

THE FANTASTIC ADVENTURES OF DOC SAVAGE NOT BY KENNETH ROBESON

# THE 89th KEY

# DOC SAVAGE<sup>®</sup>



# The 89th Key

## **A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE**

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NOT KENNETH ROBESON

2015

A strangely familiar sound brings death rather than reassurance. The quiet contemplation of a charity concert is broken by the sudden violent kidnapping of Warren Evans, a prominent businessman. Doc Savage and his men have only hours to rescue him.

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## 1. THE CHARITY CONCERT

The music swirled around the small auditorium. It seemed to reach out and touch each of the fifty people in the room. The sound was a haunting melody.

In the front row sat Warren Evans. Eyes closed; he was lost in the dulcet tones of the piano. Warren was well dressed, although it looked as if he could barely squeeze his bulk into his suit. Glasses clung to the tip of his nose, while atop his balding head; a two or three beads of sweat were evident.

Many who knew Warren as the senior partner of the Evans and Kincaid would have been surprised to see the emotions that danced across his face. Over many years he had build a reputation as an unemotional and ruthless businessman. Tonight saw a very different Warren

Behind Warren's closed lids, his emotions flitted about in time with the music. The music would suggest sadness, and then transform into a riot of joy.

Warren opened his eyes to watch the performance. In front of him, he saw a man playing a baby grand piano. Warren stopped at that thought and corrected his impression.

It was a normal sized grand piano, but the pianist was not normal by any measure. At times, he looked a bronze statue that had come to life. Although large, years of training had given him a

body so perfectly proportioned that it was hard to gauge just how large he was.

The pianist was Doc Savage. A man famous around the world for his many exploits, his medical skills, and his strength. Few ever suspected the full range of his talents. Tonight he performed a new composition of his own for a select group.

Doc's fingers flew gently across the keys. Beneath his tuxedo and bronze skin, powerful muscles resembled bundles of tightly coiled piano wires.

Above him hung a banner, proclaiming the charity that would benefit from money collected from the audience. Some of the richest people in New York listened with rapt attention.

An unlikely pair of individuals sat beside Warren.

One was a tall thin waspish man with sharp, intelligent features. His attire was so immaculate that it made everyone else seem shabby. Indeed not a few of the men in the audience had looked at him in envy. In his hand, he held a somber-looking cane.

The man beside him was very different. Short, almost as wide as he was tall, he could be mistaken for a large gorilla. The clothes he wore featured garish and contrasting colors. The get up seemed intended to annoy his companion. For indeed, they were two of Doc Savage's team.

The tall man was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, but known to his hirsute companion as Ham. His cane was, in reality, a sword cane with a blade of the finest steel. Many people considered

him as one of the best legal minds to graduate from Harvard.

His simian-like companion was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, who, not surprisingly, was known as Monk. His low brow was deceptive. He was one of the greatest chemists in the world, but was quick to acknowledge Doc as his superior.

On the opposite side of the hall from Warren Evans sat his junior partner, Peter Kincaid. Peter was a much younger man, with perfect vision and a veritable forest of hair on his head. Like his partner, he was dressed elegantly.

Peter's manner was not the absorbed intensity of Warren. In fact, unlike anyone else in the hall, he hardly seemed aware of the music. His eyes scanned around the room, taking in the doors and other people in the room. All the while, his hands played with a wristwatch; the band almost twisted to destruction.

A more astute observer, had they watched Peter, would have realized that his attention was mostly focused on his partner.

Peter looked from face to face recognizing each. He stopped briefly on a man far in the back row. He didn't seem to fit with the rest of the crowd. The man sat apart from the rest of the audience. His face was in shadow, his identity unknown. Peter's eyes moved on.

A closer look at the man in the back row revealed how much out of place he looked. While the rest of the audience was dressed in expensive

suits and eveningwear, the man looked scruffy. The suit he wore looked like it had been made for a larger man. A close examination of the suit would reveal loose threads and patches where the surface of the fabric had worn away.

The man's hair flew about his head in reckless abandon.

He gazed off into space, only sneaking an occasional glance at Peter. His eyes moved to stare at Doc Savage. He frowned and shuttered.

His hand came out of his pocket and he held it carefully out of sight of any of the others in the hall. He opened up his fist to reveal a small box. It had two buttons. One button said, "Go" while the other said "cancel". A short wire protruded from the device.

He looked up at Doc Savage. His face looked almost painful. He shook his head and looked down at the box. He muttered, "Not worth the risk." With that, his thumb moved over and pressed the cancel button. The scruffy man let out a deep breath and his body relaxed. "We can do it later," he thought.

A strange sound began to fill the hall. It was a low, mellow, trilling sound, like the song of some strange bird of the jungle, or the sound of the wind filtering through a jungle forest. It was melodious, and mixed perfectly with the piano's notes. The sound seemed to come from everywhere in the room.

The strange trilling was Doc's sound—an omen of his presence. A small, unconscious thing, which he did in moments of utter concentration.

The scruffy man gave a start. Fear filled his eyes. After a few seconds, the trilling faded away. As the sound faded, relief spread across the scruffy man's face.

His relief was short lived. A door burst open near the front and a group of men tumbled through it. They were a group of the toughest thugs that money could buy. They waved their guns about and screamed obscenities. They raced over to Peter Kincaid, who, like every one else in the audience, was shocked into inaction. The thugs were almost upon him.

Not everyone was struck motionless. Doc Savage moved, as if by magic, from behind the piano toward the thugs. The transformation from the elegant pianist dressed in a tuxedo into a man of action was as complete as it was surprising. He raced toward the thugs who had grabbed Peter and started to drag him toward the exit.

From across the room a huge roar let out. Monk hurtled himself in Doc wake. His eyes were ablaze; a smile on his face. Just behind him came Ham.

One of the thugs spun around at the sound of the roar. He screamed, "Doc Savage". He frantically pulled his gun up to shoot, but Doc knocked it out of his hands with a flick of his hand.

The thug threw himself at Doc, trying to grab a hold. He succeeded only in ripping open Doc's shirt. He took a swing, but a massive bronze hand parried the blow with ease. A huge bronze fist swung and the thug fell to the ground.

Doc looked up. Two thugs faced him. As he glanced around, he saw Monk drop a thug to the floor, and move onto another. Ham exchanged blows with a fifth, while the one remaining thug held Peter and tried to drag him to the exit. A woman screamed.

Doc wasted little time with his two assailants. With a kick, he sent one man's gun flying. Doc stepped toward the other as he tried to aim his gun. A quick jab of a bronze fist and the man dropped to the floor. The other thug spun around and tried to run away. Doc grabbed him. With a quick manipulation of his neck, Doc put him out of action.

Doc turned his attention to the kidnapper, who had almost reached the exit door. The kidnapper glanced at his companions then turned back to the door. What he saw was a massive bronze colossus that blocked his way. The thug pulled out a knife and held it to Peter's throat. He may have planned to make a threat, but instead he screamed in pain as a bronze hand clamped onto his knife hand and squeezed. The knife fell to the floor. Moments later, he joined it.

Doc grabbed Peter as he staggered away from his assailant. In a gentle tone that contrasted with his recent actions, Doc asked, "Are you OK?"

Peter nodded. "Yes, yes," he whispered. A moment later in a stronger voice he added, "I'll be OK."

Doc helped him back to his seat. He heard Monk behind him and turned to check. All the thugs had been vanquished.

With a huge grin on his face, Monk said, "Got 'em all." His small voice had a tinge of disappointment. Monk enjoyed a good fight.

The woman screamed again. Doc looked and saw her standing over a man who lay on the floor. Doc sped over and knelt over the man. As he examined the man, the woman said, "They came in that door and grabbed that nice Mr. Evans." Her voice shook as she talked. She paused to gather her wits, then, indicating the man on the floor, said, "Terry tried to stop them and they knocked him down."

"Where did they go?"

The woman pointed to an exit door. Doc motioned to Monk and Ham and they rushed out of the door in hot pursuit. Doc worked to revive Terry. Eventually he groaned and began to breathe more easily.

Monk and Ham returned. Ham said, "We missed them. We couldn't find anything."

Doc frowned.

## 2. RANSOM

Terry Adams groaned, and then his eyes blinked open. Above him, he saw the finely sculpted features of Doc Savage. Doc asked, "How do you feel?"

"Sore, very sore." Terry tried to sit up, but failed.

"Take it easy, you've had a bad beating. You will need a little rest."

"Will I be OK?"

"Yes. You're bruised and battered, but you'll feel human again shortly."

"Is Mr. Evans safe?"

"No, they got away with him."

Terry groaned and sank down. "I'm sorry. I wish I could do more."

"You did what you could. That's anyone could ask."

Doc stepped away and Terry's eyes follow him. He realized that he lay on a couch in an office. He could see Ham and Monk. They sat in chairs on opposite sides of the room and glared at each other. He surmised that he was in Doc's famous headquarters on the 86th floor of one of tallest tower in the city.

As he cast his eyes about, he saw Peter Kincaid sitting nearby. He gazed ahead, but seemed blind to his surroundings.

Doc stopped in front of Peter. "How are you doing?"

Peter roused himself and flexed his arms and leg. He replied, "I think I'll be OK."

Terry pulled himself upright and was able to sit. Albeit, he still felt woozy. Doc asked, "Can you tell us what happened?"

As Doc walked back to him, Terry said, "Give me a second." He closed his eyes and tried to breathe deeply. When he opened his eyes again, he gave a wan smile.

"Like everyone else," he looked at Doc and his two companions, "except you of course, I couldn't move when those thugs burst in." He paused.

Doc said, "Take your time."

Terry nodded. "I just sat and watched, and then." He paused again, closed his eyes and took a deep breath. With his eyes closed he continued, "I heard a woman scream, so I turned to look." Terry shook and opened his eyes. "There were three or four thugs who had grabbed him."

"Can you describe them?"

Terry said, "Not really, they all wore dark clothing and balaclavas. I could only see their eyes."

"What happened next?"

"Well, I stood up and took a run at them." Terry smiled. "Like a fool." He hesitated and then said, "I'm no fighter."

Doc's voice held a strong sense of reassurance. "No one can be faulted for trying." He let Terry have a brief respite and then said, "Go on."

"One thug broke away from the others and came at me. He looked like he was going to throw a punch." Terry took a deep breath again. "Then I opened my eyes and saw you."

Doc was silent for a few moments, and then asked, "Did you notice anything else?"

Terry looked down at the floor and thought for a moment. "Yes, the guy who came at me was different from the others." He looked up at Doc. "He was short, maybe a half foot shorter than me." Terry's eyes opened wide. "... and he wore glasses!"

Terry's brow furrowed. "I think that's all I can remember."

"Thanks. If you think of anything more, let me know."

Terry cleared his throat and said, "Um, could I help you in any way? I really would like to."

"What do you do?"

"I'm an accountant. Do audits mostly." Terry looked embarrassed.

Doc smiled at Terry. "I'll keep your offer in mind."

Doc walked over to Peter Kincaid. "Can you answer some questions now?"

Peter looked up at Doc and nodded.

"Do you know of any body who would want to kidnap you and Warren?"

Peter thought for a moment and then replied in a tentative tone of voice. "I've had several threats in the mail recently." He shrugged his shoulders. "It didn't make any sense, so I just ignored them."

"Did Warren get threats as well?"

"He never mentioned any."

"Can we have a look at the letters?"

Peter's shoulders slumped and he shook his head. "No. I got rid of them."

"What did they threaten?"

"The threats were vague; you know, 'or else'."

"Why did they threaten you?"

"That wasn't clear either. They just said to 'stop it', but didn't spell out what 'it' was."

"Do you have any idea what they might have meant?"

Peter sat and thought for several seconds, then blinked and shook his head.

Doc stood silently, as motionless as the bronze stature he resembled. Peter glanced at Doc and then quickly away. He started to fidget in his seat. After nearly a minute, he said, "I suspect they really wanted me, not Warren. They must have decided to grab him when they saw that you'd save me." He glanced up at Doc and added, "Don't you agree?"

Doc remained silent, and then turned to walk toward the door of his laboratory. He moved as silently as a ghost. Before he reached the door, there was a light tapping at the door to the hallway. Doc stopped and looked back.

Monk walked over to the door and opened it. A dark haired young woman stood in the hall. She wore a light beige coat over a tan dress with light colored sensible shoes. She took a half step back as she looked at Monk. In a quiet voice she asked, "Is this Doc Savage's office?"

Monk smiled broadly. "Yes it is." With an elegant gesture, he stepped aside and said, "Come on in."

The woman hesitated and then took a couple tentative steps into the office. She looked around the room. When she saw Peter, she gave him a little nod. Then her eyes found Doc Savage and they went wide. She said, "Hi, um, I'm, er, my name is Virginia Evans." she paused again. She glanced around uncertainly. "My father is Warren Evans."

Doc took a couple steps toward her. His deep voice sounded gentle. "We have some bad news. Your father has been kidnapped."

Virginia gave a wan smile. "I know." Her voice choked. "I had a call asking for ransom."

"Why did you come here?"

"Kidnapper said he'd call back here."

"Did he say anything more?"

Virginia shook her head. Her eyes fluttered and she looked faint. Monk and Ham each grabbed a chair and offered it to her. She said, "Thank you." She glanced at Peter and chose Ham's chair, which was just a little father away from Peter. She composed herself, and then looked up at Doc. "Can you tell me anything? Is he OK?"

Doc's face was grim. "I'm afraid we don't know anything more than you do."

Virginia face paled and she nodded. She bent over and put her face in her hands. They could hear her breath come in sobs. Everyone waited in silence as she let out her grief.

The phone rang and Doc walked over to answer it. He motioned to Ham to pick up the other phone and listen in. They picked up at the same time. "Hello."

"Is that Savage?" The voice sounded odd, muffled and disguised.

"Yes."

"We have Mr. Evans. If you and the little lady ever want to see him alive again, you better play along with us." The line was silent for a couple of seconds. "Understand?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Money, what else?"

"How much?"

"Oh, um, let's see." The voice went silent for a few moments. "OK, make it 10 grand. That has a nice ring to it doesn't it?"

"It will take us some time to get that together."

"Well, make it snappy. You a big wheel; pull some strings."

"How do we know that Warren is OK?"

The line went silent again. Doc could hear muffled voices, but couldn't make out what they said. After nearly a minute, the voice came back. "OK, just hang on a bit." Doc motioned to Monk to get another phone so that Virginia could listen in.

