

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Table of Contents

<u>THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS</u>	1
<u>A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson</u>	1
<u>Chapter I. THE CAMPHOR WRAITH</u>	1
<u>Chapter II. ACCIDENT CASE</u>	9
<u>Chapter III. THE SECOND CORPSE</u>	18
<u>Chapter IV. THE VAULT TRAP</u>	23
<u>Chapter V. THE ROCK DEVIL</u>	31
<u>Chapter VI. THE BALD-HEADED GIRL AGAIN</u>	37
<u>Chapter VII. THE OMINOUS BEQUEST</u>	43
<u>Chapter VIII. TURKEY-NECK</u>	48
<u>Chapter IX. ONE MILLION</u>	53
<u>Chapter X. CAMPHOR WRAITH UNMASKED</u>	60
<u>Chapter XI. END AND BEGINNING</u>	66
<u>Chapter XII. DEATH WARNING</u>	71
<u>Chapter XIII. GRIM MANSION</u>	79
<u>Chapter XIV. AGATE DEVIL AGAIN</u>	88
<u>Chapter XV. DESTINATION UNKOWN</u>	95
<u>Chapter XVI. THE DEVIL'S BREW</u>	101

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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- [Chapter I. THE CAMPHOR WRAITH](#)
- [Chapter II. ACCIDENT CASE](#)
- [Chapter III. THE SECOND CORPSE](#)
- [Chapter IV. THE VAULT TRAP](#)
- [Chapter V. THE ROCK DEVIL](#)
- [Chapter VI. THE BALD-HEADED GIRL AGAIN](#)
- [Chapter VII. THE OMINOUS BEQUEST](#)
- [Chapter VIII. TURKEY-NECK](#)
- [Chapter IX. ONE MILLION](#)
- [Chapter X. CAMPHOR WRAITH UNMASKED](#)
- [Chapter XI. END AND BEGINNING](#)
- [Chapter XII. DEATH WARNING](#)
- [Chapter XIII. GRIM MANSION](#)
- [Chapter XIV. AGATE DEVIL AGAIN](#)
- [Chapter XV. DESTINATION UNKOWN](#)
- [Chapter XVI. THE DEVIL'S BREW](#)

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Chapter I. THE CAMPHOR WRAITH

SOME ONE who made his living with words once said that drama is everywhere. Presumably, this was intended to mean that many persons contact adventure and fail to recognize it.

This was undoubtedly the case at the Los Angeles airport on one particular Monday evening. There was something sinister underway. But no one was sharp-eyed enough to realize it.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

This was explained by the fact that the two men in the black coupé were good actors. There was nothing furtive or suspicious about the manner in which the car drove into the parking lot, where hundreds of other machines were already stationed.

The two did not leave their car immediately. They might have been just two more spectators.

It was an inspiring scene over which their eyes roved. The airport administration building, around which the milling throng was most dense, was washed with brilliant light. Beacons cut great swaths through the darkness, and out on the field ground lights were rows of colored dots. Every available source of illumination at the airport appeared to have been tapped.

Somewhere among the parked cars, a pint-size newsboy with a barrel-size voice was shouting: "World-girdling airship to touch Los Angeles! Read about it!"

The two in the coupé listened icily to the boy's shouting.

"Doc Savage and two aids aboard airship!" yelled the news-vending urchin.

The two men in the coupé looked as if a hornet had suddenly blown into the car.

The newsboy howled, "Doc Savage making mystery trip!"

"Mystery trip!" one snarled. "Savage ain't kiddin' nobody! He's found out about them agate devils! He's maybe got a line on our whole—"

"Shut up, you nut!" gritted the other. "Somebody might overhear!"

The other put out his jaw angrily. "Who you gettin' tough with?"

"You, you dope! Talking about agate satans! Next thing you'll be broadcasting to the world that in China and Germany and England and—" The man stopped and swallowed. "This is too big to take any chances with."

HE was a large man, who had the look of one who made his living with his muscles. There was little intelligence perceptible in his heavy-featured, brutal face. He was the type who did what he was told, and probably was not too particular about what it was. His clothes were flashy and in bad taste.

The second man began to speak.

"That airship came from Europe, and is a new type, making an experimental flight around the world," he said. "Doc Savage joined the crew unexpectedly in New York. He is not going on around the world, but is getting off here; so there's not much doubt about what he's coming for."

This man was rather slender, remarkably well dressed, and would have been handsome had it not been for the lower part of his face. He had a hybrid visage. His eyes, his forehead, were fine and delicate. The rest of his countenance was rather terrible. Something had happened to it in the past, making the skin and flesh below loose and rubbery. The folds of tissue lay in gullied lines.

The lower part of this man's face had a somewhat hair-raising way of retaining whatever expression was on it. It seemed incapable of changing expression voluntarily. The man had a discomfiting habit of fingering his

countenance.

He would push up the corners of his mouth with his fingers, giving his face a grim smile, and the smile would stay there.

The other man, the one with the muscles, growled. "I've heard things about this bronze guy. He's arsenic to some."

"We'll stop him," grunted the hybrid-faced man.

"Yeah?"

"A little agate devil will take care of that."

All the muscles of the other seemed to swell and harden. His voice whispered, "You mean we're gonna kill Doc Savage?"

The first man absently touched his lips, straightening them. They remained straight, due to the weird condition of his facial muscles.

"There is too much at stake to take chances," he said, "Sure, we'll have to kill him!"

A new sound came into the night air. It might have been a big swarm of metal bumble-bees in the distance. The crowd by the administration building milled more violently, surging toward the confining rail. Faces turned upward. The distant buzz became louder, a deep-throated drone.

The airport searchlights darted up like great rapiers, probing the black belly of the night. The tip of one of these beams picked up a silvery glint. Play of all the searchlights concentrated on that point. A huge strange shape began to take on form and outline.

It was the world-circling dirigible.

The airship descended. A ground crew laid hold of its dangling hand lines, and it was snugged down to a temporary mooring. Pandemonium broke loose. The crowd surged through perspiring police lines.

It became evident that many of the spectators were interested in more than a mere glimpse of the airship. They wanted to see some one else, an individual of whom they had heard a great deal. The throng surrounded the dirigible passengers as they began to alight. These latter wore ordinary business garments, for the dirigible accommodations were the height of comfort and luxury.

Whenever a passenger of more than ordinary size appeared, a roar went up from the crowd.

"There's Doc Savage!"

A moment later, they would find they were mistaken.

Men garbed as the dirigible crew got little attention. It was easy to sort these men out. They wore rather unusual cover-all suits—a special stratosphere garment, with attached hood.

Thus it happened that the crowd overlooked a little group of three figures, clad in the stratosphere suits, that moved across the field to the operations office. One of the trio was short, immensely broad, with long simian

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

arms which dangled hairy hands below his knees. The other figure was slender, of medium height, and carried one article oddly at variance with his aerial garb: a thin, black cane.

The third member was far the most dominating of the trio. His size was remarkable. The stratosphere suit hood was over his head, and there was a flap with goggle attachment down over his features, concealing them completely.

It was possible that, among the spectators, only one individual recognized the trio. This was the fellow with the unlovely hybrid face.

"There goes Doc Savage and his two aids!" he hissed at his stupid-looking assistant. "Let's get our job done!"

Doc Savage entered the airport operations office and lifted the goggle flap of the stratosphere suit and chucked back the hood. Perhaps the most striking thing about the features thus revealed was their bronze hue and the fine texture of the skin. The modeling of the face—the wide forehead, straight nose, firm mouth—bespoke rigidly directed force. Sinews of the neck, almost startling in size, indicated tremendous physical strength.

The bronze man's eyes lent a touch of weirdness to his countenance. They were like pools of flake gold, swirled by hidden current. The bronze man spoke and his voice, clear and resonant, perfectly modulated, was as attention-arresting as a police siren.

"Take care of this, Monk," he requested, and handed his aid a pouchlike bag.

"Monk" pursed a tremendous mouth and handled the pouch gingerly. "I don't like the dang thing that's inside this."

Doc made no reply.

Monk continued, musingly, "What I mean, it's queer! The whole thing is queer! It's a dag-gone mystery, and I hate mysteries!"

Instead of replying, Doc Savage said, "Wait here. I'll look after the baggage. In the excitement, some of it might not be unloaded."

A moment later, he was gone.

Monk had a pleasant homely face, which bore out his resemblance to an ape. He turned the document case in his hands, looking puzzled.

"Do not strain your one brain cell over it," the other man of the trio that had departed the airship, advised.

This individual was slender, dapper, with a high forehead, intelligent eyes and the flexible mouth of an orator. He still held his thin black cane.

"The great Ham speaking!" Monk sneered. "Knows all, sees all, says all!"

The two glared at each other.

An old acquaintance of the two would not have been surprised. No one could remember either of the pair having addressed a civil word to the other. Contrarily enough, each had found past occasions to risk his life to

aid the other.

Monk was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, the chemist of Doc Savage's group of five aids. "Ham" was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, and one of the smartest lawyers ever turned out of Harvard.

Doc's three other aids were not accompanying him on this adventure, for they were practicing their various professions in other parts of the world. They were "Renny"—Colonel John Renwick—famous for his engineering accomplishments; "Johnny"—William Harper Littlejohn—one of the greatest living experts of geology and archaeology; and "Long Tom"—Major Thomas J. Roberts—a wizard with electricity.

Unexpectedly, Monk's hand which held the document case made a flicking gesture.

Ham, staring at the hand, was puzzled; but only for an instant. Ham did not turn around. Instead, he whipped a hand inside his stratosphere suit to an armpit where was holstered a machine pistol of Doc's own design.

"Leave it there!"

The voice came from behind Ham, and sounded as if the speaker were delivering the words entirely through his nose.

Ham raised his hands, not too briskly, then came around to face the door. The stranger was standing half across the sill of the door, one foot in and one foot out, as if ready to go in either direction. His gun was a small cannon, the kind of weapon with which Mr. Colt had cornered the frontier trade when men liked their hardware substantial to the eye. The gun did not waver.

The man behind the weapon had the face of a beet and the neck of a turkey. So far as could be seen; there were only two teeth in his mouth; one was in the upper jaw, the other directly below it, and they were tobacco-stained until they resembled a pair of mahogany pegs.

"They've got it!" this strange-looking individual said to some one out of sight behind him. "You can come in and get it!"

The one who had been spoken to was a woman—a girl, in her early twenties. She was very beautiful.

It was not her clothing that made her such. She wore carelessly a nondescript felt hat, leather jacket, and one of those rough and ready tweed skirts which look as if they wrap around.

Evidently she had definite ideas about what she wanted. She walked soundlessly in tennis shoes, reached Monk, and snatched the leather document case from under his arm.

"Here's a tip!" she snapped. "Clear out, see? Get back on that airship and go around the world, or something!"

She had a nice enough voice.

Monk growled, "Just what's the big idea?"

The girl eyed him intently. "You know what you're mixing into?"

"No!" Monk exclaimed heartily.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Fine!" said the girl. "Maybe you won't be killed."

"Haw!" Monk jeered. "Am I scared!"

"You would be," the girl snapped, "if you knew just what you are running up against—"

"Get movin'!" advised the man with the beet face and turkey neck.

Carrying the document case, the girl began to back toward the door.

Then the red-faced, turkey-necked individual holding the gun got a surprise of his own. A voice gritted behind him.

"Just let go of that cannon!"

THE scrawny-necked man let his arm bend down, and the gun fell out of his hand.

Ham darted to the dropped revolver, scooped it up, and used it to gesture its discomfited owner inside the room.

Monk's pleasantly unlovely features were now wearing a smirk of supreme satisfaction.

"Boy, was my ventriloquism good!" he chortled. "If I had a stuffed doll to sit on my knee, I'd join a circus!"

The turkey-necked man and the attractive girl registered surprise. They stared at the door, as if loath to believe that no one was there, and that the voice had merely been a ventriloquial effort on Monk's part.

Then Monk proceeded to spoil everything. He reached for the leather document folder, which the girl still held. She extended it toward him, as if glad to get rid of it.

What happened next gave the homely chemist one of the genuine shocks of his career.

The girl dropped the leather folder. And before Monk could stiffen, resist in any way, she had seized his arm and the arm had become a lever by which he was yanked toward her, twisted, and sent spinning across the room. It was beautiful jujutsu.

Monk's bulk crashed Ham. The big revolver filled the room with noise, and its bullet dug plaster out of the ceiling.

The girl had lost her hair. In the sudden exertion, the wig which she wore had been dislodged. The girl's head was absolutely bald.

She started forward, as if to seize the document case.

"No!" barked her companion. "The dude'll use the gun before you can get it!"

The girl surrendered ideas of securing the case, spun, sprinted out of the room. Her companion followed, and they made quite a clatter running down the corridor leading to the outside.

MONK and Ham were as tangled on the floor as a pair of quarreling octopuses. Their separation was delayed somewhat by the tendency each displayed to be as rough with the other as possible. Finally they separated, stood erect, and ran in pursuit of their two assailants.

"She was bald-headed," Monk gulped. "Notice that?"

Ham stared at Monk, and a quick succession of emotions swept his face—rage, utter scorn, superior contempt. Then—most galling of all to Monk—derisive mirth. Ham emitted a roar of laughter.

"He flies through the air with the greatest of ease," he jeered. "When the lady his arm does seize—"

Monk's ears got red.

Then came the sound of a car. It was a machine leaving the parking lot in a hurry. Monk and Ham raced toward the sound.

It was hopeless, of course. The car got away into the night. As it passed under a distant floodlight at the entrance arch, Monk got a glimpse of the occupants—the woman, and the man with the scrawny neck. Monk endeavored furiously to find a car which was unlocked, but failed.

He was still at the task, when Doc Savage and Ham came up. Ham had dropped back to find Doc. Ham was still chuckling.

"Monk was going to join the circus," he smirked. "He's a ventriloquist. And you should have seen him rehearse an acrobatic act with the bald-headed girl!"

The miserable sound that came out of Monk's throat made Ham look very happy.

Doc Savage asked, "What were they after?"

"That document case," Ham declared.

They worked back toward the operations office and, wishing to avoid the throng, made for the rear door.

Doc Savage stopped suddenly. "Wait!"

Monk and Ham halted. Anxious peering into the surrounding darkness showed them nothing.

"What is it?" Monk demanded.

"Detect that odor?" Doc queried.

Monk sniffed. Ham did likewise. They both caught the scent.

"Moth balls," Monk grunted.

"Camphor," Ham corrected.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"That does somewhat describe the odor," Doc said. "But it probably is neither. It has a distinctly different quality of its own. See if you can detect the stuff on your persons."

Monk and Ham sniffed.

"Not on us," they declared.

"It is distinctly noticeable on my stratosphere suit," Doc told them.

The bronze man finally moved forward again toward the operations office.

"Queer business," Ham murmured. "First, the attempt to seize the document case. Second, that odor."

"I told you it was all a dag-gone mystery!" Monk grunted.

THEY entered through the rear of the brightly lighted main operations office, and Doc Savage removed his stratosphere suit. He made a bundle of the garments and hailed an airport attendant. Doc handed him the suit.

"In my baggage you will find an unlocked duffle bag," he told the attendant. "Put this suit there, please."

The attendant took the suit and walked off.

Monk squinted curiously at Doc Savage. "What was the idea?"

"That odor," Doc told him. "So far, we have experienced no symptoms of toxic action; so, presumably, it was not a poison gas. Yet the odor was strange, quite different. An analysis of it, during spare time, might be interesting."

"I see," Monk said, vaguely.

Ham flourished his black cane, caught it, then untwisted the handle in a manner that showed the innocent-looking thing was, in reality, a sword cane.

"That pair wanted the document case!" he snapped.

The homely chemist, Monk, still carried the document case. He tapped it with a finger.

"Let's look the things in here over again," he said, "and see if we can figure out—"

The words seemed to freeze in his throat—freeze because of a sound that came through the door from the hallway outside. It carried a quality utterly blood-curdling. The product of a human throat, a cry with agony in its every pulsation.

Doc Savage was already diving into the hall. The other two followed him. They headed for the shrieks, running down a dark hall.

The light!

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

They saw it, quite unexpectedly. It must have been a tremendous light, because it was reflected down corridors; and even then, its intensity blinded. It had a reddish quality—or was it yellowish? It lasted only a moment, and then vanished.

They ran on. Doc Savage produced a small flashlight and sprayed light over two lumps on the hall floor.

One of the lumps was the stratosphere suit which Doc had given to the attendant to place in the duffle bag.

The other lump was a human body, contorted in a manner that was utterly grisly.

The shouts had attracted the throng. People began to run up, many of them to take a look at the thing in the flashlight glow, then regret their impulsiveness.

Most hideous was the hole in the center of the dead man's chest. A cannon ball going through might have left such a path.

The dead man was the attendant to whom Doc Savage had given the suit.

"Blaze!" the homely Monk choked. "Lookit!"

A miniature devil carved from agate stood on the floor near the corpse.

The floor was of concrete, and the little devil stood perfectly upright on it. The height of the thing could be more than spanned by a man's hand; but the workmanship of it, the proportioning, the carving, was perfect.

It was a rather glassy red in color.

Monk leaned over to pick the thing up. He touched it, howled and wrenched his hand back.

"It's hot!" he squalled.

Chapter II. ACCIDENT CASE

MONK GASPED, "what killed the guy, Doc?"

Doc Savage, apparently not hearing, dropped a handkerchief over the little satanic image. It was too hot to hold in the bare hands, but did not quite burn the handkerchief. He picked it up.

"Come on!" he rapped.

They ran through the hallway searching, but found nothing before the crowd, drawn by the cries and finding of the body, overran the place.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Hm—m—m," Monk scratched the bristles atop his bullet-shaped head. "It would be kinda hard to find anything now. But, say, this is the queerest dang thing I ever saw!"

Monk started to say something else, then gave a violent jerk. He had just noted that Doc was carrying a bundle under his right arm—the stratosphere suit which the airport attendant had been directed to put with the rest of the baggage. This suggested things to Monk.

"Lookit, Doc!" he gulped. "Remember the funny odor? It was on that suit!"

Instead of answering that question, Doc Savage, who had paused to examine the little satan image, said, "Here's something almost as strange. Notice the face of this image." The bronze man handed Monk a tiny magnifying glass.

Monk observed the face of the little devil image. The workmanship was exquisite.

"Recognize the face?" Doc asked.

"Yours!" Monk squalled. "Doc, this thing has your face!"

"Exactly!" Doc Savage said. "Now, let us look around."

The bronze man had spent almost no time around the body of the slain attendant, but this did not mean he was not going to make an investigation, for he now roamed over the operations office, flake-gold eyes searching. Finding nothing, he went outside. He was soon recognized, and became the center of a seething throng of autograph hunters. He gave up the search.

Some time later, Monk stood on tiptoe under the brightly lighted marquee of the administration building and stared over the thinning mass of parked cars. He frowned and shook his small head.

"A car was to meet us, wasn't it, Doc?" he asked. "Funny it don't show up."

"Nothing was said about the car having a driver," Doc Savage reminded him.

MONK still carried the black document case, and Doc now took this, opened it. It held, among other things, money and at least two, folded telegrams. Doc removed one of the telegrams, opened it and extended it for the scrutiny of Monk and Ham. It read:

DOC SAVAGE

NEW YORK CITY

BLUE CAR LICENSE CALIFORNIA 9K7376 WILL BE AT AIRPORT FOR YOUR USE.

MONTGOMERY MEDWIG PELL

"Uh—huh," Monk grunted. "Let's look around."

They found the car shortly. It surprised them somewhat, for it was a very big, very expensive town car, with the driver's compartment open.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Match you shyster, to see who drives," Monk suggested to Ham.

"Nothing doing!" snorted Ham. "You look the part! The job is yours."

Monk got behind the wheel. Doc and Ham entered the rear, and the machine was put in motion. Doc Savage rolled down the glass partition which separated them from the driver's compartment, in order that Monk might hear what was being said.

Progress proved very slow. There was something of a traffic jam near the airport.

From the front seat, Monk called, "Hey, read that first telegram we got, will you? I'd like to hear it again."

Doc Savage drew back the flap of the document case and extracted a second folded telegram. The traffic jam was holding their speed down, so Monk had time to read it:

DOC SAVAGE

NEW YORK CITY

HAVE CLIENT WHO HAS AUTHORIZED ME ENGAGE YOUR SERVICES FOR JOB OF SAVING NUMBER OF LIVES STOP CLIENT SAYS WILL PAY FOR YOUR SERVICES BY CONVERTING ANY REASONABLE SUM TO ANY CHARITY YOU NAME STOP CAN YOU COME LOS ANGELES AT ONCE STOP IT MIGHT BE ADVISABLE USE PRECAUTIONS

MONTGOMERY MEDWIG PELL

LAWYER

Monk passed the message back, said, "And so we wired him we could come, and he sent us the other message about the blue car being at the airport."

Ham said, "It looks as if it *were* advisable to use precautions. Wonder just what's back of this?"

No one answered. The big car worried at the traffic stream, making a little better time.

"Blazes!" Monk exploded, suddenly. "Look! This was fastened to the brake lever with a rubber and I just noticed it!"

He passed back a bit of cardboard. A business card, it bore on the front:

MONTGOMERY MEDWIG PELL

Attorney at Law

Suite 720 Western Bldg

Doc Savage turned the card over. The back of it bore a penciled inscription:

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

DOC SAVAGE:

Please come immediately to my office in the Western Building.

PELL.

"That," Monk said, "seems to fix us up."

THE Western Building proved to be a gaudy piece of showmanship. The terra cotta facade was illuminated much too brightly by a profusion of floodlamps. It had a distinctly cheap look.

The neighborhood bore out the feeling of cheap flash. It had been given what is slangily called a "front" at the outlay of the least expense possible. The sidewalks were too wide, and too cheap, because they were beginning to crack.

There was an alley alongside the Western Building.

Monk suggested, "I'd better run our bus in the alley and get it out of sight. Some crook might annex the tires."

"Very well," Doc Savage agreed.

The bronze man and Ham alighted in front of the Western Building, and Doc said, "We will wait here for you."

Monk drove into the alley and discovered a small court recessed into the rear of the office building. Provided, probably, for the loading and unloading of trucks.

Monk drove into this, turned off the ignition, and got out.

Monk's small eyes were sharp, and walking much in the paths of danger had given him an almost animal alertness. This accounted now for his observing of something suspicious.

The something was a man who had popped his head around the corner of a door which opened on the little freight court. The fellow had obviously been watching Monk, and he jerked back suddenly.

Monk scowled, taking a moment to make up his mind. He was in a suspicious mood after the events at the airport, so he dashed for the doorway.

The man he had discovered, ran. His feet made noise in a passage. Monk charged after him. The rapidity with which he gained on his quarry surprised even himself.

The fleeing man was short, but very fat. He was not built for fast movement. Somehow, he resembled a gorged buzzard trying to get started in flight. He even flapped his arms in a way that carried out that impression.

The fleeing man was running past open doors, the rooms beyond which were darkened. Monk kept on his trail, centering all attention on catching him. That was a mistake.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

A chair swung out of a darkened doorway and broke itself to bits on Monk's nubbin of a skull. Monk put his head down, turned a perfect somersault, landed flat on his back, and did not move.

MONK was not entirely senseless, but the effect was about the same. He could not see very well, and there was no strength in his body for resistance. He felt hands half drag, half walk him down the passage. They were going back the way they had come.

The homely chemist heard the rumble of sliding doors, then caught that distinctive gasoline-and-oil odor which garages have. He got his eyes open, and bright light made his eyeballs ache. This slight pain seemed to help dissolve the mists in his head.

He felt something making new pain against his side, looked down and saw a gun.

The man who held the gun was big, had a heavy-featured, brutal face. He looked like a man who would use the gun.

"Who the devil is this ape?" he demanded.

"He's Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, commonly called Monk," said a new voice. "One of Doc Savage's men."

Monk twisted to scowl at the speaker. The fellow made interesting inspection. He was a well-built man, who would have been handsome but for one thing—the lower part of his face.

The lower portion of his face was loose and rubbery. The folds of it lay in gullied lines.

"What're we gonna do with him?" pondered the gun-wielder aloud. "There's too much involved in this, and too many men have died already, to let one guy mess the works."

"Savage isn't wise to what it's all about," growled the man whose lower face was like rubber. "We will give this fellow the same thing we were giving the other one."

Mention of another victim caused Monk to peer around again.

The room was a ground floor garage, rather large, and the ceiling was supported by a number of pillars—heavy girders of steel encased in a covering of concrete.

To one pillar, a man was tied. The manner in which the fellow's head sagged down on his chest indicated he was senseless. A rope, passed around the man and the pillar many times, held him erect. The fellow had dark and very baggy clothing, and rather gray hair.

A vicious jab from the gun took Monk's attention away from the other prisoner.

"Over by that post!" directed the heavily built thug.

Monk was never loath to fight. He made a grab at the gun, but he was too dazed. He missed it, and the thug promptly employed it to crack him over the head. Dazed, Monk was rushed over to the same post to which the other man was tied. A wadded handkerchief was used for a gag.

Monk was jerked around so that his back was to the post, and they began to tie him.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Monk was mad, but not too greatly worried. Doc Savage was close. These men would surely say something—at least ask questions before they did anything drastic. Doc would come to investigate before long.

A moment later, Monk came to the chilly conclusion that he had been too optimistic. The men finished tying him. They went to the back of the garage, got into a car. They started the engine.

"Everything set?" asked the man behind the wheel.

"Everything set," agreed the man with the hybrid face.

THE car started forward. It came fast. Monk experienced exactly such a feeling as would result were the contents of an ice water cooler emptied down his back.

The automobile was going to smash not only himself, but the other prisoner!

It was a clumsy way of doing murder. Also, it was a grimly reasonable one. The bodies could be dumped beside a road somewhere and, when found, they would look as if they had been victims of a hit-and-run driver.

Monk twisted, squirmed. He tried to jump up, and he tried to sink down. But the ropes held him. He tried shutting his eyes. That did not work. He had to look, somehow. The front of the car seemed to get bigger and bigger.

Came the rescue. It was not exactly in the proverbial nick of time. It had been necessary for the dramatics to reach this crucial point before the thing could be executed properly.

Doc Savage was inside the garage, behind one of the pillars. And it was necessary for the car to come abreast before he could act without being discovered. He moved now, his form a bronze blur as he leaped.

Both feet thumped the forward edge of the front wheel on the left side. The impact knocked both front wheels almost as far to the right as they would go, steering wheel spinning in the hands of the man who held it.

