THE MENTAL MONSTER

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Scanned and proofed
by Tom Stephens

Chapter I. THE WHITE BIRD

HIS name was Bill Keeley. William Jerome Keeley, if it was necessary to give his full name, he said.

He had quite a bit of trouble getting to see Doc Savage. Probably trouble was not the right word. Difficulty would be a better word. There really wasn't any trouble just then.

He began by not wanting to see Doc Savage.

“I want to see Renny Renwick,” he explained. “Renny Renwick is an old pal of mine. We built a dam together in Africa before the world got so crazy.”

He told this to a receptionist, to another receptionist, to a couple of guards, and finally to another guy who didn't seem to have much authority either.

“Now look here!” said Bill Keeley. “I'm not here to pick old Renny's pocket or sell him any insurance. If the big-fisted bull-voiced lug don't want to see me, let him say so, and it'll be O. K. It'll be O. K. I'll kick his teeth in the next time I run across the big palooka. But it'll be O. K.”

“Mr. Renwick,” said the superreceptionist, “is out of the city. He is, to tell the truth, out of the country.”

“Where is he?”

“That,” said the superoffice boy, “is something I can't tell you. The man is building a highway for the U. S. army in an unnamed place, and that's more than I'm really supposed to tell you.”

“Well,” said Bill Keeley, “why the hell didn't somebody say so before this?”

Bill Keeley was an ample young man who somehow looked as if he would be more at home pushing a wheelbarrow of concrete up a ramp and dumping it into a power dam in some jungle. The suns had burned him and things had scarred his fists, and he had the mellow ease of a young man who had been around. He had the air, too, of a young man who wasn't accustomed to being thrown out of places.

This last air, the atmosphere of being at home in good intelligent surroundings, told something else about Bill Keeley. He was a young man who accomplished things. He wasn't a tough. There might be scars and horns on his fists, and his hide might be thick, but his mind was light and agile, like a bounding fawn. It was the kind of mind that traveled fast, his conversation indicated. As fast as a deer, to make a comparison.

The superreceptionist said, “I am supposed to ask a routine question. Renny Renwick is an associate of Doc Savage, and they work closely together. Is your business with Renwick anything which Doc Savage could handle?”

Bill Keeley opened his mouth; obviously he was about to make an answer. But he didn't speak. Instead, he thought deeply for a while.

“What's the chance,” he asked, “of my having lunch with Doc Savage?”

“I'll see.”

The other went away and came back later and said it was arranged, that Doc Savage would have lunch with Bill Keeley in twenty minutes in a restaurant in the neighborhood.

The restaurant didn't sound like one in which there would be a mysterious white bird.

BILL KEELEY didn't pay much attention to the restaurant as they went in, because he was too interested in Doc Savage. Bill was embarrassed, and he apologized immediately.

“This comes under the heading of a danged imposition, Mr. Savage,” he said. “You see, I don't know you, and you don't know me. But when I found Renny wasn't here, it was just an impulse that led me to ask you to have lunch with me.”

“Did the impulse have any connection with business?” Doc asked.

“Yes, it did,” said Bill Keeley.

Doc Savage had impressed Bill Keeley a great deal, now that he was looking at the so-called Man of Bronze at close range. Bill had heard stories of Doc Savage all over the world, and Renny Renwick had told him some very graphic and hair-raising ones. Doc Savage was supposed to be strictly a scientific product, the result of a completely unnatural youth and early manhood, for his father had placed him in the hands of scientists for training from babyhood. As a result, Doc Savage was supposed to be a somewhat freakish combination of mental genius, muscular marvel and scientific wizard.

Doc Savage, it was known, followed the unusual career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers who were outside the law, often carrying his profession to the remote corners of the earth. How Doc Savage made such a bizarre career profitable, Bill Keeley didn't know. He understood, though, that Doc had a source of secret wealth somewhere. Renny had mentioned this once.

(This source of gold is a lost valley in a little-known Central American republic. The place is far from the usual air lanes and almost unexplored. The valley is watched over by descendants of ancient Maya, and Doc has but to broadcast a request at a certain hour any seventh day to have a pack train load of gold come out of the mountain fastnesses. This was the scene of Doc Savage's first adventure, The Man of Bronze.)

“Business,” Doc Savage said. “You mean your own business.”

“No,” said Bill Keeley. “Your kind of business.”

The restaurant was a pleasant place done in dark-stained wood. There was no music and no loud conversation. The silver seemed unusually bright and the linen remarkably crisp. Doc Savage was known in the place. They were taken to a secluded table, one which the bronze man evidently used regularly.

Bill Keeley noticed that, as Doc Savage sat, he could not be recognized by the other diners, but he could keep an eye on what went on in the restaurant by watching a mirror.

“You know,” Bill said, “I'm a little stricken by awe.”

Doc Savage's metallic features had been rather expressionless. But now he smiled. “Nonsense,” he said. “Be sure and order the corn bread. It is very good here.”

Bill laughed. “Liking corn bread makes you home folks, as far as I'm concerned.”

He was more at ease. He studied Doc Savage a moment, thinking that, at close range, the man certainly looked the part of his reputation. Savage did not seem such a giant when you were a few yards away from him, but when you stood close, the remarkable size of the man was evident, as was the evidence of fabulous strength in the play of sinews in his neck and on the backs of his hands. The bronze man's strange golden eyes, like pools of flake gold always stirred by tiny winds, were impressive also.

“What did you mean—my kind of business?” Doc asked.

Bill Keeley moved a little in his chair. He took a drink of water. He was uncomfortable, it was plain. And he was uneasy.

“I'm Bill Keeley, engineer,” he said. “I'm connected with the Black Pagoda Co., one of the big concerns which is making rubber out of alcohol and other things. They claim that makes me indispensable. They wouldn't let me join the army. Now ain't that a hell of a note?”

“They said,” Doc suggested, “that you were more valuable to the war effort doing what you were doing?”

“That's right. I don't agree. Say, how can I get around those brass hats and get where there's some fighting?”

Doc Savage looked rather strange for a moment.

“If you find a way,” he said, “let me know.”

Bill Keeley grinned at him. “Hey, you don't mean they pulled the same gag on you? Told you to keep on with the same work you were doing?”

“That is right,” Doc admitted.

“I'll be damned!” Bill said. “Well, I can see how you do more good doing the kind of work you do. But you take me, I'm just an engineer.”

“This the business you wanted to talk about?”

“No.”

“And it is the kind of business in which I would be interested?”

“Very.”

“That means,” said Doc Savage, “that it should be something too unusual for the police to handle, and something involving a great deal of trouble.”

“Yes,” said Bill Keeley. “It's about a strange white bird.”

BILL KEELEY was a very scared man.

Doc Savage realized that suddenly, about the same time that it dawned on him that Bill Keeley was an excellent actor. Any man who could hide his feelings so well was an actor of ability. The young man was in a state of terror. But he had been carrying on with what even Doc had thought was a casual air.

The young man had a tight hold on his fear. He was holding it between his teeth, almost, judging from the way he clenched his teeth whenever he was not speaking. And when his hands were still, they were always still on a chair or holding arm, a knife or a fork, or something else they could clench in desperation. The way he was feeling was showing in these and other ways.

“Did you say white bird?” Doc Savage asked.

Bill Keeley breathed inward deeply, as if he was afraid he wouldn't get to take another breath.

“Hold it,” he said. “Let me tell you more about Bill Keeley. It'll help you get the picture.”

“Go ahead.”

“I meant to tell you about Carole,” said Bill Keeley. “Carole is my girl. We're engaged. And I'm not just bragging about a girl either. Carole is a very special girl, but then every guy who has a girl he's gone on thinks she's very special, and there's none other like her. So I'm not telling you about her because she is so special.”

“The girl,” suggested Doc Savage, “has something to do with the business you think I'd be interested in?”

“That's it, I'm afraid.”

“And with the white bird?”

Bill Keeley jumped, much as if he'd been slapped. Then he looked uncomfortable. “I guess it's got my goat,” he said. “I jump even when I hear it mentioned.”

Doc Savage studied the young man closely. The waiter was bringing the appetizer, oysters on the half shell, and they were both silent.

“You have had a few adventures in your life,” Doc Savage suggested.

“I've made a few mistakes,” Bill Keeley admitted. “That's what adventures are, aren't they? Mistakes?”

“That has always been my definition,” Doc agreed.

“Well, I've had a few.”

“What about this white bird?”

“Well,” Bill Keeley said, “it's not very large, and—”

He became silent. He didn't just stop speaking. The words froze in his throat, his speech muscles holding them in a cramp. He lost color, a great deal of color for so ruddy an outdoor-looking man.

“There.” He pointed. “I won't have to describe it now.”

THE white bird was fluttering around the restaurant. It circled slowly, and it flew like any other small bird, but it was white.

The head waiter of the restaurant was looking at the bird indignantly, for the restaurant was proud of its calm elite atmosphere. This bird certainly didn't fit in with the dignity of the place. It was not a very clean-looking bird, either.

Suddenly the head waiter stuck a finger in the air. This was to summon other waiters. There was nothing so undignified as handclapping in this restaurant.

Other waiters came, and they began a discreet pursuit of the bird.

They didn't have much luck.

“Oh my!” gasped Bill Keeley. “Oh, murder!”

Doc Savage examined the young man. Bill Keeley had lost still more color. He looked even more horrified.

“Murder?” Doc said. “You mean literally?”

Bill Keeley looked at Doc. He actually tried twice to speak before he managed it.

He said: “A friend of mine, named Franklin, died. I think he died violently, although the coroner said it was natural. Just before it happened, he saw one of those birds.”

There was more to it than that. There was obviously a great deal more to it. But Bill Keeley wasn't in any mental state to tell it coherently.

Bill Keeley stood up.

“Excuse me,” he said. “Watch that bird. Watch it, while I go somewhere and get something to catch it. I think there is a dry goods store next door. Sure there is. I'll get a few yards of cheesecloth, and we'll net the bird.”

Bill Keeley left the restaurant, walking rapidly.

The waiters chased the white bird into a window. Some of the less blasé of the diners giggled at the performance. The head waiter's neck was red. The waiters grabbed here and there, trying to catch the white bird.

Doc Savage got up suddenly. He went out into the street.

He went into the dry goods store.

Bill Keeley was not there.

Doc approached the restaurant doorman. “Did you notice the young man who came here with me?” he asked.

“Yes, Mr. Savage,” the doorman said. “He left a few moments ago.”

“Where did he go? Did you notice?”

“He ran like the dickens,” the doorman said. “He got a taxicab. The number of the cab was 343-607.” He pulled out a notebook in which evidently he had written the cab number. “Yes, 343-607 is right,” he said.

“Good work,” Doc told the doorman.

“Thank you, sir,” the doorman said. He was tickled pink. “I had hoped to some day be of some slight service to you, sir.”

Chapter II. TROUBLE IS A WHITE BIRD

IN the restaurant, they had caught the bird. The head waiter had wrapped a napkin around the bird, and the expression on the head waiter's face promised no good for the bird. He was going to wring the bird's neck as soon as he could get in the kitchen.

Doc Savage extended a hand. “Do you mind?” Doc said.

“Oh.” The head waiter knew the bronze man. “You wish the bird? Of course. Certainly.”

Doc took the bird. He went to the table, sat down, and told the waiter, “Telephone.”

New York restaurants which are snazzy, and high-priced, have a system of plugging a telephone in at your table. This one was no exception.

Doc Savage called Johnny Littlejohn. Johnny Littlejohn was actually William Harper Littlejohn, the eminent archaeologist and geologist, and noted user of big words. Johnny, however, never used any of his big words on Doc.

“Johnny,” Doc said. “Can you get hold of Long Tom?”

“Long Tom is right here,” Johnny said.

Long Tom was Major Thomas J. Roberts, who looked so unhealthy that undertakers always eyed him speculatively, and who was one of the world's leading electrical experts.

“Here,” Doc said, “is what I want you to do. First, check up on a company called the Black Pagoda Co.”

“What do you want to know about the concern? Anything in particular?”

“Find out anything and everything about the concern that you can dig up without taking too much time.”

“Where is the Black Pagoda Co. located?”

“You will have to find that out. But it is a concern that is making rubber out of alcohol products. Probably one of the new war-time concerns.”

“Right.”

“Second,” said Doc, “find out all you can about a young man named William Jerome Keeley, an engineer in the employ of the Black Pagoda Co.”

“You want to know all about Bill Keeley?”

“Yes.”

“Right.”

“Bill Keeley,” Doc said, “has a girl friend named Carole. Find out all about her, too.”

“Yes.”

“And about a man named Franklin. Franklin was a friend of Bill Keeley's. Find out when Franklin died, and from what cause, and if there was anything suspicious about the death.”

“Right,” said Johnny Littlejohn. “Is that all? It sounds as if you had a line on something. How does it look? Does it seem interesting?”

“There is just one more thing that makes it interesting,” Doc told him. “It is a white bird. And while you are doing your investigating, you might ask about the white bird.”

“Who do you think we had better ask about the white bird?”

“Ask everybody you talk to.”

Johnny Littlejohn was puzzled.

“What kind of a white bird,” he inquired, “do I ask them about?”

“Just a small white bird,” Doc told him, “about the size of a sparrow.”

THE head waiter came to the table. He looked apologetic, and he had a glass jar with a perforated lid. “For the bird,” he explained.

“Thank you,” Doc said.

He put the bird in the jar, which served as well as a cage.

The bird had obviously been handled a great deal. It was, in fact, a somewhat tame bird. It fluttered

around for a while, indignant, then settled in the bottom of the jar. It straightened out its feathers.

It was a sparrow.

There was no doubt about it being a sparrow, and it had been dyed white. Doc Savage examined it closely, but that was about all that he learned. As nearly as he could tell, the dyeing had been done two or three weeks ago, judging from the way the dye had worn out, and the feathers had grown. The dye had stained the beak of the bird, but had rubbed off somewhat.

Doc Savage studied the bird for a while. Then he sat back and considered.

There was no point, actually, from which to start thinking. The bird was just a sparrow, and it had been dyed white, and the sight of it had scared the blood out of Bill Keeley's face. It had, in fact, scared Bill Keeley into taking flight.

Those were, briefly, the facts. And there was no sense to it, and nowhere to start thinking. To form a theory, you had to have a sensible fact or two, and there was nothing sensible about this.

Doc Savage surveyed the restaurant thoughtfully.

The bird, it was obvious, had come from somewhere in the restaurant. Someone had released it. Who? There was no way of telling.

But none of the diners had left the restaurant, as Doc Savage had noticed. He had kept his eye on the door, and Bill Keeley and Doc himself were the only persons who had left. That proved one thing.

Whoever had released the sparrow was still here.

Doc Savage stood up. He spoke loudly, addressing the head waiter.

“Did you ever hear how easy it is to bring out latent fingerprints on the feathers of a bird such as this?” he asked. “Will you bring me a cloth to wrap around the glass jar, so that I can carry the sparrow without attracting too much attention?”

The statement about attracting attention was almost ridiculous. He had spoken so loudly that everyone in the restaurant had heard. There was, however, a quality of subdued power in the bronze man's voice that made his tone seem natural. He did not seem to have raised his voice when he spoke.

“Yes, sir,” the head waiter said, and galloped off for a large napkin.

Doc did not leave immediately. Instead, he consumed his dinner, ordered a dessert, and took his time with that.

“Tell me,” he requested of the head waiter, “who asks for the telephone.”

Three men used the telephone during the interval, as the head waiter pointed out discreetly. One of these received an incoming call, and was known to the restaurant. The other two were outgoing calls, and one caller was a well-known banker.

The third man who used the telephone was a stranger, a tall man with a darkly sunburned face and the most remarkably blue eyes.

Doc paid his bill, got up, took his hat and walked to the man's table.

“Do you want the bird back?” Doc asked.

The man was good. He did not look ruffled.

“I didn't think you saw me turn it loose,” he said.

THE man sat there at the restaurant table. Probably he was worried, certainly he must have been surprised. Despite his not seeming ruffled, he had been jarred enough to admit releasing the bird. His face showed that.

“Would you sit down a moment?” the man said.

“Why?”

The bluntness of Doc's question made the man look uncomfortable.

“I want to know why you think I turned the bird loose,” he said.

He was old enough to miss the draft, not much older probably, although his hair was salted with gray at the temples. The tan on his skin had a soft look, as if it had been put there with sun lamps, or by sports that kept him in the sun. It was not the kind of tan that a man got working in the sun.

“Want to walk down the street with me?” Doc asked.

“Why?”

“Because you are being invited.”

The man looked up. Strain was beginning to show around his lips. “I don't know why you think I let that bird loose,” he said. “I can't understand that. I don't understand why you are standing here, threatening me.”

“Threatening you?”

“You are, aren't you?”

“Yes,” Doc said. “Are you going to walk down the street with me willingly, or are you just going?”

“I'm a perfect stranger,” the man said.

“A stranger.”

“Meaning I'm not perfect, eh?”

Doc Savage said, “When a thing is a settled fact, there is not much sense arguing about it, is there?”

The man got up meekly enough. They went out into the street.

The man kept saying: “I don't know anything about it.”

BECAUSE Doc Savage's profession was actually nothing less than continually meddling in the other fellow's business, he had enemies. The business in which he meddled was invariably crooked business, which meant the enemies were usually violent fellows. It was a path of danger which Doc Savage walked, with his five associates.

The five men were specialists in various professions—Ham Brooks was a lawyer, Monk Mayfair a chemist, Johnny Littlejohn an archaeologist-geologist, and Long Tom Roberts an electrical expert—but it was not their professions which held them to Doc Savage. The member of the group who was now in Africa, Renny Renwick, was an engineer.

Because the five of them were always in danger, they took precautions. They had learned the habit of precautions from Doc Savage, who was inclined to overdo it. The extent to which the bronze man went to meet trouble was fantastic. The pains he took often looked ridiculous, particularly when an interval went past without any of them being necessary. Monk and Johnny and the others often said that it was impossible to catch Doc flat-footed, without being prepared with a gadget or a trick. This was, of course, ridiculous. But at times it did seem a truth.

“You have a name?” Doc Savage asked the stranger.

“If I told you my name, you wouldn't believe it,” the man said. “So phooey.”

Doc made no other comment. He walked silently beside the stranger.

The stranger was silent, too. And his mind was not easy. His remarkably blue eyes kept shifting, traveling here and there, not seeking anything in particular but just too nervous to look at any one thing very long at a time. His eyes were the color of a winter sky.

“Who did you telephone?” Doc asked.

“So that's it! That's how the hell you got wise to me!” The blue-eyed man straightened up, acting as if that was all that had been worrying him, and now that he knew the answer, he felt fine. “Well, I don't feel so bad. I thought maybe I had made a real mistake.”

“You did,” Doc said.

“What kind of a mistake?”

“Just be patient.”

Doc Savage carried the white bird in the glass jar. They went around the corner, and passed the front entrance of the skyscraper which housed Doc Savage's headquarters. It was one of the tallest buildings in midtown Manhattan.

“Hey,” said the blue-eyed man. “Ain't you going upstairs?”

“So you know who I am?”

“Sure. You're Doc Savage, and you scare hell out of me.” He looked sidewise at Doc. “I mean, you really do. But I'm kind of glad to get this chance.”

They turned a corner into the side street.

“What are you glad about?” Doc asked. “What chance?”

“That I got a chance to kill you right away,” the blue-eyed man said. “I didn't have to fool around.”

