



MEASURES FOR A COFFIN

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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This issue of DOC SAVAGE is an extra-good one, we think. The novel, MEASURES FOR A COFFIN, represents Kenneth Robeson at his best . . . and we bet you'll be wondering if Doc is really what he pretends to be. See how long it takes you to guess the answer in this puzzling thriller.

Chapter I

MR. WATERS, an average-sized and undistinguished man, had worked Gate Four at the Coliseum for years. His job was listed on the payroll as Admissions Clerk, which meant taking tickets. However, the Coliseum had highbrow aspirations—the management hoped to eventually displace Carnegie Hall as the ultimate goal of singers, performers, lecturers, musicians—and the label of ticket taker was not gilded with sufficient dignity, so it was Admissions Clerk.

It was 2:40 p.m., a Wednesday afternoon in December.

“Joey!” said Mr. Waters.

“Yeah? What is it?” Joey handled Gate Three.

Mr. Waters waved some ticket stubs, two ticket stubs to be exact, which he was holding in his hand.

“Here's a funny one,” Mr. Waters said. “Somebody is counterfeiting tickets on us.”

“You're kidding,” said Joey.

“No. Honest. I've got two tickets here which have the same numbers. I just noticed they were alike. One has got to be a counterfeit.”

“I don't see how that could happen. The Coliseum has its own print shop do the tickets, and they wouldn't slap out any duplicates, unless they made a mistake. I guess that's what happened. Somebody made a mistake with the numbering machine and got the same number on two tickets.”

“No mistake,” said Mr. Waters firmly.

“Why not?”

“Take a look.”

One ticket was a counterfeit, quite skillfully done. There existed no question on this point, because both Mr. Waters and Joey had been handling Coliseum tickets for in excess of five years, hence knew Coliseum tickets better, probably, than they knew their own faces.

“Hell's patoot!” said Joey. “Why should anybody counterfeit tickets to *this* shindig. 'Tisn't like as if it was a big-time show or an opera.” He jerked his head in the direction of the lobby to indicate he was talking about the crowd gathered there. “All of those guys in there are doctors or surgeons here for the big convention, and to listen to that bigshot sawbones lecture. They didn't pay anything for their tickets. The tickets were distributed free.”

“It is,” agreed Mr. Waters, “rather strange.”

“Better call Old Bubblenose's attention to it, though,” Joey suggested.

“I will.”

Old Bubblenose was an unloving term for Mr. Glizer, the Staff Manager, who had a suspicious nature, and who was immediately seized with the horrible suspicion that the Coliseum was being systematically defrauded.

Mr. Glizer forced the staff to work overtime, checking all ticket stubs for the performance in search of more counterfeits. As Joey expressed it, this was a hell of a job, because about twelve hundred doctors and surgeons had that afternoon attended the convention's feature lecture.

They found seven counterfeits.

Mr. Glizer was quite bothered, but he needn't have been, because only seven counterfeits had been printed, and none were ever printed again. The seven men using the phonies had already gained admission. That was their objective.

THE lecturer for the afternoon, to whom Joey had referred to as “that bigshot sawbones,” wished desperately that he had not put his neck out by agreeing to give a talk. He was at the moment in the

throes of a worse-than-mild attack of stage fright. He had a tough audience, a hard subject, for what he was going to do was get up and try to convince twelve hundred of the country's best physicians and surgeons that they were, in their present methods of treating epithelioma, as prehistoric as the cave man.

He became aware that Doctor Joseph Benson was addressing him.

"You look," said Benson, "as if you thought there might be a lighted firecracker in your pocket."

"That about expresses it."

"Why?"

"I don't like lecture platforms."

"They're safe."

"And twelve hundred of those guys out there are going to think I called them quacks when I get through."

Doctor Benson laughed heartily and said, "They'll eat it up. Three fourths of the men out there only came to this convention because you were scheduled to talk."

He said, "Thanks for the cheering words. I hope you are right."

He really hoped so, too, and the thing he hoped even more strongly was that he was right about his epithelioma theories. Being a scientist had taught him to distrust theories, even after endless experiment. Sometimes a theory stood up like the rock of Gibraltar for a century or more, only to get blown to hokum. How many hundred years was it that Doctors had been sure the best cure for a common cold was bleeding?

The platform chairman was turning to Doctor Benson and saying:

"Our esteemed colleague, internationally known, who is to make the feature address of this convention, will be introduced by Doctor Joseph Benson, of New York City, who has known him personally for years. Doctor Benson."

Before he arose, Benson leaned over and whispered, "I'm going to lay it on thick."

"Don't you do it, Joe. For God's sake, have a heart."

Benson snorted.

Benson addressed the gathering.

"Ladies and gentlemen: Dr. Clark Savage Jr." he said. Benson sat down.

THE accident happened when they were leaving the Coliseum, after he had insulted all the good doctors, and after they had crawled all over him with questions and arguments and insults, as he had expected them to do. He had, as a whole, come off rather well, he thought. He had put his epithelioma ideas in their hands, or, in other words, the hands of the gods. Time would tell whether he had really found an effective treatment for cancer.

He was not the only victim of the accident. He and Doctor Benson and four other surgeons were in the group who were leaving by a side door, intent on going to a coffee shop across the street for food and an

argument. Six of them. Of the six, Doctor Benson was the one who escaped.

“Dammit, I forgot my hat,” Doctor Benson said, and turned back. “Wait for me, eh?”

The hour was now twenty minutes past five, a wonderful, golden, warm afternoon, unusual for New York in the boisterous month of December. On this sort of an afternoon everyone looked happy. The faces were smiling. The city was rumbling contentedly.

Two taxicabs came down the street. The street was a one-way crosstown thoroughfare, and the cabs were traveling fairly fast but not breaking the speed limit.

Apparently something went wrong with the steering gear of one cab, causing it to swerve and crash into the cab alongside. This taxi in turn smashed into a parked gasoline transport truck. The truck tank was ruptured.

The transport truck was loaded with high-test aviation gasoline, and in a moment, literally in a flash, there was a hell-sheet of fire over street, sidewalk, pedestrians, the five surgeons.

The blue gasoline blaze went up to the fifth floor level, people screamed and flesh burned.

Doctor Benson charged heroically out of the Coliseum side door.

“Doc Savage! My God, Doc Savage is burned!” he was screaming.

There was no question about Benson's heroism. He was burned somewhat himself, and he did rescue Doc Savage, although it was true that Savage at the time was endeavoring to drag three of the surgeons to safety. Doctor Benson, when he had Doc Savage safe, attempted to dash back after the remaining two surgeons, but was restrained. The pair had reached safety under their own power, anyway. Benson was sobbing now.

It soon developed that no one had actually been burned fatally.

Ambulances, fire department, police, and gaping multitude converged on the scene.

THE hospital, clean and white, had a reassuring air of crisp efficiency. Doctor Benson permitted himself to be treated for minor ankle, hand and face burns, then hurried to Doc Savage's room.

Savage was getting the administrations of four anxious doctors.

“There are too many cooks,” Doc Savage told Benson, “working on this broth.”

His cheer didn't come off. Obviously he was in considerable pain.

Benson drew a doctor aside. “What's his condition?”

“He'll be out tomorrow or the next day. Outside of some peripheral lesion, and the expected amount of shock, he should make it all right. There may be some scarring, although that is unlikely.”

Doctor Benson watched the dressing of Doc Savage's injuries, and the bandaging.

“Get me a mirror,” Doc Savage requested. And then, when he had examined himself: “I look like a

mummy!”

“I’m certainly sorry about this,” Doctor Benson said.

Doc Savage laughed. “You should be! It was your idea to slip out through that side door.” And then, when the remorse on Benson’s face actually became horrifying, he added hastily, “I was kidding you, Joe. It was an accident. Stop looking like that. It was nobody’s fault. Go on home and let me get some sleep.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

“Not a thing,” Doc Savage said.

“Well, good night.”

“Good night, Joe.”

Doc Savage watched Benson leave, then lay back thoughtfully on the hospital bed. He asked one of the nurses if any fatalities had resulted from the fire, and she said she would find out, soon reporting there hadn’t. “Thank you,” Doc said. “Could I have a telephone plugged in, please?”

“You are supposed to rest.”

“I will,” he promised, “after I make a call.”

The telephone call he made was to the desk sergeant at the district police station, an inquiry for information. He learned successively that the taxicab drivers, both of them, were being held, that the gasoline transport truck driver had been in a restaurant when the accident happened, that one cab had been found to have a broken steering gear.

“The accident seemed legitimate, then?” Doc asked.

“Oh, sure.”

“Thank you, Sergeant.”

The nurse took the telephone, said, “You cut out this activity, or we'll give you another hypo.”

Startled, he said, “Another!” He hadn't realized he had had one already, and suddenly he concluded that he had been burned worse than he thought.

Either that, or he was more disturbed than he had thought by the feeling there was something off-tune about the accident.

HE closed his eyes and, to satisfy the hypo-minded nurse, pretended to compose himself, but actually went back to thinking intently about the accident. He could not, he was forced to admit, lay his finger on a thing that was off-color about the accident, but he still had the feeling that something wasn't right. He knew from experience that such hunches usually sprang from a warning caught by his subconscious, but not by him. That is, he had seen something, but had not yet been able to realize what it was.

Or was this ridiculous? It was possible that his profession had made him overly suspicious. He rarely thought of his profession any longer as being surgery, or electrical research, or chemistry, or psychiatry, or any of the other skills he had endeavored to master. His profession was the pursuit of excitement. There was no need to kid around about that.

The investigating of the strange, the unusual, the fighting of crime which seemed to be beyond the fingers of the law for one reason or another, occupied more of his time than anything else. That made it his profession. It was not always a safe business, so he would naturally become sourly expectant of trouble disguised as innocence, he reflected. Instead of beating his brains together now trying to find something sinister in the accident, probably what he should do was go to sleep.

Drowsiness, brought by the hypo shot, was settling his nerves anyway. He felt drowsy, and presently he sincerely endeavored to relax.

It would be a poor time for him to get into trouble. His five assistants, with whom he usually worked, were, at the moment, scattered widely. Renny Renwick, the engineer, was in China, and Major Thomas J. Roberts, known everywhere as Long Tom, the electrical wizard of the group, was in the Pacific somewhere, on a radar project. The other three, chemist Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, lawyer Theodore Marley “Ham” Brooks, archaeologist and geologist William Harper Littlejohn, were in Europe, helping

with the mess that had fallen into the American lap after the end of the war there.

He concluded he was going to be able to sleep after all. He felt quite drowsy indeed. They must have given him a large shot of morphine. . . . larger than he needed. He wasn't in any danger, and he could have rested. . . .

He slept . . . presently he was aware, vaguely, of movement. Of being moved. Stirring. The bed being rolled. Voices. Saying: "Push it over here. He's heavy. Better use the same bed. You can't tell what these nurses might have noticed, a spot on the bed covers or something. . . . The nurse coming yet?"

Another voice: "There's no one in sight yet."

"Get a move on!"

Quite suddenly, he knew there was indeed something wrong, and alarm ran along his nerves like wild horses. His conscious gave a great wrench at the restraining mud of morphine dullness.

A voice: "Hey, he's waking up!"

Another voice: "Bust him one."

He was busted one. The blackness felt squishy, as if it was a semi-gelid substance which had squirted out of a pipe or a hose. It filled everything, every cranny of the conscious world, completely.

Chapter II

DOCTOR JOSEPH BENSON, at about six-thirty o'clock that evening, found himself possessed of a set of nerves that wanted to scream. He had changed from the grimy clothing in which he had left the accident scene, his intention being to have a private snack of milk and sandwiches from his refrigerator, then go to bed. But it was obvious he was too much on edge to sleep. He went to the telephone and dialed Miss Clayton's number.

Benson's apartment, startlingly expensive—he had always liked a better apartment than he could afford—was high in the tower of one of those sand-colored monoliths on Central Park West, and it was richly done throughout. What it cost Benson would have maintained five ordinary families for a year, but he never thought of getting less pretentious quarters. He was eaten by envy, on the other hand, when he saw a better place.

"Miss Clayton, please," he said into the telephone.

His nerves quieted and he smiled slightly in anticipation of talking to Miss Clayton. He was, in his sparse, withdrawn, cautious way, in love with Miss Clayton. On the other hand, Miss Clayton was not the least bit in love with him, and he knew this. It hurt his pride. It was a problem to which he had given considerable thought, and the thing he thought most about, the part of the situation that most fully puzzled him, was how in the devil Miss Clayton could help being madly in love with him. Doctor Benson was a

bit of an egoist.

“Miss Clayton? How are you?” In spite of himself, Doctor Benson always found that he was reserved with Miss Clayton, although Miss Clayton didn't, when one was looking at her, seem like a person with whom one would be reserved.

“Hello, Joe,” said Miss Clayton.

“Are you doing anything this evening?” Doctor Benson asked.

He had not planned to be so blunt, but it came out. My nerves, he thought, have really gone to hell.

He thought that Miss Clayton hesitated, but finally she said, “Nothing in particular, Joe. Why? Got plans?”

He said, “I wondered if you'd be nice enough to have dinner with me?”

“It's rather short notice.”

“Well, you don't have to dress up. This won't be anything fancy. I just thought of the idea myself.”

Miss Clayton laughed. “Nothing fancier than the Colony, I imagine. All right, call for me.”

“When shall I call?”

“Right now, if you wish,” Miss Clayton said. He knew she was laughing at him. “I'm really not going to fancy-Dan it. That's what you said, isn't it?”

“Sure,” Doctor Benson said, hiding his discouragement. He knew she wouldn't dress up, and he decided to take her to the Colony after all, just to make her feel uncomfortable if he could, among all the rich clientele which patronized the Colony.

MISS CLAYTON laughed at the idea of the Colony and said sure, why not. She was wearing low-heeled shoes and a sweater, like a college kid, except that she had an air about her. Doctor Benson proceeded grimly to the Colony. He winced when Miss Clayton said, “Hy'yah, Mike,” to the doorman. And he was embarrassed when they got one of the tables that were given to people the management wanted seen.

Miss Clayton, he reflected, was a damned deceitful package, because such a piquant and sassy looking girl really shouldn't have any brains. Not an Intellect, anyway. And Miss Clayton had an Intellect. She was something or other in a concern manufacturing something complicated and electrical. Whatever Miss Clayton was to this outfit, it entitled her to the most impressive office in the place, and two secretaries. Miss Clayton was a gold brick enclosed in a tinsel wrapper, to Benson's way of thinking.

“What,” demanded Miss Clayton, “is corroding you?”

“Eh?”

“You're acting,” said Miss Clayton, “like a man who forgot to wear his suspenders.”

Doctor Benson smiled wryly. “I imagine I'm still upset over a rather disagreeable experience I had this afternoon.”

“You mean the accident in which Doc Savage was burned?”

“How on earth did you know about that?”

“Oh, it's in the newspapers,” Miss Clayton said. “Why do you think we got a front row seat here tonight?”

“What? Good God, what do you mean?”

“The newspaper accounts make you out the hero who saved Doc Savage,” said Miss Clayton.

This was genuinely news to Benson, who colored deeply, then said savagely, “Let's get out of here! They must think I'm a damned show-off!”

“You mean, you haven't seen the newspapers?”

“Of course not!”

“I'm glad of that,” Miss Clayton said. “I was afraid you were really the kind of a rat I've always halfway suspected you of being.”

Benson grimaced. “You've made cracks like that before, and I didn't like it. Why do you say such things?”

Miss Clayton laughed. “I don't know,” she said. “Let's dance.”

“I'm going to get a more secluded table. Do you mind?”

“I'd appreciate it, Joe.”

The food was good, the service excellent, and they had a satisfactory amount of privacy. But Doctor Benson was distracted, obviously absorbed with his thoughts.

“Something *is* on your mind,” Miss Clayton said.

Doctor Benson nodded soberly. “As a matter of fact, I'm worried.”

“What about?”

“I can't get rid of the feeling there was something wrong about that accident to Doc Savage this afternoon,” Benson said grimly.

MISS CLAYTON looked at Benson thoughtfully. “What do you really mean by that?”

He made aimless marks with the tip of a spoon on the linen. “I haven't been able to put my mental fingers on anything, exactly. There was just something too pat about the whole thing.”

“Did you mention this to Doc Savage?”

“No, I didn't, although perhaps I should have. But Doc was rather painfully burned, and I didn't want to bother him with it.”

“I should think,” said Miss Clayton, “he would want to be bothered with something like that.”

Doctor Benson gloomily finished his coffee, seemed lost in thought for an interval. He straightened. "I have an idea!" he exclaimed. "What do you say we do a bit of detecting?"

Miss Clayton was definitely interested. "Fine! That would be more interesting than the stuffy show I was expecting you to take me to." She gathered her handbag and gloves together. "Where do we detect first?"

They got a cab outside. "The Coliseum," Doctor Benson told the driver. He added apologetically to Miss Clayton, "I don't know of anywhere else to start."

"I can't think of a better place," she told him.

They looked over the scene of the accident without learning much. The burned gasoline transport truck had been removed, the two taxicabs were gone, and there was only the blackened sidewalk and seared side of the buildings to show that anything out of the ordinary had happened there late that afternoon.

It was Miss Clayton who suggested that they talk to the Coliseum management, and Doctor Benson agreed. Soon they were in conference with Mr. Glizer, the Coliseum manager.

Mr. Glizer was at first aloof, feeling that the management of the Coliseum was being unjustly suspected of something. They corrected this impression, and Mr. Glizer unbent to the extent of assuring them there had been nothing suspicious. "Outside of the matter of the seven counterfeit tickets," he added.

Miss Clayton pounced on that. "What counterfeit tickets?"

Mr. Glizer explained that one of the Admissions Clerks had spotted a counterfeit ticket stub, and that a search of the tickets had been made, and six other counterfeits had been located, or seven in all.

"Are counterfeit tickets to the Coliseum a usual thing?" Benson demanded.

"No, sir, not at all. This is the first time."

Miss Clayton frowned. "Did these doctors who attended the lecture buy their tickets?"

"No, Miss, they didn't. The Convention management rented the Coliseum for a lump sum, and distributed the tickets to registered attendants of the convention."

"That," said Miss Clayton, "makes it seem darned strange that there would be counterfeits."

"I'm sure the personnel of the Coliseum would not be engaged in anything shady," said Mr. Glizer stiffly.

"JOE," said Miss Clayton when they were leaving in a cab, "I have a hunch, and I don't like it."

Doctor Benson eyed her intently. "I imagine you feel the same way I do. A vague, gnawing suspicion that there might be something rancid afoot."

"Rancid is right," Miss Clayton agreed. "I think we should do something."

"What?"

"Put our suspicions," said Miss Clayton, "in more capable hands."

Benson nodded miserably. "But I hate to disturb Doc Savage at the hospital about what may not be

anything after all.”

“Doesn't Doc Savage have some helpers?”

“By Jove, you've hit it! He does. He has five friends who have worked with him a number of years. They're just the fellows to sic on to this thing.”

“Do you know where we can find them?”

