



THE SECRET OF THE SU

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Scanned and Proofed by Tom Stephens

Chapter I. THE SECRET OF SLOW JOHN

HE had a round, pleasant face, but he was a scared man. The round, pleasant faces of some men do not have much character; they just look as if the owners had eaten too much. This round, pleasant face was different. It was the face of a man who had done good things in life, worked hard, enjoyed his neighbors, been enjoyed by them, in addition to eating well. But now the fright was the uppermost thing.

He stood on his front porch, beside the sign that said, *Dr. R. W. Wilson*. The sign was his shingle. He was a doctor of medicine.

He had practiced thirty years here in Logantown.

His lips moved stiffly, for he was speaking to himself.

"It's fantastic," he said. "Fantastic, such a thing happening to a man to whom nothing exciting has happened in thirty years."

He looked up and down the street. It was a pleasant street. There was nothing alarming about it. There was nothing out of the way about the pleasant afternoon in a small town—Logantown, population 6,780—in the State of Georgia. But cold, uneasy sweat stood out on his forehead.

He walked around the yard, acting as if he were inspecting the shrubbery, the grass, and the flowers. When he felt reassured, he went back into the house.

He picked up the telephone.

“Hello, Laura,” he said to the operator.

“I want you to get me a Dr. Clark Savage, Jr., in New York City.”

“Do you have a cold, Dr. Wilson?”

Laura asked. “You sound a little hoarse.”

“No, no cold. And, Laura, ask the New York telephone operator just for Doc Savage.

I imagine he is better known under that name. “

“Doc Savage?”

“Yes.”

Laura said, “That name sounds familiar. What is he, a specialist?”

“Yes—a specialist,” Dr. Wilson said.

His voice, when he said that, was a little strange.

“I’ll call you back,” Laura said.

Dr. Wilson did not move from the telephone.

He stood there, stiff and waiting, like a man who had thrown a firecracker and was waiting for it to explode.

An ancient and wrinkled Indian came to the door and looked at him for a moment.

The Indian—he was an American redskin—was very ancient indeed, judging from the lines on his face, but his walk was that of a younger man. He looked at least eighty, handled himself as if he were no more than forty.

The Indian did not smile or speak. He just stared. He wore dark trousers and the white coat of a serving man.

“I will talk to you again in a minute, Slow John,” Dr. Wilson said.

Slow John nodded. He went away.

THE telephone rang and Dr. Wilson said into the instrument, “Yes . . . Hello, New York. Doc Savage? . . . I see. When will he be back? . . . I find that rather awkward because this is an important matter. Where could I get in touch with him? . . . It can't. . . . You are Monk Mayfair? . . . Oh, I see. One of Doc Savage's assistants. . . . Just a moment, please.”

He stood there, holding the telephone, discouraged, not knowing what to do. In his abstraction he beat one fist absently against the wall.

Slow John, the Indian, appeared again in the door. He came swiftly, and looked at the doctor's fist thumping the wall in defeat, and he was relieved. Slow John had a fireplace poker in his hand. He put the poker behind him and disappeared again.

Dr. Wilson spoke into the telephone.

“Thank you very much,” he said. “But I would rather place this matter in the hands of Doc Savage personally, instead of an assistant. . . . I’m sorry, and thank you. Will you have Doc Savage telephone me collect when he can be located? . . . Yes, Dr. R. W. Wilson, Logantown, Georgia. Good-by.”

He started to hang up, then said rapidly, “Hello, hello, are you still there? . . . I want to impress on you that this is a frantically vital matter, possibly one of the most important things that has happened to this generation. I am sure Doc Savage would be vitally concerned, and that as soon as he knows its nature, he will certainly act. . . . Yes, thank you. I know you will try to get hold of him. Good-by.”

That time he replaced the receiver, and pulled his shoulders up straight. But the defeat and the fear was still on his face.

He didn't seem exactly sure what he should do.

Finally he spoke to himself again, muttering, “I hope they can locate him. He is the one man capable of dealing with such a fantastic thing.”

The telephone rang then, and he snatched it up eagerly. But it was only Laura, the operator. “The charges will be four dollars and eighty cents with tax, Dr. Wilson. I’ll put it on your bill.” Then Laura added, “I just remembered who this Doc Savage is, Dr. Wilson.”

“Thank you, Laura,” Dr. Wilson said.

Laura asked, “Isn't he the one they call the Man of Bronze? The man who is supposed to be such a fabulous combination of scientific skill, mental wizardry and physical prowess? And he makes a business of helping people out of trouble, when the trouble is fantastic or weird and beyond the facilities of the police? Isn't that Doc Savage?”

“Yes, that is the man,” Dr. Wilson said.

“I was thinking I had read an article somewhere about him,” Laura said.

“Thank you, Laura, and good-by,” Dr. Wilson said. He hung up.

And again he just stood there, a man who did not know what he wanted to do.

FINALLY Dr. Wilson went into another room, a neat old-fashioned front parlor.

Slow John was there.

“Slow John,” Dr. Wilson said. “Why didn't you tell me about this incredible thing years ago?”

The Indian's face was inscrutable, composed with the expressionlessness of his race.

He did not answer.

Dr. Wilson knew the Indian was uncomfortable.

“Don't feel badly, Slow John,” he said. “I am not reproaching you, or accusing you of doing something you shouldn't have done. But you have been my servant for how long?”

“Thirty years,” Slow John said.

“Thirty years, a long time,” said Dr. Wilson, nodding. “I am only surprised that, in those thirty years, you did not tell me this thing.”

The Indian said, "It was not mine to tell."

"Why?"

The Indian said, "I am a Su."

"Su." Dr. Wilson frowned, seemed to be digging around in his memory. "You have only said that once before. Thirty years ago."

Slow John nodded, but did not elaborate.

"You're an unusual fellow, Slow John," Dr. Wilson said. "Unusual even for an American Indian, who are a remarkable people as a class."

Slow John was silent.

Dr. Wilson went over and put a hand on his shoulder. There was a great deal of affection in the gesture.

"Not many human beings would have insisted on paying a debt of gratitude as you have paid this one," he said.

Slow John said, "I do right as I see right."

"Yes, but it's still unusual. It was thirty years ago, almost thirty years ago to this month, that I found your family in the Everglades and was able to do them a service.

But you didn't owe me anything, and I know that you are sure I mean that. And yet you insisted on being my servant for thirty years."

Slow John grunted.

"Life," he corrected. "I am your servant until one of us shall die."

Dr. Wilson nodded, as a man who understood all that. "But why?" he asked.

"It was ordered."

Dr. Wilson looked startled. "You were ordered to do that?"

"Yes?"

"By whom?"

"The Su. "

"That," Dr. Wilson said, "is a strange thing."

Slow John grinned briefly. A grin was a rare thing for him. "I know it sounds strange, and maybe silly," he said. "But it was my family you saved, and they would have died had you not done so, and that would have been bad, because they were members of the higher clan of the Su. To serve you for my life is small payment. I am happy to do it."

DR. WILSON sank into a chair. He was amazed, suddenly amazed. Thirty years he had known Slow John, and he was just now realizing what an amazing person the Indian was.

Truthfully, Dr. Wilson had always suspected that Slow John was a fakir of a mild sort. He'd figured that

the Indian was an old fellow who had told a good story, and was sticking to it.

The incident, thirty years ago in the Everglades swamp of Florida, when he'd saved the lives of Slow John and his family, had been spectacular, probably. The Everglades in those days were unexplored and rather terrible. Today they were still somewhat unexplored, but not as terrible. Planes had flown over the vast swamp and photographed it, and one highway, the Tamiami Trail, had been put across from Miami to Tampa, Florida.

Thirty years ago, during a hurricane, he had saved the lives of this Seminole family.

He was convinced they were Seminoles. He didn't understand this talk about Su.

The hurricane had been the typical piece of hell that Caribbean hurricanes can become. There wasn't much doubt but that if Dr. Wilson hadn't happened along, in an unsinkable power launch that had a motor much too large for the size of the craft, Slow John and his relatives would have drowned.

Dr. Wilson himself had nearly drowned. He'd saved their lives, all right. And his own, too.

He had thought he'd just saved the lives of a family of Seminoles—father, mother, two daughters, and two sons. He'd thought that, in his heart, for thirty years.

Now suddenly, he knew better.

He was silent for a while, remembering how Slow John had come out of the swamp and overtaken him—the Seminoles he'd rescued had disappeared immediately after the blow—and said that he was going to be his, Dr. Wilson's, servant from this time on. Dr. Wilson had laughed at that.

I was younger in those days, Dr. Wilson thought now. I passed up a lot of things that were important. I didn't notice things, or if I noticed them, I too often didn't follow them through to their logical conclusion. In other words, I saw many a thing and didn't realize I was seeing it.

He remembered Slow John's family.

He'd thought at the time that they were remarkably intelligent-looking Indians. They were Indians, all right. But there were things that were different about them. Their manner, for instance, had not, been aboriginal and their clothing—they had worn long garments, or what was left of long garments, for the hurricane by that time had dusted them up a bit.

The girls had worn long garments of a cloth that was unusual and exquisitely woven. Dr. Wilson thought about that cloth now. He wished he'd asked for a sample of it. He knew now that he'd never seen a piece of cloth like that since.

Now, in view of what he had discovered earlier in the day, he was intensely interested.

He looked at Slow John thoughtfully.

“What are the Su?” he asked.

“My people,” said Slow John immediately.

“Where are the Su?”

SLOW JOHN did not answer that immediately, but Dr. Wilson could tell that he was not going to ignore the question. The Indian was thinking it over, choosing words, weighing them, and probably weighing Dr. Wilson's own belief or disbelief in the story.

With his first words, Slow John showed a remarkable understanding of Dr. Wilson's ideas.

“You have always believed I was just a Seminole, haven't you?” Slow John asked.

He had been in Georgia so long that he had lost his native accent, the accent of his mother tongue, and he had a little of the drawling Southerner in his voice.

“Yes, that is what I half suspected,” Dr. Wilson said.

Slow John thought for a while longer.

“You are not a imaginative man,” he said.

Dr. Wilson was not offended. “No, I am not,” he agreed. “I am hardheaded.”

Slow John said, “You are not a man who, if he heard the cry a passenger pigeon in a bush, would readily assume there was a passenger pigeon in the bush.”

“Not me,” said Dr. Wilson. “And do you know why? Passenger pigeons have been extinct for many years. The last one died in a zoo in 1913.”

“That,” said Slow John, “is what I mean. “

“Eh?”

“You would not believe me if I told you the story of the Su.”

“Why not?”

“Let me illustrate,” Slow John said.

“Many years ago, many thousands of years ago, there was a land called Atlantis. It was between Africa and South America, and it was a very civilized land, more civilized than any part of the world. Probably more civilized in many things than is our world today. Now it lies beneath the sea. “

“I've heard that legend of the lost continent of Atlantis,” Dr. Wilson admitted.

“Do you believe it?”

“I can't say I do. “

“Why?”

“Too improbable.”

Slow John spread his hands. “The story of the Su is the story of Atlantis, probably, and the story of things beyond Atlantis, the story of things for many a thousand year down to this day.”

It took a moment for that to sink in. And while he was understanding, Dr. Wilson sat there and blinked his eyes.

Slow John stood up.

“It is time I went after the milk,” he said.

Dr. Wilson kept a cow, which a friend fed and milked for him, and each evening it was Slow John's duty

to go after a quart of milk.

Slow John left to get the milk.

A MAN came out of hiding while Dr. Wilson was still sitting in the parlor and blinking thoughtfully, in amazement, in disbelief, in astonished incredulity.

The man who appeared had been concealed in the attic. The house was a onestory dwelling, with a sharply peaked roof, and there was a considerable attic, with plenty of standing room. After the frugal oldfashioned method of construction, the attic was not floored, and there was a hatchway in the front hall which gave into the attic.

The man dropped through this hatchway.

His gun had pearl handles, but it was a weapon made for grim business.

He walked into the parlor.

“Why, Dr. Light!” said Dr. Wilson. “I didn't hear you knock.”

“I didn't knock.” Dr. Light showed him the gun. “Put up your hands!”

“Good Lord! Are you crazy!”

“Put them up!” said Dr. Light.

Dr. Wilson slowly lifted his arms. His face began getting pale.

“Good,” Dr. Light said. “Now keep doing as you are told.”

Dr. Light was a round fat man with a pale, pink baby skin and a very light, almost white mustache. His hair was not white, but extremely blond, and in his eyes there was a lack of coloration, such an absence of it that he came near having the pink eyes of an albino, a person whose body is lacking in coloring pigment. He was not a true albino, though. He was just a very pale and very blond man. His spectacles with magnifying lenses gave him a goblin aspect.

“Walk with me,” he said.

Chapter II. FLOCK TOGETHER

DR. LIGHT and Dr. Wilson walked along the streets of Logantown in the gathering dusk. Dr. Light kept his hand and the gun in his coat pocket.

“You're doing fine,” he told Dr. Wilson.

“But just do not get it in your head that I would not shoot you, because I would. “

“You would be hanged!” said Dr. Wilson.

“I might be. But they would have to catch me first. And if they didn't catch me, it would be worth it.”

They went into a shack section on the outskirts of town. It was the section called Honesty Flats, and it was not called Honesty Flats because the name fitted.

Dr. Light turned their course into a weed-grown yard which was occupied by a three-room shack which,

apparently, had never been painted.

A woman in a cheap red dress opened the door, smirked and said, "Why, hello, Doc Light." Then she saw Dr. Wilson, looked startled, and said, "Hell, Doc, I didn't know you had highborn company."

"Kate, where's Snuffy?" Dr. Light asked.

The woman eyed Dr. Wilson suspiciously.

"What you want with him?"

Dr. Light took the hand and the gun out of his pocket and showed the woman that it was pointed at Dr. Wilson.

"Oh, jeeps!" the woman said. "I'll get Snuffy!"

She went away in a hurry.

Snuffy Gonner was a small furtive man with the large eyes and large ears of a fox.

He carried himself as if he were always looking around for a hole into which he could dodge in an emergency. And there had been quite a few such emergencies in his life.

Snuffy was supposed to be a petty crook and rascal around Logantown. He was barely tolerated by the decent inhabitants, and was always visited by the marshal when anybody reported a raid on a chicken roost.

Actually, he was not such a petty crook as people thought.

Snuffy came in wiping his hands on the flanks of his trousers.

"Hyah, Doc," he said.

He looked at the gun with which Dr. Light was menacing Dr. Wilson, but seemed not to notice the weapon.

"What's cookin'?" he asked.

Dr. Light indicated Dr. Wilson. "Tie him up, Snuffy. And gag him good."

Snuffy gave his pants a hitch.

"Hope there's something in it for me," he said.

"There is. Fifty dollars."

Snuffy grinned. He got a length of clothesline and some adhesive tape of the black sort called bicycle tape locally. He walked behind Dr. Wilson, grasped him around the neck and neatly tripped him to the floor.

"Snuffy!" gasped Dr. Wilson. "You don't know what you are getting into!"

"Nope, I don't," Snuffy agreed.

Dr. Wilson said desperately, "Snuffy, don't do this. Don't help this man. Here is a chance to redeem yourself in the community, to do an honorable thing for humanity and for yourself."

“Ho, ho, ho!” said Snuffy. “My momma done told me the same thing lots of times.”

He tied and gagged Dr. Wilson.

“Now put him in the cellar,” said Dr. Light.

“Been an old rattlesnake hanging around in that cave, “ said Snuffy.

“We'll keep our eyes open for him, you and I,” said Dr. Light.

THEY put Dr. Wilson in the cave, and Snuffy said, “My cave rents for a hundred dollars.”

“All right,” said Dr. Light. “I'll pay it.”

Snuffy whistled. He was impressed.

“That's a hundred and fifty you owe me,” he said. “I'll buy a quarter interest in the company for that.”

Dr. Light said, “You're being childish, Snuffy.”

“Yeah? You've got something, eh?”

Dr. Light nodded slowly.

“It was the strangest thing,” he said.

“This afternoon, I just mentioned casually something about a newspaper clipping. It was at the Lions club luncheon down at the Loganhouse Hotel. I mentioned to Dr. Wilson about reading this clipping, and I saw an expression come over Dr. Wilson's face. You know how Doc Wilson is, always kind of a composed guy. Doesn't have many strong feelings, apparently. Well, the feeling I saw on his face was plenty strong. And then, I remembered that Dr. Wilson once did some research down in the Everglades.”

Snuffy nodded, for the fact that Dr. Wilson had once done research in the Everglades was common knowledge in Logantown.

The town was small enough so that most of the inhabitants knew quite a bit about everyone else.

“Dr. Wilson was in the Everglades trying to find a cure for malaria fever, before he set up practice in Logantown,” Snuffy said.

“That's what I remembered,” Dr. Light agreed. “So when Dr. Wilson left the luncheon in a hurry, I trailed along, but didn't let him see me. I got into his house, into the attic, and I listened to him talk to that Indian.”

“Slow John?” Snuffy asked.

“That's right.”

“I heard Slow John came from Egypt,” said Snuffy. “I heard he wasn't an Indian at all.”

“He's an Indian, all right,” said Dr. Light.

“Or at any rate, he's a Su.”

“What's a Su?”

Dr. Light eyed Snuffy dubiously. "You wouldn't believe it, Snuffy. And if you did, it would be a little beyond your mental ability to assimilate."

"Go ahead and insult me, doc," Snuffy said. "I'll just raise my price ten dollars."

"Ten dollars!" Dr. Light said, somewhat contemptuously. "That's all right. What's ten dollars?"

Snuffy whistled. "Quite a change come over you, Light. Ten dollars used to be just your right eye, that's all."

Dr. Light leaned back and eyed the fellow.

Then he jerked his head, indicating they should leave the vicinity of the cave, where Dr. Wilson might overhear them.

When they were out of earshot, Dr. Light said, "Snuffy, I've got a job for you."

"I'd like to see some cash on the barrel head," Snuffy said.

Dr. Light tossed a bundle of bills on the table at which they had seated themselves.

Snuffy picked up the bills. His eyes popped a little when he saw the top one was a fifty. He counted rapidly.

"Wow, wow!" he said.

DR. LIGHT leaned forward and gave instructions. "I want you to get hold of Bill Cox," he said.

"Hell, the cops are looking for Bill for draft evasion," Snuffy said.

"You can find him, can't you?"

Snuffy just grinned.

"Bill Cox," said Dr. Light, "is a sample of the kind of men I want. I want about twenty of them. I don't want dumb ones, you understand.

I want smart boys."

"A man has to pay smart boys," Snuffy reminded him.

"Do you ever get your mind off a dollar?"

"Not very far off," Snuffy admitted. He touched the roll of bills. "This expense money?"

"Use it however you need to use it to get the men I want together. "

"You want smart ones, eh?"

"Well, we won't get any Einsteins or Edisons. But fellows like Corny Cornman, who got turned out of States after serving his sentence for kidnaping last month. Jake Davis, who killed that girl over at Sikeston City. Frenchy, the knife thrower who used to be with a carnival. And Bancroft, one of the brothers who deserted from the army. You see what kind."

Snuffy nodded. "When you get them guys together, you got yourself an awful bunch of stinkers," he said.

“That's the kind of a bunch I want,” Dr. Light said.

“That's what you'll get.”

“I want them quick.”

“That'll cost more.”

“I don't care what it costs.”

Snuffy leaned forward curiously. “Dr. Light, mind telling me how much might be involved in this?”

Light grinned at him. “Snuffy, your imagination wouldn't hold it,” he said.

“That sounds silly.”

“It is silly. The whole thing is what you—a man like you, Snuffy—would call silly.

But this is more fabulous than Columbus discovering America, if you get what I mean.”

“I don't get it,” Snuffy said.

Dr. Light shrugged. He produced a prescription pad from his pocket, wrote out a prescription, and handed it to Snuffy. “Pick this up at Greenwitz's drugstore,” he said.

SNUFFY GONNER came back with the filled prescription in about an hour, and Dr. Light administered it to Dr. Wilson.

They then used Snuffy's car, which was old but powerful, to haul Dr. Wilson to a small office-hospital which Dr. Light maintained, in connection with the rather flamboyant suite of offices which he had in the downtown section.

The nurse in charge, a man, looked surprised. This wasn't the class of cases which Dr. Light was in the habit of handling.

In fact, Dr. Light's cases were more often on the questionable side.

Dr. Light filled a hypo needle with a solution.

“Stick him with this,” he told the nurse, “every half-hour. “

The nurse blinked. “Say, that'll make him as goofy as an owl,” he said.

“That's the way I want him, as goofy as an owl,” said Dr. Light.

The nurse looked uneasy. “My forty dollars a week don't pay for too much,” he said.

Light swore. “Money, money!” he said.

“There's an extra week's pay in it for you if you insist.”

“How about a jail?”

“I'll go to bat for you. But there'll be no jail for any of us.”

“O. K.”

“When I bring that Indian, Slow John,” said Dr. Light, “you play along like it's a natural case. Just listen to me and take your cues.” “

Sure.”

Dr. Light then got in his car. He drove to Dr. Wilson's home, where he found Slow John.

Slow John had returned with the milk, found Dr. Wilson missing, and he was worried.

He had finished searching the house, and was walking around outside.

Dr. Light became innocence itself.

“Hello, Slow John,” he said. “What happened today?”

