

# Death in Silver

A Doc Savage Adventure  
#26

Kenneth Robeson  
[Lester Dent]  
1934

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*Title:* Death in Silver

*Date of first publication:* 1934

*Author:* Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson) (1904-1959)

*Date first posted:* Dec. 24, 2019

*Date last updated:* Dec. 24, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20191248

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

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**William Harper Littlejohn**, the bespectacled scientist who was the world's greatest living expert on geology and archæology.

**Colonel John Renwick**, "Renny," his favorite sport was pounding his massive fists through heavy, paneled doors.

**Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair**, "Monk," only a few inches over five feet tall, and yet over 260 pounds. His brutish exterior concealed the mind of a great scientist.

**Major Thomas J. Roberts**, "Long Tom," was the physical weakling of the crowd, but a genius at electricity.

**Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks**, slender and waspy, he was never without his ominous, black sword cane.

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THE GREEN EAGLE  
THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND  
DEATH IN SILVER

# DEATH IN SILVER

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A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE

BY KENNETH ROBESON

## **DEATH IN SILVER**

*Originally published in DOC SAVAGE Magazine October 1934*

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# DEATH IN SILVER

## Chapter 1

### SILVER DEATH'S-HEADS

There was a frozen, stony expression on the tall man's face, and his dark eyes rolled and jerked with unease. His hands were drawn pale and hard at his sides.

These signs should have told an experienced observer that the man was worried and scared. But there were no experienced observers among the stenographers and clerks in the office of Seven Seas, so the glances they gave the tall man were merely the boot-licking smiles of employees who had about as much spirit as rabbits.

A person with spunk did not work long with Seven Seas, because Paine L. Winthrop, the owner, was a cold-blooded driver of the old school, an industrial emperor who looked upon those under him as vassals. Had Paine L. Winthrop lived a hundred years earlier, he would have kept a retinue of slaves—and beaten them often.

Maybe Clarence Sparks had an inkling that something was awry. Clarence was a billing clerk for Seven Seas, which operated transatlantic freight boats and had no connection with Winthrop's Shipyards, which was also controlled by Paine L. Winthrop, and which built freight steamers. Clarence was a rabbit, like the rest of those who worked for Seven Seas. But Clarence also had sharp wits.

"Good afternoon, Commodore Winthrop," said Clarence.

Winthrop's only claim to the designation of commodore was that he held such an office in an exclusive yacht club, but he liked the title and the canny Clarence knew it.

Winthrop seemed not to hear. He walked stiffly, mechanically, from the corridor door to his private office, and his face was rigid, his eyes busy, his hands hard and gray.

"The old wolf!" grunted Clarence. "Some day somebody is going to give Winthrop what he has coming to him."

Clarence was a prophet, a great deal more of a prophet than he knew.

Paine L. Winthrop entered his office, turned the key in the door, then tried the knob to make sure it was locked. He stuffed a corner of a silk handkerchief into the keyhole, using a match for the purpose. He pulled off his topcoat and laid it along the bottom of the door. After these two precautions, he seemed to feel that no one would eavesdrop.

Striding stiffly to the window, he looked down at the street, forty floors below. Pedestrians there resembled ants. Paine L. Winthrop ordinarily got a thrill out of the view, because he liked to think of other people as ants. But now the view made him shiver.

One of New York's frequent fogs was mushroomed over the city, especially thick out over the near-by East River, but less dense here in the Wall Street sector. Winthrop shivered again and jerked a cord which closed the slats of the Venetian blind.

Seating himself at his desk, he hugged a telephone close and dialed with a trembling forefinger. He missed his number the first time, through nervousness, but got it on the second attempt.

Before speaking, he drew out a costly watch and noted that it lacked only a few minutes of being four in the afternoon. Evidently he recognized the voice which answered at the other end of the wire, for no names were exchanged.

“Your t-time is almost up,” he said shakily.

The other did not respond immediately, and Paine L. Winthrop seemed on the verge of repeating his warning. Then a coarse, angry whisper came over the line.

“Winthrop, you are passing up a chance of becoming one of the richest men alive,” said the distant speaker.

“I am passing up a chance of landing in the electric chair,” Winthrop snapped.

“Listen, Winthrop,” the other said earnestly. “I have explained to you very——”

“There is no object in arguing,” said the shipping magnate. “I may be a hard business man, and I may be a skinflint and a slave driver, as some people have called me; but I stay within the law. Early in my youth, I learned that was the best policy.”

The distant whispering voice took on a menacing quality.

“You are already too deep in this to back out, Winthrop,” it pointed out. “We have used your shipyard.”

Winthrop flinched as if he had been seized with an inner chill in the region of his spine, but his forbidding face remained set and determined.

“I was deceived,” he grated. “I thought the thing being built in my shipyard was for a foreign government. I think I can convince the authorities of that.”

“It seems that I made a mistake in taking you into my confidence,” said the whisper.

Winthrop snapped, “You certainly did!”

“I should have turned the matter over to the Silver Death’s-Heads, as the newspapers so dramatically term them,” retorted the other.

The mention of Silver Death’s-Heads had the effect of nearly causing Winthrop to drop the receiver. The man peered about as if fearing some grisly menace might be in the room with him. Then he got a grip on himself.

“There is no more to be said,” he stated grimly. “I have given you a chance to disband the Silver Death’s-Heads and destroy the—the thing that was built in my shipyard. You refuse. Therefore, I shall now call the police.”

His voice, charged with desperate excitement, had risen to a yell that had considerable volume. The sound penetrated through the door of the private office, despite the precautions which Winthrop had taken in stuffing the keyhole and covering the crack at the bottom of the door.

Clarence Sparks, at his desk outside, heard. He hesitated, eyeing the door, longing to listen. Then, summoning his nerve, he shuffled over to the water cooler, which was beside the door of the private office. He could listen from there.

Inside the office, Winthrop screamed, “I am going to call the police and tell them all about the Silver Death’s-Heads! I am going to tell who is apparently their chief, and I am going to tell whose devilish brain is actually behind all of this!”

The coarse whisper over the telephone said, "I can promise that you will not live long enough to do that, Winthrop!"

Winthrop was squirming, perspiring. He shouted, "Killing me will not help! I have a blueprint showing some of your working methods. I have given it to my secretary. And I have told her the whole story."

"You are bluffing, Winthrop," snarled the whispering one.

"I am not!" Winthrop barked. "My secretary will give the whole story to the police if anything happens to me. Now, will you give this all up, or do I call the police?"

"Call them if you dare," suggested the other.

"I will!" Winthrop banged the receiver up.

Shaky and pallid, Clarence Sparks backed from the door. He had overheard too much for his peace of mind. He was in the same boat with the young man who was fishing for minnows and caught a shark.

The fact that Clarence Sparks was backing away from the door undoubtedly saved his life.

There was a cataclysmic crash. The door of Winthrop's private office exploded to fragments. The whole partition wall caved. Part of the ceiling came thundering down.

Forty stories below, on the street, an ear-splitting crack of a sound caused people to look up. It was like the lash of a stupendous thunderbolt. After one glance upward, the pedestrians cried out in terror and began to run.

A cloud of bricks, mortar and twisted steel was falling down the side of the skyscraper, giving at first the impression that the whole great building was coming to pieces. A moment later, to those farther up the street, it was evident that a great cavity had been blown in the side of the fog-piercing edifice.

Débris fell to the sidewalk with a great uproar. Three parked cars, fortunately unoccupied, were crushed, and a prowling taxicab was partially wrecked. The driver of the hack, slightly cut and bruised, got out and ran, squawling that there had been an earthquake.

Following the fall of the débris, there was a brittle jangling of dropping glass all over the neighborhood, for windows had been blown out by the blast. Numerous people were cut; others had narrow escapes.

Then came several moments of almost complete silence. The quiet was so complete that the droning of an airplane over the near-by river could be heard; then, as the plane swept away, there was the sound of a motor boat, also on the river.

The presence of the plane and the motor boat on the river at that particular instant came to the attention of a number of persons, and was later to become a fact of significance.

The tension following the explosion snapped. Women screeched and had hysterics. More stoic souls peered up in the fog and observed the yawning hole in the side of the skyscraper where the private office of Paine L. Winthrop had been. Policemen came running, and ambulance sirens wailed. Bedlam reigned.

## Chapter 2

### THE ARCHER IN SILVER

The building housing Paine L. Winthrop's shipping company, the Seven Seas, was not the most imposing in the Wall Street sector, but it narrowly missed that designation. Penthouses ornamented the tops of most of the skyscrapers in the district, and this one was no exception.

The penthouse on this building was a pretentious affair with numerous glass walls which afforded the occupant full sunlight. Most of the glass had been shattered by the blast below. In fact, it was a miracle that the whole structure had not gone down, with a resultant vast loss of life.

One of the penthouse rooms contained many work benches, and these supported racks holding innumerable test tubes, retorts, microscopes, mixing trays, pestles and bottled chemicals. That the benches *had* supported this array would be more correct, for most of the stuff was now on the floor. Several small chemical fires had started.

A remarkable-looking man was picking himself up from the mess of glass and liquids. He jumped up and down and emitted a roar, for he had been slightly burned by a vial of acid.

The roar and the way the fellow bounced about gave the impression of a great, angry ape. The man's appearance did little to detract from the impression. He had practically no forehead; his thick, muscle-gnarled arms were longer than his legs, and his skin was leathery and covered with bristles which resembled rusty nails. His mouth was so unnaturally large that it looked as if there had been an accident in the assembling of his pleasantly ugly face.

"Habeas!" the apish man bellowed.

A pig came galloping into view, squealing excitedly—an almost incredibly grotesque specimen of the porker family, as homely in his way as was the man who had called him. The shote had long, doglike legs, a scrawny body, an inquisitive snout, and ears almost large enough to serve as wings.

"Dang it, Habeas," the homely chemist grinned, "I was afraid that dude lawyer had thrown a grenade at you."

Some one seemed to be trying to open a near-by door. Loud kicks sounded, wood crunched, and the door fell inward.

The man who came through was slender, waspish, and attired to the height of sartorial perfection. He had a high forehead, the mobile mouth of an orator. In one hand he gripped a thin black cane which was slightly separated at a joint near the handle, thus disclosing the object to be a sword cane with a razor-sharp blade.

The well-dressed man glared at the homely chemist, his expression that of a gentleman who had just found a toad on his breakfast table.

“Monk, I always did know you would blow us up with some of your idiotical chemical experiments,” he snapped.

This was nothing if not libel. The apish man, “Monk,” was Lieut. Col. Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, and conceded by those who knew to be one of the greatest of living chemists. His head, which did not look as if it had room for a thimbleful of brains, harbored a fabulous amount of chemical and electro-chemical lore.

Monk glared at the dapper newcomer.

“The shyster lawyer heard from,” he growled.

That was another libel. The dressy gentleman was Brig. Gen. Theodore Marley Brooks, better known as “Ham,” one of the most astute lawyers ever to get his sheepskin from Harvard.

A strange pair, these two. They were always together, yet no one could remember either one having spoken a civil word to the other. Those who knew, however, could cite a number of instances when each had risked his life to save the other.

Men far-famed in their professions, both of them. Yet they were known to the corners of the earth for another reason—known as two members of a group of five who were assistants to a man who was probably the most famed adventurer of all time.

Monk and Ham were aides of Doc Savage, the man of bronze, the man of mystery, the being of fabulous accomplishments, who was almost a legend to the general public, but who was the synonym for terror and justice to those who preyed upon their fellow men.

Ham flourished his sword cane. “What was that—that quake?”

“Search me,” said Monk, whose voice, in repose, was remarkably small and querulously childlike.

Seizing a fire extinguisher, Monk went to work on the chemical blazes. He resented this damage to his laboratory, for it was one of the most complete in existence, exceeded only by those maintained by the man of bronze, Doc Savage, who was himself a greater chemist than Monk.

Habeas Corpus, Monk’s pet pig, backed away from the flames, saw he was getting near Ham, and hastily shied off. Habeas and Ham did not get along together. Ham had repeatedly threatened to make breakfast bacon out of Habeas.

The fires doused, Monk cast aside the extinguisher.

“Let’s find out what happened,” he said.

“A good idea coming from a strange source,” Ham stated unkindly, and they went out. The pig, Habeas, they left behind.

The elevators were not operating, probably due to the damage wrought by the blast, and they had to walk down. It did not take them long to reach the scene of the detonation.

They were efficient, these two—men accustomed to scenes of violence through their long association with Doc Savage. Doc seemed to exist always in the shadow of

peril and destruction.

Without delay, they went to work to ascertain the cause of the explosion. And there, they ran up against a profound puzzle, as well as a gruesome scene.

Paine L. Winthrop was dead. No doubt of that, as it was necessary for the ambulance surgeons to assemble the scattered parts of his body on a stretcher before it could be carried away.

Several of the Seven Seas office employees had been injured. A broken arm, received by a stenographer as she was knocked over her desk, was the most serious. Others were only lacerated and bruised.

Monk and Ham put quick inquiries about the cause of the blast. No one could give a reply of value except Paine L. Winthrop's head clerk, who was quite sure there had been no bomb, since she had left the private office only shortly before the arrival of her boss.

Before Monk and Ham could locate fragments of whatever had caused the detonation, a swarm of policemen and newspaper reporters arrived. The officers herded every one to an office one floor below, it having been decided that the skyscraper was in no danger of falling.

The office in which those who had been on the explosion scene were concentrated, was the headquarters of a firm dealing in imported antiques and art works. Adjoining the office were numerous stock rooms holding pictures, armor, pieces of ancient furniture, weapons, costumes and like articles. These were all antiques.

The newspaper reporters descended upon Monk and Ham. Both were high-pressure copy, for it was known that they were members of Doc Savage's group of aides, and Doc was front-page news all seven days of the week.

"Is Doc working on this?" a journalist connected with a tabloid demanded.

"No," said Monk, irked because the locust swarm of scribes were keeping Ham and himself from investigating. "Keep Doc out of it."

The tabloid reporter ran to a telephone and informed his city editor, "Two of the famous Doc Savage's men are on the spot and working on the mystery explosion. They deny that Doc himself is interested, but we don't need to mention that Doc's name in this will make it all the bigger."

"Our pals," Monk growled.

Modern newspapers function with breath-taking speed, and while the reporters were still harassing Monk and Ham, extra editions of their sheets arrived.

Monk snatched one of these and retired with Ham to a stock room, the walls of which were hung with the work of old masters, to see how much Doc had been brought into the affair.

They expected to see the blast story occupying a whole page of the tabloid, but to their surprise, it divided honors with another yarn.

"I say," said Ham, who affected a pronounced Harvard accent whenever he thought of it. "Those Silver Death's-Heads beggars have been acting again."

They read the big black headlines and the news story below them. The thing was almost childish dramatic, as written.

SILVER DEATH'S-HEADS STRIKE;  
MYSTERY MEN ROB ARMORED CAR

---

Get a Quarter Million In Loot  
Vanish As Usual

---

The terror in silver is with New York again! At three o'clock this afternoon, these frightful men of mystery shot down the drivers and guard of an armored truck in the streets of Manhattan and took \$250,000.00 in cash.

Accounts of the number of robbers vary. Some spectators say there were twenty; others claim only five or six. The robbers escaped in a fast car and evaded police pursuit in the water-front section of the East River.

The thieves wore silver-colored suits and weird silver hoods which made their heads resemble skulls. This description tallies with the gang which has committed other robberies and murders and which is known to the police as the Silver Death's-Heads.

The last crime committed by the Silver Death's-Heads was the cold-blooded sinking of the liner *Avallancia*, pride of the Transatlantic Company, in New York harbor.

Bedford Burgess Gardner, president of the Transatlantic Company, has not been able to explain what motive could have been behind the sinking of the *Avallancia*.

"Wild stuff," commented Monk.

"Typical newspaper sensationalism." Ham clipped, agreeing with Monk because he still resented being questioned by the reporters. "Silver Death's-Heads! Imagine that! What rot!"

"Too melodramatic to have much foundation in truth," Monk added. "I doubt if there are really any men called the Silver Death's-Heads. This particular tabloid colors its news to beat the band."

The two men had been making no effort to pitch their voices low, and a number of the Seven Seas office employees huddled in the room of the antique dealer overheard what was being said. Among those who could not help but catch the words was Clarence Sparks.

Mention of the Silver Death's-Heads caused Clarence to stiffen visibly, then look undecided. He hesitated, mustering up his nerve. As yet, he had not told any one of what he had overheard outside the door of Paine L. Winthrop's private office, but hearing Monk state his belief that there were no such individuals as Silver Death's-Heads apparently moved Clarence to speak. He sidled over to Monk and Ham.

“You—you gentlemen are mistaken,” he said hesitantly.

Monk squinted at the receding chin and the none-too-robust physique of Sparks.

“You know something?” he asked.

Clarence Sparks moistened his lips nervously. “I—I hope this won’t get me into trouble,” he muttered.

Monk and Ham were both intensely interested.

“Spill it,” Monk directed.

The Seven Seas billing clerk swelled his thin chest with a full breath of resolution.

“I was eavesdropping outside Paine L. Winthrop’s door,” he said in a voice which excitement made loud. “I heard him make the telephone call which was directly responsible for his death.”

“Blazes!” Monk exploded. “Then it was a murder, huh?”

Clarence Sparks clenched his fists and said, “It certainly was!”

“Who was Winthrop talkin’ to?” Monk demanded.

“To the secret mastermind of the Silver Death’s-Heads,” Clarence gulped.

“For the love of mud!” said Monk. “What was his name?”

Clarence Sparks almost yelled, “I heard Winthrop say over the telephone that it was \_\_\_\_\_”

That was the last word Clarence Sparks spoke, although not the last sound he made, for his mouth suddenly flew open to its widest and let a terrific scream rip out. It was as if the scream had burst out, destroying his vocal cords; the yell rasped and was unnatural.

Clarence Sparks put his arms stiffly above his head in the manner of an aboriginal saluting the sun. Then he turned slowly, trembling and on tiptoe. When he had his back to Monk and Ham, they could see the feathered shaft of the arrow which protruded from his back.

Because Clarence Sparks was thin and poorly, his body made a clattering sound as it fell to the floor. After he fell the stiffness seemed to go out of his thin frame, his head rolled over slackly until his cheek pressed the floor, and with a bubbling rush, scarlet came from his mouth and nostrils.

But Monk and Ham were not watching the phenomena incidental to death. They were staring at the archer who had discharged the arrow, an archer in silver, a being so grotesque of appearance that they were held stunned.

## Chapter 3

### THE ARCHER QUEST

The archer was not a large man—if he was a man. He was shorter than Ham, who was not tall, and he was also scrawny, with thin arms and gnarled legs.

His garb was the strange, the gripping thing. It was silver. The cloth was of the metallic stuff such as is used to make the stage costumes of show girls, and it was cut in one garment—a coverall.

There was a hood over the head, also of silver, elastic and tight fitting. Because eye and mouth openings were dark against the shiny metallic hood, the affair had the aspect of a death's-head, a silver skull. A costly wrist watch adorned one of his pipestem arms.

The silver archer stood in the door of an adjacent office, holding a heavy medieval bow, evidently one of the antiques which filled the rooms. He dropped the bow, it thumping loudly as it fell; then he leaped backward.

The movement snapped Monk and Ham out of their trance. They dived headlong in pursuit. But the killer slammed the door; a key clinked among the tumblers. Doc Savage's two aides, flinging against the panel, found it solidly resistant.

“So there isn't any such thing as the Silver Death's-Heads!” Ham snapped.

Monk knotted an enormous, bristle-covered fist and grated, “You were the first one to get that idea, you nitwit shyster.”

Then Monk grimaced and hit the door panel with his fist. The wood splintered, gave a trifle; it splintered more extensively under a second blow, then collapsed, making a hole large enough to pass the apish chemist's hairy hand. Standing well clear of the door, Monk groped for the key, found it in place, and unlocked the panel. He shoved it open.

Ham started through, sword cane in hand.

“Wait, stupid,” Monk growled, and shoved the dapper lawyer back.

From a holster, so cleverly padded under an armpit that it was unnoticeable, Monk drew a weapon bearing close resemblance to an overgrown automatic pistol. But it was no automatic.

It was a supermachine pistol, product of Doc Savage's mechanical genius, a weapon which fired at an incredible speed, discharging, instead of regulation lead slugs, thin-walled composition bullets which carried an anæsthetic compound producing quick, harmless unconsciousness.

Machine pistol in hand, Monk jumped through the door. Considering that a murderer had just entered the room, his act might have seemed reckless. But Monk wore a bulletproof vest which protected his entire body, and he knew gunmen of the modern type do not often shoot at a man's head.

Ham trailed the homely chemist. He, too, wore one of the bulletproof vests which were so light and thin as to be unnoticeable under their clothing, and was not at all

uncomfortable. These vests were also a product of Doc Savage's mechanical skill.

Both men jerked up inside the room. Their jaws sagged; their eyes, roving, widened in amazement.

"Well, I'm a camel's uncle!" Monk breathed. "Where'd he go?"

Ham shook his head slowly and turned his sword cane in his hands, for their quarry was nowhere in the room. Both the outer windows were down, and the lawyer knew that this skyscraper had a wall sheer and smooth, impossible for even a so-called "human fly" to scale by ordinary methods.

Monk, charging around the room, jerked a rectangle of expensive tapestry from the wall, scowled when he saw there was no aperture back of it, and flipped the carpet up. Nowhere was there a trapdoor.

"The windows are unlocked," Ham pointed out.

"But that bird in silver couldn't have——" Monk swallowed the rest, ran to a window and wrenched it up. He looked out, seemed stunned, but said nothing.

Ham leaped to his side. Together they peered down.

"We must be getting very dumb," Ham said disgustedly.

"Speak for yourself," Monk growled, then placed a hand on the window sill and vaulted through the opening, out into space.

Without hesitating, Ham followed, instinctively using care not to disrupt the neat hang of his garments. It was a rare occasion when Ham forgot his clothing.

Perhaps six feet below the window was a wide ledge. For the moment, the two men had forgotten that the skyscraper was set back, pyramid fashion, at intervals, and that one of these setbacks was at the level of the Seven Seas offices. The killer must have fled by this route, after closing the window behind him to confuse his pursuers.

Monk pointed, "He went this way!"

City grime was smeared on the roof of the set-back, soot and dust which retained footprints plainly. The two men followed the tracks around the skyscraper. They disappeared into a window on the opposite side.

Monk and Ham clambered through the window and found themselves among mops, buckets and window-washing paraphernalia; the room was obviously one used by janitors. There was no trace of the weirdly garbed slayer.

A corridor was beyond the store room, this being deserted for the moment. Not until Monk emitted an angry roar did any one appear, then two policemen popped out of the offices of Seven Seas.

"What's going on here?" snapped an officer.

"Where'd that killer go?" Monk demanded.

The cop gulped. "Killer! Say, what're you talking about?"

And that was the first inkling the police had of the slaying of unfortunate Clarence Sparks, for the meek-spirited billing clerk was dead, the arrow having punctured his

heart. They found that out when they examined him.

Where the killer had gone remained a mystery through the course of the next fifteen minutes. Then an excited call came up from the basement regions. A fireman had been found knocked senseless in the basement.

Monk and Ham hurried down.

The fireman had thick blond hair, and that had possibly preserved his life, for the blow he had received over the head, judging by the bruise, had been terrific. A policeman was waiting for a doctor to revive the fellow.

“Let me do it,” said Ham. “I have an infallible system.”

Ham unsheathed his sword cane, and the onlookers say that the tip was coated for a few inches with a brownish substance which was slightly sticky. This was a drug mixture which produced senselessness when a victim was pricked.

With a finger tip Ham removed a bit of the drug from the sword and applied it to the tongue of the unconscious fireman. The stuff, in small quantities, was a stimulant, but if administered in quantity, produced senselessness.

The fireman revived almost at once.

“What happened to you?” Ham demanded.

“Aye not bane know,” mumbled the fireman, feeling his blond head.

“Who hit you?” Ham persisted.

“He bane a feller all dressed up in shiny suit,” was the reply. “Aye just see him—then *bop!* He hit me with gun.”

The room where they stood was a concrete inferno far below the street, where the great oil-burning boilers roared, generating steam for the radiators and hot water for the washrooms.

Moved by a thought—he was sharp in spite of Monk’s habit of terming him a nitwit shyster—Ham went over and peered into one of the fire boxes. He started violently, moved to use his sword to probe in the heat, then changed his mind and employed a cleaning bar.

Out of the fire box Ham brought a crinkled mass that had once been silver metallic cloth.

“The suit the murderer was wearing,” he declared.

“Then it is some one in the building,” Monk growled. “The fellow burned his rig because the police have the doors blocked and are not letting any one out.”

Unnoticed, a man was standing in the background near the door. He was a scrawny fellow, bedecked with grease stains and dust, garbed in the green coveralls which the janitors of the building wore. It was because he was one of the janitors that he was receiving no attention.

He deserved attention. No hint of the fact showed on his features, but he was catching every word that was being said. He had a stupid face, anyway; it was almost without a jaw, being round, with small features, and having a sickly gray color. His

whole head was very much like an old, white rubber ball which had been handled with grimy fingers. He wore a costly wrist watch.

The fellow glanced over his shoulder, as if anxious to get out of the boiler room. Shortly, he did leave, but he took his time so that no suspicion was attached to his departure.

Finding his way to a telephone, he called a number. A voice—a coarse, whispering voice, obviously disguised—answered.

“This ain’t goin’ so hot,” said the man in janitor regalia.

“What is wrong, Bugs?” asked the whispering voice.

“Two of Doc Savage’s men are snooping around,” reported “Bugs,” his round, pale face close to the transmitter.

The whispering one swore. “I saw that in an extra edition of a tabloid newspaper. What on earth got those two involved in the affair?”

“One of them, named Monk, has a chemical laboratory on top of the building,” Bugs advised.

This called forth more sibilant profanity.

“If I had known one of Doc Savage’s men had a place on the building, we would have used other methods on old Winthrop,” grated the distant whisper. “Doc Savage is the last man on earth we want on our necks at this stage of the game. Savage is almost inhuman. He is a mechanical wizard, a scientific genius, and a man as strong as Hercules; and he applies all of his abilities to helping other people out of trouble. He goes in for big stuff. Something like we are pulling would be his meat.”

“Boss,” Bugs muttered, “there’s somethin’ else.”

“What?”

“A clerk must’ve been listenin’ outside old Winthrop’s door when—well, you know—and he overheard stuff. I don’t know how much, because I croaked him before he could tell it all to Doc Savage’s two men.”

“You damned fool!” snarled the other. “There was nothing said in that telephone talk which would give me away.”

“How was I to know that?” Bugs whined. “I was afraid he had a line on us. I had my silver outfit on, and I got hold of an old bow and arrow and let him have it.”

“Oh, you idiot!” the whispering man groaned. “Right in front of two men who are as brainy as they come. Doc Savage does not have any mental blanks working for him—like I seem to have.”

“Aw,” Bugs mumbled. “I got away, banged a fireman over the head and burned my silver outfit, so they couldn’t find any finger prints or where it was made or maybe trace the cloth.”

Several seconds of silence followed this; the distant mastermind seemed to be giving deep thought to the affair. Bugs, impatient at the delay, began speaking.

“If we just hadn’t bumped old Winthrop,” he said. “That was——”

“That was necessary!” the distant voice finished for him. “Winthrop was a man who would not hesitate to swindle an orphan, if it could be done legally. That fooled me. The old nut had his own screwy idea of honor. Or maybe he was afraid of the law. Anyway, he was going to tell the police all about us. And he knew plenty, especially about the job we had done in his shipyard.”

“Well, Savage’s two men are snooping,” Bugs muttered. “What’re we gonna do about that? Let it ride, huh? They ain’t got a line to go on.”

“They’ll get a line, don’t worry,” grated the whisperer. “Doc Savage’s men are wizards, and that fellow Savage himself is positively inhuman. We must do something.”

“What?” Bugs wanted to know.

After a pause, the other said, “Listen to this.”

Following that, there was a chain of rapid commands, Bugs mumbling frequently that he understood. An expression of evil pleasure overspread his unhealthy moon of a face as he heard the plans unfolded. He consulted his remarkably high-priced wrist watch.

“That oughta fix ’em,” he grinned finally.

Hanging up, he made his way back through the corridor labyrinths of the great building until he located Monk and Ham. Lurking in the background, unnoticed, he kept an eye on Doc Savage’s two aides.

Bugs was waiting for something, and he eyed the watch often.

As for Monk and Ham, they had given up all hope of the blond fireman furnishing any valuable information. The fellow had seen only a grotesque figure in silver. The ashes of the silver garment, a shapeless sediment of metal and cinders, furnished no clue.

“Even Doc couldn’t learn anything from this,” Monk complained, indicating the garment.

Ham started to nod, then refrained, since agreeing with Monk on any subject was against his policy.

“We’re killing time,” snapped the dapper lawyer. “Why don’t we go upstairs and look over the explosion scene.”

“The police have done that,” Monk grunted.

“They have not found what caused the blast,” Ham pointed out.

That seemed to settle the question, and they started mounting stairs, the elevators not yet being in working order.

The skyscraper had, not one basement, but three, one below the other, and the boilers were in the lowermost level, deep in the solid bed rock of Manhattan Island and probably below the surface of the near-by East River, which at this point was very wide, actually a neck of New York Harbor.

The two men reached the second basement and encountered a police officer. The cop had the rank of lieutenant, but he was deferential, for Monk and Ham held

honorary police stations far above his own. Doc Savage and all of his men held these honorary commissions, issued out of gratitude for past services in aiding the law enforcement agencies of the city.

“We have learned something,” reported the lieutenant. “I knew you gentlemen would want all information as quickly as we got it.”

“Shoot,” Monk invited.

The police officer explained rapidly: “We are entirely mystified as to the cause of the explosion which killed Winthrop, although a more intensive search may turn up some clue. We are overlooking no bets. The blast might have been a bomb, launched in some manner from a plane. In checking up, we learned that a plane was flying over the river, very near the building, at the time of the explosion. Too, there was a man on the river in a motor boat.”

No one paid attention to Bugs, who was loitering within earshot.

“Any way of identifying the plane?” Monk asked the policeman.

“You would be surprised how people notice things like that when something grabs their attention,” replied the officer. “I suppose some persons wondered if the plane had dropped a bomb. Anyway, we have several witnesses who got the number on the lower wing surface of the plane.”

“Great!” grunted Monk. “You’re checking?”

“You bet. And, moreover, two or three dock workers identified the motor boat which was on the river. There was one man in the boat, and he may have seen the plane drop a bomb.”

“It’s pretty foggy,” Monk pointed out.

The officer nodded, fumbled in a uniform pocket and produced a notebook. He thumbed through the leaves.

