BIRDS OF DEATH

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. TO CATCH A CANARY

THE afternoon sun sprayed gay cream-colored light on the tall buildings which surrounded the park in the center of the city. But shadows lay across most of the park itself, taking the glare off the sidewalks and darkening the trees.

The darkest shadows in the park were probably those in the low bushes beyond the lagoon.

In one of these bushes was the canary. It was a genuine, if ordinary, canary, as yellow as any canary. It flew around a little.

Two men had watched the canary fly down from a window of one of the apartment houses. The two men were now trying to catch the canary.

They were rather serious about it, because on catching the canary depended whether or not they would kill a man.

One pointed. "There it goes, Abner. Right there," he said.

He was the small man, the well-dressed one, the important one. He had the suit by the Fifty-seventh Street tailor, the custom-made shirt, the five-dollar cravat. He was the short man, the thin one.

Abner—the other man—said, "I'll get around the other side of the bush, Mr. Manley. You wanna give me the end of the net, huh? Maybe we can pen the dang thing up."

He was the big man, the one who was crudely dressed. Not cheaply attired. Crudely. The crudeness was in the size of the checks in his suit, the raw, ungentle color of his shirt. No one would ever call his necktie a cravat. It was common necktie, forty-nine cents on Broadway.

The dang thing referred to was the canary. They went about the business of catching it.

There was one other mistake no one would ever make about them, and that was: They were not friends, they couldn't be. And neither could they be business associates. The only possible status between them was that of the man who gave orders, and the one who executed them. One was Brains, and the other was Muscle. More nearly exact, one was Thug Muscle.

The net was half a dozen yards of the stuff called "mosquito bar" in the South, or mosquito netting. Mr. Manley had thoughtfully provided himself with this. It was still in the paper sack, the way it had been handed to him in the store where he bought it. He took the net out of the sack.

"Take the end, Abner," he commanded.

At the edge of the park, the towering apartment house showed a window-freckled wall.

From the apartment-house window out of which the canary had flown in escape a few minutes ago, a man leaned. He waved his arms. He put his hands on edge against his mouth and shouted. What he yelled was not understandable.

"Mr. Manley," said Abner.

"Yes?"

"A man is yelling out of the window."

"Who is it?" demanded Mr. Manley.

"I think it's that servant, Julian."

"You sure it's not Benjamin Boot, himself? Be sure about that. If it's Boot looking out of that window now, I want to know it."

"It's the servant."

"Good. The servant is shouting to attract Benjamin Boot's attention. Boot is probably in another room of the apartment," said Mr. Manley. "Abner, let's catch that canary."

They stretched out the mosquito netting. The afternoon breeze caught it and wafted it like a plume of smoke. Six yards was eighteen feet of netting, and it was hard to manage.

The canary sat in the bush and twittered derisively at them.

High up in the apartment-house window, there was a change in figures leaning out. The servant, Julian, withdrew. Another man appeared. He wore a dressing gown that was very yellow indeed, about the color of the canary.

Abner said, "Benjamin Boot has come to the window, Mr. Manley."

"Good," said Mr. Manley. "Punch me, and draw my attention to him. Let's make this a well-rounded job of acting."

Abner punched Mr. Manley, pointed at the window. Mr. Manley looked up. The man in yellow robe waved his arms like an airplane propeller. Mr. Manley pointed at the bush where the canary sat, and waved back. The man in the yellow robe disappeared from the window.

"He's coming down here," said Mr. Manley. "Hurry up and catch that damned canary. And Abner—remember this is part of a murder, and the police do not think murders are funny."

BENJAMIN BOOT sprinted through the park with yellow robe flying. Under the robe he wore buff-colored pajamas, and bedroom slippers of matching color clung to his pounding feet.

He arrived all out of breath at the scene of the canary catching.

"For gosh sakes, don't hurt Elmo!" he exclaimed apprehensively.

Benjamin Boot was a tall young man with an excellent pair of legs, superb shoulders—in fact, a body that was so perfectly fashioned that it was beautiful. His hands, however, were very large and knobby, and his face extremely homely.

Elmo was the canary.

"Come, Elmo, come, come," said Benjamin Boot anxiously. "Say, I'm sure glad you fellows caught Elmo."

Concern and delight mingled on Benjamin Boot's homely face, and the result made the face something with which to haunt a house. Young Boot's face was not exactly ugly. Stupid was more the word. The face was a dumb, illiterate, foolish, simple, shallow, dense, donkeylike, wooden one.

Mr. Manley smiled.

"Glad to be of service," he said heartily. "I just happened to notice the bird as I was passing by, and this stranger"—he glanced at Abner—"was kind enough to assist me, weren't you, Mr.—"

"Mr. Jones is the name," lied Abner.

"I am Mr. Manley," said Mr. Manley.

The owner of the canary extended a toadlike hand.

"I am Benjamin Boot," he said. "This is my canary, Elmo, and I sure love him. I wouldn't part with Elmo for anything. I couldn't get along without him. That jackass of a manservant of mine, Julian, accidentally let Elmo out of his cage. I'm everlastingly grateful to you fellows."

"It's nothing," said Manley. "I'm glad to be of service. It was fortunate I had this mosquito netting along. I was taking it home to my wife, who was going to make some butterfly nets. She collects butterflies."

Benjamin Boot eyed the netting.

"The net is all messed up," he said. "I'll buy you some more."

"You needn't mind."

Benjamin Boot thrust a hand in his robe pocket, then looked crestfallen. "Gosh, I haven't any money with me. I was going to offer you a reward."

"Oh, no, no, we couldn’t think of that," said Mr. Manley.

"Nah, we couldn’t," echoed Abner, rather reluctantly.

Benjamin Boot showed a great deal of concern.

"Mercy me, you gentlemen just have to let me do something for you to show my gratitude," he said.

"You don’t owe us a thing," insisted Manley.

"Oh, but I insist, I really do. Would you—ah—accept a drink and some cigars in my apartment?"

Mr. Manley melted somewhat. "Well, now," he said, hesitating, "I might do that. How about you, Mr.—"

"Jones," said Abner. "Yeah, I might stand a snifter of whiskey."

"Oh, my, I’m afraid I don’t have anything that strong," said Benjamin Boot, abashed.

"O. K., I’ll go along and take the cigars, then," said Abner hastily.

They moved toward the apartment house.

Benjamin Boot, showing exquisite delight over the recovery of Elmo, walked ahead, cooing to the canary and petting the bird.

Mr. Manley and Abner dropped behind.

Abner whispered from the side of his mouth, "This guy is a pantywaist. Hell, he’s silly over the damned bird!"

Mr. Manley nodded. "Fine, fine. Our plan of bribing Julian to release the canary was excellent. It is getting us invited into Boot’s apartment."

Abner asked, "When we get this milk-toast in his apartment, what do we do?"

Mr. Manley eyed Abner appraisingly. "You have your knife, Abner?"

"Yeah."

"Do you think you can get it in Benjamin Boot’s back without too much fuss?"

"Just watch me!" Abner’s face became uneasy. "What about the servant, Julian?"

"I have a knife of my own for Julian," said Mr. Manley.

"It’s gonna be a pipe," said Abner. "Like takin’ two babies."

A Mr. Manley and an Abner who were highly satisfied with themselves got into an elevator in the apartment building and were carried to the twenty-third floor, where they stepped out into a cream hall that had only one door, the single door indicating that Benjamin Boot’s apartment was a large one. Apartments occupying entire floors in this neighborhood cost around twelve thousand dollars a year.

Benjamin Boot unlocked the door, and stepped back for Mr. Manley to enter. They went inside. Benjamin Boot stepped in after them. He hit Mr. Manley a blow on the jaw. He turned and hit Abner’s jaw a blow. Neither punch seemed hard, but the recipients flew backward and actually bounced off the

walls.

BENJAMIN BOOT examined Mr. Manley and Abner for signs of consciousness. He distinguished none.

"Julian!" he called.

The manservant appeared. He was a skinny man who perpetually looked as if he had an apple about half swallowed.

"Julian," said Benjamin Boot, "here they are."

"Yes, sir," replied Julian.

"Now what do we do with them?"

"I don’t know, sir."

"Are they the pair who bribed you?"

"Yes, they are, sir."

"Which one," asked Benjamin Boot, "actually paid you the money?"

"This gentleman," said Julian, indicating Mr. Manley.

"I suggest you return the sum you accepted, Julian. Since you did not fulfill your contracted duty, you did not earn the bribe. I shall myself reimburse you handsomely for doing the proper thing. Honesty always pays, Julian."

"Yes, sir," said Julian. "Shall I tie them up?"

"Yes, tie them by all means. But first, let me examine the contents of their pockets."

Their pockets proved to have no contents except a little silver and paper money which in grand total was not twenty dollars. A pair of knife scabbards, one on each man, was a different matter. Benjamin Boot withdrew the long steel blades which these held and tested their edges admiringly with his thumb. He flipped the blades away and they stuck in the hard oak paneling. It was rather expert flipping.

"Nothing to identify them," he remarked. "What an excellent pair of unidentified corpses they would make!"

Julian, the manservant, looked frightened. "The police, sir, have so many ways of doing things," he said. "It might be of danger to—ah—"

"I contemplate no violence, Julian."

"I am glad, sir." The servant was relieved.

They tied Mr. Manley and Abner. The manservant did the preliminary placing of the ropes, but Benjamin Boot tied the actual knots. He did an excellent job.

Benjamin Boot walked to a window, stood there rubbing his jaw and contemplating the park. Behind him, Elmo the canary twittered in his cage, to which he had been returned. Suddenly Benjamin Boot

whirled.

He said, "Julian, are you sure you don't know why these men approached you with their silly scheme for getting into my apartment?"

"I have no idea," insisted Julian.

"It's a confounded mystery, then!" snapped Boot.

"Yes, sir."

"The dangerous part of it is," said Boot, "that the mystery involves Miss Moldenhaeur and her father, it would seem."

"Yes, sir."

"I've got to get at the bottom of the thing, Julian. I didn't sleep at all last night, wondering about it. I can't have that. I've got to have my sleep. To say nothing of the fact that I'm in love with Miss Moldenhaeur."

Julian ventured, "Begging your pardon, sir, but I do not think Miss Moldenhaeur is aware of your deep affection. Perhaps if you made some slight move toward letting her know—"

Benjamin Boot shook his head vehemently. "Nothing doing. I told a young woman I loved her once. She looked at my face, and didn't stop laughing for a week."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Julian.

"I was sorry, too," said Boot. "I also ruined the laughter-filled young lady's father in a business deal, and the laughing damsel had to become a waitress in a greasy-spoon restaurant. I was sorry I did that, too. I was sorry all around. I'm always the one who is sorry. I was a baby lying in my cradle when I started being sorry about being born so homely."

"Yes, sir."

"Lay out my gray business suit, Julian. And see that I get dressed in a hurry."

Benjamin Boot walked through a living room with heliotrope wallpaper in delicate design and dainty furniture, into a bedroom with tender pink-coral walls, a white wall, and a lovely old bedroom suite in ancient ivory. There were flowers growing everywhere, several more canaries, and exquisite pictures on the walls. The apartment was a thing of loveliness, arranged with a touch somehow more dainty than a woman could have managed.

"Julian," said Boot, "did you ever hear of man named Doc Savage?"

"Yes, sir," replied the servant.

"What have you heard about him?"

"Mr. Savage composed a series of selections particularly adapted to the violin," Julian replied. "There is a touch of genius to the work. They are going to become famous in future centuries."

Benjamin Boot was surprised.

"Oh, so he composes music, too! I had heard of him as a scientist. One of my mining companies is using an invention of his for using very short ultraviolet rays to locate deposits of fluorescent minerals at night.

Such minerals as scheelite, which is seventy percent tungsten."

Julian hesitated. "I . . . ah . . . have heard of Doc Savage as a man of violence, too."

Benjamin Boot laughed.

"That," he said, "is why I am going to see Doc Savage about this confounded mystery. I think this affair needs his peculiar brand of violence. And, take it from me, Julian, the violence of Doc Savage is in a class by itself."

"Yes, sir."

"Also take good care of the two prisoners, Julian. In case they should escape, I feel almost sure I would separate you from your ears."

"Yes, sir."

Chapter II. MYSTERY AT MOLDENHAEUR

BENJAMIN BOOT entered a skyscraper in the center of the city. He was exceedingly well dressed, twirled a cane, and hummed thoughtfully. Seen from the rear, he gave the impression of a male movie star, but viewed from the front his homely, stupid, asinine face so dominated his appearance that he looked like a harmless half-wit out for the afternoon.

The skyscraper was the tallest in that part of the city. He went to the elevator starter.

"Doc Savage?" said the starter. "Go around that corner there, and take the private elevator."

"I have heard his headquarters are on the eighty-sixth floor?" said Boot. "Is that correct?"

"Take the elevator around the corner," said the starter.

Benjamin Boot took an elevator operated by push buttons. On the control there was only one button, and that one was labeled, *Doc Savage*. He punched the button. The cage rose only a few floors—no more than five—and stopped, the door opening.

Boot found himself in a brightly lighted room, undergoing an inspection from two men.

Boot took a look at the two men, and wondered if he could have accidentally gotten into an office which booked animal acts for side shows.

One of the men examining him had a pet pig with enormous ears and long legs. The other man had a pet baboon—some kind of an outside member of the monkey family, at least—which had a marked resemblance to the fellow who owned the pig.

Boot warmed toward the homely man. The latter was one of the few individuals Boot had ever met who was as homely as himself.

"Ah, good afternoon," said Boot.

The homely man stood up. "I’m Monk Mayfair." He nodded at his companion, who was already in evening dress, tails. "This fashion plate is Ham Brooks. What can we do for you?"

"My name is Benjamin Boot," said Boot.

"The owner of the Boot Mines?" asked Ham Brooks, the dapper man.

Benjamin Boot nodded. "And some railroads, ships and ranches and things," he said. "I came here in the hopes of seeing Doc Savage."

"You're in the right place," Monk informed him. "This is the going-over station. We look you over, and find out if your business is important enough to interrupt some experiments in electrochemistry that Doc is conducting."

Boot frowned. "Just what position do you gentlemen occupy in relation to Mr. Savage?"

"We're his right and left hands," Monk said.

Ham Brooks said, "That's exaggerating, Mr. Boot. Mr. Savage has five assistants, of whom we happen to be two."

"Brooks . . . Brooks," said Boot thoughtfully. "I have heard of a noted lawyer by that name. A Harvard man. Quite famous. Any relation?"

"No relation," Ham said, smiling, "but I happen to be the lawyer of whom you are thinking, I imagine."

Benjamin Boot was impressed. If Doc Savage had an assistant the caliber of Ham Brooks—Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, his full title—the man himself must be extraordinary.

He said, "I want to see Mr. Savage about a mysterious thing that has happened. A business associate has disappeared, and a young lady of whom I am . . . er . . . fond, who is also the associate's daughter, has become strangely terrified. On top of that, two men have just sought to kill me."

Ham examined Boot's face thoughtfully. "That sounds urgent enough," he said.

DOC SAVAGE exceeded any of Benjamin Boot's expectations. The name of Clark Savage, Jr., had come vaguely to Boot's attention several times in the past, but his actual knowledge of Doc Savage was not extensive. He had heard that the man was a scientist, student, something of a mental wizard—and had a unique hobby of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far ends of the earth. Savage had a name of being the man to go to when in trouble of such a nature that the police might be helpless for one reason or another.

"Goodness!" said Benjamin Boot. "I didn't expect a giant . . . er . . . I mean, how do you do, Mr. Savage. My name is Boot—Benjamin Boot."

Doc Savage's unusual features included remarkable flakegold eyes that were like tiny pools of the metal always stirred by tiny winds. His size was huge, yet proportioned so that it was not apparent until one came close. His skin was deeply bronzed, and his hair was straight, a bronze hue a little darker than his skin. The total effect was almost that of a man made out of metal.

"Please be seated, Mr. Boot," he said.

Boot sat down. He held his hat in his hands. He said, rather embarrassed, "I—ah—your associates passed me. I had heard of Mr. Brooks, the attorney. The other man—Mr. Monk Mayfair, I believe he said his name was—was a stranger."

Doc Savage said, "Monk Mayfair is probably the most skilled industrial chemist in the world."

Two things about the remark astonished Benjamin Boot. First, the idea of a fellow as dumb-looking as Monk being a famous chemist. And secondly, the rather amazing quality of control and vitality in the bronze man's voice.

"I'll try not to waste your time," said Boot. "Is it all right if I start my story?"

"Proceed."

"I am Benjamin Boot, and I am a rather wealthy man, owning a number of enterprises. I am not saying I am wealthy because I am proud of it. In fact, the contrary. I happen to be wealthy because I was born into this world such a homely, stupid-looking fellow that there was nothing for me to do but devote my time to making money. Girls would never have anything to do with me, and I have few men friends, because they invariably make cracks about my looks, and I do not like that. So I'm a lonely man, and a rich one. I love beautiful things. I spend much time in my greenhouses with my flowers, or in my aviaries with my birds, or listening to fine music and admiring fine paintings."

Doc Savage nodded. His flake-gold eyes had traveled over Benjamin Boot completely, from head to foot, with such a thorough intentness that Boot felt as if his mind had been read.

Boot said, "I have a business associate named Winton Moldenhaeur."

"The industrialist?"

"Yes."

"Head of the Moldenhaeur Chemical Enterprises?"

"Yes."

"Proceed," Doc Savage said.

"He has disappeared—or something has happened to him," said Boot. "We had a deal on. I was to meet him four days ago. He didn't keep the appointment. I couldn't locate him. No one connected with him seemed to know what had become of him."

"What about his family?"

"I went to see his daughter, Liona," explained Boot. "I saw at once that the young woman was terrified. I asked her where her father was. She said she didn't know. I saw all during her conversation that she was beside herself with fear, or some such emotion."

"Did she explain why she was frightened, or did you ask?"

"I asked. She said she wasn't. That was not the truth."

"Then what?"

"I suggested that we notify the Missing Persons bureau of the police department that her father was gone. She burst into tears. All her terror seemed to be brought out by my suggestion that we call the police. She practically ran me off the place."

Benjamin Boot was silent for a moment, frowning.

"I love Liona Moldenhaeur," he said. "I have never told her so. I probably never shall. I would not want her to laugh at me. It would hurt me deeply. But I left there—left her home—wanting to help her more

than I ever wanted to help anyone else."

"And then?"

"And then two men tried to bribe my servant, get into my apartment, and kill me," said Boot. "I have the two men prisoners. My servant is watching them."

Doc Savage asked, "Did you tell Miss Moldenhaeur anything else?"

Boot shook his head.

Then, "Oh, yes, I did," he said. "I told her I was going to help her whether she wanted it or not. I remember that now."

"That might have a bearing on what happened to you," the bronze man said. "By the way, Mr. Boot, just what do you want me to do?"

"Investigate this. If Miss Moldenhaeur is in trouble, help her. Help her father."

"That sounds like the job of a private detective."

"That's why I came to you."

"You seem to misunderstand," Doc Savage said patiently. "I am not a private detective, nor are my associates. We are simply a group banded together by love of excitement, more than anything else, to do things which we think need doing."

"I'll pay—"

"We do not accept pay."

"I'll pay any reasonable sum to any reasonable charity you suggest," said Benjamin Boot.

"I am sorry."

Benjamin Boot started up. "You mean you won't help me?"

"I am sorry, no."

Boot purpled. "But why?" he yelled.

"I see no necessity of explaining motives. Good evening, Mr. Boot."

Benjamin Boot yelled, "This is a hell of a note!" and stamped out.

DOC SAVAGE swung to the box-shaped office intercommunicator on the inlaid table in the reception room where he had been talking to Benjamin Boot. He flipped the switch on the box, said, "Monk."

"Yeah?" said Monk Mayfair's small, rather squeaky voice.

"That fellow Boot," Doc said.

"Yes?"

"He is on his way out of the building. You and Ham follow him. Check on everything he does. If he goes to his apartment, pay him a visit, make use of your special police commissions, and take charge of the two men he says tried to kill him."

Monk asked, "Are we stepping into this trouble Boot seems to have found?"

Doc said, "We are going to learn more about Mr. Boot before we commit ourselves. Better get going, you two."

"Right," Monk said.

Doc switched off the intercommunicator. Adjacent to the reception room was a larger room containing a scientific library. Beyond that—and covering the remainder of the eighty-sixth floor of the skyscraper—was the scientific laboratory.

The bronze man used a short-wave radio transmitter in the laboratory, called into the microphone, "Johnny, Long Tom, Renny."

Almost instantly, a voice answered, "Long Tom."

Then, in a few moments, "Renny speaking," rumbled a deep voice that could have come from a sleepy bull. "I don't think Johnny is on deck. He went up to Westchester, where some explorer from South America has a pre-Inca tablet of some kind that he wants Johnny to translate."

Doc said, "Renny, Long Tom, meet me in forty-five minutes at a spot half a mile south of the Winton Moldenhaeur mansion in Bayside."

"Right," Long Tom said.

"Holy cow, so something has started!" Renny rumbled. "I'll be there."

The bronze man got a few things from the laboratory, small articles which he placed in the pockets in the fabric of a bulletproof vest which he donned. The vest was not of steel plates, the usual construction, but was made of a chain alloy mail which was lighter, more flexible, and fully as good.

He took a car from a private garage in the basement. A garage, its driveway on a side street, which passers-by no doubt mistook for a delivery entrance, if they gave it any thought at all. He used a sedan, an ordinary-looking machine, and drove fast.

Because he did drive fast, he was able to spot the man who was following him. The man drove a coupé, small and fast. But his frantic dodging in an effort to keep the bronze man in sight made his presence obvious in the rear-view mirror.

Doc drove more slowly. He changed his direction, so that he was not heading toward Bayside, although still going in the general direction.

He kept in the traffic of a parkway, got into the region of truck farms, and turned off on a narrow road, paved with blacktop.