Moments later a new voice came on. "Hi Doc." Doc indicated to Virginia to say nothing.

"Warren, are you OK?"

"Yes. I'm ..." Someone pulled the phone away.

"That'll do. Now get this straight, if we haven't got the money by noon tomorrow, well you can guess."

Doc said, "I think we can get the money tonight."

The voice betrayed a note of surprise. "Oh, well then, we'll call back in a few hours and see." The line went dead.

Doc put down the phone and faced Virginia. "Was that him?"

She looked quite shaken. "Yes, that's him." She gave a shudder. She looked at Doc with fear in her eyes. "He didn't sound OK. Will they kill him?"

Doc considered his reply. "I think not. They want the money." Doc waited for her to take his reassurances in. "Can you get the \$10,000?"

"\$10,000! That's a lot of money!" Peter had sprung from his seat and looked very agitated.

Virginia glared at him then looked to Doc. "I'll need to ask our banker. His is usually very supportive of dad."

"See what you can do." Doc turned to Monk. "We'll need some help; call Renny, Long Tom and Johnny." Monk nodded and went to the phone.

"We need to know more about what is behind this." He motioned to Ham and they went to the laboratory door. "We'll interrogate the thugs from the concert."

### 3. PLANS ARE LAID

Monk stood with his ear tightly pressed to the office door. He waved his hand to signal the others in the room to be quiet. Everyone's watched Monk. He remained motionless. Then, suddenly, he grabbed the door handle and whisked the door open. A huge fist flew into the room, followed closely by a giant of a man. The man stumbled and then caught himself. He looked back at Monk.

As Monk closed the door he said, "Sorry Renny, we need the door for later."

Renny, the giant with the huge fist, pointed a gloomy look at Monk. Renny was Colonel John Renwick, another of Doc's team of experts. He was a

world-renowned engineer, with a penchant for destroying doors with his gargantuan fists.

Someone who did not know Renny would have assumed that Renny's gloomy look reflected anger at Monk. But, those who knew him well recognized the engineer's gloomy demeanor reflected his amusement at Monk's trick.

Renny looked about the room. The others had been joined by two of Doc's other team members, Long Tom and Johnny.

Long Tom was Major Thomas J. Roberts, one of the most renowned electrical engineers in the world. In contrast to Renny, Long Tom was small and looked half-dead. His appearance had fooled many to their dismay.

Johnny was William Harper Littlejohn. Tall and thin with black hair, he was a leading geologist and archaeologist. In his hand, he held a pair of spectacles. Johnny, as the result of an operation by Doc Savage no longer needed them, but the lens were actually the powerful magnifying lenses he used in his work.

As he surveyed the others, he stopped on Terry Adams. He said, "Hi Terry." Terry smiled back, but before their conversation could go any further, the laboratory door opened and Doc Savage entered, followed by Ham.

Doc gave a slight nod to each of his team, and then launched directly into his report. "The thugs who tried to grab Peter," Doc indicated Peter to his three aides who had just arrived, "were hired earlier today by a man they called Scruffy Sam."

'Scruffy Sam?'" Monk piped up. "I remember seeing a rather rough looking character at the concert. I thought he looked out of place."

"That was a mirror you dumb ape." Ham sneered. Monk scowled back at the dapper lawyer. Although they were really good friends, the two always seemed to about to break into a serious fight.

Doc ignored their banter and went on. "They were told to grab Peter and take him to the abandoned warehouse where they met Scruffy Sam. They knew nothing about the other people who grabbed Warren."

Long Tom said, "So we don't know anything that could help us."

Ham replied, "They did tell us where they met with this Scruffy Sam."

Doc said, "We will start there." He looked at Ham. "Maybe you can get a lead on Scruffy Sam from one of you contacts with the police."

Ham nodded. "I'll talk to Fred Quinn. He was head of the intelligence section with the police department. He may help us find out who this character is." Ham moved toward the door. Monk made to follow him, but Doc caught his eye.

"I need you here Monk, Ham can handle this alone." Ham gave Monk a haughty look of contempt. Monk responded with a glare.

Peter spoke out. "Are you all going? What about me? It sounds like these kidnappers are still out to get me. I need protection."

Doc calmly replied, "Monk and Johnny will stay here as long as needed. You can trust them to

keep you safe." Peter looked at the two men with an air of uncertainty. Doc continued, "They need to wait for our guests to be picked up." He indicated with a tilt of his head that he meant the thugs they had just talked with.

Doc looked at Virginia. "Did you talk to the bank?"

Virginia exuded much more self-confidence than she had evidenced earlier. "I got in touch with the manager." She smiled. "He didn't enjoy being woken up so early in the morning." Doc let a slight smile show on his face to give her some encouragement.

"He agreed to meet me down at the bank and he'd see what he can do for us." She paused for a moment and looked at Doc's aides. "Could someone come with me?"

Doc frowned. "I have plans for each of us."

Terry popped up and said, "I can go."

"Are you sure you're up to it?" Doc added a note of concern to his voice.

Terry squirmed a bit, but gave a forceful answer. "Yes."

Doc looked at Virginia. She said, "I would feel better with someone. I've known Terry long enough to trust him."

Doc said, "Good. Just wait a moment before you go though."

"Excuse me." It was Peter. "I've thought it over. It is late, and I'm very tired." He yawned in a rather theatrical manner. "I can't help much around here, so I might as well go home."

"Are you sure? We can keep you safe here."

"I can arrange for a body guard to come with me."

"OK."

"Just let me make a call."

Doc pointed to a door and said, "There is another phone in the library."

Peter said, "Thank you," and entered the library.

Virginia and Terry were at the door about to leave. Doc walked over to them. "Good luck." He handed Terry a small package. "This is a small portable radio. If you need help, one of my men will answer."

Terry looked relieved. "Thanks, that is reassuring."

Virginia walked down the hall to the elevators. Terry started to follow, but Doc indicated he had something more to say. He stepped out into the hall and quietly whispered, "I don't think the motive was the ransom." Terry looked surprised. Doc said, "I'd like you to keep your eyes and ears open. You may catch some useful information for me." With that, Doc returned to his office.

Back in the office, Doc motioned to Renny and Long Tom. "Let's go." The three friends took their leave just as Peter returned to the room.

Monk noticed his look of concern and said, "Don't worry, just have a seat and relax." Peter still looked dubious, but he did sit down to wait. He didn't look relaxed.

Four large men sat around a table in a dingy room. All of their clothing was very dark in color. Balaclavas lay on the tabletop.

Each man stared at cards in their hands. A big fellow on the left tossed two cards on the table and said, "Gimme two." The man across the table gave him a suspicious look, and then dealt two cards from the deck. The first man picked them up and studied his cards.

The door flew open and Nathan Ingram stormed in. He was short; much shorter than the others in the room, and he wore glasses. He, like the men was dressed in dark colored garments in the same style as the other men,

He glanced at the table and frowned. "All right you mugs. We have another snatch to do."

"Jesus," growled one of the bigger men.

Nathan gave him a dirty look. "You do what you're paid to do. Right!" The other men were silent, but showed their reluctant acquiescence. "Grab your stuff and come with me." He turned to go as the other four men stood up. Nathan stopped, looked back, and pointed at the largest of the four. "Except you."

The big man looked confused. Nathan explained, "You need to stay and watch that Evans guy." The big man thumped back down in his chair. Nathan glared at him and then stomped out of the room. The other three men trailed behind him like a group of goslings following their mother to water.

In Doc's office head quarters, Peter watched as the men in white suits took the last of the erstwhile kidnappers out the door. He turned to Monk. "They don't look like the police to me."

Monk smiled back at him. "They're not. Doc has a better solution for them." Monk didn't explain further about Doc's "college" where medical treatment and training would soon turn these hardened thugs into useful contributing members of society. Peter imagined something quite different and less pleasant.

A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts. Johnny walked over and opened it.

A tall heavysset man lumbered into the room. He was dressed all in black. A "J" shaped scar adorned his left cheek. A sneer adorned his lips.

He looked around at Johnny, Monk and Peter. He asked, "Which of you is . . .". He paused to look at a slip of paper in his hand; he looked up again, and said, "Peter Kingcaid?"

"That's me." Peter stood up and walked to the door and out into the hall. He stopped after a couple steps and looked back.

The man in black had not moved. He glared at Monk and Monk glared back at him. It was hate at first sight.

Peter rushed back in and stepped between them. "Hey, we're all on the same side here." The glares cooled down a little. Peter said to the man in black, "Come on let's go." he left the office again.

After one more dirty look at Monk, the man in black backed out of the office and lumbered after

Peter. Johnny closed the door and walked over to Monk. "A real nice guy there."

"Yeah." Monk went over to a couch and dropped into it. He looked at Johnny and said, "I'll meet him again someday and then ..." Monk let his voice trail off.

It was quiet in the office now that only Johnny and Monk remained. Monk grumbled, "Here we are, stuck in the office while everyone else is out having fun."

#### 4. THE WAREHOUSE

The street was deserted at this early hour. Pools of light under streetlights left many dark shadows. Many dangers could be lurking there.

A blank wall of one of the tallest skyscrapers in New York faced the street. In the low levels of light, it lay in shadow. The wall began to move revealing a large opening in the wall. Silently a large bronze colored car drifted out of the hidden garage and headed off down the road. The wall closed quickly and in moments, there was no evidence of any doorway.

The car was a specially built vehicle designed by Doc Savage. Armor plated and equipped with many gadgets, it would out class many a military tank. Doc was at the controls. The car sped down the road and turned toward the dock area. Renny sat in the front seat with Doc, while Long Tom sat in the back.

Doc said, "I didn't want to mention it back at the office, but there was something odd about those kidnapers." Renny and Long Tom looked to the giant bronze man. Doc continued, "They were totally unaware of the other kidnapers. As far as they were aware, we got all of them."

"Holy Cow." Renny fell back to his favorite expression.

Long Tom said, "That means that the kidnapping of Evans was planned. Peter's abduction could have been a diversion."

Doc nodded. "That could very well be."

Renny said, "Peter could be lying".

"Anyone could be lying." Doc was silent for a long time before he added, "I don't doubt Peter's sincerity. He just might misinterpret what happened."

"But you didn't want to mention that where Peter could hear you." Long Tom smiled.

A large building appeared at the end of the road. The car slowed and stopped in front. A battered sign above the door read, "Prosperous Warehousing and Distribution." The building was dark. The darkness seemed to seep out of the cracked and shattered window. Dust and cobwebs were everywhere. A weather-yellowed sign by the front door proclaimed a closing sale scheduled for almost a decade earlier.

Doc and his team scanned the front of the building.

"A real going concern isn't it." Renny's voice seemed to echo in a great hollow space.

Doc got out of the car. "Renny, wait here. Ham should contact you with more information on this Scruffy Sam." Renny nodded and shifted over to the driver's seat. Long Tom exited the vehicle and joined Doc on the street. "Long Tom and I will reconnoiter the joint."

Long Tom followed Doc as he moved to the corner of the building. They walked slowly along the side of the building.

A block away on the top of another warehouse, a pair of eyes clamped to binoculars followed the two men. The man put down the binoculars. It was Nathan Ingram. He smiled to himself, then turned and walked to the open door of a stairway that led down into the building.

There was little light in the laneway that surrounded the warehouse. Doc and Long Tom stopped and donned strange goggles that resembled canned soup tins. The gizmos were night vision goggles. The lane and the warehouse now appeared as clear as day to the two men.

As they turned around to the back of the warehouse, Long Tom stopped and pointed to an open window. It was close to a fire escape that would allow easy access. Doc studied the window and the fire escape. It seemed to be in unusually good condition compared to the rest of the building. Doc put his weight on the bottom rungs and they held firmly.

Doc took a step back. Then the two men moved further along the back of the structure. Then they walked along the far side. Along the way, they

stopped a couple more times to inspect possible entries to the building.

Back at the front, Doc paused to consider. "That fire escape looks like the best option".

Long Tom replied, "A little too good if you ask me."

"Yes". Doc's face was grim. With that, the two men returned to the fire escape. Doc studied the fire escape again. He whispered to Long Tom, "Wait here while I go inside." Long Tom nodded.

Doc grabbed the bottom rung and seemed at run up the fire escape as easily as most men would walk on a level surface. When he reached the open window, he stopped and did a close inspection. He noticed that there was no dust on the sill and unlike nearby windows, there were no cobwebs. He frowned.

Doc took out a small flashlight and shone it into the room. The floor, like the windowsill, was clear of dust. After he had inspected the whole room, he moved to the far side of the window. He waited a few seconds, and then quickly entered the window. He dropped to the floor and lay prone. He lay still for many minutes as he carefully studied the room again. He listened closely for any sounds. All he heard was the scurry of the small vermin that infested the ancient edifice.

Confident that there was no immediate danger in the room, Doc stood up and made a thorough, but rapid search of the room. He found minor scuffmarks and disturbed dust. To Doc that was

clear evidence that several people had been in the room recently.

Doc moved to the door. He opened it slowly and looked through the crack. The room opened out onto a narrow mezzanine floor that overlooked the large main room below. The room Doc had entered was one of a series of rooms along the back of the building.

Doc carefully scanned the entire room with his eyes. There was no one visible, and no sign that anyone else was in the building. Doc opened the door and slipped out onto the mezzanine. He knelt down next to the banister that ran along the edge of the mezzanine. He listened carefully, but heard only the frantic scurry of the frightened vermin.

Doc moved slowly along the mezzanine toward the second door. He again listened carefully at the door, but there was no indication of anyone inside. He pushed the door open, but stayed back out of sight. Again, there were no unusual sounds. He quickly stepped into the room and pressed himself against the wall.

The room was similar to the one he'd first entered, but had several pieces of furniture. On a small table, there was a phone and several pieces of paper. Doc went to the table and inspected these. All but one was blank. On that one sheet, some body had written Doc's own phone number in crude lettering.

After he had completed his inspection, Doc moved to the next room. Unlike the others, this room had a hasp and padlock on the door. The padlock

was unlocked. The room contained only a chair. Closer scrutiny revealed shackles attached to the chair. They looked new.

Doc checked each of the remaining rooms, but found nothing more of interest. Finally, he stood at the end of the mezzanine. A set of stairs ran down to the main floor below.

