

The following short-story has **Adult XXX-rated** themes. These are entirely fictional and are not meant to condone any real life violence toward women etc. (*note: acting out fantasies in private consensual "role-playing" games doesn't apply here*). This added material is intended only for those Adults who are entertained by such fictional imaginations.

The actors and actresses in the rehearsed photos are over 18 years (see [here](#) for a list of sites from where they were extracted). The anime/hentai/cartoon/3D/CGI images depict sexual fantasies of many Adults and as strictly drawings of erotic art are harmless and (at one time) were not subject to any legal restrictions (see [here](#)). These images were created to be over 18 years old by their artists.

These short-stories do not have an "editor-in-chief". Many individuals contributed to different sections in a story. So it is possible that some questionable images "slipped through the cracks". If any image is judged to be illegal by a newer law, please contact kelli@hotlegsinlove.com and it will be removed.

All of these images were retrieved from "free" public (i.e., non-paysite) websites including Google. Some have a massive collection from fake-celebrity-sex to BDSM to incest to bestiality images [such as [8muses.com](#)]. The assumption was that if these somewhat-realistic images were illegal, the legal authorities would have had them removed a long time ago. But they are still there and so they are being used here and saving you a lot of web-surfing time.

If you are someone who might be offended by such fiction or the prevailing Laws of your locale do not permit viewing ***“Forced Sex”***-type material --

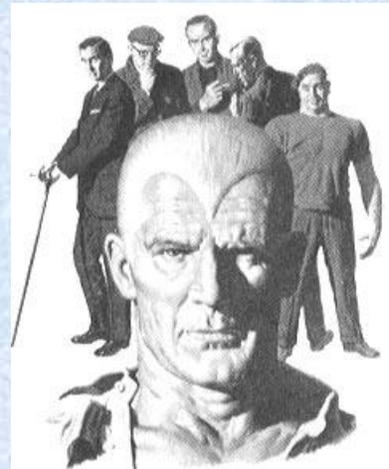
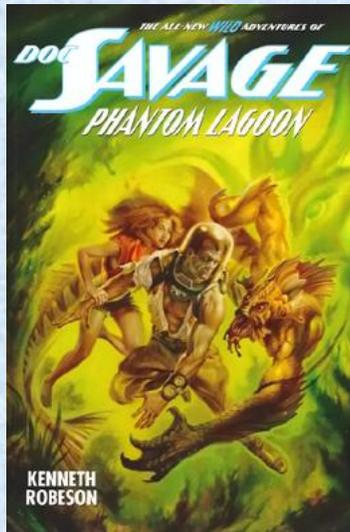
and especially if you are under 21 years of age --

DO NOT READ FURTHER .

Doc Savage #198XXX - "The War Makers"

by Ryerson Johnson - April/2014

(XXX material added by kelli@hotlegsinline.com)



XXXXXX Not For Viewing By Anyone Under 21 XXXXXX

When a brazen adventuress tries to hire Doc Savage for a secret mission, it lights the fuse for one of his most explosive exploits. Why does she need to rent Doc's private submarine? And who is so determined to eliminate her that they destroy Doc Savage's skyscraper headquarters in the process? (with Patricia Savage !)



<http://www.hotlegsinline.com/PSXXX.htm>

XXXX This is a 'X'-rated version of the original novel. **XXXX**

The Perils of Patricia Savage

modified by kelli@hotlegsinline.com

***** Not For Viewing By Anyone Under 21 *****



Thanks to Blackmask.com , Worldlibrary.net , Munseys.com and the other websites who previously converted these Doc Savage paperbacks into electronic format. They were used as the base for inserting the **XXX** material.

The Adult **images** that accompany the **XXX** material were from free public sites such as LuxBabes.com , Twistys , HotPornstars , Richards-Realm.com , and Celebritiesmix.com .

The fantasy **XXX** material was in part created by inspiration from Rebecca at RebeccaHAP.com and those wicked and talented **BDSM** erotic artists at DoFantasy.com and 8Muses.com .

note: to skip to images of **Pat Savage In Peril**, do a <Ctrl>-F (Find) on **XXXX**

I – Girl Off An Isle

A wise man once observed that Trouble has walked around in **skirts** since the beginning of things.

This particular wise man did not proclaim such a thing in so many words. But every man knows it to be true. Particularly seamen understand this just as they know to batten down their hatches and furl sail when the wind strengthens and becomes strange.

It was around noon in the Caribbean when the liner *Amberjack* happened upon the little wart of a cay with the troublesome girl on it.

The *Amberjack* was one of those dazzlingly white ships that ply the Caribbean Sea looking like a floating castle built of polished seashells. Her passengers were invariably tourists. In the expensive brochures that were used to entice the public to part with their hard-earned money in return for a 5-day passage from New York City to Port of Spain, Trinidad with port stops in Haiti, Barbados, Havana, and Port Charles, romance was hinted.

And sometimes, it was found.

The *Amberjack* was on her return leg when she passed the isle. It was a clear day. A few lost-lamb clouds plodded across the too-blue sky. There was a breeze that smelled of salt and sand. The placid Caribbean Sea was a cerulean hue that might have been associated with the Afterlife.

The cay was a low stretch of white sand off to port crowned with a few shaggy-headed palm trees. Sultry breezes shook their leafy skulls like Hula dancers calling sailors ashore.

In the crow's nest, the lookout suddenly shouted.

"Cap'n, ahoy! A distress signal on that island!"

The lookout couldn't see the girl and so was not in a position to reflect on the recorded opinions of wise men in regards to skirted trouble.

The liner captain ordered engines stopped. A small regulation dory was put off. Its outboard motor toiled noisily as it headed for the isle to investigate the distress signal.

"Probably some Carib native playing a prank," muttered the First Mate who understood that the Laws of the Sea required that the signal be looked into. It was a stretch of the Caribbean that saw no fishing boats, few pleasure craft, and only a passing liner now-and-again.

As the dory drew near the isle, it could be seen that in addition to the drooping coconut palms, there was a little coral honeycombing the cay. But not much.

A figure stood on the white beach waiting for them. The figure was indistinct under the brassy Sun. But it seemed to have its hands planted purposefully on its hips. It also stood next to the distress signal which was a ragged **skirt** flapping atop a pole and planted in the white sand.

That was where the **skirt** came into the picture.

The skirt-pennant made the First Mate sit up at attention. He had the requisite sailor's interest in the opposite sex. He adjusted his black tie.

As the dory beat closer, the indistinct figure lost its indistinctness.

"Split my keel!" the First Mate explode. "It's a dame!"

The other sailors grew interested then.

They ran the dory onto the white sands cutting the engine in the last few yards of turquoise water so that the propeller would not have to fight the granular stuff.

The sliding keel made a brief grating sound and then stopped. They piled out and dragged it the last several feet onto dry land where it promptly leaned over like a drunken boatswain. The dory crew were themselves looking a little unsteady as they approached the one they had come to rescue.

It was a girl. No doubt about it. Clad only in a kerchief bra and a pair of ragged shorts. She was a brunette. Tall with some excellent curves of a kind not usually seen in tall girls. He had a thin nose and a rather grim mouth.

Standing there with her frowning mouth and her arms folded impatiently, she was enwrapped in an attitude that suggested anything but what she appeared to be. A marooned beachcomber.

"About time that you mugs showed up," she said tartly.

This comment took them off-guard. As far as they knew, they were not expected.

Yet it was obvious that she was alone on the cay. The hump of sand and jungle was that small. There appeared to be no sign of a boat wrecked-or-otherwise.

"how long have you been here/" the First Mate wondered noticing her sunburned and peeling features.

"2 weeks."

"Anyone else with you?"

"No."

"Lady," exclaimed the First Mate, you mean to say that you have been living on this dab of an island all alone?"

The brunette girl at once showed she was inclined to answer no questions.

"Listen, stupid!" she snapped. "if you're gonna rescue me, then rescue me. And don't ask fool questions."

The *Amberjack* crew swapped befuddled looks. Probably half of them had at one time or another fantasized about rescuing a castaway as fetching as this one.

This was not how they envisioned the reality of it. Their faces soon grew long with disappointment. They wore them that way even as they helped the girl into the dory and all during the trip back to the liner.

When the brunette castaway was safely aboard the liner, her attitude did not noticeably improve.

"How I got on that blasted island is my own business," she informed the captain almost before he could put to her a complete question. "And I'll settle it myself. Don't think that I won't!"

"You might at least give me your name," the nonplussed Captains aid.

The brunette put her hands on hips, stuck her pert chin in the air, and snapped:

"Listen! That's my business! Now will one of these white-coated stiffs show me to my cabin or do I pick one for myself?"

The First Mate showed the willful young woman to an empty cabin on a lower deck upon which she promptly slammed the door in his face and locked herself in.

"If there is anything we can get you, Miss ..." the First Mate began to say.

"The girl's tart voice came through the door.

"3 things. Food. Privacy. And something to read."

A well-rounded meal and a stack of newspapers arrived within 20 minutes on separate trays. The steward was instructed to leave them outside the cabin door. After he had departed, the trays were claimed.

The ship's skipper provided these amenities for sound business reasons. He knew the kind of publicity that would greet the *Amberjack* once it docked in Manhattan. In fact, he had already radioed ahead to the home office so that would be arranged for.

Nothing more was heard from the cabin for the rest of the day. The incident would have to be reported to the maritime authorities, of course. Inquiries as to the castaway's identity crossed via ship-to-shore radio in both directions. The upshot was that no one seemed to have lost a tall shapely brunette with a thin nose and even thinner patience.

It was a deep mystery. And, naturally, it was the talk of the *Amberjack* passengers and crew as she steamed north to the United States.

The line published its own newspaper. It was a modest thing not much larger than a Broadway program guide. The next morning's edition was headlined:

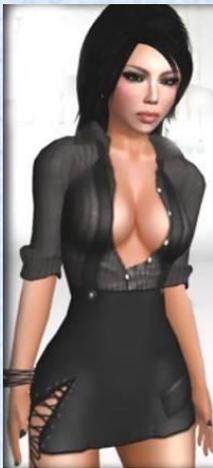
BRUNETTE MYSTERY GAL RESCUED OFF TROPIC ISLAND

REFUSES TO EXPLAIN HOW SHE GOT THERE

The story below was remarkably bare of facts.

A copy was delivered to the erstwhile castaway's cabin as a courtesy. She had not had it more than 2 minutes when she came storming out of her cabin leaving her breakfast eggs and toast untouched.

She was now clad in a rather sporty ensemble that had been contributed by a sympathetic passenger. She made a fetching sight as she bowled down the promenade deck, her chin lifted with an air of "leave me alone". Heads turned, naturally. A few passengers called after her. She ignored them pointedly as she found the Captain's office and burst in with all the quietude of a typhoon.



"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded of the Captain flinging the paper at his immaculate uniform front. "Can't a gal have any privacy on this tub?"

The Captain ignored the outburst and said in a reasonable voice: "We have had inquiries, Miss. No one seems to know who you are."

"Listen! I've told you that's my business! And I aim to keep it that way!"

The skipper looked pained.

"Could you at least give us something to call you?"

The brunette fixed him with a baleful blue eye.

"If I give you a name, will you leave me out of your silly shipboard rag?"

"I can arrange that, yes," the Captain allowed.

"Call me Henrietta."

The Captain looked disappointed. "No last name?"

"That wasn't in our agreement," the brunette snapped. "Next time, get it in writing."

And with that, the salty castaway calling herself 'Henrietta' stormed off.

She got several paces halted ... and <snapped> sunburned fingers sharply.

"Dammit! I meant to ask where-and-when this tub will put into port."

Her sun-inflamed face twisted and softened.

"I know. I'll just mingle with the *hoi-polloi*."

And with that, Henrietta made a very determined beeline for the nearest unoccupied deck chair. This drew attention.

"Are you the gal off the island?" a smiling 'Joe College' type in a sleeveless varsity sweater asked in passing.

"And what if I am?" snapped Henrietta, her lip curling.

"Ah, I was just making conversation."

"Come back when you've grown into your long pants, sonny-boy," the girl said acidly.

Abashed, the college boy betook himself away.

A very snappily dressed gentleman tried to board the brunette windjammer next.

"Hello, Babe!" he called cheerily.

"G'wan! Scram!" growled the brazen brunette.

The would-be swain sought more agreeable companionship.

Others attempted to engage Henrietta in conversation but to no avail. She put them all off. Even the sportiest guys on the ship couldn't pick her up. She ignored them all.

There was a magazine on a table beside the deck chair. She snapped it up, burying her thin nose in it. Idly she paged through the periodical looking up every so often.

Whenever a passing male caught her eye, she abruptly lifted the magazine by way of encouragement. They invariably moved on.

But passing women brought a different reaction. Henrietta attempted to catch their eye. Contrarily, they hurried along.

"My reputation must have preceded me," she muttered to herself.

Finally, a woman possessing more nerve (or perhaps a larger than usual curiosity bump) than the others came and claimed an empty lounge chair across the promenade deck.

Henrietta lowered her magazine and asked: "Where is this ark bound, anyway?"

"Manhattan. Did no one tell you?"

"Forgot to ask."

Then Henrietta buried her head in the magazine as a pointed inducement to be left to her sulking.

At one point she began muttering under her breath.

"I gotta pay them mugs back. But how?"

The nearby woman looked interested. "Eh?"

"Nothing."

Henrietta had not been reading very far when she came upon an article that was entitled:

MODERN GALAHAD SLAYS DRAGONS OF TODAY WITH BRAIN AND BRAWN

Her sunburned brows puckering, Henrietta narrowed her eyes and read along.

Abruptly she threw the magazine up in the air and yelled:

"Yippee! I've got it! Clark Savage is the man who can help me!"

"Got what?" asked the other woman.

"Nothing. Never mind."

"Did I just hear you mention **Doc Savage**?" asked the other woman.

"Who is Doc Savage?" asked Henrietta with what appeared to be genuine puzzlement.

"You don't look old enough to have been stuck on that island quite that long, dearie."

"Same to you, I'm sure," Henrietta said huffily. "So who is he?"

"Merely the marvel man of the Century."

"A big shot, eh?" asked Henrietta.

"That is a vulgar way of puttin git," the other returned with more than a trace of frost.

Taking the magazine, Henrietta got up and went in search of an officer. By sheer luck, she happened to cross the path of the First Mate who had rescued her.

"Are Clark Savage, Jr. and **Doc Savage** one-and-the-same person?" she asked without either salutation or preamble.

"Yes," admitted the First Mate. "I believe so."

"Where can he be contacted?" asked Henrietta.

The First Mate laughed.

"Don't tell me you've got trouble for Doc Savage to crack! He makes a business of other people's troubles, you know."

"Where can he be contacted?" Henrietta repeated stiffly.

The First Mate lost his laugh as if he dropped it and the article had shattered underfoot.

"We dock in New York in a few hours. You can look him up when we put in. Doc Savage operates out of that city."

"Point me to the radio room," ordered the brunette bombshell.

The First Mate offered to show her the way. But Henrietta put him off with a curt "I can navigate without assistance, thank you very much."

The First Mage gave succinct instructions to the radio room. Then he went off to nurse his wounded male pride.

Henrietta marched into the radio room. She snatched up a blank and began writing.

"Send this and make it snappy," she said slapping the yellow flimsy over the countertop. "Collect."

The radio operator glanced at the message and saw the name of **Doc Savage**. He whistled in surprise.

"That **Savage** is quite a guy from what I hear," said the radio operator expansively.

He had a fresh innocent face. Henrietta decided that she could motivate him faster with hand-wringing than with scorn.

"Can you send the message right asway?" she asked anxiously.

"No reason why not," said the operator. "Funny thing. This **Doc Savage** is a man known all over the World as the guy to go to if you've got big trouble. When I was in Africa on my last ship, I heard

talk of **Doc Savage**. Believe it or not, the guy is as well-known there as he is over here. He's sure got a reputation. Do you know him personally?"

"Only by repute," said Henrietta.

"I saw **Doc Savage's** picture once," the operator volunteered. "He is a giant of a man, his skin **bronzed** by the Sun."

"You don't say."

"It was in an electrical engineering trade journal. He had discovered something new about the nature of atomic forces."

"This fellow suffers no flies to alight on his collar, now does he?" Henrietta said dryly.

"**Doc Savage**," the radio operator said with grave sincerity, "will probably be remembered 2,000 or 3,000 years from today."

"You," she shot back, "just remember to send my radiogram!"

And with that, the brassy brunette flounced out of the radio shack.

II – Landfall

The advent of the pleasure liner *Amberjack* was the occasion of great excitement along New York City's steamship docks. Long before Gotham tugs nudged their blunt tire-fendered snouts alongside the gleaming ivory gem of the Atlantic, reporters began showing up in anticipation of her arrival.

The reason was evident in the bulldog editions the reporters and camera boys clutched, still warm from the heat of the presses.

Proclaimed one:

MAROONED BRUNETTE DUE IN GOTHAM

Wondered a second sheet:

WHO IS MYSTERY CASTAWAY?

Screamed another:

CASTAWAY GAL REFUSES TO TALK!

The assembled representatives of the Press were in hopes of changing that last headline. They jostled rubbernecking Manhattanites who jumped up on tiptoe with each **blast** from the nearing tugs.

It was a pleasant Autumn day in November. Not as pleasant as the Caribbean had been on the previous night. But for New York, it was about as splendid as the city got.

The crowd grew and swelled as about the point the sheer numbers of the assembled threatened to push those on the outer edges of the South Street Seaport wharves into the dingy waters of the East River, the liner hove into view.

That was the cue for the police (who were out in force) to take up their nightsticks and begin to push the crowds back so the dock workers could prepare to receive the giant ship.

She was speedily made fast. The *Amberjack's* horn gave a final **blast** of relief and the gangplank was set in place.

The Captain himself escorted the brunette girl (who was still clad in her rather loud and revealing sport ensemble) to the top of the gangway and unhooked the chain so that she could disembark.

"There she is!" shouted one reporters.

"That's the gal they found on the island!" barked another.

Instantly flashbulbs popped and were ejected. New bulbs were inserted to be ignited and discarded as fast as the cameras could be worked. Newsreel cameras ground busily.

"That's her!" the crowd began shouting.

"Boy," said one scribe. "I wouldn't mind being marooned with something like that!"

"Hey, sis!" shouted a photographer. "I'm from the *Daily Comet*. How about a li'l picture?"

The blistered brunette covered up her face to prevent her picture being taken and started down the gangplank.

"We want an interview!" yelled a reporter.

"How about a statement for the Press?"

The girl did not pause when she reached the foot of the gangplank. She was hard-boiled and in a hurry.

"Scram!" she snapped. "All of you newspaper mugs!"

"Come on, lady. Say something. This is the Press!"

"Go peddle your papers!" Henrietta flung back.

The excited newshawks jostled closer. There was not much choice in the matter. Eager to catch a glimpse of the mysterious castaway, the surrounding crowds were pressing in. A catastrophe impended.

No doubt a tragedy would have taken place had not the police intervened. Whistles shrilled! A wall of blue festooned with brass buttons surrounded the girl. When it surged, she moved with the push.

Thus was the brunette girl escorted to the first in a line of waiting taxis idling nearby.

"Thanks," she bit out as a copper opened the passenger door for her convenience.

"Think nothing of it," the cop replied touching his cap politely. "What did you say your name was, Miss?"

"I didn't," sniffed the brunette slamming the door.

To the taxi driver, she said: "Take me to Doc Savage's hangout. And make it snappy!"

This was overheard by the officers of the Law. When the cab departed in haste, they declined to follow as was their plan.

If the mystery brunette had business with Doc Savage, it was no business of theirs. For he held an honorary commission with the Manhattan police and they were under strict orders to defer to the **Bronze Man** in matters such as this.

As they trudged back to the crowd with the firm intent of breakin' git up, one officer was heard to mutter: "What I wouldn't give to be Doc Savage for just one day. Imagine! Having a fetching thing like that come all the way from the Caribbean to ask for my help."

"She might have been fetching. But she sure had herself a sharp enough tongue," another bluecoat observed candidly.

A man who had been crouching inside a waterfront warehouse door waited for the cab to get out of sight.

He was a tall thin-faced individual wearing an expensive tan hat with a snap brim, tan shoes, and kid gloves of excellent quality. The rest of him was obscured in a rust-covered overcoat.

His face was also obscured. By a handkerchief he was holding to his face. It was a big loose thing of pearl-gray silk. And it prevented much being discerned about his features.

The well-dressed man spun suddenly and ran back into the warehouse to a dark corner where another man lurked at a knot hole that overlooked the pier at which the *Amberjack* lay docked.

"It was that she-hornet!" he barked.

The man at the knot hole spun. His face was a dim shape in the poor light. He remained in the shadows as would one accustomed to doing so by force of habit. All that could be discerned of him was his shirt. It was a rich chocolate brown.

"You sure of that, Pippel?"

"Positive."

"What-the-hell is she doin' here?"

"Must've got rescued," growled Pippel letting the handkerchief fall from his face.

"But why would she come to New York?"

Pippel said: "Only one answer to that. She's wise! The question is what are we gonna do about it?"

"Only one answer to that too," said the one at the knot hole grimly.

"You're probably right. You stay here. I'm gonna follow her."

Pippel ran to a side door of the warehouse. He slipped outdoors and piled into a small green sedan. The car pitched over ruts and took the turn into the street on 2 wheels.

There is quite a fleet of taxicabs prowling the island of Manhattan, each with its own distinctive livery. The cab hired by the brunette castaway happened to be one of the more rare types. It sported a ghastly two-toned blue paint job. This was easily found and overhauled.

"*Let's see where she goes,*" the man called 'Pippel' muttered under his breath.

In the two-toned taxi, the brunette peered out the back window warily and said:

"Step on it, driver!"

"Lady, said the man, "they got a speed limit in this town."

Then came a stream of sulfurous words from the otherwise delectable lips of the brunette so blistering that the driver bore down on the gas pedal as if in hope of outrunning them.

The taxi made good time. The driver barely had opportunity to peer into his mirror to examine his unusual passenger. A stoplight afforded him his first opportunity.

The girl had her head turned completely around. Her Sun-blistered nose all-but-pressed against the rear window.

"See that green sedan?" she said suddenly.

"yeah."

"He's tailing us."

"Must be the Press. Them guys stick like glue."

"Lose him," she said.

"What about Doc Savage?"

"What I have to tell Doc Savage is between him and me!" snapped the brunette. "And I don't need any nosy reporter butting in. Get it?"

The driver did. When the light change, he began cutting in-and-out of traffic and got to work on losing the green sedan.

Finally by detouring to Brooklyn, he did.

"How's that for service?" the driver beamed into the rear-view mirror.

"If you're expecting a big tip, then don't," the brunette said tartly.

The taxi driver's long face fell.

"Why not?" he demanded rather bluntly.

"I just came off a desert isle, buster. I ain't even got a seashell in my pocket."

"Does that mean you can't pay the fare?" the jehu asked unhappily.

"Let me see your goods, **Bitch**," he commanded. "All of them! Strip, '**Ho!**'"

"Don't you dare touch me, you **black bastard!**" she yelled.

"Oh, the hell you say," he replied as he started tearing off her clothes.



She squirmed and struggled. But to no avail.

"Ahhh!" he exclaimed. "Just look at them **knockers** of yours!"





"Ugh!" she cursed as she felt her lush breasts being crudely fondled.

"Give me some sugar, **Slut!**"

"Yuck!" she moaned as he slobbered on her red **lips**.



"Now git down on your knees before your master, you White **Whore**. You gotta git me hard!"



He laughed as she gagged on some vile **semen** that spurted from his massive **cock**.

"Don't worry, **Bitch**. You just got a little **jizz**. I'm saving most of it for your pussy. I'z gonna knock you up good!"

"Now lift your knees and spread those fuckin' legs for me!" he commanded.



He was not gentle in the slightest when he speared her tight vagina.



"Please! Stop!" she pleaded. "Oh God! It's too BIG!!!"

"Shuddap!" he hissed. "I gots to get off, damn you!"



"YOUR WHITE PUSSY FEELS GOOD, SLUT!"



HER LEGS WERE HIGH UP ON MAMA'S SHOULDERS AND THE POWERFUL MAN WAS FUCKING HER BALLS DEEP ON EACH STROKE.

OH... FUCKING GOD!



HER PUSSY MADE A RESOUNDING SQUEAL AS SHE TOOK HIM, THE BLACK 'SNAKE' LIVING UP TO HIS NAME. AND FELT LIKE SHE WAS GOING TO PASS OUT.

Suddenly he became rigid. His back arched backwards as he yelled "Arghh!"

She felt a disgusting flood of a warm viscous *fluid* seep upward through her cunt.



TAKING HIS TIME WITH CONTROLLED, FIRM THRUSTS HE FUCKED HER BACK INTO THE MATTRESS.



PUSHING HER LEGS APART AS HE DID DO, SHE WAS ONLY JUST HOLDING IT TOGETHER, WHIMPERING.



SOAKING HIS BALLS WITH HER CUNNY JUICE.



Having shot his baby-making *load*, he was satisfied albeit exhausted. He laughed at her squirming and twitching with the vile stuff *oozing* out from her crotch.

"Hell," he said. "I ain't done with you yet, baby."

"Haven't you done enough to me yet, you damn pervert?"

His grin turned into an evil smirk.

"Not by a long shot, you filthy **whore!**"



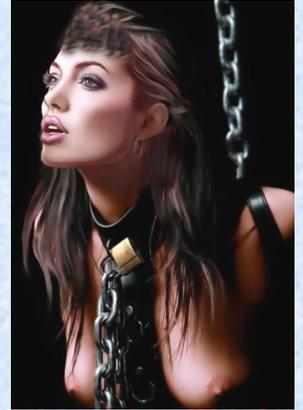
From somewhere in his cab he produced a strange mechanical contraption. It didn't take long for her to discern its operation.



"Oh God!" she cried. "I'll never be the same again!"



An hour later, it was over. He went to sleep as she squirmed herself out.



As he was finished with his dastardly deeds, he was spent physically as all males are. She took this opportunity to break away and get in his cab. Fighting back tears of shame and humiliation, she sped away.

Came the <clunk> of a car door shutting followed by another.

When the cabby regained normal vision, he was watching his hack depart the vicinity.

The green sedan pulled up not long afterward. A man leaned out of the driver's window and asked: "You look like a guy who's been gotten the best of by a brunette."

"You can say that again, brother. First, she tries to beat me out of the fare. Then she steals my hack."

"Where was she headed?"

"Back to the city. Hey, if you're after her, how about a ride/"

The man in the green sedan might have heard the request. On the other hand, he might not have.

In any case, he took off in the general direction of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Evidently, Pippel knew this section of Brooklyn for he presumed after a suitable interval to ensure she had shaken all pursuit, the girl would head for the famous bridge across the East River.

He took a shortcut and drove in a crow-flight line through cramped streets with gullied pavements. Repeatedly his lips moved soundlessly as he calculated whether he was going to be able to head her off.

When he reached the bridge, he was looking pleased with himself. He had made it.

Parking in a sidestreet at the Brooklyn end of the bridge, he waited. Shortly, the girl's sedan appeared in the traffic.

Pippel then pulled out into the stream of vehicles and followed her. The girl slammed across the bridge ... took a screeching turn at the first opportunity ... and arrowed toward the downtown skyscraper section.

He trailed her. 2-or-3 times he swore at the girl ahead. The rest of the time he was scowling and preoccupied.

"Damn her!" he snarled more than once. His oaths had a vicious canine quality about them.

The young woman stopped her car before one of the tallest buildings in the city. It was a towering monolith of steel and brick. Pippel gave a violent start and popped his eyes at the structure. His hands choked the steering wheel.

"Whew!" he gasped. "She's going to ... to ..."

He got starkly pale.

The girl sprang out of the car and ran toward the entrance of the skyscraper. She was hailed by a policeman.

"Sorry, Miss," the cop called. "But you can't park there."

If the girl heard, she gave no sign. She kept on running.

The cop was evidently in a bad temper because he dashed after her and caught her. He took hold of her elbow.

"Hey," the cop growled. "You can't park ..."

He gulped when he saw the *terror* on the girl's face.

"Glory be! What's wrong with you?"

"I ... er ..."

The girl swallowed 2-or-3 times before getting control of herself.

"Nothing," she insisted in a flinty voice. "I'm just ... just in a hurry."

The cop peered at the girl.

"You look like the wrath of Old Nick was after you. What's wrong with you, lass?"

The girl swallowed. She looked to be on the verge of venting some of her cargo of sulfur but thought better of antagonizing an arm of the Law.

"I'm ... just ... late picking up a fare," she explained grimly. "Get me?"

Evidently, the policeman had no patience with women who showed up late for anything because he snorted derisively.

"Lady," he said, "late or not, you can't park your car where you've got it now."

The brunette throttles her abrasive personality and became wheedling.

"Please. Just for a few minutes," she pleaded.

"Sure, I know. The few minutes will turn into the whole darn mornin'."

The cop jerked his thumb at her car.

"Get it outta here!"

She <stamped> an irate foot. Then tapped back and flounced into her taxi and wrenched the little jitney out into traffic.

Enough arm waving had accompanied this incident to make what had happened clear to Pippel who had double-parked in a spot where he could observe. He watched the girl leave.

Then he wheeled his machine into a sidestreet, pulled up beside a parked taxi, and jumped out. He accosted the taxi driver.

"Look, hackman." Pippel showed a \$5 bill. "Park my car for me, will you? I haven't got time. Business appointment. Hell of a hurry."

The taxi driver looked at the bill and nodded.

"Okay," he said. "But how'll you know where I parked your car?"

Pippel pointed at a sign which stood on the sidewalk. It was a black&white sign on a metal frame that said 'Taxi Stand'.

"Take a pencil and write on that where you parked the car," he said. "And leave the keys in the machine."

"Okay."

The taxi driver jumped into Pippel's machine and drove off to park it.

Pippel ran to a cigar store, dived into a telephone booth, and the dial mechanism whizzed while he was getting his number. He recognized the voice which answered.

"Listen!" he exploded. "The damn girl went to **Doc Savage!**"

This apparently failed to register at the other end.

"*What?*" the voice asked.

"Doc Savage! Damn the girl. She's going to **Doc Savage!** A cop wouldn't let her park in front of the building. That gives us a few minutes to get organized."

"*Why so worried?*" the voice interrupted.

"**She's going to Doc Savage!**"

"*And so what?*"

"Listen, you fool! Haven't you heard of **Doc Savage?**"

The other admitted: *"I remember a story in the newspapers about a 'Doc Savage' who invented something called an electro-scalpel for a new painless kind of surgery. But why should we go into a cold sweat because the girl ran to some physician?"*

Pippel looked as if he wanted to bite pieces out of the black telephone mouthpiece.

"I didn't think you knew much about **Savage**, you dummy! The guy's a doctor the way the President is a politician. What I mean is that ain't the half of it. He's some kind of professional trouble-buster."

"What do you mean?"

"It's his main line of work. Solving other people's troubles. He works without pay. Does it for the thrill of it, I hear. I know it sounds crazy. But when the girl spills what she knows, it's gonna be too bad."

"What makes you so sure she knows anything?"

"Look, sucker. Why else would she be going to **Doc Savage**? Get over here quick as you can. That girl is gonna have trouble finding a place to park. I got a little time. But mighty little."

"What are you going to do?"

"What we should have done to start with. Get rid of her."

*"And what about **Doc Savage**?"*

"If she talks to him first, I'll have to get rid of him also."

"Ain't that pretty drastic?" the telephone voice blurted out.

"We can't have any stink stirred up," Pippel growled. "Hell, we're just ready to start everything. We can't have anybody getting suspicious. This is just too Big."

"This is BIGGER than Big," the other muttered. *"This is the future of the World that's gonna change if things go right."*

"They are going to go right," growled Pippel, "no matter who ends up sleeping in pine boxes."

III – The Exploding Lady

The blistered brunette calling herself 'Henrietta' had driven about 5 blocks before she found a place to park. Then she sprang out of her machine and looked around for a taxi. She was in a hurry. But this was a sidestreet in the garment district and there was nothing in sight but trucks. She had to walk back to Doc Savage's skyscraper *Headquarters*.

As she approached it, Henrietta studied the building. It was the tallest spire in the forest of masonry skyscrapers that constituted the city. By reputation, it was the tallest such structure ever built. Tourists came from all over the World just to stand in its modernistic lobby. Despite herself, Henrietta was impressed.

She barged in showing no interest in the office directory going instead directly to the sleepy-looking proprietor of a lobby cigar stand. Once again, he manner abruptly changed. She was again snippy.

"Wake up, buster! Where can I find Doc Savage?"

The proprietor seemed to take no offense to the unexpected familiarity.

"Screening room is on the 20th floor."

"Screening room?" she quizzed.

"That's where people who want to see Doc Savage are weeded out from those that he doesn't want to see."

"He'll want to see me."

"That'll be up to the screeners."

The brunette leaned over the glass counter.

"Isn't there a quicker way?"

She <batted> her crystal blue eyes.

"Doc Savage has the 86th floor all to himself. Private elevator around the corner. But people who stick their snoots up there without being invited are usually disinvited. Kinda firmly, too."

"I'll take my chances."

Henrietta stormed around the corner.

A private elevator, she realized, would cost plenty of dough. She expected something ostentatious. But to her surprise, she found a lift which was dignified and restrained.

The cage surprised her when it arrived. There was no uniformed starter. Just a button marked '**86th Floor**'. Boarding confidently, she <stabbed> it.

The cage door closed and the elevator shot upward. The ride began smoothly. But after a dozen floors, the brunette fell to her knees and began feeling like an inebriated elephant was balancing on her shoulders.

When the doors opened again, she was astonished to discover she had reached the 86th floor.

The combination of the breathtaking ride and the speed with which it had completed seemed to take some of the gustiness out of her mainsail. Picking herself off the floor, she tentatively stepped out into the plain corridor on rubbery feet.

At the end she found a door. It was painted **bronze**. On the front was modestly lettered:

Clark Savage, Jr.

"At last!"

Composing herself, Henrietta assaulted the panel with her knuckles.

The door fell open right away. She found herself face-to-face with a striking individual with the general air of a snowy eagle.

"And just who might you be, gramps?" she demanded.

"Ham Brooks," the eagle replied.

Her eyes narrowed. Henrietta's first impression had been that he was an overdressed fop. But she revised that opinion. Indeed, the white-haired Ham would have been considered a "fop" in any city but New York because of his striped afternoon trousers, tea vest, and spats.

He held a tasteful black cane in one well-manicured hand.

"Call me Henrietta," she said. "I'm the gal who sent the collect telegram."

"You are not expected," Ham Brooks said. "And we do not accept collect telegrams from persons that we do not know. Normally, unexpected visitors are first received on the 20th floor."

"This is too important for ceremony, glad rags."

This saucy comment seemed to get Ham Brooks' attention because he stepped back allowing Henrietta to enter.

"You must be the legal eagle who pals around with Doc," she observed tartly.

Ham looked injured.

"I am Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, one of Doc Savage's associates."

A remarkably squeaky voice broke in.

"Don't let him kid you. He's only Doc's personal chauffeur."

Henrietta found herself standing in a **Reception** room. The spires of Manhattan were visible through the tall windows. There was a desk (it was really a massive table decorated with inlays and a gigantic floor safe of significant age. Through an open door was what looked like a **Library** filled with tomes and dominated by a globe of the World that was no less than 12 feet around.

The owner of the voice ambled in from the **Library**. He was a squat apish fellow possessing an incredibly homely-but-pleasant face. It was the kind that dogs wag their tails at and kids follow. There didn't seem to be room for more than a spoonful of brains in his bullet of a head. But Henrietta knew this impression was deceptive.

"You have to be the industrial chemist Monk Mayfair," she said.

Monk beamed. He obviously enjoyed being recognized by attractive females.

"In the flesh, ma'am."

"In the fur, you mean," sneered Ham. "You might want to keep your distance, Miss. He sometimes suffers from fleas."

"Yeah, honey," growled Monk suddenly rolling up both sleeves to really amazingly **red-furred** forearms. "Keep back. His mouth is liable to fly in any direction once I knock his block off."

The odd duo traded fierce expressions that suggested impending slaughter.

Henrietta half expected war to break out. In fact, it looked imminent when Ham Brooks lifted his dark cane and raised it threateningly. It was revealed to be a sword cane.

Monk blocked rusty fists. The pair appraised one another like 2 bull moose contemplating a vigorous round of butting heads and horns.

"Well if this doesn't beat all," she said acidly.

"What's that?" asked Monk not taking his small eyes off his opponent.

"A man-monkey versus a man in a monkey suit."

Han snapped out of his fighting stance.

"Here here, now! Just what is your business with Doc Savage?"

"I understand he owns a submarine," the brunette said loftily. "I want to hire it and a crew. No questions asked."

"By whom?" asked Ham, puzzled.

"I said no questions asked!" the brunette snapped back.

"You just answered this fashion plate's question," chuckled Monk. "And we're not exactly in the sub-renting business."

"Where is this sub?" Henrietta suddenly demanded.

"Sure you don't wanna tell me what you want it for, first?" asked Monk.

"I don't explain myself to just any ape," Henrietta snapped.

Monk looked pain. As a matter of fact, it had been his experience in the past that he had very good luck with femininity. As a rule, the prettier they were, the better his luck. His complete homeliness seemed to fascinate them or something.

Seeing that she was getting nowhere, Henrietta promptly changed tactics.

"I demand to see Doc Savage!" she yelled.

"Doc is presently conducting a scientific experiment of some consequence," related Ham in an important tone.

"Yea. He left orders sayin' he can't be disturbed," Monk chimed in.

"You mean you won't let me in to see him?" Henrietta snapped.

"Listen, lady," monk said. "Doc is busy in the **Laboratory**. You gotta tell us what it is you want or else you don't get in. ... And don't yell at me."

"I'll do more than yell at you!"

Monk Mayfair's bullet skull boasted a furring of **rusty** red hair. Henrietta took hold of 2 tufts of this and commenced screaming at the top of her healthy lungs.

"I've got to see Doc Savage! And I'll see him if I have to tear you apart!"

Her long fingernails raked his homely physiognomy. This so startled the simian chemist that he backed away muttering "What hit me?"

Ham Brooks stepped in then and attempted to settle the brunette into a soft chair. She turned around and barked his elegant shin with the toe of one high-heeled shoe.

Howling, Ham grabbed up his shin and hopped in place. He managed to retain his polished cane all during this procedure. It made a very comical picture.

Stepping in, the fire-eating brunette took hold of the dapper lawyer's cravat and gave it a forceful yank. Still hopping, Ham made a grab for the dangling adornment. He lost his cane.

Henrietta snatched it up and gave it a twist saying: "I read about this frog-sticker of yours."

The cane came apart revealing a long thin blade of excellent steel with which she proceeded to slash gaping tears in Ham's faultless attire. The elegant one went into paroxysms of horror. He attempted to dance out of the way of the flashing blade that chased him into a corner.

This struck the homely Monk as hilarious. He quickly forgot his own injury and began shouting encouragement to the brunette.

"See if you can spear his tie without cuttin' his throat."

Tossing aside the useless portion of the cane, Henrietta backed the beset barrister into a corner and began flaying the know of his silk tie.

"How do you like them apples, you fancy Dan?" Henrietta hissed.

Ham howled. "Monk, you anthropoid! Don't just stand there! Restrain this madwoman!"

Monk doubled over with mirth. He was enjoying himself immensely.

"And after you shred his tie, see if you can harvest his cufflinks," he encouraged. "Those diamonds are supposed to be real."

At that moment, Doc Savage entered the room.

No sound attended his arrival. No shadow preceded him to warn of his *silent* approach. But instantly the atmosphere in the room changed. It was as if a dynamo had started up filling the air with the *crackle* of electricity and the promise of exciting things.

Henrietta felt some of that electricity. She turned. Her crystal blue *eyes* fell on the imposing figure of Doc Savage. They widened. Her grim mouth lost its elastic band quality.

"Oh, doctor!" she exclaimed.

He was a **bronzed** giant of a man. But there was nothing beefy about his build. His neck *sinews* and the *tendons* in the backs of his long-fingered hands looked as supple as bundles of violin strings and piano wires. There was a flowing ease about his movements that indicated great *agility* and Herculean **strength**.

Doc's features were regular. He had remarkable penetrating flake-gold *eyes*. His hair was *bronze* slightly darker than the hue of his skin. A disturbed lock of it hung down on his forehead. His big bronze body was encased in a white laboratory smock. The contrast between the smock and his deeply *bronzed* skin was arresting.

"See?" muttered Monk in disgust. "Now you've disturbed Doc in the middle of his work."

"What seems to be the trouble here?" the **bronze** giant asked in a noticeably well-modulated tone of voice.

"This dish-faced ape told me I couldn't see you," Henrietta complained fling aside the sword-cane.

Doc noticed the worse-for-wear Monk and Ham.

"What-on-earth happened to you two?"

"I'd try explainin'," the homely chemist muttered. "But it's too embarrassin'."

Ham said nothing. He was contemplating his ruined attire as if it were burned and peeling hide.

Doc Savage took in the brunette's severely sunburned skin and her loud-and-revealing outfit which ran to polka-dots.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

Henrietta composed herself and her voice.

"Honestly, Mr. Savage, you have quite the reputation," she breathed. "I read all about you in a magazine."

She batted her striking eyes.

"I think you're just the guy I need to help me."

The **Bronze Man** retained his poker face. Obviously he was not susceptible to flattery.

"This is new," Henrietta murmured to herself. "A man who is impervious to feminine charms."

She experienced her first inkling that the *Man of Bronze* was something more than an ordinary man.

Doc Savage belonged to a class of mortals who demonstrated that if a man set his sights upon a goal and devoted intensive efforts in the pursuit of that goal, astounding results might be achieved.

In his case, Doc had been set upon the path to greatness by his father who entrusted him into the care of a succession of scientists and other renowned experts with the firm and unwavering purpose of transforming the young lad into a scientific superman.

All knowledge from Science and Medicine to how to ride a horse and sail a sloop as well as the rougher arts of combat, wilderness survival, and speaking foreign languages had been made available to him. And Clark "Doc" Savage, Jr. had mastered them all becoming in adulthood a greater expert in these respective disciplines than those who had tutored him.

All of this strenuous activity had been channeled to a single noble purpose.

Doc Savage had been trained for the far-ranging career that he was following. That of righting wrongs which ordinary forces of Law&Order could not combat. This altruistic career for which he took no pay sometimes took him to the distant and dangerous corners of the Globe.

"Trouble, Inc." might have been the name of the organization which he headed. But it had no name other than his own. For everyone knew that if one had troubles too large to handle, Doc Savage as the man to see.

Hence, the arrival of Henrietta and her presumed problem was a not a unique thing.

Doc appraised the brunette with his compelling flake-gold *eyes*. No emotion registered on his *metallic* lineaments.

"Aren't you the girl that they found marooned on a tropic island?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'm the gal off the island," Henrietta returned. "And don't start asking me my name or how I got here."

"Said her name was 'Henrietta'," said Monk feeling of his face and hair.

The girl stepped up to the *bronze* giant and made fists at her sides.

"I've got a proposition for you, Big Boy," she said.

"Proposition?"

"Call it a job. And I'll pay you plenty to do it. But no questions asked, see?"

Doc began removing his smock. It presently became obvious that he possessed the *muscular* development of a gladiator. He stood taller than he had first seemed which was the result of the unusual symmetry of his wonderfully well-developed physique.

"I think you have us wrong, lady," Monk interjected.

Henrietta spun on the apish chemist.

"You stay out of this, King Kong!"

Whirling back to the *Bronze Man*, she said: "Listen, I read about you in a magazine. You're professional trouble hunters, ain'tcha?"

"In a way," Doc admitted. "But we are not for hire."

"Whatcha mean not for hire?"

Showing more patience than the occasion demanded, Doc replied: "We mix in things that interest us and where we can do some good. We don't care to be hired. And we certainly don't go into anything unless we know what it is."

Henrietta's face grew indignant. Her voice reclaimed some of its previous volume.

"Well you're going to work for me like or not! And don't think ..."

Doc Savage broke in then. It was a testament to the restrained power of his voice that it was heard over Henrietta's screeching.

"We are not interested, Miss. Show her to the door, Monk."

"With pleasure!" Monk declared.

Ambling up, he batted Henrietta's flailing hands away and tucked her under one hairy arm. The brunette firecracker kicked wildly and pounded helplessly on the hairy chemist's chest.

As the apish Monk carried her from the **Reception** room, Henrietta howled a parting threat.

"You mugs! You'll see! You don't know who you're fooling around with! I'm **Hornetta Hale!**"

Monk Mayfair bore the struggling kicking brunette to their special elevator. He summoned the cage with the <thumb-press> of a button. And when it arrived, he casually asked: "Is this the lift you took?"

"Yeah, you big monkey. It practically disjointed my skeleton on the way up."

Monk chuckled good-naturedly.

"Well, you might want to curl up into a ball on account of the ride down is even more bone-jarrin'."

The doors opened and the hairy chemist deposited her into the waiting cage. He sent it on its way.

As the doors closed, the brunette hellion called out: "You'll hear from my lawyer! I'll use your pants off for this. And don't think I won't!"

Grinning broadly, Monk started back for the **Reception** room.

Ham Brooks suddenly burst out saying: "Come on, you baboon!"

He pointed imperatively to the door with his recovered sword-cane.

"What's up now?"

"Trouble down in the screening room."

So fast did the elevator run that by the time the pair reached it, the cage was again free having deposited Hornetta Hale in the lobby of the skyscraper.

They reached the 20th floor screening room and found 2 men there. At sight of them, Monk and Ham went instantly on guard.

One was tall and thin and held a pearl-gray handkerchief before his face. A rust-colored overcoat enveloped his rangy form and the brim of his hat was pulled down low. The other man was short and blond and had a nondescript air about him.

"Can we help you gentlemen?" Ham asked coolly.

"Yeah," said the shorter of the two. "We're looking for a woman."

"Really?"

Monk asked: "A brunette? Kind of sassy?"

"Yeah. That's her. Where is she?"

"I ain't seen hide nor hair," said Monk. "I was just testin' you. We get a lot of crackpots here."

"We have to screen visitors very carefully," added Ham in a suave tone.

The pair didn't whether to explode or not. They stood on their feet with a general air of race horses awaiting the starter's pistol.

"What makes you think you'd find your nameless brunette here?" Ham asked pointedly.

"Just a hunch. You see, she's my kid sister. Goes by the name of Hornetta. She fell out of a tree a few months ago and it knocked her cockeyed. If you know what I mean."

"Cockeyed, eh?" said Ham.

"Yeah. Hornetta's a little off. She's been talking about coming here to see Doc Savage for weeks. We think she ... Well, her head is so full of wild stories that we're not sure what she was going to tell him. Anyway, she up and ran away. And this is naturally the first place we thought to look.

"Ain't seen her," Monk repeated.

The apish chemist then addressed the man in the rust-hued overcoat who kept his handkerchief before his face at all times.

"What about you?" he asked. "Cat got your tongue?"

"Hab a code," the man said thickly.

"Yeah. It sounds like you got yourself a whopper of a cold," Monk agreed.

Ham inserted: "Would you gentlemen care to identify yourselves?"

"We would not," said the nondescript one. "This is a family matter. Confidential, you understand?"

"Perfectly," drawled Ham.

Monk and Ham regard the duo, patience written on their faces. The odd pair seemed reluctant to leave.

Finally the short one said: "Well if you're sure that our sister never showed up ..."

"Absolutely positive," returned Ham crisply.

"In that case, we'll be on our way."

"Sorry we can't help," said Monk.

"Good luck with your search," added Ham stepping aside to allow them to pass.

The 2 men then departed in sullen silence. At no point did the tall one allow his features to be viewed clearly.

After the door had closed, Monk asked: "Whatcha make of their story, shyster?"

The dapper lawyer shrugged. "It sounded like a story."

"But it could be true," Monk suggested contrarily.

"It might," allowed Ham.

They consulted Doc Savage in his 86th floor **Laboratory**. The **Bronze Man** took in all they had to say in absorbed silence.

Then he announced: "It would have been better had you trailed those two rather than stopped to consult with me."

The remark was not offered as criticism. Merely as an observation. No tone of recrimination touched Doc's well-modulated tones.

Still, Monk and Ham looked instantly crestfallen. The aristocratic attorney twisted his elegant in both hands until his knuckles turned white.

"Should we give chase?" he asked.

The *Man of Bronze* shook his head.

"My experiment is too important for me to abandon it without sound reason. The girl did not appear to be in trouble if her appeal can be believed."

"Gotcha, Doc," said Monk. "We'll skip it then."

"If this matter turns out to be important, we will hear of Hornetta Hale again," Doc said turning his attention back to the experiment that he was conducting.

Seeing that their **bronze** chief was immersed in his work, Monk and Ham silently withdrew to the Library.

"For my part, sniffed Ham looking at the ruin that was his garments, "I would just as soon forget that woman ever darkened our door."

"Same here," muttered Monk in a rare agreement with his arch-nemesis.

IV – The Jam

The name of 'Hornetta Hale' was not an easy one to forget.

True, that was not her real name. A newspaper journalist had hung the appellation on her back in the days when she dominated the headlines. That had been several years ago.

She was not exactly forgotten these days. Adventuresses of Hornetta Hale's stripe are hardly ever forgotten. But her luster had dimmed since the short-lived era during which she and her smart racing job of a seaplane had buzzed the World.

She had been Henrietta Hale then. Which was supposed to make her pretty extraordinary. She had done so much that sometimes she felt old at 29. People generally believed she was older than that. Yet she looked younger.



She was a stunningly pretty girl, just a little regal. Most men were scared of her, the average male preferring to wear the chest hair in his family. After an average male heard about the time the Tugeri headhunters of the Dutch East Indies besieged Hornetta Hale for 6 days, he was apt to crawl away.

This freelance adventuring for pay had been profitable. It had been a calculated and planned business. The idea had occurred to her after she got what she considered a lucky break and became the leading debutante of the season. They called it No. 1 Glamour Girl now. Ordinarily the attendant fame lasted for a few weeks. Maybe it lasted longer if you were good newspaper copy and appealing camera fodder.

Henrietta had made herself a job. It was the Nation's adventure girl. She was not American First Family. She wasn't even Park Avenue. She was just a tall brunette gal whose folks had come from Oklahoma with some oil money, most of which they had lost. It was good background and the public ate it up.

With the war in Europe in full cry, the exploring racket was slipping. It was a dying horse. But Henrietta Hale in her heyday made good coy and good camera fodder. So she made the old nag gallop.

She flew to Australia via the South Sea Islands and got stranded on an uninhabited isle. She had no food. So she ate plankton. They're the little sea organisms on which whales live. Depend on Hornetta Hale to come up with the unusual (for the papers had taken to calling her that by that time). She had earned the nickname by buzzing one of the European passenger dirigibles as it had docked at Lakehurst, New Jersey flying her tiny personal plane dubbed the *Hornet*.

In an effort to upstage the event and grab headlines for herself, she had flown rings around the slow-moving airship. When the European government had lodged a formal complaint against the reckless aviatrix, Henrietta Hale gave a radio interview during the course of which she expressed a choice opinion of that country's war-mongering dictator.

He was not pleased. He promised that if Henrietta Hale ever crash-landed in his country, she would be stood before a brick wall and shot as a spy.

Eventually she simmered down and was heard of less-and-less. The spreading World War in Europe was accorded much of the blame. People who had enjoyed the dangerous life of Hornetta Hale vicariously through the rotogravure newspaper sections were now preoccupied with real danger. In a word, she was passé.

Hornetta Hale was still on the minds of Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair as they tooted one of the **Bronze Man's** sedans along a country road in upstate New York. Doc was at the wheel.

The sedan was typical of the type of machines he preferred. It was subdued and unobtrusive. The paint job was not flashy. The motor, however, was an 8-cylinder dynamo capable of speeds in excess of 180 mph. The steel body was bulletproof as were the windows. Tires were composed of sponge rubber. They could not be flattened by nail or bullet.

There were other aspects of the sedan that were also remarkable. The hydraulic brakes were of his invention as were also the airplane-style shock absorbers. It was these latter innovations that Doc Savage was testing at present. For this was the sedan's maiden run.

"Oh boy!" said Monk happily. "Some day for a drive in the country. Ain't that right, Habeas?"

The apish chemist scratched the head of a peculiar dwarf pig that was sitting on his lap. This was 'Habeas Corpus' who possessed a body that was undersized and huge ears that were oversized.

Roused by his master's touch, Habeas climbed up and leaned its long inquisitive snout out the passenger window. Slipstream filled its ears like sails making them spread like wings. The ungainly shoat seemed to be enjoying itself immensely.

"The machine seems to be performing as expected," noted the **Bronze Man** as he whipped through winding country switchbacks.

"Say, Doc. Did you hear any more out of that Hornetta hale?" asked Monk.

"Nothing after we put the young lady out of our office the other day," the **bronze** giant replied as he took a sharp turn at hair-lifting speed.

No expression of concern crossed his *metallic* features. Doc Savage rarely showed emotion. It had been schooled out of him at an early age.