“Gilbert Stiles is the owner of the plane, according to the check we made on the numbers,” he said. “Stiles keeps the plane for his personal pleasure. The man in the boat was a fisherman named”—he stumbled over the pronunciation—“named Gugillemo Bellondi, or something like that. The flier lives on Eighty-fifth Street in Jackson Heights, and the fisherman on Sand Street in Brooklyn.”

Bugs, who had overheard all of this, turned surreptitiously, fumbled out a sheet of paper and a pencil stub and put down the name of Gilbert Stiles and Gugillemo Bellondi. He added data on their residences. Bugs did not put much trust in his memory.

Monk and Ham, accompanied by the police lieutenant, mounted the stairs into the topmost basement.

“We had better ring Doc in on this,” Monk suggested, eying Ham.

Ham said, “I had the same idea before you did.”

In the skyscraper lobby were a number of telephone booths. Monk entered one of these, found the outside connections undisturbed by the blast, and called the number of Doc Savage's headquarters.

The headquarters was a strange aerie on the eighty-sixth floor of the most impressive skyscraper in uptown New York, and the bronze man spent much of his leisure there. Actually, Doc Savage allowed himself no leisure in the accepted sense, all of his time being spent in research, in experiments, in study. There was a fabulously equipped library and laboratory in the headquarters.

"Doc?" asked Monk.

The question was unnecessary—Doc Savage had a remarkable voice, one which was powerful, yet controlled, modulated, giving the impression of almost eerie strength. Unmistakable, that voice.

"I just saw an extra edition of the newspaper," said Doc Savage. "Was your laboratory damaged by the explosion?"

"Some," Monk admitted. "But that isn't what I called about, Doc. There is something underhanded going on down here."

"We do not involve ourselves in anything the police can handle," Doc reminded.

"I figured you'd be interested," Monk explained. "You see, it's a queer business all along. First, there's nothing to show what caused the explosion—or if there is, they haven't found it yet. Then a guy in silver murdered Clarence Sparks, a Winthrop employee."

"What is this?" Doc asked sharply.

"A bird dressed up in a sort of silver coverall suit and a silver mask, shot Sparks with a bow and arrow just as we were about to question the fellow. Sparks seemed to know something."

"Did the killer resemble the strange silver-clothed figures who have recently committed a series of big robberies and who also sunk the Transatlantic Company's liner, *Avallancia*?" Doc questioned.

"Sure," said Monk. "I think he was one of the gang."

Doc Savage was silent a moment, as if engaged in thought, then a weird, a most unusual sound came from the telephone receiver. It was a sound defying description. It was a most unmusical trilling, a whistle and yet not a whistle. Possessing a throaty, exotic quality, it ran up and down the musical scale, but without adhering to a definite tune.

It might have been a wind whistling with ghostly quality through a ship's rigging, or it might have been the song of some strange jungle bird.

Monk stiffened as he heard the sound; he had heard the eerie note many times before. It was the sound of Doc Savage the small unconscious thing which the bronze man did in moments of mental excitement. It usually came before some startling development; often it marked Doc's discovery of some obscure fact which was later to possess great significance.

“Monk,” Doc said, “have you noticed anything queer about the robberies these so-called Silver Death’s-Heads have been committing?”

Monk began, “Well, their silver disguises——”

“Not that,” Doc told him. “There is one strange point about the robberies themselves. Have you noticed?”

“No,” said Monk. “What is it?”

“A number of men have been killed in the course of the thefts,” Doc stated.

“Sure. But men are often killed during robberies.”

“In each case, these men were prominent,” Doc explained patiently. “And on one or two occasions, the thefts during which they were shot down were of a trivial nature. I can give you one very good example.”

“Let’s have it,” Monk requested.

“Two weeks ago a gang of the Silver Death’s-Heads, seven of them to be exact, held up a small filling station on Long Island,” Doc announced. “The filling station was very small and never had more than a few dollars on hand. But a limousine had just driven into the station to fill up with gas. It was occupied by a wealthy man named Kirkland Le Page. He was shot and killed. The filling station attendant was lying on the floor of his station at the time and did not see what provoked the shooting. Le Page was driving his car himself.”

“I remember,” said Monk.

“Kirkland Le Page was vice president of Transatlantic Company, owners of the liner *Avallancia*, which was later sunk by the Silver Death’s-Heads,” Doc stated.

“Blazes!” exploded Monk. “There’s something big behind this!”

“Exactly,” Doc agreed.

Monk stood silently in the telephone booth, mentally turning over what Doc Savage had just revealed. The homely chemist nodded slowly to himself. He would have been willing to bet that Doc had been on the verge of investigating the weird Silver Death’s-Heads, even if this afternoon’s explosion had not occurred.

Monk opened his mouth to speak further—but things began to happen.

There was a stifled yell from the lobby behind Monk, where Ham and the policeman stood. Feet pounded on the lobby floor. There was another yell. A shot banged.

Monk tried to turn. His shoulder spread was vast, the telephone booth small. At first, he did not make it. He squirmed to get around.

The booth had glass windows. With a jangling crash, these caved in. Glass showered Monk. The homely chemist got a flash of a hand encased in a silver glove. The hand held a heavy automatic.

Silver glove and weighty gun were all that Monk saw. The weapon lashed for his head. He sought to duck. The booth was too small, and the automatic came down full on the top of his nubbin of a head.

Monk slumped and never felt the gun club down on his head twice again, the blows murderously vicious.

## Chapter 4

### TWO SILVER MURDERS

Doc Savage heard the ugly sounds of the blows upon Monk's head, for there had been no time for the homely chemist to replace the telephone receiver, and telephones are sensitive.

Doc listened closely. The noise had been distinct enough to tell what had happened. Over the wire came scuffling sounds, grunts, which meant that Monk's bulk was being hauled from the booth. Then the telephone receiver in the booth must have been replaced; there was a *click*, with silence afterward.

Doc Savage had been bending over an expensively inlaid table as he conversed with Monk. He straightened, and his tremendous physical build was apparent to its fullest. The telephone, the massive table, seemed to shrink beside him; yet it was only in comparison to these objects that his full proportions were evident.

So symmetrically was his giant frame developed that, seen at a distance and away from objects to which his size might be compared, he appeared no larger than other men.

But he would never be mistaken for another, this Herculean figure. His bronze motif prevented that—his skin, remarkably fine of texture, had been turned a rich bronze hue by countless tropical suns, and his hair, straight and fitting like a metallic skull cap, was of a bronze color only slightly darker.

His face was regular, the lineaments having an unusual quality of handsomeness, but in no sense possessing the somewhat effeminate prettiness often found in very handsome men.

The most striking feature, however, was his eyes. They were slightly weird, like pools of flake-gold stirred continually by tiny whirlwinds. They held an almost hypnotic quality, a compelling power.

The room where this amazing bronze man stood was the outer office of his headquarters, and held only comfortable chairs and a massive safe. Adjacent was the library with its thousands of scientific volumes and the laboratory with an array of equipment nearly without equal.

Doc whipped into the corridor, his movements apparently unhurried, but his speed great. A special elevator, a fast lift installed for his own use, lowered him eighty-six floors to the skyscraper basement. There, he kept several automobiles, all of special construction, in a garage the existence of which was unknown to all but a few.

The bronze man's skyscraper establishment had cost a small fortune, yet its expense was scarcely a drop from his reservoir of wealth. Doc possessed an almost unlimited source of funds, a treasure trove as unusual as the bronze man himself.

Scarcely three minutes after disaster befell Monk, Doc Savage was on the street in an expensive but unostensible roadster. He touched a dash button. Under the hood a siren began wailing. Traffic police heard and opened a way for him.

Doc went down Broadway, and for a long time the speedometer needle swayed above seventy miles an hour. He drove with an uncanny skill.

The roadster was fitted with short-wave radio receiving-and-transmitting apparatus. Ordinarily, Doc Savage would have used this to get in touch with the other three members of his group of five assistants.

But three of his aides were not at present in New York. William Harper "Johnny" Littlejohn, the expert on archæology and geology, was in London, filling a special lecture engagement at a famous university.

Major Thomas J. "Long Tom" Roberts, electrical wizard extraordinary, was in Europe, collaborating in experiments with another electrical expert on a device which was Long Tom's pet dream—an apparatus which, when perfected, could be used to kill insects with ultra-short sonic or electric waves. This would be an inestimable boon to farmers.

Colonel John "Renny" Renwick, famous engineer, was in South Africa, halfway around the world, overseeing construction of a particularly difficult hydro-electric plant, a project in which the engineer had a financial interest.

For the first time in many months, Doc Savage would have to go into action without the aid of three of his remarkable group of five men, each of whom was a master in some profession.

Several blocks from the scene of the strange explosion in the office building, Doc switched off the siren. A crowd milled in front of the building itself. There were signs of excitement.

Doc parked at the end of the block and hurried forward, intent on learning what had befallen Monk and Ham. He caught snatches of conversation from the crowd.

"They came in an armored truck!" gasped a man.

A woman was telling a friend, "Did you notice how they were dressed? Silver-colored suits!"

"Those silver masks on their faces!" gasped the friend. "Ugh! Hideous!"

Doc went on and heard a fat colored fellow in a bus boy's uniform exclaim, "Dem silver lads done lit out of heah in the same truck dat dey came in!"

"Boy, did yoah see dem two men they was draggin' when they up an' left?" asked a brother bus boy.

"Yassuh," agreed the first. "Dem two was daid, if yoah asks me."

Doc Savage's remarkable bronze features did not change expression. That did not mean he was unconcerned, for he schooled himself until he possessed an uncanny control over his own emotions.

A lieutenant of police—the same individual to whom Monk and Ham had been talking—answered the question. Doc encountered the officer in front of the building. The cop saluted briskly.

“It was the Silver Death’s-Heads,” the policeman explained before Doc could put a query. “They drove right through the crowd in an armored car. Ran down two spectators. They rushed in, clubbed down the guard at the door, and seized Monk and Ham. It happened so quickly that we could do nothing, although I did manage to fire one shot.”

“Did they harm Monk and Ham?” Doc demanded.

The lieutenant shivered slightly at the grim sound of the giant bronze man’s voice.

“Both were clubbed over the head,” he said thickly. “Ham was caught beside me. The silver devils came up behind us. Monk was in the telephone booth and did not get out in time.”

“How badly were they clubbed?” Doc questioned.

The officer moistened his lips. “Pretty hard. I don’t know—if they are alive. They were dragged away.”

“What about the armored truck?” Doc asked. “Armored trucks are not extremely common on New York streets.”

“This one was a steel pay-roll truck,” the policeman replied. “It was stolen, we learned, from a company which makes a business of delivering pay-rolls. It was taken only a few minutes before the raid here.”

“You assemble information very quickly,” Doc told the officer. “Good work. Was the truck followed?”

The policeman grimaced. “I’m sorry to say that it got away completely. Of course, every radio patrol car in the city is now looking for it. We expect a report at any minute. It cannot escape.”

Doc Savage did not rush off on any wild chase of his own in search of the armored truck. He knew the efficiency of the metropolitan police; he had, in fact, served in a consulting capacity when the present radio car system was inaugurated. A vehicle as prominent as the armored truck would not get far before it was discovered.

The bronze man’s first move was to examine the semimolten silver mass which Monk and Ham had found in the basement fire box. A small bag was brought from Doc’s roadster. With chemicals taken from the bag, Doc tested the silver.

“Coin silver,” he announced.

“Eh?” The police lieutenant was puzzled.

“The cloth is interwoven with fine wire made from molten silver dollars,” Doc explained.

“Does that prove anything?” the officer queried.

“Only that the criminals must be making the garments themselves, which indicates that some of them are highly skilled metalsmiths,” said the bronze man. “If the disguises had been purchased, it is almost certain that a different grade of silver would have been used.”

The policeman nodded, not greatly surprised, for he knew the amazing detective ability possessed by Doc Savage. He was slightly abashed, however, when Doc went upstairs to the explosion scene and almost at once turned up the cause of the blast.

Doc did not expend much time on the wreckage itself, except to apply chemical tests to some of the powder stains.

“The work of trinitrotoluene,” he stated.

“Huh?” asked the officer.

“T.N.T.,” Doc elaborated. “The famous World War explosive.”

“Oh!”

The bronze man dug into the office walls, probing pits made by bits of wreckage, and brought out, after some work, several bits of steel. He assembled these, studied them.

“We found some of that metal and sent it to a specialist for an opinion,” said the officer. “We hoped it would tell us what caused the blast—whether it was a bomb or not.”

“It was a high-explosive three-inch shell,” Doc said.

“Good night!” the lieutenant exploded. “You don’t mean a cannon ball?”

“You might call it that,” Doc assured him. “Except that this was a very modern demolition shell from a three-inch artillery piece.”

“But where was it fired from?” yelled the officer.

There was an interruption while a sergeant came in with a report that the armored truck had been found. A radio car had come upon the truck, abandoned on the water front of the East River.

No trace of the sinister men in silver garments had been found in the vicinity of the truck. Nor were there finger prints. No one could be found who had seen the truck being abandoned.

“Finding it doesn’t help us a bit,” the police lieutenant groaned.

“I would not say that,” Doc told him.

“Yes?” the other queried. “But how is this going to help?”

“According to the newspapers, the men in silver robbed another armored truck earlier in the day and took a quarter of a million dollars in cash,” Doc pointed out.

“Of course.”

“Police followed them,” Doc reminded.

“Yes, and lost them——” The officer did not finish, but swore and snapped his fingers violently.

“Exactly,” Doc said. “The police lost trace of them around the water front of the East River—in the same vicinity in which this armored truck was found, to be exact.”

The lieutenant shouted, “I’ll have every square inch of that area combed!”

“Do it unobtrusively,” Doc requested.

“Of course,” the officer agreed. “We will use plain-clothes officers, and put a flock of stool pigeons to work. We’ve got a swell lot of stool pigeons. They’re in nearly every crook hangout in the city. You’d be surprised what they can turn up.”

“Do you wager?” Doc asked.

“Bet? Sure—on sure things.”

“Want to bet me that your stool pigeons won’t turn up a thing?” the bronze man asked.

“What makes you think they won’t?” the cop demanded.

“These are not ordinary crooks,” Doc told him. “And I doubt very much if robberies, such as the armored truck holdup this afternoon, are the real motive behind the organization of men who use the silver disguises.”

The police lieutenant considered, then said, “I’ll bet you fifty that the stool pigeons turn up something.”

“The winner to contribute the fifty to the police Death Benefit Fund,” Doc said.

“Sure.”

A police messenger ran into the room. He was animated, breathless.

“Gugillello Bellondi was just murdered by a guy in silver!” he yelled.

Doc Savage demanded, “Who is Gugillello Bellondi?”

“A fisherman who was in a boat in the river at the time of the explosion,” said the police lieutenant. “We thought he might have seen the plane flying overhead drop a bomb, and we sent a man over to talk to him.”

“And our man found him dead,” said the messenger. “A woman saw a fellow in a silver suit run out of Gugillello Bellondi’s room just before the cop got there.”

“The killer got away?” the lieutenant wailed.

“So far, he has,” the messenger admitted ruefully.

Doc Savage put in, “Any line on the plane?”

“Yes. I forgot to tell you.” The lieutenant pulled out his notebook. “The flier was Gilbert Stiles, who lives on Eighty-fifth Street in Jackson Heights.”

“What house number?” Doc asked.

The policeman furnished that information, started to ask a question, but did not—Doc Savage was already whipping for the door.

The bronze man reached his roadster. Once again traffic police opened a lane, and the trip north to Queensboro Bridge, thence along Northern Boulevard to Jackson Heights was made in astounding time.

Jackson Heights was an apartment residential suburb near the north shore of Long Island, not far out. There were grass plots around some of the apartments, a few trees in the parkways down the center of a street or two.

Doc did not stop directly in front of Gilbert Stiles's home, but parked in an adjacent side street, under the lazy droop of a weeping willow. He swung along the sidewalk, reached the corner, made a move at turning, but instead of doing so, continued on with long steps—and stopped when he was sheltered behind a parked car.

Doc's move was urged by discovery of a man standing beside a shiny blue sedan down the street, near where Gilbert Stiles lived. The man was scrawny, with traces of grease stain on his hands and face. His face was a sickly gray hue, resembling a white ball which had been mauled in unclean hands.

During the past, Doc Savage had visited Monk's skyscraper chemical laboratory frequently, and in doing so had occasionally seen members of the janitorial force. The bronze man never forgot a face. The man down the street was one of the janitors of Monk's skyscraper.

Doc had no way of knowing the individual was Bugs, murderer of Clarence Sparks.

After watching Bugs for a moment, unobserved, Doc concluded something was not resting easily on the fellow's mind.

Bugs squirmed. He smoked innumerable cigarettes. He walked about, and he glanced frequently at a tall brick apartment building before which the blue sedan stood. He even got into the sedan, but remained only a moment and climbed out again.

Bugs stood scowling at the apartment house. Then his pasty face took on an expression of resolve, and he went inside.

Doc Savage whipped back to his roadster. The rumble seat jumped open at his touch upon a button, and he dipped in a hand, withdrew a small box to which stout spring clamps were secured; then he ran to the blue car.

Employing the spring clamps on the box, Doc clipped the container to the chassis of the car in a spot where it was not likely to be noticed. Then he followed Bugs into the apartment house.

There was a Spanish-type lobby, with ornate columns, fake iron balconies, and a rather threadbare carpet. Bugs was nowhere in sight. Nor was there a directory of the tenants to be seen.

The elevator was automatic. You got in and pushed a button marked with the floor to which you wished to be lifted. Doc listened. The lift was running.

These apartment buildings were all similar in construction. Doc leaped around a corner, found stairs which ran to the basement, descended them, and located the master electric fuse board. He could still hear the low whine of the elevator. The sound stopped.

Doc took out the fuse in the power circuit. The cage would remain where it was, now. The bronze man ran up flight after flight of stairs.

The elevator car was on the sixth floor, which happened to be the top story. A long hallway was lined with numbered doors. Doc stood perfectly still, listening.

The bronze man possessed remarkable hearing. He used a special scientific device giving forth sound waves above and below the usual audible ranges, to develop his

aural organs.

This was a part of a daily two-hour routine of intensive exercise which he had not neglected since childhood. The exercises were responsible for his physical development, for there reposed in his great bronze frame a strength that to many seemed incredible.

Down the corridor, a doorknob rattled. Doc whipped back. A niche—it probably housed an incinerator door—offered concealment. He pressed into that.

He heard the door open. Feet scuffed. Doc counted at least six persons, all men. The clicking of women's high heels are distinctive, and there were none of those. One man walked far in the lead of the others. An instant later, the fellow appeared.

It was Bugs. He saw Doc Savage. He could not very well help it. His eyes flew wide; stark horror contorted his face.

“Savage!” he bawled. “Watch out!”

Then Bugs clawed at his clothing for a gun.

Doc moved with dazzling suddenness. Flashing out of the niche, he drove a fist. So that there would be no lasting damage, he struck lightly. But the blow slammed Bugs back against the wall, knocking him instantly unconscious. The gun he had tried to get into action skidded over the floor tiling.

Doc now faced down the corridor—faced weird, inhuman figures, forms garbed in grotesque silver garments. The footstep count had been good. There were five of them.

Bugs's yell had warned them. Three had drawn guns. The weapons gushed flame and raised ear-splitting thunder in the corridor.

There was a touch of the unearthly in the speed with which Doc Savage got back into the niche. Only fabulous muscles, carefully conditioned, could manage such blinding motion. The bullets, missing him, gouged plaster off the walls and knocked glass from a window at the corridor end.

“Rush him!” a man in silver squawled.

“T'hell with that, Ull!” another growled.

Shots almost drowned the words, and it was doubtful if the man in charge realized his name had been called—Ull. But Doc caught it and filed it mentally for future investigation—should he escape.

He was in a tight spot. It was his policy never to carry a gun, and he had none now. But he did have some of the scientific devices which he used. One of these he employed now.

A hand dipped into a pocket and came out with what might have been mistaken for a glass marble. This was actually a thin-walled glass globe, and the liquid inside was a chemical concoction which vaporized instantly into an anaesthetic gas.

The gas was unique in that its effects were immediate, and it became ineffective within less than a minute, so that Doc, holding his breath, could escape the potent stuff, while the unwary, breathing it, were rendered senseless.

Doc threw the anaesthetic ball.

Rarely had these gas balls failed to catch foes by surprise. But this was an exception. Doc waited, holding his breath to escape the vapor. But his enemies gave no sign of succumbing. They did not, however, call out again, and the clatter of their feet retreated. A door slammed. They had fled ahead of the gas.

Doc knew from past experience just how quickly a man can shoot at an unexpected target, and knew he could get a fleeting glimpse of the corridor without great danger of being shot. He looked out.

The hallway was empty. The silver men had gone back into an apartment. Doc stepped out into the hall.

An instant later, he flashed backward into the niche, for a door had opened and a metal object slightly smaller than a baseball had sailed through. No doubt the silver man who hurled it intended for it to stop beside Doc. But the thing had too much momentum. It clattered past. Then it exploded.

The concussion almost disrupted the bronze man's eardrums. Clouds of plaster gushed. The big apartment house trembled. The ceiling lifted, split, and came down with a thundering clamor. The floor collapsed for some distance.

Doc, secure in the niche, unhit, was enveloped in a cloud of smoke, plaster particles and splinters. The grenade had been powerful. Directly in front of him, the floor was gone, fallen down into the hall below. Bugs's body had been blown back out of sight.

Toward the end of the uproar, the door down the hall opened again.

"Get him?" asked the voice which belonged to Ull—it was a shrill, querulously whanging tone. Ull was not the one looking into the corridor.

"It fixed 'im," said another voice. "The whole damn corridor is blown to pieces!"

At that point, a loud, agonized groan sounded.

"Who's that?" asked Ull.

"Bugs," said the other. "He's butchered up some."

"Let me take care of that," Ull suggested.

A moment later there was a single deliberate shot, and after that the groans no longer ground out.

"He's taken care of," said Ull.

"What next?" grunted the other.

"Down the fire escape—all of you," ordered Ull. "We've got to beat the cops away from here."

Doc Savage gave Ull and his sinister silver aides a few minutes to be on their way. The bronze man did not want any more of those grenades thrown. Women were screaming, children crying, in the apartment below, although it was unlikely that any had been hurt.

When he considered sufficient time had elapsed, Doc stepped out of the niche.

Bugs was a slack figure, torn a little by the blast and with a bullet hole drilling his head just above the ears. Ull had made a cold, accurate shot in ascertaining that his followers did not live to talk. Evidently Ull had not wanted a wounded man on his hands during the get-away.

Doc shoved open the door through which the grenade had been hurled. He stood just inside, strange flake-gold eyes resting on the deep leather chair in the center of the apartment living room.

There was a man in the chair, but not a living man, for his body was stiffly erect, probably held that way by the blade of the long knife which had gone through his chest and well into the chair back.

A book had fallen to the floor beside the dead man and was open at the fly leaf, so that the name written there could be deciphered.

“Gilbert Stiles,” the name read.

## Chapter 5

### RAPID PACE

Doc Savage rested a hand on the man's wrist where there should have been a pulse—had he been alive—but there was no throb.

This aviator had been flying over the river when the explosion occurred in Paine L. Winthrop's office. He must have seen something. The fisherman in the boat on the river must have seen the same thing. And both had been killed before they could talk, or be questioned.

How had the silver fiends gotten their names? Doc had a suspicion—he had no way of knowing how right it was—that Bugs was responsible for this. But Bugs had paid for his part.

Motor roar came up from the street, throbbed, then receded. Doc Savage did not look out. They might see him, and it was just as well if they thought him dead, for they might become careless.

The blue car had vanished when the bronze man did glance through the window. He stepped out on the fire escape and ran down, lightly, swiftly, and made for his roadster. He did not waste time, but there was no wild haste in his movements.

The sudden life in the oil gauge and ammeter was almost all that told when the roadster engine started, so silently did it operate. The car moved at a touch on the accelerator; it was equipped with the most modern of automatic clutches.

Doc touched one of innumerable buttons on the dash. Then he turned a knurled knob. Static noises came from a radio speaker under the dash, these became terrific as a street car was passed, and, as Doc continued to adjust the knob, snatches of voice and telegraph were heard. A radio fan would have realized that the bronze man was fishing through the ultra-short-wave bands, seeking some particular transmitter.

After a time, regular buzzes—short dashes repeated at three-second intervals—whizzed from the speaker. They were not unlike time signals, except more widely spaced, and they kept coming steadily.

Doc turned the knob to the right. The signals faded. He turned back to the left and they faded again. Setting the knob at the loudest point, he eyed a dial above, which bore close likeness to a compass card. A pointer on this indicated almost due west.

Doc Savage drove west. The apparatus he had just employed was a radio compass, the tiny loop of which was in the roadster rear and operated from the knob by remote control.

This compact radio directional device was one which Doc employed for many uses. For instance, his five men, when working with him, used cars which also had transmitters, and these were left on at all times. By simply turning the directional compass knob, Doc could locate the nearest of these cars.

The radio compass had another use, as well. Doc Savage had perfected tiny mechanical short-wave transmitters which, batteries self-contained, were little larger than a cigar box. These sent out a series of buzzing sounds. Attached to the containers were clamps by which they could be affixed to various convenient objects.

Doc had, as a matter of precaution, attached one of the transmitters to the azure sedan. The bronze man overlooked few chances. In the perilous life he led, chances could not be overlooked.

From time to time, a twist of the directional knob, as the buzzing signals faded, brought the sounds in loud again and gave a check on the direction being taken by the blue machine.

The chase led to Manhattan Island, downtown to the vehicular tunnel under the Hudson, thence along the elevated roadway and, after a few miles, down into a manufacturing district. It ended close to the water front when Doc Savage sighted the sedan, empty now, parked before an imposing, massive steel gate.

The gate was not of steel bars, but of riveted plates; it looked forbidding. There was a square aperture in the gate for a watchman to peer through. Above the gate, a sign read:

WINTHROP'S SHIPYARDS  
PAINE L. WINTHROP, PRESIDENT

Doc Savage advanced swiftly and put an eye to the square opening in the gate. The shipyard was beyond, grotesque in the fog, with its cranes, material piles and moving booms. There seemed to be no work under way.

Just inside the gate, a man was sprawled on his back, one arm angled across his face in an attitude of grisly slumber. The shoulder of his rough suit was sodden with crimson leakage from his head.

Doc gave the door a shove. It was unlocked, swung back quietly, and let him in. He examined the man.

The fellow was old, work-stooped, gray-haired, and on his breast was a watchman's badge. Doc felt his wrist, although he could see that the man still breathed. Some type of bludgeon, perhaps a revolver barrel, had beaten the watchman down.

He would be unconscious some time, judging from the nature of the wound, but was in no immediate danger.

Doc advanced into the shipyard. There was some breeze here; the fog eddied, swept past in nebulous streamers like marching ghosts. Moisture had been deposited on the packed earth, and this slime bore tracks.

Reasoning that the freshest prints were those of the sinister men in silver garb, Doc followed them. The tracks progressed in a direct manner which indicated a definite objective. They ended at the door of a massive brick building, evidently housing the offices.

Doc waited outside, listening. Gray fog around about made his great frame seem larger, more formidable. The gloom of early evening was pressing down, bringing the clammy murk of a water-logged catacomb.

A trial of the door showed it locked, but a moment's work with a thin steel probe tripped the tumblers. A professional locksmith would have been slightly stunned at the swiftness with which the lock was solved.

Inside was denser murk; mingled with it, the faint heat from radiators which bubbled against the fog chill. There was a desk, telephone and hard, wooden waiting benches. A fly-specked calendar was crooked on the wall.

Doc advanced, passed through an open door, found worn wooden steps which led upward. But he did not mount immediately. Instead, he dipped a hand into a pocket and brought out what might have been mistaken for a handful of black clover seed. He strewed some of this on the floor of the outer office. Then he went up the stairs.

At the first landing he found a door, open. Beyond was an office, fitted up more luxuriously. The desk drawers were open, the papers within littered up as if they had been gone through hastily.

A curl of smoke arose from a metal smoking stand which stood beside the desk.

Doc went over to it. The smouldering objects were old cigar and cigarette stubs which had been ignited by bits of burning paper dropped into the stand. The bronze man examined the charred paper fragments.

Blueprints, he decided. The print had been torn into fractional sections, each burned separately, and the ash crushed. Even his consummate skill was unequal to telling what nature of diagram had been on the blueprints.

The burning had been done within the last few minutes, however. And the care with which it had been done indicated sinister motives.

Doc dropped the ashes. He stood very still, listening.

From below came a loud report. It was like a shot. Three more followed. There was a cry—strangled, inarticulate.

Doc Savage did not go back down the stairs, but whipped, instead, to a window. He managed to get it up without noise that could be heard downstairs. From inside his clothing came an object he always carried—a thin, stout silk cord, affixed to the end of which was a folding grapple of lightness and strength.

The grapple, hooked to the inner edge of the window sill, held his weight as he slid outside and down the silk line. He went slowly, supported by the incredible strength in his metallic hands.

A few feet to the left of the spot where he touched the ground, there was a window. It allowed a look into the reception room.

The glass pane was grimy. That, with the fog and darkness, made vision difficult, the outlines inside hazy. But there was one point cleaner than the other sections of the glass.

Through the clear section, Doc could distinguish—his flake-gold eyes peered closely—a small, flat automatic pistol, a vest pocket .25 caliber gun. A thin hand

encased in a suede glove held it.

Doc brought out a handkerchief, doubled it, spread it over his knuckles, but did not wrap it around so that it would interfere with his fingers. He struck. Glass splintered. The cloth protected his knuckles, but did not interfere when his arm went through the window and his corded fingers gripped the gun hand.

Coat fabric over the bronze man's arm bulged slightly as great muscles exerted tension. Inside, a shriek piped out. The gun fell from a hand made nerveless by the steel pinch of Doc's fingers.

Doc knocked more glass out of the window, found the lock, twisted it, then released his victim long enough to get the sash up and bound inside.

The victim was on all fours, clawing for the dropped automatic. Doc nudged the weapon away with a toe.

The woman on the floor—not until he had seized her gun arm had Doc been sure it was a woman—looked up angrily and gritted, “Why didn't you just shoot me? That's what you tried before!”

She was a vision in suede. Not only were her gloves suede, but her pumps and the pert, saucy riding béret, a wealth of brown hair. Her frock was almost the gray of the suede, making, with her gray bag, an ensemble studied, yet extremely striking.

The garments set off some intriguing curves, and the picture was aided by a pair of exquisite eyes, a nose bordering on the retroussé, and rosebud lips, which trembled a little with rage and fear.