As he ran his eyes over the floor below, some footprints across the dusty floor quickly drew their attention. There were two sets of footprints that ran from the bottom of the stairs to a doorway at the front of the building. Between them were two lines, as if they had dragged a person's feet across the floor.

Doc moved to the top of the stairs, but did not go down. He looked at the steps. He turned his attention to the banister that ran along the mezzanine. Ornate pillars rose from the floor below to the mezzanine at several points along the wall.

He went to the first of these. He jumped over the banister and grabbed the top of the pillar. After he checked the strength of the pillar, he quickly slipped to the floor below. Doc took a quick look around the room. There did not seem to be anything different.

He turned and walked to the staircase. He moved under the steps and looked up. It did not take long for him to find what he looked for. Someone had sawn through several struts that supported the stairs. If he gone down the stairs, they would have collapsed beneath him. He noticed that the space near and under the stairs had been cleared of dust.

Doc began to walk slowly across the room. He walked to one side of the line of footprints. His pace was slow and deliberate. He stopped once or twice to listen. He continued, at a slower pace. He stopped again. The sound of his footsteps sounded different. He took another step and listened carefully as he put his foot down. The sound seemed to echo as if the space below the floor were hollow.

Doc stayed motionless for several seconds. He put a little more weight on his leading foot. The floor felt firm and strong. He began to walk forward again.

Then he heard a new sound. A cracking sound. It came from below. He felt the floor drop away beneath him. As he looked down, he could see rows of sharp spikes arranged on the basement floor beneath him. He fell towards them.

## 5. THE SCRUFFY MAN

Fred Quinn liked Ham, even though they had often been on opposite sides of many cases. Fred was a kindly looking and chubby fellow. His gentle appearance hid an inner strength and fitness. His appearance often helped in his work; disarming people who were too quick to underestimate him.

Fred sat in his favorite leather chair. At times, it seemed he might sink into it and vanish. He took a sip of his drink and looked up at his guest. "Are you sure you won't have some?"

The elegant lawyer sat comfortably in the chair next to Fred. Ham smiled, "No, I'll have to do it another time. I can't relax just now."

Fred gave a frown. "Ah yes. Our poor Mr. Evans." He stared into his drink for a short time. He looked up at the ceiling and scratched his chin. "Scruffy Sam. It does sound familiar."

Fred sat quietly as he raked through his memories. His eyes lit up. "OK. I think I know now." He smiled at Ham and leaned forward. "It wasn't his nick name, or at least not when I knew him. Scruffy was a good description though."

"Can you tell me anything about him that might help us?"

"His real name is Sam Collins. He was always more of a gofer than anything else. I doubt that he ever had an original thought." Fred's bemuse demeanor hardened. "Very smart though, and dangerous."

Ham said, "It sounds like he could be our man."

Fred replied, "I could see him involved with this, but he wouldn't be the real boss." Fred stood up and walked over to a desk in the corner of the room. "I haven't heard about him for a while. I should have his last known address though."

Fred took a seat and began to shuffle through the papers on his desk. He stopped periodically to have a closer look at one or another paper. He shook his head several times. Ham got up from his seat, went over, and stood beside Fred.

"I really should organize these papers some day." Fred flipped through a few more papers, and

then stopped. "Got it." He took a small slip out of a sheaf of others and showed it to Ham. "I'll write down the address for you." He grabbed a pad of paper and a pen. As he wrote he said, "I hope this helps you."

Ham was grim. "I think it will." He took the sheet from Fred and put it in his pocket. "I don't wish to be rude, but I really need to get to work on this."

A few moments later, Ham sat in his car. Like Doc's, it was a big custom machine, with many hidden defenses. Ham opened up a small panel in the dashboard to reveal a radio. He switched it on.

A few seconds later, Renny's voice boomed out over the small speakers. Ham asked, "Can I speak to Doc?"

"He ain't here. He and Long Tom are searching that old ware house."

"I thought they'd be done by now."

Renny was slow to reply. "Yeah. It has been a long time." The radio went silent for a brief time. "But, you know Doc, he could be anywhere."

Ham pulled out the sheet of paper. "I got a handle on our main suspect." Ham gave Renny a replay of what he'd learnt from Fred Quinn. He ended with Scruffy's address.

"Holy cow. This guy sounds like he could be a problem." They talked a bit more then Renny said, "I'll let Doc know when he gets back."

Ham said, "I'll head back to the office."

The conversation done, Ham turned off the radio and closed the panel. He put the key in the ignition, but didn't turn it. He'd stopped and turned his head. A low trilling sound pervaded the car. "Doc?"

Ham exited the car. The trilling was louder on the street. Ham couldn't make out where it came from. He called out, "Doc!" There was no reply except the echo of his voice and the trilling.

Ham felt confused. He took a step forward. He nearly stumbled. His head began to swim. He took another step. As he realized something was wrong, he turned back to the car.

He took a step and then the world went dark for him. He fell forward. His head hit the open car door and spun him around. He landed part way into the car, but then he slid down onto the pavement. He lay still. Blood dripped onto the concrete beneath him.

As Ham began to fall, the trilling sound vanished. The street became silent. Only in the distance could the sounds of the city be heard. There was no movement.

Then, the sound of quiet footsteps came from a dark alley. A man came into the light. He wore a mask that depicted a certain popular cartoon character. In his hand, he held what looked like an undersized oboe.

The man walked toward where Ham lay on the street. While he walked, he pulled a case out of his jacket. He placed the small oboe in the case and put it back in his jacket.

He stopped beside Ham and looked down on him. He knelt down and felt Ham's wrist. A streetlight down the street shone through the mask onto a sinister smile. The man stood up.

He looked down on Ham and giggled. He held up a hand and snapped his fingers. Three big thugs lumbered out of the lane and over to where the man stood.

The cartoon man jerked a thumb at the body on the ground. "Take that down to the river." The man turned and walked away up the street away from the river. The three thugs grabbed Ham and picked him up. They carried the limp body in the other direction toward the river. In a few moments, they were gone.

The street was again quiet. Nothing moved. Only the car with the open door and the drops of blood on the ground stood witness to the recent events.

Scruffy's apartment wasn't squalid. It couldn't dream of such a high honor. There was only one room. A handful of dishes sat in the sink. The only dishes in sight. A ratty mattress draped over a wooden frame that would groan under the weight of one of the larger mice.

Scruffy didn't pay much attention to his environs. He never did, but tonight he was even more distracted. He paced from one end of the room to the other, slowly rotated about and paced back to the other end, where he repeated the maneuver. All the time he muttered to himself. "Hey it wasn't my

fault. I did what I was sposed to." He shook his head back and forth.

The phone rang. Scruffy jumped. He stared at it. His face was a visage of fear. The phone rang again and he grabbed the hand piece and picked it up.

The voice he feared began to speak. Scruffy cut it off. "It wasn't my fault. I did what you told me to do. I pressed the cancel button, but they came in anyway."

"Shut up." The voice on the other end didn't sound as angry as Scruffy expected. He calmed down a little. The voice said, "we've got other things to do, forget that for now."

"What do you want me to do?" Scruffy's voice still shook.

"I need to meet you. Get a pen and paper."

Scruffy did a mad search through the garbage on the table, the chair and the kitchen counter. He found a stubby pencil and a scrap of brown wrapping paper. He grabbed the phone again. "Go ahead."

The voice gave him an address. "Now write it down."

"I can remember the address. It's that amusement park that shut down."

"I said write it down."

Scruffy wrote it down. "When?"

The voice said, "3 am". After a pause it said, "And write that down too!"

Scruffy wrote it down. The voice said, "Be there on time!" There was a click and the phone line went dead.

Scruffy quivered as he wiped his hand over his brow. He wandered a random route around his apartment. After a couple minutes, he calmed down.

He shoved the paper in his pocket. "He thinks I'm some kind idiot." Scruffy grabbed his coat and headed to the door. "I'll be damned if I'll give him a chance to do me in."

He stopped dead in his tracks. A trilling sound came into the room. Scruffy's eyes went wide. He screamed, "No." He ran toward the door, but stumbled. He tried to get up, but fell again. He lay on the floor and struggled as the trilling continued. He tried to cover his ears, but that didn't seem to help. His struggles got weaker and weaker and then stopped. The trilling continued.

Finally it stopped. The room was quiet. Then there was a rattle at the door. It came open. A man came in.

He wore a mask that depicted a certain popular cartoon character. He knelt down beside Scruffy and felt his wrist. He smiled and giggled.

He searched through Scruffy's pockets. He found the note about the meeting. After he read it, he put it back in the pocket where he found it. He returned to the door. He looked around the room, and then went out. The room was silent again.

A short time later, a mouse crept out from under the bed. It moved nervously across the floor to Scruffy. After some hesitation, it climbed up on his

chest. After a short search, it found a few crumbs left over from Scruffy's last meal caught in some folds of his shirt. The mouse nibbled away at them.

## 6. THE PIT

Monk fidgeted. He got up from his seat, took a few steps, then went back and sat down again. He looked at the clock, again. "Where is that shyster? He should have been back by now."

"You've said that ten times now. Ham's an adult you know." Johnny said.

"Really. He is?" Monk showed mock shock at the statement.

Monk's good humor didn't last. He got up and wandered around the office. Johnny shook his head.

Monk stopped and looked at the phone. He picked it up. "I'm going to call that Fred Quinn guy."

Johnny shrugged his shoulders as Monk dialed.

Fred answered, "Hello?"

"Hello, this is Andrew Mayfair, could I talk to Ham, er, Theodore Brooks?"

"Oh, he left, maybe a half hour ago."

"That's odd; he should have been back here by now then. Are you sure he left."

Fred sounded annoyed, but kept his voice measured, "I'll have a look out the window if that will ease your mind." He put down the phone.

Monk waited impatiently for Fred to return. "What kind of silly game is that mouthpiece up to now?"

When Fred picked up the phone, his attitude had changed radically. A tone of panic had taken hold. "His car is still out front." He paused to catch his breath. "The car door is open." Then in a more tentative voice he added, "I think I can see blood on the ground."

Monk howled. He dropped the phone and went pell-mell at the door, ripped it open and was gone.

Johnny looked up in surprise. He walked over and picked the phone off the floor. Fred took only a few seconds to relay the news.

After he hung up the phone, he walked over to the window and looked the 86 stories down to the ground below. In a quiet voice he said, "Good luck Monk." His face was grim.

Long Tom paced back and forth. It had been a long time since Doc had vanished into the warehouse. He knew he shouldn't worry about Doc, but in his bones, he felt something wasn't right. He checked his watch again.

He stopped and peered at the open widow for any sign of movement. There was none. He thought, "OK, I can't wait, I need to check." With that, he grabbed the bottom rung of the fire escape and scrambled up. While not as fast as Doc, his pace would have shocked many who thought he looked to be on death's doorstep.

Like Doc, Long Tom was cautious as he reached the window. When he felt confident it was safe, he climbed in the window. He glanced around

the room. Doc wasn't there, so Long Tom moved to the door and out on to the mezzanine.

He looked around the large interior room. He could see nobody in the room. It was quiet. Long Tom's hearing wasn't as keen as Doc's, so he did not notice the vermin as they scurried away from him. He noticed a large hole in the floor on the first level below. The place is falling apart he thought, although the opening seemed unusually regular.

In a soft voice, he called out, "Doc?" He knew that Doc would be able to hear even that quiet voice and he didn't want to alert any other less desirable people who may be around.

A few seconds later, he heard Doc's voice. "Long Tom, I need your help." The voice seemed to come from the hole in the floor. "I'm on my way Doc." He flipped around and began to run to the staircase at the end of the mezzanine.

Doc's voice boomed out. "Don't take the stair case. They're booby trapped."

Long Tom stopped short of the stairs. He looked over the banister and found the nearest column. It took him longer than it took Doc, but in short order he was at the edge of the hole. He looked down.

Doc was about half way down the hole. He was not far above the spikes at the bottom. He was stretched to his full extent. He had pressed his feet against one wall and his hands against the other. The splinters of what remained of the floor had ripped his shirt to shreds. He said, "I've managed to move

up a couple feet, but your help will save me some time."

Long Tom looked around, but couldn't see anything he could use to help Doc. He had another look down the hole. He judged the distance and made up his mind. He knelt and took off his jacket and then his shoes and socks. He lay down on the floor and peered over the edge into the hole. He grabbed one of the sleeves of his jacket and dropped the other down toward Doc. He let his arm drop down the hole as far as it would go. He tried to dig his feet and other hand into the floorboards.

The end of the sleeve was a few feet from Doc, just beyond reach. Doc looked at the situation. He said, "Hang on tight." Long Tom braced himself.

With the amazing strength of his powerful body, Doc made a leap upward. He reached out for the tip of the sleeve. His thumb and forefinger caught just above the first grace button. Doc held on.

Long Tom gave out a grunt as the full weight of Doc pulled on his arm. Doc now hung literally by his fingertips above the sharp steel spikes. Doc slowly pulled himself upward. One of the sleeves tore slightly at the armpit. Doc continued and soon both hands grasped Long Tom's jacket.

Long Tom breathed heavily. His arm felt like it might come off. Still he held on for Doc's sake. Doc reached higher up the jacket. He was able to grab Long Tom's arm.

Long Tom let the coat drop to the floor. It fell on one of the spikes. The spike was so sharp that the

weight of the coat caused the spike to punch through the coat and it slid to the bottom.

Doc reached up and grabbed Long Tom's hand. Long Tom held it tight. He pulled his arm upward. It was hard work and moved slowly. Soon, Doc's other hand grabbed the edge of the hole, and seconds later he was standing beside Long Tom.

"How's your arm?"

Long Tom felt his arm. "Seems OK. It'll be sore for a while though." He glanced down at the jacket impaled on the sharp spikes at the bottom of the pit. "I'll need a new jacket." He looked ruefully at his arm. "I think this sleeve will need to be a little bit longer."

Doc surveyed the room. He pointed to the drag marks on the floor. "I suspect we won't find anything, but we better make sure."

The two men moved apart and began a slow and cautious movement across the floor. The room was quiet, except for the occasional squeak of the floorboards.

A hollow echo beneath his feet brought Long Tom to a halt. He slowly took a step back. Doc had stopped as well. He spotted a small sand bag on the floor. He moved over and picked it up.