“No, I don't. But we can try the headquarters which Doc Savage maintains.”

“Let's do that,” said Miss Clayton. “I think that's the smart thing to do, since we're not detectives ourselves.”

“We'll telephone,” Benson said, “and see if we can contact one of Doc's friends.”

They made the telephone call from a drugstore on Sixth Avenue. Doctor Benson did the actual calling. He found the number in his address book. “Doc's private number,” he explained, whirling the dial with his forefinger.

Presently a metallic, businesslike voice said: “This is Doc Savage's office, but Savage is not immediately available. Will you state the purpose of your call, please.”

Benson said, “This is Doctor Joseph Benson, and I've become convinced there was something sinister about the accident which befell Savage this afternoon. If you will connect me with Monk or Ham or some of Doc's aides, I'll be glad to give the details of what I've learned.”

There was a perceptible pause.

The metallic voice said, “Have you finished?”

“Yes, of course,” Benson snapped.

Another silence.

Again the metallic voice, saying: “Thank you very kindly. Your message has been recorded by a mechanical device and will be made available to Doc Savage as soon as possible. This voice is mechanically recorded and so it cannot answer questions or give information. Thank you very much. If you have anything more to say, please say it immediately, because the circuit will be broken and the mechanical recorder disconnected after an interval of thirty seconds.”

“I'll be damned!” Benson exploded. He hung up. He was angry.

Noting the rage on his face, Miss Clayton asked, “What happened?”

“Some kind of a damned robot,” said Doctor Benson sourly, “made a sucker of me!”

Miss Clayton listened to the details, then burst out laughing.

“What the hell are you laughing at?” Benson demanded.

“The expression you wear when your dignity is upset,” Miss Clayton explained. “It's good for you. It should happen to you more often.”

Benson snorted. “I guess I should not be surprised. Doc is always tinkering around with gadgets, and I

should have expected something of the sort. But it makes me feel like a fool, talking to that phonograph or whatever it was. I probably sounded as important as anything." He rubbed his jaw sheepishly.

"Then none of Doc Savage's aides were there?"

"Apparently not."

"Then," said Miss Clayton, "we had better disturb Doc Savage after all."

Benson exhibited displeasure. "I hate to do that. This after all may be of no importance."

Miss Clayton was determined. "We're going to tell him about the counterfeit tickets," she insisted.

"It couldn't be," suggested Benson, "that you just want an excuse to meet Doc Savage?"

"Could be," said Miss Clayton.

ON Fifty-sixth Street, which is a one-way street going east, they stopped for the traffic light at Fifth Avenue, and a sedan drew alongside. The sedan was dark grey in color. The sedan's rear door opened, two men got out, and one of these opened the front door of the cab and said to the driver, "Slide over, bub!" Simultaneously he showed the driver something.

The driver's, "Hey, what d'ya think—" died at that point, and he gazed in terror at what the man was showing him. He slid over. The man got behind the wheel.

The other man jerked open the cab's rear door. He got in.

"This cab is taken, fellow!" Doctor Benson snapped.

"It's share-the-ride night, hadn't you heard?" the man said coldly.

Enraged, Doctor Benson started to lunge forward with his fist clubbed. Then he froze. The stranger had displayed a revolver of ominous proportions.

The cab got moving. The sedan fell in behind. The doings had escaped notice on the street, apparently.

The man who had joined them so ominously was a long, blond young man with a full-featured Scandinavian look, well-dressed in blue suit, white shirt, neatly shined black shoes and socks with a faint red clock of dashes. He wore shiny, dark leather gloves.

He told Miss Clayton, "I hope you aren't a screamer by nature."

Miss Clayton stared at him wordlessly. She was more shocked than scared. Actually, fright hadn't yet had a chance to take hold of her.

The Scandinavian-looking young man added, "It's much too quiet a night on Fifth Avenue for a scream ended by a shot, don't you think?"

Benson blurted, "What's the meaning of this?"

"Sit still, Doctor Benson," the young man said. "Better clasp your hands behind your neck. Don't raise them. Just clasp them behind your neck. We want this to look natural, you know."

"You know my name!" Benson exploded.

“Why, of course, Doctor. Will you clasp your hands as I suggested, please?”

“I’m damned if I—uh!”

The young man, with what seemed blinding quickness because it was so unexpected, had slugged Doctor Benson alongside the head with his gun. Benson flopped back on the seat, senseless.

The man driving turned his head, asked, “Trouble, Ole?”

Ole examined Miss Clayton. “What do you say, toots? Is it to be trouble?”

Miss Clayton shuddered. “No,” she said. “No trouble.”

“No trouble, Sven,” Ole reported.

Sven said, “That’s good.” Then, with a vicious abruptness that equalled Ole’s handling of Doctor Benson, he knocked the taxi driver senseless with the gun which he had been using to threaten the fellow into silent compliance. He pushed the limp hulk of the driver down out of sight. “We’d better dump this cookie somewhere,” he said.

Ole asked, “Where’s a good place?”

“Oh, the parkway after we get out of town is as good as any.”

Ole fumbled inside his clothing. He brought out a small object. It was an ice pick. He passed the ice pick forward to Sven.

“If you’ll use the eye socket, it’ll go in easier,” he said. “But be sure to slant it up enough to do the business.”

Miss Clayton, watching the movement of Sven’s shoulders in the front seat, closed her eyes.

Quietly and horribly, she fainted.

Chapter III

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW BLODGETT “MONK” MAYFAIR had never been overly fond of German cooking, and his ideas had become somewhat bitter on the subject during the past six weeks, the length of his stay in occupied Germany. Except for the cooking, and the creepy feeling that came from living in an occupied country that might not for many years change its ways, he was comfortable. He should have been happy, because he was doing a big job in chemistry.

The business of altering the life and thinking of a people was complicated, and Monk was at the moment functioning as a sort of advisory czar over the German chemical industry. The idea was to let the German chemical industry reestablish itself only in so far as it would be unable to later convert itself to war use, and Monk Mayfair, who was admittedly one of the world’s great industrial chemists, was helping with the job. He had boned up on the German language, armored himself with intense suspicion of the most harmless-seeming Germans, and done the best he could with the job. He had done fairly well. At least, there had been many squawks from the Germans, and none from anyone else, which was a good sign.

Monk Mayfair was a short man of great breadth, great length of arm, and a great quantity of homeliness. His general resemblance to an ape, particularly the family of great apes called Simiidae, considered closest of all animals to man, was noticeable. Monk didn’t mind. He had an amiable grin that made

friends with everyone, a fondness for loud clothes and red-haired chorus girls, and a general inclination to do exactly what no one expected him to do.

He liked his sleep, and since the high army officials with whom he was working had the habit of getting him out of bed at all hours, he had, tonight for the first time, cunningly rigged a gag every kid knows about, or has seen in the funny paper. He had put a bucket of water over the bedroom door so it would deluge the first guy who came in.

Sometime during the night, he heard a knocking.

“Come in,” he called drowsily, but not so drowsily that he forgot to open one eye and watch for the bucket of water to fall.

The door opened. Monk blanched, started to yell. “Hey, Angele, watch out! Don’t—” He went silent, but mentally added an, “Oh, great grief!”

There was quite a commotion when the bucket of water came down, and Monk learned one thing immediately. Angele could not take a practical joke. Angele was a French girl, very pretty. Monk had been doing promotion work re: Angele for some time.

“You dog-faced ape!” Angele said, after she had said all she could think of in French. “Here is a cablegram which came for you!”

She threw the cablegram, now sodden, at Monk, after which she called him a sow's son, and departed.

How fortunate I am, Monk reflected, to learn in time that the little lady has a temper like that.

MONK supposed the cablegram would be from the Allied Military Government headquarters in Washington, giving him hell about something. It wasn't. It wasn't from Doc Savage either, although almost. The message had been sent by the superintendent of the building which housed Doc Savage's New York headquarters. It was the man's job, when Doc and his aides were not around the office, to open up the telephone recording gimmick and relay to them any messages that seemed important. Having the super do this was Doc's idea, after they had learned that the man had an uncanny facility for finding out what part of the world they were at the moment occupying.

The building superintendent, a frugal gentleman, was always appalled at the thought of a dollar or so a word rate for cables, and saved all the words he could, sometimes at the expense of clarity.

The cablegram read:

DOC HOSPITAL BURNED DOCTOR BENSON PHONED UNLIKE SUSPECTS FOULPLAY
MYSTERIOUS COUNTERFEIT TICKETS CLUE.

“Boy!” Monk said, and re-read the message wondering whether Doc had burned down a hospital full of mysterious counterfeit tickets and Doctor Benson, or what had happened.

He got up and ran cold water in the basin, buried his head therein so the sleep would be driven away, towed his homely countenance vigorously, after which he went to the telephone.

“I want to talk to Doc Savage in New York,” he told the telephone operator.

An argument followed with the Signal Corps operator, for this was an AMG line and a civilian call

couldn't just be put through without preliminaries. But eventually Monk was informed by the New York operator that Doc Savage was in a hospital, and that the hospital refused to permit a call to go through.

Monk was quite alarmed. If Doc Savage was in a state where the hospital wouldn't allow him to take a call, it wasn't good. It must be serious.

Furthermore Monk realized he was the only one of Doc's group of five aides in a position to do much about it, although being in Germany didn't put him in a very favorable position. But he was handier than the others. Renny Renwick was in China, Long Tom Roberts was Heaven-knew-where in the Pacific, Johnny Littlejohn was in Sweden, Ham Brooks was in Jugoslavia. Ham was, in a pinch, available. At least Monk knew where he could be reached. He had no idea exactly where the others were.

Monk dressed, his concern increasing. He tried to think of whom he could call in New York, and wished Patricia Savage was available. Pat was Doc's cousin, a young lady who liked excitement and occasionally helped them, but the catch there was that Pat was herself in England somewhere, trying to hire a high-powered Frenchman for her string of beauty salons.

A knock on the door sounded the second time before he heard it and he asked, "Who's there?"

It was the pretty Angele.

"Come in," Monk said.

Angele had thought of several other things she thought he was, and she expressed herself. "Here, you scurvy ape," she finished, "is another cablegram which just came for you."

This message said:

DISREGARD SERIOUS TONE EARLIER CABLEGRAM DOC IS IN HOSPITAL SLIGHTLY BURNED BE OUT TOMORROW DOCTOR BENSON WAS JUST EXCITABLE.

"That's a relief," Monk remarked.

SOME three or four seconds later, a red light flashed in his subconscious. He became suspicious. He did not immediately know why, but he knew he was suspicious, and he eyed the cablegram speculatively.

It was a little funny, he decided, that the superintendent of their office building would be so cryptic in the first cablegram, then use plenty of words in the second one. In fact, the second message didn't sound as if the same fellow had sent it.

He got on the telephone again. "A cablegram was just delivered to me, and I want to check back on the thing to see who sent it. Where would I start?"

"You want to start at this end?"

"Sure."

"I'll connect you with the telegraph office."

At the telegraph office, they were emphatic on one point. They had handled no such cablegram.

"I want to be sure about this," Monk explained.

“You got the message handy?”

“Yes.”

“Read us the letters and figures that precede and follow the message, the stuff that's tacked on to show the filing time and transit route of the message.”

Monk read this.

The telegraph station man sounded surprised. “What kind of a typewriter is that written on?”

“An ordinary typewriter,” Monk said.

“That's a phony message, brother. Our stuff nearly all comes in teletype on a tape, and the tape is pasted on the message blank. The rest we copy on machines that type all capital letters. It's a fake.”

“How,” Monk demanded, “would anybody find out I received a cablegram earlier? Wait a minute! Maybe the first one was a fake, too.”

“Give me the same data off it, and I'll tell you.”

Monk furnished the information.

“That one is genuine,” he was assured.

“Okay, answer my question. How would anybody learn I received it?”

“I'm not Sherlock Holmes, bub. There's twenty ways. Where are you? A hotel? Maybe somebody at the hotel got money across his palm.”

“Thanks,” Monk said. “I'll look into that angle.”

ANGELE had some more to say when Monk confronted her.

“Stow it, baby,” Monk said grimly. “Do you know what the American army does to civilians who pull funny stuff on them? Stuff like letting people read cablegrams they're not supposed to read?”

Angele had seemed very pretty, but now suddenly she wasn't so pretty. She was a sharp-faced, cunning little shrew who had been caught.

“Liar!” she snarled. “Don't you dare accuse me of such a thing!”

Monk had had experience with such females. He sighed. “You sit and stay there.” He pointed at a chair. “In a few minutes after I use the telephone, some nice unsympathetic MPs are going to come and take you to jail where you will rest comfortably until time for you to be shot.”

Angele, like almost everyone else in Europe, had seen enough violence during her lifetime to be impressed. The emotions which she began experiencing were violent enough to make Monk feel sorry for her. Presently her tongue loosened.

The man was about five feet seven, dark-haired, dressed in a gray tweed suit and a beret and army shoes. He spoke French with a Parisian accent, and had carried a very large roll of good American banknotes. He had approached Angele day before yesterday, paid her twenty American dollars and two

cartons of cigarettes for her services in intercepting any cablegrams which came for Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. She was to intercept them, and permit him to read them.

This man had read the first cablegram. He had then typed out the second one—he had a typewriter and cablegram blanks all ready for this—and given it to Angele to deliver, together with an additional twenty dollars, and another carton of cigarettes.

“Where,” asked Monk, “is this guy?”

“I don't know.”

“Come on, baby. You took the cablegram to him in a hurry, didn't you?”

Angele burst into tears. The man was at the Pension Avalon, down the street, she confessed.

An MP appeared at this point, engaged in making his routine patrol of the town, and Monk explained things to him and gave Angele into his custody, not being entirely sure that Angele had told the whole truth. Also he wanted Angele on hand to identify the man if he caught him.

The Pension Avalon, in spite of its French name, was operated by a stout, shifty *fräulein* who had Nazi Women's Corps worker written all over her. Did she have a boarder of such a description? *Nein*, of course not.

“Lady, if you want to know what trouble is, just tell me another lie,” Monk said.

Monk's anthropoid appearance, which he could accentuate by looking fierce, was not far short of terrifying. He tried his worst manner out on the woman, who presently mumbled in German, “Ah, you must mean Mr. Williams.”

“I probably do,” Monk growled. “Now, where is this Mr. Williams?”

He was in No. 9.

Only he wasn't. Mr. Williams had fled the coop. Monk climbed out of the open window and looked disgustedly into a dark alley, after he went back and scowled at the still-smoking cigarette which Mr. Williams had left behind.

THE officer to call when you wanted action, Monk had learned, was Lieutenant Jackokisi. Almost everyone in the local AMG unit outranked Lieutenant Jackokisi, but for making things happen the Lieutenant was unexcelled. He had been assistant director for a second-rate movie outfit in Hollywood before the war, which was probably where he had gotten his training in doing a lot with nothing.

Monk addressed the Lieutenant over the telephone. “I have got to get back to New York, because something has happened to Doc Savage there. I haven't got time to fool around with official red tape. Now, how do I get to New York quick?”

“It just happens that tonight I was daydreaming about how fast I would get back to Hollywood if a miracle happened and I got a discharge,” said the Lieutenant. “I was going to do it this way.”

The Lieutenant explained in detail how he was going to do it.

“Thanks,” Monk said. “That will either get me to New York, or get me locked up in jail for twenty years.”

“Let me know how it works.”

“I will.”

Monk did a quick packing job. He also called the local MP headquarters and put out a description of Mr. Williams. To insure a little special action, he added the information, wholly untrue, that Mr. Williams was really Adolf Hitler in disguise. He hoped he made this convincing enough.

Then he put in a long-distance telephone call for Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks in Zagreb. A miracle promptly happened. He got Ham.

“Fan out your ears, you shyster lawyer, and listen,” Monk said.

He liked Ham a great deal, although he made it a careful practice to never speak a civil word to Ham if he could think of an insult. They had been close friends for years, and had quarreled most of the time.

Monk disgorged what information he had.

“I’m headed for New York right now,” he finished.

“I’m going along,” Ham said promptly.

“Not with me, you’re not,” Monk assured him. “I’m going to do it without what it’s supposed to take in the way of official paper, and I don’t want you crabbing my act.” He frowned at the telephone. “Anyway, aren’t you supposed to be giving those Yugoslavians a line-up on international law?”

“I’m finished,” Ham explained. “Or rather, the Yugoslavians are throwing me out. They contend they’ve gotten along without international law for several hundred years, and they see no reason for it now.”

“Then you’re going to New York?”

“Sure.”

“Good. But you aren’t going to be around to mess me up. However, if you want to get in touch with me, send a message care of that little blonde barmaid in the pub across the road from the flying field at Stratford, and I’ll try to pick it up.”

“Well, okay. Who is this guy Adolf Hitler you’ve got the MPs looking for?”

“Some bird who was hired to make me think nothing had happened to Doc,” Monk said.

“You say he planted himself there two or three days ago?”

“According to what I got out of this wench Angele, he did.”

“That,” said Ham, “looks like foresight.”

“They had it all cocked and primed, all right,” Monk admitted.

“It doesn’t,” suggested Ham, “sound so small.”

Monk agreed that it didn’t.

“It looks,” he said, “as if someone had done a pretty slick job of working something out.”

Chapter IV

CRISSY, being a tiny girl, as well as very blonde, was wont to inspire in male breasts a desire to protect her. Actually, it was the other way around. Males would have done well to watch out for Crissy.

The job of barmaid in the little pub across the Kings Highway from the American ATC field at Stratford was hardly one for training angels, but it hadn't done too badly by Crissy. She was tough, noisy, skeptical and she would cajole a man out of his last dollar if he was that big a sucker, but she had a code of honor, which consisted of sticking by a friend. Monk Mayfair was one of Crissy's friends, in every sense of the word, in spite of previous endeavors to be more.

Crissy leaned her elbows on the bar. Monk was partaking of the free lunch, a feature only recently returned to the establishment.

"He's a medium bloke," Crissy advised. "Hair as black as Donegan's alley at midnight. Has army shoes and wears a beret and a French accent to go with it."

"Blazes!" Monk remarked.

It had struck him that this description answered very closely that of the cablegram-faker, the fellow Monk had described to the MPs, with great inaccuracy, as probably being Adolf Hitler.

"Where," Monk added, "is this lad?"

"Around," said Crissy.

"Eh?"

"He's keepin' his bloomin' eye on you, honey," Crissy explained.

"How'd you find it out?"

Crissy bridled slightly. "I got me ways. And don't go askin' them."

Monk grinned. The pub was the hangout for most of the chiselers and petty crooks in the neighborhood, gentry who probably regarded all strangers with great interest lest they be Scotland Yard men. Crissy probably had her contacts.

"Thanks," Monk said. "You're a very handy gadget, Crissy."

Crissy sighed. "When you get to New York," she said, "give my best to the missus and your thirteen wee 'uns."

Monk gave two violent jumps, the first one because he was surprised that Crissy knew he was on his way to New York, although on second thought he realized Crissy probably knew the devious ways that Yanks used to get to New York in a hurry these days.

