THE BLACK, BLACK WITCH
A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Chapter I. STRANGE CALL

The plane was an HE 111K. Which meant that it had two Junkers Jumo twelve-hundred-horsepower engines and could do maybe three hundred miles an hour at an altitude of twenty thousand feet. A crew of four and a machine gun for each man. Bomb load: Four thousand pounds. Designed as far back as 1935—when it masqueraded as a twelve-seater airliner—this was the plane that became the key machine on which the Luftwaffe was built up.

Heinkel bomber.

A bad kind of wolf to have chasing you.

Monk Mayfair, who was as homely as a noteworthy mud fence, spoke to a boy from Kansas who was the pilot of their plane. “Why don't you do something?” Monk asked.

The Kansas boy nodded toward the pursuing Heinkel. “You mean about old apple strudel back there?”

“Sure.”

The Kansas boy gave the throttles a comfortable bump or two with the palm of his hand. The throttles already were open as far as they would go. “We're outrunning him,” he said, “the way a Kansas cyclone outruns a mule.”

When Monk Mayfair was excited, he had the habit of bellowing, and now his bellow was special. “That's the trouble!” he yelled. “Why outrun him? Why not turn around and knock some feathers off? Why run?”

The pilot was about twenty-two. He was one of the best bomber pilots in the American air force. He grinned. “Orders,” he said.

“Orders?”

“Instructions are to get you and Mr. Savage over a certain spot in Occupied France as near the hour of midnight as possible. That's my job. Now stop bothering me. Go sit down.”

“You ain't gonna fight that Heinkel?”

“No.”

“A fine war.”

“A fine lot of hell I'd catch if I didn't follow orders,” the pilot said. “Go sit down. Your face is ruining my digestion.”

Monk grinned. “Look,” he said. “Answer me a question, huh?”

“Just one question,” the pilot agreed. “Then go sit down.”

“Sure. What's the black, black witch?”

“What's what?”

“The black, black witch.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I was,” said Monk patiently, “asking you a question. What is the black, black witch?”

The pilot looked at Monk disagreeably. “If you're trying to be funny, you ain't. If you're trying to bother me, you are. Do you know how many gadgets there are on this instrument panel? Over a hundred. I'm supposed to watch some of them. You and your black, black witches. Get 'em out of here!”

“You never heard of a black, black witch?”

“Hell, no!”

MONK MAYFAIR gave up and went back and sat on a canvas fatigue bunk under the navigator's “astro” dome. The place was cramped for space. The complicated rumps of machine guns projected into the cabin and a collection of half-ton bombs took up space in the bomb bay underfoot.

“Why were you bothering the pilot?” Doc Savage asked.

“I thought I'd talk him into taking a shot at that Heinkel,” Monk explained. “But he's a very

serious pilot. He don't fool around with little things like Heinkels."
"They probably told him not to."
"Probably," Monk agreed.
Doc Savage stood up then and began adjusting the fit of his parachute harness, so Monk judged that it would soon be time for them to jump.
Doc Savage seemed a big man, a giant of a man, in the plane cabin. In the crowded cabin space you got an idea of his amazing physical build. On the street, or when he was not close to things to which his size could be compared, he did not look such a giant. The unusual things about his appearance were more noticeable now, too. The metallic bronze which tropical sun had given his skin. His rather startling gold eyes were like tiny pools of flake gold always stirred and in motion. And the controlled power of his voice.
It was more than his reputation, Monk reflected, that had caused the bomber crew to spend their spare time looking at Doc curiously.
Monk said, "He's never heard of the black, black witch."
"Who has not?"
"The pilot."
"That," Doc Savage said, "makes us even. We had never heard of it either."
"The thing I want to do is hear more about this black, black witch," Monk said.
The plane tipped its nose down. It dived into the clouds. For hours the clouds had been below them like a vast ethereal earth covered with gray snow.
The night became very dark in the clouds.
The navigator touched Doc's arm. "Time to jump," he said. "That is—in forty seconds."
They threw open the escape hatch in the plane hull.
They waited, eyes on the navigator.
The navigator grinned, threw up his arm and brought it down.
Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair tumbled out into space that was cold, black, damp.
AIR roared in their ears as they fell. Altitude of the plane had been eleven thousand. It was good sense to open the parachutes while they were still in the clouds, for that would be less conspicuous in case anyone had heard the plane and happened to be looking up. "Pull, Monk!" Doc yelled. He yanked the rip cord out of its metal sleeve and set his muscles and took the shock of the parachute opening.
It was black and still after the parachute opened. But immediately a nightingale called out nearby in the night sky. Doc answered the bird call, imitating another nightingale. Then he dragged down the shrouds on one side, causing the chute to slide a little in the sky, slide toward the sound of the other nightingale.
He deliberately did not think of landing. A parachute landing in strange country on a night as dark as this was something better not thought about. The 'chute was a big, silent one, made for the army for this sort of thing.
The landing wasn't bad. It did sprawl him out on flat ground, in a grasslike crop that was too tall and rank for grass. He felt bearded heads on the stems and knew the crop was wheat. He had landed in a wheat-stubble field.
The bomb navigator had done a wonderful job—they were actually supposed to land in a wheat-stubble field. Flying a few hundred miles, blind most of the time, and dropping a parachutist in a designated wheat field—that was navigating.
Doc got out of the parachute harness. He gathered the 'chute together and tied it in a bundle with the harness.
He imitated the call of a nightingale again. The nightingale was one of the few European birds which exercises its vocal powers at all hours of the day and night, so its sound wouldn't be suspicious. Another nightingale answered from close by.
"Are you all right?" Doc asked.
"You'd think," said Monk, "that as many parachute jumps as I've made, I could do one right."
"Something wrong?"
"Heck, I threw away the rip cord," Monk said sheepishly. "In the army they laugh at you and then fine you five dollars for doing that."
"If someone should happen to find that rip cord, they would know a parachutist had landed."
"Yeah. I remembered that too late. Depend on me to step on the cat's tail, first thing."
Doc opened the lid of a pocket compass and consulted the luminous dial. "There should be a road west of this field."
"I'm r'aring to go," Monk said. "So far, this whole thing has been as queer as a hog with wings. I hope it starts making sense."
THEY found and followed the road. The road was not paved, and it climbed a hill, then went down to a stone bridge, which was what it should do according to a map which Doc Savage had memorized in England.
"Mind me talking about this?" Monk asked.
"No."
"This the road?"

“Apparently.”
“Three miles south, there should be a farmhouse with Joan of Arc in the window. In that farmhouse, Harve MacChesney is supposed to be waiting. Waiting for us with some stupendous secret about a black, black witch.”
“Yes.”
“Do you,” Monk asked, “mind a candid question?”
“Go ahead.”
“What,” said Monk, “do you suppose it's all about?”
“Harve MacChesney,” Doc said, “is not the kind of a man to yell wolf when he sees a mouse.”
“So it's important, whatever it is?”
“Harve MacChesney said it was in his note.”
Monk scratched his head. “Personally, all I know about Harve MacChesney is what I remember reading in the newspapers. 'Harve MacChesney, of the United States diplomatic staff in Berlin, said this morning—' Stuff like that. And as I remember, he never had anything very important to say. He isn't a big shot, is he?”
“He is a war prisoner,” Doc said. “He has been one for months. It is hard to be a war prisoner and a big shot at the same time. It usually isn't done.”
“Forgotten man, huh?”
“You might call him that. He is one of the American diplomatic officials who has not been sent to the United States in exchange for German diplomats.”
“He wouldn't,” said Monk, “be crazy?”
“He never has been.”
“If he wasn't crazy,” asked Monk, “why'd he put in that stuff about a black, black witch?”
“Probably because he had good reasons.”
“Do you,” Monk inquired, “know what a black, black witch is?”
“Once upon a time,” Doc told him, “a black, black witch lived in this part of France.”
“When was that?”
“In 1555.”
“The sixteenth century, you mean?'
“Yes.”
“That was three hundred and eighty-eight years ago.”
“Yes.”
“Could it be the same witch?”
“How long do you think witches live?”
“I don't think they live at all,” Monk said. “I think there ain't no such thing as witches.”
“Scientists,” Doc said, “will agree with you.”
Monk scratched his head. “What about this sixteenth-century witch? You've got my curiosity aroused.”
“I think,” Doc said, “we are getting close to the farmhouse.”
ANOTHER road had joined the road they were following, and there was pavement of asphalt that had been pitted by weather and not properly maintained. The clouds thinned somewhat, enough to let moonlight down, and they could see that great, dignified trees bordered the road. And they saw lights in two or three farmhouses and passed others that were dark at this late hour.
“Look,” Monk whispered.
A farmhouse had in a front window two candles which shed light on a white plaster image of Joan of Are standing with uplifted sword.
“Looks like it,” Monk said.
They stood in front of the farmhouse and listened, but there was no alarming sound. Doc Savage then circled the house.
It was a typical peasant French farm home, low and gray, with plenty of shrubbery and the usual manure pile in the yard.
He rejoined Monk.
Monk said, “I took a peep in the window. Funny little old lady in there.”
Doc went to the window. He saw a room with a low-beamed ceiling, old-fashioned stove, cupboards, knicknacks.
The old lady sat sewing in a rocking chair. She wore a shapeless peasant dress and a shawl over her head, and had white hair and a square face with an ageless tranquillity in its wrinkles. She seemed to be fashioning a bit of lace. She and the room looked peaceful.
Doc knocked on the door. The old lady opened it for them.
“Bonsoir, monsieurs,”
she said. “Que voulez-vous?”
“Do you speak English?” Doc asked, although he could speak a considerably better brand of French than the crone had used.
“A leettle,” she replied.
“We wish to see Harve MacChesney,” Doc said. “Is he here?”
She did not reply with words, but nodded and stepped back and held the door open. Doc entered and

Monk followed.
The crone closed the door. “You are Monsieur Savage. I have seen a picture of you.” She turned to Monk. “And this gentleman is—”
“Monk Mayfair, my associate,” Doc told her.
The old lady then took a gun out of her clothing and pointed it at them.
“I guess,” she said, “we've hit the jackpot.”
Out of different places, from under a sofa, a trapdoor in the ceiling, a chest, a curtained cupboard in a corner, crawled, dropped and climbed men wearing German army uniforms and carrying German military pistols.
One of the soldiers, a colonel from his uniform, took charge.
“Jackpot,” he said in good English, “is the word for it. It's too bad Mr. MacChesney isn't here to greet you. As soon as we found out that he planned to escape and have a rendezvous at this farmhouse with you, we had to take stern measures. He is back at the Chateau Medille, only a few miles from here. We know how to take care of men like him.”

Chapter II. INTEREST IN A WITCH

SOLDIERS kept appearing until the place swarmed with them. Every soldier had a gun which he kept ready for action, and none of them took their eyes off Monk and Doc more than was necessary.
Several armored cars arrived, and Doc and Monk were placed in one of these. They were rushed several miles to a stone building which probably was large, although the night was too dark for them to tell what kind of a structure it was. Armed soldiers lined the halls along which they were conducted to a cell that looked strong enough to hold an earthquake.
Doc and Monk were placed in the same cell.
The German officer who wore the uniform markings of a colonel addressed them.
“You will be questioned in the morning, Herr Savage,” he said. “Officials are coming from Berlin to do that.”
Monk Mayfair, who could tell wonderful lies with a straight face, said, “Savage? This man's name isn't Savage. His name is Jon Verdeck. He was born in Munich, and now lives on the Friedrichstrasse, in Berlin. His house number is Friedrichstrasse, No. 138. My name is Jon, too. Jon Protest, and I live near Potsdam.”
Monk's perfectly spoken German startled the colonel.
“Ja?”
the officer said.
“Ja,”
Monk lied. “That is right.”
The German finally smiled fiercely. “You are a good liar.”
Monk shrugged. He hadn't fooled the man.
The German colonel clicked off a bow to Doc Savage, said, “I trust it will not insult you to say I am proud to have met you, Mr. Savage. You are a man of great accomplishment.”
Doc made no comment.
“Good night,” the German said.
He went out. He closed and locked the cell door. After that there was the regular pacing of sentries in the corridor outside.
“Doc,” Monk whispered.
“Yes?”
“They sure planned this thing. You notice how many soldiers they had? Two or three hundred. All picked men, too, from their looks.”
Doc was silent.
“They were tipped off about us,” Monk said.
“Obviously.”
“MacChesney,” said Monk, “is the only guy who could've tipped 'em.”
Doc said nothing.
“We're likely,” Monk said, “to find ourselves looking up at six feet of earth.”
“How do you figure that?”
“We were caught in enemy territory in civilian clothes, carrying American army parachutes. Technically, that makes us spies. So they'll shoot us.”
“Maybe not.”
“Since when,” asked Monk, “did they stop shooting spies?”
Footsteps approached hurriedly in the corridor outside. The door was thrown back. The German colonel came in. He frowned at the prisoners.
“The things I have heard about the ability of Mr. Savage alarms me. I shall take your clothing. You may have chemicals concealed in the cloth. Disrobe, please.”
While Doc Savage and Monk removed their clothing, the officer stood by, alert. He examined the garments one at a time and returned none of them. The German made no comment until they had been relieved of everything, including socks.
“Their mouths,” he told one of his men. “Examine their mouths. Comb their hair. Inspect their

ears.”
The officer then faced Doc and Monk. He said, “Gentlemen! I have orders to ask you a question.”
Doc and Monk waited.
The German demanded, “Where is the black, black witch? You are ordered to answer that, please. You came to Germany to get it. We know that.”
Doc Savage did not reply.
Monk, when he had swallowed his astonishment, laughed and said, “Believe it or not, we came to Germany to get a new and rare species of macrocephalus.”
The officer scowled. “There are no new and rare wart hogs in Germany.”
Then he went out, slamming the door angrily.
Monk frowned, somewhat disappointed that the officer had known a macrocephalus was a wart hog. Monk had happened to know what a macrocephalus was by accident, because he owned a pet pig, and so was an authority on such things.
THERE was one electric bulb in the cell, and the light from it showed four stone walls and a floor and ceiling of the same material. The excuse for a window was not much more than a foot square, and obstructed by a pair of bars as thick as one of Monk's by no means fragile thumbs.
“Doc,” Monk whispered.
“Yes?”
“What the hell's this witch stuff? It must be something important, the way it's got these Germans excited. What was that story about a black, black witch in the year 1555? What did—”
Doc stopped Monk by lifting a hand. The bronze man then moved to the center of the cell and indicated the fixture from which the single electric-light bulb dangled. He beckoned Monk, who came close, and saw what Doc meant.
There was a microphone rather cleverly concealed in the light fixture. It was there, of course, to pick up anything they said and relay it to a listening ear somewhere else in the building.
Monk nodded to show that he understood they were being eavesdropped upon.
“Since we have no idea what this is all about,” Monk said with elaborate sleepiness in his voice, “we might as well turn in and get some sleep.”
“That,” Doc said, “is a good idea.”
There were two mattresses and plenty of blankets and pillows on the floor. Doc stretched out on one bed and closed his eyes.
Monk made a couple of rounds of their cell, giving a lusty yank at the window bars, just to be sure they were as solid as they looked, and finding them more solid, if anything. Escape seemed out of the question.
“Naked as a jaybird,” he complained. “A fine hell of a note!”
“Go to sleep,” Doc said.
Monk flopped on one of the mattresses. He didn't sleep. He thought about Harve MacChesney.
MacChesney's strange call for help had come to them in New York. Monk at once had investigated MacChesney. Doc Savage knew MacChesney personally, but Monk did not. Doc was rather inclined to take for granted that MacChesney was an honest man. However, it was Monk's secret hope to some day catch Doc making a mistake, so Monk had investigated MacChesney most thoroughly.
Monk turned up nothing to indicate Harve MacChesney was anything but what Doc had said he was. MacChesney was a career diplomat of the old, dignified school. Born in Boston of a distinguished family that traced its ancestry to the Mayflower, MacChesney had commenced, at least as early as at the age of six months, doing exactly the correct things.
Having completed an education in the correct schools, MacChesney had followed family tradition and become a diplomat—every third MacChesney male became a diplomat, it seemed. MacChesney had served in various foreign countries, functioning for America with dignity and efficiency.
His diplomatic career had made MacChesney into a sober gentleman, of the sort who always wore a striped-pants morning suit in the daytime. It had made him studious, serious, dignified. In fact, it had made him too much the dignitary. Harve MacChesney had become stodgy. A droop was the slang word.
The newer-crop diplomats—fellows with wild economic theories and no dignity—had run away from MacChesney, dashed off and left him. Probably there was not a more competent United States diplomat, and certainly there wasn't a more dignified one, but Harve MacChesney wasn't prominent. He was one of the workhorses. The younger men, the prancers out in front, got the public attention.
On the day when Germany declared war on the United States, the American diplomats, naturally, had been taken into custody. Many of the men since had been swapped to the United States in return for German diplomats. Harve MacChesney, however, for some strange reason, was one of those who had not been exchanged.
MacChesney still was in a chateau in Occupied France, where he had been incarcerated by the Germans. Monk had learned something of the chateau. The chateau was very old, one of those historic relics which abound in France. It had been built by Catherine de Medici in 1550 for the use of herself and her favorites.
That was MacChesney.
It hadn't seemed very suspicious.
But the message from MacChesney was almost weird.

IT was astonishing that MacChesney's message could have come out of Occupied France. The Germans were supposed to have things well under control there.

Monk had found out, however, that United States diplomats had certain secret channels for getting messages to America. Such methods were not being advertised.

What had actually happened was that a military-intelligence agent had walked into Doc Savage's office in New York and handed them a pair of spectacles. He told them what to look for on the glasses.

“Spectacles,” the agent pointed out, “are not usually taken from a man.”

Monk's impulse had been to look for engraving on the temple bars of the spectacles. He'd been wrong—it was on the lens.

“Special glass, chemicals—invisible ink,” the intelligence man explained. He demonstrated how one brought out the message by using chemical baths. “Exposure to infrared and ultraviolet light won't disclose this stuff,” he said.

(The non-appearance of “invisible” writing when exposed to ultraviolet and infrared light treatment has become an important requisite of modern secret inks. Making invisible inks, which possibly began by using milk on ordinary white paper—heating the paper until the milk stain turns brown brings this out—has become a complicated chemical science.—THE AUTHOR.)

The message text wasn't very informative:

DOC SAVAGE OF NEW YORK IS ONLY MAN ABLE TO HELP ME. GET THIS MESSAGE TO HIM. I WANT SAVAGE TO COME AT ONCE TO FARMHOUSE WITH JOAN OF ARC IN WINDOW FOUR AND QUARTER MILES WEST OF CAROTIN, FRANCE. THIS MAY SOUND MAD. MATTER AT STAKE CAN BE FABULOUS BLESSING OR HIDEOUS TRAGEDY FOR MANKIND. IT IS THE WORK OF THE BLACK, BLACK WITCH. IT IS NOT MAD. ITS IMPORTANCE IS INCREDIBLE. SAVAGE MUST COME.—HARVE MACCHESNEY

Having read the missive a couple of times with the aid of a magnifying glass, Monk had remarked, “Kind of stands your hair on end. What's this black, black witch thing?”

“We don't know,” the intelligence agent had replied.

Monk remembered Doc Savage's questions.

“This message is genuine?” Doc had asked.

“Unquestionably,” said the intelligence man.

“Written,” Doc asked, “by Harve MacChesney?”

“Yes. His handwriting. He has special equipment for doing the messages.”

“He is the MacChesney I know? The MacChesney who is a diplomatic hostage living in a chateau in occupied France?”

“That's right. Chateau near the town of Carotin.”

Doc had asked, “Is there anything to indicate that the Germans might have persuaded Harve MacChesney to pull some kind of a trick for them?”

The intelligence man shook his head.

“MacChesney wouldn't do that,” he said.

“Has MacChesney undergone anything that would upset his mental balance?”

“What do you mean?”

“Illness or shock?”

“We don't think he's crazy,” the intelligence agent said.

“This message is strange.”

“We know that. It doesn't prove MacChesney is unbalanced.”

“Do you know what he means by the black, black witch?”

“No.”

“Has MacChesney ever mentioned it before?”

“No. . . . Are you going to France?”

“We are,” Doc said.

“I'm glad of that,” the intelligence man said. “The thing has a desperate sound to it. My department will help you all it can. Good luck.”

So now Doc and Monk were in France.

MONK tossed restlessly on the mattress on the stone cell floor.

“They're going to shoot me!” he thought.

Monk was a lieutenant colonel in the United States army, on detached duty, which simply meant that he was assigned as Doc Savage's assistant.

“They'll shoot Doc, too,” he decided.

Doc himself held a much higher army commission than Monk's, and Doc was also on detached service, detached service for Doc consisting largely of doing the same thing he had been doing for some years—righting wrongs and punishing evil-doers in the far corners of the earth, a profession for which he had received an unusual training.

