



THE ALL-WHITE ELF

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. THE OGRE

THE man stopped his black coupé in the street in front of the apartment house. He looked at the apartment house, then glanced up and down the street, looking particularly for a policeman. There was no cop. Relieved, the man wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

He felt of his hip pocket.

Then he got out of the coupé and headed purposefully for the apartment-house entrance.

He was a man made of bones and dry, brownish hide. His suit was dark and new, apparently being worn for the first time. He had made a mess when he tied the knot of his dark tie. He had eyes like a tiger.

He ran a finger up and down the doorbells until he located one— *Arnold Haatz, Apartment 4F*.

To get into the apartment house, the man used an old gag. He pressed several buttons at once. He did not ring Arnold Haatz's bell, however. When the lock release buzzed, he entered.

The elevator was a self-service type—there was no operator. The man rode it to the fourth floor, pulled off his overcoat and rolled it into a ball, used the ball to block the elevator door so it would not close. The elevator would remain there as long as the door was blocked open.

He felt of his hip pocket again. He stood with his hand on the pocket for a while after he reached the door of Apartment 4F.

He was perspiring. His face was white. His chest felt heavy, as if his lungs were made of lead.

He was afraid to kill Arnold Haatz here, he realized. It was too public. The sensible thing to do, and the only alternative he saw, was to decoy the man into the country.

He knocked on the door.

"Mr. Arnold Haatz?"

"Yes."

"You are the Haatz who works for the government—you are in Russel Kinner's office, connected with the superintendent of prisons?"

"That's right."

Arnold Haatz was a placid-looking goose of a man. His skin was pink, his eyes were as pale and pleasant as August sky. His body was thick, and his hands were small hams.

"I've got a message for you, Mr. Haatz."

"Message?"

"From Audine Million. You know her, don't you?"

"If it's Jerry Million's sister you mean—yes, I know her."

"That's the one. She's in a jam. She wants you to help her."

Haatz narrowed his blue eyes. "Where is she?"

The man who was made of bones and dry brown hide hesitated for a grim instant.

"She's at a tourist camp north of town," he said.

Haatz did not answer immediately. He was puzzled. "I don't understand why she should send for me," he said.

"I was just around handy, so she sent me."

"What is this trouble?"

"Don't know. She didn't tell me."

"Is it her brother who is in trouble?"

"I don't know."

Haatz said coldly, "I wouldn't give that brother of hers a drink of ice water if he was in hell. Jerry Million is no good. I would rather help a snake."

"It ain't her brother."

"Jerry Million is as low as they come." Harshness was in Haatz's voice. "A man who would do what he did should be hung."

"It ain't her brother."

"I thought you said you didn't know what it was," Haatz said.

"I just know it ain't her brother."

The puzzled frown left Haatz's forehead. He looked at the other man. "What did you say your name was?" he inquired.

The other hesitated.

"Smitty," he said. "Call me Smitty."

"Well, wait a minute, Smitty," Haatz said, "and I'll get my hat and coat."

HAATZ stepped back and shut the door. The moment he was alone in his apartment, he flung to the telephone, riffled through the directory, found a number, and called it, dialing with nervous jerks of his stubby forefinger.

"Hello. Miss Audine Million's home? . . . Can you tell if Miss Million is there? . . . Oh, it is! You are Miss Audine Million?"

"Yes, this is Audine," the young woman said. She had a throaty, pleasant, earnest voice.

Haatz scowled at the hall door. "Have you been home all evening?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Are you in trouble? Do you want help?"

"No. Why, of course not." The girl sounded completely amazed. "What . . . what on earth is this, anyway. Who . . . who are you."

"Arnold Haatz. You remember me?" Haatz considered, frowning. Then he said suddenly, "Listen, where is that brother of yours?"

The change in Audine Million's voice was stark. Terror came rushing with her words.

"Oh, mother of mercy! Has Jerry been— Did they find him, and— *What has happened to him?*"

"Were you expecting something to happen to your brother?" Haatz countered.

"I don't know. Something strange is going on, and I was afraid—" She stopped with that, and was silent a moment. Then she said, "Oh, I shouldn't have said that." She laughed, but it was not a hearty sound of mirth. "I was just kidding."

Haatz was puzzled enough to nibble at his lower lip.

"You say something strange is going on?" he asked.

"No, no, I was just—well, being facetious," the girl said swiftly.

She's a very poor liar, Haatz thought. And very upset.

He said, "I like for people to tell me the truth."

Audine Million's answer was slow coming.

"Really, Mr. Haatz, aren't you presuming a little?" she said finally. "After all, we hardly know each other."

"Yes, we hardly know each other," Haatz agreed dryly. "As a matter of fact, that's why I called you."

"I don't understand."

"And I," said Haatz, "don't understand that remark about your brother and something strange going on."

Again, there was a silence. This time, the girl did not reply. She hung up. The click was a slow one, as if she had placed the receiver on the hook very thoughtfully.

Haatz stood and bit at a thumbnail for a time. Then he went into his bedroom, and got two heavy woolen socks. He put one sock inside the other. Then he entered the kitchenette, poured a box of common salt into the socks, and smacked the result against the palm of one hand. He had a very good blackjack.

He opened the hall door. Smitty was standing there. Haatz hit Smitty with the salt-filled socks. He tried to land the blow on Smitty's temple, but the man ducked. The blackjack, glancing off the top of Smitty's head, knocked the fellow to his knees.

