NO LIGHT TO DIE BY

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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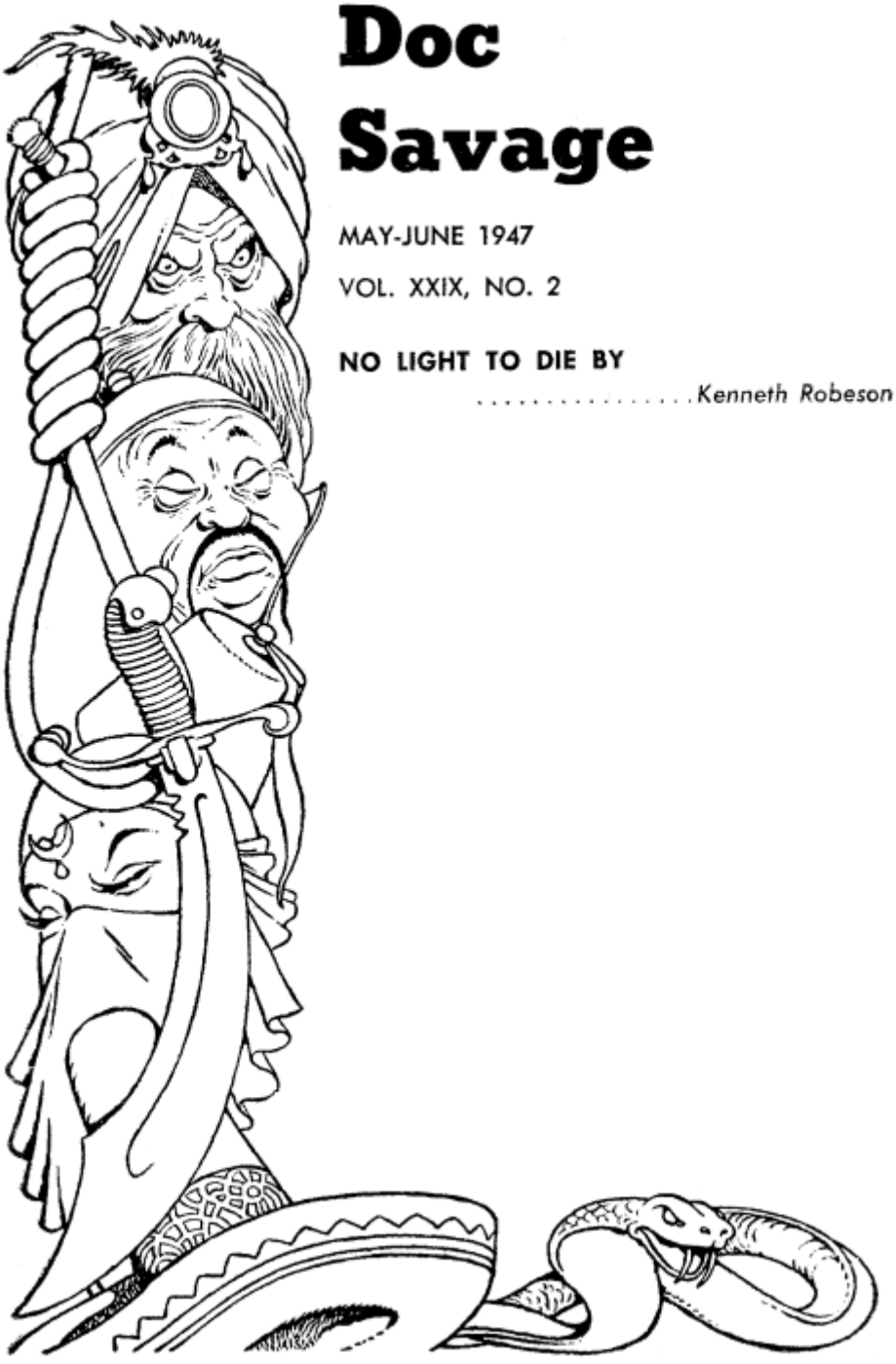

Doc Savage

MAY-JUNE 1947

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NO LIGHT TO DIE BY

.....*Kenneth Robeson*

FOREWORD BY KENNETH ROBESON

BY chance just now I found in an old notebook an entry that reads: *This thing started Nov. 12, 1932.* This brusque notation, it so happens, was made the day the writing of the first Doc Savage novel began. . . . If you'll notice the year—1932—you will see that it was fourteen years ago. Fourteen years is a long time, and from it we get, by multiplying, one hundred and sixty-eight months, which is about the number of book-length Doc Savage novels that have come from this typewriter. One hundred and sixty-eight.

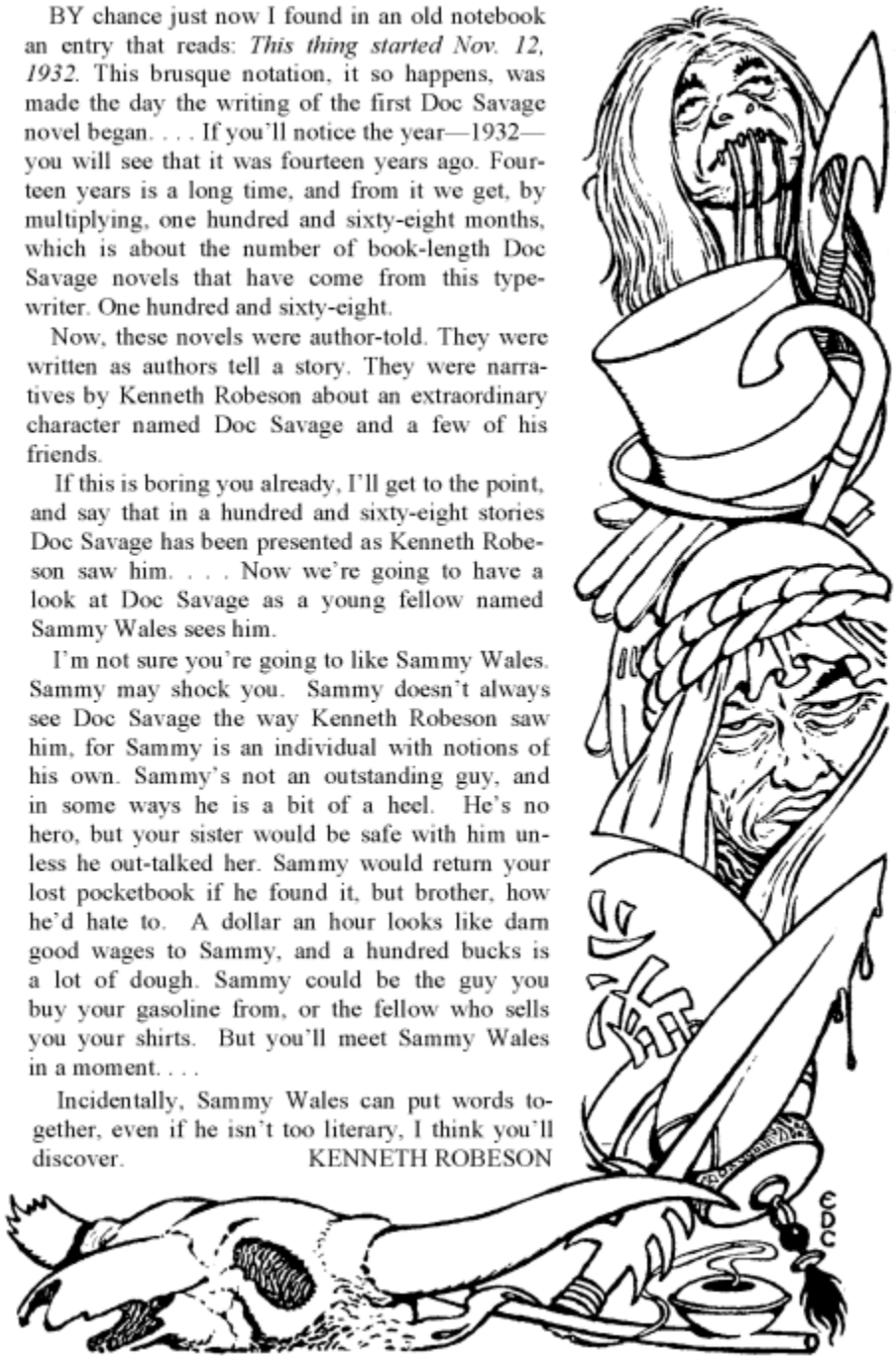
Now, these novels were author-told. They were written as authors tell a story. They were narratives by Kenneth Robeson about an extraordinary character named Doc Savage and a few of his friends.

If this is boring you already, I'll get to the point, and say that in a hundred and sixty-eight stories Doc Savage has been presented as Kenneth Robeson saw him. . . . Now we're going to have a look at Doc Savage as a young fellow named Sammy Wales sees him.

I'm not sure you're going to like Sammy Wales. Sammy may shock you. Sammy doesn't always see Doc Savage the way Kenneth Robeson saw him, for Sammy is an individual with notions of his own. Sammy's not an outstanding guy, and in some ways he is a bit of a heel. He's no hero, but your sister would be safe with him unless he out-talked her. Sammy would return your lost pocketbook if he found it, but brother, how he'd hate to. A dollar an hour looks like darn good wages to Sammy, and a hundred bucks is a lot of dough. Sammy could be the guy you buy your gasoline from, or the fellow who sells you your shirts. But you'll meet Sammy Wales in a moment. . . .

Incidentally, Sammy Wales can put words together, even if he isn't too literary, I think you'll discover.

KENNETH ROBESON



NO LIGHT TO DIE BY

by Kenneth Robeson

CABLEGRAM
ROBESON, NEW YORK
DISAPPROVE OF THE IDEA. SORRY.
SAVAGE

CABLEGRAM
SAVAGE, LONDON
SAMMY IS BULLHEADED ABOUT THIS. HE IS GOING TO PUBLISH MANUSCRIPT. WON'T LISTEN TO ME. SAYS HE NEEDS THE MONEY.
ROBESON.

ROBESON, NEW YORK
BUY THE MANUSCRIPT OFF HIM. BURN IT.
SAVAGE.

SAVAGE, LONDON
SAMMY WONT SELL. SAYS THE PUBLIC SHOULD KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT DOC SAVAGE.
ROBESON.

ROBESON, NEW YORK
THAT'S WHAT I WAS AFRAID OF. I'LL WRITE SAMMY.
SAVAGE.

MEMO FROM THE DESK OF DOC SAVAGE:
To: Sammy Wales.
Mr. Kenneth Robeson, the author, advises me that you have written a first-person account of a recent adventure which brought you in contact with myself and my group of aides. He states that you intend seeking a publisher for this manuscript, and that you have refused to sell it to him. I disapprove of this. It is true that Kenneth Robeson has written a hundred and sixty-eight novels around the adventures of our group, but these were fictionized versions and in no way hampered our work. It is not satisfactory to me to permit publication of an account written by an unskilled outsider. I hope you will drop the matter.
SAVAGE.

RADIOGRAM
SAVAGE, PARIS
WHO'S UNSKILLED? AND WHO IS AN OUTSIDER? I WAS THERE WASN'T I? THIS GUY ROBESON IS A FICTION WRITER ALL RIGHT. I HAVE READ SOME OF HIS STUFF AND HE SOFT-PEDALS TOO MANY FACTS. I THINK WHAT I'VE WRITTEN SHOULD BE PRINTED.
SAMMY WALES.

RADIOGRAM
WALES, NEW YORK
HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS IN PARIS?
SAVAGE

SAVAGE, CAIRO
A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME.
SAMMY WALES

MONK MAYFAIR, NEW YORK
IF YOU ARE THE BIRD TELLING SAMMY WALES THINGS, CUT IT OUT.
SAVAGE

SAVAGE, BOMBAY
SO THAT'S WHY THAT PRETTY FIANCEE OF HIS GAVE ME A DATE.
MONK MAYFAIR

CABLEGRAM
ROBESON, NEW YORK
DO NOT UNDERSTAND SAMMY WALES ATTITUDE. WILL YOU ASCERTAIN HIS TRUE REASONS FOR WISHING MATERIAL PUBLISHED. CABLE ME SHANGHAI.
SAVAGE.

RADIOGRAM
SAVAGE, SHANGHAI
SAMMY FEELS TRUTH ABOUT YOU SHOULD RE KNOWN. SEEMS SINCERE. SAYS IT WILL SCARE SOME PEOPLE WHO NEED SCARING.
ROBESON.

RADIOGRAM
ROBESON, NEW YORK
IT SCARES ME ANYWAY. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF SAMMY'S MANUSCRIPT?
SAVAGE.

SAVAGE, SHANGHAI
I THINK SAMMY AS A WRITER IS NO SHAKESPEARE. BUT HIS INTENTIONS GOOD. CAN MAKE DEAL TO PUBLISH MANUSCRIPT IN MAGAZINE. SUGGEST DO SO. SUGGEST YOU BREAK ALL PRECEDENT AND GIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT TO BE PUBLISHED. THIS IS ONLY OUT I SEE.
ROBESON.

CABLEGRAM
ROBESON, NEW YORK
HAVE READ SAMMY WALES MANUSCRIPT. SHAKESPEARE WILL SPIN IN GRAVE. SO WILL I IF I EVER REMEMBER THIS. STATEMENT FOR PUBLICATION FOLLOWS AIRMAIL.
SAVAGE.

STATEMENT BY DOC SAVAGE

YOU are about to read a manuscript written by a young man named Sammy Wales. Quite probably you have never heard of Mr. Wales. I certainly had not heard of him until quite recently when the incidents described in his writings occurred. Sammy seems to feel what happened was extremely fantastic and exciting. It was.

But Sammy Wales has made a mistake—he has told about what happened, and neglected *why* it happened. Perhaps that is not Sammy's fault. He knows me only from what he saw me do. He knows the whole world, really, only from what he has seen it do to him and to others. You'll have to look deep into Sammy to see it, but I think Sammy has a universal fear.

Who can blame Sammy Wales for being afraid? These are the days when all brave men tremble a little for the future of humanity. And no wonder! There has just swept over the world an epidemic of unworkable schemes derived from Hitler, Mussolini, a poison gas thrown into our minds by theorists and demagogues, by tyrants and rascals. Wasn't it Doctor Johnson who wrote, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." Thirty years ago they were beginning a great war to save liberty. We have just finished another. And yet I dare you to show me a square foot on the earth's surface where liberty is safe today.

Don't misunderstand me! I have faith. I think I know why we are afraid, too. I think it is change that has terrified us. Changes always breed fear, and that is good, because a change is a dangerous thing, not to be avoided, but to be approached warily. And any kind of changing that destroys is particularly vicious. Destruction, like death, is so permanent. And the professional wreckers of houses are almost never the men who build homes.

Have you heard anybody, when speaking of crime, of deplorable government, say: *But what can just one guy do?* Certainly you've heard that. You've heard it many times. And each time it was the voice of cowardice that spoke. Speak out, my friend, and speak out firmly, and you will find that you are the multitude. When you let a bad thing happen to you, you have it coming to you.

One thing I can say for Sammy Wales—he speaks and acts with the courage of his convictions. I admire that in him, although Sammy has certain other deplorable traits.

Sammy Wales, as you will see, is perfectly willing to fight single-handed against anything he dislikes, or for anything he likes.

That has been my creed, too. I had the fortune, or misfortune, to receive an odd training as a youth. My father, victimized by criminals, imagined that he could turn me into a sort of modern Galahad who would sally out against all wrongdoers who were outside the law, and who would aid the oppressed. My father, before his death, outlined a stringent course of training in which I was placed in the hands of a series of scientists, criminologists, physical culture experts, psychiatrists—I won't bore you with an endless list of these experts, but they had me in their hands from the time I was fourteen months old until I was twenty years old—so that I might be fitted for this career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers. I chose medicine and surgery for specializing, largely because the understanding of human beings that a doctor has fitted in with the other, and because I liked it. This training, foresight of my father's imagination, equipped me with many skills, mental, physical and scientific. There is no point in being modest about that. If you study and practice many things, you become adept at many things. The only remarkable thing about me is that I have worked like the dickens to master some skills. You'll be surprised at what patient and continual trying can accomplish.

You see, I believe in trying.

There is where Sammy Wales missed the boat in this account he has written. He has not painted me as an individual who has earned whatever abilities he has the hard way—and there is no other way—by repeatedly trying. Sammy seems to frankly believe that the strong things in life are passed out ready-made, instead of being created by the individual within himself.

Sammy should have told more about *why* things happened. Sammy himself is a changed man—not yet changed as much as might be desirable, however. He hardly mentions this change in himself, possibly because he does not fully grasp it—yet surely he could understand such an important thing as a man acquiring a purpose in life, when the

man is himself. But Sammy glides over this; he is too much interested in the action of events, rather than their causes.

He should at least have stated the philosophy that society prepares the crime and the criminals only commit it, and that each individual is a part of society, and indeed he is that society. . . .

CLARK SAVAGE, JR.

THE SAMMY WALES MANUSCRIPT

Chapter I

THE telephone had a voice like a truckload of coal banging down a tin chute, straight into my ear. My head felt just about big enough to hold a truckload of coal, too.

It was probably a beautiful morning outdoors, for the sunlight stood through the hotel room window in bright hard bars and dust mice rode up and down them. I rolled over and took hold of the telephone very gently, before it killed me, and answered. The voice that came out of the receiver was as sweet as honey on ice cream. It said: "I want the moonlight man."

"Who?"

There was some kind of a conference at the other end of the wire. I thought that a male voice addressed lovely-voice sharply. Then lovely-voice said, "Hello?"

"Yeah?"

"Is this Mr. Samuel Wales speaking?"

"Who wants to know?"

She did not have to confer about that, but it stopped her short for a moment and put a bit of vinegar in her honey voice. About a drop of vinegar to a barrelful of nectar. She said: "This is Miss Fenisong speaking. Is Mr. Wales there?"

"Partly so, I would say," I said.

I didn't know any Miss Fenisongs yet.

"May I speak to Mr. Wales?" she said.

"You are."

"Oh," she said. "Oh, indeed! . . . You are Mr. Wales, the expert on moonlight?"

"Expert on what?"

"Moonlight."

That sort of had me going. It couldn't be a gag because I wasn't aware that I knew anyone in New York City. To a lovely voice like that and to such a question, what was there to say?

"It could be, Miss Fenisong. It could be."

"Are you free this afternoon, Mr. Wales?"

"Is there a moon in the afternoon?"

She laughed heh-heh to show that she didn't think I was very funny, but she was willing to be agreeable. "Say about three, then. Is that satisfactory?"

"Why not lunch? Why wait?"

"Well . . ."

While she was considering, I saw my pants hanging over the back of a chair, the right hip pocket weighted down by a big fat billfold that was stuffed, as my billfolds usually are, with everything but money. There were nine one-dollar bills in it, and there weren't any more in the world, I was beginning to figure.

"Maybe we'd better skip the lunch," I said.

"Very well," she said. "Three o'clock, then."

"What address?"

"The Parkside-Regent," she said. "Goodbye."

I PUT the telephone on its cradle and laid my headache back on the pillow as gently as possible. The headache was a dog. It was one of those things where your temples bulge out about a foot each time your heart beats. But it wasn't an entirely unforeseen headache, because missing three meals in a row invariably produces such an effect on me. The trouble was, the cheapest meal I had seen on a menu last night was a dollar forty. With only nine paper dollars between me and poverty, I wasn't shooting any dollar forty on dinner.

So now I was an expert on moonlight. . . . This very unusual fact wouldn't let me sleep again. I tried going into the bathroom and getting a drink of water that tasted from standing in pipes, then sitting on the edge of the bed and holding my face with both hands. It didn't help. No good. I would have to eat.

The telephone operator was coöperative when I got hold of her a minute later. She said: "Mr. Samuel Wales is in four-twelve. Oh! . . . Oh, that's you, isn't it?"