"What do you suppose she wanted?"

"Given her past as a wild woman," Doc said, "probably publicity. Or something equally foolhardy."

"Mebbe so," the simian chemist returned. "But she ain't been heard from since she came off that Caribbean isle. What do you suppose that was all about?"

"Hornetta Hale," stated Doc Savage, "has a knack for becoming stranded, marooned, or otherwise landing in the center of attention."

"She sure was a publicity hog in her day," Monk agreed, giving Habeas' back a vigorous scratching. "Maybe she done it to herself to grab off some headlines. But I still wonder who those 2 guys were."

"Hornetta Hale was rumored to have gone broke after her last escapade," Doc offered.

Monk grinned. "Maybe it was bill collectors who stuck her on that sandpile."

The sedan had been barreling along at a surprising clip given the twisting road. A professional race car driver would have sworn that not man-and-car combination could have held the road at the speed at which the **Bronze Man** navigated the turnpike. Yet Doc Savage drove with an ease of handling that verged on the superhuman.

That skill was no more in evidence than when the sedan slid around a hairpin turn to abruptly find a truck van blocking the road. Its rear was open, the doors flung wide, and a steel ramp had been lowered.

There was no going around it and precious little room in which to stop. Monk Mayfair grabbed the door frame with both hairy hands and squeezed his piggish eyes shut. Habeas was more intelligent than most dogs and scooted for the floorboards.

Doc pressed the brake pedal with a smooth sure <tap> of his oxford-shod foot. Slewing not at all, the roadster slid to a stop. Its front bumper was jutting just over the bottom of the waiting ramp.

"You may look now, Monk," he suggested quietly.

By this time, the hairy chemist had clapped his hirsute hands over his homely face. He now dropped them. His jaw sagged cavernously.

Staring into the yawning mouth of the van interior, Monk muttered: "I sure don't like the looks of this."

He had little time to digest the view. For zooming up behind them came barreling a sturdy milk delivery truck. It struck their rear bumper. With a **clash!** and **clang!** of steel, the sedan was knocked halfway up the ramp.

"What the blue blazes!" Monk howled.

The milk truck roared into reverse ... stopped ... and then came at them again. This time it pushed the subdued machine fully into the van interior.

It was that slick. The milk truck spun back and out popped a peppery brunette. She rushed up to the rear of the van. With surprising speed, she pulled a pin that caused the ramp to drop free. That was sufficient to prevent the sedan from backing out safely.

There were 2 swinging doors affixed to the van body. The brunette threw one and then the other shut. Then she bolted them tight adding a sturdy brass padlock for good measure. That took care of any last chance for escape.

Climbing in the van's cab, she gunned the motor to life. The van roared off with its captured cargo jouncing in back on immobilized tires.

"Wouldn't work for me!" Hornetta Hale cried gleefully. "Hah! I'll make 'em do it!"

The van lumbered along for perhaps a quarter-hour. Behind the wheel, Hornetta Hale was talking to herself.

"I knew that big **bronze** bohunk was overrated the minute I laid eyes on him," she sniffed. "Sure, he has a reputation. Probably hired himself a good press agent."

Presently the van approached a grade. The brunette firecracker proved that she could have made a fair living as a teamster. She double-clutched up the hill ... reached the top ... and slid down the summit with her foot off the gas allowing gravity to pull her machine along.

"Doc Savage my fancy foot!" she bit out.

During the climb, the truck gave a mighty jounce just before reaching the hilltop. It was accompanied by a commotion such as might be produced by a pig being fed alive into a meat grinder. A compressed procession of piggy squeals, grunts, and other porcine sounds filled the van interior.

Then they abruptly ceased.

"What the hopping hell was that?" exclaimed Hornetta, sounding a little like a teamster now.

She peered out the side mirror but saw nothing. For she had begun her slide down the grade and became busy keeping the van on the road. The graded dirt road behind her was no longer in view.

When the road smoothed out, she fed the engine gas and the van continued its progress. The piggy cacophony continued intermittently before finally settling down.

Before long, Hornetta Hale pulled onto a side road that ran through unkempt weeds until it reached a clearing where an old barn stood slowly falling into ruin.

For some reason (probably simple homespun thrift), farmers have a tradition of letting old disused barns succumb to the elements rather than paying to demolish the structures.

This one was in the early stages of decomposition. The weatherboard sides had been stripped of all vestiges of paint by time, rain, and wind. The roof presented a profile like a broken-backed carcass.

Obviously a beam had caved. The sides were solid barnboard, however. And when Hornetta Hale stopped the van and got out to run the door open, it still operated although its big hinges squeaked in protest.

Dusk was falling now. Hornetta drove the van into the barn as darkness swallowed the big machine. Then jacking a bullet into the chamber of an automatic she reclaimed from the front seat, she stormed around to the van and addressed the closed doors.

Listen, you mugs. I have a gun and I ain't afraid to use it."

To prove her point, she fired a single shot into the barn roof. Old hay and sawdust filtered down from above.

"If either of you overrated clowns try to jump me, it will just be too damn bad. See?"

No response came from the padlocked van body.

Hornetta pressed on.

"Now I'm going to open up these doors and we're going to have us a good old-fashioned pow-wow. No tricks, either of you. Or else. Get me?"

Still no reply came from within.

"No tricks or it'll be pow! And then wow!" Hornetta repeated. "I know how to turn loose bullets and I know where to shoot a man. Right in the belly where it hurts most."

Her bravado was met with even more silence.

Hornetta seemed to hesitate. Her blue eyes narrowed suspiciously.

Finally she gathered herself. Unlocking the big padlock, she threw open the doors.

In the dimness of the barn, the interior of the van was a box of gloom. Still, one could see into it. There was sufficient light for that.

What Hornetta Hale saw -- or rather did not see -- was enough to cause her stubborn jaw to hang open. Her flinty eyes struck sparks. The words that came tumbling out of her mouth would have done credit to a mule skinner.

For the interior of the van into which she had forcibly introduced a 2-ton sedan was utterly and undeniably empty!

"I don't believe it!" Hornetta snapped. "I do not believe it!"

Incomprehension seemed to seize her voice, her expression, and her mind. She stood as if stupefied.

Then succumbing to an irate anger that brought hot color mounting to her cheeks, Hornetta yanked a flashlight from a pocket and shone it inside. The beam disclosed nothing but the quilt-hung sides of the interior.

It was impossible! Hornetta knew that mere minutes before, she had locked the sedan within. She had felt tis weight and drag as she piloted the van to this destination. True, the last portion of the trip felt lighter. But a sedan cannot be made to melt away into thin air. And yet one seemingly had!

Hornetta Hale reached for a handhold, levering herself up and into the back determined to investigate every inch of the van's boxy body. Her mind was running to tricks with mirrors when she distinctly heard the powerful **roar** of a machine outside. Humping down, she went to investigate.

If astonishment had ridden her pretty (if hard) features before), it roosted there for good now.

For up the dusty road came a familiar sedan. At the wheel was the homely face of Monk Mayfair. He was grinning from ear-to-ear. The grin looked a mile wide. Beside him in the passenger seat was a pig. It stood up on its hind legs, forepaws resting on the dashboard. It seemed almost as if the pig was grinning also.

The sedan pulled up and braked.

Hornetta Hale simply exploded.

"How the holy heck did you get loose?"

The pig opened its mouth more widely and seemed to speak.

"A magician never reveals his tricks, honeybunch."

"A pig and his ventriloquist!" Hornetta retorted. "Where is the big **bronze** guy?"

From behind came the surprising answer.

"You are not the first to attempt to capture us by that same artifice" said a quietly confident voice that Hornetta recognized just before strong **bronze** fingers seized her neck and performed movements that caused the World to release its grip on her.

Monk jumped out of the auto beaming.

"She never heard a thing thanks to Habeas."

Doc Save nodded. "The shoat's chorus prevented Miss Hale from hearin the sedan slid out the van doors during that last climb."

"The new shocks worked like a charm on landin'," Monk agreed. "Easy enough to run so close behind her that she never knew we were on her trail until that last turn. Our silenced motor couldn't be heard under the roar of that truck. The hard part was pickin' the padlock on the door bar with the truck moving along at a good clip."

"Do not forget that while we were trailing her so closely," reminded Doc, "you had to clamber onto the hood in order to reclose the van doors so that she would not suspect a thing."

"It was nothin'."

The hairy chemist eyed the troublesome Hornetta lying on the ground.

"Guess we go to work on her, huh?"

"Miss Hale," said Doc Savage grimly, "has quite an awakening ahead of her."

V – Tall Tale

Hornetta Hale woke up in what she first thought was a zoo.

She was in a cage. She realized that almost at once. It was of good size. It had to be in order to contain both her and the monkey.

Now Hornetta Hale had done her share of exploring. She had been chased by baboons, set upon by orangutans, and once a howler monkey ran her up a tree. But the monkey that squatted at the other side of the cage resembled no species of anthropoid that she had ever seen or heard of.

In some respects, it rather resembled a miniature version of the chemist Monk Mayfair. It possessed the same gimlet eyes in a broad face. Even the color of its fur (a **rusty** red) brought to mind the apish chemist.

"What are you doing here?" she asked thickly.

Then her head began clearing. She changed the question.

"What am I doing in here with you?" she exploded.

Hornetta looked around. It was not dark exactly. There was some light. It seemed to be coming through a haze or something.

"Hello ... Is anyone home?"

Silence.

The monkey approached. It wore a curious expression.

Looking about for a weapon, Hornetta found nothing. So she took off her shoe. Grasping it by the toe, she threatened to brain the monkey with its heel.

"Stay away from me!" she warned.

The monkey ambled closer.

Hornetta threw the shoe. It bounced off the monkey's skull. The monkey grabbed the top of its hairy head, emitted a sharp squeak of pain, and then scrambled after the shoe.

It is said that monkeys possess the fundamental trait of imitation. This one proved it. It grasped the shoe by its toe and promptly and expertly bounced it off Hornetta's forehead.

She retaliated by letting the monkey have it with her other shoe. The monkey promptly snatched it up and swiftly let fly.

The 2 shoes bounced around the cage interior for more than 5 frenzied minutes until both combatants lost the energy and enthusiasm for combat.

"How did I ever get into this mess?" Hornetta moaned.

The monkey looked equally pained but said nothing.

After a period, the lights came up and a voice said calmly:

"We are interested in your story, Miss Hale."

She saw **Doc Savage** standing nearby. He stood in a vast room as large as (it seemed at first glance) the concourse of Grand Central Station. White tiles covered the walls as if she were in a hospital.

"You!"

"The tables appear to be turned," the **Bronze Man** said.

"Get me out of this cage!"

"In due time," said Doc Savage unhurriedly. "But first, I would like to know what was behind these shenanigans of yours."

"I told you last week. I want to hire you!"

"For what purpose?"

"That's my business!" snapped Hornetta.

"You showed interest in my personal submarine. Why was that?"

Hornetta pulled herself up as if about to launch a verbal pitchforking ...

Abruptly, she subsided.

"If I tell you, will you let me out?" she pleaded.

"If you promise no more hijinks."

"Deal."

"Go ahead then," said Doc.

"You know that I am an explorer."

"After an unorthodox fashion," allowed the **Bronze Man**.

"I earned a living at it for a while. But this time I have a way of amassing a young fortune."

"I am listening."

"Did you ever hear of a Chinese warlord named Lei Chi?"

"I had not," admitted Doc.

"Lei Chi wanted to smuggle some gold out of China before the Japs came in and looted everything. Then he came up with a nifty idea. Boats usually have keels formed of lead to insure stability. This wily old warlord melted down all his **gold** and poured it into the keel of this ship the *Hussy*."

Hornetta paused, apparently for dramatic effect.

"The *Hussy* sank in the Caribbean," she added breathlessly. "I think I know where it is. If I can find it and raise it, there's 10 million dollars in pure **gold** in the keel. We'll be rich!"

Doc Savage said nothing.

"What's the matter, Big Boy? Immune to **gold**?"

*Doc continued to be silent. In fact, the **Man of Bronze** was already quite wealthy. And moreover, he had access to more **gold** than anyone could ever want or need. But he said nothing of that.*

Instead he asked: "What were you doing on that cay?"

"I was scouting the waters of Bimini. My plane went down. I managed to swim to that isle. I was stuck there for weeks and weeks. Good thing for the conch."

"What conch?"

"The ones I caught and ate," replied Hornetta off-handedly. "They're tough. But if you pound them enough with a rock, you can eat them even if they are kinda like chewing on a tough snail. After this, it will be a long time before I ever eat anything but cow again."

Doc Savage regarded the sunburnt Hornetta Hale in silence for a long time. His eerie flake-gold eyes seemed to be measuring her. Hornetta suddenly felt as if she were some species of wild animal instead of a formerly famous aviatrix and explorer.

"I have done a little research on your recent activities," he said quietly.

"Yeah. What of it?"

"2 weeks ago, Arthur Bottorff hired you to fly down to South America to do aerial surveys for the Magellan and Amazon Oil Corporation. You flew out of Teterboro Airport and were never heard from again."

Hornetta grimaced. "Why, that was just a story I floated so that no one would suspect the truth. Any treasure hunter can claim the *Hussy* according to the Law of the Seas."

Doc Savage said steadily: "I spoke with Arthur Bottorff by telephone. He confirmed that he hired you. But you have been missing since that day."

Hornetta Hale fell silent. Her eyes narrowed craftily. She seemed to be thinking.

"I won't tell you he's in with me," she said at last. "But I won't tell you he's not. This is my discovery and I ain't sharing. But I'll cut you in if you'll let me have your sub for a week-or-two. I'll return it undamaged."

She touched her chest.

"Cross my crafty heart."

"Not a chance," Doc replied.

"And why not?"

"I told you. We are not for hire. Especially to prevaricators."

"To ... what?" Hornetta sputtered.

Doc Savage walked away.

"Wait!" Hornetta implored. "You said you'd let me out of this monkey cage."

Doc turned, his eyes metallic.

"On the condition that you tell the truth. Who were the 2 men who came looking for you after your visit last week?"

"What 2 men?"

He described the two individuals quickly and effectively. Hornetta Hale made a rather grim mouth.

"That was a close shave," she murmured after recovering her powers of speech.

"Who were they?"

"Devils. Crooks. Treasure hounds. If I don't get out of here and start down to the Caribbean, it will be too late. It's less than a week until ..."

She stopped and abruptly cut off her words.

"Until when?" asked Doc Savage.

"Nothing. I just figured they won't let any mosses sprout on their ambitions, that's all."

The **Bronze Man** stepped up and unlocked the cage.

"That means you believe me?"

"No," said Doc, not mincing words.

Carefully but firmly, he guided Hornetta Hale into the **Library** where Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were exchanging insults.

"You frog-faced ape!" Ham howled.

"You should talk, you unsaddled clothes horse!" countered Monk.

Hornetta inserted one of her own.

"I just met your baby brother," she told Monk snappily.

Ham grabbed his midriff and roared out his laughter.

"I threw a shoe and he threw one back," Hornetta added. "We had quite the battle. Too bad he lost."

Ham's roaring laughter choked off.

"Chemistry! What happened to him?"

"He is fine," Doc reassured him. "Merely an exchange of spleen."

Ham dashed into the **Laboratory** and came back with the tiny ape in his arms.

"Don't tell me it belongs to you!" Hornetta snapped.

"My pet," said Ham defensively.

"And my pain," growled Monk eyeing the tiny replica of himself with ill-disguised scorn.

The ape stuck out its pink tongue at the hairy chemist. Monk lifted a chair threateningly. The unclassified anthropoid executed a backflip and disappeared under a table.

Doc Savage addressed his 2 aides.

"Did you hear her story?"

"Every syllable," sniffed the dapper Ham. "And I don't believe a word of it."

"Ditto," added Monk.

Doc piloted Hornetta into an overstuffed chair. He simply laid one bronze hand on her peeling shoulder and urged her over-and-down. She sat as if she had no power of resistance.

"You're stronger than you look," she grimaced. "And you look pretty strong."

"We will ask you to repeat your story," said the big **Bronze Man**.

Hornetta did.

This time the *Hussy* was owned by a Greek who needed to get his **gold** out of Ethiopia. And there were other embellishments. But none noteworthy.

"You are not even trying to lie convincingly," Doc told her.

Hornetta made a face.

"I'm still a little shook off if you don't mind. It's been an ordeal. Now am I under arrest or can I be on my merry way?"

"You are neither."

When Hornetta stood up to go, Monk Mayfair gave her a casual shove and back she went into the cushions. Her snapping eyes shed blue *sparks*.

"Now look here! I ..."

A red light began *flashing* on a wall. All heads turned toward it.

"Trouble!" Ham howled.

Monk grinned. "It's about time."

"What do you mean 'about time'?" demanded Hornetta. "What a you? A glutton for punishment?"

Doc Savage said: "When we drove you back here, we picked up shadowers."

"Yeah?"

"They were the same two who were inquiring after you last week."

"Is that so?" Hornetta asked thinly.

Her sunburned face seemed to pale half a shade. But it remained ruddy.

"We thought if we let them a good look at you being brought back to our *Headquarters*, they would try something," Doc explained. "And now they have."

"That's quite a banana bunch of coincidences," Hornetta said slowly.

"Not really," returned Doc Savage. "After your visit, I did some research on you. Operatives in my employ discovered your seaplane adrift in the Caribbean many miles from the cay upon which you were marooned. Far too many for you to have put down and ended up on that remote isle. You will be interested to know that it was flown back to Tetterboro Airport and is in airworthy condition."

An intrigued light came into Hornetta's blue eyes.

"My interest was naturally aroused by these circumstances," continued Doc. "Since you seemed so set upon hiring us and your pursuers equally determined to locate you, I thought a quiet drive in the country might draw one or the other of you out. Instead, it drew both."

Battering sounds came from without. Hornetta cocked an eye at Doc.

"If there's shooting to be done, how about handing me my fair share of bullets?" she said fiercely.

"Not a chance," returned Doc.

"Yeah," chimed in Monk. "No tellin' who you'd perforate once you got started.

"A fine pal you are!" Hornetta flared looking about wildly. "Is there a back way out of this mausoleum?"

Before anyone could reply, a thunderous **explosion** sounded from the **Reception** room area.

The connecting door jumped off its hinges and catapulted across the **Library** jam knocking over a ponderous bookshelf which struck another and created the effect of fantastic falling dominos. Glass shattered unmusically,.

"Ye-e-o-w!" Monk howled and began firing into the cloud of evil black smoke that rolled in like a boiling fog bank of doom.

VI – Devil Grab Devil

Pandemonium broke loose in the magnificent **Library** of Doc Savage. It sounded like a succession of earthquakes rolling across the spacious room. More bookcases toppled. The ceiling cracked in 3 places.

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were firing blind into the oncoming **smoke**. They wielded intricate machine pistols which produced a deafening **thunder**. That was just the commencement of the vigorous proceedings.

Quickly they reached into their coats and drew on compact gas masks. Doc Savage did the same.

From another pocket, the **Bronze Man** also pulled a flat silver object which he flipped open in the manner of a cigarette case. Inside carefully nested in cotton were tiny clear globules. He began pitching these into the oncoming smoke. Glass *tinkled*.

"Retreat!" Doc rapped.

They backed out from the paneled **Library** which resembled a jumbled profusion of giant fallen dominos. They closed the substantial door as a barricade. The great Globe of the Earth which dominated the room had become dislodged from its **bronze** mounting and rolled off into a corner of the room like a titanic blue&green marble.

Hornetta Hale came along. But not by choice. Doc Savage picked her up bodily and slung her over a shoulder. He dropped her onto a stool and swung to a wall. Depressing a stud caused a woodgrain panel to hoist up.

Exposed was a large glass plate. An experimental television device. It displayed the interior of the **Laboratory** with its glittering forest of test tubes and glass piping and other complicated scientific apparatus.

Men were emerging from the **smoke**. They too wore gas masks. These were of the type that made men resemble goggle-eyed elephants.

Seeing this, Doc's hands flew to a switch. In the other room large exhaust fans began whirring.

The choking **smoke** was rapidly drawn into ceiling vents and the **Laboratory** began to clear. The invaders seemed surprised by this.

Doc Savage scrutinized them momentarily. His flake-gold eyes were intent.

They wore ordinary coats and ties. But that was where the outward semblance of the ordinary ceased. Some carried spike-snouted pistols of a foreign manufacture. Quite a number wore unusual shirts of a dark hue.

From Doc's surprise-parted lips emerge a peculiar sound. A *trilling* so low that it was at first a vague thing ... but then escalating into a tuneless melody that permeated the room like a curiously searching banshee.

This was the sound of Doc Savage. A mental quirk that was his substitute for expressing emotion.

The sound piped up and then died, leaving in its aftermath a lingering note that told that the *Man of Bronze* was intrigued.

For he recognized that these were the latest military pistols of a **foreign government**. They were not likely to be in the hands of ordinary American thugs. Not at all.

Others brandished rifles. These were military-type rifles, also of the latest manufacture.

The raiders (sic caught their number) moved with the cold precision of a well-oiled engine. Military precision.

"These babies look mighty serious," Monk snorted.

Ham exclaimed: "By Jove! If they are soldiers of fortune, they have good backgrounds for it."

The raiders rushed to the **Laboratory** door. It was strong. They proved it by unleashing a storm of steel-jacketed slugs against the portal. It held.

Five of the men retreated.

Doc <tapped> a key. The angle of the televised image shifted.

Evidently several concealed cameras were positioned throughout the big **Library**. Doc could transfer between viewpoints at the <flick> of a switch.

He spotted the man kneeling at the door. He was working with something there. Wires showed.

"Bomb!" warned Doc.

No sooner had he said than the man retreated to the **Reception** room. A flick of another switch showed clearly that they were rushing out into the corridor and as far away from the **Bronze Man's** offices as humanely possible.

Doc Savage then realized the magnitude of the danger they faced.

"Escape!" he rapped out, his voice metallic and urgent.

He had trained his men well. That one word was all that they required.

They raced for a far wall. Doc grabbed Hornetta and once again ignominiously slung her over his shoulder.

Hornetta had no comprehension of what next transpired. She was dimly aware that a large section of outer wall somehow opened. She was dumped into something resembling a capsule such as department stores send through their pneumatic tubes. Only this one was of gigantic size.

Unnerving *hissing* and **clanks** preceded the wildest ride of her life. The capsule dropped. All dropped with it. Man and monkey, girl and pig. It was as if the bottom of the World had dropped out from beneath them.

Unexpectedly the capsule change course corkscrewing madly.

It ran horizontally for what seemed to be an eternity but was only hurtling seconds. Then it kicked upward and came to a skull-jarring stop. All sprawled there amid padded quilted cushions for long seconds.

Doc Savage was the first to rouse to activity. He threw open a double set of hatches and began helping everyone out.

"Boy!" enthused Monk windmilling his long hairy arms. "That gets my blood pumpin' every time!"

Ham climbed out and, predictably, fell to fussing with his immaculate clothes.

Hornetta Hale found herself in a concrete blockhouse of some kind. She looked around. Behind her was a cavernous warehouse of some sort.

Lights were dim. She tried to make out the interior. She perceived great solid shapes cobwebbed in bloom. A spidery crane was the only thing that she could discern.

Gradually light came on so as not to hurt the unaccustomed eye.

Hornetta was staring at a veritable fleet of modern aerial conveyances. A great 4-motored amphibian was visible. Others included smaller planes and a gyroplane that looked a good 10 years ahead of anything she had ever seen or flown.

Hornetta was a connoisseur of aircraft. She had to resist an unladylike urge to whistle at the speedlines of the various craft.

There also were several boats ranging from a small speedboat to a sleek cabin-cruiser docked in a water-filled basin. All were ultra-modern beauties.

But then her gaze fell upon the **submarine**. It lay in a drydock trough. It was a razorback hog of steel, unlovely and to all appearances unseaworthy. But she started toward it eagerly.

"How much to hire by the day?" she breathed.

No one answered her. They were too busy dogging the double hatches of what was a pneumatic car.

"I saw how much?" she repeated.

Doc Savage was in the act of throwing shut the outer hatch when a gush of foul black **smoke** struck him in the face.

"Blazes!" Monk gulped. "Blazes!"

Doc raced to a televisor plate. He manipulated several controls. Distant cameras were relaying closed-circuit images from the 86th floor of their *Headquarters*.

But no images came. The frosted glass screen remained dark. He checked the circuits. All were in working order.

"This can mean only one thing," he said gravely.

"What's that?" Hornetta asked.

"Our *Headquarters* has been destroyed.

The eyes of all 3 men turned in Hornetta Hale's direction. They were not pleased eyes to behold. Even the calm flake-gold *orbs* of Doc Savage contained a harsh metallic light.

Hornetta thought fast.

"Okay," she said slowly and distinctly. "That hooey about a racing boat with gold in her keel instead of lead wasn't true."

"We know," said Doc.

"It's bigger than that," Hornetta admitted.

"That much is obvious," said Ham dryly.

"Yeah," added Monk. "Them guys who just wrecked our *Headquarters* aren't garden variety thugs. They're serious."

"It's bigger than you think," Hornetta. "It's bigger than you can imagine."

"Imagine it for us," prompted Ham Brooks wringing his cane.

"This thing is so big, it might change the course of History!" snapped Hornetta Hale with such force of conviction that all doubts about her veracity instantly evaporated.

Doc Savage requested: "The complete details, please."

Hornetta hesitated. What she would have said was never known. The acerbic brunette wavered on the verge of confessing whatever tale she might have been willfully withholding.

But all thought of that fled when the door on the land side of the warehouse caved in.

A truck came rushing in. To the bumper was affixed a construct like the prow of a ship made of 2 curved pieces of steel welded into a wedge. It was a plough or battering ram such as those that the Department of Justice men affixed to their trucks in the hectic days of Prohibition.

Doc Savage rapped out: "Seek cover!"

He and his men scattered. They gave Hornetta the option of finding her own shelter. And she did. Predictably, she ran for the submarine.

Men were dropping off the truck. They had submachine guns. Not Tommy-guns but modern military weapons. They began unleashing lead like torrents of rain.

Gun thunder echoed. Bullets flew madly in all directions. There was a lot of gray gun smoke which began obscuring everything.

Monk and Ham unlimbered their compact supermachine pistols and began returning fire. The **sound** of giant bullfiddles filled the great space.

Doc himself normally went about unarmed. But he was not without resources. From his pockets he extracted large steel grenades. Flipping firing levers, he tossed these.

They produced violent noise concussion and smoke. The latter was tinged with a malevolent ochre. That made the attackers think of mustard gas. They promptly ceased all shooting in order to don gas masks of the type used in the First World War.

That gave Monk and Ham time and opportunity to use their machine pistols to good advantage. Their tiny weapons moaned hosing "mercy" bullets. These were hollow capsules which did not kill but produced swift unconsciousness after breaking the skin of victims, thereby introducing a potent drug into surface blood vessels. Attackers began dropping out.

Seeing the tide turn, Monk and Ham moved in clapping fresh ammunition drums into their superfirers. Doc called out a sharp warning for caution. He had noticed something that the others had not.

But too late. Some of the fallen raiders jumped to their feet and opened up on the hapless duo with vicious intent.

Monk and Ham broke in opposite directions and beat one another to shelter. They hunkered down behind a spidery crane.

Doc raised his voice. "They are wearing some type of body armor!"

A man called out. *"You think we don't know about those trick bullets you guys use? We have on mailed union suits that will turn them babies."*

Monk howled. Ham groaned.

Throughout the warehouse (it was really a combination hangar and boathouse), Doc Savage had secreted many hidden controls. He found one such statin and threw a lever. At the far end of the hangar which faced the Hudson River side of Manhattan, great roller doors swung open admitting brilliant outdoor light.

This caused momentary consternation amid the attackers. They were still mixed in black **smoke**. But now the sudden light was throwing them into confusion.

Doc rapped out guttural orders in Mayan. It was the ancient language that he and his assistants shared in common and employed for secret communications.

They raced for a plane. The **Bronze Man** directed them toward one in particular. A seaplane nearest the river. They clambered aboard and closed the door.

"Where's that gal Hornetta?" Monk wanted to know.

Doc said: "In the sub. Safe. She dogged the main hatch after her."

"We leavin' her behind."

"That remains to be seen," Doc said grimly.

The **Bronze Man** knocked the seaplane's engine into life.

Propeller slipstream began beating back throwing the coiling poisonous-looking black **smoke** around. This added to the confusion of their attackers.

Releasing the brake, Doc jazzed the throttles. The plane started down the sloping concrete apron which dropped into the river.

Bullets began arriving. Snarling, they clipped the duralumin empennage and snapped at the tail.

Doc got the plane into the water. It wallowed. He threw the throttle all the way and the speedy plane gave a lurch.

Gunmen surged onto the apron. Dropping to their stomachs, they took up stances that showed superb training and began shooting with methodical rapidity. Whatever else they might be, these men were marksmen. Hardly a bullet awry.

The window glass on Doc Savage's planes were as tough as modern science can manufacture tempered glass. That made them bulletproof. Within reason.

An unreasonable quantity of lead began punishing the stuff. Glass was chopped out of the side windows. The windscreen cracked and then fell open. The tail became perforated and started to come apart under the relentless hammer of storming steel. It was as if unseen sledge-hammers were at work.

Doc realized very quickly that attempting flight was hopeless. A sudden whiff of aviation fuel gave the first warning of what was coming next.

"They got the tank!" Ham screeched.

"We're sunk," groaned Monk.

Doc Savage was pushing the speed-ship as hard as he could. The hull pontoon was hammering across the river trying to get on step.

But the thundering aircraft never made it.

The relentless gunfire took its toll. Observers along the Jersey shore got the best sight. The plane was bouncing along the water without any preliminary flash or fire.

Then it simply exploded! A ball of red *fire* shot upward. Black **smoke** billowed up after it.

The detonation was not loud compare to the pyrotechnics which accompanied it. But when it all subsided, there were flares and flame on the water. Blackened debris began showering down to show that nothing remained of Doc Savage's plane.

A grisly silence followed ...

VII – Hornetta Stings

An eerie interval of quiet followed the destruction of Doc Savage's racing seaplane.

The last shards of wreckage finally fell on the heaving Hudson to plunk beneath the waterline. A patch of oil burned for a time and then died down to faint licking flames. Smoke continued to coil upward.

On the riverward side of the Hidalgo Trading Company warehouse, the attackers on the sloping concrete apron kept their eyes and their gun sights trained upon the water.

Their leader spoke up. He was a fair-haired individual with anthracite-black eyes that might have been all pupil and raw sunburnt features.

"Any sign of *der bronzemann*?" he asked in his guttural native language.

"*Nein.*"

"If there is, treat him as a duck hunter treats a roosting fowl."

The men kept their eyes on the water. But no heads bobbed to the surface.

The leader trained field glasses of expert workmanship on the smoky patch of burning oil.

"*Der Mann aus Metall* is finished," he said. "*Kaput.*"

The others began picking themselves up off the concrete. They formed a rigid row as if at field inspection.

Fire engines wailed in the distance. They were drawing near.

"What about the meddling fraulein, Kolb?" asked one of the assembling men. "We did not see her."

Kolb demanded: "What do you mean 'did not see her'? Was she on the airplane or not?"

"We do not know."

"She must have been. Search the entire place!"

"But there is no time. Those are sirens."

Making harsh faces, the black-eyes Kolb ground his teeth in exasperation.

"Torch this place. Blow it up. If the girl is still here, let it become her tomb."

"*Jawohl.*"

They set about tipping over various fuel drums gathered from a storage area. Some were rolled to the corners of the warehouse. Others were set in the center among the aircraft hangered there.

They began puncturing drums with well-placed rifle slugs. The stink of high-test gasoline filled the vast interior. Oil-soaked waste rags were ignited and open tins of kerosene tossed in.

Gouts of *flames* exploded. They made racing tongues of *fire* along the concrete flooring. **Fire met Fire**. Combustible mixtures encountered other combustible mixtures.

The Hidalgo Trading Company was completely *ablaze* by the time the 3 machines fled the vicinity.

The fire engines were too late. Water hoses were unreeled and firemen fell to work at attempting to quench the spreading flames. But all to no avail.

Within an hour, all that remained of the Hidalgo Trading company was a smoking brick shell that breathed malodorous noxious **smoke**.

Night had fallen by the time the exhausted firemen had collected their hoses and stowed away their equipment. The warehouse was a total loss. Almost nothing of Doc Savage's fleet had survived the ferocious conflagration.

Deep into the night, something could be heard in the ruin of a building.

A charred timber shifted. Then another. A clattering of dry wood came. The rank odor of burnt wood assailed the nostrils. Had there been any nostrils to assail, that is.

In the dry dock of the boathouse section of the building, a hatch came open in stages. More timbers settled. That was what had caused the clattering.

On the razorback submersible, a hatch clanged all the way open. Coughing and hacking, a tall lithe form emerged.

"Damn that man!" choked Hornetta Hale.

Whatever man she consigned to eternal fires remained unknown, however.

Hornetta concentrated on getting out of the still-smoking ruin without inhaling any more pungent odors.

The submarine had been an unpleasant place to endure a conflagration. Hornetta looked as if she had spent the day in a steam bath. But she had survived the ordeal.

Casting a mournful glance back at the drydocked and immobile underseas craft, she slipped out of the blackened shell that had been the Hidalgo Trading Company boathouse-hangar.

A nighthawk taxi driver was loafing along the waterfront in search of a fare. Hornetta Hale stopped him by the most expedient method. She ran into the beams of his headlamps and waved her arms energetically.

The driver braked smartly and craned his head out of the window.

"What's the big deal, lady? Trying to end it all?"

"Mind your beeswax," said Hornetta Hale coming aboard.

She clapped the door shut.

"Fade out of here. And make it snappy!"

The driver grinned. "Where's the fire?"

She gestured behind her and forward.

"Back there. And up ahead, too."

"Huh?"

"Just skip it," sniffed Hornetta.

Her eyes were red and swollen. It might have resulted from exposure to the smoky ruin. But it might also have been repressed emotion.

"Where to, Sugar/" the driver asked at last.

"Do they have flophouses for ladies in distress?" Hornetta asked disconsolately.

"I know just the place," said the cabby.

It wasn't exactly a flophouse. But it wasn't the Ritz, either. The sign over the entrance read:

HOME FOR WANDERING WOMEN

Hornetta paid the driver and entered. Where she obtained the funds would have earned her a night in jail. She had picked a man's pocket on the street after he had whistled at her.

"I need a room for the night," she told the matronly desk clerk.

"Spat with hubby?" asked the matron.

"Not as big a spat as what's coming," Hornetta said fiercely.

"Excuse me?"

"Never mind. Just give me my room key.

"You don't have to be snippy about it, Mrs. ..."

"Mudd."

"Huh?"

"Mary Mudd. That's my name. Mudd with 2 d's."

Hornetta Hale took 2 flights of stairs. She put the key in the lock with every intention of taking a much-needed bath and sleeping as long as necessary.

She got as far as opening the door and halfway across the threshold. Then she gave an uncharacteristic start.

3 men awaited her inside. They looked at her with unmistakably stern intent.

Hornetta Hale attempted to backpedal out of the room. She simply hadn't the moxie left for any more pointless flight.

A hairy hand grabbed the other side of the doorknob and gave a yank. Clutching the opposite knob, Hornetta was pulled in with the door. She was unceremoniously precipitated onto the threadbare rug landing on her polka-dotted backside.

A thin blade of some sort touched her throat. It was long and vicious looking. The tip was discolored with what Hornetta Hale mistook for dried blood.

"I am tempted to run you through," a thin voice sniffed.

"And I ought to break you in half," another male voice threatened.

But nothing of either sort happened.

Instead, Doc Savage reached down and took Hornetta by one flailing arm. He lifted her to her feet by main strength and planted her in a wooden chair.

"How ... What ...?" she sputtered.

Monk Mayfair squinted his small eyes at her.

"That taxi driver belonged to us," he explained. "As a matter of fact, we set him prowling for you along with some other drivers."

"Indeed," seconded Ham. "He had instructions to take you here if you did not give another address."

"Yeah," said Monk. "And if you did, we would have collected you there."

"Either way," finished Ham, "you were bound to become our prisoner."

Hornetta looked flummoxed. Biting one pale lip, she turned her angry gaze up at Doc Savage who had said nothing through it all.

"Stop looking at me like that, Tall, Dark, and Metallic. You make me nervous."

"If you had been honest with us from the start," the Bronze giant said simply, "a great deal of trouble might have been averted."

"That's nothing."

"Eh?"

"I said that's nothing."

"Explain yourself," prompted Doc.

"Compared to what's coming, I mean."

"Exactly what is coming?" Ham asked in his best lawyer manner.

"I told you it was Big," Hornetta reminded.

"You did."

"Bigger than Big."

"Get to the point!" snapped Ham.

"It's so BIG," said Hornetta Hale, "**that it could mean the end of the United States of America.**"

Doc Savage's uncanny *trilling* abruptly filled the room. It had a quality of astonished skepticism. The **Bronze Man** stifled it with difficulty.

"Continue," invited Ham.

Hornetta Hale folded her sunburned arms stubbornly.

"That's it. That's all I have to say."

"We have methods for making you talk," suggested Ham Brooks.

"Then use 'em! See if I care. Pull out my fingernails. Singe my toes. Pluck me like a chicken. I ain't talking."

"Leave her to me, Doc," boasted Monk Mayfair. "I'll make her crackle like a hen."

"You?" sneered the brunette. "That'll be the day! You're just sore because I got the better of you."

Ham opened his lean mobile mouth to speak whereupon Hornetta flayed the dapper lawyer with her exquisitely sharp tongue.

And as for you, fancy britches, I can see that you're all in a lather because I wouldn't give you a tumble."

Ham turned purple and was reduced to sputtering inarticulately.

Doc Savage said steadily: "What is the point of all this stubborn silence? This is a serious matter. You are in very deep."

Hornetta snorted. "Deep a Davy Jones' locker, I'll tell a man!"

"Then come clean, sister," growled Monk.

Hornetta promptly changed the subject.

"Listen. I got out of that brick kiln alive because I hid in your sub. It looked might seaworthy. So what do you say?"

"Not without explanations," said Doc.

Hornetta suddenly thought of something. "Say! How did you three get away?"

"Our plane exploded," explained Ham.

"Yeah," said Monk. "But we weren't in it. We dropped out an emergency hatch on the opposite side where we couldn't be seen."

"I heard all the little explosions before I heard the bigger one," Hornetta stated.

"That was our plane," admitted Ham.

"We just sat down on the riverbed until the coast was clear," added Monk.

"You and the local catfish, huh?"

"We have our methods," said Doc cryptically.

"I'll bet you do," Hornetta said dismissively.

Hornetta continued her stubborn stance. She returned to the subject of her present obsession.

"What about that deal? Your sub for a ration of truth?"

"Only a ration?"

"I'm rationing out my truth these days. If you want your share, all of you have to string along with me."

Hairy Monk Mayfair looked at the **Bronze Man**. "Doc?"

"Yes, Monk?"

"You got any of the new **truth serum** on you?"

Doc Savage made a show of going through his pockets.

"I might just have some."

" 'Cause I think that's the only way we're gonna get this leaky faucet to start gushing."

"Agreed," said Doc extracting a case from one pocket.

Opening it revealed a thin vial of colorless liquid and a hypodermic needle nestled in a bed of maroon velvet.

He directed quietly: "Monk, hold her arm."

"With pleasure, Doc. I always like to watch you go to work on 'em. Especially tough sisters like this one. They all think they have nerves of iron. But once that truth juice gets to work on 'em, they start spillin' all their secrets like confession is going to come back in style."

Doc Savage charged the needle. He came over and took one of Hornetta's sinewy forearms. He pressed the need point to the raw skin. Her eyes grew wide.

"You ... you can't do this! It's illegal. ... Isn't it?"

Monk grinned widely. "Doc is a surgeon. Don't you know that? And if the truth juice don't work, he's got a machine that will x-ray your brain."

Hornetta's eyes protruded from their sockets. A starkness took hold of her shapely form.

"All right, all right! You ... win."

"No tricks," warned Doc.

"Cross my heart and hope to strike gold," vowed Hornetta Hale.

Doc set the needle on a table as if to keep it handy should she reverse her decision. Hornetta composed herself and began speaking.

"You remember when that German passenger dirigible went blooie a few years back?"

"Yes. Of course," said Doc.

"And when the *Lusitania* sank?"

"yes."

"And the assassin's shot that touched off the powder keg that was the last World War?"

"I do," admitted Doc Savage.

"Well, this will make all three of them look like barnyard accidents."

"How so?" asked Ham, his eyes glowing with interest.

"Well, boys. Gather around and I'll tell you."

Instantly, Ham Brooks leaned in. It was a mistake.

Hornetta took a swipe at his sword-cane. She caught it and claimed possession. Bouncing out of her chair, she swiped the syringe off the table. It shattered.

Then she took aim at the center of Ham's elegant cravat and lunged in with the supple blade saying:

"Gonna inject me, were you? Well, try a taste of your own medicine!"

The blade probably only pink Ham Brooks' throat. But that was enough. The concoction on its tip was a chemical compound that brought swift unconsciousness.

Hornetta yanked out the long blade and swept after Monk Mayfair crying out: "Next!"

Monk was no sissy. But years of being threatened by that keen rapier at the hands of the ever-dapper Ham gave him a studied respect for its incapacitating effects.

Howling, Monk bobbed back. The blade swished several times slicing open his shirt front and revealing a red mattress of chest **hair**.

Doc Savage was moving now. While Hornetta sparred with Monk, he slipped up from behind and seized her by the neck.

Hornetta had learned fighting skills somewhere. She kicked backward and barked Doc's shins. First one and then the other.

Doc momentarily lost his grip. That was all Hornetta needed. Spinning, she slashed and sliced wildly. Hastily, the **Bronze Man** retreated.

Luck was against him. One heel hooked a fringe of the threadbare rug and upset him. He got tangled up in a coat tree and had to arrest it with both hands before the heavy object could crash to the floor and create a commotion.

Hornetta flung up a window and made for the fire escape.

She stared down and paused, listening intently. Then whipping off one shoe and throwing it to the sidewalk, she raced up toward the roof.

She was looking down over the stone parapet when Doc and Monk hit the sidewalk. They discovered the dropped shoe and raced in opposite directions in search of her.

After a while, they returned dejected and empty-handed.

The last that Hornetta Hale saw of them, they were carrying the unconscious Ham Brooks out to a waiting sedan.

It whined off.

"And that," said Hornetta peering over the parapet, "brings this evening to a satisfactory conclusion."

She passed the night on the roof and slept like a lamb.

Which she most assuredly was not.

VIII – The Aristocratic Assassin

The time was 1 week later.

It had been an uneventful week, all told. After explaining to the authorities that they did not yet know who had undertaken to demolish his skyscraper *Headquarters* and his riverfront hangar, Doc Savage had disappeared.

Doc's men were not as a matter of fact unduly alarmed because it was the **Bronze Man's** habit to disappear at times without a word of explanation.

Sometimes he was gone for months completely shut off from the World in a far-off spot which he called his *Fortress of Solitude* where he went to study and experiment. Even his 5 aides did not know the exact location of the *Fortress* although they knew it was somewhere within the Arctic Circle.

They were reasonably certain that Doc had not gone there. But the *Man of Bronze* had many enemies and it was always possible that someone had slipped something over.

The authorities had been skeptical. But Doc held a high honorary commission with not only the local police but also with the Department of Justice as well. He was taken at his word even if there some doubt on the matter.

Monk Mayfair had been left in charge of the rehabilitation of the 86th floor suite of offices. Ham Brooks was attending to legal matters having to do with that. Doc Savage had a permanent lease on the building but did not own it. Its owners were irate. This was not the first time that destruction had visited the 86th floor [e.g. see #185 - "White Eyes"]. It was Ham's job to smooth down ruffle feathers.

Meanwhile, Monk supervised reconstruction. The **Reception** room was relatively intact. The **Library** was a wreck. And the great **Laboratory** was no more. Virtually everything there would have to be replaced.

In the **Reception** room, Monk was busy making telephone calls.

"Sure wish Renny and the others were here to help with all this."

'Renny' was Colonel John Renwick, a civil engineer of International repute. Together with Long Tom Roberts and Johnny Littlejohn, they comprised the rest of Doc's tiny band. All three of those were in different parts of the World pursuing their respective professions.

Since there was a lull in the investigation, Monk thought it unnecessary to summon them home. Renny was the man they most needed. He was in Australia supervising the construction of a new-style cantilever bridge. The big-fisted engineer had promised to return to the States as soon as practical in order to oversee the restoration of the Hidalgo Trading company warehouse. But there was no telling how long that might be.

By midafternoon of the 7th day after the raid on Doc Savage's *Headquarters*, a buzzer sounded. Monk looked down on the big inlaid table that functioned as a desk.

On a panel, s view of the corridor leading to the **bronze** door showed. A cautious soul, Monk always liked to give visitors the once-over before receiving them.

"Oh boy!" Monk said happily. "It's Pat!"

Depressing a stud permitted the door to open.

In flounced pretty Patricia Savage, Doc's cousin and only living relative. She was smartly attired in the latest Fifth Avenue autumn frock. Her **skin** partook of Doc Savage's russet coloring but lacked the metallic aspect. Her eyes were a frank and inviting **gold**. A wealth of **bronze** hair crowned the vision that was Pat.



(<http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/AnnaXXX.htm>)

At sight of the homely chemist, she bestowed her most inviting smile.

"Hello, Monk. How goes the war?"

"Makin' progress, Pat. Doc ain't here."

Pat looked around her.

"Where is he then?"

"No clue," said Monk. "But you know Doc."

Pat frowned. "I sure do. And if he caught me here, he might bend me over his knee for a paddling and send me home."

"Aww, Doc just wants to keep you out of trouble is all."

"Trouble is my main meal," said Pat Savage. "Any word on that Hornetta wench?"

"Nope. I got a posse of some of Doc's private detectives out lookin' for her."

Pat dropped into a comfortable chair.

"Well maybe I'll just stick around here and see if anything pops up."

"Suit yourself," said Monk picking up a desk telephone from a bank of instruments. Inserting a furry finger into the rotary dial, he gave it a series of brisk spins.

Pat picked up a magazine and attempted to peruse it. It proved to be a particularly erudite scientific journal that the bronze-haired woman found impenetrable. She eventually gave it up as a bad job.

Noticing a neat stack of newspapers on the big desk, Pat reached for one.

"Nis! I'm savin' those for when Doc gets bac," snapped Monk. "The Press has been beatin' up on him pretty bad since all this trouble hit town."

"I know," said Pat. "I read the news rags, too."

The newspapers did themselves proud.

SAVAGE FINALLY DROWNED

That was the way one sheet had it.

BAD MEN SHOOT BRONZE MAN

A tabloid said:

SAVAGE NOT SO SAVAGE !

"maybe you should them instead," sniffed Pat.

"Doc owns a few of these sheets," countered the hairy chemist. "I think he might want to give some of them editors a good talkin' to."

Pat crinkled her pretty nose.

"The way my cousin acts sometimes, he will probably give them all raises for being so darned honest," she said wearily.

Not long afterwards, the buzzer whined again. Consulting the television device, Monk look interested.

A man stood in the outer hall. He was doing a strange thing. He was carefully twisting a metal cap off the lower end of a Malacca cane which he carried. When he had the cap off, he pocketed it and then hung the cane over an arm.

The man looked prosperous and faintly Continental as if he had just gotten off a trans-Atlantic ocean liner. String, though, was the way his skin appeared raw and blistered. This was noticeable even in black&white.

Peering over the homely chemist's shoulder, Pat Savage remarked cheerfully:

"You don't look pleased to see company."

"I don't like the look of that cane," muttered Monk.

Pat arched one penciled eyebrow.

"You're just allergic to them after all the times that Ham tried to brain you with his own walking stick."

Monk scowled. "Take another look."

Pat did. "I see now. The cap is missing from the end."

"He just took it off."

"Why do you suppose he did that?" wondered Pat, her brow creasing.

"Gun or gas in the cane, maybe."

"Recognize him?" asked Pat.

"Naw," said Monk. "But after all that's happened, I ain't takin' no chances. Step closer and roost on this rubber mat."

There was a rubber mat on the floor behind the long desk. Pat complied.

The visitor with the large red hands and cane entered with his hat in hand. It was the type of hat called a Tyrolean. A stiff brush was tucked into the band on one side.

"Good day to you," he hailed waving his hat.

His voice sounded immensely pleased like a voyager who had traveled far and had reached his long-awaited destination.

"We're busy," monk returned shortly. "Whatcha want?"

"I seek the gallant known as **Doc Savage**."

"He ain't here. I'm his assistant Monk. State your business."

The aristocratic man stood there on the decorative rug with his cane gripped casually in both hands. He bent a supercilious eye on Monk Mayfair.

"I have important information for Doctor Savage and only for him," he announced. "It is imperative that I consult with him."

Monk growled. "We don't know where Doc is or when he will be back. And if you try to use whatever kind of weapon you've got in that cane, it'll be just too bad."

The visitor looked nonplussed in a casual way. He was, they saw, the cool and nervy type.

"My information," the man said without agitation, "concerns one Hornetta Hale."

Monk began: "If you would bust loose with some info..."

"Watch it, Monk!" Pat suddenly warned.

The visitor was tilting his cane up at Monk. The tip pointed at the notch between the hairy chemist's tiny eyes.

Monk <tapped> a small pedal on the floor. Results were instantaneous.

The visitor shrieked unmanfully, dropped his cane, and tied himself in a knot. Moaning, he tried to pick up the cane. When his fingertips came near the brass handle, blue *sparks* leaped toward him. This produced another howl of anguish.

Scuttling like a crab, the man attempted to crawl out of the **Reception** room moaning and shrieking.

Monk <depressed> the floor pedal again. He leaped out from behind the massive desk and across the *electrified* rug which was woven of fine wire which could not be distinguished from the other fibers unless a magnifying glass was used. The current had merely given the man an uncomfortable shock.

But the visitor had quick wits. No sooner had the juice stopped contorting his paralyzed body than he yanked a small 2-shot derringer from somewhere and gave Monk Mayfair both barrels in the stomach.

The caliber of the weapon was undoubtedly heavier than the typical .22 derringer round. Monk was thrown back with great force. That was enough for the man to reach the elevator although he stumbled once and had to pick himself up.

The door responded instantly. That was fortunate for the man and unfortunate for the others. For Pat Savage had come flying out with a ludicrously large six-shooter in one tanned fist. She had extracted it from her commodious handbag.

Pat aimed and managed to send one .44 slug ripping through the closing doors. After that, the cage was sinking.

"Darn it!" she complained.

She raced for the super-speed express elevator with the intention of using it to beat the man to the lobby. Pressing the button, she discovered the cage was parked at the lobby level. Her eager expression sank to the marble floor.

"Drat!" fumed Pat.

Monk picked himself up with difficulty and grabbed a telephone.

"Building electrician!" he shouted.

When the connection came, he said: "Shut off the juice to the visitor's lift!"

"Will do, Sir."

Then a **bang** came over the phone wire followed by 2 more bangs, a shout, and curse in the electrician's voice.

"Hells bells!" the electrician snarled a moment later. *"There's a guy with a gun in there watching the switchboard. He's masked. ... Wait a minute! He just lit out of here like his pants were on fire!"*

Hanging up, Monk called the lobby and absorbed the unwelcome news that their courtly assailant had exited the building.

He ran out to join Pat at the special lift growling: "They had it all figured out. And that makes two of them at least."

"Your trick rug didn't go so hot," huh?" Pat said.

"Maybe," admitted rubbing his stomach gingerly. "But my chain mail bulletproof vest sure saved my bacon."

Halting, the hairy chemist stooped and picked up the cane which the Continental visitor had dropped. The examination he gave it was low and careful.

The hollowed-out cane barrel yielded an ingenious mechanism consisting of a cylinder of compressed air and a valve which could be turned on by twisting the head of the cane so that compressed air would feed into a tiny sprayer chamber. Monk noted the presence of a bilious liquid in the chamber where it could be shot from the cane end.

"Sulfuric acid," he said thoughtfully. "it would have done a swell job of blinding me. And you, too."

"Then maybe I was wrong about the rug," Pat admitted sheepishly. "It saved your eyesight. Or Doc's had he been around."

Monk finally got his breathing organized.

"Come on, Pat! Maybe we can still get a line on 'em."

Down at the switchboard, the girl described 2 men. One was masked by a handkerchief tied around his lower face. The other was the would-be assassin.

Both had fierce **sunburns**. The girl gave a good description of them. So did the doorman. A taxicab had taken them away. Oddly, Monk accepted this datum without disappointment.

"What do lobster-red **hands** mean?" he asked Pat he was back in the office. "Remember, it's almost winter here. Sunburn ain't likely."

Pat considered.

"Dishwashing?" she ventured.

"No good.

"Chemical burns?"

Monk shook his head.

"Naw. I've been plenty burned by chemicals in my work. It wasn't that."

"The Tropics then?" hazarded Pat.