He hefted the bag and gently tossed it across the room. It landed several feet in front of Long Tom. It made a loud thump. For a second nothing more happened. Then there was a cracking sound and the bag, and the floor it sat on disappeared into a pit below the floor.

Long Tom looked down into the hole. More sharp spikes lay at the bottom. "I don't think they really want any visitors here."

They reached the end of the drag marks without further incident. The trail ended at a small doorway that led to a small room at the front of the building.

Doc motioned to Long Tom to stand back. He grasped the knob and turned. There was a click from the lock. He gave the door a slight push and it swung open. The room was dark, so Doc switched on his flashlight and played it around the room.

No obvious danger was visible. Doc stepped into the room. Long Tom followed behind him.

The room was empty, except for what appeared to be a carpet rolled up on the floor. Doc walked over to the carpet and examined it closely. There was something inside.

Doc unrolled the carpet to reveal the contents. At first, it looked like a man's body, but upon inspection, they identified it as a dummy.

"They fooled us." Long Tom was livid.

Doc replied with note of calm in his voice. "Yes, it is unlikely that Warren Evans was ever in this building."

A quick search of the basement confirmed Doc's suspicion.

When they arrived back at the car, Renny's first words were, "Ham has been kidnapped."

The three friends were silent, each momentarily lost in their own thoughts. Finally, Long Tom said, "We need to find him."

Renny replied, "Monk has already started to search."

"We can rely on Monk. We will continue our search for Warren Evans." Doc's voice was decisive.

Renny reported, "Ham did give me an address for that scruffy guy."

Doc strode to the car door. "Let's go."

## 7. FRANTIC SEARCH

The tranquility of the street was shattered as the car squealed around the corner. The vehicle flew down the street then screeched to a halt behind Ham's car. Monk exploded out of his car and ran toward the other vehicle.

He stopped by the open door and gazed down at the bloodstains on the ground. A moan escaped his throat. He looked up and whirled around. He looked one way and then another; then yet another. He stopped to stare at the dark alleyways that were scattered up and down the street.

His eyes stopped at a dark alleyway directly across from Fred Quinn's home. He glanced both ways and then dashed across the road and into the alley. He went in a few steps then stopped. In the darkness, he could see nothing. He backed out onto the street.

After a few seconds, he pivoted around and rushed up the street. He stopped after only a few steps. Confusion spread across his face. He started to

go back the way he came when a noise caught his attention.

He looked back at Ham's car. Beside it stood a man wearing dress pants, slippers and a pajama top. The man beckoned to Monk. Monk glanced both ways and then forced himself to walk slowly across the street to the man.

"Mr. Mayfair?"

"Yes."

The man held out his hand. "I'm Fred Quinn."

Monk grabbed the man's hand and squeezed until he realized the man was in pain. "Sorry." He let go.

"I can understand how you must feel. I hope your friend will be OK."

Monk nodded. "Is there anything more you can tell me?" He tried to keep the anxiety out of his voice.

Fred held his hand up to rub his chin as he thought back. His head began to shake slowly back and forth. He looked up again. "Nothing I didn't tell you on the phone."

Monk frowned as he walked back to the door of Ham's car. He stood and studied the situation again.

Fred came up beside him. "Is there anything else I can do?"

"No. Not right now."

Fred stood beside the bulky chemist for a few seconds. He was unsure what to do. Finally, he said, "I'll see if I can get some rest." As he walked away, he added, "If there is anything..." He let his voice trail off. Monk just nodded.

After Fred shut the door to his home, the street was silent again, except for the faint breathing of the apish figure by the car door.

Monk turned his back to the car and scanned the ground in all directions. Something caught his eye several feet from the car. He went over for a closer look. He knelt down and saw a small droplet of blood on the pavement.

He jumped up and rushed back to his car. In the trunk, he rummaged through several boxes of equipment. He opened a small box and pulled out a small flashlight, with an unusual lens.

Back at Ham's car, he flicked on the light and ran it across the ground. When it reached the droplet of blood, the blood glowed brightly in the dark. Monk walked over and swung the light ahead. Another droplet of blood glowed several feet further on.

Monk moved faster now. As he moved forward in the darkness, little glowing embers of light popped up ahead and led him on. The trail ran down the street toward the river. When he reached the corner, the trail vanished.

Monk bent down and looked at the pavement. A light dust covered this area of the. No car had stopped there recently. He stood up and walked several yards into the middle of the intersection. Then he walked in a circle around the last droplet. All the time the little flashlight flicked over the ground.

Then another spot glowed. Several feet further on, he saw another. He was back on the trail. The

spots were less frequent now, but the road ran straight and Monk was never in doubt of the direction of the trail.

The trail ended at the edge of the river. Monk walked back and forth along the riverside, but there was no sign of the trail. He walked over to the edge of the river and looked down.

The river, normally clear in this area, was murky and the water roiled as if a heavy weight had been tossed in.

A howl of anguish echoed across the water and up the street.

Doc and his two aides looked up at the small apartment building. Long Tom said, "His apartment looks scruffy too."

Doc scanned his eyes along the line of window. He stopped at one that was dark. "He wouldn't try to escape out that window. Too far up." With that, he led the way to the entrance. His two aides followed closely behind.

Down the street, a man in a car watched until all three men had entered the building. When they were out of sight, the man giggled. He glanced down at the mask on the seat beside him. It depicted a certain popular cartoon character. The man started the car, and then drove away.

Doc moved quietly down the narrow corridor until he found the room. Renny and Long Tom stopped several feet back. He stopped to study the floor in front of the door. Then he leaned toward the door and listened. No sounds seemed to come from

the room. He stepped past the room while his two companions moved in closer on the other side.

Doc rapped his knuckles on the door. Seconds went by and there was no response. Doc knocked again, with the same result.

Doc took a step back and studied the door. A transom opened above the door. Doc caught Long Tom's eye and pointed to the transom. Long Tom nodded. Doc stepped up to the door and placed his hands firmly on the jambs. Long Tom quickly climbed up and stood on the larger man's shoulders. He looked into the room through the transom.

The room was dark, but an open window let in just enough light to reveal what Long Tom needed to see. A man lay on the floor in the middle of the room. While he watched, the man did not move. He could see that a mouse sat on his chest, then another scurried across his face.

"It looks like we have a dead man." Long Tom scrambled down to the floor.

Doc stepped aside. He indicated the door. "OK Renny."

Renny's dour look revealed his enjoyment as he stepped forward. A massive fist flew and the fragile door splintered apart.

Doc led the way into the room. The three men moved cautiously across the floor. Doc carefully studied the dirt and smudges on the tiles.

As Doc reached the body, the mice abandoned their scavenging and escaped away under the bed. Doc knelt down over the body. He felt the wrist and then neck. "Yes, he's dead."

Renny pointed at the dead man's clothing and hair. "He certainly looks like someone they'd call scruffy."

Doc replied, "Yes, I recognize him from the concert hall." Doc continued his exam. He opened the eyelids. He felt around the skull. He even turned the body over to inspect the back. "There's no obvious cause of death." Doc stood up and looked around the room. "See if there are any clues in the room."

While Long Tom and Renny combed through the flotsam and jetsam that the late Sam Collins had scattered about the squalid room, Doc had a second look at the scruffy man on the floor.

Long Tom opened each of the cabinet doors. The shelves were empty behind most of them. Some stale bread lay on one shelf, while a half-eaten bag of cookies lay behind another. The sink and the drawers revealed only a meager few utensils and some cups and plates.

Renny looked through the few pieces of clothing that hung on the wall or lay on the bed. At the bottom of the pillow, he found a small roll of money. Hardly enough for a decent meal. Renny shook his head.

Tacked to the wall above the bed was a faded photograph of a woman with a young child in her arms. Her resemblance to the man on the floor was unmistakable. Renny pointed it out to Doc, who gave it a quick look.

Long Tom and Renny finished their search. Renny said, "He really didn't have much to show for his life."

Doc nodded. "It's sad to see some poor mother's son come to an end like this." He looked up at his friends. "He may have been a criminal, but he deserved better than this."

Doc stood up again. "There is something unusual about the manner of death. We need to take him back to the lab."

As they moved out of the room, Renny looked back and said, "I guess we didn't learn anything useful here."

Doc replied, "We may find something useful in Scruffy's examination."

## 8. THE AMUSEMENT PARK

George Olson led the way across the great foyer of the bank. Virginia and Terry followed behind him. The room was dark except for a light on a desk where a bank clerk sat sorted money into piles. The windows were dark.

George's face looked profoundly sad. "I've been your father's banker for 15 years." He shook his head. "I can't imagine what he did to deserve this." He noticed the sadness in Virginia's eyes and held back from expressing any of his other thoughts.

They reached the clerk and, while George and the clerk discussed his progress, Virginia sat down

in a chair next to the clerk. Terry leaned against a desk a short distance away.

George turned to Virginia, he indicated the clerk, and said, "You and Yates here should double check the count." Virginia nodded and took the pile of money that Yates offered her.

George walked over and stood beside Terry. They talked in hushed tones. George was morose. "It seems like everything is going well and then your life falls apart." He looked at Terry. "It doesn't seem fair."

"No."

The two men were quiet as they watched Virginia and the clerk. George seemed uncomfortable. He said, "I was supposed to meet him this morning. An 8 o'clock early riser." He leaned over to Terry, "I don't like meetings that early, but when time is of the essence, you have no choice."

"You know him well?"

"Only through business I'm afraid. I try not to get personal with customers."

"I know what you mean." Terry struggled to keep his excitement out of his voice. "He told me he wanted to talk after the concert." He shrugged. "No idea why."

George raised his eyebrow. "You can blame me for that." His eyes returned to the two people as they neared the end of their counting. "You do forensic auditing don't you?"

"Yeah, not a lot, but I do get some come my way." Terry also watched the two counters. "Will you meet with Peter instead?"

George looked at Terry closely. His eyes grew suspicious. He turned back to the counters. "No, he wasn't invited."

The mood in Doc's office was gloomy. His three aides sat in silence as they waited. Johnny periodically glanced at the phone. It didn't ring.

Doc came out of the lab. He stripped off his lab coat and gloves as he did so. He tossed them into a garbage can beside the door. He looked at the three men. "Have you heard anything from Monk or Ham?" He didn't wait for a reply. The answer was clear to see.

Johnny cleared his throat. "We have another problem now." He hesitated for a moment. "I called Peter Kincaid's home and they said he never arrived."

The room was quiet. Johnny added, "Monk really distrusted that bodyguard that came for him."

Doc nodded, then after a moment, he held up a slip of paper in his hand. "I found this in Scruffy's pocket." He put the slip on his desk. "It says where he is supposed to meet someone." Doc looked at the clock. "In about a half hour, so we should have time to get there."

Long Tom, "It's odd that he'd write it down like that. Could it be a trap?"

"Could very well be. Whether for us or him a trap is possible." Doc glanced at the paper again. "It

is one of the two lines of inquiry we have now. I don't think we have choice but to go."

"Two? What's the other?" Johnny queried.

Doc nodded toward the lab. "I couldn't determine Scruffy's cause of death, but I've seen one just like it. Just a week ago." Doc was grim. "You know Zachary Bond."

Long Tom nodded, "Yes, we worked together on several projects. I hadn't seen him for a while, and then I heard about his death."

"The police asked me to help them with some advice. I examined his body, and then I searched his lab." Doc paused. "Something had been taken from the lab. The police already knew that. They hoped I might find out what it was, but there were no clues to follow. Except ..." Doc hesitated, "... there were some lab note books stashed in a hidden drawer."

"Did it tell you what was missing?" Renny boomed.

Doc shook his head. "No, it was all in code. I'm pretty sure that I can break it, but haven't had the time yet." Doc turned to Johnny. "I think the lab notes have information we need. Can you decode them?"

Johnny thought before he answered. "I have no apprehension about my cryptanalysis competence, although I must confess some equivocation about imminent accomplishment."

Doc moved toward the lab and Johnny followed him. Doc said, "Renny, Long Tom, get ready for Scruffy's little rendezvous."

The amusement park looked run down. Financial problems had caused it to close several years earlier. Time and weather conspired to slowly destroy the remains. The only light came from the city beyond.

A man shuffled into view. He walked slowly. He moved into a brighter area and his features became visible. It was Scruffy Sam Collins; or rather, it looked like him. In fact, it was none other than Long Tom. With Doc's help, he looked so much like the late Scruffy that it would fool many of his acquaintances at close quarters.

Long Tom, seemed to be unsure where to go. He stopped several times to look around. In the darkness to either side, he caught glimpses of two people trailing him on either side. He seemed to take no notice of them. He knew that it was Doc and Renny.

Long Tom arrived at a broken down merry go round. He stood there briefly, then pulled out a slip of paper and studied it closely. That done, he moved over to a bench near the merry go round. He sat and waited.

He waited a long time. After he checked his watch, for what seemed like the tenth time, Long Tom got up and walked around. He looked at the other side of the merry-go-round. He looked around in the dark. He saw no one.

He looked at his watch. It was nearly a half hour after the scheduled time. Long Tom made a decision. He walked in the direction he last saw Doc

Savage. In a quiet whisper he said, "Doc, I don't think they're going to show."

Almost before he finished talking, two machine guns clattered to action. Only Long Tom's rapid reflexes saved him. He was flat on the ground as the bullets flew over his head.

Then over to his right, Long Tom heard the familiar bass fiddle roar of the small machine pistols that Doc's team carried. Renny's burst of bullets shut down the machine guns momentarily. This gave Long Tom the chance to run to better cover. He pulled out his own machine pistol and sent a barrage at the hidden machine guns.

The machine guns opened up again. Both Renny and Long Tom ducked behind their protective cover. A slight pause from the machine guns and the two were up and firing away. The back and forth fire carried on, with neither side able to dislodge the other.

Far to Long Tom's left a figure moved silently through the night. It was Doc Savage. He stopped several times while his remarkable eyes searched for the muzzle flashes of the enemy machine guns. Finally, he spotted one of the machine guns and moved toward it. His progress was slow as he was careful to remain out of view.

There was a scream ahead. One of Renny's bullets had found a human target. The man flew backward and lay motionless. Doc's men used a special mercy bullet developed by Doc. It did not kill; just put the victim to sleep.

The resulting confusion at the machine guns gave Renny and Long Tom an opening. They both moved quickly to new positions. Soon, the gun exchange roared back to life.