"What about another Mr. Samuel Wales? Have you got another one of us?"

After she had probably consulted whatever it is that operators in big hotels use to keep track of the guests, she said, “A Mr. Samuel Wickert Wales is registered in six-teen-forty.”

“Will you ring him?”

“Yes, Mr. Wales. I’ll ring the other Mr. Wales.”

He didn’t answer.

So that was that. There had been an error. The expert on moonlight wasn’t the Sammy Wales who had a headache from hunger. I would have called lovely-voice and told her about it, but that would have cost a nickel. A dime, probably.

I should have let it go at that. I thought I had.

Putting on two suits of clothes, I went out to look for a cheap breakfast. Wearing the two suits was a precaution, because it looked as if I was going to have to beat that hotel bill.

In Grand Central Station, in the men’s room, I took off both suits, put the one that was not wrinkled back on, and made a bundle of the other one and gave it to one of those locker contraptions that keep your stuff twenty-four hours for a dime. I had an old slot-machine slug that would exactly fit.

A cheap breakfast in New York wasn’t easy to find. I didn’t know the town, and must have walked the wrong directions, because I did not come upon any part of the town that looked cheap. I finally compromised on an Automat. There at least you get a preview of the size of the portions your money is going to buy. The girl who skillfully slung out nickels and dimes for one of my dollars said, “Thank you,” in a voice that reminded me of Miss Fenisong, who wanted a man who knew about moonlight.

I sat there at the little marble-topped table with its puddle of coffee that another diner’s cup had left and its bread-crust crumbs and ate my thirty cents worth with great care. Then I sat there some more. I hadn’t had spaghetti, but there was a spaghetti worm about an inch long lying on the table. I didn’t know why I was sitting there until it dawned on me that I was listening to the voices from the other tables, just to see whether there was another voice that sounded as nice as lovely-voice.

Three employment agencies took my name, two employers expressed no interest in hiring me, and at three o’clock I turned up at the *Parkside-Regent* to find out what went with that voice.

It was easy to see what went with the *Parkside-Regent Hotel.* Probably a minimum bill of fifteen bucks a day.

SHE invited me into her sitting-room. She said: “Come in, Mr. Wales. I’m awfully glad you’re here.”

So was I glad. This might be a very temporary visit, but already it was definitely a pay-off. I had known there were people like her, because I go to the movies. I had supposed there might be hotel suites as fancy as this one was, for the same reason.

“You don’t need a moon,” I said.

She didn’t warm up very well to that. I was sorry about this, because I was doing my awed best to pay tribute to a masterpiece. It wasn’t just that she was tall, blonde, peach-colored, although even that was a little like describing a mansion by saying it was a house. It was the plus details that were important; an air of quietly drawn reserve, for example, that probably indicated no great emotional need of being surrounded by others, which might mean a little inhibition. But who wanted to be psychological about Miss Fenisong. With that figure!

A trim, dark-haired man sat in a chair holding a cigarette in a holder that was long and as white as a tooth. He looked a little too wide for his suit.

“Mr. Albert Gross,” she said.

We didn’t shake hands. I wondered if we took such a sudden dislike to each other for the same reason.

“So you’re Samuel Wales, the moon expert,” he said.

“My name is Wales,” I said. “But it so happens—”

“Make it snappy, will you,” he said sharply. “We haven’t got much time.”

Miss Fenisong said, “Mr. Wales, would twenty dollars be a satisfactory fee?”

“Twenty dollars would satisfy me plenty,” I said. “But I’m afraid—”

“Give him fifty bucks, baby,” Albert Gross said. “We haven’t got time to fool around.”

“Look,” I said. “It so happens that—”

“What the hell’s the matter with you?” he complained. “Do you want fifty bucks or don’t you?”

"Albert!" the girl said. She seemed to think he was making an ape of himself, which he was.

I didn't like him well enough to let him keep his money.

"Sure I want fifty bucks," I said, and went over and shoved my hand out to him, and added, "As long as it comes from you, and not her."

"What's the damned difference—"

"From you and not her," I said.

He counted out five tens and I took it. I might give it back to him after letting him know he had paid out to the wrong Samuel Wales. But again, if I got to disliking him much worse, I might not.

That seemed to settle things down temporarily.

FOR about forty-five seconds, that is. Long enough for Miss Fenisong to take my hat and place it on a table, and seat me in an overstuffed chair and ask, "Shall we start at once?"

"Why not?"

She seated herself on a straighter chair, and she became a fairy princess on a fairy throne. She had a notebook and pencil in her hands. She was going to take notes on my words.

She said, "I have backgrounded myself fairly completely."

That was good to know. Such a lovely one should have a nice background. I said it was good.

"Good," I said.

She said, "What I want to ask you about is the Eber idea of starting with a preliminary lunar theory solution in which the orbit is supposed to lie in the ecliptic and to have no eccentricity, then finding the additional terms which depend on the first power of the eccentricities and of the inclination."

"What?" I said.

"Do you agree with Eber?" she asked.

"Who is he?" I asked.

Her smile was strictly not from the heart. "You have a sense of humor, Mr. Wales," she said. "But, really, we are pressed for time. So if you will kindly coach me on the matters I wish to know, I'd appreciate it."

Apparently it was coaching she wanted, but she was out of my pond. I would have loved to explain to her about moonlight, as who wouldn't, but it seemed that it was lunar theory she was interested in. Lunar theory probably had to do with the moon. More than that about lunar theory, I didn't know.

"I'm sorry I haven't met this Eber," I said. "I'm sorry about that, indeed I am."

The pencil stood up straight and astonished in her fingers. "What do you mean?"

"I'm afraid I'm just plain Sammy Wales. Lunar theories are out of my line."

"You're not Samuel Wickert Wales, astrophysicist at the Compton Observatory?"

"I came here to tell you I'm not."

Trim-and-dark-haired put down his cigarette holder that was the color of a hound tooth. He came over and hit me on the head.

HE used an ash-tray. It was a sort of surprise; he did not look like that kind of a fellow, although in looking back I can see that he had talked like that kind of a fellow. He came at me silently; he was there before anything could be done about it.

The ash-tray was a heavy thing of crockery, about a foot across, an inch thick, glazed and almost like glass. It broke. He picked up one of the larger broken pieces, and prepared to cut my throat with it. Possibly he was not in earnest about the throat-cutting, and only wanted to distract my attention enough that he could kick me in the stomach, which was what happened.

The carpet nap against my face was thick and soft and did not smell of dust. It was the first carpet my face had been on that did not smell of dust. I lay still, but watched him with my one eye that had him in range. He was as disgusted as a dowager who had cracked her lorgnette.

He told Miss Fenisong: "You've made some kind of a stupid mistake."

She didn't say anything. She looked scared.

He added: "This bum isn't your moon man. I wonder what happened?" He scowled, didn't wait for her to answer, and continued, "Well, there's no time left to fix it up. The reception begins at five, so you'll have to go on and do your best. Do you think you can get by with what you already know?"

Her voice was high and scared, like a cat on a tall pole.

"Why did you hit him?" she asked.

He yelled: “Do you think you can get by?” He sounded like the dog that had chased the cat.

She was silent. She was looking at me and anxiety was taking her lips away from her nice teeth.

“Answer me!” he bellowed.

She didn’t.

He got even with her by moving over and aiming a kick at my face. But I’d had time to rest and organize. I got his foot, gathered it in my arms like a football, and tried to turn a cartwheel, but his leg was rubbery and wouldn’t break. He made, in pain, a large hissing noise, and I climbed up the front of him, trying to take an arm off him, or at least a nose or an ear. All I got was the front of his coat. It tore off. He had paid his tailor probably two hundred dollars for the coat, and I took the front of it off him like stripping one peel off a banana. He didn’t like that.

“You dirty thug!” he said.

I whipped him in the face with the coat rag, the way you would use a dishrag on a naughty dog. He went back a few paces on his heels. There was a large cut-glass vase on a gilded wood French side table, and he took the vase, rapped it on the table to break it and get a cutting edge of glass, and made for me. I made for the door and got through it into the hall and got the door closed.

He didn’t come out into the hall. Presently the key turned in the door lock.

“Come out and fight like a man, you dirty-so-and-so,” I said.

“Beat it, bum,” his voice said.

“Miss Fenisong,” I said.

She didn’t answer.

I said: “I’m sorry about the mix-up, Miss Fenisong. There were two Wales registered at the hotel and you got the wrong one this morning, which was me. I was groggy with sleep and didn’t get it straightened out at that time. I really came around just now to square it.”

“Scram,” he said.

On the way to the elevator. I threw the part of his coat I had taken into a corner. . . . But I went back and picked it up and examined the pockets. There were three engraved invitations that read:

You are cordially invited to a Reception honoring the esteemed Isotopist, Professor Enri Baedeker, at the Parkside-Regent Friday, 5 p.m.

Doctor Morand Funk Hodges, Chairman.

Scripted in ink at the foot of the invitation was this additional information:

The celebrities present will include Clark Savage, Jr. (Doc Savage).

I didn’t know what an isotopist was, and had never heard of Professor Baedeker or Doctor Hodges. . . . It seemed to me that the other name, Doc Savage, should be vaguely familiar, perhaps mean something, but I couldn’t quite place it.

The shindig was this afternoon.

Chapter II

I HAD his fifty dollars, anyway.

Even the washrooms in the *Parkside-Regent* were as regal as such a place could conveniently be, and apparently it was not unusual for a guest to come in and repair minor physical damages. I was treated very discreetly by the attendant; he pretended he could see no evidence whatever that I had been in a fight. I was tempted to hand him one of Mr. Albert Gross’ ten-dollar bills, an impulse that was overcome easily.

Repaired and enraged, I sat in the lobby. There is nothing quite as full-blown as the kind of anger that you have righteously after you have come out of a mess second-best. Particularly if it follows something that swatted you without just cause. Admittedly I wasn’t the moon expert, but that didn’t seem to me like a good reason to be hit over the head and kicked in the middle.

After sitting in the elegant hotel lobby for a while, I began to get the feel of the place enough to see that something out of the ordinary was happening. Men were arriving, were getting a lot of attention, getting ohs and ahs of wonder, were being put in a private elevator and whisked aloft somewhere.

Presently there was a particularly violent spell of gasping and eye-popping. A very large man who had just entered was the

cause of this. I stood up to look. He was large, all right, but not in the sense that you mean fat when you say large.

This was a giant bronze man, so excellently proportioned that his size wouldn't have been jarring if he hadn't been near other men. He was good-looking, not pretty-handsome in any sense, but really something to look at and impress. He seemed a little embarrassed by the twittering and finger-pointing. Moving as easily as if he was on oiled bearings, he went to the special elevator and was taken up.

"Who's that?" I asked a fat man.

"That," said the man pompously, "is Doc Savage."

"And who is Doc Savage?" I inquired.

The fat man stared at me as if I had not heard of Christopher Columbus, the New Deal, and night and day.

"A poor joke, sir!" he said, and walked off.

I asked a bellhop, and he said, "Doc Savage? He's the big shot they're all coming to see. I wish to God I could get an autograph off him."

"What does he do?"

"Savage? He rights wrongs and punishes evildoers."

I looked to see if the lad was ribbing me. The expression on his face was as serious and admiring as that of a pickaninny who had just touched Joe Louis.

"He shouldn't lack for business in this world," I said.

The bellhop sighed loudly.

I asked: "Are you serious?"

He just looked me up and down and walked of the way you would leave a stray dog after you found fleas on it.

I thought I would sit in on this Reception upstairs whatever it was.

NOW, I always have a reason for everything I do. Sometimes the reasons don't satisfy anyone but me, but that's all right with me. In this case, I felt a little guilty about embarrassing lovely-voice, and about taking fifty dollars of her friend's money, if he was her friend, and I wanted to clear the slate of that. I might even offer to give him back his dough. But not if I saw him again. In that case, I intended to take a stroll across his face.

The man who hired the waiters was a slick-mannered white-haired old gentleman who was a little distracted by the moment of the occasion.

"From the union?" he asked.

"From the union," I said. "I'm an extra they sent over in case you need more help for this shindig upstairs."

He said: "We always need help. Where's your working paper?"

"I lost that, but I can run back to union headquarters and get a new one signed," I said. "It won't take long."

He shrugged and said, "Never mind. What is your name?"

"Samuel Wales."

"Sam, can you bus?"

I did not have much of an idea what he meant by bus. "If I can't, I won't expect any pay," I said, trying to sound as if I didn't think much of being a bus, and was half-way insulted.

It was an insult, all right. The job was that of bus-boy; they handed me a big bowl with ice in it, a pair of tongs, and it was my job to go around and chuck ice in the glasses. It was a good thing they didn't start me laying out the silverware. There were enough tools around each plate to look as if a mechanic had laid out his kit.

"What are these guys?" I asked a waiter.

"Scientists," he said.

If scientists are supposed to be bald men in shaggy suits and with no hair, only about half of those present qualified. Many of them were young, and there was a woman here and there.

The big bronze fellow, Doc Savage, was getting a lot of play. He was being talked to more than he was talking. The bellhop downstairs had said he righted wrongs and punished evildoers, which sounded like something you hear in Sunday School, and didn't go with this fellow's appearance. Savage looked as if he was a man who knew where all the marbles were. Galahad went out of fashion a long time ago, and this man didn't seem back-dated. He puzzled me.

"Who's the big copper-colored guy?" I asked another waiter.

"That's Doc Savage."

"I know, but what makes him rate?"

"Boy, you're kind of ignorant, aren't you?" the waiter said, and walked off.

Miss Fenisong—lovely-voice—came in presently, but her entrance was ruined for my money by Albert Gross being with her. He

was slick in tails and white tie, and he looked too wide for that outfit too.

Two other men were with Miss Fenisong and Gross. One of these was somewhat taller than the other, and the taller one had the redder face. There was an air about them that spoke of something in common, although it probably wasn't a family tie. It was hard to say what they shared, but it was probably something in their minds, a common interest or purpose.

The four didn't have but one engraved invitation between them—the other three had been in Albert Gross' coat and I had them—but they got in all right. A fine-looking old fellow at the door was checking names off a list, and he had their names on the list. I went over, asked him who they were, and he showed me.

Miss Paula Fenisong.

Mr. Albert Gross.

Mr. Alec McGraff.

Mr. J. B. C. McCutcheon.

"Fellow, aren't you one of the waiters?" The fine-looking old gentleman was scowling at me. He must have noticed my bowl of ice cubes and tongs.

"Waiter!" I sneered at the idea. "I'm the bus." I went back to my work.

The words that came out of the little groups that had gathered to talk were long on syllables and, as far as I was concerned, short on meaning. They talked isotopes and alpha particles; the arrangement of carbides and ferrite in relation to martensite. Not all of it was that dry though, and a few of the good scientists were conducting mild experiments with their own bodily tolerance to alcohol.

The doings of Miss Fenisong's little party were more interesting. Miss Fenisong began by waving her eyelashes at Doc Savage. She could have only one idea there; but the pickup didn't work—the big one either wasn't interested, or wasn't showing it.

Albert Gross gave a little coöperation. He moved a place-card from the dais at the head of the room, where the great ones were to sit, to another position at a side table that was more secluded. It was Doc Savage's place-card he moved, and he put it next to Miss Fenisong's.

The ice-man job afforded an opportunity to circulate and watch the conniving progress. I was nicely disguised—the management had fitted me out with cadet-striped oversized black trousers, a brick red mess jacket and white gloves. I combed a lick of hair down over my forehead like the late Adolf Hitler, and hardly knew myself.

PRESENTLY they began introducing each other to Doc Savage. Mr. Alfred Gross introduced Mr. McCutcheon to Doc Savage. Then Mr. McCutcheon introduced Mr. McGraff and McGraff introduced Miss Fenisong, who introduced Mr. Gross who had started the whole thing. They had it straightened out now; between the four of them, they had introduced each other to the bronze man.

The girl remarked that it was a wonderful affair, wasn't it?

"Yes, isn't it. Quite nice," he said, with something less than enthusiasm.

"So many eminent people here," she added.

"Indeed?"

I wondered if Savage was married, had a jealous girlfriend, or was just cautious. Probably by the time you have become as important as he seemed to be, you have learned to be cautious. If Miss Fenisong had been giving me the kind of office he was getting, they would have had to sandbag my feet to keep me on the ground.

They were working on him like a basketball team in slow-motion. They were using signals—one eyebrow higher than the other, a small smile, a head gesture—to keep in touch with each other. They probably had other signals I didn't catch.

But I got it when one of the Macs came in from the terrace and ran his hand through his hair. I didn't know which Mac was which, but he was the taller one with the redder face. He could be McGraff or he could be McCutcheon.

Miss Fenisong took the signal with a widening of the eyes. She said: "Mr. Savage, will you look at the moon with me?"

Would he look at the moon with her! Would the mouse like some cheese! Only he didn't take her up very happily.

Mostly she had to drag him toward the terrace, and from the others present she got the kind of looks that a beautiful babe always gets when she drags the lion away from the party.

So they wanted him on the terrace, and were going to a lot of trouble to get him there. . . . I moved that way myself.

THE *Parkside-Regent* probably had its own yardstick of snobbery. A gathering of mere artists and writers would no doubt rate no better than the basement banquet room, while diplomats might rank the Imperial Room that opened off the mezzanine. The doings tonight, obviously extraordinary, rated the Starlight Room on the roof. It was only a few steps outside to the terrace, a wondrous place well-equipped with potted greenery.

There was some kind of a hitch. The Mac suddenly reappeared with another kind of signal, a go-back one made with down-hooked mouth corners and a head-shake. Something that was supposed to come off on the terrace wasn't going to come off, his high-sign said.

It seemed to be too late for Miss Fenisong to stop the trip to the terrace with Doc Savage, so she went through with it. She did and said things that weren't what she had planned to do and say was my guess.

She said: "I wanted to ask you about the Eber idea of starting with a preliminary lunar theory solution in which the orbit is supposed to lie in the ecliptic and to have no eccentricity, then finding the additional terms which depend on the first power of the eccentricities and of the inclination."

That sounded familiar. . . . Why, sure. She had used the same words on me. Hearing it twice made it sound as if it was something she had memorized out of the encyclopedia.

Doc Savage looked mildly surprised. I didn't know whether she had fooled him or not. The surprised look didn't mean a thing. Words like that from such a beautiful girl would surprise anybody, like hearing a canary sing bass.

"Quite logical," he said vaguely.

"Then you agree?"

"With what?"

"With Eber's hypothesis."

"I—ah—wouldn't quarrel with Eber," he said.

"Oh, I'm glad," she said.

She didn't seem very glad to me. It was hard for me to distinguish fright amid such beauty, but I thought I could see it. They always have one of those phony palms on a hotel roof terrace, and I and the ice bucket were behind it. . . . Yeah, she was scared.

She added, "Look, they're starting to take seats for the banquet. I'd love to get more of your thought about Eber, but we'd better go in, hadn't we?"

He bowed politely, took her arm, and they went back inside.

There were plenty of stars overhead. There wasn't any moon.

Alfred Gross strode out of the darkness. He said, "McGraff!" sharply. The tall red-faced Mac appeared. Alfred Gross called him a long breathful of names, none complimentary, and finished with: "Why did you give a false alarm, you dumb boob?"

McGraff made a sickly upward gesture with his thumb. "I thought I saw it begin."

Gross threw a glance at the sky. "There's no sign of it," he said. "And it isn't time yet by twenty minutes or so."

"I can't help it," McGraff said.

A waiter captain came up to me and said, "Get to work, bud!" I had to go back to the tables, where service was beginning.

She had done a fairly smooth job of handling Doc Savage on the terrace mix-up, and it had not entered my mind that the big bronze man suspected anything. He looked dignified, bored, and harassed by being stared at by so many people, the way a convention of misers would look at the stuff in the Fort Knox vaults. Obviously he was aware of Miss Fenisong, but he seemed to be in the indecisive stage about her, like a fox eyeing a bait of a sort that had poisoned him previously.