"Now that's an idea," muttered Monk. "It might mean they had enough dough to go south. Only a scorching Sun would peel a man that way."

Within the hour, a desk phone buzzed. Monk scooped it up.

"Yeah? Great! Thanks."

The apish chemist replaced the instrument.

"We got a line of 'em."

"How?"

"Doc has this guy working for him. One of the graduates of our '**College**'. He's usually stationed I the cab stand outside the building for things like this. The two hired him and they went out to Long Island. The cabby just me the dang address."

Doc Savage did not believe in prisons and incarceration. He understood that most prison were actually breeding grounds for further criminality. So he created a secret institution in the wilderness of upstate New York where criminals who fell under his power are subjected to a unique course of renovation.

First, all memory of their criminal pasts are erased surgically. Then they are re-educated to despise crime n all forms. And finally, they are given new identities and taught a useful trade to prepare them for the second chance in life.

*Many of the "graduates" of Doc's secret **College** were employed by the Bronze Man himself. And quite a number had been trained as operatives of a private detective agency that Doc had built up over the years.*

"Swell. What are we waitin on?"

Monk made simian faces. They were comical in the extreme.

"I'll ring Ham in on this," he decided reaching for the telephone.

"The more the merrier," Pat said brightly.

Nix!" protested Monk. "Doc'll chew me out but good if I let you tag along."

Pat pouted prettily. "But Doc doesn't have to know."

"If you get injured or worse, it'll be my neck," Monk pointed out.

He had the telephone receiver in hand again and said:

"Shyster, meet us here at Headquarters.

Monk gave an address. Being no slouch, Pat made a mental note of it.

"We can get there faster in my facing plane," hinted Pat after the apish chemist hung up.

Interest registered on Monk's simian features.

"How many does it seat?"

"Two."

"Swell. Ham and I will borrow it, then."

"In that case, forget it," Pat countered snippily. "I'll meet you there. And may the best man win."

"Aww, Pat!" pleaded Monk.

But glamorous Pat Savage was already out the door.

XX

Next ...



... Stuck-up Pat is Gang-Raped !

IX – The South America Trend

Pat Savage kept her racing plane stored at the seaplane base on the East River side of Manhattan island at East 23rd Street. It was a 20palse job. A glaring scarlet with black trim boasting an engine that was overpowered for an aircraft of its class.

The establishment had an ingenious method of putting planes in the water. She had only to start her trim little craft, taxi onto a concrete turntable, and wait while the mechanism was engaged.

The turntable ramp was set at an angle so that one side dipped into the river. Pat's plane was slowly rotated until the amphibian's pontoon hull was delivered into the water.

Advancing the throttle, she slid off like a duck entering a pond. She taxied some distance and the smart little ship got on step. After some bumping along, the scarlet amphibian took to the air and overflowed the breathtaking ironwork structure that was the Queensboro Bridge. Soon she was winging toward the far tip of Long Island near the Montauk Point lighthouse.

Finding an address from the air was practically impossible. But with the aid of a handy road map, Pat was able to locate the spot. Barnes Road wound along to the shore. She imaged that putting down at the far end was the best place to begin her investigation.

She was mildly surprised to see a brick boathouse at the water's edge with a seaplane docked inside. Its snout was visible, its prop gleaming in the Sun. This part of Long Island is inhabited by the well-to-do. So perhaps it was not so unusual.

Pat eschewed the hangar, however, beaching her ship in a sleepy cove. Tossing out a sea anchor, she picked her way carefully along jetty rocks until she reached solid ground. The area was sparse of homes so she was not challenged by local folk.

The **bronze**-haired girl hiked to the place where Barnes Road terminated.

This time, surprise seized her with greater force. For the number she sought ('364') was that of a brick mansion that plainly belonged to the seaplane hangar. Or actually vice versa.

"Looks like I beat the boys for once," she chortled as she reconnoitered the place.

It developed that it was not all that she beat.

A long phaeton came sliding up. It eased onto a winding white gravel driveway and lurched to a stop.

Out of it stepped the Continental visitor of the day with his Tyrolean hat jauntily askew. Evidently he had the presence of mind to carry it from the scene of his late embarrassment.

With him was a man wearing a rust-colored overcoat that Pat did not place. She had not been informed of the description of the earlier raiders on Doc Savage's skyscraper establishment.

"Mr. Trick Cane himself," Pat muttered.

She unlimbered her six-shooter which was charged with the same mercy bullets that Doc Savage invented. She rarely flung lead indiscriminately (although she was not shy about doing so if the occasion called for it).

As the pair entered the house, Pat slipped up using topiary shrubbery for shelter. It allowed her to get within peeping-tom distance of a broad bay window.

Men were inside. Several of them. They were competent looking men with intelligent faces.

There was also a woman. She was seated in a high-backed stuffed armchair. Pat did not place her and the angle did not allow her to identify the femme as the missing Hornetta Hale (if indeed it was she).

On the theory that a woman discovered in the company of such men as the Continental assassin and the others was as likely a kidnap victim as not, Pat resolved to liberate her at the earliest opportunity.

Creeping around to the front door, Pat used a hairpin on the lock. One of her less ladylike skills was lock-picking. Doc Savage had taught her a few tricks of the trade knowing of Pat's propensity for getting herself into trouble. (It was supposed that the *Man of Bronze* had grown tired of rescuing his scrappy cousin from peril and decided to equip her with a few necessary survival skills.)

The lock quickly surrendered. She slid in gun-in-hand and eased through a well-appointed entryway. This led to a parlor dominated by a long sofa and matching armchairs upholstered in mohair. Along one wall, a grandfather clock ticked the minutes away.

Voices were emanating from another room. It was evidently a library of some sort. Pat could catch glimpses of walnut book cases filled with expensive tomes that appeared from the perfect condition of their spines to be decorative rather than purchased for perusal.

A man was saying: "Now that this woman has been prevented from seeing Doc Savage and *der bronzemann* has been neutralized, we have no time to waste."

That was the Continental fellow. No mistaking that suave voice. Pat recognized it at once.

"Everything now depends upon returning to the lagoon to accomplish what has begun," he continued.

"Ja," another agreed. "Should we fly?"

"Too risky. We will go by boat. Liners are leaving for South America daily. We will blend in with the passengers. If we encounter difficulty, it may become necessary to commandeer the boat. But let us hope that such unpleasantness may be avoided."

"That will take time," a man pointed out.

"We have time. Our objective will not arrive at the secret location for another 2 days. We have planned a long time for this. Many months. And now events are coming to a head."

They spoke reasonable English. But their pronunciation was not American. Pat recognized that they were the accents of one of the European warring powers that had stirred up so much trouble until War had broken out in Europe.

"Then it is time to book passage, *mein Herr Graf*."

"Attend to it, Pippel. *Schnell!*"

The one named Pippel <clicked> his heels (if Pat recognized that sound correctly) and came out in search of a telephone.

Pat took up a crouching position behind one of the overstuffed chairs of expensive workmanship. Her **bronze**-haired head was cocked and eager to capture more information.

The *whizzing* of a dial mechanism came followed by a rapid exchange.

"Yes. I wish to book passage on the next steamer for Nassau in the Bahamas. ... Yes? The *Caribbulla*? It will suffice. ... Leaving tonight? That is acceptable. ... Yes, there are five in the party. Book under the name of ..."

The man seemed to hesitate.

"... Jon Schmidt. ... That is right. Schmidt. Thank you."

Hanging up, Pippel returned to the library saying: "It is all arranged."

"Not quite," Pat murmured.

Coming out of her crouch, she stepped lightly toward the open library door with hogleg-in-hand. Her intention was to get the drop on the group cowgirl-style.

Her intentions were good. But the results were not.

Pat stepped boldly in and started to say "Reach!"

She swallowed the word, half-spoken ...

... for the 6 men were ready for her. They had spike-snouted foreign pistols out. All six were pointed at Pat and her frontier Colt.

Mentally she did the arithmetic. 7 guns against a six-shooter. She had one bullet for each man. They probably had 9 slugs in each magazine.

So Pat Savage did the only sensible thing.

"I surrender," she said weakly.

The Count pointed to Pat with a new cane.



Still, she had some remarkable ability for her body to heal itself. In doing so, any vaginal or rectal passageways that had been brutally stretched-out had quickly returned to their original tightness. For all practical purposes as far as the pain and bleeding went, she was still a "virgin".

Pat was taken into a dark damp chamber. The brunette's eyes lit up.

"Rape her, you bastards!" she shouted.



"You're gonna be Raped !"



Still dazed and half-dumbfounded, Pat looked up to see large men exposing themselves and yelling lustfully.



It didn't take long at all for them to swarm all over her and start tearing off her tight-fitting clothes with raging gusto!



"Look at what you did to me," a man said pointing at his erect **penis**.



Pat had to endure their crude foreplaying gestures.



Then the "preliminaries" were over. They were too anxious and horny now.



The brunette looked angry.

"What-the-hell is going on here?" she demanded. "**Bitch**, you lay down there and get those goddamn legs of yours spread WIDE!"



It wasn't long before the **bronze**-haired woman-child felt the first hard **penis**.



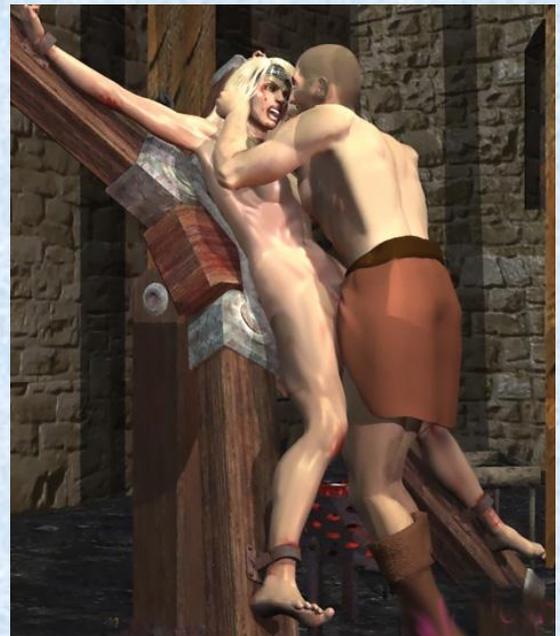
"Oowww!" she cried. "It hurts! Damn you!"



Her rapist only grinned and groaned. "Ugh! Ugh! Ugh Ugh Ugh Ugh Ugh!!!"



She soon lost count of how many cocks emptied their *impregnating* loads up into her fertile womb.



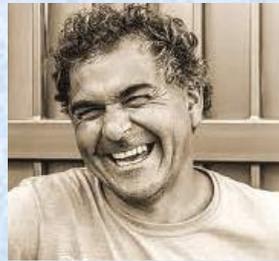
"Stop it!" she cried. "Stop it, you bastards! I can't take any more!"

"You're take as much as we got, you goddamn **Whore!**" one panted as he shot his own sticky **load** deep into her tight cunt.



In a Parallel Universe ...





The brunette seemed satisfied looking at the exhausted men and the violated **bronze** beauty. She knew what was now biologically happening inside the latter's body.



[9 months later ...]

"Perhaps we should take her up in the plane and dump her in the Sound," another man suggested.

The Count's serious mien brightened.

"An excellent idea. Change of orders. Take her to the seaplane hangar. We will all take a nice airplane ride and Miss Savage will go for a rather unhealthy swim. *Nein?*"

This seemed to be an attempt at humor on the part of the leader. But no one laughed. They were too truculent of face for laughter. In fact, they looked very grim indeed as they bundled the insensate bronze girl in a bedsheet and lifted her by the simple expedient of taking hold of both twisted ends.

In a grim silent line, the group wended their way down to the seaplane hangar. The undergrowth was not well-tended here. There were weeds and late Fall wildflowers. Cattails predominated. Recent abundant rains had caused them to grow to phenomenal height.

From across a clearing called a voice harshly, metallically.

"Lay 'em down, you yeggs! You're in a spot!"

X – The Pugilist

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks chose that exact moment to pull up in Doc Savage's new sedan.

They had made fair time leaving the city. But to travel to entire length of Long Island was a chore. Even running with a concealed police siren caterwauling, it had taken over an hour to arrive at their destination.

Prudently, they had parked several blocks before their destination and were approaching by foot.

That was when the disembodied voice had crashed *"Lay 'em down, you yeggs! You're in a spot!"*

There was no sign of the author of the harsh warning.

The Continental leader began snarling. "Down, you men!"

The others flattened with military efficiency. They did not even drop their sheeted burden but rather fell atop it. One hunkered behind Pat Savage's concealed form fully prepared to use the unconscious woman as a shield.

The leader was calling to his men.

"Someone is over by the hangar. Acts like he has a pistol. He yelled ..."

"Stay down!" invited the voice from across the clearing. *"I've done enough kiddin'!"*

The voice resembled that of a brawler of the waterfront variety.

The leader took deliberate aim at the voice which seemed to be coming from the cattails. The swiftness with which he did that showed that he had been thinking of it.

He fired. Gun sound whacked, echoed, and re-echoed.

"Lay to with some sense!" rapped the voice that might have belong to a dockwalloper.

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks also decided that falling flat was a smart decision. They got down on their stomachs and produced their mercy pistols. Unlatching the safeties, they began crawling forward.

"Whatcha think is up?" Monk muttered.

"Quiet, you ape!" snapped Ham. "We'll find out soon enough."

Gunfire was erupting from the men. They began scything weeds with smart precision.

Return fire was nonexistent.

The Count's men paused ... then they climbed to their feet and began advancing in an organized skirmish line. They fired sporadically as they advanced.

Monk lunged forward in the middle of the cannonading. His rusty fist whistled and dropped a man. He booted another in the middle with an eye to results rather than ethics and folded the fellow like a jackknife. Then he jumped on Pippel's back with both feet. He kept jumping as if he were hopping on a trampoline.

Ham swept in employing his sword-cane. He plinked a man in the shoulder. To his astonishment, the other man wheeled and uncorked 3 shots knocking the sputtering lawyer into a drainage ditch.

Bellowing, the apish Monk seized the shooter by the back of the neck and began bouncing him in place. Various objects such as keys, a wallet, and extra money and coins began falling out of his pocket. The pistol in his grip came loose showing that it had a "broom handle" grip.

When Monk stopped slamming him, the man corkscrewed in such a fashion that his knees seemed to knock together as he fell on his face.

Scowling, the simian chemist looked around for another potential victim.

"That is quite enough violence," a precise voice said coldly.

Monk's piggy eyes fell on the speaker. He was the Continental leader. In one hand was a **Mills bomb**. He held it in such a way as to suggest that he was unafraid to use it.

Monk saw that the man was deadly serious.

"That would be like committin' suicide," Monk pointed out.

"No. It would be suicide. Such I am perfectly prepared to commit," clipped the man. "Now stand aside. And your friend as well."

For Ham Brooks was clambering out of the drainage ditch apparently uninjured. Only his chain-mesh undervest saved him from serious injury if not death itself. He flicked leaves off his fastidious person.

"I'll be damned!" exploded the barrister. "What's behind this mad behavior?"

"We'll danged soon find out," grumbled Monk keeping his superfirer trained on the count.

He was calculating the odds of putting the man out with a blast of mercy bullets before he could pull the pin on his hand grenade.

Then an entirely strange voice broke into the discussion.

"You'll find it's something unpleasant unless you stand very still."

Monk's neck was nothing to speak of. He had to turn his entire apish torso to look behind him at the opposite side of the road.

A huge figure had lifted out of the weeds and was braced on widespread legs. It was an individual who looked like a prizefighter. He had a nicked revolver which was small in his scarred lump fist.

Monk started to swing his machine pistol around.

The nicked revolver lipped flame and noise. Monk ducked wildly.

"I'm levelin' about it," said the big man. "You two guys come loose from them guns or you'll be pickin' lead out of yourselves."

Monk considered that ... then let fall his gun. Ham did the same. The pig Habeas Corpus sat down dog-fashion and watched the proceedings with beady-eyed interest.

The pugilistic one gestured at Monk and Ham. Then he pointed up the road. It ran west toward the setting Sun.

"You'd better take Horace Greeley's advice," he said. "And do it fast."

"Huh?" Homely Monk seemed not to understand.

"Pick 'em up and lay 'em down," growled the other. "Get on your bicycles. Raise a dust."

Scowling, Monk began to run. Ham trailed him. They looked back. The prizefighter snarled loudly and lifted his gun.

The 2 men ran faster and ceased looking back.

The pugilist looked at the hog Habeas and said "Scat!"

The shoat ran after the 2 men.

The man who looked like a prizefighter laughed grimly.

He was a human hulk. Facially, he resembled the caricature which cartoonists drew to depict Old Man Prohibition a decade back.

Pounding fists in the past had thickened his eyes and brows. His nose had a too-perfect shape which suggested that it had been made over by a plastic surgeon. Thin gray lines of old scars were plentiful on his face and a thick net webbed his solid hands. He wore old khaki clothes of a disreputable type.

"Come on, you guys!" he rapped at the Count and his companions.

"Who are you if I may inquire?" drawled the Continental fellow pocketing his grenade.

"Starr. Gloomy Starr."

The name fit his description. He was a tall tower of muscle with a face that rather resembled an unhappy dray horse.

"I heard the ruckus and figured I'd join in," offered Gloomy.

"To what purpose, Mr. Starr?"

"I hear shootin' and it's like a call to Action. I'm also for hire, I might add."

"We appreciate your assistance," said the leader coolly. "But we do not need your help."

He <snapped? His fingers once sharply.

2 men went to drag out the sheeted form of Pat Savage. The pugilistic one showed sudden interest.

"What have we here?" he murmured. "A body maybe?"

"None of your concern, Mr. Starr."

Starr smiled broadly displaying massive horse-like teeth.

"Call me 'Gloomy'."

A sudden thought struck the Count.

"By chance, can you fly an airplane?"

"Sure as shootin'. Can a ride a horse, too."

"We have ... er, a disposal problem. Would you be interested in attending to it for us?"

"How much?" asked Starr.

"500."

"Dollars?"

"What else?" replied the Count.

"The way you gents talk, I kinda question the currency. But no offense."

"None taken, I assure you."

The other bowed in courtly fashion. With his cane, he pointed to the brick structure by the water's edge.

"The aircraft sits in that hangar. We will wait for you here."

XI – Clay Bound

The aristocrat called the 'Count' advanced to meet Gloomy Starr upon his return.

The landing was not smooth. Pancaking, the float plane hit hard and all-but-dipped a wingtip into the choppy waters of Long Island Sound. In attempting to taxi toward shore, the hapless pilot managed to stub the craft's pontoons against a group of half-submerged rocks.

The final result was that the hulking man was forced to abandon the stricken seaplane and swim back toward land.

The Count asked coolly: "It went well?"

"You saw how well with your own eyes," replied Gloomy laconically. "Sorry about your ship. I was always better at takeoffs than landings."

"You mean that your piloting skills did not, in truth, include seaplanes," clucked the Count.

"Now that you mention it, yeah," admitted Gloomy sheepishly.

"No matter," said the Count. "The plane was a rental and we are done here. I was referring to the disposal operation, by the way."

Gloomy shrugged gigantically. "You saw that, too."

From his dull expression, cold-blooded murder was neither a new experience nor especially nerve-jarring.

The Count smiled unreservedly. "I did indeed. By the way, my name is Rumpler. ... Now we must be off."

Turning, he gave orders in some guttural language.

The speed with which the men gathered up their fallen comrades was remarkable. They were carried into the house which was plainly rented for the purpose of sheltering the group.

Instantly, clothes were packed and suitcases thrown into the trunk of the waiting vehicle. Another car (a sedan) was wheeled out of the attached garage.

"Where to?" asked Gloomy Starr.

"Steamship docks," he was told.

"And after that?"

"You will be told at the appropriate time."

Gloomy Starr went over to the brunette who was very subdued.

"And who might you be?"

"None of your business!" snapped the woman.

Gloomy scrutinized her with intensely dark eyes.

"Have we met before?"

"I doubt it," the brunette said frostily.

"I didn't think so," Gloomy muttered.

"I normally keep better company," she added sarcastically.

The Count spoke up. "Miss Haler here presents a special problem."

Gloomy pursed thick lips. "She does now, does she?"

"We can't kill her much as we would prefer to."

Gloomy cocked a quizzical eyebrow. "No? Why not?"

"It is a long tedious story. But your job will be to get her out of the country."

"A kidnap job, eh?"

"If you want to call it that. We wish you to take the young lady to the South Street docks and book passage for the two of you on the packet steamer *Matador*."

The Count favored Gloomy with a speculative eye.

"Have you got that?"

"*Matador*, right. Bound where?"

"Brazil. That is as far south as the *Matador* travels. That should be good enough."

"And when I get her there?"

"Check into the Alhambra Hotel and wait there until you hear from us."

"Sounds simple enough," Gloomy said.

"It is simple. And it will pay a cool 3 grand. Collectable at the Brazilian end."

Gloomy grinned. "I'm game, gents."

"And so there are no untoward complications, we will escort you to the docks and see you off," explained the count.

"Right kind of you," Gloomy Starr returned.

"Nothing kind about it," returned the Count. "We have no margin for failure."

Glints of interest came into Gloomy Starr's scar-surrounded eyes.

"And where are you gents gonna be in the meanwhile?" he asked.

"We have a destination of our own in mind."

"Is that right?"

"Yes," said the Count. "One not found on any map."

Curiously, Gloomy Starr looked like he wanted to ask another question.

But a problem came up that preventing it.

"Count," a man said. "Pippel is not feeling right."

"Let me attend to him."

Gloomy followed the nobleman into another room where the latter went over to a man on a couch. It was that man who wore a rust-colored overcoat. The one called Pippel. He looked ill. His face was pale and his breathing labored. He grimaced with each intake of breath.

"What is wrong, my Ernst?" asked the Count in a solicitous tone.

"I ... I think my ribs were stoved in by that *verdammmt* ape-man."

"That is too bad. You cannot be moved," said the Count. "And if you cannot be moved, you cannot come with us to the cay."

Gloomy Starr perked up. "Cay?"

He was ignored.

"I would be safe on the cay," grunted Pippel with effort.

"But we will be safer with you out of the picture. I am sorry, Ernst."

And with those words still on his tongue, the Count drew his double-barreled derringer from a vest pocket **and shot Pippel through the skull**. The double report was muffled. The pillow on which the dead man's head had been resting slowly changed **color**.

Gloomy Starr said angrily: "Was that really necessary?"

"Very," said the Count pocketing the smoking pistol. "You object, Mr. Starr?"

"You're kind free with your lead slugs and your men's lives," Gloomy pointed out. "Since I'm now one of them, that kinda gives me an itch I wanna scratch right now."

The Count smiled bleakly.

"Since you will be going to Brazil on our behalf, Mr. Starr, I think you will be perfectly safe there. So long as you do not return before instructed to."

The suave man smiled in a friendly manner.

"You see/"

Having dismissed the concern, the Count then turned to address the others who had looked on with stiff unemotional faces.

"Now, it is high time that we departed. Yes?"

The men gathered up their things. One of them took rubbing alcohol and a chamois and began going over the doorknobs, light switches, and other smooth surfaces.

"Clean everything up rough or smooth that could have been touched," directed the Count. "That iodine-vapor method the American police use will bring out fingerprints on almost everything."

The men fell to work at once. They were very efficient as if they had covered their tracks in this organized manner many times before.

Watching them, an interested gleam came into the eyes of the pugilist who called himself 'Gloomy Starr'. He paid special attention to the supervising aristocrat as if trying to place him in his memory. But if he succeeded in this mental inventory, the results were written upon his horsey features.

With those chores accomplished, the wonderfully efficient men exited locking all doors. They drove off in the 2 machines heading toward Manhattan.

Gloomy Starr was packed into the town car with the brunette. She looked unhappy. Miserable might capture her mood most descriptively. She was dabbing her red eyes with a handkerchief, obviously fighting back tears.

"She seems kinda upset all of a sudden," commented Gloomy.

The Count replied: "I have just broken to her the regrettable news about poor Pippel."

The brunette woman squeezed her eyes shut. Pain was evident on her pale features. Taking the tear-moistened handkerchief in her trembling hands, she twisted it in her silent agony. In that way, she seemed to get a firm grip on her composure.

Gloomy regarded her with something akin to sympathy.

"What got you into this mess, Missy?" he asked.

"I made the mistake of trying to reach **Doc Savage**," she returned stiffly.

"Doc Savage ...," said Gloomy Starr as if tasting the name. "Think I've heard of him."

"Many have," the brunette said vaguely.

"What be your first name?"

"Honoriam."

"Nice name," said Gloomy and left off the conversation.

He seemed to drift off into thought as the vehicles made their determined way toward the city.

The *Matador* was scheduled to depart the Manhattan steamship docks at 4:00 in the afternoon stopping at Havana, Curacao, and points south until reaching Sao Paulo, Brazil.

It was a popular run and had become even more so since the frantic day 2 years before when with the outbreak of war in Europe, passenger liner companies had called back to their all trans-Atlantic vessels. Once the frantic scramble had been completed, the steamship companies had been forced to look south. Passenger travel to Europe was out of the question for the foreseeable future.

It was not much of a vessel. But she looked shipshape if one overlooked the scabs of **rust** distributed here-and-there over her dark hull.

Preparations were well under way for departure. There was a lot of scurrying on deck. The gangplank was already unchained and accepting passengers.

The aristocratic Count purchased one ticket from the steamship agent and handed the brown envelope to Gloomy Starr.

"Once you smuggle her on board," he said out of earshot of the girl, "you will hear from a man named Burch. Karl Jon Burch."

"Who is he?" asked Gloomy.

"A contact on the boat. While you will be watching over Miss Hale, he will be watching over you. And we will loiter here to make absolutely certain that you board this rather **rusty** vessel."

Again, the Count offered his charming Continental smile that conveyed superficial warmth and nothing of the genuine article.

"I gitcha," said Gloomy.

The Count grew earnest.

"Nothing must prevent Miss Hale from reaching Brazil safely. Is that fully understood?"

"Completely," said Gloomy. He collected Miss Hale and then piloted her to the baggage area where he intended to acquire a steam trunk. She seemed to go along willingly albeit reluctantly.

After they were gone, the Count left his men on watch and went to a pay telephone. There he dropped a nickel in the slot. Reaching the operator, he said briskly:

"Yes, I would like to be connected to a long-distance party. Collect. Inform the other party that Count Rumpler is calling him."

After providing the operator with the number, the suave gentleman waited patiently while the call was put through. He examined his walking stick and noted a nick in the fine wood. He frowned with unconcealed displeasure.

Eventually the connection was made.

"This is *V-Mann-Fueher* Rumpler," reported the Count whose name was not really 'Rumpler'. "The immediate problem has been resolved. Regrettably, *Haupt-V-Mann Pippel* had to be liquidated. We are preparing to steam for the staging area."

"*Pippel proved to be unreliable,*" suggested the thickly-accented voice coming over the wire.

"For which he has paid the ultimate penalty," the Count returned coldly. "But on a more positive note, I have just sent **the Doc Savage aide named Renny Renwick** to Brazil."

"Excellent," returned the other. "*Are you certain that it is he?*"

"Absolutely certain. He is a long-face hulk of a man with great scarred knuckles. His disguise is good. But not perfect. The truth dawn on me after I had undertaken to hire the brute.

"A man of *Herr* Renwick's size and countenance should think twice before undertaking to pass himself off as anyone else. I have rather adroitly turned his attempt to infiltrate our little band into a wild goose chase which we can employ to lure Doc Savage to South America and so then out of our way."

"*What about the girl?*" the accented voice wanted to know.

"She went along willingly. She does not the true identify of 'Gloomy Starr' as he calls himself."

"*Wunderbar. Miss Honoria Hale will be taken care of. Arrangements will be made at once.*"

"Very good," said the Count crisply. "We will see you at the cay in another day then, *Herr Kapitan.*"

The call was terminated.

XII – The Sick Woman Trick

Honoriam Hale was being taken care of very thoroughly just as the mysterious *Herr Kapitan* had boasted.

After making certain arrangements, Gloomy Starr had smuggled her on board in a steamer trunk purchased with her proportions in mind. When the trunk was delivered to the cabin on the 'B' deck of the *Matador*, Gloomy paid the longshoremen who had set it on the floor and tipped them lavishly.

After they had departed, Bloomy knelt, unlocked the trunk with a brass key, and threw the lid open.

Honoriam Hale was revealed trussed, gagged, and glaring red-faced fury. She kicked at the trunk's lining with both feet.

When Gloomy Starr lifted her out of the receptacle and dropped her into a chair showing no more exertion than if he had picked up a sailor's duffle bag, the red-faced woman's features grew fearfully pale.

The gag was removed. Gloomy grinned.

"Since we are going to be cabin mates," he began, we ought to know more about one another."

Honoriam glared at him. Her blue eyes snapped. But a deep fear lay behind her optical sparking.

"Let's start with why those foreign yeggs want you out of the country so badly," invited Gloomy.

"Why don't you ask them?" Honoriam Hale said flintily.

"Tried that. No soap. It's your turn."

Honoriam Hale (if that was her real name) drew in a long breath. She seemed to be steeling herself for something.

But Gloomy Star was no fool. He sensed what was coming. Before Honoriam could give vent to a cry for help, he clapped his huge hands over her mouth and kept one paw there while he returned the gag to its original position.

Through a tight cloth, Honoriam attempted to give the monstrous pugilist a sharp piece of her mind. But only a *muffled* honking resulted.

"Now, now," clucked Gloomy. "Be a lady."

Honoriam continued her *muffled* tirade.

"Such language," Gloomy murmured.

Apparently, he was a humorist for the woman's vocal exertions could not be understood in any way.

The *Matador* was by this time leaving port. There was the tooting of foghorns and the usual dockside bustle and uproar. The sounds of gurgling as lines were cast off and the hull shifted away from the busy port. Soon the rushing of water came signifying that the steamer was being guided by tugs out to the Narrows and thence into the open Atlantic.

Bloomy went to the porthole and peered out. His cartilage-scarred eyes narrowed. He turned to his captive.

"Long voyage ahead of us. Sure you don't want to unlimber with some palaver?"

The look that came into Honoria's frightened eyes tended toward the blank. Her features were by now dull with defeat.

"Talk turkey," Gloomy clarified.

Honoria shook her head vehemently.

"Something was said about **Doc Savage**. Know him?"

Another head shake came.

"I hear he's bad medicine," Gloomy muttered.

Honoria did not disagree with that opinion.

Gloomy sat down and began making faces that a bulldog might have recognized. He was no beauty. He rubbed his too-perfect nose a few times and pulled on a cauliflower ear.

Abruptly he stood up.

"I think," he offered, "I will avail myself of a promenade of the deck."

Grinning, he added: "You stay put."

As the big man exited the cabin, Honoria stamped a foot in anger!

Gloomy Starr moved to the nearest companionway and ascended to the main deck. Passengers had gathered at the stern and were waving to well-wishers clustered at the dock. It was the usual *bon voyage* ritual.

He made a reconnoiter of the deck, his dark eyes searching faces.

After 20 minutes of this, he failed to recognize anyone and returned to the cabin.

"Not much excitement," he muttered upon his return.

Honoria only glowered at him.

Gloomy Starr may have been many things. But a prophet was not one of them. Not long after his casual statement, a sharp <knocking> came to the door.

He shot up from his chair and went to the panel.

"Who's there?" he growled.

An unfamiliar voice called: "A friend."

"Name?"

"Blitz."

"Don't know you," said Gloomy.

"We have mutual friends."

"Name a few," Gloomy invited.

"Count Rumpler. Pippel. Kolb. Need I go on?"

Gloomy seemed to hesitate ... then threw open the door.

A man entered. It could be seen that he was the opposite of the huge hulk calling himself 'Gloomy Starr'. The new arrival had the slim lithe form of a dancer. Such men are sometimes found in the prizefighting ring in the bantam-weight division.

He sauntered in as if entering his own cabin. Gloomy Starr laid a large obstructing hand against his chest arresting the unwanted visitor's attempt to peer about the curtained room.

"You got a longer handle?" asked Gloomy.

The other looked momentarily confused.

"Eh?"

"Full name?" clarified Gloomy.

The bantam-weight smiled a begrudging inch.

"Bantam Blitz. Ever heard of me?"

"Fighter?"

"A good guess, my man."

He craned his head around the open door and indicated Honoria whose head had been cocked in their direction since the first <knock>.

"Is that her ladyship?"

"Could be," grunted Gloomy closing the portal. "What's it to you? She's my headache."

"Did you really think that the Count would entrust you with her care-and-keeping without someone keeping an eye on you?"

"Makes sense, you put it that way," admitted Gloomy. "But I was told a different name. Burch, it was."

"There is no 'Burch' on the passenger list which I gave the once-over," advised Bantam Blitz.

Gloomy blinked as if not sure what to make of that morsel.

Bantam Blitz walked over to the trussed woman in the chair and examined her critically from several angles.

"I rather doubt," he ventured coolly, "that keeping this dame tied up will be practical all the way to Brazil."

"You got a point," grunted Gloomy.

"Suppose that we make other arrangements than these crude ones," suggested the newcomer.

"I'm all ears," said Gloomy.

Bantam Blitz looked over Gloomy Starr with an appraising glance.

"All muscles is more like it."

"It's how I make my living," said Gloomy rather defensively. "With my muscles."

"I on the other hand," purred bantam Blitz, "prefer to rely upon my wits."

"Maybe we would make a good team at that," suggested Gloomy.

"We can discuss this later," said Blitz thoughtfully. "For now, we must solve the matter at hand."

"Like I said, I'm all ..."

"Ears. Yes, yea. I know," Bantam Blitz said distractedly.

Cupping his chin in one hand, he mused: "I suddenly have what they call a brain storm."

"Yeah?"

Blitz laughed shortly. "She is desperately ill."

"Eh?" Gloomy appeared puzzled. "How come?"

"Just wait here, friend. I will be back shortly."

Bantam Blitz left the cabin and was gone some 15 minutes. He came back smiling wide carrying a small bottle in one hand.

"Where'd you get that stuff?" Gloomy wanted to know.

"From the medicine chest of the ship's doctor," explained Blitz. "It is an ordinary opiate."

"Dope, eh?"

"Exactly. We will put her to sleep. A nice long restful slumber."

Gloomy <blinked>. "Isn't that dangerous? What if she don't wake up?"

"But she will. I am an expert in administering such dosages."

Gloomy looked skeptical.

"After we get her ashore, what then?" he growled.

"We put her in one of the Brazilian hospitals."

"Just like that?"

"Once we have this bothersome woman committed to a doctor's care, no one will pay any attention to her ravings," Bantam Blitz said with satisfaction.

During the exchange, the clouded blue eyes of Honoria Hale jumped from speaker to speaker. Her pretty brow grew more worried with each passing moment. It was clear to see that the conversation did not sit well with her.

Neither Gloomy Starr nor Bantam Blitz gave her much consideration, however. They were arguing over the advisability of such a risky ruse.

"Never work," Gloomy was insisting shaking his huge head.

"Have you a better solution?" inquired Bantam.

Gloomy sealed his thick lips by way of silently admitting that he did not.

"It's your show," the horsey pugilist said at last.

Grinning, Bantam Blitz produced a hypodermic syringe. He removed its protective cork cap exposing the gleaming needle.

The bottle of opiate was likewise corked. He jammed the needle into this and slowly extracted the liquid contents until the hypo reservoir was filled.

Setting the bottle aside, Bantam Blitz approached the woman who began stamping her feet in frustrated fury. She rocked her chair from side-to-side. Gloomy moved in and stabilized the chair, preventing an upset.

Seizing one arm, Bantam Blitz prepared to discharge the contents of the syringe.

The woman attempted a final scream of protest. She began chewing on her gag in a frantic effort to remove it.

Something like concern then warped the thick features of the towering Gloomy Starr.

"Hold up," he growled seizing the wrist of the smaller man.

Bantam Blitz glowered. "What now?"

"I'm thinking maybe you aren't any sawbones."

"Guilty. So what of it?"

"Suppose that dose you got there is too strong."

The small man shrugged negligently. His smile was cool and unconcerned.

"Suppose it is?"

"My orders are to keep her alive," Gloomy pointed out.

"And my orders are to keep her from causing trouble," snapped the other shaking off Gloomy's grip.

"You won't kill anybody!" Gloomy exploded.

"I damn well might!" Blitz snarled.

Gloomy whispered: "Murder ain't nothin' to monkey with."

"Since when did you grow a conscience?" sneered the other. "I understand you already did away with one wren this week."

"That was necessary," returned Gloomy defensively. "There wasn't any other way to get the thing done. I was thinkin' that on a tub like this one, accomplishin' the deed and getting' away with it is a horse of a different hue."

The crafty eyes of Bantam Blitz narrowed. The hulking pugilist was making sense of a sort.

"Maybe she wants to talk now," Gloomy suggested, his dark eyes switching to the fearful girl and back to the fuming Bantam Blitz.

"Maybe she'll spill her guts and fill your ears, too," the smaller man insinuated sharply. "Is that what you're pushing for?"

This time it was Gloomy's turn to shrug massive shoulders.

"We'll find that out once we tear off the gag."

The huge specialist in fisticuffs reached out a scarred paw to tug at the well-chewed but still intact gag.

Bantam Blitz stepped in blocking Gloomy Starr.

"In a minute you're going to push me too far, big guy."

"I don't like to be pushed around, Blitz. It that's not a made-up name."

"Do you want trouble?" snarled the small man.

Gloomy drew himself up to his full height. Which was impressive.

"It won't be the first time I've had it."

They glared at each other. There was something in Gloomy's huge size and the fantastic self-assurance with which he conducted himself that was menacing. Bantam Blitz abruptly shrugged.

"You have brains in that muscle," Blitz said. "Brains are the only commodity in the World that could be worth a million dollars-a-pound or not a thin dime. Once you learn to take orders, you'll be valuable."

"Then what do you say? Suppose we quit getting into each other's hair."

"Suits me."

But neither of the 2 strange hard men made a move to shake hands.

Honoriam Hale had been watching this tense exchange with round eyes. Her fear was palpable.

Gloomy Starr now reached out and removed the gag in her mouth. He did so with surprising gentleness.

"Out with it."

Honoriam hesitated.

"Snappy," encouraged Gloomy growing belligerent. His well-scarred face was turning into a storm cloud with dark eyes.

"You want to know what this is all about?" breathed Honoria.

"That measures the matter," grunted Gloomy.

Honoria's eyes went to Bantam Blitz.

"But this other man does not wish me to speak. So I dare not."

"Maybe he's curious also," suggested Gloomy coolly.

"He is with the Count. He will kill me if I talk."

"That so?" demanded Gloomy of Blitz. "You'll croak this frail lass if she yaps?"

Bantam Blitz seemed to waver.

"Let's hear your song," he said suddenly addressing Honoria.

The girl maintained a pensive silence.

Gloomy gave her an ungentle shove saying: "Come on, sister. Spill. Spill!"

That did the trick.

"Perhaps it is time to clear the air after all, " she breathed.

Gloomy grunted: "I was wondering when you would see your way clear."

"I overheard something awful, truly horrifying, while I was with those horrid men," announced Honoria. "I must confess that what they said convinced me that something pretty terrible is transpiring."

"Just what did they say?" prompted Gloomy, his horsey face betraying no outward perturbation.

"Word to the effect that the life of no one man, no dozen men, or score of men were worthy to stand in the way of their destiny.

Gloomy absorbed this without comment. Bantam Blitz seemed to become acutely interested.

"Did it make sense to you?" demanded the latter.

Honoria shook her head.

"No. It did not ... by itself. But there was more. Someone had mentioned somebody else by name. A very important name. Then there were the whispers about the U-Men ..."

She hesitated.

"Go on, sister," encouraged Gloomy. "Let's have it all in a nice bundle."

The 2 men had been so absorbed in Honoria Hale's recital that they failed to pay attention to anything other than the anxious woman. That proved to be their mistake.

For furtive lurkers had begun silently assembling outside the cabin door. They made their move then.

Glass broke! It was the porthole window looking out on the starboard lower deck. The sudden commotion was followed by another shattering sound.

Bantam Blitz swung about, his fists coming up defensively.

Gloomy Starr's massive head swiveled. His dark eyes took in the broken porthole and then dropped to the floor. There a broken glass bottle was disgorging a quantity of billowing *vapor*.

"Gas!" Bantam Blitz exclaimed.

Honoria screamed shrilly: *"They're trying to kill me so I don't talk!"*

"We gotta get outta here!" Gloomy barked.

The cabin quite naturally offered only one means of egress. The door giving out onto the lower deck. No attempt was being made to batter it down.

"They want to panic us," hissed Blitz. "Stampede us into their ambush!"

Gloomy Starr nodded wordlessly. His eyes grew crafty.

"You first," he suggested.

Whitish *fumes* were spreading fast.

From pockets, the 2 uneasy allies produced what appeared to be bags of cellophane. They drew these over their heads. The transparent envelopes snapped about their necks with elastic bands sewn into the open ends. These made serviceable gas mask even if the air supply was necessarily limited with what was enclosed about their heads.

A clasp knife came out and made short work of the ropes tying the girl to the chair. Gloomy wielded the blade. Picking up Honoria Hale, he set her atop one beefy shoulder and clamped her nose and mouth shut to protect her lungs from the fast-flowing fumes.

Plucking an intricate machine-pistol from an underarm holster, Bantam Blitz made for the door. Unlocking it, he cracked the panel and slipped the weapon's muzzle out through the crack. Depressing the firing lever, he began jerking the weapon this way and that way.

The pistol shuttled, moaned, and ejected brass cartridges like a slot machine disgorging pennies. There were a lot of these clattering to the floor.

Outside, men began howling. There came a commotion consistent with a frantic scramble of retreat.

Yanking the door open, Bantam Blitz thrust out his head craning about. It was a mistake.

Someone threw a blackjack. It flew true. The weighted portion struck one of Blitz's temples. He flopped backwards, his unusual pistol falling from nerveless fingers.

Gloomy Starr charged in and pulled the small man back where bullets could not finish the job of vanquishing him.

A man's voice yelled.

"You in there! Give up the girl!"

"And if I don't?" bellowed back Gloomy.

"We have hand grenades. And the firm intention of using them."

"If I give up the girl, you'll use 'em anyway," the pugilist countered.

"You may take that risk. Or you can die with her."

"Who are you, brother?"

"Call me Schmidt. Or Burch if you prefer. ... Now do your deciding. We have no time to waste on indecision."

Gloomy struggled slightly to keep Honoria Hale perched atop his shoulder. She was wriggling and writhing frantically, feet kicking. The *fumes* were beginning to get into their eyes. They smarted as if stung by ammonia.

Gloomy knew that the passing seconds were precious.

"I'm gonna carry the girl out and lay her on deck by the rail," he called out.

"Do it then."

Gloomy eased out. A human monster who cautiously peered both way before emerging completely.

He set the girl down against the rail and went back to help the insensate Bantam Blitz. He fully expected a hand grenade to come bouncing down the deck.

He was not disappointed. One did. The round black object bounced once.

Moving with amazing *speed* for one so hulking, Gloomy Starr showed how he had earned his reputation in the ring.

Reversing direction, he kicked the grenade. It went flying between 2 uprights supporting the rail and then into the water.

The sound of the explosion was not loud. Nor was the spurt of water produced by its detonation remarkable.

But Gloomy had no time to absorb that. Because another grenade came sailing is way.

This one he raced to meet. He caught it on the fly and pitched it out to sea. It was an amazing catch worthy of a professional baseball infielder. The pugilist was forced to drop to the deck because this one, set to a shorter timer, detonated before it hit water. A **blast** that produced grayish-black smoke mixed with fire made his cauliflower ears hurt.

By this time, the ship was full of commotion. The crew had been roused. A bell rang. Feet pounded up-and-down companion steps as the ship's complement searched out the source of the battle.

At that moment, another glass bottle like the one that had broken inside the cabin came hurtling Gloomy's way.

He lunged for it and captured it in both hands. But it was a near thing. He had to dive for the clumsy projectile like a football player attempting a flying tackle.

When the second bottle came, it scooted along the deck. It was not thrown but shoved. It slid along the varnished wood very smartly. Gloomy's hands were full. Intercepting it was out of the question.

A bullet came along and shattered the glass container before Gloomy Starr could retreat to the relative safety of the cabin.

As it happened (and this was purely by chance), glass fragments raked his cellophane gas mask rupturing it. Big hands sought to clutch at the tears and seal them by hand pressure.

But there were too many. The eye-stinging whitish *vapor* swiftly seeped in.

Nearby, the brunette woman was in the middle of screaming when suddenly the scream turned into a high howling *laughter*.

Hearing this wholly unexpected sound, Gloomy Starr wheeled in its direction. Then he began *laughing*, too.

The pugilist was still emitting sounds of unbridled mirth when he struck the deck, his gas mask coming apart in his clutching hands.

Hard-faced men swept in and seized Honoria who was no longer laughing. She appeared to have lost consciousness.

They bore her away around a corner to another cabin whose door snapped shut before the first converging crew members arrived to investigate the raucous sounds of combat.

XX

Next ...



... Honoria Hale is Gang-Impregnated !

XIII – The Corner

Honoriam Hale awoke in an entirely different passenger cabin.

She was no longer trussed to a chair. But cords were wound around both wrists and ankles and the tight gag still crowded her mouth.

Correction, she realized when she fell to examining her wrists. These were different cords and a fresh gag. It all came rushing back to her. The 2 men, attack upon the cabin, and her loss of consciousness.

Curiously, the last think she could recall was screaming wildly and then, paradoxically, bursting into a fit of laughter.

The laughing was strange, bizarre. She did not laugh because she thought her predicament was funny. Quite the contrary, she had been terrified. And yet she had laughed. Then she had evidently blacked out.

Honoriam could not explain it. Not even to herself.

By a combination of wriggling and shifting, she managed to maneuver herself so that she was seated on the edge of the bed on which she now lay. This gave her a clear view of her face in a nearby mirror.

This showed 2 things. That her gag was fresh (this one was tan while the other had been white). And there were a few gray hairs in her tousled brunette head.

This latter was probably a figment of her imagination. But that was how Honoriam Hale felt about her present situation.

Standing up, she decided, might be achieve. But progressing with her ankles bound together was probably not a smart idea. Nevertheless, she attempted the feat.

Hopping in place proved to be the only sensible method of locomotion. Honoriam managed to jump 3times before she lost control of her equilibrium and fell smack on her face.

Looking about, she came to a startling realization. The cabin was nothing like the one she had previously occupied against her will. This one was more modern, its appointments tasteful in the way that the other had not been. She began to question if she was not on an entirely different boat than before. The very thought made her wild.

She swore through the gag for more than 2 minutes. This did not nothing to alleviate her predicament. But she did feel slightly better.

While she was contemplating her unfortunate situation, a door jumped open. The cabin was a "double" with a connecting door.

A man she did not recognize banged in. He took one look at her and gave out a holler.

"She is awake!"

This brought another man, also unknown to Honoria. This second arrival began muttering.

"I understood that the *fraulein* was supposed to be out for a day-or-more."

"Well, she isn't. Let's get her back on the bed."

The 2 strangers caught her up. One at the shoulder and the other by her feet. They actually gave her a couple of hammock-like swings before they let go.

Honoria sailed a few feet and bounced onto the bed and nearly bounding off it again. The mattress was that new. *Muffled* imprecations came from her gagged mouth.

"In case you are wondering," one of the men said, "we are with the Count. I am 'Mr. Schmidt' and this is 'Mr. Schwartz'. You understand that these are just names for convenience, *ja?*"

Honoria frowned. One of the men must have been an unconscious mind-reader because he seemed to understand the frown.

"Those two who had you before this were fakes," Mr. Schwartz explained.

Honoria's frown deepened.

"The big one who called himself 'Gloomy' was Renny Renwick, a **Doc Savage** aide," added Mr. Schmidt. "We don't know who the other one was. But we got you loose from them and now you're going stay under wraps until the Big Thing is accomplished."

At mention of that, Honoria squeezed her eyes shut.

The 2 men departed ...

... to return shortly carrying a rather bulky steamy trunk which had evidently been stored below in the ship's baggage hold. Honoria Hale watched curiously as this trunk was opened.

Inside was much wiring, black insulation panels, knobs, dials, and many batteries taped together in groups. Not until Schmidt donned a telephone headset and seated himself where he could <tap> a key attached to the apparatus did the young woman realize the trunk held a portable radio transmitter and receiver.

Schmidt was undoubtedly going to communicate with the other members of his organization. He did not speak but instead began <tapping> out a message telegraph-style. Honoria watched him anxiously as he <clicked> off switches and hung up the radio headset.

"What did you learn?" the other asked anxiously.

The first man was perspiring freely, obviously worried about something.

"**Doc Savage** has been tricked," he reported. "He was led to believe that Renny Renwick booked passage on a different boat than this one. One whose destination is Buenos Aires in Argentina. This message was sent to his headquarters by telegram. **Savage** will no doubt hop into one of his big planes and go chasing after that boat to assist his man."

"Which leaves us in the clear?"

"Precisely."

The other looked doubtful.

"I'll be damned if I see how **Doc Savage** can be taken in so readily. That Yankee *supermann* is supposed to be foolproof."

"**Savage** won't dare risk not following up on the message," the other insisted. "He understands something very large is in the wind. The Count saw to that in his attempt to frustrate Horetta Hale's foolish efforts to draw him into the matter."

"Brains did the job."

The other nodded.

"The Count and his associates are very brainy," he added. "It is regrettable that word of Horetta Hale's escape from that island caused this other one to attempt to reach *der bronzemann*. For **Doc Savage** has the reputation of a lightning bolt. Sometimes one hears the warning thunder and other times not. But either way, when **Doc Savage** strikes, he does so with the same irresistible ferocity."

The other man nodded somberly.

"Thor-the-thunder-god and his war hammer are no less fearsome by reputation."

Honorita Hale took in this byplay with a great deal of interest.

First, because she was surprised by the terror which mere mention of this man of mystery **Doc Savage** had produced in the unscrupulous pair.

And secondly, she was seeing symptoms of a disagreement between her captors. A condition which she hoped might escalate and so draw attention her own plight.

A hot argument now ensued. Schmidt pointed out jeeringly that Doc Savage was not even upon the trail. And furthermore, that the *Man of Bronze* probably did not even suspect that Honorita Hale had been on her way to enlist his aid.

"How do we know Savage doesn't know she was coming to see him?" Schwartz countered.

"We will find out about that, Herr Schwartz," Schmidt stated grimly.

The tall dark man with the guttural voice came over to Honoria. He glared at her then informed:

"If you try to scream, *fraulein*, you will promptly receive a knife in your pretty throat."

Schmidt produced a pocket knife which had a 4-inch blade that <snicked> into view when a button was pressed. He put the cold dull back of the blade to Honoria's throat and made a few other threatening gestures by way of impressing her.

When the gag was removed, the young woman did not cry out. She was convinced that these men were thorough villains who would not hesitate to slit her throat to preserve their own skins.

"Were you on your way to enlist the aid of this **Doc Savage**?" Schmidt questioned.

"Yes," Honoria answered promptly.

She was surprised that she answered at all. It was not her intention to do so. But there was not much use denying it. And she wanted to worry her captors anyway. But still, the word 'Yes' jumped off her tongue unbidden. It was strange.

"What made you think he would believe your story, *fraulein*?" Schmidt persisted.

"I have my reasons," said the young woman frostily.

Schmidt scowled.

"I will put the question in another way. Have you been in communication with this **Doc Savage**? Does he know of your existence and your concerns?"

Honoria said grimly: "You will find out the answer to that in the course of time."

Which was the truth albeit evasive.

"The knife, *fraulein*," Schmidt warned holding the blade almost against her rather regally thin nose. "You have not gotten hold of him. You were going to employ a telegram to send a message.

Honoria glared into the gravelly-voiced Schmidt's eyes and requested: "I'll bargain with you."

"How, *fraulein*?" asked Schmidt.

"Tell me what has happened to Hornetta hale," she requested.

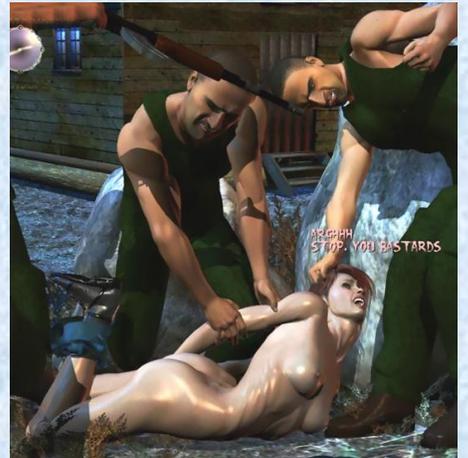
Schmidt spread his hands and murmured: "Most impossible to say, *fraulein*."

"Then you can go take a flying jump into the Atlantic Ocean!" Honoria snapped. "I am not talking anymore."

And she did not.