The second jump was because Monk didn't have a wife and thirteen young ones. But the lie was familiar. It was a falsehood which Ham Brooks invariably told about Monk to Monk's lady friends, actual or prospective.

"That overdressed shyster!" Monk said bitterly.

MONK'S procedure for getting to New York was now to board an ATC plane flying back to the States. There was nothing shady about his way of traveling, but it did take certain inside knowledge. The Air Transport Command was vast and complicated and its current policy was not to fly any planes from England to America unless they were fully loaded with cargo or men, preferably the latter. As was natural in so bulky an organization, the flow of passengers was likely to get diverted at one place or another so that the outgoing planes had empty seats, and it was these depots of departure where, if a man was on hand when a plane was leaving, he could get out for New York or at least the States. Where these seats were available was naturally a prized piece of information, and it was this which the Lieutenant in Germany had told Monk.

Although he had been laid up here twelve hours, Monk imagined he would get out shortly on a States-bound plane.

Monk, perversely, was rather pleased to discover himself shadowed. Alarmed, too. But not as much alarmed as pleased to know he wasn't chasing to New York after any wild geese.

He left the pub casually, visited the local ATC office and made his usual query about the next plane.

"About three hours," he was told to his surprise. "You be here, and I don't think there's any doubt but that you'll be able to get a seat."

"Good enough," Monk said with pleasure.

"And if you miss that one, there'll be another two hours later."

"I'll make the first one," Monk stated.

The flight across the Atlantic in an ATC ship would be no luxury cruise, and there probably wouldn't be any meals served, since this was not a brass hat run. Monk decided to eat, and was crossing the street when he noticed the lean-hipped, wide-shouldered man watching him.

Monk scowled. Two shadows, he thought. He became cautious, but not so elaborately so that he would arouse suspicion.

He noted the lean man turning back, entering the ATC office.

A bit later, Monk returned there himself. He described the fellow he had seen. "What did he want?"

"Wished to know what plane you were taking."

"Did, eh! That guy's got a crust. Did he try to get on the same ship?"

"Yes, he did. And he has a seat."

"You don't say! His credentials were okay, eh?"

"Is there something wrong?" the ATC officer demanded, his suspicions aroused. "This guy had papers in order showing he had been on an AMG mission, but if he's not on the up and up, I want to know about it."

Monk pondered, finally resisting a desire to make some difficulty for the man. "No, as far as I know he's all right," Monk told the ATC man, and took his departure. I'll skin my own cats, he was thinking.

THE young man with the good shoulders and the lean middle made a rather obvious job of watching Monk Mayfair consume a good dinner, so obvious that he was sure another man, a dark fellow in tweeds and beret, vaguely reminiscent of Adolf Hitler in looks, took note of the shadowing. The fellow who resembled the paperhanger had been keeping in the background. He was, it was obvious, a highly skilled man at his work.

Having made sure the expert would notice the less skillful shadowing job, the lean young man stepped into a haberdashery shop, took his way out the back door, down a service street, turned right, took off his shoes, produced a formidable pistol, and cautiously approached the Hitleresque man. He pressed the gun muzzle to the man's back and explained, "This is a gun, so don't do any jumping around."

The other man had considerable cold nerve. At least he was brave enough to turn coolly and make sure there was really a gun.

"Ah," he said.

"We seem to be getting in each other's way."

"Eh?"

"Too bad, too. A thing like this shouldn't be cluttered up."

The dark man took off the beret and scratched the perfectly bald central top area of his head just as though there were hair there. He spoke with a heavy voice which had a fluttering quality, as though his throat needed clearing. "You're a bright-eyed Joe," he said. "I see you with the eye on this Monk Mayfair as big as the Tower of London, which shoulda tipped me. What'd you do, suck me in?"

The lean young man thoughtfully cocked his revolver. The clicking sound this made did not seem to disturb the other at all.

"What became of Williams?"

"Eh?" asked the dark man.

"Williams. The one who was supposed to keep the eye on him in Germany. Incidentally, you had better get rid of that beret and tweed suit, because that was what Williams was wearing."

"Yeah?" The dark-skinned man glanced down at his tweed. "I don't dig no Williams."

"Okay," said the younger man. "Suit yourself."

"Wait a minute, Joey boy. Who're you? Where do you hitch in this thing?"

"Frankly, I'm damned if I know."

"That," said the dark man, "is dumb talk. Get on the ball with some words."

The lean young man put the revolver inside his coat pocket, but kept his hand on the weapon in a pointed fashion.

He said, "The word. It comes to me from New York."

"Who from?"

"An old pal."

"Who did you say?"

"I didn't say."

The dark man thought this over. Most of the swarthy cast of his face was contributed by a pair of eyebrows which resembled mice fresh from a coal bin. He said in a conversational way, "Williams is in kind of a warmish predicament. It seems that guy Mayfair put the word out that he was really Hitler, who was alive after all, and damned if the story wasn't believed. Williams is out of circulation."

"Hiding out?" asked the young man.

"Why're you interested?"

"It's one of the things I'm supposed to find out."

"And after you've found it out?"

"I report it."

"Williams won't be found, 'tain't likely," the dark man said. "Yeah, he's hiding out. But good."

THEY could see Monk Mayfair in the restaurant. Monk was on his coffee and dessert course, and had lighted a cigar that was large and black. Monk hooked his thumbs in his vest armholes and blew blue smoke. He examined the waitress with interest.

"That Mayfair," said the dark man, "gets around. You'd think a boy that homely would scare the dames silly."

The lean young man said, "He's got a seat on a plane leaving in a couple of hours."

"Yeah?"

"I'm on the same plane."

"Risky?"

"I think not. He doesn't know me."

"He will if you don't do a better job roping him."

"That's my worry."

"You said it," the dark man growled. "That's your worry, not mine. So go ahead and worry about it."

"Don't get tough. I thought I'd tell you about it, was all. Oh, yes, and another thing—are you going to New York yourself?"

The dark man grinned.

“Maybe, he said. “And again, maybe not.”

The younger man shoved out a considerable quantity of square jaw and advised, “Listen, topsy, I’m supposed to find that out, too. Give me an answer. You’re not funny. You’ll be less funny in about ten seconds if you don’t watch out.” For effect, he cocked the gun again in his pocket.

The dark man was evidently considerably confused himself, and baffled by the generally intangible nature of the conversation. He had given no indication of having made up his mind whether the younger man was friend or foe, screwball or cold-blooded realist. Suddenly, however, he decided the younger man was dangerous.

“Take it easy!” he urged hastily. “I’m heading for New York tomorrow. Got a seat on the clipper, and papers all in order.”

“That’s fine,” the younger man said.

He turned around and walked off.

The other man scratched the hairless part of his scalp thoughtfully again while he made various thinking shapes with his mouth. Presently he blew out his cheeks, let the breath in them escape with a rush, and sauntered across the street where he could better watch Monk Mayfair.

THE younger man, walking briskly, traveled quiet streets. He did various things to make sure he was not followed, stopping to watch the reflection in store windows, tying his shoe, making unexpected turns. Satisfied he was alone, he doubled into a house on Robertwood Road. He was known here; the landlady addressed him politely, saying, “Mr. Mayfair hasn’t returned, Mr. Brooks.”

He said, “Thank you, Mrs. Gravois.”

He took off his shoes in his pleasant room. The shoes were the very finest English hand-made, but they were too small for him; he was determined to wear them anyway because they were so fine. He liked good clothes. Fine garb was his hobby, and he had managed, before the war gave mankind many things more important to think about, to get for himself the reputation of being the best-dressed man in New York City. Today, when he thought of the inordinate pride he had taken in that accomplishment, he could blush a little. But he still liked the very finest clothes.

It was looking very much, he thought sourly, as if he would have to go back to New York immediately with Monk. He wasn’t unwilling, but he did wish he could have had time for fittings at his English tailor’s on Bond Street. The fellow was back in business, and his best cutter was out of the army, a report had said.

Altogether, his last few weeks had been sour. Yugoslavia had always been a fever spot in Europe, and Washington, in sending him there, had hoped that his extensive knowledge of international law—he was supposed to be one of the best at it—would impress the Yugoslavians into falling in line with the trends. They hadn’t been impressed. They were, if one were charitable, individualists. He had listened to more chest-thumping in the last few weeks than he had imagined possible, and left Yugoslavia with the feeling that someone like Joe Louis would have made a better emissary. Probably he had not failed entirely, but he had not made a howling success, either.

Footsteps came into the hall. His eyes jerked to the door, which opened, and Monk Mayfair came in.

“Hello, you shyster,” Monk greeted him. “What’s the matter, shoes hurt?”

He scowled and lied, “I was just admiring a really fine piece of boot-making.”

“You collar the guy?”

“Yes.”

“You think he knew you were Ham Brooks?”

“If he did, he was a mighty good actor,” Ham said.

“What'd you find out?”

“Darned little, to tell the truth. There seems to be a whole organization at work. This fellow has been assigned to trail you, and that other man who used the name Williams is in hiding.”

Monk nodded. “I thought maybe Williams and this guy were the same, and I didn't see how the dickens Williams followed me from Germany with the whole American Army looking for him. What else did you find out?”

“He knows you're headed for New York. He's going there himself on the clipper tomorrow.”

“But what about Doc Savage?” Monk demanded very impatiently. “What's the low-down there?”

“I didn't find out.”

Monk went to a window, pulled the curtain back a fraction and looked out. “He's down there in the street now, damn him. Do you suppose he knows enough to make it worth our time to grab him and pump the truth out of him?”

“He's a wise guy. I sort of got the feeling he doesn't know too much himself. I could be wrong.”

“Think we should grab him?”

“I'd vote against it.”

“You're probably wrong,” Monk said, not because he didn't agree with Ham, but he was not going to admit any agreement, as a matter of policy. “We've got to think of something,” he added.

They sat there frowning at each other.

Chapter V

THE ATC plane was a C54. It carried mostly cargo, and only a few passengers. The cargo had been picked up in Germany, radar apparatus that was needed in the Pacific.

The field officer told Monk, “All right, good luck.”

A moment later, he said the same thing to Ham Brooks, who trailed along far enough behind not to give the dark man the idea he knew Monk other than as a quarry.

The dark man was watching. He had trailed Monk to the field; Ham had in turn trailed the dark man.

It was a smoky, foggy morning; actually the field should have been closed, but the meteorologist said the soup was only on the deck. The C54 would take off on instruments; at a thousand feet it was supposed to go out on top, and have good weather the rest of the way across.

Monk and Ham boarded the plane, and Ham commented on the weather.

“They’ve sure come a long way toward licking weather in flying,” he remarked. “A few years ago, this would have been scary as the dickens. You can’t even see the other end of the runway. Notice that?”

Monk said he had noticed.

The plane taxied away from the loading depot, made the run downwind to the starting position slowly and stopped for the cockpit checkoff and clearance from the tower, the latter by radio. The four engines thundered successively, pulling the fog back hungrily and throwing it in troubled billows far astern.

Presently the pilot got his clear to take off, acknowledged, and began running the rapid-fire verbal take-off procedure, making a little game of it. The pilot was particularly cheerful. This was his last run; he had the points necessary for discharge, and he was looking forward to getting into civilian clothes for the first time in more than four years.

The big transport left the ground smoothly, and climbed. This was a ticklish time, and the pilot concentrated on the instruments, mentally deciding that if he ever took an airline job, it would be on a run where the sun always shone.

At eight hundred and fifty feet by the sensitive altimeter, they pulled out into the sunlight. It was now as if they were flying over an Arctic vastness of wonderfully white snow piled in soft billows and drifts and dunes, with here and there a chasm or a little hillock.

The pilot leaned back, relaxing.

THE plane blew apart at five thousand feet altitude. Therefore it must have been an altimeter gadget which detonated the bomb, rather than a timer. At least this was the finding of the board of investigation.

The board which looked into the disaster got a clear picture of what happened, because there was an eyewitness, another plane flying to the rear and about a thousand feet lower, a perfect spot for observing.

The pilot of the second plane was not watching, but his co-pilot was, and he declared there were two explosions, then a fire. The first blast, accompanied by a spurt of yellowish smoke, split the starboard hull about midship. After an interval of about three seconds, the second blast came, this one evidently the fuel tanks exploding, because it seemed to run the full length of the ship and to the wingtips, and the fire which followed was completely enveloping.

The ship had fallen at once, breaking up slightly before it disappeared into the clouds. The fire had been terrific, however, and it was almost completely certain that none of the occupants of the plane escaped even from their seats.

The examining board was also able to ascertain, from the parts of the bomb which were found in the wreckage, that the bomb had been of home-made construction, although none the less effective for that.

They found bits of the exploding mechanism, which had consisted of an ordinary aircraft altimeter with contacts soldered to the hand which indicated thousands of feet—the hand that would correspond to the hour one on a watch.

Because the thing was set at five thousand—at any rate the explosion had occurred at five thousand—it was certain the bomb had been put aboard at Stratford.

They were never able to discover how it had been done.

When it was announced that Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks had boarded the plane before it took off, there was a locust-plague descent of newspapermen on the scene.

Chapter VI

NEW YORK CITY newspapers are frequently accused of being only two kinds, tabloid and dignified. Regardless of the justice of this charge, the death stories of Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks received two treatments. The tabloid sheets and some of their large-format brothers played up the slam-bang lives of the two men in their association with Doc Savage, who was referred to as a man of mystery—not the first time Doc had been so indicated.

The newspapers designated as dignified let emphasis fall on the accomplishments of the two men and the extent of their loss to the world. The review of Monk's accomplishments in chemistry were something to blush at. Monk, who was no shrinking violet, could not have done better publicity had he written it himself. Monk's research in plastics; the cracking process in high-test gasoline he had developed, his dye-drug research, his work in the fields of explosives, synthetics—the list read like the index to a volume on general chemistry—was fully outlined. Ham Brooks, lawyer, got the same sort of obituary, one of the features being an interview containing many fine words from a Supreme Court justice who, like Ham, was a Harvard product.

City editors got their best reporters in and directed, “See what you can get out of Savage about this.” The hopes of most of them were considerably less than mountains. Doc Savage had never been famous for hunting publicity.

The tabloid boys, in particular, expected to finish by discovering that somehow or other they hadn't been able to see Doc. But they were fooled. They were admitted and greeted with the same brand of restrained dignity as greeted their full-sheet brothers who smelled of Scotch instead of gin.

Doc Savage's headquarters, as was soon discovered by anyone who tried to barge in without preliminaries, were best approached through an interviewing office on the fourth floor. This place proved to be a private detective agency office where inquiries were greeted with courtesy and suspicion.

When Canbeck, of the *Times*—his column, *The World Today*, commanded considerable respect—arrived at the sleuthing office, he found a number of other fourth estaters, some of whom he respected very little. Canbeck was a nice guy, however, who kept his feelings to himself. He noticed that the other newsmen regarded him with respect, and he was pleased. Presently, as became a man with prestige, he found that leadership in the interviewing fell upon him.

Nobody, including Canbeck, really expected an interview with Doc Savage. He was as surprised as the others when they were conducted to the eighty-sixth floor in what was obviously a private elevator.

“Hey, buddy!” exclaimed one of the private detectives in the corridor. “Out you go!” He had caught one

of the reporters snapping candid pictures, which had previously been forbidden.

The offender was expelled.

The private detective in charge made a brief speech in which he explained, "Mr. Savage is grieved deeply by the news, and because of that and the burns which he received in the accident, it would be better if you gentlemen confined your interview to twenty minutes."

This was fine. The reporters had expected five minutes at the most.

CANBECK had never seen Doc Savage's headquarters before. He believed none of the others had either, and he could see that they had come planning not to be impressed, but that they were being impressed anyway. Canbeck found himself in the same boat, although, having been a financial and political writer for years, he had met many influential people against their own background, and he had not expected to feel any particular emotion. But the surroundings did impress him—and no surroundings had impressed him for a long time.

Actually, Canbeck was a little startled when he saw the inside of the reception room and the library where they were received. The library was breath-taking in its inclusiveness; there were, Canbeck realized, thousands upon thousands of books, all heavily scientific and specialized. Canbeck happened to cast an eye over a battery of cases containing material in his own field, economics and trade, and he realized presently that surprise was holding his mouth open.

The reporters, about twenty of them, were placed in comfortable chairs in a rather crowded space.

A man who was very large, a giant, you realized suddenly when you saw him near something to which his size could be compared, entered quietly and seated himself behind a desk. His, "Good morning, gentlemen," was delivered in a deep-throated, cultured and trained voice.

"This is Doc Savage," explained one of the private detectives.

The newsmen had realized this immediately. But no one asked a question until Canbeck said, "Mr. Savage, may I express on behalf of all newspapermen in the city our regret at the untimely death of Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair. If we can offer, through our facilities, anything in the way of news you desire, we would consider it a privilege to do so."

The big man lifted a bronze hand to adjust the bandages which swathed the right side of his face and his jaw. He thanked them quietly.

Then his flake gold eyes examined them thoughtfully for a while.

He added, "The world has a way of yielding up what is demanded of it. Each of us is a man moulded by whatever we have inside of us in the way of desires, coupled with whatever we have met in the way of obstacles. That is the way we measure ourselves. But our real measure, I think, is in our contribution to the world outside us."

He paused at this point to produce a stack of mimeographed sheets from a drawer of the desk at which he was seated.

"Any weakness of faith in yourself and your friends will cut yourself off from many of the good things of this earth," he continued. "Friends are very important to a man. Close friends may not be as necessary as breathing, but they are necessary to breathe properly, and losing two of them is like taking away a

necessity.”

His voice had retained its depth, but emotion was moving it deeply, and he paused a moment, then continued:

“A man's philosophy of life is not easily changed, and only the deepest things change it. But if the impact is sufficient, it can move a man to retire from the pursuit of excitement and go into straight business life.”

It took a moment for that to slap the newsmen in the face.

CANBECK, voice scaling up in excitement, demanded, “Mr. Savage, does that mean you are abandoning your—er—profession?”

The bronze man nodded slowly, “It does.”

“You mean you're going into business life?”

“Yes.”

“For God's sake!” Canbeck gasped.

The news meant more to Canbeck than any of the others. To the tabloid reporters, it merely meant that Doc Savage, deeply shocked by the death of two friends, was going to abandon the pursuit of excitement which had in a sense been his career. To Canbeck it meant that a giant was coming into the industrial field. That, to Canbeck, meant more than any other news could have.

“What,” Canbeck asked, “are your plans? Or can you disclose them at this time?”

“I have no objection to disclosing them. I shall enter private enterprise, organizing various corporations to accomplish what I feel should be accomplished.”

One of the reporters exclaimed, “Can you imagine that! Doc Savage turning into a money-maker!”

The bronze giant winced slightly. “Perhaps I have misstated my philosophy slightly. Let us say that I am changing my field of activity from righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth to creating and providing employment for men. Much of the philanthropy which has characterized my past will be carried into my new line of work, I hope. That is why I stated that a man's lifetime philosophy is not easily altered.”

The reporter grinned.

