?”

Monk shrugged. “As much as anyone, I guess. He is a man you think you know well; yet you never do know him.”

“How do you explain that?”

“The way he was developed, I guess. You know his dad put him in the hands of scientists about the time he outgrew his three−cornered underwear. From then on, the best scientific minds did their best to make him a prodigy.”

“From what I hear, they succeeded,” the girl suggested.

“Yeah. He's human enough, though.”

The girl shot some more small ducks. There was only one smaller target, and that was a row of matches. The girl fired three times with measured precision, and three matches burst alight.

“Annie Oakley!” Monk exclaimed admiringly.

“Just Dead−eye Dick's daughter,” she corrected. “Look, I wanted help.”

“Help?”

“When I pulled that thing about the germs. It was silly, wasn't it? Melodramatic.”

“You made it convincing enough for me. My hair is still on end,” Monk told her gallantly. “What kind of

help?”

“Some people are in trouble. Very serious trouble.”

“Doc's your man.”

“Oh, but I couldn't go back to him after that trick I pulled.”

Monk brightened noticeably.

“Why not,” he offered hopefully, “let me offer my assistance?”

“You wouldn't mind playing second fiddle?”

“Second fiddle,” Monk said, “is the instrument I play loudest.”

THE girl was very slick in the next thing she did. It was executed casually and simply. Monk did not notice the part of it where she rubbed her fingers on the ejector mechanism of the rifle and got grease on her fingers.

She turned to Monk and showed him her hand. “Oh, the darned gun had grease on it!” she said. “I had better go wash my hands. I don't want to ruin my gloves. I just bought them today.”

“Sure,” Monk said. “Then you can tell me what all this mystery is about, and what kind of help it is you need.”

“Of course,” she said quickly.

This was a large shooting gallery, an emporium somewhat more elaborate than the usual run. There were other items of amusement other than the shooting gallery, and there were telephones in the ladies' washrooms. The girl used one of these. She dialed a number.

She recognized the voice which answered and said, “It went wrong.”

A man was on the other end of the wire. He demanded, “How could that happen?”

“Doc Savage was wearing a bulletproof vest. The tip of the needle did not go through it. I was so flabbergasted that I ran away.”

The man swore a rather genteel oath. “I cannot say I blame you.”

“I balled the thing up.”

“Not,” said the man, “providing you did not mention anything about three wild men. Did you?”

“Not a word.”

“Even a hint that would tip him off that this matter concerns three wild men would upset the apple cart.”

“I didn't give a hint,” the girl insisted. “But I've got something else to tell you.”

“Something else?”

“There is a Doc Savage assistant named Monk Mayfair.”

“To be sure. Monk Mayfair. The man who has a pet pig named Habeas Corpus.”

The girl laughed without any humor at all. “Right now he is minus his pig. He is following me around.”

“Following you around!”

“Monk Mayfair,” she said, “is in my hair, with love in his eye.”

The man's voice at the other end of the telephone wire became excited. “Oh, oh! Maybe it isn't so bad then. Can you lead this Monk into the same trap we intended for Doc Savage?”

“You want that?”

“We'll try it. We're desperate. As a last resort, we've got to try everything.”

“All right,” the girl said. “I'll do that.”

“Good.”

As an afterthought, she said, “Wait. One thing isn't good. That Mr. Adam you employed to locate Doc Savage.”

“What about him?”

“I didn't like him. He kept calling me his butterfly.”

The man laughed. “Didn't mean a thing. He even calls me his butterfly.”

“I didn't,” said the girl, “like our Mr. Adam.”

Chapter III. TUNE ON THE FIDDLE

THE girl with the bright eyes and Monk Mayfair rode uptown in a taxicab driven by a thin Negro who had only grunted at them.

Monk said, “Really, you lovely thing, I don't want to argue with you. But I fail to see why you can't tell me the whole story, whatever it is, here and now.”

“Wait until we get uptown,” the girl said.

“I don't want to wait until we get uptown,” Monk explained. “Patience is the thing I have the least of. My good friend Ham Brooks, whose neck it is my ambition some day to wring, says I was born without any.”

The girl was somewhat thoughtful for a moment. “Perhaps we could stop by and pick up your friend Ham Brooks. He is also a Doc Savage assistant, is he not?”

Monk snorted and shook his head violently.

“Not on your life. He thinks he is a lady killer. You'd find him as interesting as a bucket of mud.”

“Mr. Brooks is rather handsome, isn't he?”

“As ugly,” Monk lied, “as a crow without feathers.”

“I was just thinking that Mr. Brooks might be willing to help me also.”

“Not on your life,” Monk insisted. “You think this is a two−man job?”

“Yes.

“If it is a two−man job, I can still handle it. A ten−man job, too. You should see me in action.”

“I soon will, I trust,” the girl said, a shade strangely.

Monk had a faint inkling that there was something strange in her voice, and he fell silent, trying to figure it out. He was wordless and contemplated the back of their dark driver's scrawny neck during the rest of the ride.

They got out−to Monk's approval and surprise−on the part of Park Avenue where the extremely wealthy lived. Monk gazed about. He had often reflected that people living in this neighborhood had more money than sense. Ham Brooks lived not far away. They charged you fifty cents for a coke in some of the restaurants around here.

They entered one of the finest buildings. The doorman bowed like a jackknife and said a crisp, “Good afternoon, Miss Cushing.”

The elevator was as large and ornate as a bedroom in a harem, Monk reflected.

“So your name is Cushing,” Monk whispered.

“Abba Cushing,” she explained.

Twenty floors up, they went like a breath of spring, then out into a hall that should have been in a palace.

“Yi, yi,” Monk said.

A door was opened for them by a butler in knee stockings and a cutaway coat. At least, Monk presumed the functionary was a butler because Monk had never seen that kind of trappings on a servant before. He made a mental note to hire one of those after he made his next million dollars. One would probably be a handy gadget to have around.

“My father,” said Abba Cushing.

The man who was coming toward them was Monk's idea of what, say, a senator should be. Tall and capable, with regularly formed, confidence−inspiring features, and just enough gray hair to make him distinguished. The man was discreetly and impeccably dressed; there was nothing about his attire to suggest the conscious effort to reach sartorial perfection. The man looked as comfortable as a very good shoe. A fine old gentleman, was Monk's instant thought.

The fine old gentleman put out his hand to Monk.

Unexpectedly, there was a gun in his hand, a dark−blue gun that was capable of ejecting a bullet the diameter of Monk's little finger, which was not small. And the weapon was held as if the holder knew how it functioned.

“Welcome, Mr. Mayfair,” he said in a deep, melodious, pleasant, calmly undisturbed voice. “In case you also are wearing one of those bulletproof vests, I assure you that I can shoot you in the head!”

MONK finally got his mouth closed and the lump swallowed out of his throat. He gave the girl the accusing look of an abused sheep. “Nice going,” he muttered. “Very nice. Do you eat your brothers and sisters, too?”

The fine old gentleman with the gun laughed. “You misjudge us,” he said. “I am Raymond E. Cushing. This is my daughter, Abba, whom you were fortunate enough to meet.”

Monk eyed the gun. “I don't see what is so fortunate about it.”

“Oh, come, come! You are jumping at conclusions.” Mr. Raymond E. Cushing gestured slightly with the weapon. “Won't you step into our parlor?”

“And meet more flies?” Monk inquired sourly.

“Possibly. I trust not.”

Monk accompanied the man−Cushing kept behind him−into the parlor, which proved a room that seemed large enough at first glance to berth a yacht.

It contained a round half dozen old gentlemen who probably owned yachts−also steamships, railroads, factories and political empires. Some of the gentlemen were not so old. Monk examined them and out came his eyes again. He recognized two of them. Andrew Casteel, the rubber baron, and C. C. Gross, who was someone fabulous in international finance. Both had more money, thought Monk, than Heinz has pickles. The other gentlemen also looked filthy with money.

There was enough combined gold in the room, it occurred to Monk, to sink a battleship.

Somewhat impressed, he said, “You platinum−plated old ducks have bit off more than you can chew. You'll regret this, and I'm the boy who'll make you.”

Raymond E. Cushing smiled grimly.

“Can't we keep this on a gentleman's plane?” he suggested. “Threats and angry words belong in the gutter.”

“In the gutter is where you'll wind up, with me standing on your necks,” Monk advised.

Cushing shook his head quickly. “Hold on. Hold your horse, Mr. Mayfair. We want your help.”

“Help?”

“Yes.”

“You picked a fine ring−tailed way of starting out to get it.”

Cushing put away the gun. “Do you feel better with the weapon out of sight?”

“Not a bit,” Monk growled.

Cushing drew the gun again, held it in his hand. “In that case, we will abolish the pleasantries and get down to business. The business being−we want something done about the three wild men.”

Monk, suspecting his ears had not done him right, demanded, “The *what?”*

“The three wild men,” said Cushing.

Having given that thirty seconds of the deepest and the blankest kind of thinking, Monk blurted, “I don't believe I understand. I don't savvy. Three wild men. What the hell!”

Cushing turned slowly to the other old gentlemen. “My friends, it seems he is going to act dumb.”

They nodded.

“Shall we,” inquired Cushing, “proceed according to plan?”

They nodded again, immediately.

“Plan?” Monk demanded.

“We are going to give you to the three wild men,” Raymond E. Cushing informed him. “Now what do you think of that?”

Just what he should think of a matter of three wild men did not occur to Monk, although he gave the thing the best efforts of his brain. They went down from the palatial apartment in a freight elevator and got into a limousine so long that Monk doubted if it could turn the corner. During the trip to the limousine, the other fine old gentlemen all produced guns. There were guns everywhere, all good ones. Some of the possessors did not seem fully skilled in their use, though this was not encouraging.

“This is great stuff,” Monk muttered. “Three wild men! Boy, somebody's crazy!”

No one commented. The fine old gentlemen loaded into the limousine and the overflow got into another. The girl, Abba Cushing, drove the car Monk was in.

It was not a long trip. Only to the millionaire's yacht basin on the nearby East River frontage.

THE most puzzling things began to happen.

First, it suddenly developed that all the fine old gentlemen were scared. They had not looked or acted frightened, which was probably natural for them. To get as much money as they probably had, each one of them needed to be a gambler with a dead−pan face.

However, they each were as scared as a mouse in a cage of famished cats. This became evident when they

had an argument about who was to get in a power tender and accompany Monk out into the river. There were no loud voices in the argument, but they were not men who had to raise their voices.

The argument ended as was to be expected when such iron−willed men get together. Nobody would go. Then they took a fresh start and reached a compromise.

They would wait until darkness. Then they would draw lots to see who took Monk out into the river.

Monk gathered that their destination was to be a yacht anchored in the slack water along the opposite shore. It was, as far as Monk could tell from that distance, a not very large yacht that seemed to be substantial and comfortable. Comfortable in a seagoing way, that was, for the distance was too great to tell anything about the luxury of her furnishings.

So they spent the late afternoon and the early hours of the darkness aboard another yacht which was tied to the dock. During the wait, Monk learned absolutely nothing about three wild men or anything else pertaining to the affair. He did get the thorough conviction that his captives thought he was lying to them when he disclaimed any knowledge of three wild men.

There was one interesting point, however. What they were going to do to him was what they had planned to do to Doc Savage. Whatever that was.

After it became very dark, with thunder gobbling and thumping its chest in the great distance, Raymond E. Cushing approached Monk Mayfair and presented a smile and a substantial glass of champagne, which Monk considered the next thing to drinking vinegar.

“We will sally forth now,” Cushing said. “We have drawn lots. Myself and my daughter and Mr. C. C. Gross were the abashed possessors of the short straws when it was over.”

“You take me on the boat ride?”

“Right.”

“That's right, don't tell me a thing,” Monk muttered. “Leave me in suspense.”

“Don't you care for it?” Abba Cushing asked.

“Sure. Pretty soon, my suspenders will snap.” Monk scowled. “You know, you are not nearly as pretty as I thought you were.”

The girl laughed grimly. “Come on, second fiddle,” she ordered. “We'll see how loud a tune you can play.”

As they walked out past the other rich men, Monk noted how white their faces were. It gave him an unpleasant sensation. It would take a lot to scare fellows like these. True, they were elderly gentlemen with soft hands and pink skins; but their minds were not soft, and fear is a thing of the mind. Monk began to feel his hair want to stand on end.

THEY got in a power tender, the ritzy name for a motorboat. Instead of heading straight for the yacht, Cushing made note of the direction of the tide flow here and headed upstream. He stopped the motor when the boat was in such a position that the outgoing tide would carry it down to the yacht. There was a brisk tide

at this point in the river, and it tossed them about merrily. Except for the ripple of water, and the occasional hungry sucking sound made by a whirlpool in the tide rush, there was a complete and depressing silence.

“Yo−ho, and a bottle of rum!” Monk said hopefully. “How about a note of song to cheer us on our way?”

They were as silent as undertakers.

“You have nerve of a sort,” Cushing said finally in a low, grim voice. “I hope there is more to it than words.”

“I am a foolhardy man, not a brave one,” Monk advised him. “So it would make no difference. I love your daughter. Or at least I did. I'm not so sure, now, that she's the sugar on my oatmeal.”

No one commented, and that made Monk feel uncomfortable, wondering if they thought he was crazy. If they did, they had nothing on *him.* He thought *they* were nuts!

He said, “Three wild men! Hah!”

“I wouldn't be too loud,” Cushing said. He sounded like a man in a dark jungle, approaching a man−eating tiger.

“Huh?”

“The boat,” Cushing whispered, “is just ahead.”

Their ominous manner, their deathly seriousness, silenced the usually irrepressible Monk. He peered ahead through the sultry night. The yacht was there. He could distinguish it first as a thicker place in the night, then its clean lines began to take on shape.

C. C. Gross, the fabulous international financier, was steering with practiced skill. He sent the tender along the starboard side of the yacht.

It developed that a landing stage was hanging over the rail. The boat drew alongside this, and the Cushings caught hold and held on.

“Get aboard,” Cushing ordered Monk.

With the utmost interest, Monk asked, “What happens after I do that?”

Cushing gave him a totally unsatisfactory answer.

“You'll find out,” Cushing said, and prodded him onto the landing stage with a pistol.

MONK stood there and listened to the boat depart. They were not afraid of noise, now. They started the motor and gave it the gun, and the boat departed with about as much stealth as a dive bomber. Somehow, that was very disquieting. They *had* been afraid. There was nothing to be heard, seen or felt to be afraid of. But that was worse. The most terrible fears are the intangible ones. Eventually, the boat faded into the sulking distance, and there was nothing left but the gurgle of tide water, like blood coming out of a body, past the yacht. Monk shuddered. He did not shudder easily, as a rule.

Presumably, this was what they meant by giving him to the three wild men. This and whatever the future held, and Monk was anticipating the future with, somehow, no pleasure at all. Giving him to the three wild men. That was the way they had put it. It meant nothing. At least, it didn't make sense.

“So what the hell happens next?” Monk said.

He sat down to wait. He had decided to stay near the water because, in case he did not like what was to come, he could dive overboard. He was a good swimmer. When scared he was an excellent swimmer.

He contemplated the Manhattan shore line which, with its myriad lighted windows showing through the darkness, was like a compressed night heavens.

Twenty minutes of that palled. “Blazes!” Monk muttered. He got to his feet, listened, then shook the ladder hopefully. Nothing happened. He was not pleased. The silence on the boat, the utter and complete silence that could have been in a tomb, was not reassuring. Something was supposed to happen, and it wasn't happening. It was too much like a bomb with the fuse lighted.

He began to climb the steps of the landing−stage ladder, one step at a time. It took more effort than he had expected, more mental effort. He was scared himself, he began to realize, without knowing what there was to inspire fear.

The ladder made no noise whatever. It should have squeaked. The lashings which held it should have groaned. They made no sound. Monk became so preoccupied with the ghostly quiet of the ladder that he forgot to notice when he should reach the deck and, reaching it, all but fell on his face. He did stumble and make considerable noise, then found himself standing there as stiffly as a fawn caught in the glare of a flashlight.

He heard nothing to alarm him, however. And not hearing anything, he was the greater alarmed.

It was about then that he was taken by the coat lapel. The fact that he was first seized by the coat lapel was only incidental; almost instantly the grip was transferred to his neck.

He was thrown to the deck. Not silently, but like a ton of loose bricks. He was pounced upon. He tried to fight back. Monk was strong, stronger even than he looked, and he resembled a bull ape. He could take a pony−sized horseshoe in his two hands and change its shape. But he was licked in this fight before he even got going. He was spread out on the deck and held helpless.

An explanation of how he could be so manhandled occurred to Monk.

“Doc!” he gasped. “Doc Savage!”

Doc Savage said, “We should wear perfume, or something, so that we could recognize each other in the dark.”

Chapter IV. THE WILD MEN

MONK moved about slowly to locate his various bruises. “We should at that,” he admitted. “It wouldn't be a bad idea. How did you get here?”

“By trailing you,” Doc Savage told him.

Monk was in thought for a moment. Then he snorted. “Hey, did I get sucked in! And I don't mean by that girl, either. You let her get away this afternoon after she used the hypo needle on you so you could follow her.”

Monk stopped to make noises of self−disgust.

He added, “And that taxi the girl and I took−the driver! Now, I remember he looked familiar. He was a Negro, only he wasn't! Great blazes and little oceans! The driver was Ham Brooks in disguise!”

“Ham thought you recognized him and took his cab deliberately,” Doc remarked. “Didn't you?”

Monk groaned. “No, but don't ever tell Ham the difference. If he thought I was dumb enough to not recognize him just because he had blacked his face, he'd run me ragged with his ribbing. Keep it quiet, will you?”

Doc Savage changed the subject.

“What is this about?”

“You know as much as I do,” Monk said grimly, “providing you don't know a thing that makes sense.”

“What did they do to you?”

“Put me on this boat. They called that giving me to 'the three wild men.'“

Doc said, rather strangely, “Three wild men?”

“Sure! Sounds crazy as a pet coon, doesn't it? Maybe it is.” Monk paused to listen. There was no trace of life in the adjacent night. “You been over this boat, yet?”

“I just came aboard,” Doc Savage explained. “I waited until certain they were going to put you aboard the yacht, then came aboard by the anchor line. I had a canoe. It is tied to the anchor cable.”

Monk was thoughtful for a moment. A few minutes ago he had been scared and had admitted it to himself. Now, he should be feeling better, for two reasons. First, there had been a climax−when Doc Savage seized him−and following a climax there logically should be a letdown and a more rational viewpoint. Second, he had been joined by Doc Savage, and Doc for a companion was about equivalent−when one knew the full capability of Doc Savage−to the protection of the army.

Strangely, Monk did not feel at all easy. That was disquieting. It was not a natural result at all. It was alarming.

“Doc,” Monk said.

“Yes?”

“Is there something about this boat that gets you?”

“What do you mean?”

“I can't exactly make words out of it,” Monk admitted. “Maybe it is the result of the way those people acted. There were several men besides the girl, and all of them were important, capable people.” Monk digressed to name the men he had recognized and give a rough idea of their importance. “They were scared,” he

explained. “Of what, I don't know. But they were afraid, no two ways about it. I'm sure that when they put me on this boat they were certain something drastic was going to happen to me.”

Doc Savage asked, “You have no slightest idea of their object in putting you on the boat?”

“Without ideas, that's me.”

“What would you say,” Doc suggested, “to our searching the boat?”

“Let's go.”

AS if to express an ugly cast over the decision to search the yacht, the sky gave a whoop and a grumble of thunder, after which lightning popped down out of the sky with great light but no sound. Lightning should precede thunder, but this was reversed, and somehow it made Monk's hair want to stand on end. The river looked wide and slick with the wave corrugations on it like the crawling devices on a snake's belly.

Feeling their way, for it was intensely dark on deck, they located a door. The moment he was inside, Monk explored for a light switch, found it, snapped it on. And nothing happened.

He took a step into the cabin then felt something that felt like soft flesh underfoot, and gave a great jump with his heart between his teeth, only to discover that it was nothing more formidable than a very rich and deep carpet.

“Maybe it's *me* there is something wrong with,” Monk muttered sheepishly. “Not the boat.”

He was trying to talk himself out of the way he was feeling, which was somewhat as if he was crawling into a grave that might be occupied by a corpse. The corpse part of the sensation gave him slimy chills. It was not a feeling of danger at all. Danger he would have welcomed. Danger was something you could recognize. This was something else.