The blue-eyed man lifted his voice.

“Jerry, Frenchy, Tim!” he screamed. “What the hell you waiting on? Hang it on this guy, and get the damned bird!”

THE blue-eyed man pulled the pin out of his tie. The pin was a steel needle about eight inches long, and the head, the part that made the tie-pin ornament, formed a handle.

He made a pass at one of Doc's eyes. He missed when the bronze man moved. So he tried to stick his weapon in the bronze man's heart.

The man cursed, and jumped back, nursing his hand. The blade had broken off, and driven into his palm from the force of the thrust.

He said, “Bulletproof vest, eh?”

He raised his voice and bellowed, “Bulletproof vest, guys! Go for his head!”

Doc looked around for the guys. There were four of them, all somewhat disguised.

Two were taxi drivers. One was a telegraph-company messenger. The fourth had been pretending to be an old lady. The latter was holding up his skirts as he ran forward. Like the other three, he had a pistol.

Again the blue-eyed man screamed, “What are you waiting on?”

The one dressed as an old lady lifted his pistol, but tripped and fell on his face.

The other three began shooting.

Doc Savage was down. Getting down put him behind the curb, which sheltered him for a moment, provided he crawled fast, which he did. He reached a metal grille that covered a curb drain. He heaved up the grille, and went through the opening.

A bullet scraped his back, raked the bulletproof vest, as he went down.

The blue-eyed man jumped around and cursed. He thought his four assistants should have hit Doc Savage.

“A barn!” he yelled. “A barn you couldn't hit!” He ran toward them. “Give me a grenade.”

“We haven't got any grenades,” a man told him. “What you think we are, Commandos?”

“Give me a gun then, you idiot!” the man yelled.

Doc Savage had disappeared by now.

The blue-eyed man seized a gun from one of the others and began shooting down the hole.

He shot four times.

There was an explosion. It was dull, as if a match had been dropped in a can containing a small amount of gasoline. There was not much smoke, and quite a bit of flame.

The blast threw the blue-eyed man back a few yards. He stumbled and went down on his back and lay there for a few moments slapping at his hair and eyebrows.

More flame came out of the hole. It blazed up about twenty feet and stood there in a moaning column. The heat began to melt the asphalt around the hole.

Chapter III. THE SECOND ACCIDENT

THE blue-eyed man decided he hadn't been burned as badly as he thought, and scrambled to his feet. He stared at the pile of flame.

“We must be living right,” he said.

The other four men stood close. They had put their guns out of sight. “Do we run?” one asked.

“Walk,” said the blue-eyed man. “And act innocent.”

They walked away, heading for the subway entrance at the end of the block. There was nothing slow about their walk and they did not look innocent.

“The fire. What made the fire?” one asked.

“An accident,” said the blue-eyed man. “I think there must have been a gas main down there, one of those big pipes that carry natural gas. And one of the bullets punctured it, and another bullet made a spark that set off the gas.”

“Did you see Savage?”

“After he got into the hole? No. But he couldn't have gotten away.”

“Maybe the gas didn't burn back in the tunnel, or the pipe or whatever that hole led into.”

“With that explosion?” The blue-eyed man snorted. “Listen, that explosion would drive flame for a block through the pipe.”

They reached the subway. A train came in, and they got aboard. The blue-eyed man did not like the way they were acting.

“You look like scared rabbits!” he snarled. “Look at the signs, or something. Anything to stop looking like you're looking.”

They rode uptown for two stations, then changed to a downtown express train, took a crosstown train, then went uptown again. They left the subway.

“Now it's safe to get a cab,” the blue-eyed man said.

As they were crossing the sidewalk, one of the four men rolled up his eyes and collapsed.

“Hell, what's wrong with him?” one muttered.

The others, crowding around to pick up the man, did not say anything. They knew what had happened to him. The man was scared. So frightened that he had fainted.

“Old Joe, here, got one too many,” they told a cab driver.

They went to one of the parking lots which, because of the war gasoline condition in the East, was almost devoid of cars. They had an automobile there, a sedan, a very large one which held all of them.

When they were driving crosstown, one tried a chuckle that did not come off. It was more cackle than chuckle. “Old Joe fainted,” he said. “We'll kid the socks off him.”

They were relaxing a little now. Enough that they could discuss what they had done.

“Did Bill Keeley get away?” demanded the blue-eyed man.

“Yes.”

“Why didn't you follow him?”

“Keeley lit out running the minute he got out of that restaurant,” the other explained uncomfortably. “We could've kept track of him, only he got a cab. That caught us flat-footed. The cab got him away. There wasn't any other cab around. You know how scarce cabs are.”

The blue-eyed man gave a snort of disgust. But he seemed to think some kind of an explanation was due them about his own misfortune.

“That Savage,” he said, “was not the wizard they talked him up to be, but he was sharp. He didn't see me let the bird loose. But he did see me use the telephone when I called you fellows and told you to be ready to waylay him when he left the restaurant. That telephone call tipped him off somehow, and he collared me.”

“What was he going to do with you?”

“Ask me questions about the white bird, I think,” said the blue-eyed man. “Only we fixed that.”

They discussed one other point during the ride.

“I see,” one of them told the blue-eyed man, “that you're heading for the farm. I thought we had orders not to go out there.”

“What we've just done changes the situation,” he snapped.

WHEN he reached the farm, though, he got thoroughly worked over with words for coming to the place.

A long graveled road swung through trees and a cornfield to a stone house and one of those enormous barns that are painted red and have hex signs embellished on the gables. The barn looked as if it belonged in Pennsylvania, although it was in New Jersey, about forty miles from New York City. The farm looked a little seedy, but it was a working farm; there were cows in the pasture and pigs and chickens about.

(The many fancy trimmings seen on barns, especially in the rich Pennsylvania farmlands, are said to be good-luck symbols, or “hex" signs, which the original settlers painted on their barns to keep bad luck away. They add an extra touch to an already picturesque section of our country.—Ed.)

Nobody who was loitering around the place looked like a farmer, though. A man was sitting on the porch, oiling a shotgun that didn't need oiling.

He said, “Hello, Blue-eye.”

The blue-eyed than walked past him with only a grunt.

The man gave his shotgun an extra wipe. He chuckled. “Blue-eye is scared. First time I ever saw him that way.”

“We're all scared,” said one of the other four men. “And we ain't exactly ashamed of it. Old Joe, here, fainted.”

Joe looked angry, embarrassed.

“What happened?” asked the shotgun wiper.

“We knocked off a guy named Doc Savage.”

The other stared. “Don't give me that trick gangster talk. What you mean, knocked off? You mean you killed him?”

“Yes.”

“And it was Doc Savage?”

“Yes.”

The man carefully folded his oil-stained rag. He frowned for some moments at the shotgun, which was lying across his knees, and then he stood up and grasped the shotgun by the barrel and threw it as far as he could, out into the garden. He hurled the rag after the gun. Then he took a watch out of his pocket and looked at it.

“Train to New York in twenty-eight minutes,” he said. “And I can get a job on a merchant ship and nobody will ever find me.”

He walked down the road and none of them ever saw him again.

THE blue-eyed man had walked into a large bedroom, a room with tall windows through which the sunlight streamed, a pleasant place, nicely furnished.

The one strange piece of furniture in the place was the bed. It was a great four-poster with a canopy. But the canopy was black cloth, heavy, and it fell to the floor on all sides. The bed was like a square black tent.

The blue-eyed man cleared his throat to draw attention, to explain that he was there.

Nothing happened.

“This is Blue-eye,” he said.

A metallic and somewhat unnatural voice, a voice with definitely mechanical quality, came from behind the curtains.

It said, quarrelsomely, “That is no way to approach me. You know very well that is no way to approach me.”

The blue-eyed man swore under his breath and said, “This is too important to—”

“Nothing is too important!” the voice snapped. “Nothing is important enough to warrant overlooking the formalities. Suppose you do it again. And do it the right way.”

With an uncomfortable glare at the black curtains around the bed, the blue-eyed man obeyed.

He drew back a few feet, controlled himself, and began to make, through his nose, a humming sound. This humming had a musical quality, and it was soon apparent that there was a tune, as well. The tune was not lively, but after a while, it did have something unusual. It was impressive. If given under the right conditions, it might have been inspiring.

There was one particular point about the tune that was striking. Its clear pattern, its simplicity. It had a very definite pattern, a thing that was as catchy and easy to remember as "Yankee Doodle."

The man went through it as carefully as if it was a ritual. He made a mistake once, and went back and repeated with infinite care, correcting his mistake.

"This," he finished, "is an humble disciple of the mind, come to the master."

From the curtained, tentlike bed, a new voice:

"Who is the disciple that comes to me, please?"

This voice was new and different. It was obviously not the same voice, although it, too, had a metallic and somewhat mechanical quality.

"It is the Blue-eyed-one-who-seeks-knowledge," the man said.

"Good," said the voice. "And what is it that troubles you?"

"Bill Keeley went to Doc Savage. They went to a restaurant. I let Bill Keeley see the white bird, to warn him not to talk. The warning had the proper effect, for Keeley fled the restaurant. But he escaped from my men. He took a cab, and they could not get a cab to follow."

"Then we have lost track of Bill Keeley?"

"Yes. I am sorry."

The other, treating the loss of Bill Keeley's trail as a minor matter, asked, "What about Doc Savage?"

"He is dead."

"You killed him?"

"In a way. We started shooting at him, and Savage ducked into a drainage hole, and we fired some bullets down it and there was an explosion. Illuminating gas must have exploded in the hole. Anyway, there was no way Savage could have kept from being burned to death."

"What about the white bird?"

"Savage had it. There was enough flame and heat to destroy it."

THERE was an interval, obviously one of thought for the owner of the voice that was coming from inside the curtained bed. Finally the voice put a few questions.

"Was it necessary to kill Savage?"

"He was involved. Bill Keeley had started to talk to him."

"Could you hear how much Bill Keeley said?"

"No."

"Killing Savage took a great deal of courage."

The blue-eyed man hesitated, then denied there had been any courage involved. "There wasn't anything else to do. Savage had announced that he would bring out finger prints on the white bird's feathers, and I didn't know what would result from that."

"Nothing," the other said, "would have resulted. There is no successful process for bringing out such fingerprints. It was a trick."

"Trick? What kind of a trick would it be?"

"Savage must have been worrying you."

"That might have been it," the blue-eyed man admitted. "But he had grabbed me. And there was nothing I could do but have the men take him."

"And are you sure that Savage is dead?"

"Yes."

Another interval of thought, and then the voice said, "You had orders not to come here to the farm."

"Well, this was a set of particular circumstances that I thought warranted coming directly here."

"Hereafter, do not disobey orders."

"Very well."

"Is that all you have to report."

"Yes."

"Get out."

The blue-eyed man backed out of the big bedroom, and there was perspiration on his forehead. He went out to stand on the porch in the afternoon sunlight, and use a handkerchief to wipe off the sweat.

One of his men, one of the four who had taken part in the attack on Doc Savage, looked at him and said, "You caught hell for dashing out here, eh?"

"No, not much." The other shook his head. "But every time I hear that voice, I get to thinking. I get to thinking about how devilishly impossible it is for anything to read a man's mind."

The first man stared at him. "You think that mind-reading stuff is straight, eh?"

The blue-eyed man turned his head. He cursed the other softly for a moment.

"I had it done to me," he said, "or I wouldn't believe it."

Chapter IV. THE GIRL AND THE BIRD

DOC SAVAGE peered intently through the tiny portable telescope which was a part of the assortment

of gadgets which he always carried around with him, and made a resolution. He resolved to re-design the telescope so that the thing would have more power. Increasing the magnification and field would add a little bulk, but it would probably be worth it. If it had more magnification now, he could be certain what the man on the porch was saying.

Doc had been reading the man's lips. It looked as if the blue-eyed man was saying something about somebody or something that could read minds. The idea was fantastic enough that Doc was not sure that he had read the other's lips accurately.

The bronze man watched for a while longer. But the blue-eyed man lit a cigarette and sat down on the porch, saying nothing more.

The white bird was fluttering around in the glass container and making a little noise. Doc had left the bird back about ten yards, where the weeds were thicker.

Doc eased back out of the clump of shrubbery in which he was lying, and got the container with the bird. He took it about a hundred yards, into a thicket of woods, and left it concealed under a leafy bough.

Doc crouched there for a while, debating his next move. The fact that it was bright daylight, and that there was not too much cover around the farmhouse and barn, made it advisable not to take too many chances. Particularly since he had no way of telling what he would be getting into.

He decided to wait a while, and in the meantime see what he could learn.

The telephone line from the house passed through the trees only a few yards away, which was why he had picked this spot to conceal the bird.

He got out the small portable radio transceiver which he carried. The device, made as intricately as a watch, and remarkably small considering its power and versatility, was other things beside a radio transmitter-receiver. An adjustment or two would convert the apparatus into a circuit which would pick telephone conversation off a nearby telephone line without making an actual tap of the wire.

(The principle of picking up a telephone conversation merely by placing a sensitive antennae in the electrical field which surrounds any wire carrying a current is not a new one. Radio amateurs who have experimented with old-fashioned homemade regenerative receivers have doubtless at one time cobbled up their circuit until it would pick up telephone-line conversation and nothing else.—Ed.)

He listened fifteen minutes, and heard nothing.

So he converted the apparatus back to radio, and called into the transmitter: “Johnny. Johnny. Or Long Tom.”

He got an immediate answer.

“I'll be superamalgamated. That you, Doc?”

It was Johnny. Such a word could belong to nobody but Johnny, and anyway, it was Johnny's pet word.

“Had any luck on what I asked you to find out?” Doc inquired.

Johnny Littlejohn said, “Yes. You wanted to know about the Black Pagoda Co. There is such a concern. It is located in the Kentucky mountains, where there is plenty of hydro-electric power. It is a remote mountain district, so doubtless the company went there because of the cheap and abundant electricity, and because there was plenty of native American labor. Hill people. It is not a large company, but it is a

prosperous one, and headed for big things after the war. They are turning out synthetic rubber now almost as cheaply as natural rubber could be bought before the war."

Johnny evidently had made notes, because he paused a moment.

"William Jerome Keeley is an engineer and executive vice president of the Black Pagoda Co. Good reputation. Widely traveled. Efficient. Inclined to fight at the drop of a hat. And don't care who he fights. He threw three boneheaded government so-called specialists out of his office by the slack of their pants a few weeks ago.

"Carole is Bill Keeley's fiancée. Carole Evans is her name. She's a Kentucky mountain girl, but not a hillbilly. Got a temper. I guess her and Bill Keeley would be a pair. At least, I'd like to sit in on some of their fights."

"WHAT," asked Doc Savage, "about a man named Franklin?"

"Bus Franklin, who is supposed to be dead," Johnny said. "Bus Franklin is president and majority stockholder of the Black Pagoda Co. A week ago, he was supposed to have gone off a cliff into a lake in his car. A river, rather. They got the car out, but the body wasn't in it, so they supposed it washed down the river."

"Why so many *supposeds?"* Doc asked.

"Well, the man bought twenty-five thousand dollars in travelers checks the day before the so-called accident. And he hadn't mentioned any trip to anybody."

"Married?"

"Had been. Wife died several years ago. Franklin is a man of about fifty."

"Any more."

"We're still digging up information."

"Have you heard from Monk and Ham?" Doc asked.

Monk and Ham, two more of the group of five associated with Doc Savage, were in the city somewhere.

"No word from them," Johnny told Doc over the radio. "But I've got a hunch they're in Monk's penthouse laboratory downtown, working on something. They must have the telephone muffled and their short-wave radio cut off, because I haven't been able to raise them."

"Keep trying."

"Sure," Johnny said. "By the way, Doc, there was some kind of a commotion in the street next to headquarters. Heck of a lot of excitement. A big fire, apparently gas, spouting up out of a storm drain at the curb. And there was a report of some shooting, and some men seen running." Johnny's voice over the faint scratching of static on the radio, sounded concerned. "Want us to look into it?"

"Pay no attention to it," Doc said.

"Oh, it was you. What happened?"

“Several fellows got me in a tight spot,” Doc explained. “You remember the escape set-up we arranged almost a year ago, the manholes and gratings around the building with connecting passages? You dive into any one of the openings, go through a steel door, close the door, and turn a valve that releases and ignites inflammable gas?”

“Oh, sure, I remember,” Johnny said. “It was Monk's idea and he superintended the work.”

“Well, I made use of the arrangement to get away from the men, and to lead them to think I had been killed, in order to give me a chance to follow them.”

Johnny chuckled. “I remember when Monk tested out the installation. Ham put a stink bomb in the tunnel that went off when Monk slammed the steel door and turned the handle. Monk went around smelling like a polecat for a month. And Ham had to take a hurried trip to England, on the pretense of studying the rationing set-up over there, but actually to keep Monk from skinning him alive.”

Doc said, “I was beginning to think we had wasted a lot of money putting in the silly contraption. But it paid off today.”

“Where are you now?” Johnny asked.

Doc told him. The bronze man gave Johnny a general outline of what had happened.

Johnny said, “It's a queer-sounding mess. But if they're willing to go around killing people, there's something big behind it. What did you say about mind reading?”

“I am not sure about the mind-reading part,” Doc said. “I got that by reading the blue-eyed man's lips, and I am not positive that is what he said. It may not be. It sounds far-fetched.”

“Yes, but the whole thing sounds far-fetched. The white-bird part, particularly.”

“When you were getting together your information, did you ask everybody about the white bird?”

“We asked everybody,” Johnny declared.

“And you learned?”

“Not a— Wait a minute. Here's Long Tom. He may have something more. He has been on the long-distance telephone.”

Long Tom Roberts took over the other microphone. “Doc, here's something on the white bird. Not much, but something. I talked to the private secretary of Bus Franklin, the missing-or-dead president of the Black Pagoda Co. The secretary says she heard Bus Franklin mention something about a white bird.”

“Just how,” Doc asked, “did Franklin mention the bird?”

“Mumbled about it. Seemed horrified. The secretary overheard.”

“I see.”

“Franklin,” said Long Tom, “was a scared man for two or three days before whatever happened to him took place.”

“The secretary gave you that information?”

“That's right.”

“Did the secretary think the white bird might have scared him?”

“The secretary thought it was quite possible.”

AFTER he finished talking with Johnny and Long Tom, Doc Savage tried a few times to call Monk and Ham. He had no luck, and switched the radio transceiver back to the circuit which would pick up conversation off a telephone wire.

He eavesdropped on the telephone wire from the farmhouse for some time. He heard no conversation, but he was interested anyway. The peculiar sound of the telephone wire interested him. It was not, somehow, the sound of an ordinary telephone line.

The telephone line had the usual faint cross talk, the scratchy leakage across poor insulation in the exchange, and the humming. But what interested Doc was the presence of certain indications of a carrier current of some sort, a note of rather high frequency.

He became absorbed in studying the sound.

He was sufficiently absorbed, with his ear jammed against the loudspeaker of the pick-up, that he did not hear the girl until she was taking her last step, a quick purposeful step, before she swung a piece of fence post at his head.

The instant he heard the sound, Doc rolled.

The club missed him, came down on the radio outfit, and made a mess of it. One of the vacuum tubes in the set exploded almost as loudly as a pistol.

The girl was long-limbed and agile, a girl with wheat-colored hair and tobacco-brown eyes, who wore slacks and sweater very interestingly. She was pretty, but not in a cupid fashion, and she looked disgusted that she had missed Doc, and intent on trying again.