Haatz grabbed the socks with both hands and wound up like a baseball pitcher and did his best to brain the other man. More by accident than design, Smitty got his head out of the way and the socks hit his shoulders, so that there was a loud report and a white spurting of salt as the socks split. Smitty flattened out on the floor. He pulled a gun out of his clothing.

The gun made a deafening noise. The bullet made cold the left side of Haatz's face, went on up and made a neat round hole in the ceiling plaster, and, on the floor above, started a woman screaming.

Haatz jumped back, slammed the door. The only gun he had was a .30-06 caliber big-game rifle. There is a Federal regulation about the ownership of a gun with a barrel less than sixteen inches long, but this one certainly didn't come under that prohibition.

He got the rifle, clipped some of the cartridges—they were almost the size of fountain pens—into the magazine. He tossed a chair against the door. The man outside promptly fired a bullet through the panel. With the .30-06, Haatz proceeded to blow channels through door and wall.

The man outside ran.

HAATZ heard the man's feet rapping the corridor floor, and peered through a hole he had blown in the door. He saw Smitty scoop up his balled topcoat, which had been holding the elevator door open, leap into the cage, close the door. Lunging down the hall, Haatz reached the elevator door. He lifted his rifle. For a moment, he calculated where he should aim; then the rifle blasted flame and lead against the sliding metal door.

The one-hundred-and-eighty-grain bullet had a muzzle energy of twenty-nine hundred and fifteen foot-pounds. It tore through the sheet metal and ripped the safety switch off the inside, opening the circuit. The opening of the safety circuit instantly cut the current out of the motors at the top of the shaft, and the cage stopped.

The moment he was sure the elevator had halted, Haatz ran for the stairway. He took the steps in a series of downward jumps, holding the rifle ready.

The elevator had stopped between two floors, in such a position that, when the doors were opened, there was a crack at the top through which a man could crawl to freedom, although the crack was very narrow and difficult to reach.

Haatz saw the man crawling out of the elevator. He saw this without being noticed. He hesitated, half lifting the rifle. Then he changed his mind.

Running down another flight of stairs, and out of the door, Haatz looked about for a hiding place. There was only one car parked in the block, a black coupé. Haatz started to climb into the machine; then it occurred to him that the car might belong to his quarry. Smitty had said he had a car waiting.

Haatz tried the baggage compartment in the back. It was open, and it was roomy. He climbed in with his rifle, and lowered the lid. To keep it from locking, he jammed his handkerchief into the slot which the lock tongue normally entered. This not only kept the lid from locking, but caused it to remain open a crack, through which he could keep a watch.

Grim curiosity was causing Haatz to do what he was doing. A stranger had come to him and lied to him, apparently in hopes of decoying him into the country. Haatz was going to trail him.

Haatz wanted to know why. What was going on? At heart, he was a man who liked excitement, although he looked meek and, he well knew, a little like a pink pig. His fondest memories were of his army days, the war, of a hitch he had served with the Villa revolutionists in Mexico. These things were in his youth, and he did not talk about them much any more. People did not believe him. No one could think, after looking at him, that he had done deeds of daring and peril, and would like to do them again.

It was luck that put him in hiding in the back of Smitty's car.

Smitty dashed out of the apartment house a moment later, dived into the machine and drove it away.

THE car went fast. The bouncing made dust rise up and get in Haatz's soft pink nostrils. He ground a finger against his upper lip desperately, but in spite of that remedy, he had to sneeze twice. Luckily, the car made so much noise that he was not heard.

Soon the car traveled at a more leisurely pace. And eventually it stopped. Through the crack around the edge of the lid, Haatz watched Smitty cross the sidewalk with nervous haste and enter a drugstore.

The drugstore had a side door. Haatz reached that. He held the rifle straight up and down at his side, so that it was as inconspicuous as possible, and eased inside the door.

Smitty was in one of a bank of three telephone booths.

Haatz stepped into the adjacent booth without being noticed. He could hear some of what was said.

"—and I got into the apartment house all right," Smitty was saying. "I knocked on the door, and this Haatz opened it. I had me a story all ready. I told him Audine Million was in trouble, and wanted him to help her."

Smitty sounded whining and uncertain. Obviously, he was making explanations to someone he feared.

"I couldn't just fill him full of lead when he opened the door," he wailed. "There was a cop in front of the place a minute before. I knew the cop was somewhere in the neighborhood. And how was I to know the guy wouldn't fall for the story about the girl wanting his help? . . . What's that you're saying? Oh, why didn't he fall? I don't know. He said he was gonna get his coat and hat, but when he came back, he cut loose on me with a club. I was damned lucky to get away from there alive. That Haatz guy may look soft and pink, but he's hell on wheels."

Haatz was warmed by this praise of his ability. He had been thinking about calling the police. But now he changed his mind.

He would enjoy some excitement. His daily employment, the hunched-over-a-desk job which he had held during recent years, was monotonous. For a long time, his life had been dull to the point of despair. Now he felt a sudden consuming desire to take another whirl at the kind of life he had once led.

He heard the man in the adjacent booth say, "What do you want me to do now?"

Haatz strained his ears.

"What about my car?" Smitty asked. "But that jellopy cost me—Oh, sure. Sure. I wasn't trying to argue. Sure. I'll let the car set where it is. But what if the cops find it?"

The other lowered his voice, and it was more difficult to catch what he said. But Haatz gathered that the man at the other end of the wire, who was Smitty's boss, was going to send a third man, a man who had an air-tight alibi for the time of the excitement at the apartment house. This third man would pick up the car and see that it was run into the river in an obscure spot, where it would not be found.

