



THE ANGRY CANARY

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I

THE cage was there on one of the shelves in the package check-room at four o'clock when the two men on the night shift came to work.

It did not at that time bear much resemblance to a canary cage, because it was wrapped in coarse brown paper and tied around with string. Some expertness with knots had gone into the way the string was tied. That is, the knots were not conventional granny knots.

The two check-room attendants were pleasant fellows. Fred Lill, fiftyish, lived in Brooklyn and had a son studying at Columbia to become a doctor. Jim Presse, younger, unmarried, had grown up on an Iowa farm. Actually, though, the only important part Fred and Jim took in the matter was when Fred tore a bit of the paper loose from the cage. He did this as an act of misguided kindness.

This happened after six. The hours of four to six were peak rush for the check-room, as steel-souled Manhattan hurriedly emptied itself of office workers, and quite a few of these picked up packages or week-end or overnight cases. About six, the pressure eased, both men fired up cigarettes, and Fred walked back along Tier Seven and cocked his head at the paper-wrapped cage. Fred's interest was bird-like. Owl-like, because he was a fat man.

"Hell of a lot of scratching around going on in there," Fred remarked.

"Canary cage, isn't it?" Jim wasn't too interested.

"Guess so. Looks like it." Fred frowned, and added, "Poor birds are probably smothering in there. Some people are sure careless." And on impulse, he poked a finger against the paper, broke it, and peeled a piece loose.

Jim asked, "What'd you do that for? Now somebody'll complain about the paper being torn." He came

over and glanced at the cage, but with no interest. “There was probably holes in the bottom for ventilation.” He bent down and looked. “Sure. A couple of holes.”

“Black paper under the brown,” Fred said, pointing. He was surprised. “Why wrap it in black paper, then put brown over that?”

Jim shrugged. “I don't know nothing about canaries. Maybe they're like chickens. Sit still and roost when they're in the dark. Or is it canaries in there?”

A shrill tittering came from the cage.

“I never heard a canary make a noise like that,” Fred muttered. He leaned down and put an eye to the hole he'd made. “Yeah, canaries. Two of them—” He stopped on a rather shocked note.

“Sounded like the canary giggled,” Jim remarked. “But like I said, what I don't know about the things is plenty, and anyway it's none of our business—say, what's the matter with you?”

Fred was distressed. “They're fighting!”

“Yeah?”

Slapping a hand against the cage, Fred said, “Here, here, stop that!” He jiggled the cage around. “They won't stop!”

“Aw, the cage was probably wrapped that way to keep it dark so they wouldn't scrap,” said Jim indifferently. “Cover up the hole, and they'll be all right. They'll settle down.”

Fred followed the suggestion quickly. He was upset. “I never saw anything like that—such hate. Such viciousness.” He stepped back from the cage. “I wish to God I hadn't messed with it.”

Jim laughed. “Why get worked up about a couple of birds pecking each other a time or two?”

But Fred was distressed and puzzled. “We keep three canaries at home,” he muttered. “They never act like that.” He shook his head, adding, “It isn't a natural way to act.”

“I can say the same thing about some people,” Jim said.

BOTH check-room attendants noticed the man named Plott before he indicated any intention of approaching the checking concession. He was not anyone they had seen before, and they came to know him as Plott only because that was the name he presently gave them.

“Hey, Fred,” Jim said.

“Eh?”

“Day in and day out, a lot of funny-looking people pass here,” said Jim softly. “But take a look at that skeezicks yonder. The one over by the newsstand.”

Fred studied the individual. “I see what you mean.” Then he added, “He seems to be heading this way.”

The man was of average height, but there his claim to the average began and ended. He had perfectly white hair which seemed to grow forward-pointing on his head instead of backward, his skin was the rich hue of diluted gold, or of knotty pine, and he was thinner than a healthy man had a right to be. His eyes

were large, bulbous and almost transparent. Should these oddities escape note, he wore a green suit of a shade hitherto unheard of, and a yellow shirt about equally as preposterous.

“Wow! And I thought fire-engines were gaudy,” Jim whispered. He sauntered over to the counter, asking the man, “What’ll it be, pal?”

The man spoke English so precise it couldn’t be his mother-tongue.

“I deposited a package for safekeeping earlier in the day,” he said. “Unfortunately, I seem to have mislaid the small ticket which I am supposed to present to reclaim my property. I should like to obtain the article, however.”

“Sorry.” Jim shook his head. “You’ll have to have your claim-check to do business here, mister.”

The man looked at them. His eyes were like glass bulbs containing slightly soiled water. “Oh, luckily, I can perfectly describe package and contents. That should serve, shouldn’t it?”

“No tickee, no washee,” said Jim.

“I beg pardon?”

“Just an old American catch phrase, like showing your claim-check if you want your package,” Jim told him curtly.

The man looked at Jim in a way that gave the latter a somewhat creepy sensation. “But I can tell you my name. It is Plott. Mr. Plott.” He did not smile. As a matter of fact he did not smile at any time, as if he was physically incapable of doing so. “My item of property consists of a canary cage. I can, if you insist, describe the birds inside, even to their age and sex.”

Jim felt a strong urge to be rid of the fellow, and he said, “Look, to save a long argument, I can tell you that you won’t get to first base with us. We have rules to follow. If you want your package without a claim-check, you’ll have to see the boss-man about it.”

“Boss-man? You mean someone of higher authority?”

“Yeah. Buck Fineberg. See him. He’s in the main check-stand on the upper level, north end. Go see Buck, and he’ll take care of it.”

The odd man had been kneading his thin hands together during the discussion, and now there was a greenback in his facile fingers. Mysteriously, too; where it had come from would be hard to say.

“Conceivably, there could be an alternative?” he asked.

Jim looked at the bill.

“Inconceivable!” he said curtly.

The odd man bent his head slightly. “Then I shall consult with your Mr. Buck Fineberg.” He turned and went away.

Fred moved up beside Jim and breathed hoarsely. “Didn’t you notice he had a double sawbuck?”

“Jobs these days,” said Jim angrily, “are worth more than twenty bucks.”

Fred grinned and said, “That’s right, boy. That’s sure right.” He went back and stood looking at the

canary cage and listening.

Jim called, "Them birds still going at it?"

"I'm afraid so," Fred said. "I can't understand it, either."

THE second one who didn't have a claim-check was a girl. Not a gloriously lovely girl, and not a homely one either, although there was some reason to believe she might have taken pains to make herself non-distinctive. Her dull grey coat was shapeless, but she clearly wasn't, and her seal-brown hair drawn back from her forehead as straight as strings didn't have the aspect of always being worn that way. No rouge, no powder, nothing extra at the eyes. And she, too, wanted the canaries.

She smiled a nice enough smile. "I know people who've mislaid their claim-checks must be an awful nuisance, but I haven't mine. I have a package here, though. Now, how do I go about getting it?"

Jim liked this one, and he said temporizingly, "Well, now, that's a tough break, isn't it?"

Fred happened to have overheard. "No check, no package," he said bluntly.

Jim wheeled and frowned at him, so Fred shrugged and moved away. Jim grinned at the girl. "Fred's an old grouch. A nice guy, but an old-timer who's heaved too many satchels around in here." He leaned forward confidentially. "I'd sure like to help you, Miss—"

"Meg," said the girl promptly. "Margaret, I mean. Miss Margaret Prince. And I would certainly like to pick up my package without causing a lot of bother."

"I'd like to have your address, too, for our files," Jim said cunningly. "And your telephone number."

Margaret Prince hesitated. "Well, all right. It's East Barent Avenue. 1233 East Barent. The telephone is Barentwood 9-7600."

"Fine, fine. Now could you describe your package?" Jim asked. And his eyes bugged slightly as he listened to the girl say, "Yes, of course. It's a canary cage wrapped in brown paper and tied around with string. There are two canaries inside. They are named Jim and Joe."

Jim grinned foolishly. "Well, my name's Jim, too," he said. After a moment of confusion, he asserted, "I'll go back and have a look for it." He sauntered to the rear, found Fred, and told him, "This one's after the canaries too."

Fred scowled. "Going to give them to her?"

"I'd rather she had them than old queer-eyes," said Jim dryly. "But the answer is, hell no."

THE girl listened to Jim with a little frown of disappointment when he came back. She said, "You say I'm to see a Mr. Buck Fineberg? Very well. But I did hope it wouldn't be necessary to bother a lot of people, just because I lost my claim-check."

Jim looked at her steadily, and told her a lie. "I think Buck was on duty here this morning when you probably left the package," he said.

"Oh, good! Maybe he'll remember me, and that will save a lot of explaining," she said happily.

Jim was nonplussed, a little ashamed of himself, and he passed the buck to Fred, saying, "I'd let you have it, only old sour-puss"—he jerked his head toward the rear, where Fred was—"doesn't like the idea. You know how it is. I gotta get along with the guy."

"I understand," said Miss Margaret Prince, and she walked away.

"Between the two," Jim told Fred, "I think the babe was straight goods. She looked all right to me."

"They mostly all do—to you," said Fred.

"Hell, I lied and said Buck was in here when she left the package, just to see what her reaction would be. And she seemed pleased, and hoped he'd remember her. Does that sound like she's a sharper?"

"It sounds," said the more experienced Fred, "about like a woman would sound when she was making a foot out of a guy with a bushy tail like yours."

"Yah. Nuts." Jim jerked his head. "How the canaries getting along?"

"They're still fighting."

"In the dark."

"Yes, in the dark. They haven't let up an instant. It's incredible."

"What's so incredible about a fight? I mean, almost everybody and everything is equipped to do a little fighting. That's why moose have horns."

"I don't think canaries ever fight in the dark," Fred said. "Mine never have, anyway. And I've never seen anything like this hate, unadulterated hate, which these birds manifest."

"The way you're talking, I'm beginning to feel funny about this," Jim said.

"I feel that way when I look at those hate-crazed birds."

Jim went into the back, picked up the telephone and got himself connected with the larger check-room on the upper level of Grand Central, where supervisor Buck Fineberg presided. Jim spoke with Buck for a few minutes, then hung up. "Hey, Fred, old scare-face never showed up to ask Buck for the package. What do you think of that?"

"I'm not surprised."

"Nor the girl either."

"I'm still not surprised."

Grabbing up the telephone again, Jim dialed the number which Margaret Prince had given him as her own. Upon receiving an answer, he asked boldly for Miss Prince, and the reply he received made an interesting study on his face for Fred to watch.

"Well?" asked Fred.

"It was the precinct Police Station," said Jim sheepishly. "They don't know any Miss Prince."

Twenty minutes later, Fred called thickly, "Jim, come here."

Jim hurried to Fred's side. "What's the matter now?" He saw that Fred was staring at the canary cage

sickly.

“One bird is dead,” Fred said.

“Huh?”

“Dead. The other bird killed it.”

Jim shrugged. “Yeah? Well, that ought to quiet things down on the old homestead.”

Grimacing, Fred said, “Oh, don't be so cold-blooded. If you had seen the poor little things showing such malevolent hate, you wouldn't be so smart about it.”

But the other man was getting tired of the whole subject of canaries. He spoke his mind on the matter. “Oh hell, get it off your mind. Two birds get to fighting in a cage, and there's a winner. So what? So if you don't blatt out that you opened up the paper in the first place so they could get a look at each other and start operations, there's nothing to it. Forget the whole thing.”

Fred was peering into the cage. “Hate,” he murmured. “I never saw such anger and hate in a bird. I didn't know a canary could show such a thing.”

“Oh, shut up,” said Jim. “You and your angry canary!”

Chapter II

THE possession of a reputation had long ago saddled Doc Savage with a few handicaps. Out of somewhere near a hundred and forty million U. S. inhabitants, not each one had heard of Doc Savage, but the percentage who had was respectable. Impressive, too, considering the care which Doc had taken to avoid publicity, or at least notoriety. Since the scientific genius of the man, his startling physical ability, and his unusual Galahad-like occupation of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, was not unknown in quite a few odd corners of the world, perhaps the total terrestrial population of around two billion two hundred million should be considered in the percentage table. The point was, that out of a number like that, there were sure to be screwballs to make life irritating.

Doc Savage's work, the righting of wrongs and punishing of evildoers whom the normal fingers of law enforcement did not seem to be able to grasp and crush, was itself enough out-of-place in a currently war-cynical and distrustful civilization to make it a subject of disbelief, and on the tongues of the ignorant or disillusioned, of ridicule. That sort of thing perhaps had been believable in the days of Galahad, but it had become as unfashionable as tin pants, rescuing damsels in distress, and knighthood in general.

In plain words, the gag had been worked to death. Charlatans had used it. Too many politicians had instigated wars to save humanity, until it was becoming pretty clear that what the world needed was saving from the leaders who were continually getting control of the masses. The world was getting wiser, or at least more cynical, about the whole saving business with its iron curtains and goose-stepping. Do-gooding was out of style these days. A guy was supposed to have an angle. And if the angle wasn't at once apparent, the thing to do was be disbelieving and hold an air of ridicule.

Doc Savage's “angle” wasn't apparent, and for a pretty good reason. He didn't have one. He did good, righted wrongs, punished evildoers, did scientific work so completely for the benefit of humanity as a whole that money-minded corporations, or publicity-minded “foundations” wouldn't finance it, and the only return he received was inner satisfaction. It was well that he expected no other return, too. Satisfaction was frequently all he got.

Doc Savage was a man of fantastic feats and good deeds and taking return only in satisfaction had not made him a meek nor an impoverished man. He was a spectacular person. Physically, a giant bronze man with hair a little darker bronze and strange flake-gold eyes that could be sympathetic, firm, or scare the hell out of a wrongdoer, he could do things with sinew that were not quite believable. Mentally, he was a phenomenon that a biographer would find hard to make convincing. A man simply didn't accomplish such scientific or psychological feats. It was a difficult fact to sell.

But the point was that there was enough percentage of zanies on the planet, two billion two hundred odd million to make some isolation desirable. So, while Doc Savage's headquarters occupied as conspicuous a place as there was in New York City, the eighty-sixth floor of one of the city's tallest buildings, and there were forty or fifty elevators operating in the vertical arteries inside, getting to see Doc Savage personally was a matter that took doing. More specifically, it took a crime. A fantastic one, of one that the law didn't seem to be able to touch. Even then, there was a certain screening routine.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW BLODGETT "MONK" MAYFAIR, who looked like a reasonably pleasant ape, was one of the screens. Monk had approximately seven-eighths-inch of forehead, and was one of the world's great chemists, when anybody could get him to work at it.

From the private detective agency downstairs, which sifted the inflow for cranks and chaff, Monk received a parcel-room claim-check.

"It came in the mail," he was told.

Not much impressed, Monk asked, "No note with it, or anything?"

"Just this." He was handed a bit of colored paper with one torn edge.

"Blazes!"

"It impressed me, too," said the private detective whose office force did nothing but screen and investigate the people who wished to see Doc Savage.

Monk took off his hat, which looked as if it had been used to dust off his shoes, and scratched around in some bristling rusty, shingle-nails that served him as hair. "Doc won't care for this much. He doesn't like something to start out smelling of money, particularly big money, as payment for his services."

"Then you're not interested?"

"In one-half of a thousand-dollar bill? Hell yes, I am," said Monk. "But the question is, will Doc be? What else was there with this?"

"Just that. The claim-check. The half a thousand-buck bill."

"Hmmm. Well, I'll take it upstairs and see what the master says."

MONK took the private elevator to the eighty-sixth floor, and in the reception room, a large place with comfortable chairs and a ghastly old-fashioned steel safe of tremendous size, and an inlaid table that was a priceless Oriental piece, he found Attorney Theodore Marley Brooks. He paused to speak unpleasantly to Ham Brooks. "Hello, shyster," Monk said. "I've warned you before, and I'm going to do it again. But this is the last time, savvy?"

Ham Brooks, a very dapperly dressed man, sneered.

“Well, well, it breathes, it walks on its hind legs, it looks like the missing link,” he remarked. “What can it be? Not a certain lout of a chemist who has been molesting my girl-friend?”

“Yours? *Your* girl-friend! Hell's bells!” Monk turned purple, waved both arms and screamed, “Molesting! Where do you get that stuff, you miserable flea on the reputation of Blackstone? Audrey was, and is, my girl-friend.”

Ham smirked. “Is, you say?”

“Yeah, even if you did have her out last night,” Monk bellowed. “And I'm telling you, you tort, if you mess around with Audrey once more, you'll be asking, 'Where's my arms and legs?' I don't mean maybe.”

Ham leaped to his feet, seized the slender black cane which he habitually carried, and screeched, “Don't you threaten me, you physical freak!”

“Threaten you?” Monk howled. “I won't say a word. I'll just—”

A buzzer somewhere in the room made several irritated beeping sounds. It ended the dispute temporarily, because it was a signal from Doc Savage.

Monk found Doc Savage in the laboratory, which was the largest room, composing over two-thirds of the skyscraper's eighty-sixth floor, that lay behind a library containing Doc's amazing collection of scientific tomes. Monk asked uneasily, “Our little fuss bothering you?”

“It was shaking the whole neighborhood,” Doc Savage said briefly. “Female trouble again?”

“Yeah,” Monk admitted sheepishly.

“Which one?”

“Audrey,” Monk muttered.

Doc Savage's metallic bronze features remained expressionless, and he said thoughtfully, “Do you fellows know what is going to happen to you sometime? You're going to get so interested in one of these competitions that some blond fluff with dark blue eyes is going to ring one of your fingers.”

“How'd you know she had dark blue eyes? You never met Audrey,” Monk demanded.

“They go with peroxide, don't they?”

“I think I should resent that,” Monk said. “What makes you think we might get hooked?”

“Because you'll be so busy watching each other, you'll forget to watch the girl.”