“Anyhow, I'd like to own a slice of stock in any company you head,” he said.

The other reporters looked as if they would like to own the same thing.

That was the meat of the interview, which ended presently.

Chapter VII

WILLIAM WALTER WALLACE, a tall young man with hair the color of a haystack on fire, was a smart boy on Wall Street and, while the street was not the lamb-trap it had been in other days, it was still no pasture for fellows who did not have their shirts fastened down securely. Wallace had never actually

lost his shirt, which made him rather an oddity among Wall Street's long-time operators, something equivalent to living in the rain for years and never getting wet. Back in the days when wolves had no connection with female chasing, Wallace had been known as a Wall Street wolf, and of late years he had been known as Wonderful Wallace, the man who wouldn't trust God. Wallace was cautious.

Favorite reading material with Wonderful Wallace was the *Street Today*, a news organ of two small pages which was to the inner financial nervous system of the country what the little gossip sheets, circulated only in Hollywood, are to the film industry.

Friday's *Street Today* had a small item to the effect that Clark Savage, Jr., known as Doc Savage, was leaving other activities to become a business operator. Small items in the sheet were, like dynamite in cracks, usually the most important. For instance, the suicide of a financier, which had collapsed some forty corporations, had first appeared as half a line buried on page two.

Wallace, who took the trigger easily, blew smoke from both nostrils, reached for the telephone and got hold of Canbeck.

"Hello, Chet, how are you this morning? How about lunch with me?" he said.

Canbeck, who was not a dope, chuckled. "Slowing up, aren't you? Noon is three hours away."

"I was thinking of an early lunch," Wallace explained. "Say in about twenty minutes. You were with the gang who interviewed Savage, were not you?"

"Can do."

"The Mutt's?"

"Sure."

The Mutt's was a deceitful place in the extremely stinking environs of Fulton Fish Market; to reach The Mutt's was as unpleasant as braving a gas barrage laid down by civet cats, but once inside the scrubbed interior, which was largely decorated by hair-raising cartoons of idiots, not just any idiots but the famous idiots of all time including a well-known paperhanger and a buck-toothed emperor, the fish odor mysteriously vanished, and the food was world-renowned.

Canbeck said, "Doc Savage is a mental genius, a scientific wizard, and any business he gets into is going to make the insiders so much money they won't even gripe about their taxes. I would like to be in on a thing like that."

"You're reading my mind," Wallace told him.

"I was just on the telephone," the financial columnist added. "And I have an appointment with Savage for eleven."

"Invite me along, why don't you?"

Canbeck grinned. "I was already thinking of that."

"Favorably?"

"Yes."

Wallace, surprised, said, "You're more of a friend of mine than I thought you were."

“I need your prying nature,” Canbeck observed.

Wallace gave him a quick glance.

THEY found—and they were not really surprised when they did—several prominent industrial operators at Doc Savage's office. There were a few other men who, as insiders knew, were scouts for investment firms or individuals who did heavy speculating. At least, the interview was not private. Canbeck flushed angrily, and it did not soothe him entirely when one of the private detectives, through whom Canbeck had made the appointment to see Savage, approached and apologized for failing to tell Canbeck that the interview was not to be private; Mr. Savage would have no time for private interviews unless on a specific subject and by advance negotiation. So sorry.

“That's all right,” Canbeck said briefly.

He surmised the other men were here for the same reason as Wallace and himself.

Presently, when Doc Savage appeared, he found this was true. The other visitors were not inclined to be bashful, and they launched at once to the matter that had brought them. They would furnish Doc Savage with capital, and they stated their terms.

The big bronze man spoke, and it was evident he was irritated.

“Gentlemen, I have never asked favors, and I can assure you that you are not going to do me any now,” he said. “Frankly, you fancy yourselves occupying a position which you do not occupy at all—that of being able to finance me. I do not need financing.”

The bronze man's suit was a neat blue pin-stripe, his facial bandages were crisp, and there were not as many of them, and his voice was more vibrant, had more of the powerful quality recognizable by those who had heard Doc Savage previously, either in person or by radio.

Now there was some oil-on-troubled-waters talk. Canbeck listened wryly to a man named Doyle McSwain explaining that personally he was intrigued by the satisfaction that he would get out of knowing Doc Savage was working with his dollars. “At my years of life, a man who has not really done much good in the world finds that he is entering a desert emotionally,” said McSwain. “I would feel, if I became associated with Doc Savage, much as a man must feel who has contributed a million to founding a cancer research plan or something of the sort.”

Canbeck reflected that McSwain was at least half right; the man had never done a switch of good to anyone except himself, and the latter only financial. As for McSwain getting an emotional lift out of helping Savage, that was extremely doubtful. Snakes like McSwain didn't change their scales to angel feathers overnight.

Slightly disgusted, Canbeck noted that Doc Savage seemed mollified. He listened to the remarkable bronze man's voice saying that, although he had not contemplated using outside capital, it was true that there were points to be considered.

The bronze giant seemed lost in thought for a while.

“Suppose I put it this way,” he said finally. “I do not promise definitely to accept outside capital, but I will consider using only money which the investors will not take from present holdings.”

McSwain asked cautiously just what was meant by that.

“Shall we say that I will accept only such cash as you gentlemen have on hand—and then only when you produce evidence it is cash on hand, not the proceeds from assets you have converted in order to invest with my corporations.”

McSwain wished to know what in the hell was meant by that. But he didn't use those words.

“Exactly what I say,” the bronze man replied. “You will hand me your investment in cash, together with proof that the money is not taken from other worth-while holdings. In other words, millions of dollars will be involved, and I do not wish to create an unstable condition in investment funds. Incidentally, my detective agency will investigate your proof that the money you wish to invest is cash that is not working.”

That made it clear enough for McSwain.

WHEN they had left the conference, Wallace stopped in the building lobby to light a cigarette. He narrowed one eye through the smoke at Canbeck.

“This,” Wallace said, “could be a lulu.”

“Eh?”

“Don't you know what I mean?”

“I think I do.”

“Could I be wrong?”

Canbeck had started to light a cigarette himself. He was holding the cigarette poised, however, in an astonished posture. He was silent for a while.

“You scare the hell out of me,” he said.

Wallace grimaced. “Answer my question. Could I be wrong?”

“You could.”

“Am I?”

“God, I hope so,” Canbeck said quietly.

“Hadn't we better find out?”

“I hope to tell you we'd better find out.” Canbeck's hand was shaking when he lit his cigarette. “What do you say we look into this detective agency he's using so freely?”

They did not, at least not actually, in the course of the afternoon put into words the thing that both had in their minds. It was not necessary, because both Canbeck and Wallace knew each other probably much better than they realized or would have admitted.

Name of the detective agency: The Durwell Agency, Research and Investigations. The owner, Mike Durwell, was unquestionably a man of character, and he had been associated with Doc Savage for a considerable period of time.

It was Wallace who made an interesting discovery.

“Canbeck,” he said. “Come over here.” They were in the bank where Mike Durwell, private detective agency owner, did his banking.

Wallace had been talking to a thin-necked vice-president.

“Tell Mr. Canbeck the news,” Wallace requested, having introduced the thin-neck as belonging to a man named Kissel.

“Mr. Durwell sold his agency,” said Kissel.

“When?”

“Two weeks ago.”

“Who to?”

“A man named Estabrook.”

“What,” demanded Canbeck, “do you know about the purchaser, Estabrook?”

“Very little.”

“Where is the former owner, Mike Durwell?”

“I believe he agreed to go to Mexico on an investigative mission for the new owner.”

Neither Canbeck nor Wallace looked at each other, and Canbeck said dryly, “That is very interesting. Very.”

THEY had a conference in a bar booth with ox-red leather and deep green woodwork, and the upshot of it was that they thought they had better keep snooping. Wallace swore softly for a while. “And I was so damn near putting my money into it that it wasn't even funny,” he said.

“We could,” Canbeck reminded him, “be wrong.”

“The world could be flat.”

“We haven't a damned shred of proof.”

“Proof you only need in courts.” Canbeck stood up. “Come on. Let's look into the wilderness farther.”

MIKE DURWELL was in Campeche state, Mexico; probably right now he was riding a burro back into the jungles, because his job was to reach a remote gold mine, the Orotá Gold Mining Corporation No. 1, and find out who was stealing the production. It was a job that would entail Durwell being out of touch with civilization for weeks. This information came from Durwell's fat wife, who was a little indignant about the whole thing.

“Nice setup,” Canbeck commented when they were leaving.

Wallace agreed it was. “Durwell was an honest man. He's right where a crook would want an honest man to be.”

“You think we've got something?”

“What do you think?”

“It's got me upset.”

“Okay. Let's see what we can find out about the new detective agency owner, Estabrook.”

Canbeck said, “We wouldn't want to upset *him*.”

They went out on the sidewalk. Mrs. Durwell lived in a modern apartment facing Central Park South, and there was a half block walk south and a block walk east to the subway. They were halfway across the sidewalk to their cab, which was waiting, when a laundryman got out of a white laundry truck carrying a bundle of laundry in a rather peculiar position in his arms. The laundryman walked toward Canbeck and Wallace, walked toward them and passed them, but as he passed there was a hissing sound that blew open the paper at one end of the laundry bundle. He went on without looking at the two men, who had stopped. He went on and got into another car which was parked. That car left. The white laundry truck left. Neither lost time.

Canbeck and Wallace, quite sick by now, staggered into their cab.

“The nearest hospital!” Canbeck croaked.

The driver looked around. “Huh?”

“That guy squirted gas or something on us,” Canbeck explained in a much sicker voice.

“The hospital? You want me to take you to a hospital?”

“For God's sake, you ape, yes. Yes!”

The driver put his gears in mesh. “Okay, keep your shirt on. Just keep your shirt on.”

The cab got moving. Canbeck and Wallace leaned back. They looked at each other in horror, now too sick to understand much that went on about them. Probably too ill to notice that the driver had closed the glass partition between the seats, and that he had his windows wide open for plenty of ventilation. It was not, for that matter, the same driver who had brought them to Mrs. Durwell's apartment.

Presently they stopped breathing, and later the driver pulled over to the curbing and a man, a stranger, got in. Not exactly a stranger; it was the fellow in the laundryman's suit. He examined the two bodies.

“How are they feeling?” the driver asked.

“They aren't,” said the man in white.

Chapter VIII

IMPERIAL AVIATION, LTD., had its American terminal at Baltimore, other landings being made at Nova Scotia, or Bermuda, depending on the weather. The reason for the line having a Baltimore terminus rather than a New York or Boston one was purely a matter of competition. The line was British, and the American competitors had, by way of turning the cheek for some little unpleasanties imperial had done them, kept the line from getting a New York base.

Imperial's flight seven, a variation of the Short Class C seaplane developed early in the war, came in from London, made a good landing, swung up to the ramp, and the lines and fenders were made fast.

Preceding the unloading of the passengers, the cabin steward had some trouble with the door lock. He couldn't get it open; the door was jammed he explained. Would the passengers please be patient. "The delay will only be a moment."

As a matter of fact, the delay was about two or three minutes, and the part of the ground crew who were the equivalent of stevedores began unloading the baggage from another part of the plane. There were two men riding in the baggage hold of the plane, and neither had had a pleasant voyage because they'd neglected to provide an essential for ocean flying—something to sleep on. They had occupied a considerable part of the flight quarreling over who was responsible for the oversight.

The two, who weren't stowaways, managed to reach the passenger depot without there being the slightest chance of any of the passengers having seen them.

Presently—the passengers were unloading now—the cabin steward paid them a furtive visit.

"Good job," Monk Mayfair told him. "Good, that is, if that blackbird didn't see us."

"He did not," said the steward positively. The blackbird referred to a dark-haired man with smouldering eyes who wore heavy shoes, and whom Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks had been trailing with great concentration for some time—since, indeed, Monk and Ham had picked up his trail at the pub near the ATC field at Stratford, England. "He suspects nothing," the steward reasserted.

Monk tipped the steward five dollars. Ham's contempt was aroused by the niggardliness of the gratuity, and he added a twenty-dollar bill. "Thank you very much," he told the steward.

"I believe there are some reporters on hand," the steward advised. "I suggest you take a side exit if you wish to avoid them."

Ham said they sure didn't want to meet any reporters. "They'd probably lynch us," he added.

"Did you send that radio to have a car waiting?" Monk demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

"I'll show you," the steward said.

The car was a cab. They had suggested a cab because it was the least likely to attract attention. They got into the machine, which was parked where they could watch the passenger exit for the dark man's appearance.

"Five dollars!" Ham said disgustedly. "Boy, it really frightens you to turn loose of a dollar."

"Tipping undermines a man's character," Monk insisted.

"Nobody's character is going to fall into the size holes you dig."

“Pssst! There he goes!”

“Where?”

“Behind that elderly couple. He's getting into a cab.”

Ham told their driver hastily, “We want to trail a cab. I'll point it out in a minute. There! That one.”

Their driver turned his head suspiciously, wished to know, “Buddy, what am I getting into?”

Ham had sized up the fellow. He showed the man another twenty-dollar bill. “You'll get into this bill, and a brother like it if you don't lose that fellow.”

The driver took the greenback, held it close to his eyes, turning it to inspect one side and then the other. He put his machine in motion without more remarks.

THE ride proved to be a long one, a direct run to the downtown railway station. Traffic was satisfyingly thick, their driver efficient, but not reckless.

Monk and Ham were both rather silent. Without being aware, they were being worm-eaten by the same thoughts. . . . They didn't like the present situation, with themselves supposed to be dead.

Actually there was no justification for their feeling that they were responsible for the death of the men in the ATC plane which they were supposed to have boarded in England. They had, as a matter of fact, warned the ATC that their lives were in danger, and so the plane might be in danger. Someone had slipped. Somehow, a bomb had been put aboard the ship. It was not their fault. But they felt very low about it.

Their plan had been, and still was, simply to make the dark-complexioned man think they had taken the earlier plane for the States, then to be aboard the ship on which the fellow had let slip that he had booked passage. This they had done, and it was working out well.

The circumstance of their supposed death they would have ordinarily welcomed, but it had been brought about by the loss of the ATC plane and all aboard, so it was really a sickening thing.

The newspaper hullabaloo over their supposed deaths was also a source of worry. They didn't like the stir, although they were not as yet aware just how much excitement their supposed demise had caused. The way they felt about it, there would be almost no one but Doc Savage who would be extremely shocked at the news. Monk and Ham both felt they had many friends, no close relatives. Doc would be the most concerned about them. They intended to let Doc know they were safe as soon as it could be sensibly managed. They had not considered it wise to use cable or telephone to advise Doc of the truth. Information could leak out of cable and telephone offices.

Now that the enemy thought them dead, it was worth the unpleasantness of the thing to stay “dead” for a while, in order to work without being suspected.

Monk cleared his throat.

“We oughta let Doc know.”

“First chance,” Ham agreed.

“I guess we could get on a telephone and change our voices.”

“Sure.”

“If you talk to him,” Monk said, “find out what's behind this mess.”

“I will,” Ham agreed grimly.

Presently, when their cab was stopped at an intersection for a red light, they had the opportunity to buy a newspaper, and did so. Monk began looking on the back pages to see whether there would be a line of print about their deaths. He heard Ham gasp, “Oh my God!” He lowered the paper, stared at Ham, demanded, “What's eating you?”

Ham indicated the front page. “They're going in for jungle art,” he said.

Monk turned the paper, discovered he was scowling at his own likeness, two columns wide. He read the cutlines underneath, then read a few lines of print. His ears became red. He tried to sit on the paper.

“Come on, come on! Hand it over!” Ham ordered. “Son, you're blushing like a schoolgirl.”

Ham began reading. Then he blushed himself and shoved the paper down beside the cushion.

“What'd you find?” Monk demanded.

“Never mind,” Ham said uncomfortably.

He was concerned lest Monk read the flowery tributes paid the memory of Ham Brooks. He could imagine the amount of ribbing Monk would get out of the stories. Secretly, though, he was quite pleased, and presently he cautiously moved the newspaper from the crack between the cushions to his coat pocket, for later reading.

FIVE hours later the sun went to bed in puffy black clouds in the west, and the clouds did considerable squirming as if they were unhappy about it. There was considerable wind, tasting of snow.

There were about two inches of snow on the ground where the ground had not been scoured clean by the wind, all the way across the five-acre patch of lawn to the low, white rambling house of wide wooden siding. The house had at least three fireplace chimneys, and many windows. All of the windows were heavily curtained inside—or there were no lights being shown.

Ham blew breath like cigarette smoke into his hands and complained, “I wish we'd had a chance to get to a telephone and talk to Doc.”

Monk said, “I wish it were warmer.” He was crawling under an evergreen bush of some kind. The bush dumped some snow down his neck, and he backed away. “How we going to get into that house?” he wanted to know.

Ham did not answer. He could see the cab which had brought the dark man to the house. The cab was returning. He was sure the dark man had gotten out, but he decided to take no chances. “I'm going to stop that cab,” he said. “Maybe the driver knows something.”

“Maybe you'll get your head shot off, too,” Monk said.

Nothing violent happened, though. The cab driver thought Ham, standing in the street gesticulating, was a fare. He halted.

Ham examined the driver and decided he was impressionable. "We're investigators. You can help us, or you can tell the police why you didn't," Ham told him in an impressive voice. "But if you delay us, you're going to get into trouble. Plenty of trouble."

The driver, becoming frightened, said he didn't want any trouble. However, he would like to know, he said, who they were. This stumped Ham; they couldn't very well tell the man who they were, and he wouldn't believe them if they did, probably.

Monk came stalking up to the cab, looking as formidable as a truck. "My name's McGinnis, Plain Clothes Detective McGinnis," Monk lied. "This is Mr. Gillicuddy, my assistant," he added, indicating Ham. "And here's my badge." He turned back his coat lapel, and a silver half-dollar, which he had palmed and held in place with his thumb, glinted impressively.

This fooled the cabby. No, he didn't know anything about his fare. No, he hadn't noticed anything peculiar. Yes, he knew who owned the house.

"Who," Monk demanded, "owns the place?"

"Doctor Joseph Benson," the hack driver explained.

HAM BROOKS jumped visibly; his mouth opened to let out something surprised, but Monk punched him in the ribs to silence him, then drew him over to where the cab driver would not overhear. "I kept thinking," Monk whispered, "there was something familiar about that house."

"Yes, I remember Joe Benson showing Doc a picture of the place one time," Ham agreed. "It's his summer house, his little cottage by the sea, he called it." Ham peered about in the darkness. "Where's the ocean?"

"Over yonder somewhere." Monk was thoughtful. "Doctor Joseph Benson, eh? Joe has been a friend of Doc's for years."

Ham wrapped his arms around his chest and tried to dispel the bite of the cold wind by shivering. He had already turned up his coat collar.

"I think we'd better call on Joe," he said.

"You mean just pay a social call?" asked Monk, with some alarm.

"No. I think we'd better be cautious," Ham said. "I think a small dose of caution would be wise."

