

## **The Bronze Saga #8**

### **THE TRIAL OF DOC SAVAGE**

A Doc Savage Novel by Mark Eidemiller

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*Romans 13:5 – Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. (NIV)*

*1 Corinthians 4:4 – My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. (NIV)*

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Excerpt, **ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA, Online Millennium Edition**

SAVAGE, Clark, Junior. Born 1901, died?. In the early 1930's and 1940's, Clark Jr. ("Doc") Savage was thought to be an adventurer and crime fighter. However, because of the EDWARD R. MURROW expose into the so-called "Crime College" (see video, 'See It Now: TARNISHED BRONZE') and subsequent investigations (Senator ESTES KEFAUER in 1951, Senator RICHARD M. NIXON in 1952), the picture of the "Man of Bronze" became a major event in the battle for CIVIL RIGHTS in America. Savage was never brought to trial, but his holdings were liquidated by court order for compensation to the Crime College's victims. Rumors abound - especially in the tabloids - that Savage is still alive and in exile, but no proof of this has yet been found.

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS** [\[Skip to Story\]](#)

### **THE ORIGINAL TEAM**

#### **- Clark "Doc" Savage, Jr. (aka Clark Robeson Dent)**

In 1948, following the events chronicled in *Up From Earth's Center*, he returned to the caverns of Maine – alone, unarmed, and in secret – in a determined attempt to recapture the mysterious villain Wail. Instead, he was caught off-guard, rendered unconscious, and placed into suspended animation by an enemy (for more details, read **Epilogue, *Bronze Refined As Silver***). Awakened fifty years later and finding himself in Oregon, he wandered into a downtown rescue mission, heard the message of salvation preached by Perry Liston and received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Taken in by Liston's church, he faced the harsh reality of the world believing Doc Savage as a criminal. Adopting the identity of 'Clark Robeson Dent', he and Liston traveled the United States to reconcile with the surviving members of his team.

He now fights the source of evil as a traveling evangelist, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost.

#### **- Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett "Monk" Mayfair**

Monk tried desperately to keep fighting crime during and after the Senate hearings. However, after several major events changed his life – his marriage to his 'favorite secretary' Lea Aster, the birth of his daughter Caroline, and the apparent suicide of his old friend and sparring partner Ham – he turned his back on his old life of crimefighting and adventuring, and withdrew to a lakefront house near Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he remained in isolation until located by Clark and Perry. Shortly after, Clark was able to lead him to know God's peace.

Several years prior to that, convinced that Doc would one day return, Monk had purchased the land on which the Crime College stood. Later, he, Renny, and Johnny devised a plan that would eventually become the Clark Savage Institute.

He and Lea have five children - Carrie, Clark, Hamilton, Mark, and Deborah - and eleven grandchildren.

### **- Brigadier General Theodore Marley "Ham" Brooks**

It was originally believed that Ham had committed suicide as a result of the enormous stress of the Senate hearings, his disbarment from legal practice, and a growing alcohol abuse problem. However, in *Bronze New World*, Clark and Perry discovered that Ham was actually murdered while attempting to trap the person responsible for leaking the Crime College information to Edward R. Murrow, and the scene was altered to make it appear as if Ham had committed suicide. Clark and Perry were also able to travel back in time and minister the gospel to Ham, thus securing his spiritual future.

### **- Ivan (John) "Renny" Renwick**

In 1989, everyone believed that Renny had been killed in the collapse of the Interstate 880 freeway during the Loma Prieta earthquake. He had, however, barely escaped. But his own desire for the adventure of the past caused him to perpetuate the lie and therefore become a fugitive. He ended up in Romania, where he found a reason to settle down and get married. Later, Renny (now Ivan) and wife Amanda returned to the United States, and are now living on their farm in Oberlin, Kansas.

Since Clark's return, both he and Amanda have become Christians, and Renny has played a major part in the design and construction of the Clark Savage Institute.

### **- William Harper "Johnny" Littlejohn**

Breaking from the team during the Senate hearings, he continued his love of archaeology and participated in several digs around the world, accepting a professorship in a small California university, and becoming the head of the Archaeology Department at Drake College in Vermont. He has since moved to the Clark Savage Institute where he is Dean of the Archaeology Department.

### **- Thomas "Long Tom" Roberts**

In the 1960's, while on a fact-finding trip to post-war Vietnam, Long Tom accidentally triggered a booby trap that destroyed his legs and hospitalized him. While recuperating, he was drawn to a little girl whose family had been killed. Taking compassion, he adopted her and raised her as his own daughter. They settled in Lincoln City, Oregon, and spent many years in anonymity before being reunited with Doc.

Shortly after, however, he suffered a heart attack that eventually cost him his life. On his deathbed, he was able to clear his conscience of the truth behind the loss of his legs, the death of Amy's birth-family, and, with Clark's help, was finally able to know peace with God before the end.

**- Patricia "Pat" Savage**

Clark's cousin and only living blood relative. In light of events chronicled in *Bronze Refined as Silver* and *More Precious Than Gold*, she turned her life from one of selfish goals to selfless goals. She has turned her island home into a refuge and home for children who have been abandoned or orphaned.

**THE NEW TEAM**

**- Perry Liston**

A former street preacher from Portland, Oregon, he found his life tied into Clark's. Now, as his friend and companion, he shares the task of evangelism with Second Chances Ministry.

**- Dorothy ("Dot") Liston**

Granddaughter of Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks, wife of Perry Liston. Prompted to accompany Clark and Perry in the reconciliation of Clark's past, she eventually married Perry and is the third partner of Second Chances Ministry. Became a Christian through Perry in *Bronze Refined As Silver*.

**- Bonnie Savage**

Former mercenary and member of Jill Woodward's APEX group, wife of Clark Savage, Jr. She first encountered Clark and Perry in *More Precious Than Gold*. Became a Christian through Clark in *Bronze Avengers*. Married Clark in *Bronze New World*.

**- Clark "Gumball" Mayfair**

Firstborn son of Monk and Lea Mayfair. Freelance pilot. First worked with Clark and Perry in *Bronze Refined As Silver*. Has worked with them on several occasions, mostly as a pilot. Became a Christian through Monk in *The Abduction of Amy Roberts*.

**- Amy Mayfair**

Adopted daughter of Long Tom Roberts, wife of Clark "Gumball" Mayfair. She was at her father's bedside when he accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and made the same decision soon after. They married and now live in her family's home in Lincoln City, Oregon, where she carries on her father's electronics research.

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**PROLOGUE**

*February, 2006*

*Estacada, Oregon*  
*Evening*

It was a dark and stormy night.

Lightning lit up the skies above the little town of Estacada. And it rained a cold rain that was good for the plants but lousy for those who weren't used to northwest weather.

It was the perfect night for a resurrection.

\* \* \*

The name on the mailbox at the side of the paved road was SLOAN. It was the only thing that gave any indication that there was something beyond it, down the gravel road that vanished into the forest, into the darkness, to finally discover the house hidden within. At first glance, a casual observer would've believed the house to be deserted, if it hadn't been for the young man sitting on the porch smoking a cigarette.

Inside the house, in a small room that was off limits to everyone else, Bill Sloan sat before a homemade altar. He switched on a clip-on desk light mounted to the wall, illuminating a shelf holding a small silver urn next to the framed picture of a man.

"Well, Dad," Sloan sighed. "This is it. Wish me luck."

Sloan switched off the light, standing in the darkness. Just then a clap of thunder sounded in the distance. "Nice touch," he commented to himself.

Bill Sloan felt a bit like Doctor Frankenstein bringing his creation to life ... more or less.

Actually, the creation wasn't lifeless, but only sleeping. *Sleeping* ... the word sounded so innocent when compared to the actual facts of the matter. And it wasn't his creation. It was his grandfather. Robert 'Sweet Tooth' Sloan had placed himself in a suspended animation chamber fifty-some years ago, intent on waking up after a hundred years. Things didn't work out quite as he had intended, as an accident had caused the chamber to malfunction and made it impossible to free him without killing him.

Bill Sloan, who had taken the mantle of responsibility from his father, now made it his life work to find a way to release him. Due to his grandfather's foresight, he had a considerable war fund to work with, allowing him to transport everything to the basement of his house. He spent countless hours sitting before the chamber, studying every inch of it, striving to understand how it functioned. He searched the library, surfed the internet, and eventually traveled around the world in search of knowledge that would lead to his grandfather's freedom.

He had gathered four assistants to help him. They were students from Oregon Health and Sciences University – OHSU – looking for 'something more' than their studies could provide. And Sloan paid them well for their cooperation. As he went down into the basement, he could hear them buzzing in preparation, making final checks of their supplies and making certain nothing could go wrong.

They were amped.

So was he.

As he entered the room, his crew practically came to attention.

"Status," he commanded, disregarding their reaction.

One by one they reported, confirming that everything was indeed ready.

A flash of lightning reflected outside one of the basement windows; it brought Sloan back to his thoughts of Doctor Frankenstein. This wasn't a castle laboratory like he had, with all the dramatic flairs of the 1931 classic – the electrical paraphernalia that crackled and went *snap snap snap*, and *whirrrr*, and *bzzzzzt*, and *zit zit zit zit zit* – but it would suffice.

He wondered if he would insanely shout at the heavens, "*He's ALIVE! He's ALIVE!*" just like Colin Clive did when his Creature first moved.

*Maybe*, he thought with a grin.

He'd know very soon.

"Okay," he responded to his assistants with an authoritative tone. "All right, people, let's do it!"

\* \* \*

His team knew their parts, and they performed them precisely.

Bill Sloan pressed his face against the glass of the chamber lid. He didn't dare blink or take his eyes off of the face of his grandfather for fear that he'd miss something. His grandfather was a tall man with a long gaunt face; there'd always been a disturbed expression to his face, but this time it seemed to be more *pronounced*, as if he somehow knew this was the moment of truth.

Then, suddenly, his grandfather's eyes burst wide open, and his mouth opened in a breathless gasp.

**"CRACK IT OPEN!"** Bill Sloan exclaimed, reaching for the latches.

Two boys moved in and helped remove the lid, lifting it up and clear. As they moved out to the left, two girls moved in from the right. They quickly unbuttoned the man's shirt and placed a set of wireless telemetric sensors about his upper body. As they backed off, monitors began to emit a steady *beep-beep-beep*.

"Life signs slowly improving!" someone interpreted, reading off the figures every few seconds.

Bill Sloan had been leaning over the open chamber. His grandfather's eyes were still wide, and he was repeating two words in a bare whisper: "I'm ... alive."

"Yes, Grandfather, you're alive! Can you hear me, Grandfather?"

The wide eyes turned to look into Bill's, and there was a vague awareness.

Bill spoke slowly and patiently. "Grandfather ... you're all right ... you've been in hibernation for

fifty-five years, but now you're free. Your muscles have probably atrophied ... don't push things ... you will soon regain your strength."

"Grand ... father?" he whispered.

He gave an exaggerated nod. "Yes, *Grandfather*. I'm *Bill* Sloan ... your *grandson*."

"W-what ... y-year ...?"

"Two-thousand-six."

He silently repeated the words, his blinking eyes mirroring confusion. Then he seemed to focus and looked up at Bill. With a rasping whisper, he asked, "Doc ... Savage?"

Bill Sloan knew this question would come. He repeated his practiced answer.

"Doc Savage is alive, but he is in hiding."

Robert 'Sweet Tooth' Sloan took several deep breaths before saying his next words. When they did finally come out, the words were slow and deliberate, and filled with hate.

"I ... will ... find ... him." He took a breath. "Then ... he ... will ... *die*."

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER ONE

*February 12, 2006*

*Caroline Island*

*Daytime*

Sometimes, you never know what God has in mind until you get there.

Someone once declared, "No man is an island." Anyone who's seen the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* knows this, but not everybody wants to accept it. Each of us has an invisible, intangible, and undeniable sphere of influence about us – people we meet, people we come in contact with, and people we just interact with. And our actions (or inactions) touch upon that sphere in one way or another. Whether we choose to accept it or not, our life affects others. And most of us may not see how we've influenced others until it's too late.

\* \* \*

A misassumption by some non-Christians is that Christians possess infinite patience, bordering on the supernatural and making them capable of waiting patiently for anything. After all, they cite, haven't Christians been waiting centuries for the return of Jesus Christ?

Those people obviously don't know the crowd I hang around with.

"*Blazes!*" exclaimed Monk Mayfair, pacing a hole in the lounge carpet and throwing his arms up in the air. "How long does it take for one woman to have a baby?"

Nobody tried to stop him or answer his rhetorical question. He was just voicing what the rest of us were thinking.

An outsider looking at us would've assumed us to be the stereotypical 'expectant family' waiting for a new life to enter the world.

The only one who wasn't pacing was Kal; he stood like a rock, his steely eyes trained towards the birthing wing of Caroline Island's hospital.

"Well?" I asked him, knowing he was using his x-ray vision to satisfy his curiosity.

Suddenly he smiled and announced softly, "It's finished."

A heartbeat later, we heard the first cries of a newborn. We froze for an instant, then erupted in cheering, hugs, high-fives, and Monk and Lois doing a Victory Dance.

When Pat Savage came into the room a few minutes later, dressed in a surgical gown and mask, we practically mobbed her with hugs and questions.

"One at a time!" she grunted. "*One at a time!*"

"How did it go?" asked Dot.

"It went great!" she answered with a broad smile.

"And the babies?" asked Lea.

"Beautiful, all *three* of them!"

We froze again.

"*Three?*" asked Lea. "But the ultrasound showed only *two* – a boy and a girl!"

"It was wrong," she corrected. "The *third* one – another girl – must've been hiding."

I looked over at Kal. "You *knew*."

"I was sworn to secrecy," he replied with an impish grin.

"So how's Bonnie?" Johnny pressed Pat.

"She's doing just fine. She's resting."

"I would hope to shout," quipped Monk.

"And Clark?" I asked.

Pat's face was contemplative. "You know, in all the years my cousin and I have known each other, I've rarely seen him cry. But when he was holding little Jason in those big ol' hands of his, he became a human tear duct." Her own eyes started misting over; she wiped them with the back of her hand. "He's really come a long way, hasn't he?"

"Amen," we agreed.

\* \* \*

Clark's sensitive hearing heard his name whispered, and he looked up from the Bible resting in his lap. Dr. Diane Cunningham brushed her short blond hair out of her eyes and gestured for him to come into the next room. He rose from the chair next to Bonnie's bed, laying the open Bible face-up on a side table, and paused briefly to look down at the three babies sleeping peacefully in identical cradles before he continued.

He carefully closed the connecting door and smiled down at Dr. Cunningham. "Yes, Doctor?"

"I completed the birth certificates."

"Thank you," he acknowledged. "Did you enter the information as I had requested?"

"Yes. I entered the father's name as Clark Savage, Jr."

He took both of her hands in his and sighed with relief. "Thank you, Dr. Cunningham! Thank you!"

"You're welcome, Clark. It was an honor."

\* \* \*

*Monday, February 12, 2007  
Lincoln City, Oregon  
Afternoon*

"*Parlor Bears* at two o'clock!"

I looked over to where Dot had indicated and saw the distinctive storefront with the teddy bear cut-out silhouette on the roof. As we got closer, I dared a quick glance at the imaginative displays in the windows. Then my attention returned to keeping our RV on the road.

We'd taken the scenic route from Seattle along the coast, crossing from Washington to Oregon at Astoria, then continuing south along Highway 101. But it was our extended stop at the Tillamook Cheese Factory that delayed our estimated arrival in Lincoln City by two hours.

"Perry," announced our on-board AI, Myrna. "You are in danger of moving dangerously close into the opposing lane. Would you like me to drive?"

I grimaced. "I only veered off for a moment, Myrna. Cut me some slack!"

The computer did not reply. I had been understood.

"I'm going to call ahead and let them know we're close," offered Dot, pulling out her cell phone. "Myrna, what's our ETA?"

"Six minutes fifteen seconds," came the instantaneous reply. "At our current rate of speed."



Dot nodded and made the call.

\* \* \*

"It looks like we're the last ones to the party," I observed, seeing the many rental cars.

Their house was about a half mile off the main drag. Like several of the houses here, there was a parking area and garage, and the house itself was on the far side of the hill, closer to the beach proper. In addition to the standard stairway connecting the garage to the house, Clark and Bonnie had installed a covered motorized platform that was ideal for carrying groceries (as well as people) down to the house.

Since they'd been thoughtful enough to have a special slab built to park our RV, I wasn't worried about finding a parking space. With Myrna's guidance, I smoothly maneuvered onto the slab and stopped. It was chilly climbing out of the RV, but there was fortunately no rain. Standing at the top of the steps, bundled in a long coat and assisting one of the babies to wave at us, was Pat Savage. Dot gave them a hug, then took the baby as I hugged Pat.

"Heard you were on your way, figured me an' Sarah would meet you up here," she greeted. "How were the roads?"

"Ran into a little bit of difficulty maneuvering the curves between Seaside and Tillamook," I answered. "But Myrna kept us steady."

"Good." A breeze from the ocean gave us a sudden chill. "C'mon, let's head down. Anything I can help you carry?"

I went in and grabbed the presents, handing them back to Pat. We placed them on the covered platform while Dot kept Sarah occupied. Then Pat activated the platform and we slowly descended to the deck that curved around the house.

The last time we'd been here had only been a couple of months ago, from just before Christmas to just after New Year's. Prior to that, there had been a lot of changes. Kal and Lois had stayed long enough to attend the dedication of the triplets, and then had returned to their own dimension. Clark and Bonnie were dealing with the challenges of a new family. And Dot and I were starting to feel the tug of the 'Sawdust Trail'. So, after Mitch Drake's professionals gave Nomad the once-over, we returned to the open road.

Now, even in the waning months of winter, the view of the ocean from here was truly wonderful.

Even before we reached the front door at the bottom of the platform, I could smell Clark's barbecuing in the air. It was amusing, actually, realizing that Clark had never really taken to barbecuing until after they'd moved into this house. Then he went for it with both feet, becoming the type who would barbecue even if surrounded by four feet of snow. But as the smell made me salivate like Pavlov's Dog, I wasn't about to discourage him.

The platform gently stopped next to the front door, and Dot didn't bother knocking before walking in.

Everybody was scattered around the house. Most of the men were in the living room or standing

out on the deck. The women were either in the kitchen or in the kids' room. Against one wall of the living room, a huge flat-screen HDTV monitor showed some historical program; Johnny seemed to be the only one interested in it, though. Pat and I put the presents on a table with the rest of them, and I wandered out onto the deck. Sure enough, Clark – wearing an apron with IT'S A BARBECUE, NOT A BURNT OFFERING embroidered on the front – was center stage at the deluxe Weber barbecue, flanked by Monk, Gumball, and Renny.

He wrapped me up in a big bear hug, then gestured to the food. "Help yourself. We got 'em all – hamburgers, hot dogs, steaks, Alaskan cod, Northwest salmon, or the ever-popular boneless skinless chicken breasts. Condiments and plates are inside."

"He's using *my* barbecue sauce recipe, Perry," added Monk, emphasizing his point by taking a bite from a massive double-cheeseburger.

"Yes, I know," I agreed with a deadpan expression. "The State Patrol has issued a Travel Advisory because of the traffic created by people following the scent."

Clark, Gumball, and Renny guffawed. Monk simply bobbed his head up and down and beamed a satisfied grin.

"Be right back," I said, smiling, and went through the sliding door into the kitchen.

As I fixed my plate, I saw Gumball's wife Amy standing by Dot and Bonnie. By the look of her swollen belly, she appeared to be three months into her pregnancy. Gumball came alongside me. I congratulated him again.

"You sure she's only having *one* baby?" I joked dryly. "I mean, look at the crowd you hang around with."

He leaned in. "We've had *three* ultrasounds. If there's more than one, he's camera-shy."

"We'll see," I nodded.

\* \* \*

The food was excellent, and I indulged a bit more than I expected.

After dinner, we all got together for cake and ice cream. The photochromic windows had automatically darkened against the glare of the outside light, and the single candle atop the cake was lit.

However, when it came down to singing *Happy Birthday*, order turned into chaos. Having not practiced how we were going to manage it, everybody sang the song their own way. No two people sang the kids' names in the same order, or at the same speed. In the end it was all hysterical laughter and a vow to circulate an email with the words for next year.

The kids didn't care. They just sat squirming and cooing in their high-chairs while waiting for the food that was just out of reach.

\* \* \*

As the afternoon wore on, we all settled back. Pat wandered about with a DVD camcorder, capturing images: Renny and Monk snoring happily on the couches. Johnny holding Jason. Amanda holding Jennifer. And everybody coming up missing when the triplets needed changing.

And Pat remembered an earlier time ...

\* \* \*

As usual, the guys hadn't brought her into the loop when investigating the case of a missing woman, a Jane Doe. However, when the woman's baby – temporarily *sans* family – was placed in their care, they didn't hesitate to send up a whine for help.

She heard the commotion even before the elevator let her off on the 86th Floor. As the doors opened, she simply followed the sound to its source.

"*Me* pick her up?" Ham yelled indignantly. "*You* pick her up!"

"Are you out of your mind?" replied Monk strongly. "She'll take one look at my ugly mug and we'll never shut her up ... *you* pick her up!"

Ham threw up his hands and took a step back. "And get baby spit on my expensive suit? I think not!"

Renny hesitated a moment, then pivoted towards the door. "I'm outta here, guys ... I got a bridge to build ... somewhere!"

Johnny looked on intently, muttering something in polysyllables; unable to translate his words, Pat simply ignored him.

Doc, as usual, was a safe distance away. He stoically stood, his arms crossed before him. When he realized she was in the room, he walked over to her with a deliberateness that disguised the stress she knew he was feeling.

"Thank you for coming on such short notice, Pat," he said in an even tone. Then he explained where the baby had come from. "You're a woman – make the child stop!"

She had at least a dozen smart-aleck responses on the tip of her tongue. But before she could use them, Long Tom came into the room and went straight to the table where the baby was.

"Oh, fer cryin' out *loud*!" he exclaimed. "Outta the way!"

The others parted without hesitation, and Pat was able to see the source of chaos to the team. She was lying on her back, wrapped in a black bath towel that was far too large for her. Her little arms and legs flailed as she pierced the air with her cries.

Without hesitation, Long Tom slipped a hand under the baby and raised her carefully into his arms. Then he shifted her so that she rested against his shoulder, and gently bounced her while caressing her back. She silenced almost immediately, much to the surprise of the others. Then she released a pop-like burp, and the crisis was over.

"Y'see, all she needed was burping!" Tom berated the others. "You bunch'a *sissies*!"

At that, Monk, Ham, and Johnny surrounded Long Tom and verbally proceeded to defend their manhood. Tom continued to gently bounce as he walked around, keeping the baby quiet.

Doc looked over at the scene, then at her. His face didn't betray his emotions, but Pat couldn't suppress a grin. "I guess you don't need me after all," Pat told her cousin.

"Uh-huh," he curtly replied.

She pivoted on her heel and gave him a backwards glance. "Have fun, cuz!"

And she left the 86th Floor.

\* \* \*

I stepped out onto the deck looking for Clark. A sunshield kept much of the strong light reflecting off the churning surf from getting through. He wasn't there, but then my eyes wandered out onto the beach. I thought I saw him, but wasn't certain. A telescope mounted to a tripod stood at one side of the deck, and I used it to get a closer look. Sure enough, Clark was a couple hundred yards away, dressed only in shorts and a sweatshirt, and bathed in the glow of the sunset.

I started to go back inside, but something stopped me. There was something about Clark's stride that ... wasn't *right*. So I continued to watch through the telescope, as he walked a little farther, then dropped into a seated position in the sand. Nothing unusual there, I observed; Clark often found the movement of the waves to be a perfect backdrop for prayer and meditation.

"*Here* he is," I suddenly heard Pat behind me, and turned to see her approaching with little Jenny. "It's their bedtime, but she wouldn't settle until she saw her Uncle Perry. You know, she's really taken to you. What's your secret?"

As I took her into my arms and her little face nestled against my shoulder, all I could do was just smile at Pat. If I could only tell her that – 78 years in the future – the adult version of this little girl and her brother would teleport Clark and me through time, from an alternate 2005 to the year 2085, and save us from an imminent death from radiation poisoning. But I alone was privy to this detail – and I'd given my word to keep it secret.

I felt little Jennifer's breathing slow as she fell asleep, and I carefully handed her back over to Pat.

She glanced out at the beach. "What's with Clark?" she asked.

"I don't know," I answered honestly.

She nodded, and took Jenny into the house. I continued to watch on and off for the next ten minutes. Then I saw Clark rise and return to the house. His stride was purposeful now, not wandering.

"You okay?" I asked casually as he climbed the steps to the deck.

He nodded. "Don't let anybody leave just yet. I need to talk to Bonnie first, then to everybody."

"But what - ?"

I was too late; he'd moved on. I saw him touch Bonnie's arm and whisper something to her, then the two of them disappeared into the bedroom. I passed on the word that Clark had something to say to all of us after he finished talking with Bonnie. When pressed for details, all I could say was, "Just be in prayer, okay?"

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER TWO

The door to the bedroom opened, and Clark and Bonnie came out.

The fact that they were holding hands was a good sign. The grim looks on their faces wasn't.

Without a word, they headed to the living room, with the rest of us in tow. The HDTV screen had been back lowered into the floor, revealing a stone fireplace with a raised hearth. Clark stood, while Bonnie sat on the hearth. The rest of us quietly sat around the room, waiting to hear what was going on.

"What is it, Clark?" asked Monk, unable to contain himself. "It's not bad news, is it?"

Clark's response was a barely-perceptible smile.

"My friends," he began. "I apologize for keeping you here this late." He paused. "Eight years ago, when I came out of suspended animation, and realized that the world considered me a criminal, I adopted the identity of 'Clark Robeson Dent'. It gave me a way to live in this world without revealing my true self to the public-at-large. Nobody had been harmed by it; in fact, at times it's been kind of humorous.

"But that was before Bonnie and the kids came into my life." He reached out and took Bonnie's hand. "And now I see more clearly that, all this time, I've been comfortable with a lie. I'm not Clark *Dent* ... I'm Clark *Savage*. Now, please don't get me wrong. There are plenty of people who know who I truly am and hold no animosity. And for the most part, it's no big deal to identify myself as Clark Dent; it's like a secret identity I put on to protect who I am. But then there are the *other* times, where it grinds at the pit of my stomach. I want to shout to the world who I am, but I'm afraid to.

"Well, I'm finally going to face my fears. I've been praying for some time about this, and God has finally given me His approval. I want to be Clark Savage Jr. again! That is the name my father gave me, and I must be true to it. Whatever I have to do, whatever I have to face, I am going to take my identity back!"

"Isn't this all a bit sudden?" asked Pat.

"I've been thinking about this – and praying about it – for over a year."

That didn't surprise me. Clark had a long-standing habit of keeping things to himself, even from those closest to him. It used to bug me, but now I understood.

Clark looked to Monk and Lea. "When your children were old enough to ask who they were, who their family was, did you have any problem answering them?"

Monk slowly shook his head; he understood the point Clark was trying to make.

Clark continued. "You're *proud* of the name Mayfair; and that's the way it should be. It's part of the heritage you've passed along to your children. I'm a *Savage*, not a *Dent*, and that's the heritage I want to give to *my* children."

Pat came over to him and put an arm around his waist, leaning on his arm. "It's about time, cousin."

"But you could go to prison!" exclaimed Renny, visibly agitated.

"Yes, I could," he responded calmly, his eyes connecting with the big engineer's. "But if that's what has to happen so my wife and children can proudly say they are Savages – then I'll do it!"

"Okay," affirmed Monk. "I'll admit, this sounds like a dumb stunt, and you probably need your head examined, but ... but I'll support'cha."

Dot and I looked at each other. She gave me a thin smile and a nod. Then we added our voices, offering our support.

Everyone else joined in after that. All but Renny.

I glanced over at him and Amanda. I didn't know if Amanda understood all of what was going on – I assumed she did – but she respectfully stood by her husband. Renny had to be aware of what he was saying, and that he was the only dissenting voice. He remained silent for a few seconds, then suddenly threw up his arms and exclaimed angrily, "*Have you all lost your minds?*"

His outburst had the effect of instantly silencing all conversation and making him the center of attention.

"Do you realize just how *crazy* this plan is?" he continued. "Have you ever heard the phrase, 'If it ain't broken, don't fix it'? You've got a wonderful wife, three terrific babies, and just about anything you could ever want. Why do you want to *screw* things up by doing this? Besides, think of how this could affect the *rest* of us! Once the media gets wind of this, we'll *never* see the end of it! You remember how it used to be? Well, it'll be a million times worse! They'll analyze our lives like we wuz bugs under a microscope! We'll have reporters hounding us day and night! They'll camp out on the beach! They'll fill the sky with helicopters! They'll be all over us like a school of *piranhas*! And they'll pick our bones dry!" He looked over to Pat. "They'll converge on Caroline Island like rabid dogs!" He spun and pointed to Johnny. "And God knows what they'll do to CSI!" He turned back to Clark. "They'll dig up all of the skeletons from our past and put them on the Six O'clock News! Is *that* what you want for *us*?"

We all stood there dumbfounded.

"Well," he concluded. "I think you're making a stupid mistake! *Count me out!*"

And with that, he grabbed his jacket, hastily signed something to Amanda, and stormed out of the house. A confused Amanda signed 'sorry' and followed him.

"Whoa," exhaled Monk after the door closed. "Didn't see that one coming."

"He'll be okay," Pat whispered to Clark. "This isn't easy, but we're with you."

"What do the rest of you think?" he tossed out. "Do you agree with his assessment of the possible consequences?"

We went quiet for several seconds, glancing at each other. Finally, Monk grinned and declared, "Bring it on!"

The rest of us, some reluctantly, nodded in affirmation.

"So," asked Johnny. "What have you found out?"

"Actually, nothing. I've not done any research into this yet."

"*What?*" the archaeologist exclaimed, genuinely surprised. "That's not like you, Clark. You've always been the one to think out a project before taking the first step."

"And you'd be right – under *normal* circumstances."

I spoke up, "These circumstances are *far* from normal."

"Exactly," agreed Clark. "Like Renny said, the consequences of this could be more than any of us can bear. That's why I wanted to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that *God* wanted me to proceed with it."

"Yes," agreed Johnny. "But even the Bible speaks about 'counting the cost' before going into battle."

"May I say something?" I asked, getting everyone's attention. "Many of you may not be aware that I'd been married before, before Dot. It was a long time ago, and it ended in a messy divorce. For many years after that, I didn't want to even come *close* to another relationship unless it was God's will. Then I met Dot." I looked over at my wife and gave her a gentle smile. "I had my hesitations, even *after* she became a Christian. I wanted God's blessing in the worst way. Then, during our little *clash* with Pat's guards ..." Reluctantly, I met Pat's eyes; she knew what I was referring to, and she gave a brief nod. "... *without warning*, I got my answer from God. I can't explain exactly how it came to me, but you know what I mean – I felt as if it had been carved in stone. All doubt I may have had vanished, and I was free to propose." I looked over to Dot and smiled again. "Which I did."

"You tossed down a fleece," Gumball smiled, nudging his father. "Sound familiar?"

"Here's my point," I continued. "If I had jumped the gun and started planning a wedding, figuring God would give His approval in the end, and then have God tell me 'no', it would've been a huge mess. But I hung in there, patient, until God gave His answer in His time. And it all worked out." I looked over at Gumball. "You know what I mean; you got your answer. And now Clark has *his* answer. And since God has given his answer, it *can't* fail!"

"Maybe it can't fail," affirmed Gumball. "But you just can't walk into the Lincoln City PD and say, 'Hi, I'm Doc Savage, and I'd like to turn myself in.' Try that, and you'll either be laughed at or end up in a rubber room with lots of real interesting pharmaceuticals to pick from."

"He's right," added Johnny. "We still need a plan."

"You need a *lawyer*," stated Pat flatly.

"What about Doug?" asked Dot.

Pat shook her head. "He doesn't do Criminal Law. He can offer some suggestions, though."

"Dad?" offered Gumball. "Didn't Hamilton spend three years working for the Dade County DA?"

Monk's eyes brightened. "*Blazes*, you're absolutely right!" He addressed the rest of us. "My son Hamilton is experienced in Criminal Law! I'll give him a call first thing in the morning and see if he'll help!"

Clark sat down on the hearth, and we began to plan.

"I want to know what people think of Doc Savage *now*," stated Clark. "Do they still look at me as a menace to society, or am I just a distant memory? Also, I want to know what *specific* crimes I'm accused of committing and what penalties I could face as a result of those charges."

"Karleen," I suggested. "She'd be the best one to tell us what the world thinks of Doc Savage. I'll call her."

Dot added, "While we were on the road, I used to drop in on the *Bronze Avengers* chat room. Let me see what reactions I can get from them."

"You know," mentioned Clark. "What Renny said about CSI and Caroline Island – he's got a good point. Something like this is bound to shake them up. Johnny, Pat, what do you think of beefing up security?"

"Yes," nodded Johnny. "All it would take is one crackpot with a grudge and a bomb to turn this into a catastrophe."

"We're good," affirmed Pat. "But I'll make sure. Bonnie?"

"Thanks," she smiled; before marrying Clark, she'd been the Head of Security for Caroline Island. "I'd be more than willing to check around and see if there's something you might've overlooked."

"Another thing," Clark added. "What happened to the records from the Crime College? Are they still around somewhere? And whatever happened to the rest of the staff from there?"

"Most of the Senate hearings centered on just us," answered Monk. "They didn't drag the rest of the staff into it, except as witnesses."

"Talk to Mitch," I suggested. "If anybody can get the information, he can."

We continued to talk through the night.

\* \* \*



### CHAPTER THREE

*Tuesday, February 13, 2007  
Coral Gables, Florida  
Morning*

In the law firm of *Allen, Patte, Drescher and Mayfair*, everyone knew Hamilton Tyler Mayfair.

Most people who worked with him described him as *Perry Mason* meets *Planet of the Apes*. And once they realized who his father was, they understood how he got to be the way he was. At six foot six, and close to 300 pounds of solid muscle, he wasn't your average lawyer.

Hamilton's phone buzzed, and his secretary Toni announced, "Ham, it's your father."

The phone was on the edge of his desk, out of reach for most people but insignificant to him. He picked it up and greeted, "Hey, Pop! What's up?"

"I need your help, son." His tone was sober.

"What is it?"

"The boss wants to talk to you."

"You mean ..." His voice trailed off. He understood immediately who his father was referring to. "Is he in trouble?"

"Could be. He's decided to come clean."

Very few things could shock Hamilton Mayfair. This became one of them.

"Ham?" repeated Monk.

"I'm here, Pop. He wants *me* to represent him?"

"We're considering a legal team, an' I thought o' you."

"I appreciate it, Pop. I'm yours, but let me check my calendar before I commit." He put the phone on hold and took a deep breath. *Wow*, he thought. Then he pulled up his calendar on his computer and checked ahead. "Sorry about the wait. I'll be there. Are you at home?"

"No. We're at his place in Lincoln City; the triplets turned one yesterday."

"Already? Time flies."

"Yeah. Anyhow, we're not sure where we're gonna end up, but this is where we're at now. How soon can you get away?"

He thought a moment. "I can catch the first flight out this afternoon."

"Don't bother. I figured you couldn't turn this down, so your brother Clark's on his way to pick you up."

Hamilton laughed. "I can't remember the last time Gumball and I hung out together. I'll be looking forward to it!"

"Lemme give you his cell number, and you two can work out the details."

Hamilton Mayfair snagged a leather portfolio from the shelf behind him and flipped to the next available page. "Shoot!" He wrote down the number. "Okay, got it! Who else do you have in mind for this Dream Team?"

"So far, just you and Doug Martin," he answered. "He doesn't know Criminal Law like you, but he's got experience. And he's a good friend."

Hamilton nodded absent-mindedly. "Would you mind a few suggestions?"

"You got someone in mind?"

"Not really, but I'll give it some thought and get back to you. And, Pop? Thanks!"

"Love ya, son," he shrugged. "Talk to you soon."

Hamilton Mayfair hung up the phone. His face split in a giant grin and he giggled. "Oh, *wow!* It's finally happening!"

He pushed the button on the intercom. The secretary to the senior partner answered.

"Frances? Is Dave in?"

"He's in a meeting."

"Can you snag him for me when he gets out? Let him know it's real important."

"Sure will, Ham," she replied.

"Thanks." And he disconnected.

He made a few more notes in the portfolio. Then he got on the intercom again. "Toni, come in here."

The door opened and a tall brunette came in; she carried a steno pad and pencil.

"I'm going to be going out of town for awhile."

"Problems?" she asked, concerned.

He shook his head. "Just the opposite. A **big** client. I'm going to talk to Dave about rearranging my other cases. Synchronize my notebook and have it ready for travel."

She made a note on her steno pad. "How soon?"

"As soon as possible. My brother's on his way to get me."

"*That* important?"

His expression became serious. "Could be the most important case in my career."

Her eyebrows rose. "You gonna need me." It was a statement of fact rather than an inquiry.

"That I will," he agreed. "Be ready."

"I'll pack a bag."

"Good. That'll do it until after the initial interview."

She pivoted and left the office. Hamilton picked up the phone again and hit the speed dial for home. His wife Lucy answered.

"Hi, hon, it's me."

"Hi. What's up?"

"I just got a call from Pop. Doc's coming clean, and they want me leading defense."

She understood exactly what he meant. "That's great, hon! How soon?"

"Gumball's coming to get me even as we speak. I'll call you later. Hug the kids for me, okay?"

"Sure will. Love you."

"Love you too."

He disconnected and returned to the computer. He opened his top desk drawer and took out a small plastic container. Opening the container, he pulled out a metallic thumb drive and plugged it into one of his computer's USB ports. The computer acknowledged the device and prompted for a password. He typed it in without thinking, and a window opened up to display the drive's contents. As he glanced over the dates attached to the filenames, he muttered to himself, "Yeah, this is definitely going to need updating."

\* \* \*

*Alpha Base  
Somewhere in the Florida Everglades  
Morning*

The buzz of the communicator was a welcome distraction to Mitch Drake. The black man turned away from the monitor he'd been focusing on and rubbed a hand along the top of his bald head.

"Drake speaking," he forced a professional tone.

"Mitch, it's Clark."

Drake's eyes opened a little wider at the sound of his boyhood idol's voice. "Hey, Clark, how's it

goin'?"

"Fine," he answered, a little too brusque. "I need your help."

Drake assumed that much by the tone of his voice. "What's up?"

"I've decided to come forward and face the authorities."

Drake stared at the communicator and mouthed a silent profanity. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yes." The tone of Clark's voice was final.

"Okay. Where can I help?"

"What's the status of *Blue Sun*?"

"It's still quite a ways from operational ... six months at least." He paused. "You need it sooner?"

"We might. I don't want Bonnie and the kids to be in the line of fire, if you know what I mean."

"I'll see if we can speed it up a bit," he assured. "But I won't cut corners."

"Not asking you to."

"If you need a safe house in the meantime ..."

"I'll keep in touch." He paused and changed the subject. "Needless to say, we're going to need lots of proof."

"You'll have it," he assured. "Clark ... are you all right?"

There was a hesitancy in Clark's voice that spoke volumes. "I'm fine, Mitch."

"You wanna talk about it?" he said casually. "I'm a good ear."

"Later."

"I'll hold you to that, Clark. Or should I start calling you 'Doc' again?"

Clark smiled on his end. "Let's wait on that for the moment, okay?"

"Okay. I'll talk to you later. Take it easy."

"You, too." And the call disconnected.

Drake leaned back in his chair and stared ahead. He took in a deep breath and released it between pursed lips, "*Damn.*"

\* \* \*

*New York City, New York*  
*The Offices of Martin and Associates, Attorneys at Law*  
*Morning*

In the legal offices of *Martin and Associates*, Douglas Martin's private line buzzed. Briefly glancing at the caller ID, he smiled and picked up the phone.

"Hey, good lookin'!" he greeted.

"Mornin', Doug," replied Pat behind the grin.

"How's Lincoln City?"

"Nice, even if it is a bit cooler than I'm used to."

"I'm really sorry I couldn't be there for the kids' birthday," he apologized. "Did you give them my gift?"

"And your love," she added.

"We still on for dinner tonight?"

"Plans have changed, Doug. We have a situation."

The lawyer leaned forward in his chair. "What's up?"

"Last night, Clark announced that he's coming clean with the law."

"Oh, my," he commented. "He wants me?"

"Yes."

"You did point out that I'm not a Criminal Lawyer?"

"Yes, I did," she acknowledged. "He still wants you on the team."

"I'll be there," he acknowledged. "I'll come up with a list of candidates."

"He'd appreciate that. Monk's also contacting his son Hamilton; he's a lawyer in Florida, with a specialty in Criminal Law."

"Excellent." His voice hesitated. "*Hamilton?* Named after ..."

"...your old boss?" she finished the sentence. "Yes."

"Interesting," he commented. He scribbled a note on a nearby pad to check on the man. "How soon are you going to want me?"

"As soon as you can get away, I guess. I'll talk to Clark, and have him talk to you."

"I'll check my schedule. Is Gumball flying Hamilton back?"

"I think so. You want him to make a detour and pick you up?"

"If it's no trouble," he answered. "Do you have Gumball's cell number?"

She did, and he wrote it down. "Got it. Let me check on things and call you back in ... say, ten minutes?"

"I'll be here."

The tone of his voice changed. "You know, this isn't going to be pretty. And we all might end up getting dirty before this is over."

"Yeah, we considered that. But, hey, getting dirty's not a new thing for *us*, is it?"

"True. Still, Clark could be looking at prison time."

"He knows. It still doesn't matter. He's sick and tired of hiding who he really is from the world."

Martin nodded to himself. "How do *you* feel about it?"

"I'm proud of him," she answered without hesitation. "He's got guts. I mean, sure, he's scared at what could happen, but he's also determined. I'll back him 110%." She changed the subject. "By the way, can you get your hands on the stuff from the original Senate hearings?"

"Sure." Martin thought a moment. "Who knows, it might even be public domain by now."

Her voice suddenly became emotional. "I miss you, Doug. I hope you can make it."

He chuckled. "Hey, I'm the boss – I make my own rules. I just need to rearrange my calendar."

"Okay. See you soon. Love you."

"Love you, too."

\* \* \*

*New York City, New York  
Hidalgo Trading Company  
Morning*

Karleen Bush stood on the roof of the *Hidalgo Trading Company*, overlooking the Hudson River. The squat edifice of steel and glass was the second such structure to carry that particular identity. Karleen had never seen the first one except in archival pictures; she knew that it had been a warehouse that held some of Clark's boats and stuff, and that it had eventually been replaced with a park. The park was still there, ironically right next door where she could look down at it from where she stood. This building housed a new and different *Hidalgo Trading Company*. Under its roof were several businesses, including *Waverly Arms*, *Second Chances Ministries*, and her own PR firm *Rosewood*. They had several clients, including those within the building and – indirectly – the *Clark Savage Institute*.

Although it was a little chilly this morning, the roof was one of the few places where she could go to enjoy a cigarette without being nagged about the dangers of second-hand smoke. As she took another drag, her Bluetooth phone earpiece buzzed for attention.

She tapped the side and answered crisply, "Bush."

"Karleen, it's Perry."

"Perry! *Wazzup?*"

"I'm calling on Clark's behalf," he came right to the point. "We need your special talents."

"What's up?"

"First, I have to tell you ... this is *top* secret."

"I haven't put your dirty little secrets out on the Internet yet, have I?" she replied smartly.

"No, you haven't," he replied with a chuckle. "Clark's decided to come clean and turn himself in to the authorities."

Karleen coughed out a cloud of smoke. "Did I hear you right?"

"Yes. It's a long story, but he wants to be Doc Savage again. A lot of it is 'cause of the kids."

Karleen dropped her cigarette to the ground and crushed it out with her shoe. "So where do I come in?"

"He wants to know what the world thinks of Doc Savage. Do people still look at him as Public Enemy No. 1, or is he just an obscure footnote in some history book? We'd like you to find out what we're facing."

"I assume you're going to want polling data?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I'll contact NARF."

"NARF?" he repeated with a tilt in his voice.

"*North American Research Foundation*. One of the top market research institutes in the country. They're based outta Philadelphia; we've used them in the past. They're *very* good."

"Okay," he acknowledged.

"So how soon do you need things?"

"As soon as possible," he replied. "We're starting to put together a legal team; they should be here by evening. Anything you can give us by, say, tomorrow morning would be great."

"I'll see what I can manage. Where are you?"

"Lincoln City."

"Three hours difference," she muttered. "Not that it really matters, but what kind of a budget are you talking about?"

"The usual."

"*Yummy*," she replied. "Have you thought about what kind of a spin you want to put on this?"

"Spin? No."

"Be thinking about it. And when you get a chance, I'll need to talk to Clark."

"Okay."

The tone of her voice changed. "How are *you* takin' this, Perry?"

He chuckled briefly. "It's a bit of a shock, Karleen. I kinda wonder if he's making a mistake by doing this, but ... no, this is the right thing to do. Thanks for asking."

"Anytime. Talk to you soon."

"Okay. And thanks."

Karleen pressed the button on her Bluetooth and disconnected. She stood there on the roof for a couple of minutes, gazing at the magnificence of the Big Apple.

"*Ready or not ...*," she quietly announced, a grin crossing her lips. "... *here we come!*"

Then she turned around and headed downstairs to her office.

She took a step past her secretary's desk, then backstepped and stopped; the Vietnamese girl, used to her boss' spontaneity, poised a pen above a steno pad. "Tranh, call Dwana in Marketing for a meeting in my office in ten minutes! Next, call Gerald Atkinson at NARF; let him know I've got a **priority** job for him and his crew, and make sure he's available after 10:30. And ... *yeah*, first thing ... get me Terri Dow from *FuzzyTree!*"

Without waiting for the instructions to be acknowledged, Karleen continued into her office.

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

*Lincoln City, Oregon*  
*Afternoon*

"Nick?"

The dark-haired man had been leaning back in the wooden chair, dozing, when the radio came alive at his side. His Air Force-honed reflexes instantly brought him awake. "Gotcha, Cap'n!"



"We're comin' in," announced Gumball. "Three minutes and change!"

"Pad's ready, Cap'n! See you in three!"

Retired Sergeant Nicolas Dalton ran his remaining hand through his hair and quickly scanned the helipad to confirm his earlier statement. Then he heard the sound of the Osprey's engines. He glanced at his watch and grinned. "Don't know how he does it," he commented to himself. He looked up and saw the aircraft come over the clearing. It hovered as the engines rotated from horizontal to vertical flight. Then it descended with practiced skill and settled smack dab in the center of the helipad. Nick waited a moment for Gumball to cut the engines, then he trotted over to the door, put a stepping block below it, and stepped back as it opened.

Nick Dalton looked up and gasped.

"Hello," boomed the voice of the one standing in the doorway. "Are you all right?"

Another man came behind him. "Nick, this is my brother Hamilton. Ham, Nick Dalton."

"Good ... to ... meet ... you," muttered Nick.

"You, too," replied the gorilla-like Hamilton, stepping down and extending a hand.

After a moment, Dalton returned the gesture. "Sorry, Mr. Mayfair, but ..."

"Don't sweat it, Sergeant. I get this reaction all the time."

"Remember me, Mr. Dalton?" asked the next man down from the Osprey.

"I sure do. You're Mr. Martin ... you're datin' Miz Patricia."

Gumball put a hand on Martin's shoulder. "Better watch yourself, Doug, or you'll find yourself on the cover of the *Inquirer*."

"Attorney-Client privilege," he countered with a sideways look and a smile.

Just then a car rounded the corner; Amy waved at them from behind the wheel, then pulled into a parking space. Gumball met her as she climbed out and gave her a kiss and a hug. Hamilton came next; the diminutive Amy tried her best to get her arms around the big man, but came up a few inches short. Martin's was easiest, as he gave her a fatherly embrace. Gumball and Dalton exchanged a quick salute before he climbed into the car and left.

\* \* \*

Monk answered the door.

This was the first time I'd seen Dot's Uncle Hamilton in person. Dot had showed me pictures of him, and I was past the initial shock. But seeing him up front and in person took me by surprise. The others exchanged hugs and handshakes. When he was introduced to me, I was hesitant in returning his outstretched hand. He sensed my shock and gently commented, "Not to worry. I get this reaction all the time."

I apologized and accepted his handshake.

We relocated into the living room. Clark and Hamilton sat on opposing couches.

Hamilton nodded. "Mr. Savage, in your own words, what do you hope to prove by doing this?"

"You are aware that I was in suspended animation for fifty years, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," he nodded.

"When I emerged from hibernation and was taken in by Perry, I learned of what had happened during my absence – the Crime College had been exposed to the public, labeled a house of horrors, and I had been branded a criminal. Some even said I as bad as Josef Mengele."

"I bet that went over well," Hamilton commented dryly.

"My priority at the time was to make contact with the surviving members of my old team. But since I couldn't just come out and address myself as Clark Savage, Jr., I adopted the alter ego of *Clark Robeson Dent*."

"Why didn't you come forward then?" Hamilton asked. "Explain things to them just as you've explained it to me?"

Clark paused; his eyes lowered briefly as he considered his words. "You have to understand where I was at that time, where ... my head was. Prior to my hibernation, I was on the verge of burnout. I'd spent years, even decades, establishing and maintaining the public image of The Man of Bronze. To the rest of the world, I was admired, venerated. I'm embarrassed to admit that some even thought of me as some sort of god. But that wasn't who I was inside; I was, and am, just a man. I'm mortal, but I couldn't let the rest of the world see my mortality. So I kept acting the part, blind to the fact that I was heading full speed towards burnout. The incident with Wail brought that burnout to a peak."

Hamilton nodded gently. "Please, refresh me. What happened?"

"At the time, I believed that science could explain all the supposedly-supernatural incidents we had encountered. And, usually, it did. When Wail claimed to be an actual demon from Hell, I refused to take him seriously; I assumed he was insane. When Monk and I followed him into some caves after another man, many things happened that I tried to excuse. I invented explanations for things that were beyond explanations.

"Once we were away from the caves, Wail was locked in a storeroom that was used as a makeshift cell. He didn't resist. Even when confronted with a scientific explanation for all that had happened, he still stuck to his story. A few minutes later, I returned to the storeroom, but he had completely vanished. In a way, it didn't surprise me. Later, I went over that cell with a fine-toothed comb, but I never was able to find an explanation.

"I didn't show it at first, but inside I was frustrated. When we were in those caves, I lost it. I even ... let out a scream of terror. I'd never done that before, and it had been a critical blow to my own ego. I'd like to think that something inside of me had snapped, but I can't use that as an excuse. Rational thinking was the farthest thing from me; I was determined to correct things. I returned to

the caves seeking to find Wail. I was alone. I was unarmed. I was without backup. In Proverbs it says, 'Pride goes before destruction.' And I stepped right into an ambush."

"That doesn't answer my question, sir. Why didn't you turn yourself in after coming out of hibernation, and try to explain things to the authorities?"

Clark turned to meet Hamilton's eyes. "I was scared."

"Of what?"

"Despite the fact that I had a renewed peace in me as a result of becoming a Christian, I was still human. I was weak, both physically and emotionally. I *had* been familiar with how the Justice System worked, but I wasn't certain how fifty years would've changed things. My priorities were now survival and finding my old team. I figured God would work out the rest of it in His timing."

Hamilton nodded. "But once this had been accomplished, why didn't you *then* try and clear your name? Why wait seven years?"

"By that time, I was comfortable with being 'Clark Robeson Dent'. We'd included several people into our little circle of friends, and they had no problem with keeping my secret. The more I became involved in what God was calling me to do – evangelism – the more I believed that turning myself in would complicate that."

"But that's not the way you feel now." It was more statement than question.

"That's correct. My attitude started to change after CSI was built. I had expected more negative reactions from the world at large, especially since it was associated with me. But it didn't happen that way." A beatific smile crossed his face. "The biggest change in my attitude came after Bonnie and I got married, and the triplets were born. I'm Clark Savage, Jr., and my wife and family are *Savages*, not *Dents*. I didn't want to hide who I was. I didn't want to go through life whispering my name in public. And I didn't want my family to hide their heritage." He paused. "I prayed about it for over than a year, and yesterday God gave me my answer. I realize that there were things I had done that were wrong in the eyes of the law. So now I want to make amends for them, and face the consequences of those actions."

Hamilton stood and turned towards the windows that looked out on the ocean. Then he turned to face Clark, and spoke.

"Mr. Savage ... *Doc* ... I can understand your feelings of remorse for your actions. But I believe that, should you continue along your desired course of action, you'd be making a *martyr* of yourself. And that ... would be pointless."

Clark said nothing for a few moments. Then, "So, what *should* I do?"

Hamilton smiled and held out his hand. In the center was a small thumb drive. The look on his face was a grin that reminded me of Monk's more-mischievous moments.

"Pop, you remember how you used to tell all of us kids about Doc?"

Monk nodded. "Sure do."

"They were our bedtime stories *and* our lessons in life. But what you may *not* have known, Pop, was that I was more interested in what had *become* of Doc than of your adventures together." He turned to Clark. "I mean, you weren't in the Fortress, or in the Valley of the Vanished, or in any of your other hangouts. It was as if you'd just vanished off the face of the earth, like some alien abduction. In fact, I even wondered if that was what had actually happened."

We all shared a laugh.

Hamilton continued. "Now, Pop and I were both convinced that you'd be back some day. And I wondered ... what would you do when you did return, and had to face the criminal charges? And you might say I became *inspired*."

"You turned it into a legal exercise," Clark muttered, smiling thinly.

"***Exactly!***" Hamilton exclaimed. "A bunch of random notes became one document ... then two ... then three ... and so on and so on. It was one of the factors that prompted me to go into criminal law. As you said, it was a legal exercise ... just a hobby to challenge me in my private moments. I'd walk away from it for awhile, then come back and play with it ... update it ... interject new thoughts and strategies. I couldn't begin to count the number of times I rewrote it."

Monk smiled with pride at his son. "And how long have you been doin' this?"

"Twenty years or more," Hamilton smiled back. "All I need to do is update it."

"So," I asked. "What can they charge Clark with?"

Off the top of his head, Hamilton listed kidnapping, forcible drugging, malpractice, and various degrees of violating others' civil rights. "You deprived your 'victims' of due process of law, which would technically fall under the category of violating their civil rights. In 1950, the primary charge would have been violation of 18 USC § 1201(a)(1), the Federal Kidnapping Act, also known as the *Lindbergh Law*. Now, when the Federal 'death penalty' statutes were revised in 1970, they removed the death penalty for incidents in which death of the victim did not occur." Hamilton probed Clark's face like a lie detector. "From what I understand, Clark, you are fluent in law. Didn't it occur to you, even once, that the statutes of limitations would've run out on all these charges after fifty-plus years?"

His statement stunned us all into silence.

Clark was the first one to break it. "You mean to tell me that I can't be tried for *any* of them?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying."

The relief that hit us all was overwhelming. Many of us laughed or applauded, or just raised our hands and praised God.

Monk looked over at Douglas Martin, who was sitting next to him. "Did you know about this?"

The old gentleman tilted his head in Monk's direction. "Remember, I don't handle Criminal Law. But ... I had a hunch."

Hamilton continued by giving us a quick lesson in law. "The laws regarding all of the statutes of

limitations place a burden on law enforcement officials to locate, arrest, and bring to trial within a reasonable period of time, the suspected perpetrator. If legal authorities fail at this, the accused cannot be made to face trial after the limit has expired." He paused. "**However**, despite the fact that you can't be tried in a criminal court, you could very well have to face civil charges."

We quieted down. Bonnie asked, "You mean, like O.J. Simpson?"

Hamilton nodded. "Exactly."

"Still," commented Monk. "What's the worst that could happen?"

"Depends on the judge."

"All right, son," Monk pushed past the small talk. "What's your battle plan?"

Hamilton reached down to his backpack and unzipped one of the compartments. He removed a manila envelope and opened the flap. Pulling out two stapled sheaves of papers, he handed one of the copies across to Clark.

As Clark looked the papers over, Hamilton brought the rest of us in. "Your biggest obstacle is going to be the 'Court of Public Opinion'. If the public won't accept you, you'll still be a criminal in their eyes."

His point was well taken.

Orenthal James Simpson had been a well-respected and honored football legend. He was a decent actor with several high-budget movies to his credit, and he was a spokesman for one of the largest car rental companies in the United States. That was before his wife and her friend were murdered, and everything pointed to O.J. Simpson. Now, since those famous (or infamous, depending on your interest) trials, he's just another liar and murderer – lower than a leper in the eyes of much of the American people. Overnight, the value of his sports memorabilia dropped like a rock; and it was highly unlikely that it would ever come close to its old value ever again.

O.J. Simpson wasn't alone. There've been hundreds, possibly thousands, of celebrities and public figures over the years that have screwed up, have fallen from the public's graces. In some cases, it was a moment of 'being human' (or being stupid) where it could make its way into the public eye. Recovering one's self from public damnation wasn't impossible, but it sometime involved jumping through a lot of hoops.