(Because many readers of Doc Savage Magazine have followed the Man of Bronze through his previous adventures, the story of Doc's early life is often omitted to avoid monotony. For new readers, here is Doc's background: First, something happened to Doc's father—Doc has never known exactly what it was—that led him to make a remarkable decision, the decision that: shortly after birth Doc should be placed in the hands of scientists for training. This training lasted nearly twenty years. Many

scientists had a hand in it, men who were specialists in everything from electronic chemistry to how to squeak like a mouse. As a result, Doc Savage slowly became a remarkable combination of physical marvel, mental wizard and scientific genius. It was inevitable that this upbringing should leave him with some strange traits. The small and weird trilling sound which he cannot help making in moments of mental stress is an example. However, as a whole, Doc is a rounded human individual with the same likes and dislikes as the next nice guy. His handicap is that his abilities are so unusual that people seldom treat him as an ordinary man.—THE AUTHOR.)

Monk,” Doc whispered.

“Yeah?”

“Sleeping?”

“Heck, no.”

“You should. We've been without sleep two days already.”

“I got insomnia. I keep seeing myself in front of a stone wall.”

Doc's whisper was too low for the microphone.

“In that case,” he said, “we might as well get out of here.”

“HUH!” Monk blurted. He was astonished. “How?” he whispered. “They took our clothes and looked down our throats, you know. And I examined these four stone walls. If I was a ghost, I'd still hate to be in here.”

Doc Savage went to the door and listened. The door was a modern steel affair, although the remainder of the cell was old enough that it doubtless had once been used to incarcerate men who wore broadswords and armor as regular dress. There were two sentries outside.

Doc bellowed suddenly at the sentries.

“Get the colonel,” he shouted in German.

Both sentries jumped, then unconsciously struck attitudes of stiff-legged attention. “The colonel is not available,” one sentry finally said. “He has flown to Berlin for a conference.”

Doc said, “Bring the man in charge then! I want to talk to him. This is important!”

The sentries looked at each other. Doc's order sounded so important that they temporarily lost sight of the fact that a prisoner had issued it. “You . . . you have something to say? A statement?” one asked.

“This,” Doc snapped, “is about the black, black witch.”

This had a firecracker effect. Both sentries jumped. Both started to dash away. After they had yelled at each other, one came back.

Monk was impressed.

“That witch stuff sure stirs 'em up,” he said. “Well, we pushed one of 'em off the log. What next?”

Doc Savage twisted an arm behind him to reach his left shoulder. Monk looked at Doc's shoulder and it suddenly dawned on him that there was supposed to be a scar pit there—whereas now none was visible. An oonapik, a short Eskimo hunting spear, in an unfriendly hand, had caused the scar two or three years ago.

“Help me peel it off,” Doc whispered.

The thing wasn't adhesive tape, but an imitation-skin preparation which make-up artists sometimes use. It looked like skin. It felt like skin. The object it covered was a flat aluminum box somewhat smaller than the smallest of old-fashioned pill boxes. The scar pit had helped hold it unnoticed.

Doc dumped some of the box contents into the door lock. He wet a finger and dampened the stuff with saliva.

Moving fast, he put the remainder of the box contents—a powder, bright red—in a crack beside one of the window bars. He wet this deposit also, using just a bit of saliva on the end of his finger.

“Now get in a corner,” he said. “And cover up.”

“So it's that stuff!” Monk said, understanding.

Monk got in a corner on his knees and wrapped his arms protectively around his head and opened his mouth as wide as possible and waited for the earth to come to pieces. He hoped the building—old castle or whatever it was—was stoutly built. That powder, as crimson as a cardinal, was about two thousand times as violent as trinitrotoluene—TNT—or any other known toluene-derivative explosive.

Monk had helped Doc develop the red powder, which they had hoped would be a revolutionary war explosive. It had proved to be a flop—they had never been able to discover a way to keep the stuff from blowing up when it got the least bit damp.

The saliva dampness would set it off now.

Chapter III. TRICKERY TRAIL

BOTH explosions were up to Monk's expectations. First came the door. A rip of a crash, blue flame like lightning striking. The door flew open and knocked the guard back as if a big hand had slapped him.

Then the window was suddenly a deafening cloud of blue flame and rock fragments.

Monk dashed to the window and nearly jumped out before he saw what was below.

“Whew!” he gasped. “We'll need wings if we go this way!”

He gave another appalled look at a sheer drop of approximately two hundred feet below the window, his skin got wet and cold with nervous sweat. He'd so nearly jumped out of the window without

looking.
Doc Savage left the cell through the door. Electric lights made the stone corridor eye-achingly bright. The guard sat on the floor with a nose shaped differently than it had been and leaking two wet red strings. Apparently he did not see, hear, or in any other way become aware of them.
“Come on,” Doc said.
He took seven or eight long strides down the corridor with Monk on his heels. Then he stopped, seized Monk's arm and hauled him through the nearest open door.
Several soldiers dashed into the other end of the corridor. They'd heard the explosions.
In the room into which Doc and Monk had retreated, there was one large window. But it was on the same side of the building as their cell. Hence the formidable cliff would be below the window.
Monk thought of the cliff and shuddered. He listened to soldiers pound down the corridor. Monk was—for one of the few occasions in his life—genuinely scared. He felt naked, helpless.
Then Monk jumped straight up six inches, for he was hearing Doc Savage's voice—apparently from an infinite distance—calling out, “Monk! This way! Here's a way out!” But Doc was still at his side. Doc obviously was using ventriloquism, making his voice sound far away.
(Despite the atmosphere of hocus pocus with which ventriloquists frequently try to surround the art, the voice is not thrown, but merely made to sound as if it came from a distance. The words are formed in the normal manner, using very little breath, the glottis narrowed, mouth nearly closed, the tongue drawn back and using only the tip. Ventriloquism is of ancient origin, the Egyptians using it. One famous early ventriloquist was Eurycles, a citizen of Athens. What is not generally known to the public is that ventriloquism is common among uncivilized tribes of modern times, the African Zulus being experts, as are the Eskimos. It is widely practiced in Hindustan and China as well. Many so-called “miracles” of early mythology are attributed to the adept practice of ventriloquism and it is a peculiarity of ventriloquism that young people learn it easier than adults, although many of the youths lose the ability later in life.—THE AUTHOR.)
The soldiers in the hall heard. They were fooled. One yelled, “They are ahead! Around the corner! Get them!” He squalled it in German.
The soldiers charged down the corridor.
Doc and Monk dived into the passage as soon as the Germans had gone. They ran toward the exit. They passed a room which was evidently some kind of temporary headquarters, for it contained folding tables and chairs and a field telephone switchboard and radio apparatus. There were topcoats and officers' caps lying around, but no one in sight.
As Doc and Monk reached the building exit, a car roared up to the door and stopped.
Monk said, “Oh, oh! How do we get outta here now?”
Doc wheeled back and ran into the room which contained the portable office equipment and switchboard, and where the coats and caps were lying around. He put on an officer's topcoat. The first cap he tried fortunately fitted him.
He told Monk, “Put on a coat and cap. Be a radio operator.”
Monk—in another coat and cap—flopped in a chair before the radio transmitter.
Doc planted himself in front of the telephone switchboard and held one receiver of a headset against an ear.
A German soldier—a lieutenant—appeared in the door. Four or five others, occupants of the car which had just arrived, crowded behind him. They'd heard the uproar. Before they could ask questions, Doc yelled at them in excited German:
“The prisoners have escaped!” he said. “Go help catch them! The back of the building! Hurry!”
He half turned his head toward the newcomers while he bellowed. The hand in which he held the headset receiver concealed most of his face.
The newcomers took the bait and charged off toward sounds the searchers were making in the rear of the building.
Doc and Monk waited for them to get out of sight.
Then Doc became aware of a voice in the telephone receiver. The connection had been plugged up when he took the headset, doubtless by an operator who had deserted his post when he heard the explosions.
The telephone voice demanded with a strong Bavarian accent,
“Was ist? Was ist? Ich verstehe nicht was sie sagen.”
The voice on the wire sounded as if the owner was covered with ants, so probably he'd heard Doc's misleading shout to the newcomers about the escaping prisoners.
Into the telephone mouthpiece, Doc said, “Connect me with the commanding officer!”
Monk, who was scared, had to grin. The way Doc did such things as this was fascinating. There was, of course, not a chance in a hundred that the commanding officer would be available. But an important-sounding voice said over the wire, “Ja? Herr Kommandant spricht—“
Doc interrupted in even more important-sounding German.
“Who gave the tip which led to the capture of Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair?” he demanded.
Monk jumped to Doc's side and grabbed the other receiver on the headset. He jammed it against an ear. He wanted to hear the answer.
“Harve MacChesney furnished us the information,” the official said. “Who is this? Is this

Friedrich speaking? Who is—”
Doc dropped the headset and ran for the door.
MONK MAYFAIR, plagued by being scared and naked at the same time, paused to grab up the telephone which Doc had just dropped. Monk could speak German himself. He had studied chemistry—Monk was one of the world's great industrial chemists, in spite of his looking like an amiable ape and his habitually clownlike behavior—for some time in one of the Leipzig schools.
Into the telephone, Monk gasped in German, “The prisoners, Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair, have escaped! They are going to kidnap Hitler! Their plan cannot fail! They'll kidnap Hitler! Oh, do something!”
“Ach,”
yelled the German official on the wire.
Feeling much better, Monk dropped the phone and dashed after Doc.
Doc was already outside, waiting in the automobile which was standing there. It was the car which had just arrived. Somebody had been shortsighted enough to forget to switch off the motor, which still ran.
“What kept you?” Doc said impatiently. “Get in here!”
Monk got in the car. “I was putting,” he explained, “a bur under their saddle.”
Doc Savage got the car moving. There was fairly bright moonlight now, and a little additional light that came from approaching dawn. They could see that they had been confined in an old castlelike structure which had two tall towers and not many windows, all of the latter small and forbidding. The driveway circled as they followed it and led them back to a concrete highway.
Behind them there was one shot, and then an excited soldier shouting, “Halten! Halten!”
Doc switched on the lights. He sank the accelerator pedal to the floor. Thereafter the car did everything but fly.
“What do you mean—bur?” he asked.
Monk grinned. “Oh, I just said over the telephone we had escaped and were going to kidnap the little man with the mustache.”
“Hitler?”
“Yes.”
“That,” Doc said without much approval, “was childish.”
“Somebody might believe it,” Monk said cheerfully.
Doc Savage was silent while he guided the car around a series of right-right-left-right-left turns that made each individual hair on Monk's head stand on end and shake.
Then Doc asked, “Did you hear what the officer said over the telephone?”
“About who betrayed us?”
“Yes.”
“Harve MacChesney. Well, I must say I didn't drop dead. I'd figured it had to be him.”
DOC SAVAGE kept driving at a speed which Monk did not consider at all safe, passing up some turns, taking others, in a way which showed he knew where he was going. Monk remembered how thoroughly Doc had studied maps of this part of France before they left London. And Doc had gotten much information from the British army intelligence, who had a surprising amount of detail about what went on in enemy-controlled France.
At last Doc stopped the car. There was more light now. The morning sun would soon top the horizon.
Monk stared at a railroad track near which they had halted. The spot was the top of a hill, where trains on the track would be going slowly.
“So now we hop a freight,” Monk said.
“Passenger train,” Doc told him. “One is due to pass in a few minutes.”
“That part of the information you got from the British intelligence in London?”
“Yes.”
“I wish I had just half your memory.”
“Come on.”
They walked to the railroad track.
Monk said, “But as soon as they find the car abandoned, they'll know we hopped a train.”
“To make them more sure, we will try to let the train crew see us hop their train.”
“Huh?”
“And a half mile up the track there is a tunnel. As soon as the engine is in the tunnel, where the train crew cannot see us get off, we will do so. We should then be near a good-sized stream where we can take to the water.”
Monk nodded, then put both hands to his ears and listened. “Train coming.”
A moment later the train twittered its whistle in the valley below, then came chugging up the grade. The toylike sound of the little foreign engine whistle was somehow startling, as French train whistles always are to Americans who hear them again after becoming accustomed to the deep-throated howl of American locomotives.
The grade was steep and the engine labored. Doc and Monk stood beside the track. The engineer, leaning out of the cab, obviously saw them. To be sure to get his attention, Doc and Monk began

running beside the track in the same direction the train was going. They were doubtless remarkable figures in the German army overcoats and caps and nothing else. The engineer stared at them. He waved his arms, yelled, “Allez-vous en! Allez-vous en!” He tried it in English. “Go away!” And in bad German. “Gehen!”

Monk yelped with every jump as the roadbed ballast rocks punished his bare feet. They boarded the train.

“My bare feet!” Monk bleated.

They had jumped aboard at the junction of two coaches and clung to the handrails and steps. Doc worked with a door and managed to open it. They swung inside.

But almost immediately the engine dived into the tunnel. Monk jumped off; Doc followed. They hit the roadbed gravel hard and had to roll.

The train went on into the tunnel like a dark, noisy snake.

“Ow! My bare feet!” Monk howled.

Doc said, “There is the river. We better get in it. They may try bloodhounds on our trail.”

The river was not deep, with a sand-and-pebble bottom, and when they had walked down it perhaps two miles it became wide, slow, lazy, with pleasant meadows on either side.

In the meadows stood round little French haystacks.

Monk eyed the haystacks. “I begin to realize what you meant by sleeping last night.”

Doc searched for and found a tree with branches low enough that they could climb onto the boughs and leave the water without leaving traces. “We can sleep in one of the haystacks,” he said.

Monk, ashamed, said, “I can keep going. I should've slept when you did.”

“Too risky to travel by daylight,” Doc told him. “Come on.”

They reached a haystack and dug in.

“Wish I could get some shoes and pants,” Monk complained. “I feel naked as a jaybird. What are we going to do tonight?”

“It is about five miles,” Doc said, “to the chateau where Harve MacChesney has been living.”

Chapter IV. THIS WITCH HAD A MOTORCYCLE

THE night which followed the day was very dark. It already had become dark by the time Monk was awakened by Doc Savage—and Monk looked around in the darkness and laughed. Monk laughed for some time. And then he did not complain at all during the long, stumbling, difficult walk across French fields through the darkness. This puzzled Doc. It wasn't like Monk not to complain. Monk was one who usually could be depended on to squawk about hardship, therefore it was strange he wasn't grousing now, because he had plenty of reason. He had no pants, no clothing at all but the German army overcoat and cap. He'd torn strips off the bottom of the overcoats and tied these around his feet, but the result was a poor excuse for shoes. The night was bitingly cold. Yet Monk remained mysteriously cheerful.

“What reformed you?” Doc asked.

“Eh?”

“You,” Doc said, “are too cheerful.”

“Oh, that.” Monk laughed. “My dream.”

“Dream?”

“About the witch,” Monk explained. “I had a hell of a dream. The witch wasn't black. It was white. That is, it was kind of a golden, dazzling white. It didn't ride a broomstick, either. It rode a—what would you guess it rode?”

Doc didn't guess.

“A motorcycle,” Monk said gleefully. “She was some witch. Boy, a pippin! A blonde. At first she chased me on that motorcycle, and I ran and ran, because I was plenty scared. But then I got a look at her and saw what kind of a looking witch she was. So then I turned around and chased her. I guess we sped at a hundred miles an hour up and down these French country roads. It was some dream. Believe it or not, I was able to outrun that motorcycle in my dream. But the motorcycle could dodge. It could dodge like a rabbit. I'd almost catch it, then it would dodge.”

They topped a hill and before them was what seemed to be a thick woods in the middle of which stood an old building.

“What do you think of a dream like that?” Monk asked.

Doc thought the dream was a typical Monk Mayfair dream because of the blonde in it, but he did not mention this conviction.

He said, “That is the chateau yonder.”

“Some dream!” Monk said.

THEY approached the chateau with great care, having learned a lesson about walking into things. The place had some architectural lines of a castle. It was low and rambling and nowhere more than three stories in height except at the ends where there were towers. It was no doubt a pleasing structure when seen by daylight. The chateau was completely blacked out but the light of the moon reflected enough to give them an idea of the shape of the chateau. The chateau was certainly no ruin.

“Wait here,” Doc told Monk.

“Sure.”

Doc Savage circled the chateau, drifting from one clump of shrubbery to another as silently as the shadows. He found the remains of a moat wall. The moat, once containing water, was now filled with earth, and it indicated the chateau was very old, since it had been almost two hundred years since country gentlemen stopped putting water-filled ditches around their houses for protection. He saw four different German sentries pacing.

A stone garage sat in the shrubbery on the north side. There were no cars in it. Beyond this was a stable. There were no horses in the stable. The stable had a tall, gabled loft, and there was hay in this. There were six German soldiers asleep on the hay. The hay had been put in the stable with a hayfork and track not unlike an Iowa farm.

The trip line for the hayfork was a good three eighths-inch rope about a hundred and fifty feet long.

Doc got this. He took his time, did it silently, was not discovered by the sleeping soldiers.

He doubled the rope and made a cowboy loop and silently lassoed a fireplace chimney on the west wall of the chateau. The sentries were not close.

He joined Monk. “Soldiers are around here like fleas.”

Monk asked, “Do dreams ever come true?”

Doc said, “There seems to be a skylight or two on the chateau roof. They might not expect us by that route.”

“Let's find out,” Monk said.

Monk Mayfair not only had the build of an ape, he could do practically anything an ape could do. He followed Doc Savage up the rope in almost complete silence to the roof.

The roof slope did not bother them. Their bare feet were an advantage because they did not slip, whereas shoes might have skidded.

The skylight which Doc located was fastened from below. It consisted of a dozen or more squares of glass puttied in a wooden frame. Doc got one of the metal rank insignia off the German overcoat he was wearing, used it to gouge putty from around a glass. He loosened the glazier's points which were finally exposed and lifted out the glass, then ran an arm into the opening. The catch was not hard to locate.

The squeaking of the skylight as he opened it was not loud.

He looped the rope around the chimney, dangled it down the skylight, and descended until his bare feet located a carpet.

Monk came down after him into the darkness of the room.

And they got the shock of their lives as a woman's voice spoke to them casually.

“I have been waiting for you,” the feminine voice said. “Please do not make any noise.”

DOC and Monk stood there with muscles tight. Somewhere, a clock ticked. The sound seemed loud.

The voice—a girl's—said, “I know this must be a surprise, Mr. Savage. But do not make any loud noises, please. There are German soldiers on guard outside all the chateau doors and outside the ground-floor windows.”

Doc said, “You know who we are?”

“Yes. He asked me to meet you.”

“You knew we were coming?”

“Yes.”

“You knew how we were coming?”

“Yes.”

“Through the skylight—you knew that?”

“Yes. You were to be here at ten minutes past nine. It is now exactly ten past nine.”

“How,” Doc asked, “did you get this information?”

“From Mr. Harve MacChesney.”

“MacChesney told you when and how we'd be here?”

“Yes. He asked me to meet you.”

Doc considered what she had said. As he thought about it there became audible a small, exotic trilling which was a sound he made unconsciously in moments of mental excitement. He did not make the trilling often, only when profoundly startled. The sound had a weird quality, musical and yet without a tune, very low and yet audible for some distance, and with a ventriloquil quality that made it seem to come from everywhere rather than any definite spot. Doc realized he was making the sound and stopped it.

She said she'd known they would come by the skylight at ten past nine.

Doc, himself, hadn't even known they would use the skylight route until he found the hay rope in the barn.

“How,” he asked patiently, “did you know we would come by the skylight?”

“MacChesney told me.”

“When?”

“This afternoon. About four hours ago.”

Four hours ago they had been asleep in the haystack and hadn't even known the chateau had a skylight.

“Wow!” Monk said. Which also expressed Doc's feelings.

The girl said, all in a rush of words, “My name is Sien Noordenveer. I am Dutch. My home was in Zaandam, near Amsterdam. And do not think I am not a patriotic Dutchman because I am here. Six months ago a Nazi work leader visited my Dutch town and I, along with other able-bodied young women, was asked to come and work in Germany and Occupied France. Asked—that's what the Nazi called it. I came. Otherwise the already pitifully small food ration of my village would have been shut off. I was sent here. This is a prison. A highbrow prison for diplomats and newspapermen—persons who are likely to be sent to America in exchange of captives. They are well-fed and well-treated—particularly well-fed. That is so they will not be able to tell America the true food situation. I am head housekeeper here.”

Doc Savage wondered why she was giving them so much information.

“I'm telling you this,” she said, apparently guessing his thoughts, “because I am helping Mr. MacChesney, and I want you to know who I am.”

They were silent.

“Now,” she said, “I'm going to give you a look at me.”

The light which she turned on was an electric hand lantern which gave a wide spread of illumination.

Monk stared at the girl.

“Where's your motorcycle?” he gasped.

SHE was not—not exactly—a tall, gold-white girl such as had been the witch in Monk's dream. However, she was very tall and her hair—quite red, about as red as good bright copper—was partly concealed under the small white cap, a maidservant's cap, which she wore. A maidservant's apron added to the startling impression of all-white. In spite of being dressed as a maid, she didn't look at all like a maid.

“I left it,” she said, “at home.”

“Left what?” Monk blurted.

“My motorcycle. How did you know I had one?”

