

The Polar Treasure

Doc Savage, #4

by Lester Dent, 1904-1959

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Menaced by the strange “clicking danger”, Doc Savage and his fabulous 5-man army take a desperate journey on a polar submarine in search of a missing ocean liner and a dazzling treasure. Their only clue is a map tattooed on the back of a blind violinist. Awaiting them at their destination is the most terrible killer the Arctic has ever known.

Chapter I

The Bronze Nemesis.

Something terrible impended.

This was evident from the furtive manner of the small, flat-chested man who cowered in the shadows. He quaked like a terrified rabbit at each strange sound.

Once a cop came along the alley-like side-street, slapping his big feet heartily on the walk, twiddling his nightstick, and whistling *Yankee Doodle*. The prowler crawled under a parked car and lay there until the happy cop passed.

Nearby loomed the enormous bulk of the New York Concert Hall. From the stage door on the side-street crept strains of a music so beautiful that each note seemed to grasp the heart with exquisite fingers.

A violin!

It was a Stradivarius violin. One of the most perfect in the World. It had cost its player \$60,000.

The player was a blind man!

He was Victor Vail. Many music lovers maintained him to be the greatest living master of the violin. He ordinarily got hundreds-of-dollars for rendering an hour of violin music before an audience. Tonight, however, he played for charity and got nothing.

The flat-chested man—cowering and fearful—knew little of Victor Vail. He only knew the music affected him strangely. Once it made him think of how his poor mother had sobbed that first time he went to jail long years ago. He nearly burst into tears.

Then he got hold of emotions.

„Yer getting‘ goofy!“ he sneered at himself. „Snap out of it. Ya got a job to do!“

* * * * *

Soon afterward, a taxi wheeling into the side-street. It looked like any other New York taxi. But the driver had his coat collar turned up and his cap yanked low. Little of his face could be seen.

The cab halted. The small man scuttled out to it.

„Ya ready for de job?“ he whined.

„All set,“ replied the cab driver. He had a very coarse voice. It was as though a hoarse bullfrog sat in the taxi. „Go ahead with your part, matey.“

The flat-chested man squirmed uneasily. „Is dis guy gonna be croaked?“ he muttered anxiously.

„Don‘t worry about that end of it!“ snarled the driver. „We‘re handlin‘ that. Keelhaul me if we ain‘t!“

„I know. But I ain‘t so hot about getting‘ mixed up in a croakin‘...“

A thumping growl came out of the cab.

„Pipe down! You‘re already shipped with this crew, matey! Lay to an‘ do your bit of the dirty work!“

Now that the man in the taxi spoke excitedly, one thing about his speech was even more noticeable. He had been a seafaring man in the past. His speech was sprinkled with sailor lingo.

The small man shuffled away from the cab. He entered the stage door of the concert auditorium.

Victor Vail had finished his violin playing. The audience was applauding. The hand-clapping was tremendous. It sounded like the roar of Niagara Falls transferred to the vast hall.

The flat-chested man loitered backstage. Applause from the delighted audience continued many minutes. It irked the small man.

„De saps!“ he sneered. „You‘d t‘ink Sharkey had just kayoed Schmeling or somethin‘!“

After a time, Victor Vail came to his dressing room. The blind maestro was surrounded by a worshipful group of great singers and musicians.

But the loitering man shouldered through them. His shoving hands—none too clean—soiled the costly gowns of operatic prima donnas. But he didn‘t care.

„Victor Vail!“ he called loudly. „I got a message for yer from Ben O‘Gard!“

The name of *Ben O‘Gard* had a marked effect on Victor Vail. He brought up sharply. A smile lighted his artistic features.

Victor Vail was tall and distinguished. He had hair as white as cotton and almost as fine. His formal dress was immaculate.

His eyes did not seem like a blind man’s until an observer noticed that it made no difference to Victor Vail whether they were open or shut.

„Yes!“ he cried delightedly. „What is the message from Ben O‘Gard?“

The intruder eyed the persons near by.

„It’s kinda private,“ he suggested.

„Then you shall speak to me alone.“

Victor Vail waved his admirers back. He led the way to his dressing room with only a hand thrust out before him showing he was blind.

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The flat-chested man entered first. Victor Vail followed, closing the door. He stood with his back to the panel a moment. His thoughts seemed delving into his past.

„Ben O‘Gard!“ he murmured reverently. „I have not hear that name for 15 years! I have often sought to find him. I owe my life to Ben O‘Gard. And now that worldly success has come to me, I would like to show my gratitude to my benefactor. Tell me, where is Ben O‘Gard?“

„In de street outside,“ said the flat-chested man, trembling a little. „He wants ter chin with yer.“

„Ben O‘Gard is outside? And he wishes to talk to me?“

Victor Vail whipped the dressing-room door open. „Take me to my friend! Quickly!“

The dirty man guided the blind master of the violin to the stage door.

Just before he reached the door, something happened which made the guide feel as if a bucket of ice water had been poured on him.

He saw the Bronze Man!

The bronze man presented a startling figure. He did not look like a giant until it was noticed that some fairly husky men near him seemed puny, pale specimens in comparison. The big Bronze Man was so well put together that the impression was not of size but of power. The bulk of his mighty form was forgotten in the smooth symmetry of a build incredibly powerful. His dress was quiet and immaculate but expensive.

The bronze of this remarkable man’s hair was a little darker than the bronze of his features. The hair was straight and lay down smoothly now.

Most striking of all were the eyes. They glittered like pools of flake-gold as backstage lights played on them. They seemed to exert a hypnotic influence—a quality that would make the most rash individual hesitate.

So pronounced was the strange power of those golden eyes that the flat-chested man shivered and looked away. Chill perspiration oozed out of his sallow skin. He glanced back uneasily ... saw the weird golden eyes still upon him ... and felt an overpowering impulse to run and hide in the darkest dive of the vast city.

He was very glad to get into the outer darkness!

* * * * *

„Where is Ben O’Gard?“ Victor Vail asked eagerly.

„Aw, hold yer ponies!“ snarled the flat-chested fellow. „I’m leadin’ yer to ‘im, ain’t I?“

He was suddenly very worried about the Bronze Man. The strange golden eyes seemed still boring into his back. He turned his head to make sure this wasn’t so.

He wondered who the bronze giant was. He couldn’t be a detective. No „dick“ could ever wear dress clothes as immaculately as this astounding man had worn them.

„Gosh!“ whimpered the rat. „Just lookin’ at dem gold glims made me feel like I’d been kicked in de belt! What’s de matter wit’ me, anyhow?“

He didn’t know it, but he wasn’t the first man who had quailed before those weird golden eyes.

„Is it far to where Ben O’Gard waits?“ Victor Vail inquired anxiously.

„Yer about dere.“

They came abreast of a darkened doorway. Out in the street, a taxicab had been keeping even with them. This cab held the sinister seafaring man who had sent the small man into the concert hall after Victor Vail.

The musician’s guide looked into the murky door. He made sure several men lurked there. He grasped Victor Vail’s arm.

„Yer dere now!“ he snarled.

Then he smashed a fist against Victor Vail’s jaw.

Simultaneously, the gloomy doorway spouted the men that it concealed. They pounced upon the famed blind violinist.

Victor Vail fell heavily from the traitorous guide’s fist blow. But the sightless musician was more of a man than his assailants had expected! Though he could not get to his feet, he fought from his clumsy position on the sidewalk.

He broke the nose of one attacker with a lucky kick. His hands found the wrist of another. They were artistic hands—graceful and long and very powerful! He twisted the wrist in his grasp.

The man whose arm he held let out a shriek. It blared like a siren over the rumble of New York night traffic. The fellow spun madly to keep his arm from breaking.

The murk of the street aided the blind man just as it hampered his assailants. The world he lived in was always black.

Blows whistled, thudded. Men hissed, cursed, yelped, and groaned. Bodies fell noisily. Laboring feet scuffed the walk.

„Lay aboard ‘im, mateys!“ howled the seafaring man from his cab. „Make ‘im fast with a line! And load ‘im aboard this landgoin’ scow! Sink ‘im with a bullet if you gotta! Keelhaul ‘im!“

A bullet wasn’t necessary, though. A clubbed pistol reduced the fighting Victor Vail to quivering helplessness. A thin rope looped clumsily about his wrists and ankles. After the fashion of city dwellers, the men were slow with the knots.

„Throw ‘im aboard!“ shouted the seafarer in the cab. „Let a swab who knows knots make ‘im shipshape!“

The gang lifted Victor Vail and bore him toward the taxi.

And then the lightning struck them!

* * * * *

The *lightning* was the mighty Bronze Man! His coming was so swift and soundless that it seemed like magic.

Not one of blind Victor Vail's attackers saw the giant metallic figure arrive. They knew nothing of its presence until they felt its terrible strength!

Then it was as though a tornado of hard steel had struck them! Chins collapsed like eggshells. Arms were plucked from sockets and left dangling like strings.

The men screamed and cursed. Two flew out of the melee—unconscious and not knowing what had vanquished them. A third dropped with his whole lower face awfully out-of-shape. And he, too, didn't know what had hit him.

Others struck feverishly at the Herculean bronze form only to have their fists chop empty air. One man found his ankles trapped as in a monster vise of metal. He was lifted. His body swung in a terrific circle, mowing down his fellows like a scythe.

„Sink 'im, mateys!“ shrilled the seafaring man in the cab. „Scuttle 'im! Use your guns...“

A piercing shriek from one of his hirelings drowned out the sailor's urgings. The unfortunate one had been enclosed in banding bronze arms. The fearsome arms tightened. The man's ribs breaking made a sound as of an apple crate run over by a truck. The fellow fell to the walk as though dead when released.

Incredible as it seemed, only 2 of Victor Vail's assailants remained in anything-but-incapacitated conditions. The sailorman in the taxi was unhurt and one villain was upright on the walk. Even an onlooker who had seen that flashing battle with his own eyes would have doubted his senses—such superhuman strength and agility had the bronze giant displayed.

The man upright on the walk abruptly spun end-over-end for the taxi. He had been propelled by what for the Bronze Man was apparently but a gentle shove. Yet he caved in the rear door of the cab like a projectile would!

The seafaring hack driver got scared.

„Well, keelhaul me!“ he choked.

He slammed the car in gear. He let out the clutch. The car wrenched in motion.

The sailor saw the Bronze Man flash toward him. The metallic Nemesis of a figure suddenly looked as big as a battleship to the seafaring man. And twice as dangerous! The fleeing sailor clawed out a spike-snouted pistol of foreign make. He fired.

The bullet did nothing but break the plate-glass window in a shoe shop. But the Bronze Giant was forced to whip into the shelter of a parked car.

The seafaring man kept on shooting, largely to prevent his vehicle from being boarded. His lead gouged long rips in the car behind which the Bronze Man had taken shelter, broke windows in a bookstore and a seafood restaurant, and scared a fat man far up the street so badly that he fainted.

The taxi skidded around a corner and was gone.

Blind Victor Vail abruptly found himself being lifted to his feet by hands which were unbelievably powerful—yet which also possessed a touch as gentle as that of a mother fondling her babe. He felt a tug at his wrists.

Something was happening which he would not have thought possible. Bronze fingers were *snapping* the ropes off Victor Vail's wrists as effortlessly as though they were frail threads!

The sightless man had been dazed during the furious fight. But his ears—keener than an ordinary man's because of his affliction—had given him an idea of the momentous thing which had happened. Some manner of mighty fighter had come to his rescue. A fighter whose physical strength was almost beyond understanding!

„Thank you, Sir,“ Victor Vail murmured simply.

„I hope you were not damaged seriously,“ said the Bronze Man.

It struck Victor Vail as he heard his benefactor speak for the first time that he was listening to the voice of a great singer. It had a volume of power and tone quality rarely attained by even the great operatic stars. A voice such as this should be known through the music world. Yet Victor Vail had never heard it before.

„I am only bruised a little,“ said the musician. „But who...“

The loud clatter of running feet interrupted him. Police were coming, drawn by the shots. A burly sergeant pounded from one direction. 2 patrolmen galloped from the other. A radio squad car careened into the street with siren moaning in a way that stood one's hair on end.

Cops raced for the giant Bronze Man. Their guns were drawn. They couldn't see him any too well in the murk.

„Stick 'em up!“ boomed the sergeant.

Then a surprising thing happened.

The policeman lowered his gun so hastily that he nearly dropped it. His face became actually pale. He couldn't have looked more mortified had he accosted the Mayor of the city by mistake.

„Begorra, I couldn't see it was you, Sor!“ he apologized.

The bronze giant's strong lips quirked the faintest of smiles. But the sergeant saw the smile and beamed as if he had just been promoted to a captaincy.

A roadster was parked nearby. It was a very powerful and efficient machine. The top was down. The color was a reserved gray.

Not another word was spoken. The Bronze Man escorted Victor Vail to the machine. The roadster pulled away from the curb. The police stood back respectfully. They watched the car out-of-sight.

„T'row these rats in a cell on a charge av disturbin' the peace,“ directed the sergeant.

Then he looked more closely at the prisoners and grinned widely.

„Begorra, 'tis in the hospital yez'd better t'row 'em. Sure, an' never in me born days did I see a bunch av lads so busted up!“

„But won't they be charged with somethin' besides disturbin' the peace?“ questioned a rookie who had but lately joined the force.

The sergeant frowned severely. „Glory be! An' didn't yez see that big bronze feller?“

„Sure.“

„Then button the lip av yez. If the bronze man had wanted these scuts charged wit' anyt'ing, he would av said so.“

The rookie's eyes popped. „Gosh! Who was that guy?“

The sergeant chuckled mysteriously. „Me lad, yez know what they say about our new Mayor? That nobody has any pull wi' him?“

„Sure,“ agreed the rookie. „Everyone knows our new Mayor is the finest that New York has ever had and that he can't be influenced. But what's that got to do with the big bronze fellow?“

„Nothin',“ grinned the sergeant. „Except that, begorra, our new Mayor would gladly turn a handspring at a word from that bronze man!“

Chapter II

The Clicking Danger.

As he was whipped along New York streets in the speedy gray roadster, it suddenly dawned on Victor Vail that he knew nothing about his rescuer. He didn't even understand why he had accompanied the strange man so readily.

The blind violinist was not in the habit of meekly permitting unknowns to lead him about. Yet he had gone with this mighty stranger as docilely as a lamb.

„Are you a messenger sent to take me to Ben O'Gard?“ he asked.

„No,“ came the bronze giant's amazing voice. „I do not know anyone by that name.“

Victor Vail was so intrigued by the beauty of his unusual companion's vocal tones that he could not speak for a moment.

„May I ask who you are?“ he inquired.

„Doc Savage,“ said the bronze man.

„Doc Savage...“ Victor Vail murmured.

He seemed disappointed. „I am sorry, but I do not believe I have heard the name before.“

The bronze giant's lips made a faint smile.

„That is possible,“ he said. „Perhaps I should have been more formal in giving you my name. It is Clark Savage, Jr.“

At this, Victor Vail gave a marked start!

„Clark Savage, Jr.!“ he gasped in a tone of awe. „Why, among the violin selections I rendered in my concert tonight was a composition by Clark Savage, Jr. In my humble opinion—and to the notion of other artists—that composition is one of the most masterly of all time! Surely you are not the composer?“

„Guilty,“ Doc admitted. „And it is not flattery when I say the selection was never rendered more beautifully than by your hand tonight. Indeed, your marvelous playing was one of two things which led me backstage. First, I wished to compliment you. I noted the furtive manner of the man leading your outside and followed. That is how I happened to be on-hand.“

„What was the second thing which led you to seek me out?“ Victor Vail asked curiously.

„That is something I shall explain later,“ Doc replied. „I hope you do not mind accompanying me.“

„Mind?“ Blind Victor Vail laughed. „It is a privilege!“

The sightless master of the violin indeed considered it such. He had many times wondered about the mysterious Clark Savage, Jr. who had composed that great violin selection. Strangely enough, the composer was listed as an „unknown“. He had claimed no credit for the marvelous piece of work.

This was astounding in itself considering what money-mad beings the human race had become. The composer could have ridden to a fortune on the strength of that one selection alone.

Victor Vail could not help but wonder and marvel at the powers of this strange man who had rescued him.

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As the roadster wended its way through the heavy traffic of the theatrical district, no one noticed one particular cab which followed Doc Savage and the blind violinist. Not even Doc.

The seafaring man who had directed the ill-fated attempt to capture Victor Vail occupied the machine. However, he had stuffed his cheeks with gum, donned dark glasses, stuck a false mustache to his lip, thrust a cigar in his teeth, and changed his cap. He looked like a different man.

„Keelhaul me!“ he snarled repeatedly to himself. „I gotta get that Victor Vail. I just gotta!“

Doc’s roadster halted finally before one of the largest buildings in New York. This was a gigantic white thorn of brick-and-steel which speared upward nearly a hundred stories.

Doc Savage led the blind violinist inside. They entered an elevator. The cage climbed with a low moan to the 86th floor. Noiselessly, the doors slid back.

They now entered a sumptuously furnished Reception office. This held an inlaid table of great value, a steel safe so large it reached to the bronze giant’s shoulder, and many comfortable chairs. A vast window gave an impressive view of a forest of other skyscrapers.

Doc ensconced Victor Vail in a luxurious chair. He gave the musician a cigar of such price and quality that it came in an individual vacuum container. Doc did not smoke himself.

„If you do not mind telling, I should like to know what was behind that attack upon you tonight,“ Doc said.

The unusual voice of the Bronze Man held a strangely compelling quality. Victor Vail found himself answering without the slightest hesitancy.

„I am completely in the dark as to the reason,“ he said. „I have no enemies. I do not know why they tried to seize me.“

„Those who seized you had the earmarks of hired thugs. But there was a man in the cab—a sailor. He shouted at the others several times. Did you recognize his voice?“

Victor Vail shook his head slowly. „I did not hear it. I was too dazed.“

Silence fell for a moment.

Then the office abruptly rang with the coarse tones of the seafaring man!

„Sink ‘im, mateys!“ it shrilled. „Scuttle ‘im! Use your guns!“

Victor Vail sprang up with a startled cry.

„It's Keelhaul de Rosa!“ he shouted. „Watch him closely, Mr. Savage! That devil once tried to kill me!“

„Keelhaul de Rosa is not here,“ Doc said gently.

„But his voice spoke just then!“

„What you heard was my imitation of the voice of the sailor in the taxi,“ Doc explained. „I repeated his words. Obviously, that man was this *Keelhaul de Rosa* as you call him.“

Victor Vail sank back in his chair. He fumbled with the fine cigar. He mopped his forehead.

„I would have sworn that it was Keelhaul de Rosa speaking,“ he muttered. „Why ... why ... holy smoke! What manner of man are you anyhow?“

Doc passed the question up as though he hadn't heard it. He disliked to speak of his accomplishments even though it might be but a few words that were well-deserved.

A truly remarkable man, this golden-eyed giant of bronze!

„Suppose you tell me what you know of Keelhaul de Rosa,“ Doc said.

The blind man ran long fingers through his white hair. It was apparent he was becoming excited.

„Why, bless me!“ he muttered. „Could this mystery go back to the destruction of the OCEANIC? It must!“

* * * * *

With a pronounced effort, Victor Vail composed himself. He began speaking rapidly.

„The story goes back more than 15 years,“ he said. „It was during the World War. My wife, my infant daughter, and myself sailed from Africa on the liner OCEANIC. We were bound for England.

„But an enemy sea raider chased the liner northward. The enemy boat could not overhaul us, but it pursued our craft for days. Indeed, the OCEANIC sailed far within the Arctic ice pack before escaping.

„The liner was trapped in the ice. It drifted for months and was carried by the ice far within the Polar regions.“

Victor Vail paused to puff his cigar.

„Trouble with the crew arose as food ran short,“ he continued. „A shell from the enemy raider had destroyed our wireless. We could not advise the Outside World of our difficulty. The crew wanted to desert the liner although the master of the vessel assured them the ice pack was impassable.“

Victor Vail touched his eyes. „You understand, I am telling this only as I heard it. I, of course, saw nothing. I only heard.“

„The leaders of the crew were 2 men. Ben O'Gard was one. And Keelhaul de Rosa was the other. They were persuaded not to desert the liner.“

Victor Vail suddenly covered his face with his hands.

„Then came the disaster. The liner was crushed in the ice. Only Ben O'Gard, Keelhaul de Rosa, and about 30 of the OCEANIC's crew escaped. I was also among the survivors, although that is a mystery I do not yet understand.“

„What do you mean?“

„I was seized by members of the crew 2 days before the disaster and made unconscious with an anesthetic. I did not revive until the day following the destruction of the OCEANIC. Then I awakened with a strange pain in my back.“

„Describe the pain,“ suggested Doc.

„It was a sort of *smarting* as though I had been burned.“

„Any scars on your back now?“

„None. That is the mysterious part.“

„Who saved you when the liner was lost?“

„Ben O’Gard,“ said the blind violinist. “He was hauling me across the ice on a crude sled when I revived. I owe Ben O’Gard my life. Not only for that, but some days later Keelhaul de Rosa seized me and tried to carry me off by force. He and Ben O’Gard had a terrific fight. And O’Gard ended up rescuing me. After that, Keelhaul de Rosa fled with several of his followers. We never got trace of them again.“

„Until tonight,“ Doc put in mildly.

„That is right ... until tonight,“ Victor Vail agreed. „It was Keelhaul de Rosa who tried to seize me!“

The sightless musician now put his face in his hands again. His shoulders convulsed a little. He was sobbing!

„My poor wife,“ he choked. “And my darling little daughter Roxey! Ben O’Gard told me he tried to save them. But they perished.“

Doc Savage was silent. He knew Victor Vail’s story must have brought back memories of his wife and infant daughter.

„Little Roxey—that was my daughter’s name,“ murmured the musician.

* * * * *

Doc Savage finally spoke.

„It strikes me as rather strange that the story about the fate of the liner OCEANIC did not appear in the newspapers. Such a yarn would have made all the front pages.“

Victor Vail gave a start of surprise. „But ... didn’t it?“

„No.“

„That is strange! Ben O’Gard told me it had. Personally, I never mentioned the incident. The memory is too painful.“

The sightless violinist paused. He made a finger-snapping gesture of surprise!

„That is another mystery! Why should Ben O’Gard tell me falsely that everyone knew the story of the awful fate of the OCEANIC?“

„Perhaps he desired to keep the fate of the liner a secret,“ Doc offered. „Did he suggest that you keep quiet?“

„Why ... why ... I recall that he DID bring up the subject! And I told him I never wanted to hear of the ghastly affair again!“

Doc’s great voice suddenly acquired a purr of interest.

„I should like very much to know what actually happened during that period when you were unconscious,“ he said.

Victor Vail stiffened slightly.

„I refuse to listen to anything against Ben O’Gard!“ he snapped. „The man saved my life! He tried to save my wife and baby daughter.“

„You will hear nothing against him,“ Doc smiled. „I judge no one without proof.“

But Doc did point out that Victor Vail only had Ben O’Gard’s word about that life-saving business.

The blind man rubbed his jaw in a puzzled way.

„Perhaps I should mention another strange thing which may be connecting with this,“ he said. „The mystery which I call the *Clicking Danger*.“

„By all means. Please leave out nothing.“

„It has been nearly 15 years since I last met Ben O’Gard,“ muttered Victor Vail. „With Ben O’Gard’s faction of the survivors was a sailor with a nervous ailment of his jaws. This malady caused his teeth to chatter together at intervals, making a weird *clicking* noise. The sound used to get on my nerves.

„Here is the mystery. At frequent intervals during the last 15 years, I have heard—or thought I heard—that *clicking* noise. I have gotten into the habit of playfully calling it the *Clicking Danger*.

„Actually nothing has ever come of it. In fact, I rather thought it was my imagination entirely instead of the sailor. Why should the fellow follow me all over the World for 15 years?“

„It is possible that Ben O’Gard has been keeping track of you,“ Doc replied.

The sightless master of the violin considered this in a somewhat offended silence.

Doc Savage studied Victor Vail’s eyes intently. After a bit, he came over to the musician. He led the man across an adjacent room. This was a vast Library. It held hundreds-of-thousands of ponderous volumes concerning every conceivable branch of Science. This was probably the second most complete scientific library in existence.

The one collection of such tomes greater than this was unknown to the World. No one but Doc Savage was aware of its existence. For that superb library was at the spot he called his „Fortress of Solitude“—a retreat in a corner of the Globe so remote and inaccessible that only Doc knew its whereabouts.

To this Fortress of Solitude, the giant Man of Bronze retired periodically. On such occasions, he seemed to vanish completely from the Earth for no living soul could find him. He worked and studied absolutely alone.

It was in these periods of terrific concentration and study that Doc Savage accomplished many of the marvelous things for which he was noted.

* * * * *

Beyond the skyscraper Library lay another room—a vast scientific Laboratory. This too was of a completeness equaled by but one other—the laboratory at Doc’s Fortress of Solitude.

„What are you going to do?“ asked Victor Vail curiously.

„I came backstage tonight to see you for 2 reasons,“ Doc replied. „The first was to tell you how I enjoyed your rendition of my violin composition. The second was to examine your eyes.“

„You mean...“

„I mean an artist as great as you, Victor Vail, should have the use of his eyes. I wish to examine them to see if vision cannot be returned.“

Victor Vail choked. His sightless orbs filled with tears. For an instant, he seemed about to break down.

„It is impossible,“ he gulped. „I have been to the greatest eye specialists in the World. They say nothing less than a magician can help me.“

„Then we'll try some *magic*,“ Doc smiled.

„Please! Don't joke about it!“ moaned the blind man.

„I'm not joking,“ Doc said steadily. „I positively can give you sight of sorts. And if conditions are as I think, I can give you perfect vision. That is why I wish to examine.“

Victor Vail could only gulp and sag into a chair. It did not occur to him to doubt the ability of this might being beside him. There was something in the Bronze Man's voice which compelled belief.

An overpowering wonder seized Victor Vail. What-oh-what manner of person was this bronze master?

A lot of folks had wondered that very thing.

Rapidly, Doc took numerous X-ray pictures of Victor Vail. He also got exposures using rays less familiar to the surgical profession. He continued his examination with ordinary instruments as well as some the like of which could have been found nowhere else. They were of Doc's own invention.

„Now wait in the outer office while I consider what the examination shows,“ Doc directed.

Victor Vail went into the outside office. He did not comprehend why, but he had such confidence in the bronze giant's ability that he already felt as though he could see the wonders of a World that he had never glimpsed.

For Victor Vail had been born blind.

The sightless violinist would have been even more happy had he known the true extent of Doc Savage's ability. For Doc was a greater master of the field of Surgery than of any other.

Doc's composition of the violin selection marked him as one of the greatest in that field. He had done things equally marvelous in Electricity, Chemistry, Botany, Psychology, and other lines.

Yet these things were child's play to what he had done with Medicine and Surgery. For it was in those fields that Doc had specialized. His first training—and his hardest—had been in these.

Few persons understood the real scope of Doc's incredible knowledge. Even fewer knew how he had gained this knowledge.

Doc had undergone intensive training from the cradle. Never for a day during his lifetime had that training slackened.

There was really no „magic“ about Doc's uncanny abilities. He had simply worked and studied harder than ever had a man before him.

Doc was developing the X-ray photos he had taken. The task quickly neared completion.

Suddenly Victor Vail—in the outer office—emitted a piercing howl!

A shot exploded deafeningly! Men cursed! Blows smashed!

Doc's bronze form flashed through the Laboratory door. Across the Library, he sped.

From the Library door, a Tommy-gun spewed lead almost into his face!

Chapter III

Fighting Men.

Doc had charged forward, expecting to meet danger. So he was alert. Twisting aside, he evaded the first torrent of bullets.

But nothing in the Library offered shelter. He doubled back.

His speed was blinding! His bronze figure snapped into the Laboratory before the wielder of the machine-gun would correct his aim.

The gunman swore loudly. He dashed across the book-filled room. With his deadly weapon ready, he sprang into the Laboratory. Murderous purpose was on his pinched face.

His eyes roved the lab. Then his jaw sagged.

There was no bronze man in the lab!

To a window, the gunner leaped. He flung it up and looked out.

No one was in sight. The white wall of the skyscraper lacked very little of being smooth-as-glass. Nobody could pull a human-fly stunt on that expanse. No rope was visible—above or below.

The gunman drew back. He panted. His pinched face threatened to rival in color the white shirt he wore.

The Bronze Giant had vanished!

Fearfully, the gunman sidled about on the polished bricks of the Laboratory floor.

Two half-circles of those bricks suddenly whipped upward! They were not unlike a huge bear trap. The gunman was caught!

His rapid-firer cackled a brief instant. Then pain made him drop the weapon.

Madly, he tore at the awful thing which held him. It defied him. The bricks which had arisen were actually of hard steel and merely painted to resemble masonry.

Before the would-be killer's pain-blurred eyes, a section of the Laboratory wall opened soundless. The mighty Bronze Man stepped out of the recess it had concealed.

The giant metallic form approached, taking up a position before the captive.