Rubber screamed. The car swerved. It hit the front of the garage, the doors. The crash, the yells of the men inside, made explosive bedlam. The garage doors were fragile, and the car went on through into the loading areaway.

The driver could think fast. He straightened the wheel frantically, and skidded into the alley. Down came his foot on the accelerator, and the machine made much noise and departed rapidly.

Doc Savage ran to the town car Monk had parked. But the keys were not in it. Monk had taken the keys, had lost them sometime during the skirmish.

The two would-be killers and their car were gone before pursuit could be organized.

DOC SAVAGE came back to the pillar where Monk and his fellow victim were roped. Ham was unwinding the still-dazed chemist.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"What happened, Monk?" the lawyer asked.

"Saw a guy actin' funny," Monk growled. "I followed him, and him and his pals got me."

"So I see," Ham said, dryly.

"The two guys were fixin' to kill this fellow here," Monk said, ignoring the sarcasm. "They must have thought I was wise, and wanted to get me out of the way."

Doc Savage's metallic fingers were plucking at the lashings which upheld the baggy-suited, gray-haired man beside Monk. The cords were half-inch cotton rope, and the knots were very difficult to untie. Doc Savage simply broke them, his cabled bronze hands accomplishing this somewhat amazing feat without much apparent difficulty.

Doc held the limp form erect. An ominous blue swelling showed back of the senseless man's left ear. His eyelids began to flutter. The unconscious man's face was pinch-lipped, angular. But the startling thing about him was his skin; it was surprisingly youthful, almost boyish. Yet his rumpled thatch of graying hair went with advanced years. His eyes were still glazed, but his lips began moving.

"Whereas, the parties of the first part and second part, having with malicious intent—" The man's dazed, mumbling words became unintelligible.

Monk said, "Sounds like shyster lingo to me."

Doc Savage shook the gray-haired man gently, and, after a bit, the fellow's eyes began to lose their glazed look. He straightened and, when Doc released him, managed to stand, weaving only a little. He blinked at them.

"Doc Savage!" he said, hoarsely. "I've seen—your—pictures!"

The bronze man nodded slightly. "And you?"

"Montgomery Medwig Pelt is my name," said the man.

"Blazes!" Monk exploded. "This is the guy who wired us to come to Los Angeles!"

"What was behind this attack on you?" Doc Savage asked Montgomery Medwig Pelt.

"I do not know," the man with the old hair and the young skin answered.

"Who were the attackers?"

"I never saw them before," said Pelt. The tall, thin, stooped barrister waved in the general direction of the upper part of the building. "Why not go to my suite of offices?" he suggested. "Talk will be easier there; maybe safer."

The white-haired attorney led the way to a door in one corner of the basement garage and climbed stairs to the first-floor lobby, where a lone elevator took them upward.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

LAWYER Montgomery Medwig Pell's offices strove hard for an effect of spaciousness. The two rooms were large; but they had hardly enough furniture to keep from seeming bare. Cheap desks, cheap chairs. The set-up was not impressive. The inner sanctum contained a case full of legal tomes that looked as if they had been picked up secondhand.

Pell, looking seedy, sank weakly into a chair behind a large desk. There was dust on the unused parts of the desk.

Doc Savage waited for Pell to begin speaking. When the attorney showed no sign of doing so, the bronze man asked a question.

"You summoned us from New York?" Doc queried.

Montgomery Medwig Pell promptly got down to brass tacks.

"Here are the facts," he said. "A week ago, I received a package and a letter. This is the letter."

He sorted through some papers, and handed over a typewritten sheet:

MONTGOMERY M. PELL,

Suite 720, Western Bldg.,

Los Angeles, Cal.

DEAR SIR:

I am seeking your services in a rather unusual matter. Enclosed is the sum of five thousand dollars (\$5,000) as a retainer. I hope the amount will be satisfactory.

My life is in danger. The lives of several other persons are also in danger. In fact, we are about to become the victims of an incredible terrible thing. But this letter is not one of explanation.

You probably think by now that I am perhaps insane. The five thousand is to persuade you otherwise.

At present, I can think of only one man capable of aiding myself and the others. He is a man who makes a business of getting people out of trouble. His name is Doc Savage.

Arrange to secure the help of Doc Savage, please.

Hold the enclosed package for instructions. Do not open.

I will telephone you later.

Sincerely,

C. WRAITH

"That," said Monk, "don't tell us a heck of a lot."

Pell sighed. "Nor me."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Know anything else?" Doc asked.

"A little," said Pell. "The next day, the fellow who wrote the letter telephoned and wanted to know if you were coming. I said you were. I was instructed to rent a safe-deposit box in the Cinema Trust Company and place the package in it."

"Had you opened it?"

"Oh, no! The letter said not to open it."

"Where is the package now?"

"I obeyed instructions and put it in a safe-deposit box in the Cinema Trust Company."

"What disposition were you to make finally of the package?"

"I was getting to that. I was to turn it over to you, when you arrived. And that, gentlemen, is everything I know about this mysterious affair. Why those men a while ago tried to kill me, I do not know. They neglected to explain."

Doc asked, "Did this C. Wraith happen to mention his full name?"

Pell frowned. "Oh, yes. Camphor Wraith."

"What?" Monk howled.

"Camphor Wraith. Strange, eh? Obviously a faked name."

"Doc!" Monk roared. "That stuff at the airport—the stuff that got on your flying suit—it had a camphor smell!"

"Camphor Wraith," Doc Savage repeated, slowly. "The name might have significance."

"It is all utterly baffling to me," Montgomery Medwig Pell murmured, weakly.

Doc Savage suggested, "Perhaps the package you put in the bank vault will help explain."

Pell heaved up out of his creaking chair. "An excellent thought!"

Monk frowned at him, said, "You sound kinda relieved?"

"I can assure you," Pell murmured, "that I shall be very glad to get this affair off my hands. And that will be as soon as I transfer the package to you."

Doc Savage led the way out of the office into the hallway. Since the others were slow in following—Monk and Pell were still a bit dazed—the bronze man waited for a moment. His flake-gold eyes roved the corridor, searching everywhere. Doc had long ago found it necessary to make alertness habitual.

The bronze man's eyes steadied on a crack in the hallway ceiling.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

A PECULIAR line, that crack. It was very long, wandering from a spot near Pell's door, across the hall ceiling, and down to the top of a door opposite the attorney's office.

Monk, Ham and Pell came out into the hallway. Doc Savage accompanied them to the elevator. They all rode down silently.

In the cheap and gaudy lobby of the building, Doc Savage spoke.

"Wait here," he directed.

The others looked blank. Monk began, "But what—"

Doc Savage was already gone, mounting the stairway which zigzagged upward near the elevator shaft. The bronze man climbed swiftly until he reached the level of lawyer Pell's office. He did not step boldly into the corridor, but paused, out of sight.

A bronze hand went into an inside pocket, and came out with an object that resembled a fountain pen. A tug at one end of this caused it to elongate, telescope fashion. There were detachable caps at each end. The ingenious contrivance became a telescope, microscope, or periscope, merely by altering the lenses.

Doc Savage employed it as a periscope, to examine the hallway. The periscope showed the figure of a burly man coming out of the door opposite Pell's office—the door to which Doc had noticed ran the rather unusual ceiling crack. There was furtiveness in the burly fellow's manner. He ran to a window at the end of the corridor, glancing frequently over his shoulder, but not discovering the periscope.

He was one of the pair who had tried to murder Monk and Pell in the basement garage.

He raised the window, scrambled through it and disappeared, probably on a fire escape.

Doc Savage ran forward, swiftly, soundlessly. He produced a penknife. By standing on tiptoe, he could insert the point of the knife in the ceiling crack. He pried. A fine wire came out. This wire led from Pell's office to the room across the hallway.

Doc Savage traced the wire. In Pell's office, concealed behind a picture, he uncovered a sensitive pick-up microphone.

The room across the hall held a small box of apparatus—a vacuum tube amplifier to which the wires from the pick-up microphone ran. There was also a telephone headset, for listening purposes.

Chapter III. THE SECOND CORPSE

DOC SAVAGE did not make further examination of the elaborate set-up by which the spy hidden in the room across the hallway must have heard every word spoken in Pell's office.

Doc Savage moved with an almost phantom soundlessness, down the hall to the window through which the thick-bodied eavesdropper had disappeared. Rows of metal bars, dimly visible outside, indicated the means of departure—a fire escape.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

There was an alley below. Doc descended.

Reaching the alley, he gilded toward its mouth. He stopped for a moment, just before reaching the sidewalk, and used the periscope. His quarry was making swift progress down a side street. The fellow twisted his head frequently for a backward glance. He was nervous. That would not make trailing him any easier.

The man ahead turned into an all-night drug store at a corner.

Doc Savage did not abandon his caution, it not being entirely improbable that his quarry might have adopted the simple ruse of going into the drug store and watching through the show windows to see if he were being trailed.

The bronze man hugged the building fronts as he approached the brightly lighted window of the pharmacy, then used his periscope device again.

Inside, staring anxiously out of the window, stood the burly fellow whom Doc was trailing. Doc held the periscope tube perfectly still. The man had not seen it, and it was doubtful if he would, as long as it was not moved.

The man seemed to be watching something fixedly—something across the street. Doc drew back from the periscope tube and, turning his head only slightly, surveyed the street.

Across the thoroughfare, near the corner, a black coupé stood at the curb. Its engine was running, but so quietly that even Doc's trained ears could barely detect its purring. The car was dark.

It remained dark for only an instant. Then its interior was filled with a brief faint dab of light. This was followed shortly by a longer dab, also faint. The dome light in the coupé was being used to signal in the Morse code!

Of the appearance of the person in the coupé, switching the dome light on and off, little could be seen.

THE coupé suddenly went into motion. It traveled down the street and disappeared.

Doc turned his attention to the periscope and the man in the drug store. The fellow no longer stood at the window, but was going toward the back of the store. There was haste in his movements.

The drug store followed the current policy of dealing in everything from bathing suits to garden hose. The man purchased a package of stationery and some rather gaudy pink envelopes.

He carried his purchases to a telephone booth in the rear. He selected a sheet of the stationery, produced a pencil and began to write. He was not an accomplished scribe, but had difficulty with the composition.

He finally employed the telephone directory as a foundation on which to rest his paper while he wrote.

Tucking the single sheet of stationery into one of the pink envelopes, the man quitted the phone booth. He left the rest of the stationery and the envelopes behind in the booth. He departed from the drug store by a side door.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Doc Savage promptly entered by the front door. The bronze man made directly for the telephone booth, and grasped the directory which had been used for a writing pad. He ripped off the cover, folded the thick, heavy sheet and consigned it to an inner pocket of his clothing.

A moment later, Doc Savage was making a cautious survey from the side door by which his quarry had departed. The fellow was on a side street, running.

A nighthawking taxicab was parked at the distant corner. Doc's quarry reached this, yanked the rear door open and popped inside. The cab began to move.

Doc Savage glanced about in search of another taxicab. There was none in sight.

Small trees lined the sidewalk, making dark shadows. The bronze man took to this murk and ran. Doc, in perfect physical condition and in possession of muscles developed by a lifetime of intensive training, was a remarkable runner. He could travel at a pace which some adjudged as superhuman. Yet his ability to run was fabulous only when compared to the speed other men could make. Pitted against an automobile, he was distinctly outclassed. The cab began to draw ahead.

Three blocks distant, a traffic light was red. The cab obeyed the law and stopped. Doc began to regain the ground he had lost. The cab rolled on. Doc increased his speed—then the unexpected happened.

The quarry got out of the cab. Doc caught a glimpse of him as he sought shelter in the darkness along the sidewalk.

The cab turned around in the middle of the street and came back, passing under a street lamp. The driver had the pink envelope. Clutched with it was a wad of green paper. Money. What the combination of letter and money meant, was not hard to fathom: The driver had been paid to deliver the note.

THERE came the sound of a motor car approaching. Doc Savage saw the machine itself, an instant later. It was the same black coupé that had been parked before the drug store, the dome light winking.

The car came along the street and swung in, as if to pick up the man Doc was following.

In doing this, it was necessary for the machine to pass the bronze man; and Doc, peering intently, got a look at the face of the driver. The lower part of it was rubbery, line-gullied. The visage of another of the men who had escaped from the basement garage of the Western Building after attempting to kill Monk and the lawyer, Montgomery Medwig Pell.

Doc Savage hurtled out of the shadows, angling diagonally across the street toward the slowing machine and the man it was preparing to pick up. Doc made no attempt at concealment. He wanted to be seen. He even shouted.

The man Doc had been following whirled at the shout. He saw the big bronze figure bearing down on him. The significance of the situation struck him instantly. He could not reach the coupé before Doc cut him off!

The thug emitted one sharp squeak of fear, gave up all ideas of reaching the coupé, and fled. He drew a revolver and began to fire backward over his shoulder in a manner so reckless that only rank luck could have let him hit anything.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The hybrid-faced driver of the coupé also got a gun in action. He showed no such carelessness with his marksmanship. Orange flame and gun roar came out of the coupé window with measured precision.

Doc felt cold air stir, and the snap of a bullet almost against his face. He veered, seeking shadows. The gun in the coupé roared five times—evidently all of the shells it held, because silence followed.

The man whose lower face was rubbery leaned out of the coupé window and shouted at the fleeing one.

"Know where to head for?" he squalled.

"Where?" screeched the fleeing man, without slackening his pace.

"The place I signaled you with the dome light!" howled the man in the coupé.

After that, the car got in motion. It left the scene completely in the space of seconds.

Doc Savage's quarry reached an alley. As he entered it, the man turned to see how far behind was his bronze nemesis.

Turning to look over a shoulder while running is a feat which requires coordination and agility. This man lacked one or the other, for his rather large feet became entangled and he hit the alley paving with a squawk and a thud. The man was up again almost instantly, and continued running down the alley.

Doc reached the alley mouth. He went in quickly, but warily, resorting to the gait known to football players as a change of pace. His rate of speed was not the same from one instant to another, and made him a difficult target for a gun.

Then he caught the odor.

It was faint, so faint that attempting to ascertain its actual existence only worried the nostrils. A moment or two was required for Doc's olfactory sense even to identify it.

Camphor—or moth balls! That described it as accurately as any description could, although there was a vague difference which led to the suspicion it was neither of these.

DOC slowed almost to a stop, his movements very wary. The only light in the alley was yellow overflow from a night lamp burning in the back of some store.

Then came a sound that jerked the bronze man into swift motion. It was a quivering sound, and made one think of razor blades gritting on glass. A man's scream. Utter terror it held, and it came from ahead.

There were foot noises ahead—not sounds which might be made by a man walking or even running. They were frenzied foot-slappings and scrapings, a struggle.

The screams came again and again. They were not nice to listen to. The shrill screams suddenly became fainter. The victim must have ducked into one of the buildings which lined the alley.

It took Doc Savage only split-seconds to find the door through which the cries still came. The door was closed. The bronze man found fastenings. The portal remained closed; it was wrenched. Barred on the inside.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The door was thick—a slab of wood. Doc jarred it with his shoulder. It held.

Then, muffled by the thick panel, the screaming voice began to make words. The victim must have heard Doc at the door.

"Who's there?" he squalled.

There were, perhaps, a number of reasons why Doc Savage should not reveal his identity; but the bronze man, appraising them all swiftly in his mind, found none worth considering.

"Doc Savage!" he identified himself through the door. If the bronze man expected the victim within to be frightened or become silent at the news, he got a surprise.

"Savage!" squalled the fellow. *"The damn thing is tryin' to kill me!"*

The weird odor, like moth balls, yet different, was very strong.

"The Agate Devil!" the man inside screamed suddenly. "It's been killing—all over the world—gonna kill—plan under way—go to Solar Seven—"

He broke off and bawled out in utter horror. There was the stamping of feet, as if he struggled madly.

Doc hit the door again. It resisted.

"The Agate Devil!" the man inside screamed. "Savage! Get to Solar Seven—Solar Seven—"

That was all he said. While Doc Savage hit the door with a force which only alloy-hard muscles could withstand, the cries of the man within trailed away, as if something had dragged him into a deep hole.

Then the fantastic light appeared.

THE lurid yellow glow, the same unholy luminance which Doc had seen at the airport—it was, if anything, now more unnatural.

Only around the edges of the door was the unearthly light visible. Doc Savage sought to get an eye to these cracks to peer inside, but the apertures were situated so that this was impossible.

Then the mystifying ochereous glow disappeared. There was no noise, no commotion. The eerie luminance simply faded, and complete darkness took its place. There was silence.

The alley began to echo with the sound of running feet. These noises approached Doc, coming from the direction of the street: Three men racing furiously, judging from the sound.

A moment later, the newcomers appeared—Monk and Ham, trailed by lawyer Pell.

"Doc!" Monk howled. "That you?"

"Here," Doc Savage called.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"What in blazes happened?" demanded Monk. "That screaming! We heard it back in Pell's office building! Man, it sounded like somebody was plenty scared!"

Doc Savage did not make explanations.

"We must get this door open," he said.

The bronze man now took from a pocket a small affair of folded leather that might have suggested a needle case. The contents of this somewhat resembled needles, except that they were longer and curved in various strange shapes. It was the lock-picking outfit which the bronze man always carried. He employed the little probes on the door.

The door seemed to be secured by a stout spring lock, which, no doubt, had sprung when the fleeing man slammed the panel. There ensued some minutes, when only the slight clicking of Doc's instrument could be heard. Then the door came open.

So intense was the darkness within that it seemed to flow out of the opening. No flicker of emotion showed on Doc's metallic features, as he stepped through.

The place became brilliantly white with light as Doc found an electric switch. Monk, Ham, and Pell sidled gingerly through the door.

It was a shabby room, apparently long unused. The instant they were inside, Monk and Ham stopped short. Pell also seemed to freeze in his tracks.

"Blazes!" Monk gulped, hoarsely.

They all looked at what was on the floor.

It was a man, a corpse. The dead visage was that of the thick-bodied fellow whom Doc had trailed after catching the man eavesdropping outside Montgomery Medwig Pell's law office.

Horrible contortion had come upon the dead man's features in his last moments, and still lingered. Yet that mask was not what gripped their attention and made Monk and Ham look somewhat strange, and made lawyer Pell become white and trembling.

The chest of the dead man had a hole in it. Had it been possible to find some one callous enough to do so, an arm could have been thrust through the hole.

"Lookit!" Monk leveled an arm at the concrete floor of the chamber.

On the floor stood a devil of agate.

Chapter IV. THE VAULT TRAP

HOMELY, APISH Monk's little eyes seemed on the point of jumping out of their pits of gristle, as he stared at the tiny statuette.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"The airport—that hole in the body—the red devil—" Monk, for once, had difficulty finding words. "Was there that glow of light, too, Doc?"

"The light came for a moment," Doc Savage admitted.

They all stared at the little scarlet devil. It was an unlovely thing, infinitely satanic. The statuette could not have been six inches over all. Droplets of what looked like molten stone clung to it, and a little puddle about the feet of the thing was still smoking.

Monk waddled over, reached down toward the devil, then jerked his hand back.

"It's hot as—as—hell!" he muttered.

"Search the place," Doc directed.

The building was not old, but whoever owned it had let it go to wrack, and, patently, none of it had been in use for a long time. They went over everything with the utmost thoroughness.

They found exactly nothing.

Monk wound up in the alley and sniffed curiously.

"There's that camphor smell," he said. "Still here."

"Moth balls," corrected Ham.

Monk scowled. "You know so much—maybe you can explain what happened to that guy inside? How'd that little red devil get there? An' what's it mean?"

Ham, rather than confess to Monk that the whole thing had him bewildered, turned and walked off.

Monk shifted his frown to lawyer Montgomery Medwig Pell.

"Don't you know anything about this?" he demanded.

"Nothing!" Lawyer Pell wrung his hands. "I wish I had never become involved in this, indeed I do! It is all utterly confounding to me!"

Monk went back into the death room and found Doc Savage kneeling on the floor. The bronze man had upset the devil of red agate, and was using a small pocket microscope—the periscope device converted by the substitution of lenses—to examine the repulsive statuette.

From the small scarlet thing, Doc shifted his attention to the face of the dead man.

Monk swallowed several times, and then demanded, "Don't tell me that—"

"Exactly the same thing as at the airport," Doc Savage told him. "The face on this satanlike statuette is quite distinct, small as the thing is, and it matches the face of the dead man."

"Queerest blame thing I ever heard of," Monk grunted.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The bronze man lifted the red statuette. He wrapped it in a handkerchief, knotted the corners of the cloth and carried the statuette with him as he went over to Montgomery Medwig Pell.

"Have you any idea why this dead man, before his death, was eavesdropping with a dictograph upon the proceedings in your office?" Doc Savage asked.

The reaction of that upon Montgomery Medwig Pell was surprising. The attorney shut his eyes tightly, put his arms down stiffly at his sides, and made fists of his hands. He fell backward, rigidly, as a tree falls.

DOC SAVAGE caught Pell, lowered him to the floor.

"What's wrong with him?" Ham demanded, anxiously.

"This thing must have been more than he could stomach," diagnosed Monk, who knew practically nothing about medicine. "Boy, for thirty cents, I'd faint, too!"

Some moments later, Pell's eyelids did a fluttery dance. In time, he managed to get shakily to his feet.

"I guess I can't—take it," he said, feebly.

"Maybe you had better go home," Doc Savage suggested.

"No, no!" Pell rejected the suggestion with surprising vigor. "I think I shall be quite all right, now."

Doc Savage nodded, then was silent for a time. Finally, he asked, "Where is the Cinema Trust Company?"

"In the business district," said Pell. "I can guide you there."

Monk put in, "There ain't no banks open at this hour."

Lawyer Pell shook his head, and said hastily, "Wrong. The Cinema Trust remains open twenty-four hours a day. It is near a number of movie studios which work day and night. There are also night shifts at a near-by factory. The Cinema Trust remains open to accommodate these workmen."

A police siren began wailing in the distance. They could tell that it was approaching.

"Some one has telephoned the police," Ham said, dryly. "Probably some one who heard the screams and the shots."

"We will go," Doc Savage said, abruptly. "Explanations to the police can be made later."

They hurried away from the vicinity. As they reached the street, it could be noticed that Montgomery Medwig Pell was glancing about almost continuously, peering into the murk of the dimly lighted streets.

"You lose something?" Monk asked him.

"My town car—the one you drove from the airport. We can use that instead of a taxi."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

They got the car from behind Pell's office building, and, with Montgomery Medwig Pell himself at the wheel, drove through streets that were at first quiet, then, as they neared the main business district, noisier.

"The Martel Hotel," Doc Savage directed.

It was to the Martel that Doc had ordered their equipment and baggage taken. The Martel was not a large hostelry, but was among the better ones in the city. Not that its equipment was luxurious. The quality of the Martel was due to its management, which happened to look the patrons over closely to keep out touts and gamblers and like gentry.

Doc Savage, inquiring at the desk, learned that their luggage had been taken to a four-room suite on the top floor. They rode the elevator up. Approaching the door of the suite, they began to hear noises.

The noises were of two kinds. One was a squeaking and chattering, almost humanlike. The other sounds were grunts and squeals.

The instant he heard the sounds, Monk looked very indignant.

"That blasted Chemistry!" he growled. "He's picking on Habeas again!"

The dapper Ham looked very cheerful.

They entered the suite.

ABOUT the living room stood numerous stout-looking metal cases and a few hand bags. The metal cases held Doc Savage's equipment—innumerable scientific gadgets which he frequently found occasion to use. The bags, of course, contained their clothing.

"Hey!" Monk howled, and lunged forward. "Blast that Chemistry! I'm gonna make a grease spot outta him!"

Chemistry, it now developed, was a very remarkable-looking tailless monkey—remarkable-looking because of the almost startling resemblance he bore to Monk.

Chemistry belonged to Ham. He had gotten the monkey in South America, in the Republic of Santa Amoza, while on an expedition with Doc Savage.

Chemistry had been tied by a lead chain to a chair leg; but the chain had enough scope to permit him to capture Habeas Corpus. Chemistry was holding Habeas Corpus by one oversize ear and industriously parting the animal's hair as if he expected to find something interesting therein.

Habeas Corpus was Monk's pet pig. Monk had found him in Arabia. Habeas had some qualities of appearance all his own. He had elephantine ears, a tremendous inquisitive nose, a body of no consequence, and legs of amazing length.

"Get your animal away from mine!" Monk yelled, and launched a kick at Chemistry, which missed.

Ham snapped, "Stop that!" and partially unsheathed his sword cane.

Chemistry and Habeas Corpus got along together about as smoothly as did Monk and Ham.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Doc Savage gave no attention to the quarrel of his two aids. They were always squabbling.

From a pocket, Doc brought forth the cover of the telephone book which he had secured in the drug store. It was on this cover that the man who had later died had placed his paper to write the note which the taxi driver had carried away.

Next, Doc Savage opened an equipment case. From it he took a phial of very white powder, which he sprinkled over the directory cover, making an even film. He shook the powder off.

Out of the same case, the bronze man brought a small projector of ultra-violet light. He darkened the room, and played the rays of the ultra-violet projector on the telephone book cover. The results might have surprised one not acquainted with modern scientific detective methods.

Writing became visible in thin lines of fluorescence. They all gathered around to decipher it:

Savage and men told of Safe-deposit Box 1772 at Cinema Trust. Better beat them to it.

The note was unsigned.

Lawyer Montgomery Medwig Pell seemed dumbfounded at the manner in which the latent writing had been brought out, and demanded, "How did you do that?"

"The pencil point pressed the paper fibers together," Doc Savage explained. "The white powder was of a type which glows when subjected to ultra-violet light. That is a common property. Ordinary aspirin has it, among other substances. The powder remains in the depression, in many cases in quantities invisible to the naked eye, and the ultra-violet light brought it out."

Monk growled, "I'm thinking we'd better head for that bank."

"Exactly!" the bronze man said.

THE Cinema Trust Company was not a large bank. It was wedged in among other and bulkier buildings.

Doc Savage led the way into the marble lobby of the bank. Everything seemed normal and sleepy inside. Tellers were in some of the cages. There was a substantial sprinkling of big men in gray uniforms—guards. No doubt the fact that the bank was open at night, increased the likelihood of robbery. Hence the augmented force of guards.

At the far end of the lobby a neon sign said:

SAFEDEPOSIT VAULT

Doc Savage and his party walked under the sign, descended a staircase and were confronted by a guard who stood in front of a grilled wire enclosure. The gate in this was shut. Beyond was the round door of the vault, through which could be glimpsed tiers of deposit boxes.