“You mean shot with a marriage license when we're not looking, eh?” Monk snorted. “Fat chance. Ham and I are wary old wolves. We love 'em and leave 'em. There's nothing to it.” Monk fished around in his pocket and brought out the claim-check and the half of a thousand-dollar bill. He presented these to Doc Savage. “Interesting trivia from the afternoon mail,” he remarked.

Doc looked at the items, but did not take them until he had pulled on rubber gloves. “You'd better be more careful with odd stuff through the mail,” he said. “Science has been doing some hair-raising things with killing germs lately.”

“You must be getting jumpy.”

Doc Savage said nothing, but carried the check and the greenback fragment over to a microscope and took a look at them. He was a giant of a man, and it was impossible for a casual air and normal mannerisms to conceal the fact of his fabulous physique. Monk, watching him, was impressed, and Monk had known Doc for quite a few years, and he was not easily impressed. Doc was more than a physical giant. He was a trained symphony in sinew and coordination, the product of a childhood devoted entirely to rigorous training at the hands of experts who had been hired by the man's father and given one instruction: If interminable training will develop a superman, produce one. There are probably limitations to what consistent practice and self-development over a period of years can accomplish, but sometimes Monk wondered.

“No germs, eh?” Monk remarked.

“Apparently not.” Doc took the two articles to another contrivance, a device of his own development for measuring radiant emission which was considerably more sensitive than the Geiger counter and its successor, the one which utilized certain properties of diamonds.

Monk was amused at the giant bronze man's precautions. “If they should be radioactive, so what? They wouldn't likely be charged enough to harm a man.”

“The claim-check is for a package at the stand on the lower level at Grand Central Station,” Doc Savage said. “The package could be a bomb, triggered for detonation by the presence of a radiant nearby.”

Monk nodded. “But that would take imagination and some scientific skill.”

“Decency has no corner on imagination, unfortunately,” Doc said. He seemed satisfied with his examination. “They seem to be clean. What do you make of it?”

“I don't know what to figure.” Monk shook his head. “The two things just came in the mail. Postmarked a little after noon. “ He hesitated, then added, “The half of a thousand-dollar bill gives it some bite. The bill's genuine, I think.”

“Yes, seems to be.”

“You going to pick up the package and see what gives?”

Doc looked at Monk thoughtfully. “You might wish you'd done that yourself, in case acquiring the package should lead to a contact with the owner later.”

“Yeah? How you figure?”

“A female.”

“Eh?”

“The package seems to have been checked by a brown-haired, brown-eyed girl who is rather exotic, probably about twenty-four years old, smokes long gold-tipped cigarettes, and is quite a traveler. Sound interesting?”

Monk blinked a couple of times. “Sounds more like you're running a whizzer on me.”

“The brand of cigarettes she likes is named Trieens, and her most recent trip was to India.”

“How you figure that?” Monk asked. “And don't tell me it's simple, dear Watson. . . . Or is it?”

"I'm afraid it is." Doc indicated the microscope. "Put the things under the glass and see for yourself."

Monk grunted, and followed instructions, but the examination did not fully convince him. He said, "I see the flecks of face powder, and tobacco, but danged if it means that much to me."

Doc said pleasantly, "If you had been doing research recently into allergies as related to cosmetics and tobacco, as I have, it would be clear enough. First, the powder: Face powder, a shade used by medium-complexioned girls but shunned by blondes and deep brunettes. Second, the tobacco, from an exotic cigarette, Trieens, made in India and not shipped abroad at all because of government monopoly regulations. They're long and gold-tipped, and since they're sold nowhere but in India, perhaps she bought them there. And there's a trace of perfume about the claim-check, a rather rash scent affected by younger women."

Monk grinned. "I missed the perfume, but she sounds interesting. Shall I take this up and see what it draws?"

"If you wish."

"Okay."

MONK collected Ham Brooks, and they caught a cab uptown. Monk did not tell Ham about Doc Savage's theory that a girl was involved; as a matter of fact, Monk invited Ham along only because the girl, if any, might pay the headquarters a visit during their absence and if Ham was there, and if the girl was promising, that would give Ham the inside track. Ham probably suspected chicanery, because he thought Monk had brought him along merely for the pleasure of renewing their quarrel about the blonde, Audrey, whereas it developed Monk was unusually quiet. Monk, for his part, was absorbed by amazement at Doc's deductive performance with the claim-check and thinking about it admiringly. But Ham was alarmed.

"What snide deal are you pulling on me?" Ham demanded.

"What? Oh calm down, you're not in the company of another lawyer, so nobody is going to steal your shirt. . . . Somebody checked something at Grand Central and sent Doc Savage the check, along with half a thousand-dollar bill, and we're going after it."

Ham was interested. "We're going after the other half of the bill, I hope you mean."

"The package."

"That's an impractical approach. The thousand-dollar bill is the thing," Ham said.

It was dark, a little after nine o'clock, and the midtown traffic was catching its breath after the theater rush, so that their cab was able to enter the drop-off at Grand Central without delay. They strolled inside, descended the steps, made the proper turns, went down the ramps to the lower level and located the check-room.

Fred Lill looked down at the check when Monk dropped it on the scuffed and shiny sheet metal counter-top, and Fred stiffened instantly. He had recognized the number on the claim-check as matching the stub on the canary cage.

"Are you the party who checked this?" Fred asked suspiciously.

“We got the claim-check, ain't we?” Monk countered. “Trot it out.”

Fred hesitated. There had been enough mystery surrounding the canary cage to upset him, and while he would be glad enough to be rid of the thing, he didn't wish to invite more trouble. He said, “Will you give me your name, Mister?”

“Listen,” said Monk. “I've been checking packages in depots since I was a runny-nosed little stinker so-high to a poodle, and I never had to give my name before. What are you getting up, a Christmas card list?”

Fred scowled. “Did Mr. Plott send you for the package?”

“Who's Mr. Plott?”

“Then it was Miss Margaret Prince?” Fred suggested.

“Who's she?”

“You don't know either one of those people?” Fred asked pointedly.

“Can't say I do,” said Monk. “Can't say I understand why you're galloping around bushes, either. Would you care to trot out whatever this claim-check calls for, or would you care for a little trouble?”

Fred stiffened. “You can't scare me. I don't like your manner.”

“You won't get the package?”

Fred shrugged. “Sorry. I can't. It's not in my section. If you could describe the package, which I don't imagine you can, or identify yourselves as honest citizens, I might help you. But the attendant of the other section, Jim Presse, is out to lunch. He will be back presently, if you care to wait. In fact, he's due back now.”

This was half-truth to the extent that Jim Presse was indeed out to lunch, but for the rest, Fred wanted to wait until Jim returned and consult him about procedure.

“Honest citizens, he says,” Monk growled.

Ham eyed Monk in exasperation, remarking, “That comes of letting you do the talking. That face of yours has upset the man. One look at that sub-human visage, and it's Katie bar the door.”

Monk ignored this and asked Fred Lill, “Who are these people, Mr. Plott and Margaret Prince?”

“Two who tried to get the canary cage,” said Fred triumphantly.

“The what? Canary cage?” demanded Monk.

That had slipped out, and Fred winced. “Wait until Jim gets—oh, yonder he comes now.” Fred sighed with relief, and called, “Hey, Jim, here are two more guys after that cage. What'll we—”

The other man in the check-room attendant's uniform stalked past, swung a leg over the counter, slid across it, muttering as he did so, “Back in a minute. Feel kinda sick.” He hurried into the rear, between the long aisles of shelf-racks.

Fred was shocked. “That isn't like Jim. He didn't look at all right—” He scowled nervously at Monk and Ham. “Just a minute, you guys. I want to see what ails Jim.” He turned and hastened after the other man.

Monk glanced at Ham, and the latter was saying, "If you ask me, there is something odd—" when Fred Lill's whoop of terror reached them from the rear. "Help! This ain't Jim." Fred shrieked. "Help! He's got the cage!"

Ham finished his speech with, "Take the left aisle, Monk. I'll go right." And they were both across the metal-topped counter instantly and lunging to the attendant's aid. But Monk was just as quickly back in view. His homely face was distorted, his hurry wild. The reason was promptly self-evident when a clap of gunshot exhaled from the rear. Monk yelled, "He's in this aisle. He's got a gun." Ham said, "Well, go in and get him." Monk's reply was pained. "I'm not bulletproofed today," he said, and this was not in any sense intended to be smart-aleck; what he meant was that he wasn't wearing a bulletproof undershirt of chain mail which Doc's aides often wore.

The sequence of the next twenty seconds of action they mostly reconstructed later. The invader, who was not Jim the attendant—they later found the genuine Jim unconscious in his underwear in a men's room booth—had knocked Fred Lill down and taken the canary cage. He was, as Monk had called, coming up the other aisle, and he knew Ham was in the adjoining one and moving fast, because he gave packages on one of the shelves a shove and these toppled through and made an excited mound on the floor before Ham, who stumbled over them and went down. Scrambling up, Ham spoke his mind in Harvard accents, but not Harvard words. Meantime, the intruder went on with the canary cage, and passed Monk, who was flat at the end of the aisle, waiting, full of anticipation.

Monk made his pounce as the man went past. Monk's object was to do a judo disarmament, a spectacular feat, but not a difficult one if the armed man is close enough. Monk knew, as do most men who teach judo tactics to the police, that it is perfectly safe to start taking the gun away from anybody fool enough to jam the muzzle against any part of the body, and that it can be done in practically every case before the trigger can possibly be pulled. This wasn't quite that simple, but nearly.

And Monk was wonderfully successful. A flash of movement, and he had the gun. He didn't have the man, though.

The two things that happened next were right in the tempo of action. First, Monk found out why the man had fired only one shot earlier. The gun was jammed. It was a cheap foreign automatic, and the new shell hadn't fed. It was useless to Monk. Second, the man had another gun.

Monk's immediate desire was to be elsewhere. He dived backward wildly, hit the floor, which was dusty and littered with torn claim-checks. Two or three bullets went into the steel shelves, broke up the contents of some packages and suitcases, and from a hole in a traveling bag a trickle of bourbon came, contributing the unnecessary aroma of a brewery.

The intruder left with the canary cage.

THE man ran headlong for fifty feet and reached a ramp leading up into the station. Then, prudently, he slowed his pace. He turned right, then left, heading for the spot where the crowds were thickest. Grand Central Terminal is a monstrous tabernacle dedicated to haste and it is generally not possible to hear the arrival of incoming trains, and trains are not as quiet as mice. The shots, while they had made a hell of an outlay of sound in the vicinity of the check-stand, had contributed minutely to the overall noise of the station.

Crowds are also the boon, temporarily at least, of a fugitive who keeps his head, wears a casual look, and doesn't stay in any one place too long.

The man had the canary cage, which was conspicuous, and would mark him instantly once the police had spread fully an alarm. He debated what to do with it. Check it at another stand? He was almost tempted.

It would be bold enough, surely. But he didn't have quite that much faith in the ability of the normal to escape notice when men were searching for the unnatural. So he kept the cage with him.

In the end, he concluded to walk out of the station right now, before the word became general. He wondered how much time had elapsed. It was hard to tell, and he wasn't sure what facilities for a quick broadcast of a description the police had in the station.

The latter question was answered rapidly, for the station loudspeaker began to boom out his description.

He was already at the entrance, however. He walked out casually. No one stopped him. He looked for a taxi, found one that was emptying itself at the ramp, and shoved inside. He settled back calmly, saying, "Penn Station, and in a hurry if you will. I want to catch another train."

The driver grunted. "Cab ahead has gotta move out of the way first."

Two or three seconds later, the cab door was opened casually, and a man got inside. A large man with rather unusual bronze features and strange flake-gold eyes.

"Hey, this cab's occupied," objected the man who had acquired the canary cage.

"So are you," Doc Savage told him.

Chapter III

"THE thing I object to," Monk Mayfair remarked disgustedly, "is not that Doc made a grab and saved the bacon. That was all right, because I know he doesn't think we're a couple of saps. But what I resent is that we made of ourselves, voluntarily and with only mild urging, a pair of saps. That guy with the canary cage walked through us as if we were duck-pins."

"Oh, shut up," Ham said. He told Fred Lill, "Not you, Mr. Lill. Go right ahead. You thought the man was your co-worker, Jim Presse, and you walked back to see what made him seem different. Then what?"

Fred Lill was speaking uncomfortably into a wire-recorder. "He hit me," he said. "And that's all I knew for a while. In fact, that's all I know."

"Do you know why all this rumpus is being made about a cage with two canaries in it?" Ham asked.

"No, sir. I don't know from nothing, and I'd like to forget all about it," Fred Lill said.

"Okay, thanks, Lill." Ham closed the machine, and he and Monk went to the first-aid room in the station, where Jim Presse was being treated for a scalp cut and a headache.

They recorded Jim's account, which seemed to add nothing to the general picture.

Riding downtown, Ham remarked, "This is an odd one, isn't it? Somebody wants Doc to have the canaries, and somebody else is all against it."

"Yeah, the girl was sure anxious for Doc to have them," Monk agreed.

"What girl?" Ham scowled. "You've been holding out on me, you baboon." They quarreled over the girl from India who smoked exotic cigarettes during the rest of the ride.

Doc Savage was seated in the reception room at headquarters. The canary cage reposed on the inlaid

table nearby. Across from Doc sat a slender young man with a wiry body, a hard brown face, rather thick lips, and a manner that was not otherwise stupid.

"He given out anything yet?" Monk asked, indicating the stranger.

"Silence, exclusively," Doc Savage replied. "Let's hear the recordings." He arose, adding, "We'll listen in the other room, however. Monk, will you keep an eye on our speechless friend here."

Monk strode over to the stranger, said, "Go on, make a break for it. Go ahead, pal. Let's see if your footwork is as good as it was." But the young man merely scowled.

In the library, with the doors closed, Doc Savage and Ham Brooks listened to the recorder play-back.

"Doesn't clear up much, does it?" Ham asked, when that was finished.

Doc Savage looked thoughtfully at the machine.

He said, "Both check-room attendants state there were two canary birds, which fought until one was killed."

Ham nodded and explained, "That's right."

"There is only one bird in the cage," Doc told him.

Ham was startled. "One! But I don't get that. Both men said the cage held two birds. I think they both actually saw two birds in the cage."

"Nevertheless, there was only one bird when I took possession."

"Which bird is in the cage? The winner, or the loser?"

"The loser. The dead one," Doc said.

THE stranger with the hard brown face sat in the reception room and the only indication of inner tension was the claw-like hold his hands kept on the arms of his chair. Monk Mayfair raked a finger around in the, small litter that the stuff they had taken from the man's pockets made on the table.

"Not a thing here to give him a name or a home. That in itself is pretty near evidence against a man, come to think of it," Monk remarked. He watched Doc Savage slide an ampoule of chemical into a hypodermic, and laughed. "You want to bet your big silence lasts much longer?" he asked the man.

The man stared with wordless intensity at the needle. He watched Doc Savage show him the label on the container which had held the ampoule, and a thin mist appeared as by magic on his upper lip. "You can't shoot that stuff into me! It's illegal!" he blurted, using a voice considerably more high-pitched than the one in which he'd last spoken nearly an hour ago.

"It's illegal, he says," Monk remarked. "Now that's reasoning for you. He only shot at me a couple of times."

"I think he knows what it is," Ham remarked. "I suppose he should, at that. A couple of national magazines have carried stories about its hypnotic qualities on the human mind."

Monk went over and stood behind the man, remarking, "It may be illegal, you potlapper, but you're

going to talk your head off in a minute or two.”

Suddenly he seized the man from the rear, pinioning his arms, clamping him to the chair.

The man screamed. “That stuff’s dangerous!” he shrieked. “I read where—oh my God, no! Don’t!”

Doc Savage had his left arm now, and Ham his legs, and the man’s howling clawed at the busy silence in the room for a few moments longer, then began to change in quality. The drug was quick, and would produce fairly complete anaesthesia in hardly more than twenty seconds. But it was not anaesthesia Doc wanted, so he checked the flow carefully. He glanced at Ham, said, “Begin feeding him questions. You’ve done it before, and know about the results to expect.” And to Monk: “Set up the wire recorder, in case there is something that might interest the police.”

The following half-hour was a monotonous matter of applied effort, livened only occasionally by a gem of pertinent information. Since the man talked in a twilight state, his mind free of conscious control, there was dullness spotted with bursts of hysteria, and the whole was incoherent as to form. Only Ham’s steadily repeated questions gave it a plan and progress.

In summary, they learned: The man’s name was Clinton Williams and he had been born to a mother who had waited only until he was old enough to leave with his father, then she had disappeared. His career consisted of grade-school, one hitch in the reform school, different penitentiaries, two hitches, the army two years, kicked out, and a series of odd jobs and minor criminal activities which had resulted in late months in an association with a gang of thugs headquartering in Jersey City, and headed by one named A. C. Black.

Black was known, naturally, as Blackie, and a few days ago he’d hired himself, Clinton Williams and the whole gang of bruisers out to a Mr. Plott, a foreign gentleman. The remuneration was handsome, their duties negligible, consisting of trying to find a young lady named Miss Meg Prince. Or Margaret Prince, really.

Mr. Plott furnished the information that Miss Prince had arrived by plane from India via Cairo, London and La Guardia Airport, with Mr. Plott hot on her heels, whereupon she’d given Mr. Plott the slip. The gang did the rest. Included in the coterie was a private detective who’d had his license lifted, and it was through his management that they located Miss Prince living in a discreet hotel in the fifties off Madison Avenue.

Profusely delighted with their services, Mr. Plott assigned them the next part of the job—Miss Prince had two canaries, and he wanted them. He wouldn’t mind, either, if he got Miss Prince also. The canary birds first. Then Miss Prince. Mr. Plott wouldn’t mind if the canary birds were dead, but he wanted the bodies. As for Miss Prince, preferably she should be alive in condition to talk.