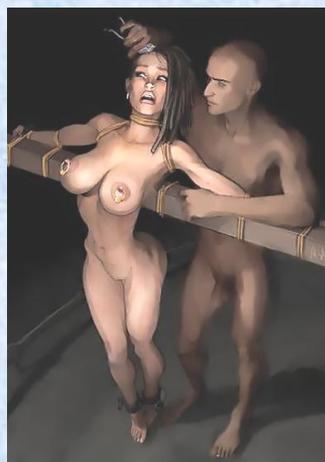
"Shit!" Schmidt laughed. "You wish!"

She struggled as they tore the clothes off her voluptuous body.



They <slapped> her around a little as she struggled in vain.

"Damn you bastards!"



"C'mon, baby. Don't be so shy. Give your daddies some luvins."



With their crude lovemaking attempts concluded, they let her fall to the ground.



"Now spread those long legs of yours, girlie!" Schwartz commanded.



She *yelped* like a stuck pig-slut as a steel-hard penis penetrated her pussy.



"Damn ... you ... to hell ...!" she panted as he vigorously fucked her.



"See this?" Schmidt asked waving his rejuvenated **penis**. "Kiss it. Make love to it. It is your new Master."

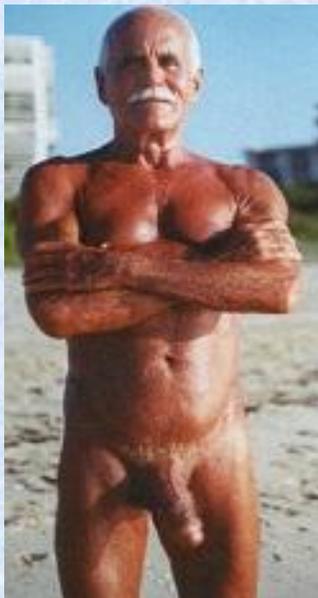


She coughed and gagged as the smelly **dick** started raping her **mouth**.



"That's so fucking beautiful," he laughed. "You are quite the filthy **slut**, you know."

But Schwartz wanted something other than her sassy mouth. He wanted her bitchy stuck-up **ASS!**



It was bad enough before in her vagina. But this really HURT!



"O-h-h-h-h ..." she moaned and cried. "O-h-h-h OWWWW! ... o-h-h-h ..."

But he didn't pay any attention. "Ugh! ... Gr-r-r-r!!! Fuckin' ... whore!!!"



2 COCKS UP A WHORE'S ASS



They were congratulating themselves on the woman's ravishment. But they still weren't satisfied ...



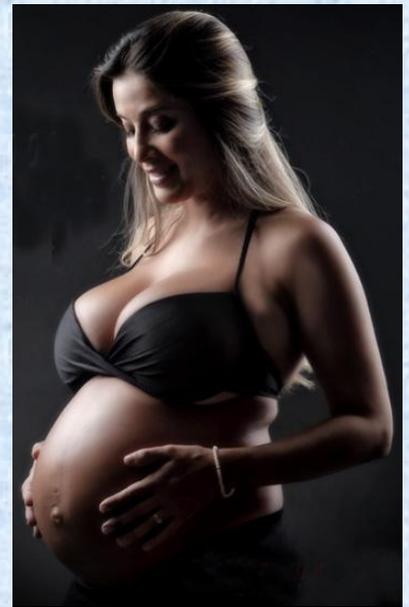
"How bad does it hurt, **Bitch**?" they mocked.



In a Parallel Universe ...



SODOMIZED WHORE



[Impregnated Slut]

"You aren't going to get anything more out of her," Schwartz muttered finally.

"Ja," Schmidt agreed. "She has the nature of a clam."

"This **Doc Savage** angle isn't something to trifle with," Schwartz warned. "I think we had better put the problem up to *Die Mannner Unter dem Meer*."

"Yes," Schmidt repeated. "**The Men Under The Sea** will know what to do."

One of the men went to the steamer trunk and opened it, again disclosing the portable radio transmitter and receiver. He warmed the tubes and snatched up a radio headset.

Honorina did not know Morse code and hence had no idea of what was being sent and received. She could only watch the expression on Schmidt's rather dark features, a procedure which told her little.

He finally took off the receivers. He was smiling strangely.

"Good!" he chuckled. "Good! The Count will take care of **Doc Savage** just in case the young lady did communicate with him. *Herr Kapitan* himself will transmit them."

"But what about the *verdammte* dame herself?" Schwartz growled.

"Our ingenious Leader suggest a most effective method of silencing her," Schmidt leered.

Seized with sudden horror, Honorina Hale threw back her head and started a *scream* of utter fright. A frenzied *shriek* for aid!

Leaping swiftly, Schmidt managed to smack a hand down over her mouth to cut off the cry.

He produced a glass ampule from a pocket. He broke the long neck off with a snap of his thumb.

Holding his own breath, he waved the tiny vial under Honorina's quivering nostrils. A tiny thread of whitish *vapor* licked out. This was disturbed by the woman's escaping air.

When she inhaled, the *vaporous* tendril was drawn into her open nose. She fought against its unfamiliar smell. Very quickly, her eyes began to water and her shoulders started shaking. Her captor held the distressed woman still for a time and then released her.

When Honorina Hale stood free, the reason for her convulsions became apparent. She had been laughing uproariously. The hilarity which had seized her was an unpleasant unnerving thing to hear.

She *laughed* and *laughed* and then keeled over as if expiring from uncontrolled laughter.

Holding their breaths, Schmidt and Schwartz rushed in to catch her in the act of falling on her open-mouthed face.

XIV – Rude Awakening

When Gloomy Starr returned to consciousness, his dark eyes snapped open and his rather large and shaggy head shifted about. The pugilist's lips parted and he seemed about to say something ...

But he caught himself before he could release the utterance whatever it might have been.

He was in the steamer *Matador's* infirmary. Next to him sprawled on another hospital bed lay the man who called himself Bantam Blitz. He was not yet awake.

Rolling out of bed, Gloomy went over to the undersized man and gave him a quick-but-very-professional physical examination for wounds. Finding only a significant bump on one temple, he seemed to relax.

Then the pugilist noticed the ship's wall calendar. It was a day later than he remembered. The sight of the date seemed to hold the man transfixed for quite a long time.

Once more, Gloomy's lips parted and he caught himself before any sound could emerge. With an effort, the human hulk turned the unspoken thought into music making a low whistle of astonishment instead of what was about to come out of his rangy mouth.

He went in search of the ship's doctor.

Gloomy did not have to search far. Rounding a corner, he all-but-bumped into the other. The glum-faced medical man was just returning to the infirmary.

"Good. You are awake," said the medico. "I had begun to question if you would."

"What happened?" demanded the pugilist.

"You missed all the excitement. Or most of it, rather, since I understand that you were in the thick of it when all Hades first broke loose."

"Let's hear it," encouraged Gloomy.

"You along with your friend were discovered outside your cabin dead to the world but still breathing. There had obviously been a battle. A very serious one. In fact, we are putting into Bermuda to see the authorities there. This is a British ship as you may know."

Gloomy nodded.

"There was a girl named Honoria Hale," he said. "What became of her?"

The doctor <blinked>.

"I have been going over the passenger list with the Captain with the intention of accounting for the missing. I do not recall that name."

"She was smuggled on board," explained Gloomy.

"This is very serious. Especially in wartime," clucked the medico. "We have missing passengers. During the night, a lifeboat was commandeered and an unknown number of persons went into it. This was discovered only this morning. Most of the missing are from 2 adjoining cabins. But none of the unaccounted-for passengers was a woman, however."

"I think," said Gloomy grimly, "that we had better talk with the Captain."

The Captain of the *Matador* wasn't very happy to speak with the hulking prizefighter. In point of fact, he was downright irate as he demanded answers. Straight ones.

"What-the-bloody-hell went on here yesterday?"

"A group of men attempted to kidnap a woman from my cabin," replied Gloomy.

The Captain placed hard fists on either hip and stuck out his jaw.

"You had a woman in your cabin, did you?"

The ship's physician inserted: "The name of 'Honorina Hale' was mentioned by this man."

This brought a dark glower to the Skipper's weathered features.

"No such passenger on this ship. Can you explain that?"

"She was an unregistered passenger," admitted Gloomy.

The Captain looked the huge tower of a man calling himself 'Gloomy Starr' up-and-down, canting his head so far to one side that he almost lost his captain's cap.

"You appeared to have recovered," he appraised. "How do you feel?"

"Fit. But confused," said Gloomy. "It appears that I have a lost a day of my life."

"You may lose more than a mere day. Since you appear to be in good fettle, I am consigning you to the ship's brig."

"Perhaps it is time to make full explanations," said Gloomy.

"Make them then!" the officer bit back. "But you are still going to the brig regardless."

Instead of replying, Gloomy Starr reached up and began peeling away the scar tissue that crisscrossed his rugged features. He removed his cauliflower ears disclosing outwardly normal aural appendages. Horsey false teeth came out of his mouth.

As pieces of his unlovely countenance came off, more-and-more the true face of the man who had been calling himself 'Gloomy Starr' came to light. His pasty pale complexion revealed a healthy **bronzed** hue beneath.

The disguise was excellent. Not until dark glass shells were removed from the eyeballs revealing irises that glinted with myriad golden *flakes* did the truth become evident.

"I recognize you!" chirped the medico. "**Doc Savage!**"

"My word!" exclaimed the ship's captain. "The **Man of Bronze** in the flesh! So who is the other man we found with you?"

"My aide Long Tom Roberts who booked passage on this ship under the pseudonym of 'Bantam Blitz'," imparted Doc.

"Do you care to reveal the details of the matter you are obviously investigating?" asked the befuddled Captain with more than a trace of respect cutting through his British reserve.

"That matter is confidential," returned Doc. "But I am prepared to reimburse the shipping line for all damages."

"That will be more than appreciated, I am sure," said the Captain. "But there is still the awkward matter of answering to British authorities in Bermuda."

"It is vitally important that the lost lifeboat be found," advised Doc Savage.

"Every effort is being made to locate it," the Captain assured him. "As a matter of fact, we have been steaming in circles all morning."

The **Bronze Man** asked to use the ship's radio. This permission was promptly granted.

Taking of the radio room, Doc tuned to a frequency used by his men for private communications and began speaking into the microphone.

"Doc Savage calling Monk Mayfair. Come in, Monk."

A squeaky voice came back: "*Monk speakin'. Where are you, Doc?*"

On the steamer Matador heading toward Bermuda."

"We're not far behind you. I got word to hightail it to Buenos Aires. But no explanation why."

"It was a ruse," explained Doc. "Desired to lure you to Argentina."

"Well, it didn't work. The telegram didn't have our usual code so we knew it was phony. It was Long Tom who radioed us to head south by boat and wait for word from you."

"Who is with you?" asked Doc.

"Ham and ..."

Monk hesitated.

"And who?" pressed Doc.

The hairy chemist lowered his childlike voice.

"Pat's with us. And she's madder than the proverbial hornet. Says you took her up in a plane and pretended to drop her into the Long Island Sound."

"It was to preserve her life."

Ham Brooks came on the air saying: *"You put her under with one of your hypo needles and left her in a plane practically scuttled off Long Island. When she came to, she reclaimed her own bus and came seeking you at Headquarters."*

Doc sighed. "This was all explained to Pat before she was rendered unconscious."

"Pat thinks you just wanted her to miss the party," piped up Monk.

"I wish that my cousin would take up a nice safe hobby," Doc said fervently. "Such as climbing Mount Everest or diving for sharks."

Then Pat's angry voice jumped out of the radio receiver.

"No thanks to you, I missed out whatever I missed out on! And just what did I miss?" she asked, her voice changing from wrathful to intensely curious.

"You missed out on a number of hand grenades blowing up," stated Doc dryly.

"How are your ears?"

"Red," admitted the **Bronze Man**. "My participation in this did not go as planned."

"Try explaining that part."

Doc said: "In my guise as Gloomy Starr, I joined up with the group and took possession of a woman named Honoria Hale. You met her, Pat."



"I'll say I did!" flared Pat Savage. *"She threw me to the wolves so-to-speak. And Honoria is not Hornetta, by the way."*

"They appear to resemble one another rather closely," stated Doc.

He continued his recitation of recent events.

"Earlier in the week, I had radioed Long Tom to return to the States and remain in hiding in his private experimental laboratory. He did so. Once I had custody of Honoria Hale and had some privacy, I telephone him with further instructions. In disguise, Long Tom booked passage on the *Matador*. Then he barged in on my cabin pretending to be one of the gang. We faked an argument with me taking Honoria's part. This way, we thought she might divulge what she knew of the situation to 'Gloomy Starr'."

"And did she?"

"Very little. But what she did reveal was alarming."

"I'm listening."

"It would be better if you went in search of a lifeboat carrying Honoria Hale and her abductors," directed Doc. "They have left this vessel."

"It's a doggone big ocean!" muttered Monk.

"The other gang members were supposed to sail south on the liner *Caribbulla*. It is possible that the lifeboats are simply waiting in the Atlantic until that ship happens along."

"So you want us to find the Caribbulla?"

"Or the lifeboat," said Doc.

"How is Long Tom?" inserted Ham.

"He has yet to awaken."

"How long were you two asleep?" asked Monk.

"Almost a day," admitted Doc.

"That doesn't sound reasonable."

"It is not reasonable. And what is more, before I lost consciousness I began laughing."

Pat broke in. *"You? Laugh? I would expect to see the stone Presidents on Mount Rushmore crack a smile before you burst out in hilarity. Why, the Sphinx would giggle before you would."*

"It's the truth," stated Doc defensively.

Pat's tone grew intrigued. *"What was so funny?"*

"Nothing," said Doc.

"Now that is funny. You laughing without any reason, I mean," added Pat.

"I do not think so," said Doc Savage frankly.

"One thing is deucedly clear," inserted Ham Brooks. *"This affair is becoming very complicated."*

"Complicated is a rather mild word for recent developments," replied the *Man of Bronze*.

Doc Savage returned to the ship's infirmary and found the *Matador's* doctor examining Long Tom Roberts aka 'Bantam Blitz'.

"He has not yet awakened," the medical man told him.

The **bronze** giant bent over the slender form. He lifted each eyelid in turn, checked Long Tom's pulse at the wrist, and performed other tests.

Indicating the egg-sized lump discoloring Long Tom's left temple, the doctor said: "There's what put him out."

"A flung blackjack accomplished that," supplied Doc. "But after he fell unconscious, Long Tom inhaled a *vapor* that worsened his condition."

"I take it that you inhaled the same potent brew?"

Doc nodded grimly.

"The only reason for my shaking it off so quickly can be attributed to my more robust constitution."

"This man does not appear to have been very healthy from the start. He shows signs of acute anemia and severe malnourishment if not tuberculosis."

Doc Savage corrected the medico's hasty diagnosis.

"Long Tom Roberts has never fallen ill in all the time I have known him."

He took a dab of Long Tom's forearm and gave it a <pinch>. The slender man did not respond to the pain if he felt any.

"How do you yourself feel?" asked the physician.

"Peculiar. Although that sensation is fading."

"Peculiar in what way?"

"Peculiar in that the last thing that transpired before I lost consciousness was that I began laughing without cause."

"How very odd. Do you think that you inhaled a form of laughing gas?"

Doc did not immediately reply but instead asked: "Did you administer smelling salts to this man?"

The doctor nodded.

"To both of you. But without result, obviously."

From a pocket the big **bronze** man took out a tiny vial and broke the stem. He waved the ampule under Long Tom's nose.

This brought immediate results. The man roused and began shaking his head as if shrugging off a powerful spell.

"What is that?" asked the doctor.

"A concoction of my own devising," returned Doc without elaborating further.

Long Tom sat up, <blinked>, and peered around. One pale hand went to his stricken temple. He <winced>.

"How long was I out?" he demanded in a querulous tone of voice.

"Nearly a day."

Long Tom stared.

"I am not joking," stated Doc. "After the blackjack knocked you out, there was a battle during which another bottle of a mysterious *vapor* was hurled at us."

Long Tom made a face. "What was so mysterious about it? It smelled of methane."

"Once the fumes entered my nostrils," Doc told him quietly, "I began laughing uncontrollably."

"That's not like you," remarked Long Tom sliding off his bed.

"Almost a day passed before I woke up here beside you," elaborated Doc.

Long Tom felt of the *throbbing* knob discoloring his temple.

"I take it they made off with the girl we tried to bamboozle with our play-acting?"

"All departed the ship in the night," replied Doc. "Efforts are being undertaken to locate the lifeboat they used to escape in."

"In that case, our entire charade was a profound bust," groaned Long Tom. "We don't know any more about these crazy shenanigans than before."

"On the contrary," corrected Doc, "we know that something terrible is in progress."

"But what?" snapped Long Tom.

He stood not very tall once he was on his feet. He was on the lean side very slender. His hair and skin possessed a pallor for which a medical man might prescribe a week in the Sun fortified with plenty of orange juice.

But as Doc Savage revealed, Long Tom had rarely (if ever) taken ill. In fact, he was an absolute terror in a fight even if he had been unceremoniously knocked out early during the prior night's battle. His unhealthy looks were the result of long hours spent toiling in a cellar laboratory where he often conducted experiments.

Long Tom was the electrical engineer of the **Bronze Man's** tiny band of experts. He was an electrical wizard of the first order. Those who knew him half-expected the slender experimenter to simply <snap> his fingers and produce *sparks*. Long Tom had worked with Edison and Steinmetz in his day.

"What's our next move?" he asked Doc.

"This ship is putting into Bermuda where we are to be questioned by British authorities."

Long Tom squared his jaw. "Can't you pull a little 'weight' on them?"

"Ordinarily, yes. But this is wartime. We will have to submit to British interrogation until they are satisfied. Monk and Ham are following on the *Stormalong*."

"I thought all of our ships and planes were destroyed in the fire at our warehouse hangar."

"Most were," said Doc. "But some prove salvageable. Our boats were held in a water-filled basin that protected them from complete destruction. I had the *Stormalong* rebuilt at great expense."

"What about the other members of the gang? The ones on the steamer behind us?"

"For the moment, we will allow them to think that they are not under suspicion by the *Caribbulla's* crew," Doc said. "The liner is no doubt actively searching for that missing lifeboat as they would be expected to do. The captain had been previously instructed not to hinder the Count and his men unless their hand was forced."

"You sound very confident of your influence over the other ship's captain," inserted the physician.

"Doc Savage owns the steamer company," supplied Long Tom applying an icepack to his injured temple. The lump appeared to be going down.

"Oh," said the medico.

Not an hour later, a radio man <knocked> on the door of Doc's cabin which had been repaired during the latter's unfortunate convalescence from the mystery *vapor*.

During that period of time, Doc Savage had removed the last of his 'Gloomy Starr' disguise and stood revealed in his normal state.

The transformation was astounding. No one could have ever connected the 2 individuals.

Bits of broken glass had been retrieved for him. Doc had been studying the remnants of the shattered bottles which had contained the liquid which had *vaporized* with such volatile and unexpected (not to mention unfortunate) consequences.

He was handicapped by a lack of specialized equipment. It was a regrettable result of inhabiting the personality of Gloomy Starr.

Long Tom asked: "Make anything of it?"

Doc shook his head somberly. He had sniffed the shards. But other than a *whiff* of something suggesting methane, he got nothing out of the procedure.

Long Tom murmured: "Too bad that Monk wasn't here. He always lugs that portable chemical laboratory with him everywhere he goes."

"When we rendezvous with Monk and the others," said Doc, "we will subject these specimens to a rigorous analysis."

A <knocking> interrupted.

When Long Tom opened the cabin door for the radioman, the latter declared:

"Mr. Monk Mayfair is on the wireless and wishes to speak with you, Mr. Savage."

"Thank you," said Doc following the man to the radio room.

The apish chemist was excited! His boyishly squeaky voice made the radio all but jump.

"We found that lifeboat. Empty.

"No sign of the former passengers?"

"Nothin'. In fact, the thing was overturned. I had to get into the water and flip it over to make sure it was empty."

"Strange."

"Either they had a mishap," Monk ventured, "or they got picked up and tried to scuttle the boat."

"Meet us in Bermuda," directed Doc.

The **Bronze Man** next radioed the liner *Caribbulla*. The captain came on and reported.

"All quiet, Mr. Savage. The passengers we were requested to keep an eye on have done nothing out of the ordinary."

"Continue on your way," said Doc. "When you near Bermuda, put into Hamilton Harbour. Do not announce this change in course until the last possible moment. Make reasonable excuses to allay any suspicion. We will meet you at the shipping pier."

"Yes, Sir" said the other captain crisply.

Doc replaced the microphone.

Long Tom tugged at an oversized ear. "The Count and his men are sure going to be surprised to see us."

"Especially since they were led to believe that Renny Renwick was the one who infiltrated their gang," added Doc.

"Is that why you made yourself up to look like Renny's ugly brother?"

Doc nodded. "In case they penetrated my disguise, having them jump to the wrong conclusion as to my identity allowed for more latitude in proceeding."

"Well, you may have not completed fooled them," Long Tom said. "But we made a little progress."

"And there was another reason," Doc stated.

"What's that?"

"It is a virtual certainty that they would have slain 'Gloomy Starr' at their first opportunity had they known his actual identity. At the worst, they would have held 'Renny Renwick' as hostage against my interfering with their master scheme."

"Whew!" said Long Tom. "The Count sure plays for keeps. But what's his game?"

"We will find out when we all reach Bermuda," said the **Bronze Man** grimly.

XV – Terror At Sea

Only one ship was destined to reach Bermuda. But Doc Savage had no inkling of that. Neither did the crew of his own vessel shadowing the *Caribbulla* as it made its way down the Atlantic Coast.

Ham Brooks was on the bridge of the cabin cruiser *Stormalong*. He was (predictably) attired for the occasion wearing an impeccable yachtsman's outfit of tropical worsted with matching ascot tie and white cap.

He had stored his sword-cane since it was not exactly an ocean-going convenience. Plus Habeas Corpus (no doubt motivated by monk Mayfair) had twice made off with it only to be caught by the dapper barrister in the act of trying to drop the cane off the stern and into the drink.

"You might consider," Ham told Monk bitingly, "tying a life preserver to that infernal pest."

"Habeas is too sure-footed to fall overboard by accident," Monk returned blandly.

"What I am considering," snapped Ham, "will not fall under the category of an 'accident'."

Since the ungainly porker was an indifferent swimmer, Monk gave this suggestion some thought. Ham was unusually out of sorts having had to leave behind his pet ape Chemistry. The unclassifiable monkey had an aversion to boat travel owing to its distressing tendency toward seasickness. Ham might act out of pure spleen.

Pat Savage came up from below. She was quite a vision in white slacks and a cream-colored shirt. She seemed not to mind the relative coolness of the ocean breezes.



"I don't mind taking in the salt air," she remarked. "But I signed aboard for my share of **action**. Where is it?"

"Once Doc catches up with you, young lady," Ham said reprovngly, "you will have all the 'action' you need."

"Yeah," seconded Monk. "Tryin' to keep Doc from lockin' you in a cellar somewhere. You know he don't like you bargin' into any of our shindigs."

"That glory grabber should learn to share," sniffed Pat unimpressed by their threats.

She had insinuated herself into several of her **bronze** cousin's past adventures. And despite a hair-raising brush-or-two with Death, she never seemed to get enough excitement.

"I wish," she said after a few moments, "I was at the wheel of my 3-masted schooner."

"Why?" asked Ham, curious.

"This tub is too slow for my taste. On the *Patricia*, I could catch up with Doc instead of nurse-maiding a pokey liner."

Ham made an indignant face.

While technically a yacht, the *Stormalong* was no pleasure craft. She was an ocean-going cabin cruiser capable of great range. 60 feet long, she had plied the South Seas and done exploration work in the mid-Atlantic.

Her hull was steel. Her bow was reinforced so that she could serve as an ice-breaker if need be. She was also equipped with an astounding number of marine gadgets many years in advance of current science.

Nothing like her existed elsewhere. Which was why Doc Savage had put a crew of shipbuilders to working round the clock until she was restored and made seaworthy after the devastating Hidalgo warehouse fire.

It was late afternoon now and Pat Savage was taking out her boredom on a swarm of jellyfish. She had loaded her antique six-shooter with mercy bullets and was giving the floating organisms a taste of her marksmanship.

Unerringly, she hit every one. The jellyfish immediately went to sleep although that was a supposition since they were floaters who drifted with the tides. It was impossible to judge their degree of wakefulness.

"Don't you ever miss?" Monk wondered eyeing her work with admiration.

"Not in the last 327 shots," Pat said confidently.

Monk <blinked>. "You keep count like that?"

"Missing is something I never forget," the **bronze**-haired girl said grimly.



It was hard for her to breathe gulping down all that foul sticky *semen*.





They laughed and mocked her watching her try to wipe off their *junk*.



Then it was time for her **butt**! Oh that beautiful tight stuck-up **ASS!!!**





She *yelped* and **bucked** like a wild horse with each rock-hard **dick** poking hard into her tender rectum ...



"Ugh! Ugh ... O-h-h-h-h! That feels so fucking good!" said every old man who squirted his sperm deep up into her rectum.

Even though their lust had been spent, their *hatred* toward the beautiful **bronze**-haired woman persisted. It led them to ...



"Let me hear you *squeal*, baby," a man said as he inserted a mechanical dildo into Pat's ravaged vagina. "Squeal for us. Squeal like the **pig-slut** tou are!"



Pat did squeal. She also *groaned* and *moaned* and silently *cursed* as dildoes of all types were eventually inserted into every one of her body's orifices.



"Oh, what a sleazy **whore** you are," they taunted watching her squirm when their humiliating torment finally finished.





Ham Brooks called back from the wheel.

"You say she resembled Hornetta Hale?"

"The two," said Pat popping a jellyfish dead center, "could be twins."

"Are you sure it wasn't Hornetta Hale in disguise?" asked Monk.

"I know hair. And Honoria's tresses were a darker brunette than the gal I saw in the color newsreels. I run a beauty salon, you will doubtless recall. The face was the same. But the hair was different. And it wasn't colored. It was natural. A gal knows these things."

"If you say so," muttered Monk. "But the idea of there being two Hornetta Hales makes my scalp itch."

"And if ever catch up to either wench," Pat promised vividly, "I won't miss!"

Another jellyfish jumped out of the water and Pat blew a curl of smoke from the muzzle of her six-gun.

A little before dark, they heard a dull *sound*.

The noise was coming from the south in the general direction of the line that they were following at a discreet distance.

"What was that?" growled Monk Mayfair.

Habeas Corpus erected its ridiculously long ears. It sniffed the air with its peculiarly extended snout.

Taking up a pair of binoculars, Ham Brooks coned the sparkling waters before them.

"I did not like the sound of that," he said slowly. "Submarine raiders belonging to one of the warring parties have been known to operate in these waters."

Rushing up to the bridge, the apish chemist snatched the glasses away from the dapper lawyer saying: "Let me see that, you seagoin' shyster!"

Bringing the eyepieces to his tiny eyes, Monk searched the tossing waves. Before very long, black **smoke** began smudging the horizon line.

Everyone saw it. Ham jumped to the controls and threw the throttle to its maximum. The *Stormalong* responded by surging ahead, digging in her stern, and knifing through the waters with her reinforced bow.

The impressive yacht pounded through the whitecaps as Monk raced for the radio set. He listened a minute and then shouted:

"S.O.S. coming through. ... It's the *Caribbulla!*"

"What happened?" asked Pat Savage anxiously.

"They ain't saying. There has been an **explosion** on board. A big one! The liner is already listin'."

Monk listened further.

"It's bad! Plenty bad. They're already orderin' the passengers into lifeboats."

"That is bad," mused Ham. "They appear to have fallen victim to a submarine attack."

Monk was hollering into the microphone demanding to know what was happening. From the changing expressions on his homely face, he did not appear to be receiving satisfactory answers.

"They're scramblin' to get off the boat," he reported hoarsely. "Let's see if we can help out."

Ham wailed. "I already have the engines running at their maximum speed."

Monk turned to Pat and said: "Grab a pair of binoculars. Look for a periscope or wake or anything that tells of a submarine. We could be next."

"Jove!" moaned Ham.

The dapper lawyer rushed to the special device called a "listener". This enabled him to hear through headphones the sounds of any underwater activity through hydrophones distributed about the hull below the waterline. This would include the engines of any submarine.

Clapping the cans over his ears, the elegant attorney concentrated on the marine noises coming from the activated device.

"I hear nothing that smacks of a submersible," he reported.

Stationed on the flying bridge, Pat was searching the crinkling blue waves.

"All clear!" she called out.

"Nothin' here either," reported Monk.

Pat said cautiously: "I don't see any sign of trouble."

Grimly, Monk piloted the powerful yacht toward the smudge of **smoke** that was growing and spreading across the waves. Soon they could smell it.

Monk sniffed the approaching odors with a chemist's curiosity.

"Smells like T.N.T.," he muttered.

"This does not seem like the work of a submarine torpedo," said Ham.

"Remains to be seen," returned Monk.

Pat wore her six-gun on a holster at her hip Western-style. Lowering her binoculars, she drew the huge weapon.

Monk asked: "What are you aimin' to do?"

"I am aiming to pick off anything that looks suspicious to me," said the bronze-haired girl with steely determination."

"In your excitement," cautioned Monk, "just try not to shoot any survivors."

Pat gave the homely chemist a withering look. Then she returned her attention to the smudgy waters.

The black **stuff** was rolling in like an evil fog bank. The stink of the smoke was climbing into their nostrils getting into their lungs and clogging their breathing.

Ham began coughing. And complaining.

"Dratted foul stuff!"

The sepia **smoke** caused Monk to throttle back the engines while Ham turned on a movable searchlight to pierce the enveloping smudge.

They could see the liner now. It was, in fact, listing to port. Lifeboats were being lowered from davits. There was a mad scramble to get off the ship.

"What are we going to do about this?" asked Pat, her features stricken.

Ham said: "Looked for the injured. The people in lifeboats should be fine for now. No doubt that rescue vessels are already responding to the SOS distress call."

They soon came upon the first lifeboat and called over to those huddled on its bare benches. Passengers were wrapped up in coarse blankets and shivered visibly.

"What happened?" Ham asked them.

A man cupped his hands around his mouth megaphone-style. "Explosion below decks!"

"Any sign of a sub?" yelled Monk.

"No. But the explosion was below the water line."

Pat offered: "Sounds like a sub ..."

Ham Brooks then interjected. "Jumping to conclusion is not becoming of associates of Doc Savage."

"Oh, pardon me," sniffed Pat in a mock-snooty tone of voice.

They moved among the lifeboats which began pushing away from the stricken vessel. Every shell was full of huddled humanity. Everywhere, passengers looked frightened. But they were seemingly uninjured. Pat questioned every passing boat.

"Any injured? Did any of y use a submarine in the water?"

The answers to both questions were a resounding "No".

Cautiously moving at a deliberate pace so as not to run down any bobbing lifeboats in the murky pall, Ham Brooks made a circuit of the liner.

In due course a final lifeboat was lowered. The black cap of the captain of the ship was visible at the bow. They made for that boat.

Pulling up to that bobbing shell, they accosted the *Caribbulla's* skipper.

"We're Doc Savage's men," identified Ham. "What happened here?"

"Explosion in the hold near the hull."

"Torpedo?"

The captain shook his head. "No. Sabotage."

"Are you sure?" demanded Monk.

"There was no question of it. Someone deliberately blew a hole in the boat from within the cargo hold."

Ham asked: "Where are the passengers you were watching for us?"

The skipper shrugged helpless shoulders and admitted: "We have no idea. I personally supervised the loading of every lifeboat. They were not aboard."

"You lost track of them?" complained Ham.

The captain said defensively: "In the aftermath of the explosion, there was naturally a great deal of confusion. Watching those men was no longer an imperative. Once we saw that the liner was doomed, evacuating the passengers became our chief concern. I assumed that the matter of the missing passengers would sort itself out during the evacuation."

"Was there any missing lifeboat?"

"That too seemed unimportant at the time," admitted the officer. "Possibly. I cannot say for certain. But someone on board holed my vessel. And it stands to reason that those persons evacuated at some point. Possibly before the explosion."

At that point, the captain turned and watched his liner list further-and-further to the point where its smokestacks inexorably sank toward the brine. Silently, tragically, he watched the still-smoking stacks extinguish themselves amid the waves like gigantic cigars.

With a surge and a gurgle, the liner Caribbulla began slipping beneath the waves. Its bare deck was facing them like a great sinking wall.

It was over in an astonishingly short period of time. Atlantic waves sloshed and crashed around, somewhat obscured by the black smudge. The ship had gone below.

When the captain was done watching, he turned his emotion-stiffened face back to them. A tear could be seen crawling out of the corner of one eye.

"Mark me," he said hoarse-voiced. "This is sabotage! Nothing less!"

They believed him.

Cutting in-and-out among the lifeboats, Monk and the crew searched every face seeking the aristocratic countenance of the mysterious Count.

But no one resembling that worthy -- or anyone else who looked suspicious -- presented themselves. The survivors appeared shaken and frightened and too preoccupied with their plight to be of much help.

"Good thing there were no casualties," commented Ham Brooks.

"But where did our scalawags run off to?" gritted Pat Savage. "Could they have slipped off the boat before the explosion?"

XVI – The Water Gargoyle

Doc Savage was most definitely not happy to hear about the fate of the passenger liner *Caribbulla*.

His melodious *trilling* was yanked out of him when the skipper of the *Matador* brought him the news.

"Any loss of life?" asked Doc.

It was characteristic of the **Bronze Man** that his first thought would have been for the passengers rather than the loss of a valuable ship of which he was part owner.

"Happily, no," reported the Captain. "All passengers are reported safe and well. We are, of course, changing course to meet the lifeboats and render whatever assistance we may."

"All passengers?"

"Perhaps you had better speak with your man," suggested the *Matador* skipper.

Doc went to the radio room and Monk Mayfair came on the line.

"This is the scariest thing I've ever heard of," complained the hairy chemist. *"The ship was sabotaged, no question about it. But the guys we were shadowin' got clean away."*

"Clean away in the mid-Atlantic?" demanded Doc.

"They ain't among the lifeboat passengers. We checked all the way around and the crew agrees with us. They got scot free! Probably before they blew up the tub."

The **Bronze Man** said grimly: "If the passengers are safe, see if you can hunt up any sign of the dory on which our quarry evacuated."

"Gotcha, Doc. Monk signing off."

Doc Savage turned to the captain of the *Matador*.

"How long until we reach the lifeboats?"

"No sooner than midnight."

The **bronze** giant seemed dissatisfied.

"It is urgent that we locate those missing men."

"I will request that a British naval cutter look into it."

"Thank you," Doc Savage said sincerely.

The packet steamer *Matador* reached the zone of thinning smoke where the *Caribbulla* had gone down long after darkness had descended upon the Atlantic. By this time, a few of the women passengers had grown hysterical.

But the men were holding up. In fact, except for an individual here-and-there, most were holding up remarkably well. Nerves were understandably frayed and on edge. They all knew that they were sitting ducks in the event of a submarine attack. Which was not entirely unlikely given how a certain enemy nation of the British had been harassing and sinking shipping for some months now.

The securing and raising of the lifeboats onto the deck of the *Matador* was executed with admirable British efficiency. It took less than 2 hours. Soon the extra lifeboats were littering the afterdeck of the steamer. There was some discussion of what to do with these latter shells. The *Matador* was not designed to carry twice its customary complement of lifeboats.

It was soon realized that in the event of further trouble, they would need all those boats to handle an evacuation of the *Matador*. So they were organized where they would be as much out-of-the-way as humanly possible.

With the Captain's permission, Doc Savage and Long Tom Roberts went among the general passengers who were being given strong coffee or tea as well as sandwiches as they became accustomed to their new vessel.

After a thorough search, Long Tom came up to Doc and said:

"Nobody out of the ordinary that I can make out."

"The Count and his men either went down with the ship or got off before the explosion. If the latter, then that implicates them in the sinking."

Long Tom fingered his jaw forcefully.

"Sounds like they are guilty, all right. Do you suppose they smuggled that TNT on board just to scuttle the ship?"

"It is difficult to say," admitted Doc. "The entire affair is difficult to comprehend. The objectives of this group remain murky to say the least."

He went to confer with the *Matador's* skipper. They did so in the latter's quarters talking at great length.

In the end, the Captain said heavily: "It is clear that something is transpiring which requires deep investigation. Given the present circumstances and in light of the acute assistance that you and your men have rendered to the Crown, I think that your presence in Hamilton can be put off until later."

"Thank you," said Doc Savage. "We will escort you to port. However, we may join you in Hamilton once we have concluded our search."

"That would be much appreciated," said the Captain. "In the meantime, you and your man may board your own vessel at your convenience. With our best wishes."

Doc Savage found Long Tom in the radio room exchanging reports with Monk on the *Stormalong*.

He told the slender electrical engineer: "We will put off in one of the surplus lifeboats."

This was thought to be the most prudent way to go about it. Bringing the steam about to rendezvous with the *Stormalong* would be to invite attack if there were, in fact, any hostile raiders lurking in the vicinity.

Doc and Long Tom lowered the lifeboat by themselves in order to accomplish the task without calling attention to their departure. Once in the water, they pushed off and watched the *Matador* steam onward.

The *Stormalong* was informed by radio of the position of the tiny lifeboat. Having discovered nothing of interest, it cut through the waters at its best speed. Before long, it had located Doc's lifeboat navigating in the darkness with ease.

Ham Brooks hailed them from the cabin cruiser's bridge saying: "No luck. No luck at all."

The 2 vessels maneuvered until they were floating side-by-side. Long Tom came up the pilot's ladder followed by the **Bronze Man**. The latter looked around the open cockpit aft.

"Where is Pat?"

"Hiding below," Ham said dryly. "We put the fear of your wrath into her headstrong noggin."

"That was unnecessary," replied Doc.

Monk offered: "Considerin' that she was after your scalp in the first place, it seemed to be a smart thing to do."

"Yes," added Ham. "Pat has been blaming you for what 'Gloomy Star' did to her."

"Even though you saved her life," added Monk.

Upon reconsideration, Doc decided not to go below.

Taking the wheel of the *Stormalong*, he thrust the throttles ahead. He executed a smart maneuver that cut a deep wake across the wrinkled face of the Atlantic taking the yacht away from the drifting lifeboat.

"No assign of anything unusual?" he prompted.

"None," said Ham. "However, if the rascals got away, they did so very thoroughly and completely."

The *Stormalong* was running along a brilliant track of moonlight. There was a fair breeze. It wasn't too cold despite the lateness of the season.

They followed along in the wake of the steamer. Doc Savage was intent, concentrating on the headset earphones of the listener device whose receiver was installed in the bridge for convenience.

Positioned along opposite rails, Monk and Ham had their binoculars clapped to their eyes scouring the dark horizon in all directions seeking any hint of a periscope or other sign of a lurking vessel.

"Except for the steamer," Monk remarked at one point, "there ain't nobody around."

"If there is," Ham said tightly, "we are sitting ducks."

"Brandishing his superfirer, Monk growled: "Ducks don't shoot back."

At that point, Pat Savage decided to poke her **bronze**-haired head out of the lower deck.

"Did someone say something about shooting?" she inquired brightly.

"Just a figure of speech," grunted Monk.

Pat pretended to notice Doc for the first time and said cautiously:

"Oh. Hello, Cousin. How goes it?"

The headset clamped tightly to his ears, the big **bronze** man did not respond. It may have been the intensity of his concentration. Or it may simply be that he did not wish to respond. Pat had many times disobeyed him. And her antics had been growing tiresome of late.

She shrugged and said casually: "Anything for me to do? I'd like to be useful."

Ham suggested: "Find a flashlight and scour some light around. Periscopes are hard to see at night."

Pat frowned. "Do you think that there is a sub lurking nearby?"

"We cannot be sure. But we need to protect the steamer."

"In that case," Pat said, "I'll go below and point out the portholes there so I can get a better look."

She returned below. After that, light blazed from various portals in the lower hull and to port as she moved about the cabin below searching with her powerful flash ray for any sign of activity on the ocean surface.

Pat was very diligent about this. The flashlight moved about constantly.

"Speaking of sitting ducks," Monk said to Ham, "she's makin' us into a pretty fair target."

"Hearing this, Doc Savage commented: "It is better this way. We will attract any first torpedo launched which will warn the *Matador* crew."

The **Bronze Man** sounded very matter-of-factly about it. But there was an undertone in his voice. A kind of steely edge that made them all feel chilled up-and-down their spines.

Ham inquired: "Doc, if there was a sub, that device will detect the sound of its engines. Corect?"

"Only at a reasonable distance. Do not forget that some modern submersibles are rigged to run silently via electric motors."

That made Monk and Ham redouble their efforts with their binoculars.

It was getting to be a long night when from below Pat Savage let out something that sounded like a *yelp!* It had a choked-off quality. But when she got her vocal cords back in working order, she let out a piercing *scream!*

Monk lunged for the below deck howling: "What is it?"

Pat came charging up. Her face was twisted in a kind of a horror.

She said: "**I saw a head in the water!**"

"A head?" gulped Monk.

"Yes! It was hideous!"

Pat went to the starboard rail and pointed in the direction she had seen the head. Her flashlight was gripped in one hand as she sprayed illumination about liberally.

Doc Savage turned the boat in that direction asking: "What did the head look like, Pat?"

"Inhuman." Pat shuddered the length of her bare arms.

"Was it a severed head?" demanded Ham training his binoculars on the patch of illumination that was now in their direct path.

Pat seemed to struggle to put her words together.

"It ... it was shaped like a human head. But the details were anything but. The eyes looked liked silver dollars with bullet holes in the center. It was more like the face of a frog or a fish or ..."

She paused ...

"I don't know what it was!" she said at last, plainly rattled.

Stationing themselves on either side of the boat, Monk and Ham used their own flashlights. They had their supermachine pistols out, stood ready to bring them to bear.

They saw nothing unusual. Just moonlight on the heaving Atlantic. The cool night air plucked at them bringing out goose bumps along their arms although the skin prickling hadn't been there a few minutes before. Perhaps it was the vivid description that Pat had gasped out that brought about the alteration in their exposed flesh.

After a few minutes, there came a *splash!* All heads turned, flashlights darting this way and that.

Then they saw it.

Something like a fishy tail flashed into the water shaking itself.

"What was that?" Pat demanded.

"Fist," Monk said nonchalantly.

"Are you sure?"

"I know a fish tail when I see one," Monk retorted. "That was a fish I saw. A big one. But a fish's tail for sure. Might be a swordfish."

Doc Savage caused them all to freeze in their tracks at his next words.

"That was no ordinary fish."

They waited for him to elaborate.

"What was it then?" Ham asked when the *Man of Bronze* offered no more.

"That remains to be seen," said Doc. "The tail was very large. But it did not resemble anything known to live in these waters."

"What do you suppose it was?" Ham asked tensely.

The **Bronze Man** declined to reply. It was a habit he had when he did not wish to answer a question or had no answer to give. He maintained his grim silence as he piloted the big ocean-going cruiser around in careful circles.

Finding nothing untoward, he placed the sleek *Stormalong* on a heading that took it back into the wake of the steamer *Matador*.

"Guess it's gone," Monk said. "Whatever-the-heck it was."

"Any guesses?" Ham asked no one in particular.

Monk muttered: "First, Pat spies a floatin' head. Then we spot a fish tail that doesn't belong in these waters."

He scratched his **rusty** head in puzzlement.

"Say, Pat. That head you saw, did it look like a girl's head?"

Pat shook her head firmly.

"It was so ugly that I couldn't tell what it was. Instead of hair, it looked like had kelp or seaweed growing out of its scalp. Why do you ask?"

"Maybe it was a mermaid," Monk said thoughtfully.

"No such creature exists!" Ham retorted unkindly. "The very idea is a pure fantasy."

"Oh, I dunno," Monk muttered. "Sailors the world over have been reportin' silkies and nixies and the like for centuries. Maybe there's somethin' to it."

Long Tom had been a silent participant up to this point.

He said: "Did that stubborn brunette Honoria Hale say something about the U-Men while we were giving her the third degree?"

"She did," said Doc Savage. "However, it is unclear what the remark meant for she had no time to complete it before we were besieged in our cabin. But she seemed troubled about these individuals whoever-they-were."

Doggone it!" squeaked Monk. "Do you suppose she was tryin' to warn about mermen livin' underwater?"

"Nonsense!" snapped Ham. "Utter rot!"

A little more time passed. They were making fair progress. Doc had no trouble pacing behind the steamer. In fact, he had to keep the *Stormalong* throttled back so that she didn't overhaul the vessel. The cruiser was very fleet and nimble. It had been designed by the **Bronze Man** himself and was undoubtedly a decade ahead of its time.

It was rather deep into the night when Doc Savage again placed the locator headset over his ears. He seemed to become interested in sounds that the hydrophones were picking up.

"What's up, Doc?" Long Tom asked.

The **bronze giant** waved an admonishing hand requesting silence.

Suddenly, something shot out of the water just ahead.

Not everyone saw it clearly. Doc had the best view.

The thing looked to be over 7 feet in length. An iridescent **green** and nearly human. Its head was a mass of seaweed. Long scale-covered arms projected forward like someone diving into the sea. Except that this fantastic **form** had jumped out of the sea.

XVII – The **Men** Under The Sea

The British steamship *Matador* reached the port city of Hamilton in Bermuda without further complications. It pulled in around daybreak with the cruiser *Stormalong* piloted by Doc Savage trailing not far behind her.

A delegation of customs officials and other high dignitaries were there to meet the 2 vessels.

Doc Savage was commended for his efforts. He was told that he would be required to submit to a formal interrogation. Evidently the British authorities had changed their minds about giving the Bronze Man his liberty until the sinking of the *Caribbulla* was solved. He consented to this without outward objection.

Doc's 3 men and Pat Savage went along. Official cars conveyed them to a government building situated amid the white roofs of downtown Hamilton. The streets were quiet, the hour being early. There, Doc Savage met privately with several high British officials.

Sympathy was expressed for the loss of the liner *Caribbulla*. The **Bronze Man** was questioned closely about all that he had witnessed on the high seas. He freely admitted to having seen no signs of any submarine activity.

"It is my conclusion," he stated, "that certain persons of foreign extraction who had booked passage on the *Caribbulla* had come to suspect that they were being watched and took matters into their own hands."

"By blowing up the entire boat?" one official blurted out, aghast.

"So it would appear," Doc replied calmly.

"Rather extreme, would you not say?"

"I would."

"What do you think these rotters were about that in order to escape they would sink a passenger ship and manage to vanish in mid-ocean?"

"A reasonable person," returned Doc thoughtfully, "would assume that they had a boat or a submarine which they radioed and managed to make rendezvous with."

"But you say that there were no signs of a submersible?"

"My vessel is equipped with sensitive listening devices. I detected no sound consistent with Diesel or electric engines belonging to an underwater vessel."

"Do you have any inkling of their scheme?" asked another official.

"Only that it is of the highest importance to them," advised Doc. "And that they will stop at nothing to bring it to fruition or to eliminate anyone in their path."

"But you do not know the particulars?" pressed one official.

"No."

Another asked: "Have you any reason to suspect that these people are working against British interests?"

"I have no data one way or the other. But they were headed south. But just how far south is open to speculation."

They conferred until Noon with the **Bronze Man** patiently fielding question-after-question. He seemed to talk freely but in fact volunteered no usable information beyond the gravity of the situation as it had already developed.

Doc Savage thought it prudent not to mention the sighting of the **merman** (or whatever the oceanic gargoyle was).

At length, the official stood up and said: "Thank you for your cooperation in this unpleasant matter. You are free to depart Hamilton at any time."

Doc Savage stood up and thanked everyone saying: "Since we do not have a definite destination in mind, we may stay in port some while before we depart."

"Be careful to apprise us of any developments which may affect British interests," reminded the chief official. He was very grave in his tone.

"Yes," added another. "Concealing information of vital interests to the Crown during wartime would very inadvisable. Very."

With that not-so-veiled threat hanging in the air, the **bronze** giant left the building.

Doc Savage collected his men in the waiting area.

"Let us repair to our boat."

Puzzled, Ham Brooks asked: "We are not being detained?"

"Our services are very much appreciated. So we have been let go with a warning."

"They have some nerve warning us," grumbled Long Tom Roberts.

"Nonetheless," said Doc quietly, "it would be best if we took possession of the *Stormalong* immediately."

The official car was waiting to take them where they wished to go. They rode in silence back to the waterfront. By this time, news of Doc Savage's arrival in Bermuda had reached the fourth estate. There was a crowd of reporters ready and eager to interview the notoriously publicity-averse **Bronze Man**.

"All of you go ahead," Doc said quietly after instructing the driver to drop him off some distance from where the *Stormalong* lay anchored. "I will join you directly."

The car door opened and closed so quietly that it was several seconds before Pat Savage gasped: "He vanished!"

"That's Doc for you," grinned Monk.

Upon arriving, the quitted the car, thanked the driver, and made their way to the *Stormalong*.

The local press had been keeping their eyes peeled for a Herculean **bronze** giant with golden eyes. So they were not immediately recognized.

By the time the party got to the pier, they rushed on board and repaired to the lower deck where they held a conference.

They were astonished to find Doc Savage waiting for them there, his hair only slightly wet from his swim. For the **big bronze** man had obviously gone into the water ... swam some distance ... and climbed aboard the yacht unseen. His close-lying **bronze** hair possessed the peculiar quality of shrugging off moisture as if it were greased.

He had already changed into fresh clothes. The wet ones were sitting on a bench neatly folded.

"You move mighty fast for somebody so tall," Pat said admiringly.

Doc addressed his cousin.

"It is time to assemble what little we know about the situation. Starting with you, Pat."

She shrugged. "All I have are some scraps and rags."



"They may be important," invited Doc. "Proceed."

Pat sat down and began: "While I was eavesdropping on the Count and his men, they said something about a lagoon."

"Does this lagoon have a name?" queried Doc.

"If it does, it was never mentioned in my presence," returned Pat dryly. "But they were talking about going to the lagoon. Or so they claimed."

Doc said: "The Count also let slip something about a cay. Cays are a Caribbean term."

"Are lagoons found in the Caribbean?" wondered Pat. "I seem to connect them with South Seas atolls in my mind."

"Coves are more common," admitted Doc. "But lagoons are not unheard of."

Monk offered: "Sounds like he's headed for a cay that has a lagoon in it. Does that sound about right?"

Doc Savage reminded: "Hornetta Hale was picked up on a tiny cay in the Caribbean. She is the trigger for all of these unsettling events."

"Did that isle have a lagoon?" asked Pat. "Perhaps we should start there."

"It would make perfect sense to do so," allowed Doc. "But from the descriptions in the newspapers, that particular cay was so tiny that a lagoon would be not a natural feature for it."

Pat Savage eyed her cousin skeptically.

"Have you a better lead?"

"I have not," admitted Doc. "Prepare to cast off. We will take the *Stormalong* south and see what we can discover."

Long Tom grumbled: "Sounds like the beginning of a wild goose chase if you ask me."

"Yeah?" challenged Monk. "Got a better idea?"

"Yes," said Long Tom. "I'm going to dig up some ice for this knob growing out of the side of my head."

Monk quipped: "From the size of it, I'd hunt up an iceberg."

"Keep your opinions to yourself!" snapped Long Tom. "Unless you'd like a shiner to match my bruise."

The hairy chemist subsided. Long Tom was in a foul mood. And when he was thus agitated, one risked his wrath at their peril.

They cast off. They pushed their way out of Hamilton Harbour and plotted a course south to the Bahamas which was the closest island group.

Once out in the open water, Ham Brooks was complaining.

"Cays stretch from the Bahama Bank all the way south to the tip of Florida and around into the Gulf Coast. The Bahamas group alone comprises hundreds of islands. Without a name for this cay or any inkling about this lagoon, we could be months plying these waters."

"Not to mention the fact that everything we overheard might have been designed to deceive us," reminded Pat.

Doc Savage said: "It is conceivable that what the Count told 'Gloomy Starr' was designed to confuse and confound him. But the fragment that you overheard about a lagoon, Pat, was spoken in an unguarded moment. Therefore we are looking for a lagoon. Unavoidably, this points to an island or cay or some similar spot."

"Doc makes sense," Ham allowed. "Let us head south and see what luck we have."

What luck they had, as it turned out, proved to be very mixed fortune indeed.

The hour was late. The *Stormalong* was skirting the maze of small islands of the Bahama Bank as the Sun began to set like a slow comet.

Monk Mayfair had been testing the shard of the glass bottle that had released some potent vapor that first produced high hilarity followed by unnervingly deep unconsciousness.

The apish chemist availed himself of his wonderfully versatile portable chemical laboratory. He toiled long hours. But the only result was to deepen the furrows in his miniscule forehead.

Doc Savage looked in at one point. "Any progress, Monk?"

"These traces don't give me much to work from. But I think it's a gas that has been concentrated under pressure to make a liquid. Break the bottle and it turns back into a gas again."

"Natural? Not man-made?"

"That's my guess," said Monk. "And pretty volatile stuff, too. There's traces of carbon dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, methane, and a bunch of other things. It's a real witch's brew."

Doc Savage's *trilling* piped up briefly. But he declined to offer any hint as to his conclusions if he had any. Indeed, he might only have been surprised by Monk's findings.