„Lemme out of dis t'ing!“ whined the gunman. „It's bustin' me ribs!“

The Bronze Man might not have heard for all the sign he gave. One of his hands lifted. The hand was slender, perfectly shaped. It seemed made entirely of piano wires and steel rods!

The hand touched lightly to the gunman's face.

The gunman instantly slumped over. He was unconscious!

He fell to the floor as the bronze giant released the mechanical trap which held him. The trap settled back into the floor and became a part of the other bricks.

Like an arrow off a bow, the Bronze Man whipped into the Library and then to the outer Reception room.

The gunman had never moved after striking the floor. Yet he breathed noisily as though asleep.

In the outer office, the Bronze Man saw Victor Vail was gone!

* * * * *

A dribble of moist crimson across the floor showed the single shot which had sounded like it damaged some one. The red leakage led to an elevator door. The panel was closed. The cage was gone.

Doc Savage glided down the battery of elevator doors. The last panel was shut. His finger found a secret button and pressed it. The doors slid open. A ready cage was revealed.

This car always awaited Doc's needs at the 86th floor. Its hoisting mechanism was of a special nature. The cage went up-and-down at a speed far surpassing the other elevators.

Doc sent it dropping downward. For a moment-or-two, he actually floated in the air some inches above the floor so swift was the descent!

The cage seemed hardly to get going before it slowed. And with such an abruptness did it halt that only great leg muscles kept Doc from being flattened to the floor.

The doors opened automatically. Doc popped out into the first-floor lobby of the skyscraper.

An astounding sight met his gaze.

Directly before the elevator door stood an individual who could easily be mistaken for a giant gorilla. He weighed in excess of 260 pounds. His arms were some inches longer than his legs and actually as thick as his legs. He was literally furred with curly, rust-hued hair.

A more homely face than that possessed by this anthropoid fellow would be hard to find. His eyes were like little stars twinkling in their pits of gristle. His ears were cauliflowered. Something had chewed the tip of one. And the other was perforated as though for an earring except that the puncture was about the size of a rifle bullet. His mouth was very big.

This gigantic individual held 3 mean-eyed men in the hoop-like clasp of his huge arms. The trio were helpless. 3 guns—which they had no doubt held recently—lay on the floor.

The gorilla of a man saw Doc. His knot-of-a-head seemed to open in halves as he laughed.

„Listen, Doc!“ he said in a voice surprisingly mild for such a monster. „Listen to this!“

His enormous arms tightened on his 3 prisoners. As one man, the three howled in agony!

„Don't they sing pretty, huh?“ the anthropoid man chuckled.

He squeezed the trio again and listened to their pained howls like a singing teacher.

Across the lobby were 2 more mean-eyed men cowered in a corner. They had their arms wrapped tightly about their faces. Each was trying to crawl into the corner behind the other.

The cause of their terror was a slender, waspish man who danced lightly before them. This man was probably as immaculately clad a gentleman as ever twirled a can on a New York street.

Indeed, it was with a sword cane that he now menaced the pair in the corner. A sword cane which ordinarily looked like an innocent black walking stick.

This man was „Ham“. On the military records, he was Brigadier General Theodore Marrley Brooks. He was one of the leading civil lawyers of the Country. He had never been known to lose a case.

But there was no sign of poor blind Victor Vail.

* * * * *

Doc Savage addressed the grinning gorilla of a man.

„What happened, Monk?“

„Monk.“ No other nickname would quite fit the homely, long-armed furry fellow. The highly-technical articles he occasionally wrote on Chemistry were signed by the full name of Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair.

There apparently wasn't room back of his low brow for more brains than could be crammed into a cigarette. Actually he was such a great chemist that other famous chemists often came from foreign countries to consult with him.

„We were coming in the door when we met our *friends*.“

Monk gave his 3 captives a squeeze to hear them howl.

„They had guns. We didn't like their looks. So we glommed onto 'em.“

Reaching forward, Doc Savage placed his bronze right-hand lightly against the faces of each of Monk's 3 prisoners. Only Doc's fingertips touched the skin of the men.

Yet all three instantly became unconscious!

Hurrying over, Doc also touched lightly the pair that Ham menaced with his sword cane.

Both fell senseless!

Ham sheathed his sword cane. He twirled the innocent black stick which resulted.

He was quite a striking figure, sartorially. Indeed, tailors often followed Ham down the street just to watch clothes being worn as they should be worn.

„You didn't see more of these rats dragging a white-haired blind man, did you?“ Doc asked.

„We saw only these five.“ Ham had the penetrant voice of an orator.

Neither Ham nor Monk seemed the least surprised by the way in which their prisoners dropped unconscious at Doc's touch.

Ham and Monk were accustomed to the remarkable feats of this mighty bronze man for they were 2 of a group of 5 men who worked with Doc Savage. Each of the other three was a master of some profession just as Monk was a fine chemist and Ham a great lawyer.

The 5 men and Doc Savage formed an adventuresome group with a definite—although somewhat strange—purpose in life. This purpose was to go here-and-there, from one end of the World to the other, looking for Excitement and Adventure, striving to help those in need of help and punishing those who deserved it.

Doc suddenly went outside. He moved so effortlessly he seemed to slide. He had been seized by a suspicion. Either Victor Vail was still in the skyscraper or he had been removed by way of the freight elevators.

Hardly was Doc on the walk when a bullet splashed chill air on his bronze face!

2 sedans were parked down the street near the freight entrance of the giant building.

One machine lurched into motion. It ran rapidly away. Doc did not get a chance to see whether Victor Vail was in it.

Doc flashed over into the shelter of a many-sprouted fire hydrant. The hydrant had couplings for several hose lines. It was nearly as large as a barrel.

Down the street, the driver hopped out of the sedan which remained. He was a big man, very fat. He wore a white handkerchief mask.

„Git a hum on yer!“ he howled.

The cry was obviously directed at some of his fellows who were still in the skyscraper.

Monk and Ham popped out on the walk. The shot had attracted them. Monk held a pistol which—in his hairy paw—looked as small as a watch chain ornament.

The sedan driver leveled a revolver to fire again. Monk's fist spat flame!

The driver jumped about wildly like a beheaded chicken. His spasmodic actions carried him into the street. He caved down finally and rolled under the sedan.

3-or-4 evil heads poked out of the freight entrance.

Another red spark jumped out of Monk's paw. The heads jerked back.

Suddenly, Doc's low voice reached Monk's ears. Doc spoke half-a-dozen staccato sentences. Silence followed.

When Monk glanced at the fire hydrant a moment later...

...Doc Savage was gone!

Several times in the next minute, guns roared in the gloomy street. The reports echoed from the man-made walls on either side like satanic laughter.

The driver of the sedan abruptly appeared! The fellow still wore his mask. He hauled himself laboriously to the sedan door. Getting it open, he fell limply into the machine.

This seemed to embolden the fellows in the freight entrances. They launched a volley of bullets at Monk and Ham. The pair were driven out-of-sight.

As a tight group, the gunmen sprinted from the freight entrance to their sedan. They made it safely. They piled in, trampling the prone, white-masked form of the driver.

„T'row de stiff out!“ snarled one man, seizing the driver.

The driver kicked the man who had grasped him.

„I ain't no stiff, damn yer!“ he cursed. „Dey jest winged me!“

„It's a lousy deal—us goin' off an' leavin' our pals in dat buildin!“ growled a gunster.

„What else could we do?“ retorted another. „Dey was saps to go bargin' out wavin' der rods. If we hadn't heard 'em squawk, we'd hav been caught too!“

„Dry up, you mugs!“ snapped the man who had taken the wheel.

The sedan rolled down Broadway. It veered into a side-street blocks downtown.

* * * * *

The street became shabby. Smell of fish permeated the air. Ragged derelicts of men tottered along the thoroughfare. Men in seaman's clothing were plentiful. Raucous music blared out of cheap honkytonks.

It was the waterfront district. A region of sailor lodging houses, needled beer, and frequent fights.

„De others got here first!“ growled a gunman. „Dere's de car dey was drivin'.“

The machine that the man indicated was the first sedan to pull away from the uptown skyscraper.

The evil fellows left the 2 sedans parked close together. „Honkey“—the former driver—staggered out but nearly fell.

„Help 'im, you guys!“ directed the man who seemed to be the straw boss.

Honkey was half-carried across the walk. This side-street was very dark. They did not bother to remove the white mask Honkey still wore.

„Gosh but he's heavy!“ complained a man helping the driver.

They mounted a stairway. The rickety steps whined like dogs when they were stepped on. There was no light except that from a match going ahead had struck.

Into a lighted room the group went. Several other men waited there.

Still there was no sign of Victor Vail.

„Put Honkey on de bed in de nex' room,“ commanded the straw boss.

The 2 thugs hauled Honkey into an adjacent chamber. It was a slatternly looking place. Wallpaper draped from the walls in great scabs. The one bed was filthy.

The pair prepared to lower Honkey.

At this point, Honkey's hands came up with apparent aimlessness. The fingertips touched each man's face.

Instead of Honkey dropping upon the bed, both thugs collapsed upon it! They made no sound.

Honkey now stumbled back into the other room. The gang assembled there eyed him in surprise.

„Yer'd better go te bed, Honkey!“ snarled the one who had been giving orders.

„Aw... I ain't feelin' so tough,“ Hokey muttered.

„Well, take dat crazy mask off anyway!“

„In a minute,“ mumbled Honkey. „Son's I find me a chair.“

He weaved among the gangsters. He seemed very unsteady on his feet. To remain erect, he clutched the persons of such men as he passed.

Always, his fingertips touched some portion of bare skin.

He came in contact with 6 men on his way across the room. The six sat in their chairs with a strange rigidity after he had passed.

The gangster who served as straw boss watched. Curiosity rippled over his face. Then came ugly suspicion!

He shucked 2 big automatics out of his clothing. He covered the reeling driver.

„Stick 'em up!“ he snarled.

There was nothing the driver could do but obey. Up went his arms.

At this point, the 6 gansters he had touched fell out of their chairs. They made a succession of thumps on the floor. They were unconscious!

„Whew!“ gritted the gunman. „Keep dem hands up!“
He advanced gingerly. With a quick move, he plucked the mask off the driver.
„I t’ought so!“ he hissed.
The features revealed were not those of Honkey, the driver.
They were the bronze lineaments of Doc Savage!

Chapter IV

The Blind-Man Hunt.

Bewilderment gripped the assembled thugs. They could not comprehend that the Bronze Man had taken the place of Honkey back at the uptown skyscraper. It was too much for them to believe that anyone could be such a master of voice imitation as to fool them by emulating Honkey’s hoarse growl.

They looked at the 6 of their comrades huddled senseless on the floor. A near-terror distorted their ugly faces.

The Bronze Man slowly pushed Honkey’s cap off his head. The cap was none-too-clean. It was as though he didn’t wish to wear it longer than was necessary.

For a brief instant, his fingertips probed in the bronze hair that lay down like a metal skullcap.

„Keep clawin’ for the ceilin’!“ snarled the gang chief.

Doc’s arms lifted obediently. His hands nearly touched the ceiling—indicating what a really large man he was.

„Search ‘im!“ ordered the leader.

Gingerly, 4 of the thugs advanced. They frisked Doc with practiced fingers. They found some silver coins and a few bills which had belonged to Honkey. These they appropriated. But they unearthed no weapon.

„De upmcha ain’t got a rod!“ they muttered.

The fact that Doc wasn’t armed seemed to stun them.

Their leader eyed the 6 limp hulks on the floor. He moved to the bedroom door. He whitened perceptibly when he saw the two sprawled on the bed.

„I don’t savvy dis!“ he shivered. „What messed dem buys up like dat?“

Suddenly his mean eyes narrowed.

„Hunt in his sleeves!“ he commanded his men.

They did so ... and brought to light a small hypodermic needle.

The leader grasped the needle fearfully between thumb and forefinger. He inspected it.

„So dis is what laid ‘em out!“ he leered.

The other villains stirred uneasily. They didn’t fancy weapons such as this. A gun was more their style.

„Croak ‘im!“ they suggested.

But their boss shook his head violently.

„Ixnay!“ he snapped. „Dis guy is just de umpcha we need. We’re gonna make ‘im tell us where old Victor Vail is!“

A marked interest now registered on Doc Savage's bronze features. He was obviously surprised.

„You mean to say that you haven't got Victor Vail?“ he asked.

The remarkable power of his great voice held the gangsters speechless for a moment. Then their leader spoke sneeringly.

„D'you t'ink we'd be askin' where de guy is if we had 'im?“ he demanded.

He scowled blackly. „Say, whatcha driving at askin' us if we got 'im?“

„Victor Vail was seized,“ Doc replied. „I naturally supposed you fellows had him. That is why I am here.“

The thugs exchanged angry glares.

„Dat damn Keelhaul de Rosa crowd got 'im first after all!“ one grated.

* * * * *

This morsel was very interesting to Doc Savage.

„You mean to say your outfit and Keelhaul de Rosa's outfit were both after Victor Vail?“ he asked.

„Button de lip!“ rasped the leader of the thugs. „I t'ink yer lyin' ter me about anybody getting' Victor Vail!“

„Den why would he come here?“ put in another fellow. „Don't be a nut! Dat's what the shootin' upstairs was. Yer remember we heard a typewriter turn loose. Dat's what scared us off!“

Doc Savage gave the tiniest of nods. He understood now why the five captured by Monk and Ham had come dashing out of the elevators with their guns in hand. They had heard the machine-gun fire upstairs and had become terrified.

„I wonder how Keelhaul de Rosa got ahead of us at de skyscraper?“ mumbled the leader.

„He tried to grab de blind guy from under our snozzles at de concert hall, didn't he?“ asked the other thug. „He drove off mighty fast in dat taxi. But he could've circled back an' followed de blind guy to dat skyscraper just de same as we did, couldn't he?“

Doc listened with interest to all this. These fellows must have arrived at the concert hall in time to witness the street fight. And they had been cunning enough to keep out-of-sight.

The leader swore loudly. „Cripes! Yer remember dat guy in a cab who had a trick mustache? De one dat was puffin' a cigar? He followed de roadster to de skyscraper, den went in right after dis bronze guy an' old Victor Vail. I'll be dat was Keelhaul de Rosa!“

„What we gonna do?“ growled a man.

The leader shrugged. „Ben O'Gard will wanta know about dis. I'll go an' have a talk wit' 'im!“

This apprised Doc of another fact. These men were hirelings of Ben O'Gard!

Victor Vail had mentioned a strange feud between Ben O'Gard and Keelhaul de Rosa on the Arctic ice pack. It was evident that this old feud still continued.

But what was back of it? Did Victor Vail's unconsciousness at the time of the disaster to the liner OCEANIC and his awakening with a queer smarting in his back have anything to do with this mystery?

The leader of the thugs came over and confronted Doc. He looked small and unhealthy before the mighty Bronze Man. He held up the hypodermic needle.

„What’s in dis?“ he questioned.

„Water,“ Doc said dryly.

„Yeah?“ sneered the man.

He eyed the unmoving forms of his fellows on the floor ... shuddered violently ... then got hold of himself.

„Yer a liar!“

„There’s really nothing but water in it,“ Doc persisted.

The thug leered. Then his hand darted like a striking serpent!

The hypo needle was embedded in Doc’s corded neck. The implement discharged its contents into his veins.

Without a sound, the giant Bronze Man caved down to the floor.

„So it was only water in dat t’ing!“ snorted the gangster straw boss. „Dat needle is what got our pals!“

* * * * *

He gave orders. The big Bronze Man was turned over, kicked a few times, and soundly belabored. He showed no signs of consciousness.

„Dat guy is harder’n brass!“ muttered a thug, blowing feverishly on a fist with which he had taken an overly hard swing at the limp, metallic form.

„Watch ‘im close!“ commanded the leader.

Then he pointed at a telephone on a stand against one wall.

„I’m goin’ to talk wi’ Ben O’Gard in person. I’ll either give you mugs a ring about what to do wi’ the bronze guy or come back myself an’ tell yer.“

The man now departed.

The other gangsters expended some minutes in seeking to revive their unconscious fellows. However, they had no luck. They smoked. They muttered to each other and one of their number took a post outside in the hallway as lookout.

Suddenly a shrill voice came from the room where the 2 thugs lay senseless on the bed.

„C’mere, quick!“ it piped. „I got somethin’ important!“

A number of gangsters rushed into the room. Others crowded about the door. For a moment, not an eye watched the bronze figure of Doc Savage.

„Dat’s funny!“ declared a man, examining the pair on the bed. „He must’ve gone back to sleep. They’re both out like a light now!“

„I never heard either one of dem guys talk in a shrill voice like dat,“ another fellow said wonderingly.

They came out of the bedroom, a puzzled group of villains.

Not one of them glanced at the telephone. So none noticed that a match had been jammed under the receiver hook holding it in a lifted position.

The strong lips of Doc Savage began to writhe. Sounds came from them. Clucking, gobbling sounds they were—absolutely meaningless to the listening thugs. The sounds were very loud.

„What kinda language is dat?“ growled a man.

„Dat ain’t no language!“ snorted another. „De guy is jest delirious an’ ravin’!“

But the gangster was wrong. For Doc Savage was speaking one of the least-known languages in existence. The tongue of the ancient Mayan civilization which centuries ago flourished in Central America. And his words were going into the telephone!

When all the gangsters looked in the bedroom, they had given Doc sufficient time to call Monk at his skyscraper office. The thugs had been too excited to hear him whisper the phone number.

Doc was a ventriloquist of ability. He had „thrown his voice“ into the bedroom to get the attention of his captors.

It would have surprised the absent leader of the thugs to know the hypodermic needle he had used on Doc had actually contained nothing more harmful than water! Doc had chanced to have the needle on his person. And he slipped it up his sleeve for the purpose of deceiving the villains.

It was not the needle with which Doc made his enemies unconscious so mysteriously.

* * * * *

Doc Savage continued to speak Mayan. The lingo sounded like gibberish to the listeners in the shabby room.

To homely Monk in the uptown skyscraper, however, it carried a lot of meaning. All of Doc's men could speak Mayan. They used it when they wanted to converse without being understood by bystanders.

„Renny, Long Tom, and Johnny should be there by now,“ Doc told Monk in the strange language.

The 3 men he had named were the remaining members of his group of 5 adventuresome aides.

„Tell Johnny to get the contents of Drawer No. 13 in the Laboratory,“ Doc continued. „The contents will be a bottle of bilious-looking pain, a brush, and a mechanism like an overgrown field glass. Tell Johnny to bring the paint and brush here.“

Doc gave the address of the dive where he was being held.

„There are 2 sedans parked outside,“ the Bronze Man went on in the gobbling dialect. „Tell Johnny to paint a cross on the top of each one. He is to bring his car which is equipped with radio. He is to wait in a street nearby when he has finished the painting.

„Long Tom and Renny are to take the overgrown field glasses and race to the airport. They're to circle over the city in my plane—Renny doing the flying while Long Tom watches with the overgrown glasses. The glasses will make the paint that Johnny will put on the sedan tops show up a distinctive luminous color. Long Tom is to radio the course of the sedans to Johnny who will follow them.“

The gangsters were listening to the clucking words. Evil grins wreathed their pinched faces. They didn't dream the gobble could have a meaning!

„You, Monk, will visit the police station where the thugs who attacked Victor Vail and myself outside the concert hall were taken,“ Doc said. „Question them and seek to learn where a sailor called *Keelhaul de Rosa* would be likely to take Victor Vail.

„Ham is to remain in the office and question the rat you found unconscious in the Laboratory, also seeking to find Keelhaul de Rosa and Victor Vail.

„If you understand these instructions, *snap* your fingers twice in the telephone transmitter.“

2 low *snaps* promptly came from the wedged-up telephone receiver. They were not loud. Not a thug in the room noticed them.

* * * * *

Doc Savage now became silent. He lay as though life had departed from his giant form.

„Reckon he’s kicked the pail?“ a crook muttered.

Another man made a brief examination.

„Naw. His pump is still goin’.“

After this, time dragged. The guard outside the door could be heard. Once he struck a match. Twice he coughed hackingly.

A gangster produced 2 red dice. The men made a pretense at a crap game. But they were too nervous to make a success of it. Seating themselves in the scant supply of chairs or hunkering down on the filthy floor, they waited.

Doc Savage was giving his men time to get on the job. Johnny would have to daub the luminous paint on the sedans. Renny and Long Tom would have to arrive over the city in the plane. 20 minutes should be sufficient time.

He gave them half-an-hour to be sure. Indeed, his keen ears finally detected a series of low drones which meant the plane was above. Doc’s plane had mufflers on the exhaust pipes. Renny was evidently cutting the mufflers off at short intervals to signal his presence to his pals.

Doc rolled over. He did it slowly like a sleepy man. He now faced the hallway door.

The thugs tensed. They drew their pistols. They were as jittery as a flock of wild rabbits.

Doc imitated the raucous voice of the guard. He „threw“ it against the hall door.

„Help!“ the voice called. „Cripes! ... Help! ...“

The guard outside heard. He might have recognized his own tone. Maybe he didn’t. He wrenched the door open at any rate.

The instant his ugly face shoved inside, Doc „threw“ words into his mouth. The guard was too astonished to say a word of his own.

„De cops!“ were the words. „Dey’re on de stairs! Lam, youse guys!“

Pandemonium fell upon the gangsters. They rasped excited orders. They actually squealed as though they were already caught!

One man saw the giant bronze figure of Doc Savage heave up from the floor. He fired his pistol.

But he was a little slow. Doc evaded the bullets. He reached the light switch and punched it.

Darkness clapped down upon the room.

„De cops are inside!“ Doc yelled in the guard’s voice. „We gotta lam, quick!“

To make sure they fled in the right direction, Doc glided over and kicked the glass out of the window.

„Dis way out!“ he barked.

A thug sprang through the window. Another followed. Then a succession of them.

Standing nearby, Doc darted his hands against such faces as he could find in the black void. 3 men he touched in this manner. Each of the three instantly dropped unconscious.

The others escaped from the room in a surprisingly short space of time.

Doc listened. He heard both sedan engines roar into life.

The cars streaked away like noisy comets.

* * * * *

Into the room where Doc Savage stood there now penetrated a weird sound. It was low, mellow, trilling. It was exotic enough to be the song of some strange bird of the jungle or the eerie note of wind filtering through a jungled forest. It was melodious ... though it had no tune. It was inspiring ... without being awesome.

This sound had the peculiar quality of seeming to arise from everywhere within the shabby room rather than from a definite spot.

This trilling note was part of Doc—a small, unconscious thing which he did in moments of emotion. It would come from his lips as some plan of action was being arranged. Sometimes it precoursed a master stroke which made all things certain. Or it might sound to bring hope to some beleaguered member of Doc's adventuresome group.

Once in a while, it came when Doc was a bit pleased with himself. That was the reason for it sounding now.

Doc turned on the lights. He lined up the thugs he had made unconscious.

11 of them! It was not a bad haul.

Doc used the phone to call Ham at the scraper aerie uptown.

„You might bring your sedan down here,“ Doc requested.

10 minutes later, Ham came up the rickety stairs twiddling his sword cane. Ham's perfection of attire was made more pronounced by the blowsy surroundings. He saw the pile of sleeping prisoners.

„I see you've been *collecting*,“ he chuckled.

„Did you get anything out of Keelhaul de Rosa's man?“ Doc asked.

„I scared him into talking,“ Ham said grimly. „But the fellow was just a hired gunman. Doc, he and his gang were hired to get Victor Vail. They were to deliver the blind violinist to Keelhaul de Rosa, right enough. But the delivery was to be made on the street. The man had no idea where Keelhaul de Rosa hangs out.“

„That's too bad,“ Doc replied. „There's a chance one of the crew who attacked Victor Vail outside the concert hall will know where the sailorman hangs out. If they do, Monk will make them cough up.“

The unconscious thugs were now loaded into Ham's limousine. This car of Ham's was one of the most elaborate and costly in the city. Ham went in for the finest in automobiles just as he did in clothes.

Ham did not ask Doc what they were going to do with the prisoners. He already knew that. The senseless criminals would be taken to Doc's skyscraper office. In a day-or-two, men would call for them and take them away to a mysterious institution hidden away in the mountains of upstate New York. There they would undergo a treatment which would turn them into honest, upright citizens.

This treatment consisted of a delicate brain operation which wiped out all knowledge of their past. Then the men would be taught like children with an emphasis on honesty and good citizenship. They would learn a trade. Turned out into the World again, they were highly desirable citizens for they had been taught to hate criminality.

The mysterious institution where this good—if somewhat unconventional—work went forward was supported by Doc Savage. The great surgeons and psychologists who ran it had been trained by Doc.

Ham drove his limousine to the skyscraper which held Doc's Headquarters. The unconscious thugs were loaded in Doc's special elevator. The cage raced them up at terrific speed to the 86th floor.

Dragging along several of his unconscious prisoners with Ham behind him, Doc entered his office.

Surprise brought him up short.

Blind Victor Vail sat in the office!

Chapter V

Gone Again.

Doc Savage instantly noted a slight reek of chloroform about the sightless musician.

Otherwise, Victor Vail seemed undamaged.

„I am glad you are here, Mr. Savage,“ he said eagerly.

Like many blind men, it was obvious Victor Vail could identify individuals by their footsteps. Doc's firm tread was quite distinctive.

„What-on-Earth happened to you?“ Doc demanded.

„I was seized by men in the employ of Keelhaul de Rosa.“

„I knew that,“ Doc explained. „What I mean is how do you happen to be back here alive and unharmed?“

Victor Vail touched his white hair with long, sensitive hands. His intelligent face registered great bewilderment.

„That is a mystery I do not understand myself,“ he murmured. „I was chloroformed. I must have been unconscious a considerable time. When I awakened, I was lying upon the sidewalk far uptown. I had a passerby hail a taxi ... and I came here.“

„You don't know what happened to you beyond that?“

„No. Except that my undershirt was missing.“

„What?“

„My undershirt was gone. Why anyone should want to steal it, I cannot imagine.“

Doc considered.

„Possibly your captors removed your clothing to get a look at your back and forgot the undershirt when they dressed you again.“

„But why would they look at my back?“

„I was thinking of the incident you mentioned as occurring more than 15 years ago,“ Doc replied. „When you awakened after the alleged destruction of the liner Oceanic in the Arctic regions, you said there was a strange smarting on your back.“

Victor Vail stirred his white hair with his fingers.

„I must say I am baffled. But why do you say *alleged* destruction of the OCEANIC?“

„Because there is no proof it was destroyed beyond Ben O‘Gard’s unsupported word.“

The blind violinist bristled slightly. „I trust Ben O‘Gard. He saved my life!“

„I have nothing but admiration for your faith in O‘Gard,“ Doc replied sincerely. „We will say no more about that angle. But I want to inspect your back.“

Obediently, Victor Vail peeled off his upper garments.

Doc examined the blind man’s well-muscled back intently. He even used a powerful magnifying glass. But he found nothing suspicious.

„This is very puzzling,“ he conceded, turning to Ham.

„You don’t think, Doc, that Keelhaul de Rosa seized Mr. Vail just to get a look at his back?“ Ham questioned.

„I do think just that!“ Doc replied. „And another thing that puzzles me is why Keelhaul de Rosa turned Mr. Vail loose once he had him.“

„That mystifies me also,“ Victor Vail put in. „The man is a murdering devil! I felt sure he would slay me.“

* * * * *

Swinging over to the window, Doc Savage stood looking out. The street was so far below that automobiles on it looked like cubby bugs. Streetlamps were pinpoints of light.

There came soft sound of elevator doors opening out in the corridor.

Monk waddled in. He was smoking a cigarette he had rolled himself. The stub was no more than an inch long and stuck to the end of his tongue.

Monk drew in his tongue and the cigarette went with it, disappearing completely in his cavernous mouth. His mouth closed. Smoke dribbled out of his nostrils.

Through the performance, Monk’s little eyes had remained fixed on the sartorially perfect Ham. This bit of foolishness was just Monk’s latest method of annoying Ham.

For Monk was the one person alive who could get Ham’s goat thoroughly. It had all started back in the War when Ham was known only as Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks. He had been the moving spirit in a little scheme to teach Monk certain French words which had a meaning entirely different than Monk thought. As a result, Monk had spent a session in the guardhouse for some things he had innocently called a French general.

A few days after that, though, Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks was suddenly hauled up before a court-martial, accused of stealing hams. And convicted! Somebody had expertly planted plenty of evidence.

Ham got his nickname right there. And to this day, he had not been able to prove it was the homely Monk who had framed him. This rankled Ham's lawyer soul to no end!

„They're gonna clap you in the zoo one of these days!“ Ham sneered at his tormentor.

The cigarette came out of Monk's mouth together with a cloud of smoke. From his lips burst a *hoinck-hoinck* sound—a perfect imitation of a pig grunting.

The next instant, he dodged with a speed astounding for one of his great bulk. Ham's whistling sword cane just missed delivering a resounding whack on his bullet head. Ham was touchy about any references to pigs. Especially when made by Monk!

Monk would probably have continued his goading of Ham for an hour. But Doc interrupted his fun.

„What did you learn from Keelhaul de Rosa's men being held at the police station?“ Doc inquired.