At the farmhouse, they had heard the vacuum tube explode, because they were shouting.

The girl got her club lifted. It was about a third of an oak fence post which she had found somewhere, and too big for her to swing with ease. She wobbled around, a little like a kid with a grown man's baseball bat.

Men were charging from the farmhouse. Haste and noise.

The girl swung the club. Doc wasn't where he had been when it came around. She looked disgusted.

“You want to run?” Doc asked. “Or are these fellows your friends?”

She said, “I'll bat your ears off if it's the last thing I do!”

A man appeared—not from the direction of the house, but the other way—and leveled a rifle.

“What goes on?” he demanded.

The girl took another swing and another miss at Doc.

“Cut it out, sister,” said the man with the rifle.

Men arrived from the house.

The blue-eyed man was one of the newcomers. He looked at Doc Savage, turned as white as a man could turn, and appeared to have some kind of nerve shock that paralyzed his speech. He did not say a word.

The girl missed Doc again.

“Get him on the outcurve, sister,” a man called, laughing.

“Who the hell is she?” someone demanded.

“Bill Keeley's girl friend,” another man answered.

“Get him on the outcurve!” repeated the man who had laughed. “Knock a home run, sister!”

Chapter V. THE BIRDS IN HAND

THE man who was talking about the outcurve had not seen Doc Savage's face and not recognized the bronze man. But now he saw Doc, and stood very still for a few seconds with his mouth open, then walked backward, still looking at the bronze man, until he bumped into a tree. He stood there, his back against the tree, and soon he began to sweat. He had no more funny remarks about outcurves.

Doc Savage did not move. Plenty of guns were pointing at him.

The girl slowly lowered the part of a fence post. She looked from the guns to Doc Savage. She lost some color, and moistened her lips.

“I made a mistake,” she said.

A man—not the blue-eyed one—said, “It looks as if more than one mistake was made.” To his companions, he said, “Keep your guns on this guy. He's Doc Savage. He's not dead.”

There was a silence that was like a screech.

The man said, “He's Savage. He's Doc Savage. Oh, mother of mine!”

Finally a man came close and, standing nearly two yards away and reaching out as far as he could, gingerly felt of the bronze man's pockets and clothing.

“He's got some kind of a bulletproof vest on,” the searcher said uneasily. “And it feels like he's got things in pockets attached to the vest.”

They decided to take Doc Savage into the house to search him. They seemed to agree that they could watch the doors and windows and handle the bronze man better.

“I made a mistake,” the girl told Doc again.

He said nothing.

“I'm sorry,” she said.

The blue-eyed man was still standing speechless. Someone went over and asked, “You want him taken into the house, Blue-eye? That's the thing to do, ain't it? Out here in the brush, he might pull something

and get away. That what you want us to do, huh?"

The blue-eyed man did not answer him and did not show by any sign that he had heard. He just stood there. The other man said, "Hey! Hey, what the hell?" He grabbed the stupefied man and shook him. Another man came over and snapped his fingers in front of the staring blue eyes.

"He thought Savage was dead," someone said. "Take him into the house."

Guns were kept pointed at Doc Savage from every angle while they took him into the house. They picked a living room first, then someone suggested an attic room where there was one window and one door. So they took him up there.

They brought the girl into the room, and the blue-eyed man, who was still dazed. They lowered the latter into a chair, and he remained there.

The girl looked at Doc Savage and again said, "I made a mistake."

Doc seemed to hear her for the first time. He said, "Can you manage to just stop breathing, do you suppose?"

She was clever. She was quick, miraculously quick on the uptake. She saw what he meant and played up to it.

"That's a nice thing to say to a lady," she said, and she made it sound angry.

Then she held her breath.

Doc Savage himself took a deep breath, then a moderate one so that his lungs would have fresh oxygen but not be strained, and held his own breath.

Then he flexed his biceps muscle and rubbed the arm, or the inner portion of the forearm, the part which was above the elbow near the armpit, in a circular motion against his body. This released, after a little difficulty, the trick container which held his liquid anaesthetic gas.

THE anaesthetic gas was a type which Doc Savage had used for a long time. It produced almost immediate unconsciousness; it was colorless and odorless. It did not harm the victim.

It would have been a wonderful war gas, except for one thing. It became absolutely harmless and ineffective after mingling with the air for about a minute.

The fact that the gas became impotent after mixing with ordinary air for sixty seconds or so was not miraculous—the oxygen in the air simply oxidized and rendered useless the main ingredient in the trick gas. The short life of the stuff was something that Doc Savage, despite plenty of experimenting, had not been able to overcome. So the gas was useful for his trick purposes, and not of much other value.

It was rather strange that the blue-eyed man should be the first to go down, but he was, slumping forward out of the chair in which they had placed him and making a thumping noise on the floor. Either his resistance was at a low point, or the air currents in the room had carried the anaesthetic gas directly to him.

The man falling out of the chair should have helped the anaesthetic gas attack. It didn't. It tipped off the others that something was wrong. Or tipped one of them, who bellowed, "Gas! Get outa here!"

The way they reacted showed they were all in a state of terror.

There was a surging charge for the door and the window. It was a second-floor window, and not large, but three men went through it, one after the other, as if it was on the ground.

It was not a mad flight, except to get out of the room. Once they were out of the room, the door was shut. And trouble started in earnest.

Doc ran to the girl. As he approached her, he put his hands on his nose and shook his head to indicate it was not yet time to breathe. He got her, and moved her clear of the door.

Bullets came through the door. They came by handfuls, from two machine guns which made an enormous clatter.

Doc Savage looked around the room and there was no closet and no piece of furniture large enough to stop a bullet. There was a large old-fashioned fireplace, however.

There was the window, but now someone began shooting through it with a rifle. The rifle bullets didn't fool around. They went into the ceiling and dug out plaster and splinters as if a pickax was being used.

When the gas had been loose in the room long enough to have been rendered impotent by the oxygen, Doc said, “We are not in too happy a spot.”

“I've seen better,” she said.

She was frankly very scared.

DOC SAVAGE took to the fireplace. This house was probably a hundred or a hundred and fifty years old, and it had been built in the day when fireplaces were the important item in the house. This one was big. But more than that, they had allowed plenty of room for the smoke to get up the chimney. The chimney was huge.

Doc climbed into the chimney. There had, of course, been no fire in the fireplace for months. But there was plenty of soot.

“Come on,” Doc told the girl.

He got up a little higher into the chimney, then hauled the girl up after him. They could stay there by wedging crosswise of the chimney. It was not comfortable and it was not a place where they could stay indefinitely.

“Just like Santa Claus,” the girl said. “But what happens if they start shooting up the chimney.”

“To come to the chimney,” Doc said, “will take more nerve than they have shown. Or we hope.”

His judgment seemed to be sound. There was more shooting, enough for a battle. The house was made of stone, with walls a foot thick, and even a shell from a tank-destroyer gun would have had trouble knocking a way through. The rifle bullets did not do much damage to anything but partitions.

There was a commotion when they threw open the door and jumped inside with a hand machine gun. The gun spouted for a while, then was silent, and a man yelled, “Hell's bells, they got out of the room somehow!”

There was running around and yelling. They did considerable swearing at each other.

Then all of them got in automobiles and departed in haste.

The girl listened to the cars leaving and said, “I don't believe it!”

“They seem to be going,” Doc said.

“But why?”

The bronze man said nothing. To have announced what he suspected would have been stretching his modesty a little, since he was convinced that the men had fled because they were so impressed by the Doc Savage reputation that they hadn't dared hang around.

Doc was convinced that his reputation was exaggerated, as most reputations are. But it was a handy thing to have around.

As they got out of the fireplace, the girl got another idea, one that scared her.

“They've probably put a bomb under the place!” she cried.

That was possible. Anyway, it would be a good idea to look into it.

The blue-eyed man was lying on the floor of the upstairs room. Crimson was leaking slowly from his left leg, but apparently he had not been hit anywhere else. Doc carried him outdoors.

Because a shock would probably do as much as anything to bring the man back to normal, and because Doc didn't want to bother watching the man for a while, he knocked the blue-eyed man out with a jaw blow.

“Wait here,” he told the girl.

THERE was apparently no bomb. Doc went into the house and tried the telephone, but the phone was dead. He traced to find where the wires were cut. They were cut, all right, but the telephone line hadn't been connected to the phone for some time. It was hooked to another gadget.

The bed with the black curtains held the gadget to which the telephone line was connected.

The thing was a wired-wireless transceiver. It worked like an office intercommunicator—you talked and listened over the same speaker—but the hook-up put the conversation on the telephone wire in a high-frequency carrier wave. It was, in fact, a standard wired-wireless outfit in most respects.

(The method of voice transmission commonly known as “wired-wireless" is not new, and possibly it is as old as radio. Certainly it is more than twenty years old even in its well-developed form. A number of efforts have been made to apply the thing commercially, none with any shining success.—Ed.)

From the room, it had been possible to talk to someone. The other party to the conversation might be miles away, anywhere within a reasonable distance on the telephone network. The transmitter was powerful.

This was why, when Doc had put the induction tap on the telephone wire, the line had not sounded natural. It was the wired-wireless carrier wave which had puzzled him. He was disgusted with himself for not recognizing the sound before.

The bronze man eyed the gadget for a while.

Then he concentrated on remembering the blue-eyed man's voice. He fixed the fellow's tone, voice quality, and speech characteristics in his mind. Then Doc tried imitating the fellow's voice.

He tiptoed to the door, waited a while, then opened the door, slammed it shut again, and dashed to the bed, panting.

“Savage!” he gasped. “Savage got away!”

The wired-wireless transceiver came to life immediately, and an excited, metallic voice demanded, “Isn't Savage dead? I thought you said he was dead?”

“Thought—he was!” Doc puffed, imitating Blue-eye's voice.

“He got away?”

“Yes.”

“Clear out of there.”

“Where,” gasped Doc, “will we go?”

“You fool! You know where to go?”

Still puffing, Doc asked, “Which place do you mean? I've forgotten.”

“Room 708, in the North Prince Hotel in New York. Now get there in a hurry. And be careful.”

“O. K.”

That was that.

DOC SAVAGE left the wired-wireless gadget alone, although the things were not plentiful, and there was a chance that it might be traced to the maker. But to disturb it might alarm the distant speaker. So Doc left it there.

He searched the house rapidly. The place was a typical down-at-the-heels country farmhouse in furnishings. The stuff was old, had been used a great deal.

As nearly as he could tell from the signs, the place had been occupied by one man over a period of time, and by about a half dozen, possibly more, men for not more than a week.

All of the old, worn clothing in the closets or dumped in the attic was of the same size, which was where Doc drew his conclusion that one man had been on the farm for some time.

The cigar and cigarette stubs and liquor bottles which had been tossed outdoors were not rain-stained, and it had been just about a week since it had rained. And there was no such waste that was rain-stained.

The farm belonged to Benjamin Union Samuel Franklin. It did not take much deducting to shorten that down to Bus Franklin.

There were letters and canceled bills, statements and copies of government farm organization forms,

other stuff which an owner would receive about his farm. All of it addressed to Benjamin Union Samuel Franklin.

Bus Franklin was an absentee landlord, apparently. The hired man who operated the farm was named Lewis Gordon.

Doc went outdoors and found the blue-eyed man still unconscious on the ground. The fellow had a wallet and the wallet contained a chauffeur's license, commercial, which bore his photograph.

The blue-eyed man was Lewis Gordon, the farmer. The girl was nowhere in sight.

“Young lady!” Doc called. “Miss Carole Evans!”

She was gone. She was really gone.

Chapter VI. NORTH PRINCE, 708

DOC SAVAGE had left his car more than half a mile away, parked on a side road. He carried the blue-eyed man as he walked to the machine.

At the car, Doc tried to get Monk and Ham, but received no response, although he tried repeatedly on the little radio.

Then he contacted Johnny and Long Tom. “Anything more turn up?”

“We've been doing our best to check the trains and planes and busses,” Johnny said, “in order to trace this Bill Keeley. But no luck.”

“What,” Doc asked, “has become of Monk and Ham?”

“They still won't answer the telephone,” Johnny explained. “But I know they're downtown in Monk's penthouse place. But they're not answering the telephone.”

“Could anything have happened to them?”

“No, they're all right. You see, I called the janitor of Monk's building and asked him to go up and tell them to answer the phone. They were there, all right, and they told the janitor to go chase himself, that they were too busy to answer any telephones.”

“Did you have the janitor tell them I wanted them?” Doc asked.

“No, but I should have, I guess,” said Johnny. “Say, when do we see some action in this thing, Doc?”

“Ever hear of the North Prince Hotel?”

“North Prince? Sure, it's a nice place uptown.”

“Get up there, you and Long Tom,” Doc said. “Glue your eyes on Room 708, and do your best job of gluing.”

“What should we expect to happen?”

Doc summarized the possibilities as, “A fellow named Bill Keeley came to see me, but fled when he saw a white bird. The white bird was released by a blue-eyed man, and when I seized him, he and some other

men tried to kill me. I fooled them into thinking they had succeeded, and followed them to a farm in the country. They caught me, and I got away, after meeting a girl named Carole Evans, who is Bill Keeley's fiancée. Carole Evans didn't have time to explain what she was doing there. Now she has fled. The farm was owned by Bus Franklin, president of a rubber company for which Bill Keeley works, and Bus Franklin is supposedly dead, but possibly alive. The fantastic touches are: A wired-wireless gadget by which the master mind apparently keeps up with things without putting himself in too prominent a spot. A white bird which has mysterious significance. And some talk about something that can read the human mind. Does that make it very clear?"

"Not a bit clear to me," Johnny said. "I take it we can expect almost anything to happen."

MENTIONING the white bird reminded Doc Savage that he had forgotten the bird, so he decided to go back and get it.

But first he cast about for something to which to tie the blue-eyed man, and his eye spotted a discarded concrete fence post which lay in the weeds nearby. He lashed the man to that.

He got the bird.

Back at the car, he looked thoughtfully at the blue-eyed man, who was still tied to the fence post.

Soon there was a small trilling sound, a vague and eerie note, tiny and as exotic as a small breeze through the ice spires in an arctic wasteland. The trilling was a sound which Doc Savage made unthinkingly in moments of mental excitement, often when surprised, or when a novel idea had occurred to him.

He got in the car, drove rapidly, and reached a woods which he had noticed while en route to the farm. He was interested in the woods because a river ran through it.

He carried the blue-eyed man, still bound to the concrete post, into the woods, and placed him in thick brush. He made sure the man was located so that he could see the deep, slowly moving river.

The fellow was still unconscious.

Doc moved through the woods, collecting large rocks, rocks as large as he could readily lift, and stumps. He piled these—four of them—in the brush a few yards from where the man lay, and out of sight of the man.

He went to the man. There was, in the bronze man's car, an emergency kit containing a fairly complete assortment of drugs. He used some of these on the blue-eyed man, restoratives which brought the fellow out of his coma.

There had been a question in Doc's mind whether the man's mental shock would have subsided by now. But it had. The fellow stared at Doc and licked his lips.

Doc gave him time to get his thoughts organized, then said, "You fellows are a tight-lipped bunch, are you not?"

The blue-eyed man was silent for a while.

"How did you get away?" he demanded. "How come you weren't killed."

"Trick," Doc said, telling him the truth. "The whole neighborhood around headquarters is equipped with

trick escape devices."

"Oh."

"Want to talk?"

The man showed his teeth unpleasantly. "Not me."

"Something rather unpleasant will happen to you if you do not tell me what you know about this affair."

The blue-eyed man was not too impressed by the threat. "There is nothing worse than death," he said, "if you want some corny drama. And I happen to know you do not kill people. That's one thing they say about you."

"So you think you will not be killed?" Doc said.

"Not by you."

The bronze man showed no concern. He just looked at the man, his flake gold eyes wide and intent, and an expression of quiet fierceness about his lips.

Soon the blue-eyed man began to look alarmed. His confidence in what he had heard, that Doc Savage never took a human life, was shaken by the bronze man's expression.

"It is your hard luck," Doc said.

He wheeled and walked into the brush.

DOC SAVAGE went directly to the stumps and large rocks which he had collected at the point hidden from the blue-eyed man. There, Doc put on a voice act.

He said in his own voice, "Well, your pal doesn't want to talk, either."

In a different voice, one resembling as closely as he could make it resemble one of the men's who had escaped, he said, "The devil with you!"

"That your last word?"

"Sure."

"You don't seem to get it through your head that you are going to get killed."

In the faked voice, Doc sneered, "Hell with that! You never kill anybody."

With his own voice, he said, "No bodies have ever been found."

After which he made a grunting sound, and then screamed in the man's voice, "Don't! Tied to this fence post, I'll drown!"

In his own voice: "And your body will not float again easily, will it?"

After which he heaved the stump into the river. It made an impressive splash. Doc added a gurgle or two for realism. Doc then did almost exactly the same thing twice more. He varied the conversation and the voices. He added a realistic scream or two. And, while pretending to throw in the last victim, he said

angrily, “If you fellows did talk, you would not know enough to make it worth while.”

Then he went back to the blue-eyed man.

The man was scared. The sweat was pooled in the wrinkles on his forehead.

Doc rolled him over roughly and began tightening the ropes which held the fellow to the fence post.

“Wait a minute!” the man gasped. “You're not going to drown me in cold blood.”

Doc said, “Is your blood cold? You look hot enough, the way you're sweating.” He gave the knots another yank.

The blue-eyed man groaned.

“I'll make you a proposition,” he said.

“You've got a proposition now. You got yourself into it, and now we will see how you make out.”

“Wait, how about a deal?”

“What kind of a deal?”

“I'll tell you all I know. You let me go.”

“That is ridiculous,” Doc assured him. “The very best you could expect was not to get drowned.”

“O. K.”

“O. K. what?”

“Don't drown me, and I'll tell you what I know.”

Doc studied him. “Know enough to make it worth while?”

The man hesitated. He looked very ill. “I don't know everything you'll want the answers to,” he said.

Doc looked pleased. “That sounds like the truth for a change,” he said. “All right. We have a deal.”

IT was quiet in the woodland, although in the far distance an airplane was droning. But there was no sound other than that, except the occasional flip of a fish in the river and the sounds the insects made. There was not enough breeze to stir the tree foliage audibly, and the clouds were motionless in the sky.

“My name is Lewis Gordon,” the blue-eyed man said. “Six years ago I was released from the State penitentiary in Kentucky after serving a sentence for robbery. Benjamin Union Samuel Franklin gave me a job operating his farm. The farm was Bus Franklin's birthplace, and he wanted it kept up. That was why he put me on it. The farm didn't make him much profit, although it did about pay expenses. I was a farmer when I was a kid.

“Three weeks ago, a guy approached me, and wanted all the information he could get about Bus Franklin. He said he was a government agent. I got wise to him. He wasn't any Federal man. So I kept my eyes open and my blatt shut and followed him and he met some other guys and I saw I was right. They weren't any Federal boys. So I put in my bid.”

“Bid?”

“I demanded a cut.”

“Did you get it?”

The blue-eyed man looked sourly at the ground. “I got it in the neck,” he said.

The man was tied too tightly to more than move his head. Doc cut through the wrist bindings, and the man grunted gratefully, began kneading his wrists.

He continued, “I got it in the neck, what I mean. I was taken to a place. There was a big black bed in the place.”

“Bed,” Doc Savage interrupted. “You mean a bed like the one back at the farmhouse?”