Slow John was not bad at innocence himself. “What mean?” he asked. At times, when he wanted to be particularly obtuse, he had the habit of pretending not to be able to handle the English language too well.

“I thought something awful might have happened to Dr. Wilson,” said Dr. Light, lying.

“He was found wandering, out of his mind, on the edge of town. I was called. He is at my hospital now.”

Slow John's jaw fell. He was shocked.

“Where is he now?”

“At my little hospital. He is asking for you.”

“I go see him right now,” Slow John said excitedly.

“Yes, I think you had better. I think he wants to tell you to do something.”

“Tell me to do something?”

“Yes. He will explain.”

“He is able to talk?”

“He is very nervous. You have been around Dr. Wilson long enough to understand how nervous breakdowns come upon a man. They are often brought on by intense mental strain or shock.”

“I go see him,” said Slow John.

THE telephone rang just as they were about to leave. Slow John turned back, the habit of years asserting itself in spite of his anxiety, and picked up the telephone. “Dr. Wilson not here,” he said. “Sorry.”

Then he listened to the instrument. A puzzled expression came over his face, and he turned to Dr. Light.

“Is long distance,” Slow John said. “Is Doc Savage in New York City, so must be important. What shall I do?”

“Doc Savage, did you say?” asked Dr. Light.

“Yes.”

Dr. Light had turned pale. Now he became altogether whiter, and he seemed not to know what to do.

He got hold of himself quickly, however.

“Let me talk,” he said.

Slow John passed over the instrument without comment.

The voice in New York said, “This is Doc Savage's office in New York City. Will you tell Dr. Wilson that we have located Doc Savage, and he will be available by telephone in the morning? I'm sorry, but that was the best we could do. Doc has been unavailable to anyone for several days, and we just got this radiogram that he was coming in by plane. He is now traveling over a section where strict radio silence is advisable due to the war, so that we cannot contact him. But his plane is quite fast, and he should be here in the morning.”

Dr. Light swallowed two or three times and made his voice as calm as he could manage.

“Very well, we will take care of the matter,” he said.

That was the best he could manage.

He replaced the receiver as if it were hot.

And he got out of the house as if the telephone were a dangerous animal which someone had turned loose.

Chapter III. ESCAPE

DR. WILSON lay very limp and pale on the bed in the little makeshift office-hospital.

The male nurse looked properly concerned.

“Hasn't revived, eh?” said Dr. Light.

The nurse shook his head. “No, doctor.”

Dr. Light examined Dr. Wilson, doing it rather elaborately, in order to impress Slow John. But he made no false moves, did not overdo it, because Slow John was no fool.

“How is he?” asked slow John.

Dr. Light indicated the conference room, and said, “Let's go in there.” And when they were seated in the other room, he said, “Dr. Wilson has had a complete nervous collapse.

He realized it was coming on, and he talked to me about it.”

“How long,” asked Slow John, “before he gets better?”

“That will take months,” said Dr. Light.

“Months before he is fully recovered. You know how nervous breakdowns are, and this is a bad one.”

Slow John waited in silence. He was grief-stricken, overcome with a feeling of helplessness.

Dr. Light leaned forward, and said, “Dr. Wilson asked me to do something for him, Slow John. Dr. Wilson and I have never been particularly close friends, but I have the greatest admiration for him as a man. It is a privilege to do the favor he requested.”

Slow John seemed hardly to be listening, or if he heard, not interested.

"I am to go to the Su, and get the thing which Dr. Wilson and you discussed this afternoon," said Dr. Light.

Slow John heard that, all right. He looked up.

"Dr. Wilson talk to you about that?" he asked.

Light nodded. "I am amazed."

Slow John said nothing.

Light said, "Dr. Wilson cannot go to the Su, so I will go in his place. I promised him."

Slow John was not happy. He said, "Not sure that is thing to do."

Then Dr. Light began to talk. His speech was not in the shape of argument or even persuasion, not directly, but it served the purpose of both.

He was trying to persuade Slow John to take him to the Su, and he was doing a skillful job of it. He showed no eagerness. He even talked for a time about whom he would have to take over his practice and the practice of Dr. Wilson while Wilson was ill, to show that he was making a sacrifice.

In the end, Slow John said, "I will take you to the land of the Su."

Dr. Light masked his elation. He'd done a good selling job on the redskin.

LATER that night, Dr. Light started off on a hurried and furtive trip. He got in his car, filled with gasoline, and took the main highway toward Savannah. He drove hard, eighty and ninety miles an hour, and twice when policemen stopped him he got off by explaining that he was a doctor, adding the lie that he was rushing to a Savannah hospital to perform an emergency operation.

It was no hospital to which he went in Savannah.

The house was big, dignified. A picture place with a dozen upflung white columns on the great porch, winding drive and magnolias, flowers, all neatly trimmed and clipped and almost polished.

The doorman, the butler, was a very black man with white kinky hair.

He did not recognize Dr. Light at first.

Then he started slightly.

"*Wie geht es Ihnen, Herr Doktor Licht,*" he said.

"Is Schlitze here?" Light asked.

"*Ja.*"

"I want to talk to him. Important."

The black man, who looked like a Georgia colored gentleman of the old slave days, but certainly didn't talk like one, abandoned the foreign tongue.

"Yassuh, boss," he said.

He went away and came back and nodded to indicate that the audience was granted.

Schlitze was a big heavy man, a man made of beef rather than fat, with a bald head and a black mustache. He was well and fairly favorably known as the proprietor of a lumber mill near Savannah, and had lumber interests back inland. He had actually lived in America about twenty years, claimed to have been born there, which was a lie.

“Why, *Herr Doktor Friedrich Licht!*” he said, sounding as if he were not pleased at all. “How delightful to see you.”

“This is a business trip,” Light said.

“I hope so,” said Schlitze. “I would not want to think it was anything less, the way things are going.”

“Don't get me wrong,” Light said. “I'm not here to ask for a job as agent. I told you before that there wasn't enough money in it for me. That still goes.”

“You haven't become patriotic, then?”

“Patriotic, hell,” Light said. “I've got something to sell you. I'll take three million dollars, cash, as a down payment.”

“Three mil—are you crazy?” the other exclaimed.

“Sit down,” Light said.

“But—”

“Sit down,” Light repeated. “I'll tell you about it.”

They sat down, and they talked for nearly two hours in whispers which could not have been heard a yard away.

“We might make a deal,” Schlitze said, finally.

By now his face was pale with excitement.

DR. LIGHT returned to Logantown late the following afternoon. His step was light, his manner determined.

“How is Dr. Wilson?” he asked.

The nurse, the same man who had been on duty the night before, said, “He's still out. Once he sort of regained consciousness, but I gave him another hypo in a hurry and he's out again. He must be allergic to the drug. I notice his arm is swelling where I've been shooting him.

“Let him be allergic,” said Light callously.

“What about that Indian?”

“Oh, that dumb cluck? He's been around, mooning. He went back to Wilson's house to do his work.”

“That Indian,” Light warned, “isn't too dumb. You want to be careful and not underestimate him.”

“O. K.”

“You are to keep Dr. Wilson here, and keep his skin full of dope, until you hear from me,” Light said.

“O. K. But that'll take some planning.

Want to tell me just how you want it done?”

They got the details straightened out.

Dr. Wilson was to be kept in the little hospital that night, then was to be transferred to Dr. Light's fishing camp on a nearby river, and kept there in the future. The camp was isolated, and it was not likely there would be visitors at this time of year. Dr. Wilson's friends were to be told that he was away for a rest cure and must not be disturbed.

Dr. Light then went to Dr. Wilson's home, where he found Slow John.

Slow John showed signs of strain and worry over Dr. Wilson's condition, which was to be expected.

“Dr. Wilson is going to recover,” Dr. Light told the Indian. “But it is going to take considerable time, many weeks. I am having Dr. Wilson transferred to my fishing camp for peace and quiet, and I have arranged with the best doctors in the South, physicians far more skilled than myself to attend him.”

“Why do you do all this?” Slow John asked curiously.

“Because, “ said Dr. Light, “of the fantastic thing which is involved.”

Slow John admitted, “That is reasonable.”

“When can we get started?”

“To the Su? You still want to go there?”

“Yes.”

“We go first to the Everglades,” Slow John said.

Light did not entirely hide his eagerness, and turned away so that the Indian could not see what was on his face.

IT was nearly midnight when Light visited his hospital-office, and he did not stay long. Just long enough to ask the male nurse how the patient was coming.

“Still doped,” the nurse said. “And that arm isn't looking any better. “

“Let him die of blood poisoning, or whatever he gets,” said Light.

This conversation took place beside the bed on which Dr. Wilson lay. After Light had gone, the male nurse got a bottle of liquor out of a drawer, went into the outer room where the chairs were more comfortable, and settled himself.

Dr. Wilson's eyes opened now, and he sat up as quietly as he could in his dazed condition. He worked with the tourniquet which he had applied to his upper arm, loosening it slightly.

It was the tourniquet which was making Dr. Wilson's arm become congested. He had overdone it a little; they were dangerous unless used cautiously. But he had managed to keep some of the drug out of his system, enough of it out so that he was far from as helpless as he was pretending, or was supposed to

be.

The last three shots had not bothered him at all, as a matter of fact. He had gotten hold of the drug, emptied it out and exchanged it for a harmless solution of water which he had stained a little with tobacco. So that now he was in fair shape.

He looked around for a weapon, and finally decided on a microscope. It was an expensive microscope, but the only thing handy that would make a good club.

He got the microscope under the sheet, and lay back again. He groaned two or three times. Then he called out thickly, and half intelligently.

The nurse came inside.

“Damn, you're a tough old goat,” the nurse said disgustedly. “What does it take to keep you under, anyway? Brother, I'll give you a shot this time that'll lay you out.”

He filled the hypo needle, bent over Dr. Wilson, and Dr. Wilson hit him with the microscope.

Dr. Wilson was weaker than he had thought himself, and the blow was not as effective as he had intended. But the microscope was heavy. The man was driven backward by the blow. He went back two or three paces, more by terror and astonishment than by actual force.

There was a window, and he came against it, backing away. The window broke.

He toppled back. His clutching hands tried to hold to the sash edges, but the glass cut one hand, and the other hand got its grip, but could not hold on. He went on back, yelling in horror, and hung for a moment with just his knees hooked over the sill, then he fell.

It wasn't over six or seven feet to the sidewalk, so all the commotion was hardly warranted.

THE nurse got up and ran. He did this because he had the impression that Dr. Wilson had hit him with a revolver. The blue steel and shiny brass of the microscope he had mistaken for a large revolver, so he was taking no chances. He ran fast and straight, although his head was singing from the blow.

He came to a cigar store, where he used the telephone, after stripping off his white nursing smock before he entered the establishment. He called Snuffy Gonner.

“Doc Wilson's busted loose,” he said, and gave the details.

“I'll try to get hold of Dr. Light,” Snuffy said.

“He's already left for Florida.”

“I know.”

“Well, how you going to get hold of him?”

“By radio. He left me a radio transmitter- receiver outfit that's as simple as A, B, C.”

The nurse was uneasy. “Radio. Ain't it against the law in wartime to have or use a radio without permission?”

“If you don't use it much, and keep moving around,” Snuffy said, “it's a little hard for them to do anything about it.”

“Dr. Wilson will go to the cops,” said the nurse.

“Oh, no, he won't,” Snuffy said.

“Why not?”

“What he would have to tell the cops as the reason behind it,” said Snuffy, “would make the cops sure he had gone crazy. Dr. Wilson would realize that.”

“Oh,” said the nurse. “Light told you what was back of it?”

“Yes. Some of it.”

“What is it?” asked the nurse eagerly.

Snuffy laughed mockingly into the telephone.

Chapter IV. PATRICIA

DR. WILSON went through exactly the process of reasoning which Snuffy Gonner had predicted.

I can't go to the police, Dr. Wilson thought, because they wouldn't believe this.

As a matter of fact, he was barely able to navigate. He stumbled frequently, had to rest every few yards, and felt violently ill. He finally found a taxicab. Because of the war and rationing, there were not many taxicabs left in Logantown. Dr. Wilson knew the driver.

“Andy,” he said, “find Bill Rones for me. Take me to him.”

“Gosh, you look bad,” Andy said. “Can I get you anything?”

“I've had plenty already,” said Dr. Wilson.

“That's the trouble. “

Bill Rones was a tall, red-haired man who operated a garage during the time he did not devote to his hobby of tinkering with airplanes. Since the war, Bill had been letting the garage take care of itself and was spending all of his time in his plane. He had just returned, with his plane, the week before from an assignment as a civilian air patrol pilot searching for enemy submarine along the coast.

“Bill,” said Dr. Wilson. “I want you to drop everything and take me to New York.”

“Gosh,” Bill Rones said. “That's going to take some doing. That'll take more paper work than a confetti basket.”

“Then please get at it, Bill. It's very important.”

“O. K.,” said Bill Rones. “I've got a radio- equipped plane, and I'll arrange the red tape after I'm in the air. I think that can be done.”

Bill Rones' ship was a light plane, three-passenger, and they gassed up, rolled out on the runway and gathered speed. Dr. Wilson leaned back for the first time breathing easily. The plane left the ground.

Then there were several violent whackrip noises. Bill Rones yelled in astonishment.

He dodged. The plane pitched alarmingly, came down on one wheel in a jar that shook their teeth, then bounced. Bill got the craft straightened out and kept it in the air.

Dr. Wilson scrambled forward.

“What was that?” he demanded.

Rones turned an incredulous face to the physician. “Bullets,” he said. “Brother, a hatful of bullets just went through here. “

“The nurse,” gasped Wilson, “must have got hold of Snuffy Gonner and Light!”

Bill Rones stared at him. “Doc, what the hell is this?”

“Dr. Light,” said Wilson, “is trying to kill me.”

Bill Rones thought it was a gag at first.

“Doc, you shouldn't be fooling around another guy's girl at your age.”

“Bill, I'm serious.”

Bill Rones saw he was.

“You want to land?” he asked. “Or do you want to use the radio to put the police on their trail, and keep going for New York ourselves?”

“Use the radio,” said Wilson.

THE radio wouldn't have been necessary, because the men at the airport had heard the shots. There was a government army training program in operation at the airport, hence plenty of men were around, including an armed guard. The guard dashed off toward the sound of the shots.

Snuffy Gonner saw the armed man coming. He cursed.

“Scram,” he said. “Make tracks, boys.”

There were seven men with him, and four of them had modern hunting rifles. It was these guns which had poured a volley into Bill Rones' plane.

They got into brush, ran fast, reached two parked cars, and left the vicinity.

“Hang on the outside of the cars, two of you,” Snuffy ordered. “If you see they're spotting us from a plane, we'll have to do something about that.”

But Bill Rones' small plane flew on toward the northeast and disappeared into the limitless blueness of the sky.

Snuffy and his men got clear. They abandoned their cars, on the chance that they had been seen, and loaded into a small truck. Eventually they reached Snuffy's house.

Dr. Light was waiting there.

“We didn't get him,” Snuffy said. “We put a couple of fistfuls of bullets through that plane, and nothing happened. He just kept flying.”

Light said, "So you bungled your first job."

"Sure. You owe us for two cars, if the cops pick them up. We had to abandon them to play safe. Cost you about twelve hundred dollars."

Light swore. "Twelve hundred!"

"Sure, we're making you a bargain price on them."

"Wilson got away?"

"Yes."

"Headed for New York?"

"Apparently."

"Get hold of a plane," Light said. "We're going to head him off before he gets to Doc Savage."

Of the other men, who were men hired by Snuffy, only one showed no recognition of the name Doc Savage. The others were startled and alarmed in varying degrees. Two of them were deeply shocked.

One of the shocked pair, stepping forward, asked, "You said Doc Savage?"

Light nodded.

"That fellow they call the Man of Bronze?"

Light nodded again.

The man took some money out of his pocket. "This is what Snuffy paid me in advance."

He tossed the money on a table.

"Just pretend you never heard of me, and I'll do the same for you."

"You're quitting?" Light demanded angrily.

"I'm practically running right now," the man said.

"Me, too," said the other one who was alarmed.

Light said patiently—the patience cost him an effort—to the pair, "Savage isn't in this. Dr. Wilson is just trying to reach him. We can stop him, and Savage will never know anything about this."

"I'm running anyway," the man said.

"Me, too," the other one said.

Light swore. "Get out of here!" To the others, he said, "We want a fast plane to Pittsburgh. From there in to New York City, we can take an airliner. And see that we get seats on the airliner, priorities or no priorities."

Snuffy nodded. "All right. We're on our way."

DR. WILSON and Bill Rones landed at an airport on Long Island which was used by the airlines as well

as by what civilian flying was permitted in the restricted area.

Dr. Wilson tried to pay for the flight.

“Don't be silly,” said Bill Rones. “You've done favors for everybody in Logantown at one time or another. This is my chance to pay off one of them.” He examined Dr. Wilson intently. “You need any help? I got a good strong arm, a gun and a license to pack same.”

Wilson seriously considered the offer.

“No, thanks, Bill,” he decided. “I think I can get Doc Savage's assistance, and we can handle it.”

Bill whistled. “Friend of mine was telling me about that Savage once.”

“He has quite a reputation.”

“Where it does the most good, too, I hear,” Bill said.

“Well, thank you for the flight up here,” said Dr. Wilson.

“Don't mention it.” Bill Rones eyed Wilson.

“You still look pretty rocky. Think you wouldn't care to tell me what this is all about, and let me help you?”

Dr. Wilson shook his head.

“You'd think I was crazy,” he said. “And that would be bad, because sometimes I wonder if I am.”

“Right-o,” Rones told him. “But if you need a hand, you know whose bell to ring.”

“Thank you, Bill.”

Dr. Wilson walked to the administration building, and through the gate used by airline passengers. He felt stiff, and ill, so weak that his knees seemed to be jointed both ways.

But he kept alert, and for safety, doubled into the waiting room crowd as soon as he was inside.

He doubled over, worked his way to a staircase, and hurried up until he could see out over the crowd.

He had a bit of luck. He had taken Snuffy Gonner by surprise. Snuffy was near the center of the big room.

Snuffy saw Dr. Wilson at about the same time. Snuffy looked astonished, nonplused.

He stood there foolishly for a moment.

Then he wheeled and made for the exit, traveling as fast as he could without running.

Wilson groaned. He was in a spot.

They were ahead of him, and probably they knew where he was going.

But then a cunning twist came to his mouth, and he went to a telephone directory, where he got an address.

He made a dash for a cab, swung inside, and said, "The beauty establishment of Miss Patricia Savage, on Park Avenue." He gave the Park Avenue number, the one from the phone directory.

MISS PATRICIA Savage said, "I don't believe I know you, Dr. Wilson."

She was a remarkably pretty young woman with two or three physical characteristics which put her somewhat on the spectacular side. Her bronze hair, for instance, was unusual and only slightly darker than her tanned skin. And she had remarkable flake gold eyes.

"I came to you," Dr. Wilson said, "because I was afraid to go to Doc Savage direct."

"Afraid?"

"I think they would have waylaid me."

Patricia Savage showed considerable interest, said, "This might be one time I get to something ahead of Doc." She sounded very pleased about that. "Come into my private office," she said.

The private office was the kind of room with the kind of furniture that would impress the wife of a multimillionaire or the spoiled daughter of one.

"Call me Pat," Patricia Savage said.

"You came to me because I am Doc Savage's cousin?"

"Yes. I knew you were Doc Savage's cousin."

Pat seated herself behind a desk. It was a large and extremely modernistic desk, and she pulled out a drawer which contained cigarettes, and offered the cigarettes to Wilson, saying, "Smoke?"

She left the drawer open.

She did not smoke herself.

"Now, Dr. Wilson," she said. "You want to see Doc Savage, but you came to me first because you were afraid some men would waylay you."

"That is right," Wilson said in a low, weak voice.

"Speak up," Pat requested. "I'm a little deaf."

She was not in the least deaf.

"Yes," Wilson said. "I saw one of them, Snuffy Gonner, at the airport. The others would naturally be with him. So I thought of you. They wouldn't be expecting me to come here."

"Did they follow you, possibly?"

"I do not think so, but it is remotely possible."

"Just what," Pat asked, "is your trouble?"

Dr. Wilson hesitated. "I have always had a horror of hearing people tell fantastic, unbelievable stories. I hate to tell one myself—and have to insist that it is the truth."

Pat said, "I have been with Doc in quite a few of his adventures. Some of the things that we have been up

against have been plenty fantastic. Fantastic things are Doc's specialty.”

“I know. That is why I came.”

“Go ahead with your story.”

Wilson thought about it for a while. He shook his head. “I'm sorry. I insist on telling Savage. Can you get me to him safely.”

“Yes.” Pat looked at him thoughtfully.

“But first, I'm going to have some hot food brought up here. And you had better have a massage to put some life into you. I have a men's department here. I'll turn you over to one of my masseurs.”

“But the delay—”

“Won't be much,” Pat said.

THE masseur, a muscular man with blond hair, led Dr. Wilson away. Pat returned to her desk and sat down. She glanced at the desk drawer, which was still open.

In an anxious voice, Pat said to the drawer, “All right, Monk or Ham or some of you. Did you get that?”

A voice—it came from a loudspeaker concealed under the desk—said, “Doc was here. He got it.”