Monk made a respectable try at jumping out of his hide when Doc Savage turned on a flashlight. The beam stood out in the darkness like a white rod and roved. They saw, now, that it was an ordinary yacht, perhaps with a little more than the average quota of mahogany and teak work.

“Nice piece of flotsam,” Monk suggested.

Doc Savage asked, “Monk, did they search you before you were put aboard?”

“Yes. Sure!”

“Did they leave you matches or a flashlight?”

“No, come to think of it, they didn't. You think that would have any bearing?”

“Hard to say. The thing does not exactly make sense, yet.” The bronze man did not offer any further comment, and Monk was too oppressed with the sensation of evil, or of depression−there was some distinct sensation−that pervaded the boat. It was uncanny. Now that they were inside, the feeling was infinitely greater.

Because he preferred to have company, Monk followed Doc Savage, who headed for the yacht's bridge. The bridge was an inclosed affair, more of a pilothouse. Doc began yanking open drawers and soon found what he wanted. Monk peered over his shoulder and saw that it was the log book.

The boat, according to information on the log fly leaf, belonged to a man named Root Too Hooten.

“Hah−hah,” Monk said. “That name is the first funny thing that has happened.”

There was nothing mirthful on Doc Savage's face. He asked, “The name is not familiar?”

Something in Doc's tone sobered Monk. “Should it be?”

“Hooten,” Doc Savage said, “is a Dutchman who went to Borneo when he was fourteen years old, without a penny. He became one of the most wealthy men in the Dutch Indies, and one of the most influential. He has done more to shape the political destinies of that part of the world than any other white man.”

Light came to Monk. “Sure, I'll take it back; I've heard of him. One of those men who is a power behind the throne in Oriental affairs. I read an article somewhere.”

“The article,” said Doc Savage, “happens to be the only one ever published about him. Hooten permitted that one only because his nephew was a young man endeavoring to be a writer.”

Monk looked sharply at Doc Savage. This evidently was not idle conversation about Hooten. Doc did not do things like that.

“What are you getting around to?” Monk asked.

Doc Savage thumbed through the log book then returned it to the drawer where he had found it. “This boat,” he said, “has been lying at anchor here in the river for nearly a year. The only people aboard during that time have been the captain and two sailors, who have been keeping the boat in condition.”

Monk was more puzzled. “Which leads up to what?”

“For slightly more than three weeks,” Doc Savage said, “Root Too Hooten has been missing. The man is very important in Dutch Indian financial circles. Doubly important, considering the present condition of the international situation. So a frenzied search has been made for him. Two of the largest detective agencies in the United States have every operative looking for him. Other agencies in Europe and the Orient are at work trying to find him.”

“Doc, have you been asked to help locate him?”

“No. We are not a detective agency. Furthermore, we do not do jobs for pay.”

Monk rubbed his jaw. “I thought maybe you had taken on the job of trying to find Hooten. If you had, that might explain why we were roped into this thing, whatever it is.”

“It would, if we had been called in,” Doc agreed. “Only we were not.”

Monk rubbed his jaw again, then his forehead. “I sure feel queer. Kind of shaky and scared.”

Doc Savage looked at him. The bronze man's metallic features had a strange expression.

“I have the same feeling,” Doc said.

THEY had left the pilothouse and were continuing the search of the boat before the significance of what Doc Savage had just said dawned on Monk. He started to say, “Well, it's funny that such a flashy boat would give a man the creeps−” He brought up short. “Wait a minute! You mean that?”

“The queer, depressed, shaky sensation?” Doc asked.

“That's it, exactly!” Monk exploded. “Do *you* feel that way too?”

“Yes.”

“Wait now!” Monk exclaimed. “This is no hunch I'm talking about. This is definite. It's a real feeling. It's nothing vague, like a hunch. It's a big sensation.”

Doc Savage said grimly, “My sensation is the same. Large.”

“It's like I'm having hell scared out of me,” Monk explained. “Only there's nothing here to scare a man.”

“Exactly, in part.”

Monk was dumfounded. “I got it the minute I began to climb on the boat. I thought it was caused by my noticing how scared those other people were. But *you* wouldn't get the sensation because of that. You didn't see how scared they were.”

Doc Savage made no comment.

Monk had small, twinkling eyes. He batted them rapidly. “You said *in part.* What'd you mean by that?”

“That,” Doc said, “is how much you might be wrong.”

“Partly wrong about what?”

“About there being nothing on the boat to scare a man.”

Monk gave that some thought. “Say, what're you feeding me? We have seen nothing, heard nothing and found nothing.”

“We found fear.”

“Huh? Does that make sense?”

Doc Savage made no comment.

“I'm sorry,” Monk said. “I didn't intend to get sassy about it.”

That was another thing that showed how Monk was feeling. Under normal circumstances, an apology was the last thing to be expected from him, even to the bronze man, for whom he had more respect than he probably had for any other individual.

They did not search any farther. Instead, Doc Savage gripped Monk's arm, said, “Out on deck!”

Not understanding, but not asking any questions either, Monk raced after the bronze man. They reached the deck. Doc went immediately toward the bow. Monk expected Doc to go down the anchor cable to the canoe in which he had arrived.

Doc began working with the anchor cable. He got the winch loosened, and the cable went out with a great roaring. It was chain cable, and sparks flew out of the guide chocks as the force of the tide pushed the boat back. When the end of the cable was reached, the boat stopped with a yank that almost unfooted them.

Doc began working with a cotter pin on the last link of the chain.

“You going to turn the boat adrift?” Monk asked blankly.

“Without delay,” Doc agreed in a grim voice.

WHAT Doc Savage did next was no more explicable than turning the boat loose. He ran back and hauled down the kerosene anchor light, which Monk realized was lighted and burning as the law prescribed. The lighted anchor marker was an eerie touch on the otherwise blacked−out vessel.

“You light that?” Monk called.

“No.”

Monk was positive it had not been lighted when he was put aboard the yacht. And yet there had been no noise and no movement.

Doc Savage took off his coat. He tied it to the forestay with many turns of the line which had held the anchor light aloft. Then he ripped open the fuel container of the anchor light and poured its contents over his coat. He set the coat afire. The blaze crawled up like a magically growing red animal.

“Gosh!” Monk gasped. He found himself seized by Doc and bundled toward the low brass rail. “Overboard,” the bronze man said. “And wait in the canoe.”

Monk hesitated, then took a header into the water. It was cold in contrast to the sultry evening.

A moment later, Doc Savage landed in the water beside Monk. The bronze man came in cleanly and seemed to barely wet his back before he was swimming beside the canoe.

Overhead, the blaze from the kerosene−soaked coat shot upward with cardinal glee, casting a ruby glow over the river's surface.

There is a trick to getting from the water into a canoe, and Doc Savage managed it. He strained water out of his hair with his fingers.

“Follow the drifting boat,” he told Monk, who had the paddle.

Monk, not understanding the situation at all, but convinced there was a great deal more in it than met the eye, dug the spruce paddle into the river water. It was not difficult to keep pace with the yacht, the tide taking care

of that.

The yacht drifted. The coat blazed with surprising prominence. The blaze was no small beacon in the dark night.

Then Doc Savage lifted his voice to its loudest.

“Help!”

he yelled. “Get the coast guard! Get the harbor police. Help! The boat is afire!”

Doc Savage's voice at its loudest was something not ordinary. In the course of scientific training which the bronze man had received throughout his childhood, his vocal abilities had not been neglected. Apartment dwellers in Tudor City, half a mile away, opened the windows and put their heads out.

Monk's pride was hurt. He said, “What do we need with help? We were just on that boat. Why'd we leave it? I, personally, can lick as much as the coast guard.”

Doc Savage did not argue the point. He said, “Keep your eyes open.”

The advice was a little unnecessary, it developed. Keeping the eyes open was certainly no requisite to witness what happened. A blind man, if he could not have seen the flash, could have heard the explosion. And an elephant would have been jarred by the blast. The flower of flame which came out of the yacht reached straight up at least two hundred feet.

The explosive had been in the hold of the yacht, deep enough under the waterline to create a great commotion. A miniature tidal wave came boiling toward the canoe. Monk grabbed the gunwales, hung on. The little craft climbed up on the wave like a hog tackling a snowdrift, went askew at the top, then promptly capsized, dumping them into the river.

ONCE in the water, Monk realized the force of the tide. Not that he was in any danger. But it was not a place for an unskilled swimmer. He saw, outlined against the flames that were now bundled over the wreckage of the yacht, what of it was still afloat, the shadow of the canoe, already right and with Doc Savage in the little craft. Monk swam over, reached the stern and boarded the canoe rather ungracefully.

After he was in the canoe, Monk sat there in complete silence for a while.

“Since when,” he asked, “did you become a fortuneteller?”

“Fortuneteller?”

“You knew the boat was going to blow up.”

Doc Savage's voice was quiet, but noncommittal, as he said, “There was no certainty that it would blow up. But it was reasonable to suppose that something would happen to it if we got off and did something to attract attention to it.”

“Hey,” Monk said. “You mean it blew up because we got off?”

“Partly.”

“What was the other part?”

“We attracted attention to the craft with the burning coat,” Doc Savage said. “And there was my shouting. That probably helped.”

“I don't get it,” Monk said frankly.

“They did not want attention drawn to the yacht. They did not want it boarded.”

“Why not?”

“The fear.”

“You mean,” said Monk, “the fear that we were feeling. That sensation we were talking about?”

“Yes.”

Monk gave the matter some thought.

“What,” he asked, “about the three wild men?”

Doc Savage, suddenly alert, asked, “Did you see any sign of them?”

“Heck, no! Of course not!” Monk leaned forward. “Wait a minute. Are you kidding? Do you suppose there were really three wild men on the yacht?”

“Possibly,” Doc Savage said.

Monk growled, “There's going to be another wild man around here if this thing doesn't begin to make sense before long. It'll be me.”

Doc Savage, with nothing to show that he had noticed anything unusual in the surrounding night, said, “Perhaps a diversion might help preserve your balance. There appears to be one swimming ahead of us.”

Chapter V. GENUINELY WILD

MONK was startled into silence until he had crouched forward in the canoe and listened until he was sure there was a swimmer in the river. Then he muttered that he wanted Doc Savage's flashlight, which was waterproof and, furthermore, was operated by a spring generator gadget which was dependable. He gripped the flashlight, located the sound of the swimmer, and pointed the beam at the sound.

“It's the Cushing girl! What do you know?” he exploded.

The canoe was a small one which Doc Savage had hurriedly rented that afternoon. While it would carry three people, it certainly would not haul more than that. They got Abba Cushing aboard, along with some roiled river water.

As Monk lowered the girl into the bottom of the canoe, he felt her shaking uncontrollably. He turned his light on her again. She was, he saw, fully clad. No bathing suit. And she was infinitely more scared than she had been that afternoon.

It developed that she did not know who had rescued her.

“Who . . . who are you?” she asked tensely.

Monk turned the light on himself. The girl promptly screamed and slumped over in the canoe. Dumfounded, Monk examined her. “You better look at her, Doc,” he muttered.

Doc Savage's inspection was brief.

“Fainted,” he said.

Monk let that soak in, then tried a laugh that was not a success. “Heh, heh! Do you suppose a look at me had that effect on her? I'd hate for Ham Brooks to have seen that.”

Doc Savage made no comment. He sat silent in the canoe for a few minutes, then dug the paddle in and sent the small craft toward the spot where the yacht had blown up. Very few fragments of the yacht remained afloat. There were life preservers, one of which had a flare light attached, the type which ignited when wet; and this had blazed up to shed an awesome red glow over the scene. Doc kept out of the light and circled the spot.

They found no one else floating or swimming in the vicinity.

Then, from the Manhattan shore of the river, came a series of sounds that did not belong in a well−ordered night. There was feminine screaming. Two women. There was sound like a dog barking; yet it was not a dog. Following this in a few seconds, a crash which was partly glass breaking. The dog barking that was not a dog barking came again.

Doc pointed the canoe toward shore and dug the paddle in. The lightning crawled and jerked across the sky, and this time there was following thunder, as there should have been.

Monk explored in the bottom of the canoe to see if there was another paddle wedged there, but there was none, so he held the girl's wrist. Her pulse was strong.

Then, abruptly, there was a dock above them−a ponderous thing−and the canoe jarred against a landing float. Monk lifted the girl ashore, while Doc steadied the canoe.

Doc ran along the dock, vanished in the darkness. He seemed to have something on his mind. A moment later, Monk heard him call out in Mayan. Mayan was the forgotten language of the ancient civilization of Sun Worshipers of Central America. Doc and his aids used it for communication with each other at times. As far as they knew, they were the only individuals in the so−called civilized world with a speaking knowledge of the language.

Doc was calling out in the darkness for Ham Brooks. Apparently, he was having no luck.

He came back shortly.

“Ham was posted here,” he said. “He is gone.”

Monk, genuinely anxious, muttered, “I hope nothing has happened to Ham. I hope he never finds out I was concerned about his safety, though. The overdressed shyster lawyer!”

Doc said, “Monk, you stay here with the girl.” He wheeled and went away into the night.

Monk noted that the bronze man headed in the direction of the weird noises they had heard when out on the river. The thing that stuck in Monk's mind about the sounds was the laugh, one like a dog barking. He shuddered, then scowled at his own uneasiness.

NOT more than five minutes later, a man hurried out on the dock from shore. Monk crouched beside the girl and kept carefully silent until he saw the newcomer silhouetted against the momentary flash of a distant automobile headlight. He saw that the newcomer carried a cane.

“Ham!” Monk called.

Ham Brooks rushed to Monk. He was still in the blackface make−up which he had used to drive the taxicab early in the day. He was breathless.

“Where's Doc?” Ham demanded.

“Went off a few minutes ago,” Monk explained. “I think he went to investigate a bunch of funny noises we heard on shore.”

“What happened to the yacht?”

“Blooey!”

“What do you mean?”

“Just blooey,” Monk explained. “Hell, we haven't the least idea of what is going on. At least, I haven't. I'm in complete ignorance.”

Ham said, “Complete ignorance is your natural condition. Were you hurt?”

“Naw, just wet. The explosion overturned the canoe. We just got off in time, though. Boy, did she go up! There must have been a barrel of nitroglycerin in the hold.”

Ham discovered the form at Monk's feet. “Who's this?”

“Abba Cushing.”

Ham said, “I'll take care of her. You go hunt Doc.”

“You'll take over nothing,” Monk informed him, “except maybe a boot in the britches. I know what you're trying to pull. She *is* darned pretty, and I saw her first. I'm the caretaker, my fine−feathered friend.”

“That face of yours is probably what is keeping her unconscious.”

“Be that as it may, brother, my face is by her side to stay.” Monk became more belligerent. “Since you feel

that way, you better take a walk. Go on, scram! Vamoose, hombre, before I dump you in the drink."

Ham said rather hastily−Monk was an impulsive fellow who sometimes did what he promised−and in a firm tone, "Doc told me to come help you guard the girl."

Monk was startled. "Oh, so you saw Doc!"

"Yes," Ham admitted, "I did,"

"Where was he going?"

"To have a look at the three wild men who swam ashore after the yacht blew up," Ham explained.

DOC SAVAGE found an excited policeman standing beside a call box and talking to his sergeant on the telephone. The officer spoke earnestly with some profanity, with gestures of his hand which was not holding the receiver.

He finally reached the end of his patience and said, "All right, don't believe it and be damned! Just sit there and don't send any radio cars down here. See what the newspapers have to say about it tomorrow!" He banged the receiver back on the hook.

Doc Savage said to the officer, "Could you tell me what is going on? What is this talk about three wild men?"

The policeman happened to be one who did not know Doc Savage, but who believed in being patient with citizens.

Said the officer, "What is the world coming to, Johnny? Here I'm walking my beat with nothing on my mind, except that maybe it's gonna rain before morning. And what happens?"

"What did happen?" Doc supplied.

"A naked man pops up."

"Naked?"

"Well, not the way he came into the world, entirely. But naked enough. He had on a leopard skin thing. A sarong, you might call it."

The officer stopped to throw his arms into the air to show how he felt about the whole thing.

He continued, "This sarong guy runs up to me and snatches my necktie. He runs and ties the necktie on a horse that's pulling a cart by us at the time. This scares the horse and he runs off. There is a fat man on the cart, and the horse scatters the fat man and a wagon load of tomatoes over the street. Then this sarong guy makes a run at a fat lady. He lets out the awfulest laugh that ever came out of a radio, and scares the fat dame into an even louder scream. He seems partial to fat people. I'm fat, you notice. And about that time I come to life and chase him. And he knocks down another fat man as he runs away."

The policeman got out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

“I'm chasing the sarong guy, see. He laughs at every jump. Laughs like them wild men they used to have in phony circus side shows when I was a kid. Sounds like a dog barking. A laugh every jump. Me right after him. Up a tree he goes.”

The officer threw both arms in the air in desperation.

“Up a tree I chase him. A crowd gathers. I climb the tree. He's gone. Thin air. If this is a gag somebody is pulling, they'll land on their pants in the jailhouse. That they will.”

The tree up which the representative of the law had pursued the wild man was not hard to find. It would have been difficult not to notice the tree, because there were approximately a hundred people gathered around it, with more arriving.

The tree was one in a park which faced an array of the better apartment buildings of the neighborhood.

“That the tree?” Doc Savage asked the policeman.

“That's the tree.”

Doc Savage sauntered casually toward the tree, went around it, using his eyes. Several citizens were gathered about the trunk, and at least two were up among the branches with flashlights, exploring the mystery of what had become of the wild man.

Doc Savage went back to the policeman and remarked, “There must have been a number of witnesses to your chase of the wild man.”

“Johnny, we made more noise than a circus parade,” the officer said. “Why shouldn't there have been witnesses?”

Doc said, “Your wild man got out of the tree.”

“Sure.”

“He must have used the telephone cable, which passes near the large branch of the tree. He could swing from the tree to the cable, go hand−over−hand along the cable to that apartment fire escape, and from there to almost anywhere.”

“Sure,” said the cop. “I figured it out like you did−too late to do any good.”

“Your wild man must have been very agile.”

“He wasn't *my* wild man, Johnny. And 'agile' was the word for him, like you say. Listen, that bird was as strong as a bald eagle who had just lost his feathers.”

At this point another pair of policemen arrived. They looked a little embarrassed, until they heard the onlookers talking about the wild man who had gone up the tree and supposedly vanished.

“You mean you had another one here?” one of the newcomer officers asked the fat policeman.

“Another? You mean there was more'n one?”

“We had two over on the next street.”

“Wild men?”

“No other word would suit 'em,” said one of the policemen. “Little one had on a leopard skin and a plug hat. Big one had a leopard skin and the cuffs of a shirt on his wrists, and neither of them had anything else.”

“They chased three perfectly respectable businessmen for two blocks,” supplied the other officer.

“Howling that they were going to catch them and cook them and feed them to their saber−tooth tiger,” said the first.

“Saber−tooth tigers name was Clarence,” added the other. “Or so they said.”

The officer who had merely chased his wild man up a tree sighed with relief. “I'm glad somebody saw one besides me. I was beginning to think those pancakes the old lady feeds me every morning had done something to me, like I've been telling her they would.”

“What happened to the one you treed?”

“Got away.”

“So did ours,” advised one of the two policemen. “Got clean away. Like rabbits, they were.”

“Rabbits never made that much noise.”

His companion laughed. “You know something, McGorrick?”

McGorrick seemed to be the officer who had talked to Doc Savage. He asked, “What?”

“Ned here thinks he recognized one of the wild men. You remember a poster out for some Dutchman with a lot of money? Ned says he thinks this wild man was him. The big wild man, Ned means.”

McGorrick said, “You mean that Dutch millionaire named Root Too Hooten? I noticed that poster. Offering a big reward to anybody who locates him, his family is.”

“Not his family, one of his companies. Ned says the big wild man was Hooten. You reckon Ned could be right?”

Doc Savage eased back from the policemen, merged with the crowd and spent the next half−hour prowling the neighborhood. It was an intensive and alert half−hour, but he turned up no further sign of three wild men.

Chapter VI. HELP FOR FRIENDS

MONK MAYFAIR and Ham Brooks were not being friendly when Doc Savage joined them. Ham Brooks−he was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, a noted lawyer, as well as one of the nation's best−dressed men−was gripping his cane and threatening Monk. The cane was a sword cane; its tip was kept coated with a chemical mixture that would make a victim unconscious rather quickly.

