

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

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Scanned and Proofed
by Tom Stephens

Chapter I. GIGGLING GIRL

THE dictionary says:

GIGGLE: To laugh with short catches of the breath and voice; to laugh in an affected or a silly manner or with an attempt at repression.

That is the definition of a giggle as given in the dictionary.

There is nothing extraordinary about giggling. Most persons giggle a little at one time or another. The psychologists claim that it is a form of laughter, and therefore good for you.

But when ghosts giggle, it is different.

The giggling these ghosts did was not good for anybody, it developed.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Like many unpleasant and momentous events, the existence of the giggling ghosts began as rumors. There was nothing very definite. Just stories.

A small boy came tearing home one night and told his mother he'd heard a ghost giggling in a brush patch. Now most ghosts are seen by small boys, and so the story was pleasantly smiled upon. No one thought anything about it. Naturally it didn't get in the newspapers.

A New Jersey politician the giggling ghosts seemed to haunt only New Jersey was the next man to see a ghost. His constituents had long ago stopped believing anything the politician said about lowering taxes, so they treated his story dubiously.

He'd been taking an evening walk in a Jersey City park, and he'd heard a giggling ghost, and caught a glimpse of it. This little item got in the newspapers, and quite a number of people humorously remarked that more politicians should be haunted.

Two or three other giggling ghost stories got around, and at this point a bad mistake was made: Too many people thought the stories were being imagined. This was the Twentieth Century, the age of realism in thought and action. There were no such thing as ghosts.

Particularly, there could be no such thing as giggling ghosts.

A girl was the first one to make the awful discovery that the ghosts' giggling was catching.

"MIAMI" DAVIS was the girl's name. She had been standing with her head shoved through a hole where a pane had been broken out of a window of an old storehouse just across the Hudson River from New York City.

She had heard a giggling ghost. She was trying to see it.

She had been trying to see the ghost for about three minutes when she caught the giggling.

The giggling of girls is usually pleasant enough to listen to. Girls will giggle if you tickle their necks, and when you tell them nice little lies.

The giggling of Miami Davis was not pleasant to listen to. Not in the least. It was terrible.

Her sounds were made with short catches of the breath; there was certainly an attempt at repression; she did not want to make the noises. She was giggling, according to the literal word of the dictionary definition.

The girl grabbed her mouth with her right hand, her nose with her left, and tried to stop the sounds coming out. She had no luck. Then she tried to gag herself with a mouthful of her own coat collar. That failed.

She ended up by fleeing wildly from the storehouse.

The storehouse was made of brick, had a tin roof. It looked as if the Bureau of Public Safety should have ordered it torn down about ten years ago. The storehouse was full of steam shovels, dump trucks, excavators and other construction equipment.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

At one end of the storehouse was the Hudson River. Past the other end ran a typical water-front street: rutted, dirty, haunted by smells.

The sky was a dome of gloom in the late dusk, crowded with clouds, promising rain. It had showered about an hour ago, just enough so that the marks were visible where rain drops had splattered the dust on the pavement.

The girl got in the middle of the street and ran. Ran as if something were after her. She covered about a block and reached a car a small convertible coupé, new and neat and pitched into it.

The girl was frightened. She jabbed at the rear-view mirror, knocking it around until she could see herself in it. She saw a pert, dynamic small girl with an unusual quantity of copper-colored hair, large blue eyes, inviting lips, and a face that was distinctly fascinating in a bright way.

Suddenly she giggled. Convulsively. She couldn't help it. And complete terror came on her own face.

She started the car motor and drove away speedily.

FIFTEEN minutes later, some policemen listened to the girl and smiled. She was an easy girl to smile at. Also, her story was ridiculous, and that encouraged them to smile.

"How did you happen to be looking into a storehouse for a giggling ghost?" a cop asked skeptically.

Miami Davis giggled hysterically.

"I followed the ghost there," she said.

"Oh, you followed it. Well, well!"

"I was working late," the girl said. "When I left the office it's in a factory not far from this storehouse I saw a shadowy figure. It was a ghostly figure." She looked at them, giggled, then screamed wildly, "*A ghost figure, you hear? I followed it. It giggled!* That's why I followed it. I had been hearing those stories about giggling ghosts."

"Was it a male or a female ghost?" a cop inquired.

The girl giggled angrily.

"You don't believe me!" she said, between giggles.

"There have been some yarns about giggling ghosts floating around," one policeman admitted.

The captain of police came in, then, and heard the story. He did not believe it. Not a word of it.

"Go home; go to bed and call a doctor," he ordered.

The girl stamped an irate foot, giggled wrathfully at him, and flounced out.

A cop followed her, and stopped her when she reached her coupé.

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"Look," the cop said, "why not go to Doc Savage?"

This apparently failed to mean much to the girl.

"Doc who?" she asked.

"Doc Savage."

The girl frowned, trying to remember, then said, "There was a story in the newspapers a while back about a man named Doc Savage who had discovered something new about atoms or molecules or some such thing. But why should or do you mean he treats crazy people? Well, I'm not crazy!"

The cop waited until she stopped giggling.

"You've got me wrong," the officer said. "This guy's a scientist, but that ain't his main racket. He puts in most of his time going around helping people out of trouble. And the more unusual the trouble they're in, the better he likes it."

"I don't understand," the girl said.

"It's his hobby, or something. Helping people. I know it sounds crazy, but this Doc Savage is a good man to see about this giggling ghost business."

The girl giggled while she thought that over.

"It won't be much trouble," the girl said, "to see this Doc Savage."

"No," the cop said, "it won't be much trouble."

They were both wrong.

THE girl drove across the George Washington Bridge into New York City, guided her car to the uptown business district, and parked her car near a very tall building.

The elevator starter in the big building said, "So you want to see Doc Savage?"

The girl nodded, and she was ushered to an express elevator.

A man hurried and got in the elevator with her.

The man was tall, thick-bodied, and wore an expensive gray hat with a snap brim, fuzzy gray sports oxfords, and gray gloves of high quality. He also wore a yellow slicker.

Miami Davis she was not giggling as much now noticed what the man wore. She did not see the man's face, because he kept it averted.

The elevator climbed up its shaft.

Suddenly the man in the slicker yelled, "Operator! *The girl is gonna hit you* "

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Then the man himself hit the operator. He knocked the fellow senseless with a blow from behind, a skull blow with a blackjack which he had whipped from a pocket. The operator could not have seen who had hit him.

Because of what the man had yelled, the operator would think that the girl had struck him.

The man who had slugged the operator showed cigarette-stained teeth in a vicious grin.

"He'll think you slugged 'im," he told the girl. "That won't do you any good."

He bent over, lifted one of his trousers legs, and removed a double barreled derringer from a clip holster fastened, garterlike, below his knee. He pointed the derringer at the girl.

"This wouldn't do you any good, either!" he said.

Chapter II. CHANGED MINDS

THE GIRL stared at the derringer.

The gun was not much longer than the middle finger of the man who held it, and the barrels were one above the other so that looking into their maws was like looking at a fat black colon. She could have inserted her little fingers in either barrel without much difficulty. She could see the bullets, like lead-colored bald heads.

"This thing" the man moved the derringer "will do as much damage as any other gun."

The girl moved, pressed herself into a corner of the elevator, and went through swallowing motions several times.

The man said, "When we get back to the lobby, we say the elevator operator fainted, see? Then you walk out with me." He gestured again with the gun. "Make any cracks, sis, and they'll be your epitaph!"

The girl tried to swallow again.

The man folded his newspaper carefully and tucked it in a pocket so it wouldn't be left lying around for fingerprints. He stepped to the elevator controls. When the operator had dropped after being slugged, he had instinctively shifted the control lever to the center, so that the cage had come to a stop.

The man set the control at, "Down." He seemed confident. He leaned against the side of the cage, cocking an eye on the girl, whistling idly as he waited. Abruptly his confidence got a puncture.

"What the devil?" he gulped.

The elevator was not going down. It was going up. *Up!* The man doubled over, stared at the controls. The handle was on "Down." But the cage was going up.

The man yanked at the handle, thinking control markings might be reversed but the cage kept going up. The controls now seemed to have absolutely no effect on the elevator.

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The man's mind leaped instantly to the conclusion that he was in a fantastic trap. He made snarling noises, even fired his derringer at the elevator controls, but accomplished nothing except to deafen himself and the girl.

His eyes, searching for escape, found the safety escape hatch in the top of the cage. He jumped at that until he got it open. With a great deal of grunting, kicking and snarling, he managed to pull himself through the hatch at the top of the slowly rising cage.

The girl let him go.

The man crouched on top of the cage; there was no stable footing. He clutched at a cable to steady himself, but the cable was moving, and he cursed.

The elevator was rising very slowly, although it was an express lift, and expresses in this building normally traveled at high speed. Obviously there was some kind of emergency mechanism in operation.

The skyscraper was served by a battery of elevators, all operating side by side. There was no division between the shafts only the vertical steel tracks on which the cages operated.

The man peered upward, saw another cage descending in the adjacent shaft. He made a lightning decision to take a long chance; he jumped for the top of the other cage as it passed. And he made it!

THE elevator in which Miami Davis was left alone with the senseless operator continued its snail-like progress upward.

The girl stood with her back against the cage, palms pressing against the side panels. When the elevator stopped, the girl took hold of her lower lip with her teeth and giggled a little.

For a moment there was silence.

Then, outside, a voice spoke. An unusual voice. It was a calm voice, with a remarkable tonal inflection, a quality of repressed power.

"The door will be opened in a moment," the unusual voice said. "The best thing you can do is to come out peacefully."

A moment later, the elevator door did open, and Miami Davis saw a giant bronze man.

The bronze man was so remarkable that she knew instinctively that his was the voice which had spoken a moment before. It had been a striking voice, and this bronze giant was striking.

There was a symmetry about his physical development which took away from his apparent size, until he was viewed at close range. He seemed normally built at a distance. His features were regular, his skin was an unusual bronze hue, and he had eyes that were like pools of flake gold being stirred by tiny winds.

The bronze man stood not more than a pace in front of the elevator door where, Miami Davis thought suddenly, he could have been shot down by any gunman inside the elevator.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

The bronze man was so close that he saw the elevator was empty, except for Miami Davis and the unconscious operator.

"You slug the operator?" the bronze man demanded.

Miami Davis shook her head and giggled. "No, I "

"There has been trouble before in elevators that lead up here," the bronze man said. "We installed a mechanical device, that, if the operator doesn't hold the control in a certain fashion, causes the cage to rise slowly to this floor. Also, an alarm bell rings. Now what happened?"

Miami Davis heard an electric bell buzzing steadily somewhere. Probably that was the alarm which the bronze man had said rang when something went wrong in the elevators.

"There was a man in here." She pointed at the roof of the cage. "He climbed out. I think he jumped to a cage in another shaft."

From below came shot sounds: two reports; a pause about long enough for the man to have reloaded the derringer followed; then came two more reports.

A man screeched. The screech was faint, with an eerie quality lent by the great distance it traveled up through the elevator shaft.

"You see!" the girl gasped. "He's down below! Shooting!"

Miami Davis then stepped out of the elevator, advanced brought up with a gasp. She had walked into something she couldn't see! She explored with her hands. Bulletproof glass, she decided. It must be that.

She fumbled for a way around. The panel was like a fence in front of the elevator door. No wonder the bronze man had felt so safe!

The bronze giant moved to a second elevator, entered, and sent the cage down. This was a private lift, and it sank with almost the same speed with which it would have fallen free, then brought up at the first floor with enough force to cause the bronze man to brace himself. He got out.

People were running around in the lobby, and the proprietor of the cigar stand was under the counter for safety. Out on the street, a cop was blowing his whistle furiously.

"Anyone hurt?" the bronze man asked.

"Something queer just happened, Mr. Savage. A man rode down on top of one of the cages. We started to ask him questions. He fought his way out."

"He shoot anybody?"

"No, Mr. Savage. He had a derringer, and you can't hit much with one of them things."

The bronze man went out to the street.

A cop said, "He got away, Mr. Savage. A guy in a car picked him up."

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WHEN Doc Savage returned to the eighty-sixth floor, Miami Davis had given up trying to get past the bullet-proof glass around the elevator door.

She had discovered the panel did not quite reach to the ceiling, and that accounted for her having been able to speak to the bronze man. She didn't feel like trying to climb over the top.

Doc Savage went to a wall panel in the corridor, opened it, and disclosed a recess containing small levers. He moved a lever and an electric motor whirred and the glass panel sank into the floor, its edge then forming part of the modernistic design of the floor. Miami Davis looked at the bronze man.

"What I read about you in the newspapers must've been straight stuff," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"I read you were a remarkable guy with a lot of scientific gimmicks."

"Oh."

"And I was told that your business is helping people out of trouble. Is that right?"

"It isn't far from the truth," the bronze man admitted.

"I've got trouble. That's why I am here." Miami Davis made a grim mouth. "More trouble than I thought, it begins to seem."

Doc Savage led the way into a reception room which was furnished with a huge safe, an exquisitely inlaid table, a deep rug and comfortable chairs.

The window afforded a startling view of Manhattan spires, and an open door gave a glimpse of another room a great paneled room, where all available floor space was occupied by bookcases.

"Have a chair, please."

The girl sat down weakly.

"Now, suppose you give me some idea about this trouble of yours," Doc Savage suggested.

"That man on the elevator tried to stop me from coming here "

"Go back to the beginning."

"Oh well " Miami Davis took a moment to assemble her information. "It began this afternoon when I saw the ghost sneaking into a water-front storehouse and I followed it."

"Ghost?"

"Well I thought so."

The girl giggled a little, helplessly.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"You were curious and followed a ghost into a storehouse," Doc Savage said. "So far, it's well, unusual. But go on."

"Then I began to giggle," the girl said. She shuddered.

"You what?"

"Giggled."

"I see."

Miami Davis knotted and unknotted her hands. "It sounds silly, doesn't it?"

"Well, at least extraordinary," the bronze man admitted.

"It was horrible! Something just just came over me. I seemed to go all to pieces. It frightened me. So I fled from the storehouse."

"And after you fled from the storehouse, then what?"

Miami Davis did not look at Doc Savage. "A policeman told me about you. It just occurred to him you, might be interested. So I came here."

Doc Savage's metallic features gave no indication of what he might be thinking.

"Let us hope," he said unexpectedly, "that you are telling the whole story."

"Oh, but I am."

Chapter III. THE MAN WHO OWNED A STOREHOUSE

WITHOUT speaking, the bronze man took the young woman by the elbow, guided her into a vast room which contained a great deal of laboratory equipment, seated her in a modernistic metal chair and did several things: first, he had her inhale and exhale several times through a tube which led to a complicated-looking contraption; then he examined the young woman, giving particular attention to her eyes. When he finished, he seemed slightly puzzled.

"You're not intoxicated, apparently," he said.

"I like that!" the girl gasped.

"Your eyes indicate that you are not a drug addict, and you seem earnest, although excited."

"Maybe I'm crazy," Miami Davis said dryly.

"We might have a look," Doc Savage said, "at the storehouse where you trailed the giggling ghost."

"Please," the girl said earnestly. "Let's do that."

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"Just a moment."

Doc Savage went into the library, picked up the telephone, and spoke for some minutes. The telephone was fitted into a boxlike device which, when pressed against the face, made it possible to use the instrument without being overheard by anyone in the room; the girl did not catch anything that the bronze man said. Doc put down the telephone.

"All right," he said. "We'll go now."

Rain had started to leak out of a sky that was grimy-looking, when Doc Savage, driving one of his cars, headed into the street. The rain came in drops as fine as fog, so it would probably continue for some time. It was rain that obscured vision, and most cars had their headlights turned on.

Doc Savage's car was a coupé, long, heavy, of expensive make, but with a subdued paint job that did not attract attention. There was little outward indication that the machine was armor-plated and equipped with bulletproof glass. Doc used his car in preference to that of the girl's, which he placed in his garage that lay under the towering skyscraper.

Finally the bronze man said, "This seems to be it," and pulled up before the old brick storehouse with the tin roof.

"You still think I'm a phony?" Miami Davis demanded.

"I still think it is unusual for a woman to follow a ghost."

"Well, I " The girl giggled, although she tried not to do so.

Doc asked, "What did it look like this ghost?"

"I it was just a shadowy figure."

"Did it make a noise walking?"

"I didn't hear any noise."

"If you would tell the truth "

The girl put up her chin indignantly. "I told you everything that happened!"

Without commenting on that, the bronze man wheeled his car over the curb and up to the side door of the storehouse.

When the bronze man went to the storehouse door, he carried a piece of apparatus which he had taken from a compartment in the car.

This device had three principal parts: The first part, which he fastened to the storehouse door with suction cups, was small, and insulated wires ran from this to an electrical amplifier; and from the amplifier other wires ran to a telephonic headset which the bronze man donned. He switched on the contrivance and listened.

The device was a high-powered sonic amplifier which took the smallest sound and increased its volume several hundred thousand times.

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Somewhere in the storehouse a rat ran and squealed, and in the amplifier headset it sounded as if an elephant had galloped over a wooden bridge and trumpeted. The girl came close and listened, too.

They had not listened long before they heard the giggling.

THE giggling was inside the storehouse. Three or four gigglings, all going at once, judging from the sounds.

It was fantastic. No other sound just a concert of giggling inside the storehouse.

"Now," the girl said, "what did I tell you?"

"You think that is your giggling ghost?"

"It sounds like more than one."

Doc Savage took the listening device back to the car and replaced it in its compartment.

The bronze man returned to the storehouse carrying a small cylindrical metal container holding anaesthetic gas under pressure. The container was equipped with a nozzle and valve. He inserted the nozzle in a crack at the bottom of the storehouse door and turned the valve.

With a hiss, gas rushed out of the container into the storehouse. Doc waited, depending on the sound of rain on the tin storehouse roof to keep the "ghosts" inside from hearing the gas. Evidently the rain on the roof was the reason they had not heard his car coming.

The girl pointed at the cylinder. "I don't get this."

"Gas. Anaesthetic. Practically no odor or color. There are men inside the storehouse, and the gas will make them unconscious without doing them any lasting harm."

"Oh."

Eventually the bronze man tried the storehouse door. It wasn't fastened; it came open at his shove. Inside, there was a cavern of gloom inhabited by the strange crouching shadow monsters that were the machinery. The place was full of the sound of the rain on the roof.

Doc Savage waited until the gas lost its potency it underwent a chemical reaction with the oxygen of the air and became impotent usually in about a minute then went into the storehouse. The flashlight which he used he had taken it from a door pocket threw a beam that was like one long white finger.

There were four unconscious men in the storehouse.

One man was very long, with a body which gave the impression of being a tube filled with round things. He had an Adam's apple like a golf ball, a large melon for a stomach, but not much of anything for a chest. His eyes were closed in senselessness, but it was evident that they must be very large. His nose, his mouth, his ears, were also large. His face had a benevolent expression.

The other three men were policemen in blue uniforms.

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All three policemen were slumped in the cab of the steam shovel. The long-looking loose-limbed man was lying beside the caterpillar tread of the shovel.

Doc Savage went out and got the girl and took her in to look at the men.

"You recognize any of these?" he asked.

Miami Davis shook her head while examining the policemen, but frowned when she came to the loose-jointed man. She seemed a bit doubtful about him.

"This one" she pointed at the long-looking man vaguely "sure needs some exercise."

"You know him?"

"I thought for a minute I had seen him somewhere. I guess I was wrong."

DOC SAVAGE was a scientific product. He had undergone specialized training from childhood to fit him for the unusual work which he was doing. Surgery had been his first training and his most specialized; but through patient effort he had managed to acquire an amazing amount of knowledge concerning geology, chemistry, electricity and other sciences.

This anaesthetic gas was a product of the bronze man's chemical skill. He had managed to keep the composition of the stuff a secret. Victims of the gas, however, could be revived by the administration of a proper stimulant made up in the form of tablets, pills that were large and a deep-blue color.

After Doc Savage administered stimulant pills to the men he had made unconscious the tablets came from his carryall vest he wore it took about fifteen minutes for the victims to revive.

The cops came out of it first, and squirmed around, got their eyes open, then sat up, one at a time, acting like men who had been in a sound sleep.

Doc Savage and the girl were both keeping out of sight behind the steam shovel. Doc wanted to listen.

The cops looked at each other for several moments before they spoke. Finally one giggled, then asked, "What the blazes happened?"

The trio scratched their heads, rubbed jaws, and giggled.

"It seemed," one said, "like we got the giggles, then went to sleep."

"That's crazy!"

The other pointed at the loose-jointed man, who was snoring softly.

"Birmingham Lawn looks like he is asleep, don't he?" he demanded by way of proof.

The first policeman scrambled over to the long-looking man.

"I hope he's all right," the cop said. "He's a swell old guy. Funny-looking, but swell. Always whistling."

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"Whistling?"

"Sure. Whistles all the time."

"You're sure he ain't a giggling ghost, then?"

"Ghosts hell! Don't let's start believing such lop-eared stuff. I've known Birmingham Lawn for years. I bought my little home through the real estate firm he runs." The officer went over and shook the long-looking, loose-limbed man. "Wake up, Lawn! Wake up, dang it!"

Birmingham Lawn opened one eye, then closed it. He licked his large lips, then opened both eyes, and worked his face around in puzzled shapes. He sat up and felt of himself, then started giggling a little.

Apparently in an effort to stop giggling, he whistled, pursed his lips and whistled a bar or two from a popular song.

"You feel all right, Mister Lawn?" asked the policeman who knew him.

"I do not feel," Birmingham Lawn said, "in the least like giggling. And yet I cannot help giggling."

Doc Savage came from behind the steam shovel and asked, "Did you gentlemen follow a giggling ghost here, too?"

The cops stared at the bronze man; then they gave him a brisk salute. They had recognized him and remembered that he held a high honorary commission on both the New York and New Jersey police forces.

Birmingham Lawn stared, looking puzzled, then amazed, then delighted. He giggled.

"Look here!" he exploded. "*Aren't you Doc Savage?*"

Doc admitted it, and Birmingham Lawn became as excited as a movie fan meeting a picture star. He bounced up, rubbed his hands together and glowed.

"Marvelous!" Lawn exclaimed. "I am delighted! I have read about you and I have heard about you. I have certainly wanted to meet you. This" he was very earnest "is a high point in my life."

Doc Savage looked uncomfortable. Being the focus of admiration was something he found embarrassing, which was one of the reasons he kept out of the public eye as much as possible.

IN a calm voice, Doc began telling the policeman and Birmingham Lawn what had happened.

"I thought from the giggling I overheard," Doc explained, "that the er ghost the girl followed was still here."

"That checks exactly!" Lawn ejaculated.

"Checks with what?" Doc asked.

"I own this storehouse," Lawn said. "This is my construction equipment here. I heard about the girl having caught the giggles when she followed a ghost to the storehouse, so I got these policemen and came to

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investigate. We were here only a few minutes when we well, we got the giggles, too."

Doc Savage asked the policemen, "You searched the place?"

The cops said they had, and that they had found nothing. They added that they didn't believe in ghosts, giggling or otherwise.

"Mind if I look around?" Doc asked.

They didn't mind.

The bronze man moved around, pointing his flashlight at different objects. After a while, he went to the car, came back with his fingerprint paraphernalia. Birmingham Lawn trailed Doc closely, watching every move the bronze man made with hero-worshipping earnestness. Judging from his expression, Lawn expected to see a procession of miracles performed. Doc was busy trying to find prints.

At last Lawn looked disappointed when nothing startling occurred. He began to poke around for himself, ambled about aimlessly. He was drawing near the girl, Miami Davis, when he doubled over abruptly, then straightened.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Here's something!"

Miami Davis came over and looked at it.

She emitted a strangled gasp. "Oh!" she choked. "I dropped that!"

"But "

"It's mine!" The girl snatched the object.

Lawn shrugged, looked puzzled. He walked back and devoted his energies to watching Doc Savage.

Miami Davis went to the bronze man. She had a pale, desperate expression.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I lied to you."