Suddenly Doc Savage arose, excused himself to lovely-voice, and moved around the table to where Albert Gross sat. He laid a hand on Gross's shoulder, said something, and Gross was dumfounded.

Gross, besides being too wide for his suits, had a jaw like a mule's hoof. The jaw fell.

"Nice work with the place-cards," Doc Savage said.

"I beg your pardon!"

"I don't mind." Doc Savage patted the man's thick-looking shoulder. "The scenery at the new location is quite interesting."

Gross registered the expressions of a man who had unexpectedly found a hundred and ten volts of electricity in the seat of his chair, but he didn't say anything.

Doc Savage rejoined Miss Fenisong.

He hadn't missed anything, it appeared.

That was the end of the genteel jockeying for the evening. The stage was all cleared for the fireworks.

Chapter III

A SHORT bald man who seemed to be a sub-chairman stood up and introduced the Chairman, a Doctor Morand Funk Hodges, president of the Welland Institute of Physical Sciences, distinguished in the field of the strontium isotope, and Albert Gross left while the words were being said.

Gross left unobtrusively, like a polecat leaving the vicinity of a chicken-coop at dawn.

Doc Savage smoothed down his left eyebrow with a fingertip. I'll swear that was all he did. But a very wide apish looking man, homelier than a frog, got up from one of the tables and sauntered out after Gross.

We had about three minutes and forty seconds of uninterrupted dish-clattering and lip-smacking. Doctor Morand Funk Hodges had stood up long enough to say we would have music by the stringed ensemble. The music seemed to be slow getting started.

Mac—the shorter one this time—dashed in from the terrace.

"For God's sake, come out here!" he said in a loud attention-getting voice. "Come, quickly! Look at what is happening to the sky!"

He was stared at, but nobody did or said anything. They probably thought it was a gag, part of the entertainment of the evening.

"Gentlemen!" he screamed. "Please! Please, for God's sake, come and look at this!" He sounded about as unconcerned as a cat with its tail freshly stepped on.

Finally one of the scientists did get up somewhat sheepishly—you could see he believed he was biting on something—and go outside. He was back with his coattail stretched behind him. He yelled: "Come out here!"

Curiosity had bitten every man and woman in the room, and now they had the excuse they wanted. Within a couple of minutes, the terrace was packed. I was late getting out there, and I wanted to laugh when I saw that every head was thrown back, every eye fixed on the sky, as if they had been ordered to take that position and hold it. The heads were held a little to one side or the other, or straight back, but the attention was undividedly straight up.

A light was up there. It could have been moonlight, except that there was no moon, and that much of a glow couldn't have come from it if it had been there. There was, also, no evidence of a single brightly lighted object such as the moon. . . . No sign at all of the source of the brilliance.

"Aurora borealis," someone said.

I thought so too. My education had gone that far. The aurora borealis was the two-dollar word for the Northern Lights.

A gentleman with a trimmed white beard, standing at my left, snorted forcibly.

"Borealis!" he said. "Ridiculous!"

He had expressed the general opinion, it seemed. Nobody who knew anything about the Northern Lights would admit the manifestation above us bore any resemblance to Northern Lights. But no one had another idea to offer.

Doc Savage, his voice plainly identifiable in the stillness, requested, "Will someone switch off the terrace lights."

The electric lights were doused in a moment. The glow from above was then more impressive. It had the shape of a circular patch, fuzzy around the edges, and was a rather poisonous looking purplish grey in color. It didn't cover the whole sky. I held both hands above my head, the palms about two feet apart, and that about spanned the glow area.

I noticed the thing, whatever it was, shed enough light that we could see each other distinctly.

"Savage," a voice called. "What do you say it is?"

There was no answer. While I was listening for one, a couple of pairs of hands laid hold of me, a pair on each arm, and I was told, "We would like to speak with you, son."

IT is unlikely that every individual hair stood erect on my head, but the one or two that failed to do so didn't detract from the effect. Looking up at that spook light had done more to me than I had been aware of. I think my body became as stiff as a post also, and the two Macs moved me off the terrace by sort of lifting me and skidding me along like a piece of statuary. By the time the kinks began to return to my hair, they had me in a niche just off the banquet room.

"Son," said the shorter Mac, "aren't you the phony Mr. Wales?"

"Wales is my name," I said. "I'm not phony."

"Indeed?"

"That's right," I said.

"When," asked the taller Mac, "did you become a waiter?"

"Tonight. But you mean a bus, not a waiter," I said.

"Are you being humorous?"

We had the niche to ourselves, and it was a little dark there, but a lot more lonely than dark.

"No," I said. "I'm not being humorous. Leggo my arms, do you mind?"

"We're intrigued," the short Mac said, "by the oddity of your presence, and the way you have been fanning out your large ears. We're rather puzzled, as a fact. Could we ask you a question?"

"I'm good on questions," I said. "How is Mr. Spatny?"

"Who?" I asked.

"Spatny."

"Don't know him."

Short Mac looked past my chest at tall Mac and said: "He states he isn't acquainted with Spatny."

"That speaks well for his character," tall Mac said.

"Son, we'd like to have a long talk with you."

"Let's not," I said.

"Walk between us," the short one said. "And wipe that my-pants-are-on-fire look off your puss."

"The hell I will," I said.

They did a quicker job on me than Alberto Gross had done earlier with the ashtray. The speed they got into it and the thoroughness was proof that it pays to organize, to have a plan. Tall Mac jabbed two fingers into my eyes, and then I couldn't tell who was doing what as they kneed me, slammed my jaw, banged my nose, kicked my feet from under me and stamped on my face. I fought them like a bundle of wildcats. I swung blows that would have wrecked a house if they had hit a house. They didn't hit anything. But I did considerably better with my howling for help.

Quite likely it wasn't the hour or more that it seemed before the Macs ran away from me.

THE room, a small one, not ten feet on a side, ornate, completely without furniture but with numerous mirrors, fooled me for a while. It turned out to be the elevator, and it and not my head was doing the moving.

"I haven't any eyeballs left," I said, when my teeth would stop gritting long enough to let words out.

"Pepper."

"Huh?"

"One of them had the foresight to have pepper under his fingernails," Doc Savage said. "A bit painful, I imagine."

"You cover a lot of ground with that word bit," I said. "You mean I've got eyes after all?"

The elevator stopped. I was not yet feeling well enough to know, or care about knowing, which way the cage had been traveling, but presumably it had gone down, because I could hear muffled through the door the low cave-like sound that is in hotel lobbies.

I was sitting on the elevator floor. Then suddenly Doc Savage had a fistful of my coat front, and I was no longer sitting on the floor. I was on my feet, or rather up in the air.

He said: "Now would be a good time for you to do a quick job with the truth."

The way he said it made me glad that I couldn't see his face very well. I'm no Jack Dempsey or Charlie Atlas, but neither do I have to be helped across streets, yet he was holding me up there against the elevator sidewall, and I was completely helpless. I felt like an insect that a kid had just fastened to a plank with a pin.

"What do you want to know?" I gasped.

"Use your judgment," he said. "As long as it's the truth."

I didn't stop to figure out why I suddenly wanted to talk—it obviously wasn't a time for pausing to figure out reasons. Not that he was exactly threatening me. He didn't sound like one guy laying it down to another on a street corner, not a lawyer bulldozing the opposition witness, and least of all did he sound like a ballplayer mistreating the ump. He'd merely said I'd better talk, and I knew that was what I'd better do, if I didn't want them collecting me off the sides of the elevator with a putty scraper. I'd never had anybody scare me so much so quick.

Doc Savage listened while I packed a couple of minutes full of words. . . . If I told

him any lies, it was an accident due to excitement.

He said: “So you don’t know what it’s all about?”

“That’s right.”

“You have nothing on me,” he said. “I don’t know either.”

HE opened the elevator door, and we stepped out into the lobby. He laid a hand on my elbow, about as gently as a blacksmith’s vise, and guided me across the lobby. Then we stopped.

“Monk!” he said.

The fellow who had followed Albert Gross out of the banquet room upstairs, the short and wide man who looked like an ape, was sitting in a lobby chair. He seemed a little battered. He had a thumb stuck in his mouth, feeling to learn how many teeth he had left.

“Doc,” he said. “I must be losing my manhood.”

The bronze man said nothing.

“Or that Gross guy is specially tough,” Monk added.

“I could have told you that,” I said.

Doc Savage introduced me to the baboon. “This is Monk Mayfair, a friend and associate of mine.”

Monk pointed a finger at me. “The waiter!” He had a big finger, attached to a hand that was also large and covered with almost as many bristles as a toothbrush. “The nosey waiter. What does he know about this?”

“He has a funny story,” Doc Savage said.

“It better not be too funny.”

“What happened to you?”

“Gross somehow got the idea I was following him, which I was,” Monk explained. “I got in the elevator with him. I acted as innocent as anything, and while I was doing that, he hit me between the eyes. It felt like he used an anvil. I guess it was a blackjack. Did you know a man could be knocked sillier than a coon by getting hit between the eyes with a blackjack?”

“Where did Gross go?”

Monk said bitterly, “The guy had his nerve. He told the elevator operator, who hadn’t seen me get hit, that I just gave a jump and keeled over. When I woke up, I was in a nice comfortable chair on the mezzanine with an assistant hotel manager throwing ice-water in my face.”

“And you do not know where Gross went?”

“Nobody seems to know.”

Doc Savage asked, “Did you see what happened in the sky?”

“Sky?” Monk shook his head carefully. “All I saw was stars—from the blackjack.”

“Did you ever hear of a Mr. Spatny?” Doc Savage inquired.

“Who?”

“Never mind,” Doc Savage said.

THE assistant hotel managers were fluttering around us now, looking as if they would have liked to wring their hands, and introducing a Mr. Casey, the house detective. Casey fitted the picture of a house man, five feet seven and tapered at both ends like a seal. He was no help.

Doc Savage spoke briefly to Monk Mayfair in a language I did not understand. Evidently the bronze man had suggested that it would be more private in his car parked in the street, because that was where we went.

The automobile, a large sedan and not a new model, had an unusually solid quality that I noticed when I was boosted in. I looked at one of the windows where it came up through the body, and it was more than an inch thick.

“Is this thing armored?” I asked.

“That’s one of your lesser worries, bud,” Monk Mayfair said.

They got in, one on either side of me, and the car door sounded like the door of a bank vault when it closed. Doc Savage flicked a switch, presently a radio speaker was hissing, and Savage said into a microphone: “Police radio from Special 243.” They answered him. He gave the police a specific description of Miss Fenisong, Albert Gross, Alec McGraff and J. B. C. McCutcheon. It was a wonderful description; I could almost see them from his words. He said: “I dislike making extra work for somebody, but I would certainly appreciate a rundown on the name of Spatny. Probably a man. I have nothing but the name, but I’d like it checked against anything you might have.”

“Don’t worry about making extra work, Mr. Savage,” the cop’s voice said. “We’ll get the stuff for you. What do we do with the other four if we pick them up?”

"I'd like to question them," Doc said. "If you need a charge, one of them committed an assault on my aide, Monk Mayfair."

"And lived through it!" The cop sounded surprised. "Very well, Mr. Savage. You can expect the fullest coöperation."

I said: "I didn't know a cop could be that polite to a citizen."

Savage took another look at the sky to learn whether the odd light was still up there. It wasn't.

I said: "That was a nice description. I could almost feel the two Macs kicking me in the slats again."

"You say they were going to take you out of the hotel with them?" Savage asked.

"That was the idea they expressed. By the way, why didn't they?"

"They made quite a bit of noise working on you, enough to get my attention. They saw me and ran. Unfortunately, they had an escape route all planned, with doors they could lock behind them. They got away."

I said: "That's the way I figured."

Monk Mayfair showed some life. "What about gorgeous?" he wanted to know. "Miss Fenisong, if that was her name? What became of her?" He sat up straight, adjusted his necktie, and added, "You know, I think we should question that babe."

"I saw her first," I said.

Monk gave me a look that would have cracked a rock. "Yeah?" he said. "Well, maybe I'll hand you something else to think about."

"Easy on that," Doc Savage told him. "Sammy has been rather coöperative so far."

"Who's Sammy?"

"Me," I said. "What *did* become of the girl?"

Doc Savage said: "I have an associate following her."

"By God, have you got that shyster lawyer trailing her!" Monk yelled. "Having Ham Brooks shadow that girl is about as practical as posting a hound dog to watch a beefsteak."

I gathered that Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks had opinions about each other, and Doc Savage was accustomed to it.

"Sammy," Doc Savage said. "Tell Monk how you got into it. And if you think of anything you forgot to tell me, toss it in."

"You mean I gotta go through that again?"

"Probably several times," Savage told me. "You see, we probably know less than you about the affair."

"In that case," I said, "you're probably without any information at all."

THE way they let me recite my tale again—without a single interruption—wasn't too reassuring. I would have liked them to indicate whether they did or didn't believe me. All that came out of them was attentive silence.

"If you're a liar," Monk said when I finished, "you're pretty fluent."

Savage said: "His story has the ring of truth, Monk. And it's logical except on one point—his reasons for going to the hotel to see Miss Fenisong after she phoned him by mistake, and then going to the trouble he did to be present at the banquet."

"Shucks, that's the only part I believed," Monk said.

"You think his actions were reasonable, then?"

"You saw the babe, didn't you?"

"Well . . ."

"Take it from me, Miss Fenisong was the bait that got him into it," Monk said. "That part I believe." He shoved his face at me and added, "But you'd better get over the yen, bum."

"I don't think I can lick you," I told him. "But you call me a bum again, and I'll test it out."

"Aren't you a bum?"

"Only to my friends."

He grinned, and I was glad he did. I was going to hit him, and he would have ruined me.

I asked: "How come you fellows took hold of the thing the way you did, if you didn't know something was coming off? It looked to me like you were cocked and primed."

"How do you mean?" Monk asked.

"Well, you followed Gross when he left. This Ham Brooks, whoever he is, is tailing the girl. And Doc Savage didn't exactly sleep through it. All of that seems to require advance arrangements to me. How come?"

Monk shrugged. "We've developed a technique."

"Huh?"

"When you've been in trouble as many times as we have," he explained, "you just

function automatically when something doesn't look right."

Doc Savage said: "There was no magic about it. I saw Gross change the place-cards, and Miss Fenisong was fairly transparent—she claimed to be a lunar expert, but what she didn't know about it was considerable. I saw McGraff signal her to bring me out on the terrace. That was fairly obvious. I had the four of them spotted—I'd noticed that they went through a mumbo-jumbo introducing each other to me—and so, without attracting any more attention than necessary, I asked Monk to trail Gross, and Ham the girl. I was going to do my best with the other two. As it turned out, my best wasn't good."

"Whooeeee!" I said. "You had your eyes open."

"I think the whole arrangement was designed to get me out on the terrace when the chromospheric eruption occurred," Savage added.

"The chromo—the what?"

He hesitated. "There was a rather unique luminance in the sky—"

"I saw that," I said. "You mean you've got a name for what we saw?"

He shook his head. "I wouldn't want to be quoted, but it seemed to be in the nature of what scientists call chromospheric eruptions, although certainly I know of no recorded instance of such magnitude and purely localized nature. Apparently, too, it occurred far short of the Appleton stratum, but without the aid of an electronic multiplier, it's hard to say—"

"You've gone off and left me in the bushes already," I said. "Negative and positive electricity is as far as I go, and all I know about them is that they're marked plus and minus on a battery. . . . Tell me this—is it bad?"

He hesitated over that one, too.

"It might not be good," he said.

"How do you figure that?"

"I haven't figured it. If what happened up there in the sky tonight is what I think it was, it stepped off into the field of advanced science, and when you do that these days, it's not safe to predict what might be done. Let me put it this way—if that manifestation in the sky we saw tonight was man-made, and there are indications it was, we're up against knowledge reaching beyond that necessary to create the atom bomb."

I was impressed enough to hang my mouth open and not say anything. He had an effective way of saying what he said, and I didn't doubt for a minute that he knew what he was talking about, my thought being that all those scientists tonight wouldn't have all but fallen on their knees if he was an ordinary guy.

He gave us a piece of his philosophy. "It's unfortunate that the moral enlightenment of the human race isn't keeping pace with its scientific discoveries. It's frightening to think that a crook might someday get hold of something as effective as the gadget they dropped on Hiroshima."

"What makes you think that thing in the sky was man-made?"

"They had it timed. . . . Miss Fenisong seemed to know to within a few minutes of the time it was going to come," he said.

He was right. And he had me scared. He had the little cold-footed things scuttling up and down my spine. If anybody had said boo! right then. I would have made a good try at jumping right through the side of that armored car. They had me frightened stiff of something I didn't know what was, and they didn't know what was.

Chapter IV

HE was dying when he came down the street. Not yet dead of course, but well on his way to it—enough of his life had leaked out of him that he probably had no very clear idea where he was going or what he would do if he got there.

Savage saw him first and pointed, said, "Look at that!" Then, when Monk started to get out, he added, "Could be a trap. Stay in the car. We'll drive up beside him."

This was a fine street of tall modern buildings with no basement entryways and no iron picket fences to give a staggering man trouble. That was probably why he had gotten this far. Maybe he had not come a great distance, but even a few feet would be a great distance for him. He kept against the buildings, kept his feet under him somehow, and moved by skidding a shoulder against the buildings.

Our car came up with him as warily as a kitten stalking a cricket. We sat there a moment. "It looks clear," Doc Savage said.

Savage got out, stood before the man, stood in the man's path, and the man came sliding along the slick granite side of the building until he was against Savage, and even then he kept pushing with rubbery legs.

"Gross," Savage said to the man. "Gross, do you know me?"

Gross' knees kept bending forward, then back, a little more each time, and he seemed to grow shorter and settle into the pavement. He moaned—a hurt-sheep sound—as Savage took hold of him and lowered him to the pavement.

Doc Savage leaned down and wrenched open the man's vest and shirt. An ice pick had done it, it seemed to me. I counted seven little pits with scarlet yarns coming out of them, and it was dark and I could only see a part of his torso.

"Holy smoke, why didn't somebody help him?" I said.

Monk Mayfair said: "This is New York. Nobody bothers with anybody else. It's the damndest town that way. . . . They probably thought he was drunk."

Albert Gross spoke, and I jumped a foot. I had supposed his voice would be made of thin gasps and gurgles, but it was strong and bell-clear.

He said: "I was trying to get to you. Did you see the sky?"

"I saw it," Doc Savage told him.

"We wanted you to."

"Why?"

"Listen to me," Gross said. "It was black, but it wasn't big. Black, see—maybe fifteen feet long and not quite as high nor that wide. The outside looked sort of fuzzy. It seemed to keep that shape. It came out, or seemed to come out of a doorway, a kind of an arcade into a building. There was no appearance of it flowing out. It just came out, full-blown. It came to me, or toward me, and I ducked into a niche between two buildings. It came right in after me. It was black as hell inside the thing. Then I felt sharp things sticking into me, and it didn't hurt too bad, and then it hurt like hell."

"More than one sharp thing?" Doc Savage asked.

"One thing, sticking into me many times. I could be wrong, though."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. I passed out."

Doc Savage asked: "Who is Spatny?"

"A great one," Gross said.

I wondered why Savage had changed the subject to Spatny, and then I knew. It was because Albert Gross was dead. He was spread out there on the sidewalk, and his life was all gone. His last words had been clear, fine and clear as a politician telling a constituent the high taxes aren't his fault.

"Go through his pockets, Monk," Doc Savage said.

I DIDN'T believe it, and I still didn't believe it even after we dug up three different people who had seen the black object. One of them had seen Gross run into the niche between the buildings—we looked at the niche and it was there, all right, a kind of service alley about five feet wide—and the same spectator had seen the black object go in after Gross. It hadn't come out. The police dug up some more witnesses with the same yarn, except that one of them had the black thing a hundred feet high. The cops weren't any more willing to believe it than I was.