Haatz grinned thinly. These men were clever. If he was going to take a whirl at excitement once more, Haatz thought, these men would be worthy foes.

Haatz slipped out of the telephone booth. He left his rifle behind, because it was too conspicuous. He wished he had a pistol.

Smitty was not difficult to follow. He used a bus, changed to another bus, then walked. After a time, he joined a tall, cadaverous, bushy-haired man.

Haatz stared at the man whom Smitty had met.

"What a horrible thing!" he muttered.

He was so shocked that he felt a little sick.

THE man whom Smitty had met had the general aspect of an emaciated crow, and he attempted to overcome this handicap by wearing bright clothing—his garb just now was gay tweeds, ox-blood shirt, with emerald tie, handkerchief and socks—with the result that the effect was even more macabre. His face was long, had the complexion of deceased fish; his nose was large and hooked; his eyes were piercing black demons that roosted back in the caverns under the black caterpillars that were his eyebrows.

He could have played the lead in a horror picture without much make-up.

Smitty met him in front of a house. The two turned, sauntered idly to a tobacco store a few yards away, where they bought cigars. Then they returned to the house, and entered.

The pair had seemed well known in the store, so Haatz entered and made a check.

He bought a cigar. "Thought I knew those fellows who were just in here," he said. "Haven't seen either one of them for years, so I was a little bashful about walking up to them. It always embarrasses me to make mistakes in identity." He looked at the clerk. "Happen to know them?"

"Oh, sure," said the unsuspecting clerk. "The tall one, the skinny one in the dark suit, is called Smitty. I never heard him called anything else."

Haatz was a little surprised that Smitty had given his right name.

"It's the other one I was really interested in," Haatz said. "You see, if he's the man I think he is, he was

blind when I knew him."

"He's the man you think he is, mister," the clerk said. "Milan Zinn used to be blind."

Haatz masked his excitement.

"Then that cadaverous man in the loud clothes is Milan Zinn?" he asked.

"Sure. Known him for years."

Haatz hesitated, then leaned over the counter. "What do you know about his character?" he asked. "He looks like a sinister master mind out of some bloodcurdling thriller. Is he that type?"

The clerk scowled. "Thought you knew him, mister," he said suspiciously.

Haatz straightened up. He shrugged. "Skip it," he said. He smiled at the clerk. He did not want to attract notice to himself by arguing with the fellow. "You see, I was just wondering what kind of a guy old Zinn turned out to be after he was no longer blind."

"Oh, I get it." The clerk moved his shoulders. "I couldn't tell you, mister. I don't know a thing about him except that he's been living in this neighborhood for years, and he always comes in and buys a Fantesto fifteen-cent cigar at this time every evening. Always says the same thing to me, too. He'll walk in, and he'll say, 'What's good news today?' He always says that."

"Thanks," Haatz said. "I guess I'll look him up." He hesitated, then turned and left the cigar store.

THE cigar-store clerk stepped from behind his counter and went to the door, where he watched Arnold Haatz going down the street. Haatz was not heading toward Milan Zinn's home. The clerk's suspicions were aroused. They were not quieted at all when he saw Haatz begin running from the vicinity.

The clerk used the telephone.

"Mr. Zinn," he said. "This is Ernie Meeks. Quite probably you don't know me by name, but I'm the clerk down at the store where you buy your Fantesto cigars. I may be making a dope out of myself, but you've been a customer of mine for a long time, and I want to show you that I appreciate it. . . . A minute ago, some bird was in here asking about you, and acting funny while he did it. He just ran away."

Milan Zinn was much interested. He asked several questions.

ARNOLD HAATZ ran four blocks, his head back, breathing easily—he was in good physical trim—until he found a drugstore which had telephone booths. He had not wanted to telephone from the cigar stand, because there had been no booth and the clerk would have overheard.

Haatz got his boss on the wire.

Haatz had no great degree of respect for his boss, Russel Kinner. But he felt he owed the man a warning. Kinner was flighty, possessed of delusions of grandeur, inclined to be a bit short on scruples, Haatz suspected.

"Listen, Kinner," Haatz said bluntly. "If you're half smart, you'll throw some clothes in a suitcase, sneak out of the back door of your place, and catch a plane for Florida or the Maine woods or somewhere."

After a startled silence, Russel Kinner said, "Haatz, are you drunk?"

Haatz said, "Less than an hour ago, a man came to my apartment and tried to decoy me away and kill

me. I think you will be next."

"Me?" Kinner's voice, ordinarily deep and pleasant, became shrill. "Why would anybody want to kill me?"

"For the same reason they tried to knock me off."

"Why is that?"

"To shut our mouths."

"Huh?"

"I think," Haatz said coolly, "that we are the only two people in the world who know one certain fact, and that very thing is going to get us killed."

Kinner was silent a minute. Then he began to laugh. "You sound like you had gone completely crazy," he said.

Haatz's voice was like something made by steel.

"You remember Milan Zinn?" he asked.

Kinner stopped laughing. "You mean the old duffer that looked like Frankenstein's monster—the one who said he had been blind for so many years?"

"I see you remember him," Haatz said grimly. "Well, get this through your head. That stuff he was talking about that day he came to see us—he wasn't crazy. *You remember what he said that day, don't you?*"

"Yes . . . but . . . but it's so incredible."

"Zinn isn't crazy, and the thing isn't incredible," Haatz snapped. "The thing may be frightful, hideous and astounding."