„Nothin'“, grinned Monk. „They was just a bunch of hired lice. They don't even know where Keelhaul de Rosa hangs out.“

Doc nodded. He had half-expected that.

„Ham,“ he said, „your legal work has given you connections with prominent government men in America and England. I want you to go at once and find out what you can about the liner OCEANIC. Learn all possible of the crew, the cargo, and anything else of interest.“

Ham nodded ... sneered elaborately at Monk ... and went out.

* * * * *

He had hardly gone when the phone rang. It was Johnny.

Johnny's voice was that of a lecturer. He chose his words precisely after the fashion of a college professor. As a matter-of-fact, Johnny had been both in his time. William Harper Littlejohn—for that was what his mother had named him—stood high on the roster of an international society of archaeologists. Few men knew more about the World and its inhabitants—past and present—than Johnny.

„I have your men located, Doc,“ said Johnny. „They halted their sedans before a low-class rooming house. Renny and Long Tom radioed me the location from the plane from where they were watching, and I arrived in time to see the men enter.“

Johnny added an address on New York's lower east side. It was not far from Chinatown.

„Be right with you,“ Doc replied and hung up.

Monk was already half through the door.

„Hey!“ Doc called. „You're staying here.“

„Aw...“

Monk looked like a big, amiable pup who had been booted in the ribs. He was disappointed. He did love action!

„Someone has to guard Victor Vail,“ Doc pointed out.

Monk nodded meekly ... pulled out his makings ... and started a cigarette as Doc went out.

* * * * *

Doc Savage's gray roadster was equipped with a regulation police siren. He had authority to use it. His careening car touched 80 mph several times.

A dozen blocks from he destination, he slowed. The wailing siren died. Like a gray ghost, Doc's car slipped through the tenement district.

He pulled up around the corner from the address Johnny had given.

A tall man was selling newspapers on the corner. The fellow was very thin. His shoulders looked like a coat-hanger under his plain blue suit. The rest of him was in proportion, incredibly skinny.

He wore glasses. The right lens of these spectacles was much thicker than the left. A close observer might have noted that this left lens was in reality a powerful magnifying glass. For the wearer of the unusual spectacles had virtually lost the use of his left eye in the World War. He needed a powerful magnifier in his business, so he carried it in his glasses for handiness.

The newspaper vendor saw Doc. He came over. As bony as he was, it was a wonder he didn't rattle when he walked.

„They're still in the room,“ he said. „Third floor, first door to your right.“

„Good work, Johnny,“ Doc replied. „You armed?“

Johnny opened his bundle of papers like a book. This disclosed a small, pistol-like weapon which had a large cartridge magazine affixed to the grip. A more compact and deadly killing machine than this instrument would be difficult to find. It was a special machine-gun of Doc Savage's own invention.

„Fine,“ Doc breathed. „Wait on the street. I'm going up to that room.“

* * * * *

The steps whined under the giant Bronze Man's considerable weight.

To avoid the noise, he leaped lightly to the banister. Like a tightrope walker, he ran up the slanted railing.

He took the second flight in the same manner, not troubling to see if those steps squeaked also. By using the banister, he avoided any electrical alarms which might have been under the steps.

A white rod of light lying close to the floor marked the bottom of the door he was interested in. He listened. His keen ears detected men breathing. One grunted a demand for a cigarette.

Doc Savage lurked outside the door perhaps 2 minutes. His mighty bronze hands were busy. They dipped into his pockets often. Then he turned and started up another flight of steps in the fashion of the first two.

The structure had 5 floors. A creaking hatch let Doc out on a tarred roof. He moved over to a spot directly above the window of the room in which his quarry waited.

A silken line came out of his clothing. It was thin and strong. One end he looped securely about a chimney.

Like a spider on a string, Doc went down the cord. His sinewy hands gripped the line securely. He reached the window.

Hanging by one thewed fist, he dropped the other hand into a coat pocket. He boldly kicked the window inward. Through the aperture his foot made, he threw the objects he had taken from the pocket.

A roar of excitement seized the room interior!

Back up the silken cord, Doc climbed. He had no more trouble with the small line than he would have with a set of stairs. At the top, he replaced it inside his clothing. He seemed in no hurry.

Below him in the room, the excitement had died a mysterious death.

Doc ambled to the front of the building and seated himself on the parapet. Below, he could see the gaunt Johnny with his papers.

„Poi-p-e-r-s!“ Johnny was bawling lustily. „W-u-xtra! Latest poi-p-e-r-s!“

No one would have dreamed Johnny was actually doing all the bellowing to cover any sounds from within the building.

Nearly 10 minutes elapsed before Doc Savage went down the 3rd floor room.

On the hallway carpet lay many colorless glass bulbs about the size of grapes. Doc had spread these there. Men charging out of the room had trampled many of them and crushing some. This had released the powerful anesthetic they held. Anyone near and not equipped with a gas mask was certain to become unconscious.

The hallway floor and the room itself were littered with senseless men.

Doc stepped in, avoiding the unbroken bulbs of thin glass. His bronze hand made a disgusted gesture.

Ben O’Gard was not among the vanquished!

* * * * *

Doc Savage let his eyes range the room again, making sure. He noted that all the glass balls of anesthetic which he had tossed through the broken window had been shattered. None of the gas-like stuff remained in the room or corridor—Doc had waited on the roof long enough for it to be dispelled.

Ben O’Gard was certainly not present. These were merely the gang Doc’s men had trailed here.

„Bag anybody of any importance?“ Johnny asked from the doorway. He had thrown his bundle of papers away.

„Not to us,“ Doc admitted. „We’ll send these gentlemen upstate for our usual treatment, though. I imagine every one of them has a police record.“

Johnny inspected the unconscious villains judiciously. „I’ll at least bet our treatment can’t hurt them any. But what about the chief devil Ben O’Gard?“

„He simply wasn’t among those present.“

Doc and Johnny now loaded the prisoners aboard their cars. Doc’s roadster held several.

Johnny’s machine was a large touring car of a model at least 10 years old. The thing looked like a wreck. A used-car dealer—if asked what he would give for it—would probably have taken one glance and said „\$20! And I’m robbing myself at that!“ Yet within less than a year, Johnny had paid \$3,000 for the special engine in it. On a straightaway, the old wreck might do 150 mph without unduly straining itself.

They got their prizes in both cars and drove uptown. They parked before the white spike of a skyscraper housing Doc’s office. Loading the captives into the elevators, they took them up to Doc’s Headquarters.

Gales of derisive laughter met them as they unloaded in the corridor. It was Ham laughing.

Doc stepped into the office.

Homely, hairy, gorilla-like Monk sprawled in a chair. He held his bullet-of-a-head in both furry hands. He rocked from side-to-side. His doleful groans made a somber orchestration for Ham's uproarious mirth.

A trickle of crimson wriggled through Monk's fingers.

Doc thought for an instant that Monk had been goading Ham again and for once had been too slow in dodging the whack with the sword cane which Ham inevitably aimed at him.

Then Doc saw the implement which had struck Monk. This was a heavy metal paperweight. It lay on the rug. A twist-or-two of Monk's coarse, rust-colored hair still stuck to it.

Doc noted something else.

Victor Vail was gone!

Chapter VI

Hanging Men.

„What happened?“ Doc Savage demanded.

Ham tried twice before he choked down his mirth.

„I thought for a minute I'd die laughing!“ he gulped hilariously. „The blind man said he wanted to feel the bumps on that wart Monk calls a *head*. Our fuzzy missing link of a pal let him...“

„He got a telephone call first!“ Monk put in sourly.

„Who did?“ Doc inquired.

„Victor Vail,“ Monk grumbled. „The phone rang. Some guy asked to talk to Victor Vail. I put the blind man on the wire. He didn't say much to the guy who had called. But he listened a lot. Then he hung up. After a bit, we got to arguin' about tellin' fortunes by the knots on people's heads. He claimed there was somethin' to it an' offered to feel my conk an' tell plenty about myself.“

„And you fell for it!“ Ham screamed mirthfully. „And he kissed the top of your noggin with that paperweight! Then he beat it.“

„You weren't here?“ Doc asked Ham.

„No,“ Ham laughed. „I came in just as Monk woke up talking to himself.“

„Aw ... how was I to know the blind guy was gonna hang one on my nob?“ Monk demanded.

„You have no idea why he did it?“ Doc questioned seriously.

„None atall,“ declared Monk. „Unless he got the notion from that telephone talk.“

„You don't know who called?“

„He said his name was *Smith*. But it might've been a fake name that he gimme.“

Monk took his hands away from his head. A nesting goose would have been proud of such an egg as now decorated the top of his cranium.

„That's one bump it'd be easy to tell your fortune from,“ Ham jeered, his hilarity unabated. „It shows you are an easy mark for blind guys with paperweights!“

Doc Savage swung into the Laboratory. The prisoners were lined up there. Each man snored slightly. They would sleep thus until the administration of a chemical which was capable of reviving them from the thing which had made them unconscious.

Doc ignored them. He lifted from the heavily-laden shelves of equipment an apparatus which resembled nothing so much as the portable sprayers used to treat apple trees.

He carried this into the outer office.

Monk and Ham eyed the contrivance with surprise. The thing was a new one on them.

Monk asked, „What is...“

He never finished the query. Sounds of distant shots came to their ears.

The noise was coming from the street below. Doc whipped to the window. He looked out and down.

An extremely flashy car—streamlined almost as beautifully as the world's record-holding racer—was canted up askew of the curb. 2 machine-guns stabbed red flame from the racer. Flame that looked like licking snake tongues.

Across the street, other guns spat fire back at them.

„It's Long Tom and Renny!“ Doc rapped.

* * * * *

The giant Bronze Man was whipping into the corridor with the last word. Johnny, Monk, and Ham followed. Monk had forgotten his cracked head with surprising suddenness.

The super-speed elevator sank them. Both Johnny and Ham—unable to withstand the force of the car halting—landed on the floor with their stomachs.

„Wheeee!“ grinned Monk. „I always get a wallop out of ridin' this thing!“

Doc and his men surged for the street. A stream of lead clouted glass out of the doors.

Monk, Johnny, and Ham drew the compact little machine-guns which were Doc's own invention. The weapons released streams of reports so closely-spaced that they sounded like tough cloth ripping!

Doc himself doubled back through the skyscraper. He left by the freight entrance—furtively—almost before his friends realized he was not with them.

He glided down the side-street, haunting the deepest shadows.

Reaching the main thoroughfare, he saw the fight still waged as he had seen it from above. A lot of lead was flying. But nobody had been hurt. Renny and Long Tom were sheltered by the flashy racer. It was Long Tom's car. Their opponents were barricaded behind the corner of a building across the street.

Somebody had shot out the streetlights at either end of the block. The resulting gloom probably explained the lack of casualties.

Doc's bronze form flashed across the street. A bullet whizzed by, missing by 10 feet. He was a nearly impossible target in the murk.

„It's de bronze swab!“ howled one of the enemy. „Keelhaul me!“

The words were all that was needed to break up the fight. The gunmen fled. They had a car parked around the corner with the engine running. Into this they leaped. It whisked them away.

A diminutive figure popped out from behind the racer. The small man sprinted wrathfully after the fleeing gunmen. His pistol-like machine gun released spiteful gobbles of sound.

„Hey!“ Doc called. „You’re wasting your time, Long Tom!“

The small man came stomping back. Besides being short, he was slender. He had pale hair and pale eyes and a complexion that looked none too healthy.

Only his extremely large head hinted that was no ordinary man. *Long Tom*—formally known as Major Thomas J. Roberts—was an electrical wizard who had worked with the foremost men in the electrical world. Nor was he the physical weakling he appeared to be.

„The rats shot my car full of holes!“ he howled irately.

The flashy racing car was the pride of Long Tom’s heart. He had equipped it with about every conceivable electrical contrivance from a television set to a newly perfected gadget projecting rays of an extremely short wavelength which were capable of killing mosquitoes and other insects that might annoy the driver.

This latter device—worked out with some aid from Doc Savage—was probably destined to bring Long Tom worldwide fame. Farmers could use it to destroy insect pests. It was worth billions to the cotton growers alone!

As they approached Long Tom’s racer, a mountain heaved up from behind it!

* * * * *

The „mountain“ was Renny.

6’4“ would have been a close guess at his height. The fact that he looked nearly as wide was partially an optical illusion. He weighed only about 250 pounds. On the ends of arms as thick as telegraph poles were a couple of kegs of bone-gristle, which he called *hands*.

Renny was noted for 2 things. First, many countries knew him as an engineer little short of a genius. Second, there was no wooden door built with a panel so stout that Renny could knock it out with one of his huge fists!

„How’d you birds start that fight?“ Doc demanded.

„We drove up here as innocent as could be,“ Renny protested in a voice which resembled a very big bullfrog in a barrel. „Them guys ran out in the street and pointed a machine-gun at us. Evidently we weren’t the birds they were expecting because they lowered their guns and turned back. But we figured if they was huntin’ trouble, we’d accommodate ‘em. So we started a little good-natured lead slingin’!“

Doc smiled slightly.

„If the fight did nothing else, it cleared up something that has been puzzling me,“ he said.

„Huh?“ Renny and Long Tom chorused while Doc’s other pals came up to listen. No one of the group had been injured.

„Until a moment ago, it was a puzzle to me why Keelhaul de Rosa turned Victor Vail loose,“ Doc explained. „But now I see the reason. Keelhaul de Rosa and Ben O’Gard are fighting each other. Just why is still a mystery. But both were after Victor Vail.“

„The reason for that is another mystery. Keelhaul de Rosa got Victor Vail. And I believe he got whatever he wanted from the blind man—something which required removal of the clothes from Vail’s upper body.

„Then the violinist was turned loose as a bait to draw Ben O’Gard into the hands of Keelhaul de Rosa’s gunmen. It was that crowd we just mixed with because Keelhaul was along. They thought you birds were Ben O’Gard’s men.“

The moment he finished speaking, Doc beckoned Renny. The two of them entered the skyscraper.

The others—Monk, Ham, Long Tom, and Johnny—remained outside. They would have to explain the shooting to the police. Radio-squad cars laden with officers were hooting up from all directions.

There would be no trouble explaining. Each of Doc’s 5 men bore the honorary rank of „Captain“ on the New York police force.

* * * * *

Entering his 86th floor office, Doc secured the sprayer-like contraption which he had abandoned at the start of the fight down in the street.

„What’s that doofunny?“ Renny inquired. He, too, had never seen the sprayer of a contrivance before.

„I’ll show you.“ Doc indicated a sticky material on the corridor floor outside his office door. This resembled extremely pale molasses. The color blended with the floor tiles so as to be hardly noticeable. „See that?“

„Sure,“ Renny replied. „But I wouldn’t have if you hadn’t pointed it out.“

„I chanced to have the foresight to spread that stuff outside the door when I left Monk here with Victor Vail,“ Doc explained.

„What is it?“

„I’m showing you. Take off your shoes.“

Bewildered, Renny kicked off his footgear. Doc did likewise.

Doc now pointed the nozzle of his sprayer down the corridor, away from the pale molasses material. A shrill fizzing sounded. A cloud of pale vapor came out of the nozzle.

„Smell anything?“

„Not a thing,“ Renny declared.

Doc aimed a puff of the strange vapor at the molasses stuff.

„Smell anything now?“

„Ph-e—e-w!“ choked Renny. „Holy cow! A whole regiment of skunks couldn’t make a worse...“

Doc hauled Renny into the elevator.

„The stuff in this sprayer and the sticky material on the floor form a terrible odor when they come together, even in the tiniest quantities,“ Doc explained as the cage raced them down. „So powerful are these chemicals that anyone walking through the stuff in front of the door will leave a trail which can be detected for some hours. That’s why we took off our shoes. We had walked through it.“

„But I don’t see...“

„We’re going to trail Victor Vail,“ Doc explained. „But cross your fingers and hope he didn’t take a taxi, Renny. If he did, we’ve got to think up another bright way of finding him.“

But Victor Vail hadn't taken a taxi. He had walked to nearest subway and entered the side which admitted passengers to uptown trains, feeling his way along the building walls.

„We're sunk!“ Renny muttered.

„Far from it,“ Doc retorted. „We merely drive uptown and throw our vapor in each subway exit until we find the odor which will result from its contact with Victor Vail's tracks.“

Renny laughed noisily. „Ain't we the original bloodhounds, though!“

They tried the exits of 7 stations. At the 8th, Doc's remarkable vapor—a chemical compound of his own making—combined with the other chemical left by Victor Vail's shoe soles and gave them the nauseating odor.

„It goes down this side-street,“ declared Renny.

There were few pedestrians on the street at this late hour. Even these, however, promptly stopped to gawk at Doc and Renny. It might have been the fact that Doc and Renny were without shoes and going through the apparently idiotic process of spraying an awful perfume on the sidewalk.

More likely, it was Doc's mighty bronze form which caught their eye. Doc was a sensation whenever he appeared in public.

„What puzzles me is how the blind guy got around like this,“ Renny offered.

„Simply by asking help of those near him,“ Doc retorted. „Everyone is glad to aid a blind man.“

Renny got tired of the crowd of curious persons trailing them.

„Scat!“ he told the rubberneckerers violently. „Ain't you folks got a home you can go to?“

Renny had a most forbidding face. It was long, thin-lipped, serious, and grim. Meekly—awed by that puritanical countenance—the crowd melted away.

5 minutes later, Doc and Renny halted before a door on which a plain gilt sign said:

DENTIST

„He went in there, Doc,“ said Renny.

* * * * *

Like 2 dark cotton balls before a breeze, Doc and Renny drifted into the shadows. This district was a moderate residential section. The buildings were neat but rather old and not showy.

„Wait here,“ Doc directed.

Doc was always leaving his men behind while he went alone into danger. Long ago, they had become resigned to this, much as it irked them to stand back when Excitement offered. They literally lived for Adventure!

But no one could cope with danger quite as Doc could. He had an uncanny way of avoiding—or escaping from—what for another man would be a death trap.

Around to the rear of the brick building, Doc glided. He found the back door. It was not locked inside—it was bolted. Heavy iron bars crisscrossed it.

Doc leaped upward. The height of that tremendous spring would have astonished an onlooker.

He clutched an extended ledge and worked his way to a window on a second-floor hallway with hardly more sound than the noise of a prowling cat.

The hall was dark. Doc drew things from his pockets. Some sticky gum he affixed to the windowpane. Then a faint, gritty hiss sounded.

Doc had cut the glass out of the window. He kept it from falling inward by the gum he had stuck to it. He eased inside.

Silence gripped the interior of the house. Doc prowled noiselessly. Only one room held a light. It was downstairs. The door was locked.

Doc let Renny in. They went to the fastened door.

„We might as well go in there all of-a-sudden,“ Doc breathed.

„Okay, Doc,“ murmured Renny.

He lifted his gallon of iron-hard knuckles. He struck!

With a rending crash, the door panel was driven inward by Renny's great fist!

They sprang into the room! Renny held a gun. But Doc's powerful bronze hands were empty.

Horrified surprise halted them.

Only 2 men were in the room. One was Victor Vail. The other—as denoted by the sanitary smock he wore—was obviously the dentist who had his place-of-business here.

Both men hung suspended by ropes around their necks from a stout ceiling chandelier!

Chapter VII

The Map.

The Sun was up. Doc's remarkable companions lounged in the skyscraper office. They had lost a night's sleep but showed no effects of it.

Ham was honing the blade of his sword cane to a razor edge, looking ominously at Monk each time he tested its sharpness. Monk sat in an easy-chair, reading a pocket manual on how to raise hogs. He took pains to hold the book so Ham could see the title. Monk often maintained—always within earshot of Ham—that someday he was going to retire and raise pork for a certain finely-dressed lawyer he knew.

The archeologist Johnny was penning a chapter in the book he was writing on the ancient Mayan civilization.

Looking as pale as an invalid, Long Tom was in the Laboratory, humped over an apparatus which for intricacy would have given Professor Steinmetz a headache.

Truly an amazing crew, these men!

Doc Savage entered. With him was Victor Vail. Renny walked in after them.

The blind man's neck was swollen somewhat where the rope had nearly strangled him to death. Doc had arrived just in time save him.

The explanation of Vail's situation was quickly made.

„The dentist didn't know a thing about the gang that seized him,“ Doc concluded. „They called him to the door and cracked him over the head.“

„It was Ben O'Gard!“ Victor Vail put in, his voice thick with emotion. „Oh, Mr. Savage, I was so mistaken about that man! I thought he was my friend. I had every confidence in the world in him. When he called me here...“

„So it was Ben O'Gard who telephoned you!“ Monk interposed.

At the sound of Monk's mild voice, Victor Vail registered great remorse. Obviously, he was terribly sorry for that crack he had taken at Monk's head with the paperweight.

„I do not know how I shall ever redeem myself for that horrible mistake,“ choked the blind man. „Ben O'Gard told me an awful story of how you men were holding me here to keep me from seeing him. I believed O'Gard. I know I was a fool to do that now. But at the time, I regarded O'Gard as a friend who had twice saved my life. He told me to escape and come to him. That is why I struck you.“

„Forget it,“ chuckled Monk.

Renny spoke up. „What baffles me is why Ben O'Gard took over the dentist's office?“

Doc's strong lips warped their faint smile.

„Simple,“ he said. „Ben O'Gard wanted to use the dentist's X-ray!“

* * * * *

This statement elicited surprised looks from everyone present.

„X-ray!“ Renny grumbled. „Why'd they want the X-ray?“

„I'll show you the reason in a minute,“ Doc replied. „First, though, I want to find out what Ham learned about the liner OCEANIC.“

Ham now divulged the information which several transatlantic telephone calls to England had gathered.

„On the English records, the liner OCEANIC is down as lost at sea, sunken without trace,“ Ham said. „There's no hint of this stuff about it being trapped in the Polar ice pack.“

„I'm not surprised,“ Doc Savage said dryly.

„I've got something that will surprise you,“ Ham smiled. „There was 50 million dollars in gold bullion and diamonds on the OCEANIC!“

An electric shock seemed to sweep the room.

„50 million! Will you say that again?“ Monk said mildly.

„50 million in gold and sparklers!“ repeated Ham impressively.

„That explains it,“ Doc declared.

„Explains what?“ Renny wanted to know.

„What's behind this whole mess,“ retorted Doc. „Come into the Laboratory. I want to show you something, brothers.“

It was an excited crowd of adventurers which surged into the vast Laboratory room.

From a tray, Doc lifted several large photographic prints. These were X-ray pictures which he had taken of Victor Vail in the course of examining the violinist to determine his eye affliction. Until now, Doc had not had time to as much as examine the prints.

He held one up.

„Holy cow!“ barked Renny.

„Exactly,“ Doc agreed. „More than 15 years ago while Victor Vail was under the influence of an anesthetic, someone tattooed a map on his back with a chemical, the presence of which could only be detected by use of a certain intensity of X-ray.“

„You mean that I have carried the map on my back these many years without knowing it?“ Victor Vail questioned wonderingly.

„You certainly have. You recall the man with the *clicking* teeth who seemed to haunt your trail through the years? Well, he was simply keeping track of you and map.“

„But what is the map?“

„It shows where the liner OCEANIC is aground on a land far within the Arctic regions,“ Doc announced.

* * * * *

Some minutes were expended examining the chart.

„But I cannot understand why I carried the map around unmolested for so many years,“ Victor Vail murmured.

„Possibly I can reconstruct a story which explains that,“ Doc told him. „The 50 million in treasure aboard the OCEANIC led Ben O’Gard, Keelhaul de Rosa, and the other members of the crew to mutiny. They probably disposed of all who did not join them.“

„The beasts!“ Victor Vail covered his face with his hands. „My poor wife. My poor little daughter Roxey. That devil Ben O’Gard murdered them! And I thought he was my friend!“

„It’s merely guesswork about the *murder* part,“ Doc put in hastily. „I said that simply because the eagerness of Ben O’Gard and Keelhaul de Rosa to get this map shows they think the OCEANIC is where they left it, even now. This indicated there were no survivors but themselves.“

Victor Vail recovered his control.

„When Keelhaul de Rosa tried to kidnap me from Ben O’Gard, he was really trying to steal the treasure map!“

„Of course,“ Doc agreed. „That explains why the 2 factions split. No doubt they have been waging unremitting war with each other ever since that day, each faction trying to slay the other so they would be free to secure the chart off your back and go get the 50 million.“

„I’m surprised they left it behind in the first place,“ Monk put in.

„We barely escaped with our lives as it was,“ Victor Vail assured him. „To carry more than food over the ice pack was impossible!“

Ham made a quick gesture with his sword cane ... and Monk ducked involuntarily.

„Both Ben O’Gard and Keelhaul de Rosa now have copies of this map,“ Ham said thoughtfully.

Doc Savage let his strange golden eyes rest on each of friends in turn. The gilded orbs seemed to be asking a question. And receiving a highly-satisfying answer!

„Brothers,“ Doc said softly, „these birds who are after that treasure are fellows who have no right to any man’s gold. What say we get it ahead of them? We can use the money to enlarge our secret institution in upstate New York to which we send criminals to be made into useful citizens. That place is becoming a little crowded.“

Pandemonium seized Doc’s Headquarters!

Renny swung over to the door. His enormous fist struck! The panel flew out of the door as though hit by a cannonball. No door was safe around Renny when he was happy.

Monk fled wildly about the place, each ape-like leap barely taking him out-of-reach of the lusty whacks delivered by the pursuing Ham’s sword cane.

Long Tom and Johnny got into a mock fight and promptly upset a stand of apparatus. In the ensuing crash, several hundred dollars’ worth of equipment was ruined.

The horseplay was their way of saying they thought Doc’s treasure-hunt scheme was the best idea they’d heard recently!

* * * * *

Before that day was done, Doc Savage had operated on Victor Vail’s eyes.

He performed the delicate bit of surgery in New York’s finest hospital. Those who surrounded him as he worked were not ordinary nurses. They were some of the leading American eye specialists. One had flown from Boston to see the operation. Another was from Detroit and two came from Baltimore.

They wanted to see this epochal piece of work. For Doc Savage was seeking to do something which every expert present had—until this day—maintained was impossible.

And what the assembled specialists saw the mighty Bronze Man do that day in the New York hospital operating room was something they would talk about for a long time to come. The mastery of it held them breathless long after big Doc Savage had taken his departure.

Victor Vail would have his sight back!

* * * * *

The next morning as Ham entered Doc’s office, Doc was taking his exercises.

Ham sat down to wait. Doc took his exercises—a terrific 2-hour routine—each day of his life and nothing interfered.

Doc’s ritual was similar to ordinary setting-up movements. But infinitely harder and more violent. He took them without the usual exercising apparatus. For instance, he would make certain muscles attempt to lift his arm while other muscles strove to hold it down. That way he furthered not only muscular tissue but also control over individual muscles as well. Every ligament in his great, bronzed body was exercised in this fashion.

From a case which held his special equipment, Doc took a pad and pencil. He wrote a number of several figures. Eyes shut, he extracted the square and cube root in his head, carrying the figures out to many decimal places.

Out of the case came a device which made soundwaves of all tones—some of a wavelength so short or long as to be inaudible to the normal ear. Years of straining

to detect these waves had enabled Doc to make his ears sensitive enough to hear many sounds inaudible to ordinary people.

With his eyes closed, Doc rapidly cataloged by the sense of smell several score of different odors—all very vague—each contained in a small vial racked in the case.

There were other exercises still, far more intricate.

Ham shook his head wonderingly. He knew that at the clip Doc was doing the routine, 5 minutes would be more than he himself could stand. And Ham was husky enough to give most professional boxers a drubbing.

From the cradle, Doc had done these exercises each day. They accounted for his astounding physique, his ability to concentrate, and his super keen senses.

„What’s on your mind?“ Doc asked suddenly. His routine was over.

Ham plucked a newspaper out of a pocket.

„What do you think of this?“ He handed Doc the paper, indicating an item. It read:

WANT TO BUY A POLAR SUBMARINE EXPEDITION?

There is one for sale. Captain Chauncey McCluskey announced this morning that he is hunting a purchaser for a share of the projected trip of the submarine Helldiver under the polar ice.

Captain McCluskey has the submarine, full-equipped and ready-to-go. But it seems he has run out of money...

There was more of it, written up in typical tabloid style. But it told nothing of importance except that the submarine Helldiver was tied up at a local pier and Captain Cauncey McCluskey could be found aboard.

„Who is Captain McCluskey?“ Ham inquired.

Doc shook his head slowly. „Search me. I never heard of the man before. Nor had I heard of any other projected submarine trip under the Pole.“

„This sub may be just what we need,“ Ham declared. „But there’s one point which has me guessing. It’s darn queer the thing should pop up at just the time we’re interested!“

Doc smiled slightly, „It won’t hurt to look into it, anyway.“

The regular elevator—not the superspeed one—lowered them to the street level.

They took the first taxi which rolled up.

Doc gave their driver the address of the pier to which was moored the polar submarine Helldiver.

Office workers were going to their daily tasks. The walks were crowded. Each subway kiosk vomited humanity like an opened anthill. The cab rolled down into a cheaper district where merchants were setting a part of their wares out on the walks.