Not much else transpired until a strikingly colored seaplane flew overhead. Pat was the first to notice it, Doc having gone below for reasons of his own.

The **bronze**-haired girl lifted a pair of binoculars that she had hung around her neck. She trained the powerful lenses on the overflying craft. It was a small sports job equipped with floats. Its colors were a distinctive canary yellow. The cowl ring, tail, and other elements were trimmed in black.

"If I didn't know any better," Pat told the others after she called their attention to the high-flying plane, "I would swear that yellowjacket crate belonged to no less than **Hornetta Hale** herself.

Ham lifted his own field glasses.

"I spy the name *Hornet*."

He frowned.

"Whatever would she be doing way out here?"

As if in answer to that interrogative, the bumblebee-like ship performed an expert maneuver and came flying back toward them. It buzzed the cruiser at a low altitude. Then it took to the skies wagging its wings.

On the second pass, the trim aircraft tilted so that they could see the brunette tresses of Hornetta Hale hunkered at the controls.

She tossed out a bottle as she zipped by, motor snarling. The snappy aviatrix was attempting to land the bottle on the deck. But she missed.

It made a splash off to port. Momentarily slipping beneath the waves, the object bobbed back to the surface. Ham and Monk trained their binoculars on it. They saw that it was a common quart milk bottle sealed with candle wax.

By this time, Doc Savage had come up on deck. He needed no binoculars to see that the bottle appeared to contain a message.

Stripping off shirt and shoes, the **Bronze Man** plunged into the ocean and struck out for the container. He seized it in one might fist and brought it back to the *Stormalong*.

Once on deck, Doc uncorked the bottle and brought forth a curled note. One word was marked in pencil:

TRUCE?

Peering at the note, Pat sniffed disdainfully.

"Give me the word, Doc, and I'll clip her sassy wings for you."

She brandished her antique six-shooter.

Doc shook his head. He found a flare gun and shot a greenish rocket into the sky.

Pat asked: "Is that a 'Yes' or a 'No' to the note?"

The yellowjacket ship was an amphibian and capable of landing on water. Doc throttled the *Stormalong* back until it was wallowing in the swells.

Hornetta dropped her ship to the lightly-rolling waves. She spanked down hard and coasted in their direction. Once the prop stopped spinning, she stuck a brunette head out and jauntily asked:

"Permission to come aboard?"

"Permission granted," Doc called over.

"No horseplay!" admonished Hornetta.

Ham called out: "We could ask the same of you."

The brunette grinned. "Deal."

Hornetta swam over to the *Stormalong* and climbed aboard acting as if it were nothing at all. Her attire was very abbreviated. Shorts and a halter top.

Doc Savage wordlessly offered her a towel with which to dry herself off. Hornetta applied it to her face and hair as strings of water dripped off her clothing. She was dressed for warm weather. Apparently she was some sort of optimist.

"It is high time," Hornetta announced, "that we trade information."

"You first," Pat said tartly.

"And just who are you?" Hornetta demanded giving the bronze-haired girl the once-over.

"Pat Savage."

"Never heard of you," said Hornetta thinly.

She turned her attention to Doc Savage.

"I lost the trail. So I need to take it up with you."

"Trail to what?" questioned Doc.

"Her name is Honoria Hale."

"We have met her," admitted Doc. "What is she to you?"

Hornetta seemed reluctant to divest herself of any facts.

Heaving a reluctant sigh, she said: "My big sister is you must know."

"Doc said: "She could be your twin."

Hornetta appeared to be struggling with her tongue. Another sigh came before she spoke.

"She is my twin. Honoria is 3 minutes older than me."

Doc Savage said: "The last we saw her, Honoria Hale had been abducted by men in the pay of an individual who was calling himself 'Count Rumpler'."

"Never heard of him," snapped Hornetta. "Hear anything of the gent named 'Lancelot Lacy?'"

"No," said Doc. "Who is he?"

"The biggest phony-baloney you ever could meet," snorted Hornetta.

"Perhaps you need to start at the beginning," suggest the **Bronze Man**.

"First things first. What happened to my twin sister?"

"She was abducted aboard the steamer *Matador* but was spirited away last night. Her kidnappers took her off in a lifeboat. The boat was found overturned floating in the Atlantic with no sign of anyone who had formerly been on board."

"The Men Under The Sea got her!" snapped Hornetta.

"Who exactly are 'The Men Under The Sea'?"

Hornetta made a stubborn jaw.

"If I told you," she returned, "you would not believe me."

"Her abductors appear to be very dangerous men intent upon a very alarming mission," Doc pointed out.

"Don't I know it!" gritted Hornetta. "How Honoria got mixed up in all this is the fault of that rascal Lancelot Lacy."

"We are going around in circles," Doc pointed out. "Just what is behind all of this?"

Again, Hornetta made a stubborn square of her jaw. She was thinking.

"My bossy big sister fell for this Lancelot Lacy. Which I don't even think is his actual name. They are up to skullduggery. Serious skullduggery."

Pat interjected tartly: "If you don't shake loose with some details, I might come over there and box your ears proper."

Hornetta Hale took that as a challenge. Instead of shrinking, she marched over to the **bronze**-haired woman and attempted to flatten her nose.

Pat hauled off and connected with the point of Hornetta's sharp chin. The sassy brunette went flying backwards and pitched over the rail.

Doc Savage rushed to the rail and looked down. There was no sign of the woman. Only disturbed blue water. He leapt in fearing that Hornetta had been knocked unconscious and was at risk of drowning.

Once underwater, the **bronze** giant rushed about looking for any sign of the woman. TO his amazement, he saw none.

Working his way around to the bow of the boat, Doc broke the surface. Hornetta was on the other side of the boat swimming toward her rolling amphibian. He struck out in her direction swimming madly.

Hornetta had only a fair head start. Doc soon overhauled her grasping her by one forearm, arresting her in the water.

"We had a truce," he admonished. "You promised to share information."

"That was before your brassy girlfriend socked me!" spat Hornetta.

"You were attempting to throw the first punch," Doc pointed out.

"Either way, the truce went overboard when I did. Now let me go!"

Instead of replying, Doc Savage began swimming back to the *Stormalong* towing the girl by one arm.

Hornetta had no appetite for returning to the vessel. She began kicking and clawing, spitting and screaming in the manner of an enraged wildcat. Doc Savage had been in many battles in the past. But this was something new.

As Pat once remarked, Hornetta Hale was a genuine bearcat. It was as if the **Bronze Man** got hold of a hurricane in female form. The feisty brunette tried to stick her thumbs in his eyes; poke fingers in his ears; pulled at his hair; twisted his nose; and generally made a miserable nuisance of herself.

Doc let go ... dived underwater ... came up on the girl's blind side and attempted to get hold of her neck.

Alerted by the rush of water, Hornetta turned around and attempted to bite his fingers. She had very strong teeth. They snapped like castanets.

Brandishing her frontier peacemaker, Pat called over.

"Say the word, Doc, and I'll pot her with my trusty hogleg. You know I never miss."

"Never mind," Doc called back.

Reluctantly, he allowed the girl to return to her amphibian. Slamming the door shut, Hornetta kicked the engines to life producing a great deal of exhaust smoke and noise. The engine was sorely in need of an overhaul.

As the **bronze** giant watched with various parts of his anatomy smarting, Hornetta Hale sent the amphibian scooting across the water and then droning into the air. She pointed the screaming prop south and settled in for a flight to an unknown destination.

Doc Savage's men were waiting for him when he returned to the deck of the *Stormalong*.

Pat said triumphantly: "Now we know who wears the pants in the Savage family. You let that brazen hussy slap you silly. **I** put her over the rail with one clean sock!"

Doc had nothing to say to that. He looked thoroughly disgusted and more than a trace embarrassed.

The **Bronze Man** had been trained by a seemingly endless cavalcade of scientists and other singular experts from the point in life where he had just begun to walk. No expense had been spared nor any necessary skill deemed suitable for his life plan of roaming the Globe rendering humanitarian service to those in need and dealing out uncompromising justice where lawful authorities could not reach was unlearned.

This extensive training had continued relentlessly until adulthood. It was an audacious and demonstrably risky endeavor. That it had been wonderfully successful was proven by the type of man Clark Savage, Jr. had become and the great works that had attached themselves to his legend.

There had been only glaring flaw in the undertaking.

No scientist nor other learned expert had ever satisfactorily explained the female of the species to Doc Savage. Having been handed off from one tutor to the other with frequent moves from country-to-country learning chemistry, botany, and other specialized disciplines, Doc's social life naturally suffered. And no one had thought to correct this oversight when it came to the opposite sex.

Thus it was that in adulthood, Clark "Doc" Savage, Jr. could design a modern aircraft and perform delicate brain surgery. But women in general baffled him. It was as close to an Achilles' heel as the **big bronze** fellow possessed.

It explained his perpetual difficulties with his untamable cousin Pat as well as giving insight as to how Hornetta Hale had heretofore managed to run rings around him.

Grimly, Doc took the controls and drove the *Stormalong* deeper into the southern reaches of the Caribbean Sea.

XX

Very soon ...



... Honetta Hale gets Degraded !

XVIII – Horror In The Hold

The hour was now very late and a brittle half-Moon rode high in the night sky. A chill laced the ocean breezes as the *Stormalong* beat further southward.

Doc Savage stood at the controls with the listener device headphones clapped to his ears. From time-to-time a light rain speckled the roof of the bridge. But it didn't amount to very much. The skies remained as clear as a black velvet curtain dusted with diamonds.

From time-to-time the **Bronze Man** steered the boat off course as if probing for underwater noises. His silence as well as the fact that he kept turning to course indicated that he detected nothing of the sort.

Sidling up to him, Ham Brooks said quietly: "You are worried about submarines, aren't you?"

Doc replied: "For the last year-or-so, there have been unconfirmed reports of foreign submarine activity in the Caribbean. Rumors of refueling bases and resupply depots. None of these have even been confirmed, however."

"I have read the same reports," said Ham. "They appeared in reliable periodicals."

"Reliable magazines have proven to be in error in the past," Doc reminded.

Below, Long Tom Roberts and Pat Savage were taking turns shining torches down an ingenious window that was built into the bottom of the *Stormalong's* keel. This portal of glass-like composition material was big enough to offer an excellent view of the waters beneath the cruising yacht. It had many useful applications. Not the least of which was that it afforded the ability to examine the ocean floor in the type of shallow depths toward which they were headed.

Another value was the ability to make out various underwater lifeforms and, of course, any submarine that might have been passing beneath them. Despite the narrowness of the window, the portal combined with the moving lights showed any disturbances such as would be made by the wake of any silently cruising submersible.

After several hours of observation, Pat remarked: "I don't see anything not fish nor fowl."

Long Tom <blinked>. "Fowl? Underwater?"

Pat winkled her entrancingly pert nose.

"Something sure smells foul when we all see a **merman** cavorting in the pale moonlight."

Long Tom had no reply to that. He was still examining the mental image of the catapulting creature that had shot out of the water and dived back in.

"What happens if we do spy such a creature?" Pat asked. "What do we do about it?"

"Bait our hooks?" Long Tom grumbled.

Pat regarded the puny electrical wizard dubiously.

"With what, pray tell?"

"If I know Doc Savage," Long Tom said carefully, "he will go after it with his bare hands."

He pointed back in the direction of a projecting pipe. It was a tall round tube of a hatch which had been dogged shut. Pat had noticed it before but had not investigated.

Now she wondered: "What is that?"

"A diving well. You open it up so you can enter the water quietly and unseen."

Curious, Pat moved over to investigate. It looked like an ordinary hatch that might have been found on a submarine or similar vessel. It was rather small. It would allow only one person at-a-time to enter or leave via this route.

Compelled by her feminine curiosity, Pat undogged the hatch and threw it back using both strong hands owing to its heaviness. Staring down the pipe, she heard rushing water. After her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she was able to discern the sea swirling past. It was unusually tranquil.

"Very clever," she remarked. "This well is so tall that the water can't get up and spill over."

"It's similar to the escape tubes found in most modern submarines," advised Long Tom.

Pat shut the hatch, gave the wheel a careless spin, and got back to her feet. Eyeing the overhead bulkhead, she observed: "I don't like this one bit. Doc is too quiet."

Long Tom frowned. "Doc is always quiet."

"That's true," Pad admitted. "But he hasn't blistered my hide yet or confined me to my quarters for barging into this screwy mess."

Long Tom was concentrating on the glass porthole underneath him. He had taken to squatting on the port itself and moving his flashlight all around.

"This is as dangerous a mission as I can remember," he said grimly. "You can tell by looking at him that Doc is very preoccupied with getting to the bottom of things."

"Still," grimaced Pat, "I can feel my spanking coming."

"You might want to sit down then," suggested Long Tom. "And stay that way."

Pat made a face composed of thoughtful lines.

"Maybe I should turn in for the night."

"Good idea," said Long Tom. "We're going to have to take turns on watch. Maybe you should grab your forty winks so you can take the morning watch."

The *Stormalong* was spacious enough below decks to boast private staterooms. These were very small, barely more than a bunk and a few other items. Pet selected one and closed the door. She did not bother to lock it. In the event of an emergency, she would need to get out in a hurry.

Long Tom went back to his underwater scrutiny.

After a while, Monk Mayfair came down toting Habeas Corpus by one oversized ear. He yawned like a steam shovel getting ready to grab a large boulder.

"Where's Pat?" he asked Long Tom sleepily.

"Turned in for the night," answered the slender Electrical Expert.

"That's what I come down for. Doc said to get some shuteye. He and Ham will keep an eye on things."

Long Tom doused his flashlight and stood up.

"I have the same idea," he said. "There's nothing down there except fish. And not many of those."

Monk peered down into the blue depths. "See anythin' interestin'?"

Long Tom shook his pale head. "Sand shark or two. Just the usual."

Monk grunted and encouraged Habeas into one of the staterooms.

"Sure it wasn't a mermaid?"

Long Tom favored the apish chemist with a sour glance.

"You know that there isn't any such animal@"

"I knew that yesterday," commented Monk. "But today, I ain't quite so sure ..."

And with that, the hairy chemist closed his door quietly. Before long, the sounds of his snoring could be heard.

Long Tom stuffed some cotton into his ears so that he could get some needed sleep. And before long, he also was gone from the world of wakefulness.

Hours passed. Dawn was far off.

The passage of the *Stormalong* down the Atlantic Coast wended through the multitudinous islands of the Bahamas with its lonesome coral atolls and strange sandy cays proved to be entirely uneventful.

At the controls, Doc Savage stood like a statue cast of **metal** listening intently to the underwater listener. He turned to Ham and suggested: "Why don't you wake up Monk and get some sleep yourself?"

"Right-o," said the dapper lawyer.

He did not look so much like an attorney now in his nautical outfit. Despite the situation, he seemed to be enjoying the voyage. It was suspected that had he druthers, Ham Brooks would have spent more time at sea had not the pressing work of his demanding legal practice and his associated with Doc Savage kept him on dry land.

Ham plucked his sword-cane from its place of concealment where Habeas Corpus could not capture it and went down the hatch into the lower hold.

He was not down there very long. There came a kind of a screech. Ham came rushing up waving his stick excitedly.

"Doc!" he howled.

The **Bronze Man** turned. "What is it?"

"Pat! She's missing!"

Doc Savage plunged for the hatch. He banged down the companionway so fast that he nearly bowled the aristocratic attorney over. Ham followed him down.

The other cabins disgorged their occupants. Monk and Long Tom looking sleepy and annoyed at the same time.

"What-the-heck is going on?" demanded the hairy chemist.

The answer was not long in coming.

The floor was wet and there were tracks.

These tracks were not human. They were splayed, larger than a human foot and had some of the qualities of a duck. Or perhaps a goose. But no duck or goose or similar waterfowl possessed such monstrous appendages, however.

The tracks came from the escape well and went directly to Pat Savage's stateroom whose door lay open.

Doc entered the cubicle and found rumpled sheets. But no one was lying in the bunk. He <touch> the mattress. It was still warm.

Tracks led back to the escape well which had been left open by whatever had stolen aboard the yacht and carried Pat away. Doc read that story in a glance from the myriad weird tracks and by Pat's distressing absence.

While the truth of the matter was sinking in, the **Bronze Man's** *trilling* began to issue from his parted lips.

But this time it had a strained almost agonized tone. It was nothing like his men had ever heard wrenched out of him. They detected multiple emotions threaded through it as the sound circulated about the narrow confines. Shock, anger, confusion, and something that they took to be a weird species of grief.

Without hesitation, Doc stepped out of his shoes and went down the well.

Monk plunged for the companionway and went up to the rail. He also dived into the water.

Neither man said a word. Concern for the missing Pat Savage impelled their frantic behavior.

They swam about as the *Stormalong* with its robot helmsman engaged beat on into the night. Doc had set the automatic controls before abandoning his post.

Realizing what was transpiring, Long Tom raced for the controls and threw the boat back in the direction that Doc and Monk were treading water.

While Long Tom raced about making wild circles on the face of the Caribbean, Ham Brooks dogged the hatch and was liberally shining his flashlight through the hull-bottom portal. He saw Doc Savage floating by the stern landing stage. The latter called for a diving outfit.

Hearing this shout, Ham got one out of the locker and brought it to the rail. He handed it down to the waiting *Man of Bronze*.

This consisted of a mouthpiece and a spring nose clip to which was attached a breath purifier pack. There was nothing more to it than that.

But the contrivance allowed Doc Savage to stay submerged longer than his usual extended period of time. He had a remarkable lung capacity. The result of a childhood spent among the legendary pearl divers of the South Seas.

Another outfit was handed over to Monk Mayfair who began diving, submerging, and resurfacing time-and-again.

Over an hour passed before silently and reluctantly, Doc and Monk returned to the *Stormalong*. They all went below.

Removing his breathing apparatus, Doc Savage looked like a stricken man. The flake-**gold** of his eyes seemed to have become unnaturally still as if the suspension medium in which the flakes normally whirled (or gave that appearance at any rate) had congealed.

Monk exploded. "What-the-heck could've happened to Pat? Where could she have gone?"

Ham said thickly: "Those tracks were not the tracks of anything human. Nor were they made by swim fins. See those points? I will wager those are **claw marks**."

XIX – The Cross That Was Crooked

They reached the sandy speck of a cay in the Caribbean just before noon that day.

The tiny isle proved to be on no marine chart. Not even the authoritative *West Indies Pilot* listed it. Thus it had no name and no history that they could ascribe to it.

Doc Savage located the cay by radioing the liner captain who at first stumbled upon it during the rescue of Hornetta Hale. From this individual, he obtained its exact longitude and latitude. It was nowhere near the spot where the brunette firecracker's seaplane had been discovered floating abandoned. A suspicious circumstance in itself.

There was no question but this was the correct island for it matched the description given in the newspapers. A pitiful little hump of sand surrounded by a couple of forlorn palm trees. Not much else. Not even a sand lizard.

They circled the tiny spot. But that was just a precaution. It was so small that they needn't have reconnoitered it to determine a fact that was obvious to all.

Ham Brooks spoke up after a while.

"No lagoon. Not even a tiny cove."

He sounded disappointed.

"Heck," snorted Monk. "It ain't but a sand spit. If that."

Nevertheless, Doc brought the *Stormalong* to a suitable spot for anchorage. He halted the engines and lowered the stainless-steel anchor by a mechanical windlass.

They were east of the tip of Florida. Somewhere northwest of Cuba many nautical miles south-by-west of Great Abaco Island in the Bahama island group.

While the others remained behind to guard the cruiser, Doc and Monk got into the water ... waded for shore ... and investigated the little dab of an island.

There were, of course, signs of recent habitation. A few cracked coconut shells. Some remnants of the shell of a crab. Most of the rest were broken shards of pink shell and dark husk proving that Hornetta Hale had subsisted largely upon conch meat and coconut milk during her enforced exile.

Peering about, homely Monk scratched his **rusty** head and made a perplexed face.

"Well, love a duck! That brunette fire-eater must be one tough babe in order to survive on this sandpile the way she done."

Doc nodded. "She has quite a reputation."

The **Bronze Man** searched about for any signs of why the brunette-haired adventuress had been marooned on this tiny cay. Of course, there was nothing. Whatever had compelled unknown persons (probably the Count and his crowd) to strand Hornetta Hale in a remote corner of the Caribbean in this manner and not kill her, those answers would be found elsewhere.

But this did not stop Monk from trying to puzzle it all out.

"Whoever done this, they didn't want to kill her," he ventured. "But maybe they didn't care whether she lived or died."

XX

Actually, they didn't care if she would survive their lustful **Gang-Raping**.



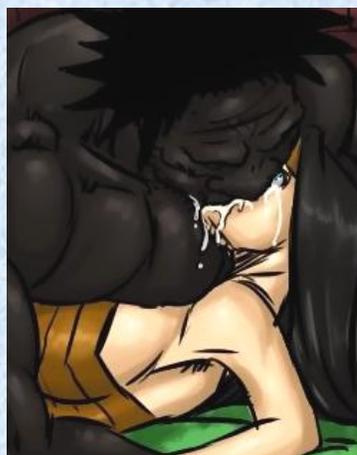
She had a strange feeling as they approached. It wasn't one of fearing for her life. But something else ...



A major clue was when they started ripping and tearing off her clothes.



Soon she was completely naked and defenseless against their probing ...





"Oh no!" she cried as she felt a huge hot *glob* erupt up into her womb. "Oh no! ... No! No! No! No! No!"

With sweat pouring off his forehead, her rapist looked down contemptuously into her tearful eyes.

"That's right, **Bitch!** That's my *sperm*. My **black** baby-making *sperm*. You are gonna be a new **Mommy!**"



TAKING HIS TIME WITH CONTROLLED, FIRM THRUSTS HE FUCKED HER BACK INTO THE MATTRESS.



SQUEEZE YOUR MASTER HARDER WITH THAT JUICY CUNT, WHITE TOLASH YOU'RE NOT PUTTING ENOUGH INTO IT...

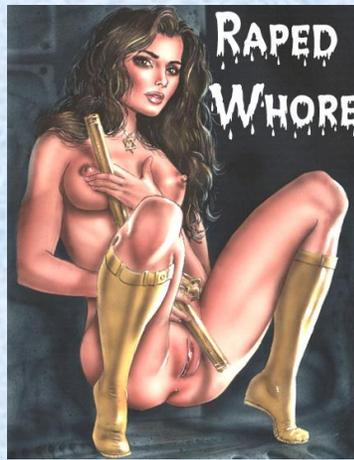
Y. YES, MASTER.



U gon have my baby ha?

The skinny man finally spasmed and spurtd his stank jizz in her fertile womb!

She sobbed as she forced herself up from her spread-eagled position.



Then another man-beast said:

"Got something for you, **Slut**. Hope you like IT. I know IT will like you."





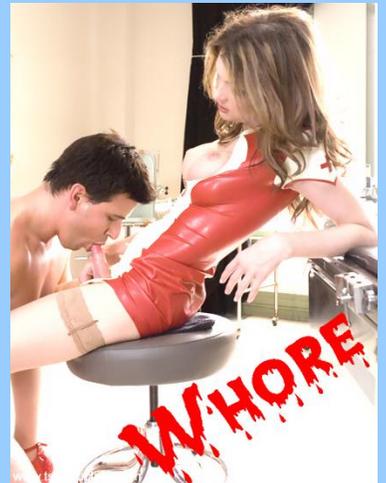
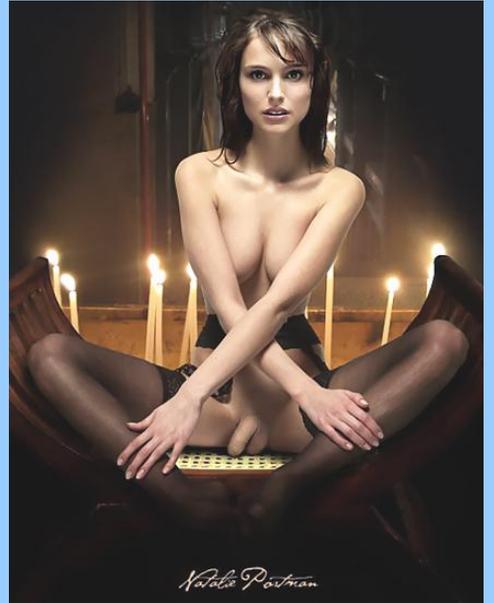
She was not prepared at all for the anal invasion.

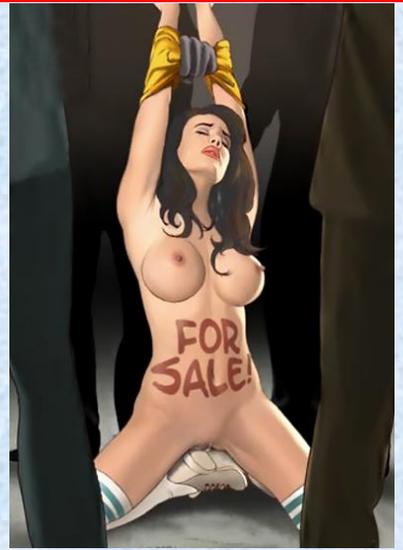
"O-o-o-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w ... !!" she moaned.



It was *disgusting* and *messy*. But at least it was finally over.

In a Parallel Universe ...





"A reasonable conjecture," admitted Doc.

He was scratching about in the sand with toe of one shoe looking for any evidence, sign of writing, or even a distress marker.

He found a few sun-bleached stones carefully arranged in the shape of an SOS. But they were too few to properly spell out the letters. It was only by chance that the liner *Amberjack* had wandered close enough to spy Hornetta's flag of rags.



The flag was still there consisting of a piece of driftwood stuck in the sand. The pennant was what was left of a summer skirt.

Doc Savage examined this. There was no pocket, no writing. Nothing in the way of a message.

Examining the boles of 2 palms, the **Bronze Man** looked for signs of writing. It would be possible to scratch out something with one of the pink conch shell shards if one put their mind to it.

Indeed, he found a number of broken shards at the base of one tree, evidence that this was attempted.

The smooth silvery bark of the palm proved to be too tough for anything in the way of a message. Glancing over the attempt, Monk grumbled: "Looks like she gave up on it."

Going to the next palm, they found more evidence of an attempt at writing. This palm was younger and somewhat stunted and therefore softer of bark.

Hornetta had managed to scratch out 5 words. They read:

**BEWARE !
MEN UNDER THE SEA**

That was all.

"For the love of mud!" exploded Monk. "She could be talking about the **fish-man** we spotted."

Doc Savage offered nothing. He was examining another mark below the letters. It was not a letter but rather a symbol.

Crude and of unequal lines, it might have been simply a hash mark or a first attempt to test the bark before carving the other message.

Monk wrinkled his simian face in perplexity tilting his **rusty** head this way-and-that until it hit him.

"I know what that jigger is supposed to be," he gulped.

It was a cross. Its arms were bent in a clockwise manner. A crooked cross. A twisted thing of harsh right angles.

"This hooks up with the Count and his boys, all right," Monk stated grimly. "But what does all this have to do with men livin' under the sea?"

"That remains to be seen," said Doc. "My hunch is that Hornetta Hale left these marks as a warning to others in the event she perished here. No doubt whatever she can tell us will have an important bearing on the mystery behind all this. In other words, the motive, the reason for what is happening in the Caribbean."

He was then silent for a time. He was studying the strange twisted cross.

"Let us return to the boat," he said abruptly.

They made their way back to the Stormalong and shared this latest information.

His dark eyes glowing, Ham Brooks said: "Everything we have encountered or witnessed so far appears to tie together. Yet it makes absolutely no sense."

"No apparent sense," corrected Doc Savage. "This does not mean that there is no sense to be found at the bottom of the matter."

"If so," Ham said twisting his polished sword-cane in his hands, "we're going to have to dig very deep to find it."

Long Tom spoke up.

"This is a dead end for sure. Where do we go from here?"

Doc said: "We have 3 clues. There is a cay with the lagoon. The Count and his cohorts appear to have a hideout or a base there. It is imperative that we find this unknown cay."

"What about Pat?" asked Monk, his voice stricken.

"The fact that these men were too squeamish to do away with Hornetta Hale could imply that they will hesitate to bring harm to Pat. If they wanted her dead, there would be no necessity of abducting her. It is a slim hope, I admit. But it is all that we have."



"Do we know that the Count and the **mermen** are connected?" wondered Ham.

"We do not," Doc said flatly. "But we can hope that one trail converges with the other. The fact that Honoria Hale and her captors disappeared from a lifeboat mid-Atlantic in a manner similar to Pat's vanishing suggests a tie-up."

"But not much of one," muttered Monk. "This sure is a screwy fish stew."

Going to the controls, Doc Savage raised the anchor. He reversed the engines and piloted the powerful cruiser away from the nameless island.

Ham got out all the marine charts and was pouring over them. They had been doing previously in the hope of locating a cay possessing a noticeable lagoon. But now they became very intent upon the task.

"Deuced needle in a haystack," he muttered.

"What is?" asked Long Tom.

"Finding the correct cay with the accompanying lagoon."

Doc Savage surprised them by announcing: "The cay we are seeking is **volcanic**."

How the **Bronze Man** had arrived at this conclusion was a mystery. But no one questioned it. Doc often came to correct conclusions through what appeared to be magic but was, in reality, just sound deductive thinking.

Suddenly Monk <snapped> his blunt fingers.

"Those vapor traces that I analyzed. All of that stuff are products of volcanic action! I shoulda realized that myself."

"Some lagoons are created by water eroding the extinct cone of an underwater volcano," mused Ham. "Are there any extinct volcanic cones in this immediate vicinity?"

"None," asserted Doc. "But it is possible that an ancient volcano overgrown by tropical greenery and worn down by perpetual action of the tides could exist in this region undiscovered. You both will recall our troubles on such an island a few years back when we fought a battle on a volcanic spot such as we now seek." [read #79 - "Poison Island"]

"That don't help us now!" snapped Monk. "What difference does it make what kind of isle it is? We're lookin' for a lagoon, ain't we? Then let's get to it. Pat needs rescuin'!"

The *Stormalong* worked its way amid scattered islands. Shoal cays and coral atolls were plentiful. Many were simply forlorn mangrove swamps overgrown with the touch water-seeking roots home to lizards and tropical birds. They were clearly uninhabited (if not uninhabitable) by humans.

They discovered nothing of interest along the way.

It was a little bit further along in the afternoon when they came upon the yellow&black amphibian plane roosting upon the waves. It looked like a tired duck resting after a long flight.

Monk trained his binoculars on it and squawled: "**Hey! That's Hornetta's bus!**"

Doc Savage sent the *Stormalong* hammering in the direction of the amphibian. He cut in the silencing mechanism for the motors. But it was of limited value. Even throttled down, the powerful Diesels made considerable noise despite the ingenious baffles.

As they drew near, he throttled back the engines to reduce the noise, hoping not to give away their approach. The sleek cruiser slipped up on the amphibian from its tail section where visibility was nonexistent from the point-of-view of the cockpit.

Still, something alerted the pilot for suddenly the exhaust stack spat sparks and began belching grayish-black fumes. The seaplane began shuddering and moving forward. Advancing the throttles, Doc raced to get in ahead of the craft.

The famous *Hornet* had been a champion in her days and had come in second in 2 consecutive Schneider Cup races. But that was years ago. She was showing her age.

Its prow throwing up spume and spray, the *Stormalong* soon overhauled the thundering amphibian. Perhaps desperate for a lead, Doc lunged toward the port wing of the amphibian as she tried to climb up on step.

The pilot (they could clearly see that it was Hornetta Hale) flung the amphibian to starboard. In this way she avoided a collision but lost headway.

Doc veered the *Stormalong* in a great sweeping circle attempting to get in front of the plane's buzzing nose. Each time Hornetta attempted to bring her ship around and resume taxiing, the *Stormalong* intercepted it.

Finally, Hornetta realized the futility of escape. She shut down the engine. The spinning prop froze as she slid open a window.

"You win!" she called out.

Doc Savage called over in a voice that carried with amazing clarity: "It is time to parley."

"I don't seem to have much choice in the matter. You stiff's are in my way."

Reluctantly, Hornetta stepped out of the cockpit and onto a pontoon. Without hesitation, she threw herself into the water and swam with the agility and speed of an Olympic diver for the waiting yacht.

Monk and Ham raced one another to be the first one to help her on board. Hitherto they had considered the brunette adventuress to be the female equivalent of the Devil complete with horns, spiked tail, and a tongue like a pitchfork. But now their initial impression subsided, the girl's evident feminine charms providing the motivation.

To Ham's slack-jawed surprise, Hornetta spurned his offered hand and accepted Monk's assistance onto the heaving deck of the *Stormalong*. The apish chemist grinned. The dapper lawyer frowned.

"We meet again," Hornetta said boldly.

Long Tom warned her: "Watch your step around me unless you want to be knocked into the drink for all the trouble you bring.

"Pick on someone your own size, Shrimp," sneered Hornetta. "I only fight them that's in my weight class."

Looking around the deck, she snapped: "Where's that gal that socked me? I want a rematch right here-and-now!"

Doc said somberly: "My cousin Pat was abducted in the middle of the night."

Hornetta hesitated before replying. She seemed at war with herself.

"By the **Men** Under The Sea, apparently," prompted Doc.

Hornetta's snapping blue **eyes** popped in surprise. She bit her tongue.

Doc said: "Given the uncanny manner in which Honoria Hale vanished in mid-ocean, we might conjecture that both women are being held by the same persons possibly in the identical location."

"Where is she?" Hornetta yelled. "You tell me this instant, you **copper**-faced wooden Indian!"

Doc ignored the insult.

"At last report, Honoria Hale was a prisoner of a man calling himself 'Count Rumpler'. What can you tell us about these **Men Under The Sea**?"

"They are not what they seem to be," Hornetta supplied sullenly.

"If you are speaking of the same type of creature we encountered, one of which we saw under moonlit conditions suggested a **merman**," Doc Savage returned simply. "But last night an aquatic marauder stole aboard this vessel leaving behind footprints like those of oversize geese."

"The **Men Under The Sea** come in 2 varieties," said Hornetta slowly. "The web-footed ones and the fish-tailed ones. They're pretty ugly customers as I'm sure you realize by now."

"Where do **they** dwell?" pressed Doc.

"That's what I'm down here trying to find out!" snapped Hornetta. "But you clowns keep cramping my style. I need to be free to act. My sister's life is at stake!"

Doc said calmly: "Then it appears we have a common cause."

Hornetta subsided. Her facial contortions showed that she was doing considerable thinking. She gave her bedraggled brunette locks an annoyed fluffing.

"It all goes back to the rime that Honoria took up with that phony-baloney Lancelot Lady character," she began.

"Tell us about Lacy," Doc requested.

"Lancelot Lacy is as vain as all the peacocks in Siam," exclaimed Hornetta Hale. "He struts about like some kind of uppercrust swell when in fact he's a dirty low-down dog. That's my opinion."

"Was Lacy the one who stranded you?" asked Ham.

"No other. He wanted me out of the way because I knew too much. But he refused to knock me off."

"Why not?" inquired Doc.

"Because of my stuck-up sister Honoria!" snapped Hornetta. "She's sweet on the rat."

"You had better start at the beginning," suggested Doc Savage. "We would like to hear a full account of your recent activities."

Hornetta looked as if she had swallowed poison. She began spitting out words.

"My sister and I are twins. But we didn't like being twins. And what's more, we are as different as a pineapple and a peach. I like the limelight, adventure, and seeing my name in headlines.

"Honorina - who was nicknamed 'Honeybee' - was the exact opposite. She likes the nightlife, parties, and socializing. She had an affinity for European royalty. She took up with a number of them during the period she lived in Europe. Then came the War and she had to return to America. You probably remember that fuss the week the War broke out."

Doc nodded. "All nations recalled their vessels back to their home ports. There was a scramble to evacuate Europe by tourists visiting the continent. For a few days, the Atlantic was choked with passenger liners and refugees fleeing the outbreak of War."

"Honorina returned to the United States on one of those panicked liners," supplied Hornetta. "With her came that no-good Lancelot Lacy. He promptly joined one of those Bunds you read about where they grow identical trick mustaches, go off to weekend camps, and dress up like pretend soldiers."

Doc Savage said: "I have looked into your background. But I found no written record of your having a twin sister."

"That's because Honorina and I could barely stand one another. Sure, we're sisters. But we are exact opposites. Our parents died and we were separated. Honorina was raised down in Virginia where she took on the buttery manners of a Southern Belle. I landed in Jersey. Because Honorina was 3 minutes older, she thought she was better than me. She tried to pretend that I didn't exist. So I returned the favor. It's as simple as that. This goes back to when we were young. Get me so far?"

"I get you," returned Doc. "Please continue."

Hornetta was looking at her nails. She was still plainly upset over her predicament.

"Lancelot Lacy is the rottenest of bad apples. Strictly Fifth Colum material if you get my meaning."

Then her crystal blue eyes shifted up over their heads.

Doc Savage was the first to notice this. He turned his head.

The **Bronze Man's** vision was sharper than it seemed possible for human optics to be. It was the result of a lifetime of intensive training for all of his senses.

"What is it?" asked Long Tom peering in the same direction.

"A passing mail plane," said Hornetta. "Probably nothing."

But still, the brunette adventuress did not take her eyes off the approaching aircraft.

Suddenly Doc Savage rapped out crashing orders.

"Everyone go below! Take cover!"

Doc plunged for the controls and got the engines going. He began driving the *Stormalong* in a zigzag line changing direction frequently as if attempting to slice up the Caribbean seas into sections.

Her sunburned arms flailing, Hornetta Hale tumbled off the stern. Whether by accident or design was never known. Once in the water, she struck out for her own amphibian the *Hornet*.

Maneuvering wildly sweeping in half circles alternating with sudden shifts in course, Doc Savage spotted the approaching plane. It was a very modern craft whose wings were bent in a fashion that had become feared all over Europe. It was now flying very high climbing hard.

Then suddenly, it rolled its canted wings and dived straight down. There came an unearthly *screaming*.

"Dive bomber!" moaned Long Tom recognizing the sound.

The **Bronze Man** had already determined that from the canted configuration of the warplane's wings.

Hurting down out of the clear sky, the alarming howl grew nearer. Doc steered to port and then starboard, desperate to avoid what was coming next.

Fortunately, the dive bomber carried only one bomb slung to its undercarriage. There was no telling when it would release or where it might land.

Finally, this let go.

Their first certain knowledge that they were under attack came when a great upheaval disturbed the coral-hued Caribbean waters off to starboard. A gush was followed by a fountain of water. It was so close that chilly spray spattered their faces.

Monk and the others had by this time unlimbered their superfirers. The tiny weapons made **thunder** on the open water. But it was all show. The ingenious pistols did not have the range needed to pepper their attacker.

Doc had rushed below and came up with a .220 rifle which the *Stormalong* carried for potting sharks.

Bringing this to his shoulder, the bronze giant fired 2 shots clipping one wing fuel tank and then the other. It was amazing shooting. It had a marked effect upon the pilot who might have been about to trip his machine-guns.

The screaming warplane leveled out and headed south. It carried only one bomb. And that had missed. With precious fuel stringing behind, it had no more business to conduct.

They all saw that it was painted a flat battleship gray and bore no markings whatsoever.

"Where-the-heck did he come from?" bellowed Monk emerging from below. "This ain't Europe!"

Doc Savage was pushing the *Stormalong* hard attempting to come around in an effort to head off Hornetta Hale. She had already climbed back into the cockpit of her yellow&black amphibian.

Its engine was still warm. So Hornetta got the propeller spinning smartly. It sounded like a buzzsaw getting ready to rip through timber.

XX – Dead End

As a race, it was not much.

Despite being armored and no longer encumbered by its undercarriage bomb, the foreign warplane pulled away from the speedy Hornet which was hampered by the fact the it hauled 2 plump Edo pontoons on its underside.

The warplane was soon lost from sight.

Taking up the rear, the yacht *Stormalong* was no match for either aircraft given the fact that it was thundering over placid waves. Friction drag of the sea ensured that its streamlined hull was no substitute for wings slicing freely through the air.

Still, Doc Savage refused to give up. He kept the yellowjacket amphibian in sight at all times as steely fingers like a **bronze** vise held the yacht wheel locked in a dead-reckoning position.

Before long, his eyes began shifting to the **turquoise** waters. A flicker of concern touched his metallic features.

Ham Brooks scrambled to pore through the charts. He sensed what was coming.

"We are approaching the region where the waters are extremely shallow. Dangerously shallow," warned the dapper lawyer. "There are blackheads and coral reefs. If we're not careful, we could tear the bottom out of our keel."

Hearing that, Monk Mayfair rushed below and manned the hull-bottom porthole which looked down into the amazingly clear waters. There was a speaking tube down there. He used it now.

Monk's voice bellowed upward. *"I can see the bottom plain as day. Blackheads everywhere you look. This is getting' dangerous."*

Doc Savage called into the speaking tube. "Guide me as best you can."

Monk worked his way around so that he could shine a light ahead of the boat at an angle. It was not much warning. But still it was something.

He yelled into the tube. *"Hard to starboard!"*

Doc flung the wheel carving a new course.

The Monk called up: *"Now sheer off to port!"*

Doc rocked the wheel in response. The yacht again changed course.

They got about 5 nautical miles in twisting fashion. They were losing headway as the yellowjacket amphibian dwindled to a black dot in the azure sky.

Finally, Monk called up, his voice twisting.

"Back off! Back off! Blackheads everywhere you look!"

Doc reversed the engines. The ship shuddered. He sheared off and -- probably by scant inches -- avoided scraping bottom by the barest of margins.

Monk came climbing out of the lower deck to join the others watching the yellow amphibian vanish into blue nothingness. The high drone of its engine had already ceased to echo over the waves. Long Tom stared after the departing aircraft.

"Mark my words. She's gone for good this time. If we ever catch up to that high-flying hussy, I'm going to turn her bag of tricks inside out for good."

Monk turned to Ham and said: "My money's on Long Tom. He don't like women much. And this one's gotten his goat for sure."

To which the dapper attorney responded: "20 dollars says that Hornetta Hale will pick Long Tom's pockets without him suspecting it."

They shook hands on it, each man convinced that he would get the better of the other.

A profound gloom descended upon deck. Doc Savage brought the *Stormalong* to a dead stop.

They looked at one another. Monk and Ham exchanged sharp glances as if on the verge of a new quarrel. However, their spirits were by now very low indeed. No argument commenced.

Ham examined his sword-cane thoughtfully and asked a supercilious question.

"What do you suppose Hornetta Hale is going to do if she manages to overhaul that warplane? It could shoot her down on a whim."

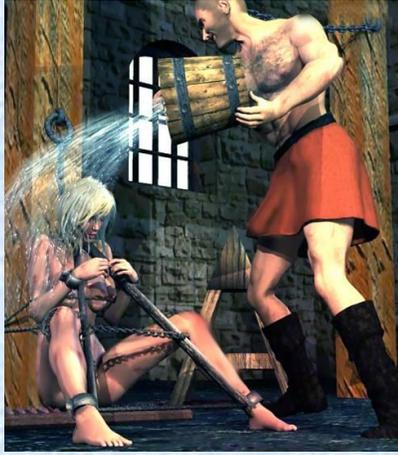
Doc Savage replied. "No doubt that she is attempting to locate the warplane's landing strip. Evidently that base may be the key to this entire mystery."

"What buffalos me," Monk muttered, "is why that warbird just didn't turn around and blast her out of the sky on general principles."

"That is something to ponder," returned the **Bronze Man** thoughtfully.

Then Ham said: "The Count and his crowd have stopped at nothing. Not even wholesale murder and destruction. And yet they won't lay a hand on either of these Hale women."

"Nor, it is to be hoped, Pat Savage," added Doc.



They were going over marine charts trying to come up with a solution to their vexing problem of having no clear destination and no way to get to that destination if it lay in unusually shallow waters.

A *sputtering* came to their ears.

"Someone's returnin'," warned Monk.

Ham and Long Tom grabbed binoculars and began scanning the seemingly endless horizon. The latter was the first to spot it.

"Hornetta's crate! Must be she ran out of gas."

Minutes later, the yellow&black amphibian came scooting over the waves struggling to stay aloft. One wing dipped alarmingly before righting itself. The other started to sag. To all appearances, it was low on fuel.

Then the engine gave a final pop and the propeller jerked to a halt. Now it was gliding.

By expert manipulation of the controls, Hornetta Hale managed to pancake the bumblebee amphibian onto the surface of the Caribbean Sea. It was a good job. It also helped that the water was smooth. Of course, the Caribbean Sea is almost always smooth except during hurricanes.

They watched as the tiny *Hornet* bounced along a bit and began wallowing.

Then the hatch popped open. Out came a stick decorated with a white rag.

Long Tom grinned widely. "She's surrendering!"

Doc urged the *Stormalong* over the helpless amphibian. He reversed the throttle and eased up alongside bringing the heeling cruiser to a slow sliding halt.

The vessel bumped the pontoon. Monk reached out to take hold of a wing strut arresting the *Stormalong's* tendency to drift.

"I guess I can't shake you. So I might as well join you," Hornetta said disconsolately. "That bum got away from me."

This time no one offered her assistance to board the yacht. Hornetta jumped up from the pontoon. She managed to do it with an agility that didn't come from playing tennis on the courtyards of the wealthy. She bounded over the rail nimbly showing her fiercely **sunburned** legs.

"I'll bet you want me to start at the beginning," said Hornetta in a forlorn tone. Her shoulders were sagging. She wore an air of utter defeat.

Doc Savage said: "We already heard the beginning. Now take us to the present. There is no time to lose unless I am very much mistaken."

"You? Mistaken?" scoffed Hornetta with a little of the former fire returning to her voice. "The **Man of Bronze** is hardly ever mistaken from what I hear."

"Enough of your tart tongue," snapped Ham. "This is a very serious matter."

"Yeah," seconded Long Tom. "Bottle that sass and give out with some dope."

Hornetta Hale's crystal blue **eyes** sharpened cunningly. It could be seen that she was thinking hard.

"Tell you what," she slowly said. "I'll make you a deal."

Ham sniffed: "She sounds like Pat."

"You stay out of this, you overdressed dude!" Hornetta snapped back.

Ham clenched his cane angrily while Monk Mayfair grinned at the cutting jibe.

Curling her lip in the simian chemist's direction, Hornetta added: "What are you dreaming of? Banana and coconut soup?"

Monk glowered while Ham brightened.

Doc Savage interjected cautiously: "What deal do you propose?"

"You tell me how you got out of my van. And I'll get around to spilling the beans."

Doc aid: "If I am not mistaken, this was already explained to you."

"All that you coughed up was that you had that particular trick pulled on your before. Which explains exactly nothing."

Hornetta folded her arms defiantly.

Ham quipped: "You should know that a magician never reveals his tricks."

To which Monk added: "Yeah, that's right. Not only that but also Doc's secrets keep him alive."

Hornetta Hale flounced around presenting her attractive back to them all. She looked over one raised Sun-**blistered** shoulder.

"You know my terms. They stand just the way I do. If you want me to turn around, start yakking."

Doc Savage heaved a heavy sigh. Which was a veritable mountain of emotion where he was concerned.

"Getting out of the sedan was no effort whatsoever," he began.

Hornetta whirled.

"That van was sealed so tight that you couldn't open the car doors a crack once you were trapped in the back. So don't hand me that hooey."

Doc continued patiently.

"As you know, we have fallen for that trick in the past. So my new automobile was designed with that future eventuality in mind."

Hornetta eyed the **Bronze Man** skeptically.

"In other words, it was built so that you could get out if it ever happened again?"

"Precisely," remarked Ham.

Doc looked at Hornetta Hale in the hope that she was satisfied by that explanation. But the brunette spitfire was not. She wiggled her fingers at him saying: "Give."

Doc then gave what was for him a rather long speech.

"The interior of the sedan was rigged so that the driver by pushing back on his seat could crawl into the rear seat. By removing the seat cushions, he could thereby wriggle into the trunk."

Hornetta looked very interested.

"Once in the trunk, it was a simple matter to actuate a catch which caused the trunk to spring open."

"I get it now," Hornetta crowed. "But that does not explain how you got out of the van interior. It was locked tight."

"By standing on the sedan's hood, it was possible to apply acid with a special tool on the underside of the van's roof."

Hornetta cocked a dubious eyebrow. "Acid?"

"By painting a nearly complete circle in the roof, a large was created," continued Doc. "It was then possible to push up the top of the roof in the same way that the lid of a soup can might be opened after the application of a can opener."

"Clever," said Hornetta. "But how did you get the vehicle out of the van?"

"By crawling to the back end, hanging upside-down in front of the door, anchored by a small grappling hook-and-line that I always carry, and picking the padlock. Once the doors opened, it was possible to swing into the van interior."

Hornetta made nearly comical faces as she processed the mental pictures created by the **bronze giant's** succinct account.

"But I drove along the whole time and I didn't hear anything. Spill."

With more patience than he possessed at the moment, Doc Savage said: "You may recall that Monk's pet pig was putting up quite a fuss at the time. This covered any noise we made. Furthermore, the sedan was equipped with aviation-style shock absorbers. This allowed it to land safely without a ramp. With the engine running, the sedan shot ahead rather briskly.

"After following the van closely for a time, we waited for you to go around a tree-shaded bend in the road. At which juncture we pulled over to the side of the road and parked. Possibly you noticed the vehicle then but failed to realize that it was the one that had been inside your truck."

"Impossible!" raged Hornetta.

Monk inserted: "Like it or not, lady, that's how it happened."

Fuming, Hornetta fretted for almost a minute as if searching for a retort. It was clear that the salty female was smarting from having been outwitted in such a spectacular fashion.

"Just one second, buster! Who closed the doors to the van?"

Doc Savage hesitated.

"Out with it!"

"It was necessary to fool you into thinking that nothing untoward happened."

"Watch what you call me. I do not like that word 'fool'."

"Just a manner of speaking," the **Bronze Man** reassured her. "My associate Monk here climbed out onto the sedan's hood and re-closed the doors replacing the padlock which I had previously pocketed."

"You never suspected a thing," chuckled Monk.

For once, Hornetta hale was utterly speechless. Her brow began to furrow as she appeared to be searching her memory.

XXI -- Hornetta Stings Again

Had his cousin Pat savage not gone missing under such mysterious circumstances, it is unlikely that Doc Savage would have behaved as he did now.

He strode up to Hornetta Hale ... seized her fiery red **shoulders** ... and spun her around until the startled brunette was facing him.

The **strength** of the **Herculean Bronze Man** was undeniable. Hornetta Hale momentarily lost her facial composure. She looked on the verge of being afraid of the towering metallic Samson who stood over her.

"My cousin is missing," Doc said harshly. "It is imperative that we locate her without delay."

"I don't know where she is!" Hornetta retorted hotly, her naturally feisty female personality reasserting itself.

"You know a great many answers to our questions."

"What if I do?" she sneered.

"Has this anything to do with your having antagonized a certain foreign dictator years ago when you flew rings around his nation's passenger dirigible?" queried Doc.

"No comment!" snapped Hornetta.

Doc Savage's ever-active flake-gold **eyes** were boring into Hornetta's strikingly **blue** ones. He modulated his vibrant voice until it became quiet but compelling.

"You will explain why you were so anxious to obtain a submersible."

"What are you doing?" Hornetta demanded trying to look away.

But the **bronze** giant would have none of it. He forced her to meet his penetrating gaze.

"Why were you marooned on that island in the first place?"

"That's my business! I tried to hire you. But you wouldn't make a deal."

"Who are the **Men Under The Sea**?" Doc questioned. "And what have **they** to do with the sign of the twisted cross?"

"How do you know about that?" Hornetta flung back.

"Do you not remember the message you carved into the palm tree on that Caribbean cay?"

"Oh. So you checked the island out, did you?"

Not taking his whirling eyes off the brunette girl, Doc Savage nodded firmly.

"Tell me about the ones who live under the sea," he directed.

Hornetta Hale found herself unable to tear her eyes away from the **Bronze Man's** compelling *orbs*. They fascinated. They seemed alive in a very strange way as if their animated depths were full of radiant lights like *aureate* stars. There might have been a galaxy of golden *sparks* in either eye.

The more Hornetta peered into them, the more they seemed to expand, enlarge, and all-but-swallow her.

"They ... they are hideous," Hornetta blurted out. "Monsters! Spawn of a terrible civilization. They aim to take over the World."

"Why did you carve that symbol?" pressed Doc.

Hornetta seemed on the verge of divulging a modicum of truth ...

... but abruptly she shook her head and snapped her eyes shut.

"Stop trying to hypnotize me!" she spat.

Doc released her suddenly, his features dark with suppressed emotion.

Monk Mayfair interjected: "Do we have any truth serum on board?"

Doc said: "Go look, Monk."

The apish chemist went below and rummaged around for a time.

He came back holding a hypodermic needle that had been fully charged with a rather murky-looking chemical.

Monk asked seriously: "Should I just jab her with this?"

Doc nodded. "I will hold her for you."