The voice was a strangely childish one which might have belonged to a twelve-yearold, except for a certain squawking quality that showed the owner was an adult.

“Where is Doc now?”

“On his way over.”

“When will he get here?”

“Fifteen minutes, probably. He just left here.”

“Good,” Pat said. “I'll tell the masseur to get Wilson ready in a hurry. I'll go down and do that now.”

“You think there's anything much to this?”

“Yes, Monk, I do,” Pat said. “The man was in very bad shape. He was excited, and scared. And whatever he had to tell is so strange that he was ashamed to tell it to me.”

“Look like a sensible guy?”

“Yes, a very fine-looking old gentleman.”

“Got a good, sensible reputation, too,” Monk said.

Pat was startled. “Monk, how do you know that?”

“Oh, a Dr. Wilson was trying to get Doc Savage on the telephone a day or two ago, and I put a checker on him as a matter of routine. An old fellow with a good record, I found out. He was supposed to call back when Doc got in, but didn't.”

Pat said disgustedly, “So I didn't get to this one first, after all?”

“Nope.”

“You're not just making that up? I wouldn't put it past you.”

Monk chuckled. “Doc says he wants you to stay out of this affair, Pat. He says it may be too dangerous for a woman. Ham was on the long-distance telephone to Logantown, Georgia, and he found out the plane carrying this Wilson was fired on by persons unknown, who had rifles, as it was leaving.”

“Doc always says for me to keep out. I intend to pay no attention to that, as usual,” Pat said. “And you fellows have been digging up information fast, haven't you?”

“Just the usual routine when something turns up.”

“I'll tell you what I'll tell Doc,” Pat said.

“And that is this: Here is one piece of excitement I'd like to see anybody make me miss!”

She hung up and went downstairs. The halls, the stairs, were richly carpeted. The men's division, more used now than before the war—by pot-bellied business men who looked at trim soldiers and got a yen to streamline themselves—had the crisp, neat look of a hospital laboratory.

Pat tapped on the door and called, “Jamie.” Jamie was the head masseur.

The door opened to let out a man who was not Jamie. This man had fox ears and fox eyes and something in his hand covered by a towel. He examined Pat, and said, “Miss Savage?”

“Yes.”

The man showed Pat that the towel covered a gun in his fist. He said, “Let's not have a fuss. My name is Gonner. They call me Snuffy, a nickname I never did care for.

But you can use it.”

Pat said, “So you followed Wilson here.”

“Uh-huh.” Snuffy stepped back. “Won't you come inside?”

There were half a dozen desperatelooking men in the room, in addition to Jamie, the masseur, who was piled loose and senseless in a corner, and Wilson, who had been knocked unconscious as well.

THEY did not fool around.

“Get going with the old guy,” Snuffy said. “For some reason, I don't think this is a good place to hold any picnics.”

He turned to Pat.

“You, too,” he added. “And that doesn't make me happy. But don't worry, we'll let you loose like you were a hot potato as soon as we get downstairs.”

“Scared of me, eh?” Pat said.

“Not of you, sis. Of Doc Savage.”

“Suppose,” said Pat, “that Dr. Wilson told me what all this was about?”

“In that case, we'd chop off your pretty little toes right up next to your ears,” Snuffy said. “But I don't think old Wilson did tell you.

He's too foxy an old boy to go spreading this around.”

“Why wouldn't he tell me?”

“It's too important.”

The gang had organized a retreat. Two of them had gotten into the locker of Jamie, the masseur, and found white smocks which they had put on. In the smocks they looked enough like interns to avoid suspicion. This pair carried Dr. Wilson.

“Too important,” Pat said, as they went downstairs. “How important is it?”

“*Tsk, tsk,*” Snuffy said. “Too many questions.”

In the reception room, the receptionist came forward in alarm, but Pat said, “It is nothing, Nancy. We are taking the gentleman to a hospital.” And the receptionist was fooled.

“That was smart of you,” Snuffy told her. “I was going to slug that girl.”

The street was quiet, thinly sprinkled with the decreased traffic that was using New York streets in wartime. They climbed into a car.

One of the men said, “I don't like the idea of driving a stolen car in a strange town.

If we had our own pads, or something like that—”

“Yeah, and if we had a million dollars apiece,” Snuffy interrupted.

Pat had been watching the street.

“You've got worse than that,” she said.

They ignored her, which caused Pat to smile strangely. They got the car moving. It pulled out into the traffic lane and loafed along, the men trying to look innocent.

Pat said, “What you've got I wouldn't trade for a million.”

Snuffy eyed her, said, “Sis, you talk upside down, don't you?”

“The expressions on your faces alone,” Pat said, “will be worth it.”

“What is this, new zoot talk?” Snuffy asked.

The car was moving more rapidly now, but it was plain that the driver was not going to exceed the speed limit. They had placed Dr. Wilson on the floor boards, and one of them had a blackjack ready in case he moved.

“I'm talking sense,” Pat said.

“Yeah, the kind a gremlin would talk,” Snuffy said.

Pat leaned back, said, “I foresee a black future for you eggs.”

Near the end of the block, a car, a dark sedan swung ahead of them slowly, and about the middle of the next block, when it was thirty yards or so ahead, it seemed to catch fire. At least there was a dull explosion, and a great deal of smoke that was very black.

The smoke became a fat dark mushroom in the street. Two or three seconds and it filled and choked the street.

The driver ran into it. He jammed on the brakes, said, "Damn! I can't see a thing!"

"Drive on!" Snuffy barked.

"But I can't see—"

"Drive on!" Snuffy yelled.

Pat made a jump, hit the car door, which came open. Pat went out, landed in the street running.

Behind her, Snuffy said something, violently.

Pat ran very fast for not more than twenty feet, and then, while she was still in the smoke, someone grabbed her, got her by the throat.

Chapter V. PIER END

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"AWK!" Pat said to the man holding her throat. "Cut it out. I'm a pal!"

"I'll be superamalgamated!" said the man who had grabbed her. "Pat!"

"Since when did you become a stranger, Johnny?" Pat asked.

"*Ps-s-st!*" Johnny said. "I thought you were one of the gang in the car."

"They'll stay in the car."

"Good," Johnny said. "Doc was going to load into the trunk compartment in the confusion."

"I figured something like that," Pat said.

"Cross your fingers. The trunk may be locked."

"In that case, we'll have to clean house right here in the street."

Pat and Johnny moved out of the smoke, and stood behind a parked car, waiting.

The smoke had little value other than being intensely black.

Johnny was William Harper Littlejohn, one of a group of five men who always worked with Doc Savage. Johnny's specialty was archaeology and geology. The other four were respectively lawyer, chemist, engineer and electrical expert.

Johnny was a very tall man. He was also thinner than it seemed any man could possibly be and still retain health. Johnny's health was about as robust as a General Grant tank.

“An ultrafrangible interregnum,” Johnny said.

Pat surmised that he meant that it was a tense moment. Such words formed Johnny's more normal speech.

The smoke, which had been released from one of Doc Savage's special sedans, hung thickly in the street, but moved with the breeze. The wind carried it slowly back.

Pat heard a car go into gear and leave.

“That's them,” she said. “I hope Doc made it.”

When the smoke cleared, they ran into the street. They found a spare tire lying there.

Johnny said, “Better than gold!” and took possession of the tire.

“Doc dumped it out, so he could get in the trunk compartment,” Pat said.

They walked to the car which had made the smoke. A big fellow with a remarkably sad face and a pair of fists which would have choked an alligator was sitting in the car.

“Hello, Renny,” Pat said to him. “Doc's idea was to follow them and find out where they were going, wasn't it?”

Renny nodded. “You go back to your place of business,” he said. “You've rung your little bell very nicely. We thank you.

Good-by.”

“Doc tell you to say that?” Pat asked.

“He gave me the idea, not the words.

His words were plainer.”

Pat got in the car where Renny was sitting.

“I can't hear you at all,” she said.

DOC SAVAGE was a very large man, although he did not look it until one stood close to him. His proportioning was so symmetrical that it made his size deceptive. But at close range there were certain signs, cabled sinews on the backs of his hands, and flowing bars of strength in his neck, which indicated some of the remarkable physical power which he possessed.

His eyes were pools of flake gold, with a continual live quality as if they were always stirred by tiny winds. His hair was a metallic bronze a little darker than his sun-bronzed skin. There was no looseness, no flatness in his face anywhere, and there was too much strength in it to allow it to be as handsome as the finely molded features would otherwise have made it.

He was dressed quietly in shades of brown.

His appearance as a whole was sufficiently distinctive—and he had always considered this a handicap—to make him stand out in any kind of a crowd, to permit anyone to recognize him who had heard and remembered even a fragmentary description of him.

He looked what he was—the almost abnormal product of an unusual training, at the hands of an assortment of scientists, which he had received starting in childhood, and continuing to early manhood. The training had been arranged by his father, and it had been aimed solely at fitting Doc for the profession which he now followed—the rather strange career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers who were outside the law, often in the far corners of the earth. Meddling with other people's troubles, it really amounted to.

He was very cramped where he rode in the baggage-tire compartment of the car.

SNUFFY GONNER was driving the car.

Snuffy had been around Logantown off and on most of his life, and no one had ever heard of his having visited New York. But Snuffy showed a slightly sinister familiarity with New York streets.

He drove until they had crossed the Queensborough Bridge into Long Island City, and were driving along under the I. R. T.

subway lines, which in Queens operate on an elevated track, following the route out toward Sunnyside and Jackson Heights.

“You drive,” he told one of his men.

“Keep under the elevated.”

He exchanged positions with the other man without stopping.

Then he leaned over and whispered in the driver's ear, “Doc Savage is in the trunk!”

The driver was shocked. He all but hit an elevated pillar. Snuffy grabbed the wheel, slapped the man, said, “Keep your head, damn it! I've got an idea!”

Then Snuffy gave the bad news to the others in the car. He whispered in each case.

The information wasn't cheerful for anybody.

“The radio,” Snuffy whispered.

The radio outfit was a small, portable set in a suitcase, which both transmitted and received. It operated on voice. Snuffy used it to call, “Tony! Tony! Did you manage to get hold of a car?”

From another transmitter somewhere nearby came a cautious answer: “Yeah.”

Then Tony added a warning that the car had been stolen. “Hot.”

“O. K.,” Snuffy said. He gave them the name and location of the street on which they were driving. “Get the heck over here. We want to transfer to your machine—and do it while we are still moving, so somebody who is in the trunk of our car won't know what is going on.”

“Who you keeping secrets from?” Tony asked.

“Doc Savage.”

“You mean he's in the trunk of your car?”

“Yes.”

Tony said grimly, "I wish I had stayed in Italy."

"It's a bad break," Snuffy admitted, "but don't let it get you worked up too much. The only reason Savage would have for getting in the trunk is so that he could trail us. But now that we know he's in there, he's behind the eight ball."

"I'll be there in a few minutes," Tony said unhappily.

Snuffy switched off the radio, closed the box which held the apparatus, and handed it to one of the men. "Take it with you when you get into Tony's car," he said.

The man nodded. He leaned forward and whispered a question to Snuffy, "How did you know Savage was in the trunk compartment?"

"I just happened to be looking out of the back window when we were in that smoke," Snuffy said. "And I saw him."

"That was a lucky break."

"It was a mighty lucky break," Snuffy agreed.

THEY had more luck when they changed cars. The possibility that Doc Savage would hear the sounds as the men stepped from one machine to another had been bothering all of them. But a train came rumbling along the elevated overhead, traveling in the same direction they were moving.

Snuffy drove under the train and the train traveled slowly.

One after another, the men left, stepping from one car to the other. They shifted Dr. Wilson by the same means, using care not to create a commotion and to do it quickly.

At last only Snuffy Gonner was in the car.

He waved the other machine away.

"Go on ahead and wait for me," he had told the men.

The man called Tony grinned at Snuffy, and went through the motions of shaking hands with himself, complimenting Snuffy on the successful transfer. Snuffy returned the handshake, then jerked his thumb toward the trunk of the car, and pantomimed the gesture of drawing a finger across his own throat. It was expressive enough.

The two cars now took different directions.

Snuffy Gonner drove rapidly, turning back toward the water front near the Queensborough Bridge. He kept the car rolling steadily, and added a bit of realism—he hoped—by talking loudly to himself, first in his own voice, and then in a voice which he changed by talking into his hat, or which he distorted by holding his mouth out of shape with a forefinger.

"I sound like three or four guys at that," he thought approvingly.

He drove to the river. He knew where he was going—the yard of a large sand and gravel company. The place had been shut down when he had seen it last.

The gate, he saw with relief, was open.

There was no watchman in sight. Snuffy decided to take a chance, and he drove in, following a lane that was narrow and weedgrown, toward the dock where the sand and gravel barges had unloaded.

The dock was clear and he went out on it. He left the car in gear, threw open the door, dived out, landed on his feet, but lost his balance and rolled, got erect, pulled a revolver out of a pocket. He was standing on the edge of the dock where he was splashed by the cloud of water which flew up when the car hit and sank.

Snuffy waited and watched with the gun ready. He remained there something like five minutes without seeing anything but bubbles come to the surface.

There was plenty of light. No one could swim under the dock because the dock was a solid concrete box affair. He kept thinking of that. And finally, satisfied, he lit a cigarette.

He walked back toward the gate slowly, trying to feel as relaxed as he felt he should be. When a man confronted him unexpectedly, Snuffy gave a violent jump. But the man was old, in overalls, and dangled a watchman's clock.

"You looking for somebody?" the old man asked.

"I was looking over the place," Snuffy said. "Thought I might lease it. But I guess not."

"Oh," the watchman said.

Snuffy walked on, leaving the yard by the same gate through which he had entered.

DOC SAVAGE came from behind a shack. The wooden fence around the yard was about ten feet high. He climbed the fence, and followed Snuffy Gonner.

Doc was not as neat as he had been.

The baggage compartment of the car had been dusty. His coat, at the shoulder, had a long rip. He'd done that in leaving the compartment of the car secretly soon after the machine had driven into the sand and gravel yard. The knuckles of one hand, his left hand, had been skinned at the same time.

His reason for leaving the car at that point had been logical. He hadn't at any time let the baggage compartment lid close fully, but had kept it propped open a crack with a toe in order to have a space through which he could watch where they were going. Recognizing the sand and gravel yard had not been difficult; he had known instantly that they wouldn't drive into the place merely if passing through. So he'd gotten out.

The presence of Gonner alone in the car had puzzled him for a while. When had the others gotten out of the machine? Puzzling about it, he had evolved a fair idea.

They had driven under the elevated so that the uproar of the trains overhead would hide the sounds as all but Gonner transferred to another car.

Snuffy Gonner walked rapidly. He saw only one cab, but the cab ignored him when he windmilled his arms. Gonner swore at the departing cab. It had a fare, however, and he did not see another cab.

Gonner took the subway.

Doc got aboard the same train—by going up the stairs on the other side of the street, remaining concealed until the train came in, then scampering across the tracks and hanging on to the rear of the last

car of the train. At the next station, he transferred to the inside of the coach.

At the end of the line—Flushing—Snuffy Gonner had better luck with a taxi.

Several were waiting at a cab stand. Gonner took one. Doc got another.

Gonner went to a flat Long Island pastureland surrounded by woods. There were two airplanes, small, fast ships, on the edge of the pasture, backed in under the trees.

Small bushes had been cut and pushed in the ground to screen the ships from view.

The rest of Gonner's men were there.

They had driven the cars into the woods.

When they did not leave at once, Doc surmised they were waiting for nightfall. They were pretending to be picnickers, for they cooked their six-o'clock meal over a campfire.

In the meantime, Doc Savage got to a farmhouse and used the telephone. Ham Brooks answered the call at headquarters.

“Doc, what happened to you?” Ham demanded.

Doc Savage told him about the car that had gone into the river. “They seem to think I am dead, and now they are waiting around for darkness before they leave in the two planes they have hidden.”

“How the dickens did they get those planes in there without Aircraft Warning spotting them?”

“They evidently came in from the ocean at night, probably got very high, shut off their motors and came in deadstick. The pasture is quite large. One of them must have been familiar with it.”

“What are we going to do?”

“Is Long Tom there?”

“Yes.”

“Put him on.”

Long Tom Roberts was the electrical expert of their outfit. He said, “I’ve been standing here beside Ham listening. Doc, can you get at one of their ships?”

“I plan to try to do that,” Doc said.

“Oh, then you want me to rush out there with one of my new bumblebees. That the idea?”

“You read my mind,” Doc said.

LONG TOM ROBERTS had lately been spending much time on the gadget he called a bumblebee. He was proud of the device, and anxious to give it a test. He thought he had something that was going to help the war effort a great deal.

The thing was remarkable. It was not a mechanism, unless a solid slug of three different kinds of metal and plastic—the exact chemical composition of which was a secret—could be called a mechanism. The substances in the metal, when smashed together, got along together, atomically, about like cats and dogs. The result was that some of the atoms flew off into space. This was the way Long Tom had explained the

thing in a simplified way to Johnny Littlejohn, whose knowledge of electro-chemistry was somewhat less than his command of big words.

There was a fog of excited electrons around the three chemicals while they were mingling. And this mingling would continue for about three days. The electron cloud was like dust around a dogfight. Around a lump of the chemicals the size of a .50-caliber machine gun bullet, for example, the cloud would have a diameter of about half a mile— for practical purposes.

A good atomic locator of the radio short-wave type would register the presence of the ball as being about half a mile in diameter.

The ultra-short radio wave “eye” used to locate the ball of atomic “dust” was almost a standard plane locator mechanism.

Military uses of the discovery was obvious.

Shoot a chemical bullet or two into the enemy plane—a chemical cartridge could be inserted in the ammunition belt at regular intervals the same way tracer bullets are inserted —and construct the slugs so that they would stick in the enemy ship. Then trail the enemy with a regular radio “eye.”

The idea of separating the three chemicals in the bullet before it was fired was to keep the enemy from using an “eye” of his own to spot planes which had belts loaded with the slugs. This was what had held up military use of the device. Now Long Tom believed he had it licked. He had conducted the last steps of the experiment with Doc's aid.

Half an hour later, Long Tom met Doc Savage. He was carrying a rifle capable of firing the .50-caliber cartridges, underloaded for the purpose.

Doc said, “Did you have some of the others get planes in the air?”

Long Tom gestured at the sky. “Monk and Ham are up there in the north. Renny and Johnny and Pat are in another plane to the south. Renny's outfit will land and pick us up when they get a radio signal from us.”

“Good.”

“I hope I can hit that pair of planes when they take off.” Long Tom hefted the .50-caliber rifle dubiously. “This thing probably will kick like a cannon, even with the reduced powder load.”

He hit them all right.

Chapter VI. EVERGLADES

THE two planes in which Gonner and his men rode remained together on the flight south. They flew a course which kept them about two hundred miles from shore. They had two breaks in luck, first in not encountering naval patrol planes, second in catching a favorable wind. Their average speed was around two hundred.

Long Tom Roberts was elated about the way his gadget was working.

He pointed ahead. “They're out of sight, anyway thirty miles ahead. But you can spot them as easily with this apparatus as you could see a Kansas whirlwind with your naked eye.”

Renny Renwick, who was flying their plane, looked around. “Monk is on the radio.

He wants to know where those fellows ahead are going to refuel.”

Monk and Ham were in a smaller and faster ship, loafing along about a half mile to the west.

Long Tom snorted. “How would we know? Tell him to find his own crystal ball and look into it.”

Renny conveyed the information. “If you haven't got a crystal ball handy, you might use Ham's big blue eyes instead.”

Renny listened to the response this got, and laughed.

Pat smiled. “What did Monk say to that?”

“I don't want my ears to get red, so I won't repeat it, Pat. Monk seems to have learned a new cussword.”

“He and Ham must be in the middle of the usual quarrel.”

“From the way he sounded, I'd say they were about ready to throw each other overboard.”

Long Tom unrolled a chart and looked at it thoughtfully. “Where do you suppose they will refuel?”

“You saw the planes at close range. Do you suppose they had extra fuel tanks?”

“I didn't see them that close, Renny.

They could have. However, I don't think they did, because there are enough men aboard to load them close to their maximum limit.”

Renny made an adjustment in the automatic pilot which had been doing most of the work of flying the plane. “Well, they might make it to Cuba. “

CUBA was a good guess, as it developed.

Snuffy Gonner had never been to Cuba.

He stared down at the Cuban countryside, about seven thousand feet below. “Joe, you sure you know what you're doing?”

Joe grinned at him. “My real name is José. I lived here most of my life. I know what I'm doing.”

“You better.” Gonner knew Joe only as a recruit who had been well recommended, and who had followed orders this far without question, and even with enthusiasm. Joe had one asset—he did not seem to get scared every time he heard Doc Savage's name mentioned.

It had been a windfall for Dr. Light and Snuffy Gonner when they discovered Joe, or José, knew of a rich Cuban planter who lived on an isolated sugar plantation, where he had a private flying field and a fat supply of high-test aviation gas.

“This caballero is no friend of mine. We will have to take the gas away from him.”

“We'll do that, Joe.”

Dr. Light was not with them. Only Gonner and his hired aides were in the two planes. They had communicated once with Dr. Light by radio, making a date for a rendezvous near Everglades, a small town in southwestern Florida.

The understanding was that Dr. Light was to meet them there, with the Indian, Slow John. The purpose of this was to keep Slow John from becoming suspicious.