Doc gave the beauty an impersonal eye. Then he glanced at the floor.

On the boards of the floor lay the numerous particles which resembled black clover seed, just as Doc had left them—except in four spots, where there were scorched spots. It looked as if firecrackers had gone off on the floor.

The entrancing young woman got to her feet. In doing so she stepped on one of the clover seeds. There was a loud report as it exploded. She jumped and glared at Doc.

“What are those things?” she snapped, and put a hand up to adjust her luxuriant brown hair.

“Just a precaution to warn if any one was following me,” Doc told her.

The girl fingered in her hair, thrusting in her fingers, patting. Suddenly she took her hand down. She pointed it at Doc.

The hand held the twin to the small automatic which Doc had caused her to drop.

“Your precaution,” she said, “is not going to do you much good.”

The girl's arm was out rigid, the gun pointed at about the middle button of Doc's vest, and because her arm was tense, her gray sleeve was drawn off a white-gold wrist watch. He could hear the animated clicking of the watch, tiny as the sound was.

“This may be a mistake,” Doc told her.

“It will be a mistake if you make any move that I don't order,” she informed him.

Doc asked, “There has been a previous attempt to kill you? And you think I had a part in it?”

The girl seemed fascinated by the eerie quality of the bronze man’s eyes.

“I can’t prove it was you,” she said.

“Why not?”

“The man who shot at me had some kind of a silver-colored suit on,” she answered. “He had a silver mask, too.”

“When did this happen?”

“The attempt to shoot me? Yesterday. Yesterday evening about this time.” She moved her gun meaningfully, but it still pointed at the center of Doc’s vest. “I went right out and bought me two guns. And don’t get the idea I can’t use them. I was born and raised in Montana.”

“Why,” Doc asked her, “should a man in silver try to kill you?”

Her gun remained steady. “That is what I would like to know.”

Doc Savage studied her, as if trying to read her mind. Then, slowly, but firmly, he walked forward.

“I’ll shoot!” the girl shrieked.

But Doc came on and she did not fire, but retreated, biting her lips in vexation, until she was against the wall. The bronze man reached out and removed the gun from her hand without difficulty.

“You fool!” she flared. “You don’t know how near I came to killing you!”

“Your pea-shooter,” Doc advised her, “would not have dented my bulletproof vest.”

She had tucked her bag high under an arm, so that it had not fallen throughout the encounter. She did not resist when he took the bag. There was a folder of business cards inside. They read:

MISS LORNA ZANE  
Private Secretary to Paine L. Winthrop

“Lorna?” Doc asked.

“Miss Zane to you!” she snapped.

Silently, Doc extended the bag, after noting there was nothing else in it other than a metal powder box, almost full.

The girl took the bag, absently opened it—then apparently got a big idea. She flipped the powder case open and dashed the cosmetic flakes at Doc’s eye.

But she had not counted on the blinding speed with which the bronze man could move. He ducked and the powder, shooting over his shoulder, spread in a cloud over the room.

The girl tried to flee. Doc grasped her arm. She screamed from fright, since he could not have been hurting her.

From behind Doc came a loud report as a black pellet on the floor exploded. There was a second bang, a third.

Doc whirled.

Turning, the bronze man saw first the chair, big and heavy. It clubbed in a whining arc for his head. Doc threw head and shoulders back through the air, turned sidewise.

The chair missed him, snapped buttons off his vest, such was its speed, and broke itself into fragments on the floor.

“Blast me, you’re lightning in chains!” rapped the man who had swung the chair. “Blast me, lightning in chains!”

The man gave the impression of something operated by electricity. His words actually gobbled, such was their high-pressure speed. His arms moved as if driven by a clockwork which had lost its governor.

He stabbed a hand at his coat pocket. Weighty hang of his coat on that side indicated a gun.

Doc lunged. He was fast. But this other man had speed, too. He brought his left fist up in a terrific blow. It landed flush on Doc’s jaw.

The other waited expectantly. His mouth fell open and his eyes flew wide when Doc did not drop. He looked scared, but desperate.

“Incredible!” he exploded. “Incredible! Yes it is!”

He started another blow. But he was not as fortunate this time. Doc’s left hand drifted out, pushed, and the fellow upset. As he went down, Doc’s other hand grasped his coat pocket and wrenched. Half of the man’s coat was torn off, with it the pocket and the gun which it held.

“I’ll be damned!” the man exclaimed with staccato rapidity. “I’ll be damned! Yes, I will. Damned!”

Doc ignored him, for the girl was running to get the automatic which she had first held. When Doc swept across the floor and got the weapon first, she grimaced angrily and backed into a corner.

The man of staccato speech came up from the floor like a suddenly awakened cat. He bounced backward warily, as if apprehensive of encountering Doc again. His hands and lower lip trembled.

“Who are you?” he clipped. “Who are you? That’s what I want to know!”

“Doc Savage,” the bronze man said.

“That explains it,” gulped the other. “It sure does!”

Doc glanced at the girl. “Who is this fellow?” he asked.

“Harry Pace is the name,” answered the man for himself. “Yes, sir, Pace. People call me ‘Rapid.’ Rapid Pace. Get it? Efficiency, that’s Pace. You bet. Efficiency.”

“He,” the girl said dryly, “is Paine L. Winthrop’s efficiency expert.”

The young woman had undergone a marked change. She wore a somewhat sheepish expression.

“So you are Doc Savage,” she added. “I have heard so much about you that I began to think you were a legend.”

“Yes, sir, you’re almost a legend, Mr. Savage,” said “Rapid” Pace. “Yes, sir, a legend.”

“Why did you try to club me with that chair?” Doc asked him.

“A mistake,” Pace clattered. “All a mistake. You see, I was protecting Lorna. Efficiency on all occasions, that is me.”

Doc’s flake-gold eyes probed. “Have you seen any Silver Death’s-Heads around the shipyard?” he asked.

“Good night!” Rapid Pace stuttered. “What are you talking about?”

The floor seemed to jump a little under their feet. A loud thump accompanied this phenomenon. Several windows in the building evidently broke; they could hear the glass jangling.

“Bless me!” gulped Rapid Pace. “What was that?”

“Stay here,” Doc rapped, and whipped for the stairs.

Rapid Pace started after him, stepped on one of the explosive particles on the floor, gave a wild jump, and trembled furiously.

“Dear me!” he choked. “My nerves aren’t going to stand this! No, sir!”

“Stay with Miss Zane!” Doc directed. Then the bronze man vanished up the stairs, his going as silent and swift as the progress of a gale-swept tendril of fog.

Rapid Pace eyed Lorna Zane and said hurriedly, “Lorna, I’m worried. What is this all about?”

“I do not know,” said the girl grimly.

“If anything would happen to you, I think I—I’d die,” Pace said earnestly.

The young woman studied him. “I doubt it,” she said dryly.

“Now don’t joke, Lorna,” Pace pleaded. “You know I’m crazy about you. Yes, sir, crazy! Why don’t you like me?”

“You get scared too easy,” said Lorna. “You go off half cocked.”

“I can’t help it,” Pace groaned.

“And you talk too much,” Lorna continued. “You say everything twice, and you could get along with half as much conversation.”

“I’m trying to stop that, too,” Pace assured her.

“Well, we’ll see how you improve,” Lorna told him.

They strained their ears, but did not hear Doc Savage, for the bronze man was moving with an uncanny quiet through the upper floors of the building. He swung

down a corridor, angled right, and found the building was much larger than it had seemed; there were numerous hallways. In fact, the place was a labyrinth.

Doc came unexpectedly to a room which was very large. There were rows of desks, many—judging from the lack of wastebaskets and absence of other paraphernalia—not at present in use. Others were seeing service. Evidently the Winthrop Shipyards had once done more business than at present.

Across the room was a safe, huge and battered, with flakes of the black paint scaled off by long usage. But there was more wrong with the safe than scuffed paint.

The door of the strong box was off and reposed on the floor. Papers, the former contents of the safe, were scattered about. A bilious-looking cloud of smoke eddied above the wreckage, and there was the itching tang of burned nitro in the air.

The safe being blown open was undoubtedly what they had heard downstairs.

## Chapter 6

### MYSTERIOUS BLUEPRINTS

Doc Savage did not expend time examining the safe, but whipped to the left, found a door open, and went through. The hallway beyond led him several yards and turned, conveying him back the way he had come, toward the stairs and the front door.

An excited, staccato yell sounded. Rapid Pace's voice! A gun made an ugly roar. Lorna Zane shrilled something unintelligible.

Doc changed his course, found a window and got it up as silently as was consistent with slashing speed. More than a dozen feet, that drop below. He made it easily, tremendous leg muscles cushioning his landing.

An instant later, he was at a corner—it chanced to be the one nearest the gate.

Lorna Zane and Rapid Pace were running across the shipyard, striving to reach the shelter of a pile of steel ship frames. Neither looked back, but gave all attention to sprinting.

A gun whacked.

"I'm hit!" Pace grabbed his arm. "I'm hit!"

But he did not glance back, and both he and the girl dived behind the frames. Another shot slammed; the lead made a bellling noise on the steel frames.

"Get that damned girl!" yelled the voice of the Silver Death's-Heads member called Ull.

Feet pounded. Doc stepped from his concealment. The group in the weird silver garments and masks, which he had followed here, were running for the frame pile, guns ready.

Over the thin cloth of woven alloy metal which protected his body, Doc Savage wore a most unusual vest, a garment of many pockets, compartments rather, padded so that they were unnoticeable. From one of these, he extracted a metal vial, the padded interior of which held metallic objects about the size of cherries. He flung one of these ahead of the charging silver killers.

It struck. There was a blinding flash, a terrific crack of a noise which left ears ringing. Two silver men were upset by the blast.

Ull—he was prudently not leading the charge—yelled, "The girl must have grenades! Get her!"

In the gloom, it was impossible to tell from where the thrown object had come. They renewed the charge.

There was a second flash, and a rapping crash. This one knocked fully half of the group down. Even Ull was upset, and a bundle he was carrying flipped from his arms.

The bundle was long, round, azure-tinted at the edges, tied with cord and sealed with wax. A bundle of blueprints, undoubtedly.

Ull scrambled after the prints as if they meant his very life. Their merely getting out of his hands seemed to change his whole plan.

“Let the girl go!” he howled. “The big boss said to get these prints, and that’s our job. We do not want to lose them, after all the trouble we had getting them out of that safe. Back, men! We’ll leave here before some one calls the police.”

The silver men retreated, firing freely at the pile of massive steel frames. Scrambling over the keel of a partially completed small vessel, they made for the gate, working around a tractor, a mobile derrick and other machinery. One produced a flashlight and employed it to aid their flight.

They reached the gate. It was locked.

“Hell!” snarled Ull, and glared at the watchman, who was still unconscious. “I thought we left this unlocked!”

The fastening of the solid metal sheet was a bar affair, and this was jammed very tightly, but they got it back and shoved out into the water-front street. With frantic haste, they piled into their blue sedan.

“We’ll go to Gardner’s home next,” barked Ull.

The car engine backfired, came to life, and the machine wailed its tires on the fog-damp pavement, then rocketed away.

There were shadows close to the wall outside the gate, very dark shadows, and the men in the silver regalia had neglected to examine them. Thereby, they had missed an important discovery.

The layer of damp murk seemed to swell, then condense and materialize into a bronze figure of giant size. This occurred at a point no more than fifteen feet from where the sedan had been parked.

Doc, taking advantage of the night and the fog, had beaten the silver men to the gate, gotten through, jammed the lock by the handle outside, and concealed himself.

Ull’s bark, “We’ll go to Gardner’s home next,” had reached his ears.

Doc had taken a good deal of trouble to avoid showing himself, for it was well that the silver men continue thinking they had killed him at the apartment of the unfortunate flier, Gilbert Stiles.

Finding his two men, Monk and Ham—rescuing them if they were still alive; punishing their murderers if they were dead—was Doc’s immediate task. Eventually these silver men probably would lead him to his objective.

Once again, he could follow them by the radio directional device.

Doc did not take up the chase immediately. He ran back into the shipyard.

Lorna Zane came cautiously from behind the steel pile. Rapid Pace, once sure the coast was clear, bounded out like an excited cricket. He waved his arms and began to talk like a phonograph which had lost its governor, indicating a mere scratch on his shoulder.

“An outrage!” he yelled. “Yes, sir, an outrage! A mystery, too! A very black mystery! A most confounding affair——”

Doc ignored him, and asked the girl, “Do you know what was in that large safe upstairs?”

“I should know,” she replied. “I am the only one who has the combination.”

Doc gestured, “Come on!”

As they ran into the brick office building, Lorna Zane said angrily, “I do not understand this! Why should those men try to kill me?”

“What position do you hold here?” Doc asked her.

“I really manage the shipyard,” she explained, “although I am only secretary to Paine L. Winthrop.”

“That might explain it,” said Doc.

The young woman glanced sharply at the bronze man, a strange light in her entrancing eyes. “What do you mean?”

Doc Savage seemed not to have heard the question, and they soon reached the large room where the safe had been blown open.

“Will you see what is missing,” the bronze man requested, and indicated the rifled strong box.

Lorna Zane went through the strewn contents of the safe, picking up packages, dropping them, inspecting letters. The inventory did not take her long.

“Only one thing is missing,” she decided.

Doc watched her closely. “What is it?”

“A sealed roll, a blueprint which Paine L. Winthrop gave me nearly four months ago to lock in this safe for him,” said the attractive young woman.

“Blueprint of what?”

The girl hesitated. “There was something strange about that. I got explicit orders not to look at it, and it was sealed so no snooper could open it without that fact being apparent. I have no idea what it was.”

Doc nodded. “The blueprint seems to have a sinister importance.”

Lorna Zane bit her lip uncertainly, then said, “There was another strange thing. Last spring, Mr. Winthrop gave all his regular employees a five-months’ vacation with pay. That was queer, because he usually did not give vacations with pay. I came back four months ago.”

“When you came back, did you notice anything?” Doc asked.

“There had been a great deal of work done in the shipyard,” the girl replied. “But when I got back, whatever had been built was gone, and no workmen remained.”

“Come on,” Doc directed. “We’ll talk as we ride.”

“I wonder if the vacations could have anything to do with this,” Rapid Pace mumbled. “You know, I got one, too. Yes, it was swell!”

They retired to the bronze man's roadster; all three occupied the commodious front seat, and the machine lunged away. The buzzing radio directional device gave them a line on the blue sedan.

Doc drove swiftly, silently for a time, so as to decrease the lead of the sedan. The radio transmitter under the car of the silver men would only carry a few miles.

"Did Winthrop have the combination of the safe which held the mysterious blueprint?" Doc asked.

The girl shook her head. "No."

"Why is that?"

"That is what I was wondering," said Rapid Pace. "Yes, I was wondering."

In the gloom—it was much darker now—the girl's rather inviting lips compressed into an angry line.

"I virtually manage the shipyard," she snapped. "There are many details to which Paine L. Winthrop does not give close attention. The combination of that safe happens to be one of them."

The tires on the roadster were designed with a tread which prevented, as much as possible, the usual wail present at high speed. The engine was still silent, although turning at high speed. Sway and pitch of the car, the blur of lighted buildings on their side, told of their true momentum.

Doc Savage said suddenly, "Paine L. Winthrop is dead. Did you know that?"

The girl became very quiet in her corner of the seat. She separated her lips as if to speak, seemed to reconsider, and closed them. Slender hands tangled and untangled on her lap.

Rapid Pace started up in the seat at the words, groped for expression, and burst out, "The old boy's heart, eh? His heart. Sure, I knew it would get him sooner or later."

"It was not his heart," Doc corrected. "It was a three-inch high-explosive shell, fired from a spot as yet not definitely determined."

For once Rapid Pace did not repeat himself. "This is very mystifying," he muttered.

"Do either of you have any idea of what is behind it all?" Doc asked.

"Not I," said Rapid Pace.

"Nor I," murmured the girl.

Doc adjusted the directional apparatus knob. The procession of buzzing was louder. Doc's metallic features showed no trace of concern, but he did not resume the questioning.

He slowed the roadster, for the increasing loudness of the signals indicated he was coming up rapidly on the sender. Then he turned sharply to the right, the roadster pitching over ruts, muddy water flying from puddles. He stopped.

They were on a side road. Brush walled them in. The headlights glinted on blue. Doc slackened speed, rolled up windows, especially designed in the doors of the roadster, and which were of bulletproof glass. The car body, engine hood, radiator, were all protected by armor plate.

The machine ahead was the blue sedan, empty.

Using a flashlight, Doc located tracks. It seemed that the silver men had gone back along the road afoot. Following the trail closely, Doc progressed to the main thoroughfare and down that—footprints were faint in the fog damp on the pavement—to a drug store before which there was a taxi stand.

As a matter of precaution, the silver men had abandoned their easily recognized sedan.

Doc Savage secured, from the drug store clerk, a description of the taxi driver who frequented that stand. The driver was an elderly man, distinctive because of a great drooping white mustache.

The clerk had not seen the men who had taken the taxi, although he had heard the hack depart only a few minutes before.

Thirty minutes later, Doc Savage pulled the roadster to a stop before an elaborately modernistic building on the more elite section of Park Avenue. Instead of one doorman, there were two, and they were caparisoned in uniforms somewhat more distinctive than doormen elsewhere on this, possibly the most expensive street in the world.

“What now,” Lorna Zane asked curiously, eyeing the imposing structure.

“I am going to leave you here,” Doc told her.

Lorna nipped her lower lip with white teeth. “Haven’t I anything to say about that?”

“Your life is in danger,” Doc told her. “You will be safe here.”

“What about me?” Rapid Pace clattered. “Yes, what about me?”

“You stay in the car,” Doc directed.

The bronze man escorted Lorna Zane into the building. They received much attention, the doormen collaborating efficiently in ushering them inside. There was a waiting room, a bewildering resplendence of chromium, enamel and colored rugs.

A stately, exquisitely formed young woman ushered them to comfortable chairs. She was a blonde. A redhead, equally as shapely, brought them a tray of iced drinks. A young lady with black tresses popped up with the most fashionable magazines.

“*Whew!*” said Lorna. “What is this, anyway?”

Doc did not answer, but watched another young woman who was approaching. The attendants who had waited upon Doc and Lorna were striking, but they were completely overshadowed by the newcomer. This entrancing Venus had bronze hair of a hue remarkably like Doc’s.

“Hello, Pat,” Doc greeted the bronze-haired beauty. “This is Lorna Zane. Lorna, this is Pat Savage, my cousin.”

Pat shook hands with Lorna, then waved an airy hand.

“This is the first time you have been here, Doc,” she said. “I want to show you the gymnasium upstairs. It’s a knockout. And I have over thirty beauty operators at work, all highly skilled. I already have all the fashion leaders on my list, waiting to have their youthful figures restored. How I am going to reduce some of those heavy-weights is a mystery to me, but they pay me in advance.”

“Busy?” Doc asked.

“Busy?” Pat laughed. “Say, this business of running a combination beauty salon and gymnasium is no joke. You bet I’m busy.”

At this point, a customer departed—a fat man whose countenance was still flushed from a facial, and whose sparse hair had undoubtedly been curled.

“Men on my clientele, too,” Pat smiled. “But I do not know whether they come to have their looks improved, or to flirt with my snappy assistants.”

“Want to help me, Pat?” Doc asked.

“Help *you*?” Pat said cheerfully. “Do I want to fly the Atlantic? Do I want to stand up and get shot at? Do I want to go in for parachute jumping? All of those are safer than helping you.”

“Do you want to help?” Doc repeated.

“Sure,” Pat laughed. “Who is trying to kill you now?”

“Miss Lorna Zane, here, is the one in danger this time,” Doc explained, and briefly outlined what had occurred.

Pat Savage listened with profound interest. Pat liked excitement, and had aided Doc on other occasions. She had even tried to join Doc’s group of assistants, had been turned down because Doc considered it no life for the so-called gentler sex, and had started this elaborate beauty establishment to keep herself occupied.

Rapid Pace was walking rapidly back and forth beside the roadster when Doc joined him down in the street.

“I am puzzled,” clipped the high-pressure efficiency expert. “Yes, deeply puzzled. What I want to know is this: How are we going to find those silver devils?”

“Through an order their leader, Ull, gave,” Doc said.

“What was the order?” Pace questioned swiftly.

“Something about going to an individual named Gardner,” Doc told him.

“Oh, oh!” gulped Pace. “Gardner? Bedford Burgess Gardner, did you say?”

“Who is Bedford Burgess Gardner?” Doc countered.

“Gardner is owner of Transatlantic Lines, the ocean line which was Paine L. Winthrop’s chief rival until lately, when there has been talk of the two companies merging,” said Pace, using what for him was an extraordinarily long sentence. “Gardner is——”

“We will go to Gardner’s home,” Doc said briskly.

“I happen to know where he lives,” said Pace. “Yes, I know. He has a lolapaloosa of a place. A lolapaloosa!”

The “lolapaloosa” was a cluster of white buildings which stood like big dice atop a green hill that shouldered up impressively from the Hudson’s tranquil blue ribbon some miles north of New York City.

The mansion itself was palatial, modeled after the lines of Mount Vernon, with tall white columns. Near by were smaller buildings in imitation of old slave huts. The stables were large, and back of them a private race track looped around a private flying field on which stood a hangar, also ingeniously Colonial.

The river edge at the foot of the hill boasted boat houses and a seaplane hangar, also Colonial.

There was no fog this far north—it seemed to be present only along the sea—and the sky was comparatively free of clouds, so that moonlight spilled down, giving Doc Savage and Rapid Pace sufficient illumination to look over the ground.

Pace said, “A lolapaloosa! Didn’t I tell you? Yes, sir, a——”

“Quiet,” said Doc, who was getting tired of the efficiency expert’s repetitive manner of speaking.

They had left the roadster a short distance from the palatial estate and they were approaching on foot. They were on a driveway which was banked on either side by black, ominous brush.

A small red point of light appeared ahead. They used more caution, came close and perceived a taxi. The tail light illuminated the license—a New Jersey plate.

“Probably the machine the silver men took when they abandoned their sedan in New Jersey,” Doc imparted.

Doc rounded the cab, saw it was empty, and they advanced through the shrubbery until they came to a stretch of lawn which was close-cropped and somewhat glassy with dew. Beyond was the house—ample, impressive, almost unnaturally white.

“Makes me think of a bone,” Pace shivered. “Yes, sir, a white bone.”

“What do you know about Bedford Burgess Gardner?” Doc asked.

“A mysterious person,” said Pace. “A very mysterious person.”

“What do you mean?”

“He rarely gets out,” Pace explained. “Offhand, I cannot recall any one who has seen him. He does not keep offices downtown, and all his business is transacted by telephone. They say he is a strange person who does not like any one around him. They even say his servants do not live here—that he makes them leave every evening before dark.”

“Wealthy?” Doc queried.

“Within the last year his company has merged with other shipping concerns until he is the most powerful shipping magnate in America, unless I am mistaken,” said Pace.

“Ever see him?” Doc asked.

“No, sir,” said Pace. “Didn’t I just tell you that very few people have ever seen the old codger?”

“Old?”

“An old wreck, from what I hear,” said Pace. “They say——”

What “they said” never did come out, however. From the white house exploded a shout—hollow because it was inside; guttural with fright.

The cry repeated. A door banged open, spilling white light. It had opened on a small balcony, some fifteen feet up on the side of the mansion.

A figure reeled through the door. It was a man who made a grotesque form against the glitter from within. His age must have been near forty, and his face, even from that distance, radiated terror. He wore the uniform of a taxi driver.

The man was fleeing, obviously. He endeavored to get over the balcony railing.

Then a gun banged hollowly inside the house. Bullet impact kicked the taxi driver around so that he fell across the balcony rail, teetered a moment, then was carried over by momentum. There was a concrete sidewalk below and the driver struck that squarely on top of his head—which would have killed him, had the bullet not done so already.

## Chapter 7

### THE INDIAN'S HEAD

Doc Savage heard a fluttering sound beside him, looked around and saw that Rapid Pace seemed to be in the grip of a violent chill. His shaking was oscillating a bough of the bush against which they stood. Suddenly, Pace dived for the nearest cover, disappearing like a frightened rabbit.

Doc ran for the house, angling to the right, keeping low so that he could not be glimpsed by the gunman inside the balcony door. The house seemed to grow in proportions as he came near it; the structure was very large.

A side door which he approached was locked, but Doc's thin metal probe gave him silent, quick admission. The darkness inside swallowed him.

A few feet inside, he turned into a room where the carpet was thick, soft. He caught breathing sounds, uneasy, jerking. After a few seconds, feet shuffled on the carpet.

Doc moved like a wraith; his tendon-wrapped hands lashed out and closed on arms. The struggle was brief. There was a soft thump, evidently of a gun falling. Doc released his captive, leaped back, got the gun, then found a light switch and clicked it on.

He studied the individual who was revealed in the brilliant flood.

It was a man, a weird figure, stooped almost double. The man had a black beard, slightly larger than a Vandyke, which made his lower face a dark bundle of fur. The eyes were squinted to the thinnest of slits; not even the color of the orbs were distinguishable.

The bent, bearded figure scuttled back, stooped over, almost falling, but managed to pick up a heavy cane which leaned against a chair. Then he glared at Doc from his slitted eyes.

Silence persisted for a few seconds. Then the thick beard bobbed as the other nodded.

"Doc Savage," he said in a coarse, quavering voice. "I've seen you somewhere before. Or maybe it was your picture."

Doc ejected cartridges from the gun—it was an automatic. None of the shells had been fired. He threw the cartridges out of an open window and placed the weapon on a stand near a telephone. Doc never employed a gun, although he was a skilled marksman if need arose.

"What's going on here?" he asked. "Who are you?"

The bearded man answered the last question first. "I am Gardner."

"What happened?" Doc repeated.

The coarse voice quavered, "I shall tell that to the police."

"I," Doc pointed out, "have a police commission."

“This is Westchester County,” Bedford Burgess Gardner growled. “You may have a New York commission, but it will do you no good here.”

“It is a State Trooper commission,” Doc advised.

Gardner thought that over, while the cane trembled a little under his nervous weight.

“You go to hell!” he suggested finally. “And also clear out of here! I do not like people around me at night.”

There was noise outside, footsteps, and Rapid Pace’s voice called out nervously. When Doc answered him, Pace came in.

Gardner pointed a shaking hand at Pace and grated, “You get out, too!”

Pace asked, “Who killed the taxi driver?”

Doc eyed Gardner. “Who did?”

“I don’t know,” Gardner wailed. “I don’t know anything about it!”

“That’s going to make it tough for you,” said Pace. “Yes, sir!”

Gardner lifted his cane and started for Pace. Pace leaped back, and Doc was forced to move aside to get out of his way.

Changing his course suddenly, Gardner moved for the door.

Nerves overwrought at what he considered an intrusion of his home, he left the room in haste.

Doc, disappointed at the results of the inquiry, started for the hallway, followed by Pace.

There was no sign of Gardner now—until they heard sounds from above, scuffling, scraping sounds.

They ran up a flight of stairs. Doc had his flashlight out. A moment later they dived through a door into the room that faced on the balcony.

On the floor lay the cane Gardner had carried. Near it were wet crimson spots. A chair was upset.

“Been a fight,” said Pace. “A fight, sure! But was it the taxi driver, or was Gardner being seized. Is this Gardner’s blood, or the taxi driver’s? That’s the question.”

Doc Savage lunged forward, swooped, and picked up a shiny limp fragment from the floor. It was a bit of silver cloth, ragged, as if torn from one of the weird garments of the mysterious silver men.

“They got Gardner,” Pace muttered. “Or did they?”

Doc Savage glided to the nearest door, opened it and went through.

Pace, slow in following, reached the door and seemed frightened by the darkness beyond. He squirmed uncertainly, his habitual nervousness even more pronounced.

The upshot of his hesitancy was that Pace, instead of following Doc, went back upstairs and got the gun which Doc had taken from Gardner.

Then Pace eased from the room and through the darkened house, the automatic ready in his hand, a grim expression on his features.

Some moments later, in the murk beside one of the imitation slave houses which stood near the white mansion, a sinister meeting occurred. There was an elaborate garden about the slave cabins, with tall flowering plants arrayed in neat rows. These formed an ideal concealment for furtive comings and goings.

Two silver men were just being joined by a third.

“Ull?” one of the two whispered suspiciously, drawing a gun.

“Yes, it’s me—Ull,” hissed the newcomer.

“Did you see who was breaking them doors down?” asked the other, replacing his gun in its holster.

“It’s Doc Savage,” grated Ull.

“But I thought——”

“I know,” Ull snarled. “He must have avoided that grenade at the flier’s apartment. He is not dead.”

The first man swore quietly, briefly. “Then what are we going to do? If we hadn’t shot that taxi driver when he tried to run——”

Ull considered, a harridan figure in his all-enveloping disguise of silver which shimmered slightly in the moonlight.

“Everything else has turned out all right,” he said finally. “The safest thing for us to do is leave here. The rest of our party went on ahead, did they not?”

“They did,” said the first.

Ull gave the fellow a shove. “Then get a move on. We will join them.”

The three furtive figures had taken scarcely a step when they were brought up by a voice. It came from the slave hut window.

“You fools!” said this new speaker. “You are overlooking a chance.”

Two of the silver men started violently and wrenched out weapons. Ull, grabbing at their arms, swore in an angry whisper.

“This is the master!” he grated.

The other two obviously had never heard the voice before, but at Ull’s words, they seemed profoundly impressed.

“You mean—the big shot who is behind all this?” one stuttered.

Ull ignored him and addressed the window behind which the unseen speaker lurked. “You say we are overlooking a chance? What is it? And what are you doing here?”

“An opportunity to get rid of Doc Savage,” said the voice from the window murk. “And never mind what I am doing here.”

“But it is too risky to rush him,” Ull protested. “The man is a walking storehouse of scientific weapons. Twice as many men as I have could not overcome him.”

The tone of the concealed mastermind took on an edge. “You do not underrate an enemy, do you?”

“Not if I can help it,” said Ull. “And I have seen this fellow work. To rush him would be too dangerous.”

“I am going to throw you a package,” said the voice inside the cabin. “Catch it!”

An instant later, a small packet sailed out into the moonlight and Ull cupped it successfully in a silver-gloved palm. The parcel seemed to be a bottle, carefully wrapped, for it gurgled as it hit Ull’s hand.

“Come close under the window,” the unseen chief directed. “I want to give you explicit directions.”

Ull crept near, and their voices dropped so that even the two who waited near by in the garden, the two who had been with Ull, could not hear what was said.

These two kept eyes avidly on the window, for they had never seen this mysterious chief, this sinister one of great ingenuity, who was their real leader. Nor did they see him now. The fellow did not show himself.