"Nothing in his pockets," Monk reported.

"Nothing?"

"He's been gone over with a vacuum cleaner."

Doc Savage made me a proposition. "Do you want to go to jail, or do you want to go with us?"

That had been on my mind. I could see I wasn't going to just walk out of this.

"Your company satisfies me," I said.

We went back to the *Parkside-Regent* and paid a visit to Miss Fenisong's room. She was not inhabiting it. Nobody was surprised.

"We'll go down to headquarters, and see what we can work out," Savage said.

He didn't mean police headquarters, which is what I supposed. We rode downtown in silence. They didn't mention what they were thinking about, but I was thinking of Albert Gross, too wide for his suits, too quick to hit people on the head, and now too full of little holes. We got out in front of a building, and when I looked up I realized that I'd seen plenty of picture postcards of the place. I gathered it was a private elevator we used; there was no one else in it, and no operator. You pushed a button. It went up as softly as a whisper in a girl's throat, and let us out into a hall. We walked into a reception room, on to carpet that felt like a fall of snow underfoot.

There was an enormous ancient safe, a table of inlaid woods that was the most beautiful thing I'd seen in the way of tables, and no furniture that you needed to look at twice before you sat on it.

Through a door, there was a library which seemed to have about as many books as I imagine the Library of Congress has. Beyond that, past another door, there seemed to be near an acre of floor-space cluttered with the sort of stuff—enameled tables, glass tables, chromium thingajigs and thingajigs of glass, trays, retorts, filters, pumps, bottles, phials, coils, tubes, wire—that you see in moving picture scenes of laboratories.

"Well?" Monk Mayfair asked. He was watching me.

I pulled my jaw and asked, "Whose diggings?"

"Doc's."

"You mean one guy, all of this?"

"That's right."

THEY fixed a comfortable chair for me, and Monk brought out a piece of apparatus that could have been a radio but wasn't. They put the gimmick beside my chair. "Take off your coat and roll up your sleeve and sit down," Monk ordered. I did, and they put attachments on my hand, around my chest and one, the only one I recognized, on my arm above the elbow. The latter closely resembled, or was one of those things the doctors wrap around your arm to get blood pressure.

"What's this?" I asked.

"Lie detector," Monk said. "Are you worried?"

"Okay," I said. "Okay, but stick to what's your business, or I'll stuff the thing down your throat."

Monk grinned. "I wouldn't want one of the things on me, either," he said. "Not all the time."

You had to like the homely baboon. He was uglier than a mud fence. A mud fence would have looked like a piece of silk ribbon beside him. But it was an amiable kind of homeliness—you felt the same way toward him that you feel toward St. Bernard dogs, who also have faces which don't take beauty prizes.

"Let's have your story," Doc Savage said.

"Heck—again?" I complained.

This time they didn't sit back and let me recite. They had questions, a hundred questions about details. I had always supposed my memory was pretty good, and that I had an eye for details. I was wrong. Five minutes of this, and I felt like a blind cow.

Doc Savage asked: "What did you do with the part you tore off Gross' coat?"

I told him what trash-can I had stuffed it in.

"Get it," he directed Monk, and Monk left.

He threw a question at me every other word, and we covered the rest of it. The machine was making a zig-zag mess of lines on a roll of moving graph paper, and he had watched it closely.

"Do I pass?" I asked.

"Ever been in New York before, Sammy?"

"No. I mean, I went through it when I was in the army, which I don't call being here," I said.

"Where are you from?"

"Kansas City."

"Why did you leave Kansas City, Sammy?"

"I was getting fired off too many jobs," I told him. "I wanted to see if a change of scenery would change my luck."

"What seemed to be the trouble?"

"Not enough money, too much work, and bosses looking down my collar," I said.

"Everyone has that kind of a problem."

"Yeah? Well maybe it's none of your business," I said.

He said: "Maybe you didn't put it out. Maybe you felt the world owed you a plush living."

"Why not?" I said. "I spent a lot of time in foxholes, and while I'm lying in mud and being shot at, guys not as good as me drew their hundred bucks a week and saw their babes every night. Okay, now I want some of that."

"Oh, a professional hero."

"I resent that."

"Look," he said. "There were ten million men more or less in service, just about all the able-bodied men in one generation, just about all the men who are going to be capable of being successful for the next few years. That would have been true if there hadn't been a war. What would happen if all ten million stood around holding their hands

out and yelling for a hundred dollars a week and no work?"

"You mean I'm a bum?"

"I mean you are making noises like one."

"I don't know what the hell started this," I yelled. "But I got a couple of medals that says I did this nation a service. Now it owes me service, what I mean."

"Who is the nation?"

"Huh?"

"Think it over," he said. "If you and the other ten million aren't the nation, you might tell me who is."

That was all of that—except that I happened to wander into the big room where the books were, and while I was looking to see whether there were any at all with titles I could understand—it was entirely scientific stuff—I came across a little display case. It wasn't conspicuous, back in a corner. It was full of medals. I got a funny feeling. There was everything from that little blue ribbon with the stars on it on down, and I mean it made me feel down, to the couple I had. I thought maybe, at first, he'd warmed a swivel chair for them. The trouble with that idea was, you didn't get purple hearts for a swivel chair pinching your bottom. And he had four! There was a little leather folio containing some of the citations, and I read a couple. He hadn't been in any swivel chair. I didn't have much to say for a while.

MONK MAYFAIR came back. He had the part of Albert Gross' coat I'd torn off, and a question. "Any word from the shyster lawyer?" he wanted to know, and looked worried—while trying not to look worried—when told there had been no news from Ham Brooks.

For my money, the piece of coat wasn't going to do them any good. I'd looked it over, and all it had given me was three invitations to the Reception. I figured it was a dopey waste of time, going back uptown for it.

Monk said: "I checked with old Doc Hodges, the chairman, about how the four of them got invited to the Reception. He'd wondered himself, and he's finding out. He'll call."

Doc Savage went over the coat fragment. He became interested in the inside of the coat pocket, and cut the pocket out with a razor blade.

"Laundry marks," I said. "That won't help you."

Not discouraged, he got on the telephone, talked to some expert in the police department, and made a liar out of me.

"The suit was cleaned the last five times by a shop in the eleven hundred block on Lexington Avenue," Savage said.

He telephoned the cleaning shop proprietor at home, but the fellow was out on a party. He called the police, and got them looking for the man.

He handed the coat fragment and pocket to Monk, and said, "Run a chemical and microscope test on the cloth and the pocket scrapings. It might give us something."

Monk Mayfair didn't look to me as if he had brains enough to run a test on anything, unless it was to run his eye up and down a pretty leg. There was less than an inch between his eyebrows and his hairline.

We had a visitor then. Doctor Morand Funk Hodges, chairman of the doings at the *Parkside-Regent* tonight. He had a thin young man in tow, and was acting as if he intended wringing the latter's neck a bit later. The thin young man had wet lips, a pimple on his neck, and was wearing a large scare.

"Tell them, Wilfred," Doctor Hodges said ominously.

Wilfred had more trouble with his words than a guy juggling a lighted match in a powder factory. He, it seemed, was the banquet secretary, the one who sent out the invitations.

A man had paid him a hundred dollars to mail four invitations to Miss Paula Fenisong, Mr. Albert Gross, Mr. Alec McGraff and Mr. J. B. C. McCutcheon. And, of course put their names on the guest-list. The man who had spent the hundred was Mr. McCutcheon. The taller and redder-faced Mac.

"Wilfred, you're fired!" said the good Doctor Hodges. "And I am going to kick you a good one in the pants."

He sounded funny, the dignified way he said it, but at the same time as if his mouth was full of knives. He was an eminent-seeming old codger, quite likeable. And so help me if he didn't lead Wilfred out in the hall, and we could hear him put his foot against Wilfred's seat. It sounded like a good one.

Doctor Hodges came back in, sat down and took off his shoe and examined his foot

for damage. He said, “A hundred dollars—they wanted to meet you badly, Savage. Nobody ever pays a hundred bucks to meet me. Fools if they did. You know, that business really livened up the banquet, didn’t it? Good thing. We had a lousy program. You should have heard Baedeker’s speech. It put half of them to sleep—those who didn’t know enough about what they saw in the sky tonight to have their hair scared up on end.”

Doc Savage said: “Doctor, do you think what we saw was a chromospheric eruption of terrestrial origin?”

“Sure. So do you.” Doctor Hodges had chin whiskers of the nanny goat variety, and he gave them a worried yank. “Drat it, man, who could have developed a means of creating molecular collision with free electrons in one of the perturbing strata? I thought I knew all the atmospheric physicists doing work along that line. But I know of no one who is near achieving the sort of success we saw demonstrated over that hotel tonight.”

“It’s a puzzle,” Doc Savage admitted.

“Dammit, doesn’t it scare you?”

“Somewhat.”

Doctor Hodges did some shuddering and whisker-yanking, and pondered, “How do you suppose it was achieved? To drive electrons against molecules and obtain optical wave emission, in the visible spectrum—for at least part of it was in the visible spectrum, since we could see a round luminous patch in the sky—they either had a terrific transmitter for microwave-lengths, or they had stumbled on a short-cut. God, I wish I’d had an electronic multiplier there while it was going on, with enough other apparatus to get a test.”

The next five minutes of discussion was over my head. Probably I recognized two words. My minus and plus electricity didn’t get me far.

The eminent doctor could have talked about it all night, but Savage threw him out in a polite way, promising to let him have a peep at the gimmick that had made the light if we found it.

“Nice old guy with a lot of big words,” I said.

“And big deeds,” Doc Savage said sharply. “Doctor Hodges is the man who—”

He didn’t finish that. But whatever Doctor Hodges had contributed to science, I gathered it was plenty.

I said: “The old gaffer didn’t seem to have heard of the black it-can’t-be that was crawling around in the street and did in Gross.”

“That reminds me,” Doc Savage said, and he telephoned the police medical examiner, asking if the exact cause of the death of Albert Gross had been ascertained. Evidently it had, because he listened intently to the news.

“Well, what did Gross die of?” I demanded.

“Of little holes in him,” Savage said briefly.

This hardly came under the heading of fresh news. I gathered that he thought I couldn’t do much with the details if I had them. It could be.

DOC SAVAGE made telephone calls. He got hold of Samuel Wickert Wales, the astrophysicist of the Compton Observatory, the guy whose phone call I’d accidentally received that morning—and how I was wishing I hadn’t!—and learned that Wales had made a deal to coach Miss Fenisong on the lunar theory. The deal had been made by telephone; Wales had never met Miss Fenisong. In other words, he had nothing to contribute. Savage thanked him as gently as a chorine stroking her new mink coat.

“If it was me,” I said, “I’d throw a little scare around.”

“If it was you,” he replied, “you’d probably get hit on the head again.”

“Touché,” I said. “Only there’s been murder done.”

“Probably worse,” he said, and went into the laboratory, leaving me to discover that I had a first-rate case of the creeping jeebies. I didn’t know exactly what there was to be afraid of—I wasn’t that scientific—but I knew alarm in other people when I saw it. Savage was alarmed. Doctor Hodges had been alarmed. The only emotion that would show on a face like Monk Mayfair had was dumbness, but he was probably alarmed too.

I wasn’t kidding myself—mostly I was afraid of what I didn’t know. As a kid, I always ran like blazes past graveyards at night, for the reason that I didn’t know what might come out of a graveyard. Only a few months ago, I was one of those who figured those tinkering scientists would probably blow the world to dust with their atom bomb tests. Ig-

norance isn't bliss sometimes—it can be stark terror.

Anyway, I was in such a tizzy that I was forgetting lovely-voice and how swell she looked and how nice a dish she would make across the breakfast table of mornings. That, for me, was quite a tizzy.

Chapter V

IT was a surprise for a rough crummy-looking package done up in burlap and tough cord to contain a fistful of polished diamonds—but that was what Monk Mayfair turned out to be. He finished with his microscope and some mixtures of stinking chemicals which he had been using on Albert Gross' coat fragment.

Monk said: "Well, here's the story on Gross."

"Let's have it," Savage told him.

"You want me to interpret?"

"Sure."

"Albert Gross," Monk said, "lived on the north shore of Long Island, in a large house that is part of an estate having a greenhouse and stables. The house is new, been built within the last year, and the outside is white-painted brick, which should make it easier to find. The room in the house that Gross liked best is furnished in green velvet and the furniture is overstuffed. . . . Take a look and see how far you think I missed it. Here's my notes."

I said: "Nice guessing."

"What guessing?" Monk asked.

"That stuff you just spouted."

"Don't be a dope."

"I'm not," I said. "That's why I don't swallow that line of Sherlock Holmes guff you just put out."

"No?"

"No," I said.

Monk gave me that baboon grin. "There were traces of salt on the coat fabric, and that—and the distribution of the traces—meant exposure to sea breezes. Ergo, he had been around the sea or seashore. I didn't find any salt-water spots, so it was probably the seashore. There was pollen from nine different flowers, including orchids of three varieties, on the cloth, or in it. That meant either a flower shop or greenhouse. There were several horse hairs on the lapels, from at least two different horses, both greys. He didn't get them petting horses ridden by New York cops, because the mounted police don't use grey horses. That meant country, an estate, a greenhouse. Get it?"

"Is this a rib?"

He shrugged. "There was a flake or so of white brick paint—a new type the Nazis developed during the war, and never on sale in America until the last year. It doesn't work on old brick that has been painted, only on new brick. Hence a new white house—and probably quite new, because he's been fooling around the outside of it to get the paint traces on him. There were plenty of green velvet hairs from upholstery fabric. . . . So, we get an estate in the country—where but in the country do you find estates?—with a greenhouse, near the north shore of Long Island. The last is a guess—the North Shore is where you find most of the estates near a seashore around New York City. And the house is white brick. Now do you catch on? See how simple."

"It sounds like moon-jumping to me," I said.

Doc Savage said, "Gross probably owns the estate."

"Huh?"

"Expensive suit. Three hundred dollars, probably. A man with that money for his clothes could own an estate."

"You too!" I said. "You mean to tell me you look at a piece off a guy's coat and tell where he went to school?"

"He went to school in Vienna, Austria," Doc Savage said.

"Yeah?" I said. "Now I know it's a rib."

PRESENTLY the telephone rang, and it was the police. They said they'd found the proprietor of the cleaning shop on Lexington Avenue, and were rushing him down to look at his records and see if Albert Gross had left an address when he left his suits to be cleaned.

"Ain't Lexington Avenue right here in downtown New York?" I asked. "Down the spout goes your wild-and-woolies about Gross having a Long Island estate."

They didn't seem discouraged. It appeared they were going to look on the north shore of Long Island for the place.

"You've laid out a month's job there," I said.

The police called again. They were at the cleaning fellow's shop, had found out all the man knew about Albert Gross, and it wasn't much. He remembered Gross. But it wasn't Gross who had brought in the stuff to be cleaned; it was the chauffeur. The chauffeur had brought in a half dozen of his boss' suits at a time, explaining the boss had a mad on at the cleaner out on Long Island where he lived. The man didn't know Gross' address, nor did he know the chauffeur's name and address. The chauffeur didn't answer the description of anybody we knew.

"What do we do now?" I asked. "Spend thirty days combing Long Island?"

Monk dug me. He said: "Oh, you admit Gross lived on Long Island, now?"

"Just because one pin fell down don't mean you got a strike," I said.

Doc Savage telephoned somebody named Edsing. He didn't get much satisfaction. He called somebody in Albany, the state capitol, and the somebody said he would phone Edsing right now and see that Edsing delivered satisfaction.

Monk Mayfair had me puzzled. When he went in the other room, I asked Doc Savage: "This guy Mayfair's got me guessing. He looks like an empty box. He looks like something grass wouldn't grow on. Maybe his looks are deceiving—eh?"

"Maybe," Savage said.

"Who is he?"

"Monk? His full name is Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. He has a lot of letters after his name meaning degrees and fellowships, but if you used them he'd hit you in the eye. He's one of the world's leading research chemists."

"I guess I'll overhaul my human-nature yardstick," I said.

THE fellow Edsing, the one who hadn't given Savage satisfaction on the phone, arrived. He was weighted down with satisfaction and anxious to deliver it. The somebody in Albany had certainly built a fire on his coattail.

Edsing was with the New York State Highway, Department of Planning—a job he obviously feared might terminate as of tonight—and he had a suitcase full of aërial photographs. It seemed that, last fall, his department had made the pictures as a part of the planning for future highway development. He sweat a couple of pints while he was showing Doc Savage which photographs were the north shore of Long Island.

Doc Savage thanked him mildly, and asked me to show him out.

In the hall, Edsing grabbed me by the necktie and blurted, "Do you think I'll be fired?"

I asked him: "What's the matter, did a taxpayer bite you back?"

"Good God, I didn't realize who he was," Edsing gasped. "The Commissioner in Albany was mad as a hornet. Man, he ate me out up to here." He looked as if he was going to spray me with tears. "And me with a home I just paid two prices for, and a pregnant wife. Could you smooth it out for me with Savage?"

"I'm having trouble smoothing it out for myself," I said. "But I'll try."

Edsing filled my ear full of grateful words, and I got rid of him.

Savage and Monk Mayfair were going over the aërial photographs.

I said: "That guy thinks he's going to lose his job. His wife is in a family way, and it might go hard on him."

Savage was concerned. He told Monk Mayfair to send Edsing a note of thanks, and say that if Edsing would call so-and-so hospital, Mrs. Edsing would find her hospital services wouldn't cost her anything.

I asked: "Ain't that a kind of expensive tip for the reluctant favor the guy done?"

Monk said: "Doc owns the hospital. So what?"

They finished up by marking rings around three houses, or estates, which had greenhouses or stables and where construction of one or more buildings had been recent, as evidenced by fresh grading work around the buildings.

"We'll try those," Savage said.

"Damn it!" Monk said suddenly. "I'm worried about Ham Brooks! Why hasn't he reported in? Something has happened to him."

I said: "The way you've been talking about this lawyer Brooks, I figure you rated him about the same as a bad smell in your socks."

"Shut up!" Monk said.

They left a message for Ham Brooks in case he called. They told him the places they were going in Long Island, and why. Savage spoke this information into a gimmick that

recorded it, and Monk told me the machine would put the words into the telephone when Ham Brooks called, if he called the unlisted phone number the contraption was hooked up to. I took his word for it.

"Sammy, you go along with us," Doc Savage said.

"Why?"

He didn't give me much satisfaction. Monk was more explicit, if less reassuring. He told me, "Doc probably thinks it a little odd that you got yourself in all this by chasing a sweet voice you heard over the telephone."

"You saw sweet-voice, didn't you?" I asked him.

"Sure. But Doc is more babe-resistant than you and me, and he probably overestimates our strength where one like Miss Fenisong is concerned."

"I don't think I got much strength where she's concerned," I said.

"You better get strong," he advised me. "Because I liked her looks, and I'll walk right over you, you get in my way."

"That face of yours will scare her to death," I said. "And if you fool with me, the face will look worse."

He wasn't much impressed.

I looked at the clock as we left. Only two hours! In two hours they had taken a piece torn off a man's coat and made it read like a book. I didn't know much about scientific detecting, but I was impressed.

I said: "There's one crack been made that I don't get."

"Only one?" Monk said, meaning that he was thinking about Miss Fenisong and didn't like me.

"Somebody said Gross went to school in Vienna, Austria," I explained. "That one I can't see through."

Savage said: "Gross attended *Osterreich Zoologische* University, or at least he had a tattoo mark in his armpit which was affected by the *Zoologische* students during the early twenties. The idea of armpit tattooing, instead of a class-ring, was a general practice, and preceded the Nazi practice of armpit tattoos to identify SS men, of which you may have heard. . . . Incidentally, you didn't see the armpit mark on Gross, nor have I but the police medical examiner described it accurately over the telephone."

"From Austria, huh?" I said. "That could mean something, couldn't it?"