Doc Savage showed the credentials which lawyer Montgomery Medwig Pell had supplied. The uniformed man considered, frowned over the credentials, then made an entry in a book, and said, "Sign, please."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Doc Savage did so. The guard unlocked the gate.

Obedying a slight gesture from Doc Savage, Monk and Ham were first through the gate. Lawyer Pell trailed them.

Doc Savage did a strange thing before he followed the other three—strange, that is, to any one knowing the bronze man well. Doc drew a pipe from his pocket and clamped the stem between his teeth. The action was strange, simply because the bronze man had never been known to use tobacco.

There was a reason for the pipe. Around its bowl was a ring of brightly polished metal. This, at first glance, seemed a perfectly simple ornament. As a matter of fact, the brightly polished surface of the ring served as a mirror.

By carrying the pipe in his teeth at a jaunty angle, Doc could see most of what went on behind him.

He saw plenty. The uniformed guard had followed them through the gate and locked the gate behind him. He followed them into the vault. There the guard's features changed, became a snarling mask. The fellow turned, seized the heavy vault door, got it closed. Then he turned back, dipping a hand into a pocket for a gun.

Doc Savage went to a knee, got both hands on the uniformed man's ankles, jerked. The fellow crashed on his back to the floor with a loud smack.

The shock made the man's gun go off. The report all but split their ears in the confines of the vault. Dizzily the guard tried to turn the gun muzzle on Doc Savage.

A second gun explosion did not come. Instead, there was a milder report—the brisk crack of Doc Savage's bronze fist contacting the man's jaw. The fellow went to sleep.

"The vault door!" Monk bawled. "We're locked in here!"

Doc Savage had dived forward with amazing agility to land his blow. He continued his dive, straightened, got to the vault door. The thing was equipped in such a manner that, should bank employees be locked in by robbers, they might free themselves.

Doc got the door open.

Outside a gun went off, making a booming sound in the confines of the bank basement. A bullet came through the wire enclosure and into the vault, wailing and whizzing as it ricocheted.

Uniformed men were coming down the stairs toward the safe-deposit vault. More bank guards! They were shooting as they came.

"No!" Doc Savage barked. "Everything is all right now!"

The men in uniforms continued shooting.

"Get that bronze guy!" one of them yelled.

"We're in a trap!" Monk barked. "Them guys are all here to kill us!"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

MONK and Ham produced weapons from under-arm holsters. These were guns that resembled oversize automatics, but really were supermachine pistols, capable of firing at a tremendous rate of speed. Bullets they discharged were the type commonly called "mercy bullets," slugs which merely produced quick unconsciousness without inflicting more than a superficial wound.

The rather grotesque-looking weapons began to vibrate and give off a great moan of sound, like the humming of a gigantic bullfiddle.

Two of the uniformed men on the stairs cried out, wheeled and tried to run. But the chemical in the mercy bullets worked quickly. The men collapsed, came thumping down the steps.

Dropping two members of the party had a marked effect on the other uniformed men. There was sudden panic, hasty flight back up the steps. Some of them, though, kept their nerve, seized the two who had fallen, dragged them out of sight

"Them guys are fakes!" Monk roared. "Where's the real bank guards?"

Monk and Ham darted to the stairs, went up together on hands and knees, machine pistols ready. Pell was shivering behind them. They popped their heads over the top step, then jerked back as guns made noise and bullets whined at them.

Doc Savage was running down a small hallway to the right of the vault. At the end of this there seemed to be another flight of steps. He reached them, mounted and disappeared.

A hissing started and vapor fell from small and previously unnoticed vents in the ceiling.

Monk and Ham began gasping, choking, as they crouched on the steps.

"Tear gas!" Monk gasped.

The tear gas, they knew enough about banks to realize, was coming from the regulation protective devices. One of the fake guards must have actuated the controls which released the stuff.

Knowledge that the vapor would soon blind them, made Monk and Ham desperate. They did an apparently insane thing. They came erect and charged up the steps toward their foes.

The move was not entirely madness, however, for both Monk and Ham wore light bulletproof undergarments. They habitually wore these when walking in the paths of trouble, and they had donned them at the hotel.

They were more than a little surprised when no shots greeted their appearance. They strained tear-streaming eyes. They saw the unexpected. The uniformed raiders were making a hasty exit through the bank's front doors.

Cars drew up to the curbing. The uniformed fake guards piled into the machines, and the cars roared away.

Doc, who had come up another stairway, ran to Pell's town car. He made a move as if to get in, but did not, and walked around to the rear. The gasoline tank had been punctured, probably with a stout knife. All of its contents had leaked out.

"That," Monk growled, "sinks us!"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

It did. They did not find another car in time to take up pursuit.

THE bank had not been robbed. The uniformed raiders had simply walked in, overpowered any resistance, then forced every one to act as if nothing unusual were happening.

The genuine bank guards had been locked in a vice president's office.

"I cannot understand it!" declared a bank employee. "There was money in plain sight. They took none. What do you suppose it could mean?"

Monk and Ham, in the confusion, discovered Doc Savage coming up the steps from the vault room with the limp body of a uniformed fake guard in his arms. The prisoner was the fellow who had opened the vault for them, and who had tried to crush the bronze man's skull with a gun.

Doc carried his burden into one of the low-railed enclosures in the bank and sat the fellow down in a chair, so that he faced a large desk lamp.

"He still out?" Monk demanded.

"Still," Doc agreed.

Monk grinned. "Well, we got *somethin'* outta the scrap, anyway. We got that fella. He can give us some idea of what's behind this."

Monk spoke as if he took it for granted that the unconscious man would talk when he awakened. Monk was acquainted with some of the unusual and highly effective means which Doc Savage used to make unwilling men talk.

Around them, the bank people milled curiously. Police were circulating, asking questions. There was somewhat of a tumult of voices.

Came a sudden crash. It was loud, over the voice babble. A hole surrounded by a web of cracks appeared in a window near the chair where Doc had placed the unconscious man.

The prisoner was obviously senseless. Yet he did a strange thing. He jumped completely out of the chair. He stood there as rigid and stiff as if he were turned to stone. Then he made dull noise falling to the floor. A little fountain of crimson began to play out of his throat.

"He's been shot!" a woman screamed.

"The bullet came through the window!" Doc rapped.

The bronze man flashed to the door. Monk and Ham were close on his heels. Policemen flocked behind them.

Across the thoroughfare, a car was rolling slowly as if just getting in motion. Police machines parked up and down the street had their headlights turned on, and these illuminated the occupants of the rolling machine. Doc and his two aids recognized them.

"The bald-headed girl!" Monk howled. "She shot the guy!"

"Her partner is along!" Ham echoed.

There was no mistaking the identification. The oddly matched pair of the airport attack—the attractive, competent girl who was a master of jujutsu, and the strange-looking man with the neck of a turkey—were in the machine, and their manner showed plainly that they were anxious to get away from the spot. The girl drove.

"They shot that guy inside to shut his mouth!" Monk bawled again.

Doc Savage ran for the machine. His two aids trailed him. The car was moving very swiftly, too fast for the bronze man to catch it.

"They're gonna get away!" Monk wailed.

A moment later, it looked as if he were wrong.

Chapter V. THE ROCK DEVIL

ANOTHER CAR had been parked near the end of the block. A large sedan. It wheeled out from the curb and stopped directly crosswise in the street. The street was narrow, and the car was long enough to block the thoroughfare.

The spectators were now treated to a bit of quick thinking. For split-seconds, it seemed inevitable that the girl would crash into the other machine.

Then the girl spun her steering wheel hard to the right. She headed for the spot at the curb vacated by the blockading car. Her machine hit the curb hard, and held together. It hopped the sidewalk.

A clothing store window was directly ahead. The car hit it. The crash was unbelievably loud. Plate glass flew high in the air and showered the street. The car disappeared into the store.

After they lost sight of the machine, they could hear a great roaring of its motor and a crashing and thumping of show cases being knocked about. Then there was a second crash of plate glass.

The store into which the girl had driven was a corner one. She had simply wheeled through the fragile show cases and driven out through the other window. All four tires of her machine must have been flat. It made a great racket going away down a side street.

"That gal sure believes in takin' her chances!" Monk barked.

Doc sprinted down the street.

"Where you goin'?" Monk yelled, legging after the bronze man.

"The blockading car!" Doc rapped.

That reminded Monk to do something he had not thought of before. He stared in an effort to get a look at the driver of the blockading car.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The occupant was a man whose very black clothing was his distinguishing feature. His suit was black, and his hat, also, which was not uncommon; but he wore also a black shirt and a black necktie. The fellow had a face somehow remindful of the countenance of a bird of prey, the nose a beak.

The bird-beaked man fought steering wheel and gearshift lever. The heavy car jumped back and forth, straightening itself out in the street. With a protesting squawk from spinning tires, the car got under way.

Doc Savage was incredibly fast on his feet, but there is a limit to the ability of even the best of tendons. He failed to overtake the car.

The heavy car took the corner on two wheels and was gone into the night.

There was now gusty noise of many motors in the street, as the police cars got into motion, taking up a furious pursuit. The police machines went off quite triumphantly, officers occupying them filled with confidence, which, as it developed, was not justified. The chase proved a flop. They found no trace of either of the two machines which they sought.

Back in the bank, Monk and Ham had recovered enough from the excitement to start quarreling again.

"The guy was shot so that we couldn't question him," Monk said. "But who was that bird in black, an' why'd he beat it after he tried to stop the girl's get-away?"

"Oh, get a recording made of it!" snapped Ham. "None of it makes sense! None of it *will* make sense, until we see what's in that safe-deposit box."

Getting access to the safe-deposit box proved to be not so easy. There was explaining and much persuasion on the part of Montgomery Medwig Pell before Doc Savage was given permission to enter the box.

During the argument, Doc occupied himself by making an examination of the dead fake guard. His search was thorough, and it brought to light only one thing which seemed to interest the bronze man.

"What's that?" Monk demanded.

Doc Savage passed over an object which he had taken from a pocket of the dead man's vest. It was an oblong wooden box, which bore no label at all. It had a slide top. Monk shifted this back.

Inside the little box reposed a cigar that was of obvious excellence. There was no band on it, and no label; no printing whatever was in the box.

Doc took cigar and box and stowed them carefully in a pocket.

Montgomery Medwig Pell came over and said, "They will now let us examine the safe-deposit box."

The box contained one package. It was wrapped in ordinary paper such as might have come from any grocery store. The package was about the size of a loaf of bread.

Doc removed the paper. A cardboard container was disclosed: a shoe box. It was encircled with string, which Doc snapped. He removed the lid.

"Blazes!" Monk said.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The box held three objects:

One was a small bottle of syrupy-looking liquid, unlabeled.

The second object was a folded bit of paper. Doc Savage opened this. They all read it:

GO TO S. P. F. L. 7 FOR INFORMATION

"Very illuminating," Ham said, dryly.

"This gets stranger and stranger," Monk agreed. "Open that other thing."

The "other thing"—the third and last object in the box—was wrapped in cotton. Doc Savage picked the cotton apart.

"Whe-ew!"

Monk gasped.

It was a small and exquisitely carved statuette of blue stone. It was the likeness of a devil, complete even to horns and spiked tail.

There was utter silence in the vault, as the men looked at these objects. Ham broke it.

"Give the devil to Monk!" he suggested. "Kindred souls should associate."

Monk scratched his head, trying to think of a sufficiently biting retort, then gave it up.

"Lookit!" he grunted. "This statue is a different color!"

They had all noted that. The stone of which the thing was made was of a different hue and texture. Its color was that of a cold winter day. It was almost transparent.

"Agate," Ham decided.

Monk held the thing up. "Wonder if the face of the thing is the likeness of anybody we know?"

He scrutinized the features; but not until Doc produced a tiny pocket magnifier and offered it, were they sure.

"Blazes!" Monk gurgled. "It's a woman's face!"

"It's the face of that bald-headed girl we had the run-in with at the airport!" Ham echoed.

They stood in silence for some time.

At last, Monk picked up the bottle which had been in the safe-deposit box. "At least, I might figure out what this is," he said. "Chemistry is my line."

He uncorked the bottle. The result was highly discomfiting. There was a *swish!* Vapor spurted out of the bottle, as the liquid contents vaporized instantly. The stuff sprayed over Monk.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The reek of an odor that was like camphor, yet not like it, filled the vault.

MONK emitted a howl, dropped the bottle, turned and ran. Why he did this, it was hard to say. He already had the stuff all over him.

But, feeling no ill effects, the homely chemist stopped. Great anxiety was on his homely features for a few moments. Then he began to look less thoughtful.

"The stuff—ain't—poison—I guess," he said, hesitantly.

"You were your usual bright self when you opened that bottle," Ham told him.

"Aw—w!"

Monk growled. "How was I to know what was in it?"

"Do you know now?" Ham countered.

"No!" Monk growled. "An' quit ridin' me, or I'll walk over you like I would a bridge!"

Ham sneered, "The only thing we had that might have been a clue, and you got rid of it nicely!"

Lawyer Montgomery Medwig Pell had withdrawn to the end of the vault and was standing there, trembling a little, pale. The avalanche of exciting action had apparently gotten the best of him.

"Do you—gentlemen—need me any longer?" he asked shakily.

"Have you any more information?" Doc Savage asked him.

"No!" Pell said, promptly. "This is all a terrific mystery to me. It really is!"

Monk whispered to Doc so that Pell could not hear: "The poor guy's got the jitters, for which you can't blame him much."

Doc Savage studied lawyer Pell for some moments.

"We will not subject you to further danger by asking that you accompany us," the bronze man said. "If you wish to leave, you may."

"Thank you," said Montgomery Medwig Pell. "I am at the Flower Hotel, if you want me."

Montgomery Medwig Pell now departed. He looked as if he were a man about to become a nervous wreck.

Monk fingered the blue satan statuette, examining it closely. He grumbled, "It looks just like them other two we found, except for the color."

Ham was scrutinizing the paper which bore the cryptic message. The dapper lawyer, it chanced, made somewhat of a hobby of the study of ciphers. He had taken the paper with high hopes; but it had baffled him.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"The meaning of this thing is an absolute mystery to me," he said.

"Suppose we consult a telephone book," Doc suggested.

Ham blinked. "You mean you have an idea?"

"The S. P. F. L. 7 is the mystifying part," Doc Savage replied. "However, it may mean—but we will consult a telephone book first."

The bank switchboard operator produced a telephone directory. Doc Savage turned to the "S" section and ran rapidly down the columns of names and numbers.

"Here," he said, and pointed to: "SOLAR PRODUCTIONS."

"Hm—m—m," Monk grunted. "The 'Solar Productions' takes care of letters 'S. P.'"

"Solar Productions is a movie concern, it seems," Doc Savage said; and the bronze man now employed the telephone to call the main studio. The individual who answered was apparently a watchman.

"Have you a Field Location No. 7?" Doc Savage asked.

"Yes," said the watchman.

"Where is it?" the bronze man asked.

"In the desert below Palm Springs," he was told.

"'Go to Solar Productions' Field Location No. 7 for information,'" Ham said slowly, repeating the cipher message as he had decided Doc Savage had translated it.

"Brothers, let's set sail for the place!" Monk suggested. "Information is what we want!"

HOURS later in the night, they came around a shoulder of San Jacinto Mountain, and caught sight of the movie company location.

There were lights about the place, but they saw more than the lights. Judging from the number of luminous spots, the location was of considerable size.

This was correct, as it later developed, for Solar Productions had moved a complete studio out here to the edge of the desert, to film a desert picture which chanced to be their major production for the year.

Doc Savage was driving. They still rode in Montgomery Medwig Pell's big town car. Repairs had been made to the damaged gasoline tank. They had the windows open. Ham insisted on this, declaring that he could not stand Monk's odor.

The strange, camphor-like smell still clung to Monk with an annoying persistence. The homely chemist had tried removing his outer clothing. As a matter of fact, he now wore only his underwear. The results had not been encouraging.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"The smell of you would scare a moth to death," Ham told the homely chemist.

Monk kept his council. He was secretly a little worried by the smell which clung to him, and of which he could not rid himself. He pretended to devote his attention to keeping his pig, Habeas Corpus, out of the clutches of Ham's pet ape.

Doc Savage had driven past their hotel to pick up more equipment, and Monk and Ham had added their two strange-looking and quarrelsome pets to the entourage.

They drew near the movie location, which was surrounded by a high wooden fence to keep out the curious. They bounced along the miserable trail to the gate. A uniformed gateman confronted them.

"Now the argument starts," Monk whispered. "I've heard these guys are tough."

The gateman looked the car over, did not recognize it, and snapped, "There's no admittance to the lot at this time of night."

Just what line of argument would have gotten them past the guard, they never did learn. It was not necessary. A figure appeared inside the gate. It was a man. The headlights illuminated him distinctly.

"Good night!" Monk breathed, after one look. "That's the bird-beaked guy who tried to block the bald-headed girl's get-away!"

It did look like the same man. He wore black, even to necktie and shirt. He had a beak of a nose, and his jowls hung down like those of a Newfoundland dog.

"Gateman!" the black-clothed fellow called sharply. "It is all right! Admit these people!"

The gateman turned to the speaker, who was evidently a person of consequence.

"Admit them!" snapped the man with the hooked nose and the dark raiment. "I was expecting them."

The gate was promptly opened by the guard, and Doc drove inside. The man in the dark garments sprang on the running board.

"Drive to the right!" he rapped. "Turn out your headlights! Make as little noise as possible!"

DOC SAVAGE complied with the suggestions. His machine rolled past huge stacks of scenery.

On either side stood the false fronts of buildings intended to depict an old-fashioned western cow town. Doc wheeled the car in between a corral and a structure marked, "Drinking Emporium."

The man on the running board began speaking in a hoarse voice. It was not loud enough to be heard very far.

"The blue devil!" he gasped. "You have it?"

"Devil?" Monk gulped. "Say, what the dickens—"

"Shut up, dope!" Ham said, and nudged the homely chemist.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"The *blue* devil!" went on the man in black, gasping in his haste. "It must be like mine. It must be blue! It is very important!"

He fumbled in his clothing and drew out an object wrapped in a handkerchief. He unwound it and held it up.

The thing was one of the little satan statuettes. It was blue.

Monk and Ham looked exceedingly blank at sight of the object. Doc Savage said nothing, showed no emotion; but the bronze man's small, strange trilling sound came briefly into being and ran its eerie way up and down the musical scale, seeming to adhere to no definite tune, yet distinctly melodious in its fantastic fashion.

"Please!" exploded the man in black. "This must be done quickly. Is yours like mine?"

"You mean you want to compare your statuette with ours?" Monk demanded.

"Oh, yes!" gasped the other. "Please! Quickly! Thousands of lives may depend on this! Persons all over the world—"

Monk got a package out of a door pocket, a package Doc Savage had given him. It consisted of a paper-wrapped cardboard box. Monk had not understood why Doc had put the statuette in the box, unless to keep them from being separated and lost. He took the package in one hand and got out of the car.

THE next move of the bird-beaked man in black was almost an insane thing, and such a complete surprise that it caught Monk off guard. The fellow was holding out his rock fragment for Monk's inspection. Suddenly, he swung it, driving it upward. Before the homely chemist could get his head aside, the thing caught him between the eyes.

It was a terrible blow. Monk made a bubbling sound and landed on his face in the sand.

The beak-nosed man was quick with his hands. He managed to get possession of the package Monk had been carrying.

A gun had appeared in the black-clothed man's hand. He cocked it as he shoved it forward. There was not the slightest doubt but that he intended to shoot.

Doc Savage and Ham both got doors open on the opposite side of the car, scrambled out and lay where the frame of the car would protect them.

Footsteps ran away in the darkness. When Doc Savage and Ham got to their feet, the assailant had disappeared.

Chapter VI. THE BALD-HEADED GIRL AGAIN

DOC SAVAGE whipped away from the car. The bronze man did not start in hurried pursuit, but stood listening. Whatever sounds would be made by running feet in the smooth desert sand, inside the studio lot,

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

would not carry far. Doc heard nothing.

He did, after a moment, hear a low groan. The sound came from Monk, on the sand near the side of the car. More groans turned into a thick-tongued mumble.

"I'll—I'll wring that guy's—neck!" The homely chemist was getting himself shakily erect. A slow trickle of scarlet was staining one side of his face.

"Where'd that baby go?" Monk demanded, fiercely.

Ham interposed. "We're wasting time, Doc. We should be trying to catch that fellow."

Doc Savage seemed unconcerned with immediate pursuit of the beaked individual who had knocked Monk out and stole their package. The bronze man helped the unwilling Monk to sit on the running board of the car, and began minor repairs on the forehead wound.

"That guy'll get clean away!" Monk groaned.

Doc Savage said nothing, and dabbed at the cut made by the piece of carved rock in the assailant's hand.

Ham said suddenly, "*Phe-w-w!* Monk, aren't you ever going to get rid of that awful smell?"

"I can't shed my skin, can I?" Monk demanded, a bit plaintively. "That stuff sure sticks with a guy. It kinda worries me."

"Aren't we going to follow that fellow in black who got the package?" Ham demanded again.

"Wait," Doc Savage said.

The bronze man snapped off the car headlights. Then he did a strange thing. He climbed atop the car and began to look on all sides. Monk and Ham, puzzled, climbed up and joined him.

"I don't get the idea of this," Monk grunted.

And almost immediately, he emitted a squeaky gasp and demanded, "Am I nuts? Or do you see that, too?"

Off to the right, a patch of transplanted desert growth was carefully arranged to give movie fans the idea that the desert was a great deal more horrible thing than it actually was. A huge yucca was the central part of this arrangement. Its vague silhouette had the distinct outlines of a balled fist.

But the strange shape of the tree was not what got their attention. Out of the tree, growing and spreading, came an even more fantastic shape. It climbed into the air.

It was a form of intense black, eerily writhing and swelling up into the night. One moment it looked like a huge hooded figure. The next, its outline had dissolved, and reformed to make the bent shape of a grotesque something in flight.

Doc Savage got clown off the car top and moved toward the apparition. Monk and Ham followed. As they approached the fantastic monster in the air above the yucca, the nature of the thing became apparent.

"Blazes!" Monk breathed. "Smoke!"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Ham exploded, "Look! Two people! Senseless!"

Doc Savage snapped on his flashlight, played the white funnel over the two prone forms.

One was the individual who had seized Monk's package.

One look at the other, and Monk nearly upset.

"The bald-headed dame!" he gasped.

"The lady who flung you about like the well-known gentleman on the flying trapeze!" Ham agreed.

"Yeah," Monk growled. "And her face was also on that *blue* statuette!"

It was unmistakably the bald-headed girl, attractive even when she did not have her hair.

"Now we can find out what these two were afraid the guy they killed in the bank would tell us," Ham said.

In the hand of the hairless girl was the package the bird-beaked man had stolen from Monk. It was open, and both wrappings and box were partially burned.

"They will not be unconscious for long," said Doc Savage.

"What got them?" Ham demanded.

"The package which Monk was taking care of," said Doc Savage. "It was a dummy. It contained a quantity of the anaesthetic gas that we use to produce temporary unconsciousness. And with the gas was mixed another chemical concoction which, when exposed to the air, will burn and give off that smoke."

Ham opened his mouth, shut it, and said no more. He did not ask how Doc had come to make this particular preparation. Ham could guess. The bronze man habitually took every precaution, and this matter of the fake package was probably just one of many measures which Doc had, no doubt, taken.

Monk bent to pick up the limp figure of the bird-beaked individual. The apish chemist barely began to heave, then relaxed suddenly. His face, in the flashlight glow, showed ludicrous puzzlement.

"This guy feels kinda funny," he declared.

Ham snorted. "It's probably that crack on the head you got!"

Monk shook his head. "No, the guy is—"

Doc Savage bent over the prone form of the beak-faced man. His bronze fingers made exploring passes over the fellow's features. Grasping the hooked tip of the unconscious individual's beakish nose, he pulled. Part of the nose came away with his fingers. It was reddish theatrical makeup wax.

Monk and Ham stared at the face of the unconscious man.

"Blazes!" Monk choked.

"Lawyer Montgomery Medwig Pell!" Ham gasped.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Monk looked at Doc Savage, wiped imaginary perspiration off his forehead, and growled, "This is the last dang thing I expected. I thought that lawyer was on the up-and-up. I mighta knowed that all lawyers is crooked, though."

Ham ignored this dig, and felt over Montgomery Medwig Pell's limp form. "No wonder Monk said he felt funny."

"Padded!" Doc Savage said, tersely. "Pell used pads to make himself appear much heavier."

For some moments, there was silence. It was quite evident that although Pell had been masquerading as the beak-faced, black-clothed individual, there must be such a person. For Pell had been in the bank with Doc and his men at the time the car driven by the beak-faced man had swerved crosswise in the street in an attempt to stop the get-away of the bald-headed girl and her turkey-necked companion.

"What'll we do with these two?" Monk queried, after a while.

"We will let them recover consciousness together, and make sure they think they are alone," Doc Savage explained. "They will then talk freely to each other, let us hope."

DOC SAVAGE now cast about for a spot where they could secure privacy suitable for their project.

"What we need is a joint that's soundproof," Monk offered.

Monk picked up the girl, and Doc took the senseless form of Pell. They carried their prisoners to the door of a building which had the shape of a huge flat-roofed barn. Doc Savage tried the door, got it open and went inside.

Monk looked around. "What's this place?"

Doc played his flashlight about and the beam revealed much intricate equipment.

"Sound studio!" Monk said.

"Exactly," Doc Savage agreed. "And, if the equipment is intact, it will make our task much simpler."

The bronze man now moved across the great barn of a sound studio to a small room which was separated from the studio by a large plate-glass window. Inside this, there was a great deal of equipment.

Doc Savage began to examine the apparatus, to make a change in the wiring here and there. Then he came out in the studio again, and made adjustments on a device which, at first glance, could have been mistaken for an oversize electric heater. This was really a beam microphone. The dishlike reflector caught sound waves and directed them down at the microphone, which was mounted at the focal point.

Doc placed the "mike" at a point where it would not be noticed by the bald-headed girl and Pell, when they revived. He connected the wires, then went into the control room. Various switches were turned. The monitor loudspeaker came alive, as denoted by a soft hissing.

Monk and Ham, at Doc's suggestion, made a round of the sound studio and locked all of the doors on the inside. Then they joined the bronze man in the control room.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

There was silence for some time before the loud-speaker began emitting scrapings and scuffings. A groan came. The pair inside the sound studio were beginning to revive.

The bald-headed girl was first to speak. Her voice was fairly distinct. "Well, Pell, you sure put your fast one over!" she snapped.

"We got the agate devils," Pell mumbled, thickly.