Doc looked at her.

"You what?" he asked.

"I lied to you," the girl said. "I wasn't even in this storehouse. I didn't have any giggling fit. It's all a lie. A big lie."

Chapter IV. WAR OVER A WATCH

THE men gathered around the girl and stared at her in astonishment. The cops frowned, Birmingham Lawn looked amazed, and Doc Savage's metallic features remained composed.

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The girl looked at them wildly.

"Don't you understand?" she gasped. "I didn't tell you the truth! Nothing that I told you was the truth!"

A cop shook his head skeptically.

"Then how come you went to Doc Savage with the yarn?" he asked.

The girl laughed; she seemed to get the laugh out with the greatest difficulty.

"Why wouldn't I want to see Doc Savage?" she demanded. "He's famous. I've read about him. I just well, I wanted to see him. That's all."

The cop began, "Now, look "

The girl whirled and raced wildly to the storehouse door and flung through the drizzling rain, not looking back, flight her only object.

As the girl fled, she held, clenched in her right hand, the object which she had taken from Birmingham Lawn.

The policemen started to chase the girl.

"Let her go!" Doc Savage said.

"But "

"Let her go," the bronze man repeated, but didn't elaborate his instructions.

The cops stared at Doc, apparently wondering what his object might be.

The bronze man turned to Birmingham Lawn. "You gave the girl something?" he asked Lawn.

"You you saw it?" Lawn seemed startled.

"Yes."

"I it was a small article I found," Lawn explained.

"What was it?"

"It was a girl's wrist watch. I picked it up off the floor."

"Woman's watch?"

Lawn nodded. "It was back there in the corner where someone must have dropped it."

"And it excited the young woman?" Doc demanded.

"It did seem to," Lawn admitted.

"What do you make of it?" Doc asked him.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"Me? I I why why should I make anything of it?"

The bronze man did not comment, and this seemed to confuse Birmingham Lawn.

A policeman jammed his clenched fists on his hips angrily. "That girl was lyin'!" the cop said. "She was lyin' like nobody's business!"

"Obviously," Doc agreed.

"Somebody tried to stop her gettin' to you, remember? When she changed her story, she forgot that!"

Doc Savage went out to his car, got in and switched on the radio. It was not an ordinary radio; it was a short-wave transceiver. He picked up the microphone.

"Monk!" he said into the mike.

A small, squeaky voice answered. "Yes, Doc?" it said.

"You are following the girl who just fled from the storehouse?" the bronze man asked.

"We sure are," said the squeaky voice. "Me and Ham both."

"Keep on her trail," Doc Savage directed. "Let me know where she goes."

"What's up, Doc?" the squeaky voice asked.

"We're not sure yet, Monk," Doc explained. "But it is something strange. This girl, was frightened into flight by the fact that a woman's wrist watch was found in the storehouse."

That ended the radio conversation.

"MONK," known as Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, and Brigadier General Theodore Marley "Ham" Brooks were two gentlemen so remarkable that people frequently followed them on the streets to stare at them.

The two were alike in only one way: both were associates of Doc Savage, assistants to the bronze man. They differed in every other particular.

Monk Mayfair came near being as wide as he was tall, had arms longer than his legs, and he was covered with a prodigious quantity of rusty-looking hair; he resembled, in fact, an ape. But despite his looks, Monk was one of the world's leading chemists. People did not follow Monk down the street to admire his erudition; they followed him because he was as funny-looking as a baboon.

Ham Brooks, on the other hand, was lean and dapper, and when people gaped at him, it was because Ham was living up to his reputation of being one of the world's best-dressed men. Ham changed his clothes at least three times daily, always carried a slim black sword cane, and was admitted to be one of the most astute lawyers Harvard had ever turned out.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Monk and Ham were riding in a large limousine, with Monk driving. Ahead of them was a taxicab which the girl, Miami Davis, had hailed.

While they trailed the girl, Monk and Ham diverted themselves by quarreling. They could quarrel on any subject. Now they were squabbling about marriage, both of them having barely escaped getting married in the course of a recent adventure.

Monk leaned back, gullied his homely face with a big grin, and announced, "The only reason I ain't never got married is because I don't believe in likes marryin' likes. Now, if I could find a girl the exact opposite of me, I'd marry her in a minute."

Ham said, "Surely you could find an honest, beautiful girl of high character?"

Monk said, "No, I don't " Then he got the dirty dig and glared at Ham. "Hey, that was a crack!" he squealed.

"Merely a statement of fact, you hairy oaf!" Ham said.

Monk looked indignant.

"You you seed!" he bellowed. "I could eat you alive, you overdressed runt and you'd probably taste like a scallion!"

Ham snorted.

"In that case you'd have more brains in your belly than you'll ever have in your head!"

While Doc's aids drove along in the wake of the girl's cab, the two continued this type of discussion, doing so with a loudness and violence that was deceptive; for it seemed that they were continually on the point of stopping the car and trying to murder each other, whereas they were actually the best of friends. There had been a time or two when each had actually risked his life to save the other.

In the back seat of the car, a minor edition of the Monk-and-Ham bickering flared up occasionally between their two pets. Two pets named Habeas Corpus and Chemistry. Habeas Corpus was a remarkable-looking pig. The pig had long legs, winglike ears, a snout built for inquiring into holes. Chemistry was a freak edition of an ape. Chemistry looked rather remarkably like the homely Monk.

Habeas Corpus, the pig, belonged to Monk.

Chemistry, the ape, belonged to Ham.

The car made very little noise. The *swick-swack* of the windshield wiper was louder than the motor or the rain. Occasionally they crossed low places in the pavement, and the wheels sent water sheeting outward. It was beginning to get dark.

Monk stopped squabbling to remark, "The girl seems to know where she's goin'."

"Apparently she's going toward Sheepshead Bay," Ham admitted.

"Yep, as much as I hate to admit you're right about anything," Monk grumbled.

Later, the girl's taxicab swerved over to the curb and stopped.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Monk promptly turned off the street to get out of sight. They were a block behind the girl. Their car jumped over the curb and stopped behind a rattletrap building bearing a sign which said:

FRESH BAIT

Monk squinted at the sign.

"I hope that ain't an omen," he muttered.

Ham pointed suddenly. "Hey! Who's that?"

Monk squinted in the direction Ham was pointing and saw nothing but some old rain-drenched buildings and growing gloom.

"Who's what?" he asked.

Ham explained, "I thought I saw a man start toward us, then jump back out of sight after he got a better look at us."

"Maybe we'd better go see about that," suggested Monk.

Monk was happiest when he was in trouble.

HAM had actually seen a man. The man had come out of a long, narrow, discouraged-looking building of planks. He had fled back into the same building. This structure had no windows, and one whole end was open. The building was a place where small boats had once been built, and what was left of a marine railway sloped from the open end down to the bay water.

The mysterious man was the same individual who had attacked Miami Davis in Doc's headquarters.

The man watched Monk and Ham through a crack in the planks. He wore his yellow slicker, gray hat, gray gloves, gray suit and gray sport shoes, all rather soggy with the rain.

When he saw Monk and Ham coming toward the building the pets had been left in the car he gave a disgusted grunt and plucked his silk handkerchief from a pocket and held it ready to hide his face if necessary.

The man then ran to the open end of the building and made a quick survey of the marine railway. It was obvious that he could get on all fours, crawl down the bed of the abandoned railway, and get to the edge of the water. So he did this.

There was a retaining wall of piling and timbers along the shore, and many ramshackle wharves. The man found cracks which gave purchase for his toes and hands, and worked along until he reached a dock to which several fishing boats were moored. He crept out under the dock, clambering from one stringer to another, until he reached a fishing boat.

This fishing boat differed very little from several others. It was a party boat of the kind which, for a dollar and a half, took you out to sea a few miles, furnished your dinner and a hook and line, and you could fish over the side.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

The man crept down a companionway into the lighted cabin of the fishing boat.

Three men in the boat cabin looked relieved when they recognized him, but when they saw the grimness on his face, they grew uneasy again.

"Somethin' wrong, Batavia?" one asked.

Batavia nodded.

"The girl showed up, like we figured she would," he said. "She's probably on Hart's boat now."

"That's hunky-dory, then."

"It's a hunk of trouble!" Batavia growled.

"Huh?"

"Two guys named Monk and Ham showed up right behind the girl," Batavia said.

The other man scratched his head. "Who're they?"

Batavia looked disgusted. "Two of Doc Savage's men; that's who they are!" he snapped.

"I don't see anythin' to get in a sweat about." The other man shrugged. "I think you and the boss, and everybody else, are gettin' steamed up too much about this Doc Savage."

Batavia put his fists on his hips and looked utterly disgusted.

"Those have been the last words of more than one smart cluck," he growled. "This Savage is worse than lightnin'; you can generally tell by lookin' at the sky when there's any chance of lightnin' strikin'."

The other subsided.

Batavia said, "We gotta get the girl!"

"What about this Monk and Ham?"

"We'll tie a rock to 'em, and drop 'em in the bay!" Batavia said.

While the other men got guns and flashlights, Batavia pulled up his left trousers leg and examined a skinned area on his shin. The damage had been done when he had leaped from one elevator to another in the skyscraper which housed Doc Savage's headquarters.

MONK and Ham had poked around in the ramshackle boathouse and found nothing.

So they stood for a few moments and abused each other.

"You and your imagination!" Monk piped disgustedly. "Saw a man, did you?"

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"You dish-faced ape," Ham said, "I did see someone!"

They went back to their car, and peered around the corner of the building which bore the sign "Live Bait."

The girl's taxicab was driving away.

Miami Davis went down a rickety dock and stopped beside a small schooner which was held alongside the dock by springlines. She picked up an oar and whacked the deck of the schooner.

"Hey, on board!" she called.

The schooner was about fifty feet long, two-masted, a pleasure type of craft. It was gaff-rigged. Also, it was elderly, but well kept. There were patched canvas covers over the furled sails to keep out the rain, and a cockpit awning that was also patched.

The girl gave the deck another whack.

"Hart!" she cried. "Are you aboard?"

Miami Davis got on the schooner. She was evidently accustomed to boats, because she used care that her high heels did not cut the deck. She went to the cabin hatch, opened it and entered. The cabin of the schooner was neat, and arranged in a way which showed the boat-owner was no landlubber.

The girl searched the boat. She looked in a little stateroom aft, in the galley, the forecabin; then she came back and slumped down on a transom seat in the cabin.

There was no one aboard the boat.

Miami Davis had turned on the electric lights in the craft. She let these burn.

MONK and Ham had followed the girl to the boat by now. Also, they had been able to tell, from the way lights had gone on in the boat, that the girl had searched the craft.

Standing on the dock, they could see her crouched tensely on the transom seat. The two aids retired to the shore end of the dock for a conference.

"This is a goofy business!" Monk complained.

"How do you mean?" Ham asked.

"It don't make sense. Ghosts that giggle. Is that sense?"

"We haven't dug into it yet, stupid!"

Monk said, "One of us better report to Doc. He said he wanted to know where the girl went."

"Go ahead, dunce," Ham directed. "It will be a pleasure to get you out of sight."

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Monk walked away, rather resembling an ambling wart in the murk. He grinned as he moved along; he was always happy when involved in some kind of mysterious excitement. To be sure, Monk didn't know what they were mixed up in. That bothered him.

When Monk reached the car, he switched on the radio receiver with which the car was equipped.

"Doc!" he said into the microphone.

"Yes, Monk?" Doc's voice answered almost at once.

Monk advised the whereabouts of the spot to which they had trailed the girl.

"Look, Doc," the homely chemist added, "what's this all about?"

"There is no way of telling, just yet," the bronze man explained.

Monk was not entirely satisfied. He rubbed his jaw, scratched his nubbin of a head, and smoothed the bristling hair down on his nape.

"What do you want us to do?" he asked.

"Keep an eye on the girl," Doc Savage said. "And eavesdrop."

"Eavesdrop?"

"Try to find out why the fact that she found a wrist watch made her take flight," Doc explained. "In case you can't learn anything by eavesdropping, you might grab the girl."

Monk grinned.

"Grabbin' that girl would be a pleasure!" he chuckled. "She's a looker, what I mean!"

That ended the radio conference.

Chapter V. THE JAMEROO

MONK closed the car doors, locked them, and went back to the dock where the schooner was tied up. He walked out on the wharf confidently, came to a patch of gloom behind a piling, about where he had left Ham, and stopped.

"Ham," he said, "Doc says "

The bunch of shadow that the chemist had thought was Ham straightened. Monk suddenly found a gun jammed into his middle. A gun snout that made a rasping noise as it hit his belt buckle.

"Pipe down!" said a strange voice.

Monk peered, trying to make out the features of the speaker. He got a slap in the face for his pains.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"Where's Ham?" Monk gulped.

Considering that during the last hour he had stated at least a dozen times that he intended to tear Ham limb from limb, Monk's anxiety was inconsistent.

"Shut up!" said the man with the gun.

Men appeared on the schooner. They had been hiding behind the deckhouse and dinghy. The men climbed onto the dock.

"Search this clunk!" ordered Monk's captor.

"Sure, Batavia," one man said.

Monk swelled indignantly as he was searched, but there seemed to be nothing he could do about it.

"Now," Batavia told Monk, "you get on the boat."

Monk climbed down on the boat and entered the cabin.

"Ham!" the homely chemist yelled.

Ham was lying on a bunk, motionless. Monk leaped to him, clutched the dapper lawyer's wrist, and was relieved to discover pulse. Ham was alive! More than that, he was in the act of regaining consciousness, it appeared, for he squirmed, blinked open his eyes and focused them on Monk. As soon as he had organized himself, Ham began to scowl.

"What's the idea," he snarled, "sneaking up behind and banging me on the head?"

"Listen, Blackstone," Monk said, "I didn't bang you "

Batavia came over, gouged Monk with the gun muzzle and said, "Sit down and shut up!"

Monk sat down on the transom seat near the girl.

Miami Davis was tied hand and foot. She was trembling, but she made no sound because of the adhesive tape which crisscrossed her lips.

Batavia moved toward the companionway, his slicker rustling.

"I'll see if I can get hold of the chief," he said to his men. "Gotta find out what to do with these three."

Batavia climbed the companionway and went out.

Monk said, "What I want to know is about them ghosts "

A man came over and showed Monk another gun. "Listen, you gimlet-eyed baboon, you're on the spot! Keep that ugly trap shut!"

Monk subsided.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Rain washed the cabin roof, sluiced along the decks, and the wind slapped the halliards against the mast. Little waves gurgled like running water along the hull.

BATAVIA came back a little while later. He was scowling.

"We croak 'em later," he said. "I couldn't get hold of the chief."

Monk frowned at the girl, Miami Davis.

"When you talked to Doc," he accused, "you left out some stuff."

The young woman nodded. Her mouth seemed to be too tight with strain to let words come out.

Monk said, "That was a mistake. Now we're in a jameroo."

Batavia took a fid out of a rack. The fid was a steel rod a foot long, half an inch in diameter at one end and tapering to a needle point. The fid was used to separate the strands of rope while splicing.

Batavia waved the fid under Monk's nose. "Another blat out of you, and I'll peg your tongue down with this fid!"

"Why don'tcha let us loose?" Monk asked hopefully.

"Brother," Batavia said, "you've been unlucky. You got messin' around with somethin' too big for you."

"Too big?"

Batavia poked Monk in the chest with the sharp end of the fid.

"You're just a beetle," he said, "that got in front of the wrong steam roller."

Batavia then gave a number of orders.

"We'll get rid of their car first thing," he said.

A man muttered, "Ain't Doc Savage liable to trace these two guys?"

"We're going to make some preparation for Doc Savage!" Batavia said.

Batavia had a craggy face. All angles of his face were sharp; the nose was also, and so was his jaw; his eyes had a piercing intentness, and his ears were pointed. He was either darkly tanned, or of Latin extraction. Beside his fondness for grays in dress, he had one other principal character tag: This other was his cigars.

Batavia's cigars were thin, hardly half ordinary thickness, and about two inches longer than the usual cigar. The ends were equipped with cork tips.

Batavia removed the Cellophane wrapping from one of his cigars, put it in his mouth and tried to light it with one of the modern flameless type of lighters designed for lighting cigarettes alone. The lighter didn't fire the cigar immediately.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"Damn this gadget!" Batavia complained.

He finally got his cigar going. Then he took a five-yard roll of one-inch adhesive tape out of his slicker pocket. Strips of this tape, he crisscrossed over the mouths of Monk and Ham.

"Adenoids!" Monk croaked wildly just before the tape was slapped on his lips.

Bad adenoid cases will suffocate to death if gagged.

Monk then pretended to be unable to breathe through his nostrils. He faked suffocation. He flounced around, made whistling noises through his nose, blew out his cheeks, did his best to make his face go purple.

Batavia got behind Monk and slugged him with the heavy end of the fid. Monk fell his length on the floorboards, momentarily dazed, and began to breathe in a normal fashion.

"That homely ape," Batavia complained, "is full of tricks. What d'you think of that tryin' to get out of bein' gagged?"

The prisoners were prodded out of the hatch, goaded onto the dock, and led to the street.

Batavia said, "We better get rid of their car."

BATAVIA went to the limousine which Monk and Ham had used. A couple of men went with him. He opened the door, started to get in, and was greeted by a belligerent grunt and an angry chattering noise. Batavia turned a flashlight beam into the rear seat. He was curious.

The pig, Habeas, and the ape, Chemistry, batted their eyes in the flashlight glare.

"A regular zoo!" Batavia grumbled. He got into the car. When the pets tried to escape, he slammed the door and kept them in the automobile.

Batavia drove the car out on a dock, headed the machine toward the wharf end, and jumped out and slammed the door. The car ran to the end of the dock, nosed over, and entered the water with a *whoosh!* of a splash.

"You left that pig an' the ape in there!" a man muttered.

Batavia stood at the dock edge and listened to big bubbles make *glub!* noises. He dashed his flashlight beam down briefly. The water was slick with oil, and bubbles kept bounding out of the water like frightened white animals.

"You left that pig an' ape in the car!" the man muttered again.

Batavia said, "I didn't like the way the danged things looked at me."

Batavia threw his cork-tipped cigar in the water, took a fresh cigar out of his clothing, removed the Cellophane band, threw it at the bubbles and put the cigar in his mouth. Then they led the prisoners to two cars parked in near-by side streets. The captives and half of Batavia's men loaded in one machine.

"You fellows take the prisoners to the boss's place."

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"What are *you* gonna do?" a man demanded.

Batavia took his cork-tipped cigar out of his mouth and laughed grimly.

"I'm gonna rig somethin' for Doc Savage," he said.

The car pulled away with the captives. Batavia vanished in the darkness, headed back toward the little schooner. Half of his men followed him.

Chapter VI. HUNT FOR A WATCH

DOC SAVAGE had completed a thorough examination of the old bleak storehouse with the tin roof. But to all outward appearance, the search netted nothing.

Birmingham Lawn seemed disappointed. The golf-ball protuberance that served Lawn as an Adam's apple went up and down as he swallowed. He had whistled something from a tune, and the rest of the time he had giggled, or just watched.

"I was hoping," he said, "that you would solve the mystery."

Doc Savage did not comment.

The policemen by now had tired of the mystery, and in addition, they held a suspicion that the whole business would not look so good in the newspapers.

"The public will think the Jersey police are a lot of jackasses," a cop muttered, "once the newspapers get hold of this."

"Then why notify the newspapers?" Doc asked. The bronze man didn't like newspaper publicity.

The policemen thought that was a swell idea.

One cop said, "Furthermore, maybe there ain't nothin' to it. The girl admitted her whole story was a lie. She just made the thing up so she could meet Doc Savage."

Doc Savage neglected to remind the cops that an attempt with violence had been made to prevent the girl reaching him.

Finally the cops took their departure.

Doc Savage began loading his fingerprint paraphernalia in his car. Birmingham Lawn trailed the bronze man around.

"Matters seem to have become quiet for the time being," Doc Savage told Lawn. He extended a hand. "It's pleasant to have met you, Mr. Lawn, and let us hope that your property is not molested again."

Birmingham Lawn made a big grin.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"Could I make a request?" he asked.

"Request?"

"I haven't the slightest doubt but that you are molested a great deal by pests," Lawn said. His melon of a stomach shook as he chuckled. "But I should like very much to go along with you, providing you have any intention of continuing to investigate this ah mystery."

"Why do you wish to go along?"

"Well, I've read a great deal about you." Lawn squirmed and looked embarrassed. "Matter of fact, I'm a great admirer of yours. I'd give a lot to watch you work for a while." He smiled fatuously. "I suppose it's a form of hero worship, and I'm fully aware that you probably consider me a silly pest."

Doc Savage said, "It may be a little dangerous."

"In that case," Lawn said, "you can depend on me to run. I am not a brave man."

Doc Savage got into his car.

"My aids, Monk and Ham, are trailing that girl," he explained.

TAKING for granted that he had permission to accompany the bronze man, Birmingham Lawn planted his long-limbed, loose-jointed frame on the car cushions and settled back, looking eager, and also nervous, like a man who has started out rabbit hunting with a shotgun and just remembered he is in bear country.

Doc Savage worked with the radio.

"Monk! Ham!" he said into the microphone.

He said that several times, then remarked, "Probably they are away from the other transceiver."

Doc Savage drove away from the storehouse, turned right, and drove toward the spot from which Monk and Ham had last reported.

Rain came down steadily, the drops swirling like snowflakes in the glare of the headlights. Several times Birmingham Lawn opened his mouth, as if he wanted to say something, but was unable to think of anything to fit the occasion.

"You have no idea," he told Doc finally, "what a reputation you have." He fell to whistling bars from a popular tune.

When Doc Savage brought his car to a stop near the ramshackle boat house, Monk and Ham's car was nowhere in sight.

Doc Savage listened to his radio. The transmitter in the other car was switched on; the transceivers were always kept ready for instant communication while Doc and his men were investigating.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

The carrier wave of the other transmitter sounded very close, which meant the car was not many yards away. But where was it? It wasn't in sight.

Doc Savage swung out and examined the car tracks. It was dark enough now so that he had to use a flashlight. In the mud, he found car tracks with distinctive tread design used on the machine driven by Monk and Ham.

It was obvious that Monk and Ham's car had backed out into the street; but there, the rain had washed away any traces that might have been visible to the unaided eye.

Doc Savage went back to his machine. From a compartment all the spare room in the car was occupied by compartments he got a device which resembled nothing so much as an old-fashioned magic lantern. This contrivance, however, had a lens which was almost jet-black.

"What's that?" Birmingham Lawn wanted to know.

"Self-contained ultra-violet ray projector," the bronze man explained.

"Ultra-violet ray?"

Doc Savage pointed the lantern lens at the tracks left by Monk and Ham's car, switched the device on and, although it emitted no light visible to the eye, tiny flecklike spots glowed with greenish luminance on the pavement where the tires of Monk and Ham's car had rolled.

Birmingham Lawn proved to have enough scientific knowledge to solve this phenomenon. He said, "There are chemical substances which glow, or phosphoresce, when subjected to ultra-violet light. Some such chemical must have been incorporated as an ingredient in the tires of the car your two associates were driving. Am I right?"

"That," Doc Savage admitted, "is correct."

THE bronze man followed the trail of Monk and Ham's machine down the street, and out to the end of the dock; a splintered patch, where the bumper had dragged as the car went over, told him instantly what had happened.

The bronze man shucked off his coat and dived off the dock edge. The water was cold and intensely black.

The submerged car lay on its side with the doors closed and the thick bulletproof windows intact. Ordinarily, with the windows closed, the machine was airtight, this feature having been incorporated in its construction as a defense against gas. Like most of the cars used by Doc Savage and his men, this one was a rolling fortress.

Doc wrenched, got the car door open. An air bubble a yard across leaped past him, and rushing water sucked him into the machine.

Later, when he swam to the top, Doc had the two pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry. After handing the animals up to Birmingham Lawn, Doc climbed to the dock.