He glanced at me as if I had pulled the rabbit out of the hat.

"It could be," he said.

Anyway they were some detectives. They had just about made a believer out of me.

Chapter VI

IT was the third house. At the first place we tried, an aged butler in a nightshirt was polite to us, and at the second place two Great Dane dogs offered to eat us alive, if one was to believe their uproar. I was about to drop the needle on a recording of I-told-you-so, but something restrained me—probably common sense was getting a toehold on me.

The night was still with us, and would be for another two hours, since this was February and the nights were long. But there was a scattering of snow out here in the country that made the night seem less dark. Old snow, scabs too tough for the sun to melt, now hard-frozen, crusty, shiny. The driveway where it turned off had a thin glaze of ice, and we skidded across that and up to a stone gate-house and a pair of iron gates formidable enough for a penitentiary.

Nothing more than our headlights brought an old man out of the gate-house. An old man who was as big as a buffalo, taller than a buffalo and nearly as wide, but as thin and bony, and perhaps as tough, as he would be if constructed of oak sticks. He was wearing an enormous black overcoat. It looked like a shroud on a dead tree. He had a voice as deep, as amiable, as a skull rolling down a roof.

"Good morning," he said. "Can I be of some service?"

Savage asked him who lived here.

"The owner of the establishment, sir," said the old giant.

"Would his name be Albert Gross?" Savage asked.

He buttoned the black overcoat, doing it slowly, taking time to measure us with a micrometer and do a little thinking. His hair was as grey as an old seagull, nearly a foot long and seemed to stick out straight from his head everywhere. All he needed was a scythe, and he could play Death.

"This is indeed the residence of Mr. Albert Gross," he finally admitted.

He put one word after another like a mason fitting a row of stones in a wall. Each word was finely chiseled. English wasn't the language he'd heard in the cradle; I had been introduced to the detective business tonight, so I deduced this with confidence.

"We'd like to see Mr. Gross," Savage said.

It would be quite something if we did, I thought.

"I'm sorry. Mr. Gross is not here," said the old tower of bones.

"Mr. McGraff?"

"I'm sorry."

"Mr. McCutcheon?"

"Indeed I'm sorry," said the old man. "Mr. Gross, Mr. McGraff and Mr. McCutcheon left for the city early this morning—yesterday morning, I mean—and have not returned."

Doc Savage asked. "And Miss Fenisong?"

"Again I'm sorry. Miss Fenisong, I know, is an acquaintance of Mr. Gross—perhaps his niece, although I am not sure—but she does not live here, and is rather seldom a visitor. I regret being so disappointing."

Monk took it up. "We'd compromise for Mr. Spatny," he said.

"Who?"

"Don't you know Spatny?"

"I'm afraid I can't help you, sir." Old rack-of-bones shrugged. There was a gun in his hand, a gun that was big the way he was big. "Unless, of course, you prove to be friends of mine," he added.

HE put the cavernous mouth of his firearm into the car window and let it look at us. Savage had rolled down the window in order to talk with him.

I don't know what got into me. Maybe I had just seen too much preposterous magic for one night, and this was the last straw. It wasn't heroism. I was scared cold as a kid who'd broke his first window. The first thing I knew, I had hold of the gun with both hands.

The second I matched strength with the old man, I knew I was going to need my rabbit-foot. He was tough like a thirty-cent steak. Trying to twist his arm was like trying to do the same thing to the leg of a mule. He used his free hand on me and gave me a worse headache than I'd had that morning.

Suddenly there was more noise in the car than anybody wanted. The old man's gun was speaking. It spoke twice. Both bullets hit the left-hand window, flattened and fell away, and so help me the window merely had two small splattered places where a couple of hard-flying and well-fed bugs might have hit.

Then old hard-as-nails no longer had the mortar, and I didn't have it either. Savage had taken it away from both of us.

The old man drew back. He didn't run, but merely waited.

Monk Mayfair spoke to me. He spoke fluently for more than a minute, giving his opinion of my impulsiveness, not one word fit to print.

"You're a fool," Doc Savage told me.

"Listen, guns make me jumpy," I said. "Where'd the old boy get it from, anyway? One moment he was bare-handed, and the next one he was loaded for bear."

"The car," Doc Savage told me, "is equipped with a device which discharges an odorless, colorless anaesthetic gas. He could have been overcome without all the wild-west."

"The gas would have got us, too," I said.

"No. We merely hold our breath, and in about forty seconds the gas undergoes a chemical reaction with the air and becomes ineffective."

"You couldn't have told me to hold my breath without him hearing," I said. "You'd have gassed me, too, I suppose."

Monk Mayfair said: "I'm in favor of doing that anyway! It would be a good idea. I vote for it."

WE got out of the car. It was cold here in the country. The old man's breath came from his leathery lips as if he was blowing cotton. He said: "It's warmer in the gate-house, if you would care to converse there."

"We prefer the car," Savage said. "Climb in."

The old man limped slightly in his left leg as he moved. He got in the back seat with me, and I would have as soon welcomed a man-eating tiger. Monk Mayfair came around and got in with us, searched the old giant, and looked over what he had found—a wallet, a dun from the light company, a crested gold cigarette lighter, and more than a dozen big fat walnut-colored cigars.

"Fifty-centers," Monk said of the cigars. "And his name seems to be J. Heron Spatny, of 1880 Vista Road. His January light bill was eight dollars seventy. He has slightly over seven hundred dollars in cash."

Monk made a second search. He didn't find a holster. "Where were you carrying the gun?"

"Why, it was reposing in my sleeve," Spatny said.

Monk got out and looked in the gatehouse, came back and reported, "There's a repeating shotgun standing inside the door, where he might have grabbed it if we had accepted his invitation for a conference in there."

The old man stirred uncomfortably. "Really, you're attributing me with excessive bloodthirstiness," he complained.

"Would you care to correct any other wrong ideas we might have?" Savage inquired.

Spatny sat with back bent, head bowed. But the top of his head was nearly against the top of the car anyway. He was taller than Savage. He said: "First, would you mind telling me who you are?"

Savage introduced himself, Monk Mayfair and me. The names seemed to mean nothing to the old Alp.

"I don't know you," Spatny said gloomily. "That's my trouble—I don't know enough about anything. If Albert had just told me more . . . But he didn't. Albert was so afraid, too."

"Albert Gross?" Savage said.

The old man lifted his head; it whacked the top of the car, and he lowered it again. "You know Albert Gross?"

Savage said: "Sammy, here, got better acquainted with him than the rest of us."

"A wonderful chap, Albert, don't you think?" Spatny said to me.

"Great," I agreed. "Very quick with a rap on the head, that Albert."

"I wish we could get hold of Albert and have him vouch for you gentlemen," Spatny said thoughtfully.

I said: "He ought to be easy to get hold of. But he's a little dead for vouching."

The old man jumped with every muscle. He rocked the car like a rowboat. Thinking he was starting a go-around, I ducked. But he gave only the one jump, sank back in the seat, and laid off breathing for a while. It was quiet enough to hear our breath condense in the cold. Then Spatny moaned like a hound that had ground glass with his dinner.

"Alfred is dead! *Das ist zu arg!* Oh my God!" He brought his hands to his face, and long as his face was, his hands would span it. The yellow skin showed between the fingers. "Is this true?" he blurted. Without waiting for an answer, he added, "Alfred—I was waiting here for him—he is my friend. He is in danger. He told me so this morning, and asked me for help. He made an appointment to meet me here, secretly, at midnight—after I agreed to help him."

Savage said: "Midnight? A meeting here?"

The words came out of the mountainous old man like rain out of a cloud. His name was J. Heron Spatny—the J. was for Jemnost—and he was a Czech, a refugee, five years in this wonderful United States of America. He had refugeed via Vienna, Austria, where he had met Albert Gross—then wearing the name of Albert Grossberger—under awfully nice circumstances. Albert had helped him lam from the Nazis, I gathered. Here in America, Spatny had spent four years in the traveling salesman business in Florida, and one year here in New York in the flower business. He had a shop on Madison Avenue near Thirty-fourth Street, he said. He was happy, getting rich, and Alfred Gross had turned up a few months ago, and they'd had a delightful reunion.

Alfred Gross didn't seem to have any business, and he had for partners in it Mr. McGraff and Mr. McCutcheon. Spatny intimated he didn't like McGraff and McCutcheon, didn't think highly of them either. But they, and Albert Gross, lived well at this estate, which Gross professed to own. Spatny thought the Macs were refugees too. Three idle refugees rolling in wealth, apparently.

"Truthfully, I imagined they had profited well in the business of getting refugees out of Europe, and had settled down to enjoy the fruits of their labors," said the old man.

Yesterday his friend Albert Gross had called on Spatny; they'd lunched, discussed old times, and Gross was noticeably jerky. But they hadn't done business yesterday—he kept referring to day before yesterday as yesterday—and the next day Gross had called on him again. Gross had intimated he was in a predicament, his life was in danger, and

there was great devilment afoot. Would Spatny help him? In memory of old time spent dodging Nazis, Spatny would. The midnight appointment was made, Spatny had kept it, and here he was—Gross naturally hadn't shown.

That was what he had to tell us.

DOC SAVAGE chiseled on him for more details. Savage asked: "What about Miss Fenisong? You said she was related to Gross—his niece? Was that straight?"

He confessed he'd made that up. He didn't have the speck of an idea who Miss Fenisong was. "I didn't know who you were, and I was pretending to be the gatekeeper," he explained.

"What about that chromospheric eruption tonight?" Savage demanded.

The old giant merely hung his mouth open.

I said: "And a black scare-baby in the street. Don't forget that one."

No pay.

Savage asked him how he'd like to help us pay a visit to the estate. He said he'd like it fine, and wanted to know exactly how Albert Gross had died. Savage told him about it without really telling him anything—just that Gross had been found dead of little holes following some strange doings at a banquet for scientists. Meantime, Monk got out and found the large iron gates were locked.

The gate-lock didn't stump Savage long. He picked it. He also found an alarm on it, and short-circuited the wiring so the thing wouldn't do us any dirt. We drove up a lane that could have been the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and came to the mansion, the greenhouse, the stables, a garage, servants' quarters, tool houses, guest cottage and a few other buildings. It was still dark night; if anything, it was darker than it had been. Clouds like soot rolls had moved in overhead.

Savage radioed the police. He asked them to check up on Mr. J. Heron Spatny, Madison Avenue florist.

At that, the old man hissed once like a viper.

"I'm relieved to find you are affiliated with the police," he said, which didn't fit with the hiss.

We got out of the car. The snow grunted under our feet, or squeaked like nails being pulled. It was cold, and the cold took hold of my nose and cheeks like somebody's fingers. I thought that an estate like this should have servants enough around to keep the sidewalks shoveled of snow.

Savage said: "Here, Sammy. Better put this on." He was offering me a kind of a jacket; I took it and it was a lot heavier than a jacket should be, but not as heavy as I thought it should be when I found out what it was.

"What's this?" I asked.

"Bulletproof vest."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Does anybody mind if I just start back to Kansas City?"

"Put it on," Savage said, and leaned a finger against a button. We could hear a set of chimes clanging, and no other sound for a while, and then a voice said loudly—and too friendly—a greeting.

"Come in, fellows," the voice said. "I'm glad you got here."

Savage looked at Monk. Monk looked at Savage. There was a certain amount of coöperation in the way their eyebrows went up, then down, questioningly.

"Ham Brooks?" I asked.

"His voice, anyway," Monk said.

"What's the matter?"

"Too friendly," Monk said. "Watch." He lifted his voice and called, "Ham, this is Monk."

"Well, come in, old pal, old pal," said the deep oratorical voice. "Don't stand out there in the cold, old friend."

Monk shook his head. "Something's wrong. Normally he'd invite me to freeze to death."

We went in anyway.

HE was a man I had seen at the banquet, and not remembered as well as I should have. He had wide shoulders, a trim waist; a good-looking man except for an overwide mouth and hair that was a little slick, too wonderfully barbered for my taste. He wore full dress—tails, white tie—and I had supposed one monkey suit was about like another, but this one had class and snap. I found out later Ham Brooks was reputed one of the best-dressed men in New York, but I think I knew it then.

He sat in one of the parlors—there would be several parlors in a house like this—on a gold-brocaded, purple velvet,

fringe-edged divan that was large enough to hold half a dozen other occupants. He didn't get up and the great pleasure in his voice was not matched by the expression on his face as he said, "Come in, come in. How many of you are there? Just four of you? Is that all?"

Monk said: "We left the others outside holding the reindeer. . . . What are you pulling off Ham?"

Ham Brooks said too loudly, "Nothing at all—unless I want to learn whether or not I'm bulletproof. I'm quite sure I'm not, so the test doesn't appeal."

"Huh?"

"I have great faith in my judgment of human nature," Ham Brooks added. "I hope it isn't misplaced. Otherwise I'd have a rather sad opinion of myself for inviting you in."

Monk got it. He said: "Male or female?"

"Who?"

"Behind the pretty divan," Monk said.

Ham Brooks sighed like the fellow who had decided he would have to swim the creek where the alligator was. He said: "It's Miss Fenisong."

"Ah!"

"Indignant and well-armed," Ham added.

In the silence that followed, if frowns had had magnetic properties, the divan would have been lifted and suspended. Monk Mayfair said: "Sammy, would you care to try out the properties of your new bulletproof vest by being first to look behind the divan?"

"Miss Fenisong wouldn't shoot nice people like us," I said. "But no thanks, anyway."

Doc Savage said: "A tense situation like this makes one hold one's breath, doesn't it?"

I missed the cue. The floor rocked a little, steadied, came up and rested against my face, gently enough. I slept, but I didn't dream of a thing.

Chapter VII

AWAKENING was just as pleasant—I swam up out of nothing that was soft and not at all bad, and there I was, on a nice tiled floor, with ice-water flying into my face. No headache. Not much dizziness. Just a feeling of having been a fool.

My head came clear quickly, too; because at once I knew that Savage must have used some of that gas they had talked about, the stuff that you couldn't see nor smell, that would knock you, but not if you held your breath for as long as forty seconds. I hadn't held my breath. Savage had hit me with a hint that was as big as a scoop-shovel, but my latch string hadn't been out.

"Never a dull moment. Oh, boy!" I said.

Monk Mayfair said: "You should have let me put him in the bathtub." He was talking to Ham Brooks, who was looking pleased with the world, and with as much of Miss Fenisong's leg as he could see.

Miss Fenisong still slept. Whoever had picked her up and arranged her in the chair should have been a window-dresser in one of those Broadway shops I'd noticed that day, the places where sexy black underthings seemed to be the principal article of trade. Asleep, she was nice. I was wide awake in no time.

"We ought to get together on these things," I said. "If you've got any more trick gadgets, how about letting me know?"

Ham Brooks examined me. He didn't exactly fall on his face with approval. "Who is this chap?" he asked. "A taxi driver?"

"What's the matter with taxi drivers?" I demanded.

Savage told the dapper lawyer who I was. He could have made my character stand out a little more in the telling.

"Miss Fenisong is reviving," Monk remarked, and that put a stop to my history. We gathered around and waited admiringly. Even the old giant, Spatny, had his shoulders back.

She awakened the way I had. Quick. Clear-headed. She arranged her skirt more decorously, disappointing Monk. She had a natural question. "What happened?" she wanted to know.

Doc Savage said: "Mr. Brooks advises me that you took him unawares, menaced him with a gun"—he nodded briefly at a .25-caliber automatic, blue, lady-size, on the table—"and were holding him here, apparently pending the arrival of friends."

"Unawares—nothing!" she said. "He had been trailing me. He had his eyes open wide enough, particularly when I was getting out of a cab and the wind blew my skirt. I may have outsmarted him, but he was clearly aware I was in existence."

She saw me, and said, “Oh, hello, Mr. Wales. I’m glad Mr. Gross didn’t do much harm to you.”

“It’s all right with me now,” I said. “I should have made it more clear that I wasn’t Mr. Wales the moon expert when I came to see you at your hotel.”

“I’m sorry Mr. Gross was nasty,” she said. “It was uncalled for. I’m going to tell him so, too.”

“That will be a hard—”

Doc Savage, cutting ahead of me before I could give anything away, said, “Did you leave the banquet with Mr. Gross, Miss Fenisong?”

She shook her head. “No. Mr. Brooks can tell you that.”

“And you haven’t seen or heard of Mr. Gross since?”

“No.”

“And Mr. McGraff and Mr. McCutcheon—what about them?”

She hesitated. We could see she had decided not to tell us anything.

Ham Brooks said: “I think she was waiting here for Gross, McGraff and McCutcheon.”

THEY were building Miss Fenisong up to a shock when she found out Gross was dead. It was all right with me; I didn’t think she would feel too badly; it was my idea that she hadn’t thought too much of Gross. Still, the guy had been at home in her room at the hotel, and he’d ordered her around as if he had certain rights. . . .

When Savage had her set up, and had given her a chance to be coöperative and she wouldn’t, he gave her the Gross death.

She fooled me and probably all of us. She fainted.

I was trying to think of one single nice thing to think about what had probably been her relationship with Gross when Ham Brooks looked at the window, and said, “Say, it’s getting daylight in a hurry, isn’t it?”

Savage went to the window, went fast, and said, “It’s not dawn—unless the sun is coming up straight overhead.” He sounded shocked.

It was that light again. Not quite the way it had been earlier that night, when we saw it from the hotel terrace, thirty or so stories above the street, and with no clouds above that. The clouds didn’t seem to cut it down in brilliance, exactly, but they changed the effect, gave it a different coloring, a kind of bluish quality that seemed to get in your eyes and stay there, as if you’d been looking too long and too close at a cop’s uniform.

Spatny came over, stood beside me. He seemed to be twice as tall as I was.

Spatny said: “What is this?”

“You tell me,” I said, and put my face close to the window glass in order to see how it looked coming through the clouds.

“Better not look directly at it. There might be emanations harmful to the eyes.” This was Savage. There was plenty of alarm, of the kind you feel when you’re lying in a shellhole and know a tank is going to run over it, back of his calmness.

I didn’t want to look at it any longer anyway. There was something coming across the lawn that I wanted to look at a lot more. It was thirty or forty feet in diameter and as black as the original bad luck cat.

Monk Mayfair, probably intrigued by our petrified stances, came over and took a look.

“A visitor,” he said.

He sounded as if his head had moved about six feet from his body to make the statement.

SAVAGE said: “Get to the car! Everybody! Quick!”

I picked up Miss Fenisong. I was thinking about Gross in her hotel room, but I picked her up anyway. I beat Monk Mayfair to it by a yard.

Monk said: “Let a strong man carry her, panty-waist.”

“If you’re so strong,” I said, “go out and fight that thing in the yard!”

Monk showed how upset he was by bellowing at me, “What is that thing?”

I didn’t take the trouble to tell him I didn’t know. I started walking out of the room with the girl. She didn’t weigh a thing in my arms. I didn’t weigh an ounce myself. I was so scared I floated in the air.

Spatny went with us. The old giant was active, or he couldn’t have managed that—we passed through the rooms like antelope. The old man’s right foot made a little more noise than his left foot hitting the floor, because of his limp; I remember thinking it must be a genuine limp, or he would have forgotten about it now. Awfully genuine.

There was another one in the front yard.

Two black scare-babies.

This second one was poppa. About sixty feet across and nearly as high. There was a tall Australian pine tree out there that I'd noticed when we arrived that was all of fifty feet, and it was hidden behind this thing.

"Perhaps," Savage said, "we best not go outside."

It was all right with me. They couldn't have shot me out into the yard if they had stuffed me in a cannon. I still wasn't weighing a thing, and neither was my lovely burden, and if I still had a heart I couldn't find it.

Savage said: "Has anyone got a gun?"

No one had a gun.

He went back after the little pea-shooter they had taken from the girl. I don't think anyone liked his going; we didn't want to be left alone with the goblins.