This interruption delayed Doc's forward progress. He had to change his route to avoid becoming a target for his two friends. In the dark, they wouldn't know it was him.

Doc spotted a row of concession stands that ran near to the two machine guns. He slipped over behind it. With a prodigious jump, he grabbed the eave. Seconds later, he lay flat on the roof. He listened for a few seconds to make sure the gunners had not seen him. The machine guns continued their focus on Renny and Long Tom.

Doc rose to a crouch and ran along the top of the concession stands. At the end, he moved to the edge and lay down. He could see the two machine guns and their crews clearly. It would be the work of just a few seconds to put them out of commission.

Doc prepared for his leap, and got into a low crouch. Suddenly there was a burst of fire from a machine gun. It was behind Doc. A bullet ripped a large hole in Doc's shirt. Doc dropped down again. The bullets missed him.

The noise had caught the attention of the two machine guns in front of him. Doc saw one of the crews spin their gun around and open up at his position. He wasn't there when the bullets arrived.

More gunfire from the third machine gun tore into the concession stand beside Doc. The bullets missed Doc, but they ripped up the stand's support

and it collapsed. Doc assessed his situation. Machine guns in front and behind him pinned him down. With the collapse of the other stand, if he tried to move away, the enemy would see him. The concession stand, just light plywood and fabric, provided no shelter. Death was a certainty.

## 9. ESCAPE

Ham groaned. He felt his head throb. He opened his eyes and blinked a couple times. He could see the ceiling above. Slowly he twisted his head around to see the rest of the room.

He lay on a cot against the wall of a small room. At the other side of the room sat Warren Evans. He looked very tired and his rumpled up clothes hung from his body. Manacles held his wrists and ankles. Ham looked down to see saw that his captors had also manacled him.

Warren's eyes were fixed firmly on Ham. He said, "Thank god, I thought you were dead."

Ham tried to move, but the chains about his wrists and ankles held him back. He found it awkward, but after a bit of a struggle, he managed to sit up.

Ham looked at Warren, "I think you were almost right."

Ham tried to stretch and relieve the pressure on his limbs. After he found a position that was slightly more comfortable, he asked, "How long have I been here?"

Warren replied, "I don't know. Maybe a half hour. I can't really tell time in here." He indicated the room with a sweep of his head.

Ham continued his survey of the room. There was only one door; locked no doubt. The walls looked solid and were bereft of windows. A small vent in the ceiling let in some air, or so he assumed. The air felt stuffy and stale.

Other than the cot and Warren's chair, the only furniture was a small table in the middle of the room. Ham noticed the remains of someone's sandwich on top of it.

Ham returned his attention to Warren. "Who is our gracious host?"

Warren smiled, "I don't know. A man comes to check on me every now and then. A big brute of a guy." Warren sighed, "I'm not much help am I?"

Ham smiled back. "You never know what will be of help." With that, Ham began to examine his chains more closely. They were a common type; quite cheaply made. If he could get the right kind of leverage and enough time, he felt he could get them off.

His investigations came to a stop when he heard footsteps in the hall outside. The steps halted outside the door. A key rattled in the door lock. The door swung open.

A huge man pushed his way into the room. When he saw Ham, he laughed. "Done with your beauty rest grandpa?" He laughed again.

Ham struggled to his feet and tried to walk toward the door. The big man laughed again. "Isn't that cute. The old man wants to go for a walk."

He walked over to Ham and stood in his way. He looked down on the lawyer. He pressed a finger into Ham's chest, "Sorry, but you stay here."

Ham glared at the thug for a second, and then made his move. With a speed and agility that few would have expected from the slighter man, Ham jumped up and toward the thug. Their foreheads crashed together. A large thump filled the room when they hit.

The larger man staggered back, and then crashed to the floor. Ham, unable to keep his balance, fell on top of him.

Ham rolled off the other man and knelt beside him. The big man wasn't about to do anything more for quite some time. A blood vessel had burst on Ham's forehead and some blood dribbled down into his eyes.

Ham began a methodical search of the man on the floor. He found a set of keys. One by one, he tested them in the manacles he wore. In short order he found the one he needed and was free.

He ripped part of the thug's shirt and used it to daub up blood from his forehead. He stanchd the bleeding. It wasn't a serious wound and Ham was not too worried about it.

Ham moved over to Warren and soon, he too was free. Ham went to the door and looked up and down the hall. He looked back at Warren. "Do you know how to get out of here?"

Warren looked confused. "Well, sort of." He shrugged. "It seemed like we went through a whole rabbit warren of rooms and corridors before we got here." He poked his head out into the hall. He pointed to the right and said, "I remember we came from that direction. He looked at Ham. "There is set of stairs just around that corner. I think."

"Well, that' a start."

Ham led the way down the hall. They both moved slowly so they would make little noise. At the corner, Ham spotted the stairs. One flight went up, the other down. He looked at Warren. Warren pointed to the stairs that went up.

The two men began to climb the stairs. About half way up, a step made a loud creaking sound when Ham put his weight on it. They stopped to listen. For long seconds they heard no other sound. They waited. After nearly a minute, there was still silence.

Ham nodded to Warren, and they started up the stairs again. Ham helped Warren get past the noisy step. None of the other steps protested their weight.

At the top of the stairs, they found another corridor. Ham could see several doorways on either side. Only one, in the middle of the corridor, was open. Light poured out of the room and into the hall. The two men could hear muted voices echo down the corridor.

Ham took a few steps down the hall toward the voices. He stopped and looked back. Warren seemed frozen in place. This was something beyond his experience and his face reflected his fear.

Ham went back to him. He held the man's shoulder and said quietly, "Come on, this is our best chance." Warren nodded and after a deep breath, he forced a look of determination on his face.

Ham led the way down the hall. They moved slowly to make their passage as silent as possible. Step by step, they neared the open door.

The voices from the room became louder and more distinct. Other than strings of obscenities, their conversation was limited. A game of poker was underway.

Ham reached the doorway and stuck an eye around the jamb. Three men sat around a table in the room. All were big and all were dressed in dark clothes. They appeared to be totally engrossed in their game. None looked toward the door.

Ham signaled to Warren to walk past the door. Warren's progress was slow. He seems on the verge of stumbling to the floor. He froze when one of the men in the room pushed his chair back.

Ham and Warren waited, but the three men in the room remained oblivious to the two in the hall outside. Ham pointed to the end of the hall and Warren made it past the door. He stopped several feet further on and watched Ham. Ham waited until the men in the room began to argue about the cards. He quickly moved to Warren's side.

The two men moved quietly down the hall. They'd only gone a few steps when one of the voices suddenly grew louder.

"Where is that clown?" A chair screeched across the floor. "Is he telling those people a bed time story?" The other men laughed.

One of the other men suggested, "Well go have a look."

The first man replied, "Why don't you go."

Another man expressed a negative opinion of the first man's mother. They began to yell at each other. A fight seemed imminent.

As the men argued, Ham hurried Warren around the corner at the end of the hall. Barely a second later, they heard a man step out into the hall.

He yelled back into the room, "You guys owe me one." They heard footsteps echo down the corridor, then they stopped and the man yelled again, "And don't look at my cards."

Ham didn't wait. He knew the man would raise the alarm as soon as he got down to the prisoner's room. They had to get out and fast.

Ham looked down the corridor. He saw a single window about half way toward the end. He walked rapidly toward it.

As Warren caught up, Ham inspected the window. They were on the second level, but there was a fire escape that ran from the window to the ground.

Ham tried to push the window up. It didn't move. Warren moved beside him and they pushed together. There was a squeak and the window came up. To them, it sounded like a huge explosion.

They waited. Silence. There was no response from the men in the room. They pushed the window all the way up.

Ham helped Warren through the window and onto the fire escape. Warren made his way down as Ham went through the window after him. In seconds, they were safely on the ground. They found themselves in a short dark alley.

From the window above them, they heard a man yell, "They're gone!"

Ham said, "We better get out of here." They rushed down the alley to the main road. The streetlights cast but scanty illumination on the street. Ham scanned the street from the dark of the ally. He could see no one.

Ham led the way as they moved on to the sidewalk. Ham broke into a run.

"There they are!"

Ham looked back. A group of men had run out of the front of the building they'd just left. Ham started to run faster, but noticed that Warren wasn't beside him. He stopped and looked back. Warren was running, but the man was not in shape and his pace was slow. Ham went back and grabbed him by the arm and they resumed their escape.

They could hear the pursuit behind them. A shot rang out. A bullet ricocheted off the curb. Ham looked ahead. He recognized the area. If he could get around the next corner, he was sure they could get away.

They were mere feet away, when a car came around the corner and came to an abrupt stop.

Several men jumped out of the car and pointed guns at the two prisoners. Ham and Warren stopped in their tracks.

A short man with glasses climbed out of the car. "Are you boys being naughty?" he laughed.

## 10. THE BANK

Monk stared down the riverbank at the murky water below him. He knew what he had to do, but for once, he hesitated. After a deep sigh, he took a step down to the edge of the water.

"Colonel Mayfair."

Monk did an about face at the sound of his name. A man limped slowly toward him down the street. A streetlight silhouetted the man and Monk could not make out his features.

Monk answered, "What do you want?"

The man came closer. He stood at the end of the road and looked down at Monk and the water below. "I recognized your voice." The man came a little closer. "You lookin for some thing?"

"I think some people threw a body in the river."

The man pointed to the river. "I did see some guys here a little while back. I didn't think nothin of it."

Monk climbed back up to the road. He moved to where he could see the man's face. "What happened? Did you see them throw the body in the river?" He barely kept his anxiety out of his voice.

The man shook his head. "No. Nothing like that. I thought they were carrying a drunk friend."

He gestured upstream. "They got him into a boat and started to row that a way."

Monk smiled. "How long ago?"

"Ten or twenty minutes I think." The man looked a bit confused.

Monk turned and clambered down the bank to the river. Just as he was about to jump into the river, he looked back up at the man. "Thanks. I owe you one."

The man laughed. "I guess you've forgot me."

Monk stared up at the man in the dark. The man turned slightly and Monk could see that he had only one arm.

The man said, "You saved my life at the Marne. I'd say I still owe you."

"I remember now." Monk's voice was solemn as he remembered the fresh faced boy that the man had been. "Is there anything -"

The man held up his hand. "I know what you've done with your life. The opportunity to help is thanks enough." The man turned and walked away.

After he watched the man go, Monk dove into the river and started to swim upstream.

Monk found a boat tied up at the end of a road just a short distance down the river. He crawled out of the water and up the bank. His meticulous search found no evidence of the bloodstains he expected. He stood at the end of the road and scanned his eyes over the vista. Nothing jumped out at him. He turned and dove into the water again.

Three times more, he got out and searched. Each time he had the same result. On his fifth try, he

went through the same routine. He found nothing. He stopped to consider. Should he continue up stream, or go back to one of the roads he'd already tried. As he thought, he swept the light of the special flashlight across the ground. A flicker caught his eye.

In a few steps, he reached the point where he saw the light. A close look revealed a drop of blood on the pavement. Monk gave a whoop and moved forward with more intense purpose. A short distance further, he found another droplet; then a third beyond that one.

Back on the trail, Monk bent over as he rapidly followed the blood track. Like a bloodhound on the scent, he focused on the search. He basely looked up as he made his way along the road.

At an intersection, he stopped again. He passed the light over the ground, but no trace of blood showed up. He went across the street and a few feet into the next block. His search produced nothing.

He returned to the intersection and searched the other two directions. Again, he found nothing. Monk stood in the middle of the intersection. He turned around slowly. As he did so, his eyes searched the buildings for any sign of illicit habitation.

One building looked abandoned. Some windows were broken and the front door hung loosely, yet there was a faint glow of light deep inside the building. Monk made his way to the door. He waited out side and listened. Nothing.

Monk had just taken a cautious step toward the door, when shouts from around the corner caught his

attention. He stopped to listen. Then he heard a shot. As if it were the sound of a starter's gun, Monk flew over the ground.

He rounded the corner and a short block away, he saw a group of men crowded around a car. As he watched, a truck came out of an alley and parked by the men. Monk ran toward the group. He noticed that two of the men seemed to be prisoners as other men loaded them into the truck.

One of the prisoner's turned and the light caught his face. It was Ham.

Monk let out a roar as he redoubled his efforts to reach the two prisoners. Alerted, the other men swung into action. Several shoved Ham and Warren into the truck and door slammed down. Others dropped behind the car. A shot rang out, then another. Monk had to dive to the ground. Then he was up and into an alley.

He reached for his gun, but it wasn't there. It must still be in his car. He poked his head out of the alley. A bullet slammed into the bricks above his head. Pieces of brick and mortar showered the area. He jumped back out of the way. He heard more doors slam shut.

Monk knelt down and crawled out of the alley behind a garbage can. He looked again. The truck was gone and the car had started to move. On his feet again, he made for the back of the car.

Men in the car saw him and guns flared. The motion of the car disrupted their aim and none came near Monk. It didn't mater. Monk tried to keep up, but the car drove off too fast and soon he was alone

again in the middle of the road. He stopped and looked around. He screamed his frustration.

George Olson led the way to the door. Terry and Virginia trailed behind. Each carried a large packet of money. Before they reached the door, Terry said, "I should call ahead and let them know we're on our way."

George stopped. He nodded and led them to a room off to the side and indicated a phone.

Terry picked up and dialed. The phone hardly seemed to ring when Johnny came on the line. "Ham, Monk?"

"Uh no, it's me, Terry, the accountant."

Johnny sounded disappointed. "Oh, are you OK?"

"Yes, we have the money now. We'll be on our way shortly and should be there by the top of the hour."

"That is a gratifying development."

After a short chat, Terry hung up. He looked at Virginia and set, "Let's go."

At the door, George stopped before he put the key in the lock. "Are you sure you'll be OK?"

Terry looked through the glass window to the street. "Our car is right there. We'll be plenty safe once there."

George said, "Good luck" and the door eased open.

Once out on the sidewalk alone with Virginia, Terry didn't feel quite so confident. The two walked toward their car. Terry looked around the street but

saw nothing. Once at the car, he pulled out the key and opened the door. Virginia got in and he handed her the parcels of money.

He shut the door and began to walk around the car. He heard a noise behind him. A glance revealed a thug running head long at him. For a second, he felt paralyzed, but he managed to step out of the way. The assailant few past him, tripped and sprawled on the road.