"I don't understand this!" Lawn gasped.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Lawn sounded frightened, confused.

Doc Savage took Lawn's elbow and led him off the dock and to the car, Lawn all the while stuttering demands to know what it was all about. Doc put Lawn in the back seat of his car, placing Habeas Corpus and Chemistry in with him. The bronze man then slammed the car door shut, twisting the handle in a certain way that automatically closed all the other doors. Lawn tried the car handles, then beat on one of the bulletproof windows.

"Hey!" he complained. "You locked me in here."

"Where you'll be safe," Doc Savage explained.

"I've got enough of this!" Lawn howled. "I don't like it. I want to go home. Let me out!"

Doc Savage moved away. Lawn would be as safe in the machine as anywhere, and out of the way if there was going to be trouble.

Doc used his ultra-violet lantern. His aids, when operating alone, were under instructions to blaze their trail frequently, using a special chalk which each carried.

This chalk resembled the styptic pencils used to heal small cuts, and were made of a chemical composition and left a mark which was invisible to the naked eye, but which fluoresced when subjected to ultra-violet light. Doc found marks on a dock dolphin. Ham had printed:

GIRL ON THIS SCHOONER

An arrow indicated the schooner.

The bronze man went to the boat. There was a light in the cabin. Doc craned his neck, saw no one, then swung quietly on to the schooner and put an ear to the cabin top.

There was no sound to indicate life aboard the boat, and he moved toward the companionway.

Blinding glare from a flashlight jumped over him.

"Just keep the peace, friend!" a voice advised coolly.

THERE was a man standing in a dinghy under the dock, holding a flashlight. The man shoved a gun out into the light, a gun that was a single-action six-shooter, looking big enough for elephants.

"Lie down on the deck!" the man ordered.

Doc lay down on the deck.

The man pulled the dinghy to the rail and swung aboard the schooner. In the glow from his flashlight he was a large young man who seemed to be composed mostly of shoulders. He had black curly hair. His black slacks and dark polo shirt were drenched, the wet shirt sticking to his torso closely enough to show some unusual muscles.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

This burly fellow jabbed Doc with the gun and said, "Get down in the cabin!"

They entered the cabin. The young man had blue eyes, a grim mouth.

He growled, "There's somethin' familiar about you."

Doc Savage said, "Is there?"

"I dunno what this is all about, but I'm gonna find out." The young man cocked his single-action six-shooter. "I find my hooker has been searched. Then I see you monkeyin' around. Now spill it! What's the idea?"

"Where is the girl?" Doc asked.

"Eh?"

"The girl who was aboard this schooner."

"I live on this hooker alone. There's no woman around. I like boats. I don't like women."

Doc Savage said, "Would you know anything about two men named Monk and Ham?"

"No. Never heard of 'em." The brawny young man squinted one eye thoughtfully. "I still think I've seen you somewhere before."

"What is your name?"

"William Henry Hart," the young man growled. "I ain't ashamed of it."

"And your profession?"

"Is none of your damn business!" the young man grunted. "However, I'm an inventor."

"Inventor?"

"We won't go into that," the other growled. "I manufacture things, too. I'm not such a small-timer!" He wagged a thumb around at the boat. "Just because I live on this hooker, it don't mean I can't afford a penthouse." He beetled his brows and added, "I don't like women."

Doc Savage explained, "I'm looking for two friends of mine who were led here when they trailed a young woman who claimed she caught a strange giggling fit from a ghost."

"That sounds crackpot!" The young man shoved out his jaw and his gun. "Come across with a story that makes sense or I'm gonna get tough!"

He took a step forward, hooked his thumb over the hammer of his gun, so the gun would not discharge, used the big six-shooter as a club to strike at Doc Savage's head.

Several blurred things then happened. The gun clubbed the spot where Doc's head should have been, but the bronze man had moved. The young man went off balance. Doc grasped his gun wrist.

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The young man started struggling struggling confidently but his confidence went out of him like air out of a split balloon. For the gun was yanked out of the young man's hand; he was slapped down on the floor, held there, searched, and although all the while he struggled he was a very strong young man his muscles might have been as soft and unmanageable as a sack of mice.

He peered dazedly at the bronze man.

"Now I know why you seemed familiar!" he muttered. "*You're Doc Savage!*"

Doc Savage did not answer that. He was examining an interesting object yielded by the young man's pockets: a woman's wrist watch.

Chapter VII. ROAD TO DEATH

EARLIER that evening in the storehouse, Doc Savage had seen the wrist watch that Birmingham Lawn had handed to Miami Davis. Lawn had also described the watch in detail: small purple jewel in the stem, the two small diamonds, one at either end of the dial.

This was undoubtedly the watch which had scared the girl into flight.

And now it had been in William Henry Hart's pocket.

Doc Savage tossed the burly young man's big six-shooter overboard. Then he took a yachting book off a shelf and glanced at the flyleaf; the book was marked:

PROPERTY OF WILLIAM HENRY HART

"Do you know a girl named Miami Davis?" Doc asked.

Effect of this on the brawny Hart was pronounced. He slapped both hands against his chest and gaped, his mouth very wide.

"Who?"

he exploded.

"Her name," Doc Savage said, "is Miami Davis. This is her watch, supposedly?"

"I uh wuh "

The young man hauled himself up and sprawled on the transom seat. "She's my secretary," he said.

Doc Savage pointed at the watch. "How did this watch get in your pocket?"

"I found it lyin' on the chart table when I came back," Hart said.

"That all you know about it?"

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"I gave the watch to Miss Davis as a Christmas bonus," Hart said. "A couple of days ago, she said it had stopped runnin'. I told her I would get it fixed. She gave it to me, and I guess I put it on top of the chart table and forgot all about it." He scowled. "Now what about it?"

"For one thing," Doc said promptly, "someone might have taken the watch and made her think you lost it in that storehouse."

"What storehouse?" The young man with the large shoulders looked puzzled.

"Again, *you* might have lost it in the storehouse," Doc said.

The other glared. "What's this storehouse talk?"

"Is she in love with you?" Doc asked.

"Love who?"

"Miami Davis with you."

"How the hell would I know?" Hart yelled.

Doc Savage opened a galley locker, took out a can of coffee and poured it on a galley table. He reached for the salt.

"What in blazes you doin'?" Hart yelled.

"Going to give your boat a thorough search," Doc explained.

"Over my dead body, you will!" the burly young man howled.

The search proceeded over his bound and gagged body; during the incidental fighting and kicking, a locker door was caved in, the table kicked loose from its fastenings, and some dishes broken.

The note had been jammed hastily into the mouth of a brass chart case.

It was a plain white envelope with Hart's name on the outside. Its content was a single sheet of white paper. Printed on this:

Hart:

The two Doc Savage men and the girl have been taken out to Beach Road.

Doc Savage held the note in front of Hart's eyes. Doc removed Hart's gag.

"What do you say to this?" the bronze man demanded.

"I've been framed!" Hart yelled.

"That is hardly original," Doc said.

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BIRMINGHAM LAWN was beating on the car window, trying to break them, when Doc Savage returned to the machine. Doc unlocked the doors.

"This is no way to treat an innocent bystander," Lawn said indignantly. "Locking me in the car!" Lawn pointed at Hart. "Who's this fellow?"

"Ever see him before?" Doc asked.

"No never."

Doc Savage explained. "Monk, Ham and Miami Davis have been seized and carried off. I intend hunting for them."

"You can take me home," Lawn said sourly. "I've got enough of this mess!"

Doc Savage's patience was about exhausted, but his words, rather than his tone, betrayed the fact.

"There is no time to chauffeur you home," he said. "Either you walk, or you go with me."

Birmingham Lawn peered around at the drizzling darkness long enough to lose his taste for a walk in the rain. He licked his lips, changed feet, then whistled a bar.

"If your car is as hard to get into as it is to get out of," he muttered, "I'll probably be safe."

He got into the rear seat with Hart, whose ankles and wrists Doc had bound.

Doc put the car in motion.

"Where we going?" Lawn wanted to know.

"A note said they had taken the prisoners out Beach Road," Doc explained.

Beach Road was the name applied to a rough, winding thoroughfare along the shore of New Jersey. The shore was a marshy district, with many shoal bays and inlets. The road passed through dune sections, where sand had drifted like dirty snow across the rutted blacktop pavement. Bridges were frequent.

Doc's car traveled fast, bucking in ruts, sloughing when it hit sand. The rain washed down steadily, and there was fog.

They had covered all of a dozen miles down the Jersey coast when Birmingham Lawn screamed.

LAWN'S yell was strangled, agonized. Simultaneously, the rear door of the car flew open Doc hadn't locked the doors this time and Hart's burly form shot out of the speeding machine.

Doc stamped the brakes; the car skidded, went broadside, straightened, turned broadside the other way, then stopped. Lawn was making barking noises of fear on the back seat.

"You hurt?" Doc rapped.

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"He kicked me!" Lawn howled. Lawn held his melon of a stomach. His squalling could have been heard a mile away. A man badly hurt could not yell like that, so Doc left him.

Doc Savage ran to the spot where Hart had jumped, flashlight in hand. Rain beat against the bronze man's face; his feet knocked up water. Hart wasn't where he had landed.

Doc dashed the flashlight beam about searchingly. He saw wet, disturbed sand where Hart had landed, but no tracks led into the dunes which shoved up drably on either side of the road; so the escaping prisoner must have gone down the road.

Doc turned the flashlight beam down the road, and it picked up nothing. The bronze man ran down the road, using the flash continually, and still found no footprints.

He was hunting when the rifle report smashed out.

The bullet cut the air close to Doc's head, its sound like a big fiddle string breaking. Possibly it missed the bronze man only because he was holding the flashlight so as to give a wrong impression of where his body was a habitual bit of caution. Doc extinguished the light. He doubled down, whipped to one side.

The rifle began slamming again; it was an automatic gun, and put out a dozen bullets in the time it would take a man to swallow. Then somebody cursed somebody else for shooting too quick. Feet retreated. There were evidently two men with the rifle.

Doc set out after the fleeing gunmen. He did not catch the retreating riflemen because they had a motorcycle hidden in the dunes. The cycle engine started, as noisy as an angry bulldog; its headlight jumped whitely; the cycle wallowed in the sand.

The two gunners, straddling it, kept it upright with their legs. The motorcycle reached the road and went away like a scared rocket.

Doc Savage reached the spot where the motorcycle had been, and found a greasy canvas cover which had been over the machine to keep off the rain. Doc examined the cover and the sand around about. The cover was just dirty canvas, and the sand was too sloppy to retain footprints.

But he found two soggy cigar stubs, cork-tipped cigars, discarded on the sand.

The bronze man stood, listening, and the rain reached through his clothing with cold fingers. Then suddenly he spun and raced back to the car and whipped behind the wheel.

"Hang on!" he ordered.

An utter silence in the back seat caused Doc to look around. Now Birmingham Lawn was gone.

Birmingham Lawn must have been frightened he had said he was a very timid man so it was logical to think of him leaving the car and fleeing into the sand dunes, frightened by the rifle fire.

Doc splashed flashlight glow on the sand beside the road. Yes; there was a man's tracks, leading into the dunes.

There was no time to follow Lawn.

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Doc started the car motor, maneuvered the machine around, and set out after the riflemen on the motorcycle. Fifty miles an hour was as high as he dared send the car over this crooked, rutted, sand-drifted, rain-flogged road.

When Doc had covered four miles, he knew that the motorcycle had turned off somewhere, and that the riflemen stood a good chance of escaping.

THE two riflemen on the motorcycle were reaching the same conclusion; they thought they were going to escape, too. They had turned off about two miles back, and had ridden to an abandoned summer bungalow. Paint was scabbing off the sides of the bungalow, and the roof was leaking strings of water into the rooms.

One of the riflemen was Batavia. Batavia stood shaking sand off his trousers with one hand the front wheel of the motorcycle had plastered him with the wet stuff and with his other hand, he held a telephone receiver.

He kept saying, "Hello, dammit!" into the telephone. Finally he got an answer.

"Look," Batavia said, "did you get Monk, Ham, and the girl hidden?"

"Did you get Doc Savage?" the telephone voice wanted to know.

"I asked you," Batavia yelled, "if you got the prisoners hidden!"

"Yes, yes keep your shirt on! Did you get Doc Savage?"

"Not yet," Batavia explained. "Savage hasn't crossed the bridge yet. Hart escaped from Savage's car just this side of the bridge; we knew from Lawn's yell that Hart had got away. Then Doc Savage came huntin' Hart, and we cut loose with a rifle. We figured if we didn't get Savage, we'd at least give Hart a chance to vamoose."

"Did Hart get away?"

"I don't know yet."

"You sound excited," the other said.

"Excited hell!" Batavia barked. "If you had been ridin' a damn motorcycle with Doc Savage after you, you'd be excited, too!"

"How you gonna know if Hart got away?"

"Some of my boys are waitin' at the bridge with a speedboat," Batavia explained. "They'll pick up Hart."

"And Savage will "

"He'll probably go on across that bridge," Batavia said.

"When he does, we're rid of him."

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This terminated the telephone conversation. Batavia went outdoors to stand in the rain and listen for some sign of Doc Savage. Then he took the motorcycle around to the back, where there was a small wharf; he wheeled the cycle out on the wharf, and toppled it into the water.

"No use leavin' evidence around," he muttered.

The man who had been with Batavia was a squat fellow who wore the coat half of a suit of oilskins. He was stamping his feet and grunting, trying to get a grain of sand out of his eye.

Suddenly there was noise of a boat, and a light out on the water. The bungalow stood beside one of the sea-water tidal creeks which indented the shore of New Jersey.

The boat came to the dock off which Batavia had toppled the motorcycle.

"That you, Batavia?" a voice asked.

"Did you find Hart?" Batavia demanded.

"Yep." The fellow jerked a thumb at Hart, who stared angrily from his seat in the boat.

Batavia said, "We gotta blow from here in a hurry." He dropped down into the boat. Batavia's companion on the motorcycle ride also got in the boat.

Batavia exclaimed aloud, pointed at a strange figure in the boat. "Who's this?" he barked.

Birmingham Lawn, who sat with a gun jammed into his back, said peevishly, "I am Birmingham Lawn, and an innocent bystander in this whole disagreeable matter."

"He's the lunk who owned that storehouse," a man said. "How he got messed up in this, I don't know."

"I am an absolutely innocent bystander," Lawn insisted.

Batavia dropped on a seat in the speedboat.

"Pull her ears down!" he said.

The man running the craft pulled the gas lever down and the speedboat went away from there at a great speed.

A FEW minutes later, Batavia ordered the boat stopped, directed that the bow searchlight be extinguished. The boat then floated silently on black water with rain slopping down. A man bailed occasionally with a tomato can.

From this spot, they could watch the location of both the bungalow and bridge a bridge where the road spanned the tidal creek. It was too dark to actually see much more than their hands before their faces. The bungalow was in the distance. The bridge was closer at hand.

Suddenly a light appeared at the bungalow. It went off and on repeatedly, and disappeared inside the house, came out, then progressed out on the dock.

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"That'll be Doc Savage." Batavia muttered. "He's lookin' around. Fat lot of good it'll do him!"

Doc's distant light vanished and the bronze man's car headlights retreated in the direction of the road.

Batavia laughed shortly.

"The next ten minutes makes or breaks the whole thing!" he said grimly. "If Savage crosses that bridge "

The speedboat got broadside to the waves and began rocking violently, and Batavia growled an order to the man in the bow to put out a small anchor. Raindrops made a steady sobbing on the water.

William Henry Hart sat very still, scowled, did not say anything at all.

Birmingham Lawn squirmed and tried to say again that he was an innocent bystander, but someone got hold of his ear, twisted it, and snarled an order, and Lawn fell into silence.

"Hey!" Batavia hissed. "Stand by to signal!"

A car was approaching the bridge, headlights pushing a great fog of luminance ahead of it. The bridge was of wood with plank banisters, and it appeared ancient. The car rolled out on the bridge.

"Put a light on the bridge!" Batavia barked.

The speedboat searchlight beam sprang at the bridge in a blinding white streak which landed on a car. Batavia strained his eyes.

"It's Doc Savage's machine!" he yelled.

He whipped out a gun and fired twice at the water the signal.

The bridge came apart under the car. Came apart with blue-white flash, ear-splitting roar. Parts of the bridge climbed up up fragments that swirled around the car.

The car, armor-plate though it was, split; opened like a tin can. Water under the bridge rushed back to leave a great hole. Scores of yards in all directions, concussion knocked trees flat.

The glare of the explosion went away and left blackness, and for moments there was the sound of heavy things falling back and splashing and crashing.

"Whew!" a man in the launch muttered. "We danged near blew this neck of the woods off the map!"

"Pick up the man who fired the charge," Batavia ordered.

The launch angled over to a bank of the creek, where a man stood, the man pumping his ears with the palms of his hands to get rid of the effects of the explosion. At the man's feet lay a generator of the type used to detonate explosive.

The man got in the launch.

"That," he said, "was what I call blowin' your troubles away!"

Chapter VIII. THE EARTHQUAKE-MAKERS

THE most placid hours of the day in New York City are probably those from three o'clock in the morning until dawn. The city does not quiet down much before three o'clock in the morning, even on rainy nights.

It was after three o'clock in the morning and very dark, when Batavia rolled a large sedan to the curb, near an array of imposing stone buildings in uptown New York. The buildings were very large. A name was chiseled on the facade of one of them. The name:

METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Batavia got out of the car, and three men followed him. All of them wore dark suits, dark-blue shirts, black hats and dark gloves.

Batavia said, "Don't waste any time!"

The men went directly to one of the larger buildings; they stopped at the steps leading up to the front door. One of the men lay down on the walk. A second man crouched beside him.

Batavia went up the steps, grabbed the door handle, began to shake the door and shout.

"Help!" he yelled. "Help!"

The remaining member of the party had eased back into the darkness, where he wasn't likely to be noticed.

Batavia continued to shake the door and shout until the watchman appeared, unlocked the door, and came out. The watchman splashed light on Batavia's face. Batavia then looked as scared as he could.

"He's had a heart attack, or something!" Batavia pointed at the man lying at the foot of the steps.

The watchman ran down the steps and stared at the prone man.

"I'll telephone for a doctor!" the watchman exclaimed.

"I'm a doctor," said the man kneeling beside the prone one.

"What do you want me to do?" the watchman asked wildly.

"Just wait a minute," said the man who claimed to be a doctor. "I'll see if we can bring this poor fellow out of it."

During the excitement, the fourth member of the party had left his concealment in the shadows, and had entered the building through the door which the watchman had unlocked and left open.

The man who entered the building seemed to have a very definite idea of where he was going, what he wanted to do. He galloped through the massive halls his rubber-soled shoes made little noise until he came to a room which housed the scientific instruments.

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This was the science hall of the university.

The man stopped before a seismograph, the complicated and highly sensitive device which registered, by recording microscopic earth convulsions, the occurrence of earthquakes.

The marauder put a flashlight on the seismograph recording apparatus. He removed the cover with skill and speed which showed he knew a great deal about seismographs, then studied the inked record. With infinite care, he reached into the seismograph.

He made the seismograph show an earthquake which had not occurred.

The prowler then replaced the cover, satisfied himself there was nothing to show the seismograph had been tampered with, and eased back to the door.

The watchman was standing, staring at the man lying at the foot of the stairs. He did not see the prowler quit the building. A few minutes later, when the man who had been lying on the sidewalk got up and vouchsafed, with a proper amount of shakiness, that he felt able to navigate, all the men went away.

The watchman returned to his duties, having no suspicion that anyone had gained entrance to the building by the use of an elaborate trick.

BATAVIA and his men got in their car and Batavia drove grimly, holding his mouth tight. Several times he grumbled about the long trip from the New Jersey bridge, where they had dynamited Doc Savage's car, to the city.

"The length of that trip delayed us," Batavia growled. "It made us get started at this business too late in the night!" He was full of complaints. Then he turned to the man who had entered into the science hall. "You sure you fixed that seismograph?" he snarled.

"I know my business," said the man who had tampered with the seismograph.

"Them things show the direction of an earthquake, don't they?"

"Leave that part to me!" the other said ill-temperedly. "I know more about seismographs and earthquakes than you ever read. You do your part as well as I do mine, and we won't have any more hitches!"

"Who's caused hitches?" Batavia snarled.

"You have!" said the seismograph expert. "You tried to stop the girl from getting to Doc Savage in the first place, and got scared out of your wits!"

"For a little," Batavia grated, "I'd stop this car and knock that sass out of you!"

Batavia speeded the car up, made a left turn, traveled a few blocks, took a right turn, and pulled up on the obscure side of the block of buildings on Central Park which housed the American Museum of Natural History.

"This one may be a little tougher," Batavia said.

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"If we get one seismograph, we've got to get them all," the seismograph expert said.

"Oh, shut up!" Batavia growled.

There was no elaborate trickery about their method of gaining admission to the museum; their ruse was simplicity itself.

A man opened the door for them and greeted them impatiently; he was one of Batavia's men, and he had hidden himself in the museum before the closing hour. He had made sure no watchman was in that portion of the museum.

"You guys been taking in night clubs?" the man demanded. "You were due three hours ago!"

"Pipe down!" Batavia ordered. "We been busy."

They went to the room which contained the seismograph, and the others took up positions of lookout while the expert went to work on the instrument. When he had caused the university seismograph to record a fake earthquake, the expert had noted the time to the split part of a second he wore a jeweled wrist watch with a large second hand for this purpose.

The expert then made a fake earthquake register on the Museum of Natural History's seismograph, made it show at the precise instant that he had recorded the one at the university.

"That fixes it," he said finally.

THEY left the museum the way they had come. The man who had hidden in the place to let them in, left with them. Batavia consulted his watch as he got into the car.

"We may make it," he admitted grudgingly.

They drove to the nearest hotel, and found a telephone booth. Batavia scowled at the seismograph expert.

"You call Washington," Batavia ordered.

The expert was in the booth several minutes, part of which time he spent ringing the bell with quarters, to pay the toll on his Washington call. When he came out, he looked pleased.

"Bub will call me back," he said.

"How long will it take?" Batavia demanded.

"An hour maybe."

"We'll wait."

They settled in the hotel lobby chairs, where it was murky and quiet. Street cars went clanging past occasionally, and now and then the exhaust of a bus made noise.

Batavia growled, "You sure the mug in Washington knows his business?"

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"He's no mug. He's my brother." The seismograph expert scowled.

Batavia subsided. The hour dragged past, and still there was no call from Washington. Suddenly thunder gave a great whopping gobble outside, and it began to rain again. Finally the telephone rang; it was Washington.

The man who knew all about seismographs talked to his brother in Washington and laughed several times. He came out of the booth chuckling.

"Perfect!" he said.

"He have any trouble getting to the Washington seismograph?" Batavia demanded.

"Nope. He had keys to the place." The expert chuckled again. "He made the Washington instrument show a quake at the same place and time that we faked one on the two machines here. You know, I'm beginnin' to enjoy this gag."

"You're sure," Batavia asked, "that these seismographs are the only ones in this part of the United States?"

"The only ones in operation," the expert said.

"Then we got us an earthquake all fixed up," Batavia declared.

Chapter IX. THE GIGGLING PEOPLE

THE next instance of a giggling ghost came to the public notice about nine o'clock the next night. The newspapers did not print the story of this giggling ghost that night; that came later.

No giggling ghost actually appeared this time.

A man just caught the giggles.

He was not a very happy man, which made his giggling all the more startling; startling at first, that was, before it began to be realized that being happy or sad had very little to do with the giggling.

This first victim was a grocer; he ran a store, which he kept open evenings. The store was close enough to his residence that he could go home for dinner, and he habitually took a short-cut across a vacant lot which was thickly overgrown with weeds.

On this night he took his usual short-cut. He was rather a bug on health, and he always walked with his chest out and head back, taking deep breaths.

He did not see a ghost.