We in the Pacific Northwest had our own example: Tonya Harding. Tonya started off as an elite figure skater, twice winning the U.S. Figure Skating Championships. However, after January of 1994, when she conspired in the assault of fellow figure skater Nancy Kerrigan, things went downhill. For many years, most of her escapades – both during and after her competitive career – were often more silly than tragic, but she was always good for a "here we go again" news item in the midst of a dull news day. A lot of people thought she just got in with a bad crowd, and was more victim than active participant.

But the local media has yet to let us forget about "The Bad Girl of Skating".

"Our biggest advantage is going to be the element of surprise," Hamilton explained. "The world is not expecting you to suddenly show up on their doorstep. So when you *do* step into the public

light for the first time, all you have to do is present yourself as a *man* and not as a monster or a mad scientist. Then while they're scrambling like kids on an Easter egg hunt to find filed copies of the original arrest warrants, we get you all the media coverage you can handle – interviews, talk shows, photo ops, the works! We'll flood the airwaves with a new and improved Clark Savage, Jr. – alive and well, back from the dead, and demanding vindication for all the lies that were spread about you over the past fifty years! And when they ask where you were all those years, we tell them the truth – that you were put into suspended animation; the fact that it is so fantastic will make it even more believable – who'd invent something like that? We'll explain how you became a Christian and how you've been living in hiding for six years while trying to manage a life of your own!" He paused to take a breath. "It'll make *great* copy! But we'll need a PR connection."

"We've got one," answered Monk. "*Rosewood*."

He nodded. "Yes ... I thought I remembered you mentioning them. Excellent!"

"I talked to Karleen this morning," I informed them. "We're having her test the waters for public opinions on Clark. She should be contacting us by morning."

"Good!"

"And Dot's touching bases with some ... *private sources*. Lemme see if I can get her to take a break." I called Dot. A minute later, I reported, "She'll be down in a few minutes."

Dot came through the front door a couple of minutes later without knocking. Focusing on the pages of a steno pad, she made a beeline for the living room. I snagged her arm as she came through, and guided her to a place next to me on the couch. After a few seconds, she looked up to see everyone watching her. Giving an embarrassed giggle, she said, "Hi, guys!" Then after a quick pause, she continued. "Okay, I've been canvassing the *Bronze Avengers'* chat room."

"Who?" asked Hamilton.

"Think 'Baker Street Irregulars'," informed Monk.

"Oh-kay," he acknowledged reluctantly. "Go ahead."

"Thanks. Clark, you'll love this! If my sampling is any indication, you'll not find a group more loyal than them!" She explained that she posed as a newbie and asked questions – including some deliberately naïve questions – intending to draw them out. "Most of them believe that you're still alive, somewhere in the world, and that you secretly continue to fight crime. They also believe that the College was a good idea that was misunderstood by the rest of the world." She paused, looked up from her notes, and grinned. "Oh, and they figure CSI is here because *you* are."

"Can't accuse 'em of bein' dense, that's for sure!" Monk commented. "I wonder if there's anybody else out there that's made that conclusion?"

"I'll mention it to Karleen," I noted.

"Were you able to get any first-hand witnesses to the Crime College?" asked Hamilton.

"As a matter of fact, yes. There was a newsstand owner in Palo Alto, California, by the name of

Willie Medici. He was a model citizen. They later found out he'd been known as 'Eddie the Pick'."

"I remember him," Clark whispered. "He'd been a hired killer for the Chicago mobs; his weapon of choice was an ice pick. What happened?"

"Some 'friends' of his came to visit; they addressed him as Eddie. When they left, he left with them ... and was never seen again."

"Would any of these ... people be willing to testify?" asked Hamilton.

Dot shook her head. "Sorry, Uncle Ham. The *Avengers* is a mysterious group. Nobody knows their numbers. Few people know their names or locations. And they prefer it that way."

"That might need to change before we're done," commented Hamilton. "Go on, Dot."

"That's the headlines. Here're my notes." She handed the steno pad to Hamilton. "If you have any questions, let me know."

"Yes, I will. Thank you."

"This looks like a good time to call it quits," interrupted Bonnie. "Anybody up for pizza?"

I thought I'd smelled pepperoni. Several voices responded to her query, and we stood and stretched. Bonnie was an excellent hostess, and the kitchen island was arranged with paper plates, three different kinds of pizza, some salad fixings, chips, and salsa that I knew was from Monk's personal stock – it was the one with the authentic BIOHAZARD sticker on the side. Clark put an arm around his wife's waist and kissed her; it brought a smile to my lips. As I poured orange soda into a plastic tumbler and added a couple of ice cubes from a nearby bucket, I heard Monk, Doug, and Hamilton discussing living accommodations.

"Your mom and I are staying at the Best Western, about a half mile away on 101," he informed. "I think we can get you and Doug a room."

"I'd appreciate that, thank you," approved Martin.

"If you don't mind, Pop, I'd like to stay here. It'll give Doc and me an opportunity to talk." He turned to Clark. "Mr. Savage, do you have a guest room I can stay in?"

"Sure," he called back.

"Okay," acknowledged Monk. "But, remember, son: your mother's gonna want to see you tomorrow. And you know what happens when you disappoint your mother."

Hamilton's face broke into a huge grin. "Yes, Pop," he said with exaggerated patience.

I joined the group. "Have you ever had breakfast at *The Pines*?"

"Best breakfast in town," Monk added, turning to Hamilton. "Even for *your* appetite."

"Sounds good, Pop. I'll give you a call in the morning."

"Okay. Ready, Doug?"

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

*Wednesday, February 14, 2007*

*Lincoln City, Oregon*

*The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent*

*Morning*

I got the call from Karleen before 5:00 am. As my eyes tried to focus and my mouth tried to speak through the cobwebs, I answered it.

"Sorry" she apologized, realizing the difference in time zones. "But I figured you'd want this as soon as possible."

"Okay," I mumbled. "What'cha got?"

"A lot. Happy Valentine's Day, by the way! Do you have a lawyer yet?"

"Yeah. Monk's son Hamilton. He's here with Clark and Bonnie. And Doug Martin's staying nearby. They're probably still asleep ... as was I." I didn't try to conceal my sarcasm.

"I said I was sorry," she repeated. "How soon can you set things up for a video conference?"

"Not long. What's up?"

"I've got some data I need to send you before the conference."

"What kind of data?"

"Trust me, you'll *love* it!" Her voice was excited.

"Okay," I sighed. "Gimme a half hour. I'll call you."

"Okay! Good!"

We disconnected. Dot rolled over to face me. "Karleen?"

"Yeah." I swung my legs onto the floor and started changing my clothes. "Sounds like she just won the lottery. Wants a video conference with Clark."

"Sounds like good news, though. Maybe the results of her polling came out better than expected."

"Don't know. I just hope they're awake in there."

"You want me to call ahead?"

I shook my head. "Naw. But if I'm not back in a half hour, remember I always loved you."



Dot chuckled. I headed for the door.

\* \* \*

It took over an hour, but we got everybody together in the living room for the conference. On the large screen was Karleen's smiling face.

"Good morning, everybody, and Happy Valentine's Day. I'll get right down to business. I've got the tentative results from NARF."

"NARF?" repeated Monk.

"*North American Research Foundation*," she repeated. "They're an independent market research group. We've done work with them for a couple of years."

"What did they find out?" asked Clark.

"I sent a copy of the results to Perry," she replied. "*Perry*?"

On cue, I handed a printed copy to each person in the room.

"To summarize," she continued. "The big news is that a majority of respondents recognized the name Doc Savage, and believed him to be a *hero* and not a *villain*. They also believe him to be alive and in hiding, and not dead. When asked, most of them believe that it is possible to put a human being into suspended animation be successfully revived, and close to half believe that this has already been done. When questioned about general concepts of criminal punishment, the majority preferred the concepts used with the Crime College over corporal or capital punishment." She paused. "It looks great, guys ... and it's all because of *me*."

We were all surprised at Karleen's sudden burst of ego.

She gave us a sheepish smile. "Guys, I'm in Public Relations. When you took me in to handle PR for CSI, I had to know just *how* you'd be received. I discovered that many people had a 'who?' mentality towards Doc Savage, especially from those who had been born *after* 1950. The ones who lived *before* 1950, who might have paid attention to the Senate hearings, are a lot older now, and frankly, they've got more important things to think about.

"I determined that it's the younger crowd who need to get into the concept of Doc Savage."

"I'm a *concept*?" Clark asked.

"Everything's a concept at some point or another. When you can be summarized in one sentence, that's the concept. You're the Man of Bronze, the superman raised by scientists from birth to fight crime, the bronze Odin reigning over the city from your shining tower, the bronze knight waging war against the supervillains who would seek to destroy the world ... you get the idea?"

"Yes," he responded, his impassive face hiding his disgust. "It's the reason why so many looked to me as greater than I was."

"Exactly. It's their *perception* of the man that makes the difference." She paused. "Anyhow, I went after the younger crowd. Impress the kids, and you've established a foundation. Most of it

was covert, just in case it went belly up on us. But instead I'm happy to say that it looks like a success.

"I also put an emphasis on overseas markets. It's no secret how overseas markets can sometimes be a boon to entertainers, as compared to low results in the States. For example, Jerry Lewis is practically a god in France. And David Hasselhoff is a singing superstar in Germany, Austria, *and* Switzerland. For you, Clark, I was inspired to direct my efforts at Japan. I had some Anime people transform a few of your old adventures into animated episodes. And the reactions have been *massive!* They see you as an 'honorable warrior'. They tell their friends in the States. Bootleg copies get circulated through the internet. People in chat rooms and newsgroups spread the news. And a star is born!"

"*That's* what they were talking about!" suddenly exclaimed Dot. "I didn't understand it then, but now I do! Karleen's, that's absolutely *brilliant!*"

"Glad you like it. That's the beauty of it, everybody! It's been mostly underground and background stuff. Perry, you remember when you guys suggested planting a story in the tabloids, actually telling them the truth?"

I nodded reluctantly. "Yeah."

"Well, I did it," she admitted. "But I didn't mention Doc. I submitted scientific stories, stuff having to do with suspended animation. All fact, no fiction, very boring. But my intent was to plant a seed here and a seed there, getting the concept of suspended animation into the public mainstream. For example, say that Jane or Joe Average reads a little blurb on suspended animation while standing in line at the local Jiffy-Mart. Later they catch a thirty second filler piece on the news in between Sports and Weather, maybe about some scientist in Switzerland successfully putting a rat in suspended animation and reviving him after a month. Then, what do you know – Doc Savage comes out of hiding and explains that he was in suspended animation for fifty years. Now, do you think that their first reaction will be to *reject* such a story or *accept* it?"

"Accept it," we all agreed.

"*Genius*," commented Clark.

I could've sworn she actually blushed at his comment. "Thanks."

"So what exactly *did* you do?" asked Hamilton, his interest piqued.

"Perry's got it all on the DVDs," Karleen answered with a smile.

I waved the disks above my head. Hamilton held up his huge hands, and I tossed them to him.

"Great work, Karli," complimented Monk.

"The pleasure's all mine!" she returned. "I'll let you guys get to it. Call me if you need me."

"Will do, Karleen. And thanks again."

The connection ended.

"How much stuff is on those DVDs?" asked Monk.

"A *lot*," I answered. "This could take all day. *Fortunately*, she told me she put together a compilation – a narrated synopsis – to save time. That one's only a few *hours* long."

"So, who's up for breakfast and a movie?" asked Bonnie, casually.

\* \* \*

*Portland, Oregon*  
*Nell's Restaurant*  
*Lunchtime*

Nell's Restaurant was a favorite hangout for the local police. There wasn't an hour, day or night, where at least one police cruiser wasn't parked there. Officers Ben McGee and Elaine Descartes parked next to the other cruiser and ambled in. The blonde waitress – her nametag identified her as Julie – saw them enter and waved them past the WAIT TO BE SEATED sign. They continued over to a table where Officers Marilyn Crossway and Salvatore Key were finishing their meal.

"What's good for lunch?" asked McGee, as Descartes looked over the menu.

"Couldn't say," replied Crossway. "I'm still on a diet. My husband's promised to take me to Bermuda in the summer. And I set my own goal – a string bikini that I'm gonna fit in by the time we go." She gave them a grin.

Descartes looked over at Crossway's plate. She folded the menu. "I'll go with the salad."

Julie came over with some coffee, and McGee and Descartes ordered.

McGee added some sugar to his coffee and casually asked, "Hey, Sal, have you seen Rollie around?"

"Rollie?"

"Yeah. Homeless guy ... always wears fatigues. He was part of the 5th Cav – my old unit. He usually hangs out on Third an' Burnside next to the Mission."

"Yeah, now I remember him. Haven't seen him in a while. Come to think of it, I haven't seen a lot of homeless down there in awhile. The Gov tryin' to look good again by pushin' the homeless outta downtown and into the suburbs?"

"Search me. I heard some scuttlebutt about the First Lady comin' to visit, but that's not for a few months." He turned to his partner. "What'cha think about swinging by some of the camps to see if he's there?"

"Sure," she agreed.

"Sal, ready to go?"

"Yeah, sure."

McGee and Descartes slid out to make room for the others. Crossway tossed a couple of bills onto the table to cover their part. "Later, Ben. Hey, lemme know what you find out, okay?"

"Sure, Sal. Later." And they left the restaurant.

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER SIX**

*Lincoln City, Oregon*  
*The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent*  
*Afternoon*

It was the most incredible thing we'd ever seen.

She had included a couple of the animated episodes. Although we had a good laugh at the exaggerated depictions of Clark and the team – especially Monk – we had to agree the animation was excellent. Beyond that, we were awestruck by the character traits that came through – honor, integrity, strength, brotherhood, and even faith.

"We *definitely* need to give that girl a raise," commented Monk, his head bobbing up and down. "This is unbelievable."

We moved on to some of the shows that had been aired on the cable networks.

We all remembered the Travel Channel special on CSI a while back, but this version had been updated to celebrate its anniversary and add certain very subtle innuendos that Doc Savage could still be alive.

Some of the specials – Sci-Fi Channel's *Golden Age of Adventurers* and History Channel's *Vigilantes: Fiction and Non-Fiction* – carried only a short piece on Doc Savage. Both specials emphasized on the harshness of the times, explaining that "it took a tough hero to defeat the tough villains". They profiled vigilantes with names like the Shadow and the Spider, then contrasted their homicidal methods with Doc Savage's Crime College reforms.

A couple of the full-length specials had to do with Doc Savage himself, focusing on his disappearance. Sci-Fi's *In Search of ... Doc Savage*, and History Channel's *History's Mysteries: Doc Savage* both presented suppositions that Doc Savage's disappearance was due to his being captured by one of his numerous enemies. They even lent clues to the possibility that Doc Savage had been placed in some sort of suspended animation. Covering another angle, The Military Channel profiled the Superfirer; an emphasis was made on its non-lethality, that the mercy bullets were decades ahead of their time.

Next were a couple of films made by independent filmmakers, which had aired on local cable channels and on the Internet. They pondered the question, "Was the Crime College Successful?" and presented positive examinations of what Clark had intended.

The last group focused on stories about suspended animation. There was a segment on *20/20* that followed a scientific breakthrough in Norway where several animals had been put into suspended animation for months and revived without harm. Another was a special on Tech TV and Sci-Fi about suspended animation with examples both in fiction and in real-life.

"Was that Charlton Heston narrating?" asked Lea, astounded. "Talk about credibility!"

When it was all done, we couldn't help applauding.

\* \* \*

We took a break for a few minutes. As we did, Pat and Monk were reflecting on the first trial from the 1950's. So, as we gathered together in the living room, I brought that up. "I tried researching the trial when I was first searching the internet for items on you guys, but there was hardly anything out there. It wasn't very much more than a canned summary. So what *did* happen back then?"

I noticed Monk glancing over to Pat and Lea; they gave him a sober nod, designating him to start things off. "It all started with Murrow. When he came to the HQ and started askin' us questions – especially with a film crew by his side – we knew it wasn't gonna be good."

I could confirm that. Years ago, when researching Clark and his dissipated team, I'd found a copy of the *See It Now* broadcast at the library. The title alone had been damning enough: ***Tarnished Bronze***. Murrow had presented his case with his usual thoroughness, and exposed the Crime College for all to see. At the end of the broadcast he announced that he would turn the evidence over to the United States Senate for an official investigation. Due to our little time-traveling escapade, Clark and I both knew that Murrow's evidence had originated from a spy planted within the College itself.

"I saw the videotape," I admitted. "You told Murrow that Doc Savage was in Australia on business. You lied."

Monk wasn't offended by the accusation. Instead, he chuckled. "What else could we do? *'Well, gee, Mr. Murrow, we don't know where Doc is – he just kinda up and vanished on us. Next question?'*"

Pat turned to Monk and played the role of Murrow. "*You're the closest people to Doc Savage, and yet **you** don't even know where he is? If that's the case, how can you be sure he's innocent of the charges leveled against him? If he can't trust you with where he goes, how do you know he's not hiding other things? Or maybe he saw this coming and has jumped ship? How can you be sure?'* Etcetera, etcetera."

"Yeah," I acknowledged. "I can see that happening. Good point."

Monk continued. "It wuz like watchin' a train wreck in slow-motion. We knew it was gonna happen, but we couldn't do anything to stop it."

"Not quite," corrected Pat. "We did have a chance to clear out the College."

"True. We quietly slipped everybody out of the College an' hid 'em elsewhere. And then we trashed the personnel records." He looked over at Clark. "But we never touched the **patient** records."

"Why not?" asked Hamilton.

"*My* orders," answered Clark. "I had taken responsibility for these people. I had supervised their treatments, their therapies, and their placements. I couldn't just toss them back into the world and let them fend for themselves. Those records were irreplaceable. So I gave strict instructions that they were never to be destroyed."

"One note," added Lea. "Just because we kept the records doesn't mean we handed the police a confession. Right from the start, the records had been worded so that it would appear as if they were *medical* records."

Monk nodded. "Anyway, we had a chance to do a little damage control before the train hit. And it was a good thing, too. After Murrow's broadcast, the you-know-what hit the fan, and the people seemed to go bug-nuts. It reminded me of how people went bug-nuts after the *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast."

Pat added, "People who had friends or loved ones who had vanished mysteriously now looked to the Crime College for answers. They surrounded the building. When they realized there wasn't anybody there, they bombarded it with rocks and bricks. We finally had to throw up a chain-link fence to keep them from tearing the place down brick by brick."

"Yeah, it was ugly." Monk paused. "The people wanted answers, so they tried hitting us up for answers – even picketed the Empire State Building. And since his name was mentioned in the broadcast, they also hit on Senator Kefauver. And *he* put the squeeze on us for th' patient records – specific ones at first, but then all of 'em."

"I have copies," informed Hamilton. "A few years ago the Department of Justice scanned a bunch of old documents and archived them. A friend of mine was able to get me an electronic copy of the patient records."

"Excellent!" commented Clark, relieved.

Monk continued, "Anyhow, somewhere along the way, some of those jokers put their pointy little heads together and filed a Class Action Lawsuit against us ... especially you." Monk looked over to Clark. "Since you wasn't around to defend yourself, and no judge in his right mind would dare rule against an angry mob, they won the suit hands down."

"How *Pontius Pilate* of them," muttered Bonnie. "Washing their hands of the matter."

"Yeah, ain't it," Monk chuckled. "Well, these guys were findin' out all about us, and they weren't hesitant to show how angry they were. They practically shut down business at the Empire State Building, and almost burned down the original Hidalgo Trading Company."

"Thank God Ham changed the locks on the Valley of the Vanished," commented Pat. "I shudder to think what could've happened there."

"The Feds instructed us to surrender everything for auction. But Ham had warned us of this, and that gave us just enough time to take care of a few details. I bought up the valley where the College wuz, and tried getting away with personal stuff, like the painting of your father. But by that time they'd gotten wise to what we were up to, and so were watchin' us 'round the clock. That's why I ended up trying to get things back at the auction."

"The Feds used the money from the auction to pay off the Class Action Suit. Now, some o' them

took the money and split, but not all. There were still a lot of them who were ticked that you hadn't been caught. They wanted their pound of flesh, but they couldn't have it."

Pat continued, "It turned into a political issue. The public at large had put pressure on the judges and District Attorneys to issue arrest warrants against you. And since they didn't want to face an angry mob who might keep them from reelection, they backed down. If I remember right, New York was the first one to do it – just in case you showed up at the headquarters or the College – but other states quickly jumped on the bandwagon. Kefauver initiated the Senate Hearings, and then ol' Tricky Dick Nixon joined in; he was a Senator back then. Well, since the damage had already been done, most of what they did was political grandstanding and posturing for the press."

"I concur," agreed Hamilton. "The records from that time differ considerably from modern trials, even high-profile ones like the Simpson trial. It provided a lot of newsreel footage."

"Face it!" sneered Monk. "They wuz kickin' a dead horse! They'd done their damage on us with that law suit ... they got everything that wasn't nailed down! Then they found you guilty *in ... in* ..." He tried to remember the right words.

"*In absentia*," provided Hamilton.

"Yeah, that's it!"

"You told me they gave up after Ham's death," I reminded them.

"Yeah." Monk stared down at the floor. "Ham's death put a damper on their ... *bloodlust*, and the rest just petered out." Pat and Lea nodded their agreement. "Anyhow, that's how it all went down, more or less. Let's see what we can do to reverse things this time – right, son?"

"Absolutely, Pop!" answered Hamilton. "One thing I've never been able to determine is – with all the people you transported from one state to another without their permission – why didn't the Feds ever charge you for kidnapping?"

Monk looked back at him and said two words: "They knew."

"The government knew about the College?" Hamilton echoed.

"Is it that much of a surprise? Remember, we told the whole world about the College through the pulp novels! So why shouldn't the Feds know? Besides, it's never been a secret that all of us – not just Doc – helped out the government from time to time. During WWII, we were involved in all kinds of top-secret projects for the Feds. Of course, we'd capture a spy or a saboteur every now and then ... and make 'em vanish; it wasn't a mystery about what we were gonna do with 'em. But since they would'a been executed otherwise, the Feds just looked the other way."

"That would make sense," Hamilton mused. "But, if the government turned a blind eye to you and the Crime College, why would they want to press charges against you and risk having the public find out about their involvement?"

"I think I can answer that," piped up Bonnie. "Let's look back at the chain of events. Murrow starts the ball rolling. He brings it to the Senate hearings, not the other way around. The Senate can't do anything that might point the finger at themselves, so they do the only thing they can do

– they shine more light on the College. Then, almost out of right field, somebody gets the idea to file a Class Action Lawsuit. So what if it was the Feds that planted that little seed in somebody's head?"

"I was sacrificed so they could keep their involvement hidden from the public," reflected Clark.

"I wouldn't kick 'em *too* much, hon. Look at it from their perspective. They were looking out for their own interests. You were MIA. They didn't know if you were alive or dead. So, since you weren't around to physically face the music, they could've felt it couldn't hurt you. They may have influenced the judges in the Class Action Suit, and encouraged *that* as an outcome for the whole Crime College debacle."

"Yeah, but that's not how it ended," I added. "The people put the pressure on local judges and police to issue arrest warrants. The Feds might've had something to do with *that*."

"That makes sense," said Monk. "Arrest warrants popped up all over the place. It didn't matter that they couldn't find you ... it was symbolic of the anger they felt over the whole mess."

"I'm a bit of a history buff," stated Bonnie. "There were a *lot* of things going on during the end of the 1940's and the beginning of the 1950's. Russia was starting to play with atomic bombs, and the United States was already looking into the hydrogen bomb. North Korea invaded South Korea, and the Korean War started. China was doing its best to screw up everybody, including Tibet. Apartheid started in South Africa. And that's just those things off the top of my head. People would soon start fearing that this was the Beginning of the End. Fear sparks anger, and they needed something to focus their anger on. And you, my dear husband, were a convenient target."

"Possibly," Clark agreed. "They found me guilty *in absentia*. And when Ham died, they might've figured that was the last straw. So they let the issue drop. End of story."

In its own tragic way, it made sense.

"Clark," Hamilton changed the subject. "What was your intent with the Crime College?"

"It actually all started with my father," he began to explain. "In some old papers of his, I found something like a mission statement he had written as a direction for my life. He had dedicated me '*to go here and there, from one end of the world to the other, looking for excitement and adventure, striving to help those who need needed help, punishing those who deserved it.*' Most of my life was spent in intense special training. During that time, Father finished medical school and continued his own adventuring. Towards the end of my training, Father returned to New York and there we planned for what would become the Crime College. He preferred execution to rehabilitation, but I persuaded him otherwise. Using our combined medical knowledge as well as knowledge of somewhat ... *radical* techniques, we established the procedures that we used on our subjects."

"By subjects, you mean criminals?"

"Yes."

"And that's when it started."



"Yes. Please understand, my intent had never been to take life. The only ones subjected to the Crime College had been people who had criminal records, people who had attacked me and/or others in my influence, people who had intended us harm, and had committed crimes that would've resulted in the death penalty or, at the very least, considerable prison sentences. In most cases these people had already committed violent acts ... people had already been killed long before I came on the case." He paused. "I took these criminals to a place that would give them a second chance at life."

"Self-defense?" Hamilton mused aloud.

"I can see where that would apply," replied Clark with new understanding. "Possibly."

Hamilton made some notes on a portfolio pad. "What about a man who had, for example, stolen food in order to feed his family?"

"I'd never subject someone like that to the College." Clark chuckled. "First I'd pay back what he had stolen, plus a bit more for good measure. Then I'd help the man take care of his family's immediate needs: groceries, rent, medical needs. Finally, I'd give him a job ... I'd give him a way to provide for his family and maintain his honor and self-respect."

"That's good," Hamilton nodded. "What about a terrorist?"

"That's one aspect I've had to wrestle over, especially since 9/11. I believe that most 'terrorists' are nothing more than bullies and blowhards; they're all attitude, anger, and posturing. They compensate for their own insecurities by intimidating others. In the past, I would've just ignored them. Now, however, I wouldn't. I would remember them, keep tabs on them. If they took the next step, from words to actions, I would step in and seize them."

"You'd wait until *after* they'd done something – even if it cost lives?"

"I'm sorry to say it, but ... *yes*." He paused. "However, I was able to intercept him *before* he carried out his plans, I would do everything in my power to stop him."

"Kananga," said Monk.

Hamilton was the only one who hadn't gotten the reference. Monk filled him in. "Umberto Kananga was an African terrorist who'd kidnapped Amy to help him with his plans to attack the United States. We went after 'em, got Amy out, and kicked Kananga's butt."

"When did this happen?"

"Late September of 2001," I supplied.

Hamilton was confused. "I never heard anything about that."

"And you never will," explained Clark. "If you want proof, we can give it to you. But outside of *us* ... that mission never happened."

Hamilton looked around at our sober faces. "All ... right."

Clark changed subjects. "Hamilton, the men that I took into the Crime College ... I didn't just

shove them back on the streets after I was done with them. I took *responsibility* for them."

"Elaborate," pressed Hamilton.

"For the most part, the criminals we dealt with were ... misguided. In one respect, they were dangerous to others as well as themselves. And so, in the same way a parent or guardian assumes responsibility for a minor child, I took on the responsibility of raising ... or re-training ... them."

"You became the guardian for those you operated on," Hamilton observed.

"Yes," Clark acknowledged. "You said you had copies of the patient records?"

Hamilton nodded.

"Did it include the criminal records and post-relocation records?"

"Yes."

"Then you've seen how thorough our operation was. Each 'graduate' was trained in a skill, then placed in a town far from his previous environment, and established with both a job and a place to live. Then we'd keep an eye on them – especially during the first year following their release – to make sure they were happy and productive. We gave them self-respect and honor by sending them down the right road. And we returned something to society." He looked out the window at the ocean. "I always believed there was more to them than what they had done in the past, and I never gave up on them. And if things weren't working well for them, we would help them along their way. Some of the 'graduates' even married and started families of their own." Clark paused. "Given the justice system prior to 1950, could there have been a better outcome for these criminals?"

"Highly unlikely." Hamilton smiled. "This is good ... this is *very* good. Thank you, sir."

\* \* \*

*Wednesday, February 14, 2007  
Portland, Oregon  
Portland Police Department  
Evening*

Officer Ben McGee was coming off shift. He walked back to his locker and was just starting to put his things away when Officer Salvatore Key called his name. McGee looked over his shoulder and acknowledged his presence.

"We swung by the camps near the Industrial Area," Key informed him, pausing to open his own locker and store his gear.

"And?" prompted McGee.

"The numbers are down a lot. You know how many people are there at any one time?"

"Couple dozen, easy."

"Ten."

McGee gave him a double-take. "Ten?"

Key nodded. "They talked about a man and a woman in a dark van flashing a lot of cash around. They'd show up every couple of days. When they'd leave, one or two would go with them. But those who go with them are never seen again."

"That's not good, even for transients," McGee mused. "Get any descriptions?"

"Male and female, late-20's to early-30's. Dark suits and sunglasses."

"MIB types ... interesting."

"It looks like they're working all the camps. Same description, same results."

"Not good," McGee repeated. "You gonna report it to the sergeant?"

He shrugged. "Report what? It's not as if they're being taken at gunpoint."

"True. But we'll keep a watch on them, just in case."

"Good idea. Thanks." He headed for the door. "Later, Sal!"

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*Lincoln City, Oregon*  
*The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent*  
*Evening*

"Hi, Toni," Hamilton greeted his secretary back in Coral Gables.

"Hey, Boss! How's the West Coast?"

"Chilly. Did you get my emails?"

"Sure did. Since Lee's a rabid sci-fi fan, he's doing the research on suspended animation; he says he's already pegged one possible expert witness. And Kristee's working on the list of DA's and their staff."

"Good."

"And like you instructed, I'm personally checking out that other lead, the ... *Bronze Avengers*? What sorta group is this, anyhow?"

"You ever read Sherlock Holmes?"

"A bit."

"They're a lot like the *Baker Street Irregulars*, but they started up *after* Clark vanished. They do good deeds in the name of Doc Savage. They're always anonymous, and they never stick around

long enough to be identified. It's not going to be easy to find anything on them – if at all – but give it a shot. Okay?"

"Okay."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

*Thursday, February 15, 2007*

*Lincoln City, Oregon*

*The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent*

*Afternoon*

Martin and Hamilton were in Clark's office, using his speakerphone for a conference with Karleen Bush.

"So what did you think of them?" she boldly asked, referring to her special project.

"You got a standing ovation, kiddo," replied Douglas Martin.

"Thanks." She sounded a bit humbled at the flattery.

"That's why we wanted you in on this," informed Hamilton.

Karleen's voice had returned to her usual confident tone. "I thought you might."

"Most of the charges against Clark are fifty-plus years old and the Statutes of Limitations have long since expired on them."

"That's great! So what's next?"

"Our biggest obstacle is going to be the public angle – your turf. Once Clark comes back into the public light, the opposition's going to do anything it can to remind the public of what he did way back when."

"And you want me to make sure we're on solid footing if and when that happens."

"Exactly."

"So how do we make an unpredictable public more favorable to Doc," Karleen mused. "For one, time is on our side. A couple of generations have passed since Doc was in vogue. A lot of people either don't remember or don't care about Senate Hearings done in the 1950's. I mean, how often do the McCarthy hearings come up in conversation to the average man on the street? No, for the most part, the whole thing's no more than a paragraph in a textbook, or a factoid on *The History Channel*. Now, there *was* a jump in interest when the Crime College was destroyed to make way for CSI, and again after CSI opened its doors. Anyone old enough to remember it may or may not still have feeling associated with it. The rest will develop new images in connection to Doc and the Crime College. I've tried to help things along, and I'm thrilled that it seems to be working, but it's going to be up to Doc once he's back in the public eye that'll make the difference. We need to paint the most favorable picture of him that we possibly can, and then he'll have to live up to that

picture. If the public buys it, they'll dismiss the Senate Hearings as just another example of an untrustworthy government."

"Well put," complimented Martin. "So what kind of strategies can you give us off the top of your head?"

"Have you ever seen the wax statue of Doc at *Fisherman's Wharf* in San Francisco?"

"I'm sorry, I haven't," admitted Hamilton.

"I have," acknowledged Martin. "And I see what you're getting at. The statue is outlandish – more like a *caricature* than an accurate representation."

"Exactly," agreed Karleen. "That's the kind of image we need to be farthest from. But ... what do you think about him making his announcement *there*, with the statue standing nearby like an evil twin? It would be a graphic representation of what the statue makers thought of Doc Savage, as compared to the Real McCoy."

"I like it," nodded Hamilton. "With Doc in a suit and tie, it'll be a very dramatic contrast. And it'll make a first impression that'll be hard to dismiss."

"It could sweep away a lot of old impressions," agreed Karleen. "So after that, the next thing is to win over the people. I'm thinking a *lot* of public appearances. He's a personable guy, so let him mingle with the people. Let them see Clark, not as others would have them believe he is, but as he actually is. No offense intended, but here is where you can capitalize on the religion angle – arrange for him to talk to some of the more-popular evangelists, or speak before a few church congregations."

"You make it sound like he's running for office," commented Martin.

"*The Selling of Doc Savage*," she mused aloud. "Good title for a book. But remember, he can't be arrogant! He's got to be humble, repentant of any acts he'd done in the past. Even if he's a bit self-deprecating, that's not a bad thing. He's not a stone statue; he can even laugh at himself!" She paused, and then giggled. "I wonder if we could get him to host *Saturday Night Live* or *MAD TV*?" She gave off with a piercing guffaw.

"Is there something we can do *before* the fact, to get people to think about Doc Savage?"

"Promotional packs," Karleen answered. "If we were talking about a celebrity that was already known by the public, I'd mail out some 8x10 glossies, a biography, a video of his stuff – you know, like sending out a resume to prospective employers. But for Doc, coming from the perspective of an unknown, *mystery* is the key." Her voice sped up as she brainstormed. "How about a promotional DVD? Bronze-colored plastic. No words, just a lot of question marks? A video ... a figure coming slowly out of a fog bank ... you can see him, but you can't identify him. And music – you gotta have music. You might want to talk to Clark about something that could be associated with him – a signature piece."

"A theme song?" asked Martin.

"Why not? Who can't hear the theme from 'Superman' without thinking of Chris Reeve? Or 'Raiders' and not think of Harrison Ford?"

"Point well taken," Martin acknowledged.

"We can send out the video a week before the announcement. If you want to, you can have the place, date and time come out of the fog at the end of the video – an invitation. Then, at the announcement, everybody gets handouts with all the details. Give them a website. You can always monitor it, see how many hits it gets, and that way you can track progress and interest." She paused. "So what do you think?"

"The idea of speaking to church groups isn't bad, but we need something close to the people. Something that won't *look* like a photo op."

"Agreed. Have him go to a ball game, a concert, a play. He used to have his headquarters on the 86<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Empire State Building – have him make an appearance there. Get a few pictures just for the fun of it. It would be impressive, wouldn't you agree?"

Hamilton concluded, "Point Clark in the right direction and let him loose. That's good, Karleen."

"I'd probably do better with time. Give me a couple days to sketch out a few ideas. You're not in that much of a hurry, are you gentlemen?"

Hamilton and Martin both laughed.

"Okay, Karleen," dismissed Douglas Martin. "We'll fill Clark in on what we talked about. Keep in touch."

"Count on it." Her voice suddenly became dramatically softer. "Thanks."

"Our pleasure," Hamilton smiled. "Talk to you later."

They broke the connection.

"Ham," addressed Martin. "I need to talk to you about something."

Hamilton sensed something. "What it is?"

"I don't think you really need me on this one. You've got things covered. So I was thinking about heading back to New York."

Hamilton's face showed his concern. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"For now, yes," the older man nodded. "But I'll be there if you need me. Hey, I'm part of this family, too!" He placed a hand on Hamilton's shoulder.

"When are you planning on going?"

"In the morning. I'll see if Gumball can give me a lift to PDX."

Hamilton gave Martin a thin smile. "Okay. But before you leave, what do you think about having our base of operations in New York, after Clark makes his announcement?"

He nodded. "I was thinking about that, too, when Karleen mentioned the Empire State Building. Also ... what if we put Clark up in the most-expensive penthouse in Manhattan?"

"You got a name?"

"Not yet, but I'll think about it. Have something for you before I leave."

Hamilton laughed. "Since he's going to be in the spotlight anyhow, let's show the world that we're not hiding anything!"

\* \* \*

*Thursday, February 15, 2007  
Lincoln City, Oregon  
The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent  
Evening*

"Perry," Clark addressed me. "Got a minute?"

"Sure," I answered. "What's up?"

He gestured to the beach outside. I didn't say anything more until we were far enough from the house not to be heard. Then I asked the question again. "What's up?"

"Mitch found a second hibernation chamber," Clark revealed. "It's identical to mine."

"*Identical?*" Talk about a shocker. "Where'd they find it?"

He paused momentarily, knowing how the answer would hit me. "Clackamas County."

"***Oregon?***" I blurted.

"Remember when we saw Ham's death from the Time Tunnel?"

Now I understood why he wanted to talk to me apart from the others. "Yes."

"And you remember Detrich's declaration?"

"How could I forget it? Some guy named 'Sweet Tooth' Sloan had masterminded the whole thing: your capture, putting you in suspended animation, leaking the information of the Crime College, all of it."

"Sloan had been in the second chamber."

"No!" I exclaimed softly. "He was in suspended animation at the same time as you?"

"It would appear so."

"Was ... there anybody *in* the chamber?"

"No," Clark answered. "It was empty, dumped in a ravine; had it not been for the heavy growth

cushioning the fall, it would've been destroyed."

"Thank God for the undergrowth," I muttered. "Sounds like somebody was trying to get rid of the evidence."

"Indeed," Clark nodded.

"Fingerprints?"

"Two so far," he clarified. "Sloan's and another fellow by the name of Vernon Tree. Mitch found both men's prints on the inner mechanisms of *both* chambers; that connects them to me. But more than that – Sloan's prints were on the *inside* of the chamber. He was inside. I wanted to share this with you."

"I appreciate it," I replied, glancing out at the ocean. But then I turned back to Clark, my face a mask of concern. "Does that mean that ... there might be *more* hibernation chambers out there?"

"I ... don't know," he echoed my concern. "When there was only one – *mine* – the thought never entered my head. But now ..."

I placed a hand on his arm. His eyes turned to me, and I smiled. "Why don't we table this issue for a later time, okay? I'm sure it'll still be there."

Clark nodded, and we headed back to the house.

Hamilton and Martin were in the living room, talking to the others. They shared Karleen's ideas, and Martin told us of his decision to return to New York. We tried talking him out of it, but gave up after a few minutes.

Hamilton shifted topics. "Perry, Pop, we're going to need your help."

"Comic relief?" I offered with a grin.

"That's *junior* comic relief," corrected Monk with a mock-stern glance. "I had the job *long* before you were born, kid!"

Clark waved in our direction, and pointed over to the lawyers.

We dropped the levity. "Okay, so what's on your mind?" asked Monk.

Hamilton explained. "Clark, you'll be making your initial announcement at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, with the wax statue of you in the background for contrast."

"I know that statue!" I beamed. "That's a *great* idea!"

"After the announcement, you'll stay at one of the most lavish hotels in New York City; since we don't want to tip our hand, we'll make the reservation in your name, Perry. And since we're hoping for a lot of responses for personal appearances and interviews, we'll coordinate it all through Doug's offices."

Doug Martin continued. "Clark, I know you could probably handle everything by yourself, but we



don't want you to be spread so thin that you make mistakes. Therefore, we're thinking that Monk and Perry can act as support; they'll give public interviews and such, and they'll provide a balance of perspectives."

I gawked at the thought. "Ahem! I'm *not* a public speaker! I'd be the worst choice to give interviews!"

"You're a preacher, you dunce!" Monk elbowed me in the side. "Public speaking's written in your DNA!"

"Don't worry, Perry," comforted Hamilton. "I'll coach you through anything they can throw at you. By the time I get done, you'll be as comfortable in front of a camera as Paris Hilton."

I grimaced. "You could've chosen a better example than that."

My comment sparked a couple of smiles. Hamilton continued. "The two of you are like bookends to Clark. Pop, you represent his past. Perry, you're his present. And, since you've been the strongest spiritual influence he's had, you'll be billed as his 'spiritual advisor'."

"I can see that. A lot of people will wonder if Clark's real ... or is he just faking it in order to gain sympathy."

"And you'll be the best one to assure them of his sincerity."

"Okay. I'm in."

Hamilton changed subjects. "Now, Clark, assuming that New York is the first state to find arrest warrants on you, I'd like to brief you on who you might be facing. They say the District Attorney is a real barracuda; her name's Carlie Goldsmith."

"Goldsmith?" I coughed. "Naw ... it *can't* be."

I glanced over at Clark; he tilted his head slightly and lifted his eyebrows as if to ask, "Why not?"

Monk commented, "You two look like you've seen a ghost!"

How could we answer him? I thought. *Oh, it's just that, last year, Clark and I were thrown into a parallel timeline where Clark became the President of the United States and Carlie Goldsmith was his Vice-President.*

But before I could speak, Clark answered, "We've heard of her."

"Hamilton," I ventured. "Would you happen to know, is she a ... *lesbian*?"

"I'm not sure," he answered. "I think so. Why do you ask?"

Clark and I didn't answer him. Instead we were locked into a private conversation.

"And I thought seeing Daniel Franklin again was a shock," I muttered. "Well, at least she won't be a total stranger."

"I wonder what she'd think if we sent her a box of Cuban cigars?" Clark mused aloud. Then he looked over at Hamilton. "Can you see what else you can find out about Ms. Goldsmith?"

Hamilton nodded warily. We hadn't answered his questions, and yet he said, "Yeah. Sure."

We continued to talk, but the topic of DA Goldsmith didn't come up again. We knew we'd have to tell Hamilton about it eventually.

But not now.

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

*Thursday, February 15, 2007*

*Portland, Oregon*

*Somewhere in the Northwest Industrial Area*

*Evening*

The large-screen plasma TV glowed black-and-white with the images of the old gangster movie.

Jimmy Cagney, his eyes wide with madness, still reeling from the death of his beloved mother, and now trapped atop the oil storage tank by the Feds, fired his remaining shots recklessly.

**"*Made it, Ma!*"** he cried to the heavens, flames surrounding him. **"*Top o'the world!*"**

Then the screen vanished in a fireball of high-octane gasoline. Then another. And another. And the cops watched a safe distance away as Cody Jarrett died instantly in the fiery inferno.

Sitting in a lounge before the large screen, the old man clapped and laughed over the top of the final lines of the movie. He moved the half-consumed bag of microwave popcorn from his lap to the table on his left, and spat out the DVD. Putting the disk aside for someone else to put away, he rose from his chair and walked over to the shelves of movies. As he bent over, squinting to see the titles in the dim light, another man entered the room behind him and turned on the light.

"Yeah, that's better," commented the older man, blinking at the sudden light. "*White Heat*. Hellova movie, Billy! Last time I saw it was about six months before goin' under! I tell you, the quality of the picture here is a darn sight better than that old movie house in Chicago." He straightened up and reflected on the end of the movie. "Well, at least Jarrett got to be with his ma at the end, so it ain't too bad." He selected another movie and moved back towards his lounge. "So what's going on, Billy?"

"Just wanted to let you know, test subject four was a success," he announced.

"Good. Was it that *colored* girl ... you know, the one with the name I can't pronounce?"

"T'xhal'Neetra," Bill supplied with only slight difficulty. "And it's not 'colored' anymore. They prefer 'black' or 'African American'."

"Whatever," the old man dismissed with a wave of his hand. He grinned. "So ... did you take my suggestion?"

Bill gave him a lecherous smile. "Yesterday she wouldn't let me touch her, let alone do what she did to me today."

"And when she was brought out of it?"

He shook his head. "She didn't remember a thing. And I'm not about to tell her."

"Good!" the old man clapped. "Good!"

"So, Grandfather ... when do we go after Savage?"

The older man gave the younger a stern expression. "Billy, I told you *not* to call me that! My name's Robert or Bob! Got it?"

"Yes, sir," he conceded again.

"An' as far as goin' after Savage ... we already *are*."

The young man's expression was startled. "What do you mean? How?"

The older man patiently explained. "You know I've been working with those two computer goons of ours."

"They're called *geeks*, not *goons*." He was used to correcting his grandfather's confusion of terms. "Glenn and Patrick are computer *geeks*."

"Whatever," he shrugged. "Anyhow, you and I know that Doc Savage is alive. He's out there, and he's probably in the States. Considerin' that nothin' public has been said about him means that he's obviously livin' under another name. Still with me?"

Bill nodded.

"Okay. So, I been payin' attention to the stuff on TV and that internet place. And I've noticed that they're talkin' more about Savage now than they were six months ago. So, Billy, what's that tell you about Doc Savage?"

"He's planting seeds."

"Right!" The older man smiled. "Savage is out there, and he's pavin' the way for his own version of the Second Coming. And, Billy, I'm willing to bet that it's gonna be soon. All we gotta do is be patient a little ... while ... longer."

Bill nodded somberly. "Okay. Thanks."

"No problem." He turned around and continued looking through the movies. Then he selected one and put the disk carefully in the player. "You wanna get the lights, Billy?"

Bill Sloan flipped off the switch. As the movie started, he paused at the door and looked at the back of his grandfather's head and smiled.

Both he and his father had revered the old man. To them, he was a hero and a pioneer. He had defeated Doc Savage. And Bill Sloan was thoroughly convinced that he would do it again.

The hard part was the waiting.

It had been over a year since Bill had freed his grandfather from hibernation. It had been a *long* year, and not one without difficulties. There were the anticipated weeks of physical therapy to reverse the atrophy in his muscles. But then, on the heels of that, was the sudden and mysterious illness his grandfather contracted that had made him seriously ill. He would've died if it hadn't been ... *for the med students*. Bill stared at his grandfather's back, trying not to remember what happened to the med students.

"Hey, Billy!" his grandfather interrupted his thoughts. "You gonna stand over there forever?"

"No, Robert," he answered, somewhat embarrassed at his daydreaming, but at least he'd used his grandfather's preferred name. "I was just thinking. Sorry."

He closed the door behind him as he left the room.

As he headed back upstairs to his own quarters, he noticed all the work that had been done to this old warehouse. It was his grandfather's idea to move from their house in Estacada and set up shop here in Northwest Portland, next to the Willamette River. It was also his idea to quietly remodel the warehouse to fit their overall plans.

Bill Sloan couldn't help but smile at his grandfather's exuberance for classic movies such as *White Heat*. That's what prompted the old man to have a well-stocked home theater built on the ground floor of the warehouse.

His grandfather had adapted well to this time. And Bill Sloan trusted his grandfather's instincts and wisdom. The time for action would be soon.

\* \* \*

Robert Sloan sighed as he heard the door close behind him. He hadn't really been paying attention to the movie, not when he knew his grandson was staring at him. He hadn't seen him staring at him – but he could feel him.

He remembered his grandson's admission that he looked to his grandfather as some sort of a hero.

"I hate to use him like this," he muttered under his breath. "After all, he is family."

*Family doesn't matter when you're looking out for Number One.*

His hand reached down to a recessed niche next to the chair where the .45 automatic was hidden; Bill didn't have a clue this was here – or any of the *other* 'precautions' built into this room.

"I'm not a hero. Heroes are selfless. Not me. I'm an *opportunist*."

*It's a gift. You've had it all your life.*

"Yeah. It's a knack ... a talent ... an ability. Whatever it is, it's kept me comfortable during the hard times of my life. I could take advantage of others, barrow their ideas, talk them into doing what I wanted – and they'd never realize they were being tricked."

*Remember how easy it was getting through school?*

Sloan remembered his younger years, as he would take advantage of smarter kids. He'd copy from their tests or claim others' projects as his own. When there was a group project, he'd magically become their best friend and ride along on their coattails. And the fun part was that he never got caught.

*Too bad you never went into politics. You probably would've ended up in the White House.*

"I'm not a high-profile person. High-profile people make good targets, and I never wanted to be a target. So I'd let the others get caught; I'd follow in their shadow, walk in their footsteps, but I'd avoid their pitfalls."

*You still got caught.*

"Hey, that was only once, for breaking and entering. I did three lousy years. But even on the inside, I got away with a lot more than *anyone* ever knew."

*And that's where you learned about the Crime College.*

"It was always spoken of in the shadows, in whispers, like it was some sorta boogeyman. But I wanted to know more. I wanted to know a *lot* more. And I did. Piece by piece, I learned all I could, including how somebody could get a job there. I didn't want to wait three years to check it out in person, so I needed somebody else – somebody who would take all the risks."

*And that's when you met James Detrich.*

"Jimmy'd been arrested for bootlegging. He'd be free long before I was. He had a talent for remembering everything he saw. He was also a bit of a loner. So I became his best friend. I showed him how to get a job in the Crime College. He collected the information, and fed it to me while I was still in the joint. It was a real eye-opener."

*You learned of Savage's weakness.*

"Yeah. There were a lot of rumors about the so-called Crime College – that it existed, and what happened there. But its location had been a bigger secret than the Manhattan Project. Sure, some had tried to get to the bottom of it – but they never got far. Savage stopped them. I knew that, if Savage could be kept from cutting them off at the pass, the truth would nail him to the wall."

*So you had to take Savage out of the picture.*

"Not an easy task, I might add. But I remembered something from a few years earlier. I was working for John Sunlight's gang, and we'd busted into this mysterious Great Blue Dome in the Arctic Circle. At the time, I grabbed a bunch of blueprints and plans, and snuck 'em out. Later, as I was going through them, I saw something that would put a person into suspended animation. Now *that* was something I could use!"

*You've always wanted to be Buck Rogers.*

"Yeah! One guy in the joint told me about some financial investments he had going. So I took a bundle and put it into some *extremely* long-term investments – you know, things that wouldn't make money right away, but would after forty years or more. I thought, that's the ticket – skip past everything in the present world and take a cosmic shortcut into the future. I figured a hundred years was a nice round number. The cops would have long forgotten about me, and I'd be rich as a king."

*But you also wanted to take care of Savage.*

"Savage was a smart man ... his security was in how much he knew. But set him down a hundred years in the future, where his knowledge would be old news, and he'd go nuts. I planned on watching him fall into despondency and depression. Then, at just the right moment, hand him a gun and give him a last push, and he'd blow his own brains out. End of story."

*That's what you told your family. But that wasn't the truth.*

"No, it wasn't. I didn't want to be a guinea pig for some science experiment that might not work. So I put Savage in there first ... see if he croaked. Then, once I knew it was safe, I followed. And Savage? Well, I didn't tell my son that that Savage's chamber wasn't gonna open up *ever*. I just figured, when I woke up in the future, that I'd have his chamber dumped in the ocean somewhere.

"And, just in case Savage found some way of escaping his chamber first, I wanted to make sure that his future would be a seriously unpleasant one. I took all of the information Detrich had collected and had it delivered to that reporter, Murrow."

*But you're still scared of Savage.*

"And why shouldn't I? He could still come after me! That's why I'm here, and I've burned all my bridges behind me. The first thing I did was to get rid of that blasted chamber. It's not my fault that those fools I sent to dump it in the river botched the job."

*They got spooked by a police car following them.*

"Yeah. They dumped it in a ravine instead ... swore to me that it hit the bottom and was destroyed. Still, I didn't trust them; if they'd spook at a stupid cop car, they'd spill their guts if the cops gave 'em the third degree."

*So you had them killed. But why the med students?*

"Don't get me wrong. I'm grateful to those kids for bringin' me back and nursing me back to health. But we were moving the whole operation – starting fresh – and they knew far too much to be left alive. They were expendable."

*So now you're here. And you have a plan.*

"I sure do. And all the credit goes to those television shows I watched while I was recovering. The first thing that had made an impression on me was that movie – *Telefön*. It was a spy yarn about a bunch of "sleeper" agents who were woken up and had been programmed to do a lot of destruction. The other thing that made an impression on me was a documentary on cults. I tell ya,

I was shocked and amazed to see what had happened at Jonestown from just one man."

*You found the ultimate example of using others.*

"Yeah. And it's workin' like a charm!"

*Good boy.*

Robert Sloan smiled, grabbed another beer from his cooler, and restarted the DVD.

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER NINE**

*Friday, February 16, 2007*

*Lincoln City, Oregon*

*The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent*

*Morning*

I came into the house. Clark was already awake, wearing a robe over his pajamas. He shuffled around the kitchen, putting together the ingredients for breakfast. As he preheated a skillet, he acknowledged me with a sleepy, "Mornin'."

"Mornin'," I muttered back.

Making myself at home, I got a plastic tumbler from a cabinet and filled it from a gallon jug of 1%. I took a few sips, then topped it off before putting the milk back.

"You're makin' breakfast?" I observed. "Is Bonnie okay?"

"She was up half the night with the triplets, so I'm lettin' her sleep in."

"That's nice," I smiled. "Did you have any ... *weird dreams* last night?"

Clark froze briefly, and he turned to me. "About the *Avengers*?"

Now I wasn't surprised. "You were talking to *all* of them."

"God's telling us something," he simply stated.

Just then, the phone rang. Being closer, I caught it just after the first ring. A moment later I held it out to Clark. "It's Sunni. She sounds excited. You don't think ...?"

Clark didn't answer, but just took the phone. "Good morning, Sunni."

"Clark!" By the tone of the blind woman's voice, she was definitely excited. "Last night I had a dream that you were talking before the Bronze Avengers!"

"Easy, easy!" He tried to calm her. "Perry and I had the same dream."

Sunni's voice softened. "Okay ... God's got plans. So how are we gonna run with this?"

"Not sure."

Just then, Hamilton joined us in the kitchen; his expression was excited. "You wouldn't believe the night I had!"

Clark turned to the phone. "Sunni, hold on a moment."

"You had a dream about the Bronze Avengers," I stated without hesitation.

"Yeah," he replied, suddenly dumbfounded. "Clark was in some kinda auditorium or lecture hall, talking to a room full of people. I knew they were the Bronze Avengers, but ... I don't know how I knew they were."

"Doesn't matter," I grinned, not wanting to give out my true opinion.

Clark turned back to the phone. "Sunni, it's unanimous. Let me call you back in a few minutes."

Hamilton's expression was amused curiosity. He looked at me and asked, "This happen a lot to you guys?"

"More than you know," I answered with a grin.

"So, what does this mean?"

Clark didn't hesitate. "I need to talk to *all* of the Bronze Avengers."

"The most I've ever seen in their chat room has been maybe a dozen. How do we get everybody to log in at the same time?"

Clark smiled knowingly.

\* \* \*

*Arronaxe, New York*  
*The home of Darren and Sunni Bowman*  
*Morning*

In the study/nursery of her home in Arronaxe, Sunni Bowman carried her 2-year-old daughter Tina to her crib and gently laid her down. As she placed her pink teddy bear Rebecca next to her and covered them both with a blanket, she heard the phone ringing in the other room. Her husband Darren answered it. As she came out of the nursery, he announced, "It's Clark."

She was expecting it. She took the phone. "What did you come up with?"

"Who manages the Avenger chat room?"

"*Manages?*" she repeated. "I don't think I ever heard of a manager. It's never come up. But it makes sense that somebody would have to."

Clark paused. "Okay. I'll talk to Mitch."



"I'll keep you in prayer. If I think of anyone I'll let you know."

"Thanks. I'll keep you posted."

\* \* \*

*Friday, February 16, 2007  
Portland, Oregon  
Multnomah County Morgue  
Evening*

It was late, and Carlotta Dupree was tired.

She and her husband Oswald had just come back from a couple of days snowboarding on Mount Hood. The powder had been excellent, but they ran late in returning to Portland ... too late for either of them to catch a nap before coming on shift. So she compensated with an espresso OD from Starbuck's.

She put on the blue surgical mask and walked into the examination room. Beneath the overhead lights, on the exam table, lay the naked corpse of a man.

"Good evening," she addressed the body respectfully. "Let's have a look at you, shall we?"

She started to work by taking measurements and reading the information into a microphone that hung from the ceiling. He was a Caucasian male, somewhere in his late 40's. She indicated height and approximate weight. Cause of death seemed to be obvious: a large section of the left side of his head was missing, the exit point of a bullet wound. But as she looked for the point of entry, it was not to be found.

"From the inside ...?" she muttered to herself.

Just then Oswald joined her.

"I've got the police report," he informed her.

"Talk to me."

He read from the clipboard. "Name, Lawrence Cowen. Transient. Occupation, none. Residence, none. At 3:15 this afternoon, he walked into the Seafirst by OHSU, pulled out an automatic which later turned out to be a plastic replica, and ordered everybody to lay face down on the floor. Witnesses said he seemed to act a little spacey, as if he was on drugs, but nobody wanted to play the hero and run the risk of getting shot. While he emptied the tills, one of the tellers tripped the silent alarm, and the police showed up a few minutes later. They surrounded the place and ordered him to surrender. At first it looked like he was going to cooperate, but then suddenly the side of his head opened up like a melon and he went down."

"Did anyone hear a shot?"

He shook his head. "And none of the officers at the scene discharged their firearm."

"Sniper?"

"SWAT was on their way, but hadn't gotten there yet."