Kinner made gurgling sounds of astonished stupefaction.

"But—great grief! Haatz, you must be mistaken about this."

Haatz said, "If you're half smart, you'll get out of town, where you'll be safe."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," Kinner snapped. "I'm no coward."

"It isn't a case of being a coward. It's a matter of having good sense."

"I don't like your brusque tone, Haatz," Kinner said sharply. "After all, I'm your boss."

Haatz lost his temper.

"Listen, you stupid braggart," he said, "you're no longer my boss, because I quit! I resign. If the government is dope enough to let you work for it much longer, I'm badly mistaken, too. I'm doing you a favor, calling you up and trying to save your life. And what do you do? You get officious about it, and start telling me who is boss."

To Haatz's astonishment, the other man took this meekly.

"Now, now, let's don't fall out about it," Kinner said ingratiatingly. "After all, the thing is something of a shock. It just kind of knocked me loose from my wits."

Personally, Haatz believed it would be very hard to knock Kinner loose from his wits. However, he agreed, "Well, it is fantastic, all right."

"Zinn must be insane!" Kinner exclaimed.

"He may be a little abnormal. Being blind all your life, then suddenly being able to see, is liable to do something to your balance." Kinner swore grimly. "It's too bad the old reprobate didn't stay blind. That damned surgeon who brought back the old man's eyesight should be shot."

Haatz started. A look of intense thought overspread his face. His lips shaped, "The surgeon who operated on old Zinn," thoughtfully.

Aloud, he said, "Say, it was a man named Doc Savage who operated on Zinn, wasn't it?"

Haatz sounded a little excited in spite of his effort at control.

Kinner said, "I don't know."

Haatz, suddenly anxious to end the conversation, said, "You better get out of town until I get this cleared up."

Then he hung up.

Haatz went to the cashier of the drugstore and changed two five-dollar bills into quarters, dimes and nickels—coins which would go into a pay telephone. He went back to the telephone. He dialed the zero for the operator.

"I want to get in touch with a man known as Doc Savage," he said. "It is very important. How do you go about doing it?"

Chapter II. THE ELF

THE telephone operator said in a mechanical voice, "just a minute, sir. I will give you the information operator."

There was a delay. Haatz compressed his lips in thought. He was in a dilemma—he had unexpectedly found a menace, a ghastly danger, threatening not only himself but many others. It was hard to estimate the scope of the peril, but it was great. His dilemma sprang from the fact that the thing was so fantastic. He could hardly make the police believe him. They would probably laugh at him. If they did not laugh, they would hardly be likely to give the situation the intense action it needed. All in all, this was a job for someone with more agility and capacity for coping with the unusual than the police possessed.

"Information," a friendly voice said.

"Operator, this is Arnold Haatz calling from"—Haatz looked up and got the number of the phone—"Arling 9-9-100. I want to get in touch with a man named Clark Savage, Jr."

After a moment, the operator said, "We have no Clark Savage listed."

"He probably doesn't live in Washington," Haatz said hastily. "You see, I don't know *where* he can be found. But I've got to locate him. It is very important."

"I am sorry, but I am afraid we can not—"

"This is a matter of life or death for quite a number of people," Haatz said seriously. "I wish you would understand that. It is very serious."

The information operator hesitated. "Can you give me any further information about this person?"

"He happens to be one of the greatest surgeons in the world, although he does not have a practice," Haatz explained. "He is also a scientist, a chemist, an electrical wizard, and a man of all-around marvelous mental ability."

Haatz pondered a moment.

"But Doc Savage," he continued, "is best known because of an unusual career he follows, a career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth. I understand that he was trained from childhood for this strange profession.

"Savage," he finished, "maintains a corps of five assistants, all of whom are trained specialists, and they have a headquarters somewhere. I do not know just where. Probably it is in a city. . . . Does that help you any?"

The operator asked, "Did you say Doc Savage?"

"Yes."

"Simply call New York City, and ask for Doc Savage."

Haatz was impressed. He said, "Thank you." He had heard of Doc Savage at various times, but always in the back of his mind there had been an impression that the man was overrated.

When Haatz heard Doc Savage's voice—the long-distance phone connection went through quickly—he was even more affected. It was a controlled, modulated voice that was as full of latent ability as dynamite.

Haatz came directly to the point.

"I have just discovered a devilish thing," he said. "I need help."

"Who are you?" Doc Savage asked.

"Arnold Haatz. Employed by the government. The office of superintendent of prisons. I'm a minor assistant executive. It would be a miracle if you had ever heard of me."

"What is your trouble?"

"An hour or so ago, a man tried to kill me," Haatz said steadily. "I was puzzled, so I followed the fellow. . . . And I found out that I was to be killed because of something I happened to know. One other man has that same information. He is Russel Kinner, my immediate superior in the office."

Doc Savage said, "Warn the other man, Kinner."

"I just did."

THE man who had called himself Smitty entered the drugstore. He came in cautiously, hat low over his face, eyes roving. He spotted the figure in the telephone booth. The clothing told him the man was Haatz,

but he maneuvered and got a look to be sure.

Haatz did not see him.

Smitty eased back out of the store. He glued his elbows to his side, and ran until he reached another store, and another telephone. He put in a call.

"Smitty calling, boss," he said.

"Yes?"

"I had luck. I spotted Haatz. He is in a telephone booth, in a drugstore. . . . What do you want to do about that?"

"What drugstore?"

Smitty told him.