Terry took a step toward the car, but a large hand grabbed his arm. It held him fast. He struggled against it, but his efforts were futile. Slowly the thug pinned his arms to the side. Terry redoubled his efforts, and managed to force his captor to struggle with him.

He heard a crack. The arms around him went limp and he pulled free. He turned to see the thug slide to the ground. Virginia stood over him. Her eyes wide open in shock. In her hands was one of the parcels of money, which she had used to hit the man. She looked at Terry.

"My father made me take self defense. I hated it, but now I'm glad he did."

The two stood motionless for a moment. Virginia looked ill. Terry roused himself. "We better get out of here."

Almost as he finished, Virginia shrieked, "Look out. Behind you."

Terry flew around. Another thug took a swing at him. It connected with Terry's head, but the larger man had misjudged and it didn't carry much force. Still, it staggered Terry back. Out of one eye, he saw

two men grab Virginia. She struggled, but she just didn't have the strength.

Terry stepped back. Two more thugs had arrived. He felt very weak.

## 11. BREAKTHROUGH

Johnny came back into the library and walked over to the desk where he had been at work. The notebook sat in the middle of the desk. Balled up discarded work sheets had piled up inside the wastebasket beside the desk. After he settled into his chair, he rubbed his eyes and tried to remember where he'd left off when the phone rang.

He stared at the notebook, then at his last work sheet. He picked up the work sheet, crushed it into a ball and tossed it into the basket.

He turned his attention back to the notebook. His face fell into a deep frown. He picked up another worksheet. After he put it down, he pointed his eyes at it, but he didn't see it. He picked up his pencil and started to write.

Then he stopped. He sat bolt upright. "Maybe," he whispered. He grabbed the waste paper basket and riffled through it until he found the ball of paper he had just thrown in. He put it back on the desk and flattened it out.

For several minutes, he sat motionless and stared at the work sheet. He grabbed a pencil and quickly jotted down some letters. Again, he studied the puzzle in front of him. He crossed out some letters and wrote new ones. Twice more he did it.

A faint smile appeared on his face. "I'll be superamalgamated. That's it!" He sat up straight. "It's so obvious once you know."

Johnny grabbed a pile of work sheets and began in earnest. As rapidly as he could, he translated the coded notes into plain language. In short order, he was half way through the notebook.

He stopped suddenly. He scanned back and reread the passage he had just decoded. He sat and thought, then went back and read the passage again.

He stood up and went for a short walk around the library. His brow furrowed in thought. He went to the office and got a glass of water. He stood in the middle of the room as he slowly sipped his drink.

With the glass empty, he returned to the library. He picked up the decoded notes and reread the last passage again. He put the notes down on the desk. "Now, I'm really superamalgamated."

The archaeologist gathered his wits and began to decode the notes again. "Doc isn't going to believe this!"

Bullets tore through the fabric next to Doc. It was only a matter of time before they found their mark. Doc had to act and act quickly.

He studied the plywood floor beneath him. He took a chance and a bronze fist slammed down on the rickety wood. Wood snapped and part of the panel broke off and fell to the floor below. A burst of gunfire drowned out the noise of the breaking wood.

Doc looked down through the hole. The bullets from the machine guns had torn away most of the fabric walls below him. By chance, two pieces left blocked the view of the gunners. They left a narrow space where the gunners could not see Doc.

Doc gauged the distance. He dropped his head and shoulders through the hole. Grabbing the edges of the broken plywood, he lowered his body down. He then pressed his legs against the edges of the hole and brought his hands down.

Bit by bit, Doc lowered himself down. Finally, only his feet held him in place. With his arms full extended, there were still several feet to the ground. Doc let go with his feet and fell head first toward the ground.

His out stretched hands hit the ground and his arms took the shock of the landing. Doc achieved a perfect handstand. In this position, he was still not visible to the gunners. The machine guns still clattered away. One sent a spray of bullets through the space he had just vacated.

In this position, Doc was very vulnerable. He slowly lowered himself to the ground. He had to rotate his body to keep it hidden. In less than a minute, he lay safely flat on the ground.

Doc moved away from his shelter. He moved almost like a snake across the ground. He went around the first gun and closed in on the second. This gun had kept Long Tom and Renny pinned down, while the others blasted away at Doc.

Doc moved in close and waited. Long Tom and Renny broke off their gunfire. Doc jumped up and

was instantly upon the gunners. They screamed and one leapt out of the nest and ran toward the other machine gun. Doc grabbed the other and put him to sleep.

The other machine gun spun around. The gunners took aim. Doc dropped down and the bullets flew over his head.

The gunner who had tried to run away was not so lucky. He jerked around as the bullets smashed through him. His bullet-riddled corpse fell to the ground.

The gunners tried to shoot Doc as he hid in the nest. The bullets tore the other gunner to pieces. Doc had already moved away.

A bullet flew in and hit the side of the machine gun. The mechanism ground itself to pieces as Renny's bullet ripped through. The two gunners turned and ran. Long Tom was up and running, followed closely by Renny.

Doc made for the third machine gun. The gunners abandoned it before he reached it. He searched about and found evidence of the rapid retreat of the gunners. The three friends met at the fence at the edge of amusement park. In the distance, they could hear the roar of the get away car.

Johnny was just finished collating the decoded notes when the door opened. Doc came in, followed by Long Tom and then Renny. The three men looked grim.

Johnny held out the notes to Doc, who took them and began to read. Johnny looked at the other

two. 'What transpired in your nocturnal reconnaissance?'

Long Tom's voice reflected his anger and frustration. "It was a trap and we walked right into it."

Renny nodded agreement. "Holy cow, were those guys ready for us." Renny smashed his gargantuan fists together to add emphasis.

"Sorry I missed it."

Then a strange sound began to fill the room. It was a low, mellow, trilling sound, like the sound of the wind filtering through a jungle forest. It seemed to come from everywhere within the room.

As the sound began, Johnny shuddered. His eyes swept around the room. An unusual tinge of fear appeared on his face.

The sound stopped. Doc said, "Sorry Johnny."

Johnny gave himself a shake and the color returned to his face. Renny and Long Tom looked baffled by Johnny's reaction.

Doc handed the notes to Long Tom. "Have a look through these. Let me know what you think."

Doc asked, "Where are Terry and Virginia? I hoped they'd be here with the money by now."

Johnny replied, "Terry called from the bank to say they were on their way." He looked at the clock. "They said they'd be here by now. When I heard you coming I thought it would be them."

Doc took in the information. He stepped out of the room for a few minutes. When he returned he had replaced the rags of his old shirt with a fresh

new one. Long Tom still read the notes. The phone rang and Doc picked it up.

The voice on the other end began to talk right away. "OK now, I want you to stuff the money into a cookie tin and ..."

Doc interrupted. "The money isn't here yet."

"What!" The line went quiet for a few seconds, then Doc heard a string of obscenities burst out of the man at the other end. After his tirade ran out of steam, his voice became calmer. "Are you trying to pull a fast one on me?"

Doc said, "I'm playing straight with you. We thought the money would be here by now."

The man on the other end was quiet again. Doc could hear some movement in the background. At least one other person was with the caller.

The voice came back. "Alright. Now get this straight. I'll call back in a half hour. If you don't have the money then, that it, I'm done." He hung up.

After Doc reported the conversation to his team, he asked Long Tom, "What do you think?"

Long Tom thought for a moment. "I want to have a closer look at these notes." He paused, "But, I think I have an idea." He walked toward the lab. "Let me show you what I have in mind."

The two men entered the lab. Renny and Johnny looked at each other. Renny walked over to a couch and lay down. "The night's not over yet, we better get some rest." Within seconds, he was asleep.

Johnny said, "I'm hungry." He went to a small kitchen located beside the laboratory. He collected various and copious amounts of foodstuffs. He

returned to the outer office and proceeded to rapidly devour the food before him.

## 12. MONK TO THE RESCUE

Virginia used the money parcel to hit one of the thugs. It didn't have any effect on the man, and it burst open sending the bills to the ground.

She wheeled about and managed to dig her elbow into one thug's belly and he let go. She twisted around and her knee dived into the other thug's groin. He screamed in pain. She pulled away and looked for the car. She hesitated too long. One of her assailants grabbed her arm.

As she tried to break free, a third thug arrived and sent a balled fist at her jaw. She rolled with the punch, but it left her winded and confused. She felt someone grab her from behind.

Terry backed away from the two men in front of him. They seemed wary of him. His foot hit something on the ground and he fell over backward onto something soft. He rolled off onto the sidewalk. He looked back and saw that he landed on the thug that Virginia knocked down earlier.

The two thugs were on top of him before he had time to think. As they pressed down on him, he heard Virginia scream in pain. He tried to push the men off him, but he didn't have the leverage he needed.

In what seemed like the far distance, he heard the sound of tires screeching to a stop. Then the sound of a door as if flew open and banged against

the car body. Finally, he heard a large roar like a gigantic gorilla.

One of Terry's opponents suddenly levitated away from Terry, spun around, and sailed through the air. He landed with a thump. He didn't move. The other thug struggled to his feet. A hairy fist slammed into his head. He staggered back.

Terry sat up to see Monk pivot to the men attacking Virginia. The hirsute chemist charged the three thugs. The thugs dropped the woman. Two of them turned to run while the other stood his ground.

Monk's deep-throated yell filled the night as he made quick work of the man who confronted him. Then, he was after the cowardly thugs who attempted their escape.

Monk bounded after them. He caught the first one. He swung the man around and tossed him at the wall of a building. There was a thump and the body slid to the ground where it lay motionless.

The other thug looked back it time to see a large fist aimed at his face. He tried to duck, but it was too late. The force spun him around. He took a couple of steps and fell to the ground.

Monk swiveled around on the look out for more opportunities to pummel bad guys. The only bad guys left had made a hasty retreat. They were too far away to catch.

Monk turned his attention to Virginia. He helped her to her feet. "Are you OK?"

Virginia gave a wan smile. "I think I'm fine."

Monk stepped over to Terry and gave him a hand up. Terry claimed that he too was fine. He

professed his gratitude to their benefactor. Monk took the two over to his car and got them inside.

He looked at the money that lay about on the ground. "We're going to need that." He bent over and picked up the loose bills one by one.

He was almost half done when he noticed some movement. He twirled to look and caught sight of one the thugs as he got to his feet. The man saw Monk look at him, took to his heels, and ran as if the devil was on his tail.

Monk accelerated in the direction of the fleeing hooligan. He only took a few steps, and then forced himself to stop. "I have to get this money back. Now."

He went back and finished collecting the bills. He jammed the bills back into what was left of the package.

He hopped into the driver's seat and yelled, "Hang on". The car jumped away from the curb and sped down the empty road.

The man put the mask of the popular cartoon character down on the table. His eyes seethed with anger. He paced back and forth. He stopped when there was a knock at the door. He went over to the table, where he again donned the mask. "Come in."

Nathan Ingram opened the door and entered. His demeanor was of abject supplication. His eyes darted about the room. Except for the table, Nathan and the man in the mask, the room was vacant. He noticed the bump in the masked man's coat.

"Where have you been?"

"At the amusement park. Just as you told me to be."

"Well, did you get him?"

Nathan was quiet and looked very uncomfortable. He looked away from his superior.

The masked man, "You failed didn't you." He started to pace back and forth. "God, you're useless aren't you?"

Nathan remained silent, but the masked man had deigned to pay attention, he would have recognized the fire of resentment in the smaller man's eyes.

The larger man stood in front of Nathan and looked down on him. "Well, what do you suggest we do now?"

Nathan tried to sound confident in his reply. "I say we get the money as soon as we can and clear out right away." He became a little bolder. "We can't string them along for much longer."

The masked man's face grew red. "You fool!" he yelled. "Don't you understand anything?" He turned his back to the small man and stomped across the room.

Nathan thought, "Maybe if you told what you were up to, I'd understand." He was too intimidated to say it aloud.

The other man continued to rant. "You are so small minded. This is bigger than you seem to imagine." After a long harangue, he slowed to a stop. He stared at the quivering small man who stood still in the middle of the room.

Slowly, with exaggerated patience geared to irritate Nathan, the man with the cartoon mask laid out his plan. Nathan nodded several times. Finally, the masked man smiled at his own cleverness. "Got it now?" Nathan nodded silently. "Get to it. Now!" Nathan nodded again and quickly backed out of the room.

Alone again, the man took off the mask and placed it on the table. He rubbed his eyes. He glared at the door. "What fools these people are."

He picked up the mask and left through a second doorway at the opposite side of the room. He held his hand on the case in his pocket.

Monk walked into the office. He laughed when he saw Johnny munching away on a pile of food. "You never miss a meal do you?"

"I must respond in the affirmative to your inquisitorial request." Johnny immediately returned to his meal.

Terry and Virginia followed Monk into the office. They both sank quickly into the softest chairs they could find. Monk placed the packages of money on the desk. Monk's face became serious.

Johnny asked, "Any word about Ham?"

Monk wandered over to a window and looked out on the dark city below. Finally, he said, "He's been kidnapped. I saw him briefly, but they got away."

When his eyes returned to the room, he noticed Virginia staring at him. He told her, "I saw your father too. He looked OK."

Monk's frustration infused his whole body. They all knew he had given his best effort. It hadn't been enough.

"Where's Doc?"

Johnny indicated the lab with a wave of his hand. "He and Long Tom are closeted in a creative conference."

They sat quietly. Each of them lost in their own gloomy thoughts.

The door from the lab opened and Doc Savage strode out. His eyes fixed immediately on Monk. He raised an eyebrow. In response, Monk's face sank into a frown. Doc's mood seemed to darken.

Renny suddenly come to life and he stood close by in rapt attention. All eyes were on the bronze man.

Doc brought them up to date. "We are up against a very sinister weapon. Long Tom thinks he can develop a way to neutralize it." The others were grim faced. "Until his gizmo is ready, I want you to all remain here."

Doc went over to examine Virginia. After he'd treated her injuries, which fortunately turned out to be superficial, he turned his attention to Terry. That took a little longer.

As he worked on Terry, the accountant quietly whispered what he heard at the bank. Doc asked several questions.

After he was done with Terry, Doc walked over to the desk. He inspected the damaged packets of money. He gave a quick glance at the phone.

He turned to address the others in the room. "I am afraid that we have less time than we thought."

This statement brought consternation to the faces of his listeners.