It was getting dark now, being the time of the evening when the sun does not seem to furnish sufficient light for driving, and yet automobile headlights also seemed inadequate.

The road was quite deserted.

Doc Savage reached under the dash and twisted a small valve in a copper pipe line of small diameter.

The engine then made a faint frying noise as the chemicals from a tank poured through the line into the hot exhaust line, were turned to vapor by the heat, and came out of the exhaust pipe a grayish fog, as if the motor was burning a little cylinder oil.

Doc drove on three quarters of a mile, turned into a crossroad, backed, and retraced the route he had just come.

He stopped his machine near the coupé which had been following him. The coupé now lay on its side in the ditch.

The bronze man put on a gas mask, got out, went to the coupé.

A young, square-bodied man with a freckled face and red hair was asleep from the gas in the car. Doc Savage pulled him out. Doc looked in the glove compartment, and then in the baggage compartment at the rear of the coupé, but found nothing except some rusty tools.

Doc put the young man beside him, and drove toward the Moldenhaeur place in Bayside.

Chapter III. THE HORRIBLE THING

THE Winton Moldenhaeur mansion sat in nearly a hundred acres of carefully-kept grounds. From the mansion itself—there were several buildings perched on a bulking knoll overlooking Long Island Sound—a paved road led curvingly through the trees and beyond a stone-arched gate, where it joined a highway. Some distance south on this highway, a lane turned off through some straggled trees.

Doc Savage pulled into this lane, stopped under the trees. Two cars, two men, were already there. The men—Renny and Long Tom, the pair he had radioed—approached.

Colonel John Renny Renwick, was almost as big a man as Doc Savage, and notable for the overgrown size of his fists and his perpetually sad expression. He had considerable reputation as an engineer.

Major Thomas J. Long Tom Roberts looked as if he had matured in a cellar. He had no color, no appearance of health. The impression of feebleness was deceptive, as many a robust fellow had discovered. His specially was electricity.

These two members of Doc Savage’s group of five associates stared at the burly red-headed stranger in the bronze man’s car.

"Holy cow!" Renny exclaimed. "Who’s the sleeping beauty, here?"

"I do not know"—it was a peculiarity of the bronze man’s that his voice rarely showed any emotion—"but he was following me. I released some of that gas Monk is trying to develop for use by military airplanes in battle, and he has not yet recovered from the effects."

Renny and Long Tom showed no surprise at the bronze man’s matter-of-fact casualties. They had heard him sound as unconcerned with violent death crashing toward him, and knew it was a sign of his amazing mental control. A stranger would have been astounded.

Doc added, "We might go through his pockets."

O’Brien O’Callaghan was the unconscious red-headed man’s name. They found that on his driver’s license. The license was New York State.

"Name sure fits him," Renny said, chuckling. "He’s sure a bit of the ould sod. Faith, and that he is."

Long Tom fanned through the contents of Mr. O’Callaghan’s billfold. "Six hundred and ten dollars," he said. "He goes well heeled."

Doc Savage went through some papers from the young man’s pocket.

O’Brien O’Callaghan was associated with someone named Sam John Thomas, Inc., in the capacity of general research engineer.

There was also a newspaper clipping. It said:

Aboard the *Yankee Clipper* when it arrived from Portugal today was Sean Larkin, Irish politician, Maurice Revel, French minister, and O’Brien O’Callaghan, of South Africa.

The clipping was dated two weeks previously.

"He isn’t a small-timer, whoever he is," Long Tom remarked. "Flying the Atlantic by plane these days costs money."

Doc Savage turned a flashlight on O’Brien O’Callaghan’s skin. It was deeply tanned. In fact, it was like leather. He opened the young man’s shirt. The skin there was also tanned.

Doc took off O’Callaghan’s shoes and socks.

Renny stared and said, "He’s been going barefoot."

Long Tom Roberts got down and poked the soles of O’Brien O’Callaghan’s feet with a thumb. "Regular hoofs," he said. "The skin on the bottom of his feet is half an inch thick. He’s gone barefoot for years."

Doc Savage made no comment, except to ask, "Which one of you prefers to stay here with him?"

Neither Renny nor Long Tom preferred it. Finally, "Oh, well, I’ll match you to see who stays," Long Tom said. And then, when he had lost, he grumbled, "The lug probably won’t want to talk to me when he wakes up."

Doc Savage and Renny climbed in one of the cars and drove toward the Winton Moldenhaeur estate.

THE gate was big, but it was closed with steel. The stone walls were at least a yard thick, and to the left and right there were small pillboxes of stone, perforated with windows high up.

A man put his head and a rifle out of the right-hand pillbox, asked, "Who’re you guys and whatcha want?"

Big-fisted Renny Renwick turned the beam of a flashlight upward. It illuminated the rifleman, disclosed that he had a round, determined face, red nose, large ears, and the general air of a rock.

"Holy cow!" Renny exclaimed. "It’s Ollie Saff. Imagine finding you here!"

A flashlight beam jumped down upon them, and Ollie Saff said, "For the love o’ little fish! My old boss, Renny Renwick!"

"How are you, Ollie?" Renny said. "I haven’t see you since that dam job on the Nile River, years ago.

What on earth are you doing here?"

"I'm a night watchman," said Ollie Saff. "And danged if I don't like it better than contracting!" He shifted his flash beam to Doc. "Is that Doc Savage? I've heard a lot about him."

Renny said, "Yes, it's Doc Savage. Come on down, Ollie. We want to talk to Moldenhaeur."

Ollie came down, threw the gate open. "You won't talk to Moldenhaeur," he said. "Anyhow, nobody has seen him for several days."

"Miss Moldenhaeur will have to do then, Ollie," Renny said.

"Well, she's here." Ollie Saff eyed them, rubbed his jaw uneasily. "You know, I'm glad to see you fellows. Something is wrong here."

"What?" Doc Savage asked.

"I don't know. All I know is that Liona Moldenhaeur is scared stiff for some reason, afraid to leave the house, and afraid to have anybody come. That's why all the servants have been laid off, and only I'm here. And I'm not allowed near the house. My orders are to stay down here with a rifle, and not let anybody in."

"That sounds rather unusual," Doc told him. "Are you going to let us in?"

Ollie Saff chuckled.

"Officially, no," he said. "The stone wall around the estate is wired with a burglar alarm. One of those capacity things which goes off if any prowler comes near the top of the wall, or tries to tunnel through." He peered at them foxily. "I guess the thing didn't work. Anyhow. I haven't seen you."

"Thank you," Doc Savage said.

"You're welcome. When you leave, I wish you'd satisfy my curiosity about what is wrong up there."

Doc nodded. "You knew Mr. Renwick in Africa?"

"Renny? Sure. On the Nile job. British government project."

"It is a small world, after all," Doc remarked conversationally. "How long since you left Africa, Mr. Saff?"

There was an abrupt silence.

"Four years," Ollie Saff said.

Renny said, "It was only three years ago when you worked with me on the Nile job."

"Uh—I left right after that," said Ollie Saff.

Doc said, "Well, thank you very much for letting us in."

Ollie Saff made no comment. He seemed rather subdued.

Doc Savage and Renny left their car parked near the gate, on the outside of the estate, and walked along a winding path bordered with tropical pines, overhung with weeping willow.

"He seemed a little uncertain when he left Africa," Doc remarked.

"Yes, didn't he?" Renny muttered. "That guy you caught following you, O'Brien O'Callaghan, was from Africa, too."

Doc offered no comment but he turned abruptly off the path, and started to circle back to the gate, keeping in the cover of the shrubbery.

"Where you goin'?" whispered Renny.

"Did you notice Mr. Saff's shoes? Very large. They seemed uncomfortable on him."

"Holy cow!" Renny said.

Early in his strange career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, the bronze man had developed a gas. The gas was an anaesthetic, quick-acting, odorless, colorless, and produced a harmless unconsciousness. Ordinarily the bronze man carried it in thin-walled gas containers, liquefied, which would burst and disperse the stuff without too much commotion.

From concealment in the darkened shrubbery, Doc Savage broke an anaesthetic gas container near Ollie Saff. The man shortly collapsed.

Renny removed Ollie Saff's shoes.

"Yeah," he said. "Been going barefooted a long time. Sole hide like leather."

"Is his skin tanned?" Doc asked.

Renny looked. "Like an Indian."

Doc Savage remarked thoughtfully, "It does not take long for a man to lose a tan in civilization."

Renny grunted. "I'll see if he's got anything else interesting on him."

Saff didn't have. They left him there. Renny said, "He'll wake up in twenty minutes or so and wonder like the dickens what made him faint, but otherwise he'll be all right."

Doc Savage was already walking toward the Moldenhaeur house.

LIONA MOLDENHAEUR was a frightened girl in a gray slack suit. Her face was not beautiful in a spectacular sense, but she was attractive. She looked kind. Her face was pale. Her eyes were dark. Her hair was still darker, although not as dark as the barrel of the automatic shotgun she held when she opened the door.

"Miss Moldenhaeur?" Doc Savage asked.

She had her mouth open, obviously to order them away in words they would not fail to understand. But the bronze man's voice, the power and friendship in it, stayed her, caused her to look at him. She had switched on the portico light. Looking at Doc Savage impressed her even more.

"I . . . yes," she said, hesitating. "I am Miss Moldenhaeur."

"This is Mr. Renwick," Doc said. "I am Clark Savage. Could we speak with you?"

"I . . . I'm afraid not," she said. "I'm very—well, I'm not feeling well. If it's business, you can take it up

with my father’s general manager."

"It is not business."

She frowned. "It couldn’t be anything else. I have never seen you before."

"Do you know Benjamin Boot?"

Her eyes flew wide, exposing the utter fear in their depths. "Yes . . . yes, I do."

"He suggested we come."

Liona Moldenhaeur’s lips compressed. "Ben Boot is a fool. I told him I don’t want help. You go back to him and tell him to mind his own business."

Doc said, "Two men tried to kill Mr. Boot this afternoon. Another man tried to trail me here. The name of the latter man is O’Brien O’Callaghan. Do you know him?"

Her eyes went even wider. Then they narrowed.

"O’Callaghan—" she said. "No . . . no, I do not know him."

Doc watched her. "Where is your father?" he asked.

Color left her face. "He . . . isn’t here."

"Where is he?"

"He went away. A business trip."

"Why are you becoming pale?" the bronze man asked.

Her answer was motion. She jumped back, tried to slam the door. The bronze man, moving with what looked deceptively like idle unhaste, was inside before she got that done. And with a continuation of the same unexcited movement, he took the shotgun out of her hands.

Renny followed them inside and closed the door.

The girl sank down on a thronelike hall chair, covered her face with her hands.

Doc Savage said, "We are sorry, naturally, Miss Moldenhaeur. But something is wrong. We have decided to investigate it. There is nothing—we hope—that you can do to prevent that. Why don’t you take a sensible attitude?"

She began to tremble, then to sob. She was, the bronze man saw, in no condition to talk.

"You stay with her," he told Renny.

He left the big-fisted engineer with Miss Moldenhaeur, and began searching the house. He took the ground floor first. The place was as magnificent as it had seemed from the outside. The rug in the west-wing parlor was an Oriental piece worth fully twenty thousand dollars, and the other furnishings were in keeping. The bronze man searched systematically, unawed by the magnificence.

The only thing he found on the ground floor was evidence—in the shape of undusted furniture, mostly—that servants had not been in the house for several days. In the kitchen, only one person, apparently, had been preparing meals.

Upstairs, it was different.

There was a locked room. The bronze man examined the door. It was heavy. The lock was a modern one; the keyhole did not go entirely through. He rapped, received no answer, and went to work on the door lock with a thin metal probe, one of the gadgets which he had brought along. He worked three or four minutes, during which there was no sound from the room, and got the door open.

It was a bedroom, a huge thing, fitted with a desk and office equipment as well as sleeping accommodations.

He went to the man on the bed. The man looked as if he might be asleep.

The man was tall, a well-preserved, fifty perhaps, and there was a feeling of competence about him. He looked so natural, so certainly asleep, that Doc spoke.

"Wake up!" the bronze man said.

The man did not move. He had the features of the girl downstairs. Doc had never met him. But the man was so famous that his picture had often been in the newspapers. He was the industrialist, Winton Moldenhaeur.

Doc took his wrist. There was no pulse. Winton Moldenhaeur was not breathing.

And yet there was the conviction, absurd though it might seem, that the man was not dead.

Too, his feet were extremely calloused.

AS Doc Savage came down the stairs, Liona Moldenhaeur looked at him. She had stopped sobbing. "You . . . you found him?" she asked.

The bronze man nodded. "How long has he been that way?"

"Since a week from last Monday," she said.

"That would be ten days."

"Yes."

For the first time the bronze man’s face showed a ripple of astonishment.

He said, "The man is your father, of course?"

She nodded.

"All right, give us the story," he said. "First, tell us why you were trying to keep his condition secret?"

Liona Moldenhaeur shuddered. "Two weeks ago, he told me he was afraid something horrible would happen to him. He made a peculiar request. He said that if he should die, he would not be dead. He said that if he did die, or appear to do so, I was not to call a doctor, or let anyone see him. He told me a doctor would not be able to help, and that he would be pronounced dead by the doctor, and buried, or turned over to an undertaker and embalmed. I think that is what horrified him the most—the fear of being embalmed."

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes fixed on the girl. "Your father knew something was going to happen to him?"

"Yes."

"How did he know that?"

She said, "I am not sure, but I think he had been threatened."

"Threatened by whom?"

"He gave me no details."

"None whatever?"

She shook her head. "Absolutely none. He refused. I . . . I thought his mind might be affected from overwork, and I think he realized what I thought, and it irritated him."

"Had he been overworking? Or showing previous signs of worry, or excitement?"

"It began the day before he had that talk with me about not calling a doctor in case something weird happened to him—and above all not allowing him to be embalmed. Prior to that, I had noticed no difference in him."

Doc Savage asked, "And this thing that has happened to him—when did it occur?"

"In the afternoon. I . . . I just found him like . . . the way he is. On the bed. I thought . . . I would have sworn, he was dead. But I know"—her eyes got round with horror—"he isn't really dead."

"Has there been any change in him?"

"None whatever. He has been exactly like that."

"Have you cleaned the room, altered it in any way?"

"No."

Doc Savage was silent a moment, as if assembling details, considering them.

He inquired, "Has anyone besides Benjamin Boot showed an interest in your father?"

"Oh, yes, naturally. His business associates, of course. I told them he had—gone on a trip. I got rid of the servants by giving them all vacations. And then—there was the white-haired man."

"The white-haired man? Who was *he?"*

She shook her head again. "I don't know. But he came here twice, demanding to see father. He seemed to know that father was in the . . . condition . . . he is in. I got the idea he had been sent here to . . . or told to come here, rather . . . to learn for sure that father was in the condition he is in."

"What did you do?"

"I . . . I was horrified. I refused to let the man in, and threatened him with the shotgun. He went away."

Doc Savage asked, "Did this white-haired stranger give you a name?"

"Sam John Thomas," she said.

Renny jumped, said, "Holy cow!"

The girl whirled and demanded, "Does that name mean something to you?"

Renny looked at Doc Savage, who was inscrutable. The big-fisted engineer swallowed, straightened out his face.

"Nope," he said. "I don't know any Sam John Thomas."

Which was, technically, the truth. But according to the documents in the pockets of O'Brien O'Callaghan, O'Callaghan was associated with a concern named Sam John Thomas, Inc.

DOC SAVAGE asked, "Miss Moldenhaeur, is that all you can tell us? Think hard, please. There must be some detail, something you think might have a bearing on this thing."

She shuddered. "Nothing," she said. "I . . . I've racked my brains for days. I haven't the least idea what it is about."

"What were you going to do about your father?"

She sank down on a chair, put her face in her hands, and said through her fingers, tremulously, "I didn't know. It has been driving me mad."

Doc moved toward the stairs, obviously intending to go back to Winton Moldenhaeur.

He paused, asked, "By the way, you said you got rid of the servants. But there is a watchman at the gate."

"Yes," said Liona Moldenhaeur. "Ollie Saff. He has been a great help. He has kept everyone away."

"Except Sam John Thomas," Doc suggested.

"Yes, except Thomas."

"Has Ollie Saff been in your employ long?"

"In father's, yes," the girl replied. "Father brought him here two weeks ago, just before this . . . happened. He said Mr. Saff had been working for him for years, and was a thoroughly trusted man. He also said that, in case anything *did* happen to him, I was to keep Saff here and accept his aid."

Doc Savage made no comment on that.

But big-fisted Renny rumbled, "What kind of a job would your father give Ollie Saff where he would go barefooted and almost naked in a hot tropical sun for two or three years?"

The girl showed her surprise.

"My father said Mr. Saff had been working in his office," she said, "for several years."

Doc Savage went up the stairs, out of sight.

Renny eyed the girl. Renny's face was even more woeful than usual, which, contrarily enough, meant

Renny was pleased with the situation. Not that he was elated over the misfortune of the Moldenhaeurs, or anyone else who was in trouble. The satisfaction was personal. Renny liked trouble. The kind of trouble he liked most of all was the mystifying kind.

This was satisfactorily mysterious. A man named Benjamin Boot had become alarmed when two men tried to kill him, and had appealed to Doc Savage for aid. Benjamin Boot had felt the only explanation of the attack attempt lay in something mysterious at the Moldenhaeurs. And he was right. There seemed to be ample mystery at the Moldenhaeurs.

If Renny would have been any sadder, he could not have helped bursting out laughing.

He hoped there would be some action connected with it.

He was thinking about the action when there was a rap on the door, and he opened the door immediately, to face Ollie Saff. Ollie Saff was excited.

"Listen," gasped Ollie Saff. "I just fainted, or something, down at the gate, and when I woke up, *this* was in my hand."

Renny stared at an object indistinct in the darkness. "What is it?" he asked.

"Something from Africa," said Ollie Saff.

Renny was so astonished that he neglected his normal amount of caution to bend forward and peer at what was in Ollie Saff's left palm, thereby completely forgetting to pay attention to Saff's right hand, which contained a blackjack that promptly whipped around and made a perfect connection with Renny's head behind the ear, where it would do the most damage. Renny was conscious of an explosion, then conscious of nothing.

Chapter IV. DANGER FROM AFRICA

MR. SAFF swatted Mr. Renwick again, just to make sure.

"All right, take him away," Saff said.

The order brought half a dozen men out of the shadows. They were not masked, except that tension was holding their faces tight. Tension and, in a case or two, open fear.

Liona Moldenhaeur stared in wordless terror.

She heard a man say, after staring at the recumbent hulk of Renny Renwick, "Hey, this is a Doc Savage man!"

"Sure," said Saff. "So what? Take him away."

The man said, "Listen, I don't want no part of Savage." He started to back off.

Ollie Saff drew a revolver and cocked it. "We can't have that," he said, in a voice completely cold and determined.

The man who wanted no part of Doc Savage changed his mind. He seemed to decide that he wanted a lot to do with Doc Savage, as long as it would permit him to go on living.

Liona Moldenhaeur came out of her horrified trance then. She began screaming. Her shrieks set the farm dogs barking and the chickens cackling in alarm on farms nearly a mile away. It was the first indication of a thing which they later found out about her, that she had once studied to be an opera singer.

Ollie Saff said something—it was not in English—that must have been profanity. He leaped for the girl, seized her. There was no sense in trying to silence her after that bugling shriek, and he did not seek to do so.

She hit him.

"Cut that out, you!" he said.

She kicked his shin, stuck a thumb in his eye, and pulled his hair.

"Help me!" he snarled at his companions. "Gimme a hand. Doc Savage is somewhere around the place."

Two men helped him with the girl. They ran, the whole group of them, taking along Liona Moldenhaeur and Renny Renwick, down the winding road toward the gate.

Ollie Saff stopped long enough to plant a flashlight—switched on so the beam blazed—in the grass where it illuminated the door of the house.

"Keep a watch," he ordered. "If Savage comes out, we may be able to pot him."

Liona Moldenhaeur resumed her screaming.

"Beller," Saff told her. "See what good it does you."

They approached the gate to the estate.

There, to Liona's astonishment, Saff said, "Hell, we don't need the girl. Throw her away."

The two men carrying Liona must have been expecting the order. They promptly pitched her into a bush. The bush was a rose clump, plentiful with thorns, and it was not pleasant.

Clawing out of the shrub, Liona ran in pursuit of the men.

"Mr. Savage!" she screamed. "They're going this way!"

The men had a car parked close to the gate, a driver in it, the motor running. They piled into the machine. The car stood there a moment, while one of the men aimed deliberately at the girl. She knew, even before he shot, that the man could have hit her, because she stood full in the glare of the automobile spotlight. But the bullet missed her. It missed her at least twenty feet, which was too much of a miss to have been an accident.

Another strange thing—Ollie Saff laughed. He laughed heartily, as if something had gone very much to please him.

Then the car containing Saff, his half dozen men, and Renny Renwick, went away at high speed.

And Doc Savage appeared beside Liona Moldenhaeur.

The bronze man asked a question which surprised the girl. "Did one of those men laugh?" he demanded.

"I . . . yes," she said.

"They probably decoyed me away from the house so they could get your father," he said.

HE wheeled, ran back in the direction of the house. Liona Moldenhaeur followed him, but he far out-distanced her. He was in the house, upstairs, and back outside when she arrived.

"They got your father, all right," he said.

"But—"

"Listen!" he said sharply.

She strained her ears. There was nothing, she thought, other than the night sounds, the barking of a dog in the distance, cars on a faraway highway.

He said, "Is there a road north?"

"An old one, between the estate and the Sound," she said.

The giant bronze man left her then, abruptly, silently. His going was fabulously ghostlike, and she stared in amazement at the surrounding darkness.

Then, two or three minutes later, she heard a car motor. It was on the north road, the old one, and it departed in a great hurry. She realized that the bronze man's hearing must be extraordinary, so that he had heard sounds from that direction.