"Trail him," the voice ordered. "Report as often as you can."

"What about finding out who he telephoned?"

"I'll send a man to the drugstore after he leaves to do that."

Smitty said uneasily, "Something should be done about this Haatz fellow."

"It will be."

IN the drugstore phone booth, Haatz said, "I do not think it would be a good idea if I went into details over the telephone. But I can tell you this thing is fantastic to the point of being unbelievable. That is why I hesitate about going to the police."

"Can you come to New York to talk to me about it?" Doc Savage asked.

"It might be better if you came down here."

"It will be impossible for me to leave for twelve hours," Doc Savage said. "I have important laboratory experiments under way."

"Then I'll come to New York."

"Good,"

Haatz said, "Do you know a man named Milan Zinn?"

"There is a very brilliant man by that name," Doc Savage replied. "He was blind until two years ago, when a surgeon was fortunate enough to be able to return the man's sight."

"Did *you* operate on Zinn?"

"No. A technique of optical surgery was used by the surgeon who did operate, however. That is how I happen to know of the case."

"Have you ever met Zinn personally?"

"No. Why?"

"I better let that part of it go until I talk to you personally," Haatz said.

Doc Savage did not argue. He said quietly, "Give me an exact outline of your plans for the next few hours."

Haatz told Doc Savage where he was, what he intended to do between now and the time he caught a plane for New York. He finished, "That's a good idea—in case anything happens to me."

When the conversation ended, Haatz hung up and stepped out of the booth. He felt relieved. He knew that he had just talked to a man of unusual ability, a man who was quite possibly the remarkable combination of physical and mental genius which rumor claimed him to be.

Grimly, Haatz returned to the place where he had left his rifle. It was still standing behind a showcase where he had left it, and he tucked the heavy weapon in the crook of his arm and sauntered out.

He took a taxicab.

"Going hunting?" the cab driver asked.

"Figuring on it," Haatz said. He gave the address of his apartment.

The ride was without incident. Before entering, Haatz searched the vicinity thoroughly, but saw no sign of an enemy. "Wait for me," he directed.

The cab driver nodded, gave him a strange look. It had dawned on the driver that something was wrong.

Haatz packed a light bag with shirts, socks, a spare suit, and adjusted the sheath of a long-bladed dagger inside his trouser waistband. The dagger was a relic of his old days; he had taken it from a hashish-crazed brown maniac on a Cristobal street.

He carried the bag out to the cab.

"Hey, bud," the driver said.

"Yes."

"Guy trailed you here, I think," the cab pilot explained. "He cruised past and looked us over. Then he went around the block, and parked."

"Was he a bony, brown, dried-out man?" Haatz asked.

"Yeah. Mean eyes, too."

No flicker of expression changed Haatz's round pink face.

"An old pal of mine," he said. "Take me out to the airport. And thanks."

The cab was of the fresh-air type, with a sliding hatch in the ceiling which, when shoved back, gave the passenger air and light. Haatz eyed the hatch, then shoved it back.

He waited until they were on the outskirts of the city. By that time, he had gotten a good glimpse of the man in the car behind, and was sure it was Smitty.

He pushed up through the hatch with the rifle and put a hundred and eighty grains of jacketed lead through—he tried to put it through Smitty, but the cab hit a bump—the windshield and seat cushions of

the following car.

The other car angled off the road, dived into a shallow ditch and stood on its nose. It remained that way briefly, upended on the radiator, as if undecided whether to go on over. Then it fell back on all four wheels.

Smitty got out and ran. Haatz dusted off the ground under Smitty's feet. But Smitty got behind a low stone building to which was attached a stone fence. He was safe.

Haatz wriggled back clown into the cab.

"You tried to kill that guy," the driver said. His voice was full of horror.

"Yes, and it was the second time," Haatz said. "The third time I'll get him."

The driver made a terrified noise.

Haatz said, "You seem nervous. Maybe you had better let me drive."

The driver nodded frantically. "If you don't mind, I'll get out and walk."

"No need of that," Haatz said. "You can ride in the back seat, or the front seat, whichever you want."

"No. I'll walk."

Haatz said, "I'll leave your cab at the airport."

THE driver alighted, and he was very glad to get ground under his feet, even more pleased when the cab taillight vanished down the road. The cab belonged to the company, so he didn't care about that.

"That guy ain't afraid of anything," he muttered.

The statement was in error. Haatz was scared. In fact, he was as terrified as he had ever been in his life, which, considering the kind of a life Haatz had once led, was strong tribute to the danger which now menaced him.

During the ride to the airport gate, Haatz spoke only once to himself, and that was grimly.

"I should have told Doc Savage the whole thing," he growled.

The rest of the time he wondered how Smitty had gotten on his trail. Checking back in his mind, he thought he saw how it had happened. The cigar-store clerk. The fellow must have called Milan Zinn, and Zinn had put Smitty on the trail. That was what Haatz concluded.

He was wrong. But, unfortunately, he never knew that. There were ramifications to it that he never imagined. He had believed that the thing was fantastic, extensive, charged with peril, yet his wildest guess never encompassed the full extent of the matter.

For instance, he had not imagined there was such a thing as the very white elf.

He saw the elf almost as soon as he parked the cab. He drove into the parking area, stopped the machine in a remote spot, alighted—and saw the thing.

His eyes popped a little. It was a weird figure. It was some distance away, so he never did know for sure just how large it was. He was not even sure it walked upright, because it was on all fours when he saw it.