"Weird." She beckoned him over to the body and showed him what she had seen with the man's head. "Wouldn't you say it looks as if whatever happened originated from within the skull, not from without?"

"Looks like it," he agreed.

"I'm going to open him up and look a bit deeper," she informed him.

"I'll go through the vic's things and the photos of the scene. Security tapes, too."

"I've got Grace running a tox screen; check on her in a little while. And check on me once in a while, too. Make sure I don't fall asleep face first in this guy's chest cavity."

He gave her a smile and a quick kiss on the shoulder. "Will do."

He left the room. She turned back to the body. "Okay, Mr. Cowen, let's see if we can get a few answers out of that head of yours ..."

\* \* \*

*Sunday, February 18, 2007  
Lincoln City, Oregon  
Morning*

It was our first Sunday since this all went down.

And, boy, were we ready for it.

The *Lincoln City Church of Christ* was a small congregation a mile from the main drag, with a new housing development sprouting up next door. Its pastor was Mark Klatt, an amiable fellow and a good spiritual leader. As soon as he saw us, he welcomed us with hugs and handshakes.

We felt at home.

Pastor Mark had been privy to Clark's secret for some time, and he'd dedicated the triplets, so we had no problem filling him in on our plans.

He wasn't surprised. "I could see this has been weighing on your heart for some time, Clark," he disclosed. "This is all for God's glory, no matter how it turns out. I'd suggest you start putting out the word to everyone you can trust. Establish a prayer base – the more the merrier." He put his hands on Clark's shoulders and looked up into his face. "And always, always remember – this battle is the Lord's. And so is the victory."

So by the time we returned to Clark and Bonnie's, we knew our next move. It came in the form of subtle, almost coded emails and cell phone conversations.

*Pray. Pray hard. Pray diligently.*

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER TEN

*Wednesday, February 21, 2007  
Lincoln City, Oregon  
Afternoon*

Dot sat at her notebook computer. She entered the password to open the file, then took a deep breath and started typing.

Jennifer, Jason, Sarah:

I've decided to start a journal to chronicle this time of our lives. Part of it is because of you three. Eventually you're going to wonder why your dad did what he did. Hopefully, this'll answer all your questions.

My other reason for doing this is admittedly selfish. If this turns out to be as epic as we feel it's going to be, it's a good bet *someone* will write a book about it. And if it's going to be done, I want to be the first one out with the truth.

I figure by now your folks have told you their reasons for doing this, so I won't tell you again. Suffice it to say that he wants the name *Savage* to count for something, especially for you three. He's really taken to being a dad, and he's really putting a lot on the line for you.

But that's just the kind of man he is.

Your Uncle Hamilton's working on your dad's defense, seeing what things they'll need well ahead of the time. And your Uncle Doug Martin is back in New York City, setting up operations on that end. In the meantime, Hamilton's brought in one of the secretaries from his law firm in Florida. Her name's Marion Carter.

Dot paused to insert a digital photo of Marion into the document. She was in her early 30's, of medium build, and with short brown wavy hair. She continued.

Marion's a hard worker. When she's 'on duty' she's totally professional, seriously attentive and severely businesslike.

Since she's from Florida, you'd think she wouldn't be surprised by having the beach in our backyard. But when I took her to get a motel room when she first came in, she saw the view from the lookout at the 'D' River and practically jumped out of the car! And when I finally stopped the car, she pulled off her shoes and sprinted down to the ocean's edge like a kid!

Later, she told me it was because this was her first trip to the *West Coast*.

She admitted to having a vague recollection of the name Doc Savage, but that was the extent of it. So the first thing Hamilton did was give her a briefing on Clark's life and times, including an intensive viewing of the material Karleen had provided. She came

highly recommended as someone who could be keep things secret, and I personally have a peace about having her as part of the team.

One of the strategies that Doug and Hamilton came up with is a little 'seeding' among the media. Shortly after Clark filmed the short film for Karleen, she added some music and some effects and sent out a bunch of bronze-colored DVDs to a select "A" list of movers and shakers, giving them an invitation to Clark's announcement.

You might notice me referring to the time of Clark's announcement before the public as his 'coming out party'. That one's your mom's fault. Having lived her early life in the Southern U.S. – specifically New Orleans – she'd always been familiar with the concept of a *cotillion* or a *coming out party* that would formally introduce young ladies – called *debutantes* – to society. Well, as we were talking about Clark's announcement, your mom teasingly referred to it as his 'coming out party' – since Clark would, after all, be re-introducing himself to the public. Well, it caught on. And the intentional humor has done well to counteract some of the stress we're going through.

Hamilton has been doing his best preparing for the inevitable interviews. Your Uncle Perry's sweating bullets (but that's just between us). However, Granddad's encouragement and wry humor are making things easier.

Just then, Dot heard the door to Nomad opening. She quickly saved the file and closed the notebook PC.

Perry appeared at the top of the stairs, and announced, "We found the Sysop."

\* \* \*

*Friday, February 22, 2007*  
*Indianapolis, Indiana*  
*Morning*

Jeremy Stone rested his bulky frame into his recliner lounge and checked out the items on his side tables. On his left was his remote. On his right were chips and dip, and a large mug of root beer on ice. He had loaded up his DVD player's carousel with a full season of *Star Trek: Voyager*, and had carefully cleaned the screen of his widescreen HDTV. His cell phone and landline phone were on silent; the voicemail would get any messages. Nothing was going to stop this event, he promised himself.

Just then, there came a knock at his door.

Offering a few grunted obscenities – including one in fluent Klingon – he hoped they'd just decide to leave him alone. But after the third knock, he knew it wasn't to be. He gave a low growl as he got to his feet and headed for the door.

"WHO IS IT?" he called loudly, hoping they'd take the hint and go away.

The response – a young female voice who spoke only one word: "Wingbear" – surprised him.

This has got to be some bizarre practical joke, he thought. But it couldn't be! He knew who Wingbear was, and that Wingbear is a woman. But why would she be here? He looked through

the peephole, and saw a woman standing there; the handle of a white cane near her face. He hesitated for only a second before unlatching the door and opening it.

He looked at the woman. She didn't respond to his movement.

"Yes?" he said.

"Jeremy Stone?" she asked. "I'm Sunni Bowman ... *Wingbear*."

He tried to bluff. "Do I know you?"

"Is this Apartment 12?"

"Yes."

"Are you Jeremy Stone?"

"Yes."

"Then you're Sysop of the *Bronze Avengers* chat room," she declared, extending her hand. "I'm Sunni."

Stone blinked at the hand for a moment, his mouth open for a rebuttal, his suspicions on alert, his shields raised. But then his mouth closed and he shook the hand. "What ... why are you here?"

"I've got some important news about Doc Savage. Can I come in?"

He nodded, then realized his *faux pas* and said, "Sure."

The woman stretched out the white cane, swinging it methodically from side to side as she took a step into the apartment. As she began to head for a floor lamp, he put a hand on her shoulder to stop her. "You need a hand?"

"It would help," she replied. "Thanks."

He hesitated, and she reached out a hand. "Give me your elbow."

"Okay." He obliged, and uneasily guided her towards the couch, identifying it. She released his elbow and sat down.

He sat back down in his lounge chair. Then he turned off the TV and took a quick sip of the root beer; the sudden icy cold sugar rush startled him.

"Okay, Sunni. You said you have news about Doc Savage. What is it?"

"First thing, I gotta say, you've done a dynamite job over the years. Heck, I didn't even think the chat room had a Sysop until I got to thinking about it."

"Okay," he brushed off the compliment. "Again ... what's the news about Doc Savage?"

"He's alive."

"Old news," he shrugged to himself. "I've seen the tabloids."

"This isn't about the tabloids. Let me ask you: what would it take for *you* to believe that Doc Savage is alive?"

Stone wanted to laugh. There'd always been rumors that Doc Savage was alive, but they were all too ridiculous to believe. "First, I'd have to see him face-to-face," he answered with a smirk. "And maybe have one of his team here, too."

"Such as Monk Mayfair?"

She couldn't be serious, he thought. He placated her. "Sure. Mayfair's as good as any."

"Can you guide me back to your front door?" she asked calmly.

Was she giving up? he wondered. Hopefully she'll leave and I can get back to *Voyager*.

He assisted her to the door.

"Could you open it, please?" she asked.

Concluding that she was indeed going to leave, he complied. But instead of leaving, she faced the hallway and said, "*Okay, guys! C'mon!*"

As Jeremy looked down the hall, two men appeared around the corner and walked towards his apartment. He instantly recognized Monk Mayfair, and his jaw dropped. But the other man walking with him caused Jeremy Stone to suddenly gasp for air.

"It *can't* be!" he muttered under his breath. "It's *not!*"

Sunni gave a small smile and replied, "It *is*."

The hell with *Voyager*, Stone instantly decided.

As the two men stopped at the door, Sunni made the introductions, "Jeremy Stone – Monk Mayfair, Clark Savage, Jr."

Monk held out a hairy hand. "Good t'meet'cha. Mind if we come in?"

Stone nodded dumbly, his brain trying to believe the evidence of his eyes. The two men walked past them and into the apartment. Clark closed the door behind them.

"Nice place," commented Monk. "Love the video system."

Jeremy didn't move.

"Jeremy?" addressed Sunni at the silence near her. "Jeremy?"

"He's there," Monk responded. "But I think he's in shock, though. Do y'think, if we smack him in the back of the head, he'll –"

Just then, as if jolted by a shot of adrenaline to the heart, Jeremy exclaimed, "You *are*!"

"You wanna see my driver's license?" asked Monk, starting to reach for his wallet.

"*No, no, no!*" he blurted. "Please, *please* – have a seat!"

It took a few moments after they were all seated, but Jeremy finally relaxed.

"This ... this is so ... *surreal*," he commented, aghast. "So what can I do for you, Mr. Savage?"

"Don't you want to know where I've been all these years?" asked Clark.

"No," he shook his head. "I figure if you want me to know, you'll tell me."

"That's faith," commented Sunni.

"Thank you, Mr. Stone," said Clark.

"Jeremy."

"Jeremy. A bit of background is needed before I answer your question. In 1949 I was placed in suspended animation by one of my enemies. I was revived in 1999. I found out what had happened with the Crime College, and I tracked down the rest of my team. Considering what the rest of the world thought of me, I decided it prudent to hide from the law until the proper time. *Now* is the proper time. I want to face the law and clear my name."

"So you believe that what you did with the Crime College was the right thing to do?"

Clark again explained his position with regards to the Crime College. He knew it would be a story he'd tell over and over again once he came into the open, so he tried tailoring it to Jeremy in ways he would understand.

"A few days ago, there was a newbie asking questions about you and the Crime College ..."

"My granddaughter," provided Monk.

"Your ... *granddaughter*?" he repeated, starting to put the pieces together. "So you were testing the waters ... to see what kind of public response you might get?"

"Yes," answered Clark matter-of-factly. "Who better than the *Bronze Avengers*?"

"Quite. When did you find out about us?"

"Two thousand one."

"The quake in Pine Corners," he deduced.

"We were there," acknowledged Clark. "Actually, though, Sunni was the real hero; she used my short wave to make contact with Buddy Brannan."

Jeremy Stone sat back. All his anxiety had been replaced by the familiarity a man has around dear friends. He smiled. "If I had any doubts before, I don't have them now. So, what can I do?"

"Obviously we're going to have plenty of physical proof that it's me: fingerprints, voiceprints, and DNA. But, despite all this, there will be some who just will find it hard to believe that I'm alive. Your first reactions are an example of that. I want to improve the odds before coming before the public at large."

"So you want to run it past the only group of people in the world that will *challenge* you but won't turn you in," nodded Stone. "Tell me more."

"I want to set aside a specific date and time where I can be in the chat room, and present myself to the entire membership of the Bronze Avengers. Let them challenge me, ask me questions that will prove to each of them that I am indeed who I say I am."

"What would it take for you to set something like that up?" asked Sunni.

"Well," Stone started musing aloud. "I'd need to get the word out to *everybody*. Let them know this isn't some practical joke, but it's on the level. There's a few out there who would get *real* paranoid if we let out member numbers, so I'll have to suppress that for this occasion. And, if we're going to have questions and answers, I'll need to set up a few ground rules, otherwise we're inviting wholesale chaos. Doc? – mind if I call you Doc?"

"No," he smiled warmly. "I'm getting used to hearing it again."

"Doc, would you mind putting a web cam on your computer? That way I can set up an inset window that would show a live picture of you answering their questions. It would be far more convincing than just having an anonymous body typing on a keyboard."

Clark and Monk agreed that it was a good idea.

"How will you know if it's working?" asked Monk.

"I'd probably have to set up something like an exit poll. Let them know about it in advance so they don't feel they're getting the third-degree – give them a few minutes after they're done with their questions, so they can think about it, then ask them what they think." He suddenly let off with a peal of joyous laughter. "Man, this is *amazing*! Thanks, Doc!"

"Thank *you*," Clark returned. "Jeremy, once thing I *have* to emphasize. Once I come into the open, every police agency in the nation will be scrambling for the old arrest warrants they have on me. In the meantime, I'll be giving as many interviews as possible. I don't need to stress the fact that secrecy is essential."

"Of course," Jeremy nodded. "I don't blame you. I don't know if I can vouch for *everybody*, but I'll do what I can. Beyond that is up to them."

"Fair enough."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**



*Saturday, February 24, 2007*  
*New York City, New York*  
*Morning*

In his apartment, Jefferson Davis Frye bolted straight up in his bed, his body covered in sweat.

He looked over at his clock radio, confirming that it was Saturday morning and that he didn't have to go in to work today. He decided to take a shower. As the water washed away his sweat, his mind focused on what had woke him so suddenly.

It was Doc Savage.

He didn't know much about Doc Savage, except what he picked up in passing while working for Penelope Savage. And there had been those two strangers who had visited Penelope, whose mere presence had caused her to go ballistic. He was in another part of the building when it had all gone down, but the story got around. Penelope had apparently shot both men with tranquilizer darts and ordered them to be loaded aboard her Osprey for God-knows-what. But then something happened, and the strangers disappeared along with her pride-and-joy Osprey. Nobody wanted to get near her after that. She seemed to focus her rage on another lawyer, Douglas Martin, who had connections to the two men. So she sent him to exercise some legal muscle against Martin, to be able to track them down.

It was one of the worst days of his life, as Martin sent him back with his tail between his legs, then Penelope fired him on the spot.

In a way, however, his being fired had been a lucky break. If he hadn't been fired, he would've been in his office in the World Trade Center tower on the morning of 9/11.

Lady Luck had spared his life, but the next few years were rough as he went from job to job and client to client, until he ended up at the ACLU, then the New York City District Attorney's office.

But now he was having those dreams. They were all the same, of Doc Savage; he looked like he had from the old pictures, but he was in modern-day New York. As Frye finished his shower, he remembered seeing a retrospective news clip about Doc Savage on television.

*Could there be a connection?* he thought.

He sat before his computer and did a search on Doc Savage. He was surprised at how many recent references there were to a man who'd been gone for over fifty years. He decided to check them out.

He didn't take a break until the morning sun came through his window. As he got up from his computer, stretching away the stiffness of his searching, his mind echoed with one thought: *what if Doc Savage is alive?*

He pictured Richard Dreyfuss in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, staring at a mound of mashed potatoes and mumbling, "This *means* something." But he understood Dreyfuss' near-maniacal obsession. He grabbed some fruit in lieu of a proper breakfast, then, like a man possessed, he returned to his task.

\* \* \*

*Saturday, February 24, 2007  
Lincoln City, Oregon  
Afternoon*

Dot came into the house, holding a fresh printout. "Here's the email from Jeremy Stone!"

When we'd all come together, she read it aloud.

"From: Sysop. To: Undisclosed.

"Subject: 'Greetings to all Bronze Avengers.

"Greetings to all Bronze Avengers from the Systems Operator. When I'm in the chat area I go by the screen name *Phantom Lad*. I apologize for this unorthodox break in protocol, but I believe you will soon understand why.

"A couple of days ago I was visited by the Avenger known to us as Wingbear. She was accompanied by the real Monk Mayfair and another gentleman who identified himself as Clark Savage, Jr. I was skeptical at first, despite the man's resemblance to Doc Savage, and the personal endorsement from a known celebrity. However, after a few minutes, I was fully convinced that he was indeed Doc Savage, alive and in the flesh.

"He proceeded to explain to me in detail what had happened to him and where he's been since 1949. I believe him. He is requesting an opportunity to address the body of the Bronze Avengers and prove to you all that he is who he says he is.

"Therefore, on Saturday, March 3rd, starting at approximately 0800 Eastern Standard Time, I am inviting all Bronze Avengers to log in and challenge this man with your questions. In order to make this as painless as possible, and to alleviate any apprehensions you may have, I will be invoking several special measures.' Then he lists some technical stuff having to do with ensuring member privacy, suppressing the usual chat room numbers, and organizing an order to the questions. It's actually pretty good. It also says about the inset window with you on the webcam, so they can see who they're talking to."

She scanned the text. "Okay, here: 'Some of you may be reluctant to participate in this. Don't be. We're a family here. And this may be the most important day in the history of the Bronze Avengers. On my word, this is no trick or deception. As a gesture of good faith, I give you my email address in case you have any questions. I'll see you on the 3rd at 0800. *Do right to all, and wrong no man.*'"

She lowered the paper and smiled.

"Impressive," I commented. "He's really putting himself on the line."

"What do you think, Clark?"

Throughout the reading, Clark had sat at the table nearby, his attention fixed on Dot. I couldn't read him.

"I agree," he finally said. "I'm very impressed."

"You nervous?" I asked.

"I'm ... apprehensive," he clarified. Then he stood. "If you'll excuse me, I need to spend some time in prayer."

Without waiting for a reply from us, he turned and walked away. I waited until he was out of earshot, then turned to Dot. "You think it's starting to get to him?"

"Possibly. He has a good idea, though. Let's head back to the bus and get in some prayer time as well."

We excused ourselves.

\* \* \*

*Sunday, February 25, 2007*

*Portland, Oregon*

*Evening*

**"Bull!"**

Oswald Dupree stuck his head around the corner from the kitchen. "What is it?"

"Channel Six just reported that Larry Cowen died as a result of sniper fire!" She joined him in the kitchen, still fuming. "You and I both know that's *crap*! They're just trying to sweep it under the rug 'cause he was *homeless*!"

"I don't think that's the case, Lotta. Besides, you weren't able to give them a cause of death."

She grunted with frustration. "There wasn't an entry wound!"

"What if the entry wound was in that part of the vic's head that got blown away? You said there were traces of metal, right? Well, suppose the vic had a metal plate in his head. The sniper shoots, hits, but it hits the metal plate. But the plate and the bullet shatter back in the direction of the entry wound. *Possible?*"

"Possible," she conceded. "But unlikely. First, the witnesses and the security cameras showed him facing away from the shooters when things happened. Second, you talked to everybody who was in that bank; apart from the bank's own security, nobody was carrying. And they all said that not one shot was fired ... unless it was a silencer, and that's kinda doubtful. And third, I found a trace of some kind of explosive near the wound. That adds up to a lot of reasonable doubt. But Eggers has closed the case." She paused, then spat, "That ... *butthead*!"

"Agreed," he sighed. "I don't know. The vic was a transient ... no next of kin. You can't give him a definitive COD. Plus, Eggers is the Chief, and he can do what he wants to. It happens."

"Yeah," she said coldly. "But it doesn't mean I have to like it."

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER TWELVE

*Saturday, March 3, 2007*

*Lincoln City, Oregon*

*The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent*

*0800 EST minus ten minutes*

Clark's den had been rearranged for the big event. A second PC with an extra-large monitor had been set up on a table perpendicular to Clark's desk; that would be the one the rest of us would monitor from the Avengers' perspective. A partition had been set up behind Clark so that nothing in the background would give away details of our location. The webcam was providing a sharp image of Clark's stoic countenance.

It had taken Clark over an hour to pick out which shirt to wear. In the end Bonnie handed him one of the *Clark Savage Institute* sweatshirts and said, "Put it on!"

It was a full house, both here and in the Bronze Avengers chat room.

We'd talked with Jeremy Stone several times between his invitation email and now. As had been expected, there'd been a glut of responses in his mailbox after the big announcement. Most of those concerns had been about security, and Jeremy was convinced that his answers were sufficient for them. He confided in us that there were almost a million people around the world 'tuned in' to the chat room.

It was awesome.

Despite the fact that most of us had spent the last 48 hours in fasting and praying, there was still a tinge of anxiousness in the room as we waited for the starting pistol. Clark sat alone, his breathing slow and steady, his eyes closed in prayer.

"Hon," Bonnie announced, "Coming up on eight o'clock in three ... two ... one ... *now*."

Clark's eyes opened.

On our monitor the inset window appeared in the upper right corner along with the words PLEASE STAND BY.

WELCOME, BRONZE AVENGERS, came Jeremy Stone's introduction. THANK YOU ALL FOR BEING HERE. AS YOU CAN SEE, THE COUNTERS HAVE BEEN SUPPRESSED. OUR NUMBERS ARE SAFE. A VIDEO WINDOW HAS BEEN PROVIDED SO THAT YOU CAN ALL SEE THE MAN WE'RE ALL HERE FOR. AND NOW I TURN THIS OVER TO CLARK SAVAGE, JR. – DOC SAVAGE.

The PLEASE STAND BY was replaced with Clark's face.

He smiled, and his fingers played across the keyboard. THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS YOU ALL. I DON'T KNOW IF ALL OF YOU HAVE BEEN INFORMED AS TO WHAT HAPPENED TO ME BACK IN 1949. TO THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVEN'T, ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN.

And so Clark summarized his story again, from the time he was ambushed and placed into suspended animation, to the present. He did explain that he was now a Christian, but he didn't expand on the details. He didn't say anything about our more-recent adventures, with the exception of what happened at Pine Corners – of which the Avengers had been key players. He commended the Avengers for the amazing job they did in providing supplies and manpower to Pine Corners, and the lives that were saved because of them. We knew we had to exercise a lot of discretion in what we shared with others, so Clark didn't bring up his role in Pat's life and CSI's conception.

SO THERE YOU HAVE IT, he concluded. NOW, PLEASE, ASK YOUR QUESTIONS.

Below is a selection from the questions that followed:

\* \* \*

Q: WHY WASN'T THE REST OF YOUR TEAM WITH YOU WHEN YOU RETURNED TO THE CAVES?

A: I HADN'T TOLD THEM I WAS RETURNING TO THE CAVES. THEREFORE, I WAS UNPREPARED FOR AN AMBUSH. ADMITTEDLY, IT WAS A STUPID MOVE.

\* \* \*

Q: YOUR STORIES ALWAYS PORTRAYED YOU AS OPEN TO ALL FAITHS AND RELIGIONS. SO WHY WOULD YOU ABANDON THAT FOR A MONOTHEISTIC FAITH-BASED SYSTEM?

A: IN ORDER TO ANSWER THAT, I MUST GIVE YOU A LITTLE BACKGROUND.

PRIOR TO MY HIBERNATION, I TRIED TO BE WHAT EVERYONE EXPECTED ME TO BE – MORE THAN HUMAN. IN STRIVING FOR THIS PERFECTION, I WAS QUICKLY APPROACHING A POINT OF BURNOUT.

THIS DIDN'T CHANGE AFTER I WAS REVIVED. IN FACT, IT WAS COMPOUNDED BY THE FACT THAT I WAS FIFTY YEARS BEYOND MY TIME.

EVENTUALLY I SOUGHT FOOD IN A RESCUE MISSION. WHILE THERE, I LISTENED TO THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION.

EVERYTHING I HAD LEARNED OF RELIGIONS AND BELIEF SYSTEMS WAS JUST HEAD KNOWLEDGE. IT WAS NO DIFFERENT THAN LEARNING THE PERIODIC TABLE.

THERE WAS NO REASON FOR ME TO TAKE IT TO HEART, UNTIL THEN. BUT THIS TIME IT WAS DIFFERENT.

I SAW SOMETHING THAT WAS MISSING IN MY LIFE. MY DECISION WAS NOT BASED ON RAW EMOTION, BUT ON LOGIC. SO I MADE A DECISION, A CHOICE. AND I FOUND A FREEDOM THAT I HAD NEVER KNOWN BEFORE.

AND I HAVEN'T REGRETTED IT.

His face had been intense as he typed the words. But then he looked up and gave a sheepish smile.

FORGIVE ME ... I DIDN'T INTEND TO PREACH. PLEASE, NEXT QUESTION.

\* \* \*

Q: HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT HAM'S SUICIDE AND RENNY'S DEATH?

Clark tried not to hesitate in his response, especially when it concerned Renny.

A: I'M SAD, OF COURSE. THEY WERE BOTH GOOD FRIENDS AND TRUSTED ASSOCIATES.

I AM THANKFUL FOR ONE PIECE OF EXCELLENT NEWS: LAST YEAR WE WERE ABLE TO FIND EVIDENCE THAT PROVED THAT HAM'S DEATH WAS ACTUALLY A MURDER THAT WAS MADE TO APPEAR LIKE A SUICIDE.

\* \* \*

Q: WHEN AND WHERE WILL YOU SHOW UP IN PUBLIC?

A: SOON. STILL WORKING ON DETAILS.

\* \* \*

Q: MY BROTHER'S A LAWYER. DO YOU HAVE A LAWYER YET?

A: YES.

He looked over at us, then beckoned to Hamilton. The big man was hesitant, but then he came out of our area and into his, coming into range of the camera's eye. Without saying a word, I directed him until he was in frame of the camera, then gave him a thumb's up.

THIS IS HAMILTON MAYFAIR, Clark introduced. HE'S MONK'S SON.

HE LOOKS LIKE HIS FATHER, came the reply. IS MONK THERE?

YES, answered Clark.

Monk, seeing his cue, joined them and waved at the camera, giving his audience a grin. He held up a handmade sign that said **AVENGERS ROCK!**

We all laughed.

"That's good," I commented aloud. "If they recognize Monk, they'll be more apt to accept Clark."

\* \* \*

Q: FOR MONK. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS 'NEW' DOC SAVAGE?

"You want at the keyboard?" asked Clark.

"Yeah," Monk replied.

They switched places. Clark and Hamilton came behind us and saw how it looked from our perspective, as Monk paused a moment before typing.

IT WAS A SHOCK AT FIRST. BUT ONCE I KNEW IT WAS HIM, AND HE WAS ALIVE, I WAS THRILLED.

\* \* \*

Q: FOR MONK. WHY DIDN'T YOU HAVE DOC DECLARED LEGALLY DEAD?

A: I NEVER WANTED TO BELIEVE THAT HE WAS DEAD. I ALWAYS WANTED TO BELIEVE THAT HE WAS ALIVE, SOMEWHERE. AND I DIDN'T WANT TO CLOSE THE DOOR ON HIM BY DECLARING HIM LEGALLY DEAD. I'M GLAD WE DIDN'T.

\* \* \*

Q: FOR DOC. DID YOU HAVE A HAND IN SETTING UP THE CLARK SAVAGE INSTITUTE?

Clark returned to his seat. He stretched out his CSI sweatshirt so the camera could easily identify it, and smiled.

A: THE IDEA WAS MONK AND JOHNNY'S, BUT I HELPED. I EVEN WORKED ON THE CONSTRUCTION CREW.

It was encouraging to see others referring to him as 'Doc'; it meant that more of them were open to acknowledge him.

\* \* \*

Q: HOW'D YOU GET THE FUNDING FOR THE INSTITUTE?

A: PRIVATE SOURCES.

\* \* \*

Q: IS IT TRUE YOU HAVE AN UNLIMITED STASH OF GOLD AT YOUR DISPOSAL?

A: IT'S NOT UNLIMITED.

\* \* \*

Q: WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING SINCE YOU'VE COME OUT OF HIBERNATION?

A: WHILE I WAS SEARCHING FOR MY OLD TEAMMATES, I SPENT A LOT OF TIME FINDING OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED WHILE I WAS IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION,

AND LEARNING ABOUT THE WORLD OF THE PRESENT. APART FROM THAT, I'VE BEEN TRYING TO HELP OTHERS ANONYMOUSLY.

THAT'S ONE REASON WHY I ADMIRE WHAT THE AVENGERS ARE DOING. AND THAT'S ALSO WHY I WANT TO BE EXONERATED: I'M LIMITED IN MY CAPACITY TO REALLY HELP OTHERS.

\* \* \*

Q: DO YOU THINK YOU WERE FRAMED?

A: YES. I BELIEVE THAT INFORMATION WAS DELIBERATELY LEAKED AFTER I WAS PLACED IN HIBERNATION. IF I HAD NOT BEEN IN HIBERNATION, I COULD HAVE DEFENDED IT.

\* \* \*

Q: DO YOU BELIEVE THE CRIME COLLEGE WAS WRONG?

A: THE CRIME COLLEGE WAS A SOLUTION DURING A TIME WHERE PUNISHMENT FOR CRIMINALS WOULD BE LONG PRISON SENTENCES OR THE DEATH PENALTY. MY SOLUTION WAS DRASTIC, BUT IT GAVE THE CRIMINAL A SECOND CHANCE TO BECOME A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY.

\* \* \*

Q: DO YOU BELIEVE THE CRIME COLLEGE COULD WORK TODAY?

A: I DON'T BELIEVE SO. THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE MAJOR REFORMS IN PLACE IN SOCIETY BEFORE IT WOULD HAVE A CHANCE.

\* \* \*

Q: IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, WOULD YOU WANT THE CRIME COLLEGE TO RETURN?

A: IT WOULD BE INTERESTING. HOWEVER, I DOUBT THAT IT WOULD EVER BE THE SAME.

\* \* \*

Q: DO YOU STILL KEEP IN SHAPE WITH YOUR DAILY REGIMEN?

A: YES, TWO HOURS PER DAY. MUCH OF IT IS ISOMETRIC, EVEN THOUGH I HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF MODERN EXERCISE EQUIPMENT.

\* \* \*

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE PROGRESSES OF THE MODERN WORLD?

A: IT'S EXCITING. He smiled at the camera as he typed AND, AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M ESPECIALLY FASCINATED BY COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY.



\* \* \*

Q: WHAT DID YOU THINK OF 9/11, AND DO YOU THINK YOU COULD'VE STOPPED IT?

Clark and I had talked about this question, knowing it would come up. So I was curious to see what his answer would be.

A: IT WAS VERY TRAGIC. I HAVE VISITED THE TRADE CENTER TOWERS. AND I HAVE STOOD AT GROUND ZERO. I'VE ALSO WITNESSED THE DESTRUCTION AT PEARL HARBOR. I'VE SMELLED THE DEATH IN DACHAU AND BUCHENWALD. I'VE WALKED THE MELTED STREETS OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI.

EVERY TIME I THINK ABOUT 9/11 OR SOMETHING LIKE IT, I ASK MYSELF IF I COULD'VE DONE SOMETHING DIFFERENT. SADLY, I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO STOP IT, NO MATTER HOW I WISH I COULD.

IT'S EASY FOR US TO ASK US THESE QUESTIONS AFTER THE FACT. BUT WE CAN'T LET OURSELVES BECOME MIRED IN GUILT. ALL WE CAN DO IS KEEP OUR EYES OPEN TO THE EVIL AROUND US, AND BE PREPARED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT IF WE ARE ABLE.

THIS ADVICE IS NOT NEW TO YOU. THE BRONZE AVENGERS DO THIS EVERY SINGLE DAY. IN PINE CORNERS, YOU COMBINED YOUR TALENTS TO ACHIEVE FEATS THAT WOULD'VE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE INDIVIDUALLY.

Clark paused, blinking as his eyes started to mist over. AND IT MAKES ME PROUD TO KNOW THAT YOU HAVE ADOPTED MY CODE AS YOUR OWN.

\* \* \*

The questions went on for several hours, well into the afternoon and early evening. Monk took the keyboard occasionally, when Clark needed to take a restroom break.

Some of the questions were silly, asking about Clark's life and adventures. Others were serious examinations into Clark's past – especially his reasons for challenging the law at this time rather than earlier; he answered them honestly and logically. There was no mention of Bonnie or his personal life, and we were blessed that no one asked about it.

Each member of the Bronze Avengers, having had their turn, was electronically 'taken aside' and asked if they now believed that the man they spoke to was indeed Doc Savage. The numbers were encouraging: 87% were fully convinced that Clark was Doc Savage, while 10% was undecided, and only 3% were unconvinced.

When the last question was answered, Jeremy Stone finished up with a word of encouragement for those who participated, and offered an email address for anyone who wanted to ask questions outside of the chat room.

\* \* \*

"And it's a *wrap!*" I announced as the connections ended.

As Clark leaned back in his chair and whispered a heartfelt, "Thank you, Lord", the rest of us erupted into spontaneous applause and cheering.

Bonnie came around and kissed Clark on the top of his forehead. "You did great, hon!"

My Bluetooth headset on, I stood and stretched while I called Jeremy Stone. "Jeremy? Perry. That was *outstanding*, man!"

"Did you see the numbers?"

"Yes! It's absolutely amazing! Good job!"

Jeremy paused. "It looks like a few are still sticking around, talking about it. But I think it's safe to say that the Bronze Avengers are on your side."

"Thanks, Jeremy! Hey, I'm going to let you go. Let us know if anything changes, okay?"

"Sure. Bye!"

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

*Friday, March 16, 2007*  
*New York City, New York*

In the 1940's, the Hotel Monolith was one of the most elegant hotels in all of New York. Its privileged clientele boasted stars of stage and screen, business tycoons, athletes and royalty. It was one of *the* places to be seen, and it certainly lived up to its reputation. But as the 40's became the 80's, the Monolith went from being the grandest gem in the Big Apple to being just another condemned building.

But then it was given a second chance.

During the late 80's, a group of dot-com billionaires bought the Monolith, restored and refitted it, and – five years and a small fortune later – turned it back into one of the finest hotels on the East Coast.

\* \* \*

Despite the weather, it was nice to be back in New York City. Since we were supposed to be big spenders, our transportation was an eye-catching pearl-white stretch limo. We pulled up to the front of the Hotel Monolith; a doorman got the door for us and cheerfully welcomed us. I casually tipped him a \$50, then Dot and I walked into the lobby. Despite the fact that we'd seen expensive hotels before, we were amazed at the unabashed opulence around us.

Five minutes later we were in the Penthouse, feeling like Pied Pipers with a trail of bellhops following us. Dot went into the bedroom with a cosmetics case while I spread around the green. When the last of them had left, and I'd locked the door behind me, I turned and called out Dot's

name.

"I'm in the bedroom, baby!" she said sensuously. "Changing into something ... a little more comfortable."

Then she came out of the bedroom.

She hadn't changed clothes. Instead, she was looking at an electronic device in her hand that reminded me of a tricorder from the latter *Star Trek* franchises. As she moved from room to room, she scanned for surveillance devices. Sure, it was a stretch that we'd find anything, but we brought one of Drake's most sophisticated bug-spotters just to be on the safe side.

"We're clean," Dot announced.

I took out my cell phone and speed-dialed Clark.

"Yes, Perry," he answered.

"We're in the Penthouse. Dot just cleared us for termites."

"Okay," he acknowledged. "We'll see you on Omaha Beach next Friday."

"You're still planning on visiting the Mad Russian?"

"This Sunday."

I asked him a question I knew only a few of us could get away with. "You nervous?"

"A bit," he answered honestly. "Cover me?"

"Of course," I replied nonchalantly.

"Thanks. Bye."

\* \* \*

*Sunday, March 18, 2007  
Oberlin, Kansas  
The Farm of Ivan and Amanda Renwick  
Afternoon*

Clark drove the pickup down the access road to the main house of the Renwick farm. It seemed oddly quiet. Maybe it was just the fact that Clark was engrossed in prayer that made it seem that way.

Regardless, he was here.

He stopped the truck in the parking area near the house and stepped down. A breeze carried the smell of wheat past him, and he took in a deep breath; it smelled marvelous.

Before Clark could reach the door, it opened, and Renny stood there.

"Clark," greeted the big man in a cold monotone.

"Renny," Clark returned. "Is Amanda here?"

He shook his head. "Shopping. I figured this was something just for the two of us."

"Can I come in?"

Renny took a step forward and closed the door behind him. "Let's walk."

"Works for me."

The two big men walked around the house and headed towards the barn. There was a lot of quiet between them until Renny broke it.

"Still going ahead with it?" he asked, his eyes staring forward.

"I'm going to make the announcement on the afternoon of the 23rd," Clark replied. "Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco."

"Still believe this harebrained scheme is going to work?"

"I don't know," he answered sincerely. "I pray it does. I can't turn back now."

"Yes, you *can*," Renny countered. "All you have to do is admit you made a mistake. None of us would fault you for it."

"Maybe not. But God's given me a peace about doing this, and we both know what happens when we go against God."

"Yep," Renny had to admit.

Clark changed the subject. "Your crops look great."

"Thanks."

"Do you remember the first time we met here?"

Renny smiled in spite of himself. "A couple of troublemakers on motorcycles were trying to torch my crops. I was chasing after them on horseback when you suddenly came on the scene – riding bareback, no less – and cut 'em off. You hit 'em in the face with the spray of a fire extinguisher – good idea, by the way."

"I grabbed it out of our little RV as I jumped out. It took care of some of the fires before I used it to knock them off their bikes."

"And even though one of them clipped you in the arm, you still took him out."

"Bet'cha didn't know I used anesthetic gas on him."

Renny spun and faced Clark, a surprised expression now on his face. "Are you serious?"

Clark nodded. "It was part of a 'just in case' kit Monk gave us before we left his place."

His mouth agape, Renny slowly shook his head. "Holy cow!"

"Renny," Clark suddenly asked. "Are we still friends?"

"Renny ... *John*," Clark suddenly asked. "Are we still friends?"

The big man was silent for several moments. "I believe that's the first time I've ever heard you refer to me by my given name." His expression softened. "Yeah ... we are. Don't get me wrong: I still think this is a *boneheaded* move of yours, but ... I respect the guts you've got to try it."

"And if you're right," added Clark. "You can have the pleasure of telling me 'I told you so!'"

"***Tell*** you? Mister, I'll personally tattoo it on your forehead!"

And the two men shared a long-overdue laugh.

"We're going to need your prayers, you know."

"I know. You'll have 'em, both from me and from Mandy."

"Thanks." He reached out a hand. Renny took it, then pulled Clark into a bear hug.

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

*Friday, March 23, 2007*

*Alpha Base*

*Somewhere in the Florida Everglades*

*Afternoon*

The black man standing in the large room full of electronics nodded to a technician, then spoke into his wireless microphone.

"May I have your attention?"

All voices hushed and all heads turned to face him.

"Okay, this is it," he announced. "This is what all of us have been working towards for the past few weeks. Today begins a new chapter in the life of a man we all know and respect. He's the one who's taking the first step, but we're going to give him as much support as we possibly can. You all know your jobs, so let's get to it!"

Rows of technicians, male and female, sat before ergonomic computer workstations about the room. Plastering the walls were dozens of monitor screens, including one huge monitor comprised of several smaller screens; it could show a single image or hundreds. At the moment, it displayed news channels around the world.

Drake slowly paced the room. He had his command seat on the raised platform, but he didn't feel comfortable sitting there yet. He knew the capabilities of his people, and the sophistication of the machines at their fingertips. But he wanted to be down here with them, rather than sitting on high observing them. He also knew many ways things could be screwed up, and he wanted his eyes on them just to be safe.

Drake's head turned at the sudden hiss of the pneumatic door. Two women rushed in. One was stout and middle-aged, and was dressed in a wrinkled and stained lab coat. The other was a younger brunette dressed in leather jacket and jeans, who bore an uncanny resemblance to ex-Beatle Ringo Starr. Both women carried with them the acrid smell of cigarette smoke.

"Are we in time, Mitch?" asked the lady in the lab coat.

"We're just getting ready to make contact with the watchers. Pull up a seat!"

Security personnel produced two chairs for them.

Drake tapped his microphone and requested a systems check. The voices around him responded in turn.

"Police frequencies are active!"

"Standard traffic on websites!"

"Avengers chat room is 30% above normal!"

"Communication lines are green!"

"The Studio Audience has reported in – they're ready!"

"Watchdogs on station!"

"Okay," Drake acknowledged. "Get me the Watchdogs."

\* \* \*

### *San Francisco, California*

The weather in San Francisco was good. They'd predicted a 'possibility' of rain, but right now it was beautiful. From a nearby balcony, Robbie Will had a good view of Fisherman's Wharf. He brushed his sandy hair out of his face and peered again through the telescope.

The crowd below was larger than normal. The media people were present because they had been tipped to the fact that there would be *something* happening today. The rest of them – tourists and residents – had been drawn to the area like vultures to carrion. Will had noticed a few SFPD officers roaming the area, but they didn't look like they were expecting trouble.

A podium had been set up below on a platform. Behind it was a wax statue loaned from the nearby museum. The figure stood over six feet tall, disproportionately muscled, his skin the color of a rich mahogany. His expression was one of determination and power, with his eyes slightly

squinted and baring his teeth in a menacing grimace. His outfit was leather breeches, vest and shirt. In his hands were twin .45 automatics, ready to blast away.

Will knew what the little plaque on the front read: CLARK "DOC" SAVAGE, JR.

"Robbie?" came the voice through his transceiver.

"Watchdog One on station, *sir!*" he responded.

"Status."

"So far so good. How's the picture?"

"Give us a quick sweep."

He slowly panned the telescope with the optical attachment over the area at Fisherman's Wharf. "It's a pretty good crowd," he observed. "A lot of media coverage."

"They were invited," Mitch informed. "Whoa, swing it back a moment ... *stop!* Are those police?"

"Yes," Will confirmed. "But there are only a couple of them. If they were here for *Center Ring*, they'd be more organized and with greater numbers. My guess is that they're just a show of force to keep the crowd from getting out of control."

"I concur, Robbie. Stand by."

\* \* \*

"Come in, Rei," Drake signaled.

A young Asian girl was unnoticed as she wandered through the crowd at Fisherman's Wharf. She wore a short wide skirt and a pink *Hello Kitty* tee shirt, and her turquoise-blue hair was styled in twin pigtails. She held a pink flip phone to her ear, but it was just a prop; her actual communication was through a transceiver identical to Will's.

"Hi, Mitch," she said cheerily.

"Hi, Rei. How are things going at ground level?"

She peered through her oversized sunglasses. "Good ... crowded. The buzz is that this is some kinda media event, but nobody's got a clue as to what it could be."

"What about the police?"

"Just a handful, *sensei*. They don't look organized."

"Confirmed. Anything else?"

"There's a *lot* of excitement," she replied, her trained eyes swiftly taking in the area.

"Okay, Rei. Stand by."

\* \* \*

*The Clark Savage Institute, New York*

"Attention, students!" came the announcement over the public address system. "Please direct your attention to the room monitors for an important news broadcast."

Professor Johnny Littlejohn looked over at one of his students. "Mr. Beech, would you please turn on the monitor?"

As the student walked over to the controls, Johnny glanced down at his watch and offered up a silent prayer. All of the teachers were ready, but he figured that, considering his unique association with Doc, he'd be fielding a lot more questions than the other teachers at CSI.

He prayed he'd be ready.

"Professor Littlejohn," came a voice from nearby. He turned to see three people walking towards him, two men and a woman, all in their seventies. The man who had called his name was of medium height and build, sporting a full head of curly white hair. He wore a pea-green turtleneck that looked very natural on him. "What's going on?"

"Professor Newman," he addressed him. "I apologize for interrupting your tour of the campus. I trust this won't dissuade you from becoming part of our faculty."

The other two came in behind Newman, walking hand-in-hand like newlyweds.

"On the contrary, Professor Littlejohn," smiled Ann Phillips. "CSI is a fine place. We appreciate your invitation."

"We've been very impressed by all we've seen," agreed Doug Phillips.

"Good," nodded Johnny. He looked over at the screen. "You're going to want to see this. Would you care to have a seat? I believe things are going to start in just a few minutes."

\* \* \*

*New York City, New York*

*The Offices of Martin and Associates, Attorneys at Law*

"Doug?"

Douglas Martin felt odd wearing the transceiver. But he had to accept it as a necessary piece of hardware for the moment. And, besides, it gave him a rather nostalgic feeling, wishing he'd had this kind of equipment during his days in Intelligence.

"Go ahead, Mitch."

"Status?"

He looked over at a woman in her 40's pacing the floor of the converted conference room.



"Chris?" he addressed her. "Status!"

Christine Snow walked around the large mahogany table in the center of the room, leaning over occasionally to check the computer workstations of her crew. The prosthetic/exoskeleton that was compensating for her missing legs was acting a little stiff this evening, but it wasn't anything she couldn't handle. Besides, she wouldn't have missed this day for the world, and she was very thankful that she'd been given this 'piece of the action'. Executing a smooth pivot on her titanium feet, she looked back to Martin.

"Five-by-five, Doug!" she reported. "How's Clark holding up?"

"We're ready on this end," Martin relayed to Mitch. "How's Clark?"

"He's next on my call sheet," Drake informed. "Stand by."

\* \* \*

*San Francisco, California*

This wasn't the first time I – or any of us, for that matter – had worn a suit, but I was feeling a bit like the groom at a shotgun wedding.

We spent most of the drive in silence. Apart from Hamilton, I figured we were all praying for the time ahead.

When the transceiver chirped in my ear, I jumped.

"*Ringmaster to Center Ring*," said Drake, intently. "How are you doing?"

"We're ready," Clark reported confidently.

"As ready as we'll ever be," I added with a smile.

"What's your position?"

Monk answered, "ETA is five minutes, give or take. How's the welcoming committee?"

"There're a lot of people waiting to see what's going to happen."

"Let's hope they're not disappointed," Monk commented.

"Agreed, gentlemen. Godspeed!"

\* \* \*

Robbie Will's report was tinged with excitement: "They're here! I repeat – they are *here!*"

"Okay," acknowledged Drake. "Signal the Studio Audience: 'We go live in two!'"

Everyone in the command center glanced over at the main screen, which was now split into four

separate images. One of the pictures was the live shot from Robbie Will's camera, showing the Wharf from a distance, then panning over and sharply zooming in as the limousine arrived. All heads turned in that direction, and the media crews – sensing that this was the event they had been alerted to – came alive.

The limo door opened, and the occupants climbed out one by one as assorted individuals recorded the event with cell phones, digital cameras, and camcorders.

The first one was Hamilton; the abrupt change in body language of the people around him made it clear that they weren't ready for the tall gorilla-like figure. With a remarkable gracefulness, he disregarded the surprise and gave the crowd a quick sweep with his eyes before he signaled for the next in the limo to emerge.

The next one out was Monk. His dark suit made him appear like a Mafia enforcer. The surprise factor was somewhat less than Hamilton's, but there was still a lot of activity.

The third man out was Perry. After seeing his two simian-like companions climb out first, he looked almost out of proportion by comparison, as far as the crowd was concerned.

Finally, Clark stepped out. Since there had been so many changes in his hair and beard since his hibernation, it was decided that it was best if he returned to his pre-hibernation appearance – still a far cry from the distorted view portrayed in the wax doppelganger. With his bronze frame in a simple white suit and tie – a deliberate contrast to the others' dark suits – he was impressive. He didn't hurry, and the three men exchanged a few words before they made a beeline through the crowd to the podium.

By this time, some in the crowd had made the connection between the guy in the white suit and the wax statue near the podium, and their excitement spread like a red tide. Many tried getting a better view of the men passing through the crowd – especially the media people – but with Hamilton and Monk effectively running interference, the crowd never got too close for comfort.

As arranged, Hamilton moved silently to stand behind the podium. Clark was behind him, just in front of the wax statue. Monk moved to Hamilton's left, and Perry moved to his right. Hamilton switched on the master switch for the microphones and tapped the closest one to him; the echoing noise hastened the crowd's silence.

\* \* \*

*Lincoln City, Oregon*  
*The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent*

In the living room, Bonnie, Dot, Gumball, and Amy had the news on, and waited for the imminent interruption. The triplets were asleep, lying in identical baby rockers on the floor.

At the moment, the four adults were joined in prayer. None of them had their eyes closed, but intently looked at the large screen.

"God," Gumball chimed in. "Please let it be Your words that come out of their mouths, and protect them from any hotheads in the crowd."

A few moments later he paused, and Bonnie continued the prayer.

\* \* \*

*Portland, Oregon*

Mark and Karen Eidemiller sat on the couch in the living room of their apartment, the sound of the rain outside competing with the sound of the television. Mark turned up the sound with the remote.

"They're standing around a podium," he casually described for his blind wife. "There's Perry and Monk. Clark's kinda standing a bit behind them. You remember when Perry told us about that wax statue they saw in San Francisco?"

"Yes."

"They put the statue right behind Clark. *Nice* contrast. The statue looks like Conan the Barbarian while Clark's dressed in a suit and tie."

"How's he look?" asked Karen, referring to Clark.

"From what I can see, he looks good. Monk's son Hamilton is at the podium – now that's what I call a family resemblance!" Mark grinned. "Praise God, this is *so* good."

"Yep. This is the beginning of a whole new chapter."

"For all of us," added Mark under his breath. His eyes were misty.

\* \* \*

*Pine Corners, Washington*

In the office of the police station, several people were gathered around a small color television resting on a wheeled metal cart. As they watched the announcement and subsequent questions from the audience, many of them applauded and cheered.

"I *say*," commented a wiry old gentleman with a mischievous face. "I never thought I'd live to see this day."

"Oh, knock it off, Romney!" A stocky young Hispanic woman swung an arm back, smacking the librarian playfully on the leg. "The way you take care of yourself, you're gonna outlive *all* of us!"

"Pipe down, willya?" berated Police Chief Isaac Randolph. "I'm trying to listen!"

"Yes," agreed Jacob LaCroix, owner of one of the local wineries. "Please! We're watching history being made!"

Their attention returned to the television.

\* \* \*

*Portland, Oregon*

"Hey, Jack!" a young man observed, pointing at the TV set. "That guy looks like Clark!"

"Good eyes, Don," responded Jack Heady evenly. "Because it is."

Jack knew that – under normal circumstances – it was like pulling teeth to get all the men in the ministry house to gather together without a lot of warning, and this time was no exception. But once familiar faces were recognized in the 'breaking news' story out of San Francisco, they quickly hushed and concentrated on the television.

A couple of the men recognized the name Doc Savage, and were flabbergasted at knowing that not only had he actually lived in this very house, but he was a brother in Christ. The others looked at them with confusion, wondering what the big deal was. But Jack knew they'd find out soon.

Meanwhile, at the back of the room, an old man absently rolled a cigarette in his fingers. Despite his advanced years, he looked like a picture from *Easyriders* magazine, wearing faded jeans and a weather-beaten leather jacket.

He knew Clark and Perry. They'd met years ago, along a lonely Ohio road in the middle of the night. His longtime companion, a red Harley Sportster, had finally punked out on him, and he was cursing up a blue streak until this fancy van showed up and its occupants offered to help him.

In all his years traveling down those long, lonesome highways, Jim Bronson never had a place he could call home ... until then. Part of their offer had been an invitation to come to this ministry house. They never pressed it, just offered it. And he accepted it. Even though he still spent a lot of time on his bike – a brand new, mint condition red Sportster exactly like his old one – he always ended up here.

Oh, he knew who Clark was. And as he finished rolling his cigarette and placed it unlit between his lips, he just smiled and muttered admiringly, "Right on, brother. Right on."

\* \* \*

### *Rutland, Vermont*

In the Pastor's Residence of *Rutland Community Fellowship*, Kevin Woods had been watching the news when they suddenly broke in for breaking news. As the picture switched from the studio to a remote camera in San Francisco, Kevin called out for his wife Brenda.

A tall, slender brunette rushed into the room; her hands were still holding a wet plate, dripping lightly on the floor. "What is it?"

"Y'see that guy in the middle – the one in the white suit?"

"Yeah," she answered.

"You remember how I told you I'd met Doc Savage back in '99?"

She saw the name on the captions at the bottom of the picture. "That's him?"

"That's him," he echoed proudly.

"What's he doing?"

"If it's what I think it is," he replied, "God, please give him strength."

\* \* \*

### *Walla Walla, Washington*

In the recreation area of the Washington State Penitentiary, Frankie Larkin broke into laughter as he recognized the man at the center of the live news bulletin coming from San Francisco. "Put a lid on it, Larkin!" yelled one of his fellow inmates.

Larkin quieted down, but his eyes were transfixed on the screen.

He remembered the bronze man.

It had been five and a half years ago, just a couple of weeks before 9/11. He'd come into a real sweet deal, something that had the promise of financial prosperity for himself, his wife, and his kids. The world would have been his. But then *he* rolled into town and screwed everything up. First he robbed him of the object of his prosperity, then – as if God Himself was out to ruin him – an earthquake hit the town and wrecked his business.

And when he finally tried to end his suffering with a bottle of liquid courage and a .38 slug, the bronze man stepped in and stopped him. His persuasive words of a Savior's love spoke to the emptiness within him. And, at the time, it seemed to be the right thing to do. It gave him a temporary respite when his family left him and he was taken to prison. But the years in this kind of environment eroded his 'faith', erased it entirely, and proved to him that the concept of a 'loving god' was nothing more than an empty fantasy.

And now, watching the events unfold on the television, Frankie Larkin *aka* Frank Larsen couldn't help but burst into laughter again.

"We'll see just how powerful your 'god' is," he muttered bitterly at the television.

\* \* \*

### *Madison, Wisconsin*

Kelly ("Irish") O'Neal took another pull from his bottle of Coors when the bar's television kicked in with some sort of news bulletin. The leader of the *Southern Riders Motorcycle Club* casually watched the story unfold. However, when he saw a familiar face on the screen, his bearded mug broke into an amused smile. Then he turned around and shouted over his shoulder at some other bikers involved in a game of pool.

"Hey, Bruiser! Daisy Mae! Get yur butts over here!" His tone reflected the urgency of the order.

A hairy man in a leather jacket and his muscular girlfriend sauntered over to him and asked what the matter was. O'Neal jerked a thumb in the direction of the television. "You guys recognize the dude in the middle?"

They stared at the image, then the man answered, "Yeah. Ain't that whazisname - th' Preacher?"

"Sure looks like him," responded O'Neal slowly.

"What's he doin'?" asked Daisy Mae.

"I'd say, it looks like th' Preacher was no less than Doc Savage himself!"

"Doc Savage?" repeated Daisy Mae with an explosive laugh. "Ain't he a wrestler for th' WWF?"

O'Neal smiled. "Doc Savage wuz what they useta call an *adventurer*. My granddaddy used to tell me about him. He lived back before any of us were born." He guffawed. "And to think ... the famous Man o' Bronze wuz ridin' with th' *Southern Riders!*" He paused and took another sip. "Didn't you guys screw up his bike and dope his water?"

"His lady's bike, yeah!" admitted Bruiser proudly. "So what?"

O'Neal just looked at the beer in his bottle. "Well, let's just hope you got your health insurance paid up."

"Why?"

"Well, if this guy still holds a grudge against you ... you might just need it."

Bruiser slapped his chest roughly. "Just let him try! C'mon – let's get back to our game!"

He pivoted and sauntered back towards the pool table with Daisy Mae in tow.

However, had anyone paid attention to Bruiser's face as he walked away, they would've seen the terror mirrored in his eyes and the growing line of sweat on his forehead.

\* \* \*

*Lincoln City, Oregon*  
*The home of Clark and Bonnie Dent*

The room broke into spontaneous cheering as the announcement successfully came to an end.

Jason and Sarah were now both awake. Dot and Amy held them outward, facing the screen and repeating, "That's your daddy! That's your daddy!"

Bonnie was quiet. She smiled, but her eyes were quickly misting over. Then she slumped back on the couch, leaning her head back, and released her stress in her tears.

\* \* \*

*Caroline Island*

Pat Savage's cell phone rang. Both she and resident physician Diane Cunningham looked at it for a moment before Pat answered it. She glanced at the Caller ID and announced, "It's Carrie." Then she activated the speakerphone function. "Hi, hon!"

"Well?" Carrie said excitedly. "What do you think?"

"I think it went well," Pat answered, looking over at her friend. "Di?"

"Yes," added Diane Cunningham. "Looks like it was very effective."

Carrie released a tired sigh. "God, I just hope he's not making a mistake."

"I know what you mean, dear. But he's fully convinced that this is what God would have him do. So it's up to us to give him all the support we can."

"Especially now," added Diane. "There's no turning back."

\* \* \*

### *Oberlin, Kansas*

The real-time closed captions did their best to capture all the words that Amanda Renwick couldn't hear. The ticker scrolling across the bottom of the screen, in addition to the 'headlines' that summarized the points of the announcement and subsequent questions, did well in painting a complete picture.

Occasionally, her eyes darted over to her husband. He had been silent and unmoving ever since the bulletin came on.

Then he stood. He handed her the remote control, walked over to the door, put his coat on, and went outside. He said nothing.

Amanda Renwick didn't follow him. She knew he needed this time alone. She switched off the television, placed the remote on a side table, then bowed her head and prayed.

\* \* \*

### *Portland, Oregon*

#### *Somewhere in the Northwest Industrial Area*

"Robert! Robert!"

Bill Sloan ran into the home theater and snatched up the remote control.