"Wake up!" The girl sounded bitter. "They weren't in that package. Something has happened to us!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Pell. "I did my best. Where are we?"

This new voice of Pell's was a marked change from the one Doc Savage had heard him use previously. It sounded a great deal younger.

"We've got to get those agate statuettes," the girl said.

"I may be able to manage," Pell groaned. "Savage suspects nothing of the real thing behind all of this. He does not have the slightest notion of how big it really is."

"Let's try to get out of here," said the girl.

Then things happened. A sharp crackling came out of the loud-speaker. The noise of something breaking! The bald-headed girl of a sudden cried out shrilly.

DOC SAVAGE lunged for the light switch, which he had located previously, snapped it. Nothing happened. The current had been shut off somewhere.

The girl cried out again. This time, there was utter terror in her voice.

"Somebody's grabbed 'em!" Monk roared.

The homely chemist pitched for the control-room door. So headlong was Monk's dash across the floor of the sound studio that he did not notice that Doc and Ham were not with him. The bronze man and the dapper lawyer had adopted a different method of procedure. They were circling, moving around the edge of the sound studio for the doors, their intention being to cut off any attempted retreat.

Monk was running in complete darkness, and promptly fell over something. Judging from the noise, he ruined a camera. He got up, stumbled forward, and found the spot where Montgomery Medwig Pell and the bald-headed girl had been.

Both were gone.

Monk listened. He could hear Doc and Ham moving; but of the two prisoners there was no trace. Monk was about to call out, suggesting that Doc turn on the flashlight, when he saw something that silenced him.

The something was a faint string of darkness before his eyes. He touched it. A rope.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Then he saw a shadow on the floor of the room. It was an incredible shadow, for the simple reason that there seemed to be no light that could create a shadow in that position.

The studio inside was almost totally dark. Nor was the mystery of its source the only queer thing about the shadow.

The shape of the thing was grotesque, a hideous distortion of a vaguely human form, perhaps; a grisly caricature of humanity. Peculiarities of light angles could hardly account for the somewhat startling shape of the outline. The thing suggested the head of a carrion bird on the body of a spider.

MONK gaped at the floor for only a moment, then lifted his eyes, seeking the only possible explanation: a skylight. Yes, there was one. The rope was hanging down from it.

The object which had made the shadow, however, was gone.

Monk now did something typical of him. Without saying anything, he grasped the rope and tested its tightness. It would hold his weight. He began to climb, hand over hand, with great rapidity.

Monk gained the lip of the skylight, hung there almost as much at ease as if he had been on the ground. He heard no sound.

At length, deciding to take a chance, Monk swung up through the skylight and let himself down lightly on the roof.

The next instant something grasped his arms, forced them to his sides. He strained. To his astonishment, he could not loosen the thing that grasped him.

"Doc!" Monk squalled. "Ham!" Not that he was scared, but assistance was always a nice thing where the odds are unknown.

Monk liked noise with his fights. The present situation had developed to a point where noise was in order. The homely chemist roared, squalled, jumped up and down. He knew by now what had seized him. He had been lassoed, cowboy-fashion.

He located the spot where the individual holding the rope stood, and ran in that direction. This slackened the rope. Monk threw the loop off, and continued his charge. A flashlight beam dashed into his eyes, blinded him. His quarry dodged, got away.

Then he was ganged. Came movement at one side. The flashlight whitened out again. There was a whistling sound and something hit Monk's head. He cried out and fell into infinite blackness.

DOC SAVAGE and Ham heard Monk's shout. The bronze man and the dapper lawyer immediately raced to the center of the sound studio. They stared upward at the skylight.

"Here is a rope," Doc snapped.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The bronze man seized the cord and began to climb. He was about ten feet up when it was cut from above. He fell back, landing on Ham, who had also started to climb. They got to their feet.

"There may be a way to get up from outside," Doc said.

They ran to the door, shoved it open, and both dived outside.

Flashlight beams blazed at them. At least half a dozen masked men pointed guns at them in a businesslike manner. Sound studios are purposely built noiseproof. That is their function. An army might well have approached the outside of this place without those within hearing, even with hearing as developed as that possessed by Doc Savage.

"I hope," said one of the men, "that you use good sense."

It was as efficient a method of trapping as could have been seized upon. Guns at close range are an unanswerable argument, even to a person who is armed. Doc and Ham put their hands up.

Curt commands directed the bronze man and the dapper lawyer to a big touring car, which now wheeled up silently, a seventh man driving. Crowding gun muzzles dictated a hasty entry into the rear seat of the car. Their captors sat with them, stood on the running board of the car. The machine rolled toward the gate.

The gate guard saw them coming and ran out.

"Hey?" the fellow yelled. "What the hell's this?"

Two men leaped off the running board, ran at him, and before the guard could escape, he was felled by hard-swung revolvers.

The touring car vanished into the desert, bearing Doc Savage and Ham as captives.

Chapter VII. THE OMINOUS BEQUEST

MONK'S HEAD felt as if firecrackers were going off inside it. His big muscles simply would not work for some time. When he finally got into shape that he could move again, and began to search, he discovered that the rooftop was empty. He found a length of rope dangling down the side of the building.

Monk climbed down the rope, then stood peering into the night blackness. The homely chemist could see nothing, but he could hear, off to the right, sounds of movement. He scuttled in that direction.

Then he paused, listening for some sound which might tell him which way to continue his pursuit of the escaped prisoners—Pell and the bald girl—and their rescuer—Monk was sure now that there had been a rescuer.

It was then he heard the peculiar noise.

It was a rasping noise of a rather strange nature. He concentrated, trying to identify it, make it fit somewhere in his past experience with sounds. He failed. The rasping—slightly metallic, it seemed, was more like an insect noise than anything else the homely chemist could imagine.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

It dawned on Monk that the sound was coming toward him, coming fast.

Darkness where the homely chemist stood was intense enough to seem nearly solid. Monk might as well have been blind, for all he could see.

Suddenly, he did not know why exactly, there came to Monk's mind a vivid remembrance of the horrible condition of the bodies beside which the devil statuettes had been found. The homely chemist abruptly decided he did not want that rasping noise any closer.

Monk ran. Hands out in front of him encountered a building wall, and he bounced off that. His running became faster with the realization that the rasping noise was definitely pursuing him. It came along behind with unexpected speed. Gaining!

Monk completely forgot the two prisoners. This thing was after him! He twisted, dodged, making desperate efforts to elude the unearthly thing that rasped behind him.

He smashed a tree trunk, glanced from that to another tree. The trunks were smooth. Palms!

Concerned with nothing except his desire to put distance between himself and the rasping mystery behind, the homely chemist did not take time to realize that the clump of palms probably indicated a prop oasis on the movie lot.

His failing to take this into account made his sudden and headlong stumble into a pool of water totally unexpected. He went completely under the surface of the water. The pool was shallow, and there was mud in the bottom.

Monk wallowed, managed to get thoroughly coated with mud and water before he got out on the other side of the pool and continued his sprint. He ran a number of yards. Then he stopped, feeling rather foolish.

The rasping noise no longer pursued him.

Monk stood there and strained his ears. He caught sounds, recognizable as the movements of something among the trees of the prop oasis. There was no suggestion of a rasp, a clack or a whirl. That was encouraging.

Monk made an elaborate and quite excellent stalk. Shortly, he was within what he judged to be a few feet of the noises of furtive movement. He set himself and pounced.

His judgment had been good. His hands got a firm grip on a body that was unmistakably human. Monk squeezed experimentally. The squawk this brought forth was like the noise made by squeezing a child's rubber ball of the whistling variety.

Monk transferred his grip to what he judged to be a man's throat, squeezed, and the squawks shut off. He shook his victim. When the fellow was moderately limp, he hurriedly conducted a search with patting hands.

It was a man. Monk found a revolver and took it.

The prisoner revived enough to begin to scream shrilly. There was unmistakable terror in his voice. The movie set had not been aroused before, but it was awakened now. Luminance sprouted at a number of points. Men with electric lanterns came running. Lights were turned on, making much of the location nearly as bright as day.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Some one caught sight of Monk and his captive.

"Hey!" yelled the fellow. "What's the idea?"

"Help!" squalled Monk's captive. "This guy is trying to kill me!"

The homely chemist growled, "Let out another squawk, and you'll really need a coffin!"

Monk did not wait for the running men to reach him. He advanced to meet them, propelling his captive ahead.

A large number of the movie personnel seemed to live on the set. These individuals, mostly in piecemeal attire, began to form an unfriendly convoy around the homely chemist and his prisoner. Flashlights began to spray whiteness over them.

"Take your hands off that man!" somebody told Monk.

"Don't get tough with me, you guys!" Monk advised. "I'm gonna ask my friend here some questions."

Monk's captive yelled, "This man is a prowler! I was trying to seize him!"

For the first time, Monk made a close scrutiny of the man whom he had seized. He had seen the individual before, under conditions anything but pleasant.

The man's face was striking in a hideous way. There was fineness in the modeling of his forehead and deep-set eyes; but the lower part of the face was a grotesque mismatch. The flesh had a rubbery aspect. Some accident had deadened the muscles.

It was the man who had seized Monk at Montgomery Medwig Pell's office building and had attempted killing him in the basement garage, along with Pell, when Doc Savage interfered. His pal had been the hard-faced thug killed in the old alley building by the menace that left behind the agate devils.

A man in uniform, evidently a special guard for the movie company, came up and showed Monk the muzzle of a gun and said, "Kindly release Mr. Del Ling, and explain the meaning of this!"

Monk was in a bad humor. Events had piled on him during the night, not pleasant ones. He suddenly shoved Del Ling into the guard. The latter turned his gun aside. The next instant, Monk had knocked the guard sprawling.

Seizing Del Ling again, Monk surveyed the crowd, growled, "Anybody else who wants any can have it!"

They milled about. Obviously, Del Ling was a man of some importance, and there were a number anxious to gain favor in his eyes.

Some one demanded of Monk, "Do you know who this man is?"

"It won't make any difference," Monk said.

"He is Del Ling, chief director for Solar Productions," said the informant.

Monk snorted, entirely unimpressed by this.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Director Del Ling said suddenly to Monk, "Suppose we talk this over in my bungalow?"

Monk considered, decided the best policy was to accept. If he did not, there was certain to be a general fight.

"O. K.," he said.

DIRECTOR Del Ling's bungalow was on the other side of the fenced location. There was a cheerful living room, matings on the floor, gayly cushioned wicker furniture. Not until they were inside did Monk release his grip on Del Ling's arm. And then Monk sat down beside the only door by which the other could leave the room.

"You helped that bald-headed girl and Pell escape," Monk snapped. "What was the idea? And what was that thing that was chasin' me in the darkness a minute ago?"

"My dear fellow," Del Ling murmured. "I do not know what you are talking about."

Monk bounded out of his chair, hurried forward, and fastened his hands to Del Ling's neck. He exerted some pressure. The rubbery part of the fellow's face felt cold under his fingers.

"I like to play rough," Monk growled, grimly. "Doc Savage has got better methods of makin' you talk, but I'm gonna try mine first. It ain't gonna be nice."

Then he released Del Ling's face so the man could speak. The words were surprising.

"You are one of Doc Savages aids?"

the hybrid-faced man gasped.

"Yeah," Monk admitted.

Del Ling's attitude changed completely.

"I have a remarkable story to tell you," he said.

Monk shoved him into a chair. "I'm a guy who likes to hear remarkable stories."

"A world-wide plot is behind this," Del Ling said.

Del Ling had a queer way of speaking without moving the lower part of his face; yet his words were quite clear.

"How many persons have you met, that are connected with this?" Del Ling demanded.

Monk growled. "You tryin' to pump me?"

"No," denied Del Ling. "I am merely trying to name those connected with the mystery."

"Well," grunted Monk. "We ran into a lawyer—Montgomery Medwig Pell."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"One of the marked men," said Del Ling.

"Yeah?" Monk looked very curious. "There was a bald-headed girl—"

"Named Kateen MacRoy," said Del Ling. "Also marked for death, it seems."

"Heck she is!" Monk gulped. "Well, there is a guy who has a beak like a bird an' wears black clothes—"

"Samuel Wartz Gime," Del Ling identified. "Also on the list."

"There's an old goat with a scrawny turkey neck an' two peg teeth, who runs around with the bald-headed girl—"

"That's Old Dan. He is on the death list."

Monk put his jaw out "Listen, you! What kinda rattle-brained movie thriller plot you trying to feed me?"

DEL LING looked perfectly sober; indeed, his strange face made it impossible for him to look any other way.

"Attempts have been made to kill these people," he said. "They were called by a strange voice over the telephone, and each was told the names of the other to be killed."

"That don't make sense!" Monk grunted.

"It certainly does not," Del Ling agreed. "Just why this Camphor Wraith should want to kill all—"

"Who?" Monk howled.

"Camphor Wraith," said Del Ling. "But the name doesn't mean anything. It was just a name that was used over the telephone."

Monk gulped, when he tried to swallow.

"But this Camphor Wraith was the one who—" Monk swallowed quickly. He had been about to state that Camphor Wraith had been the one who summoned Doc Savage.

"Don't you know—what—it is—all about?" Monk asked, haltingly.

Del Ling put his forefingers to the corners of his mouth and exchanged a faintly satirical smile to one of somberness by simply pressing upward.

"No one knows," he said. "None of us has the slightest idea!"

Del Ling went over, sat in a chair and seemed to be ready for questions. Monk promptly put them.

"You say Montgomery Medwig Pell was a victim along with you?" the homely chemist growled. "Yet I found you an' that thug-faced guy tryin' to crack Pell."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"We were *not* going to kill him," Del Ling denied, promptly. "We—the other man was a friend of mine—were merely trying an experiment on Pell. You see, we suspected Pell of being the mysterious Camphor Wraith. We were trying to scare proof out of him, when you interrupted."

"Hm—m—m." Monk rubbed his jaw, wondering if he should believe that. "What about that attack at the bank?"

"I do not know what you are talking about," Del Ling said.

Del Ling now got up and went to a desk which stood in one corner of the room. Monk followed, watching alertly. Del Ling removed a large envelope and shook out newspaper clippings.

"These will interest you."

Monk rifled through them, reading headlines. There were at least a dozen of the clippings, and each one told of a mysterious death. Not all the deaths had been in Los Angeles. Nor were all of them in the United States. There was one in Japan—a prominent diplomat. There was one in Germany—a wealthy industrialist. A lawyer had been killed in England. While all of these clippings were from Los Angeles, they bore the credit lines of telegraphic news associations.

All the deaths had one thing in common: the bones of the victims had been broken, and large holes had been perforated in the bodies. And near each body had been found a tiny statuette, carved in agate—a devil.

"Blazes!" Monk gulped. "This Camphor Wraith guy's been working all over the world!"

"Exactly!" Del Ling agreed.

Monk thought this over at some length. He believed he could see holes in the story. "Let's talk to Doc Savage about this," he said, grimly.

"Where is he?" Del Ling demanded.

Monk opened his mouth, shut it. It had suddenly dawned on him that after the excitement, there had been no sign of Doc and Ham.

"Doc must be around somewhere!" Monk growled. "We'll look him up."

They had no more than left the bungalow, when they received bad news. The guard at the gate had been found senseless, and had been revived. The fellow recovered enough to talk.

Monk learned from the gate guard that Doc Savage and Ham had been taken away by a number of men in an automobile.

Chapter VIII. TURKEY-NECK

MONK'S REACTION to the information was a loud bellow. He spun on Del Ling.

"I want you around where we can ask you more questions," Monk growled.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"I shall be here!" Del Ling snapped.

"You darn bet you will!" Monk assured him, and swung a hairy fist.

If Del Ling saw the fist coming, he had no time to duck. He hit the sand; his heels flew up, thumped back, and he lay still.

Angry growls went up from the movie people at seeing their director manhandled. Monk, however, did not wait for them to do anything about it. He ran for the gate, ducked through it and started down the road.

The homely chemist's wrathful departure from the movie location had one observer who remained unnoticed. This watcher kept well in the background, being very careful to attract the attention of no one. The fellow was moved to chuckle a little to himself, as he observed Monk's unconventional conduct.

"Boy, that ape sure likes to make things happen!" the man chuckled.

The fellow grinned, exposing gums entirely empty of teeth except for two incisors stained a rich brown by tobacco chewing. The two teeth resembled a pair of mahogany pegs.

The man was gaunt and weather-beaten. He had a wrinkled visage, to which the absence of teeth gave a pinchmouthed aspect. His scrawny, extraordinarily long neck was full of wrinkles—a neck which made one think of a turkey.

The turkey-necked man proceeded to trail Monk, using every care in the darkness to avoid notice. He did not even leave the movie location through the gate, but scuttled down the fence several yards and climbed over, negotiating the feat in a manner which indicated he was better muscled than he appeared to be.

The follower observed Monk for some time—if keeping track of the homely chemist by the sounds he made could be called observing. He became satisfied that Monk was moving down the road, following the tracks of automobile tires.

The turkey-necked man gave up spying. He moved with set purposefulness back toward the motion picture location. He made his way, without being observed by any one, to a room which held a pay telephone. He fed a nickel into the instrument, spoke to the operator, then put in several more coins, proof that the call was a long distance one. When he had his party, he came straight to the point.

"This is Old Dan," he said. Then he gave a rough word sketch of what Monk was now doing.

He listened to the reply. What he was hearing evidently did not please him greatly.

"So I have to handle this Monk myself, eh?" he snapped.

After that, he cracked the receiver on the hook, scowled, spun and made for the door of the room. He reached for the knob, but did not get it. The door whipped open in his face.

Monk came in, stopped, put both hairy fists on his hips and looked very accusing.

"You can start handlin' me now, you old gobbler!" he announced.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

THE weather–reddened, scrawny–necked individual reacted much as if lightning had struck near him. His clawing right hand managed to get a big revolver from under his coat before Monk was upon him.

Monk tied two long, furry arms around his opponent. There was squeezing, heaving, grunting on both sides. They hit the floor, spun over and over.

The gun dropped out of the mêlée. Monk managed to keep his arms around the other and put his bullet of a head against the man's chest. He pulled inward with his arms, pushed outward with his feet and knees. The turkey–necked man bent. His face got redder. To keep his spine from snapping, he gave up, relaxing.

Instantly, Monk released his grip and swung a huge fist against the man's jaw. When the fellow hit the floor, his eyelids were doing a queer dance.

Monk secured the revolver which the man had dropped, and pocketed it. He examined his victim. The fellow would remain unconscious for some time.

Monk was grinning widely. He crossed to the pay phone which the red–faced man had used. Inserting a nickel, he got the long distance operator.

"Where'd that call, go that was made from this phone a minute ago?" he demanded.

Evidently, the operator demurred at divulging that information.

"Don't be like that, lady," Monk growled at her. "Right now, I can't ask the guy who made the call. This is important; studio business!"

He listened intently, said, "Samuel Wartz Gime? What's the address. . . . 13 Seacrest Drive. In Palomar. Where's Palomar?"

The operator gave him that information.

"Just south of Los Angeles?" Monk repeated. "O. K. Thanks."

Monk hung up, backed away from the phone, reached down, got his hands full of his prisoner's coat and jerked the fellow erect. He slapped the man briskly. This had the effect of a stimulant. The victim's limply dangling legs began to scissor back and forth and his eyes opened.

"Start walkin'!" Monk ordered.

The turkey–necked man gasped, made choking noises, then got words out.

"You're throwin' your rope in the wrong corral!" he gritted.

"We'll have a long talk about it in due time," Monk informed him.

By main strength and some violence, Monk got the fellow outside, and to the gloomy spot where stood the town car in which Doc's party had come to the studio. Monk secured a length of slender stout rope from under the car seat and bound his prisoner securely.

"That's so you can meditate," the homely chemist explained.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Monk left "Old Dan" in the car and went to the group of studio attendants who were administering to Director Del Ling. Del Ling was still senseless. Monk waded to the center of the group and grasped the unconscious Del Ling's collar.

The very boldness of Monk's move nonplused every one for a moment. Perhaps the homely chemist's belligerent appearance had something to do with it. Then the crowd moved forward threateningly.

"We're gonna hold you for the cops," a man growled. "You can't go around here boppin' people and get away with it!"

With his free hand, Monk produced the turkey-necked man's big revolver from a coat pocket. He waved it, motioning the crowd back.

"Keep outta my hair!" he warned. "I got a very short temper!"

Monk tucked his captive under an arm, backed away, spun and darted through the night to the car. The car horn suddenly emitted a loud bleat. The unexpectedness of this ear-splitting noise caused Monk nearly to make that move commonly designated as "jumping out of one's skin."

The horn hooted again. Monk peered into the front seat to discern the cause. Then he reached in, grabbed and brought the offender out.

It was Ham's remarkable-looking monkey, Chemistry.

"You got about as much judgment as the guy who owns you," Monk grunted.

The homely chemist swung the simian to the floorboards where Habeas Corpus, the pig, rested, sleeping blissfully through the confusion. Then Monk bound Del Ling.

The motor throbbed, roared, the car churned sand and got under way.

The gate was closed. Monk did not even slow for it. Two men who had ideas of stopping him by their mere presence in the road, got out of the way with wild leaps. There was a crash and Monk was through the gate.

Monk drove furiously in the direction of Palomar and the residence of one Samuel Wartz Gime—which Old Dan had telephoned.

When he drew near populated districts, Monk took to side roads. He had a hunch that the movie people would have caused a police alarm to be spread for him. It was possible that he might stand accused of the offense of kidnaping.

The movie location was well out in the desert. Palomar was a seashore town. The distance between the two points was considerable.

Director Del Ling and turkey-necked Old Dan regained consciousness in the back seat. They ridded themselves of long and pointed orations concerning Monk and his ancestry. They would give no real information.

Daylight had come.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

By mid-morning, the homely chemist was tooling the car over the gravel road which twisted upward to the top of a cliff facing the sea. Along this cliff perched a score or so of aloof estates, comprising the reserved community of wealth that was Palomar. The steep narrow road curved through pine trees and underbrush.

The excellence of this natural cover at either side of the road intrigued Monk. At the first opportunity, he directed the car off the road into the grove. He drove a hundred yards and concealed the car.

Monk shut off the motor, got out and opened the rear door.

"Turn us loose!" Del Ling grated.

"Can't hear you!" Monk said.

Inspection convinced the homely chemist that his two prisoners could not free themselves. Just to decrease the likelihood of such a thing happening, he separated them, putting one in the front and one in the back of the car.

In the tool box, Monk found a large sponge, evidently used for washing the car. He divided it into halves, forming the base for two excellent gags. The captives could make sounds only through their noses.

Then Monk cranked up the thick glass windows, making it unlikely that the pair would attract attention.

He left Habeas and Chemistry locked in the car with the prisoners and moved through the pine woods, mounting until he came to the flat area atop the cliff. It was from this that the Palomar mansions looked out over the sea.

Having in mind the police alarm which might have been broadcast for him, Monk did not wish to show himself while searching for 13 Seacrest Drive. From his concealment in the brush, Monk could see that Palomar possessed only one thoroughfare—a poplar-bordered drive which ran along the cliff top. That would be Seacrest Drive, and No. 13 would be the thirteenth house down the line. So Monk figured—correctly, it developed.

MONK worked toward his destination.

The house—13 Seacrest Drive—was blocked off by a thick hedge, over which Monk could glimpse colored tiles and stucco chimneys of what was probably an imposing example of the popular Spanish style of architecture.

Monk crawled to the hedge, worked along it, looking for an opening through which he might wriggle without too much commotion. He found one and got down and crawled through. He made a slight noise, rustling and scraping. As a precaution, he paused and listened.

He heard sounds almost at once. Some one approaching, creeping cautiously, it seemed. Monk remained perfectly quiet. The hedge was thick and he could not see what was on the other side.

The prowler came closer. Then a trousered leg appeared in front of the opening in the hedge. Monk knew instinctively that the other was going to bend down and look into the hole.

Monk lunged, grabbed the ankles and jerked. An instant later, he was tangled with an opponent and the hedge. Fast work was necessary, or the other would be able to call out an alarm. Monk started a fist in a great haymaker swing.

At the last possible instant, he changed his mind and managed to miss his captive.

"Blazes!" Monk gulped.

His captive was the dapper Ham.

Chapter IX. ONE MILLION

HAM SQUIRMED, got loose, gave the surprised Monk a vicious kick in the midriff. Monk upset. Ham grabbed his sword cane, which he had dropped in the confusion, and unsheathed the blade.

"You blundering anthropoid!" he snarled.

"I wish I'd gone ahead and hit you!" Monk told him.

The two glared, as if on the point of doing mutual murder. The fact was that each was delighted to see the other.

"What are you doing here, stupid?" Ham asked.

"Looking for four-leaf clovers," Monk advised. "How come you're still alive?"

Ham explained: "The gang that grabbed us at the movie location brought us up here and held us in the house under guard. It seems they were waiting for their big boss."

"How'd you get away from 'em?" Monk asked, curiously.

"That odorless and colorless anaesthetic gas of Doc's," Ham explained, tersely. "Doc had a phial of it in the lining of his coat, where they didn't find it. He broke it. They just keeled over. We held our breaths and kept the stuff from affecting us."

"You're waitin' for this mysterious chief to show up?"

"Exactly!"

Monk expanded visibly. "I've got the whole thing cleared up already."

Ham sniffed. "I expected that. Having a little time to work unhampered, you could accomplish wonders!"

"I've got the dirty low-down on the whole thing," Monk assured him. "Where's Doc?"

"At the house," said Ham,

Doc Savage was on a veranda upon which opened large French windows. Inside these windows, the prisoners

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

were arrayed. Apparently, they had not yet recovered from the effects of the anaesthetic gas.

"Look, Doc!" Monk said. "I've got the dope on this!"

"Excellent," Doc Savage said.

Ham grunted at Monk, "Well, tell us the solution."

Monk grinned. "What I mean is that I've got two guys who do know what it is all about."

Ham looked as if he were about to choke. He jabbed a finger at the prisoners on the floor. "We've got the same thing here!"

"Yeah." Monk looked only slightly downcast "That's right!"

Ham scowled blackly at Monk, opened his mouth, then shut it, and struck a listening attitude.

"What's that?" he demanded, sharply.

Monk stepped to the door, and something struck his legs, all but upsetting him. He looked down.

"Habeas Corpus!" he grunted.

"And Chemistry!" declared Ham, sighting his ungainly pet chimpanzee in the wake of Monk's pet pig.

The homely Monk leaned down, grasped one of Habeas's oversize ears and swung the shote back and forth. For a moment, Monk looked rather happy to see his pet. Then a startled expression convulsed his homely features.