Shortly afterward, he returned.

"They had another car waiting," he said. "Ollie Saff moved in on us from the front, got Renny and you and used him as a decoy to pull me away from the house. The other gang was waiting in the back. They simply crept in, got your father, and left."

He took out of a coat pocket an object that might have been a kitchen match box, except that it was black, had two dials and a tiny grilled opening. He held the box close to his lips and told it essentially what he had just told the girl. He added, "Get in the car and get here as soon as you can. Bring O'Brien O'Callaghan with you."

"All right," the box said, and Liona realized it was an extremely compact radio outfit.

Doc Savage entered the house, ran upstairs to the room in which her father had been lying. Liona followed him, and watched him search.

She had heard of this unusual bronze man before—she was recalling that now. A friend, a young man who was interested in science, had talked about Savage at a party; she was recalling things the friend had said, not the exact details, because the subject had held no interest for her at the time and, because she was not awed or even mildly intrigued by celebrities, she had not paid much attention. But she remembered the tone of the friend's remarks. Savage, the friend had seemed fully convinced, was a phenomenal individual with capacities and abilities amazingly developed.

Liona got a sample of the bronze man's uncanny ability as she watched.

She saw him go to the one thing which was out of place in the room. And yet she, who knew the place thoroughly, had not noticed it before.

He examined a canary cage which hung on an ornate gilt stand.

"Where is the canary?" he asked.

Liona stared. "Why . . . I . . . I don't know," she said.

"It was not in the cage when I entered the room the first time." The bronze man examined the cage. "Apparently there has been no bird in it in some time. Should there have been?"

Liona nodded. "Why, yes. Yes, my father had a canary. He has had it for more than a year."

"Where did he get it?"

"Mr. Boot gave it to him. It was a birthday gift."

"Did you notice when the canary disappeared?"

She tried to remember. "No, I don't recall."

"Have you see it since your father became the way he was?"

She paled. "No, I haven't."

An automobile horn hooted in front of the building. Doc Savage slipped the canary cage from its hook, took it along down to the car.

Long Tom Roberts complained, "Blast it! I missed the excitement. You say they got Renny?"

Doc Savage nodded. He took Liona Moldenhaeur's elbow. "You had better come with us," he said. "There is no point in your staying here alone."

"You are going to look for my father?" she asked anxiously.

"Naturally. For Renny, too. And for the reason behind your father's condition."

Long Tom said, "This O'Brien O'Callaghan is beginning to come out of it."

Doc Savage examined O'Callaghan. When he pinched O'Callaghan, the latter stirred dazedly. Doc calmly clipped O'Callaghan on the jaw with a fist, prolonging his period of senselessness.

"Drive to Pat's place," Doc told Long Tom.

PATRICIA SAVAGE was an extremely attractive young woman who had the bronzed hair and golden eyes of the Savage family. She met them in her private office in the beauty establishment which she operated for the benefit of a Park Avenue clientele, charging unearthly prices.

Her eyes lighted, "Trouble?"

Doc Savage said, "Pat, we have a young lady here, Miss Liona Moldenhaeur. Something we do not yet understand has happened to her father. She may be in danger herself. While we are trying to get at the bottom of the thing, I wonder if you would look after her."

Pat eyed him narrowly. "Is *that* all that is wrong?"

"Renny has been seized by some fellows," Doc admitted.

Pat made an exaggerated gesture of pretending to faint. "Now the earth can come to an end, because there's nothing more startling left to happen!"

This remark, meaningless to Liona Moldenhaeur, was perfectly understandable to Doc Savage and Long Tom Roberts. In the past, they usually had a great deal of difficulty with Pat Savage, trying to keep her from getting mixed up in their troubles. Pat liked excitement.

Doc Savage said, "You understand, Pat, that you are to take no part in this thing."

Pat's face fell. "Now you sound more like yourself. I suppose there is no danger whatever connected with looking out for Miss Moldenhaeur."

"None, I hope," Doc admitted.

"Dang!" Pat said. She took Liona's arm. "Come on, darling. Don't misunderstand me and think you are not welcome, because you are."

Doc Savage drove back to his headquarters building. He drove fast. There were many special gadgets—the gas equipment, for example—on the machine, and these included a police siren. He used the siren to clear traffic, supplemented with two lights which ordinarily appeared to be fog lights, but glowed redly upon operation of the proper switch.

They entered the private elevator carrying the O'Callaghan.

Long Tom said, "There's someone upstairs," after a glance at an indicator button inside the cage.

Doc touched what seemed to be an ornamental rivet high up on the cage side. The rivet was a push button, and a moment later an answer came from a concealed loud-speaker.

"Inquietude is a supererogation of turgescence," the loud-speaker remarked.

"Johnny," said Long Tom.

Johnny was William Harper Littlejohn, notable archaeologist and geologist, eminent user of big words, and a man who was taller and thinner than it seemed any man could be.

There was one favorable thing about Johnny's big words. He never used them on Doc Savage. No one knew exactly why.

Johnny said, "I just got back from Westchester County. That pre-Inca tablet the fellow had was no more pre-Inca than I am. In fact, it was not as much. Some fellow had faked it within the last year and palmed it off on him. Say, what is going on here? I dropped in at headquarters to find out what is going on, and nobody is here."

Doc Savage told him. He used remarkably few words to do it, and said, "Moldenhaeur is not dead, and yet he was not alive. I have never seen anything like it. It was rather incredible, whatever was wrong with him."

Johnny was impressed.

"Ollie Saff and his men have Renny," Doc continued, and Monk and Ham are trailing Benjamin Boot. And we have a man named O'Brien O'Callaghan, who should be able to give us some information."

"What do we do about Renny?" asked Johnny uneasily.

Doc said, "Johnny, you take one of our cars. Long Tom, you take another. As soon as I can get hold of Monk and Ham, I will have them take cars and help you. Use the cars which have powerful short-wave ultraviolet light projectors equipped for mounting. Drive over those Long Island roads, and keep your eyes open."

"That's a long chance," Johnny said thoughtfully.

"Yes, it is," the bronze man agreed. "But Renny was wearing the same type of clothing as the rest of us, garments treated with metallic salts which are highly fluorescent under ultraviolet light. He may regain his senses, tear off bits of clothing or any personal object and drop it in the road. It is a slim possibility, but the only one we have at the moment. I will keep in touch with you by radio."

"Any idea where they might have been taking Renny?"

"None at all," Doc said. "But it is fairly safe to assume that they would remain on Long Island. Bridges and ferries are their only method of leaving Long Island, and they would suppose that we immediately notified the police to watch those. We did not, but they would not know that. So confine your hunting to Long Island."

"Right. We'll do our best with the ultraviolet lights."

"And the airports," Doc added. "They might have used a plane."

Long Tom and Johnny departed.

(The ultraviolet wave lengths of light utilized by Doc Savage in this instance have been developed beyond the experimental stage by science. The light, being of a wave length invisible to the eye, is called "black." It is being used more and more in prospecting for ores. For example, more than a hundred varieties of ores which fluoresce under "black" light are found in one California county alone. These include the tungsten-bearing scheelite, halite, calcite, hydrozincite, types of borax, colemanite and many others. Uranium-bearing minerals fluoresce vividly. The apparatus used by the ore prospector is usually a portable 6-volt outfit. The method of prospecting can only be used at night, because the presence of daylight glare so much stronger than the fluorescence blots out the fluorescent phenomena entirely. Among the animals which fluoresce under "black" light are horned toads, lizards and snakes of many varieties.)

DOC SAVAGE switched on a recording device which was connected up with both the telephone and radio receiver. This somewhat complicated gimmick would record any call made to the headquarters in his absence.

Monk and Ham had not called in, he found.

He put O'Brien O'Callaghan in a chair, and used restoratives.

When the O'Callaghan got around to opening his eyes, and his predicament seeped into his mind, he took it calmly. He rubbed his jaw.

Doc Savage said, "The soreness is not serious. We found it necessary, or at least convenient, to clip you several times on the jaw."

O’Callaghan grimaced.

"It feels like you had run a locomotive back and forth over it," he said.

"Have you any idea where you are?" Doc inquired.

O’Brien O’Callaghan looked around. He nodded.

"I have heard of this place," he said, "so I can guess."

Doc told him, "You realize you are in difficulties, of course. We prefer to work with as little turmoil as possible, and without force. So I will ask you if you have any intention of talking to me."

"I don’t mind talking to you."

"Of telling me the truth, I should have put it," Doc said.

O’Callaghan considered that. "I guess I had better."

"You were watching this building?" Doc asked.

"Yes."

"And followed me when I left?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I was trying to find out," said O’Brien O’Callaghan, "what in the dickens is wrong with my boss."

"Who is your boss?"

"Sam John Thomas, of the company by the same name. I am employed by the company. I am called a general research engineer."

Doc said, "All of which we learned by examining the contents of your pockets."

"I’m telling you the truth. That’s what you want, isn’t it?"

"What is wrong with your boss?"

"He’s scared. He isn’t himself." O’Brien O’Callaghan stared at the floor. "I don’t know what is wrong. A week ago, about, is when it happened. He wouldn’t tell me what is wrong. I got the idea, though, that he feared some kind of terrible danger."

Doc Savage asked, "And how did you happen to be trailing me?"

O’Callaghan lifted his head.

"That’s easy. It was because of something I overheard the boss say over the telephone. It was just part of a sentence. *‘—know damned well Doc Savage could stop it!’* That was all I heard. Sam John Thomas wouldn’t talk to me when I asked him about it. He became violent. I could see he was in a state of terror. I think a lot of my boss, so I started looking into it on my own hook. I was investigating you. That’s how I happened to be watching you."

"Where is your boss now?" Doc asked.

"At his country home, I imagine."

"Where is that?"

"On Long Island."

"Near the Winton Moldenhaeur estate, by any chance?"

O'Brien O'Callaghan's forehead puckered. "I never heard of anyone named Moldenhaeur," he said.

"Your boss, Sam John Thomas, paid the Moldenhaeur estate a visit recently," Doc said.

"I can't help that. I don't know any Moldenhaeurs. Never heard of them."

Doc Savage was silent a moment.

"Do you own a canary?" he asked.

O'Callaghan stared in astonishment. "That's a funny one!"

"What is funny about it?"

"Somebody sent me a canary day before yesterday," said O'Brien O'Callaghan. "I don't know who. It just came by messenger. The messenger said a woman hired him to bring it to me. Why do you ask?"

Doc Savage was silent.

"So—a woman sent the canary," he remarked finally.

Chapter V. FROM A DRUGSTORE

THE telephone had, instead of a bell, a buzzer which gave forth a high-pitched and not unmusical note. When it sounded, Doc Savage picked up the instrument.

It was Monk. "Well, people have started dying," Monk said. "Two of them so far."

"Who?" Doc asked.

"Those guys who tried to get Benjamin Boot. Their names seemed to have been Mr. Manley and Abner. They're plenty dead. It happened this way: We trailed Benjamin Boot, like you said to, and he went different places and fooled around as if he was mad and trying to take time to think. Then he went to the apartment where he lives, and then was when we walked up to him. We told him we wanted the two prisoners, and he surprised us by not objecting."

"When did Mr. Manley and Abner die?"

"Right after we got up to Ben Boot's apartment with him. We went in the apartment, and Boot told his servant, named Julian, to bring the prisoners. The servant went in another room. He came rushing right back yelling that they were dead. Sure enough, they were."

"Where are you now?"

"Boot's apartment."

Doc Savage said, "I will be up there immediately."

He hung up the receiver, and turned to O'Brien O'Callaghan.

In a voice which held no particular emotion, the bronze man remarked, "Naturally, your misfortune befell you because you happened to be trailing us, and that made us suspicious. But your story explains several things. By the way, how long have you been with Sam John Thomas, Inc.?"

"Oh, several years," said O'Brien O'Callaghan.

"For the last several months, have you been situated so that you would have noticed any gradual change in your boss, any slow build-up of overwork which might result in a collapse, and nervous breakdown, of which this imaginary terror, in case it is imaginary, might be a symptom?"

O'Brien O'Callaghan shook his head vehemently.

"I've been sitting right here in the New York office for several months," he said.

"At a desk?"

"Yes."

"Then," said Doc Savage, "I am to presume you got those callouses on your feet sitting at your desk. And the sunburn, the deep leathery tan of tropical sun, all over you body—also at your desk?"

O'Callaghan swallowed. All his muscles seemed to slacken.

"My lying didn't go very far, did it?" he muttered.

"Not very. Are you going to come across with the truth?"

O'Callaghan shook his head again.

"No," he said. "We might as well get that understood."

"Truth serum," Doc Savage said, "is not very pleasant to take. It depends for its operation upon so addling the conscious nervous system that the victim is unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and cannot think clearly enough to concoct lies."

O'Brien O'Callaghan leaned back. He was determined.

"Bring on your truth serum," he said. "I don't believe the damned stuff will work."

DOC SAVAGE went to a cabinet, got out a hypo needle, and filled this with a villainous-looking chemical concoction. He approached O'Brien O'Callaghan. The red-headed freckled faced young man came up out of his chair. He brought the chair cushion with him, tried to hurl it in the bronze man's face. Doc moved enough to make it miss.

O'Callaghan came in with his left out, chin buried in his shoulder, carrying himself like a man who knew how to fight. He feinted a few times with his left, saw what he thought was an opening for a right uppercut, shot it in—and found himself sitting on the floor. He groaned, took hold of his jaw.

"You oughta been decent enough to hit me somewhere else," he said thickly.

Doc kneed him down on the floor, held him there, and used the hypo.

"Unfortunately, there is no time to use the truth serum on you just now," the bronze man explained. "This stuff will keep you quiet for a while. Incidentally, it is harmless."

A few minutes later, O'Brien O'Callaghan was a slumbering hulk of a young man sitting in a closetlike aperture in one wall of the laboratory. The niche had a comfortable chair. Doc closed the door, which became an indistinguishable part of the laboratory wall, with a seemingly very heavy piece of apparatus in front of it. The niche was ventilated.

The bronze man rode uptown.

Monk Mayfair let him into the Benjamin Boot apartment. Monk had a worried look, and his pet pig, Habeas Corpus.

"They're in the library," Monk explained.

A twittering sound filled the air, and the bronze man listened to this for a moment.

"Canaries?" he asked.

"A load of 'em," Monk said. "Flowers, and paintings, and all kinds of fragile gimcracks. This Boot has the tastes of a woman. But he's got the nerves of an alligator, too."

Doc Savage asked, "Did Boot seem to meet anyone when you were following him?"

"No."

"Where are the bodies?"

They were in the room adjoining the library, and the strange look on Monk's face was a slight forewarning of what to expect.

Doc made a brief inspection, then turned to Monk.

Monk squirmed. "Well, are they dead?" he asked nervously.

"What do you think?" Doc asked.

Monk stared at the bronze man, apparently wondering if he was being ribbed. Then the homely chemist wiped perspiration off his face.

"No pulse, no heartbeat, no breathing, no nerve reaction," he muttered. "They say you stick a pin in a dead man and the hole don't close up if he's dead. Well, I tried pins on both of them, and the holes didn't close." He waved his arms. "And yet I get the feeling they are *not* dead!"

Doc Savage asked, "When you followed Benjamin Boot, you are sure he met no one?"

"He didn't meet anybody."

"Did he buy anything?"

Monk stared. "He went in a drugstore. He could have bought something."

"What drugstore?"

"The corner drugstore, three blocks south of here."

Doc Savage nodded. He went into the other room and summoned Ham Brooks. So that only Ham and Monk could overhear, he spoke rapidly. He told them what had happened, and about Johnny and Long Tom being engaged in combing Long Island roads with the ultraviolet light.

Doc said, "I want you two to join Johnny and Long Tom at that job. Get cars at headquarters, and mount projectors on them. Fortunately, we have enough powerful long-range projectors to equip the cars."

Ham nodded. "We will get in touch with Johnny and Long Tom by radio and find out what roads they have covered, so we don't duplicate each other's work."

"Good."

Taking their pet pig and pet chimp along, Monk and Ham left the beautifully furnished apartment of Benjamin Boot.

BENJAMIN BOOT confronted Doc Savage. He said, "I don't understand this. You said you wouldn't help me, and then you turned up, or your men did. What were you doing—checking up on me?"

"Yes."

"Well, you didn't find out anything against me," said Benjamin Boot, "because there isn't anything."

Doc Savage said, "You entered a drugstore down the street?"

Boot hesitated. "Yes."

"What did you buy?"

"I . . . some cigarettes."

Doc Savage went to the telephone, called the drugstore, three blocks to the south, and said, "This is a police matter," and described Ben Boot, asked if he had been in the store recently, and what he had bought.

Having received an answer, Doc hung up and faced Boot.

"You bought perfume," he said.

Boot reddened. "All right, all right, it was perfume and not cigarettes," he said. "So what?"

"Why didn't you tell the truth?"

Boot's color deepened. "I'm sensitive about buying perfume," he said. "I like it, but I do not like being jibed at when I buy it."

Doc Savage said, "It might be better if you did not let your sensitivity interfere with your veracity."

"What do you want to know?" Boot muttered.

"Would you care to hear what happened at the Moldenhaeur estate?" Doc countered.

Boot sprang to his feet. His face was anxious. "Yes, what goes on there?" he demanded.

Doc Savage told him the story—with reservations. The reserved items included all reference to canaries, to calloused feet, to tanned skins, and Africa. But the bronze man was very detailed about the strange living-dead condition of Winton Moldenhaeur. Another point which the bronze man did not mention was the present whereabouts of Liona Moldenhaeur. Boot pounced on that point at once.

"Where is Liona now?" he demanded.

"In a safe spot," Doc said. "Have you noticed that I mention Moldenhaeur's weird condition as being the same, apparently, as the condition of the two men in your apartment?"

Ben Boot's face went blank. "What do you mean?"

"The two men, Mr. Manley and Abner, if that was their names, seem to be in a condition which might be described as completely suspended animation. Notice that I say *completely* suspended. In a normal case, immediately following death, certain chemical and physiological changes begin occurring in the body, these resulting in rigor mortis, among other things. The presence of chemicals in the shape of medicines may in a case of normal death arrest certain otherwise natural processes, just as embalming arrests normal putrefaction. But in the present case—Mr. Moldenhaeur and these two men—none of the normal after-processes of death are proceeding. Normal death might be called a suspension of the processes which supply life and animation and consciousness, but *not* a suspension of all activity in the body, chemical for the most part. The present thing consists of both—both a suspension of life and animation, *and* a suspension of all natural chemical activity as well. Does that make sense to you?"

"What you are saying is that they are dead, and yet they aren't dead?" Boot inquired.

"Something like that," Doc replied. "By the way, when you returned to your apartment with my two men, and they asked for the prisoners, did *you* go to get the prisoners?"

"No."

"Then you had not seen the two men since you left to come to my headquarters?"

"That is right."

"Who did go to get the prisoners?"

"My man here, Julian."

Julian immediately began having trouble with the halfswallowed apple in his throat. It went up and down.

"I . . . I didn't do anything to 'em," he mumbled.

Doc Savage's voice was quiet, the kind of a tone that would be very reassuring to an innocent man, but equally alarming to one who was not innocent.

The bronze man said, "You need not be excited, Julian. We merely wish to ask some questions. How long did it take you to ascertain the men were dead?"

"Not . . . not more than a minute," Julian replied.

"Mr. Boot sent you for the two men, and you were not gone more than a minute. At the end of that minute, what did you do?"

"I rushed back in here shouting that they were dead," said Julian.

"That's right," said Benjamin Boot. "Julian was in a dither."

Doc Savage did not take his flake-gold eyes from Julian. "In that minute, you learned both men were dead?"

"Yes," said Julian.

"That was fast work," Doc said. "I would say the finest of doctors would have difficulty telling for *sure* that two men were dead, and do it in a minute."

Julian paled. "I wasn't sure. I just—it just came over me that they were dead, so I rushed in here."

"Then what?"

"We all went to look at the two men as soon as we could get the door unlocked," Julian said.

"Oh, the door was locked now?"

Julian said, "In my excitement, I slammed the connecting door, and it has a spring lock. I was so wrought up I could not find the key immediately."

"How much delay was there?"

"Not over two or three minutes. Maybe five."

"Would you swear it was no more than five?"

"I don't know," Julian said.

Benjamin Boot said, "Let's say that no more than ten minutes elapsed. I'm sure that will cover it."

"Thank you," Doc Savage told him. The bronze man leaned back and looked around the room. "You have a number of canaries, haven't you?"

"Yes, I like canaries," replied Boot.

"I see you have some large Belgians," Doc remarked. "And I noticed you go in for variety. There are hooped, bowed, feather-footed, topknots and various hybrids, among other types of canary. I believe that bird yonder is a hybrid of canary and siskin, that one there a citril hybrid."

Benjamin Boot smiled. "You seem to know a bit about canaries."

Doc Savage did not go farther into the subject of canaries. He glanced at Julian.

"Julian," he said, "will you do one more thing for us?"

"Yes, sir," said Julian. "Of course, sir."

"Take off your shoes and socks."

"Eh?"

"Take off your shoes, Julian. Then your socks."

Julian thought that over. Then he decided that, instead of removing his shoes and socks, he would remove a flat automatic from its hiding place under his left arm, and see what luck that would bring him.

Chapter VI. CALLOUSED FEET

DOC SAVAGE seemed hardly to be watching Julian at the moment the servant decided to turn Wild West. But the bronze man lifted out of his chair, and had hold of Julian's wrist about the time the gun came into view.

Julian was fast, had nerve, knew how to use a gun. On top of which he was desperate. He began shooting. His haste was such that he even grooved his own shoulder with a bullet. He fired three more times, and the lead knocked grooves in one wall, broke a light fixture.

Doc held him. Julian kicked with both feet, flogged with the one arm which did not hold the gun. He said things, loud angry and violent things, most of which were in English, but some in dialect. The dialect was definitely foreign, and undoubtedly primitive.