"What the hell?" his grandfather exclaimed.

Bill didn't answer, but just shifted from DVD to cable feed, and switched over to CNN.

Robert Sloan started to open his mouth again for the abruptness of his grandson, but the images on the screen froze him in place. He leaned forward in his seat with rapt interest and watched. It was only after the announcement was over and they were recapping what had just happened did the old man react. He let out an explosive laugh and clapped his hands together gleefully. "He's done it! He's shown himself!"

Bill Sloan muted the set. "But the police ..."

"But nothing!" the older man interrupted. "He's out in the open, and we'll know where he is every step of the way!"

"But how can *we* get to him?"

"We wait." Sloan put a hand on his grandson's shoulder and looked him in the eye. "We wait."

\* \* \*

*San Francisco, California*

Hamilton, Clark, Monk, and I had moved smoothly back through the crowd to the limo, all the while responding to spontaneous comments or questions while the click-click-click of cameras about us made me think of a Geiger counter. Our driver had opened the door and provided us cover as we ducked inside. Then, with the door closed and the limo moving slowly away, the four of us released a simultaneous sigh of relief.

Then we laughed.

"Well, they didn't stone us to death," quipped Monk. "That's a plus."

"**Pop!**" chided Hamilton. "C'mon! It turned out better than expected. Don't you think so, Clark?"

Clark smiled. "It was ... exhilarating."

Monk touched his ear. "Mitch?"

"I'm here," we all heard. "Way to go, guys!"

Hamilton asked, "How was the response?"

"**Outstanding!** Websites, chat room, phones, they're all buzzing like a hornet's nest! The networks are switching between highlights of the announcement and reactions from the witnesses!"

"Anything from Doug?" asked Hamilton. "Any calls from the 'A' list?"

"And *how!*" Drake replied with a laugh. "How'd you guys like to be guests on tonight's **Larry King Live?**"

\* \* \*

*New York City, New York*

NYPD Police Commissioner Artemus Gordon swiveled around and looked out the window. It had been a hell of a week. The Big Apple was just coming out of a nasty cold spell. The Postal Workers were threatening to strike, and his own family was laid up due to the nasty flu bug that was going around. He'd been trying to head it off by taking Vitamin C, Echinacea, and garlic to boost his immune system, but he knew that it was only a matter of time.



The only bright spot, the one he was focusing on like a man desperately swimming towards a life raft in the middle of the ocean, was the fact that this week was just about over, and the weekend was only minutes away.

He was staring at the wall clock, watching the second hand move at a snail's pace, when his secretary's phone rang. It was one of those lonely-in-the-middle-of-all-that-silence rings that gave him a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

He muttered a profanity under his breath.

A moment later, Juliet appeared in the doorway. Giving him an apologetic look, she said, "It's the Mayor."

Gordon thought about telling her that he'd already left for the day, but he suspected that the Mayor wouldn't give up that easily. He sighed and nodded. He looked down at his phone, pressed the button on the active line, squeezed out a smile, and answered it.

Despite the Mayor's rantings, Gordon calmly reached over to the remote control and switched on the television. It was already on CNN, so he hit the mute button and focused on the captions while the Mayor continued to talk. It didn't take long to understand what was going on in San Francisco.

After the Mayor was finished, and had hung up, Gordon called for his secretary, and then un-muted the volume on the television. Carrying a steno pad and a pencil, she stood while they watched the recap of the announcement.

"Is this what the Mayor's so up in arms about?" she inquired. "Who is this guy?"

"His name is Doc Savage," Gordon answered with a degree of reverence. "Believe it or not, he was around before *I* was born."

Juliet gave him a look. "You're kidding."

"Hardly. This was around the nineteen ... twenties, I think. He was a big thing here in the city, like Indiana Jones and Batman rolled into one. He had his headquarters in the Empire State Building. And you know that school up north, by the Finger Lakes?"

She nodded.

"There used to be a secret hospital there, where he'd bring alleged criminals and subject them to illegal surgeries, supposedly ridding them of what made them criminals. They finally got busted back in the nineteen fifties. But they never caught *him*." He jabbed a finger at the screen.

"He vanished?"

"That was the popular theory. They figured that, underneath all that big guy exterior, he was just a damn coward."

"Boss?" asked Juliet, looking at the screen. "Just how old *is* he?"

"I don't know ... maybe a hundred years old."

She peered at his image on the screen. "He doesn't look it. He actually looks pretty good."

"That doesn't mean anything," Gordon shrugged. "My wife's eighty-year-old mother spent \$100 Grand on cosmetic surgery, and now *she* looks half her age! No, if a man's got enough money, he can do anything. Besides, if I remember right, he was independently wealthy – y'know, like Batman; but Savage had some sort of a gold mine."

"What does the Mayor want us to do?"

He smiled at her; God bless her, she was amazingly loyal. He took a deep breath as he collected his thoughts, then outlined what he wanted her to do. She took her notes with efficient swiftness, then returned to her desk and went into action. Before Gordon could settle back into his chair and reboot his computer, she had the District Attorney on the phone for him. She waited until he picked up the phone, then continued her tasks.

Gordon's finger was poised over the line button, pausing just a moment to let out a tired sigh.

He corrected his earlier thought: it was going to be a *busy* weekend.

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

"Good evening! It's seventeen minutes after the hour. I'm Simon R. Wolff, and you're listening to *The Wolf Pack*. Charlene in San Antonio on Line 2 ..."

"Mah husband was killed in 1991. They caught the <bleep> who did it and threw him in jail for 30 years. Ah was left alone with three kids, but ah didn't have any skills outside of the home. Ah finally got a job working swing shift in a restaurant. 'Cause ah could barely afford someone to keep an eye on mah kids in the evenings, ah had to settle for a less-than-reputable babysitter ... the <bleep> ... got mah daughter hooked on meth. And ev'ry day, ah think about the piece of <bleep> who killed mah husband ... and he don't have to do a thing to work for his food and rent. <sniff> I would'a given anything if this Savage fella would'a done a number on his brain, then put 'em to work for us. It wouldn't get mah husband back, but at least Ah'd have a little satisfaction at seeing him workin' his butt off for paying us back for what he did!"

\* \* \*

(Baker, Utah)

"Yeah, man. I know what's goin' on ... I know the truth, man! They never really got rid of the Crime College, man! The Republicans, man, they got Colleges set up all around the world, man! Jimmy Hoffa, man ... they got him! He's a janitor down at the Kwik-E-Mart here, man! It's him, I tell ya, it's him! And he's not the only one they done it on! But I gotta make this quick 'cause they're watchin' me, man!"

\* \* \*

(Toledo, Ohio)

"I remember Doc Savage. We had a rough neighborhood ... most people didn't care about our people, and less would even dare invest money here. But Doc Savage did. He built a school in our

neighborhood; we put his name on it in his honor. <pause> After the Murrow show, we had all kinds of people combing the place for relatives. A lot of them got angry ... and one of 'em set fire to the school. Eighteen killed, including my brother Roberto. They never fixed the damage; they just leveled it three months later. <pause> I still admire the man. He could've gone somewhere else to put up a school, but he saw potential in us. I'm glad he's still alive, and I'm all for him."

\* \* \*

(Blaze, Nevada)

"Am I on? Okay, lemme turn down my radio! You're the best, man! I lissen to you all the time! Oh, yeah! That other guy, th' one that wuz sayin' that there were Colleges all over the place – he was tellin' it straight, man! I've seen one o' them! I was out in th' desert, and I saw the ground openin' up wide, man! And then ... then ... then somethin' came out of it! It ... it was *massive*, man. It was bigger than a *mall*, man! Bigger than that mothership from *Close Encounters*, man! And it flew! It just went up ... up ... and *away*! Vanished in the clouds, it did! And when I looked down at the hole it came outta – it wasn't *there*, man! It was, like, totally gone, as if it wasn't even there!"

\* \* \*

(Boggy Creek, Louisiana)

"Am I on? Thank you. I don't doubt for a minute that this is the original Doc Savage. It was foretold in the 812th quatrain of Nostradamus' writings, where it speaks of a 'man of bronze' coming from the past ..."

\* \* \*

(Detroit, Michigan)

"Doc Savage? He's a fictional character! And even if he is real ... <laughs> Suspended animation? And now he's a Jesus Freak? Get real! Try selling it to the Sci-Fi Channel!"

\* \* \*

(Roxanne, Arizona)

"You're the best, man! I lissen to you all the time! Those other guys ... the ones talkin' about the Colleges still bein' around ... I know it, too. Durin' the 60's they did experiments with LSD on blacks in the ghettos! They invented Agent Orange and used it in Vietnam! They gave AIDS to the gays to try an' wipe 'em out! And this Savage guy? He's a clone, man! The original one died back in the '50's when the military wuz buildin' that missile base on the moon!"

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

*Saturday, March 24, 2007*

*New York City*

*Hotel Monolith*

"You awake, Perry?" called Monk through my closed door.

"I'm sorry, the number you have reached is still sleeping," I moaned back. "Try again around

noon ... *beep*."

I rolled over and tried to go back to sleep. But I knew, with Monk's persistence, I had about sixty seconds before he'd come in and drag me feet first out of the bed.

To say that last night was 'intense' would have been a gross understatement.

The King interview had been amazing. We found out that Larry King had been quite a fan of Doc Savage in his youth, and still was. Following the interview, he treated us all to an excellent dinner brought in from a nearby Chinese restaurant; he didn't want to run the risk of having us go to a public restaurant only to be mobbed by the patrons. We talked off the record for hours before calling it a night and returning to the Monolith. While still awake, we spent a few minutes praying together, then went off to bed.

I don't know about the rest, but I was asleep almost immediately.

That was then. This was now, as I heard my bedroom door burst open. I started to tuck my feet up, to make them less of a target, but my Father-In-Law was quicker; he yanked the bedding out at the foot of the bed and grabbed my ankles, dragging me through the tunnel of sheets. It was a good thing I was still clutching my pillow, because it cushioned my landing as I flattened onto the floor with a grunt.

"You could've just asked," I muttered, my eyes still closed.

"Yeah, and you would've told me to go away – or worse," he defended. "Look, junior, I've raised five kids, and this is the quickest way of getting them out of bed. Niceness *don't*. Now c'mon – breakfast will be up here any minute. And you've got to be at your first interview in ninety minutes."

"Me?" I blurted. "*I've* got the first interview?"

"Yep," he grinned. "And guess what? It's with Roger Hilton, the golden boy of CIN."

I groaned.

The *Christian Information Network* was the largest Christian communication organization in the world. Using television, radio, print, and internet, they spread the Word of God 24/7 to billions.

Where I disagreed with them was in some of their 'doctrines'.

They regularly broadcasted their faith healing crusades ... people lining up to walk across a stage and fall over at the touch of the alleged healer. Now, I have personally seen – and participated in – healings that had been *truly* miraculous. And I fully understood that all manifestations like this were a direct act of God.

That wasn't my problem.

Where I drew the line with CIN was the *financial* correlation they made to faith. They would declare that any healing their followers received was directly proportional to the faith they had *as proven by* how big of a 'love gift' (translated: money) they gave to CIN. They were very much into the 'name it and claim it' doctrine – they would explain in their own sugar-coated words that

God was **your** magic genie and was therefore compelled to do **your** will.

It ground at my soul like fingernails on a blackboard.

I got up and caught a quick shower. I smelled toast from the other room, and knew breakfast had arrived.

As I dried off, my mind came up with a perfectly *nasty* scheme.

I'd go into the interview as straight as an arrow. Then, after a few minutes, I'd suddenly get this sudden crazed look on my face. I'd burst to my feet, and shout something about God giving me a word for CIN. Naturally, they'd jump at it like a pit bull to a t-bone. They'd beg me to continue, to tell them what God had to say. Then, wide-eyed, I'd stare into Camera #1 and loudly and dramatically – doing my best impression of Charlton Heston as Moses before Pharaoh's court – tell them off. I'd scripturally blast all their doctrinal misconceptions out of the water, and declare that God would wipe CIN off the face of the earth if they didn't get things right. Then, after I'd sprayed the room with fire and brimstone, and they were panicking over their fate, I'd look up to the sky, covertly trigger my ring and – *poof!* I'd turn invisible right there with all of CIN watching. And, while they were running around in terror, I'd be standing in the wings and watching it all with glee.

I was excited now, as I dressed for success. But then God tapped my conscience on the shoulder and explained just how disastrous the results would be if I proceeded with my mad scheme.

Then, as if that hadn't been enough, God put scripture into my head, from the first chapter of Philippians: *"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."*

And I had to admit, despite CIN's failings, they **did** preach Jesus Christ.

So I gritted my teeth and finished dressing.

*Here I am, Lord. Send me.*

\* \* \*

*Saturday, March 24, 2007  
New York City  
Office of the District Attorney  
Early Morning*

Jefferson Davis Frye hadn't been surprised by the emergency call from his boss, ordering everyone here this early in the morning. As he filed into the District Attorney's office with the rest of the staff, he could feel a strong sense of discord among his co-workers.

**Miz** Goldsmith sat behind her desk, nursing a large black coffee. She was in her early 40's, attractive in a Glenn Close-type of way, and with short black hair. She lamely returned the comments as she waited for everyone to come in. Then she took a final sip, stood up, moved

around her desk, and perched herself on the edge.

"Marty, get the door," she instructed in a throaty tone. A tall red-haired man reached over and closed the door.

"Okay. I'm going to assume that, unless you've been in a coma for the last 24 hours, you all have an idea why we're here this morning. The topic is *Clark ... Savage ... Junior*, also known as 'Doc' Savage. Who knows who he is?"

Everyone raised their hands.

"Good. Now, who can tell me the story behind him?"

Nobody responded right away. So Frye did. "He was what you'd call an adventurer during the first half of the last century. Some people also called him a crimefighter; it's rumored he'd actually held a commission with the NYPD. But rather than following Due Process, he took alleged lawbreakers to a private hospital – where that *Institute* is now – and subjected them to illegal surgeries. Supposedly he operated on their brains, took out all their memories, then gave them new identities and released them. The last anyone ever saw of him was in 1949, right before his whole operation was blown wide open by Edward R. Murrow." Frye paused. "And now it seems he's back."

"I'm impressed, Mr. Frye," Ms. Goldsmith looked at him appreciatively. She looked around at the rest of her staff. "He's absolutely correct. Back in 1949 we – meaning the NYPD – tried to have him arrested for kidnapping and a host of other charges. But by then he'd taken off, leaving the rest of his gang to fend for themselves. Now, all of our interns have been here since last night. They're downstairs in the records archives, searching through boxes of papers looking for the original arrest warrants." She paused. "By order of hiszoneer the Mayor, this office is to find those warrants and go after that creep Savage. And he wants it yesterday." There were a few assorted chuckles. "So, if you're not working on anything else, I want you down in the archives with the interns. Got it? Good. Go."

The room quickly emptied.

Frye left the room with the others. He wasn't working on any particular assignment, but he wasn't about to join the others searching through boxes of dusty paperwork. Let them find it, he thought; I know what the warrants will say, and I know they'll be useless.

He had his own project to work on.

\* \* \*

*The Christian Information Network  
New York Studio*

I was escorted by a young lady to the preparation room.

"As you know," she explained. "We tape today for the actual Sunday broadcast. Please help yourself, Mr. Liston. Mr. Hilton will join you in a few minutes."

She gestured to a long table covered with a rather generous assortment of snacks, fruit and non-

alcoholic beverages, then gave me another charming smile and left the room. I looked around at the decorations – simple but tasteful – and walked over to the goodies table. I looked over the food and then selected a baby Braeburn apple.

I turned around and saw a gallery – photos of CIN's resident celebrities standing alongside major world figures. I was looking them over when Roger Hilton came into the room.

Hilton was in his mid-fifties, just under six feet, with perfectly styled hair that was the color of pearls. From the tissues loosely sticking out from his collar, it was apparent that he had just come from Makeup. He had a bottle of water in one hand, and he reached out to shake my hand with the other.

"**Brother** Liston," he greeted me with the hint of a Southern accent. "Or is it Pastor Liston?"

"Perry is fine," I clarified.

"Perry, then. I appreciate you granting us an interview."

"You're welcome," I returned. "I assumed I'd be interviewed by CIN, but I didn't think it would be this soon."

He reached into a jacket pocket and removed one of Karleen's bronze DVDs. "Were you aware of these?"

"Yes."

"Very clever," he commented, taking a sip of his water and slipping the DVD back into his pocket. "First, let me say that I've been a Doc Savage fan for some time. I inherited my father's collection of pulp magazines that survived World War II. Considering that most pulps during that era were usually read and recycled for the good of the war effort, having any sort of pulp collection from that time was quite an accomplishment."

"Definitely," I agreed. "So you're familiar with Doc."

"I am. We checked out the website you mentioned in the press release. Is it true that Doc Savage is a Christian?"

"Yes, it is."

His eyes lit up. "Well, praise the Lord! This *is* excellent news! Anyhow, after finding this out, I persuaded my station manager to expedite an interview." He took another sip of water. "Shall we have a seat?"

We walked over to one of the couches. Hilton sat down carefully so he wouldn't wrinkle his suit. I had to give him credit, he wasn't what I had expected. He started talking about the direction he wanted the interview to go in, and some of the questions he would be asking. A few minutes later, we received notice that they were ready for us in the studio.

"Let's have a quick prayer before the interview," Hilton suggested without hesitation. We bowed our heads and he led us in a simple but sincere prayer for a successful interview.

I followed Hilton out of the waiting room and over to the studio set where the interview would take place. As soon as we got in range, we were treated like cars at a pit stop at Indianapolis. Hilton moved smoothly into the seat on the right, as I was directed into the chair on the left. Oblivious to the people removing the tissue from around his collar, adjusting his clothes, touching up his makeup and hair, I was amazed at Hilton's professionalism. I, on the other hand, felt like I was in the midst of a swarm of bees that surrounded me one moment and vanished in the next.

"*Sixty seconds, everyone,*" announced the set director. "*Sixty seconds.*"

I heard my name and glanced over at Hilton, who was gesturing to a small table between our seats; two open bottles of water had been placed there.

"Thanks," I replied, taking a quick sip.

Just then, the set lights kicked in, startling me with its sudden brightness.

"You'll do fine," Hilton assured me. "Remember, you're amongst family."

He had noticed my nervousness, and I was touched at his sincerity.

The lights dimmed, and the set director counted down. The main camera was on Hilton, as he sat cool and collected. I could hear the show's dramatic theme music through feedback speakers. Then the lights came up on both of us and Hilton went into action. Looking directly at the camera, he briefly summarized the situation, and introduced me as Clark's 'spiritual advisor' just as he said he would.

Then he turned to me. "Mr. Liston, thank you for granting us an interview."

"My pleasure," I replied. "And please call me Perry."

"Perry, then," he acknowledged. "So what exactly do you mean by a 'spiritual advisor'?"

I grinned. "It's a fancy term for the man who introduced Doc Savage to Jesus Christ."

"Tell us about it."

"You do realize I can't give out certain details, such as exact locations or some peoples' names."

"Of course," he understood. "It might put them in danger."

"Exactly," I acknowledged. "It was mid-'99. I was preaching at a rescue mission when Clark came in. I didn't recognize him; he was just another man coming in for a meal and a message. But there was something about him – the way he held himself, his walk – that was hard to avoid. Our eyes met briefly, and I could see that his eyes were *clear*."

"He'd never been into drugs or alcohol," supplemented Hilton.

"Correct," I agreed. "He gave me a respectful nod, which was rare for first-time visitors. Anyhow, as I preached, I felt God directing me towards him, like ... like Philip, suddenly transported to where the Ethiopian eunuch would pass by. I preached the gospel message as usual, and finished things up with an altar call."



"And ...?" Hilton probed.

"And he came forward."

"Were you surprised at this?"

I looked at him thoughtfully. "I had been ... compelled ... to pray specifically for God to touch this man with His love. So, when he came forward, I wasn't particularly surprised. So I prayed with him. You know the concept of the box of rocks?"

"Pilgrim's Progress," Hilton answered. "The weight of sin on our backs."

He was right. I nodded. "I could almost *feel* the box of rocks on Clark's back slipping off and being replaced by forgiveness ... love ... peace ... and joy. And he knew it." I paused; my eyes were getting misty at the lucid memories. "When we both got to our feet, he raised his arms to the sky and praised the Lord ... *loudly!*"

"Praise God," Hilton echoed.

"Afterward, we sat down at one of the tables, and I got us some food. He was famished. While we ate, we talked. I asked him his name, and he told me. It was only then that my eyes were opened, and I knew who it was that I was sitting with."

"Did you know about Doc Savage prior to this?"

"Only through the pulp magazines my uncle used to collect. Needless to say, I was rather shocked when he told me who he was."

Hilton leaned forward slightly. "Did you have any doubts that it was really him?"

"Actually, no," I stated plainly, tapping my chest. "The Spirit was confirming it here."

"Did he explain about being in suspended animation?"

"Yes."

"What did you think about that?"

"Again, the Spirit gave me a peace about it. Later I realized that, why would a brand new born-again Christian spin a tale like that unless it *was* true?" I paused and smiled. "Besides, look at all the technological advances the world has made in the last fifty years – then tell me it's still not possible."

"Point taken," conceded Hilton. "Have you seen this machine?"

"Yes I have. I was there when they found it."

"Amazing!" he beamed. "So ... how is Doc Savage's walk with Jesus?"

"It's been seven years, and there've been good times ... and bad times," I answered sincerely.

Hilton nodded. "Have you had any ... *adventures* since he's become a Christian?"

I had been ready for this question. I chuckled and grinned. "The Christian walk is *always* an adventure."

Hilton smiled in return. "Quite right."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

*New York City*  
*Hotel Monolith*  
*Noon*

Monk disconnected from the speakerphone. For a moment all was silence. Then as if on cue, both Clark and Monk let out a tired sigh.

"Thank God that's over," Monk breathed as he slumped back on the couch.

Clark chuckled. "Remember, this is only Day One."

"Are you sure Johnny can't do this better than an old reprobate like me?"

"Nope. You're more of a 'Peoples' Man', old friend."

"Right ... me an' Ben Grimm. So what's on tap for the afternoon shift?"

Clark took a look at their printed schedule. "Good news. Chris decided to have mercy on us; she left the rest of the day open."

"Hallelujah!" Monk's arms flew into the air. Then he wearily stood. "Well, I'm drained; I'm gonna take a nap. How 'bout you?"

"Actually, I've been thinking about heading over to the Empire State Building. You know, it's been seven years since I last looked at the 86th Floor."

Monk stopped, surprised. "You went back? How? When?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you."

Monk returned to the couch.

"It was while we were trying to get in to see Pat, when she was Penelope," Clark started.

"I remember that."

"Well, we had some time on our hands, and I'd been dwelling on Ham's death. So, I took a walk to clear my mind. Sometime in the middle of the night, I ended up there. You remember all those secret passageways we used to have?"

Monk laughed. "Do I? Some of my best gags on Ham wuz when I'd work my way through one of 'em he didn't know about and come up from behind him and go *boo*."

Clark joined in the laugh. "Well, I found one of those passageways – one that ran the full height of the building. It was an emergency escape route, a vertical shaft with just a ladder and no lights."

"You climbed up 86 floors?" Monk was aghast.

"It took a while, but I was determined. And I was able to find a panel that opened onto the floor – barely enough to crawl through. So there I was ... just me and the building."

"So what'd you do?"

His eyes looked away, and his lips turned into a thin smile. "I prayed. I prayed a lot. And I got a lot of things out of my system."

"I'll bet."

"Then I backed out – covering my tracks behind me – and returned to our hotel. I felt so good I couldn't wait until morning to tell Perry."

"So this time you're going back in the daylight?"

He nodded. "Yes."

Monk stood again. "Well, have a good time. I think I'll give Lea a call before I catch a nap."

"Tell her hi from me."

"Will do." As he passed by him, he placed a hand on Clark's shoulder. "See you later."

\* \* \*

Wearing an overcoat, Clark stepped into the chilly New York air and climbed into the first taxi in line in front of the hotel.

"Where to, Mac?" asked the driver in a rich Brooklyn accent.

"Empire State Building, please," Clark answered.

The cab pulled neatly away and merged into traffic.

"Hey, you're the guy!" the driver suddenly recognized Clark through the rearview mirror. "You're that Savage guy!"

"Yes, I am." It was a good feeling to be able to say that once more.

"Saw you on *King* last night. So, you just takin' in the sights? I mean, visiting the Empire State Building an' all."

"Sort of. My old headquarters used to be there. We had the whole 86<sup>th</sup> floor."

"Back in th' 30's? Wow! So ... you plannin' on taking it back?"

"No, no!" Clark answered with a smile. "It's an interesting idea, but I don't think the city would let us."

He shrugged. "Who knows? This is the Big Apple – take a bite!" The taxi pulled up next to the skyscraper. "Here you go, Mr. Savage."

Clark gave him enough for the fare plus a generous tip. "Call me Doc," he smiled as he opened the door.

"Thanks, Doc!" returned the driver. "See you 'round!"

Clark closed the cab door and walked into the Empire State Building. As he waited in line to go through the security check, he realized just how much things had changed since he lived here. It felt like it was a whole new building, but he knew that was just his imagination. As he showed the *Express Pass* he'd purchased online, he praised God for prompting him to do his homework, and was soon waiting with others for the Observatory elevator.

Despite the fact that he felt all the stares and heard the whispered comments from those around him, nobody ventured to talk to him. He realized it was taking extra effort to maintain his 'face of flint' and keep him from getting a swelled ego from his newfound celebrity status. He wasn't rude or anything; whenever his eyes met someone else's, he returned their awestruck glance with a smile.

Was it ever this way back then? he reflected. Was it ever *this* hard to keep from getting a swelled ego? But then he remembered. Back then he'd thrived on the acceptance of men. They thought he was a god, and – despite the occasional façade of humility – he did his best to accommodate that image. But it wasn't the same now. God had taken him down a few notches for his own good, and it had made him a far better person.

The elevator doors opened, and Clark joined the next group of sixteen riders. They made their ascent to the 80<sup>th</sup> floor, where they were directed to the Tower Elevator that would take them up to the 86<sup>th</sup> floor. Light poured in from the windows surrounding the Observatory, causing many of his fellow riders to blink. Clark took a few steps and moved close to the wall. At the moment, all he wanted to do was stand and take it all in. He mentally commended the designers for doing such an amazing job in converting his old headquarters.

Clark moved with the crowd to step out onto the open balcony. As he found an open spot that overlooked the great city, he chuckled to himself. Their 'biographer' never – in any of their stories – included the fact that the 86<sup>th</sup> Floor had a balcony. All their readers were led to believe that their headquarters extended no farther than the walls. But Clark remembered how he enjoyed coming outside in the middle of the night, feeling the wind and looking out at the city.

His eyes glanced at a young couple walking hand-in-hand, paying more attention to each other than the scenery, and he missed Bonnie. It was torture, knowing that he couldn't just pick up his cell phone and call her; all it would take would be one person overhearing him, and they'd be exposed. So, for the moment, he prayed for their safety and comfort, and continued moving

around the balcony.

One side of the building seemed to have more people grouped around it than the rest. Clark drew closer and immediately understood: it was the side that faced Ground Zero, where the World Trade Center towers once stood. The people who stood there were either silent or spoke in hushed tones. Some whispered prayers. Others, overcome by emotion, wept openly. Clark thanked God once more for saving his cousin and many of her employees. After a few minutes, he retreated and let others move in.

"*Mister?*" Someone was tapping at his sleeve. He turned around to see a young boy standing with his father.

Clark smiled, "Yes?"

"Are you Doc Savage?"

Clark smiled down at him. "Yes, I am."

He turned to his father. Excitedly, he said, "See, I thought it was him!"

"I'm sorry, son," the man apologized. "You were right." He looked up at Clark with a sheepish expression. "He said it was you, sir. But I didn't believe him."

"That's quite all right," Clark said with a forgiving look. "I'm not used to people recognizing me in public."

"Are you really over a hundred years old?" the boy asked boldly.

"Yes," he answered without hesitation. "What's your name?"

"William," he beamed. "William Henry Stanford. This is my dad – his name's Mr. Stanford."

The father reached out and said softly, "Arnold. Good to meet you."

"And you," he returned, shaking hands.

"The news said you were in suspended animation," said William. "What's suspended animation?"

"It's a special type of sleep," Clark answered simply. "But you don't get older."

The boy understood. "Like *Rip Van Winkle* – I read that book last summer."

"Exactly."

"It's truly amazing, Mr. Savage," commented the boy's father.

Clark entreated, "Please, call me Doc. Okay?"

They both smiled and nodded.

Being involved with the father and son, Clark hadn't noticed that the previously-reluctant people

around them were starting to lose their reluctance. Many took pictures of them. Others moved in and asked Doc for an autograph. Young William and his father were quickly displaced by the crowd; Clark saw them backing away, waving at him and mouthing their thanks. Clark gave them a gentle wave and a smile and turned his attention to the swiftly-growing crowd.

**"YOU!"**

A ruddy-faced white man in his 40's pushed his way through the crowd and got right up in Clark's face. His eyes filled with anger, he poked an index finger into Clark's chest as he growled, "My uncle worked the streets for 20 years before **you** got ahold of him – and then we never saw him again! What gave **you** the right to take him and <blank> around with his brain, huh? And now you pretend to be a Christian, beggin' forgiveness! You're nothing but a <blank> **hypocrite!**"

On Clark's other side, a Hispanic man raised his voice in defense. "Hey, amigo! Chill! He didn't do nothin' wrong!"

"Back off, *Pancho!*" fired back the first man. "I'm talkin' here!"

The Hispanic man's eyes flared at the racial epithet, and retaliated with one of his own.

His anger now redirected, the white man lunged past Clark and had barely touched the Hispanic man, but the action was enough to escalate the war of words into a shoving match between the two men.

Suddenly Clark's voice boomed out like a rifle shot: **"STOP IT THIS INSTANT!"**

Everybody froze for a moment. Witnesses will later report that it was as if a candle had been snuffed out by a windstorm.

Clark turned to the two men at the center of it all. Looking from one man to the other, Clark addressed them both. **"Gentlemen!** We are **all** civilized people here! Now **act** like it! You both have the right to your own opinions – there is **no** reason for violence!" He paused, waiting to see how they would respond to his rebuke; since neither man gave any indication of continuing the fight, Clark lowered his voice and continued. "Now, if you want to discuss this, we can sit down over a cup of coffee and talk about this. **Or** we can find a place where you two can beat the crap out of each other, and I'll get out of the middle." There were a few scattered chuckles at the intentional humor. **"Or** ... you two can agree to disagree and not let this get any worse! So what do you want to do – talk or fight?"

The two men averted their eyes from everyone around them and stared down at the floor, doing their best impression of schoolboys in the principal's office.

"Look at me, please," Clark gently ordered the man who had spoken against him; his head slowly lifted, and their eyes met. Clark gave him a smile, letting him know he wasn't angry at him. Then he said, "If you'd like, we can get a cup of coffee and talk. I'd really like to hear what you have to say."

The other man blinked his eyes, unable to believe what he was hearing. "You would?" Then he nodded and said, "Okay. Sure."

Just then, several Building Security guards burst onto the Observatory, expecting to find a riot in

progress. Witnesses and onlookers quickly explained what had happened. Clark approached and apologized for causing the disturbance; he also promised to leave peacefully. A quick survey of the crowd confirmed that nobody wished to press charges, so Clark was allowed to leave. Within a few minutes, Clark and the two former combatants – along with several others from the crowd who'd asked to join them – left the 86<sup>th</sup> floor.

\* \* \*

### *The Hotel Monolith*

It was six hours after Clark had left to go to the Empire State Building. We were starting to get concerned. Suddenly, the room phone rang, and all heads turned. Hamilton answered it. His face immediately brightened as he met our eyes.

He hung up and announced, "He's on his way up!"

Monk and I breathed a sigh of relief.

When the door opened and Clark walked in, the three of us gave him a standing ovation.

He looked at us as if we'd lost our minds.

"Uh, has something happened?" he asked reluctantly.

Monk walked up to him, and lightly punched him on the arm. "Only *you*, my brother," he grinned. "*Only* you."

Clark turned to follow him with his eyes. "Would someone please tell me what's going on?"

I walked over to the television set and picked up the remote. "What he means is that only you can take a simple visit to the Empire State Building and turn it into a major public relations coup!"

"You ... know about what happened?"

"All of the East Coast knows," I answered, turning on the set. We'd set up a DVR when we took the suite, just in case something of interest came on television. Now, as Clark dropped his coat on the back of the couch, I played back what we'd recorded.

"Good evening. Our top headline: 'Doc' Savage causes incident in the Empire State Building. We begin our news with Brad Neary ... *Brad?*"

The scene changed to another reporter. Behind him loomed the Empire State Building.

"It appeared to be just another average Saturday, with a number of tourists visiting one of the Big Apple's most famous tourist attractions. But then Doc Savage arrived. It didn't take long for the presence of the Man of Bronze to spark tensions. But the ending of the drama that took place on the 86<sup>th</sup> floor was quite different from the way it started.

"There was just something about the way he held himself," said Darla Kramer, a 28-year-old 8<sup>th</sup> Grade teacher from Spokane, Washington. "It was kinda ... magical, like he was a character from one of my kids' books."

"He held himself tall," said Rick Edgemon, a minister from Portland, Oregon. "He couldn't have done all those things the news said he did. He just didn't look like a bad guy."

"Some butthead tried startin' a fight, cussin' at Doc," said Mary Jane Forbes, a 21-year old marine biology student from New Jersey. "An' somebody else tried shuttin' the guy up."

"When those guys started goin' back and forth, we didn't know what was gonna happen," said Phil Drummond, a salesman from Cocoa Beach, Florida. "Some guy next to me said Doc was going to punch both the guys out."

"He just *shouted*," described Debbie Helser, from Dayton, Texas. "And we all froze!"

"It wuz starting to get out of hand," said Saul Brockitch, a cab driver from Manhattan. "But Doc wusn't fazed. He wuz tryin' to pull it all together, so's not to cause a scene. But everybody knows it's hard to calm a New York crowd down once they're riled."

"His presence in the middle of this powder keg," reported Dwayne Ravens, 25, from Miller's Bay, North Carolina. "It diffused the moment like a bucket of water on a campfire."

"His words were stern, like from one of the sisters at school," reported Sister Catherine Lent, 42, from Queens. "His stare was intense, but ... *compassionate*."

"And it was all over, just like that," said May Parker, 75, from New York. "Some of us went with him downstairs to one of the restaurants. And we talked ... just talked. And that dear man paid for dinner."

The scene returned to the reporter. "Well, there you have it. Saint or sinner, hero or villain. Two things are certain: one man *can* make a difference, and New Yorkers have certainly taken to one of its own. This is Brad Neary, *Action Central News*."

I switched off the recording, then looked back to Clark and asked, "Wanna see it again?"

Clark was stunned. "But ... but ... it *wasn't* that big a ..."

"Oh yes it *was*, my friend," corrected Hamilton. "You did the *perfect* thing, and you made an impression on a lot of people."

"Not a bad finish to our first full day," commented Monk, handing him a glass of sparkling apple cider from a tray he'd set up. "I'd say it calls for a toast."

We all raised our glasses, and Monk spoke. "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*"

"Amen."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

*Sunday, March 25, 2007 and Monday, March 26, 2007*



*New York City*

It was Sunday, and our calendar was empty. Christine Snow was a sister in Christ, and she knew – despite it only being two days after the announcement – we needed a day of rest before facing the new week. She also found us a church in the area where we could praise and worship without ending up under a media microscope. It was good. Later we watched my CIN interview with Roger Hilton; the others thought it went quite well, and I had to agree with them.

We were ready for Monday.

Our schedule was packed. More interviews: radio, television, print. Each person trying to get that one piece of information that would give them the edge over everybody else. Clark's 'adventure' at the Empire State Building kept coming up – everybody wanted a comment. Overall, though, the questions were challenging ... and fair.

It was a good day.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, March 27, 2007*

*New York City*

*Office of the Police Commissioner*

*Afternoon*

The intercom buzzed at Gordon's side. "Yes, Juliet?"

"The DA's here, sir," she announced.

"Send her in."

She entered the room. "Afternoon, Artie."

"Carlie," he returned. "You found it?"

"Yeah."

She handed him a small courier's pouch and took a seat as he opened it and examined the contents.

"*Damn*," he commented under his breath.

She knew the reason for his reaction. "All the charges have gone past their statute of limitations. There's not a single charge we can get him on."

"The mayor's not going to like this," stated Gordon.

"Tell me about it," Goldsmith agreed. "That's why I came here first; figured we could come up with a plan to keep us from losing our heads."

Gordon nodded, and the two of them became quiet.

Gordon finally spoke. "Have you heard from Savage's lawyer?"

"Yes; yesterday morning. He's pushing for an identity hearing. He wants to prove that Savage is who he says he is, and that he'd been in suspended animation for fifty years."

Gordon looked up. "Why would he want to stress the suspended animation angle?"

"Good point, Artie," agreed Goldsmith. "It wouldn't take much to confirm his identity – fingerprints, DNA, voice recognition. But confirming that he was in suspended animation ..."  
Her eyes suddenly went wide. "Of course! *Tolling!*"

"Tolling?" Gordon repeated.

"Yeah, tolling." Goldsmith now had a big smile on her face. "Let's say, for instance, Mr. X commits a crime. We put out an arrest warrant on him and go after him. But instead of staying in the country, Mr. X bolts and escapes the country, disappears. When that happens, the clock *stops* on the statute of limitation for the warrant – it's paused like a videotape. When we find him, though, the pause is taken off, and the warrant continues right where it left off. It wouldn't matter if he was hiding for one week ... or fifty years."

"Interesting," nodded Gordon. "What about loopholes?"

"Only if Mr. X had been held against his will ... or ..."

"Or had been put in suspended animation against his will," concluded Gordon. "But that's going to be *impossible* for him to prove, Carlie!"

"He wouldn't have come out of hiding unless he *had* the proof," stated Goldsmith. "I'll bet'cha they've got a pair of aces up their sleeves."

"Or he's bluffing," countered Gordon. "Look, I don't believe for a moment that he was ever in suspended animation. I say give him his hearing ... and watch him hang himself with it."

"Agreed. I'll tell Savage's lawyer he's on."

"I'll update the Mayor."

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, March 27, 2007*  
*New York City*  
*Hotel Monolith*  
*Evening*

Room Service had just delivered steak dinners for all of us, and we were sitting around the dining table talking about each of our days when a knock came to the door.

"Anyone order dessert?" hypothesized Monk, rising.

It was the desk clerk with an envelope. Anticipating the possibility of reporters posing as hotel staff, we'd made arrangements with the management. If there were any messages to be delivered, the desk clerk – whom we knew – would bring it here personally once they routinely scanned it

for hazardous materials.

"I apologize for the late hour, gentlemen. A young lady handed this to me, to your attention, Mr. Savage. It's clean, sir – just a piece of paper."

Monk took the envelope and thanked the man. He locked the door behind him and brought the envelope over to the table.

"These letters and numbers written on the outside of the envelope – **BA3307**," Monk observed. "Ain't that the little code Jeremy Stone came up with if any of the *Avengers* wanted to deliver a message to us in person?"

"Yes, it is," acknowledged Clark. "Please, read it."

He pulled out the single piece of paper and read the message: "Prosecution has found the original warrants. I'd like to talk to you. I'm down in the lobby.' And it's signed, 'Carol Dunham!'"

"We've got an *Avenger* in the prosecution's camp," I observed with a grin. "I'll go get her."

I went down to the lobby. As I stepped out of the elevator, I cautiously scanned the room for a woman who would be expecting us. Sure enough, a girl in her 20's met my eyes and gave me a brief wave. She came over to me. "Mr. Liston?"

"Yes," I acknowledged.

"I'm Carol Dunham. I sent the message."

"Call me paranoid, but ... can I see some ID?"

She smiled and handed me her driver's license. I smiled and nodded as I handed it back. As we headed up in the elevator, I apologized for the cloak-and-dagger treatment.

"Don't sweat it," she laughed. "I'm an *Avenger*; cloak-and-dagger is part of the job description."

We entered the suite and I made the introductions. Despite the indirect familiarity, she gawked at Clark and Monk until Hamilton startled her by asking, "What was it you wanted to talk to us about?"

She snapped out of it, blushing briefly at her exposure. "I work for the New York City District Attorney's office. They've been searching for the old warrants ever since you made your announcement. This morning they found them. I had a chance to get my hands on them long enough to make copies." She smirked as she produced a manila envelope.

Hamilton took the envelope and looked over the contents. "We were right."

"Expired?" Clark asked.

"Yes," Hamilton nodded, handing them across to him.

"I take it you'd anticipated this?" inquired Carol.

"Yes," answered Clark.

"From what I heard," reported Carol. "The DA wasn't too thrilled about it; I figure she also knew what was coming. But something changed that by the time she got back from seeing Police Commissioner Gordon. She was smiling and actually *whistling*."

"They found something," I commented dryly.

"Something *big*," added Monk.

"She found a loophole," concluded Clark.

"*Tolling*," Hamilton said with finality. "They're either going to try and prove you were never in suspended animation, or it was voluntarily. If they can prove that, they can hit you with the charges as if the statutes of limitations never existed."

"But you've got the evidence to the contrary?" asked Carol. "Don't'cha?"

"Yes," smiled Hamilton. "Hopefully it'll be enough."

\* \* \*

*Wednesday, March 27, 2007*  
*New York City*  
*Hotel Monolith*  
*Morning*

As we had breakfast in the suite, Hamilton broke the news to us.

"I thought about waking you all up when they called," he began. "But I didn't want to disturb you when they called at *four in the morning*."

We all reacted with surprise at the earliness of the hour of the call.

"So what was it?" asked Monk.

Hamilton grinned. "It was from the DA's office. Not the DA herself, mind you, or any of her primary staff, but some basement-office junior assistant clerk intern who was yawning as he told me we had a date for the identity hearing." We all laughed. "Friday, April 27th; we have to have our evidence to the judge no later than two weeks before that."

"Who's the judge?" Clark asked.

"Jonathan Kilmer," Hamilton said with a tinge of awe. "He's been on the bench for thirty-plus years, and he's known for his fairness. He's one of the best."

"Sounds like a winner," commented Monk.

"Yeah, he is." Hamilton paused. "Odds are that they won't believe the validity of our evidence, so they'll probably have their own people go through it to corroborate or disprove. How sure are you about it?"

"All of us have worked with Mitch and his people," Clark affirmed. "They're *good*."

"Son, take our word for it," added Monk. "They're the best in the business."

"Even though it's a secret organization?" argued Hamilton, looking his father in the eye.

I answered his question. "Mitch assured us that this isn't the first time they've had to prove their findings in a legal setting. He's not worried about it."

"Okay." He looked over to Clark. "You want to tell him about the hearing?"

"No," he replied firmly. "I want *you* to do it. In that way, you can satisfy any ... *reservations* you may have. I don't want you to have any doubts."

"Very well," he agreed. "I'll talk to him."

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

Needless to say, the print tabloids went nuts when Doc Savage returned to the world.

The *Inquirer* was the first to come out with a special edition. With a full-page picture of Doc Savage on the cover, the headline was comprised of only four words in the biggest type they had: **WE TOLD YOU SO!**

The main article was basically a rehash of what everybody already knew, with a few of their own tricks mixed in. They bragged about how their 'world famous investigative reporting team' had discovered the mummified remains of the Man of Bronze in a warehouse, and then how a 'mysterious figure' had resurrected the remains and brought Doc Savage back to life. They deliberately left the identity of the 'mysterious figure' unknown, inviting the readers to submit their suggestions. Not wanting to make it too hard, they listed a few possibilities, including The Pope, Billy Graham, Franklin Graham, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, Mother Teresa, Princess Diana, Satan, the Roswell space aliens, the Bat Boy, and (of course) Elvis Presley.

They even had my name there, as if my being his 'spiritual advisor' gave me the power to bring back the dead. They also inferred that I was nearby just in case Clark started ... *dying* again.

Yeah, right. If they only knew.

Needless to say, sales at the *Inquirer* skyrocketed.

\* \* \*

Both *Time* and *Newsweek* followed up with similar stories, their headlines asking: "Is This The Second Coming of Doc Savage?"

Both stories focused on how the people of the United States – as well as the entire world – had taken to the reappearance of this icon. Of course, they all went over what the Crime College was, and what Clark had done to warrant criminal charges. *Time*'s article had a sidebar on the

suspended animation angle, pointing out that – regardless of the science fiction aspects of cryogenics – it *could* be possible. *Newsweek's* article focused a bit more on the religious angle, of Clark's testimony of faith and his Christian walk since emerging from suspended animation; it had a sidebar spotlighting me, explaining what a 'spiritual advisor' was, and how I was connected to Doc Savage. Both articles were quite well done and surprisingly well rounded.

\* \* \*

*The History Channel* dug up the original Edward R. Murrow SEE IT NOW exposé, "Tarnished Bronze". It was followed by a forum discussion. Within a week it became available on DVD through their website.

\* \* \*

After Larry King had trumped all the other news shows with the first interview, everybody else scrambled to be the top of the dogpile. Nancy Grace, Tim Russert, Bill O'Reilly, Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, and countless others – conservative, liberal, and middle-of-the-road – filled the airwaves with their own positions and opinions.

\* \* \*

Two weeks prior to the identity hearing, under instructions from the court, both Clark and Pat appeared before the New York City Forensics Laboratory. There, under supervision of the chief medical examiner, they submitted samples of fingerprints, retinal eye pattern, voiceprints, and DNA.

\* \* \*

The Crime College became a spotlight issue like the war, the abortion issue and the death penalty.

Newspaper editorials all across the country criticized the administration for not taking a stronger stand against the Crime College. Polls appeared in *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *U.S. News and World Report*, asking the question of the hour: ***is/was the concept of the Crime College justified or not?***

From a strict political party stance, Republicans and Conservatives were for it, and Democrats and Liberals were against it.

But the American people were drawing their own lines in the sand. Most of those responded said that they supported the treating of violent 'career' criminals in this manner, but not non-violent criminals; it was interesting to note that drug traffickers, sex offenders, and those involved in repeated domestic violence were included with 'violent criminals.'

\* \* \*

Clark continued to make personal appearances around the Big Apple. One night he'd attend a hit Broadway musical. The next night he'd be seen in the stands at a sporting event.

On weekends we would show up in rescue missions, helping out in feeding the homeless. In these cases, we'd never announce our intent; the most we'd ever do is to contact the person in charge of the mission and ask if we could help. Then we'd show up in jeans and sweatshirts and try our best

to blend in. Occasionally the media would find us and try to bring in a camera crew, but we'd try to reason with them to back off or even join us. Regardless, it was obvious that we didn't have a hand in their appearances.

Once the hesitation wore off, local churches invited Clark to speak and preach at Sunday morning services. He never used the pulpit for his own gain, but simply gave witness to what Jesus Christ had done in his life, and proclaimed the good news of salvation.

Needless to say, Clark was 'impressing the socks off' of people wherever he went.

\* \* \*

Eleven days prior to the identity hearing, Clark and Pat participated in a Barbara Walters television special. The first half of the show was an abridged version of the one-on-one Walters had with Pat several years earlier. It was a good lead-in to the second half, a live interview with both Clark and Pat in the hotel suite.

True to form, Walters asked if Clark had influenced Pat in her decision to dissolve her cosmetics company several years earlier. They jointly admitted that it had been the loss of Pat's daughter Penelope that had been the major factor in her decision, although Clark had been secretly around to help comfort his cousin. Then Walters followed up with the obvious question: "Why didn't you help in the rescue?"

Clark's face became serious. "In retrospect, I wish I *could've* been there to help. However, at the time, the authorities seemed to have the matter well in hand. None of us could've anticipated the tragic outcome." He tenderly squeezed Pat's hand. "But I thank God that I *was* there to help my cousin through her *personal* ordeal."

The answer had been sufficient for the audience, despite the fact it wasn't completely true.

Those of us who knew the truth knew about Pat's silphium addiction, and how she had used the youth drug to appear to be several decades younger than she really was. In order to explain away the presence of a younger self, she'd invented a daughter to vicariously live her life through. While the rest of the world believed that 'mother' Pat lived in comfortable seclusion on Caroline Island, 'daughter' Penelope ran the company and engaged in all sorts of personal debauchery.

It all came to a head in the Valley of the Vanished, where Pat had been taken prisoner by a group of women who had been horribly damaged by goings-on within Pat's own cosmetic company. We followed them into the Valley and saved the day, but the drama was far from over.

Unbeknownst to any of the combatants, they'd been manipulated by Pat's personal assistant (and paramour) Daniel Franklin. They had been pitted against one another, while Franklin executed a bloodless coup of Pat's company behind their backs.

In the end, the combatants joined forces against the common foe, and Pat got her company back.

Afterward, Pat was reunited with her real daughter – the daughter she had given up years ago – and discovered the true meaning of family. After seeing the tragic consequences of her 'innocent' silphium habit, she decided to give it up and return to her true age. Since Franklin had invented a story where Penelope had been kidnapped, we invented a story that a rescue team had been ambushed attempting to rescue her, and that all were killed – *including* Penelope. And in a

decision that continues to have countless repercussions, Pat dissolved her cosmetics company and devoted her island and her resources towards giving the abandoned children of the world a home.

Needless to say, the Walters special easily swept the Nielsen ratings.

\* \* \*

Since there weren't many people who would associate the *Hidalgo Trading Company* – let alone the new building with the same name – with Doc Savage, the tenants were pretty much sheltered from any 'extreme' public reactions.

On the other hand, attention to CSI had predictably increased. Visitor attendance rose sharply, as people flocked to the school just to see what this place was all about. What had been a surprising blessing was that the number of protestors had been limited only to a handful of people demonstrating against Doc Savage rather than CSI itself. Security did their job well, keeping them outside the gates, giving them an avenue for their freedom of expression, but limiting their movement.

Security was also heightened against individuals who might pose an actual threat to their charge, especially within the airspace above CSI. Acknowledging it as a particular point of vulnerability, they restricted media flyovers, as well as stopping a surprising number of unmanned drones attempting to discern the answer to the ominous question, "What secrets are being hidden behind the walls of the *Clark Savage Institute*?"

Meanwhile, the Hotel Monolith was holding its own. Aware of Doc's lodging within their walls, and accustomed to defending other famous patrons against the sometimes-overly-aggressive media, their security had been more than sufficient. Despite the hazard to everyday business due to tourists or demonstrators, the Monolith superbly lived up to its name.

\* \* \*

New online newsgroups and chat rooms sprung up practically overnight – some supporting Doc, and others criticizing him.

\* \* \*

Attention to Doc Savage, we discovered, wasn't limited to just the United States.

In just the field of print media, stories and articles appeared in international publications all over the planet, as scientists and laymen alike confirmed, expounded, and commented on the existence of suspended animation technology.

One such story, reported in the *Moscow Bugle* by Madame Kitanya Irenya Tantanya Karenska Alisoff, corroborated that, during the Cold War years, the former Soviet Union had made great strides in the field of suspended animation. She even suggested that Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964, and successor to the "Glorious Man of Steel" Joseph Stalin, had placed a cryogenics chamber deep within an underground bunker, to use as a way of escape had the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis resulted in nuclear war.

She tied the story to Doc Savage by quoting Gregor Nicolai, a scientist in the field of suspended



animation: "We are quite aware of Comrade Savage's heroics to the former Soviet Union, and we offer our expertise during his inquisition."

\* \* \*

*Friday, April 20, 2007  
Portland, Oregon  
Somewhere in the Northwest Industrial Area*

Robert Sloan was preparing dinner for himself when his grandson came in. Without a word, the younger man made a beeline to the refrigerator, removed a bottle of beer, dropped the cap in the trash, and took a big swig.

"What's the matter, Billy?" the older man said without glancing back.

"I'm sorry, Robert," he apologized. "It's not easy to stand by while Savage is winning the hearts and minds of the people."

Sloan placed a hand on his grandson's shoulder. "Don't let it bother you. Remember, the best is yet to come. We just need to bide our time. Right now he's just trying to convince them that he is who he says he is. If he can't prove that, they'll toss him out on his ear and brand him a fraud and a liar. Then we can move in on him. If they do prove it, then he'll go before the same legal system he bucked by taking all those people to the Crime College. As they show him the blood on his hands, he'll break down and fall apart. And when that happens, all it'll take is a little *push* to topple him over and send him into deep depression."

"And if he doesn't?" dared Bill.

"Take heart, Billy," the old man grinned. "He *will*."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER TWENTY**

*Friday, April 27, 2007  
New York City, New York  
Courtroom Twenty-six  
Morning*

We arrived at the courthouse to find a crowd of rabid media sharks waiting for the first sign of blood in the water. As we walked from the limo to the building, we were barraged by questions from all around; I remained quiet and prayed while Hamilton and Clark chose their targets carefully and responded briefly. We were finally rescued by security guards who surrounded us and escorted us to the hearing room. The crowd inside was graciously light. I saw a few people who had been allowed to attend, including Pat and Carrie; our eyes met, and I knew they were interceding against our anxiety. I wish Dot had been with them; I really could've used one of her encouraging smiles right about then.

Hamilton, now in familiar territory, guided Monk and me to our seats behind the bar on their side of the courtroom. I gave a little cough for Clark's benefit; only he and Monk would've been able to translate the Mayan blessing, and appreciate it. Hamilton pulled out his notebook computer and

started it up. Clark looked back at his cousin Pat; they exchanged a brief smile, and she gave him a thumbs-up. He appeared to be relaxed, but in my spirit I knew he was exerting every muscle in his body to maintain his face of flint.

On the other side of the courtroom, District Attorney Carlie Goldsmith and a couple of her assistants took seats at their table, making every effort not to look over in our direction. Despite the fact that I knew she would be here, it was eerie to see her in *this* reality. She didn't look very much different from the last time I saw her ... or, should I say, her counterpart. It was in the War Room below the White House, mere hours away from a nuclear holocaust that, for all I knew, had been the end of the – *that* – world.

I pulled my mind away from those memories; I couldn't let them distract me from what was happening here. I looked around and saw a section that had been designated for the media. I was pleased that the judge had banned cameras from the courtroom, and had limited the media to a few reps selected from a pool. I knew that even this could be turned into a circus if given half a chance, so I appreciated that the judge had chosen to limit things.

The bailiff – a tall bald man who reminded me of that character in *Night Court* – announced the court and instructed us all to rise as he introduced The Honorable Judge Jonathan Kilmer. Without looking at his audience, the judge came out of his chambers and took his place; he was a black man in his early 50's, with a head of kinky salt-and-pepper hair. He had a file folder with him, which he placed on the desk. He made a brief wave with his right hand, which the bailiff translated: "Be seated."

It was obvious that this was a seasoned judge who had presided over countless hearings and trials. He had us all in his power, and he knew it as he patiently reviewed the papers in the folder.

Finally he looked up at us and said to the parties, "Good morning."

Hamilton and Carlie returned the greeting, adding a respectful "Your Honor".

"It is my understanding that there is more at stake here than just confirming the identity of this man." He looked over at Carlie. "Ms. Goldsmith, is this correct?"

Carlie stood. "Yes it is, your Honor. Since the defendant *claims* to have been forcibly placed in suspended animation for fifty years, we need to prove the validity of those *claims*."

He didn't blink at her emphases, but turned to Hamilton. "Mr. Mayfair. You've presented me with several criteria that will establish the validity of your client's claims."

He read from a document:

"*Criterion One*: the individual calling himself Clark Savage, Jr. is confirmed to be truly Clark Savage, Jr.

"*Criterion Two*: the devices, designated as Exhibit A and Exhibit B, are proven to be capable of placing a human being into suspended animation, then reviving them after a specific length of time.

"*Criterion Three*: the device designated as Exhibit A is proven to have been used to place the individual known as Clark Savage, Jr. in suspended animation between the years of 1949 and

1999.

"And *Criterion Four*: The individual known as Clark Savage, Jr. was placed in the device designated as Exhibit A *without* his permission or consent."

He looked up from the document to the lawyers. "Are these agreeable to all parties?"

Hamilton replies, "Yes, your honor, they are."

Carlie added with a sneer in her voice, "Yes, your honor. I agree."

Judge Kilmer paused to sign the document he just read. He then handed it to the bailiff. "Mr. Mayfair, you have turned over to this court all the evidence in your possession and your client has conceded to all additional requests for supplemental evidence?"

"Yes, your Honor, we have," Hamilton replied.

"All right," said Judge Kilmer, relieved. "Now that we've got that out of the way, let us proceed."

Several of us took a collective deep breath and held it a moment.

*Let the games begin*, I thought.

\* \* \*

A tall man with dark hair and a rugged face took the stand and identified himself as Detective Mac Taylor of the New York Crime Lab.

"It is my expert conclusion that the man sitting over there *is* indeed Clark Savage, Jr.," he declared flatly.

Then he proceeded to meticulously outline the proof of his findings.

He cited fingerprint matches to records on file with the NYPD from when Clark was a duly-deputized officer of the NYPD. He compared recent voiceprint records with several vinyl recordings – including a speech Doc Savage had made at a charity dinner back in 1938, and a 1941 War Bonds promotional message.