“Let's not go into that,” Monk said weakly. “It might get complicated.”

The girl switched off her hand light. “We shouldn't talk too loud,” she said. “There are German soldiers on guard in the chateau, and several of them walk beats.”

Doc asked, “Is Harve MacChesney here?”

“Oh, yes. I am to take you to him. He felt it'd be too risky to meet you in his quarters. He is waiting for you. He is down in the old vaults beneath the chateau, in the library. He spends a great deal of time there, reading, so the Nazis will not be suspicious. The Nazis never bother him there. They used to keep a guard there with him in the beginning, but for the past few weeks they have not done so.”

“You say there is a library in the vaults under the chateau?”

“Yes.”

“A strange place for a library. Is it not damp?”

“The subterranean chambers are very dry, due to the drainage and the nature of the surrounding stone.”

“What kind of a library?”

The girl was silent long enough for it to be clear to them that she was hesitating before she answered. “A private library belonging to the estate which owned the chateau before the Nazis took it over,” she said.

“Modern stuff?” Doc asked.

She hesitated again. “No. Old books and manuscripts. They interested Mr. MacChesney. He is a student of ancient forms of Latin and French as you know.”

Doc had known that. MacChesney was a studious man with somewhat of a reputation as a translator of ancient languages. “Come,” Sien Noordenveer added. “Mr. MacChesney is waiting.”

Monk took a hand in the conversation. “Wait a minute. Last night a lady invited us in to see MacChesney—and we didn't have such good luck.”

The young woman looked uncomfortable. “I heard about that. That is, I heard some Nazi officers discussing it. They took you prisoner. You escaped.”

Monk watched her closely. She had switched on the electric lantern again and he could see her face. “That's right,” Monk said. “And we were told MacChesney tipped off the Germans where to grab us.”

She went completely blank. “That . . . that isn't true!”

Monk shrugged. “I'm telling you what we found out.”

“Who told you such a thing?”

“A German officer who didn't know who he was talking to over the telephone.”

“He lied to you!”

Monk was not convinced. “Maybe a Nazi or two has told a lie in their time,” he said. “But I didn't know they lied to each other. This guy thought he was talking to another Nazi.”

“I suppose,” she said bitterly, “you think I'm lying, too?”

“Now, now, do we have to start calling names?” Monk asked.

“Then are you going with me—or aren't you?”

Monk looked at Doc, who nodded.
“O. K.,” Monk said. “We go with you.”
Doc Savage asked one question before they got moving.
“Are you sure that Harve MacChesney—four hours ago—told you we would be arriving by this skylight?”
“Of course,” she replied.
“This specific skylight?”
“Yes.”
“At this very minute?”
“Yes. I don't see how you were able to arrive right on the minute, either.”
Doc said a startled, puzzled, nothing.
Then the girl had a question for Monk. “How did you know I had a motorcycle?”
“Let's keep the peace,” Monk said, “by me not telling you.”
THEY made their way from the top floor to the ground floor of the chateau with caution. The interior of the chateau was enormous, although none of the rooms were extremely large. There were, Sien Noordenveer whispered, one hundred and seventy-three rooms in all, counting only those above the level of the ground. Underground, beneath the chateau, there were thirty or so subterranean chambers.
They soon entered these underground rooms. Sien Noordenveer opened an innocent-looking wooden door of much thickness and weight, disclosing a flight of stone steps leading downward.
She descended boldly. “Hurry,” she said.
“Ain't we liable to run onto sentries?” Monk asked.
Sien pointed at a bit of crumpled paper lying on the floor at the foot of the steps. “Mr. MacChesney was going to pick up that paper if any sentries came down into the underground rooms,” she explained. “There are other pieces of paper. As long as we see them it is safe.”
They passed another ball of paper. They went down more steps.
The walls were dry, clean in some places, the natural stone was almost a white color. The floor was worn, grooved by generations of feet. There were rooms, and most of these seemed to be devoted to storage. Each of them looked, except that it had walls of stone, like the arch-ceilinged, cluttered interior of an attic.
More steps going down.
“The library,” Sien said, “is down here.”
The corridor became narrow. It was about four feet wide, eight or nine feet high, and cut through solid rock. There were no doors.
“Library,” Monk said. “I don't see no library.”
“At the end of this passage,” Sien told him.
The passage was lighted by an electric bulb at the far end. This bulb got its current from a pair of insulated copper wires which were fastened to the rock at intervals by cleats which were screwed to wooden pegs drilled into the stone. Doc looked at the wires, then at the sides of the passage. He saw something and stopped.
He bent over to examine what he had found.
“What is this?” he asked.
He meant two wires—a twisted pair—which were strung through the passage, lying on the floor against one wall.
“What?” Sien asked.
“This pair of wires.”
The pair of wires were very fine, no thicker than horsehair. Sien bent over to look at them.
“Oh, those,” she said. “I don't know. There may be a bell or something.” She straightened. “This is as far as I am going,” she said.
“You stop here?” Doc asked her.
“Yes.”
“Thought you were taking us to Harve MacChesney?”
“I have. He's over there.” She pointed. “In that room. You go on. I'll go back.”
Doc looked at the two small wires. His face had a peculiar tightness. “Why are you going back?” he asked.
“I was told to,” Sien said. “I was told to leave you here.”
“Why?”
“I tell you I—”
Not waiting to hear her finish, Doc seized the two small wires and jerked them apart. They were not strong, broke easily in his hands.
Nothing happened.
Nothing happened for a full minute, which can be a long time under the right conditions.
Then, far back, the end of the passage, the way by which they had entered, turned to flame and noise and falling and flying rock.
Chapter V. TOMB FOR THREE
THE noise was confined, held close in the narrow passage until it was terrific. It was in an

instant as great as their ears would register. Noises which followed it, noise of the whole passage roof collapsing, falling of hundreds of tons of stone, thunder of great broken rocks bounding along the passage toward them—all of that seemed lesser bedlam after that first blast.

For moments they were busy dodging rolling rocks and feeling shock and wondering if they were going to die.

The cataclysm ended.

"The wires!" Monk yelled. "Wires ran to dynamite planted in the ceiling at the entrance."

His voice seemed as small as the sound of a mouse, although his wide mouth and the convulsing of his chest indicated he was bellowing.

Doc ran to the explosion scene. The route they had come was blocked by fallen stone. Rocks were still dropping, sliding down the face of the barrier. He stood there in front of the mass. Monk came up behind him.

"Blocked!" Monk said in an I-see-a-corpse voice.

"Completely."

"There was a minute's time," Monk said, "between the time you broke those wires and the blast. A full minute."

"Breaking the wires did not cause the explosion," Doc said. "Someone set it off later."

Monk looked at Sien Noordenveer. "You," he said, "wanted to go back."

Sien's face was white except for two round red spots, one on either cheek. She did not say anything.

Monk said, "If you had gone back, you'd have been safe. We wouldn't have been."

The two red spots went out of Sien's cheeks as she understood his meaning. Then she slapped Monk. A quick and hard slap, a flash of her hand and a report that was as hard as a blow. It had force enough to make Monk take two quick steps backward.

Doc Savage watched the byplay, said nothing. Then he began following the wires he had broken. These led farther on down the passage. Near the end of the passage they went up the wall, over a door, and attached to an electric detonator. It was a second dynamite trap.

The detonator was arranged to explode a phial of heavy, oily, nearly colorless liquid—nitroglycerine. The phial was held to the wall by adhesive tape. Other phials and bottles, about twenty in number and half of them flat pint brandy bottles, were full of nitroglycerine and fastened to the rock wall and ceiling with wide strips of adhesive tape. The blast of the phial, of course, would have set them off.

Monk looked at the bottles and his mouth fell open and he was gaspingly without words.

The wire went no farther.

"Whoever set off the blast did so from the other end of the corridor," Doc said.

Monk looked at Sien Noordenveer. She met his gaze. Her face got whiter than it had been.

She said, "I know what you're thinking. If I had gone back, you would have been trapped and I would have escaped."

Monk said nothing.

Sien said, "MacChesney told me to leave you. I didn't know the passage was to be blasted. But I know how it looks. Like I was leading you into a trap as if I didn't fool you and was trapped with you." Her voice kept getting higher, tighter, crawling toward hysteria.

"Did you?" Monk asked.

Doc Savage said, "All right, all right, come down to earth, you two. Miss Noordenveer, if you didn't trick us, your conscience is clear and you have nothing to get excited about. Nothing, of course, except what danger there is to your life, which should not unduly upset a young woman of your obvious courage."

There was enough power and composure in the bronze man's voice to quiet Sien, and make Monk look ashamed.

THE room where they stood was about thirty-five feet long, and there were five doors opening off into cavernlike chambers in the solid stone. The hallroom was all there was at the end of the narrow, tunnellike corridor in which the attempt had been to kill—it wasn't likely the idea had been only to imprison—them by blasting down the rock at each end.

Doc entered each of the five doors in succession. He found that the large stone chambers into which they led appeared to have been excavated by the ancients for torture chambers, for prisons, and one, the largest, for a well room. The well was a round opening covered by a lid. Doc removed the covering. "Your electric lantern," he asked Sien. She handed the lantern to him.

The water in the wall was about twenty feet down.

"I thought you said these rooms were a library."

Sien said, "I didn't lie to you. Look in this other room."

She wheeled and led them into a cavern that was large. It contained metal cabinets, and these held metal cases. The metal was a stainless alloy which would not corrode. The cases were the most modern scientific type designed for the preservation of rare manuscripts.

"Ancient documents, all of them," Sien said.

Doc opened a case. He inspected the parchment roll it contained.

Monk frowned over his shoulder at the writing. "What's that?"

“Manx.”
“What's Manx?”
“Celtic speech of the Isle of Man,” Doc explained. “This example is not particularly old. Eighteenth century. A piece by Joseph Bridson. There is much better in the British Museum.”
Sien Noordenveer looked sharply at Doc. “How did you know that?”
“It is just a hitherto useless bit of information I have been carrying around.”
“Are you an expert on ancient languages?”
“Hardly an expert.”
Sien went to another of the cases, opened one to the manuscript containers and unrolled, with great care, another document. “What would you call this?” she asked.
Doc Savage glanced at the script. “Some work by Michael de Notredame, the astrologer, about the year 1555,” he said.
The girl carefully rerolled the document, returned it to the case and placed it back in one of the steel cabinets.
“That,” she said, “makes you an expert.”
MONK MAYFAIR waved both arms and yelled. “We're entombed here! This is a hell of a time to be talking about old manuscripts!” He ran to the rock barrier and listened. “No noise of digging!” he blurted. “They're gonna leave us here! They couldn't help hearing that explosion up in the chateau. If they were gonna dig us out they'd at least be at it. They're gonna leave us here!”
He wrenched feverishly at some of the fallen stones. He moved a few. Others balked him. His muscles knotted, rising up under his hide like bubbles, but he could not budge the larger stones.
“We can't dig out without tools!”
Sien asked him, coldly, “Scared?”
Monk looked at her. He wet his lips and his wild agitation became sheepishness. “Hell, yes,” he said. “But I get over it.”
Doc finished a general inspection of the place where they were imprisoned. All the walls looked solid enough.
There was a desk in the manuscript room. Doc went through it and seemed to find nothing that interested him except a box of matches and a package of tobacco which someone had left in a drawer. He used a match and some scrap paper to start a fire in the middle of the floor. He broke the wooden bottom out of a desk drawer and piled the thin kindling on the fire. On top of that, he put a fragment torn from the German army overcoat which he still wore.
The fire then smoked.
He did not explain why he had lighted the fire.
Sien Noordenveer stood watching him.
“Mr. Savage,” she said.
“Yes?”
“There is something fantastic and very big behind this. I think I had better tell you all I know.”
Doc watched smoke climb from the fire.
“Ever hear of the black, black witch?” he asked.
Sien said instantly, “I certainly have. I think I know plenty about him.”
Monk jumped.
“Him!” he blurted. “I thought witches were always females!”
“This one wasn't,” Sien said.
“Wasn't?” Monk asked.
“The black, black witch has been dead nearly four hundred years.”
Doc told her, “Go ahead with what you want to tell us.”
“I'm going to tell you everything I know.”
“Go ahead.”
Sien looked at the fire. She didn't ask why it had been lighted. No one asked. The smoke climbed from it in a thin plume that slanted off to the right as it reached to the ceiling. Doc extinguished the electric lantern to save its battery.
Sien said, “First, I want to make it clear that I am somewhat an authority on the sixteenth century.”
Monk told her, “A girl as pretty as you would more likely be an authority on jive and jitterbugging.”
Sien looked puzzled. “What are they?”
“Never mind,” Monk said. “I forgot we're in Europe.”
Sien looked at Doc steadily. “I was brought here,” she said, “by the Nazis—because of what I know about the sixteenth century. In other words, I was brought here to get the confidence of Harve MacChesney. To spy on him.”
“To spy on MacChesney,” Doc said. “Spy on him for what?”
She frowned. “I'm going to use the exact words the Nazis used.”
“Go ahead.”
“That will,” she said, “make it sound foolish.”

“Go ahead.”
“'As soon as MacChesney finds the secret of the black, black witch—steal the secret from him. We must have it. Believe me, Fraulein, this is as important as the whole war, it may well be.'“ Sien spread both hands. “That is exactly what the Nazi leader said. I will never forget it. He sounded so intense.”
No one said anything for a while. The smoke from the fire, dark and uneasy against the ceiling, was crawling along slowly.
SIEN NOORDENVEER shook her head slowly at them. “And now you are going to stop believing me. Because I do not know what they wanted me to steal from MacChesney. But it is something of enormous importance—I am sure of that, because of the number of men, soldiers and Gestapo, who were kept here continuously.”
Doc told her, “There were at least a hundred soldiers involved in our capture last night.”
“That's a sample. That's what I mean. And you noticed how many guards are around the chateau here? Soldiers everywhere.”
“Will you,” Doc suggested, “get on with the story.”
“The Nazis ordered me to spy on MacChesney. They told me to get MacChesney's confidence, to use our common interest in the sixteenth century—MacChesney is also an expert on the sixteenth century—as an entering wedge.”
“And when you had MacChesney's confidence, what were you to do?”
“Report all his movements.”
“Did you?”
“Not all of them. I told Mr. MacChesney what they were demanding I do. We fixed up stories to tell them. Nothing of value.”
“MacChesney was doing sixteenth-century research?”
“Yes.”
“On who?”
“Just general research on these manuscripts, he claimed.”
“Why?”
“To amuse himself—he said.”
“You think he had another reason?”
“In the beginning, I don't think he had another reason,” Sien said. “But then he must have made a discovery. I don't know what the discovery was. But it was something of great importance. MacChesney kept it a mystery. That was what the Nazis wanted.”
“Did MacChesney tell you he had made a discovery?”
“No. He never even hinted at anything like that until the last. I worked with him, going over these manuscripts, for weeks. But he never told me a thing. And yet I knew he had a secret. A secret he considered very important. And he wasn't telling me.”
“How did you know that?”
Sien moved a hand vaguely. “A woman knows such things. And I found out MacChesney was sneaking down here in the night and doing something.”
“You feel he had made a discovery?”
“Yes. And he was working on that discovery.”
“But you didn't learn its nature?”
“No.”
“Did the Nazis know?”
“I'm not sure. I think they know more about it than I know.”
“What leads you to think that?”
“Because,” she explained, “they told me to watch any research MacChesney did on Peterpence.”
Monk had been listening with his small eyes partly closed. Now he sat up and said, “Peterpence? Who's he?”
“The black, black witch,” Sien said.
Monk's small eyes popped. “The who?”
“Peterpence,” Sien told him, “was called the black, black witch.”
MONK looked blank. And then he looked pleased. He said, “Now comes a thing I understand. This black, black witch was a fellow named Peterpence. That's simple. When did he live?”
“From 1497 to 1559,” Sien explained.
Monk scratched his head. “Who was that other guy who lived about that time? Doc was looking at one of the manuscripts a minute ago.”
“Michael de Notredame,” Sien said. “Better known as Nostradamus.”
Monk nodded. “Nostradamus—I've heard that name before.”
“Nostrum,” Sien said, “is a word meaning medicine. It came from Nostradamus' name.”
“Any connection between Nostradamus and this Peterpence?” Monk asked.
Sien nodded. “They were the bitterest of enemies.”
“What'd they fall out over?”
“Professional jealousy, I imagine,” Sien explained. “Peterpence was an astrologer, sorcerer and medical doctor. He was brilliant. He must have been extremely brilliant, because he got the

reputation of being a witch. To be a genius, in those days wasn't always smart. If you were much more clever than other people, they figured you were possessed of the devil."

Doc Savage was watching the smoke. He had switched on the electric lantern and was moving its glow across the ceiling where the smoke was traveling slowly.

Sien continued, "Most historians think this chateau was built for Nostradamus by Catherine de Medici. That is wrong. Actually, Catherine de Medici built it for Peterpence."

Monk grinned suddenly and interrupted, "His girl friend?"

"Catherine de Medici was a queen of France," Sien informed him. "And neither Peterpence nor Nostradamus were her boy friends. In those days it was fashionable for royalty to patronize genius."

"The way rich men angel shows today?"

"The same general idea, providing there aren't chorus girls involved."

"Shucks," Monk said. "What was the fun of being royalty?"

Sien went back to her story impatiently. "Catherine de Medici built this chateau for Peterpence, then took it away from him and gave it to Nostradamus."

"No wonder they didn't like each other."

Sien frowned at Monk.

"Do you," she asked, "know the least thing about Nostradamus?"

"You just said—"

"I haven't told you the thing that made him famous—the thing which he did that was incredible, fantastic, and hardly even believable."

Monk looked at her intently. "Yeah?"

"Nostradamus," Sien said, "did something which, the more you study it today, gives you a feeling of incredible, frightening wonder."

Doc Savage seemed to have grown tired of the discussion of the ancient feud between Peterpence and Nostradamus. He interrupted with a question.

"Did you," he asked Sien, "know that Harve MacChesney had sent to New York for me?"

"Yes. He told me."

"He trusted you, then?"

"A little. That much." She compressed her lips a moment. "He was very strange when he told me. He looked more worried than usual that evening. He said that he had made an incredible discovery, a thing so fabulous that he did not trust himself to handle it. He said that you, Mr. Savage, were the only one he could think of who might be qualified to handle the matter. And he said he had sent for you."

Monk, looking at her steadily, asked, "Did he tell you we were to come to a farmhouse—"

"Go ahead and insinuate I gave the enemy the tip that enabled them to capture you," Sien said. There was a bitterness in her tone that made Monk subside, and then say, "I could be wrong about you. If I am, you can expect some apologizing."

Sien said, "That was all Mr. MacChesney told me until this afternoon, more than four hours ago, when he said you would enter the chateau by the skylight, and that I was to meet you, and bring you here. He told me there would be balls of crumpled paper in the corridors if the way was safe. And he said I was not to come in here with you, but was to leave you in the corridor."

Doc asked, "He explain why you were to leave us?"

"He said he wanted to talk to you privately—that I must not overhear."

"That does not sound as if he trusted you."

"He trusted me with everything but the big secret, whatever that is," Sien said.

A telephone began ringing then.

MONK jumped completely off the floor, the way he had of jumping when he was astonished. "Blazes!" he gasped. "An alarm clock!"

Sien said, "It is the telephone. I forgot to tell you about the telephone."

She went to a cabinet and opened it and lifted out a telephone hand set. "They drilled down through the solid rock, a small hole for the telephone wire," she said. "Do one of you wish to answer?"

Doc Savage took the telephone from her hand. He looked at the instrument. "This is a special microphone," he said. "A sensitive velocity-type microphone."

Sien nodded. "For eavesdropping. The Germans put it in. I was to leave off the receiver so that they could hear what went on down here. We frequently did so—and let them overhear stuff that meant nothing."

Doc said into the telephone, "Yes?"

A Teutonic voice that belonged to the colonel in charge of the men who had captured them last night rattled the receiver diaphragm, asking, "Is Mr. MacChesney safe?"

"MacChesney?" Doc asked.

"Is he safe?"

"Is there any reason," Doc countered, "why we should answer your questions?"

The officer recognized Doc's voice.

"Was nun?" He changed back to English and yelled, "How did you get there?" He did not wait for an answer. "Mr. Savage, I do not know how you got there. But we must know—is MacChesney safe?"