Ham complained, “Doc, this polecat Monk told Miss Cushing that I'm his Negro chauffeur. I have nothing against chauffeurs, black or green, but I detest a liar.”

Doc Savage said, “So she has regained consciousness.”

The girl answered for herself. “Yes, sometime ago. I've been hoping you would come back. Did you find them?”

“The three wild men?” Doc asked.

“Yes.”

“No. No trace.”

“That,” said Miss Cushing in a stricken voice, “is terrible.”

“Is it?”

“I was hoping that you would find them,” she explained.

“Why?”

“So you could help them,” Abba Cushing explained. “I am going to tell you something now that I wish you would believe. I came to you this afternoon to get you to help those three men.”

“You used,” Doc Savage pointed out, “rather strange methods.” He turned his flashlight on the girl. There was color back in her face. She was undeniably easy to look at.

“I know I did,” she admitted. “Foolish methods, too. But we thought it would work.”

“What would have happened if it had worked?” Doc Savage asked curiously.

Abba Cushing made an embarrassed gesture. “That wasn't germs I tried to shoot into you. It was water. We figured out that business with the hypodermic needle because we had heard that you were a very unusual man who was interested only in the unusual. We thought that would be unusual enough even for you. We figured it would appeal to your liking for adventure and your interest in danger.”

“It was spectacular and dramatic enough,” Doc admitted.

“Also nutty, I can see now. But we thought at the time that it would work. By work I mean get you interested. After you were interested I would tell you that the germs had come from a certain place, and take you there. I was to take you to my father's apartment. That was where we took Mr. Mayfair. I presume Mr. Mayfair has told you what happened to him. The same thing was to be done to you, had we succeeded in decoying you there.”

Monk put in, “What happened to me didn't make sense.”

“It will when you know the rest.”

“I hope it does,” Monk told her. “I am beginning to feel very dumb about the whole thing.”

“A more or less permanent condition, I hope,” Ham put in sourly.

Monk ignored him.

Doc Savage said nothing.

The girl said, “You see, we are sure that you made the wild men wild!”

DOC SAVAGE was astonished enough that he made, for a moment, the low, exotic trilling sound which was his unconscious habit in moments of surprise. Ham dropped his sword cane, and Monk was knocked wordless for several minutes to come.

“I?” Doc Savage said. “I made the wild men wild?”

“Of course.”

“This,” said Ham, “is making less and less sense fast.”

Out on the river, a police−boat siren hooted briefly twice, which was evidently some kind of signal to other police boats which had been prowling around the spot which the yacht had blown up. The signal got a response, and the boats slowly quitted the vicinity, apparently giving up the search.

Abba Cushing said, “The three wild men have names.”

“I'm glad of that,” Ham said.

“Their names,” she said, “are Irving Eenie, Miner Thomas and R. T. Hooten.”

Ham whistled. “The first and last ones−Irving Eenie and Hooten−have a few more dollars than the Sahara Desert has grains of sand. But Miner Thomas−who is he?”

“His name,” said Abba Cushing, “is not Miner Thomas. That is his nom de plume. His real name is Mehastan Ghan.”

Ham's whistle was louder. “The little man, half Englishman and half Tibetan, who is the religious leader of millions of Orientals?”

“Yes.”

“Those,” Ham asked incredulously, “are the three wild men?”

“Yes.”

Doc Savage put in, “Miss Cushing, you might go ahead and put together some kind of story that makes sense.”

“Meaning,” she said, “that you probably won't believe me. O. K. Here it is. And it's the truth. Those three men−the three wild men, if you insist on calling them that−are friends of my father and of my father's friends.”

Monk came to life to ask, “By your father and his friends, you mean that gang of gold−plated old gentlemen who put me on the yacht.”

“Correct,” Abba Cushing told him. “And they are, in turn, very close friends of the three wild men. So, when something happened to the three wild men−when they became wild−we naturally began doing what we could to help them.”

“What made them wild?” Doc Savage asked.

“You should know. You did it.”

“You sincerely believe that?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because,” said Abba Cushing, “of the proof. It was conclusive. Oh, you did it all right. My father hired a famous doctor to do what he could for the three men. The doctor gave them some kind of drug that helped them slightly. The drug brought them back near enough to rationality that one of them was able to scrawl an accusation against you. He wrote, 'Doc Savage is behind this.' He wrote some more, but it was not readable.”

“Who,” asked Doc Savage with interest, “was present when this accusation was made?”

“My father. And the accusation was genuine enough. It wasn't any trick. Mehastan Ghan wrote it in Hindustani. My father does not read or write Hindustani−in case you're trying to say he faked something.”

“Was that the only time I was accused?” Doc asked.

“You sound interested.”

“Naturally.”

“And you sound innocent. You are not innocent, of course. You are a good actor.”

“Was there another accusation?”

“Yes,” said Abba Cushing, “there was. You were seen prowling in the vicinity.”

“Did your father see me that time?”

“No,” the girl snapped. “My father was very reluctant to believe you guilty. It was a man named Junior Waddell who saw you. He pursued you, but you escaped.”

“This Junior Waddell,” Doc Savage remarked, “must be a remarkable fellow.”

“He is. He is as large as you are, and very strong. He was a football star at Harvard.”

Ham muttered, “I'm going to disown my alma mater.”

“Now,” said Abba Cushing to Doc Savage, “what are you going to do about all this?”

The bronze man straightened. He extinguished his flashlight and put it in a pocket. “Find the three wild men and help them,” he said. “That is what you wanted, is it not?”

WHEN Doc Savage did not do what he had told the girl he would do, Monk and Ham were surprised. They had taken it for granted he would live up to his word, because the bronze man never said he would do a thing, either in fun or in earnest, without doing it. In that respect, he never joked. At the best, he was not a man who was inclined to pull a joke. When he did, it was to exhibit a subtle kind of humor that missed fire for most people, or did not dawn on them until several days later. A little humor of the slapstick kind, Monk and Ham often thought, would do Doc some good. He was not exactly a sober−sides, but it seemed to them that he passed up a lot of fun.

Doc Savage double−crossed the girl after the police department got in touch with him. The police and Doc worked together sometimes, and the bronze man held a high honorary commission on the force.

Contact with the police was by telephone, a sergeant reporting, “Mr. Savage, we found one of the wild men.”

“Where and how?”

“We pulled him out from under a subway train. The wild man got a hatchet somewhere, and he took out chasing the subway train, yelling that it was a big worm and that he was going to kill it. Unfortunately, he caught the train.”

Doc Savage, Monk Mayfair, Ham Brooks and Abba Cushing went down to the police station. The girl was manifestly surprised when they took her along. She had been considering herself a prisoner, and she announced her intention of telling the police that she was being held a captive against her will. However, when they reached the police station, she did not say anything, except to identify the dead wild man.

“It's Mr. Hooten!” she said, and pressed her fingers to her cheeks.

There was nothing much to the trip to the police station except that. It was not actually the police station, but the morgue, which happened to be in close conjunction. Doc Savage examined the leopard hide, saronglike garment, which the wild man had been wearing.

The leopard skin was a piece cut from what was evidently a quite new leopard−skin rug of the type sold in department stores. It bore a price tag, having cost eighty−three dollars and ninety−eight cents. The hatchet was an ordinary hatchet, source unknown.

Doc Savage and his party left the morgue. Abba Cushing went with them, not explaining why she did so. She looked as if she didn't know herself.

Monk said, “I thought you were going to tell the cops on us.”

“It wouldn't do any good!” she snapped. “You have too much of a pull with them.” Then she shuddered. “I don't know what to think. You do not act guilty: This thing is so fantastic I'm afraid it's getting me so I can't think clearly.”

Doc Savage then informed Abba Cushing that he was going to double−cross her.

“We are not going to hunt the wild men,” he informed her. “Instead, we are going to resurrect one of them.”

“Resurrect?” said the puzzled girl.

DOC SAVAGE went to the police officer in charge of the precinct where the wild man had chased and caught the subway train. “Have the newspapers been informed of this?” Doc asked.

“Not yet,” said the officer. “One has called up about it. They got a report about something of the sort and wanted a statement. I told them there was no statement yet.”

“Here is what I want you to do,” Doc Savage told the officer. “First, have you a bottle of red ink? Two or three bottles would be better.”

“Sure.”

“I am going to dress in the leopard skin,” Doc Savage said. “And you will wrap me up in bandages. Spill some of the red ink on the bandages to look as if I was hurt badly. Then we will call an ambulance from a hospital where I am acquainted, and they will take me there. You will give out word to the newspapers that I am the wild man and that I am badly injured.”

The policeman said, “I don't get this.”

“I want to pretend to be Hooten and be taken to a hospital.”

“Sure, I understand the details,” the officer said. “But darned if I see why.”

“You will tell the newspapers I am the wild man.”

“I heard you the first time.”

“You will say nothing about the wild man being dead.”

“You're not explaining this.”

Doc Savage continued, “You will also tell the newspapers that the wild man was suffering from a mental condition, and that the shock of being hit by the subway train has straightened him out. Such things sometimes happen.”

The officer rubbed his jaw dubiously. “This needs an explanation before I will go along with you.”

Doc said, without resentment, “Suppose you call your superior officer and see if you need an explanation.”

“Don't think I won't.” The police officer went away, used the telephone, and came back with a sheepish expression. “I don't need an explanation from you, the boss says.”

Doc Savage nodded. “Good. You will go ahead with it, then?”

The other nodded. “But exactly what will I tell the newspapers about that shock business? They'll probably want to know how I know the shock of getting hit by the train straightened out your mental condition.”

“That part is very important,” Doc told him. “Tell them that I was able to give my name as Root Too Hooten.

Tell them that I said I was on the yacht in the Hudson River, the yacht which blew up tonight."

"Holy smoke! So that's where the three wild men came from! Did they blow up the yacht?"

Doc pretended not to hear the question, and added, "Tell the newspapers that I requested that my friend, Raymond E. Cushing, be brought to see me. On second thought, make the word 'demanded.' Make it sound strong. Say that I was very excited and insistent about seeing Cushing."

The officer nodded.

Abba Cushing had been listening, and she now looked indignant. "What are you doing?" she demanded. "Trying to get my father into trouble?"

Doc pretended not to hear her, also. "Let us get going on this."

The police sergeant punched a button and told the officer who responded, "Go out and get some bandages, Phil. Get plenty of bandages. Better get another bottle of red ink."

ONE of the policemen bandaged Doc to resemble a man who might have been hit by a subway train.

While the bandages were being applied, Doc Savage turned to Monk and Ham and Abba Cushing.

"Go to headquarters," he directed, "and get on the transatlantic and transpacific telephones, contacting our agents. Ask them to begin an investigation to see if there are any reports of wild men."

Monk, startled, said, "Blazes! You mean call Europe and places like that?"

"Exactly."

Monk nodded dumbly, too surprised to ask any more questions about that angle.

Ham Brooks inquired, "What do we do then? Stick around headquarters and wait for reports on that?"

"The one of you who guards Miss Cushing can do that," Doc said. "The other one had better come to the hospital where I will be taken, and be ready for developments."

"Which one of us," asked Ham with much interest, "takes care of Miss Cushing?"

"You had better decide that for yourselves," Doc said.

A police patrolman came in and reported, "The ambulance is here to take Mr. Savage−the wild man−to the hospital."

DOC SAVAGE was halfway to the hospital in the ambulance when he changed his mind. The fact that he did change his mind was totally unexpected. He did not often do such things.

"Go to headquarters instead," he said.

At headquarters, he spent two hours in the laboratory which was a part of the establishment. He was working, Monk and Ham saw, with the chemical section. He was making something.

What he was making proved to be several buttons. They were ordinary buttons, dark ones which would match almost anything in color.

He gave two of the buttons to Monk, two to Ham, and kept two himself.

“Sew these on your shirts,” he said. “Sew them on the shirts rather than the coats, and sew them close to the neck, but not too close, so that you can reach them with your teeth should you be bound hand and foot.”

“Buttons?” Monk said. “Teeth? I don't get it.”

“At the right time,” Doc said, “you had better eat them.”

“Eat them?” Monk eyed the buttons.

“Yes.”

Ham said, “You mean they're pills?”

“Eat them,” Doc instructed, “if it should at any time appear that you are in imminent danger of becoming wild men.”

“Great glee!” Monk said.

Doc Savage then put back on the bandages and the other paraphernalia which was to make him look somewhat like the wild man named Hooten. “Tell the ambulance to come and pick me up,” he said.

Chapter VII. THE EPIDEMIC

MONK and Ham liked to put Doc Savage's world−wide organization to work. It gave them a thrill. Doc Savage had developed the organization of late months; and considering the efficiency which the thing had already shown, Monk and the other members of Doc's group of associates were surprised that he did not make more use of it.

The organization was a direct out−growth of the rather fantastic method Doc used of disposing of such crooks and malefactors as he caught. The bronze man maintained a secret hospital in upstate New York−he and his associates referred to it as the “college"−to which criminals were sent. There, they received a complicated brain operation, the technique of which Doc had developed. The operation wiped out all memory of past, and following this, the “students” received a course of training which filled them with a hatred of wrongdoers and equipped them with a trade or profession by which they could earn good and useful livelihoods.

Doc Savage had, of late, taken to scattering these students in the far corners of the earth. He got them jobs−often in business firms in which the bronze man had a substantial interest, but not always−and fettered them with no other obligation than that they should perform service in the gathering of information from time to time, as called upon.

It was these men whom Monk and Ham began contacting after they went to Doc's headquarters on the eighty−sixth floor of one of the most imposing skyscrapers in the midtown area. They used a system. They called some of the agents and gave them the names of other agents whom they could call, relaying the information that Doc Savage wanted to know about any reports of wild men.

The silly angle of what they were doing got the best of Ham. He burst into laughter.

“You'd think the population of Borneo had been turned loose,” he said.

“There are no wild men in Borneo any more,” Monk advised him.

Abba Cushing had been watching them. She was not impressed as much as they had hoped she would be by the world−wide telephoning, probably because she was the daughter of a man who no doubt did a lot of it himself.

“We'll get results for you,” Monk told her.

She tapped a toe on the rug with ill temper.

“You are acting,” she informed them, “like a pack of wild men yourselves. Or idiots, I should say. What on earth makes you think there are more than three wild men?”

“What makes you think there aren't more than three?” Monk countered.

“That isn't an answer that makes sense,” she snapped. Then she added: “However, it is about what I would expect.”

While they were waiting for action from overseas, and for the young woman's temper to cool, Monk and Ham produced their pets. Monk had a pet pig that was a runt. Ham had a pet chimpanzee−or possibly some species of ape−that was also a runt.

“Habeas Corpus,” Monk introduced the pig.

“And Chemistry,” Ham said of his chimp. “Don't be alarmed if he seems to resemble Monk. The resemblance was purely an accident. Both their ancestors hung by their tails from trees, that's all.”

The two animals had a bad effect on the girl. She gazed at them as if the last of her confidence were gone. “You two fellows are just a couples of goons,” she said grimly. “And here I have been hearing that Doc Savage and his associates were one of the most remarkable groups of men. I heard you were capable of doing anything. Somebody has lied. You're a bunch of clowns.”

Ham smiled. “Monk may be a clown.”

“You're a bigger one,” Abba Cushing advised. “You and that scrub ape, or whatever it is! And you're supposed to be a lawyer. A Harvard man! What a laugh!”

Monk laughed, and Ham's neck got red.

“Clowns or not,” Ham snapped, “there is something going on here that we do not understand, and we're going to get at the bottom of it. You can bet your bottom dollar on that.”

“Then why aren't you out trying to find the other two wild men, Irving Eenie and Miner Thomas? They're the ones who need help. Or don't you want to find them?”

“Of course, we want to find them,” Ham said indignantly.

“I'll bet,” she snapped, “that you don't. I'll bet you are at the bottom of this yourselves.” She leaned forward, her face pale with emotion. “Yes, sir, I'll bet you are back of it. You are just eccentric enough to start something as insane as this affair of the wild men is. It is the kind of a thing you would concoct. It would take minds like yours to do it.”

Monk looked at Ham and said, “I don't think she likes us.”

“It's pretty obvious,” Ham muttered.

“I believe,” offered Monk generously, “that I'll let you take over the guarding of her. Doc said one of us should do it. You can have the job, Ham.”

“The heck I can have. It's yours.” Ham scowled.

Monk told the girl, “And just for the way you've treated us two fine fellows, we're going to see what we can dig up on your father.”

THE record of Raymond E. Cushing, man of finance and, at times, of somewhat eccentric ideas, was easily traced. There was nothing secret about his career. It was in “Who's Who” and on the tongue of anyone in Wall Street.

Born poor, Cushing had done what many Americans had done, amassed wealth−tremendous wealth in his case−at an early age. There was nothing shady in his amassing of wealth, at least nothing more shady than in the amassing of any man's wealth.

There had been a period of Cushing's life, shortly after he amassed his first half dozen million or so, when he had made a considerable splurge as a philanthropist, donating ungodly sums to various things. There was nothing reprehensible about this, unless it was that the man might have used better judgment in his donations. The money had not done the good which Cushing had intended. There had been maladministration in many cases, and apparently Cushing had quit philanthropy in disgust. As far as anyone knew, he had not devoted a dime to charity since.

There was one other item. The revolution which Cushing's sugar company had foisted on a Central American republic. There were many revolutions brewed by American business concerns about this time, but this one had a little different cast in that Cushing had apparently owned a genuine desire to reform the country. He had reformed it, putting in some fine old gentlemen, natives, with a great reputation for honesty. These fine gentlemen had turned out to be as big, or bigger, crooks than anyone before or since.

Cushing, then, was a violent philanthropist who was invariably beset by poor judgment and bad luck.

Renny Renwick phoned then. Renny was Colonel John Renwick, one of Doc's associates, an engineer, at present in South Africa for the British government.

Monk talked to him. Monk had a goblin−pestered look when he hung up. “Yes,” he told Renny at the last,

“by all means look into it.”

Monk hung up. He wheeled, to confront Ham.

“That was Renny in South Africa,” he said. “He called us up to report that there are three wild men down there.”

“Huh?” Ham's mouth hung open. “Three?”

“Three,” Monk agreed. “There was three of them here. There are three of them down there. Quite a coincidence, wouldn't you say?”

DOC SAVAGE occupied a wing in the hospital that was quiet, facing the river. The river was the same one in which the yacht had sunk the night before, and the spot was not far from the one where the boat had gone down. The point of the sinking was visible from the window, but this was a coincidence.

Doc had not asked for this particular room, although he was spending his time sitting up in bed and gazing out over the river. There was a police launch anchored where the yacht had sunk, and a tugboat of some size. Divers were working from the tug, evidently searching the shattered remains of the sunken yacht in search of clues or bodies. Neither of these had been found, as far as Doc Savage was able to tell from that distance.

In the hall outside the bronze man's room stood a burly guard. He was there to keep away the newspaper reporters, who were nagging the hospital for an interview with the wild man.

The fact that the wild man was reported to be R. T. Hooten, the noted Dutchman, had stirred up the newsmen no end. Some of the leading special news writers had been assigned to the story. There were headlines in most of the morning sheets about the affair.

Doc turned his head as there was a knock on the door. It was the guard. He said, “That Chinaman is here again. The big, ugly one. He got shirtee, he says. Last time it was coatee.”

“Let him in,” Doc said.

The Chinaman was Monk Mayfair. He asked, “You likee mo' laundly, chop−chop?” Monk looked exactly like a Chinaman, provided a Chinaman could be found who had descended from an ape, which was very doubtful. However, it was a very effective disguise.

“Chop−chop,” Doc Savage agreed.

“There's three more wild men in London, England,” Monk said. “Isn't that something to hang on the fence? I don't get it at all.”

“Three in South Africa, and three in England?” Doc asked.

“That's right. Three in each place.”

“Who reported the London trio?”

“One of our agents. Bill Lee, the guy who used to be a professional thug. After Bill told me that the three

wild men in London were all mighty prominent, I got in touch with Renny again and asked him about it. Sure enough, the three in South Africa are prominent men. At least two of them are. The third has not been identified for sure, but I'll bet he is prominent, too."

Doc Savage was thoughtful for a moment. Then he asked, "Did you find out anything about the three wild men in each place?"

"Sure. What you want to know?"

"What kind of men are they?"

"Well, in South Africa, there's a noted mining man, one of the leading political bosses and a professional reformer who has a great following both among the natives and the English."

"What kind of men," asked Doc, "are they in London?"