A fist on the jaw finally silenced Julian.

Benjamin Boot had been dancing around with a chair. He looked disappointed. "I was going to brain him," he said, glaring at Julian. "The cheek of the devil. He's one of my enemies, of course. He's mixed up in it."

Doc Savage asked, "How long has the servant been in your employ?"

"He worked for me three years about five years ago," said Benjamin Boot. "Then he quit. About a month ago, he turned up and wanted a job, so I hired him back."

"Then Julian has only been with you a month?"

"Well, slightly less, I would say. Three weeks might come closer."

Doc Savage stripped open Julian's shirt. Julian's skin was very deeply tanned. Next, the bronze man removed the servant's shoes and socks.

Benjamin Boot had been looking on in astonishment.

"Gracious!" he said.

The callouses on the bottoms of Julian's feet were thicker than any callouses yet seen.

"My!" said Benjamin Boot. "What on earth made his feet like that?"

Doc Savage said, "It looks as if he might have gone barefoot in a hot sun for a long time, not so many weeks ago."

"Why, that's very strange!" said Boot. "Julian told me he had been clerking in a store in Hartford, Connecticut, for a long time just prior to his coming with me."

The bronze man made no comment. He walked into the room where the two "dead" men lay, and began another examination. This one was thorough. It included blood samples, spinal fluid samples—every known preparation for a scientific search and analysis.

He spent more than an hour at that task. Finally, after he had stowed samples in a case for later analysis in the laboratory, he straightened.

"Mr. Boot," he said.

"Yes."

"Will you look over your canaries?" Doc Savage suggested. "Examine them closely, and see if you notice anything unusual or unnatural."

Puzzled, Benjamin Boot made a thorough inspection of his canary flock. He called the birds by names, whistled at them to get them to singing to him, and was otherwise thorough. He nodded his head in satisfaction.

"Nothing whatever is wrong with my canaries," he said.

Doc asked, "Are they all here?"

"Yes."

THE elevator attendant at the Benjamin Boot apartment house was somewhat puzzled when they carried the two "dead" men out of the building. Doc Savage had sprinkled some rubbing alcohol—Ben Boot had nothing so base as whiskey in his apartment, he explained—on the two men to give the impression they were inebriates. Julian looked more alive, although still limp.

The elevator attendant seemed more astounded by the fact that drunks were being taken out of the Boot apartment, than by the fact that the three men were completely out.

Doc put them in the back seat of his car.

"You had better go with me," he told Benjamin Boot.

"Thank you very much," said Boot heartily. "I do want to be with you. That may enable me to help Miss Moldenhaeur."

Doc Savage headed south on Central Park West, then took the west side to avoid the theatrical district which, although the night was getting on, was still brilliantly lighted and crowded. He reached back and rapped Julian again on the jaw.

Benjamin Boot continued, asking, "Do you think we will be able to help Miss Moldenhaeur?"

"Miss Moldenhaeur is perfectly safe," Doc said.

"I mean her father, of course."

Doc asked, "What was the nature of this business transaction you had scheduled with Mr. Moldenhaeur when he met with this misfortune?"

"Oh, that." Boot shrugged. "We were going to combine one of his smelting companies and two of my copper mines and make an efficient unit out of them."

"Could that have had any bearing on this matter?"

Boot shook his head violently. "There is absolutely no possibility that it could have."

Doc Savage asked, "Do you know a man named Sam John Thomas?"

Boot nodded. "Slightly, that is all," he said. "I believe he is on the directorate of a concern of which I am also a member of the board."

"What company is that?"

"The Century Projects Corp."

The name told little enough about the company, so Doc asked, "What is the concern's business?"

"It has various manufacturing holdings," Boot replied. "Say, what are you going to do next?"

Doc said, "Question O'Brien O'Callaghan, and investigate Sam John Thomas."

The bronze man drove into his private garage in the basement of the midtown building which housed his quarters. He shifted the two "dead" men to the elevator, carried them up to the eighty-sixth floor, and unloaded them, along with Julian.

He spent the next two hours making a scientific examination of the two, and running tests in the laboratory. He drugged Julian.

One interruption occurred when Monk Mayfair called in, his small squeaky voice sounding irritated over the radio. Monk reported, "Nothing yet. No sign of Renny."

"Keep looking," Doc directed. He got O'Brien O'Callaghan out of the concealed niche in the laboratory wall.

BENJAMIN BOOT looked at O'Brien O'Callaghan and said, "I never saw this fellow before."

The O'Callaghan rolled his eyes. He tasted his lips, as if they were bitter. "What day of the month is it?" he muttered.

"It is still the same night," Doc told him. "Are you ready to have that truth serum tried on you? Incidentally, I can assure you that it will not be pleasant. You will probably live through it, although there are cases of men who have not, and you will not feel the same for several days. The latest scientific opinion, in fact, is that truth serum does an injury to your mind that may be more or less permanent."

O'Callaghan licked his lips again.

"I don't suppose," he said, "it would make any difference if I told you why I'm *not* telling you the facts in this."

"It probably would not," Doc told him. "You can try, if you wish."

O'Callaghan was lost in contemplation for a moment.

"It's because there's too much at stake," he said. "I can't make myself think the situation is so serious that we have to ring in any outsiders."

Doc asked, "Are you at all familiar with my organization and its methods?"

"I've heard of you," O'Callaghan said. "I've heard you were honest."

"You do not believe it?"

"One of the first things I learned on this earth was that it was always safest to go on the assumption that there wasn't such a thing as an honest man," said O'Callaghan.

Doc Savage turned away. "We are wasting breath, I see. There seems to be nothing to do but try the truth serum on you."

"Wait a minute," called O'Callaghan. "How about a compromise? How about you taking me out to talk to Sam John Thomas, my boss? What he says to do, I'll do."

Benjamin Boot exclaimed, "Ah, no doubt this is a trick!"

Staring at Boot, O'Brien O'Callaghan demanded, "Who is this homely goon who doubts my word?"

Boot registered indignation. "I am Benjamin Boot," he snapped.

The O'Callaghan showed sudden interest. "Say, I've heard of you, goldilocks. You're director in a company in which my boss, Sam John Thomas, is also director."

Doc Savage showed a great deal of interest.

"What concern is that, O'Callaghan?" the bronze man demanded.

"Century Projects Corp."

Boot snapped, "I am a director in dozens of corporations."

Doc Savage said, "Come on, O'Callaghan. We will talk to Sam John Thomas. Boot, do you want to go along?"

Benjamin Boot hesitated. "I—yes, I will," he said. "But I think it is a trick. I don't trust this man O'Callaghan. I seem to read menace in his face."

The O'Callaghan told Boot, "I'd hate to say what I read in your face. It would make the devil blush."

They went downstairs—after Doc drugged Julian, placed him and the "dead" men in the same niche which O'Brien O'Callaghan had lately occupied—in the elevator, riding directly to the garage. Boot and O'Callaghan were not even looking at each other.

They stepped out into the garage, and Pat Savage said, "Well, good evening. Or, rather, good morning, it being well past the hour of midnight, when evil is supposed to stalk."

Pat sounded brightly alert.

Doc Savage frowned at her. "What are you doing here?"

"Why, Miss Moldenhaeur and I couldn't sleep," Pat explained, "and we decided to spend the rest of the night helping hunt Renny."

"How did you know about the hunt for Renny?" Doc demanded.

"I have a radio. I overheard Monk and the others reporting to you and talking to each other."

Doc said, "You will have to go back to your place."

"Nothing doing," Pat announced. "You let me in on this, and when I'm let in, I don't stop with my foot in the door. It's whole hog or nothing for me."

From past experience, the bronze man knew the futility of arguing. He had tried it before, and gotten nothing for his pains. His five associates respected his judgment, took his orders without question. Pat Savage respected his judgment, also, but only took such orders as appealed to her.

In an alarmed voice, Benjamin Boot said, "If this girl heard your men reporting by radio, what is to keep anybody who has a radio receiver from hearing them?"

Patricia answered that.

"Nothing," she said, "except an unscrambler gadget that is about three vacuum tubes and a cogwheel more complicated than a television receiver. You see, Doc's outfits are equipped with them, and so are mine. I don't think anybody else overheard."

Doc frowned. "Where did you get your scrambler, Pat?"

"Stole it out of here one day," Pat replied calmly.

Benjamin Boot was examining Liona Moldenhaeur rather self-consciously. "Good morning, Liona," he said. "I . . . I'm sorry I stirred up this mess, but it seemed the thing to do."

Liona Moldenhaeur nodded. "You were right, Ben," she said. "I realize that now. I'm the one who should be sorry—sorry I did not tell you all about it when you first wanted to help me. I . . . I understand I was the cause of two men trying to kill you."

Ben Boot beamed. "I think that's what the two men were going to do, but they didn't make the grade. And it wasn't your fault. Probably they were tackling me because I was showing an interest in the mystery."

O'Brien O'Callaghan was also examining Liona Moldenhaeur. The O'Callaghan seemed greatly impressed by Liona's qualities.

"Come on," Doc Savage said briefly. "We will all visit Sam John Thomas."

SAM JOHN THOMAS lived as befitted his wealth, and as became a modest man. His estate was large, but it was not devoted to fancy shrubbery, as was the Moldenhaeur place, but to farmland which was in production. The place looked profitable.

The house itself was not much more than a stone cottage, crowning without spectacle a low hill which dropped down sharply to the waters of a cove. There was a boat in the cove, a large deep-water cruising yacht, possibly eighty feet in length.

The night was dark around them as they pulled up to the house. The car's headlights seemed unnaturally bright.

Doc Savage got out of the big sedan. He said, "Pat, you stay here with Miss Moldenhaeur, Mr. Boot and Mr. O'Callaghan."

"Right," Pat said.

"I'm going with you," Boot snapped.

He tried vainly to get the door of the car to open. He wrenched at the handle, pounded at the glass.

Pat said, "You might as well compose yourself. This car locks up tight, and I'm the only one who can open it. You stay here, as Doc suggested."

Boot subsided, scowling, and watched Doc Savage vanish into the darkness.

The bronze man moved cautiously to the house, carrying a listening device which he had taken from a compartment in the car. The listener gadget was simple—a ribbon microphone of the contact type, feeding into an amplifier which threw its output into a headset. He used the listener on various windows in the house.

There was no living thing in the house, he decided. Death there might be; he had no way of knowing. But no living thing.

He approached the boat. With caution and with silence, keeping in the shadows, he drew near a small dock to which the yacht was tied. All portholes were dark, and there was no sound from the boat. But he detected, very faintly, the odor of pipe smoke. Not odor of a pipe, but of smoke, carried ashore by a breeze which blew across the boat.

He tied a string to a bush, then moved away, took concealment behind a tree.

"Mr. Thomas," he called.

There was no answer. Water insects had been making small noises around about, and they went silent. The stillness was of infinite tension.

Doc Savage made his voice take on a ventriloquial quality, so that its source was doubtful.

"Thomas," he said, "we want to talk to you. It's about Moldenhaeur."

No answer.

He pulled the string to the bush and the bush shook.

Flame spouted from the fore deck of the boat, and a bullet clouted the bush which was moving. The shot echoes whooped off the hills, and a long time afterward came gobbling back from across the water.

Doc Savage threw a glass-ball anaesthetic grenade, lobbing it at the gun flash. He heard it break softly. He threw two more. A man made the sound a man would make collapsing on a boat deck.

The bronze man recovered his string. It was a silken cord, long and very stout, equipped with a grappling hook on one end, and it had many uses. He rolled it carefully, then went aboard the boat.

THE white-haired man lay on the boat deck. There were documents—membership cards in exclusive yacht clubs, mostly, and a driver's license—which indicated he was Sam John Thomas. He seemed to be sleeping. At least his breathing was regular and deep. Doc pinched him, and he did not move.

The bronze man searched the rest of the yacht. There was no one else aboard. He noted that all portholes were fastened, all hatches battened, all companions secured firmly except one, that exception being the companionway nearest where Thomas lay.

It appeared that Sam John Thomas had been barricaded on the yacht.

Doc went back to his car, said, "All right, open up, Pat."

Benjamin Boot piled out of the machine and yelled, "What happened? We heard a shot?"

"Thomas was on his yacht, behaving like a cornered man," Doc said quietly. "We will question him."

Pat, who had worked with the bronze man before, was a little surprised. Doc was talking more than usual. Normally, neither persuasion nor dynamite would move him beyond a cryptic remark now and then. It had been Pat's experience that the less the bronze man said, the more progress he was making. She was wondering why he was talking so much, explaining his moves before he made them. She suspected he had some object in doing that.

Doc walked back to the yacht, following the others, telling them where to go.

Pat, noticing that he *did* walk behind them, got a cold sensation on the back of her neck.

They had Sam John Thomas in the salon of his yacht when he came out of the gas stupor. He blinked at them.

Pat stood against a wall. The feeling she was having was stronger now, the impression of danger, of tension. She could tell from the bronze man's extremely calm manner, from the continual motion of his flake-gold eyes, that she was not wrong.

Doc said, "You are Mr. Thomas?" to Sam John Thomas.

The man nodded. "Who the devil are you?"

Doc indicated O'Brien O'Callaghan. "This young fellow work for you?"

The man's eyes flicked at the O'Callaghan. "Hello, O'Brien," he said. "What on earth does this mean?"

O'Brien O'Callaghan shrugged. "This is Doc Savage. I don't know whether you have heard of him. He follows a rather unusual career—righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, he calls it. I call it sticking his beak into other people's business where he's not wanted."

Thomas looked at Doc Savage. "I've heard a great deal about you," he said.

He seemed impressed.

O'Brien O'Callaghan said sharply, "Don't tell them anything, boss!"

Benjamin Boot grunted angrily, stepped forward and acted as if he was going to do nothing but tap the O'Callaghan on the chest. He did tap O'Callaghan's chest with his left hand, but after the second or third tap his right fist came whistling up and around to O'Callaghan's jaw. O'Callaghan's teeth came together with a loud noise, as of two rocks meeting hard, and he would have fallen backward stiffly as a stick of lumber would fall, had Pat not caught him and lowered him to the floor.

Pat stared at Boot. "Some wallop," she said. "I saw sparks fly when his teeth came together."

Boot smiled at Pat. He leveled an arm at Thomas. "The thing for you to do," he said, "is tell the exact truth about this affair."

Sam John Thomas scowled.

"I don’t think I have anything to say," he said.

Doc Savage suggested, "You might explain why you were so anxious to see Winton Moldenhaeur a few days ago. You recall you visited the Moldenhaeur home and Miss Moldenhaeur would not let you in. Did you know that something—peculiar—had happened to Mr. Moldenhaeur?"

"I have nothing to say," said Thomas.

"That blasted O’Callaghan!" Boot said angrily. "He persuaded him not to talk."

"Will you take off your shoes, Mr. Thomas?" Doc said.

SAM JOHN THOMAS was obviously startled, and he did what seemed natural under the circumstances. He shook his head. Then, after looking at Doc Savage and realizing the futility of argument or resistance, he shrugged and began unlacing his black Oxfords.

He wore a neat business suit, a shirt which was well-cut and evidently custom made, an expensive wrist watch, a lodge ring on one finger, a lodge emblem in his lapel. His face was innocent for a man of nearly fifty, and a rich man. His eyes were clear blue, and now that the effects of the gas were wearing off, he was beginning to focus them without trouble. He was in all a fine, gentlemanly figure of a man, but scared. Scared! There was no doubt of that. It showed in his eyes.

He kicked off his shoes.

"Now your socks," Doc said.

Thomas removed his socks.

His feet were extremely calloused.

Doc Savage asked, "Do you have a canary, Mr. Thomas?"

The man was startled. "Why . . . how did you know that?" he asked.

"Most everyone seems to have canaries in this affair," Doc Savage said. "Where did you get yours, and how?"

Thomas frowned. "It was sent to me. Three days ago. It bore the card of a friend of mine, Adam Latimer. But I telephoned Mr. Latimer, and he insisted he did not send it. I was rather puzzled. I detest birds."

"You do not know who sent you the bird?"

"No."

"What did you do with it?"

"I still have it. I detest birds, but I did not know what to do with this one except keep it. Eventually, I intended giving it to someone. When I had time to do it, that is."

"You have been rather busy?"

"Yes."

"How did your feet become so hardened?"

Sam John Thomas compressed his lips. He fell into a silence that was obviously going to be as permanent as he could make it.

Doc Savage tried one more question.

"What are you afraid of, Mr. Thomas?"

He got silence for an answer.

The bronze man turned to Liona Moldenhaeur. "Miss Moldenhaeur," he said.

"Yes?" She was surprised.

"Will you show us your feet?"

"My feet!" She stiffened. "What an insane suggestion!"

"Will you?"

"Why—" She began losing color. Her face turned pale so swiftly that they could see the change. "No!" she exploded. "Of course I won't!"

The bronze man said patiently, "We are involved in something very serious and very horrible. We are trying to get at the bottom of it. You must help us."

Quite white now, she snapped, "Don't you dare touch me!"

Pat Savage looked extremely cheerful. Pat was a slender girl, but her slimness was deceptive. "Doc, you're wasting time," Pat said. "Let me do it. I've been taking jujitsu lessons and I'd like to try them out."

Doc said, "Go ahead."

Pat advanced on Miss Moldenhaeur, a hand extended, saying, "Come on darling, don't be nasty about this." Liona Moldenhaeur tried to slap Pat, which must have been what Pat expected, because there was some motion, violent and intricate movement, hard for the eye to follow, and when the swirl of skirts subsided, which it suddenly did, Liona was flattened out helpless and Pat already had one of her slippers off. Pat stripped at a silk stocking.

"Calloused," Pat announced. "As horny as a hoof."

They could all see the hardened sole of Liona Moldenhaeur's small foot, so the remark was hardly necessary.

Benjamin Boot had been stunned with the abruptness of Pat's move, apparently. But now he got his wits together. And his rage went climbing.

"What do you mean—manhandling Miss Moldenhaeur that way?" he shouted.

He rushed forward, obviously to drag Pat off Liona.

What then happened to Mr. Boot would have been highly entertaining had anybody been in the mood for humor. Pat used a grip on his necktie for initial leverage. During the first part of what she did to Benjamin Boot, she inserted an extended pair of forefingers into his eyes, temporarily disrupting his vision. Boot left

the floor and turned over in the air at least twice. He hit the floor. Dust flew up from the carpet.

Doc Savage shook his head, said, "Pat, you are too rough with that. You'll injure somebody."

"I need more practice," Pat said gleefully. She sat on Boot's back, held him flat and gasping with a variation of a wrestling toe hold. She looked at the shoe she was holding. "I wonder about *his* feet," she said.

Doc said, "The same thought has occurred to me."

"Shall I look?"

"Do."

Boot's immaculate patent-leather Oxfords came off easily. He wore them rather large. His socks were anklets, and as easy.

"Oh, oh!" Pat said.

Doc Savage examined briefly.

"Boot's feet are as calloused as any of them," he remarked.

Chapter VII. MÊLÉE IN A MARSH

DOC SAVAGE loaded Benjamin Boot, Sam John Thomas, O'Brien O'Callaghan, and Liona Moldenhaeur, into the back of the sedan, where they made a tight-fitting, disgruntled group.

Pat looked them over. She gave an opinion.

"A fine bunch of liars, all of you," she said.

The sedan was equipped like a limousine—there was a panel of glass, inch-thick bulletproof glass in this case, which rolled up out of the back of the front seat to make a partition. Doc raised this. Then he made a small speech in an unconcerned voice.

He said, "As Pat says, some or all of you are lying. All of you have calloused feet, and no one of you cares to explain why. All of you have canaries, or some connection with canaries. So I am afraid you must regard yourselves as prisoners."

He closed the door to the rear compartment of the car.

Pat put her lips close to the window, and said, "To save you some possible headaches, be advised that you couldn't break out of the back of that car with less than dynamite. And in case you start acting funny, all we have to do is pull a lever up here, and you'll get a dose of that anaesthetic gas."

Doc got behind the wheel. Pat slid in beside him.

"Where do we go now?" Pat asked.

"Back to the laboratory," Doc Savage said. "I want to make some more experiments with those two men who made the attempt on Boot's life."

Pat nodded. Then she frowned. "This stuff about their feet," she said. "I don't get it."

The bronze man suggested, "There seems to be a great deal at stake."

"Why won't they talk?"

"Some of them are confused, perhaps," Doc said. "Others are full of greed and schemes. Maybe one or two do not fully trust us. Mixed motives, as a whole."

Pat settled back and the car began moving. She said, "You knew when we went to the boat that the girl's feet and Boot's were calloused. I could tell there was something wrong, the way you walked behind and watched everyone."

Doc made no comment.

He was listening to the radio receiver. It had been turned on throughout, but there had been nothing from it but the frying of static, occasionally the vague interference of some station not on the wave band. Because the speech went through a scrambler, the interference was quite unintelligible.

But now a background noise of a microphone had cut into the carrier.

Ham Brooks' very Harvard accent said, "Do you happen to be listening, Doc?"

The bronze man said, "Yes, Ham," into a microphone.

Ham said, "Finally I think we have something. A bit of a job it was, too. But Long Tom located Renny's handkerchief with the ultraviolet light. It was on a road, a rather deserted part of countryside. The road leads to a mud flat where a bunch of old barges are drawn up. We think Renny is being held there. And possibly Moldenhaeur, too."

Ham gave the location of the road. "This is flat country," he warned, "so be careful about using headlights. It should be near enough daylight that you won't need them, anyway."

FLAT was a mild descriptive for the country around the road where Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair met Doc Savage's car. It was marsh; with more vegetation, it would have been an impassable swamp. Grass of a type which thrived in salt water grew high and rank.

Ham glanced into the car, exclaimed, "By Jove! Who are these people?"

Pat told him, "They all have calloused feet, and some of them have canaries, and they're all full of lies. That's about all I can tell you. Oh, yes, they're all connected in one way or another with a company named Century Projects Corp."