Old man Spatny made us a bitter speech. "No guns!" he said. *"Das ist zu arg!* No guns! Of all the unequipped fools! When there is such danger, not to have armed yourselves—you are imbeciles! I was beginning to admire your methods, but you have disappointed me grievously. No guns! Disgusting! Surely it should have occurred to you to—"

He stopped expressing my opinions and his, and took off. He just seemed to split at the seams, and what came out was action. He wanted to get away from there, and he did. I was under the impression he went through doors without troubling to open them, but that must have been an illusion, because there were no splinters in the air after he had gone.

"Catch him!" Monk yelled.

"Catch him yourself," Ham said. "I may follow his example."

We heard the little gun go *pip!* in another part of the house. Savage had started shooting. It was an utterly inadequate little noise, it struck me.

The old giant was crashing and banging doors in the back of the mansion somewhere. His flight had the sedateness of a bull in a crockery shop. The terminus of the uproar was a particularly loud jangling crash of glass—and I happened to be standing where I could see what Spatny had done. The mansion was T-shaped, and we were in the stem of the T, the old man had come into the left arm of the T, where there were large French doors of glass. He had gone through one of these French doors, or windows—just simply passed through it.

I wished I had been with him.

And then I didn't—for the it-couldn't-be in the yard began chasing him. The *it* didn't move rapidly, not as fast as the old man was moving—possibly nothing could have traveled quite that fast—and it took a rather erratic S-shaped route across the grounds. The serpentine path was puzzling. . . . It was following a sidewalk! That was the reason! It seemed to have no liking for the grass, which was a white carpet of frost where it was not glazed over with snow. It kept on the paved walks which snaked across the grounds in almost any direction one cared to take.

Monk said: "I'm going to try something." He began working at a window, and got it open. There was a storm sash and he threw that upward—he had one leg over the sill when Savage came in, demanding, "What are you doing?"

"The old guy ran—"

"Stay in here," Savage said. He seemed confident his instructions would be followed, because he went back to the other part of the house, the part where he had been, and his little gun went *pip!* again. This time there was a deep bass rejoinder—a rifle had been fired at him, a rifle that was plenty of gun because we could hear plaster falling off at least three walls that the bullet had gone through.

THE old giant screamed. Off there in the garish phony moonlight somewhere, he cried out. . . . I went big-game hunting in Wyoming one time—well, at least I was there; I was the big-shot's chauffeur—and the coyotes occasionally howled around the camp in the night, and I think that coyote howling is the most ghastly sound there is. This sound old Spatny made was something similar. It made my teeth feel as if they were on a grindstone.

Five seconds, ten, after the old man ki-yoodled, the black business was gone. It was out there in the trees and shrubbery; it got smaller. It was like a black balloon with the air going out, except there was no noise. In a trifle of time, it was smaller than the trees and we couldn't see it at all.

Monk said hoarsely, "The poor old devil!" He wheeled and ran through rooms.

He was looking for Doc Savage to tell him what had happened.

Savage was in a large room, an enormous room that was a state dining room or a ballroom or possibly both. He was throwing small stuff—vases, statuettes, light chairs—at the ceiling fixture trying to put out the illumination in the room.

Savage said: "Watch out! Keep away from the windows!"

Ham Brooks said: "Why—"

Three bullets came in, giving him an answer. They dug holes in a picture, walls, and in our peace of mind. There was very little of the latter left. I listened closely to the sound of the weapon outdoors, and I figured about three years spent during the war listening to guns whack made me an authority, so I said: "A rifle, a .30-06 caliber and probably a model M1."

Monk Mayfair said, "Shorter barrel, I think from the sharper sound. More likely a carbine. Those short guns always talk like a short man, too big for their britches."

He was probably right at that.

The phony moonlight went away. It just died out. Not instantly—the process of going took a second or two; it was like when you throw a bucket of water in the air; a few drops are always late reaching the ground. Then it was dark.

IT seemed to be over for the time being. We picked out different windows and did plenty of cautious looking and listening, but outdoors it had become a normal night again.

Miss Fenisong awakened. She didn't have much to say—we had doused all the lights in the house in order to see out into the night better, and apparently she thought at first that she was alone in the mansion, because she began trying to stumble around. Savage told her, "Better sit and rest, Miss Fenisong."

She did that.

I broke out into cool sweat and had a couple of chills, a reaction from what had happened. It was the worst when I thought of how the old giant had yelled out there in the night when that impossible patch of blackness had overtaken him. I said: "Nobody is going to tell me that was straight stuff, not anything that fantastic. It's a gag of some sort. It's got to be."

Nobody agreed with me, but Monk said, "It's good to be ignorant, because ignorance is bliss."

Presently it began to get a little lighter outside, but this light didn't scare anyone. It was the dawn. It came to us quite slowly and normally, as daylight should come. The clouds weren't as thick in the sky as I had thought. They were cumulous, a thin layer of cotton-ball clouds.

Savage said: "I guess it's safe to look for tracks."

If he meant footprints, there weren't any. At least none I could see, and I heard Monk and Ham telling each other there didn't seem to be a trace—other than the widely spaced prints, a little like those of a hard-pushed jackrabbit, that old Spatny had made leaving the house. We trailed him through a neatly trimmed woods to a black-topped road, and that was the end of his trail. There were no signs of a struggle. The black-top hadn't retained a trail—the sun of the last few days had melted the snow off the road, as it had off the sidewalks that turkey-tracked the estate.

Miss Fenisong had missed out on our visitation from the queer light and the black no-such-things. I told her about it. She was so beautiful that I got to thinking about her and Gross, and I said most of the last part of it through my teeth.

She listened without a word, then asked, "How did Albert die?"

I told her that. Maybe my tone partly conveyed that it was going to be hard for me to shed tears about Gross not being one of us any longer.

"Albert was my half-brother," she said.

"Huh?"

"My mother was first married in Czechoslovakia, and separated from her husband, leaving her baby—Albert—with her husband when he got custody of the child in court. She came to the United States, married again to a man named Fenisong, and I was her child by the second marriage."

I was so pleased I couldn't have hit the floor with my hat. I wasn't even able to keep my feet on the floor; it was almost the same thing as a while ago, when I had been so scared.

"Savage!" I yelled. "Come here!"

HER parents—mother and second husband named Fenisong—had died natural deaths two and seven years ago. Fenisong, an art gallery operator, had been well-to-do, and Paula Fenisong had inherited his money, which explained how she was able to live in a place like the *Parkside-Regent.* She had only lived there a couple of weeks, having moved from an even more expensive place, which accounted for her not being well known to the management.

The half-brother, Albert Gross, had looked her up more than a year ago. He had changed his name from Grossberger to Gross, migrated from Austria—he said he had been living in Austria for several years, having left Czechoslovakia to escape the domination of his father, who was a tyrant and a Nazi to boot—and had a nice stamp business in New York. He dealt in rare stamps, finding and buying them on order for wealthy collectors. There had been no special closeness between brother and sister—or half-brother and half-sister—which was natural since they had never seen each other before, but they'd had dinner together a few times, and the relationship had been all right. Not close, but friendly.

She had not, at this time, met McGraff or McCutcheon.

That had come a few days ago when Gross came to her and said that he needed her help. He wanted her to get acquainted with Doc Savage, and see that he took a look at the moon from the terrace of the *Parkside-Regent* at precisely fifteen minutes past seven o'clock. Miss Fenisong had—or she said she had, and I for one believed her—been understandably reluctant and curious. Her hesitancy had been overcome by Albert Gross's protestations that this was a tremendous thing, vitally important to a great many people—and finally, when he broke down and told her there was a devilish plot afoot and that he couldn't go to the authorities about it because he, Albert Gross, was an alien illegally resident in the United States, she had agreed to decoy Doc Savage, see that he was on the terrace and looking at the moon at seven fifteen.

Gross had impressed her with the fact that Doc Savage was an extraordinary sort, wary of feminine traps, and that the best way of getting his interest was to be very erudite and scientific. Considering the circumstances, the moon seemed a logical subject to be scientific about, and so she had read up on lunar theory, and, finding it was quite involved and mathematical, they had negotiated for a coach named Wales. That was how I got into it.

She told all of it without coaching, said that was all she knew, and answered Savage's questions. He wanted to know what the strange light was, what the black things were, who Spatny was, and where the two Macs could be found, and who the two Macs were. Negative answers to all this. She'd told us all she had.

"Mind re-telling it to a lie detector?" Savage asked.

"Now wait a minute!" I said. "It's not any fun to have that gadget strapped to you and—"

The too-sweet ding-dong-bong of the door chimes interrupted me. Monk went to the door. We heard him swear a mighty oath. He sounded like a pirate who had sighted two treasure-laden galleons.

Monk, wearing a grin that pushed his ears together at the back of his head, brought the company inside and introduced them as: "Our two lost sheep!"

The two Macs were ready and willing to tell us plenty of nothing. McGraff—the shorter one with the lesser red face—made most of the speech. McCutcheon confined himself to head-nodding, or saying, "That is correct!" in a fine baritone voice.

Albert Gross had been their pal. He had asked them to help him get Savage to look at the moon at 7:15 p.m. Gross hadn't said why.

They had picked on me because they felt I was no friend of Albert Gross—that much of what they said was certainly true.

They had come out here to see Albert. They didn't know he was dead. . . . Dead! Albert dead? How awful! They blew their noses into handkerchiefs. They wouldn't rest until their friend's murderer was found. Never! McGraff said this first, then McCutcheon said it.

Savage asked: "We can depend on your help?"

"Emphatically!"

I opened my mouth to say let's try the lie detector on them. But I didn't, because Monk Mayfair kicked me on the shin. Just before that I had been smiling at Miss Fenisong, and Monk kicked a lot harder than necessary.

Chapter VIII

THE next five hours were productive of nothing. The police came to the Long Island estate, listened to the facts, which they naturally didn't believe, and were polite about it all.

McGraff and McCutcheon seemed surprisingly willing to be locked up if the police wanted it that way. When Doc Savage said that he would like to have them along so they could be asked more questions, they were agreeable to that also. But no more agreeable than they were to being in jail.

I said: "I don't make them two guys out."

"They're scared stiff, you dope," Monk said. "They want protectors. Either us or the police will do."

This did seem logical.

We all went—excepting the police, of course—to Doc Savage's headquarters on the eighty-sixth floor of that midtown building. While they had Miss Fenisong in the library, fitting the lie detector to her, I got myself alone in the reception room with tall Mac. I hit him. I began with a light chair, figuring it would soften him up.

Maybe a heavier chair would have been a better idea. Perhaps not. From the unhampered quality of his reactions, a sixteen pound sledge would hardly have been adequate. He was all over me. I was on the floor. The best I could do was keep him on the floor with me.

Monk Mayfair came in. All he did was watch admiringly. All he said was: "I've paid ten bucks ringside, and seen less."

Ham Brooks came in too, and his attitude was about the same. A bit more clinical, perhaps, because he remarked: "The technique is certainly original Bushido judo."

I was too busy to even ask for help, although I outweighed the tall Mac at least thirty pounds. Most of what he was doing to me he did with the tips of his fingers, the edge of his hand, and a lot of the time he handled me so that I seemed to be doing it to myself.

It was certainly a relief to have Savage come in and detach my intended victim from me.

My excuse was: "That guy started the beating I got at the hotel by sticking his fingers in my eyes. He had pepper on his fingers, remember?"

Savage had no comment. Miss Fenisong had entered, a part of the lie-detector hanging to her arm, to watch. I felt about as heroic as some of those guys we saw after we got into Germany.

"You two had better shake hands," Ham Brooks suggested.

"And get my arm torn off?" I said. "Not me."

THAT happened about nine o'clock, and by ten I wouldn't have bid high on the chances of finding any more answers than we already had. The latter, everyone seemed to feel, were negligible.

Miss Fenisong came through the lie-detector with flying colors. She was most coöperative, even letting Monk Mayfair ask her a few personal questions which had no bearing on the mystery, but were questions I wanted answered too.

"Okay," I said, getting Monk into a corner afterward. "Is she fancy free?"

He said: "You're out of luck. She's married to a guy named Culpepper, an engineer who is in South America building a banana plantation."

"That's oil from some of his bananas you're giving me," I said. I had seen him looking at the wiggly mark the lie detector had made, and grinning.

Doc Savage had been tinkering with the lie detector. He was frowning. "Ham," he called, "have we an extra third stage bypass electronic tube? This one has been getting weaker and weaker, and seems to have given out."

Ham Brooks said: "I don't know of a way of getting one of that special type short of Pittsburgh, where they're made."

Savage got on the telephone and ordered one from Pittsburgh, directing it be airmailed.

"They can't get it here before late afternoon," he reported. Turning to the Macs, he added, "We intend, of course, to give you two gentlemen a lie-detector test. I gather you have no objections. Unfortunately, our apparatus is out of commission, and we'll have to postpone it until this evening."

The Macs didn't seem at all unhappy.

"The police use them things, don't they?" I demanded. "Why not borrow one?"

Savage shook his head. "I'm inclined to distrust the accuracy of the type they have."

Ham Brooks got me aside and said: "Keep your smart suggestions to yourself, pumpkin-seed."

"Oh!" I said.

IF they were fixing something for the Macs, Sherlock Holmes and his magnifying glass couldn't have seen what it was. Relations were most amiable.

It was one of the Macs—McCutcheon—who suggested that we all stay together, which possibly saved Doc Savage from making the same motion. McCutcheon used too many words to say that, although he realized the facts did not substantiate the belief fully, it was conceivable that we might all be in danger, not so much because of what we knew, but because our antagonist—man, machine, or man-from-Mars, whichever it was—might feel that we knew more than we did. In view of such hypothetical danger, perhaps we should stick together for mutual protection. Savage agreed it was a sound idea, so we stuck together.

We had breakfast—discovering that Savage had his own food privately prepared—and some of us tried to sleep. I hadn't had a wink last night, my eyes felt like golf balls and my tongue tasted like last week's cigar stub, but I was able to get just as much sleep as everyone else—none at all.

"Do you mind not hanging around in here?" Savage asked when I tried standing around in the laboratory.

The big bronze man had dropped everything to work on some kind of a contraption, and I was curious about what it was.

"Go keep Miss Fenisong company," he added.

I liked the advice, but the Macs were moving in on that territory. They had smooth manners, voices as confidence-building as insurance salesmen, they didn't find their work unpleasant, and they had an additional advantage in having known the deceased half-brother. They did plenty with the last, building Gross up as a great guy, their pal, a fellow who had been kind to dumb animals.

It is not supposed to be cricket to speak ill of the dead, but Albert Gross was down in my book as a large stinker. Right alongside him were the Macs. I did not participate in the conversation, not trusting myself to show either respect for the departed or politeness to the living.

Around eleven o'clock I accidentally happened to overhear a conversation between the Macs and Miss Fenisong. This accidental bit of news was interesting, even if the only accident about it was that they didn't happen to hear me ease along behind a row of bookcases in the library until I was in earshot. For once I was light-footed as a leaf.

Short Mac—McGraff—was saying, "—not deny for a moment your contention that the man has personality, a presence, and surroundings." He gestured at the surroundings, added, "This layout, as you can see, cost a fortune. How does Savage explain it? Why, on the basis that he needs such laboratory and research facilities for his profession, which is righting wrongs and punishing evildoers—to use the words I heard somebody speak. Now I ask you—what do you think of that for a profession?"

"I—well—it seems unusual," Miss Fenisong said.

They already had her doubtful.

McGRAFF closed with her, selling his proposition at full speed. He said: "Look, how old are you, Paula? Twenty-three? Let's say you're twenty-three, that you've been around this world that many years. Then I want to ask you how many knights in shining armor, good fairies, or just plain Good Samaritans you've met in that time."

"I've met some Samaritans," she said, not entirely with him yet.

"Well, it's ridiculous! A grown man, righting wrongs for a career! Even with salt, I can't take that," McGraff said.

Miss Fenisong frowned. "What are you getting at?"

"Something pretty serious," he told her. "It's this: Why do you suppose Albert was interested in Doc Savage—and so secretive about it? Doesn't that strike you as peculiar?"

"It certainly did." She was emphatic about that.

"Maybe," said McGraff, "Albert knew what he was doing in being secretive."

"Oh!"

"Yeah—maybe it was Savage whom Albert was afraid of," said McGraff grimly. "McCutcheon and I know Albert—and we know he was as honest as a July day is long. Albert was no crook; I don't care what hap-

pens, Paula, you can bet on Albert. Now, Albert was afraid of someone, and the person he was investigating was Doc Savage. That must have been what Albert was doing—investigating Doc Savage. That's probably why he wanted Savage on the terrace of the hotel at 7:15. He wanted to watch Savage's reaction. Albert probably felt that, by observing Savage, he could see whether the man was guilty."

Miss Fenisong was silent. A shocked silence, I gathered. Like my own.

"Because of what he had done, Albert got killed," said McGraff. "Albert was investigating Savage, and he got killed. Now, who would be likely to kill him? Let's be practical. Let's not dream. Let's say the logical one to knock him off was Savage."

She must have looked pretty upset at that, because the long Mac jumped into the selling job. His voice sounded as if he had been oiling and preening it while he waited.

McCutcheon said: "Mr. McGraff and I have discussed this Spatny chap, and we've concluded he must be what he said he was—another good friend of Albert's. And he, too, met foul play."

"But Mr. Savage didn't have anything to do with what happened to Spatny!" she objected.

I knew what the Macs were doing with the silence—sneering.

"How do *you* know, my dear?" McCutcheon asked. "You were unconscious, were you not? You had fainted from the shock of learning Albert was dead."

Her indrawn breath was like fear going into a cold room.

"Uh-huh," said McGraff. "That's it. That's the point we're making. . . . We, the three of us, may be in just as much danger as Albert was—and not from some mysterious mumbo-jumbo. From Savage!"

McCutcheon laughed about as ugly a laugh as you could take out of a coffin. He said: "You don't for a moment believe this mumbo-jumbo about black things fifty feet high, do you?"

That was something Miss Fenisong hadn't thought of. It was a good argument, a fine clincher, too. The best argument is one you can't answer without seeming a fool, and this one was that. Who was willing to believe there were black spooks fifty feet high? They were hard to believe when you had seen them, and Miss Fenisong hadn't seen them. . . .

Monk Mayfair, the big chew, came into the library yelling, "Sammy! Hey, Sammy! Where are you, shining-eyes?" And I had a busy three seconds moving down to the other end of the library where I could call, "I was just coming in here to get a book. What do you want?" As innocent as anything.

"You couldn't understand any of these books," Monk said. "Doc says you can beat it if you want to. He's decided you're innocent enough."

"On what theory does he figure I'm honest?"

"Search me. On the theory no evil can grow in an ivory ball, I guess."

From the other end of the library, behind the big bookcases where the Macs had been doing that selling job on Miss Fenisong, there wasn't a sound. They were as quiet as the mouse after the cat ate it.

"No, thanks," I told Monk. "I'll stick around."

"No need to trouble yourself," he said.

"Oh, you're real educational, and I like it," I said, and leered, meaning to let him know that I knew the main idea with him was to get me out of competition for lovely-voice.

SAVAGE listened to me patiently—but without, I had a feeling, removing more than two per cent of his attention from something purplish that was happening to something liquid yellowish in a glass thing I had heard called a wash bottle.

I said: "You're being sold down the river by two termites. The Macs are boring from within."

He asked what I meant, and I told him.

"Indeed?" he said.

"The rats," I said.

"Oh, they were only doing some natural conjecturing," he said.

"They were conjecturing a coat of tar on to you, as far as the girl is concerned," I said. "If you've got a baseball bat around here I can borrow, I'll do a little missionary work on the Macs."

Savage said: "The technique of Bushido judo which McGraff demonstrated includes quite a repertory of moves for disarming an opponent armed with a club, in case you are interested."

"Yeah, but the alley will be dark next time," I said. "Thanks for the note, though."

"I appreciate your interest."