Monk said fine, but make his a large dose. They went back to the cab driver. They told him they wanted to get into the house, or at least get a look into the house.

"You'll change clothes with my friend here," Monk explained. "Then you'll go back and say there was a mistake in the fare—only my friend will say that."

Ham became alarmed. "What good will that do?"

"It'll get the door open."

The driver had some objections. It was too cold to do any clothes changing. "Just your hat and coat," Monk told him. "Let's get at it. I'll lie down in the back of the cab with you."

“I don't see what this is going to accomplish,” Ham complained. The hack driver's coat did not fit him too badly, but the cap sat on his head like a tomato can on a watermelon. Monk advised, “If Doctor Benson answers, we'll ask him some questions. Or you can. I'll listen. I'll be the reserves, if there's trouble.”

Ham said he thought the thing was half-smart. He said this because it was Monk's idea; actually he saw nothing wrong with it. They were suffering from a long spell of monotony because of the trans-Atlantic flight, and they wanted to see some action.

Ham drove the cab back to Doctor Benson's house. Monk crouched in the back seat, on the floor, with the driver. The driver smelled of bourbon whiskey and sen-sen, and Monk noticed he was shaking, either from fright or the cold.

The cab stopped. Ham said, “Here I go,” out of the corner of his mouth. With foresight, he pretended to try the rear door lock before leaving the cab, actually opening the door a trifle so Monk could see what went on. Then he went to the door and made a tum-tum-tummy sound on it with his knuckles.

The door opened a little too promptly.

“I'm sorry,” Ham began, “but I made a mistake in the fare of the passenger I just—hey! Hey! Ugh-h-h. . .” This finish was due to the fact that two men were trying to seize him by the throat simultaneously.

MONK came out of the cab. Strangely enough, it did not seem to occur to the pair who had laid hold of Ham that there might be anyone else in the hack. All their attention they gave to Ham. When Monk reached them, one was grunting, “Told you . . . he wasn't . . . the same hacker!” Between spurting words, he was belaboring Ham. Monk swung for the jaw, got the side of the man's head instead, but the fellow fell anyway.

The second man released Ham, who promptly hit him in the stomach, but with surprisingly small results. The man simply doubled over, then straightened, butting Ham on the jaw in the process. Dazed, Ham stumbled back against the wall.

Monk's slugging victim suddenly rolled over and crawled with remarkable speed, crawling with such effort that his fingernails and shoes made teeth-edging sounds on the floor. Monk tried to catch him. Monk thought he would kick the man in the head this time and really quiet him. But Monk couldn't catch the fellow, who went through a door and slammed it. Monk began kicking on the door.

Ham's man was doubled up again. He was sick. Being sick as he ran, he dashed outdoors and jumped

into the cab, the engine of which was still running. He yanked the gear shift and the cab began moving.

“Help! Help! Help!” yelled the cab driver. He was in the back seat.

The man escaping in the hack took both hands off the wheel, turned in the seat, and hit the yelling proprietor of the hack a terrific blow in the face, collapsing him. The cab angled across a driveway, colliding with a small Australian pine tree and causing a cloud of snow to erupt.

Ham came out of his coma sufficiently to stumble to the door, produce a large army pistol, which he fired. The pistol made a loud noise, and a twig fell out of a tree some twenty feet wide of the cab.

The cab was now leaving a path like an inebriated serpent across the snow-covered lawn. It regained the driveway and departed while Ham was trying unsuccessfully to rest the barrel of his gun against the side of the door.

Monk finally kicked down the door which the fleeing man had locked. He peered distastefully at the darkness beyond, and decided not to go in.

“One guy ran in there,” he told Ham. “Don't you want to go in and see about him?”

Ham wasn't that dizzy. “Go yourself,” he said.

“No, thanks!” Monk threw a chair through the door into the darkness and listened to it bounce off walls. He was still listening when the lights in their room went off, indicating someone had pulled the master switch. “Now why'd he turn off the lights?” Monk wished to know.

“I'm going outdoors,” Ham said. “I'll look for a back door in case he tries to beat it out that way.”

Monk told him to go ahead. “Hey! Two of them! There's at least two of them. The dark-haired bird didn't show at the door.”

“I know it,” Ham said disgustedly.

MONK waited perhaps a minute, trying to decide whether it wasn't wise to start prowling through the darkened house, or whether he was merely afraid to do so. Then he heard Ham Brooks hollering.

“Here they go!” Ham howled. *Blam! blam!* went a gun which Monk took to be Ham's.

Monk dashed outside, and in a moment found himself flat on his back a dozen feet down the sidewalk. There seemed to be ice on the walk, he decided. Gaining his feet, he proceeded more cautiously.

He couldn't distinguish much in the darkness. He thought it was a great deal darker than when they had gone into the house, although that could hardly be the case. The gun said *blam! bam!* again, and two other somethings said *zizz!* near his head. “Here! This is me!” Monk yelled indignantly.

From a spot nowhere near where the shots had sounded, Ham's voice advised, “If you'd hold a light, they could see you better.”

Monk flopped wildly into the snow. “Oh, God! I thought it was you shooting!”

“It wasn't,” Ham explained needlessly. “I haven't been able to see—listen! I think they're running for it! Running away.”

Monk listened to what seemed to be two men going away in great haste through the snow and bushes. Becoming reckless, he sprang to his feet and attempted to pursue the sounds. He was quite disturbed at the idea of their quarry escaping.

Presently he lost the sounds, and he was unable to find any tracks without showing a light. He did not think it would be very bright to show a light.

"It sounded to me like there were two of them," he told Ham. "How many did you see?"

"Two."

"Was Doctor Benson one of them?"

"I couldn't tell. They were just shadowy forms against the snow when I found them. I only got a glimpse."

"Let's take a look in the house."

Ham was agreeable. "There should be a telephone. We can get the State Police looking for those guys. Where did the other one go?"

"He got away in the cab. Didn't you know that?"

"The cab? Well, we can report its license number to the police. What was the license number?"

"Search me," Monk said.

THEY decided to enter the house via the back door, which was the route the fugitives had used in departing. Ham had located electric power wires leading to the back porch, and he thought the master switch might be there, which proved correct. Monk threw the switch, but jerked it off when light flooded the porch; he turned it on again long enough for Ham to extinguish the porch light, then left it on.

"You've got the gun, you can go in first," he told Ham.

"You've got one, too," Ham reminded him. "But I'm not afraid. They scrambled. There's nobody here."

Nevertheless they didn't turn on the light in the room which they entered. Odors told them the room was a kitchen, and the smooth feel of cabinets confirmed this. An electric refrigerator frightened them by starting to purr softly.

Monk opened another door, advanced cautiously, then lifted his voice.

"Anybody home?" he demanded loudly.

A reply came in the form of a scuffling and whimpering noise.

Then a man's voice, vibrating with terror, demanded, "Who's there?"

Monk retreated wildly to the safety of the kitchen, from where he called, "Who are you?"

"Doctor Benson," the frightened voice said.

Suspicious silence reigned for a few moments. Monk whispered, "Ham?"

"Yes."

“Was that Bensons' voice?”

“It could be.” Ham sounded doubtful.

The voice they were discussing, louder and more frantic, asked, “Who are you? Are you the police? If you are, for God's sake get in here and turn us loose!”

“It's Benson. I'm sure of it,” Ham whispered.

Chapter IX

DOCTOR JOSEPH BENSON had a nosebleed. He lay on his back, hips twisted to the left, head twisted right, mouth open and nostrils distended, and the crimson from his nostrils had stained his face, his neck, giving him a horrifying butchered appearance. He looked at them from wide relieved eyes and said, “I bumped my nose.”

There was a wad of handkerchief on the floor and another handkerchief which had formerly held the first one in his mouth was knotted around his neck. His wrists and ankles were tied, but not tightly nor expertly.

He said, almost apologetically, “They tied me in a great hurry. I can get myself loose, I think. Please see about Clayton.”

When both Monk and Ham started to untie him, he urged, “Won't you see about Miss Clayton first?”

Ham jumped up nervously, held his cocked pistol and demanded, “Who's Clayton? One of the gang?”

“Miss Clayton,” Benson said. “She's in there.” He pointed at a door with his chin.

“How many people around here besides yourself?” Ham asked.

“Two men, another man who just came, and Miss Clayton,” Benson explained.

Confused, Ham said, “We saw three men leave here—”

“Good! they're all gone, then!” Doctor Benson exclaimed.

Monk was looking with interest at the door Doctor Benson had indicated. He wondered who Miss Clayton was. He wondered if Miss Clayton would be interesting. He decided to investigate, and told Ham, “You keep that gun cocked and protect me if I need it.”

He advanced on the door cautiously, then decided to be bold, flung the door open and strode forward. He was somewhat let down by finding himself in a small hallway which had a door at the other end. He strode forward, flung that door open even more grandly. He intended to make a dashing impression on Miss Clayton.

He had an impression of darkness, of a swishing noise, of a lot of dull red stuff like fire that began as a multitude of small points, grew into a crimson curtain turning into blackness and stillness.

Later a female voice began saying, “Oh, I'm so sorry! I'm so awfully sorry!”

Presently Ham Brooks said, “Don't worry about it at all, Miss Clayton. You could no more hurt that head than you could nick a cement sidewalk with your fist.”

“But I thought he was one of the men who've been keeping us here.”

“You haven't hurt him.”

“I was so scared when I saw him!”

“A perfectly understandable reaction,” Ham assured her. “His face would scare a porcelain saint.”

“Who is he?” Miss Clayton wished to know.

“Just a thick-witted stooge who helps me,” Ham said lightly.

Monk hurriedly assembled his wits in order to complain about the buildup he was getting. He opened his eyes. He examined Miss Clayton. What he saw caused him to close his eyes at once and groan as though in death, hoping this would move Miss Clayton to administer to him. It did. She took his head on her lap and made anxious noises.

ANXIOUSLY, Miss Clayton said, “He may be dying. I'm terribly worried.”

Ham leaned down, stared at Monk and gave his opinion. “Faking, probably. I've heard him groan before, and it didn't sound like that. His genuine groan sounds like a lion with a knot tied in its tail.”

Miss Clayton said, “We'd better send for a doctor.”

Doctor Benson said dryly, “Will I do? After all, I'm supposed to be a doctor.”

Ham remarked that what he thought Monk needed was the reviving effect of cold water. He suggested they put Monk bodily into a bathtub and turn the shower on him. Doctor Benson ignored this, and began exploring Monk's head with his fingers, causing Monk to groan loudly and genuinely and sit up.

“I'm Miss Clayton,” Miss Clayton explained. “I hit you. I thought you were the enemy.”

Monk assured her gallantly that it was all right, perfectly all right. He liked Miss Clayton. As long as it was necessary that he be hit over the head, he was glad Miss Clayton had done it. “What did you use, the kitchen stove?” he wished to know.

It was a chair. Miss Clayton explained. It seemed the chair had been upholstered, so it hadn't skinned Monk much.

“There is more contusion and possibly concussion than laceration,” Doctor Benson explained. “I would advise quiet and observation for a while to make sure it isn't serious.”

Monk told Ham, “I think you'd better search the house. There may be some of those guys here who didn't run off.”

“I already did.”

“When?”

“While you were asleep.”

Disbelieving this, Monk asked, “How long was I laid out?”

“About ten minutes.”

Monk looked at Miss Clayton's shapely arms with respect. He had not supposed she could swing a chair that hard.

Doctor Benson announced, “I've already told Mr. Brooks how frightfully glad we are that you arrived. I was becoming rather terrified.”

“I,” said Miss Clayton, “was scared stiff.”

Monk observed that Doctor Benson had washed the blood off his face, although the damp handkerchief he was holding was stained. Benson's clothing was rumpled and his gaunt face had an expression of strain.

“Did you call the police?” Monk asked Ham.

“No. The telephone is out.”

“They cut the wire yesterday,” Doctor Benson explained. “I think they were afraid Miss Clayton or I would get to the phone and call help.”

“They were holding you prisoner here?” Monk asked.

“Yes.”

“How long have they been doing that?”

“Since night before—let me see—it's silly, but I've sort of lost track of time. I think this would have been the third night we would have been held here.”

Miss Clayton nodded emphatically. “That is correct. We were seized the night following the afternoon when Doc Savage was burned.”

Monk scrambled to his feet in alarm. “Burned! You mean Doc has been hurt!”

Doctor Benson and Miss Clayton exchanged rather strange glances.

“We'd better tell you all the details,” Doctor Benson said uneasily.

LEAPING to his feet so precipitously had caused the room, including Miss Clayton, to begin swinging around Monk. He sat down and listened to Doctor Benson describe how he had introduced Doc Savage at the convention of physicians and surgeons and how he had been with Doc when the taxi collided with the gasoline transport in the street and Doc Savage had been burned in the resulting fire, later going to the hospital with Doc.

Here Miss Clayton interrupted to say, “During the fire, Doctor Benson made a hero out of himself by rushing in to rescue the victims of the flames. He's neglecting to tell you that.”

Benson looked as if he felt he should blush, but he didn't.

“I don't know what first aroused my suspicions,” Benson said. “Maybe nothing did. But at least I told Miss Clayton, when she was kind enough to have dinner with me later in the evening, that I had a feeling something was not as it should be. It was Miss Clayton who insisted I should investigate. I'm afraid, if it

had not been for Miss Clayton, I would not have had the good judgment to begin amateur sleuthing.”

Miss Clayton shivered. “I’m afraid I just thought it was play-acting at adventure, that nothing would develop.”

“What did develop?” Monk asked, watching Miss Clayton with interest. He thought Miss Clayton’s sweater could have been a bit more snug.

Doctor Benson explained about the counterfeit tickets to the lecture at the Coliseum. This had put a foundation under his suspicions, he said. “I know now that those men must have got into the hall to keep track of Doc Savage, and be ready for trouble,” he said.

“You say seven counterfeits?” Monk asked.

“Yes. At least they found seven phony tickets.”

“That means seven guys in the hall.”

“True.”

“And one driving the gasoline truck. Another one in the cab. Two in cabs, maybe. Didn’t you say two cabs ran together and one crashed into the gasoline truck?”

Doctor Benson nodded. “That makes at least nine, possibly ten, doesn’t it?”

Monk added, “One in Germany, and that dark-haired guy we trailed across the Atlantic. That makes twelve.”

“Maybe more,” Ham said. “Go ahead with your story, Benson.”

Benson described the seizure. When he came to the part where they had been forced into the cab, he stopped uncomfortably “They did an awfully cold-blooded thing then. They—well—they had an ice pick.” He shuddered violently.

Miss Clayton said, “They killed our cab driver.”

Monk glanced, somewhat sickly, at Ham. He was thinking of their own cab driver, calculating the fellow’s chances of going on living. He had a feeling they were small.

A hollowness in his voice now, Benson said, “They brought us here. This is my house, my summer cottage. They kept us here. It was an utterly brazen thing to do, but smart. If anyone came, anyone they couldn’t get rid of, they planned to force me to answer the door and convince the visitor everything was all right.”

Monk frowned. “That would have been a big chance for them to take, wouldn’t it?”

Benson shook his head sickly. “They were going to kill Miss Clayton if I didn’t.”

Miss Clayton broke the strained silence that followed with, “The pair called each other Ole and Sven. I think they just made up those names. But they were very bad men.”

MONK said he believed he would see about the telephone wire. He discovered at once that the instrument had been damaged beyond repair instead of the wires being cut. He was standing scowling at

the instrument when Ham joined him.

“What do you make of it?” Ham sounded uneasy.

“It's jimmied too bad to fix.”

“I don't mean the telephone.”

“I didn't think you did.” Monk rubbed the side of his face slowly, felt of the bruise on top of his head, then examined his hand to see if his scalp was still bleeding. “Frankly, I don't get it. The thing doesn't make sense to me.”

“I found a newspaper in the other room.”

“Huh?”

Ham produced the paper. “Take a look at the financial page.”

The paper was the *Times*, and it had a headline that said Doc Savage had announced that he intended to abandon his career of adventuring and devote all his efforts to private business.

“Blazes!” Monk was genuinely astonished. He read further, and found that Doc Savage had announced at a private interview with business leaders that he intended to finance his projected enterprises himself, but that he would accept a few approved investments of cash that was not otherwise usefully employed. Savage had made specifically conditional the agreement that any funds he accepted must be in the form of cash that had not come from the sale of other stocks, or from investments already made. “That sounds like the way Doc would do it,” Monk said.

“It does like hell!” Ham declared bluntly. Ham usually became very Harvard in his speech when he was excited, but this time he didn't. “It does like hell! It stinks! Doc wouldn't break up our group without consulting all of us. He'd talk it over.”

“Maybe he doesn't plan to break up our outfit.”

Ham said angrily, “How long would I last as a businessman? How long would you last as a businessman? How long would Renny, Long Tom and Johnny last? How long would a snowball last in Hades?”

“Not very long.” Monk thought of himself as a businessman. “God forbid!” he added. He thought about it some more, added, “Even with a pretty stenographer, I don't believe I'd like it.”

“I think,” said Ham, “we'd better see what's got into Doc.”

Monk thought so, too.

Chapter X

IT had suddenly begun to snow and blow. The dark cloud in the west had suddenly emptied itself of pent-up wind, leaving it gray and spent, and the wind was howling through the canyons of Manhattan, shoveling the snow about with great briskness. The night, where the street lights whitened the tumbling snow, looked as it was filled with angels fighting, but where it was dark, it was very dark and to open your mouth was to get hard, icy snowflakes poured into it.

Monk Mayfair was very glad it was only a block from the subway, and he said so. He said, “Much more

of this, and we'd need whatever an Eskimo uses for a seeing-eye dog.”

“Maybe,” said Miss Clayton, “Doc Savage won't be at his office.”

“Sure he will be,” Monk assured her. “He sleeps there.”

“Doesn't he have a home?”

Monk said Doc didn't. He was surprised when he said it; it had suddenly occurred to him that he had never before thought it unusual that Doc didn't maintain an apartment or at least a room in a hotel or a club. He explained this to Miss Clayton.

“That's no way for a man to live,” said Miss Clayton. “I don't wonder that he has decided to give up the kind of a life he has been living.”

It was warm in the lobby of the skyscraper, although the wind had drifted small pennants of snow through the cracks at the bottoms of the revolving doors. There were a few footprints in the snow pennants, but not many because the hour was late.

There were only two elevator operators on duty at this time of night, and both greeted Monk and Ham with pleasure.

“Good evening Robert, Willis,” Ham said. He agreed with Robert and Willis that it was a bad night outside.

Suddenly Monk said loudly, “Here! What's this? What goes on?”

Monk had discovered that the private elevator which ran only to Doc Savage's eighty-sixth floor suite was not operating and had a neat closed sign on it.

The elevator operator named Willis explained, “Mr. Savage had discontinued the private elevator service. All visitors are screened through the detective agency on the fourth floor.”

“Won't this elevator work?”

“No, sir. The power has been disconnected on Mr. Savage's instructions.” Willis looked uncomfortable. “I'm afraid, sir, you'll have to first visit the detective agency if you wish to see Mr. Savage. We have very strict orders.”