“That's the kind. The black curtains were drawn on the bed. You talked to the curtains. Well, I sat in front of the bed and talked to the curtain. I never looked in the bed. Nobody looks in the bed if they're smart. Well, I talked—”

“You know,” Doc said, “what was in the bed at the farmhouse?”

“Yeah. A radio of some kind that worked on the telephone. But that wasn't what was in this bed I talked to that first time.”

“What *was* in it?”

“Something,” said the man, “that hadn't oughta be on this earth.”

Doc glanced at him sharply. The man didn't look as if he was exaggerating or making a wild statement. He was quite serious.

“Something—what do you mean?” the bronze man asked.

“I dunno.”

“Don't be coy. You have expressed a definite opinion that something unusual was there, something that shouldn't be on this earth, as you put it. And now you say you don't know what it was.”

“I don't. I really don't. I don't know whether it was man or beast or *thing,* but whatever it was—”

“What do you mean—*thing?”*

“A *thing* is something that ain't natural, that ain't supposed to be on the earth. A real ghost would be a *thing,* or one of them people that are supposed to turn into werewolves. See what I mean.”

“You suspected,” Doc said, “a supernatural power.”

“I sure did.”

“Why?”

“It read my mind!” The man's voice lifted. “I tell you, it read my mind!” He sounded terrified.

DOC SAVAGE was silent, thoughtful, and impressed. There was no question but that the prisoner was telling the truth, and it was equally sure that the fellow was impressed by whatever he had undergone.

“Tell me,” Doc requested, “exactly what happened.”

“Well, I sat in front of this curtain, like I said. And I answered questions—”

“Who asked the questions?”

“One of the men with me. It was kind of funny. He read them off a paper.”

“What kind of questions were they?”

“Just questions about what I liked to do, and what I liked to do when I was twenty-five years old, twenty years old, and so on.”

“Did you answer them truthfully?”

“Hell, no. I didn't think it was their business, and the questions seemed kind of silly.”

“And then what happened?”

“Nothing right then. But the next day, I got a call to come back, and a metallic voice out of this bed told me all about my past, everything. It told me things that nobody but me knew, or had ever known.”

The man looked at Doc Savage, and his face was pale.

“That thing in the bed read my mind,” he finished.

“Then what?”

“I had to go to work for it.”

“It?”

“I don't know who it is. A voice. That's all I know. A voice over that wired-wireless radio thing.”

“You have never seen your boss?”

“No.”

“Had the other men seen him?”

“No. I don't even know whether it is a him—once I'm sure it was a woman's voice. Or I think so.”

“Just why, when it read your mind, did you have to go to work for it?”

The man looked uncomfortable. “There was a thing or two that I had done that the law wouldn't have liked.”

“You had to serve, or go to jail?”

“Well, yes. Yeah, that's it.”

“I do not suppose,” Doc said dryly, “that the profit motive entered into it at all.”

The man was truthful enough. “Sure it did. But it wasn't all the profit. I didn't have any choice.”

“What,” Doc asked, “is behind the whole thing?”

“I don't know,” the man said. He began to look scared. “Now comes the part where you ain't gonna like how little I know.”

“What happened to Bus Franklin?”

“He's dead. Accident. At least, I think he is.”

“You don't know anything specifically about Bus Franklin's death?”

“No.”

“What,” asked Doc, “about Bill Keeley?”

“He's part of the plot. We were told to stop him.”

The man looked relieved, because he had something to tell about Bill Keeley, and be told it rapidly, eagerly, saying, “You see, we were told Bill Keeley was on his way to Washington with something that was important. We weren't told what Keeley had, and all I know is that we got orders to stop him at any cost.”

“You were trying to stop him when he came to see me?” Doc asked.

“That's right. That's the way it was. We were trailing him, and when we saw him meet you, we were plenty scared, and we knew we'd better knock both of you off if we could.”

“Who did you telephone in the restaurant?”

“My men. Told them to be ready to take you when you came out of the restaurant.”

“Where did Bill Keeley go?”

“I got no idea.”

DOC SAVAGE considered. He was getting quite a fund of general information, but nothing that led to a very definite point. What he was learning was having the effect of making the whole thing more mysterious, instead of clearing the air.

“What,” asked Doc, “about the white bird.”

“Oh, the bird,” the man said. “Well, I was told to let the bird loose if I wanted to scare the hell out of Bill Keeley for any reason or other.”

“And you released it in the restaurant to scare Keeley?”

“It did the job, too. Did exactly what I wanted it to do. Scared him into leaving you in a hell of a hurry.”

“Where did you get the bird?”

“Where I was told to get it.”

“Where was that?”

“I got a key in the mail. The key unlocked one of those package lockers in the subway at Times Square, and the bird was in there.”

“The key came from your boss?”

“From the *thing*, yes.”

“There is no such thing as a *thing,”* Doc said.

The blue-eyed man shrugged. “I'm not crazy, even if I do sound like it,” he said. “But after what happened to me, I'm not as sure about matters as I was. I tell you, there were things that I had never told anyone, and that no man on earth could possibly have known, and yet this *thing* knew about it.”

“After you had the interview at the black bed? The first interview?”

“Well, yes.”

“This all you know?”

“All I can think of.” The man began to look scared again. “Ain't it enough?”

“What,” inquired Doc, “do you know about the North Prince?”

“What's the North Prince?”

“You don't know.”

In a voice which fright made sincere, the man said, “No, I never heard of it.”

“It's a hotel.”

“I never heard of it.”

Watching the man closely, Doc explained, “Your *thing*, over the wired-wireless radio gadget, indicated that you should know that you were to go, if you had to flee from the farm, to Room 708, the North Prince Hotel.”

“I never knowed anything about that,” said the blue-eyed man.

Doc Savage made his low, weird trilling sound. It had no definite tune, yet its quality was musical. And it had, this time, a taint of startled horror.

It looked as if he had been tricked into sending his aids, Johnny and Long Tom, into a trap!

Chapter VII. THE RACE

THEREAFTER Doc Savage moved fast, as fast as he possibly could, with all the haste that desperation could muster. And he was more and more certain that Johnny and Long Tom were walking into something devilish.

He cut the blue-eyed man loose from the concrete fence post, flung him into the car, got behind the wheel, and began driving.

He tried to raise Johnny or Long Tom on the short-wave radio.

“Johnny!” he called repeatedly. “Long Tom! Come in! This is an emergency.”

They did not respond.

One of the assets which the strange scientific training of his early childhood had given the bronze man was the ability to control his emotions, to present a poker face to any situation. But now he showed alarm and concern.

(Since more than a hundred and twenty book-length novels about the adventures of Doc Savage and his five associates have been published, the repeated description of Doc's unusual upbringing would naturally get monotonous. Particularly to the many readers who have read most or all of these novels. But for the benefit of newcomers to Doc Savage magazine: Doc Savage was placed in the hands of scientists for training when he was a baby, and the training lasted for many years, until early manhood, in fact. Just why his father gave him such an unusual and drastic youth, Doc Savage has never learned for sure. But he does know that he was trained for the career he follows now, the unusual business of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers. It is this scientific upbringing which makes Doc Savage the remarkable, and sometimes almost freakish character, which he is.—Ed.)

The bronze man tried to raise Monk or Ham, his other two assistants who were at present in America, but he got no results.

There was one other possibility, Patricia Savage, a young woman who was Doc's cousin. Pat liked excitement, and she had helped them in a number of adventurous episodes in the past. She had a short-wave radio which she kept tuned to the frequency they used.

But he did not raise Pat, either. They had lately shifted to another radio frequency, or rather two or three different frequencies which they used at various hours of the day, in order to keep Pat out of their hair. Thinking that might be why he couldn't raise Pat, Doc tried changing the radio wave length. He got no results.

The blue-eyed man was sulking in the car beside Doc.

“When you gonna let me go?” he demanded.

Instead of answering, the bronze man removed a hypodermic needle from a case, and seizing the blue-eyed man, used the needle on the fellow before he recovered from surprise.

“What's the idea?” the man yelled indignantly. “What'd you shoot me with?”

“Sit still,” Doc said.

Shortly drowsiness began to make the man sluggish. The fellow realized what was happening, tried to get out of the car.

“You promised to let me go!” he bellowed.

“No such promise was made,” Doc assured him. “You were told you would be kept alive, and that was all. Well, you are going to be kept alive.”

The blue-eyed man went to sleep.

Doc Savage entered Manhattan Island over George Washington Bridge, turned south, and paused briefly at a hospital, where he left the blue-eyed man. The fellow was not committed to the hospital as a patient, however.

“This one,” Doc told the hospital attendant, “is to be called for.”

The attendant nodded.

That was all that was necessary to start the prisoner on his way to the strange, secret institution which Doc Savage maintained in upstate New York. The place was called the “College,” but it was hardly that. Doc sent his captured criminals there.

Once in the institution, the crooks underwent a brain operation which wiped out all memory of the past, after which they were taught a trade and taught to hate crime, then released to become useful citizens.

Because the place was a little advanced and radical for the public ideas, Doc kept it secret. It was his conviction, however, that in the future habitual criminals would be cured by some similar method.

THE North Prince Hotel was a neat-looking hostelry in the genteel middle-priced section of New York City. It was possibly a little on the high-class side, which meant that its prices were not low, and that the management did not tolerate much high life from the guests. The doorman, who had been on the job for many years, was a genteel old fellow with one leg.

He said, “Unless your room is on a lower floor, sir, so that you can use the stairs, you might prefer to do something else for a while. The elevators are temporarily out of commission. A failure of the power.”

Doc Savage thanked him and went on inside.

The elevator power was off, but there was more to it than that.

Doc Savage listened to an angry opinion, given from one of the stalled elevators, about the number of turtles that must have been crossed with the ancestors of the men working to get the elevator in operation again, in order to produce men who could work that slowly.

“Long Tom,” Doc called.

“Doc!” yelled the voice that had been complaining about the turtles. “Boy, did we make a mess!”

“What happened?” Doc asked. “Is Johnny with you?”

“I'll be superamalgamated if I don't wish I wasn't here,” said Johnny's voice.

Long Tom said, “We heard a couple of shots from the seventh floor, or what sounded like the seventh floor, and we got in the elevator to start up. I guess that was what we were supposed to do. Anyway, off went the power, and here we are.”

The elevator cage had stopped exactly between floors, so that the doors were blocked. There was a hatch in the roof for use in emergencies of this kind, but no ladder had been located yet which would reach down to the cage roof, and the elevator cables and tracks were too slick with grease to be climbed, while nothing else offered a foothold.

“How long,” Doc asked, “have you been there?”

“Not as long as it seems,” Long Tom said.

Johnny said, “A sempiternitically intransmutable perpetuity.”

One of the workmen heard the big words and clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth admiringly. “He must be talking in hieroglyphics,” he said. “It can't be English.”

Johnny and Long Tom had climbed out and were standing on the elevator-cage roof. Doc Savage uncoiled a silken line which he carried, dropping it down for them to climb. They grunted around and had trouble with the silk cord, claiming they couldn't hold on to it, or that it cut their hands, so Doc pulled them up himself.

“You say there were shots?” the bronze man asked.

“Seventh floor, sounded as if,” Long Tom agreed.

“What about that?” Doc asked a hotel employee.

“There was a report of shots. But we didn't locate them. And we finally decided it was an automobile backfiring which caused the trouble.”

“There has been no excitement?”

“Nothing but the elevator, as far as we know.” The hotel employee began looking alarmed. “I am the assistant manager,” he explained. “Is there something wrong?”

Before Doc could answer, a bellboy arrived from below, out of breath from dashing up the stairs, to draw the assistant manager aside and whisper in his ear.

The assistant manager beckoned, looking alarmed.

“A strange thing,” he told Doc. “The operator of the freight elevator, or the service elevator as it is called, has just been found in the alleyway at the rear of the hotel. Someone knocked him senseless, he says.”

“Who did it?”

“One woman, and at least four men, he says,” the assistant manager said.

ROOM 708 at the North Prince was not a single room, but a suite of living room, sun room, two baths, two bedrooms, and serving pantry. It was rather a majestic layout, renting for forty dollars a day.

The assistant manager let them in, unlocking the door. He looked as indignant as a bulldog which had just been bitten by another dog. “The idea of these people, creating a disturbance!” he said.

There was no disturbance in the suite, but there had been one. Quite a disturbance, from the looks of the place. The hotel man took one look at the damage, and screamed, “They've ruined everything!”

Doc Savage looked about, deciding that the fight had been a respectable one in violence. It looked as if everything in the room had been used to club somebody, someone even having yanked the chandelier loose from the ceiling to use it as a weapon.

“Oh, oh, oh!” said the hotel man.

Doc Savage asked, “Did anyone hear this fight while it was going on?”

“No. That *is* strange, isn't it?” muttered the hotel man.

“It looks like almost too good a fight,” Doc said.

“What do you mean?”

The bronze man did not explain what he meant, but Long Tom and Johnny exchanged knowing glances, then inspected the damage to the room with suspicious eyes. Such a fight certainly should have alarmed other parts of the hotel.

“Fake,” Long Tom whispered. “Somebody wanted it to look like there was a heck of a fight here.”

“Maybe, and maybe not,” said Johnny, who was concerned enough that he was using small words. “I think this hotel is well made and soundproofed. This is a corner suite, too, and if there weren't any guests on either side or above or below, maybe the fight just wasn't heard.”

“Well, I'm suspicious.”

“I am, too,” said the assistant manager. He sent for the registry, to ascertain what nearby rooms were occupied.

Doc Savage had gone into the sun room, which was the very corner room, with huge glass windows, walls of glass on two sides. The furniture was the usual bamboo and reed stuff found in sun rooms, although being in the North Prince it was quite fancy.

Doc lifted a blanket off a settee, and said, “Look here!”

Long Tom almost yelped his astonishment, while Johnny demanded, “Is she dead?”

She wasn't dead.

She was Carole Evans, fiancée of Bill Keeley.

She sat up, saying, “Oh, I was terrified. I thought you were those terrible men again!”

JOHNNY and Long Tom watched the young woman suspiciously. She was very pretty, but they were not too susceptible to pretty girls.

Johnny Littlejohn was longer and thinner, physically, than it seemed possible that any man could be and still be alive, much less in a state of rousing health. His incredible height probably added to the impression of thinness which he gave, although the thinness needed no accenting. He looked somewhat the part he lived, which was that of an eminent archaeologist and geologist. The monocle which dangled from his lapel was not an affectation, but a magnifier which he used in his work. Once, before Doc Savage had operated on a bad eye, Johnny had worn the monocle as a monocle.

Long Tom Roberts, who was Major Thomas J. Roberts, was not thin, although he certainly was not fat. But he looked as if he'd never had a well day in his life, which was exactly the opposite of the truth. His anaemic appearance probably resulted from his complexion, alongside which a mushroom was ruddy and robust.

“She thought we were those terrible men again,” Long Tom said, still eyeing the girl sourly.

Carole Evans looked at him, apparently uncomfortable.

“Carole,” Doc said. “What happened?”

She looked at Long Tom and Johnny for a while longer, then shifted her gaze to Doc Savage's face.

“Will anybody believe anything I say?” she asked.

“Possibly.”

“Well, they don't look as if they would,” she said. “But here is the story: After I left the farm, I got a ride to the railway station and just made contact with an express to New York, and I hurried up here.”

“Why here?”

“Because Bill Keeley was staying here.”

Doc Savage turned to the assistant manager of the hotel to corroborate this, and the man nodded, said, “A Mr. William Jerome Keeley, of High Point, Kentucky, has the suite engaged.”

“How long has he been here?”

“Two days.”

Doc said nothing more at the moment, but Long Tom Roberts looked at Carole and asked the young woman, “What did you use to hit the operator of the service elevator?”

She stared at them. She looked innocently puzzled. “I do not understand,” she said. “I came up in the regular elevators, not the service one. And I was standing in the sitting room talking to Bill Keeley, when some men broke in through the door. Bill yelled for me to go into the sun room, which I did, and I have been there since.”

Long Tom asked, “What did you do, crawl under the couch?”

“Yes, part of the time.”

Long Tom's snort was completely skeptical. “You just hid under the couch and let these guys carry off your fiancé. A fine gal you are. Didn't help him a bit, eh?”

Doc Savage thought that was a bit raw, too, but the biggest thought in his mind was that it wasn't like the girl. During that hair-raising trouble on the farm, she had not shown any shortage of nerve.

Carole was staring at Long Tom.

“Look,” she said. She went into the sun room, and pulled back a window drapery, and a wall tapestry which was next to it. The drapery and tapestry were punched with holes which no one had noticed, bullets obviously having done the punching.

“I lay behind that couch,” she said, “and they thought I was behind the window drapery. So they filled the drapery full of bullet holes. Here is how I got away from them.”

She went to the couch, which was an ornate chintz-covered thing with a fringe of pleated cloth around the bottom. She lifted the fringe, and it became apparent that there was room enough for a person of her size to squeeze under the couch. “They didn't know I was there.”

She straightened and stared at Johnny and Long Tom.

“Death,” she said, “isn't a funny thing when it starts looking down your throat. You can talk big and brave about courage and sacrifice, but that is just talk. You can take it from me, it is just talk. When it comes

looking for you, that is different. And when you get away from it, when you crawl away from it and hide, and you know you have hidden from it, you feel like staying there." She looked them over from head to foot.

"I was so scared," she finished, "that I stayed under that thing until a few minutes ago. Then I got out, and when I heard someone at the door again, I just had time to duck under this blanket."

She looked them up and down again.

"I'm not ashamed of it, either," she said.

LONG TOM and Johnny had nothing more to say, the wind having been taken out of their sails.

Doc Savage, to hide a smile at the discomfiture of his two woman-hating associates, got busy inspecting the hotel suite. The inspection gave him nothing of interest, however, other than the caliber of the guns which had fired the bullets into the drapery and the tapestry, which might or might not be of value.

The bird was different. The bird was interesting enough. It was a white bird and it was in a bureau drawer.

The bird fluttered out of the drawer when Doc Savage opened it, and sailed about the room until the bronze man, cautious about touching the bird with his bare hands, got a pillowcase and succeeded in capturing it.

It was, like the other white birds, an ordinary English sparrow, the feathers of which had been dyed white.

In the drawer where the sparrow had been, there was nothing.

Doc took the white bird into the other room. He opened his hands, showing it to the others, to the young woman, Carole Evans.

At first, the girl merely stared at the bird.

Doc said, "I found it in the bureau drawer in the bedroom."

The girl's eyes started getting wide, wider and wider, showing the whites, until it seemed they could not possibly be more wide, nor more horrified. Her face likewise twisted, the cheek muscles flattening and pulling her lips into a thin tension.

She said, her words unusually distinct considering the twisted condition of her face, "So it's that mental monster."

After which she folded down on the floor, and Johnny, examining her quickly, said, "She's fainted."

Long Tom Roberts looked at Doc Savage. "What'd she say? Monster. Mental monster, wasn't that it? That sounds silly."

"It didn't sound silly the way she said it," Johnny told him. "I'll be superamalgamated."

THERE was no question but that the girl had genuinely fainted, Doc Savage found. He administered

restoratives, but she responded slowly, so there was nothing to do but stand around and wait.

Doc said, “You fellows never did get track of Monk and Ham?”

“No,” Long Tom admitted.

“You are sure they are at Monk's laboratory?”

“Yes.”