Ham toyed with his sword cane and wondered what kind of a tub the Helldiver would be.

Suddenly he snapped rigid as an icicle.

Into the cab had permeated the low, mellow sound which was part of Doc. Weird and exotic, the note trilled up-and-down the musical scale. Looking directly at Doc’s strong lips, Ham could not tell the sound was coming from them, such a

quality of ventriloquism did the trilling note have. Indeed, Doc himself probably did not quite realize he was making it.

The sound could have but one meaning now:

Danger!

„What is it?“ Ham demanded.

„Listen!“ Doc told him abruptly.

Silence lasted about a minute. Then Ham's high, intelligent forehead acquired a dubious pucker.

„I hear a *clicking* noise at intervals, I think,“ he said. „Sounds like somebody shaking a couple of dice.“

„Remember the *clicking* noise Victor Vail mentioned having heard often during the past years?“

Ham never got to say whether he recollected or not.

Their driver suddenly flicked several small objects back into the tonneau. He was careful to keep his face from being seen.

The objects he flung were the grape-like balls of anesthetic that Doc had used to overpower Ben O'Gard's hired gangsters. No doubt these had come from the scene of that affair since Doc had neglected to retrieve such of them as had not been broken.

The globules shattered.

Doc and Ham were caught! With hardly a quiver, they tumbled over unconscious on the cushions.

They had not glimpsed the countenance of their driver.

Chapter VIII

Steel Walls of Death.

Ham sat up. He groaned loudly.

„If you're complaining about the darkness,“ came Doc's steady, capable voice, „that's why you can't see anything. And as for where we are—we seem to be inside a steel vault.“

„What a dream I had waking up!“ Ham muttered.

„The anesthetic sometimes has that effect. I judge we're been unconscious nearly 2 hours. One shot of the anesthetic lays a man out for about that long.“

Ham suddenly clutched at various parts of his person. He made loud slaps on his bare hide.

„Hey!“ he yelled. „I've only my underclothes!“

„So have I,“ Doc told him. „They took our clothing. They even combed our hair from the way mine feels. And they swept the interior of the vault clean. There are no shelves or anything else except a candle and 3 matches which they kindly left us.“

„Light the candle,“ Ham suggested. „This place is blacker than the inside of an whale!“

„No, Ham,“ Doc replied. „They left the candle hoping that we'd light it.“

„Huh?“ Ham was puzzled.

„A flame will exhaust the oxygen in this place very quickly and hasten our death by suffocation.“

„You mean the vault is air-tight?“

„Yes. And soundproof, too.“

Ham now listened. He realized he could not hear a sound but the booming of his own heart. It was so quiet he could almost hear the blood gurgle through his arteries. He shivered. A heavy lead weight seemed to climb on his chest.

„The air in here must be pretty foul already,“ he muttered.

„Very,“ Doc agreed. „I have been thinking, Ham. You recall that some months ago, a large chain of New York banks went out-of-business. Probably we are in the vault of one of those banks.“

„Ugh!“ Ham shuddered. „Can't you think of something cheerful?“

Doc Savage's low laugh vibrated through the awful steel cubicle. He rarely laughed.

„How's this for something cheerful?“ he inquired. „As a matter-of-fact, I've only been waiting for you to regain consciousness before walking out of this place.“

* * * * *

Ham emitted a howl of delight that was almost a sob.

He sprang erect. They were 2 semi-naked men enclosed in thick walls of hard steel. Their voices could not penetrate outside just as no sounds could get in. The situation seemed hopeless.

But Doc Savage had a way! He never joked about matters as serious as this.

„How do we do it?“ Ham demanded.

„Our captors probably looked in our mouths,“ Doc explained. „But they forgot to count my teeth. They didn't notice that in my upper jaw, there is an extra wisdom tooth on each side. They're false. And they hold 2 chemical compounds of my own concoction. When combined, these form one of the most powerful explosives known.“

Doc now went to work on the vault door. He operated in darkness, guided only by his sensitive fingertips.

„Kind of them to leave us the candle,“ Doc said dryly.

He used the candle wax to chink his explosive in the joint of the vault door near the lock.

„Get in a corner!“ he directed Ham.

„How you gonna explode it?“ Ham questioned.

„It explodes itself due to chemical reaction about 4 minutes after the 2 compounds are mingled.“

They huddled in the corner farthest from the vault door. Doc employed his mighty bronze form to shield Ham although Ham did not realize it at the time, so great was the nervous tension.

„It's about time for the blast!“ Doc breathed swiftly. „Open your mouth wide to equalize the pressure on either side of your eardrums so there'll be less likelihood of them being ruptured.“

Ham barely had time to comply.

Wh-a-a-m-m-m!!!

Compressing air smashed them against the solid steel with stunning force! It crowded their eyeballs inward. It seemed to tear the flesh from their bones!

So terrific was the explosion that Ham was reduced to senselessness.

Doc Savage—huge and bronze and apparently affected not-at-all by the concussion—flashed to the heavy steel door. It was still shut. But the hard metal was ruptured about the lock. He shoved.

The door opened about a foot and stuck. But that was enough. Doc carried the unconscious Ham outside, thence through 2 vacant chambers.

Ham revived after several minutes in a large, bare room—the lobby of a former bank.

Pedestrians moved on the street outside the unwashed plate-glass windows. One of these chanced to look in. He was a portly man with spats and a cane, smoking a cigar. No doubt he had heard the blast.

Doc Savage rushed Ham to a side door. It was locked.

The lock came out of the hard wood like an ear of corn out of its shuck when Doc exerted a little of his tremendous strength!

A taxi driver at a stand in the street heard the lock tear out. He glanced around. He was just in time to see the 2 men climbed into his hack.

The driver bellowed for a cop!

The cop came. He did not know Doc Savage by sight. He pinched both Doc and Ham. Doc did not put up an argument. This was the quickest way of getting clothes. The cop was tough and swore a lot.

At the police station, the captain in charge insisted on stripping to his underwear so that Doc would be properly clad in the captain's own clothes!

And the cursing cop got a lecture from his superior that would make him remember the giant Bronze Man the rest of his life! He would also have gone suspended a month without a pay if Doc hadn't interceded.

„Anyway, begorra, yez had better learn to know some of the big men in this town by sight!“ the captain warned his patrolman.

* * * * *

20 minutes later, Doc Savage stood on the wharf appraising Captain Chauncey McCluskey's under-the-Polar-ice submarine.

The thing looked like a razor-backed cigar of steel. The hull was fitted with lengthwise runners resembling railway rails. As a matter-of-fact, these actually were such rails converted to the purpose of ice runners. They were supposed to enable the undersea craft to slide along beneath the Arctic ice path.

A wireless aerial collapsible was set up for action. There was a steel rod of a bowsprit ramming out in front the size of a telegraph pole. The rudder and propellers were protected by a steel cage intended to keep out ice cakes.

Doc liked the looks of this latest of Polar-exploring vehicles. He stepped aboard.

A man shoved his head out of the main hatch amidships. All this man needed to make him a „walrus“ was a pair of 2-foot tusks. Doc had always believed that Monk was the homeliest human creation. But now it was a toss-up between Monk and this man.

The man squeezed out of the hatch. He would tip a pair of scales at 300 pounds if he'd budge them at an ounce.

„What-the-blazes do you want aboard here, matey?“ the man demanded.

His voice was a roar that frightened roosting gulls off floatsam in the middle of the bay.

„I'm hunting Captain Chauncey McCluskey,“ Doc announced.

„You've found him!“ roared the walrus. „An' if yer a dinged landlubber just wantin' a look at this bloody hooker, yer can take shore leave right now! I been pestered to death by cranks since that piece come out in the papers this mornin'!“

Doc didn't bat an eye. He rather liked to deal with a man who got down to business and said what he thought.

„Let's look your vessel over,“ he suggested.

The walrus blew noisily through his mustache. „Mean to say you're interested in buyin' a share in this expedition?“

„Exactly. IF your craft meets my needs.“

„Come below, matey,“ rumbled Captain McCluskey. „I'll show ye her innards.“

They looked at her innards for an hour-and-a-half. They came back on deck.

Doc was satisfied.

„It will take approximately \$250,000 to see you through,“ he said. „I will put up the sum ... but on one condition.“

Captain McCluskey blew through his walrus mustache and eyed Doc as if wondering whether the bronze man had that much money.

The walrus would have been surprised if he had known the true extent of Doc's wealth. For Doc had at his command one of the most fabulous treasure troves in existence—a vast cavern stored with the wealth of the ancient Mayan nation. This was located in a lost canyon—the *Valley of the Vanished*—in the remote recesses of Central America. Living isolated from the rest of the World, survivors of the ancient Mayan civilization kept Doc supplied with mule trains of gold whenever he needed it.

„What's the one condition?“ McCluskey rumbled.

„The expedition must be entirely in my hands the first 2 months,“ Doc explained. „Within that length of time, I shall visit a certain remote spot in the Arctic regions and secure the thing I am going after.“

* * * * *

Captain McCluskey was surprised.

„The *thing* you're goin' after... What d'you mean, matey?“

„I'm afraid you'll have to swallow your curiosity on that point, Captain. The object of our quest will be disclosed when we arrive and not before. I can assure you, though, that it does not involve breaking the Law in any way.“

The walrus considered deeply.

„All right, matey. I'll sail 2 months under your sealed orders. But strike me pink! If yer breakin' the Law, I'll throw ye into the brig the minute I finds ye out!“

„Fair enough.“

„Cap'n McCluskey is as honest a swab as ever sailed the ocean!“ the walrus continued his roaring. „I've save me money many a long year to bank enough to build the HELLDIVER. The good lads in me crew have done the same. We want to

do somethin' to leave our mark in the World so we'll be remembered after we're in Davy Jones' locker.

„This explorin' f'yage under the Pole is our bid for fame, matey. It means a lot to us. We ain't gonna be throwed off our course this later in the game. Maybe ye don't understand our feelin's. But that's the way it is.“

„Naturally, my project will not interfere with your goal of sailing under the North Pole,“ Doc replied. „And you may rest assured we shall make no effort to share in the glory of your accomplishment. I shall not permit my name to be mentioned either as partial backer or as having accompanied you.“

The walrus man seemed deeply moved.

„Yer a generous man, matey,“ he rumbled. „But one other point we'd better clar up.“

„What's that?“

„The hearty lads in me crew,“ chuckled Captain McCluskey. „Them swabs ain't sissies, matey. They're good men. They've sailed in naval submarines aplenty in their time. But they're hard as iron an' a little rough in their ways. You said you'd bring five of your own mates along. That's all right. But if they ain't got hair on their chests, my crew is liable to haze 'em around some.“

Doc smiled faintly. „I don't know about the hair. But I think my lads can hold their own.“

„Blow me down!“ grinned the walrus. „Then we'll get along like frogs on a log!“

„I wish to make a number of changes in this craft,“ Doc declared. „I shall pay for them, naturally.“

The walrus frowned. „What kinda changes?“

„A special radio. Electrical apparatus for sounding and locating icebergs. A collapsible seaplane. Better diving suits than you have. And other things of that nature.“

„Strike me pink!“ chuckled McCluskey. „Yer a swab that knows his business, I can see that. How long'll it take?“

„2 weeks.“

Chapter IX

Tough Cargo.

The 2 weeks had passed.

„HELLDIVER is right!“ Monk grumbled. „The name sure fits!“

The under-the-Polar-ice submarine was off the Maine coast sailing Northward. The craft had run into a stiff blow. And nothing is quite as disturbing as the movement of a U-boat in heavy going.

As each gigantic sea approached the sharp bows of the sub, the steel cigar of a craft did a sort of devil dance of anticipation. It shimmied from side-to-side. It squirmed. It gurgled like a thing in agony. Then it would sink in the wave as though going to its death.

They had to keep the hatches closed. To breathe the air inside was something like being shut up in a can of axle grease.

„It’s an old-fashioned hell ship if you ask me,“ Long Tom muttered.

Doc Savage glanced sharply at the frail, unhealthy-looking electrical wizard. This was Long Tom’s way of telling important news.

„What do you mean by that, Long Tom?“ Doc asked.

„Last night, I had a dream...“ Long Tom began.

„So did I,“ groaned Monk, who was slightly seasick. „I dreamed I was Jonah and the whale had swallowed me.“

„Shut up!“ snapped Long Tom. „In my dream, I saw somebody bending over me as I slept. I heard a *clicking* noise as though a pair of dice were being rattled in somebody’s hand.“

Strange lights flickered in Doc’s golden eyes.

„You’re not trying to be funny are you, Long Tom?“

„I never felt less funny! I grabbed at the man bending over me in the dream. I got this.“

Long Tom drew an object from his pocket.

It was a black-haired wig.

„Did you get a look at his face?“ Doc rapped.

„It was too dark. And he was gone before I could follow.“

Doc considered in silence for perhaps a minute.

„This is serious, brothers,“ he said at length. „That killer of Ben O’Gard’s is aboard this sub. And we don’t know him by sight.“

„It oughta be easy to find him now,“ snorted Monk eyeing the black wig. „Just find the guy whose hair changed color during the night.“

It was astounding the way Monk’s seasickness had vanished now that danger threatened!

„No good,“ said Long Tom. „I looked everybody over this morning. And no hair had changed color. That means the man was wearing the wig as a disguise while he did his dirty work.“

„What *dirty work*?“ Doc inquired.

„I forgot to mention the fellow had a knife,“ Long Tom said dryly.

* * * * *

The unhealthy-looking electrical wizard went below. Long Tom’s looks were deceptive. Although the weakling of Doc’s crowd, he was man enough to thrash a good 9-out-of-10 men that one would pass on the street.

Long Tom was serving as radio operator. He had installed a radio set so powerful he could keep in touch with the remotest corners of the Earth even while resting on the bottom of the sea.

He had also equipped the HELLDIVER with the most sensitive devices for measuring underwater distances with sound waves. Simply by watching dials, Long Tom could tell how far below the sea bottom was, how far they were from the nearest iceberg, and how big that berg was. An alarm bell would even ring the instant they came within dangerous distance of any floating object big enough to harm the sub.

Monk left Doc considering the new danger which threatened them. Monk had confidence that Doc would find a way to trap their enemy with the *clicking* teeth.

Monk retired to the cubicle where he kept his chronicles. Monk's contributions to the expedition were numerous. The most remarkable of these was a chemical concoction which—when released in quantities from the sub—would dissolve any ice which happened to be above it.

This removed any danger of the HELLDIVER being trapped under the ice.

Special apparatus for supplying oxygen within the sub and concentrated foods which were composed simply of the necessary chemical elements for nourishment in a form easily assimilated were also products of Monk's genius.

Renny was doing work which his experience as an engineer eminently fitted him. He was the navigator. At this, Renny had few equals. Moreover, he was making maps. The voyage of the Helldiver would lead through unexplored Arctic regions, and Renny's maps would be of great value to future generations.

The archeologist-geologist Johnny possessed a fund of knowledge about the Polar ice cap and ocean currents which would be invaluable. There were very few things about this old bud of mud we call the „Earth“ which Johnny did not know.

As for Ham, he had taken care of the legal angles such as securing the necessary permission to put in at Greenland seaports. The Danes run Greenland as a monopoly. And a handful of permits are necessary before a foreign vessel can touch there.

Ham also furnished everybody aboard the HELLDIVER an example of what the well-dressed voyager under the Polar ice should wear. His oilskins were impeccable. The fact that he always carried an innocent-looking black cane afforded Captain McCluskey's crew some chuckles. They didn't know this was a sword cane. If Ham ever drowned, he would still have that sword cane in one hand!

About Noon, Ham searched Doc Savage out. Doc was on deck. It seemed a miracle that each terrific wave did not sweep him overboard. But the seas had no more effect upon Doc than upon a statue of tough bronze metal.

There was a strange quality about Doc's bronze skin. It seemed to shed water like the proverbial duck's back without becoming wet.

Ham was excited.

„Good news!“ he yelled. „Radio message from New York. Long Tom just copied it!“

„What is it?“ Doc asked.

„Victor Vail left the hospital this morning,“ Ham replied. „He is no longer blind. He can see as well as anybody!“

* * * * *

The smashing waves soon drove the immaculate Ham into the greasy vitals of the submarine.

„I've inhaled so much oil already that it's oozing out of my hide,“ he told Monk.

But Monk was making a chemical concoction capable of giving off warmth for several hours at a stretch—something that would be very handy to tuck in a man's shoes and gloves when he took a stroll on the ice in the vicinity of the North Pole. He didn't want to be bothered.

„G‘wan off an‘ chew a bacon rind!“ he sneered.

Ham bloated indignantly. Monk had been goading him for several days about pigs and pork. And Ham hadn‘t been able to devise a single way to get back at Monk.

Ham wished mightily he dared take a swing at Monk. But he knew better. A grizzly bear with any sense would think twice before tackling Monk.

Muttering to himself, Ham ambled forward. He heard a sound which might have been an angry bull in a china shop. Ham quickened his pace. It sounded like a fight. He ducked gingerly through a slit of a door in a steel bulkhead.

One of HELLDIVER’s crew sprawled on the grille floor of the engine room. The man was an „oiler“. He was big—fully as big as Monk. He looked tough. Privately, Ham had considered this oiler and Monk embroiled in a fight just for his own amusement.

But the fighting oiler now sprawled on his back. He whimpered. His lips had been smashed into a crimson pulp. One of his eyes was closed.

Over him towered walrus-like Captain McCluskey.

„I kin lick any swab aboard this iron fish!“ the Captain bellowed. „Rust my anchor, but I‘ll wring the neck of the next scut I find shirkin‘ his work! Get up on yer feet, you! An‘ see that them engines is kept better oiled!“

Captain McCluskey evidently ran his craft like an old-time clipper master.

Ham mentally kissed the oiler goodbye as a prospective opponent for Monk. He addressed Captain McCluskey.

„I like your discipline methods,“ he said flatteringly.

„They‘ll do, pretty boy!“ bellowed the walrus.

Ham writhed under the appellation of „pretty boy“. But he kept the oily smile of admiration on his face.

„I‘m afraid you‘re going to have trouble with one man aboard this vessel,“ he said in the air of imparting a warning to his *hero*.

„Who?“ roared the giant captain.

„The hairy baboon they call *Monk*,“ said Ham blandly.

„I‘ll watch ‘im!“ boomed the walrus ominously. „If he bats an eye at me, I‘ll hit the swab so hard his fur will fall off!“

Ham had a foxy look in his eye as he ambled back to Monk’s steel cubicle. He looked in at Monk.

Monk gave him an elaborate pig-like grunt. Ham ignored the insult.

„The Captain says the next time you bat an eye at him, he’s gonna hit you so hard you‘ll shed all that red fuzz,“ Ham advised.

„Yeah?“

Monk heaved to his feet. „Yeah? Well, I‘ll just go tell ‘im I don‘t like guys talkin‘ behind my back like that!“

He waddled out. He was so big that he barely got through the door of his cubicle.

Ham trailed along. He wouldn‘t have missed what was going to happen for a thousand dollars!

* * * * *

Monk found walrus-like Captain McCluskey in the officers‘ quarters.

The 2 giants promptly glowered at each other. Monk's little eyes sparkled with the prospect of a fight. The walrus blew noisily through his mustache, each hair of which was like a crooked black peg.

„Listen, guy!“ Monk began in a sugary voice. „I don't like...“

The walrus hit Monk. It sounded like a gun going off!

Monk hadn't expected it so soon. He was caught off-guard. The glow drove him backward as though he had accidentally stood in front of a 12-inch coastal-defense gun.

His bulk collided with Ham who was standing behind him. That kept Monk from falling.

But Ham was tumbled end-over-end. His head cracked a valve wheel. He was promptly knocked senseless!

From Ham's point-of-view, nothing worse could have happened.

He slept through the whole fight! He was cheated of enjoying the fruit of his devilment. It was the biggest disappointment Ham had suffered in years. For days afterward, he was wont to get off in a corner and swear to himself about it.

Monk emitted a series of deep bawling noises. He jumped up-and-down like an ape. This cleared his head.

He rushed the walrus!

The walrus kicked him in the stomach!

Monk folded down to the floor. The walrus leaped high into the air and came down. But his face collided forcibly with Monk's driving feet!

Captain McCluskey turned over completely in the air. He spat out 3 teeth. He got up roaring!

Monk knocked him down, loosening 2 more teeth in the process!

The walrus tried to bite off Monk's left ear with what teeth he had left.

Monk stopped that by grasping great folds of his opponent's ample stomach in monster fists and striving to tear the man open!

They stood toe-to-toe and traded haymakers. They swapped indiscriminate kicks.

It was a Battle of the Giants! A fray primeval! A thing of pristine savagery! It would have drawn a million-dollar gate in the prize ring except that the women's clubs would have stopped it.

And poor Ham—sleeping through it all—would have cut off an arm rather than miss it!

Captain McCluskey lunged unexpectedly. Monk was carried backward. His bullet-of-a-head crashed against a hard steel bulkhead.

Monk fell senseless!

The walrus drew back a foot to kick him...

At this point, Renny dashed forward. He grasped McCluskey's huge arm.

„You whipped him,“ Renny rumbled. „No need of crippling him!“

Renny only wanted to keep Monk from serious damage. He was a peacemaker. And he got what peacemakers usually get...

The walrus knocked Renny flat on his back!

* * * * *

The fight now started all over. Renny was nearly as heavy as Monk. He was also a fine boxer. And for years, he had been smacking panels out of doors with his fists.

Renny got up from the floor and hung a left jab on McCluskey's nose.

The walrus emitted a sound that was a combination of Vesuvius and Niagara. By a marvelous feat of acrobatics, he managed to jump on Renny's midriff with both feet.

Air came from Renny's mouth so fast it almost blew out his teeth. He collapsed, largely to keep his middle from being jumped on again.

Captain McCluskey rushed in to the kill.

Renny hooked a fist. It hit McCluskey's ear. It smashed the ear flat as a well-ironed handkerchief!

A strange thing now happened.

McCluskey got to his feet as calmly as though he were arising from the mess table. He ambled toward the slit of a door. He was unsteady on his feet—it was true—and nearly walked a circle. But he seemed to have forgotten there was such a thing as a fight.

McCluskey was extremely „punch drunk“.

He sobered before he got out of the room, though. Whirling, he emitted a bellow and sprang upon Renny!

Renny round-housed 2 good swings! The first folded McCluskey like a Barlow knife. The second ruined the walrus's other ear and spun him like a top.

McCluskey staggered backward and fell into a bunk.

An instant later, however, he came out of it. He was a lot of man, that walrus!

The two bartered punches. Renny „blocked“ one with his jaw. For an instant, he was dazed.

That instant was his undoing. Another swing landed on top of the first.

Renny dropped—kayoed for one of the few times in his career.

Mountainous Captain McCluskey took 2 weaving steps for the narrow bulkhead door. Then he sighed loudly and—turning around twice like a dog finding a place to lay down—slumped prone on the floor.

Afterward, Ham awakened. The combatants had been attended to. Ham was so disappointed that he crawled out on deck and actually mingled salty tears with the sea.

* * * * *

Doc Savage now inaugurated a campaign of his own. He began to fraternize with the crew in a most diligent manner. It was only another evidence of his immense knowledge that he found something of interest to discuss with each man.

Doc was hunting for the fellow whose teeth *clicked*.

A strange thing became evident. None of the crew was willing to open up and talk frankly with him. Instead, half-a-dozen sought—none too adroitly—to worm from Doc his reasons for coming along on the under-the-Polar-ice expedition.

The big oiler whom Captain McCluskey had chastised for neglecting the engines was the most outspoken. His name was—not without reason—„Dynamite“ Smith.

„Just where is this boodle yer goin' after, Sir?“ asked Dynamite Smith.

„What *boodle*?“ queried Doc innocently.

Dynamite Smith shifted uneasily.

„Well, me an' my mates kinda got the idea yer was goin' after somethin' up in the bloody Arctic," he said. „Have yer got a map that show where it is?"

„What put all this into your head?"

„Nothin'," muttered Dynamite Smith.

Then, unable to stand the searching gaze of Doc's strangely potent golden eyes, the big oiler turned away.

It was obvious that the man knew more than he had divulged. It was also evident that some sinister devilment was breeding among the crew.

Doc didn't like it.

„I'll bet that bird with the *clicking* teeth is stirring up the crew," Doc decided.

Then an idea hit him. He went to make sure he still had the treasure map he had taken off the back of blind Victor Vail by X-ray.

The map was gone! Somebody had stolen it!

* * * * *

Several days passed. Nothing happened. The HELLDIVER now sailed off a barren section of Northern Greenland. Great blue icebergs cocked nasty snouts out of the sea all about them. The sub sloughed through mile-after-mile of thin pan ice.

Occasionally—where the pan ice had joined with fields of „growlers" or small bergs to make a solid barrier—they submerged and passed under.

The submarine was behaving beautifully. Long Tom's wonderful apparatus kept them out of danger with the double safeguard of Monk's special chemicals should something go wrong.

Monk, Renny, and the walrus-like Captain McCluskey had resumed relations. Indeed, they got along handsomely. They had a hearty respect for each other's fighting qualities.

Doc hadn't found the man with the *clicking* teeth. He was mystified. He couldn't imagine who had his treasure map, but he did not worry greatly about it. He could sit down and reproduce it perfectly from memory.

The only discovery of note he had made was that the big oiler Dynamite Smith used narcotics almost steadily. Doc consulted Captain McCluskey about this.

„Sure, I knowed the swab was a dopehead," the walrus assured him. „Rust my anchor, but it don't seem to hurt him! He's been usin' the stuff for years. Let'm alone, matey. The stuff just keeps 'im harmless."

Doc was not so sure about that. But there was nothing to be gained by starting trouble.

Long Tom radioed their position daily to Victor Vail. The violinist showed a great interest in their progress as well as the exact course they intended to follow.

Sometimes Doc wondered about Victor Vail's avid desire to know their whereabouts to the fraction-of-a-mile.

They were in a zone of continuous daylight now. The Sun shone around the full clock. It was never night.

„Confound such a region!" Ham complained.

He had just found out that for the last 3 days, Monk had awakened him at Midnight and made him believe it was Noon the next day. Consequently, Ham had

been losing a lot of sleep and couldn't understand what was making him feel so groggy.

A strange, sinister tension was growing aboard the HELLDIVER.

The crew congregated in groups, whispering. They dispersed or fell to speaking loudly of commonplaces when Captain McCluskey, Doc, or any of his 5 men came near.

„Rust my anchor, but I smells trouble!“ Captain McCluskey confided to Doc.

Day after day, the submarine bored into the Polar regions. Twice it traveled under the ice more than a score of hours. It made many shorter jaunts under the pack.

On one occasion, they would surely have been trapped under a vast field more than 30-feet deep had it not been for Monk's chemicals. Released from compartments in the skin of the undersea boat, the stuff let the craft reach the surface through a great self-made blowhole.

It was now but a matter of dozens-of-miles to the spot where the treasure map indicated the long-lost liner OCEANIC lay.

Doc noted a perceptible increase in the sinister tension.

„We're in for a jam,“ he told his 5 men seriously. „The crew of this sub—part of them at least—know what we're after. And one of these surely must have my map.“

Monk grinned with all his homely face and popped his knuckles.

„Well, we ain't seen no signs of Keelhaul de Rosa or Ben O'Gard,“ he chuckled. „That's one consolation.“

„It's my opinion that Ben O'Gard's man with the *clicking* teeth is behind this trouble brewing with the crew,“ Doc replied.

„Confound it!“ declared Ham. „The *clicking* of the teeth should make the man easy to find!“

„That's what I thought,“ Doc said wryly. „But bless me, brothers, I do believe that fellow's teeth have stopped *clicking*. I've gone around—straining my ears day-after-day—and not a *click* have I heard.“

„Maybe it was really a dream that Long Tom had about the man with noisy teeth bending over him that night?“ Johnny suggested.

„I didn't dream that black wig!“ Long Tom retorted.

There was nothing to be said to that. The conclave broke up. At a scant 5 mph, the HELLDIVER nosed for the dab of unmapped land where the liner OCEANIC supposedly lay.

This was virtually an unexplored region where they now cruised. Possibly a polar aviator had flown over it. But even that was highly unlikely.

Doc retired, confident another 24 hours would bring action of some sort.

It did!

Johnny's frantic plunge into Doc's quarters awakened the big Bronze Man. Johnny's breath was a procession of gulps. His spectacles with the magnifying lens on the left side were askew his nose.

„Renny! Monk!“ he shouted. „They are both gone! They vanished during their watch on deck!“

Chapter X

Marooned.

In flash parts of seconds, Doc was in the control room.

„Put about!“

His powerful voice volleyed through the monotonous complaint of the diesel engines. It penetrated to every cranny of the submarine from the „hard-nose“ bow up front loaded with steel and concrete in case of collision with the ice to the little tunnel through the after trim tanks which gave access to the rudder mechanism.

The helmsman spun his wheel.

„Full-speed ahead!“ Doc boomed into the engine-room speaking tube.