“I'm damned if I do!” said Monk indignantly.

“Oh, stop being temperamental.” Ham was getting into another elevator.

JIM LUBBOCK was the man on night shift at the Durwell Detective Agency. He said, “Monk! Ham! For crying out loud, how are you?” He shook hands warmly with them and said, “Glad to see you two back. Things are sure changing around here.”

“We're glad to be back,” Monk assured him. “We want to see Doc. Is he in?”

“He's in,” Lubbock said, then added uncomfortably, “But I'll have to telephone up for an appointment first.”

Monk was startled. “What the hell!”

Ham was surprised, too. "Things *have* changed around here."

Jim Lubbock was on the telephone. He asked, "Did you know Durwell is out of the agency? He's sold out, and he's in Mexico doing a job for the new owner."

Monk frowned. "Who bought Durwell out?"

"Guy named Estabrook."

"Don't know him."

"He seems okay so far." Lubbock spoke into the telephone, advising Doc Savage that Monk and Ham were here to see him.

Monk said, "Give me that phone." Into the mouthpiece, he said, "Doc? Getting kind of exclusive, aren't you?"

A powerful, pleasant voice said over the telephone, "I thought both of you were in Europe."

"Doc, were you badly burned in that fire?" Monk demanded anxiously.

"Not very," Doc Savage's voice explained. "I'm feeling better now, although the bandages are a nuisance. And I'm hoarse. I think I must have inhaled a little of the flame."

"We'll be right up."

"Oh, no, you won't," Doc's voice said.

Monk was dumbfounded.

"*What?*" he yelled.

"You're not," said the voice, "going to see me tonight."

"For God's sake!" Monk was indignant. "What are you pulling on us?"

"Monk, I'm not going to argue with you, nor with Ham either. I know why you came rushing back from Europe, and it won't do a bit of good. You're not going to persuade me to go back into my old avocation of chasing excitement. I've decided to go into business. It's final. So save your breath."

"Wait a minute!" Monk exclaimed. "You've got us wrong. We didn't know you had taken up a business career until a couple of hours ago."

The deep-timbered voice seemed startled. "No? Then why did you leave Europe so suddenly?"

"We've got," said Monk, "a mystery on our hands."

"Mystery?"

"It's quite a story. We'll be up there with it in a minute."

There was a pause, then Monk heard Doc's voice crash out a burst of skeptical mirth. "Oh, no you don't," Doc said. "You don't get away with that gag. I don't know what you've cooked up as bait, but I don't want to hear it. No, thanks. I'll see you in a few days, when you've decided to be reasonable."

The receiver clicked on its cradle at the other end of the line.

MONK was dumbfounded. "Doc's not going to let us come up!"

"Why not?" Ham yelled. He was more amazed than Monk.

"He thinks we came rushing home to talk him out of taking up a business career, evidently. And he's not going to give us a chance to spring any arguments. Isn't that a hell of a note!"

Miss Clayton eyed them strangely. "It seems queer, if you ask me."

Monk shook his head. "Not so queer when you know Doc. He probably feels guilty about making this change without consulting us."

Doctor Joseph Benson said, "You spoke to Doc Savage?"

"Yes."

"You are certain it was Mr. Savage's voice?"

Monk blinked, then his eyes narrowed. "I think it was."

Benson turned to the private detective, Jim Lubbock, and asked, "Mr. Lubbock, who did you say this Estabrook, your new employer, is?"

Lubbock shrugged. "I didn't say."

Monk glanced at Lubbock sharply. "Cut that out, Jim. We've known you for years, so don't be coy. What about Estabrook?"

Lubbock grinned his embarrassed friendship. "I never heard of him before he took over the firm, but I checked on him out of curiosity. He used to operate a big agency out in Chicago. Heard he was a nice guy."

"How did Durwell come to sell out to him?"

"That's easy. For the money, Durwell got his price."

Monk wheeled back to Doctor Benson, demanded, "Why the hell are you acting so suspicious?" He raised his voice. "Don't you think I know Doc's voice when I hear it?"

Benson was undisturbed. "I'm an outsider. I would have an unbiased viewpoint."

"Unbiased viewpoint of what?" Monk shouted.

"Listen, my friend," Benson said. "It seems damned strange Doc Savage won't see you!" Benson sounded angry.

Monk opened his mouth, closed it, glanced at Ham, and didn't like the peculiar expression on Ham's face. "My God!" Monk said, and his voice was suddenly queer.

Doctor Benson cleared his throat hastily. "This is a rather terrifying thing we're talking about, and perhaps I shouldn't have made such a blunt statement."

"Never mind how blunt it is," Monk growled. "But it's crazy. Cuckoo!"

Miss Clayton said, "Does anybody mind if I make a suggestion?" Nobody did, so Miss Clayton continued. "If there is any doubt, any doubt at all, why don't we get this man's fingerprints. Or would that be practical?"

MONK was delighted with Miss Clayton. "It would be as practical as anything—if we got them. But how?"

"Doctor Benson is a good friend of Doc Savage's," said Miss Clayton. "He could pay him a call."

Doctor Benson looked delighted. "That's a wonderful idea! And I'll get Doc's fingerprints! I'll find a way."

"Without his being aware of it," added Miss Clayton.

Ham said he thought this was an excellent idea if it worked. Benson saw no reason why it wouldn't work, he declared. He turned to the detective, Lubbock. "Get Mr. Savage on the phone, will you?"

Lubbock was agreeable, but also puzzled. "Is there something going on I should know about?" he wished to know. Monk said he wished he knew. Lubbock got on the telephone, and said, "Mr. Savage, a Doctor Joseph Benson to see you." He listened, then handed the telephone to Benson.

"Hello, Doc," Benson said. "How you feeling? . . . Fine. Say, I'm coming up. Okay? I have a young lady with me, a Miss Clayton. . . . Well, it's rather important. Something very strange has happened to us. . . . We were kidnapped. . . . You will? Good. A couple of minutes."

Benson put down the phone and made an everything-is-rosy sign with circled thumb and forefinger. "He says come on up."

Detective Lubbock ran Doctor Benson and Miss Clayton up to the eighty-sixth floor. He couldn't find the light switch in the elevator and the cage was dark, vibrated dolefully, and air rushed past with a distressed sighing. Miss Clayton was glad when the ride was over. "That's worse than a hearse," she said.

Miss Clayton entered Doc Savage's eighty-sixth floor headquarters in a spook-hunting frame of mind. She also expected to be awed, because she had heard enough about Doc Savage to be impressed. She had Doc Savage built up in her mind as just about the most remarkable living man. She had never met him.

She was not disappointed. The bronze giant who came forward with hand outstretched was everything she expected. The flake gold eyes, the texture of his bronze skin, the bronze hair a little darker than the skin, was exactly what she had anticipated.

"Hello, Benson," the bronze giant said. "What did Monk and Ham do, send you up here to do spade work for them?"

Benson seemed surprised. "Well, to tell the truth they did."

The bronze man laughed softly. "It won't do them any good."

"I think you've got them wrong," Benson said.

"Wrong? Listen, I've known that pair for years. They've been the closest friends any man ever had. I know exactly how they think."

"They didn't come from Europe to talk you out of going into a business career."

“No?”

Benson took a seat. “I want to tell you what happened to myself and Miss Clayton. Will you listen?”

“Of course.”

MISS CLAYTON watched the bronze giant while Doctor Benson talked, and she was impressed. She saw that he still wore bandages on a part of his face and a portion of his scalp, and his voice was obviously rather hoarse. He looked tired. But the bronze giant seemed at ease, and presently she found she was ashamed of having promoted the idea this man wasn't Doc Savage.

Doctor Benson did what Miss Clayton thought was a remarkably good story of telling the story of their kidnapping and the incidents which had led up to it. Without using too many words, he covered just about everything. “That's what brought Monk and Ham up here,” he finished.

The bronze man frowned. “Did they tell you why they came from Europe?”

“Only generally. They said they discovered an effort was made to keep them from getting my message informing them I thought something was wrong, and that when they headed for New York, attempts were made to kill them.”

“That,” the bronze man said, “is interesting.”

“Doc, I think they're sincere.”

The big man's laugh was amiable. “I hate to disillusion you, Doctor Benson, but you're underestimating Monk and Ham. This whole thing has the earmarks of being staged.”

“For heaven's sake, how do you mean? How could it be staged?”

“They probably knew I intended to quit adventuring and go into business. They would be against that. Monk and Ham are adventurers at heart; nothing else means anything to them. They like me, like to work with me, and naturally would want our arrangement to go on as it has in the past.”

Benson was shocked. “Doc, you mean they would stage this—this kidnapping of Miss Clayton and myself, as part of a plan to make you go back to adventure-chasing?”

“Exactly.”

“Great Scott!”

“You can see how nicely worked out the thing is. You in danger—I'm to rush to the aid of a friend. Monk and Ham attacked repeatedly in Europe and America. They need my help.” The bronze giant chuckled. “They're a slick pair.”

“But the murders!” Doctor Benson gasped.

“Have you actually *seen* any of these murders?”

“Well, not exactly—”

“Staged.”

“But the death of all those men on the plane!” Benson exclaimed. “That is genuine. The newspapers are full of it.”

The bronze man shook his head slowly. “That was either staged, or was an accident and Monk and Ham took advantage of it. If it was staged, the men on the plane aren't dead. Monk and Ham wouldn't commit murder. But they're clever chaps. I don't think you realize how clever they really are. They act like a pair of clowns, particularly when they're together.”

MISS CLAYTON was amazed, and she could see that Doctor Benson seemed equally startled. The thing was fantastic at first glance, but the more she thought about it, the more facets of logic she could see in the matter. Monk and Ham had impressed her as being slightly eccentric, and they might resort to an elaborate plan to keep intact an association which they liked.

Doctor Benson sighed. “Well, they seared the devil out of Miss Clayton and myself.”

“They shouldn't have done that,” said the bronze man severely.

“Miss Clayton,” Doctor Benson said, “has been very near a collapse. How do you feel now, darling?”

Surprised, Miss Clayton said, “I'm in somewhat of a mental whirl, to say the least.”

Benson clucked anxiously.

“I wish,” he said, “that we had some wine. A drink is what you need, Miss Clayton.” He turned, asked, “Doc, have you some wine?”

The bronze man stood up quickly. “No, but I can produce a stimulant that won't taste bad.”

“Good.”

Miss Clayton started to say she didn't need a stimulant, but caught Benson's warning shake of the head, and remained silent.

The bronze man disappeared into what Miss Clayton decided, from the apparatus visible through the door, was a large laboratory. He was not gone long, and came back bearing a glass of something that looked like lemonade. “This will pick you up. It's harmless.”

Miss Clayton understood now. The fingerprints. She took the glass, but held it near the bottom so that her fingers wouldn't smear the bronze man's fingerprints.

The stuff didn't taste like lemonade. It wasn't unpleasant, though, and almost at once she felt a lift.

“Thank you, Mr. Savage,” she said. She retained the glass.

Doctor Benson was watching her approvingly. He turned, said, “Doc, what would you suggest we do?”

“Go home,” said the bronze man, “and get a good night's sleep.”

“But suppose this isn't what you think it is?”

“I'm sure I'm right. But I'll look into it, if it will make you feel easier.”

“I wish you would.”

“I will.”

Chapter XI

THE bronze giant saw them to the door, shook hands with Benson, expressed delight with Miss Clayton—who had surreptitiously stowed the drinking glass in her purse—and said he was very sorry that the whole thing had happened as it had, and that he really didn't think they should worry. Probably there was no mystery, no one had been killed, and Monk and Ham would eventually admit the whole thing was an innocent but vigorous effort to trick Doc into staying with his former profession, if it could be called a profession.

Benson and Miss Clayton left.

The big bronze man closed the door. He locked it. He went back into the laboratory. “Okay,” he said loudly.

Two men, the two who had called each other Sven and Ole, came out of a closet where they had been concealed. They were armed.

“Oh, put those guns away,” the bronze man told them.

“They suspect anything?” Ole demanded.

“Not a thing.”

“My God, I was afraid you would not get away with it.”

“It was a cinch. The lights were dim in the reception room, and that story I fed them was good enough to fool anybody.”

“They believed it?”

“Seemed to.”

“Boy, what a relief!”

Sven wasn't as pleased or relieved. He demanded, “Is there going to be much more of this?”

“I think we're over the hump,” the bronze man said. “So far, everyone thinks I'm Savage. Monk and Ham are going to fret around a few days, and then I'll either have gotten rid of them, or they'll go chasing off after some other adventure.” The bronze man chuckled. “We might even fix up a nice wild goose chase for them.”

Sven shuddered. “The less we have to do with those birds, the better I'll like it. They damned near caught us at that house tonight.”

The bronze man wasn't alarmed. “As it turned out, that was the best thing that could possibly have happened for us. We've got them headed off.”

“What makes you so sure they're headed off?”

“The fingerprints.”

“Oh, they fell for that.”

The bronze man told how Benson had asked for wine for Miss Clayton, and how he had brought her a stimulant in a water glass.

“I’ve had that water glass stashed here for just such a chance,” he added.

“You sure Savage’s fingerprints are on it?”

“Positive. I put them there.”

“When?”

“The first night, right after we snatched Savage out of the hospital, and I took his place.”

Sven scowled. “You say you took it in and handed it to the girl?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know *your* prints aren’t on it now, too?”

The bronze man laughed. He showed them the fingertips of his left hand, in which he had carried the glass. The fingertips were coated with collodion. “Several coats of it, sandpapered smooth between coats,” he told them. “The whorls of the fingerprints won’t show through. I’m sure, because I made several tests.”

“That was pretty slick,” Sven admitted.

The bronze giant thought it was, too. “I liked the idea of putting the stuff on the left hand only,” he added. “I used my right hand to do a lot of handshaking, so they wouldn’t notice. The stuff is hardly noticeable on my fingers anyway.”

Sven said, “You think they’ll compare the prints on the glass with Doc Savage’s prints, find they’re the same, and be satisfied.”

“Certainly. The girl took the glass. She thought I didn’t see her do it.”

Ole was grinning. “What’s next on the calendar?”

“Fleecing the sheep,” the bronze man said. “Tomorrow, we’ll start accepting investments. In cash only.”

Ole and Sven looked interested. “How much do you estimate the take will be?”

“Five or ten million.”

“Oh, hell! Be reasonable!”

The bronze man chuckled. “You underestimate Savage’s reputation for integrity and acumen. The money will come in a flood. I think we’ll only stay in business four or five days, then I’ll announce I’m taking a little trip to close deals for factories and things. The little trip will take us to South Africa. I think we’ll enjoy South Africa.”

Sven said he thought they would, too, and added, “The thing I don’t enjoy is that Monk and Ham.”

The bronze man stopped chuckling. His face was sober for a while. “Maybe we’d better take measures about them.”

“What kind of measures?”

“Measures for a coffin. I think I've got an idea. The fingerprints will convince Monk and Ham that I'm Doc Savage, and they'll come to meet me any time I suggest it. I might pick a place where we can knock them off without trouble.”

Sven moistened his lips. “I'd get some sleep if I knew they were out of our hair.”

“All right. We'll do that, then.”

“What about that girl, that Miss Clayton?” Ole demanded. “She's smarter than one dame should be, if you ask me.”

The bronze man grinned. “Ole, were you ever a magician?”

“Huh?”

“I was,” the big man said. “And the first thing a magician learns is that the dumb ones are the hardest to fool. The dumb ones and the kids. But give me an intelligent audience, and I'll fool them every time. A smart person has sense enough to follow a misdirection, but the dumb ones are too dumb.”

Ole was biting a fingernail. “I hope that's right. But if Monk and Ham ever get a look at you, the goose is cooked.”

The bronze giant was indignant. “Don't you think I look like Savage?”

“You don't,” said Ole, “look a damned bit like him, except in a general way. We wouldn't get away with this, except that very few people really know what Doc Savage looks like at close range. It's a good thing you kept the lights low in there a while ago.”

Sven joined the argument. “You're not Savage's double, by a long shot.”

“I never said I was,” the big man reminded them. “When this thing was hatched out, the first thing that stared us in the face was that we couldn't use a double for Savage.”

“Well, we're getting away with it.”

“You'd better continue keeping the lights dim,” Sven warned.

The big man said they were boring him. “Let's have a drink,” he said. “Where did you guys hide the whiskey?”

Chapter XII

CORBETT, the police lieutenant, was getting considerably wrought up. He had listened to Ham Brooks tell about the kidnapping of their taxicab driver, had listened to Doctor Benson and Miss Clayton tell about the murder of their own taxi driver, their kidnapping, and the rest of it. Corbett had made quite a number of descriptive notes.

“We'll get a general alarm out for this Ole and Sven,” he said. “And that dark-complexioned guy. It's too bad we haven't got descriptions of the seven who gave the fake tickets to attend that meeting in the Coliseum.”

Monk had known Corbett for a couple of years. "Corbett, I love you," Monk said. "For a change, it's mighty wonderful to have a guy talk sense."

Corbett grinned. "I'll bet you tell all the girls that. What the dickens has got into Doc Savage, anyway? Going into business! I never expected anything like that."

"Neither did I," Monk admitted. "Say, I just thought of something. Why don't you check into the record of that guy who was driving the gasoline truck that had the accident, and the taxicab driver that hit the truck."

"I think the precinct up there did that," Corbett said.

"Mind getting me the dope they dug up?"

Corbett got on the telephone and asked questions for quite a while. "Nothing particularly black about either one," he reported. "Neither one had police records."

Monk wasn't convinced.

"This has the earmarks of being a very slick piece of business," he said. "The truck guy and the cab driver worked in the open where they were sure to be picked up, so their manager, if he was halfway cute, wouldn't pick a pair with a record. Why don't you put a tail on them?"

"I'll do exactly that," Corbett said.

"Now," Monk told the officer, "we want Doc Savage's fingerprints."

Surprised, Corbett asked, "What for?"

"Matter of satisfying curiosity."

While Corbett was gone to get the fingerprint classification card, Doctor Joseph Benson nodded approvingly at Monk and said, "I'm glad you're getting right into this investigation. I don't hold with Doc Savage's belief that you and Ham are staging something to get his interest, and persuade him from entering private business."

Monk said, "We know damned well we didn't stage anything."

Miss Clayton wasn't as convinced. She eyed them intently and said, "Will you tell me the truth?"

"Eh?" Monk glanced up.

"Did you?"

"Did we what?"

"Stage this thing."

"You babes," said Monk bitterly, "always fall for Doc in a big way. It happens every time." Before Miss Clayton could say some of the things she was obviously wanting to say, Corbett came back carrying print powder, dusting equipment and the fingerprint classification card of Doc Savage.

Monk dusted the water glass which Miss Clayton had filched. He examined the prints this disclosed.

"They're Doc Savage's," he said.

Benson scowled, as if disappointed. "Let's have an expert look at them and compare them to the card."

The expert said the fingerprints on the drinking glass and on the card were identical. Both Doc Savage's.