They also compared DNA samples. Comparing Clark's DNA to that of Pat Savage, they were able to confirm their genealogical commonality. They had found hair samples in the device designated as Exhibit A, as well as on evidence found that was impounded by the NYPD in 1950, and compared the DNA to that of Clark Savage, Jr.

"It was a perfect match," he officially concluded.

As Taylor got up from the stand, he gave us a thin smile. Watching, I praised God, knowing that we had another who believed in us.

\* \* \*

The evidential testimony was then followed by personal testimonies.

First up, of course, were publicly recognized celebrities Pat Savage, 'Monk' Mayfair, and 'Johnny' Littlejohn. Each of them confirmed that Clark was exactly who he said he was. Monk and Johnny reminisced about their first meetings with the post-hibernation Clark, and how he had convinced them who he was. Pat also recalled how she met her cousin again, but – for those of us who'd lived through those *dangerous* days – understood why she had to explain things a little differently from the true facts.

Next up was Douglas Martin. "It was 1943. I was new to the law firm – having been brought in by Mr. Brooks, of course – and Mr. Savage had showed up at the office Christmas party. Years later, as we spoke over the telephone, he reminded me of the details of that Christmas party. And he recalled the brand of pipe tobacco I had been using at that time – a rare blend, by the way." He paused. "At that moment, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt to whom I was speaking."

Jack Heady came next. He related the story of the Red Skull Mine, and how as a child he had met Doc Savage. "At first I didn't recognize him when Perry brought him to the house – remember, I was a kid when this all happened – but once it clicked in my head, all of it came back to me. He remembered my father, and he remembered me." He paused. "Clark is a good friend, and a strong brother in Christ."

Several other witnesses finished up the morning, all testifying to having known Doc Savage prior to 1950, and all verifying that Clark was who he said he was.

By the time they were done, there was little doubt as to the outcome of *Criteria One*.

\* \* \*

Since the first part of the hearing had taken most of the morning, Judge Kilmer dismissed us all for lunch, instructing us to reconvene in two hours.

"It's about time," exclaimed Monk, standing and stretching his gorilla-like frame. "I could eat a horse!"

"Not quite yet, Pop," interjected Hamilton. "First we have to talk to the press and make our comments about what's happened so far."

"You really know how to let your old man down, don'cha, boy?" Monk said half-joking.

"Sorry, Pop."

"So we appease them. *Then* can we go to lunch?"

"I'll even let *you* pick the place," he smiled at his father.

"Now you're talkin'," Monk rubbed his hands together. "Lets' not keep the press waiting, Son!"

We were grateful that the courthouse had its own press room. And as we suspected, the press was waiting for us with bated breath. Clark, Monk, Hamilton, and I were present, as were Johnny and Pat.

Hamilton took the podium and unfolded a piece of paper covered in handwritten notes; he

indicated the paper. "Ladies and gentlemen, I will read a brief statement, then we'll open it up for a few questions.

"As you all know, this identity hearing was based upon four criteria. The first criterion, verifying that Clark Savage, Jr. is indeed who he says he is, was successfully met. The overwhelming physical evidence and testimony from friends and associates who knew him back then were unable to be refuted. Following the lunch recess, we will address the second criterion, proving that the suspended animation machines were and are actually capable of producing suspended animation." He paused. "That's the end of the statement. Questions?"

Hands flew up like they were rocket-propelled, and everybody seemed to speak at once. Hamilton took it all in stride, ignoring the pushy ones and pointing to the ones he knew were favorable to our cause. Five minutes later he cut things off despite the fact that the reporters weren't backing off, and we walked away from the press room. The press was stubborn, as expected, and they followed us as we left the courthouse.

Our limousine was waiting for us. "I figured we'd need something for a quick getaway," Monk informed us.

"Good work, brother," grinned Clark as we climbed in to safety.

With Monk in the front seat directing the limo driver, we took an indirect route to a small Italian restaurant. As we went in, the portly owner recognized Monk and embraced him like a brother. "Monk! How goes it, my old friend?"

"Luigi!" returned Monk. "We're on a lunch break, and we don't really want the press interruptin' our meal, if you know what I mean."

"That I do," the owner nodded knowingly. "Follow me."

He directed us to a back room that looked like it could've come out of *The Godfather*. It was very private and gave us a chance to relax. After ordering, I moved off to one side and called Dot. She had seen the abbreviated press conference. "You looked good. How did it go?"

"Very well," I answered. "How's Bonnie doing?"

"She's okay. We've both been doing a lot of praying – except when the triplets are demanding our attention, of course."

"I miss you," I said softly.

"Ditto," she returned. "Is there a chance they'll let you out for a conjugal visit?"

I chuckled to myself. "Odds are that we won't finish it up today. We'll probably wrap it up on Monday. Let me talk to Clark ... see if we can break away for the weekend."

"Another thing for us to pray for. I love you."

"I love you, too. Bye."

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Lunch was delicious, and – as I got a business card from Luigi – I promised him I'd come back with my wife once this mess was all over. The limo took us back to the courthouse, and we returned to our seats.

I glanced over at DA Carlie Goldsmith; she looked like whatever she had for lunch – if indeed she *did* have something for lunch – disagreed with her. My heart went out to her. She didn't have Jesus in her life, and it showed. I wished I could talk to her, to be able to tell her about the peace she was missing out on. But, since I was the last person she'd ever want to see, the only thing I could do – and, ultimately, the *best* thing – was to pray for her.

I had plenty of personal experiences seeing how God worked behind the scenes. And I knew that no legal or physical machination of man could keep God from getting His way. So I prayed, knowing that God would get through to Ms. Goldsmith in His perfect timing.

The bailiff announced Judge Kilmer's return. We stood, and sat.

"To summarize the morning's activity," the judge announced. "*Criterion One* was successfully met, verifying the fact that you are indeed Clark Savage, Jr. Let's continue now with *Criterion Two*."

A man stood and moved before the judge's bench. He was tall and ruggedly handsome, his blond hair styled in a buzz cut and a two-day-old beard covering the lower half of his face. He identified himself as Clay Rasmussen. He was one of Drake's professionals.

"Your Honor," he addressed the judge with a gentle nod of his head. "With your permission, I'd like to begin with a bit of video to introduce the evidence."

"You may proceed," replied Judge Kilmer.

Rasmussen gestured towards the back of the courtroom. Several technicians wheeled in a large flat-screen monitor and several electronic devices, including a notebook computer. Smoothly the techs set things up and all but one moved away; the remaining tech took a seat off to one side of the monitor in order to operate the notebook. Rasmussen nodded to him, and a familiar picture came up on the monitor.

"This home video was taken by Mr. Perry Liston –" He gestured to me. "– and was taken when the cavern that had held Mr. Savage was rediscovered; I call your attention to the time and date stamps at the bottom right of the picture. This is the first look at the actual suspended animation chamber. As you can see, there is physical damage to the chamber; this was made by a rock falling onto the controls from the ceiling during an earth tremor.

"I have a document here from the United States Geological Survey. The mission of the USGS is to provide geologic, topographic, and hydrologic information that contributes to the wise management of the Nation's natural resources. This document verifies that a seismic disturbance measuring 2.5 on the Richter scale had occurred *in* that area *on* the day that Mr. Savage was freed."

He proceeded to narrate as the video played on. He pointed out that an analysis of the ground

surrounding the cavern showed that it hadn't been disturbed in a number of years, thus dispelling any thoughts that the chamber had been placed in the cavern recently. To support that, he called in an entomologist who talked in some detail about various insects native to the region. According to his observations, those particular insects were in the area of the cavern, and had been in that area for decades, undisturbed.

"It was only when the chamber was removed was their land disturbed," the entomologist concluded. "There's no way the bugs could've been planted in that area to give the appearance that decades had passed. That's just the way nature works."

The video shifted and shook as I passed the camera to Clark on the inside of the chamber. He panned the area slowly and carefully. "Let me remind Your Honor that this video has been *thoroughly* authenticated," assured Rasmussen. "It has not been doctored in any way, shape, or form whatsoever, nor has it been electronically altered. If there is any doubt, I have sworn affidavits attesting to the authenticity of this video, and to the investigation of the area."

The time index on the video occasionally shifted to show the passage of time during which Drake's people made a detailed examination of the cavern and the land surrounding it; Rasmussen passed documents to the judge showing that everything had been done with the permission and supervision of the US Fish and Wildlife Service under the Department of the Interior. The land was carefully excavated and the chamber removed. At that point the video ended.

"And now, Your Honor," announced Rasmussen. "I would like to present to you Exhibit A."

On cue, the technicians rolled a large object into the courtroom; it rested on a wheeled platform covered with a blue tarp, and both doors had to be opened to fit it all in. The techs stopped a few feet from the judge's bench and retreated.

With a dramatic flair, Rasmussen removed the tarp and announced, "Your Honor, this is Mr. Savage's suspended animation chamber."

Referring to notes and using a telescoping pointer, he walked around the chamber and identified various parts and mechanisms. Looking back to the judge, he lowered his arms and gave the judge a disarming smile. "In all honesty, Your Honor, I don't know how this machine works. So I'd like to call in a few experts to explain and authenticate this machine."

One by one, over two dozen scientists from all around the world came forth. All of them presented remarkable credentials, each proving themselves to be professionals in their fields. Despite the fact that some of them required translators to be understood, and that it took several hours for all of them to present their testimonies, each of them went over the suspended animation machine, identifying the parts and explaining how they worked in the machine's overall operation.

Each and every one of them closed their testimony by reporting that the device was an amazing piece of work and that there was no doubt in their minds that it was fully capable of producing suspended animation on a subject.

\* \* \*

After a well-needed afternoon break, Rasmussen addressed the court. "As you have seen, the device known as Exhibit A is certainly capable of producing suspended animation on a subject.

But without testing it on an actual subject, the question is left half-answered."

The tech at the notebook computer tapped a few keys, and another video appeared on the flat-screen monitor. "Under closely scrutinized conditions, two rhesus monkeys were placed into a state of suspended animation – one in Exhibit A and one in Exhibit B – where their life signs were reduced to next to nothing. Ten days later they were successfully revived. Both monkeys were in good health, and they have shown no after-effects of their hibernation."

And with that, the second criterion was proven successfully.

\* \* \*

Considering the lateness of the hour, Judge Kilmer announced that the hearing would continue at 9:00am on Monday morning, and we were dismissed.

After another briefing with the press, we returned to the Monolith, where Clark and I broke the news to Monk and Hamilton.

"You wanna do *what*?" blurted Monk.

"We're going to play hooky," smirked Clark.

"We're going home for the weekend," I explained.

"That'll be a good trick," Monk shot back sarcastically. "Have you two lost your minds? You'll be recognized!"

"Not if we're disguised," I answered.

"I called Mitch during lunch," elaborated Clark. "The trunk I picked up at the front desk was from him. Do you remember the disguises we used when we first confronted Pat?"

"How can I forget? If it hadn't been for me coverin' your backsides, you two would've ended up stuffed and mounted on her wall."

"Well, Mitch still had the ID papers for our alter egos; everything we'll need is in there."

Monk glanced over at the large rolling trunk. "Okay," he conceded the point. "But why don't'cha just drive over to CSI and have Gumball fly you from there? He could get you there in half the time."

"Yeah, after a five-hour drive to CSI," I commented.

"Actually," explained Clark. "We're calling this a fact-finding mission. It's going to be a long flight, and there's bound to be a few ... *talkative* people. We're going to see what some average citizens think about Doc Savage."

Monk was catching on. He smiled. "Okay, that makes sense."

"Ham, what do *you* think?" I asked.



"I don't see anything wrong with it," he acknowledged. "If anybody asks where you are, we can tell them you're resting and aren't available. Of course, if we *do* run into anything urgent, all bets are off."

"Fair enough," nodded Clark. "Monk, could you set up the flight reservations while we're getting prepared?"

"Sure," agreed Monk. "You need a rental car when you get there?"

"No," I answered. "Dot and Bonnie will meet us there in *Nomad*."

"Okay. Tell 'em 'hi' for us."

"Will do."

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

An hour later I looked at another man in the mirror.

I was once more 'Don Iverson', computer wiz and radical non-conformist. I wore wire-rimmed glasses with orange-tinted plain glass lenses, a Jerry Garcia sweatshirt and Levis, and a long-haired black wig pulled back into a ponytail. Instinctively, I started mumbling in a Cheech-and-Chong-type drawl.

Ambling into Clark's room, I was impressed.

Clark's personality of 'James Morris' had been intentionally opposite of mine. But his disguise had a few small differences from before. Seven years ago, when Clark was more concerned about being recognized, he'd shaved his head bald. So, when he took on the Morris disguise, he had worn a blond hairpiece. This time, though, he'd used a temporary white spray-on dye to change his hair color. And, instead of sunglasses, a pair of tinted contacts hid his distinctive gold-flecked eyes. He turned to face me, and his whole demeanor was different. As he gave me a toothy smile, he looked like Jack Cassidy's older brother. His clothes were just like the last time – a tailor-made Armani suit, complete with a full set of accessories like a Rolex watch and gold neck chain.

Once more he was the king of glitz.

"You two are having *way* too much fun with this," quipped Monk sarcastically.

Clark answered back in a different but familiar voice. "Don't you criticize *me*, you mindless gibbon!"

Monk's eyes grew wide and his jaw dropped. "*Blazes!* Doc, you sounded just like Ham!"

Clark smiled and glanced at me. "I used to be real good at mimicry; nice to know I haven't lost my touch."

"I'll say!" echoed Monk, his eyes narrowing. "It's spooky!"

Clark shifted into a British accent. "What do you think about this accent? Any better?"

"Sounds good. But why the British accent?" I asked.

He pretended to talk to someone sitting next to him. "*I say, isn't this where that Doc Savage trial is going on?*"

I understood. People might be more open to expressing their opinion if they were talking to a foreigner than to a native. It was a good strategy.

"I see." I shifted into my Don Iverson voice. "Yeah, man. I'm ready. Jus' let me get my backpack and we can get goin'."

Half an hour later we slipped out of the suite and made our way downstairs. We took an indirect route, walking down a couple of flights before transferring to the elevators. Fully confident that we wouldn't be recognized, we left the Monolith and walked a couple of blocks from the hotel before catching a taxi. We'd considered taking separate taxis, but concluded that it would've been overkill. Besides, if we kept our cover story of being a business team, why would anyone suspect us of being otherwise?

I was thankful that our disguises passed through airport security, and all we had was our carry-on luggage. We stopped off at the little gift shop and picked up a couple of magazines with Clark's face on them; we figured they'd make good icebreakers and conversation-starters. I headed for the check-out counter and paid for my merchandise. I looked back, thinking I'd see Clark, but he wasn't there. I got my stuff and waited for him outside the store. A couple of minutes later he joined me.

"What took you?" I asked.

He opened the plastic bag and took out familiar black book. "But you've already got a Bible," I reminded him.

"When I was in there," he explained, "I just had this urge to get one."

I could relate to urges; I'd had a good many of them myself. "Works for me."

\* \* \*

As soon as we'd boarded the jet, I was looking for people to talk to. Considering, at this time of night, the Coach section was about half-full, I didn't have very many choices. I didn't worry about it; I knew God would provide.

My seat was on the aisle. A couple of seats over was a young woman, with her seven-year-old son sitting next to the window. Despite the lateness of the hour, the boy seemed to be fascinated with the view. Shortly after we took off, the woman took the opportunity to catch a nap. While I looked through the magazine, I looked around for somebody to talk to.

"He's cool, isn't he?"

I glanced over at the kid. The picture on the magazine had drawn his attention away from the view.

I decided not to disguise my voice. "You like Doc Savage?"

"Yeah! He's cool!" He moved around his sleeping mother, and took the empty seat next to me. "Hi. My name's Justin. Justin Brewster. That's my mom; her name's Katherine."

I reached out and shook his small hand. "Good to meet you Justin. I'm Don Iverson."

"I saw Doc Savage on TV," he bragged. "He's really somethin', isn't he?"

"Yes he is," I agreed. "I've met him."

The boy's eyes grew wide with amazement. "You *have*?"

I nodded. "I was walking in front of his hotel last week when he came out."

The boy was enraptured. "Wow! Does he look like his pictures?"

"He sure does! He's, like, over six feet tall, with a permanent tan. And he's got muscles you can see even when he's got a coat on."

"Wow!"

"You said you've seen him on TV. So what do you think ... did he do the things they said he did? You know, the bad things?"

"I dunno," Justin shrugged. "Sometimes you gotta bend the rules to get the job done."

I was impressed. "That's very wise. Where'd you learn about that?"

"*Batman Begins*."

I smiled and nodded. "Cool."

\* \* \*

"Would you like something to drink, sir?" the stewardess asked Clark.

He gave her a smile. "White wine, my dear, if you have it," he responded in his British accent.

She handed him the small bottle and a plastic tumbler to pour it into.

"And you, miss?" she addressed the woman two seats over from him.

"Rum and Coke, please," the middle-aged brunette looked up from her leather *Day Timer*. "With ice."

The stewardess put a couple of ice cubes in another plastic tumbler, and handed it and the two bottles to Clark. He passed it across to the other woman, who thanked them both.

As the stewardess continued down the aisle, the brunette mixed the two bottles in the tumbler and

took a tentative sip. With a satisfied sigh, she looked over at the magazine. "You got business in Portland?"

"Pardon me?" Clark asked casually.

"Your accent and that magazine you got there. You're British, right? So what brings you to the States?"

"I'm a journalist for the *London Times*. The name is Morris. James Clarke Morris. We're covering this Savage affair."

She took a sip of her drink. "Barbara Greene. I'm with *Ewing and Barnes*."

"I'm sorry. I don't recognize the name. What do they do?"

"We're into fashion. That's why I'm here ... I'm heading to Portland for a fashion show."

"Fascinating," Clark commented.

"I didn't think the trial was over. So why are you flying to Portland?"

"Since they won't be continuing the identity hearing until Monday morning, I thought I'd take a day holiday and visit some friends in Portland." He gave her a sly smile. "Besides, if I ask people what they think of the Savage trial, I can write this off on my expense account."

"I know that feeling," she agreed. "So, are you asking?"

"Yes. Would you allow me to record you?"

"Sure," she shrugged. "Why not?"

He reached down to his overnight bag and retrieved a thin digital recorder, turning it on and placing it on the seat between them. "Go ahead, Barbara Greene. What do *you* think about Doc Savage?"

She grinned and turned up one eyebrow. "I'll tell you one thing – he's a hunk. Now, as to those things they're saying he did ... well, I don't know. Besides, that was over fifty years ago – who really gives a damn about it? There're a lot more important things to worry about these days."

"So, do you believe he's innocent?"

She chuckled. "*Nobody's* 'innocent' in this world. That's just the way it is. There are just some who are more 'heroic' than others. Firemen, for instance; they got my respect on 9/11."

"What about Doc Savage ... would you call him 'heroic'?"

"I really can't say." She gave him an apologetic look. "I'm sorry ... apart from what I've seen on the news, and in some of the papers, I haven't really been paying much attention to it. So my knowledge is somewhat limited."

"That's perfectly all right. I certainly can't expect everyone to be fully-immersed. I appreciate

your answer. Thank you, Barbara Greene." He turned off the digital recorder and returned it to his bag.

They sat in silence for almost an hour. Barbara Greene had two more Rum and Cokes, and Clark prayed.

"Mr. Norris?" she finally asked, still looking forward, sipping on her drink.

"Yes, Miss Greene?"

"How ... well ... do you know Doc Savage?"

"Fairly well," he shrugged. "Why do you ask?"

"What ... happened?"

"What do you mean, *happened*?"

"I heard he'd become a Christian. What would make a guy like him turn to religion?"

Clark hesitated only a moment before replying. "Back in the 1930's and 1940's he had a reputation of being somewhat of a ... *superman*. It was quite a reputation, and he tried to live up to it. But, being human, it was never enough for him. He kept trying, kept striving for perfection, but he never achieved it. And it was slowly driving him mad." He paused. "The way I hear it, after he came out of this hibernation-thing, and found that everything he had known had been turned topsy-turvy, he still didn't have any answers. As he wandered the streets, he somehow ended up in one of those rescue missions. He listened to the person doing the preaching ... and something made sense that had never made sense before.

"Before he went into hibernation, he'd prided himself on being a worldly man ... one to whom no single religion or belief system stood out above the others. But this was *different*. In the end, he discarded all the arguments, all the mental stuff that had stood between him and truly believing in *something*, and chose to let Jesus Christ into his heart."

She was looking at him now. "Didn't he know what he was getting into?"

"I suppose he did," he answered her. "But not completely. It was only *after* he'd made his choice, and God was working on him, that much of it made sense. You see, Christianity isn't just something you can put on and take off like an overcoat in winter, but it's something you have to live with ... through the good, the bad, and the indifferent. And it seems to have done wonders in his life." He paused. "You see, I, too, am a Christian."

Clark noticed that the woman had turned her head away from him, and was staring at the back of the seat in front of her. He paused a second or two, then asked, "What are you thinking about, Barbara Greene?"

"Nothing," she whispered.

"Miss Green?" he persisted. "Where is your security?"

"Security?" She released a short, bitter laugh. "Mr. Morris, I am 47 years old. I am alone. My job

is the only thing I hang on to ... that hangs onto me. I've seen my friends get married, start families. And through it all, I am alone. It's not as if I want to start my own family, mind you, but ... I ... don't ... want ... to die ... *alone*. I'm ... scared of dying."

"Most people are," Clark agreed softly.

"Are *you* scared of dying?"

"To an extent, yes. But as a Christian, I know what follows death ... and it's pretty good."

"I don't know that," she shot back. "I don't have that assurance, that hope."

"You *can*," he countered. "It's not as if it's some great big secret. It's just a matter of knowing and making a decision."

"Yeah," she shrugged. "But there are so many religions out there. Why should Christianity be the only one that leads to heaven?"

Clark chuckled this time. "You're right. There are a lot of religions that claim to know the way to heaven, or to spiritual enlightenment. And yet, *only* Jesus Christ said that he *was* the Way. Buddha never said it ... Confucius never said it ... at best, they all said that they *knew* the Way. But Jesus didn't mince words. He declared that he *was* the way. I'd say that was pretty special.

"Think about it – why follow *any* of these others who say they *know* the way when you can go right to the one who *is* the way? The secret is to go *directly* to Jesus Christ and eliminate the middleman. Oh, sure, there have been good times and bad times in my life ... that's only natural. But, beyond all that, or in spite of all that, I have an assurance, a hope, that gets me through it. I can tell you all about it, but I'd rather show you where to find it, and let you do the homework ... *if* you're interested."

"You make an excellent point, Mr. Morris," she commented with a thin smile.

"Take your time. Think about it. It's going to be a *long* flight." He paused. "Do you believe in ESP?"

She gave him an odd look. "Yeah, kinda."

"Before I got on the plane, I stopped off at the airport gift shop to pick up a couple of things to tide me over during the flight. Before I left, however, I was ... inspired ... to purchase this." He took out the Bible and angled it in her direction. "Now, since I already have a Bible, why then should I want another one?"

"For me?" she asked.

"Do you have a better explanation?"

She thought about it a moment, then shook her head. "No."

He handed her the Bible. "So here you go. You can read it, or you can toss it in the garbage when you get off the plane. Your choice."

She held it in her hand, feeling its weight. "Where would I start?"

"I'd say, start at the beginning – Genesis; might bring to mind any Bible stories you grew up with. Then browse through Psalms, to show you that it's not just a book about a bunch of old men who don't know how you feel. And finally, skip ahead to the Gospels – Mark or John, take your pick. That'll give you a good taste. And, by the way, Miss Greene, I don't believe in stupid questions."

She smiled at him. Then she looked at the Bible for several seconds without opening it. Finally she placed it on the seat next to her. The fact that she didn't carelessly toss it was a good sign; she had at least a minimum of respect for the Bible.

Clark said nothing; the ball was in her court now. So he just sipped at his white wine until it was gone, then leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

But he didn't sleep.

\* \* \*

Dot was waiting for us when we disembarked. We greeted her with hugs. But before we could say anything, this dark-haired woman addressed Clark by his alias and ran over to join us. She gave him a big hug and asked, "Are these the friends you came to visit?"

"Yes," he answered in his British accent. "Don Iverson, Dot Liston ... I'd like you to meet Miss Barbara Greene. She's a new sister."

"*Very* new," the woman added with a smile.

"Well, praise God!" exclaimed Dot, who moved in for a hug. "Welcome to the family!"

I stood by, nodded and smiled. "Congratulations!" Then I gave her a hug too.

Clark handed her a piece of paper. "Here are some phone numbers – friends here, and back in New York City. If you need some fellowship, a place to worship, or just need a friend to have a cup of coffee with and talk to – don't hesitate to call these numbers. They won't say no." He smiled. "Do me a favor, though: if they ask who helped you, use my middle name – *Clarke*."

"Okay," she agreed. "Clarke."

She gave us all last hugs, then walked away with a bounce in her step. Once she was out of earshot, I leaned in to Clark and said, "Well, now I know why you got the Bible."

"Yep," Clark nodded, looking around. "Where's Bonnie?"

We started walking towards the parking area. "She's in the RV with the kids," answered Dot. "Besides, I was the only one who recognized you from before."

"That's true," I smiled. "The first time we wore these, it was you and your mom."

"Yeah," she laughed. "You two tried to fake us out."

Clark laughed. Then he laughed again. It was enough for me to ask, "What's up?"

He grinned at us. "Oh, I was just thinking ..."

\* \* \*

Bonnie closed the door to the bedroom, and took another look at her watch. The triplets were sleeping soundly, and she was concerned about the others. She hoped their flight hadn't been late. She was about to call Dot on her cell phone when a knock came to the door.

*They have keys, she rationalized. Why would they knock?*

She moved closer to the door and called, "Who is it?"

"Uh ... you Miss Bonnie?" It was an unfamiliar voice.

She called back suspiciously. "Who's askin'?"

"My name's Theodore ... Theodore Baer. You Miss Bonnie?"

"*Mrs.*," she corrected. "I'm married. Do I know you?"

"No, ma'am. I was told to come out to an RV here in the parking lot and ask for a Miss Bonnie, and you'd show me a good time."

Bonnie's jaw dropped. "*What* did you say?"

"I'm willing to pay top dollar, ma'am. But can we hurry things up? I've only got an hour until my connecting flight takes off."

Bonnie gaped at the door.

*This idiot thinks I'm a hooker?* she thought as she balled up her fists. *I'll show him!*

But then she stopped.

"Myrna?" she addressed the on-board AI computer. "Identify all individuals within a ... thirty-foot radius."

"There are three people outside: one female and two males. The female is Dot. The males are not familiar."

"Describe the man next to the door."

As Myrna responded, Bonnie's smile grew. She walked over to the refrigerator and took out a pressurized can of whipped cream. She shook the can vigorously as she headed for the door, then held it behind her back as she reached for the door handle with the other hand. As she opened the door, she gave the man a seductive smile. Then she brought her hand from behind her back and pressed hard on the nozzle, instantly obscuring the man's surprised face in a torrent of whipped cream. She didn't stop until the can fizzled with its final spurts.

To the left, Dot was standing with some hippie-type person she assumed was Perry in disguise;



they were both laughing. The other man – her target – was sputtering and laughing as he tried to wipe whipped cream away from his eyes; as he did, his voice returned to normal.

"That'll teach you to try and pull a fast one over on *me!*" she declared. "Now, are you ready to give up, or am I gonna have to use the hose on you?"

He raised both hands. "I surrender! I surrender!"

"Wise move, Sparky. Now, c'mon in and let's get you cleaned up. And keep it quiet – the kids are asleep."

Once they were all aboard, Bonnie went back and grabbed a bath towel. But before she could give it to Clark, he put on a burst of speed, wrapped her up in his cream-covered arms, and gave her a big messy kiss. She had to fight back a reflexive scream, but she finally conceded to her husband's kisses.

"You realize you're both going to need to take a shower to get that stuff off," Perry observed.

"I think that's the idea," leaned in Dot, kissing him tentatively on the cheek. "Why don't you get that guck off your face while I head us back to Lincoln City?"

Clark and Bonnie slipped back into the rear bedroom and closed the door. Perry sat at the kitchen table and started removing his disguise. Dot stepped down to the driver's position and started up the RV; she easily maneuvered out of the parking lot and connected to the freeway. After a few minutes, Perry joined her and sat on the steps. She reached over, and his hand took hers. "It's good to have you back, even if it is only for the weekend."

"Same here," he reciprocated. "Now what was that you were saying about a conjugal visit ...?"

\* \* \*

### **CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE**

*Monday, April 30, 2007  
New York City, New York  
Courtroom Twenty-six  
9:00 am*

Clark and I took Gumball up on a ride back to New York City in his augmented V-22 Osprey. Even then, we got back to the Monolith with barely enough time to clean off the makeup and catch a few hours of sleep before it was time to head back to court.

Clark's suspended animation chamber was still in the courtroom, as was the large flat computer monitor which now showed a rotating, three-dimensional representation of the device.

Clay Rasmussen started things off, this time to prove the third criterion: that Clark had been put into suspended animation for fifty years.

"Your Honor, since we already covered the pertinent mechanisms of Exhibits A and B last Friday, today I will explain how they come together. For most of my explanation, I will use the computer representation rather than the actual device.

"Fact: both of these chambers were intended to place their occupants into suspended hibernation for a specific duration of time. In order to do so, there would have to be some type of mechanism or mechanisms that would index the beginning or suspension time ..." The computer image circled and froze, and zoomed in on a particular section. "... index the end or intended interval time ..." With the first section now colored bright green, the image panned around and located a second section, zooming in again. "... and then accurately measure the passage of time between the first and second point." With the second part now colored bright red, the image once more panned around and zoomed in on a third section, which turned bright yellow. "Having located these mechanisms, and going on the eyewitness testimony of Mr. Perry Liston as to the arrival of Mr. Savage, it was a simple matter to compute how long both chambers were working." He paused. "Mr. Savage testified that it was December 28, 1948 when he was ambushed and captured by persons unknown. The device identified as Exhibit A recorded that the beginning date was January 12, 1949."

Judge Kilmer nodded and stated that the explanation and evidence proved the third criterion.

"As for the fourth criterion – proving that Clark Savage, Jr. was forcibly placed into suspended animation – no single test can prove this."

"I didn't think there would be," commented Judge Kilmer dryly.

"However, with your indulgence, Your Honor, I'll endeavor to make sense of all this."

"Proceed."

"Thank you, Your Honor. We've already established that Exhibits A and B were built prior to 1950, are both operational, and that Exhibit A was occupied by Clark Savage, Jr. between 1949 and 1999. But we've not covered who was in Exhibit B."

"In order to do this," continued Rasmussen. "We must introduce a new character to this drama, a man by the name of Robert Sloan."

"Objection!" cried DA Goldsmith. "Irrelevant, Your Honor!"

"Objection overruled," countered Judge Kilmer. "You may proceed."

"Thank you, Your Honor." He walked over to the table and accepted three stapled sheaves of paper from Hamilton. He handed the first sheaf to the bailiff, who gave it to Judge Kilmer. The second set he gave to DA Goldsmith with a smile; grudgingly, she snatched it out of his hand. The third he kept for himself and referred to it as he continued. "This is a copy of the police record for a Robert Louis Sloan. As you can see, Mr. Sloan was a petty criminal who was last seen back in 1949."

"Again, irrelevant!" DA Goldsmith spoke up.

"Overruled," repeated Judge Kilmer.

"Your Honor, Mr. Sloan's fingerprints were found in several places on both Exhibit A *and* Exhibit B, especially on the mechanisms that make the machines work. But that's not all. His fingerprints *and* DNA were found on the inside of Exhibit B. The logical conclusion is that Mr.

Sloan was involved with both hibernation chambers, but was *inside* the second chamber."

"Irrelevant, Your Honor!" objected DA Goldsmith.

"Overruled," sighed Judge Kilmer. "Mr. Rasmussen, your point?"

"My point is to prove that Robert Sloan had an integral part in what happened to Clark Savage Jr." He paused. "Mr. Savage's fingerprints were only found on the inside chamber of Exhibit A – where the subject rests when placed in suspended animation. They were not found anywhere else on either machine. However, Mr. Sloan's fingerprints were all over the machines. The only way that could be possible is if Mr. Sloan had participated in the assembly of both chambers ... and then had *occupied* Exhibit B."

He paused to let that sink in.

"Now, having determined that both Mr. Savage and Mr. Sloan had been in suspended animation at the same time, the question arises as to which of these two men went into suspended animation first? According to the mechanisms in the chambers which indicate the starting date, the answer is Mr. Savage; he went into hibernation on January 12, 1949, while Mr. Sloan went into hibernation four months later, on April 5th.

"Was Mr. Savage's hibernation by his own volition? According to the analysis of both chambers, there were traces of an anesthetic-type substance in Exhibit A that was not present in Exhibit B. In addition, if the anesthetic was part of the hibernation process, why wasn't it used on Mr. Sloan? The logical conclusion here is that Mr. Savage had been rendered unconscious by the time he went into hibernation – as he has already testified – whereas Mr. Sloan was wide awake.

"Let's take this a step further. Say, for instance, that Mr. Savage and Mr. Sloan were somehow working together, and had built the machines together. If Mr. Savage were the selfish person some people believe him to be, wouldn't it have been natural for him to order Mr. Sloan into the first chamber *first* in order to test it out before putting himself into the second chamber? And yet, Mr. Savage was the first one to test it out, with Mr. Sloan following four months later. Also, if Mr. Savage was daring – and *selfless* – enough to test the machine on himself before others, specifically before Mr. Sloan, then why would he be choosing this drastic measure in order to *evade* the law?" He paused. "It doesn't make sense when you look at it that way, does it? However ... if you look at it the other way, with Mr. Sloan putting Mr. Savage into the first chamber *first* to make sure it worked, then following when he was sure it was safe ... that would fit more in line with the proven facts."

He paused to take a sip of water from a glass at Hamilton's table.

"One last thing before I move on," Rasmussen posed. "If the first hibernation chamber had been intended to help Mr. Savage escape legal prosecution as a result of the Crime College, then ... why would he build a second one? I mean, why would he feel there'd be a *need* for a second one? And, if the intent was for someone to accompany Mr. Savage during his hibernation, why did he pick a petty criminal like Mr. Sloan, and not one of his *closest* ... and *dearest* ... personal *colleagues*?" He gestured to Monk, Pat, and Johnny in turn to emphasize his point.

He was on a roll, and all of us were praying him on.

"Now, let's look at the timeline of events," he continued. "Edward R. Murrow received the

evidence that exposed the Crime College in mid-1949. Prior to that, there had been no threat to the Crime College. So, to those who accuse Mr. Savage of having himself placed in suspended animation in order to avoid prosecution, that accusation is groundless – since, at the time he was placed into suspended animation, no threat even existed, nor *would* it exist for another four months. Now, if Mr. Savage had known about the evidence prior to it coming into the hands of Edward R. Murrow, wouldn't it have been more logical for him to intercept and destroy the evidence, rather than an extreme measure of placing himself into suspended animation? And, if that were so, where did Mr. Sloan come into the picture?

"For a man who had been well known for his logical thinking, this kinda strays far off the path, wouldn't you agree? And, since there had been numerous occasions in the past where he and/or his associates had been wrongly jailed for crimes, why treat this any less urgent?"

He paused to take a sip of water while we all digested what he'd said.

"If you would allow me, I'd like to clear up a few loose ends. Your Honor, it is true that there were additional fingerprints on both machines. Most of those fingerprints were found after the chambers were discovered. There were parts on both machines – parts native to that time period – that had been replaced with present-day materials; I have detailed files indicating who the fingerprints belonged to, and what parts were replaced.

"The conclusions are clear. In early 1949, Clark Savage, Jr. –" He turned and pointed his hand in Clark's direction, acknowledging him. "– was rendered unconscious and, without his knowledge or approval, was placed into one of two suspended animation chambers. Four months later, Robert Sloan – who had had a hand in assembling *both* chambers – voluntarily climbed into the second chamber and was also placed in suspended animation.

"I believe this proves the final criteria of this hearing." He offered the judge a brief respectful nod of his head. "Thank you, Your Honor."

Period.

I had to restrain myself from applauding.

I wasn't alone.

\* \* \*

The recess lasted only twenty-eight minutes.

"In the light of the evidence presented," declared Judge Jonathan Kilmer. "It is the decision of this court that all four criterion in the matter of Clark Savage, Jr., have been successfully met. This hearing is concluded."

And with a bang of his gavel, it was over.

*Now* we cheered.

\* \* \*

When we went to talk to the press, we saw that DA Goldsmith was just finishing up. I looked

over to Clark. "What's she saying?"

"Nothing good," he reported, having read her lips. "She says all this did was prove that I was the criminal she believes me to be. And she says she's still going ahead to prosecute."

"She's a stubborn woman," Hamilton said aside. "But she can't do it."

Goldsmith stepped away from the podium and it was our turn. Since the people already knew the headlines and the DA's opinion of it, all we needed to do was comment.

"We're happy for the decision," smiled Hamilton. "But we always knew he was Doc Savage, so this was just to prove it to the rest of the public. We commend District Attorney Goldsmith for her effort in trying to thwart us; she was only doing her job, but the evidence was overwhelming. I hope she'll accept this decision."

"What about the charges?" asked one of the reporters.

"The statutes of limitation have expired," Hamilton simply stated. "My client can no longer be held accountable for them."

"Isn't that rather ... *convenient*?" someone yelled out.

Hamilton wasn't fazed. "It would appear so. But since it *has* been proven that my client had been in suspended animation during that time, it's not something he had any control over."

"So what's up next?" asked one of the reporters.

"Wadda ya think we're gonna do?" spoke up Monk with a grin. "We're gonna *celebrate! Doc Savage is back!*"

\* \* \*

We went back to the Monolith, riding on adrenaline and praising God for the victory. But it wasn't until we'd scanned our room – just in case, mind you – that we felt comfortable to discuss our next move.

"Despite what you said about the DA, she's not going to give up," said Pat.

"So what's the worst she can do?" asked Monk, getting a drink from the fridge.

"She can push it, Pop," informed Hamilton. "All this did was confirm who you are and verify your story. She's still got the warrant against you."

"But she can't press it," I reminded. "The statutes of limitations."

"I know. Still, that can't stop her from going through the motions. If she does, *I'll* enter a motion to have the charges dismissed, due to the statutes of limitations having run their course. She'll counter with the tolling argument, saying that the statutes haven't really run out. She'll force the case to be bootied up to a higher level court, most likely the Appellate Court. If they do that, they'll have a panel of judges listen to arguments on both sides and then rule on it. And so on and so forth. In the end we'd still win, but they'd have inflicted some serious damage to us in the

public eye."

"So it's *not* the time to celebrate," Monk commented wearily.

"Not just yet, Pop. Sorry."

"Is there anything wrong with us puttin' on the feedbag and *pretending* we're celebratin'?"

"No, my old friend!" Clark put a hand on his shoulder. "After all, we *have* won a victory today."

\* \* \*

*Monday, April 30, 2007*  
*New York City, New York*  
*The Office of Police Commissioner Gordon*  
*11:00 pm*

As soon as the hearing was over, Jefferson Davis Frye knew the action would begin.

His instincts told him to follow DA Goldsmith. He watched her go out to her car and make a call on her cell phone. Then she went straight to her house. As Frye sat in his car and watched from a distance, he wondered if his instincts had failed him. But as he was about to give up and head to his own home, Goldsmith came out of her house and climbed into her car. Frye ducked down as she passed his car, then pursued her from a distance.

As he tailed her, he hoped the police wouldn't notice how erratic her driving was; had she been drinking? he wondered. If that were the case, and she was more desperate than she appeared, his little 'secret weapon' would secure his future.

She drove straight for the office of the Police Commissioner. As she walked through the deserted hallways, she paused a couple of times to steady herself. He didn't figure she was in any condition to notice him, but he still moved carefully along the hard floors.

By the time Frye reached the secretary's office, the Commissioner and Goldsmith were already talking. Actually, *she* was doing most of the talking. She was very much pissed off at Savage, and both the tone of her voice and the content of her speech confirmed his suspicions of intoxication. She was animatedly talking about her next plan of attack.

However, when Commissioner Gordon finally spoke, it stopped her right in her tracks.

"Forget it," he said, with a harsh tone of finality.

"*Forget it?*" she blurted.

Gordon wasn't fazed by her anger. "Carlie," he offered patiently. "A wise man once said, 'You gotta know when to hold 'em, and know when to fold 'em.' Now, sure, you can try to press this, but both of us know he's holding all the aces. And in the end, he'll turn around and sue you and this city for wrongful arrest ... and he might just win." He smiled at her. "Are you sure you want *that* on your record?"

"No, I don't," she conceded after a few seconds. "But what else can I do?"

That's my cue, Frye thought with a smile, and tapped on the door.

"Who is it?" asked Gordon.

Frye identified himself. "I have something you both should see," he boldly said.

"Do you know this guy?" asked the Commissioner in a low voice.

"He's one of my staff." Her tone was not favorable.

There was silence for a moment.

"Come in," said the Commissioner.

Frye opened the door and entered the room. Both Goldsmith and Gordon were sitting around the Commissioner's desk.

"This had *better* be good, Frye," threatened Goldsmith.

"It is, ma'am ... sir." He closed the door behind him. "I'll get right to the point. We all know that Savage is going to get off Scott Free on the charges from fifty years ago. But I have a different approach."

Not waiting for permission, he proceeded to unfold his observations and outline his conclusions. As he did, Carlie Goldsmith's attitude transformed from anger to interest. The Commissioner's eyes narrowed and his lips formed into a thin smile. Frye finished and waited for the reactions.

"I trust you have this on paper?" asked the Commissioner.

Frye just smiled and removed a stuffed envelope from his inside jacket pocket. He started to hand it to Gordon, but Goldsmith intercepted it. She ripped the envelope open and started going through its contents. After a few moments, she passed the papers over to Commissioner Gordon.

"You're sure of this?" she asked Frye intently.

"It's a long shot, I'll admit," Frye commented. "But it's the *only* shot we have – wouldn't you agree?"

"If we play our cards right," she agreed.

"This looks good," Gordon commented approvingly. "You've done your research."

"Thank you, sir," Frye responded. "I have a personal stake in this. I used to work for Patricia, Inc. – they fired me."

"Jeff," addressed Goldsmith. It was the first time she'd ever called him by his first name. And she sounded far more sober than a few minutes ago.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Do you have a judge in mind?"

"No, ma'am," he admitted. "But I *will*."

"You do that." She reached into a pocket and withdrew a business card; leaning over the Commissioner's desk, she wrote a number on the back of the card. "This is my private number." She handed Frye the card.

"Thank you, ma'am," he accepted.

"Call me Carlie." Then Frye left the office to take care of his assignment. As he paused outside the door, he heard her say, "You know, we might just get that SOB and his whole bunch with this!"

Jefferson Davis Frye, basking in his own importance, smiled to himself.

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR**

*Tuesday, May 1, 2007*  
*New York City, New York*  
*Lunchtime*

We started the morning with telephone interviews.

We did our best not to let our apprehension show, but instead tried to project a positive, even confident, outlook on the situation. The questions followed the same pattern: "How do you feel about the outcome of the identity hearing?" "Do you believe the District Attorney will still go after you for your actions at the Crime College?" "So what are you going to do next?"

Our answers were standard, except Monk's.

"Next?" he laughed. "Well, Doc's thinking about doing some public speaking, or maybe he might write a book. Or ... *who knows?* ... maybe we'll rent a couple of floors in the Empire State Building and hang out our shingle ... see what happens."

\* \* \*

For lunch, we decided to eat at one of New York's finest restaurants.

However, in the middle of things, Monk mumbled through his steak, "Uh, oh! Here comes the Wicked Witch of the West."

"And she brought reinforcements," I added ominously, as I saw the five uniformed police officers in her wake.

As they weaved their way towards our table, many people recognized her from the news, and every eye seemed to be on them or us.

"Okay, everybody, stay cool," cautioned Hamilton in an even tone. "Remember, this was not



unexpected."

Goldsmith stood near Clark. "*Clark Savage, Jr.?*" she asked in a cold and formal voice.

"I am," answered Clark calmly.

"You're under arrest. The charge is Murder." She turned to Monk. "Andrew Blodgett Mayfair?"

"Huh?" he acknowledged, still stunned by her previous statement.

"You're also under arrest," she announced. "Accessory to Murder."

We all did a double-take.

"*What?*" exclaimed Hamilton, bolting to his feet. "This is outrageous! What proof do you have of these allegations?"

"You'll find out soon enough," she hissed, her eyes flaring as her hatred shone through for a brief moment. Then she was back to her guise of crusading District Attorney. She read Clark and Monk their Miranda rights as the officers handcuffed them. As she did, Monk released a low growl; I put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed enough to get his attention; he relaxed and we exchanged a nod.

Around us, patrons brazenly captured the moment with cell phones and digital cameras.

"I'll have this straightened out before the night's out," promised Hamilton.

"I wouldn't count on it," Goldsmith challenged, moving her face in close to his and whispering, "*Monkey Boy.*"

Her personal dig had been too quiet for anyone but the two of them (and me) to hear. I saw the look in Hamilton's eyes, and – having seen what his father was capable of when provoked – I pictured him picking up the DA and shot-putting her across the room. However, his reaction wasn't what I had anticipated; instead, he remained controlled as she moved away from us and followed her parade from the restaurant.

"Hamilton," I got his attention. "**Go** – I'll take care of the check!"

Hamilton gave me a quick nod, and then followed the others.

At that moment, it didn't matter that I was the center of attention. I paid the check as quickly as possible, and left the restaurant. I heard the comments of those around me as I walked through the restaurant; I clung to the encouraging ones and disregarded the rest. When I reached the limo I told him to take me back to the hotel, then filled him in on what had happened.

He acknowledged me and we headed towards the hotel. I raised the middle partition and realized something. I pulled out my cell phone and urgently made the call to CSI. I'd realized that, if they were arresting Monk as an accomplice, they'd also go after ... Johnny.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, May 1, 2007*  
*The Campus of the Clark Savage Institute*

Johnny Littlejohn answered his cell phone.

Elena Inez Garcia de Ybarra saw her mentor's face pale. The young woman with jet black hair kept silent until he disconnected, then she asked him what had happened.

"They've arrested Clark and Monk. They charged Clark with murder and Monk as an accessory to murder." He paused a few moments. "They'll be coming after me next."

"But why?" she asked, anxiously. "You are a *teacher!*"

"I've also been a close colleague of Doc," he replied calmly. "I will most likely be arrested as an accessory."

Johnny's office phone rang; he answered it. "Yes, George. No, it's fine; I was told they might be coming. Yes, I'll be waiting for them ... no, I won't give them any problems. Thank you, George. Goodbye."

He replaced the handset and looked over at Elena.

"You can't let them take you!" she pleaded, anger filling her eyes. "I won't let them!"

Johnny walked over to the young Honduran woman and rested his hands on her shoulders; he looked her in the eyes and gave her a beatific smile. "Elena, please don't worry. God has this whole thing under control; this is far from over. In the meantime, please take over my classes. I will endeavor to keep in contact. Can you do this for me?"

She opened her mouth, but no sound came out at first. Then she nodded and muttered, "I will."

He swiped a fist gently across her chin and smiled. "You're a brick."

She gave him a half-hearted smile. Johnny excused himself and used the bathroom. Then the two of them sat for only a couple of minutes before a knock came to the door. Johnny nodded to Elena, who answered it. Two uniformed policemen stood in the doorway.

"William Harper Littlejohn?" one asked.

Johnny stood. "I am he," he acknowledged.

One of the officers informed him of the charges against him – Accessory to Murder, as he had suspected – and read him his Miranda rights; the other came around behind him and handcuffed his wrists. Johnny didn't resist as they escorted him from his office and into a police vehicle.

The last thing Elena saw was his smile.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, May 1, 2007*  
*New York City, New York*

I hung up the cell phone with Johnny and dialed Dot's cell. She answered on the second ring.

"Hi, hon!" she greeted.

"Hi," I returned. "Where are you?"

"We went grocery shopping. We're just leaving."

"Is Bonnie driving?"

"Yeah," she replied, her voice curious. "What's going –?"

Through the cell phone I suddenly heard Dot exclaim, "**LOOK OUT!**" Then there was a sudden screeching of tires, glass shattering, and that unmistakable gut-wrenching sound of metal hitting metal. There were screams – and then there was sudden silence.

I stared ahead and stopped breathing.

Just then, we pulled up in front of the Monolith. I forced myself to breathe again. As I climbed out, I could see that the press was there again. The last thing I wanted to do was talk to them – I was afraid they'd say something wrong and I'd do something very non-Christian-like. So I took my cue from Clark, and set my face like flint as I looked ahead and walked straight through them into the building and straight to the elevator.

As soon as I closed the door to the room, however, I dropped to my knees, then to my face, as I prayed hard and long, weeping unashamedly as I cried out to God. It was only the ring of my cell phone that pulled me back. The Caller ID said AMY. I frantically pressed the answer key and blurted, "**Amy?**"

The sound of my wife's voice opened the floodgates of my tear ducts. "No, it's me! We're okay!"

"*Thank God!*" I exclaimed. "What happened?"

"We got into an accident," she answered. "We were pulling out of the parking lot by Safeway when we got broadsided by a pickup. The guy was trying to get up that hill – you know, the one that turns into town there – and the light started to turn red. He tried, but he wasn't able to stop in time."

I knew the area. Breathing again, I asked, "Are Bonnie and the kids okay?"

"The kids are fine," she answered. "Bonnie was hurt, but not badly! I don't know all the details – I couldn't get in close enough to ask! She was conscious, but hurting! She may have broken her arm! The paramedics took her to the hospital! Thank God for side air bags!"

"Where are you now?"

"With Amy, at the hospital," she answered. "When we were hit, my cell went out the window and got smashed."

"That's why I couldn't get a hold of you."

"Yeah," she agreed. "Anyhow, Amy kept an eye on the kids while I talked to the police, then I had the minivan towed to the mechanic. Bonnie's in the emergency room right now; we can't visit her yet, but she knows we're here."

I dared ask the next question. "Are you hurt?"

"The paramedics said I'll survive, but I'll definitely be sore in the morning." She tried to inject a little levity in her answer. "I'm waiting for 'em to come and check me out." The tone of her voice lowered as she reassured me, "I'm fine, babe."

"Okay." I berated myself for nearly forgetting the other crisis. "Are you near a television?"

"Yeah ..." I could hear her directing Amy to turn on the television in the waiting room. "What happened?"

I'd been sitting on the floor since answering the phone. Now I got to my feet and grabbed the television remote we'd left on the couch. I muted the audio, and switched over to the news. "They arrested Clark *and* Monk," I told her. "They charged them with Murder and Accessory to Murder."

Whether she was reacting to me, the television, or both, she gasped, "*What?*"

"We were having lunch, and the DA arrested them right in the middle of the restaurant! Hamilton went after them. I called Johnny to warn him he might be next, and then I called you."

Just then my eyes caught the television. "Oh, God," I muttered.

Dot was watching it also. "They got Johnny."

The silent pictures said it all – the police cruiser leaving CSI with Johnny in the back seat, and the headline *Savage Associate Arrested*.

As my heart groaned within me, I knew I'd been too late.

Dot was repeating, "I've got to tell Bonnie, I've got to tell Bonnie!"

"*No!*" I stopped her. "*Please!* Not just yet! She's had enough shocks for the moment! Wait until she's a bit more stable, okay?"

"Okay," she conceded. "At least we know we've got prayer coverage." She paused; I heard someone in the background call her by her full name. "They're ready to check me out. I'll talk to you in a few. I love you!"

"I love you, too," I hastily replied before she disconnected. Suddenly feeling very fatigued, I slumped back against the couch.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, May 1, 2007*  
*Oberlin, Kansas*

*The Farm of Ivan and Amanda Renwick*  
*Evening*

The tanned anchorman gave the lead-in. "Famed 'Man of Bronze', Clark Savage, Jr. is arrested on the heels of his successful identity hearing. Lisa Peratino brings us the story – *Lisa?*"

The picture switched to a close-up of a female reporter. She was standing on the sidewalk. The camera slid back to a wider shot of a restaurant in the background; the caption identified her as coming from New York City. "It was here, less than 24 hours after confirming his identity, that Clark Savage, Jr. was apprehended by District Attorney Carlie Goldsmith on the charge of Murder. Also arrested was Savage's long-time associate Andrew 'Monk' Mayfair; Mayfair was charged with Accessory to Murder."

A video clip – taken by one of the witnesses at the restaurant – showed the two men being arrested and led away.

Next was a clip of Hamilton Mayfair; his angry expression made him appear more simian than his father. "This is nothing more than *harassment* and *false arrest!* And the District Attorney's office will pay for their actions!"

A voice-over from reporter Lisa: "District Attorney Goldsmith had this to say –"

Carlie Goldsmith's face was pure glee, covered by a veneer of seriousness. "For decades, Clark Savage, Jr. and his cronies took men and women to their so-called Crime College and surgically *subjugated* them, deliberately *destroying* what made them *individuals*, and replacing it with a *fabrication!*" She stared at the camera, her face filled with righteous anger. "This *violation* on the individuality of man is nothing short of *mass murder.*"

"Are you certain you can make it stick?" asked a voice off-camera.

"*Absolutely,*" declared Goldsmith.

"Will you seek the death penalty?" someone else asked.

"*Absolutely,*" she repeated, her tone dead-serious.

A voice-over from reporter Lisa: "Within minutes of the arrest of Savage and Mayfair, Savage's only other living associate, William Harper "Johnny" Littlejohn, was also apprehended."

A looped video clip – a police car leaving CSI – showed a blurred close-up of a figure sitting in the back seat that we were supposed to believe was Johnny.

The reporter wrapped up, and they returned to the anchorman who moved on to the next story.

Even if she could, Amanda Renwick didn't have to hear the words her husband was speaking. She could feel the air vibrate with his angry profanities. After he appeared to have calmed down, she got his attention and signed, "Are you angry because your friends have been arrested ... or that you aren't at their side?"

"*Shut up!*" he signed back. Then he bolted up from his chair and stormed outside.

Amanda knew her husband. She knew his moods. She knew he was being tortured by this development. In the past she would try to talk to him, but this ... he was beyond listening. She corrected herself; he was beyond listening to *her*. But because of her newfound faith, she knew there was someone her husband could not shut out. So she did the only thing – and the best thing – she could do: she prayed.

\* \* \*

It was raining, but right now Renny didn't give a damn.

Mandy was right, and that made it even worse. He turned and started walking through his fields. After a few minutes of silently looking at the sky, he suddenly asked, "God, am I truly doing the right thing for my family? Or am I just being a ... a *coward*?"

A still, small voice spoke to him from out of the storm. *You always fought together, side-by-side, even when the odds were against you.*

"I'd be putting Mandy in danger," Renny argued. "She won't be safe."

*I kept you both safe before you knew Me,* the other voice reasoned. *I still do.*

Renny didn't reply. The rain was doing more than soaking him to the skin. It was washing away his fears.

He knew what he had to do.

\* \* \*

The door opened and Renny stepped in. Amanda was where he had left her, sitting in her chair. He went over and got down on his knees before her. He signed, "I'm sorry."

She signed, "I know. I love you." Then she leaned forward and kissed him on the forehead.

"You know what I have to do," he stated, looking her in the eyes.

She grinned. "First you have to dry off."

He laughed.

"Would you like me to stay with Lea or Pat?" she asked.

"Only if you want to," he replied.

Amanda knew she could handle herself. She had been a freedom fighter in Romania before she and Renny met. But she knew that Renny would be concerned to the point of distraction if she was alone. So she told him, "I will stay with Lea."

Then they embraced.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, May 1, 2007  
New York City, New York  
Evening*

Hamilton had followed Clark and Monk back to the police station, but didn't get in to see them until after they had been joined by Johnny. They were booked and transferred to a holding cell. Hamilton informed them that they would be arraigned in the morning. "The DA has *got* to be bluffing," he assured them. "There's no way she'll be able to make these charges stick."

Then he returned to the Monolith, but not before making a statement before a waiting press. "The District Attorney is trying to railroad my clients," he declared. "Her statements against Doc Savage's character are not only false, but they border on *slander!* My clients have cooperated fully with the NYPD – they have offered *no* resistance *whatsoever!*" He paused. "Over the years, all three men have embraced Christianity and renounced any trace of their past misdeeds. Despite any *accusations* made by District Attorney Goldsmith, I call you to remember Doc's public appearances, and implore you not to be deceived into thinking that Doc Savage is *not* who he has *shown* he is."

I was watching a replay of his statement on television when he came into the suite. He glanced over at the set and uttered a low unsatisfied growl.

"It was a good statement," I complimented.

Hamilton didn't reply, but retrieved his notebook computer and started to set it up.

I joined him at the table. "How are they?"

He filled me in. Then it was my turn. I informed him about the accident in Lincoln City.

"I don't want to tell Clark just yet," I explained. "Not until we know more."

"I concur," agreed Hamilton. "They have enough on their minds as it is. Besides, it was hard enough getting in to see them when I did; they're deliberately trying to put distance between us."