But Miss Prince had been wary, had discovered they’d found her about the time it happened, and without delay she had left her tiny hotel carrying what was clearly a canary cage enclosed in paper. She’d checked this at Grand Central, then mailed the claim-check to someone, although first visiting a bank and exchanging a number of traveler’s checks for a single bill of large denomination.

Clinton Williams had been assigned the job of getting the birds by force after Mr. Plott had failed in a peaceful attempt. In the meantime, others of the gang were going to see what could be done about removing Miss Prince from circulation.

“Two birds?” Doc said.

Yes, there were supposed to be two birds in the cage, the man said.

“There was only one bird, and it was dead,” Doc said.

That confused Clinton Williams, because his mind in the drugged state was incapable of rationalizing to any degree. He began to mumble, and Doc listened carefully and wonderingly, gathering that Mr. Plott had felt that one canary, or either canary singly, was of no value in the scheme of things. Both canaries were needed.

“Why were the canaries angry?” Doc asked.

The man didn't know that. He had no idea why they were valuable. In fact, he did not know anything more of pertinence.

“Monk and Ham,” Doc said, “you get up to that girl's hotel, find her, and bring her in. I'd like to know why she wanted me to have two angry canary birds.”

Monk put on his hat, remarking, “Miss Prince is the girl who called at the check-room in an effort to get the birds back. The check-room attendants gave a pretty good description of her, and I guess we can recognize her from that. It should be simple.”

“To insure it being simple,” Doc warned him, “you'd better be careful. According to this fellow, the rest of his gang is hunting her.”

Ham said, “This seems screwy to me. Why would Mr. Plott pursue Miss Prince all the way from India to get a couple of angry canary birds?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Doc said. “And you two had better get going.”

When Monk and Ham had gone, Doc took a pair of handcuffs from the desk and manacled Clinton Williams to the heavy chair in which he sat, fastening the man's ankle to the lower part of the chair, so that it would be impossible for the fellow to walk away carrying the chair.

Obtaining a pair of tweezers, Doc extracted the dead body of the canary from the cage, carried both bird and cage into the laboratory, and began running tests.

He checked the paper cage wrappings, both brown paper and black paper, for writing, visible and secret. There seemed to be none. The black paper was not American made, and was quite worn, as if it had been used to wrap the cage a number of times. It was completely light-proof.

He noted one significant thing about the cage. It was, or had been, divided into two compartments by a wire partition, and the small door in this had in some fashion come open, allowing the two canaries to get together, whereupon one had killed the other.

As he prepared to inspect the canary itself, the radio receiver emitted a hissing sound at one side of the room, then Monk's voice, saying: “We're almost at Miss Prince's hotel, Doc. Nothing unusual yet.”

Doc Savage picked up the push-to-talk microphone. “Report at five-minute intervals. And don't walk into any traps.”

Chapter IV

HAM BROOKS, glancing sidewise at Monk Mayfair, remarked uneasily, “You didn't mention our guest.” He watched Monk's face, and saw the homely chemist wince, a sight that would ordinarily have pleased him, but which gave him little satisfaction under the present circumstances. Ham concluded that

Monk was harassed by a feeling of guilt, and he knew he had the same misgivings himself. He noticed that Monk gave the siren an angry poke with his thumb, a gesture that was unnecessary, and he felt some sympathy for Monk as well as for himself, a sort of we're-in-the-same-boat complex.

“One would think,” stated the spectacular, if somewhat varnished, blonde riding with them, “that I’m not very welcome.”

She was Audrey, the belle they had been besieging, and she sounded near tears. And Audrey near tears was like a kitten drowning.

“Now, my dear, you mustn’t get that idea,” said Ham hastily. “It’s perfectly lovely having you along. Perfectly.” Ham remembered to add, “It’s Monk who doesn’t want you around.”

“That’s a damned lie,” Monk muttered, which was another lie.

Audrey looked daintily hurt. “I don’t care, neither of you were a bit nice.” She pouted. “You’re not being nice now, either.”

“Baby, you’ve got it all wrong.” Monk was glancing at the microphone, wondering how Doc Savage would react if he knew he and Ham had a lady friend around their necks. “Baby, I was just surprised to see you, that’s all.”

“You certainly seemed surprised,” Audrey snapped.

“Yeah, I was bowled over—with pleasure, I mean,” Monk assured her. “What gets me is this: How’d you happen to be waiting there in the lobby of the building at just that time?”

Audrey favored Monk with a frown. She also moved a little closer to Ham, coyly. “I’ll bet you don’t know,” she said, “what time it was.”

“Why, about three minutes after nine o’clock,” Monk said, after glancing at his watch.

“I thought so,” Audrey said.

“Huh?”

“We had a date for eight o’clock.” Audrey sounded near tears again. It was both puppies and kittens drowning. “I stood around a whole hour, waiting. And you’d forgotten.”

“No, baby! No, never!” Monk proclaimed loudly, also wondering how he’d happened to forget it. “You see, Audrey, we’ve been busy on a big case and—” He noticed Ham’s free hand giving Audrey’s shoulder comforting pats and scowled.

“You just passed the street the Prince dame’s hotel is on,” Ham volunteered. “You taking a tour, or something?”

“Stop pawing my girl,” Monk said.

“Who’s your girl?” said Audrey. “And who is this Prince person?”

“Oh, some babe Monk’s interested in,” said Ham helpfully.

Glaring, Monk said, “Aw, she has canary birds.” That didn’t sound like much of an explanation, but it was the best he could produce. He U-turned the car angrily in the traffic, blowing his horn, and drawing irate blasts from other motorists, an uproar that was promptly joined by the twitter of a traffic cop’s

whistle. The cop, brawny and red-faced and short of temper, came over, fisted his hands on his hips and listened to Monk's statement that they were Doc Savage aides, replied with the classic understatement, "That's fine. I haven't given an assistant celebrity a ticket in a week." He wrote out and presented a traffic summons.

Monk then drove on and yanked the car to the curb in front of the Prince girl's hotel.

Audrey giggled. "I thought Mr. Savage was such an important person. I'm surprised they'd dare give you a ticket."

"It's this shyster lawyer we've got along," Monk growled. "They probably know him for what he is, and that handicaps an honest man."

Audrey noted their preparations to enter the hotel. "You're not going to leave little Audrey alone in this dark, lonesome street?" she asked anxiously.

Monk groaned inwardly, and looked hard at Ham in order to hang the responsibility for an answer on him.

"I'd be simply terrified. Simply petrified," Audrey bleated.

"We wouldn't think of petrifying you," Ham said uneasily. "So come along."

THE hotel lobby gave them a genteel air of honesty and quiet, and the middle-aged clerk surprised them with the information that they were expected. "Miss Prince? Yes indeed," he said. "You say you are associated with a Mr. Savage? Then you are to go right up. Five-fourteen."

They traveled over a well-trod taupe carpet and stopped on a rubber mat in front of the elevators to wait for a cage to appear. Monk drew Ham aside and muttered, "I don't like the idea of hauling Audrey around with us. There may be fireworks."

"You had the date with Audrey, so get rid of her yourself," Ham retorted. "If this Prince character is expecting us, how come she didn't contact Doc Savage directly? And how'd she know we would show up?"

"Secrets?" Audrey's pert little face was beside them. "I love secrets."

Monk contemplated Audrey's rather plump throat, and it occurred to him that his fingers would fit around it very nicely, and willingly, too. An elevator came, though, and they entered.

"Five," Ham said.

"Canary birds? So you're going to see the lady about canary birds?" said Audrey, simpering. "I think that's just too sweet for anything, but I don't believe a word of it."

"Shush, baby," Monk muttered. "It's supposed to be kept quiet."

"Oh, a mystery!" shrieked Audrey. "I do love mysteries!"

Extremely irritated with Audrey, Monk examined the blonde to learn what he had just found that he had missed before. He saw a very cute number, strictly jewelry-case, the usual quota of baby blue eyes, cupid-mouth—the model came fully equipped, he had to say that. Brains? Who bothered about brains? He hadn't noticed, and he imagined Ham hadn't either. Which led him to recall Doc Savage's remark that

sometime the two of them, Ham and himself, would get to running competition so hard that one would likely get permanently hooked. Oh brother! Not if he could duck.

“What did you say?” inquired Audrey, dragging her fingertips over his arm.

THE door was no different from the door of a room in any other hotel that had been built perhaps twenty years ago, except that possibly this one gave back more silence.

“Knock again,” Ham said. “The desk clerk downstairs seemed to think she was in.”

Monk flattened his knuckles on the door again, got more silence from that point, and a rather pleasant-voiced, “Good evening, gentlemen,” from behind them. They whirled as if a snake had hissed at their heels.

Here was a silent man. That was the first—and lasting—impression Monk got of the fellow, and it dealt in no way with his voice, which was mellifluous, resonant, free-flowing and confidence-inspiring. Otherwise he was tall, slightly soft-looking and handsome in a very careful way. “I trust I’m not making a mistake,” he added.

“What kind of a mistake would you make?” Ham Brooks asked him.

“My name is Kelvin,” the man said, smiling pleasantly. He opened his right hand and there was a piece of paper in it. “I have the answer to a question written here,” he added. “Will you tell me who you are, or rather who you represent? They will be identical, I hope.”

“Doc Savage,” Ham said. “And I don’t get this.”

“Oh, excellent.” The man who had given himself the name Kelvin presented the bit of paper. On it was written: *Since you are from Doc Savage, I am at your service.*

“What kind of service,” Monk asked suspiciously.

“Guide, you might call it.”

“Yeah?”

Kelvin beamed pleasantly. “Bear with me for a brief explanation. The hotel is my residence—this is my room behind me, as a matter of fact—and a few days ago I managed to make the acquaintance of a very attractive and interesting young lady, by name Meg Prince. Margaret Prince. We had dinner and did a few theaters, with the result that I was totally fascinated, and when Meg asked me to do a favor for her that seemed somewhat bizarre, I’m afraid I consented with unseemly enthusiasm.”

“Oh, you know Miss Prince?” Ham said.

“I just said so, perhaps with too many words.”

“What do you know about her?”

“Charming. Mysterious. And frightened.”

“Frightened of what?”

Kelvin shrugged. “I have no idea. The mysterious qualities I mentioned add to the young lady’s

fascination.”

“Canary birds?”

Surprise arched Kelvin's eyebrows. “She has two, I believe. She kept them always in a cage which had two compartments, and it was always darkened.”

Monk said, “Lets get around to the favor you mentioned.”

“Certainly. Meg asked me to accost anyone who knocked on her door, ascertain whether they represented Doc Savage, or included Doc Savage, and then I was to guide them to her.”

“Okay, pal,” said Monk curtly. “Where is she? Just tell us that. We don't need any seeing-eye help.”

Kelvin's head bent apologetically. “I'm supposed to show, not tell, you.”

“Yeah?” said Monk suspiciously. “Brother, the story sounds thin to me, and if you think—”

Audrey stamped her foot. “Oh, tush!” she said. “I think Mr. Kelvin is being nice and gallant, and you're acting nasty to him.”

“Shut up,” Monk said.

Audrey gasped. “Oh, you big baboon!” she cried. She shrank back against Ham Brooks for protection, wailing, “He told me to shut up!” Ham stroked her shoulder comfortingly, telling her, “He's a baboon, all right, and I'm glad you're finding it out.”

Monk said, “Hell!” disgustedly. “Oh, all right, let's go along with this guy like sheep,” he added. He looked thoughtfully at the door of Miss Prince's room. “But first let's take a look in here.”

The door was locked, and Monk bent down to examine the lock, then drew out his pocket-knife, opened the large blade, and shoved it against the narrow strip of wood which served as a buffer for the door. He pried and the strip came up easily—suspiciously easy. He hesitated, sure the lock had been picked recently the way he was going to pick it now, wondering whether he should mention the fact. Then, without speaking, he took the card-case from his purse and shoved one of the celluloid card-protectors into the slit he had made. After a bit of maneuvering and pressing, he felt the bolt slide back. He pushed the door open.

Inside there was just a hotel room with the things in it that hotel rooms have—when they're ready for a guest, but before a guest checks in, or more exactly, after a check-out. There were no clothes, no bags, no article of personal nature whatever. Two used towels in the basket in the bathroom, cigarette ashes but no stub in one of the trays.

Monk looked at Kelvin. “Got any remarks you want to make about this?”

Kelvin shrugged. “Only that I imagine Meg moved to another address to which she wishes me to bring you.”

“Okay. Let's get there.”

THE elevator operator was sleepy and he looked at them once, but not again, and the cage took a long tired time getting them down to the lobby. They walked silently to the revolving door and it let them out on to the street one at a time, along with gulps of warm air that smelled faintly of cleaning-fluid.

“Better check in with Doc on the radio,” Ham told Monk, when they were in the car. And Monk took up the microphone, switching on the transmitter and receiver so that it would warm. Thirty seconds was about right for the filaments to heat, and after that had passed, he pressed the push-to-talk button. But no response came—the audible one should have been a muting of the receiver while the transmitter was on the air. There was none.

“Transmitter's on the blink,” Monk muttered. “It won't work.”

Kelvin seemed both interested and surprised. “You mean to say you fellows use two-way radio, like the police?”

Monk looked at him narrowly. “It's nothing new. It wouldn't be very original either if somebody fixed the thing so we couldn't use it to report where we're going.”

Kelvin's eyes narrowed. “Does that remark have a personal touch?”

Audrey said disgustedly, “What crude manners you have, Monk! You're behaving utterly stupidly.”

“I hope no more than my manners are stupid,” Monk said darkly.

Chapter V

HIS name was Caspell. He had once been high brass in the army—Brigadier General C. E. Caspell. The man was not a has-been by any means, and probably threw more weight than he ever had as an army man, officially. He was, by inclination, a scientist, and by profession, a watchdog on the progress of science as it related to the unholy practice of war. Caspell was a product of the era; war had turned scientific, and the advent of the atom bomb had been a sort of presentation of diploma to show the graduation of the laboratory into the realm of death and destruction. Caspell belonged to an unsung section of the government intelligence that applied itself to the ferreting out of any new discoveries that might be dangerous to the safety of the nation. He did not head the department, but he was second in charge, stationed in New York, and he was a brilliant man.

“I don't want to seem to exaggerate,” Doc Savage said to Caspell. “But I feel it is fortunate that you were in New York and immediately available.”

“I take it this is important?”

“My guess would be so.”

“How important?”

“It will take a little peering through the microscope and looking at analysis results,” Doc said. “But you might start holding on to your hair now.”

Caspell was scientist enough to follow his nose through the information Doc had assembled, which meant that he was quite some scientist indeed. The stuff was complex. Not only the physiological side of it, which any top-ranking brain surgeon would not have found too complicated, but the psychological, or neurological aspects, tying one into the other, as they did, made it something strictly not for junior-grade dabblers in—even the word applied to the study was not exactly simple—neurenergenics.

“I don't believe it!” Caspell said. He didn't speak as a man who didn't believe, though. He sank in a chair, a straight and hard chair and he sat there in a straight and hard way, mopping his face with a

handkerchief. "My God! Of course it's possible—I mean, there's a reason for everything. . . . You say this canary came from where?"

"The girl came from India. Presumably she brought the canary birds." Doc had given Caspell a general picture of the situation. "She came, as nearly as we can gather, in fear, and she was pursued by this Mr. Plott character."

"Reading between the lines, that would indicate she was coming to you with this ghastly thing in hopes you could stop it," Caspell said.

"That seems far-fetched. India is a long way off—"

"Not to me. You underestimate your repute in far-away places, Savage."

"Nevertheless—"

"She brought two angry canary birds, didn't she?" Caspell demanded. "Samples. The two birds were samples. Why else would she bring samples, if not to show them to you to prove her story?"

Doc was wary. "Let's not jump to conclusions. The infernal thing may not be perfected. Perhaps it will work only on canary birds, and they hoped by some trick to get me to continue development."

Caspell jumped up suddenly. "Savage, you really think a thing like that is possible?" He sounded more than a little wild.

"Certainly."

"No! Oh Lord, no!"

Doc shrugged. "Why not? The medical dictionaries even have a word for it—neurenergen. Meaning a substance supposed to furnish the energy of the neurosis. Medically, a neurosis is a nervous disease, especially a functional disease. A functional disease is one that affects the functions of the body but not its structure. You see, it can even be reduced to small words."

Caspell leveled an arm at the dissected fragments of the canary bird. "You've just shown me a change in the structure of that canary—"

"Not bodily—"

"Now wait, the brain is part of the body, isn't it? The brain of that bird—"

Doc Savage interrupted gravely. "Tell me this, Caspell. As far back as two years ago, or even six months ago for that matter, would cerebrology have offered enough knowledge to indicate that the abnormal condition of that particular part of a canary bird's brain meant that the bird was incapable of doing anything but hating and being angry?"

Caspell shuddered. "Stop it! You're scaring the hell out of me. This is shadowy stuff from the unknown, and I don't like thinking about it."

"The thing I want to know is this: Did the canary hate one thing? Was it angry only, for instance, at the other canary?" Doc said.

"You can't tell that. It's dead now—"

"There were two angry birds. The other one disappeared. If we could get it, and if it is alive, and could

be observed—”

“Dammit, let me back away from this for a minute!” Caspell gasped. “I tell you, it frightens me more than the damned bomb ever did.” He went to the window, stood scowling outward, and his hands moved uneasily, unable to find a place, in his pockets or elsewhere, where they felt safe. “You know this trouble in India,” he said grimly.

Doc looked at him sharply. “India has had nothing but trouble for months,” he said. “What trouble? Be specific.”