“Would you call this a safe place?”
The colonel did not answer immediately.
“Listen to me,” he said at last. “We know why you blew down the stone and imprisoned yourselves in there. It was so you have time to destroy the secret of the black, black witch—the discovery of Peterpence. But I warn you! Do not do it!”
Doc asked, “Do not do what?”
“Destroy the thing that MacChesney found—don't. We know MacChesney found it. And we want it. Orders have come straight from Berlin that we must have it at all costs.” The colonel sounded anxious, frightened, desperate. “Do not destroy it, understand! We have sent for miners and mining equipment. We will reach you in a few hours, a day or two at the most. Lie on the floor. Conserve the oxygen. Do not move around. And I assure you, if we do not find the black, black witch discovery when we reach you, the things we shall do to you will be thoroughly unpleasant.”
“You sound scared, colonel.”
“I have reason to be,” the Nazi officer said bluntly. “I have just received the führer's personal assurance that if I do not handle this successfully the most pleasant thing I can do is shoot myself. I understand the führer means such things.”
“You are unusually frank.”
“I am also unusually desperate. I want you to understand that.”
Doc placed the telephone on the metal case. He took its wires in his hands and broke them apart. He pointed at the ceiling.
“Monk,” he said, “that smoke is moving along the ceiling. There is a definite air current up there. We had better see why.”
Chapter VI. THE MAN FLEEING
IT soaked into Monk that Doc meant air was circulating in the rooms cut in solid rock beneath the chateau. There was an air shaft somewhere. Monk howled. The howl had no definite words, just pleasure. Then he galloped around under the slowly moving smoke, prancing and pointing his nose at the ceiling like a bird dog.
Sien Noordenveer laughed. Her voice had been tight as she talked to them, but the laugh was more loose, relaxed.
“What's funny?” Monk demanded.
“You are. You act as if you were a bloodhound trying to smell a hole in the ceiling.”
“Go ahead and have your fun,” Monk told her with pleasant tolerance.
Monk went ahead inspecting the ceiling. And his glee began to fray at the edges. “I don't see any hole,” he said. “The smoke just collects in the ceiling of the hall.”
Doc studied the hall. “Get some of those manuscript cases,” he said.
They made a stack of the stainless metal manuscript files, piling them one on the other like big bricks. Doc climbed on these, examined the ceiling.
He made his trilling sound for a moment, and it had an intensely pleased quality.
“Air channels around the edges,” he pointed out. “They are in this ornamental frieze.”
“How big are the holes?” Monk asked.
“You might get your little finger in the largest.”
“That's great,” Monk said. “We'll have to use the nitroglycerine, huh?”
They used the nitro, getting it all off the ceiling. They used only one bottle to blast, and put the other in the manuscript storage room, padding it carefully with paper. They stuck the one bottle against the ceiling near one of the air ducts, and Doc Savage stood across the room in a door and hurled a phial of nitro at the spot.
After the deafening results subsided they took a look.
“Hole here,” Doc reported.
“Big enough?” Monk asked.
“Yes. Barely. But it goes straight up.”
The ventilating shaft had been drilled straight down from above, and made large enough for a workman. At the bottom a tunnel circled the hall, and it was through small holes drilled from this that air entered the hall. They worked up into the shaft.
There were handholds by which they could climb, they discovered.
“Wait a minute,” Sien Noordenveer said. They stopped.
“I thought of something else,” she said. “Maybe I had better show it to you. It might be important.”
She took them into the most shabby room. In an uninviting corner she pointed at a design of cracks in the wall. They seemed ordinary cracks.
“Look at them closely,” she said. “And then watch.”
She shoved against a part of the wall with her left hand. A small segment of rock slipped inward. Then she pushed at another point and a larger panel opened. The first spot was a catch which held the panel secured, obviously.
Inside there was an opening about three feet deep, two feet wide, and a foot high.
It was empty.
“This,” Sien said, “was a secret. I think it might have been a secret for centuries. But Harve

MacChesney found it. I think he found in an old manuscript by Peterpence—the black, black witch—directions which he followed."
She looked at them. They said nothing.
She explained, "I know MacChesney found it because I accidentally saw him opening it. He had a Peterpence manuscript in his hand, and was obviously following directions which it gave."
"What was in here?" Monk asked.
"I suspect," she said, "that it was this thing everybody is calling the secret of the black, black witch."
THEY climbed the air shaft. The going was difficult, treacherous. As they got higher, the rock grew damp, which was surprising. It was slippery. There was moss. And then there were dangling slimy vines, and the passage had turned at right angles, becoming level.
"It couldn't be gold or jewels," Monk said.
"What couldn't?" Sien asked.
"Whatever was in that secret hole in the wall. The Nazis wouldn't raise this kind of a fuss over gold or jewels. With the financial set-up, they don't need money that bad."
Doc Savage parted vines. He extended a hand and found space beyond. The tunnel had come out, apparently, in the face of a cliff.
He found loose, damp dirt, dust that had drifted into the tunnel. He molded a little into a ball and tossed it out, listened to it fall. Its sound came back finally.
"About a hundred feet," Monk muttered. "That's great!"
"We daren't show a light," Sien warned. "They might see it."
Doc explored the rock outside the tunnel mouth. It felt firm. His fingers found a small ledge. He clung to that, swung over, and up. Then he found another ledge—like the first one, obviously cut there long ago. Once they had been footholds, and they still offered finger purchase.
The top of the cliff was about ten feet up, overhung by brush and vines. The vines helped a little.
He found a tough vine, broke it free and lowered it. With that he hauled Sien to the top. Then he brought Monk up.
"Now what?" Sien whispered.
"We will try," Doc told her, "to locate Harve MacChesney."
Sien was surprised. "Say, don't you ever give up?"
"Give up?"
"I thought," Sien said, "that you would try to get out of Germany." She hesitated, adding, "And I wanted to go along."
"We came over here to help MacChesney," Doc said. "You say MacChesney was around the chateau tonight?"
"Yes, of course. I left him not fifteen minutes before I met you under the skylight."
"The Germans," Doc reminded her, "seemed to think he was in the underground rooms with us."
Sien said grimly, "Which means he's hiding."
"Then the thing to do is find him," Doc said. "You stay here. Monk will stay with you. You will wait right here."
"You," Sien said suddenly, "be careful."
"I will watch out for Germans," Doc told her.
"I wasn't," Sien said, "meaning the Germans."
"You meant MacChesney?"
"I sure do. It looks to me like MacChesney isn't your friend. Maybe he did tip off the Germans to grab you last night. Maybe he blew down that underground passage."
"A possibility," Doc admitted. "And could you guess why?"
"I could and would."
"Guess away."
"Maybe," Sien said, "he changed his mind. Maybe he sent for you, and then decided he didn't want you after all."
Doc was thoughtfully silent for a moment. "What reasons would he have?"
"MacChesney is queer. He's different. He's benevolent. He loves mankind. He's what people think diplomats are when they don't really know what diplomats are like. Harve MacChesney has an I-want-to-do-good-in-the-world complex."
Doc knew this was very true of MacChesney. He waited to hear the rest of Sien's theory.
"He could," Sien said, "have changed. Greed maybe got the upper hand. He found something. It was so big and so world-shaking that he sent for you to take charge. He did that when he was all stirred up with his I-want-to-do-good-in-the-world feeling. Then greed got him. He decided he wanted the thing he'd discovered all for himself. But he'd sent for you. You were coming. He'd have to stop that. How does that theory sound?"
Monk had listened. He answered her question.
"It sounds," Monk said, "like some first-class reasoning."
THE German army overcoat which Doc had been wearing had a very good lining. Doc tore out the lining and fashioned himself a breechcloth which did not hamper silent motion as much as the heavy

overcoat. The cold of the night, and it was cold, might not be as unpleasant as the caliber 11 m-m bullet which German army rifles fired.

He was twenty or thirty feet from the chateau entrance when the door flew open and an officer dashed out. It was the colonel.

“Corporal Schultz!” he yelled.

The sentry whipped a salute, “Yes, Colonel Rohr.”

The colonel had so much trouble with his voice that he practically strangled.

“The Luftwaffe commandant, this zone, has telephoned me,” he said. “It seems that an American approached the flying field, knocked a guard senseless, and stole a Messerschmitt. The plane was fueled and armed, ready for action in case of a raid. The American succeeded in taking off. The American carried two small suitcases. He was seen and discarded one suitcase in his haste. In the suitcase was an old manuscript. The American was identified as Harve MacChesney.”

The sentry stood at rigid attention through this long speech. He did not say anything.

“Schultz!” snapped Colonel Rohr.

“Yes.”

“You have a brother assigned to Field 3, Zone 37, Area 5.”

The sentry didn't want to answer that. “I—yes sir,” he said.

“That was the field from which the American, MacChesney, just escaped in a stolen plane.”

The sentry had gotten much tighter.

“Schultz,” said Colonel Rohr. “You often go to that field to visit your brother, do you not?”

The sentry swayed a little. Terror began to crawl over his face. “Yes, sir,” he croaked.

“At all the other windows and doors of the chateau, there has been two guards tonight,” the colonel said. “But you have been the only guard at this door, Schultz.”

Fear made the sentry wordless.

Colonel Rohr said, “Schultz, you let MacChesney leave here tonight with two small suitcases. You told him where the flying field was located and just how he might approach it and steal a plane.”

The sentry couldn't keep his arm at salute any longer. The arm sagged, shaking, as if it had no strength to do anything. He could not speak.

Colonel Rohr grinned suddenly. He looked around, listened, then laughed. It was a friendly laugh.

“Give me half the money MacChesney paid you,” he said in a low voice, “and I will settle this thing so you will not have any worries.”

The sentry made a gulping sound. He whirled, pounced on the soft earth under a bush, dug frantically for a moment, and came up with a packet of paper money.

“Here!” He thrust the money on Colonel Rohr. “Take half. Take two thirds.”

Rohr grinned thinly. “MacChesney paid you plenty, did he not?” He folded the money and pocketed it.

“I will not need to worry?” asked the frightened soldier.

“No more,” Colonel Rohr said.

The colonel used a dark pistol to shoot the sentry, once in the forehead and once in the left eye.

TWENTY minutes or so after they had taken the body of the sentry away—Colonel Rohr calmly stated that the sentry had confessed to letting MacChesney escape the chateau, but made no mention of the money—there was a car sound on the road. The machine was a field gray-green army staff car, camouflaged. It rushed up the drive to the chateau entrance.

A soldier sprang out with a small suitcase. A piece of baggage about the size of a week-end case.

“The bag which MacChesney dropped,” he explained.

Colonel Rohr took it.

Apparently he had telephoned the Luftwaffe field an order to send him the bag.

The staff car departed.

Colonel Rohr did not enter the chateau. He scowled at the place, then craned his neck, looking over a bush at the sentry who now guarded the entrance.

The door sentry was not in a position to have seen the staff car emissary hand the bag to the colonel.

The colonel backed away, keeping the bush between himself and the sentry. He began to run. He was in good physical condition, knew where he was going, and covered ground fast. He was in such a hurry that he never saw or even heard Doc trailing him with quiet, Indian stealth.

He ran three quarters of a mile and came out in a yard of a small French inn. There were several cars and two trucks, all Reichswehr machines, parked in the inn yard.

One of the trucks was an army communications vehicle. Colonel Rohr had the key. He unlocked it, climbed in, and turned on the light. He closed the door and drew the blackout curtains with which the machine was equipped. He must have been a little excited, because he missed one small curtain from which light crept.

Doc Savage glued his eye to the spot where the light showed.

Colonel Rohr had opened the small handbag, spread a pile of parchment rolls over a table and was studying them. The writing on them did not seem to give him much trouble.

For at least fifteen minutes the colonel read.

“Wie scade!”
he snarled. He cursed a little, fists on his hips, bitter disappointment in his voice. He dumped the parchment rolls back in the case.
He consulted his wrist watch.
“I hope nobody has missed me,” he muttered.
He extinguished the electric lights and got out of the truck with the bag.
Doc was there to take him by the coat lapels.
Doc said, “So you are trying to steal it yourself!”
He hit Colonel Rohr a quick blow on the jaw point, then another in a spot that would produce more lasting unconsciousness. He dumped the colonel back in the truck with the bag.
There was no sound from the little French inn, where soldiers were probably sleeping.
Doc climbed into the truck, closed the black-out curtains, switched on the lights. He looked for a moment at the radio apparatus in the truck. It was powerful equipment. Then he opened the suitcase and began examining the parchment rolls.
Colonel Rohr was an expert on ancient French languages himself. No one but an expert could have read this stuff so rapidly.
It was a manuscript done in 1554.
The author was Peterpence, known in his old age as the black, black witch.
DOC skimmed over the parchment rolls, reading some paragraphs closely.
Most of the stuff was rather foul. It was villification, slander, venom. All directed at Nostradamus.
According to the manuscript, Nostradamus had been many kinds of a rascal and evil fellow. But the very magnitude of the crimes showed them to be written lies. False slander and evil. The outpouring of a bitter, hating heart. A piece of sixteenth-century bile.
The manuscript was a sample of consuming hate.
Except for one page—which had a different flavor. The flavor of revenge. And of a secret.
That page must have been written after the others.
It was obvious that Peterpence had gotten some kind of revenge on Nostradamus—but that the revenge had backfired. Peterpence had intended to tear Nostradamus down, to disgrace him. He hadn't. Instead, Nostradamus had shot to fame and glory. He had gotten great favor in the eyes of Catherine de Medici, Queen of France. The chateau, which had been built for Peterpence by the queen was being taken from him and given to Nostradamus.
The manuscript, apparently, had been executed the night before Peterpence would have to leave the chateau forever.
The two last paragraphs were interesting.
Next to the final paragraph read:
The world is a fool. It is an idiot child. It has no acceptance or appreciation of greatness. Here I have a discovery that is great, greater than hope, charity, hate, fear, love. Greater than any emotion. As great as life itself. But the child-idiot-fool world has not the sense to accept it. They call me a he-witch, the imbeciles. I shall, therefore, not give the secret to mankind. I shall hide it here in the chateau. That will be a great joke. The fool Nostradamus will never know what made him what he is—that it was my work, by accident.
The final paragraph was a description of the hiding place in the room in the stone beneath the chateau.
This was the manuscript which had guided MacChesney to the hiding place.
There was nothing else of interest in the collection of old manuscripts.
Doc went to work on the radio equipment.
THE radio apparatus—this was evidently a central command truck—was powerful. It was the kind of an outfit that was designed so a Nazi general in Paris could talk by radiophone to a colleague before Stalingrad.
There was “scrambler” equipment to make the conversation unintelligible to eavesdroppers. Doc disconnected that.
The transmitter wave length also could be changed. He worked with the set, put the wave length on a frequency where he knew English or American monitor sets would be tuned in. He cut in the power and the microphone.
In English Doc said, “Emergency call. Emergency call to all English and American listening posts. Emergency. Cut in your recording machines. Make a recording of the following. Make a recording of the following. Then play it over transatlantic radio to headquarters of Doc Savage in New York City. Get the recording to Doc Savage aids in New York. Here is the recording.”
He changed to Mayan. Mayan was the dead language used by Doc and his associates to communicate with each other when they did not wish to be understood by others. The Mayan tongue was spoken by a few inhabitants in a strange lost valley in Central America, but by almost no one else in the so-called civilized world, except Doc and his five assistants.
(The lost valley in Central America is also the source of the enormous wealth expended by Doc Savage in his strange profession of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers. It was the scene of Doc's first great adventure with his five aids, in the Doc Savage novel titled “The Man of Bronze.”

It was in the course of this adventure that they learned Mayan, the lost language of the original clan of Maya, which had a civilization greater than Egypt thousands of years before Egyptian learning reached its climax. How Doc gets his Mayan gold is rather strange—on any seventh day, at a certain hour, he can broadcast a request in Mayan by powerful radio. A few days later a pack train of gold will appear mysteriously at his bank in the capital of the Central American republic.—THE AUTHOR.)

In Mayan, Doc said:

"Ham, Johnny, Renny or Long Tom—whoever gets this: Monk and I have not been doing so well. MacChesney made a mysterious, and an apparently vastly important discovery while amusing himself by digging through old manuscripts in the chateau where he was confined in Occupied France. MacChesney sent for us, then changed his mind, and apparently tried to get us captured by the Germans, or killed. He failed by narrow margin. MacChesney has now escaped in a stolen German plane. He has small suitcase probably containing his discovery. Get busy on this, all of you."

Doc was speaking the Mayan slowly and carefully, enunciating the words so that they would be clearly registered by the recording machine.

He continued: "Try to find and capture Harve MacChesney. Get help from American and English military authorities. One of you come to France and pick us up. We will be at the edge of a woods located seven miles due south of La Glenze, in Occupied France. We will be waiting there Friday at midnight."

He repeated the Mayan instructions, in case the listening posts had been late switching on recorders.

He turned off the radio.

He found a half dozen one-soldier supply packs of emergency rations in a locker in the truck and took those. Colonel Rohr was still unconscious when he left.

Chapter VII. THE FIRST TERRIFIED MAN

HAM BROOKS looked the part. Ham's full name and title was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, and by reputation he was one of the most astute lawyers Harvard had ever turned out, which made him quite astute. He looked everything he was, and possibly a little more.

Most remarkable thing about Ham, probably, was his clothing. This was remarkable on any and all occasions, and was good reason for the name of being the second best-dressed man in America. Last year he had been best-dressed man in the polls which counted, but this year an actor in Hollywood had edged him out of first place into second. Ham's alibi was that the war was distracting his attention, but privately he had done a bit of worrying. He was proud of his sartorial repute.

He was even prouder of his association with Doc Savage. He was one of Doc's group of five assistants.

He came flying into Occupied France, and by reason of the specially silenced motors on one of Doc's own planes, the fine job of camouflage, daring and some luck, he avoided possible interception and landed in a meadow at the edge of the woods located seven miles due south of La Glenze.

Monk and Doc, waiting, quickly jumped into the plane.

"Monk, you ugly thug," Ham said. "It's too bad they didn't hang you."

He sounded as if he meant it.

"Ham, you overdressed shyster," Monk said, "danged if I don't think I'll stay here before I'll ride back with you."

Monk sounded as if he meant that, too.

Which was, for them, a completely affectionate greeting.

Then Ham looked at Sien Noordenveer. "The breath of an angel!" he exclaimed. "Who's this?"

"The witch I dreamed up," Monk told him. "Did a pretty good job, didn't I?"

Sien said. "He keeps talking about a witch and a motorcycle in connection with me. He never has explained why."

They were losing no time getting in the plane.

Ham asked Doc, "Have any trouble with the Germans since you made that radio speech in Mayan?"

"Nothing serious," Doc told him.

Sien laughed. "I'd hate to see something he called serious, then. German patrols have been as thick as bees in a clover field. With all the soldiers who have been around here I don't see what they have left to fight the war."

"They were after you, huh?"

"In waves."

"You have a radio-receiving set?"

"No."

"You don't know, then," Ham said, "that the whole Nazi outfit is in a stew over this thing. Grapevine reports have been coming out about it."

Ham hauled back on the control wheel. The ship lifted.

He said, "The reports are to the effect that the Nazis are all stirred up about a black, black witch. The English thought that was funny, at first. Then they heard Hitler himself was very interested, and had made a personal trip to a chateau near Carotin, France, in connection with the matter. That made them stop laughing. Then they heard Colonel Rohr had been executed by a firing

squad on Hitler's personal order. That convinced them it was important. But they're puzzled."
Doc asked, "Colonel Rohr was executed?"
"That's the report," Ham said. "Stood against a stone wall."
DOC SAVAGE lapsed into silence. Death invariably had a depressing effect on him when it was connected with his doing. Long ago he bad issued orders to his men that there was to be no killing of enemies, regardless of how much killing was deserved. It was the one order of which he expected no violation. He himself never directly took a life. Nor did the others, although in the case of Monk Mayfair, there was room for a little doubt. Monk had been afflicted with a series of accidents—as he called them—in which his enemies unfortunately got killed. He had been warned about this. Nobody expected the warning to do much good. Monk had been warned about involving himself with anything attractive in skirts, without noticeable effect.
The plane climbed up into the sky. It was a moonlit night with the sky full of star sparks and the air hard with cold.
Ham said, "About that recording in Mayan: Half a dozen listening posts in England got it, and two in America. They were playing it to us over long distance telephone in less than thirty minutes. We got busy."
"All of you?" Doc asked.
"Renny and Long Tom are in Australia on that army mission," Ham said. "They haven't gotten back. That left Johnny and me and Pat."
Sien Noordenveer asked, "Who is Johnny?"
"Johnny Littlejohn, archaeologist and geologist," Ham explained. "The longest one hunk of man you ever saw."
"And the user of the biggest words," Monk added.
"And who is Pat?" Sien asked. "Is he another one of your group?"
"Pat isn't a he. Pat is Patricia Savage. She's Doc's cousin."
"Pretty?"
"Oh, boy!" Ham said. "The only trouble is, she likes trouble the way a frog likes flies. Every time we get mixed up in some excitement like this she's right down our throats."
Doc Savage, who rarely showed expression, was now looking irritated. "You called Pat into this?" he asked.
Ham registered discomfort. "She invited herself. You know how she is, Doc."
"You should have kept her out. This thing may prove to be the biggest and most dangerous article we have tackled. The whole German government is excited about it. And the German government, in the middle of its other troubles, would not get excited over a trifle."
Ham said, "Well, she's in it now."
"What is she doing?"
"Helping Johnny keep track of Harve MacChesney."
"You have," Doc asked, "located MacChesney?"
"You might say we're keeping track of his smoke."
"Smoke?"
"MacChesney," Ham explained, "is burning up the landscape in an effort to get somewhere. We think the somewhere is New York. He got out of Germany in the Luftwaffe plane he stole. He landed in French Africa, and refueled. The French-African airport was an out-of-the-way one, and the authorities there were so bamboozled by the combination of an American diplomat and a German war plane that they were afraid not to refuel him. The next heard from he was in Brazil."
Ham had been climbing their plane rapidly. They went into clouds. He continued, "In Brazil, they were too smart for him. The Brazilian authorities seized the plane and arrested MacChesney. But, of course, when the American officials there identified MacChesney as a United States diplomat, the Brazilians turned him over to the United States officials. And then MacChesney made jackasses out of the United States officials. He escaped from them. He stole another plane, an American one this time, and headed for the United States."
DOC SAVAGE lifted a hand to interrupt the recital of MacChesney's actions. "MacChesney," he said, "escaped from United States officials in Brazil and stole an American plane?"
"Yes."
"Strange way for a hitherto dignified and trusted American diplomat to act."
"Darned strange," Ham agreed. "Everybody in Washington who knows MacChesney is dumfounded."
Doc asked, "He didn't explain himself?"
"Not a word."
"Did he," Doc asked, "mention how he escaped from Germany?"
"He didn't tell anybody anything."
They flew in silence for a while. Clouds were thin and ghostly wisps around them. Overhead, the moon and the stars were as bright as fire.
"Go ahead," Doc said, "with anything else you know about MacChesney."
Ham shrugged. "There isn't much more. MacChesney flew from Brazil to the United States by the land route. He refueled once in Honduras, at a remote mining-company flying field where they hadn't heard about him. That's the last trace. He is headed for the States, of course, and probably for New

York. He lived in New York a long time, and he'd doubtless head for familiar ground. Furthermore, the Honduras mining company manager reported that he saw a map in the plane, and it had three or four alternate routes to New York charted on it with pencil."