Hornetta Hale began flailing frantically attempting to wrest out of the **Bronze Man's** *metallic* fingers. But it was no good. The grip was **unbreakable**.

Monk ambled over and seized Hornetta's right arm at the elbow. Her arms already were bare so there was no necessity of lifting up sleeves.

"No! Stop! Wait!" Hornetta pleaded. "I'll talk. Just put that needle away."

In the act of introducing the truth serum, Monk looked to Doc. The latter told Hornetta: "Last chance, young lady."

"That symbol I carved. You recognized it? You know what it means?"

Doc Savage nodded. "It is the political sign emblazoned on the flag of one of the warring European nations."



"It's more than that," Hornetta returned. "That mark is as old as civilization. I found it on Hopi pottery and Navajo blankets. In temples on the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere."

Doc Savage agreed. "It is an ancient symbol having many meanings. The significance of the symbol varies from nation-to-nation depending upon the era."

Now that things were taking a conversational turn, Hornetta began subsiding.

"There is an island in the Caribbean. And on that island is an ancient ruin," she informed them. "That mark can be found on that island."

"What is the significance of this island?" asked Doc.

"It is the isle where the **Men Under The Sea** dwell," replied Hornetta matter-of-factly.

Ham Brooks was listening very closely.

"This is not the first wild tale that she has attempted to tell us."

Suspicion threaded his well-bred tones.

"This time I'm leveling with you," insisted Hornetta. "Find that island and you'll find your cousin. That's my guess. If the **mermen** took her, that's where **they** would hold her."

Doc Savage searched Hornetta Hale's fiery face as if searching for signs of truthfulness. He did not speak. But he would have been the first to admit (assuming he was willing to be so uncharacteristically forthcoming) that he was an utter failure at reading the female face.

"Can you lead us to this island?" he asked finally.

"Turn me loose and I will. It's a promise."

Ham Brooks objected vociferously.

"Doc! You can't possibly trust this woman after all she has said and done!"

Monk Mayfair added: "She's poison. She's shown that a bunch of times. Don't listen to her. She'll just fly away on us."

Although normally impassive of countenance, the **Bronze Man's** expression twisted slightly at the corners of his mouth and around his eyes. His normal emotional reserve was cracking. He was genuinely torn.

At last he said: "Time is of the essence."

"No fooling," murmured Hornetta. "Do you let me go? Or do you jab me with that thing and lose some of the who-knows-how-man-hours of search time?"

With evident reluctance, Doc Savage released Hornetta Hale.

"Take us to the island of the **Men Under The Sea**."

Monk and Ham began objecting in raw voices talking over one another to such a vociferous degree that their precise words blended and mixed in a verbal confusion.

It was Long Tong Roberts who became the voice of reason.

"Doc's right," he said. "If we're ever going to find Pat, it's now or maybe never. And that never probably means forever."

That silenced everyone. Hornetta Hale backed away from them all. She turned to the rail and made a great splashing dive into the Caribbean Sea.

She wasted no time in backstroking to her waiting plane. Climbing aboard, the prickly brunette started up her overpowered engine and was soon running the plane into the soft Caribbean headwind.

Doc Savage lunged for the controls and began jazzing the big Diesel engines.

As they watched, Hornetta's yellow&black ship with its Wasp radial engine went banging along the water's surface. It jumped into the air and started spiraling upward, evidently to give them time to orient the *Stormalong* in the proper direction.

Hornetta flew south staying low, only 1,000 feet high. Doc Savage sent the *Stormalong* surging after her.

Long Tom muttered: "We're taking a long chance. But it's the only chance that makes sense."

"I still don't trust that glory hound," Monk Mayfair growled.

"My sentiments exactly," added Ham Brooks.

It was rare that the 2 friendly foes ever agreed upon anything. And even rarer where they did not fall over themselves putting halos on himself and adorning his romantic rival with horns and a spiked tail in an effort to impress a beautiful woman.

That Hornetta Hale was a delectable morsel was something that no red-blooded man could deny. But her fierce personality, her stubborn contrariness, and other quirks of her free-spiritedness had cooled any fires of desire that Monk and Ham might otherwise be harboring.

"Count me in as part of your chorus," Long Tom echoed.

XXII – Double Snare

For nearly 2 hours, they followed the yellowjacket seaplane of Hornetta Hale. She maintained a reasonable airspeed and flew low enough to be visible and within sight at all times. This prompted Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks to reevaluate their opinions of the slippery Amazon.

Ham offered cautiously: "Hornetta appears to be adhering to her part of the bargain."

Monk grunted: "Much as I hate to admit it, the shyster may be right. That screwy dame ain't tried to shake us yet. And she's had plenty of chances."

To which Long Tom Roberts contrarily suggested: "Unless that firecracker female is leading us into a trap."

Doc Savage contributed nothing to this discussion. He was becoming visibly tenser as each nautical mile reeled behind them.

It was a warmish afternoon. And this part of the Caribbean appeared to be both vast and deserted. They saw no passing ships. And of course no airplanes, these remote reaches not being on any airline route.

Noticing Doc's concerned expression, Ham put forth a question.

"Hornetta is leading us somewhere. Do you think it is a trap?"

Doc shook his head. "That is not my chief concern."

"Then what is it?" wondered the dapper attorney.

Before Doc could answer, a think *muttering* carried over the waves to their ears. At first, only the **Bronze Man** appeared to notice it because he waved a *metallic* hand for Ham to be quiet.

Ham looked up, empty hands clenching. His sword-cane was stored away for comfort and safety.

Abruptly, Doc Savage killed the Diesel engines. The speedy cruiser continued knifing forward, its momentum carrying it along.

Quiet followed.

Before long, the sighing of the Caribbean winds became mixed in with that sultry song and resolved into a grow *sputtering*. Flying low, Hornetta Hale's trim little amphibian plane bumped into sight.

Monk exploded: "She's running out of fuel for sure!"

At the radio, Doc attempted to raise the *Hornet*. He found the correct frequency swiftly enough. Out of the speaker came Hornetta's succinct ripping complaint.

"I really ran out of gas this time."

"Attempt to land near our boat," Doc advised her.

No reply came. No doubt the acerbic aviatrix was too busy managing her stricken steed. The colorful craft began to wobble its wings and lose additional altitude.

Banking, the *Hornet* swooped back around in their direction. They could see that its propeller blades were clearly defined. They were no longer spinning.

Hornetta glided along the surface of the Caribbean smacking the ship down on its fat pontoons, executing a respectable-but-bumpy landing that made the yellow wings dance. The ship soon wallowed, its wingtips rocking with the undulating waves.

Restarting the engines, Doc Savage sent the *Stormalong* in the crippled craft's direction.

By the time they reached the plane, Hornetta had clambered down onto one pontoon and jumped into the water. She began swimming in their direction (obviously there being no other recourse left to her).

As she swam, Hornetta wore an expression of extreme agitation. She was not the pleasant person they had encountered in their years of adventuring. And they were used to her rather unfeminine facial expressions. But now she truly looked upset.

Doc Savage throttled down the cruiser and veered in the trouble-prone brunette's direction in order to pick her up. It was while he was executing this maneuver that a very strange thing happened.

Hornetta was swimming furiously doing a dog-paddle. Her brunette hair sometimes was the only thing visible between her flashing forearms.

Abruptly, she disappeared from sight!

Ham Brooks reached for a pair of field glasses. He clapped them to his eyes.

Something thin was cutting through the blue water like a blade. It resembled the fin of a shark. But sharks the World over are uniformly dull colors such as a gray or brown. This fin was a gangrenous **reddish-green!**

Then Hornetta's head resurfaced. She was screaming.

"It's got me!"

"Who?" howled Ham.

Doc Savage advanced the throttle to its maximum. The engines roared throwing up a violent wake sending the cruiser lunging in her direction."

"Monk!" Doc rapped out. "Take the controls!"

The hairy chemist dived for the wheel yelling: "What got her? A shark?"

Doc Savage did not reply. Kicking off his deck shoes, he flung to the rail. It was evident that he was going to jump into the water as soon as the cruiser reached the spot where Hornetta was flailing and thrashing in the waves.

Before the prow knifed into position, Hornetta disappeared again. And this time she did not resurface.

The liver-colored **fin** had also vanished beneath the sea.

Monk Mayfair killed the engines gliding the last stretch of water to the spot where Hornetta had vanished while Doc Savage pitched himself over the rail and knifed into the cool coral waters.

Immediately after, a startling apparition came up from below decks throwing open the deck hatch. The figure made enough noise to be heard. All heads turned at once. Long Tom Roberts stood at the stern. So he was the first to yell out an identification.

"It's that Count!" he howled.

And it was indeed. The immaculate figure of Count Rumpler (as he styled himself) now stepped up from below as if he had just come topside after an afternoon nap.

He wore his usual elegant ensemble. A neat Tyrolean hat was perched jauntily on his head. He also sported a fresh cane. This one was cut from wood so that a spiral groove ran down its length.

The Count pointed his knurled stick held in one gloved hand at Long Tom and did something which caused a spurt of pale **vapor** to strike the slender Electrical Expert in the face.

Taken by surprise, Long Tom took a step backward and then began laughing uproariously. Tears welled up from his eyes. Overcome by this fit of laughter, he pitched forward.

Doc Savage had meanwhile gone under the waves in search of Hornetta Hale.

He saw nothing at first. No shark. No blood. No sign of the troublesome brunette.

Then 50 yards off, something could be discerned to the south.

It was a great **bluish** shadow as large as a small whale. The **Bronze Man** knew that blackfish (otherwise known as killer whales) could be found swimming in these waters. Blackfish were, quite naturally, ebony of hide with ivory markings.

This thing was an **aquamarine** hue that was so closely blended with the coral color of the Caribbean Sea that its outlines were indistinct. It possessed a dorsal fin not unlike that of a shark. But this fin was bluish-gray, not **red**.

What became of Hornetta Hale and the **red**-finned thing that had apparently snatched her was utterly baffling. But the **blue** creature gliding away was the only trail Doc Savage had. So he began swimming after it.

A strange thing happened as soon as the **bronze** giant arrowed toward its blur of a tail.

A jet of water so **powerful** that it knocked Doc backward dozens of yards struck him full in the chest with irresistible force driving the air from his might lungs. Air bubbles boiled from his mouth. A tightness clamped about his muscular chest.

Recovering his underwater orientation, Doc fixed his gaze on the uncanny thing. It was even more indistinct now. Catching up to it would be impossible.

Reluctantly, Doc resurfaced for air.

The sounds of combat emanating from the becalmed *Stormalong* caused his **metallic** head to turn. Seeing the commotion on deck, the **Bronze Man** rushed toward the diving stage at the *Stormalong's* stern and grasped it with both hands preparing to climb aboard.

To his utter astonishment (for he had been entirely unaware of the situation on the cruiser), the clever Count swung in his direction.

Doc Savage had the presence of mind to hold his breath. Thus when the jet of **vapor** came his way, he was initially unaffected.

Seeing this, the Count drew a lean-barreled foreign automatic from his coat and pointed it at Doc Savage's face.

The **Bronze Man** abruptly veered to the left avoiding the spiteful snap of the weapon and its vicious bullet. His reflexed made his body a bronze **blur**. He vanished beneath the waves.

Meanwhile, Ham Brooks had not been idle. He swept up his sword-cane and exposed the glittering blade. He came charging at the dashing gallant.

There followed a very strange duel as Ham's blade collided and clashed with the Count's sturdy cane barrel.

The Count was not a bad fencer. He might have won some awards in the past. But he distinctly belonged to the saber school of the art. He parried Ham's first lunge expertly and performed a riposte that sent the dapper lawyer gingerly dancing back and henceforth exercising greater caution.

Blade and barrel banged and clashed while Ham Brooks fought to press the advantage against the hacking attack.

The problem turned out to be that the blade was not as sturdy as the barrel. And each time Ham struck, he found its edge slithering against the barrel becoming caught on one of its spiral grooves.

Redoubling his effort, Ham lunged and lunged again, features working. But nothing the determined lawyer could do appeared to defeat the debonair Count's strong defense.

Stepping back a moment, Ham paused, seeking an opening.

It was at that point that the resourceful Count <pressed> a stud on his cane and out from the far end jutted a tiny steel needle. With a casual sweep of his hand, the Count brought the sharp tip slicing along the back of Ham's outstretched fist.

The swipe drew **blood** and Ham let out a yelp of pain. In that startled moment, a spurt of white *vapor* took him full in the face.

The expression on Ham's face changed immediately from twisted anger to high hilarity. His laughter was on the high-pitched side and rolled out in peals-and-peals-and-peals as if he were steadily losing his mind.

Then the dapper lawyer collapsed joining Long Tom sleeping on the deck.

Monk now came on roaring. His upraised fist was ready to pound his adversary to the deck floor.

Casually, the Count holstered his automatic and this time brought forth a small glass jar filled with liquid from a pocket.

He drew back to throw it and the jar smashed ahead of Monk's pounding feet. The contents immediately vaporized producing a spreading white *cloud*. The Count backed down below deck locking the latch behind him.

Monk Mayfair began laughing almost at once. It was a great bellowing laugh. It shook his barrel chest and made him convulse and double over as if he could not contain his belly-quivering mirth.

Doc Savage got back aboard. He reached into a pocket and extracted a portable gas mask which he drew over his head. It was another one of his pliable transparent cellophane hoods which sealed about his neck with an elastic.

Thus it was that when the *vapor* filled the cockpit of the cruiser, he was entirely unaffected.

Lunging for the hatch, the **Bronze Man** tried it and discovered that it was locked. He began using his **bronze** fists on the wood.

Metallic knuckles reduced the hatch to a broken shambles. Doc plunged downward.

Below deck, he was not greatly surprised to see the hatch of the diving well flung open. Around the device, seawater stood about in fresh puddles. There was no question that the Count had entered the *Stormalong* by this means.

What appeared to be utterly baffling was how the debonair antagonist had done so. And how he had managed to show up on deck as dry and immaculate as if he had strolled off a seaside dock.

Doc Savage bent to one knee at the well and peered downward.

XXIII – Hades Cay

Monk Mayfair snapped awake with a start.

The simian chemist had been dozing making the most amazing sounds as he snored. It was as if a flock of geese had formed an orchestra.

Now those sounds turned into a snuffle followed by a succession of snorts as Monk became aware of a scratchy sensation in his mouth and nose.

He sat up and peered about. His tiny eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"Where-the-heck am I?" he muttered to himself.

Sitting up, the hairy chemist saw that he lay in darkness. He looked to the left.

There Ham Brooks lay sprawled, apparently slumbering. For the sound of his regular breathing was audible.

Over to the right, Long Tom Roberts was likewise asleep. Since the underside electrical expert was closest to hand, Monk reached out with one of his overlong arms and gave him a hearty tap.

Long Tom was no heavy sleeper. The <slap> jarred him awake. He jumped to his feet wielding the first thing he could get his hands on. Which proved to be a thorny stick of some sort.

He almost brained Monk Mayfair before the latter sprang to his own feet waving his arms saying:

"Whoa! It's me! Monk!"

It was dark and there was a Moon. The moonlight probably saved Monk Mayfair from one of the most serious beatings of his entire life.

For Long Tom Roberts, while he could be classified as a bantamweight, had been known to take on f-04-5 grown men at a time and beat them within an inch of their lives. He had quite a temper.

"Where are we?" Long Tom demanded when he got control of himself.

"Beats me," admitted Monk.

Long Tom noticed that his nose and throat felt scratchy. He gave the air an experimental sniff.

"Smells like we landed in Hades," Long Tom ventured uneasily.

Monk said: "I smell fire all right. But not the brimstone part."

They searched their clothing and discovered that they had no weapons. Long Tom produced one of the tiny flashlights that Doc Savage and his aides always carried. These were operated by a spring-generator that required only a brisk winding to produce strong illumination.

After digging it out of his sock where it had been secreted, Long Tom speared illumination all about.

At first, it looked as if they had landed in some kind of charcoal pit. The ground was charred and blackened by fire. The fire was recent for the stink of burning wood hung heavily in the warm night air.

Investigating, Long Tom discovered what he initially mistook for a great horny tentacle that ran for some length around and along the ground. It also was black and charred.

Casting about, he discerned more of them traveling in all directions. It was as if great beanstalks had caught fire and fallen in tentacular profusion. The sprawling protrusions had an otherworldly look to them.

Monk walked up to the ugly thing and rubbed it with his hairy paws. Burnt charcoal resulted smearing the palms of his hands. He sniffed them.

"Smells like creosote or something like that," Monk said.

They woke up Ham Brooks. He started awake with wide eyes, the expression on his handsome face suggesting he had been having nightmares. Looking about, the dapper lawyer saw and smelled that they were no longer aboard the *Stormalong*.

"Where are we?" he began thickly.

"Your guess is as good as ours," Long Tom informed him.

Ham got up. He found no trace of his sword-cane or any weapon on his person. He began flapping his hands which he did whenever agitated or feeling helpless. The lack of a sword-cane always made him feel helpless. The others suspected that he always slept with the thing under his pillow.

They began exploring guided only by the penetrating ray of Long Tom's flashlight. He had to stop and wind it periodically. But unlike a battery-powered torch, the device would never fail to produce illumination.

As they walked along, they began coughing and hacking. It was the result of continuing to inhale the low-lying haze that had been produced by what had apparently been a very recent fire.

"What-the-heck happened here/" Monk wanted to know.

Long Tom said: "I think I see water ahead."

They followed him craning their heads this-way-and-that, unsure of what to expect.

Every man remembered the seemingly miraculous appearance of the Count who had sauntered up from the hold of the *Stormalong* as dry as a flag and overcame them all with his trick cane.

Now they were here. Wherever 'here' was. They had no idea. Nor did they know how many hours had passed since they had fallen into laughing fits followed by a black unconsciousness.

At last they came to shore. Their feet crunched on the immaculately white sand that suggested crushed sea shells.

They followed the pearly beach for a bit. Soon the moonlight showed them the *Stormalong* which was lying at anchor as calm as can be.

"Our cruiser!" Ham bleated. "What-the-devil is it doing here?"

Long Tom said sourly: "The better question is what are we doing here?"

Since no one had an answer for that, they decided to investigate the cruiser.

They had to roll up their pants legs and wade out to the vessel. The water was very cold but tolerable.

Monk arrived first. He boarded by the simple expedient of climbing the anchor chain. He reached the foredeck in jig time, clambering into the bridge.

Long Tom followed. Ham came last, apparently reluctant to commit himself to the indignity of climbing the cumbersome links. He worked around and used the pilot's ladder.

Once on deck, they initiated a thorough search.

The boat appeared for the most part to be intact. But Long Tom started swearing when he discovered that the radio tubes had been smashed.

Many things were missing. Weapons and other equipment that would prove useful. Miraculously (at least according to Ham's lights), Ham discovered his sword-cane. It was lying in 2 sections. Blade and barrel.

Picking them up, the dapper lawyer made the stick whole. His handsome features grew pleased.

Monk commented: "A lot of good that thing done you against that Count's trick walkin' stick."

"I will know what to do next time," Ham said stiffly.

Going below, they discovered Doc Savage lying on the floor near the diving well. The **bronze** giant appeared to be asleep.

Monk attempted to rouse him. But Doc slumbered on.

He placed on hand over the **Bronze Man's** chest and felt a very strong steady heartbeat. Monk appeared very relieved.

Monk offered: "Doc musta gotten a bigger dose than the rest of us. Normally he's the first one to come out of anything."

The hairy chemist fidgeted uneasily and looked around some more.

Detecting scratching sounds from the lazaret door, the simian chemist threw it open. Out popped the pig Habeas Corpus. The homely shoat had taken to sleeping in the space and no doubt had passed the last few hours therein.

"Hog," said Monk proudly, "leave it to you to stay out of trouble."

The pig jumped into Monk's waiting arms and cast a beady glare in Ham's direction. This made Monk suddenly suspicious.

"Shyster, did you lock him in there?" he demanded of Ham.

"Nonsense," denied the elegant attorney. "That misbegotten insect is smart enough to hide from trouble on its own account."

This unexpected compliment made Monk's tiny eyes narrow and his suspicions grow.

"It appears as if the vessel has been stripped of anything in the nature of weapons," Ham observed veering away from the subject of Habeas.

"Yeah," allowed Monk. "But how did it get here? And how did we get here?"

Again, there were no answers.

Monk sat down and waited for Doc Savage to come back to life. Ham and Long Tom went topside to continue their investigation.

After a while, they discovered that the Diesel fuel tanks had been drained.

"Bone dry," reported Long Tom in a dispirited voice.

"That means we're stranded," said Ham grimly.

"Marooned is the technical term," Long Tom corrected sourly.

Ham stood watch while Long Tom went back below and waited for Doc Savage to return to consciousness.

Impatiently, Long Tom asked Monk: "Isn't there some stimulant you can give him?"

Monk shook his bullet head.

"No. We ain't got any idea what Doc was dosed with. No tellin' what reaction he might have if we try. Better to let him wake up on his own."

Another our passed before the **Bronze Man** showed signs of activity. He began to stir. His eyes snapped open and came into clear focus.

Without a word, Doc Savage stood up and looked around. But he said nothing. Not even his customary *trilling* issued forth.

"We're stuck on some Hell-forsaken island somewhere," Monk informed him.

Doc seemed not to hear. Despite the clearness of his eyes, he seemed a little out of sorts as if still half-asleep.

"You okay?" Long Tom asked him.

Finally, Doc spoke.

"Precautions are not always sufficient," he said simply.

There was a trace of disappointment in his *metallic* tones.

Monk said: "It got us all. And the heck of it is, we don't know how we landed here or how our boat got here. But they took away anything we could fight with and drained the fuel tanks to boot."

Doc Savage seemed to want to unburden himself of something. He addressed no one in particular. He simply began speaking.

"I took the precaution of swallowing an oxygen table before donning my gas mask. I assumed that would protect me from the laughing *vapor* in the event the mask was breached or the period of exposure went on too long. But I was in error.

"What happened?" Monk asked.

"I followed the Count down. But apparently he escaped through the diving well. When I looked down, his sword stick licked up and ripped my mask. Then came the jet of *vapor* which produces uncontrollable laughing followed by unconsciousness."

"Yeah?"

"The oxygen table allowed me to continue breathing without having to respire normally."

Monk grinned. "Yeah. They are handy little gadgets at that."

"Unfortunately, they are only good for 20-to-30 minutes," added Doc Savage. "I feigned unconsciousness awaiting another move by our enemies."

Long Tom looked interested. "What happened?"

"As I lay there playing possum, the sounds of strange *flopping* feet came on deck," reported Doc. "I could hear things moving about. But I saw nothing, of course."

The **Bronze Man** seemed to be searching his memory.

"I waited for a chance to make a move. But I feared doing so prematurely lest any of you be harmed in your helpless condition."

"So what happened?" pressed Monk.

"Our adversaries are as clever and determined as before," Doc said with a trace of ill-concealed disgust. "While there was scurrying about above deck, someone tossed a jar of the *vapor* down the hatch introducing a great quantity of the *stuff* below decks. I decided it was necessary to enter the water. But before I could so, I was overcome by laughing. I had only pretended to laugh loudly the first time I was gassed. But the second time, I was not in control of myself. So consciousness was lost with the end result that I accomplished exactly nothing."

Monk clucked: "Well, at least you gave it the old college try."

Doc Savage did not seem mollified by the homely chemist's pronouncement.

Moving suddenly, he went topside and made a thorough investigation verifying the fact that the tanks were empty and the vessel stranded. He looked about him in the night and saw the dark shape of a mangrove-covered island.

Doc took to the rail ... went into the water ... and waited until the others followed him. Monk carried the pig Habeas above his blunt head triumphantly.

They reached the beach of pearly white sands without incident.

Doc Savage had borrowed Long Tom's generator flashlight and was using to pick his way around the island.

Monk offered: "This hickey on the Caribbean looks like a stray patch of Hades."

Doc said nothing. He merely worked his way around examining the burnet terrain and the great charred profusion that resembled horny gropy elephant trunks reaching everywhere.

Then the **Bronze Man** looked up and began studying the waning Moon and stars.

After a while, he ventured: "A day has passed. It seems that we are still in the Caribbean."

"What part, though?" wondered Long Tom. "That takes in a lot of territory."

Doc Savage did not answer that directly. Rather, he said:

"This island appears to have been fire-blackened and scorched by a recent lightning strike. The blaze has burned itself out. But the air remains heavy with the resulting smoke."

That explanation relieved their minds no end since their initial impression suggested that they had been deposited into some kind of Purgatory.

They were on the flat side of the island which sloped upward to a kind of broad hump covered in unchecked **green** growth. Doc Savage ignored the rise and simply walked around the beach which soon became obstructed by tangles of thorny brush, some scattered cactus, and woody mangrove roots.

One end of the isle was choked with red mangrove swamp whose tough twisting roots dipped into water's edge as if attempting to escape the awful place by walking into the sea.

There was absolutely no life. No birds. No insects. No tropical lizards of any kind. It was a little uncanny.

Reversing course, the **bronze** giant followed the beach around in the other direction only to discover another tangle of mangroves.

There was no point in attempting to negotiate the tough root system. So he began mounting the high summit of the island.

Glancing about, Ham Brooks ventured: "There doesn't seem to be any kind of lagoon here."

"Why does that matter?" asked Long Tom peevishly.

"With all the talk of lagoons, this might be the place to find one," Ham explained. "But there's nothing of the sort along the shore."

Doc Savage led them up the rise which was thick with grass. When he got to the top, his eerie **trilling** began to filter through the night air. It wafted briefly and then trailed off in an intrigued curious sound.

When the others joined him, they discovered the reason for this expression of surprise.

What they took to be a hill was in fact a great hollow crater at the bottom of which lay a pool of placid water, dark and unmoving in the moonlight.

"**Blue hole**," said Doc Savage.

"What?" asked Ham.

"A natural formation in this part of the World as well as in others," Doc explained. "We are looking at a body of water which no doubt leads to one-or-more underwater caves. Sometimes there are networks of tunnels feeding seawater into these so-called '**blue holes**'."

Monk peered downward and remarked: "Looks **greenish** to me."

Indeed as they watched, luminous patches of faint **green** showed here-and-there deep in the depths of the dark pool as if creatures were stirring the waters.

"Sea fire," ventured Ham.

And to prove his point, the dapper lawyer kicked a loose stone over the edge.

Where the stone made a splash, a zone of disturbed water sprang into vivid *luminescence* which turned a spectral green before dying into darkness again. It appeared almost alive. Which, in a way, it was.

Doc nodded. "The pool is undoubtedly brimming with minute marine organisms which when agitated produce temporary *phosphorescence*. They are already subsiding."

He began to walk along the lip of the depression. His flashlight showed that the soil was black and rocky. Some of it was very shiny ebony glass.

Monk reached down and picked up a chunk of this. He looked at it closely.

"Obsidian! This isn't any valley. This is the cone of an extinct volcano!"

Long Tom excavated some growth with the toe of one shoe revealing igneous rock.

They looked at the formation with new eyes. Apparently a volcano had existed on this spot but had gone extinct possibly thousands of years ago. It had filled with rainwater (if not seawater) which infiltrated through lava tunnels.

Doc Savage said: "The Lesser Antilles is predominately comprised of volcanic isles such as this. That could place us in the West Indies in the westernmost portion of the Caribbean Sea."

He shone the intense pencil beam of his flashlight down into the water. He did this for quite some time.

"What are you looking for?" wondered Ham.

Doc did not reply. It was characteristic of him no to respond when he preferred to keep information to himself.

He said only: "This *blue hole* bears investigating."

Abruptly the bronze giant retreated down to the shore and made his way back to the anchored cruiser. Rummaging through broken equipment cases, he unearthed a diving helmet that was remarkable in the extreme.

It was no clumsy affair of stainless steel and glass ports. Instead, it resembled one of those tall crystal glass covers that are placed over old-fashioned desktop clocks to protect the intricate gearworks from dust and dirt. Except for a shoulder plate of formed aluminum as well as leather straps to go under the armpits to secure the thing, the diving helmet was entirely transparent. It was not glass but rather a clear composition stronger than steel produced in Doc Savage's fabulous *Fortress of Solitude* at the North Pole. [read #68 - "*Fortress of Solitude*"]

From a drawer he took a handful of white pills that resembled ordinary aspirin. These, however, were more of the oxygen tables that Doc Savage had invented many years ago.

Cradling the helmet under one arm, he returned to the water and waded back onshore. He joined his men as they took up a position under a palm tree that was black with soot but otherwise unscorched.

"What I have in mind is best accomplished after sunrise."

"So we wait?" asked Long Tom.

Doc nodded.

Ham Brooks had a sudden thought.

"It has just dawned on me that the Count and these web-footed *creatures* must be in league with one another."

"They are," said Doc. "Furthermore, I recognized the Count. His name is not 'Rumpler'. Rather, he is Count Runo von Elmz, a Prussian aristocrat of some renown. I have never met him. But in pictures I have studied, he was always bearded. With his face shorn, it took a second encounter until I was able to place his identity."

"Spy?" asked Ham.

"Without question," replied Doc.

Long Tom grumbled: "None of this adds up to much."

Monk looked about him and then up into the crown of the palm tree which was rustling in the soft breeze.

"I wonder if there's anything to eat around here?"

Ham sniffed: "You would think of your stomach at a time like this!"

Monk snapped back: "If we're stuck here any length of time, we're all going to be dreamin' of grub."

That sobering thought made Ham grow silent.

Long Tom looked out across the water at their anchored cruiser and rubbed his jaw in perplexity.

"I still can't figure how we got here boat-and-all. We didn't pilot it in our sleep, that's for sure."

No one seized the conversational hook dangling in the darkness until Monk suddenly asked:

"What do you suppose happened to that waspy Hornetta Hale?"

"Shark most likely got her," Long Tom said without sympathy.

The thought of the feisty brunette having been devoured by a shark did not bring any cheer to their collective mood. Doc Savage's group again lapsed into silence.

While they waited for the Sun to rise, Monk Mayfair grew restless and stood up.

"I need to stretch my legs," he remarked to no one in particular.

Doc cautioned: "Do not go very far. Stay in sight."

Monk shrugged resignedly and said: "This whole dang island ain't much more than a half-mile in any direction."

The gorilla-like chemist ambled off.

Hardly 5 minutes passed before Monk came charging back waving his long furry arms:

"Ye-e-o-w!"

Doc rushed up to meet him and demanded: "What is it?"

Monk did not immediately reply. He was too agitated. He made noises that the **Bronze Man** recognized as inarticulate panic.

When the hairy chemist got himself under control, he asked Doc Savage a simple question.

"Are you sure that this place was scorched by lightning?"

"Absolutely. Why do you ask?"

"Because I just saw the **Devil**."

"The Devil?" Doc prompted.

A weird **horror** was in the homely chemist's tiny eyes. His hairy forearms actually trembled.

"This **devil** didn't look like the **Devil** that you see in picture books. He was worse."

Doc Savage instructed: "Describe this 'devil'."

Monk made wild gestures of description.

"**He** stood nearly 8 feet tall. Had a row of horns all around the top of his head. Not just two in the front like you would expect a decent devil to have."

"Jove!" Ham breathed. "Monk has lost his mind."

Doc gestured for silence.

"Continue, Monk," he invited.

"Like I said, 8 feet tall. And **He** was as *green* as a grasshopper, not *red*. I think **He** had a tail. But **He** was starin' directly at me so I didn't see that part for sure. And *yellow* eyes. They were not a good yellow, either. A witch's black cat might own such eyes."

"Did he have a pitchfork?" demanded Long Tom apparently in all seriousness.

Monk had to think about that.

"No. It was more like a trident. Like King Neptune would carry."

Ever eager to pick apart a story, the lawyer Ham Brooks said: "You are describing an underwater Satan."

Monk had to think about that one also for a moment.

He admitted: "I am at that, aren't I?"

Doc Savage said: "Take us to this 'Devil'."

Monk hesitated. His hairy arms still trembled.

"I don't think I ought to," he said vaguely.

The *bronze* giant gave the hairy chemist a strong shove by way of propelling him on his way. Reluctantly, Monk got going and they followed him.

When they got to the palm tree where Monk had encountered the green *Devil*, there was no sign of any such creature.

Doc Savage speared his flash beam about looking for signs of tracks. He discovered none. But in moving around some more, he found something that brought Ham Brooks to a dead halt.

"Look," he said to the others.

The bright ray disclosed a sandy area where the ground went down to the beach. There were messy-looking **tracks** that were certainly not human feet or cloven hooves. They were wet.

Ham remarked: "Looks like geese have been walking around here."

"Mighty big geese," muttered Monk.

Doc said: "These tracks bring to mind the ones we discovered in our hold after Pat vanished."

"They do at that," said Long Tom.

Turning to Monk, he asked: "Did the *Thing* you saw remind you of that *merman* we saw?"

Monk shook his head in a violent negative.

"No. Not unless it was the **King** of them."

Doc Savage poked around looking for more tracks or signs of anything stalking about. He found nothing.

Returning to the grotesque webbed footprints, he seemed to be committing their weird watery contours to memory.

Ham Brooks was down on one knee examining a splayed print.

"These were not made by diving fins. But I cannot tell if these tracks are coming out of the water or going back into it."

Monk grunted: "My vote is for goin' back into it. I never want to see that emerald **Satan** again. It was taller than Doc."

Ham pressed: "The **Creature** you saw, did it have skin or scales?"

"What's the difference!" snapped Monk. "It was awful looking!"

"The difference," Ham returned, "is that scales would make it a relative of the merman."

"Nothing like that **Hob-Seagoblin** should have any relatives," Monk said with a trace of trembling *fear* in his voice.

Long Tom turned to Doc Savage and asked in an undertone:

"What do you make of Monk's story? He's always been on the superstitious side. Think he's embellishing what he saw?"

"It is difficult to say for certain," Doc admitted. "But Monk is convinced that he encountered such a **Monster**."

They went back to the doubtful shelter of the palm tree and returned to awaiting the dawn.

It was a difficult wait for the haze of smoke rasped at their throats and made them scratchy. Their nostrils felt as if they were clogged with sand.

From time-to-time the air seemed to carry unusual odors reminiscent of sulfur or brimstone. Given their Hellish surroundings, it was not a cheering thing to breathe into the lungs.

Long Tom happened to be looking toward the surf when he thought he saw something moving in the water. It was still dark so he could not be certain. Moonglade on the waves stared at long enough can produce confusing optical effects.

The puny Electrical Expert stared carefully at the spot that seemed to be disturbed. There was *phosphorescence* in the water. It produced a weird *greenish* effect as if underwater fireflies were dancing in the shallows.

Long Tom nudged Ham Brooks. In a low voice he whispered:

"Look where I'm pointing. What do you see?"

Ham peered through the darkness.

"I see something moving. But I'm not sure what it is."

"Looks like a **mermaid** to me," Long Tom breathed.

Doc Savage caught this exchange and turned his attention in the direction of Long Tom's pointing finger.

"Something is out there all right," he said.

Then the **bronze** giant was up on his feet and moving toward the water.

The others were not far behind him. Running alongside, Long Tom made a strangled sound and blurted: "Is that real?"

Ham cried out: "I can't see it clearly! What is it?"

Long Tom's voice lifted wildly.

"Don't laugh at me. But it looks like a **mermaid**. **An honest-to-goodness mermaid!** She's wearing seashells and her hair is as **green** as kelp."

Ham squinted hard and murmured: "I can barely make anything out except some thing is floating in the water."

"Are you sure it's a **mermaid**?" Monk demanded.

Long Tom barked back.

"I'm not sure of anything. But unless I'm dreaming, **the mermaid looks just like Hornetta Hale!**"

XX

Next (finally!) ...



... Hornetta is used as a Whore !

XXIV – Confoundment

Doc Savage reached the surf ahead of the others and plunged in.

He waded out legs churning until the water was deep enough to swim in. Then he threw himself upon the dark rollers charged with wavering sea fire.

It was clear to the others that the *Man of Bronze* had spotted something in the water as well. For he arrowed out into the deep and then disappeared beneath the waves for a time.

There followed a *splashing* and *thrashing* and *crashing* of violently disturbed water. Doc Savage surfaced clutching something that squealed and flailed and fought him madly.

Monk and the others charged out to give assistance. But when they reached him, the battle was already over.

Doc Savage was treading water. The thing that he had captured was floating placidly beside him, its distressed squealing having subsided.

Even in the moonlight, it was difficult to discern clearly. It was almost as long as an average man. But beyond that all resemblances to anything human ceased.

Swimming with the brine up to his barrel chest, Monk Mayfair stopped propelling himself forward and suddenly began to jerk backwards, momentarily aback by the ugly creature floating there.

It was long and fat and grayish-brown with a blunt snout. All of it was covered with thick leathery skin like a walrus. But it was no walrus. For one thing, there were no tusks.

"What-the-heck is that thing?" the hairy chemist sputtered.

"Manatee," Doc Savage said calmly.

Long Tom pushed his way forward and glared at the beast.

"That is not what I saw," he insisted. "It was a **mermaid**. It looked like Hornetta Hale. And that's final!"

Doc Savage said simply: "Manatees -- or sea cows as they are also known -- are sometimes mistaken for mermaids by superstitious sailors."

"I am not superstitious!" blazed Long Tom. "Keep looking! That **mermaid** is around here somewhere."

Doc shook his head.

"There is no mermaid. There is only this solitary manatee."

As they trod water, the manatee got its strength back and began paddling away. It was a very placid-looking animal. And now that they could see it more clearly, its resemblance to a human being was general at best.

Doc Savage struck out for shore. The others followed.

But Long Tom was not finished defending himself.

"She had **green** hair like seaweed. She wore seashells to protect her modesty. And her face was just like Hornetta Hale's thin-nosed puss."

"Did she have scales or skin?" asked Ham sharply.

"What difference does it make?" returned Long Tom hotly. "I saw what I saw."

"You saw a manatee," corrected Doc Savage without a trace of reproof. "At a distance and under present conditions, it was an understandable mistake to make."

"Either that," inserted Ham, "or you dozed off and had a nightmare."

"If that was a nightmare," defended Long Tom, "it was a very vivid one."

"My **Devil** was pretty vivid also," added Monk Mayfair sheepishly. "Maybe Long Tom did see what he saw."

They all turned to look at the simian chemist. Monk Mayfair was among the bravest men they had ever known. But his encounter with the Satanic version of Father Neptune had reduced him to a quivering wreck.

"I think both of you were imagining things," Ham insisted.

An argument broke out between the three of them as they beached themselves and started wringing seawater out of their clothes.

Doc Savage left them for a time and resumed his reconnoiter of the island. The first peep of dawn light was breaking across the water. And now that he could see more clearly, the **Bronze Man** wanted to investigate the terrain more closely.

He first looked over the spidery sprawl of horny fire-blackened tentacles. Along their charcoal surfaces were sharp protrusions rather resembling the tough surface of a pineapple but of immense size. The light was bright enough to show details clearly. The extensions (for that is what they were) led back to a central stalk that was also barbed and blackened.

Long Tom had drifted up by this time drawn by the spectacular sight.

"looks like a petrified giant tarantula," he hazarded. "Or something worse."

Doc Savage shook his head.

"The ground-traveling roots of a species of Philodendron bush which had been blasted and burned by lightning strikes. You can plainly see the charred leaves lying about after having been burnt off."

The puny Electrical Wizard looked down. The ground was covered in great leaves resembling blackened elephant ears, he now realized.

"That's a relief," he exclaimed. "Monk thinks we landed on an outer isle of Hades."

"This species is native to the Lesser Antilles," Doc pointed out. "This erases all doubt as to our approximate location."

"I'll go tell the others," offered Long Tom. "it will take a load off their minds."

As Long Tom looked back, Doc Savage pressed on with his tour of the weird cay.

He was soon lost from view ...

Monk Mayfair's and Ham Brooks' argument had pretty much ended when Doc Savage's *trilling* suddenly sounded, carrying to their ears through the tropical night.

At first, the others thought it was the song of a tropical bird. But after a few bars, they knew differently. The eerie sound drew them inland. They found him among the mangroves where the going was difficult (to say the least).

The **Bronze Man** had used his hands with their remarkable *tendon* strength to excavate something that was overgrown.

It was a very ancient stone temple. Constructed along the lines they all recognized. But were also very unusual. Great basalt blocks comprised the structure over which something like stucco had been applied. The stucco surface had largely fallen over time exposing the foundational blocks.

This temple had been all-but-reclaimed by the growth of many generations if not centuries. Sinuous creepers had entwined it in a verdant web. In the back, a runt palm was growing out of the riven rock at a drunken angle. The thing was an utter ruin.

Monk offered: "Must be the ruin that doggone she-hornet told us about."

"You should talk," jibed Ham. "About pests, that is."

Long Tom remarked: "Looks kind of Egyptian."

Monk contradicted him saying: "Reminds me of the temples down in the Valley of the Vanished where the Mayans who supply us with our **gold** dwell."

Early in Doc Savage's career, he came into contact with a fabulous civilization hidden deep in the mountain fastness of the nation of Hildago. [read #001 - "The Man of Bronze"] There, he encountered remnants of the ancient Mayan people still living as they did thousands of years ago entirely isolated

from modern civilization. In gratitude for a past service rendered by and in honor of Doc's father Clark Savage, Sr. who had originally discovered this hermit enclave, the good Mayans agreed to give Clark Savage, Jr. the benefit of their enormous reserves of gold. Periodically, burro trains of the precious metal are sent to the Outer World to be deposited in a bank account owned by Doc Savage. This seemingly endless supply of wealth is what funds the Bronze Man's worldwide operations.

To which Ham Brooks inserted: "The architecture is a peculiar blend of both."

But that was not what drew their attention as Doc Savage worked.

For over the entrance were cut a series of symbols. Four of them in a row. They were the same symbols that Hornetta Hale had carved into a royal palm trunk back on the sandy island on which she had been marooned.

Ham Brooks said darkly: "I don't like the looks of that mark."

"You mean that *swastika*," corrected Long Tom.

"Whatever it is," ham sniffed, "I don't like it."

Doc Savage reminded them: "This symbol may not be what it appears to modern eyes. Remember that it was carved long ago."

"What would it mean in this part of the World?" wondered Ham.

Doc Savage was thoughtful.

"In the Far East, the *swastika* is considered to be an auspicious sign. Rather like a good luck charm. South of here, the Cuna people of Panama and Columbia use it to represent to octopus deity whom they believe created the World."

"Did they build temples such as this one?" asked Ham.

"They did not," said the **Bronze Man** returning to his investigation of the weird ruin.

Doc got to the point where he could access what appeared to be an entrance. He brought out his flashlight and directed the light around.

To his disappointment, the light disclosed only a choke of jungle growth and old vegetable debris. The interior of the temple was largely awash with water and mangrove roots. Small fish darted between the roots. Gray angelfish and blue tangs predominantly.

He found a stick and attempted to stir the tangle. But the only result was that it became clear to him that whatever lay in the temple, it would be impossible to get at it without the proper tools. Mangrove roots were tough stuff. Brute strength alone would not dislodge them.

They stood back marveling at the ruin. It appeared to be ancient.

Ham Brooks asked: "What do you make of it, Doc?"

"You will remember several years ago when we discovered a vault at the bottom of the Atlantic not far from Nassau in the Bahamas." [\[read #36 - "Mystery Under The Sea"\]](#)

Ham nodded. "We always wondered if it wasn't some remnant of something akin to Atlantis. The continent was reputed to have sunk beneath the waves centuries ago in a terrific cataclysm."

Monk scratched his furry head.

"And it wasn't long after that when we discovered that dome under the water where people who descended from those original builders still lived." [\[read #67 - "The Red Terrors"\]](#)

Long Tom asked: "Do you suppose that these **mermen** -- or whatever they are -- are kin to that race of people?"

"It is too soon to tell," admitted Doc. "But it is very worthwhile exploring."

Ham considered this.

"It may be well that the Count and his men are on the trail of some treasure or scientific knowledge to be found in these ruins or similar ruins nearby."

Long Tom added: "It would explain a lot, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah," Monk said slowly. "That big vault we discovered was filled with scientific knowledge that we weren't able to get out of there before the roof caved in."

"Those ruins are very far from here," reminded Doc.

But to every one of them, the pieces began to come together in a way that made sense.

Doc Savage's remarkable oxygen pills had been developed as a direct result of his discoveries in that underwater realm that had once stood on dry land and harbored a great scientifically advanced civilization in a long-ago era before recorded history.

With those thoughts in mind, they returned to the more habitable part of the island which under the rising Sun took on a very weird aspect. The very gory tropical light looked like it was setting the charcoal ground back alight.

The air seemed more breathable than before. Which did not make it very palatable. It stank of smoke.

Doc Savage retrieved the transparent helmet and its harness. He began mounting the overgrown slope of the dormant volcanic cone. The others followed not far behind.

Reaching the summit, the **Bronze Man** swallowed 3 oxygen tables which he washed down with the milk of a coconut he had found.

The manner in which he cracked the coconut would have astonished a circus strong man. Doc merely balanced the coconut husk atop one metallic palm and brought the edge of his other hand down sharply similar to a martial artist's knife-hand strike (but more powerful). The coconut split with an audible *crack!* Swiftly, Doc took it up and drank milky fluid from the breach.

That accomplished, the bronze giant set the heavy helmet over his head and connected the straps under each shoulder. This created a very tight seal. No air could get out. But inasmuch as his system was charged by the oxygen-generating chemical pills, he would not have to breathe for over an hour.

On one wrist he wore an ingenious leather strap on which were several instruments including a dial watch, a compass, and a depth gauge. These would come in handy if he discovered any underwater tunnels. All 3 instruments were painted with *radium* so they could be read under unfavorable conditions.

Doc removed his shoes and placed his flashlight in one pocket. Without another word or gesture, he turned and prepared to plunge in.

But before he could do so, the *Man of Bronze* was stopped by a remarkable sight.

There was a bubbling kind of disturbance in the water below. The surface had been very placid up to this point. But now it roiled.

Something bobbed up from below.

Doc pointed but said nothing. No sound could escape his sealed helmet, anyway.

Up from the deep came a *green*-haired head. They all saw it.

The owner of the head flung her hair back snapping long *green* tresses that shook off seawater the way a dog sheds rain from its coat.

A face looked up. It was a face they all recognized.

Monk bellowed: "**Hornetta Hale!**"

"And pipe this!" exploded Long Tom. "She's got the *mermaid* hair I told you about!"

XXV – Snags

There was little question that it was Hornetta Hale emerging from the depths of the algae-green **blue hole**.

Neither was there any doubt that her hair was as **green** as seaweed exactly as long Tom Roberts had described hours before.

While Doc Savage and his men were taking in the strange sight, the strange vision began stroking toward the side of the extinct cone.

She reached what looked like a wall of cooled lava and remarkable scrambling up. But the same agility that had allowed her to climb coconut trees and survive on a remote tropic isle for several weeks failed her now.

Monk Mayfair lowered a hairy arm to assist the **green**-haired girl up to the rocky rim of the cone. The brunette hesitated at first and seemed to shrink from the sight of the gorilla-like chemist. But she finally accepted the offered paw.

Setting the thin-nosed woman on her feet, Monk demanded hoarsely: "Where did you come from?"

They all saw that she had 2 perfectly formed legs with matching feet and not the long fishy tale of a mermaid. Nor did she wear sea shells.

Her hair, however, was an unearthly **green**.

Doc Savage removed his diving helmet and asked: "Explanations would be appreciated, Miss Hale."

The green-haired brunette looked as put out as a spinster in a rowdy saloon.

"Whatever you do," she said fiercely, "do not go down there."

"Why do you say that?" asked Doc.

"Because **They** are down there," she said thinly.

"Who are 'They'?"

"Do I have to spell it out for you? The **U-Men**. Devils who dwell under the sea."

Ham Brooks said curtly: "Stop giving us the runaround. What happened to your **hair**?"

The **green**-haired girl made a distasteful face.

"Don't ask me to explain that now."

Doc Savage added: "We discovered the old ruin with the strange symbols carved into it."

Hornetta said: "That was only a clue as to the location of this place. Those ruins are just the tip of the most terrible iceberg you could ever imagine."

Her voice tone caused Doc to remark: "You have been issuing such dire warnings since we first encountered you. Is it not high time to reveal the facts behind your threats?"

"I ... can't," she said with a struggle.

"Oh, here we go again," said Long Tom sourly.

"Do you recall how you got here?" demanded Doc.

"Recall it? I'll probably never forget it! I was swimming for your boat when I could feel slimy hands grab my ankles and pull me down."

"I take it these were the so-called **Men Under The Sea**?" Ham prodded.

"In all their fishy glory," she shot back. "You have no idea what it's like to be manhandled by those ... those **Things**."

"Where did they take you?" asked Doc. "And while you are answering, how did you get to this island?"

The former brunette spitfire sat down as if tired.

"I don't even know where to begin."

Ham sniffed: "The runaround again."

She sighed very deeply and said: "I'm done."

Doc regarded her steadily. "Done?"

"As in beaten. Defeated. Shanghaied. And marooned. Once more."

"Say again?" asked Ham.

"This time I want to talk. I want to talk so badly my teeth hurt. But if I do, Honoria will suffer. And your cousin, too."

"Where is Pat?" Doc asked sharply.

"Alive. That is all I can say."

"Safe?" demanded Doc.

The girl shrugged Sun-**reddened** shoulders.

"Only as long as the **Men Under The Sea** keep her that way."



They seemed at an impasse.

Then the trouble-prone girl looked up with imploring blue eyes. These were very different orbs from those which had previously shot sparks every time they glanced in their direction.

"I suppose you figured out a lot of this already," she murmured.

Doc advised: "It suggests all this fuss is over a great treasure yet to be unearthed."

"You are not far from correct. About the treasure, I mean."

"It is a wonder that we were not murdered when we were helpless," Doc stated simply.

"You and me both, Big Boy."

"In New York, every effort was made to slay us," continued Doc. "But in this instance, we were transported to this island alive. It is very puzzling. Why were we spared?"

The green-haired girl began wringing out her seaweed-hued tresses.

"I am sure that I do not know. I'm stuck in the same boat as you shipwrecked stiff."

It was not a satisfactory response and the expression on the **Bronze Man's** face mirrored that judgment.

Reaching down, Doc lifted the woman to her feet. They were bare. Fresh cuts laced them obviously from climbing the sharp obsidian walls.

He scrutinized her formerly brunette hair and saw that the green hue was running. It was turning her face and neck into a splotchy chlorophyll wash.

"Dye," he concluded.

"I hope so," quipped Hornetta. "I would hate to think I was stuck with **green** hair the rest of my days however long-or-short that may be."

Doc demanded: "Who did that to you? And why?"

"What makes you think I didn't do it to myself?" she countered.

"We seem to be an impasse," said Doc Savage.

"How so?" retorted the other.

"You cannot speak freely for fear of your sister's life. And we are inhibited from taking overt action lest we risk my cousin's safety."

The erstwhile adventuress said flatly: "That's about the size of it, alright. And it's a pretty miserable package."

Everyone stood around in silence, lost in their individual thoughts.

Doc Savage showed no further inclination to dive into the **blue hole** which promised to contain many of the answers to the mysteries which had engulfed them so thoroughly.

After a bit, their captive wondered: "Anything to eat around here? I'm famished."

"Coconuts," advised Doc.

Hornetta sighed. "As long as it isn't conch. Take me to these monkey fruits."

They walked down to the slope to where a few scattered coconut palms waved in the breeze. Morning was full on and the air seemed fresher. Lingering smoke haze still nipped at their nostrils.

Picking her way along the charred and blackened ground and skirting the fire-ravaged Philodendron roots, she asked a natural question.

"Did your campfire get out of hand?"

Monk mumbled: "We woke up in this charcoal pit. Doc says that lightning started a blaze."

"I don't know any different," returned Hornetta, "so don't look at me."

When it came to gathering coconuts, all eyes turned to Monk Mayfair. He had the general physique for it. So the simian chemist began going up one coconut palm after another uprooting the dark shells and dropping them to earth.

Doc Savage repeated his amazing stunt of cracking them open with the sharp edge of his hands. Hornetta's eyes went wide in spite of herself.

"You must really be made out of *metal*," she said wonderingly. Her fire seemed to have gone out.

Firm-lipped, Doc offered her the dribbling coconut shell. Hornetta drank it greedily. She tossed the husk aside and wiped her mouth clean.

The *bronze* giant repeated the procedure. The woman drank her fill.

When she was done, she looked at them all with a mixture of concern and confusion.

"What do we do now?"

No one offered any idea.

So Hornetta asked: "I don't suppose any of you have a deck of cards in your pockets? I'm a shark at poker."

Their stony expressions wiped the patently fake grin off her face.

"In that case, I'm going for a walk," she told them flatly.

If she expected anyone to stop her, Hornetta Hale was vastly disappointed. She walked down to the beach and pretended to be looking for seashells.

They were not plentiful as she discovered during her perambulations. So when the green-haired girl exhausted all opportunities offered by the white pearly sand, she drifted inland.

Doc Savage directed: "Monk, keep an eye on her."

"Gotchas, Doc."

The hairy chemist ambled off.