“While we are waiting,” Doc said, “I will try to raise them.”

Monk Mayfair's penthouse establishment was downtown, far downtown, in the Wall Street financial district. Monk had picked the neighborhood for a residence, he claimed, because it was quiet at nights and on Sundays, but Doc Savage suspected the real reason was that Monk happened to own the building on top of which the penthouse was located. The building was Monk's only piece of property, other than his plane and boat and car, but it was quite an impressive piece of property for Monk, who claimed to be as poor as a mouse.

Monk was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, actually, and known among great chemists all over the world for his work in industrial chemistry.

It was natural, of course, that Monk would be with Ham Brooks.

Ham was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, eminent lawyer, pride of Harvard's law school in fact, and claimant to the title of best-dressed man in the country.

Ham and Monk had carried on a quarrel, good-natured in spite of the fact that half the time it sounded like a genuine murder in the creating, that had lasted over a period of years.

Close acquaintances claimed they had never heard Monk and Ham speak a civil word to each other, except once or twice when it had happened by accident.

Monk and Ham were inclined to be a wild and unpredictable pair, and Doc was not surprised that they were having a spell of paying no attention to the telephone or the radio.

He was pleasurably relieved, however, when he got them on the phone immediately.

It was Monk who answered the telephone.

Doc said, “Monk, we are mixed up in something where you and Ham can help us. Is Ham with you?”

“Ham is right here,” Monk said.

Doc knew, then, that something was wrong. It was in Monk Mayfair's tone, something unnatural.

Monk added, “Doc, has this got something to do with a devilish business of something knowing what goes on in a man's mind—”

That was all. He did not finish. The telephone line became quite dead.

Chapter VIII. THE MENTAL MYSTERY

MONK MAYFAIR was a wide gentleman who was quite homely and professed to be somewhat proud

of the resemblance he bore to an ape. It was quite a resemblance, so it was probably a good thing that he didn't mind. Despite the fact that he was an eminent chemist, he had practically no forehead, and he usually wore a big amiable grin, which wasn't turned on now.

The muzzle of the gun into which he was looking had a tendency to discourage any desire to grin.

“What's the idea,” Monk demanded, “of pointing a gun at me and making me hang up the telephone?”

The man who held the gun was well dressed, clean-looking, about fifty. He was smooth-shaven, his hair was groomed and his teeth, when he exhibited them by smiling, were white and bright from brushing.

“Precaution,” he said.

“You better take a precaution yourself.” Monk indicated the gun. “You better put it away. You might irritate me.”

“Sorry,” the man said. He put the gun away.

Monk, watching his movements, decided the man had not used a gun a great deal. He was too clumsy with it.

“Your name's Royal Bond,” Monk said. “That what you say?”

“That is correct.”

Monk turned to the young woman who was with the man. “And this is Brandis?”

“Miss Brandis York,” she said.

“Have you got a gun, too?” Monk asked.

“I have not. I hate them.”

Monk said, “I don't care for them much myself, when they're pointed at me. If you have any influence over your friend, here, persuade him not to point no more guns at me. The next time he does it, I'm liable to relieve him of an arm.”

“Mr. Royal Bond,” she said, “is my employer.”

“Persuade him anyway,” Monk said.

She smiled. She was a spectacular black-haired girl, tall and theatrical, and probably she was in her early twenties. She was so unusual, so much a show-girl type, that the competence in her manner was somehow itself a little startling.

She had arrived, with the man who said his name was Royal Bond, about fifteen minutes before. Monk and Ham had at first pretended they were not at home, but the pair of visitors had pounded thunderously on the door, and shouted that they knew the place was occupied, the building superintendent having told them so.

So Monk and Ham had let them in.

Monk and Ham had been staging an argument, and they had not wanted company. They had muffled the telephone and switched off the radio in order not to be disturbed, and were going at it hotly, the point being which of their pets, the pig Habeas Corpus or the chimp Chemistry, was the more intelligent. The

fact that they had fussed over the subject for years wasn't the point. This was just a day, apparently, when they felt like an extra special argument, so they were hard at it.

The visitors—Royal Bond and Brandis York, they said their names were—had not yet had time to say much. Monk had unmuffled the telephone automatically, and Doc's call had come. The call had come just after Brandis had said something about wanting to see Monk and Ham because there was something terrible that involved a matter of knowing what went on in men's minds.

"We have got to get out of here!" Brandis York said.

Monk frowned. "Eh? Why?"

"Your telephone. It might be tapped."

"Nonsense."

The man who had said his name was Royal Bond produced his gun again. It was a small nickel-plated weapon with a pearl handle, one which looked very new, the kind of gun that a greenhorn would buy. But if it went off, it still wouldn't do a man any good.

"This isn't a time for foolishness," said Royal Bond. "Come on. We leave here."

MONK and Ham followed instructions, after exchanging sly looks which agreed that it might be more interesting to play along and see what this was all about, than to attack the man now. There was no denying it would be safer, too.

They took the two pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry. Habeas was a pig with remarkably long legs and phenomenal ears, a runt hog of Arabian extraction. The pig was intelligent and knew a number of tricks, but then he should have been, because Monk had subjected the shote to what was probably the equivalent of a couple of college educations. Monk had acquired the pig in the beginning to irritate Ham Brooks, who didn't like pork on the hoof or on a platter. Chemistry, the chimp, was a runt ape of doubtful ancestry who had the questionable virtue of looking almost exactly like Monk Mayfair, and Ham had acquired the chimp for that reason, to irritate Monk. The result was that the two men did more quarreling over the pets than over anything else.

They took an elevator down to the street.

"What about a car?" Ham asked. He had brought along his cane, an innocent-looking black stick which was in reality a sword cane with the blade tipped with a chemical which would produce sudden senselessness.

There was a car waiting, a sedan. It seemed to belong to Royal Bond. The tires were thin, and he drove carefully, keeping away from streetcar tracks and avoiding sudden stops.

"Where," asked Brandis York, "is Doc Savage?"

"He was just on the telephone," Monk said.

"But where has he been? We have been trying to find him."

"You know where his headquarters is?"

"Yes. He was not there."

“How long have you been trying to find him?”

“For nearly two hours,” the girl said. “And we were desperate, so we came down to talk to you.” She looked at Monk. “We had to see you. That's why we walked in on you.”

Monk's strong point certainly wasn't his resistance to a pretty girl. A neatly turned ankle, as the saying goes, was his strongest poison. This he knew to be a fact, but he was always perfectly willing to be poisoned again.

“Young lady, we're not mad at you at all,” Monk said fatuously.

In return for this, Monk received a smile which made his toenails crackle happily.

“I hoped you would be sweet about it,” Brandis told him.

Ham Brooks looked slightly indignant, because he liked a pretty girl himself, and it always irritated him to see Monk make any hay.

Ham said, “You want to be careful of this homely gossoon, Monk, and always remember that he has a wife and thirteen children. All the latter, tragically enough, resemble their father.”

Monk turned purple. This was the identical lie which he usually told about Ham. Ham had beat him to it.

ROYAL BOND stopped the limousine before an office building just off Fifth Avenue, in the better part of the street above Forty-second. He put the car against the curb with infinite care not to rub the tires.

“What's this?” Monk asked.

“My office,” said Royal Bond. “It seems as safe a place as any to talk.”

They went to the twenty-seventh floor of an office building without anything else happening.

ROYAL BOND

CONSULTANT

This was lettered in genteel gold script on an office door.

“Consultant? What's that mean?” Monk asked.

“We'll get to that,” Brandis assured him.

“You're doing all the talking,” Ham told the girl. He pointed at Royal Bond. “Hasn't your boss got a tongue?”

“Mr. Bond is worried,” Brandis assured them.

The office was large, but it was more than that. The decorator had taken a great deal of pains to give the place an air of extreme dignity and affluence. You felt like a banker as soon as you walked into it.

Royal Bond looked flustered and dashed to one room after another, and to closets, looking into them as if he expected to find them full of wild cats. He seemed only partly satisfied when he found nothing. Worried, Brandis had said, and she was right.

“There is an inner office,” Bond said.

The inner office was more of a comfortable living room than an office. There was a fireplace, the chairs were all enormous overstuffed things, huge chairs, pleasant and very comfortable. They faced the fireplace.

Monk started to move one of the chairs and discovered it was bolted to the floor.

“I'm sorry,” Royal Bond apologized. “I like the arrangement of the chairs the way they are, but visitors were always moving them, and I discovered that for some reason it irritated me no end. And so I simply screwed them fast to the floor.”

Monk sank into one of the chairs, leaned back. “Boy!” he said. “Comfortable.”

The chairs were arranged, they realized, so that none of them were particularly aware of any of the others. They could see the others, but not without turning their heads, and it was more comfortable not to do so.

Royal Bond stood in front of them. The arrangement of the chairs was ingenious, for they made the man the immediate focal point of interest.

“THIS is the story” said Royal Bond. “First, who am I? I will answer that. I am no one very important. I began life as a doctor, and I was not a very successful one. They always told me I was too full of theories to be a good doctor, but I suspect it was my lack of interest in germs and scalpels. I was more interested in human beings. I suppose you would call it psychology.”

The man did not have a very pleasant speaking voice, although he put his words and his sentences together coherently enough. His delivery was halting, and somehow a listener found himself thinking about the man and about the office, thinking about anything that happened to come to mind, in fact. It was the same reaction that any dull talker provokes, in fact.

Monk discovered himself thinking about the attractive Brandis. He glanced at Ham, deciding disgustedly that Ham was thinking about the same subject.

Royal Bond continued, “At present, and for the past two years, I have been consulting examiner for a number of insurance companies. My duties are simple. When there is some doubt about an applicant for an insurance policy, or when the applicant is asking for a particularly large policy, I make a sort of additional medical examination. Except for that, I do not practice medicine or surgery.”

The girl, Brandis, apparently worried by the poor job of talking which Royal Bond was doing, interposed, “Mr. Bond is quite busy, and his work is somewhat more important than he has led you to believe.”

Bond looked uncomfortable.

“I tell you about me,” he said, “because I thought that was the best way to begin my unusual story.”

“Get to the unusual part,” Monk suggested.

“Bus Franklin,” said Bond, “came to me for an examination three weeks ago.”

Monk and Ham were interested, but not startled. They knew nothing of what Doc Savage had been

doing, so they hadn't heard of Bus Franklin, the Black Pagoda Co., Bill Keeley, Carole Evans, or mysterious white birds.

“Bus Franklin's visit was in connection with an insurance policy, which is saying that he came to me in the way of business,” said Bond.

“Who's Bus Franklin?” asked Monk.

“Don't you know?”

“No.”

Royal Bond looked disappointed. “Bus Franklin is the president of a concern called the Black Pagoda Co. I understand he is a fairly wealthy man. The policy was large. I examined him, and passed him as satisfactory, a good risk.”

“This story,” said Monk impatiently, “isn't very exciting.”

Royal Bond winced. “It gets exciting. Don't worry.”

“Well, let's hear the exciting part.”

“There was nothing, absolutely nothing, about my talk with Bus Franklin that would make anyone want to kill me,” said Bond.

Monk sat up, interested. “Who's trying to kill you?”

“There is,” said Bond, “more to it than just killing me.”

“What more?”

“The white bird.”

“Yeah?”

“And something about a monstrous thing that can read your mind.”

MONK swapped glances with Ham, both of them looking about equally skeptical. It sounded silly.

“You got us confused,” said Monk. “Can you make it make sense?”

“A man named Bill Keeley came to me and asked me if I had talked to Bus Franklin,” said Royal Bond. “And when I admitted I had, he tried to kill me. He would have succeeded but for Miss Brandis.”

He gave Brandis a look of approval, something that Monk and Ham had also been doing.

Brandis said, “I threw a bottle of ink in this Bill Keeley's face. And then I hit him with a paperweight.”

“And then,” said Monk approvingly, “you should have called the police.”

“If he hadn't got up and ran,” she said, “I would have.”

“He got away?”

“Yes.”

“You should have called the cops anyhow.”

“I realize that now,” the young woman admitted. “But Mr. Bond thought that would be the end of it, and we didn't.”

“You see,” said Royal Bond, “I thought the young man was intoxicated, or under the influence of drugs, or something. And I didn't want the newspaper notoriety, because my business is very high class and dignified. When your name is mentioned in connection with any rough stuff I don't care how innocent you are, there are always people who say that you probably weren't innocent, and I think there is a taint of suspicion in the mind of everyone who reads it.”

Monk nodded. “All right, that takes care of the attack on your life. The white bird was next, wasn't it?”

“Those two,” said Royal Bond, “happened to me today. This afternoon, in fact. I got a telephone call from a man—”

“A woman first,” interrupted Brandis. “That is, a woman placed the call, asking for Mr. Bond. It might merely have been someone's secretary—”

“The fellow didn't sound like a man who would have a secretary,” Bond put in.

Monk asked patiently, “Where does the bird and the mind reader come in?”

Bond gestured as if pleading for patience.

“This rowdy, over the telephone, said that Bill Keeley was going to kill me,” he said. “He told me it was because of the white bird and that damned monster which could read minds.”

The man went silent. He looked satisfied with himself, as if he had told them everything.

“Is that all?” Monk practically yelled at him.

“All. Yes.”

“But hell, it don't make sense!”

“I assure you,” said Royal Bond, “that is all the man said to me. And then he hung up.”

Monk sounded as if he wanted to wave his arms, and shouted, “Just that, and you got so scared you came to us? Why'd you come to us, anyway?”

“I tried to go to Doc Savage first,” Bond corrected. “I could not find him, so I found you. I want you to protect me.”

“Protect you from what?”

Bond looked at them thoughtfully.

“I am a poor talker,” he said. “I seem to have failed to impress on you the horrible conviction which I gathered from the events, the conviction that my life is in deadly danger. And furthermore, that some hideous thing is happening.”

Monk and Ham both stared at him. They suddenly realized he wasn't fooling. He sounded so serious that

he scared them.

Chapter IX. TRUTH AND THE TRAP

MONK and Ham got to their feet. They had worked together so much that they often did things simultaneously, without a conference. Their conferences were never very satisfactory, anyway, because each one hated to agree with the other.

“Where are you going?” Royal Bond demanded wildly. “I want you to protect me.”

“You stay here,” Monk told him. “We'll go in the outer office and protect you from there.”

Bond looked sheepish, and uncomfortable, for he understood that they wanted to talk over what he had told them, and decide whether he was a liar.

Brandis followed Monk and Ham into the outer office. She was a very attractive young woman indeed. When she smiled, the air got full of electricity.

“It's awfully kind of you to help,” she said. “I know Mr. Bond hasn't made it clear why the thing is so terrible.”

“Maybe it isn't terrible,” Ham suggested.

“Oh, but it is,” she said quickly. “Mr. Bond doesn't scare easily, and you can see he is concerned.”

Monk grinned. “Don't worry. We're going to look into it. It sounds interesting.”

She smiled, said, “I imagine you want to do some private telephoning,” and left them alone.

“Smart girl,” Monk told him.

“If you don't stop rolling your eyes, they'll drop out of your head,” Ham said sourly.

They used the telephone, making about ten calls checking up on Royal Bond. He seemed to be what he said he was. From three of the insurance companies which employed him as an examining consultant came good reports.

They tried to telephone Doc Savage at headquarters, but there was no answer.

“Where do you suppose he is?” Ham asked.

“I don't know,” Monk said. “We shouldn't have come off without our portable radios.”

Ham then started violently, having thought of something. “Say!” he exclaimed. “Why did this Royal Bond come to Doc for help? Why not the police? He didn't explain that?”

The thing looked strange to Monk, too, so both he and Ham charged for the inner offices.

Brandis confronted them.

“Where's your boss?” Ham demanded.

She took them into a different inner office, where Bond sat before a more conventional desk. The man leaped to his feet when they burst in, whipping out a revolver.

“Oh, oh!” he apologized quickly. “I'm so nervous. I . . . you frightened me, coming in so suddenly.”

“Why,” asked Monk, “did you call on Doc Savage for help? Why not the police?”

Royal Bond looked amazed. “Didn't I explain that? It was because the person who threatened me over the telephone specifically warned me not to go to Doc Savage for assistance.”

“You were particularly warned not to see Doc?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“The answer to that,” said Bond, “I don't know.”

“Want to go talk to Doc right now?”

Bond nodded eagerly. “I certainly do.”

Monk and Ham both grinned, for it was plain that Royal Bond did not have any too much faith in their ability to protect him. The man wanted to see Doc badly.

“Come on,” Monk said.

Pretty Brandis started to remain behind at the office.

“You must come, too,” Ham said. “We have reason to think you are in danger, too.”

He didn't have reason to think anything of the kind, but he thought it was a very bright idea.

THEY left the office and rode the elevator down to the Fifth Avenue lobby of the office building.

They were out on the street when the small man in the blue hat accosted them. The man's age was not very definite, nor was his nationality, his face, or his manner of walking. The only really definite thing about him was the blue hat, which was a light glaring blue color.

The man in the blue hat walked past them at first, giving Monk and Ham a curious stare which they usually received from pedestrians. Monk and Ham, with the pig and the chimp, drew stares anywhere.

Then the man dashed back.

“Aren't you Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks?” he demanded. “Two of Doc Savage's associates?”

Monk admitted it.

“Come here!” the man exclaimed. “Come here quick!” He pointed. “That way! That cigar store!”

Monk, puzzled, asked, “What's in the cigar store?”

“A radio!” the man said excitedly. “I want you to hear it! The news! Something has just happened to Doc Savage. It's on the radio! I was just in there!”

Both Ham and Monk were alarmed.

“Come on!” they told Bond and Brandis.

The cigar store was a typical tobacco shop of the Fifth Avenue section, subdued and dignified. In the rear there was a radio with several men grouped around it, listening attentively. A deep voice was saying, “And now I will interrupt this general information about the background of Doc Savage to bring you another late news flash concerning his accident.”

The man with the blue hat yelled, “Here are two of Doc Savage's helpers. They want to hear this.”

The group of men separated, let Monk and Ham and Bond and Brandis in to the radio.

They waited.

The radio was quite silent.

Monk and Ham realized the radio wasn't even switched on.

“What the heck!” Monk exploded.

Ham gasped, “Monk! It's a gag!”

A man—he had the voice which they had thought was a radio announcer's voice—said, “It was a pretty good gag too. And this trick goes with it!” He whipped out a pistol.

THE one thing which Monk Mayfair most enjoyed and best understood was physical conflict. So the radio-voiced man hardly had his gun in view before Monk was on him with both fists. Monk got hold of the gun.

Ham jumped back, unsheathed his sword cane and stuck two men before they had time to move.

The girl, Brandis, screamed loudly.

Royal Bond shut his eyes tightly and turned white and sprawled out on the floor and was motionless.

A man who had been in the front of the store dashed to the door and closed a folding steel grille of a door which was closed at night to protect the glass door. He had obviously prepared himself with the key to lock this, and he now locked it. He also closed the glass door.

There was no such thing as a quick retreat except through the back door, if there was a back door. None was immediately noticeable.

Monk got the radio-voiced man's pistol. He hit the man over the head with it. Then Monk reversed the gun and tried to start shooting.

Brandis was looking foolishly at Royal Bond. “He fainted,” she said in a voice that was remarkably normal.

A man picked up a steel chair and ran at Ham. The man knew what he was doing, knew that a chair was probably the best makeshift weapon for fighting a man with a sword. In fact, if a man was not a good fencer, it was better than another sword.