Monk scratched his nubbin-shaped head. "What I'm wondering is where MacChesney learned to fly like that. It ain't no small job to pilot stolen planes around over the world like he's doing."

Ham said, "MacChesney is a private flier of much experience. Kept own plane for years, and traveled from one European capital to another in the course of his business."

"That costs money. Do they pay diplomats that kind of dough?"

"The MacChesney family had a lot of wealth in the shape of rubber plantations."

Doc Savage looked up. "Rubber plantations? In the East Indies?"

Ham nodded.

"Then," Doc said, "the MacChesneys have lost their holdings."

"I was going to mention that." Ham adjusted the automatic-pilot device. "We wondered if that could have anything to do with the way MacChesney is acting. Men who have been wealthy all their lives, and lost their money suddenly, react in strange ways, sometimes."

Doc made no comment, was thoughtful for a while.

"Has there," he asked, "been any report of MacChesney carrying a small handbag?"

"It's a steel dispatch box," Ham said. "It's chained to his wrist."

THEY came down in England without difficulty. A flight of R. A. F. fighter planes escorted them the last fifty miles suspiciously, however. Doc's plane, while it bore United States military markings, was obviously not an American military type.

While they were refueling, a field officer approached them, reported, "Mr. Savage, a transatlantic radiophone call for you."

The call was over the regular radio land-line service. It was Johnny Littlejohn in New York City.

"A laetificantly empyrean transubstantiation," he remarked.

"What is on your mind?" Doc asked him.

"Oh!" Johnny said. "I thought it was Ham on the wire."

Johnny liked to use his jawbreaking words on everyone except Doc. For some reason or other, he never employed them on the bronze man.

Johnny continued, "I think we are on the trail of Harve MacChesney."

"You have found him?"

"No. But he landed his plane and abandoned it in a field in Pennsylvania. That seems to indicate he is headed for New York."

"No trace of him since?"

"None."

Doc said, "Get a complete list of MacChesney's friends. Get every close friend he has."

"We have that already. Pat assembled it."

"Get our private-detective organization to work on the friends," Doc directed. "Watch them. Supply every detective with a full description and pictures of MacChesney. They will have MacChesney's photograph on file in the State department in Washington. Get it. Better have a good artist make up several possible disguises around the photograph, and give copies to all the detectives."

"Right. Anything else?"

"And get Pat off this thing," Doc said, "if you can."

"I don't know about that."

"There is something fantastic behind this thing," Doc told him. "It is not small. The whole German government is excited about it. It has made MacChesney, a staid and dependable man, behave like an insane man. Before we get the thing settled there quite probably may be fireworks. Nothing for a girl to be fooling around."

"How," Johnny asked, "would you suggest I get Pat to go about her business?"

"You have me stumped," Doc admitted.

THEY made the England-to-America flight in company with two big cargo transports loaded with army fliers going back to bring over more bombers. The transports were fast and did not cut down their speed much.

It was late afternoon when they landed at LaGuardia airport.

The plane, unlike most of the craft which Doc owned—he had several—was a land ship only. Hence their use of LaGuardia Field instead of the Hudson River and the waterfront warehouse-hangar which they normally employed.

Johnny met them. He stood out like a tower in the crowd. Monk told Sien, "He's longer than the words he uses. You couldn't miss him."

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny said with much pleasure.

He sounded so satisfied that Doc knew he had good news.

"Found MacChesney?" Doc asked.

Johnny shook his head. "No. But he's in New York. And we know he saw one of his friends, a man named Robert Diamat. And now Robert Diamat is scared stiff."

"Scared?"

“With the strangest kind of fear you ever saw,” Johnny said. “This thing is sure beginning to look interesting.”

Chapter VIII. THE FRIGHTENING FUTURE

JOHNNY LITTLEJOHN had appeared at the airport in his private automobile, an elderly and extremely dilapidated vehicle which Monk had often called a fugitive from an assembly line. This ancient land ark could actually travel a hundred and fifty miles an hour, if everything kept out of its way, and the occupants were safe from bullets coming from less than an antitank gun providing the windows were closed. A spectator would have said it was an impossibility, but it could be made absolutely airtight, hence safe from gas attack. Along with its other qualities was that of noise. When in motion it made such a racket that conversation was difficult.

Johnny set the course of his vehicle into downtown Manhattan and toward the swank and dignity of residential Park Avenue.

Monk looked at the skyscrapers, at the people on the streets. He grinned, much pleased.

“This,” he said, “obviously isn't Europe.”

Sien was gazing out of the window. “It isn't Holland, either.”

They rode silently, in a state not less than completely pleased.

Monk laughed. “You know, I've knocked around over the world plenty, and I haven't lost the kick that comes of getting back to the States. I wonder if you ever lose it?”

Sien glanced at the city around them, at the people on the streets, and at their dress. “I don't see why one should lose it.”

Johnny had been told the story of what had happened to Doc and Monk so far. He had been thinking it over as he drove his remarkable car. Now he shook his head. “The Germans must know more about it than we do,” he said. “Their excitement indicates they do. I wonder what it is?”

Monk told him, “Whatever it is, it's something that a sorehead named Peterpence, also known as the black, black witch, discovered back in fifteen hundred and something-or-other. The black, black witch hid the secret in that underground room of the chateau. MacChesney got to digging through old documents, and found the hiding place. Whatever he found got him so excited that he sent for Doc. And then it got him even more excited, so that he tried to stop Doc getting there. And when Doc did arrive, MacChesney grabbed the secret—we think—and lit out for New York.”

“You told me all that before.” Johnny was absentmindedly using small words. “What did MacChesney find?”

Monk snorted. “Suppose you let me ask some silly questions.”

“Mutiloquate,” Johnny said.

“Huh?”

“Go ahead and ask.”

“Who,” Monk asked, “is this scared man?”

“Robert Diamat.”

“You told us his name. Who is he?”

“A very close friend of MacChesney.”

“And what else?”

“He is married,” Johnny explained, “to MacChesney's ex-wife.”

“I didn't know MacChesney had been married before.”

“They were divorced some years ago.”

THEY pulled up before an apartment house which made it evident that Robert Diamat was a man who had a lot of money to spend on living. Monk said, “Ham should be impressed. He once had an apartment in this neighborhood.”

Ham nodded, said, “And had to give it up because I couldn't pay the rent. You know what these places rent for? Some of them as high as twenty thousand a year.”

A doorman with good manners and much dignity passed them inside. “We're expected,” Johnny told the telephone operator inside.

As they rode up in the elevator, Monk said, “Expected? Did this Robert Diamat ask you to bring us here?”

“No. We got thrown out,” Johnny explained. “They probably expect me back, though. So I didn't lie about being expected.”

A butler let them in. He recognized Johnny. He shook his head wordlessly.

“The doctor come?” Johnny asked.

“Yes, sir,” the butler said. “He doesn't understand it.”

“And you called in a psychiatrist?”

The servant nodded. “He was completely baffled, sir. He indicated a belief that it was the result of some kind of continuous and growing shock, apparently induced by belief that something horrible is going to happen.”

“Can we see Mr. Diamat?”

“He won't like it, sir. He did not like it when the doctor and the psychiatrist came. And he was not exactly courteous to you on your other visit.”

Johnny grinned. “He practically chased us out with the fireplace poker. But we'll take our chances.”

The butler—evidently he and Johnny had previously reached some kind of an agreement that involved money, judging from his attitude—admitted them. He indicated which way they were to go.
Doc paused to ask a question.
“Where,” he inquired, “is the lady of the house, Mrs. Diamat?”
“The madam is wintering in Palm Beach,” the butler explained. “She has not been notified of this matter.”
Johnny then conducted them down a hall, through a pleasant room, and stopped at a door. “He's in here,” he said. “Before we go in I want to tell you what he's been doing. For hour after hour, more than a day now, he has done nothing but sit and stare fixedly at the radio-receiving set, and with the most awful expression of growing horror.”
“Listening to the radio?” Doc asked.
“The radio isn't turned on.”
Doc frowned. “Before his strange behavior started, he was visited by Harve MacChesney?”
“Exactly.”
“Did Robert Diamat tell you that?”
“No. I got it from the butler. Diamat refused to tell me a thing.”
“How did the butler know about Harve MacChesney?”
“The butler,” said Johnny, “is an old family retainer. He has been in the family of the present Mrs. Diamat, who was the former Mrs. Harve MacChesney, for years. He was with her when she was Mrs. MacChesney. So he knows MacChesney by sight as well as anybody would. He saw Mr. MacChesney sneaking into this apartment a few hours before Robert Diamat began acting so strangely.”
Johnny flung open the door.
WALKING into a strange man's house and throwing open doors was a procedure which they expected the owner to resent. But Robert Diamat did not as much as look at them. If he had any consciousness of their arrival, he gave no sign.
He sat in front of the radio.
Six radios, rather. There were five new sets and one old one, and all were connected and all seemed ready for operation.
None of the radios was switched on.
Doc stepped forward and noted that the dials of all the radios were set to the same wave length. It was the frequency of a large broadcasting chain local outlet.
“Mr. Diamat,” Doc Savage said.
The man kept looking straight in front of him for a while, then turned his eyes only. When he saw Doc Savage he moved his head slightly, but not much. It was about the least impression Doc had ever made on a stranger. The man did not speak.
Doc Savage walked slowly around Diamat, examining the man. He made no bones about inspecting Diamat, as if the fellow was a patient who had come for a diagnosis and treatment. He made his visual inspection, then took the man's wrist and counted pulse. It was slow and slightly thready, but not bad.
Doc reached for Diamat's head to tip it back and examine the eyes.
Diamat struck the hand away, hitting the hand a quick snakelike blow.
“Get out of here!” Diamat croaked.
Doc Savage glanced up at the butler, who had followed them into the room. The butler's face was tragic. Doc asked, “That sound like his normal voice?”
“It isn't like him at all, sir,” the butler said sadly.
“Please leave!” Diamat muttered.
Doc pulled up a chair in front of the man. “Mr. Diamat,” he asked, “what gave you this shock?”
No response.
“Mr. Diamat!” Doc said loudly.
The man looked steadily at one radio. His attention seemed focused on that radio to the exclusion of the others, although the radio differed from the others in no way except that a clock sat upon it.
It was not hard to deduct that the man was watching the clock.
DOC SAVAGE got up and sauntered around the room—and changed the time of his watch. Johnny had brought the wrist watch along with clothing when he met them at the airport.
Doc went back and sat down in front of Diamat.
“Mr. Diamat,” he said. “Why are you watching all the radios?”
The man did not answer.
Doc moved his wrist casually so that the man would not help but notice the dial of the wrist watch.
“Johnny,” Doc said. “Did Mr. Diamat have all the radios when you were here before?”
“No, he didn't,” Johnny replied. “He has ordered the other radios since. He had only one when I was here.”
“Mr. Diamat,” Doc said. “Why did Harve MacChesney visit you?”
Diamat then saw the dial of Doc's wrist watch. Doc had set the time ahead fifteen minutes.
Diamat's eyes protruded.

He emitted a weirdly inarticulate cry and sprang upon the radios. He turned the sets on, one after another, pawing them madly and making wordless groanings and gabblings.
He acted like a man who was about to explode while the tubes were warming up. The radios blasted on. A swing band. Their racket was ear-splitting.
“I've missed it!” he screamed.
Doc cut down the volume of the sets. “Missed what?”
“The . . . the—” Diamat stared at him. He shook his head. He sank back in a chair.
Doc said, “Mr. Diamat, have you considered the possibility that we might be here to help you. My name is Savage—Doc Savage, and these are my associates.”
This had an effect on Diamat. He closed his eyes slowly, the first time—everyone remembered suddenly—that he had closed them since they had come into the room.
“Help?” he said. “Help is the extending of aid and succor, the offering of a haven. There is no haven from the inevitable, so how can you help me?”
Doc studied the man for a moment. “It is always best to deal in tangibles, Mr. Diamat. What do you mean by the inevitable? If you mean that literally, there probably is no such thing as the inevitable. The inevitable is a result, and results are always the product of an addition, whether of numbers, elements or events.”
The voice which Doc used was a quiet, heavy oil on troubled water in its effect. The man seemed to relax.
“I have always been helpless,” he said, “when I get a shock. My physician said I should always avoid them. I am too emotional.”
“One of the best things to do with a shock,” Doc said, “is to unload the unpleasant details on someone else. It helps, and psychiatrists can give you a long list of reasons why it does help.”
“You want,” Diamat asked, “me to tell you everything?”
“I am merely telling you that it would help.”
Diamat stared at Doc's watch. “Is your time right?”
“It is a good watch.”
Diamat turned to the others. “What time do you have?”
Monk had seen the time at which Doc had set his wrist watch and he announced the same time casually. “Eight thirty-nine exactly,” he said.
Diamat leaned back. “I do not understand it.”
“Understand what?”
“Why Harve MacChesney did what he did.”
“Which was?” Doc inquired.
Diamat did not answer immediately. He was thinking. He closed his eyes again, and rubbed his hands together slowly as if the circulation had gone bad in them.
He said, “It was so horrible and unbelievable. And yet he convinced me. I think it was the utter—utter fantasm—of it that convinced me. And yet there was no proof. There is no proof now, I mean. Because it is past eight thirty, and it has not happened.”
Doc glanced at the clock on the radio. It was almost exactly eight twenty-five by correct time.
“What was supposed to happen at eight twenty-five?” he asked.
“The radio,” Diamat said, “was to broadcast the report that the airplane carrier Chicago had been sunk. The broadcast was to be exactly at eight—”
They came near getting their hair stood permanently on end then.
Because the radios, all of them suddenly said,
“Ladies and gentlemen, we interrupt the scheduled program to bring you the following news flash. The navy department has just announced that the aircraft carrier Chicago has been sunk in action with the enemy. More details will follow in a few minutes. Keep tuned to this station.”

Chapter IX. ONE WASN'T SCARED

TEN seconds of silence. Then Diamat shrieked and came out of his chair and shrieked again, and the shrieking turned to laughter and he was on the floor twisting and squirming, to all appearances a mental wreck.
Doc got hold of him, said, “Help me,” to the others. They took Diamat into a bedroom while the man kicked and laughed—mad senseless laughter that was a screaming and sobbing and gobbling and blubbering, all without reason.
“Go to the pharmacy on the next corner,” Doc said. He told Johnny what to get. It was a sedative. He wrote Johnny a prescription for the stuff.
It was half an hour before he got Diamat quiet and asleep.
“One of us,” he said, “had better stay here with Diamat.”
They were silent. All of them felt queer. The radios were still playing softly, and pausing now and then to tell about the sinking of the aircraft carrier Chicago, in enemy action surprisingly close to the coast.
They finally matched to see who would stay.
Johnny lost.
Doc said, “Keep close watch on Diamat. Makes notes of any of his mutterings that seem important. Call us when he revives.”

“What,” Johnny asked, “is wrong with him?”
“Nervous shock,” Doc said. “It affects some people that way sometimes if the shock is great enough. And there seems to have been nothing small about the shock Diamat received.”
Johnny scratched his head.
“It sounded,” he said, “as if Harve MacChesney caused the shock.”
Doc made no comment.
“What did Diamat mean by that talk about the inevitable?” Johnny asked.
Doc did not reply to that either.
With Monk and Ham and Sien, the bronze man left the impressive Park Avenue apartment house. They got a cab, leaving Johnny's remarkable car parked where it was, in case Johnny should have use for it.
There was complete silence in the moving cab for a while. Then Ham said, “Doc, that was a strange thing.”
“Which part of it?”
“His knowing the radio was going to broadcast that the carrier Chicago had been sunk. I mean—knowing that it was going to come on the air at exactly eight twenty-five.”
“The information,” Doc said, “came from MacChesney. Or that was the impression one received from Diamat.”
“How would MacChesney know such a news broadcast was to go on at exactly eight twenty-five?”
Doc Savage's metallic features had a tight expressionless composure. “We will check into that,” he said.
THEY stopped at a midtown office building where there was a minor United States navy headquarters. Doc Savage identified himself, after which he did some telephoning to Washington over the navy's private wires. He got the information he was after.
What he learned caused the bronze man's strange, small trilling sound, like the noise of a puzzled wraith, to hang weirdly in the room for a few moments. And his flake-gold eyes were hard and shocked as he replaced the telephone on its cradle.
“Yeah?” Monk asked.
“Diamat knew the Chicago report was coming,” Doc said, “two hours ago.”
“Even before that, according to what Johnny said,” Monk agreed.
“The navy,” Doc said, “didn't know it themselves two hours ago.”
Monk's small eyes tried to get out of their sockets. “Huh?”
“The report of the sinking of the aircraft carrier Chicago is one report which was not kept secret for strategic reasons,” Doc said. “It went on the air ten minutes after the navy received the news. In fact, the report was being broadcast while the airplane carrier was still sinking.”
In a blank silence they went out and got in a cab, and started downtown toward headquarters.
“The carrier hadn't even been sunk two hours ago,” Monk said finally.
“No.”
“Then,” said Monk, “how did Diamat know?”
Ham interrupted, “What's more to the point, how did MacChesney know it so that he could tell Diamat. We're pretty sure Diamat got the information from MacChesney.”
That kept them silent for a while.
Ham added, “MacChesney might have got this information from the Germans in some fashion or other.”
Monk snorted. There was disbelief in his snort.
Sien Noordenveer spoke for what was hardly more than the second or third time since they had landed in America.
“How,” she asked, “would he know the news broadcast would go on the air at exactly eight twenty-five?”
For some reason her simple question gave them all a strange, cold feeling.
They rode nearly a dozen blocks.
“Doc,” Monk said.
“Yes?”
“You remember in that chateau in France—that night when we sneaked in through the skylight?”
“Yes.”
“Sien,” Monk said, “was waiting under the skylight for us. She knew the minute we were supposed to arrive. We didn't know the minute ourselves. We didn't even have watches. But Sien knew it.”
Sien said, “MacChesney had told me.”
“Diamat,” said Monk grimly, “knew when the radio was going to broadcast.”
“MacChesney had told Diamat,” Sien said.
Monk looked at Doc Savage intently. “Some coincidence, huh?”
The cab stopped. It was in front of the towering building which housed Doc Savage's downtown headquarters. They got out.
Doc stopped them.
He said, “Something in the nature of a warning is probably in order at this point.”
“Warning?”