But before he could get more than a few yards, a strange *sound* rippled out in the morning air.

It was preceded by a clatter that made them think that Hornetta Hale had tripped over one of the charred pieces of wood that lay strewn about as if Hell itself had exploded. This was followed by a convincing *thud* of a body tumbling to earth.

Then came an uproarious peel of laughter. Very feminine laughter even if it had a bit of a hard edge to it.

There was no doubt but who was emitting the maniacal mirth. Doc Savage's voice crashed out.

"Monk! Do not approach her!"

"You don't have to tell me twice!" the homely chemist returned.

He came charging back, his healthy respect for the laughing phenomenon uppermost in his mind.



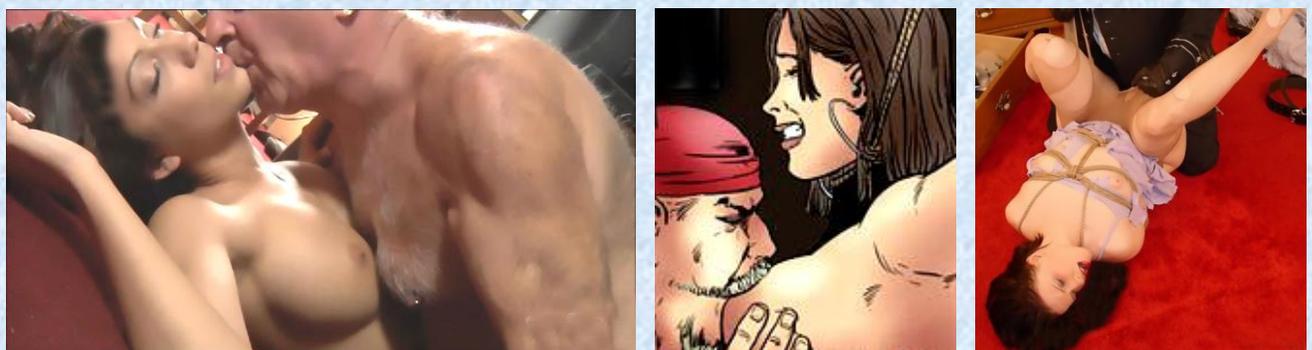
Her clothes were eagerly ripped and torn off to display a magnificent Hollywood-type physique. She was manhandled, <slapped>, and punched during their maniacal disrobing efforts.



Completely **naked** and vulnerable, she could only await their advances ...

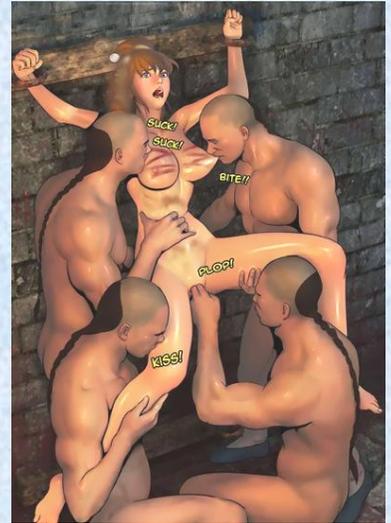


... which quickly happened!



"Kiss me, baby!"

"Gotta suck them big jugs of yours, **Bitch!**"



After 30-or-so *degrading* minutes, she was left prone on the ground.



Hornetta watched in horror as the first of many **dicks** entered her tight pussy.

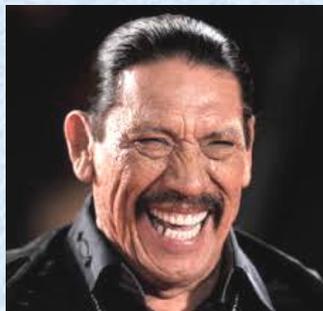


"Stop it! Stop it, you bastards!" she cried as she was being pummeled.

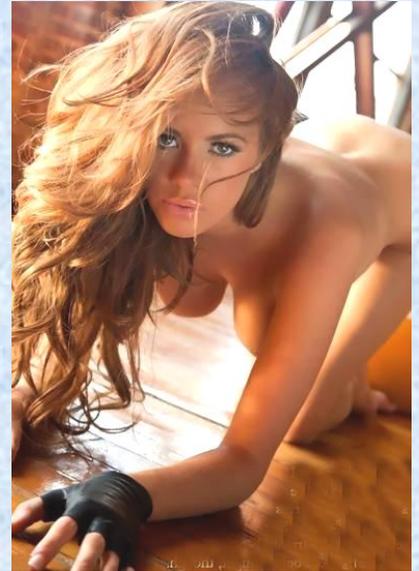




They were oblivious to all her *squeals* of protest as they emptied their **semen**-filled genitals deep into her fertile womb.



Groaning in pain, she forced herself up into an upright position. *Her mistake.*



"Open that bitchy **mouth** of yours, **Slut!** You got a lot of **suckin'** to do!"

"No!" she said defiantly. "Keep that filthy thing away from me!"

"Oh, fuck you **whore!** I said open up! And I mean it, goddamn you!"



She made grotesque *slurping* sounds as her saliva coated each of the foul-smelling penises that penetrated her soft **lips** and found the warm confines of her mouth.



"*Ga-a-a-a!*" she gulped and gagged as **spurt**-after-**spurt** splashed into her.



Maybe if she had stayed still, they would have stopped. But when she started to push herself up and jutted her tight muscled **buttocks** in the air ...



"I'm gonna sodomize you now, **Whore**. My dick wants your Ass!"



She *shrieked* loudly as the first hard penis rammed straight up her **anus**.





"O-h-h ... O-h-h ... O-h-h ... O-h-h ... O-h-h ..." she moaned like a vinyl record stuck in a particular spot.

Meanwhile, her assailants were making all kinds of animalistic *grunts* and other utterances as they reamed and stretched out her rectum mercilessly.

"Take that, you *Whore!*"

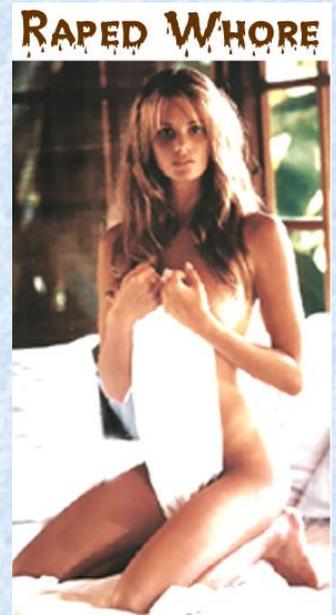
"You're too goddamn tight, *Slut!*"

"Here it cums, *Bitch!*"



Finally they had exhausted themselves. But they wouldn't let her recover ...

"We call this the '**Rape-All**,'" he bragged. "It has busted the hymens of many a virgin. And it has torn and stretched the cunts of **Whores** like you!"



"God no!" she screamed. "You evil bastards! I hope you rot in Hell!"



They laughed and turned it 'on'. It had many appendages. They used them all.



At first she just squealed as the insidious machine plunged effortlessly.

After an hour-or-so, she reduced to just softly *moaning* as it continued its impassionate raping and fucking.



They finally turned it 'off'. Not because of any mercy on their part. But rather to prevent it from overheating and damaging itself. They still intended to use it on other "deserving" **bitches** and **wenches**.



RAPED WHORE



GANG-IMPREGNATED WHORE



[Gang-Impregnated Slut-Whore]

It appeared to be a shattered dome about the size of a human hand. Doc recognized it as an old lava bubble. Hornetta had evidently struck it with her foot shattering it.

Doc picked up the green-haired woman and bore her back to the shore. There, he laid her carefully on the white sand. The others drew near.

"What happened?" asked Ham Brooks.

"Miss Hale discovered one of the sources of the laughing fits," explained Doc.

They looked at him in perplexity. He elaborated.

"There are pockets of volcanic gas fumes trapped here-and-there in cavities in the caldera. Places where bubbling lava cooled long ago forming thin domes that are easily broken. Some of those bubbles contain pockets of *gas*. Miss Hale evidently encountered one and, in breaking it, released a small quantity of the *gas* that causes uncontrolled laughing fits followed by swift unconsciousness."

Rubbing his jaw, Long Tom murmured: "So now we know where the Count found his concoctions."

"Yeah," added Monk. "And I'll bet there's a lot of other valuable stuff to be found on this dang island, too."

Recognizing that the woman would be unconscious for some hours, Doc Savage said: "She cannot interfere with anything we do."

Ham asked: "What makes you think she would be of such a mind?"

"She believes she is protecting her sister with her silence."

"And is she?"

"That," said Doc, his golden *eyes* flashing to the moonlit rim of the nearby volcanic cone, "remains to be discovered."

They all understood what the *Man of Bronze* meant by that statement.

He was going to dare the volcanic pool regardless of the risk.

XXVI – Green Hole

Doc Savage did not ordinarily deceive his men. Nor was it his nature not to reveal his plans when it was essential for them to know his intentions.

As the inflamed Sun climbed higher into the sky hurling a chaotic array of splendor over the heavens and across the sea, the **bronze** giant picked up his diving helmet and told them a half-truth.

"Guard the girl while I return to the cruiser to look into its seaworthiness."

Monk Mayfair said: "Sure, Doc. How long do you think you're going to be?"

"Difficult to say," said Doc tucking his helmet under his muscular arm. He cleared his throat rather noisily, doing so twice as if in anticipation of going for a dive.

Monk and the others swapped strange looks but said nothing.

Without any further comment, the **Bronze Man** went down to the water and waded out toward his waiting ship. He set the helmet on the stern landing stage and clambered aboard. Carrying the transparent thing into the cockpit, he seemed to be looking around it for something in particular.

Apparently not finding what he searched for, he disappeared below. He took the fantastic-looking helmet with him. Anyone watching from the shore would assume that Doc Savage had become preoccupied with the condition of the *Stormalong*.

From time-to-time, Monk Mayfair and the others glanced in the direction of the stationary vessel.

Ham remarked: "I wonder what Doc is doing down there?"

Monk shrugged saying: "Beats me."

To which Long Tom added: "One thing's for sure. He's not taking a nap. We've all had so much sleep that we won't need any shuteye for a week."

They spoke rather loudly the way men do when they find themselves in uncomfortable circumstances and feel the strong need to keep up their courage.

But had Doc Savage's men possessed eyes with the penetrating properties of an X-ray machine, they would have been slack-jawed in amazement. For the **Bronze Man** was no longer aboard the *Stormalong*. He had donned his transparent helmet and gone down the diving well.

With his lungs charged with chemical oxygen, Doc Savage swam slowly underwater circumnavigating the weird volcanic cay. He kept himself close to the sandy ocean bottom. The weight of the helmet and its harness rig assisted him in that operation.

Swimming in toward shore, Doc investigated the mangrove tangle that dipped its weird woody roots into the water to feed off the ocean currents in the fashion of such swamps.

It took some time. But he finally found a spot where reef coral formed a very large maw. This proved to be an underwater cave, apparently entirely natural.

Long ago, molten lave had streamed out into the sea and deposited itself on the ocean floor forming a strange cooled surface. It was this solid magma which gave the *Man of Bronze* his first clue.

He eeled into the tunnel using his flashlight sparingly. There were tropical fish darting around in the underwater passage. But not many of them. Their colors were a riot of **neon**.

Doc Savage swam with powerful strokes. While the helmet was cumbersome, it had the advantage of not releasing air bubbles which might give away his approach should he slip and exhale unnecessarily. It had been specially constructed for use with the chemical oxygen pills.

The tunnel did not run in a direct line but rather twisted at one point devolving into a fork in the passage. Doc kicked backward arresting his progress and showed every indication that he was uncertain which way to go.

He checked the illuminate dial of his wrist compass. This helped his decision-making. He swam to the left.

From time-to-time, Doc grasped the sides of the tunnel and pulled himself along on the theory that this produced less noise and turbulence than swimming and kicking with hands and feet. Sound carried far underwater. He was cognizant of the fact that he was swimming into the unknown.

This way, he approached the crater-bound body of the so-called **blue hole** which was almost entirely landlocked other than this reservoir tunnel.

Doc pulled himself out of the passage and found himself suspended in a great **emerald** pool. The waters were not as clear as he would have liked. There were a lot of algae and seaweed strands. Enough of them to discolor the water in the direction of **greenishness**.

No doubt erosion created by rainwater and storms washing silt and debris down the inner walls of the cone had also polluted the naturally pure body. Caribbean waves had a reputation for crystalline beauty. But not so here.

Doc swam about, no longer needing the flashlight. Brilliant sunlight charged the water with a measure of **jade-green** clarity.

Below he spied something moving with a sinuous serpentine fashion. A deeper green than the surrounding waters, it all-but-blended with the murky bottom of the crater.

It was a moray eel about 4 feet long opening-and-closing its mouth lazily so that its rows of vicious needle teeth could be counted. It moved away like an undulating green **ribbon** waving in an underwater current.

Here-and-there, Doc Savage saw what appeared to be other passages or possibly underwater caves on the inner side of the caldera. He swam toward one of these, taking care not to inhale or exhale at any time.

The oxygen tablets were a wonderful aid to underwater exploration. They freed a diver from such encumbrances as an oxygen hose or other artificial breathing apparatus. But the lifelong habit of respiration is not one easily suppressed. The instinct to draw life-giving air into the lungs runs very deep. Over time, minute quantities of carbon dioxide gas tended to seep from the mouth and nose filling the diving helmet. To inhale too much of this, Doc discovered through experimentation, interfered with the action of the oxygen tablets.

So he had to focus on the unnatural discipline of holding his breath lest he draw pure carbon dioxide into his lungs.

As he approached, he restricted his movements to the minimum swimming effort necessary to propel him along. Barracuda dwelt in underwater dens such as these. If disturbed, they could inflict a nasty bite.

But instead, out of one cave came a great turquoise-and-tan thing like a disembodied bladder but possessing many whipping arms. A tropical octopus. Many roamed among the coral reefs. He recognized the species as not dangerous although its many-suckered arms could create complications if they wrapped themselves around him.

On the boat, Doc had donned a belt of many pockets which he had unearthed from a concealed compartment known only to him and which had escaped the raiding party. This was the equipment vest he wore whenever his gadget vest was impractical. He reached into one pocket now.

From it came a tiny device with attached nozzle. Doc pointed the nozzle in the direction of the approaching octopus whose hooded eyes appeared inhumanly curious.

Octopi are infamous for squirting **clouds** of sepia ink into the faces of any potential predator that approaches them. Perhaps this was on the mind of the aquatic creature.

If so, this particular octopus must have been startled for it was Doc Savage who squirted a cloud of sepia potion in its direction!

The billowing black **pall** struck it full in the face. The octopus suddenly convulsed and propelled itself back into its warren via a jet of violently expelled water.

This told Doc that this particular cave was probably otherwise untenanted.

The **Bronze Man** moved onto another cave which was much larger and consequently more interesting to him.

Doc Savage had been accused in the past of possessing clairvoyant abilities. Actually, nothing could be farther from the truth.

But he did have a strong sense of caution and the wariness that came from walking danger trails all over the World.

Approaching the large cave mouth, Doc slowed ... kicked backwards ... and moved about scrutinizing the cavern from different angles preparatory to entering. This was purely precaution on his part.

What happened next proved that sensible precautions could be prescient.

For out of the cave project a pair of blood-red **feelers**. They resembled those of the Caribbean crawfish. It was a lobster-like sea creature considered a delicacy throughout the many islands.

But these waving stalks were of immense size!

Doc approached with care, calculating the probable size of the crawfish to which those monstrous feelers belonged. It verged on the impossible.

In a swirl of air bubbles shout out 3 swimming figures. Great muscular arms edged with long spiny fins and capped by claw-tipped talons reaching out and scooping water as they advanced.

Reddish-green and covered in scaly crab-like plates, they were substantially greater than the size of grown men. Two possessed webbed feet and the third boasted a heavily-muscled torso that taped down to a lean sleek fishtail. All of these appendages jerked spasmodically.

Each of the trio sported blood-red dorsal fins running along their backs. Above jutting lower jaws filled with pointed teeth, their flat fishy eyes glistened with the strange brilliance of freshly-minted quarters. Their inhuman gaze was fixed on the **Bronze Man**.

Suddenly, the approaching forms began convulsing in the violence of their swimming. They were not retreating. Rather, they were arrowing in Doc Savage's direction.

Doc had been floating in place kicking his feet, treading water, and using his hands to keep his balance. His eerie **trilling** began to fill the confines of his transparent diving helmet. He quickly stifled it.

Gathering his great muscular metallic body, Doc turned into a human torpedo and swam hard in the direction of the trio whose faces were hideous with waving fins and gleaming teeth.

This bold action took the approaching **creatures** by surprise. They broke in 3 directions. Doc knifed after the one closest to hand.

His legs scissoring, he lunged for the kicking claws that were so much like the feet of wild geese except for their reddish-green **color**.

Doc Savage was a **powerful** swimmer even if he lacked fins and webbed appendages. He soon overhauled his target. **Metallic** hands swept out and grasped an ankle that was slick to the touch the way fish skin is.

The **creature** doubled up and thrashed. From somewhere on its person, **it** pulled out a crude dagger that appeared to be made out of obsidian lashed to a spiral seashell handle.

The glassy black blade proved to be viciously sharp. It sliced out scraping across Doc's transparent helmet with a think shriek that pierced his eardrums.

Doc swept out of hand ... found the wrist back of the knife ... and gave a *violent* twist. Fishy fingers released the shell handle and the blade went sinking out of sight.

Doc next reached out for the **creature's** neck, clamped over what felt like thick gill slits. The skin there felt very slick. The **Bronze Man** struggled to locate the nerve centers that in a human being could produce unconsciousness when pressed a certain way.

That he failed to find those nerve centers did not entirely surprise him. The anatomy of the grotesque **thing** diverged from human sin striking ways.

Doc switched tactics. He pressed metallic palms against the **merman's** gills sealing them shut.

Expelling bubbles from its fishy mouth, the **creature** struggled but could not shake Doc Savage's *powerful* grasp. It reached up with its webbed hands and attempted to rake his face but to no avail.

The **thing** began a frantic flailing. **Its** massive claw-tipped hands strove to find skin, scored metallic forearms with the needle-like weapons. **Crimson** began to billow in long thread clouds.

As the **creature** fought to break Doc's iron grasp, the other **two** swam around and came at him with obsidian blades thrust forward.

3-against-1 would have been no difficult combat for Doc Savage on dry land. But here underwater, a foe could slip up from any direction. Possessing no blade of his own, the **Bronze Man** decided that discretion was the better part of courage.

Releasing his foe, Doc kicked away and dived deeper into the crater pool.

Out came the device that expelled a chemical processing the properties of octopus ink along with a few other noxious ingredients. Doc directed a *spray* upward.

This disturbing **cloud** rolled and spread in the direction of the 3 **mermen**. They reacted as if a barracuda was arrowing toward them intent upon taking off an arm or a leg.

Swimming madly, they retreated to the surface leaving Doc Savage free to explore their underwater lair unchallenged.

XX

Later ...



... Pat Savage gets Humiliated !

XXVII – The Mermen

Doc Savage plunged for the large underwater cave entrance. He moved with incredible *speed* even burdened as he was by his diving helmet and equipment belt.

The **bronze** giant had his powerful flashlight out and was using it to spray intense illumination ahead of him.

All caution seemed to have departed. Doc slipped into the cave sweeping the flashlight's penetrating beam all around. He noticed that the natural formation was largely hardened lava interspersed with colorful coral formations that might have belonged to another world. This did not surprise him for a great number of these Caribbean islands were composed of coral built up over the centuries.

Pushing along with rapid kicks of his bare feet, Doc gave special attention to the roof of the tunnel. Twisting about, he maneuvered himself until he was swimming upside-down (the better to play his flash ray on the tunnel roof).

He proceeded along in this fashion. His light disclosed a cleft in the roof, evidently excavated by hand. A faint light shone down. It had not the fresh quality of sunlight but rather was dull and dingy looking.

Doc kicked upward and began exploring this phenomenon.

Before long, his head broke the surface of an underground grotto in which a steady artificial illumination predominated.

The light came from bare lightbulbs strung along the cavern wall. This revealed a rocky ledge which showed signs of having been smoothed by stone-working tools. A great deal of effort had been invested in the task, Doc saw.

There were strange designs carved into the rear wall. They depicted a civilization that was remindful of the Mayan race with whom Doc Savage had long acquaintance. [read #001 - "**The Man of Bronze**"].

But there were differences too in the style of clothing and architecture. The latter resembled the ruin of a temple sitting broken and forgotten in the mangrove swamp not very far from this strange spot. It was abundantly clear to him that this chamber had been excavated for ceremonial purposes very long ago. This despite the profusion of *swastikas* carved into the design.

Doc directed his attention toward the solitary inhabitant of this grotto (which was wide but not very deep). Seated on the floor of the ledge was one of the **mermen**. It presented a remarkable sight inasmuch as it was crouched before what appeared to be a **radio transmitting set** with a pair of fully modern headphones clamped over its finny ears.

The grotesque **creature** was so intent upon listening to what was coming from the cans that it failed to notice the big **bronze** man ease out of the water and distribute himself on the ledge unseen.

Doc paused for several moments listening in a prone position. The *metallic* helmet of hair capping his head began drying, a quality that it possessed.

The **merman** did not speak once. Instead, it listened intently. Its **reddish-green** skin speckled by silvery scales was very slick from a recent immersion.

Carefully Doc got to his feet and padded up behind the **creature** whose sharp-finned back faced him.

No matter how *stealthy* a man might be, he has no certain defense against being seen. This was especially true for Doc Savage who stood well over 6 feet tall. (Closer to 7 feet with the addition of the transparent diving helmet encasing his head.)

Suddenly the **merman** jerked its hideous face around and weeping off the headphones leaped to his splayed feet.

There was a huge monkey wrench nearby. The **creature** picked it up in both finny paws. Charging, it came at Doc full force. Its webbed feet made strange flopping sounds against the smooth stone floor.

Doc Savage moved in to intercept the raised weapon. Blocking the downward sweep with one wrist, the bronze **giant** seized one of the **creature's** forearms and attempted to yank the wrench out of its grip.

But instead, an awful *ripping* sound was heard. **The entire hand and forearm peeled off the merman!**

The wrench came along with it. Doc snapped fingers around the handle and flung it backward into the water where it was no longer a threat. The ease with which the metallic giant handled the heavy tool spoke volumes of his prodigious *strength*.

He examined the **reddish-green** hide that he had inadvertently harvested. A glance told that it was very thick. The inner side was coated with an insulating substance resembling blubber.

But he had no more time for study, however. Strange *guttural* sounds came from the **merman's** distended jaws. It was apparently startled. Its thick blubbery lips disclosed a horrible basket of pointed teeth.

These teeth began snapping like thin bone needles. The mouth lunged for Doc's arms.

Doc Savage applied a set of **bronze knuckles** to the scaly jaw. A satisfying *crunch* of a noise resulted with the merman flailing backwards.

Lunging in, Doc reached down and seized the frilly set of gills that ran along the jawline of the strange being. The result was astonishing!

The ugly **green** head came away disclosing that it was composed of some substance resembling formed rubber.

Doc Savage found himself looking down at a perfectly human head atop the grotesque reddish-green physique. Ordinary gray eyes glared hate. The man began cursing at him in a guttural foreign language.

Doc shot back sharp words in the same tongue with the result that the man in the elaborate **merman** costume lost all composure. Hot words were spat. But before Doc could press for information, out from the shadows stepped another individual.

Doc turned and discovered himself facing no less than the aristocratic **Count Runo von Elmz** once more. The debonair one had emerged from a separate chamber which had been concealed by the deep shadows of a cleft in the natural stone.

The courtly aristocrat was attired in his usual splendid fashion right down to the Tyrolean hat and snappy sword stick cane which was carved so that a spiral groove ran from cap to ferrule.

The Count directed the tip of this cane at the **Bronze Man** and remarked:

"You do seem to get around, my good fellow."

Doc Savage touched a stud on the breastplate of his diving helmet. This permitted him to speak and be heard through a miniature microphone and reproducer imbedded in the contrivance.

"You have shaved your beard. But it is clear that you are Count Runo von Elmz."

The Count bowed and said: "At your service. How do you like my lair? It appears as if the ancient race who once inhabited this place is smiling upon my cause."

Doc ignored the obvious reference to the carved *swastikas* and said levelly:

"Such an elaborate subterfuge must mask a powerful purpose."

"Ah," returned the Count. "No doubt you are referring to the Great Objective."

"Objective?"

"I see you have met one of my **U-Men**," remarked the Count changing the subject. "They are very handy fellows. Especially for scaring away interlopers and eavesdroppers."

Doc said: "Is that what you are doing here? Eavesdropping?"

Count von Elmz inclined his head.

"Yes. This is a listening post. All that was said during your island respite was overheard, you see. It was necessary to learn how much you knew of our plan. But it appears, however, that you actually know very little."

"Then that at is why we were conveyed here and allowed to live," suggested Doc, golden *gaze* growing animated.

The Count smiled gallantly.

"Very astute of you. But you do have the reputation of an *übermensch*, no? *Der Mann aus Bronze*. A modern Sherlock Holmes. Yet more physically formidable than Tarzan of the Apes. Yes, we could have killed you. But we needed to know what you knew. Murder is messy and time-consuming. This method was much more efficient. Not to mention considerably less bloody."

Doc Savage began advancing on the man.

Up came the count's tricky sword stick. Before he could <press> the trigger and squirt a dose of *vapor*, he stopped and frowned. The nobleman hesitated. It was obvious that the transparent diving helmet made the **Bronze Man** impervious to any gas.

Lowering the cane, Count von Elmz extracted a double-barreled derringer pistol from his immaculate jacket and snapped off a quick shot.

Doc dodged to one side causing the round to go wide. The bullet, however, managed to graze the side of his clear diving helmet.

Doc Savage's head was knocked sideways. The helmet did not shatter. It was all-but-bulletproof. But he was still momentarily staggered.

Recovering, Doc resumed his advance.

Redirecting his aim, Count von Elmz attempted to place his remaining bullet in his adversary's unprotected chest.

Bronze fingers dipped into his equipment belt and produced a device that flew in the Count's direction.

This proved to be a **flash bomb** which exploded harmlessly in midair. This device produced no shrapnel or gas but instead made a blinding glare. It stunned the Count's optic nerves. Doc swiftly swooped in and harvested the small pistol from his hand.

Flinging the derringer away, he next stripped the helpless man of his cane. Doc studied the thing for a moment while the Count made mewling sounds and pawed at his paralyzed eyes.

Finding the lever that released the *vapor*, Doc pointed the cane nozzle at the Count's face and <pressed> it once.

The spurt of whitish vapor enveloped the man's head. He immediately began laughing. And then laughing much more heartily as if his entire body were being shaken by an irresistible hilarity.

Doc watched with interest as Count Runo von Elmz rolled dark eyes up in his head and collapsed into waiting **bronze** arms.

The *metallic* giant laid the insensate aristocrat across his Atlas-like shoulders. In the act of attempting to carry the man away, he was suddenly confronted by 3 frilly-finned reddish-green heads bursting above the waterline beside the ledge.

Grasping the ledge's rough lip with their outlandish talons, the 3 mermen started scrambling up emitting angry sounds. It was the same aquatic trio that Doc had earlier discouraged with his chemical repellent. Setting the limp nobleman on the ground, he raced to the stony edge and met the first of the oncoming foes.

Taking the man by the top of his head, Doc lifted and ripped off the artificial mask. A *metallic* fist collided with the exposed jaw knocking him unconscious.

One of the other dripping mermen rushed in to keep his comrade from sinking underwater and drowning. This occupied him while Doc Savage went after the third of the trio who had not emerged from the pool.

Plunging into the water, Doc began pursuing the man until he caught hi by his slippery fishtail. *Strong* fingers clamped down.

The other reacted in a natural and understandable manner. He began to panic.

Doc hauled the salmon-red tail closer to him. He grabbed a flailing wrist and soon had his hands around the merman's rubbery neck. Wrenching off the artificial head, the Bronze Man found the sensitive nerves at the base of the spine and began manipulating them. The flopping "creature" immediately lost all animation.

Doc wrapped a huge arm around the hapless horror's waist and began swimming away.

Reaching the blue hole, he made for the shimmering sunlight above. He broke the surface and held the man's head above water so that he could breathe.

The erstwhile "merman" proved to be no true amphibian. He was choking and gurgling in the manner of a man who had taken water into his lungs. Doc performed some quick artificial respiration until greenish fluid began streaming out of the other's mouth and nose.

When the merman's distress finally abated, Doc Savage swam toward the sheer wall of the blue hole and pulled him up onto a lava rock shelf.

Packing is captive across one shoulder, he scaled upwards until he reached the volcano rim. Stepping over, the bronze giant strode down to flat ground. He made excellent time even encumbered by a full-grown man (as it was).

He was still wearing his transparent helmet when he rejoined Monk Mayfair, ham Brooks, and the others. There had been no opportunity to remove it. Leaving it in place was the simplest way of toting the cumbersome contraption.

The hairy chemist gave out a lusty whoop.

"Doc! Where did you come from?"

Doc Savage replied calmly: "Investigating the **blue hole**."

Ham rushed up to examine the "**merman**" as Doc laid the latter out on the hot ivory sand.

"The very devil!" he exclaimed. "That beggar is actually human!"

Doc nodded. "A man in a free-diving suit designed to look like a fanciful **denizen** of the Deep. But he is actually nothing more than a common sailor of a foreign navy.

Long Tom knelt to examine the costume and pronounced to be (in his words) "just painted rubber".

"Good job, though," said Monk examining the material with the eye of an industrial chemist.

The puny Electrical Wizard grunted: "So there are no **mermen** after all?"

"Nor **mermaids**," replied Doc.

Long Tom stood up and made a belligerent jaw.

"So what did I see last night that looked like Hornetta Hale?"

Before Doc Savage could reply, the woman in question began stirring. All eyes went to her.

"What happened?" she demanded.

Her eyes were very strange. Her voice had lost its tough edge.

"You experienced a misadventure," implied Doc calmly.

The **green**-haired girl struggled to her feet murmuring: "The last I recall I was laughing ..."

"There is nothing funny about your predicament," Doc Savage said in a serious tone.

"Don't you mean our predicament?" returned the girl. "I am just as much a prisoner as you are."

Doc Savage eyed her without emotion.

"There is no further need for pretending. **You are Honoria Hale.**"

"Nonsense!" the girl snapped.

Doc elaborated. "Your hair is cut in a slightly different style. The fact that it is wet cannot disguise that fact. Your skin has been treated with an astringent solution to give it a reddish cast. But you are manifestly not suffering from **sunburn**. There is no peeling. Furthermore, your attempt to mimic your sister's speech and manners was not entirely successful. You kept slipping back into your normal self."

Honorio Hale turned very pale. She sealed her lips in a determined mouth.

"Where is your sister and my cousin Pat?" demanded the Bronze Man.

There were golden *sparks* igniting in the depths of his eyes.

Honorio made an abrupt move for the water's edge. Doc Savage rushed in and overhauled her.

Taking Honorio by one arm, he arrested the woman's headlong flight. She attempted to struggle. But the obdurate *strength* of the **bronze** giant's metallic digits convinced her escape was all-but-impossible.

"Where is the submarine?" demanded Doc.

Honorio's mouth flew open.

"How did you ..."

"Common sense. You were anxious to hire our submarine. This strongly suggested that you were hunting another underseas craft. Something had to tow our cruiser to this spot. That **blue hole** and its tunnel passageway form a natural a very sheltered cove for secret anchorage. A **Phantom Lagoon** if you wish to call it that.

"For the love of little fishes!" exploded Monk. "You mean we've been sittin' next to the mystery lagoon all along?"

Doc nodded grimly.

"What is this all about?" Monk asked.

"The **Great Objective**," said Doc steadily looking at Honorio Hale.

Honorio's hand flew to her open mouth.

"You know more than we dreamed," she gasped.

Doc Savage regarded the **green**-haired girl without expression. The compelling power of his flake-gold *eyes* bored into her. She seemed to wilt.

"Now let me ask you again," he said firmly. "Where are Hornetta Hale and Pat Savage?"

Before the woman could form a response, a new sound came to their ears.

It was a familiar drone. They had heard it before. Always out on the open Atlantic.

Long Tom snapped: "Sounds like that foreign warplane!"

"Yeah," muttered Monk. "Comin' back for another crack at us."

Honorita Hale became extremely alarmed. She tried to pull away from Doc Savage. But the *Man of Bronze's* grip was unbreakable. He pulled her into the scant shelter of a sprinkling of silver-sided royal palm trees.

Handing her off to Monk Mayfair, Doc said: "Hold on to her."

Then the **Bronze Man** shinnied up the palm tree poking his head out of its leafy crown.

He spied the bent-winged warplane coming out of the east. It was flying low and approaching fast like a gray daylight bat. Obviously, its wing fuel tanks had been patched up.

Doc Savage slid down to the ground so fast that he lost some skin.

"Get down!" he rapped. "And stay down! Do not move a muscle!"

The unmarked warplane overshot the tiny island and circled back around. It dropped lower. Banking, the pilot seemed to be attempting to seek them out amid the overgrowth.

He made 2 more passes and then threw back the greenhouse-style canopy of his cockpit. A gloved fist was raised. Something *glinted* in that hand.

Doc saw it and warned: "Bomb!"

Monk, Ham, and Long Tom immediately stuck fingers in their ears. Doc tightened his helmet. They had experienced being dive-bombed in the past and were protecting their ears from concussion. Seeing this action, Honorita Hale copied it.

When the bomb came, it landed not with an explosion but rather a glassy *crash*. They heard it only faintly. But when no blast disturbed the tropical atmosphere, they unplugged their ears.

Off about a hundred yards where the glassy *crash* had sounded, a whitish *cloud* arose like a creeping ghost.

Monk bellowed: "It's that laughin' hoodoo!"

Everyone pinched their nostrils shut and sealed mouths knowing that the measure could only be a temporary protection at best.

"Wonder where we'll end up this time?" moaned Long Tom.

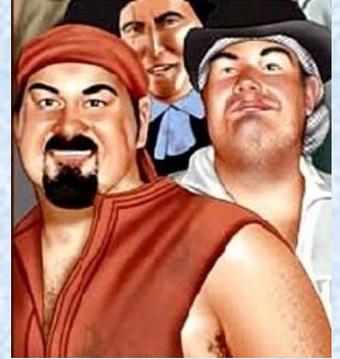
"I do not wish to contemplate the prospect," wailed Ham.

But the prospect appeared to be inescapable.

Inexorably, the spreading *monster* of white rolled toward them with its questing tendril-like ghost fingers.

XX

Very soon ...



... Pat Savage gets Sodomized !

XXVII – Phantasmagoria

Doc Savage distributed oxygen tablets to everyone.

"Do not inhale or exhale after taking these."

Honorina Hale refused hers, not understanding what they were and perhaps fearing some trick. As a result, she was the first one to be affected by the creeping exhalation.

Rolling closer, the whitish *spume* assumed a more sinister hue becoming rather purplish at the edges.

They had naturally retreated to higher ground. But there was a vast cloud of the crawling *miasma* spreading in all directions and not many places in which to hide.

The *stuff* got into Honorina's nostrils. The **green**-haired woman immediately began *screaming*. Not laughing as they expected.

Suddenly her screams turned to ripping words.

"I'm on fire!" she wailed slapping at her bare arms and legs.

"Mustard gas!" Ham yelled.

Doc Savage seized her by her wrists. Honorina struggled. His golden *eyes* stark, the **Bronze Man** searched her forearms for signs of blistering.

But there was nothing. Only goose bumps.

"What is happening to you?" Doc demanded shaking her.

Her face twisted. "My arms are on fire! Can't you see that?"

But they could not. There was no sign of any chemical reaction on her skin.

Neither Doc Savage nor the others experienced any such horrific sensation. They were holding up their arms seeking signs of the kind of hideous blistering produced by mustard gas or Lewisite. But they found none.

While they were puzzling over this, Habeas Corpus suddenly began chasing Ham Brooks.

The scrawny porker commenced by baring its tusks and narrowing beady eyes in the dapper lawyer's direction. A strange snuffling sound began issuing from its long inquisitive snout. Abruptly and with fangs gleaming, the shoat charged for Ham's ankles.

With a cry of shock, Ham attempted to fend off the snarling pig with his cane. But Habeas had become enraged. It snapped at Ham's shoes like a dog forcing the bewildered attorney into ignominious retreat.

This would normally cause Monk Mayfair to double over in laughter. But instead, he was pointing a finger in the direction of the **merman** that Doc had captured and laid out on the beach.

"Ye-e-o-w!" the hairy chemist called out. "Watch out! He's comin' out of it!"

Doc Savage looked toward the beach and then eyed the simian scientist.

"What do you mean?"

"What do you mean 'what do I mean'?" howled Monk. "He's getting' away!"

Doc watched the recumbent half-human form and saw that the erstwhile **merman** simply lay there unmoving.

"Monk," Doc said calmly, "he is doing nothing of the sort."

But the hairy chemist would not hear of it. He was jumping up-and-down like a frustrated bull gorilla.

"Lookit! Now he's growin' a new head to replace the old fishy one. It's kinda like a seahorse but with a mane of yellow hair an d..."

At that point, Doc released Honoria Hale. She went charging down to the beach and threw herself in the water splashing madly about in a desperate attempt to put out the imaginary flames that tormented her.

Doc Savage's eerie *trill_{ing}* began to issue from the helmet reproducer. It had an ethereal quality of *wonder* in it.

The **Bronze Man** looked around for Long Tom Roberts and received a shock.

The latter was in the act of climbing a mist-shrouded coconut palm. Upon reaching its leafy crown, he began throwing coconuts down upon something at the base which could not be seen.

Doc called up. "Long Tom! What is the matter?"

"Sea serpent! Don't you see it? It's winding its way around the trunk!"

But there was no sea serpent winding its way around the coconut trunk.

"Now it's breathing fire at me!" howled Long Tom ducking and dropping another drupe on his imaginary foe.

After he had exhausted his cache of coconut husks, the puny Electrical Wizard scooted up to the very top of the crown. He began wildly yanking loose big fonds, waving them, and flinging down fragments in a desperate attempt to ward off the creeping sea serpent that only he could see.

The expression on his pale features was quite distraught.

Alone among them all, Doc Savage was unaffected by the outbreak of bizarre **hallucinations**.

He looked into the sky and saw that the gray warplane was scooting away making a moaning noise that diminished with each passing moment. It appeared to have lost interest in them.

The **Bronze Man** shifted his attention to the top of the volcanic crater. He decided that there was nothing he could do for his men who were unlikely to injure themselves while under the spell of the weird **gas**. So he moved in that direction.

It might have been a kind of pre-science that impelled him to do so. Or perhaps the sudden departure of the mysterious warplane gave him the idea.

Doc moved up to high ground and found the craggy lip of the crater. He looked downward but saw nothing of interest. Then his uncanny **eyes** began searching the surrounding seas.

They came to rest on something far to the southeast. From one belt pocket, Doc Savage removed an optical tube that could be converted from a pocket microscope to a serviceable telescope and other devices. He now employed it as a telescope. It was not very large. However, it had a good deal of range in a narrow focus.

Against the blue horizon, Doc saw what he soon realized was a pair of Coast Guard cutters moving in the general direction of this lonely isle. This alone was unusual for they were not in American waters.

Keeping his spyglass trained upon the 2 vessels, he was surprised to spy a small destroyer taking up the rear. Even from this distance, he could see that it was a United States Navy destroyer.

Shifting the glass around, he attempted to discern the purpose of the unusual nautical formation. Coast Guard cutters and Navy destroyers did not normally travel together. It was after a considerable visual search that the **Bronze Man** spotted **the yacht**.

It was of modest size compared to the destroyer, of course. But it rivaled that of the Coast Guard cutters. It had not been immediately recognizable in the **aquamarine** water because it was a dull **mahogany** color and the cutters were a bone white.

Doc studied the yacht for a very long time.

That he had in some manner recognized it became evident when his **trilling** began to flavor the tropic air. It was so low that it was a phenomenon *more* felt than distinctly heard. Tuneless, it was somehow melodic as if the sound belonged to some higher realm of Reality.

It had the unusual property of carrying in its melody the essence of the **Bronze Man's** repressed feelings. The emotions that flowed forth at this point began as a kind of curious wonder and swiftly escalated to a genuine **alarm!**

Doc was so focused on what he was witnessing that he lost much of his habitual presence of mind.

XXIX – The Bottom

Doc Savage struck the water with an immense *splash!*

Under dangerous circumstances, he would normally have taken care to cleave the water more cleanly in order to make minimum noise. But something momentous was impelling him to move at the greatest possible speed at the expense of stealth and caution.

Doc's plunge had brought him once more into the seaweedy depths of the emerald pool. He pulled out his spring-generator flashlight and <thumbed> it on. With this, the **bronze** giant found his way to the merman's ancient grotto where the radio set had been in use.

He traveled with *powerful* muscular strokes, feet kicking furiously, until he reached the ledge himself.

There was no sign of Count von Elmz now other than drag marks that showed that the sleeping nobleman had been removed from the scene.

But there was a solitary merman. At the sound of Doc's head breaking the surface of the grotto pool, he turned and fixed reflective eyes.

He rasped: "*Der Man aus Bronze!*"

Doc Savage disposed of him with a carefree toss of an anesthetic bomb. The glass capsule landed before the oversized green feet releasing an invisible odorless vapor which swiftly overcame the shambling monstrosity.

Doc pulled himself onto the ledge while the "**merman**" fell with a wet rubber smack! He lay still. A grotesque form in frilly fins.

The **Bronze Man** himself did not have to hold his breath for the requisite minute-or-so due to his protective helmet. Going to the radio set, he began manipulating dials until he found the frequency on the 600-meter band employed by the Coast Guard at sea.

"Doc Savage to Coast Guard naval escort in the Caribbean Sea," he called into the microphone. "Doc Savage to Coast Guard escort."

There was no answer.

Doc repeated his request. His voice was extremely urgent.

"Doc Savage calling Coast Guard escort in the Caribbean Sea operating in the Lesser Antilles."

After several minutes of this, an angry voice yelled back.

"Whoever you are, this is an official frequency. Cease transmitting at once!"

Doc attempted to push through the official obstinacy.

"This is Doc Savage calling from an uninhabited island in the Caribbean. I can see your formation from my position. It consists of 2 cutters and a U.S. Navy destroyer escorting a yacht."

"I say again," snapped the Coast Guard radio operator. "Stop interfering with this frequency!"

The Bronze Man spun the tuning dial and shifted over to the Naval frequency.

"This is Doc Savage transmitting from an uncharted island in the Caribbean Sea. It is urgent that the yacht being escorted by the Coast Guard and U.S. Navy destroyer turn around as soon as possible. There is grave danger to the yacht. ... Repeat, this is Doc Savage transmitting an emergency declaration."

This call was met with complete silence.

The **Bronze Man** seldom showed emotion. And even more rarely did he display anger.

But his face flushed, his skin darkened, and he hauled back and kicked the radio set! This uncharacteristic outburst was an unmistakable physical expression of the **bronze** giant's inner turmoil.

Doc went in search of the Count. There was not much to the grotto. But he found a crawlspace and examined it closely employing his flashlight. It led upward at a shallow angle. Consulting his wrist compass, he determined that the escape tunnel (for that was what it was) went in the general direction of the old temple ruin in the mangrove swamp.

Worse still, it was too narrow to admit his broad shoulders. He could not use it to reach the surface of the cay.

Clapping his helmet back into place, he leapt off the ledge and slipped back into the water.

But he had not progressed very far when the 2 "**mermen**" who had been trailing him came at him with their vicious black blades. They swept in intending to rip him to shreds.

Doc Savage slapped one against the side of his rubber-coated head. The man's skull smashed into the tunnel wall. An eruption of bubbles from his needle-pointed maw showed that he was out of the fight for good.

The other reached for a hank of Doc's hair intending to snap back his head, the better to slice into his throat.

Doc blocked the sweeping blade with one massive forearm and kicked clear. He drove a bone-hard fist into that awful basket of teeth, thus smashing in the rubber mouth and driving the artificial gangs into the man's natural face. Billows of crimson began leaking from the ruin followed by dribbling air bubbles. The "**merman**" lost all interest in the struggle.

Doc left them behind to battle their way to the ledge and oxygen.

Swimming back out into the hidden lagoon, the **Bronze Man** located the natural tunnel that led out into the warmer waters of the open sea. He made remarkable speed causing tropical fish and the odd wild-eyed seahorse to scurry out of his way.

His head soon broke the surface beyond the lonely cay itself.

Searching the horizon with his strange flake-gold eyes, Doc saw that the 2 Coast Guard cutters and the destroyer were steaming closer. He had his telescope out again and commenced searching the surrounding waters for something else. It was very difficult work because the thing he was searching for could hardly be visible any closer than 100 yards (if that).

But the **Bronze Man** had a stroke of luck.

Sunlight glanced off something *metallic* jutting up from the water's surface. At first, he could hardly discern it from the sparkle of sunlight on exquisitely blue water. The glint was of a different character.

The other glints twinkled with the wave action. But this whitish blob stood very still making it stand out in the dance of tropical sunlight on waves.

Pocketing his telescope, Doc Savage struck out for the strange object.

An Olympic swimmer would have been impressed with his performance. He cleaved the waters with choppy motions of his arms. It was as if he were hacking his way toward his objective.

The **Herculean Bronze Man** ate up a tremendous amount of distance at a speed that scientists would have said was unsurpassable by anything except a fleet porpoise. As he swam, Doc shrugged off his diving helmet and shoulder piece lest it slow him down.

The intensity of his determination was incredible. Doc Savage focused on one thing alone. **Reaching the stationary thing sticking up out of the water.**

As he neared it, Doc saw the approaching ships creeping ever closer, unwittingly driving in the direction of the lurking thing in the water.

He reached his objective. It appeared to be an upright pipe a dull blue. He wrapped one hand around it capping its unwinking glass eye.

For it was the periscope of a submarine! Its lens was pointing in the direction of the approaching ships.

But now it was blind. The **Bronze Man's** large palm lay flat against the lens blocking out all light.

Maneuvering in the water, Doc immersed his face and gazed downward.

There he spied a vague cigar shape painted an **aquamarine** hue so that it was all-but-invisible in the blue water. Its shape was strange for it flared out at either side into what might have been the fins of a small whale. But it was no whale.

It was one of the smallest submarines that he had ever beheld. It was a runt. But still no less deadly despite its small size. And it struck Doc with great force that he had seen it before.

It was the indistinct blue shape he had spied in the water after Hornetta Hale had been dragged under the waves by something that could not be clearly seen except for its blue-gray back fin. Which was really a truncated conning tower.

It was now obvious that one of the shark-finned "mermen" had pulled the brunette adventuress from sight and dragged her into this waiting submersible.

Pivoting, Doc clamped his *muscular* legs around the periscope and took hold of the upper portion directly under the bend in the tube beneath the lens with both strong hands. Flexible fingers clamped tightly.

With a **tremendous** effort, the **Bronze Man** exerted himself. With *tendons* popping out on his neck and arms, he wrenched the periscope inexorably backward. It commenced complaining with metallic *squeaks* as the metal began distorting, acquiring a joint that grew more-and-more pronounced as Doc Savage applied unbelievable **pressure** until the glass eye was pointing up useless in the clear blue sky.

That accomplished, Doc began shimmying down the narrow tube until he reached the flat deck of the submersible. From one pocket of his equipment belt he extracted a pair of special grenades.

Easing to the stern of the U-boat, Doc made his way to where the propeller screw should be. His intention was to disable the screw but not damage the submarine. He was all-but-certain that Pat Savage and Hornetta Hale were prisoners inside the strangely-shaped submersible.

The grenades were magnetic. So it was possible to place them where they could do the most damage and not fall away into the water.

However, once he reached the tail (it was actually shaped like the fluked tail of a killer whale), Doc Savage discovered that the U-boat lacked regulation screws. Instead, there was an open maw very much resembling a torpedo tube.

Curiosity compelled the **Bronze Man** to investigate.

Swimming head downward, he shone a light into the opening. It was smooth and there was no sign of any propulsion mechanism.

Had he not been underwater and so constrained, he might have emitted his distinctive trilling sound. But as it was, a stream of bubbles dribbled from his parted lips and the gold flakes in his eyes whirled with a light of understanding.

It seemed inescapably clear that the weird fish-like underseas craft was propelled by compressed air. Hence it was virtually noiseless when submerge. It also explained the discouragingly powerful jet of water that had force him to abandon the chase when he first encountered the strange vessel the previous time. [note: Doc had previously used this technique himself. Read #60 - "Haunted Ocean"]

Grimly, Doc Savage set the timer mechanism on the magnetic grenades and inserted them into the propulsion vent.

Returning to the deck, he moved forward to the bow side of the small conning tower that was shaped to suggest a flat fin.

It was then that the **Bronze Man** began wishing he had his helmet. For he knew that the coming underwater concussion would be punishing to his eardrums. He inserted fingers in his ears ... closed his eyes ... and waited ...

The detonations came only seconds apart. They threw the submersible about the way a helpless fish switches its tail when gigged.

Doc shot toward the surface and found himself bobbing in the water with the Coast Guard cutters bearing down upon his position. He cupped his hands over his mouth and called out.

"Ahoy! U.S. Coast Guard cutters! Turn back! Danger! U-boat!"

But if anyone heard him, there was no sign. No alteration in the course of the approaching ships. They continued steaming ahead.

Then to Doc Savage's great alarm, the twisted periscope began lifting out of the water. Which meant that the submarine was breaking toward the surface.

Doc flung himself to one side. Soon the truncated conning tower popped into view spilling water off its sides. The fiery Sun made it smooth blue hull blaze.

The Bronze Man swam for the deck. He clambered aboard and stood up.

Facing the oncoming cutters, he again megaphoned hands and mouth and yelled out a sharp warning.

"Turn back! Hostile U-boat!"

This time there was a response.

Coast Guardsmen appeared on the bows of the approaching cutters. They saw the Bronze Man standing atop the weird floating shape that resembled a small blue whale.

They immediately lifted rifles. They began shooting in his direction.

That was when the thing that Doc Savage had been fighting so hard to avoid happened ...

The U-boat unleashed its torpedo!

XXX – When The Hatch Popped

The torpedo swished out of its tube and tunneled along until it broke the surface. Then it began charging the Coast guard cutters with the foaming ferocity of a mad dog.

The shot had been blind, of course. The U-boat captain could no longer aim by sight thanks to the mangled periscope. Still, the torpedo drove hard in the direction of the small flotilla.

The sight of the dreaded "tin fish" coming in their direction caused the sharpshooting Coast Guardsmen to suddenly scramble to 'Battle Stations' calling out an alarm.

That gave Doc a momentary respite. He dived into the water to avoid any more sniping bullets.

One did graze him on his left shoulder. The **bronze** giant jerked but failed to take notice that he had been wounded. His concentration was that fierce.

Risky as it was, he swam toward the oncoming cutters.

Presence of mind is something that Doc Savage always strove to maintain even in the heat of battle. Even as he arrowed toward the cutters, the **Bronze Man** realized that there was a fair chance the torpedo would hit home.

And it did. The tin fish caught one of the cutters square in its fast-veering prow. It detonated with an awful roar! Klaxon horns began caterwauling on both cutters adding to the general pandemonium. This made the sharpshooters of the other cutter even more determined to shoot back and hit something.

Doc dived underwater and swam the rest of the way unseen. Here-and-there bullets chopped into the drink, their energy spent by the stopping power of the water.

It was only then that he discovered he had been grazed in the shoulder. Saltwater was making the **blood**-filled groove sting. Reaching into a pocket of his gadget belt, he clapped a self-adhering bandage over the spot which was impregnated with cauterizing chemicals.

Doc grasped the lower rungs of an accommodation ladder on one side of the undamaged cutter and climbed up with alacrity. When he reached the deck, a dozen rifles suddenly pointed in his direction.

Throwing up his hands, he said as calmly as he could: "I am Doc Savage."

"You are our prisoner!" a seaman said sharply. "One wrong move and we will riddle you!"

Doc did not move a muscle. The crew looked very grave of countenance. Their well-tanned faces had the bloodless quality of exposed bone.

The cutter captain came out, red in the face, figurative blood in his eye. He at once recognized the **Man of Bronze**. But he did not seem very impressed.

"What-the-hell is going on?" he roared.

"Foreign raider attempting to torpedo the **yacht** you are escorting," Doc told him.

That sunk in very swiftly for the skipper growled: "We'll blow that sea wolf out of the water. Just watch us."

He turned to bark orders to his men.

Doc Savage called after him. "There are innocent prisoners aboard that sub!"

"Too bad for them. We have to sink that thing. I'll tell you why later."

"No need," said Doc lowering his hands. "I know the nature of the vessel you are escorting."

"You do? Well, then you understand."

Dully, Doc Savage said: "Yes. I understand."

His eyes were very bleak.

Over on the other cutter, they were putting on life-jackets and preparing to abandon ship. Coast Guardsmen are all experienced seamen so they needed no help. The immediate concern was a second torpedo.