(Instructors in Commando-type fighting teach the use of a common chair against a man with a knife. The odds are at least two to one in favor of the man with the chair. Just use them like lion tamers use

them.—Ed.)

Monk fired his captured revolver, and his fist got full of noise, flying steel, smoke. The gun had blown up. Evidently hitting the man over the head had put the barrel out of line with the cylinder.

Monk danced around trying to find whether his fist was badly damaged.

"That's what you get," he yelled, "when you buy a gun for three dollars ninety-eight!"

There were no more guns in sight. Three men were on the floor, the two Ham had nicked with his sword cane, and the one Monk had beaned. The chemical on the tip of Ham's cane sword worked quickly.

The man with the chair and Ham engaged briefly and furiously. Ham backed away looking foolish. He had snapped off his sword cane at the hilt, lost the blade.

Brandis screamed a few more times.

"Help!" she shrieked. "Police! Police!"

The man with the blue hat howled, "Get them, guys! Get them! What are you waiting on?"

One of his companions snarled indignantly, "Waiting on some help from you, you ornament!"

They closed in on Monk and Ham. There were six of them left; six who knew how to fight.

IT was the man with the blue hat who finally got Monk down, downing him behind the counter, where Monk had scrambled in hopes of finding something that could be used as a club.

There was, Monk had time to discover, another man behind the counter. He wore a cutaway coat and he smelled strongly of pipe tobacco, so evidently he was the proprietor of the tobacco place. He was unconscious, probably having been slugged.

The wearer of the blue hat wrapped around Monk's legs. Monk beat him furiously, did no good before he was carried down by more assailants. The space behind the counter was narrow. Monk got the impression there were at least fifty men, all galloping around on top of him. He got tramped out of breath, out of patience, out of fight.

They rolled him over and tied him.

They got Ham down soon afterward, throwing the chair at him, then kicking at his head.

Strangely enough, the girl Brandis put up the most active fight. She moved about swiftly, and she kicked several men and hit others. But they caught her, and held her and tied her.

They tied Royal Bond also.

Monk had his breath back by then.

"We got licked in a roughhouse fight," he told the dazed Ham.

He sounded as if it was the worst disgrace that could possibly befall him.

The man with the blue hat staggered over to Monk and said, "You act as if that was the end of things for you."

“It's the all-time bottom,” Monk said.

“You ain't lying,” the man said. “It's the all-time finish, too.”

He hit Monk a terrific blow on the head with the blackjack. He slugged Ham. Then the girl.

THE police broke in about ten minutes later. The fight had been heard in the street. The explosion of the revolver which had shattered in Monk's hand had attracted the attention of a pedestrian, and he had looked through the barred door long enough to get an idea of what was going on. He had run for a policeman.

The police had some trouble breaking in through the folding metal grille, and more trouble finding the back door. It developed that the latter led into a courtyard, access to which was gained from the other end of the block.

They found the cigar store empty, except for the proprietor, who was regaining his senses.

“Some men came in and slugged me,” was all the proprietor knew.

A policeman was following around behind the counter when there was a fluttering sound, and a small bird flew up to the lighting fixture.

“What the hell's that?” asked the surprised cop.

The bird was white.

Chapter X. FLIGHT WEST

DOC SAVAGE had reached Monk Mayfair's penthouse laboratory in the Wall Street district some time previously. With Doc were Long Tom Roberts and Johnny Littlejohn, and Carole Evans. Carole Evans had recovered from her faint about the time they reached Monk's place, but there had been no previous chance to question her.

And they let the questioning go while they dashed about trying vainly to locate Monk and Ham.

Johnny said, “A longaniminously leucophlegmatic aspect.”

Carole Evans stared.

“He means,” Long Tom translated for her, “that the peaceful look of the place indicates there probably wasn't any violence.”

“Does he always use those words?”

“Often enough to be aggravating.”

“Where does he get them?”

“I don't know,” Long Tom said. “Sometimes I think he manufactures them.”

Johnny snorted.

Doc Savage said, “We will go to headquarters.”

The bronze man's metallic features were expressionless, a fact Carole remarked upon as they rode uptown. She whispered to Long Tom, “Your two friends probably are not in danger. Mr. Savage does not seem much worried.”

Long Tom grunted, but made no other comment. The fact that Doc did not look concerned did not mean a thing.

They parked the car in a private garage—entered from the side street, through a radio-controlled door—in the building which housed Doc's headquarters. A private elevator took them to the eighty-sixth floor.

The headquarters was the whole eighty-sixth floor. It was divided into three rooms, one of them a reception room that was small, the other two big rooms, a library and a laboratory. The laboratory had more floor space than some factories, and the finest equipment of its type in existence.

They went no farther than the reception room. The place was furnished with some heavy leather chairs, a remarkable inlaid table that looked somewhat Oriental, and a huge old safe.

“Find out if Monk and Ham have been here,” Doc told Johnny.

Then Doc wheeled to the girl, Carole, and said, “Let's have your story.”

“Story?” Her eyes were wide. I have told you—”

“Nothing,” Doc interrupted. “Nothing whatever about why you are here. Nothing that sounds like the truth.”

She was angry now. “I like that!” she said.

“We do not.”

The bronze man said nothing except that he did not like it, but his tone, and the silence which followed his statement, had a sobering effect on the girl. She stopped being angry and was uneasy.

“I made a mistake,” she said.

“You said that before, at the farm,” Doc said. “What do you plan to do, go on making mistakes?”

“You're right, I did make more than one,” she admitted.

Johnny came in. He had searched the library and the laboratory. “No Monk and Ham,” he said.

CAROLE EVANS sat in a chair, perching tensely on its edge, and said, “It is not true that I am Bill Keeley's fiancée. Not literally true, although Bill Keeley may think it's true. The fact is that I was hired to trail him and see what was on his mind.”

“Who hired you?” Doc asked.

“Bus Franklin.”

“The missing president of the Black Pagoda Co.?”

"Yes."

"Go on."

"I do not know what was behind this, but Bus Franklin became worried about Bill Keeley, afraid Keeley was behind something that was going on. Bus Franklin told me that the thing was something devilish about something that knew what went on in a human mind, and about a white bird, but he did not say more than that. He said he knew no more. He might have been lying. I do not know."

Doc Savage made no comment.

Carole Evans continued, "So I have been trailing Bill Keeley, and trailing men who seemed to be in turn following Keeley. That was how I got to the farm, following those men."

She looked at Doc Savage.

"I saw you with a small white bird," she said, "such as had been described to me. That made me suspicious of you. That was why I fled from the farm. Suspicious."

"What significance have the birds?"

"I've told you I don't know."

Doc asked patiently, "You went from the farm to Bill Keeley's apartment."

"Yes. I've told you that, too."

"How did you know where he lived?"

"He doesn't live there. He just rented the suite for his stay in New York."

"You came to New York with him?"

"Of course not," she said sharply. "I came up here to buy some clothes, and to look for a job. Or that's what I told Bill."

Doc asked, "Just why did Bill Keeley come to New York?"

"I'm not sure. I think he was investigating something, or had some kind of business here, and if the business turned out a certain way, he was going on to Washington. That's all I know."

The telephone was buzzing, and Doc picked up the receiver. It was an insurance company, a voice informed him. The caller named a large insurance concern.

"I thought you might be anxious for the information which your aid, Mr. Monk Mayfair, called us about," the voice informed Doc. "We called back to Mr. Royal Bond's office, but got no answer."

"What," Doc asked, "was this information Monk wanted?"

The insurance man said, "Will you tell him that Royal Bond examined Mr. Bus Franklin three weeks ago, in connection with an insurance policy for four hundred thousand dollars which Mr. Franklin wished to take out."

"That all Monk wanted to know?"

"Yes."

“And he called from Royal Bond's office?”

“That is right.”

“Exactly where,” Doc asked, “is Royal Bond's office?”

THEY reached Royal Bond's office building with such speed that Carole Evans was flustered. The way Long Tom and Johnny kept an eye on the young woman bothered her too. “I'm not a crook,” she said.

“Don't mind us,” Long Tom told her. “We've been wrong once or twice.”

Standing on the sidewalk, Doc Savage looked up at the building for a moment. “There seems to be a fire up there,” he said.

They entered the lobby hurriedly, to be stopped by a policeman and a fireman.

“Sorry, but there's a bad fire upstairs,” the officer said. “No one can go up. We are going to have to empty the building, in fact.”

“Where did it start?”

“An office occupied by a Royal Bond.”

They got upstairs all right. Doc Savage had honorary commissions in both the police and fire departments which helped in such emergencies.

The fire was big, hot, violent. The building was supposed to be fireproof, but there seemed to be plenty to burn anyway.

“How in the hell such a hot fire could've got started, I don't understand,” a fireman official grumbled.

“It might have been a started fire,” Doc suggested.

“Yeah, but what would a firebug use to start a fire like that?”

Doc Savage had been testing the character of the smoke, and had been in close to the flames.

“Thermite,” he said. “Any of the stuff they make incendiary bombs out of.”

The fireman rubbed his jaw. “I was wondering about that. I think we'll start looking for this Royal Bond.”

It was obvious that the fire had completely gutted Royal Bond's suite of offices. Several hours would have to elapse before the thing would cool off enough for a lengthy inspection.

Doc Savage left the building.

“Did you,” he asked Carole Evans, “ever hear of this Royal Bond?”

She shook her head. “But listen, I followed Bill Keeley to this neighborhood and lost him.”

“You think that Bill Keeley came to see Royal Bond?”

She hesitated. “Could be.”

Shortly they discovered the excitement around the cigar store. The police were still questioning people in the neighborhood.

Doc got their story. He knew that Monk and Ham had been in the trouble.

“We're sure they were overpowered and carried off,” a policeman explained.

“Any idea where they were taken?”

The officer didn't have any idea. He was embarrassed about it.

Another detective came sauntering up. He carried a loosely held handkerchief in which something fluttered.

“What you want done with this white bird, skipper?” he asked.

Doc looked. It was another of the white-dyed sparrows. He took the bird along with him as they left.

DOC SAVAGE did not drive back to the midtown building which housed his headquarters. He went to the Hudson River water front, stopping in front of a large elderly structure of brick which bore a ramshackle sign that said “Hidalgo Trading Co.”

“We are going to blindfold you,” he told Carole Evans.

“That's what you think!” she said indignantly. “Over my dead body you will!”

“Not over your dead body, just over your body,” Doc told her. “Get the chloroform, Johnny.”

The young woman, alarmed, capitulated. “All right,” she said. “It's a great way you've got of making friends.”

They blindfolded her.

The warehouse door opened by radio control, and they drove inside. It was a big structure, their waterfront hangar and boathouse.

Doc selected a large amphibian plane.

“Fuel the ship,” he told Johnny and Long Tom, “while I examine this particular white bird.”

He drew all the curtains in the plane cabin. They were good blackout curtains, designed so that not a blade of light could be seen from outside the ship.

Doc removed the blindfold from the girl's eyes, telling her, “You just stay in the seat for a while.”

She shrugged. “This is practically kidnapping, or girlnapping.”

“You want to remain behind?”

Doc sounded rather enthusiastic about leaving her behind. She eyed him, nonplussed. “Of course not,” she admitted. “I want to see the end of this.”

She continued to examine him, and in a moment added, “You know, I'm not very flattered. You seem to want to get rid of me. That wouldn't flatter any woman.”

“Oh, we would not get rid of you,” Doc told her. “We would just lock you up somewhere.”

She blinked. “You don't trust me?”

“We are not sure.”

Doc got out a portable laboratory, a type which Monk Mayfair had designed. A good microscope was part of the outfit. This he used on the white bird.

It was another ordinary sparrow dyed white.

Long Tom put his head in the cabin. “Tanks full. We'll have to file a flight plan with the army, or they'll have a pursuit plane jumping on our necks. Where are we going?”

“Kentucky,” Doc said. “We are going to look over this Black Pagoda Co., the scene of Bus Franklin's supposed death, and some other things.”

Chapter XI. WATCHER

SINCE the country had entered the war, great care had been taken to keep track of civilian air traffic. Along the coast line in particular, the passage of every plane was checked and rechecked. Almost as complete a tab was kept on inland flying.

The system was frequently improved, as good systems should be. The current requirement was that each plane file a flight plan indicating what airports it would fly over, and report at each of these control fields, as it passed over. And civilian flying was being permitted only between designated fields and over indicated control points.

The result was that any plane flying from New York to a specific part of Kentucky, for example, would be routed over certain logical control or checking points.

Willow Flats was such a checking point. Willow Flats was an emergency government airport, equipped with a weather station, radio communications, radio range.

Because work was light at Willow Flats, there was only one day operator on duty. His name was Stevens.

Stevens had a visitor. The visitor was a thin leathery man who wore overalls, and who just walked into the weather station to stand around gossiping. He talked about the fishing, the hunting, the progress of the war.

Willow Flats was lonesome. Operator Stevens was lonely. The visitor, who said his name was Gates, seemed lonely too eager to talk.

Visitor Gates entered the weather station, conducting a pleasant conversation.

It was against the rules for unauthorized persons to be admitted to the C. A. A. station, one of the reasons being that an enemy agent could loaf around and pick up information about air traffic in the neighborhood, thus getting an idea of how many army ships were moving cross-country. But the visitor was so pleasant that Operator Stevens overlooked the rule.

Soon the visitor began thumbing through the report books.

“Here, here!” Operator Stevens said hastily. “That's against the rules. Matter of fact, having visitors is against the rules.”

“Sorry,” the visitor said.

“That's all right. You know how rules are.”

“Sure.” The visitor lit a cigarette, offering the pack to the operator. “I didn't know about the rule. You keep a record of any planes that pass over the place, don't you?”

“That's right,” Stevens said.

Then Operator Stevens reached to take one of the cigarettes, and the visitor dropped a blackjack out of his sleeve, slugged the operator over the left ear. Operator Stevens fell on his face with a concussion and a slight skull fracture.

THE visitor stood over the prostrate operator, pondering. He was debating whether to kill the operator. The man could describe the visitor; if the fellow was killed, his mouth would be closed. On the other hand, a dead operator would mean that government agents would stage a man hunt that would really be something.

In the end, the visitor made it look like simple assault and robbery by relieving the unconscious operator of what money he had on his person, besides a watch and a ring.

Now the visitor went through the records.

He found one particular notation which made him grunt explosively. He made a copy of this on a bit of scrap paper, then left the weather station.

He ran for a quarter of a mile, not hard enough to wind himself, to reach a parked car. He took off his overalls, hat, necktie, shirt, and tied them into a bundle around a stone which would weight them, before tossing them into a creek.

He drove rapidly for a while, finally stopping on a mountain ridge.

The car contained a portable radio transmitter and receiver. The apparatus was hidden in a suitcase. Since it was war time, the possession of unlicensed radio transmitters by civilians was a particularly serious offense.

The man was nervous as he used the radio. “Station KPLO, police radio of Louisville, testing portable,” he said into the microphone.

He had his receiver tuned to a specific wave length, over which came an immediate answer. “Ship number eight,” it said.

This was the kind of stuff that was usually heard over short wave.

The man consulted the notes he had made at the radio station.

The note said that Doc Savage's plane had checked over the Willow Flats station about an hour previously. That would be at four o'clock.

“Testing, testing,” the man said. “One, two, three, four, testing. Four, four, four. Over at four, the great

big bad wolf himself."

"Got you," the other radio voice said.

"Have the home fires burning."

"We will," said the other. "And firecrackers in them. Good work."

That ended that.

Chapter XII. MOUNTAIN TROUBLE

IT was late in the afternoon when Doc Savage put his plane down on a lake in the Kentucky mountains. He taxied the plane cautiously inshore, finally beaching the craft.

"The lake," explained Carole Evans, "is the water supply for the power dam from which the Black Pagoda Co. gets its electricity."

"How far is this Black Pagoda Co.?"

"About two miles is all."

The bronze man was surprised, but he kept quiet about it.

Johnny and Long Tom, however, were not as inclined to be silent. "Hey!" said Long Tom. "Two miles! From the looks of these mountains, it doesn't look like there was anything but maybe a moonshiner for a hundred miles."

"It isn't that bad," the girl said.

"But this is hillbilly country."

Carole became indignant. "Hillbilly yourself!" she snapped. "You city slickers think anybody who doesn't ride a subway to work eats corn pone and carries a squirrel rifle. Well, you're silly!"

Long Tom grinned. "I take it you are a native."

"I'm not ashamed of it."

Doc Savage used light lines to tether the plane to trees, so that a breeze would not swing it out on the lake where the current might possibly carry it to a power-dam spillway.

"They located the plant out here," snapped Carole Evans, "so they could get good native American labor. That as much as for the electric power."

No one said anything. No one cared to get in an argument with her, because they knew the quality of the solid American natives, despite all the "hillbilly" humor about them.

They climbed a wooded slope. The late sunlight reddened the trees and the lake surface. A pleasant stillness hung in the air. They came to an unpaved road, curving among the trees, following the ridge.

"South on this," Carole said. "It leads down to the plant."

They soon got a glimpse of the Black Pagoda Co. plant. The building, a rambling modern structure, had

been excellently camouflaged with paint. It lay in the valley snugly and secretly. Standing on the ridge, with the structure not more than a mile away, it was hardly distinguishable to their eyes.

They could see the power lines. And a railway siding swept away down the valley. There seemed to be twenty or thirty freight cars under the long camouflaged loading sheds.

"Nice," Carole said. She sounded proud. "They are producing synthetic rubber more cheaply, and making a better product, than natural rubber could be obtained before the war."

They went on.

They had walked about a half a mile when a lean sunburned man sauntered out in their path. He was a man of middle age, of old American stock. Tucked under his arm, he carried a repeating shotgun.

"Wes!" Carole cried. "Why, Wes, I'm glad to see you!"

"Howdy, Carole," the man said, without much feeling in his voice. He indicated Doc and Long Tom and Johnny with a nod of his head. "Who're these folks?"

"Doc, this is Wes Begole," Carole said. "Wes, this is Doc Savage, and two of his assistants, Johnny Littlejohn and Long Tom Roberts. Johnny is the long one with the long words."

Wes Begole eyed Doc Savage. "Savage, eh?" he said. "Doc Savage."

Carole said, "Wes, Mr. Savage is—"

"I know who he is." Wes suddenly shifted his shotgun, pointed it at Doc and the others with him. "Stand still, all of you!" he said.

DUMFOUNDED, Carole cried, "Wes, are you crazy?"

The man with the shotgun had become grim.

"Keep still, Carole. You're included in this." He gestured the muzzle of the shotgun toward her to show that he meant it. Then he lifted his voice. "Come on out, boys!"

About fifteen men came out of the brush, all of them heavily armed.

Doc Savage, seeing how many of them there were, was astonished. The truth was that he hadn't known there was a single man concealed in the neighborhood. He was angry at himself for being deceived.

These men, he decided, were good mountain stock, fellows who had done a lot of hunting for squirrel and wild turkey in these mountains. They knew how to get about silently.

They were not law breakers, either. They did not carry themselves like crooks. None of them looked in the least ashamed of what he was doing. They were, instead, proud.

Doc Savage suddenly realized a cold rage had hold of the group. There was not one of them who would not shoot.

"Do not do anything reckless," Doc told Johnny and Long Tom. "These men are doing what they think is right. They are not fooling!"

“That's right,” Wes Begole said. “Not fooling.”

“Wes, are you insane?” Carole cried.