Captain McCluskey lurched in from the officers' quarters. He was sticky-eyed from sleep.

„What's goin' on here?“ he roared. „Rust my anchor, what we puttin' about for?“

„My two men—Monk and Renny—have disappeared,“ Doc told him. „We're going back to hunt them.“

Captain McCluskey clambered up on deck. But he came down almost at once, his hairy shanks blue from the cold.

„No use!“ he rumbled. „Stormin' up there! If them 2 swabs ain't aboard, they're in Davy Jones's locker.“

McCluskey seized the speaking tube to the engine room and shouted into it: „Slow your engines to normal speed!“

Then to the helmsman: „Hard over, me hearty. We're resumin' our course.“

Cold and hard as a statue of bronze, Doc Savage was suddenly in front of McCluskey.

Doc was big. But the walrus was bigger. He outweighed Doc by nearly a hundred pounds.

„Countermand that order!“ Doc directed.

Such a quality of compelling obedience did his remarkable voice have that McCluskey made an involuntary gesture at compliance. But then he bristled.

„I'm the skipper of this tin fish!“ he bellowed. „We ain't wastin' no time goin' back to look for them 2 swabs. Davy Jones has got 'em, I tell you!“

„Countermand that order!“ Doc repeated. „We'll find Monk and Renny—or their bodies—if we have to winter in this ice pack!“

Captain McCluskey glowered. He had a lot of confidence in himself. He had whipped Monk and Renny in succession. And either one of them looked more dangerous than this strange Bronze Man.

„I'll show yer who's master of this hooker!“ he snarled.

He reached for Doc's throat.

The walrus was now treated to the biggest surprise of his life!

His hand was trapped in mid-air by case-hardened bronze fingers! For an instant, McCluskey thought the hand had been cut off so much did that grip hurt and so numb did it make his arm!

He started a blow with his other free fist. It traveled hardly more than an inch.

Then that hand was closed in a fearful clasp. The hard paw crushed like so much dough! Big blisters of blood popped out on the fingertips and burst with fine sprays of crimson.

The walrus screamed like a hurt child!

He stared at his hands. His eyes nearly fell out! But his monster claws were now being easily by one hard hand of bronze. Strain as he would, he could not budge them. The largest vise could not have held them tighter ... or more painfully!

The walrus screamed again! He had thought himself a mighty fighter. Not in the scope of his memory had he met a scrapper who could stand before him.

But in the hands of this strange Bronze Man, he was like a fat sheep in the jaws of a hungry tiger.

Then a „Big Bertha“ shell seemed to go off in the captain's head. He slumped senseless.

Doc Savage had kayoed him with one punch!

* * * * *

The submarine rooted through growlers and pan ice. Back-and-forth, right-and-left, it lunged and wallowed. Sometimes sheets of pan ice crowded up on the deck until Doc, Long Tom, Ham, and Johnny had to dive hastily down the hatch to avoid being crushed or swept overboard.

But no sign of Monk or Renny had they found.

A bitter wind was swooping off the distant wastes of ice-capped Greenland. It froze spray on the steel runners affixed to the hull of the under-the-ice sub. But the chemicals on the sides of the ship flushed the frigid coating away at intervals.

„The gale was worse during the night,“ Johnny muttered. „Poor Monk! Poor Renny!“

He *blinked* his eyes back of his spectacle lenses.

Although Monk and Renny had indeed vanished during the night, it was night only by their watches. The Sun hung well above the horizon where it had lingered for some days. It was wan, almost lost in a pale, nasty haze. Ice which had piled up on deck abruptly slid off with a grinding roar.

Doc went outside. He carried powerful binoculars. But once more, a search through them disclosed nothing.

However, the sub now surged across a comparatively open lead in the ice pack. This was what Doc had been hoping for.

„Stand by to put out the seaplane!“ he ordered.

The crew crowded the deck. They were surly. The air of sinister trouble still hung about them.

But they obeyed Doc's orders with alacrity. Some of them had seen what had happened to Captain McCluskey. They had told the others.

A deck plate was lifted. A folding boom was jacked into position.

Out came an all-metal, collapsible seaplane. Doc himself got the tiny hornet of a craft ready for the air.

Captain McCluskey came on deck while the work was under way. Doc Savage rested his golden eyes intently upon the walrus of a man.

McCluskey scowled for a second-or-two. Then he grinned sheepishly.

„Ye won't have any more trouble from me, matey,“ he mumbled. Then he winced and moved his hands.

Each paw was bundled in bandages until it resembled the foot of a man with the gout!

Doc drew his 3 remaining companions aside.

„Keep your hands on your guns,“ he warned them. „I don't think McCluskey will make more trouble immediately. But watch his crew!“

It seemed a miracle when the cockpit of the diminutive seaplane held Doc's mighty bronze form. The little radial engine was fitted with a starter. Doc turned it over. The cold made it stubborn. But it fired at last.

The exhaust stacks smoked for a while. Then they lipped blue flame. The engine was warm.

The plane floats left a ribbon of foam as they scudded across the open lead in the ice pack. Doc backed the control stick. The ship vaulted off the water.

He banked in circle-after-circle, each one wider than the last.

The pale haze hadn't looked so thick from the surface. But it hampered vision amazingly from the air. The gloom was increasing, too.

No sign of Monk or Renny could he discern.

He flew back at last and alighted beside the submarine. The frozen rigidity of his bronze face told Long Tom, Ham, and Johnny the worst.

„Monk and Renny are ... finished,“ Long Tom said thickly.

„Monk... How I'm gonna miss that guy!“ Ham mumbled. He was near tears.

The crew hoisted the seaplane aboard, collapsed it, and stowed it under the deck plates.

* * * * *

2 hours later, walrus-like Captain McCluskey was pointing with a thick arm.

„Rust my anchor... Look!“ he boomed. „Two points off the starboard bow!“

Coming up from below, Doc Savage was a bronze flash. He thought Monk and Renny might have been sighted. There was always the possibility that they had been washed overboard and had reached one of the many icebergs.

This, however, was only a herd of walrus asleep on an enormous pan of ice.

„We need fresh meat,“ explained Captain McCluskey. „It's unusual to sight 'em this far North. I'm goin' after some of the critters. Want to go along, matey?“

Doc nodded. He advised Ham, Johnny, and Long Tom to go also. It would get their minds off the loss of Monk and Renny.

Several of the crew were also going, big Dynamite Smith included in them. Doc made sure a number of the surly faction amid the crew—the suspected plotters—were among the hunters. There seemed nothing to be lost in deserting the sub for a time.

2 folding kayaks—long and narrow boats with a covering of sealskin—were set up. They also assembled an umiak. It was an overgrown brother of the kayak.

Doc went below. He was gone about 10 minutes. During the time he was alone below decks, everyone else was outside to witness the departure of the hunters.

Doc came up bearing a sizable bundle. This was done in waterproof silk.

„What's that, matey?“ Captain McCluskey wanted to know.

Big bronze Doc Savage seemed not to hear the query.

They put off.

The edge of the iceberg—near where the walrus herd slept—arose almost vertically. It was too sheer for a landing. The hunters decided to stalk the animals from the berg. They paddled directly to the floe ... alighted ... and drew the folding boats well out of the cold water.

Captain McCluskey and the rest of the HELLDIVER crew led the stalk. Doc kept warily in the rear with his strange bundle. Ham, Long Tom, and Johnny trod his heels.

The bitter cold bothered them at first but became less noticeable in a few minutes. They wore regulation Eskimo garb. Moccasins reaching to their knees and lined with reindeer skin, bearskin trousers, shirts of auk skins with the feathers inside, and shirts of sealskin with a hood which covered their heads.

The surface of the ice pack was rough. Progress became laborious. The need for silence made it harder. Their speed was hardly half-a-mile per hour.

Captain McCluskey and his men drew a little ahead.

Suddenly they whirled! They aimed rifles at Doc and his friends.

„Kill the swabs!“ shrieked Captain McCluskey.

* * * * *

Doc had been alert. He was not taken off guard. Hardly had the HELLDIVER men started their show of hostilities when a mighty bronze arm rushed Johnny, Long Tom, and Ham to cover behind an ice hummock.

The move was executed so quickly they were sheltered before the first rifle volley spattered out noisily.

Bullets dug into the ice hummock, showering Doc and his friends with fragments of ice. The pieces tinkled down the hard flanks of the ice mound with a sound like tiny bells.

„Retreat!“ Doc commanded his friends. „We’re between the gang and their boats. We’ll try to keep them from reaching the craft.“

They were extremely thankful for the rugged surface of the iceberg now that the situation had changed.

Doc found a small crevice in the ice. Into this, he lowered his bundle. With a single rap of his tempered fist, he shattered enough brittle ice to conceal the package.

Captain McCluskey’s booming voice reached them.

„The deck swipes!“ thundered the walrus. „Put the lot of ‘em in Davy Jones’s locker!“

„They don’t seem to be trying to beat us back to the boats,“ Doc said in a tight voice of wonder.

A storm of lead scored the ice all about. The HELLDIVER gang had caught sight of them.

Ham whirled. He secured a glimpse of a fur-swathed head. His rifle jarred. A man slouched out from behind an ice spike and lay down as though tired. Steam curled up from the scarlet pool that gathered around his feebly squirming body.

„I haven’t lost my shooting eye,“ Ham said with a grim mirth. „Did you see who I winged?“

„Dynamite Smith, the oiler,“ Doc retorted. „Let’s veer over to the right here. It looks like better footing.“

There ensued a frightful couple of minutes before they reached the spot Doc had indicated. The more frantic the effort they put forth, the more they slithered around on the terrifically rough-and-slippery ice.

„Seas have been breaking over this berg recently,“ Doc explained. „That’s why it’s so infernally slick.“

Bullets gouged ice around them like hard-driven, invisible picks. Ricocheting, the lead squalled like unseen wildcats.

Doc, Long Tom, Ham, and Johnny finally reached the smooth footing where Doc had indicated. This was a great crack which had opened in the berg ... filled with water ... then frozen. They glided down it.

„We’re gonna beat ‘em to the boats anyhow!“ said the bony Johnny.

He had taken off his glasses with the magnifying lens on the left side. His breath steam had been fogging the spectacles. Johnny really did not have much need of glasses on his good right eye, anyway.

„It’s funny that they’re not putting up more of a race to keep us from reaching the boats,“ Long Tom snapped. „I don’t understand it.“

But they did understand it a moment later.

They came in sight of the boats.

Or more properly, the spot where the boats should have been. For the craft were now gone.

And the submarine was not where they had left it either!

* * * * *

„They’re clever rats,“ Doc Savage said grimly. „The men who remained aboard the HELLDIVER put another folding boat in the water the instant we were out-of-sight. They secured the craft we left on the ice. And look! There’s why McCluskey’s gang were not so ambitious in pursuing us.“

A bronze arm pointed.

The three stared. Then their hearts sank.

The HELLDIVER had cruised down the edge of the iceberg. Standing by, the submarine was picking up members of the villainous crew as they slid off the sheer edge of the vast pan of ice.

Doc’s pals opened fire with their rifles. The range was considerable. A high tribute to their shooting was the fact that they put 2 of the HELLDIVER crew out-of-commission.

The rest of the sailors reached the submarine safely. The craft sped down an open lead in the pack ice headed Northward. It was making for the spot where—according to the map—the liner OCEANIC lay. The dense mist swallowed the sub completely.

The last thing they saw was the gigantic figure of Captain McCluskey standing on deck, shaking both his fists in their direction.

„Brothers,“ Doc said mildly, „we have been guilty of an unforgivable mistake.“

„What’s that?“ Ham wanted to know.

„We underestimated the intelligence of our friend McCluskey,“ Doc replied. „Some days ago, McCluskey commented on the furtive actions of his own crew,

giving the impression that he himself feared trouble from them. The clever fellow must have been aware that I had noticed the attitude of the crew and he expressed himself thus to allay my suspicions of him.“

„They’ve got the treasure map, of course,“ Ham clipped. „They’re set out to grab the treasure.“

„And they’ve left us in a pretty serious position,“ Johnny muttered. „Marooned on the Arctic ice pack is tantamount to a sentence of death.“

Johnny’s words carried awful portent. Johnny knew the Polar regions. It was a part of his profession. And if he said their situation was bad, then it was really BAD!

„We might as well realize we’re up against it,“ Doc told them, „and stop talking about it.“

„The racket scared the walrus off the floe,“ Long Tom grumbled, his unhealthy-looking features drawing deeper into the hood of his fur parka like the head of a turtle into its shell. „We’re without grub!“

Ham whipped his bearskin trousers vigorously with his sword cane. „I’ve heard of Eskimos living quite a while by eating their clothes,“ he said.

„We won’t need to start on our wardrobe quite yet,“ Doc smiled. „We have concentrated rations for about a month.“

„Where?“ the others yelled in chorus.

„In the bundle I brought along,“ Doc replied.

* * * * *

The party retraced their steps to secure the all-important bundle Doc had cached in the ice crevice.

There was no excitement now. They had leisure to realize the full peril of their predicament.

The death-like quiet of the Polar waves had enveloped them. The stillness was as of a tomb.

From time to time, the awful silence was shattered by a crashing roll of sound like thunder. These noises would start with a report as sharp-and-loud as a cannon crack. And there would follow an increasing volley until the very ice under their feet seemed to quake.

This was the awesome voice of the ice waste. It was simply cracks opening in the floes.

„Nice *music!*“ Ham shuddered.

Thoughts came to them of Renny and Monk and of the death that both giants seemed certain to have suffered. This depressed them.

There was a quality of horror in the grisly spells of silence. It was as though they existed in some weird, frozen habitat of lost souls. They found themselves listening with an eagerness near pathetic for the sporadic connoise of the ice ... then shivering when the sound finally came.

Only big bronze Doc Savage showed no emotion. He swung along easily, keeping his feet on the slick iceberg under foot as surely as though his mukluks were arms with steel spikes. Often, he waited for his 3 friends to overhaul him.

The mighty Bronze Man seemed to sense that his very presence offered a bolster to the courage of Long Tom, Ham, and Johnny. So he remained near them,

although the best pace they could manage was but the speed of a snail compared to the swiftness with which Doc could have reached the cache.

They secured the bundle from the crevice in the ice.

Doc let his met squat around it. They went to work on the wrappings with cold-stiffened fingers. The more they kept busy, the less they would brood over their fearsome predicament.

Suddenly, Ham gave a start and stopped fiddling with the knots.

To his ears had come the low, exotic trilling sound which was part of Doc. So low, so nearly unreal was the mellow note that it was almost lost in the fearful silences about them. It might have been the voice of some fantastic spirit of this domain of cold.

Ham grasped his sword cane. Johnny and Long Tom became as rigid as the ice hummocks about them.

Doc's trilling slipped away into nothingness in a manner as intangible as its coming.

For a long minute, silence fairly reeked. It was the kind of quiet—this dead apathy of the Arctic—which one momentarily expected to explode.

Then came a new sound! Doc had heard it before. That was what had surprised him into setting up his trilling note. Now Johnny, Long Tom, and Ham also heard it distinctly.

A *clicking!* A *clicking* as of dice rattled together in a palm!

The noise which had haunted Victor Vail down through the years. The noise which marked the presence of Ben O'Gard's man!

„That, brothers,“ Doc Savage said softly, „is one of the last things I expected to hear at this spot.“

* * * * *

With the final word, Doc glided forward.

The others raced after him. But they were left behind as though their feet were frozen in the ice pack. Doc Savage was lost to their sight.

When they overhauled him, Doc was standing over a human figure that sprawled in a steaming lake of scarlet.

„Dynamite Smith!“ Ham clipped. „The bird I shot.“

Doc and his 3 friends now exchanged understanding glances.

An uncontrollable palsy had seized Dynamite Smith's jaws. They rattled together, making the distinctive *clicking*.

Dynamite Smith was the one of Ben O'Gard's villains who had kept track of Victor Vail down through the years.

„I don't understand it!“ Long Tom muttered. „When he bent over me that night in my bunk, his teeth *clicked*. But we have talked with him many times since then aboard the submarine and his teeth made no sound.“

„I see the explanation of that now,“ Doc replied. „In other words, every addict gets the *heebie-jeebies* when deprived of his narcotic. When Dynamite Smith is without it, his jaws shake. When he has it, they don't.“

The wounded man was conscious. He rolled his eyes.

Doc Savage now examined the man's wound. Ham had made an accurate shot.

„You're doomed,“ Doc told Dynamite Smith without emotion.

The dying man's lips moved. Doc was forced to bend close before even his keen ears could decipher the fellow's gaspings.

„Ben O'Gard an' my mateys went off an' left me here, huh?“ Dynamite Smith said.

Emotion rarely showed on Doc Savage's handsome bronze face. But it was in evidence now.

„Was Ben O'Gard on the HELLDIVER?“ he demanded.

Dynamite Smith did not answer the question. His glazing eyes rolled slowly until they focused upon Long Tom.

„I was huntin' the map when yer grabbed the black wig off'n my head that night,“ he whispered feebly. „After I come near getting' caught, Ben O'Gard hisself done the huntin'. It was him found the map an' swiped it from yer!“

„Which one of the HELLDIVER crew is Ben O'Gard?“ Doc asked.

An evil, vicious sneer distorted the blue lips of the dying man. His whisper gurgled in his throat.

„We fooled the crew of ye plenty neat!“ he labored.

It seemed he would never get the next words past his stiffening throat muscles. The villainous sneer spread upon his lips.

„Ben O'Gard is Cap'n McCluskey!“ he coughed.

* * * * *

One startled glance Doc and his 3 friends exchanged. When they looked back at Dynamite Smith, the man was dead.

„Ben O'Gard and Captain McCluskey—the same person...“ Ham muttered. „For cryin' out loud!“

Doc Savage's strong lips warped slightly.

„It seems, brothers, that we kindly financed the expedition of our enemies to get the treasure,“ he said dryly. „No doubt Ben O'Gard—we'll call him that from now on instead of *Captain McCluskey*—did take some of the treasure from the OCEANIC when he left the liner more than 15 years ago. He used that money to fit up the HELLDIVER. But his funds were not sufficient. He advertised for a sucker to back him. Imagine his pleasure when we presented ourselves!“

Ham groaned loudly.

„It was ME who called your attention to that newspaper story about the under-the-ice submarine,“ he berated himself. „What a mess I got us into!“

Doc's low laughter danced merrily among the ice hummocks.

„Forget it, Ham. If the fault belongs anywhere, it's on my shoulders. Let us go back and open that bundle of mine.“

They retraced their steps to the bundle. The sealskin thong was untied. The waterproof covering was removed.

„Hey!“ barked Johnny in surprise. „This wrapper is a small silk tent!“

„It's more than a tent also,“ Doc informed him. „With it in the package is a collapsible frame of alloy metal. Expanded—and with that silk tent stretched over it—the frame becomes a boat. There are web paddles which can be attached to our rifle barrels for propulsion.“

They all now dived into the rest of the bundle. They were anxious to see what fresh wonders it held.

Long Tom released a howl of delight!

„A radio set!“ he squawled. „Transmitter and receiver, complete!“

Swiftly, Long Tom drew aside with the wireless equipment. He proceeded to put it in operation. The apparatus was of Doc's own devising, marvelously compact. It had no bulky batteries which might be rendered useless by moisture or cold or exhausted by use. Current was supplied by a generator operated by a powerful spring and clockwork. The set operated on very short wavelength.

In 15 minutes, Long Tom had it ready for a test. Eagerly, the electrical wizard cocked an ear at the tiny built-in loudspeaker and twirled the tuning dials.

Suddenly a voice purred out of the speaker!

The astonishment of Doc and his friends at hearing that voice was unbounded. It was as though they had tuned in on the „other world“.

They jumped up and down! They bellowed at each other in a near hysteria of delight! They danced circles on the iceberg!

„I tell you we're tuned in on Hell itself!“ Ham howled.

Ham was back in his old form.

For it was Monk's voice coming out of the loudspeaker!

Chapter XI

Polar Peril.

One hour had passed. In the haze-soaked sky hung a dark spot. This spot emitted a loud droning. The droning increased in volume.

The spot became a seaplane.

It was a 2-motored job. Not the latest and speediest type of plane and somewhat shabby.

But an Angel would not have looked better to the 4 men watching it from the iceberg!

The ship sloped down in the fog. It circled. Then it lowered. The floats scraped a long white chalk mark of foam on the open lead in the ice pack.

Then they settled. The plane taxied in to the rim of the berg.

Monk and Renny stood on the floats. With acrobatic leaps, they bounded to the ice.

Probably no more hearty reunion ever occurred than took place there in the cold shadow of the North Pole!

Unnoticed at first, a man clambered out and sat on the cabin of the plane. Doc Savage was the first to glimpse him.

„Victor Vail!“ he called in surprise.

The famous violinist smiled at Doc. He tried to speak ... but could find no words to express the depth of his feeling.

Finally Victor Vail pointed at his own eyes. It was a simple gesture. But its meaning was unbounded.

Victor Vail now had eyes which were entirely normal. So deep was his gratitude to this giant Bronze Man that he could not put his emotion into coherent sentences.

„I sure thought I was rid of the sight of your ugly mug,“ Ham told Monk happily. „What happened?“

„The dang submarine submerged while we were keeping watch on deck,“ Monk explained in his mild way. „We were washed off. We swam like polar bears. I’ll bet we swam 10 miles. Talk about cold! We happened to have some of that chemical stuff I fixed up to keep a man warm or we’d have frozen stiff. Anyway, we finally found an iceberg big enough to roost on.“

„And we roosted on it until Victor Vail came along and took us off,“ Renny put in, his vast voice rumbling over the ice pack like thunder.

Doc Savage eyed Victor Vail. The violinist was alone in the plane. Surely, he had not flow into the Arctic wastes alone?

Victor Vail sensed his puzzlement.

„I hired this plane and a pilot to overhaul you,“ he explained. „You may have wondered why I have been so interested in your exact position and the course you intended to follow. The reason was because I intended to join you.“

„But why?“ Doc questioned.

„My wife and my infant daughter Roxey,“ Victor Vail said quietly. „I wanted to satisfy myself as to their ... fate.“

* * * * *

Long Tom now busied himself taking down the portable radio outfit. It had served its purpose well for it had guided the plane to this iceberg.

„Where is the pilot that Mr. Vail hired to fly him?“ Doc asked.

„The monkey got cold feet!“ Renny grinned. „Looking at all these icebergs got his goat. He refused to go on. So we took him back south to a little settlement on the coast of Greenland, bought his plane for twice what it is worth, and left him.“

„That accounts for our not finding you,“ Doc decided.

Long Tom stored the last of the radio equipment into its container.

„You haven’t told us how you happened to be marooned here,“ Monk grunted.

So Doc explained. „Captain McCluskey is Ben O’Gard,“ he concluded.

Victor Vail made a gesture of regret.

„I could not describe Ben O’Gard to you,“ he murmured. „I had no eyes to see him at the time I was in contact with him.“

The famous violinist was now seized again with emotion. In halting words, he sought to express his gratitude to big bronze Doc Savage for the return of his vision.

„Any debt of gratitude you owed me is already paid-in-full,“ Doc assured him. „You have saved me and my friends from almost certain death. In the Winter—when the ice pack is frozen solid—we might have reached civilization. But as it was, we were in a death trap.“

„McCluskey and Ben O’Gard are the same guy...“ Renny ruminated.

He popped his enormous fists together! They were so hard it was a wonder sparks did not fly.

„I'd like to have another chance at that walrus! I'll bet the chump wouldn't lick me a second time!“

„You an' me both, pal!“ Monk said with deceptive gentleness. „Dibs on first whack at 'im when we meet again!“

Long Tom had been delving in Doc's bundle. Now he gave a bark of surprise!

„Hey, what's this jigger?“ he demanded.

He held up an oddly-shaped blob of metal. It weighed quite a number of pounds.

„That,“ Doc explained softly, „is something I took off the submarine before we came away on our walrus hunt. It's a valve from one of the submerging tanks.“

Long Tom grinned widely. He sensed that Doc had pulled a fast one.

„Furthermore,“ Doc continued, „Monk's chemical which melts the ice is all exhausted from the containers in the hull of the sub. There's material for more of the stuff aboard. But the HELLDIVER crew doesn't know how to mix it.“

„You mean the gang can't take the submarine beneath the surface without this valve?“ Long Tom demanded.

„Exactly,“ Doc replied. „They will realize they'd never come up if they did. The craft would be flooded.“

„Two, they haven't the chemical to melt themselves out of a jam. The HELLDIVER cannot escape from this Arctic ice pack without submerging to pass under solidly frozen floes.“

„Then we've still got the upper hand on the gang!“ Monk chuckled.

* * * * *

The spirits of the adventurous group now soared. They boarded the seaplane. Old though the craft might be, it was amply large enough to accommodate all of them. Doc himself handled the controls.

The shabby buzzard of a plane seemed to take a drink out of the *Fountain of Youth* or whatever rejuvenates decrepit seaplanes. It wiggled its tail like a fledgling. With a skipping lunge, it took the air.

„The HELLDIVER cannot have sailed far,“ Doc remarked.

Long Tom, Ham, and Johnny were taking stock of the plane fittings. There was an emergency outfit for Arctic travel including pemmican and concentrated fruit juices intended to prevent scurvy.

There were also parachutes.

„They may come in handy,“ Long Tom grinned. „From what I've seen of this ice pack, a man sometimes can go many-a-mile without finding enough open water to land a plane.“

„Suppose you birds use binoculars on what's below us,“ Doc suggested mildly. „Finding the submarine in this fog is going to be a job.“

„You said it!“ agreed Renny. „We'd never have found you on that iceberg if it hadn't been for the radio-compass with which this plane is equipped.“

Long Tom hastily seated himself before the radio compass. He twirled the dials and cranked the gear which turned the loop aerial of the compass. Then he growled disgustedly.

„They're not operating the radio on the submarine,“ he declared. „Finding them would be a cinch if they were.“

It was much colder in the air. They shivered in spite of their fur garments. Such warmth as there was in this frigid waste seemed to come from the water.

Doc's great voice suddenly reached every ear in the plane. He spoke but one word.

„Land!“

Several intent looks were required before the others saw what Doc's sharp gaze had discerned.

Land it was, right enough. But it looked more like a vast iceberg. Only occasional rocky peaks projecting from the glacial mass identified it as „land“.

„No map shows this land,“ declared Johnny. „It can't be very great in area.“

„What we're interested in is the fact that the liner OCEANIC is aground on it somewhere,“ Doc informed him.

Victor Vail peered eagerly through the cabin windows. He had spent terrible weeks somewhere on that bleak terrain below. It held the secret of the fate of his wife and daughter Roxey. Yet this was the first time he had ever actually seen it.

The sight seemed to depress him. He shuddered.

„No one could live down there ... more than 15 years,“ he choked.

In Victor Vail's heart had reposed a desperate hope that he might find his loved ones alive.

But this now faded.

„There's the HELLDIVER!“ Doc said abruptly.

The others discovered it a moment later.

„Holy cow!“ exploded Renny. „The ice is about to crush the submarine!“

* * * * *

Ben O'Gard and his villains were trapped! They had nosed the HELLDIVER into an open lead in the ice pack, close inshore. Excitement over the nearness of their objective must have made them reckless.

The ice floe had closed behind them. Slowly ... inexorably ... it now squeezed toward the sub.

The bergs—a pale and revolting blue in the haze—crept in like the frozen fangs of a vast monster. No more than a 20 feet of water lay open on either side of the sharp-backed steel cigar of an undersea boat.

Ben O'Gard and his thugs crowded the deck. They saw the seaplane. They waved frantically!

„I do believe they're glad to see us,“ Monk snorted grimly. „We oughta sail around up here and watch 'em get squished!“

„There might be some pleasure in that,“ Doc admitted. „But we need that submarine to take the treasure home. There's too much of it to fly back by plane.“

Monk shrugged. „How can we help 'em? There's not enough open water to land the plane.“

„Take the controls,“ Doc Savage said to Renny.

Renny remonstrated: „Hey! What on...“

Then he made a leap for the controls. Doc had deserted them.

Renny banked the plane in a circle. Like all of Doc's 5 friends, he was an excellent pilot. Doc's teaching had made accomplished airmen out of them. Doc seemed able to impart a share of his genius to those whom he taught.

Doc now snugged a parachute harness about his powerful frame. He grasped the valve which was all-important to the safety of the submarine.

Before the others could voice an objection, Doc shoved open the cabin door.

He dived through!

The white silk of the parachute came out of the backpack like a puff of pale smoke. Doc was lowered to the ice near the distressed HELLDIVER.

Ben O'Gard and his crew held guns. They made threatening gestures.

But Doc displayed the valve. That was the „magic wand“ that quieted the villains.

„Throw your weapons overboard!“ Doc commanded.

For this order, he was roundly cursed. Ben O'Gard waxed especially eloquent. He must have gathered swear words from most of the dives of the World. He swore in 6 distinct languages not counting pidgin English.

But the guns went overboard.

* * * * *

Doc Savage now sprinted forward. The ice had closed in perceptibly. But more than 20 feet still separated the HELLDIVER from the remorseless blue jaws.