Inside the big white house, Doc Savage was pushing his search for some sign of Gardner or the silver men. Doc did not use undue haste, for that, in the perilous career which he led, was synonymous with risking sudden death.

He heard sounds after a time—some one moving. He waited. The prowler seemed to be coming from outdoors. The bronze man used his sensitive ears to their fullest, noting particularly the number of nervous moves which the skulker made. This identified the man.

“Pace,” he said quietly.

Rapid Pace emitted a loud gasp, and struck a match. He seemed relieved at sight of Doc.

“I have been looking for you,” he gulped. “Yes, sir, looking for you. I was outside.”

“Where did you get the gun?” Doc questioned.

Pace glanced down at his weapon. “It is the one Gardner had. I got it. I had no cartridges, of course, but just holding the gun kind of makes me feel more—well, brave.”

“Hear anything of Gardner?” Doc asked.

Pace denied this, and they continued their hunt in company. The efficiency expert seemed never to run out of conversation, and he began whispering his personal opinion in the darkness until Doc reminded him that the noise would make an excellent target.

“I think Gardner is behind all this,” Pace breathed, and fell silent.

They moved outdoors, kept to the shadow-banked side of the house and moved to the right, toward the spot where the body of the murdered taxi driver had fallen. Doc peered around a corner.

For an instant, the bronze man’s weird trilling note came into being. Hardly audible, it trailed up and down the musical scale, fantastic in its vague similitude to the cadence

of an exotic tropical bird. It had been brought forth by surprise.

Over the prone form of the slain cab driver crouched a second silver figure. This individual held a glass bottle; he was sprinkling the contents on the clothing of the corpse.

Doc stepped into view. The silver man looked up, bleated and threw the bottle. Doc whipped back to let it go past. A few drops of liquid, showering from the bottle as it gyrated, spilled on the bronze man's coat.

Doc promptly wrenched the coat off, lunging for the silver figure as he did so.

The silver man ran. But his pace was wild with haste, his metallic garment slightly clumsy, and he stumbled. Down on all fours he slapped. Twisting his head over his shoulder, he saw that Doc was almost upon him.

Beside the silver man was a low basement window. Without thought of glass cuts, he rolled into the window, knocked the sash out with head and shoulders and vanished within.

Doc Savage flung his coat aside and rapped at Pace, "Keep away from that coat. Don't touch the body, either!"

Pace barked, "But what——"

"Contact poison!" Doc shouted. "An acid and some sort of toxin in solution. A trick to kill whoever touched the corpse!"

The last words were lost in a crashing noise as Doc kicked the basement sash out and dived inside. He hit the concrete floor lightly, let the rebound carry him to one side.

Flame plunged through the basement murk, a yard-long tongue; powder bellow accompanied it. The bullet made a hammering sound against the wall.

Doc, seeing darkness with his hands, found a chair with one leg missing. He shied it at the gun flame source, but got only the noise of the chair striking. The gunman had shifted position.

Came a dull *pat-pat-pat* noise and Doc, looking up through the window, saw Rapid Pace's head and shoulders recede in the moonlight. The efficiency expert was living up to his name—he was fleeing across the lawn. The situation had gotten the best of his nerves.

Doc advanced under cover of the sound. He passed the spot where the powder fumes were thickest, and made for the opposite side of the basement. The quarry would be over there somewhere.

Bending low, Doc drifted a hand over the concrete floor. Like most basements, this one was covered with a film of gritty dust. The stuff did not grind audibly under Doc's shoe soles, because they were of rubber—not ordinary rubber, but the soft sponge variety. But the grit would make sound under ordinary shoes, even rubber heels of the prosaic type.

As Doc had hoped, the grit gave the silver man away. Doc heard the fellow drift slowly nearer through the gloom. When the man was near, the bronze giant leaped.

Doc did not flail blows or try to hold the man. He simply found the fellow's neck and grasped the back of it with corded fingers.

Doc Savage was skilled in many lines, but easily his greatest knowledge was in the field of surgery, of human anatomy. He knew the location of certain nerve centers on which pressure, properly applied, produced a temporary paralysis.

The silver man went limp under Doc's fingers.

Doc called through the smashed window, "Pace! Everything is all right!"

It was not a desire for Pace's company that moved Doc to call. The efficiency expert, with his aggravating habit of repeating half of what he said, was as tiresome a companion as Doc could recall encountering. Pace was shy on nerve, as well.

But Doc wanted to keep all threads of this weird mystery of the silver man as closely at hand as possible. And Pace might be one of the threads.

Rapid Pace appeared at the basement window, after giving the poisoned corpse a wide berth. Another man might have been sheepish over the recent show of cowardice, but not Pace.

"I was looking for another weapon," said Pace. "You know, a club or something."

Doc said nothing, but used his flashlight to locate a switch which filled the basement with light. Then he went to the man in silver and stripped off the hooded mask.

A rather square, stupid face was revealed. The eyes were ugly, the mouth twisted in a perpetual sneer.

"A typical crook," said Rapid Pace. "Yes, typical."

Doc searched the fellow, but found nothing to indicate the man's name. The fellow, unable to move or speak because of the weird paralysis, could only glare.

Doc turned him over, adjusted the thick neck and exerted pressure with skilled finger tips. The results were amazing. The victim began to squirm in an endeavor to sit up.

"Lemme go!" he snarled. Fear rasped in his coarse voice, and he stared at Doc's hands, at the sinews that were like bundled cables.

"There are two things I want to know," Doc told him quietly.

"T'hell wit' yer!" snarled the thug.

"What happened to my two aides, Monk and Ham? Where are they now?" Doc spoke slowly, and the ominous undertones of his great voice caused the listener on the floor to cringe involuntarily. "That is the first thing I want to know. The second is: What is behind all of this melodramatic business of the silver disguises?"

The evil-faced man wet his lip nervously, hesitated, then snarled, "I dunno a t'ing, s'help me!"

"Hit him, Mr. Savage," suggested Rapid Pace. "His type cannot stand physical pain."

"Yer been takin' in de movies," sneered the other. "I can take all yer got."

“Hold him, Mr. Savage,” Pace urged. “I’ll try busting him one on the nose. Hey—what——”

Doc, lashing out an arm, upset Pace. Simultaneously, the basement quaked with gun sound. A shot had been fired from the window—not at Pace, but at Doc himself.

The slug smashed against Doc’s bulletproof vest. Despite his great physique, air was driven from his lungs and he was half turned.

A long lunge carried him to the shelter of a cellar pillar. Rapid Pace was safe where he had been propelled by Doc’s shove.

There was movement at the window. A pistol came gyrating through the air and landed on the lap of the man Doc had been questioning. No words were spoken. None were needed. The fellow clutched the gun avidly and wheeled in Doc’s direction.

The bronze man seemed, for a moment, caught between two fires. If he left the shelter of the pillar, he would be in range from the window—and the marksman would be intelligent enough to shoot at his head this time.

The thug on the floor heaved up for a deliberate aim.

Doc flattened closer to the pillar. His right hand seemed to vanish, so swiftly did it move. It dipped into his coat and came out with the only weapon at hand—the collapsible grappling hook with its silken cord. The cord was wound tightly around the hook, adding weight to it. Doc threw the device, threw it with all the violence he could muster from tremendous thews. The gunman’s hand was not a difficult target; any baseball pitcher of ability should have been able to hit it.

The thug howled. His gun, knocked from his hand, skittered toward Rapid Pace.

The man on the floor peered abruptly at his hands. It was as if he were surprised by something he had discovered on the somewhat grimy paws. Then he began to scream. His voice held terror.

Pace reached for the gun which had been tossed to the thug.

“Don’t!” Doc rapped—and Pace jerked his hand back, stared stupidly at Doc, then at the thug on the floor, and his eyes flew wide with horror.

The thug was becoming mottled of face. He made gagging sounds. A hideous foam came to his lips, and he twisted with a convulsive violence.

“That gun—stuff off corpse—on handle!” he choked.

Doc took a chance, leaped and broke the one electric light bulb with a snap of his hand. Darkness descended. There was no shooting from the window, the person outside evidently having departed.

Doc wheeled back and seized the stricken man, then moved him to the shelter of the pillar.

“Your chance to get back at them,” Doc said rapidly. “The grip of the gun that was tossed to you was smeared with some of the poison you were putting on the body. It was a trick to kill you, to shut you up, just on the chance that you would fail to get me.”

“Damn—damn Ull!” the groveling man choked. “What you—want know?”

“Where are my two assistants, Monk and Ham?” Doc rapped.

“Indian’s Head,” mumbled the man.

“Where?” Doc asked.

The stricken one was having difficulty with his words. The strange poison seemed to work with uncanny speed.

“The Indian’s Head—both there,” he labored.

“What is this Indian’s Head?” Doc demanded.

But the man seemed not to hear.

“Ull—not brains—back of Silver Death’s-Heads,” he said, and the words seemed to come from a bag which had leaked almost empty.

“Who is the chief?” Doc snapped.

There was no answer.

The bronze man made a brief examination. He was careful not to touch the hands with which the other had gripped the gun tossed to him from the window.

“Dead,” Doc said.

## Chapter 8

### THE BIG MYSTERY

Heavy silence hung in the gloomy basement. Outside, there was no sound but the faint shuffle of night breeze in the shrubbery. In the distance a dog moon-bayed mournfully, then, far up the Hudson, a boat whistle blew a deep note.

Doc Savage glided to the window, careful not to disturb the broken glass on the floor inside. He heard nothing. A quick glance showed him no one.

The bronze man did not go outside through the window, for that would be inviting a shot. Instead, he ascended stairs, worked through hallways and let himself out through a rear door. He began a search.

He found no one. The gunman who had fired through the window had disappeared—not a difficult task, since there had been time for him to flee.

Back in the house, Doc addressed Rapid Pace. “Do you want to stay here and watch things until the police arrive?”

Rapid Pace shuddered so violently that he almost fell down. “Stay with these two dead men?” he gulped. “Not me! No sir!”

Doc, however, had decided the efficiency expert was a liability.

“There will probably be much more violence before I find my two men, Monk and Ham,” he pointed out.

Pace groaned, “I shall take my chances with you. Yes, with you. You seemed to bear a charmed life. Just being around you braces my——”

“*Sh-h-h*,” admonished Doc. “Listen!”

The breeze made leaves flutter outside the basement window; the dog was still baying the moon in the far distance. *Chunk!* The sound was dull, as if soft dough had been dropped on a board. *Chunk!* It came again.

“The Silver Death’s-Heads haven’t g-gone!” Pace stuttered.

“Come!” Doc rapped, and swung up the stairs that led to the second floor.

They heard the sound again—more of a hollow thumping this time. It came from the front, from a bedroom. Doc swung into the chamber, across it, and opened a closet door.

A man fell out. He was bound and gagged, and had been making the noises by thumping the door with his head. Doc untied him and extracted the gag.

The man was a powerful, handsome fellow in his early thirties. His hair was dark and thick, a bit shiny with a pleasantly aromatic oil, and the sideburns in front of his ears were cut, not squarely across, but slanting. His complexion was as perfect as a woman’s; his eyelashes were long. But his strapping physique kept him from seeming unnaturally pretty.

Rapid Pace took one look at the stranger and groaned, “Hugh McCoy, of all people!”

“You have seen him before?” Doc demanded.

“I have seen entirely too much of him,” Pace said gloomily. “He has been hanging around the shipyard a lot lately. Er—Lorna Zane was the attraction. Yes, she was the attraction.”

Hugh McCoy managed to get up on his feet, although his muscles apparently were cramped. He rubbed and kneaded himself briskly. It became apparent that his suit was of most expensive tailoring.

“What happened to you?” Doc asked him.

McCoy studied the bronze man briefly, then said, “Some one leaped onto me from behind and overpowered me.”

“Who was it?” Doc asked.

“It must have been Bedford Burgess Gardner,” McCoy snapped.

Doc indicated the door. “We will talk while moving. Two of my men have been seized by Silver Death’s-Heads, and everything but their rescue is secondary.”

“But you haven’t got a clue to where your two men may be,” Rapid Pace protested. “That man in the basement did gasp something about an Indian’s head, but I do not see how that is going to help you.”

Doc ignored that, said, “Hurry!” and they clattered down the stairs and out into the night, swung boldly across the lawn and reached Doc’s roadster without anything happening.

The machine chased the white funnels of its own headlights through the night, like a quiet black ghost hurtling after some lustrous siren.

“You saw Gardner attack you?” Doc queried of Hugh McCoy.

McCoy shook his head. “It was dark. I saw no one. But it must have been Gardner, because there was no one else in the house. The black-whiskered old devil!”

“Any idea why you were attacked?”

“To get me out of the way,” McCoy said, and shrugged. “I know of no other reason.”

“I wonder,” Pace put in.

McCoy stared coldly at the efficiency expert. Pace returned the frosty look with interest. It was apparent that no love existed between these two.

“Just what are you driving at?” McCoy asked harshly.

Rapid Pace snapped, “Your story sounds fishy to me! Yes, fishy!”

McCoy’s features darkened in the back glow of the car headlights. He made one hand into a hard square fist and drew it back wrathfully.

“I’ll cave your face in!” Then he lowered the fist. “No, I won’t either. You’re just a sorehead. Peeved because Miss Zane has gone out with me a few times, aren’t you?”

“Let’s not bring Miss Zane into it,” Pace suggested stiffly.

Doc nursed the roadster over a bridge, where their speed caused the machine to travel a score of feet with all wheels off the ground.

“Drop the personalities,” he suggested. “McCoy, what were you doing at Gardner’s house to-night?”

“I am a financial relations counsel, by profession,” McCoy began. “I——”

“A general four-flusher would be more like it,” Rapid Pace sneered.

“Shut up or I’ll crown you!” McCoy snapped. “Mr. Savage, I am a financial relations counsel.”

“Just what does that mean?” Doc interposed.

“I give corporations and business concerns financial advice,” explained McCoy. “Sometimes, I take charge of disputes between companies, serving as intermediary to get things settled amicably. For instance, take the currently discussed merger between Gardner’s shipping company, and the steamship concern and shipyard owned by Paine L. Winthrop. Gardner called me in as consultant. I looked over the situation and advised the merger. Winthrop, however, opposed it. I was at Gardner’s house to-night discussing the matter.”

“Did you,” Doc queried, “know that Paine L. Winthrop was murdered late this afternoon.”

“Hell, no!” Hugh McCoy said feelingly. “Who killed him?”

“The Silver Death’s-Heads, undoubtedly,” Doc answered.

McCoy shook his head slowly. “How was it done?”

“With a shell from a three-inch cannon,” Doc replied.

“Listen,” McCoy exploded. “Are you serious?”

“Do you,” Doc asked, “know anything about this mystery?”

“Not a thing!” McCoy said vehemently.

Doc Savage seemed on the point of putting another question, but instead, he applied the brakes, bringing the roadster to a sharp stop. They were approaching one of the bridges which led over the Harlem River into Manhattan.

A squad of policemen with riot guns and tear-gas bombs was barring their way.

A burly sergeant advanced, recognized Doc Savage, stepped back hastily and motioned the car on. But Doc tarried to ask questions. He wanted to know what happened.

“Why the blockading party at the bridge, officer?” he queried.

“It’s them blasted Silver Death’s-Heads,” said the cop. “We have all the bridges an’ ferries an’ the subways blocked. We’ll get ’em.”

“Have the silver men done anything since the murder of Paine L. Winthrop?” Doc questioned.

“Done anything!” the policeman exploded. “They’ve been running wild! They robbed a string of movie theaters, blew open a bank vault, and looted three jewelry stores. They worked like an army. They’ve got gas masks inside them silver hoods they wear, and they’ve got bulletproof vests, machine guns and gas grenades. They’re the worst thing this town has ever seen.”

“Any trace of where they go to?” Doc asked.

“No—nor where they come from, either,” groaned the officer. “Except maybe it must be somewhere in the East River water-front district. After their jobs, they seem to flee in that direction.”

Doc Savage drove on. Signs that the law enforcement agencies of the city were on edge was evident at point after point. Instead of one traffic cop on duty at a corner, there were two, or even three, and an unusual number of radio cars were prowling.

“But we have been chasing the silver men all evening,” Rapid Pace remarked. “It does not seem possible that they could have committed the robberies the policeman told about. No sir.”

“The organization must be large,” Doc told him. “We have been following only a small portion of the gang.”

“Where are we going?” Hugh McCoy asked abruptly.

Instead of replying, Doc Savage swung the roadster up before an all-night drug store which displayed a telephone sign, entered and thumbed through the directories.

Pace and McCoy, following him in, were interested observers.

In the directory, Doc found numerous concerns which used the name “Indian Head.” He moved a metallic finger down the list.

“We will try this one,” he said, and stopped his finger at:

#### Indian Head Club

Pace squinted, then asked, “But why this particular one?”

“Notice the address,” Doc suggested. “It is in the Brooklyn water-front district, across from the Manhattan side of the East River where the crooks have been disappearing. On Wallow Street, to be exact. After their crimes, they ferried in some manner across to the Brooklyn shore.”

“Have you,” Hugh McCoy asked abruptly, “any objection to my doing my bit to aid you? I have a personal interest in this matter.”

Doc’s flake-gold eyes were inscrutable. “Personal interest?” he queried.

“I am on Gardner’s pay-roll,” McCoy elaborated. “I do not like to have anything put over on me. Gardner has been acting uneasily of late, which leads me to think something is queer. If anything is wrong, I would be involved—in the minds of the public at least. If I have been working for a crook, I want to be known as one of those who helped put him behind bars.”

“You think Gardner is a crook?” Doc asked sharply.

“Gardner might be the leader of the Silver Death’s-Heads,” McCoy reminded.

Wallow Street was a narrow, teeming alley full of odors and gloom. The thoroughfare was less than half a dozen blocks long, with the first two blocks, the two up on the hill, lined with tenements of the lowest type. The other four blocks housed sail lofts, warerooms, and shops dealing in ship supplies.

Wallow Street ended at the water front, where piers bulked gloomily and the polluted water of the East River sloshed and eddied. At this hour, the section down by the water was deserted, while farther up in the tenement stretch, wretched inhabitants draped themselves on fire escapes and roof-tops to escape the fog-soaked warmth.

Rapid Pace and Hugh McCoy were silent as Doc guided the roadster into Wallow Street. They were still showing a coldness toward each other, neither having addressed a word to the other since entering the city.

Doc pulled into a side street, stopped the roadster and motioned McCoy and Pace back when they moved to get out.

“You two stay here,” he directed.

Then the smelly darkness seemed to absorb the bronze giant. There was no sound to indicate which way he had gone. Pace and McCoy watched the corners, where street lights were brilliant, expecting to see the bronze man. But, to their amazement, he did not appear.

They should have watched the roof line along the street. They might have seen Doc Savage poise for an instant against the fog-gorged sky, after he had climbed a heavy metal drain pipe.

There was no sign of life on the roof-tops, but Doc went forward as warily as if he were stalking an abnormally alert sentinel. The roofs were level, except for one stretch a floor lower than the rest, an obstacle which Doc bridged by use of his grapple and silk line.

Advancing to the forward edge of the roof, he employed a thin periscope device to scrutinize the street. This apparatus functioned remarkably well in the darkness.

## INDIAN HEAD CLUB

The sign was almost below, the letters arrayed around a gaudy likeness of a redskin brave's head. The building was as devoid of lights as the black, sombre warehouses on either side.

Doc retreated. Buildings such as this usually had roof hatches. Doc searched and found one, and pressed an ear to it. He listened for a long time, but heard nothing from within.

Doc did not enter the hatch, but moved to the rear of the building, slid down his grapple cord with the hook affixed behind a chimney, and reached a window.

The glass pane in this was large. Doc's flashlight came out, protruded a beam little thicker than a lead pencil, and he examined the edge of the glass where it was puttied in. He dug very carefully with his penknife.

What he eventually found was so well concealed that it almost evaded his intent scrutiny. Affixed in the putty was a hair-fine wire of copper. Had he carelessly tried to remove the putty, the wire would have been broken, setting off an alarm somewhere.

The discovery was proof that his caution was not wasted. The roof hatch, of course, would be fitted with another alarm.

With a penknife Doc went to work, carefully uncovering the fine wire, locating its terminals. He twisted them together, forming a short-circuit that would keep the alarm system electromagnets energized. Without this short-circuiting, he would not have been able to remove the glass without actuating the ingenious device.

He now removed the glass.

Before entering, Doc clambered back up the roof. He ran boldly to the hatch, gave it a wrench, and it came open.

Doc whipped back to his grapple cord, slid down to the window he had operated upon, freed the grapple with a jerk, and rolled it up and pocketed it as he eased into the Indian Head Club.

He advanced silently, eased through a door—and found proof that his precautions were wise.

Four grim figures in silver crouched at the end of the hallway, scarcely discernible in the vague light which came down through the open hatch. Doc took a chance on the floor squeaking, and crept a bit closer.

“Be sure the silencers are on your guns,” said a coarse whisper.

“Why don’t the guy who opened that hatch come on down?” grated another.

Perhaps a minute of grim waiting ticked by.

“Two of you go back and watch Savage’s two buddies,” breathed the coarser whisper.

Two silver men detached from the group and eased along the hallway and down a flight of stairs. They did not see Doc Savage, for the bronze man was moving ahead of them.

Doc was doing a strange thing as he glided along; in one of his hands was a small can with a perforated top, not unlike the containers in which talcum powder is often sold. From time to time he sprinkled some of the contents on the floor behind him. The powder was dark, and did not show up in the darkness.

The two silver men reached a door, shoved it open and thumbed on flashlights. A glance within seemed to satisfy them.

“They’ll never get away,” said one. “Come on. Let’s take a look at the back door. I don’t like that business of the roof hatch opening. Somebody might’ve done that to cover up while they got inside some other way.”

“Nobody could get in without setting off an alarm,” the other snorted skeptically.

“We’ll take a look, anyhow.”

The two men retreated.

They were hardly around a corner when Doc appeared at the door, got it open and passed through. His flashlight traced its white thread.

Big, apish Monk and slender, dapper Ham were handcuffed, wrist and ankle. In addition, wrist shackles were linked to ankle manacles. Both their lips and eyes were taped, the strips almost concealing their features.

The manacle locks were simple. They surrendered quickly to Doc's metal probe. He got the gags off with quick jerks—the least painful method.

Monk, making a snarling sound, reached up and uncovered his eyes. He saw Doc, gulped and dropped the fist with which he was preparing to drive a blow.

“Glory be!” he grinned. “I knew it was only a question of time until you got here!”

The door snapped open. A silver-hooded head thrust in, attracted no doubt by the noise Monk had made. The observer let out an ear-splitting yell.

Doc scooped up a heavy handcuff and snapped it at the door. The head jerked back. The manacles struck the wood so hard that splinters were torn off. With a slam, the door was yanked shut.

From the hallway came a sound reminiscent of buckshot being poured on a taut bed sheet—a silenced machine gun. Its clamor was not as loud as the uproar made by the slugs tearing through the door.

Monk was on his feet. Shoving, Doc propelled him to a corner. Ham was jerking at the tape over his eyes. Doc pitched him bodily after Monk, clear of the leaden storm.

In the hallway, there was shouting and the pound of racing feet. The silver men were gathering to the attack.

The room which held Doc and his two men were fitted with easy chairs, tables and smoking stands. Doc heaved a chair at a window, and it went through with a great jangling of glass.

Three silenced rapid-firers were stuttering in the hall. But the weapons, firing cartridges of pistol caliber, could not penetrate the walls. The door, however, mangled by metal, toppled off its hinges.

A silver-gloved hand thrust a machine gun inside. Monk threw a smoking stand. It hit the hand; the owner screamed, and his gun skittered across the floor.

Monk started for the weapon, willing to chance being shot in order to get it.

“Wait!” Doc rapped.

The bronze man stripped off the light alloy metal mail which he wore to protect his torso from bullets. He spread this over a cheap, overstuffed chair, making a mobile shield. Using this, Monk scuttled across the floor.

The mail jumped and whipped under the impact of lead, and flattened bullets fell from it to the floor. But Monk got the rapid-firer. He loosened a brief burst of fire—and outside, a man squawked in agony.

“They're wearing bulletproof vests,” Monk said grimly. “You've got to shoot at their legs or their heads. I got that one in the legs.”

Monk's single burst had a remarkable effect, for the shooting outside suddenly ceased. Footsteps pounded, grew fainter. Monk promptly charged outside, holding Doc's bulletproof garment in front of his chest.

"Sounds like they're heading for the back!" he roared.

Doc and Ham followed. They could hear the running feet—until silence fell unexpectedly.

On the floor was a spattering of crimson which had come from the leg of the man Monk had shot. Doc followed the trail, but not for far. It ended, indicating the injured one had stemmed the scarlet flow, perhaps with a handkerchief.

"It's a cinch they didn't leave the place," Monk rumbled. "We'll find 'em."

"Watch the doors." Doc directed.

Monk raced to the front entrance, and almost at once there was a violent scuffle. It subsided quickly.

"Doc, I've got one!" Monk called. "Caught him just inside!"

Doc Savage, running to the spot, found the homely chemist holding a very frightened young man speared on the muzzle of his gun.

The frightened individual was Rapid Pace.

"We h-heard f-fighting," Rapid Pace stuttered. "We decided to h-have a look."

"Where is McCoy?" Doc demanded.

"He took the back way," said Pace. "Y-yes, the back way."

"Did you see any one running from the club?"

"No," said Pace. "No, sir."

Doc studied Rapid Pace for a moment. It had taken quite a degree of nerve to enter the Indian Head Club as Pace had done. The efficiency expert was a puzzle; at times he exhibited plenty of nerve, at other times none at all.

Hugh McCoy, appearing from the rear door, put a halt to Doc's character appraisal. No one, asserted McCoy emphatically, had fled down the alley which ran past the back door.

"But they went somewhere," said Monk.

Monk had returned to his habitual tiny-voiced manner of speaking, in marked contrast to his gusty roaring when he was in action. Monk liked plenty of noise with his fights.

"We will," Doc stated, "pull this place apart if necessary, to find where those four silver men went. Monk; Ham—did you overhear anything to indicate who is behind this affair?"

"There is a mastermind," Ham offered crisply. "He is a fellow who remains in the background. He does not even mingle with his gang. Some of the gang do not even know him by sight. We did not get his name, or overhear anything to indicate his identity."

“A bird named Ull is first lieutenant to this chief,” Monk put in. “This Ull is no dunce himself. He is a scientist, from what I overheard. He has invented a lot of things these Silver Deaths’s-Heads use—their disguises for instance, and bulletproof vests which are almost as efficient as our own. Too, he mixed up a poison which kills you when you touch it.”

Doc’s gaze, roving, eyed a telephone.

“Wait,” he directed, and went to the instrument. Lifting the receiver, he found it alive. He dialed a number, then heard the ringer operate the distant phone twice before a receiver came up.

“Park Avenue Beautician,” said a cultured feminine voice.

“Miss Savage,” Doc requested.

A moment later another voice said, “Miss Patricia Savage speaking.”

“Is Lorna Zane safe?” Doc asked.

“She is unless she succumbs from some of my beauty treatments,” Pat advised. “I told her anything she wanted was free while she was with me. And did she take advantage of it! She started with my Special Egyptian Clay Pack Facial, and is going right down the list. Doc, do you know what I think?”

“Better put a guard over her,” Doc suggested.

“Sure,” Pat agreed. “Doc, I think she is setting her cap for you. She keeps wanting to know about you.”

Doc said dryly, “Try to discourage her,” and hung up.

## Chapter 9

### THE CAPTURE

Patricia Savage smiled as she hung up, because she knew that Doc was as woman-proof as any man could be. Feminine attention only embarrassed Doc, and Pat, womanlike, enjoyed kidding him. More the pity, too, because there was no doubt but that Lorna Zane was actually entranced by the bronze giant, and Lorna was not only a beauty, but she had good sense and ability as well. No one without ability could run a shipyard.

“Poor Lorna,” sighed Pat aloud. “She’s bumping her head against a stone wall.”

“And you, sister,” said a cold voice, “are going to bump into some lead if you don’t behave!”

Pat started violently and whirled. The windows of her private office were adorned with drapes which hung to the floor. From behind one of these, a man had stepped. At least, Pat decided he was a man, since the voice was too coarse to come from a feminine source. The fellow was garbed in one of the weird silver regalias.

“What,” Pat demanded, “does this mean?”

“Never mind that,” growled the silver man. “Call that Zane dame in here.”

The speaker moved his right hand, silver-gloved, to emphasize the presence of the pistol which he held.

Pat studied the gun. She was outwardly calm, and looked very chic in an evening gown from one of the city’s finest designers.

“Get a jump on,” advised the silver man.

“All right,” Pat said, and picked up an interoffice telephone.

Leaping swiftly, the silver man wrenched the instrument from Pat’s fingers and clapped it back on the hook.

“What in blazes are you tryin’ to pull?” he grated.

“That phone connects to the operator who is now dressing Miss Zane’s hair,” Pat explained. “I was going to call her. If you don’t believe me, call her yourself.”

The other hesitated, thinking the matter over.

“You got some men working in this joint, ain’t you?” he grunted.

“Of course,” said Pat. “Very handsome men, too. The older society matrons like that.”

“Yeah,” the silver man leered. “Well, I’ll take a chance on ’em thinking it’s one of your men callin’.”

He picked up the instrument, which was one of the cradle type—receiver and mouthpiece on one arm—and began: “I want to talk to the operator dressing Miss Zane’s hair——”

That was as far as he got, because a popping noise interrupted him. He dropped the instrument and staggered back, gasping and blinking. He seemed to forget that he held a gun, and pawed at the eyeholes in his mask.

Pat lunged, seized his gun with both hands, wrenched and got it. She sprang back triumphantly. Because she helped Doc Savage occasionally, she was sometimes in danger, and she had taken precautions. This trick telephone was one of them.

It was not connected to anything; but the mouthpiece, when spoken into, ejected a tiny spray of tear-gas. She had borrowed the device from Doc Savage, who had fashioned countless such trick contrivances.

“When you get around to it,” Pat advised, “you can put up your hands.”

The silver man snarled incoherently and kept on pawing at his masked features. The noises he made in his agony and rage were bubbling and babylike. They were loud enough to cover the sound, if any, as a second silver man appeared in the open door behind Pat and advanced swiftly, lifting a gun club-fashion.

The gun bludgeoned down heavily. Pat moaned and collapsed to her knees.

“A wise dame,” said the newcomer. “But not wise enough.”

While still stunned, Pat was jerked up and slammed into a chair. The same gun which had clubbed her was shoved into her face.

“Don’t think I’m finicky about usin’ it on a dame, neither!” the man advised her. “We got too much at stake to take chances on the works bein’ gummed.”