“You had better make up your minds,” Doc said, “to having this thing become utterly fantastic.”
“You mean,” Monk asked, “that the impossible is going to happen?”
“It is already happening,” Doc told him flatly.
DOC SAVAGE'S headquarters for some time had been located in one of the tallest skyscrapers in midtown New York. They had at the beginning of their association and strange work established headquarters there. They had remained there because the place had the advantage of a central location and—in spite of it being in the heart of the city—the privacy which they often needed. Strangers often came to Doc Savage with unusual troubles, and the place was accessible to these. It had the disadvantage of being conspicuous also to their enemies, of which there were not a few. But they had installed numerous safeguards against such foes, so that they considered the headquarters as safe as any spot.
The place consisted of all the eighty-sixth floor, which was divided into a small reception room, a huge library, and an enormous laboratory which contained the intricate and advanced scientific gadgets which Doc used in his experimenting.
Patricia Savage met them. She had been standing by a wire-television gadget which could be switched to any of the approaches to the eighty-sixth floor and—from almost unnoticeable pickup apparatus—give a view of visitors. It was a handy precautionary gadget.
Pat pointed a finger at Doc.
“Don't,” she said, “start telling me to go home.”
Doc looked at her wearily. “It would be wasting breath. I have found that out.”
Pat laughed. “You don't mean you've changed over and recognize the value of the feminine touch?”
Doc made no comment.
Pat looked at them triumphantly. “I've made discoveries,” she announced.
“As of what nature?” Monk asked her suspiciously.
“Two more friends of MacChesney,” Pat said, “have become scared.”
“Two more!” Monk yelled.
“Very scared,” Pat said.
“Who are they?”
“One is that real-estate man who used to handle the MacChesney real-estate holdings here in the United States. He disposed of the MacChesney family estate, in fact, over a period of years. Made quite a fortune in commissions out of it, I gathered. Name is Tom de Houser.”
“Who's the other scared one?”
“Ben Smith. An old school chum of MacChesney's. They went to college together, and as near as I have been able to find out, that is all the connection they've ever had.”
Monk scratched his head. “When did they get scared?”
“Just within the last hour or two.”
“Was it news about a plane carrier,” Monk asked, “that scared them?”
“Plane carrier?” Pat was puzzled.
“Never mind,” Monk said. “What scared them?”
“MacChesney, it seems.”
“He visited them?”
“Yes.”
“What were our detectives doing?” Monk demanded “Didn't they have their eyes open?”
“MacChesney,” Pat said, “has disguised himself as a black man. He has changed his face around. His disguise was too good for our detectives.”
“How'd you find out about him being a black man?”
“It's partly a guess. I noticed from our detectives' report that a black man had visited both Tom de Houser and Ben Smith.”
“And now they're both scared?”
“That's right.”
“How,” Monk asked, “are they scared. Like Diamat?”
“Not like Diamat,” Pat told him. “Not quite the same. Fear affects people different ways. But they're scared.”
Doc Savage had remained silent. He frequently did that and listened to the questions and answers of whoever was with him. But now he spoke.
“Are there any MacChesney acquaintances who are not scared?” Doc asked.
“One,” Pat said, “that we know of.”
“Who is he?”
“An ex-ambassador to Europe by the name of Andrew J. Stiles.”
“Get his address.”
“I have it. He lives over in New Jersey.”
“Come on, then.”
“What are you going to do?”
“Get hold of this Andrew J. Stiles,” Doc said, “before he gets scared, too.”
The telephone started ringing.
DOC SAVAGE picked up the telephone receiver and at first the voices that came out of it did not

make words, but gruntings and the explosive sounds that voices make when their owners are struggling and straining, or getting hit blows. There were also noises of blows, and other sounds of furniture upsetting and getting kicked around.

“What is it?” Doc asked.

Johnny Littlejohn's voice yelled at him. Johnny didn't use big words. He sounded as if breath was what he had the least of.

“The blankety-blank so-and-sos!” Johnny said. Johnny was not addicted to the use of profanity, and he used the words blank and so-and-so. “Trying to grab me!” he added.

“Who?” Doc demanded.

“Blamed if I know them,” Johnny said.

There were more blows.

“Help!” Johnny howled.

The telephone was apparently torn out of his hand, judging by the way it sounded.

“Help!” Johnny said again, but farther away from the telephone.

The fighting was brought to an end by the closing of a door. Someone hung up the phone.

Monk and Ham and Pat and Sien got out of the door and started a rush uptown to help Johnny if any help could be gotten to him in time.

About fifteen minutes later the phone rang again.

It was the Diamat butler.

“Hello,” the butler said. “Hello, Mr. Savage.”

“Hello,” Doc replied.

“I heard Mr. Littlejohn trying to reach you, and I was not sure you were still on the wire,” said the butler. “Mr. Littlejohn has been taken away.”

“Who took him.”

“Strangers.”

“How many?”

“Seven or eight. I am not exactly sure how many. They struck me over the head and rather befuddled me.”

“Where is Mr. Diamat?” Doc asked.

“They took Mr. Diamat with them, too,” the butler replied. He hesitated. “I am—ah—rather disturbed about a certain aspect of the matter.”

“What aspect?”

“The seven or eight men,” said the butler, “seemed to be quite friendly to Mr. Diamat. And I rather got the idea he was glad to see them, and was expecting them.”

“Can you explain that?”

“I can't,” said the butler, “explain anything. But wait a minute—your aides have just come in. Here's Mr. Mayfair.”

MONK and the others were on the telephone.

“Eight guys,” Monk said, “carried Johnny away.”

“And took Diamat?” Doc asked.

“Diamat,” said Monk, “went willingly.”

“Any trace of Johnny?”

“No. I think the guys used cars. We ain't sure of that even.”

“Search that apartment,” Doc said, “from one end to the other. Turn up everything, and note anything that's interesting.”

“Right.”

“And grab the butler,” Doc directed, “and make him tell what he knows.”

“He knows something, you think? The butler's been co-operating with us pretty well.”

“He has been co-operating too well,” Doc said grimly, “for an old family retainer. Give him the works, but don't be too long about it. We have to get over to Andrew J. Stiles' house in New Jersey before anything happens to him. I want you all to meet me in Jersey City in about an hour and a half. Be there on time.”

Chapter X. DEATH AND THE BRAVE

RIGHT on the dot, an hour and a half later—they were always prompt about their appointments—Monk and the others met Doc at a subway station in Jersey City. They had come by car while Doc had used the Hudson Tubes—in New Jersey they called the subways the “Tubes” because it went through a tunnel tube under the Hudson River to New York.

There was, the group reported, nothing to show where Johnny had been taken, or why he had been seized. However, said Ham Brooks grimly, it was obvious that Johnny had been grabbed because he was guarding Robert Diamat. Furthermore, Diamat had been glad of it, and might even have instigated the seizure. Diamat had certainly welcomed the raiders. “For a guy who was as scared as he was acting,” Ham said, “he sure came out of it and went into action.”

“Doc,” Pat said, “I thought you gave him a sedative, a sleeping potion.”

Doc Savage nodded. He had. A strong one. “The man was an exceedingly nervous type,” he said. “Probably he takes such sleeping powders all the time, causing his system to develop a tolerance for them, so that they do not have much effect.”

Pat nodded.
“Now,” Doc said, “what about the butler?”
“He talked.”
“At first, he claimed he didn't know anything,” Ham corrected.
Monk said, “But we threw a scare into him. He figured the fact that Johnny had been seized had made us desperate.”
“After that, the words ran out of him like water out of a jug. Gurgle and all,” Pat said.
“Had he,” Doc asked, “been carrying MacChesney's messages to Diamat?”
Pat shook her head.
“Not MacChesney's messages,” she said.
“Whose then?”
“The butler had been relaying messages from Tom de Houser and Ben Smith to Diamat,” Pat explained.
“Tom de Houser and Ben Smith,” Doc said, “are the other two scared men.”
“That's right. Only it doesn't look as if they were too scared for action.”
Doc's flake-gold eyes showed grim interest. “They are going into action?”
“Tom de Houser and Ben Smith and Diamat,” Pat explained, “have formed a combination. They've got their heads together, and have pooled their resources, and gone into action. The action was when they seized Johnny and rescued Diamat. Rescuing Diamat was what the raid amounted to.”
“Diamat's butler told you this?”
“All of it. And here's some more he told us: There are more than those three men—De Houser, Smith and Diamat—mixed up in it together. It seems there are some more friends of MacChesney around the city. We didn't have all their names.”
Doc was thoughtful.
“The friends of MacChesney,” he said, “seem to be ganging up.”
Pat nodded.
“MacChesney,” she added, “is the one they're ganging up on.”
“Why?”
“They've decided to seize whatever it was that MacChesney found in that chateau in France,” Pat said.
Monk rolled up the car windows. “Beginning to snow,” he said.
THE snow proceeded to come down in one of those sudden, furious storms which occur in the fall of the year. The flakes fell with incredible abundance.
They had about forty miles to go, north and slightly west of Jersey City, into a suburban section of rich country estates. Their progress was slowed aggravatingly by the snow, not by its depth, but by its blinding thickness in the air.
They came finally to a stone wall and a great iron gate which was chained and padlocked.
Monk pointed at a spot somewhere beyond the fence, and said, “There's where we'll find the friend of MacChesney who isn't scared.”
Doc asked, “Do you have a detective watching the place?”
“He should be around here somewhere.” Monk got out in the snow and wandered around. Pat joined him. Pat said, “The detective said he'd been hanging around outside the gate. I guess he'll still be here.”
They searched for some time. Pat imitated, with some skill, the call of a high-flying duck. There was no answer.
Then the wind stopped blowing as hard and the snow settled silently for a few moments, then it, too, stopped. The little blizzard had ended as quickly as it had come.
Pat imitated her duck several times.
“No detective,” she said. “He was to have a duck call and answer.” She laughed. “A duck headed south was the only thing we could think of that would be making a noise at night this time of year.”
“How close is the house?” Doc asked.
“About two hundred yards.”
Doc said, “The rest of you wait here. Better get off the road, out of sight. Hide the car in that clump of trees. If anyone approaches, stop them. Do not let them get away.”
Pat said, “I hope this fellow Andrew J. Stiles knows something that will lead us to Johnny.” She said it grimly.
Doc went to the stone wall, studied it, then went over it quickly.
Inside there was a wide sweep of lawn, here and there neat, naked shrubbery, and everywhere the un-pitted expanse of snow.
Doc followed a walk to a house that was big, wide, low, as white at the snow itself. It was not an old house, and it was the type an architect would call Cape Cod Modern.
A chime sang four pleasant notes inside when he pushed the door button.
He did not wait long before a tall, red-headed man in a brown dressing robe opened the door, stared at him and grinned hugely.
“Mr. Savage!” he said. “I've been trying for half an hour to get you on the telephone!”
“Stiles?” Doc asked. “Andrew J. Stiles?”

“That's right,” the man said. “Come in, will you.”
BEAMING and rubbing his hands, walking backward half the time and giving the impression he was going to bounce up and down with pleasure, the man led Doc down a hall and through a library into what was evidently a sun room, because the windows were high and wide, and a door at the end of the bank of windows probably admitted to the outdoors. Everything was new, crisp, bright. Its newness and brightness made it attractive, although it was a style which was a fad, and would be outmoded in a few years.
The red-headed man took the floor.
“Mr. Savage,” he said, “I hope you came out here to talk about Harve MacChesney.”
Doc studied him, then nodded slightly. The man was about forty-five, with a body wrapped in heavy long muscles, which would make him weigh much more than he seemed to weigh.
“MacChesney a friend of yours?” Doc asked.
The man laughed. The laugh had a fierce roughness.
“Mac?” he said. “Mac isn't the friend of anybody. Not now. He used to be a fairly grand guy. But you're aware of that, because I understand you knew him.”
Doc admitted, “I knew MacChesney. He seemed polished, honest and straightforward.”
“He's changed. You wouldn't know him. But then, you can't blame him for changing.”
Doc's face became expressionless.
“You know,” he asked, “what changed him?”
“You came here to find that out, didn't you?”
“Yes.”
“It is,” the other said, “quite a story.”
“There have been signs of that.”
“It needs,” the man said, “some substantiation.”
“In the form of what?” Doc asked.
“Evidence,” announced the other, “to prove a most remarkable tale. I'll have to get it. Will you wait here?”
He backed toward the door.
“I won't be gone but a minute,” he said.
He opened the door and went out—the door that led to the outdoors, and which was placed beside the bank of windows.
There was a fireplace in the other end of the sun room. Doc stood close to the blaze, finding its warmth pleasant, and trying to put a mental finger on something that was bothering him.
Something troubled him. He did not, at first, know exactly what it was. Some kind of a mental thorn. He did not know exactly its nature. He worked at it, picking the feeling apart, and gradually he began to understand.
It was the red-headed man. It was the sincerity of the red-headed man, or rather his lack of it. The fellow had been loud and active and effusive, but those things were natural to one who was excited and not taking the trouble to hide it. If the man's manner was natural, what then was wrong? Sincerity. There had been no sincerity in it that was genuine.
Doc jumped visibly. He'd been remarkably dumb.
The red-headed man had been acting.
The conviction, however, had come a little too late. Because there was noise at the front door and heavy feet in the halls, and an authoritative voice shouting, “Sergeant Jones, take the north wing!” And, “Officer Lee, take the basement, Landers, upstairs!” And men scattering through the house.
They were not soldiers. They were State police. They came into the room.
“You might as well,” said the officer in charge, “consider yourself under arrest.”
“On what charge?” Doc asked.
“One murder that we've found already,” the officer said. “And there's probably another we're supposed to find. And don't start telling us who you are. We know you're Doc Savage.”
IT developed that there had been two murders.
They did not find the second one for a matter of two or three minutes.
In the meantime they brought in the first body. “From the hall closet,” the police official said grimly.
Doc knew the victim. The man was one of the private detectives who often worked for them—the detective who had been watching the gate. This was why they had not been able to find him.
(In addition to his group of five associates—and unwillingly, on occasion, Pat Savage—whom Doc employs, the bronze man also makes use of private detectives. These private agents, however, are not members of any regular commercial service. They work only for Doc Savage, and their work is in addition to whatever trade they happen to follow for a living. They are “graduates” of Doc Savage's unique criminal-curing “college.” This “college” is a secret institution in upstate New York to which Doc sends such criminals as he captures. Here the crooks undergo delicate brain operations which wipe out memory of past. They are then taught to hate antisocial ways, and are educated in a trade. They leave the place excellently equipped to earn a living and without any knowledge of their criminal past. None of these “graduates” have returned to ways of crime. It is Doc's hope that some

day his method of handling criminals will supplant penitentiaries, but he is fully aware that his system is too drastic for public acceptance as yet. Hence the secrecy.—THE AUTHOR.)

The ice pick which had killed the man was still embedded in his left ear.

"Know him?" the policeman asked Doc.

The bronze man seemed not to hear the question, asked, "What brought you fellows here so opportunely."

"Opportunely, hell!" The police official scowled. "We didn't get here in time to keep you from killing him. What's opportune about that?"

"What," asked Doc steadily, "gave you all these ideas?"

The police officer looked at the bronze man. He lost a little of his rough sureness.

"We got a telephone call. Tip. Anonymous. Mentioned you by name. Said you'd murdered two people here. One of them a stranger. Guess this is the stranger. The other one you killed is supposed to have been the owner of the place—Stiles."

"Does Andrew J. Stiles have red hair?"

"No, of course not."

"Tall and muscular?"

"No, he—"

There was a commotion in the corner. One of the policemen, searching the room carefully, had opened a large locker which had evidently been designed to hold firewood. The policeman looked into the locker, barked in unpleasant astonishment, and dropped the lid. He opened it again.

"Come over here," Doc was directed, "and you can see for yourself what Stiles looked like."

Andrew J. Stiles was a short, solid fat man with gray hair and a skin leathery with golf tan. His jaw was the jaw of a man who had used it and determination for pushing people out of his way. It was the face of a man who had made money. It was a righteous, hard-willed face, and death had not removed much of its character.

The ice pick was in the right ear this time.

Chapter XI. PHANTOM

THERE were no footprints in the snow outside the door.

That was quite bad. It proved Doc Savage a liar. It was the first thing that had actually proved him a liar.

First, Doc said, "This is ridiculous. A red-headed man met me at the door, said he was Stiles, brought me to this room. He said he had something to show me and would step out and get it. He went through this door." Doc indicated the door beside the windows through which the red-headed man had gone.

A policeman opened the door. He looked down at the snow. He laughed.

"I would think," he said, "that the great Doc Savage would be a better liar."

Doc looked at the snow, and he was startled enough to make the trilling sound that was his unconscious manifestation in moments of mental stress. He sank to a knee to get a closer look at the snow.

There were no tracks in the snow outside the door.

The bronze man got to his feet.

"When," he asked, "did you receive this telephone call which brought you here?"

The New Jersey State police officer frowned at him thoughtfully.

"I don't think," he said, "that I should take any chances with you. You fellows in New York think you're the cat's whiskers. And I've heard of you in particular."

Doc said, "What difference if I happen to live in a different State?"

"Shut up!" the officer said.

Doc stared at the man. The officer was genuinely bitter, out to make a goat of somebody from New York State.

Probably some New York cop had made a fool out of this Jersey officer some time or other, and the Jersey man was still burning.

"You want to hear the complete story?" Doc asked.

"Seeing as you started off with a lie"—the officer waved at the untracked snow—"I guess not."

He swung and gave orders. Doc was to be placed in a police car and taken to the nearest jail. The county attorney was to be informed, and the government investigation department, the latter on general principles, and the local office of the army intelligence, this last also on general principles.

Doc studied the snow outside the door, wondering how the man who had stepped through that door had managed to make his departure without leaving tracks. There was no snow-bare ledge onto which he could have stepped.

A police photographer appeared and began taking pictures of the room, the bodies, the unmarked snow.

Doc was loaded into a car.

There had been no sign of his associates—Monk, Ham, Pat, or of Sien Noordenveer.

Doc studied the snow around the car in the driveway. He saw no tracks except the prints of car tires.

The car which carried Doc reached the gate.
Doc did some yelling in Mayan.
He said, “Trail any policeman who leaves here on foot.”
He said it with enough volume that probably it could be understood a quarter of a mile away.
THE Jersey police official scowled at Doc Savage, demanded, “What kind of noise was that?”
Doc remained silent.
The officer prodded him. “Come on, come on! Don't be coy!”
“It was,” Doc said, “an expression of feeling.”
“Huh?”
“Don't you,” Doc asked, “ever get worked up to the point where you just have to let go?”
The officer scratched his head. “I've heard you were a strange-acting guy.” He leaned back in the seat. “Yell all you want to,” he said. “But you let out a howl or two like that after you get in jail, and they'll stick you in solitary confinement.”
Doc made no comment.
Snow had made the highway a little slippery, and the rear tires of the police car were evidently worn slick because the machine moved slowly and skidded a bit now and then.
They had searched Doc Savage. As police searches went it had been a thorough one. Actually, they had missed a number of gadgets which the bronze man habitually carried. Gadgets which actually were constructed into his garments.
The cotton in the shoulder padding tailored into his coat was chemically treated, the buttons were not ordinary buttons at all, and the fabric of any one of his garments would serve some specified purpose in an emergency.
The cold had caused the policemen to roll up the car windows.
The anaesthetic gas which Doc released had a closed space in which to work. The stuff came out of a plastic capsule which was fixed to the inner side of each elbow where it would feel, to the exploring hands of a searcher, like merely the firmness of one of the elbow bones. Careful, hard pressure smashed the capsule and the liquid contents flooded out, vaporized, became a gas which would produce quick unconsciousness if inhaled, but which had the added property of becoming impotent after mingling with the air for a minute or so. It was simple for Doc, who could hold his breath several minutes, to escape it by not breathing for a while.
(The ability of an individual to “hold his breath” for several minutes is not phenomenal. The capacity of different individuals to hold their breath is one that varies remarkably. Polynesian divers in the South Seas frequently stay under water five minutes or more. The average person can hold his breath a full minute by remaining motionless. Exertion which requires oxygen naturally reduces the interval. But the world record for holding breath is a little startling. It was established by a college student under laboratory conditions—and is slightly in excess of twenty minutes.—THE AUTHOR.)
The car turned lazily across the road as the driver slumped and his foot came down hard on the accelerator. Doc leaned over, turned off the switch. The car bumped along the shoulder, off the pavement, settled into a ditch that was not deep.
Doc took the policemen out and placed them in a neat row. It was not cold enough to freeze them. The gas influence would soon dissipate, leaving them with so little after-effects that they wouldn't understand exactly what had happened.
Doc drove back toward the Stiles estate.
PAT and Sien were alone when Doc came back.
They came out of the shadows under a cluster of evergreen trees some distance down the road from the big iron gate—which had been forced open by the police—in the stone wall around the Stiles place.
“Monk and Ham,” Pat said, “followed him.”
“Followed who?”
“The policeman,” Pat explained, “who came out of the estate alone.”
“Did the man act suspiciously?” Doc asked.
“He sure did.”
“What did he do?”
“He ducked out of sight,” Pat said, “and skedaddled away from here. I'll bet Monk and Ham have a time following him.”
Sien Noordenveer looked at Doc Savage. “I don't understand this. Who was that man? Aren't we ever going to find Harve MacChesney?”
“The man,” Doc said, “was a murderer.”
Pat exclaimed, “But the man was a cop—”
“He was not a cop. He only wore a cop's uniform,” Doc explained.
The bronze man told them about the pleasant greeting he had received from the red-headed man when he arrived at the Stiles home. He explained how the fellow had stepped out of the door, but—when the police arrived and unearthed the two bodies—there were no tracks.
Doc said, “He climbed a rope, of course. Climbed a rope up to the second-floor window—there is one over the door—and pulled the rope up after him.”