“I can't be—not too specific.” And in a moment, Caspell added bitterly, “My God, we discussed it down in Washington the other day, and somebody said, 'They must be brewing some new drink over there that makes them hate each other.' Or something like that. Just a remark that looked dumb at the time.” He wheeled. He licked dry lips. “How would it be done? Something in the food? A secret ray? Ultra-high-frequency magnetic field?”

“That's what we've got to find out.”

“How?”

“Monk and Ham have gone after the Prince girl.” Doc threw an uneasy glance at the radio. “They're not reporting in, though, and it's beginning to worry me.”

“What do you want me to do?” Caspell asked.

“You saw that fellow tied up in the outer office? He's a hired thug, Clinton Williams by name, member of a gang employed by Plott to stop the girl and the canary birds from reaching me. We shot him full of hypnotic, so his story is probably square. I want you to take him off my hands—the police would do it, of course, but their imaginations are a little too self-respecting for a thing like this.”

Caspell nodded. “I could do without my imagination right now, too. We'll take Mr. Clinton Williams. We'll ply him with a few questions.”

Doc gave Caspell a spool of recorder wire. “Here's his story, recorded as he told it. It should help.”

“It will,” said Caspell ominously. “What else can we do?”

“Nothing I can think of right now,” Doc told him.

Caspell seemed puzzled. “I appreciate your handing this Williams bird over to us—but is that why you called me in? It doesn't seem too important, measured alongside the other.”

“It isn't,” Doc told him frankly. “As a matter of fact, I'm doing something I've never done before, probably because it never seemed so urgent to take such a precaution. . . . Frankly, I wanted you to know, or the proper agencies of this government to know—it amounts to the same thing—that there is a ghastly probability that someone has discovered a means, chemically, electrically or otherwise, of altering the minds of human beings so that they are consumed by anger and hate. I particularly wanted the information, because it is obviously far-fetched and astoundingly unbelievable, to get into the hands of a man of sufficient mental breadth to understand that such a grim thing is possible. In fact, that it seems preposterous is only because the structure of the mind is the least-understood of all things in the human body. I didn't want it laughed at, or passed up as silly. . . . In case, as you've guessed by now, I should have the bad luck to lose out with this fellow Plott. By losing out, I mean getting killed.”

Caspell nodded. “I understand.”

“Good.” Doc hesitated. “Would you mind sticking around here a while.” He showed Caspell how to operate the radio transceiver. “If Monk and Ham call in, tell them I’ve gone looking for the other angry canary.”

“All right, I’ll stay here and tell them that,” Caspell said, nodding.

FRED LILL’S tired roundish face became flat-looking with surprise, and he said, “Oh, you again! Well, come in.” He wore no shirt, had a glass of milk in his hand, as he stepped backward opening the door. “I was just having a snack before I piled into the hay.”

“This won’t take long, probably,” Doc Savage said, entering a three-room flat which was obviously kept by Mrs. Lill with great care on the small salary that Fred earned at the check-room. An elevated train, outward bound through Brooklyn, made a long clanging bedlam through which Doc Savage waited patiently. “It’s about the missing canary,” Doc added.

Fred Lill bobbed his head. “Yes, I guessed that. . . . You’re Doc Savage, aren’t you? I talked to my wife about it after I got home from work, and she knew about you. You’re a famous man.”

Doc looked at Lill thoughtfully. “That isn’t what is making you nervous, is it?”

Lill winced. “No. . . . You’re pretty sharp, aren’t you? To see that I’m nervous, I mean.”

“Do you have the missing canary?” Doc asked.

Fred Lill registered indecision and reluctance, all the while shaking his head. “No, I don’t have the bird.” He hesitated, then blurted, “Damn it, I’m not going to get in a lot of trouble over it. Jim is a young fool in some ways, although a nice boy, and one you wouldn’t suspect of feeling tenderhearted about a bird.”

“Jim? You mean the fellow who works with you in the check-room?”

“Yes. . . . Jim has the canary. He took it out of the cage because he was sorry for the poor thing. And then, after all the rumpus over the birds and the cage, he was afraid to tell anyone what he’d done.”

“Where is the canary now?”

“Jim took it home with him. I have Jim’s address.” Fred Lill went to a table, seized pencil and paper and wrote for a moment. “Here’s the address,” he said.

“Thanks, Lill. You should have told this sooner.” Doc pocketed the paper, after glancing at it. “One thing more. Did you see Jim Presse take the canary out of the cage?”

“Well, yes,” Fred said uneasily.

“Don’t be alarmed. This was the canary that killed the other bird? The victor?”

“Yes.”

“How did the canary act toward Jim?”

“Why, just kind of scared, was all.” Fred Lill was puzzled. “Like any bird would toward a stranger who was handling it, I would say.”

“The bird didn’t seem to hate Jim?”

“That would be kind of funny, wouldn't it, for a canary to hate a man?”

“Just answer the question.”

“No. I didn't notice anything I would call hate.”

“The canary was in a good humor?”

“It was scared,” said Fred Lill.

“But it didn't act as it had toward the other canary?”

“Oh, no. No indeed.”

“How did the canary act toward the other bird?”

“Hateful and angry,” Fred Lill said grimly. “I never saw such hate and ferocity. Never.”

“All right, thanks,” Doc told him. “I'm going to see Jim Presse about the surviving canary, but don't telephone Jim about my coming. In fact, keep this under your hat.”

“All right,” said Fred Lill, nodding. “But what do I say to your man if he calls again?”

Doc Savage, moving toward the door, whirled sharply. “What man? Did someone telephone you, saying he was one of my associates?”

Fred Lill stared. “Yes. Didn't—”

“When was this?” Doc demanded.

“Why, about an hour and a half ago—”

“You didn't tell him Jim Presse had the canary?”

“Well, yes. Did I do wrong?”

“You probably saved your own life,” Doc said grimly. “But how Jim Presse came out is another matter.”

AT between fifty and seventy miles an hour, using the siren and the red lights continually, Doc Savage made the trip back from Brooklyn in record time. He used outlying streets, the ones normally employed by trucks, because it was not yet late enough in the night for truck traffic to begin appearing. On Thirty-eighth Street, he shut off the siren and doused the red lights, but kept rolling fast. The car was his own, outwardly not an unusual looking machine, but equipped with the scientific gadgets he liked to use, and the development of which were a hobby with him.

There were only three cars parked in the block between Third and Lexington on Thirty-eighth. He decreased speed, and as a matter of course, used one of his gadgets, pressing a control button as he passed each of the three parked machines. The small hissing that resulted in each case was not particularly noticeable.

Doc drove on, completed half a circle of the block, and stopped on Thirty-seventh. He had, in passing, noted that Jim Presse's address was a building of small apartments, a tobacco-colored brick structure three stories taller than the surrounding brownstones. An innocent-looking place, but he took a lot of

trouble to get into it by the back way, first entering an apartment house on Thirty-seventh and pressing all the buttons in sight until someone buzzed and let him in the door. He walked upstairs through the smell of last evening's dinners, and twice he mumbled, "Excuse me, I rang the wrong bell. Wanted Mr. Glickens." Glickens was a top-floor name he had noticed. On the top floor, he found the way to the roof. The hatch was padlocked, but that held him up not much more than a minute. He had a kit of useful tools that he used on it.

The way across the rooftops was easy, and there was no alley, so presently he stood beside Jim Presse's apartment house. The windows that could be conveniently reached from the roof all showed him distrustful teeth of painted iron bars. So he used a little steel grapple-hook on the end of a knotted silk cord, and presently—it had not been difficult for him, since his physical strength was close to abnormal—he sat on the window-sill of a hall window one story up. He used the kit again—glasscutter, a quick cut in a circle, then a bit of stickum to hold the glass from falling when he tapped it sharply and it opened where he had scratched. He unlocked the window and went in, being once more met by last night's dinner odors. Jim Presse's apartment was five-one-three.

That was one floor up, and he met a man. The man was coming down the stairs, lightly, turned a little sidewise, whistling softly. It was not an American tune he was whistling, and the man's clothing wasn't American, nor was, less noticeably, his face. His voice was. He said, "Hi, pal." And went on.

Doc had been making no sound, and he continued to make none, and the man didn't either, presently. When Doc noticed that, he leaned over the well the zig-zagging stairs made, and looked down. The man had his shoes off, was carrying them, and making terrific time down the steps.

Moving fast now, checking, Doc reached Jim Presse's door. It was a metal door, but not too impregnable if one knew where to hit them with a foot, and he knew. He went in, and found Jim Presse at once, not a difficult discovery, because the man was spread out on the floor pretty much as he'd stopped moving, if he'd moved much after the knife had done its work on his throat. The cut somehow looked as if the hand with the knife had just reached around from behind, and yanked. It was a messy murder.

Ten seconds later, Doc Savage was taking the third flight of stairs down, and he made just as good time to the lobby, which was empty. The man, the man who had nothing American about him but the two words, "Hi, pal," was not there. Neither was one of the three cars that had been parked in the street.

Doc went outside, crowded both elbows against his ribs, and sprinted around the block for his car.

Since the advent of atomic fission and the resultant interest in locating radiant materials, a number of detectors have been developed which make the Geiger counter—itsself not the original instrument for such a purpose, but probably still the best-known to the public—seem as cold-nosed in comparison as a Pekingese lap-dog staked out against a bloodhound. The one Doc had in his car was phenomenally sensitive, so much so that he had trouble with it. The thing worked, all right, but directionally it indicated his own car.

He worried with it for a while. The tank of radiant spray, a quick-drying adhesive charged with enough radioactive substance to make it quite dangerous if a persons clothing got a full squirt of the stuff—was shielded fully, and the indicator shouldn't be nosing out the tank, instead of the car in which the killer had fled. Doc finally figured it out. There had been enough breeze in the street to blow some of the vapor back on his own car, where it had settled and hardened. The stuff wasn't something one just wiped off.

So he changed to a cab. A taxi came along, fortunately. He climbed in the back seat with his contraption, which was rather bulky.

“Head over toward Fifth Avenue,” he told the driver. “I’ll tell you where to go then.”

The driver got the cab moving. “What the hell’ve you got there, Joe?” he wanted to know.

“An invention we’re testing,” Doc said. And when they came to Fifth, “Try going north for a while.” He had picked up no indication as yet, except the two cars left behind, which proved it was working.

“Damned world’s getting full of inventions,” offered the cab driver. “One thing wrong with the world, if you ask me, Joe.”

“Could be.” Doc watched the indicator intently, and decided he had an indication. “Keep going north,” he said. It could be that he was nosing out the office safe of some doctor who used radiants for treating cancer or some other malignancy. He silently condemned himself for depending on such a dubious contrivance in a city where there were so many possible false scents. “Keep north. Step on it,” he said. And then later, “Head east at the next block.”

“This leads towards Queensborough Bridge,” the driver said. It did, and they took the sweep of ramp and rolled between the dark leaning girders, and the river was a thing below them, shining faintly in mist like a snake’s back. Doc gave directions. Right. Then right again.

“You goin’ to the airport with that thing?” demanded the driver.

It was a good guess.

Chapter VI

SOMEWHERE in the half-moist and half-black night, an aircraft engine was running steadily and monotonously and with a certain oddness about its sound that, to the knowing, explained why it ran on and on that way. It was an engine getting a run-in after an overhaul. What it did to the airport, to the whole mass of darkness around the airport, was lend a sense of poised urgency. Doc Savage stood for a long time looking at the car, the one that had been parked in the street before Jim Presse’s apartment house, and he found himself doing what anyone else with a moment of spare time must be doing—waiting unconsciously for the drumming engine to increase speed, slow down, miss a single beat. Anything to break the voodoo-like drumming.

“Want me to wait?” the cab driver asked. He was looking at Doc’s gadget with wonder.

“No, thanks.”

“What is this gimmick, anyway? You acted, coming out here, like it was some kind of direction-finder.”

Doc said, “It is,” and walked away from the cab, and away from the car, which was empty. Parked, too, near the terminal building itself. He stopped in the shadows, and used his pocket radio in an effort to raise Monk or Ham, but there was no response. Bothered now, more wrapped with the grim feeling that things weren’t going well, he scowled at the terminal. What had he overlooked that he should reasonably have done? The canary that Jim Presse had taken? He might have searched for it. But he was still certain, as sure as he’d been back in Jim Presse’s room, that the canary was in the possession of the man he had met on the steps.

He walked into the terminal, entering by a side door, moving unobtrusively, and giving the occupants of the big waiting-room a careful inspection. The drowsy faces—sleep rode anyone at this time of the morning—were as uninteresting to him as they were to themselves. There was somehow the dry dull taste

of fatigue in the air and a kind of subtle disgust with life for having such a thing as four o'clock in the morning to offer.

Then he saw Monk and Ham. Just like that. They walked in much as anyone else would walk in, by the entrance from the taxicab ramp, which was also the way from the parking lot.

Doc took just about half a step toward them, then stopped. Monk and Ham had company. Two people. The blonde seemed familiar although there was not any single feature about her that he recalled, and he concluded that it was the assemblage—a flashy, doll-faced blonde—that he recognized. Automatically and immediately he placed the blonde as Monk and Ham's current goal, yet knowing she was not really their type. She was just what they liked to pretend was their type.

The man was a different proposition. He had too much assurance, packed too much confidence, along with a hand under a topcoat that he carried over his arm. The hand might or might not contain a gun. He walked always slightly behind Monk and Ham.

They went straight to a loading gate that was open and lighted, and the confident man, without taking his one hand from under the topcoat, used the other hand to display four airline tickets. Trans-Atlantic tickets, Doc saw.

Then they passed on through the gate, and Doc moved quickly, urgently, and saw them, still a compact party of four, get aboard a four-motored passenger ship. Doc hailed a porter. "What destination?" He indicated the big plane.

"London, Cairo and Calcutta."

"What is the departure time?"

The porter consulted the clock. "Due out in about thirty seconds."

Doc moved swiftly, and had a pass-case out when he reached the loading gate. The attendant there stared in surprise. "Yes, of course, Mr. Savage," he said hastily. "Are you going over on—"

"I want that plane held," Doc said. "Get on the phone to the tower. Tell them not to issue taxiing clearance to the ship."

The gate-attendant, slack-jawed with surprise, wheeled and began fumbling for the telephone on his desk.

Doc Savage did not walk directly to the passenger roll-steps. He walked, instead, a bit to the left, which put him almost at once under the gleaming wingtip of the ship, cut off from view of some of the cabin windows. Two men were at the engines with fire-extinguisher carts, and one of these started toward him angrily. Doc ignored him, cut right, kept close to the hull, under it in fact, and then whipped around the stairs and up them.

"Keep the door open," he told a startled stewardess. "The ship isn't moving just yet."

"Who do you think you are?" she demanded.

"The last four passengers aboard—where did they go?"

The girl stared at him. "I don't believe you have any authority to—" She went silent, flushed, and then gasped, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize who you were. . . . The last four? Compartment fourteen."

“Fourteen is in the back?”

“That is right, Mr. Savage. Is there anything I can do—”

“Keep the door open, so the pilot won't get a green light from it. As long as the ship isn't buttoned up, he won't start the engines. . . . And listen—if there is trouble, or anything that looks like trouble, don't start investigating. Leave the plane at once and summon the police.”

Doc went inside, warily, using his eyes. The plane was a new type—there were, Doc understood, about twenty of them in service, all on trans-oceanic work. They were land planes, four-engined, with double-decked fuselage arrangements. That is, the public rooms, the lounge, the bar, were topside, while the lower deck was divided, in the fashion of continental railway trains, into a series of four-passenger compartments with individual doors opening off a single aisle down the starboard side of the ship. The seats in these compartments were readily convertible to berths, pullman fashion. These were the deluxe accommodations for long-flight passengers. Aloft, on the recreation deck, there were individual seats that were sold, club-car fashion, to short-trippers, individuals traveling, for instance, between London and Paris, or Paris and Rome.

Touched by the pleasant compact modernity of the great ship, but not letting it divert him, Doc moved aft. Fourteen would be well to the rear, as the stewardess had said.

There was music above, small seductive strains that was more a mood than sound. The compartments had plastic doors, solid panels of lightweight stuff that looked like weighty glass doors but probably weighed a couple of pounds apiece. He gave each little room a sharp glance as he passed. He saw no one he knew. Nobody seemed scared by him. Neither fact meant anything.

Monk, Ham and the varnished blonde were in Fourteen. They sat three in a row on a seat intended for two, and they were held there by an ample number of handcuffs. Five sets.

Reaching for the door, Doc saw Monk's lips moving, and on Monk's face was the look of a man with a snake in his hands. The chemist's moving lips said, “—gone forward watch out—saw you in the station—” The cabins were soundproofed expertly and it did a weird job of muffling and de-terrorizing Monk's voice of excitement, which was always a surprisingly tiny voice for such a violent-looking man.

The soundproofing did nicely with the shot sound that now came. It made it round, full-toned, a handsome loud thing without the loud nasty squawk of labored gases and tortured lead. Almost a nice sound, but the bullet was in Doc's back before the sound got there.

Doc landed on one knee and one elbow in the compartment, and because of the ghastly feeling in his back, he rolled completely over. There was no sensible reason, other than pain, for rolling. That, and the absurd notion that he hadn't put on the chain mesh undergarment that he'd learned to wear almost day and night.

TWO other nice bullet noises arrived while he was on the floor. One slug made a rather respectable rip in the compartment bulkhead on the aisle side. It was a mystery where the other went.

“The plane's crammed with them,” Ham Brooks said. “They're all over the ship.”

Doc rolled over again, still in considerable agony, and then looked blankly at a generally shapeless and abused chunk of lead on the carpeting. It was, probably, the bullet that had hit him. Further inspection indicated it was likely a .45-caliber, and it went through his mind that the slug packed a little over four

hundred foot-pounds energy, according to ballistics tables. Not helpful thoughts, but they fitted well with the way his back felt.