"Aren't you gonna take steps about this?"

He said: "If you don't happen to notice any counter-moves don't feel unduly alarmed."

I felt better. "This guy Monk is trying to chase me. What about that?"

"Want to pull out?"

"Well, no. I haven't got a home, but that's not why I don't want to go to it." My ears got red and I had trouble with my words like the tough kid standing in front of the class while teacher made him admit he pulled Mary's pigtail because he liked Mary. "Miss Fenisong has happened to say a couple of nice words to me. That's the rock Monk is chewing on."

"Stick around, then," he said, and I walked out of there with the little wings on my feet helping me along. He was on my side. The Monk must have given trouble before with his chasing.

SIX hours passed and it was five o'clock, a long time later. It probably seemed longer than it was. The telephone had done plenty of ringing, but it was either the police or Doctor Hodges, the scientist, and they had no developments to report. They only wanted to know if there had been any. They seemed to feel that Doc Savage was taking, for him, an unusually long time to show results.

"Come into the laboratory," Savage said.

He looked hard-used. His fingers were stained from chemicals, his shirt was wrinkled, and sheets of notes were sticking out of his pockets where he had absently stuffed them.

The laboratory was too full of complicated gadgets—I didn't notice that anything new had been added, not until he pointed out two clusters of apparatus—wires, tubes, things that looked like a composition of all the radar transmitters I had ever seen in the army—at the other end of the laboratory. There was a cleared space there. Nearer at hand was a smaller portable gadget in a box hastily improvised from a big suitcase.

Savage distributed eye-protectors, saying, "Better put them on, in case there should be flying glass." There was nothing unusual about the shields; they were of plexiglass shaped like welder's masks. The grinder operators in the bomber plant in Kansas City, Kansas, where I worked before the army got me had worn similar transparent masks.

Savage said: "We won't be technical. . . . At the other end of the room is a transmitter of micro-wavelengths, built on laboratory scale—which, incidentally, is as far as we have been able to progress in the research field—probably similar to the one being used to cause the effect we refer to as chromospheric eruptions. It has to be similar, in fact. The other transmitter is enormously more powerful, however."

He showed us a large glass bottle—about five-gallon size—surrounded by magnets and stuff.

"Air has been pumped out of the bottle, and certain elements introduced, and magnetic effects applied, so that we have here what amounts to a bottled bit of the stratosphere layer where the effects we saw last night were produced."

He said he would demonstrate. He turned on the machine. The result was not anything to stand my hair on end; the transmitter contraption just lit up like a radio. There was no particular sound.

"Notice the interior of the bottle," Savage said.

The bottle was glowing with approximately the same quality of ghost-light that had appeared in the sky last night.

"Now," he added, "we will recreate the field of neutralization."

He threw a switch, and the second piece of apparatus proceeded to give me a mild case of cold tracks up and down the back. . . . A noticeable darkness had appeared around the thing.

Savage said: "Turn out the lights, draw the curtain, and the impression one would get is of a fuzzy black area completely enveloping the neutralizing transmitter. Simply stated—the visible wave-lengths of light are no longer present, having been broken up around a short area, and what we have left is a patch of the normal darkness of the night."

"Hey!" I said. "You mean there wasn't any black can't-believe-its?"

"Exactly. What we saw was merely a small area of normal night. It looked spectacular because it was something we were not accustomed to. We are perfectly familiar

with making a light in the night. But making night in the light is something different."

I think I admitted it was different, all right.

SAVAGE was speaking naturally and even using a tone that implied there was still a great deal he didn't know about the thing, but he was becoming impressive as anything. The Macs did not like that; both of them were glancing at Miss Fenisong dubiously, and the admiration on her face did not cheer them. The long Mac began tearing it down. He said: "Mr. Savage, you admit being present when Albert Gross died last night"—he gave that some extra meaning—"and you said, I believe, that it was a city street where it happened. The street near the hotel. Now, you're not telling us there would be the darkness of night in a city street, with lighted windows and streetlamps, are you? After all, witnesses say a black thing pursued poor Albert. By your own words, there couldn't be a black thing unless there was night. How do you account for that?"

Savage turned to me. "Sammy, what did I do with you after I took you out of the hotel?"

"After these two lugs were scared off before they could knock me off, you took me downstairs and we talked in your car," I said.

McCutcheon yelled: "You silly fool! Do you imply your life was in danger from us last night?"

"I know damn well it was!" I yelled back at him.

Savage made smoothing-down motions with his hands and said: "Let's skip personalities—we can gain nothing by becoming a house divided. . . . The point is that Sammy sat in the car on the street and talked to me. Isn't that right, Sammy?"

"That's right. But I don't like this guy calling me a fool—"

"Did you see Albert Gross immediately?" Savage asked.

"See him? No, not right away."

"Why not?"

"It was a side street, kind of dark. Pretty darn dark, in fact."

"You're sure it was rather dark?"

"I ought to know," I said. "I could hardly make Gross out even after you pointed at him, and I didn't recognize him until we were right beside him."

"That should answer the question of whether the street was dimly lighted enough for the black 'thing' effect to be achieved," Savage said.

The Macs subsided. They didn't want to, but they saw they were getting nowhere, and probably felt that they had made their point for Miss Fenisong—that Savage *could* be lying.

"Now," Savage continued, "we have produced the chromospheric eruption on a laboratory scale, proving we have the fundamentals of the system used. And we have a demonstration of the neutralization of the visible spectrum of the emanations to indicate how the effect of black shapeless objects was produced. If you'll step to the other end of the room . . ."

He had the other piece of apparatus, the stuff in the suitcase, for our attention.

He said: "This is also a neutralizer, but of a different type—I won't become technical about this one either. Let's say that it merely creates a high-frequency field which blocks certain cathode functions in the other transmitter, with violent results. Any questions?"

McGraff put out his jaw and said: "You say you're not being technical, but it sounds damned complicated to me. If you turn on this contraption here—what will happen exactly?"

"I could demonstrate," Savage said.

"Do that."

"Hold your hat," Savage said. He closed a switch and nothing much happened except some tubes lighted up; then closed a second switch, and the other end of the room came apart in flash and noise.

IT was a little too late to hit the floor, but I hit it anyway. The Macs were there ahead of me. Their speed in getting there gave me a fact from their past history—they had once been in a war somewhere. A one hundred per cent civilian background wouldn't produce that kind of reaction.

The plastic shields came in handy, because a little glass reached us, fragments that buzzed like mosquitoes as they traveled. And the room suddenly had the smell of an electrical power-house in a thunderstorm.

"Jove! The transmitter blew up," Ham Brooks said, sounding about as startled as a senator who had dropped his briefcase.

Monk gave it more. He yelled: "Hey, you gotta gadget that'll destroy the transmitter!"

The Macs got up from the floor with sheepish looks and—but this went away quickly—about the same surprise they would have had if they had been shot at. When the surprise left, cupidity took its place. They looked at the gimmick in the suitcase. Loving looks. I didn't understand why they should be so affectionate.

Savage switched the device off.

McGraff said, "You mean that thing will blow up his transmitter?"

I waited for things to pick up. McGraff had said *his.* He had professed not to know anything like that. . . . But Savage said nothing, and there was a weight on my toe, about half a ton, as Monk Mayfair put his foot there. Apparently I was supposed to be silent.

Savage, replying to McGraff, said, "You saw what happened."

"You knew it would?"

"Certainly."

"How far will the thing do that? I mean—how close to the other gadget would you have to be?"

"Possibly a greater range than two hundred feet would not be effective," Savage said. "By the way, I demonstrated the thing so you will understand that we now have a weapon. In case any of you should need to use the thing, I'll show you how to turn it on."

Chapter IX

BY six o'clock the police hadn't found Spatny. The old giant had disappeared—personally I had been thinking maybe the black scare-baby had carried him away or digested him or disintegrated him or something, but if there was any fact in Savage's show with the contraption, Spatny's fate had probably been more normal. I didn't know how much fact there had been in Savage's show. Possibly not too much.

Nor had the police dug up anything on McGraff and McCutcheon—anything the Macs liked, at least. The cops had learned so remarkably little that they were beginning to wonder; they wanted a detailed account of the lives of both Macs for the last five years. Savage said he would get it for them.

McGraff said he had been, beginning five years ago, a truck driver for six months, a door-to-door salesman for two years, foreman in a chemical plant until the plant went bust—two years and one month, that was—and for the remaining five months, the most recent, he had played the stock market at a profit.

McCutcheon's life had been simpler. He'd made a living off the stock market all five years.

The two Macs had met in a broker's office one day when they both had a stock that shot up ten points, and having this in common had led to friendship.

Savage made no comment about these professions being hard ones to check on. But he did pass the information along to the police, and let the Macs hear him doing it.

He could be scaring them.

Miss Fenisong's attitude had undergone a change I didn't like. She had grown cold toward us, and friendly in a we-know-something-that-you-don't way with the Macs. I was not allowed much time to worry about this, however. Things, which had been slow, began picking up.

Monk and Ham left to learn whether there was a delicatessen in the neighborhood that would provide enough for our dinners.

Five minutes later, the telephone rang, Savage answered it, and said, "Yes, I suppose I can come down." He hung up and told Miss Fenisong, the Macs and myself: "The police have something they want to discuss. . . . Sammy, will you take any phone calls and look after things. I'll be back, probably, in half an hour or a trifle over."

"Sure," I agreed. "You think we're in any danger?"

"It's quite possible," he said. "That is why I have insisted on sticking around here all day." He frowned at the Macs and added, "You two will stay here, you understand. I believe this matter the police wish to discuss concerns you—possibly the fact they can't seem to corroborate your version of your whereabouts for the past five years."

"I'll hold the fort," I said.

Savage went out, got in the elevator, and I returned to the reception room—which lived up to its name. They had the reception all ready for me.

It was short, but not sweet. The room—everything—turned the color of nothing at all. I read somewhere once that an astronomer said that if you could get to a place where there was nothing—no matter, life nor soul—

what you would see would be blackness blacker than a charcoal factory. Here was such. Maybe there were accompanying phenomena, but I wasn't aware of them.

IN a voice much too unconcerned, Savage was saying, "You obviously have no cardiac decomposition, so an extra heavy dose of aspirin won't hurt you. And the head will appreciate it."

I heard myself asking something. It was: "Where am I?" Presently it seemed an extraordinarily stupid remark, even for me.

He said: "Alive. Fortunately."

"Want to bet on it?" My eyes were old rocks, my skin was used sandpaper and my tongue was a tired gopher. I moved my head a trifle, enough to cause it to come loose and roll across the floor and I up the wall. There was a picture of Doc Savage's father—he didn't look too much like Doc—on the wall, and my head circled that a couple of times before it came back. I didn't like the returned head; it surely couldn't be mine.

"Notice which one hit you?"

"Was I hit?"

"Apparently."

"What with? A truck?"

"Dictionary. Hold still." He did something to my skull with his fingers, asked, "Does that hurt?"

"Damn! Yes!" I yelled.

"You're in fine shape," he said. "One of the Macs struck you down—I doubt that it was Miss Fenisong—and they have gone. They took the gadget I demonstrated earlier—the thing I called a neutralizer, the one in the suitcase. You get that? McGraff, McCutcheon and Miss Fenisong have departed, taking the device. This happened all of forty minutes ago, probably. So we'd better be following them. Come on."

"I can't walk," I said, stating what seemed to be a conclusive fact. "I'll come to pieces. I won't be able to get within fifty feet of my head."

He shrugged, began putting some gadgets in a ditty bag, and preparing to leave. It came to me that things were moving, that this might be the home stretch, and it was not too hard for me to stand up and move after all—as long as there was something for both hands to hang to.

The dictionary they had used on me lay there on the floor, as thick as a concrete building block. I kicked the thing automatically, so probably I wasn't going to die after all.

Presently we were going someplace in the car with the thick glass. Savage and myself.

"Where are Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair—not that I can't do without the latter?"

"Trailing the Macs and Miss Fenisong."

"Yeah, but where?"

"We'll know soon."

He turned on the radio in the car, said into the microphone: "Monk?"

"Yeah?" was the homely chemist's response from the loudspeaker. "You want to know where they are? Take the Tri-Borough Bridge, then keep on the parkway. I'm about half a mile behind them, I'd judge."

"Don't get any closer than that."

"Roger."

Savage said: "Ham?"

Hams voice said: "I'm on the parkway about the middle of the island, in case they turn south. This way, I'm able to get a cross-bearing. Okay?"

"Okay," Savage said.

THE night had settled down darkly, and there was some rain, thin stuff that fell through the headlight beams like dying gnats. There were no pools of water on the pavement yet, only a continuous wet steaming sound from the microphone—it was attached to a reel that withdrew the cord from sight. He glanced at the speedometer needle. It was swaying around sixty, as troubled as a politician's conscience.

I said: "So you set a basket for them, and they fell into it."

"Something like that," Savage admitted.

"You sent Monk and Ham out—but not to scare up some food. You got yourself out—the phone call was from Monk or Ham instead of a cop. Is that good guessing?"

He nodded. "It goes back farther than that."

"How far?"

"This morning," he said. "Why do you think we stayed in one spot all day? It was to get McGraff and McCutcheon impatient. If anything would make them nervous, being exposed to us all day would do it."

"That's true. I could see their hair get gray."

He nodded again. "It was encouraging to watch them grow a crop of nerves. Anyway, we decided to try this."

"We?"

"Monk, Ham and myself."

"So I'm an orphan?"

He didn't say what I was, because a police prowl came up beside us as slyly as a schoolgirl, and cut loose a howl from its siren. A red-faced cop stuck out his mouth and demanded where in hell and three blanks did we imagine the conflagration was? Savage rolled down the inch-thick window and said: "Good evening, Morneci—those new sergeant's stripes look nice on you."

Officer Morneci said: "The hell!" Then he asked: "Do you want us to run ahead of you, Mr. Savage?"

"Thanks, no, Morneci. And don't say anything on the radio about seeing me. The people we're having some trouble with are a scientific sort—they just might keep a radio tuned in on the police frequency."

The prowl car let itself get swallowed in the night behind.

I THOUGHT about the thing. I picked out the points that puzzled me. There were enough of these to make them easy to find, but I fished out one that was particularly baffling.

"Mind telling me how you knew the Macs and Miss Fenisong would make a break if given the chance?"

"Didn't you think they were scared?" Savage asked.

"Sure, but what made that a novelty? I was scared too, and so were Monk and Ham—even old Doctor Hodges, the strontium isotopist. I think you were, too."

"I still am," he said.

That called for at least an inner shudder, and no words. Of course the only man who is never afraid is the one without enough sense for it. But it wasn't comforting to hear a man like Savage say he was afraid.

He added: "I'm not a mind-reader. I didn't know they would make a break. I merely tried out the chance that they would—and it seems they have."

"Where are they going?"

"To get rid of the people they're afraid of. . . . That is a guess, mind you."

"How do you reason that way?"

"They took the gadget in the suitcase."

"They took—that's right, you said they did. . . . But I don't see—or maybe I do. You mean that they figure that with the gadget to use, they can clean up on the fellow who makes moonlight?"

"Yes," he said. "But there's more than one fellow, I suspect."

"Did you show them the gadget so they would get the notion of borrowing it?"

"Yes."

"For crying out loud!"

We had crossed a long bridge now, and were running through heavier rain past naked trees and wet shiny scabs of snow by the roadside. The radio spoke Monk's voice; it told us to make the right turn and go past the old Century of Progress fairgrounds. Monk said it was raining harder where he was.

Savage told me: "McGraff and McCutcheon had to be encouraged to strike out on their own."

"So they would lead you to—I may not pronounce this right—Mr. Chromospheric Eruptions?"

"That's right."

One of those involved parkway crossovers appeared in front of us, an arrangement of overpasses and turn-offs intended to simplify things for the motorist, but looking about as uninvolved as six gray snakes in a wrestling match. We made the correct turns with no slackening of speed.

"You mean the thing had you so stumped you had to pull something like this?" I asked.

"That's about it."

"Why not just try that lie detector thing on them?"

"Oh, that? It's a lie detector, not a truth extractor. I was already fairly sure they were lying, so it wouldn't have helped us much, probably."

"I'm full of questions—do you mind telling me how you knew they were lying?"

He put the car around another motorist who was driving blissfully in the middle of the twin-lane parkway.

"Just a hunch I had," he said.

The answer was nice. He hadn't had any more to go on than I had, and I'd figured the Macs for black-faced prevaricators, too. It made me feel that I was one of the boys.

THEY did it to us on a road that ran through the tidal flats. The road was as lonely as a coyote on a hill. It crossed a rickety wooden bridge and S-turned its way, as slimy with rain as a fishing worm and as crooked as one, through a mud flat that was furred with brush and winter-dead grass, and the whole thing was being deluged with the rain fit to drown a duck.

Two hundred feet beyond the bridge, Monk Mayfair was suddenly beside us. The road had a starved coat of gravel and he had pulled his car, a coupé, as far off it as he dared without getting stuck.

Monk said: "They've stopped somewhere ahead. Not over a quarter of a mile, I should judge." He wore a green slicker and with his build looked like the great caricature of a frog in the rain.

Savage said: "Let's see how it sounds," and Monk handed a small case in the window. The case had about the proportions of a two-dollar novel, but there were knobs on it, a compass with a luminous dial, and it was making a high-pitched—but not loud—series of whining notes. The code letter T repeated over and over. A portable radio receiver, obviously a special job with a built-in directional loop.

Having put the thing to his ear and fiddled with the volume control a while, Savage said: "Yes, not over half a mile anyway." He rotated the thing, got a null—the signal at its least audible point—and gestured. "That way."

I was a little slow, but I got it. "The hell. You've got a radio transmitter planted on them! How did you do that?"

"There was nothing to it," Monk said. He was wet, anxious and impatient. "Let's get going."

"Look, handsome, how did you plant a radio on them?" I demanded.

"We had Miss Fenisong's help," Savage said.

"Huh?"

I must have sounded like Zachariah when he saw the Angel, because Monk Mayfair felt sorry for me. "You're pretty dumb, aren't you? You didn't think Miss Fenisong had really thrown in with them, did you?"

"Of course not!" I said. And oddly enough, that was whole truth.

"Sammy, you stay here," Savage said. "Monk and I will get the lay of the ground, before we start doing whatever we can."

They went away into the darkness.

I stood there by the car. I stood in the rain, soaked to the skin, and didn't mind. Didn't mind at all. Miss Fenisong was okay. Lovely-voice was on our side—and the funny thing was that I must have known it all the time. Oh, I had been disturbed about the Macs working on her, selling her the dark stuff about Savage. But not as disturbed as I would have been without confidence. Without the kind of confidence a twenty-year-married husband must feel at a party when he notices some wolf making passes at his wife and knows the fellow will get nowhere. That's real confidence.

The pleasant thoughts were wonderful. They must have plugged my ears and blinded my eyes and put sweet mud in my head—because McCutcheon had a gun in my back before I knew he was there.

"No jump, no holler," the tall Mac said. "You'll live longer—just a little bit longer." The edge on his words could have been put there with a file.

He searched me, but found nothing he wanted.

"We'll take a walk back the way you came," he said.

"You won't get away with this," I said.

"Neither will you."

We slopped through the streaming night. The wetness softened the soles of my shoes and the gravel hurt my feet through the flaccid leather. One trouble with cheap shoes. Then the bridge was being bumped hollowly by our feet.

At the other end of the bridge, McCutcheon gave me an extra hard gouge with the gun muzzle and said: "I'm not bad on running targets, Sammy." He seemed to mean for me to stand still, and I did.

McCutcheon got down at a corner of the bridge. He floundered around in the mud and wet grass, lifted a raincoat carefully, and thrust his arm beneath it. His cigarette light flickered, the flame close to a gray cord that looked as if it had been soiled with tar. A fuse. The fuse caught fire. It spilled sparks and a little twisting smoke.

He rejoined me. "Now we move on," he said.