He began to giggle shortly after he had crossed the weed-grown lot. He started with small snickers. When he got home, he sat down on his front porch and tittered. He snickered until he had to hold his sides, but strangely enough, there was no joy on his face. Rather, there was growing terror.

The grocer's wife came out on the porch. His wife was a large woman with affirmative ways, and after she

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had asked him several times what he thought was so funny, and her husband only snickered at her, she lost her temper and gave him a kick in the ribs.

Her husband toppled over and continued to shake with his giggles.

"Gug gug get a doctor!" he giggled.

His wife did not believe in doctors. She hauled him in the house, and tried doctoring him herself with good old-fashioned remedies such as castor oil, ice packs, smelling salts, and a hot foot bath. But by midnight the grocer was so much worse that his wife grew really scared, and called an ambulance.

The ambulance attendants looked puzzled as they carried the grocer, quaking and giggling, out to the white vehicle. The ambulance moaned through the streets to the hospital.

In the hospital, all the doctors looked puzzled.

The giggling merchant went into the diagnosis room, where he was X-rayed, had his reflexes tested, his metabolism measured. Most doctors joined the conference.

Then all the doctors stood around and shook their heads. The giggling merchant had them stumped.

When five other giggling people landed in the hospital the following day, it was a much bigger mystery. The newspapers got hold of it. The giggling ghosts became an incredible story.

IT had been a quiet day for the newspapers; the international situation was calm, the stock market was stationary, and there had been no interesting murders. True, there had been a mysterious bridge explosion on a remote New Jersey road two nights before.

Residents of the thinly populated district had heard this detonation, but no one had been found who had witnessed it. This mystery of a destroyed bridge was played up in the early newspaper editions, but lost prominence after an anonymous note reached the sheriff of the New Jersey county, a note stating that some unruly boys had been experimenting with a home-made bomb.

This note caused the authorities to start looking for unruly boys; it kept them from dragging the deep water under and around the bridge, something they had been considering doing; so the note succeeded Batavia had sent it in its purpose: a ruse to keep Doc Savage's submerged car from being found.

There also appeared in the newspapers a small item to the effect that William Harper "Johnny" Littlejohn, the eminent archaeologist and geologist, had stated that Doc Savage had disappeared.

Johnny Littlejohn was another one of Doc Savage's five assistants.

The fact that Doc Savage had disappeared would have received a burst of newspaper publicity, except that William Harper Littlejohn declared there was no justification for any belief that the bronze man might have met with foul play. Johnny made this tempering statement because he knew of Doc Savage's dislike for publicity.

The bridge explosion, the missing Doc Savage, were wiped off all the front pages by the giggling people.

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By six o'clock five gigglers had turned up in hospitals, in addition to the merchant.

Some of these insisted they must have caught the giggles from the giggling ghost, or ghosts.

Automobiles loaded with doctors kept rushing from one hospital to another, trying to diagnose the epidemic. As might be expected, there was disagreement among the specialists, some contending one thing, and some another.

Gradually, however, they all agreed that the giggling was caused by spasms of the respiratory muscular system, undoubtedly was the result of something drastically wrong with the respiratory nervous centers.

By ten o'clock that night, over twenty gigglers were in Jersey hospitals. The gigglers were all in Jersey: there were none in Manhattan, the Bronx, or Staten Island.

Each victim of the giggling malady became steadily worse.

The police investigated, of course. The police at once noticed that all gigglers were being found in Jersey in a certain area of Jersey, to be exact. The sector was confined to a district on the river front, near the mouth of a vehicular tunnel which had been recently constructed under the Hudson River.

It was a region of low-priced homes, not a particularly fashionable neighborhood. By dawn the following morning, it was absolutely certain that every giggling victim had come from this sector. So had the stories of the giggling ghosts.

Also by morning, it had been ascertained that each of the gigglers had one thing in common: they each had taken a walk that day, or that evening. In every case, the victim had walked through the streets in the river-front district.

At nine o'clock the next morning, A. King Christophe put in an appearance.

A. KING CHRISTOPHE was a very fat man, with round eyes, not much of a nose, a puffy face and very black hair. When A. King Christophe blew out his cheeks and glared, which he had the habit of doing on the slightest provocation, he looked very fierce. He was a geologist. Newspaper investigators later in the day learned that A. King Christophe was a rather well-known geologist.

Geologist A. King Christophe got a load of newspaper publicity that day, for it was he who came forth with a discovery of the source of the giggling malady.

A. King Christophe arrived in a taxicab. When he alighted from the cab, he carried a suitcase, large and much worn. He immediately had a quarrel with the taxi driver over the fare, and blew out his cheeks and looked so fierce that he bluffed the driver.

When A. King Christophe's worn suitcase was opened, it proved to contain litmus papers and other scientific aids for analyzing the composition of earth and air. For two hours he prowled over the region, using the devices. Then he went to the police.

"See!" he said. "I have idea."

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"Go away," the cops said. "Everybody seems to have ideas around here to-day. Ghosts with the contagious giggles! All kinds of ideas!"

A. King Christophe blew out his cheeks, glared and intimidated the officer into listening.

"She are gas that make all this giggle!" Christophe declared. "She are gas, and she come from ground!"

"What kind of gas?" the cop wanted to know.

"Give me time, give me time!" said A. King Christophe indignantly.

The policeman called other policemen, and they called chemical experts; and A. King Christophe demonstrated to the satisfaction of everyone that the earth in certain parts of the Jersey gas area was undoubtedly saturated with a mysterious vapor.

The newspapers broke out their biggest type.

MYSTERIOUS EARTH GAS,

NOT GHOSTS,

CAUSING GIGGLE DEATHS!

Two giggling victims had died by now. The poor grocery merchant went first, and the other victim was a truck driver.

A. King Christophe was hailed as a hero; he had accomplished nothing, but he was hailed anyway. He had learned there was gas.

But what kind of gas was it? That was the question.

"Have chemists make analysis," suggested A. King Christophe. "They might learn."

Why did the gas happen to be coming from the ground? That was another question. A. King Christophe pondered that.

"I have theory." Christophe blew his cheeks out. "Suppose this gas are deep in earth for long time. Suppose she not get out because of strata of rock over it, like a lid. Suppose earthquake crack the stone lid."

"Earthquake?"

"I say it may be."

It appeared, however, that no one had felt any earthquakes around New Jersey recently. The giggling ghost story seemed as sensible.

"Many earthquakes no one are notice!" A. King Christophe said angrily. "To find earthquake, look at instrument made to record them instrument called seismograph!"

They consulted the seismographs at the university, the museum in Washington; so they found evidence of a subterranean earthquake in the vicinity of Jersey.

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A score of people then popped up to declare they had felt the earthquake at the precise time the seismograph records said it had occurred. These people even described how pictures danced on the walls and glasses had jumped off tables; such is human nature.

Now it was generally concluded that a mystery gas had been imprisoned under the earth's crust for centuries, that an earthquake had cracked the crust, and that the gas was coming out and making people giggle themselves to death.

Ghosts nothing!

Then William Harper Littlejohn put in an appearance, and the affair began to get complicated.

AS a geologist William Harper "Johnny" Littlejohn had a reputation considerably exceeding that of A. King Christophe. Johnny was just about tops in the geology business.

Johnny Littlejohn was also probably the longest and the thinnest man who had ever been in that part of Jersey; newspapermen liked to label Johnny as being two men tall and half a man thick, and he came near being that. Johnny's clothing never fitted him, for no tailor could quite manage to cope with such a broomstick physique.

Johnny appeared in the gas disaster district to conduct an investigation of his own. Johnny's scientific instruments were more complicated than those used by A. King Christophe. Because Johnny had a geological reputation, a number of newspapermen followed him around, awaiting his conclusions.

When Johnny voiced his findings the first time, nobody understood him.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny exclaimed.

He had a habit of never using a small word when he could think of a big one.

"An ultraconsummate mumpsimus!" he added.

The reporters copied Johnny's big words down; the tongue-knotters always made good color in a news story.

"Now, just what do you mean?" the reporters asked. "Ghosts?"

Reluctantly, Johnny fell back on little words.

"There is gas," he said. "There is no doubt that the gas is causing the giggling, because it seems to be some nature of pulmonic "

"Whoa!" a reporter interrupted. "Little words if you don't mind."

"A pulmonic," Johnny explained, "is an agent affecting the lungs. In this case, it is causing spasmodic behavior, and eventual disintegration of the affected nervous area."

"So that's what you said," a reporter grunted. "That's what you meant by ultra-ultracon "

"No, it isn't," Johnny corrected.

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"Huh?"

"What I said," Johnny explained, "is that there has been a tremendous mistake."

"Mistake about what? *You don't mean there is a ghost?*"

"The earthquake."

"Meaning?"

"There wasn't any earthquake," Johnny said.

WORD of this remarkable statement reached A. King Christophe who, after sneering several times, blew out his cheeks.

"Who is this William Harper Littlejohn?" he jeered.

"He's got a bigger reputation than you have," he was told, but more impolitely.

"Poof!"

A. King Christophe let the air out of his cheeks. "He has reputation as Doc Savage hanger-on! I not consider him authority."

The reporters, on the lookout for the dramatic, made an inquiry. "Would you like to tell Johnny Littlejohn that to his face?" they asked.

"Yes," said A. King Christophe.

The two geologists met and surveyed each other like two strange roosters. Physically, they both came rather close to being freaks, and the news cameramen got busy taking pictures.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny said grimly.

A. King Christophe looked startled.

"Which?"

William Harper Littlejohn said, "In Doc Savage's headquarters there is a seismograph."

"But "

"And this seismograph of Doc's did not register an earthquake," Johnny said.

"But three other seismographs did register one!" A. King Christophe shouted.

"I don't care what registered which!" Johnny yelled. "There wasn't any earthquake! I stake my opinion on Doc's machine!"

A. King Christophe stamped away making remarks about long, lean walking dictionaries.

Chapter X. FAKE QUAKE

WILLIAM HARPER LITTLEJOHN did not care for reporters, because of the joy the scribes took in exaggerating the long, lean geologist's characteristics.

As soon as Johnny had given the press his opinion about there having been no earthquake, he retired to the midtown Manhattan skyscraper where Doc Savage made his headquarters.

Johnny was worried about Doc. The bronze man had been missing two days. Johnny had learned of the excitement here in the building two days ago, when someone had tried to prevent a young woman from reaching Doc Savage.

This was the effort Batavia had made to stop Miami Davis, but Johnny had no means of knowing that; he just knew there had been some trouble, following which Doc had disappeared.

Johnny had been at headquarters about an hour when there was a knock on the door. The gaunt geologist and archaeologist hurried over, hoping it was Doc, and opened the door.

"Oh!" he said.

The visitor was a stranger, a tall young man with great shoulders and a body that was impressively muscular. The visitor scowled at Johnny.

"I'm William Henry Hart, an inventor and manufacturer," he said.

Johnny frowned at Hart, whom he had never seen before. "Is replication exigent?" he asked.

"Huh?" said Hart.

Johnny translated, "What do I say to that?"

"You mean I'm William Henry Hart and so what?"

"Equiparably correct," Johnny said.

William Henry Hart looked puzzled. He put out his jaw. "Look here," he growled, "use little words, if you don't mind."

"What do you want?"

"I've got important bad news," Hart said. "Ah Doc Savage is missin', isn't he?"

"Doc seems to have disappeared," Johnny admitted.

"He's dead," Hart said.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Johnny took a step back, sank in the chair. His face blanched. His fingers tightened until they bit into the chair arm. His jaw sagged.

BECAUSE Doc Savage led a life of constant danger, Johnny had always feared of disaster befalling the bronze man. As a matter of fact, all Doc's men were in enough danger constantly to make them concerned about each other's safety.

It was several moments before Johnny could speak.

"Who what " He still couldn't frame a coherent sentence.

Hart hooked a long leg over the desk corner.

"I could've broke it easier," he said. "But I figured bad news was bad news."

Johnny's hands shook. The shock was tremendous. He could not believe that the bronze man was was

He said, "What happened?" hoarsely.

William Henry Hart got off the desk, clasped his muscular fingers behind his back and tramped the length of the office, then back again.

"I don't like women!" he said.

Johnny looked up. "What?"

"Well, a girl was the cause of this. A girl named Miami Davis. She's the one who got me and Doc Savage mixed up in it."

Johnny said, "Please tell a coherent story."

"O. K.," Hart said. "Here it is plenty coherent. Miami Davis followed a gigglin' ghost to a storehouse, or so she said. In the storehouse, she got a gigglin' fit. Then she came to Doc Savage. A man tried to stop her, but failed. The girl took Doc to this storehouse. Then she found her wrist watch; she'd given me the watch to have fixed. The watch was lyin' in the storehouse.

"The girl then came rushin' to the boat where I live. Why, I don't know. Some men grabbed her at the boat. At the same time, the men grabbed Monk and Ham, who were trailin' the girl."

Hart explained how Doc Savage had arrived at the boat, and found the note saying Monk, Ham and Miami Davis had been taken out to Beach Road.

Hart then described the incident on the way.

"This Birmingham Lawn," he said, "kept tightening the knots of the ropes which bound me. He must have pulled the wrong rope end or something, because the ropes got looser all of a sudden. So I got loose and jumped out of the car."

"Strange thing for you to do," Johnny said grimly.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Hart put out his jaw and glared.

"Look!" he snapped. "Any time a guy barges in on me and ties me up with a rope, I'm gonna do somethin' about it! I don't care if the guy is Doc Savage!"

"You jumped out of the car," Johnny prompted. "Then what?"

"I went tearin' across the sand dunes," Hart explained. "I hit the beach, and about that time a bunch of mugs popped out and shoved guns into my ribs. They put me in a speedboat."

Then Hart described in blunt detail the blasting of the bridge when Doc Savage's car appeared upon it.

"They killed Doc Savage right there," he finished.

JOHNNY sat and contemplated his own feet with blank intentness, and no muscle in his long body seemed to stir, his eyes did not blink, his breathing was imperceptible, and the throbbing of a vein in his forehead was the only sign of life about him.

"Why did you come to me?" he asked hollowly.

The burly young man said, "Well, hell, what else could I do?"

"They turned you loose?"

"They did."

"Can you give any clues?"

"You mean clues to who those men were or where you can find them? Or clues to well, this giggling ghost stuff?"

"Any of that."

"Not a clue," Hart said. "They blindfolded me in the boat, after the explosion. They kept me blindfolded until they kicked me out of a car. They kicked me out on a New Jersey road."

Johnny growled, "You say this Birmingham Lawn was also taken a prisoner?"

Hart scowled.

"Yes," he said. "And I ain't plumb satisfied about that mug, either."

"What do you mean?"

"Lawn seemed too damn innocent to me!" Hart growled.

William Harper Littlejohn got up and shuffled to the window. He seemed to have become as stiff as an old man. An oppressing shroud of fog lay over the dark, smoky towers of Manhattan.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"When did Miami Davis have her giggling fit?" Johnny demanded.

Hart gave the time.

"Then the girl was a victim before the time this earthquake is supposed to have happened! That is important!"

Hart was puzzled. "Before the earthquake "

"It proves," Johnny said grimly, "that an earthquake had nothing to do with the gas!" Johnny turned away from the window. His face looked so sunken that it seemed composed of nothing but bone. "What about Monk and Ham?" he asked.

"I think they were goin' to kill them," Hart said.

Johnny winced. His mouth worked.

Hart got up, straightened his coat on his wide shoulders, and jammed his large fists in his pockets.

"I thought I'd tell you this," he said. "Them guys promised to croak me if I opened my mouth to anybody, but" he stuck out his jaw "let 'em hop to it! And if they harm that girl" his voice lifted to an angry yell "I'll tear the heads off every last one of 'em!"

Hart went over and clasped Johnny's arm. "Look here," he continued, "I'm worried about that girl. The snip! If they dare hurt her "

"You are in love with Miami Davis?" Johnny asked.

Hart swallowed.

"I don't know," he growled. "But I'm worried as hell about her."

Johnny said, "I am going to call on you if you can be of any assistance."

"Do that," Hart said grimly. "I got a rushin' little manufacturing business to look out for, but it's gonna be neglected until I find that girl is safe."

Hart then stamped out of the office, holding his jaw out belligerently.

Johnny flung to a telephone.

"Long Tom!" he said into the instrument.

"Yes!" a voice responded.

"A man is leaving the office" Johnny described Hart "and I want you to follow him."

"Right!" "Long Tom" said. "Who is he?"

Johnny said, "Man named Hart. He says Doc is dead. I think it's queer he came to me with the story, instead of going to the police."

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

The other man, Long Tom, made a horrified noise over the telephone. "Doc you say but it can't "

"Follow Hart, Long Tom."

"I'll follow him. Renny is with me. We'll both follow Hart."

The man called "Long Tom" was Major Thomas J. Roberts specialty electricity; avocation that of Doc Savage assistant.

"Renny" was Colonel John Renwick, a great engineer, also a great hand to prove he could knock panels out of wooden doors with his huge fists. He, too, was an aid to Doc Savage.

These three men Johnny, Long Tom, and Renny with the missing Monk and Ham, comprised Doc Savage's staff of five associates.

Chapter XI. NO MEDDLERS

BY now there were almost fifty giggling victims in the hospitals. Each one of these had come from one small section of Jersey. Only this area was affected. Police had roped off streets leading to the district, and were keeping back the spectators. Some of the curious were idiots enough to want to venture into the affected zone and take chances with the gas, solely to see what was going on, or look for giggling ghosts, if there really were any.

Evacuation was commencing. Just as river bottoms menaced by flood waters are cleared of inhabitants, so was the gas area to be cleared. Huge moving vans, piloted by policemen wearing gas masks, moved in and out, carrying household goods.

The evacuation was a pitiful spectacle. The section was one of small homes. The homes were unpretentious, often shabby, but nevertheless homes in the real sense, because the homes were owned by those who lived in them.

These people were stubborn. They did not understand. They could not see the gas, not actually see it, and many of them were inclined to be suspicious of the attempt to get them out of their homes.

The fact that the gas did not completely blanket the district made the exodus more difficult to arrange. The gas appeared only in spots; whole blocks were not affected.

A company of national guardsmen were sent to the scene to assist.

Meanwhile, geologists and scientists went around, wearing gas masks, trying to figure out some way of blocking off the gas. Many possibilities were suggested; one possibility was that deep wells might be drilled, the gas drawn off through these, and piped out to sea.

Army engineers came to investigate the chances of compressing the gas and storing it in containers, to use in the next war.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

THAT night, in the vicinity of all this confusion, a sinister meeting was held.

It was held in a very large, very old house. This house stood alone in the center of a vast lot that was jungled with shrubbery. The house was made of concrete blocks, and it had four entrances, one on each side.

Batavia was first to arrive at the house, and he bustled around, unlocking all the doors, making ready for the meeting. To-night Batavia wore a different assortment of gray clothes, and he chewed a cork-tipped cigar.

He did not seem happy.

Men who arrived for the conference came furtively. They entered the house by different doors, coat collars turned up, hats yanked down, handkerchiefs held to their faces. Two or three, apparently not caring, made no effort to conceal their visages; one of the latter was the man who had fired the blast under the bridge as Doc Savage's car was crossing.

The interior of the house was kept dark. Each man had to give a password. Beyond that, little talking was done, and this was confined to grunts.

Several times, however, there were outbursts of giggling.

When more than a dozen men were present, Batavia called order by clearing his throat loudly. Then he turned a flashlight on his own face and let all the men see him.

"I am Batavia," he explained. "Some of you already know me."

His audience was silent, except for one man, who couldn't help giggling.

"I am the man who hired all of you," Batavia said. "Your orders came through me."

He paused to let that sink in.

"There is another over me," he said. "I am not the real leader."

This got two or three surprise grunts from the assemblage. The men squirmed uneasily, for the spooky atmosphere in the old house had their nerves on edge.

Batavia said, "Progress has been satisfactory. The public is being fooled into believing gas from the earth is causing the giggling. No one now believes there were any giggling ghosts."

Batavia threw his cigar on the floor and put a fresh one in his mouth.

"It's a good thing for us," he said, "that we got that ghost story stopped."

He added, "Doc Savage was disposed of. That was good work, too."

Someone in the audience started giggling, and Batavia waited until the man could control himself.

"Some more trouble has developed," Batavia said. "One of Doc Savage's aids, a man named Johnny Littlejohn, is causing the trouble. This Littlejohn is going around claiming there wasn't any earthquake. We can't have that!"

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Batavia now called out four numbers; evidently the men in the organization answered to numbers rather than names.

"I want you four men," Batavia said, "to go with me, to-night. We're going to get rid of this Johnny Littlejohn as fast as we got rid of Doc Savage!"

A man in the background muttered, "What about this guy named Birmingham Lawn?"

Batavia laughed harshly. "Don't worry about Lawn!"

"And that geologist, A. King Christophe?"

"Christophe is harmless," Batavia said. "Forget him."

Batavia extinguished the flashlight which had been glowing on his features.

Then he did something dramatic.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "I have a surprise."

Tense silence dropped over the room.

Batavia said, "I told you a moment ago that another man was the real leader of this. That man is here now. He wants you to see his face, wants you to know him, so that, when he gives you an order, you will know who he is."

Batavia pointed his flashlight at an open door.

The light struck full on the face of a man standing there.

At least one of the group knew the face by sight, because this individual emitted an exclamation.

"William Henry Hart!" he ejaculated. "The inventor!"

Batavia laughed.

"Yes," he said. "The boss is William Henry Hart."

GEOLOGIST WILLIAM HARPER LITTLEJOHN habitually drove an old goblin of a car that appeared as incapable of efficiency as its owner, but which was just as deceptive in appearance. Johnny had been known to go at top speed for an astonishing length of time without sleep or food, and his old car had like qualities, except that it never fasted; it drank prodigious amounts of gas.

It was midnight an hour after the meeting in the old cement block house when Johnny, driving his ancient chariot, drew up beside the waterfront curb.

A man came out of the darkness and got in the car.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

The new arrival, besides being big, was distinctive for two features: he had a long going-to-a-funeral face, and his fists were nearly the size of quart pails. This man was Major John "Renny" Renwick, engineer, fist-smasher of door panels, and a Doc Savage aid.

"Holy cow!" Renny said, trying to find a soft place in the car cushions. "That Hart sure led us a chase."

Renny had a voice reminiscent of a lion roaring in a cave.

"Has Hart done anything suspicious?" Johnny asked.

"Heck no! He just bounces around like the Irishman's flea. I never saw a guy do more work than he's done."

"You haven't lost sight of Hart at any time?"

"Long Tom and I have watched him every minute," Renny said.

"Where is Hart now?"

"In the Digester Company plant just around the corner. You might as well walk."

Johnny got out of his traffic hazard. Alongside Renny, Johnny looked incredibly thin. They walked about two blocks, and were confronted by a new brick factory building which, while not extremely large, was neat and modern. A sign across the front of the factory said:

HART DIGESTER COMPANY

"What's a *digester*?" Johnny asked.

"It's a contraption they put on smokestacks," Renny explained. "It takes the soot and smell out of smoke. This patent digester of Hart's is something a little extraordinary. It purifies the air. If it could be generally adopted, they claim it would be a boon to cities."

"How does a smoke digester purify the air?"

"I'm no chemist!" Renny grunted. "But it takes the impurities out of the air, and puts back oxygen, or something. Works with chemicals."

"Works with chemicals? That seems significant."

"We thought so, too," Renny said grimly.

"If Hart invented the purifier, he's a chemist."

"Hart is a chemist, all right."

"It would take a chemist to develop a gas that makes people giggle themselves to death."

"Still," Renny said, "I wonder if that business about giggling ghosts ain't more important than we figure."

Looking thoughtfully over their conclusions, the two men entered a vacant lot located directly across the street from the factory. The lot was surrounded by a tall board fence.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Long Tom was posted at a knothole in the fence, using a pair of binoculars.

It was a fact that undertakers always brightened when they saw Long Tom Roberts, because he appeared to be an immediate prospect for a funeral.