“That seems far-fetched,” Sien said. “How did the rope happen—”
“A plant. Everything planted and prepared. The two men murdered and their bodies hidden. The call to the police as soon as I drew near the house. The red-headed man doubtless made the telephone call. The police station isn't far, and he knew just about how long it would take the police to arrive. He gave me a big welcome, left me and stepped out of the door, seized the rope and climbed up to the window, pulled the rope in, and got busy changing into a policeman's uniform, which he had ready. As soon as the police came and took me away, and more police arrived, he walked out of the house as if he was a police officer. And naturally no one suspected him.”
Pat asked, “Why was Stiles killed, do you suppose?”
“Stiles,” Doc said, “was an individualist. You could tell that by looking at his face even. He did not scare. He was probably a man of character, ideals. In other words, he was not a man who would turn crook.”
“They killed him because he wouldn't join them?”
“That is my guess,” Doc admitted. “Either that, or he threatened to tell the police about the whole thing.”
“What whole thing?”
“About what Harve MacChesney found in that vault under the French chateau.”
“What did he find?”
Doc said, “I imagine we shall soon find out for sure.”
Pat fell silent. She'd got an evasive answer from Doc Savage, and she knew that was all she was going to get. The next time she asked Doc, he'd probably pretend not to hear the question.
Sien Noordenveer gestured impatiently. “Mr. Savage,” she said. “I asked you one more question awhile ago.”
“If we are ever going to find Harve MacChesney?”
“Yes. Are we?”
“The murderer,” Doc said, “will probably lead Monk and Ham to MacChesney.”
HE dispatched Pat and Sien to New York. He told them to use the police car, but not to stay in it over half an hour, because by that time there would doubtless be an alarm out for it. “Leave the car.” he ordered, “and get to New York by train.”
“Then what?” Pat asked.
“Do not go to headquarters. And do not go to your home. Stay out of sight,” Doc said. “Go to some large hotel, where you will not be conspicuous, and register. Go to the Park-Ritz. I will contact you there.”
“The Park-Ritz,” Pat said, “won't let us in without baggage. That's a very snooty place.”
“Tell them who you are and they will. Then tell them to keep quiet about you being there.”
Pat stared at Doc Savage with one eye narrow and the other eye wide open and suspicious.
“This,” she said, “sounds like the old run-around.”
“What do you mean?”
“You're just getting rid of me.”
“Nonsense.”
“You don't intend,” Pat said, “to call me until this whole thing is wound up.”
“Ridiculous.”
Pat snorted. “I see through you. And I think it's a very cheap scheme for getting rid of me. After all, I've been a great help so far.”
Doc became indignant. “Be on your way!” he ordered. “You are to guard Miss Noordenveer. Her life is in danger. After all, her knowledge of the sixteenth-century written language was important enough for Harve MacChesney to have her help him. Miss Noordenveer is very important. When this thing comes to a head you will find she is more important than you realize.”
Pat climbed in the car with Sien Noordenveer.
“You,” she said, “aren't fooling me. You think you're getting rid of me.”
She managed to drive away indignantly.
Chapter XII. BAIT
MONK MAYFAIR and Ham Brooks had some trouble following their quarry for the first mile, but after that the man got over his scare and stopped running and dodging. They came upon the policeman's uniform, which the man had discarded. Ham took it along for evidence and because it might be useful.
“He's the guy, all right,” Monk said.
“What do you reckon happened at Stiles' house?” Ham pondered.
“Dunno. Wish Doc'd had a chance to tell us. But the way the police popped in, and Doc being under arrest, it looked like some kind of a trap.”
Ham scowled. He thought so, too, but he hated to agree with Monk. “Don't make so much noise, you knothead,” he told Monk.
Their quarry eventually came to a small neighborhood settlement, turned into a drugstore, made a telephone call, then went into the restaurant next door and ordered food.
“Telephoned somebody to come get him,” Monk surmised.
“We better rent a car,” Ham declared.
They found a taxi concern which rented drive-yourself cars, but the quality of the cars for rent

left a lot to be desired. The proprietor of the place was indignant. “You expect a new car?” he yelled. “Why, with this war, everybody drives used cars.”
They took a car. They drove the rattling heap around the corner and parked it.
“This sounds like one of the cars everybody drove,” Monk complained.
They discovered they had made a car deal for nothing. Two men came for the red-headed man. They came afoot, bundled in overcoats, and with flashlights. They seemed in no hurry. After some handshaking, the two newcomers had hot coffee and chili.
Monk and Ham waited and grumbled in the darkness outside.
The three then left, and walked.
“I'm not sad about leaving this junk pile,” Monk whispered as he climbed out of the rented car.
Their quarry tramped along a street a short distance. The street dead-ended, and there was a path leading up a hill through a thick growth of evergreen trees. The three men ahead walked into the trees. They had paused and looked back a time or two, but did not seem unduly suspicious.
Monk and Ham followed on the path. There was enough moonlight that they could see the three men ahead of them, walking through an open space. They were themselves out of sight. They quickened their pace and a voice full of determination said, “All right, wrap 'em up!”
It was completely dumfounding. The three men they were following were ahead; they could see them. They hadn't expected an attack.
But the dark night shadows around them seemed to turn to charging humanity.
MONK and Ham decided to split for the sake of confusion. Monk went up the trail. Instantly, his toe hooked something and he went down. A wire had been stretched across the trail.
Ham went the other direction. There was a wire there, too. It had been lying in the snow and the enemy had jerked it up. Ham hit it, landed on his face in the thin layer of snow. Men piled onto him.
Men were on Monk, also. A startling number of them. They tried to get his legs. He proceeded to kick some faces. His mouth was full of snow from the fall. He got that out, and started chickens cackling and dogs barking all over the countryside with his bellowing.
The three men farther up the trail wheeled and ran back. The red-headed man took charge.
“Get them!” he howled. “They were the only two following me!”
Monk got up, men hanging to his arms and legs, and made for the red-headed man like a torpedo. He bowled the fellow over, trampled on him.
“Hold him!” the red-headed man squalled. “What the hell! This all the men you brought?”
“You said a half dozen over the telephone!” someone gasped.
Ham heard that, and decided they'd been a little mistaken about what the red-headed man had telephoned. He'd done more than ask someone to come to meet him. He'd known they were following him, and had arranged this elaborate deadfall for them.
Ham got hold of an arm. He twisted with the arm, whirling over and over like an alligator, trying to break the arm. The arm was like rubber, although its owner howled. Someone stepped on Ham's neck as if it was a piece of stovewood and proceeded to chop at it with the barrel of a short rifle. Ham began seeing stars and a slight, agonizing blackness.
They got Monk quelled about the same time.
The red-headed man panted and puffed and ran his hands over his hair as if it was standing on end. “Boy!” he said. “Boy, oh, boy! I began to understand why these guys scare people.”
“What,” asked a man, “will we do with their bodies.”
The redhead looked dumfounded. “Hey, you ain't killed them?” He jumped forward. “Here, no killing yet! We want to ask these guys questions.”
“Well, let's start asking them.”
“Don't be funny,” the redhead said. “I'm not the guy who asks the questions.”
They picked Monk and Ham up bodily and carried them on up the hill.
“What about tracks?” someone demanded, frowning at the prints they were making in the snow.
“Railroad track over the hill,” the redhead explained. “We'll walk on that. First train along will stir up the snow and cover our tracks. Then, when we reach the main road we can take that. Snowplow will have the road cleared by now.”
“Hell, do we have to take that long way around?”
AT the end of the walk was a log house. They had walked about a mile, making Monk and Ham do their own walking. The log house was very big, had many rooms, and a rustic sign in front, saying, “The Old Frontier Inn.” A sign equally as big and much more prominent said, “Closed.” The latter looked as if it might have been printed that night.
There was a man standing inside the door with a shotgun who greeted them angrily and demanded to know who the hell thought he was going to stand there on guard all night. They ignored him and he did not seem surprised. They went into another room.
The room was big, had boards nailed over the windows, curtains drawn over the boards. A big fire popped and made wind sounds in the fireplace.
Monk looked around and recognized—from their descriptions—Tom de Houser and Ben Smith. He recognized Robert Diamat because he had seen him before. Two other men had the looks and clothes of men who were important enough to be friends of Harve MacChesney. The remainder were just hired

talent, fellows who had done things for smarter men all their lives. Also, over in a chair in the corner was Johnny.
“Johnny,” Monk said, “are you all right?”
“This,” said Johnny, “is a cacographically bedlamitic miscomputation.”
Johnny was tied to the chair.
“You're in pretty bad shape,” Monk said dryly, “when you use words that small.”
Johnny did not look as if he had been harmed other than a black eye and some trace of previous leakage of red from the nose. Judging from the amount of rope they had used to tie him, he had made a previous effort to slip his bonds, causing them to add more rope.
Monk scowled at De Houser, Smith, Diamat and the other friends of Harve MacChesney.
He frowned at the man who must be MacChesney, himself.
MacChesney was tied to another chair near Johnny.
Monk had trouble recognizing MacChesney, although he'd been supplied with an excellent description of the man, and had once met him briefly. He had also looked at MacChesney's pictures. Some traces of dark grease paint still was on MacChesney's skin, largely in the wrinkles of the neck skin, survival of his disguise as a black man.
The thing that made MacChesney hard to recognize was a ghostly, haunted look, a strain and wildness that became, after you watched it awhile, somewhat frightening. He looked like a man who had done exactly what he had done—a man who had made a discovery so fantastic that it had upset his whole character.
Monk had the quick thought that the man was looking just as he had expected him to look.
After looking at the ropes which held MacChesney to the chair, Monk said, “This surprises me a little.”
MacChesney stared at him wordlessly.
“We had you figured,” Monk said, “as the little boy with the hatchet. We figured you were No. 1 skunk in the den. Boss of this, in other words.”
MacChesney remained without words.
Robert Diamat, however, laughed. His laugh had a high, fluttering quality, as if the pleasure in it was frenzied.
“He was the boy with the hatchet,” Diamat said.
Monk sized up the situation.
“You,” Monk said, “took it away from him. That the way it was?”
“You might say we did,” Diamat agreed.
Monk frowned at Diamat, De Houser, Smith, the other two well-dressed men. He included MacChesney in his frown.
“You fellows,” he said, “are all supposed to be fine, upstanding examples of leading citizens. You have positions. People look up to you. You're used to being somebody. The consequences will be hard for you to take.” Monk stared at them impressively. “You won't like it in jail.”
Diamat smiled.
“It's worth it,” he said. “Anyway, there won't be any jail for us.”
“No jail, huh?”
“No.”
“You won't be in it long,” Monk predicted.
“You think not?”
“Just,” Monk said, “while they're warming up the electric chair.”
THE remark about the electric chair removed courtesy from the situation. Monk and Ham were slammed into stout chairs and tied with everything that would hold a knot.
The tying was not without incident. And very important incident it proved to be, later.
Monk staged a rebellion, assisted by Ham. Monk began with the unusual gymnastic feat of jumping into the air and kicking two men in the face simultaneously. What his feet did to the two faces was one of his pleasant memories.
The kick got him free for a moment. He jumped, ran, kicked, swung, grunted, yelled. He got Ham loose. Ham joined him in everything but the yelling.
What Monk did to the stuff on the table was pure accident.
He needed the table for fighting. That was all. He'd hardly noticed the stuff on it, and certainly he didn't consider it important.
Just before he got hold of the table, Ham got the lights out. The lights were electric, and Ham shorted them and blew the fuse while he was trying to employ the cord of a floor lamp to strangle a man. It was red-brick in the room then, because of the bounding fire in the big fireplace.
Monk snatched the table.
On the table was one or more articles covered with a white cloth. If Monk gave the articles any thought at all, he presumed they were dinner dishes covered with a napkin.
As he said later, if he was aware of what was on the table, it was only a subconscious knowledge that something or other was there.
He jerked the table.
The stuff flew into the fireplace.

It was wholly chance. Monk wasn't even aware the objects on the table had gone into the fire. No one else in the room seemed to notice or care—for a moment or two.
Monk lifted the table by a leg, high over his head. The leg broke off the table and the table came down and cracked Monk on the head, knocked him to his knees. Men piled onto him. There were more than he could fight successfully.
Monk was slammed into the chair and really tied. Ham was overpowered in the meantime, thoroughly kicked—he got much worse handling than Monk out of the fray, because they seemed to be getting scared of Monk's wildness in a fight—and also lashed to a chair.
Someone found the burned fuse and replaced it.
Robert Diamat looked at the fireplace. His jaw fell. His eyes popped. His face turned white. He screamed as if an entrail was being torn out.
His first shriek was wordless, nothing but horror. His second was, “The fire! Look! In the fire!”
He jumped forward madly and began to slap, dig, paw at the fire with his bare hands. It was not a small fire. The cooking of his hands seemed to have no effect on his frenzy.
“Hell, he's gone crazy!” Tom de Houser shouted. De Houser grabbed Diamat and began to haul him away from the fire. “You'll burn yourself to death, you fool!” De Houser shouted.
Diamat struck at him.
“In the fire!” Diamat screamed. “He knocked it in the fire!”
They all understood then.
They converged on the fireplace as madly as Diamat had behaved.
Monk and Ham and Johnny watched two or three minutes of as mad a frenzy as they had ever witnessed.
They backed away from the fireplace. They had burned themselves. They cursed and groaned. One ran and brought a bucket of water, and another got bandages and some kind of salve that stank of carbolic.
A kind of sickened silence held them for a while.
Finally, “Didn't you save any?” Diamat asked.
No one answered him.
A man said later, “It was a fool thing for us to have left it there on the table, so close to the fire.”
Another man, as angrily as if he had been struck a blow, screamed, “How in hell'd we know that'd happen?”
Monk swallowed, after making two efforts because his throat was quite dry.
“What,” he asked, “did I burn?”
It was Harve MacChesney who answered that. MacChesney spoke in a low voice that was stupefied, “Everything,” he said.
“What's everything?”
“The thing,” MacChesney said, “that was going to remake the world.”
“To suit your tastes, I suppose,” Ham interjected at MacChesney, “while it was being remade?”
Monk asked patiently, “What was going to remake the world?”
“What I found under that chateau in France,” MacChesney said. “You just burned it.”
“Oh, hell!” Monk wearily. “Around and around we go again.”
FOUR new men came in then. The new arrivals, flushed with excitement and triumph, were in contrast to the drop-faced air of the men already in the log inn.
“Look what we found!” one of the newcomers cried gayly.
He meant Pat and Sien Noordenveer.
The two young women had put up a fight. A sleeve had been partly torn from Pat's suit coat, and she was generally bedraggled. There were signs that the two men holding her had been bitten more than once. Sien had a black eye that was going to be a wonder, and one slipper was gone.
Pat stared blankly at Monk and Ham and Johnny.
“It looks,” she said, “as if they're making a collection of us.”
“How'd they get you? Monk asked her.
“I'm ashamed to tell you,” Pat said.
Sien put in, “She didn't follow orders.”
“You shut up,” Pat told Sien with no ill feeling. “Nobody expects me to follow orders when they give them to me, so it's not important.”
“Mr. Savage,” said Sien, “told us to go to the Ritz-Park Hotel and register and wait for him to call us.”
“It was the Park-Ritz Hotel. You might as well be accurate,” Pat said. “Things are mixed up enough.”
“Anyway, we did not go there.”
Pat nodded forlornly. “That's right, we didn't. I had one of my wonderful ideas. I decided I had figured out what this was all about, or just about had it figured. I wanted to talk to Sien about this fellow Nostradamus that lived in the sixteenth century, and I also wanted to do some research on him. I wanted to take a look at that book called Centuries, which Nostradamus wrote. I think there's a copy in Doc's library. So we went down there—instead of going to the hotel, as we had been

told—to get the book.” She spread both hands palms up. “These four human avalanches were waiting there. They took us. They took us good.”
“What's good about it?” Monk asked.
“You've got me there,” Pat confessed, after a moment of thought.
Sien said, “These men have murdered two persons. We're the only ones who know it.”
Pat's eyes swept the room unhappily.
“Which may be our hard luck,” she said. “But did you have to remind them of it?”
DIAMAT and the others now held a conference, gathering in a corner and lowering their voices. They threw frequent apprehensive glances at the prisoners, so the subject matter of the powwow was not exactly a pleasant mystery.
The captives inspected each other. Ham asked, “What happened back at the Stiles country place?”
Pat told him. She informed him of the double murder which had been expertly framed on Doc Savage, but she left out any mention of Doc's possible whereabouts. She didn't know that anyway. But she did say that Doc had escaped from the police who had arrested him.
In order to heckle their captors, Pat gave all this information in a voice so loud it was practically a scream. Their captors finally stopped their own conference and listened to her. Robert Diamat—he seemed to be in charge—suddenly kicked one of his associates in the seat of the pants.
“She's yelling!” Diamat bellowed. “You fool! Suppose somebody should hear her? She's trying to attract attention!”
They rushed forward, and for a moment Pat thought they were going to brain her.
“We've got to get rid of them,” Diamat said, indicating the prisoners.
There was general nodding of heads. Everyone looked frightened. The leaders—Diamat, De Houser, Smith and the other two—were not men who were accustomed to violence, or to feeling fear.
These five leaders were men who could, without batting an eye, sign a contract which swindled a competitor, or take a widow's savings. They called such things business, or foresight. But this was different. This was murder. They had killed, or their hirelings had killed, Stiles and Doc Savage's private detective. They had killed Stiles, it was obvious, because he wouldn't go in with them, and the detective because he was in the way. Now they were desperate.
MONK looked at Pat and said, “They're going to kill us.”
Pat nodded. “They'll figure,” she said, “that getting rid of us will put out the fire.”
“But it won't,” Monk said.
“Not the fire in their consciences anyway,” Monk muttered. “But that's not going to stop them.”
Pat stared at the floor, her face tight with emotion. Her lips worked. She cleared her throat.
“It was my stupidity that got me here,” she said. “But I'm not sorry.”
Monk frowned. “What are you talking about?”
Pat looked at the floor again and had some trouble getting the words to come. She finally stared at Monk, Ham and Johnny. “I don't think I could take it if you three were murdered,” she said. “So I'm glad I'm here.”
“You're crazy,” Monk said quietly. “But it's a nice speech, anyway.”
Diamat was now trembling, and the color had washed out of his face. His companions were in as bad shape with their nerves. And the hired men did not look as if they were enjoying themselves.
“We've got,” Diamat said hoarsely, “to do it.”
No one said anything.
Diamat went into another room and came back carrying a paper bag. He emptied the bag on the floor. It contained a pair of cotton gloves which would be handy for eliminating fingerprints. The half dozen ice picks which the bag held rattled on the floor.
“We'll draw lots,” Diamat said.
“We'll play hell,” Smith gasped. “Count me out. I couldn't do it.”
“I've got a weak heart,” De Houser said hurriedly.
Diamat's trembling had become a shaking. His lower lip shook until it fluttered and he gripped it between his teeth. But he was not backing down. He was in a frenzy compiled of desperation and fear, and it was growing. The grisly emotion came to a climax when he grabbed up two of the ice picks.
“I'll do it to one!” he gasped. “And then, you yellow-livered scoundrels, you'll each do it to one of them.”
It was a dramatic and horrible statement which somehow did not sound at all dramatic and horrible, possibly because such a statement required a little time for its full effect and implication to roll up and burst in the mind. And the thing got no time to roll up and burst. Because Doc Savage knocked the glass out of a window, batted off the boards which had been tacked over the inside of the window, shoved the curtains aside, and put his head in the opening.
“You fellows want to hear something?” Doc asked. “About the lights being out?”

Chapter XIII. CENTURIES

DOC SAVAGE remained perfectly still in the window, and in the room there was no movement, no words, no sound, but the clicking and whispering of the fire as it burned.
“First,” Doc said, “remember that the lights were out a minute ago, during the fight. A short circuit blew them out.”