Monk examined Liona Moldenhaeur. He was favorably impressed.

"I think somebody should stay here and watch the prisoners," he declared. "I'll do that. Me and my hog."

Ham looked indignant.

Doc said, "Ham, both you and Monk and Pat had better stay here and keep an eye on the guests."

Ham nodded. "Come over here," he said. "I'll show you why we think both Renny and Moldenhaeur may be on the barges."

A hundred yards down the road, he turned off on a patch of firm ground, and approached two parked cars. Both machines were empty. Ham used a flashlight cautiously.

Pointing at the car nearest the road—the machine had obviously been the last one to arrive at the spot—Ham said, "In the back of that one, we found a couple of buttons off Renny's coat. It was the one Renny was in, all right."

Then Ham went to the second car. He dragged out a blanket that was soft and expensive, and monogrammed "WM" elaborately in one corner. "Recognize this, by any chance?" Ham asked.

"On the bed on which Moldenhaeur was lying when I saw him," Doc said.

"Then they brought Moldenhaeur here, too."

Doc Savage examined the prints made by the car tires, sinking to a knee several times for a closer inspection of details. More water had seeped into one set of tracks than into another; grass seemed a little more recently mashed by one set of tires.

He said, "The cars came here about an hour apart. First, Moldenhaeur was brought. Then the machine carrying Renny arrived." He extinguished the flashlight he had been using.

Ham was surprised. "We supposed Renny and Moldenhaeur were brought at the same time." He pointed, finger following the road. "About half a mile down that way is the water. The barges are scattered around. Johnny and Long Tom are down there. They are expecting you. Monk slipped down and told them you were coming."

"All right," Doc said.

"Imitate a farm dog barking in the distance," Ham said. "They will know it's you."

Doc directed, "keep a close watch on Thomas, O'Callaghan, Boot, and Miss Moldenhaeur."

FROM the swampy nature of the flats around about, the marsh might have been expected to run into sea gradually. But it did not. The line of demarcation was sharp. There was even a sand-mud beach, deep water fairly close to it, and marsh grass leading up to the beach. Out to sea, or in the direction of the sea, rather, for the sea did not properly touch the spot, was a long and low neck of land that was not much more than a sandbar.

There were seven barges. Two of these did not count, for they were submerged until only odd parts of them stuck out of the water. One other barge lay on its side, more or less. The other four were drawn up on the mud where they had been floated at some high spring tide and left. They were worn beyond usefulness, and discarded here to rot in peace.

Doc Savage imitated a dog barking in the distance. It was not a difficult trick—the hard part of learning the deep-in-the-throat art of ventriloquism; once that was mastered, it was fairly easy to do tricks with various sounds.

He heard an answer. It was not a good one. So bad, in fact that he hoped it would not be repeated. He made for the sound.

It was Johnny, the long, lean archaeologist of big words. He was proud of his effort. "I should have been an animal imitator," he declared.

Long Tom joined them a moment later.

"The middle barge," Long Tom said. "They're on that, near as I can tell."

Doc said, "Wait, you two."

The bronze man then went forward. He was distrustful of the beach, of the tall grass near it, and he made a wide circle. Up the shore a short distance, he removed much of his clothing. He took to the water. Enough of a breeze was blowing to ripple the surface, and the sun was not yet up, or even near enough the horizon to lighten the night. He approached the barge cautiously.

His distrust included the wood of the barge. He explored carefully with his hands, located an iron fitting that would certainly support him.

There were at least two fast speedboats tied to the east side of the barge, he noted.

But the talking was going on near the bow, in the long box of a deckhouse. Ollie Saff's voice. Doc Savage moved close, got against the deckhouse, an eye to a crack.

Saff had his legs wide apart, fists on his hips. He spoke to Winton Moldenhaeur.

He said, "Last chance, Moldenhaeur."

Winton Moldenhaeur was now a man very much alive, but extremely ill. Ill to the point of caring for nothing. He slumped in his green sickness, on his haunches on the floor, arms out on either side, palms on the floor, propping himself erect.

There were seven men, not counting Moldenhaeur. Seven visible ones. And others, no doubt, who were out of sight. The crack did not give a view of the whole room.

Saff bristled rage. "Come, come!" he snapped. "I didn't follow you out here for nothing! You are the only one holding out. Thomas has come around to my way of thinking. So has Boot."

Winton Moldenhaeur said, "Damn you, no!"

Saff said, "This thing is in two parts. I have one part. You, Thomas and Boot have the other part. Together we can get rich."

Moldenhaeur glared sickly at him.

"You stole your part."

Saff shrugged. "Sure. I got it. But then, I was along with the rest of you when you got hold of the thing. I'm as much entitled to it as you are."

"You were working on a salary and we were risking the money we invested in the expedition," Moldenhaeur countered.

"This is just an argument."

Moldenhaeur said nothing.

Saff tried again. "Look, now. You better use your head. I have the antidote, or whatever you want to call the stuff, that will bring you out of it. I've demonstrated that. Didn't I just bring you out of it?"

Moldenhaeur scowled. "You gave the infernal stuff to me in the first place!"

"Sure, sure—but we've got only the supply of it we stole from you. When that's gone, we're licked, I admit. But before it's gone, you'll be a dead man. So what is holding out going to get you?"

Glaring at Saff, Moldenhaeur demanded, "Who is in this with you?"

"Nobody," Saff said. He laughed. "What gave you such an idea?"

"You haven't the brain to tackle it alone."

Saff sneered.

"Who," asked Moldenhaeur, "got Doc Savage mixed up in this affair?"

"It was Boot, damn him!" Ollie Saff cursed Benjamin Boot at some length.

The two fell silent, both angry.

DOC SAVAGE considered what he had heard. An expedition to somewhere—a tropical jungle—would account for the tanned skins and calloused feet; an expedition to some spot where they had been forced to go primitive.

And they had found something that caused the "death" effect. And an antidote.

They were all in it—Moldenhaeur, his daughter, Thomas, O'Callaghan, Boot, Saff, Mr. Manley, Abner, these other men.

Now they were fighting over the spoils. Ollie Saff's group had terrorized—the way Saff told it—Boot, Thomas and the Moldenhaeurs, and Boot and Thomas had given in. That, then, explained why Ben Boot and Sam John Thomas had not wanted to talk. The girl had been silent because of her father. And O'Brien O'Callaghan, of course, worked for Thomas, so he was being silent because of orders.

That all held together—except for one thing.

If Benjamin Boot had called Doc Savage into the case—which he had—why had he then refused to tell the truth? Why had he painted it a mystery when he visited the headquarters with the story of the attempt on his life, and his worry about the girl he admired, Liona Moldenhaeur? That part needed some explaining.

THE shot came rapping out of the distance.

Pat's scream followed. It was not a shriek of terror—it was made up of words, a warning. But the words were not distinguishable, and more shots interrupted them.

Men came diving out of the barge deckhouse. Two of them were just inside the door. They appeared with flashlights, and the beams landed upon Doc Savage.

The bronze man pitched forward. There was time only for his fists. He landed one blow, dropped a man. The flashlight climbed up in the air, scattering light over water, barge and beach as it whirled, and fell overboard.

Doc was not as fortunate with the second man. The fellow was going backward, trying to get away. He went in through the door, tripped, hit the sill and stretched out flat on the floor. Going in, Doc walked over him.

There was a gasoline lamp and an astounding number of men in the room. Doc made for the lamp. His eyes searched, tried to locate Renny. But Renny was not in sight.

Doc got the lamp, threw it at Saff. There was a pistol in Saff's hand, and he held up gun and hand to ward off the lamp. It hit him. The brass chamber of the lamp hit the gun hard enough to split. The gasoline in the chamber was under pressure. It spouted out, sheeting into flame.

Saff, suddenly a pillar of fire, screeched. He went back, had luck, and found the door. He went over the side into the shallow water and mud.

Streams of burning gasoline ran over the floor like red snakes.

To the right, there was a rectangular opening, a ladder standing in it.

Doc carried his anaesthetic grenades in a small metal case. He got this out, opened it, and dashed the case on the floor, very hard.

Then he jumped for the opening in the floor, went down it.

A man howled, "Gas! Gas! Get outa here, you guys!"

Doc knew then that it would be too much to hope that anyone would be overcome by the anaesthetic. He held his breath, used his flashlight.

The mud was about knee-deep, about as thick as automobile grease, and part of a coat, the tail, protruded from it. Doc grasped the tail and pulled. A form came up. A body that had been immersed completely in the mud came into view.

The size of the fists, more than anything else, showed that it was Renny Renwick.

The bronze man lost no time, but shouldered Renny's huge form, climbed back up the ladder. The fire was spreading in the deckhouse. The rectangular opening, fortunately, was out of view of the door.

Doc had breathed down below. But now he held his breath. The gas was effective only when inhaled.

He popped a pair of smoke bombs down on the floor, one near the door, one just outside it. They turned into fat clouds of intense black smoke.

The bronze man dropped Renny beside the ladder. He went back down again. He needed more air.

While he was in the hold of the barge, where the gas had not penetrated, he threw his flashlight beam around. In the extreme bow, there were large shelves, and these were laden with packing cases.

Outdoors, there was an abrupt moan. A huge sound, as if a great bullfrog had turned loose. It was a machine pistol, a compact weapon of the type carried by Johnny and Long Tom. A burst of rifle and pistol fire replied.

Then someone put a pistol muzzle through a crack in the barge hull and shot the bronze man in the back.

THE bulletproof vest stopped the slug, but the blow knocked Doc sprawling. His flashlight landed somewhere in the mud and sank. For moments, he wallowed desperately, trying to get to his feet again. The chain-mesh armor of the vest, while infinitely lighter than the plate type, had the disadvantage of not scattering shock as much. It was like being kicked by a well-fed mule.

Several bullets hunted unsuccessfully for him, splattering mud and clouting the barge hull.

Coming to his feet, the bronze man found the ladder, held his breath—no small job, with the agony in his back—and climbed. The smoke made it intensely black in the deckhouse. He found Renny.

He could not see the fire. Flames burned his legs. He made the door, got outside, jumped overboard and landed in the waist-deep mud and water.

"Here!" someone bellowed at him from the stern. "We're getting in the boats!"

The voice belonged to Ollie Saff, and it meant they were using the speedboat to escape.

Doc changed his voice, shouted, "Wait for me!"

He shoved Renny's form a few yards, left Renny on a hummock of mud, safely away from the fire, face out of water.

Then the bronze man went wallowing boldly for the speedboat. He reached the bow of the boat. A man was there, trying to turn the bow out to sea. Doc helped him. Then he climbed on to the coaming deck of the boat, hauled the other man up.

The big motor of the craft let out a shuddering moan, and they gathered speed. Doc Savage and his companion lay on the coaming, braced against the windshield.

From shore, a machine pistol gobbled suddenly. In the boat, there was profanity, and a man collapsed. Doc kept down, behind the glass windshield. He could tell, from the sound of the striking machine pistol bullets, that they were mercy slugs, merely shells charged with chemicals which produced temporary helplessness. It was the type of bullet Johnny, Long Tom and the others usually employed in the machine pistols

Saff cursed steadily for a few minutes.

"Where's Moldenhaeur?" he snarled.

"I got him here," a man said.

"Good!" Saff snapped. "Hey, you, turn this boat around."

The man running the speedboat did not like that idea. He started to object.

"Turn it around!" Saff screamed.

The man obeyed. Doc Savage and the other man lying on the rounded bow portion of the speedboat clutched each other to keep from rolling overboard.

The boat roared back toward the burning barge for a while.

"That's far enough," Saff said disgustedly. "Hell, the barge is going to burn to the water's edge!"

A man groaned. "That means all the stuff and the antidote will be destroyed."

"It'll be worth it if Savage burns in the barge," Saff growled.

"He will," a man declared. "I tell you, I shot Savage right square in the back."

Ollie Saff turned to the speedboat operator again. "Head for LaGuardia Airport," he ordered. "You know where that is, don't you?"

"You mean the big—"

"Yeah, I mean the big New York airport. Only we're interested in the transatlantic seaplanes."

"That's a long way—"

"Can you make it by ten o'clock?" Saff demanded.

"Sure," said the man at the wheel.

"All right, do it," Saff ordered. "We're going to grab one of those big planes, the one that leaves at ten o'clock."

"Hell, we've got nobody capable of flying a job like that," a man interrupted. "I'm a navigator, and I could tell where we were going. But as for flying it—"

"We'll make the crew fly it for us," Saff snapped.

Doc Savage grasped the shoulder of the man lying with him on the coaming. He squeezed the shoulder until the man gasped. Doc Savage moaned loudly. He croaked: "They . . . shot . . . me!" Then he made a blubbering noise, a few gasps, and had a convulsion.

Eventually he rolled off the coaming into the water, giving his body a shove which sent it clear of the propellers.

The boat passed him with a roar; its wash ran over his head. The noise of the speedboat exhausts immediately slackened.

He heard Saff bellow. "What the hell happened to *him?"*

And the man on the coaming answered: "He was shot!"

"Turn around," Saff ordered. "Pick him up."

Doc swam furiously, and when the speedboat got close, dived. He kept under the surface. Ghosts of light traveled over the water, indicating they were using the boat spot and flashlights. When he had to have air, he took it with only his nose above the surface, then sank again. And finally the speedboat departed.

Chapter VIII. THE PILOT

A FLUSHED sun, harassed by storm clouds, was dispelling the night when Doc Savage crawled out of the water and walked along the mud-and-sand beach, the inlet on one side, the vast marsh expanse on the other. Gulls moved fretfully overhead.

Pat Savage met him. Pat looked too angry, too horrified, for tears.

"Renny," she said chokingly. "He . . . Monk and Ham say he is like . . . like . . . he isn't alive, and he isn't

dead."

"Like Mr. Manley and Abner?" the bronze man asked quietly.

Pat nodded. "And like Mr. Moldenhaeur."

Doc said, "There is an antidote. They brought Moldenhaeur out of it."

Seizing the bronze man's arm. "Oh, Doc!" Pat gasped. "You mean . . . he can be cured? Renny can?"

Doc said, "He *can* be."

She stared at him. "Can we?"

"We do not have the antidote," he said.

"Is there a chance to get it?" Her voice was stark.

"That remains to be seen," he said.

Johnny, Long Tom, Ham and Monk were working over Renny. Or were standing around him, rather, looking helpless. They had carefully removed the mud, and one of them had driven their car to the spot.

What remained of the barge was pouring a cloud of smoke into the air.

Long Tom pointed at the front of the barge.

"It burned like a furnace," he said. "There must have been something inflammable, chemicals or something, stored in the front. You never saw such a fire for a while."

Doc Savage said nothing. His metallic features were inscrutable, his manner composed.

Monk stepped forward, "Doc, we lost all the prisoners. Miss Moldenhaeur, Boot, Thomas, O'Callaghan—everybody we had in that car."

The bronze man did not comment.

Monk added, "They came down the road. They had a new car, and they didn't use their headlights. They must have sent a man or two ahead to scout, and they located us. They set a trap, and we fell for it."

Ham entered the conversation. The usually dapper lawyer was mud-smeared, and his voice was full of self-disgust.

"A nice bunch of saps we were!" Ham said. "I heard a man moan in the marsh nearby. I . . . I thought it was one of you and you might have got hurt. I got out to look—"

Monk said, "I told him not to do that, but he—"

Ham's fists knotted. He strode over in front of Monk, snarled, "This is one mistake you better not ride me about, you homely goat!"

Monk subsided. Ordinarily, he took a great deal of pleasure in ribbing Ham unmercifully. Their existence, in fact, was a perpetual quarrel. But Ham was in a bad mood.

Ham faced Doc. "They jumped me. Pat and Monk got out to help. They were all around us, loaded for bear. They chased us into the marsh. Then they grabbed all the prisoners and got away with them."

Doc Savage walked over to the remains of the barge. He got a long plank, and began to splash water on the flames with it, extinguishing them slowly.

"Monk," he said.

"Yeah, Doc."

"I want every burned fragment, every bit of ash, metal, or any particle of anything, no matter what it is, that remains of the front of this barge. Load it in the car—not our car, but one of their two machines. Their two cars are still back there in the marsh, are they not?"

"Yes—the cars they brought Renny and Moldenhaeur here in. Both machines are still there."

"Use those," the bronze man directed. "Take the stuff you gather to our water-front hangar, and load it in the biggest plane. Put Renny aboard the plane. Go to headquarters and get that butler of Boot's, Julian, and load him in the plane. Keep him drugged. Load Mr. Manley and Abner in the plane also. You will find those three in the hiding place in the laboratory where we usually keep prisoners."

Monk nodded. "Then what?"

"Load plenty of gasoline on the plane, and stand by the radio for orders."

"Right."

The bronze man's flake-gold eyes drifted to Renny, then back to the smoldering barge. "When you collect the remains of the front of that barge, you can leave the timbers, all but a few scrapings from the outer surface. That will cut down the bulk of the load."

Monk nodded. "You want all of us to be ready to take off on a long trip in the plane?"

"Yes," the bronze man said.

Monk watched him walk to the car, slide behind the wheel, and drive away.

THE transatlantic passenger plane—Bermuda, the Azores and Portugal—was afloat at the passenger loading dock. The ground crew were putting last touches on the craft before its take-off.

A car came across the field, drew up at the dock. The machine bore the markings of the airline, and the executive head of the line alighted. He was followed by a burly, swarthy, black-haired man in a pilot's uniform.

The pilot of the transatlantic plane saluted the executive, said, "Good morning, Mr. Lane."

"Good morning, Hal," said Lane. "Will you get your crew together at once inside the plane? I have something to say to them."

The pilot was puzzled, but he assembled his navigator, radioman, mechanic, co-pilot and steward.

Lane, the chief executive of the line, talked for some minutes to the crew. Then he reappeared and addressed the black-haired man who had come in the car with him.

"They are willing to go through with it," he said. "The pilot insists on going along. The navigator is the only one who seems dubious, and he is the only married man aboard. I took the liberty of ordering him to

remain behind. The pilot will serve as navigator, ostensibly."

"Good."

"You will take over as pilot."

The black-haired man nodded.

"However," said the airways executive, "I am not going to let this thing happen to our regular passengers. I will put aboard enough of our employees, whom I shall ask to volunteer, to make up a pretended passenger list. I will insist on that requirement. Is that satisfactory?"

Again the dark man nodded.

"All right, take over," said Lane. "And good luck, Mr. Savage. The thing seems wildly fantastic to me, but, if I may speak frankly, you own enough of this airline that your requests must necessarily be granted, regardless of what I personally think of their sanity."

The manager apparently realized he had expressed himself with more bluntness than tact, because he looked nervous. But Doc Savage said, "Your position is well taken. If you had expressed any other opinion, I would doubt *your* sanity."

Lane smiled faintly. "I'll go get volunteer passengers together," he said. "The plane will take off at ten, as scheduled."

The airport attendants, unaware of any change in routine, finished servicing the big ship. A few minutes before ten, trucks arrived, and mail sacks and air express was placed aboard.

Later, half a dozen passengers filed into the plane.

Doc Savage took the pilot's compartment. In the polished window, he gave his reflection a last inspection, checking on his disguise. He had changed the contour of his face—not by using such conventional methods as paraffin fills—with the use of chemicals which caused swellings, harmless and not particularly unpleasant, of face tissue. The effects would last several days. He had altered the color of hair and skin with dye, and his flake-gold eyes with optical caps of tinted nonshatter glass, unlikely to be noticed even on close inspection.

The regular pilot, Hal Stevens, shook hands with him. The co-pilot, Tom Vanstein, did likewise. And the radioman, mechanic and steward exchanged brief greetings and wishes for good luck. They seemed a competent group, unafraid, rather eager for the excitement.

"Believe it or not," said Odets, the radioman, "this transatlantic run is about the most monotonous job there is. I'm going to relish the trouble, if any."

Doc said, "Can you change your radio transmitter so that, when the switch shows off, it will actually be on?"

"Yes, I could."

"Do so."

The bronze man's eyes moved over the expanse of water in the direction of Flushing. A motorboat was moving idly in the distance, following the far shore. Doc used field glasses briefly, then replaced them in their case. Unless he was much mistaken, the boat carried Ollie Saff and a number of others.

It was ten o’clock.

THE wind was coming from the west, which made it necessary to taxi downwind, then turn and come back into the breeze in order to make a take-off into the wind.

The bronze man drove the four big motors idly, and the plane crawled across the surface. It drew near the Flushing shore.

The loitering motorboat turned, lifted up its nose, took a white bone of foam in its teeth and came scudding toward the plane.

The bronze man turned the great plane expertly, but not too hurriedly.

The motorboat got directly in the path of the ship. Doc throttled the motors, and the plane drifted idly. A man—Saff—stood up in the speedboat, waved his arms.

The steward opened the plane window and shouted, "Hey, you! You’re blocking our course!"

"Hold it!" Saff bellowed. "I’ve got a message for you. We’re government agents."

The speedboat approached the plane, drew alongside. The steward held open a door.

Saff climbed into the big transatlantic seaplane and took a gun out of his pocket. Other men followed him and showed more guns.

"Radio operator, get away from that set!" Saff snarled.

Ollie Saff was well acquainted with the arrangement of the plane, and he had instructed his men with care. They spread rapidly, covering the—they supposed—passengers.

Saff said, "Nobody who does what he’s told is gonna get hurt."

Doc Savage put his hands up meekly. Sitting where he was at the controls, he could see the speedboat below. There were bound figures in the craft—five of them. Liona Moldenhaeur, her father, Sam John Thomas, O’Brien O’Callaghan, Benjamin Boot, all of them were captives and being taken along forcibly.

A man stood at the door of the pilot’s compartment. He held an automatic as black as evil, asked, "You the pilot?"

Doc Savage nodded.

"Sure, and what yez think you be pullin’?" he asked with a brogue.