The man stared at her, contempt pulling his lips tightly. “I never thought old Jake Evans would have a daughter who's doing what you've done, Carole. Old Jake would be ashamed of you.”

“Wes! What on earth—”

“I'm sorry we caught you with them, Carole.” To his men, Wes Begole said, “Search them. About half of you get back fifty feet or so. Go against the wind, so if they try to use any kind of trick gas, you can shoot 'em down before it takes effect.”

Johnny and Long Tom were disarmed. It was discovered that they wore bulletproof undergarments, likewise that Doc wore a trick vest containing many gadgets.

“Take 'em behind that bush, one at a time, and strip 'em,” Wes ordered. “Take everything. Amos, there's some extra coveralls in the cars. Get three suits that will come near fitting these fellers. We'll put the coveralls on them.”

The coveralls bore the words, embroidered, “Black Pagoda.” Wes and some of the others were wearing similar suits of coveralls.

Johnny, then Long Tom, were taken behind a bush, and brought out clad in nothing but coveralls.

Then they took Doc Savage behind the shrub. They stripped him of everything.

When they brought the bronze man back, one of them whistled and said, “Boy! I never saw anybody built like this fellow is! You should see the way he's muscled.”

Wes said grimly, “Hanging is just as effective on a strong man as a weak one.”

CAROLE EVANS, frightened now, burst out with another demand to know what they thought they were doing. She called them idiots two or three times. She was incoherent from fright, her fear making the men uneasy.

“Carole, we ain't doing anything until we're sure,” Wes Begole said.

One of the others said, “Won't hurt to tell 'em the situation, Wes. Even if they already know.”

Wes nodded. He eyed Doc and the others.

“We just found out,” he said, “what has been going on here at the plant. I'll make it short. An attempt is being made to take over the ownership and management of the plant. The attempt is inspired by foreign interests, enemies of this country.”

Doc Savage said nothing. He was listening intently.

Wes Begole continued, “Bus Franklin owns the company. He was approached by these men. They first wanted to buy the concern, but Bus refused. Then they threatened Bus. He told them where to go. So he was killed. And before he was killed, he was forced to make a will giving the plant to the men, ostensibly the will being made as security for a previous loan of money. There was no loan, of course.”

Carole eyed him grimly. “That sounds logical, Wes. Where did you get the information?”

Wes Begole frowned. “Telephone calls to several of us. I got one. Others received them.”

“Who telephoned?”

The man looked disappointed, a little hesitant. “We don't like that. He didn't tell who he was.”

Carole's contempt showed on her face.

“That's smart,” she said. “You are doing a thing like this just on the telephone tip of some nut. I thought you were smarter than that.”

Wes Begole shook his head. “We've got more than that.”

“What?”

He turned to his men. “We better show them. We don't want any mistakes about this.”

They obviously agreed with him.

They went now, all of them, to a spot where three cars were concealed. They loaded into the machines, the overflow clinging outside the cars.

They did not drive for long. Less than twenty minutes, slowly following the road that traced its way along the ridge, away from the plant.

THE cabin was neat. It had a crisp, rather expensive look, so it was not the cabin of any native. It was not a farm, and not a tourist place. It was so obviously what it was: a summer cabin built by someone who had plenty of money for such things.

Wes Begole glanced at Doc Savage, asked, “Recognize it?”

“Should I?” Doc inquired.

“It's yours, isn't it?”

“Not to my specific knowledge,” the bronze man said. “But it is possible.”

The other frowned. “What do you mean by that?”

Long Tom grunted, then put in, “Doc owns a lot of property here and there. He controls holding companies, and the companies do the buying and selling connected with their business. Quite a lot of the time, Doc does not know what he owns.”

Wes Begole grunted. He saw that this could possibly be true, but he did not believe it.

There were more guards around the cabin. They were Black Pagoda Co. men.

“That guy who tipped us on the telephone,” explained Wes Begole, “told us to come here and see what we could find. We did. We found plenty.”

Doc Savage, Johnny, Long Tom and Carole were taken inside.

They were shown the evidence against them.

Damning, that was what it was. So convincing that it was frightening.

It wasn't too complete, not complete enough to arouse suspicion. The letters, for example, were in code, and decoded. They did not tell a complete story, but the imagination could supply what was missing. They objected to the price which Doc Savage was demanding for the job he was doing.

Only one letter professed to be from Berlin. It agreed to the terms, naming a sum that was fantastic, explaining in detail how the payment would be made, how the money would be brought from Germany. The funds, the letter advised, would be deposited to Doc Savage's credit, in gold, in a Swiss bank, as soon as the work of taking over the Black Pagoda Co., and the placing of control of the company in Axis interests, was completed.

There was a postscript to the letter urging haste, stating that in view of the growing urgency of the war situation, it was essential to get the Black Pagoda Co. involved in the disputes which would halt or hamper production.

Another letter outlined in general form the method of stopping production of synthetic rubber by the Black Pagoda Co. The new management, bought off by the enemy, was simply to get in disputes with the Washington bureaucrats. They were to violate priorities, then when they got jumped about the violations, they were to yell patriotism and raise plenty of hell, and they were to grab more than the legal allowance of profit, to further antagonize the bureau heads.

All the letters were addressed to Doc Savage.

Long Tom had inspected the documents, with Johnny.

“I'll be superamalgamated!” Johnny said slowly. “An ultraconsummate architectural device.”

Long Tom nodded.

“A fine ring-tailed frame-up,” he agreed. “Boy, did somebody plant a garden for us!”

THE mountain men were alert and grim. They were not hillbillies, but hard-jawed, sharp-eyed Americans.

“Deny anything?” Wes Begole asked Doc.

“Do you know Miss Carole Evans well?” Doc asked.

“Since she was a baby.”

“Would you take her word?”

Wes Begole considered. “Not complete. Money has quite an effect on people. It could affect Carole, here. Her folks never had much of it, and I guess she ain't either.”

Carole Evans, made very angry by that, snapped, “Wes Begole, you ornery watermelon thief! Just because I worked my way through college and worked like the devil to get somewhere, don't get the idea I'd do anything for money.”

“Didn't say you would. Just said you hadn't proved you didn't.”

Doc asked, “The same goes for us?”

“Same.”

“What are you going to do with us?”

“This,” said Wes Begole, “is a good old American institution.”

“What do you mean?”

“A mob,” he said. The mountain man became eloquent about it. “A mob is a good American institution. This country was formed by a mob that got together and took after some guys who were giving them trouble. You hear a lot of agitation against mobs, but when Americans stop getting together in a mob when they get about so mad, this country is all shot to hell. Take Europe. If a little gang of upright citizens had gotten together at the right time, where would old Hitler and old Mussolini be?”

Doc did not argue the point.

Wes Begole finally shrugged. “We'll take a vote. It may wind up with us hanging you, or we may turn you over to the Federal law.”

“Hang them,” a man said.

“But make sure they did it first,” another warned.

“Heck, there's proof right here.”

Wes Begole eyed them thoughtfully.

“Hanging is kind of permanent,” he said. “What say we take a vote right now and see where we are?”

They took the vote. The balloting was vocal, only one or two looking uneasy or doubtful about the way they voted. Wes Begole kept tab on a sheet of paper.

“Three for turning you over to the police,” he told Doc, “against twelve for hanging.”

Carole stared at the man unbelievingly. “You're going to murder us!”

The leader of the mountain men shook his head. “Justice,” he said, “is a better name.”

“Wes,” a man said, “maybe we better show them the rest of it.”

Wes Begole looked at Doc Savage. “You want to see the white birds?” he asked.

“White birds?” Doc said.

Chapter XIII. FLIGHT OF THE BIRDS

THE shed contained a buggy, set of harness, a canoe, outboard motor, some other stuff. It was a well-made and expensive shed, its quality in keeping with the rest of the camp.

The bird cage stood in the center of the shed. The cage was made of wire, about four feet wide and four high, but only about a foot and a half deep, with a wooden base and wooden boards around the bottom of it. It was divided into compartments, each with a separate door.

Not all the birds were white. Some were not, and they were ordinary sparrows.

The white birds were on the left side, and that side bore a sign:

WARNING—TREATED

Lying on top of the cage was a case, an ordinary flat leatherette-covered case of the type which could be purchased in any drugstore before the war. The type of case that was used by girls for a week-end case.

The case contained a bottle of white dye, labeled as suitable for feathers.

The other bottle it held was more sinister. The only label was a bit of white paper with a pen-drawn skull and crossbones insignia.

Wes Begole handled this bottle gingerly.

“Know what it is?” he asked Doc.

“Guess you wouldn't admit it at that,” the mountain man said. He went over and closed the door and came back.

He uncorked the bottle, shook a small amount of the contents—a powder—out on a bit of paper. He put the paper on the table, then backed away.

He asked Doc, “Want to go over and look at it and tell us what it is?”

One of the others, alarmed, said, “Watch out, Wes! He might try to throw the stuff on some of us!”

“He does,” Wes said, “and he'll get himself full of lead.”

Doc Savage, curious about the powder, went to the paper and examined it. He did not touch the stuff, and he approached it with great care, using his nostrils. He did not, in fact, get close to the stuff at all.

Soon he made his low, exotic trilling sound that was his unthinking habit in moments of mental excitement. The sound had its usual ventriloqual quality, which caused the mountaineers to glance about curiously, and one of them growled, “What's that noise? What the heck?”

Wes Begole said, “It's a sound Savage makes sometimes. Take it easy!”

Doc Savage backed away from the powder.

“Give me a match,” he said.

No one moved.

“Burn that powder, someone,” Doc said. “That stuff is one of the most deadly germ-concentrate poisons known. Burn it.”

Wes Begole grunted unpleasantly. “So you knew what it was.”

“Not knew—any doctor who has done germicidal research would know what it is. Burn it, someone.”

“It's dangerous, eh?”

“Did you know what it was?” Doc asked.

“No. It says poison on the label, though.”

“That stuff,” Doc said, “is worse than poison. It is a high concentrate of germs in a food medium. One puff of wind, if one should happen along and scatter that dust among us, might kill us all.”

(Among the things that are deadly in this world, concentrations of germs which can kill men probably receive the least public attention of any. This, despite the obvious fact that as a weapon of war they are far more hideous than any type of poison gas. For many years it has been feared that the next great war—this one we're in now—would be a war of germs. Instead, it has turned out to be a war of airplanes. But many a military leader who is acquainted with the possibilities of germ warfare is standing back with his fingers crossed, hoping the horror will not be loosed this time.—Ed.)

A man grunted hastily. He went over and touched a match to the paper and powder. It burned.

CAROLE EVANS suddenly pressed both hands to her cheeks. She said, “Oh, Mr. Savage! The white birds! They dusted that germ-bearing powder on the white birds and released them and anyone who caught the birds would be killed!”

Doc said nothing.

Long Tom reminded, “Three or four of the birds have been seen around, and nobody has died. How do you account for that?”

Doc Savage spoke then. “They were released for the terrifying effect they would have. Bill Keeley was horrified when he saw the white bird. It scared him so that he stopped talking to me and fled.”

“Yes, that must be it,” Carole agreed. “The birds were released without the germ poison to warn someone to keep their mouth shut.”

“I'll be superamalgamated!” Johnny said.

The man named Wes grunted, and jerked the cage around so that they could see a label on the back, a part of a printed legend, rather, which had been on one of the bottom boards.

“Used a packing case around your place to make the cage, didn't you?” Wes said.

The part of the legend said plainly:

DOC SAVAGE, NEW YORK

No one spoke for a while.

“You got anything to say?” Wes asked Doc.

Doc was silent.

“Get the rope, boys,” Wes said. “Get the long one. We'll cut it in four pieces, and I think there'll be enough.”

Doc moved then. He pointed an arm upward. He indicated the rafters which supported the roof.

“Did you look up there?” he asked. “The letters, I mean. The letters that would explain this whole thing?”

Wes scowled. “What letters? There ain't no letters up there?”

“Did you look?”

“I don't see any.”

Doc turned to the nearest man, a thin fellow who was chewing tobacco. It was one of the men who had helped search Doc earlier. It was, in fact, the man who had been so impressed by Doc's physical build.

“Lift me up,” Doc said. “Give me a boost. You want to see this, before you commit an injustice for which you will be sorry.”

The thin man said, “Keep your guns on him, guys.”

They did that.

The thin man grasped Doc about the legs, to give him a boost. He did not have much luck. “Hey, some help,” he said. “This guy is a ton of muscle.”

Another man came to help lift Doc. They made a cradle with their hands. Doc stepped onto this, grasping their shoulders in order to steady himself.

It was not hard for the bronze man, fumbling with their shoulders, to get his fingers into the thin man's breast coat pocket, and remove the smoke grenade which was there.

It was easier, in fact, than concealing the grenade there had been. Doc had concealed it there earlier, when they were searching him. He had hid this grenade on one of the men, and a gas grenade on another, but the other man was in the background, so that he could not easily have been decoyed near.

Doc twisted the release on the little smoker and let it fall. It hit the floor, bouncing with some noise that drew attention to it.

Someone said, “What's that?” Then there was noise and flash, not much, and smoke. A great deal of smoke.

“Gas!” Doc yelled, just to make it good. “Poison gas!”

JOHNNY and Long Tom saw the grenade before it bloomed, so they knew what it was. They acted; acted by grabbing Carole Evans, one holding each of her arms. They plunged into the smoke. Doc also jumped into the smoke.

All the mountain men ran away from the smoke, which was the sensible thing to do.

Doc Savage had kept a sense of direction. He said, in Mayan, a little-known language which he and his aids used when they didn't want to be understood by outsiders, “Out through the side.”

Then he lunged, came against the shed side with both feet. The siding caved off, the nails squawking. Doc went on outside. The other three followed.

They were in brush, thick brush. They ran away. A few rifle bullets drove through the shrubbery, missing them. And there was some enraged shouting.

They ran half a mile, changing direction. Then Doc stopped suddenly under a large tree, one with many

branches and thick foliage, but not a tree that was too conspicuous.

“Climb it,” he said, “and wait.”

“You're not,” asked Johnny, so startled he used small words, “going back?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“To see if Wes Begole will not lead us to whoever has hired him.”

Carole exclaimed, “Begole! Wes! Now I think you've got something.”

“What tipped you off, Doc?” Johnny asked.

“Wes Begole handled the business of the birds too dramatically,” Doc said. “And did you watch him handle the powder, the germ-concentrate? He knew what it was. He tried to act casually when he poured it out on the paper, but he was very careful. And before he poured it out, he went over and closed the door. That was to keep the wind from blowing into the shed and stirring up the powder so that he might become a victim of it himself. And then, when I pulled the hocus-pocus about the letters hidden behind the shed rafters, he was too sure there were no letters there.”

“It's obvious enough when you point it out,” Carole said.

“Climb the tree,” Doc said.

He left the three of them concealed in the foliage, and went back toward the shack. He circled, came toward the shack from the other direction, and moved cautiously until he spotted a mountain man ahead. The fellow was hunting industriously.

Doc picked up a rock and heaved it close enough to alarm the man. The fellow whirled, saw Doc Savage, then tried to yell and shoot at the same time.

Doc got out of sight. He traveled fast for a while, safe enough in a gully, then went up the ridge, and lost his pursuers without too much trouble.

He located Wes Begole about five minutes before Begole left the other mountain men and began a furtive flight across the hills.

Chapter XIV. THE DEVILS DRUM

DOC SAVAGE got the direction of Begole's flight—it was down toward the lake—before he summoned Johnny, Long Tom and Carole. The bronze man went back over a ridge, found a round rock, and kept going until he located a hollow tree.

The hollow tree did not make too good a drum. But then he did not have a great distance to transmit the drum message.

It wasn't jungle drum talk, nothing as complex as that. It was simply Morse code with two quick thumps serving as a dash and a single thump as a dot. Doc made it short, repeated the message once. All he sent was, G NW. Johnny and Long Tom would know that meant to go northwest.

Doc then resumed the trailing of Wes Begole.

The man went straight down to the lake shore, to the edge of the water. Here there was a path, made by fishermen and hikers who had followed the lake shore. Begole turned north, walking rapidly.

Doc Savage dropped back again. He found Johnny and Long Tom, running with Carole. They were out of breath, but not making much noise.

"Did the drum message mean anything to any of the mountaineers?" Doc asked.

"They didn't act as if they got anything out of it," Long Tom said.

Carole said, "Mr. Savage, those other men can't be criminals. I've known most of them all my life. One or two of them might do something out of the way, but the others I would swear are honest."

"Apparently," Doc said, "Wes Begole is the only crook in the gang."

Carole nodded. "I think so too. The other men are very loyal to the Black Pagoda Co., to the plant. They have been given the idea that the enemy is trying to get the plant out of commission, and naturally they are aroused. They figure they're fighting a war right here at home."

Doc said, "Wes Begole is following a path along the edge of the lake. I am going to trail him, going ahead. You follow. Watch for signs."

"What kind of signs?" Carole asked.

Long Tom told her, "We've got signs we usually use. We know what they are."

DOC SAVAGE left them, went ahead, traveling fast, keeping above the path, and cutting the distance as short as possible.

He did not overtake Wes Begole until the man had descended into a small cove, a pleasantly picturesque spot, where a highway touched, and where there was a roadhouse, a dock that was fairly substantial for an inland lake, and a houseboat tied to the dock.

The houseboat was big, but not palatial. It had obviously been built by someone who had purchased an old river scow, and constructed a bungalowlike building on this unwieldy craft. The houseboat apparently had no power of its own, but was towed by a rowboat. The rowboat, a powerful four-cylinder outboard motor attached to its stern, was tied to the houseboat.

Wes Begole stood alone on the top deck of the houseboat.

Doc Savage did not show himself. He kept out of sight, watched Begole, and Begole did not move, hardly turned his head in fully fifteen minutes.

There was no traffic on the highway. No movement, no sound, no smoke; no light came from the roadhouse to show that it was open to business. No one appeared anywhere. Wes Begole stood alone on the roof of the houseboat, leaning forward, his hands gripping the rail tightly. He was waiting, and a man who would wait that way was very scared.

Then Johnny and Long Tom and Carole appeared, with four men walking behind them with shotguns. They'd been captured.

The four men were dressed as squirrel hunters, town men out for an afternoon in the woods. They even had a bird dog, a cowering animal which obviously had been mistreated.

The moment Wes Begole saw the men and their prisoners, he actually jumped up and down in his glee. And he yelled, “You got them! Boy!”

At his shout, a man sprang out of the houseboat itself, a rifle ready. The man saw that nothing had gone wrong, and swore at Wes Begole.

“You damned fool!” he said. “They didn't get Savage. And you go yelling loud enough to be heard a mile.”

“Nobody heard me,” Begole said. He called to the approaching group, “Hey, where is Savage?”

“Didn't see him.”

Doc Savage hurriedly changed his position to get closer to the houseboat, where he could hear what was said.

Begole, sounding discouraged, said, “I thought maybe you had knocked him off.”

“You didn't hear any shooting, did you?”

“You could've used a knife or something.”

A man said, “If Savage ever gets close enough to me that I could stick him with a knife, I'll be paralyzed. And I ain't kidding.”

He sounded earnest, meaning what he said, but also pleased about having taken Johnny, Long Tom and Carole prisoner. The very fact that he admitted his fears frankly probably meant that he had plenty of nerve.

“That was a nice tip you gave us,” he told Wes Begole. “How'd you know they would be coming along?”