Pat sat very still, and said thickly, “The last thing I would think of doing is gumming anybody’s works.”

“You take a lot of killin’, don’t you,” the other jeered, half admiringly. Then he snapped at his companion: “Get over in the corner to that water cooler and wash your eyes.”

The blinded man stumbled to the water cooler, spilled water down the front of his clothing, but finally managed to bathe his eyes. By that time the effects of the tear-gas had started subsiding, and he was soon able to use his orbs. With gusto, he took over the task of guarding Pat.

“Pull a funny one on me, will you,” he gritted at the young woman. “I oughta hand you yours right here!”

“Nix,” said the other. “This hank of hair goes with us. The big shot’s orders.”

“You mean,” Pat demanded, “that I am going to be honored with your companionship?”

“You get the idea.”

“Why?” Pat wanted to know.

The silver man squinted at her through the eyeholes in his mask. “This guy Doc Savage thinks a lot of you, don’t he?”

“I suspect,” said Pat, “that Doc sometimes wishes I had never been born. You would be surprised how much time he has to spend rescuing me from trouble.”

The silver man laughed harshly. "O. K. Now he's gonna have another chance."

Pat snapped, "I fail to follow you."

"Live bait, sister," the other sneered. "Get it? We use you to pull the bronze guy into a trap."

"Is that why you kept Monk and Ham alive?" Pat asked.

Teeth made a gritting noise behind the silver mask. "So you know that Savage got 'em away from us, eh?"

Pat had not known this. Doc, with a reticence characteristic of himself, had neglected to tell her over the telephone, Pat smiled cheerfully into the gun muzzle.

"My feminine intuition or something tells me you fellows will be better off if you drop everything and hunt a nice hide-out in—let us say—Timbuktu," she advised.

"Your intuition had better show you when it's wise to pipe down," the other grated, and shoved his gun closer to her face.

"Can the chatter," said the second silver man, who was carefully examining the telephones on Pat's desk. He picked up one, held it gingerly, got the operator, and seemed satisfied there was no trick.

"Will you send Miss Zane to Miss Savage's offices," he requested, then put the instrument down, scowled at Pat and added, "You had better hope that scheme works."

The scheme worked as perfectly as the two silver men could have wished. Lorna Zane, unsuspecting, freshened and more entrancingly pretty than ever, came swinging in. She was an advertisement for the effectiveness of Pat's beauticians.

The two men, stepping to her side as she came through the door, put guns to her side and chorused, "Do the wise thing, sister!"

Lorna Zane looked at the two men, then at Pat.

"Sorry," said Pat. "I did all I could."

"I could scream," Lorna stated grimly. "But they would probably shoot us both."

"You're damn right we would," she was assured.

"We're walking you out," advised the second of the two men in the metallic disguises. "Take the back way."

Lorna Zane did not move. She stared steadily at the two sinister figures in silver.

"What do you want with me?" she demanded. "Why did you try to kill me at the shipyard?"

"Don't kid us, sister," sneered the man. "You know why."

"I do not," Lorna insisted. "And that is the truth."

The vehemence in her tone seemed to penetrate the callous armor of the two men, convincing them that she was telling the truth.

"Let's get this straight," one growled. "Didn't you know what that blueprint was about?"

“You mean the print that your gang stole from the safe out at the shipyard?” Lorna demanded.

“Sure. You know what it was, didn’t you?”

“No,” said Lorna, “I did not.”

The silver man whistled softly, as if amazed. “Didn’t old Winthrop tell you what it was all about?”

“Emphatically not,” Lorna snapped.

“Damned if I don’t believe you,” the man mumbled thoughtfully.

The second silver man emitted a gritting laugh. “Say, I see what happened! Remember when the big boss threatened Winthrop over the telephone? Winthrop was scared. He said this dame had the blueprint and knew the story, and would go to the cops if anything happened to Winthrop. We had been keepin’ an eye on Winthrop and knew who had the blueprint—this dame, here.”

“You think Winthrop stalled to save his neck for a while?” his companion questioned.

“It looks like it,” the other admitted.

“Then you’ll let me go?” Lorna asked hopefully.

“Watch us do that!” the man growled. “Get goin’, both of you skirts! Out the back way.”

Pat and Lorna walked meekly ahead of the two gunmen. There was nothing else for them to do.

Instead of an alley at the back of the modernistic skyscraper which housed Pat’s beauty establishment, there was a large tunnel of an affair, closed at the street by large steel doors. During the daylight hours, this was used by the trucks which had merchandise to deliver to the building, but at the present late hour, the tunnel was occupied only by an innocent-appearing truck.

The truck driver had his collar turned up and his hat was yanked over his eyes. This, coupled with the darkness, afforded him a complete disguise.

Pat and Lorna did not see his features as they were forced to get into the back of the truck, accompanied by their two captors. The doors were closed.

One silver man pressed his metallic mask to a slit in the van and spoke to the driver. “All set?”

“Sure,” said the driver.

“And listen—did I get a message that was relayed from the big boss?” chuckled the other.

“Savage doesn’t know it,” the driver advised gleefully. “He’s all set to get his within ten minutes, though. Everything is fixed. The big boss himself arranged it.”

“Where is Savage now?” asked the silver man.

“In the Indian Head Club. He’s frisking the joint.”

The silver man swore violently. “Hell, if he ever finds——”

“Don’t worry,” snapped the driver. “He won’t find anything but sudden death. It’s all fixed, I tell you. Savage won’t suspect a thing until—*blooie!* He’ll be done for.”

Pat heard each word. Desperation seized her, and she lunged at the nearest captor. It was a move doomed to defeat, because the fellow was alert. He simply stepped back and sideswiped Pat’s head with the barrel of his heavy automatic, not hard enough to do violent damage, but forcibly enough to send her reeling back.

The van rolled out of the tunnel and into the traffic as the two men in the rear used tape to gag Pat and Lorna.

“You’ll hear all about the party at the Indian Head Club.”

## Chapter 10

### DEATH BLASTS

The Indian Head Club was outwardly quiet, but there was grim work underfoot inside. Doc and his party were searching.

"This place is more than a hide-out," Monk stated firmly. "There's some secret about it."

"What makes you think that?" Doc questioned.

"The way them silver mugs acted," Monk explained. "They were mighty careful. And I heard one of them remark that if you or the police found out what was here, the fat would be in the fire."

Ham, who was hauling clothing out of a closet, emitted a grunt of pleasure. He had found his sword cane.

"Our captors brought this along when they seized us," he said, flourishing the weapon. "They were curious about the chemical on the tip. I heard one of them remark that Ull might make use of it."

"Yeah," Monk admitted. "This Ull is a brainy cuss, from what they said."

Hugh McCoy, flushed and seemingly enjoying the excitement, put in, "Did either of you gentlemen hear a mention of Gardner while you were prisoners?"

"No," said Monk. "Who's Gardner?"

"A man who might conceivably be behind the Silver Death's-Heads," McCoy replied.

Rapid Pace snapped, "What makes you suspect Gardner? That is what I want to know? What makes you suspect him?"

"Have *you* any better suggestion?" McCoy asked coldly.

Rapid Pace merely glared at McCoy, then wheeled away.

"We are killing time," he snapped. "The thing to do is find where those four silver men went to."

"That will not be difficult," Doc assured him quietly. "Monk, you watch the rear door. McCoy, you take the front entrance."

The bronze man moved out into the street and ran toward the corner where his roadster stood. The streets were quiet, except that late-playing children made a little noise up in the tenement section. The fog seemed to be thicker.

From the rumble seat of the roadster, Doc got an object which might have been a press photographer's camera, but which was actually a lantern projecting light rays in the ultra-violet range of the spectrum.

The device was simple, merely being an electric bulb, battery operated, which gave off light closely akin to that of an arc, and a deep filter which cut out all the light but ultra-violet.

Doc went back to the house and to the stairway where he had sprinkled the powder from the shaker during the time that the silver men were unwittingly leading him to Monk and Ham. The silver men had walked through the powder without knowing it.

Doc extinguished all lights, turned on the ultra-violet lantern and pointed its dark lens at the floor. Scattered patches of glowing electric blue appeared wherever Doc had sprinkled the powder—and where the silver men had walked through the powder, their feet had therefore left prints.

Doc followed the trail. It grew a bit fainter, for the powder would soon wear off the shoe soles of the quarry. The tracks progressed down into the basement.

The basement floor was of concrete. A large furnace stood in a corner, and insulated steam pipes stretched about like the tentacles of an octopus. There were barrels, boxes and a bin holding coal.

The glowing tracks led to a barrel which stood against one wall.

“Stand back,” Doc warned, and moved the barrel.

At first, it seemed there was solid concrete below, but a closer scrutiny revealed a circular manhole, its lines intended to be concealed by the mark the barrel bottom had made on the floor.

With a heel, Doc put weight on various parts of the lid. It hinged up, uncovering a cavity so black that it resembled a puddle of drawing ink.

The thin flashlight beam showed a room below, with a ladder leading down. Walls and floor of the subterranean recess were lined with bricks. There was a table, chairs, a rack holding numerous silver garments, opened cases of submachine gun ammunition, and other boxes holding rapid-fixers and hand grenades.

But there was no sign of the silver men.

Doc descended the ladder, after searching to make sure there were no trick triggers or death traps.

On the rack of silver garments, four metallic regalias lay askew, as if hastily cast there. Doc lifted them curiously.

One was crimson stained, still wet.

“Discarded by the man Monk shot in the leg,” Doc decided.

He stood hefting the silver cloaks curiously.

Upstairs, Monk was shifting from one foot to the other as he watched the rear door. Monk believed there would be action below, and he hated to miss it. He peered into the alley, listened, then withdrew to the stairway that led down into the basement, and strained his ears.

He did not hear anything from the basement. Instead, he caught a faint sound from the direction of the front door, where Hugh McCoy was functioning as lookout. Monk hesitated.

“McCoy,” he called softly.

There was no answer. Gripping his captured submachine gun, Monk eased toward the front. McCoy should have been just inside, but he was not there. Monk peered out into the street.

It was some seconds before he caught an indefinite blur moving away from the Indian Head Club, keeping in the shadow of the buildings. With a silence remarkable for a man of such bulk, Monk floated down the steps, glided a dozen yards, took a deliberate aim with his weapon and invited, “Whoever you are, stand still!”

The figure was silent so long that it seemed there was going to be no answer.

“Speak up!” Monk growled.

“You dope!” said McCoy’s voice. “They’ll hear you!”

“Who?”

“The four silver men,” grated McCoy. “I just saw them sneaking up the street.”

“Wait here,” Monk grated. “Doc will want to know about this!”

The homely chemist whipped back into the Indian Head Club, went halfway down the basement stairs and barked, “Doc! McCoy just seen the four birds pulling a sneak!”

Monk saw Ham and Pace race for the stairs, saw Doc appear from the round hole in the basement floor. He waited for no more, but pitched back outside to aid McCoy.

McCoy was not where Monk had left him. Deciding the financial counselor had gone ahead, so as not to lose sight of the quarry, Monk scuttled up the street. He gained the corner and discerned no sign of McCoy.

Monk looked around to see if Doc and the others were following him—and saw the most stupendous display of pyrotechnics he had ever witnessed.

The ground seemed to sink several inches under Monk’s feet, then jump straight up. Simultaneously, there was a sound as if a firecracker had gone off in each ear. Blood-red light flooded his eyes, blinding him.

Against the lurid glow, Monk saw Doc, Ham and Pace outlined. The trio were not running, but seemed to be flying through the air, carried by an invisible force from behind. Then the force of the explosion reached Monk, slapped him like an unseen Colossus, and he was knocked sprawling.

Dazed, unable to hear because the blast had temporarily deafened his ears, Monk managed to land on all fours. Peering upward, he saw copings toppling off buildings. Window glass was falling like brittle snow. Walls began to come down.

Down by the Indian Head Club—or rather, where it had been—a mound of flame and debris was climbing toward the sky.

Monk began to crawl. Then something happened to the top of his head; things turned very black in front of his eyes, and all noise of the uproar left him.

Monk’s next connection with the material world was a briskly calloused voice saying, “No ordinary brick could do anything to that head of Monk’s. He’ll be all right in a minute.”

Monk, unable to think coherently, “Where’s Habeas?”

“There you are!” said Ham. “Thinking of that pet pig ahead of everybody else. We left the pig at your laboratory.”

“Yeah?” Monk got his wits together. “I sure wasn’t worrying about you, shyster. Say, what happened? The last I remember, Vesuvius seemed to turn loose.”

“That was no more than a minute ago,” Ham snapped. “Take a look at the Indian Head Club.”

Monk, realizing he was facing away from the club, turned himself around with his hands, still in a seated position. A great glare caused him to close his eyes tightly.

Where the Indian Head Club had been there was a tower of flame that moaned and squirmed fully two hundred feet in the air. Waves of heat shoved against his face.

“Say, what could burn like that?” Monk gulped.

“Chemicals,” Doc Savage said quietly. “There must have been a mine under the place, charged with an inflammable chemical in addition to explosive.”

“Them four silver devils must have lit the fuse and were beating it when McCoy saw them.” Monk reared up shakily. “Say, where did McCoy go?”

“No sign of him,” Doc advised.

Rapid Pace, standing in the background dabbing at various minor cuts, snapped, “I do not trust that McCoy. No, sir. He is a very smooth man.”

“If he hadn’t discovered those silver lads skipping out, it would have been just too bad for us,” Monk growled.

Down the street, a weaving figure appeared. It was a man. He was staggering, keeping both hands pressed to his head. His clothing was torn, and dust fell from him when he stumbled.

When he was close, they saw that it was Hugh McCoy.

“Where did the four silver men go?” Doc asked sharply.

McCoy looked at them painfully, still holding his head.

“How would I know?” he snapped. “Part of a wall fell on me. I’ve been unconscious.”

The flames from the Indian Head Club ruin seemed to be climbing higher; gory tongues of fire detached themselves and shot upward hundreds of feet. The howling bedlam of the blaze made conversation difficult.

To escape the searing heat, Doc and his men retreated. From all around them came the wail of fire sirens, but none of the apparatus was yet in sight.

Doc Savage, eyeing the flames, decided. “It will be a good many hours before we can get into that ruin to do any investigating. Come on. We have something to do besides watching the fireworks.”

Monk peering at Doc, started slightly. He had just discovered that Doc carried, tucked obscurely under one arm, one of the strange metallic garments worn by the Silver Death’s-Heads.

“Where’d you get that thing, Doc?” the homely chemist demanded.

“From the room under the Indian Head Club basement,” Doc replied.

“Think it’s a clue?” Monk questioned eagerly.

“No,” Doc told him. “But there are pockets inside the garment, and the contents of one of those pockets is, I think, going to prove very valuable.”

They were still retreating from the flames. A crowd sprang up rapidly about them, curious persons drawn by the terrific blast and the amazing fire. Howling fire trucks bored through the throng, followed by hose wagons, rescue squads and emergency police.

In the uproar, Doc Savage and his party attracted little attention.

They reached a drug store, windows of which had been broken by the detonation. It was unoccupied, the proprietor evidently having dashed off excitedly to the fire. Lights were burning inside—the first spot Doc and his party had encountered where there was illumination.

“Let’s have a look at what was in the pocket of that silver suit,” Monk requested.

Doc nodded, and they went in the drug store. Broken glass strewed the floor, for many bottles had been shaken off counters. The bronze man employed the marble top of the soda fountain as a table.

From the inner recesses of the silver suit, he extracted a long blue roll sealed with wax.

Rapid Pace took one look at them and exploded, “The blueprint that was taken from the shipyard safe!”

“You’ve seen it before?” Hugh McCoy asked sharply.

Pace scowled at his rival for the hand of Lorna Zane.

“No,” he retorted. “But Miss Zane described it.”

Doc unrolled the print—it was, it developed, the only one.

“Blazes,” muttered Monk eyeing the lines traced whitely on the blue background. “A sketch of New York Harbor! Now, that ain’t quite what I expected.”

The map—it was actually no more than that—of the harbor was not especially complete, but it showed certain prominent details, outstanding landmarks, and the depth of water was carefully gauged at numerous points. Compared with a regulation marine harbor chart, it would have been crude, yet it apparently had been traced from such a chart.

Doc dropped a finger on the blue expanse. “These four small stars seem to be the only especially-outstanding marks.”

The stars with Doc indicated were situated in approximately the center of the East River—the first off the Wall Street section of Manhattan, the next possibly a quarter of a mile south, and the others spaced at like intervals farther down.

“Maybe they’re buoys,” Ham suggested.

“No buoys at those points,” Doc assured him. “And notice the position of the first, the northernmost one.”

Ham looked again, then started.

“By Jove! It is almost directly opposite that Indian Head Club.”

“Exactly,” Doc agreed.

“You think that is significant?”

“I do.”

“Will you explain, Doc?” Ham requested.

“Later,” Doc told him.

The bronze man went to a telephone booth, took the receiver down, found the circuit intact, and dialed a number. He spoke quietly for some moments.

His metallic features did not alter expression. However, there was audible for a brief moment that unearthly trilling sound which was the bronze man’s peculiar characteristic, the sound which he made unconsciously when some unusual danger threatened, or which marked some stark discovery, or which preceded some unusual course of action. Finally he replaced the receiver and left the booth.

“The Silver Death’s-Heads,” he said slowly, “have seized Pat and Lorna Zane. I just talked to Pat’s establishment.”

## Chapter 11

### THE RIVER BED MYSTERY

It was getting along toward dawn, and Father Knickerbocker, as New Yorkers like to dub their city as a whole, was for the most part asleep. It had been a hectic night.

No less than twenty major robberies had been committed by the weird Silver Death's-Heads during the early part of the night.

New York had had her crime waves in the past; there had been nights which saw more robberies and nights when more loot had been annexed by thieves. But never had a crime wave possessed quite the spectacular qualities of this one. Never before had the thieves all affected the same fantastic costumes. That was the startling thing.

The tabloid newspapers ate it up; the radio broadcast it, and the police began to expect gray hairs when they next looked in mirrors.

The mayor was up all night walking the floor; the governor called twice to know whether the militia would help, and editorial writers sharpened their pencils to take digs at the city administration.

Almost a million dollars in loot had been taken, the largest haul being the armored truck earlier the previous afternoon. Robbery reports piled onto the city desks of newspapers so fast that the editors could not tell which was which.

The murder of Paine L. Winthrop, good for a front-page streamer on the first edition, was relegated to the back pages before the final edition went to bed.

Most amazing aspect of the whole thing, however, was the fact that New York's usually efficient policemen had not captured a single silver man. What was more, they had no idea where any one of the silver men could be found.

The sinister fellows in metallic disguises bobbed up, committed a robbery, shot down any one who resisted, and fled. Maybe the police chased them a few blocks. Then, without exception, the silver men disappeared.

Usually, they disappeared in the vicinity of the water front surrounding Manhattan Island. The police had noted this fact.

It was still foggy, and although dawn was more than an hour distant, there was still intense darkness. Ocean vessels were dropping anchor outside the Narrows, waiting for the soup to lift; such tugs as prowled the harbor nosed along with tooting horns and every spare man on lookout duty.

There was one boat on the river which was not making undue noise, however. It was a thin lance of a speed craft with motors which did not make sound proportionate to their great power, for they were scientifically muffled. With just a few alterations, that boat could well be a contender for the Harmsworth trophy. She was fast.

Doc Savage and Monk were alone in the speedboat, Monk handling the controls, Doc in the cockpit, donning a pair of heavy lead diving shoes.

From time to time, Monk lifted a boxlike device to his eyes and peered at, first, one shore of the river and then the other. Monk was getting bearings.

On the shore, Doc had placed projectors emitting strong infra-red light, rays invisible to the unaided eye, but which had the power of penetrating fog and smoke to a remarkable degree. The boxlike apparatus rendered the infra-red beacons visible. Merely an adaptation, this contrivance, of the signaling apparatus well known to naval technicians, and of principles with which alert photographers were familiar.

“The place is about a hundred feet upstream,” Monk decided.

Doc paused in buckling on the lead shoes, and reached into a locker. He brought out a flashlight already tied to a float, and switched it on. This he tossed overboard, together with a long line to which was affixed an anchor weight.

The light bobbed astern, moored in place by the line and weight.

Monk took another bearing, then said: “We’re right over the place where the first star was marked on that blueprint.”

Doc Savage stood up as the boat slackened speed. He lifted an apparatus which might have been mistaken for an oversized fish bowl, and put it over his head.

It was a diving hood of a transparent composition infinitely stronger than glass, and had the advantage of permitting vision on all sides. The helmet was a product of Doc’s inventive genius, its composition vaguely akin to the common cellophane.

Inside the helmet was a receiver and microphone, these being connected to a tiny radio transmitter that was attached to a stout tool jacket which Doc now donned. The radio transmitter aerial was in one sleeve of the jacket, the receiving aerial in the other.

The receiving aerial was a loop, and by pointing the arm in various directions, the position of another diver using one of the transmitters could be ascertained.

Doc switched on the radio, which was waterproof, and twirled the wave-length knob. He got major broadcasting stations, amateurs, very short-wave stuff—than a sudden, ear-splitting moan.

He waited tensely. The moan came again.

The sound was the radio compass station operated by the Government. Doc searched on down until he found a clear band, then gave Monk the wave-length figure.

Monk, who had lifted another radio transmitter-receiver combination from a box, tuned to the same wave.

Doc stepped overside. The heavy lead shoes pulled him down with a gurgling rapidity.

“Cruise above this spot,” Doc directed Monk. “Better shut off your motor, douse all lights and use the oars. You can hold your position with the oars alone.”

“Sure,” said Monk. “Keep me posted on what you find.”

The two-way radio functioned perfectly, a fact that did not displease Doc, because this was the first time he had been able to test it and the transparent helmet under actual diving conditions.

Inset in the helmet side, low down where it did not interfere with vision, was a watch-shaped depth gauge calibrated in feet. It was marked with radiant paint. Doc watched the hand crawl around.

The pressure did not greatly hamper his powerful body, the water at this point being not excessively deep. Patent “lungs” of conventional type kept breathable air in the helmet.

When he was near the bottom, Doc switched on a powerful waterproof searchlight.

He hit bottom, and mud clouded up around him. By pointing the arm containing the receiver loop upward, he located Monk’s transmitter. It was a bit upstream. Doc walked in that direction, sweeping the river bottom with his hand searchlight.

He almost missed it. The thing was drifted over with mud, and only the clank of the lead diving shoes against the metal cover disclosed its presence. Doc picked it up, washed it off and studied it.

He held in his arms a metal box something over a foot square. It had thickly soldered seams to render it waterproof.

“Lower a line,” Doc directed Monk.

A moment later, a weighted line came snaking down. Doc grasped the end and was hauled upward.

“So you got it,” Monk chuckled when they were both in the speedboat.

“Yes,” Doc told him. “And I believe we have our hands on the whole secret.”

The bronze man employed a screwdriver to thrust into one of the soldered seams. Prying, he gradually tore the metal box open. Inside was a soft black composition of the type used to fill automobile spark coils. Doc carefully dug into this.

He uncovered scattered wires, then a coil, and finally the rounded glass top of a vacuum tube.

Upstream, the light he had left afloat made a pale blur in the darkness. Doc worked low in the boat cockpit, his own light painstakingly sheltered. Down in the bay, two tugboats were hooting at each other. Their own boat was drifting.

“What do you make of it?” Monk asked anxiously.

“Well,” Doc began. “It seems——”

Monk had stood erect to look over Doc’s shoulder. He flopped flat in the cockpit as a piercing whistle sounded overhead.

There was a flash; it seemed to come from some distance down the river. Another, much brighter flash followed it—that one from up the river. Then came two ear-splitting roars which blended, intermingling until they became one whooping tumult.

A great geyser of water lifted where Doc had left the floating light. Biliious water pushed away from the spot in a wall that boiled down upon the speedboat.

The craft was caught broadside. It lifted, and turned completely over.

Doc and Monk, clutching life lines, remained with the boat—and the craft, because of its design, came upright again.

Everything loose, including the mysterious box on which Doc had been working, was gone from the cockpit. A full six inches of water sloshed in the bottom of the boat.

Doc lunged for the instrument panel, thumbed a button, and the big motors in their waterproof compartment moaned into life. A stroke of a lever set pumps to work emptying the shallow cockpit. No ordinary boat, this, but one with such peculiar qualities of efficiency that the naval experts were considering its design for creating a fleet of light coastal defense speedsters.

“That was a shell!” Monk gulped. “Boy, I’ve heard too many of them things whistle to be mistaken.”

Doc said grimly, “Fired from downstream, too. The sound from the gun reached us just before the shell detonated. It was aimed at that decoy light we left floating.”

Doc had the speedboat controls now. The craft lifted its snout out of the water and knifed downstream.

Clambering forward, Monk wrenched at a hatch and a mechanical tripod lifted a gun into view. The weapon fired shells no more than an inch in diameter, but they were armor-piercing and high-explosive, slugs which could sink a destroyer if carefully placed.

Monk hunkered behind the piece, waiting.

The homely chemist had no idea what manner of craft they might encounter, but any antagonist armed with a cannon was formidable. He wondered how it happened that they had not heard the motors of the enemy.

Monk found cause for fresh wonder when they passed over the spot from which the gun flash of the foe had come—and found nothing.

Doc curved the fast boat in a narrow circle. Still, there was nothing. He described a wider circuit, with the same negative results. Twice more, he went around. Then he cut the motors and both he and Monk listened.

The only sound was the noise of a loud motor upstream, and a bit later a siren wail from the same source. This identified an approaching police boat.

Monk squinted in Doc’s direction, moistened his lips, then growled, “Well, only one thing can explain it.”

“Yes,” Doc agreed. “That shell was fired from a submarine, fantastic as the idea seems.”

Rapid Pace and Hugh McCoy leaped to their feet when Doc Savage and Monk entered the reception room of Doc’s skyscraper headquarters.

“Any word of Lorna—Miss Zane?” McCoy asked anxiously.

“Yes,” Pace echoed. “Any word?”

“No,” Doc said. “Is Ham back?”

Pace nodded at the library door. "In there. He told us to stay out. Said he did not want to be bothered."

Doc and Monk waved McCoy and Pace back when the pair would have followed them into the laboratory.

Ham gave them a well-bred frown when he saw their dripping garments.

"I knew I would miss out on some excitement," he said peevishly.

Doc questioned, "Did you have any luck with your end?"

"I followed the orders you gave before you and Monk started out in the speedboat," Ham replied. "A fine job I had, too, digging up old sanitation maps of the city at that hour of the night."

"What did you learn?" Doc demanded.

Ham picked up a rolled map which reposed on the writing desk.

"You can see it on here," he said. "But I can tell you just as well. Up until fifteen years ago, a large drainage pipe ran under the water-front section of Brooklyn and emptied into the East River. It was abandoned fifteen years ago. Not taken up, mind you, because that was too expensive. It was merely abandoned."

Doc said, "It ran in the neighborhood of the Indian Head Club?"

"Right under the Indian Head Club, to be exact," Ham stated.

"Daggone!" Monk gulped. "This is beginning to shape up. The Silver Death's-Heads had opened a passage into that old pipe. That's why they blew up the Indian Head Club—to keep us from finding the pipe and the secret passage."

"But what did they use the abandoned drain pipe for?" Ham pondered aloud.

"To get to their submarine," Monk grunted.

Ham had secured a new sword cane from a supply of the unique weapons which he kept in his apartment at a fashionable club. He picked the weapon up, twirled it slowly, eying Monk the while.

"That brick which cracked you when the Indian Head Club blew up, must have done some damage, after all," he said dryly. "You sound even crazier than usual. Submarine! Bosh!"

Monk scowled. "Listen, shyster, there was a submarine in the river to-night, or at least some craft that went under the water. What's more, whoever was running it took a potshot at us with what sounded like a three-inch cannon."

Ham absently unsheathed the blade of his sword cane a few inches, then clicked it back together. Amazement sat his features.

"You are serious about this submarine business?" he asked earnestly.

"It may sound wild," said Monk. "But it is the truth."

Doc Savage put in, "You will recall that it was a three-inch shell which killed Paine L. Winthrop yesterday afternoon. Later, two men who were in a position to see the submarine, were killed. I mean the fisherman and the aviator, of course."

"Murdered to keep the existence of the submarine a secret," Monk mumbled.

“I say,” Ham queried sharply; “do you mean that these Silver Death’s-Heads came into New York harbor under water, and reached the Indian Head Club through that abandoned drainage pipe?”

“That is not at all impossible,” Doc assured him. “And now, Ham, did you learn anything about a scientist named Ull?”

Ham, drilling his sword cane with his eyes, said, “This fellow must be Don Ull, alias Ellis Nodham, alias Professor O’Donald, alias a flock of other names. He served a term in Sing Sing for manufacturing pineapples for gangsters. In the United States Patent Office he has over a dozen electrical inventions registered, some of them extremely clever.

“He was technician for a concern manufacturing poison gas during the war, which means he was a skillful chemist. He once designed a patent two-man submarine, and he is an expert on diving apparatus, having patented one of his creations. I talked to a dozen men who had known him in the past, and every one said Ull was as crooked a snake as ever lived.”

“Whew!” Monk exploded. “The fellow seems to be a jack-of-all-trades.”

“Think what a clever rascal the mastermind behind Ull must be,” Ham said.

Monk looked grim and stated, “That reminds me. How in blazes did the Silver Death’s-Heads know we were going to be on the river?”

“Probably had men shadowing us,” Ham retorted. “Now, what I want to know is: What did you find in the river?”

“A tin box,” Monk told him. “A tin box soldered waterproof, and filled with black insulating compound, wires and vacuum tubes.”

Ham demanded, “What was it?”

Instead of answering, Monk turned around and faced the door of the reception room. In there, the telephone buzzer was whining.

Doc leaped to the door. Rapid Pace was reaching for the phone.

“I’ll take it,” Doc said, and scooped up the instrument.

A voice remindful of a squealing rat said, “I wanta talk to a guy named Doc Savage.”

“You have him now,” Doc replied. “What is it?”

“A dame threw a note out of a window,” whined the rodent voice. “The note said some mugs had kidnaped her, and for me to call you for help and you’d pay me plenty to show you where she was bein’ held.”

“Was there a name signed to the note?” Doc questioned sharply.

“Yeah. It was ‘Pat.’” The squeaking took on a more uneasy quality. “Listen, mister, step on it. I’m kinda worried. I dunno but what some guys are followin’ me. I sorta thought they was, a time or two.”

“Where are you?” Doc rapped.

“In an all-night drug store at the corner of Stein and Decker Streets. I’ll wait here —” The ratty voice broke off sharply in an excited gasp.

There followed a tense dozen seconds of silence. When the squeaking tone resumed, it was stark with terror.