"A fellow who owns a flock of factories, another man who has been mentioned frequently as probably the future government leader in England, and another famous reformer− Wait a minute!"

Monk's face got a blankly quizzical expression, and he sank into a chair. He sat there turning things over in his mind.

"A reformer in England, a reformer in South Africa, and a reformer in New York. You *would* call this fellow Miner Thomas, alias Mehastan Ghan, a reformer, wouldn't you?"

Doc Savage said, "A financier in South Africa, a financier in England and a financier here in America."

Monk nodded vaguely. "Yeah, that just dawned on me. And a man of great economic influence in South Africa, one in England and one here."

"Exactly."

"It takes on a pattern, doesn't it?" Monk muttered. "But darned if I see what kind of a garment the pattern could make. Darned if I do."

Doc Savage made no comment. He lay quiescent, completely wrapped in bandages so that he resembled a mummy. Only his nostrils, one eye, his mouth and his right hand were not wrapped with bandages. After he had been silent for a while, there came gently into the room the low, trilling sound which was the bronze man's absentminded trait. It had a puzzled quality for a moment, then sank back into nothingness.

Monk said, "This wild−man thing is an epidemic."

DOC SAVAGE seemed to reach a decision. The strange life in his eyes, like flake gold in movement, became more alert.

He asked, "Have you and Ham been talking with Miss Cushing?"

"She's been talking to us," Monk said gloomily. "You know, for such a pretty girl, she sure has a tongue like a witch."

“Have you,” inquired Doc, “asked her why the yacht was blown up in an attempt to kill us?”

“Sure!” Monk nodded. “She's got an answer to that one.”

“Does she admit her father and her friends blew it up?”

“Not her. She says we did it ourselves.”

“Why should we do it, does she think?”

“In an effort to kill the three wild men who were on the yacht. The three wild men were being kept there by Cushing and his friends, receiving treatment from doctors which was not doing them any good. She says we probably wanted to get rid of the three wild men, once we saw that we were suspected. So what simpler method would we take than to blow up the yacht. Isn't that a sweet line of reasoning for you?”

“Has she explained what she was doing out on the river?”

“She said that she had a weak moment. She began to wonder if I was really guilty. She had come out in a rowboat to get aboard the yacht and have another talk with me. She was close to the boat when we blew it up, she says.” Monk scowled. “She even accuses us of trying to kill her!”

“Does she account for our not continuing the attempts?”

“Sure. She says the police and everybody knows she is with us, so we wouldn't dare attempt to kill her again.”

“She has a more or less logical explanation, or line of reasoning, for everything.”

Monk groaned, “Oh, brother, has she! You know what she says we are doing? She says we are practicing up for something by testing out some kind of devilish experiment. She says you are using human guinea pigs for some experimental work. She says that is what it is.”

“So I am experimenting on the wild men, eh?” Doc Savage said grimly.

Monk glanced sharply at Doc Savage. He saw that the bronze man was extremely disturbed. There was hardly a noticeable change in Docs voice, and his features were hidden under the bandages, but Monk knew him well enough to be sure that Doc was agitated. Understanding Doc's emotions was more a matter of sensing them than actually witnessing any change.

“That's her nutty idea,” Monk admitted. “She says it's her father's idea, too.”

“The fact that wild men have cropped tip in South Africa and England should change her mind about its being my work,” Doc said.

Monk snorted.

“On the contrary, Doc. She knows Renny is in South Africa. She says he's your agent there, seeing how the experiments will work in different climates.”

Monk stopped and ran a finger around his collar.

“You know what else she claims? She says you've got five associates. Two more besides Ham and Renny and

me. She claims one of the others, either Long Tom Roberts or Johnny Littlejohn, is in England."

Doc Savage's flake−gold eyes were absolutely rigid for a moment.

He said, "Johnny Littlejohn is in London, now."

"Yeah. I didn't tell her that."

"Monk," Doc Savage said, "someone seems to have done a very subtle and complete job of involving us in this thing."

Monk nodded. "Yeah, and they knew where Renny and Johnny were. That means they know a lot about us. Renny didn't advertise the fact that he was going to South Africa, and Johnny didn't advertise that he was going to England. They are on war work, so it is a secret. Or was supposed to be. It means that whoever we're up against not only has an organization, but brains as well."

Doc Savage was silent for a while. "There is just one other thing," he said finally. "Has the girl mentioned the strange fear we felt when we boarded the yacht?"

"The fear? No, she hasn't said a thing about that."

Chapter VIII. ONE TOO MANY SHIRTEE

WHEN Monk Mayfair left Doc Savage's hospital room he took his departure with specific instructions which he had received from Doc. The instructions baffled Monk; he did not understand them at all.

"Post yourself near the hospital," Doc Savage instructed him. "Have a fast car and a fast boat handy, and have Ham Brooks bring one of our planes around to the river front several blocks below here."

"In other words, get ready to follow somebody in a hurry," said Monk, understanding that much of it.

"Exactly."

"Who will I follow?" Monk asked. "Don't tell me you are going to produce a wild man. If you are, just say so. This thing has gotten screwy enough that nothing would surprise me."

"This man," Doc Savage told him, "may be acting wild, but it will only be because he is excited. You will actually recognize him because he is smoking."

"Smoking!" Monk swallowed twice. "What you mean?"

"I mean smoking," Doc Savage said. "Probably you had better be on your way now, so you can get set. The news of my presence here, or the presence supposedly of Hooten, has been in the newspapers long enough to begin to get results."

Those were the instructions with which Monk left the hospital, and he did not understand them.

There was one comfort. It was not the first time he had not understood Doc Savage's instructions. On other occasions, the improbable−sounding instructions issued by the bronze man had turned out very foxy indeed.

That was one thing that made life interesting when you were associated with Doc Savage. Not only did the most fantastic adventures seem to happen along, but the bronze man's system of attacking the trouble was frequently more fantastic than the trouble itself.

It was Doc Savage's unorthodox methods, the surprising gadgets he concocted and had the imagination to use, which accounted for his remarkable record, Monk suspected.

Having left the hospital, Monk visited a nearby drugstore and telephoned Ham Brooks about bringing around the airplane. “I'm supposed to follow a smoking man, now,” he said.

Ham laughed. “This will round out Miss Cushing's opinion of us,” Ham commented.

“Look here!” Monk said ominously. “You're not making friends with that girl?”

“Why not?” Ham demanded. “When we drew lots to see who would stay, you handed me the short straw. Don't think I didn't notice you cheating. So whatever I do, it's no hide off your back.”

Disgruntled, Monk slammed up the receiver in Ham's ear. He turned and left the drugstore, stopped on the sidewalk, and stood there wondering what he should do about watching the hospital, where would be the best spot.

A man's voice asked him casually, “Got a match, buddy?”

Monk started feeling absently in his pockets for a match.

The voice said, “You gottee shirtee, fliend?” in a fake pidgin English.

Monk started violently and looked down at the stocky blue gun which the stranger had produced and was holding against his stomach, just above the belt buckle.

“You catchee hole in shirtee, you movee,” said the man. “And, brother, don't think I don't mean it, either.”

WHEN the burly guard in the hospital next knocked on Doc Savage's door, it was to report, “There's another Chinaman out here. This one says he wants to talk to you about shirtee.”

“The same Chinaman?” Doc Savage asked.

“Not unless he's shrunk a lot, this one ain't.”

Doc Savage lay back on the bed and inspected the gadget which he had rigged on the ceiling of the room. This consisted of several small paper sacks stuck to the ceiling with suction cups, and connected with a string. The string, not at all conspicuous because it was made of a rayon fabric and was very thin, led to Doc Savage's bed. He took hold of the end of the string and set himself.

“Send him in,” he said.

When the guard immediately got slugged in the hall it did not surprise Doc Savage. Monk and Ham, in visiting Doc here at the hospital, had been instructed to use a kind of laundry code to identify themselves and give the word that nothing was wrong. First trip was to be to see Doc about a coat, the second about a shirt,

the third about a necktie, and so on. Here was a second shirt. There was to be no second shirt. Therefore, something was wrong.

So Doc set himself. When the door popped open he was ready.

The man who came in was not large, but he made up in dynamic purpose, and armament, what he otherwise lacked. He was man hunting, and he was what would be called completely equipped. He had a gun in his left hand, while his right hand tried to contain both a gun and a hand grenade. There was suspicious bulk under his coat that might be a bulletproof vest. Hooked over one of his arms was an industrial−type gas mask which was as effective as anything against tear gas and other types likely to be used by the police or, the man probably hoped, Doc Savage.

After the man came into the room, Doc Savage pulled the cord. He pulled it slowly, moving not much more than his fingers, so that the man would not be alarmed.

The cord broke the sacks, and the sacks showered their contents down on the man. It was a powder. It looked innocent enough at first glance. The man cursed.

After he had cursed, he stopped. Then he yelled. There was pain, astonishment and horror in the bellow. He did a kind of Indian war dance, moving his feet up and down, but not traveling around the room. He did some slapping at himself as if he had mosquitoes. In the course of this he lost the grenade he was holding in one hand.

The grenade bounced off the wall and hopped across the floor like a hard egg. That scared the man. He wheeled and all but crashed the door off its hinges getting out of the room. He went down the corridor with the best speed he could manage.

Doc Savage came out of the bed, rising almost straight up. He was scared. The grenade had scared him. He had not figured on that.

The bandages he had split previously, and had been lying on the splits so that they would not be noticed. The bandages came off with no more difficulty than a covering of dry leaves.

He got the grenade. Ten seconds was the average time one of the things took to make up its mind. He was all convulsed to give it a mad pitch out of the window; then he relaxed and looked sheepish. He put the grenade on the table. Then he decided someone might pick it up and get hurt, so he pocketed it.

The pin in the thing had not been drawn.

DOC SAVAGE went into the hospital corridor. The guard was squirming on the floor and did not look badly hurt. There were no nurses in the hall, despite the commotion. Doc had specifically requested that the floor be vacated, so that no one would get hurt if there were trouble.

The bronze man went down the stairway, which was obviously the route taken by the fleeing man. He traveled fast, and reached a service door which opened upon the same street as the front entrance of the institution.

His gadget−the powder he had taken such pains to get on the man−was working. The stuff, upon exposure to the air, reacted violently, giving off a certain amount of heat, not enough to kill a man but enough to make

him extremely uncomfortable, and also produced quantities of dark vapor resembling smoke.

The stuff was a result of some experiments Doc had been making in an effort to develop a chemical mixture which would create artificial heat in the garments used by ski troopers and other soldiers in cold−country fighting. This material was worthless for the purpose because of the smoky vapor. But it had occurred to the bronze man that it would be ideal for a purpose such as the present one, and he had had a supply of the stuff on hand.

(As the readers have noticed who have followed Doc Savage in previous adventures, it is the policy of the publishers and author to omit all exact chemical formulae, in order that such information may not fall in the wrong hands. There are two reasons for such omissions: First, tinkering with these chemicals by inexperienced persons might easily result in explosions or burns. Second, the primary purpose of the stories is the conveying of entertainment, and the deleting of such information as might be dangerous in the wrong hands does not, we hope, detract from this entertainment value.−The Editor.)

The man who had tried to raid the room had taken the middle of the street and was moving fast. He was smoking, literally. The chemical on his clothing had reacted with the air, so that he seemed to be afire.

There was no sign of Monk Mayfair.

Doc Savage moved with casual efficiency. Against an emergency, he had a car parked in the neighborhood. It was a small machine with few distinguishing features. He entered it then drove after the running man. The latter stopped a taxicab, but the driver took one look at him and drove on hurriedly.

The man who had been doused with the chemical went in search of another cab. The stuff on his clothing had about completed its reaction. There was now very little smoke.

The man found another cab, got in, and the machine took him away. Doc followed.

If Doc Savage had any feeling that anything unusual had just happened, he did not show it in his manner. This stoicism with which he usually accepted a thing of this sort was a source of amazement, sometimes hilarious glee, to Monk and Ham and his other associates. Doc, however, had a different viewpoint. Many of the things he did−this smoking chemical was an example−were ridiculously fantastic. But he did them for a definite purpose, and the results, not the oddness of the method, interested him.

He was fully aware that the un−conforming methods he used made him look eccentric. He did not mind. His methods were productive of results in a high percentage of cases, and they had an awe−creating effect on enemies. So it was the result and not the method that counted.

He followed the cab ahead with care, leaving nothing to chance, taking nothing for granted.

And when the man with the armament left the cab while it was caught in a traffic jam, and ducked into a subway entrance, Doc saw him. The bronze man left his car in a loading zone and descended the subway steps, on the opposite side of the street. Subways are the most difficult places to trail people. But this station had the advantage of being one that was not heavily patronized.

It was a typical New York subway station−a pair of tracks, one for uptown trains and the other for downtown, and on each side of them a long platform for the passengers. Entrance to the downtown platform on the west side of the street, entrance to the uptown platform on the east side. The quarry had taken the east entrance. Doc took the west.

Looking across the tracks, through the array of supporting pillars that held the street overhead, Doc located the man. The fellow had gotten rid of his coat, which had been discolored, no doubt, by the chemical. He was in his shirt sleeves. He stood at a newsstand, pretending to read a paper he had purchased, but actually standing so that he could see anyone who came down the street stairs to that platform. It had not occurred to him to watch the opposite side.

A subway train soon came rumbling in and stopped at the platform on which the man stood.

Doc Savage promptly dropped to the tracks, took care to keep clear of the electrified rail, leaped across the tracks and climbed up between two of the cars.

The cars were connected by a kind of bellows, and an arrangement of metal bars and a protective grille to keep passengers on the platform from being crowded down between the cars. It was a difficult spot to hitch a ride, but possible if a man was strong.

At the next station, Doc Savage climbed over to the platform and boarded a car in the conventional manner. His quarry was in the car forward. Doc located him through the open door between the cars and remained where he was.

AT the third stop, the man left the train. He walked casually down the street and entered a large chain drugstore. The business establishment had a side door, and Doc entered by that route. There was a group of telephone booths in the back, racks containing bargain books, the usual array of bargain counters and drug counters. A soda fountain, cigar stand and news rack were in the front.

The man was standing at the news rack, holding a magazine and again watching to see if he were followed.

Surmising the man's object in entering the drugstore, no doubt, was either to use the telephone or to get something in the line of an unguent for his burns, Doc sidled into one of the phone booths.

Doc took down a receiver, dialed the operator, asked for the wire chief, and said, “This is U−93, Department K. I am talking from"−he glanced at the number on the telephone−"Circle 0−7000. It is one of a battery of booths. Hook me up so I can eavesdrop on any conversation from any one of the other booths. Quick.”

“Yes, sir,” said the wire chief. “Just a moment.”

There was an interval of silence.

The man put down his magazine and sauntered back toward the telephone booths.

The wire chief came back on the wire. “Sorry, sir, but did you say you were U−93, Department K?”

“Yes.”

“Your credentials have been canceled,” said the wire chief. “Sorry, we cannot do anything for you.”

Doc Savage stared at the mouthpiece in blank astonishment. U−93, Department K, was his identification number with the department of justice. He had expected it to get its usual magical results. Canceled? Evidently, there was a mistake.

Mistake or not, there was no time to argue about it. The man was entering a booth. He was cautious and picked the farthest booth.

There was nothing to do but take a chance. Doc Savage took the booth adjoining the man, pulled the door shut, and decided that the other man, alarmed, was not making his call. Doc dialed at random, held the receiver down, said, “Let me speak to Alice. . . . Hello, Alice, this is Joe. How about tonight?”

He went on with the kind of conversation a young man might have with his girl.

Eventually, the man in the adjoining booth, his alarm gone, dialed his number.

Doc did not get the number from the dial clicks. He had performed this feat a number of times; it was not too difficult if one developed an ear for telegraphic clicks. But this time someone in the drugstore burst into loud laughter at the wrong time, and he lost out.

The man's voice was audible, however, by snatches. He made a fairly complete report on what had happened to him. He explained that the man in the hospital room had not been Hooten, but Doc Savage. He described, profanely, the business of the smoke. He was emphatic about his flight being cautious. No one had followed him, he insisted.

The man said, “Did the boys bring in that Monk Mayfair?”

Evidently the answer was in the affirmative, because the man said, “That's fine.” He laughed. “He should make an interesting wild man.”

Doc Savage's metallic features lost color. It was the first he had heard that Monk was in trouble.

The man in the adjoining booth said, “I tell you it's safe enough. I could come in right now. Nobody is following me.”

He evidently got a skeptical answer from whomever he was talking to, because he tried to argue and got shouted down. Doc Savage could hear the angry rasp of the receiver through the telephone−booth partition. It was a man's voice at the other end, or a very raucous−voiced woman. Probably a man.

“Oh, all right,” said the man in the booth hastily. “I'll go to my hotel. You say you want me to wait there?”

Evidently, that was the plan.

“O. K.,” said the man. “I'll wait there for you.”

The man then left the telephone booth.

But he was cautious. He loitered again at the magazine stand at the front of the drugstore, and this time he kept his eye on the telephone booth into which Doc Savage had stepped.

Doc took his time about leaving the booth. When he did leave it, he did so stern first, after the fashion of a crab, so that the man would not be able to see his face. He also kept his shoulders rounded and changed both his stature and his walk as much as possible. He got out of the store without showing the man his face.

He did note that the man had turned and was following him.

THE fellow might not be suspicious, but at least he was being extremely cautious. Doc Savage turned toward a taxicab which stood at the curb.

He gave the man in the drugstore time enough to come out and witness as Doc stepped into a cab. The cab was parked, and the bronze man said to the driver, “Here is five dollars. I am giving somebody the slip. You know how dames are. Wait a moment, then drive on. Don't look around when I leave the cab.”

Without turning his head and out of the corner of his mouth, the driver said, “O. K., bud.”

Doc Savage leaned back in the seat. He had spotted the man by now, standing in the side door of the drugstore.

Leaning back in the seat put the bronze man out of sight of the watcher. Doc slid down in the seat, got on the floor boards. When the cab started, and the opening of the door on the far side was not likely to be as noticeable, he eased the door open, dropped to the street, made a scuttling run and got behind another parked car. Fortunate timing and the position of taxicab and parked cars kept him from being seen.

The man who had visited the hospital was satisfied. He lit a cigarette, stood there for some time, then ambled down the street.

His hotel was not far away. The desk clerk of the hostelry was subject to a bribe. He sold out cheap. Five dollars.

The man was registered under the name of John Stone. He received mail under the name of Oliver Dillard. He liked to play the races, had a habit of coming in drunk. He had never had a visitor. He made many telephone calls, all of them to a girl friend named Genie. Doc got Genie's number.

Doc Savage telephoned his headquarters and got Ham Brooks on the wire.

“Nothing new here,” Ham reported. “Say, what's happened to Monk? He hasn't reported in.”

Doc said, “Monk is in bad. They got hold of him somehow, and they are going to see what kind of a wild man he would make.”

“Great Scot!” Ham exploded. “That's fantastic. Why?”

Doc said, “Get to the Jefferson Wilson Hotel on Fifty−fifth Street. I will meet you at a small restaurant at the corner west of the hotel.”

“Right away,” Ham said instantly.

“Is Miss Cushing with you?”

“Right here.”

“Can you lock her up until I get there?”

“She won't like it.”

“Let her not like it,” Doc Savage said grimly. “I want you to watch this man in the hotel while I start other wheels turning.”

“Right−o,” Ham said. “Say, Doc, the department of justice has been trying to get hold of you on the telephone. I guess it can keep, whatever it is.”

“It can keep,” Doc Savage said.

Chapter IX. QUESTION OF GUILT

DOC SAVAGE met Ham Brooks on his arrival in the vicinity of the hotel. Doc gave Ham enough of an outline of what had happened for Ham to go ahead. What he wanted to know, Doc explained, was who came to the hotel to meet the man.

Doc Savage then rode a cab to his car, which he picked up and drove to his headquarters. He left the machine in the private basement garage which he maintained there, then entered the private elevator which lifted him to the eighty−sixth floor, where he stepped out into a corridor.

He stepped directly into the arms of three young men. Or, at least, he stepped against the stiffly outstretched arm of one of the young men and stopped.

“Mr. Savage?” asked the owner of the stiff arm.

He was a well−developed young man with a good jaw line and an eye that was not afraid, and at the same time not overbearing.

“That is right,” Doc told him.

The young man produced his credentials. He was an F. B. I. operative.

“I am Swain,” he said. “This is Carson and Roberts"−introducing his two companions−"who also are operatives.”

“Won't you come in?” Doc suggested.