Long Tom had been a weakly baby, and a feeble-appearing youth, and all through his manhood he had looked as if he ought to be in a hospital. This appearance of being an invalid was misleading; Long Tom could lick nine out of ten of the average run of men on any street.

"Hart is still working," Long Tom explained disgustedly and pointed. Johnny put his eye to the knothole.

HART was seated at a desk in his factory. Hart had his jaw shoved out, and he was doing things to papers with a pencil. He was plainly visible because the entire wall of the room was windows.

"That all he's been doing?" Johnny asked.

"Yep," said Long Tom.

"You sure?"

"Listen!" Long Tom said belligerently. "We ain't taken an eye off him since he left Doc Savage's headquarters!"

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny complained. "I hoped he'd lead us to Monk and Ham."

They stood there gloomily, thinking of Doc Savage and Monk and Ham, and the fate that had befallen them.

"Well, Hart hasn't made a guilty move," Long Tom said finally.

Johnny sighed. "We might as well get him and take him with us. He said he was willing to help. As long as he's with us, we can watch him."

"Take him with us where?" Renny demanded.

"We're going," Johnny said, "to interview a man named Birmingham Lawn."

When Johnny, Long Tom and Renny walked in, William Henry Hart flung one hand on a handkerchief lying on his desk. Hart glared at them, a burly and belligerent young man.

He pointed at Renny and Long Tom. "Who are these guys?"

Johnny explained that Renny and Long Tom were more Doc Savage associates.

Hart then took his hand off the handkerchief, picked the handkerchief up, and disclosed a large automatic pistol under it.

"I ain't takin' chances," he explained. "I've had enough funny business to do me for a while."

Johnny said, "We hope you will join us."

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"I got work to do!" Hart said.

Johnny said, "We will look for Miami Davis among other things. We thought you "

This had an immediate effect on Hart. He put down his pencil, kicked his chair back, and picked up his gun and tucked it in the waistband of his trousers.

"Let's go hunt bear," he said.

They left the smoke-digester-air-purifier manufacturing plant.

"We'll start our hunt," Johnny said, "with Birmingham Lawn."

"He's one of our bears, if you ask me," Hart said.

They reached Johnny's old car and got in.

When the engine started, it shook the whole elderly vehicle, and when the conveyance got in motion, there was a suspicion that one or more of the wheels were square.

William Henry Hart took his gun out of his belt, and began unloading it.

"What's the idea of that?" Johnny asked.

"I'm afraid this car will jar it off!" Hart explained unkindly.

Chapter XII. THE RESCUED

LAWN might not have had the largest house in the country, but it was unlikely there were many houses with more dignity. Lawn's house was as dignified as an art gallery; it also looked rather like an art gallery, being made of light-colored stone, and it was the shape of a long cube, with no ornate gimcracks or decorations. Everything was so simple and reserved.

The house sat alone on a grassy knob, and there were a few trees. A white gravel driveway wound from the house to a gate in a bleak stone wall. It all looked a little like Mount Vernon, Washington's home, except that the house was more severe.

There was a gatehouse at the gate, and a gatekeeper.

Johnny pulled up before the gatehouse, stopping his rattletrap by some combination of which he alone was the master.

"An abode of attitudinarianism," Johnny remarked.

Hart looked at Johnny. "Huh?"

"He means a showplace," Long Tom translated.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"It would be easier for him to say so," Hart muttered.

A gatekeeper came out of the gatehouse to frown disapprovingly at the old car.

"We wish to see Birmingham Lawn," Johnny said.

The gatekeeper went back into the gatehouse and, judging from the sounds, he telephoned an inquiry about whether or not he should admit the visitors, because he put his head out the door to demand their names.

"Mr. Lawn will be glad to see you," he announced then.

Johnny drove through the gate, along the winding gravel walk.

Johnny looked at Hart. "I thought you said the gang had Lawn prisoner."

"They must've turned him loose," Hart said.

"Humph!"

Hart made a growling noise and shoved his face almost against Johnny's.

"You wouldn't," he grated, "be insinuating that I'm a liar!"

"You said Lawn was a prisoner. But he isn't."

Hart yelled, "I'll take the hide off anybody who calls me a liar!"

Renny blocked out his two huge fists and shoved them under Hart's nose.

"You see these?" Renny demanded.

Hart ogled the fists.

"Water buckets!" he muttered.

"They're the buckets to pour water on that temper you've got!" Renny said.

THERE were no more verbal pyrotechnics. The car arrived before the impressive entrance of Lawn's house, and stood shaking itself until Johnny turned off the motor. A butler in a resplendent uniform told them that Birmingham Lawn would see them in the library.

Lawn did not seem very enthusiastic about the visit. Lawn stood behind a large library table in a softly lighted study where there were many bookcases. "Good evening, gentlemen," he said.

Hart walked around the table and looked Lawn up and down.

"Last time I saw you," Hart said, "you were tied up with ropes."

Lawn looked uncomfortable and swallowed two or three times. He whistled a bar from a popular song.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

"They turned me loose," he explained.

"You saw Doc Savage killed?" Johnny asked with an effort.

Lawn looked at the floor.

"I yes, I saw it happen."

"Why didn't you tell the police?" Johnny grated.

Lawn paled and sank into a chair. "I well "

Johnny came over, said, "*Why didn't you?*" savagely.

Lawn seemed to shrink. "I well, I was afraid. They said they would kill me!"

Hart sniffed. "They told me the same thing."

"I'm not a brave man," Lawn said plaintively.

Johnny said, "Lawn, we want every particle of information you have."

Lawn sat and frowned at the desk top. He chewed his lower lip. He whistled for a moment, then stopped.

"I know nothing," he said.

The floor then literally jumped under everybody's feet.

A PART of the ceiling also came down on their heads, the part of it that was plaster. Big cracks appeared in the floor; dust flew up out of these. The dust fogged the room.

When the commotion subsided, it was evident one wall had received the brunt of the blast. The wall was out of shape.

"A bomb!" Long Tom gulped.

"Anybody hurt?" Renny howled.

Apparently no one had been seriously hurt.

The bomb, obviously, had exploded outdoors.

There was a window, covered on the outside with huge ornamental iron bars. The bars were still in place. But the bars had been loosened by the blast.

Renny clamped his huge fists to the bars, set himself, began yanking. The bars gave slowly.

"Listen!" Long Tom exploded.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

From outside came sounds; blows, angry gasps and threshing of shrubbery. There was a fight going on in the darkness outside.

"Fight out there!" Renny ejaculated.

He got the bars loose. Then Renny and Johnny leaped outdoors, used their emergency flashlights they carried in their rear pockets. The air was so full of dust it was hard to distinguish details. They did manage to distinguish a shaking in a clump of shrubbery.

Long Tom suddenly whirled from the window. He discovered Lawn in the act of opening a desk drawer. Long Tom leaped over and knocked the drawer shut.

Lawn pointed at the drawer. "A gun in there, if you want it," he said.

Long Tom said, "We don't use guns."

William Henry Hart growled something and started toward the window.

"Stay here!" Long Tom ordered.

Hart ignored Long Tom, so the feeble-looking electrical wizard ran over, stuck a foot out and tripped Hart. Hart got up, snarled. He swung a roundhouse right at Long Tom.

Long Tom caught the arm, went through a convulsion, and Hart sailed up in the air, turned over, hit the floor flat on his back, knocking up a cloud of plaster dust. He didn't have breath enough to get up.

Outdoors, Renny and Johnny were floundering around in the bushes where the mysterious fight was going on. Their flashlights picked up three figures.

The air reeked of burnt cordite. Apparently the bomb had been lying on the ground when it let loose, for shrubbery had been torn out of the earth.

Two of the figures lay on the ground, apparently just knocked senseless. The third man stood.

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed.

He tried to say more, but was incoherent.

Johnny went rigid.

Long Tom put his head out the shattered window and yelled, "What's goin' on out there?"

Then he saw the standing man.

"Doc!" Long Tom whooped.

Doc Savage pointed at the two senseless men at his feet.

"These two," Doc said, "threw that bomb at me when they found out I was following them."

Chapter XIII. ACCIDENT

BY the time Doc Savage had carried the two senseless bombers into Lawn's house, Renny, Johnny and Long Tom had tamed down with their delight. They had stamped gleeful circles in the lawn, yelled, whooped.

The entire party now gathered in another room of Lawn's house.

William Henry Hart stood in glaring silence.

The prisoners two heavily constructed, unpleasant-looking men sat on chairs. They wore dark clothing, gloves, and both had expressions of deep gloom. They had been gagged.

"Did they follow us here?" Renny demanded.

"No," Doc said. "They came later. I am the one who followed you."

"You followed us?"

"Exactly."

"But why?"

"Because it was logical to think someone might make an effort to get rid of you."

"Oh, then these men with the bomb were "

"Were probably sent to kill you."

At this point, William Henry Hart came over and poked a puzzled finger at Doc Savage.

"I don't get this," he said. "I saw 'em blow you and your car higher'n a kite, along with your traveling zoo!"

Doc Savage's metallic features remained inscrutable. Right now the pets were safely hidden away in a vacant house that Doc had taken them to after the explosion. He had then followed his aids with a coupé he'd taken from his hangar. But Doc didn't elaborate on all this.

"You saw them blow up the car just the car," he said to Hart

"You weren't in it?"

"I got out just before the machine rolled onto the bridge."

"How in the devil did you know enough to do that?"

"I was suspicious of the bridge in the first place. Bridges have been blown up before. So I stopped down the road, left the car, and investigated the bridge. It wasn't difficult to find the explosives."

"But it was dark."

Long Tom, the electrical wizard, said, "Doc has an infra-ray device to see in the dark."

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Birmingham Lawn and William Henry Hart stared at Doc Savage, bewildered. Renny, Johnny and Long Tom did not look as surprised, being familiar with the bronze man's strange working methods.

"You let us think you were dead!" Lawn muttered. "I don't see the reason for that!"

Doc said, "As long as the men think I am dead, they will not try to interfere with me."

DOC SAVAGE removed from his coat pocket three small metallic disks. These appeared to be made of stainless steel and were the size of English pennies about twice as large as American one-cent pieces. Each disk bore an address.

Doc Savage indicated these medallions.

"These," he said, "are keys."

He gave one of the metal disks to William Henry Hart, and another one to Birmingham Lawn.

Doc put the third disk back in his pocket.

Lawn and Hart eyed their disks, puzzled.

"Keys?" Hart muttered.

"On each disk," Doc Savage said, "there is an address."

Hart eyed his disk. "A street name, a house number, and a room number," he said.

"Exactly," Doc Savage agreed. "Go there if you wish to get in touch with me."

"Where does the key part come in?"

"On the door will be a small black spot," Doc said. "Press your disk against this spot, and the door will open. It's a magnetic lock. Those disks are magnetized."

"Then this address is where you're hiding out?" Hart demanded.

Doc Savage nodded.

The bronze man then picked up the two prisoners, handling them both without apparent difficulty, and prepared to leave.

"Wait, Doc!" Johnny gasped. "I've got questions! A lot of questions! What's this all about?"

"What do you think?" Doc Savage countered.

"Well," Johnny said, "I we you see well "

"It's got us superamalgamated!" Long Tom said.

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"It would superamalgamate anybody," Doc told him.

Doc Savage went out carrying the prisoners.

"I'll get in touch with you," he said.

DOC SAVAGE kept under cover of one of the hedges and carried his prisoners to the road, then down the road some distance to a spot where an inconspicuous coupé was parked. Doc put the captives in a rear compartment of the coupé and locked the lid. Then he got behind the coupé wheel and drove.

Reaching the nearest boulevard, the bronze man turned toward the city. In a short time he was passing through the new vehicular tunnel under the Hudson River, the coupé running quietly, and the gleaming white sides of the tunnel flashing past. Despite the length of this new tunnel, the air was clean and pure. This was the tunnel that had recently been completed, with its New Jersey mouth near the sector affected by the gas.

Doc Savage ignored the skyscraper which housed his headquarters, and drove to the Hudson River water front; he came to a stop before a huge, somber brick building. This structure had a weather-beaten sign which said:

HIDALGO TRADING COMPANY

This was Doc Savage's water-front hangar and boathouse. The doors opened automatically as his coupé approached, a matter accomplished by a radio device, an apparatus similar to the type which anyone interested in gadgets can buy on the market. Doc drove into the great vault of gloom that was the warehouse interior.

He removed the prisoners from the rear compartment. They glared at him, buzzed around their gags; he had also tied their wrists and ankles.

The warehouse hangar had for a long time been a secret establishment, but now the bronze man suspected that quite a number of persons knew of its existence.

Doc Savage looked at the prisoners. "I have to hide you here," he said. "And still your friends may know about the place."

They glared at him.

Doc Savage dragged the pair to the other end of the building. Here, among a mass of paraphernalia stood a diving bell a type of contrivance sometimes called a bathosphere, and used for diving to great depths.

The bell was of thick steel; there was a ring in the top for a cable, also a hatch for entrance and exit.

"You can avoid trouble," Doc advised the prisoners, "by telling all you know. Begin with the rumors about the giggling ghosts."

He removed their gags.

"Blazes with you!" one man snarled.

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The other man was more detailed about where the bronze man could go.

Two or three times, Doc tried to get information out of them, but with no success.

"Unfortunately," Doc said, "there is no time to go through a process of extracting information."

Doc then put the men inside the diving bell. They fought as best they could, being bound. Doc closed the diving bell lid on the pair.

IN order to prevent the lid being opened from the inside, Doc wired the patent dogs with which the lid was secured. Inside the bell the men kicked angrily and screamed. Then, with a jerk, the prisoners felt the bell rise off the floor.

They gave each other terrified looks. They felt the bell swing slowly. There was clanking, as a hydraulic lift lowered them. There was a gurgle as water closed about the bell. Finally the bell settled on the bottom with a thump.

The men squirmed around, managed to roll together, worked on each other's knots. They got free. They threw the ropes aside.

One man kicked the interior of the diving bell angrily.

"Sank us in the water!" he snarled.

The other growled agreement.

"Maybe we can get out, though."

They worked with the hatch fastenings until their fingers began leaving crimson smears. Having failed to budge the lid, they looked at each other uneasily.

"Not a chance," one croaked, "of gettin' out."

The men sat there, swearing until they ran out of breath. Then they noticed something else something that horrified them. It was a buzzing sound, a tiny buzzing sound such as water makes coming through a small hole.

"A leak!" one yelled.

They sprang up wildly and tried to find the leak. They succeeded. The leak was under the floor grille, and when they tried to wrench up the grille, they could not, for the grille was riveted down.

One got down on his knees, shoved his fingers as far as he could through the grille. He jerked the fingers out as if they had been bitten.

"Water!" he gasped. "I feel the water!"

It was intensely dark, and the men fumbled through their clothing for matches, finally found one, and struck it, then crouched close to the grille, popping their eyes at the water which they could see coming in a thin

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needle stream, bubbling and buzzing.

The match went out; the man dropped it, and the end sizzled in the water under the floor grille.

Horror held the men speechless. Then, suddenly, as if both had the same mad hope at the same instant, they began to scream.

They squalled, "Help!" and, "We're drowning!" until the lining almost came out of their throats. After that, they lay panting and speechless, listening for an answer that did not come.

Chapter XIV. NO QUAKES

DOC SAVAGE stood at the far end of the warehouse, where there was no possibility of hearing sounds that might be made by the two men in the diving bell.

Doc was disguising himself. He pulled a wig over his head, rubbed bleaching compound on his bronze skin, fitted faintly colored glass cups over his eyeballs to change his eye color.

He began chewing a chemical substance which would stain his teeth, and give them a poorly tended look. Lastly, he put on a rather loud suit and began carrying a cane.

Doc Savage got in the coupé, left the warehouse, and drove to a neighborhood drugstore. From a telephone booth inside this store, he got in touch with a newspaper which, he happened to know, employed a reporter named Bill Sykes. Doc got the city editor on the wire.

"Bill Sykes," he said, using Bill Sykes's tones as nearly as he recalled them. "What's the address of this geologist named A. King Christophe?"

"The Twentieth Avenue Hotel," the editor said. "Say what the hell? Here's Bill Sykes sitting at his desk!"

Doc hung up and drove to the Twentieth Avenue Hotel, which proved to be a hostelry located on upper Broadway above the theatrical district. It was an imposing edifice, as far as size, but not too high in quality.

It had, for instance, a doorman who needed his shoes shined and his brass buttons polished; and the lobby floor could have stood a scrubbing. The clerk behind the desk also had no business smoking a cigar while on duty. It was that kind of hotel.

Doc Savage said, "A. King Christophe what room?"

"He's not in his room," the clerk said. "He's over in Jersey, where they're havin' that giggling ghost trouble."

"Exactly where?"

The clerk gave the address.

DOC SAVAGE left the hotel, drove to Jersey, to the address the hotel clerk had given him. He put on a gas

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mask, which he took from the car.

A. King Christophe was crouching on a vacant lot, working with some apparatus. He wore a gas mask, one of a type which, like the one Doc was using, permitted the wearer to talk. A telephone headset was clamped to his ears.

"I'm very busy," he said impatiently. "Go away!"

Doc Savage saw that the contraption with which Christophe was working was a sonic device for exploring the subterranean strata of the earth. Geologists use similar devices to locate formations favorable to oil.

Doc Savage bent close to Christophe's ear.

"Keep this a secret," the bronze man whispered, so no one else could hear. "I am Doc Savage."

A. King Christophe made a gulping noise inside his gas mask and sprang to his feet.

He said, "I what who Doc Savage?"

Then, because Doc wore a disguise, the stubby geologist concluded there was a mistake. A hoax. He puffed out his cheeks fiercely.

"You are not look like Doc Savage!" he snapped.

"Disguise," Doc explained.

"But why "

"I'm supposed to be dead," Doc warned. "Do not tell anyone differently."

"What do you want with me?" Christophe demanded.

"There is a question of an earthquake," Doc reminded him, "between yourself and an associate of mine, William Harper Littlejohn."

A. King Christophe blew out his cheeks to the fullest.

"Littlejohn that skinny bluffer!" he exclaimed. "He try to claim that are no earthquake. *Pah!* All seismographs are show one. Still he claim there are no earthquake! *Pah!*"

The stubby little man said, "*Pah!*" several times, and ended with an expressive, "*Phooey!*"

Doc Savage pointed at the sonic apparatus for exploring the depths of the earth by the use of sound waves.

"What are you doing with that?"

"I try to locate fissure that gas come through."

"I see," Doc said. "Will you be kind enough to give me any information you may secure?"

A. King Christophe beamed as much as a man could beam behind a gas mask.

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"I should be delight!" he said.

Doc Savage took out the third disk of metal which looked like steel. He gave the disk to A. King Christophe.

"I would be very pleased if you brought the information to the address on that disk." Doc said. "I am oh hiding out at that address."

He explained how the coinlike piece functioned as a key.

"I do that," A. King Christophe said. "I tell you what I are learn. That Littlejohn *pah*."

Doc Savage asked, "Have you found any trace of ghosts that giggle?"

"Ghosts *pah!*"

Doc Savage went back to his car, consulted his wrist watch as if he had an appointment. Apparently he decided he had plenty of time, because he drove at a leisurely pace through the district which was affected by the gas.

For the sake of safety, he rolled up the car windows. This coupé, like all of his closed cars, could be shut up until it was completely gasproof.

THE bronze man was taking advantage of his first opportunity to survey the district haunted by the giggling ghosts. His previous knowledge was secondhand, gained from the newspapers, and newspaper accounts were often overdramatized.

The picture he saw now was grim, as heart-rending as an evacuation in the path of a war. Most houses were now empty, but a few moving vans were backing up to doors or rumbling along the streets. The district already looked dead, despite the fact that the gas had first appeared only a few days ago. Newspapers littered the sidewalks; shrubbery looked ragged.

Real signs of the giggling gas terror were few. A few dead birds and pigeons lay in the streets. At one place lay a peddler's horse, dead from the gas, which the Department of Sanitation had not yet removed.

Doc Savage got out a gas mask, put it on, then opened the car windows. He opened a cardboard box which contained empty bottles having airtight rubber corks.

The bronze man got air samples throughout the gas zone in these bottles.

Doc Savage then drove back to his warehouse-hangar on the Hudson River water front. The big hangar doors opened with the radio device; he rolled the car into the vaulted gloom.

Doc showed no immediate interest in the bell or the two prisoners inside it; he made, in fact, no effort to see how they were getting along.

In the warehouse-hangar was stored quantities of equipment: mechanical devices the bronze man had used in the past, others he'd prepared for future emergency. Most of the regular equipment was kept here, for this was the point from which Doc and his aids started expeditions by plane or boat.

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One item was Monk's portable chemical laboratory. Monk usually took this on expeditions. The laboratory contained, among other things, a device for spectroscopic analysis a contrivance for ascertaining the chemical make-up of any given substance by examining a burned vapor spectrum.

Doc Savage used the analyzer to examine the air samples from the gas district. These were not the first gas samples he had analyzed; he had taken others from the storehouse, at the beginning of all this strange mystery. But examination of these had not been especially helpful; they had contained such microscopic quantities of the gas.

When Doc Savage finished analyzing the gas samples, he stood frowning thoughtfully. Now he knew the composition of the gas. Knew it exactly. It was not exactly a pioneer discovery. The police chemists had already managed to ascertain the general nature of the gas.

The stuff affected the human respiratory centers and associated nervous system, eventually producing complications which resulted in death. But that was already known.

Where was it actually coming from? That was what Doc was trying to learn. Had he secured any clue? The sample bottles were numbered, and he'd made a mental note of where each sample had been selected. He knew, now, exactly where the gas was thickest.

The bronze man stood contemplating the results of his efforts.

Then, almost imperceptibly, there came into existence in the huge warehouse a tiny, trilling note, a low, strange, exotic sound which rose and fell. A sound with a strangely human quality, this trilling; and yet it was eerie, as fantastic as the call of some rare jungle bird, or a chill wind in an Arctic waste.

It had a quality of ventriloquism; although the sound was perfectly real, it would have been almost impossible to locate the exact source. It was the sound of Doc Savage. The sound he made without conscious effort.

The sound invariably presaged, or accompanied, a state of intense mental activity or a discovery.

Doc Savage went back to the place where he had sunk the captives in the diving bell.

THE two men in the diving bell had lived longer than they had expected; had lived too long. Too long by ages, as time in terror is measured.

They were pale. They trembled. They had spent so much of themselves in fear, that they had hardly vitality to move. The water was rising. Rising, rising, and rising; it should have filled the diving bell long ago. Strangely it had not.

At times, hope had come to the two, only to leave. Maybe air pressure would keep out the water! Maybe the bell would fill only so high, no higher! But when they got one of these frenzied hopes, they would see the water had crept above another seam. Above another bolt or another rivet head.

The pair stood now with only their chins out of the water. Their eyes, wide and mad, were fixed in the darkness.

"We haven't haven't "

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"Not a chance!"

One man took hold of his own throat; the water was up high enough that part of the hand was under water.

Earlier, the men had cursed profanely. They had raved, beat and kicked the walls of the diving bell. But now that ugly fire was gone, and they were limp. They were men who were looking at death with plenty of time for doing it.

"If we we "

"If we'd talked, you mean?" the other croaked.

"We could have told him Monk and Ham are alive. And the girl."

"We should've done it!" the other said wildly. "We should've told him the prisoners were at Hart's penthouse!"

"Yeah!" the other croaked. "And then Hart would've fixed us!"

They were trying to keep up their spirits. They did not have deep minds, so their talk was not spiritual, not philosophical. It was talk of realities. But even that did not keep up their courage.

One man suddenly began to scream. To his mad mind came somehow the idea that his partner was responsible for his predicament. He struck out at the other, clawing, digging, biting. They went under water.

Later, half drowned, they had to stop fighting. They came to the top separately, stood choking, panting like animals.

They did not realize the diving bell was being lifted out of the water. Then the hatch opened. The hatch! A hole through which they could crawl back to life!

The men fought to be first through the hatch; once through it, they jumped around, yelled, swore. They were mad with delirious pleasure.