And before long, it appeared.

The sight of a new blunt-nosed monster skimming along the wave tops produced considerable consternation. It distracted everyone.

The Coast Guard gunnery officer manning the 20-millimeter autocannon mounted on the forward deck trained it on the churning wake. He opened up and quickly the stuttering mechanism chewed through its bulky box of ammunition.

But to no avail.

Frantic crewmen hustled to get a second ammo box mounted. No one doubted for a moment that it was too late for that.

Too late for them all.

Doc Savage seized a rifle from an unwary man's grip. He rushed to the rail and began shooting.

He fired 3 shots. And from the sounds of the detonation, it appeared that his second shot had successfully exploded the warhead.

A water sprout appeared which became a genie of smoke that started off a very black but began thinning to an ugly gray haze. The cutter rocked in weird fashion. But that was all.

The cutter captain whistled in admiration. He gave Doc the 'OK' sign.

"I would never have believed that could be done. Congratulations."

Doc Savage did not reply. He stood by the rail rifle-at-the-ready prepared to repeat the performance that so impressed the Coast Guard skipper.

That was when the destroyer started maneuvering into position to take the U-boat apart with its powerful deck guns.

Doc Savage's golden **eyes** went from the sub wallowing in the water to the maneuvering destroyer. Something akin to helplessness came into his gaze.

From the tension of his amazing **muscles**, it could be seen that the **bronze** giant was restraining himself. But every nerve fiber wanted him to jump into the water to intervene.

All eyes watched this sparkling stretch of Caribbean water lying between the menacing U-boat and oncoming flotilla.

No third torpedo appeared.

His self-control strained to the utmost. Doc Savage turned and spoke rapid words.

"Captain, that vessel may not carry more than 2 torpedoes."

"Could be," the skipper said doubtfully.

"Radio the destroyer to stand off. Permit me time to try something."

"I don't have any authority over the Navy," protested the Captain.

"I have a naval commission. Tell the other skipper that the request comes from **Doc Savage**."

"It may not work. This is serious business."

"Tray!" rapped Doc.

Then he flung himself over the rail.

Swimming hard, the **Bronze Man** reached the submarine and gained the wet deck drying in the Sun.

Making for the conning tower, he began going through his belt pockets looking for something that might serve to breach the hatch.

While he was taking inventory, the hatch popped open and a familiar face lifted into view.

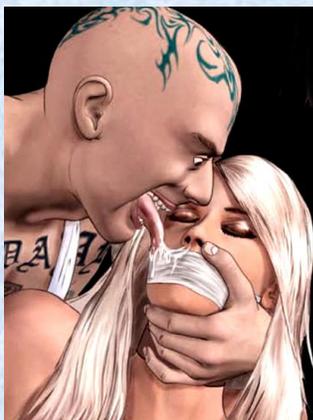
Pat Savage smiled. Her shirt was on its way to becoming a rag. She sported a black eye, split lip, and some of her **coppery** wealth of health appeared to have been yanked out of her head.

Whatever physical strength Pat Savage had was of no use whatsoever against overwhelming numbers of crazed lustful man-beasts.



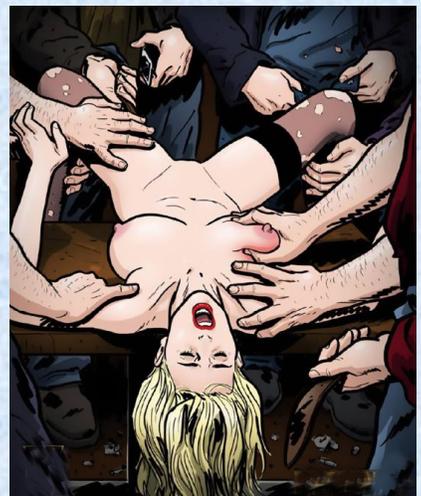
"Git out of that bra, woman! **Whores** don't wear bras!"

"Show us them big titties of yours, **Bitch!**"





The final remnants of clothing (her last line of defense) were eagerly ripped away.



"Now lie down and spread your legs, Woman. Let me see your whisker-biscuit."



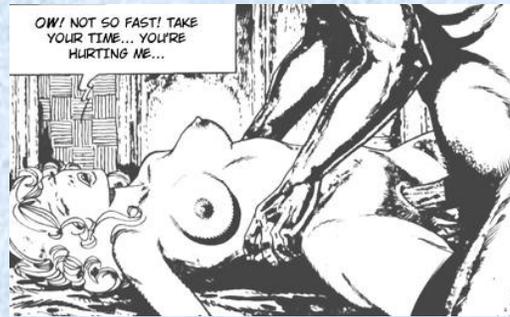
Pat was embarrassed. But she was intimidated by the crazed looks in their insane eyes. She forced herself to comply. She closed her eyes as she opened up her pussy lips.



"Oh yeah! Look at her! The **Whore** wants it!" a rapist exclaimed.



The **bronze**-haired beauty could only writhe and grit her teeth as **dick-after-dick thrusted** into her once-tight vagina.



Somewhat surprisingly, she didn't feel as exhausted as she thought she would after the last **penis** emptied itself into her cunt.

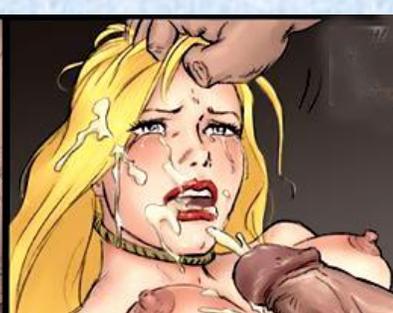
She promptly sat up. Which was exactly what another set of men wanted!



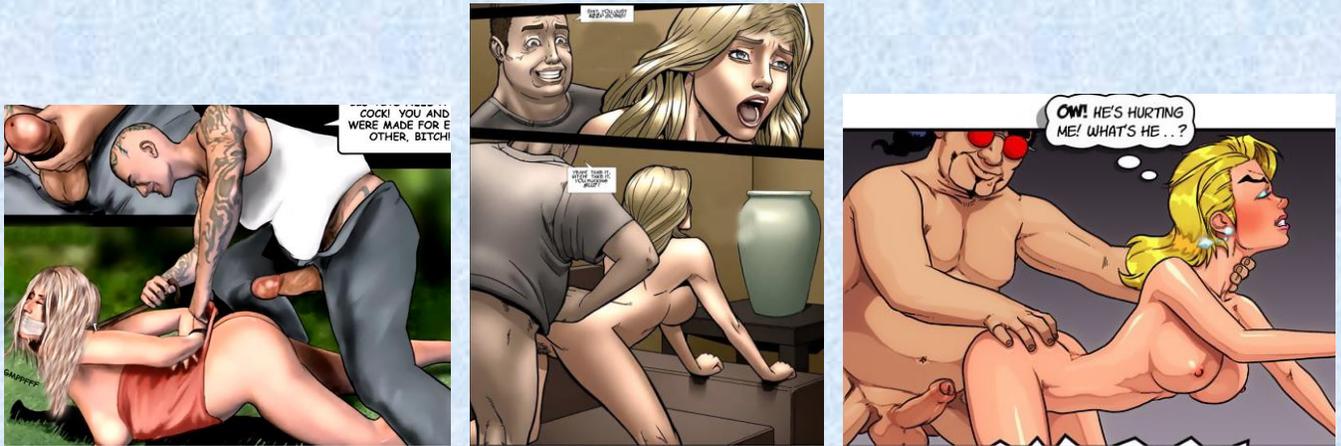
"You have a nice-looking mouth, **Bitch**," one said. "Think it would like to **suck** on this for a while? But remember ... No Biting!"



She closed her eyes everytime she tasted a semen *glob* gush into her throat.



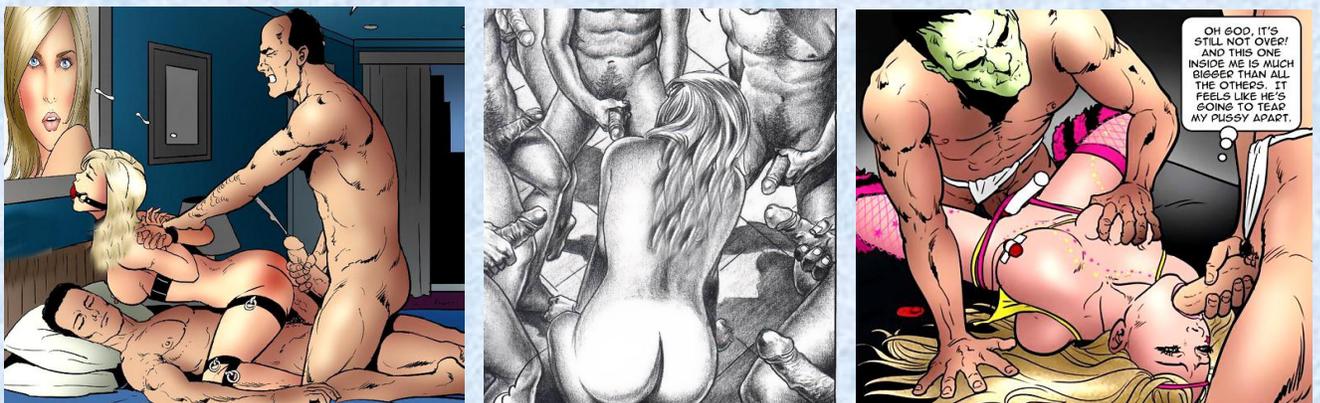
And even the ones who had already taken her were re-aroused when they saw her well-toned buttocks. Their eyes grew hard again as they thought **Sodomy!**



"Oh shit!" Pat thought to herself (no pun intended).



It was much more difficult for them to penetrate her rectum like they did her vagina. But they accepted it as more of a challenge. **Grunting** and *cursing*, they used all the muscles in their being to poke every last inch of their cocks deep up in her!



Does every pervert and rapist in the country have a **mechanical fucking device**? It would seem so to anyone who followed this entire adventure including Hornetta Hale. For these criminals were quick to use one on the already-ravaged woman-child ...



Her will to survive prevented her from losing consciousness to the machine.



In a Parallel Universe ...



All "good things" must come to an end. So thought her assailants. They unplugged the machine and inspected the fruits of its labor on the sore and twitching female bitch. They noted her newly stretched-out and slightly **bleeding** vagina and rectum.

"A job well done," laughed one.

Pat heard him and silently damned him to the place where Evil resides permanently.



[Gang-Impregnated Woman-Child]

Taken aback, Doc blurted: "Pat?"

"Who else?" beamed Pat.

In her bronzy right fist was one of the supermachine pistols that had gone missing from the *Stormalong*. 2 more were jammed into the waistband of her slacks (which now qualified as shorts) along with her old single-action frontier revolver.

Not for the first time in his dealings with his thrill-seeking cousin was Doc Savage struck speechless.

Pat said cheerfully: "Well, don't just stand there gawking. Help haul out our prisoners!"

"Our?"

"After you mangled this tube, the hull started springing leaks everywhere. The crew kind of lost interest in us. Hornetta and I jumped them and whaled these sorry sailors to within an inch of their lives. ... Now get down there and pitch in."

She waved a tanned finger in Doc's face.

"This time, I really pulled your fat out of the fire. And don't think you'll ever hear the end of it, either!"

XXXI – The Mop-Up

In very short order, the crew of the whale-like U-boat was brought up from the vessel's innards.

Hornetta Hale did the prodding from below. She was the last to emerge wielding the sub commander's spike-snouted automatic. She looked as though she had been in a fight and enjoyed every minute of it. When she grinned at Doc, a gap showed in her front teeth that would have delighted a dentist.

The crew numbered less than a dozen. They looked frightened and dejected. Being bested by a pair of former female captives probably did not add to their present dispositions.

The U-boat captain was not eager to identify himself. Predictably, he gave his name as Schmidt. But no one believed him.

Doc Savage strode up and scrutinized the officer's square features briefly and commented:

"Kapitan Carl Brock if I am not mistaken. You are very far from your home base in Lorient."

The sea captain's square face grew very long in the cheeks.

By this time, the surviving Coast Guard cutter had come alongside and a picked boarding party were descending into the subseas boat to check for any stragglers. They soon emerged topside to report that there were none.

The prisoners were taken aboard the cutter at gunpoint. There was an argument over whether they should be placed aboard the Naval destroyer. But since the cutter had reached the scene first, its skipper asserted the privilege of taking the prisoners into Coast Guard custody.

The crewmen were pretty rough in their treatment of the prisoners. They seemed to find it necessary to use the hard buttstocks of their rifles to prod them along. By this time, the torpedoed cutter had sunk. But all hands had been plucked from the water. That was small consolation to the wounded pride of the Coast Guard.

Once everyone was safely aboard the cutter, the strange submersible was sent to the bottom by a thorough sieving of steel-jacketed lead. The rescued Guardsmen were permitted this honor. They riddled the ship's blue hull so completely that if it every raised from the Deep, the mystery U-boat could never again be made seaworthy.

The captured crew was made to watch during this. The significance of this action was not lost on them. The incident was not going to make the newspapers and they were unlikely to see their homeland again.

With that operation concluded, Doc Savage and the Coast Guard commander held a conference.

"This is not over yet," stated Doc firmly.

The Captain nodded tensely. "I imagine they have a base nearby."

Doc directed the skipper's attention to the nearby volcanic cone.

"My men were stranded on that small island yonder along with the apparent ringleader of this plot. An individual calling himself Count Runo von Elmz."

The skipper grinned tightly.

"Then let's go mop them up. I think my men would enjoy the exercise."

As the cutter got underway, Pat Savage and Hornetta Hale joined Doc Savage who was keeping an eye on the prisoners. They had been made to kneel on the afterdeck with their hands clapped over their heads. They looked miserable. Or as Pat wryly put it, "green around the gills".

"What's going on now?" Pat demanded.

"We are going to bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion," advised Doc.

She put her hands on her hips, cocked her pretty head to one side, and asked:

"Just exactly what is this all about? I still don't have it straight in my head."

"Miss Hale did not inform you?"

Pat grinned crookedly and dabbed at her **bloody** lip.

XX

She was also trying to remove traces of *semen*.



"We were too busy clobbering these goose-steppers."

Before Doc could say anything, Hornetta Hale barged into the conversation demanding:

"Where is my wayward big sister?"

"At last report, safe on that island," Doc told her.

Hornetta made apoplectic faces at the **Bronze Man** and asked:

"What do you mean 'at last report'?"

Doc replied: "We are investigating the situation on the island. There may be more trouble ahead."

Pat's grin got wider. She pulled a brace of superfirers from her belt.

"Wonderful! My blood is up! Just lead the way."

"You have done your share," Doc said firmly while relieving her of the weapons. "We will discuss this later."

Pat went in search of a Coast Guardsman susceptible to feminine charms. She swiftly found a suitable specimen and talked him out of his Garand rifle. It was nimble tongue-work to be sure.

As they were approaching the volcanic island, the crooked-winged warplane that had earlier disappeared came droning back.

The gray aircraft overflowed the island and then the flotilla. It apparently spotted the blue submarine wallowing on the ocean bottom for it circled the weird U-boat's location twice. The crystal clarity of the Caribbean permitted it to be seen from a height.

Evidently recognizing that the jig was up, the pilot swiftly turned tail. But he did not get far.

On the destroyer, an order was given and antiaircraft guns were brought to bear. They commenced firing, multiple barrels working mechanically. Quite a rolling *racket* resulted.

A punishing barrage began painting noisy **black** clouds in the blue sky all around the fleeing warplane. The pilot banked ... sought higher altitude ... then rolled in the opposite direction. He was quite an acrobat. But it did him no good.

The bursting Archie shells tore the gray aircraft apart in midair.

The place where the warplane had last been seen became indistinguishable from the Archie detonations. Then pieces of the aircraft began falling out of the sky. They watched, waiting for any sign of a parachute.

There was none.

Doc Savage informed the cutter commander: "The airstrip for that warplane must be on another island in the vicinity."

The Captain nodded. "I will radio the destroyer. No doubt an official request of the British government will lead to a vigorous search for that spot and appropriate punishment meted out."

The cutter circled around the island without drawing fire. It dropped anchor at a spot not far from the *Stormalong* which rocked in the sand-lapping waves rolling in.

Doc Savage was the first one off the cutter. He simply leapt into the water and began swimming. He lost no time getting to the white sandy beach.

The **Bronze Man** arrived in time to discover Ham Brooks and Count Runo von Elmz engaged in an unusual duel just up from the immaculate beach where the great ground-traveling roots of the charred and blackened Philodendron groped in every direction like questing tentacles.

The Count evidently shrugged off the effects of the brief whiff of gas that had overcome him. He was (as always) immaculately dressed. His clothes were as dry as if they had come off a washing line.

Ham was contending with his debonair foeman in a manner that defied all the proper rules of sword fencing. He was using the barrel of his cane instead of the blade which remained sheathed.

The Count was beating back with his own cane. So it was a combat of brute force rather than blade wizardry.

The Count was somewhat taller which seemed to give him a slight advantage. His aristocratic features fierce, he was banging down hard again-and-again attempting to break through Ham's defenses as if wielding a Viking war hammer and not a stout walking stick.

But Ham Brooks gave back as good as he received. The 2 stout barrels clashed and clattered against one another flashing in the Sun as the 2 men pounded at each other relentlessly. Neither one was able to land a blow on his resolute foe.

Seeing that he was getting nowhere and exertion was causing him to tire, the Count decided to change the rules in mid-combat. He <depressed> the stud that caused the small needle of a blade to spring forth from the cane's tip.

Charging, he attempted to impale Ham Brooks in the center of his chest with the clear intention of transfixing the heart.

Enraged by this flouting of gentlemanly rules, Ham swiftly sidestepped. With a flashing series of moves, he suddenly came up behind the Count and laid the barrel of his cane against the back of the man's close-cropped head.

The Count's Tyrolean hat went flying in one direction while the hat's owner stumbled forward and smashed his face into the sand.

He did not rise again.

Planting the tip of his stick upon his defeated opponent's unmoving back, Ham Brooks turned to offer Doc Savage a thin smile of triumph.

"Where are the others?" asked Doc.

"Monk and Long Tom are off chasing **mermen**," Ham said casually directing the tip of his cane toward the brush-furred crater.

Sounds of fists colliding with substantial portions of human anatomy came rolling down from the volcanic cone. One of Monk Mayfair's tremendous war *whoops* could be heard.

Before very long, there was complete silence.

Monk came down dragging 2 "**mermen**" by their finny feet, one in each hand. He was grinning to beat the band.

"Hiyah, Doc! I went' fishin' and look what I caught! This is the last of 'em."

Lugging another, Long Tom added: "We caught them trying to sneak down on us. But it looks like somebody got to them first. They were in pretty rough shape. Not much starch left in any of them for a good brawl."

He sounded disappointed.

Doc replied dryly: "We had an encounter earlier."

Long Tom deposited his defeated "**merman**" beside the one that Doc had overcome earlier. That man was still unconscious. There was no fight left in the other two.

The **Bronze Man** looked around and remarked: "Evidently, the **gas** which creates hallucinations remains effective for only a short period of time."

Long Tom muttered sheepishly: "I found myself up in a tree when it wore off. It was very embarrassing."

"No doubt **it** is extracted from this island as was the laughing **vapor**," continued Doc. "Some of it must be seeping out of fumaroles in small quantities, odors masked by the smoky air. Which would explain why Monk thought he encountered that 8-foot tall Satanic King Neptune and you believed you saw a **mermaid** with Hornetta Hale's features.

"If that was a figment of my imagination," Long Tom pondered, "how is it that Honoria Hale later turned up with **green** hair?"

"As you were informed before I departed on my mission," replied Doc, "that was my first clue that we were being eavesdropped upon. The Count and his men were inspired by Long Tom's **mermaid** hallucination to cut and dye Honoria's hair **green** hoping to pass her off as her twin Hornetta in order to determine once-and-for-all how much -- or how little -- we knew of the plot."

Monk grinned. "My jaw almost dropped when you switched to the **Mayan** lingo and clued us in.

His beetling brow wrinkled.

"Did you ever figure on how that tricky County slipped on and off our boat without getting wet?"

Doc nodded. "No doubt he passed from the silent U-boat to our diving well wearing a free-diving 'dry suit' which he shucked after breaching the cruiser's hull. In his hasty escape, it was a simple matter of taking the suit with him so as to leave no trace."

"It was unlucky for us that Pat failed to seal that hatch that first time she looked it over," Monk allowed.

He picked up Habeas Corpus and gave the porker a vigorous scratching.

Ham Brooks inserted waspishly: "And it was fortunate for that infernal hog that it shook off the effects of the equally infernal **gas**. Otherwise I would have been forced to trim strips off its miserable hide to make breakfast bacon. I am utterly famished."

To which Monk growled: "If that ever happened, I would grab hold of your ears, jump on your shoulders, do a somersault, and pull your head off like it was your hat."

There promptly ensued another argument. But Doc Savage had no interest in that. He went searching for Honoria Hale.

A contingent of Coast Guardsmen had waded ashore about this time. The importance of their mission was underlined by the fact that they were being led by no less than the cutter Commander.

Doc Savage told him: "Matters appear to be well in hand. All but one of the plotters has been apprehended.

He led the Captain over to the peculiar pile of helpless foreign seamen.

The officer studied the half-human half-piscatorial profusion. He noted their brush haircuts and took off his cap in order to scratch his head.

"Don't that beat all ..." he muttered.

"Free-diving suits," explained Doc. "When donned and secured tightly, they formed a sealed envelope which contained sufficient air to permit 10-to-15 minutes of underwater swimming before the individual needed to surface for oxygen. And sewn into the webbed fingertips are jaguar claws. Very deadly in a fight."

The Captain nodded. "That -- and the mystery submarine -- go a long way toward explaining some of the strange reports floating about the Caribbean these last few days."

"The passengers who disappeared off the 2 liners were spirited off into that waiting U-boat," Doc explained. "Its silent method of operation and camouflaged hull prevented the sub from being detected. All in all, a very elaborate ruse designed to confuse observers and throw maritime authorities off the track of the true plot."

Ham Brooks was hovering nearby and put forth a question.

"Exactly what was their plot? I fail to fathom any of this."

Doc Savage gestured out into the open ocean toward the handsome **yacht** that had dropped anchor well away from the isle. They could read the name on the stern. It said:

WISTERIA
MIAMI, FLORIDA

"All of the efforts were aimed at sinking the **Presidential** yacht with all hands aboard," explained Doc.

"Presidential!" bleated Ham, aghast.

"Blazes!" yelled Monk. "Do you mean that the President of the United States is on that hooker over there?"

The cutter Commander answered.

"This is a State secret, of course. You all know that the President recently gave a speech about dealing harshly with foreign submarine raiders that have been sinking commercial and relief shipping in the Atlantic. Well, he decided he wanted a first-hand look at the Caribbean where some of those raiders were rumored to be based in secret.

"That name you see is not the real name of the President's yacht. It was painted over to disguise it. Although that did not seem to fool Doc Savage here who recognized it from a distance.

"Sort of a secret fact-findin' mission," muttered Monk.

"Exactly," said the Captain.

Ham Brooks twirled his dented and dinged sword-cane jauntily and pointed its tip toward Count Runo von Elmz who was being lugged to a waiting dory like a sack of spoiled potatoes.

"What was the motive for his heinous murder scheme?"

The cutter Skipper answered that.

"Some of the U-boat crew are already spilling. Seems all the official talk of sinking raiders in the Atlantic has got the head mustache [i.e., Hitler] over there worried that America would step in and settle the war. His theory was that if the President were to die, the new chief executive might think differently. Or at least think twice unless he wanted to be the next target for assassination."

Ham frowned.

"I rather doubt that mad scheme would have worked out the way the Count planned for it to," he drawled.

"An assassination started World War I, you'll remember," agreed the Captain. "This old planet of ours is a ball of powder right now. And there are a lot of spots where an assassination would be just the spark to touch it off. The consequences would be stupendous. A lot is hanging in the balance for America."

At that point, 2 Coast Guardsmen returned escorting Honoria Hale. They found her hiding in the mangroves. The former brunette looked crestfallen.

When Doc Savage asked "What have you to say for yourself?", she hung her head in shame.

"Who is this?" demanded the Coast Guard Captain noticing Honoria's **seaweed**-hued hair.

"Honoriam Hale," answered Doc. "The key to the entire plot. She evidently fell in love with one of the plotters. This man used her to obtain confidential information about the President's secret trip enabling the Count and his men to lay this diabolical trap."

"Is this true?" questioned the Skipper.

Her pale lips trembling, Honoria Hale mustered up enough strength to say:

"I ... I had friends in Washington society. I was in love. He ... he got me to draw them out. We learned about the ..."

That was all she could manage before words failed her.

The Officer regarded her coldly.

"Well, you're a traitor to your Country now. And liable to be hung for the offense of high treason."

The effect of this cold declaration on Honoria Hale was stark. Rigidity seemed to wrench all through her.

Seeing this display, the Captain relented slightly.

"Inasmuch as you're a woman and only an accomplice, they will probably give you life imprisonment instead."

"I guess it was all for naught," mused Ham Brooks. "Now that she and the Count are prisoners, they can never see one another again."

Hornetta Hale said thinly: "It's worse than that. She wasn't in love with that old warhorse."

Long Tom <blinked>. "No?"

"It was that 'Pippel' guy who was chasing me. He called himself Lancelot Lacy. He was the one who marooned me on the little cay in the first place. The skunk! He couldn't bump me off. Otherwise my sister might get wise and then spill the beans."

"So he stuck me on that island hoping that I'd die of exposure and the papers would write me off as going the way of Amelia Earhart. Only I was too tough for them mugs."

Doc asked: "You knew of the plot all along?"

Hornetta nodded. "Most of it. I needed some money for a venture. Against my better judgment, I went to Honoria for some dough. She tried to give me the business. But I could tell that Sis was worried about something. I got her to cough up and the next thing I knew, I was snatched and stranded by Pippel's Bundist Brown Shirts."

"Which one was Pippel?" asked Ham.

"The one the Count had to blast when he was wounded so bad that he couldn't leave Long Island," explained Hornetta. "That cold-blooded blueblood executed him with Honoria right in the next room. He was sore that Pippel had boasted of the plot to Honoria which is why Pippel was so hot to stop me from reaching Doc Savage in the first place. He knew the penalty if the plan did come off because of his big mouth. And in the end, the louse paid it anyway."

At that grim reminder, the green-haired girl sank to her knees and buried her face in the immaculate sand. Her shoulders shook convulsively. Strangely, she made no audible sound.

Long Tom tugged at an oversized ear.

"What I don't get is why they didn't kill either of you when they had the chance."

"They were going to. Don't doubt that for a minute," Hornetta said tightly. "But the Count knew if he did away with me, Honoria would go running to the authorities. That's why they marooned me in the first place. When the papers broke the story of my rescue, Honoria put two-and-two together and took a train from New York to find me before the Count did. But they had a spy shadowing Sis and he caught up with her before she reached Doc Savage.

"Later after Pippel was plugged, they tried the same gag in reverse in the hope I wouldn't go running to the G-Men. Only this time, their scheme was to pack her off to Brazil. Honoria gave me all this dope when we all ended up in that U-boat together."

Ham frowned. "Why didn't they do away with you both, then?"

Pat Savage answered that one.

"If their assassination plan had come off the way they figured it, they were going to shove all three of us out the torpedo tubes so that our bodies would be found with the ones who perished in the explosion. They thought it would a touch of mystery to the grisly proceedings."

She added: "Incidentally, remember that ugly '**merman**' we all saw leaping out of the water that first night? That was one of the Count's **U-Men**. They shot him out of a torpedo tube just to impress us. They recovered him later. Those reinforced rubber suits are plenty tough."

Her clear golden **eyes** went to Doc Savage.

"When did you finally figure out that the 'mermen' were not real, Cousin?"

"From the beginning," admitted Doc.

"Oh, tell the truth you-know-it-all!"

The **Bronze Man** replied calmly. "It was obvious from the first that the purported 'merman' was not a genuine living creature."

Pat cocked a skeptical eyebrow as he continued.

"The aquatic apparition displayed the tail of a bony fish but the cartilage back-fin of a shark. The two are not found together in Nature. It is evolutionary impossible. Therefore the 'merman' could not have been real."

Pat made a flustered face. She bit her tongue and stalked off.

No one had much to say as Honoria Hale was hauled off to a launch and brought back to the surviving cutter to join her co-conspirators.

Hornetta Hale watched her twin depart with white-knuckled fists and a strange pallor creeping over her **sunburned** features.

"We didn't like each other much," she said hoarsely. "But we were still kin. That makes it kinda tough to take."

That was all the comment she offered.

XX

But she still couldn't forget her sister laughing as Honoria ordered Pat Savage and her to be **raped by young boys, dogs, and fucking machines.**



Honorita screamed: "Get these **whores** into the chamber and let the **fucking** begin!"

"You're gonna be Pregnant!"



The two women were dragged kicking and scratching into a secluded but well-lit inner room. Many men assisted in ripping and tearing their tight-fitting clothes off.



Pat and Hornetta couldn't believe their eyes. There was a teenage **boy** with his young penis exposed outside his pants.

"You're gonna be **RAPED!**"



"What the ..." Hornetta and Pat thought almost simultaneously.

But their question was not ready to be answered. For Honoria appeared with a huge strapped-on **dildo**. Her intentions were quite obvious.

"You're getting Fucked!"



Honoria promptly proceeded to fuck Pat Savage lesbian-style. But she only did this for 15 minutes-or-so. Almost as if she were preparing Pat for something else.



Afterwards, several evil-looking **boys** watched with eager eyes as the beautiful **bronze**-haired woman groaned and writhed on the hard floor,



Then Honoria turned her attention to Hornetta.

"Don't think I've forgotten about you, **Bitch.**"



She **raped** her just like she did Pat Savage. Hornetta cursed and struggled as she felt her tight vagina being stretched and involuntarily lubricated.



As with Pat Savage, excited adolescent **boys** were witnessing her rape.



Honorita now addressed the boys.

"Okay you little fuckers. Now is your big chance. Now we will see if all that watching of porn movies taught you anything. Show me your hard-ons!"



Honorita obviously approved of the boys' erections.

"Now see them two **whores** over there?" pointing to a dumbfounded Pat and Hornetta. "I just finished opening them up for your pathetic little peckers. Now git over there and **FUCK** the living hell out of both of them **sluts!!!**"

The boys' eyes were crazed with wild lustful stares. Some were even licking their lips. They had never tasted a female's lips or breasts before. And certainly no one like these two Hollywood-style adult women.

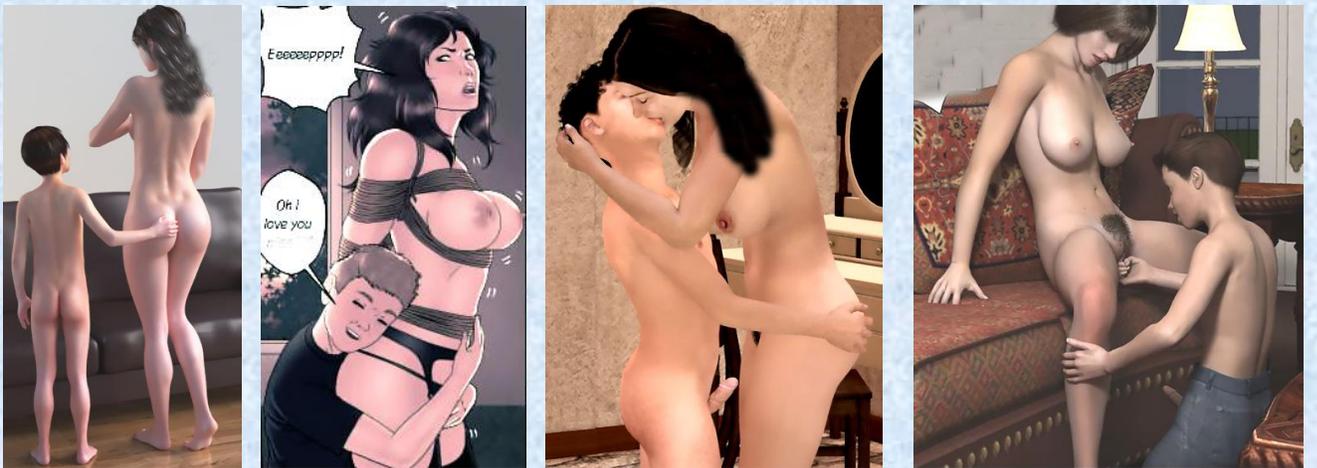
Pat Savage and Hornetta Hale watched in disbelief and mounting anxiety as a group of young horny naked boys rushed over to them.



Pat was the first to feel a boy's wet mouth and his prodding fingers.



Then Hornetta felt the same thing. She felt so humiliated.



The two adult women grimaced as they were forced to submit to the young rapists.



Honorina cheered them on.

"C'mon! Be bad! Show these 2 **bitches** that you mean business. Show them how **babies** are made!"



"They're gonna RAPE the hell out of you!"



WHORE FOR TEENAGE RAPISTS



Hornetta Hale and Pat Savage reluctantly layed down and spread their legs like **whores**. The boys' penises were as erect and hard as they were ever going to be.



Pat was the first to get a young **cock** rammed up in her. She yelped! Surprisingly, it **hurt!** Honoria had already torn her a little with that big dildo.

Honoria taunted her while the perverted-looking boy tried to *impregnate* her.

"Don't cry while they're making you Pregnant!"



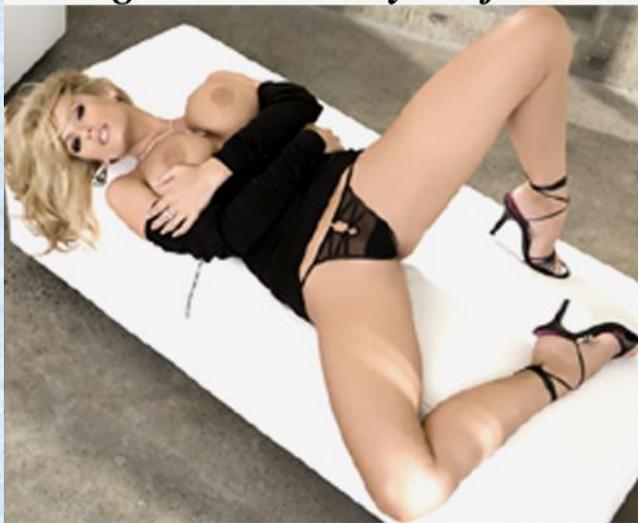
Honoria glanced over to the other side of the room. A nerdy-looking kid was having his way with a non-resisting Hornetta. He finished with his *sperm* running out of her.



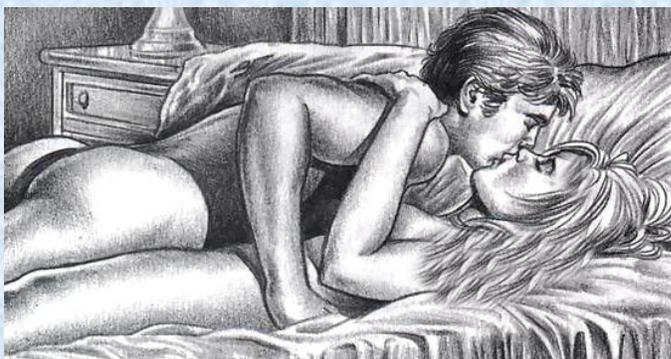


But there were MANY more boys to "dip their wicks". Pat saw this and only wished that they would hurry up and get it over with. She tried to pose seductively.

*"Go ahead and stick it in me, runt.
Then go to Hell with your father!"*



That resulted in Pat Savage being repeatedly **fucked** for 2 hours!





Hornetta thought the same as Pat. Just lay there without resisting and let them get it over with as quickly as possible. Perhaps she didn't count on the dozen-or-so boys!



Lots of baby-making *sperm* were injected into her womb by young anxious cocks. Hornetta was groaning more from *humiliation* than pain.



Honoria looked down at the two women with *sperm* running out of their vaginas. She smiled at the boys. She was so proud of them!

She pointed to Pat and said to one of them: "With a little luck, you might have given her a baby. Do you want a little boy or a little girl?"

The boy was one of the nastier ones. He replied: "I want a girl. Then when she gets old enough, I'm gonna fuck her just like I did her mother."

Honorica laughed and said: "Well, you better do it to her again just to make sure."

Hearing this, Pat groaned. "Oh not again! You have to be kidding!"

The boy <slapped> her hard across the face. "Shut-up, **Whore!**"

Honorica smiled as he promptly tore into the **bronze-haired woman-slut**.



Honorica looked over at a writhing Henrietta as the boy finished his attempted *impregnation* of Pat Savage.

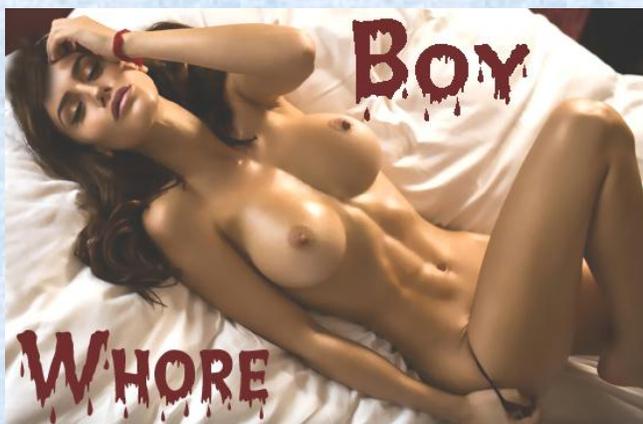
"Well, what about you?" she asked another. "Do you want a little boy or a girl?"

"I want a little boy," he stammered. "So both of us can fuck her."

Honorita smiled gleefully. "Then go for it! *Rape your bitch!*"



But then it was time another *humiliation*. She watched as Pat and Hornetta slowly raised themselves off the hard **urine**- and **semen**-coated floor.



"You two are now going to get the hell fucked out of your stuck-up **asses**," she promised.

She motioned to what appeared to be an entirely new group of boys.

"Assume the position, **Bitches**," she commanded. "Get those **butts** raised up!"



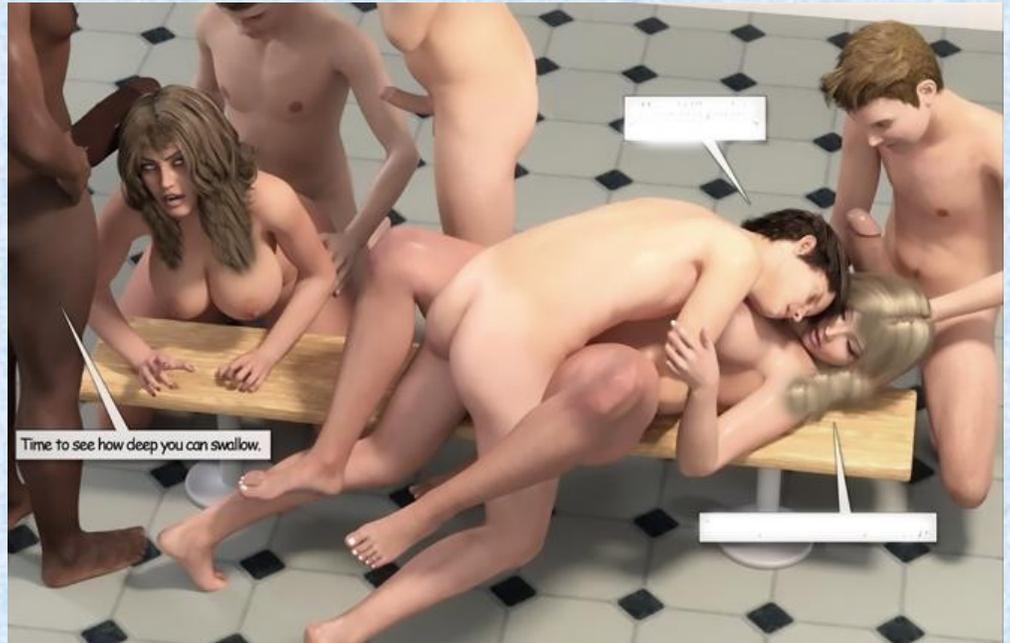
One boy had difficulty getting his penis into Pat's rectum. She groaned and cursed as he twisted and poked around until he finally hit paydirt!



Much the same happened to Hornetta. Her young rapist was also inexperienced in **sodomy**. He kept jamming and twisting until it finally "broke through".



Honorina stood watch over the gang of boys **reaming** out the adult women's **rectums**.



The boys were a lot hornier than Honoria expected. But after all, it was their first time. And the adult women were stunningly gorgeous to boot. They were finished.



But the wicked Honoria had another torment up her sleeve. The two gang-banged women looked over to see some large **dogs** looming in the background.

"Breeding time!"



Pat caught on quicker than Hornetta. She had been raped by a canine before.

"Oh you can't be serious!" she gasped.

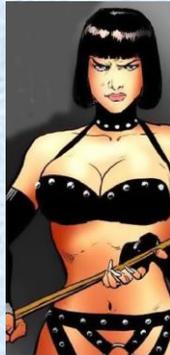
"Oh but I am!" insisted Honoria. "You two are supreme **bitches**. And every dog needs its **bitch**. Don't you think?"



"What's going on?" Hornetta asked Pat.

"I'm afraid we're in for a lot of trouble," Pat replied. "And this time it's going to hurt real bad."

If Honoria did something to make the dogs extra horny, it would never be known. Maybe they just picked up the *scent* of the boys' **semen** dripping from the 2 women's pussies. But they started *whining* and *whimpering* as they walked over to their **bitches**.



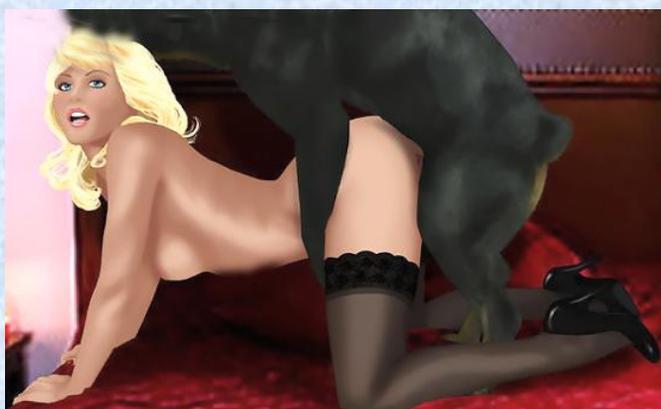
Hornetta was the first to get it. The large canine mounted her. It struggled to get its long penis in her. Once in, it ejaculated some **pre-cum** intended to lubricate her.



But the beast didn't wait for it to take effect. Its **breeding** tool was much too rigid at this point. The dog **growled** and Hornetta **screamed** as the steel-hard penis thrust deep into the beautiful woman's fertile womb.



Pat's dog did much the same thing. It inserted a few inches into Pat's cunt to shoot its **pre-seminal** fluid. Once that was done, it wasted no time in ramming the rest in.



The final act of the beasts was the notorious "**knot**". Once completely inside their bitches, the base of their penises formed a bulge which prevented the penis from slipping out. It was infamous for keeping the breeding tool inside a womb long after every last drop of *doggie cum* had been expended.

"**Fuck**, you mangy beasts!" commanded Honoria. "**Rape!!!!**"





The long breeding and the huge **knot** was killing Pat Savage. She was **screaming** and **crying** for the damn beast to get out of her torn cunt.



Hornetta was not fairing any better. She was in **pain** also. But because this was her **first dog raping**, it was more degrading than Pat Savage's.



Honorina and the boys were happily cheering the obscene mass canine **breeding**.



The 4-legged beasts had their way with the beautiful human bitches. It took a while for the **knots** to relax and the penises to extract themselves out of the well stretched-out women's wombs.

Dog sperm flowed freely from their mouths as well as their pussies. The beats whined in exhaustion. Pat and Hornetta were just thankful the 4-hour breeding session was over.



Now the only question that remained in the evil Honoria's mind was whether the women's **offspring** was human or beast!



[9 months later in the hospital delivery room]



[**who** or **what** is the daddy?]

*But Pat Savage would recover from her sexual abuse. She had an unexplainable remarkable ability to somehow heal herself. Maybe it was the Savage bloodline. It would only be a matter of weeks for her stretched-out vagina and rectum to return to their original firmness. She would be **virgin-tight** again! But could she escape future rapes and gang-bangs????*

Doc Savage was explaining to the Skipper: "This island is honeycombed with pockets of volcanic gas. When disturbed, some of them can cause a man to fall down in fits of laughter and go unconscious for periods up to a day. Other pockets if disturbed will produce vivid and apparently surreal hallucinations."

The Captain felt of his smooth jaw.

"Sounds like the Navy boys could use this spot for gunnery practice. I'll set that in motion."

"Good idea," said Doc.

They set about evacuating the island and getting the cruiser *Stormalong* seaworthy once more.

Pat Savage and Hornetta Hale were transferred over to the cruiser as Doc Savage prepared to clear the island. Cans of fuel were conveyed from the cutter to the cruiser as the *Stormalong's* fuel tanks were replenished. A working radio receiver and transmitter came with them courtesy of the grateful United States Coast Guard.

It was not long before a message came over the set. Long Tom took it and called up to Doc Savage:

"They want you on the yacht. Pronto!"

The **Bronze Man** was ferried over to the Presidential yacht in a small launch. He spent over an hour in conference with the President of the United States.

When Doc Savage returned, the others gathered around him asking excited questions.

Pat cut through all of them.

"How exciting! What did you two talk about?"

The future defense of the Nation," returned Doc quietly. "With Europe sinking deeper into war, it may be only a matter of time before we are drawn into the conflict."

After that sobering statement, all queries died. It was also manifestly clear that Doc Savage was not going to reveal any more of his private conversation with the Chief Executive.

The cutter and the *Stormalong* soon cleared the island sailing northwestward toward the United States.

The Sun was setting in riotous Caribbean splendor when a series of **detonations** commenced erupting to the stern.

Turning, they watched as the forlorn little island began to come to pieces under the destroyer's pounding deck guns. Palms shook their crowns like angry fists before toppling. The caldera was blasted apart. Before long, the pool it had contained came rushing out to mix with sea. Quite a quantity

of marine life from groupers and starfish came with it. Many floated to the surface unmoving, their eyes staring up at the blue sky in stunned surprise.

"That," said Monk Mayfair, "is the end of that blasted wart on that Caribbean."

Ham Brooks pondered. "Too bad we could not get a better look into that old ruin. Who knows what wonders it might have contained."

This caused Long Tom Roberts to ask: "What about those *swastikas* carved on the temple entrance?"

"Pure coincidence," explained Doc. "Such signs are found the World over. Aside from that, the crosses we saw cut in stone displayed arms twisting in the opposite direction as a modern *swastika*. It was not the same thing at all."

All seemed over.

Then Hornetta Hale, who had been uncharacteristically silent after her sister was taken away in irons, marched up to Doc Savage.

"Hold up, Golden Boy! I wanna talk about your attitude."

"Attitude?"

Hornetta planted scuffed fists on her curvaceous hips as she pointed her thin nose at the big **bronze** man.

"I tried to hire you to go to town on these rascals and you refused."

"Which is my right. I do not work for hire."

"Cast your mind back over the last few days, high Pockets," Hornetta blazed. "If you had gone along with me, we could have nipped this thing in the bud before the Presidential yacht was almost torpedoed."

Doc began to object ...

... then Pat Savage interjected: "Hornetta has a point. If you had listened to her, we could have cleaned up on these assassins before it ever got to this point."

A rare ire showed in **Bronze Man's** tone as he replied:

"Miss Hale refused to divulge any details. It was impossible to know that anything serious was underfoot or to determine if her shenanigans were merely some madcap scheme for notoriety."

"Doc's right," added Ham Brooks reasonably. "This woman is notorious for seeking publicity for herself."

"Yeah," added Monk Mayfair. "She's a headline hound."

"No, you **rusty** gorilla," countered Hornetta. "I'm an adventuress! And I'm just getting started on my career."

Doc advised: "It would be very wise of you to put such thoughts behind you. Adventuring is a highly perilous occupation."

"Well, just try and stop me!" threatened Hornetta.

"Yes. Try and stop us!" added Pat.

Doc Savage stared. "Us?"

"You heard me," snapped Pat. "Down in that submarine, Hornetta and I discovered that we make an unbeatable team. So we buried the hatchet. When we get back to New York, we're hanging out a shingle. **Savage & Hale, Troublebusters for Hire**. We'll clean up."

"You will not," Doc said earnestly.

"What's to stop us?" demanded Hornetta. "After this triumph, we'll probably end up in the history books."

Doc Savage seemed at a loss for words.

Finally, he said: "Normally common sense would stop you. But between the two of you, there seems to be a shortage of that commodity."

"Hah!" crowed Pat. "Common sense and what army?"

Studying the 2 excited amazons, the **Man of Bronze** decided that probably no army on the face of the Earth could dissuade the troublesome team of Pat Savage and Hornetta Hale from doing exactly what they set minds to do.

He left it to Ham Brooks to break the bad news.

"I am afraid that nothing of what transpired this day will be allowed to reach the newspapers," he told them. "Washington will hush it up."

"Well, they can't hush US up!" flared Hornetta.

"That's right!" snapped Pat. "Savage & Hale are unhushable."

"Make that Hale & Savage," corrected Hornetta.

Ham pointed out the undeniable fact that the United States of America was not presently at war. And that if word of this attempted assassination of the President got out, a declaration of War would inevitably follow. They had a solemn duty to their country to keep their own counsel on the matter.

"There are no two ways about it," he concluded firmly. "Why, they would probably clap you both in jail if you so much as whispered the truth of this atrocious International incident."

After this sad state of affairs had sunk in, Pat said defensively:

"We don't need publicity. Our names and reputations will make us rich. Why, we'll have to much profitable trouble tramping up to our doorsteps that you lads will start begging us for leftovers."

"May I make a suggestion?" Doc requested.

"Go ahead," Pat and Hornetta said in unison.

"In the future, leave us out of it," said Doc dryly. "It sounds like more excitement than we normally prefer to handle."

And with that, the **Bronze Man** walked off to permit the 2 women to argue over whether the new enterprise should be called 'Savage & Hale' or 'Hale & Savage'.

"I was off adventuring before you opened up that swanky beauty salon, you glorified shampoo slinger," Hornetta sneered at Pat.

"I like that!" Pat hurled back. "For your information, you frizzled brunette lobster, I come from a long line of famous adventurers."

"Coming from ain't the same as practicing," retorted Hornetta. "But don't fret, toots. I'll take you under my wing and teach you all the ropes. Stick with me and you'll see trouble the likes of which you heretofore have only dreamed about. That is, of course, if you're tough enough to take it."

Pat Savage's mouth fell open. She struggled for a choice phrase with which to verbally skewer the brassy brunette. Nothing immediately came to mind, however.

She felt a growing temptation to sock her new partner in the jaw just for the sheer satisfaction of knocking Hornetta Hale into the drink again.

Monk turned to Ham and spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

"This could work out at that. They're startin' to sound like you and me on a good day."

"You mean a bad day," corrected Ham giving his cane a snappy spin that sent a fully recovered Habeas Corpus scampering for the safety of the lazaret.



(<http://www.hotlegsinline.com/AnnaXXX.htm>)



The next episode in **“The Perils of Patricia Savage”** is
PS198XXX.pdf ("The War Makers")

[http://www.hotlegsinline.com/PSXXX/PS198XXX_The_War_Makers.zip]

(the previous adventure was [PS191XXX_The_Desert_Demons.pdf](#))

The images here plus video GIFs are stored online at <http://www.hotlegsinline.com/PSXXX.htm>

Mega Porn Sites (from which the images above were taken):

<http://luxbabes.com> ; <http://www.tiava.com> , <http://www.extremeapril.com>

Rebecca's HAP (Housewives At Play) - <http://www.rebeccahap.com>

Role-Playing Costumes – Forplaycatalog.com LoversLane.com

T-Girl/Tranny Call-Girls at <http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/AnnaXXX.htm>, <http://barbie-boy.com> ,
<http://www.cute-shemales.com> , <http://www.trannyhardpics.com>,

Fantasy "Forced-Sex" sites at <http://www.forcefantasies.com> , <http://www.dofantasy.com> ,
<https://www.8muses.com/> , <http://www.superheroinecentral.com/~wizard/> ,
<http://www.savageartwork.com> , <http://www.boundandgagged.net/>

"Forced-Sex" RolePlaying Forums – <http://savage-violation.com> , <http://ravishu.com> ,
<http://www.collarspace.com/>

an online Escort/Call-Girl site => <http://www.erostranssexuals.com/>

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<http://www.topcelebrityfakes.com> , <http://www.celebritiesmix.com>

"Monster/Alien/Dog" sex at <http://monsterfuckgirls.com> , <http://3dcreaturesex.com/> ,
<https://beastartforum.com> , <http://3dmonster.xxx/> , <https://www.pichunter.com/tags/Monsters>

To contribute ideas for future stories (or possibly even participate in role-playing), email ...



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