He said, "You fellows know too much about handcuff locks to just sit there. What are you waiting for?"

Monk grimaced. "For them to come along and put something besides combination locks on the cuffs, I guess."

"Sorry." Combination locks, the sort which opened by twirling a little numbered button, were tough. Doc added, "Get down on the floor as much as you can. The seats will stop handgun bullets." He rolled over once more, and laid hold of the handcuff links which fastened Monk's wrist to the seat arm-rest. "Let's see how good stuff they put in the chain."

The blonde, Audrey, said thinly and shrilly, "You can't break those in a million years. Monk tried."

"Thanks, baby," Monk said. "But I'm just an ordinary strong-boy. I need two hands to straighten out a horseshoe. Now watch the real thing."

Everybody was speaking with the casual air of the fellow in the dentist chair asking, "Is it going to hurt, Doc?" But even that sort of composure was unexpected from a baby faced blonde, so Doc filed a fact for future guidance. Audrey, in a crisis, became about as soft as one of the diamonds she wore.

Doc set himself against the chain. He had good purchase for pulling, except that one foot presently went through the rear bulkhead. Then the seat arm-rest gave. It came out, literally, by the roots.

"I don't believe it," Audrey said, wide-eyed with amazement. "A ten-ton truck couldn't have done that."

AS time is related to the endless wheeling of a second-hand on a watch, none of this had taken long. But there had been an interval, and the enemy had been using it to make developments. A voice was shouting, and it seemed to be urging the passengers to get off the plane.

Now the same voice screamed at them. "If you don't want a lot of innocent passengers hurt, lie low until we get them off," it said.

"Know that voice?" Doc asked.

Monk agreed, unpleasantly, that he did. "Yeah, that's Kelvin," he said.

"And who would Kelvin be?"

"The guy whose face I hope to use for a little dancing," said Monk bitterly. "Foxy. Convincing voice. And a quick hand with a gun. Also, he told us he was taking us to Miss Prince, and we fell for it."

"Savage, you hear me?" Kelvin yelled.

"Yes," Doc called.

"I'll be damned—you must be bulletproof," Kelvin said disgustedly. "I'd swear I shot you through the heart. Okay, what about letting the passengers leave? Or do you want to include them in the party?"

"Get them off the plane," Doc said. "But don't try any tricks."

Ham growled, "That's like telling a goat not to smell. They're pulling something."

"No doubt," Doc agreed. "But if he's willing to let the innocents off the ship, it's worth the chance. How

many men have they got on board, anyway?"

"Ten," Ham said.

"How do you know?"

"I don't. I'm taking Kelvin's word for it. He said ten."

"He might have dropped a word of truth," Doc said. "We'll take it seriously."

"What about these handcuffs?"

Doc picked two buttons off his coat. He added a third button, this one from a hip trouser-pocket flap. "Try these," he said. "One at a time, though. Better still, half a button."

There was a shot. Not from the plane. Doc lifted up to look through the window. A uniformed policeman stood just outside the loading-gate, holding a revolver which he had fired in the air.

"Come out of that airplane with your hands in the air," the officer shouted.

A single shot answered, and the policeman fell. He lay perfectly motionless for a moment, then one leg began to move. Scratching and grating against the black pavement, the one moving leg slowly propelled the officer out of sight, a stomach-wrenching thing to watch. Where the policeman had been, there was the beginning of a smeared wetness, and his revolver.

"That was cold-blooded," Doc said grimly. "It's not the safety of the passengers they're worried about. But I wonder what?"

Monk had carefully broken a button in half. He placed this, balanced carefully, on a link of the handcuff chain, after first wrapping his own handkerchief and Ham's around the adjacent wrists for shields. Now he moistened the other button, the one that was different, and applied it quickly to the first one. The result, a moment later, was a hissing and eye-hurting blue light such as comes from an arc-welder. Monk jerked, and the cuff links separated. He and Ham both whipped their arms around, attempting to cool the metal that the special Thermit had melted.

Kelvin had seen the glare. He yelled, "You guys set this ship on fire, and we'll shoot you down when you come out!" He sounded alarmed and puzzled.

"Just let us know when the passengers are all out," Doc called.

Kelvin cursed at him. And the man's enraged voice was suddenly half-lost in the drumming, deep-throated and at first troubled, that meant one of the engines had started. A second engine took hold immediately. Then the other two.

"Why are they starting the engines?" Audrey asked uneasily.

"Probably want a private party," Monk said. "Maybe they'll taxi to the other end of the field, then light their firecrackers." The plane gave a lurch. "We're moving!"

"Are we in danger?" Audrey demanded.

"I've felt safer," Monk told her.

"They're missing a fine chance," Ham said, "if they don't jam the throttles wide open, jump off, and hope we'll crash into the bay at the end of the runway."

Doc Savage had thought of that. He lunged to the window, reasonably sure he would not be shot from the outside, now that they were moving. He watched the runway, the pattern of marker-lights, and noted that the plane was being guided from the flight compartment. "There's a pilot at the controls," he said. And a bit later, "They're taxiing to a runway."

"If they're going to take off," said Ham, "I sure wish they'd warm the engines a little more."

"Why? Is that dangerous?" Audrey asked, sounding suddenly alarmed.

"La Guardia Airport," Ham reminded her, "is filled-in ground with water on three sides."

"This much airplane," Monk contributed, "makes a big splash."

"Shut up! You're scaring me!" Audrey wailed.

"Only now? Personally, I've been white-faced for twenty minutes," Monk muttered.

"I can't swim!" Audrey yelled in terror. "Do something!"

"I am," Monk said. "I'm shaking like hell."

The bawling of the engines increased, and they could feel the vibration shaking the rear section of the fuselage which housed the compartment. It was increasingly difficult to maintain balance, for the plane was accelerating speed. They crouched, faces strained, looking at each other in growing apprehension. Doc Savage suddenly went to the door, knocked it open and ducked his head out, then back. This drew a shot.

"That," croaked Monk, "is the first time I was ever glad to see you shot at. It means they're on board."

The quality of the plane's labor changed somewhat. A slight relieving, as if the big craft had finally entered an element in which it was more at home.

"We're airborne," Doc said.

"Is that good?" Monk muttered.

Chapter VII

"AS I remember the way these ships are designed," Doc Savage said, "the upper deck ends right above this compartment."

He moved to the rear bulkhead, and inspected the rent where his foot had gone through while he was straining to snap the handcuff linkage. He began kicking at the torn section, which split wider.

"I see your point," Ham Brooks told him. "They can shoot down through the floor above. But if we can get farther aft, they still can, only we mightn't mind as much."

"Doc, how many compartments aft of this one?" Monk demanded.

"One, I think."

"Will we be safe there, like Ham says?"

"I don't know how safe," Doc said. "But they can't riddle us from above."

Doc continued to kick at the thin bulkhead skin, pausing to drag out the insulating material and expose the other wall. He broke through that, peered cautiously into the rearmost compartment, then began widening the opening.

“Anybody in there?” Ham asked.

“Yes. A girl.”

Ham said bitterly, “Oh, fine. Some dame who was too hysterical to get off with the other passengers.”

Doc crawled through the hole he had made. A moment later, his head reappeared. “Better join me,” he said.

Monk pushed Audrey through the aperture, ignoring Audrey's terrified, “Do the engines sound as if they're likely to stop?” Monk and Ham followed through the hole.

They examined the figure of the young woman in the compartment. She did not return the inspection. Her eyes were closed.

“She looks,” said Ham, “like somebody who has been described to us.”

“She does, and she doesn't,” Monk agreed. “Didn't the check-room guys describe the girl who tried to get the canary birds as a dull number. No zip?”

“They must have been blind. Look at those legs. This one's got glamour,” Ham said.

“It's Miss Prince, I think.” Doc, on his knees, laid two fingers against the girl's throat. In a moment, he moved the fingers slightly, then rolled the girl's eyelids back.

Monk, looking over his shoulder, remarked, “She's nice-looking, too.”

“So is a cobra,” said Audrey bitterly, “if you don't happen to know what a cobra is.”

“Speaking,” asked Monk, “from a knowledge of facts? Or just speaking?”

Audrey shrugged. “Just speaking. She's the one who got you into this mess, isn't she?”

Doc Savage completed his examination. “I'm not sure about the drug. But that's what they've done to her.”

Ham had been searching the compartment, and he reported, “No purse, no baggage of any kind. Too bad. I was hoping there'd be a gun lying around somewhere.”

“Speaking of guns,” Audrey said grimly. “Don't you think you might do a little shooting yourselves. To let them know we're not pushovers.”

“With what?” Ham asked wryly.

“What? You mean you haven't got a gun? Oh, Kelvin searched you, didn't he? Well, hasn't Doc Savage—”

Monk shook his head gloomily. “Doc has never carried a gun that I know of.”

Audrey flopped angrily into a chair. “A fine predicament we're in! Cornered in an airplane flown by a lot of crazy killers.” She compressed her lips and glared. “A fine thing.” She pointed at Monk and yelled,

“And you promised me a nice quiet date for tonight, you homely baboon!”

THEY were being left alone, and it worried Doc. He made a precautionary move against surprise by smashing a small mirror which was part of the compartment equipment, then tossing a seat cushion out into the corridor, and flipping another cushion so that it landed at an angle of about forty-five degrees. On this, he pitched the mirror fragment that was the largest in size. It gave them a periscope view of the passageway.

They saw immediately that Kelvin stood at the far forward end of the passage. He held an automatic pistol, quite a handful of gun, which he aimed deliberately at the mirror. However, instead of firing, he grinned and lowered the gun, calling over his shoulder to someone.

Another man now appeared beside Kelvin, a grotesque figure of an old man, bone-thin, lemon-skinned, with a snatch of forward-protruding white hair. His green suit was an outstandingly ugly shade.

“Wearing a carnival-barker suit like that, he walked right under the noses of the police who had his description,” Doc said gloomily. “That’s the fellow who also tried to get the canary birds out of the check-room.”

“Who gave his description to the police?” Monk demanded.

“Caspell undoubtedly did that first thing.”

“Caspell? You mean the big shot in the new department the government set up for science espionage?” Monk was puzzled. “Who rang him in?”

“I did, and gave our prisoner Clinton Williams to him,” Doc explained.

“You mean,” asked Monk, “that there’s an angle to this that is up Caspell’s alley?”

“Seems so.”

“Caspell’s field is atoms, germ-weapons and such gimcracks. I don’t see where canary birds connect up.”

“The connection,” Doc said, “will curl your hair.”

Kelvin and the bizarre old man—Mr. Plott, according to the name he’d given the check-room men—had been watching the mirror. They seemed cold-bloodedly amused. Both turned away, and their place was taken by another man, a complete stranger, who kept a spike-nosed automatic pistol in his hands and settled down to watch.

“They seem damned self-satisfied,” said Ham nervously. “Somehow that doesn’t cheer me up any.”

Audrey had been peering out of the window. She got their attention. “There’s an awful lot of water down below,” she said.

Monk went over and looked out gloomily. “There generally is, of the Atlantic Ocean,” he said.

THE plane had lined out in a course more northerly than easterly, which indicated the destination might be Europe, a premise that seemed almost too fantastic. True, they could not keep an accurate check,

because within about an hour, the ship entered an overcast, a great area of stratus cloud evidently two or three thousand feet in thickness, and they flew through this for some hours. Doc expressed the opinion that they were making the Atlantic passage, but somewhat south of the Great Circle route. Heading, conceivably, for the Mediterranean section.

“You mean,” said Ham, “that they've stolen one of the biggest passenger airliners, and us with it, and are heading across the Atlantic Ocean?” He grinned foolishly. “A fiction writer would really need a hole in his head to dream that one up.”

“Oh, I don't know,” said Monk. Monk's nerves had stopped twanging sufficiently to allow him to assume his normal position contrary-wise to anything Ham had to offer. “The plane flies the Atlantic on regular service, doesn't it?”

They received some attention from forward. A coffee cup, hurled from up ahead, landed against the cushions which pillowed the mirror. There was a note tied to the cup handle, and they raked it inside cautiously with a loop made in the end of Monk's belt.

Your compartment has window. Better use it and jump. You'll enjoy it more.

“They've got a humorist in the crowd,” Monk muttered.

A few seconds later, there was a series of loud reports, shots, accompanied by the vibration of bullets tearing through the floor from the upper deck. Doc put his head into the compartment they'd left earlier, and noted the ragged holes in the ceiling. He paid some attention to the pattern of the shots.

“They were pretty careful,” he remarked, “not to send any bullets near the control cables, which run along the keel of the ship.” He glanced sharply at Monk, and suddenly went to work on the floor, ripping up the carpeting.

They discovered, gratefully, that there was a hatch in the floor, equipped with simple lock-fasteners that could be released by using a half-dollar as a screwdriver. Lifting the hatch aside, they found they had access to the long tunnel-like conduit through which the control cables for elevators and rudders, and the controls for the trim tabs, passed.

“Let's have your shoelaces,” Doc said. “Also anything else in the way of cords.”

Highly interested, Monk, Ham and Audrey watched him rig a purchase on two of the control cables. This wasn't simple, because the cables didn't offer much of a grip. Miss Prince, while still unconscious from the drug she'd been given, was beginning to stir and moan.

Doc was studying the rearmost parts of the plane. “We might,” he said, “get clear aft.”

“One man back there,” said Monk, “could make somebody nervous.”

Doc indicated the bulkhead. “Go to work on it. See what can be done.”

Monk and Ham took turns kicking. They were not successful. “This one,” said Monk, “is thicker.” He frowned at the sheet of metal. “Now, if I was an aëronautical engineer, I'd know what to do with that one button I have left.”

Doc Savage gave the matter thought, pounding on the bulkhead with his fist to locate the hollow-sounding spots. “Try here,” he said. “Half a button, only.”

Monk prepared carefully, borrowing some chewing gum from Audrey to hold the button in place. “All

set? Here goes.” He applied the ignition charge, stepped back, and there was a display of heat and blue glare as the Thermit ignited, liquified and slid downward, cutting a slit nearly three feet long. Monk gave the metal a kick while the edges were still hot, and it started to tear. He continued kicking.

Several shots were fired into the compartment immediately ahead, coming from the upper deck.

Doc instantly dropped into the floor opening, seized the cords he'd attached to the control wires, and yanked. The plane gave a sickening vault upward, then, as Doc changed pressures, it toppled off on one wingtip. In a moment, however, the astonished pilot began to use his strength on the control wheel and rudders, and the ship shakily found an even keel. Doc tried two or three more yanks. There was not much response.

Audrey had watched, first in fright, and then with some contempt. “Didn't you waste that?”

“Ham, crawl back in the stern,” Doc said. “Figure out how to put leverages on the controls. We can partly handle the ship from there, in a pinch.”

Monk grinned. “They won't know. They'll think they can out-pull us on the control cables. They'll be cocky.”

“That's the idea,” Doc agreed.

MISS PRINCE opened her eyes, looked around carefully, then stared fixedly at the floor. She said, “This isn't my hotel room?” in a confused voice.

“You bet it isn't your hotel, toots,” Audrey said. “You're a long way from anybody's hotel.”

After a vague glance at Audrey, one that held no recognition for the blonde, Miss Prince resumed staring at the floor. She wrinkled her forehead repeatedly. Then she lay back, determined to wait for her mind to clear.

“Good idea. Wait until your head stops ringing,” Doc said.

“It isn't ringing,” said Miss Prince dully. “Its full of fog, or mud, or something.”

“You're on a plane. A big one. A Trans-Atlantic airliner. We're cornered in the rear part of the ship. A number of men, including a Kelvin and a Mr. Plott, control the rest of the ship and are flying it. Likewise, they are trying to kill us.”

Miss Prince closed her eyes again for a moment. “I don't,” she murmured, “think I like the joke.”

“It's true, anyway. The stocky man is Monk Mayfair, a chemist. The slender one is Ham Brooks, an attorney. Both men are associated with me. The lady is Audrey, who came along for the ride.”

“The ride,” said Audrey bitterly, “is one I won't forget for a day or two.”

Miss Prince stared at Doc, her dark eyes open wide. “You wouldn't be Doc Savage?” she asked wonderingly.

“Good guess.”

Miss Prince frowned. “You're Doc Savage? And you're cornered in the rear of an airplane? You're in trouble? But I understood you were supposed to be rather invincible.”

Audrey laughed wryly. "Invincible? What's dat?"

"Baby," said Monk to the blonde, "you're beginning to develop a personality like a rock in a shoe."

Miss Prince took her head in her hands. "Let me think," she mumbled. "This is awfully confusing."

"I'd call it scary," said Audrey coldly. "Anybody with brains, and I'm beginning to think that lets out present company, would be frightened out of their wits."

"Like you are, for instance?" Monk suggested pointedly.

"Exactly."

"You don't act it," said Monk. "You seem cool as icicles."

"Wait," said Audrey, "until I begin to melt. Just wait."

With visible effort, Miss Prince had been thinking. "There is a gap," she said. "I remember my hotel room. I came in, looked under the bed, in the bathroom, and locked the door. Then I looked in the clothes closet, which was the wrong time. I should have done that before I locked the door, because they were there. Two men. I couldn't get the door open, because I'd locked it. One held me. The other jabbed something sharp into my arm. The gap begins there. It ends here. What happened?"

Doc said, "We can fill it with a guess—they got you out of the hotel and aboard the plane."

"That seems impossible."

Doc shrugged. "So does kidnapping an airliner, and us in it."

"Yes, I guess so."

"Is that," Doc asked, "the only gap?"

Miss Prince frowned thoughtfully. "I see what you mean," she said.