"What's wrong, you missing link?" Ham demanded.

"Habeas and Chemistry!" Monk gulped. *"I left 'em shut up in the car with those two prisoners!"*

DOC, Ham and Monk lunged outdoors, began covering ground with great leaps. The glint of the big enclosed car could be seen ahead through the trees and brush. Doc and Monk put on an added burst of speed and reached the machine.

"Empty!" Monk howled. "Lookit! The doors are open!" The machine was not empty, however, as Monk discovered an instant later.

The homely chemist pointed an arm excitedly. What he was seeing seemed to have rendered him inarticulate.

"There—there——" He swallowed twice. "Look! Whatcha know about that?"

Ham came up. He also stared.

"So that is who you have been riding around with all night," he told Monk.

Monk shook his head in a slow, bewildered way. He reached into the car, carefully lifted a limp form.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

It was the girl—the very attractive young woman who had treated Monk so roughly at the airport, and who had proved to be bald-headed. She had escaped them at the movie location.

The young woman was bound securely and gagged.

Monk walked around the car, craned his neck and looked through the brush. There was no sign of Del Ling or turkey-necked Old Dan.

Doc Savage, in the meantime, was removing the girl's gag. The instant she was free, she began to explode excited words.

"They're going to kill me!" she wailed. "You've got to do something!"

Monk came to a stop in front of her. His nostrils were apprising him of something he had previously missed. Almost at the same moment, Doc Savage's tuneless, yet melodious, trilling came into being. The fantastic sound, apparently coming from no particular spot, wavered up and down the musical scale and trailed into nothingness, leaving the young woman looking vastly puzzled.

Ham said, "That camphor smell is still on you, Monk. Stronger than before."

"It's on me," the girl corrected. Her voice sounded strained.

"What became of the two guys I left in the car?" Monk demanded.

"They were taken away by the men who brought me here."

"What way'd they go?" Monk demanded.

"I'm not sure," evaded the young woman.

"You might as well stop lying," Ham snapped. "You turned those two prisoners loose!"

"I did not!" was the retort.

"You did!" Ham assured her. "And now you are taking up our time, until they have an opportunity to escape. That is why you remained behind—to hold us up, to give us a bum steer, so they could get away."

The young woman looked at Monk, and requested, "Untie my arms."

"Why?" Monk asked.

"I'm going to gouge his eyes out," she said, indicating Ham.

Ham snapped, "Young lady, it will take a mighty good explanation to account for your presence here."

"I *have* a good explanation!" she fired back.

"Yes?"

"My death is to be a warning to you!"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Monk and Ham stared at her, frankly astounded. Doc Savage also watched the young woman, but there was nothing in the bronze man's flake-gold eyes and on his metallic face to show whether he believed or disbelieved, or was even greatly surprised.

Monk broke the tension with, "Your death? Going to be killed?"

"There's not a chance of my escaping," the girl said, quietly.

"This doesn't make sense," Ham said.

The young woman looked at them levelly. "I'll tell you anything I can," she said.

"Suppose you tell us the whole story," Doc Savage suggested.

She began talking.

THE young woman spoke crisply, making a few words convey a great deal. Her story paralleled exactly that told by Director Del Ling. Camphor Wraith was a sinister mastermind who had perfected an unusual, and unescapable, form of death—and was killing, apparently aimlessly. The young woman—she said her name was Kateen MacRoy—had merely received a telephone call that she was one of the victims.

The girl denied that she knew why she had been selected as a victim.

"Why were you and Old Dan at the airport?" Monk interrupted.

The girl seemed to hesitate for the briefest of moments.

"We heard that Camphor Wraith had sent for you," she explained. "We couldn't understand why. We were afraid that—afraid that—well, you won't like this."

"What were you afraid of?" Doc Savage prodded.

"Afraid you were going to help Camphor Wraith," the girl snapped.

If the bronze man detected anything amiss about this explanation, he said nothing.

"And you appeared at the bank later," he reminded.

"Old Dan and myself were watching Montgomery Medwig Pell," she explained.

"Why?"

"Well, we thought he might be Camphor Wraith."

"Any proof of that?"

"No," she admitted. "Not at that time. But later, Old Dan and I separated. Pell seized me. I do not know what he intended to do. I was out at the studio. You know what happened. Pell went off, came back disguised to look like Samuel Wartz Gime—"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Like who?" Doc interrupted.

"Samuel Wartz Gime," the girl explained. "His face is beaked like a bird's."

"Who is he?"

"Another of the victims," said Kateen MacRoy. "Anyway, Pell was overcome with some kind of gas when he opened that package he grabbed from your man. Then we woke up in that studio, after which some of Camphor Wraith's men carried us away."

DOC SAVAGE nodded, as if this cleared everything up perfectly.

"What was that about your death being a warning?" the bronze man queried.

"They—Camphor Wraith and his men—are going to try to scare you. They left me in that car. I was told to tell you that I am to be killed. They want you to see just how helpless you are against them, their idea being that they can convince you you had best drop the whole thing."

Ham, still playing the part of the skeptical cross-examiner, shook his head and advised, "It sounds thin to me."

For a young woman who had been promised death, Kateen MacRoy had been holding her composure very well. Now she showed the first symptoms of a flare-up. She took a step—they had untied her during her recital—toward Ham, and looked as if she were about to strike the dapper lawyer.

"I don't like people calling me a liar!" she shrieked.

Ham now demonstrated that he was well versed in feminine psychology. Women are always sensitive about their appearance.

"Why is it you are bald-headed?" Ham asked.

If Ham had intended to make Kateen MacRoy more indignant, he certainly succeeded. She made sputtering sounds of rage, apparently tried to find something that would express her feeling adequately, then gave it up.

"I'm a movie double," she explained. "An oil lamp blew up and burned my hair."

Doc Savage asked her quietly, "Can you be of any further assistance to us?"

"I think I can," she said.

"How?"

"I think I know where you can find Camphor Wraith," said Kateen MacRoy.

"Look here," Ham snapped. "A moment ago, you said you were trailing Pell around in hopes of finding out whether or not he was Camphor Wraith. Now you tell us you know—"

"I didn't say I knew who Camphor Wraith was!" the girl retorted. "I know where he is—I think."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Is it close?" Doc Savage interposed.

"It is. Very close."

"Which way?"

"We will go to the house first," she said.

The four of them moved away from the car, trailed by the two grotesque-looking pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry. They mounted the hill in almost complete silence. Doc Savage, moving ahead, paused frequently to listen. If his trained ears picked up any ominous sounds, he made no mention of them.

They crawled through the hole in the hedge and advanced on the house. Monk surveyed the palatial dwelling and decided it was one of the fanciest he had ever seen.

The group approached the veranda with the French windows, inside which the bronze man's prisoners had been reposing.

"Doc!" Ham screeched, suddenly. "The prisoners—"

"Gone!" Monk barked.

A wild five minutes ensued. The house was searched from top to bottom. The grounds were gone over thoroughly. No trace of the captives could be found.

Ham confronted Kateen MacRoy, and said, "You should be able to call it a day, now!"

"What's that?" snapped the girl.

"I mean, you did a good job," Ham said, frigidly. "You kept us occupied while those thugs were being released."

Ham should have known better. He had seen the violence with which the young woman had performed upon Monk at the airport. She did even better now. There were two loud sounds—one made by the girl's fist, and the other by Ham hitting the floor.

Monk looked as if he were going to choke to death on his laughter.

"Pipe down, you tree climber!" the girl snapped.

"Huh?" Monk stopped laughing.

"There's no need of showing them we are back here," the young woman said.

"Mean they might hear us? They're that close?"

"They are."

Doc Savage said, "Suppose you guide us to this spot where you think we may find Camphor Wraith."

She nodded. "Come on."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Ham got up sheepishly from the floor.

KATEEN MACROY led the way across the shrub-dotted lawn until they reached the edge. Before them, blue and sun-splashed stretched the Pacific. The coast was ragged with little headlands, and the particular vantage point on which they stood was situated above a tiny cove which had a remarkably narrow beach.

Edging the beach were gaudy little bungalows— *cabañas*—used for bathing facilities and lounging around.

Kateen MacRoy pointed at a *cabaña* directly below.

"There!" she said.

"You mean Camphor Wraith is down there?" Monk demanded.

"I think so," she said.

Ham, still looking very indignant, squinted at the girl as if to make sure he was well out of her reach.

"If you ask me, it's a trap," he said. "She's trying to send us into something."

"Oh, go sour a bottle of milk!" the girl suggested.

"Is it dangerous for *you* to go down there?" Doc Savage asked the girl.

"I didn't think any one was believing anything I said," she retorted. "Yes, it's dangerous."

Doc Savage asked her, "Can you give us any idea of what this Camphor Wraith looks like?"

"No," she said. "I have no more idea of what the creature looks like than I have idea of why he has killed so many people."

Doc Savage addressed Monk and Ham. "You two wait here," he said.

The bronze man turned away, but he took only a single step and halted. His flake-gold eyes were focused on something below. Monk and Ham, startled by the intensity with which he was staring, moved forward to his side.

The girl also advanced. Suddenly, she gasped and her hand, clutching in excitement, closed upon Monk's arm, a circumstance which obviously pleased the homely chemist.

"There!" she breathed. "Look!"

The others did not need to be told to look. A figure had appeared from the *cabaña*. This figure was beginning to climb the steep slope of the cliff.

It was a grisly specter, this figure that climbed—an apparition oddly at variance with the peaceful noonday setting of turquoise sea, white beach and brown rock cliff. Up and up it clambered, like a tarantula making for a remote den. The man, if it was a man, wore a long loose cloak. A darksome hood made the head seem only an elongated neck. Thin legs carried the form.

"Quiet," Doc Savage breathed.

It had become apparent that the climber was heading directly toward them. There was a path down the cliff, and it began almost at their feet. They had but to wait and the quarry would be in their hands.

The homely chemist looked at the girl who crouched beside him. Monk was reflecting that he had never seen a more personable young woman, when suddenly she did something he would never forget.

The girl screamed.

"Camphor Wraith!" she shrieked. "Run!"

Monk was held motionless by surprise. Ham, however, whipped toward the girl; but Doc Savage was ahead of him. The bronze man clasped a hand over her mouth.

It was too late. The girl's shriek reached the climbing creature below. The figure stopped. It hung there on the side of the cliff, poised in motionless intensity for a moment. Then it whirled and started downward in wild leaps.

The very haste of the descent led to disaster for the spidery figure. Lost footing caused a fall. A rolling, thrashing bundle of arms and legs, the being went down the steep slope.

Almost miraculously, the fleeing apparition came out of the fall and was once more an upright, vaguely humanlike figure. It ran for the *cabaña*, gained the door.

"Come on!" Doc Savage said.

Doc descended the cliff with surprising speed. The others followed him. Monk nearly took a wild tumble, having forgotten to use the necessary amount of caution.

Ham went more slowly. He had secured a tight grip on the girl's wrist and was literally dragging her along. She held back, hampering him all she could.

Chapter X. CAMPHOR WRAITH UNMASKED

THEY RECEIVED a grim warning that the mysterious Camphor Wraith had ideas about being captured. The warning came in the form of three kinds of sound—yells, gun explosions, the whistle of lead. All the sounds issued from the beach *cabaña*.

Up above, Ham hauled the girl into a rock cranny.

Doc grasped a slab of stone which was a part of the cliff face, and tilted the slab upright, providing perhaps a square yard of thick stone shield that would turn almost any bullet. Monk crouched beside him.

"Ham!" Doc Savage called. "Are you all right?"

"Yes!" Ham called down. "But this girl keeps kicking me in the shins!"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Bullets still came from the *cabaña*. The men there were not wasting lead, however. The frequency of shots subsided, as the targets disappeared.

Then voices called from the *cabaña*, voices shrill with horror.

"Doc Savage!" they yelled. "They're going to kill us!"

Doc glanced at Monk. "Ever hear those voices before?" he said.

"Del Ling, the movie director with the dead-pan face!" Monk explained. "And that turkey-necked old slicker, Old Dan!"

The shooting suddenly increased. Gun sound made whooping thunder. Slugs hammered the rock shield, chipped its edges.

Doc and Monk were forced to concentrate on keeping themselves completely covered by their protective shield of stone. It would have been fatal to make any effort at retaliation.

Not once had they caught sight of the men firing up the side of the hill from the *cabaña*. Yet they knew, from the gun sound, that the little beach structure must contain at least half a dozen gunmen. The concentrated fire kept Doc, Monk and Ham trapped on the side of the cliff. Yet the men in the *cabañas* could not flee without an excellent chance of stopping bullets from the revolver which Monk still carried.

"Looks like it's fixed up so nobody could do anything,"

Monk complained.

DOC extracted from a coat pocket half a dozen little flat metal cases, not much larger than a wrist watch.

"Where'd you get those?" Monk demanded.

"From the door pocket of Pell's town car, where I had placed them previously," the bronze man explained.

Doc moved a lever on the side of one of the little metal cases, then drew back his arm and made a long throw. The thing fell almost against the side of the *cabaña*.

As the little metal object landed, there was a blast that made the previous noises of the battle trivial in comparison. The side of the *cabaña* that faced the cliff seemed to receive the thrust of a giant fist. It was obvious that the metal object which Doc Savage had flung was a compact grenade, holding an explosive of high order.

Monk, popping his head over the top of the slab at the sound of the explosion, could see the inside of the *cabaña*. The front wall had been caved in. A man was scurrying for the back.

Monk distinctly heard a yell.

"That scow better be gettin' here quick!" screamed a man in the *cabaña*.

"Doc!" barked Monk. "They're expectin' a boat!"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Doc merely pointed.

Monk followed the gesture, and saw what the bronze man meant. It was a sleek motor cruiser, plowing around the headland to the north of the cove and heading for the beach in front of the *cabaña*.

The gunmen inside the now wrecked structure sent another volley up the hill. Monk and Doc were driven to cover. Then the gunfire trickled away to occasional desultory shots. Doc Savage and Monk took another look.

The cabin cruiser, a craft nearly forty feet in length, was almost motionless in the water, a few yards from the beach in front of the *cabaña*.

Suddenly, like a covey of frightened quail, half a dozen figures rushed out of the *cabaña*, scurried across the narrow strip of beach and plunged for the motor boat.

"Blast it!" Monk gritted. "They're gettin' away!"

He heaved erect, only to be dragged back by Doc Savage. A moment later, the reason for the bronze man's action was apparent. From the deck cabin of the motor cruiser came the firecracker rattle of a machine gun, raking the cliff face with a leaden sickle of death.

"Whew!"

Monk gasped. "These guys sure mean business!"

Doc Savage said nothing. He moved the lever on another of the tiny grenades, heaved it. There was a crashing and roaring. The whole side of the cliff face seemed to be coming down. Dust arose in gigantic clouds. Monk, not sure whether he should flee or retain the shelter of the stone block, was in a quandary. Doc Savage left his side.

"Doc!" Monk barked. "Where you goin'?"

The bronze man did not answer. Down the cliff side he hurtled, seemingly with winged feet, and vanished in a fog of rock dust.

Bullets had stopped coming from the cruiser. Those on the craft could not see their target; dust from the rock slide had shut off their view completely. In fact, the rock slide was extending into the water, even menacing the cruiser itself.

A breeze blew the dust to one side, and Monk could see the *cabaña*, the boat, but he could see no sign of the bronze man.

Monk stared, puzzled, wondering where Doc Savage had gone. The bronze man had disappeared.

Then another figure interested Monk, a runner. The fellow had appeared from the *cabaña*, was making for the cruiser. It was the grotesque figure the girl had hailed as Camphor Wraith.

"Hurry!" the men aboard the boat were squalling.

The cloaked-and-hooded figure of Camphor Wraith reached the water, plunged in. The cruiser had backed out from shore a little, to be safe from the rock slide. This made it necessary for the spiderlike being to swim.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The spiderlike one had still some yards to go when something happened to him. His motions became convulsively violent; his long arms windmilled wildly. Camphor Wraith disappeared beneath the surface.

There was shouting, howling, jumping about on the deck of the cruiser. The men lined the rail. Some dived for their chief. The frantic search seemed to have no success.

Monk started to leave his concealment. Rifle bullets, excellently placed, convinced him he had better keep to shelter.

The men on the cabin cruiser were howling and cursing at each other.

"Get aboard, you mutts!" screamed the one who seemed to have taken charge. "He's done for! He's drowned!"

Those who had dived overboard to save their chief swam back and were helped on deck. The motor cruiser plowed a deep gash in the quiet sea, making to round the headland. It disappeared a few minutes later.

Monk, long before the craft's disappearance, had come out from behind his sheltering slab. He began a recklessly hasty descent of the steep hill. He had almost reached the wrecked *cabaña*, when the gaping hole in the side of the structure emitted a familiar figure. The newcomer was a beak-nosed, pousy-jowled man in uniformly black attire.

Samuel Wartz Gime, motion picture director Del Ling had said this man's name was.

"Such an ordeal!" the man groaned. "Believe me, I would not have insured myself for ten cents, an hour ago!"

Monk stared about intently. There was still no trace of Doc.

"HOW'D you get here?" Monk yelled.

"They made us prisoners!" groaned the beak-nosed Gime. He pointed at the *cabaña*. "Del Ling and Old Dan—they are in there, too. Prisoners the same as myself, only those sons of guns were in too big a hurry to take us with them when they left."

"How come this gang was hangin' out at your place?" Monk demanded.

Gime waved his arms. "Could I help it? They point a gun at me, and they say we stay here, and what are you going to do about it."

Monk ambled into the *cabaña*. From the clifftop it had seemed a small structure. But it was imposing enough. It had several rooms. He searched industriously. Groans drew him to a closet and he opened the door.

Del Ling and Old Dan tumbled out, both bound and gagged securely.

Monk left the bird-faced Gime to free them. Monk had something else on his mind—Doc Savage's safety. The homely chemist ran outside and to the pile of rocks which the slide had deposited at the foot of the cliff. It had struck Monk that Doc might be buried beneath that mass of stone.

A call drew Monk's attention to the water. He whirled.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Doc!" he howled.

Something was coming out of the sea. But it bore no resemblance to Doc Savage.

It was the limp, bedraggled figure of the apparition called Camphor Wraith. The fellow seemed to be unconscious and he was rising slowly from the sea, moving toward the shore. The reason for the seemingly mysterious phenomenon became apparent. Underneath the sodden bundle, carrying it, was the giant form of Doc Savage.

Monk grinned from ear to ear. He knew what had happened.

Under cover of the dust and noise of the rock slide, Doc had reached the water, dived in. The bronze man, through years of practice, had developed a remarkable ability to stay beneath the surface. He had swum to Camphor Wraith, seized the fellow and drew him under.

Camphor Wraith, who was still wearing the enveloping hood, seemed to be senseless. The haste with which the bronze man threw the figure on the sand and began to administer artificial respiration made it evident that Camphor Wraith might be revived.

Monk leaned down and tugged at the hood. It was fastened by a chin strap arrangement, and he did not succeed in removing it. A mouth hole permitted breathing.

"Hold his tongue," Doc directed.

Monk complied, although he would rather have finished stripping the hood off so that he could inspect the man's face. Holding the tongue, Monk knew, was a necessary precaution in resuscitation efforts. The tongue of drowning victims sometimes clog their throats.

Bird-beaked Gime, hybrid-faced Del Ling, and gaunt turkey-necked Old Dan came up. They stood in a silent group and looked expectant.

"Do you know who Camphor Wraith is?" Doc asked them.

They all shook their heads.

"I've had more suspicions than you could shake a stick at," Old Dan grumbled.

The unconscious individual who had used the name of Camphor Wraith was squirming with returning consciousness. Monk yelped and released the tongue, as the fellow bit his fingers. The grotesque figure heaved to a sitting position.

"We got you red-handed, hombre!" growled Old Dan. "Don't try to give us no stall!"

Bird-faced Samuel Wartz Gime snapped, "Well, why not unmask him!"

Monk unmasked him. "For the love of little fairy tales!" he gasped.

The unmasked man was lawyer Montgomery Medwig Pell.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

LAWYER PELL, if he saw them, was strangely undemonstrative of that fact. There was a look of utter blankness in his eyes. Doc passed a hand close to Pell's eyes. The man did not blink.

Monk said, "Pell, what's the idea of killing guys all over the world?"

Pell seemed not to hear.

"And how'd you do the killin'?" Monk continued.

He got no answer. Pell continued to stare. He did not move, or otherwise seem aware of their presence.

"What ails him?" Monk asked, finally.

"Nervous shock," Doc said.

"Huh?"

"He's faking!" yelled bird-faced Gime.

Doc said, "The man has been under some kind of a terrific nervous strain, and the shock of recent happenings has temporarily unbalanced him."

"He's faking!" howled Gime.

"Sure, he is!" shouted turkey-necked Old Dan.

Doc Savage ignored them. "Give a hand with him."

"Where are you taking Pell?" Del Ling snapped.

"To an institution equipped to handle psychopathic cases," Doc Savage explained.

With scant willingness, Old Dan, Del Ling and Samuel Wartz Gime assisted.

They were nearing the top of the cliff when something occurred to Monk.

"Ham!" Monk yelled.

There was no response.

Monk, suddenly alarmed, bawled, "Ham! Where are you and the girl?"

Considering his frequently expressed sentiments that nothing on earth would please him more than the privilege of skinning Ham alive, and that one of his main objects in life was the hope of some day doing this, Monk's alarm, as now displayed, was remarkable. He bounded up the cliff face in a way which proved that Ham was his dearest friend. Suddenly, Monk was pulling a limp body from a rock crevice.

"Ham! Ham!" Monk exploded. "Are you hurt?"

Ham opened one eye a faint crack. "Hold the world still," he requested, "and I'll try to sit up."

Convinced Ham was not badly damaged, Monk's attitude changed completely.

"You overdressed shyster!" gritted the homely chemist

. "What became of that girl?"

"If she wasn't a lady, I could gladly hope she broke her neck," Ham told him.

"What happened?"

"That young lady is a firecracker," Ham mumbled. "She blew up in my face. And that is as near as I can describe it."

"She's gone?" Monk howled.

"I hope," Ham groaned, feeling his head, "I never see her again."

Chapter XI. END AND BEGINNING

THE EDGEWORTH Clinic—where Doc Savage had sent Montgomery Medwig Pell to be treated—did not look like a psychopathic hospital. It was a rambling, Spanish style house in Beverly Hills. There was abundant tropical shrubbery about its spacious grounds. A tall hedge enclosed the whole. That there was a high wire fence behind this hedge, was something an observer would have to look closely to see. It certainly did not look like a hospital for mental patients.

It was night, but the interior of the clinic was, nevertheless, a lively place, and brightly lighted. The interior of Edgeworth Clinic maintained the formal appearance which characterized its exterior. It looked like a rather sumptuously furnished town house.

The nurses did not wear uniforms. There were no internes in white coats. Indeed, it was difficult, in some cases, to separate the patients from the staff.

An evening get-together was in progress, a social gathering of the inmates. Every one was well dressed—the men in tail coats, the women in evening gowns.

There was one individual present who could not possibly have been mistaken for an inmate. He was a huge, white-haired man with a ruddy face—a face that was deeply lined. They were strong lines, however, and the features were almost classically regular. This man was obviously a physician.

He was talking to a girl, a tall, broad-shouldered young woman whose lovely face was clouded as from an inner trouble. Her hair was black. Judging from her youthful figure, her hair should have been a glossy black, but it was not. It was dull, streaked with gray.

This woman was a nurse. The big, white-haired man was addressing a question to her.

"Do you find your profession a strain?" he asked.

She tried to smile up at him, but failed, and the failure was a little pathetic.

"Sometimes it terrifies me!" she said.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"That is an unhealthy trend of thought," the big man told her. "When the nurses here begin to identify themselves with their charges, they are courting trouble. It is not good. You have only been here a week. It has affected you quickly."

The girl made no effort to reply.

"There is one case which seems to affect you more than the others," suggested the big, white-haired physician.

"Yes," the troubled young woman admitted. "The young man in Room 16."

Then, as if she found the conversation distasteful, she walked off, crossing the big room and mounting the stairs.

Shortly afterward, the giant form of the elderly doctor climbed the stairs. It might have been noted that the white-haired man's step was surprisingly light, considering his aged appearance. At the top of the stairs, the big man stood listening for a moment. The girl had mounted these same stairs, but she had disappeared.

With an easy smoothness, the white-haired man walked down the hall and quietly opened the door which bore the number, 16. The room was unlighted, but there was enough moonlight to reveal it as a bedchamber. There were bars across the window.

A young man lay on a bed in the room. He wore pajamas, a striped bathrobe. He was sound asleep, a tall, cadaverously thin young fellow with a tight-lipped, angular face. His hair was very gray.

It was lawyer Montgomery Medwig Pell.

THE white-haired physician began to act very strangely. He went to a door, which he opened to reveal gleaming white tile of a bathroom. Moving with no perceptible sound, the big man stepped inside and closed the door, but not completely. He left a narrow crack through which he could observe Pell.

There was a wait that literally stretched into hours. The institution fell quiet. Not that it had been noisy at any time.

Montgomery Medwig Pell was awakening. He yawned, stretched, then lay there for a time without moving. Finally, he got up and went to a wall switch and turned on a flood of brilliance from a ceiling bulb.

He walked over to the door and listened. He began to make a sound, a rather horrible sound. It was a thin, high wail, a whimpering. It was like the cry of a lost soul, the sound of a completely darkened mind.

And all the time Montgomery Medwig Pell was making this ghastly sound, he was acting in a very normal manner. He moved to a bureau, ran a comb through his hair. He put on a striped flannel robe, picked up a newspaper and began to read it. Every now and then, he would stamp his foot on the floor. To any one outside, it would surely sound as if the person in the room were fighting the demons of a diseased mind. He kept up his mewling noises.

The attendants must have grown accustomed to this performance, for no one came. It was not uncommon for insane people to act in the manner in which Pell was performing.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Pell laid down the newspaper, went to the dresser and peered at himself in the mirror. This mirror, as a precautionary measure, was constructed of polished metal instead of glass. Pell seemed to be examining his head and apparently was not satisfied with what he saw.

He seized a can of white talcum and began to carefully sprinkle it in his scalp. The results of this did not satisfy him, either. He was now looking somewhat worried.

At this point, the big, white-haired watcher glided out of the bathroom. He moved soundlessly, and was almost beside Pell before he spoke.

"Pell," he said, "you are not what could be called a skilled actor!"

Pell gave a violent start, and whirled. His eyes for an instant were astounded, but perfectly sane. Then they became fixed, staring; but the manner in which they did this showed that the action was deliberate.