But the joy took a drop when Doc Savage fell upon them. Doc tied their wrists and ankles.

"What what " The men glared at him.

"You could've drowned us!" one snarled.

"Hardly," Doc Savage said quietly. "Didn't it seem strange you were able to breath the whole time? Normally, the oxygen would have been used in a short while. You would have suffocated."

"But "

Doc said, "Oxygen was being supplied to the bell automatically. Too, the water level was not allowed to get over your heads."

They gaped at him, puzzled.

One said, "But why "

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"This is why," Doc said.

The bronze man went to a device in a portable cabinet, a mechanism for recording sounds picked up by a microphone.

Doc said, "The microphone of this recorder was in the top of the diving bell."

He set the recording device to play back. The "playback" functioned through a loud-speaker. For some moments there was clatter, thumping, grunts and curses the noises as Doc Savage first put the prisoners in the bell.

Every word, every curse, every whisper in the diving bell had been recorded.

The prisoners stared at each other.

"So Monk, Ham, and the girl are being held in a penthouse owned by Hart," Doc said.

DOC SAVAGE contemplated the prisoners gravely. "What is behind this giggling ghost business?"

They glared at him, for they had recovered courage.

"Devil with you!" one gritted.

"It's too big for you to stop, anyway!" the other snarled.

Doc's face was grim. He picked the two up, popped them into the diving bell.

"There will be no oxygen this time," he said. "No control of water level."

Then the men yelled. Horror faced them; their nerves broke.

Doc Savage hauled them out and they talked.

The men knew little, really. Only that a man named Batavia had hired them. At Batavia's orders, they had helped with the bridge trap for Doc Savage.

To-night, Batavia had ordered them to follow Long Tom, and Johnny and Renny; to kill them if possible. But principally, about the giggling ghosts, they knew nothing.

"You are sure," Doc asked, "that you do not know the reason for the gas? *And you don't know what the giggling ghosts are?*"

They knew nothing about the gas, or the reason for it.

Doc Savage got a hypodermic needle, administered to each prisoner a drug which would cause them to remain unconscious for some time. Doc then sent the captives away to his upstate criminal-curing institution the "college", as they called the institution.

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A weird place, that "college," its existence unknown to the world. At the "college," criminals underwent delicate brain operations that wiped out memory of the past, after which they received vocational training to fit them as honest citizens.

They were turned into assets to society.

Chapter XV. HIGH TROUBLE

WHEN Doc Savage walked into the skyscraper headquarters, William Harper Littlejohn was frowningly contemplating an inked seismograph recording. The record was off Doc's seismograph the night there was supposed to have been an earthquake.

Johnny glanced at Doc Savage and frowned. He did not recognize the bronze man; Doc still wore a disguise.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny complained. "Can just anybody walk into this place "

"Make anything out of that record?" Doc asked.

"Oh!" Johnny recognized Doc's voice.

Johnny got over being surprised, pointed at the seismograph record. "There wasn't any earthquake!" he said.

Doc asked, "Did you compare that record with the recording of the seismographs at the university, the museum, and in Washington?"

Johnny nodded. "I did. Funny, too. The other records are exactly like this one except for this single earthquake. Our seismograph doesn't show the earthquake. The others do."

Doc Savage said, "Monk and Ham are still alive. We have a line on their whereabouts."

Johnny sprang up from the table; he looked as delighted as a man who had won a sweepstakes.

"Renny!" he howled. "Long Tom! Come here!"

The other two came running out of the laboratory.

"Doc's got a line on Monk and Ham!" Johnny shouted.

"Where are they?" Renny roared.

Doc gave them what information he had secured from the two prisoners.

"The two didn't know what is behind this devilish gas business?" Renny demanded.

"They did not know," Doc said. "They did not know the truth about the ghosts, either."

"There's an infernal mystery behind the gas," Renny grumbled. "That giggling ghost business is the most puzzling of all."

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Doc Savage consulted a telephone directory. He found William Henry Hart listed in an apartment on Riverside Drive.

"Holy cow! Reckon Hart don't live on his boat all the time," Renny rumbled.

Because they might need more than one car before they were through, Doc and his aids took two machines for the short trip to Riverside Drive. Doc drove his coupé; the others rode in a sedan.

When the bronze man pulled to the curb in a side street near Riverside Drive, the other car drew up behind him, and Renny, Long Tom and Johnny came to Doc's coupé.

"How we gonna work this?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"You wait here," Doc said.

The bronze man walked around the corner, found the number listed as William Henry Hart's address.

It was a tall brick building, one of the most impressive on the Drive, where there were quite a few impressive buildings.

The sign said:

APARTMENT HOTEL

Doc Savage entered the building, went to the rental agent. Doc had little fear of being recognized, for he had not discarded his disguise.

"Penthouses?" the agent murmured.

"Yes. I'm interested in one," Doc said.

"I'm sorry. We have only one. It is rented."

"Is there any possibility of it being vacated soon?" Doc asked.

"I ah can't say."

"If you will show me a floor plan of the penthouse," Doc said, "I might be interested in the future."

Any hotel, apartment or otherwise, likes to keep one hundred per cent rented. The proposal appealed to the rental agent.

"I have a floor plan!" he said quickly.

"Who is the present renter?" Doc asked.

"A man named William Henry Hart, a young inventor and manufacturer," the agent explained. "Here is the plan."

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DOC SAVAGE took the penthouse layout and went back to his men. They got in the larger car to hold a consultation and examine the penthouse plan.

"This is gonna help," Long Tom grunted.

They saw the penthouse contained almost a dozen rooms, was actually on the roof of the hotel, with a terrace taking in all the rest of the rooftop.

"As a battlefield," Renny rumbled, "there's plenty of room!"

Long Tom said, "How'd they manage to get Monk, Ham and the girl up there secretly?"

Doc Savage pointed out the probable method. "Notice the private elevator. It does not open into the hotel lobby, but into a private hallway, with a side door, on the ground floor."

"They probably got lookouts all over the place!" Renny boomed.

"We will see."

Doc went to the side door which admitted to the private penthouse elevator hallway. He walked in nonchalantly, immediately stopped, and looked as confused and surprised as he could.

"Er doesn't this door lead to the hotel?" he said uncertainly.

"Naw!" said the man. "It don't."

The man was built for guard duty. He had big hands, thick arms, sloping shoulders, and a scowl-ridden face. Also a natural look of suspicion.

From the ceiling, a flexible wire ran down to the man's right fist; he was evidently holding a push button on the end of the wire. He must have to hold it all the time he was standing there.

"This door is private!" he growled.

"I'm sorry," Doc said.

The bronze man then backed out, and went back to his men.

"They have a guard," he said.

Long Tom growled, "I'll get a messenger boy's uniform. I'll take him a telegram and bop him on the head."

"It will not work," Doc said.

"No?"

"The guard is holding a push button in his fist," Doc explained. "The moment he releases it, an alarm will probably start ringing."

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "Then we can't gas the guy, or rush him, or nothin'!"

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That was about the situation.

Doc Savage said, "Wait here."

"But "

"The fireworks will start in about twenty minutes," Doc said. "When it does, you fellows use your own judgment."

DOC SAVAGE got in the coupé, took the express highway south, making as much speed as possible without menacing other traffic. Later he pulled up before his water-front warehouse-hangar.

The hangar portion of the building housed a number of planes, ranging from a huge speed ship three-motored, capable of making a jump half around the world on one fueling down to a small gyro, or "windmill", which could descend vertically.

Doc took the gyro. He ran fuel into the craft, started the motor, and while it was warming, opened the great doors in the river end of the hangar. The plane was equipped with both pontoons and retractable wheels, so it could operate from land or water.

The bronze man loaded equipment he needed for the immediate project. He guided the craft out on the river, and took to the air.

It was late afternoon. Sidewalks of Manhattan spread below, crowds hurrying from work. Down the bay, two liners were leaving, one behind the other, headed out to the Atlantic Ocean. The sea stretched away in gray-blue flatness until it was lost in the haze. Few clouds. The clouds were very white.

Doc flew north, the gyro nose pointed upstairs, gaining altitude. When he was high over the lower end of Riverside Drive, he cut the motor. The craft began to settle. The windmill craft did not glide forward after the fashion of an ordinary plane, but settled straight downward.

From time to time, Doc gave the craft enough headway for maneuverability, so he could keep descending directly above the roof of the tall apartment hotel on Riverside Drive.

The sole sounds the gyro made were about the sounds that a big bird would make flying.

Doc hung his jaw over the cockpit edge, watched. He studied the penthouse, judged possibilities. It did not look so good.

This building, unlike many structures on Manhattan, did not have a water tank tower on the roof. The roof was flat and unobstructed, except for some wires which appeared to be a radio aerial. So far, good.

But the penthouse itself was a wide building of Spanish architecture, with a sloping tile roof and a patio in the center. In the patio there was a swimming pool.

All the rooftop surrounding the penthouse had been planted in grass and shrubbery. That was the bad part. It would be like landing in a backyard rock garden.

There was no doubt that the plane could get down safely. Whether it could take off again was doubtful.

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Two hundred feet over the roof, Doc dropped two large grenades overside. They were not explosive grenades. These contained anaesthetic gas. Being fish-shaped and stream-lined, the grenades fell faster than the craft, and hit the roof ahead of it.

Doc had time to put on an abbreviated gas mask.

First, the gyro hit a radio aerial. It tilted. It slid sideways, landed with a crash. Undercarriage snapped, the ship tipped over, two of the rotor blades smashed into the shrubbery and lost shape.

Doc was out of the craft instantly; he seemed to bounce out. He went headlong for shelter of bushes. The shrubs grew in sunken boxes of earth.

Doc made concealment, waited and listened.

SCREEN doors banged and men came tearing out of the penthouse to see what had happened.

"A plane hit the roof!"

"Hell's bells!"

A strangled sound; the noise of a body falling. At least one man had inhaled the gas.

"Hey! What's happened to Joe?"

"It's gas!"

The screen doors all banged again as the men ran back inside. Next, there was shouting in the penthouse. Rushing around. Excited bawling of orders.

Someone began to pump bullets through a window into the plane. The gunman fired methodically, emptying clip after clip, five shots to the clip, into the craft.

A louder voice now shouted angrily that they would have to leave, that the uproar would bring the police.

"Get the prisoners into the elevator!" this voice ordered.

Doc Savage worked through the shrubbery to a window. He tried it. The sash was open. He shoved it up, dived through into a room which had a bare tile floor and furniture of Spanish type and a gaudy blanket hanging on one wall.

Doc whipped across this room to a door, had almost reached it, when a man came through holding a gun. The gun holder asked no questions. He fired.

Doc Savage, twisting, bent down to let the bullet pass over his head. There was a rug on the floor; Doc yanked it. The other man tilted over, firing again, his bullet gouging plaster out of the ceiling.

Doc got hold of the gun arm, and the arm went out of joint and the man began screaming, one shriek after another, in agony.

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There was now shouting through the penthouse, enough to indicate men were running to see what had happened. Doc tossed a smoke bomb through the door. It was a small bomb, but it made big smoke. A pall of sepia spouted, grew; smoke that was as black to the eye as drawing ink from a bottle. The charging men got in the smoke and swore and shot off guns.

DOC SAVAGE left the room through the window by which he had entered. Looking for another way in, he came to a window covered with steel shutters.

The window shutters were shaking; someone was pounding on them from the inside. The one doing the pounding was also yelling in a squeaky voice that could be recognized anywhere.

Monk! It was Monk!

A bar fastened the shutters from the outside. Doc wrenched the bar loose, got the shutters open.

Monk peered at Doc. "Who who the blazes are you!"

"Isn't it Doc Savage?" Miami Davis demanded.

"It don't look like him!" Ham said.

Which was a tribute to the bronze man's disguise as an old man.

"Out!" Doc said.

He could talk through his gas mask.

The girl came through the window, then Ham. Monk, coming last, all but got wedged.

Ham peered at Doc's size.

"It's Doc all right," he said. "But but they told us they blew up "

"How do we get out of here?" Doc demanded.

Ham said, "There's only one way out; that's the elevator."

Inside the room the prisoners had just vacated, there were yells. The escape was discovered.

"Away from here!" Doc said.

They dived through the shrubbery, turned right, were in a kind of flower garden. The flowers, fortunately, were tall; there were entwining vines on trellises overhead. Good concealment.

Bedlam was all through the penthouse. Batavia's men seemed convinced the roof was bathed with poison gas. Evidently they had no masks, for none came out to investigate.

They did not hesitate, however, to shoot through the windows at every object that might conceal an attacker. The bullets, all from high-powered rifles, were not pleasant things.

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Doc Savage crawled to the roof edge. Here, there was a blind spot, one point which could not be covered by gunfire from any of the penthouse windows.

Doc took from his clothing a thin silk cord that was long, and to one end of the cord was affixed a light, collapsible grapple. This cord was little larger than twine.

"Let me tie this around your waist," Doc told the girl.

She stared at the thin cord.

"What "

"We'll lower you to a window," Doc said. "You break the window, then climb in."

The thinness of the cord horrified the girl.

"On that " She stabbed a finger at the cord. "*We're twenty floors up!*"

Then the girl closed her eyes and dropped, completely slack, to the rooftop.

Ham said, "She fainted "

Then he, too, fell over.

"Blazes!" Monk said. "Ham fainted, too "

And then Monk went down.

The gas which had been in the aerial bombs was not exactly like that used in the little pocket grenades that the bronze man carried. This gas did not lose its strength so soon after it became mixed with the air. Doc had broken a couple in one hand and held his breath.

MIAMI DAVIS would have been really frightened if she could have seen what happened next, if she had seen Doc Savage gather the three of them together Monk, Ham and herself and lash them all in a cluster on the end of the silk cord. Then he lowered them over the roof edge.

There was not enough cord to reach twenty floors, of course. Doc lowered the burden to the first window, then tied the line to a steel pipe, part of the trellis supporting the vines.

The silken cord was equipped with knots bulky knots for climbing purposes and the bronze man went down after the captives, apparently unaffected by twenty floors of space below.

He had overguessed the distance to the window a little; that was not as bad as an underguess. He broke the window with a quick kick, driving the glass inward.

Reaching in, Doc turned the lock, after which he raised the sash. A step in through the window, a little more trouble hauling the gassed victims inside, and it was all over.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

They were now in an apartment, modernistically furnished, with bright-colored walls, gaudy rugs, furniture all straight lines. Apparently no one was home.

Doc went out into the hallway and began trying to cut off electric current to the elevator that ran to the penthouse. Without power, the elevator could not move; flight from the penthouse would be cut off.

But he was too late. The elevator had already been used in flight.

There was a crash of shots, a slamming volley of them like buckshot on a tin roof, in the street. Doc caught the regular passenger elevator downstairs.

He was in time to see two policemen come flying in the door, one of them reeling, holding an arm which was leaking blood. Both cops had been tear-gassed.

Doc Savage made for the door, but stopped when tear-gas fumes bit his eyes. He retreated, got his own mask back on. Then he went out into the street.

The street was full of tear gas and excitement. Came an explosion, sudden, terrific, jarring the earth. Doc's big armor-plated limousine the car which Johnny, Long Tom and Renny should have been occupying turned half a flipflop, lit on its back. A high-explosive grenade had gone off under the machine.

At the far end of the street were two cars, going fast. They rocketed around the corner, and were out of sight.

"RENNY!" Doc called.

No answer.

"Long Tom! Johnny!" Doc shouted.

The bronze man's voice was a great anxious crash in the street.

There was no trace of Doc's three aids.

Doc Savage whipped back to the front of the hotel. A police squad car stood there, motor running. Doc dived into the machine.

"Around the corner!" he said. "We've got to chase! Quick!"

The cop driving the machine looked at him.

"Who who the blazes are you?"

"Doc Savage," Doc explained.

The cop snorted, "Listen, I know what Savage looks like and you're not kiddin' "

Doc lost time explaining there was such a thing as a disguise. By the time they set out in pursuit of the fleeing cars, none of the machines were in sight. There was nothing, no trace, to show where they had gone.

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The private elevator from the penthouse was down and empty. There was no sign of the guard, no trace of anyone in the elevator. Doc rode up to the penthouse, accompanied by policemen. There was not a soul to be found.

"They got away with Renny, Long Tom and Johnny," Doc decided grimly.

Chapter XVI. THE GOOD MAN

THE excitement at the penthouse on Riverside Drive got considerable publicity in the newspapers.

Doc Savage, however, managed to keep his connection with the affair unknown, and as a result, most newspapers attributed the fracas to a dispute of gangland. It was a good story because of the unusual fact that a gyro had been used.

The giggling ghosts still monopolized the newspapers, however.

The giggling mystery received a new impetus. A fresh angle entered the situation. The fresh angle was the S.R.G.V.

The S.R.G.V. was the abbreviation the newspapers used. The letters stood for, "The Society for the Relief of Gas Victims."

There is almost always a mushroom growth of relief and aid agencies after a disaster, most of them well-intentioned. These new chicks rarely get much attention, the old agencies such as the Red Cross being the ones depended upon.

The S.R.G.V. was different. It hit the public prints with a bang, and for a sound reason. The S.R.G.V. was going to do a great good; it was going to buy up the homes of the giggling victims. It was going to see that no one was impoverished by the disaster.

That is, if its money held out the S.R.G.V. was going to do all that. It was rumored a group of wealthy philanthropists was behind the S.R.G.V., men who didn't want their names to be known.

The S.R.G.V. began to buy homes, paying, it was explained, all that it was possible to pay. Payment, in a great many instances, was not nearly what owners thought they should get. But the S.R.G.V. said it didn't have all the money in the world to spend, that the whole thing was philanthropic, and that it was impossible to pay pre-disaster prices. No one, the society added, was being forced to sell.

The gas scare got fresh impetus when sonic devices for exploring the subterranean strata of the earth indicated the presence of faults. This bore out the theory that gas came from some pocket deep in the earth, where it had lain unsuspected for no telling how many centuries.

Apparently it did not occur to anyone that the faults might have been in the strata for ages, too, and might have nothing whatever to do with gas.

However, there was one rumor that ghosts with the giggling disease might have come out of the cracks. It was laughed down, of course.

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It began to be suspected that people could never again live in the area. In view of that, it was considered kind of the S.R.G.V. to take property off people's hands.

As Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett "Monk" Mayfair said, "Human nature is sure a great thing."

"What's great about it?" Ham asked him.

"Well, you overdressed shyster, you take this S.R.G.V.," Monk pointed out. "Look how they're helpin' out them poor gas victims. That's wonderful, that is."

MONK and Ham had recovered from the effects of Doc's anaesthetic gas. So had the young woman, Miami Davis. The three of them were now at Doc Savage's skyscraper headquarters, in the great library.

Doc hadn't explained why he'd used the anaesthetic gas on them, but Monk and Ham suspected he'd done so in order that he could work alone to find a way out and attempt to capture some prisoners. Later on, after the disappearance of Long Tom, Johnny and Renny, Doc had returned and brought them to headquarters, where he had revived them.

Doc Savage was in the reception room now, seeing some policemen.

Later, when Doc Savage rejoined them, the bronze man seemed pleased.

"The police," Doc explained, "are going to keep the newspapers from learning that we had anything to do with the fight at the penthouse."

The homely Monk frowned. "As I understand it, Doc, you are still supposed to be dead. Is that right?"

"That's it," Doc told him. "That is, if we can fool anybody into thinking so."

"But why? What's the idea?"

"No one hunts buffalo any more."

"Huh?"

"Because everyone knows there are no buffaloes to hunt."

"Oh. I see."

"For the first time since the penthouse business, we have time to talk. What did you learn while you were prisoners?"

"They just kept us tied up," Monk said.

Ham nodded.

"Can you add anything to that? Surely you learned something."

"How long did they hold us?" Monk countered.

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"About three days," Doc told him.

"Well," Monk said, "I never learned less during three days in my life!"

"It would help," Doc said, "if you got some idea about the reason behind this whole grim mess."

Monk said, "We didn't get a smear of an idea."

"I hate to agree with hairy ignatz" Ham jerked a thumb at Monk "but he's right. We didn't learn a thing."

"Not even about who their leader is?"

"The leader," Monk said, "seems to be a guy named William Henry Hart. But you musta knowed that. You found us in his penthouse."

"This Hart is an inventor," Ham said. "He has a factory manufacturing a smoke-digester."

"How did you find out that?" Doc asked.

"Oh, we heard our captors talking," Monk explained. "I guess they figured we'd be unable to repeat what we heard."

"What I don't understand," Ham said, "is why they kept us alive."

Monk peered at the bronze man. "Doc, can you explain why they didn't kill us?"

Doc said, "Perhaps because they wanted someone around to overhear what they had to say."

"Huh?"

"What do you mean, Doc?" Ham barked.

"Let us drop that point until we have more information," Doc said.

Doc got up, went into the laboratory, and came back with the two animals, Habeas, the pig, and Chemistry, the questionable ape. Monk and Ham greeted the two animals with enthusiasm.

"Miss Davis," Doc said, "maybe you can help us."

MIAMI DAVIS had been silent. She sat on a large chair a pert, dynamic girl, with copper-colored hair in a tangle, a haunted look in her large blue eyes.

Her breathing was irregular, and often she was bothered by a convulsive affliction of her respiratory nerve centers which made it seem she was giggling the after effects of the slight gassing she had received in the warehouse, at the beginning of the mystery. The dose she'd received hadn't been enough to kill her like the other unfortunate victims.

Doc Savage went to her. "How do you feel?"

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"Not so good," the girl admitted.

Doc asked, "What did you mean by inferring that perhaps you can help us?"

The girl bit her lips.

"I hate to say anything," Miami Davis said, "because I well, I'm in love with him."

"That was why you ran away from the storehouse that night, wasn't it?" Doc asked.

She nodded.

"You decided he had been in the storehouse, didn't you?"

"Yes." Miami Davis nodded again. "He had been there, too. It was my watch. I had given it to him to have fixed, and he had lost it there in the storehouse."

Monk said, "I take it you're talkin' about Hart."

The girl winced, bit her lips, looked down.

"Yes," she said.

"He's the guy behind this," Monk insisted.

Doc Savage did not comment. Miami Davis apparently did not want to speak either, because she kept silent for a long time; then, finally, she doubled over in her chair and put her face in her hands, sobbing.

"Do you know the reason for this giggling mystery business?" Doc asked her.

The girl got out several wrenching sobs before she could answer. "No," she said. "No, I don't know a thing about any ghosts."

Doc Savage showed no inclination to question her further. He got up, went out into the reception room, and worked the combination of his huge safe, leaving Monk and Ham and Miami Davis behind in the library.

Now Monk and Ham made two or three stumbling attempts to strike up a conversation with Miami Davis. They wanted to get her mind off William Henry Hart. They failed. She was so miserable that she even depressed Monk and Ham, so they fled into the reception room, where Doc had gone.

Doc Savage was before the huge safe, fingering through government bonds and gilt-edged securities.

He carried the securities over to the inlaid table and put them down.

"Ham," he said.

Ham he was dapper again, his first act of freedom having been to change his clothes came over and eyed the securities. Ham now wore immaculate evening dress, and carried one of his innocent-looking black sword canes, a supply of which he kept on hand.

Doc said, "Your legal training makes you the man to take charge of our next move."

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"Charge of what?" Ham was puzzled.

"We are going into competition," Doc Savage explained, "with the S.R.G.V."

"With the what?"

"The S.R.G.V. the Society for the Relief of Gas Victims."

Ham frowned. "Competition! But it strikes me that society is doing good work."

"Have you noticed prices they are paying for property?"

"No."

"If you had, it might change your ideas about the philanthropy of the S.R.G.V."

Ham frowned, rubbed his jaw thoughtfully and suddenly looked blank. The blankness was followed by an I-begin-to-see-through-this expression.

"Say!" he exploded. "Could it be that "

"We had best not jump at conclusions," Doc Savage said. "But we will go into this ghost district and pay full value for any property that any victim wants to sell. Buy anything and everything offered. Do not let anybody rob you, but pay full prices."