MONK dropped down into the opening in the floor, and gave the control cables a hard jerk. This caused the plane to give a short goat-like buck, but the pilot retained control. There were, however, loud frightening curses from the forward part of the ship. Monk grinned. "Sounds as if we've distributed a little unhappiness," he remarked.

"It won't be funny," said Audrey, "if they get unhappy enough to rush us."

"Suit me fine," Monk told her.

"But you haven't a single gun. You're unarmed," Audrey reminded contemptuously.

Monk grinned fiercely. "Unarmed wasn't the word used," he said.

Monk started to get in the hole again, but Doc stopped him. "The middle of the Atlantic Ocean," Doc said, "is a poor place to hurry things. Let's ride along. They'll probably leave us alone for a while." He turned to Miss Prince, adding, "Also, if I get killed, I'd hate for it to happen in a state of ignorance. Have you got a story to tell us, Miss Prince?"

Miss Prince nodded quickly. "Yes. Yes, I certainly have. But I don't know which end to begin."

“The canary birds?” Doc suggested.

“Well, all right, but that will mean telling it backwards,” she said. “I was stuck with the birds. I wanted you to have them. But I was being watched. I was mighty frightened, too. You see, it had been a long race to New York, and I'd thought I'd be safe when I got there. But I could see I wasn't. It was disconcerting.”

“Who was watching you?” Doc asked.

“Plott, for one. Not that he was alone. Only I didn't know the others by sight. That was no help, either.”

“Who is Plott?”

“The one who killed Reverend Lauterbach,” Miss Prince said, and suddenly looked shaken.

“When did that happen?”

“In Cairo, while we were enroute from India. They poisoned him. An Egyptian dish called *lahm quishtah*. The Reverend loved it. I detested it. . . . After that, I made a run for New York, knowing that's what the Reverend would have wanted.” She frowned. “No, that's taking the story the wrong direction. It's awkward, backtracking.”

“You were chased from India?” Doc asked.

“Yes. We didn't know it, though, until Cairo. Then it was too late.”

“How had you left India?”

“From Karachi? By plane. Before that, from Apozai, by one way and another. Whatever was secret. We thought we were doing a good job of skedaddling.” She paused and compressed her lips. “I guess not.”

Doc Savage said thoughtfully, “Apozai? That is up near Afghanistan. Pretty far from the beginning of anything.”

Miss Prince shuddered.

“But close,” she said, “to the beginning of the end. Likely as not.”

“Is around Apozia where it developed?” Doc asked.

She nodded. “That's the snake's nest.”

A SINGLE shot sounded. A single desolate bullet passed in the corridor, striking the cushions, shattering the mirror, and doing no harm. Monk grunted, and tossed out another bit of mirror, so that it landed in a position to show them the forward portion of the corridor. He waited expectantly for it also to be smashed by a bullet, but nothing happened. “Guess they were just venting spite,” he remarked.

“Plott,” said Doc, looking at Miss Prince narrowly, “seems a likely type. Half of something or other, isn't he?”

“Half Tibetan,” she agreed. “And I hope a Tibetan never hears me say so. He'd be insulted. The other half of Plott is something with the white skin, I'd guess.”

“But hardly a white soul,” Doc suggested. “Father evidently had money, though. The man, to get the kind of a scientific education he needs for such a thing, went to a lot of schools. Advanced ones.”

“You're not,” said Miss Prince, “as much in the dark as I thought. Or am I wrong?”

Doc asked, “Who was Reverend Lauterbach?”

“My uncle. Mother's brother. Missionary. Loved the far and the odd places of the earth. But a curious man, too. Spent a good part of his life, when he wasn't converting, satisfying his curiosity. Reverend would hear that a tribe of natives in Borneo stood on their heads whenever they saw a full moon, and he wouldn't rest until he got to Borneo and found out why. Curious. A seeker of answers to riddles. He died of it.”

“And so,” Doc said grimly, “could a lot of others.”

She nodded. “You seem to know. Did you read it in a book somewhere?”

“Not in a book—in the brain of a canary.”

She stared at him. “You mean it showed. There were physical traces?”

“An aberration of that type, and as intense as that one was, shows in changed formation of the brain.”

“A canary's brain,” said Miss Prince, “can't be very big. You're not stretching truth?”

“I take it the canary was a laboratory case. Overdosed.” Doc looked at her thoughtfully. “Did I miss on that?”

“You hit it on the nose.”

“You'd better put a few words around the canary. I don't know everything about any of it, and practically nothing about the part we've reached,” Doc told her.

“Let me get myself in India in the first place,” she said. “It was a rather ordinary way to get there—I finished business college and applied to the mission service for a job, requesting foreign service. Well, they knew I was Reverend Lauterbach's niece, and so they assigned me to him. I thought they were just being nice to me because of Uncle, but I found out otherwise. The Reverend was a tough one to work for, and I suppose they were doing him a dirty trick when they sent me. Anyway, I wound up in India, first at Karachi, then farther north near the Afghanistan border. We were there about a year before the British got out of India, and the civil uprisings started.” She looked at them grimly, and put a question. “Did the internal troubles in India get much publicity in the States?”

“NEARLY all printed mediums—newspapers, magazines, and so forth—carried fact stories on the strife that followed the setting up of self-government in India,” Doc told her. “It was a pretty gory affair.”

Margaret Prince shuddered. “The stories couldn't have been half as bloody as the facts. Believe me, they weren't exaggerated. It was ghastly. It seemed impossible to conceive such bloodthirsty, murderous hate in human beings, particularly those who incited the violence. And that is the thing that aroused Uncle's interest.”

Doc Savage's attention was sharp. “The leadership in the rioting and wholesale murdering—it didn't seem to be organized.” He sounded shocked.

“Organization,” said the girl, “is having a plan.”

Doc nodded. “That's what fooled me.”

“Oh!” She stared at him. “You noticed an oddness about the trouble in northern India, too?”

“Everyone who was in touch with the situation was unpleasantly surprised,” Doc said. “But they looked for organized effort—communist, fascist, or some other totalitarian master-minding. I know that's what I looked for. I didn't see much of it, and that seems to be where I missed the boat.”

She nodded. “The Reverend was more fortunate—or unfortunate—maybe. Anyway, he traced the source of the crazed leaders. He couldn't trace them to men who were influencing them. But he traced them to a *place*.”

“Where?”

“Near Apozai. Near the place I mentioned.”

Monk and Ham were staring. Audrey, her blonde head tilted, seemed interested in a skeptical way.

“Now let's get this straight,” Doc said. “Massacres and violence in a part of India was being stirred up by men. These men were influenced into doing what they were doing. Influenced by a *place*?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure you mean a place? Don't you mean other men in a place?”

“I—yes.”

“Yes what?”

“I mean,” said Margaret Prince, “that men have found out how to make other men *hate*.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean mechanically—that is, it may be electrically, or sonically. Let's put it this way: By some scientific discovery, the human mind can be thrown out of kilter and the part of it that hates developed out of all proportion.”

“Your uncle, the Reverend Lauterbach, discovered this thing?”

“Yes.”

“Was your uncle a psychophysicist?”

“I don't know what the word means. I guess he wasn't.” She frowned, and added sharply, “Oh, I see what you're driving at. Well, let me tell you this: Reverend Lauterbach knew enough to find out what was going on. You don't have to know what causes influenza, to be able to see when someone's got it.”

“He didn't discover how it was being done, then?”

“Why do you think we were coming to New York with the two canary birds?”

“Where did you get the canary birds?”

“I don't know. The Reverend got them. He went away from camp one night, and came back frightened

and in a desperate hurry, and we lit out for New York at once. He told me he was going to get the canary birds to you to prove that his theory wasn't crazy, and that you were a man who could stop the devilish thing if anyone could."

Audrey sniffed, shaking her blond hair back over her shoulders.

"I wish somebody'd stop it," she said.

Presently Doc Savage produced a pocket knife, slit the seat coverings, shaped out swatches of fabric, and began fashioning a pair of moccasins. They were of quite small size, and he worked idly but with care, paying no attention to the curious stares.

"What," demanded Audrey, "do you think you're doing?"

"Making moccasins."

"What?"

"Moccasins. Indians used to wear them." He glanced judiciously at Audrey's shapely foot. "They should about fit you, if you'd care for a souvenir."

Audrey sniffed.

"If I get out of this mess with my life," she said, "that'll be souvenir enough for me."

Chapter VIII

MONK MAYFAIR and Ham Brooks, after several years' association with Doc Savage, had become rather experienced with trouble. At least, they had learned to pretend some degree of unconcern. Familiarity with danger, they had discovered, does not breed contempt, or not more than once, anyway. Because a man contemptuous of danger is a man soon dead. Pretending they weren't terrified took a lot of effort, and they never managed to be as calm as Doc Savage seemed to be, and it unnerved them.

Doc had been sleeping four hours. Monk and Ham were wide-awake and jumpy as cats.

"You'd almost think," Monk complained, "that Doc is sure those guys aren't going to rush us."

"Why would he think that?" demanded Audrey.

"Search me," said Monk. "I sure don't share the belief, either."

"If you were rushed," Audrey asked thoughtfully, "what would you do?"

Monk grinned, but with no pleasure. He showed her a couple of small metal pellets. "Doc gave me these. They're grenades. Explosive. They'd blow half the front end of this airplane to pieces."

Audrey paled. "You wouldn't be crazy enough to use those things?"

"If they're crazy enough to rush me, I would be," Monk said.

Audrey jumped up and, before anyone could stop her, shoved her head out of the compartment and screamed, "Don't rush us! They've got bombs here! They'll blow the ship apart!"

Monk and Ham seized Audrey and dragged her back. "You baby-faced dope!" Ham yelled. "Why'd

you do that?"

"You think I want to be in an airplane when its blown apart over the Atlantic Ocean?" Audrey screeched. She was shaking, showing signs of hysterics.

Doc Savage had awakened, and was watching placidly. "I don't think she did us any harm," he said. "As a matter of fact, we might all get some sleep now."

"Sleep!" said Audrey bitterly. "I doubt if I will ever sleep again."

THERE was land below. At first, it had been a long way below, fully twenty thousand feet down, so that there had not been much detail. Doc, however, after watching the terrain for a time, said, "I think we're well south in Africa, crossing eastward over a deserted part of the Sahara."

Twenty thousand feet was a lot of altitude, and now the ship began to gather more. Simultaneously, they noticed that the cabin pressure started dropping.

"Trying to get high enough to knock us out," Doc said. "Took their time getting the idea. Ham, crawl back in the tail section. Set the elevator trim-tab for full nose-down. You can do that, because of the way the trim-tab is connected, without their being able to tell exactly what is wrong, can't you?"

"I think so," Ham said. He scrambled through the hole they had opened into the tail section.

Margaret Prince was staring anxiously. "High enough to knock us out? You mean lack of oxygen?"

Doc nodded. "Yes. They've blocked the forward section off, and opened a window in our part of the plane."

"Are we in danger?"

Doc hesitated. "Well, it's hard to say. The ceiling of this ship is enough to get up where there isn't enough oxygen. But I think the trim-tab, plus Ham's weight back there, will keep the ship from doing its best. As a last resort, we can force the elevator main control into diving position."

"Why not do that at once?"

"They don't know we can partly control the ship. We may need to surprise them later." Doc gestured at the seats. "Stretch out and relax as much as you can. Don't get panicky. They can't get above twenty-five thousand, and the pressure altitude inside won't reach that."

Regardless of Doc's assurance, what followed wasn't pleasant. The symptoms of anoxia, or oxygen want, began to appear. They were, characteristically, greatly at variance with individuals. Monk, for no reason at all, began to giggle. Just stare at the ceiling and giggle at intervals. Audrey was the only one who became hysterical, and she did it in a ghastly restrained fashion, glaring at them all with intense hate.

"The ship's not getting any higher," Doc said quietly. He was watching the mirror arrangement on the pillows, their periscope for inspecting the forward part of the plane.

Suddenly Doc whipped to the door. He had, in one hand, a slab of mirror glass, and he whipped this back and threw it forward into the passage. A howl of agony was the immediate result. The mirror on the cushion showed him a man, one he had not seen before, staggering backward with a badly cut face. The man disappeared.

The plane began to descend.

“They’ve given that up,” Doc said calmly.

Ham joined them presently. “Man, that was rough,” he muttered. “But I don’t think they caught on about the trim-tab. I reconnected the thing, anyway.”

The ship continued to drop, and presently it leaned over in a lazy turn. Monk jumped to the window. “There’s an airport down there! We’re going to land.”

THEIR compartment was, fortunately, on the starboard side of the ship, which was the inside of all regulation traffic pattern turns, so they were able to get a full look at the airport. Doc Savage recognized it immediately, said, “The place is south of Barca, in Libya. Bomber base first established by the Nazis, later developed by the Allies. I was in here a couple of times during the war.” He pondered for a moment, added, “As far as I know, the field is still maintained as an auxiliary for heavy ships. Rarely used, though.”

“Rarely used or not,” Monk said, “you can’t tell me there’s an airport too remote to have heard of the theft of a plane this size, and be on the lookout for it.”

“It looks to me as if they’re calmly going to land,” Ham remarked.

“That,” said Monk, “would worry my insurance company if they knew about it.”

The plan of landing became evident at once. The ship was going to use the north-south runway, whereas the administration buildings, a far from impressive cluster of ramshackle structures that had survived from the war which had long ago touched this part of the north African coast, were at one end of the east-west runway. Coming in slowly, with a little wider pattern than was necessary—a hint the pilot was unfamiliar with this type ship to some degree—the plane leveled out on the final approach. The landing was good enough. The ship stopped at the end of the field farthest from the buildings.

Immediately, the engines were killed. They could hear trucks approaching.

From forward, a voice hailed them. “We’re going to refuel. If you stick your heads out, or start yelling, you’ll be shot. Otherwise, you will not be harmed.”

Doc listened to the yelling between the truck drivers and the plane crew. There was an angry dispute, clearly between the truck drivers and two men who had hired them to fuel the plane. The drivers had recognized this as the stolen ship. As soon as that became clear, the fuss ended. Doc took a cautious look. Both drivers had been knocked unconscious.

The refueling proceeded. Both tank trucks were enormous affairs, and one went to work on each wing-tank.

A battered jeep started to approach from the hangars. There were a few shots. The jeep turned and pulled a fast cloud of dust after itself in flight.

Refueling done, the tank trucks were driven aside, the two men who’d hired them climbed aboard with the others, the engines started, and presently they were in the air again.

“Our friends,” said Monk gloomily, “are used to organizing.”

“That's not all they're used to,” Margaret Prince assured him. “They're experts at handling undesired guests. And we qualify.”

Monk nodded. “They radioed ahead from New York for their pals to be ready with gas, probably.”

“Radio,” said Margaret Prince, “works both ways.”

“Yeah, you mean they've probably arranged a reception committee at our destination.”

“Wouldn't you imagine?” she asked.

“I've been,” said Monk, “trying to stuff my imagination in a hole and keep it there. Don't drag it out.”

AFTER more endless hours of flying, during which nothing violent happened, Doc Savage concluded they must be over northeastern India or southern Afghanistan. In either case, it was a wild-looking country.

“They know where they're heading,” Doc remarked. “And if they're smart, they've arranged an ambushade at the landing-place. We'd better get on our toes.”

A half hour later, Margaret Prince said, “That mountain off yonder looks familiar. Unless I miss my guess, we're near Apozai.”

“I wonder,” Doc said, “if you've flown over southern Nevada?”

“Flown? No. I've driven. Should I have remembered something?”

“The mud lakes.”

“What? Oh—oh, I see. . . . I think you've got something.”

“I'd be satisfied,” complained Audrey bitterly, “if half your talk made sense. Just half.”

“A mud lake,” Doc explained patiently, “is not really mud, but is the bed of a lake that is flooded during the rainy season, and the rest of the year is as flat as a floor and baked hard as pavement. Most desert countries have them. There are a few, a very few, in this part of the world. One might be handy for a landing-field.”

Ham had been watching from the window. “Nice predicting,” he called. “Yonder's our lake bed.”

The big plane sank lower, and passed over the expanse of dried mud, which did not look any too large, and which was surrounded by low brush-covered hills.

With no difficulty, they saw a group of some dozen horsemen clustered near the down-wind end of the lake bed. These gentlemen, some of whom wore turbans, waved rifles in the air.

“Reception committee,” Ham said.

The plane began a slow swing to the right, then a steeper turn to the left.

“Pilot's going to drag the place downwind to look it over,” Ham decided.

“Ham,” Doc demanded. “Can you do business with the elevator controls?”

“Sure. The rudder, too, if I had some help.”

“The elevator will be enough. Get set. Monk, you park at the hole so you can relay instructions to Ham.” Doc hesitated, and added a word of possibly unneeded caution. “This wouldn't be a good time for you fellows to have an argument.”

Ham grinned thinly. “We'll call a truce.”

Doc issued a few instructions. “It may be messy,” he finished. “And it's not going to do the airplane any good. If anybody has a better idea, let's hear it.”

“Sounds fine to me,” Monk said. “How about the rest of you?”

Audrey shuddered violently. “I vote awful. We could all be killed.”

“Could,” said Monk, “is half a word.”

THE pilot, as Doc had surmised, intended to make a very low pass at the mud lake so that he could satisfy himself the area was smooth enough for a landing. Doc, having looked it over on the first trip across, thought it was satisfactory. Also, his plan wouldn't pay off so well if they made a conventional into-the-wind landing, which would mean the plane rolling to a halt near the horsemen.

He watched the scrubby, brownish, hump-like hills swell upward. The pilot was coming in very low. They heard a whining noise.

Monk, crouched at the torn gap in the bulkhead, ready to relay to Ham, laughed. “Getting the gear down,” he said. “That's a favor for us, I'd say.”