\* \* \*

As the sun set on the Big Apple, the suite became increasingly quiet.

Hamilton focused on his computer, and I immersed myself in Psalms through headphones. The front desk had been given instructions to take messages; if anyone asked, we were in a 'planning session', and couldn't be disturbed. We also screened our cell phone calls, accepting only those from a handful of people. Dinner was a sad reminder of our last meal together; I suspected that the others were faring no better.

Dot called after dinner, and we brought each other up to speed.

"Bonnie's arm suffered a small fracture," she informed me, "in addition to the usual bumps, bruises, and scrapes."

"Has she seen the news?" I asked.

"Yes," she sighed, and her voice lowered so it would be hard to overhear. "She ... didn't take it well. She became hysterical. They had to give her something to make her relax. The doctors want to keep her overnight for observation."

I grieved inside, picturing Bonnie's reaction and imagining the pain she must be feeling. "That makes sense."

"You know," Dot confided to me, "she's really been going through a lot of stress during this time. Seeing the arrest on the news was just the last straw. I'm going to stay here, too, just in case she needs me. You know the drill."

"Yeah," I acknowledged. There'd been many times over the years when that little coastal hospital was the center of spiritual and physical battlegrounds. "Just letting you know ... Clark and the others don't know about the accident yet. We're looking for the right time."

"Gotcha," she agreed. We understood each other's dilemmas.

"Are the triplets with Gumball and Amy?"

"Yeah. It's the best thing for them."

"Uh huh," I agreed. "They're gonna make good parents."

"Definitely." She changed the subject. "Oh, I saw that lady DA on the news. Is she *really* a cold-hearted you-know-what, or is that just the way she comes across on TV?"

"She's even worse in person. So keep her in prayer."

"God is good."

We finished up the conversation.

After bringing Hamilton up to speed, I returned to my mp3 player and Psalms. I was half again through them when something prompted me to check on Hamilton. He was still sitting at the table before his computer. He looked stressed. His breathing was shallow and faster. This wasn't good. I hit the pause on the player, but made it appear as if I was still listening to it. I stood and made my way around the room. I walked over to the kitchenette, got a drink of water, then wandered over to Hamilton's table. I pulled out my ear buds and took a seat.

"You're going to hyperventilate if you keep this up," I informed him softly.

He looked over at me. His breathing returned to normal, and he apologized.

"It's okay," I smiled. "How *are* you doing?"

"Not good." He took a deep breath and sighed. "When Clark was running the College, he'd somehow wipe the memory of the criminal. Then he'd *re-educate* them – he'd set them up with a new identity with new memories, and a skill that could be used on the outside. He'd relocate them in a place far from their old life, and give them a fresh start."

"Sounds a little like the Witness Protection Program," I observed.



"Yeah, it does," Hamilton nodded. "But the Witness Protection Program doesn't change the inside of the person. They provide new identities, but the inside doesn't change ... their memories stay with them, their thoughts stay with them. If they really want to go back to their old ways, there's nothing to stop them. Clark, on the other hand, changed the inside so that the criminal wouldn't have any reason to go back to his former ways ... it just wouldn't matter to them anymore."

"Out of mind, out of sight, so to speak," I paraphrased.

"Exactly," Hamilton agreed. "But what Goldsmith is attesting is that, by wiping the memory, Clark actually *murdered* the original person – deleting, as it were, what made that person unique. At first I thought she was out of her mind ... I mean, she's attempting to redefine the legal definition of murder. How could she ever prove it? I even wondered if she might just be bluffing, hoping that I'd agree to a lesser charge. But ... I don't know. What if it's not a bluff and she's found a way to make it stick?" His eyes looked down to the floor. "They could be facing life in jail, or ..."

"And you're wondering if you've failed them," I surmised.

He looked at me with pleading eyes. "*Yes!* All my life I've prepared for this moment where I could legally challenge what happened at the College, and vindicate Doc! But, now ... it's all falling down around us."

"Hang in there," I encouraged. "What's going to happen in the morning?"

Hamilton focused. "They'll be arraigned before a judge. He'll read them the charges, and ask how they plead. They'll plead 'not guilty'. The judge will set bail, and order a date be set for the trial." Suddenly his eyes narrowed and he brought up something on his computer. "No, they can't take it straight to trial! They'll have to put it before a grand jury in order to see if they have enough evidence to indict!" His head tilted slightly to one side as he mused aloud. "Could *that* be her intent? Sure! The prosecution practically has *carte blanche* to present evidence, and there isn't a thing I can do to stop or dispute it!"

"*Hamilton!*" I said gently, seeing his anxiety begin to rise. "Everything's going to work out *okay!* Understand?"

Hamilton anger suddenly flared, "*How can you remain so calm?*"

"Practice," I admitted with a smile. "Years and years of practice."

Hamilton didn't say anything. After a moment, he seemed to calm down.

I took a long shot. "Not trying to push anything, but ... would you like to pray?"

His expression was apologetic, not arrogant. "I ... don't believe."

"That's okay," I replied with a grin. "God does."

Hamilton paused, then nodded.

I bowed my head and prayed a simple prayer. Without getting fancy, I admitted to our worries

and frustrations and feelings of helplessness. Then I just turned it over to God, paraphrasing 1 Peter 5:7, "Cast all our anxiety on Him because he cares for us." I figured, it had worked for Clark, it could work for Hamilton. I asked God to keep the others safe – naming them by name – and finished up asking God to give us all a good night's rest, refreshing us and preparing us for the day to come. And that was it. Inside, I smiled when I heard Hamilton mumble an 'amen'.

"How do you feel?" I asked afterward.

Hamilton paused. "Okay, I guess."

Good enough, I thought. "We've got a busy day ahead of us. Let's get some sleep."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE**

*Wednesday, May 2, 2007  
New York City, New York  
County Courthouse  
8:30am*

Hamilton and I were waiting there when the others were escorted into the courtroom. Hamilton admitted that, despite the fact that he hadn't slept much, he did feel refreshed and ready to tackle whatever came at him.

The judge entered and we all stood. Then he sat and called the first case to be heard. Clark, Monk, and Johnny's case were third on the schedule. They were escorted in and we were able to get in close enough to shake their hands. As I went to take Clark's hand, I coughed twice as if I had a tickle in the back of my throat. Then I recovered and shook Clark's hand.

"You okay?" Clark expressed his concern.

"Yeah. Just a tickle."

"All right," he accepted. "It wouldn't do for you to catch a cold now."

"I'll keep an eye on it."

DA Goldsmith wasn't present at the arraignment, but there was another man representing the District Attorney's office. I heard the name Frye mentioned, and made a note of it.

Hamilton stood with Clark, Monk, and Johnny. The charges against them were read, and they were reminded of their rights.

"How do you plead?" the judge asked.

Hamilton spoke up. "My clients plead 'not guilty', your honor."

The judge wasn't fazed; he looked like he'd been at this for a number of years.

"Your honor," spoke up Frye. "Prosecution wishes to move for a grand jury!"

Before Hamilton had a chance to say anything, the judge announced, "Granted!" And his gavel pounded on his desk with a decisive **BAM!**

This hadn't been unexpected. However, the swiftness with which the decision had been made seemed to be a bit too quick.

"Your honor," addressed Hamilton. "We request bail be set for my clients!"

"*Your honor*," countered Frye. "Prosecution wishes to note that the defendants have been deemed potential flight risks – after all, the defendant failed to appear in court previously."

"**Objection**, your honor!" cried Hamilton. "It has already been established that my client had been in suspended animation during that time, and was **unable** to appear in court!"

"I will take that under advisement, Mr. Mayfair," calmly replied the judge. "In the meantime, though, I am denying bail for the defendants." **BAM!** "Next case!"

Hamilton tried arguing, but it was too late. I couldn't hear the exchange of words between him and the others. Guards moved in and escorted Clark, Monk, and Johnny out of the room. I met Clark's eyes and he gave me an almost-imperceptible nod. Hamilton collected his things and we left the courtroom in silence.

Back at the Monolith, I showed Hamilton a small metal box.

"What's this?" he asked, opening it.

"It's a transceiver. Put it in your ear." I instructed him how to turn it on.

He did so, even though his expression was confused. "Okay, now what?"

I turned my head slightly to one side. "Clark, cough twice if you can hear me."

I heard two coughs in my ear. So did Hamilton; surprised, he put his hand up to his ear.

I explained it to Hamilton. "I had a feeling that they wouldn't be getting out on bail. And we still needed a way of keeping in contact. When I shook Clark's hand, I palmed another transceiver to him; it was in a flesh-colored adhesive pad so it wouldn't be seen."

"But the metal detectors ...?"

"Undetectable."

"But how can he talk without drawing suspicion?"

"Remember when I coughed before shaking Clark's hand?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"I was speaking Mayan," I explained. "It's an oldie, but a goodie."

Hamilton's face brightened. "Dad used to tell me about doing that. That's excellent, Perry! So you can translate?"

"Of course," I acknowledged.

"And nobody but Clark can hear us?"

"Trust me, they're *very* good," I reassured him.

"Okay." He turned his attention to the transceiver. "Clark, are you back in the holding cells?"

We heard coughing. "Yes," I translated. "*But I believe they will move us soon.*"

"Can you tell me how Pop's holding up?"

"*Like a caged animal. Johnny's taking it a lot better.*"

"That doesn't surprise me," Hamilton commented. "Clark, the fact that the judge was so quick in denying you bail tells me he might be on the prosecution's side."

"Agreed."

"Hang in there. I'm going to see what I can do to get you out."

"*I know you'll do your best.*"

Hamilton looked at me, indicating he wanted to turn off the transceiver. I showed him; he put it back in its box.

After Hamilton had moved away, I turned back to Clark. "I need to talk to you about something. Forgive me for not saying anything sooner, but I wanted to wait until things became a bit more ... stable."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Yesterday afternoon, just about the time you guys were arrested, there was an automobile accident back at home – everybody's okay! The minivan was broadsided. Dot and the kids are fine, but Bonnie suffered a broken arm."

I could hear the stress in his voice. "Can you connect us?"

"I'll see what I can do," I replied. "Hang in there."

"Thanks," he said reluctantly.

I disconnected and quickly redialed Dot.

\* \* \*

*Wednesday, May 2, 2007  
New York City, New York*

*Late Morning*

"Okay, Clark. I've got Bonnie on the cell phone. Are you guys ready?"

"Yes," replied Clark in English.

I was picturing Clark, Monk, and Johnny, standing together in the common area of the cell block. Our intent was to make it appear as if they were talking together, but in actuality Clark would be talking to Bonnie via the transceiver. Bonnie had been released earlier, and they were all back home. I had Dot on the other end of the cell phone with a Bluetooth headset; in a few moments, Dot would pass the headset over and I would complete the connection.

"Dot, are you ready?" I asked.

"Roger," she replied. "We're both on the couch, waiting on you."

"Okay. Everybody, here we go ..."

I made the connection. There was the initial hesitation as they made sure they were talking to the right person. But once that was done, the conversation went smoothly. Wherever possible, Clark refrained from using sideways references, but spoke clearly and from the heart. I lost count of how many times they affirmed their love for one another. Bonnie kept telling Clark how okay she and the triplets were in spite of the accident. "The other guy was apologizing all over himself," she explained. "I think he was more in shock than we were."

Clark was strong. He repeated that they were doing well, and that everything would turn out fine. "Just hold onto Jesus," he affirmed. By the end of the call – it only lasted about five minutes, and finished with a prayer – both parties sounded somewhat back to their old selves.

I took the phone back and talked to Dot.

"Well?" I asked.

"Looks like it went well," she reported.

"Good. I'll talk to you later. I love you."

"I love you, too." And she disconnected.

I got back on the transceiver and Clark thanked me for bringing them together. Then they had to go, so we ended the connection.

I sat back, closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I felt exhausted.

\* \* \*

*Friday, May 5, 2007*

*Alpha Base*

*Somewhere in the Florida Everglades*

Mitch Drake was sitting in his opulent office reading a technical report from his computer screen

when his personal line rang. The Caller ID caused his eyes to narrow as he answered it.

"Afternoon, Perry! What's up?"

"Is this a secure line, Mitch?"

"Perry ... it's *me*, man. Of course it's secure." He paused. "What's got you bothered?"

"They just announced the date and location of the grand jury. It'll start on Monday. Mitch, it's a closed session. There's no way of finding out *what* the prosecution has up their sleeves. *Unless ...*"

Drake grinned to himself. "Let me guess – you want a fly on the wall?"

"Yes," he sighed. "What do you have?"

"Only the best," Drake replied. "Small, powerful, won't be spotted unless they're looking for it. It'll send a pinhole transmission that only *you* will be able to pick up. Any guess how long the grand jury will be?"

"It depends on how much stuff they have and how long they take to decide."

"Okay. Hang on." Drake hummed a Broadway show tune as he called up the information on his computer. "Okay, Perry. The flies are in the box. I assume you'll be planting them under cover of invisibility?"

"Nobody better equipped," he acknowledged, then backtracked. "*Them?*"

"You'd get good coverage with one camera, but you'll get the best coverage with three. Don't worry, they'll never be spotted. I'll send full instructions, including suggestions on where best to plant them, and a special notebook computer with which you can control *everything*."

"Marvelous!"

"It'll be going out by special courier. You'll have them by tonight."

"Thanks, Mitch."

"Anything for Clark," he dismissed, and they ended the conversation.

Mitch Drake paused from what he was doing and leaned back in his seat. "Mr. Liston," he reflected to himself. "You've come a long ways since the Valley of the Vanished. And where Clark is concerned, I'm going to do everything I can to make sure you're prepared." His eyes angled towards the ceiling. "Beyond that, it's up to You ... keep his butt covered, willya?" He smiled. "Thanks."

As he returned to his technical report, Drake thought he heard a still, small voice say, *I am*.

\* \* \*

*Friday, May 5, 2007*

*New York City, New York  
Hotel Monolith  
Evening*

"What's that?"

I carried the package towards my room. "Care package from Mitch. Tell you about it later."

Then I was in my room with the door closed. Knowing that my actions weren't exactly kosher, I didn't want to involve Hamilton unless I absolutely had to. I laid out the items on my bed and went over the instructions Mitch had provided.

I was impressed – as usual.

I couldn't make my move tonight. I needed to understand the gear before I could plant it where it would do the most good. So it would have to be this weekend. I prayed that they wouldn't change locations before Monday morning.

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX**

*Saturday, May 5, 2007  
New York City, New York  
County Jail*

Clark could feel the stares of thirty pair of eyes on him as he followed Monk and Johnny into the recreation area of the cellblock.

Johnny made a beeline over to a couple of picnic tables where they were playing chess; it didn't take long for him to get in on a game. Clark overheard snippets of conversation, as Johnny discussed historical aspects of body markings with a beefy man with a bald head and a torso full of tattoos.

\* \* \*

There came a yell from another part of the rec area. Monk was holding two men in the air as they struggled.

"Now, y'wanna take that back, or am I gonna have'ta toss ya back to your cells from here?" he growled at them.

"Okay, man – you're not an old ape! You're not an old ape!" they both cried out.

Monk lowered them to the ground.

"Now, getchur butts over here – I wanna tell ya about Jesus!"

"What?" they gawked.

"Lookit it this way," he pointed out. "If God can save an 'old ape' like me, he won't even break a

sweat savin' you punks!"

\* \* \*

Carlos ("Snowman") West and Jose ("Hawk") Barranza stood against the wall, looking tough with their exposed torsos covered in gang tattoos. Members of the *134's*, they'd been caught in a routine drug sweep, and had been busted for possession. Fully confident that they'd be getting released after the weekend, all they had to do was hang out. Besides, being in the joint was good for their reps, especially if they did something that told others how bad they were.

And then Barranza recognized Doc Savage.

"I saw him on TV," he told West. "He used't be a hotshot back in the Stone Age."

"He ain't nothin'," the other man observed with a sneer. "He's just an old man."

Barranza's face took on a wicked smile. "I heard he's also a religious nut! Wanna have some fun? Let's see if we can piss him off!"

Clark was off to one side of the common area, sitting on the floor with his back against the wall. He was calmly observing the others, praying silently, when he saw the two youths approaching him. He'd noticed them earlier, and – having read their lips – he knew of their plans to agitate him and rack up reputation points. He didn't stand when they came up to him; let them believe they have the high ground.

He just looked up and smiled.

The two bangers glared down at him and started calling him names.

*Typical*, he thought, unfazed. "That the best you *kids* can do?" he challenged them.

It wasn't. They shifted verbal tactics, battering Clark with intimidation, bragging on the nastier points of their gang reputations.

Clark just continued to smile at them.

They changed tactics to include physical violence. One would kick him, then the other. Clark took their attacks without flinching, even when they accentuated them with sharp profanities directed against him and against Christianity in general. Finally Clark slowly rose to his feet, making it evident just how much taller he was than they.

"You know, boys," Clark addressed them through their tirade. "In Matthew 5:39, Jesus Christ said, '*If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*' Now, you both can see I've got a pretty hard hide. And all you're really going to accomplish is making yourselves look like idiots in front of all these people." His eyes looked beyond them. "Take a look behind you and ask yourself, is that *really* what you want to do?"

Barranza casually glanced behind them. He was right; they had an audience. Unfortunately, he and West were committed – if they backed off now, they'd look like cowards. West tried shoving the bronze man, but it had all the effect of trying to tip over a reinforced concrete wall. So they went back to loudly cursing the man's God.



It still didn't make the bronze man flinch.

Clark looked again beyond the two boys and saw Monk subtly trying to get his attention; he and some other men were standing on top of one of the tables. When he knew Clark was watching, he silently mouthed, "Don't hurt them *too* bad."

The two bangers continued hammering on Clark, feeling like they were starting to wear down the bronze man. But just then, without warning, Savage's hands moved with incredible swiftness and snatched West's and Barranza's hands in mid-air! What was even more shocking to the youths was that he held their hands motionless with just his thumbs and index fingers!

With almost childlike ease, Clark slowly bent their hands backwards. Fiery pain seared up their arms, and they felt as if their hands were in the grip of steel pincers. As they vainly struggled, he bent their hands back another millimeter and their knees buckled. Whether they wanted to or not, they sank to the floor.

The audience, led by Monk, was now rooting Clark on.

He bent down and spoke to them in a soft, almost cordial, tone. "Trust me, I can keep this up for hours. Or I can let you go and you can walk away with your dignity. All you have to do ... is stop fighting me."

Barranza saw the logic in this old man's words. He also saw how West's struggles, curses, and threats weren't making the least bit of difference. So he relaxed. He let his hand go slack in Savage's grip, and he didn't offer any resistance physically or verbally. Savage's response was almost instantaneous. As Clark continued to hold West at bay with one hand, his other hand opened and helped Barranza to his feet.

"Are you hurt?" Clark asked Barranza, his tone compassionate.

It did. But Barranza shook his head and reported, "It's cool."

They both looked to West. His face was contorted with pain, and yet he continued to struggle, curse, and rail against Savage. He looked ... foolish. As Savage continued holding West at bay, he looked Barranza in the eye and softly asked, "Are you sure this is how you want to live your life?"

Barranza didn't want to answer him – at least not here. "Later," he whispered back.

Savage didn't push it, but turned his attention back to West. The gangbanger's face was red with rage, and he continued to curse and rail, but all his struggles were ineffective against the simple two-finger submission hold.

"Give up now or I'll show you *The Pacifier*," Savage promised in a tone loud enough to be heard by even their audience. "You have five seconds."

Barranza watched as Savage counted back from five. At zero, he effortlessly pivoted the younger man about and plugged his thumb into his own surprised mouth ... and held it there.

The crowd erupted into laughter.

Just then several guards moved in and ordered the assemblage to dissipate. As Savage released West into the hands of the guards, he apologized for his actions and explained that the other man had started things. Barranza admitted to taunting Savage and apologized to the bronze man.

"It's okay." Savage extended his hand in friendship and smiled at him. "No harm done."

The two men shook hands as the guards took West away.

"How'd you do that, man?" asked Barranza, as the audience went back to their business.

"Do you know martial arts?"

"Yeah." He listed off several different styles he was proficient with. "But I ain't never seen that!"

"Not all martial arts are intended to be injurious. Want to talk about it?"

Barranza nodded, acknowledging to himself his newfound respect for this old guy. "Yeah, I would. Thanks."

\* \* \*

While Clark was making friends and influencing people, I was breaking into the grand jury room.

As I slipped inside the room, I thanked God for Mitch Drake's insight in providing me with a few 'tools' to make my job easier. An electronic 'skeleton key' got me into the room, some night-vision goggles saved me from having to turn on the lights, and another device Drake called *the Henry* put the security cameras temporarily out of commission without drawing attention. I quickly planted the 'flies' on the walls, and checked them out with a handheld analyzer. Satisfied, I left the courtroom – making sure everything was as I had left them – and made my way to a location where I could wait out the remainder of my invisibility before meeting up with the limo.

When I returned to the Monolith, I realized I had been busted.

"I shouldn't be surprised," commented Hamilton, the special PC opened before him.

I put my gear bag just inside the door of my bedroom.

"Do you want me to tell you, or not?" I inquired boldly.

He paused, his eyes boring into mine. "Tell me."

I came over to the table and pulled out a chair next to him where we could both see the computer. "I didn't like the fact that the prosecution could bring out anything they wanted to, and we wouldn't know about it. So I wanted to level the playing ground." I paused and gave him an apologetic look. "Okay ... I wanted to spy on them to see what they've got on Clark."

"Did you plan on sharing this information with me?"

"Of course I did, but ... subtly." I looked at him resolutely. "I'm doing this for Clark. Please don't try to stop me."

Hamilton didn't say anything; he just turned to the PC. After a few seconds, he muttered, "So how does this thing work?"

Overjoyed, I gave Hamilton a quick primer on operating the devices through the special notebook computer. We took turns operating the video controls and playing with the cameras and the recording capabilities of the PC, and familiarizing ourselves with the capability of our 'flies' on the wall.

"Impressive," Hamilton repeated. "Very impressive."

"It's all about gathering information. Everything gets recorded digitally so we can take it apart and analyze it."

"In that way," Hamilton completed the thought. "If Goldsmith *does* take it to trial, we'll be prepared for anything she throws at us."

"And Ms. Goldsmith will be the one who gets surprised!"

"Hamilton," I asked, my voice lowering. "This whole thing is a bit ... underhanded. Are you sure you're comfortable with doing this?"

"It's like you said ... all we're doing is leveling the playing field. And I've been around my father enough to know that sometimes you gotta bend the rules to get the job done."

"Groovy."

\* \* \*

*Monday, May 7, 2007*  
*New York City, New York*  
*9:00am*

Had this been a Roman arena, a group of uniformed soldiers would be blowing a trumpet fanfare to herald the beginning of the games.

At the Monolith, with instructions to hold our calls, Hamilton and I sat were ready to be silent witnesses to the proceedings. The PC was in split-screen so we could see things from all three cameras. At the moment, the main characters of this drama were filtering into the courtroom.

Hamilton suddenly pointed to a man sitting at the prosecution's table. "**Now** I remember him!" he exclaimed.

"He was the one who was at the the arraignment," I acknowledged.

"His name's Frye. I had a run-in with him a few years ago, when he was working for the ACLU. He's a vicious son of a —"

"I get the idea," I interrupted. "It looks like Goldsmith's about to begin."

\* \* \*

Carlie Goldsmith, dressed in a smart black suit, glanced over at the presiding judge, giving him an acknowledging nod of her head. Then, slowly, she silently paced slowly before the jury box containing twenty-three men and women.

All she needed was the theme from *Jaws* in the background to make the image complete.

**"Life."**

The word echoed in the courtroom's acoustics like the after-image of a gunshot.

"What makes a person *alive*?" she continued. "All of us have our own *opinions* ... our own *beliefs* ... our own *theories*. We base them on things we've heard, seen, or read. And with our concepts of *life* come our concepts of *death*."

"And that's why we're here.

"I'm certain that many of you have seen the reappearance of Clark Savage, Jr., also known as Doc Savage, and his connection to an 'institution' that was once known as the Crime College." She paused and gave them a thin smile. "*Crime College*: such a clever nickname. In World War II, *going to the showers* meant something quite different to the millions of men and women who died at Auschwitz and Dachau. A small village in South America known as *Jonestown* seemed so innocent – until Jim Jones declared that nine hundred men, women, and children would participate in the greatest mass suicide in the history of the world. And September 11, 2001 started off as just ... another ... Tuesday." She paused for several seconds, her head lowered. "Anyhow, you get the idea. Things aren't always what they sound. And if you've not heard anything about the Crime College ..." She smiled again and her eyes narrowed as she looked at the jurors. "... I will show you."

\* \* \*

I realized that my breathing had become very shallow. I took in a deep breath and let it out in a quiet exhale.

"She's good," whispered Hamilton. "I hate her, but she's good."

"Uh huh," I agreed.

\* \* \*

"Each and every one of you is an *individual*. There is just one *you* ... not *twenty* ... not *ten* ... not *two*. You all possess your own thoughts ... your own experiences ... and each of your minds is as unique as your fingerprints, working in ways that are *absolutely* one of a kind.

"Clark Savage, Jr. *murdered* the people he took into the Crime College." She paused and held up an index finger. "Let me make this *perfectly* clear. I'm not suggesting that he *physically* caused their life forces to cease. But he destroyed the *individuality* of these people. Without their permission, without their consent, without their input, Clark Savage, Jr. *robbed* these people of what made them individuals, and then substituted their memories with a fabrication. It would be like painting a *black* Model T Ford *blue* and trying to pass it off as a Porsche.

"Clark Savage, Jr. has made the public believe a fantastic story about being in *suspended animation* for fifty years – probably borrowed from one of his fictional pulp stories – and now he believes he can escape *justice*."

Her expression was determined. "I say ... he *won't*."

"**You**, ladies and gentlemen, will decide from the evidence whether Clark Savage Jr. will face trial for these *heinous* crimes ... or get away with them."

\* \* \*

I manipulated one of the cameras to show the jurors' reactions; they were uniformly sober. It looked like Carlie had made her point.

We were in trouble.

\* \* \*

A large flat-screen television had been rolled into the courtroom, and was facing the jury box.

"In order to understand things completely, I would like you to watch a video made fifty years ago by esteemed journalist Edward R. Murrow."

She signaled an assistant to dim the lights and start the video.

\* \* \*

I stood up from the table.

"I've seen this," I announced. "I'm going to give Clark an update."

"Okay," acknowledged Hamilton, not turning away from the screen.

I walked back into my bedroom, but didn't close the door. I took a few moments to pray before I switched on the transceiver.

"Clark?" I said softly.

I heard a cough in my ear – Clark responding in Mayan, "Go ahead."

"Goldsmith is laying down a foundation; she gave a very persuasive opening argument, and now she's showing them the Murrow tape."

Clark paused a moment before grunting his acknowledgement.

I could feel the silence on the other end, but pretended otherwise. "I'll keep you posted."

"Thanks," he acknowledged.

I hoped he would say something more, admit his stress. He didn't. After a few seconds I reluctantly disconnected.

I didn't leave my room yet. I needed to take this to prayer.

\* \* \*

"He didn't take it well, did he?" Hamilton commented when I returned to the table.

"No, he didn't," I confirmed. "Are they still on the Murrow episode?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to call Dot. Let me know when they wrap up the video."

"Sure."

I went back into my room and called Dot. I shared with her the early turmoil that was going on. I didn't need to tell her to pass on the prayer concerns ... bless her heart, she was already a step ahead of me.

\* \* \*

The flat-screen television went dark as Carlie Goldsmith addressed the jurors.

"That Murrow episode is what got the ball rolling. But prior to that – *years* earlier – all of America knew about the Crime College." She walked over to the table. Like a caddie handing a player the proper club for an upcoming hole, Frye handed Goldsmith an opaque plastic box. She took off the lid. She walked closer to the jury box and angled the box for them to see.

"These are issues of *Doc Savage Magazine*. Between May 1933 and August 1948, one hundred and eighty-one issues were published, with a combined distribution of *millions*. Sixty-one of those issues – approximately one-third of the series – contained *detailed* references to the Crime College." She took out the magazine on the top, resting the box on the floor at her feet, and casually flipped through the pages. "On the surface they appear to be simple, entertaining stories of fiction, like many others of that era directed towards prepubescent boys. Now, I'm not going to presuppose that these stories were intended to be biographical or historical documents. However, *collectively*, they show us a bigger picture. They show us a man, who believed himself to be above the law, who arrogantly told the world all the details of his crimes and *dared* us to stop him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to hear these excerpts. I want you to know how blatantly Doc Savage told the world about the Crime College. Now, on the surface it might appear as if what Doc Savage did was very *noble* by taking 'dangerous criminals' and turning them into 'productive members of society'. But let me *hasten* to point out that the people they took in were denied due process of law ... they *did not* volunteer for this, *did not* consent to this, and *did not* have any choice *whatsoever* in what Doc Savage did to them. Keep that in mind.

"I'll pass on some of the excerpts because they are repetitious. But all of these issues will be available to you to examine on your own. I present these in order of their appearance on the newsstands.

"Let's start with *Quest of the Spider*, May, 1933. William Littlejohn – who's being held as an

Accessory to Murder – is speaking. *'I don't understand how it's done! I mean – how one of these rats can be taken and made into an honest man ... whether he wants to be made an honest man or not.'* Savage replies, *'It is done by many methods. Most undergo intricate brain operations that wipe out all memory of their past.'*

*"The Polar Treasure*, June, 1933. They're speaking of the Crime College: *'The mysterious institution where this good, if somewhat unconventional, work went forward, was supported by Doc Savage. The great surgeons and psychologists who ran it had been trained by Doc.'*

*"Pirate of the Pacific*, July, 1933. *'Their brains were operated upon' ... 'all memory of their past wiped out.'*

*"The Red Skull*, August, 1933. *'Operations which wiped out all knowledge of their past, leaving their minds a blank.'*

*"The Lost Oasis*, September, 1933. *'Here great brain surgeons, trained by Doc's skill, operated on such criminals as Doc sent to them. The operations took from the crooks all knowledge of their past.'*

*"The Czar of Fear*, November, 1933. This is an interesting quote: *'Doc's institution would have caused a world-wide sensation, had its existence become public.'* That indicates that he was well aware that his actions were illegal.

*"The Phantom City*, December, 1933. *'Men would undergo a delicate brain operation which would wipe out all knowledge of their past lives. They would not know their own identity after awakening.'* Here's another interesting quote; *'Doc kept his institution a secret. Had news of it gotten out, there would be a nationwide hullabaloo, no doubt and much publicity.'* No doubt.

*"The Man Who Shook the Earth*, February, 1934. *'Brain operation, which completely wiped out all knowledge of their past.'*

*"The Annihilist*, December, 1934. Now, pay close attention to these quotes: *'None beyond those immediately concerned knew of that "college," those concerned being Doc Savage, his five aides, Pat Savage, and the attendants in the institution itself.'* And here: *'For the students entered unwillingly, usually under the affects of a stupor-inducing drug. When they left after graduation, they were also drugged' ... 'Turned them into honest men whether they wished it or not. The world did not know about the place. The world would probably have been shocked.'* And again, here: *'Had the existence of this place become known, it would have been a newspaper story unparalleled. Doc Savage also knew it would excite many misguided reformers who would stir up government investigations, for the criminals had no choice about taking the treatment.'* The people subjected to these procedures had no choice about taking the treatment ... whether they wished it or not." She paused, then continued. *"Doc Savage, in the final analysis, was a private individual, and such are not supposed to mete out their own brand of justice. The courts are for that. And Doc Savage had never sent a crook before an American court.' 'If news of his "college" got out, there would be all kinds of trouble.'* That's an understatement," she commented sarcastically. *"Of course, he severs certain nerves in their brains, too, which makes them forget their past.'* And this last quote, from another character in the story, a policeman by the name of Hardboiled Humboldt: *'All of which may be a build-up by Savage to make himself a big shot, while he's actually a master criminal of some kind.'* Could this have been a message from the writer to warn the public of what Savage was doing?"

She took a sip of water as she paused to let that sink in, then continued. "**Spook Hole**, August, 1935. *'The physician at the address in New York would take this man, by force if necessary, and it probably would be, and send him to a strange institution' ... 'trained surgeons would operate on the man's brain, causing a complete loss of memory of past events.'*

"**The Derrick Devil**, February, 1937. *'They were drugged, each in a stupor which would last until the bronze man got around to calling for them' ... 'First had his brain operated upon, so that his past memory was completely wiped out.'*

"**The Feathered Octopus**, September, 1937. *'Had their brains operated on in such a manner that all memory of the past was wiped out.'*

"**The Mountain Monster**, February, 1938. *'They would be unconscious for several hours. When they recovered, they would be on their way to a private hospital' ... 'There they would undergo a delicate brain operation. They would forget their criminal tendencies.'*

"**Devil on the Moon**, March, 1938. *'They underwent brain operations which deprived them of all memory of their past.'*

"**The Red Terrors**, September, 1938. *'All these highly efficient operatives of Doc Savage had one very peculiar thing in common: Each one could remember back just so far in his life, and no farther. There was not one of them who could recall any incident in his youth. More peculiar, none of these operatives could remember a period when he or she had been a desperate criminal.'*

"**Mad Mesa**, January, 1939. Again, here's another quote about how Savage knew the ramifications of his actions and deliberately covered them up. *'But then, very few knew the "college" existed. The newspapers didn't, certainly. Or they would have broken out the type they used for war, earthquakes and the World Series.'* ... *'Permanent mental amnesia was created surgically.'* ... *'But the course of training would benefit her, so Doc was putting her through the place ... prepared to make him forever forget that he had been a crook.'* In that last quote, they were actually going to take this woman – whose only offense was that she had been a witness – and subject her to this heinous procedure.

"**The Yellow Cloud**, February, 1939. *'Van Blair, Heck, and the girl still did not like it very much, even after Doc explained. But they gave up protesting.'*

"**The Gold Ogre**, May, 1939. *'Operations which permanently wiped out all memory of the past.'*

"**The Stone Man**, October, 1939. *'Surgeons trained by Doc Savage would perform delicate brain operations which would wipe out all memory of the past.'* ... *'Existence of this "college" was kept from the public for various reasons, one being that the place was a little unorthodox; and this method of curing criminals, while it was one that Doc felt would eventually be used widely, was somewhat too fantastic for public acceptance.'* It's interesting that, even though he knew what he was doing was 'unorthodox', he still had plans for the future. God knows what this could've turned into if it had gone undiscovered.

"**The Dagger in the Sky**, December, 1939. *'Delicate brain operations at the hands of specialists trained by Doc Savage, operations which wiped out all memory of the past.'* *'It should be no more difficult to train men to want to do good with money.'* This shows that their programming could change at a whim.



*"The Flying Goblin*, July 1940. This has to do with one of the people who had been through the Crime College; it shows that Savage's infallible technique had its flaws. *'Birmingham got conked on the head by one of Dillinger's boys some years back. Seems, therefore, this Doc Savage outfit couldn't quite cure Birmingham of being a crook.'*

*"The Purple Dragon*, September 1940. The story has to do with a man who was killed, and then it was discovered that he used to be a 'graduate' of the Crime College. *'Examination of the skeleton showed that Mavrik once underwent a skull operation' ... 'it was Shalleck.' 'Doc's skilled fingers performed brain operations upon them.' 'When they departed from the institution, all memory of their previous life had left them. Certain nerves had been cut, isolating parts of their brains.' 'A severe shock might produce such a condition. In non-technical language, such a shock might produce a short circuit in the brain, re-establishing contact with that portion which had been rendered inactive.'*

*"The Men Vanished*, December, 1940. *'Here they would undergo delicate brain operations which would wipe out all memory of the past – a sort of **enforced amnesia**.' 'Was a little drastic for the public consumption.'* Once more, note that their operation was a sort of enforced amnesia, and that they were well aware that their techniques would not be accepted by the public.

*"The Devil's Playground*, January, 1941. *'The operation removed all memory of the past and all tendency toward crime.'*

*"The Pink Lady*, May, 1941. *'At this college he maintained a staff of men trained by himself, and to the place he sent such criminals as he caught. A course in the college was unusual – the enrollee first received, **whether willing or not**, an intricate brain operation which wiped out all memory of the past.'* Whether willing or not," she repeated slowly.

*"The Mindless Monsters*, September, 1941. *'There, delicate brain operations erased all memory of their criminal pasts. They also erased any tendency toward crime.'* *'None of Doc's "graduates" knew of their own backgrounds.'*

*"The Rustling Death*, January, 1942. *'There, a delicate brain operation was performed which robbed them not only of criminal tendencies but also of all memory of criminal past and associations.'*

*"The Speaking Stone*, June, 1942. Again a comment about the legal status of the Crime College. *'Which was not advertised to the public because its methods were a little unorthodox.'* *'The treatment had a batting average of success **close to a hundred percent**.'* Later it says that the success rate *was* 100%; makes you wonder which – if either – statement was closer to the truth.

*"The Man Who Fell Up*, July, 1942. *'The patient underwent a delicate brain operation at the hands of specialists trained by Doc himself.'* *'Once a criminal, he now bore no traces of it, no more trace than he had recollection.'*

*"The Three Wild Men*, August, 1942. *'Monk and the other members of Doc's group of associates were surprised that he did not make more use of it.'* *'There (the Crime College) they received a complicated brain operation, the technique of which Doc had developed. The operation wiped out all memory of past.'*

*"The Fiery Menace*, September, 1942. *'There, specialists trained by Doc perform an involved brain operation which wipes out memory of past.'*

"**The Laugh of Death**, October, 1942. 'Trained surgeons perform a delicate brain operation – developed by Doc – which removes all memory of a criminal's past.' Interesting; Savage developed the procedure, but others did the dirty work.

"**The Black, Black Witch**, March, 1943. This is a statement included parenthetically, presumably by the author. 'Here the crooks undergo delicate brain operations which wipe out memory of past.'

"**The Talking Devil**, May, 1943. 'Doc Savage, as a matter of fact, had antagonized some of the newspapers at various times by refusing to give out information concerning his activities. One paper in particular, the *Morning Blade*, a blaring tabloid which featured a stable of columnists who were unreliable sensationalists, did not have a great love for Doc Savage.' The newspaper then asks the following: 'Question one: Why is this fellow Doc Savage so secretive about himself that he is known as the Man of Mystery? What has he to hide? Question two: What does Doc Savage do with the men he seizes, the men he says are criminals. (He alone says they are criminals; isn't it the right of our courts to judge those things?) What happens to these men? They disappear. Their old friends never see them again. Question three: What is this mysterious "college" which Doc Savage maintains, of which rumors are sometimes heard? Has it horrors to hide?'

"There is more, but this much will suffice." She paused. "This is a unique story in the series, in that it addresses the issue of having the Crime College exposed by the press. It tells of a newspaper called the *Morning Blade*, possessing details about the College, and demanding answers from Savage. And yet, despite the 'public outcry' as a result of this revelation, the story wraps it all up in a neat little package at the end, and the *Morning Blade* is seemingly silenced.

"In preparation for this grand jury, we tried to research the facts of this story, but ran into dead end after dead end. Not only were we unable to confirm that there was ever a newspaper called the *Morning Blade*, but there was no trace of a similar story in any of the many newspapers that did exist at that time. Which brings us to ask ourselves: was the story pure *fiction*, written in order to taunt us with what they were able to do right under the public's noses? Or had there really been, once upon a time, a newspaper called the *Morning Blade*, which had made the mistake of crossing Doc Savage's empire, and one day simply ... ceased ... to ... exist? Draw your own conclusions."

Goldsmith continued with the next story in the list.

"**The Mental Monster**, August, 1943. 'Because the place was a little advanced and radical for the public ideas, Doc kept it secret. It was his conviction, however, that in the future habitual criminals would be cured by some similar method.'

"**According to the Plan of a One-Eyed Mystic**, January, 1944. 'The method Doc used was a little radical for the present idea the public had of criminological therapy, so Doc was keeping the matter secret' ... 'criminals underwent a complex brain operation, perfected by Doc and taught by him to the surgeons who performed it, which wiped out all memory of the past.' ... 'So far, the treatment had been a hundred percent successful.' They either improved things, or they decided to lie about the *almost* in the earlier story.

"**The Angry Canary**, July-August, 1948. 'Doc sent his criminals here, where they underwent a brain operation which wiped out all knowledge of the past – not a wondrous thing these days, but

*quite a novelty when Doc developed it, and still a fantastically skilled operation the way his trainees did it.'* It's interesting how they speak of a procedure that had never been seen before, as something as common as a tonsillectomy. Who were they trying to fool?"

\* \* \*

"Done!" I exclaimed.

"Thank God!" sighed Hamilton, causing me to do a double-take.

\* \* \*

The examination of the pulp novels had taken most of the day, and the jurors were dismissed to reassemble in the morning.

I didn't have to guess what would happen tomorrow. Both Pat and I had received subpoenas earlier in the day, with instructions where to appear the next day. I also found out that Monk and Johnny had been given instructions to testify.

We were concerned that our testimony would serve to condemn Clark, and so kept in prayer that it wouldn't result in that.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, May 8, 2007  
New York City, New York  
9:00am*

Day Two.

I was escorted to a windowless room by a uniformed officer. He explained that I would be summoned when it was my time to testify. In the meantime, a closed-circuit monitor would show me what was going on in the the courtroom. He pointed out the restroom and asked if I needed anything. I answered no, and he left; I heard the *click* as he locked the door behind me. I looked around to see if I was being monitored; it didn't look as if they had gone to that much trouble.

I casually reached up to scratch my ear. As I did, I switched on the transceiver. Assuming they'd have the place bugged, I addressed Clark in Mayan. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes," he responded, also in Mayan.

I explained where I was and what it looked like they were doing.

"Divide and conquer," Clark observed. "Not unexpected."

"*Greater is He that is in us,*" I quoted.

"*Than he that is in the world,*" Clark finished the verse.

I took a drink of water from the pitcher on the table to satisfy my 'coughing fit'.

"I better let you go. I'll keep the line open."

"Stand firm in the truth."

Then there was silence.

I sat down at the table, facing the dark monitor, and prayed.

\* \* \*

Carlie Goldsmith was proud of herself.

Yesterday she'd laid down a rock-hard foundation against the Crime College. Today she planned to bring in some of the key people in Savage's empire and give 'em the third degree. Granted, it had taken calling in a few favors to authorize the individual rooms with the monitors tuned into the action here, but it would be well worth it. Once her expert witnesses finished their testimonies of what happened at the Crime College, these four would open up like ripe melons. And they'd be only too eager to testify against each other rather than let themselves be cornered or be forced into committing perjury.

\* \* \*

The jurors were ready. The 'special' witnesses were getting both sound and picture.

Showtime.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury," she opened. "I want to start things off today by showing you something. It's kinda small, so I'll pass it around."

It was an electronic chip, square, about half the size of a postage stamp. As it was being circulated, she explained, "As you can see, it's an electronic chip. This was found in the *brain* of the man whose story I want to share with you."

The large-screen monitor in the courtroom came to life, showing an image of a man in his late 50's. He had soft features and was smiling at the camera. He was posing in front of a small shoe repair business.

"The name of this man is Maxwell Rose," Goldsmith narrated. "However, that's not the name he was born with."

New images appeared. The face looked familiar to the previous one, there were several obvious differences. For one, he wasn't smiling. The other difference was that the two poses – front and side profiles – and the numbered plates supplied by the Georgia State Penitentiary gave little doubt as to the circumstances surrounding the pictures. "The name of this man is Snuffy Gonner. According to the information from the story *Secret of the Su*, Gonner was a petty criminal who lived in and around Logantown, Georgia prior to November of 1943. In June of that year he disappeared off the map along with others whom he regularly hung out with and were presumed to be his gang. So far, these details match those found in the Doc Savage novel.

"In the patient records confiscated from the Crime College, there was no reference to Snuffy Gonner, but there was a reference to Maxwell Rose who had been admitted in June of 1943. The

next reference was January 1944; it said that Maxwell Rose had opened up a shoe repair business in Quentin, Montana, near the Montana-Canada border." She paused and put the two pictures up side-by-side on the monitor. "It appears as if these two men are one and the same. The only thing connecting their histories is Doc Savage's Crime College."

The monitor next showed an article from the *Quentin Chronicle*, the headline declaring ***Vicious Shooting Takes Life of Local Businessman***. "In September of 1962, following the release of information on the Crime College victims, Maxwell Rose was found dead in the kitchen of his modest apartment. He'd been shot half a dozen times. Witnesses reported that, shortly before the discovery of his body, he'd been visited by three men – strangers to the area. Comparing their descriptions to police mug shots, the three men were identified as having belonged to Snuffy Gonner's old gang.

"A simple check of his fingerprints proved that Maxwell Rose and Snuffy Gonner had been one and the same person. Police later concluded that Rose/Gonner had been one of Savage's 'graduates', relocated in Quentin, and – when some of his old gang found out what had happened – they tracked him down and killed him. A manhunt was launched to find his murderers, but they were never found. Meanwhile, back in Quentin, friends of Maxwell Rose got together and paid for a proper funeral for him. And that was the end of the trail ... until now.

"The reason for bringing up these details on Snuffy Gonner is to shed some light on the supposedly 'fictional' accounts in the Doc Savage pulp stories. Think about it. If there's truth in the account of Snuffy Gonner, then who's to say that there hasn't been truth about all of Savage's victims in the pages of these innocent-appearing novels?" To emphasize her point, she held up a handful of pulp magazines from the plastic box.

She explained that they had ordered an exhumation of Gonner's body, followed by a detailed autopsy. To elaborate, they called their next witness, a medical examiner from the NYPD by the name of Sidney Hammerback.

"You performed the autopsy on the man identified as Snuffy Gonner?" Goldsmith asked the lanky man.

"That is correct."

"And what did you determine from your examination?"

"The subject died as a result of multiple gunshot wounds."

"Did you find anything *unusual* when you examined his brain, Dr. Hammerback?"

"Yes, I did." He outlined the steps he took in examining the body. As pictures and diagrams were displayed on the monitor, he explained that the subject had undergone brain surgery, and that an electronic chip had been placed next to the temporal lobe of the brain.

Goldsmith held out the electronic chip she'd brought out earlier. "Does this look like the chip that you removed from the subject?"

He pulled apart the glasses hanging about his neck, separating them at the nosepiece, then reconnected them in their proper position before his eyes. He took the chip and looked it over for several seconds. Then he affirmed, "Yes, it is."

"You said that the chip had been placed next to the temporal lobe of the brain. Is there some particular significance to the *temporal* lobe as compared to, say, the *frontal* lobe?"

"The temporal lobe primarily handles memory storage."

"And what, in your opinion, would've resulted from placing that chip in the temporal lobe of the brain?"

"It would've behaved like a firewall. It would've stood in the way of the brain's accessing of memories. And if the chip contained other information, then the brain would've accessed *this* information rather than its own memories."

"If the chip had contained, say, *false* memories, would the subject have been able to know the difference? In other words, would the subject have known his memories were false?"

"I really can't assess that without actual observation."

"But *in your professional opinion* ... would you say that would be an accurate assessment?"

"In my opinion," he repeated. "I would say that would be accurate."

"Thank you, Dr. Hammerback." And he was dismissed.

"With this," summarized Goldsmith. "We've connected this electronic chip to memory tampering in at least one subject with ties to Clark Savage, Jr. and the Crime College."

\* \* \*

A white-haired gentleman in his 80's took the stand. He identified himself as Dr. Owen Lazenby, a citizen of Great Britain.

"Dr. Lazenby," inquired Goldsmith. "Are you acquainted with the institution sometimes referred to as the Crime College?"

"Yes, I am."

"Were you associated with that institution at one time?"

"Yes, I was."

"And what was your association with that institution?"

"I worked there."

"In what capacity?"

"Brain surgery."

"Would I be correct in assuming that you performed brain surgery at that institution?"

"Yes."

"Could you give us an idea of what you would do in, say, an average day?"

"I would implant an electronic chip against the temporal lobe of the brain." He tapped his head in the area of the temporal lobe.

Goldsmith handed the electronic chip to Lazenby. "Do you recognize this item?"

"Yes," he acknowledged without hesitation. "It looks like one of the chips I used to work with."

"Are you certain, sir?"

"It has been a few years, mind you." He looked it over a couple of times. "But, yes – I would say this is the same type of chip I used to work with."

"Can you tell us what chips such as this one were used for?"

He slowly shook his head. "I'm sorry, I can't. My job was simply to place the chip near the temporal lobe of the brain. I never knew what they did."

"You said you placed the chip near the temporal lobe of the brain," Goldsmith repeated. "Just the temporal lobe? Nowhere else?"

"Just there. It was all very routine."

"Did you ever speculate or wonder about what the chips were being used for?"

"Occasionally," he answered. "But I don't believe I ever went farther than that."

"And why was that?"

Dr. Lazenby simply shrugged. "I don't really know."

"Who taught you the surgical procedure to put the chips in that particular location of the brain?"

"Doctor Savage," he replied simply. "Clark Savage, Jr."

"Please look at the screen, Dr. Lazenby." The old man did so, and pictures of all of Doc's men appeared. "Do you recognize any of these people?"

"Of course," he answered, then identified each person by name.

"In what capacity do you remember these people?"

"They were Doctor Savage's team. The woman is Patricia Savage, Doctor Savage's cousin."

"Did any of them ever visit the Crime College?"

"Certainly! Every one of them came to the Crime College on a regular basis."

"Do you recall anything they did on these visits?"

"No, I'm sorry, I can't."

She changed subjects. "The people who were admitted to the Crime College – did they submit to your surgery willingly or were they unwilling?"

"I really can't say. Usually by the time I saw them, they were anesthetized in preparation for the surgery."

"One last question, Dr. Lazenby. Was Clark Savage, Jr., the individual who gave you your orders?"

"Yes, ma'am, he was."

\* \* \*

The next witness was an elderly black gentleman of approximately the same age as Dr. Lazenby, who identified himself as Dr. Jonathan M'Benga of South Africa.

Under Goldsmith's questioning, he explained that he, too, had been a brain surgeon in the employ of the Crime College under Doc Savage. His answers pretty much ran parallel to Dr. Lazenby's, in that, apart from his own area of expertise, he hadn't been privy to what went on at the College. Despite that, in the end, Goldsmith got what she wanted – another person implicating Clark in what went on at the Crime College.

\* \* \*

Carlie Goldsmith was relishing this next part: exposing Savage's friends and family. No doubt they'd be quivering in their boots, having seen all the evidence she'd presented on what had occurred at the Crime College. She predicted they wouldn't last long under her direct questioning, and would easily rat on each other and especially on Savage.

Her first target would be the lawyer's own father – Monk Mayfair.

\* \* \*

Monk was led into the courtroom with the assistance of three armed guards. He was still dressed in his orange jumpsuit, and heavy metal restraints restricted his movements; she wanted to give the impression that Mayfair was a hostile and dangerous witness, liable to go on the attack at any moment. The simian-like Mayfair was secured to heavy metal rings firmly embedded in the floor before the witness stand, despite the fact that he hadn't offered any resistance whatsoever.

Goldsmith slowly walked back and forth a few feet before the witness chair before she began questioning. Then she asked him his full name. His high-pitched response caused a few of the jurors to react with surprise.

"Mr. Mayfair, do you recall the 'hospital' in upstate New York that went by the nickname of the Crime College?"

"Yeah."



"What can you tell me about the Crime College?"

"For one, I hated the name," he grouched. "I mean, it was only a hospital ... a *clinic*."

"Is it true that you brought criminals there in order to operate on their brains?"

Monk laughed. "Are you kiddin' me? Sure, we'd admit patients there, but it wuz 'cause they wuz hurt and Doc was able t' save 'em. I mean, after all, he didn't get th' name Doc 'cause he's a good dancer."

There were assorted chuckles from the jurors, causing Goldsmith's ulcer to suddenly burble. She did her best to maintain an even keel, and continued with the questioning.

"So, then, what *was* the official name of this hospital?"

"I don't recall. It probably was the *Doc Savage Clinic*, or somethin' like that."

"Why wasn't there ever a sign outside identifying its actual name?"

"Guess it didn't need it. Doc was like that. I mean, a lot o' people dedicated buildings to him, but he'd wished they would've preferred something else. So he never officially gave the clinic a name. We just called it 'the clinic' or 'the hospital'. Somewhere along the way somebody coined the phrase 'Crime College' 'cause we'd take in so many crooks." He paused. "'Sides, with it bein' a private clinic out in the middle of the toolies – the only building at the end of the road – why stick up a sign?" He shrugged, and the restraints made a metallic clacking.

"You heard the testimony from the previous witnesses, did you not?"

He nodded. "Yeah."

"They testified that they had performed a special surgical procedure – taught them from Doc Savage – that placed a mind control chip into their patients' brains. They also testified that Doc Savage had ordered them to use this procedure on their patients. What do you have to say to that?"

"We used to bring people to th' clinic all th' time. Some of them were in bad shape. After that, I haven't a clue. I'm a chemist, not a sawbones."

"But the accounts in the magazines ... they say that you knew all the details of what happened in the Crime College. Are you denying they ever happened?"

He gave her an exasperated look. "Of course they never happened! They wuz *fiction* ... they wuz entertaining, if not a little exaggerated. Dent was a good writer, and he did a good job with our adventures, but that wuz it. Next thing you're gonna tell me is that *Superman* is real 'cause you read his comic books!" He gave off with a guffaw that caused his restraints to clatter like a bad wind chime.

*Burble.*

\* \* \*

Goldsmith knew he was lying, but she continued trying to press him hoping that he would trip up in some way. However, after 45 minutes, she was getting nowhere.

So she dismissed him, and had the archaeologist Littlejohn brought in. He, too, was in restraints, but not as severe as Mayfair's.

"Mr. Littlejohn, do you recall the 'hospital' in upstate New York that went by the nickname of the Crime College?"

"I have a positive cognitive recollection of the institution," he replied smoothly.

Goldsmith blinked twice.

"What can you tell me about the Crime College?"

"It was a most prodigious organization."

Goldsmith pressed on.

"Is it true that you brought criminals there in order to operate on their brains?"

"In the atypical course of our transnational undertakings it was unpreventable to encounter individuals who required medical amelioration. Since we had a hospital within our hegemony, it would've been amiss of us not to impart our distinctive ministrations."

"Uh – yeah." Goldsmith, dazed, paused to translate his answer in her mind, then muttered, "Did ... the hospital have a name?"

"I believe the appellation was the *Doc Savage Clinic*."

She was losing steam. "Why was there never a sign on the building?"

"Doc articulated that resolute pronouncement. Despite what you might believe, he didn't gravitate towards celebratory pretentiousness."

"You heard the testimony from the previous witnesses, did you not?"

"The proceedings were significantly absorbing, if not amusing."

"They testified that they had performed a special surgical procedure – taught to them by Doc Savage – that placed a mind control chip into their patients' brains. They also testified that Doc Savage had ordered them to use this procedure on their patients. What do you have to say to that?"

"Exceptionally imaginative," he replied thoughtfully. "However, as an archaeologist, my medical expertise is severely limited to basic First Aid. Surgical procedures are outside of my vocational discernment."

"But you are quoted in several of the pulp magazines as having an understanding of the workings of the Crime College. Are you denying this understanding?"

"I am not contradicting your challenge. I am merely reiterating the fact that our printed adventures were embellished adaptations of factual accounts, and those considerable minutiae particulars had been skillfully fictionalized by the novelist Dent."

Goldsmith was getting frustrated. Beyond Littlejohn's big words, his answers were identical to those of Mayfair. But that was *impossible!* They might've had a chance to compare notes while still in custody, but they'd been sequestered since early this morning, and *neither* of them knew she was going to bring in the two Crime College surgeons! Mustering up as much calm as she could, she ignored the nagging of her stomach and walked over to the table where Frye looked at her with concern.

"Are you okay?" he whispered.

"Yes," she lied. "Gimme the water!"

She took a sip of lukewarm water and browsed through her folders as if she was consulting some notes.

After a few moments, she returned to Littlejohn and continued her questioning.

"Prior to the demolition of the Crime College, you headed an archaeological team that scoured through the site. What were you expecting to find?" Her eyes pleaded as she added, "And, *Professor* Littlejohn, could you answer in plain English, *please?*"

Johnny smiled graciously. "We weren't sure what we'd find, if anything. Despite the fact that it had been boarded up and surrounded by a chain-link fence, for years it had been a rendezvous for drug dealers and the like. We wanted to be absolutely sure that nothing dangerous had been left behind – such as weapons or chemicals. At the time I was teaching archaeology at Drake College in Vermont, and I thought it would be an interesting field trip for my students. So I volunteered."

"And *did* they find anything?"

"As a matter of fact, they did. If I recall, we found some small arms ammunition buried next to a wall, and some items used for processing methamphetamines. Beyond that, nothing. With the assistance of the NYPD, it was all disposed of properly." He raised an eyebrow. "It *is* on record if you wish to check."

*Burble.*

\* \* \*

After lunch, Pat Savage took the witness stand. As she entered the courtroom, she trained her eyes on Jefferson Frye. Sipping from a Styrofoam cup, he looked up and they made eye contact; whatever he saw there made his hand twitch and his coffee spill on his shirt.