Snuffy addressed one of his men.

“How is Wilson coming?”

“He don't look so good. “

Snuffy examined Dr. Wilson himself.

Wilson sat in the rearmost seat in the plane cabin. They had tied his wrists as a matter of caution, although Wilson was too ill, weak, and dazed from the drugs they had given him to be dangerous.

Snuffy put his left palm against Wilson's face and pushed the man's head back.

“Feel tough, eh?”

Wilson gave him a sick glare. “You devil!”

“Well, well, with horns and spike tail and everything.” Snuffy sat down across the aisle where he could yell at Wilson. “I'm not a bad guy. I'm just a purposeful guy, is all.”

“This is not funny.”

“You bet it's not, or I hope it's not. Because I figure there is three or four million bucks, plus a place in history, in this for all of us.” Gonner laughed. “Won't the faces of some of these guys look like hell in the history books.” He glanced around at his assistants.

Wilson made no comment.

Gonner glanced at him. “That right? They'll look funny in the history books, won't they?”

Wilson was silent.

Gonner grinned widely at him. “What do you suppose they'll have in the book under the picture of Steveski, yonder, who has served two stretches for manslaughter?” He pointed at a thick-bodied fellow.

Wilson eyed Gonner bitterly. “Snuffy, Dr. Light didn't really tell you what this was about, did he? You're trying to pump me.”

Gonner cursed him unhappily. “If it wasn't for you telling Light on me, I would beat the whole story out of you right now.”

“I think I might tell Light you did that, anyway.” Wilson's tone was loaded with contempt.

“Might start a civil war among you. “

“Oh, no, Wilson; you're too honest an old guy to do that.”

THE Cuban who owned the plantation was named Govostez, but he wasn't at home.

Snuffy Gonner's men piled out of their plane with rifles and revolvers.

José had some advice. “Get the radio station. It's the only way of getting quick news outside. Get it.”

Gonner had another bright idea. "Yell a lot of 'Heil Hitlers'! Make 'em think we're Germans."

They piled out of the plane, yelled their "Heil Hitlers!" and shot at everyone in sight.

The Cubans, who had been expected to run for cover, put up a fight. There was nearly half an hour of sniping before the place was cleared of resistance.

José was disgusted. "It was those 'Heil, Hitlers' that did it. They fight like cats and dogs when they hear that."

Gonner howled with pleasure when he looked into the big hangar. "A seaplane!" He waved his arms. "Look, a seaplane!"

It was, technically, an amphibian. A seaplane hull with wheels which lowered so that it could operate off land as well.

Gonner told them what was in his mind.

"That Everglades country is all swamp. There may not even be a place to land around that town of Everglades. Boy, do we need a seaplane!"

"We going to take this instead of our planes?"

"Yes."

"Instead of both of them?"

"Yes. It's big enough."

They transferred their baggage, a very few valises of clothes, but many bags and packages containing guns and ammunition, from their planes to the amphibian. They found the high-test gasoline. There was plenty. They loaded and took off, went moaning away into the afternoon sun that was hot in the west.

Then a Cuban boy came out of the plane hangar. He had crawled behind an oil drum during the fight and remained hidden there.

He stood in front of the hangar, watching the other plantation employees come out of the cane fields and the jungle.

DOC SAVAGE and his aides circled the Cuban plantation widely, so that Long Tom could get direction bearings with his device.

Renny used the radio telephone. He contacted a Cuban government station.

"The plantation is owned by a man named Govostez," Renny said, relaying the information he obtained from the Cuban government radio.

Doc Savage examined a scale map thoughtfully. "There is a chance they are only getting gasoline. Find out whether Govostez would have high-test aviation gas available at the plantation."

Renny spoke Spanish into the radio telephone for a while. "Yes. Gas there."

"We will land." Doc Savage folded the chart.

At first only the plane in which Doc Savage rode came down on the plantation flying field. The other

plane remained aloft, in case there was an ambush. Doc's craft stopped rolling.

The plane cabin was bulletproofed, so they remained in it, suspiciously watching the low plantation buildings. They saw no sign of life. The two planes they had been trailing were nearby.

Big-fisted Renny was uneasy. His voice was a rumbling like a bear in a cave. "I wonder what happened? Holy cow!"

Doc indicated the hangar. "Unless they took a different plane."

Finally a Cuban shouted at them from a hiding place. They replied, and exchanged identification. Then they got the story of what had happened.

Ham Brooks was discouraged. He was dressed in the height of fashion, but it was the last word in clothing for morning wear in New York City, so he looked a little out of place.

"Blazes!" Ham flourished the sword cane he always carried. "If they took another plane, we can't trail that one. It looks as if we might be licked."

A Cuban youth approached them.

"*Muy bien, se—ores,*" he said. "I was concealed in the hangar and overheard something of value. They go, those evil men, to a place called Everglades."

"Doc, come here!" Ham called loudly.

Doc Savage listened to the Cuban.

"The Everglades swamp?"

"No, no, a town, I am sure, *se—or*. I could tell from the way they talk. They make the remark that there might not be a place to land a ground plane around that town of Everglades."

Ham Brooks thought for a moment.

"Doc, there is a town named Everglades in southwestern Florida, if I remember right."

Doc Savage questioned the Cuban on another point. "Did they have an elderly gentleman with them?"

"*Si, se—or*. One whose hands were tied, if it is he you mean."

The gasoline supply in their planes was not exhausted. But they refilled the tanks anyway.

Monk Mayfair approached Doc. "That yelling those fellows done about Heil, Hitler— you think it meant anything particular?"

"Hard to say. They might have been trying to give the impression that they were an enemy raiding party."

Monk made a fist out of one of his hands, then eyed it hopefully. "I would sure like to run into some of Hitler's boys."

"So would the rest of us, Monk."

"Doc, do you think we're ever going to get into the shooting end of the army and see actual service?"

The bronze man said a grim nothing.

The matter was one of his sore points.

Since the first bomb was released at Pearl Harbor, they had been trying to get into active service. All of them had military training of one type or another, so they'd thought they would be accepted immediately. But they hadn't been—instead, they were informed that their present work was more important.

This might be true, but it wasn't very satisfactory.

Doc Savage climbed into his plane.

“Both these ships are faster than the amphibian they took. We will let them out, and in the darkness we may be able to reach Everglades ahead of the other ship.”

Monk was still hopeful. “I hope there's some of Hitler's boys.”

THE man who pretended to be a lumberman, Schlitze, arrived in Everglades, Florida, in a bad humor. His full name was Edward Hungerford Schlitze, Jr.; at least this was the name he had used for the twenty years he had spent in America. He had been a wealthy executive for so long, a man who sat in a soft chair and gave the orders, that he resented traveling. And this was the first traveling he had done in America in wartime, which hadn't helped his humor a bit.

He felt like beating his chest. “I have to stand on the train! No drawing room! No pullman! Not even a day-coach seat!”

The gentleman who met him in Everglades was crisp and efficient. He saluted Schlitze and said, “Carl Sale reporting, sir.”

Schlitze frowned at him. “Real name?”

“Karl Satz, sir.”

“From?”

“Dresden, sir.”

Schlitze sighed. “I was born and went to school in Dresden myself. It is lovely. I plan to go back there.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Schlitze examined Karl Satz thoughtfully, finally nodding approvingly. “You are a good job, Satz. I understand the espionage school at Hanover produced you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I suppose you want more details?”

“If you please, sir.”

Schlitze liked the crisp efficiency of the espionage agent. “Well, Satz, here is the story: This fellow Dr. Light's real name is Doktor Friedrich Licht, born in Germany, and with plenty of relatives there. A year or two ago I had my agents approach him about acting as a secret agent for Germany, and, when he refused, we mentioned what would be done to his homefolks in Germany if he didn't. He laughed at us. The fellow didn't give a damn about his relatives in Germany.

Then, laughingly, he said that if he ever had anything worth selling, he would drop around.”

Satz was listening attentively, alertly, nodding whenever the other man paused for breath.

Schlitz continued his story. “A couple of days ago, unexpectedly, Dr. Light appeared at my home in Savannah. He had an amazing story. It seems that he had accidentally mentioned to a brother physician, in the same small town where he was practicing, an item that he had noticed in a newspaper. The other physician, a Dr. Wilson, became so excited that Light's interest was aroused. So he followed Wilson, and discovered that Wilson had an old Indian servant, belonging to something—a clan, a tribe, a people, we don't know what yet—called the Su. This servant, called Slow John, agreed to guide Dr. Wilson into the Everglades after the thing which was mentioned in the newspaper.

Light immediately seized Wilson, and tricked Slow John into agreeing to guide him, Light, to these Su. Light then came to me and offered to sell the thing. He wanted three million dollars, cash on delivery.”

“Three million!” The crisp Satz was astonished.

“In American dollars, that is a fabulous sum!”

Schlitz nodded. “Definitely too much for a common reprobate quack like Light.”

“Much too much, sir.”

“I am here to change that,” Schlitz said.

SATZ, speaking in measured sentences which sounded as if he had carpentered the words carefully, or had previously memorized the text of what he had to say, made his report. He had been in Everglades a day and a half, having come there from Miami as soon as he had received coded directions from headquarters, notifying him that he was to take a group of men and cooperate with Schlitz.

In obedience to the coded orders, he had checked up on Dr. Light. As soon as Light appeared in Everglades, he had been placed under close observation.

Light was waiting for the gang he had hired. They were en route by plane, and were due to arrive shortly. Satz was proud of having this information.

Schlitz clapped Satz's shoulder in approval.

“Good work. So Light's men are coming.

We will waylay them when they arrive.”

“I have prepared for that, sir. My men are armed and ready.” Satz looked efficient.

“How many men have you?”

“Ten, sir.”

Schlitz nodded approvingly. “Not too many, however. Do you have an idea where the planes will land?”

Satz had a very good idea. “There is only one logical spot. I have suggested that nine of my men be waiting there. They are there now. The tenth man is keeping tabs on Light.” “

Good. Good work, Satz. We will go grab them as they get out of the planes.”

They got moving. Schlitz, discovering they must walk and not liking to travel on foot, complained, “Isn't there such a thing as a car around here?”

“There is a boat near. It will be much quicker.”

After they were in the rowboat, Schlitze did not complain. He leaned back and fired up a cigar, relaxing. They could hear tarpon jumping in the mangrove creeks through which the boat was passing. “I should have brought my fishing gear.” Schlitze sighed.

Satz said, “Slow John, the Indian, is with this Light.”

“Are they still on good terms?”

“Quite good.”

“Then the Indian must be remarkably stupid.”

Schlitze suddenly sat up straight, listening.

He threw away the cigar. “Satz, do you hear a plane?”

“Yes, sir. It is not the time for the patrol plane, so it must be our quarry.”

“Hurry!”

“We are almost there, sir.”

THERE was a stretch of beach, then beyond that the sea stretching into the distance, dotted with a few mangrove islands.

The sea here was very shallow and nearly a part of that remarkable area known as Florida Bay where it was possible for a man to step overboard from a small boat, and wade twenty or thirty miles in almost any direction without getting in water more than neck-deep.

It was a section used hardly at all by commercial boats, and now that the war was in progress, used almost not at all by tourist fishermen.

Everywhere else mangrove roots grew, a thick and rather hideous tangle of roots extending a couple of feet out of the water to join the naked grotesque trunks of the mangroves themselves.

Offshore about a hundred yards, there floated a rowboat from which two men were fishing with long poles. They were plainly distinguishable in the moonlight.

“Who are they?” Schlitze pointed at the men.

“Two of ours.”

“The others around?”

“They are, sir.”

“Must be well hidden.”

“I hope so.”

The plane came swooping in, following the coastline. They saw that it was a big seaplane, and that it was seeking a spot for a landing.

Schlitze twisted his hands together until the joints cracked. “I hope they land here.”

“They will. This is the best clear water available. And the town is close.”

The plane came back, settling, its nose into the wind. Its hull drew a long streak of wake across the water, then the pilot turned inshore. He headed for the rowboat.

From the plane a voice hailed the rowboat.

“Ahoy, the skiff! Is this water safe?”

“Safe enough.” The voice from the rowboat was gruff.

“Who are you? Natives?”

“Sure. Where would you find a tourist down here this time of year?”

“Is Doc Light around?”

“Who?”

“Light. Doc Light.”

“Never heard of him.”

“O. K.” The man on the plane could be heard telling someone inside the craft that they might as well go in and beach, if the sand looked smooth enough. “I guess we’re not expected. “

With a roar from the motors, and a rush of wind from the propellers that flattened the small waves for some distance back of the plane, the craft moved toward shore. It approached a wide smooth stretch of beach sand, nosing in cautiously, a man standing on the hull and dropping a sounding line rapidly, and poking at the water with a flashlight beam, searching for coral heads.

The watching Schlitze became uneasy.

“How are you going to take them? Is it now too late?”

Satz was calm. “Watch this. In a moment, watch it.”

The words were not off his lips when there was a loud explosion. The blast occurred almost under the plane, its violence heaving the craft bodily into the air and tossing it over so that it came down on one wing full weight. The wing crumpled, folding like a bird wing. A hole had been caved in the plane cabin.

Chapter VII. STRANGE SWAMP

RENNY RENWICK picked himself out of a tangle of cushions and equipment cases and groped around in thick, brown smoke.

“Doc, you all right?” Renny’s rumbling voice was anxious. “Pat, what about you?”

Pat was close at hand. “I’m considerably surprised, to put it mildly.”

“Gas!” This was Doc, nearer the hole which had been caved in the hull of the plane.

“Get the masks!”

The gas masks were kept close at hand. These were not civilian planes which Doc and his aides used, as

far as equipment was concerned. There were parachutes, gas equipment, bullet-proofing and other gadgets.

The masks were kept in pockets beside the seats for convenience. They could be donned in a few seconds.

But nobody except Long Tom Roberts got on his gas mask. The gas was tear gas. It had been part of the explosive contraption, whatever that was, which had ruined them. It had been blown into the plane by the blast.

Long Tom put up somewhat of a fight when men came piling out of the mangroves and runt palmetto growth. But he was soon beaten down, trampled into the sand, and generally given an enthusiastic kicking.

Satz called loudly to the boat in which the two fishermen sat. "Come here. Tow the plane up on the beach. You have lines."

They did not get the plane up on the dry sand, but they got it grounded where it did not look too much as if it was sunk. They propped up the mangled wing, with much cursing and straining, until it would look all right in the moonlight. Because by now they could hear another plane in the distance.

"To your posts, men." Satz was bustling around.

Schlitz now got around to examining Doc Savage, Pat, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny Littlejohn. The prisoners had been taken back into the mangroves, forced to sit on the damp swamp muck, and each of them tied by one wrist to a long rope. The tying had been done with an ingenious knot which held them like the wristband of a handcuff.

To further discourage them from making any belligerent motions, two men stood by with ready submachine guns.

"Well, well, well!" Schlitz poked Renny and Doc Savage experimentally with a long crooked mangrove branch which he had picked up. "Doc Light hired some big devils, didn't he?"

Schlitz went over and prodded Pat with the stick. "And a girl, too. Well, well! Or are you a friend?" With this he started to poke Pat playfully again with the stick, and Pat, with a lightning quick motion, seized the stick, jerked it out of his hand, and whacked him on the head with it. The stick wasn't very large, but it knocked Schlitz down. "Break her arm for her!" he snarled at one of the machine gunners.

The gunner was cautious. "She should be gagged first."

The other plane was roaring closer, so Schlitz waved his arms angrily. "Let it wait."

The plane came in low, not over the land, but over the water, then banked, climbed, and the motors picked up power and violence. The ship arched around and came down, not quite like a dive bomber, but with purposeful sureness.

"*Ach!*" Schlitz hit the ground in a flat dive. "*Was nun!*"

They must have dumped over double fistfuls of hand grenades. When they hit the water, and part of them hit the plane, there was a rippling roar as if a bundle of firecrackers had been lighted and tossed. The plane lost its shape. There was some screaming.

Schlitz pounded the ground with his fists. What he said was not understandable, but it was nothing

pleasant.

Satz yelled at his men. "Shoot! Shoot!"

His men, scampering out on the beach, were dark figures. From them, gunflash.

The plane came diving back, roaring and angry in the moonlight. From its windows, also gunflashes.

Schlitz ran out on the beach. "We are not here to fight a war. Bring the prisoners.

We will get out of here!"

AFTER they had walked some distance, they climbed into boats—not the same boats they had used earlier, but two different ones—and pushed off along a mangrove creek. The plane had made another pass or two at the beach, then had flown away. They could barely hear it in the south.

Schlitz swore repeatedly to himself.

"That was a very strange thing to happen.

What do you make of it, Satz?"

"I am dumfounded," Satz said.

They kept paddling furiously, driving long wakes out behind the boats. The plane was still hanging around, but at a great distance.

"

I am dumfounded, too." Schlitz sounded sour about the whole thing. "Satz, why did that happen? Why were we fired upon?"

"*Alles habe ich nicht verstanden*," Satz said gloomily.

"Speak English!" Schlitz was indignant.

"We are in America, where they do not speak German. "

"I am sorry." Satz was meek. "I do not know why Light's men attacked us."

"He didn't attack us! He attacked these people—some of the helpers he had hired. "

"I do not understand it."

"You are sure Light is here waiting for his men to come?"

"Yes. He is at the Western Tourist Home. We heard him by radio, arranging to meet his hired men here."

Schlitz swore. "We will grab Light, force him and the Indian to guide us."

Doc Savage, who had been speechless and inactive to this point, suddenly spoke.

Doc spoke in Mayan, a language which, as far as he and his aides knew, was spoken by no one in the so-called civilized world other than themselves. He and the others had learned the Mayan tongue on one of their earliest adventures, a wild affair which had taken them into a remote Central American mountain valley inhabited by strange descendants of ancient Maya. It was from this valley, incidentally, that Doc

still received regular shipments of gold. It was the source of his finances.

(See The Man of Bronze)

In Mayan, Doc said: "This is a gang which is trying to dispose of Light and his men so they can get whatever Light is after."

The Mayan tongue was full of gutturals and not unmusical murmurings which caused it to sound a little like, if the right bitter tone was given, disgusted muttering.

"Pretend you know what this is all about, so that they will not kill you. After being properly reluctant, agree to guide them.

You will guide them by following my trail, using a mechanical scanner."

Doc stopped speaking in Mayan then.

He changed to English, speaking loudly.

"Don't tell them the secret!" Doc's voice was firm, angry. "Do not guide them to the place!"

Then Doc lunged out of the boat. He had loosened the trick knot which held him to the rope, and had slipped his wrist out of it in the darkness.

The bronze man went into the water in a long dive which took him toward the most obvious point of refuge on the bank of the mangrove creek. This was a clump of thick shrubbery not far away, growing close to the water.

The moment he was under the surface, however, he changed his course. He turned about and, swimming far down, headed back under the wake of the rowboats. The water in the mangrove creek was very clear, and they could see him several feet below the surface, even in the moonlight. But the water in the wake of the boats was swirling and bubblefilled, so they could not see him below.

He swam with all the strength and speed he could throw into the effort. The thought in his mind—if he could get far enough away before they could catch him.

When his lungs began to torture him for air, he turned to the right, into the dark moon shadow of the mangroves which overhung the creek. He came up among them, got air, and then found a spot where he could haul himself out of the water.

But when he saw how thickly the mangroves were matted, and what a terrible tangle it would be to traverse, he slid back into the water, and beneath it.

When the creek turned, he came to the surface, and swam hard with a stroke which did not bring his arms or feet above the surface.

He went back to the beach where the plane had been ruined.

What had happened was no mystery.

Snuffy Gonner's men in the plane had blasted the ship simply because they had recognized it as one of Doc's ships. The plane was distinctive enough, with its bronze coloring and the identification numbers which were registered in Doc's name. It had been easy enough for Gonner to recognize the ship, if he had taken any pains in getting together information about Doc, which apparently he had. He could have obtained the data in New York, by telephone.

Having destroyed the plane, Snuffy had gone off somewhere else to land and meet Dr. Light.

Once he had joined Light, Gonner and Light and their men would strike into the Everglades in search of whatever it was they were after. They were doubtless taking Dr. Wilson along to use his safety as a threat to make the Indian, Slow John, do the guiding.

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks, following orders, would have landed down near Key Largo, or possibly in the cut behind Lower Matecumbe Key, to wait for radio instructions.

That, Doc decided as he approached the beach, would be about the situation.

THE beach was occupied now. The explosions had been heard, and the wrecked plane located. Someone had sent for the town marshal. This much Doc Savage gathered as he moved through the crowd.

Doc went to his plane. A uniformed man stopped him, and Doc saw that the coast guard already had taken over.

The bronze man said, "Turn on your flashlight, and take a look at some credentials." The coast guardsman did so. The cards and letters of authority from the war department, which Doc always carried, were sufficient.

"There is another plane around," Doc said. "A seaplane. Stolen from a plantation in Cuba." The bronze man described the plane Gonner was using. "Pick up the ship and the occupants if you can."

"Yes, sir." The coast guardsman was efficient. "We have a description of the ship and orders to round up the men aboard. Got the information by telephone about an hour ago."

"Good."

"Can we be of any other service?"

"Not immediately," Doc told him. "Any other moves might interfere with a plan I am trying."