The white-haired man reached out and touched Pell's hair. "Your hair, which you had dyed gray, is beginning to grow out. You were trying to hide that with talcum."

Pell began speaking monotonously, "I am Napoleon Bonaparte, the mighty Little Corporal! How dare you address me—"

The white-haired man laughed. There was not much humor in the laugh. "You do not even have enough medical knowledge of insanity types to act the part of a madman. You were for a time actually unbalanced by nervous shock. But you recovered suddenly, early this morning, and since then, for reasons which you are going to tell me, you have been acting a part."

"What do—you mean?" Pell stuttered, giving up the pretense.

"You are a young man," said the other. "You have disguised yourself as a middle-aged lawyer. Why?"

Pell peered closely at the big white-haired man who held him.

"Doc Savage!" he gulped.

THE giant, white-haired physician—Doc Savage—suggested quietly, "Why not tell the truth of what is behind all of this, Pell?"

"I tell you, I am an—an insane man," Pell began, desperately.

"You were willing to take the whole burden of the Camphor Wraith business," Doc said. "Pell, what is behind this?"

Pell's face was a procession of patterns presenting desperate, goaded fear.

"Would you care to hear some things which have become pretty apparent in the course of events?" Doc Savage asked.

"You mean—what you know," Pell demanded.

"Exactly!"

Pell moistened his lips. "It might help," he said.

"All right," Doc Savage told him. "When the girl, Kateen MacRoy, appeared near Gime's house, her purpose was to lead us to that *cabaña* hide-out."

The bronze man paused for this to sink in.

"She was not, however, leading us into a trap," he continued. "She wanted my men and myself to see you. In short, she wanted to convince us beyond the shadow of a doubt *that there was a being known as Camphor Wraith!*"

Pell moistened his lips again.

"How do you know this?" he gulped.

"Simply because the story the young woman told did not hold together," Doc Savage told him. "And her flight and her warning shout to you, if you need further proof."

Pell swallowed. He did not seem to know what to say.

"You took the part of Camphor Wraith," Doc Savage told Pell. "That was for deception. Some one wanted us to think we had captured Camphor Wraith, some one who had hold enough over you to make you take orders—even orders that might mean your own death."

PELL stumbled to a chair. He sat down in it. His arms hung weakly, his whole being seeming to droop.

"What you've—discovered is—incredible!" he muttered. "You will be telling me next that you know the whole thing!"

"Suppose you talk," Doc suggested.

Pell went through facial motions of a man reaching a tremendous decision.

"I will," he said.

He did not, however.

Suddenly, there was no light in the room. The electric illumination whisked out. Then there was the sound of glass breaking. Some one outside had broken the window. An odor came into the room. It was a scent very distinct, as real as the presence of death, strangely camphor-like.

"The Agate Devil!" Pell screamed.

Doc Savage whipped to the window and peered out. Montgomery Medwig Pell ran in the other direction, tore the door open, dived through.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Doc Savage remained at the window only long enough to make sure he could discern no one below. Not that there was no one there. There must have been, but it was more necessary to keep track of Pell. Doc raced out of the bedroom and down the hallway after the fleeing Pell.

The bronze man would have overtaken Pell before the man got halfway down the stairs, had not an obstacle flung herself at him. It was the girl of the troubled face and the gray-streaked hair. She seemed to have been waiting there in the hall, perhaps listening.

She had remarkable strength for a woman. Doc grasped the girl and shook her. The shaking caused the young woman's hair to fall off.

It was the bald-headed girl, Kateen MacRoy.

"Let him alone!" she screamed at Doc Savage. "Do you have to keep hounding him?"

Doc Savage rapped, "His life is in danger!"

"Of course it is!" she shrieked. "They know you have guessed too much, so they're going to kill Pell to keep him from talking!"

Doc shoved her gently away and leaped down the stairs in pursuit of Pell.

Pell had apparently dashed out into the night.

OUTSIDE, there was enough moonlight for Doc Savage to see the madly sprinting form of Pell. The man was racing toward the gate.

Doc Savage lunged in pursuit. When his ears notified him of sudden silence ahead, he stopped.

Then came an ear-splitting shriek, such sound as would be made by a man in the grip of extreme terror.

Then the light appeared, fantastic, yellowish luminance so brilliant that it hurt the eyes. But it began to diminish in strength at once, and went out with a swiftness almost equal to that with which it had appeared.

Doc raced through the shrubbery toward the vanishing glow. There was silence ahead now. No more screaming. Back in the clinic, there was a noise of much shouting.

Doc reached the red glow. All that remained of it was a little statuette, and it stood in what looked like a pool of glowing red rock.

Pell's body sprawled near by, twisted in ghastly fashion. There was wet scarlet on his chest, on his tattered, striped bathrobe. Bathrobe and body were both wet with water. A fountain splashed near by. It looked as if Pell might have run through it in the course of his wild flight.

Monk and Ham—they had been awaiting Doc outside the grounds of the clinic—appeared almost at once, running from the direction of the road.

"We had a heck of time gettin' in!" Monk barked.

"What happened?" barked Ham.

The dapper lawyer thumbed a flashlight on, played the beam over the features of Doc Savage's limp burden.

"Pell!" Ham yelled. "They killed him!"

"Get the devil statuette," Doc ordered. "You'll find it back there in the shrubbery."

Monk and Ham, trying to pick the devil up, burned themselves. Ham solved that problem by unsheathing his sword cane, hooking the blade under the curled tail of the devil and lifting the thing. They moved back to the path.

There was a flutter of feet on the walk and Kateen MacRoy appeared. Her gray-haired wig was slightly askew.

"Pell!" she gasped. "What happened to him?"

"That infernal mystery death got him," Ham told her, callously.

Kateen MacRoy drew herself up very straight. Air went out of her lungs in a long sigh. Monk jumped, but failed to catch her before she fell heavily.

Doc Savage was calling, "Hurry! Bring Pell and the girl!"

Chapter XII. DEATH WARNING

WHEN KATEEN MACROY recovered from her faint, she peered about curiously. Hotel rooms are pretty much the same the world over. She was in one—Doc Savage's suite in the Martel Hotel in Los Angeles.

"Pell!" she asked weakly, after a time.

"It's no use," Monk told her, not unkindly. "You wouldn't want to look at him."

"Where is he?" she asked.

"We left him—at an undertaking establishment," Monk said, slowly.

The girl began to sob, but not loudly.

"We just got here at the hotel," Monk told her, as if that meant anything.

The girl continued to sob, and the very quietness of her grief made it more painful to watch.

Monk asked finally, "What were you doing at the hospital?"

The girl's answer came brokenly. "I was afraid—they would try—to kill Pell. I disguised myself—bribed the head nurse to hire me. I wanted to—keep them from killing Pell, if I could."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Who is *them*?" Monk asked. "Why should they want to kill Pell?"

Kateen MacRoy looked at the homely chemist.

"Get Doc Savage," she said. "Pell is dead. There is no reason now why I can't tell you the whole story."

Monk dived into a connecting room, where Doc Savage stood examining the little red satan statuette which had been found in the hospital yard after the attack on Pell.

"Remarkable!" the bronze man said, quietly. "The features of this satan are the features of Pell!"

Monk grunted, "The girl says she was sure they were going to kill Pell."

"They?"

"Aw, heck!" Monk growled. "Whoever is behind this. Anyhow, the girl says she is willing to tell us the whole yarn."

Ham, standing near by, interjected, "Pell seems to have been the reason the girl didn't talk before," he said.

They went back into the other room. The girl lay on the divan, seemingly interested not at all in what was going on. She did not even look at them, as they drew close.

DOC SAVAGE studied the young woman for some moments. Then he went back into the other room and opened his portable equipment case. For some moments he clinked glasses, concocting some kind of a chemical ingredient. He offered this to the young woman.

"A stimulant," he explained. "It will help overcome the depressive effects of shock."

She took the glass and emptied it without as much as even looking to see what was in it.

"It will at least relieve your mind to tell what you know," Doc Savage suggested, gently.

She nodded apathetically, and began to talk in a flat, inflectionless voice.

"Montgomery Medwig Pell was my fiancé," she told them. "We were to be married next month. He was a private detective."

"Huh!" Monk grunted, looking disappointed. "So that's the connection!"

Kateen MacRoy continued dully, "About a year ago, Monty took up some special work. He had to travel a lot. He went to Europe, China, all over the world. He seemed to like it for a while."

"Do you know what he was doing?" Doc Savage asked.

"No," replied the girl. "The work was secret. Monty was to tell no one what he was doing. Not even me."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"I see," said the bronze man.

"About three months ago, he began to get worried," the girl went on. "I could see he was concerned over something. I talked to him about it. He said that my knowing anything would probably mean my death. We had a quarrel. I finally wormed out of him that some one was holding a death threat over his head, to make him do things he loathed doing."

"What kind of things?"

"He would never say."

"How did you get yourself involved in the affair?" Doc asked.

The girl spoke listlessly. "I was determined to help him. I suggested calling you. He agreed to do so, but insisted on doing it in such a manner that you would not suspect him."

Doc said, "The fact that he had telegraphed me was found out?"

"Yes," she said, tonelessly. "They must have suspected him and been watching. At any rate, a voice telephoned me. It was a man's voice, and it said that Monty would be killed unless he and I did everything we were told to do. My first order was to go to the airport with Old Dan and rob you of the telegrams which Monty Pell had sent you. We failed. Then Old Dan and I were ordered to be in a car near the bank in which Monty had put the clues in a safe-deposit box."

"Clues?" Doc interposed.

"The satan statuette, the bottle of liquid with the camphor odor, and the note directing you to the movie location," the girl replied, dully.

"That satan statuette!" Monk grunted, abruptly. "It had your features, remember?"

She added dully, "That one was sent to Monty, to warn him that I would be killed unless he did exactly as he was told. Later, they demanded he return it. He told them he had destroyed it, for he got the idea from their wanting it back, that in some way, it was a clue that could be used against them."

"They didn't believe he had destroyed it?" Monk asked.

"Oh, no! They hoped to get it by keeping track of Doc Savage until he got it. They did not know it was in the vault at the bank, until Doc got it out and one of their men saw it from a distance."

Monk considered, then asked with difficulty, "Did you shoot that man at the bank? The man we were about to question and who was shot through the window?"

"No," the girl denied, without emotion. "He was shot by some one in a building across the street. I didn't see the killer. He got away."

Doc was silent for a moment, apparently checking her story against known facts.

"At the movie location, you were doing what?"

"Helping Old Dan try to get the blue satan statuette away from you," explained the girl.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"The *blue* statuette?" Doc interposed.

"The blue one," she agreed. "They did not seem to be interested in the red ones."

MONK whirled on Doc, and gulped. "Where's that blue devil, Doc?"

"I still have it," the bronze man admitted. "In a safe place."

"The blue one has some special significance!" Monk pointed out. He turned to the girl. "What significance does it have? Why does it mean any more than the red devils?"

"I do not know," she said, voice emotionless.

Ham, who liked nothing better than to be cross-questioning some one, put in, "What has Old Dan got to do with this mystery?"

"He claimed he was involved—at first, innocently, and was now in so deep that he was afraid to back out."

"And where does that guy with the queer face, Del Ling, come in?" Ham added.

"I can't tell you."

"And how about black clothed, beak-faced Samuel Wartz Gime?" snapped Ham.

"I do not know that, either," said the girl. "I only know that they take orders from this mysterious mastermind, whoever he is."

Ham looked thwarted.

"What's that thing they use to kill people?"

"I do not know what it is."

"What is the significance of the red satan statuettes?" Ham snapped.

She only shook her head.

Ham blew up. "Blast it, woman! Don't you know anything? I think you're lying to me!"

Doc drew Ham aside.

"She told the truth," said the bronze man.

"I don't see how you can be sure," Ham complained.

"That mixture which I gave her to drink," Doc explained, "was a truth serum."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

THE telephone emitted a sudden jangle. Homely Monk, being nearest the instrument, swung over to answer it.

"Yeah?" he said, and added a moment later, "speaking."

Monk listened intently. He began to scowl. As the conversation drew to an end, Monk looked as if he could cheerfully have bitten the heads off any nails that might have been around.

Monk emitted a roar, threw the telephone to the floor and jumped on it. He kicked a chair over. He beat his own chest with his fists.

"I won't do it!" he squawked.

"A perfect picture of an ape in a tantrum," Ham said, sarcastically.

Monk glared as if he would gladly take his spleen out on the dapper lawyer.

"What is it?" Doc Savage interposed.

"Complications!" Monk gritted. "That was the district attorney. That hybrid-faced mug, Del Ling, has entered a complaint charging me with kidnaping!"

Monk jumped up and down some more.

"The lug!" the homely chemist howled. "I shoulda throwed him in the ocean the day we caught Pell."

"What are they going to do about it?" Doc Savage asked.

"There's a cop comin' to get me," Monk growled. "I think I'll spank him or send him back or something!"

Doc Savage suggested, "It might be wise to get Del Ling and bring him to see the district attorney, too. You are in a position to ask some embarrassing questions of Del Ling."

That remark spread a smile over Monk's gloom.

"You bet I will! Now I'll drift downstairs and look for the cop, who's coming."

Monk went out.

Monk took his time getting down to the lobby.

A burly, rather stolid-looking man came into the lobby from the street. He peered about, saw Monk and approached. He tapped Monk on the shoulder, simultaneously drawing aside his coat to reveal a badge which said the man was a special investigator from the Los Angeles district attorney's office.

"They didn't need to send a flatfoot after me," Monk growled.

"My orders are to handcuff you," the badge wearer told him, unkindly.

Monk looked very black, and seemed of half a mind to start a fight. Then he sighed, and submitted to having the handcuffs clicked over his wrist.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The stolid man led Monk outside, flagged a taxi, prodded the homely chemist into it, and they drove away.

The cab turned into a side street. Monk suddenly discovered that there was a car ahead, one on either side, and a fourth behind.

"Hey!" Monk barked. "What's goin' on?"

The next instant, the hack slid a to stop. The other cars likewise braked to a halt. Men sprang out of them.

Monk's captor had produced a revolver. He let the homely chemist look into the barrel.

"What's the meaning of this?" Monk demanded. "You birds aren't from the district attorney's office."

"No?" The stolid man leered. "If it would interest you, we're from the particular corner of hell where they make them little red devils—and *one blue one!*"

Monk sat perfectly still. It was useless to resist.

BACK in the hotel suite, Ham was showing concern.

"Can they keep Monk in jail, Doc?" the dapper lawyer asked, in a worried tone.

"Doubtful," Doc Savage reassured him.

Then Doc went into one of the bedrooms and began delving into the metal equipment cases. He produced a black box of a thing, about the size of a lady's week-end case. From one end of this projected a large lens, camera-like. The lens looked like ordinary glass, except that it was purplish-black.

Ham asked, "What's the idea of the ultra-violet lantern, Doc?"

"There is one clue in this whole affair which we have never investigated thoroughly," Doc Savage said.

Ham scratched his head. He thought deeply.

"I don't remember any such clue," he declared.

"The cigar," Doc told him.

"What cigar?"

"The one in an oblong wooden box of its own," Doc reminded.

"Oh, yes," Ham recalled. "You found that in the pocket of the man who was killed at the bank."

Doc Savage went to a case containing chemicals. He opened a large jar filled with a black liquid. He poured this out. Cleverly mounted in the center of the large jar was a smaller container with an airtight, screw top. Doc Savage unscrewed this and lifted out the cigar.

"Think there's something queer about it?" Ham asked.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Instead of replying directly, Doc handed the cigar to Ham, and queried, "What do you think?"

Ham looked the cigar over closely. He sniffed of it.

"Good tobacco," he said.

"See anything suspicious?" Doc Savage asked him.

"No," Ham replied, after another inspection. "There is no writing on the cigar."

Doc Savage said nothing. He moved to a table and carefully unrolled the outside leaf wrapper of the cigar. The cigar was fresh, so the leaf could be unrolled without cracking or falling apart.

Doc Savage spread the wrapper leaf of the cigar out on the table. He turned off the lights in the room and pulled the shades. Then, in semidarkness, he picked up the ultra-violet projector and focused its dark lens at the wrapper leaf. He pressed a switch on the side of the box.

Ultra-violet light has some peculiar properties. Itself invisible to the naked eye, it causes a peculiar phenomenon upon striking certain substances. For instance, ultra-violet light played upon ordinary vaseline causes the vaseline to glow, or fluoresce.

"Jove!" Ham gasped. "There's something printed on the leaf with an invisible ink that the ultra-violet light brings out!"

THE glowing figures were quite distinct. They had been printed there with some kind of stamping apparatus, it seemed:

PATENT NO. 1 9 3 22 1 24

REGISTERED JUNE 1, 1911

"I don't see anything unusual about that," Ham said, "except that the figures in the patent number seems to be spaced a little irregularly. But say, isn't it queer that a patent number should be placed on these cigars?"

"These are very fine cigars," Doc Savage reminded. "No doubt they bring a high price, and it is logical that the maker would place on them some mark of identification, to distinguish his product from cheaper imitations."

"Yes," Ham admitted, "that is logical."

"The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy sleeping dog," Doc Savage said, slowly.

"What?" Ham eyed the bronze man as if he thought the latter had become suddenly unbalanced.

Doc Savage seemed on the point of explaining, but the telephone rang. Doc went to the instrument, lifted the receiver.

"Yes," he said.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

He listened intently. The expression on his metallic features had not changed, as he hung up. He took the receiver off the hook again and dialed a number.

"Let me speak to Samuel Wartz Gime," he requested.

Doc Savage had changed his voice until it was doubtful if any one could have recognized it over the telephone as belonging to the bronze man.

"Not there?" he said into the mouthpiece, after listening. "Thank you." He hung up.

"What is it?" Ham demanded.

"Monk has been seized," Doc Savage said. "That first call was to advise me that, unless we are back in New York in twenty-four hours, Monk will be killed."

"But what was the idea of your making the second call?" Ham gasped.

"I called the Samuel Wartz Gime residence at Palomar," Doc Savage said.

"But why?"

"A voice informed me that Gime was not there," Doc replied.

"Which proved what?"

"The voice was the same that made the call telling of Monk's seizure."

"Jove!" exploded Ham. "How'd you know where to call?"

"It was no hunch," Doc told him. "My intention was to call Gime, Del Ling, and Old Dan in succession, but it happened that the first call gave me the information."

Doc Savage got another jar from his case of chemical supplies. This one, opened, disgorged from a second inner jar the blue devil statue.

"The *blue* one!" Ham grunted. "The one that seems to be important."

The bronze man passed the blue image to Ham.

"Take care of it," he directed.

Ham examined the thing, then carefully pocketed it, shaking his head. "I don't see what's queer about it."

Doc Savage took the cigar wrapper to the window shade, pulled the shade down to its greatest length, and rolled the wrapper up inside of it.

"It may be found there," he said. "But it will not make a great deal of difference. Do you remember the figures of that patent number, Ham?"

"Yes," said Ham, who had a good memory. "One, nine, three, twenty-two, one, twenty-four."

Doc Savage led the way into the next room. Kateen MacRoy seemed to have recovered somewhat from her lethargy. She eyed them, and noticed the excitement in Ham's manner.

"Something up?" she asked.

"They have Monk," Doc told her.

She got to her feet. "If I can help in any way, count on me."

"We will," Doc Savage told her. "Come with us."

Chapter XIII. GRIM MANSION

AS THE three of them left the hotel suite, Doc Savage was carrying his ultra-violet lantern. He also carried, wrapped in a newspaper, a pair of goggles—at least, they vaguely resembled goggles. They had, however, lenses which were nearly as large as condensed milk cans.

They rang for an elevator. The cage arrived shortly and the door opened. Ham stepped inside, as the operator held the door open.

"Wait a moment!" Doc Savage said, suddenly.

"Down?" queried the operator.

"In a few moments," Doc said.

The bronze man grasped Kateen MacRoy's elbow and drew her from the cage. Ham made a move to step out also.

"You might get the car ready," Doc Savage suggested.

Ham nodded, stepped back into the elevator and rode down to the street level. As he descended, the elevator operator made casual conversation.

"I've seen the big bronze fellow somewhere before," he said.

"You might have," Ham admitted, absently.

"Who is he?" queried the operator.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Doc Savage," Ham said. There was no point in trying to keep it a secret. Doc was registered under his own name at the hotel.

"Good night!" gasped the operator. "I've read about this Doc Savage! He's got a reputation!"

Ham went outside and walked around the corner to the garage where they were keeping Pell's town car. Ham started the motor, drove to the front of the building, parked and waited.

Ham was wondering just why Doc had remained behind with the girl. The bronze man was telling her something, of course. But what?

Up in the hotel suite, Doc said, "You understand the plan, now?"

A striking change had come over Kateen MacRoy. Her listlessness was completely gone, and she seemed afire with an inner excitement.

"You are an incredible person!" she gasped. "You know the whole thing—what is behind it—"

Doc asked, "You are willing to do your part, should it be necessary?"

"Absolutely!" the girl said, fervently. "After what you have told me about Pell being—"

"Don't talk too much!" Doc warned her. "They may have dictaphones planted in this place!"

The girl nipped her lips. "Righto!"

"You will have to look gloomy," Doc warned her.

She proved she was an actress by looking very gloomy indeed. They walked out into the elevator.

In the midst of the descent, Kateen MacRoy gave a slight start. Not enough, however, to attract Doc Savage's attention. The girl glanced down at her hand. It held a folded paper.

The elevator operator had shoved that paper into her hand.

"Some very interesting things have been written about you, Mr. Savage," said the elevator operator.

Kateen MacRoy knew that this was an order to read the note. She caught the elevator operator's eye. He shifted his glance to Doc Savage and shook his head slightly. That, of course, meant that Doc was not to see the note.

The young woman hesitated, then nodded, as if to herself. But she knew the elevator operator was watching her and would know the nod meant she was agreeing to comply with his order.

Doc Savage strode ahead across the lobby. This gave Kateen MacRoy a chance to open the note in cupped hands and glance at it. It was typewritten and easy to read:

Get that blue devil statuette and you will not be killed. Man in green coupé will help you escape.

Doc Savage and Kateen MacRoy reached Ham, who was waiting in the town car at the curb.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"I think I should rather sit in front," Kateen MacRoy said.

To preclude the likelihood of argument, she climbed in beside Ham. The only strange thing about this action was that the young woman and Ham had certainly not been getting along together. Ham had treated her with frank suspicion throughout.

Doc Savage rode alone in the rear.

Ham got the car in motion. Then he rolled down the glass partition separating the driver's compartment from the rear seat. He did this so that he could converse with Doc.

"Think we've got a chance of taking Monk's captors by surprise?" he asked.

Doc Savage seemed to be watching Kateen MacRoy with rather unusual intentness.

"It is hard to tell," the bronze man said.

"The whole thing might be a trap," Ham reminded.

"Of course," Doc agreed.

"I hope they haven't got Monk at all," Ham growled.

That ended the conversation for a while. Ham found that the job of jockeying the sedan through the night traffic of downtown Los Angeles completely absorbed his attention. The dapper lawyer had begun to think he was out of the worst of the jam, when it became apparent that he was not.

Ahead, two cars tried to cross an intersection at the same time. There was screeching of tires. Horns blatted frantically. The two machines stopped, almost against each other. The drivers began to exchange hard names.

Traffic piled up at the street intersection like a log jam in an overworked flume. In a few moments, there was a considerable tangle of cars.

A green coupé pulled up alongside their town car.

That seemed to be what Kateen MacRoy was waiting for.

The young woman went into action. She grabbed for Ham's coat pocket. The dapper lawyer, his attention centered on the traffic jam, was totally unprepared. Before he knew what was happening, the young woman had grasped the stone satan carving. Then, moving with amazing speed, she started to get out of the car.

Doc Savage met that move. He reached over the back of the front seat, grasped her, held her back. They struggled furiously.

Doc Savage seemed to be concentrating entirely on keeping the stone statuette. He succeeded. But the girl got out of his clutch. She popped out of the car onto the pavement.

"Drat her!" Ham yelled, and made a move to lunge in pursuit.

A revolver began blasting from the green coupé. The first bullet all but parted Ham's hair. He changed his mind about following the girl. He flung himself backward, got out of the car on the opposite side. Doc

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Savage was beside Ham, almost instantly.

They heard the coupé door bang. The car engine made a great deal of noise. There was a thumping as the machine hurtled the curb, turned and went back up the street away from the traffic jam.

Ham, making inarticulate sounds of impotent rage, scrambled into the car. Doc was beside him. Ham got the engine started, backed the big machine and turned it around. The shooting had created a good deal of excitement.

"Doc!" Ham gasped. "Did you see who was in that coupé?"

"The man called Old Dan," Doc Savage admitted.

HAM took the corner on two wheels. The coupé was not in sight ahead.

"I thought that girl was on the level this time," Ham gritted.

Doc Savage said nothing.

Ham groaned, "Doc, I thought you said you gave her truth serum?"

"Correct," the bronze man admitted.

"She must have a lot of will power," Ham complained. "Otherwise she would have told the truth when under the influence of the serum."

"The performance of truth serum is very erratic," Doc Savage told him. "On some individuals, it will work hardly at all."

"She must be one of them."

Ham drove in a manner which alarmed many traffic cops. He searched the neighborhood thoroughly.

They did not find the green coupé.

"Blast the luck!" Ham wailed. "The girl will tip them off that we know who's got Monk! What'll we do?"

"The only thing we can do," Doc told him: "Hunt for Monk."

TWO hours later, the complex problem presented by the actions of Kateen MacRoy had ceased to be Ham's chief topic. By that time, Doc Savage and Ham were approaching Samuel Wartz Gime's Palomar estate.

They were crawling along the hedge which surrounded the estate.

"We might as well go in through that hole where Monk got me the other day," Ham suggested in a whisper.

"Good enough," Doc agreed.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

It was still night—very black night. That Doc Savage and Ham were able to move without noise, was in large part due to the ultra-violet or "black light" lantern and the special goggles which they had brought along. The mechanism of these goggles was infinitely complicated. They consisted of filters, rotating screens of a fluorescent nature, and rapid shutters. This mechanism was all contained inside the lenses that were like condensed milk cans. Only by placing an ear against the cans could the operation of the mechanism within be heard. It was very silent.

The black light was not strong enough to cause any fluorescing phenomena which might betray their presence. As seen through the fluoroscopic goggles, the world presented a weird aspect of shadows and highlights.

They moved along the hedge, directing the ultra-violet projector at the base of the green growth—it certainly did not look green as they saw it now—until they found the aperture which Ham had mentioned.