The surface of the floe was slippery. The leap to the submarine was prodigious. But from the ease with which Doc made it, he might have been gifted with invisible wings.

More than one gasp of awe escaped from the gullets of the Helldiver villains as they witnessed the great leap! They recoiled from the mighty Bronze Man. They still remembered what a child their huge walrus of a leader had been in those bronze hands.

One thug even backed away so hastily that he fell overboard. He squealed like a rat in the icy water until he was hauled back on deck.

Not a minute could be wasted. Doc hardly touched the steel deck before he was gliding through the intricate insides of the submarine.

He worked swiftly at replacing the valve.

Ben O'Gard's men flocked around him like children. They already had the deck hatches closed in readiness.

Even Ben O'Gard himself came fawning up with a wrench to assist in the work. But Doc waved him aside.

His bronze fingers were more speedy than any wrench. And they could tighten a tap just about as snugly.

„All clear?“ Doc called at last. „Fill the main tanks!“

The crew flocked to station. The electric motors started.

With a windy gurgle that was nothing if not joyful, the HELLDIVER eased down out of the fearsome blue jaws of ICE.

Doc watched the valve for a moment. Satisfied it was not going to leak, he turned away.

At that instant, the steel door of the compartment in which he crouched clanged shut! The dogs which secured it rattled fast.

He was imprisoned!

Chapter XII

Ice Trap.

Doc shrugged. He sat down on a convenient pipe. He was not worried. He was armed.

True, Ben O'Gard and his crew probably had guns themselves by now. The weapons they had thrown overboard so profanely at Doc's request had hardly comprised their entire armament. They were too wily for that.

But Doc had the explosive that he always carried in his pair of extra molars. With it, he could speedily blast open the bulkhead.

And once the sub came to the surface, he had simply to unscrew the valve and have the gang at his mercy again.

The electric motors set up a musical vibration. The HELLDIVER had slanted down steeply in its hurried dive.

Now it trimmed level. After a time, it sloped upward perceptibly. There came a jar as it touched the underside of the ice pack.

Other crunching shocks ensued. They were of lesser violence. The submarine was feeling blindly for another spot free of ice. This continued interminably. Open leads seemed to be very scarce.

Doc got up and rapped tentatively on the thick steel bulkhead.

He was cursed! He was told he would be killed if he didn't behave. He was promised all kinds of dire fates.

This didn't worry him much. Danger seldom worried Doc. A telegraph operator in a great relay office becomes accustomed to the uproar of instruments about him. A structural-steel worker comes to think nothing of the fact that a single misstep means sudden death.

By the same token, Doc Savage had haunted the trails of those who sought his violent end for so long that he took danger as a matter of course.

More than an hour passed. Doc became impatient.

Finally the submarine arose to the surface. The stopping of the electric motors and the starting of the oil-burning diesel engines showed that.

Doc promptly removed the all-important valve. Through the steel bulkhead, he informed Ben O'Gard what he had done.

But he got a surprise. Ben O'Gard gave him a hoarse laugh.

Doc was puzzled. He had thought he held an ace.

But the missing valve seemed not to worry his enemies at all. There was but one explanation.

They had found a snug harbor on the uncharted coast!

Doc settled down to await developments. They came 20 minutes later.

There reached his ears a sound like 6-or-7 hard hailstones tapping the submarine hull. And Doc knew what it was.

Machine-gun bullets!

Were his friends starting hostilities? He hoped not. They'd fool around and get themselves shout out-of-the-air. The old seaplane was no battlewagon.

With a jarring bedlam, the diesel engine sped up. The mad race of the vertical-trunk pistons vibrated the whole submarine. The HELLDIVER lunged away soggily.

Next instant came a shock which—catching Doc by surprise —piled him against a bulkhead.

The HELLDIVER had gone aground!

Men yelled. They sounded like chicks cheeping in an incubator. A machine-gun cut loose on deck. Another joined in. Their clamor was hollow like crickets shut up in a can.

This continued for the space of time it would take a man to count to several hundred.

Wham!

The sub all but rolled completely over! The plates shrieked. Loose tools jumped about as beans in a shaken box.

Doc picked himself up.

„I'd better hold onto something,“ he remarked to no one in particular.

A bomb had just exploded in the water near the submarine.

Doc shook his head slowly. His friends had no bombs.

Ben O'Gard's bellow penetrated the bulkhead.

„Come out!“ he boomed. „You gotta help us!“

„Go take an ice bath,“ Doc suggested.

Ben O'Gard spewed profanity hot enough to melt the steel bulkhead!

„Rust my anchor, matey!“ he yelled at last. „You've got the upper hand on us again. We'll do anything you say. Only you gotta help us!“

„It sounds like you're aground,“ Doc told him. „My replacing the valve won't help any now.“

„T' hell wit' the valve!“ roared Ben O'Gard. „Ain't none of us swabs can fly the foldin' seaplane. You gotta take the sky hooker up an' fight off them buzzards that's bombin' us!“

„Who's bombing you?“ Doc questioned.

„Keelhaul de Rosa's gang—the dirty deck lice!“

* * * * *

Doc digested this. It was an entirely new development.

Since the HELLDIVER had left New York, there had been nothing to show Keelhaul de Rosa still existed upon the Earth. Now the explanation for that was plain.

Keelhaul de Rosa had one of the treasure maps. He had secured a plane and flown to the wreck of the liner Oceanic. And now he was seeking to wipe out his rivals.

„Stand away from the door,“ Doc ordered. „I'll come out.“

The dogs securing the steel panel clanked free. Doc swung the panel open.

Several of Ben O'Gard's villains faced him. But not a gun was turned in his direction. They were a scared lot!

„4 of me hearties was swept overboard an' drowned by that bomb!“ Ben O'Gard roared. „The swabs are now in Davy Jones's locker!“

The thugs split like butter before a hot knife as Doc went through them. A vault...

...and he was out on deck. He had his valve along.

Doc scanned the skies.

„Where’s the plane?“ he demanded.

„Figure it went back after another load of bombs,“ boomed Ben O’Gard. „Rust my anchor, matey, we gotta shake a mean leg or it’ll be back ‘fore you set sail in the air!“

The HELLDIVER was indeed aground. The bow canted half out of the water. The stern portion of the deck slanted down beneath the surface.

Around about was a glacier-walled cove. Ordinarily, it would have been a snug-enough harbor. But the attack from the air had turned it into a trap.

Doc scrutinized the heavens once more. His strange golden eyes sought everywhere for the shabby plane flown by his friends. But there was no sign of it.

Doc juggled the all-important valve. Some of Ben O’Gard’s men eyed it enviously. Doc had no idea of surrendering it, though.

„What became of my friends?“ he questioned.

Ben O’Gard shrugged his walrus shoulders.

„The last of ‘em I saw, they was fightin’ Keelhaul de Rosa’s sky tub.“

He leveled an arm which was a cone of beef. „The fracas wandered off down that way.“

He was pointing down the glacial coast of the uncharted land.

No line changed on Doc Savage’s firm bronze features. But inside, his feelings were far from pleasant.

The shabby old seaplane flow by his friends was no fighting craft. An Immelman maneuver or a tight loop would pull her wings off.

The tiny folding seaplane was now ready for the air.

„Take ‘er off, matey,“ howled Ben O’Gard. „Rust my...“

He fell silent. The drone of a plane had come to their ears.

„That’s Keelhaul de Rosa comin’ back!“ bawled the walrus. „Hurry, matey! Our lives is in your hands.“

„I wish they were,“ Doc said under his breath.

Then aloud: „Give me the best machine-gun. And throw every other weapon overboard.“

„Aw, don’t worry about us keepin’ our hands off’n you from now on,“ fawned the walrus. „Why, we’ll cut you in on a share of the boodle.“

„Over with the guns!“ Doc rapped.

There was more squawking. But the motor sound of the approaching plane was like the howl of doom. No argument could have been more persuasive. Falling pistols, rifles, knives, and machine-guns whipped the surrounding water into a foam.

Doc waited until the last arm vanished.

Then his mighty bronze form plugged into the tiny seaplane cockpit. The motor purred like a big cat.

He took the air. And the all-important valve went with him.

* * * * *

He was none-too-soon! With a bawl like a banshee spawned by the foul gray haze overhead, Keelhaul de Rosa's plane dived.

It opened with a machine-gun. The craft had come into Arctic spurred for war. It had a pair of cowl guns synchronized through the prop.

Every 4th or 5th slug fired was a phosphorus-burning tracer. The bullets scuffed the water below Doc's fleet little flivver craft. In the green sea before they were extinguished, the tracers glowed like a streak of scattered sparks.

Cobwebby, gruesome tracer strings waved before Doc's golden eyes. Phosphorous fumes reeked in his nostrils. Lead gashed a hole in the right wing bank. The flivver wouldn't stand much more of that.

Doc banked quickly. The tiny seaplane was agile as a fly in his master hand.

Twice more, Keelhaul de Rosa's killer craft dived angrily. But its load missed both times.

Ben O'Gard and his gang now gathered the fruit of all that squawking about giving up their guns. They had delayed Doc almost too long.

Keelhaul de Rosa's plane swooped upon the HELLDIVER. It released an elongated metal egg. This hatched a choice lump of Hell alongside the submarine!

Water geysered 200 feet in the air! A huge wave sprang outward in a circle.

Over heeled the sub ... over ... over. It writhed. It skewered like a tadpole out of water.

Then it slipped free of the ledge upon which it had been hung.

For a long minute, the HELLDIVER was lost under the water. Then it came up and floated.

Doc flung his flivver for the other plane. If size of the craft had been important, the scrap would have been ridiculous. Doc's steed was to the other like a sparrow to a hawk. But size counts little in an air battle.

Doc, however, was handicapped by having to fly his plane and shoot his submachine gun by hand at the same time.

He jockeyed in above the enemy. His rapid-firer burred noisily, the breech mechanism spewing a string of smoking empty cartridges.

The other plane jumped in the sky like a thing bitten!

* * * * *

No serious damage had been inflicted, however. The 2 craft sparred warily. At this, they were about evenly matched.

Keelhaul de Rosa's seaplane was a low-wing, all-metal job of late production. Its 2 motors were huge and speed-cowled for efficiency. Even the pontoon floats were streamlined in a fashion which made them virtually another pair of small wings.

Only 2 men occupied the craft.

Neither of these was Keelhaul de Rosa. They had, rather, the wind-burned look of professional airman of the northland. Probably Keelhaul de Rosa had picked them up to do his flying.

The jockeying for position ended suddenly. A quick flip of Doc's bronze wrist, a gentle pressure from one foot...

...and the tiny seaplane pounced like a bull pup! It was doubtful if the pair in the big plane understood quite how the maneuver had been managed. But Doc

was upon them while the pilot still goggled through the empty sight rings of his cowl rapid-firers.

Doc's small machine-gun shimmied and lipped flame! His bullets pushed cabin windows out of the other ship. They tore the goggles off the other pilot.

The big plane did half-a-wingover, eased into a dizzy slip, and almost collided with Doc's little bus. He evaded it by zooming sharply.

The second man in Keelhaul de Rosa's craft took over the controls.

Once again, the manmade birds skulked each other's sky trails warily. The motors panted and steamed. The evil gray mist squirmed and boiled in the prop wakes.

Doc got in a burst. His lead started colorless streams of liquid stringing from the wings of the other plane. He had opened the fuel tanks in the wings.

In return, he took a lead-whipping that gnawed a ragged area in the fuselage of his little flivver. After that, the craft flew with a strangely broken-backed „feel“.

Then fresh trouble loomed. Doc's fuel gauge needle had retreated a lot. It already covered the first 2 letters of the word „Empty“. There had been no time to charge the fuel tanks before he took off.

Doc calculated. 15 minutes more and he would have to come down. He'd better finish this sky brawl quickly.

For the second time, Doc's small craft pulled its bewildering pounce of a maneuver. His gun hammered!

Lead went home to vital points of the opposing plane. The plane climbed up on its tail and hung hooting at the Borealis. It slipped off on a wingtip. It rocked into a tailspin.

It hit a floe hard enough to knock a hole through 4 feet of pan ice!

After that, nothing was left but a wad of tin and wire sticking out of the ice.

Doc slammed his bus back for the cove. He found it in the gray haze. But a disquieting sight met his gaze.

The HELLDIVER was streaming straight for the open sea or, rather, the ice-covered sea. All hatches were battened.

Doc's powerful bronze hand closed over the tank valve. He had it in the plane cockpit. If the submarine dived with the tank open, it would never come up.

The sub dived!

* * * * *

2 minutes... 3...

Doc circled the spot where the HELLDIVER had gone under the ice pack. Green water boiled. A lot of bubbles came up. Small growlers of ice cavorted like filthy blue animals. And that was all.

Doc's bronze features—remarkably handsome in their rugged masculine way—did not alter expression.

He banked away. The tiny folding seaplane climbed. It boomed along at the speed most economical on the fuel. Doc was hunting his friends.

The outlook was not pleasant. The plane that his friends had flown was no match for Keelhaul de Rosa's killer ship. This tiny collapsible crate of Doc's was far more efficient. And Keelhaul de Rosa's bus would have sky-scalped it easily except for Doc's master hand at its controls.

The fog wrapped him around like an odious, ash-colored death shroud. The small engine moaned defiantly. But its life blood—the high-test gas in the tank—ran lower and lower.

Suddenly Doc sighted a human figure below. It was a tiny form. It crawled on all fours like a white ant in its light-hued fur garments.

Doc dropped his plane to within a score of feet of the ice. The jagged hummocks fanged hungrily at the floats. They seemed to miss them by scant inches.

The crawling human being flashed beneath.

It was Victor Vail! He carried a bundle of white silk.

Doc's bronze head gave the barest of nods. He could guess why Victor Vail was down there, carrying the folds of a parachute.

Monk, Renny, Long Tom, Ham, and Johnny—Doc's 5 iron-nerved, capable friends—had given battle to the sky killer of Keelhaul de Rosa. They had dumped Victor Vail overboard by chute. They had wanted him clear of danger. That meant they knew they themselves were fighting hopeless odds.

It boded ill for Doc's 5 pals did that crawling figure of Victor Vail.

It meant that the Five had felt they were going to their death!

Doc flew on. He aimed the noisy snout of his little plane in the direction Victor Vail was crawling. For the violinist had been headed not for land but out into the grisly waste of the Polar ice pack. This indicated he had some goal out there.

Doc found that goal in slightly more than a minute and about 2 miles from where Victor Vail crept.

It was a horrible sight. The mighty Bronze Man had seen few more ghastly. None that tore at the insides of him like this one did!

A ruptured seaplane float lay on the ice. It was a mass of splinters.

40 yards farther on was the second.

Then the ice bore a sprinkling of airplane fragments. A section of a wing still poured off gruesome yellow smoke.

Gaping sinister, an open lead in the ice yawned just beyond. Into this had plainly gone engine, fuselage, and the heavier parts of the plane.

To Doc's golden eyes, the whole sickening story was clearly written. Tracer bullets had fired the fuel tanks of the shabby seaplane. It had crashed in flames.

The odious green depths of the Polar sea was the grave of whatever and whoever had been in the fuselage when the old crate cracked up.

Doc circled slowly. The engine of his plane gurgled loudly. It coughed.

Then it stopped dead.

Chapter XIII

Ice Ghosts.

The fuel had run out! Doc realized this and slammed the nose down.

Practically no height for maneuvering lay below. Due to small wingspan and not inconsiderable weight, the little flivver would glide about as well as a brickbat.

The only landing place was the lead which had swallowed the remains of the shabby seaplane flown by Doc's friends. And that had hardly the width of a city street. It was about half-a-block long.

Above one end of the lead—smaller than many a private swimming pool—the plane abruptly turned broadside in the air. Just as swiftly, it turned to the other side. This „fishtail“ maneuver lowered air speed to near the stalling point. With a sizable splash, the floats dug in the icy water. They plunged so deep the plane wetted its bottom.

Doc had known from the first that he was due for a crack-up. And he was not wrong. The plane sloughed for the wall of ice. Doc vaulted out of the cockpit.

Only fractional seconds elapsed between the time the plane plumped into the water and the instant it smashed into the icy bank of the lead. It taxed even Doc's blinding speed to get out of the control bucket in time.

He leaped! His feet landed on the ice. He slide a dozen yards as though on skates.

The plane hit! There was a jangling crash remindful of an armload of tin cans dumped on a concrete walk!

Metal rent and crumbled. Then the plane sank like a monkey wrench.

By the time Doc had ceased sliding and wheeled back, the craft was gone. The repellent water boiled as in a hideous caldron. The big bubbles climbed to the surface with ghastly glub-glubs. It was as though a living thing was drowning in the depths.

Doc Savage turned away. The valve from the submarine had gone down with the plane. And so had the machine-gun.

Doc stood on the menacing Arctic ice pack armed only with his tremendous muscles and his keen brain. He had no food. He had no tent, no bedding, no boat to cross leads in the ice.

Probably no one could have understood the meaning of this more fully than Doc. He was in a region so rugged and so bleak that out of countless expeditions traveling on the ice and equipped with the finest of dog teams and food, only a few escaped a dire fate.

Yet one beholding the quiet composure of the bronze man's features would have thought he didn't realize what he was up against. Doc's giant figure was striking, even swathed as it was in fur garments.

He roamed the vicinity of the wrecked planes for an hour. He found nothing to indicate his 5 friends still lived.

So Doc went off to meet Victor Vail.

* * * * *

Victor Vail was above the average physically. In an ordinary group of men, he would have stood out as being rather athletic.

He had progressed a scant half-mile from where Doc had sighted him from the plane. His breath sobbed through his teeth. He tottered near exhaustion. He was indeed glad to see the Bronze Man!

Doc Savage had covered thrice the distance negotiated by Victor Vail. Yet Doc's bronze sinews were unstrained. He breathed normally. For all appearances, he might have been taking a stroll down Park Avenue.

„Your friends!“ gasped Victor Vail. „Did you find them safe?“

Doc Savage shook a slow negative. „I found where their plane sank through a hole in the ice. That was all.“

Victor Vail sagged down wearily, disconsolately.

„I hear the plane crash,“ he murmured. „I was making for the spot. I could not see the crash because of the haze. But Keelhaul de Rosa’s hired killers shot them down.“

Doc made no sound. Victor Vail nipped his lips ... then continued.

„Your 5 friends forced me leave the plane by parachute to save my life,“ he said. „Others of the Five could have escaped. Yet they chose to fight together to the end. They were brave men.“

Doc still made no sound. The moment was too pregnant with sorrow to be shattered by cold words.

„What do we do now?“ Victor Vail queried at length.

„We’ll find the lost liner Oceanic,“ Doc replied. „And we will find Keelhaul de Rosa!“

The chill ferocity in the bronze giant’s expressive voice made Victor Vail shiver. At that instant, he wouldn’t have traded places with Keelhaul de Rosa for all the wealth in the World with a safe return to New York City thrown in to boot!

Keelhaul de Rosa was going to feel the kind of justice this mighty Bronze Man dealt!

* * * * *

They set a course for the uncharted land.

„What about Ben O’Gard?“ questioned Victor Vail. „Do we still have him and his crew of devils to fight?“

„The HELLDIVER submerged with all aboard,“ Doc replied. „I had that valve off the tanks with me.“

Victor Vail gestured as if tossing something away.

„We’re rid of them, then. Water will flood the submarine through the hole left by the missing valve.“

A vast quaking and rumbling seized the ice pack. They became aware that a wind had sprung up. This gave signs of increasing to a gale. The ice was beginning to shift. It was as though they strode the white, heaving, crusted paunch of a great monster of cold.

A crevice opened unexpectedly! Victor Vail toppled on the brink. He slipped into space. But strong bronze fingers snatched him back.

The crevice closed as swiftly as it had opened. It made a ghastly crunching. Chunks of ice flew high in the air. The frozen monster might have been angry at being cheated of a victim and was spitting its teeth out in a rage.

It was several minutes before Victor Vail could still the trembling of his knees.

„What a ghastly region!“ he muttered.

„There must be a hard storm to the southward,“ Doc explained. „It is causing a movement of the ice field.“

The going was incredibly rough. Sheer blocks of bergs jutted up everywhere. Many were as large as houses. Occasionally these toppled over. Sometimes they

pile one atop the other after the fashion of cards shuffled together. These occurrences were without warning.

Twice more, Victor Vail was saved by his giant bronze companion.

„I shall never be able to pay my debt of gratitude to you,“ the violinist said feelingly.

Doc had a 2-word reply to all such protestations.

„Forget it,“ he said.

As they neared land, the seemingly impossible happened.

The going became harder!

The Arctic ice pack was at its worst. Summer—such as it was—was in full swing. The Sun had been shining steadily for 2 months. This had rotten the ice enough that it broke up under a brisk blow.

Doc now virtually carried Victor Vail.

Time-after-time, ice pinnacles crashed upon the very spot where they stood. But in some magic manner, the mighty Bronze Man always managed to get himself and the violinist in the clear.

The air was filled with a cracking and rumbling so loud as to almost produce deafness. They might have been in the midst of a raging battle.

„You can tell your grandchildren that you went through about the worst danger that Nature can offer,“ Doc said grimly. „For sheer, terrifying menace, nothing quite equals a storm with the Arctic ice pack breaking up under foot.“

Victor Vail made no reply. Doc glanced at him sharply.

Tears stood in Victor Vail's eyes.

Doc's chance remark about „grandchildren“ had made Victor Vail think of his long-lost daughter Roxey.

* * * * *

They braved an inferno for the next few minutes. An „inferno“ of ice and wind. Pressure was forcing the pack ice high on the shore of the uncharted land. Frozen death crashed and lurched everywhere!

Doc Savage made it through in safety. He carried Victor Vail under one thewed arm, seeming not to feel the burden at all.

„We licked it,“ Doc said dryly. „The storm accounts for the thick haze we've had the last few days.“

They hurried inland. Their mukluks still trod ice. It lay below to a depth of many feet. Occasional ridges of dark, impermeable stone rammed unlovely fangs out of the white waste.

The wind hooted and shrieked! Sometimes it whirled the 2 men along like crumpled balls of paper.

They mounted higher. The glacier thinned. The dark stone reared in greater profusion.

Doc Savage halted suddenly. He poised motionless, metallic. No breath steam came from his strong lips.

„What is it?“ breathed Victor Vail.

Doc released breath from his mighty lungs. It made a spurting plume that frosted on the fur of his parka. The air was turning colder.

„Something is stalking us,“ Doc said dryly.

Victor Vail was astounded. His own senses were very keen—made so by the years when he had been blind and had to depend upon them. But he had heard nothing.

„I caught the odor of it,“ Doc explained.

Amazement gripped Victor Vail. He had not known this strange bronze man—through unremitting exercise—had developed the olfactory keenness of a wild thing.

Doc Savage pressed Victor Vail into a convenient crevasse.

„Stay here!“ Doc commanded. „Don't leave the spot. You might become lost.“

The void of shrieking wind swallowed Doc's bronze form. He glided to the right. His speed was amazing!

A few flakes of snow came sizzling through the gale. More followed. They were hard as fine hailstones. When Doc flattened close to a rock spine to listen, the snow sounded like sand on the stone. He heard nothing.

He crept on. The snow shut out vision beyond a few yards. It stuck to his bearskin trousers. It rattled off his metallic face like shot.

Suddenly he caught blurred movement in the whistling abyss. He flashed for it! His hand—hands in which steel bars became plastic as tin strips—were open and ready. His charge was that of a mighty hunger of the wild.

The next instant, Doc became quarry instead of hunter.

It was a polar bear that he had rushed!

The animal bounded to meet Doc. It seemed clumsy. The awkwardness was only in its looks, however. Its speed was as tremendous as its size. It was the most terrible killer of the Arctic!

Doc sought to veer aside. The footing was too slippery.

Straight into the embrace of the polar monster, he skidded!

* * * * *

Some men acquainted with the Arctic regions maintain the polar bear will flee from a human being rather than attack. Others cite instances where the bruins were known to have taken the aggressive.

The truth of the matter is probably covered by the words of a certain famous Arctic explorer.

„It depends on the bear, he said.

The bear that Doc had met was the *attacking* type.

It erected on its rear legs. It was far taller than Doc. It flung monster forepaws out to enclose Doc's bronze form. A blow from one of those paws would have crushed down a bull buffalo!

Twisting and half-ducking, Doc evaded the paws. His sinewy fingers buried in the fur of the polar monster. A jerk ... a lightning flip ... put him behind the bear.

Doc's fist swung with explosive force!

It seemed to sink inches into the fat flesh of the animal. Doc had struck it at a nerve center where his vast knowledge told him was a chance of stunning the monster.

The bruin was not accustomed to this style of fighting. This small man-thing had looked like an easy quarry. The bear snarled, showing hideous fangs.

With a speed that was astounding considering the size and weight of the beast, it whirled!

Doc had fastened himself to the back of the animal. He clung there solely by the pinching power of his great leg muscles. Both his arms were free.

He struck the polar bear just back of its small head. Then he slugged again, hitting a more vulnerable spot.

Snarling horribly, the terror of the Northern wastes sank to the glacier. The animal had met more than its match.

Doc could have escaped easily. But he did not.

They needed food and a sleeping robe. And here were both.

Doc's metallic fists pistoned a half-dozen more stunning blows. Slaving and snarling, the bear stretched out.

Doc's mighty right arm slipped over the bear's head just back of its ears. It jerked! A dull pop sounded. A great trembling seized all of the great white monster.

The fight was over.

Silence fell except for the moan of the blizzard.

Was it a low, mellow, trilling sound—remindful of the song of some exotic bird—which mingled with the whine of the wind? Or was it but the melodious note of the gale rushing through the neighboring pinnacles of rock and ice?

A listener could not have told.

Doc's strange sound sometimes came when he accomplished some tremendous feat. Certainly, there was ample cause for that now.

No man bare-handed had ever vanquished a more frightful foe!

Doc skidded the huge hairy animal to a near-by pock in the bleak stone. He searched until he had found boulders enough to cover the cache of potential food and bedding. He did not want other bears to rob him.

He now hurried to get Victor Vail.

He reached the crevasse where he had left the violinist.

10 feet from it, a gruesome red sprinkling rouged the ice.

Blood!

It no longer steamed. It was frozen solid, crusted with flakes of snow.

Scoring in the ice—already inlaid with snow—denoted a furious fight.

No sign was to be seen of Victor Vail!

Chapter XIV

Corpse Boat.

Like a hound in search of a scent, Doc Savage set off.

He ran in widening circles. He found faint marks that might have been a trail. They led inland. They were lost beyond the following within 2 rods.

Doc positioned himself in the lee of a boulder the size of a boxcar. Standing there sheltered a little from the blizzard, he considered.

An animal would have devoured Victor Vail on the spot! There had been no bits of cloth scattered about, no gory patches on the ice such as certainly would have accompanied such a cannibalistic fest.

Something else loomed large in Doc's mind, too. It was the odor that his supersensitive nostrils had detected at first!

Doc's mighty bronze form came as near a shiver as it ever came.

There had been a bestial quality about that scent. Yet it had hardly been that of an animal. Nor was it human, either. It had a revolting tang, reminiscent of carrion.

One thing he began to realize with certainty. It had not been the polar bear!

Doc shrugged. He stepped out into the squealing blizzard. Inland he journeyed.

The terrain sloped upward. The glacier became but scattered smears of ice. Even the snow did not linger so great was the wind velocity.

Doc crossed a ridge.

From now on, the way lay down. Progress was largely a matter of defying the propulsion of the gale.

Snow was drifting here. This was a menace for it covered crevasses, a fall into which meant death. Doc trod cautiously.

In a day-or-two—perhaps in a week—when the blizzard had blown itself out, the haze above would disperse and let the everlasting Sun of the Arctic Summer beat down upon the snow. This would become slush. Cold would freeze it. A little more would be added to the thickness of the glacier. For thus are glaciers made.

Warily, Doc sidled along. He let the wind ski him ahead when he dared. Had he been a man addicted to profanity, he would have been consigning all glaciers to a place where their coolness probably would be a welcome change.

A hideous cracking and rumbling began to reach his ears. He could hear it plainly when he laid his head to the ice under foot.

It was the noise of the icepack piling on the shore. This uncharted land must be but a narrow ridge projecting from the Polar seas.

Doc neared the shore.

An awesome sound brought him up sharp! It split through the banshee howl of the blizzard. It put the hairs on Doc's nape on edge.

A woman's shrieking!

* * * * *

Doc sped for the sound.

The snow collapsed under him unexpectedly. Only a flip of his Herculean body kept him from dropping to death on the snagged icy bottom of the wide crevasse far below.

He ran on as though he had not just shaken the clammy claw of the *Grim Reaper*.

A white mass hulked up before his searching golden eyes. It looked like a gigantic iceberg cast upon the shore. But it had a strangely manmade look.

A ship! The ice-crusting hulk of the lost liner OCEANIC!

Doc raced along the hull. It canted over his head for the liner was obviously heeled slightly.

A hundred feet he ran. Then another hundred.

He came to an object which might have been a long icicle hanging down from the rail of the liner. But he knew it was an ice-coated chain. The links were a procession of knobs.