Doc went on, "There seems to be a different motive than ransom. We have only until 8:00 tomorrow morning." Everyone looked at the clock. They didn't have long.

### 13. RANSOM PAYMENT

Ham looked up at the noise. A small window in the door had snapped open. "Are you going to feed us?" He said.

The face that peeked through the little window had a bandage wrapped around its forehead. "Not bloody likely mate." The face sneered. "I ain't giving you another chance." The little window snapped shut.

Ham turned to look at Warren. Warren sat on a low cot on the other side of the room. His face reflected his discouragement.

Ham got up and wandered around the room. It seemed like casual nervous pacing, but Ham's keen eyes scoured every inch of the wall. Except for the door and the two cots, the room was featureless. Ham sat down on his cot again.

Warren said, "They want money, I'm sure someone will come through for us."

Ham nodded. He was not about to give up yet. His mind drifted back to their failed escape. He could still hear the gunshots as Monk had tried to

save them. He felt emotions that would have surprised people who did not know him well.

Doc watched the phone for a moment, and then said, "Johnny, I'd like you to come with me." Johnny nodded. Monk jumped up. Doc said, "The rest of you stay here." Monk frowned.

While Johnny got prepared, Doc vanished into the lab. He came back with a small device that fit into his hand. He went over to the phone and flicked some switches. He flipped open the device in his hand and tapped the surface. There was a beep and a message appeared on the surface. Satisfied, Doc put the device in his pocket.

Doc walked over to a map of the city. He pointed to an area and said, "Based on where we've seen them, they seem to be based in this area." He looked to the others, "I suspect that the ransom drop off will be nearby." He watched as each of the people nodded their understanding. "What I propose to do is be in that area when the next call comes. That will allow us to reach the drop off before they expect us."

Doc pulled the small device out of his pocket and showed it to the others. "This is a specially built portable radio-telephone." He pointed at the office phone. "I've set up the phone so that when someone calls the office, I can answer it with this device."

Virginia and Terry were in awe, but Doc's men were used to such advanced technology pop up in the bronze man's hands.

A short time later, Doc's car cruised down the roadway. Johnny sat in the driver's seat with Doc beside him. The bundles of cash waited in a hidden compartment in the car dashboard.

The night was still dark, although the sky in the east seemed to be lighter. The car arrived near the area Doc had identified earlier. Johnny brought the car to a stop at the said of the road. The two men waited in silence.

A few minutes later, the device made a musical sound. Doc flipped it open and said, "Hello."

The voice on the other end sounded bored. "Do you have the money?"

"Yes."

"Oh." The voice sounded surprised. It was a few seconds before the voice started again. "Well then, we better have you turn it over to us."

"Where and when?"

The voice came back with a time and place. Doc used sign language to inform Johnny of the place. Johnny started the car and headed off to the drop off. The huge car's engine was virtually silent. The man on the other end of the line would have no indication that Doc was already on the road.

Doc said, "Will Warren, Ham and Peter be there?"

"Peter?" The voice sounded confused. A moment later, he said, "No." The voice was adamant. "We'll let them go when we're sure we have the money." Doc protested, but the voice would not budge. Finally, Doc agreed.

By this time, they were close to the drop off and Doc indicated to Johnny to stop the car. Once off the phone, Doc told Johnny to wait until the scheduled time, and then deliver the money. Johnny would return to the office and wait.

With that, Doc exited the car and blended into the darkness.

Shortly before the allotted time, a car arrived at the drop off point. The driver parked it a short distance away. He turned the lights off and the car looked like any of the many others arranged along the curb.

Several minutes passed. Doc's car arrived and stopped by the side of the road. In the darkness, a man exited the car and walked over to a garbage receptacle by the front of an old warehouse. The man stood there briefly. The man looked to the left and right. Satisfied, he stepped over to the receptacle and dropped two parcels into it. He stood back and looked around again. He walked back to the car, got in and drove off.

The street was quiet again, and dark. Minutes passed by. A light came on in the car that had arrived earlier as the driver's door opened. A short man left the car and walked briskly to the garbage receptacle. His hand dove in and pulled out the two packages. After a quick visual search of the vicinity, the man returned to the car. The door slammed and the light went off.

Silence and darkness returned to the street. A few minutes dragged by. The headlights of the car

came on as the engine roared to life. The car did a u-turn in the middle of the street and headed back the way it had come.

As it passed out of sight, a darker piece of shadow in a lane detached itself. In the streetlight, it became a towering bronze statue imbued with a vitality few men could match.

The bronze man began to run down the road after the car. He moved over to a street that paralleled the one the car with the ransom had taken.

After a few intersections, the bronze man moved over to the other street. He watched from the shadows as the car he followed drove by slowly. He returned to the parallel street and continued his chase.

Three blocks further on, Doc again slipped over to the parallel street. He waited, but the car did not show up. He ran down the side of the road in the shadows.

He reached the next intersection and looked either way down the cross street. He spotted the car two blocks down the road. He ran over to the parallel street and ran after the car.

Two blocks further, he went over to the street where he saw the car. It wasn't visible.

Doc moved into the roadway. He ran over to the place where he had last seen the car. He stood in the middle of the intersection and sniffed the air. Through many years of practice and training, his sense of smell had developed to an extraordinary degree.

He moved slowly around the intersection. He stopped. He caught the faint whiff of the car's exhaust. He moved slowly down the road, and continued to sniff the air.

With greater confidence, he began to run. At the next intersection, he stopped to sniff the air again. He quickly caught the smell of the exhaust and he was off again.

The car had changed direction several times, but Doc was able to follow the trail. He came to another intersection and cautiously scanned the streets from the darkness.

A half block to the right, he saw the car. It had parked in front of a featureless building. There was only a door and high up on the wall, a few small windows.

He watched the building for a few minutes. His keen eyesight detected a slight glow from a window high up on the wall above the doorway. Silent as a shadow, he moved over to the building.

His ears could hear two people talk in low tones. He couldn't tell where the sound came from.

Doc stayed in the shadows as he walked around the building. He carefully searched the walls for a means of entry.

When he returned to the front, he focused on the small window where he'd seen the glow.

Doc walked over to the wall. He removed his shoes and socks. His fingers pressed into the gaps between the bricks and he pulled himself up. His toes found space between the bricks and he began to climb.

Progress was slow. He stopped several times to listen. He could hear nothing from inside the building. He continued to climb.

He was only a few feet from the window when Doc noticed the sound. It was low at first but began to grow in intensity. It was a mellow, trilling sound, like the song of some strange bird of the jungle. It had no tune. Doc was angry with himself. He worried that his sound would give him away.

Then, he realized. It wasn't his sound. It came from inside the building.

Already he found that it was harder to concentrate. His eyes refused to focus. He shook his head as if it would dislodge the cobwebs that began to envelop his mind.

His toes slipped out of the gaps between the bricks. Only his fingers held him up. They too lost their grip and Doc began to plummet toward the hard pavement fifty feet below.

## 14. A SONG IN THE DARK

Johnny stopped abruptly as he entered Doc's outer office. He ran his eyes across the crew that waited there. He laughed.

"What's so funny?" Long Tom snarled. Of course, he knew what looked so funny. Long Tom and all of the others each wore a peculiar contraption on their heads. In general, shape it looked like a pair of earmuffs, but what looked like large soup cans covered the ears.

Long Tom picked up a pair from the desk and tossed it to Johnny. "Here's yours."

Johnny examined the gizmo warily. "Are you sure they'll work."

"Of course."

Johnny tried on the contraption and looked at his reflection in the window. "I look like that cartoon character in the movies with this on."

Monk asked, "Where is Doc?"

"I dropped him off OK. We don't need to worry about him. We'll hear from him in due course."

Johnny sat down to wait with the others. Only Monk remained on his feet. He moved around the room like a caged lion. His aggressive posture unnerved Terry and Virginia, but rest of Doc's team were used to Monk's moods. Although he could be fierce in a fight, Monk usually had a gentle nature.

Monk stopped. "We can just sit here. We should be out there to help Ham." He moved to the door, but the others didn't budge. He looked back at them. "Let's go!"

Renny said, "Where?"

Monk stood there for more than a minute. Then he went and sat down. His mind continued to spin. Monk wanted to do something.

Doc fell several feet before his hands caught hold of the brickwork again. He held on. His body bounced against the rough exterior of the building. The jagged edges of the brick ripped open his shirt. The trilling sound was not as loud, but Doc could still feel its effect.

Doc began to sing.

It was not really a song, just what seemed to be the random vocalizations of a mad man. The singing seemed to parallel the tuneless trilling that assaulted Doc's ears. Doc closed his eyes to concentrate.

Slowly Doc's song changed. It resembled the trilling, but was different in some unexplainable way. The trilling sound started to vibrate, loud, then soft. The variation became more rapid. Then silence.

It was quiet, or seemed to be. Doc continued to sing, but no sound was evident. No doubt, the trilling continued, but it also went unheard.

Doc stopped for a moment to suck in a lung full of air. The trilling sound returned for a brief few seconds. Doc's singing returned and the trilling vanished again.

Doc slowly began his ascent again. He reached the window and began to climb in. A shot rang out and Doc pulled back. All the time he continued to sing.

His hand found a hidden pocket in his shirt. He pulled out a small egg shaped device. This was a grenade of Doc's own design. It was meant to stun, but not injure. He pressed a button on the top of the egg and tossed it in through the window.

He heard it land and bounce on the floor. The trilling sound stopped and Doc's singing became audible. Doc heard someone run across the room and a door slam. Then there was a loud bang and a bright flash.

Barely a second later, Doc had grabbed the windowsill and flipped himself into the room. It was

empty except for rapidly dissipating acrid smell of the grenade. Confident there was no more danger in the room, Doc went for the door. He pulled it open.

From down the hall he heard someone rapidly descend a staircase. Doc trotted down the hall and found the flight of stairs. He took one step down, and then jumped to one side as a bullet burst through the step below him. He hesitated but a second and then continued down the steps. Unlike the person he pursued, Doc hardly made a noise as he floated down the stairs.

He heard a door slam at the bottom of the stairs and he redoubled his speed. The door that confronted him was locked. Doc smashed himself against the door. At first, it held. Doc slammed against it a second time, and the door splintered. Doc ripped away the splinters and was through into the hall beyond.

In the distance, Doc heard another door open and then slam shut. He ran toward it. Even before he reached it he heard a car engine roar to life outside the building. Unlike the last door, his quarry had not locked this door. Doc burst out into the alley. A car roared toward him. Doc dove back into the building. The car flew past.

As the car reached the street, Doc raced down the alley toward it. It was too far away. Doc pulled the telephone device from what remained of his shirt. With the other hand, he found a small, but powerful magnet in another pocket. He attached the magnet to the phone device. He stopped and threw the device and magnet at the retreating car.

The phone device landed on the roof of the car and slid toward the back of the car. It slipped down the rear window. It hit the rear bumper. It stopped there; the magnet held it firmly in place. The car disappeared around the corner. It was gone when Doc reached the street.

Doc walked back to the open door and re-entered the building. He began in the basement and worked upward until he had searched the entire building. He didn't find any evidence that the hostages had ever been there.

In the alley, he found a package of papers. The kidnappers had apparently dropped it when they fled. He put them in his pocket.

Back on the front street, Doc looked up and in the distance; he saw the tall spire of the building where he had his office. With his keen eyes, he could see the windows on the 86th floor were still alight.

He walked out to the middle of the street and then broke into a run as he headed toward it. It was an easy pace for Doc to maintain, but few top runners could have kept it up for long.

The room was unchanged. The table was in the same place as before. The door flew open and hit the wall. A man stormed in. He wore a mask that depicted a well-known cartoon character. When he arrived at the table, he banged on the top with his fist.

He turned to look at the man who had followed him in. Nathan Ingram tried to hide the fear he felt.

He knew he would resent the belittling remarks he expected to hear. He felt he could do nothing.

"Just what were you thinking!" before Nathan could reply, the man went on. "I told you not to get the ransom." The man fumed. "So what did you do; went and got it." The man in the mask turned and walked away from Nathan.

He spun around and pointed an accusing finger at Nathan. "And not only that, you risked our whole plan with a half baked escapade to steal the money before Savage even got it." The man let that accusation hang in the air. Nathan squirmed inside himself.

Nathan held up the money packages. "We have the money. We can let the hostages go and get out of here."

The masked man was silent, but the fire of hatred for the other man burned in his eyes. "You fool. Didn't I make it clear that wasn't the point?" He gave a dismissive gesture. "Who needs this money? A mere pittance."

Nathan stood there. His mind raced. In his arms was far more money than he had ever dreamt he could get. He wanted it so badly he could taste it. His lust for the money gave him some courage. "Well, if you don't want it, then I'll take it."

The man in the mask was silent for a minute. His posture relaxed and he gave a dismissive gesture. "Well, go right ahead. You have been worse than useless so far."

Nathan hesitated. It was not the reaction he expected. When he didn't move the other man pointed to the door and said, "Go."

Nathan held the money packets to his chest. They made him feel secure. He turned on his heel and walked rapidly toward the door.

The masked man put his hand into his coat and pulled out a small case. He open the case and removed the small oboe. He put it to his lips and began to play. The low mellow trilling sound began to fill the room. Nathan stopped dead in his track. His body spun around to face his tormentor.

Nathan ran at the man. His hands reached out to grab and throttle the devil in front of him. His face was red with anger; his eyes blue with fear. Then he stumbled. He took a few unsteady steps forward. He stopped. His eyes closed. His body went limp and he fell to the floor.

The man continued to play his little oboe. Nathan convulsed and shook on the floor. His motions got weaker and finally stopped. The trilling stopped. Than man knelt down next to Nathan and felt for a pulse. He giggled.

The man stood up and walked to the far door. He stopped long enough to put the oboe safely into its case. Once it was back in his jacket pocket, he opened the door and walked out. After a quick glance at the body on the floor, he shut the door and was gone.

## 15. TRIANGULATION

The office door opened and Doc came in. His aides jumped to their feet, all eager for the fight. Doc held up his hand to put off questions.

"They got away with the money, but I was able to plant our portable phone device on their car."

"We can track it." Long Tom added.

"That will allow us to locate the kidnappers, and hopefully the hostages." Monk smiled at this.

Doc's voice was firm. "Let's go."

While Doc's men prepared to leave, Doc talked to Virginia and Terry. "I'd like you to come along. You will be safe in the car."