The door of the bronze man's suite of rooms−three great rooms, the smallest being a reception room, the other two scientific library and experimental laboratory−had been smashed open. The work had been done with a cutting torch, for the bronze−colored door was of armorplate steel. The cutting had been neatly and efficiently executed.

“We already have been in,” said Swain dryly.

The reception room was the least distinguished of the headquarters arrangement. There were comfortable chairs, a great inlaid table of unusual design, and an ancient safe that was nearly the size of a box car.

Abba Cushing occupied one of the chairs. She tried to look at Doc Savage defiantly, but she was more frightened than defiant. She looked like a little girl who had been caught with a finger in the jam.

There were two more government men with the girl.

There was no loud talk and no accusations. But the conversation began and continued on a note so ominous that it did not need loudness.

Swain said, “I am sorry not to be able to meet you under more amiable circumstances, Mr. Savage. Unfortunately, it was not my luck to do so, and I might as well come to the two or three points we have to bring up.”

Doc Savage nodded, but did not comment.

“First,” said Swain, “my instructions are to advise you that each and every connection you have with the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been suspended. Not revoked, I was instructed to explain, but merely suspended pending clarification of certain matters.”

Doc was silent.

Swain added, “I should further state that any attempt by you to give the impression that you are connected with the F. B. I. will constitute a crime. I say this because I have been informed that you attempted, within the past hour, to obtain the facilities of the telephone company by using your connection. This was not a crime because you had not, at the time, been informed of your suspension. But any further thing of that sort will be unfortunate.”

Doc Savage asked, “Does an explanation go with this?”

“AN explanation,” Swain agreed, nodding, “*and* an explanation, I hope.”

“Meaning?”

“We explain. Then you explain.”

Doc was silent.

“Is that agreeable?” Swain persisted.

Doc Savage said, “This interview seems to be starting off on a rather emphatic note. Under the circumstances it might not be advisable to make promises.”

Swain said earnestly, “I can assure you this is not a pleasant or agreeable performance on my part. However, duty happens to be duty.”

Doc asked, “Who explains first?”

“I do, if you wish,” Swain said, smiling slightly. “First, there seems to be a rather mysterious epidemic of wild men. Very wealthy, very famous, or very important men in at least four different points on the earth.”

Doc Savage's eyes showed sudden animation. “Four?” he asked.

“Here in New York,” Swain said. “In South Africa. In London. In Lisbon, Portugal.”

“The Portugal instance is news,” Doc advised him.

“You knew about the other three?”

“One of my associates is in South Africa, and another is in London,” Doc explained.

The F. B. I. operative's face tightened. “Yes. We had noticed the coincidence.”

Doc Savage saw the way the wind was blowing. He had suspected something of the kind. “I see,” he said. “Can you tell me the type of men affected in Portugal?”

Swain nodded. “I see no reason why not. Augustez Goestal, the great reform leader of Portugal; Sir James Cousine, the English industrialist who is a citizen of Portugal, and one of the most wealthy men in the country; and Carlos Moste, the inventor and industrial organizer.”

Doc Savage's voice showed emotion−thoughtfulness.

“A reform leader, an extremely wealthy man and an organizer,” he said.

Swain said, “I see that the point has occurred to you.”

“The point?”

“The three types of men have been the same in each case, here, in Africa, in England, in Portugal.”

“Yes, they have that in common,” Doc admitted.

For the first time the F B. I. man was distinctly unfriendly.

“The other thing they have in common,” he said, “is the presence of one of your associates in each instance.”

“My fifth aid, Long Tom Roberts, the electrical expert, is in Portugal, if that is what you mean,” Doc admitted.

“That is exactly what I mean.”

ABBA CUSHING had been listening with growing concern. She had produced a handkerchief and was knotting and unknotting it nervously. There were moments when she looked as if she wanted to scream in remorse.

“Mr. Savage,” Swain said, “these facts I have just mentioned to you have been drawn to our attention. In fairness, I will say that they have been called to our attention anonymously.”

“'Anonymous,'“ Doc Savage suggested, “is usually a word for trouble−maker.”

Swain grinned. “Sure. Admitted. In this case the anonymous party gave a fairly sensible explanation. The party was giving us a tip, not proof. You are a very powerful and also respected individual. You could, if you chose, make a great deal of trouble for any informant. And the informant said that, therefore, it was more sensible to remain anonymous.”

Doc Savage looked at the girl. He was thinking of Monk's report on what Ham had told him about the

girl−that she always had a very logical explanation for what she did.

She seemed to realize that his thoughts were something of the kind. She grew more pale.

Doc asked, “The object of this interview is what?”

“There are two objects. Alternatives.” Swain met Doc's glance levelly. “The first is to get from you a clear explanation of what this somewhat zany, but obviously sinister, matter of wild men is all about.”

Doc made a slight gesture.

“At this stage of the affair, such an explanation is not possible,” he said.

“That is too bad,” Swain said. “Because that leaves us the alternative object.”

“And that?”

“My boss is spending several days aboard an American destroyer which is going on patrol up in the direction of Greenland,” said the F. B. I. operative. “He would be delighted to have you as his guest on the cruise.”

“Another way of saying,” said Doc Savage, “that he is taking me into custody.”

“He did not put it that way.”

“I can refuse.”

“Not,” said Swain, “very conveniently.”

“This is hardly legal.”

“Oh, yes, it is,” Swain told him. “We have warrants, plus whatever in the line of charges you wish.”

“On what grounds?”

Swain nodded at Abba Cushing. “Holding the young lady, here, a prisoner, for one thing. We found her locked up here. She assured us she was a prisoner.”

Doc Savage looked at Abba Cushing. “You did that?”

She nodded miserably. “I'm beginning to wish I hadn't.”

Doc Savage turned to Swain and asked, “Just what is the general nature of the department's suspicions about me?”

Swain replied frankly.

“We suspect−wrongly, we hope−that you are guilty, not of evil intentions, but of trying some rather terrible experiments on human subjects. We know that you are a scientist, and we know that you specialize in the unusual, the untried, the fantastic. Knowing a great deal about you, we sincerely believe that your objectives are good. But we are convinced that the methods in this case are completely illegal, both from a law and a humanitarian standpoint. Therefore, I do hereby inform you that you are in custody.”

DOC SAVAGE turned to Abba Cushing and said, “That illegal experiment was your, or your father's, line of reasoning, was it not?”

“It was my idea,” the girl said.

“So we gathered.”

“This is also my idea,” Abba Cushing said.

She jumped then, did something that no one in the least expected her to do. She dived at one of the F. B. I. men, and caught the fellow completely by surprise. She had evidently been studying him and had decided where he kept his guns, because her hands dived into his pockets and came out with, not one, but two revolvers. She leaped back, menacing everyone with the guns.

“I am a good shot,” she said, “though at this range I do not need to be.” She backed toward the door. “Come on,” she ordered Doc.

Doc said, “It might not be wise to leave in this fashion. The F. B. I. is not a good outfit to trick.”

The girl's voice was tight, but the guns were steady. “Come on!” she ordered. “I tried to make you a prisoner once. This time I'll get the job done.”

Doc asked Swain, “What would you do under the circumstances?”

“I wouldn't get shot,” Swain said dryly.

Doc followed the girl. She put a gun against his back, got him into the private elevator. She sent it down to the basement garage.

“Pick a fast car,” she ordered. “It looks as if we will need it.”

Chapter X. TOP WEST

AFTER Doc Savage selected the car, the girl drove the machine. She tucked her guns into a side pocket, and gave all her attention to the wheel. She seemed to have a definite destination, which proved to be the private garage in a town house in the plush−lined Seventies. A servant opened the doors at a signal from her horn and she drove inside. The servant, a man, showed no surprise at sight of Doc Savage. He went away.

“My home,” Abba Cushing explained.

“Why did you just do what you did?” Doc asked.

She sat silent for a while, both hands on the steering wheel, staring fixedly ahead.

“My father is a strong character,” she said. “He would have to be, to make the money he has made. But he is more than a machine for making money. He is a philosopher. One of the first things of philosophy that he taught me was to make sure you are wrong, then admit it and start undoing it.”

“I see,” Doc said.

Abba Cushing was thoughtful. “He has a quaint way of putting it, my father has. Admit, he says, and start again. He says not to leave out the admitting, because that's necessary. It jars your pride and makes you that much less likely to make the next mistake.”

“You mean,” Doc asked, “that you made a mistake about me?”

“I mean,” said the girl, “that it is possible.”

“Who set the Federal Bureau of Investigation on us?”

Abba Cushing stared at him. “Do you think it was me? If so, you're mistaken, and how! I don't know who did it. I haven't the least idea.”

“Your father?”

She frowned. “I think not. He would have mentioned it to me if he had such an idea, I believe.” She waved an arm at the place where they were sitting. “Matter of fact, I brought you here to discuss the matter with dad. I'll bring him.”

She got out of the car, indicated Doc was to follow her, and escorted him to a comfortable room, where they were met by a servant, not the one who had opened the garage door.

“Your father,” the servant informed Miss Cushing, “is not in.”

“Where can I reach him?”

“I do not know, miss.”

Abba Cushing grimaced. “I did so hope you and dad could get together. I'm sure this meeting would have a different result.”

Doc Savage smiled pleasantly enough, then remarked, “But since he is not, it might be wise to be taking other steps. So if you will excuse me−”

“Oh, but I won't,” Abba Cushing said, and picked up her hat, which she had removed and placed on a table. “I'm going with you.”

“That is very kind of you, but you had better not.”

“It isn't kind at all,” she said. “It's selfish. I'm looking out for my skin. I stole a prisoner from the F. B. I., and in the line of crimes, that isn't exactly jaywalking. I think I did the right thing, because I think you will solve this affair to everyone's satisfaction. But until then, until you crack the nut, I do not care to sit looking at the inside of a jail.”

Doc said, “But going with me might conceivably be dangerous.”

“Conceivably. But interesting, though.” She smiled slightly. “I was just going to say that you are probably an expert at keeping out of jail. If I go with you, I keep out, too. So I go with you.”

Doc studied her for a moment. “You are not a young woman on whom an argument would have much effect, are you?”

“You read character, don't you?” she said.

ABBA CUSHING rode downtown with Doc Savage. They took one of the Cushing automobiles, a convertible coupé, which really belonged out on the country place, and which had a Connecticut license. This was at the girl's suggestion. She said that a guest had driven the machine into town, and probably no one would think about it.

When Doc Savage parked the car, she said, “We're in front of that newspaper office. You're not going in there?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“To use a reverse−number telephone directory.”

Doc Savage was inside the newspaper building several minutes. He came out hastily, got in the car and drove away.

Abba Cushing asked, “What is a reverse−number directory?”

“They are made up by the telephone companies,” Doc Savage explained. “Most newspaper offices have one. Instead of listing the names in alphabetical order, it lists the names in numerical order. You look up the number, and the name is listed.”

“Oh!”

Doc Savage drove uptown, then cross town to a section of rooming houses. He found a number, parked, and Abba Cushing followed him into the lobby of a small apartment house devoted to one and two−room apartments. Doc looked over the name plates on the mail boxes until he came to “Miss Genie Reaveman.”

The place did not have a doorman. He went to the elevator.

“Girl friend?” Abba Cushing asked, rather sharply.

“No.”

“Who, then?”

“A man came to the hospital to either seize or kill the man he thought was R. T. Hooten. The man was scared into flight and trailed to a hotel. Ham is watching him, now. The hope is that the man eventually will lead Ham to someone higher up. In the meantime the man has been in the habit of making repeated calls to a girl named Genie at this address. This information came from the clerk at the man's hotel.”

Abba Cushing seemed undecided whether to approve or disapprove of their objective. “You are after information, I presume.”

“Exactly.”

“Men,” she suggested, “don't always tell their girls everything.”

“Seldom everything, I suspect,” Doc Savage said dryly. “But they boast.”

“Boasting with a man,” said Abba Cushing, “is what fanning his tail feathers is to a peacock. You may have something there.”

Genie Reaveman was a small, mouselike girl who looked at them with wide blue eyes that were somehow scared. She asked what they wanted.

Doc Savage said, “We just came from the Jefferson Wilson Hotel where a fellow is registered as John Stone.”

The small girl's blue eyes got wider and wider until they were bigger than it possibly seemed they could have been. Then, although she had given no noticeable impression of having her lungs full of air, she breathed outward a great, rushing breath, after which she sank toward the floor with her eyes closing.

DOC SAVAGE caught the girl before she could fall and carried her into a small apartment which was probably furnished with her own furniture, because it was the kind of furniture a mouselike girl like her would own. There was a studio couch. Doc put her on that.

Abba Cushing went to a door, found a kitchenette beyond, inspected it, then gave the bathroom a scrutiny. She shook her head to indicate there was no one else on hand.

Abba came back and stood looking down at the girl on the studio couch.

“I was going to get jealous, but I guess I won't,” she said. “She's a bedraggled lamb, isn't she?”

Doc Savage was examining the girl. “She has fainted.”

“Naturally,” said Abba. “A girl like her would.”

Abba began prowling around the apartment. She looked into drawers, opened boxes, dumped the contents of the girl's purse out on a table and pawed through the stuff.

She said, “Name seems to be Genie Reaveman, all right.” She found a bank book, opened it and whistled. “She's been making money the last month.”

Abba brought the bank book over and showed it to Doc. It had entries showing deposits of ninety dollars a week, each week for the past month.

“That's a big salary,” Abba remarked. “Big for a girl, I mean. She must have something I hadn't noticed.” She went into the kitchenette and came back with a glass containing four ice cubes. “I remember they did this to me one time after I saw a snake,” she said. She poked one of the ice cubes down the girl's dress and rubbed the others on her face.

The girl opened her eyes, and they got wider and wider again, but this time she burst into tears.

Abba Cushing winked at Doc Savage over the girl's head. “We are the police,” Abba said. “You had better come clean, young lady.”

Doc Savage frowned, started to speak.

Abba interrupted, “I know you had orders not to say you were an F. B. I. man. But I think this girl should know it. She should know how badly she is up against it.”

The mouse girl's sobs got louder. “I didn't know it was wrong,” she declared. “I really didn't.”

Abba snorted, “Not wrong? But you were able to deposit ninety dollars a week?”

“They only paid me a hundred,” said the mouse miserably. “It doesn't cost me much to live. I was saving the rest. I . . . I'll give it back.”

Abba Cushing laughed, said, “Never give a dollar back to a man, darling. It's simply not done.”

This statement seemed to appeal to the mouse. She lifted her head, and even stopped sobbing. “I . . . I really didn't do anything so wrong.”

“How much did your job include?” Abba asked.

“Mr. Stone−John Stone−was merely to call me up and talk to me as if I was his sweetheart,” the mouselike girl explained. “I took it down in shorthand. Then I read what he said to the other man.”

“Hm−m−m!” said Abba judiciously. “That just makes you the go−between. I imagine, as long as you are perfectly frank with us, there will not be such a mess. But, of course, you want to stick to the truth. How did you get hold of the other man, the one to whom you relayed the romantic talk?”

“Oh, I have his name, address and telephone number.”

“What are they?”

“Mr. West. Mr. Top West. His phone is Wyoming 9−0711. He is at 37 Gourn Avenue.”

Abba Cushing nodded understandingly.

“We have it that you knew most of what was going on,” she remarked.

The mouse of a girl jumped violently, and her face blanched.

“Oh, but I didn't,” she gasped. “That is what frightened me so. I was afraid I was doing something wrong. But I actually didn't know it.”

“Didn't this Top West or this Mr. Stone explain what it was about?”

“No. I told them I was very curious. They told me that the hundred dollars a week was for my curiosity.”

Abba Cushing looked at Doc Savage meaningly, then turned back to the girl. “Your life is in danger,” Abba said. “You had better leave town. I have a place in the mountains to which you can go. Here.” She wrote for some moments on a piece of paper, then showed what she had written to Doc Savage.

It was:

Miss Reaveman is my guest, and is to be treated as such for as long as she cares to stay.

Abba.

Abba Cushing gave the girl the note, explaining, “I'll put the address on an envelope. You go there and stay until you hear from us.”

The mouse of a girl packed quickly. They took her to the station and put her aboard a train.

“I sent her to dad's lodge,” Abba told Doc Savage. “We can find her there at any time.”

THE bronze man drove toward Gourn Avenue, where the mouse had told them they would find Top West, whoever he was.

Doc Savage was silent, but he was also appreciative of the talents of Miss Abba Cushing. The young woman had qualities he had not suspected. She had gotten information out of Genie Reaveman with much more skill, he strongly suspected, than he could have managed himself. Abba was a psychologist, which meant she had brains, though she was actually too pretty a thing to have those.

“In case you're wondering,” Abba said unexpectedly, “I had never heard of anybody named Top West.”

“I was not thinking that.”

“What *were* you thinking?”

“That you have intelligence as well as beauty.”

“My, my!” said Abba. “That was not a very flowery compliment, but coming from a man who is supposed to be proof against feminine wiles, I suppose I should be flattered.” She was silent for a moment. “I think I am.”

Doc Savage, who was uncomfortable, muttered, “For some reason, this Top West was using a very roundabout method of getting information relayed to him.”

“Obviously, the sweetheart talk was a code,” Abba agreed. “Imagine that! You know−this thing is interesting.”

“It may be dangerous,” Doc warned. “It probably will be. You had best let me drop you at home.”

“Oh, I like it,” Abba said, settling back in the seat. “My past life has been strangely devoid of excitement. It was dull. And already that dull past seems a thousand years gone. I realize I've been missing a lot.”

She sounded as if she meant it.

Chapter XI. THE HERRING

DOC SAVAGE was silent during the latter part of the drive to Gourn Avenue. The address where they hoped to find Top West was a substantial but not pretentious block of straw−colored brick houses. The bronze man drove on past, parked on another block, and walked back. He took his time and suggested that they have a cold drink at a yellow stand on the corner. Surprised, Abba Cushing did so. The orange drink they had was not bad,

“You're looking the ground over,” Abba Cushing said. “You sure don't take any chances, do you?”

Doc Savage made no comment. He entered the building and examined a directory which showed that Top West had offices on the fifth floor. It was evidently not an extensive suite, because three other concerns were listed on the same floor.

Doc rode the elevator to the fifth. He did not enter Top West's door, which was marked with nothing but the man's name, and that in small letters. He went into one of the other firms, and found an operator and a PBX switchboard.

He told the telephone operator, “Checking your telephone. May I use your headset a moment?”

It was a natural request put in a casual voice, and the operator did not realize that the bronze giant could hardly be a telephone−company employee. She turned over her board to him.

Doc called Top West's number, asked the male voice which answered, “Top West?”

“That's right,” said the voice.

Doc said, “West, you were rather clever in giving the tip. But the Federal Bureau of Investigation is not partial to anonymous tips. How about telling the bureau just why you called their attention to Doc Savage?”

There was a kind of waiting−for−it−to−explode silence from the other end of the wire.

“You . . . er . . . have the wrong number,” West said.

Doc asked, “Is this Top West?”

“Er . . . no. West, you say? No, no, this is Tom Hesten. H−e−s−t−e−n. Sorry,” Top West said.

“Sorry,” Doc told him.

“That's all right.”

The bronze man hung up and told Abba Cushing, “Our Mr. Top West keeps his brain cut in.”

Abba said admiringly, “You are a sly cuss, aren't you? No wonder we didn't get to first base fooling you.” She followed Doc as he hurried for the door. “Did Top West put the F. B. I. on your neck?”

“Apparently, he did,” Doc said.

The bronze man swung into the corridor, reached Top West's door and waited outside. He had been there not more than thirty seconds when the door burst open and a burly young man dived out, in the act of yanking his

hat down on his head.

Doc put out a foot. Top West jumped the foot, which was quick thinking. He went half to a knee, however, and dived a hand for something under his coat. Doc Savage swung a short, chopping blow that was not a good one because Doc was off balance. It took some skin off Top West's forehead and pushed the man down and back on his knees.

Doc got hold of West's coat, out of which the man was trying to take something. Doc yanked and the coat came off until West tried to hold it on with his arms. They fought for a while as if West was a fish on a line, the coat being the line; then Abba Cushing became enthusiastic and tried to get into it, woman fashion, by kicking West. The result was that he suddenly let go his coat, grabbed her foot, gave a twist and nearly, but not quite, succeeded in using her for a shield. Doc took him by the neck; and shortly West made the motions of a man wanting to be peaceful.