The bronze man then climbed into the mess that had been his plane cabin, searching for equipment boxes. He found three, the three he desired, and from them removed various gadgets, part of which he stowed in his clothing, and part of which he put in a packsack which was in one of the cases.

He complimented the coast guardsman before he left. "Good work!"

"Thank you, Mr. Savage. "

Doc got away without being recognized.

He headed for the town of Everglades, running along the path. At a beer place on the edge of town, he entered the washroom and, opening one of the small cases from his pack, he began rigging a disguise.

He had run quite a distance, and his breathing was heavy. He was momentarily tired. But there was no time to get back breath, or to clean up his clothing, which was a mess of water and mud.

The stuff he used for the disguise was simple. A hair dye, which was special only in that it was so concocted that it would instantly color the hair, but not the skin. He made his hair quite black. He darkened his skin also. He used soft rubber mouthpieces, prepared long ago for such a purpose, to change the shape of his jaws and thicken his lips. He employed a harmless injection in an ear lobe which caused a quick swelling that did a good deal to change the character of his head profile.

He went to the proprietor. "Where is the Western Tourist Home?"

THE Western Tourist Home was not conspicuous, nor very neat. The shrubbery looked shabby for Florida shrubbery, even in the moonlight. Doc Savage moved among the palmettos, doubled under a scrawny tree on which grapefruit was growing not much larger than lemons, and unexpectedly found the one guard which Satz had posted. Doc had not known there would be a guard, but he had suspected there would be, and rather expected more than one.

The man, Doc learned with an unpleasant shock, was sitting in the tree under which the bronze man had crawled.

"S-s-sst!" the guard said, then waited.

Evidently this was some kind of a signal.

There was probably a password. Doc had no idea what it could be. He lay there under the tree, plagued by the urgent necessity of doing something.

Doc made a voice as much like the voice of Satz as he could manage. And he spoke German. "*Ich vergessen*. I have forgotten.

Was there a password?"

"*Ja*." The German words fooled the man in the tree. He asked in English, "What happened? All those explosions? They sounded like bombs and grenades and shots."

Doc had worked open a small metal case in his pocket, and from it he took as many of the small glass ball-like objects within as his fingers could quickly find. He held his breath. He crushed the balls. The liquid they contained was very cold on his hand as it evaporated with a speed almost instantaneous.

The stuff was a gas, odorless, colorless, an anaesthetic that would affect a man when he breathed it, render him unconscious within the space of a couple of deep breaths.

It was a harmless kind of unconsciousness. If one did not breathe it, the stuff would have no effect at all. And, after it had mixed with the air for about eighty seconds, it became impotent.

Doc caught the watcher so that he did not make much noise falling out of the tree.

AN old man in a soiled white suit sat on the porch of the house, smoking and listening.

He looked up at Doc. "H'yah. Wonder what that noise off toward the shore was? Sounded like shooting. Heck, you reckon they've caught some of them saboteurs landing around here?"

"Wouldn't know." Doc kept his voice matter-of-fact. "I'm looking for a friend of mine. Doctor from up north. Fellow with a Seminole Indian along."

"Oh, you mean Gibbons. Him and the Indian has got that cabin fartherest back.

Yonder, along that path."

"I'll go surprise him." Doc moved down the path.

The cabin, he saw, had a lighted window.

He went to it along the path, to a door that was closed by a screen. Through the screen he saw two men,

one of them a Seminole. He pushed open the screen, and went inside looking excited and breathing heavily.

“Light?” He went on without waiting for an answer. “Light, somebody waylaid us.

Down at the shore when we landed. An ambush.

You should've heard the shooting. “

The white man was Light, all right.

Light's extreme blondness, his near albinolike lack of coloring made his emotions of astonishment, followed by fear, less noticeable than they would have been on a darker man.

Light got to his feet. “Who are you?”

“I've had a little to do with Snuffy Gonner.”

Doc made his manner cautious.

“Gonner hire you?”

“You Light?”

“Yes.”

“Gonner brought me into this. He didn't know there was a going to be this trouble.

These guys jumped us completely unexpected.

They were Germans.”

Light stared at Doc. “Germans?” Then he fully understood, and jumped noticeably as surprise hit him. “The dirty so-and-sos!

The dirty double-crossing—”

Then he realized that he was giving himself away to Slow John, who stood watching them with unblinking intentness. Light had the presence of mind to keep waving his fists, and he turned to Slow John.

“The dirty double-crossers!” He sounded generally violent against all Germans.

“They get together with the Japs, and pull that Pearl Harbor thing. They shoot prisoners and starve people.”

Light turned to Slow John. “Now they try to rob us of this wonderful, amazing thing.”

He had made this last speech for Slow John's benefit.

Slow John blinked, nothing of what he thought showing on his face.

“What for you hire Snuffy Gonner? He no good. “ Then the Indian waited patiently for an answer.

“I figured we needed protection. “ Light grimaced. “You think he sold us out to the Germans?”

“Could be.” Slow John was noncommittal.

Light waved at the door. "Go outside, please, Slow John, and listen for any sign of the enemy coming. They must not catch us. I will get the details of what has happened from this man here, then we will get into action."

Slow John went outside. He wore tan work trousers and an old flannel shirt and sneakers, and he moved silently.

DR. LIGHT made sure that Slow John had gone away from the house, then Light went over to Doc and took hold of Doc's coat lapel threateningly.

Light's voice was low and angry and threatening. "You damned fool! You unutterable damned fool! That Indian thinks we are going into the Everglades to find this land of the Su and get the fantastic secret for Dr. Wilson. He doesn't know yet that he's being lied to, and that Wilson is drugged and my prisoner. You damned near gave it away!"

"Gosh!" Doc managed to sound astonished and stupid. "There's a lot about this I don't know."

"Well, you almost gave it away."

"Awful sorry, boss."

"Keep your blatt shut after this."

"O. K."

"Those Germans that tied into you— Snuffy Gonner didn't bring them into it. Get that straight. I approached a Nazi agent named Schlitze about selling him the thing after we got it, and he has double-crossed me."

"Yeah? So Snuffy didn't double-cross you. I figured he wouldn't."

Light was getting nervous. "Did the damned Germans get all of you?"

Doc nodded vehemently. "They got every one of us. Then I escaped. Dived out of their boat, and swam like the dickens."

Slow John appeared in the doorway.

He made almost no noise. "Man under tree.

Unconscious."

Doc nodded. "That's the one I slammed."

There was a flight of color from Light's pink face. "Who is he?"

"He said something foreign." Doc pretended ignorance of the German language.

"Something that sounded like, 'Yaw, yaw!'"

"German!" Light swore explosively. He ran outdoors, out into the night, and to where Doc and Slow John took him to show him the senseless German. Light looked at the German.

"A Nazi, all right. They're hot on our trail."

Slow John stood silent beside them for a while. "Better we go into swamp right away."

These words were the ones Light wanted to hear. But he feigned some doubts.

“Do you think the three of us can handle it by ourselves?”

“The Su are my people.” Sudden pride, the unbounded pride of a man in his race, filled Slow John's voice. “The Su are a just people. They will do what is right. They have great honor.”

“I meant—can three of us fight off the Germans?” Light said hastily.

“No fight needed. We lose them in swamp.”

“They'll try to follow us. They may search and find us.”

“No one has found the Su.” Slow John was unconcerned.

Light hesitated. This wasn't the way he had planned it. He hadn't intended to go into the swamp without a gang of tough men who would do what he wanted done.

Doc could surmise what was going through the man's head. The thing Light would like to do was assemble another gang of helpers—he thought Gonner's crew was out of the running. But to do that would take time. And the Germans were close on his heels. Here in the Everglades country, Light was on strange ground. He did not know who to approach, knew no thugs whom he could approach and hire. And before he found such men, the Germans might be upon him.

“Let's get our packs,” Light said.

SLOW JOHN had evidently bought the supplies and made up the packs, because the objects they contained had been selected by someone who knew the particular conditions of the Everglades. There was almost no food. The Everglades swarmed with fish and birds which would supply food. There was a respectable supply of snake venom antitoxins and drugs for fighting fevers. There were extra pairs of rubber hip boots, rifles and ammunition—small-caliber rifles which, with their cartridges, were light and easily carried, but effective against anything in the Everglades except alligators, which could be avoided. There were very light rubber boats, two of them. And good insect nets, with chemical mixtures intended to repel insects.

“Come.” Slow John set off into the night.

Doc Savage shouldered his own pack, which was well worn from previous use.

“You not need that,” Slow John said.

“I'm taking it. I've been in swamps before.”

Light frowned at the pack which Doc carried. “How come you got that? I thought they took you prisoner, and you escaped by swimming. You surely didn't swim away with that?”

Doc had expected to be questioned on that point.

“I went back to the wrecked plane and got it,” he said.

Light was satisfied.

They walked through the night for a long distance, and during the trip, followed a path which grew more and more faint. Then Slow John grunted, turned off the trail, drew apart a heap of branches and disclosed a good, sturdy skiff equipped with an outboard motor. The skiff was heavy with gasoline in

five-gallon cans.

Slow John looked at Doc Savage.

“What you eating?”

“Want some?” Doc countered.

Slow John took some. “Peanuts,” he said. He cracked one of the peanuts and ate it. “Should not leave peanut shells lying around.” Slow John pocketed the shell of the peanut he had cracked.

Doc Savage showed him a pocketful of shells. “Sure. They might find the shells on the trail.” He kicked a hole in the earth and buried the shells.

“Good.” Slow John sounded pleased.

They got into the boat, arranging themselves among the gasoline tins while the Seminole wrapped the starting rope around the outboard motor flywheel. The motor started at the first pull, and they surged out into the mangrove creek.

Doc Savage watched the Indian, noting the familiarity which the Seminole showed with his surroundings, how he prepared the boat to take turns in the creek before they were discernible in the moonlight. And they did not go into any water which was shallow, or any creeks which ended blindly in a few hundred feet, as a stranger would have done.

ACCORDING to the information which Doc's men had obtained on Dr. Wilson and his Seminole servant—the dope they had dug up during the routine check immediately following Wilson's first call from Logantown—the Seminole servant had been with Wilson for thirty years or so.

“How long, Slow John, since you have been through this country?” Doc was thoughtful.

“Two years.” Slow John sounded calm.

“I come back for visit every two years.” The Seminole headed the boat for what looked like a bank and trees, but which opened suddenly and was a new direction taken by the creek.

Doc Savage leaned back.

“You.” Light punched Doc. “What is your name?”

“Holden,” Doc Savage said. “Junior Holden.”

“Well, junior, how much do you know about this affair?”

“Very little.”

“I'll tell you what you need to know.”

Light's voice was gruff over the sound of the outboard motor. “Somewhere in the Everglades is a people called the Su, and they dwell in the Land of the Su. Slow John, here, is one of the Su. He was serving my friend, Dr. Wilson, because it seems that is the way the Su pay debts of gratitude. Slow John is guiding us to this Land of the Su.”

Light hesitated, probably debating how much to tell a fellow whom he considered as nothing more than a large, dumb associate whom he had hired.

Light continued, after his pause, "The Su have a secret. It is a fabulous secret. It is a thing which the white man, with all his science and knowledge, does not dream exists.

It is so great that—well—selling it for three million dollars would be literally giving it away.

And three million dollars, mind you, is a lot of money."

Doc, as junior Holden, was impressed.

"Golly, yes."

"That's what we're going after."

"But you ain't told me what it is!"

"You know all you need to know. "

"But—"

"Either that, or you get off and walk right now."

Doc went through the motions of sulking, and finally got around to grumbling, "Gonner promised me a hundred a week.

This looks worse than I thought, so I ought to have a hundred twenty-five."

"Would a hundred and fifty be better?"

"Gosh!"

"Now shut up and follow orders." Light leaned back in the boat, relieved that the matter had been decided.

Doc Savage ate more peanuts in silence.

Chapter VIII. SU

MONK MAYFAIR and Ham Brooks, waiting to hear from Doc Savage, had beached their plane on a small spit of sand on Lower Matecumbe Key, staking the craft out in the shallow water of the dredged harbor near the store which stood near the Key West highway bridge to the next island to the south. They had brought along a portable radio, and were fishing to occupy time. Fishing and quarreling.

"I heard a plane off to the north earlier," Monk said. "Wonder if it was that Snuffy Gonner's gang?"

"What you heard was probably just the murmuring in something empty, like when you hold a seashell to your ear. Meaning your head."

Monk sneered. "You're slipping. That wasn't very funny."

Ham was untangling a hand fishing line.

"You know, you're an insulting, low-browed ape."

"I'm not a bad guy."

“You've got more lowbrow traits than anybody I ever saw.” Ham sighed. “Brother, I'm afraid I'll never meet you in heaven. “

“Yeah? What have you been doing now?”

Ham thought that over. “That was an insult.”

“Sure. My head doesn't roar like a seashell, either.”

Monk carefully adjusted the radio. The outfit was tuned to the short-wave frequency which Doc and his aides used. Monk clicked on the transmitter and tried a tentative, “Hello, Doc. You around?” Then he listened attentively for an answer that did not come.

They made no comment about the lack of response. But both were worried. They baited the hand fishing lines, and began to fish. The fact that they did not resume their quarrel indicated that their concern was not a small matter.

“I wonder,” Monk muttered, “what happened to Doc?”

“Our orders are to sit here until we hear from Doc over the radio.” Ham yanked angrily at a nibbling fish and didn't get it.

SCHLITZE and Satz had gone off to Everglades, their plan being to seize Dr. Light and Slow John.

All the time they had been gone, a man had been systematically deviling Renny Renwick. For some reason which was a mystery to Renny, they had decided that he was the one of the prisoners whose spirit could be most easily broken. They might have gotten this conviction from looking at Renny's long, unutterably sad face; he didn't know. But he had been letting them think they were breaking his courage. Doc had said to give in to them.

Pat and Long Tom and Johnny were lashed hand and foot, and gagged, near where Renny was being plagued. Just now, a man was carefully chipping the heads from kitchen matches and wedging them under Renny's fingernails, saying that he was going to light them. Renny could guess how it would feel, and he was sweating.

“You're going to talk,” the man told Renny. “You're going to tell us all you know.

You'll sing like a canary.”

Renny was careful not to use his normal rumbling voice, which was distinctive enough that it might reveal his identity. “You sound like a guy who got his ideas about being tough by listening to movies.”

The Nazi agent grinned so that his teeth flashed in the moonlight. “As a matter of fact, much of our training at the espionage school was being shown American films, and reading American newspapers.”

“Trained you thoroughly, eh?”

“Very.”

“For this special job?”

The Nazi shook his head. “No. This is an emergency. We were supplied at the request of Herr Schlitze.”

Renny tried fishing for information.

“What are you going to do with the thing you're after, once you get it?”

“Do not pretend such ignorance.” The man turned. “Have any of you some more kitchen matches?”

One of his companions had a full box of them.

SNUFFY GONNER was scared. He had landed his plane below Chokoloskee, inland from the Ten Thousand Islands. He had ordered the pilot to get very high, then cut off his engines, glide in and deadstick down. They did not know the water too well, and they had hit a coral outcrop and damaged the seaplane hull. The plane sank in water about four feet deep.

They had waded ashore, cursing, carrying Dr. Wilson.

Wilson was now conscious. He was stronger, too. Gonner had used all of his supply of the drug with which they had been keeping Wilson dazed.

Wilson tried whooping for help.

They cuffed him around for that.

“You be careful,” Gonner warned him.

“You're not indispensable.”

“I was on a trial jury in Logantown once.” Wilson stared at Gonner. “They wanted to convict you, Gonner, for chicken stealing. I didn't think there was enough evidence, and I talked the others out of it when they wanted to send you to the penitentiary just because they felt you needed it. I'm sorry I was fair. “

Gonner snorted. “This time it's a little bigger than chicken stealing, eh, Wilson?”

The old doctor was silent. Misery twisted at his face, the misery that was from his mind rather than his body. It was sure something bigger than chicken stealing, right enough.

The old physician was involved for a while, bitterly, with thoughts about the injustice of luck, good and bad. The best people had the worst luck, he sometimes thought.

But then he was probably wrong about that, because something about the injustice of it was always the first thing to pop into your mind when a nice person hit tough going.

Luck at times certainly perched smilingly on a buzzard's shoulders.

“We'll join Light,” Gonner said.

They struck out through the night. One of them had found a mule and a spring wagon somewhere. The wagon stank of fish and it was slow, but the Negro who drove them took a road that no car could have followed.

The Negro's name was Denzil.

“Denzil,” said Gonner. “Denzil, you ever go in the Everglades swamp any?”

“No, suh!” Denzil was emphatic.

“Why not?”

“Ain't nothin' in there I want.”

“Isn't there good fishing?”

“Maybe. “

“And good hunting?”

“Ol' gators, maybe. Who wants to hunt ol' gators?”

Gonner laughed in a calculated way that was intended to goad the man. “I believe you're afraid of the Indians, Denzil.”

“Sure.” Denzil was frank about it.

“Them of Seminoles don't like no foolin' around in that swamp.”

They reached the tourist home where they expected to find Dr. Light, but where, instead, Gonner got the tip of an ear shot off.

FIRST, they went into the cabin which was supposed to be occupied by Light and Slow John. This building was empty. They went next to the house of the camp proprietor, who told them that Light had departed.

“Light and the Seminole and another man, a big man, went off into the swamps with their packs.” The man was chewing tobacco, and he paused long enough to silence a nearby cricket with an accurate job of spitting.

“That was three or four hours ago.

About an hour before, their friends showed up looking for them. You more of their friends?”

“Friends?” Gonner was thoughtful.

“What did they look like?”

“Don't rightly recall.”

“Was one of them big?”

“Kinda.”

The chill of fear came to Gonner and some of it was in his voice as he said, “A big bronze man with flake gold eyes—”

“No, no, a big fat guy.”

“Oh.”

Gonner wrestled with his wits, trying to figure who the visitors could have been. Doc Savage did not have any assistant who was large and fat.

Seized by a thought, Gonner described Schlitze, the lumberman from Savannah. He did not know Schlitze well, but he had seen him once. He did a fair job of making a word picture of Schlitze.

The tourist-place man nodded his head rapidly. “Yes. That's one of the fellows, all right.”

Gonner stood there, the fear still in him.

He had heard enough of Schlitze to know that the man was clever, very clever and, like trained Nazi agents were for the most part, Schlitze was not a man of many scruples.

Gonner could see very clearly that Schlitze was double-dealing with them.

The Nazis, Gonner thought, think no more of a dollar than they do of their right arms. Of course they'd do this. They'd try to cut in ahead of Light and get the thing for themselves.

Light, concluded Gonner, must have gotten wind of the danger, and had headed into the swamp. Which suggested a matter that was important—had Light been able to leave a message anywhere for Gonner and his men? Or was Light trying to cross up Gonner in turn?

At the same moment that this alarming thought jumped into Gonner's disturbed mind, a bullet arrived and chopped off the top of his right ear. The bullet was one of about forty that arrived in the next thirty seconds.

ASTONISHMENT and a lucky reflex caused Snuffy Gonner to pitch behind a palm tree bole instantly after the bullet clipped his ear. This act, which he performed without taking time to think, probably saved his life.

The darkness was an aid. That, and the fact that Gonner's men were nervously expecting Doc Savage's assistants, or possibly Doc himself, to pop out of the night.

Snuffy still believed that Doc Savage was dead. He insisted that the bronze man had been in the trunk when he drove the car off the pier in New York, and that Doc had not come to the surface. Therefore Doc had drowned. It was obvious.

But everybody was feeling as if they were under a falling sword, anyway. There was, at the shots, a scattering worthy of scared quail in a brush patch.

Gonner was howling. The bullet had made quite a commotion when it banged his ear, and he thought he was shot in the head.

He yelled bloody murder. He cursed and fired at random with his gun.

The proprietor of the tourist place stood there foolishly, hardly moving, until he saw Gonner unlimber a revolver. Then the touristhome owner yelled himself—for the police and began running. The safe thing for him to have done would have been to go back into the house and hide. But he did not do that.

He headed for the road, running, yelling for police.

The shouting for the police caused everyone else to begin shooting at the man.

Bullets literally stormed about him. He ran through the angry leaden hornets, however, with charmed safety. He was shot at sixty or seventy times, and not a bullet hit him.

By this time, Snuffy Gonner got an order to retreat passed along to his men. He withdrew along with them.

The attackers, left behind, did some random shooting. Then they, too, took shelter, and faded away into the night.

Gonner had identified the assailants by now. "That was Schlitze. It was a gang of Nazis."

He also had a plan.

“We will trail them,” Gonner said. “Get going, guys. Right now, we've got to follow them.”

One of his men came forward. “Gonner, me and Lee, here, used to have a hang-out up in Dismal Swamp in Virginia. One time we had to spend a whole year there until a kidnaping rap cooled off. We ain't bad woodsmen.

We ain't no Daniel Boones, but we ain't bad.”

“That's fine.” Snuffy was elated. “Do your stuff, you and Lee.”

The pair lost themselves silently in the darkness. They were not bad woodsmen, it was at once apparent. Gonner and the others waited. They could hear voices round the tourist place, so they knew the owner had returned with the police. They remained very still, and were not molested. Gonner, thinking of bloodhounds, was apprehensive.

The two scouts returned.

“We got Schlitze's men located,” they reported.