These knobs enabled Doc to climb. But the mounting was not easy. A greased pole would have been a stairway in comparison. The blizzard moaned and hooted and sought to pick him bodily from his handhold.

The woman was no longer shrieking.

Doc topped the rail. A scene of indescribable confusion met his eyes. Capstans, hatches, bits ... all were knots of ice. The rigging had long ago been torn down by the polar elements. Masts and wire-rope stays and cargo booms made a tangle up on the deck. Ice had formed on these.

The forward deck it was. A frozen, hideous wilderness! The gale whined in it like a host of ravenous beasts.

Doc reached a hatch. But it defied even his terrific strength! The years had cemented it solidly.

The deck did not slope as much as he had thought. It was not quite level, though. He glided for the stern.

An open companion lured him. Snow was pouring in. Half inside, he saw the floor was 7 feet deep in ice—snow which had formed a glacial mass through the years.

Doc tried another companion. The door was closed. It resisted his shove.

His fist whipped a blow which traveled a scant foot. The door caved in as though dynamite had let loose against it!

Doc pitched inside. A wave of pungent aroma met his nostrils.

It was the smell of the things which had stalked them on the glacier. It was horrible! Yet there was a flower-like quality to it.

Gloom lurked in the recessed of the cabin where he stood. Formerly it had been a lounge. But the once luxuriant furniture was but a rubble on the floor.

Some fantastic monster might have torn it to bits as though to line a nest!

Bones lay in the litter. Bones of polar bear and seal. Flesh still clung to some. Others were half-eaten carcasses.

Doc sped ahead. He shoved through a door.

* * * * *

A shuffling movement came from across the room.

Doc charged the sound!

There was a squealing noise, rat-like and eerie. A door slammed!

Doc hit the panel. It was metal. It smashed him back.

His fists could knock down an inch of steel. He wrenched at the lock. But that defied him, too.

Doc sought another route for pursuit. A companionway deposited him on a lower deck. He went forward.

It was gloomy here. Doc's capable bronze fingers searched inside his parka. They brought out a flashlight of a type Doc himself had perfected.

This flash had no battery. A tiny, powerful alternator built into the handle and driven by a stout spring supplied the current. One twist of the flash handle would wind the spring and furnish light current for some minutes. A special receptacle

held spare bulbs in felt beds. There was not much chance of this light going out-of-commission.

The flash sprayed a slender, white-hot rod. Doc twisted the lens adjustment to widen the beam.

Doc went on. His flashlight cast a funnel of white. he stopped often to listen.

The derelict liner seemed alive with sinister shufflings and draggings.

Once a bulkhead door banged! Again there came another of the rat-like squeals.

Even Doc's sensitive ears could not tell whether that squeal was human. The flower-like odor was stronger.

He came to a long passage. It was painted white. It might have been used but yesterday. Wood does not decay in the bitter cold of the Arctic.

He reached the third-class dining room.

Here his eyes met a sight that would make any man cringe. It was the explanation of the loss of the Oceanic.

The room was filled with bodies!

Bodies of the passengers and crew of the ill-fated ship. Bullets had done their work. And the Northern cold had kept this tableau of carnage inviolate!

Doc thought of Victor Vail. So this was what had happened during the time the blind man was unconscious!

Pirates—human fiends—had taken over the OCEANIC. They were as bloodthirsty a gang as ever swung a cutlass or dangled a victim from a yardarm on the Spanish Main. Wholesale murder they had committed.

Keelhaul de Rosa, Ben O'Gard, Dynamite Smith—greater villains never trod a deck. And like the corsairs they were, they had fallen out over the loot.

The whole thing might have been lifted from the parchment chronicles of another century and transplanted to our time.

Doc Savage quitted the hall of murder.

Uncanny whisperings and shufflings still crept through the lost liner. Yet he saw nothing. It was as though the tormented souls of those butchered here were holding spectral conclave.

Like that ... except for the flowery odor of living things. It was present everywhere!

Doc stepped out into another lounge.

His light picked up movement!

What it was, his sharp eyes failed to detect. The thing dropped behind the massive furniture before more than the backglow of Doc's light found it.

Warily, Doc sidled along the lounge wall. This was no animal confronting him.

What happened next came without the slightest sound.

Something touched Doc's bronze neck. It was warm. It was soft yet possessed a corded strength.

It encircled Doc's throat!

* * * * *

Doc made one of the quickest moves of his career. He ducked and whirled.

But he did not get the beam of his flashlight lifted in time. All he saw was the blank panel of a tightly-shut door.

He wrenched at it!

Chug!

A hard object hit him in the back with terrific force! Only the sprung steel of cushioning muscles kept his spine from being snapped. He was knocked to all fours. But he did not drop his flashlight.

He sprayed the beam on the lounge. A dozen frothing, hideous figures were leaping toward him!

It was seldom that Doc felt an impulse to hug an enemy. But he could have hugged these. For their appearance dispelled the sinister air of supernatural foes which hung over the lost liner.

These were but Eskimos!

Doc doused his light. This was something he could cope with. He glided sidewise.

An avalanche of bodies piled onto the spot he had vacated. Clubs (it was a thrown club which had hit Doc's back) beat vigorously. An Innu-it-or-two squealed painfully as he was belabored by a fellow. They seemed to use the squeals to express both excitement and pain.

Silence fell.

The Eskimos were puzzled. Their breathing was gusty, wheezing.

„Tarnuk!“ whined one of the cowering Innuits.

This gave Doc a clue to the dialect they spoke. Roughly translated, the word meant „the soul of a man“. So swiftly had Doc evaded their charge that one of the Eskimos had remarked he must be but a ghost!

„Chimo!“ Doc told them in their own lingo. „Welcome! You are my friends! But you have a strange way of greeting me.“

This friendship business was undoubtedly news to everybody concerned. But Doc figured it wouldn't hurt to try that angle on them.

He spoke several variations of Eskimo dialect among scores of other lingos he had mastered in his years of intensive study.

But he might as well have saved his breath.

In a squealing knot, the Innuits bored down upon him! Again they found themselves beating empty space or whacking each other by accident.

From a position 30 feet away, Doc planted his flash beam on them. They were in a nice, tight bunch. A great chair stood at Doc's elbow. No doubt it would have been a load for any single steward who had long ago sailed on the ill-fated OCEANIC.

It lifted in Doc's mighty hand as lightly as though it were a folding camp stool. It slammed into the midst of the Eskimos! They were bowled over, practically to a man!

Those who were able raised a terrific squawling. They were calling upon more of their fellows outside for help.

Doc saw no object in standing up and fighting an army. If there had been some reason for it, that would be different.

He made swiftly for the forward staircase out of the lounge.

His thoughts flickered for an instant to the strange thing which had touched his neck. It had been none of these queer-smelling Innuits.

He forgot that puzzle speedily.

The staircase that he was making for erupted war-like, greasy Eskimos. His retreat was cut off!

There was nothing to do now but make a fight of it.

* * * * *

4-of-the-5 Innuits carried lighted blubber lamps. Doc wondered where they had conjured them from. They illuminated the lounge.

„You are making a mistake, my children,“ Doc told them in their lingo. „I come in peace!“

„You are a tongak—an evil spirit sent to harm us by the chief of all evil spirits!“ an oily fellow clucked at him.

Doc sneezed. He had never smelled an Eskimo as aromatic as these fellows. And Eskimos are notoriously malodorous.

„You are wrong!“ he argued with them. „I come only to do you good.“

They threw gutturals back-and-forth at each other. All the while, they kept closing in on the giant Bronze Man.

„Where you come from?“ demanded one.

„From a land to the South where it is always warm.“

Doc could see they didn't believe this. One waved an arm expressively.

„There is no such land,“ he said with all the certainty of a very ignorant man.

„The only land besides this is Nakroom—the great place beyond the sky.“

They had never heard of Greenland or any country to the South, Doc gathered.

„Very well, I come from Nakroom,“ Doc persisted. „And I come to do good.“

„You speak with a split tongue,“ he was informed. „Only tongaks—evil spirits—come from Nakroom.“

Doc decided to drop the subject. He didn't have time to convert their religious beliefs.

Doc took stock of their weapons. They carried harpoons with lines of hair seal thong bent in the detachable tips. Some held oonapiks—short hunting spears. Quite a few bayonets were in evidence. These had evidently been garnered from the OCEANIC. No firearms were to be seen.

Not the least dangerous were ordinary dog-whips. These had lashes fully 18 feet long. From his vast knowledge, Doc knew an Eskimo could take one of these whips and cut a man's throat at 5 paces. Flicking at distant objects with the dog-whips bordered on being the Eskimo national pastime.

„Kill him!“ clucked the Eskimo leader. „He is only one man. It will be easy.“

The Inuit was underestimating. It was a mistake that Doc's enemies quite often made.

* * * * *

Doc picked up a round-topped table. This would serve as a shield against any weapon his foes had.

He seized a chair and flung it as though it were a mere chip. 3 Innuits were bowled over! They hadn't had time to dodge.

A flight of harpoons and short hunting spears chugged into the table. Doc threw 2 more chairs. He retreated to a spot far from the nearest flickering blubber lamp.

He lowered the table, making sure they all saw he was behind it. Then he flattened to the lounge floor and glided away, unnoticed.

The Eskimos rushed the table, bent on murder! They howled in dismay when they found no one there.

The howls turned to pain as hunters in the rear began dropping from bronze fists that exploded like nitro on their jaws!

An Inuit lunged at Doc with a harpoon. Doc picked the harpoon out of the fellow's hands and broke it over his head. A tough walrus lash on a dog whip slit the hood of Doc's parka like a knife stroke.

The bronze giant retreated. Thrown spears and bayonets seemed to whiz through his very body so quickly did he dodge!

His uncanny skill began to have its effect. The greasy fellows rolled their little eyes at each other. Fear distorted their pudgy faces.

„Truly he is a tongak—an evil one!“ they muttered. „Non other could be so hard to kill.“

„All gather together!“ commanded their leader. „We will rush him in a group!“

The words were hardly off the leader's lips when he dropped, his blank and senseless face looking foolishly through the rungs of the chair which had hit him.

The harm had been done. The Innuits grouped. They took fresh holds on their weapons.

They charged!

They had hit upon the only chance they had of coping with Doc. There were nearly 50 of them. Despite their short stature and fat, there were stout and fierce fighters.

With mad, bloodthirsty squeals, they closed upon the mighty Bronze Man. For a moment, they covered him completely. A tidal wave of killers!

Then a bronze arrow of a figure shot upward from the squirming pile.

The ceiling of the lounge was crisscrossed with elaborately decorated beams. Doc's sinewy hands grasped these, clinging to a precarious handhold as he moved away.

He dropped to the floor—clear of the fight—before he was hardly missed.

But the Eskimos still had him cut off from the exits.

They closed in again. They threw spears and knives and an occasional club ... all of which Doc dodged. They shrieked maledictions, largely to renew their own faltering nerve.

The situation was getting desperate. Doc put his back to a bulkhead.

He did not pay particular attention to the fact that he was near the spot where the strange, warm, soft object had touched his neck.

With hideous yells, the killing horde of Innuits charged!

A door opened beside Doc. A soft, strong hand came out. It clutched Doc's arm.

It was a woman's hand!

Chapter XV

The Arctic Goddess.

Doc Savage whipped through the door. He caught a brief glimpse of the girl.

She was tall. Nothing more than that could be told about her form since she was muffled in the garb of the Arctic. Moccasins reaching above her knees and with the tops decorated with the long hair of the polar bear; trousers of the skin of the Arctic hare; a shirt-like garment of auk skins; and an outer parka of a coat fitted with a brood.

But her face! That was different.

He could see enough of that to tell she was a creature of gorgeous beauty. Enthralling eyes, an exquisite little upturned nose, lips as inviting as the petals of a red rose... They would have made most men forget all about the fight!

Had there been light to disclose Doc's features, however, an onlooker would have been surprised to note how little the giant Bronze Man was affected by this entrancing beauty.

Doc worked at the prosaic—but by no means unimportant—task of securing the door. He got it fast.

He turned his flashlight on the girl. He had noted something he wanted to verify. The gaze he bent upon her was the same sort that he would give any stranger he might be curious about.

Her hair was white. It was a strange, warm sort of white like old ivory. The girl was a perfect blonde.

Doc thought of Victor Vail. The violinist had this same sort of hair. A little more white, perhaps.

„You did me a great favor, Miss Vail,“ Doc told the girl.

* * * * *

She started! She put her hands over her lips. She wore no mittens. Her hands were long, shapely, velvety of skin.

„How did...“

„...did I know you were Roxey Vail?“ Doc picked up her question. „You could be no one else. You are the image of your father.“

„My father!“

She said the word softly as if it were something *sacred*. „Did you know him?“

Doc thought of that smear of scarlet on the ice near the spot where Victor Vail had disappeared. He changed the subject.

„Did any one besides you escape the massacre aboard this liner?“

The girl hesitated.

Doc turned his flash on his own face. He knew that she was uncertain whether to trust him. Doc was not flattering himself when he felt that a look at his strong features would reassure her. He had seen it work before.

„My mother survived,“ said the girl.

„Is she alive?“

„She is.“

Enraged Eskimos beat on the bulkhead door! They hacked at the stout panel with bayonets. They yelled like Indians.

* * * * *

Beautiful Roxey Vail suddenly pressed close to Doc Savage. He could feel the trembling in her rounded, firm body.

„You won't let them ... kill me?“ she choked.

Doc slipped a corded bronze arm around her. He didn't often put his arm around young women.

„What a question!“ he chided her. „Haven't you any faith in men?“

She shivered. „Not the ones I've seen ... lately.“

„What do you mean?“

„Do you know why those Eskimos attacked you?“ she countered.

„No,“ Doc admitted. „It surprised me. Eskimos are noted as an un-warlike people. When they got through fighting the North for a living, they've had enough scrapping.“

„They attacked you because of...“

A slab breaking out of the door stopped her. The Innuits were smashing the panel!

„We'd better move,“ Doc murmured.

He swept the girl up in one arm. She struck at him, thinking he meant her harm. Then—realizing he was only carrying her because he could make more speed in that fashion—she desisted.

Doc glided sternward.

„You haven't visited this death ship often in the passing years, have you?“ he hazarded.

She shook her head. „No. You could count the number of times on the fingers of one hand.“

They reached a large, rather barren room amidships. Doc knew much of the construction of ships. He veered abruptly to the left ... descended a companion ... then wheeled down a passage.

He was now face-to-face with the liner's strong room.

He took one look at the great vault. He dropped the girl.

The treasure trove was empty!

* * * * *

The young woman picked herself up from the floor.

„I'm sorry,“ Doc apologized.

He pointed at the strong room. „Has that been empty long?“

„Ever since I can remember.“

„Who got the gold and the diamonds?“

She was plainly surprised. „What gold and diamonds?“

Doc smiled dryly. „You've got me! But 50 million dollars' worth of gold and diamonds is at the bottom of the mess. If it were carried aboard this liner, it would have been stored in the strong room. It's not there. So that means... hmmm...“

He shifted his great shoulders.

„I'm not sure what it means.“

He glanced about. Here seemed to be as good a spot as any to linger. It would take the Eskimos some minutes to find them.

„You started to tell me why the Innuits attacked me,“ he prompted the girl.

„What was the reason?“

„I'll tell you my story from the first. I think there's time," she said swiftly.

Her voice was pleasant to listen to.

„My mother and myself escaped the wholesale slaughter of the others aboard the OCEANIC because we slid overboard by a rope. We were apart from the other passengers, hunting my father. He had disappeared mysteriously the day before.

„We hid on land. We saw the mutineers depart over the ice, hauling a fur-wrapped figure of a man on a sledge. We did not realize until it was too late that the man they hauled was my father.“

She stopped. She bit her lips. Her eyes swam in moisture. They were very big, enthralling blue eyes.

Doc made an impatient gesture for her to go on.

„Oh... I'm neglecting to tell you that it was the crew who murdered those aboard the liner. Men named Ben O'Gard, Dynamite Smith, and Keelhaul de Rosa were the ringleaders...“

„I know all that," Doc interposed. „Tell your side of it.“

„My mother and I got food from the liner after the mutineers had gone," she continued. „We built a crude hut inland. We didn't ... we couldn't stay on the liner although it was solidly aground. The mutineers might return. And all those murdered bodies ... it was too horrible. We couldn't have borne the sight...“

„When did the Eskimos come?" Doc urged her along.

„Within a month after the mutineers had departed. This bit of land was their home. They had been away on a hunting trip.“

She managed a faint, trembling smile.

„The Eskimos treated us wonderfully. They thought we were good white spirits who had brought them a great supply of wood and iron in the shape of the liner. They looked upon myself and my mother as *white goddesses* and treated us as such.

„But they refused to let us leave. In a way, we were prisoners. Then a few days ago, the white men came.“

„Uh oh," Doc interjected. „I begin to see the light.“

„These men were part of the mutineer crew," Roxey Vail said. „Keelhaul de Rosa was in command. They came in a plane. They visited this wrecked liner. After that, they seemed very angry.“

„Imagine their mortification," Doc chuckled, „when they found the treasure gone.“

„They gave the Eskimos liquor," Roxey Vail went on. „And they gave them worse stuff, something that made them madmen—a white powder!“

„Drugs... Dope... The rats!" Doc growled.

„My mother and I became frightened," said the girl. „We retreated to a tiny hideaway we had prepared against just such an emergency. None of the Eskimos know where it is.“

„An hour-or-so-ago, I came to the liner. We needed food. There are supplies still aboard—stuff preserved by the intense cold.

„I heard the Eskimos come aboard. I spied on them. They had a white man prisoner. A white man with hair like cotton. There was something strange about this man. It was as though I had seen him before.“

„You were very small when you were marooned here, weren't you?“ Doc inquired softly.

„Yes. Only a few years old. Anyway, the Eskimos talked of killing this white-haired man. I do not quite understand why. But it filled me with such horror that I went completely mad. I screamed. Then you ... you came.“

„I heard your scream.“

Doc eyed her steadily. Then he spoke again.

„The white-haired man was your father,“ he said.

Without a sound, Roxey Vail passed out!

Doc caught her.

* * * * *

As he stood there with the soft, limp form of the exquisitely beautiful girl in his arm, Doc wondered if it could have been the fact that white-haired Victor Vail had been murdered which had caused her swoon. She was not the type of young woman—from what he had seen of her—who fainted easily.

He heard the search of the Eskimos drawing near. They did not have sense enough to hunt quietly. Or perhaps they wanted to flush him out like a wild animal so he wouldn't be in their midst before they knew it.

Doc quitted the strong room. He sped down a passage bearing the unconscious girl in his arms.

He was soundless as a wraith.

He came to a large clothes hamper. It was in perfect shape. It still held some crumpled garments.

Doc dumped the clothes out. The hamper held Roxey Vail nicely as the big Bronze Man lowered her into it. He closed the lid. The hamper was of open wicker wood. It would conceal her; yet she could breathe through it.

Directly toward the oncoming Innuits, Doc strode.

His hand drew a small case from inside his parka. With the contents of this, he made his preparations. He stepped into a cabin and waited.

The first Eskimo passed. Like a striking serpent, Doc's bronze hand darted from the cabin door! His fingertips barely stroked the greasy cheek of the Inuit. Yet the man instantly fell on his face!

Doc flashed out of the cabin! His fingers touched the bare skin of a second Eskimo, then another ... and another. He got 5 of them before the fat fellows could show anything like action.

All 5 men who felt Doc's eerie touch seemed to go suddenly to sleep on their feet.

It was the same breed of „magic“ that Doc had used on the gangsters in New York City.

Murderous Eskimo with his harpoon or pasty-cheeked New York rat with his fists full of high-power automatics—both are the same breed. Docs „magic“ worked in the same fashion.

The Innuits saw their fellows topping mysteriously. They realized the very touch of this mighty bronze giant was disastrous.

They forgot all about fighting. They fled!

Ignominiously, they piled out on deck. Rigging tripped them. After the fashion of superstitious souls, the instant they turned their back on danger their peril seemed to grow indescribably greater. They were like scared boys running from a graveyard at night. Each jump made them want to go faster!

Two even committed unwilling suicide by leaping over the rail of the lost liner to the hard glacier far below.

In a matter of minutes, the last Innuit was sucked away into the screaming blizzard.

Chapter XVI

The Realm of Cold.

The lost liner OCEANIC lay like something that had died.

Wind still boomed and squealed in the forest of ice-coated collapsed rigging, it was true. The sand-hard snow still made a billion tiny tinklings as the gale shotted it against the derelict hulk. But gone were the uncanny whisperings and shufflings which had been so unnerving.

Doc Savage went below, moving silently as had become his habit when he trod the trails of danger.

His flashlight beam dabbled everywhere. Sharp and missing nothing, his golden eyes took stock of his surroundings. He was seeing everything yet speeding along at a pace that for another man would have been a lung-tearing sprint.

A squareish, thick-walled little bottle chanced to meet his gaze. He did not pick it up. Yet the printing on the label yielded to his near-telescopic scrutiny.

It was a perfume bottle. Two more like it reposed a bit farther down the passage.

Here was the explanation of the flowery odor of the Eskimos which had so baffled description. To the characteristic stench of blubber, perspiration, and the plain filth which accompanied them, they had added perfume. The whole had been an effluvium which was unique.

Doc opened the clothes hamper where he had left unconscious Roxey Vail.

Emptiness stared at him!

Doc dropped to a knee. His flashlight beam narrowed, becoming intensely brilliant. The luminance spurted across the carpet on the passage floor. This looked as though it had been laid down yesterday. But the years had taken the springiness out of the nap so that it would retain footprints.

The girl had gone forward—alone. This told Doc that some of the Eskimos had not remained behind and seized her.

„Roxey!“ he called.

Doc's shout penetrated the caterwauling of the blizzard in surprising fashion. A sound expert could have explained why. It is well known that certain horn tones—not especially loud—will carry through the noise of a factory better than any others. Because of the perfect control he exercised over his vocal cords, Doc could pitch his voice so as to waft through the blizzard in a manner nearly uncanny.

„Here!“ came the girl’s faint voice. „I’m hunting my father!“

Doc hurried to her. She was pale. Terror lay like a garish mask on her exquisite features.

„My father—they took him with them!“ she said in a small, tight voice.

„They didn’t have him when they fled a moment ago,“ Doc assured her. „I watched closely.“

Her terror gave way to amazement.

„They fled?“ she murmured wonderingly. „Why?“

Doc neglected to answer. How he produced that mysterious unconsciousness with his mere touch was a secret known only to himself and his 5 men.

But now, Doc shivered. His 5 friends had met their end in the burning plane. So the secret was now known to but one living man—Doc Savage himself.

„The Eskimos must have removed your father before they attacked me,“ Doc told Roxey Vail.

He wheeled quickly away! The glow of his flashlight reflected off the paneling of the lost liner and made his bronze form seem even more gigantic that it was. Fierce little lights played in his golden eyes!

„Where are you going?“ questioned his entrancing companion.

„To get Victor Vail,“ Doc replied grimly. „They took him away. And that shows he was alive. No doubt they took him to Keelhaul de Rosa.“

* * * * *

Roxey Vail hurried at his side. She was forced to run keep abreast.

„You haven’t told me how you happen to be here,“ she reminded.

In a few sentences as they climbed upward to the ice-basted deck of the lost liner, Doc told her of the map on her father’s back which could only be brought out with X-rays and of the efforts of Keelhaul de Rosa and Ben O’Gard to kill each other off so the remaining one could hog the 50-million-dollar treasure and the rest.

„But where is the treasure?“ asked the girl.

„I have no idea what became of it,“ Doc replied. „Keelhaul de Rosa expected to find it in the strong room, judging from his actions as you described them to me. Two, it looks like he suspects the Eskimos of moving it. That’s why he gave them liquor. He wanted to get them *pie-eyed* enough to tell him where they hid it.“

„They didn’t get it!“ Roxey Vail said with certainty. „It was removed before the mutineers ever left the liner more than 15 years ago.“

They were on deck now. Doc moved along the rail, hunting a dangling ice-clad cable. He could drop the many feet to the glacial ice without damage himself. But such a drop would bring serious injury or death to the girl. Hence the cable.

Roxey Vail was studying Doc curiously. A faint blush suffused her superb features. To someone who had been with Doc a lot and watched the effect his presence had on the fair sex, this blush would have been an infallible sign.

The young blonde goddess of the Arctic was going to fall hard for big, handsome Doc!

„Why are you here?“ Roxey Vail asked abruptly. „You do not seem to be stricken with the gold madness which has gripped everyone else.“

Doc let a shrug suffice for an answer.

Probably it was a brand of natural modesty, but Doc did not feel like explaining he was a sort of supreme avenger for the wrongs of the World—the great Nemesis of evil-doers in the far corners of the Globe.

They found a hanging cable. It terminated about 10 feet from the ice.

With Roxey Vail clinging to his back like a papoose, Doc carefully went down the cable. Into the teeth of the moaning blizzard they strode.

An instant later, Doc's alertness of eye undoubtedly saved their lives.

He whipped to one side carrying Roxey Vail with him.

A volley of rifle bullets picked through the space they vacated!

The Eskimos had returned, accompanied by Keelhaul de Rosa and 4-or-5 riflemen and machine-gunners.

* * * * *

After the flashing movement which had saved their lives, Doc kept going. He jerked the white hood of the girl's parka over her face to camouflage the warm color of her cheeks. He shrugged deep in his own parka for the same reason.

He wanted to get the girl to safety. Then he was going to hold grim carnival on the glacier with Keelhaul de Rosa and his killer group!

For his share in those hideous murders aboard the Oceanic, Keelhaul de Rosa would pay as certainly as a breath of life remained in Doc Savage's mighty bronze body!

Another fusillade of shots clattered. The reports were almost puny in the clamor of the blizzard. Lead hissed entirely too close to Doc and his companion.

Doc's fingers slipped inside his capacious parka and came out with an object hardly larger than a high-power rifle cartridge and shaped somewhat similarly. He flipped a tiny lever on this article and hurled it at the attackers. The object was heavy enough to be thrown some distance.

Came a blinding flash! The glacier seemed to jump 6 feet straight up!

A terrific, slamming roar blasted against eardrums! Then a rush of air slapped them skidding across the ice like an unseen fist!

There had been a powerful explosive in the little cylinder that Doc hurled at his enemies.

Awful quiet followed the blast. The very blizzard seemed to recoil like a beaten beast.

A chorus of agonized squealings and bleatings erupted. Some of the enemy had been incapacitated. They were all shocked. The Eskimos felt a vague, unaccountable terror.

„Up an' at 'em, mateys!“ shrilled a coarse tone. „Keelhaul me, but we ain't gonna let 'em get away from us now!“

It was Keelhaul de Rosa's voice. He, at least, had not been damaged.

More lead searched the knobby glacier surface. None of it came dangerously near Doc and his fair companion. They had gotten far away in the confusion.

Doc suddenly jammed the young lady in a handy snowdrift. He wasn't exactly rough about it. But he certain didn't try to fondle her as a man of more ordinary caliber might have been tempted to do. And it wasn't because the ravishing young woman would have objected to the caresses. All signs, in fact, pointed to the contrary.

The big Bronze Man had long ago decided a life of domestication was not for him. It would not go with the perils and terrors which haunted his every step. It would mean the surrendering of his goal in life—the shunning of Adventure, the abandoning of his righting of wrongs and punishing evildoers wherever he found them.

So Doc had schooled himself never to sway the least bit to the seductions of the fairest of the fair sex.

„Stay here,“ he directed the entrancing young lady impassionately. „And what I mean is STAY HERE! You can breathe under the snow. You won't be discovered.“

„Whatever you say,“ she said in a voice in which adoration was but thinly veiled. She was certainly losing no time in falling for Doc.

The giant Bronze Man smiled faintly.

Then the storm swallowed him...

* * * * *

Keelhaul de Rosa was in a rage. He was burning up. He filled the blizzard around with salty expletives!

„Ye blasted swabs!“ he railed at the Eskimos, forgetting they did not understand English. „Keelhaul me! The bronze scut was right in yer hands an' ye didn't wreck 'im!“

„I tell ya dat guy is pison!“ muttered a white gunman. „He ain't human! From de night he tied into us outside de concert hal in de big burg, we ain't been able ter lay a hand on 'im!“

Another white man shivered. He was fatter than Keelhaul de Rosa or the other gunmen. It was to be suspected that he had some Eskimo blood in his veins.

As a matter-of-fact, this fellow was a crook recruited in Greenland. He knew the Arctic. It was he who served as interpreter in all discussions with the Eskimos.

„Dat bane awful explosion a minute ago!“ this man whined. „Aye sure hope we bane get dat feller damn quick.“

„Scatter!“ rasped Keelhaul de Rosa. „We'll get the swab!“

The Eskimos spread out widely. The white men kept in a group for mutual protection.

One Eskimo in particular rambled a short distance from the others. He floundered through a snowdrift.

He did not see a portion of the drift seemingly rise behind him. No suspicion of danger assailed him until hard, chilled bronze fingers stroked his greasy cheek with a caress like the fingers of a ghost. Then it was too late!