"Right," Ham nodded.

"Also," Doc Savage added, "tell everyone who sells you property that he can buy it back for the same price at any time."

"Righto."

HAM went to work on the project at once. He sat down with a pencil and paper, composed handbills and newspaper advertisements and dispatched these; then, although it was late at night, he routed out a landlord near the gas area and rented a suite of offices.

Ham got painters at work putting a sign on the front of the building, by electric light: It read:

DOC SAVAGE RELIEF AGENCY

That was the name of the new organization. Ordinarily, Doc Savage did not permit his name to be used in connection with any public benevolencies, but this was different. It was believed that Doc's name would draw, create confidence.

Ham maintained a law firm of his own that was so expertly staffed that it could run itself for months while Ham was off adventuring.

Ham supplied the new organization with employees from the law firm, and by ten o'clock the next morning, handbills were being scattered; newspapers carried half-page advertisements saying the "Doc Savage Relief

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Agency" would pay full price for all property in the ghost zone.

Ham's venture into real estate began to do a rushing business.

Ham did a landoffice trade all that day, and most of the night. His appraisers went around, wearing gas masks, and estimated the value of property being offered for sale.

Such was the reputation of Doc Savage as the wrong fellow to try to pull any crookedness on there were few attempts to get half a dozen prices for property. In fact, such was the bronze man's name for fairness, the appraisers were often permitted to set a price, which was at once accepted.

All sellers were promised that they could buy the property back any time they wished, for the same price.

It was mid-afternoon on the second day after the establishment of the Doc Savage Relief Agency, when Birmingham Lawn put in an appearance.

Birmingham Lawn came into Ham's office jauntily, his round melon of a stomach jumping up and down as he walked. He was whistling something.

"Hello, Mr. Lawn," Ham said.

"You know me?" Lawn exclaimed.

"I've heard you described," Ham told him. "What can we do for you?"

Birmingham Lawn seemed to have something very pleasant on his mind. He perched on a chair, folded his hands over his tummy, and changed his tune.

"Look," he said. "I have a remarkable idea!"

"Yes?" Ham was interested.

"The newspapers," Birmingham Lawn pointed out, "are full of this great work you are now doing, buying up this property."

Ham did not comment, but it was a fact that the newspapers were giving Doc Savage's relief agency considerable space.

Lawn continued, "I have become very interested in this project, and I want to help." He repeated the last for emphasis. "I want to help!"

"Help how?"

"I want to put my own money into your project. I am quite wealthy, you know."

"You mean," Ham demanded, "that you want to help us see that the gas victims don't lose anything?"

"Exactly."

Ham was amazed. He was accustomed to gestures of grand philanthropy on the part of Doc Savage, but it was rare enough elsewhere and Ham was inclined to be bowled over.

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Birmingham Lawn became, for such a lugubrious-looking man, extremely businesslike. "I will place unlimited cash at your disposal," he said, "and I will also put part of my own real estate office force to helping you. Will you accept?"

Ham considered the proposition. He called Doc Savage on the telephone, explained Birmingham Lawn's proposal, and asked advice.

"Take him up," Doc said.

So Ham accepted Birmingham Lawn's offer to join the Doc Savage Relief Agency.

THAT evening, fireworks began. A tabloid newspaper, which had never been particularly friendly to Doc Savage, was first to make insinuations.

The story was played up under front-page headlines, and evidently the newspaper's phalanx of lawyers had gone into a huddle over the item, because it was cleverly worded. It said everything it was intended to say, but left no cracks through which the spear of a libel suit could be rammed.

The yarn took the form of several questions:

WHERE IS DOC SAVAGE?

WHAT COULD DOC SAVAGE TELL ABOUT THE MYSTERIOUS GIGGLING GHOST IN NEW JERSEY?

WHY IS DOC SAVAGE BUYING UP PROPERTY IN THE GAS DISTRICT?

SAVAGE IS REPORTED TO BE A HUMAN BENEFACTOR, BUT WHY DOES HE SURROUND HIMSELF WITH MYSTERY?

These thinly veiled insinuations created a stir and comment, favorable and unfavorable.

Monk became extremely angry. The homely chemist called up the newspaper and went into detail about what he thought of the sheet. They were not impressed.

"We smell a rat in this property buying," the editor said.

"You smell yourself!" Monk snarled at him.

The homely chemist went looking for Doc Savage.

Doc Savage had been dividing his efforts. Part of the time he sought some trace of Renny, Long Tom and Johnny, and the rest of the time he devoted to the gas victims.

The bronze man's skill in surgery and medicine was probably the greatest training he possessed; it had been his first application, his most intensive. Although he was skilled in many items, it was in surgery and medicine that he excelled.

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AT odd times, Doc Savage made furtive expeditions on which he did some things that seemed senseless. For instance: The sole object of the secret trips seemed to be to climb on top of factory buildings and apartment houses and look at smokestacks. Not only did he look at smokestacks, but he wore a gas mask while he was doing so; and sometimes he spent as much as an hour around each smokestack, making chemical tests.

He did not seem to be interested in any smokestacks except those in the gas zone.

Doc told no one of these trips; but the results must have satisfied him, because on a number of occasions he made the strange, low, exotic, trilling sound which was his characteristic sound in moments of excitement, mental stress, or satisfaction.

Monk found Doc in a Jersey hospital, where the bronze man was working as a volunteer surgeon. Doc had managed somehow to keep his identity unknown.

Monk explained about the tabloid newspaper insinuation.

"I saw it," Doc Savage admitted. "It is one of those things."

"But they're insinuat' there's somethin' dirty about your relief agency!" Monk yelled.

"Do not let it bother you," Doc said.

Monk sighed disgustedly. When anybody stepped on the homely chemist's toes, his impulse was to kick shins and knock heads together.

"O. K.," he grumbled. He changed the subject. "You doing any good helping these giggling victims?"

"Some," Doc said. "At least, we do not think there will be any more deaths. And in time, we will undoubtedly get a cure."

"I call that accomplishin' a lot!"

Monk got up, took two or three turns around the room, stamping, gnawing his lip. "But about Renny, Long Tom and Johnny," he growled. "I we well, we haven't accomplished a thing toward helping them. And Hart what about him? Hart is the guy behind this, you know."

"Hart is innocent," Doc said.

"What?"

Doc nodded.

"In fact," the bronze man said, "we had better pick Hart up and keep him out of sight for his own protection."

DOC and Monk drove to William Henry Hart's little boat, tied up to the wharf at Sheepshead Bay, where he lived.

He was not aboard.

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"He's probably at his factory," Monk said.

They drove to the factory. The moment they turned into the street before the little manufacturing structure, they knew something was wrong. The crowd! Half the crowd was police. There were two ambulances, white-clad internes, and stretchers on which men lay.

Doc Savage swerved to the curb and he and Monk sprang out.

"Kidnaping," a cop explained grimly.

"Kidnaping?"

"They got William Henry Hart a few minutes ago," the cop said. "We don't know who it was. They were a tough-looking bunch of mugs. There was shooting. The plant foreman tried to stop them, and he got shot, and a workman got shot, then Hart was carried off."

Doc Savage asked, "Any description of the raiders?"

There was description enough to identify one of the snatchers as a tall man who wore grays. Later, Doc found, discarded on the scene, the stub of a cigar which had a cork tip.

"Batavia!" Monk exclaimed.

"Yes," Doc agreed. "Batavia undoubtedly seized Hart."

Chapter XVII. GUILT

INVESTIGATION convinced Doc Savage there was no way of tracing William Henry Hart and his kidnapers. The bronze man got in the car, with Monk, and they drove away.

"Maybe the snatch was a fake anyway," Monk said. "Maybe he staged this kidnaping to make himself look innocent."

Monk had expected Doc Savage to drive back to the high headquarters building, but the bronze man did not do this. Instead he headed toward the East Side of Manhattan, and stopped in a section of brownstone fronts, second-rate rooming houses.

"What's this?" Monk demanded.

Doc Savage said, "You remember those metal medallions?"

"Metal "

"The three metal disks about the size of an English penny," Doc Savage said. "On each was an address."

"Oh, I remember," Monk said. "You told me about that. You gave one disk to William Henry Hart, one to Birmingham Lawn, and one to A. King Christophe."

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Monk looked startled. "I been wondering why you did that."

"There was a very good reason," Doc told him.

The bronze man got out of the car, went up the steps of the old brownstone house and examined the door. At the top of the panel, where it would not have been noticed, there was a seal which looked exactly like a spider web a seal Doc had placed there to show whether the door had been opened.

From his pocket, Doc Savage took out a small device which resembled a diminutive box camera, except that it had a dark-blue lens. In reality, it was a tiny projector of ultra-violet light.

Making an impromptu dark room with his coat, Doc turned the device on, focused the rays on the seal. The seal glowed blue.

"First blank," Doc said.

"I don't get this!" Monk complained.

They got in the car again and Doc Savage drove to another address, this one on the West Side. It was an old building, a walk-up apartment. They went in, climbed steps, and once more the bronze man examined a door and found the seal unbroken, found it glowed blue under the ultra-violet light.

"Second blank," he said.

By now Monk was bewildered. He planted himself in Doc Savage's path. "Explain this chasin' around, Doc!" he grumbled.

"We have a number of suspects in the gas mystery, Monk."

"One suspect as far as I'm concerned and it's Hart."

"Each of the medallions had a different address," Doc explained.

"But I don't see "

Instead of going into explanations, Doc Savage visited the third address. This one was a private house, across the river in New Jersey. A house that stood alone, windows bolted, rear door planked shut. The only ready entrance was through the front door, which Doc examined.

THE seal this time was a piece of chewing gum, and it was apparently intact. But when Doc Savage put the ultra-violet light rays upon it, this one glowed distinctly yellowish not blue.

"This is it!" the bronze man said.

"It?" Monk said, puzzled.

"The door is not sealed with the gum I used. My gum would fluoresce blue."

"Oh! Then somebody's been here!" Monk grew excited. "Who had the key with this address?"

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Doc Savage apparently did not hear the question; the bronze man had a habit of appearing not to hear a query when he did not wish to answer. Monk was accustomed to this trait, but he looked disappointed.

"We going in?" the homely chemist demanded.

"Not through the front door," Doc said.

The bronze man went around to the rear, where there was a dilapidated coal shed. He got on the shed, then to the roof of the house. He tore off a patch of shingles, wrenched up sheathing, and made a hole large enough to pass his bronze frame. It was fortunate Doc entered the house in that fashion.

The house was mined. There was almost five hundred pounds of high explosive in the basement. The TNT was wired to windows and doors, so that it would explode the instant anyone tried to gain admission by that route.

Doc Savage rendered the gigantic bomb harmless.

Then he went out, got Monk, and showed him what was in the house.

"Blazes!" Monk showed an immediate desire to leave.

"The person who had the disk with this address," Doc Savage said, "planted this death trap."

Monk shuddered.

"Who was it?"

"Birmingham Lawn," Doc said.

DOC SAVAGE was grim as they drove back, as grim as he ever became, although he rarely showed emotion.

The car pulled up before the Doc Savage Relief Agency office. Ham sat at a large desk he had a liking for big desks contemplating the bareness of the office. The place was practically empty of customers.

"It's been that way all afternoon," Ham complained. "Say, did you read that tabloid newspaper story? A bunch of dirty insinuations, and thinly veiled hints that we're crooks stealing this land."

Doc Savage asked, "Where's Birmingham Lawn?"

Ham brightened. "Now, there's a swell guy! Letting him help us out was a good idea. He brought his real estate men, who are trained in this line."

"Where is he?" Doc repeated.

Ham pointed, "In the back room."

Monk scowled at Ham. "Your swell guy is just the devil behind this giggling business!"

"What?"

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Ham gasped.

"You heard me!" Monk gritted.

"But but "

"Lawn's medallion," Doc Savage explained, "was used to open a bungalow where we found a death trap set for me."

Ham made croaking noises, looked bewildered.

"But Lawn has been helping us; he put his own money into this thing of buying property " Ham stopped stuttering and pondered. "Ah-h-h I get it. The man is going to falsify our records! He is going to change the deeds so he can take over the property we buy!"

"After he gets rid of us!" Monk agreed.

The homely chemist appeared angry enough to bite heads off spikes.

"Wipe that man-eating look off your face," Doc told Monk.

"Why not just go in and bat 'im one?" Monk snarled.

"We can use further proof," Doc said. "So far, the only thing we have against him is that disk that we connected with the death trap."

Monk subsided reluctantly; Monk was seldom in favor of cautious tactics. He preferred slap-bang drag-out. When the homely chemist had his face straightened, he and Doc entered the rear room.

Monk's utter homeliness gave him one advantage: it was impossible to tell, from looking at him, what emotion he was experiencing.

Birmingham Lawn greeted them. Doc returned his handshake cordially. Lawn shook hands with Monk. Monk, however, could not make his own hairy paw seem like anything but a dead fish.

Birmingham Lawn seemed worried. He motioned, indicating he desired they should all get in a corner of the room where they could be alone. And when they were all in the corner, Lawn stood staring at them, and abstractedly whistled a few bars from something that sounded like a funeral march.

"I have had a strange thing happen to me!" he said hollowly.

MONK barely refrained from saying that a lot of things were going to happen to Lawn.

"What do you mean, Lawn?" Doc asked.

"That metal coin you gave me," Lawn explained.

"What about your disk?" Doc asked.

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"A man came to me," Lawn said, "and offered me five thousand dollars to trade disks with me."

"Five thousand!" Monk exploded. "Offered you "

Lawn swallowed, making his golf ball Adam's apple go up and down in his neck.

"It happened last night," he said. "I well, I didn't know what to do. Five thousand dollars is a lot of money. The only condition of the bargain was that I should never tell you about the trade."

"You made the trade?" Doc asked.

"I did," Lawn said. "I traded. The man gave me five thousand dollars and his medallion, and I gave him my medallion."

Monk looked blank.

Lawn continued. "This morning, I turned the five thousand dollars in as a voluntary gift to help reimburse the poor inhabitants of the gas district for their loss. You will see the five thousand on our books. In the meantime, I began trying to get in touch with you to tell you that I had traded."

"Just why," Monk demanded, "did you trade?"

"Five thousand dollars," Birmingham Lawn said, "can do a lot of good in this poor world."

"Then why break your word?" Monk barked. "You promised not to tell us about the trade."

"I am not an honest man," Lawn said, "when I think I am dealing with a crook."

Doc moved to one side. Monk followed the bronze man; they stood together close to the door, while Lawn was still at the desk in the corner, out of ear-shot.

"Doc," Monk breathed, "it looks like somebody got Lawn's disk to throw suspicion on him!"

Doc Savage studied the homely chemist. "But a few moments ago "

"I know; I thought Lawn was the guy with the horns and tail!" Monk scowled. "I jump at conclusions too quick."

"Who, in your opinion, is the one who set the explosive trap?" Doc asked.

"Whoever traded medallions with Lawn," Monk said.

They went back to Lawn. Doc Savage put a question.

"Who traded disks with you, Lawn?"

"The man named A. King Christophe," Lawn said.

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MONK, Ham and Birmingham Lawn got on telephones, began calling different places in an effort to locate Christophe. In order not to arouse the suspicion of the cheekblowing, eye-popping geologist, they let the impression go over the telephones that they were newspaper reporters who wanted to interview the man.

Christophe had been interviewed so often recently he was getting a reputation as the man who had first discovered the gas came from subterranean fissures that he should not think it strange the press wanted another session.

While the telephoning was going on, Miami Davis approached Doc Savage. The young woman had been helping Ham with the activities of the Doc Savage Relief Agency.

Miami Davis looked worried, and appeared to have been recently in tears.

"Ham was telling me about William Henry about Hart," she said in a low voice.

"You mean about his disappearance?"

"About that yes."

"I wouldn't worry too much about it yet," Doc told her.

Miami Davis bit her lips and blurted, "But they may have killed him!"

"There is reason to think he is alive now," the bronze man said.

The young woman tightened. She got something from the remark that horrified her. She began to tremble. Suddenly she grabbed the bronze man's arm.

"You think he's the leader of this! You you're wrong!" she screamed.

Her trembling increased and she began to lose color. She was close to a break-down.

"Stop that!" Doc Savage said. There was such a quality of power and command in the bronze man's voice that it quieted the young woman although Doc himself was a little surprised that he got results; he could never tell about women.

Monk, Ham and Birmingham Lawn rushed into the room, looking as if they had accomplished something.

"We got A. King Christophe located!" Monk yelled.

"He's got a headquarters!" Ham rapped. "A house on the edge of the gas zone! We've got the address!"

They raced outside to their car. Lawn galloped after them. Lawn, it developed, wanted to go along in his own car. Monk volunteered to ride with Lawn.

Doc and Ham were getting into the other car when Miami Davis came running up. She was excited, also determined.

"I'm going with you!" she cried.

"But " the bronze man began.

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"You may find some trace of Hart!" she gasped; "I'm going along! You can't stop me! I may be able to help!"

Rather than face a prolonged argument, Doc Savage gave in, and told the young woman to ride with himself and Ham. Their car was an armored machine, and she would be safe enough.

It did not take long to drive to the spot where they hoped to find A. King Christophe.

It was early night, and darkness was unusually black.

It was a very large and elderly house which stood alone, like a gray wart, in the center of a huge lot. The house was made of concrete blocks, had doors on four sides, and the lot which surrounded it was a jungle of shrubbery.

When Lawn peered at the old structure, he gave a start of surprise.

"Why," Lawn ejaculated, "I handled the renting of that place!"

The other stared at him. "You rented it?" Monk gulped.

"I'm a real estate man, you know," Lawn said. "My firm rents property here and there business buildings, apartments and residences."

"Who did you rent this house to?" Monk asked. "To A. King Christophe?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"To William Henry Hart," Lawn said.

EFFECT of this on Miami Davis was stark. She recoiled recoiled with such a jerk that Ham, who was sitting beside her, jumped also. The girl put her fingers over her lips.

"Hart rented " The words choked up in her throat.

"Hart rented the place all right," Lawn said grimly.

"In that case," Monk muttered, "maybe he's hiding out in there. I want to see that guy Hart. There's too much evidence against him!"

The girl screamed, "But he was kidnaped "

Ham gripped her arm, said warningly, "Not so loud, miss!" The dapper lawyer added, "Hart could have faked the kidnaping. We were hot on his trail, and that kidnaping happened mighty conveniently."

The girl lost control. She lunged forward, slapped Ham, crying something incoherent. Ham dodged. Monk grabbed the girl and held her.

"You got no right to accuse Hart!" the young woman screeched. "He's he's I love him!" She began to sob.

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Monk said, "You may love 'im, but it don't make 'im as pure as driven snow."

"You better lay off that line, homely face," Ham told him. "She'll scratch out them little gimlet eyes of yours."

Monk subsided. They waited for the girl to get control of herself, and in a few minutes, she managed to do that.

"I'm all right," she said, brokenly, wiping at her eyes.

There were four gates in the wall around the old house, and four sidewalks that led through the shrubbery to the four doors in the scabby-looking cement-block house.

Doc's party went through one of the gates, immediately got off the sidewalk into the shrubbery.

It was extremely dark now, with clouds packed in the night sky. They had stopped the cars where the headlights could not be seen from the house, so that it was hardly likely that their arrival had been discovered.

"I hope we ain't expected!" Monk muttered.

Doc Savage said, "We will go closer to the house. Then you will wait, Lawn and I will look around."

They did that, the bronze man going in the lead, opening a silent path through tangled brush. Later, they stood, about twenty yards from the house, in a tiny open space that was walled around with shrubbery.

Doc said, "Lawn, you and I will look the house over."

Lawn gulped, "But why me?"

"Your real estate firm rented the place," Doc explained. "You have been in it. You can be of help. You know the layout of the rooms, and things like that."

"All right," Lawn agreed reluctantly. "But remember, I am not a courageous man."

Doc and Lawn went on. Their going was ghostly in its silence.

The others waited a minute two five saying nothing and doing nothing, except to hold their breath a great deal of the time. They could feel suspense.

Then unexpected disaster hit them. Miami Davis had been standing tense, much too tense, and Ham had been holding her arm. Now, so suddenly that the surprise made her successful, she wrenched away from the lawyer.

Simultaneously, she snatched a flashlight which he was carrying in his hand, but not using. The girl jumped away. The next instant, she thumbed on the flashlight, impaled them all in its white glare.

"Get your hands up!" Miami Davis said grimly.

Her hand the hand that was not holding the flashlight appeared in the luminance. It gripped a flat automatic pistol, not large, but plenty dangerous.

"I've been afraid I would have to do this!" Miami Davis gritted.

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The next development was about the most unexpected thing that could have happened.

THE giggling ghosts appeared.

There was more than one ghost. From the very first, there had been a question about the number of ghosts. No one knew whether there was one, or more. But now Monk and Ham knew the truth. There was more than one.

Also, from the very first, there had been doubt about whether giggling ghosts really existed at all. They had been more rumor than actuality. They had never been seen distinctly at any time. No one had observed them at close range.

But then, few ghosts are ever seen at close range.

This was Monk and Ham's first experience with ghosts.

They heard the giggling. It was low, stifled. But it was very close. So near that they whirled wildly. They knew with terrible certainty that the giggling ghosts were literally upon them.

The girl made a gasping sound. Her fingers must have slipped off the flashlight button, because the beam extinguished.

Monk and Ham were a long time forgetting what happened next.

They tried to fight. Ham began jabbing with his sword cane, in the hope that the chemical-coated tip would put a ghost or two to sleep. Oddly enough, his sword cane seemed to pass through air. Suddenly, something grabbed his sword cane, and Ham was forced to use his fists. Next to him Monk roared, as he always did in battle.

Monk and Ham always insisted they put forth their best resistance. But there was no time, and it was all so weird, so impossible, so utterly well, it was ghostly business that they really accomplished nothing at all.

Doc's aids were rendered unconscious. It happened violently. The insides of their skulls seemed to explode. Shock, crash, colored pain-lights, described what happened to their heads.

There were forms there, darksome ghostly forms that floated out of the shrubbery. Monk and Ham could tell that, an instant before the explosions occurred.

Then everything was still and black.

Chapter XVIII. THE MESOZOIC AGE

PSYCHOLOGISTS claim one of the strongest traits in mankind is the impulse for self-preservation.

There is some argument about whether self-preservation is man's strongest impulse. In the case of animals, there is evidence indicating the impulse of self-preservation may be subjugated by the emotion of rage.

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Small dogs, for instance, will attack much larger dogs, even when there is every certainty that they will meet defeat, maybe death. Men, on the other hand, seem to be motivated more by the desire to preserve their lives.

Monk awakened with this impulse for self-preservation. Monk, who had the stamina of an oak post, was first to revive. However, he lay still, batting his small eyes and running his tongue around his lips, and deciding his mouth felt as if it had been recently inhabited by a cat. Because he saw no sense in advertising the fact that he was conscious, he made no sound. He thought of the giggling ghosts, and fell to shivering.

Where was he? How long had he been unconscious? At first, he believed he was blindfolded; then he decided he was lying in a dense darkness, and there must be a roof overhead because there were no stars. He began feeling around. Ham! What had they done to Ham? Was he here?

Ham was there, close at hand. Ham must have been bordering on regaining consciousness, must have been in the state in which sleepers find themselves when they involuntarily give big spasmodic jumps. As soon as Monk's hand touched him, Ham gave a great jump.

"Sh-h-h!"

Monk quickly admonished. "Quiet!"

Ham went, "Huh?" and "*Wuh!*" confusedly. To stop that, Monk took a handful of Ham's mouth and nose and held it. He kept that muffler on the dapper lawyer until Ham had assembled his wits, then released him.

Ham snarled, "Choking a man is no way to wake him up!"

"Pipe down!" Monk said. "It's the way I'd love to wake you up!"

"Where are we?" Ham wanted to know. "Where are the ghosts?"