Gonner got his men together. “We watch Schlitze's gang. We don't do anything yet. Just watch 'em, that's all.”

LONG TOM ROBERTS and Johnny Littlejohn were lying, tied hand and foot, a little apart from the other prisoners, Pat and Renny. They could hear, unpleasantly, the sounds of blows as the systematic beating of Renny Renwick continued.

“I'll be superamalgamated!” Johnny Littlejohn was grim. “An ultrainvidious ergophobiaism.”

Long Tom tussled with the big words for a minute. “Yeah. The thing behind it must be pretty big.”

Johnny used small words. “That wasn't what I said.”

“Well, it's true anyway.”

“It probably is.” Long Tom grimaced, thinking of the taste which the gag had left in his mouth, and wondering just what the gag had been made of. “What do you suppose it could be? What could be back there in that swamp?”

“That is kind of puzzling, isn't it?”

“They talk about something they call the Su, which I take to be a tribe of Indians. A tribe of Seminoles.”

“That,” said Johnny, “puzzles me no end, in particular.”

Long Tom glanced at Johnny sharply.

Johnny was a long shape in the darkness, so thin that he looked as if he were made out of sticks of wood.

There were few men who knew more archaeology and geology than William Harper Littlejohn, which automatically meant that few men knew more about races of people in the odd corners of the earth. If Johnny was puzzled at the existence of a tribe of Seminoles called the Su, the matter was likely to be a very puzzling one. Because if there was a Su, Johnny should know it.

Some of his doubt in his voice, Long Tom said, "You think there might not be any Su?"

Johnny shrugged. "When I was a kid, another youngster told me that there wasn't any Santa Claus in red coat and whiskers, and I told him he was crazy. I was sure he was wrong. Since then, I haven't been quite as sure of things."

"Then it's possible?"

"Anything is possible." Johnny moved his shoulders in the moonlight. "If you want to make a broad statement."

"The Everglades have been surveyed by air, haven't they?"

"Thoroughly."

"Then any lost tribes of people would have been discovered."

"Maybe. "

Long Tom gave the matter some more thought. "The whole thing is farfetched," he said. "On the other hand, all this running around and shooting isn't being done for nothing."

THE beating of Renny Renwick continued for some time. Renny was groaning now, and the groans were becoming more impressive.

Renny was weakening. Long Tom and Johnny and Pat, listening to the sounds, were impressed by the job of acting Renny was doing. Not that it was all acting. There wasn't much doubt but that the beating was painful.

At last they heard Schlitze say excitedly, "It is about time! It is the wise thing for you to do!"

Renny had agreed to guide them on Dr. Light's trail. "That's fine," Schlitze said. "You should never have allowed yourself to be hired by that Light in the first place."

Renny and the others were very careful not to let Schlitze know that he had been misled about their being members of Light's crew. No one had mentioned a word about Doc Savage; as far as they could tell, Schlitze and Satz did not have the slightest idea that Doc Savage was involved. Which made it much simpler.

There was the chance, of course, that daylight would come around and one of Schlitze's men would recognize them. It had been dark so far, and the flashlights did not furnish very dependable illumination. Schlitze had not recognized Doc before Doc escaped.

It might be that Schlitze did not know Doc by sight, or description. It might be that none of his men knew Doc either.

"You got to get a man back to where you first searched us." Renny talked to Schlitze earnestly. "I need a small gadget that looked like a flashlight. It was in my pocket."

Satz spoke up, puzzled. "You mean that flashlight that wouldn't work?"

"That is the one."

"I threw it away."

“I have to have it.” Renny was emphatic about his need for the device.

Schlitze thought about it uneasily.

“Take him and get the flashlight, Satz.” So Renny and Satz and two alert men with ready revolvers worked back through the swamp and eventually found the flashlight—which wasn't a flashlight at all.

Renny demonstrated the device. “It's not a flashlight, or anything that resembles a flashlight. It makes so-called black light. Not a very strong beam, but one that's strong enough.”

The men, being trained in espionage, knew all about black light. And they understood that a number of substances had the property of fluorescence, or glowing, when exposed to the invisible rays.

(The examination of documents by black light, or light outside the visible spectrum, is a common procedure in searching for erasures or changes or secret writings. All espionage schools cover the subject.)

“Now,” said Renny, “take us to a spot where we can pick up Light's trail.”

Schlitze was puzzled. But he did as Renny asked, and stood by while Renny examined Dr. Light's trail.

“Light got away from the tourist camp before we reached him.” Schlitze was disgusted.

“While we were there looking for Light, some more of his friends showed up, and so we tried some post shooting. We did not do so well. I think they all got away.”

Renny was fooling with his gadget.

“What road did Light take?”

“We do not know. But there is only one road, and a path leading back through the jungle.”

“They go afoot?”

“Yes.”

“Then we will try the trail.”

Schlitze had called it a trail through the jungle, but it was more swamp than jungle.

RENNY held the black light projector in his hands, and mentally crossed his fingers.

If the thing did not work, if he had misunderstood Doc, if any one of a dozen things went wrong that could go wrong, it would not be good. Renny had no kind ideas about Schlitze, Satz and company. The only reason he and Johnny, Pat and Long Tom were being kept alive was because they could be useful. If they made no progress following Light, they would be killed. It was that simple.

But they had good luck. Renny pointed.

“See!”

It was about as dark on the swamp path as it could get, the moon having vanished.

In the black void, something was glowing faintly. A small, luminous spot.

“There it is.” Renny was triumphant.

“The trail will be marked by those.”

Satz picked up the object that was glowing. He examined it under the white beam of an ordinary flashlight.

“A peanut hull!” He was astonished.

Renny chuckled. “Our man was to eat the peanuts now and then, particularly when the trail reached a spot that might be difficult to follow. The peanuts have been coated with a chemical which causes them to fluoresce when exposed to black light.”

“What about following the trail in daylight? The bright sunlight will prevent us seeing the fluorescence. It would be like trying to see a lightning-bug in the daylight.”

“We will have to follow only at night.”

Schlitz grunted unpleasantly. He planted himself in front of Renny, and poked Renny's chest with a stiff forefinger. “What kind of a gag is this? Who left that peanut shell?”

“The peanut shell? Why, that was left by our pal, Rusty.” Renny hoped he sounded innocent.

“Rusty? Who is Rusty?”

“He is with Light.”

“But why is he leaving a trail?”

“Because that was the only way we could figure out of trailing Light.” Renny did his best to be convincing.

Schlitz was fooled, because he thought about it for a while and then he laughed. “You haven't told me all the truth, have you?”

“What do you mean, not told you all the truth?”

Schlitz jabbed Renny with the finger.

“You were planning to double-cross Light yourself.”

“Is there a law against that?” Renny asked.

Schlitz laughed. “Every man for himself, eh?”

“Looks that way.” Renny assumed a tone of obvious cunning. “How about you maybe paying us a little for this help you're getting from us?”

Schlitz laughed again. He said that he might do that, but sounded as if he were lying, and didn't care much whether Renny realized that he was lying.

Chapter IX. MOCCASINS DON'T RATTLE

DOC SAVAGE, by noon of the following day, had acquired a great deal of respect for the Seminole Indian—or Su, as he claimed he was—named Slow John. Slow John had been around civilization so long that he should have been physically soft, and should have lost much of his swamp lore. But fatigue was having no effect whatever on him.

And he obviously knew the swamp. Well enough so that he seemed to have a grunting acquaintance with every frog and alligator.

They were still using the boat with the outboard motor, but the motor was not propelling them. The way had become too tangled for the motor. Slow John was propelling the boat from the stern, sometimes sculling when the water was deep, the rest of the time poling the craft along.

"This is so damned slow!" Light complained.

"Can't we get out and strike across country afoot?"

Slow John did not answer that. But he watched the bank, and in a moment swung close to the shore and poked his oar into a grass tuft. With an angry whizzing, a diamondback rattlesnake slithered away. The snake was all of five feet long and as thick as the calf of Slow John's leg.

"Just a little one," Slow John said.

Light swore.

"Water moccasins here, too," Slow John added. "Moccasins don't rattle. They are very poisonous."

Light broke a long stick off a lowhanging bush. He fell to poking with this stick at fish in the water, making stabs as if the stick were a spear. He sharpened an end of the stick.

"Maybe I can get a fish for lunch."

Doc Savage said nothing. He had spoken as little as possible, and had pretended to doze whenever he could, so that he would have less chance of being recognized. But he watched Light trying to spike a fish, waiting for what was sure to happen.

It happened when Light tried for a barracuda.

The water was still saltily brackish, so there were barracuda. And a barracuda wasn't an ordinary fish. He was a tiger; he wasn't afraid of anything. This barracuda fought back the instant the sharp stick gouged him. He came out of the water completely, and got Light's forearm.

Light screamed. The idea of a fish biting him horrified and frightened him. He fought at the barracuda, which was not more than two feet long. He finally got it loose from his arm.

"Are they poison?" His face was white with terror.

Doc Savage glanced at Slow John then.

A little of the Indian's stoicism had slipped off his face. Doc saw that Slow John was slyly pleased, that he had been expecting this to happen, and had not warned Light of the danger. Slow John did not like Light.

THEY worked deeper into the swamp.

Doc Savage had flown over this section a number of times in the past, but one got no real idea of the nature of the swamp from the air.

The greater part of the Everglades was not the popular conception of a swamp. It was no tangled morass of trees and vines, exotic plants, quicksands and bottomless pools of slimy black mud. It was, from the air, more like a great grassy pasture with here and there clumps of woodland, a great pasture after a

heavy rain so that pools of water stood here and there. By far the greater part was a vast expanse of water grass, nothing else.

The peculiar nature of the Everglades was explained by the geology of the lower peninsula of Florida. There was a vast and almost flat surface of coral, and on this a little soil, and on that, the surface water. One could dig a few feet anywhere and find solid coral rock. A rise of half a dozen feet in the mean level of the surface water would have put thousands of square miles under, like a lake.

Not that it was like crossing a pasture.

The water kept it from being like that—the shallow lakes, the tidal mangrove creeks close to the coast, and the grass that was as tough as any grass that grew.

Doc Savage saw that Slow John was following a straight-line course, as nearly as he could. There were not many spots where the going was direct for more than a few yards. But the route as a whole was straight.

Doc ate peanuts sparingly, and discarded the hulls with care. First he would place the hulls carefully in a pocket, and later drop them, one at a time, flipping them whenever possible into the shadows under bushes, so that Renny with the black light gadget might possibly follow them by daylight.

(The brilliance of objects which fluoresce under black light, or under electronic bombardment, should not be underestimated. The popular conception of fluorescence is the “radium” glow from the hands of alarm clocks or watches, so faint that it can only be seen in darkness. Actually, the common fluorescent light, giving an illumination second in degrees Kelvin rating only to sunlight, is also a fluorescent effect.)

Most of the time, the bronze man spent puzzling over the nature of the place they were going. What was the land of the Su?

That there could be any extensive lost people in the Everglades was not likely. The place had been too thoroughly surveyed by air, and crossed by exploration parties.

But they were obviously going somewhere, and Slow John, Doc Savage had realized by now, was not an ordinary Seminole.

The Seminole had definite characteristics, and the language in particular was definitely their own. The language angle interested the bronze man. He wished he could speak to Slow John in the Seminole tongue, and watch the man's accent. Doc felt that he knew enough of the Seminole language to spot whether Slow John spoke it like a foreigner.

THEY came upon two Seminole families unexpectedly. The Seminoles, husband and wife, children and dogs, occupied two dugout canoes. They were sitting there stolidly, apparently doing nothing. But the men had old-fashioned lever-action rifles close at hand.

Slow John spoke to them in Seminole.

“These two do not speak nor understand this tongue.”

“Good,” one of the Seminoles said.

“Word of your coming has been passed to the Su.”

“And they say?”

“That you are their brother. That you shall proceed. That you will be heard in council.”

Doc Savage barely hid his astonishment.

Because the Seminole tongue wasn't Slow John's native language. It was so obvious!

Slow John spoke the Seminole language with a heavy accent, as clumsily as an immigrant from France would speak the English language. Slow John was not a Seminole.

One of the Seminoles lifted an arm.

“You are followed.”

Slow John showed no surprise. “By how many?”

“By two parties. White men. One group of white men follows the first group, which, in turn, follows you.”

“How do they follow me? I have left no trail.” Slow John was puzzled.

“They have a thing, a tube like a flashlight, which they point everywhere. And now and then the tube causes spots of fire to appear in the water or on the bank.”

Slow John considered this, plainly puzzled.

“I have known something was wrong, that something was amiss.” He shrugged.

“But we will take care of that.”

The Seminole spoke again. “The white man, the white doctor whom you serve, is with the second group of white men.”

Slow John did not quite conceal his excitement.

“Is he well? Has he been harmed?”

“He is not badly harmed. He seems to be ill.”

“See that he is not harmed,” said Slow John violently. “He is a fine man. My life is his life.”

“We will do our best.”

“The Su will be grateful.”

“When the Su are grateful, that is good.” The Seminole, for appearances sake, calmly baited a fishhook and dropped it in the water.

“I will go on now.” Slow John picked up his sculling oar.

They went on, leaving the two boatloads of innocent-looking Seminoles behind.

Light glanced back curiously, and asked, “Slow John, what were they doing?”

“Fishing,” Slow John said. “Just fishing.”

“They were Seminoles, weren't they?”

“Just Seminoles,” Slow John agreed.

And Slow John sculled slowly, tirelessly, sending the boat along twisting streams that hardly seemed to move, for all the water here was almost stationary water now. Slow John seemed to be thinking. Finally he looked at Doc Savage.

“You eat many peanuts,” he told Doc.

And Doc knew that Slow John had figured out how they were being followed. The knowledge did not cheer Doc particularly.

Slow John, the bronze man knew, was going to do something about it.

TRAVELING into the swamp became slow and laborious, a twisting and labyrinthine progress. More and more, they began to feel the nature of the swamp. It was all around them, the strangeness of it.

The water in the little lakes and waterways was dark now, as dark as strong tea, when one dipped it up in the palms of the hands. But in spite of its coloring, it had a remarkable clarity, so that fish could be seen on the bottom. The fish, the bass, the perch and the snappers, loitered near the passing boat, unafraid. The garfish, some of them two feet long and looking like pieces of round stove-wood lying in the water, were so thick that Light whistled in amazement.

The character of the swamp slowly changed. There were no more mangroves, for the mangroves grew only along the coast.

There were riotous flowers, flaming cannas, and the hyacinths that at times choked the streams through which they made their way.

Now they were in a seemingly endless savannah, a great plain of sawgrass broken by mounds furred thickly with palmettos and pines, and here and there a dense cypress swamp that was surrounded by a guarding growth of thorny bushes.

There were orchids and other air plants on the dead trees, completely cover them in many cases. Alligators slept on the banks, and when alarmed, got into the water with the alacrity of rabbits. Birds were everywhere.

Countless numbers of birds, herons and egrets standing in the shallow water, reed birds, woodpeckers, ground doves, sparrows, kites. And the ever-present buzzards sailing black and stiff-winged and, somehow, gruesome.

They stopped for lunch, cooking over an alcohol flame which made no smoke.

Light saw a turtle, a huge turtle that was loitering on a bit of dry land.

Light got to his feet. “I could use a turtle steak.” He proceeded to chase the turtle— and the turtle outran him, raced off and left him as if he were standing still. Light came back shamefaced. “What was that thing, a hard-shelled rabbit of some kind?”

Slow John shrugged. “Gopher turtle.

He can dig a hole faster than he can run, too.”

Light said nothing, but Doc knew the swamp was making the man uneasy. Slow John knew it, too. Slow John was deliberately sending the boat close to the most impressive tangles of cypress, and loitering past the biggest alligators, the largest snakes.

It was no sign that Light lacked nerve, the fact that the swamp was making him feel uncertain. The vastness of the place was unnerving. There was a monotonous sameness about it, coupled with a feeling of horror lurking around the next bend, beyond the next lake, even in the water underneath and the sky above. Doc had noticed that the buzzards were following them, and Light had seen it, too.

So it was not a surprise, or at least it was in keeping with the general air of a poised and nearing menace, when Slow John unexpectedly overturned the boat.

SLOW JOHN sent the boat over by jumping with all his weight on one rail. The craft spun instantly. Doc was hurled into the water, and Light as well. Slow John walked the turning boat, like a log-roller, kept atop it, and jumped well clear, as far as he could get from Doc and Light.

Doc Savage, glimpsing figures in the dark tea water that hadn't been there, shouldn't be there, was suddenly as alarmed as ever in his life. He thought they were big 'gators, or big man-eating barracuda. But they weren't. They were human figures.

The assailants had been poised in concealment on the bank. Their concealment must have been remarkably good, because Doc had noticed nothing suspicious, and he had been alert because he was expecting trouble. He could hear them diving into the water. They began to get hold of him.

He struggled with them. They were strong, but no stronger than other men. He tore loose from them. But when he got free of one, there were a half dozen others.

He tried to squeeze them out by staying underwater longer than they could. He was good at that, and he had plenty of air in his lungs when he went under. He was good, even struggling, for three or four minutes.

Without physical effort to use up oxygen, he could normally manage several minutes under water. But they thwarted him. They began replacing each other, one group going up for air while another held him below the surface.

There was no percentage in that sort of thing. He let them haul him to the top. They had caught him.

They had caught Light, too. They had him spread out on the bank. Light was cursing as a man searched him.

Doc Savage stared at the captors.

They were not what he expected. They were so different that he made, involuntarily, the strange small trilling sound which was his reaction to a moment of stress, physical or mental. The trilling was a gentle thing, but exotic, so exotic that it was like the sound of a wind in a naked forest.

He spent the next five minutes examining his captors.

Slow John came over to him, interested in Doc's coat-pocket contents. Slow John, when he had examined the few peanut hulls in Doc's pockets, grunted sharply.

"You ate many more peanuts than there are hulls. You have been dropping the hulls where they would do the most good."

Slow John rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "Fluorescence.

The hulls must be treated with chemicals, and they fluoresce under black light. The device the Seminole fishermen mentioned would be the black light projector."

Doc Savage said nothing.

Slow John poked him with a toe. "You are Doc Savage, are you not?"

Doc kept silent.

"I have known it some time. But I will make sure." Slow John gave some orders in a musical language which was one Doc Savage had never before heard. Evidently he was asking that Doc be held tightly, for that was what happened. Slow John examined the bronze man's dyed hair closely, investigated the swollen ear lobe, and found the mouthpieces which Doc had used to change the shape of his lower face. His last act was to forcibly, but not urgently, remove from Doc's eyes the small glass caps of the so-called invisible spectacle type, which were slightly tinted. Doc had used them to hide the distinctive flake gold coloring of his eyes.

"Doc Savage is right!" Slow John was triumphant.

Light looked at Doc. Light was pale and speechless.

Chapter X. THE SECRET WORLD

THE Su were not Caucasians. They were not blond Nordics. But neither were they heavily Asiatic in features, as the American Indian usually is, nor was there any trace of African blood. Many Seminoles had somewhat Negroid characteristics, due to the fact that Negro slaves had fled into the Everglades for hundreds of years, and had even at times tried to set up an independent nation in the swamp.

(Only one example of the Negro effort to establish an independent kingdom in Florida occurred near Apalachicola, Florida, soon after the War of 1812, when Negro renegades took over a fortress abandoned by the British. For many days a U.S. army force under General Gaines and Colonel Clinch besieged the fortress in vain, until one day a lucky American cannon ball hit the fort magazine, the explosion killing 275 of the defenders. After this, the fort was taken.)

One remarkable point was the light coloring of their skin. None of them, excepting Slow John, were tanned as darkly as Doc Savage himself. They had a rich golden coloring, but it was not dark. Slow John, on the other hand, was swarthy, although not as dark-skinned as the Seminoles native to the Everglades. Slow John being darker than the other Su was a puzzling point.

Doc Savage and Light were stripped of their clothing. The garments which they were given were somewhat unexpected—two pair of ordinary bathing trunks which Slow John had brought along in his pack.

"You had it well planned." Doc examined Slow John.

"I tried to." Slow John smiled.

The Su wore breechcloths of a dark green spotted with various shades of tan and buff and pale gray, and the cloths were voluminous, much more ample than necessary for mere breechcloths.

When Slow John raised his voice and called out sharply in the Su tongue, more Su appeared. They had been concealed in the neighborhood. And Doc saw why the breechcloths were of green color and spotted in that fashion. It was for camouflage purposes. A Su could wrap himself in his voluminous breechcloth, sit or lie on the ground, and blend almost indistinguishably with his surroundings.

The Su carried no firearms. But they weren't without a weapon.

The nature of their weapon was fully as amazing as anything about them. Slow John spoke in the Su language, and the Su went back into the swamp, a few at a time, and returned with their hunting birds, each of which wore a small golden bell.

They carried the birds on their wrists, as falcons are carried. The birds weren't falcons, but a species of small hawk. They were not large enough, as birds, to put up a serious fight, so that Doc Savage was for a time puzzled about just how the hunting birds were used.

The birds were not hooded, the way falcons are hooded when not hunting. Their beaks were trimmed so that they could not rend or tear seriously, and in addition, the beaks of the birds had been linked with small chains, apparently of gold in some cases, silver in others, so that the birds could not readily grab, for example, a finger.