Ham got down on his hands and knees and started to crawl through. What happened as soon as he touched the foliage of the hedge was ample proof that their visit had not been unexpected.

The entire hedge sprang out in a blaze of light. Floodlights seemed to go on everywhere. An alarm gong racketed.

The hedge had obviously been equipped with an effective alarm system.

"It looks," said Ham, grimly, "as if we were all set for a party."

They were. It developed immediately that gunmen were a part of the entertainment. Orange flame leaped from the hedge and shrubbery. Lead snipped the foliage where Doc Savage and Ham were lying. They changed their position hurriedly.

Ham listened. He decided fully a dozen men were shooting.

"This might be an occasion when discretion is the better part of valor," he suggested.

Doc Savage seemed not to hear him. The bronze man was crawling along the hedge, making for one of the floodlights.

"Putting one of those lights out won't help much," Ham barked.

Doc Savage paid no attention. He reached up, grasped the floodlight and hauled it down. The movement of the light drew a storm of lead. There was, however, a small ditch at that point, and Doc Savage was sheltered effectively.

He managed to get the lens from the light. He unscrewed the bulb, using a handkerchief to protect his fingers from the heat. He turned the reflector toward the sky. A small coin came out of his pocket and went into the socket from which he had removed the bulb.

A moment later, there was a fizzing and spitting of blue flame, as the coin accomplished a short circuit. All the floodlights went out.

HAM gave quite a start a moment later, when Doc Savage spoke at his side.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Blew the fuses," the bronze man explained.

Both Doc Savage and Ham had temporarily removed their fluoroscopic spectacles, these being considerably worse than useless where there was brilliant normal light. Now they put them on again. Doc carried the projector of ultra-violet light.

The bronze man worked through the hole in the hedge. Ham followed him.

"We will stay together," Doc Savage breathed.

They crept forward. They could hear some very disgusted cursing. A few guns still banged.

The black light picked up a skulking gunman. Doc and Ham crept up on him. Since it was intensely dark, the thug could not see the bronze man and his aid. They made no sounds he could hear.

Doc Savage grabbed him. It was within the bronze man's abilities to have made the fellow unconscious without a sound; but Doc Savage did not choose to do this. Instead, he held the fellow in a grip that was almost steel. The man emitted one squawk after another.

Doc Savage transferred his grip to the fellow's neck. His powerful fingers did something to certain spinal nerve centers. The man went limp, seemingly paralyzed. He would remain that way for some time.

"We will get a few of them, letting each one yell," Doc Savage whispered. "That will start them worrying."

Ham grinned fiercely. He could imagine the effectiveness of that form of attack. The fact that they could see in the dark and their foes could not, would make things simple.

Doc Savage advanced toward another victim. Ham also looked around. He saw a bush shake, ahead and to the right. He crept for that spot. The ultra-violet lantern threw a wide span of illumination, and, although Doc was carrying the lamp, Ham could see his own quarry.

The prospective victim was a wizened fellow. The dapper lawyer set himself and pounced. He held the man and let him scream.

Having secured several lusty shouts, Ham swung a fist. The victim became senseless.

Then Ham made his mistake. He decided to search the fellow. There was a chance the man's pockets might disgorge something of interest.

Doc Savage tarried long enough to note that Ham had succeeded in overcoming his captive. Then the bronze man went on. It was necessary that they work in a hurry. At any moment, their foes might manage to repair the lights.

Then to Doc's ears came sounds which indicated misfortune had befallen Ham.

"Doc!" Ham squalled. "Doc!"

Doc Savage spun, dashed to the spot from which the cries had come.

Ham was sitting beside a bush, unharmed, except for a gash on his head; he was holding his head with both hands.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Three of them!" he gulped. "They ganged me!"

The man whom Ham had overcome was also gone. Evidently the dapper lawyer's assailants had rescued him.

"They socked me with something," Ham muttered, dazedly. "I think it was a monkey wrench."

"What about the blue satan statuette?" Doc Savage prodded.

Ham gave a violent start, darted a hand into his pockets.

"Gone!" he gulped. "They took the blue devil!"

THEY listened. To their ears came sounds of activity. Their foes were undoubtedly in retreat.

"They're heading for the house," Ham said, grimly. "They're going to hole up there."

Doc Savage, as if something had occurred to him, ran back to the point where he had overcome the first victim. The man was gone. He must have been carried off.

"These fellows work fast," Ham said, grimly.

"Come on," Doc Savage directed.

They crept toward the house. Fifty yards from it, they realized that things were not going exactly as they had thought.

"They're not retreating into the house," Ham corrected his earlier conclusion. "They're going down the cliff!"

This was true. Stones were clattering. Men were grunting, swearing. All of these sounds came from the cliff face. Doc Savage and Ham ran for the spot.

A light sprang up. A small flame at first, it spread over the ground.

"They've set fire to dry grass along the cliff edge!" Ham yelled. "That's so they can see us, if we come close!"

That this move of their enemies was going to be effective, was proven an instant later. Doc and Ham must have come close enough that the glow of the fire was reflected upon them. Guns *whanged*. The lead came much too close for comfort.

"This way," Doc Savage said.

The bronze man guided Ham to the right. They reached the cliff edge some distance from the fire, peered over.

"Can we get down?" Ham demanded.

"It will be slow work," Doc Savage said.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Doc produced from inside his clothing a device which he always carried. It was a long silk cord attached to a collapsible grappling hook. He managed to wedge the grapple into a rock cranny. Doc glided down the cord. The cord, of course, long as it was, lacked a great deal of reaching the cliff's bottom. What he would do when he reached the end of the strand was problematical.

A rumbling sound came out of the cove at the foot of the cliff. Ham recognized it instantly: an airplane motor. He squinted intently. One of the men below flicked a flashlight on briefly. The glow illuminated a plane—a large, two-motored ship. It was a seaplane, an amphibian rather, resting on the water. The men were loading aboard.

Ham caught a glimpse of two prisoners. At least, their wrists were tied, and they were gagged. They were the hybrid-faced movie director, Del Ling, and bird-beaked Samuel Wartz Gime.

There was no sign of Monk.

Ham heard a sound beside him. He reached hastily to ascertain if the grapple was still fixed in the crevice. It was gone. He had a horrible moment, when he thought the thing had given way. Then he realized Doc must have flipped the cord from below and freed it.

What the bronze man planned to do was now clear. He would refasten the grapple hook below and continue down the cord. He must have found a ledge suitable for that purpose. The noise of the plane motors became louder. The ship was in motion.

It took off a moment later.

Ham ran to the path, wading through the brisk fire. He descended, using all of the haste consistent with safety. He found Doc Savage at the bottom.

"They got away," Doc said, quietly. "Descending that cliff was something of a job."

Ham listened. The sound of the plane was dying away to the southward.

"They took the prisoners with them!" Ham groaned.

SINCE there was nothing else they could do, Doc Savage and Ham clambered back up the path. The fire at the top had almost burned out. They approached the house, going warily, lest some sort of death trap might have been left behind.

They entered the house by the back door, and found themselves in a wide, low hall. It seemed to be open at the opposite end. They advanced and entered an inside patio, or court. The sort of enclosure that is nearly a fixture in all types of Spanish and Mexican architectures.

There was no slightest indication of a human presence in the mansion—until they got to the far side of the patio. There they heard a sound. It was a groan, and it sounded as if the one making it were nearly beyond the stage of causing any sound whatever.

Doc Savage dipped a hand into a pocket. He brought out a flashlight operating with a spring generator. Doc adjusted the beam until it was a wide funnel of light, and raked this over the inside of the court.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Look!" Ham choked.

Monk had become visible in the flashlight glow. The presence of the homely chemist, of course, was somewhat of a surprise. That alone, however, did not account for Ham's ejaculation of horror. Monk's appearance was the cause of that.

Monk was naked, except for underwear shorts. His squatty powerful hulk showed evidence of a terrible ordeal. Livid welts crisscrossed almost every inch of his torso. He seemed to be standing with his arms extending rigidly above his head.

A moment later, they could see what was wrong. Monk's feet were inches off the ground. His heavy body was suspended—by the thumbs!

HAM made a wordless sound of utter rage at Monk's tormentors, now gone. He sprang forward. Doc Savage said nothing, but, if there had been light to see, it was doubtful if his metallic features would have shown their usual impassivity.

Doc's flashlight beam, leaping upward, revealed that Monk was swinging by his thumbs from an overhead beam, the suspending medium being wires. The beam to which these were tied was part of the support for a small balcony overhanging the patio.

Doc Savage and Ham cut Monk down and stretched him out on the stone flags of the patio.

It was ten minutes before he could speak coherently. Then his voice was low and his words slow.

"Fake cop," Monk said, "led me into a trap. Brought me here."

Doc Savage asked pointedly, "Why?"

"Ask questions?" Monk muttered.

"What questions?"

"They wanted to know if you had shown any great interest in the blue Satan statuette," Monk explained. "They seem to have suddenly realized that the blue one is a clue, or something, which may betray them. They're trying to get the blue one out of your possession."

"They've succeeded," Ham interjected, grimly.

"That's tough," said Monk. "The blue statuette was important. And there was something about cigars, too."

"Cigars?"

Doc queried.

"Yeah," Monk replied. "They wanted to know if you'd talked of cigars, too. I couldn't make heads or tails of what they meant."

Ham interposed, "Monk, did you get any idea of what is behind all this?"

"No," said Monk.

Ham said, "It looks like we're sunk."

"You forget," Doc Savage told him, "the cigars."

Chapter XIV. AGATE DEVIL AGAIN

AN HOUR later, Doc Savage was guiding the town car through downtown Los Angeles. Monk had, by now, demonstrated that he possessed unusual powers of recuperation. He sat in the back with Ham. The two of them were quarreling.

"The next time I catch that flea-bitten ape of yours bothering Habeas," Monk promised, "the monkey population is gonna be reduced by one!"

"Chemistry bothering Habeas?" Ham snapped. "Ridiculous! That worthless pig bit my monkey! He all but chewed a leg off him!"

Doc Savage spoke over his shoulder from the front seat.

"Monk, in the talk you overheard from your captors, was there any mention of this affair having an international aspect?" the bronze man asked.

Monk considered, then nodded.

"Yeah, there was, now that I think of it," he admitted. "One of them mentioned some Asiatic country—something they were interested in, in connection with that country. The others told him to shut up."

Newsboys were crying papers on the corner. Their shouts were loud, raucous. "Extra! Extra! Foreign diplomat murdered!" seemed to be the trend of their cry.

Doc Savage pulled the car to the curb. He got out, purchased a paper and returned with it, spread it open, glanced at the headlines:

FOREIGN DIPLOMAT MURDERED;

STRANGE SATAN STATUE FOUND

The story had a San Francisco dateline. Doc Savage put a finger on the name of the country which the slain diplomat had represented. He held the paper so Monk could see. "That the country you heard mentioned?"

"You bet!" Monk gulped.

The homely chemist looked more closely at the story, read part of it.

"Blazes!" he exploded. "It musta been that murder I heard 'em talkin' about."

"Who was the dead man?" Ham asked.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"The murdered man was one of the most influential politicians of his native country," the bronze man explained. "The story says he arrived by steamship today and was bound for Washington on a good-will mission."

"Good-will mission can cover a multitude of sins," said Ham.

"Exactly," Doc Savage agreed. "The fellow might have been carrying a treaty. He might have come to negotiate trade agreements."

Ham fingered his sword cane absently, at the same time scratching the back of his pet monkey, Chemistry.

"This diplomat is not the first foreigner to be killed by the little devil murder method, whatever it is," he pointed out.

Monk said, "This thing still don't make any sense to me."

Doc Savage vouchsafed nothing further. He drove rapidly. He stopped before a rather exclusive tobacco store, which was open at this hour. He entered, was there perhaps ten minutes. When he came out, he offered no explanation, but drove the car to another tobacco store.

"Trying to trace them cigars," Monk guessed.

"Have any luck?" Ham asked.

"The excellence of the tobacco in the cigar made it traceable," Doc Savage replied. "They are made here in Los Angeles, at a small, private plant in the Spanish section."

THE big town car rolled a number of blocks. It entered a street which proved to end abruptly at the edge of a deep gash in the earth, a small canyon of the type locally called an arroyo. A dry stream bed it really was, providing drainage from the hills during the sudden rains.

The last structure on the right hand side of the street was marked with a sign bearing a Spanish word:

CIGARROS

"That is the place," Doc said.

"Strange they'd be open at this time of night," Ham said.

They walked in and waited. No one appeared.

The front of the establishment was furnished with a show case which held opened cigar boxes. Back of the counter, on shelves, were more boxes, most of these unopened.

On a shelf apart were a number of boxes, wrapped and addressed for shipping. Farther back in the shop, behind a waist-high wooden fence, were benches and tools. Tobacco scraps littered the benches. There were a few clamp cutters and knives.

"Old-fashioned place," Ham commented, as he looked around. "They make their cigars by hand."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Doc Savage made no reply. Instead, he walked behind the counter and took some of the wrapped cigar boxes from behind the shelf. He examined these.

"Find something?" Monk queried.

Doc held up several of the boxes for Monk's inspection, calling attention with a metallic finger to the addresses. These were varied, and somewhat surprising. One box was addressed to Paris, France. Another was destined for a recipient in Moscow, Soviet Russia. Others were addressed to New York, Rome, Shanghai.

"Boy, this place has customers everywhere!" Monk grunted. Abruptly, the bronze man replaced the boxes and moved around in front of the counter, making an elaborate pretense of being interested in the display.

A LITTLE brown man appeared, a half-anxious, half apologetic smile on his face. He came from behind the wooden fence.

"A thousand pardons, señores," he mumbled. "I was eating my nightly lunch."

Doc Savage matched his politeness.

"You have some cigars on display here," the bronze man said. "Evidently, all are of the very finest quality."

The little brown man smiled widely. He got behind the counter and rubbed his hands.

"You like to see some of my stock, señor?" he asked.

"If you don't mind."

The little man began to show cigars, naming prices, qualities, sizes, shapes.

"You do a great deal of shipping?" Doc suggested.

"But yes, señor. My customers, they remember me."

Doc pointed at the wrapped boxes. "May I see the quality of the cigars which you ship?"

The small proprietor smiled apologetically.

"I am sorry," he said. "Those particular boxes are wrapped, as you can see, señor. But these I have been showing you are of the same quality."

"My particular interest is in the quality of the cigar which you ship," Doc Savage told him. "Please show me some of those."

The small brown man shook his head. "I cannot, señor."

"Show them to me," Doc Savage repeated, quietly.

The small brown fellow moistened his lips. The color of his skin was changing, becoming a hue of lead.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Very well, señor," he mumbled, and moved back toward the boxes.

But he made not the slightest gesture to open one of the boxes. Instead, he suddenly dived headlong for the back of the little factory.

Doc Savage scooped up one of the boxes wrapped for shipping and popped it inside his shirt, making sure the clerk did not see.

"HE'S runnin' for it!" howled Monk.

But Doc Savage was already rushing in pursuit. The little brown man, however, was acting as he ran. He thrust out his hands, knocked chairs over, hampering pursuit.

He reached the door in the rear, got through, and slammed it behind him. A lock rattled.

Doc hit the door. It was solid, smashed him back. He hit it again. The wood creaked, gave a little. Monk joined him. Together they slammed. The door went down.

The three men piled through. Almost instantly, Doc Savage's arms knocked Monk and Ham back.

"Careful!" he warned.

Monk and Ham drew back, involuntarily. The rear of the yard was on the brink of the arroyo. A black depth gaped below them. They had no way of telling how far it was to the bottom.

They listened. They could hear running feet, down in the arroyo.

Doc Savage held a coin at arm's length over the brink, dropped it. He calculated the depth of the little canyon accurately from the time it took the coin to reach bottom. Then he stepped outward into space. He hit the bottom with what sounded like considerable force.

"Better not try it!" he called up at Monk and Ham. "The thing is deep!"

"What'll we do?" yelled Monk.

"Watch those cigars wrapped for shipping!" Doc Savage retorted.

"Righto!" said Ham, and he and Monk dived back into the cigar factory.

Doc Savage listened again. Running feet were going down the arroyo some distance away. The bronze man set out in pursuit. There was gravel on the arroyo floor. It was impossible to travel silently. He made a little noise.

The man ahead must have heard. He began to run more swiftly. Doc quickened his own pace.

Then the bronze man stopped.

He had caught the sharp scent of the strange camphor-like odor here in the blackness. He advanced a few paces. It became more pungent. He paused again, seemed of half a mind to retreat.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

Then there came the sound that seemed to be the inevitable accompaniment of the horribly suggestive camphor-like odor. A man howled out in mortal terror. His screaming was wordless and prolonged.

Suddenly, there was light, a glare that was blinding. Strain his eyes as he could, Doc failed to penetrate it. Even his trained pupils required moments to adjust themselves to such brilliance, and before that happened, the light was dying, fading.

The cry had stopped a moment before the light appeared, and had not sounded again.

Doc ran forward, dragging his flashlight from a pocket. He snapped the beam on.

The body of the little brown cigar clerk lay with face to the stars. The body was broken and mangled, and in the side of the head was a hole that seemed to go completely through the skull.

Doc Savage moved his flashlight beam slightly, and picked up one of the satan statuettes.

The little devil was red.

DOC extinguished his flashlight, then retreated swiftly. All of his faculties were alert, but, particularly, was he listening.

He heard a sound shortly, and it was certainly not one which he had expected. It was a howl, full of surprise and pain. Monk's voice.

"Doc!" Monk bawled. "This place is a trap! It's alive with guys—"

Monk went silent. Something had happened to the homely chemist up in the cigar factory. Doc spun and plunged back up the arroyo. The unfortunate cigar clerk had descended from the rear of the cigar store by a rope ladder, which now lay on the arroyo floor.

The bronze man could hear violent sounds in the tobacco factory. Fighting! Doc ran on and covered almost a hundred yards, playing his light on the side of the arroyo, before he found a place where it could be climbed with any degree of speed. Even then, he had some difficulty in mounting.

An automobile motor was making a great deal of noise in the street near the tobacco factory. Then the machine departed into the night.

Climbing with all the blinding speed he could muster, Doc Savage reached the factory. The show case was broken, its contents strewn. There was a smear of scarlet on the floor. Back in the factory portion, two work tables were upset. Every one of the cigar boxes wrapped for shipping was gone.

Monk and Ham had disappeared.

Doc Savage went out into the street. The town car in which he and his two aids had come, was missing. There was not much doubt but that this was the machine which had departed at such high speed.

Doc Savage went back into the factory. He searched the place thoroughly, found nothing except evidence that several men had lived in the rear.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

There were no bills, no receipts to show to whom the proprietor of the shop had shipped cigars in the past.

Slightly less than half an hour later, Doc Savage turned up at the hotel which he had made his headquarters. He entered his rooms cautiously, scrutinizing the doorknob, listening for a long time, and otherwise taking pains to avoid a trap. Then he hurriedly delved into his equipment.

He brought out one of the strange-looking lanterns which projected ultra-violet light.

Doc still had the box of cigars which he purloined from the tobacco factory, inside his shirt. He drew it out now. The wrapper bore the address of a consignee in Berlin, Germany.

Doc Savage was taking no chances. His equipment held an X-ray machine. He put this in operation, with the box under it. The X-ray examination showed no bomb; only cigars.

Doc then opened the box. With infinite care, he removed wrappers from the cigars. They were very high-grade wrappers, almost as substantial as onion-skin paper.

When ultra-violet light was played upon the wrappers, a printed patent number and date appeared on each. No doubt, it was put there with some chemical which fluoresced under the black light. Doc Savage scrutinized the numbers. At first glance, they all seemed alike. There was, however, a material difference.

Doc Savage sorted over the wrappers, until he had placed three, one above the other. The legends on these read:

REGISTERED MAY 3, 1908

PATENT NO. 16 3 13 3 13

REGISTERED MAY 4, 1908

PATENT NO. 10 3 21 6 3 20 3 25

REGISTERED MAY 5, 1908

PATENTNO. 18 10 11 3 3 19

The spacing between the figures of the patent numbers was very small, hardly enough to be noticeable. Several times, Doc Savage was forced to make a very close examination to make out any irregularity whatever in the spacing.

It was a cipher, obviously. The bronze man went to work on it. He did not cover sheets of paper with figures before beginning actual operations, but stared at the cipher, mentally trying a variety of combinations.

It was not so very difficult. He wrote down that alphabetical sentence which typists like to write, the sentence which contains every letter in the alphabet:

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY SLEEPING DOG.

Doc Savage now started at the first and numbered the letters of the alphabet as they appeared. For instance, the word "the" became the figures one, two and three. The word "quick" became the figures four, five, six, seven and eight. When he came to a letter which had already appeared, he skipped it. The "G" in "sleeping"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

was last, number twenty-six.

He now had the key to the code. He took the first patent number, that of May 3, 1908. The figure "16" proved to be "J"; the figure "3" proved to be "E"; "13" was "N";

"3" another "E"; and another "13" was "N." That gave him the word, "Jenen."

That did not make much sense. He continued. The next word—from the numbers following the May 4, 1908, registry—did make sense. It was "Relieves."

The May 5, 1908, numbers proved to be the word "Proceed."

Doc found three other wrappers with patent registry numbers on them; and when he unciphered them and added the words to the first three, the message read:

JENEN RELIEVES. PROCEED TOKIO. TAKE CAMERA.

The results of the brain tester might have been a bit disappointing. However, Doc Savage showed no outward disgust. He gathered up the wrappers, made a neat package of them and left the hotel.

Down on the street, he hailed a taxi.

"The mineralogy department of the State Mining University," Doc Savage directed.

The bronze man settled back on the cushion and for one of the few times in his career, his metallic features held a trace of worry. It was obvious that he was concerned over the safety of his two aids, Monk and Ham.

THE taxicab had covered only a few blocks, however, when Doc Savage seemed to change his mind. He leaned forward and directed the driver to a new destination.

It was before a bungalow on the outskirts of the city, that the machine stopped. Doc Savage alighted. He rapped on the door. A peculiar signal: three pairs of rapid knocks, then a single one.

The door opened. Since it was dark inside, it was impossible to see the occupant of the bungalow.

"The whole affair is coming to a head," Doc Savage said. "Do you want to be in on the finish?"

"Do I?" rapped a grim voice from within. "Be with you in a minute!"

It was too dark to distinguish much about the man who came out of the bungalow and joined Doc. But they seemed to know each other very well.

Doc Savage and his strange companion entered the taxicab.

"We will go to the mineralogy department of the university now," Doc Savage said.

The taxi rolled, and once more the bronze man settled back in the cushions and seemed faintly worried, as if again concerning himself over the safety of Monk and Ham.

Chapter XV. DESTINATION UNKOWN

MONK AND HAM, at the moment, could have used a little of the brand of assistance which Doc Savage was capable of rendering.

Monk was lying on his back, and just beginning to come aware that his head was a throbbing mass of pain. How long he had been senseless, he had no way of judging. It was still dark, however.

The attack in the cigar factory had come without warning. Ham and he had been hopelessly outnumbered. The affair had been short and violent. A hard-swung rifle had dropped Monk, unless he was mistaken. He wondered what had become of Ham.

He let his eyes come open gradually, and realized that he might as well have kept them shut. He was in a cramped space that was very dark. Then it came to him that not all of the noise he was hearing was inside his own head. Part of the racket was outside. He frowned, concentrated.

He was in a flying plane!

Monk tried to move his hands and discovered that they were behind him, handcuffed. He strained. He did not get free, but he learned that there were more than one pair of handcuffs on his wrists. He twisted and strained furiously. He could feel no weakening of his fastenings, but his efforts were not entirely unproductive of results.

"Lay still, maverick!" creaked a voice in the darkness.

"Blazes!" Monk gulped. "Are you who I think you are?"

"Quit jumpin' around!" gritted the other. "Quit kickin' me, you ranny!"

Monk shut his eyes tightly, and then opened them. He knew that voice.

The speaker was the turkey-necked man called Old Dan!

"What are you doin' here?" Monk demanded.

"Takin' a joyride for my health!" growled Old Dan, showing bad temper.

Monk continued his efforts to get free, and even went out of his way to kick Old Dan a few times.

"Cut it out, hombre!" rumbled Old Dan. "I'm a prisoner in here with you."

Monk desisted in his efforts to get loose.

"Where's Ham?" he asked.

"Behind you!" snapped Ham's voice.

"Were you knocked out?" Monk asked.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"No," said Ham. "But I might as well have been. They grabbed me, tied me up."

"Who else is here?" Monk demanded.

"Kateen MacRoy," explained Ham.

"Gosh!" said Monk.

"Samuel Wartz Gime," added Old Dan, "and that movie feller, Del Ling."

"The whole crowd?" Monk said, astounded.

"Exactly!" Ham agreed.

"They all prisoners?"

"Yes," said Ham. "This is a big tri-motored plane. We are in a kind of baggage compartment. The other prisoners are in the cabin,"

"You sure they're prisoners?" Monk persisted.

"They were handcuffed when they were brought aboard," Ham informed him.

"Where we headed for?"

"Your guess," muttered Ham, "is as good as mine."

MONK was silent for a time. He found it difficult to digest the information he had just received. All of his imaginings had pictured either Gime, Del Ling, Old Dan, or even the girl, Kateen MacRoy, in the role of villain, perhaps mastermind. Now, however, they were all prisoners. Monk felt somewhat thwarted.

Old Dan snorted. "I guess you birds had me figured out as one of these here devil hombres?"

"Well," said Monk. "Could anybody blame us?"

"Not a heck of a lot." Old Dan chuckled. It was not a very hearty chuckle. "If the dadburned truth has gotta be told, I have been sort of a coyote. In fact, I reckon whatever happens to me won't be none too good. A feller hadn't oughta muss himself up in things, if he ain't willin' to cut in on the payoff."

"What is behind all this?" Monk asked.

"Let me start at the first, and sorta progress," Old Dan suggested. "Feller come to me about two year ago, when I was punchin' cows in Nevady close to where they was buildin' that Boulder Dam. He had a little camera. He gimme it, and he gimme five hundred dollars. All I had to do was ride up on them hills above the dam once a day and take a picture."

"I see," Monk interposed. "Some one wanted to know the exact structure of that dam."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Yes," said Old Dan. "That's what I figured. Anyway, I was to mail them pictures to an address in Los Angeles. I done that. It was easy money. But one thing follied another. This guy gimme a thousand to take some packages across the Mexican border. There's been a lot of other things. I ain't gonna tell 'em to you, 'cause this ain't no confession. But I ain't killed nobody."