Monk Mayfair said he had an idea. So they went uptown to the hospital where Doc Savage had been taken for treatment of his burns following the gasoline transport truck fire.

"What," Doctor Benson wished to know, "is the idea?"

"You and Miss Clayton got into trouble for investigating the circumstances surrounding the accident," Monk explained. "That means there was something lying around to be discovered. You didn't discover it, so it's still there. Maybe we can find it."

"Now you're talking," said Miss Clayton.

THEY asked a lot of questions in the next two hours. They talked to the ambulance driver who had brought Doc Savage, to the internes who had ridden the call, the roustabouts who had packed in the stretcher. The doctors who had treated the bronze man's burns, the nurses who had attended him. Only one of the nurses, though. The nurse who had the late night shift, a man named Cones, said, "I'm sorry, I wasn't on duty that night. Willie Riker was in my place."

Ham's interest picked up. "Isn't the late night shift your regular one in that hospital wing?"

"Yes, it is," Cones admitted.

"But you weren't on that night?"

"No. Riker was."

"Exactly how," said Ham, "did that happen?"

"I took off a couple of days about that time."

"What do you mean, took off? A vacation? Why did you take off?"

"I went fishing."

"At this time of the year?" Ham said skeptically. "This is December. What kind of fishing is there in these parts in December?"

Cones grinned. "You sound as if you thought I was a crook. Ice fishing. You cut a hole in the ice, drop in your hook, and haul them out."

"Oh. where did this take place?"

"At Holacalocotalongue lake."

"Hmmm. Where is this whatever-you-call-it lake?"

"New Jersey."

"You got a cabin there?"

"No. I stayed at Willie Riker's place."

“You a friend of Riker's?”

“Not particularly. But he offered me the use of his cabin, and I took him up.”

“When was this?”

“About a week ago.”

Ham caught Monk's eye. Monk nodded. His jaw muscles were visibly tight. Ham turned back to the nurse and said, “Give this one some thought, Cones. When Willie Riker offered you the use of his cabin at—at this lake, did he suggest a definite date for you to go there?”

Cones didn't have to think about it very long. “Yes. Yes, he did. He said that he might want to use the place later himself, and another friend of his would be using it earlier, so that I'd better use it those two days to be perfectly safe.”

Ham could not quite conceal his excitement.

He said, “Give this one some thought, too: has it ever occurred to you that this Willie Riker might have pulled a scheme to get you off the job, and himself in your place, on that certain date?”

Cones was shocked. “Riker isn't that sort of fellow.”

“Never mind what sort he is. Did the thought occur to you?”

“Certainly not.”

“All right, don't get upset. We'll talk to Willie Riker. Where is he?”

“He is off today.”

“Know his address?”

“No, I don't.” Cones was now becoming frightened. “But they can give it to you at the office.”

Ham nodded. “Keep your mouth shut about this, Cones.”

“I certainly will!” the male nurse said. Fright had made his lips moist and his eyes round like the eyes of a goldfish.

THE wind scooped up snow and gave them a beating with the hard flakes as they walked the streets looking for a cab. Monk said he wished to God he was back in Germany, where it was at least warm. He wanted to know why Germany should be warmer than New York in December. “How was it in Jugoslavia? Warm?” he asked Ham.

Ham said he wouldn't trade even New York in a snowstorm for any place else. He looked at Miss Clayton as he said this, giving the impression Miss Clayton was the main thing New York had to offer.

Doctor Benson scowled and called Miss Clayton “darling.”

“Darling, are you getting tired?” he asked. The “darling” was to remind them that Miss Clayton was his girl friend. Neither Monk nor Ham was impressed.

The hospital office had said nurse Willie Riker lived at a number on Seventy-sixth, west of Central Park.

“My God, we could walk it quicker than we're finding a cab.” Ham complained. Almost as he spoke, they found a cab.

It was warm in the cab, but the radio was blaring. Ham said, “This nurse business looks funny to me.”

Monk was doubled over, peering here and there. “I think we've got a hot trail,” he said. He was looking for some way to shut off the radio.

Ham said, “Say the cab that hit the truck was part of the frame, and the truck parked there was part of it, too. Say the ambulance driver was in it, too. Maybe he was, and maybe he wasn't—”

“I'd say he wasn't,” Doctor Benson said.

“How come?”

“The hospitals have the city divided up into territories for efficiency. A case from that part of town would always go to that hospital. An emergency case, I mean.”

Ham said that was right, because he remembered a stink over one hospital refusing to send an ambulance out of its bailiwick for an emergency.

Monk said, “I wonder how they got Doc into that particular ward, or room? I wonder how many guys in that hospital are in on it beside the nurse, Riker?”

Doctor Benson had an answer for that, too.

“Nobody but Riker would have to be in on it,” he said. “The finest rooms in the hospital are in that wing. They would naturally give Doc Savage the best room. So they were sure to take him there.”

The radio music suddenly stopped. “A slick business,” Monk said. He had found the radio switch. “A very slick business. Well planned.”

Miss Clayton thought they were excellent deducers. “You're clever,” she said. “You're much more clever than I thought you were.”

Ham assured her she hadn't seen anything yet. “Watch us work on this Riker,” he said. He was feeling good.

THEY found the Riker number to be a brownstone of ratty appearance. Monk was of the opinion they should watch the back door. He suggested that Ham do it, but Ham wouldn't. They matched, and Ham lost. Then they climbed the front steps and found the door locked.

“Let's not wake anybody up ringing doorbells,” Ham said. “I'll show you what a good lock pick can do.” He employed a gimmick on his pen knife, and presently had the door open, admitting them to a small anteroom containing mail boxes which had names on them. They peered at these, lighting matches.

“Two-eleven,” Monk whispered. “Ham, you get set. Then we'll go up.”

Ham told Miss Clayton. “You'd better stay downstairs.”

“I want to see this,” Miss Clayton objected. “Anyway, I'd be too scared to stay alone.” Lest Ham volunteer to take care of it, Monk hastily said she could come along. They waited for Ham to get placed at the back stairs, then ascended to the second floor.

The door of 211 seemed to be locked. Monk tried it cautiously. He had his hand poised to knock, but changed his mind.

"I'll get Ham to pick the lock," he whispered.

The corridor was dimly lighted by one twenty-five watt bulb located directly over the stairs. The walls were shabby and the carpet under Monk's feet, as he crept toward the rear stairs to summon Ham, felt hard as if it was nearly worn out or hadn't been cleaned for a long time. It was dark enough to be spooky, and presently a succession of chills pursued each other up Monk's backbone. He wished he hadn't left Doctor Benson and Miss Clayton alone at the door of Riker's room. He started to turn to see if they were all right, and there was a sudden yell, a rushing sound, things smashing together, another cry, all from the hall outside Riker's room or the room itself.

Doctor Benson had disappeared. Only Miss Clayton stood in the hall.

Monk, arriving, demanded, "My God! What happened?"

Miss Clayton was terrified. "I don't know! Doctor Benson had his hand on the door knob when the door flew open. Doctor Benson either fell or was jerked inside. Then the door slammed."

The light went out at this point. It became as dark as road tar in the hall.

Inside Riker's room another yell, scuffling, gasps. Things upset. Monk tried the door. Locked. Monk drew back, put his right foot against the door below the lock to get properly placed, drew back and kicked. The door parted from its lock and flew open.

Inside was blackness, deathly stillness. Monk listened, holding his breath. He entered, an inch at a time. He took a long step to the left.

"Benson!" he called.

Fire, the kind of fire that comes out of a gun muzzle, sprang at him. Miss Clayton screamed. Monk realized he had a gun himself, and got it out. He shot, then jumped, which was a good thing, because a bullet clubbed the wall approximately behind where he had been standing. Monk aimed four or five times before he decided he hadn't seen the other's gunflash after all. He waited.

Stillness, strained and deathly, ensued. It was broken in time by Ham calling from the hall, "Monk! What the hell's happening? Monk!" He came closer, calling, "Monk!" Monk wished he was a ventriloquist, so he could warn Ham, but make his voice seem to come from somewhere else. He knew that any sound he made would draw a bullet.

Ham stopped, though. He joined the waiting. There hadn't been a sound out of Miss Clayton since her last scream. Monk wondered with horror if she had been killed.

Suddenly there was a swishing noise, a crashing and jangling of glass breaking. A window had gone out. A moment later, some object which sounded like a chair landed in a courtyard.

There was more silence, but it was not complete this time. Monk felt there was movement going on, but he couldn't locate any of it definitely enough to shoot.

Doctor Benson's voice, surprisingly calm, said, "I think he got out through the window."

Chapter XIII

MALE nurse Willie Riker had blue eyes, very blue eyes about the same color as lake ice on a very cold morning, and a full-featured Scandinavian face, probably a Danish face, which must have been quite ruddy in life, but death had given it a bluish cast. There was quite a lot of blood. In fact Willie Riker's body lay in a lake of it which had gathered, and was still gathering, on the sheets of the bed in which he lay.

Monk didn't feel so good.

“For God's sake! Keep Miss Clayton out of here. Don't let her see this!”

Then he looked at the kitchen knife which had been used to butcher Willie Riker in haste.

Doctor Joseph Benson, being practical, was leaning out of a window from which a chair had been thrown, taking nearly all the glass.

“He got out this way,” Benson said. “Here, you can see the marks he made in the dust climbing out. Come here and look.”

Ham was in the other room, the living-room, telling Miss Clayton she wouldn't want to see what they'd found in the bedroom.

Monk went over to examine Doctor Benson's discovery.

As Benson said, there was dust on the sill with marks in it. Across the areaway, a light came on, causing Monk to dodge wildly for cover, but it was only a curious neighbor turning on his light and raising his window shade. This put light into the areaway. Monk saw that it would have been a simple matter to drop from the window into the little court, then escape.

“You see the guy?” Monk asked.

“Not clearly, but I can tell you he was big and powerful,” Benson declared. “After you left to get Ham, I thought I would try the door knob to see if the door was really locked. This fellow must have unlatched it. Probably he had heard you moving the door knob, or heard us in the hall. Anyway, he yanked me inside.” Benson shuddered violently. “The rest was a little stupefying, it happened so rapidly.”

“But,” said Monk, “you didn't really see the guy?”

“Well, no. No, not really.”

Ham Brooks had come back into the bedroom, and was examining the dead man. “This is Willie Riker, all right,” Ham said. “He seems to have been asleep in bed, or at least he didn't have time to dress. He's still wearing pajamas.”

“It's too damned bad he's dead,” Monk called. “Are you sure he is?”

Ham said that the question was foolish. “The knife gutted him,” he added. “He died instantly. He—well, what do you know! For God's sake!”

Monk ran into the bedroom. Ham Brooks gesticulated excitedly. “Look here what the guy had stuck on his back with adhesive tape. An envelope!” Ham removed the envelope gingerly, opened it, examined the contents, a single sheet of paper. “Holy cow! We've got something here!”

The document started off:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

The next line began:

IN THE EVENT OF MY DEATH BY VIOLENCE, I WISH TO MAKE CERTAIN STATEMENTS WHICH WILL INSURE PUNISHMENT OF THE PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR MY DEATH.

Benson asked excitedly, "What've you got?"

"The works," Ham told him. "This guy must have been afraid his pals would knock him off, and he left them a little legacy."

"What does it say?"

IT said considerably less than they expected it to, but enough to be interesting. Nurse Willie Riker had been approached about thirty days previously with the proposition that he participate, for excellent pay, in a scheme to kidnap Doc Savage. Riker didn't know the name of the man who approached him, although the fellow did have an associate called Sven.

The proposition, to which Riker had agreed, was that Doc Savage was to be made the victim of an accident requiring hospitalization, and the setup was to be such that Savage would land in one of the private rooms presided over by nurse Riker. Late in the night, Doc Savage was to be removed after being drugged, with the assistance of Riker, and an impostor placed in his stead. This had been done.

"Wow!" Monk yelled. He was looking at the next part of the statement.

It began:

DOC SAVAGE IS NOW BEING HELD PRISONER AT 14 WEST BALLARD STREET, PROBABLY UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRUGS. . . .

Ham was jumping in excitement. "That's all we need to know. This tears it! That guy in Doc's place is a phony. I'm going to call a cop."

Doctor Benson was already at the telephone, however. He listened to the instrument, then his face got a surprised expression. "What do you know—the phone won't work," he said.

Ham said, "We'd better get to a telephone."

"Wait a minute!" Monk objected. "We've got some time. That guy at Doc's headquarters thinks he's safe. I think what we'd better do is grab Doc out of their hands first. If we get them stirred up first, they might finish Doc off."

Ham decided there was good sense in that. "Ballard Street—where's Ballard Street?"

Miss Clayton was the only one who seemed to know where Ballard Street was. "It's out in Queens," she said. "I don't know exactly where, but I can find it."

Monk was running for the door. "Come on!"

The rooming house was awake. There were people in the halls, full of questions to which they didn't get answers. They found their taxicab driver still in the street, and he was full of questions too. "What went on in there? Wasn't that shooting I heard?" he wanted to know.

"Somebody had a mellerdrummer tuned in on the radio," Monk said.

“It was turned on too loud,” Monk explained. “Do you know where Ballard Street is in Queens?”

“No, but I got a map here.” The taxi man was rather suspicious of them, but also somewhat frightened. He was probably wishing he hadn't waited around.

“Get us out to Ballard Street,” Monk said. “And if this cab has wings, put them on it.”

Doctor Benson objected, “I don't see why in the hell you're in such a hurry. It seems much more essential to get the police searching for the murderer.”

“Lord, has there been a murder?” The cab driver was very alarmed now.

“That murderer,” Monk told Doctor Benson, “might get to Doc Savage before we do.” To the cab driver he said, “what's holding us up? Do you want me to drive this thing?”

THEY got going. Then went south, then east across Central Park through the underpass. They went so fast they sounded like an airplane, and frequently when there were bumps the cab seemed to leave the pavement for twenty feet at a time. They came out and crossed Fifth Avenue like a rocket, against a red light.

Monk said, “Driver, for God's sake, use your head.” The driver then slowed down a little, and he stopped for the next red light.

The moment the cab halted, Doctor Benson said, “Dammit, I'm going to use my own head for a change!” He sprang out of the cab before they could stop him.

“What're you going to do?” Monk yelled.

Benson shouted back, “I'm going to warn the police about that murderer! Only take a minute.”

Monk told the driver, “I guess we'll have to wait for that guy, but we should go on and leave him.”

Miss Clayton asked, “Do you think Doc Savage is in danger?” She asked this in a clear voice, but then fear made her teeth chatter.

“I think this thing is popping wide open, and the first thing they'll do is kill Doc,” Monk said. He stood the waiting for probably thirty seconds. “I'm going in and get Doctor Benson,” he said. “He picked a fine time to go bullheaded on us.”

He found Doctor Benson in a booth in an all-night drugstore. Benson saw him coming, opened the booth door, at the same time saying into the telephone, “Don't ask so damned many questions and get busy looking for the killer.” He slammed the receiver on the hook. He told Monk, “All that cop could do was ask questions.”

Monk asked, “Did you get them told?”

Benson said, “You bet I did. Let's go. I hope you're not mad.”

They were getting in the cab by the time Monk said, "I'm not mad, no."

"Maybe they won't catch that murderer, but I wanted them to try," Benson said. "After all, the louse tried to kill me, too. He made me mad."

Monk thought this was reasonable, and that he would be a little mad himself. As it was, he was mostly worried and frightened. He had a feeling the whole thing was blowing up in their faces before they were ready for it. He didn't like the speed with which things were beginning to happen.

The driver had used the wait to locate Ballard Street. "It's in Flushing, but a long way out," he said. He was driving more sensibly.

BALLARD STREET turned out to be in College Point, which was north of Flushing. The street was a short one leading down to Flushing Bay, and the number was a boat repair shop bearing a sign, STONE'S BOATYARD, REPAIRS AND STORAGE.

Ham didn't like it. "There's lots of places to look in there. We may get waylaid."

Monk muttered, "Let's get the police to help. That's what we pay taxes for." He put his head into the cab and told the driver, "You go to the nearest place you find a telephone and call the cops. Send them down here."

"I sure will," the driver said.

"Tell them to send plenty of cops," Monk said.

"You bet."

The driver then departed in his cab.

Miss Clayton, skeptical, said, "I'll bet he doesn't call the police. I think he's so scared he'll wash his hands of the whole thing."

This proved to be an excellent piece of character reading. They never saw the driver, nor the police he was supposed to send.

They decided against trying the main gate. The place, Monk felt, would be watched. They had alighted in a side street, and they approached the high wooden fence quietly, feeling that they wouldn't be seen in the blizzard. "Give me a leg up," Monk requested Ham. Presently he found he was able to reach the top of the fence. He hauled himself up and listened.

It was bitterly cold. The world seemed filled with angry wind and stinging snow. He found that he could reach a hand down and haul the others up, one at a time, and did so.

"What about seeing if there is a man at the gate?" Miss Clayton suggested. "Maybe he can be made to tell where Mr. Savage is held."

Monk thought it was a good idea. But he wished they had left Miss Clayton outside. Why hadn't they thought of sending her for the police?

"Ham," Monk whispered. "Ham, I think we'd better send Miss Clayton for the police. We can boost her back over the fence."

Ham, who should have answered, didn't.

"Ham!" Monk said, then said it again, more urgently.

Fright suddenly crawled into his brain and roosted there like a buzzard. He didn't call again. Instead, he crouched and changed his position—and collided with someone. The someone got him by the throat, and Monk grabbed madly at the individual's arm, feeling sure the fellow had a knife or a club. It was very dark.

They fought silently and furiously, making no more gruntings and gaspings than they had to, but knocking the snow about. The snow made an incredibly soft bed for their violence; for an instant, so great was his excitement and rage and the heat it generated, the snow seemed almost warm and the anger of the blizzard nothing at all.

"Monk! Help!" the other man cried out.

And Monk said, "For the love of mud! We'd better get organized before we murder each other."

He had been fighting Doctor Benson.

BUT Ham Brooks had disappeared. It was Miss Clayton's eye which located the trail his heels had made when he was dragged away. "Here," she whispered. She was bending close to the snow, where she had caught a spot that could be seen faintly by the light from a distant streetlamp. "The marks are fresh, aren't they?"

Monk and Doctor Benson bent down to look. Benson still had the club which, largely through good fortune, he hadn't been able to use on Monk. It was a piece of iron pipe about eighteen inches long and thick enough to smash a skull.

The marks were undoubtedly fresh. In fact, the blizzard was rapidly shoveling them full of snow.

"Somebody was dragged there, wasn't he?" Miss Clayton whispered.

Monk said, "Can you climb over that fence and go for help? I have a hunch that taxi driver didn't like our looks and cleared out."

"I'm afraid," Miss Clayton objected. She sounded as if she were too.

"Have you got a flashlight?" Doctor Benson asked.

Monk had. "But I'm not going to use it, and get my head shot off," he added. He was trying to follow the tracks in the snow by feeling with his hands, a project which he had thought would be practical, but which proved utterly unfeasible, when the blizzard cleared for a moment. A kind of lull arrived, a moment when there was no wind and no flying snow, and the street light shining over the high board fence brightened things nicely.