WITHOUT saying anything, Doc Savage propelled Top West back into the office out of which the man had come, shoved him through a door on the other side of a reception room and down into a desk chair. Doc then searched a washroom and a clothes locker that was large enough to contain a man.

The furnishings were not elaborate and had seen use. Doc went through a desk drawer. The letters were mostly bills. They showed that Top West was a detective, one who was slow pay. Big pay, too, judging from the account book in another drawer. There were several cases entered, and the lowest fee was a hundred dollars, the highest five thousand, and there were three of those in the last three weeks.

Doc Savage asked, “Who paid you five thousand dollars a week recently?”

Top West gave a demonstration of why he was able to make five thousand a week. He took hold of himself as if he was a cowboy getting control of a horse.

In a voice that would not have excited a banker's conference, he said, “My money says you are the bird who just called up with that F. B. I. stuff.”

Doc said, “So you put them on my neck?”

“Of course not.” Top West leered. “Or did I sound too guilty for you to believe that?”

“Yes−guilty.”

“O. K., my friend. I did. It was a job. I was hired to do it, and I was paid five thousand a week to do that. It was worth five thousand a week. It was worth more than that.” He grimaced again, fiercely. “I worked too cheap. I was a sucker. Anyway, that explains who paid me five thousand a week recently. You asked that, didn't you?”

Doc Savage studied the man. Doc was no judge of women−he had no confidence whatever in his hunches and opinions in that direction−but he could tell something about a man's character. This man had plenty of character. He was strong. He was neither handsome nor a physical giant; he did not dress like a millionaire, neither was he shabby; he was not hard and he was not soft. But there was a dynamic quality about him that most men did not have.

“Any chance of your telling who hired you?” Doc asked.

“Not a chance,” said West. “Protection due a client, and that sort of thing.”

Doc said, “You sent a man to the hospital to get the man you thought was Hooten?”

“Sure! That was a pretty low trick you pulled, taking Hooten's place. Where is Hooten?”

“Dead!”

Top West became as alert as a cat at a mouse hole. “You do it?”

“No. He chased a subway train. He caught it.”

Top West said, “Then you killed him. You made him a wild man. If he hadn't been a wild man he wouldn't have been chasing subway trains. I know what he thought about subway trains; he thought they were big worms. He wanted to kill one.”

“You seem to know a great deal about Hooten,” Doc Savage said dryly. “I would call that an intimate detail.”

West nodded. “I should know. I've been guarding him−my men have−for nearly a month.”

“You were hired to do that?”

“That and some more.”

“What more?”

“Get dope on you. Make sure you are behind this. Find out all I could about you. Find out, for instance, that you have three aids in the three cities where other wild men have turned up.”

Doc Savage was silent for a while, his flake−gold eyes on West.

“Where,” asked the bronze man suddenly, “is Monk Mayfair?”

West frowned. “Eh? Why ask me?”

“Something happened to him.”

“Lots of things happen to you and your men, I've discovered,” said West dryly. “How does that put the monkey on my back?”

“Your man who went to the hospital,” Doc said, “knows who got Monk.”

The effect of that statement on Top West was like a bomb with a long fuse. At first, he only smiled skeptically. Then he jerked violently, bolted upright and seemed to turn to steel. “Why, that damned slug!” he blurted. “I wonder if you could be right. I didn't hire him, exactly. He was recommended to me by my client. Do you suppose− But, hell, I couldn't be sucked in like that!”

Doc said, “We might go talk to the fellow.”

West half closed his eyes for a while. “You know, you might have something there. I could have been whizzered on this thing.” He came to his feet. “You said it. Won't hurt to make talk with this guy of

mine−question mark.”

THERE was a policeman at the front door of the Jefferson Wilson Hotel. There were two squad cars parked in the street, and the black bulk of an ambulance. While Doc was surveying the situation, the uniformed ambulance attendants came out of the hotel, lit cigarettes, entered their vehicle and drove away. They had not taken away a patient.

Abba Cushing said, “I think I can find out what this is about.” She looked at Doc Savage. “At least, if the police get me, you can see what they've done and escape.”

She got out of the car and moved forward. She mixed with the gathering crowd, and they lost sight of her. She was gone for much longer than seemed reasonable, and they were about to conclude that she had been caught when she reappeared. She was pale.

“The hotel clerk is dead,” she said. “He tried to stop some men who rushed in and seized Ham Brooks, who was concealed in the cloakroom off the lobby. The man who seemed to be in charge of the affair was the man Ham was watching.” She turned to Top West. “Your operative.”

West digested this with the fierce dignity of a cat that had just been kicked.

“Listen, butterfly, what are you pulling?” West asked.

Abba pressed a hand to her cheek. “Butterfly! The man I met near Mr. Savage's restaurant called me that. The man who said he was Mr. Adam. You are−or were−Mr. Adam?”

“I was Mr. Adam,” West said fiercely. “Come on, butterfly, what are you pulling?”

“Pulling?”

“You are in on the game. Take off the mask and be one of the gang. You haven't got Savage, here, fooled, I'll bet you.”

“I don't,” said Abba, completely puzzled, “understand you.”

“Your old man hired me.”

“My−”

“Your old man. Your father. He's the guy who's been paying me that five grand a week.”

Abba reached out and gripped the car door. “He is?”

“The eminent Mr. Cushing,” said West grimly, “was so convinced that Doc Savage was guilty−so he said−that he said, 'Let's see that the F. B. I. knows about the strange coincidence of Savage and the wild men.' And so I tipped them off.” He eyed Doc Savage. “Did that make trouble for you?”

“Slightly,” Doc said.

“That,” said Abba, “is an understatement. We're on the lam right now. I rescued us by grabbing an F. B. I.

man's gun. I do not think they cared for that bit of Annie Oakley."

Top West turned back to Doc Savage. "Want a suggestion from the little man who fell in a hole? Let's go have words with Cushing."

"Let's do that," said Abba in a grave voice. "I'm sure dad is innocent."

"But you want to be *sure*, butterfly," West told her dryly. "Somebody has been pulling a red herring around in front of somebody. Let's see who."

Chapter XII. THE TERRIBLE THING

THE Cushing apartment, as Doc had noticed, had two entrances. One entered the front, off fashionable Park Avenue, where there was the doorman with the jackknife bow. The second entrance was to the rear, which gave into an old brownstone which was apparently a combined garage and servants' quarters. This had a connection by a private elevator to the lofty and elaborate quarters of the Cushings themselves, high up in the skyscraper apartment building that fronted Park Avenue.

Doc Savage, Top West and Abba Cushing entered by the servants' accommodations in the brownstone home and rode up in the small but excellent private elevator, seeing no servants on their way. The girl admitted herself with a key of her own and Abba remarked upon the absence of the help a little curiously. But the possibilities of what it might mean did not seem to dawn on her, although Doc Savage and West exchanged glances in the elevator, and they were very careful in leaving the lift, very cautious.

As soon as they were in the Cushing apartment itself, hardly had they crossed the doorstep, when Abba shrieked. It was a terrified cry she gave. She dashed forward, and sank beside the sprawled shape of a servant. She was there only a moment. Then she leaped erect, dashed away, running madly through the many rooms, and they could hear her crying, "Dad! Dad! What's happened?"

Doc went to the sprawled servant. He did the things a doctor would do on finding a man in that position.

"Dead?" asked West.

"Unconscious," Doc said.

"From what?"

"Head blow. Back of ear."

"How long?"

"Few minutes. More, possibly."

Abba Cushing came back. She was extremely pale, and completely speechless. She stood there looking at them, without words. Then she was seized with a nervous spell, during which she shook uncontrollably and drew her arms close to her and gripped the elbows with her hands as if she were very cold. The room was warm.

Doc Savage took hold of the unconscious man and administered harmless pain. This, the shock of the pain to

the fellow's nervous system, caused the man to groan and twist and finally to open his eyes. The man took a few moments to organize his wits.

When he spoke it was to Abba Cushing.

“Miss Abba,” he said, “something terrible occurred.”

She was wordless.

Doc said to the servant, “Please tell us about it. And hurry.”

“I am Spencer, the houseman,” the servant explained.

“Yes?”

“I am not very good at fighting,” Spencer added. “There were at least four of them, so they probably would have whipped me even if I had been a fighter. They came up by the servants' elevator, as if they knew the place. I heard them, recognizing that their footsteps were those of strangers. I am good at recognizing footsteps.”

He stopped to moisten his lips.

“Once, I had trouble with my eyes, and was blind. I was blind for almost a year. Blind people get to notice such things as footsteps. But that is beside the point. There were four intruders, and they took me. One used a thing I think you call a blackjack. I remember wondering if it would hurt my eyes again as he hit me.”

He tried to get up. The attempt was not successful. He must have been very dizzy, because he lay down again and gripped at the floor as if the room was turning over and over.

“They got Mr. Cushing. That is what they came for. They found him in the library. He fought them, but it was a brief fight. They came out, dragging Mr. Cushing.”

West said, “Look, Goldilocks, I thought they hit you with that thing you think was a blackjack.”

“They did.”

“You see and hear things when you're unconscious, eh?”

“Oh, no. I'm not organizing my story very well.” The servant sounded sick and apologetic. “The first blow did not knock me out. It stunned me. I could see and hear. I played possum, trying to get my wits back.”

He looked at Abba Cushing like a faithful dog.

“When they came out with Mr. Cushing, I got up and tried to help,” he told Abba. “I did my best. But they hit me again. I fell on the floor. But this time, too, I was not completely unconscious. I'll never forget what one of the men said then.”

“What,” asked West, “did he say?”

“He said, 'I wonder if this one will make as good a wild man as Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks,'“ the servant said.

“And then?”

“One of the men stood over me with what I think was another blackjack. And the next thing I knew, you aroused me.”

“That's all?” Doc asked.

“All,” said the servant miserably.

THEY left the Cushing apartment immediately. Top West approved of that. “The Federal men will come there looking for you and the girl,” he said. “Wonder they haven't been there already.”

Abba Cushing was still wordless, but her speechlessness seemed to come from preoccupation rather than shock, because she led the way to her car with a step that was firm enough.

West looked at Doc Savage as they settled in the machine. “You wouldn't take some help from me, maybe?”

“Might.”

“Apartment of mine. Nobody knows about it. I'm Mr. Dobie Johns at the place. Have kept it for years. A place to rest and a place to lay low when things get hot. By hot, I mean crooks. Crooks make it hot for me, now and then.” He grinned thinly. “I'm not all skunk.”

Doc said, “We might go there.”

West was pleased. So pleased that he glowed.

He turned to Abba. “Snap the trance, butterfly. You're better off than you were. We know now that your father isn't guilty.”

“I don't understand this,” Abba said slowly.

“It's simple, butterfly. There's a third gang mixed up in this. First, there is your father and his party who are trying to help their friends, the three wild men. Second, there is Doc Savage here. Third, the parties unknown−the polecats who are responsible for it.”

Abba asked, “Responsible for what? What are they doing?”

West considered the question. He grimaced.

“I still say it must be simple,” he said. “What we do now is find the answer.”

DOC SAVAGE sat at a telephone in West's apartment. Sitting there, he could see a vista of Bronx apartment fronts that were completely uninteresting except for the sameness of their wheat−yellow brick and the perfect uniformity in size of the windows, the sameness of the entrances, the alikeness of almost everything about the buildings.

Doc called his headquarters, and that made Top West's hair−West barked excitedly−stand on end.

Undisturbed by West's agitation, Doc did a thing that puzzled West. The bronze man whistled a code combination−long, pause, two shorts, pause, long, pause, three shorts−into the telephone mouthpiece.

This performance−it baffled West, until Doc explained it to him later−operated a sonic gadget which was connected to a combination relay similar to those used in commercial telegraph−relay offices. In simplified terms, the gimmick would connect the telephone line to any one of several gadgets in headquarters, depending on what combination was whistled into it. This particular combination hooked the telephone to a recording apparatus−the device recorded on a wire by magnetism−which would keep a faithful track of all reports telephoned to Doc Savage's office.

The recording device itself was equipped with a robot affair which, through the medium of a phonographic transcription, informed any caller that Doc Savage was absent−if he was absent, and had switched on the gimmick−but that any messages would be taken and recorded for the bronze man's future audition.

It was this recorded ledger of calls with which Doc Savage eventually got himself connected.

He sat there and listened.

What he heard was astounding.

Halfway through it, he beckoned Top West over and said, “You had better listen to this. It is the third report of the same nature.”

West came over, wonderingly, and leaned close to Doc Savage's ear. One of West's fists, resting on the arm of the bronze man's chair, was made of corded sinew and full firm bone under smooth tanned skin. The man smelled clean and vital, almost like a young animal. The bronze man's sense of smell noted that, for it was one of his faculties that had been developed by scientific training.

The telephone recorder said:

“This is Denzil Bains calling from Paris, France, and reporting on the matter of the wild men. Up until last night there were no wild men in Paris. But last night and today, conditions changed. A wild man was reported running down the Quai d'Orsay hunting, he said, a wild woman. Apparently, he did not mean a wild woman in the usually accepted sense of the word because he turned out to be genuinely convinced that he was a caveman. Moreover, he proved to be a prominent politician who was co−operative with the Nazis. At first it was believed something had happened to him because of his Nazi leanings. But another wild man cropped up, more prominent than the first, and this one had no Nazi leanings whatever. The contrary, quite. In fact he was not long ago released from a concentration camp in Germany.”

The rest of the report was garbled somewhat by wire trouble. Then it proved that the speaker was not Denzil Bains in person, but a friend who was relaying the information from a point in Mexico, where he had in some fashion received the information from Bains by radio. That concluded this report.

There was a pause while the recorder was passing through the preliminaries that preceded another long−distance call.

TOP WEST frowned at Doc Savage. “Who is Denzil Bains?” he wanted to know.

“An operative of mine, you might call him,” Doc Savage said.

Actually, Bains was an ex−criminal “graduate” from Docs unusual “college” in the upstate section.

West rubbed his jaw.

“You know, there're two ways of taking that report,” he said thoughtfully. “The way it was worded, it could be a report somebody was making to you about progress. That would mean you are behind this thing. Or it might have been what you want me to think it was, just a piece of information.”

Doc Savage's metallic features were remarkably sober. “It is worse than that.”

“Eh?”

“Unless all the signs are wrong,” Doc said grimly, “it is the beginning of a terrible thing.”

The recording apparatus made the telephone say: “This is Jack Sheffing, Buenos Aires. The wild men have started cropping up here. They are not calling them wild men. They are saying that a number of prominent politicians and business leaders were poisoned at a banquet with something that has affected their minds. But the symptoms are the same as those Ham Brooks reported as identifying the wild men. So far, there have been five reported cases in Buenos Aires. All very prominent. This is Jack Sheffing, concluding report. Seventy−threes.”

“Five!” Top West blurted. “Five! Great grief! Or did he say seventy−three?”

“Seventy−three,” Doc explained, “is the telegraphic abbreviation for good luck, good wishes, and so on.”

“Oh.” West was profoundly silent for a while. “Are there reports still coming in?”

“Yes,” Doc said. “That last one came in three hours ago.”

The message receipt time was audibly recorded on the apparatus in Doc's office by a gadget which put the time on the end of each conversation in much the same way that the receiving time is placed at the end of a telegraphic communication.

They listened to two more reports. One was from Madrid, Spain. The other was from Berlin. They were similar to the others, and the sameness was unnerving.

Sitting there with the reports coming off the recorder in such a weird fashion, they got the feeling of a momentous thing beginning small and growing, piling up, mounting and darkening in ominous portent, like the gathering and frowning increase of a storm, a small black thing at first, then growing to a culminating, dread menace.

West pulled in a deep, shaky breath.

“'The terrible thing,' as you called it, is just that.”

ABBA CUSHING had been fooling with the radio. She turned up the volume suddenly. “Listen to this,” she said.

It was a commercial program to which she was listening, and the announcer was breaking in to say, “Ladies and gentlemen, repeating this special announcement: The Federal Bureau of Investigation has issued a special request that any citizen knowing the whereabouts, or able to ascertain the whereabouts, of the man named Clark Savage, Jr.−more often called Doc Savage−please communicate with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the police, or your nearest radio station. This is an urgent matter. Doc Savage is not to be found in any of his usual haunts. Thank you. We now go back to the music of Ray Riser and his orchestra in the Blue Room of−”

Abba clicked off the radio.

“That,” said Top West, “is what is known as having the crutches kicked out from under you, one at a time. That F. B. I. is nobody to monkey with.”

Abba stared at him defiantly.

“I call it a challenge,” she snapped.

“A volley, more like it,” said West. “The kind they fire over your grave.”

“That is a salute to the departed,” Abba said.

“Same thing. We're going to be among the departed unless we have luck. They'll depart us for Alcatraz Island at the very least.” He turned to Doc Savage. “Unless you have an idea, Mr. Savage. Have you?”

Doc Savage had been contemplating the radio without particular concentration.

“There is a chance, but not a very great one, that any one group of men could seize both Monk and Ham, and still prevent Monk and Ham from getting some word to me,” the bronze man said, making what for him was a rather long and involved speech. “But the chances against such an eventuality are enormous, considering the amount of consideration and planning we have given to just such contingencies as this one.” He shook his head slowly. “There has been no report of any kind telephoned to headquarters from either of them.”

“Meaning?” asked West.

Doc said, “Go out and buy the late newspapers, will you? All of them. Better get both the early and late editions of all the newspapers you can.”

West stared at Doc. “I don't see what good that will do,” he said. “But from what I've heard of your methods, you don't do things without reasons.”

He got his hat and went outside. Abba Cushing said, “I wonder if that lad is going to scram.” She went to a window and watched. “He's getting newspapers all right, and he seems to be coming back,” she said later. “I'm surprised, I am. I can't seem to feel like trusting that fellow farther than I could push a battleship.”

West came in burdened with newspapers. “The newsstand owner thought I was nuts.” He dumped papers on a table.

Doc Savage first sought out the most complete listing of radio programs. He checked the news broadcasts with a pencil, glanced on the other side of the sheet to see what news was there, then handed the page to Abba Cushing.

“Try not to miss a single news broadcast,” he said. “In three hours, two stations broadcast the news simultaneously. By that time we should have a second radio.”

“The idea,” said Abba, “being to miss nothing. I get it.” She seated herself in front of the radio.

Doc then went through the newspaper methodically, using the pencil to check each item as he finished with it. Top West watched, and finally rubbed his jaw, making neither heads nor tails of it.

From time to time, Doc cut out an item and placed it on the table.

He clipped an article about the wild men from each paper, such items about the affair in foreign nations as the papers contained. When these were on the table, he read them.

A news broadcast came on, and he got up, moved over to the radio, and sat there concentrating on what the newscaster had to say.

Top West, hearing nothing interesting in the radio newscast, walked over to the table and shuffled through the clippings. There was one item, he discovered, that had no connection with the others.

“Blazes!” he said. “What's this one got to do with it?” He turned the clipping over and saw there was nothing on the back but a meaningless fragment of an advertisement.

A startling thing happened then. The radio news broadcaster mentioned the item which West held in his hand.

THE announcer said, “And here is a new one down in Virginia. At Cypress Chapel, Virginia, this afternoon, a waitress bought a hog. Now there are hogs and hogs in Virginia, but it seems this one talked. Half a dozen persons testify to hearing the hog explain to the waitress that he was afflicted with the spirit of Blackbeard the Pirate. The hog demanded that his owner sell him to the waitress for fifty cents. The startled owner did so. The waitress has her hog. The hog has lost his vocabulary. So now, everyone is wondering just what did happen. And we now know what happens to the spirits of radio announcers after they die. G'night, folks.”

Top West snorted. He looked at the newspaper item again. “Tripe!” he said.

He was startled when Doc Savage got up from the radio and took the news clipping out of his hands. He could tell that the bronze man was animated by excitement.

“The perpetrators of this thing have a headquarters,” Doc said.

“Sure, most everything has a headquarters,” said West dryly. “A body has its brain, an engine has its carburetor, a beehive has its queen, a boy has his girl.” He threw up his hands desperately. “Headquarters in this thing is wherever the spark plug of the thing is hanging his hat. So what has a talking hog got to do with it?”

“The talking hog,” Doc said, “sounds interesting.”

“It's a gag somebody pulled on that waitress,” West declared.

“Sounds more like a gag on the hog's owner,” put in Abba. “If he sold the animal for fifty cents.” She wheeled on Doc. “Mr. Savage, isn't this very dangerous, your going out into the streets or the highways or

however you're going to get down into Virginia?”