The Innuit collapsed without a sound.

Doc pounced upon the inert Eskimo. From Doc's lips came a loud shout—words couched in the tongue of the native.

Excitement seized the white man who understood the Eskimo lingo, and he listened intently to the distant voice.

„Dat Eskimo bane kill the bronze feller!“ he shrieked. „The bane say come an' look!“

3 men sprinted for the voice they had heard.

The interpreter glimpsed 2 figures. One was prone, motionless. The second crouched on the first. That was about all he could see in the flying gale.

„There they bane!“ he howled.

They charged up. Two of them prepared to empty their guns into the prone form just to make sure.

The crouching man suddenly heaved up. Strikingly enough, he seemed to grow to the proportions of a mountain!

2 Herculean bronze fists drove accurate blows. Both gunmen described perfect flip-flops in mid-air. They were unconscious before their feet left the glacier.

The interpreter whirled and ran. He knew Death when saw it. And big Doc Savage was nothing less!

Doc did not follow him. For to the bronze man's sensitive ears came a stifled cry. Roxey Vail was being seized!

* * * * *

Even as he raced toward where he had left her, Doc fathomed what had occurred. She had disobeyed his injunction to stay hidden. The reason: she had heard the shouted information that Doc was dead. She had started out with some desperate idea of „avenging him“.

Doc appreciated her good intentions. But at the moment, however, he could have gotten a lot of satisfaction out of turning her over-his-knee and paddling her.

A bullet squeaked in Doc's ear. He folded aside and down. A machine-gun picked savagely at the ice near him.

He traveled 20 feet on his stomach with a speed that would have shamed a desert lizard!

„Take the hussy to the boat!“ Keelhaul de Rosa's coarse voice rang. „Step lively, me lads!“

Doc tried to get to the hideous voice. But murderous lead drove him back.

He was forced to skulk, dodging bullets while Roxey Vail was taken aboard the ice-coated hulk of the lost liner.

More Eskimos soon arrived. Keelhaul de Rosa was arming some of them with guns. The interpreter instructed the Innuits on how to operate the unfamiliar firearms.

The natives were far from effective marksmen. More than one greasy eater of blubber dropped a big pistol after it exploded in his hand and ran as though the worst tongak—or evil spirit—were hot on his trail.

But the guns made them more dangerous for wild shots were almost as liable to hit the elusive figure of Doc Savage as well-aimed ones. In fact, they were worse! Doc couldn't tell which way to dodge.

The heat of the hunt finally drove Doc to the remote reaches of the glacier and rock crust of the land.

There he replenished his vast reservoir of strength by dining on frozen, raw steaks he wrenched with his bare, steel-thewed fingers from the polar bear he had slain.

The mighty Bronze Man might have been a terrible hunter of the wild as he crouched there at his primeval repast. But no such hunter ever possessed cunning and knowledge such as Doc Savage was bringing to bear upon the problem confronting him.

Caution remained uppermost in his mind. He had been crouching with an ear pressed to a pinnacle of rock. The stone acted as a sounding board for any footsteps on the surrounding glacier.

Noise of men passing in the blizzard reached Doc. There seemed to be 4-or-5 in the group.

Doc fell in behind them. He followed as close as was possible without discovery. Growled words told him they were white men.

„De skipper says for us to take de stern of de liner, mateys,“ one said. „Our pals will join us dere. Everybody’s helpin’ in dis party, even de cook.“

„We’d better throw out an anchor,“ another grunted. „Keelhaul an’ his whole bloody crew—together wit’ de Eskimos—is movin’ bag an’ baggage onto de liner. We wanta give ‘em time to get settled.“

Doc Savage sought to get even closer. He was not 3 yards away as the group of men came to a stop in the shelter of a rock spire. There were 5 of them.

What he was hearing was most interesting.

* * * * *

„De bronze guy has just about got Keelhaul de Rosa’s goat!“ he chuckled. „To say nothin’ of de panic de Eskimos are in. Dat’s why they’re all movin’ onto de liner. Dey figure dey can fight ‘im off better.“

Another man swore.

„Don’t forget, pal, dat we gotta smear de bronze guy ourselves before we leave here!“ he growled.

„Time to begin worryin’ about dat after we got Keelhaul an’ all de others croaked,“ another informed him.

„You sure Keelhaul an’ his gang don’t suspect we’re around?“

„Dey sure don’t. I crawled up close an’ listened to ‘em gabbin’. Here’s what happened, pal. De bronze guy got de idea we had croaked. He told de skoit dat. De broad, she up an’ told it to Keelhaul when they caught her. An’ he believes her.“

Once more, an evil laugh gurgled in the blizzard.

„Well, Keelhaul is sure due to change his mind!“ sneered the one who had laughed.

„Yeah! Only he won’t have the time to change ‘is mind before we boin ‘is insides out wit’ tommy lead!“

„How long yer figure we’d better wait here?“

„About an hour.“

A brief silence ensued.

„I don’t like dis t’ing much,“ muttered on of the five uneasily. „We could light out wit’out all dis killin’.“

„Yah—an’ have somebody from dis place show up in a few years an’ spill de woiks to de Law!“ was the snarled reply. „We gotta clean up de loose ends, pal. We ain’t leavin’ nothin’ behind but stiffs. We’re playin’ safe.“

Once more there was quiet. Then one of the evil gang broke it with a startled ejaculation.

„What was dat?“

They peered at each other, turtling their vicious faces forward to see in the blizzard.

„I didn't hear nothin'!“ muttered one.

„Sounded like de wind,“ suggested another.

They got up and circled their shelter. They saw nothing. They heard only the hoot of the gale. They gathered behind the outthrust of stone once more, huddling close for warmth.

They had dismissed what they heard as a child of the storm.

Indeed, it almost could have been some vagrant creation of the wind that strange, low, trilling note which had come into being for a moment then trailed away into nothingness. However, it was Doc's sound which they had heard.

Doc was now dozens of yards away. He had much to do for he had learned a great deal.

The five were Ben O'Gard's thugs. Doc's listening ears had detected enough to tell him the submarine had not met disaster as he had thought. And yet he had carried the all-important valve with him the folding seaplane!

The survival of the HELLDIVER without the valve could be explained, though. Ben O'Gard's crew had simply fashioned a substitute valve. There was a small machine shop aboard the undersea craft which they could use for this purpose. No doubt they had started work on the substitute shortly after they marooned Doc on the iceberg during the walrus hunt. It had not been finished in time to use when they were so nearly trapped in the ice. But they had completed it while Doc was locked in the compartment aboard the HELLDIVER.

This, Doc believed, was the true explanation of their presence on land.

Ben O'Gard was preparing to slay every one on this forlorn spot! No blood-bathed Jolly Roger ever held more frightful ambitions.

Doc's great bronze form traveled like the wind. He had much to do. And not much time in which to accomplish it!

Doc had formulated a plan-of-action which boded ill for his enemies.

Chapter XVII

The Captives.

It was Midnight, but the Sun shone brightly. The storm had abated as swiftly as it had arisen. Snow no longer swirled. Such drifts as had gathered glittered like tiny, ridged diamonds in the solar rays.

Around the uncharted Arctic land, the short, terrific gale had made a startling change. It had pushed the ice pack away. For miles in every direction, comparatively open water could be seen. This was spotted with a few vicious-looking blue growlers but no ice floes of any size.

In the main lounge of the lost line Oceanic, Keelhaul de Rosa walked angry circles, kicking chairs out of his path.

„Keelhaul me!“ he bellowed. „The bloody treasure has gotta be somewhere!“

He came over and planted himself in front of pretty Roxey Vail. He glowered at the young woman. He had a face that mirrored indescribable Evil!

2 rat-faced thugs held Roxey Vail. Their bony claws dug painfully into her shapely arms.

„Where’s the swag?“ Keelhaul de Rosa roared at her.

„I don’t know anything about any treasure!“ the girl replied scornfully.

It was perhaps the 50th time she had told her captors that.

„You an’ your maw swiped the gold an’ diamonds!“ snarled Keelhaul de Rosa.

Roxey Vail made no answer.

„The Eskimos told me all about you an’ your maw,“ the hulking pirate chief informed her. „Where’s she hidin’?“

The young woman gave him a look of scorn. If she had practiced all her life squashing mashers on New York streets, she couldn’t have done it better.

„C’mon, cough up!“ the man hissed in her face. „Where’s your old lady hangin’ out? I’ll bet she’s sittin’ right slab-dab on the bloomin’ treasure! Keelhaul me if I don’t think that!“

„You’re wrong!“ the girl snapped.

„Then where is she?“

Roxey Vail tightened her lips. That was something she would NEVER tell. No horror they could inflict upon her would bring the information from her lips.

„You’ll spill the dope, sister, or I’ll cut that swab of an ol’ man of yorn to pieces right here in front of you!“ gritted Keelhaul de Rosa. „I’ll start by puttin’ out the ol’ geezer’s bloody eyes again!“

Roxey Vail said nothing to this. What could she say? Her cheeks, though, became pale as damask.

Keelhaul de Rosa kicked over a couple of additional chairs. He picked up a book that had lain on a table for more than 15 years and threw it at a greasy Eskimo.

Coming back, the pirate chief tried softer arguments.

„Listen, sister,“ he purred, „gimme the swag an’ I’ll see that you an’ yer ol’ man gets safe passage back with me an’ my crew.“

„How can you escape?“ Roxey Vail questioned curiously. „Your plane is destroyed. You have no submarine.“

„I’m makin’ the Eskimos haul the swag to Greenland for me.“

„Then you’ll kill them, I suppose,“ the young woman said coldly.

The way Keelhaul de Rosa gave a guilty start showed the young woman’s guess had been close to the truth.

„Will you spare the life of the Bronze Man, also?“ Roxey Vail asked tentatively.

Keelhaul de Rosa scowled.

„That swab is already dead,“ he lied, hoping it would help break the nerve of the beautiful girl.

* * * * *

The statement had an effect exactly opposite.

Roxey Vail sprang forward so suddenly that she eluded the pair holding her. She clawed Keelhaul de Rosa’s villainous face. She handed him a haymaker that completely closed his left eye!

„Lay aboard her!“ he howled in agony. „Pull her off, you swabs! Keelhaul me, but she’s a bloody wildcat!“

His two men secured fresh hold on Roxey Vail. But not before one of them collected a flattened nose. Her Arctic life had made a very hard young woman out of Roxey Vail!

The pretty girl now broke into sobs. The reason for her grief was easily understood.

She believed Doc Savage was dead. It was incredible that the Bronze Man—mighty as he was—could cope with such odds as confronted him now.

Suddenly a bellowing voice filled the lounge.

„Boarders!“ it roared. „Ben O’Gard and his swabs! They’re comin’ aboard by the stern!“

Every eye in the lounge went toward the source of that roaring voice. It seemed to come from a small companionway which led off in the direction of the purser’s office.

„It’s Ben O’Gard, I tell yer!“ crashed the voice. „They’re crawlin’ up some lines danglin’ near the stern!“

Any doubt which might have been arising was dispelled by the loud clatter of a machine gun on deck. The sound came from the stern!

Another rapid-firer joined it. A white man—one of Keelhaul de Rosa’s small gang—shrieked a warning.

„Ben O’Gard...“

The howling of Eskimos drowned out the rest.

Ben O’Gard was indeed making his attack.

„One of you hold her!“ rasped Keelhaul de Rosa. „Keelhaul me, I gotta look into this!“

He sprinted out of the room. One of the pair who had been holding the young woman followed him.

Roxey Vail promptly engaged in combat with the single rat who now pinioned her arms. She stamped his toes through his soft mukluks. She did her best to bite him.

Although strong and agile for a woman, Roxey Vail would have been overpowered by the man.

But from the spot where that great voice had first roared a warning, there glided a form that might have been liquid bronze. Nearing the struggling man and girl, this became...

...a giant Herculean man of hard metal. Hands floated out...

There were hands which could have plucked the very head from the rat now belaboring the poor girl with his fists! Yet those hands barely stroked the man’s face.

The thug fell senseless.

* * * * *

Roxey Vail stared at her rescuer. It was apparent she could hardly believe her eyes.

„You! Oh, thank...“

„Listen! Here’s what you’re to do!“ Doc interrupted.

He didn’t like the tearful business of receiving „thanks“ from young women whether they were pretty or not.

„You are to go and get your mother,“ Doc told her. „You know the finger of land juts into the sea half-a-mile to the North of this spot?“

„Yes.“

„Take your mother there. The storm left a floe of ice attached to the point. It is long and narrow. It protrudes out into the sea fully half-a-mile. The tip is rather rough where ice cakes were piles upon it by the force of the gale. You are to hide—with your mother—among those ice cakes.“

Roxey Vail nodded. But she wanted to know more.

„What...“

„No time to explain!“

Doc waved an arm in the general direction of the stern. A bloody fight was going on back there judging from the bedlam.

Doc now grasped the girl. He shook her like a child ... but not very hard.

„Now get this!“ he said sharply. „I don't want any more disobeying my orders just because you think something has happened to me!“

She smiled at him. Tears were in her eyes.

„I won't,“ she said. „But my father is...“

„I'll attend to him.“ Doc gave her a shove. „Scoot, Roxey! And be on the end of the ice neck with your mother as soon as possible. Things are going to happen fast around here!“

Obediently, the young woman raced for the bows. These were deserted due to the fight at the stern. She should have no trouble escaping.

Doc disappeared down a companionway as though in the grip of a great suction. He knew where he was going. He had overheard a chance remark while skulking aboard the lost liner a few minutes ago which told him where to look.

He shoved a stateroom door inward. A long leap...

...and he was working over tough walrus-hide thongs which bound Victor Vail.

„They told me you were dead!“ Victor Vail choked.

„Have you seen your daughter yet?“ Doc grinned.

Victor Vail's long, handsome face now became a study in emotions. His lips trembled. Big tears skiddled down his cheeks. His throat worked convulsively.

„Isn't she ... a wonderful girl!“ he gulped proudly.

He had seen her all right!

„She is swell,“ Doc chuckled. „She's gone to get her mother. They'll meet us.“

At this, Victor Vail could not restrain himself. He broke into open sobs of delight and gratitude and eagerness.

It would be a strange reunion—this of father and mother and daughter—after more than 15 years. It would be something in itself alone worth all the perils and hardships Doc had undergone.

The fight astern was coming closer. Automatics hammered fiercely. Machine-guns tore off long strings of reports. Men shrieked in the frenzy of combat. Not a few of them were screaming from their hurts, too.

„We'd better drift away from here,“ Doc declared.

They ran down a passage. An amazing thing happened to a stateroom door ahead of them.

The panel jumped out of the door, literally exploding into splinters! An object came though which resembled a rusty keg affixed crosswise to the end of a telephone pole.

Such a hand and fist could belong to only one man on Earth.

„Renny!“ Doc yelled.

Big Renny leaped out, his somber face alight.

* * * * *

A greasy Eskimo now popped through the shattered door. His eyes were wells of terror and his mouth was a frightened hole.

He headed down the passage. He made 2 jumps.

Through the door after him came 260 pounds of red-fuzzed man-gorilla!

Monk!

He overhauled the Innuite as though the greasy bag of fright were standing still. Simultaneously, his knee came up. The Eskimo landed on his back across that knee. He all-but-broke in halves.

Doc looked into the stateroom.

Ham—not quite the fashion plate he usually presented—was there. Long Tom was astride another Eskimo. The oily native was twice the size of the pale electrical wizard. But he was now getting the beating of his life!

Johnny—the gaunt archaeologist—was dancing around with his glasses which had the magnifying lens on the left side, askew on his bony face.

Doc groped for something that would express his happiness. He had given these 5 friends of his up as dead men. The proper words refused to come. His throat was cramped with emotion.

„What a bunch of bums!“ he managed to chuckle at last.

„We’ve been praying for the Sun to come out,“ said Ham.

He pointed at a porthole. A strong beam of sunlight slanted through it.

„Johnny used that magnifying lens to burn his bonds apart. It’s lucky for us our captors stink like they do. They can’t smell anything but themselves! They couldn’t smell the smoke from the thongs as Johnny burned them through.“

The group ran for the stern. Renny secured an automatic pistol from the Eskimo who Ham had skewered with his sword cane. Long Tom carried another he had seized from his opponent. Monk had obtained a third from his own victim.

„I had written you guys off my books,“ Doc’s expressive voice rumbled pleasantly. „How’d you escape from that burning plane?“

„What d’you think we had parachutes for?“ Monk inquired in his tiny murmur.

„But I flew over the ice and saw no sign of you,“ Doc pointed out.

Monk grinned widely. „I’m tellin’ you, Doc, we didn’t linger after we landed. We come down right in the middle of a gang of wild & wooly Eskimos! They started throwin’ things at us. Harpoons mostly. Our ammunition was gone. We’d wasted it all on the plane that shot us down. So we made tracks. We thought the Eskimos was cannibals or somethin’!“

Ham scowled blackly at Monk.

„And you, you missing link, suggested leaving ME behind as a sort of pot offering!“ he said angrily.

Ham wasn't mad, though. It was just the old feud starting again. Things were back to normal.

„Listen, you overdressed little shyster!“ Monk rumbled. „You were knocked cold when your parachute popped you against an iceberg. And I had to carry you. Next time, I'll sure-enough leave you!“

„The Eskimos set a trap for us,“ Renny finished the story for Doc. „There were too many. They finally got us.“

* * * * *

The bow of the lost liner OCEANIC was deserted. The fight at the stern had drawn everybody. And a bloody fray that was for the noise of it had become more violent.

Doc halted near an ice-crushed, dangling cable which offered safe—if somewhat slippery—transit to the ice below.

„Half-a-mile North of here, an ice finger juts out into the sea,“ Doc said rapidly. „Go there, all of you! Roxey Vail and her mother should be there already. Wait for me.“

„What are you going to do?“ Ham questioned.

„I'm staying behind for a short time,“ Doc replied. „Over the side with you, brothers!“

Rapidly, they slid over the rail.

Monk was last. His homely face showed concern over Doc's safety. He tried to put an argument.

„Now listen, Doc,“ he began. „You better...“

Doc smiled faintly. He picked up the argumentative 260 pounds of man-gorilla by the slack of the pants and the coat collar and sent him whizzing down the icy cable.

„Beat it!“ he called down at them ... and then he sank behind a capstan.

They ran away across the ice.

One of the battlers on the derelict liner saw the group. He threw up a rifle and fired. He missed. He ran forward to get a better aim.

The man was one of Ben O'Gard's thugs. He crouched in the shelter of a bitt and aimed deliberately. He could hardly have missed. Squinting, he prepared to squeeze the trigger.

Then, instinctively, he brushed at something which had touched his cheek. It felt like a fly. But it was no fly. The rifleman toppled over senseless before he realized it.

Doc retreated as soundlessly as he had reached the man's side.

Rapidly, Doc removed metal caps from the ends of his fingers. These were of bronze. They exactly matched the hue of Doc's skin and were so cleverly constructed as to escape detection with the naked eye. However, one might have noticed Doc's fingers were a trifle longer when the caps were in place.

These caps each held a tiny, very sharp needle. A potent chemical of Doc's own manufacture fed through glands in those needles. One prick from them meant instant unconsciousness.

This was the secret of Doc's *magic* touch.

Doc now saw men gathering astern. They were Ben O'Gard's thugs. Victory had evidently fallen to them.

A captive was hauled up from below. He squealed and whimpered and blubbered for mercy.

2 pirates held him. An automatic in Ben O'Gard's hand cracked thunder! The prisoner fell dead.

The man they had murdered was Keelhaul de Rosa!

His proper deserts had at last reached the fellow. As an unmitigated villain, he had been equaled only by the devil who now slew him so cold-bloodedly—Ben O'Gard!

Doc Savage suddenly yelled loudly. His great voice tumbled along the ice-coated deck.

Ben O'Gard saw him and shrieked: „Get the bronze guy, mateys!“

Doc whipped over the rail. This was what he had remained for.

He wanted Ben O'Gard and the rest to follow him!

Chapter XVIII

The Thawing Death.

Doc Savage sped away from the lost liner OCEANIC. Bullets jarred showers of ice flakes from hummocks behind which he dodged. Other slugs ran about in the snow like little moles that traveled too fast for the eye.

Doc was careful not to offer too good a target. But he showed himself often enough to lure his pursuers on.

Yelling excitedly, huge Ben O'Gard led the pack. The walrus of a pirate was careful not to get too far ahead of his men, though. Once, Doc saw him stumble deliberately so as to permit the others to catch up with him.

The man was cautious. He had felt the frightful strength of Doc Savage before. In fact, he still wore bandages on his hands from that occasion.

Doc's golden eyes ranged ahead. They held anxiety. Had his friends reached the neck of ice?

They had!

Doc could see Monk jumping up-and-down like the gorilla he resembled as he watched the exciting chase.

Monk's yells even reached Doc's ears. They sounded like the noise 2 fighting bulls would make. For a man with such a mild voice, Monk could emit the most blood-curdling howls!

Doc quickened his pace! No doubt the pirates thought he had been going at full-speed for a chorus of surprised shouts arose as they saw the Bronze Man leaving them as though they stood still.

„Shake out your sails, mateys!“ Ben O'Gard bellowed. He waddled out ahead of his killer gang like an elephant.

Then—seized with caution—he was careful to let them catch up.

Doc reached the headland. The ice pack had piled up here. Passing through it was laborious business. It was as though the houses of a great white city had been shoved into one huge pile.

Rifle and submachine-gun bullets swarmed like unseen hornets through the ice hummocks!

Doc finally gained the finger of ice. He sprinted! The footing was only moderately rough here, but offering correspondingly less shelter as well.

There was one point where the ice neck narrowed. 30-or-so steps would have spanned it from one side to the other.

In the middle of this narrow place stood a slightly unnatural-looking drift of snow.

Doc sped past this snow pile without giving it a glance.

A rifle slug made such a noise in his ear that he thought he was hit. But the hood of his parka had only been torn.

He doubled low ... zig-zagged a little ... and reached cover.

Here, the ice finger widened again. Doc joined his friends. Victor Vail stood to one side.

He was doing his best to hug both his wife and pretty daughter simultaneously!

„I hope you got a deck of aces up your sleeve, Doc,“ Monk said, his voice again mild. „If you ain't, we're in a pretty pickle!“

* * * * *

As Monk hinted, they were indeed trapped. For it seemed that Doc had led them to a spot from which there was no escape.

Ben O'Gard and his bloodthirsty pirates had already passed the narrow part of the ice finger. Regaining the shore was now impossible.

To continue their flight in boats—even should Doc have a craft concealed in the rugged ice nearby—was also unfeasible. The pirates would have a perfect chance to riddle them with their machine-guns.

But Doc Savage showed no concern.

„Keep your shirt on, Monk,“ he suggested.

Then as a burst of rapid-firer slugs all-but-parted Monk's bristling red hair, he added: „And your head down!“

„Let the missing link get a lead haircut!“ Ham clipped. „He needs barbering.“

Monk leered at Ham as if he was trying to think of something ... got it ... and made his inevitable *hoinck! hoinck!* of a porker grunting.

Ham subsided.

Doc was now introduced to Victor Vail's long-lost wife. The introduction lacked something in courtliness, considering that it was made with all of them lying as flat as they could with flocks of bullets passing but a few inches over their backs.

Mrs. Vail was a tall woman, fully as beautiful as her entrancing blonde daughter although in a more mature way. She showed little effects of her long years of isolation on this barren Arctic spot.

Doc turned hastily to his men to avoid the heart-felt gratitude Victor Vail's wife sought to express. Not to mention the adoring look in pretty Roxey's eyes.

„Let me have a pistol,“ Doc requested.

His friends were surprised. It was rarely that Doc used firearms on his human foes.

Renny handed over an automatic he had taken from one of his Eskimo guards. Doc left them.

In an instant, he was lost completely to their sight so expertly did he conceal himself.

They heard his automatic crack once ... then 4 times more!

They stared at the oncoming pirates. Not a man dropped. This was little short of astounding to the five who knew Doc well.

Doc Savage was one of the finest marksmen they had ever seen even if it was seldom that he fired a shot. They had seen him toss up to 12 pennies in a single handful and—using 2 pistols—touch every one with lead before they fell to the ground!

Yet he seemed to have missed the easy targets the pirates offered.

„Hey ... LOOK!“ Monk howled suddenly.

Behind the pirates—where the finger of ice narrowed—a surprising phenomena was in progress.

The ice was melting at great speed!

* * * * *

Monk was the first to comprehend.

„My chemical mixture for dissolving ice!“ he chuckled. „Doc put a supply of it under that snow drift. He simply punctured the containers!“

Ben O'Gard and his pirates came to a stop. They had discovered the melting ice. That worried them.

But their thirst for blood got the better of them. They resumed their charge!

„Come!“ Doc called to his men. „And keep down low!“

He led them for the end of the ice finger.

It became noticeable that the whole formation of ice was now in motion. Enough of the narrow neck had dissolved to permit the rest to break free. The whole thing was now an ordinary floe, plaything of the currents of the Polar sea.

Doc reached his objective. He pointed.

„How does that look?“ he questioned.

Monk grinned from ear-to-ear. „Heaven will never look any better to this sinful soul!“

The under-the-ice submarine HELLDIVER lay before them.

It was moored to deadman anchors which had obviously been sunken in the ice by depositing a bit of Monk's remarkable chemical concoction.

They threw off the moorings, then dived down the main hatch.

Doc started the electric motors. There was no time to get the diesels going.

The HELLDIVER surged away from the floe.

„How'd it happen to be here?“ Monk questioned.

Doc smiled faintly.

„I'm afraid I stole it,“ he explained. „Ben O'Gard kindly helped me out by leaving no one aboard. But I must say I never put in a busier 20 minutes than I did running the tin whale here single-handed.“

A sporadic burst-or-two of bullets rattled on the submarine hull. But they did not have sufficient power to penetrate the steel plates, however.

The shooting stopped abruptly.

Renny took a chance and thrust his head out. He was not shot at.

„If any of you guys are interested in stark drama, come here and watch,“ he suggested.

Doc, Long Tom, Monk, Ham, and Johnny crowded up beside him along with Victor Vail.

Roxey Vail and her mother—after one glance—could not bear the horror of the sight.

* * * * *

Grim fate had at last grasped Ben O’Gard and his pirates.

They knew that to drift on the floe did of a certainty mean slow starvation. So they were making desperate tries to reach shore. Some had already plunged into the frigid water and were battling the strong current.

Others—who could not swim—were fighting those who could, trying to make them serve as unwilling pack horses. A few faint shots rang out.

Those swimming began to go down, overcome by the deadly chill of the water for some distance now separated the floe from land. Their fur garments handicapped them. Yet to remove them was to freeze.

After a while, the last man sprang wildly, hopelessly, into the numbingly-cold sea.

Two actually reached the ice-rimmed shore. One of these was the walrus-like Ben O’Gard. But they could not climb upon the ice, so depleted was their strength.

Ben O’Gard was last to slip back to his death.

Monk let a long breath swish from his cavernous lungs.

„He’d better get plenty chilled because it’s might HOT where he’s goin’!“ muttered the gorilla of a chemist. „He paid a mighty high price tryin’ to get the...“

Monk swallowed twice. His eyes stuck out. He whirled on Doc.

„Hey! What about the treasure?“ he howled. „Now we’re in a nice fix! Everybody’s dead who knows anything about it!“

Doc Savage was forced to postpone his answer for a time. Handling the under-the-ice submarine occupied his attention. The tanks had to be trimmed, the diesels had to be started. He and his 5 men would have only moderate difficulty piloting the HELLDIVER southward although they would be very short-handed.

Monk got his mind back on the 50 million in gold and diamonds.

„Say, Doc, we ain’t goin’ off an’ leave all that money layin’ around on the bleak land somewhere, are we?“ he asked plaintively.

„Ben O’Gard and his gang moved the treasure from the strong room of the OCEANIC when they mutinied more than 15 years ago,“ Doc said dryly. „In other words, they filched it from their pals—headed by Keelhaul de Rosa—and cached it in a hiding place of their own.“

„Holy cow!“ groaned Renny. „Then we have no way of finding that hiding place! Ben O’Gard and his men are all dead.“

„We don't care about the hiding place,“ Doc assured him. „Ben O'Gard and his gang had recovered the loot before they set out a few hours ago to commit wholesale slaughter on the lost liner.“

Monk emitted one of his best howls! „You mean it's...“

„The whole business is aboard this submarine,“ Doc told him. „To be exact, it's piled some feet deep on the floor of your cabin, Monk.“

It was startling information to Monk at the end of a most startling adventure. Out of the frozen grip of the North came a fortune in gold and diamonds saved from the lost liner.

But more than that. Out of this thrilling adventure came the rescue of 2 precious lives. And the reunion of a family lost for many years. And a modern Medical miracle!

To the formerly-blind violinist and his reunited family, this was the greatest thing that could have happened. And the battles of Doc and his companions were most marvelous indeed.

But they did not know of the past of Doc and his friends, of the many narrow escapes, and of the thrilling exploits that were part of their lives.