The toes of the birds were capped with metal, and it was there, Doc Savage realized, that the secret of their effectiveness lay. Because the metal caps were coated with a sticky substance that evidently was a poison.

The feet of the birds were kept confined in small leather boots. Doc saw the toe caps only when a Su removed a boot to examine the toe capping on his bird.

Doc caught Slow John's eye and nodded at the birds. "Poison?"

"Not exactly," Slow John shook his head. "But quite effective, none the less. The small bells warn when one is about."

THEY moved into the swamp. Doc Savage and Light were not tied or confined in any way, which somehow was more threatening than cheering. The tiny bells on the hawks tinkled.

After about a hundred yards, they took to dugout canoes, and pushed on through the waste of sawgrass and salt water. Two hours of this brought them toward a cypress hummock.

These cypress hummocks were the peculiarity of the Everglades. They stood like islands, thickly furred with cypress growth, rather dark and strange against the light tan vastness of the sawgrass marshes.

The Su stopped. Slow John was in charge, and he spoke quietly. Doc, trying to get the tongue, failed to understand much of it—and then he felt a surge of surprise. For this language was not Seminole in its root, or any known south Florida Indian dialect in root.

It was Yucatan basic, as near as he could tell, but not Mayan. Doc spoke Mayan, even the ancient language of the Maya that is now supposed to be prehistoric, and this was not the same root. But there had been a people, pre-Mayan, in Yucatan, a people about whom geologists and archaeologists had been able to learn little. Certain traces of the original root language of these people remained in Yucatan and other Central and South American countries. This was similar.

Doc caught Slow John's eye. "You people are not Seminole stock."

"We were here many centuries before the Seminoles." Slow John spread his hands.

"Before any Indian, for that matter. As you know, the Seminoles are not a race, but a conglomeration of many Indian tribes, members of which fled into the Everglades in the past. We are a race." Slow John touched his chest. "We are of one people, five thousand years. We are older than your Christianity and your Egyptian pyramids, Mr. Savage."

Doc Savage looked sharply at the mound. It was amazing, but it could be possible.

It was well known that there were traces of a mysterious ancient race in interior Florida.

(Little is known of the history of Florida aborigines, because early Spanish Conquistador reports were unreliable. The early Spaniards, Ponce de Leon and the others, were notorious liars sometimes. It is known that the Creeks, Alabamas, Yamassees and Athabaskan tribes were recent arrivals—and that long before them there dwelled in Florida a people with a distinct culture. On the mounds in the Everglades, far from the sea, quantities of seashells have been found, and pottery and relics of an ancient culture different entirely from any known tribe.

There is another puzzling fact—the dumfounding resemblance of the tribal dress of the present-day Seminole to the dress of the ancient Incas in Peru. The Incas are agreed to have had a civilization in some respects excelling that of old Egypt. Mummies from the graves of Peru have been disinterred wearing costumes which resemble so closely the garb of the present-day Seminole that they might have come from a Seminole village today. Similarity exists in the skirts, the beading around the Seminole women's necks—even the colors and patterns of the woven cloth resemble that of ancient Peru.

And the Seminoles are a very reticent, secretive people. Almost nothing is known of their past. As a matter of fact, they are a people who have never accepted American rule, are technically still at war with the United States.

As history students know, a force of not more than a thousand Seminole repeatedly trounced a total of 18,000 American soldiers during the heat of the Seminole campaigns.)

Slow John turned away. And they released one of the small hawklike birds, which proved to be trained as a message carrier. It winged away, heading toward the mound.

And later, twenty minutes or so afterward, a clear bell-like horn note sounded from the hummock.

Slow John gestured. “We may enter now. “

THE mound was a phony. Doc had guessed that. The mound was exactly what a person who did not know the least thing about mound-excavating would expect to find if they investigated a mound inhabited by so-called mound builders.

These people weren't mound builders, and they hadn't built the mound. The mound, of coral and naturally formed, had been there in the beginning. They had simply excavated the thing. It had long tunnels and impressive, if not vast, rooms.

The mound was reached by water. Apparently no man set foot on shore in the neighborhood, or was permitted to do so. At least there was absolutely no outward sign of human life.

Not that there wasn't air and ventilation in the labyrinthine passages of the mound.

There was. Light came through large ceiling apertures which were framed with the jungle growth which covered the hummock.

The Su men marched Doc forward through various rooms, and they began climbing a long flight of stairs. The Su women and girls, numbers of whom appeared to watch, were not hard on the eyes.

Light turned to Doc Savage, and overcame his awe of the bronze man enough to say, “Isn't this the damndest thing?”

“The whole existence of the Seminoles,” Doc agreed, “has been somewhat fantastic.”

“You think all the Seminoles know about this place?”

“Doubtful.”

“Maybe it's their headquarters, their capitol, or something.”

Slow John turned around and answered that. “We are friends with the Seminole.

We were here long before the Seminole came. They are here because we allowed them to come, and advised them how to live to remain as they wanted to remain— masters of their own freedom.”

They were placed in a wide, pleasant room. They waited there for hours, guarded by the Su. The sun came up, and the light was reflected down through a wide leafy opening in the ceiling.

They could hear and occasionally see the swamp birds, the herons, the huge blue herons and the green ones, the bitterns, the white ibis with coral-colored legs and beaks, the grebes and the snake birds. They could hear the Su moving about their daily tasks.

Light tried talking to the Su. They did not answer. He threatened them, cursed them, told them what dire things the United States government would do to them if they didn't let him go. In the midst of the direct threats, one of the Su laughed heartily. After that, Light was pale and silent. He was scared.

Doc Savage was silent and thoughtful.

His pack had not been touched by Slow John.

It lay in a corner of the room, and in it was a small radio transmitter of the type which put out a signal that was easy picking for a direction- finder. The outfit, when switched on, would send a signal automatically at regular intervals. His two aides, Monk and Ham, would have their receiver tuned to the frequency of the set.

(Direction-finding by radio is, of course, almost as old as radio, and use of it has appeared fictionally in Doc Savage magazine many times. But the use of fixed-signal transmitters which can be attached to a vehicle, dropped from a plane by parachute, or placed by other means, so that they can be located by a loop finder, probably appeared first fictionally in Doc Savage magazine. And here again, Doc Savage used a device which has since been developed and employed and hailed as something totally new. In this case, it is no longer a secret that both the army and navy—American, and unfortunately also the Japanese and Germans —are dropping such small transmitters in the hills or jungles near an objective which they wish to bomb. A single plane, a pursuit ship flying in daylight, drops the fixed-signal transmitter. Then the bombers come over in the safety of darkness and fog, find the target by direction-locating the radio signal, and unload, using a method Doc Savage pioneered as far back as 1933.)

If he could switch on the radio and keep it operating, it would be the same as summoning Monk and Ham.

Doc got to his feet suddenly, made a dive for a Su, and upset the fellow with a blow. Instantly, there was a fight.

It was not a long fight, but it was violent, and shifted rapidly. At no time did Doc seem to have a chance of doing what he seemed to be trying to do—escape. They kept him hemmed off from the doorway. The bronze man, apparently trying to reach the door, worked around the wall.

He kicked the pack. Kicked it in the particular spot he wanted to kick. The impact, he knew, had switched on the little fixed-signal radio transmitter. That was what he had been trying to accomplish.

He let them overpower him.

Slow John rushed into the room. He was indignant. "You abuse our hospitality."

"We did not ask for the hospitality."

Doc's voice was sour. He kept struggling, working away from the pack, avoiding suspicion.

He hoped Monk and Ham would have the forethought to get a cross-bearing on the fixed-signal transmitter—hoped they would plot the two bearings on their chart so that where the X of the lines crossed, the hummock in the Everglades would be located.

Slow John beckoned. "Bring them along."

THEY were led through passages, down steps, and out into another room, and from there to a platform against which dark water lapped.

On the platform, four men were making a dugout canoe. They were working lazily, and they seemed in good humor. One was a Negro, the other three were white, one about forty and the others older. They wore the same dark green spotted garments as the Su.

But none of the four could walk freely.

They could get to their feet, and move about if they used care. But they could not walk easily, and certainly they could not run.

Doc was a surgeon, so he saw immediately what had been done to them. Their heel tendons had been cut, and care taken that the operations made their legs rather useless.

"This is unfortunate." Slow John indicated the four. "But I wanted to show you. Do you care to talk to them?"

Doc did care to talk to them. "Do you speak English?"

"Hell, yes. Why shouldn't I?" One of the boat builders grinned at him. "So they caught you, too?"

Doc nodded. "Yes, they caught me. "

"That's bad." The mutilated man sighed.

"Well, maybe not too bad. It's hell for a few weeks, then you sort of get used to it. And then it's pretty good. They even let you get married." He made a clucking sound of appreciation.

"You should see these Su gals."

"How long have you been here?"

"Lost track. About ten years, I figure."

"You stumble on the place by accident?"

The man shook his head. "I didn't stumble. I found out about the place. Heard there was a big treasure in here, and me and another guy fought like hell to get in. We used to run rum in from Cuba, and we had a couple of machine guns. We figured we could lick all the Indians in this or any other swamp." He chuckled. "We didn't quite get the job done. "

“They mutilated you,” Doc asked, “so you could not escape?”

“That's the idea.”

Slow John, looking somewhat embarrassed, said, “The fellow killed five of our best Su men before we caught him. Don't you think we had reason to execute him? But we didn't.”

“What about his companion?”

“Killed in the fight.”

“And this man has been a prisoner for ten years?”

“That is nothing.” Slow John indicated another white man, the oldest one. “He has been here nearly thirty years.”

The elderly white man grinned at them.

“I don't mind. You won't either. It's not bad.”

Slow John beckoned. Doc and Light were conducted back through the passages cut in the coral.

Doc asked, “You are going to cut our leg tendons so we cannot escape?”

“Yes.” Slow John looked at him thoughtfully. “I suppose we shall do it immediately. I do not see any reason for delaying, do you?”

Doc Savage thought of the radio fixed-signal transmitter, and of Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks, and he could think of plenty of reason for delay.

Chapter XI. BAD ENDS

MONK MAYFAIR and Ham Brooks ran for their plane. They had been down on the Key West highway bridge fishing again when the fixed-signal note from Doc's transmitter began coming in over their radio.

Monk threw his hook and line into the water. He grabbed up the portable radio.

“That's Doc's signal for us to come in!”

Ham stopped to coil up his fishing outfit, which was more elaborate than Monk's. Then they ran for the plane.

Ham worked with the radio direction finder while Monk started the motor and got the plane in the air. The directional outfit was sensitive. Ham spread out a chart under the gadget and squared the chart compass rose up with true north. He ruled in a bearing line.

“Monk, fly west for about ten minutes, and I'll take another reading. That will give us a cross-bearing fix in case anything should happen to Doc's transmitter.”

Monk muttered, “Keep your knotheaded suggestion to yourself. I know how to do it.”

Ham scowled. “You want to know something?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, perhaps some day you will.”

Monk blinked. “Sort of going in for kindergarten humor, aren't you? Are all of your jokes that dumb?”

“Why, no,” Ham told him smugly. “I just adapt myself to the company.”

Monk, seeing that he had been sucked in, went into details about Ham's ancestry.

He assured Ham that all his forebears had been pig-eaters, which was a crowning insult.

Ham didn't like pork or pigs in any form. It was this dislike which had earned him the nickname of Ham.

Their violent quarrel, which was quite typical, meant that they were back to normal again. The waiting for something to happen had been flaying their nerves.

“Boy, I hope we see some action.”

Monk rubbed his hands in anticipation.

Ham headed the plane out over the swamp. He looked down at the vastness of the Everglades. “We'll soon know what goes on.”

THE fat German lumberman from Savannah, Schlitze, had reached the spot where Doc Savage and Light had been seized by the Su. Schlitze's party was intact, but not in good spirits. They were bedraggled and hot, plagued by insects, and filled with respect for the numberless rattlesnakes and moccasins they had seen.

The prisoners—Renny Renwick, Patricia Savage, Long Tom Roberts and Johnny Littlejohn—were not in good spirits either. They had been amiable enough up until a moment ago, when the party had come upon unmistakable signs that Doc Savage and Light had met trouble.

The metal boat used by Doc's party was half submerged in the water.

Satz and Schlitze got ashore and examined footprints on the bank.

“They were attacked.” Schlitze indicated the tracks in the mud. “Apparently Indians got them. You can see signs of quite a fight.”

Satz took Renny's black light projector and prowled up and down the stream and over the vicinity. He found no more of the chemically treated peanut hulls which they had been following.

Satz went back to Renny. “What happened?”

“Holy cow! Your guess is as good as mine!” Renny was so disturbed that he used his normal voice, and also the exclamation, which was his pet.

Schlitze heard, and he jumped violently.

“What was that you said? 'Holy cow!'”

Schlitze came over and stared intently at Renny, then at Johnny and the others. “*Ach, das ist zu arg!*” He spoke his mother tongue in his astonishment and horror.

Satz was alarmed. “What is it?”

Schlitze backed away. He poked a hand at Renny. “These prisoners—we have made one hell of a

mistake!”

“Mistake?”

“They aren't men hired by Light!”

Schlitz's voice was a little hysterical now.

“They are assistants of a man called Doc Savage!”

Satz blinked dumbly. “The one they call the Man of Bronze, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“But how—”

“I don't know how.” Schlitz whipped out a gun. “They have been deceiving us.”

He cocked his revolver. “The thing to do is execute them immediately.”

A parade of emotions went over Satz's face. He wanted to give some advice. But a little Nazi didn't give a big Nazi advice freely, it appeared. Satz took a chance.

“I have an idea, Herr Schlitz,” Satz said.

“Idea?” Schlitz scowled, turning his head, the gun still cocked.

Satz beckoned. “For your ear only.”

The two men moved apart from the others, and Satz whispered to Schlitz. The whispering went on for some time. Satz took a small wooden box with a sliding cover from a pocket, and showed it to Schlitz.

Schlitz was impressed.

“*Ja*,” he said. “That is worth trying, and it is as good as shooting.”

BUT they did not get to try the trick then. Because there was a shot, a single shot, the bullet ripping overhead. And out of the surrounding sawgrass and low bushes came men with rifles. White men. It was Snuffy Gonner and his gang.

“Let's see some arms go up!” Gonner called.

No arms went up. He should have known that he was up against fighting men.

But Gonner was elated, and hadn't stopped to think, or possibly he had underestimated his enemy.

Schlitz snarled, flopped down in the mud, and his gun banged. Other guns exploded then. The reports went whanging across the sawgrass marshes and frightened up clouds of birds, and the noises the birds had been making were stilled. There was only the noise of the men fighting. But that was ample.

None of the bullets were doing much damage. The sawgrass was too thick, hiding them from each other.

Then the birds came. There were four of them, birds that looked like small hawks.

They came in swiftly, unafraid of the gunfire.

Exactly as if they were hunting rabbits, the little hawks set their wings and dived. Their bells had been removed.

The first man to be hit merely screamed. But the second one fought the hawk, and he was lucky enough to knock it down with a rifle barrel. He saw the metallic talon equipment on the bird. What was probably more fortunate for all of them, the man had the presence of mind to instantly realize what was happening.

“Hey, listen!” His terrified howl carried over the fighting, and quieted it. “These damned birds! They've got poisoned toes!

The Indians must be settin' 'em on us!”

Then another man called out. “I saw two Indians a while ago. Strange guys in green sarongs.”

Another of the hawks appeared. One of the men shot it with a shotgun, making a good wing shot.

“Schlitze!” Gonner's voice was anxious.

“Can you hear me?”

“What do you want?” Schlitze was suspicious.

“It looks like we're in a spot. There may be a lot of these Indians. Maybe we had better get together, make some kind of a deal.

Fighting each other, and the Indians, too, we may not get along so good.”

“Who are you?”

“Name is Gonner. Light hired me, and these men with me.”

“How do you know me?” Schlitze asked.

“Light told me he had made a deal to sell to you. So I figure you tried to doublecross him to save some money.”

“You will naturally suspect me of double- crossing you the first chance I get.”

“Naturally,” Gonner said agreeably.

“We can settle that ourselves. It's better than having the Indians settle us.”

Schlitze thought that over. It had undesirable angles, but also desirable ones. The Indians had him scared. The idea of trained hawks, if that was what they were, with poisonous claws terrified him. He could hear one of his men who had been struck by a hawk, and the man was moaning in agony, crying out that he was dying.

Schlitze lifted his voice. “I think we are close to wherever we are going.”

“I think so, too.” Gonner sounded confident.

“

All right,” Schlitze agreed. “We will try some kind of co-operative scheme.”

THE two gangs took a little time to get together, behaving like strange roosters meeting for the first time.

When two more hawks appeared, and were shot out of the air by the man with the shotgun, it did a great deal to melt the two groups together.

Snuffy Gonner looked over Renny, Long Tom, Johnny, and Patricia Savage.

“Kind of persistent, ain't you?”

Johnny said, “An ultraunchivalric runagate.”

“I guess I am, at that.” Gonner chuckled.

“Whatever you said.”

Gonner went over and goaded Dr. Wilson with the toe of his shoe. “So you're still with us, too?”

“Snuffy, something tells me you do not have long to live,” Dr. Wilson said maliciously.

“Will you pardon me if I don't burst into tears at the idea.”

“Well, well, for an old sawbones from Logantown, you talk pretty rough.” Gonner kicked him.

Then Gonner drew a gun, and turned to Schlitze. “Schlitz, no sense in keeping these guys around. They're liable to bust loose when we ain't expecting it, and give us trouble.”

Schlitz nodded vehemently. He was relieved. “Yes. Yes, we thought of that before you attacked.”

Gonner looked at his gun. “What are we waiting on?”

“An idea.” Schlitz turned and called.

“Satz, come here. Show this man your poison.”

Satz came over. He had his small wooden box with the sliding cover. There were two vials inside, and the vials contained liquid that looked like molasses.

“What is the stuff?” Gonner pointed at the glass vials.

“Poison,” Schlitz said. “Poison. It will kill slowly, taking four or five hours. But it will kill them absolutely and surely, and with great agony.”

“That's slow.”

“Yes, slow.”

“What's the sense of it?”

“In their agony, they may talk some truth,” Schlitz said.

Gonner rubbed his jaw slowly. “You might have something there. It might be worth it. They may know what we want to know.”

“It is all right with you if we poison them instead of shooting them?”

“Sure.”

Schlitz called to his men. They came, some of them, and laid hold of Renny, Long Tom, Johnny and Pat.

They fed them killing doses of the poison. They poisoned Dr. Wilson, too.

The men had four shotguns, and they had kept alert with these, watching for hawks.

Now and then they shot a harmless swamp bird by mistake, thinking it was a hawk.

The poison soon took hold of the prisoners, and they writhed in agony.

Chapter XII. STAGE FOR DEATH

DOC SAVAGE and Light had been hearing sounds of shooting in the distance.

But they had no idea what the reason was for the shooting. They were under guard in a small room which was gloomy and somewhat damp, and they were being told nothing, for Slow John had disappeared.

But now Slow John came back. The Su scowled at Light. "I would not want to be in your shoes. All of this can be laid at your door."

Light tried to look innocent and misunderstood.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"You will regret that afternoon in Logantown when you learned the secret of the Su." Slow John eyed the man malevolently.

"You will not regret it forever, because you probably will not live forever, or even more than a few hours."

Light's alarm made him speechless.

At Slow John's orders, several Su took Doc Savage out, leaving Light behind. In a long corridor which apparently led outside, Slow John confronted Doc.

"There has been much misunderstanding."

Slow John sounded regretful, but not apologetic. "I was convinced you were an enemy."

Doc said nothing.

Slow John said, "The day this began, back there in Logantown, Dr. Wilson tried to get you on the telephone in New York, and was very agitated when he failed to do so.

He was so concerned that it seemed to me you had let him down, or that you might be making trouble for him."

"I simply was not in the city when he called." Doc's voice was quiet.

The Su nodded. "I see now it was something like that."

There were two shotgun shots, far away. The close spacing of the reports indicated a double-barreled gun and an excitedly nervous gunner.

Doc glanced at Slow John. "What is that?"

"Here is what has happened: Two groups of men, one headed by a man named Schlitze and the other by

a rascal from Logantown named Gonner, have stopped fighting each other and have joined together in one hand to fight us. They have as prisoners my benefactor, Dr. Wilson, and three of your aides, including a young woman whom I believe to be your cousin, Patricia Savage. These latter have been poisoned.”

“Poisoned!”

Slow John nodded. “One of the Su, who understands the English language, was concealed very close and heard and saw the act of poisoning. It is a slow poison. It will not kill them for four or five hours, but it will do it horribly.”

Doc Savage's voice was changed when he spoke. There was a power in it, a quiet capacity and an intention to get something done.

“It will be necessary to do something about this,” he said.

Slow John eyed him. “I've had a hunch about you.”

“Yes?”

“The hunch says you've been coasting. That you just came along and acted meek so you could find out what was at the end of the trail. But from now on, you are in earnest.”

Doc Savage made no comment. But it was close to the truth.

A young Su arrived, breathless, and spoke rapidly in the native language. Slow John listened gravely, then turned to Doc Savage.

“A plane is coming.”

THEY went outside, standing on a coral platform which could be cleverly concealed with branches. The boughs and vines now were swung back, so that the space was open to the sunlight.