The bronze man was noncommittal on that point, but it hardly required an answer anyway. If the Federal Bureau of Investigation was seeking them it was no joke. No one had intimated it was a joke. Also, the city police, the State troopers and every town constable would be watching for them.

Doc asked, “Miss Cushing, have you a private airplane?”

“Yes.” She looked startled.

“Would it be possible for us to use that plane to get to Virginia?”

“Of course,” Abba said eagerly. “Gosh, we've got three planes. Dad has his big seaplane−his 'flying office,' he calls it−and a smaller and faster ship. I have my little cabin job.”

THEY used Top West's car for the drive out of the city northward and up the Hudson into the section of impressive estates. The car was a small coach, and Doc and Abba kept down on the rear floor boards during the early part of the drive.

The Cushing estate was somewhat startling, because it was more impressive in its grandeur than the city apartment. It fronted the river; that is, there was a half mile of lawn and a curving drive down to the river and to the boathouse and hangar which were there.

Abba became puzzled as she stared around the cavernous innards of the hangar.

“That's funny,” she said. “Dad's big plane is gone.”

Doc Savage asked quietly, “Is it a ship of sufficient size for transatlantic use?”

“Yes, dad often uses it for that,” Abba replied, apparently attaching no significance to the question. “Come on, we'll use my plane.”

She climbed into the ship, which was one of the better comfortable and fast jobs being turned out for private use, and was equipped with pontoons. “I think I have charts of the route to Virginia. I flew to Florida not long ago, and used the charts.”

Top West got into the plane, but not enthusiastically. He seemed to distrust either planes or female pilots; he did not say which.

“Five hundred miles to see about a talking hog,” he muttered. “This gets me.”

Chapter XIII. THE TALKING HOG

THE waitress in Cypress Chapel, Virginia, who had bought the talking hog for fifty cents was around twenty, looked remarkably healthy and had a sweet face. She probably did not weigh quite two hundred pounds.

She sat up on a cot in a pleasant parlor in a room over the restaurant−the place was a roadside restaurant,

operated by her parents−and touched the bandage around her head.

She said, “The man, the little one, wanted to kill me. I'm sure of that.”

Top West had a white face. He said, “Describe that guy again, will you, sister?”

“He was small. Not real little. Kind of grim. Dark face, mole on left cheek, twisted finger on right hand. And just covered with guns.”

West suddenly doubled a fist and struck it against a palm.

“That,” he said in a low, guttural voice, “is what I was afraid you said. That bird was−” He went silent, realizing he might say, and probably was saying, too much in front of the waitress.

The waitress demanded angrily, “You know the man? Then why aren't you telling this to the police? The man tried to kill me.”

Instantly, without batting an eye, Top West lied, “We are investigators, kid. Did you ever hear of the F. B. I.? We didn't intend to tell anybody, but I guess you'll have to know. So keep it to yourself. We're a secret, see. Just tell us what else you know, and don't worry any more about it.”

The waitress was satisfied.

“Well,” she said, after trying to think of some more, “that's all. The little man just stole my hog and tried to kill me.”

Doc Savage put in, “This man who struck you got the hog?”

“Yes. He grabbed the hog as he fled.” The waitress nodded vehemently.

Doc Savage stood up and moved toward the door. “By the way, what kind of a looking man sold you the hog in the first place?”

“Oh, the funniest−looking fellow,” said the girl quickly. “He looked just exactly like a big monkey, except that he looked kind of pleasant.”

The girl then indicated that she was not exactly dumb. “The homely man was a ventriloquist. He threw his voice and made the hog seem to talk. It was such a funny−looking little hog−with awful long legs and great big ears−that I didn't mind taking part in what I thought was a joke of some kind. The hog was worth fifty cents as a pet, so I bought him. There were some customers in the restaurant at the time, and one of them worked for a newspaper in Elizabeth City. He said an item about a talking hog would make a good gag story. So that's how the story got in all the newspapers and on the radio.”

Doc, with his manner casual, inquired, “Were there other men with this homely fellow when he sold you the hog?”

“Oh, yes; several men,” the waitress said. “They came in a car. They were waiting for Charlie Davis and having something to eat while they waited.”

“Who is Charlie Davis?”

“Oh, he rents boats to hunters. I think these men were hunters going into the swamp. They looked like the city hunters who go into the swamp a lot lately.”

Doc asked, “What do you mean by a lot of hunters lately?”

“Oh, within the last year, we have had a lot of hunters go into Dismal from here.”

Doc Savage opened the door. “Thank you,” he said.

They went downstairs and outside. There were no facilities for landing a plane near the restaurant. They had left their ship on the shore of a lake about a mile away, back from the highway.

The moment they were outside, Abba Cushing exclaimed, “The man who sold the hog was Monk Mayfair! I'll bet he sold the hog deliberately.”

Top West smiled grimly. “Sure, butterfly, that's it. Monk was with those guys, and the guys had guns in their pockets, and Monk knew they'd use them. The hog was Monk's pet pig, Habeas Corpus. Monk sold him to the waitress like that in hopes it would attract enough attention that Doc would hear about it. “

“Charlie Davis, the man who rents boats,” said Abba. “I wonder what he can tell us.”

CHARLIE DAVIS was a gangling chain of bones and gristle with a long mule face, one cheek of which had an enormous capacity for chewing tobacco. The first discovery they made about his character was that he was completely honest.

“No, I haven't guided any of them,” he said. “They rent my boats. They don't want me along. They pay me good, but not good enough but what I've got some curiosity.”

Doc Savage asked, “Have you done anything about your curiosity?”

Charlie Davis eyed the bronze man thoughtfully, measuring and weighing. Unexpectedly, Davis said, “I can tell you where they go. I can't promise you'll get in. But I think I can promise you'll have trouble.”

“Why'"”

“Swamp and man trouble,” Davis said. “That's what you'll have. The swamp trouble won't be bad. Not to the kind of a man I can see you are. The swamp is no place for a fool, but mostly it's what its name says it is−dismal. You can go in and not come out−men have. There're poisonous snakes and mosquitoes and bears and bobcats and quagmires and mud with no bottom. There's no signposts, and everything looks alike, and you can get lost with your eyes wide open.”

Davis paused and studied them with one eye narrowed.

“The man trouble might give you the real difficulty,” he said. “Again, it might not. There ain't no fences. There are just guards. I didn't see if the guards had guns, but maybe they did have. I don't know. I was scared. I didn't see nothing to scare me. But I was scared. And the guards, they looked afraid, too. Never take chances with a man who is afraid. An afraid man is a desperate man. Nature put that in man when she made him.”

“Then you take it these men go to a definite spot in the swamp?” Doc inquired.

“I take it that way, yes.”

“Are you an easily scared man?”

“I dunno. Only fools don't get scared, I figure. But I don't go around shaking in my boots as a rule.”

“But when you got near this place in the swamp, you shook in your boots?”

“Sure. Nearly shook 'em off. I ain't kidding, either.”

“Thank you,” Doc Savage said. “Could you give us a rough idea of where this happened?”

“I'll draw you a map. I won't go in with you.”

“A map will be good.”

Charlie Davis eyed Doc, somewhat strangely.

“I figure it will,” Davis said. “Because you're Doc Savage. Oh, I know you, all right. I know the F. B. I., the police, and maybe the army and navy are looking for you. But don't get excited about me passing the word along. Do you remember a man named James Crowell?”

“The one who was crippled?” Doc asked, after considering for a moment.

“Sure. They said he would never be able to walk. For ten years he wasn't able to walk. Then you did one of those operations on him. He was as poor as hell. That was all right with you. You said if he felt he owed you anything, to give it to some hospital when he got it. Well, he got it. And he built one of the best hospitals in Virginia; he's still adding to it to pay off what he owes you, he says. He has never seen you since.”

Charlie Davis grinned.

“Jimmie was my half brother,” he said. “If you want me to go in that swamp with you, I'll go.”

“Just make us a map,” Doc said. “And thanks.”

Chapter XIV. SINISTER IS A SWAMP

THE canoe was made of tin. Not exactly tin, but a sheet−metal alloy that, Charlie Davis had explained to them, had come from the float of a seaplane which had washed up on the coast a few weeks after the great war began. They had gotten the canoe from Davis. Its hide was tough; snags would not puncture it. It was light enough so that they could pick it up and carry it. There was an outboard motor, a powerful light thing which they were not now using.

Dismal Swamp was around them. It was late evening, the sun an unpleasant flush near the horizon. The water was like coffee around them, dankly unpleasant with its odor of decaying vegetation. Top West thrust his paddle into a solid−looking bank−they were carefully traversing a narrow creek−and the paddle sank in the solid−looking crust, was gripped and held by amazingly black mud. West jerked angrily, yanked the bow of

the canoe around into the bank. He swore, then looked at Abba and muttered an apology.

“I'd sell my part of this cheap,” he said.

He seemed depressed. For the last two miles, which had been for some time because they were traveling slowly, his spirits had appeared to drop fast.

Abba was in the stern, strangely quiet. She had drawn her coat tight and buttoned it, although it was far from cold. She had taken also to drumming her fingers nervously on the control handle of the outboard motor.

“I'm getting the jitters,” she remarked grimly.

Doc Savage's metallic features were without expression. He dug in his paddle, pulled the canoe ahead with powerful regular strokes.

After Doc had paddled awhile longer, his trilling sound came into existence. It was a weird sound in the dismal surroundings of muck and starved−looking trees. Roots of the trees were thrust down into the muck like fingers from which the flesh had been steamed.

West whirled nervously. “What the devil was that noise?”

Abba Cushing stared at him. “Say, you must be feeling the same way I am.”

Doc Savage said quietly, “The same way all of us are feeling.”

“Scared, you mean?”

“Yes.”

Abba frowned. “That's queer. I mean all three of us feeling that way. We haven't seen anything yet.”

The bronze man's mouth straightened slightly. He examined the map which Charlie Davis had drawn for them, glancing up and scrutinizing the surrounding swamp for landmarks. He thrust his paddle down into the bottom, brought up mud and examined it for color. It had a yellowish tinge that it had not had before. Charlie Davis had marked even such small things as this on the chart. According to the map they were not far from their destination, even closer to the point where they should desert the canoe.

“Miss Cushing,” Doc said unexpectedly.

She jerked up as if he had screamed out that there was danger. It took a moment for her to get control of herself. “Yes?” she said finally.

“You remember the yacht in the East River?” Doc asked.

“The one that blew up? Mr. Hooten's boat?” She shuddered violently. “Of course, I remember it.”

Doc asked, “Do you remember experiencing any unusual sensations whenever you were near the yacht?”

She was puzzled.

“Whenever I was near the yacht?” Then comprehension dawned. “Oh! Oh, yes, I do! It was this way! This

fear!" She became even more pale. "But I don't understand that! I felt afraid around the boat. So did my father and the others. Terrified!"

"Did you," inquired Doc Savage, "feel this fear on other occasions?"

Her answer was not immediate. She tied her hands into tight knots for a moment. Then she nodded slowly.

"Yes, several times," she said. "I remember now. That is, it was this same feeling. I don't know whether that exactly describes it."

Top West swung to face Doc Savage. "You interested in something that just occurred to me?" West asked.

"About this sensation?"

"Yeah. About it." West sounded like a man who did not believe in ghosts, but who had seen one. "I remember having it several times."

"What occasions?" Doc asked quickly.

"Several. Also assorted, I would say. I don't know whether I can pin down to anything definitely the same about them. Any one thread that would connect these occasions, I mean."

West hesitated, glancing at Abba Cushing. "I felt this fear at your father's place, mostly. But not always there. I'm not even sure it was mostly there. And I noticed that your father and the others were feeling it at the same time."

"I do not understand this," Abba said in growing terror.

AFTER that, the "fear" grew rapidly worse.

And it came to them that the feeling was not exactly fear. Not fear in the true sense of the word at all. But the difference was not apparent until the sensation was much stronger, and Doc Savage pointed out that there was a difference.

It grew on them like atmosphere in a dramatic production of a horror play, except that it would have taken a playwright of powerful capacity and actors of enormous scope and conviction to produce such a thing. There was no feeling of staged melodrama about it, however. It was extremely real.

It was not physical in the beginning. At least there was no consciousness of its being physical. There was no weakness about the knees and tightness, or trembling, in the arm muscles in the beginning. In the beginning there was the consciousness, and nothing else, of something terribly not right, not as it should be.

Only in the beginning was it not physical.

Later, there were bodily sensations that were recognizable and plainly noticeable. Muscular and nerve behavior of pronounced nature, even of violence. Misbehavior was a better description.

An example: Doc Savage stopped paddling and placed a hand on the canoe gunwale. He watched the hand and the arm. The arm started trembling, very slightly at first, then more visibly and uncontrollably. When he

began using the arm again the trembling stopped, but the sensation of weak helplessness was still in the limb.

Doc said, “This is not fear.”

Abba Cushing nodded. “I was thinking that. It is more of a sensation of complete helplessness.”

Doc added, “It is a symptom.”

“Symptom?” Both Abba and West stared at Doc. “Symptom of what?” Abba asked.

Top West laughed suddenly and somewhat wildly. “Now, this thing really takes its head off. Before it was nutty. Now, what does it become?”

“Perfectly explainable,” Doc said.

“Explainable? This thing? Wild, men? And the way we're feeling?”

Doc Savage studied the thicket of swamp growth on the left bank. He turned the canoe toward a spot where there did not seem to be an opening, and there was suddenly another creek. It would have been almost impossible to find without the map. The water was such a deep−coffee color that nothing could be told about its depth by sight, and little more by sounding with a paddle because the mud bottom was so soft.

Doc said, “Did you ever work around an X−ray machine?”

“No,” West said. “I've been X−rayed for broken bones and a bullet or two, though. Why?”

“Remember anything particular about the attendants who took the picture? About the way they worked?”

West frowned. “No. Except that they worked behind a shield of some kind.”

“Yes. Behind a lead shield.”

“You mean there's a connection here?” West demanded.

“Not exactly a connection. I mentioned it more as an illustration.”

“Illustration of what?”

“The X−rays will burn you internally,” Doc said. “They will spread over some distance. A very powerful X−ray machine will affect a photographic plate, for instance, at a distance of more than a block.”

“You mean there's something like that affecting us? Making us feel that way?”

Doc Savage changed the subject.

“We are approaching the spot which Charlie Davis marked on the chart,” he said. “And probably both of you should be warned.”

“Charlie Davis warned us,” reminded Abba Cushing.

“He neglected something,” Doc said.

“What?”

Doc said, “Charlie Davis neglected to inform us that he was lying, that probably he was in league with the men we have traced here.”

Top West's face went completely blank. “How . . . how−”

Doc said, “Charlie Davis said he had a half brother named James Crowell, on whom I once operated. I did operate on James Crowell who has since become very wealthy. But James Crowell did not have a half brother, something he doubtless believed I would not know, or would have forgotten, since the operation was some time ago.”

Abba exclaimed, “Then we're going into a trap?”

Doc made no answer.

A VOICE out of the swamp, so close that it sounded almost in the canoe with them, remarked, “Now what are you going to do about it? That's the question.”

Top west started to leap up and his hands sought a gun. There was an ear−splitting clatter, the gobble of a light machine gun, only a few feet away. West's mouth came open as if he wanted to scream and was trying and trying and couldn't. He seemed to be unhit. But he was as white as he could possibly be. He seemed paralyzed by terror, unable to move or even breathe. Finally, he toppled sidewise out of the canoe as stiffly as if made of wood, not bending a muscle. The water that was as dark as coffee splashed high, then closed over his body.

The concealed man's voice said, “Pull him out. I don't think he is hit.”

Doc hauled West to the surface. A boat hook came out of the undergrowth, fastened to the canoe gunwale, hauled the light craft to the shore.

“Step out,” ordered the voice. “You'll find the footing is solid. And there is plenty of ammunition left in this noise−maker.”

Doc got out, hauled West from the water. Abba stepped on shore. The man with the gun was West's operative, the one who had, early in the affair, raided the hospital to get the man he had thought would be the Dutch financier, Hooten. There were other men with him, some of them with faces vaguely familiar. Faces that were familiar, Doc decided, because the men had helped shadow him at one time or another. One visage belonged to a newsboy who had been at work in front of Doc's headquarters building a week before. Another was a waiter in the restaurant where Doc and his aids usually ate. Here in the swamp, they were not newsboy and waiter. They were coldly efficient, grimly determined.

Yet, somehow, they did not give the impression of being criminals.

“We have a party all ready for you,” one of them told Doc. “So get moving.”

Doc said quietly, “This thing began as a party for me.”

“I'd like to see you side−step *this* one,” the man said.

Doc studied the man. “You do not impress me as a criminal.”

“I hope I impress you, though,” the man said dryly. “Because this is one thing you are not going to stop.”

Chapter XV. MAN OF DESTINY

The island was small, perhaps an acre in area. It was not high, and there was nothing distinguishing about it, except the growth of swamp vegetation which covered it and the size of these trees. They were great spreading trees, monsters that ran to width and not height.

The trees were all the disguise the place needed. That, and the fact that the buildings below had green roofing of the common composition variety. The roofing was not a permanent type. Neither were the buildings. They were built temporarily, and there were barrels sitting around, open at the top. The tops were covered over with a sealing of fragile but air−tight stuff, similar to the fabric out of which light raincoats are made.

Their escort indicated the barrels.

“Gasoline,” he said, “for a quick fire. Some chemicals, also, for fumes to keep anyone away.”

Doc said, “For destruction of the place in case it is discovered?”

“That's right.”

Abba Cushing screamed then. The scream did not seem so much terror as the culmination of anxiety. She pointed.

It was a plane, a large one. It lay in a creek under overhanging branches of a great tree, with the open water on which it had landed distinguishable beyond. From what Abba had said before, the plane was easily identifiable as the one belonging to her father. The ship the elder Cushing called his “flying office.”

The chief of their guards looked at her, said, “Don't get excited. He's all right.”

The exhortation not to get excited was not soothing in view of what they saw next.

Monk and Ham. They were in a great room. There was one door to the room and it was surrounded by heavy copper rods that were a high−voltage protective device designed to electrocute, perhaps not fatally, but at least distressingly, anyone who entered when the juice was on.

Monk and Ham were near the door. In lieu of chairs, a log had been placed on the floor, and Monk and Ham sat on this. They wore only their trousers. They were not bound or confined in any way. A man stood near them with a long thin stick which had a very bright red balloon fastened to the end. The balloon was about two feet in diameter. There was no recognition in the face of either Monk or Ham. Blankness only, and the blankness was horrible.

Doc Savage said, “Monk! Ham!”

Monk looked up and made a hideous cackling noise that was without meaning, but completely repellent under the circumstances. Monk then started to get to his feet.

The man with the balloon on the thin stick stepped forward and menaced Monk with the balloon. Monk recoiled as if it was something terrible, shrank back on the log in fear.

The escort laughed. “Silly performance, isn't it? But we did enough experimenting to learn how they react under almost every circumstance. They are afraid of large objects which look mysterious to their almost completely paralyzed minds. That balloon on a stick is such an object to their minds. It intimidates them, whereas a gun or a hand grenade would not faze them at all, because it would impress no intrinsic menace on their minds.”

Top West said in horror, “They are wild men?”

“The word 'wild' is not a good one,” said the escort. “'Men with a paralyzed mentality' is more exact. Still, the world seized on the term 'wild men' to describe them, and it is somehow apt. At least, it has plenty of popular appeal.”

“What did it to them?” West asked.

“The same thing that is going to do it to you,” the man said frankly. “Which is this gimmick over here.”

THE “gimmick over there” looked about as simple as a television transmitter that had been wedded to the latest thing in linotype machines. At first glance it made about as much sense as that, unless one had a considerable knowledge of electricity and electrotherapy, which Doc Savage did. Then the gadget, without getting less complicated, showed that it had been carefully and purposefully put together in such an efficient manner that it would probably function well at doing whatever it was supposed to do.

Their escort said, “The electric hammer,” indicating the mechanism.

“Hammer?” Doc asked.

“Well, that's as good a word as any. Better than most. The gadget induces nervous shock of controlled nature.”

The expression that came on Doc Savage's features was one of extreme interest. “Controlled nervous shock,” he said. He added skeptically, “You do not mean that.”

“I sure do.”

“Nervous shock,” Doc Savage said, “has been to medical men something like an avalanche. The cause can be arranged, but after it is started, no one can tell where it will lead.”