"I see," said Monk. "You're just a hired hand."

"A hired damn fool!" corrected Old Dan.

"What's behind this?" Monk asked again.

"I ain't got no idea," said Old Dan. "I never did have. The whole shebang is crazy as a locoed steer! I never could make heads or tails of it. I just took their money and their orders."

"Now look here," Monk growled, "You surely can tell me somethin' that'll gimme a hint."

"It's no use, Monk," said Ham. "I've been all over this with him while you were unconscious. He doesn't really know a thing."

"What about Gime and Del Ling?" Monk asked.

Old Dan said, "They don't know any more than I do, and that's a fact. They got mixed up in the affair somethin' like I did. I've talked to 'em."

At this point, the door opened. Arms reached in, seized Monk and dragged him out. The same thing was done to Old Dan and Ham. Monk peered about. He was in the interior of a large-sized cabin monoplane.

Kateen MacRoy, Gime and Del Ling occupied seats in the cabin. They were handcuffed. They were not, however, gagged.

The man who had dragged Monk and the others out of the baggage compartment was a burly fellow with a squint in one eye.

"Want you where we can keep an eye on you!" this worthy warned.

Monk spent the next several minutes wondering where the plane could be heading. He squirmed around and, since no one offered objection, heaved himself erect. He could look out of the cabin.

The hour must have been rather late, or early. It was beginning to get light outside. Below the plane was some of the most unprepossessing terrain Monk had ever been privileged to scrutinize. It was rock, a wilderness of rock. There was not a tree in sight as far as the eye could penetrate. Canyons and peaks of stone. The elements had worked out grotesque formations in the rocky waste. The rising sun cast an unholy red glow over the whole thing.

"Hades will probably look like that," Monk muttered, proving he was at least no optimist.

The plane tilted abruptly in preparation for a landing.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

THE spot chosen for landing was a canyon which had nothing extraordinary to distinguish it outwardly. It was not as large as a number of other canyons they had passed. Since it was very early morning, the bottom of the canyon was in shadow. The plane was quite low before Monk could make out details.

The plane now made its landing. Monk, who was an expert flyer himself, considered it a very bad landing. He was surprised that the ship held together.

He was more surprised when the craft turned at right angles and ran for what seemed to be a solid side of the canyon. The homely chemist's jaw sagged when a great cavity opened mysteriously in the canyon wall. An instant later, he realized how that was accomplished.

There was a canvas curtain on a track. The canvas was painted to resemble native rock. Men came running out of the opening. They took hold of the plane wings and helped guide it into the strange hangar.

Other men took rakes and began to wipe out traces of the plane's landing. Peering about, Monk decided the cavity in the side of the cliff had been hollowed out by nature. They had simply taken advantage of it by hanging a curtain across the front.

There were two planes in the place. One of these riveted Monk's interest. The ship itself did not intrigue him as much as the contents. He could see directly into its cabin—there were electric lights in the big cavern.

Monk knew something about radio; a great deal, in fact. The cabin of that other plane held what Monk decided was the most powerful compact radio transmitter—and–receiver he had ever seen. He could see some of the transmitting tubes. Unless he was mistaken, that set was capable of sending a message halfway around the world, on the short–wave bands, of course.

All of the prisoners were now hauled out of the plane.

Monk looked their captors over closely. Some of them had brutal faces and more brutal manners. Others were more intelligent–looking, and possessed of a politeness which was even more deadly than the brutality of their fellows. Monk decided that none of them looked as if he were the mastermind.

"Walk!" a man with a gun directed.

The prisoners obeyed. They were escorted across the large cavern and entered what seemed to be the mouth of an underground stream. Plainly, this had been enlarged by human hands. Electric bulbs were strung along the ceiling.

Monk had progressed only a few yards when he stopped and stared, his attention riveted on the rock formation. It was blue stuff that looked like glass.

"Blazes!" Monk barked. "That *blue* devil statuette was made out of this rock!"

"You want your ribs kicked in?" the man with the gun asked.

Monk didn't. He moved on hastily. They came to a very clever door which looked like a solid wall, until a man yelled and it was opened by some one on the other side. The prisoners were marched through. They were in a narrow hallway. Rooms, no doubt excavated with great difficulty, opened on either side.

Monk became particularly interested in a room to the right. It was the largest of all the rooms, but it did not seem nearly big enough to accommodate the stuff which it held. In that room was more complicated–looking

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

apparatus than Monk thought he had ever seen before. Even Doc Savage's skyscraper laboratory could not equal it.

A great deal of the stuff seemed to be metal-working tools. There were retorts, electric furnaces. There was also chemical equipment, which, for completeness, surprised Monk.

Monk, having stopped to peer into the room, received a violent shove from behind, which propelled him onward. The homely chemist shook his head wonderingly. He seemed to see every detail of that room distinctly in his mind. Monk suddenly decided on a name for that room.

"The Birthplace of the Satans of Death," he remarked.

"I think I'll shoot this ape," one of the men said.

"Later," advised another. "He's gotta answer some questions first."

MONK ignored these threats, although they sent tickling sensations through his nervous system. They had not gone to the trouble of bringing him this far alive, without some reason. He peered from side to side and tried to see everything.

His next discovery was a chamber which looked as if it were a storeroom. On the floor of this stood racks made of wood, which supported hammocks of what looked like fish netting. On these hammocks lay some articles which resembled eggs, except that no dinosaur ever laid an egg as large as these were. They were all quite black. Moreover, there was more to them than just the egg shape. There seemed to be at least forty or fifty of the things. The painstaking way in which they rested in the hammock, with cotton padding around them, indicated they received great care.

The urgent pressure of a gun muzzle moved Monk to go on. He heard clinking sounds from ahead. These were interrupted by a shrill whining, such as a grindstone makes when a tool is placed upon it for sharpening.

A moment later, Monk discerned the source of these sounds. At a bench in a tiny cubby, a swarthy man, clothed only in a pair of khaki shorts, was occupied. He was bending over a fragment of rock held in a vise at a worktable. He was chipping at the rock with a tiny chisel and a wooden mallet. From time to time, he used an electric grinding machine. Pinched in his eye was a jeweler's magnifying glass, and as he worked, he looked up frequently at the ground-glass panel of an enlarging box on which was thrown a greatly magnified image of a human face.

The face was that of a slant-eyed Oriental. It looked familiar.

"So!" Monk told himself. "The source of the devil statuettes!"

Monk was kicked suddenly and silently for his effort to see everything. Monk resented physical mistreatment; he could stand all kinds of mental torture, but when pain was inflicted, he always wanted to fight.

By a remarkable acrobatic feat, Monk jumped in the air and planted both feet on the chest of the man who had kicked his shins. The man moved fully thirty feet, end over end.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

MONK'S hands were handcuffed behind him, so they were of little use to him in the present emergency. However, his legs were remarkably dexterous. He felled another captor by running over the fellow.

Ham came to life. So did Kateen MacRoy and the others. The passage filled with noise of fighting. Blows smacked. Feet were wielded with effect.

The fray was doomed to defeat. They were hopelessly outnumbered. Moreover, they were all handcuffed. The sheer ponderance of opposition forced them down the passage.

Monk got a glimpse of one more room, an ordinary room, except that it was filled with large, green, metal filing cases. There were three desks in the room, and papers lay on these, which made it look as if men had been working there.

At the end of the hallway was a metal door, perforated by a barred window. Some one got this door open. All the prisoners were shoved into what seemed to be almost a regulation prison cell house excavated in the stone.

The doors of the cells were of steel. For ventilation purposes, each door was drilled with a number of small holes, not more than an inch in diameter.

In quick succession, the prisoners were shoved into the cells and locked there.

Monk found himself with Old Dan.

"This is sure a dang-blasted pickle!" complained Old Dan.

"You said it!" Monk grunted.

Old Dan made grumbling sounds in the darkness. "You figure there's any chance of Doc Savage helpin' us out?"

Monk considered. "I don't know," the homely chemist said finally. "Doc is a deep one. I've seen him confronted with the blamedest mysteries and it turned out that he knew all of the time what it was about and was playing the whole thing along like a director staging a show."

"If he's staging this, I don't care for his methods!" said Old Dan.

Old Dan seemed to be a congenial enough soul, but he sounded worried. In fact, unless Monk was mistaken, Old Dan was downright scared.

There came a rattling from the door as it opened. A flashlight spiked brilliance into their eyes. There were four men, all with guns. They kept Monk back with the menace of the weapons, seized Old Dan and dragged him out. The door was locked again.

Monk listened, rather anxiously. He heard them drag Old Dan away. He heard a voice apparently putting questions, heard Old Dan make a violent rejoinder. Then Old Dan screamed. He had seemed like a tough old codger, but there was utter fright in his crying. A gun went off, and Old Dan's scream stopped.

Chapter XVI. THE DEVIL'S BREW

BLACK HOURS of time dragged on. How many, Monk had no idea. They had taken his watch, so he could only estimate.

He worked at his handcuffs, and, at the door of his cell, but might as well have saved his time, for he made no headway whatever. Since there was nothing else to do, he leaned against his cell door and made conversation through the tiny ventilating holes.

"Any of the rest of you get a look at the layout as we came in?" he asked.

"I did," said Ham.

"What do you make of it?"

Ham said, "Well, they make those devil statuettes here."

"Sure," agreed Monk. "But what's the idea of the rest. Take that room filled with filing cabinets, for instance. Looked like quite an office layout."

"That was not what interested me most," Ham retorted.

"What interested you more?"

"The workshop," Ham replied. "And especially that storeroom where those funny-looking black eggs rested in the hammocks. What in the devil were those things?"

"I've worked up a headache wondering about them myself," Monk admitted.

Then the door into the outer cavern opened. Men paraded in, stripped above the waist, for it was quite hot. The foremost members of the group carried blackjacks. These were tied to their wrists with stout thongs, so that they could not be jerked away from the owners. The other men had firearms.

Apprehension flooded Monk as they opened the door of his cell. He was seized and hauled out.

"What's the idea?" Monk blustered.

"Pipe down!" he was ordered. "You'll have your chance to talk!"

The homely chemist was hauled out into the long hallway and flung on the rock floor. Near by was a crimson stain, which still looked somewhat moist. Monk stared gloomily at this.

"You heard what Old Dan got?" a man asked the homely chemist.

Monk nodded.

"That is the spot," said the man, and pointed at the wet red stain.

Monk was seized with a not unreasonable thought.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"What's the idea of bringing me all the way down here just to shoot me?" he demanded.

"Shooting may not be necessary at all—unless you get bull-headed. Old Dan was bull-headed."

Monk scowled, waited.

"All you have to do is give straight answers to a few questions," he was informed.

"Shoot," Monk directed. He was surprised at how worried his own voice sounded.

"How much does Doc Savage know about this?"

"I can't tell for sure," Monk said.

"Why not?"

"Simply because Doc never tells anybody all he knows," Monk explained.

"But you are one of his aids, aren't you?"

"That don't make any difference." Monk tried to sound convincing. "Doc is a strange character. You can never tell exactly what will happen, when he is around."

"Then Doc Savage may know things that he has not told you?" said one of the men with the guns.

"That's the idea."

Monk got the impression that his own voice sounded as if he were lying. As a matter of fact, he was telling the truth.

The man who had been doing the interrogating stepped back.

He looked in the direction of the room which held the metal filing cases and the desk. The door of this room was now closed.

"What about it, chief?" called the interrogator.

Monk looked around at those assembled. A great understanding flooded the homely chemist. There was an air about the group. It was as if the room with filing cabinets harbored a fire-eating dragon.

Monk understood perfectly. The mastermind was in that closed room!

Evidently, the mastermind was not going to show himself, because he spoke without coming out of the room. He used a very shrill voice, obviously disguised. The tricky acoustics of the cavern made it impossible to identify the voice.

"Shoot him!" directed the voice. "Then drag his body in where the others can see it! We've got to show them we will not stand for holding back of information."

The preliminaries were distressingly short. A man stepped forward, cocked his gun, aimed at Monk. He was going to shoot the homely chemist in the stomach. Monk knew the reason why. Men with bullets in that part

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

of their anatomy almost invariably emit horrible screams.

Monk shut his eyes. His stomach felt as if it were full of green persimmons.

Then the man who was about to shoot jumped backward, barked out in surprise. He stared down at his chest. Tiny glass particles hung there. In the center was a wet patch.

The overpowering moth ball–like scent filled the room.

"HEY!" squalled the man with the gun. "Who put that stuff on me?"

The lights went out.

Monk knew instinctively what to do. He flopped to one side, where he would be out of the way. A gun went off. Its red flash was too brief to furnish any illumination. The concussion was terrific. Men yelled.

Inside the office room where the filing cabinets stood, the shrill, disguised voice of the leader was yelling questions, demanding to know what had happened.

Despite the excitement, Monk gave close attention to that voice. It was not disguised as perfectly as before. He knew he had heard it in the past. He strove to place it in his memory. He could not quite do this.

Was it Del Ling? Was it Samuel Wartz Gime? Was it even the girl? Monk could not tell for sure.

He had thought all of these individuals were locked in the cells; but, of course, he might be mistaken. They could have been taken out in the darkness, and no one would have noticed.

Some one stepped on Monk. The homely chemist doubled, lying on his back, and kicked. Whoever had stepped on him sailed away, cursing. The scuffle caused a burst of shots to crash. Men were swearing wrathfully, fearfully.

Then Monk heard something that electrified him. It was a voice. But an entirely different voice. It was not speaking English.

The words were couched in Mayan, an ancient language which very few men in the so–called civilized world could have understood. Monk had learned to speak it on a jaunt to Central America some years ago. Doc Savage's aids used it when they wished to communicate with each other without being understood by those who overheard.

The Mayan words directed Monk to roll to the rear of the hall, and wait against the door to the prison cells. He proceeded to do this. He made some noise, but it was not enough to amount to anything in the uproar about him. Once against the door, he lay there and waited.

Plenty was happening in the hallway. The odor of moth balls was stronger, more sharp. Shots slammed. Every one was yelling for flashlights. There seemed to be none at hand.

Then Monk felt powerful hands upon him. He was lifted. The door of the prison compartment was opened and he was carried inside. The door slammed. The powerful individual who had carried him in, turned on a flashlight. The glow of this identified the rescuer. This was hardly necessary, as Monk already knew.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Doc!" grinned the homely chemist. "How'd you get here?"

"THE blue agate devil guided us," the bronze man said.

"How could it?" Monk countered.

"A geologist can tell pretty closely from what part of the world any given sample of rock comes," the bronze man explained. "It happened that the mineralogy department of the university had specimens of blue agate peculiar to this region. It was not hard to spot the canyon as the hiding place."

"Golly!" said Monk. "How'd you get here."

"Plane."

Doc Savage was working over Monk's wrists. The handcuff locks he picked with a small metal probe, which he had developed long ago for that purpose.

There was noise outside. Men were shouting, charging about. It was only a matter of moments until they would realize that the one who had precipitated the outburst was no longer in their midst. Then a search would begin.

"Free the others!" Doc directed. "Work fast."

"I'll have trouble with their handcuffs!" Monk grunted.

"Never mind that! Hurry!"

Monk hurried.

A light appeared in the hallway outside. One of the men must have gotten a flashlight. Its beam raced about. The fellow with the light cursed.

"Blast it!" he yelled. "There's nobody but us in here!"

Doc Savage was now at the door. He opened it a crack. His hand dipped into a pocket and brought out a metal case. This was opened and proved to hold small glass bulbs.

Doc Savage spoke in Mayan, directing Monk and Ham to hold their breaths.

Monk and Ham—Ham was still in a cell—knew instantly what the bronze man was going to do. The glass bulbs held his odorless, colorless anaesthetic which produced quick unconsciousness, and which dissipated and became harmless after mingling with the air for perhaps a minute. It had to be inhaled to be effective. All holding their breath over the minute period would escape the stuff.

The bronze man threw several of the glass containers into the hallway. The men there saw the glass pellets falling, bursting, and guessed what that meant.

"Gas!" one of them yelled. "Get outta here!"

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

There was a wild charge for the outer air.

It required a remarkably short time for all of the men to get out. Monk now had the cells open. Ham, Kateen MacRoy, Gime and Del Ling joined them. Monk was somewhat surprised to see all of these people. He had suspected one of them as the mastermind. He had concluded that the prisoner missing would be that one.

That the chief, whichever one he was, had pretended to be a prisoner as a matter of precautionary deception, had been Monk's conviction. The mastermind's voice had been vaguely familiar.

Doc Savage opened the hall door, the anaesthetic now having become harmless. He stepped out.

With striking swiftness he was back inside again. He slammed the door. The reason for this move was evident an instant later.

There was a loud *squash* of a sound. Liquid had been splashed through the bars, but hit no one. An almost choking reek of moth balls filled the place.

"WHAT the blazes!" Monk exploded.

"Keep away from the door!" Doc Savage ordered. "Do not let any of that stuff get on you!"

"What is it?" Monk asked.

"A liquefied concoction of particles of radioactive nature!" Doc Savage explained.

"Huh?" Monk gulped.

"Did you ever smell the water from so-called health springs?" Doc Savage demanded.

"Sure," Monk admitted. "Boy, did it smell!"

"This liquid is similar to that," Doc Savage explained. "It contains radioactive ingredients."

Ham interposed. "But I thought radioactive stuff glowed or made a light?"

"Not unless it is in very strong concentration," Doc Savage corrected. "This is a weak mixture."

The bronze man seemed about to explain more, but there was a noise outside: a man running. Doc Savage threw his flashlight beam through the bars of the door. Monk and Ham crowded close to him to see what was happening.

They saw a man running down the hallway, fleeing. But that was not what held their attention.

Behind the man, floating out of one of the rooms, came an object which resembled a black egg. It seemed to be somewhat lighter than air, and it was driven by a large propeller which turned rather slowly. The thing, in fact, looked like nothing so much as a black blimp built on a vastly diminished scale.

The black egg, however, floated upright. To the front of it was attached some complicated apparatus, the most impressive part of which was a pair of long, spidery arms.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Blazes!" Monk exploded. "Them's the things that were in the hammocks in that room!"

Ham let out a yell. "Some of them are coming this way!"

Several of the strange things had appeared and were floating swiftly for the door. Only when they were very close, could the men in the room hear the remarkably silent mechanism which propelled them, the breathlike sound which the large propeller made in turning. The only evidence of the motor which drove the propeller was a faint metallic rasping sound, a suggestion of clack and whirl.

One of the things reached the door. It touched the spot where the man who had fled had thrown the radioactive liquid. The long arms on the front of the egglike thing seemed to grasp as if a trigger had been released, as it no doubt had. There was a loud *chug!* A vicious-looking knife, a three-edged blade of a thing, stabbed out from the front of the mechanical monstrosity. This had little effect on the steel door, however, despite the fact that the thrust was sufficient to have penetrated the chest of a man.

The thing was going through some mechanical process. Convulsions of the arms threw it backward. And an instant later, it burst into yellow flame.

A few moments later, nothing was left of the thing but a small puddle of glowing, lavalike remains in which a small crimson satan image sprawled. The devil must have been concealed in the thing somewhere.

"Made of stuff like celluloid, metals that will burn at a moderately low temperature," Monk grunted. "Boy, whoever made that thing had a brain!"

"The satan statuette," Doc Savage offered, "is there merely as a trademark. They wanted their murders to be known; to create terror which they could use."

The men centered their attention on the other strange black egglike things. These were floating along the hall, and out of the place.

Comprehension dawned on Monk.

"Those things go toward that camphor smell!" he declared.

"Exactly," Doc Savage agreed. "If you will notice closely, you can distinguish a number of tiny modules scattered over the gas bags. These are miniature, supersensitive electroscopes, which register the circuits which propel the device in that direction. The bags are filled with an inflammable gas which helps the destruction."

Every one of the machines had now passed outdoors.

"What made them go out there?" Monk wanted to know.

"In the plane coming down here, I mixed a chemical of radioactive nature," Doc explained. "I threw some of the stuff over the men—but it only hit one of them. That was to make them afraid their infernal murder devices would turn on their masters if released. It does not seem to have worked."

Monk squinted through the bars. "Is it safe to go out?"

"It should be," Doc Savage said, and opened the door.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

They advanced, keeping a sharp lookout. There seemed to be no danger.

"I'm going to settle something that has been puzzling me," Ham snapped.

The dapper lawyer found a flashlight which some one had dropped in the confusion and went into the room which held the metal filing cases, poking the brilliant beam ahead of him. He jerked out a drawer in one of the cases, inspected the contents.

"Doc!" Ham yelled. "This stuff here explains what is behind the whole thing."

"Photographs?" Doc Savage asked.

"Yes!" Ham shouted. "Photographs of fortifications of different countries! There're maps, too! Here are sheets covered with dates, on the size and location of guns! There're some copies of things here which look like treaties between world powers!"

"Blazes!" Monk breathed. "I catch on! An international commercial spy organization!"

"A group which made a business of obtaining military and political secrets and selling them to the highest bidders," the bronze man assured him.

Monk exploded. "You already knew?"

Doc Savage did not reply to that. Instead, the bronze man started toward the exit.

"We had better find out what has happened," he said. "It has become strangely quiet."

They ran forward. Rather to their surprise, they were not molested. They burst out into the large overhang which held the planes.

Some one had raised the canvas curtain which concealed the front of the place. Doc and others stepped out, to witness a scene which they were to remember for a long time.

Monk observed his late captors running furiously down the canyon floor. They were not far away. They must have loafed around outside, until they had made a horrible discovery.

Their own death machines were pursuing them. Clumsy as the objects looked, they seemed to be able to travel faster than a man could run, after they gathered momentum. They were slowly overhauling the fleeing group.

The first of the things struck. Naturally, it was the rearmost man who fell a victim, and this was the fellow who had lurked behind in the hide-out to release the things.

The swiftness with which the killing was executed was not pleasant to watch. The thing pounced. The spidery arms clasped the victim for the briefest moment. The knife stabbed, making a great aperture which brought instant death. Then the thing bounced back and burned itself.

Others of the men began to fall. Not all of them received fatal wounds, however. Some merely got their arms or their legs perforated. Two or three were not touched at all, and they fled, screaming, into the waste of rock.

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

The things seemed to carry a fuel supply—compressed air, they learned later—for a limited flight, after which they fell to the earth and burned.

The creator of the contrivances had never intended for one of them to be found intact after it had done its work.

Monk ran forward.

"I'm beginning to have a hunch who the big big-shot behind this was," he said. "But I'm gonna look to make sure."

Monk reached for the prone figure of the first man who had fallen a victim. The body lay face up.

"I thought so," Monk grunted. "That guy pretended to be a prisoner with us, just to keep his ears open and find out if we knew anything. Then he let out a yell, spilled some red ink on the floor and fired a shot to make us think he was dead."

They stood looking at the dead chief of the international espionage organization.

It was the man they knew as Old Dan.

Doc. Savage seemed vaguely puzzled.

"There is one mystery that needs explaining," he said slowly. "How did these men get that radioactive liquid on them? I threw one bottle of it in the hall, but that only struck one man."

The bronze man spun, as if determined to solve the problem. He strode back to the cliff overhang. Monk trailed him, anxious to be in at the windup of the mystery. The instant he stepped under the overhang, Monk stopped. His jaw sagged. He looked both stunned and somewhat angry.

Pretty Kateen MacRoy—the fact that she was baldheaded did not keep her from being pretty—was wrapped in a fond embrace with a tall, dark-haired young man. They were clinging together as if this were the happiest moment of their lives.

Monk stared intently at the youth. Then Monk looked utterly astounded.

"Montgomery Medwig Pell!" the homely chemist exploded.

"It was Pell who first called us into this affair," Doc explained. "He was a private detective who got involved with the espionage ring accidentally, as was explained earlier. He called me on the scene. Old Dan, head of the espionage ring, learned what Pell had done, then forced Pell and threatened to kill Kateen MacRoy unless Pell helped trap me."

"Whew!"

Monk said.

"Pell finally agreed to work with me," Doc Savage said, "so we arranged to fake his death—on the Edgeworth Clinic grounds. As long as Old Dan thought he was dead, he would be safe. I had Pell hiding out in a bungalow in Los Angeles, and brought him here with me by plane."

THE SEVEN AGATE DEVILS

"Bless me!" said Monk. "Did Kateen MacRoy know he was alive?"

"Yes," said Doc. "She was helping me, too. Unfortunately, she was not a great deal of assistance, when she permitted herself to fall again into the hands of the organization. The purpose of her doing that was to gather what information she could."

"I," said Monk, "am dumfounded!"

A LITTLE questioning unearthed an explanation of how Old Dan and the others had gotten the radioactive liquid upon their persons. Doc Savage had left Montgomery Medwig Pell—he persisted in going by that name—on guard in the darkness just inside the cavern. In Pell's possession had been a number of bottles of the radioactive fluid, which Doc Savage had concocted on the way south in the plane.

Pell had seen the gang fleeing from the hide-out. He had done the only thing which had occurred to him. He had hurled the glass bottles of the fluid. The phials having very thin walls and the fleeing men being in an intolerable hurry, his action had passed unobserved. He had, of course, missed a number of his targets, which accounted for the men who had escaped.

Pell seemed to be a sensitive young man, and he was gloomy over the number of deaths he had caused.

"I figured they might have some of their infernal machines hid out somewhere!" he explained. "I was trying to fix it so they would not release the things."

It could be noticed that Doc Savage now moved slowly, casually. He seemed to have relaxed. The mystery of the agate devils had been cleared up, and there remained only the disposition of Del Ling and old Samuel Wartz Gime. These two individuals protested vehemently that they had been lured into the affair by the love of money alone, and that they had not actually been guilty of any murders.

That they were lying to a degree, was brought out by an examination of the records in the filing room. Old Dan, chief of the espionage organization, had been, it developed, a businesslike soul. He had kept an accurate record of the wrongdoings of all his associates, probably as a club to hold over them later.

These records showed that Gime and Del Ling were not as innocent as they claimed to be.

Doc Savage decided to confine Gime and Del Ling in a peculiar institution which the bronze man maintained in upstate New York. In this place, Gime and Del Ling would undergo brain operations which would cause them to completely forget their pasts; after which they would be given an intensive training in the ways of upright citizenship and equipped with a trade by which they could earn a good living.

Doc Savage planned the disposition of Gime and Del Ling as he went over the records in the filing room. Then he smiled to himself—for he could hear Monk and Ham squabbling. They seemed to be excited. As a matter of fact, they were trying to locate their pets, the pig and the monkey.

They found them in a compartment of the plane Doc had come down in from Los Angeles.

THE END