“Oh hell, mister, I’m on the spot!” it choked. “Them fellers that was followin’ me just came in. They’re them Silver Death’s-Heads! They’re runnin’ for this phone booth —”

The rodent voice began to scream. Glass crashed and wood broke, as if the phone booth doors had been smashed in. Ugly thumps, coming over the wire, sounded like blows.

A voice that was unmistakably Ull’s said, “It is fortunate that we saw this fellow loitering about the spot where we were holding the two women. I believe he was up to something.”

“What’s we do wit’ ’im?” asked another voice.

“Take him to the place where the two women are,” said Ull.

Then the distant telephone receiver was placed on its hook.

## Chapter 12

### THE TRICK

Ull glared at the receiver after he hung it up. In his all-enveloping silver garment, Ull made an ominous figure, and the heavy submarine gun in his left hand detracted no whit from his fierce aspect.

Behind Ull, two silver-cloaked men were pointing guns at a drug store clerk who was so frightened that he was on the point of fainting.

Two more silver men gripped a scrawny, pinch-faced fellow who was also badly scared.

“Lemme loose!” whined the prisoner in a rat-squeal voice. “I ain’t done nothin’!”

“Lay off the jaw music,” he was ordered harshly.

Ull directed loudly, “Everybody out!”

One of the pair guarding the clerk held up a hand, said, “Wait a minute, boss. I got a headache. Let’s see if I can find something that’s good for it.”

“Hurry up, then,” Ull snapped.

The silver man who claimed he had a headache began a rapid scrutiny of the drug store display shelves. He showed scant consideration for the stock, sweeping bottles off the shelves. He seemed to take an unholy joy in doing as much damage as he could.

He came to an array of vaseline in jars and tubes. These he upset. Then he trampled over the litter, and his weight forced the pale petroleum jelly from the tubes and jars and smeared the whole mess over his shoe soles.

The man left greasy tracks as he tore down more chemicals, and found his aspirin.

Then all the silver men moved for the door, dragging the fellow who had been in the telephone booth.

About to walk onto the street, Ull paused and snarled, “Maybe we had better shut this clerk up permanently.”

The soda jerker paled, swayed, his lips moved without sound, and he fainted on his feet. Toppling forward, he fell on the fountain syrup pumps, pushing them down and squirting strings of chocolate, pineapple and strawberry.

Ull and his silver-masked companions cast alert gazes about them as they moved down the gloomy street. There was still fog over the city, thick stuff which deposited a slimy coat over every exposed object. This was a remote street, and at this early hour almost deserted.

The man who had stepped in the petroleum left greasy tracks for a time, but they grew fainter and soon were no longer discernible to the naked eye.

The man looked back at his tracks, scowled, then tried scuffing along to leave more pronounced prints.

“No,” said Ull. “That might make him suspicious.”

“How d’you mean?” the man growled.

“He can see from the way you scraped your feet that you deliberately tried to leave tracks,” Ull told him.

“Hell!” said the man. “The guy ain’t that sharp.”

“Doc Savage is a mental genius,” said Ull. “The trouble so far is, that we have underrated the fellow.”

They turned into an alley where it was almost as dark as night.

“Do you think Doc Savage will fall into it?” asked one of the weirdly garbed figures.

“Yes,” said Ull. “It was perfect. The vaseline tracks, especially.”

They now released the man with the ratty voice. One of the silver garments was produced and the rodent one donned it hurriedly. The suit was fitted with zipper fasteners, which facilitated getting into it.

“How about a bonus for me?” he chuckled.

“You did excellently,” Ull told him with heartiness.

The men were moving swiftly, as if aware that each moment upon the street was dangerous. The city was inflamed against them, because of the depredations committed the previous day and night. Mere sight of them in this section would be enough to create a turmoil.

“Hurry,” Ull snapped.

“You figure Savage will come?” asked the ratty man.

“If your acting over that telephone was sufficiently convincing, he will,” said Ull. “Did he sound as if he were being taken in?”

“He sure did,” declared the rodent one.

“Then he must be on his way now.” Ull sounded vastly pleased. “He will search the drug store and, of course, he will find the vaseline which was so thoughtfully walked through.”

“What if Savage ain’t wise enough to know what we want him—I mean what we hope he’ll do about the vaseline?”

“Forget it,” snorted Ull. “He uses ultra-violet light a lot.”

They clustered about a grimy doorway and Ull rapped a peculiar signal with his finger tips, playing a short, distinctive bit from a song popular at the moment. The finger-tip aria could be recognized easily as such. The door opened.

Two men inside the building sighted grimly over machine guns. Safeties were off the weapons, and the eyes back of the mask holes were coldly grim. Both were garbed in the metallic disguises.

Ull stared at the gunmen, saying nothing.

“All right!” snarled one of the men. “You ain’t foolin’ nobody by wearin’ them silver rigs! Get ’em off!”

Moving very slowly so as not to invite a bullet, Ull tugged one sleeve back and looked at an expensive, heavily protected wrist watch.

“Seventeen minutes and eleven seconds after,” said Ull.

One of the machine gunners eyed his own watch, laughed and said, “O. K. How did I do?”

“Very well,” said Ull. “Remember, we all wear watches timed to the exact second, all set together, but not at the correct time. At the present moment we are all two minutes and fifteen seconds fast.”

“Sure,” said the other. “It beats a password.”

Ull and his party advanced down a gloomy corridor in complete darkness, reaching a room where other silver men waited. One of these men illuminated a flashlight briefly.

“What do we do now?” this man asked.

“We have set the trap for Doc Savage,” Ull explained. “This building has been carefully prepared. There are many traps to kill him when he tries to enter.”

“What about us?”

“We remain here to take a hand if the traps fail,” said Ull. “There must be no slip this time.”

A grotesque silver figure came in hurriedly, excitement in his walk.

“The big boss wants to talk to you,” he said to Ull. “He sounds mad as hell!”

Ull emitted a startled ejaculation. “Is the chief *here*?”

“No,” explained the other. “He is on the telephone. And he wants to talk to you.”

As Ull went into another room to the telephone, there was a trace of nervousness in his manner. He strode much more hurriedly than was his wont, and his hands made jerky gestures. Reaching the phone, he picked up the dangling receiver, put an ear to the instrument, got his mouth close to the transmitter and said, “Ull speaking.”

A coarse, angry whisper said, “Damn you, Ull! You have just about bungled everything!”

Ull recognized that harsh sibilance. The rage it carried evidently impressed him as well, for before he spoke, his neck stiffened slightly, as if he were swallowing some trouble.

“But chief,” he murmured, “there has been no major misfortune. I consider that we have come off very luckily.”

“Hell!” the other swore expressively.

Ull stammered in haste, “Of course, we have had backsets—such as losing the blueprint, and being forced to blow up the Indian Head Club, and a few other minor details. But in fighting a man the caliber of Doc Savage, we could not expect perfect sailing.”

“Why, you——” The other tried to find a word bad enough.

But Ull, eager to plead his own case before this whispering mastermind of whom he stood in such awe, interrupted.

“Our situation is still very satisfactory,” he pointed out. “Doc Savage does not suspect your identity. He has learned who I am, but that does not matter because I am already wanted by the police. We have Doc Savage’s cousin and the girl, Lorna Zane. The two women are perfect bait with which to draw Doc Savage into a trap.”

“Listen——”

“Doc Savage is now heading straight for a trap from which he cannot possibly escape,” interpolated Ull. “We will get him out of the way. Then there will be no one to bar our path. We will repeat what we did last night. Why, chief, we got nearly a million, all told, from those robberies.”

“You damned blathering idiot!” grated the distant master. “I did not order those robberies, except the first one—the armored truck holdup. You pulled the others on your own initiative. Ull, you went crazy. The city is in an uproar.”

“They can’t touch us,” Ull said earnestly. “Not with the system we’ve got of making a get-away.”

“And I thought you had brains!” the other snarled. “The governor will throw troops into the city. They will call on the navy. They will use naval submarine finders. Then how long do you think we will last?”

Ull mumbled, “Aw, maybe we can clean up first——”

“Damn you!” said the coarse whisper. “Why do you think I have been financing you? For the loot you could get from a few robberies? Not much. Why, the stuff you took last night won’t repay a fraction of what I have invested in this thing! The money was in large bills and the banks have the numbers. The jewelry can be identified. Hell! By the time you dispose of last night’s take, you will not have cleared two hundred thousand.”

Ull seemed dazed. “Boss, do you mean there is something bigger behind this?”

“Yes,” snarled the other.

Ull’s confusion began to turn to anger. “You were using my brains and inventive ability, eh? Using it for your own benefit! Listen, I do not like——”

“Shut up!” gritted the whispering one. “I intended for you to pull a robbery now and then, like that armored truck job, to pay expenses. But the big money was not to come from that trivial stuff.”

Ull snapped, “If you call what we got last night trivial——”

“Trivial alongside what I plan,” interjected the master. “But we’ll go into this later. Your job now is to get Doc Savage.”

Ull stood perfectly still for some seconds, glaring at the telephone. He had thought he was fully in the confidence of this mysterious chieftain who kept in the background. He had just discovered that such was not the case. It made him mad.

“Doc Savage will be taken care of,” Ull growled. “Then there’s got to be a new deal on splits. I didn’t know about this so-called big stuff you planned to pull. What is it?”

“I’ll tell you after you get through with Savage,” the other delayed.  
And the telephone conversation ended with that.

## Chapter 13

### THE PHANTOMS

Doc Savage was giving orders as he drove through the early morning fog that hung like a stuffing of wet cotton in the New York streets. The bronze man was alone. The machine which he drove was not his roadster but a vehicle with an appearance totally foreign to his character.

The car was a slightly shabby laundry truck, with a noisy motor and a manner of jolting over cobbles in a manner which seemed most uncomfortable. The cab windows, being extraordinarily grimy, made it difficult for the driver to be observed.

The vehicle was deceptive. The noise was not actually in the motor, which was huge and powerful, but was created by a mechanical device. The cab and body were of armor steel, the windows thick and proof against anything less than a tank-rifle slug, and the machine could travel nearly a hundred miles an hour.

In giving commands, Doc Savage was utilizing a two-way radio apparatus. Just now, Monk's voice, small and disgusted, was coming from the speaker.

"Listen, Doc," Monk demanded. "What was the idea of leaving us behind?"

"I want you to do some work," Doc told him. "But first, I want you to ask Hugh McCoy and Rapid Pace if either of them left headquarters while you and I were out on the river bringing up that small metal box."

There ensued a brief pause while Monk relayed the question. There was sharp interest in the homely chemist's childlike voice when he spoke.

"Rapid Pace was out for a while right after we left," he declared. "He says he went to get some cigarettes."

"Have you seen him smoking?" Doc queried.

"No," Monk replied. "I asked him about that, and he said he had been too excited to smoke. Listen, Doc, I'm wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"Somebody must've tipped them damn silver men in their submarine that we were going to be on the river." Monk paused for dramatic effect. "Do you reckon Pace could have slipped out and given them the tip?"

Doc said, "From now on, watch Pace very closely."

"Will I!" Monk growled.

"Is Ham there?" Doc asked.

"Ham speaking," said Ham's voice over the radio.

Despite the outward noise of the laundry truck—the clattering, clanking and popping of the motor and the squeak of the spring—it was comparatively quiet inside the armored van. The radio operated through a loud-speaker, hence conversation could be carried on without great difficulty.

“Ham,” Doc directed, “you will make a quick check on Bedford Burgess Gardner. Learn what you can of his character, his associates, his business career and that sort of thing.”

“Certainly,” said Ham’s melodious orator’s voice.

“Check up particularly on how it happens that Gardner’s shipping company has become one of the largest in the business,” Doc said pointedly. “Concentrate on learning the facts back of the mergers which made it one of the biggest companies.”

“So you suspect Gardner,” said Ham.

Doc did not comment on the sword-cane-carrying lawyer’s words.

“Get any available details, together with all suspicious circumstances in connection with the mergers,” he directed.

“Righto,” said Ham.

Doc clicked off the microphone button. He was driving on Decker Street, and Stein Street was directly ahead. The bronze man could see the drug store from which the rodent-voiced man had called.

There was a small crowd in front of the store, composed mostly of policemen.

Doc Savage received courteous cooperation from the police, being told without delay that the soda clerk had, upon regaining consciousness, telephoned news of the raid of the silver men.

The clerk, knees still rubbery, stopping to swallow frequently, said the silver gang had entered, seized the individual who was telephoning, then one man had torn up a lot of stock while hunting some aspirin. By way of corroborating himself, the clerk indicated the smashed vaseline on the floor.

“We followed those greasy tracks,” the police officer put in at this point. “But they played out very shortly.”

Some moments later, Doc Savage departed. When the police would have accompanied him, he requested them to refrain from doing so. The cops looked disappointed. They had hoped to see this remarkable bronze man work.

Doc followed the greasy footprints until they were no longer visible to the unaided eye. This was a bit farther than the officers had been able to trace them. The bronze man was carrying a leather case, and this he now opened.

The portable ultra-violet light lantern came to view, together with another device which resembled welder’s goggles, except that they were more bulky. Doc switched on the lantern and donned the goggles. The goggles simply made it easier to observe the fluorescing effect, by daylight, of substances in which the ultra-violet light caused the phenomena.

Vaseline being a substance which glows when exposed to ultra-violet light, Doc had little difficulty picking up the footprints which had become invisible to the naked eye. Microscopic quantities of vaseline showed up vaguely under the so-called “black light.”

The trail led to the gloomy side street. Doc, canny, did not enter. Instead, he circled to the opposite end of the block, used his black light and, finding no tracks, knew that the quarry had entered a building somewhere in the block.

The bronze man considered. A boat was passing on the river, and it was near enough that the watery wash from its bows was audible. This evidence that the river was very near seemed to give Doc an idea.

He moved down the street, careful to keep clear of the street in which the vaseline trail ended, and the thick fog swallowed him.

Some minutes later, a creature with an appearance both grotesque and pitiable appeared in the street, and the grimy thoroughfare was filled with the whine of a hand organ.

The organ player was a beggar, a hideous cripple. His legs were drawn up and apparently useless, for the fellow dragged himself along by his hands. Judging from the enormous colored glasses under the brim of a shapeless hat, the fellow was also blind.

The hand organ jangled with a quality as macabre as the personality of the grisly beggar. From time to time, the mendicant lifted a face that was purple, lumpy and utterly repulsive.

The beggar moved slowly, cranking his organ, carefully feeling his way along the sidewalk. He stopped frequently to let the organ wail, and to clink some pennies in a tin cup.

Eventually he reached the house into which Ull and his silver men had gone. A few feet beyond it he stopped, put his organ down, drew from his ragged clothing a paper-wrapped sandwich and began to eat.

The slowness with which he ate indicated he would be some time at his dining. But it was not long before things began to happen.

A door opened.

“Get t’hell outa here, bum!” grated a harsh voice.

The beggar seized his organ and began to play his loudest. The street resounded with the discordant notes.

The man in the door cursed. Then he ran down the steps, across the walk and gave the beggar a resounding kick in the side.

“Beat it, I told yer,” he snarled.

But the results were not as expected. The mendicant gave a convulsive jerk and fell over. He lay motionless, apparently in a dead faint.

The man who had done the kicking swore fiercely and seemed baffled as to what to do. He could not let the beggar lie. That would draw attention. He picked the fellow up and hauled him inside.

After he had the limp beggar through the door, the man dropped him, went back and scrutinized the street. The miserable avenue was deserted.

“*Whew!*” sighed the man. “I couldn’t leave that bum layin’ around for Doc Savage to see. It might make the big bronze guy suspicious.”

He picked up a silver garment, which had been behind the door, and drew it on. Then he turned, intending to inspect the senseless beggar.

He got barely half around. His eyes flew wide; his jaw fell. For the erstwhile beggar had undergone a complete metamorphosis.

The mendicant had turned into a giant of a figure, legs uncoiling from their grotesque positions, back straightening, head lifting.

The silver man lashed out frantically with a fist. His knuckles skidded on purplish make-up, and the theatrical grease, rubbed aside, disclosed bronze skin beneath.

“Doc Sav——” The silver man did not get past the first syllable. A metallic fist under his jaw closed his mouth clickingly, and he slumped, knocked out.

Doc Savage let the fellow sag to the floor, breaking the fall enough to eliminate undue noise. He had not struck hard; the victim would be out only a few minutes. This was so that the man could be questioned, if necessary.

Doc listened. Then he whipped for the nearest shadows. The scuffle had been heard. The clatter of approaching footsteps told him that.

A door down the hallway came open with a smash. Silver figures appeared. They held flashlights which sprayed blinding luminance. The lights picked up Doc’s form.

The bronze giant was a startling figure in the beggar make-up. The coat he wore—it went with one of several disguises which he carried in the delivery truck—was padded to feign deformities, and these padded portions protruded strangely, now that he was erect.

Curiosity gripped the silver men, held them long enough for Doc to move. He already had the implement he intended to use, had it in one hand. He lobbed it at the floor in front of the nearest silver man.

There was a roar! The floor splintered! The silver man was knocked backwards, went end over end, then managed to gain his feet.

The other silver men backed away wildly, forgetting their guns in their haste. Then, as Doc lifted his arm with another explosive grenade, they pitched for the nearest door, got through, and hurled their weight against the panel in an endeavor to close it.

Doc tried to prevent the door from closing. The silver men strained and pushed, squeezing profanity through clenched teeth.

Except the floor, which was inadequate there was no grip for Doc’s feet. He was forced back; the door closed, and the lock clicked.

An instant later, machine gun slugs began clouting splinter-edged holes in the panel.

Doc retreated, swabbing some of the make-up off his face with a sleeve. The stuff might get in his eyes in a hand-to-hand fight. He brought out a tiny, high-explosive grenade and lobbed it at the door.

Lightning seemed to strike inside the grimy building. Plaster fell off the walls; floor boards jumped up with a screeching of pulled nails. The door turned into a cloud of

fragments.

The machine gun was silenced by the exploding grenade. After débris had ceased to fall, men began cursing. Then they ran away. From the dragging sounds, it seemed they were hauling one of their number, who was injured.

Doc Savage did not advance in pursuit. He held respect for these foes. They were cunning. Just how cunning was evident when there came a second terrific concussion, which caused the old building to rock, sent window glass sheeting out and loosened more plaster.

They had left one of their own grenades behind, the time fuse set for a long interval. Had Doc followed them, he might very well have been killed.

From the entrance to the building there came noise of a movement. That would be the silver man who had so unwisely kicked the pseudo beggar.

The reviving fellow floundered about a bit, then he ran outside. His feet made a rapid patter which receded down the street.

Doc Savage did not attempt to follow him.

The bronze man waited, and it must have been full two minutes later when he heard several shots which came from the direction the fleeing silver man had taken.

Doc did not try to ascertain what had happened.

The bronze man used a second high-explosive grenade to open a hole in the hallway wall, then whipped through the aperture while débris was still falling. He was now in a bare, litter-strewn room. Plaster dust seethed in choking clouds.

Doc produced a cuplike contrivance which fitted over his nostrils. A rubber tube ran from this to a compact arrangement of metal flasks. It was a gas mask; also a protection against smoke and dust. There were airtight goggles for his eyes.

The silver men were working toward the rear. Doc could hear their profanity. Then he saw distinct traces of a cloud other than plaster dust, and knew his foes had turned loose some type of gas.

Hoping they would think the gas had overcome him, Doc did not use more grenades. He worked toward the rear. Near the center of the building, he encountered a room which had windows opening on a ventilating shaft. Through these, light came.

On the floor, a large rat groveled, its antics madly agonized. As the bronze man observed, the rodent became still. The gas was poison.

Glass had been shattered out of the ventilating shaft windows. Looking out of one of these, Doc saw a fire-escape ladder leading upward. He swung out, but before he mounted he pulled another of the explosive grenades from a pocket.

This grenade, like all of its kind, was fitted with a time fuse, but this differed from the conventional type in that its explosion was capable of being delayed, by the turning of a tiny knob, so as to withhold detonation for as long as several seconds. Doc adjusted the timing knob and left it on the floor.

The fire escape was ancient, and groaned and shed rust under the bronze man's weight. But it furnished him the means of reaching the roof. Crouched on the roof edge in the fog, he could hear the caterwaul of police sirens headed for the spot.

As Doc had expected, there was another fire escape at the rear. He ran down that lightly and stood in an alley that was black, filthy. When he was very near the rear door, he could hear voices.

The silver men were grouped just inside, arguing.

"We gotta clear out of here," one was insisting. "Listen to the bull wagons howl. The place'll be runnin' over with law in a minute."

"Quiet!" commanded Ull's voice. "Savage may hear us."

At that instant, the grenade which Doc had left behind exploded deep inside the building.

"He's still blastin' around in there," a man said, voicing what Doc had hoped they would think.

Another growled, "Wonder if he's wise that the two women ain't here?"

The police sirens were getting very close.

"We shall have to leave," Ull snapped.

The rear door opened.

The door, being heavy, opened but slowly. Ull's words had given Doc an instant of warning, too, and he was already in motion.

Forty feet away, up the alley, stood an ash can. Doc was behind it before Ull and his silver men stepped out into the alley.

The silver hoods were more bulky, due no doubt to gas masks which Ull and his fellows had donned. The group ran in the direction of the near-by river. After one searching glance around, they did not look back, but gave all attention to getting away before the police arrived.

When they were out of the alley, Doc followed them. He kept under cover, using his greatest skill, for he wanted to follow these silver men to the spot where Pat and Lorna Zane were being held. The quarry made noise in their haste, and that simplified Doc's trailing them.

Warehouses shoved out of the fog, became dank, towering piles; there was the odor of polluted bay water, the sound of waves, and the noise of a disconsolate gull.

Doc quickened his pace. He caught sight of the silver men, still in their weird disguises. They rounded a warehouse and ran out on a wharf, where they were lost to view behind a tool house.

On the pier lay old machinery, piling, timbers. Doc worked through this, on hands and knees most of the time. A dozen feet from the tool house, he lay still and listened.

There was no sound.

The bronze man leaped up and lunged for the tool structure, a smoke bomb in one hand, a grenade in the other.

As soon as he was around the structure, all of his grim haste left him and his great muscles uncoiled from their tenseness, so that he seemed suddenly slack and weary. His motions as he pocketed the grenades were slow.

The gull that had been making the noise spun low overhead, then zoomed away, frightened by a fantastic note, an eerie, indefinable sound that might have been a spawn of the fog. The sound was trilling, melodious, yet devoid of tune, an eerie cadence which lasted only a moment, then came to an end as fantastic as its beginning.

Doc's lips did not move as he made the sound; such a quality of ventriloquism did it possess that a close bystander could not have told from whence it came, without previous knowledge.

The tool house was an open shed. There was no one in it, no one on the wharf, nor on the water which lunged, greasy and menacing, at the bronze man's feet.

Doc looked under the wharf. The silver men were not there. He listened for a long time. No boat could have taken them away in the fog so silently that he could not have heard their departure.

The silver men had vanished in a fashion as strange as their costumes.

There was a crowd of police about the ramshackle, grimy—and now half destroyed—building where the trap had been set for Doc. They asked questions of the giant bronze man who wore the grotesque, padded garb of a deformed beggar.

"A trap," Doc said simply, and got the hand organ which he had carried when playing the part of the mendicant.

The hand organ held, carefully concealed in its innards, the ultra-violet lantern. The big colored glasses Doc had worn while playing beggar had been the spectacles which helped in detecting, by daylight, the fluorescing of the black light. Thus he had traced the vague smears of vaseline to the building.

Doc started for his truck, but deviated to join a crowd at a near-by corner. There, police were keeping the crowd back from a body sprawled on the sidewalk.

An officer was removing an all-enveloping silver garment from it. The dead man was burly, evil of face, and his body had not spilled much scarlet, because he had been shot perfectly between the eyes. There was a gun near the corpse.

"I came around a corner and bumped into him, and he ups and ats me with his iron," explained one of the cops. "But he was a little slow."

Doc said nothing and did not change expression, although the death of the burly man closed a source of possible information, for the fellow was the one who had come out and kicked Doc when he was doing his beggar act.

"I will take the silver suit," Doc said.

The police passed it over without objection. They knew this bronze man, with his scientific skill, his daring which sometimes seemed madness, could probably

accomplish more against the menace of the Silver Death's-Heads than the entire metropolitan police.

There was an expensive wrist watch on the dead man. Doc glanced at it, then at his own wrist watch. The other was exactly two minutes and fifteen seconds fast.

Doc Savage started away, only to pause and do what for him was a rare thing. He reconsidered. Then he came back and took the expensive wrist watch from the arm of the dead man.

He donned the watch and wore it in place of his own.

## Chapter 14

### THE GREEN TRAIL

Doc Savage had exchanged his armored delivery truck for a dark, somber sedan which, in its way, was as impregnable as the truck, and as deceptive. The change had been made at the skyscraper headquarters.

Ham and Rapid Pace occupied the commodious front seat with Doc. Monk and Hugh McCoy were wedged in the back with a large number of metal equipment cases. There had been no time out for explanations.

"Come on," Doc had directed, then rattled out a string of numbers. The numbers corresponded with the numerals inscribed on the equipment boxes, which Doc kept ready packed in the skyscraper aerie.

But now the bronze man was finishing a brief synopsis of what had happened at the end of the vaseline trail.

"It was, of course, a trap," he said. "Now, Ham, what did you learn about Bedford Burgess Gardner? Or did you have time to learn anything?"

Ham rolled his sword cane between manicured fingers. He had changed his clothing and looked dapper, neat, not at all as if he had been in a mad whirl of death, destruction and mystery throughout the night.

"I learned enough," he said, and grimness crackled in his orator's voice.

"What do you mean by that?"

"One year ago, Bedford Burgess Gardner headed a second-rate shipping company," Ham stated. "Exactly one year ago negotiations were under way, discussing the merger of Gardner's hack concern with a larger, sounder company. One man opposed the union—the president of the board of the other company. That night, the president was killed by a burglar whom he caught ransacking his house. The merger went through."

"This sounds bad," Rapid Pace gulped rapidly. "Yes, sir, it does sound bad!"

"Three months later, a second merger was under consideration, this one between Gardner's company and still another. Two men in the other outfit opposed the union. A private yacht blew up and killed them both. The merger went through."

"For cryin' out loud!" Hugh McCoy exploded, big-voiced, in the rear seat. "That was the merger between Gardner's concern and the Oriental Passenger-Freight Transport."

"Exactly," said Ham. "There was another merger a few weeks ago, and that one also had suspicious circumstances."

"Somebody else killed?" Monk demanded in his characteristic tiny voice.

"No," said Ham. "It was the sinking of the liner *Avallancia*."

"Hey," Monk barked. "We read about that in the paper yesterday. The newspaper story said the *Avallancia* belonged to Bedford Burgess Gardner's company."

“It did not at the time it was sunk,” Ham corrected. “It belonged to the other company, a small concern, and its loss put them in such a bad financial predicament that they had to merge with Gardner’s corporation. Gardner gave out that he had already merged. That was so Wall Street would not think the smaller company was financially embarrassed and try to beat down the price of its stock.”

Doc Savage asked sharply, “Did financial manipulations in stock feature these mergers?”

“All of them,” Ham rapped. “And right here we haul the cat out of the bag.”

“Listen,” said Monk. “Use plain English, will you?”

“Bedford Burgess Gardner has made over a billion dollars during the last year,” Ham said slowly and distinctly. “Does that sound like plain English?”

“It sounds like a blasted lot of money,” Monk muttered.

The conversation had not taken long, but the big sedan was traveling fast. They were now on the water front, gliding along before frowning phalanxes of pier warehouses.

“Stock ballooning?” Doc asked, without turning his head.

“Exactly,” said Ham. “Recapitalization with each merger, and flotations of immense stock issues which were disseminated to the public.”

“Again,” said Monk, “will you use plain English.”

“Here is a simple example,” Ham snapped.

“Make it very simple,” Monk told him sourly. “And don’t make any cracks about me being ignorant.”

“You own a boat worth a thousand dollars and I own a boat worth a thousand dollars,” Ham explained. “We both carry passengers and freight. We are bitter business rivals. We do anything we can to cut each other’s throat.”

“I can see how *that* could be,” Monk growled.

“As a result, neither of us makes much money,” Ham continued. “I offer to merge, you refuse and I ruin the engine in your boat, so you’ve got to merge, which is another name for selling out to me.”

“Very clear,” Monk snorted.

“Now, I have two companies worth a thousand a piece,” said Ham. “I issue stock—two thousand shares, of no par value—and offer it to the public. If the public has any sense, they won’t pay over a dollar a share for the stock, because that is all my merged companies are worth.”

“Hurry it up,” Monk commanded impatiently.

“All right,” said Ham. “I bid three dollars a share for the stock on the market, doing the bidding through a broker, so that no one knows my name, or even through a dummy purchaser. I jump the price to four dollars. The public gets excited, and begins to buy. Demand holds the price up, or possibly makes it go higher. The result, when all two thousand shares of stock are sold, is that I have cleaned up an extra thousand or two.”

“Hm-m-m,” Monk murmured, his homely features thoughtful.

“Then I find another company, make it merge with me, recapitalize, issue new stock to the holders of shares in the first merger concern, and do it all over again.” Ham leaned back in the seat. “That is what Gardner did, fundamentally. Of course, the actual high finance was a bit more complicated than that. But he has cleaned up almost a billion within the last year.”

Rapid Pace whipped around, glared at Hugh McCoy and clipped, “You work for Gardner. What do you know about this?”

McCoy returned the glare, his too-perfectly handsome face turning scarlet.

“I have only been working for Gardner on the Paine L. Winthrop concern merger!” he yelled. “I did not know anything was wrong. And I dare you to show differently!”

“You mean you were so dumb you did not know you were working for the world’s biggest crook?” Rapid Pace snapped.

“Gardner is a devil, a cunning devil!” McCoy shouted. “And don’t you insinuate \_\_\_\_\_”

“Pipe down, you birds, or I’ll bob you both,” Monk advised, his small voice turning into a rumble.

Doc pulled to a stop before an enormous building of brick and steel.

The structure in front of which they had halted, for all of its size, differed little from other warehouses which stood on piers along the water front. A sign on the front read:

### HIDALGO TRADING COMPANY

The building was Doc Savage’s water-front boathouse and seaplane hangar. Perhaps dock workers wondered why the place seemed deserted much of the time, but it was doubtful if any knew its true nature.

Doc touched a button on the dash. This operated an ultra-violet light projector on the front of the sedan, and the beam in turn actuated a photo-electric cell which caused the great door in the front of the warehouse hangar to slide open.

Doc drove into the enormous building and the door closed automatically behind them.