It was creeping through a mass of shadow, as furtive as a big white dog prowling. It was very, very white.

Haatz opened and closed his mouth, then he shuddered. He lunged back into the cab, snatched out the rifle, and raced forward. The white elf had disappeared for the moment, having either gone into a small hangar, or ducked among the parked cars, machines belonging to the airport employees.

Holding the rifle with both hands and moving like a charging soldier, Haatz kept going. He thought he saw a flash of white.

"Hey!" he yelled. "Halt!"

The flash of white was the elf of a figure, all right. It halted, turned toward Haatz. It seemed to stare at him. Then it advanced. It seemed to be curious, a hideous kind of curiosity.

The world began to turn white then. The phenomena was exactly that. Whiteness. It came slowly, evidenced at first by the fact that the night seemed to lose its blackness, become gray. The grayness increased, and simultaneously the sharpness of objects decreased. The brighter it became, the more blurred everything got.

In coming, the whiteness took no more than three or four seconds. It was sudden, really. And it seemed never to stop increasing. It became like match flame, then white, like an electric lamp, then bluish with the incredible brilliance of an electric arc. By that time, it was unbearable.

Haatz was screaming in agony.

A car, one of the airline machines bringing passengers from the city, angled off the road beside the airport, rooted into the ditch and turned over.

A plane, a giant airsleeper, trying to land, crashed down on the field, wiping off its undercarriage and bending its propellers and sliding along on its belly.

The confusion spread.

Chapter III. DEATH RAN AWAY

THE two persons who probably reacted most strangely to what had happened were standing in the waiting room, in a remote corner, where they had been watching unobtrusively.

One of the pair narrowly missed being as wide as he was tall, and had arms of remarkable length, a growth of hair on hands, arms and head that was like rusty shingle nails, and a face that was mostly mouth.

The other man was slender, had the body of a movie idol, the mouth of an orator, and the clothes of a modern Disraeli. His garb was sartorial perfection.

What rendered these two gentlemen startling was the fact that they were accompanied by two pets.

The apish man's pet was a pig. The shote had long legs built for running, a body that was nothing much, and ears that were like wings.

The well-dressed man's pet was some species of chimpanzee, monkey or dwarf ape. This animal was surprising because of the startling resemblance it bore to the apish man.

The apish man was Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, one-time lieutenant colonel in the army, now

world-renowned chemist. The dapper man was Major General Theodore Marley Brooks, eminent lawyer, always at the head of any list of best-dressed men. The pig was Habeas Corpus, hog of Arabian extraction and unusual accomplishments. The ape was Chemistry, South American in nationality, doubtful of ancestry.

These four were associates of Doc Savage, the remarkable individual known as the Man of Bronze, who made a career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers.

The four of them were notable for one other fact. They had managed to keep an almost continuous quarrel going for some years.

To the present situation, they reacted about as could be expected.

Ham Brooks, the dapper man, carried an innocent-looking black cane. He poked around with this—his eyes were completely useless, and he did not feel at all good—until he found his companion. Then he gave the homely Monk a whack over the head with the cane.

"Ow!" Monk yelled. "Somethin' hit me!"

"I hit you," Ham said. He took another cut with the cane, but missed. "I'll teach you to throw some of your infernal chemicals in my face!"

After that, they were both so very ill that they felt they needed to sit down. They did so, remained there a while. They felt worse by the moment. Not only was the world one intense blaze—they could see nothing but white-hot light—but they were becoming quite ill.

To make it worse, something else happened.

"Great grief!" Monk croaked. "The earth is rockin'."

Ham snapped, "Do *you* feel it?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"I thought," Ham said, "you had used some kind of tear gas on me, or something."

"Why would I do that?" Monk asked in an ill voice.

Confused, Ham said, "I didn't know but what you had found out who told that little Finnish girl you were a Russian commissar. Say—is this an earthquake?"

"Dizzy."

"Eh?"

"Dizzy," Monk said. "Things keep turning over and over, and they don't do that in earthquakes. We're dizzy."

The universe came back to its normal condition again.

NOT completely normal, however. They hauled themselves to their feet—they discovered they had to hang on to some object to keep from upsetting—and peered over the edge of the balcony. Turmoil, tumult and confusion were rampant in the waiting room below. A few persons were trying to stand, but having great difficulty.

Monk peered at Ham.

"Blazes!" he said. "What happened? What *was* that, anyway?"

Ham was rubbing his face, feeling of his eyes. "How would I know?"

"You reckon it had anything to do with the reason we were here?"

"How would I know?"

"Ham, what did Doc say to you on the telephone?"

"He said," the dapper lawyer explained, "that some fellow named Arnold Haatz had called him and talked rather strangely. He described Haatz. Doc said that, inasmuch as we happened to be in Washington, he thought it might be a good idea if we got on the trail of Haatz."

"Did the idea seem to be that Haatz might be setting some kind of a trap for Doc?"

Ham shrugged. "You know the precautions Doc takes. My guess would be that this Arnold Haatz's story sounded so queer that Doc thought it should be checked into."

"Doc just wanted us to trail Haatz?"

"Yes. He was to catch a plane for New York at this airport in"—Ham consulted his watch—"about ten minutes. Doc suggested that we pick up his trail here."

Monk tested his ability to stand. He managed to do so.

"Let's hunt this Haatz," he said.