“O. K. You call it one thing; we call it another. What's the difference? The ocean is still made of water.” The man shrugged. “Bring them over here, boys,” he told his aids. “Get them ready for the treatment.”

Getting them ready for the treatment−apparently this was going to be administered without the slightest delay and without explanations−consisted of stripping Doc and West of shirts and shoes. They did nothing to the girl.

Top West, looking puzzled, said, “What has become of that feeling−fear or whatever it was−that we felt awhile ago? It's gone now.”

“You mean that sensation you had while you were in the canoe and getting near the place?” the man asked.

Doc said, “Also the sensation Monk and I had while on board that yacht in the East River.”

Their captor nodded. “Sure. There was one of the machines on the yacht, too.”

“In operation?”

“Sure. You only get that feeling while the machine is working. It's got quite a field. You feel it even some distance away. Like an X−ray machine, the boss says. Or the experiments have shown, rather.”

“Boss?” Doc Savage said instantly.

Very carefully, without a change of expression, the man said, “Boss? Who said anything about a boss? Oh, just then you mean? I meant the guy who built the gadgets for me. He's boss of the machine shop. We all call him boss.”

“That,” Doc Savage said, “is a waste of breath.”

“What is?”

“Your declaration that there is no boss.”

“But there is. I just told you. In the machine shop−”

Doc Savage said quietly, “The owner of the brains behind this affair has been evident to me for some time. I think he knew it, or suspected that I would soon find out. So he arranged this chase here to at least get me out of my city hunting grounds into those here in the swamp, with which he figured he was more familiar.”

The other man stood there with narrow eyes for a while. He was impressed. Also thinking. He grunted audibly, then said, “Keep him here, you men. I guess he knows more than we figured.”

The man went away and was gone for a few minutes. Then he came back and said, not particularly to Doc Savage, but in a more general tone, “The vote seems to be that we no longer carry on the pretense.” He grinned at Top West. “How about it, chief?”

“I don't see any sense in it either,” West said.

The men who had been holding West released him and he stepped forward.

West pulled down his sleeves with an unconscious return to neatness. He put on authority as a man puts on a coat.

“I don't see how I sucked you in,” he told Doc Savage. “You know, you had me scared stiff half the time.”

ABBA CUSHING looked at Top West with white, wordless rage. But not with surprise. She was not surprised, her manner showed. She had at no time been fully convinced that West was of lamblike innocence, so she was not particularly astounded now.

West added proudly, “I did a good job of acting, don't you think? Back there in the swamp, just before I got you into the trap, I mean. I thought maybe I was overdoing it. I am not an actor, you know.”

Doc Savage made no comment.

The bronze man's silence seemed to irritate West, who was warming up to the job of showing that he was the intellect behind the affair.

“It was slick! Might as well admit it!” West snapped.

“The acting?”

“Yes.”

“The acting,” Doc said, “would have been a poor job for any vaudeville ham.”

West darkened. “Yeah?”

“If the rest of the scheme demands no more intelligence than that,” Doc Savage added, “there is probably nothing to worry about. The thing will stub its own toe and finish itself.”

West became more indignant.

Abba Cushing watched the expression on West's face, then warned Doc Savage, “The man is an egoist. You are kicking him where it hurts.”

West snorted. “Hurt me? Egoist, am I? I'll show you something, you two!” He jerked his head angrily. “Come on into another room, here.”

Doc Savage and Abba Cushing, surrounded by guns, walked through a long tunnel affair that was simply a roof and walls over a path connecting to another building, which was larger than the first. It was a hive of bustling activity.

“Oh, what on earth!” Abba exclaimed. “It looks like a newspaper office!”

A news−association central−bureau office would be a more fitting description. A relay office into which came news reports by wire, telephone, radio and teletype, from all parts of the world.

Or the headquarters of a general in command.

That was it.

A man, a young man with an intelligent face, came up and asked West, “Would you care for the reports from Rome, sir?”

West nodded, and was handed a sheet which bore typing. He scanned this, hesitated, then handed it to Doc Savage.

The typing read:

GENERAL GIO MARTINI A VICTIM AT HOUR THIRTEEN NAUGHT FOUR STOP ONLY OTHER

MAN CAPABLE ORGANIZING STABLE GOVERNMENT CARLON PINELLA WILL BE VICTIM BEFORE NIGHT OVER.

PARKER ROME

“Gives you some idea,” West said.

Doc told him, “I take it that this means that you have made more wild men?”

“Yes. But you shouldn't persist in calling them wild men. That isn't what they are.”

“Then you have more of the machines? One in Rome, for instance.”

“We have,” said west, “more then fifty of them.” He waved suddenly to indicate the young men at work in the room. “This is the nerve center of our organization. From here we keep in contact with our men throughout the world.”

Doc Savage had surmised as much. The thing was very complete, with a dozen sets of radio−short−wave apparatus, probably using highly developed beam−projection aërials so that they would not easily be discovered by direction finders.

“A large organization,” Doc said dryly.

“Very complete,” West agreed.

“Took brains,” Doc said, “to get it together.”

“Thanks.”

“Took money, too. Lots of money.”

“Sure!”

“More of both,” Doc said, “than most people would be willing to throw away.”

“It's not,” said West, “thrown away.”

“The stake must be large,” Doc said.

“It is.”

“A lot of money, probably.”

West shook his head quickly. “You know better than that. You said once we didn't look like crooks. You were right. There isn't enough money in the world to get us into this thing we're in.”

“More money, and more brains,” Doc said, “than you have.”

West became tense. “Yeah?”

Doc said, “You are not behind it, West. You are just a fellow disciple in the thing, like these others here.”

West swallowed. He seemed wordless.

Doc added, “You might as well produce Cushing, who is master−minding it.”

Raymond E. Cushing, dignified and venerable, composed, fully in command of himself and the situation, came from behind a nearby screen where he had been listening.

“This is too bad,” he told Doc Savage. “I feel it is my destiny to see this thing through to the end. That necessarily means you will not be permitted to stand in our way, to use a somewhat hackneyed way of putting it.”

Chapter XVI. THE WILDEST MAN

ABBA CUSHING tried to leave then. Not to escape; that was not in her mind. What she wanted was to get out of sight of her father, to get away from the awful discovery that had confronted her.

Cushing made a quick gesture, said, “Abba, please! Come back here.” And when she did not stop he told one of his men, “Get her. Bring her here.”

The girl came back without resistance.

Cushing said, “Abba, you should have known this earlier. I thought, at times, that you suspected it. And on a number of occasions I was on the verge of telling you everything about it.”

Abba said nothing. She was as pale as she would probably get. The bottom had gone out of things.

Cushing said, “Abba, this is a tremendous thing. It is destiny. It is a solution−a quick and somewhat violent one, but is worth that cost−of the world's problems.”

His daughter seemed to have no words.

Whirling on Doc Savage, Cushing said, “This is largely your fault, damn it!”

Doc seemed surprised. “My fault? In what way?”

“The first three subjects of our experiments,” Cushing said, “were Irving Eenie, R. T. Hooten and Miner Thomas. These men were selected for two reasons. First, their characters were not as lily−white as the world believed. Second, each was a representative type.”

Doc Savage put in, “What do you mean by representative type?”

“Psychological types.”

“Yes?”

Cushing said, “A financial leader, a political leader, and a religious or sociological−reform leader. You noticed I picked, in the beginning, one of these types in each country for my experiments.”

Doc Savage was an interested listener. “What would making wild men out of three different types of men

prove?”

“Nothing initially,” said Cushing, “except that all types were subject to mental unbalancing by my apparatus.” He smiled slightly. “There was to be more to the experiments. But, unfortunately, you stuck your big nose into it.”

“What else was there to be to the experiments?”

“Further treatment with the machines,” Cushing explained, “has a most desirable result. The will power of the victim is weakened to such a point that he will take a suggestion and act upon it.”

Doc Savage made a quick, somewhat angry gesture. “That is impossible. Do not try to tell me otherwise.”

Cushing frowned at him. Then Cushing shrugged. “Oh, all right. It was simpler than that.”

“How simple?”

“Victims of the machine recover,” Cushing snapped, “but they are like men who have had a nervous breakdown. They are easily terrified. Threat of further exposure to the machine easily persuades them to do what you wish.”

“You were, then, going to weaken these men, then terrorize them into doing what you wished?”

Cushing was becoming irritated. “Put in unkind words, that is it.” He scowled at Doc. “Furthermore, I am doing just that.”

HE was doing it, too. Just how thoroughly, Doc Savage realized when two more young men from the radio equipment interrupted with more messages. Cushing, with a grim kind of glee, ordered the messages read aloud. One was from Egypt, and another from Japan.

Cushing had selected the leading nations of the world, probably not more than a dozen of them−twelve nations could swing the rest of the world to their way of thinking, as had been proved by war−and was systematically getting control of their political, business and sociological leaders. The man was a genius. He was not, in the greedy sense of the word, a crook.

Doc Savage, watching the man revel in the growing success of his fantastic scheme, turned over in his mind what he knew about Cushing. The man was extremely wealthy, a self−made man. Cushing was a man who had been fabulously clever in the amassing of money, and also very lucky. He had acquired wealth at a very early age. Cushing had genius, undoubtedly.

He was also a man of paradoxes. There had been an interval in his life, shortly after he became wealthy, when he had given tremendous sums to charity and to worth−while enterprises. He had squandered millions, not all of which had done good. Then he had suddenly drawn the purse strings tight and, so far as anyone knew, had never given another cent to charity.

Shortly after that was the period Ham Brooks had mentioned in his investigation of Cushing. The revolution in Central America. The revolt laid at the door of Cushing's sugar company. Cushing had placed supposedly broad−minded Central American politicians at the head of the new government. These had turned greedy and became as bad, or worse, than any other set of politicians.

The revolution indicated a quirk in Cushing's character.

The man thought he had a destiny to reform the world.

This, then, was another reform by violence on a broad scale.

Doc said, “Why did you frame me, Cushing?”

“You mean select my subjects for experiments in London and South Africa and Portugal, where your aids were at the time?” Cushing asked.

“Yes.”

Cushing frowned. “That was an unfortunate necessity. For two reasons. First, you were sure to investigate this affair of the−shall we call them 'wild men?'−when it came to light. You would investigate it because it was up your alley. You like such things. You specialize in them. That is true, is it not?”

“Yes. The second reason?”

“A group of my wealthy friends,” said Cushing, “insisted on calling you in when Hooten was made a victim of the machine. To prevent that I had to make them think you were the one doing the harm.”

“I see.”

Cushing grimaced. “Unfortunately, it worked too well. The friends began insisting that we seize you and make you repair the damage.”

Doc Savage was silent a moment. “That,” he said finally, “explains all but the blowing up of the yacht.”

“I had one of the machines on the yacht,” Cushing said. “It had to be destroyed.”

“The idea,” Doc suggested, “wasn't to destroy me also?”

Cushing became white. “I am not a murderer.”

“You are something.” Doc studied him. “You are something rather fiendish. The best thing for you to do would be to take a treatment from one of your own machines.”

Cushing was grimly silent.

“Who,” asked Doc, “invented the gadget?”

Cushing said, “One of my employees. An old fellow. He came to me with the thing. I saw its possibilities. So did he. He is working with me.”

“Reform,” Doc said, “is the object of the whole thing, I presume.”

“Exactly.”

“It is terribly wrong.”

“Reform is never wrong,” Cushing snapped.

The bronze man shook his head slowly. “It is not a thing for one man to take into his hands and try to force by violence upon the rest of the world. That has been proven. Many of the great wars of our day and the past have grown out of that sort of thing. Reform, any reform that is lasting and genuine, must result from the slow development, the molding of the minds and the way of life, of all the people as a whole.”

“That,” said Cushing, “is an opinion.”

Doc said nothing.

Cushing said, “Look. You've got an out on this. You can either help me or be neutral.

“No.”

Cushing beckoned his men. “Put him in the machine!” he said.

THE gadget had a table. A tilting table covered with leather, like the tables under X−ray machines in large hospitals. In fact it was a table taken from such a device, as indicated by the name plate of the manufacturer.

The tubes above the contrivance were not like X−ray tubes, not in shape, although they were metallic after the fashion of modern X−ray tubes. They were larger, and there was a multiple battery of them, apparently two tubes of each variety, arranged in the shape of an arching canopy. There were also, in addition to the tubes, large electromagnets, evidently for the bending and deforming of emanations from the tubes. The mechanical part of the apparatus seemed to consist of a shutter affair, similar to a heavy Venetian blind, operated by a motor so that it could be opened and closed at high speed many times a second.

Doc put up his first real fight when they were strapping him on the table. The fight was not successful. He did succeed in doubling himself into a knot and stumbling back a pace or two until, almost covered by foes, he was forcibly returned to the table and strapped there.

As soon as they had him on the table, one of the men wrenched his coat back in place−a button was now missing from the coat−and forced him flat on the table. The straps were put in place.

There was nothing dramatic. No pseudoscientific mumbo jumbo of flashing fire and shooting sparks. The apparatus, at first, was noiseless. Later, there was a brisk rattling as the shutters opened and closed. They were a kind of shield, apparently, and their object was to shut off the emanations like the shutter in a motion−picture projector to enhance their shocking effect. An interrupter.

The treatment lasted about five minutes, which was a long time under the circumstances.

Doc Savage was completely limp when they lifted him from the table. They put him in a chair. Then they stood around, waiting.

In a puzzled voice Cushing said, “His two men, Monk and Ham, were also unconscious when taken from the machine. That's strange. None of the others were that way.”

Monk and Ham sat on their log, guarded by the man with the silly−looking balloon on a stick. They did not say or do anything, except to look idiotic.

Doc Savage sat up finally. That was after fully twenty minutes. He sat without moving in the chair for another five minutes.

Then Doc looked at Monk and Ham.

He said, “This foolishness has gone about far enough, do you not think?”

Monk and Ham began looking perfectly sane. They got off the log.

“I think it has,” Monk said. “And right now I'm the wildest man around here. I'm itching for action.”

SURPRISE has the qualities of an opiate, if sudden. And, too, there was the effect of the machine, its unnerving emanation which, although the machine had been shut off some time, was still productive of some aftermath which manifested itself in the form of uncertainty. The fact that Doc Savage and his aids had not been affected by the apparatus, which obviously they hadn't, was dumfounding.

Doc Savage went for Cushing. Getting his hands on the man was easy. He not only got Cushing, he was able to start for the door with the man.

“Get away!” he shouted to Abba, who had stood pale and distraught through all of it. “Get to the plane!”

The other men, the men who were Cushing's helpers in his gigantic and complex scheme to force some kind of reform on the world's political leaders, tried to save the situation. They rushed Doc.

Monk Mayfair began howling. He liked to howl when he fought. His best fights were his most noisy ones, he always claimed. The bellowing uproar he could make was something out of prehistoric times.

Monk hit two men and left them flat. He went on and tangled with a third fellow who was half Monk's size, but who in a twinkling had Monk on the floor. Immensely surprised, Monk began trying to get his hands or feet, preferably both, on the little man. The little man was an experienced atom.

Ham got a chair. The same one Doc had been occupying. Lifting the chair, Ham made for a man who had gotten the idea, a good idea under the conditions, of switching on the machine.

Ham smashed the chair into the apparatus. The result was only slightly less hell than a battle. Sparks and electric fire a yard long came out of the gadget. Two tubes exploded like shotguns and hurled out some kind of vapor that was as hard on the lungs as tear gas, but which did not affect the eyes. Simultaneously, there was a loud explosion in some other building, evidently caused by the short circuit.

Doc Savage was fighting now. He was armed with nothing but his fists, and handicapped by the necessity of hanging on to Cushing. The latter speedily became impossible. The foes were too many.

Abba Cushing tried to help Doc. It must have been a hard decision for her. It was a choice between her father and the bronze man. Probably she saw it also as a choice between the right or wrong of what her father was trying to do and the bronze man's principles. She tried to help. She did not do much good.

Men got between Doc Savage and Cushing. They separated them.

Ham yelled, “Doc, we've got to get out!”

That was true. If they could get out and reach the plane themselves they would be fortunate. Cushing had been taken away from them. So had Abba. Two men had grabbed the girl.

Doc said, “Break for the plane.”

He added something else, in a much louder voice. A voice that everyone heard, even above the noise of the fight.

“Cushing!” Doc shouted. “We have protection against your brain−shocking apparatus! You saw that! It did not affect us!”

They fought their way out and to the plane. There was no fight to it after they were out of the building. It was a race, with no one in their path.

The plane, the big private ship belonging to Cushing, was tied with two lines which terminated at the cabin cleats, where they could easily be cast off. The ship was already sitting with its nose toward the large lake in the swamp where it had landed.

Doc started one of the plane's motors. The other would not fire. It was cold. The one motor gave him trouble, but he managed to get the plane down the creek to the lake. He let the plane float there, making no effort to take off.

“Talk about bum fights,” Monk muttered. “That was one. We got licked, what I mean. It makes me wilder than I was.”

Ham stared at the water, then at Doc Savage.

“Doc, why aren't we taking off?” he demanded. “We had better get away from here and take a fresh start at getting this thing stopped.”

Doc Savage made no effort to put the plane in the air.

“There is a good chance,” he said, “that it is already stopped.”

Ham blinked doubtfully. “You mean that Cushing will think there is a protection against his gadget? That's fine if he thinks there is. But suppose he finds out the truth.”

“There is no one,” Doc reminded, “to tell him that bit of truth.”

WHEN Cushing came out to the plane he came alone in a small boat, his shoulders slumped and rowing listlessly. He was not armed; he held up his hands to show them this. “I want to come aboard,” he said.

“This a surrender?” Doc asked.

Cushing climbed into the plane. “What can I do? I'm licked. The whole success of my plan depended on there not being any protection against the apparatus.”

“It did not affect us,” Doc said.

Cushing was a collapsed man. “Yes, and that's why I am here. I'm licked. All you have to do is cable men you might figure would be my victims, and tell them to take cover until you could get whatever you used into their hands. Then I couldn't do a thing to them.”

“That,” Doc told him, “is logical.”

Cushing leaned back and closed his eyes. “I've told my men how it stands. They agree with me. But they are like I am in not understanding how you found a preventative so quickly. We experimented for months and we found no protection against the device. Yet, you discovered one almost immediately.”

Doc Savage looked at the man thoughtfully. “How about your convictions as to the right and wrong of what you were doing? Do they still stand?”

Cushing gathered enough spirit to compress his lips. “I'm afraid they still do.”

“In that case,” Doc said, “we will have to send you to a certain institution which we maintain for men whose ideas are injurious to society. At this place, you will undergo an operation which will wipe out your past, after which you will be trained to think differently.”

Cushing held his head in his hands for a while. The result of his thoughts was to bring forth an admission. “I think I would almost welcome that,” he muttered. “I've been a reformer the wrong way. I never seem to be able to think of a damned way of doing it except by violence.”

MONK went back to the island alone. That was in case there should, after all, prove to be a trap, which there wasn't. He made sure the apparatus was demolished. He also found his hog, which he considered almost equally important.

He reported back to the plane, “I saw a bunch of radio messages they were sending to their organization. They are calling off the whole thing.”

Ham got Monk aside, asked, “You figure we better tell Cushing why the machine didn't effect us?”

“Why not? It was that pill, shaped like a button, Doc gave us. Why not tell him?”

Ham stared at Monk incredulously. “Don't you know what the pill was? And you a chemist?”

Monk scowled. “You casting reflections on my mentality again?”

Ham burst into laughter.

“Your mentality casts a reflection all its own,” he said. “Wait until you find out what those button pills were made out of.”

THAT was all the satisfaction Monk got until they reached New York and everything was satisfactorily settled.

Monk came into headquarters wearing a strange expression on his homely face.

“Is Doc in?” he demanded.

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

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

Ham stared. “That sounds crazy. Is that mentality of yours reflecting again?”

Monk scowled.

“Or maybe those button pills are taking effect on you again,” Ham added. “They were just a strong hypnotic, you know. Stuff that the doctors give patients to quiet their nerves. The pill was just a heck of a strong dose that numbed our minds until Cushing's apparatus wouldn't affect us. Served the same effect as an anaesthetic before an operation; only this was on our nervous systems, not our bodies.”

“Then there wasn't any preventative. It was a trick?”

“Yes.”

“I wish,” Monk said, “that Doc was here.”

“Why?”

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

The mystery of “The Fiery Menace” will be published in Doc Savage Magazine as a book−length novel next month.

THE END