Rapid Pace and Hugh McCoy stared in gaping astonishment at the array of fast planes—they ranged from a tiny gyro to a great tri-motored speed ship which could carry two dozen passengers in excess of three hundred miles an hour.

“Hurry,” Doc commanded.

The bronze man passed the planes, opened a door into another section of the building and switched on lights. If Pace and McCoy had been surprised by the planes, they were figuratively floored by what they saw now.

“A submarine!” McCoy gasped, and his manicured hand strayed up to his eyes as if to see if they were functioning correctly.

*Helldiver* was the name on the conning tower of the underseas craft.

The *Helldiver* was probably as unique a sub as man had ever constructed. The conning tower, as such, existed hardly at all, and from bow to stern ran great steel, sledlike runners, stoutly braced. The *Helldiver* had first been constructed for a trip under the North Polar ice.

Doc and his little group of aides had seen two great adventures aboard the *Helldiver*—the first under the Polar ice, and the second through an underground river into a fantastic phantom city in the Arabian desert.

After the Arabian trip, the submersible had lain idle, but carefully greased, the fuel tanks full. The craft was ready for quick service.

“Get the stuff aboard,” Doc directed.

McCoy moistened his almost womanish lips. “Are we—are we going under the water?”

Doc studied him. “You do not like the idea?”

McCoy straightened his remarkably square shoulders. “I—I have never been down. But I shall go. I owe it to my reputation to help capture this devil Gardner.”

Doc turned to Rapid Pace. “And you?”

Pace shuddered.

“I do not like the idea. I think I shall stay here.” He shuddered again. “Yes, sir, I shall stay behind. No iron fish for mine.”

Then Pace caught Monk’s eye. Monk’s eyes were small and normally pleasant, but now they were small and not pleasant, for Monk was thinking that Rapid Pace had gone out for cigarettes about the time he and Doc were in the East River diving for the mysterious metal box.

Monk was a blunt fellow, not given to suavity, and what he was thinking showed on his incredibly homely features.

Rapid Pace began to tremble.

“On second thought, I shall be glad to go,” he gulped. “Yes, on second thought.”

The *Helldiver*’s engines had been reconditioned since her Arabian jaunt. Diesels had new pistons, the electric motors new bearings. The electric motors were running now, and they made little noise.

Doc Savage and his four companions stood in the control room. The submarine was equipped so that one man could operate her if necessary, all controls centered in one spot.

The depth indicator read only twenty feet and the periscope was up above the surface, but Doc now turned a wheel and the steel cigar with the strange runners sank slowly. A touch of a button, and the periscope swished down into its well.

Rapid Pace moistened his lips, clenched his fists and cried uneasily, “But we’re in New York harbor! A ship may run into us!”

Monk, homely features placid, said, “We’ve taken the *Helldiver* where icebergs were thicker than fleas, and never did hit anything.”

“What saved you?” Pace demanded. “Yes, sir, what saved you?”

“The instruments,” Monk shrugged. “There are sonic devices all over the hull. They tell us how deep the water is, and if anything larger than a rowboat comes near, we’ll know it.”

Monk indicated a bank of dials. These bore hands which were continually jumping slightly. Four of them were marked “North,” “South,” “East” and “West;” a fifth dial was labeled “Bottom Distance.” The dial marked South abruptly began jumping.

“That means there is a boat to the south,” said Monk.

Doc swung the steering controls slightly. After a bit, the jumping shifted to the West dial, then the North dial, which meant they had left the surface vessel astern.

“Remarkable!” Hugh McCoy murmured.

“You ain’t seen nothing!” Monk snorted. “Doc has used this sub for testing out ideas. It’s got more gadgets aboard than the average man sees in a lifetime.”

Rapid Pace, shifting about nervously as was his habit, asked in a shrill voice, “But what are we out here in a submarine for?”

Monk scowled. “We’re hunting silver men, of course.”

“Who ever heard of a submarine hunting a submarine?” Pace said rapidly. “They use sub chasers, surface vessels for that.”

“Listen, noisy, suppose you pipe down,” Monk requested.

“Yes,” McCoy told Pace. “You talk too much.”

Rapid Pace glared at the handsome, well-knit figure of McCoy. His lips curled hatefully.

“You, of course, are large enough to whip me,” he gritted. “Otherwise, I would hand you a poke on the jaw!”

“I’ll tie one hand behind me, if it will encourage you any,” McCoy jeered.

Monk said, “Cut it out, or I’ll bump your heads.”

Without taking his flake-gold eyes off the controls, Doc Savage announced, “Within not longer than two minutes, we shall know whether we have the slightest chance of finding the silver men.”

The electric motors had decreased their slight hum, and gear boxes made almost no noise, so that they could hear the bay water curling past the outer skin of the *Helldiver*.

“Where are we?” Monk asked.

Doc Savage dropped a sinew-wrapped bronze finger on the illuminated chart table, and said, “Here.”

The gorillalike chemist hunched over the map board, blinked his small eyes and observed that they were navigating by the crude map which Doc had secured from the secret room in the Indian Head Club.

Their position, as indicated by Doc’s finger, was near one of the four small stars, but not the star where the bronze man had dived and found the mysterious metal box.

“So we’re gonna try to get another one of them boxes,” Monk grunted.

“No,” Doc corrected.

Monk squinted his small eyes. “Huh?”

“I saw enough of the first box, before losing it over the side of the launch when the submarine fired on us,” Doc explained. “Those boxes are very clever radio buoys. They are nothing more than tiny transmitters.”

“Radio transmitters!” Monk grunted.

“Very compact,” Doc elaborated. “They are fitted with a form of the so-called air-cell battery, which delivers a small quantity of current over a long period of time. The transmitters in the boxes are of extremely small power, using a negligible amount of current.”

Ham tapped the chart with his sword cane. “You say those stars mark the location of radio buoys? What do you mean—radio buoys?”

“I will illustrate,” Doc answered.

The bronze man clicked switches, then turned a knob which controlled the *Helldiver*’s radio compass. The latter did not differ greatly from the type in use on most naval and commercial vessels, except that it could function on extremely short wave-lengths.

Manipulating the wave-length knob, Doc fished through the ether for the signal from the Silver Death’s-Heads’ radio buoy.

The others waited impatiently. The bronze man had decreased their speed even more, until the momentum was now barely enough to cause the planing effect of diving rudders to hold them off the bottom.

A faint popping came from the speaker. It loudened as Doc maneuvered the loop, a sound closely akin to static.

“There,” he announced. “They did not use the regular dot-and-dash signals, but an arrangement of breaking contacts which creates a sound resembling static.”

“Deuced clever,” Ham murmured. “Any one picking up that noise on their radio would think it was static and give it no more attention.”

Doc moved levers. The *Helldiver* picked up speed and headed for the radio buoy; the sound got louder, then began to weaken as they passed over it and left it astern. Soon Doc picked up the sound of the next buoy.

Rapid Pace said abruptly, “I get it! Yes, I get it! These buoys are to guide the Silver Death’s-Heads submarine into the harbor. They must have a rendezvous somewhere outside the harbor.”

There were thick glass windows in the submarine conning tower, and through these the men could see the vile green water of the bay curling past.

“The green trail,” Ham said grimly. “I hope it leads us to something.”

## Chapter 15

### HELL UNDER WATER

Although the *Helldiver* could be navigated by one man, it was considerable of a single-handed task. It kept Doc extremely busy moving levers, flipping switches. The tanks trimmed themselves through the medium of a robot apparatus—which helped.

Inset in the front wall of the control room was a large panel of frosted glass. There were similar panels in the side and rear walls, as well.

Monk, who was familiar with the *Helldiver's* intricate mechanism, adjusted dials which resulted in a remarkable thing happening to the frosted glass panels. They assumed a greenish hue. The glaucous tint seemed alive, moving.

Rapid Pace ogled the panels. But not until a bit of underwater driftage swirled past one did he realize he was seeing the watery depths outside the submarine.

“Marvelous!” he exploded. “Yes, sir, marvelous!”

“There are strong infra-red searchlights recessed in the hull,” Monk told him. “Infra-red light penetrates water a little better than ordinary visible rays. Photo-electric eyes pick up the images and they are brought to these screens through common television apparatus.”

Pace looked a little dizzy. “Why, this underseas boat is incredible. It must have cost a fortune!”

“It did,” Monk told him calmly. “This iron fish was a whiz when it was first built, and it has been improved on ever since. I told you that when Doc invents something for a submarine, he tries it out on the *Helldiver*.”

Ham, eyeing his sword cane, put in, “And that reminds me of something: Where did these Silver Death’s-Heads get *their* sub?”

Monk grunted, “I’ve been wondering about that, too.”

“That may not be so mysterious,” Doc offered.

“Eh?” Monk stared at the bronze giant.

“Do you recall my telling you that Lorna Zane said Paine L. Winthrop gave her five-months’ vacation with pay last spring?” Doc queried.

“Sure,” said Monk.

Rapid Pace exploded. “I was given a vacation at the same time! So were all of the regular employees of the Winthrop Shipyards. It was very mysterious. When we got back to work, we found that the shipyard had been in operation during our absence. We never did find out what had been built.”

“That,” said Doc, “explains it.”

“So the submarine was built in Winthrop’s yard,” Ham clipped grimly. “Winthrop was in on this. He got cold feet, or fell out with his partners or something, and they killed him with a shell fired from the submarine in the East River.”

“Fantastic!” Rapid Pace murmured. “Utterly fantastic, yes, sir!”

The *Helldiver* had now passed the last of the radio buoys shown on the map which Doc had gotten from the Indian Head Club.

“What now?” Monk wondered aloud.

“We will keep on and hope the map did not show all of the radio guides,” Doc said.

Sure enough, the directional apparatus picked up more of the bursts which had the sound of static. The buoys, it seemed, continued out toward the open sea.

Following the trail, always beneath the surface, they veered to the right, out of ship lanes. They were now heading down the Jersey coast, but a number of miles offshore.

“Pretty slick,” Monk said. “Having a string of radio buoys to guide them right into New York harbor. Boy, oh, boy! What a perfect get-away idea!”

“It required the expenditure of a lot of money,” Ham pointed out.

Monk started to say something—and his mouth flew so very wide open that it seemed he was trying to yawn. His right arm jutted out like a bar, pointing.

“I’ll be a whale’s brother!” he choked. “Look!”

In the stern-view screen had appeared an object which resembled a steel egg viewed from the front. It might have been a fish coming head-on, for they had seen other fish on the screens, but this was of a steely color and certain rudders and protuberances marked it for what it was.

“Submarine!” Ham ejaculated.

The other subseas craft was traveling more swiftly than the *Helldiver*, and therefore was gaining.

Doc Savage advanced the throttles. The *Helldiver* picked up speed. But so did the other ship. It continued to gain.

“This bus was not made for racing,” Monk grumbled. “The ice-protector rails cut down the speed.”

Rapid Pace cried anxiously, “How about torpedo tubes?”

“None aboard,” Doc advised.

“What about depth bombs, then?”

Doc Savage shook a metallic head. “The *Helldiver* is not equipped for fighting. It is primarily a scientific experimental vessel.”

The bronze man changed their course a trifle.

Monk was scowling at the screen. “One consolation—that other iron fish hasn’t got torpedo tubes, either.”

The pursuing sub swung slightly sidewise to follow the *Helldiver*, and they could observe the length of the craft. It was considerably smaller than the *Helldiver*, more slender, scientifically streamlined.

“Seems like I’ve seen that bus somewhere before!” Monk grunted. “Or maybe it was a picture.”

“It was a picture,” Doc told him.

Monk blinked little eyes. “I can’t remember where I saw it. Do you?”

“Not long ago, United States newspapers carried a photograph of a small two-man submarine which the Japanese were testing,” Doc advised. “It was a craft closely resembling that one. Probably the design of the Japanese submarine was copied in making this one.”

The smaller underseas boat was now only a few yards behind. They could see, in the front of the conning tower, a round glass porthole.

Rapid Pace barked, “I wonder what they plan to do?”

Doc, not altering expression, said, “Nothing pleasant, you can rest assured.”

Pace moistened his lips, then glanced down at his hands. He held them out in front of him. They were steady. This seemed to surprise him.

“Hurrah!” he shouted.

Hugh McCoy glared at him and snarled, “I don’t see anything to be happy about!” McCoy’s exquisitely handsome face was greasy with perspiration.

Rapid Pace grinned widely. “Gentlemen, I believe my association with you has ridded me of something which has hampered me all my life. I am speaking of my cowardice. I usually scare, get so frightened that I am positively a wreck. But now I feel like a dare-devil. Positively, a dare-devil.”

McCoy groaned, “What are we going to do? Why don’t we rise to the surface? We can’t outrun them.”

“See that streamlined hatch on the other sub?” Doc queried.

“Y-yes,” McCoy stuttered.

“That undoubtedly covers the three-inch gun,” Doc assured him. “They cannot fire it under water. But wait—let us see if this helps.”

The bronze man reached over and jerked a brass lever. The rear-view screen suddenly became black. But the viewing device had not failed. The blackness was from without—an inky cloud was pouring from receptacles in the skin of the submarine.

“Blazes!” Monk gulped. “This is a new one on me!”

Doc Savage put the wheel hard over, then cut the motors to half-throttle.

“Remember when we went under the Polar ice in the *Helldiver*?” he asked.

“Do I?” grunted Monk. “I’ll never forget!”

“We put tanks in the submarine skin to hold a chemical—a mixture you invented, incidentally—which would melt ice when released,” Doc recalled. “That was to free us if we got trapped under the ice pack.”

Monk nodded. “Sure.”

“The chemical solution I just released from those tanks is my own invention,” Doc told him. “It turns salt water black. The secret is now in the hands of the United States Government. It may come in handy should there be another war.”

Doc now manipulated the sonic locators. These showed that the small submarine of the silver men was astern, wandering in its course, baffled by the sepia water.

Doc cut the motors of the *Helldiver* entirely. The craft lost headway, sank, and came to a rest on the bottom of the Atlantic which, at this point, was hard sand, according to the charts.

McCoy mopped perspiration from his too-handsome features and groaned, "I don't see where this is going to help us!"

Pace grinned at him. "We're alive, anyway."

Glaring, McCoy snapped, "You don't need to be so damned cheerful!"

Rapid Pace, in his new personality of a man who was not afraid, was a different individual from the nervous, rapid-talking efficiency expert. He even spoke more slowly, firmly, and did not repeat himself as much.

"From now on, you use a civil tongue when you speak to me," he told Hugh McCoy grimly. "Otherwise I am going to do my best to knock hell out of you."

Monk growled, "For just about the last time, I'm telling you guys to cut that out!"

There came a loud, metallic clank. The rubber-ribbed floor tilted, throwing all but Doc Savage off balance. The bronze man's grip on the controls kept him erect.

McCoy wailed fearfully, and seemed on the point of bursting into tears.

"What was that?" he screamed.

Rapid Pace picked himself up, sneered at McCoy, then squinted at the window panels. These were black, due to the murky solution in the water without. But the ocean current had swept some of the sepia cloud away, and he could make out objects a few feet from the *Helldiver* hull.

"Look!" Pace barked. "That other submarine has fastened itself to our hull in some manner!"

Doc Savage started the *Helldiver* motors. The sub began to move, but it was an erratic motion. The resistance of the other vessel clinging to their hull—and the other craft did not dislodge—was sufficient to prevent them steering a straight course.

Manipulating valves, Doc caused the *Helldiver*'s ballast tanks to blow. They lifted a few feet, then their rise stopped and they watched the depth gauge sink back until they jarred on the sandy ocean floor again. The *Helldiver*, an extremely heavy craft, did not have enough surplus buoyancy to lift the other submarine with its ballast tanks fully filled.

"Hell!" yelled Monk. "This beats anything I ever heard of! What's holdin' that iron fish to us?"

"That is the mystery," Doc said grimly. "And what puzzles me even more. How did it find us in the black water?"

There was quiet in the *Helldiver* now, except for the clicking of a gyro compass and the microscopic ticking of chronometers. They strained their ears. Hugh McCoy had changed color, not getting pale, but blue, as if he were being slowly smothered.

*Glub!* The sound was wet. *Glub, glub!* It repeated twice again.

“Bubbles from an escape hatch on the other sub!” Doc rapped. “They are sending divers outside!”

The bronze giant lashed a glance at the depth indicators. They read slightly below seventy feet. The depth was not excessive for diving work.

Doc ran to a locker which held diving equipment—flexible, mail-armored suits and some of the transparent hoods which vaguely resembled goldfish bowls. The locker held more than half a dozen outfits. Doc hauled them out.

“Put them on!” he rapped.

Monk and Ham sprang to obey. They knew how the suits operated, having used them before. Rapid Pace joined them.

Hugh McCoy stood back, his exquisitely profiled face even more purple.

Monk picked up one of the suits and ran toward McCoy, intending to force the handsome man to put it on.

McCoy suddenly clawed at a pocket. He had a gun half out when Monk, lunging, wrenched the weapon from his fingers.

“What in blazes were you gonna do with that?” Monk yelled.

“I d-don’t know,” McCoy stuttered. “F-fight those devils, I guess. I don’t want to go outside. I hate the water. I’ve never been in a diving suit. Why, we’re s-seventy feet down!”

Monk jammed McCoy’s gun in his own pocket. “Yes, and we’ll be down here permanently unless we do something about it.”

McCoy, trembling, allowed himself to be helped into the diving suit and received instructions on its operation.

Rapid Pace, chest puffed with his new-found courage, said, “I’m not scared. I feel like a dare-devil, positively. Damned if I understand it!”

## Chapter 16

### UNDERWATER DEFEAT

The *Helldiver* was not silent now. The men were breathing noisily from the exertion of getting into the suits; the suits themselves made clinkings against the metal parts of the submarine.

But there was other sound, a hideous sound. It was a series of resounding blows against the steel hull of the submarine. These came from forward, and from immediately overhead.

“They’ve found our hatches, and are trying to get them open to let the water in,” Monk growled.

Then the homely chemist pulled the transparent helmet over his head, switched on the tiny two-way radio and added, “Let’s get goin’. We gotta put a stop to that.”

Doc Savage led the way aft. He opened an oval hatch which gave into a steel cubicle hardly more than six feet square. In the top of this was another hatch.

Doc closed the bulkhead through which they had come. He turned a lever. Machinery whined. The hatch overhead lifted and water came in, by strings at first, then with a smashing rush that jostled them about.

The bronze man let compressed air from the back tanks into his suit to compensate his buoyancy to approximately that of the surrounding sea. Then he leaped, floated upward, grasped the hatch edge and clambered out.

The others followed him—McCoy first, then Pace, then Monk and Ham.

Each man drew a sharp, long-bladed knife. These were holstered to the diving suit belts. Under water, knives were the most effective weapons.

It was lighter than they had expected outside. For one thing, the current had swept away the black cloud. And the silver men were carrying powerful portable torches.

Doc headed for the group about the main conning tower hatch. They were vague at first, like figures seen in a fog. Then they took on distinctness. There were four of them.

They wore self-contained diving suits—paraphernalia which did not require air hoses, oxygen being supplied by tanks worn on a back harness. Their helmets were not transparent, but of metal, with round grilled windows.

The diving equipment was of the sort which could be purchased at any supply house.

The silver men—there was not the slightest doubt but that they were Silver Death’s-Heads—were working with wrenches and bars, and a cutting torch made a lurid spot of light and spewed bubbles through the water.

Doc ran toward them, leaning far forward. Probably the thump of his lead shoes on the sub hull warned the group about the conning tower hatch. They straightened. The one with the torch sidled ahead, waving the grisly flame before him.

It was a hideous weapon, that torch. It burned under water by grace of pure oxygen supplied from a portable tank, and it could slice through hard steel with no more difficulty than a finger is drawn through mud.

Monk lunged along at Doc's elbow. The pleasantly ugly chemist retained some of his apish aspect in a diving suit.

"We'll flank the man with the torch," Doc said into the radio.

The bronze man went to the right. Monk took the left.

The diver with the torch made a few erratic passes, then began to retreat. He had respect for the knives Doc and Monk carried. The body of his suit was of rubber and canvas composition, by no means proof against sharp steel.

Suddenly the silver men broke and fled. Resistance of the water made their movements grotesquely slow as they took flying leaps off the hull of the *Helldiver*, then churned for their own craft, which was attached slightly forward.

Doc and Monk, following, had a chance to observe how the other submarine managed to cling so tightly to the *Helldiver*.

Attached to the hull of the smaller U-boat was a succession of circular objects which might have been washtubs. It was these which were in contact with Doc's submarine.

"Electromagnets!" Monk yelled through the intercommunicating radio. "But what in blazes are electromagnets doing on their tub?"

The answer to that did not come until later, after unpleasant things had happened.

The submarine of the silver men, while small in proportion to the *Helldiver*, was larger than it had first seemed when viewed through the lookout screen from within the *Helldiver*. It was no two-man craft. At least a dozen silver men in diving suits were outside.

They grouped to meet Doc and his party. Some of them held diver's knives. But others were doing something else, working at the escape hatch by which they had left their own submersible.

They drew out black rods some six feet or more in length, to the ends of which were attached what resembled black rubber hose. The men held these rods like lances, and advanced. The black line trailed out behind them and led into their own submarine.

One of them stumbled. He put the end of his rod down against the sandy bottom to maintain his balance. Where the rod touched, there was abrupt, sizzling blue flame, like an electric arc.

"The rods carry high-voltage current!" Doc warned his companions. "Pressure closes a contact. If they touch us with those things, we're finished!"

The silver men came on. Their features were grotesque inside the helmet windows, for they still wore the gruesome masks which had caused the tabloid newspapers to give them their designation of Silver Death's-Heads. The insulated high-voltage rods probed hungrily.

Doc halted, wheeled, saw that his four companions were behind him and waved them back.

“To fight them would be fatal,” he warned. “Stay away from those rods. Circle around them. Keep them worried. I am going back into the *Helldiver*.”

The bronze man spun and sloped back for the escape hatch. His best speed was not as fast as a normal man could walk on land. Injecting extra buoyancy into his suit, he lifted himself up to the conning tower, compensated the buoyancy, then dropped back and let himself down into the hatch. Compressed air forced the sea water out.

A moment later, he was in the *Helldiver* control room.

A twist of a lever discharged a fresh quantity of the chemical which, due to its reaction with the saline content of the sea water, created a black smudge.

Next, the bronze man dug a cutting torch out of a locker. He did not ignite it. Then he passed through the escape hatch and emerged outside again.

“Every one safe?” he asked.

Monk and Ham replied almost at once over the intercommunicating radio. McCoy was a bit slower.

“How about you, Pace?” Doc asked.

“I’m not a bit scared,” said Rapid Pace. “I cannot understand it.”

“Simply stay clear of them,” Doc directed. “Give me a chance to work on their electromagnets with this cutting torch.”

The bronze man did not ignite the torch immediately, since its glow might betray his presence despite the black smear which now filled the sea. It was like working through ink as he crept along the hard, sandy bottom.

The silver men, he reasoned, would be worried by the black cloud and stick close to their own craft. Getting between the two tightly-clinging submersibles, Doc fended off with one hand, then puffed his suit with the air valve and sailed upward.

He found one of the electromagnets which were like washtubs. The cutting torch was fitted with an underwater igniter. With a mild explosion, it began to flame.

Doc Savage promptly clamped his transparent helmet to the steel side of the submarine. This would cause the clank of lead shoes, should any divers approach, to come to his attention before danger was too close.

Instead of holding the cutting torch in his hand, the bronze man placed it on the subhull in such a position that the flame was held against the electromagnet covering without aid from his own hand. This was a matter of precaution. The torch might short-circuit through the coil and bring a death-dealing jolt of current.

Shortly, a flash of blue flame showed through the sepia void. That would be the burned-out coil wires arcing. Doc jerked the insulated lanyard attached to the torch and drew it to him.

He worked down the hull in the intensely dark, gently resisting void that was the sea, and found the next electromagnet. He repeated the process there, even to keeping

his helmet pressed to the subhull.

And it was well that he did not neglect that last. He might have missed the clanking of rapid footsteps. Lead shoes were coming along the subdeck. From the jangling noises, other divers were striving to clamber up the hull.

Doc waited. The torch made a roaring that almost drowned out the footsteps, but it did not drown them quite as much as before. The divers were getting close.

Doc hauled the torch in, cut the flame and eased away. A few feet down the hull, he stepped out and let himself sink to the sand.

Before he got his balance, the ocean current carried him against the *Helldiver's* hull. He crept along it, feeling his way.

"Monk! Ham!" Doc called into the microphone. "Get in the *Helldiver* with Pace and McCoy."

Doc reached the escape hatch and a moment later, with a dull clanking and a bubbling of released air, his four companions also reached the hatch. In order not to get lost, they had linked themselves together with a line—a hank of stout cord was a part of each diving suit belt equipment.

Doc closed the escape chamber hatch, blew the water, then stepped into the *Helldiver*. He ran for the control room without removing the diving suit.

Motors wailed out at his touch of the starting switch, wailed and labored. Suddenly there was a great crashing of circuit breakers cutting current off from the motors. The breakers functioned automatically, to protect the motors from an overload.

Doc tried again. Unclutched from the propeller drive shafts, the motors turned over readily. But the shafts themselves refused to turn. The overload caused the breakers to bang open.

"What is it?" Monk asked anxiously.

"They seem to have wrapped chain around our propeller shafts," Doc told him.

The bronze man now blew the *Helldiver's* ballast tanks to their fullest, in an endeavor to get the submarine to pull free from the electromagnets which still held it to the other underwater craft. Since some of the magnets had been rendered useless, Doc hoped the others would be insufficient to hold.

He was positive they could have gotten away had the *Helldiver's* motors been able to turn over the propellers. The submarines did not separate, however, but continued to repose on the sea bottom, magnetically glued together.

And now there was more noise at the hatches, as the silver men endeavored to force themselves inside the *Helldiver*.

Doc went back to the escape chamber, accompanied by the other four. They were grim, saying little. Enclosed in the chamber, they shut the inner door, then Doc touched the control which started opening the outer panel.

The door had opened but a few inches when he lunged for the controls and reversed them. A black rod had protruded through the opening. Its end was armored with the

shiny copper of an electrode.

“One of them blasted electric lances!” Monk growled.

“Keep away from it!” Doc commanded grimly.

The lance had been caught in the closing door. The steel panel pinched shut, and a moment later cut through the lance insulation with a resultant explosion of blue flame.

The *Helldiver* was equipped with two escape hatches, so that divers could come and go. They had been intended for scientific exploration work under water. The second hatch was located forward and was smaller.

“We’ll try the other hatch,” Doc decided.

They were in water well above their knees. When the inner door was open, this flooded into the *Helldiver* with them. But the automatic pumps would take care of it.

But they did not reach the other escape hatch, or pass through it to engage in combat.

They were abreast of the conning tower when there was a moaning roar, and water sheeted out of the control room. It came from the control room door, as if that aperture were the mouth of a great faucet which had been turned on suddenly.

Doc Savage, for all of his great strength, was tumbled about and smashed into bulkheads. The torrent jostled him down a passage, banged him into a steel support, and the transparent helmet he was wearing would have broken had it not been of very strong construction.

Monk and the others, lacking Doc’s physical hardihood, were handled with greater roughness. McCoy yelled in pain as he smashed over a motor; there was terror in his voice also. Pace swore calmly.

Monk and Ham resisted the water with grim silence.

Had they all not worn diving suits, death would have come within the ensuing few minutes. As it was, they were jostled about, helpless to resist the tremendous force of the water, until the *Helldiver*’s main compartment had filled.

Only the central section filled at the moment, however, for there were safety devices on the bulkhead doors, mechanical contrivances which closed and made the bulkheads watertight when water entered.

There were no air locks between the bulkheads, so that it was impossible to move from one compartment to the other, now that the central one was full.

Silver men in diving suits began dropping down the conning tower hatch.

The sea water, due to the strong current, had cleared up again, the black cloud having been swept away. The first silver man to enter held one of the long dark lances, and close at his elbow came another man bearing a strong underwater searchlight. They advanced.

More sinister divers entered behind them. They floated down in an ominous procession, vague forms in the water, like spectral bodies from some Stygian domain. There was only the one electric lance. The others held diver’s knives.

Doc and his men retreated. There was nothing else to do. The lance was deadly. It was the thing which had defeated them, the one weapon with which they were helpless to cope, having, as they did, no time to rig an insulated shield or other defense.

There was not even an insulated pole in the *Helldiver* which could be employed to fend off the electric lance.

Doc watched the lancer. The bronze man's remarkable features, plainly distinguishable inside his transparent helmet, showed no emotion.

Doc's attention—all of it—was on the lance. The clanking of lead shoes made a metallic mumble on the floor plates. That was why he did not hear the bulkhead door behind him open. It was a carefully made, well-greased door.

Doc had no way of knowing that the other compartments had been opened and flooded. But they had. The work had been done with wrenches and cutting torches. And silver men had come from behind to flank Doc's party.

A second diver appeared in the bulkhead opening. Then came a third, a fourth and a fifth. They had no lance, but they all held knives. They lunged in to attack.

Doc was not taken entirely unawares. He heard the flanking divers, wheeled, noted the absence of a lance, and lunged in fiercely to the attack.

The silver divers did not retreat. They must have felt they had safety in numbers.

It was a weirdly fantastic battle which was fought in the water-gorged entrails of the submarine. The fellow with the electrified lance made a few jabs, then the electric cord, leading to the power plant in his own underwater craft, became entangled and he had to abandon the unique weapon.

Doc Savage and his men, surrounded completely now, formed a tight ring, a circlet that bristled with the razor-sharp steel thorns of their knives. But they did not hold it for long.

Silver divers lunged in on the side defended by Pace and McCoy. They broke through. One man sagged back, bubbles pouring from a hole which Pace had knifed in his suit.

The fighting ring disintegrated. Four men seized Doc Savage. One lost interest in the fray and stumbled off for his own submarine, his suit streaming bubbles.

A man leeches upon Doc's arm. Doc endeavors to shake him off. In the open air it would have been a simple task, but under water it was a Herculean job. The bronze man's second arm was trapped. A man tangled with his legs.

Doc was forced over sidewise. There was no purchase for footing, because his weight above the displaced water was negligible. The diving suit hampered him.

He felt some one at his back. He endeavored to spin, despite the men trying to hold him. But it was too late. There was a roar of escaping air. His oxygen apparatus had been wrenched away!

As air pressure left the bronze man's helmet, water began to pour in. It sloshed cold upon his neck, his shoulders, spilled down in his suit, which had been pressed tightly to his great frame when the air escaped.

Water came up around his neck, his lips. Had he been erect, air pressure in the top of his helmet might have kept the water out for a few moments. But he was tilted over on the steel floor. The brine covered his nostrils, his eyes.