“Somebody beat out a signal on a tree trunk,” Wes Begole said. “Nine hundred and ninety-nine guys out of a thousand would have thought it was just a woodpecker working on a hollow limb. But not me. It just happens I used to be a telegraph operator, and it popped into my head what it was. Two thumps for a dash and one for a dot. Simple when you know how, or when you've been a good telegrapher.”

The other laughed. “You weren't so good but what the telegraph company caught you swindling them on a money transfer, and fired you.”

Begole stared at the other, astonished. “How'd you know that?”

“Oh, we done some investigating,” the man said.

They got aboard the houseboat with the prisoners. Their voices, reflected by the deckhouse of the craft, reached Doc Savage's ears more distinctly than they had a moment before.

“The boss aboard?” the man asked.

“Sure.”

“What's he want us to do with the prisoners?”

“We're going to cast off,” said Wes Begole, “and cruise around on the lake while he works on the prisoners to find where Doc Savage is.”

The other chuckled. “He's going to use the gadget on them, eh?”

They went inside.

IT was getting dark. The sun had dropped behind the hills which surrounded the lake some time ago, but now it was below the horizon as well. The night came swiftly.

Doc Savage had to go more than two hundred yards up the lake shore before he found a spot where he could enter the water without danger of being seen from the houseboat.

The water was pleasant, even a little warm for invigorating swimming. But it was the right temperature not to be weakening, which was the main thing.

The coveralls which Doc wore were hardly a help in swimming. He worked them over, ripping off the legs and the upper portion, making a belt so that he had bathing trunks of a sort.

He swam under water. Two hundred yards under water was too much for even his trained muscles and lungs. He had to come to the surface to get air.

(There is a great deal of misunderstanding about how long it is possible for a man to remain under water, holding his breath. The average individual is stumped, of course, if he tries to stay under much more than a minute. Yet there are numerous authenticated instances of men staying under fifteen minutes and longer. But, of course, being under water and swimming at the same time is something else again, since the body needs oxygen. If there are men who can swim two hundred yards under water, they are better men than Doc.—Ed.)

Getting to the top was a slow, tedious business, because the dusk made it hard to tell just when he was close to the top. And when near the surface, he had to lift an inch at a time, until just his nostrils were clear, then fill his lungs. He had to do this three times.

They had the outboard motor on the rowboat running. He could hear the vibration of its motor in the water, the loud gobble of its underwater exhaust.

Finally he was up under the stern of the houseboat. The thing had a large overhang, and it was very foul with water grass, so that concealment was not difficult.

He found a protruding nail, a spike, and clung to that, and it simplified the matter of keeping his position. The old barge did not move fast.

They were hailed from the shore. The voice belonged to one of the employees of the Black Pagoda Co. He wanted to know who they were and why they were putting out into the lake.

Wes Begole answered him.

“I know these fellers,” Begole yelled, “and they're all right. I told 'em they'd better cast off and float around in the lake tonight, to be safe from that man Savage and his friends.”

The man on shore said it was a good idea, and what was Wes going to do, stay on the boat all night?

“I'm gonna eat my supper aboard,” Wes told him. “I'll be ashore later to help with the hunt. You found

any trace of them?"

The man said they hadn't found a whisker.

IT was quite dark now.

"One of you get up on the top deck," a voice ordered. "Stay at the skylight, where you can watch the prisoners in the cabin, and watch for anybody coming."

"Right," a man said.

Doc waited until it was quiet again, then lunged up and hooked his fingers over the rail. He climbed up, then hung there, outside the boat, letting the water drip off his body and his skin partially dry. They might not notice a few damp footprints on the dark part of the deck, but it would not do to string too much water around.

The loud noise from the rowboat which was doing the towering, the howling complaint of the big outboard motor, helped a lot.

Doc swung up on top of the cabin. It was not difficult. He kept low, and went forward.

He could see the guard looking down into a skylight. The cabin below was lighted, and the guard, looking into the brilliance, was blinded when he turned his head. "Who is it?" he asked.

Doc got him by the throat and lifted him and hit him three or four times in vulnerable nerve centers. The man kicked violently a few times before he became limp. Doc put him on deck.

The bronze man looked through the skylight. He was so pleased at what he saw that he involuntarily started to make the trilling sound, but caught himself, stopped it.

The trilling sound could be an aggravating habit at times. He had acquired it, like most people acquire their bad habits, when very young. An old Hindu, a specialist in mental discipline, had used the sound often and effectively as a part of a pet system of mind control, a system in which Doc had never had much faith. But Doc had acquired the habit from him because it was picturesque, only to find himself afflicted with it. He hadn't been able to break himself of making the sound.

No one had heard it this time, fortunately.

Down in the cabin, the prisoners did not look very cheerful. There was an extensive collection of captives, one of whom, a young woman, Doc had never seen. The others were Monk and Ham, Bill Keeley, Johnny, Long Tom and Carole.

Chapter XV. THE MIND READER

DOC SAVAGE lay very still. The unconscious man beside him began to breathe with a snoring effect, the way unconscious people sometimes do. Doc turned him on his side and the snoring stopped, as if the man was asleep.

Down in the cabin, Johnny and Long Tom tried ineffectively to free themselves. They were roped. Whoever had done the tying knew his job.

(The effective binding of a prisoner with ropes is a very clean-cut matter when properly done. Only two knots are necessary, and the method mentioned above is one of the most effective. It is being taught in Commando training in the present war by many instructors. The old idea of running the rope around and around the prisoner is strictly so much doodling, the more rope that is used giving that much more room to get slack and escape. The trick is to fix the captive up so that the more he struggles the more uncomfortable he becomes. But, in practicing these strangle ties, be sure someone else is around to get you loose. That advice is given to Commando trainees, too, so you can see how dangerous it is to fool around with this system all by yourself, and the reason why we do not give a complete description of it.—Ed.)

Johnny gave it up, and used his big word: "I'll be superamalgamated."

"That about expresses it," Monk told him.

Long Tom eyed Monk and asked, "You know what is behind all this? About the German agents trying to take over the synthetic rubber plant and cut down its output?"

Monk's small eyes flew wide. "Where'd you get that pipe dream?"

"Isn't it true?"

"Heck no."

"Then what," demanded Long Tom, "is back of it?"

Through the partly open skylight, Doc Savage could hear all that they said.

The bronze man waited, listened. There was no sense in dropping down into the cabin. Two men were on guard at the door, and they had rifles. He could not break through the skylight, he was convinced, and reach the men without getting shot. He did not have his bulletproof undergarment now, so he could not take chances with bullets.

Monk pulled in a deep breath.

"The head guy in this thing," he said, "was hired by a hospital, the Metro National Hospital, which is a big one, to do some research work. The idea of the research was to develop a machine which could diagnose epilepsy by measuring the electrical currents in the human brain.

(This has recently become an accepted method of diagnosis for epilepsy and, it is believed, the only sure diagnosis for certain forms. A great deal of research aimed at finding more sensitive machines is being done.—Ed.)

"You know how that epilepsy diagnosing gadget works. It has an inking stylus, where the results come out of the gadget in the form of a graph curve. It looks like something from a seismograph machine, and it takes an expert to read the curves."

Monk made a fierce face.

"This guy didn't develop a new epilepsy diagnosing machine," he continued. "He did something better—or worse—and found out that he had a gadget that would read minds. You set the subject down in a chair that is the pickup of the thing, and ask him some key questions in a casual conversation, and then later read the chart the machine has inked, and you can read his mind."

Johnny didn't believe that.

“You're crazy,” he said. “You couldn't read a mind that way.”

“NOT *read* it, exactly,” Monk corrected. “But this thing is amazing. Take for example, if you have done something crooked in the past. The guy who is giving the business to you brings up the subject of crooks, and your mind jumps back to your misdeed, and the gimmick records your mental currents on the subject, and then—”

“Wait a minute!” Long Tom interjected. “There's nothing new—”

Monk said, “Wait yourself! Here's where this gadget has got it over the others. The electric currents in the human brain aren't all just electric currents, this guy discovered. They have different frequencies, and strengths, and things. The electric current from a happy thought is different from a sad one, and a thought out of that part of a man's life that happened ten years ago is an entirely different current from one about what happened yesterday. In fact, it's possible to tell to the month how old the memory is.”

“It gets complicated,” Long Tom muttered. “But it's possible, I suppose.”

(Most readers are familiar with the principle used in the so-called lie detectors, on which the fluctuations recorded in response to questions show pretty faithfully whether the subject is telling the truth or not. Such records have been proven scientifically correct; enough so that courts generally accept such evidence. It is quite conceivable that this method can be advanced, and probably will be, in time, to a far greater degree of accuracy and range of use.—Ed.)

“You're an electrical expert,” Monk told him. “You know darn well it is possible.”

“Then it isn't what a fellow would think when you say mind reading.”

“No, it's a complicated process.”

“How'd you learn all this?”

“The head guy likes to brag.”

“Oh.”

Monk took another deep breath, continued, “Here's what happened. The guy was excited over his discovery, as who wouldn't be. He wanted to work it out more in secret, but he had to make a living. So he got a job. He got a job as kind of a high-class detective. He got a job examining people, and spotting those who were crooked or trying to crook the people who were hiring him to examine them.”

Long Tom grunted, getting the drift.

“And he turned crook?” he said.

“He sure did. He started finding out about misdeeds people had committed, and that gave him a big idea. He changed his scheme a little, and found out about business deals they were pulling, and cut them out when he could. He made a lot of money getting in on the ground floor that way, and he got money-hungry, and became a plain devilish crook.”

“The white birds—”

“Wait'll I get to that,” Monk said. “This guy has stolen two or three businesses, by blackmail and otherwise. Then he started on the Black Pagoda Co.

“There,” said Monk, “he ran into a snag. The president of the company was Bus Franklin, and they thought that he had committed a crime when he was younger, but it turned out he hadn't. He'd just come near it one time, and it was on his mind. The machine fooled them. So, when Bus Franklin got the blackmail scheme popped to him, he rebelled. He started to go to the law. They had to kill him.”

“Then Franklin is really dead?”

“Yes.”

“What about the white birds?”

“They killed Franklin with them, or one of them.”

“But he went over a cliff?”

“Oh, no he didn't,” said Monk. “They just made it look that way.”

DOC SAVAGE got a bad start at this point, because from the deck below, Wes Begole called up, “Everything O. K. up there?”

Doc said, “O. K.,” without knowing what voice to use.

But it worked. Begole walked away.

Below in the cabin, Monk said, “Here is what happened next. Bus Franklin, before they killed him, had gotten three people to help him. Two of them were women. Miss Carole Evans, there, is one of them. The other was Brandis, here. He picked Brandis because she was in a position to check up on the man Franklin suspected. And Bus Franklin had also got his vice president, Bill Keeley, to help.

“Franklin got killed. Bill Keeley and Carole went to New York to help Brandis investigate the suspect. They were worried, because they knew they were suspected themselves. At least Bill Keeley and Carole were. So Bill Keeley decided to ask his old friend, Renny, for help. But Renny wasn't there, so Bill Keeley went direct to Doc, and they went to a restaurant where Bill Keeley was going to tell Doc all about it.”

Monk spread his hands.

“The white bird appeared, scared Bill Keeley bad, because he knew that a white bird had murdered Bus Franklin. Bill got out of there.”

Bill Keeley, entering the conversation for the first time, said, I was really scared, too. I rushed out of there to warn Carole and Brandis that they were wise to us. But they caught me before I got that done.”

Long Tom looked at Carole. “Why didn't you tell us in the first place you were working on Bus Franklin's death, trying to prove who did it?”

Carole looked uncomfortable. “Well, I figured the less a detective told anybody, the better off she was.”

Ham asked grimly, “Where is Doc?”

“We don't know,” Johnny admitted.

The door opened then, and two men came inside, beckoned the two guards to help them, and said,

“They're lying. They know where Savage is. The boss is going to get it out of them with the gadget.”

Carole said, “Questions. So that's why they didn't murder us.”

“Don't belittle their questions,” Monk told her. “That's why we're all alive.”

“You've been through the machine?”

“I've been through that thing so often,” Monk said, “that I've got it confused.”

Ham remembered to insult Monk. “The machine,” Ham said, “is baffled by that thing Monk calls a brain.”

Monk sneered at him. “The only trouble is that my thoughts register in great big curves, like earthquakes. That proves I'm a heavy thinker.”

“Or that you've got a square wheel in there somewhere,” Ham said.

Chapter XVI. SALT ON THEIR TAILS

DOC SAVAGE got up cautiously, and moved forward. The odor of cooking was coming from somewhere ahead, and he made for the spot.

The kitchen had no skylight, and the cook was leaning in the door, watching the night-shrouded shore.

It was a simple matter for Doc to lie down on the cabin top and smash a fist against the man's temple. The cook dropped, the only sound the one he made falling.

No one came.

Doc went into the kitchen. He was looking for flour. But he found salt instead, a canister of it, and two shakers. The shakers were of glass, round. He took the shakers and the canister and went back on the roof, swinging up quietly.

Carole, whom the guards were trying to take to put into the machine, was fighting, making quite a commotion.

Doc kept track of the sound, and found that they took Carole into the aftermost cabin. This was really a stateroom, the owner's stateroom, with a large skylight.

They were putting Carole in the machine.

The gadget looked complicated, even to Doc. The fact that it had been torn down recently, doubtless for transporting from New York, and hastily put together again, gave it a sprawling unlovely appearance.

In general, the thing looked about as Doc expected such an apparatus to look. There were amplifiers, several of them, some stock models which could be purchased assembled. But there was a great deal more that certainly was not stock apparatus.

All this apparatus was in one unit, stacked against the wall. From it extended a metal arm, with thick cable attached to it, connecting with the pickup antennae, part of a hooded shape which apparently would fit over the head of the subject.

They were, apparently, going to tie Carole to the chair, and one of the man had picked up a hypodermic, probably to knock Carole out if she fought too much; or perhaps after the machine had been used on

her.

Doc waited until they had Carole in the chair. He saw no sense in waiting longer.

He threw back the hinged skylight, went through, landed about six feet from the man who was in charge of the whole thing, the mind reader himself.

The man whirled.

“I imagine,” Doc said, “your name is Royal Bond?”

The man was very stunned, because he nodded foolishly and said, “Yes, that is right. What can I do for you?” And then he screamed, leaped backward. He slammed against the wall, stood there.

Doc showed one of the salt shakers. He had removed the cap. The other shaker, the salt carton, were both out of sight. He had stuffed the other shaker inside his makeshift shorts, left the salt carton on the roof near the skylight.

Royal Bond popped his eyes at the salt shaker.

“You remember,” Doc said, “the germ concentrate which you used on the birds, and a bottle of which you left with the stuff—the birds and the letters and things—which you planted in the cabin to incriminate me?”

Although the bronze man's question was one sentence, and a long one, Royal Bond did not move.

Doc added, “You know how the stuff works.”

He threw part of the salt on Royal Bond. He threw the rest on the guards, who were standing astonished.

Bond screeched, wheeled, dived out of the cabin.

The guards instantly fled. There were three of them.

The bronze man let them go, so they would spread the word about the germ poison.

DOC wheeled, jumped, got the edge of the skylight, fished for the salt container and found it. He filled the shaker he had emptied, gave it to Carole.

“Salt!” she blurted, eyeing the container.

“As long as they do not know the difference,” Doc told her, “we do not mind.”

The bronze man then took to the skylight again, and this time he made for the large cabin where the other captives were held, Carole following him. The ropes with which they had been tying her to the chair were dangling loose.

He realized, suddenly, that he hadn't gotten a knife out of the kitchen. It was a piece of complete stupidity, it seemed to him, that he had overlooked getting a kitchen knife. There had been butcher knives and paring knives and bread knives in the kitchen.

Now he had nothing to cut the prisoners loose.

He did not go through the skylight into the cabin with the prisoners immediately. He leaned down, shoved

an arm inside, and threw some salt on a guard. He said, “You like your own germs, I hope,” to help out the deception.

They must have been scared stiff of the germ concentrate. It was understandable, because the stuff was deadly, and it possessed a rather horrible appeal for the imagination.

The guard fled wildly for the door, whacking at the salt with both hands. He bumped into another guard before the man could escape, and they both began yelling.

The shouting was spreading through the houseboat.

Doc went through the skylight.

One guard, retaining his wits, lifted a rifle. Doc got a chair and threw it, then followed up, and seized the rifle.

The guard ran and Doc threw salt on him to hurry him along.

Then the bronze man began untying Monk and the others. He took Monk first, because Monk was the most effective bare-fisted fighter. The knots were tight.

Struggling with the knots, Doc thought of the knives in the kitchen, which he could just as well have brought along.

“Haven't you got a knife?” Monk gasped, exasperated at the slowness.

“Do not mention knife to me,” Doc said grimly.

He got Monk loose, and Monk took off, howling. Monk liked to yell during his fights.

Doc untied the others. Ham scooped up the rifle the guard had dropped.

Going to the door, Doc shouted, “We have an antidote! We have an antiseptic that will kill those germs! If you surrender instantly, we will let you use it! You don't want to die, do you?”

He repeated this loudly and clearly several times.

There was a commotion, a fight, forward. It ended, though, before they could reach it.

They went to the spot anyway, and found Monk, who was disgusted.

“You played hell with a good fight, by all that yelling about antiseptic,” Monk told Doc. “They up and quit on me.”

This was a slight exaggeration. There were three unconscious men scattered around the forward deck.

THEY captured the men who were in the towing rowboat. It was a distinctly freak happening. One of the men from the houseboat reached the rowboat and climbed in, shouting that he had been doused with the germ poison. The men in the rowboat immediately concluded they were contaminated. They paddled in, the big outboard motor dead, and surrendered.

Johnny Littlejohn began laughing.

“A punchinello conterminousity,” he said.

“What does that mean?” Bill Keeley asked.

“I think,” Ham Brooks explained, “that he means this thing had kind of a clown wind-up.”

Long Tom Roberts had been back in the aft cabin, where the mind-reading gadget had been set up. Being an electrical engineer, he was interested in the thing.

With a long face, Long Tom joined them. “What happened to that machine ain't so funny,” he said.

They stared at him.

“It's smashed,” he said. “Messed up completely.”

Johnny said, “Royal Bond did that. He tore back into the cabin, smashed it, then jumped overboard. I didn't have a chance to stop him.”

“Bond jumped overboard?”

“Yes.”

Doc started for the rowboat with the big outboard motor. “Find a flashlight, someone,” he said. “We may be able to overtake him before he swims to shore.”

Brandis said, “You needn't do that.”

Doc stopped. “Why?”

“You know,” said Brandis, “that I have been Royal Bond's secretary for several months, although I didn't realize what he was doing?”

“We knew that,” Doc said.

“Well, I know something about Bond.”

“What?”

“He can't swim.”

There is something about the news of a death that causes a silence.

Monk broke this one.

“Shucks! I wanted to put some more salt on his tail,” he said.

THE END

HELL BELOW

Stolen navy airplanes, an old Indian fighter, a scatterbrained heiress and a couple of German submarines make a terrific mixture—especially when Doc Savage is brought into the game to mix things up!

This exciting, smashing novel is the next one that Kenneth Robeson gives you readers. In the September issue, it will give you all you can ask for in first-rate entertainment.

Remember Doc Savage magazine is now on sale the fourth Friday of the month. The September issue goes on sale July 23rd. Be at your newsstand early to be sure of your copy.

At All Newsstands—Every Month