Ham started to walk, and after the first two steps went reeling until he collided with a wall. Monk, in spite of the way he felt—he was weak and nauseated—managed to grin. Any discomfort that befell Ham always pleased him. He professed to dislike Ham intensely, and the sentiment was returned by Ham. Contrarily enough, each of them occasionally risked his life to save the other.

They managed to get down the stairs, and onto the waiting-room floor. At close hand, the confusion seemed greater.

A fat man stumbled up to them, grabbed Monk's coat lapels and bleated, "The world is coming to an end! The reckoning day is here!" He was frightened to a glassy-eyed, drooling condition. "You better be praying, brother," he added.

Monk watched him rush off. The man looked like a prosperous politician.

Monk grinned. "He don't act as if he was ready for his reckoning day."

They moved outside.

"Look!" Ham ejaculated.

He meant the big plane. A small crowd had already collected around the skysleeper, and there was an ambulance siren wailing somewhere.

Monk said, "You wait here."

He disappeared for a moment, trailed by his pet pig. He used the telephone, then came back.

"Whatever that blindness was, it didn't affect the city," he said. "It seems to have been local, just around the airport, here. I talked to the telephone operator in town about it."

Ham was watching the pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry. It was obvious that both animals had been victims of the thing.

"Let's look for this Haatz," he said.

THE man who was screaming was locked in a small room in the right wing of the new depot building. Actually, Ham's pet chimp found him. The animal came scampering back, made an excited clattering, and otherwise showed excitement.

Ham frowned. "Take us to it, Chemistry," he directed.

The man was not letting out scared screams. They were shrieks of rage, and yells intended to attract attention. Monk and Ham exchanged glances.

Ham tried the door. It was locked. Monk said, "We should have Renny here to bop that door with his fist." Renny was Colonel John Renwick, noted for his feats as an engineer and the size of his fists. "Stand back," Monk added.

The homely chemist took a run and jump, hit the door with both feet, and the panel came to pieces. Monk and the splinters landed in a naked-looking room in which was a stack of discarded paper and boxes, the latter of cardboard and wood.

The man inside lifted one of the wooden boxes, then stared at them.

"Where'd Million go—?" he growled.

He was a long crow of a man, a crow who was wearing canary feathers. His tweeds were loud, his shirt an ox-blood hue, and tie, socks and handkerchief were matching emerald green.

Monk misunderstood the man. He thought there had been a robbery. He thought someone had stolen a million dollars.

"Where was the money?" Monk yelled. "Who got it? Which way'd they go? Great grief. A million-dollar robbery!"

"The Million I meant is a man," the other said. "Jerry Million."

"Oh." Monk stared at him.

"I'm Milan Zinn," the cadaverous man explained.

"And there's no robbery?" Monk muttered.

"No."

"What happened? What was that light?"

The man hesitated. An expression crossed his face.

"I have no idea," he said.

The homely Monk's head did not look as if it contained much room for brains, but his appearance was

deceptive. The ungainly chemist was clever and able to read character. He was positive this Milan Zinn was lying.

"You better tell us what it was, brother," Monk said levelly.

Milan Zinn scowled at him. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"That kind of blinding sickness that hit us a minute ago," Monk said.

Zinn hesitated.

"I don't know anything about it," he said.

Monk's most dominant trait was love of action, preferably the two-fisted kind.

He reached out suddenly and got Milan Zinn by the neck. He was promptly kicked on the shins and walloped in the stomach. Monk grinned fiercely.

"Which wall shall I bounce this guy off of?" he asked.

A new voice, one from the door, asked, "While you're at it, you might pick which wall you want your brains splattered on—if you don't turn that old man loose!"

THE most noticeable feature about the young man in the door was, naturally, his gun. It was a very big gun, and it was blue.

He was a very big young man, too, and he was brown. He looked healthy, competent, and as reckless as a boulder rolling down a mountain. His eyes were as blue as a gun barrel, his nose was flattened as if by pushing against things, and he had a protruding jaw of the pushing-through type.

Milan Zinn wrenched away from the astounded Monk.

"They just got here, Jerry," Zinn said.

Monk asked, "You Jerry Million?" of the capable young man.

"Yeah," the young man said. He moved his gun suggestively. "Go over there and rub your face against that wall, pal. You, too, pretty pants." This last at Ham.

Ham snapped, "Put that gun away, you fool!"

The young man's voice became a roar.

"Get your face against that wall, pretty pants!" he bellowed.

Ham and Monk hastily complied. They could tell that the young man was violent.

Jerry Million asked, "Who are these guys, Zinn? Are they airport cops?" The wailing of the siren on a police car caused him to decide not to wait for an answer. "We better blow," he said. "They must belong around the airport here."

Jerry Million gestured with his gun. Monk and Ham could not tell whether he was ordering Zinn out of the room, but Zinn went. It seemed that Zinn looked at Jerry Million fearfully.

When the two had gone, Monk and Ham stared at each other.

"Pretty pants!" Ham said fiercely.

Monk grinned without much humor. "He sure sized you up in a hurry."

They moved to the door and looked out. Jerry Million was still backing away. He lifted his gun. They ducked back in haste.

Once more, they got the impression that Milan Zinn was a prisoner of Jerry Million.

"Did that Zinn *want* to go with that loud mouth who had the gun?" Monk asked.

"I couldn't tell," Ham admitted.

"Well, let's get on the trail of them guys," Monk said.

The window of the room was small, opened readily. They dropped their two pets to the ground outside, then followed.