“Get set,” Doc said. They neared the lake. “Down elevator!” Doc said sharply.

“Down elevator!” Monk roared.

The plane seemed to drop from under their feet. Doc, at the window, watched carefully.

“This,” he remarked, “is an awkward place from which to land an airplane.” He waited a moment. “Elevator up slightly!”

“Elevator up slightly!” Monk howled.

Monk was perspiring. Forward, a man was screaming profanity.

The plane, diving, had narrowly missed the last hill-crest. It was still headed down. The horsemen, alarmed, some of them almost in the path of the ship, spurred their mounts wildly.

“Up elevator a shade!” Doc shouted.

Monk relayed, and almost instantly, which was somewhat quicker than Doc intended, the wheels hit the lake surface. It was, as landings went, a ghastly experience. The ship gave two terrific bounces, seemed inclined to stick with the baked mud surfaces, which wasn't too smooth after all. “Elevator full down,” Doc ordered.

The plane had simply been forced down until its wheels touched the ground. The full-down elevator would keep it from rising. The rest was up to the pilot. He couldn't take off again, and future

developments depended on how soon he realized this.

“Get set for a crash,” Doc said.

The tires were shrieking now as brakes were applied. With a ghastly dipping, like a fowl trying to get a grain of corn off the earth, the ship rocked forward on the nose wheel and back as the pilot tried to jump it off.

Doc held his breath, waiting. If the pilot had thought quickly enough—and had the nerve to carry out his convictions—he'd simply have slammed the throttles wide open and let the plane keep going at the better than a hundred miles an hour at which they'd slammed it on the flat expanse of dry mud. The man should reasonably know that Doc's group wouldn't hold the ship down long enough to insure a crash at high speed.

But the pilot was stopping. With a final howl of tires, a great jolting, the ship climbed up into the rough ground at the edge of the lake, slewed partly around, halted.

Doc, having waited for the plane to halt, struck hard at the window escape-hatch mechanism. The panel could then be opened, and he leaned out, picked his target—the wing area near the root on that side, and threw one of the explosive grenades.

The explosion, considering the miniature size of the explosive charge, was impressive. The whole plane flinched sidewise, the wing collapsed slowly, and the plane sagged down on that side. Lazily, which was fortunate, because the tricycle gear held the fuselage more than a dozen feet off the ground. Puncturing the groaning of tearing metal, hardly louder, there was a great mushy cough as the gasoline in that wing-tank took flame.

Doc wheeled. “Is Ham trapped back in the tail?”

“No. He's coming,” said Monk, “like a scalded cat.”

“Out,” Doc said. He seized the magazine rack above the window, swung out feet-first, turned and dropped to the ground. “Pass the women out.”

Margaret Prince was beside him almost at once. He gave her a shove toward the shrubbery and boulders that littered the hillside.

“Run,” he said, “but not too far. We hope to join you.”

Inside, Audrey started to argue. An instant later, Audrey came flying out, argument and all. Monk had tossed her.

Flames had blanketed the entire forward section of the plane on this side. Plott, Kelvin, the pilot, the others, could be heard leaving on the opposite side. None of the sounds they made were happy.

Doc wheeled, searching for the group of horsemen. They were, he discovered, out of view. The plane, in twisting partially around, had died so as to conceal this side of the craft from sight. That was more luck than Doc had expected.

Monk was now out of the ship. Ham, also, in a moment.

“We've got fifteen or twenty seconds,” Doc said urgently, “for traveling.”

Chapter IX

THEY ran a few yards, and the tangled undergrowth of the *cchota puhar*, the Himalayan sub-hill country, was around them. The lava outcroppings, the thin eroded gullies and wadis, were at the same time sanctuary and difficulty. Doc Savage, even with death milling around in confusion back there by the burning plane, was impressed with the oddness of sudden transition into a foreign scene. It was a thing that long-distance air travelers almost always feel, he knew, but he was upset by the strangeness anyway. He saw the same sense of unreality on Margaret Prince's face when they found her. It was there as much as danger was. And even her incredulous, "They didn't see you, either?" didn't dispel it.

"We got a break. The way the plane careened broadside into the hill was luck."

"Some," she said, "was managing."

"Get down," Doc said. "Let's try this gully."

They slid into a wadi, trying to make no noise, clinging to the roots of scrub *ballut* for purchase. Doc studied the formation of the gulch as they advanced, and when the footing changed suddenly from coarse sand to lava, he said, "All right, we'll split here. The rest of you keep together—"

Monk, jaw sagging in alarm, blurted, "Hey, now, wait a minute—"

"Keep together," Doc said. "Take your time, and leave no footprints. Stay out of sight."

"I take it," said Monk uneasily, "that you're going to drag a herring."

"Let's hope so." Doc examined the footgear of the two women. "Could I borrow your footgear, Audrey?"

"My shoes, you mean? You expect me to walk barefooted over these rocks? What for?"

"For herring-tracks," Doc said, smiling. "I'll bring the shoes back."

"You hope." Audrey hesitated, then said angrily, "Oh, all right. At least I can die with my shoes off."

Doc produced the moccasins he'd made quite a bit earlier. "You won't need to go barefoot, after all. You can wear these. Lucky I made them to fit you."

Audrey looked stunned.

"Luck," she said, "that was manufactured well ahead of time, I'd say."

Monk took her arm. "Doc is full of that kind of luck. Let's get going."

When they had disappeared around a turn in the twisting little canyon, Doc Savage took a course at right angles, and made plenty of tracks as he went, leaning over to dig the heels of Audrey's sharply fashionable slippers into the earth. When he had worked his way well up, he quickened his pace, using care to keep hidden from the burning plane, now marked by a column of dark smoke. And shortly he reached a spot where he could get a view of the excitement at the ship.

What he saw brought, at first, surprised disbelief. The horsemen, Plott, the others, were ringed in a big circle around the flaming airliner. Guns ready, they were watching.

In a moment, it became clear why. Down there, they still supposed Doc and the others were in the plane. The reason? He saw that also. Ham, the last one out of the ship, had had presence of mind to close the

window. There was no clear evidence that the occupants of the rearmost compartment had escaped.

He waited and watched, and they did the same, intently, grimly, poised to murder. And then he turned and began to climb, going slowly, leaving plenty of tracks. He chose now, whenever possible, going that would trouble the horses, so rough that they would have to dismount and lead the animals. He left fewer tracks now, but enough. Those were rugged, fierce hillmen of Pakistan down there, the horses indicated that, and the turbans, the *topis*, the baggy *putloons*, marked the men. Violent *darinda* tribesmen, from the northwest.

Shots came abruptly. He crawled to an eminence to watch again. They were firing into the rear section of the ship. Suspicious finally. Puzzled by the lack of life in the blazing plane.

He could distinguish the howled orders of the *Wali*, the leader. An old man, but with a scraping banshee voice.

“*Kya hoo's?*” the old voice squalled.

So now you want to know what happened, you old devil, Doc thought grimly. Well, you'll find out presently, the worse luck. The aft section of the plane isn't going to burn.

Doc located the *Wali*, a scrawny jackanapes in rags on a fine Arabian horse. A scarecrow on a living throne of beauty. Plott stood near him. The old brigand brandished a very modern submachine gun. “*Undhur jao!*” he squawked. “*Khabardar raho!*” And his ragtag following, obedient to his howling, approached the flaming wreck warily.

Waiting now only to count the men in European garb, Doc numbered them nine. They would be the ones who'd taken over the ship in New York, plus the pair who'd arranged the refueling. Nine. The odds hadn't been pleasant. Nor were they even that pleasant now.

Climbing again, Doc glanced frequently into the west, measuring the sun for time. An hour, he decided, would see the death of the day. And a fairly dark death, too. There were quite a few clouds.

HIGH on the side of a hill, where he could watch the crazily gutted courses of the wadis, he waited again. This time, for pursuit. He could still hear, faintly, the shouts that came up from the rim of the mud lake. Distance lent a novel quality to the cries, like coyote yappings in Montana. The horsemen, galloping about in search of footprints, seemed grimly playful. Illusion only, which suddenly lost its dream-like air when a robe-flapping Pakistan hillman found the trail. His shrieked, “*Age-barho! Age-barho!*” had had a biting ugliness on the evening air, even before the old chief took up the cry.

They were wild riders, but cautious. Half a dozen swarmed up the gully. The others rode wide, taking rough going, punishing their horses with spurs.

In a space of time so short that Doc could feel it in the pit of his stomach, they came to the point where Doc had separated from the others. They over-rode the trail there, shouting, and gave Doc a ghastly few minutes when he imagined his side-trail hadn't diverted them. Then they bobbed into sight, fanned out again, riding hard, following Doc's phony trail. He waited long enough to count them. They were all on the false scent. Excepting, of course, those who didn't have mounts, and who had remained where the plane was now a darkened carcass that leaked smoke.

Doc took flight now. He was calculating about it, however. He left fewer clues, but not too few.

Deliberately, he left one of Audrey's shoes wedged in a crack in the rock in which he jammed it.

A couple of hundred yards beyond where he left the blonde's slipper, Doc noted den sign, spoor that indicated the lair of some animal nearby. He investigated, came shortly to a hole of some size, large enough to show him that it must be the home of some *richh, bhalu*, a common sloth or black bear.

He crawled back into the den a few yards, warily, because the animals were dangerous and this one might be at home. Far enough, only, to make tracks, and then he withdrew, with the hair-raising conviction that there was actually a bear in there. It made no difference about the bear, personally. He only wanted the pursuers to think they had been fools enough to hide there.

Going on, he left no tracks now. He took infinite pains about that. And, half a mile away, he crawled up the side of a crag and stretched out to watch.

It was cool. The air had a slight bite, like spiced wine because of the odor of *phul*, an aromatically noisy little mountain flower that was rampant at this season. This was high country. The Indus plain lay to the south and east, the Helmand Desert was to the west, and not very far west, either. At this season, at this altitude, the desert didn't mean heat. He studied the country, trying to figure their probable whereabouts, other than the general fact that they were in northwestern India, the outlands of Pakistan. Near Apozai, Margaret Prince had said. The word "near" was relative, didn't mean much. He had, frankly, no idea where they were.

The hillmen were following his trail. He could see Plott, on a horse, with them. They were having slow, noisy going.

He watched Plott, wondering if the man was the mind behind this unpleasant and improbable thing, and he concluded presently that Plott was. The conviction, held back half-formed in his mind for some time, loosened and stood full-bodied, an ugly thing. He regretted bitterly the fiasco in New York. It was preposterous to be trapped in the cabin of a plane and hauled off to India, and do nothing to prevent it. He believed he saw, looking back, two or three possible moves they might have made, either toward escape or aggression. He had thought of these at the time in each case, but they looked a great deal more workable now than they had then. Probably lying here alone in the dusk with trouble all about had something to do with the hindsight optimism.

He began to worry. The laboratory where the thing had been developed might not be here. This was an improbable country for it. They would need apparatus, special apparatus and a lot of it built to specifications. Pakistan was not a place where you got delicate special equipment for supersonics, or U.H.F. electrical frequencies, or however they were doing it. Pakistan was a dazed little nation just born, one that hadn't quite learned what to do with itself.

On the other hand, Pakistan was logical too. Here they were Moslems, and the fanatic Moslem zeal had sprayed itself bloodily over a good part of northwestern India. Raids and bloodshed against the neighboring Kashmir state, violence directed at Hindu India, a little senseless to the distant world of newspaper readers and maneuvering United Nations diplomats, a bright outer world where there were foes as clean-cut as communism and freedom, Democrats and Republicans, Joe Louis and Jersey Joe Walcott. The violence of religious conflict was a strange violence, and so a good backdrop for manufactured hate. If they wished to test it. And of course they would want to test it. You had to test a thing that preposterous. It began to look logical to him again, and he liked it better. Too, it occurred to him that he was worrying, so he stopped that. To flatly say, *All right, stop worrying*, and make it stick—that was one of his better abilities.

Now they came to the hole in the ground. There was some laughter. A few shots went into the hole.

The old *Wali* raised a voice as shrill as a ten-cent whistle. He wanted to know if, down there at the carcass of the plane, they had any hand grenades. They hadn't.

So a man crawled back into the hole in the hill. He didn't come out, and it was evident that something of interest happened in the hole. A second man was elected to crawl in. He did so unhappily. The first had gone in willingly. That one did not come out either. Nor did the first. But a large sloth bear did, full of rage.

The bear made a good show. It caused three horses to bolt, riderless. The men scattered. Then someone shot the bear.

It was getting dark.

Doc Savage stalked the horses that had bolted, but gave it up presently. They were wary nags, and took out and kept going in three assorted directions, showing no communal instinct.

Doc threw away Audrey's other shoe.

His traveling had purpose and urgency now. There would be no more trailing tonight, unless they had man-hunting dogs, which was not an impossibility. The night came, black but not utterly, enabling him to move freely, although it hid some of the footing.

Finally in the gulch where he'd left Monk, Ham, Audrey and Margaret Prince, he used his flashlight. Except for a switch to turn it off and on, it was in no ordinary sense a flashlight, not even one of those which have a small hand-operated generator. This one had such a generator, but intricately made and with a great deal of power built into it.

The gadget had many purposes. It could, in a strong man's hands, power a fair-sized radio transmitter, do anything else that electric current of considerable voltage and some amperage could do. It could shock a man painfully. Set off explosive charges with the proper electric detonators.

It also could, and did, activate a cell that produced more ultra-violet light, outside the visible spectrum, than seemed quite logical. Ultra-violet rays having a rather odd, but not at all uncommon, effect on striking certain substances. Fluorescence.

Doc searched, and presently picked up the footprints left by the treated soles of the moccasins he'd given Audrey. The fluorescence was distinctive, a particularly malevolent greenish, like the crushed eyes of a cat.

He began to climb. The ultra-violet made other sporadic displays of odd-looking light as it struck various mineral outcroppings. But the footprints led on, not much more difficult to follow than the reflectors that warn of turns on highways.

Monk and the others had parked for the night in a particularly rugged spot where there were plenty of rocks and gullies at hand for cover.

Doc approached quite near the camp, but did not enter. He became immobile, a shadow that was part of shadow, and waited. That in itself was not the safest of things to do, in case Monk or Ham came on him unawares. Monk had a habit of immediate violence.

Chapter X

THE combination of skunk-black night, danger, and empty stomachs had brought out Monk Mayfair's primitive nature, he claimed. He mentioned it. He explained that the thing they should do, lying there in the bitterly cold darkness, was to listen for sounds at odds with the general theme of the night—the chirp of a disturbed bird, the stilling of night insects. He spoke softly, and one began to suspect, to cheer himself as much as anyone.

“What I like,” Ham Brooks told him, “is that ring of confidence in your voice. Solid and confident, like a piece of spaghetti on a vest.”

“Okay, so I can hang a hat on my goose bumps,” Monk muttered. “You think they couldn't get Doc?”

“Of course not.”

“Thanks. But I heard a lot of yelling and shooting back there.”

There was quite a silence.

“I don't think they did, either,” said Margaret Prince softly.

“What,” demanded Audrey, “convinces you?”

“I just know they didn't.”

Audrey sniffed. “Those guys in nightgowns and long underwear didn't look very comic opera to me.” She shuddered. “I never heard a bullet before. I thought they whined. They don't. They—it's like something torn out of your brain. I didn't like it.”

“None of us liked it,” Margaret Prince said gently.

Audrey stirred angrily. “Well, don't be so calm about it!” She was silent for a moment, then demanded disagreeably, “I thought you'd been in this neck of the woods, so how come you don't know where we are?”

“Because,” said Margaret Prince patiently, “I don't recognize anything but those two flat-topped mountains off to the east. They were east of our camp when I was here with my uncle, Reverend Lauterbach.”

“That's swell. That tells us a lot,” said Audrey. “The mountains are all of fifty miles away.”

“Indeed?” Margaret Prince said. “They look nearer ten miles. How did you guess?”

“Baby, I've seen mountains before,” Audrey snapped. “They fool you.”

“Like,” said Margaret, “people?”

“Huh? What do you mean by that crack?” Audrey demanded unpleasantly. “And never mind what you meant. You're right. Me, I just dressed up and left my apartment in New York for a date with a sucker, and look where I am? Sitting on a hill on the other side of the world, scared stiff.”

“Sucker?” said Monk. “I sorta resent that.”

“Go ahead and resent, you baboon,” said Audrey. “The next time I date a guy, I'm going to make darned sure he's somebody with a comparatively unexciting occupation, like a bank bandit.”

Monk chuckled. “Blondie, there's times when I think you're enjoying it.”

“That,” said Audrey, “I resent.”

They had spoken in very low voices, and now for a time they were silent. They were paying close attention to the night, and it had a subtle quality of change when it was observed intently. Small sounds of the wind, the popping of a rock somewhere as the bitter night cold shrank it, the discontented clutter of a bird, became charged with possible meaning.

And at length Monk asked Margaret Prince gloomily, “You have no idea exactly where we are, in relation to where Reverend Lauterbach found those canary birds?”

“No. I wish I did have.”

“But you think their laboratory, or whatever layout they used to develop this hate thing, is near?”

“I’m sure it is.”

“Why?”

She was still a moment. “Well, Reverend Lauterbach got the canary birds from their lab. And we’d found the region by tracing back on a couple of fanatics.”

“By fanatics, you mean men who were clearly distorted by hate?”

“Yes.”

“Who,” Monk asked, “did these guys hate?”

Her voice was quiet and weary in the darkness. “The Hindus. It was the old Moslem against Hindu religious strife that you’ve read about. It isn’t new. Even its bloody violence isn’t new. But these men—they were different. Their hate was completely unnatural.”

“Many of them loose around India?”