There was no movement yet. But one of the ice picks slipped out of Diamat's hand and fell and stuck point down in the toe of his shoe.
“The lights were out for some moments,” Doc said, “before the table was overturned.”
No one said anything. They were staring at him. Diamat kicked the foot slowly, trying to get the ice pick out of the toe. He had not looked down.
Doc said, “If you will look at the door you will find it is not locked.”
Every man in the room threw a glance at the door. It was not locked, obviously, because it was standing open a few inches.
“During the time the light was out,” Doc said, “it would have been no trick to come into the room and go to the table and get what was on it, and then get out again.”
The silence was heavy with an almost tangible weight.
“There was a great deal of excitement,” Doc said. “The movement of a man going from the door to the table would not have been anything to attract attention.”
Diamat got the ice pick out of the toe of his shoe. It made a wooden running sound rolling across the floor.
“Do you mind,” Doc asked, “if I come in and talk about a deal?”
Diamat cleared his throat with difficulty. “Come in,” he said.
Doc pushed a few more boards loose from the window, broke out some additional glass and sash carefully—his remarkable physical strength was evident in the casual way he took the window apart before he came in—and climbed through.
Diamat said, “Don't anybody shoot!”
He spoke to his men. Not De Houser and Smith and the other two gentlemen, but to the hired men, the lesser fellows who had been engaged to do the dirty work, and who knew that if there were any consequences, they would be pretty sure to get their share. The hirelings were scared. They backed away involuntarily from Doc Savage, as if the floor was caving off under their feet. Some of them had guns in their hands.
“Don't shoot,” Diamat warned.
Doc Savage got into the room. He stepped clear of the broken glass on the floor and straightened his coat.
He said, “I have something you want.”
“You got MacChesney's secret?” Diamat asked.
“Was it MacChesney's secret?” Doc countered. “We rather got the impression it was the secret of a man named Peterpence, known in his day as the black, black witch.”
“You did get it!”
“You were careless,” Doc said, “to leave it lying on the table like that.”
Diamat got out a gun with great haste. “Not as careless as you were to walk in here.”
“I have not got it with me now,” Doc said. “So naturally shooting me will not help you get it back.”
THERE was a commotion in the room then. Diamat whirled and bellowed, “Get outside, you! All of you! Look for his tracks in the snow and find where he could have hidden the thing! No, don't all of you go! Take lights.” He was confused. “Don't let anybody see you!”
A man said, “Take lights but don't let anybody see you! Hell!”
They went out, all but Diamat and Smith, and began searching.
Doc looked at Harve MacChesney. “You can talk?”
“Yes,” MacChesney said.
“Let me get this straight,” Doc said. “Go back to the beginning of the thing. At first it was just your interest in old manuscripts that got you involved in it. That right?”
MacChesney, looking at the floor, said dully, “The Germans arrested me in Berlin at the outbreak of the war, and they interned me at that chateau in Occupied France. As soon as I found that enormous library of ancient manuscripts, I was delighted with the chateau, of course. So pleased that I assured the German officials I was not at all anxious to be exchanged back to America through the regular channels.”
Doc interrupted him.
“Do you think,” Doc asked, “that you made the Germans suspicious then?”
Harve MacChesney looked up suddenly. “I never thought of that. I might have. They were suspicious, weren't they?”
Sien Noordenveer said, “They were. They brought me from Holland because I was an expert on sixteenth-century literature. They asked me to spy on you.”
“That means they suspected something.”
Doc asked, “Had you, when Miss Noordenveer joined you, found the secret?”
“Not then.” Harve MacChesney frowned wearily at the floor. “But I had investigated far enough into the writings of Nostradamus in the sixteenth century to become a little frightened.”
“What frightened you about Nostradamus?”
“I began to be convinced,” MacChesney said, “that the man actually did predict the future. That he knew how to predict. That he'd found some way of seeing into the future.” MacChesney frowned and shook his head. “And I'd found indications that the secret was really the discovery of Peterpence.”

Monk's eyes had popped.
“Future?” Monk yelled. “What's this about predicting the future?”
Ham shouted, “Shut up, you noise! It's been obvious somebody could predict the future around here! Why be surprised?”
“What made it obvious?” Monk bellowed at him.
“The news that the airplane carrier would be torpedoed at a certain time.”
Sien said, “And in France, in that chateau—MacChesney told me you were going to get to the chateau at a certain time. He had no way of knowing that—or about the torpedoing—unless he could know the future.”
Monk twisted his head and stared at MacChesney as if he was looking at a devil.
“Do you know what is going to happen in the future?”
he yelled.
“Let me tell this my own way,” MacChesney said wearily.
THERE was much charging around and shouting outdoors, and increasingly uneasy profanity.
MacChesney said, “Here is what happened in the year 1553. I will tell it briefly. Peterpence, or the black, black witch had reached the height of his career. Peterpence was a genius. An alchemist and scientist. I am fully convinced he was of a mind so freakish that it was unbalanced. At any rate, he was very ambitious, and in his incredible genius, had discovered the mixture of certain herbs which worked on the human mind, increasing its realization—or awareness—of extraordinary impulse. I am no scientist. I will not attempt to explain exactly how it works. But I know it opens the mind to some of the stuff of which dreams are made—some of the subconscious capacities of the brain which are not now understood. You have all dreamed something that actually came true later, or had premonitions of something that would happen. Well, it is that with which Peterpence dealt.”
Doc said, “He worked with herbs?”
“Yes.”
Monk blurted, “What do you do—drink it?”
“No. A gas. A brew that you inhale.”
“I'll be danged,” Monk said. “I don't believe it.”
MacChesney moved a shoulder impatiently. “Who cares what you believe?”
“Continue,” Doc said, “with the story of Peterpence and Nostradamus.”
“Peterpence hated Nostradamus,” MacChesney told them. “And Peterpence was afraid to try his own devilish brew. So he got Nostradamus to try it, rather hoping it would kill him. But the opposite resulted. Nostradamus saw into the future. He saw ahead for centuries. The things he saw were vague, and some of them were scientific wonders which he could not comprehend. So, when he wrote of them in his books of rhymed predictions, called “Centuries,” some of the descriptions were vague.”
(The volume of Nostradamus' rhymed predictions, titled “Centuries,” has amazed scholars for centuries because of the accuracy of its predictions. If access can be had to a good library which has a translation of the work, it is worth study, if one doesn't mind a scare. Motion-picture shorts have been made of it within the last few years.—THE AUTHOR.)
MacChesney was silent awhile. The search outside was reaching a climax, judging from the sounds.
“Peterpence was enraged when Nostradamus became famous because of his rhymed predictions, and his work in medicine,” MacChesney said. “It ended by Peterpence being disgraced, and labeled as a witch. He died an evil and shunned old man, known as the black, black witch. But before he died he left a small quantity of his brew, sealed in a secret hiding place in one of the stone rooms beneath the chateau. And he left written record of it—which no one happened to find until I came across it.”
Ham stared steadily at MacChesney. “You mean,” he said, “that you found the secret of seeing into the future in that hidden hole in the rock?”
“Yes.”
“And you sent for us?”
“Yes.”
“Then why,” Ham demanded, “did you turn on us?”
MacChesney's face whitened slightly. “The thing was too much for me,” he said. “The thing that I had found gave me a power that was almost divine. I kept thinking of that.” He shuddered.
“And—”
“I told the Germans,” MacChesney said, “where you would contact me. I didn't want you. I had figured out how I could escape by myself—and have this thing for my own. Have the power it would give me.”
“So you got away and came to New York. Why New York?”
MacChesney looked at Smith, a queer expression on his face. “Revenge,” he said.
“Revenge?”
“Smith,” MacChesney said, “is an old school chum of mine. I was in love with a girl. He took her away from me, married her. I hated him from that day.”
Doc Savage did not seem surprised. “What about De Houser?”
“De Houser,” said MacChesney, “handled my family's real-estate holdings. He swindled me. I could never prove it in court of law, but I knew he had, and I hated him. And Diamat!” He scowled blackly, “Diamat I hated more than anyone. He stole my wife from me.”

“And these other two are enemies also?”
“They are.”
“How,” Doc asked, “did you plan to get revenge?”
“I went to them and convinced them I really had the ability to see into the future,” MacChesney said. “And then I was going to tell each of them—and did tell them—that they would soon die horribly. That wasn't the truth. But they thought it was.”
“And then?”
“And then,” MacChesney said, “they got the bright idea of seizing me and my discovery and making the most out of it while they were alive. It was also their hope that, knowing the future, they could in some fashion circumvent it. In other words, knowing things were going to happen a certain way—what was to prevent them making things happen a different way? Why couldn't they save themselves?”
The searchers came in from outdoors now. Their faces were blue with the night chill, their expressions ugly.
“Well?” Diamat demanded. Diamat had listened to MacChesney's long story with the air of a man who had heard it before, but still found it very interesting.
“We followed his tracks,” a man said.
“Yeah?”
“And he didn't hide anything.”
Diamat cocked the gun he was holding. “Now wait a minute. Get it straight. Savage says he came in here when the lights were out and grabbed the whole supply of herbs that the black, black witch mixed in the sixteenth century. Savage says he got out with them and hid them. But you followed his tracks in the snow.”
“And he didn't hide anything,” the man said grimly.
Diamat's face became tight and sick. “Then there's nothing left but shooting,” he said.
Chapter XIV. DEATH BY PREDICTION
THE cabin was quiet, but in the distance a car made a noise as it approached. Diamat, the gun half lifted and cocked, heard the car and waited. The machine came on in the night, traveling cautiously in the snow, and it passed the cabin and went on, its sound dying rapidly. Diamat cleared his throat. He stooped and got one of the ice picks. “We're back,” he said, “where we were half an hour ago.”
Doc Savage said, “You heard that car.”
They looked at him.
“That car,” Doc said, “wasn't the only one that has passed.”
Diamat took a step forward. “What are you trying to say?”
“Ask your men if my trail didn't go close to the road for a short distance and stop for a while—or my tracks show that I had stopped—beside an evergreen tree at the very edge of the road.”
Diamat whirled. “Well?”
“Yeah,” one of the men said. “That's where his tracks went.”
Diamat wheeled back to Doc. “What's this? What're you getting at?”
“From beside the tree,” Doc said, “it would be easy to toss a small package into a passing truck—and then remember the license number of the truck so that I could look it up later.”
Lunging forward, Diamat yelled, “What was the license number of that truck?”
Doc was silent.
“You won't tell me?” Diamat demanded.
“Wouldn't it be foolish?”
Diamat threw the ice pick away. “Look here! We'll make you a deal. Turn you and your friends loose. But first you give us the license number, and we will get hold of the stuff.”
Doc looked at him with no feeling.
“You would not keep your word,” he said.
There was finality in the bronze man's voice, a complete conviction. It ended the argument.
Diamat looked dumfounded, defeated. He waved his arms wildly.
“Lock them up!” he shouted. “Lock all of them up. Put them in different rooms. About two to a room. We're not licked yet. We'll figure something.”
DOC SAVAGE and Ham Brooks happened to be confined together. The room in which they were placed was large, solid, the planks over the window two-inch stuff held in place with large spikes. The place was dank, musty, with no furniture whatever.
Ham said, “Doc, we can't trust them to make a deal. This thing is so fantastic it'll drive men mad. They'll get as crazy as—”
There were two guards in the room and one of them came over and kicked Ham. “Shut up,” he said. “Shut up or I'll knock you senseless.”
Ham said nothing more.
Doc told the guard, “Call Diamat.”
“The hell with you,” the guard said.
“Call Diamat,” Doc ordered. “I want to talk to him alone.”
The guard eyed the bronze man uneasily. He was afraid of Doc. Finally he went out.

When the guard came back he had Diamat in tow, and Diamat was suspicious and carrying a revolver.
“You wanted to see me?” Diamat asked.
“Alone,” Doc told him.
Diamat hesitated. He went around Doc and Ham carefully and tested their bindings. “Get out,” he told the guard. “But if you hear me yell, come in, in a hurry.”
The guards stepped outside.
Doc dropped his voice to a whisper which could not possibly be heard by the guards.
“Diamat,” the bronze man said, “you are going to think this over and you are going to conclude that I did not take the herb mixture off that table after all.”
Diamat nodded instantly. “Matter of fact, the thought was already in my mind.”
“If you became convinced of that it might not be too healthy for us.
“Therefore,” Doc said, “it is up to me to convince you that I do have it,” Doc said.
Diamat watched him without speaking.
“But,” Doc said, “I will have to keep the supply of herb mixture in my possession. That is, the main supply.”
“Main supply? What are you talking about?”
“Suppose,” Doc asked, “that I had been foresighted enough to extract a very small quantity of the herb—one dose—and keep it, but tossing the remainder in a truck?”
“You haven't got it on you. We searched you.”
“Naturally not.”
“Where is it?”
“Did it occur to you,” Doc asked, “that it could be tossed away so that it would fall in the snow and be hidden? No one would notice the mark a small phial would make falling in the snow?”
“Where is it?” Diamat was tense and eager.
Doc said, “It is important for us that you be convinced this sample is genuine. There is one dose. I want one of your men to take that dose.”
“That's agreeable with me.”
“Who will take it?”
Diamat stared steadily at him.
“I will,” he said. “Who the hell do you think would?”
Doc told him where to find the phial.
DIAMAT was gone no more than ten minutes. He sauntered in casually, but his face was flushed and his eyes strange. He told the guards to get out and close the door and not to come in under any circumstances unless he called them. The guards obeyed, looking at each other knowingly, aware by now that some kind of dirty work was afoot among their bosses.
Diamat took a small glass bottle out of a pocket. “This it?”
“That is what I sent you after,” Doc said.
Diamat was excited enough to explode. “Damn me!” he breathed. “I get first chance at this stuff!” He pulled out the cork, then put it back hastily. “What do I do? How do I take it?”
“Inhale it,” Doc said.
“Just pull out the cork and inhale it?”
“Yes.”
Diamat looked at their ropes again. “You can't get loose,” he said. “And the guards would fix you if you did. So what the hell! I'll do it here—no, maybe that's not smart. You might pull something.”
Doc shrugged. “Suit yourself. I am a doctor, as you know, and if the stuff goes bad with you, it might be well to have someone around who understands the symptoms and can treat you.”
“It wouldn't be healthy for you if I died,” Diamat said. “So I'll take it right here. If I need the help of a doctor, you better yell for the guards.”
He went to the door and gave the two guards low-voiced instructions that Doc was to be allowed to treat him if he was found in a bad way.
Then Diamat uncorked the phial. He held it in his hands, cupped under his nostrils, and inhaled deeply.
He seemed to go to sleep on his feet, but slowly, so that he had time to sag down to the floor without falling.
Doc Savage rolled to Diamat's side.
“Diamat!” Doc said in a low voice. “Diamat, there is death ahead for you. Smith and De Houser and the other two have it in their minds to kill you and take the secret for themselves.”
Diamat seemed to have an awareness of the words and an understanding of their meaning, although without consciousness to act upon them.
“Death for you, Diamat,” Doc said. “Death at the hands of your associates. Doc Savage is your only hope. Doc Savage and Pat and Monk and Ham and Johnny and Sien Noordenveer and Harve MacChesney will help you. You must free them and get your enemies out of the way in time. Tonight.”
Doc repeated that steadily, monotonously. He varied the words a little, making it more clear each time.
Finally he was silent.
Ham Brooks had watched in staring astonishment.

“Doc!” Ham gasped. “That guy didn't inhale any herb mixture! He's gassed, is all.”
Doc nodded. “Our anaesthetic gas. A very weak mixture.”
“When he wakes up,” Ham said, “he'll remember what you've told him. But he won't remember enough to know how he got it. I've seen the stuff work that way.”
“Yes.”
“But—”
“I put some of the anaesthetic gas in a phial,” Doc said, “and tossed it away in the snow, on the chance something like this would happen.”
Ham looked blank. “Was there a passing truck?”
“No.”
“And did you come in in the dark, and—”
Doc was uncomfortable. “If you had listened carefully, you would have noticed that I did not tell them anything as the truth. I merely made statements from which they drew conclusions. Even this stuff I just told Diamat is undoubtedly the truth. These men are crooks, and all crooks wonder how they can swindle their companions.”
Ham grinned. One of Doc's policies was to always tell the truth, but occasionally the bronze man's conception of truth-telling approached the fantastic. All that Doc had said might not contain a technical lie. But it struck Ham as some elaborate verbal gymnastics to avoid telling an outright lie.
“What,” asked Ham, “really happened to the supply of herb mixture the black, black witch left for posterity?”
“It was all burned,” Doc said, “when Monk accidentally dumped it in the fireplace.”
DIAMAT awakened slowly. He sat up, took his face in his hands. He remained in that position until the fog went out of his head.
“What,” Doc asked, “did you learn about the future?”
Without answering, Diamat got up, drew a knife, and cut the ropes which held them.
“Wait until it starts,” he said. “And then join in.”
He went out, closing the door behind him.
Ham laughed.
“It sure didn't take him long to start acting on that glimpse he got into the future,” he said.
THE first shot came not more than five minutes later. It sounded like a shotgun, a big blast which ripped through the building with its noise.
Doc Savage hit the door. The two guards, who had remained outside, had locked it. But Doc came against the door with both feet, and it flew loose at lock and hinges. He sledded out into the hall. The two guards had faced toward the shot. They tried to get around. Doc reached, took the feet from under one. He got up. The second guard fled, trying to run and shoot at the same time. Ham pounded on the guard Doc had upset.
Doc pursued the running man. The fellow got tangled, fell, fired a bullet into the ceiling. Doc seized the gun, hauled on it. The guard hung to the weapon, was hauled to his feet before he lost it. Doc got the gun. The guard ran two or three steps before Doc was on him, got the man's throat. Holding to the throat, Doc walked him backward toward the stairs.
Below, there was more shooting, much dashing about, upsetting of furniture, breaking of glass, shouting. Monk's bellowing voice joined the uproar. Monk with the great noise he made when fighting.
Doc had a little bad luck—inexcusable clumsiness, he called it later—and fell down the stairs with the guard he was choking into unconsciousness, and also using as a shield. He hit the bottom somewhat dazed—or at least he had no impression of having been unconscious. But when he got organized the cabin was quiet.
Monk walked into the corridor.
“Diamat,” Monk yelled happily, “got some of that stuff and read the future and found out the others were going to kill him. So he turned us all loose and started some killing himself.”
“Where is Diamat?” Doc asked.
“Those that are alive have all jumped out of the windows and took for the brush,” Monk said.
“Diamat?”
“Not Diamat.”
“Where is he?”
“Diamat,” Monk said, “didn't kill somebody quick enough. The somebody stuck one of those ice picks in Diamat's ear. I'm surprised how dead an ice pick can make a man.”
Chapter XV. MONK'S FUTURE
THE following day was bright and warm with a pleasant sunlight which melted the thin fall of snow by ten o'clock.
Pat and Johnny came into the Manhattan skyscraper headquarters with a report.
“The New Jersey police,” Pat said, “are finally satisfied that we didn't kill Stiles and the private detective.”
“A buckramesquely monomaniative pertinacity,” Johnny said.
“I guess he means,” Pat said, “that the Jersey officers were fairly stubborn about it. But finally they caught one of Diamat's men and he confessed.”

“Then it is cleared up?” Doc said.
“Except,” Pat told him, “that the Jersey cops think that somebody is crazy. They don't know exactly who. But they're sure somebody is. They think it's Harve MacChesney.”
“A superamalagorgeous possibility,” Johnny said.
Pat asked, “What do you think, Doc? Did Harve MacChesney actually find a concoction of herbs which would enable a person to see into the future, or did he just find a mess of stuff that got him hopped up and to dreaming? And did his dreams happen to be a wonderful coincidence of what happened later? I mean—well—did MacChesney just dream it? Or did that old guy, Peterpence, actually have something the world hasn't dreamed existed?”
Doc Savage's metallic features were thoughtful, composed. He shook his head slowly and watched navy planes circling over the lower bay.
“That is something that will have to go down as unknown,” he said quietly. “Peterpence did not leave a formula—only a mixture of the herbs. And very little of the stuff. It was destroyed in the fire.”
Pat frowned. “Can't you analyze the ashes of the fire and find out anything?”
“I have tried that,” Doc said. “There are no conclusive results.”
“Then we won't know?”
“Probably not.”
Johnny, using small words, “Well, anyway, MacChesney is reporting to the government for whatever he has coming to him, safe and ashamed. The rest of us don't have ice picks in our ears, and Diamat and two others are dead, and the rest are in jail. I'm satisfied.”
HAM BROOKS came in and he looked as if he was satisfied, too. Apparently he was in danger of complete collapse from mirth. The best he could do, as he burst in, was make croaking sounds of glee. He fell into a chair, got hold of himself, and went off in a whooping roar of laughter.
“Now what,” demanded Pat, “have you done to Monk?”
Ham held his sides. “Monk hasn't found out yet that the herb mixture was really all destroyed in the fire,” he explained.
“So what?”
“So I gave him a shot of gas,” Ham said, “and told him it was that see-the-future stuff. The gas was the same Doc used on Diamat. It makes you believe any sweet nothings that are whispered in your ear while you're knocked out.”
Pat frowned. “Some day,” she predicted, “Monk is going to turn into a calamity for you.”
Ham made spluttering sounds, laughter got the best of him, and he rocked around in the chair.
“The future I made Monk see,” Ham chortled, “was Sien Noordenveer falling for me. You know how he's been making sheep eyes at Sien. That's got him worried.”
Pat laughed in spite of her frown and said, “Wait until he finds out the truth.”
“You remember,” Ham asked, “that wife and thirteen homely children he's always accusing me of having, and conveniently making the accusation in front of pretty girls?”
“Yes?”
Ham doubled up again with glee. “Well, I gave him a wife and thirteen brats with clock-stopping faces in his future.”
“You want to know what I see in your future?” Pat asked.
“Huh?”
“I see you as a grease spot,” Pat assured him, “when Monk finds out.”
“If I die as happy as I am now,” Ham said, “it'll be O. K.”
He went off in another whoop of glee.

THE END
THE KING OF TERROR
He planned his evil scheme perfectly, even to his method of killing Doc Savage. But Doc has schemes, too, and in this exciting novel he's got to use the best of them to save his life! Be sure to get our next issue and see how Doc matches wits with the greatest evil genius he has yet met!
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