"Black Irish, eh?" The man with the gun showed his teeth unpleasantly. "You sound too much like a cop for me to like you. Hey, you there—you the co-pilot?"

The co-pilot said, "Yes."

Turning his head, the man called, "Pilot and co-pilot are up here, boss."

"All right," Saff said. "Pilot and co-pilot stay aboard. All the rest of you unload. Passengers and everybody."

The co-pilot looked at Doc Savage. He moistened his lips, then tried to twist the fear off them with a

grin, but did not quite succeed. The thing had become something besides a promise of interesting excitement; it was trouble now. Serious. Deadly, too. Men who stole several hundred thousand dollars' worth of transatlantic seaplane were not likely to take chances.

Doc Savage watched the personnel and passengers of the plane being loaded into the speedboat. Moldenhaeur, Boot, O'Callaghan and Thomas have been loaded on the plane.

Saff came forward. He looked at Doc.

"You the pilot?" he asked.

The bronze man gave him a stare under dark, beetling brows. "What about it?" he asked.

"Get hold of the airport dispatcher and tell him nothing has happened," Saff ordered. "Then take this thing off and head it for the open sea."

Doc scowled. "And if I don't?"

Saff cocked a pistol he was carrying. "We'll try getting along without you, then," he said.

Doc went through the motion of weakening. "The radio is in back," he said. "You got rid of the operator."

"Can you operate the outfit?"

"Yes."

"Do it," Saff said. "And I'll be right there listening."

Doc Savage said something unintelligible, but which had the ring of a "damn" and a "hell" and similar comment. But it was not English.

"Come on, come on, get moving," Saff ordered.

Doc obeyed. But he kept mumbling in the strange tongue while he went back to the radio cabin, closely trailed by Saff. He kept muttering while he fiddled with transmitter and held the microphone close to his lips, but scowled at Saff while he did so. With his free hand, he held a headset to an ear.

He said, "Hello, flight seven reporting. That delay down here was just some sightseers in a motorboat. We got rid of them. Taking off now." He seemed to listen for a moment. "O. K."

He threw switches, put the headset down and stood up.

"They don't suspect anything," he told Saff angrily.

Saff grinned. "Get back and take off. This will give us ten minutes or so leeway." He pointed into the east. "You see those clouds? Head for them."

WHEN the plane had moaned across the comparatively smooth water, climbed above the Triborough Bridge and banked around, heading out to sea, Saff heaved a grunt of satisfaction. He tapped Doc on the shoulder.

"You're doing fine, Black Irish," Saff said. "Just keep it up. We'll give you the course. We've got a navigator aboard, so don't try any navigation of your own."

Saff went back into the cabin for a moment.

The co-pilot threw Doc an anxious glance.

"Everything is going all right," Doc told him.

"What language were you swearing in?" asked the co-pilot, trying to make conversation. "I don't believe I have heard it before."

The bronze man made a quick negative gesture, indicating silence.

He did not want to discuss the matter. The language had been Mayan, and it was not profanity; the emphasis on the words had simply made it sound like swearing. He had started it back in the pilot's compartment in order to make it appear that he was indulging in disgruntled muttering—but the muttering into microphone had been specific instructions to Monk and the others to take the air and follow, by radio compass, the carrier wave of the transatlantic plane radio transmitter. The radio transmitter had not been set on the airport dispatcher's frequency, but on the wave length used by the bronze man's associates.

The Mayan tongue was almost unknown in the civilized world. The bronze man and his aids had learned it in the course of an adventure in a remote Central American valley. They had used it since to communicate with each other when they did not wish to be understood by listeners.

(The use Doc Savage makes here of primitive Indian dialects for secretiveness in communication is not new. It was used by American troops in the World War, when American Indian telephone operators were employed to thwart enemy wiretappers. In the recent training of American troops, the same subject has received public attention, use being made of Indians who speak unwritten dialects. Because the dialects are primitive, as well as not being written, there are no words for such modern war gadgets as tanks, so that the Indians using the lingo to convey information by telephone or radio find it necessary to improvise descriptive groups of words, calling a tank, for instance, something like a "big turtle moves fast, spits fire.")

Chapter IX. ATLANTIC CHASE

THAT was on Saturday.

It was late Sunday when Ollie Saff showed Doc Savage the muzzle of his gun, and pointed downward. "Land," he ordered. "That inlet."

The bronze man brought the plane down on smooth, stagnant water, the mouth of a river. Following Saff's instructions, he swung the ship into the wind and waited.

A boat put in an appearance, circled them cautiously, a man standing up and staring at them.

Saff threw open a window, bellowed, "Get the gasoline, you fool!"

The man in the boat yelled back, *"Si, si, señor*. I make me sure he ees you. Keep your shirt on me."

"Get the gasoline!" Saff squalled.

The motorboat went away. It came back towing two flat-bottomed craft loaded with five-gallon gasoline tins. They began loading the fuel.

Doc Savage moved back to the door, said, "Be sure that is high-test stuff. Ordinary gasoline isn't so good in these motors."

Saff snapped, "Get back in there. It's the right kind of gasoline."

The bronze man went to the radio cubicle, looked inside. A man was sitting there with an automatic. He sneered. Doc shrugged.

He went back to the pilot's compartment.

The co-pilot stared at him anxiously. "There's palm trees on shore. Where do you think we are?"

"Somewhere on the eastern coast of Brazil, probably."

"Did you get in contact with your men by radio?"

"They had a man watching the radio outfit."

The co-pilot shuddered. "I wonder what this will turn into? They're loading the tanks plumb full of gasoline."

Doc Savage did not seem concerned.

It was dark before they took off. Dark on Sunday evening.

TUESDAY afternoon.

There had been jungle below for a long time. Now there were mountains, almost entirely of stone, nakedly ominous.

Twisting a white, tired, frightened face, the co-pilot asked. "How do you suppose they had that gasoline waiting? The first time in Brazil, the second time on the African coast?"

"Cabled ahead before they ever stole the plane in New York," the bronze man said.

He was watching the instruments, compass and altimeter; from time to time he watched an object below, checking drift as best he could.

Without instruments, he was having trouble keeping an exact track of their whereabouts. The crossing of the South Atlantic had been particularly confusing. They had seen no ships during most of the trip.

Instruments took care of everything except the measurement of wind drift. To check that, Ollie Saff's navigator had used the method employed by the regular navigators on the transatlantic routes. He had dropped overboard a thin-walled glass container filled with powdered aluminum. This hit the surface of the sea, burst, and the powdered aluminum made a shiny slick which the navigator could watch through his instruments. A man had stood over Doc Savage with a gun whenever this was done, to prevent him getting even a naked-eye check on the drift. Charts had been kept from him.

"Africa?" the co-pilot asked questioningly.

Doc nodded. "Interior somewhere."

"There hasn't been a sign of civilization," said the co-pilot, "for several hundred miles."

A man put his head in the compartment. "Pipe down," he ordered. Then he pointed. "You see that mountain range yonder? The peak with the snow on it?"

The peak was not much different from others they had passed. A little higher, possibly. More naked. There had been snow on some of the others.

"Go south of it," the man ordered. "Then turn east and fly straight east by southeast."

The bronze man followed instructions. The mountain range pushed upward, and he could distinguish the terrain in more detail. Africa, beyond a doubt. And a very remote section. An area that was probably fenced off from penetration by deserts to the north and east, impassable jungles to the south and west.

The peak swung slowly under the left-hand wingtip, its snow-helmeted crest above them.

"All right, all right," said the man. "East by southeast now."

The earth dropped away sharply; they had been but a few hundred feet above the rocky terrain, and now within minutes the ground was thousands of feet below.

"Go down," the man said.

Ollie Saff elbowed the man aside, growled, "I'll take over now." To Doc Savage, he said, "Keep losing altitude. Not too fast. And watch out for currents. They are like cyclones in here."

Doc said, "You have flown in here before?"

"Sure," Saff said. Then he scowled. "Don't let a long nose get you into trouble, buddy."

There was jungle beneath. Incredible jungle and incredible stone, as if great hands had taken the jungle and the mountains and mashed them together.

A ridge of verdant green wheeled back and disclosed a lake the color of indigo.

"Land on the lake," Saff said.

The lake was extremely deep. The intense blue of the water, like a polished gun barrel, came from the depth. Doc Savage watched their wake spread out slowly until it reached the shores of the V-shaped inlet into which the plane moved.

Ollie Saff stood beside Doc Savage in the pilot's compartment, staring down at the water, then at the shores, searching for landmarks.

"There!" he exploded, pointing. "There it is."

A spire of stone came up from the depths, its top forming a submerged island perhaps a dozen feet in each dimension, and no more than four feet beneath the surface.

Looking down in the utterly clear water, they could see a steel chain lying on the top of the islet. One end of the chain seemed to be secured to a kind of bridle of three hawsers which were secured to irregularities in the stone itself.

Saff punched the co-pilot.

"Jump in and pick up that mooring line," he ordered.

Saff was grinning when he gave the command. The reason for his mirth was immediately apparent when the co-pilot jumped into the lake. Because the co-pilot shrieked, grabbed up the chain, and snatched the rope ladder with wild haste. His teeth were rattling by the time he had made the chain fast to a mooring ring and climbed into the cabin.

"That water's cold as ice!" he gasped.

Saff said, "Lay down on the floor, you two!"

Doc Savage and the co-pilot obeyed. Their hands were lashed, and their ankles. They were dumped into a compartment.

"There'll be a man on watch," Saff warned. "So don't try any tricks."

The compartment door was not closed immediately. Watching developments through it, Doc saw that Winton Moldenhaeur, his daughter, O'Callaghan, Ben Boot, Sam John Thomas—all the prisoners—were being unloaded, put aboard an inflated rubber life raft.

The raft was the usual type, one that could be inflated in a few seconds by the compressed carbon dioxide gas in a small cylinder. They made two trips with it, ferrying everyone ashore. On the last trip, only one man returned with the raft.

This one man was evidently to be their guard. After he had looked in on them, he walked back in the cabin, settled himself in another compartment, and made himself comfortable—judging by the sounds.

"How long have we gotta stay tied?" the co-pilot shouted at him.

"Shut up," the man called.

"These ropes are too tight," complained the co-pilot.

The guard asked, "You want me to kick your teeth in? Or you want to keep your blabber shut?"

The co-pilot subsided, rolled over to face Doc Savage—and his eyes protruded. For the bronze man was sitting up, and the ropes were no longer on his wrists and ankles.

Doc shook his head for silence, indicated a thin blade of steel that was like a flat wire. He had carried that in a tubing sheath in his jacket collar, where it was no more noticeable than one of the horsehairs used to stiffen the collar foundations of cheap suits. Its serrated, tempered edge had cut through the ropes readily—would saw through fairly hard iron, if necessary.

He leaned close to the co-pilot, said, "Call the fellow. Raise a rumpus," in a whisper.

The co-pilot nodded, began to kick the wall with his bound feet and howl in anger, demanding that his ropes be loosened, that he be told what would happen to him, that it be explained what this was all about—anything he could complain about. Doc Savage sat back, draped the cut ropes innocently over his ankles and wrists so that they seemed to be tied, and waited. But the guard only laughed noisily at them.

Five minutes of steady noise from the co-pilot, however, got results.

The guard wrenched the door open, launched a kick, and Doc Savage got his foot like a bear trap. The commotion inside the compartment was violent for twenty seconds or so. A fist on the guard's jaw, squarely against the end of it, made him sleep.

DOC cut the co-pilot free.

"Watch this fellow," the bronze man ordered.

He went back to the radio cubby, entered, examined the apparatus. Power during flight was furnished by a wind-driven generator; the landing of the plane had silenced this. Doc examined the apparatus, then switched over to battery operation.

"Monk," he called. "If you hear this, answer in Mayan," he added, using the Mayan tongue himself.

Johnny Littlejohn, not Monk, replied almost at once. "I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny exploded. "Say, that radio carrier wave we've been trailing for days went off the air a while ago, and were we worried!" He forgot to use Mayan.

Doc asked, "Is everything all right aboard?"

"Yes," Johnny said, remembering and using Mayan.

"You have Julian, Mr. Manley, Abner, aboard?"

"Right."

"Has Julian talked?"

"No, we can't get anything out of him," Johnny admitted. "We came off in a rush without any truth serum, or we would have tried that on him. Say, how much longer is this chase going to last? All the way across Africa?"

Doc asked, "What kind of country are you flying over?"

"Mountains. The dangedest mountains you ever saw."

"Take a radio bearing on my transmitter," Doc directed.

"Long Tom already has it."

Doc said, "All right. Fly at right angles to your present course for five minutes, keep track of your ground speed, and take another bearing on me. I'll come back on the air."

Doc Savage closed down the transmitter, sat watching the chronometer, waiting for the five minutes to elapse. He heard a commotion which was evidently the revival of their guard, and, to judge from the sound, the fist of the co-pilot putting the man back to sleep.

After the five minutes had nearly passed, Doc went on the air again, and Long Tom took another radio bearing.

"All right, you have your fix," the bronze man said. "Where the two bearing lines cross, you'll find a lake in the mountains. It is a very blue lake, and our plane is sitting on it. Fly very high, spot the lake, and immediately head north."

Doc glanced out of the windows of the plane.

"There is a cloud bank in the north," he added. "Hang around in that for about two hours, which should

be just a little before sunset. Come in high, cut your motors, and land on the far end of the lake. That would be the east end."

"Is it big enough—the lake—that no one can see us from where you are?"

Doc said, "No, but the water is very cold, and the air warm. As the sun goes down and the air cools off, the cold water will condense the moisture in it and cause a fog, probably."

"Right. We'll spot the place. Have you any idea why they made this wild dash for Africa?"

The bronze man seemed not to hear the question. He said, "If I am not here, the co-pilot will be in the plane." Then he switched off the radio.

He began removing his clothing. He stripped down to shorts, then found a sheet, removed the airline emblem on it, and fashioned himself a breechcloth.

Next he found a can of dark graphite grease, and began smearing his skin with the stuff. By judicious husbanding, he got the grease to spread from head to foot, turning him quite black.

He told the pilot, "Watch for my men. If Saff and the others return, cast off the mooring, start the plane motors and taxi down the lake away from them."

The pilot gaped at him. "Great snakes, you're not going to *swim* to shore! You'll freeze. I tell you that water is colder than ice!"

The bronze man opened a door in the hull of the plane, a door away from the direction which Saff had taken, and slid into the water.

Chapter X. THE STRANGE CANARY

THE grease helped some. But the water was still cold. Doc Savage was in excellent physical condition—he made a practice of taking an average of two hours' intensive exercise daily—but the ice chill of the water clutched at his muscles with invisible force.

He gulped in several deep breaths of air, then put a metal clip over his nostrils, and placed between his lips a chemical "lung" gadget which resembled nothing so much as a toy balloon complete with metal mouthpiece for inflating. The thing would filter breath and add depleted oxygen. Its effectiveness was limited to considerably less than half an hour.

But, using the gadget, the bronze man was able to sink beneath the surface and swim for shore. He used a very simple method of keeping his bearings—because to swim a straight line under water, with no visible object for a guide, is almost impossible. The sloping sun formed a patch of brightness down in the depths, but its light was confusingly diffused by the water. Its shadow, however, was noticeable. He kept his directions by the shadow, after a fashion.

The coldness of the water was not as bad after he got in motion. But the chill was bitter. In fact, the stone bottom of the lake, when he finally touched its upward slant, felt as if it was covered with ice.

He came out of the water beneath overhanging jungle bushes. The air was hot, as if a furnace door had been opened.

The bronze man found sand and dust, worked his hands in it, getting rid of the grease on his palms. He treated the bare soles of his feet likewise.

The graphite grease making him as black as any aboriginal inhabitant of these jungles, he moved along the shore. He found that the rubber boat had been lifted out of the water, carried along a path.

The path was a wide, cleared one. Feet had used it enough to keep down the vegetation. Doc glanced at the jungle above the path, then grasped a limb, swung up. An instant later, he was standing on the limb. He went up a vine, hand over hand, more than twenty feet. He walked out a long limb, dropped off it feetfirst into space, landed on another limb, kept his balance, and went on.

He came to a clearing. In the center stood a circular hut made of stones and mud. The hut was obviously a white man's method of construction, built for the purposes of defense.

There were portholes. There were holes in the roof for watching the treetops, and these were covered with windshield glass from a plane, as defense against poison blowgun arrows. In addition, the hut was situated so that it commanded the path all the way to the lake. A stream of water trickled out of one side of the hut continually, indicating the structure had been erected over a spring.

Ollie Saff stood in the center of the clearing. Several of his men were with him, and more were coming out of the stone citadel.

All of them were stark naked except for breechcloths. Saff was lecturing one of his men in emphatic terms.

"I don't give a damn if your feet *are* tender," he was saying. "You go barefooted and like it. It ain't safe to wear shoes, or clothes, neither."

The breechcloths they were wearing were all a brilliant yellow color. From their looks, they had been fashioned hastily out of a bolt of yellow cloth.

"Hurry up," Saff yelled at the hut.

Liona Moldenhaeur appeared, wearing a length of yellow cloth wrapped in sarong fashion. Her father followed. The other prisoners also appeared—Boot, Thomas and O'Callaghan.

Saff put his gun inside his breechcloth, took care that its presence was not noticeable. "You guys be sure your guns are out of sight," he warned his men. "And come on."

They filed away into the jungle, following another path that led upward.

DOC SAVAGE dropped silently from leafy heights where he had been crouching, watching. He landed a few feet from the crude stone blockhouse.

For moments he crouched there, listening, every sense acute. His manner had changed to the tense, alert caution of an animal. Finally, he moved to the door of the hut, went in, after closing his eyes long enough for them to become accustomed to the gloom that would be inside.

Just inside, he stopped, his eyes on the floor. There was a design in yellow on the floor, a likeness of a bird, a canary. It was nearly a yard in its longest dimension. Doc sank to a knee to look closer. Made of hundreds of yellow pegs, colored yellow and thrust into the hard earth. The heads of the pegs were tapered, sharp as needles, and coated with something sticky and dark. Possibly poisoned.

There was evidence that everyone using the hut had carefully stepped clear of the strange, poisonous yellow picture on the floor.

In the hut there were bunks, shelves, pegs. The pegs supported clothing. The place was divided into two rooms. A glance showed the bronze man that the second room was exactly like the first, except that only Liona Moldenhaeur's clothing was there.

The remains of the bolt of yellow cloth from which the breechcloths had been fashioned lay on one shelf.

Doc examined empty packing cases. These had contained supplies. They were marked:

MOLDENHAEUR-THOMAS

AFRICAN EXPEDITION

The hut obviously had been constructed months ago. The bronze man noted also that the empty packing cases were old. Certainly they had not been brought by Saff.

This spot, apparently, had been the headquarters of the original expedition to this part of Africa. He searched for some time, hoping to locate something that would indicate just who had made up the original expedition personnel. But he found nothing to give that information.

He stepped outside, careful to keep clear of the yellow bird picture of sharpened pegs on the floor.

Outside, he picked up a rock, carefully scraped a series of pictures on stone near the hut entrance. Picture writing. The Mayan symbols for danger and death. He drew them prominently, so that they would warn his aids, should they reach here before he returned.

The warning was against the sharpened yellow pegs which composed the bird picture. He was convinced they were poisoned.

Once again he took to the tree lanes. He went forward rapidly. Monkeys chattered shrilly at him, and once an ape showed him an ugly, astonished face, then made a sound like a large insect and bounded away through the intertwining limbs.

The sun was behind the western mountains now. Shadows were crawling into the valleys, darkening the incredible tangle that floored the jungle. Up high, where the bronze man moved, there was more light, space for movement.

And abruptly, in front of him, lunging upward, there was a cliff. Of dark stone, coffee-colored, the sheer surface was not smooth, but serrated with numerous cracks and water-worn channels.

Doc Savage dropped lower, kept closer above the path, so as not to lose it. He was, he knew, going slower than Ollie Saff's group, but there was no helping that. He distrusted the path, preferred the way he was traveling.

Then, suddenly he was a motionless image, staring.

THEY were sitting still. All of them. They were on low stones. The stones were arranged in a circle. And in the center of the circle, on a stone block, stood the yellow bird. The bird was as high as a man. Its brilliance, the startling contrast of its lemon-yellow against the dark cliff and the surrounding jungle, made it seem larger.

They sat perfectly still.

Doc Savage watched them. Not until one of the men made an angry swat at a fly was he sure they were

alive, and not stricken rigid by some mysterious power.

Saff cursed the man who had belted the fly.

"Cut that out!" he snarled. "Sit still, you fool! You make a couple of moves like that, and you'll be a dead duck. And so will the rest of us."

"But these danged bugs! They bite like lions—"

"Shut up!" snapped Saff. "Sit still!"

They sat still after that. Waiting.

Beyond the circular ring of stones with the statue in the center, there seemed to be a path that led upward. But there was no one on the path, no stir of movement in the numerous niches in the steep face of stone.

The sun sank lower. In the distance, very faintly, Doc Savage heard a plane motor. He heard it shut off.

The group sitting with such agonizing rigidity did not hear the plane, apparently.

Then, high on the face of the cliff, there was a whistling call, the cry of the strange yellow birds. It rose sharply, whipped to peak, sank away in a musical tone that faded.

Then, so unexpectedly that Doc Savage jumped, two dark-skinned men stepped out of niches in the cliff, where they had been concealed. They were natives, as dark as blacks, but without the thick lips of the Senegambian. Nor did they have the overlong arms, the flat noses depressed at the base common to the Gabun, Congo, or Mozambique types.

These could have been Arabs, although they were darker. They were well-built men, muscular, with the completely erect carriage of peoples whose women carry burdens on their heads from childhood.

They stood perfectly still after they appeared. But they held, poised at their lips, long reeds. The reeds were blowguns. The whistle came again from the cliff.

Doc lifted his eyes.