Monk took another look around. Getting no better idea of where they were than before, he decided to let Ham draw his own conclusions, and said nothing.

Monk arose, took two or three steps, with his hands out in front, exploring. A yank at his ankle toppled him on his face.

"What's the matter?" Ham demanded.

"Sh-h-h!"

Monk hissed.

He added some things that he had not learned in Sunday school.

"There's a chain around my ankle," he explained.

"Mine, too," Ham said.

They investigated the chains and found them large enough to qualify as log chains. The chains were padlocked to their ankles; the other ends of the chains seemed to be locked around thick iron bars.

"Blazes, I hope we ain't turned into ghosts ourselves," Monk croaked, "with chains an' everything!"

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THE bars interested Monk and Ham. They investigated and found a bar about every six inches, each one more than an inch thick.

"Cage!" Ham gulped. His hand moved toward a pocket for his matches. A moment later, he swore. "Got a match, Monk? I've lost mine."

Monk fumbled through his clothing until he found a match, then debated whether to strike the match. He listened; when he heard no sounds, he rasped the match along the steel bars, and made a reflector for it with his palms.

"Whew!" Ham said, relieved. "We look too solid to be ghosts. So do the bars."

"It's a cage, all right," Monk said.

"We're outside it," Ham added. "Thank our stars for that!"

In the fitful, dancing glow of the match, Doc's aids saw that there was a concrete sidewalk inside the cage. A sidewalk about a dozen feet wide with another set of bars on the other side. They looked to see how long the sidewalk was and it dawned on them then that the sidewalk was a long tunnel of steel bars. How long they could not tell.

"A sidewalk protected by steel bars!" Monk muttered. "That's a queer one."

All around where they stood was jungle! Such jungle! The growth was grotesque. Monk stared, his small eyes popping, at a leaf beside him a leaf so large that he could hardly have spanned it with his long arms. There were fernlike plants, closely resembling the ferns in window boxes, except that these must be more than thirty feet tall; the match light revealed they extended up at least thirty feet, and they were even higher.

But all this jungle growth was not Gargantuan in size. Some of the leaves were delicate, tiny. There were vines as thick as Monk's barrel chest, but there were also creepers as fine as silk thread.

The match burned Monk's finger, and he yipped, dropped it. Darkness clenched around them, as black as a squid's juice.

"Some place!" Monk breathed.

"Strike another match," Ham ordered.

Monk went through his pockets. "I haven't got one."

They stood silent and puzzled, wondering what kind of place they were in.

"Blazes!" Monk said hollowly. "Blazes!"

"What do you make of it?" Ham asked.

"Never saw nothin' like it before." The homely chemist sat down and felt of the padlock which held the chain to his ankle.

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"But there ain't nothing mysterious about this lock," he said. "It's ordinary."

"They didn't take our clothes," Ham said meaningly.

Monk said, "O. K. Let's get these locks off."

MONK was this was generally admitted a chemical wizard. Working with Doc Savage, Monk had developed innumerable chemicals useful in the strange career which the little group followed. For Doc and his men fought with such trick weapons.

Monk had worked out ingenious methods of carrying chemicals. Men's suits, for instance, had a stiffening fabric around the shoulders and collars. Monk had impregnated this fabric with a stiffening agent that was really a thermite compound a concoction which burned with metal-melting heat.

Doc's aids got to work on the locks. They tore the fabric out of their collars, wrapped it around the locks, and lighted it by grinding a vest button against it. The button was a firing agent for the thermite.

There was a fizzling, a bright glare that blinded them completely. But they managed, in the middle of it, to kick their chains off.

After the thermite burned out, it was several moments before they got over being blinded.

"What do we do next?" Ham asked.

"Let's just strike out," Monk growled. "We dunno where we are, anyway."

They crept away from the spot where they had been chained, feeling ahead in the intense darkness with their hands. The jungle growth felt amazingly coarse. Leaves were as thick as planks, and as hard. They skinned themselves on bark; they got into thickets of thorns that were like needles.

Monk got involved with a vine, a thin spider web of a thing, and it was strong as wire and he came near not escaping from the tangle.

"Blazes!" the homely chemist muttered.

They came to what felt like a cliff of stone. They had no way of telling how high this was. They had no light. They could not reach the top of the cliff and it was too slick to climb.

"Let's follow along the base of the thing," Ham said.

Monk gulped suddenly; he had something on his mind that he wanted to get off, something he had to say.

"Ham," Monk said, "I well, that girl must have been working with er the giggling ghosts, from the first."

"Why did you wait this long to say so?" Ham demanded.

"Er she fooled me."

"Hah!"

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"And why didn't you mention it earlier, either?" Monk demanded.

"Er she fooled me, too," Ham confessed.

"I feel like a sucker."

"Here, too," Ham said.

It was a rare occasion when these two admitted accord about anything; it was practically a record.

"I WONDER where Doc is?" Monk mumbled.

"And Hart, Lawn, and Christophe," Ham added. "Not to mention Renny, Long Tom, and Johnny."

They stood and worried about that, temporarily forgetting their own predicament.

"The ghosts didn't catch Doc when they got us, did they?" Monk asked.

"I don't think so."

"Maybe they caught him after they got us."

They were worried about Doc. They were embarrassed over the way the girl had fooled them. Ham always went through an unconscious gesture when he was embarrassed: he hooked a thumb in his waistcoat pocket. He did this now. And immediately he was aware that one thumb had touched something. He dug the object out of the pocket.

"Matches!" he exclaimed.

"Matches!" Monk muttered. "I thought you looked in your pockets before."

"Er I always carry my matches in a certain pocket. When they weren't there, I thought I had none."

"You nickelwits!" Monk gritted.

Discovery of the matches took their minds off the fate of Doc and the perfidy of the girl. They continued their efforts to escape by creeping along the stone wall or cliff, or whatever it was.

"Ugh!" Monk said suddenly. He stopped.

Ham breathed. "What "

"Sh-h-h!"

Monk said. "Come over here! Feel this!"

Ham moved to Monk's side, passed his hands over the shape that had aroused Monk's startled wonder.

"What d'you think it is?" Monk wanted to know.

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"Like nothing I could describe!" Ham said. "I'm going to strike one of my matches."

Ham's matches were in a little book and he tore one out, closed the cover, and rasped the match head on the striker composition. Light jumped over the object about which they were so curious.

The item was about fifteen feet tall, and thirty or forty feet long they could not tell how wide. It had the hide of an elephant, but it had warts, also. Warts as big as knots in a pine board. It had four legs. The two front legs short and small, small in proportion, that was, for they only had claws a foot long. The monster was half sitting up, and looking down between its paws at them.

The monster's mouth had four rows of sharp teeth, the size and shape of dirty candles, and the mouth was large enough to take a bite of approximately half a horse.

"Yeo-o-ow!" Monk squalled.

WITHOUT any thought of why, wherefore, or anything else, Monk took off from that spot. He crashed into Ham. They went down. They got up. They ran. They tripped, smashed into things, all but beheaded themselves on tough vines.

Because they ran blindly, they fell into the fissure.

Monk and Ham fell headlong into the crack, sprawling. For one horrible flash, they thought they were going to their deaths, but the fissure wasn't that deep. Only a dozen feet or so deep. They hit the hard bottom.

Monk had started yelling, a hair-splitting squall, and when he hit, the yell ended in a sound like a bad note out of a trumpet.

Almost instantly a weird greenish light appeared and suffused the crevice in which they lay. The light increased, and they began to see their surroundings.

Ham stared upward. His eyes got round with horror.

"Monk!" he croaked hoarsely. "It's look "

The monster if not the one they had seen, but one very like it was looking down into the crevice, and it appeared that the thing could easily reach them with its jaws.

Chapter XIX. THE BLOW-BACK

ONE of mankind's strong traits is also his impulse to show off; be an exhibitionist.

All through history men have shown off. The Romans had triumphal parades; kings have always had pomp and pageantry, and the circus is popular the world over; and so are the exhibitions commonly called world's fairs.

New York City's latest world's fair was being advertised as an exposition to top all expositions, a mammoth

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undertaking; a phantasmagoria beside which the recent international show in Paris or the Century of Progress in Chicago, would be rather ordinary.

For more than two years, work on the exposition grounds, buildings, and exhibits had been in progress. The fair would not open for some months, but many of the exhibits were already complete.

Doc Savage was driving his car into the exposition grounds. The bronze man pulled to the side of a street, stopped the car, and worked with the dials of a portable radio direction-finder.

Doc Savage's face was grim. Back at the old house of cement blocks, his men had been whisked away before he could do anything to stop it. Doc had been inside the old cement house with Lawn. There had been no enemies inside the house. They were all outside, seizing Monk and Ham and Miami Davis.

Doc had been unable to follow the men who had seized Monk and Ham. Unable to follow them at once. The reason was very simple.

Doc's car had been stolen. So had Lawn's machine. Batavia and his men had taken both machines.

Now Doc was taking up the chase, almost an hour late. He had been forced to go to the basement of his skyscraper headquarters and get another car.

Lawn stared at Doc. Lawn was puzzled. For Doc Savage seemed to be trailing the prisoners. Trailing them but how? Lawn was wondering.

He got it.

"Oh!" Lawn pointed at the direction finder. "That is a radio direction finder! But what is it locating? Where is the other transmitter?"

"In my car," Doc said.

"You mean the car they took when they grabbed Monk and Ham?"

"Exactly."

"I see. But why haven't they noticed the transmitter?"

"It is concealed in the body of the car," Doc explained. "Unless they knew it was there, they would not find it. It is just another of the gadgets we keep in operation, to help us get out of trouble."

Doc Savage put his car in motion again. They passed huge trucks loaded with strange items whole trees, a small airplane, a Venetian gondola, a meteorite as large as a room. Construction in the fair grounds was proceeding on a day-and-night basis.

Lights blazed everywhere, and truck drivers yelled; hoist engines clattered, and welding torches sent lightninglike glare over the confused scene. The unfinished buildings were fantastic shapes.

When Doc Savage stopped, it was beside a huge structure, a building that was like a gigantic half a muskmelon. It was about the color of a muskmelon. Inside, it must be as large as Madison Square Garden.

Birmingham Lawn doubled over his stomach to look at the vast dome. "Goodness! What a huge thing!"

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"The dinosaur exhibit," Doc said.

"Dinosaur?"

"A name designating prehistoric monsters," Doc said. "This building contains an exhibit constructed for the fair. It is supposed to be remarkable."

"I see," Lawn said vaguely.

"The prisoners are in there, apparently," Doc said.

THE bronze man seemed in no hurry to leave his car. Instead, he leaned back, and there was a trace of a frown on his metallic features. "I think," he said, "that we're very near the end of this thing."

Lawn looked startled. "I why I hope so," he gulped.

"For the sake of clarity," Doc said, "we might gather factors together and array them. There has been some confusion. It should be straightened out."

"I yes," Lawn said. "Straighten out the confusion. Yes indeed."

"Several months ago," Doc Savage said, "a new vehicular tunnel was completed, from Manhattan under the Hudson River to that part of New Jersey directly opposite thickly populated New York City. For the first time in years, a particular section of Jersey then became easily accessible. At a stroke, as it were, part of Jersey was placed at the front door of Manhattan."

"What has that to do with this?" Lawn asked.

"That part of Jersey near the tunnel became suitable for residential apartments," Doc said. "If any one could get a large block of the section, it could be turned into a profitable apartment development."

"Why that is true," Lawn admitted.

"But it was hard to buy land in the section. The people did not want to sell their homes cheaply. So someone thought up a hideous scheme of forcing the land on the market, and buying it up for almost nothing."

Lawn stared at Doc blankly, said nothing.

Doc said, "The giggling ghosts rumor was an accident. It was not intentional."

"Ghosts accident?" Lawn said foolishly.

"The giggling ghosts," Doc said, "were men who were preparing to perpetrate the gas hoax. Some of those men, in handling the gas, got dosed with the stuff. Not seriously. But enough to give them the giggles occasionally. We know that the gas takes effect to varying degrees. These men moved about furtively as they got ready to perpetrate the gas hoax."

"These men who perpetrated the gas hoax," Doc continued, "were seen moving about furtively, and their giggling was heard, hence the stories about giggling ghosts."

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"Hoax?" Lawn said stupidly. "The giggling horror was a hoax? And the giggling ghosts were men who whiffed a little of the gas while planting it?"

DOC SAVAGE nodded. "All a hoax," the bronze man agreed. "Seismograph records were faked to make it seem cracks had opened through which the gas might come. The ground in that part of New Jersey was impregnated with chemicals. Then the gas was distributed by means of smoke-digester-air-purifiers which William Henry Hart had manufactured."

Lawn grew suddenly excited.

"Hart! Then the gas came from Hart's smoke-digesters! William Henry Hart is guilty "

"Hart is the goat," Doc said. "All along, Hart has been framed. Many of the hired thugs were led to actually think a man named Hart employed them. Hart was to be the victim. Probably they were going to conveniently 'discover' that the gas really came from smoke-digesters." The bronze man paused. "Of course, once it was learned gas was *not* coming from the earth, the land would become valuable again," Doc added.

"I I " Lawn swallowed. "Incredible!"

"A. King Christophe, the geologist, is a crook hired by the crooks to pose as the real Christophe, who, at present, is away on a trip for his health," Doc went on. "They may have gotten the fake Christophe out of the way, because we were getting hot on his trail. They also kidnaped Hart, because we were too close to learning that Hart was innocent. And they grabbed my men, of course, because we were fighting them."

Lawn gulped, "What about the S.R.G.V. the Society for the Relief of Gas Victims?"

"That," Doc Savage said, "is the medium through which Jersey land was to be bought cheaply."

Lawn said, "But the girl "

"The girl was only a bystander in love with Hart. That is all. She saw some strange-acting men watching Hart, and followed them. It was Batavia and his gang. They went to a storehouse, when they saw the girl following, and tried out the gas on her, before they released it on the Jersey district. She got scared and came to me."

Lawn mumbled, "You er have you found out "

"Yes," Doc Savage said, "we have a good idea who is behind the whole thing."

"You know the leader?"

"His identity should come out in a few minutes," Doc said.

Lawn said, "*It will come out before that!*"

Lawn then took a gun out of his coat pocket, jammed the muzzle against the bronze man's chest.

Lawn said, "Now you know I'm the man behind the gun all the way."

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DOC SAVAGE sat very still and watched Lawn back away an inch at a time, until he sat at the far side of the seat.

"Make one move," Lawn said, "and I'll kill you!"

The bronze man's face remained fixed.

Lawn said, "Drive up to the main door of the dinosaur exhibit! Honk your horn. Honk it three times long, twice short!"

Doc Savage did that. He was careful to make no quick moves, for Lawn's gun hand was nervous. There was a wait after the bronze man honked the signal in front of the door.

Doc said, "It was difficult to understand why the prisoners should be brought here. It seems strange. The reason must be that the chemists you hired to concoct the giggling gas must be working on this exhibit."

"Shut up!" Hart said.

Doc, apparently not hearing, said, "The dinosaur exhibit is supposed to be a scientifically exact reproduction of the world as it was millions of years ago. Strange vapors and volcanic gases rise from fissures in the earth in lifelike fashion. The chemists called in to create the vapors must have made your gas, too."

"You sure figured it out!" Lawn said.

"We "

"Shut up!" Lawn meant it this time.

The dinosaur exhibit door opened a crack. It did not open wider for some moments, evidently while the men inside were making sure that it was safe. Then the big panels rolled ajar.

"Drive in!" Lawn told Doc.

Doc drove in. The car rolled across a concrete floor, stopped on the fringe of modern man's idea of a prehistoric jungle.

Lawn ordered Doc Savage out, and the bronze man left the car. Lawn followed him, holding the gun ready. Men gathered around. The men seemed to be excited.

"What is wrong?" Lawn demanded.

"That damn Monk and Ham!" Batavia explained. "They picked the lock and got away. That is, they got to wanderin' around in the exhibit."

"Where are they now?" Lawn snarled.

"We got 'em cornered. I think the boys have grabbed 'em."

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This proved to be true, because shortly a group of men approached, dragging a crestfallen Monk and Ham. Monk and Ham exchanged uncomplimentary remarks, each accusing the other of not having sense enough to know that the monsters they had seen were not real ones.

They fell gloomily silent when they saw Doc Savage.

One of the captors doubled over with laughter.

"Haw, haw!" he whooped. "Oh, golly! Haw, haw!"

Monk glared at him.

"Funniest thing I ever saw!" the tickled man chortled. "These two gooks" he indicated Monk and Ham "thought them was real monsters. They was scared green."

Monk and Ham said nothing. Privately, they suspected it would be a long time before they lived this down, providing they had an opportunity to live it down.

LAWN asked, "Have we got all of them?"

"The girl and Hart are over here." The man pointed. "The other three Johnny, Long Tom and Renny are with them."

"Then we'll finish this up right now!" Lawn said.

Some of the men apparently had never seen Lawn before, and wondered how he came to be giving orders.

"Who's this big mouth?" A man jerked his thumb at Lawn.

"Shut up!" Batavia told the man. "That's Lawn the chief!"

"But I thought the boss was a guy named Hart "

"Hart is the goat, you fool!" Batavia snapped. "Hart is one of the prisoners we've got here!"

"But that Hart ain't the one you showed us in the old cement block house that night "

"That was just a guy who pretended he was Hart," Batavia said. "We had it fixed so everybody would think Hart was the guy running this."

Lawn said, "Get the prisoners all together. We'll knock 'em in the head, then throw them in one of the volcanic cones and run in that cement you are going to use for fake lava."

A. King Christophe arrived, shoving out his jaw and looking important. He saluted Lawn airily.

"What about the Jersey land, chief?" he asked.

"My S.R.G.V. bought up a lot of it," Lawn said. "And I've got my people in the Doc Savage Relief Agency office. We'll grab what land Savage bought, too."

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Several men went away, came back dragging Long Tom, Renny, Johnny, Miami Davis and William Henry Hart.

The girl, Miami Davis, stared at Monk and Ham, and bit her lips.

"I'm sorry sorry I pointed that gun at you," she said jerkily. "I thought I was afraid you were going to grab Hart."

Monk peered at her. "You didn't know Lawn's men were around that old cement block house?"

The girl shook her head. "No."

"Cut that out!" Batavia ordered.

"Take 'em to the volcanic cone," Lawn commanded.

"Just a minute," Doc Savage said.

The bronze man had been standing motionless, watching Birmingham Lawn's gun. The muzzle of Lawn's weapon had not moved for an instant from Doc's chest, and the bronze man had waited, seeming to do only one thing: his lips had moved at intervals. Moved as if he was calculating the passage of a certain interval of time.

The men stared at Doc Savage.

"Damn you!" Lawn snarled. "If you pull "

"It has already been pulled," Doc said.

"Huh?"

"In the car." The bronze man moved his head slightly. "A bomb! Under the car frame, wired to a clockwork device. The clockwork staitis when a little switch is thrown under the dash. I threw the switch."

Lawn yelled at Batavia. "Go see "

The command was never executed. There was a slamming explosion not so much a detonation as a great *whoosh!*

Whoosh! It came from under the car, out in all directions. With the noise, there leaped black smoke. Intensely black smoke that shot a score of yards in every direction in the bat of an eye.

DOC SAVAGE was already moving. He went into the smoke, eyes shut, holding his breath. The containers under the car were loaded with smoke-bomb chemical impregnated with tear gas.

Doc reached the car, flung inside, got a pocketknife out of a door compartment. There were also airtight goggles, a breath filter, and he put those on.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

There was yelling now, and shooting. Men slugging at each other. Monk, Ham and the others were tied with ropes, and Doc sought them, holding the knife ready to free them.

A man staggered against him. Doc grabbed the fellow, tried to learn if he was one of the prisoners by feeling whether the man's hands were tied. While Doc was doing that, another man stumbled into him from behind. The newcomer slugged, asking no question.

They fell down, Doc and the two men. Neither man was a Doc aid. They flopped around, and Doc lost his knife. Then he got an arm around the neck of each man, and brought their heads together, not with skull-crushing force, but hard enough, and they collapsed. Doc got down on all fours and lost time seeking the knife.

Someone fell over him and said, "Holy cow!"

"Renny, here!" Doc cut the big-fisted engineer loose.

Lawn was screaming in agony.

"Somebody shot me!" he bawled.

Batavia barked, "Don't use those guns, you fools! We'll kill each other!"

After that, shooting stopped.

Doc yelled, "Get in the car!" He yelled it in ancient Mayan, a practically unknown tongue which he and his men spoke fluently, and used when they did not want to be understood by outsiders.

"Take Hart!" Doc called in Mayan. "And the girl, too!"

A phantom in the black smoke, the bronze man whipped in search of the other prisoners; he found Monk and Ham, cut Monk loose, and ordered the chemist in Mayan to carry Ham to the car.

Renny bellowed in Mayan that he had found William Henry Hart and was taking him to the car.

Doc located Johnny. Johnny and Long Tom were working on each other's rope, trying to get free. Doc slashed Johnny loose, and Johnny carried Long Tom toward the machine.

"Miss Davis!" Doc barked in English.

"Here!" cried the girl's voice.

Doc lunged, got her, swept her away, just as two men charged for her voice. Doc carried her to the car, and heaved her unceremoniously into the back seat, which seemed to be full of squirming forms.

Doc then got in the front seat.

"All in?"

"Think so," Monk gurgled.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

Doc tried to slam the doors, and got all of them shut but one; there was somebody's leg hanging out of that one, and whoever it belonged to was too excited to move it. Doc started the car motor, meshed gears, backed blindly, feeding the machine gas.

The car got headway. It was heavy, tons heavy, and when it hit the door, which had been closed, there was an earthquake crash and a rending ripping, and the door caved. The car went out.

Doc kept on backing. Wind whipped in the open door, made the black smoke vapor boil around and leave the car. Then the bronze man could see a little.

He drove down the street a short distance, stopped the car.

Police were running toward them.

In the back seat Monk suddenly yelled, "That danged Lawn got in here by accident!"

"Hold 'im!" Renny rumbled. "I'll pop 'im!"

There was a long moment of quiet, then Monk made a muttering noise.

"You wouldn't want to hit a corpse!" the homely chemist mumbled.

THE verdict of the coroner's jury: In the case of Birmingham Lawn, death came about accidentally as the result of a bullet fired by a malefactor employed by the deceased.

"That's a long-winded way of sayin'," Monk explained, "that he got in front of one of them bullets the gang was throwin' around so free."

Said the police chief: "We are satisfied, gentlemen of the press, that with the aid of Doc Savage, we have every crook in this case in custody."

"He means all Lawn's gang are in the calaboose," Monk explained.

Said a tabloid newspaper:

DOC SAVAGE EXPOSES GIGGLING GHOSTS

AS HORRIBLE HOAX

"And that means," Monk explained, "that we'll have to hide out to keep newspaper guys from runnin' us ragged, wantin' to know details."

Monk was wrong about that, though. This time Doc Savage did not run from the glare of newspaper publicity. He did not exactly seek it, but he did not disappear. Doc stuck it out so he could work in the hospitals.

Every day the bronze man made rounds of hospitals where gas victims were confined, helping with the treatments, studying them. Largely as a result of Doc Savage's tremendous medical knowledge, the victims eventually recovered.

THE GIGGLING GHOSTS

The families of those who had died sued the estate of Birmingham Lawn, and got enormous cash settlements. Ham, the lawyer, saw to that.

Ham and Doc Savage also saw that the land bought up by the S.R.G.V. was returned to the former owners. The land bought by the Doc Savage Relief Agency was also returned. Too, heirs of Birmingham Lawn were persuaded to turn over Lawn's estate to recompense gas victims, and it was to be suspected that Ham had a good deal to do with that, also.

"It begins to look," Monk explained, "like everything ain't gonna be so bad."

Monk also had a complaint to make. A disgusted one.

"When we get this giggling ghost mess straightened up," he grumbled, "I guess we gotta go to a wedding."

He meant the wedding of William Henry Hart and Miami Davis.

THE END