At first Doc Savage heard no plane noise. Then, in the infinite distance, the motor drumming came into existence, and approached.

The bronze man was puzzled. “How did you know a plane was coming?”

“We have a system of heliograph signaling —flashes of sunlight transmitted by mirrors.” Slow John gave a gesture that took in most of the horizon. “At times like these, when there is danger, we have the country covered for many miles in all directions. The signaling system is almost as quick as radio on a sunny day, and most days here are sunny.”

The plane came up fast, flying high enough so that rifle bullets could not reach it easily. It was Monk and Ham, of course.

Slow John gaped at the ship, astonished at the fact that it was heading straight for the hummock.

“How did they find us?” Then the Su wheeled and pointed an accusing arm at Doc.

“Your pack! It must be a radio in your pack!”

He shouted at other of the Su. Evidently he had ordered them to bring Doc's packsack, because they came with it.

Slow John dug into the pack while the plane was circling warily overhead. He brought out the containers of dehydrated rations and the serums and emergency equipment.

There was nothing that looked suspicious.

"I looked through the pack once," Slow John said. "I must have been fooled. I'll have to open the cans." He produced a knife.

Doc said, "No need of ruining the food and the radio, too. It is in this container." He indicated a can which outwardly resembled a can of tinned beef ration.

Slow John sighed. He looked up at the plane. "The other two of your assistants?"

"Yes."

Slow John frowned at Doc Savage.

"You will signal them, directing them to land."

Doc Savage looked sharply at the other man's face, noting that it was grim.

"You are going to seize them?"

"Of course."

"And then?"

"And then you and they will be held here." Slow John looked at the bronze man's feet. "You will be operated upon, I am sorry to say, and kept here."

"What about my assistants?"

"Unfortunately, they have been poisoned, and will have met death before we can overpower Schlitze and Gonner and their men and rescue them."

Doc Savage shook his head. "That is impossible. Suppose we make a deal."

"What kind of a deal?"

"Suppose we"—Doc indicated the plane above, and himself—"take Schlitze and the others off your hands. Suppose we overcome them."

"In that case," Slow John said, "I imagine we would release you."

"You would have to do more than that. My aides have been poisoned."

Slow John jumped. He looked at the bronze man strangely.

"So you know what is behind this affair?" Slow John said.

"I have a good idea," Doc admitted. "Is it as effective as the newspaper item said it was?"

"Even more."

DOC SAVAGE now waved at the plane again. "Bring me one of the heliographing mirrors you use for signaling. I have to get in touch with Monk and Ham."

The mirror was simply a heliographing gadget of a commercial type which had been on the market twenty or thirty years before, and sometimes used by the army for signaling purposes. It had a shutter device for flashing dots and dashes, and a set of sights for aiming the beam.

Doc signaled to the plane above. The ship waggled its wings to show that the signal had been caught. After that, Doc worked the shutter rapidly.

Slow John crowded around in front of the mirror, watching the shutter, trying to spell out the message. Evidently he knew the continental Morse code. "You are not using English!"

"Code of our own." Doc kept on signaling.

As a matter of fact, he was using a phonetic spelling of the Mayan tongue, and giving extended instructions.

He finished, and the plane wobbled again, indicating the message received.

"Now," Doc said. "We are ready to go ahead on our trade."

Slow John shook his head. "Wait! Wait!"

For such a thing, it will be necessary to call a council of the Su. No one chief of us could make such a deal with you."

"There is no time."

"But—"

Doc Savage wheeled swiftly, ran half a dozen yards, and took an arching dive into the nearest creek. The creek was more like a canal, deep, and the water was dark enough to hide him as long as he kept under the bank shadows. He swam rapidly, came to the surface, and looked back.

Slow John was yelling. The Su were fanning out along the creek, fighting the marsh growth. They had fish spears, and now they began hurling these at the bronze man. Slow John howled indignantly at the spearmen, evidently ordering them not to use the spears. But they were excited.

Doc Savage took several deep pumping breaths to charge his lungs with oxygen, then dived. He reversed his direction. And he swam as far as he could with the air in his lungs, keeping on the bottom of the creek.

When he came up, it was very slowly, and close to the bank. He got more air without being discovered, swam underwater again, and turned up a side creek.

The side creek led to a wide marsh lake. Monk and Ham landed on the lake, and Doc Savage reached them. It took about fifteen minutes until he got in the plane.

Doc said, "Monk, do you have your portable chemical laboratory along?"

"Sure."

"Open it up," Doc said, "and let's get busy."

WHILE Doc and Monk worked with the chemicals, Ham sent the plane toward the spot where Schlitz and Gonner were camped.

Schlitz and Gonner, it was obvious, had decided that it was too late in the day to try an assault on the hummock. They had no stomach for a fight over strange ground in the darkness, which was wise on their part.

They had dug in, making slit trenches and barricades of coral blocks, and were safe enough. The spot they had selected was a wide one, clear of undergrowth. They had set fire to the rank sawgrass, since it was dry enough to burn. The fire had died out, although there was still some smoke.

There were a few rapping sounds as bullets hit the plane. Ham banked away.

"They're pretty good shots," he said. He used a pair of binoculars. Then he turned to watch Doc and Monk. "You are making some gas?"

"Yes," Monk told him. "Some tear gas."

Ham looked discouraged. "I hate to give you bad news, but most of those guys down there have gas masks. It looks like they brought along poison gas themselves, which they intended to use on the Su."

Monk and Doc did not seem disappointed.

"We got another scheme, too," Monk told him. "We're resourceful."

The concocting of the gas and another chemical mixture, the nature of which puzzled Ham, progressed rather slowly.

In the west, the sun went lower. It stood about an eighth above meridian, which meant that not more than two hours of serviceable daylight remained.

Ham pointed. "The Su. A gang of them have left the mound and are heading for the enemy. But they won't stand a chance against those machine guns, and the poison gas."

Monk said, "Keep your shirt on. We're about ready."

Later, Doc Savage came forward.

"Ham, fly low, as low as you can, over the camp. But not too fast. Give us a smoke bomb first so we can check wind direction. Then another trip so we can dump the gas. Then a third trip, about four minutes later, so we can dump this other stuff. Then we will land and try our luck."

Ham nodded. "I hope this cabin armor will turn anything they heave at us."

"It will. They only have rifles and light machine guns."

"Now?"

"Now."

HAM sent the plane in low, dragging the sawgrass and the bushes. That was so that Schlitz and Gonner and their men could not see them until they were close in. They put down the smoke grenade.

"Wind southeast," Ham said. "But that smoke will start them thinking about gas. And they'll put on their masks."

Monk laughed. "Imagine their surprise."

“You sound crazy to me,” Ham said.

“Or at least, a little more nuts than usual.”

Doc directed, “Make the gas run.”

The tear gas was in liquid form, in small containers which were fused. They were regulation tear gas bombs, as a matter of fact, which were part of the regular equipment in the plane.

During the moment when the plane whipped over the camp, Doc and Monk were frantically busy kicking out tear gas. They had no time to watch the results.

“You didn't do bad,” Ham told them. He used the binoculars again. “But like I said, they've got masks.”

“See any sign of Renny, Long Tom, Pat and Dr. Wilson?” Monk sounded anxious.

“They're there.”

“Alive?”

“I can't tell.”

“Now make another run. “

“Sure.”

Ham handled the controls of the plane, and he was puzzled about what they were going to drop this time. They had let go the gas. And the men below had gas masks, so the gas wouldn't do any good. What were they going to drop this time?

Watching Doc and Monk roll the containers over the side—the things they were dropping looked like sacks crudely made of cloth and fitted with fuses—Ham did not know any more than he had known before.

But when the sacks hit the earth, they burned violently, and there was a great deal of smoke. There was an incredible amount of smoke, intensely black. The sacks had hit directly in the middle of the camp. The smoke covered everything.

“Land,” Doc said.

Ham brought the plane down. The landing job made his hair stand on end, but he did it. The creek was narrow, and the wind was quartering, what wind there was, although there was not much. But he got on the water with the ship, and the landing would have been a complete success. Except, after the ship had almost stopped, the wind shoved it over into the bank, where it crashed into the bushes and stopped. But it was not damaged much.

They were not far from the camp occupied by Schlitze and Gonner.

“Out,” Doc said. “Rush them.” The bronze man was putting on a gas mask.

They scrambled out on the bank.

“Wait,” Doc said. “Here, coat the windows in your masks with this stuff.”

The stuff he meant was a liquid, thick and clear, like glycerin. He smeared it on the windows of the small

gas masks. It hampered vision somewhat.

“Take them in a hurry.” Doc ran forward.

“We will not have much time.”

HAM had thought that they were going to make an assault while the enemy was blinded by the black cloud from the burning chemicals which they had dropped. He couldn't see where it could be anything else, but it did not make sense. It was too dangerous, because they would be handicapped the same as the enemy. Doc did not usually take such chances.

They came to the smoke, and plunged into it. The stuff had thinned now. Thinned, and the wind had blown some of it away.

Ham, seeing Schlitze himself stumbling around in the open, in plain sight, with a rifle, felt his stomach muscles tighten. They were outnumbered. Only three of them. Against— with Gonner's gang and Schlitze's crew—at least sixteen of the enemy.

But Schlitze was black! He was incredibly black, coated with a substance like thin tar. Ham had mistaken the blackness at first for the effect of the smoke, perhaps its shadow, but now he saw he was mistaken.

That second chemical Doc and Monk had dropped, the stuff that had burned, had deposited a coating of tarry black substance over everything which the smoke cloud covered.

Ham had been into the smoke. He looked at his own hands through the gas mask windows. They were black. The blackness was all over himself.

“Jove!” Ham gasped.

He saw it now. He understood fully. It was so simple that it astonished him.

The tarry stuff hadn't covered the windows of his gas mask. That was the trick to it.

The stuff which Doc had smeared on the windows, the liquid that looked like glycerin, had kept the smoke from depositing the blackness on the glass. But the black stuff was on the gas mask windows of the enemy.

Schlitze, Gonner, their men, were as blind as tree stumps. They couldn't take off their gas masks, because the gas was still present. With the masks on, they couldn't see a thing, because the smoke had deposited the black film over the mask windows.

Ham walked over to Schlitze. He picked a good soft-looking part of the man's anatomy, and kicked him. Ham kicked Schlitze the way he would have kicked Schicklegruber. Schlitze upset and howled.

Ham angled around, and knocked him out, using a chunk of coral to save bruising his fist.

He could hear plenty of shouting. Monk and Doc Savage, following the edge of the smoke cloud as it blew away, waded in and attacked the exposed and blinded enemy.

The shouting, of course, meant that gas masks had been snatched off victims.

This, Ham thought, handicaps Monk. Monk likes to whoop and howl when he is fighting.

The enemy began to use their guns. They simply laid down a barrage, shooting in every direction.

Doc Savage went flat in the sawgrass, and for a moment Ham thought he'd been hit. But Doc was getting down until the shooting mania passed.

A voice—it was Gonner's—bellowed out in horror. He had been wounded. With his mask off, he screamed for the shooting to stop. And he got it halted.

Doc, Monk and Ham went to work again. The blows which Doc struck were light, carefully calculated, did no damage to his hands. Monk was smacking jaws with fine abandon, but obviously hampered by his inability, because of the gas mask, to yell. Ham found a short club.

Seventeen men, Ham discovered, were a lot of men when you began knocking them unconscious, and had to run some of them down in the sawgrass before you did the job. And it was irritating to discover that a man you thought you had dispatched was on his feet again.

Finally it was over.

MONK dashed into the wind, stopped when he thought he was out of the gas, and took off his mask.

Then Monk just yelled. He let go two or three of his best howls. Not words. Just roaring pleasure.

“Now I feel better,” he said.

“You knobhead!” Ham shouted at him.

“Come help us move Renny and the others!”

Doc Savage was examining Renny, Long Tom, Johnny, Pat and Dr. Wilson.

“Long Tom has a bullet through the leg, one of those random shots they fired. “ Doc lifted his head. “But all of them have been poisoned.”

“Are they—”

“In another two or three hours, every one of them will be dead,” Doc said. “Unless there is a miracle and—”

Monk raised a shout. It was excited.

“Here come those Su!” he yelled. “Boy, there's a hatful of them!”

Ham groaned. “Maybe we can get Renny and the others to the plane.”

But he doubted that there was time for that. The Su were very close.

“No, “ Doc Savage said.

“But—”

“We will talk to the Su,” Doc said. “Ham, you get in the plane. Take off. Stay in the air until we signal you to land.”

Ham ran to the wide mangrove creek.

Then he realized that the plane was jammed into the bank, and that he could not get it off unhindered.

“Doc!” Ham yelled the information.

The bronze man, with Monk, came running. The Su were close enough now to yell angrily. Furiously, Doc and Monk and Ham sought to free the plane from the bank.

They got it loose, shoved it out into the water.

Ham climbed aboard.

The plane engine started, and Ham taxied away, then took the ship on step and into the air.

He looked back, and circled, wondering what good he could do up there.

Chapter XIII. SWAMP MAGIC

DOC SAVAGE stood before Slow John.

The Su were all around them, their faces expressionless.

“Tie up the prisoners,” Doc said.

“Schlitze and his men. Gonner. The rest of them.”

Slow John hesitated, then translated the order into the Su language. “You are a prisoner also, Mr. Savage.”

Doc glanced up at the circling plane.

“We are going to make that deal,” he said.

Slow John eyed the plane also. He was uncomfortable. “What can one plane do to help you?”

Doc ignored that. “Come here.” He led the way to Pat and the others. “These are my aides. They have been poisoned. Will your medicine cure them?”

Slow John pretended a profound ignorance.

“Medicine?” he said. “I do not know what you are talking about.”

Doc said, “The poison was an acid. It destroys by damaging body tissues, by an action similar to a common burn. It is slow. I can, and will immediately, give an antidote which will stop the action of the acid. But nothing I can give them will cure, with certainty, the damage already done. And that is, I am sure, enough to kill them.”

The bronze man looked at Slow John steadily.

“You will have to cure them,” he added.

Slow John indicated the plane. “And the plane?”

“Will not go for help. Will not bring in a bunch of State police who will round up you and your tribe and try them all for murder, kidnaping, and anything else they can think up.”

“We are not criminals. We are a separate people.”

“How would that sound in a court of law?”

Slow John was thoughtful. "Not very good."

"Get going. You have no time to lose."

"And afterward. You will stay here? You will never tell anyone of this place?"

"We will do nothing of the kind," Doc said. "We will handle this according to our own ideas of justice."

Slow John was very uncomfortable.

"What about those men?" He indicated Schlitze, Gonner and company.

"They will not bother you again."

Slow John sighed. "I will have the poisoned ones taken to the hummock. I think we can save them."

MONK MAYFAIR, as they started a march back to the hummock, seized Doc Savage's arm. "Doc, what is this? It's got away from me."

"The Su are going to save Pat, Renny and the others."

"You mean from that poison?"

"Yes."

"But you said you couldn't do that yourself! And if you can't, I don't see how any gang of swamp Indians could do it."

"Would you like to hear a story, Monk?"

"Will it explain this?"

"Yes."

Doc Savage moved over to walk beside Dr. Wilson, who was being carried by three Su men in a crude sling which they had arranged.

"Dr. Wilson, are you able to talk?" Doc asked.

Wilson nodded weakly. "I can, if not too much. The damned acid has burned my throat." His voice was hoarse, but understandable.

"We want to clear up the story of what happened," Doc told him. "It began when a story appeared in the newspapers. The story was to the effect that a party of research scientists were going into the depths of the Everglades in search of a new and hitherto unknown medicinal plant, or group of plants. It seems that fairly dependable reports of the existence of such a medicine had come to their ears, and they were going to investigate.

They believed that the substance, according to what they had heard, was even more magical than the group of sulfa drugs which has been developed the last few years. That was the general gist of the story as published in the newspapers."

Dr. Wilson said, "Yes. I saw the story at a club dinner in Logantown. "

"Then what occurred?"

“I suddenly remembered that my servant, Slow John, came from the Everglades.

And I remembered that once, years ago when I was ill and very near death, Slow John cured me miraculously with some kind of a drug. When I tried to find out what he had used, he told me it was a form of his tribal witchcraft, and gave me a formula of simple flour and water and sugar which obviously meant nothing. “

“Slow John had used the drug to cure you?”

“Yes.”

“And you confronted him, after you read the newspaper item, and accused him of knowing about such a drug? And you talked him into revealing its secret?”

Wilson nodded painfully. “Unfortunately, Dr. Light overheard. He had followed me, I found out. So Light hired Gonner to help him.

And they kidnaped me, and tried to trick Slow John into showing Light, not me, where the drug was.”

Wilson fell to coughing, and Doc said, “That is enough. Save your strength.”

THE drug was yellow. It was administered in powder form externally and simply by mixing with water for internal use. It was given orally, by drinking. And the Su, Doc discovered, had crude but perfectly practical hypodermic needles for giving injections of the stuff.

Pat was given the stuff first. Doc helped with the others, when he was sure how it was done. The matter of dosage, he discovered, was not critical.

Monk whistled softly in wonder. “If this stuff works, think what it'll mean on a battlefield.

“

Slow John said, “It is more effective than sulfa, any type of sulfa drug.”

“If that's true,” Monk said, “no wonder Schlitze and his Nazis were so anxious to get it.”

After Pat, Johnny, Renny, Long Tom and Wilson were treated, there was nothing to do but wait.

Doc Savage went back to where Schlitze and Gonner and the other prisoners were being held. The gas had dispersed completely by now, but some of the prisoners had red eyes, and not all of them had regained consciousness. Doc questioned them for a while. He found two—Gonner's thugs both—who were sick of the whole thing and willing to talk.

Doc gave Monk the rest of the story when he returned to the hummock.

“Light went to Schlitze and offered to sell the secret to the Nazis when he got it,” Doc explained. “Light wanted three million.

Schlitze agreed to pay it, but had no intention of doing so. Instead, Schlitze set out to trail Light's gang into the swamp, and grab the thing for himself, paying nothing. “

“In the meantime,” Monk said, “I take it Dr. Wilson got away and tried to reach us in New York, but was followed?”

“That is about it. Wilson went to Pat because he was afraid to come directly to us, and we know what

happened afterward.

They got Wilson, and flew to the Everglades via Cuba. Light was already here with Slow John. Schlitze had come down also with his Nazi agents, and everything was set for the mess that followed. Light got away and went into the swamp with Slow John, and I managed to deceive him and come along.

Schlitze's gang trailed us, and Gonner trailed them, then they joined forces, and we whipped them a while ago.”

“What happens now?”

“It depends,” Doc said, “on how the Su listen to reason, and I think they are going to be sensible. “

Doc Savage went outside and signaled Ham, in the plane, with a flashlight. He told Ham to fly to Miami, refuel, and come back in the morning, but not to land until signaled to do so. Ham's signal should be in Mayan, to avoid trouble.

BY dawn, they knew that Pat, Renny, Long Tom, Johnny and Wilson were going to pull through.

Doc Savage himself was amazed.

“That drug,” he told Slow John, “is everything you said it is. The world has nothing like it.”

Slow John nodded slowly. “I have talked to Dr. Wilson. He wishes you to take over the drug, and see that it gets into the right hands.” Slow John grinned. “It seems it is for that purpose that he first tried to reach you by telephone, there in Logantown. “

“Then you are going to let us go?”

Slow John nodded. “What about Schlitze and Gonner, though?”

“They will not bother you again,” Doc said. “But you will have to hold them prisoner until we can get a large plane down here and take them away.”

“We will do that. But how can you be sure they will not molest us again?”

“We have taken men like them before,” Doc said. “And they have molested no one afterward.”

Slow John moved away, puzzled, but satisfied.

Monk said, “Doc, we put Schlitze and Gonner and their crew in college, eh?”

Doc nodded.

The “college” was a secret among themselves. It had been in existence some time, an institution which Doc maintained in a remote part of upstate New York, where criminals were taken when captured. Here, the “student” underwent a delicate brain operation which wiped out all memory of the past, after which the patient was taught a trade and trained to hate criminal ways. No “graduate” of the place had as yet gone back to his old ways, and there had been quite a roster of graduates.

They went in to see how the poison victims were feeling.

Pat smiled at them weakly. “Whatever that stuff was they gave us, it is wonderful.”

“It was a new drug,” Doc explained.

“They make it from herbs which apparently grow nowhere but on these hummocks around here. The manufacturing process is rather complicated, but the results are worth it.”

“Is the drug what all the shooting was about?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it was worth it,” Pat said fervently.

“It saved our lives, didn't it?”

“It did. “

Pat sighed. “It will save the lives of a lot of American soldiers before long, too.”

“It will,” Doc agreed quietly.

DOC went outside, and signaled Ham down with an heliographing mirror. Ham landed, much relieved, and listened to the story of what had happened.

Learning that they would be here in the Everglades not less than a week, at least until Pat and the others were well enough to travel, he was not downcast.

Ham had gotten a look at some of the young women of the Su, and he suddenly didn't mind a visit in the place. In fact, he welcomed it.

But, half an hour later, Ham was hunting Monk. Ham had a thorn club and a wild expression.

“Where's Monk? You know what that ape did?” Ham shook with rage. “He went to these Su girls, to every one of them, and told them that old lie about me! Told them I had a wife and thirteen feeble-minded children back home!”

THE END

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