"Come on!" Monk followed the trail madly, to cover as much ground as he could before the blizzard swooped again and the illumination suffered. He came to a door in what seemed to be a large and very rough building. Frightened and startled, he withdrew hastily to survey the place. Benson and Miss Clayton were suddenly at his side. "I think that's a protective cover built around a yacht hauled out for the winter," Monk explained. "I think they took Ham in there."

“We've got to wait for the police!” Benton sounded frightened.

Monk said, “The hell with the police! I've got enough of chasing feathers.” He went over and kicked the door as hard as he could. It flew open. Miss Clayton and Benson flattened, apparently expecting bullets to come out. None did.

THE three men engaged in tying Ham to a post that was one of the shoring timbers supporting the yacht were apparently too surprised to do—for ten or fifteen seconds—more than hold their mouths open with astonishment. The light was not too good, either. It came from a small electric hand lantern around which they had carefully wrapped a sack.

Ham, Monk saw, was unconscious. There was an odor, one that Monk had some familiarity with, being a chemist. Stuff that would have the same effect as chloroform, but much quicker.

Monk cocked the revolver he was holding with the inward rolling motion he had taught American soldiers destined for raider groups. He was an addict of the school of thought which believed a hand gun should be shot from the navel, that aiming could be done more effectively by pointing the navel instead of the gun. But he didn't fire. One of the men had too tempting a jaw; Monk struck, using his left fist, and changed the shape of the jaw noticeably.

The man Monk had hit took two loose-kneed steps backward and stopped with his shoulders against the rounding hull of the boat, stood there as if trying to support the boat on his shoulders. A sick noise, blood and two teeth came out of his mouth in that order.

The second man and the third man did better. They stepped apart, saw there was no time to draw guns, and no time to get away.

They even used a little organization. “Get his legs, Nate,” one said. Which was a mistake. As Nate came in, Monk kicked him in the face, stopping him, then kicked him in the throat, chest and on top of the head while he was falling.

The survivor decided to use his gun after all. He must have been a little confused about which pocket it was in, because he went for both coat pockets. Monk lunged for the coat, got both skirts, hauled the man to him, intending to butt the man's jaw with the top of his head. However the man's coat split up the back, tore in two halves.

Presently Monk had the two halves of the coat, and the man was running. One of the coat halves was heavy with a gun of some kind.

Monk decided to shoot the runner. He pulled the trigger of his revolver. The result was a small and disconcerting sound, something like a parrot taking a bite of cracker. The portion of coat lying across Monk's gun had gotten under the hammer, stopping its fall.

Angrily, Monk yanked at the cloth, tore off a long strip, tore off another, but the hammer was as solidly wedged as ever. He threw the gun at the fugitive, who was now climbing a ladder. The gun bounced harmlessly off the man's ribs.

The moment the revolver was out of Monk's hand, he wished he hadn't thrown it. He experienced an attack of fright. He recalled that Doc Savage had always preached against the carrying of firearms on the theory that having one got a man in the habit of putting too much dependence on it; without it, he was likely to be completely at a loss. There was something to be said for the theory, Monk decided.

He lay hold of the ladder, tried to yank it loose, thus dislodging the man who was now near the top. It didn't work. The ladder was solidly nailed.

Confident he was going to get kicked in the face, Monk went up the ladder. The man, however, didn't stop to do any kicking. He ran.

The boat was a very fine houseboat about fifty feet long, a sea-going mansion with teak decks and mahogany and genuine leather.

The man, with Monk on his heels, went hammering along the deck in a direction which later proved to be the stern. It was very dark, and the pursuit was mostly by sound. Light flashed as the man opened a door, and Monk fought with him a while to see whether the door would be closed at once. Monk won, and entered a cabin where Doc Savage was chained to a berth, watched by a very long and hungry looking man who had a short rifle.

Chapter XIV

DOVE gray, stone gray and bullet-gray was the color motif of the cabin, the furniture having just the proper contrast, deep wine for an easy chair, a pastel green for another chair. The smoking stands were chrome, the porthole rims chrome, as were a cocktail shaker and a set of goblets. The floor, from which the rug had been removed for the winter, presented a startling contrast of naked dirty wood, cigarette butts, used matches, crumpled empty cigarette packages, two poker chips, empty whiskey bottles, empty mix bottles, a cigar that looked intact in its cellophane wrapper, a book with the title LEARNING TO SAIL.

The long man with the short rifle seemed perfectly confident that he was going to be able to shoot Monk wherever and whenever he pleased. Monk thought so, too.

But Doc Savage rolled over as much as the chain would permit, which wasn't much, lifted his legs which were fastened together at the ankles with handcuffs, and spread his knees, brought them down over the head and shoulders of the rifleman. The rifle snorted fire and lead, and the man screamed. The man Monk had pursued into the cabin also screamed. He had been shot through the middle.

The man fired the rifle again, this time coming closer to Monk. Then a horrified expression changed his face, his fingers straightened out stiffly with agony, and he bent his head forward and endeavored to bite one of Doc Savage's legs which were about his chest like a pair of pliers. In a moment, two or possibly more of his ribs broke, making a distinct sound. He stopped trying to bite anything.

Doc said, "Rap him over the head, or something."

Monk came over and drew back his fist, then found it was unnecessary to hit the man. The fellow had become unconscious.

Surprised, Monk said, "He was a sucker to be sitting there where you could get to him."

"They thought I was unconscious," Doc explained.

"Eh?"

"They've been giving me pills. I managed not to swallow most of them."

Doc Savage, Monk concluded, looked like hell. He became anxious about the bronze man and

demanded, "My God, what did they do to you?"

Doc said, "I'm dirty and scratched up a little. Not as bad as I look, probably."

"Do you know what's been going on?"

"I have a general idea," Doc said. "And quit looking that way."

"You look as if they'd tried to skin you alive!" Monk said anxiously.

"Oh, I was burned, remember?" Doc explained.

Monk was relieved. "So that's it. You had me worried."

Doc was watching the door. "Who is coming?"

Monk grabbed up the rifle and said it had better be Doctor Benson and Miss Clayton.

DOCTOR BENSON looked surprisingly tired and aged, while Miss Clayton was as surprisingly fresh. Monk thought Doctor Benson must be at least fifty years old, whereas he had supposed Benson was in his thirties.

Something was wrong with Benson.

He said, "I think we're in a trap."

Doc Savage eyed him sharply. "What is it, Joe?"

"They're outside."

"How many?"

"I saw three. I think there's more."

Miss Clayton said, "But I didn't see anyone!"

"I didn't tell you," Benson explained.

Doc Savage sifted angrily on the bunk. "Get me loose from this chain." He glanced about. "Where's Ham?"

"Down below," Monk explained. "He's in the shed, though. They used something on him to knock him out. Anaesthetic."

"Get him up here," Doc directed. "Then see what you can do about this lock."

Monk brought Ham up the ladder, the job making him pant. He started going through Ham's pockets. "Ham carries a gimmick to pick locks."

"Never mind that. I've tried for two days to pick this lock without luck." Doc moved again, impatiently. "Try that rifle on it, or on the chain."

Miss Clayton said, "I'll try to bring Ham out of it." Her trying consisted of wrist rubbing, shaking, and liquor. It did no good.

They decided not to risk shooting the lock because there was too much chance of damaging Doc. Shooting a lock open was something that worked better in books than in practical practice, anyway. Monk said, "I think I can blow the chain loose." He meant the other end of the chain, which was riveted to the berth stanchion. He aimed carefully and fired.

"Ow! Ouch! Oh my God!" he yelled, jumping about. "The damned bullet splashed." He tried again, more cautiously. "Now, yank on it. I'll help." Presently they got the chain loose. "It's not loose from your waist, though."

Doc swung the end of the chain experimentally. "It may come in handy where it is. Try the handcuffs."

They decided the best system on the manacles was to use Monk's revolver, which he had retrieved. He worked the cloth out of the hammer mechanism, stamped the metal cocktail shaker out flat on the floor, then used it as a shield to protect Doc's ankles from splattering lead. He fired once.

"That's fine." Doc stamped his feet on the floor and stood up. He promptly fell flat as his benumbed legs refused to function. "This is a fine mess!" He was angry. "Monk, get down below and see if you can spot those fellows."

Monk went out and down the ladder.

Doc turned to Benson. "You say you saw three?"

"Yes."

"No more?"

"No."

"All right, we know there are three. There'll probably be more. I think there are about nine of them in it. I'm sure there are nine, and I don't believe there are any others."

Miss Clayton forced out some words. "There was a nurse named Willie Riker—"

"I'm counting him."

"He's dead."

Doc Savage seemed to stop what he was doing and thinking and concentrate on Willie Riker. "How did it happen? Talk fast."

MISS CLAYTON talked fast. In less than five minutes, she told about Willie Riker, how they had become suspicious of him while investigating at the hospital, how they had gone to his rooming house, the yanking of Doctor Benson into the place, the shooting, the finding of Riker dying.

"Dying, or already dead?" Doc interrupted here. "Which was he?"

"Dying. That fellow had cut him all to pieces."

"What fellow?"

"The one who was in the room, grabbed Doctor Benson, doused the lights, killed Riker, then jumped out of the window." She told about the tell-tale document they had found on Riker. "He must have been

afraid he might be killed," she said.

"Didn't you tell the police about him?"

"Doctor Benson did. He telephoned."

"What did he tell the police?"

"I don't know. We didn't hear him."

"Mayfair heard me," Doctor Benson said. "Monk was at the telephone booth. I didn't have a very good description for the police."

"Joe, have you got a gun?" Doc asked Benson.

"Not now. I've lost it somewhere."

"Never mind. We'll try to find you one. You two stay here. I think I can navigate now. I'll go down and see what Monk has found out."

Doc was somewhat rubber-legged going down the ladder. He leaned against the foot of the ladder in the cold darkness, and in a moment Monk's breathing was close.

"Don't see nothing," Monk reported. "Hear nothing, either."

"Monk," Doc said. "Did you think Benson gave the police a thorough-enough description of the fellow who killed Willie Riker, the nurse, for the cops to pick him up?"

"I don't know. I didn't hear Benson," Monk said. "How many guys are we likely to go up against?"

"Nine. Eight with Riker out. Five with the three you got here."

"Make it four," Monk said. "There's a guy laying over here that you don't know about. I just went over and gave him some more sleep with my fist."

"Four won't be so bad."

"Bad enough for me." Monk didn't sound at ease. "I've got a hunch our luck has run out."

Doctor Benson came down the ladder, fumbling in the blackness. "I know you told me to stay up there. But I have an idea. Suppose I show you where I saw the three prowlers."

Monk shivered. "That's probably what they're wanting."

"No. No, I think not." Benson was assured. "When I saw them, they were hiding. Waiting. I'm sure they were waiting. Probably for reinforcements. I bet they're still waiting, and we can get the drop on them."

Doc made a decision. "All right. Monk, you stay here."

"Hell!" Monk didn't think much of it. "You're asking for trouble."

DOC SAVAGE opened the door of rough planks and wind and snow pounced on him. The wind was cold enough to hurt his teeth. He stepped outside. Benson followed. "Did you find a gun?" Doc whispered.

“No, I didn't.”

“Here's one. A revolver. Know how to use it?”

Benson said, “I can point it and pull the trigger. That's all you need to do, isn't it?”

Doc said it was. “Wait, I think I'd better have Monk wait at the top of that ladder. There may be another way into the shed around the boat. You stay here. Be back in a second.”

He moved back, forced open the door, and Monk's gun was suddenly against his chest.

“It's me,” he told Monk. Then he dropped his voice to say, “You follow us. I think you can manage it. In case we separate, you look out for Benson. Keep close to him, but don't let him know you're there.”

“What's the idea?”

“He's got a crazy reckless streak on,” Doc said. “He may need help. But be careful.”

“Okay.”

“Keep out of our sight.”

“Right.”

Doc went outside again. He found Benson on all fours in a snowdrift in the blackness close to the shed. “I think they're still there,” Benson whispered. “I think I saw something.”

“Let's go.”

They crawled a while. The snow was two feet deep where it had drifted, and there was none at all where the wind could get to it. Benson was making a circle. He stopped. “You're pretty weak, aren't you?”

“I've been more active,” Doc whispered back.

“Stay here. I'll crawl around where they are and make sure. I'll come back if they're really there.”

“Go ahead.”

Benson crawled on. He was lost instantly in the hissing blizzard. Presently Monk crawled past, following Benson accurately, doing an almost impossible job of shadowing. If he knew Doc was there, he gave no sign. Doc followed Monk, a few feet back. The procession dragged its way to what was evidently a watchman's shack or a toolhouse.

Doc didn't see exactly what happened, but he heard Monk bark, “That's them! Four! I'll help you, Benson.”

DOC SAVAGE came to his feet, sprinted for the shack. Things happened fast. There were three shots, evenly spaced. Monk yelled, “Hell, give them a chance!” Horror seemed about to make him choke up.

The shack door was open; Doctor Benson stood just inside the door, blazing light from a flashlight over four men, three of whom were dying. The three doing the dying consisted of Ole, Sven and a big man with some bronze-colored dye on one of his hands.

“God almighty!” Monk was looking at Benson in revulsion. “You didn't have to kill them.”

A sick wildness was on Benson's face. He sagged sidewise against the shack wall and the automatic pistol in his left hand slipped to the floor, followed by the flashlight.

He said strangely, "I—I must have gone insane."

Monk lunged for the flashlight and pinned the surviving man with its beam. The man, a small stupid-looking character, was shaking uncontrollably. A gun which he had held lay at his feet.

Doc saw that each of the three victims had been shot expertly in the head.

He asked, "Monk, is that the fellow who was taking my place and accepting cash investments from suckers?"

Monk looked as if he wished to be ill. "What about it, Benson?"

"That's him," Benson said. "Yes—I—that's he, undoubtedly." He began feeling of his pockets vaguely, and then he brought out a revolver. It was the revolver Doc Savage had given him. He asked, "Did you know you handed me an empty gun a while ago?"

He was lifting the gun when Monk, stepping in from the side, hit him across the temple. Benson fell.

"Did I do wrong?" Monk asked. His face was pale.

Doc went over quickly, broke the revolver, looked in it. There were cartridges in the chamber.

Doc blew out his breath softly. "He reloaded it."

Monk had some trouble with words.

"Is Benson—it?" he asked.

"He's it," Doc agreed.

THEY gathered the living in the cabin of the yacht where it was warm, and Monk went for the police. Ham awakened, but he did not feel at all good, nor was his head clear, for he kept mumbling about someone named Nola. It could be gathered from his incoherence that he was afraid Nola was going to sue him for breach of promise.

"I wish I had really known for sure it was Benson," Doc told Miss Clayton. "The trouble was, I only suspected him. I had been doing a lot of thinking while they had me chained up the last few days, and I could tell from their talk what was going on. The whole plan . . ."

The expression on Miss Clayton's face stopped him.

He finished, "Is something wrong?"

Miss Clayton shuddered violently. "No—that is, I'm suddenly more horrified than I've been at any time."

"It's all over."

Monk said, "I better see how the cops are doing." Monk was reluctant to leave off listening to Ham's mumbling about Nola. But he left. He clattered down the ladder.

Miss Clayton told Doc, "I guess I'm just beginning to realize the magnitude of what they were trying to

pull. It was big, wasn't it?"

"Several million dollars were possibly involved," Doc admitted. "The plan of impersonating me and accepting investments was taking hold, I gathered from their talk."

"I don't mean that entirely," Miss Clayton said grimly. "The real damage would have been to you—to the kind of work you've been doing. It would have wrecked—well—the institution that Doc Savage has become."

Doc was embarrassed by being referred to as an institution by such a good-looking girl. He didn't say anything.

But, he reflected grimly, she was right. Not necessarily about the institution part. An institution, the dictionary said, was anything "forming a characteristic and persistent feature in social or national life and habits." Maybe he wasn't.

But he had built, over a period of years, a name that inspired considerable effect. A name that had, he knew, scared many a crook out of being a crook. A name that, endorsing a cause, had tremendous prestige. It was possible for him to accomplish much, merely by sitting back and using his repute. Many good things. The mere information that he was behind a tottering business concern, for instance, would draw support and save the concern. His prestige was really fabulous, and it frequently amazed him. Recently, as another example, he had merely warned a political group in South America who had fascist leanings, and the group had changed its ideas overnight. This was power, enormous power, and it was his only because Doc Savage was a known force for right.

If this thing—if Benson had succeeded—had resulted in a lot of people losing a lot of money because they trusted Doc Savage, the damage would have been huge, possibly shattering something that could never be put together again. The thing would have received immense publicity. It would have wrecked what he had spent a lifetime creating. A reputation, once ruined, was almost impossible to rebuild.

That, Doc thought bitterly, was what had almost happened. And several million dollars, which unsuspecting investors would undoubtedly have lost, was not a small thing in itself.

Doc frowned at Benson, who was standing with his face to the wall, hands lifted.

"Whoever was braining the thing obviously knew a lot about me, which meant it was someone who knew me well. Benson did. And Benson was right into it from the first. I went down and asked Monk if he heard Benson call the police about nurse Riker's murderer. Monk said no. Benson had said yes. I should have batted Benson over the head then."

Miss Clayton looked as if she wanted to hear the results, but didn't like listening to them.

"Benson was getting rid of men who knew he was the boss man," Doc continued. "Riker was first. The three he killed in the shed were the others. He thought—just thought—or hoped—I had given him an empty gun by mistake. He was going to find out, then shoot Monk and me if necessary. He could have told the police we were killed by the others in the brawl. It could have worked out that way, too, if . . ."

There was some noise outside, then in the boat enclosure and finally on the ladder. Two policemen came in, then Monk, then more cops.

Monk was enumerating the casualties. "There's the three dead ones," Monk was saying, "and another guy and two taxicab drivers and the big guy who was playing Doc Savage. That's six, isn't it?"

One of the policemen said that was six, all right. He didn't sound as if he wished to believe it could be

that many. "That's bad," he said. "Did you have to do all that killing?"

"We didn't do any of it," Monk assured him.

The policeman nodded, hardly believing.

On the bunk, Ham—they had moved him to the bunk where he could revive in comfort—stated, in delirium, exactly where he preferred that Nola go.

"What's the matter with him?" Monk wanted to know.

Doc Savage sank wearily into the pastel green chair. "Woman trouble," he said. He felt tired, spent. "I guess he doesn't get enough trouble associating with me. He has to work up some on the outside."

Monk went over to listen to Ham mumble. He listened to Ham telling somebody, evidently a jury, what a lovely creature Nola was, and what a temptress.

Monk grinned. "I'd like to work up some of that trouble," he said.

THE END

Next month there's a mysterious adventure in store for DOC SAVAGE . . . and the title of the novel ought to hint at its background. It's called SE-PAH-POO—and you'll find out just what that means in the February issue . . . so watch for it on the stands December 28.

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