I asked: "How'd you know we were following you?"

"We found the little radio in Miss Fenisong's purse," he said, and there could have been acid in his mouth.

"Is she all right?" I asked around the rocks in my throat.

"What do you think?"

Chapter X

THE bridge went up. It made a satisfactory—to McCutcheon—whoop of a sound in the leaking night. Judging from the jump the ground gave, and the flash, there had been enough dynamite under the bridge to ruin it. It seemed to rain harder for a moment after that.

The second explosion came quickly. Thirty seconds later, perhaps. It was at least half a mile distant.

"Another bridge?" I asked.

"The only other one," McCutcheon said. "That road runs across a stinking little swamp island. The mud is neck deep just about everywhere but on the island."

"Savage can swim, probably."

"Uh-huh. And find a house, if he knows where to look. The nearest one is about a mile. . . . But that will take time. An hour, maybe. Say it's only half an hour—that will get us where we're going."

It seemed that there was another road, better-paved than the one we were on, that cut back to this one. Presently their car came along that road, moving fast, and stopped when its headlights splashed upon us.

Short Mac looked out at me and said to tall Mac, "Why didn't you shoot him and get it over with?"

"I think he's one of Fleur's boys," McCutcheon said.

"That's what I mean."

"He might be useful."

The short one shrugged. "All right. He's your responsibility, though." He was displeased about it and, as I climbed into the car, he swung some kind of short blow to my neck that sent me headfirst into the machine, with my head full of fireworks. More of his judo. By the time things settled down, McCutcheon was in the back seat with me, had his gun in my eye and the car was moving.

There was something soft against my left side, and only one touch was needed to know what it was. "Miss Fenisong!" I yelled. "Paula! What have they—are you all right?"

She scared me stiff by not answering.

"Paula!"

She stirred a little then. There was cloth, not clean either, tied over the lower part of her face for a gag. I tried to tear it loose, but McCutcheon leaned over and struck my hand with his gun, hurting my fingers and not caring much whether he banged up Paula's face.

"You don't seem to realize," McCutcheon said, "that you're not long for this world—less if you keep it up the way you're going."

"Both of us?"

"Both of you," he said.

The car, a sedan, was traveling headlong through the night, but not so headlong that it was likely to somersault off the road. And when they came to a parkway where there was other traffic, they drove as decorously as anybody, but just a bit faster.

"Where did you get the dynamite?" I asked.

McCutcheon said, "We had been figuring on a nice bombing for a guy we know. You know him too. Anyway, it was in the car. There's even some left."

McGraff said, "What's the idea telling him that?"

"Pay attention to your driving," the tall Mac said.

"You're going to kill us?"

"Probably."

"Why? . . . Because we're friends of Savage? That will just upset him a little more."

McCutcheon shrugged. "Don't give us that. You're working for Fleur,"

"Both of us? The girl, too?"

"Could be."

"Who's Fleur?" I asked.

"Hah, hah," McCutcheon said.

APPARENTLY the doings were to be held back in town. McGraff drew the car to the curb on a side street in what was clearly the better part of town. He turned, swung his hand over the seat back to show me it contained one of the biggest guns ever to go unmounted on wheels, and made a speech cut out of raw flesh. He said: "Albert Gross was our friend in a way you will not understand unless you have risked your life for a

man and had the man do the same for you—not once, but many times. Unless you have gone through hell and suffering with that man, unless you've shared troubles beyond words with him. Albert Gross is dead. Fleur killed him. You work for Fleur—"

"I don't even know Fleur!" I said.

"Working for Fleur is the only thing that would explain your involvement in the affair," he said. "The point I am making, Mr. Sammy Wales, if that is your name, is that we will go the whole way to get justice for Albert. That means Fleur will probably die, and you, and Miss Fenisong. There is just a chance, a very long chance, that we can deal with Fleur. On that chance swings your neck. Get me? In other words, act up and I'll kill you, or McCutcheon will kill you. Clear?"

"I never heard anything put clearer."

"Okay, get out and walk ahead of us into that apartment house. No, take the rag off the girl's face first. And walk with her, ahead of us."

The cloth came free of Paula's face readily enough. She didn't say anything. She rubbed, or scrubbed, at her mouth with a sleeve.

"We're supposed to lead the way, you and I," I said.

She still didn't say anything.

McGraff got the big suitcase containing the gadget. It had been in the car trunk. Along, probably, with the dynamite left over from fixing the two little bridges. Wonder where Savage was? Wasting time out there in the rain looking for the foe? It would probably look like a trap to him.

"Paula," I said. "Did you have a radio outfit in your purse and how did they find it?"

"They just looked in the purse," she said.

"Paula—don't do anything reckless."

She nodded. "You too."

Two words—but there was enough in them to mean a lot. Maybe fright had made my receptiveness high, but it seemed that she was a lot concerned for me. That was good. Everything else couldn't get much worse, but that was good. Why hadn't I met her at a picnic in Swope Park, and we could have looked at the animals in the zoo and watched the nuts on the playground flying their little airplanes around on the ends of wires. A good thing we hadn't, no doubt. Without seeing me frightened stiff, she wouldn't have known of my sterling qualities.

Long Mac had a key to the apartment house front door. One he'd given the janitor ten dollars for, he said.

THEY had been there before. They knew there would be no doorman and no telephone operator in the lobby, and they knew enough not to fool around with the boy who ran the elevator. A hungry-looking boy, this one; his uniform fitted him like something that had been blown on him by a high wind. He carried his head on a thin neck, as if it was something on a stick. He could move. Fast. But not fast enough. McGraff downed him, and took the gun the boy had half-drawn.

There was something familiar about the boy after he lay on the floor at my feet. It took a bit of recalling. But it came to me. This lad had been one of the help at the banquet the scientists held in the *Parkside-Regent.* He hadn't been out serving tables among the guests; he had kept in the rear, helping get the stuff on the trays ready to serve.

I said: "He was at the banquet!"

McGraff frowned at me. "No doubt."

"That's probably how they got a line on you fellows," I said.

"No doubt," McGraff said again.

McCutcheon said nothing; he was having his troubles making the elevator run. He'd got the doors shut, but couldn't take the cage up because he didn't know where the safety switch was.

"I used to run an elevator."

He didn't seem to hear me. He looked down at the long-necked boy. "You murderer!" he said, and kicked the boy's jaw somewhat out of shape. "Okay, run it," he said to me.

"What floor?"

He seemed to seriously consider kicking my jaw. "As far as it will go—as if you didn't know," he said.

AS far as it would go was the twenty-second floor, and the Macs got progressively paler as the elevator went up. Except for the one who had the natural redness in his face, they could have passed for corpses when we reached the top. "He'll have a signal," McGraff said, staring bitterly at the boy on the floor. "We should have asked Augustino

what it was." He shrugged, added, "Oh, well, if you're going to crack the egg."

He picked up Augustino and used the limp body as a shield in front of his own as he stepped out. McCutcheon used a shield also—Miss Fenisong and myself, which turned me as pale as either Mac.

I knew we were in a penthouse. They had those in Kansas City. We were in a reception room with a floor tiled in shades of browns, cinnamon walls striped in alligator green—the same cinnamon-and-green striping was carried out in such of the furniture as was not glass or plastic. A wild modernism saved the brown-and-green theme from being awful, or made it worse than awful, according to your taste. The place had enough room to swing a cat, even with the cat on the end of a long rope.

A man came through a door and spoiled our chances of enjoying the decorative motif. I'd seen this man before, too. He'd walked through the *Parkside-Regent* lobby several times while I'd been waiting there yesterday afternoon. He was a large man, hard the way a fist is hard in a glove.

"Augustino!" he exclaimed. He got that much out before he recognized the Macs. He didn't like recognizing them—he jerked to a stop, wheeled, and his feet whetted the shining shades of brown floor desperately. His feet didn't get traction. He fell down.

McCutcheon went forward, was upon the man, had kicked him in face, temple, back of neck and stomach, in very little time.

I got hold of Miss Fenisong, started her back for the elevator. She had the same idea anyway. I took, I think, two steps—and stood stony still. There had been a click of a sound like a needle breaking. I put out a hand and stopped the girl.

"Good," said McGraff. He looked at us, eyes far too bright, over the gun I had just heard him cock. He added, "You will walk in ahead of us."

I asked, "How many more are they?"

"Two. . . . Walk!"

The next room was cream, cream walls, cream rug, and the small things—drapes, piping on the furniture—were butter yellow. There was more glass and plastic than in the hall, but no chrome. A large yellow-flamed fire burned in a fireplace that did not look like a fireplace at all, but rather like a place to store the silverware. And again there was not much time to admire the decorations.

It was the old giant this time. Spatny. He came in wearing a candy-striped dressing robe and carpet slippers lined with yellow fur. The robe was yellow and cream. He looked big, gaunt, a frame for a skyscraper before they build up the brick.

"Good evening, Fleur," McGraff said to him. "Get your hands up."

The old man smiled. It couldn't have been a smile. He stepped back the way he had come. Like a flash of lightning, he vanished. . . . He'd had hold of me the night before when we found him at the gatehouse of the place on Long Island, and I knew he was strong. But he was quick too, quicker than was possible. He was there—then wasn't. Gone.

The door he had retreated through slammed a shade before McGraff got there.

McGRAFF thwarted, wanted to shoot somebody—for a couple of ice-coated seconds he had me in mind. But that passed. He bowed his head, took his upper lip between his teeth, released it to ask, "Why didn't I shoot him?"

We stood there. Spatny was alive, and Spatny was also named Fleur. Somehow it hadn't occurred to me that Spatny was alive, and for some reason or other it didn't seem at all extraordinary now that he was.

In a voice that was clear, surprised—and of all things, slightly reverent—McCutcheon said, "Countess!"

A little old lady had appeared. She was as thin as a string, not much taller than some of the furniture, and looked excessively evil. She had on a black lace gown—nightgown—sheer as imagination, and a woolly white fur wrap thrown about her shoulders. Her cheeks were painted, her fingernails and her toenails. She could have been eighty, and she wore more cosmetics than a Twelfth-Street hustler.

"So you got here," she said.

The Macs said nothing. They were afraid of her.

"Where is poppa?" she asked.

McGraff pointed at the door. He didn't speak.

"The laboratory," she said. She sounded satisfied. "That is good. I was afraid for poppa."

McGraff came to voice. He put his face close to the door, the laboratory door, and bellowed, "Fleur—you turn that machine on, and it'll be the end of you, you hear?" And then without waiting for a response, he shouted, "Savage has a thing that will make your transmitter explode. We have it here. You understand me? You turn that thing on, and we will turn this one on, and it will blow you to hell."

The old giant's voice, coming through the door, was as big as if it had been in the room with us.

"Ridiculous!" he thundered.

McGraff made frantic gestures to McCutcheon. And McCutcheon hastily put the big suitcase with Doc Savage's gadget in it on the table. He fooled with the knobs, brow wrinkled, doing it just as Savage had said it should be done.

The little old hag watched this. She made up her mind in a hurry. She went over to the door, called: "Poppa, they're not fooling."

The old giant swore a great oath. It was in German, a language I speak fluently to the extent of six words—but it had to be an oath.

"There must be peace, poppa," she said. She wheeled on the Macs. "You are fools, all of you. Greedy fools, steeped in the bloody past. Don't you realize the world has changed against you and that you are now fighting among yourselves like cur dogs?"

McGraff pulled in a deep breath. "Tell him to come out. We'll talk terms."

"Why do you say that?" she demanded suspiciously.

"I've spent the day with Savage, and I know more about him than I did," McGraff said. "That's why."

She stood close to the door and said, "Poppa, they have taken a bear by the tail and the animal will consume you all if you do not be friends with each other." Presumably she meant Doc Savage was bruin.

THE old man came out. I didn't like it. Paula didn't like it either, and she fastened a set of trembling fingers on my arm.

Spatny asked: "You will furnish me money? It must be so."

McGraff looked at McCutcheon, who said, "Yes."

"Much money. I am not a cheap man."

"Yes."

The old giant snorted. "You fools would better have done that in the first place. When I first approached you for capital, it was a fair deal."

"It was a stinking deal—twenty per cent," McGraff said. "We want half."

"Preposterous!"

McGraff's voice was cold. "Albert Gross, our friend, is dead. I think you understand how close we were to Albert and he to us. A friend's life we do not sell cheaply."

McCutcheon said: "Augustino killed Albert. It was Augustino's way of killing. So we want Augustino too."

Spatny—or Fleur—grunted. "Augustino was with me in Munich, then in Griefswald and Peenemunde. He helped me get out when the Party became suspicious of me—when they discovered I was holding back the better part of my discoveries in chromospheric activities. Without Augustino, I would not be here. . . . Still, Albert was as much to you as Augustino is to me—"

"No, poppa!" the old woman said sharply. She wheeled on the Macs. "Augustino we will not sacrifice. We are too few to destroy each other."

That brought silence for a while. I was getting it straight now. The old pile of bones had been a Nazi scientist, and he had kept his discoveries for himself, fled Germany with them. He must have been a typical Nazi. He had run out of money here in America—the richness of his diggings here indicated that he could run out of money rather easily. He had approached three old friends, McGraff, McCutcheon, and Albert Gross, for financing. The result was not unexpected—they'd got to fighting over the gadget the old man had, and he'd been winning. The Macs and Gross had run Doc Savage into the picture, no doubt to frighten the old giant into coming to terms. But he'd started killing them, beginning with Gross.

McGraff broke the silence. "We will surrender the point of Augustino," he said grimly, "if he can dispose of Doc Savage."

Spatny stiffened. He called them several dark things in German. Then he said: "Why did you pick a man like Savage to frighten me with? There is no more dangerous a man."

"We underestimated him," McGraff admitted bitterly.

"Fools! It was as sensible as using a barrel of gasoline to extinguish a match."

They seemed to agree with him.

Spatny levelled an arm at me.

"This fellow! You perhaps thought he was mine? He is not. He is merely an idiot with a long nose"—he glanced at Miss Fenisong—"and an eye for a pretty girl."

"Augustino can remove him," McGraff said, dismissing me more casually than I liked to be dismissed.

The old woman—she was obviously the old giant's wife, countess and all—brought Paula into it. "This girl must be disposed of also," she said.

They shrugged. Evidently it was to be Augustino again.

SPATNY—or Fleur—had left the laboratory door open. I started through the door into the laboratory with the kind of fixity that a frozen man devotes to watching the snow fall. It seemed to be a laboratory that specialized on one thing, and it certainly lacked the completeness of Savage's equipment. Beyond it there was a terrace garden, with evergreen stuff growing out of tubs or boxes, and beyond that, speckled with a myriad of lighted windows, was the bulk of the *Parkside-Regent.* The hotel was not more than a block distant. It didn't take much adding of two and two to realize that here was where the moonlight must have originated the first time. It was convenient to the hotel, which explained why they had picked the banquet at the *Parkside-Regent* to introduce Doc Savage to the affair.

I looked fixedly at the terrace and my thinking began to fog. I was aware of Paula, and I knew they had decided on death for her, and knew they meant it. There was something as cold about these people as a quack surgeon's knife. They would kill us, that was sure, unless someone posed objections. . . .

There was someone on the terrace. This fact, only a little less important than the Second Coming, did not mean much. Not until I thought it out. Let's see—one of the Macs had left. The old giant and his witch made two. That left—nobody. There wouldn't be anyone on the terrace.

He was half-way across the laboratory before I saw that it was Savage. And another one behind him was Monk Mayfair. They came quietly, but full of purpose.

I said loudly, "Well, besides Paula and myself, there's four of us in here." Then I reached for a chair, got it, and made for McGraff.

Old Spatny said, "Don't shoot him. We might have to explain a gunshot."

McGraff eyed me. He grinned. His confidence bubbled out under the lid. He tossed his gun on the table, came at me with that judo crouch that I had learned about.

I threw the chair at the short Mac. It seemed to pass through him. He just weaved, made a space for the chair to sail through, and was back in position and still coming.

This time I was going to fight him a little different. If he got his hands on me, I was sunk, probably. I threw an ashtray at him. A stool. A table lamp. He was as elusive as the fellow with his head through a canvas at a carnival pitch-joint.

This must have happened fast, because Savage wasn't in the room yet. Short Mac had me in a corner. I took a Joe Louis stance to fool him, and kicked instead. His stomach was as compact as a sack of sand, but he went down. He didn't stay down. He got my arm, did one of his tricks on it, and liquid fire went up the arm and flew out of my ears and toes. I shook him off.

Savage was in the room now. And Monk Mayfair, and the latter began yelling—there were no special words to his yelling, and he seemed to be doing it merely to show how he felt. Apparently he loved it.

There was a Scotch bottle, fifth-size, on a small table. I got the bottle by the neck, rapped it on the table, and had a scary weapon. Exactly—it suddenly developed—what I needed. McGraff's eyes got wide with horror. He backed away from me, and I chased him.

I was chasing him when I forgot not to breathe that anaesthetic gas that Savage used.

I TOOK a swing at someone, missed him—it was Ham Brooks, and he said, "There's been a recess. Take it easy."

I sat down again. I had been unconscious. I remembered the trick gas. I was on the terrace, and they had dragged one of the

yellow-piped chairs out there for me, and my face was numb with cold.

"What happened?"

Ham Brooks grinned. "The cavalry galloped. You finally got the combination on McGraff, didn't you? Too bad you had to take a deep breath of the gas when you did."

"Uh-huh. Say, how did you get here?"

"Up another elevator. Back stairs. Through a kitchen and a butler's pantry and a locker room and a service pantry—you know, this is quite a luxurious place—and on to the terrace."

"I don't mean that. How'd you find the apartment house?"

"I thought you knew about the radio transmitter we planted on them."

"In Paula's purse? But they found it."

"Oh, that one," he said. "That one was a little two-way outfit Paula was going to use in an emergency. Just insurance. The one that counted was in the suitcase."

"You mean with the neutralizer?"

He laughed. "The only thing that gadget would neutralize was McGraff and McCutcheon. It was a phony. All that show Doc put on at headquarters was phony, too. Part of the rig."

"Oh." Then I asked: "Is the fracas over?"

"Sure."

"You get all of them? The old man, his shrew, McGraff, McCutcheon, and two named Augustino and—come to think of it, I don't know the other one's name. Made of good solid stuff, though."

Ham said: "The police have them all."

"The police are here already?"

"And gone."

I didn't get that. Then I saw the old codger who had been bellwether at the scientists' banquet, old Doctor Morand Funk Hodges, who had kicked the banquet secretary's stern, in the laboratory. He was talking to Doc Savage. He would say something, take a look at a contraption they were dissecting, then say something else, and wave his arms. He seemed discouraged.

"How long was I out?"

"An hour," Ham Brooks said. "You hit your head on something when you fell."

"But my head doesn't ache!"

"Monk said it wouldn't," he said and walked out.

PAULA FENISONG was in the laboratory. She came out quickly when she saw me, and took my hands and said, "I'm so glad you weren't seriously hurt."

Her hands were warm. I nodded at the complaining in the laboratory and asked: "What's wrong in there?"

"It's technical and I don't understand it," she said. "But the elderly scientist, Doctor Hodges, claims that Spatny's device is only a slight improvement over the developments already known to have been made. Nothing particularly magical. Doctor Hodges is disgusted. He expected a great deal more. He swears terribly."

We stood there. I kept her hands. She didn't object. It was cold and clean out here, and the night air had an astringent bite that was good. There were a million lights of the city around us and cars making contented sounds in the street below.

I bent my head and thought, thought about a guy named Samuel Wales who had come from Kansas City hunting something, but not knowing what he sought. He now had a good idea of what it was. I put an arm around Paula to see how it would be, and it was even better. Then I thought about what kissing her would be like, and I tried it, and it was still better. It was better than anything could be.

Old Scientist Hodges was yelling that it was a blasted shame all that trouble had netted everyone so little.

He was wrong.

THE END