Pat hid her smile as she continued to the stand.

"Ms. Savage, you are aware of the 'hospital' nicknamed the Crime College?"

"Yes," she answered calmly.

"And were you aware of what went on inside this 'hospital'?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell us what you know of the activities that occurred inside the Crime College?"

"I know that they took people in. Sometimes Doc would operate on them, sometimes others would."

"The people who were taken in ... were they criminals?"

"I think so. Some."

"And what kind of *operation* was performed on them?"

Pat smiled. "How would I know that? I know a lot of things ... but medicine is beyond my scope of knowledge."

"Were you aware that they underwent radical brain surgery to have their minds wiped clean?"

"So I've heard."

"But you *never* witnessed anything associated with such a surgery?"

She paused as she thought. "No, I don't think so. It just looked like any other clinic."

"But you are aware of what your cousin was doing to these people?"

"Oh, sure, he'd talk to me about one of his patients every now and then. But, for the most part, he was never the type to share it with me."

"How do you explain the testimony of the previous witnesses?"

"I don't," she shrugged. "But, like I said, I never saw what they talked about."

"Ms. Savage," Goldsmith gave her a cold stare. "Are you expecting us to believe that – with all the years you and your cousin have known each other, all the adventures you have shared – that you knew *nothing* about the illegal surgeries perpetrated in the Crime College?"

"Let me explain something to you, *Miz*. Goldsmith." Pat leaned forward and gave a cold stare to the DA. "The only way I was able to get in on some of my cousin's adventures was to *push* my way through. And, even then, there were more than a *few* times they got wind of what I was planning and left early just to keep me out of the loop." She grinned as she looked at the jury. "My cousin could be a real *stinker* when he wanted to be."

*Burble.*

\* \* \*

Goldsmith didn't like that *preacher* Perry Liston.

It wasn't just the fact that the man was an annoying, self-righteous Jesus Freak; she'd dealt with their kind before. But then Liston sent her a gift of her favorite cigars – a detail that she'd *never* made public – to the home of her and her 'domestic partner' Katherine. And despite the fact that the cigars had not been tampered with – she'd had both the box *and* its contents x-rayed *and* chemically analyzed – she didn't feel safe until they were in a lead box with the other hazardous materials.

Now, Liston sat in the witness chair and gave her a smile that made her wonder what was really going on inside his mind. But she steeled herself and began the questioning.

"How long have you known Clark Savage, Jr.?"

"Seven, seven-and-a-half years," he answered. "Since 1999."

"And how did you meet Mr. Savage?"

Liston rattled off a story about having preached in some sort of rescue mission in Oregon, how Savage walked in off the street, and how he became a Christian. Goldsmith had heard it several times since Savage's announcement, so she tuned him out and focused on her next question.

"And what happened after that?" she asked when Liston was finished.

"He didn't have a place to stay, so I took him back to the ministry house where I was living."

"Did you tell him what had happened while he was in suspended animation?"

"I did," he replied. "That night I searched the internet. The next morning I told him what I had found."

"And what was his reaction to it?"

"At first he was furious. He didn't like being compared to Nazi scientists."

"Would you say his behavior was self-righteous?"

"No," he answered without hesitation. "His behavior was like someone who had been deeply offended."

"Offended ... or *exposed*?" she stressed.

"Offended," he repeated.

"Did he ever talk to you about what had been done at the Crime College?"

"Yes."

"Did he talk about operating on people's brains?"

"No."

"How did he refer to the Crime College?"

"He thought of it as a second chance at life."

Goldsmith gave the preacher a double-take. "In what way?" she probed.

"It's not surprising that a good percentage of the people who were taken to the Crime College had been criminals, with many of them repeat offenders. But that didn't matter – they required medical assistance, and Clark took them in and treated them. Had they stayed where they were, at the mercy of the justice system of the day, they would've been executed or jailed for the rest of their lives. What Clark did was give them a second chance to make their lives right, to become productive members of society."

"And how did 'Clark' say he accomplished this 'second chance'?"

The preacher shook his head, his face impassive. "I don't know."

"He *never* told you how he accomplished this 'second chance'?"

Again, he shook his head. "No."

Goldsmith paused for several moments. Then she moved next to the witness stand and leaned against the railing.

"Mr. Liston," she addressed sweetly. "Would you say that you and Mr. Savage are *close* friends?"

"Yes, I would."

"And yet ... he *never* confided to you details of his activities in the Crime College?"

"I didn't say that," he corrected her. "He has talked to me about what happened. But he never really embellished the technical details." He paused. "I am his friend. I am also his brother in Christ. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians the Bible says: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*' That means that whatever that was done in the past is not my concern – it's between him and God, and nobody else."

Goldsmith couldn't believe this **guy** was actually preaching here in her own courtroom! She wanted to shut him up, but he had finished.

"Don't you believe that's somewhat *naïve*?" she fired back.

He gave her a seraphic smile that made her want to puke. "Maybe. But it makes it easier for me to sleep at night." He lowered his voice. "By the way, how were the cigars?"

"***I'm*** asking the questions here!" she snapped.

"Sorry," he quickly apologized. "I'll ask later."

*Burble.*

Goldsmith turned to a different line of questioning. "Did 'Clark' say that any of these people had

*volunteered* for this 'second chance'?"

"He didn't say."

"But, to the best of your knowledge," Goldsmith worded carefully. "Were any of the people taken into the Crime College taken against their will?"

Liston maintained a straight face. "I wasn't there. I can't accurately answer that question."

"But to the best of your knowledge ..."

"I was not there," he emphasized, speaking slowly and deliberately. "I cannot accurately answer that question."

This was getting to be too much for Goldsmith. Her hand subtly holding in her stomach, she turned and walked back to the table.

*Burble. Burble.*

\* \* \*

Our limo had barely pulled away from the courthouse when I activated my transceiver.

"Clark, are you free to talk?" I asked urgently.

"Yes," he whispered. "But not for long."

"Okay. We're heading back to the hotel. Did you hear?"

"Yes, I did," he answered. "How did they find Dr. Lazenby and Dr. M'Benga?"

"That's exactly what I was thinking," I agreed. "I mean, we had *weeks* of advance time before you made your announcement. Hamilton and Mitch were practically beating the bushes for witnesses, and yet the *prosecution* found them when we couldn't!"

Hamilton, listening in on the one-sided conversation, added, "What kind of advantage could they have had that we didn't?"

"My first thought would be a mole in our camp," I commented. "But that doesn't make sense. If that had been the case, Clark, they would've picked you up *long* before the announcement."

"Agreed. But ... *yes!*" Clark suddenly exclaimed. "It would have to be something ... *different*, wouldn't it?"

"Talk to me," I probed.

"You and I have had *special* help in the past. What if they've got the *same* kind of help?"

I picked up on it. "Angels?"

"Angels?" repeated Hamilton.

"The other side has angels, too," elaborated Clark.

My stomach tightened. "**Demons**," I hissed.

"What? Are you serious?" asked Hamilton.

I turned to Hamilton. "Very. It's the only thing that makes sense."

"We need to adjust our strategy," Clark suggested in my ear.

I could see that Hamilton was confused. I tried to explain. "There are more things going on here than what our eyes can perceive. In the Bible, it says: '*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*'"

"Perry?" Clark interrupted me. "You know what to do!"

"I do!" I answered him. "I'll get back to you!"

I disconnected from the transceiver, and pulled out my cell phone. I paused a moment to plead with Hamilton. "If you can wait until we get to the hotel, I'll explain it all."

"Okay," he acquiesced.

I got on the phone with Dot and gave her the news. "Get out the word to the troops! If God hasn't shown 'em yet, it's time to take this fight to the next level!"

"Will do!" she acknowledged.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, May 8, 2007*

*Brooklyn, New York*

*The apartment of Carlie Goldsmith and Katherine Gibson*

*8:00pm*

"How was work, Sweets?"

Goldsmith looked up from the meal and offered the other woman a half-smile. Katherine always knew how to get through to her, even when she was in one of her 'moods' like this.

"It's that blasted Grand Jury," she sighed heavily, cursing. "I started off **strong**! I showed them the electronic chip he used to brainwash the people! I confirmed it with not one but **two** doctors who used to work there! Savage's people were watching every minute of it, and I was going to hit them **right** between the eyes with it! I was sure they'd **crack** like ripe melons and rat on each other!" She took a gulp of her Scotch; it exploded in her stomach, causing her to grimace, but it didn't matter. "But they **didn't**! It was as if they'd had their testimonies planned!"

"Could they have found a way to communicate?" Gibson threw out.



She shook her head. "Their rooms were too far apart – I called in a lot of favors to make sure of that. Mayfair and Littlejohn had been thoroughly searched already, and Pat Savage and Liston were searched when they came into the building. It would've been *impossible* to smuggle in any sort of communicator."

"Didn't you tell me that Savage had some sort of gold mine?"

Carlie nodded. "Yes, but what does that have to do with -"

Katherine cut her off. "Daddy's company used to have trouble with corporate espionage. He eventually took care of it, but it wasn't cheap. My point is that anything is possible if you've got enough money – or a gold mine."

"Maybe so," she yielded. "But that's not going to help what's already happened."

"No." Katherine put her hand on Carlie's. "But now you know what they're capable of doing."

Carlie closed her hand around Katherine's and smiled. "I knew there was more to you than just a pretty face."

She smiled back. "So tomorrow you go in there and deliver the *coup de gras*."

"Yes."

\* \* \*

*Wednesday, May 9, 2007*  
*New York City, New York*  
*9:25am*

Hamilton and I watched as Goldsmith started off the proceedings with her usual slanted summary of the previous days. Then she introduced her first witness.

"His birth name had been Johnny Kidd," she explained. "But when he was relocated in Miami, Florida in 1943 he was known as Carl Rockwood ..."

\* \* \*

Goldsmith had been impressed when Frye brought Rockwood out of the woodwork. The man was almost an unknown. His only claim to fame had been a book he'd written in the late 1950's about his life before and after the Crime College, capitalizing on the sensationalism in the wake of the Senate Hearings; during that time, he made appearances on some of the major talk shows of the time – *Mike Douglas*, *Dick Cavett*, *The Jack Parr Show*, and, ironically, Edward R. Murrow's *Person to Person*. But when the Crime College became old news, so did Rockwood. Frye had told her that Rockwood was desperate for money – he'd recently been diagnosed with lung cancer – and he hoped this would help pay for his treatment.

As she stood back, Rockwood told his story to the grand jury. He explained that the knowledge of his past life had been second-hand, through research after he'd discovered that he'd been part of Doc Savage's experiments. He made it quite clear that – despite he'd undergone numerous therapies, including chemical, shock, and hypnosis – he couldn't remember anything prior to the

Crime College.

"All ... of my memories ... are *dead*," he choked out through tears. "My wife ... my children ... my parents ... my family! And they will ...*never* ... return to me."

As Rockwood tearfully told of how Doc Savage had destroyed his life, Goldsmith nodded sympathetically, as if she really cared.

\* \* \*

The next witness approached the stand.

"*Him?*" I exclaimed.

"I've seen him before," commented Hamilton. "He's been on the talk shows lately."

I turned away from the computer, disgusted at what I had seen. "Yeah. The creep calls himself a *metaphysical authority* ... that's a bunch of *hogwash*! When he claimed to have talked to the spirit of the original Ham Brooks, I knew he was nothing more than a puppet for the father of all lies." I paused. "We need to fight back!"

I pulled out my cell phone.

\* \* \*

His name was Chandra Sunshine Morningstar.

He was born in the 1960's to unmarried parents who'd been heavily into psychedelic drugs, the *Flower Power* movement, and the renaissance of Eastern mysticism. He learned how to entertain others with magic tricks that were so convincing that even his friends started to believe that he had supernatural powers. As he grew into manhood, especially after his parents died from some bad LSD, he developed his talents into a celebrity status. He hinted of having 'gifts' of amazing powers, and strangers claimed he had performed acts of levitation, telepathy, clairvoyance, and even communicating with the dead. In 1983 Chandra claimed to have talked to legendary escape artist Harry Houdini. There were some who called him a charlatan and fakir, but their righteous indignations only increased his popularity with the masses.

For the last six months he'd been playing the humanitarian circuit – speaking out across the country on topics like global warming, world peace, animal rights, and other garbage like that. As he stood next to grown men and women claiming that making a salad was actually abusing and murdering innocent vegetables, even he thought they were creepy.

But he had to admit, it was a powerful ego trip!

It was during one of those events that a man from the New York City District Attorney's office made contact with him and enlisted him as an expert witness.

\* \* \*

Chandra was a harmony of colors. His cream-colored Nehru jacket was in contrast to the billowing robes he usually wore on the talk shows. His hair was black with streaks of white, and

was pulled back into a neat ponytail tied with a rainbow ribbon. His deeply tanned face was highlighted by the presence of a yellow jewel in the middle of his forehead.

The District Attorney gestured for him to be seated. He settled into the witness chair and folded his hands before him.

"The court appreciates you taking time out of your very busy schedule to come here today, *your holiness*," Goldsmith said with a respectful nod of her head.

"It is my pleasure, Ms. Goldsmith," he softly replied with the trace of an Indian accent.

"You have seen the evidence presented to this grand jury. As an expert witness in the field of life forces and the nature of all living things, what do you have to say?"

\* \* \*

*Lincoln City, Oregon*

Dot hung up the phone. Her expression could only be described as intense.

"What is it?" asked Bonnie, sitting on the couch.

"You remember the guy we saw on TV last night – Morningstar?"

She nodded.

"He's talking to the grand jury – now!"

"Oh, Lord."

Dot didn't take time to elaborate but walked over to the computer she'd set up to send emails and text messages to all the people on their Spiritual Warfare team.

Two minutes later she let out a sigh of relief at having got the message out, and turned back to see how Bonnie was doing. To her surprise, she wasn't showing any sign of stress.

"Are ... you ... *okay*?" she asked, reluctantly.

"Sure," she replied with a smile. "Why shouldn't I be?"

Dot felt suddenly embarrassed. "Well ... uh ... something like this would usually ... get you ... *down*."

"And you're wondering why I'm *not* ... down?"

Dot looked away and mumbled, "Yeah, that's about it."

"It's okay, Sugah. *I'm* okay." She stood and put her good arm on Dot's shoulder. "Ever since the accident, I've had to do a *lot* more depending on God. I guess it's working."

Dot turned around and gave Bonnie a smile. "I'm glad. And I'm sorry for worrying like that."

"You care," Bonnie smiled back. "It's all good."

"So, since we've still got a prayer request on the field that needs our attention, let's pray!"

\* \* \*

*New York City, New York*

"It has long been a tenet of the *enlightened*, that the life exists in the soul, and the soul is the repository where all of the life experiences of the individual are stored in the form of memories. Replace the accumulation of memories, and you have taken away the soul."

"Do you mean," argued Goldsmith. "The people who went on to live productive lives under other memories did so without a *soul*?"

"That is precisely what I mean," Morningstar replied matter-of-factly. "Their brains would still operate as functioning organs, but there would be no soul."

"What about someone, for example, with amnesia?"

"That is different," he smiled. "People with amnesia still retain their memories. They have just been ... hidden, tucked away in a portion of the brain where they can eventually re-emerge. It's like putting a picture in a box and forgetting where you put the box. It's not permanently gone; and one day you'll find the box and the picture inside."

Goldsmith carefully worded her next question. "So how can you say that what Doc Savage did is different from an amnesiac?"

"Because he made it so that the memories could *not* re-emerge. Using the previous example, the picture was put in the box, but then the box was weighted down and thrown into the deepest part of the ocean. It would be impossible to restore those memories."

"There were several of the written accounts – the pulp novels – which reported that some of those treated in the Crime College had had their memories restored. How do you account for that?"

Morningstar smiled seraphically. "They could be flukes. Or the stories could've been *fictitious* accounts meant to provide misinformation."

"Thank you, your holiness."

\* \* \*

Goldsmith was ready for her closing remarks.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Imagine if you will that you are at your work ... in your car ... in your home ... in your bed. Suddenly, without warning, you are seized ... drugged ... taken far away. While you are unconscious, your body is probed ... your brain is tampered with ... your very identity erased and replaced with a false one. You become someone else ... and you will *never* remember who you used to be. For all intents and purposes, you do not exist any longer.

"You ... are ... *dead*.

"In the meantime, your family and friends are clueless as to what's happened to you. To them, you just vanished into thin air. They become concerned. They worry about your safety ... your very life. They cry. They search in vain for you. They may eventually give up on you, declare you dead, and mourn for you. Perhaps they'll move on with their lives. Or maybe they'll continue *waiting* ... day after day after day after day ... vainly hoping that you will return to them one day. But you will ... *never* ... *ever* ... *return*.

"Despite what some people would have us believe, this is not a work of fiction ... not just the imaginings of a single man. You have seen someone who went through it. You have heard his testimony. You have felt his pain. And he is only one of many *thousands* of American citizens ... citizens whose basic rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were violently *ripped* from them, and their lives – as well as the lives of all those who cared about them – were changed *forever*.

"Those closest to Clark Savage, Jr. would like you to dismiss this case and not pursue it. Is that *justice*, ladies and gentlemen? You decide."

\* \* \*

I had Dot on the phone. She'd already sent out the prayer alert.

"Ham," I said. "Let me know if anything happens."

"Will do," he acknowledged.

Then I went into my room, got down on my knees, and joined in the battle.

\* \* \*

I didn't look up until Hamilton tapped on the door and announced, "They're back."

My muscles ached as I stood and glanced at the clock. I had lost track of time, but almost three hours had passed.

I looked at a speakerphone on the table; it connected us with Clark's transceiver.

"Clark, are you there?"

"Yes," Clark acknowledged.

I didn't say anything.

The jury was sitting soberly in the jury box. A woman on the end of the front row handed a folded piece of paper to the bailiff. He didn't open it, but took it directly to the judge. Before he opened it, though, he addressed the jurors.

"This is your decision?"

The woman answered for them all, "Yes, it is."

"Thank you," he acknowledged.

He read the paper aloud for the record. "It is the decision of this grand jury that due cause has been found to indict Clark Savage, Jr. on the charge of Murder. It is also the decision that due cause is found to indict Andrew Blodgett Mayfair and William Harper Littlejohn on the charge of Accessory to Murder." He thanked the jurors for their service, and they were dismissed.

In anticipation, I had trained one of the cameras on the DA's face in order to get her reaction. At the moment the verdict was read, a brief victorious smile crossed her lips.

"**Perry**," Hamilton addressed me. "This is *not* the end! In fact, this is just the *beginning*!" He turned to the speakerphone. "Clark, you know that a grand jury is always on the side of the prosecution – am I right?"

"This is true," he answered.

"Under normal circumstances I'd still have to wait to receive the transcripts from the grand jury before I could come up with any sort of potential defense. However, thanks to our little bit of subterfuge, I've been following everything Carlie's presented – and formulating a defense along the way. And when she presents the same witnesses and evidences at your trial ... I will nail her butt to the wall! I'll know exactly how to cross-examine her witnesses and I'll know exactly how challenge her evidence." His grin vanished, replaced by a cold sober stare. "And I'll *personally* make that black cat regret she *ever* crossed our paths."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN**

Hamilton was right. The first reaction from all of us was shock and sadness. It was hard putting out the word, but we had to get it to our troops before the networks did. It was helpful to assure them that God wasn't done yet, and that He'd given us a few aces up our sleeves for the trial.

However, when dealing with the public, we had to maintain our poker faces and make a sufficient show of surprise and indignation at the DA's victory. Hamilton did especially well in pressing her for a copy of the grand jury transcripts – which took almost a week to get. When he did get them, he went through them carefully, looking for (and finding!) discrepancies from what we had seen in the 'live' version.

\* \* \*

Reactions from the *Bronze Avengers* varied, but most of them were angered at how Clark had been treated.

In Topeka, Kansas, somebody found the words **FREE DOC SAVAGE** written on the back wall of the police station. It was written in brown chalk, but the local television station reported that it was bronze-colored. The idea became an underground sensation, and the slogan was soon seen on walls and sidewalks across the country.

Clark was encouraged and humbled.

\* \* \*

As the information presented to the grand jury made its way into the public mainstream, opinions once more became divided. Many saw Goldsmith's redefinition of murder as empty, silly, and lame, while others saw it as bold, inspired, and visionary.

Goldsmith's key witnesses busied themselves making appearances on talk shows. But they didn't blab their testimonies. Rather, they teased their audiences with: "You'll have to wait for the end of the actual trial, and then read my forthcoming book on the real, 'behind the scenes' view of the proceedings!"

With Clark, Monk, and Johnny still in jail, Pat joined Hamilton and me as spokespersons on their behalf. We maintained a positive attitude when mixing with the people, and were touched by all of the emails and telegrams from people praying for us and encouraging us to continue the fight.

\* \* \*

*Friday, May 11, 2007*  
*San Francisco, California*  
*Evening*

Barry Massey popped a *Lean Cuisine* dinner into the microwave and grabbed a light beer from the fridge. He had just turned forty, a fact attested to by how fast his hair had vanished in the last five years. He carried the TV tray over to his easy chair and put the pieces of his dinner in their usual positions.

The national news reported on the latest developments with the Savage trial. He didn't like the fact that they were calling the three in jail the *Doc Savage Gang*, as if it was a throwback to the criminal mobs of the 30's.

"It's been over fifty years," he grumbled back at the set. "Everybody changes! Give 'im a break, already!"

He was still muttering to himself when a knock came at his apartment door. Muting the television, Massey rose and stood to one side of the closed door.

"Yeah, who is it?" he called.

"Barry Massey?" asked a deep voice. "*San Francisco Chronicle*?"

Massey looked through the peephole and saw a bearded face. "Who's askin'?"

"My name is *Renwick*," the man identified himself. "And I think we need to talk."

Massey froze, his mind whirring. Usually he'd be suspicious of any visitors. However, for some odd reason he didn't question, he unlocked the door and opened it. He looked up at the man who was several inches taller than he, and saw a semblance in his bearded face.

"Come on in," he invited.

\* \* \*

"Renny, I think you're out of your mind!"

It was twenty minutes later. Massey was on his second bottle of beer; Renny was still on his first.

"Sure," Renny agreed. "But the question is: will it work?"

"How *can* it?" argued Massey. "Look, man, you've been declared legally *dead* – they can't charge you with the same *so-called* crimes as the rest 'o them. And if you did get yourself arrested, it's no guarantee you'd be put within a hundred miles of them!"

Renny finished his beer. "Okay, so I'm a better engineer than a strategist; so sue me. But I'm not done yet." He paused. "Do me a favor, willya – hold onto the story for awhile? Don't worry; you'll have the exclusive."

"Who else in their right mind would want it?" he grinned. "So, do you have a Plan B?"

"Sorta," Renny smiled. "I better not say anything more, in case it tanks."

Massey took a sip from his bottle. "So where are you staying tonight?"

"The Easterbrook. Why?"

"I don't get too many opportunities to play host to living legends."

Renny huffed. "I wouldn't call myself a living legend."

"I would. What would it take to change your mind? I got a spare bedroom that my cousin Dave uses when he comes into town. And I make a mean Denver omelet, if I do say so myself."

Renny's heart went out to the guy. "Okay, you talked me into it. Lemme grab my stuff and check out of the Easterbrook. Who knows, maybe I might even spring for some of that fancy expensive coffee on the way back."

As he reached the door, Massey said sincerely, "Thanks, Renny."

The big man left the apartment, leaving Barry Massey alone to contemplate the position he'd just been put into, and the Pulitzer Prize he'd win for *this* story.

\* \* \*

*Saturday, May 12, 2007*

Despite the fact that it was Saturday, Clark was directed to a private conference room.

On the opposite side of the solitary table sat Jefferson Davis Frye. "Good afternoon, Mr. Savage."

"Mr. Frye," he acknowledged.

"So you know who I am? But, of course; Mr. Mayfair would've told you. Very well. I'm here on behalf of District Attorney Goldsmith. Things look bad for your friends. But I've got an offer for



you."

"A plea bargain," supplied Clark.

"Yes," he acknowledged. "The DA's office is willing to release your two friends with community service ... *if* you sign this." He opened up his briefcase, removed a lengthy document, and slid it across the table. One look confirmed to Clark that it was a confession. Frye offered him a pen. "Realize, of course, that this is a *limited* offer, which could expire at *any* time."

Clark's straight face suddenly broke into a grin, and he laughed.

"Mr. Frye, your reputation precedes you. My cousin Pat told me about your employment with her company. I believe her actual quote was, 'I don't know why I ever hired that ... twerp.'" He turned the document around and slid it back. "Although I appreciate your *generous* offer, I'm afraid I must decline."

Frye returned the pen to his inside jacket pocket. "You're making a mistake, Mr. Savage."

"I don't think so. Thank you for your time, Mr. Frye."

Frye picked up the confession, gathered up his briefcase and headed for the door. He tapped twice to signal the guard to let him out. "Don't say we didn't give you a chance, Mr. Savage. By the way, the judge *has* set a date for your trial; it'll be in three months. And, since you and your *accomplices* are still considered to be flight risks, you'll be staying right here as you await your fate. Should you change your mind about our offer, you know how to reach us."

Clark didn't flinch; he remained silent as Frye left and the guard came to escort him back to his cell. As he did, God brought one of the Psalms to Clark's mind: *'Hear me, O God, as I voice my complaint; protect my life from the threat of the enemy. Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked, from that noisy crowd of evildoers. They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows. They shoot from ambush at the innocent man; they shoot at him suddenly, without fear. They encourage each other in evil plans, they talk about hiding their snares; they say, "Who will see them?" They plot injustice and say, "We have devised a perfect plan!" Surely the mind and heart of man are cunning. But God will shoot them with arrows; suddenly they will be struck down. He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake their heads in scorn. All mankind will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done. Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him; let all the upright in heart praise him!'*

Then he was returned to his cell.

\* \* \*

*Sunday, May 13, 2007  
Portland, Oregon  
Somewhere in the Northwest Industrial Area*

In Sloan's warehouse, two men were fighting to the death.

A large tarpaulin had been placed on the ground, and the two men kept within its boundaries as they circled each other with knives. Neither man was young; both were well into their elder years,

and yet they moved with an agility of someone half that span. The men were wearing red and blue jerseys, respectively; both shirts were marked by numerous slashes tinged with blood.

Robert and Bill Sloan watched from a safe distance. Robert could feel his grandson's reluctance at witnessing this test, but he didn't bother to berate him.

"Red," Sloan addressed the one man in a commanding voice. "Stand at attention!"

The old man immediately lowered his hands to his side and stood ramrod-straight.

A moment later, the man in blue plunged the blade of his knife up to the hilt into the center of the red jersey. The other man had made no attempt to ward off the attack, nor did he make a sound. He continued standing there until his legs could no longer support him, then dropped to the tarp and died.

"Good," commented Robert Sloan to himself. "Blue, take Red's knife and cut your own throat with it."

The man in blue obediently reached down and took the knife from the dead man's fingers. Then he stood and, in one swift motion, drew the blade across his own throat. As amazing as it seemed, he didn't move as his breath came as rasping gasps and his blood spurted out. Then, like the man in red, he stood as long as his body could before he collapsed and died.

To one side, Bill Sloan hid his shock.

"Excellent," commented Robert Sloan; his voice sounded sinister, like Emperor Palpatine in the *Star Wars* movies. "Now we know that we can override even their own will to live."

"But *why*, Robert?"

"Haven't you been watching the news, Billy? Sure, Savage is going to trial, but they're crazy if they think it's going to stick! He'll get off with just a slap on the wrist! But I've got a plan. And *that* is the reason for these particular tests."

"What is it?"

"I'll tell you what. Let's get somebody to clean up this mess. Then I'll show you what I got in mind."

\* \* \*

*Monday, May 14, 2007*  
*Alpha Base, Florida*

"Good morning, Renny. What can I do for you?"

"Throw me in jail with Doc, Monk, and Johnny."

"Guilty conscience?"

Renny ignored that. "My place is with them. But I don't know how to do it. I need your help."

"I love a challenge."

"If anyone can make this happen, you can."

He released a deep sigh. "I've always been a sucker for flattery. Okay, let's think this out. I could do some creative hacking with the electronic records and make you a cell mate ... but that could get messy, especially with the media who like to pay attention to details like this. And I don't think Clark would appreciate it, despite your noble intentions." He paused. "So ... let me give this some thought, Renny. How patient are you?"

Renny grunted, "Not very."

"Are you at home?"

"Yes," he replied. "Amanda's with Lea ... for her own protection, if you know what I mean."

"I do. I'll get back to you."

\* \* \*

*Wednesday, May 16, 2007  
New York City, New York  
Early Morning*

Something woke me up in the middle of the night.

I pressed the button on my watch to illuminate the dial. I was about to put my head back on the pillow when I heard a noise – no, a voice – coming from my bedside table. Then I understood. I quickly grabbed up the transceiver I'd left on and pushed it in my ear.

***"Clark! I'm here!"***

"Yes," he acknowledged softly.

I lowered my voice to a level comfortable for both of us. "Are you okay?"

"No, not really."

I sat up in bed. "Talk to me."

He didn't hesitate. "I didn't see this coming. When it was just me in the crosshairs, I was determined to take whatever came at me. But now it's not just me. It's Monk and Johnny, too. They're in danger. Yesterday, the prosecution offered me a plea bargain; Monk and Johnny'd go free if I pled guilty."

"You turned it down, of course."

"Of course," he repeated. "But now ... I wonder if that was the right thing to do."

"You're scared."

"Yes," he affirmed. "I am."

"Clark, listen to me. It *will* work out, and God will get you *all* through it."

Several seconds passed. Then Clark whispered, "How can you be sure? I mean, right now I'm not sure *I'll* make it through this."

"Let me tell you something, Clark. What you said? You're absolutely *correct* – you *can't* make it through this."

My response actually startled Clark. "*What?*"

"I said, you *can't* make it through this," I repeated. "You never could. But you're not alone in that cell. Jesus is there – always has been. He's watching over all of you. And right now he's telling you, *I can make it through this. Take my hand and walk with me.*"

Amidst the silence on his end I heard a sound I knew only too well: the sound of one man breaking with sudden emotion.

I gave him a couple of minutes before I asked, "Wanna pray?"

"Please."

Later, as we prepared to disconnect, I assured him that I'd keep my end of the transceiver on. "If you want to talk some more," I added.

He thanked me, then disconnected.

I got back to my feet and sat on the edge of the bed.

There came a sudden tap on the door; it surprised me, and I looked up.

"Come in," I responded.

Hamilton opened the door. "I heard talking. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah," I nodded with a half-smile. "Clark's going through a rough spot. He needed to talk."

"He seemed like he was doing fine."

"He's good at that. He's had decades of practice keeping his emotions in check, keeping them from reaching the surface. However, since he became a Christian, he's learned that he doesn't always have to be Mr. Spock." I paused. "It's all gonna work out."

"How can you be sure?"

I chuckled. "You know, that's just what *he* said." I paused. "To tell you the truth, sometimes I'm *not* sure. All I can do is hope for the best, and pray that – regardless of the outcome – God is glorified." I paused. "When Jesus was just days away from his own death, he told his apostles, '*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*' He wasn't going to

promise them the proverbial Rose Garden, because he knew it wasn't going to go down that way. But he gave them a valuable piece of wisdom: this is a cruel world, and bad things happen to good people ... but, if *he* could get through it, *we* could get through it. And when he was resurrected on the third day, that was his way of saying 'I told ya so.' It was his personal assurance that we could make it because he *has* made it."

"Would you still feel that way if it were *you* in that jail?"

I raised an eyebrow. "Good question. I don't know. Maybe not. But I'm not in there. And because of that, I can pray for *them*." I gave him a half-smile. "You wanna join me?"

"I'll think about it."

"Fair enough. I'll see you in the morning."

"G'night," he said, backing out of the room and closing the door behind him.

\* \* \*

The next morning, still sleepy, I called Dot to give her a private update on Clark.

"Bonnie and I have also been praying for that barracuda."

"Who?" I asked, puzzled.

"Ms. Goldsmith," she elaborated. "After all, she needs it, too."

I sighed. "You're right."

"You sound tired. How *are* you doing?"

"Just between you and me, let's say I wish I would've brought my teddy bear along."

"I can always overnight him to you."

"I'll think about it. *Inside*, I know it's all going to work out. *Outside* ... I don't have a clue."

"You're not alone. It'll all work out. Do you remember Galatians 6:9?"

I had to think a moment before I could recite it. "*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*" Thanks, hon."

"Anytime. Love you."

"You, too."

\* \* \*

*Sunday, May 20, 2007  
New York City, New York  
Early Morning*

"Savage! Mayfair! Littlejohn! Grab yer stuff! You're bein' moved!"

Clark, Monk, and Johnny were awakened without explanation. They were shackled together and silently escorted by several stone-faced and heavily-armed guards, to an office somewhere within the building. They were told to stand before an empty desk; by the books covering the shelves around them, it was a judge's quarters.

After several minutes, a man in judge's robes entered the room from a door behind the desk, and sat down. A folded sheet of paper was in his hands; by the way he held it, it looked to be quite important. He unfolded the paper and stared at it for several seconds before refolding it.

"Clark Savage, Jr. Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. William Harper Littlejohn. I'm Judge James Houk. You three have been declared to be flight risks; that's why you weren't released on bail. However, I've received new instructions. You three are to be released into the care of someone who has assumed responsibility for you. You will remain in his custody until it is rescinded, or until a determination has been made in your case."

"May we ask who it is?" asked Clark.

"You'll know soon enough," he replied enigmatically.

Just then, the door behind them opened, and two men in black suits entered. The guards, in turn, retreated. Judge Houk stood. "You'll go with them," he instructed. Then, without another word, he left the room through the same by which he'd entered.

One man removed their shackles as the other addressed them. "I'm Mr. Henderson, this is Mr. Belzer. We're assuming you won't try to escape."

"You assume correctly," replied Clark.

"Then, if you will please follow me."

Mr. Henderson led the way out of the room, and Mr. Belzer brought up the rear.

Monk suddenly cleared his throat, then asked Clark in Mayan, "Still got the transceiver?"

"Let's see what happens."

They proceeded to a basement parking garage where a nondescript white panel van was waiting for them. Clark glanced at the government license plate; there was something odd about it, but he couldn't put his finger on it. They were directed into the back, and the doors were locked behind them. Light filtered through some opaque plastic windows in the sides and roof, but they couldn't see out. Somebody climbed into the cab – assumedly Mr. Henderson and Mr. Belzer – and they were soon driving out of the building and into the morning light.

For the first few minutes, they rode in silence. Then they started recognizing sounds.

"Freeway," said Clark.

"We're heading for the airport," deduced Monk.

"Not JFK or La Guardia," corrected Johnny, his eyes closed in concentration. "But an airfield ... a private airfield?"

"Yes," concurred Clark.

"We're here," Monk said as the van made a series of quick turns and briefly stopped.

They heard a grinding noise. "A hangar," Clark identified.

A few moments later, the van continued forward into the hangar and stopped. The doors closed behind them as the two men climbed out of the cab and moved around to the back.

The van doors opened. "Gentlemen," said Mr. Henderson cordially.

They stepped down and confirmed their location; an executive-type helicopter shared the hangar.

"Do either of you know who our mysterious guardian is?" Clark asked the two men in black.

"Sorry about the cloak-and-dagger, boys," came a voice from behind them. "But this was the only way I could get you past the press and paparazzi."

They turned to see a thin man walking towards them. They recognized him immediately.

"Georgie?" exclaimed Clark. "Georgie Bush?"

"*Please*, Doc," he replied with a pained grimace. "Not in front of my Secret Service detail!"

"Of course – the license plate! It started with the letter T! The Secret Service falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Treasury. If this had been a standard Department of Justice van, the license plate would've started with a J."

"You're still sharp as a tack, Doc," answered President Bush. He shook the others' hands. "Good to meet you boys!"

Monk gawked. "You worked with Clark?"

"It was a long time ago," supplied Clark. "I was on a secret mission for the military."

"So we're going to be *your* responsibility, sir?" asked Johnny.

"You are," he answered. "You've been remanded to my custody. You'll be staying with me at the compound in Kennebunkport."

"But how –?"

President Bush held up a hand to silence them. "Let's just say that you needed a bit of high end muscle on your side ... unless you like orange coveralls and group showers." He gave an impish grin.

A man approached and announced that the helicopter was ready.

"Good," replied President Bush. "Let's go."

They climbed aboard the executive helicopter and a tow vehicle pulled them out of the hangar to the helipad. A couple of minutes later they were airborne.

\* \* \*

*Kennebunkport, Maine*  
*Late Morning*

The helicopter returned to the air as the others started towards the main house.

"Make yourselves at home," informed President Bush. "You're probably going to want to change out of those prison duds. I took the liberty of getting you guys some clothes. I believe I got all the sizes right ... even yours, Monk."

"I'll believe it when I see it," he quipped. "Sir."

"Can I contact my family, George?" asked Clark, and Monk seconded the request. "I'd like to let them know where I am."

"Certainly," he agreed. "By the way, congratulations on your marriage. I can't wait to meet her."

As they walked towards the main house, they were taken by surprise by the figure who was standing on the porch waving at them.

"What are *you* doin' there?" called out Monk.

"I heard you were looking for a fourth for Bridge," Renny smirked back. "I volunteered."

Clark reached him first, bypassed the offered hand and went in for a bear hug.

"The truth," confessed Renny, once they separated. "My place is here at your side."

"You've come clean?" asked Johnny.

"Not yet," he explained. "Remember Barry Massey, the reporter who wrote the article that put first you guys on my trail? Well, I met with him on the 11th. To make a long story short, he's on our side, and at the right time he'll tell my story to the public. After that ... I'm in God's hands."

"Amen," grinned Clark. "I'm glad you're here!"

Renny grinned back. "Ditto. Now let's get you guys settled in."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT**

It didn't take long for the rest of the world to realize that Clark, Monk, and Johnny weren't where they were supposed to be. District Attorney Goldsmith did her best to pull the guys back and into



the local jail, but she was hopelessly outmatched by the former president.

This was not to say that their new location gave them a lot of privacy. Daring paparazzi cruised the shoreline and poised their cameras across from Walker's Point, hoping to catch something no one else could.

Interviews continued to be granted – mostly via phone. Occasionally, though, we'd let a crew in for some of our more-favorable interviewers. It made for excellent copy.

As for me and the families, we were given priority clearance, even though it meant being escorted in by the Secret Service. But the experience was amazing. To be in a place like this, to be in the presence of the first President Bush, was a profound honor. It was also a thrill to sit in the family room, around a roaring fireplace, and listen to George and the guys talk about old times. It reminded me of a few years back, when we first met Mitch Drake, and Clark and Monk spending hours with him in nostalgic glory.

There was, however, one incident that sparked a brief nationwide spectacle.

In order to go from the helipad to the house, visitors would have to pass through an open area that could be seen by the paparazzi. For most of us, it wouldn't be a big deal if we were identified. Bonnie and the triplets, however, were another matter. Barbara Bush and a couple of the household staff brought the kids in, while a veiled Bonnie followed a few steps behind.

Of course, once the word got out that a "mystery woman" with three babies had been in the same vicinity as Doc Savage, the media's curiosity shifted into overdrive.

Their first assumption – that the mystery woman was Doc's wife and/or girlfriend, and the mother of the triplets – was closest to the truth. But then came the guessing game, and it turned funny. Among the contenders were Marilyn Monroe, Amelia Earhart, Julia Roberts, Uma Thurman, and even Penelope Savage.

Bonnie found it quite amusing, if not a bit flattering.

Another interesting bit of news during this time was the discovery of an online 'prayer closet' within the Bronze Avengers' chat room. It had started as a private area within the chat room, where the Christian members of the Avengers could talk about their feelings in respect to Clark's admission of faith. As days turned into weeks, though, it grew into a forum for prayer. At first we were dubious as to how a chat room, where conversations were typed in and not spoken aloud, would handle such a unique function, but they made it work; each person, as they were led, typed their prayer into the mix. And God brought them into one accord so things wouldn't be pure chaos. When one person finished with their portion, another would pick it up – and nobody's toes got stepped on.

And, since the chat room centered on Doc Savage anyhow, even the non-Christian *Avengers* didn't appear to be offended. They saw it as a difference of opinion, with each person on Clark's side, offering their support in their own way.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, June 5, 2007*  
*An undisclosed location*

*Noon*

The lake was as still as a crystal mirror. The only things disturbances were the gentle ripples generated by the afternoon breeze, or the occasional fish bobbing after something on the surface.

Standing near the edge was Bill Sloan. He was meditating on the stillness of this place ... how quiet and calm and clean. He turned to face someone calling his name; a man stood in the doorway of the cabin a few yards into the woods. He walked away from the lake, and followed the man into the cabin.

"We're all done here, sir," he informed.

"Good," the younger Sloan replied, then took out his cell phone and dialed. "Robert?"

"Yes, Billy," replied his grandfather from the warehouse.

"We're all set here."

"Excellent. The teams are in place."

"Good. We'll take one last look through to make sure there's nothing that can lead them back to us, then join you."

"Okay. See you later." And the cell disconnected.

Bill Sloan turned to the other man. "Make sure the place is policed and all fingerprints wiped. Can't have a mistake like that at this point, can we?"

"No, sir," agreed the other man.

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, June 5, 2007  
New York City, New York  
The Offices of Martin and Associates, Attorneys at Law  
Afternoon*

"So, Perry told me you had some run-ins with Jefferson Frye," commented Pat.

The three of them sat in Martin's office, taking a break from working on Clark's defense.

Hamilton walked over to the coffee pot and refilled his cup. "It was back in Coral Gables." He took a sip of the brew, then added a couple of sugar cubes. "I was assisting the DA on a Domestic Violence case, and the defense brought in a couple of people from the ACLU. Frye was one of them. He was knowledgeable, but vicious."

"That's him," affirmed Pat.

"Okay," concluded Hamilton. "What I can't figure is what kinda connections he got that enabled him to pull in those surprise witnesses."

"I thought Perry had talked to you about that," commented Martin.

"He gave me a sermon about angels and demons," he scoffed. "I didn't pay much attention to it."

"You should've," commented Pat. "Right now, it's probably the only thing that makes sense."

Hamilton stared at them. "Are you pulling my leg?"

"No, not really," defended Martin casually. "*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*" Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5."

"Hamilton," asked Pat sincerely. "If you've got a better idea as to how the prosecution got all that stuff in such a short time, please tell us. I mean, look at all the resources at our fingertips, and yet they beat us to the punch. Our suggestion may be far out, but it makes sense."

"I just find it hard to swallow," he admitted.

"*When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.*"

"Yeah, I know – Sherlock Holmes," identified Hamilton, getting tired of the old man's clichés. Then his face took on a smirk. "So you're telling me you've *personally* seen demons?"

"I've seen angels," Pat replied. "And if there are angels, there are demons."

"So you haven't seen demons ... *personally*?"

"No, I haven't," Pat admitted. "But that doesn't change the fact that I believe they exist."

"Wouldn't stand up," he said.

Nobody made a sound for several minutes. Hamilton stood by the coffee pot, looking at the two old folks. He had a lot of respect for both of them, despite the fact that they had some strange ideas. But this ... was a little too much for him to accept.

Just then Christine Snow burst into the office. Her face was a mask of fear.

"Oh my God!" she gasped. "It's horrible! Quick, turn on the television!"

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, June 5, 2007  
Kennebunkport, Maine  
The Bush Compound  
Afternoon*

Clark and I were strolling around the compound when we suddenly heard Monk yelling our names from the front porch of the main house. Without hesitation, we took off at a run.

"What is it?" Clark asked anxiously. "Is it the trial?"

"No!" he replied. "The First Lady's been kidnapped!"

We rushed into the house and joined the others gathered around a giant flat-screen television.

I didn't need to see the words at the bottom of the screen to know where this was. I recognized the familiar section of downtown Portland, Oregon. But now it resembled a war zone: smoking vehicles riddled with bullets, emergency crews and their vehicles running about ... and I got a lump in my throat when I saw several body-sized forms covered by white tarps in the middle of the street.

A seasoned local reporter stood at the edge of the cordoned off section of downtown; his voice was filled with empathy as he spoke: "It was supposed to have been a simple tour through Portland for the First Lady, visiting one of the local high schools. Her motorcade – three armored Secret Service SUV's, two Portland PD squad cars, and four Portland PD motorcycles – was traveling through Downtown Portland when they encountered several war protesters."

They shifted to a series of spot interviews with witnesses and authorities, who told the story of what had happened ...

A man: "Yeah, I saw the protesters. They were kinda grouped together ... just being loud and showin' off their signs. But I also saw the three women. At the time I thought it was a little weird to see three pregnant ladies pushin' three strollers, but I didn't give it much thought until things started happenin'."

A woman: "They were crossing the street at the intersection. They had plenty of time to get across ... but then they just stopped there."

A man: "The cops wanted to keep the traffic movin' ... I figured the motorcade didn't want to slow down 'cause of the protesters. So a couple of the cops moved their bikes in closer to the ladies in order t'get them to move. But then one of 'em ... she pushed her stroller right at the motorcycles! The guy couldn't move aside in time! It hit the bike ... and ... *exploded!*"

A teenaged girl: "My *Gawd!* Everything was jus' goin' crazy! The other two shoved their strollers at a couple of the parked cars, and *BOOM!* up they went!"

Two men: "The motorcade tried to get the hell outta there! But the women ran right for the SUVs! They couldn't have really been pregnant – they were runnin' too fast! When my wife was that pregnant, she couldn't run worth beans! My guess is that they were made to look pregnant, and that's where the explosives were!"

"The cops must'a figured that, too. When one of the cops shot one of the women, she just blew up like one 'o them suicide bombers!"

"Yeah! Then the other two took out a police car and one of the SUV's!"

A teenaged boy: "Hey, this is Portland. There's always a bunch'a of homeless people down here, pushin' their <bleep> around in shopping carts. But then several of them showed up behind the motorcade and started pullin' out automatic weapons and grenades and <bleep>, shootin' the <bleep> out of the motorcade! <bleep>, it looked like that ambush scene from *Clear and Present Danger!* When that started goin' down, I wasn't about to stick around!"

A police official: "With the motorcade boxed in, the supposed transients opened fire on the vehicles. They used Molotov cocktails and smoke bombs to escalate the confusion."

An older man: "The Secret Service tried to take a stand, but the terrorists had the draw on them! Couldn't see much through the smoke, and everybody was runnin' and keepin' low to keep from gettin' shot."

The police official: "It's suspected that the attackers rendered the First Lady unconscious and smuggled her out in one of the shopping carts. We immediately called for backup, but by the time they got there it was all over."

The reporter: "It's not certain just how many of the Secret Service agents and policemen were injured or killed in this horrible tragedy. The area has been cordoned off, and members of the Crime Lab are scouring over the area for leads."

The police official: "We've pulled in all available manpower to assist in conducting a house-to-house search of the area. We won't rest until she's safe and sound."

"The President was unavailable for comment ..."

\* \* \*

*Tuesday, June 5, 2007  
Portland, Oregon  
Multnomah County Morgue  
Afternoon*

Considering the news of the hour, Carlotta Dupree hadn't been surprised when she got the urgent summons from her supervisor. Within the hour, she was running preliminary scans of the bodies. At the moment, everything was riding on her, hoping that she would be able to pull a rabbit out of her hat and lead them to the First Lady.

And, God willing, she wasn't about to let them down.

They'd separated the bodies into three groups: the cops, the bad guys, and the bystanders.

The FBI had been explicitly instructed to assist the Portland forensics team. At that they were a big help. Because of their assistance, many of the bodies had been identified in short order.

The initial conclusions hadn't been good. There had been a number of transients involved; it was hard to tell the difference between the ones who had been in on the attack, and those who were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Most of them had died from gunshot wounds, or from fire or explosion. But then there were some that looked familiar. But what was it?

Later, during a much-needed coffee break with her husband Oswald, they started comparing notes. "None of the transients had any ID on them," he confirmed, "except *this*." He produced a small poly evidence bag; inside was a worn business card. He handed it to her and she turned it over. "Where's you find it?"

"In the shoe of one of the vics."

"Really," she brightened up as she read the card. "*Serenity Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Center*, New York City. The vic was quite a bit off the beaten track, wouldn't you say? Can you read this name?"

"Caroline Brooks," he answered.

"Do me a favor, hon. Take a couple of pictures of the vic. Call this Caroline Brooks and see what she can tell us about him."

He looked at his watch. "They're probably closed by now, but I'm going to take a swing at it anyhow. If I can't get through tonight, I'll contact her first thing in the morning." He took back the poly bag and got up from the table. He kissed his wife and headed back to his office.

Carlotta returned to where the bodies were waiting. Years of working around dead bodies had made her somewhat insensitive. But there were exceptions, and this was one of them. There were just so *many*. It helped to focus on the *damage* and not on the *faces*. As she did, an odd pattern started to emerge. In addition to body trauma, several of the vics had suffered damage to the left sides of their heads, as if something within their skulls had burst outward.

Then it hit her – that homeless man who'd tried robbing a bank several weeks back! The left side of his head had suffered the same damage ... and she'd never been fully satisfied at what had reported to be the 'official' cause of death.

She grabbed one of her assistants and pulled her back into the cold room. In a very few minutes they'd determined that over 80% of the bodies showed the same type of damage, despite the fact that there was additional damage to them.

She gathered the rest of her assistants together and pointed at the head damage.

"Does everybody see this?"

They all acknowledged her.

"Okay. I want you to start examining all the bodies *without* this damage ... repeat, *without* this damage! Don't worry about the rest of the body, just focus on the head! And please, *please* be careful!"

One of her assistants asked, "Why? What's so special about this?"

She quickly summarized the previous event. "His body had similar damage. It looked as if something within his head had *exploded*."

"Yeah, looks like that here, too!" exclaimed another assistant. "You think the others might have something explosive in their heads?"

"That's why I want you all to be careful."

"Shouldn't we let the FBI know about this?" someone else asked nervously.

"**No!**" Carlotta hissed. "I don't want to generate a panic! Let's keep this to ourselves until we've got concrete proof of anything else. Then – and *only* then – we'll bring 'em in on it! Okay?"

The assistants acknowledged her.

"Then let's get to work!"

\* \* \*

*Wednesday, June 6, 2007  
New York City, New York  
Serenity Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Center  
Early Morning*

"Mornin', Boss!" greeted a young black girl as Carrie entered her office.

"Mornin', Marie!" she returned, stopping at the desk.

As the secretary passed across the messages from overnight, she emphasized one. "You might want to take this one first; it's from Portland. One of our clients was found dead; they found one of our cards on him. They think he might've had somethin' to do with the First Lady's kidnapping." She paused to let that sink in. "They faxed over couple of pictures; I think it was Arthur Trent. Just in case, I pulled his file; it's all together there."

"Ah, you're too good for me, Marie," she hummed.

"I'll remind you of that next time I want a raise," she quipped back with a smile.

Carrie went into her office and closed the door. The message, from an Oswald Dupree, said that they'd found her card in the personal possessions of a man found dead at the scene of the kidnapping. He asked if she could provide any information on the man. One look at the faxed pictures confirmed Marie's suspicions: the man was indeed Arthur Trent. It grieved her to know that, not only was he dead, but that he could've had a connection with yesterday's tragedy. She reviewed the file Marie provided, but it didn't shed any light onto why he might have been involved.

A few minutes later she called Dupree.

"Yes, I know him," she acknowledged. "His name's Arthur Trent. He lived at the Center for a few weeks last winter. Then, one morning, he just left; sometimes that happens. It really wasn't much of a surprise, actually; he just didn't have the determination to stick with the program."

"Do you have any reason to believe why he may have been involved in a crime such as this?"

"No, I don't," she stated.

"Did he have any family, friends, whatever here in Portland – someone he might've stayed with?"

"The only person he might've known is Jack ... Jack Heady. Often we refer clients to his ministry house if they need a local point of reference. Jack's a good friend; let me get you his number." She set down the phone and read off Jack's number from the card in her Rolodex. Dupree thanked

her and they ended the call.

Carrie sat back in her chair and mused on this development.

\* \* \*

As the day progressed and Carrie carried on business as usual, her mind kept coming back to the phone call with Dupree. The more she thought about it, the more disturbed she felt by it. She didn't realize that it was that obvious, especially after so many people asked her if she was okay. It finally took her husband Lloyd, during their regular evening phone call from New York to Iraq, to bring it to her attention.

"I've got to do something about it," she concluded. "I feel like I've got to look into this for myself. It's ... important."

"Okay, hon," he replied. "I know I'd be crazy to try and talk you out of it, so I won't. But, since it could be dangerous, I do have a few words of advice. Don't go alone, and don't go unprepared."

"You sound like my dad," she said, a smile on her face. "And right after he'd say that, he'd tell my brother to keep an eye on me."

"Which brother?"

"Gumball," she answered. She went silent for a moment. "You know, that wouldn't be a bad idea after all. After all, he *is* on the West Coast; maybe I can talk him into helping me."

"I'll pray that he accepts. Just be careful, okay."

Carrie wanted to comment that, being in Iraq, he needed that advice more than she. But she held her tongue. Especially now, he didn't need that frightful reminder.

"Hey, with Gumball, I know I'll be safe."

After finishing her call with Lloyd and looking at the time, she went ahead and called her brother and sister-in-law in Lincoln City. She explained the situation.

"I'm not expecting trouble, but I could use some backup."

After excusing himself and muting the phone for a couple of minutes, he came back on and announced, "Okay, I'm in. What with Bonnie and the kids with the Prez, and the rest of the world waiting on the trial, there's nothing going on here at the moment."

"Good. I'll catch a plane in the morning. I'll let you know as soon as I know the details."

"Okay," he acknowledged.

"Oh, I *do* have one request, if you can bring it with you ..."

\* \* \*

*Thursday, June 7, 2007*



*Portland, Oregon*  
*Portland International Airport*  
*Afternoon*

The weather in Portland was cloudy but mercifully dry; they were sandwiched in between two storm fronts, and the local meteorologists had claimed that they'd have at least three days of dry weather before the next rainfall. As she'd hoped, her brother Clark had been there to meet her when she deplaned.

"Carrie!" called Gumball, waving at her from across the security checkpoint at the end of the concourse.

She made a beeline for him and gave him a hug.

"How was your flight?" he asked.

"Not bad," she shrugged. "Were you able to bring the supplies?"

He nodded. "They're in the rental car."

"Okay. I reserved us a couple of rooms at the Rose City Suites."

"Us?"

"Since I wasn't sure how long I'd be here, and since you're going out of your way to help me, I figured the least I could do is cover your room and board."

"Appreciate it, sis. So what's the game plan?"

"I'm hungry."

"What, they didn't feed you on the plane?" he quipped.

She gave him a sideways glance, and he broke into a laugh. "Okay, I know a few places. You like Chinese?"

Carrie nodded.

"Good. You'll love *Chang's*, then."

\* \* \*

After a late lunch, they checked into the Suites. Carrie had decided to give Jack a call and arrange to meet the next day.

"Yeah, a guy named Dupree called me yesterday and asked me about Artie. Sorry to hear about that. I'm afraid I couldn't shed much light on things. Artie had stayed here for a couple of weeks, then split after he'd gotten a small windfall."

"Windfall? From where?"

"I never found out," he replied. "He never told us. The last I knew, he had been living at one of the homeless camps in town."

"Which one?"

"Don't know. But I'll have something for you in the morning."

"Thanks, Jack. See you tomorrow."

\* \* \*

*Portland, Oregon*  
*Somewhere in the Northwest Industrial Area*  
*Midnight*

A grey tabby strolled silently through the dark neighborhood, stopping to lap at a puddle of water near the curb next to a warehouse. A flash of movement halfway up the block caught his attention, and survival-honed eyes tracked the scurrying of a yummy-looking mouse. Frozen in mid-step, the cat quickly calculated an intercept course and prepared to move.

But then, shattering both the quiet of the evening, and his chances for a mousie Happy Meal, the side door of the warehouse started rising. The tabby quickly scrambled out of the way, barely avoiding a dark van as it rumbled past him and into the street. He thought it was strange that the van's eyes weren't glowing like the other ones that came out after the sun had gone down, but his attention quickly shifted as he remembered the mouse. He tried to locate his late-night snack, but it had unfortunately vanished into the darkness.

\* \* \*

*Friday, June 8, 2007*  
*Portland, Oregon*  
*Ministry House*  
*Morning*

Jack Heady spread out a city map across a section of the large dining room table. On top of it, he placed a carefully-unfolded set of papers.

"This document," he explained conspiratorially, "would be worth a *fortune* to anybody living on the streets. It lists homeless camps, places to eat, shelters, and just about every other place of interest to a transient. Just circle 'em on this map, and go for it."

"You're a genius, Jack!" smiled Carrie, giving him a hug.

"Are you gonna wear those clothes when you go lookin'?"

Gumball looked down at what he was wearing. "What's wrong with it?" he asked.

"They'll spot you as a phony in a heartbeat," countered Jack.

Carrie smirked. "But you can take care of it."

"I might have something."

\* \* \*

Two hours later, Carrie and Gumball were Chuck and Gladys Bryson, Their cover story was that they had come from Austin, Texas in search of work, but finding none. Hauling around a couple of well-worn Army duffle bags, they took to the streets.