In the setting sun, which reddened the face of the cliff, a column of men had appeared. They came down what was obviously a well-worn trail on the cliff. They marched with stately precision.

Slight sounds drew Doc's eyes downward. It was, he saw, as well that he had not come on foot. There were natives in the brush below, well-hidden and motionless watching the group around the yellow bird. They were armed with blowguns, some of them with short throwing spears.

The cavalcade came down the cliff, surrounded the yellow bird, and stood perfectly still in their tracks for a while. This formality over with, they walked over and looked at the white men. They gave particular attention to Liona Moldenhaeur.

"Ya inta,"

one of the natives said. *"Da min deh?"*

Doc was startled. The language was Egyptian. A greeting.

Ollie Saff looked helpless.

"Talk to him, Moldenhaeur," he ordered. "And don't try any funny stuff, either."

Moldenhaeur returned the greeting of the native in halting Egyptian.

He added, "We have returned because we wish to again enjoy the peace of your land. We have brought with us friends, whom we hope you will like and befriend, as you befriended us before."

The leader of the natives said something Doc did not catch.

Saff turned to the others after Moldenhaeur whispered to him.

"Come on, everybody," Saff said. "It's O. K. They're taking us to where they live."

Doc Savage watched them go upward and eventually disappear. He remained where he was, keeping an intent eye on the natives in the jungle, the ones Saff had not seen.

The bronze man was puzzled. The Egyptian language was good, and in some respects these natives resembled Egyptians. But this country could be nowhere near Egypt. Even the headwaters of the Nile must be hundreds of miles away.

Finally the watchers in the jungle walked over and began conversing with the two hidden guards.

Doc lifted his eyes. The reason for the relaxed vigilance was apparent. The column composed of natives and whites had gone out of sight.

Then, unexpectedly, a whistle came from the direction of the lake. It was very faint, but it started a commotion. The armed natives jumped to the alert. Then, as one man, they dived through the jungle in the direction of the lake.

From the lake were coming fight sounds. Yells, a shot or two. Other noises of fight.

The bronze man made for the lake.

Chapter XI. DANGER AT DUSK

THE lake was blanketed in a low fog. In this gray abyss, there was excitement, violent movement. Doc heard the sounds long before he reached the lake.

Then, close to the shore, he heard a man swimming furiously. Other noises of a canoe being paddled. Then the canoe seemed to overtake the swimmer. There was a commotion, howling and splashing. The swimmer seemed to have upset the canoe.

Doc identified the howling.

"Monk!" he called.

Monk liked noise with his fights.

"Where's the shore of this danged puddle?" Monk roared.

"This way," Doc said.

He ran to the water's edge, listened. Monk was swimming with about as much stealth as a paddle-wheel steamer. There were more canoes after him. At least four of them.

Monk came floundering out of the water. He was exhausted, and fell almost at once.

"The whole . . . African army . . . is after me!" he panted, lurching to his feet.

There was no doubt about that. A short spear made a whispering sound, then a skating noise as it glanced off rock and stopped almost at their feet. The tip seemed to be coated with a chemical.

"Come on," Doc said.

He seized Monk, helped him to the jungle. A sharp pain hit the bronze man's shoulder; the missile went on, whistling. It was a *runga,* the throwing stick with a knobbed end much used by natives over central Africa.

Monk stumbled again, gasped, "I . . . I'm tuckered out."

Doc Savage said, "Hang on my back."

Monk obeyed. The bronze man, seemingly not greatly hampered by the homely chemist's considerable weight, leaped, grasped a limb, went up. He followed a dangling vine through space for fully eighty vertical feet, then the vine began to break loose from his leafy anchorage above, and let them down. Monk squawked in horror, but the bronze man, seemingly unconcerned, fastened to a passing limb, and a moment later was walking through space on a narrow, swaying limb.

He made a leaping drop of more than a score of feet, caught another limb, shot through space again, and after that took shelter in a great leafy forest giant.

Monk croaked twice, managed to whisper, "Jug-just let me go. This is worse'n being chased by them natives."

Doc found a substantial tree crotch.

He whispered, "They seem to have lost our trail."

Monk grabbed the limb, held to it for dear life. He was something he seldom became. Pale.

Doc asked, "What happened? Is there a chance of helping the others?"

"N-not now," Monk said. "They got us in that fog. We landed on the lake, all right, and the co-pilot of your ship used the radio so that we could spot him with a finder. I guess maybe we made a little noise. Anyway, we tied the two planes one behind the other, and all got into one plane to talk it over. Then was when it happened."

"What happened?"

"Dugout canoes, about fifteen of them. And some rafts made of reeds. They paddled out, got all around us in the fog, and piled aboard like nobody's business."

Doc remembered the spear and the *runga*. He asked, "Did they kill anyone?"

"That's the funny part," Monk said. "They seemed bent on taking everybody alive. Ham and I got in the water, but they caught Ham. I got away. They chased me with canoes. That's all I know."

"The others were overpowered?"

"Sure," Monk said. "There must have been a hundred natives. And those cusses are as strong as wild

cats."

SOME time later—a quarter of an hour, possibly—there was a mass movement of canoes out of the fog. It was so dark now that torches were necessary. These consisted of long sticks with bundles of greasy bark and vines fastened to the ends. They gave off as much smoke as light.

Monk watched them unload. Monk had recovered his breath, his strength, and his desire for a fight.

"Look at them," he said. "They got my hog."

This was true. The pig, Habeas Corpus, was tied to the end of a pole so that he could be managed without danger to the life and limb of his captors.

Doc Savage watched closely. Long Tom Roberts was battered considerably, and the co-pilot had a skinned nose, but the other prisoners did not seem to be in any worse condition than could have been expected if they had merely walked ashore without the attendant trouble of being captured.

Pat was along, as was Johnny. Renny was being carried, as were Mr. Manley and the man called Abner.

The entire group moved away from the beach, leaving the canoes. They were trailed by Ham's pet chimp, Chemistry. The animal appeared to have reached shore by swimming. They could hear Chemistry's angry squawking, and once a native threw a clod at him.

Doc said, "We will trail them."

Monk's arm tightened around the limb. He had decided it was a hundred feet to the earth, and en route downward there was various interference in the form of limbs and, for a landing pad, a thorn tree growing out of some jagged rocks.

"Hang on to me again," Doc said.

Monk was not enthusiastic about it, but he did so. He was less enthusiastic as the bronze man calmly stepped off into space, hit a limb with a breath-taking jar, went off it as if it was a spring board. Monk closed his eyes. He did not open them until they were on the ground.

"Whew!" he said. "I think I'll get me a nice quiet job making dynamite."

Doc said, "They may have a guard over the plane. We will see."

The bronze man approached the beach. He left Monk concealed behind a bush, moved through the darkness, and shortly located a group of four guards watching the flotilla of dugout canoes.

The bronze man had a few anaesthetic grenades inside his breechcloth, and he used these, getting quite close. The dark graphite grease, much of which still remained on his body, helped him blend with the darkness.

Shortly the four watchmen slept.

"The planes," Doc said. "We can work fast, get back before they wake up."

They paddled out on to the lake. The air, now that the sun was gone, was bitterly cold. The bronze man used his ears often in the fog. There were tiny waves on the lake, and he located the planes by the lapping of these waves against the hulls.

"Min henak,"

the bronze man called softly in Egyptian.

"Hey," Monk whispered. "What's that? Arabic, ain't it?"

"Egyptian," the bronze man said. "I'm trying to find out who is on the planes."

There was no answer to his hail, however.

He moved forward with the canoe, came alongside the planes, and swung aboard one of them, moving cautiously. Convinced that the craft was empty, he went to the other ship.

"Oa!"

a voice snarled. *"Da min deh?"*

There was a guard at the plane, after all.

To the snarled demand of who was there. Doc replied, "You fool! Why are you not in the rear plane as you were told to be?" He used Egyptian, but slurred and muffled it by holding his head down and his hand in front of his mouth, so that his accent would be disguised.

Simultaneously, he used a gas grenade—the only one remaining—to overcome the watchman. The wind was blowing from his back; he simply held his breath and crushed the grenade in his hand. The anaesthetic gas was bitingly cold, almost freezing, on his hand for a moment as liquid turned to vapor. Then there was a loud splash as one of the guards fell into the lake.

Doc said, "Find the fellow, Monk."

"I got him," Monk said.

They hoisted the dripping watchman into the plane. In the craft they found five others, all dark natives, heavily armed. They had piled down wherever they were standing when the gas hit them.

MONK announced, "Well, we got us a collection of spears, anyway. Hey, look. Poisoned arrows, too."

Doc said, "Let's have some of those arrows."

Monk passed him some of the missiles. They were not actually arrows, but darts. They were smaller than the conventional hand darts used in dart games, although made somewhat after the same plan. The tip was a large thorn which had been grooved and roughened to hold the gummy substance which Monk had called poison.

Monk watched the bronze man get out a portable microscope, the compact chemical laboratory which was part of their equipment when they had plenty of space for it, and go to work.

"Look," Monk said uneasily, "ain't we gonna do somethin' about Ham and Pat and Johnny and Long Tom and Renny? What about them?"

Doc said, "There were a hundred natives in the party which captured them. Two of us could not do anything with a crowd that large without gas. And we do not have enough gas to make the attempt worth while."

"But we oughta be trailin' them. How we gonna find 'em?"

"Every indication is that their village must be close," the bronze man said patiently.

He continued to work with the magnifier, and with various chemicals which he was applying to the gummy stuff on the end of the dart.

"Monk," he said.

"Yeah?"

"I want you to mix some chemicals," Doc said. "Make a thick liquid of them."

"What chemicals?" Monk asked.

Doc Savage told him, naming the ingredients in the order in which he wished them mixed.

(It has been the practice of the publisher of Doc Savage to eliminate the exact chemical formulae of gases, poisons, and other mixtures which Doc employs from time to time. This is not done because the chemicals which the bronze man employs are fantastic, impossible, or non-existent. Rather, it is not the wish of the author to furnish aid to criminals or others not entitled to it. Knowledge of many of these chemical formulae, in the wrong hands, would be dangerous. Hence the exact ingredients of a gas or a chemical concoction employed by Doc are seldom published. We hope that this lack of exact information, in the few cases in which it is eliminated, does not detract from the interest of the Doc Savage adventures.)

Monk was puzzled. "What the dickens good is that stuff?" he inquired. "It's not a gas, not a poison. It ain't food, drink, nor nothing that I can make any sense out of."

The bronze man did not answer; in fact, he apparently did not hear the inquiry. Monk glanced at him—they were using a flashlight with the lens wrapped in a handkerchief, for light—and grinned.

Experience had told Monk that when Doc started not hearing questions, things were picking up. Progress was being made. The homely chemist snorted, began mixing the stuff as directed.

"All right," he said finally.

Doc was still analyzing the substance on the points of the darts.

He said, "Monk, take an essential part off each of the motors. Nothing heavy. Something we can load in the canoe, wrap in a piece of canvas, and bury on the beach."

"Right," Monk agreed.

A quarter of an hour later, the homely chemist climbed back into the plane carrying a necklace of motor parts. He had carefully strung the parts, as he removed them from the engines, on a line, so they would not get lost, then slung the line about his shoulders.

"Doc, you find out what the stuff on them arrows is?" he asked.

"It is no ordinary type of plant or serpent venom," the bronze man said.

Monk stared at him. "Say, do you suppose—"

"Possible," Doc said.

Pointing at the arrows, Monk demanded, "You mean that goo can cause—well, like Renny is. It ain't

death, and it ain’t ordinary unconsciousness."

"The condition," Doc said, "is best described as suspended animation, or a complete suspension of all ordinary processes."

"That’s what I mean. You think the stuff on that arrow does it?"

"It is very possible," the bronze man admitted.

Monk frowned at the arrow.

"Brother, I’m going to steer clear of them things," he said.

TWENTY minutes later, they were ashore.

"Monk, you stay here and have things ready to go from this end," Doc Savage suggested.

Monk finished burying the airplane parts. He had waded out into the shallow water of the lake’s edge to bury the gadgets he had removed from the motors. The waves would cover traces of the burial. The parts of metal would not be harmed by submersion.

He straightened. "Doc, I hate to miss a fight," he said. "And I can’t see where I’d do a bit of good here."

"We’ll have to travel in the treetops some of the time," Doc said.

Monk was distressed. "O. K.," he said. "I’m not hot about that flying trapeze stuff, but I’ll go through with it."

They moved through the jungle, traveling slowly, and climbing most of the time. The fog which had been so thick close to the lake water abruptly dispersed. They saw that it was moonlight.

They stepped out into a clearing. Something made a loud whistling noise close at hand, and ran away. Monk took to a tree in double-quick time.

"A reed buck," Doc said. "They are comparatively harmless."

Monk muttered, "I don’t care for these jungles after night," and climbed down again.

With the closing in of complete night, the jungle had burst into noisy and hideous life. There was a moist sneeze close by, causing Monk to reach for another tree. All around them were low sighs and leafy stirrings, vague sounds that were unintelligible and ominous. With a violence fit to stand the hair on end, a jackal let go with a volley of barks, then was suddenly silent, and some other animal emitted a long gurgling noise that was as final as death. They could smell a rather unpleasant odor which Monk thought was probably a hyena.

Doc said, "This must be the only lake for miles. All the wild life comes to it for water."

"They can have it entirely to themselves," Monk declared.

Doc Savage was carrying a heavy pack wrapped in canvas. Now he vanished up a tree, and when he rejoined Monk, he was without the pack.

"We are getting near the cliff," he said. "You wait here."

THE bronze man went away again. Monk walked over with the intention of sitting down on a small boulder. The boulder, however, emitted several bloodthirsty grunts and took after him, moonlight glinting on yellow tusks. It was an excellent display of agility that put Monk up a small tree ahead of an irritated wart hog. He sat there, thinking unpleasant things about Africa, the universe in general, and Ollie Saff in particular.

When Doc Savage came back, he was without the heavy pack. He carried, instead, a bundle of yellow cloth and a jar containing the brew of chemicals which Monk had mixed in the plane.

"There seems to be only one path up the cliff," Doc said. "And that is guarded." The bronze man tossed Monk half of the yellow cloth. "Take off your clothes," he said, "and make a breechcloth out of this."

Monk listened to the prowling night insects. Some of them sounded like airplanes. He shrugged and began undressing.

Doc Savage used the breechcloth he had been wearing to rub the dark grease off himself. The task took some time, although he enlisted the help of some fruit juices.

He picked up the jar of chemicals.

"Rub this on your skin," he said. "Cover every square inch of your body, and put it on thinly, rubbing it in until the skin absorbs it, the way you use cold cream."

Monk complied. By the time he finished, he had a sensation of rebellion in his stomach, and his head felt as if it had been rotating.

"It’s makin’ me sick," he muttered.

"The effects will wear off," Doc said.

They set out through the jungle as soon as the bodily coating had been applied. Monk was racking his brain, trying to figure out what earthly good such a mixture of chemicals would do. He could think of none. None whatever.

Smooth going suddenly came underfoot. A path. And ahead, towering dark in the moonlight, was the cliff.

Doc Savage spoke. His voice was loud, charged with power and volume.

"Salamat!"

he said. *"Salamat, salamat."*

He kept repeating that. Monk remembered enough Egyptian to remember that this was a rather common greeting, the equivalent of "How do you do."

Then his hair threatened to stand on end. For the bronze man, hitherto almost completely invisible in the darkness, had turned to a man of gold.

Now walking forward, Doc was a giant figure of luminescent ocher, a living statue that might have been made of glowing gold.

It startled Monk only slightly less to look down and find the same thing had happened to himself.

Then he understood it. In the pack which Doc Savage had brought from the plane had been an ultraviolet light projector. And the chemicals which the bronze man had ordered mixed would fluoresce with a yellow-green luminescence under ultraviolet light.

The unusual statue of the golden bird appeared. Doc led the way to it. They walked very close to the thing, and stood there, perfectly still.

Monk was a little disappointed. It had first hit him that the yellow bird might be made out of solid gold. The moonlight was bright enough to disillusion him, however. Made of wood, and painted. Not a particularly artistic job of wood carving, either.

He fell to examining the surroundings, trying to spot the projector of ultraviolet light. The ultraviolet rays, of course, were invisible to the unaided eye, and the type of filters which Doc Savage used shut off visible light wave lengths completely, so the projector was not visible. He decided, however, it had to be near the cliff face.

Then the natives appeared. They came slowly, stopped just outside the ring of stones that were like benches. One of the little dark fellows put back his head, and a whistle came from his lips, shrill and piping, rising high, then falling, trailing away.

The whistle was echoed from the cliff top, then again, at a greater distance.

No one spoke aloud.

Out of the side of his mouth, not moving his lips, Doc warned, "Say nothing. Do nothing."

THERE were about twenty men in the column which came down the cliff face, following the path which was indistinguishable from a distance. They filed to a stop outside the circle of stones.

"Auz eyh?"

one of them said gruffly.

Monk recognized that as a demand of what they wanted. But Doc's answer was too fast for him to follow. He watched with interest. Then the native spoke again, more violently.

Doc told Monk, in English. "We are not welcome. No one they do not know seems to be wanted."

The bronze man burst into fluent Egyptian. It seemed to Monk that he was using more care with his diction, so there would be no misunderstanding about his meaning.

The native's answer was more mollified. Deferential, in fact.

Doc advised Monk, "I have explained that we have influence with the yellow birds. Presumably these yellow birds are their deity, or the symbol of it."

The native spoke again, gruffly again, then waited for a reply.

In Egyptian, Doc said, "Our patience grows short. We do not expect an argument. We come bringing nothing but wisdom and friendship. You are our friends. It is time you began acting like it."

His tone more than the words got action.

The leader of the natives gestured briefly. Doc Savage and Monk stepped forward. As soon as they

were out of the invisible ultraviolet rays, their bodies naturally stopped fluorescing.

Doc remarked idly. "You see, we have but to step near the golden one to glow warm in its favor."

That was apparently the first reference to their golden color which the bronze man had made. His silence on the point had evidently been more effective than a long speech on the subject. The natives were awed. None of them got overly close. Which was just as well with Monk.

They worked up the face of the cliff. Their guides had lighted torches, and these gave some illumination, also making dancing shadows that were treacherous.

Halfway up the cliff, they abruptly entered a cleft, followed this for a quarter of a mile, and came into a valley. The valley was wide, floored with rich land—as nearly as they could tell in the moonlight—and tilled fields.

Cultivation of the fields was apparently of a primitive sort. The fields were not noticeably larger than backyard gardens. A small herd of zebra were grazing in one of the patches, and an angry native rushed them, hurling his *runga* at them. He lost the *runga*, the zebra strolled off leisurely, and the column went on.

Monk asked, "Where is this going to wind up?"

"The substance they used to induce that state of suspended animation evidently came from here," Doc said. "Ollie Saff and the others made a rush back here to get a new supply, after what they had on hand was destroyed when the barge burned."

"I don’t see—"

He didn’t finish. A village had appeared in the moonlight. If anything was needed to prove that these natives were not Negroids, the structure of the village did it.

The houses were of stone. Not impressive compared to modern city buildings; but here in the jungle, they were noteworthy. The structures were square. Some of the doorways were arched; most of them had a flat slab over the openings to hold up the remaining wall.

They came to a large building, by far the largest in the village. There were no doors in this. Access to the top of the wall was by a long flight of steps made of stones piled without mortar.

Doc Savage and Monk were led to the top of this. Without warning, they were shoved off.

Their treatment up to that point had been so polite, the manner of their captors so deferential, that they were caught napping. Even Doc was surprised, found himself sprawling into space.

They fell about a dozen feet.

The bronze man landed prepared for anything. But nothing happened—except that Monk came down with a loud and distressed grunt beside him.

Above them, the spokesman of the natives made a short speech.

"We have decided to do with outsiders as our ancestors have always done," he said.

Chapter XII. THE LIVING DEAD

THE silence was very deep for a while. It lasted until the natives on the wall went away.

Monk groaned. "I fell right square on my whatchacallit," he complained.

A voice in the nearby darkness made a remark.

"It's too bad it wasn't your head," it said. "Then you wouldn't have been hurt."

"Ham!" Monk howled.

The two congenial enemies found each other and did some delighted back-pounding. "I thought you had drowned," Ham confessed, "and I was worried sick." Monk said, "I was sure worried about you, too."

Then they recovered themselves. They began insulting each other.

"You missing link!" Ham accused Monk. "What kind of stupidity got you caught?"

Doc Savage said, "We—or I did—underestimated the brains of these natives. We tried to work on their superstition, get them to thinking we were superior deities, and join them."

"Oh, you're here, Doc," Ham said in the darkness. His voice became worried. "That's what Ollie Saff and the others tried to do. They walked right into a trap."

Doc asked, "Have you found out the situation—the details?"

"Most of them," Ham said. He lifted his voice. "Miss Moldenhaeur, will you come here, please?"

Doc was silent. Then he asked, "Are you *all* in here together?"

"Sure." Ham chuckled grimly. "Ollie Saff and his crowd are over on the other side. We had a knock-down-drag-out fight, bare fists only. Everybody had been disarmed. And we licked them."

Liona Moldenhaeur arrived. Pat Savage was with her.

Pat said breathlessly, "I'm sure glad you got here, Doc. We've got to figure out something. These natives aren't fooling."

Doc said, "Miss Moldenhaeur?"

"Yes."

"Your father and Mr. Thomas led an expedition here previously, did they not?"

"Eleven months ago," Liona Moldenhaeur admitted. "It was in the beginning an expedition for the Eastern-Metropolitan Museum. It started out as—well, one of those hunting trips which rich people take and call expeditions."

"Was your finding of this valley the result of a plan, or an accident?"

"Accident, mostly. He sighted it from the plane. We were using a seaplane for scouting. We landed on the lake, and built a headquarters near the shore. It was really a fort. We spent several weeks getting acquainted with the natives, winning their confidence slowly."