“The Reverend wondered, and hoped not many. We hoped perhaps only a few, and rather believed so.”

“Why?”

“Well, it was the two we found. One was in Karachi, and the Reverend investigated him long and patiently. You understand, the hate applied only to Hindus. On other subjects, even another religion—Christianity in Reverend Lauterbach’s case—they weren’t normal, but they weren’t violent either. They did have sort of a distorted animal-like cleverness. . . . The man in Lahore was like the one in Karachi. And Lahore is a long distance from Karachi. It was the fact that both fanatics had visited a month in the same house, but at different times—”

Monk’s interest sharpened. “Hey, this I hadn’t heard. Same house?”

“Same house. Different times.”

“They were,” Monk asked, “visitors in this place? Or guinea pigs?”

“Guests.” She hesitated. “Both, I guess. They thought they were guests. Really, they were guinea pigs. Here is how it happened. It was almost the same in each case. The victims met a man who was very friendly and congenial, an older man with white hair that seemed to grow forward instead of backward, and who had large bulbous eyes—”

“That,” said Monk, “would be Plott.”

“Yes, so it would seem. Plott invited these men to be his guests, and they visited him a month—in each case, it was a month to the day. The guests ate, as nearly as Reverend Lauterbach was able to ascertain, about the same diets, did about the same things, slept in the same rooms.”

“Plott,” said Monk, “must be the mainspring, the big wheel, the guy that pulls the trigger. I’m glad to know that. I might meet him again.”

Margaret Prince asked grimly, “Would you like to know a little more about how the guests were treated by Plott?”

“Sure. Let’s have it.”

“This,” she told him, “might mean something to a psychiatrist. Reverend Lauterbach seemed to think it did. First, the guests were placed in a frame of mind as near complete relaxation, except in one respect, as was conveniently possible. That is, they were well-fed, well-entertained, and their worries about the future were somewhat dissipated by Plott’s assurance that he had excellent jobs to offer them, beginning in a few weeks. That was one status of the treatment.”

She frowned. “The other side of it is more sinister. Mr. Plott was a Hindu-hater. He bore on this fact—the enmity for the Hindus, the need for their extermination—rather persistently. Both guests indicated that they acquired their hate for the Hindu at this time, although they didn’t call it that. They called it getting an ‘understanding’ of the need for annihilating the Hindus.”

Monk grunted, said, “What was happening seems pretty clear. They were getting the treatment, and exposed to the hate they were supposed to soak up. It doesn’t take a psychiatrist to see that.”

“These men weren’t just sold on an idea,” Margaret Prince said sharply. “They were fanatics. Absolutely crazy in their cunning hatred of the Hindus.”

“Like each canary hated the other canary?”

“Exactly. . . . One more thing finishes my story about Plott’s unfortunate guests. Their dismissal as guests. He told them the Hindus had destroyed the factory in eastern India to which he had intended to send them as superintendents, and so he had no jobs. He was so sorry. The final touch, you see.”

PRESENTLY Monk began to talk, seemingly at first only reciting a little of Doc Savage’s past history, which seemed unnecessary and depressing under the circumstances. Then Margaret Prince suddenly saw that Monk was making a point.

Monk was telling her about a system that Doc Savage had used for a long time in dealing with criminals. Doc, Monk explained, maintained a rather grim institution in the wilder section of upstate New York—it was surprising how primitive some sections of New York State were, if one only knew it—which was both “hospital” and “school.” Doc sent his criminals here, where they underwent a brain operation which wiped out all knowledge of the past—not a wondrous thing these days, but quite a novelty when Doc developed it, and still a fantastically skilled operation the way his trainees did it. Following the operation, the former crooks were trained to hate crime, lead normal lives, and were taught a trade or profession. In other words, Monk pointed out, another part of their brain took over and handled the functions eliminated by the operations which blocked or cut off the hitherto active brain tissue areas.

“This Plott,” Monk remarked, “has probably found a way of accomplishing the same thing, but differently

and without surgery. The same general idea, anyway.”

“I guess so. Yes, it seems logical.”

Audrey made an angry sound. “Yak-yak-yak,” she said.

“Now,” said Ham, “what's eating you.”

“Nothing but yak-yak-yak,” Audrey complained. “We're in deadly danger, and you sit here and gab.”

“Can you think of anything safer?” Ham demanded. “We don't know this country. We go gallivanting around in the dark, and no telling where we'll wind up. We're supposed to wait for Doc, anyway.”

Audrey made another disgusted noise. “The great Doc Savage,” she said, “is probably cold meat right now. . . . And I'm not going to stay awake over it, either.” She jumped to her feet.

“Hey, where you going?” Ham demanded.

“Over yonder where I can't hear this yak-yakking,” Audrey snapped. “And where I can listen for our would-be hosts in the nightshirts and long-handled underwear.”

She flounced away. Alarmed, Ham arose and followed her, but he was reassured when Audrey scraped some sand into a shape to somewhat fit her curves, and settled down.

“You stick around,” Ham warned. “Don't go gallivanting.”

“What kind of fool do you take me for?” Audrey retorted.

It was perhaps an hour later—past midnight—when Monk sat up abruptly. He had been lying on his side, ear against a peg which he had forced into a crack in the stone, an old trick he'd heard somewhere helped you catch the vibration of any footsteps that approached. What he'd heard was not footsteps, but a softly whistled birdcall. He waited for it to come again. It did. He reached over and touched Ham. “Hear it?” he asked.

“Yes, but what's the idea?” Ham whispered. “Why doesn't he just walk in?”

Monk said, “I'll find out.”

He crawled away in the darkness, moving quietly, and presently he tried the bird imitation himself. Just once. It didn't come out too well. But good enough, it developed, to guide Doc Savage to him.

“Man, you've had us worried,” Monk muttered. “Where you been?”

“Right here, for quite a while,” Doc said.

“Huh? And you didn't let us know? I don't get it.”

“You were all right,” Doc said. “There was nothing I could do, except for your peace of mind.”

“You put a low value on the latter, I take it,” Monk grumbled. “Well, I'll tell Ham and the others—”

“No. Better wait a few minutes.”

“Why?”

“We might be heard.”

“By who?”

“The viper,” Doc said, “that we've been nursing along.”

Five minutes later, they eased back and crouched beside Ham Brooks. He in turn informed Margaret Prince that Doc had shown up. She was startled. “But I hadn't heard a thing unusual.” She sounded frightened. “Why, they could be right on us and we wouldn't hear them!”

Ham chuckled. “I wouldn't say so. Doc has a way of getting around.”

“Let's tell Audrey,” Margaret Prince said. “I'm beginning not to like her, but she should know.”

Doc started to make some comment, but held it, and they moved silently to the spot to which Audrey had withdrawn. She wasn't there.

“Good God!” Ham gasped. “She was here. I left her here. The little fool has wandered off!”

“Wander,” Doc said, “might not be the word.”

“What do you mean?” Ham blurted. “Hey, you knew she was gone! When did she leave?”

“About fifteen minutes ago,” Doc said. “Miss Prince, you haven't loaned out your shoes, I hope?”

“My shoes? Of course not. But why—”

Doc turned the ultra-violet projector on the hard-bitten earth. In a moment, he had found Audrey's footprints. The fluorescence was not as pronounced as in the beginning, but still quite detectable.

“Viper?” Monk said softly. “How the hell do you recognize a viper, when it's wearing an evening dress and its hair is blonde?”

“They don't,” Doc said, “get scared enough at the right places.”

“Oh. On the plane, you mean?”

“Yes. She wasn't afraid of the real danger—which was from Plott. But little things, like the motors maybe failing on take-off, scared her pink.”

“By golly, I did notice that,” Monk muttered.

Ham said disgustedly, “You never noticed any such damn thing. You goggle-eyed ape, a fine girlfriend you rung in on us!”

“I rung in!” Monk bleated. “Hell, you were dating her too, you shyster lawyer.”

“I'd suggest,” Doc said, “that you two work that out later.”

Chapter XI

THE harridan hills swept down abruptly to the little valley, and the valley was lovely, a delightful smile as it were, on the ugly visage of the Pakistan *chota pahar* country. In width about a Bengal *kos*, the rough equivalent of two miles, it was perhaps twice as long, and it existed, and was beautiful, because of the water. Fine sweet springs fed it, not only a small stream, but also moistened the subsurface so that here in the vicious hills there was a bit of paradise.

The house stood well to the southward where the sun was most kind. A stone house, it had considerable size, although the thickness of the walls made it a little deceptive in proportions from a distance. It had been built by a former *Wali* who'd been to England to school and had seen a medieval castle. But this wasn't a castle. It was just a house. But a large house.

Two hundred yards down the lane, there was a guard, a man so well hidden that no one would have detected him had they not known he was stationed there.

Audrey hailed the man. She spoke poor Hindustani.

"*Idhar ao!*" she said. She had trouble with the vowels, which were more like German than English in Hindustani. But the guard understood. He also recognized her voice.

She was expected, he told her, also in Hindustani. Then he added that it wasn't a good idea to speak Hindustani here in the Pakistan countryside, where Moslem didn't love Hindu.

"Oh, shut up. I can't speak anything but Hindustani," Audrey snapped. "You'd better get me into the house. My husband may be nervous."

The master was a little nervous, indeed he was, the guard confessed. And he went with Audrey, passed a word, and she was admitted into the house.

Plott was upset, all right. He glared at Audrey.

"What, no kiss?" Audrey asked coldly. "No wifely greeting at all?"

Plott, in the beautifully chiseled English that marked him as not born to the tongue, described several varieties of stupidity, attributing them all to her.

"Stop it!" Audrey snapped. "I've had it rough the last two days."

"Rough?" Plott sneered. "It seemed to me you were well-cared for. You and your two gentlemen admirers."

Audrey laughed angrily in her husband's face. "Was I? While you sat up forward in that plane, all the way from New York, and shook in your boots. A fine active villain you turned out to be."

The carefully neat and almost continuously silent Kelvin stood there. He was smiling slightly.

Audrey included Kelvin in her rage, yelling, "And you were a fine flop, too! You were going to decoy them into a trap in New York!"

Kelvin's smile widened, got a little frost.

Plott muttered, "We're wasting time. Where are they?"

Audrey told her husband angrily, "Where do you suppose? Parked out in the hills, about two miles from here."

Plott winced. "They're durable."

"They're dangerous, too," Audrey assured him. "That may have soaked into you by now. They're old operators, and they're quick with a dodge. That Doc Savage, in particular, seems almost abnormal."

"You can lead my men to them?"

“My men?” His wife smiled contemptuously. “You mean you're afraid to venture near them?”

Plott winced. “Not at all,” he denied. “I shall go along.”

“You're damned right you will, if you expect me to go near them again,” Audrey snapped.

THE house was in a state of siege anyway, so assembling a foray party was no more than a ten-minute job. Plott, irritated by his wife's contempt, made a harsh business of ascertaining if each man had firearms, ammunition and grenades.

Doc Savage, from the darkness fifty yards beyond the doorway, watched the door open and the party begin filing out.

“Monk,” Doc said softly, “is the guard unconscious still? We don't want him waking up just now.”

Monk whispered, “I'll work on his neck a little.”

The guard was sprawled beside the homely chemist in the darkness, and he found the proper spot near each of the man's ears, and exerted a pressure which, properly applied, induces unconsciousness. Rather dangerous, but effective when knowingly done.

“Get in the house,” Doc said. “All of you. If it goes right, they'll be coming back in a hurry. So be ready for that.”

“When?”

“Start now.”

Doc parted company from them, and moving rapidly, traveling a course he'd previously explored for obstacles, he reached a point where the guard had been stationed earlier.

Raising his voice, speaking excellent hill dialect, Doc said, “Master, they are very close to Doc Savage.”

Plott's party halted. Plott cursed. “Where in the Prophet's beard did you find that news, and why delay it?” he snarled.

“There was a man here a moment ago,” Doc said calmly. He was standing behind a boulder. “He has gone.”

“Why did he go?”

“To help with Savage, I'm sure. Help is needed, Master. It is suggested that you go to their aid.”

Plott swore violently. He had not, apparently, decided there was anything odd about the guard's voice. The reason—he didn't speak the hill dialect too well himself. That became clear when one of the other men, a native, said something excitedly.

“Come here, you!” Plott yelled in Doc's direction.

Disgusted because he had been hoping to split the party, Doc drew back and let fly with one of the little explosive grenades. It landed, as he intended, slightly beyond the group.

Before the explosion came, ear-splitting, he was headed back and running for the house. It was a good

move. Where he had been, three hand-grenades let loose almost simultaneously.

Monk had the door open.

“Nice delaying tactics,” Monk said. “We found the supply of guns.”

“Any grenades?”

“About half a case.”

“All right, they'll be back,” Doc said. “The path is narrow, and so is the door, and they'll come in one at a time. Let's personally accommodate the first ones. Then shut the door and see what we can do with the others as they try to break in.”

Ham joined them. He carried three light hand machine guns in his arms.

“I ran across what seems to be a hell of a well-equipped electrical lab,” he said. “I think we've found the nest.”

Monk, at the door, said, “Here they come. In kind of a hurry, too.”

PLOTT, running wildly, was first through the door, and Monk struck him hard. The man dropped. The next one inside stumbled over Plott's form, went down. Doc clubbed him. Audrey followed, saw what was happening, wrenched back flat against the wall, and began screaming. They got another man. No more came in.

“Hell, that was a short go,” Monk said. “They're wise.”

“Get the door shut,” Doc said. He helped with that himself, slamming the heavy panel, dropping the bar in place. “Ham, try for the roof. Heave a few grenades over the neighborhood. And let's get away from the door.”

He reached out then, seized Audrey by the arm. She stopped screaming, but still went through the motions, able to manage nothing but an exaggerated asthmatic outpouring of one breath after another. Doc tugged. She came along, loosely as if tied together by strings, but not tied very tightly.

They were well back from the door, and around a corner, when the door caved in, the heavy planks driven deafeningly by an exploding grenade. Two more grenades followed, opened themselves in the hallway where Plott and the other two lay unconscious. Audrey gave up a great gasp, apparently all of her breath.

“She hit?” Margaret Prince asked anxiously.

“I think not,” Doc said. “She probably thought of Plott there by the door.”

Monk threw two grenades through the door, winding up like a baseball pitcher. The house thumped in all its stones from the impact as they let go. No more eggs came in the shattered door.

A moment later, a fresh salvo of blasts sounded outdoors. They had the typically nasty quality of grenades. Ham had found a way to the roof.

There were a few erratic rifle shots. Silence.

“You don't reckon,” Monk said wonderingly, “that this is all of it.”

THE sun, when it came, lowered a widening wedge of hot light into the valley, and a thin ground-fog that lay along the stream like the breath of ghosts, held out stubbornly for not more than an hour. After that, the valley lay clear and sun-swept, and there was no movement at all for a long time.

“Kind of a pretty place,” Monk remarked. “You see any sign of our playmates?”

They lay on the roof, carefully concealed behind the thick stone parapet that must have been erected with exactly such a purpose in mind.

“I think they cleared out,” Ham said.

“Want to shove your head up and find out?”

“Not me.”

“Match you,” Monk said, “to see who goes down and has breakfast.”

“Throw it on the roof, you crook,” Ham said. But he lost anyway.

Monk found Margaret Prince in the big hall downstairs, and asked, “How's your patient?”

“Audrey? She's a mess.” Margaret shook her head sadly. “I guess Plott meant something to her. Money, anyway. And probably, she imagined, a great deal of power later on. She's really a cheap sort. She's an American who followed her G.I. husband over here, deserted and divorced him, and married Plott.”

“She took up with Ham and me before you even got to New York,” Monk said. “She explained how that happened?”

Margaret nodded. “It was simple enough. She was visiting in New York—buying clothes. Plott got in touch with her by radiophone, told her to strike up an acquaintance with either you or Ham Brooks. Plott knew, of course, that Reverend Lauterbach and I were going to Doc Savage with the canary birds. “

“Doc in the lab?”

“Yes.”

DOC SAVAGE was sprawled in a chair in the laboratory, a room of considerable size, crowded with instruments and mechanisms for experimental work in U.H.F. electrical frequencies, as well as supersonics.

“Any sign of an attack?” Doc asked.

“No sign of nothing,” Monk assured him.

“Well, don't take any chances.” Doc waved at another room. “There's a radio transmitter in there, a pretty good outfit. I got hold of the Pakistan Army station at Karachi, and they're going to get a party of soldiers in here by plane. They'll land on that mud lake, so they'll be here by this afternoon.”

“I won't,” said Monk, “be sorry to see them.”

“We're probably safe enough until they get here. In other words, it's all over.”

Monk indicated the apparatus in the room. "You figured out how the dirty work was being done?"

Doc Savage did not answer immediately. He leaned back in the chair, frowning, and presently he shook his head, saying, "Not the details—which are all that is important, really. But, generally speaking, we had it about right. A combination of supersonics—the kind of sound waves that drive small animals insane, kill insects, do all sorts of odd things to the makeup of atomic structure—a combination of that, and high-frequency electrical fields."

"The room where the so-called guests slept—is it fixed up for the treatment?"

Doc waved a hand. "You can see for yourself. In there."

Monk wandered into the other room, but was not much wiser for the trip. He emerged presently.

"Man, that thing's complicated," he remarked. "More little tubes and wires and big tubes and pipes and things. . . . What are you going to do with it?"

Doc looked up. He seemed surprised.

"Destroy it, of course," he said. "The human race has enough to worry about, as it is."

Monk went down to the kitchen. Margaret Prince was preparing breakfast. "What is he going to do with Plott's devilish outfit?" she wanted to know.

Monk told her.

"Yes, Reverend Lauterbach intended to do it that way, too," she said softly. "He'll be pleased."

THE END