Underneath their clothing, they wore special vests that had owed their origins to Doc Savage, himself.

Doc had long been known for his caution against personal attacks, his affinity for gadgets, and his zeal for being prepared for every possible contingency. To this end, he used to wear a leather vest with multiple pockets loaded with gadgets – a possible predecessor to Batman's utility belt. It would fit close to his body underneath his clothes, occasionally weighed several pounds, and was sometimes more problem than it was worth.

In contrast, the vests that Carrie and Gumball now wore under their clothes were smaller and more form-fitting, made of modern, lightweight, breathable materials. They didn't carry as many gadgets as Doc's, but they did have one item that was essential to Carrie's plans. It was a truth drug called Verity-3, and it was very good at what it did.

\* \* \*

As they went from location to location, they began to piece together a puzzle.

It was true that the number of homeless in the city had dropped considerably over the past few months. One thing kept coming up in conversation: a man and a woman. Dressed in black suits and driving a dark van, they spread around a lot of money. And the homeless went with them to ... somewhere.

\* \* \*

Carrie and Gumball were having a bowl of vegetable soup and a couple of thick peanut butter sandwiches in the basement of a church when the news broke in over the music.

"They rescued the First Lady!"

The news elicited cheers among a handful of fellow transients. As they continued to eat, details of the rescue came out. The FBI had received an anonymous tip and had launched a dawn raid on a lakeside cabin in Southern Oregon.

"They got the lot of them," one man broadcast. "Wasted all the kidnapers."

"Good for them! Those <bleep> masquerading as transients ... gave us a bad name."

"What about the First Lady?" somebody asked. "Is she okay?"

"She's fine," someone else reported. "Came out of it with only a flesh wound – a small cut to her head."

"Thank God," muttered Carrie. "That's over."

\* \* \*

Their first day was interesting, but didn't get them closer to their objective. They returned to their motel and decided to start fresh in the morning.

\* \* \*

*Saturday, June 9, 2007*

*Late morning*

At a homeless camp near the industrial area of town, they caught up with the Pied Pipers.

The dark van entering the camp immediately became the center of attention, but only a handful of onlookers ventured closer. The man and the woman who climbed out of the cab were in their early 30's. With their dark suits and plain sunglasses, they looked like *Men in Black* extras. They stood like silent wraiths for several moments until they saw that their audience wasn't going to get any larger. Then they removed their sunglasses and announced themselves.

"Good afternoon! I'm Steven, and this is Diane. We work for *The Bellerio Group*, a scientific research laboratory. We're conducting a study of sleeping patterns, and we're looking for volunteers. Anyone who participates will be well paid, as well as provided with room and board."

Diane smiled, pulled out a wad of cash, and waved it for all to see. "**Well** paid."

"Bingo," Carrie whispered to her brother. "Did you notice that the van has no markings?"

"And the numbers on the plates have been altered with paint," Gumball added. "The threes in the number have been turned into eights."

They continued to watch as people came and went – more went than came; after twenty minutes, only two men had accepted their offer. Steven took another look at his watch and dropped his half-smoked cigarette to the ground.

"They're going to head out," Carrie observed, anxiously. "Can you get in close enough to plant a tracker?"

He reached inside his shirt, to his vest. "Only if you can distract them."

"I've got a better idea!" Carrie suddenly got an odd grin on her face. "Follow me – I'll get you inside!"

"*Carrie!*" he loudly hissed as he tried reaching out to grab her, but she'd already gone too far. He kept hidden as she closed the distance between him and their target.

"**All right!**" she exclaimed happily at the couple. "You haven't left yet! You got room for one more?"

"Sure do," smiled Steven. "What's your name, ma'am?"

"Gladys ... Gladys Bryson."

Diane closed the distance and extended her hand. "Well, it's good to have you join us, Gladys. Do you have any bags?"

Carrie shook her head. "Naw, they're in the lockers at the Greyhound station; I can get 'em anytime."

"Well, it looks like it's just us then. Climb in, Gladys."

Carrie climbed into the back of the van next to the other two men. Diane closed the door, then joined Steven in the cab. As they drove away, Carrie gave her brother a quick glance and a smile before they were gone.

Gumball grunted. "God, just keep her safe, *please?*" he prayed as he jogged back to the rental. Once inside, he activated the PDA-sized locator unit for the trackers they brought with them. Much to his relief, hers gave off with low pulsing tones. "Okay, sis, here I come!"

\* \* \*

He followed the signal to a deserted warehouse near the waterfront, and proceeded to circle the building.

What was left of the lettering on the front of the building identified it as TRANSFAC, INC., but it was obvious that the place had been deserted for quite some time. Broken windows were sandwiched between faded sheets of plywood on the inside, and rusting iron bars on the outside. The dull grey paint on the outside was streaked with dirty rain, and the walls were cracked, pitted, and defaced by rival gang graffiti and bullet holes.

She said she'd let him in. *Where was she?*

The locator said that his sister's signal was coming from inside a building that looked as if it hadn't been occupied for twenty years. And despite his faith that God was watching over them both, fear began to mount up within him. He could picture the two people from the van discovering who she was ... putting her tracker here to throw off any pursuers ... and his sister's fate anybody's guess.

"*Where are you?*" he growled.

Then he saw it.

As he passed the garage door on the eastern side of the building, his eye caught lines of dirt leading under the door, and his heart leapt within his chest.

Tire tracks.

Since there was no way tire tracks could've survived years of Oregon rain, they *had* to have been made recently.

And that meant *somebody* was inside.

"Thank you," he muttered in prayer. "Okay, where's her signal?"

He continued around the building to the south side. Behind the graffiti the worn sign on the garage door said DELIVERIES ONLY; a man-sized door was next to it. His foot suddenly eased on the brakes, and he looked over at it. Two seconds later the smaller door opened just enough to allow his sister's head to emerge. She smiled, and gestured for him to park the car and join her. Gumball quickly complied, then jogged back and slipped in behind his sister.

One look confirmed the obvious, that the decrepit outside of the building had been just a clever façade for a fully-operational warehouse. Pallets of crates were stacked around them. A large open cargo elevator was off to the right and ahead, with a set of open stairs leading up to the next floor. Off to their left, behind the garage door where he'd seen the tire treads, was a parking area; a nondescript sedan and a white pickup truck were parked next to the familiar dark van.

And standing next to the dark van were Steven, Diane, and two other men. None of them moved, which – having seen what Verity-3 could do – didn't surprise Gumball. As Carrie led the way to the van, she made the introductions. "You already know Steven and Diane. The guys are Joe and Blackie."

When she got close enough, she told the human statues, "Everyone, this is Chuck. He rode in with us. Got it?"

They woodenly acknowledged her.

"Sis," Gumball said. "It's obvious that something shady's going on here. Why don't we just call Mitch and have him send in the troops?"

"Because I want to know *more*," Carrie said soberly. "Are you with me?"

He knew he could never talk her out of anything, especially when her mind had been made up. So he conceded. "So what have you found out?"

"Not much. They really do believe they work for a business called *The Bellerio Group*. Jack and Jill here take the van out two, three times a day. They canvass the homeless camps, flash the cash and make their spiel, and bring back those who take the bait. They take the newcomers upstairs to a place called Registration, then return to their quarters until the next run."

"Okay," he acknowledged.

She turned back to the mesmerized foursome. "Okay, gang! Breaktime's over! You'll wake up now and continue as if nothing had happened!"

They shook their heads as if emerging from a daydream. Steven glanced around as if getting his bearings. "If you would please follow me," he said with a plastic smile, "we'll go upstairs and get you registered."

Diane brought up the rear as they went up the stairs and turned left down what seemed to be a central corridor. Signs hung from the ceiling panels, identifying areas and rooms. They went into a doorless room marked REGISTRATION. A woman behind a central desk stood and smiled at the group.

"Hi!" she beamed. "My name's Regina, and I'll be taking down your personal information for our records. Then you'll be escorted to the shower rooms for changing."

"We gotta take a *shower*?" groused Blackie.

Regina's expression was apologetic. "Board of Heath regulations. Besides, once you've changed, we'll take you to the Recreation Area, and that'll more than make up for any inconvenience." She gave them all a disarming smile. "So who's first?"

Joe stepped forward first; he took a seat next to Regina's desk. The rest of them sat around the room or just stood. Carrie noticed that the interview questions seemed to be standard, but there were a lot of questions relating to outside attachments; it seemed very important that each of the volunteers didn't have any immediate next of kin.

The room's décor was relatively neutral, with framed landscape prints on the walls. But there was nothing, not even a brochure, which elaborated upon the mysterious *Belleró Group* sponsoring this alleged study. As Joe and Blackie finished with their interview, they were escorted out of the office by an attractive young lady named Judy.

Carrie was next. As she took a seat, she gave Regina a quick spray from her palmed Verity-3; the other woman's eyes glazed over almost instantly. Gumball hung around the door acting as lookout while his sister interrogated her.

"Regina," Carrie asked softly but intently. "Do you remember a man named Arthur Trent?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Did he come through here?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what happened to him?"

"No. Once they leave here, I never hear about them again."

Carrie paused. "Okay, thanks. Now, pay attention. When he and I go to the showers, we'll go together. If anyone asks you, it's because we're married and I didn't want to be separated. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Married?" echoed Gumball with a tint of sarcasm.

Carrie ignored him. "Regina, you'll wake up now and finish the interviews. Wake up!"

Regina's eyes blinked as she came out of the trance, and she continued where she had left off.

The interviews concluded, Judy escorted the two of them down the hall to a shower room near what appeared to be living quarters. The shower stalls were simple, separated by movable privacy walls. They had no problem keeping their vests with them as they showered and changed into terrycloth robes and sandals.

This time, they were escorted by a middle-aged black man named Scott. He took them back the way they had come, down the central corridor, past the stairs and cargo elevator towards the south side of the building. The corridor turned to the left and continued into a dead-end. More signs hung from the ceiling: SPORTS ROOM, TELEVISION ROOM, MUSIC ROOM, SMOKING ROOM, BUFFET ROOM, and others.

"These used to be offices," explained Scott. "But now it's the rec area. As you can see, our goal here is to make your stay as pleasant as possible, and we've spared no expense in accomplishing that."

"Smoking room'?" asked Gumball.

He nodded. "Smoking *is* allowed; in fact, *all* smoking material is provided. The only thing we ask is that you confine your smoking *to* the smoking room." He smiled. "Someone will be by soon to take you to Processing. In the meantime, enjoy yourselves!"

"Processing?" asked Carrie.

"Since the study involves measuring your physical and mental reactions to sleep, we need an idea of where your baseline is. Processing will determine that."

He gave them another smile and walked away.

Carrie and Gumball looked at each other.

"Too good to be true," intoned Gumball dubiously.

"Who would want to leave?" added Carrie. "They have everything they could possibly want."

"Well, I think I'm going to check out the Buffet Room. What about you?"

She shook her head absently. "I think I'll just wander around." She placed a hand on his arm. "Be cautious, though; the food could be drugged."

"Will do," he acknowledged, and walked down the hall and into the Buffet Room.

Carrie stood alone in the corridor, waiting on God's direction. Then she turned and followed her brother's example.

In the center of the room were four large rectangular tables piled with all manner of food and drink. Gumball stood next to Joe and Blackie, joining them in what appeared to be a feeding frenzy. Carrie sighed; she got the image of lambs being set up to be slaughtered, as the two homeless men piled food on their plates and stuffed food into the pockets of their robes for later.

It didn't appear as if the food was having any adverse effects on the others, so she cautiously went over and put a few of the sweeter temptations on a small plastic plate. Her first nibbles were slow and paranoid, her nose and taste buds suspicious of *anything* out of the ordinary. She moved next to the wall, munching and observing.

The room was small and cozy, almost like a lounge. She noticed that light jazz filtered in from the



ceiling. People sat at small tables, in simple metal chairs, and visited while they ate and drank. It was all friendly and civil ... very respectful. Perfectly normal behavior.

*Perfectly normal behavior?* her mind echoed. *Wait a minute!*

It hit her trained psychologist's mind like a wall of bricks.

Carrie saw perfectly normal behavior, all right, but normal if they were a group of middle-class suburbanites. But these people weren't middle-class suburbanites – they had recently been taken from the ranks of the homeless and indigent. Some of the very people she was looking at could have been living on the streets for years ... possibly involved in drugs, alcohol, or other substance abuse. And it was a safe bet to say they'd spent a fair portion of their lives on the streets doing everything they could do in order to survive.

In short, they *all* should've been acting like Joe and Blackie – but they weren't!

She could understand if these people had been here for some time, and had developed new patterns of behavior to replace the old ones. But there could've been people in this very room who had been homeless only a couple of days ago. And that's what finally smacked Carrie in the face.

With the exception of a few radical cases, you simply can't change old ways of survival – dog-eat-dog intense self-preservation – overnight. Joe and Blackie were being greedy and selfish, which was perfectly understandable. Despite what they had been told, and even what they saw with their own eyes, they had no guarantee that these people would take care of their every need. And because they didn't have that guarantee, they saw no reason not to continue doing what they would do if placed in range of a lot of food: actively surviving.

The others, however, seemed perfectly content in their environment. Fat and happy. And *that's* what didn't make sense.

Her mind went back to Arthur Trent. He'd been a part of the group who kidnapped the First Lady. He had also been here, in this building, more than likely in this very room. From just the short time she knew him all her instincts told her he couldn't have done something like this of his own volition. He *had* to have been coerced ... or controlled.

These people had to have been subjected to some form of mind control! She looked down at her food, wondering. If she could have a substance like Verity-3 – which wasn't detectable and could technically be used for mind control – then was *anything* really safe?

She had to tell her brother!

She looked around for Gumball, but he wasn't in sight. Rushing into the hallway, she saw him being escorted away from there, led by a man in medical garb.

"Hey!" she called after them. "Where are you taking him?"

The med tech answered, "Processing, ma'am." He didn't wait for her to respond, but continued down the hall back in the direction of the north side of the building. Gumball gave her a brief pleading look, but didn't resist.

Not trying to look like she was in pursuit, Carrie followed them.

\* \* \*

As he and the med tech entered an ominous area called *Red Section*, Gumball knew his sister was not far behind him. In order to give both a trail of verbal bread crumbs and to pass on whatever information he could as to where they were heading, he raised his voice and asked the med tech questions as to where they were going, what was going to happen, and so on.

"There's no need to raise your voice, sir," the tech complained.

"Sorry, sonny, but I'm a bit *deef*," he countered, not lowering his voice. "I used to work around heavy machinery."

They turned and went down a narrow set of stairs. At the bottom of the stairs was a hallway with several doors branching off of it, and one door at the end.

"What are all these doors for?" asked Gumball loudly.

"They're examination rooms, sir," the tech replied patiently.

"Which one's mine?"

"It's up ahead, sir," the tech replied patiently.

The med tech turned the knob on one of the rooms. Gumball was anxious; he'd lost track of where his sister was. He needed a way to let her know which door they'd gone into. Just then he realized he had followed Joe and Blackie's examples, and had pocketed some snacks for later. Covertly he reached into his pocket, withdrew an individually-wrapped Twinkie, and dropped it next to the door as he followed the tech inside.

\* \* \*

Carrie had been delayed by a worker in the hallway asking where she was going. She explained that she had a 'medical condition' and needed to use the restroom in a hurry. The worker gave her directions, and moved on. She hesitated at the door to *Red Section*, then tested the door. To her amazement, it wasn't locked! But then she understood. If everybody who didn't have a need to be in Red Sector was more-or-less mesmerized, it would be natural to plant a command making *Red Section* off-limits. Why need locks?

Carrie picked up the trail and headed down the narrow set of stairs. When she first saw the empty hallway with all the doors, she groaned. But then her eyes noticed the golden yellow delight, and she smiled. "Way t'go, Hansel," she said under her breath.

\* \* \*

"NO!"

Gumball was outnumbered, but he was giving his best impression of a 2-year-old having a temper tantrum.

"Please, sir," begged a young woman in medical greens. "We need for you to lie back on the table and relax!"

"I ain't gonna let you stick me with that needle!" Gumball growled, feigning terror. "I hate needles!"

"It'll only take a moment, sir!" tiredly argued the med tech who'd escorted Gumball to this room. "It won't hurt, I promise!"

Just then, the door opened and Carrie came in. Inwardly, Gumball gave a sigh of relief.

"You're not allowed in here, ma'am!" the med tech explained.

Without hesitation, Carrie moved straight in, the canister of Verity-3 held at arm's length. As she hit the med tech full in the face, Gumball held his breath and reached in for his own canister of the truth drug. A moment later he caught the female assistant as she turned her head back in confusion at all the chaos around her.

Carrie closed the door, and both of them exhaled simultaneously.

She tossed him the Twinkie. "Nice touch, brother."

"It was all I had," he shrugged. He looked at it, then unwrapped it and broke it in half; he handed half to his sister as he raised it as if making a toast. "*Cheers.*"

Carrie explained her observations in the rec area. "They're not behaving like they should be. So it's gotta be some kind of mind control." She looked at her half of the Twinkie and took a bite. "At least we know the food's not drugged. So let's find out what's going on here." She spoke to the med techs: "Okay, you two. Let's start off with your names."

"Victor Harkness."

"Rosemary Carville."

"Good," she acknowledged. "So what would you have done to this guy if I hadn't interrupted your little operation?"

"I would've sedated him," explained Rosemary.

"Once he was unconscious, I would've made an incision on the side of his head, *here.*" He pointed to a spot on the left side of his own head. "Using a special instrument, I would've removed a small section of skull bone."

"I," continued Rosemary, "would have handed him the Doc Savage Chip, and he would've carefully inserted it next to the brain."

"Once making sure the chip was operational, I would've replaced the bone fragment and fused it together with the rest of the skull with cyanoacrylate adhesive and then suture up the scalp in such a way that there would be minimal scar tissue. You'd be transferred to a post-op room for recovery."

"Excuse me," interrupted Carrie. "But what did you call the chip?"

"The 'Doc Savage Chip'," Rosemary answered in a monotone.

"And why did you call it that?" asked Gumball.

"Because it is an advanced version of the chip Doc Savage used in the Crime College."

Carrie and Gumball stood dumbfounded.

"How do you know about the Crime College?" Carrie asked. "And how did you get the chip?"

"William Sloan explained it," answered Victor. "And Robert Sloan provided the chip."

"And this chip was developed from that one?"

"Yes."

"Is this a mind control device?"

"Yes."

"And does everybody around here have one of those things in their heads?" asked Gumball.

"All but the Sloans," answered Rosemary.

"Do you have a chip in *your* head?" Carrie followed up.

"Yes," Victor nodded.

"Show me."

Victor bent down and moved aside some of his brown hair. They saw a very thin scar about an inch in length.

"Victor, you said Robert Sloan?" asked Gumball.

"Yes."

"Is he here, in this building?"

"Yes."

"*Oh, Lord!*" he exclaimed with dread. "Sis, Robert Sloan's the name of the guy who put Doc into suspended animation! We need to get this information of Mitch *now!*"

"Hang on a second!" Carrie responded, holding up an index finger. "Victor, was Robert Sloan behind the kidnapping of the First Lady?"

"Yes," he answered.

"But she was rescued this morning," Carrie muttered to herself. "Was her rescue ... arranged?"

"Yes."

"*The Manchurian Candidate!*" exclaimed Gumball, now rapidly asking questions. "Victor, does the First Lady have one of these chips in her head?"

"Yes."

"Has she been ... programmed?"

"Yes."

"*What* has she been programmed to do?"

"She has been programmed to kill the President of the United States."

His monotone made the words more shocking.

A few moments later, Carrie's voice lowered to almost a whisper as she asked, "What will happen to the First Lady after she kills the President?"

"She will die."

"*How?*" hissed Gumball.

Victor's reply was as cold as ice. "Each chip contains a minute amount of explosive. Since the chip is next to the brain, when the explosive is triggered, the host is killed."

\* \* \*

Eight minutes later, dressed in clothing hastily procured from the warehouse's stores, Carrie and Gumball were out of the building and running for where their rental car was parked. Gumball took the lead so he could unlock the doors, while Carrie dialed Mitch Drake's number.

"Yes, Carrie," he greeted. "What's up?"

"***Shut up and listen!*** You've got to warn the President! There's an electronic chip in the First Lady's head, and she's been programmed to kill him!"

"What?" he exclaimed. "What are you talking about?"

Carrie lowered the tone of her voice. "Mitch, the whole kidnapping was a setup! An electronic chip has been planted in the First Lady's head, and she's gonna kill him!"

Gumball yelled in the direction of the phone. "Mitch, it's *The Manchurian Candidate!*"

That elicited a heartbeat of silence on the other end, followed by an excited, "***Hold on!***"

Carrie pressed the button to put the cell on speakerphone. "Let's just pray it's in time!"

And pray they did, until Mitch came back on the line.

"Okay, I've got a call in to the White House! Where are you?"

"Portland," answered Carrie. "Mitch, Robert Sloan is here! He's behind it all!"

"Great Scott!" Mitch exclaimed. "Do you know where he is right now?"

"He's in a supposedly abandoned warehouse in the Industrial Area. I've got two GPS trackers in the building, and another on one of their vehicles. I can give you a visual if you can hold on for a minute – will that do?"

"And then some," Mitch replied. "Are you two safe?"

"Yes," Carrie answered for them both. "Mitch, the mind control chips ... they're based on what Doc used at the Crime College."

Gumball added, "They upgraded Doc's design. And the new ones have a self-destruct charge, so they can kill the hosts after they've done their dirty work."

"Okay! Stay close – I'll be in touch!"

He disconnected, and Carrie closed the phone. They both let out a sigh of relief and a breathless, "Thank You, God!"

"Should we keep watch on the place, just in case they try t' bug out?" Gumball asked.

"Yeah," Carrie agreed.

His voice lowered. "Sis ... thanks for rescuing me back there."

She placed a hand on his arm and gave him a warm smile. "Hey, how many times have you done the same for me? It's okay. I just hope we got the news to them in time."

\* \* \*

Mitch picked up the phone the instant it buzzed. "Mr. President?"

"Yes, Mitch, what is it?"

"Mr. President, I have reason to believe that the First Lady has been subjected to some sort of mind control!"

"My God – how did you know?" he gasped. "Laura just went crazy all of a sudden ... she tried to kill me! She wounded one of my detail before they were able to restrain her!"

"Mr. President, you've got to get her to a place shielded from all electronic signals! She's got an electronic chip in her head with a self-destruct charge!"

The President didn't acknowledge him, but Mitch could hear him giving orders in the background.

After a few minutes, he got back on the phone. "Mitch?"

"Yes, sir!"

"They're taking her down to the shelter. That'll be safe enough."

"How's she doing?"

"She's sedated. How do we get this electronic chip out?"

"I think I have an idea, but I'm going to need your help ..."

\* \* \*

*Saturday, June 9, 2007  
Kennebunkport, Maine  
The Bush Compound  
Afternoon*

Even before they heard the helicopter flying in for a landing, they knew it. The Secret Service had alerted them to it almost a half hour before he arrived.

They were all there when *Marine One* touched down and the stairs were lowered, but they knew the President was here for only one person: Clark. The look on the President's face was grim as he stepped down and approached Clark.

"Walk with me," he said soberly, and they went off together.

"You know," the President started. "Daddy had all your adventures from the pulp novels. And he used'ta tell me all about you ... including the mission you guys went on during World War Two. So it's an honor to finally meet you in the flesh. I'm just sorry it has to be under these circumstances."

"Same here, sir," Clark agreed. "Mitch Drake informed me of the chip in the First Lady's head. I can't believe the man who had me put into suspended animation is behind all this. What can I do for you?"

"I've got thousands of neurosurgeons at my fingertips who could probably remove the chip from Laura, but you have more experience with this particular item than all of them put together. In short, Doc, you're the only man on the face of the earth who I trust with safely removing that chip from my wife."

"But, Mr. President, You said the chip had been modified; it's *not* the same one I used to work with. And I haven't performed surgery in years!"

He stopped and faced Clark. "That doesn't matter! Doc, you *know* this device, despite what they've done with it – you know how to put it in, and you know how to take it out!" He looked down at the ground and spoke soberly. "Is it true that you're a Christian now?"

Clark didn't hesitate. "Yes, sir, it is."

He looked up at Clark, his expression softened. "Then that makes us brothers in Christ." His voice cracked with emotion. "Doc, she's my wife! I have faith in your experience! And I have faith that God can do this through you!"

Clark took a deep breath. "Then I can't refuse."

The President sighed and smiled. "I was hopin' you'd say that."

\* \* \*

The two of them headed towards *Marine One*. The President turned back to the house and called out, "Daddy, we're leavin'!"

Clark noticed Monk, Johnny, and Renny standing together and watching him. "Could you give me a moment, sir?"

The President looked back, nodded, then continued to the chopper. "Rev 'er up, Matt!"

The rotor blades slowly started moving.

Clark briefly summarized the situation to his three teammates. Then his voice lowered. "Guys, I don't know if I can do this. I haven't touched a scalpel in decades. And one mistake could cost the First Lady her life."

Johnny moved forward. "Doc," he spoke with intensity. "This is from God to you. You're the only man alive who can do this. You're as comfortable around this as I am around an archaeological dig, or Monk around chemicals, or Renny and buildings. And you're here so God can be glorified."

"What he said," agreed Monk.

Renny added, "Now get your butt on that chopper and just *do it* – in faith." He smiled. "God'll take care of the details."

Clark smiled. "Okay. Spread the word." He turned and jogged to *Marine One*. The door was closed and they were airborne within a minute.

\* \* \*

On the flight over, they radioed ahead and ordered that the First Lady be prepped for surgery. Clark instructed them to take several x-rays of the head so he'd know where to operate.

It was raining in Washington DC, which was providential for Clark and the President, who climbed down from *Marine One* under cover of some wide umbrellas and hurried inside. They proceeded straight for the underground shelter.

With a supporting surgical team at his disposal, Clark scrubbed up and stepped into the makeshift operating theater. He stood next to the table where the First Lady was sedated and prepped. He looked up at the masked faces of his team, then down at the First Lady's face. He took a deep breath and gently placed his hands on her arm.



"Dear God," he prayed aloud. "You are the Great Physician. I am merely your instrument. Guide me in your grace and your wisdom. Thank you. Your will be done. In Jesus' name I pray, amen."

His sharp ears picked up some of his team echoing his amen, which strengthened him.

He opened his hand. "Scalpel."

\* \* \*

One hour and forty-seven minutes later the operation was over.

The President was standing outside the operating theater, pacing the floor as two of the support team came out.

"I've never seen skill like that!" one said to the other. "It was incredible!"

Clark came out a minute later, pulled down his mask, and smiled. "The chip is in a steel box; if it goes off now, no one will be harmed by it."

"And Laura?"

"Sleeping. She'll probably have a headache when she wakes up, but she'll be just fine."

In a moment of elation, the President wrapped Clark up in a tearful bear hug. "Thank you!"

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE**

*Sunday, June 10, 2007*

*Portland, Oregon*

*Somewhere in the Northwest Industrial Area*

*Morning*

"With the information provided by Carrie and Gumball, we easily located the headquarters of the villain," Drake explained to us as we secretly watched the dilapidated warehouse. "The only activity was a dark van coming and going a couple of times; from the description, it was the same one that went around 'recruiting' transients. We didn't do anything to stop them. We've got a team of Federal agents in place, just waiting for the go-ahead."

Clark spoke up. "Before you do, Mitch, I have a personal favor to ask."

And he told us.

\* \* \*

Robert and Bill Sloan were in their home theater, anxiously watching the morning news.

"The President and First Lady made an early-morning appearance in the White House Rose Garden. She expressed her appreciation for all the prayers and thoughts during her recent ordeal, and announced that she was feeling well. In other news —"

*Click.* The television went dark.

"She failed," Bill Sloan darkly stated the obvious.

"And apparently so did our remote detonator," added Robert Sloan. "She lives."

"So what's our next move, Robert?"

But before he could answer, another voice came from behind them. "So *you're* the one," it said casually.

The sound caused the two men to spin about. There he was – *Doc Savage* – standing by the door only a few yards away from them. Robert Sloan reached down to the recessed niche next to the chair and pulled out the hidden .45 automatic. He stood and aimed it in a single, practiced move. The bronze man didn't appear to be concerned about the threat.

"Sweet Tooth' Sloan, I presume?" Clark addressed the older man.

"Yeah," he replied. "How'd you get in here?"

"That doesn't matter," Clark smiled. "I wanted to see you, face-to-face ... and to say *thank you*."

The two men said simultaneously, "What?"

Clark continued. "Have either of you ever read a Bible?"

"Ain't got time for that crap," muttered the older man. The younger one just shook his head.

"Too bad," whispered Clark under his breath. "If you had, then you might be familiar with the story of Joseph and his brothers." He paused, not waiting for them to respond, then continued. "You see, there were once these twelve brothers. One of them, Joseph, was his daddy's pride and joy, which didn't sit well with the rest of them. Well, one day Joseph was showing off this fancy coat his father had given him, when his brothers ganged up on him. They put blood on the coat and told their father that he'd been killed by an animal. But what they really had done was sell their brother into slavery. Pretty nasty, huh?"

Neither man commented, so Clark continued. "Years went by, and Joseph ended up in Egypt where he'd become the king's right-hand man. God had told him a famine was coming, so he was able to build up the food supplies and keep everybody from starving. Well, one day his brothers – not knowing that the guy they were going to was their brother Joseph – showed up at his doorstep, begging for food. Now, what would you do if you suddenly came face-to-face with the people who did had kidnapped you and sold you into slavery?"

The younger man said, "I'd kill em!"

"Yeah, that's what *they* thought he'd do, when they finally found out who he was. They figured they were dead meat. But that's not what happened. Joseph reassured them that he wasn't going to kill them. He told them that what they had intended for evil, God had turned into something good. The whole family would've starved to death if it hadn't been for Joseph being where he was, when he was." He gave them a smile. "And they lived happily ever after."

The pistol never wavered as the older man growled, "So?"

"God used what you did to me, Robert, and gave me a second chance. A lot of good things have happened because of it. I'm not angry at you for what you did. I wanted to say thank you, and tell you that I forgive you."

There was silence. I doubted that Clark's message had gotten through. But it was something that he had to do. Under my aura of invisibility, I was Clark's backup. As the two men looked at each other, I could feel the danger level rising. My thumb jammed down on the Panic Button I held in my hand.

"I don't know what in the Sam Hill you're talking about," said Robert Sloan. "But you're right where I've wanted you. Now you're gonna pay!"

Suddenly the room shook with the force of multiple explosions around us, and the sound of commanding voices booming, "**FEDERAL AGENTS! DROP YOUR WEAPONS!**"

"They're with me," informed the bronze man matter-of-factly. "You might as well give up."

"**NEVER!**" said Robert Sloan, and pulled the trigger.

I'd moved off to one side a few seconds earlier. And Clark – anticipating a reaction like this – spun aside in the nick of time, as the bullet tore into the wall behind him.

Robert Sloan stepped back towards the wall, as if he were retreating. None of us saw him trip a hidden switch on the wall. In the next instant, the room started to fill with blinding white smoke. Putting his free hand on his grandson's back as if to let him know where he was, Sloan suddenly gave him a hard shove in our direction, making him off-balance. Then, concealed by the smoke and confusion, the old man disappeared behind a sliding door in the wall.

Clark caught the younger man in mid-stumble, then moved past him and disappeared into the smoke.

The younger Sloan saw my outline in the smoke, and, charged at it. It took very little effort to intercept him with a left hook and drop him.

Then there was silence.

I tried to hear what was going on with Clark and Sloan, but ... I couldn't hear either of them.

"Clark?" I dared giving myself away. There was no reply.

*Where did they go?* I thought.

\* \* \*

All through Robert Sloan's life, his first rule had always been to look out for Number One – himself. Using his grandson as a diversion, however, was a dirty trick.

*He was expendable. He cleared the way for your escape.*

That was also why he had this escape route built into the warehouse under the pretext of a home theater. As the door to the secret room slid closed behind him, the proximity light glowed just enough to illuminate the area – including the hole in the floor inches away from where Sloan stood. Knowing that he had seconds until the light would go out, he quickly donned the battery-powered head lamp and switched it on. He set the safety on his pistol, jammed it into his waistband, angled the lamp ahead of him, and started down the ladder.

At the bottom of the ladder was the tunnel that would take him within a couple hundred yards of the shack on the docks. In the shack, hidden above the water, was an escape boat containing a cache of money and supplies.

*You'll be safe there.*

He could lower the boat into the water in a matter of seconds, unseen from the shore, and silently cruise north into Washington State.

*And from there, the sky's the limit.*

\* \* \*

Clark had dealt with enough secret passageways to see Sloan's tactic. Even surrounded by smoke, it wasn't hard for him to find the switch that slid open the hidden door. As he took a step into the room, his sharp hearing picked up the sound of feet on a ladder *below him* and he froze in place. When the door closed behind him, and the air starting to clear, his trained eyes were able to pick up the glow from the hole where Sloan disappeared.

"Gotcha," he whispered, a thin smile crossing his lips.

Now that he had Sloan's trail, he wasn't going to let him get away.

He started descending.

\* \* \*

The light from Sloan's head lamp illuminated the small scooter at the bottom of the ladder. Starting up the electric motor, he turned his head to illuminate the long tunnel before him; he was pleased that the tunnel appeared to be clear.

Suddenly his ears caught a noise from above.

*It's Savage.*

He reached over to the first of two items duct-taped to the wall: a remote control box that would make sure the Zodiac boat in his escape shack was inflated and ready for him. He pressed the button.

Then he pulled the pin from the second item attached to the wall – a grenade – and tossed it as far down the tunnel as he could.

Sloan smiled and whispered, "Catch me if you can."

Then he tightly gripped the scooters' handlebars, jammed his foot down on the accelerator, and sped down the tunnel.

\* \* \*

I had twelve minutes until I became visible. I went to the only person who wouldn't be surprised by an invisible man.

*"Mitch."*

The black man looked up. "Perry?"

"The grandson is in the home theater room on the first floor; he's out cold. Sloan slipped out through a secret panel, and Clark went after him."

"I'll send a couple of men –"

Suddenly we felt a shudder below our feet. "Mitch?"

"Not one of ours."

Just then I remembered the transceiver. I reached up to my ear and called out, "CLARK, TALK TO ME!!"

"No need to yell," I heard in my ear; he was breathing heavily. "I'm okay!"

"We're coming after you!"

"Can't," he replied. "The blast closed off your end of the tunnel!"

"What direction is he heading in?" asked Mitch. I relayed the question to Clark.

"Don't know." It sounded like he was running now. "Can you track me?"

I got the point. "Mitch! Can you track his transceiver signal?"

"**Yes!**" the black man exclaimed, pulling a device from a pocket. After a few adjustments he announced, "You're heading towards the river!"

I relayed the information.

"Sloan's ahead of me!" Clark exclaimed. "Cut him off!"

\* \* \*

Sloan stopped at the end of the tunnel. Another ladder, a shorter one, went up towards street level.

He was almost home free.

**"SLOAN!"**

Sloan whirled around in shock, muttering several profanities. Then he heard the rapid footsteps advancing on him. He drew the .45 automatic and fired a couple of shots into the darkness. The footsteps didn't stop.

He had to escape!

He scrambled up the ladder. However, in his haste, he neglected to remember that he was coming from semi-darkness into daylight. Temporarily blinded, he shielded his eyes as he headed in the direction of the shack.

He had gotten only a few yards when two police cruisers appeared ahead of him, cutting him off. Sloan cursed and looked around. Seeing the park, he made a break for it, hoping to lose himself in the foliage. But as they had before, more police vehicles pulled around the corner and directly into his path!

He cursed again. His eyes had become used to the daylight, so he quickly looked around for a way out. Behind him, Savage was just emerging from the tunnel exit; he thought of taking a stand and opening fire on Savage, hoping to kill him before being caught.

Just then, his eyes caught the barrel-like tanks of a propane storage facility. "Yes," he said to himself, and headed towards them as fast as he could run.

\* \* \*

I was visible now. Mitch and I had followed Clark's transceiver signal to the tunnel's exit, and had both men in our sights. Clark ran over to join us.

"He's armed," Clark informed us. "But he's almost out of ammunition."

"He knows we can't fire at him while he's near those propane tanks," Mitch explained. "But we *can* surround him and wait him out."

We took off in pursuit.

\* \* \*

Sloan knew they wouldn't dare shoot at him while he was around these tanks. He also knew he had to get them off his trail so he could continue to his getaway shack.

*You won't be able to make it. They'll get you first.*

"What can I do?" he asked.

*The tanks.*

As he looked up at the nearest tank, something clicked in his memory: a scene from a movie. As he reached the foot of the stairs that wound around the outside of the tank to the platform at the top, an odd laugh grew from deep within him.

Robert Sloan scrambled up the stairs.

\* \* \*

"What's he doing?" I asked. "It's a dead end. There's nowhere he can go."

"That may not be his intent," Clark said under his breath.

I looked over at him, then up at Sloan.

"No," I whispered with dread.

\* \* \*

Despite all the physical exertion he'd undergone, Robert Sloan felt amazingly relaxed. He took the last few steps unhurried, almost as if he were walking to a scenic viewpoint. He held the .45 automatic loosely in his hand; he even tried spinning it around his finger like a Western six-shooter. He reached the top and looked back at the armed troops surrounding the tank. They looked so *tense*, so ... *professional*.

He removed the automatic's clip; there was only one bullet remaining. He replaced the clip and chambered the round. Then he laughed.

*You won't let yourself be captured.*

"Of course not," he said aloud.

*If they capture you, they'll put you back into that cold hibernation chamber.*

"You're right," he replied. "They'll never take me alive!"

He threw his arms back and cried out to the heavens, "**TOP O'THE WORLD, MA! TOP O'THE WORLD!**"

*Good boy.*

\* \* \*

Anybody who was the least familiar with the movie *White Heat* knew what Sloan was capable of doing.

"**All troops!**" Mitch yelled into his communicator. "**Fall back! Fall back! Fall back!**"

"If he blows up the tank," Clark said as we swiftly backed away, "it'll cause a chain reaction that'll kill thousands!"

"What can we do?" I asked.

"Look, controls!" Clark pointed to a panel several yards away. "If I can shift some of the propane to other tanks, it could lessen the damage!"

Then he was running.

I started going after him, but Mitch put a death grip on my arm. "No, Perry! If anybody can do it, **he** can! All we can do now is **pray!**"

He was right. As we ran away from the center of the action, I prayed fiercely for Clark's success.

\* \* \*

Sloan saw the bronze man running in his direction.

*Here he comes. When you blow up the tank, you'll take him with you.*

"Oh, **yes!**" he said aloud, a wide grin on his face. "This is **wonderful!**"

\* \* \*

Clark reached the controls. He didn't know exactly how he would accomplish this, but since God had given him the ability to remove the First Lady's chip, he knew God would give him the wisdom in these circumstances. Then he understood. Working swiftly, he made the adjustments, and the propane began shifting into some of the other tanks. Waiting a moment to make sure things were going smoothly, Clark turned around and sprinted away with everything he had.

\* \* \*

*He's getting away!*

Sloan saw Savage running from him, and he gritted his teeth.

"**NO YOU DON'T!**" he yelled, pointing the gun down. "**YOU WON'T GET AWAY!**"

*Shoot! Shoot!*

He pulled the trigger.

\* \* \*

The explosion wasn't as strong as it could've been, but it was enough to singe Clark's back and send him flying into the air. Anticipating the blast, he landed in a tuck-and-roll and brought himself out of it, flat on his face, his arms protectively covering his head. He squeezed his eyes shut and prayed. The roar that filled the air around him made his ears ring.

He felt hands touching him. In the distance, he thought he heard someone calling his name. He felt as if his strength had been drained from him. He opened his eyes as the hands turned him over and placed him on something that felt cool and soothing on his back.

"**Clark!**" It was Perry. "Talk to me, brother! Are you okay?"

He looked up and gave his friend a thin smile. "Ship ... out of danger?"

Perry laughed. "He's fine."



"Transfer ... worked?"

Drake answered this time. "Yes, it did. The tank still exploded, but it didn't spread to the others. You saved them."

"*Saved ...*," he repeated. He hadn't been able to save Sloan.

He started to sit up, but hands gently held him down. "Stay put, Clark! We got paramedics on the way! Let them check you out first!"

He was too weak to move. "Okay ... just ... this ... once." And he smiled.

\* \* \*

Bill Sloan was in handcuffs. As one of Drake's people brought him before Clark and me, he commented, "Doesn't surprise me. *White Heat* was one of his favorite movies. What I can't understand, is why he never told me about the escape route."

"You thought a lot of your grandfather, didn't you?" asked Clark.

He nodded.

"I'm sorry to break this to you, but the scooter he had waiting down in the tunnel was made for only one person, and the explosives were intended to seal the tunnel and kill anyone who tried following him."

"He never intended on taking you with him," I added.

Bill Sloan tried to argue with us, but he the words wouldn't come. His eyes turned from us to the floor. Finally, as his eyes misted over, he squeaked out, "He used me?"

"I'm sorry," Clark sympathized.

He looked at us. With tears in his eyes, he told Clark, "I am, too."

"It's all right," Clark reassured him. "Like I said, God used it for good."

"Could you tell me about that again?" he asked. "I-I wasn't really paying attention the first time."

"I'll be happy to," Clark answered him.

\* \* \*

*Wednesday, June 20, 2007*

*Washington, D.C.*

*The White House*

*Afternoon*

"Excuse me, Mr. President, but Mitch Drake is here to see you," announced the secretary.

The President looked at his watch; he had time before his next appointment. "Sure, Sally – let him

in!"

The door opened and the black man entered. The President rose and greeted him.

"How's Laura, sir?" he asked.

"She keeps apologizing to the agent she wounded. Otherwise, none the worse for wear." His face took on a grin. "So what's so important that it pulled you away from your desk?"

"This," he replied, and held out a manila folder; on the outside was the designation 'THUNDERHEAD' and the notation 'EYES ONLY'.

As the President opened it and started looking through it, the expression on his face went from neutral to one of astonishment. He gravitated towards one of the couches and sat; Drake took a seat nearby.

"Mitch, is this *true*?" he finally asked.

"Yes, sir, it is. General Umberto Kananga had released over a hundred small floating packages into the ocean currents, where they would eventually wind up in places all across the United States. The packages contained all sorts of nasty stuff – some chemical, some biological, some explosive. He had a satellite that would send signals at random intervals to his packages to release their contents. Sir, can you imagine what it would've been like, having them going off in random locations at random times?"

"It would've been absolute chaos."

"Yes, sir," he agreed. "Doc told me at the time that it would've made 9/11 look like a holiday. But they stopped it in time. The satellite was disarmed, and all the packages recovered and disarmed. And it's all due to Doc."

The President glanced at the file and whistled. "Holy God," he muttered, then looked up at Drake. "You want something, Mitch. What is it?"

"A favor, sir," he replied without hesitation. "A little *quiet* Presidential clout. In return for Clark's particular brand of assistance."

The President gave the black man a wry smile. "And I take it you've experienced this 'particular brand of assistance'?"

Drake returned the smile. "A few times, yes."

"I'd like to hear about these 'times', Mitch."

"Whenever you like, sir."

The two men's eyes met. Then the President said, "But first, tell me how *I* can help *you*."

\* \* \*

## **CHAPTER THIRTY**

When the history of *The Trial of Doc Savage* is written, there will be a few details that will never be made public.

\* \* \*

Judge James Houk – following a private conversation with an undisclosed Washington, D.C. politician, announced publically that there was not a strong enough basis to define what Clark Savage, Jr. had done in the Crime College as murder. All the charges were, therefore, dismissed.

\* \* \*

New York District Attorney Carlie Goldsmith and her staff were publicly commended for their actions, despite the fact that they did not win. With their commendations came raises in grade, raises in pay, and other personal perks which were never made public. Although she never was able to identify the anonymous philanthropist who gifted her with a lifetime supply of her favorite cigar, she always had a sneaking suspicion that it was *the preacher*.

All evidence presented by District Attorney Goldsmith was collected by an official of the Department of Justice; subsequently, it ended up in an unnamed archive in Florida.

\* \* \*

Jefferson Davis Frye was made Assistant District Attorney in Butte, Montana. Forced to prosecute white-collar crimes in a city where white-collar crimes were extremely rare, he spent most of his time updating his resume.

\* \* \*

Dr. Owen Lazenby and Dr. Jonathan M'Benga were invited on a personal tour of the Clark Savage Institute by Clark himself. Afterward, they enjoyed the first of many evenings of gourmet meals and reminiscing with their old employer.

\* \* \*

Carl Rockwood a.k.a. Johnny Kidd was referred to the best cancer specialists, where all his expenses were paid by a mysterious humanitarian. However, in spite of this, he passed away three months later in a hospice in Arizona. Many of the hospice staff reported that a tall tanned man would visit him regularly; he would stay for hours, talking with him and reading the Bible to him. Just a few days before his death, he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ, and the tall tanned man was with him when the end came.

\* \* \*

Self-proclaimed metaphysical authority Chandra Sunshine Morningstar was eventually sued by the estate of Theodore Marley "Ham" Brooks for defamation of character. The case was eventually withdrawn, but Morningstar's reputation had suffered a mortal blow. Within a year, his professional life had slipped to hosting a late-night retro-horror movie show on *The Subterranean Network*, and doing Psychic Hotline infomercials in Minneapolis.

\* \* \*

Despite a masterful defense by his lawyer Hamilton Mayfair, William David Sloan was found guilty and sentenced to twenty-eight years at the Sheridan Correctional Institute in Sheridan, Oregon.

His story does not end there.

In a move that some considered to be foolhardy, Doc Savage began regularly visiting the younger man in prison.

"I see a lot of potential in him," he explained during an interview on *Larry King Live*. "Bill spent years trying to figure out how to get his grandfather out of the same type of suspended animation chamber I was imprisoned in. He traveled the world, learning everything he could in order to give himself the advantage. I dare say he understands as much – if not more – about the field as some of the greatest experts in the world. And since much of his misdoings had been primarily due to his grandfather's influence, it was clear that all he needed was a second chance. So I'm giving it to him.

"Take the example of Robert Franklin Stroud, the Birdman of Alcatraz. Despite the fact that he spent the last fifty years of his life behind bars, he made monumental contributions in the field of avian pathology. So here, too, Bill and I have been working on practical applications of suspended animation. I've already seen to it that he receives full credit for any discoveries, and – once he is released – I have guaranteed him a position with the Clark Savage Institute."

"What kind of applications?" inquired King.

"A practical stasis chamber," he replied. "More specifically, something that could be placed aboard ambulances and other emergency vehicles when transporting patients. The biggest risk to accident victims has always been *time* – how many patients have died while being transported from the accident site to the hospital? That risk is greatly compounded when there are special factors to take into consideration, such as distance to the proper facilities, a need for a particular blood type, or if more-urgent patients are currently using those facilities."

"I can relate to that," commented King, lightly touching his chest.

"With a practical stasis chamber," Clark continued, "the patient's life signs are, for all intents and purposes, put on pause. The risk of error due to haste is virtually obliterated; doctors can take all the time they need to correctly diagnose and prepare. When the doctors are ready, the patient will be ready. Transplant recipients could be placed in stasis while a donated organ was in transit. A burn victim in stasis would feel no pain while a proper treatment is prepared and made ready for them."

"And Bill Sloan is working on this?"

Clark smiled. "Yes. I'm providing him with everything he needs, both to continue his education and to assist him in this endeavor. If he succeeds, it will change the face of medicine for centuries."

"I've heard you're sharing *other* things with him as well," probed King.

"Yes. We have had numerous conversations about the Bible, and he seems to be open to the

saving grace of Jesus Christ. It's very encouraging."

\* \* \*

### **RETURNED FROM THE DEAD**

by Barry Massey for the *San Francisco Chronicle*

Many of us remember the Loma Prieta earthquake. It was also known as the Quake of '89 and the World Series Quake. We remember where we were when the 6.9 tremor hit.

Fifty-seven people were killed as a direct result of the quake. The highest concentration of fatalities was when the top deck of the Cypress Street Viaduct on the Nimitz Freeway (Interstate 880) collapsed, instantly crushing 41 people to death in their cars as they were sandwiched between slabs of concrete.

One of the reported fatalities of the collapse of that section of Interstate 880 was John Renwick. Renwick was a local businessman, an engineer and contractor, who had been monumental in the construction of several structures in and around California. Renwick – also known as "Renny" – had also been an associate of 'Doc' Savage, back in the 1930's and 1940's.

When the quake hit, he had been driving to Oakland to look over a worksite. Officials, unable to make a positive ID of the body in the crushed cab due to the damage in the midst of the chaos of the moment, assumed it was Renwick. After all, it was Renwick's truck, and his co-workers said he had been the only one in the truck when they last saw him.

But it wasn't him. En route to the worksite, Renwick had picked up a co-worker, Mark Durant. Durant had been driving so that Renwick could look over some notes on the project.

"We were on the Cypress Structure when the quake hit," Renwick recalled. "At the first tremor, both of us looked overhead. We knew that there could be serious trouble if the overpass came down. I looked for cracks while he tried to find us an off-ramp. When I saw the cracks forming, I knew there wouldn't be time to drive clear. I yelled for him to stop and make a run for it. He yelled to me to grab his jacket; ever since having his wallet fall into a cement mixer, he kept it in his jacket while working on a job. I opened my door, grabbed the jacket, and ran for the edge of the overpass. I looked down at the ground some twenty feet below, then glanced back at the truck. Mark was still there when a slab of concrete landed right on the cab. I always hoped he didn't suffer."

Renwick proceeded to jump from the shaking viaduct to the roof of a semi truck that had stopped nearby, injuring his head and shoulder.

"I rode the truck until it stopped, then climbed off. I looked around to get my bearings, and saw Mark's motel. All I wanted to do was find a place of shelter. And I was starting to feel dizzy. Next thing I know I came to on the floor of Mark's room. I musta headed there, gone in using the key in Mark's jacket – I was still holding onto it – then blacked out. When I came to, it was night. I switched on the TV to see what was going on. The news told about the quake, the collapse of the freeway, and they started giving the names of the dead. And my name was there."

It would've been simple for Renwick to let officials know of the mistake, but he didn't.

Prior to the Senate Hearings during the 1950's, Renwick was part of an elite group of adventurers who fought alongside the great 'Doc' Savage himself. He had traveled the world, experiencing a life that few of us can ever dream of getting close to. But since the hearings, life had pushed him aside. The adventures were ended, and all he could look forward to was the drudgery of day-to-day living. It was quite a let-down. He was envious of his co-worker Durant, who was a freelance engineer. So, when he realized that they had mistaken Durant's body for his own, he gave in to his weaknesses, and pretended he was Mark Durant.

Despite the morbidity of his actions, his was not an unusual choice. Many soldiers have chosen to escape the horrors of war by taking on the identities of their fallen comrades – especially if the dead had no family, or they were scheduled to be sent home. Another example is that of apparent 'victims' of natural disasters, having been reported dead, later discovered to be alive and well. A common rationalization was that the 'deceased' had a desire to escape the responsibilities of their present life, for the promise of a new start.

Taking Durant's own truck, he left the United States, first heading south into Mexico, but eventually traveling the world. He felt like he had been given a new lease on life, but he always feared that his past would catch up to him. He lived this life as a fugitive for many years, until Providence brought him and Savage together again.

He continued the masquerade, but living the lie was taking its toll on him. Finally, after he had seen his own mentor and friend come forth to 'face the music,' Renwick knew he could hide no longer – either from himself or society.

He came to this writer one night several weeks ago, and gave me his confession. He never sugar-coated the facts, nor did he try to justify his actions. He said he was finally able to face his own monsters and make peace with himself.

And what next?

He's done his best to correct the mistakes he made. He set the record straight and has reconciled with Mark Durant's family. He has a home, with neighbors who may be surprised at the changes that have been made. Apart from that, it's anybody's guess.

But whatever does come next, Renny Renwick will meet it with a clean conscience.

\* \* \*

## **EPILOGUE**

In a public ceremony at the White House, three months after the charges had been dismissed, Clark Savage, Jr., Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, William Harper Littlejohn, and John Renwick were formally granted amnesty for all crimes past and present. No more would the Crime College raise its ugly head against them – at least, not in a legal sense.

Doc Savage was a free man.

\* \* \*

"Okay, Doc," moaned Gumball, looking out at the empty sky from the pilot's seat of the Osprey. "Just where is this top-secret project anyway?"

"Keep going," Clark said with a trace of a smirk. "We've still got a ways to go."

"Doc," nudged Monk. "Is this that 'Blue Sun' whatchamacallit you an' Mitch have been yakkin' about?"

"Yes, it is."

"So what's it all about?" asked Pat. "And where're Bonnie and the kids?"

"They're waiting for us," Clark replied over his shoulder.

Even I didn't have a clue why we were all aboard Gumball's Osprey, flying towards an unknown destination. But I had seen the look on Clark's face for the last few months, and saw it now, and I knew he was *very* excited about this Blue Sun thing.

So we sat and looked expectantly out the windows.

Ten minutes later, we all heard something from the cockpit. "*Ho-leeeee cow!*"

We rushed forward to see what had prompted Renny's exclamation.

"*Look!*" he exclaimed.

He didn't have to point for us to see what he had seen.

At first it looked like a short grey shoebox with some bumps on the top, just hanging out there in mid-air like a grey '5' domino. Without any references, we could only guess how big it was. But as we continued towards it, it grew larger and larger in our view.

We were all amazed.

The closer we flew, the more details became visible. There were protrusions or extensions on the rectangular base. But it was the top that made us gasp. Sticking up from the top, at the center, was a large dome, surrounded by four smaller ones. All of the domes were geodesic, giving the appearance of a smooth surface, but in reality comprised of a network of triangular elements.

But what was most fascinating was the color of the large main dome.

It was blue.

"Behold," said Clark, as we all became silent. "The *new* Fortress of Solitude."

"I gotta hand it to ya, Doc," commented Renny, grinning. "You sure know how make an impression."

"Is this where Bonnie and the kids are?" asked Dot.

"Yes," Clark replied. "Gumball, take us around a couple of times ... not *too* fast, please."

"*Riiiiight*," Gumball agreed, dumbfounded.

As we circled this amazing structure, we got a better perspective of its size.

"What's holding it up?" asked Monk.

"Antigravity," provided Clark. "A present from Kal. He said it would be perfectly safe for us, considering."

"Considering *what*?" I asked.

"Considering this is our new headquarters ... and, for those of us who choose to take advantage of it, our home."

"How many people does it hold?" asked Renny, always the engineer.

"Well, there's a rotating crew of 125, and enough room for all of us and our families."

"You want us to move here?" voiced Monk.

"Not if you don't want to," he clarified. "But you'll have a place if you come to visit. And we'll never have to wonder where we can meet."

We finished our third orbit of the structure, and Clark picked up the radio. "Blue Thunder to *Orion*," he said into the microphone. "Prepare for docking."

"*Orion*," repeated Pat. "The name of the schooner where you were born."

"It seemed fitting," Clark replied.

"I don't know," Monk quipped. "I kinda like the *Big Grey Domino*, if you ask me."

"*Orion* to Blue Thunder," came a voice from the speaker. "Main dome going transparent."

The blue dome suddenly lost its color and became clear, and we could see all the details beneath it.

"Oh, my God," I gasped. "Are those ... *trees* in there? And a *lake*? And *houses*?"

"Yep," answered Clark with a grin.

We circled once more, then Clark directed Gumball towards a rectangular opening above what we were assuming was the front. With a grin that reminded me of a child on Christmas morning, Gumball guided us into a hover over the opening, then took us in for a perfect landing.

We were in a hangar; I could see other aircraft around us, plus a few things I knew would need explaining later.

Clark cracked open the door and gestured for us to exit. A man in a military coverall stood just outside. He introduced himself as Corporal Hughes as he gave us all a smart salute. "Gentlemen, ladies, if you would please follow me," he instructed, and walked towards a doorway.



Clark and I were the last ones to exit. As I looked around, it seemed almost too amazing to be believed. Then Clark was at my side. "What do you think?"

I opened my mouth, not sure what would come out. But before I could comment, a male voice came from overhead speakers in a tone reminiscent of 50's disc jockeys. "And now we've got a special song dedication, to Clark from Bonnie ..."

As the familiar first line opened the song, all I could do was smile and be reminded, *You never know what God has in mind until you get there.*

*It's been a long road  
Getting from there to here.  
It's been a long time.  
But my time is finally here.*

*And I will see my dream come alive at last -  
I will touch the sky!  
And they're not gonna hold me down no more,  
No they're not gonna change my mind,*

*Cause I've got faith ...*

THE END

\* \* \*

#### **THANKS AND DEDICATIONS:**

We all go through our own trials. This story is dedicated to Sharon and Vicki and Gary, to Ira Pirtle (my real life model for Douglas Martin), and to a man named Donald Eshleman whom I never met while he walked this earth. For you, physical death became your victory. For now, you are missed. But we'll see you again real soon.

\* \* \*

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For more information, check out the official *Clark Savage Institute* webpage at [TheDoormat.net](http://TheDoormat.net).