Virginia replied right away. "Yes."

Terry nodded. "I can't walk out on this now."

Doc went into the laboratory and came back wearing a new shirt. Long Tom handed him one of his contraptions.

As they walked to the elevators, Doc pulled an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Terry. "The kidnappers dropped it. It looks like some financial papers. Maybe you can find something we can use."

Terry grinned as he took the papers. "Thanks, I really do want to be of help." He flipped through the papers as they rode down the elevator and boarded the cars.

Doc drove his car with Johnny, Virginia and Terry, while Renny drove with Monk and Long Tom. When they reached the street, Doc's car turned left and headed north. Renny turned right and

headed south. They each drove several blocks and then pulled over to the side of the road.

In Renny's car, Long Tom opened up a panel in the dashboard and switched on a radio directional finder. He tuned it to pick up the carrier signal from Doc's phone device. In Doc's car, Johnny did the same.

Long Tom talked to Johnny by radio. "The signal is weak, the batteries may be fading." Johnny acknowledged that he had the same problem. Long Tom scanned the direction finder until he got the best signal. He read off the direction to Johnny.

The air was silent. Finally, Johnny came back. "I have exactly the same direction."

Doc broke in, "Renny, drive further west. I'll drive east and we'll try again."

A few minutes passed. Johnny reported, "OK, I have the new reading." He reeled off the direction.

Long Tom came on. "I can't pick up any thing." Doc could hear Long Tom say something to Renny. A minute went by. Long Tom was on again. "I got it now. Very weak though." He relayed his location and the direction to Johnny.

Johnny carefully plotted the directions on a map. "OK. We have a destination now." He passed on the location to Long Tom and Renny. Doc's car purred to life and he made a quick u-turn.

A few minutes later, they rendezvoused near the building they suspected. While the rest waited, Doc slipped into the dark shadows to reconnoiter the building. He returned a few minutes later.

"The same car is parked out front. This is the place."

The men donned their earmuff gizmos and prepared to approach the target. Doc stopped to talk to Virginia and Terry. "Stay here. Don't open the doors until we return. As long as you are in the car you will be safe." Then he and his team melted away into the darkness.

The guard sat in a chair. He was supposed to be watching the door, but it had been a long night and he was tired. He nodded and almost fell off the chair. He shook himself and thought, "How did I get myself into this?"

There was a flash and a bang. The guard came wide-awake. The door in front of him was gone. As he stared in shock, a giant bronze man appeared and walked toward him.

The next thing he knew was when he woke up at a facility in upstate New York. It was Doc's crime college. In a few months, he graduated. He went on to be a fine upstanding citizen known for his good works. Even he did not suspect his previous life of crime.

Doc's men rushed into the building. They split up and swarmed over the insides.

Monk broke through a door and surprised a huge thug. The thug stepped forward with confidence. He took a swing at Monk and missed. Monk dove in and knocked the thug back on his heels.

The thug recovered and charged back at the bulky chemist. Several more pummels convince the thug that he'd more than met his match. He turned and tried to run for it. He didn't get far before Monk put him out of service.

In a small back room, a man took off the mask that depicted a popular cartoon character. He put the mask on a desk and sat down to rest. Moments later, he heard the explosion at the door to the building. He jumped up and ran to the door. He looked out, but could see nothing. He heard a thug in the distance yell, "It's Doc Savage!" The man's voice was choked off.

The man raced back to the desk and grabbed the mask. He hesitated for a moment. He felt the small case in his jacket. A moment later, he shook his head and began to move.

He pulled a window open. He cautiously looked out in the alley. He saw no one. He slipped through the window and onto the ground. He scuttled down the lane and across the street. He looked back at the car, but just turned and walked away from the fight that raged in the building he had just vacated. He fought the urge to run and instead adopted a slightly unsteady stagger. No one, he thought, would take much notice of a drunkard wending his way home at the end of a long night.

By the time Doc reached the back room, the man was long gone. Doc's search quickly convinced him that someone had escaped through the window just a few minutes earlier. A quick look out the window revealed nothing about where the man went.

Doc walked back through the building. Monk, Long Tom and Johnny all arrived back with reports of defeated thugs lying around the building.

A shout came from above, "Holy Cow." The men rushed over to the stairs. Renny called down, "Doc you better get up here."

Doc ran up the stairs with the other trailing. He quickly found the room where Renny waited. As he entered, he saw the man on the floor. He rushed over to examine the small man. He was dead. Doc stood up. At the door, his men's eyes asked the question.

"It's one of the gang." He pointed to the body on the floor. "I think he was one of the gunners at the amusement park." Doc looked down at the body. "It looks as if he died the same way as Zachary and Scruffy Sam."

The men carefully searched the rest of the building. They found no more of the gang. Their search did not uncover any trace of the hostages. Monk was distraught. "Where do we look now?" Doc was silent.

When they got back to the car, Terry jumped out of the car. In his excitement, he could barely get the words out fast enough. "I looked through these papers." He held the papers for Doc to see. "For the most part they seem to be records of payments to gang members." He pointed to a line item that listed Sam Collins.

Terry pulled out another sheet. "This is what you will want to see though." He pointed to a list of

payment listed as rent. "This is a record of the places that the gang rented. Their hideouts."

Doc accepted the sheet from Terry and scanned down the list. The rest of Doc's team arrived. Doc continued to look at the list. "Yes, all the places we've found them are on the list." He scanned the list again, and stopped at one. "This one is the only one we haven't come across before."

Renny looked at the address. "Got it!" The gigantic engineer went over to his car, with Long Tom and Monk at his heels.

Doc looked at Terry, "You've been a huge help. Thanks." Johnny and Doc joined Virginia and Terry in the car. They roared off behind Renny's machine.

The man in the cartoon character mask stood in the middle of the room. "That fool ruined everything," he muttered. He picked up a water glass from small table pushed up against the wall. After he hefted it in his hand, he threw it violently at the opposite wall. It made a loud sound as it smashed into thousands of tiny shards.

Still not satisfied he kicked a hole in the wall. He giggled at that and kicked another hole. He stood there and thought. His face became a specter of hatred. He slammed a hand against the wall. He spewed out an impressive and creative string of obscenities.

Faintly in the distance, he became aware of a noise outside on the street. At first, he ignored it, but as it got louder, he got worried. He walked over to a window and looked out. He saw two cars racing

down the street. They stopped in front of his building.

The man swore again as a car door open and Doc Savage got out. Doc looked up at the building. The man in the mask stepped back away from the window. He cursed Doc Savage and all the others he blamed for his failure.

He stopped suddenly. His hand felt the case in his pocket and he smiled again. Quickly and quietly, he left the room.

## 16. THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK

The building was an abandoned factory. Other than a row of offices along one side, the building had one huge room. The floor was crowded with large machines of many types and descriptions. Few, if any, were in working order. The man stood outside an office on the second level that gave him a view of the whole interior.

From outside he heard car doors open and shut. He surveyed the space and made his plans. He ran along a narrow catwalk high above the floor to the other side of the room. At the other end, he slipped down the rungs of an access ladder to the floor.

He concealed himself near the entrance. He was pleased with his forethought. Broken machines and debris created a wall that would trap anyone who came into the building. He watched the door closely as he removed the case from his pocket. He opened

it and took out the small oboe. He giggled; then he waited.

Outside Doc and his team looked the building over. All of the windows were boarded up. The doorways had also been blocked. Only the main entrance seemed clear. It seemed to beckon them.

Doc turned to his men. "Long Tom, you watch the back of the building. Johnny, watch the left side. Renny, watch the right side. Monk, wait just outside the entrance. If I need help, I'll call."

"Right Doc."

The three men ran to each of their assigned posts.

Once they were in place, the bronze man boldly walked up to the front door. The hulky chemist followed a short distance behind. At a sign from Doc, Monk halted. His eyes scanned over the wall.

Doc stepped up to the door and examined it. He studied the frame and lock closely. There was no dust as there was on nearby windowsills. Someone had used the door recently. Doc tried the doorknob. It turned easily and the door swung open with just a light touch.

Doc let the door swing all the way open. He stepped forward and looked into the room behind. He could see right away that someone had tried to set up a trap. In every direction he looked, heaps of trash and old machinery barred his way. He didn't hesitate. He moved into darkened room.

He moved slowly and waited for the trap to spring. He studied the room to evaluate possible action he could take.

Then he heard the sound: the low, mellow, trilling sound that he knew so well. Long Tom's gismo filtered out the particular frequencies that he knew were there.

He looked around the room for the source. The sound had the peculiar quality of seeming to come from everywhere within the room rather than from a definite spot. No matter what direction he turned, Doc could gain no sense of where it came from.

The man in the cartoon mask watched Doc as he searched the room. He played his oboe, but Doc seemed unfazed. The man became confused. Something was very wrong. The man of bronze should have collapsed by now, and yet he moved freely across the floor.

The man could not understand, but he realized that he had one more opportunity and he must take it. He threw the oboe on the floor, grasped the first rung of the ladder, and struggled up to the catwalk.

Doc saw the man as soon as he moved. He ran forward. The barriers slowed him down but little. He jumped high, grabbed a wire cord that hung down from the ceiling, swung over the barrier and dropped to the floor. The man in the mask was half way to the other end of the catwalk. Doc raced to the ladder and began to climb.

The man reached the other end of the catwalk and looked back. Doc was running toward him. The man pulled out a gun and shot at Doc. Doc dove out of the way. He lost sight of the man in the cartoon mask.

When Doc reached the end of catwalk, he could see nothing that would tell him where the man had vanished. He stood quietly as he carefully ran his eyes over the room.

The man with the cartoon mask had climbed up on top of a small platform near the ceiling. He lay on top, scarcely daring to breathe. He listened for movement below. There was silence in the building. Outside he could hear someone call Doc's name. He closed his eyes and tried to calm himself.

Then he heard it. Like the song of some strange bird of the jungle, the sound wafted up to him. It was melodious, though it had no tune. To some it would be inspiring, but the strange trilling sound brought fear to the man. Doc had the oboe. If he didn't escape now, he would die.

He scrambled to his feet. He looked at a ceiling truss a short distance away. If he could get to the truss, he could reach a skylight and make his escape. He leapt from the platform to the truss. It was too far, his hands fell short and he began to fall. The sound of his scream cut off when he crashed to the floor.

Doc looked down at the broken figure below. He could do nothing to save the man. He had other priorities. He called for his team. Monk burst into the first, as he clambered over a wall of debris, Johnny followed. Moments later Long Tom and Renny had joined them.

"Search for the hostages. They must be here." With that, Doc went to the line of offices on the second level. Long Tom and Renny scoured the first

level. Monk spotted a stairway that led to the basement. He dove down the stairs.

He stepped out of the stairwell and almost ran into a man who came down a corridor toward him. It was a tall heavysset man dressed all in black. A "J" shaped scar adorned his left cheek. An ugly smile came to his face as he recognized Monk.

"I'll squeeze your head flat." The thug growled. He lumbered toward the smaller man.

Monk grinned as the big man bore down on him. He waited for a moment, and then with a speed that was unexpected from a man of his girth, Monk sidestepped the thug. As the big man stumbled past him, Monk took a swing and caught him in the belly. He let out an explosive gasp and then collided with the wall.

Monk stood back to watch. The other man twisted around to look at him. He needed a few seconds to catch his breath. Then he breathed, "I'll get you for that."

The man leapt forward and Monk rushed at him. He lashed out with his fists. He caught the man twice, on the jaw and the other side of his head. The man stopped dead in his tracks and shook his head.

He looked at Monk, the fire of hate glowed in his eyes. Before he could move, Monk hit him again. This time in the belly. The man doubled over. For a moment, he seemed about the fall, but then he backed up to the wall and stood up, albeit with his back to the wall.

Monk dashed forward, and after another couple of fierce blows, the man collapsed on the floor.

Monk stood back and watched for signs that man would recover. After a few seconds, Monk was satisfied, and began to walk away down the hallway.

The basement seemed a labyrinth of narrow corridors. In a voice that threatened to shake the building down, Monk called, "HAM!" Then he listened. Seconds crept by. Finally, a muffled reply in the distance rewarded his effort. It came from deep within the labyrinth.

Monk traced his way methodically through the narrow hallways. Sometimes he could hear the muffled voice, other times I couldn't. He turned down one hall way and the voice was louder. He rushed forward past several doors. Suddenly, the voice was near. He stepped over to the nearest door and pulled it off its hinges. He tossed the door on the floor.

A voice inside the room said, "You homey ape, it's about time you got here. I should have smeared the door with bananas."

"You shyster, laying about getting your beauty rest while the rest of us had work to do."

The two continued to bicker as they took Warren upstairs. Just outside the front door, Warren reunited with his daughter Virginia. As the sun rose over the city, Johnny drove the two to the bank.

The rest stood in the middle of the empty factory. Monk said, "Did anyone find Peter Kincaid. He wasn't with Warren and Ham."

Doc walked over to the man in the cartoon mask. He pulled the mask off. It concealed ear protection gizmos similar to the ones Long Tom

created. They looked down at the man's face. It was Peter Kincaid, or rather, what was left of him.

"Why?"

Doc explained, "Peter wanted to force Warren out of the company. Warren was to meet today with the bank. If he was successful, Peter would be the one forced out." He looked at the man on the floor. "He thought that if Warren missed the meeting, he would succeed."

Terry spoke up. "It wouldn't have worked though. As long as Warren was missing, no one would have approved any transfer."

Doc asked Terry, "Did you enjoy yourself tonight?"

"Yes, but I've had enough adventure for a lifetime."

With that, the men returned to the car. Only the echoes of Monk and Ham's argument remained.



WHO IS

# DOC SAVAGE®

To the world at large, Doc Savage is a strange mysterious figure of glistening bronze skin and golden eyes. To his amazing co-adventurers – the five greatest brains ever assembled in one group – he is a man of superhuman strength and protean genius, whose life is dedicated to the destruction of evil-doers. To his fans his is one of the greatest adventure heroes of all time, whose fantastic exploits are unequalled for hair – raising thrills, breathtaking escapes and bloodcurdling excitement.

## THE 89TH KEY

A strangely familiar sound brings death rather than reassurance. The quiet contemplation of a charity concert is broken by the sudden violent kidnapping of Warren Evans, a prominent businessman. Doc Savage and his men have only hours to rescue him.

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