A few bubbles left his nostrils. Then the mad desperation of impending death seemed to seize the metallic giant. His great arms corded, convulsed, and the two silver divers who held him were carried together, head-first. They dropped off his arms, stunned.

Doc stamped the other man free of his legs.

The fellow who had torn off the oxygen tank retreated, still holding the tank in one hand, a knife in the other.

Doc made a move as if to follow him. But a great weakness seemed to have seized him. He swayed, was moved about by the water currents within the swamped *Helldiver*. He sagged.

The current carried him backward and he disappeared into the gloom of the compartment from which the silver divers had come to stage the flank attack.

## Chapter 17

### THE SUBSEAS RIDE

Ull himself had wrenched the oxygen apparatus from Doc Savage's suit. He was elated. He yelled once in unholy delight, as Doc vanished into the black tomb of the compartment. Then he lunged toward two men who held Rapid Pace, and jammed his helmet to one of theirs.

"Keep them alive!" he yelled.

Because their diving suits were not equipped with the ingenious radio intercommunicating sets, it was necessary to put helmets together when they wanted to talk. In that manner, vibration through the metal carried their voices.

"Hell's fire!" the man shouted back. "Why?"

"We'll pump them!" Ull bellowed. "We must know whether they told the police what they had learned about us!"

Ull moved rapidly to his other men and repeated the order. As a result, Monk and Ham were hauled to the conning tower hatch, not greatly damaged, except in spirit. Monk's diving suit was leaking on one leg, but that would not be serious as long as he kept upright. A knife had made a gash in it.

Rapid Pace and McCoy were also unharmed. They were dragged along behind.

To the homely Monk, the trip back to the submarine of the Silver Death's-Heads seemed to take an age. He struggled at first, then desisted at the very real threat of a knife point against his chest.

The air lock by which they were taken into the other subseas boat was of the conventional type, possibly a bit larger than usual. But Monk was not interested in structural details.

Forlorn grief contorted the chemist's pleasantly ugly features. He had seen what had happened to Doc Savage. The bronze giant, he was convinced, was now dead.

The thought appalled Monk. It weakened him, took his spirit, made him listless, not caring greatly what happened henceforward. The fact that Pat Savage and Lorna Zane were still prisoners of the Silver Death's-Heads, perhaps alive, was temporarily forgotten.

Monk's existence was tied up with Doc Savage, and had been for years; but Doc was dead now. Scientist, a being of superhuman physical powers, master of incredible feats, the bronze man had perished in a tomb of steel sixty feet beneath the Atlantic.

Monk thought of that, and it put him in a mood where he could not see the need for carrying on.

Monk and Ham, under the guard of alert submachine guns, were placed together in a tiny compartment in the silver men's submarine. Their diving suits were removed.

They had to sit down, shoulder to shoulder, between two lockers. There was barely room for them. Nor was there headroom for even the shortest of their captors in the

submarine.

The U-boat was incredibly cramped, and she had a big cargo of humanity aboard, if these men who wore the silver disguises could be classed as such.

Rapid Pace and McCoy were placed somewhere else. Monk and Ham did not see them after they entered the underseas craft.

The homely chemist and the dapper lawyer did see a large metal canister being passed through the air hatch. A clockwork device was attached to this, and they recognized it for what it was—a mine of the type used by the Coast Guard to destroy derelicts.

They could guess to what use the explosive was to be put.

The Silver Death's-Heads loaded aboard the submarine and took off their diving paraphernalia. They were a jubilant lot. Some removed their silver masks. The faces they revealed had one thing in common—there was viciousness about the eyes.

A switch was thrown, cutting current off from the electromagnets. The submarine lifted a little, but did not clear the surface, and traveled away.

By the sound of the motors, Monk and Ham knew the craft was making full speed. They knew why—the mine.

The mine went off after a few minutes, and the shock of it rolled the submarine and made her steel plates groan.

Ull came and leered down at Monk and Ham, and said, “That blew your submarine and the corpse of Doc Savage to where they belong!”

Ull removed his mask now, probably because it hampered his breathing. The fact that he did remove it promised an unpleasant future. He would not show his face to men whom he expected to live to identify him later in a court of law.

It was a surprise, this face of Ull's. It mirrored no evil, not even the eyes. It was a round, cherubic thing, the countenance of a matured cupid. The eyes were soft and brown and the fat, round chin had a cleft that was almost a dimple.

Ull stared peacefully at Monk and Ham.

“You see,” he said dryly, “we were prepared for trouble under the water.”

“Whatcha mean?” Monk asked thickly.

“The electric lances,” Ull chuckled. “We have carried them aboard for a long time. You see, there was always a chance that we might be trapped under water, and divers sent down to investigate. The lances were the most effective weapons I could devise.”

Monk said nothing but tried not to think of Doc Savage and what had happened to him. His groping mind hit on another thing which was puzzling him, so he asked about it.

“The electromagnets?” he asked. “How come this—this thing was equipped with them.”

“We use them,” Ull chuckled.

“How?” Monk questioned hoarsely.

Ull chuckled. If there was placidity and innocence on his cherubic face, it did not extend to his voice, for that was ugly in its very quietness. There was satanic evil also in his calm demeanor.

“The electromagnets enabled us to contact you in that black water,” Ull offered. “We were lucky. We came close to you, and had sense enough to have the magnets switched on. Before we knew it, we were fastened to you. The magnets pulled us close. They are very powerful!”

“You didn’t put them on for that purpose,” Monk muttered. “They wouldn’t operate over a distance of more than a few feet. What are they intended for?”

Ull smirked. “Before long, I think that will cease to puzzle you.”

“Yeah,” Monk growled; then, still trying to keep his thoughts off Doc Savage’s fate, the homely chemist ejected another question: “Pat—is she all right?”

“She is alive,” Ull told him. “I would not say she is all right. In fact, her position is very bad. So is that of the other young lady, Lorna Zane. To be quite clear, they are to be killed along with you—unless you tell us whether or not the police know of our method of getting into New York harbor by the underwater route.”

That last was an afterthought, plainly, and Monk did not honor it with an answer. They would be tortured, of course. Whether or not they talked would not make much difference—to them. They would be killed anyway.

Monk tried to clear up another mysterious point.

“Is Bedford Burgess Gardner behind all this?” he asked.

Ull hesitated, put the end of a pink tongue between his teeth as he considered, then burst into an explosion of hollow laughter.

“Is Gardner the big brain?” he smiled. “You want to know that?”

“Yes,” Monk grunted.

“Yes,” said Ull.

The submarine was traveling along at half-throttle, and not making great speed. That was fortunate. Otherwise, Doc Savage might have been torn off.

True, he was lashed to a mooring ring on the deck. He could never have held on any other way, even with his fabulous muscles. Maybe he could have managed for a time, but the chances were against it, especially earlier, during the time when the underseas craft had charged full speed from the vicinity of the *Helldiver*, endeavoring to get clear before the mine exploded.

Doc’s escape from death had been executed without great difficulty or impossible legerdemain. The water where the subsea fight had occurred was not so deep that its mere pressure produced extreme discomfort.

The bronze man had managed to get to a locker in the compartment into which he had disappeared after Ull had torn off the oxygen apparatus. This was not hard, for Doc knew the *Helldiver*’s every rivet, and he could hold his breath, due to long practice, a time an ordinary man would consider beyond human ability.

A pair of diving “lungs” had come out of the locker. These were merely the tubes and mouthpiece, purifier and oxygen tanks, minus the helmet and suit of an ordinary diving rig. Donning the diving lungs had entailed no greater problem than the swallowing of a quantity of salt water. Doc wore them now.

The bronze man had to keep his head down and his features protected with enrapping arms. Otherwise, the diving lungs would have been torn out by the rush of the water. That was why it was well that he had lashed himself to the mooring ring.

Getting atop the submarine had not been difficult either, since the silver men thought him dead.

Not that the bronze man was having an easy time of it. The water tore at him with terrific force. The lashing line was gradually sawing into his great ligaments, and eventually he was certain to weaken and be battered into insensibility, or else to lose the diving lungs, which would be more disastrous.

He was unable to keep his eyes open against the tearing water, except for an occasional brief squint. The lighter hue of the water about him told him that the sub was not running far beneath the surface. No doubt it was following the radio guide buoys. The fact that they were not as deep indicated, conceivably, that they might be nearing shore.

Soon the shoreward course hypothesis became a certainty, for there was a grinding sound, and Doc, chancing a glance, saw the periscope rising. He could barely make it out through the sunlit waters.

The fog must have cleared up, judging by the illumination in the water.

The submotors became more silent. The water lost some of its tearing force. After a bit there was a soft jar, and mud billowed up around the sub. It had touched bottom. Probably its keel was reënforced against just such contacts as this.

The sub was built almost as strongly as the practically indestructible *Helldiver*.

The U-boat lifted out of the mud and continued. With bare headway, it nosed forward. Everything indicated that the craft was nearing the secret base of the Silver Death’s-Heads.

Doc could keep his eyes open. He saw the underwater searchlight on the bow of the submarine spout brilliance, although it was hardly necessary with the brightness of the sun.

A moment later, the bronze man began a mad wrenching at the lashings which held him to the mooring ring.

A mass—it resembled a gigantic log with the bark on, due to a profuse growth of barnacles—was looming overhead. He was in immediate danger of being crushed.

## Chapter 18

### THE BASE

Doc Savage unslashed himself from the ring, then stroked down and seized the fin of a diving rudder. A watery rush from the propellers nearly tore him loose.

The sub was jockeying to get under the huge hulk above. The slow, tedious task the silver men made of it was nevertheless an expert job. Undoubtedly, they were guided by highly scientific soundwave projectors and receivers, or, possibly, beam radio apparatus which told them when they were directly under the mass overhead.

Ballast was slowly blown and the underseas boat lifted. There was a jar as it touched the barnacle-covered hulk. In some spots the barnacles had been sheared away by past contacts, and steel plates were disclosed.

The sub did not move after the contact. It was being held in place by the electromagnets.

The thing above was the bottom of a ship. It could be nothing else. No doubt there were other electromagnets inside the ship to keep the U-boat from changing position.

Machinery ground. A great turmoil of bubbles poured up from the direction of the air lock by which divers came and went from the U-boat.

Doc Savage hastily released the diving fin to which he clung, then stroked down and under the submarine. From there, he managed to get under the hull of the ship, where he would be comparatively safe from discovery.

The bronze man worked forward, swimming a little, using the more clustered patches of barnacles for finger-tip purchase. The hull began to narrow as he approached the bow. It was not a large ship, it seemed.

He did not follow the bow up out of the water, but shoved himself free and swam to the right, keeping far beneath the surface. He prowled out there for a time, but found nothing. Then he tried the left side. There, he located the anchor cable, a procession of thick iron links.

Doc drew in all the air his lungs would comfortably contain, then removed the diving lungs and tied them to the anchor linkage by the straps which held the purifying mechanism to his back.

It was a precaution. If he got aboard the ship, was shot at and went overboard, not to come up, the Silver Death's-Heads would think him dead again, perhaps. He could reach the lungs, swimming under water to don them.

The anchor chain ran down on the side opposite the point where the submarine had fastened itself—which was fortunate. But Doc broke the surface very cautiously, keeping under the anchor links, they being large enough to partially conceal his head. He stared upward.

The ship was a tramp, a rusty old hulk of a few thousand tons, one of the type which helped make up the Rum Row of prohibition days.

The Row still existed, for that matter, well outside the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard, and handled other things beside rum—perfumes, watch movements and other things on which there was a high duty. No doubt a few aliens were smuggled, too.

The tramp needed paint; her brasswork was almost beyond being helped by polish, and her one funnel leaned slightly askew.

Doc saw the funnel when he reached the anchor hawse hole and lifted himself by the strength of his great arms. The vessel had two crow's nests, that suspicious in itself; and in each, a lookout was on duty.

Doc watched the lookouts closely. They would sweep the horizon with binoculars, then give attention to their comrades, who were coming up from the submarine through the air lock.

It was while they were eying the sub that Doc whipped over the rail, flashed to the nearest open hatch and dropped down it.

No one saw him, because there was a commotion aft, along the rail.

The commotion was of Monk's making. The homely chemist still thought Doc Savage dead; he had been benumbed by the fact, but now he was shedding the agonizing lethargy.

Monk topped the rail, dripping and sputtering; he had been forced to swim up from the air lock without benefit of a diving suit, and he was mad. He lashed out at the first convenient jaw. Bone crunched under his fist.

The man who had been hit caved as he went backward.

Some one tried to smash Monk over his bulletlike head with a revolver. Monk grabbed the short arm. He almost got it, but silver men, rushing in, clubbed him back. He was seized and handcuffed.

When Ham appeared, he and Monk were led below. They did not see Hugh McCoy or Rapid Pace. Nor had they seen the pair since the misfortune aboard the *Helldiver*.

"I wonder if they're alive?" Monk growled.

"Get below, gentlemen," suggested cherub-faced Ull.

Monk and Ham were convoyed below decks by a grim ring of gun snouts. They were halted before a metal door. Monk's wrists were decorated with an additional pair of manacles, and Ham was handcuffed. The door was opened and they were shoved inside.

Monk took one look at the two occupants of the rusty steel chamber and let out a loud grunt of relief.

"Pat!" he ejaculated. "So you are safe, after all!"

"Do you call this safe?" Pat demanded caustically. "Where's Doc?"

Patricia Savage, wrists ornamented with steel linkage, was far from being the immaculate personality who headed a successful swanky Park Avenue beauty establishment. She still wore her evening gown, but it was grimy, and she had torn it off above the ankles for greater freedom of movement.

Lorna Zane was with her, and she also showed traces of a rough evening and night. Her brown hair was disheveled; her ensemble of gray had lost its effectiveness; the gray beret and gray bag being missing, and a heel was gone from one gray pump.

“Where’s Doc?” Pat repeated.

Monk turned around as if to look at Ham, but actually to hide the expression on his homely features.

“I dunno,” he mumbled.

Pat, voice suddenly shrill, demanded, “Monk! Has something happened to Doc?”

Ull, laughing loudly from the door, said “I will tell the broadminded world that something happened to him. He drowned! Then we blew his body to little pieces.”

Pat became very pale and swiveled so that no one could see her face.

Lorna Zane bit her lower lip so furiously that it seemed certain her small white teeth would go through.

A silver man appeared behind Ull and said, “Listen, the big boy wants to see you. And he’s as mad as hell!”

Ull scowled, his childishly round face suddenly ugly. He leveled an arm at the prisoners.

“I’ll be back,” he promised. “And you had better make up your minds to tell whether or not you spilled the dope on us to the police before you started out in that submarine.”

Then Ull stamped out and made his way up a companionway, then along a filthy passage. The old boat had once carried passengers, and Ull turned into what had been the lounge.

In the center of the lounge stood a large table. It was long and wide, but it was none too large for the use to which it was being put.

The table held the proceeds of the Silver Death’s-Heads’ robberies of the night before. There were stacks of currency, canvas bags of hard money, piles of necklaces, bracelets, and fully a bushel of rings. Almost a million dollars’ worth of it, if sold at retail by the original owners.

At the head of the table stood an ominous figure. He waved an arm and snarled, in a coarse whispering voice, “I suppose you had this display arranged to impress me?”

The expression on Ull’s cherubic features showed that he had done just that.

“There is a great deal of money here,” he muttered.

The ominous one at the end of the table wore one of the silver cloaks. The whispering tone he used was obviously assumed to disguise his voice.

“You still think that the loot taken last night justifies the turmoil into which the robberies threw the New York police?” he asked sarcastically.

“They won’t catch us,” said Ull. “I’ll order the anchor hoisted, and we shall cruise out to sea for a few days. No one will suspect us. The papers of this ship are in order,

and there is a cargo of innocent wool and hides in the hold, by way of proving we are enroute from South America to Canada.”

“You are avoiding!” rapped the whispering one.

“Avoiding what?” Ull asked with pretended innocence.

“The fact that you ordered those robberies on your own initiative,” snapped the other. “You were to loot that first armored truck. You were to kill Paine L. Winthrop. And that was all, except for the work incidental to fighting Doc Savage.”

Ull began, “We took nearly a million dollars——”

“And you endangered a scheme which has netted me a billion within the last year!” the silver mastermind hissed.

Ull’s cleft chin sagged.

“What?” he choked. “A—how much?”

“A billion!” snarled the man at the head of the table.

Ull seemed dazed. “I do not understand this.”

“Do you recall that at various times during the past year I have ordered certain men killed,” queried the other grimly. “The killings were well done by yourself and aides, I must admit. In no case were they traceable to an organized plot.”

Ull wet his lips. “I thought they were just—enemies of yours, like you said.”

“Enemies—business enemies,” the other said hoarsely. “They were men who stood in the way of business mergers which I was engineering. It was necessary to get them out of the way.”

“But what about the billion?” Ull gulped.

“That was made by recapitalizing the merged companies and selling the stock,” he was informed. “The financial details are too complicated to consider here.”

Ull eyed the loot on the table, and it did not seem to impress him as much as it had earlier.

“Was Paine L. Winthrop in the way of one of your mergers?” he asked.

“No,” rasped the other. “Winthrop was working with me. As you know, he built our submarine in his shipyard a few months ago, when all of his regular employees were laid off, and we used our own men for the construction work. I was going to merge his company and give him a handsome cut of the profits. But he got cold feet. He had been told the submarine was for a foreign government. When he found out its true use, his nerve failed. I had to put him out of the way to keep him from going to the police.”

“Oh,” Ull said vaguely.

The master in silver teetered on his heels. He even wore the silver gloves, but it was apparent that his hands were shaking slightly with rage.

The sinister one’s anger began to get on Ull’s nerves, as did the mask. He was uneasy. Here he realized, was a schemer of much greater magnitude than he had thought.

“You do not have to wear that disguise aboard,” Ull mumbled.

“Most of your men do not know me,” the other whispered hoarsely. “It is as well that they remain in ignorance. But let us not get away from the subject. You disobeyed my orders last night.”

“That,” Ull told him quietly, “is not entirely my fault.”

“How do you figure that way?”

“Had I known of this billion business, do you think I would have been fool enough to endanger it?” Ull demanded.

The other seemed to think this over.

“In the future, my orders must be followed implicitly,” he said.

“They will be,” Ull replied earnestly.

The being in silver waved an arm at the treasure-laden table. “Divide this stuff among the men. I do not want a share. And you will get no share yourself. That is by way of punishment for overstepping your authority last night.”

Ull looked as if he had been stuck with a pin, but said nothing.

“What about the prisoners?” he asked.

“Question them,” commanded the other. “Then execute them.”

Ull departed.

“Close the door behind you,” he was directed. “And do not disturb me.”

Ull closed the door of the treasure table room and walked away.

After Ull had gone, the man in silver walked over to the table, gazed upon the jewels with an experienced eye and picked out the more valuable. He selected packets of bills. In less than a minute, he had annexed nearly a fourth of the loot.

The fellow now left the room, chuckling harshly. The passage into which he went was dark, but he strode blithely along it—until he suddenly fell on his face.

He never heard the blow which had struck him, for it had been delivered silently, with great force. Nor did he see the giant man of bronze who bent over him and searched him.

A bulky packet—not the loot from the table—was fastened inside the silver man’s garment. Doc Savage took that.

Then Doc removed the silver garment.

It was very dark in the corridor and Doc did not make a light. Hence it was impossible for him to view the features of his victim, the chieftain of the Silver Death’s-Heads. Nor did Doc risk striking a match.

He drew the silver cloak on over his own head, found that it was snug, but could be worn, then searched his victim again and found matches. He pocketed the matches.

Back to the treasure room, Doc walked. Under a light he opened the packet which had been inside the silver man’s garment.

The package held a large, well-made black theatrical beard. Doc replaced the set of dark whiskers in his pocket.

The bronze man left the treasure room, stooping, bending his knees and hanging his head in order to make himself appear smaller.

He sighted a guard down the passage and made for the fellow. But before he reached the watchman, another silver figure appeared and attempted to pass.

The lookout challenged, snarling, "Get that rig off! I wanta see your face!"

Instead of complying with the command, the silver man held up an arm and exposed a wrist watch. The guard compared its reading with the expensive timepiece on his own wrist.

"Sure," he said. "Go ahead."

Doc paused, and for a brief moment his fantastic trilling sound was audible, but not loud enough to penetrate to the guard. Doc had just discovered the significance of the expensive wrist watches which all of the gang wore. They were used in place of passwords.

The bronze man still wore the wrist watch which he had taken from the man who had kicked the beggar in New York City—the man who had discovered his mistake and later fled, only to be shot to death by a policeman. Its underwater bath had evidently not hurt the watch.

Advancing, Doc was challenged. He showed the watch as the other had done. It got him past.

A few yards beyond the guard, he turned and in a voice greatly different from his own, a harsh, cruel tone, asked, "Where are the prisoners being held?"

"Right ahead of you," he was told. "You can't miss it."

Doc went on. He saw the room in which the prisoners were being questioned, but instead of pausing, went on as if he were uninterested.

He had seen that Monk, Ham and the two girls were safe for the time being. They would be safe until they talked, providing they did not hold out until Ull was exasperated.

Working deep into the old tramp steamer, Doc carefully avoided the engine rooms. The craft was an oil burner. He found the fuel tanks, got a cap unscrewed and learned they were almost full.

He left the cap off, scooped up oil in his hands and spilled it along the tanks and down the sides, thence to the nearest bulkhead door. He carried the trail beyond that for some distance.

At the end of the oil trail, he sank to a knee and felt through the pockets of the silver frock until he found the matches. With a quick scrape, he struck one, then dropped it.

The bronze man was running furiously when the match hit the fuel oil. There was a sizzling. The stuff did not burn like gasoline, but it flamed, nevertheless, and the fire ran along until it reached the bulkhead, passed through and went on.

That was all Doc saw. He was still running. He mounted a companionway.

There was a loud roar and a rush of superheated air as the fuel tank took fire. There had been enough gas inside it to explode and split the container.

## Chapter 19

### DESTRUCTION

Ull was yelling threats at Monk and Ham when the explosion came. The cherub-faced man rocked on his feet, brought up against a bulkhead and looked very surprised.

“What the——” he began, then a mad shout apprised him of what was wrong.

“Fire! Fire!” was the yell.

Ull wheeled and plunged out of the steel cell, rapping over his shoulder, “Watch these prisoners!”

He disappeared down the passage. Other men, some in silver frocks and some in shirt sleeves, followed. They streamed past the door.

But one did not pass. He whipped into the cell. The guard stared wonderingly at him.

“I’m taking your place!” snapped the newcomer. “Give me your gun and go help fight that fire.”

The guard hesitated, then passed over his weapon and plunged outside. He had little hankering to be left below on sentry duty where he might be trapped if the ship sank.

The replacement wrenched down his hood.

“Doc!” Monk squawked, and looked as if he were going to faint.

Doc Savage snapped, “Come on! We’ve got to get out of here fast!”

The bronze man replaced his hood, concealing his features, and waved his gun prominently as he herded Monk, Ham and the two girls down the passage. Other silver men, passing him, thought, if they took time to think at all, that he was merely one of their number moving the prisoners.

Doc stopped one of them.

“Where is the other captive?” he demanded.

The silver man pointed. “Third door,” he said.

Doc ran to the designated panel, wrenched at the heavy hasp which secured it, got it open—and Rapid Pace came stumbling out. He lunged fiercely at Doc and tried to strike with his fists.

“Stop it!” Doc rapped.

“Bless me!” Pace gulped. “I thought you were dead. Yes, sir, I thought you were dead.”

Doc herded his party on, still pretending to be escorting them to another prison cell.

They came to the room which held the treasure table.

Monk stared at the assembled wealth, then made a growling sound and plunged to the left. Sacks lay there, stout rubberized canvas bags in which the loot had no doubt

been brought aboard. He seized upon some of the bags, and with sweeps of his great arms began stuffing the sacks.

“Gimme a hand!” he snapped at Ham. “I don’t want to see these guys get away with this stuff!”

Ham leaped to aid. To expedite matters, Doc also lent a hand.

Rapid Pace dashed forward, opened a door, yelled over his shoulder, “I’m gonna see if the coast is clear,” then disappeared. He had entered the passage in which Doc had overpowered the master of the Silver Death’s-Heads.

A moment later were grunts, blows, painful exclamations.

Pace yelled, “Ouch! There’s somebody on the floor here! Say, he’s tying a handkerchief over his face!”

“Watch it!” Doc shouted. “He is the man behind all of this!”

Pace shouted, “Ouch!” again, after which there were more blows. Heels kicked steel plates; grunts came from between clenched teeth. The thumping and tearing of clothing indicated a terrific fight.

Doc leaped forward and plunged into the passage. It was very dark.

The fight had worked farther down the corridor. The master of the Silver Death’s-Heads seemed to be in flight, with Pace close on his heels.

“I licked ’im!” Pace howled. “But he’s getting away!”

An instant later, Doc bumped into Pace. The efficiency expert stood in the brilliant sunlight outside. An open hatch near by indicated where the quarry had gone.

Pace’s face was blank. He tried to speak twice before he could manufacture words.

“T-that was the m-mastermind?” he stuttered.

“It was,” Doc told him. “Did you see his face?”

“I s-sure d-did!” Pace gulped. “And am I s-surprised!”

Doc gave Rapid Pace a shove. They headed for the nearest lifeboat, the two girls immediately behind, Monk and Ham, heavily burdened, bringing up the rear.

The lifeboat was an unusual craft for a tramp steamer of this sort—it was more of a fast seagoing launch. Evidently it was a provision against the necessity of a get-away some time when the submarine was not at hand.

Doc wrenched the tarpaulin off, then he and Monk threw their weight against the levers which swung the davits out. Ham heaved sacks of loot into the craft. They loaded aboard.

A silver man in the crow’s nest yelled and shot at them. The bullet dug splinters out of the boat. The second lookout had quitted his post—to assist in fighting the fire, no doubt.

Doc directed a single shot from his gun at the crow’s nest. The man there screamed and dropped his weapon, then tried to get both hands down in the crow’s nest bucket to squeeze the pain out of the leg which Doc’s bullet had drilled.

It was one of the few times the bronze man had used a gun, but the shot was accurate; he might have been practicing with the weapon all of his life.

They ran the rope through the falls a bit more swiftly than was sane, but with alert eyes and husky muscles, Doc and Monk managed to keep the craft level. Ham had the engine going as they hit the water. It was perfect teamwork.

The shots on deck had spread an alarm. Men leaped to the rail.

“Get down!” Doc rapped.

The boat sides were thick enough to break the force of a revolver bullet and, flattened below the water level, it was unlikely that they would be hit at all.

The boat heaved its nose up, dug its stern down in a mass of propeller-stirred foam and scudded away from the tramp.

Lead smacked the hull, chewed a thwart and clanged off the engine. One slug opened a pair of holes in the gas tank, and Monk, crawling back, calmly planted a hairy finger over each aperture.

A few minutes put them out of bullet range.

Smoke was climbing from hatches and portholes of the tramp. It was very black oil smoke, and it indicated the silver men had not been successful in extinguishing the oil fire. That the flames were spreading rapidly was evident when men began diving overside. They fought each other to get over the rail.

“Trying to get in their sub,” Monk grunted, lifting his head from his job of stoppering the gas tank.

“They’ll have a job,” Ham said grimly. “The sub won’t hold a fifth of them.”

Some of the silver men undoubtedly reached the submarine. Perhaps they entered through the air lock. But it did them no good.

The tanker suddenly blew up. Possibly it was the fuel tanks. In later discussion, Doc tended toward the theory that explosives were stored aboard, and these had let loose.

There was a great geyser of débris, smoke and flame. The ship came apart in the middle, separating, the two ends turning half around while men spilled off the decks, their bodies hardly distinguishable amid the flying wreckage.

A boiling inferno of oil poured out of the rent craft and spread, flaming on the sea, engulfing those men who were in the water, burning them to death, or forcing them down until their lungs took in water convulsively.

At that, the swimmers were no more unlucky than those in the submarine. The blast undoubtedly crushed the submersible, so that those within perished.

Doc said slowly, “It is too bad that they tried to fight the fire so long, and then wasted time in seeking to get into the submarine. They could have gotten off in the lifeboats. We did not take them all.”

Ham offered. “Probably afraid they would get picked up in the boats and turned over to the police.”

“Poor guy,” Monk put in.

“Who?” Ham demanded.

“Hugh McCoy,” said Monk. “We did not rescue him. That’s tough.”

Rapid Pace had been sitting as if in a stupor. Now he started and eyed Monk.

“It’s not tough!” he snapped. “No, sir! It’s not!”

Monk scowled. “Listen, that ain’t no way to talk about a dead guy, even if you were all the time going to lick him.”

“I did lick him!” Pace exclaimed triumphantly. “I finally did! I don’t understand how I had it in me.”

“When?” Monk grunted. “When did this happen?”

“Just before we got off the boat,” said Pace.

The significance of the words dawned on Monk.

“Listen!” he exploded. “Say that again, will you?”

“Hugh McCoy was the brains behind all of this,” Pace said grimly. “It was him that I fought in the corridor.”

Monk swiveled on Doc. “Is that right?”

“McCoy was the chief of the Silver Death’s-Heads,” Doc said slowly. “That was finally evident when the silver men attacked our submarine when they could have used a depth bomb and destroyed us. Their chief was aboard. They did not want to kill him.”

Monk waved hairy arms, the gas-tank leak forgotten. “But what about Gardner—Bedford Burgess Gardner?”

“The same person,” Doc said.

“What?” Monk all but choked on the exclamation.

“Remember the black beard which Gardner wore?” Doc questioned. “You did not see him, but Pace and myself did, and I told you about it.”

“Sure,” Monk admitted.

Doc produced the packet which he had taken from the unconscious chief of the silver men. He tossed it over. Monk opened it.

The packet held the black theatrical beard.

Monk slowly put his thumbs back over the holes in the gas tank.

There was not much more they could do. The sea about the spot where the tramp had gone down was a flaming mass of oil; in it, no creature could live. But they cruised as near as possible, hoping to pick up any survivors.

Lorna Zane gave way and sobbed a little, and seemed quite willing for Pace, the efficiency expert who had improved his nerve so remarkably, to comfort her. Pace was radiant.

Pat looked wan, a little exhausted by the whole grisly episode.

But Doc and his party were satisfied that the menace of the silver men was ended, and were unconcerned over the future. They cruised with the launch until there was no possible chance of survivors being found.

Then they turned toward the Jersey coast. There was sufficient fuel to make it, and the sea was not too rough for the launch.

In the stern, Rapid Pace had an arm around Lorna Zane's shoulders.

"You know, I've stopped getting scared," he told her. "I can't understand it. No, sir!"

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Death in Silver* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]