There was a stirring on the other side of the compound. Ollie Saff and his associates, probably. The prison seemed to be a simple walled inclosure.

Doc Savage asked, "Did you find out about this drug—we will call it a drug—immediately?"

Liona Moldenhaeur swallowed audibly. "Almost. Within a few days."

"Do they tip their arrows with the stuff?"

"Yes. But it takes a much larger dose than a mere arrow wound to cause the . . . the effect you saw in my father."

"How do they administer this larger dose?"

"Internally. They make their victims swallow the stuff. They put it in crude capsules made out of intestinal—you know, the same thing we used to make sausage skins out of. These are forced down the victim's throat."

She was silent a moment, then continued, "The arrow wound induces a slight effect, a kind of paralysis. When they shoot game, a zebra, for instance, they nick it with the arrow. The animal becomes paralyzed. They then approach the animal, and force it to swallow a capsule or two. In the case of a large animal, several capsules. The circulatory system then carries the drug throughout the body. Or usually it does. As a result, the effect of—everything suspended—is throughout the body. Sometimes, though, an extremity, such as a foot or a leg, is not affected and that, in time, will—rot. In the case of a man, that would be horrible. That possibility is what terrified me so when they did it to my father."

Doc Savage asked, "Who gave the stuff to your father?"

"Why—Ollie Saff, of course."

"What was his object?"

"To get control of the drug."

"Has Saff admitted that?"

"Of course."

"When?"

"Why—well, it was today."

"He didn't admit it before today?"

"No."

DOC SAVAGE turned and strode across the compound, halting in the moonlight not far from a group of figures huddled against the wall. After a while, one of the figures swore at him. It was Saff.

"You got us into this!" Saff snarled. "You burned the stock of the stuff we had on that barge."

Monk, across the inclosure, heard this. He guffawed as if he thought it was very funny. He did not manage to get much humor in his voice.

Doc Savage glanced up at the compound wall. There were no guards in sight. He could tell, from the flickering red light and columns of dark smoke, that fires had been built around the place.

He peered at Saff and the others, stepping closer to identify them.

"Saff," he said, "why did you go to so much trouble over that drug?"

Saff swore, said, "It's worth a fortune, damn you!"

"For what purpose?"

"Preserving meat," Saff snapped. "That's what these natives use it for. Hell, it'll put the whole packing industry out of business!"

"How do you arrive at that conclusion?"

"Hell, anything that's dosed with that drug—the meat won't spoil. You won't need railroad refrigerator cars, refrigeration on ships to keep fresh meat—nothing. It'll put those big packing plants out of business. Anybody likes fresh meat better than preserved stuff. That's what this will give the public—fresh meat, not refrigerated meat, because this thing works entirely different than just freezing it; it just stops all changes in it without freezing."

"The idea seems fantastic," Doc said.

"It seems like a cold billion dollars or two to me," Saff growled. "You just ain't got the imagination to grasp it."

Doc asked, "What do you think the natives are going to do with us?"

Saff's answer was a stream of spoken violence, senseless threats against the natives, and about what would happen to them if they didn't let him go.

Doc walked away in the middle of it, went to his men. "Ham," he said, "just who is here with you?"

"Sam John Thomas, O'Brien O'Callaghan, Benjamin Boot, Liona Moldenhaeur, and her father," Ham replied.

"Is Mr. Moldenhaeur able to talk?"

The pleasant, if strained, voice of Moldenhaeur answered this inquiry with, "If there is anything I can tell you, I will be glad to do so."

"Where is Renny?"

"Over here," replied Renny's deep rumble.

"You are all right?" Doc demanded.

"I'm sick as a curly-haired dog," Renny complained. "But they brought me out from under the effects of the stuff, if that is what you mean."

"Where did they do that?"

"Took me out some place—a kind of a hut they've got rigged up to treat you with the stuff that brings you out of it. Take it from me, it's not any fun, either."

Winton Moldenhaeur interrupted, "You see, Mr. Savage, this drug is behind all this trouble. We realized, all of us, what a boon it could become to the food industry. Strangely enough, it will preserve fruits and

vegetables as well as meats. A second treatment makes the preserved substance fit for consumption. In the case of a living animal or person, animation returns without the subject seeming to feel much harm, other than a violent illness which wears off."

Doc asked, "How many of you came here on the original expedition?"

"All of us. That is, all except those thugs Ollie Saff has hired."

"Mr. Manley and Abner?"

"Yes." Winton Moldenhaeur nodded grimly. "The way I understand it, Mr. Manley and Abner started out to double-cross everyone and grab the secret for themselves. They were going to murder Mr. Boot, Mr. Thomas and myself. Fortunately, they did not get away with the first crime, the murder of Mr. Boot."

Doc Savage was thoughtful for a while.

He said, "This drug—the rights to it—how did you all intend to share in it?"

"It was assigned to a holding company," Moldenhaeur said, "of which Mr. Boot, Mr. Thomas and myself were stockholders. The sole holders, in fact."

"The Century Projects Corp.?"

"Yes, that is the one."

DOC SAVAGE walked over to Monk, asked, "How do you feel?"

Monk looked at the stone walls, bathed in the moonlight. Pale-red light from the fires outside the compound colored the trace of night fog that was beginning to wrap the village. The smoke crawled up like dark worms.

"I'd feel a lot better out of here," Monk admitted.

Doc said, "We can reach the top of the wall without much trouble. Form a pyramid."

Pat darted forward.

"No, Doc!" she gasped. "You can't. The sides and top of that wall are covered with thorns. When they laid the mortar, they laid small branches of thorn trees in it, the thorns projecting. And the thorns are coated with that drug."

Doc asked Monk, "Think you can stand the pain?"

"Sure," Monk said. "I can. But what about the drug?"

Ham stepped up anxiously. "Listen, Monk did most of the fighting back at the planes, and he's tired. Why not let me help on this?"

Big-worded Johnny said, "I'll be superamalgamated! Count me in on that, too."

Doc Savage said, "You will get your chance, if this works out."

The bronze man moved over and spoke in a whisper to Monk. Monk emitted an astonished grunt, said, "I'll be danged!"

"Monk will help me," Doc said. "Make a stand, you fellows."

The "stand" consisted of a pyramid, Long Tom and Ham for a base, Johnny for an elongated peak. Up this climbed Doc Savage, then Monk.

Pat had been right about the thorns. They pricked the bronze man's hands, his elbows and shins. He avoided them as best he could, gritted his teeth against those it was impossible to avoid, and got on the crest of the wall.

He reached down and hauled Monk up beside him.

The natives around the fire below saw them then. One squalled an alarm.

"Oa!"

the man bellowed. *"Oa, oa!"*

Doc said, "Come on, Monk!"

They leaped off the wall, landed sprawling beside the fires, and began fighting. Monk emitted a howl that outdid the best native effort, and suddenly was the center of a pile of human figures.

Doc Savage dropped two men quickly. Then a third man rushed in, and Doc seemed stupidly slow in dodging a fist blow. The impact sent him to his knees. The man struck him again. Doc swung back, but erratically.

"Akhiran!"

the man yelled in Egyptian. "At last! It takes effect on him."

A moment later, Doc Savage and Monk were both stretched out, arms and legs pinned by excitedly triumphant natives.

"Bass!"

an authoritative voice ordered. "That is enough."

The speaker, the native who had been in charge of the group which had brought Doc Savage and Monk to the village, walked around the two prisoners thoughtfully.

"The big one is clever," he said. "But he did not think of the thorns on the wall. He will know better next time. Take them away, both. Take them to the hut, and revive them. Then throw them back in the compound with the others."

Inside the prison wall, Winton Moldenhaeur translated the orders for the benefit of Pat and Ham and the others.

"They are going to cure them of the effects of the drug, and bring them back," he said.

Chapter XIII. ALIVE AND NOT DEAD

FIVE minutes later, Doc Savage went into action. He sat up, took a native by the neck. He got another native by the straight black hair. He slammed their heads together.

Simultaneously, Monk came up suddenly with his legs and got the head of a native between his knees. He lay very still for a few moments, making a face and straining. Then he released his native. The fellow

was too dazed to dodge the homely chemist's fist.

Monk said, "There was only the three of them, wasn't there?"

They were in a low-ceilinged stone room that smelled violently. Sole light was supplied by a primitive stone lamp in which floated a burning wick. A more modern lamp probably graced the boudoir of Cleopatra.

"Only three," Doc said.

The bronze man swung off the stone slab on which he had been placed.

Immediately he was interested in a long vat arrangement, a stone tank, at his side. The natives had been pouring liquid from large jars into this. There had already been liquid in the stone tub, but they had been increasing the quantity.

Monk came over and smelled of the stuff.

"Say!" he exploded. "That stuff is a little like that junk we smeared on our bodies. I mean—I smell some of the chemical in this that was in that."

Doc said, "There is some similarity."

"Hey! Then you didn't mix that stuff up just so it would fluoresce yellow?"

"Not entirely. It was also an antidote—or I hoped it was an antidote, and it turned out I was right—against the drug they were using to induce that condition of suspended life."

Monk was incredulous. "When did you figure out the stuff?"

Doc said, "You remember I got in several hours' laboratory work on the thing in New York? I had Mr. Manley and Abner in the laboratory at the time, so that the reaction of chemicals on them could be observed. Following that, I had several days—or the time of the flight from New York here—to consider the results."

Monk shivered. "Is there likely to be any bad effects from this stuff?"

"It is doubtful if we will feel entirely normal for a number of weeks. Such a shock to the human system could not pass without effects."

Monk grunted.

"What now?" he asked.

"The planes," Doc said. "We will have to get some weapons."

"Well, what're we waitin on? We know the trail."

They reached the lake, but not without difficulty. The two guards at the foot of the cliff path were taken by surprise, but they put up a sizable bout. Monk slugged his opponent five times squarely on the jaw before he induced a state of unconsciousness that was satisfactory. Monk was unpleasantly amazed.

"I'm sure losin' my wallop," he declared.

Doc explained the weakness was probably due to the drug which they had rubbed on their skins, and

which their systems had absorbed.

They reached the lake, climbed in a canoe, took their bearings carefully, and paddled out to the plane.

The matter of guards in the plane was bothering them. But it solved itself. There were no guards.

Monk chuckled. "When we used that anaesthetic gas on ‘em, it scared ‘em. They got the idea the planes were hoodooed, so they went ashore, probably."

They loaded the canoe with machine pistols and what ammunition they could carry.

Doc said, "We will take only mercy bullets, and a few drums of explosives."

"Right," Monk said. "I hope we can get back to the village before they find out we got loose."

Doc said, "They had no suspicion that we had immunized ourselves to the effect of their drug. They will not be particularly concerned about us."

They paddled ashore, beaching the canoe well down the beach from the point where there was likelihood of guards being posted. Shouldering the ammunition packs, their breech-cloths thrust full of machine pistols, they worked through the noisy tropical jungle.

The two guards at the base of the cliff were still unconscious. Doc lead the way upward. Monk climbed behind him.

They passed into the cultivated valley. Life in the place evidently was not all roses, for they could hear an uproar off to the north, and see torches; a dozen or more natives seemed to be trying to herd some large animal, apparently a belligerent rhino, out of a field. The animal set out in industrious pursuit of part of the group, and they saw that it was not a rhino, but some kind of buffalo that was as black as a polecat.

DOC stopped some distance from the prison compound, lifted his head, put his hands to his mouth, and shouted in Mayan.

He told those in the compound to get ready for a break. He said that he would shortly drop a rope over the wall, and that they were to be prepared to leave in a hurry. He told them to acknowledge hearing him by staging, in five minutes, a noisy dispute.

"Come," he told Monk, "before someone investigates the queer language."

There were dogs in the village, and they were doing so much howling and fighting that an outburst of strange words was hardly anything to be noticed. But they changed their position hastily. Two of the dogs barked at them industriously, became tired, and left.

In the compound, Pat Savage and Liona Moldenhaeur had a loud quarrel. It was brief.

Doc said, "They heard our signal. From now on, we work fast."

They separated. Monk headed straight for the prison. Doc circled to come in from the other side.

They both charged the rapid-firing pistols with drums of mercy bullets as they ran. The slugs were even more effective than solid lead, because any kind of a hit by one of them would produce rather abrupt unconsciousness. The period of senselessness was short, however. Not more than fifteen minutes at the outside. Doc recently having made a change in the slugs to get quick results, so that he had found it

necessary to sacrifice their period of effectiveness. Quick results were usually the most important.

Doc began firing first. He put the initial burst into the legs of standing men. The deafening roar brought the other natives around the fires to their feet. After that, he shot low, quick bursts, switching the machine-pistol muzzle.

He ran forward. Some of the natives were going down; others were still on their feet.

He reached the slanting stairway of loose stones, bounded up it. A crude ladder made of twisted fiber and sticks dangled on the outside of the wall. He hauled it up, tossed it over on the inside.

"Come on out," he said sharply. "Hurry!"

Ollie Saff, in a horror-stricken voice, yelled, "What about us? You ain't gonna leave us here!"

They should, Monk thought grimly.

He heard Doc ask Winton Moldenhaeur, "What will they do to Saff and his men if we do leave them here?"

"Kill them," Moldenhaeur said. "But that's what they have coming to them."

Doc called, "After the others, Saff. Climb up. But do not try anything."

Saff blubbered something thankful.

Uproar had overspread the village by now. The natives seemed to find it necessary to indulge in some preliminary howling before they got into action. Women shrieked. Babies cried. Dogs barked. Warriors popped out of the windows of stone huts. They bellowed at other warriors.

All the prisoners were out of the compound by now. Nobody was letting any grass grow under his or her feet.

Doc ordered, "This way!"

He was distributing the machine pistols—five of them—to Pat and his aids, together with ammo drums.

He set out for the cliff path. The streets were as narrow as any in Cairo, little more than hallways between stone walls. They ran down and through these, following the bronze man, making enough noise that they would not lose each other.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the rear of the column. Pat shrilled out angrily. And Monk emitted a howl that ended in mid-bellow. Doc wheeled, raced back to them.

Pat was beside herself. Also without her machine pistol.

"That Saff!" she shouted. "He grabbed my machine pistol. Monk's, too!"

From down the street, back in the direction they were leaving, Saff shouted at them.

"If you think I'm going to leave here without a new supply of that drug and the antidote, you're crazy!" Saff snarled. "I'm going back after it."

Pat said, "His men are going with him, too."

Doc shouted, "Come back, you fools!"

Saff swore at him.

They listened to the foot-pounding of Saff and his men—going back toward the compound.

"Pat, how many bullets were in your pistol?" Doc asked.

"The drum was about half full."

Monk said, "Mine was nearly empty."

Doc Savage made a grim sound.

"Saff is walking into plenty of trouble," he said. "He evidently doesn't know we were using mercy bullets. Those natives around the compound aren't dead. They will be waking up in a few minutes."

Monk chuckled cold-bloodedly.

"We should worry about Saff," he said.

Doc Savage wheeled. "One thing sure, we can not stay here."

He led the way on toward the edge of the village. A few times, they encountered dark figures, but these sprang out of sight in a hurry. They were women and children mostly. Now and then an old man.

Winton Moldenhaeur dropped back to join Doc Savage. Benjamin Boot was with him.

Moldenhaeur said, "I think we are lucky. I believe the men of the village were having a meeting about us. They seem to be gathered at the other end of town, most of them."

Benjamin Boot said, "Listen!"

In the distance, one of the machine pistols let out a prolonged hoot. Whoever was firing the weapon simply came back on the firing lever and did not let up.

Monk, thinking of the fire mechanism of the machine pistol, groaned, "He'll jam that gun! He'll burn it all—"

The machine pistol stopped suddenly.

It did not resume.

"What'd I tell you!" Monk said. "He jammed it."

They listened. Ben Boot said, "But they had another of those guns to—"

"I had the safety on mine," Pat declared, sounding satisfied. "I'll bet he can't find it. Those dinguses are complicated."

A tide of battle noise rolled to their ears. It was not pleasant, for there was death in the voices, terror in the screaming for help, for deliverance. They could hear and identify the shouting of the native warriors who poured in from the far side of the village, converging on the region of the prison inclosure. They could, at long intervals, distinguish Ollie Saff's voice in the uproar. It was even possible to gauge the direction of the battle tide from Saff's tone—confident in the beginning, startled, horrified, desperate, and at last in death, shrieking out terribly in a long sound that somehow ended with complete finality.

Monk said, "I guess Saff found it too complicated, all right. He sure sounded complicated."

They were now outside the village, and they went on to the cliff path and down that and out in the canoes to the planes.

Chapter XIV. THE LOVER OF GOLDEN BIRDS

DAWN did not come up like thunder out of the east. Quite the contrary, it arrived with a breath of silence. The jungle noises suddenly stilled, as if everything had stopped, and it was daylight. The fog disappeared from the surface of the lake as if through the operation of magic.

The two planes drifted on the calm surface of the lake.

Doc Savage sat on the wing of one of them, and watched the yellow birds. They were tiny canarylike things, and they came up out of the jungle in thousands, in great flocks.

He watched the yellow birds. At times they were so numerous that it was as if someone had suddenly spread a great yellow blanket against the green of the forest.

Winton Moldenhaeur came and sat beside him.

"A strange place," Moldenhaeur said. "They are Egyptians, you know."

"You have their history?" Doc Savage asked.

Moldenhaeur nodded. "They came from Egypt a long time ago. Centuries ago. They brought those birds, which are canaries, or were canaries originally. They settled here, and for some reason, the birds flourished. The yellow birds are their symbols of religion. But of course you noticed that."

"Yes," Doc said. "You fellows took some of the yellow birds back with you, on your first trip?"

"Yes. That's how we all happened to have canaries. We—ah, I understand Mr. Boot and Mr. Thomas and my daughter lied to you about the golden birds. They didn't want the secret of the drug to get out. My daughter even released my golden bird for fear it would draw suspicion."

Doc said, "It was a great ado about nothing."

"Nothing! Good God! That drug will—"

"Is worthless."

"What?"

Doc Savage was silent a moment.

"Not entirely worthless, perhaps," he said. "But quite no account for what you were using, or intended to use it for, which was the preservation of foods."

"But that's impossible!" Moldenhaeur exploded.

"Did you have chemists work on it?"

"Well—Mr. Boot is a chemist. He experimented with it. He said he thought the taste could be eliminated."

"He was mistaken," Doc said. "When you expose meat to that stuff, there is a slight taste remaining. You

know the taste, and you know it is not pleasant. These natives do not mind it, because—well, they eat ants, and such morsels. But the civilized palate would not accustom itself to that taste. And there is no way of eliminating it."

Benjamin Boot had been listening. He came and sat down beside them.

"I am sorry to hear that," he said gloomily.

The bronze man studied Boot's homely face. Boot was watching the golden birds.

Boot said, "They are beautiful." He was still staring at the birds.

Doc Savage remarked, "You like beautiful things, do you not?"

Boot nodded solemnly. "More than anything," he murmured.

Monk let out a shout.

"Hey, Doc," Monk called, "there's that chief of them natives waving at you from shore. He must want to have a powwow."

DOC SAVAGE took one of the canoes. The occupants of the planes watched him paddle to a point on the beach. The native leader came forward alone.

The two men talked alone for some time.

Then Doc Savage paddled back to the planes at a leisurely pace. He had in the canoe Monk's pig, Habeas Corpus, who had disappeared in the excitement. Ham's pet chimp, Chemistry, had already been located earlier.

Monk greeted his hog with suspicion. "I bet he's been associatin' with them dang wart hogs. I saw one of them things last night. It tried to eat me."

Ham said, "For years, I've wondered what breed of hog that Habeas is. Now I know he *is* a wart hog."

Renny, looking much better this morning, asked, "What did the head guy want, Doc?"

"Just an offer to drop matters," Doc said. "It seems that they are satisfied. Ollie Saff's men are dead. That seems to have been enough to quiet them down. In fact, they are scared. They want to give us all we want of the drug and the antidote, in return for our going away and leaving them alone."

"What did you decide?" Renny asked.

"To take enough of the stuff for experimental purposes," the bronze man said. "As a matter of fact, if I am not wrong, this drug might explain something that science has never been able to fathom about the ancient Egyptian method of embalming. They were far better at the art than modern embalmers, it is generally admitted. There may be a connection between their skill and this drug."

Doc Savage turned slowly to face Benjamin Boot.

"Incidentally," he added, "I have a message to you from Ollie Saff."

Benjamin Boot stiffened, turned white. "Uh . . . me—" He wet his lips.

"Mr. Moldenhaeur," Doc said. "This drug secret was turned over to a holding concern named the Century Projects Corp. Is that right?"

"Yes, it is," Moldenhaeur told him, puzzled.

"Who held the stock?"

"Mr. Boot, Mr. Thomas, and myself."

Doc Savage nodded. "And tell me, did the Century Projects concern hold any other property?"

"Oh, yes," Moldenhaeur said hastily. "It controls several factories. A number of industries, in fact."

"Then," Doc Savage said, "if a man should try to force you and Mr. Thomas to sign control of the corporation over to him, he would own it. Provided, of course, the man—in this case Ollie Saff—was only a figurehead working for Mr. Boot here, and Mr. Boot went through the motions of giving him his interest in the concern, too?"

Benjamin Boot shot to his feet. Terror had lighted his face. An unthinking kind of fear, a desperation that left room for nothing but flight.

He dived into the lake.

He never came up.

It was that simple. And more correctly, he never came up alive. The bitterly cold water must have stopped his heart, and he was—they found this later, when they located the body with grapples—carrying a heavy pistol in his hip pocket, which pulled him into the depths.

Liona Moldenhaeur stared at Doc Savage. "Is Ollie Saff alive?"

"No."

"But you said—"

"That I had a message for Boot from Saff? Merely a figure of speech for the thought I was about to express."

Monk was peering down into the indescribably blue depths of the lake.

"Boot liked pretty things," remarked the homely chemist. "He sure picked some purty blue water to fall into." He shivered.

THE END