Without a word, Ham went one direction, Monk the other. They were accustomed to working with each other, and they rarely discussed a course of action. As a matter of fact, they had learned from experience that any kind of a discussion would turn into a heated argument. It was painful for either one of them to admit that the other ever had a good idea.

Monk made an ungainly figure, racing around the operations office trailed by his pig.

The excitement at the airport had, if possible, increased. The crowd had thickened around the big plane that had crashed. And airport attendants were dashing here and there, trying to ascertain what had caused the weird thing that had happened to everyone.

When Monk reached the other side of the building, he halted and searched with his eyes. He saw no sign of Zinn and Million. But he did discover, off near the parked cars to the right, a prone figure, another man kneeling over it, and several curious spectators.

Monk ran to that spot.

The kneeling man was shaking the one on the ground, as if trying to revive him.

"Haatz! Haatz!" he was exclaiming. "What's wrong with you? What happened?"

Hearing the name Haatz, Monk became very interested in the man on the ground. He studied Haatz's round, soft-looking body and rather harmless general appearance. Monk had seen plenty of men of nerve and action, and he was not deceived by Haatz's roly-poly body.

"Haatz!" barked the kneeling man. "Answer me?"

"You knew him?" Monk answered. The kneeling man ignored the inquiry, so Monk gripped his shoulder and put on a little pressure. Monk could take walnuts in his hands and crush them without much difficulty. "Know him?" Monk repeated.

"I . . . Yes." The other gasped under Monk's grip. "I . . . he's one of my assistants. Works in the same office."

Monk said, "Now, you might tell me who you are."

"Russel Kinner," gasped the kneeling man.

RUSSEL KINNER was a square, compact man with an aquiline nose and very small ears. He had alert eyes, a rather thin mouth. He was handsome, rather than pleasant-looking. When he shook off Monk's hand and stood erect, he did it rather arrogantly.

"Just who are you?" he asked sharply.

Monk ignored the query. "What's wrong with him?"

"If you'll keep your hands off me, I'll find out."

Monk said, "You won't learn anything by shaking the gizzard out of him, the way you were doing."

The homely chemist got down beside Haatz, and felt of the man's wrist. "Call a doctor," he ordered.

There was pulse in Arnold Haatz's wrist, but there was something wrong with it. Monk stared at the man's face. The color was wrong, too. Paleness would have been understandable. But there was a bluish cast to the features, a marked greenness about the mouth. Monk lifted the lids and looked at the eyeballs, then dropped the lids hastily. He didn't like the expression on the eyeballs.

He glanced up at Kinner.

"Didn't you hear me tell you to get a doctor?" he snapped.

Kinner glowered at him. "Really, I think you have no right to give me orders."

Monk said, "You get a doctor, and get him quick, if you don't want to be a patient yourself."

Monk had a small, childlike voice which was usually comical to strangers. It could change, and become as ominous as the gritting of a sharp knife against bone—which was something like its present tone.

Kinner backed away hastily, turned and walked toward the operations office.

An idea hit Monk. He sprang up, ran and caught Kinner. He whirled the man.

"What were you doing here at the airport?" Monk asked.

"I . . . I—" Kinner paled.

"Out with it!"

"I . . . I was going to catch a plane," Kinner said nervously.

"Yeah?" Monk said suspiciously.

Kinner bristled. "I'm not lying to you." He whipped an envelope out of his pocket, and flourished it. "Here are my tickets."

Monk, not taking the envelope, glanced at the outside and saw that it was the type which airlines handed out to customers, containing the tickets.

"O. K.," Monk said impatiently. "Get that doctor and get back here."

Kinner scowled, whirled and stalked away. He jammed the envelope in his pocket hastily, but did not get it securely inside, so that after he had taken a few paces, the night breeze whipped the envelope out of his pocket.

Not noticing that he had lost the airline ticket envelope, Kinner went on. He began running, as if he had finally realized the necessity for haste.

Monk saw the envelope drop. He walked over, picked it up, and thrust it in his own pocket. His intention was to return the thing to Kinner when he came back.

The shooting over on the west edge of the parking lot began suddenly, and did not last long. It was impossible to tell just how many shots there were, since the reports were crowded together, more than one gun going at once. These shots were followed by a sound as if a bull had bellowed.

The bellow could not have been made by a bull. It was mechanical, and also no masculine bovine could have made such an uproar.

The sound was enlightening to Monk. He recognized it. Ham's machine pistol. These little weapons, no larger than oversized automatics, had been developed by Doc Savage, and they could pour out an astounding number of slugs per minute.

Monk ran toward the sound, elbows glued to his ribs, head back. He was scared.

A car appeared and streaked toward the exit from the parking area. The windows were down, and two men leaned from the machine, holding revolvers. Monk braked to a stop, feet scattering gravel, and hauled out his own machine pistol. They carried the weapons in padded under-arm holsters where their presence was not conspicuous.

Powder flame and sparks jumped from the car. Monk heard a sound like brittle sticks breaking close by, knew it was bullet noise, and hastily changed his course. Before he could get under cover, the car was turning onto the highway.

The machine rocketed past the airline limousine which had upset in the ditch, and got away.

Monk said several words which he had not learned in church.

Then, racing toward the spot where he had heard Ham's machine pistol, he roared, "Ham! Did they hit you?"

His anxiety, considering the fact that he habitually professed the intention of some day taking Ham apart and seeing what made him tick, was remarkable.

Ham came out from behind a car.

Monk looked him over and saw he was unharmed.

"Well, well," Monk said. "I was hoping they broke a leg for you, or something. What happened?"

They recognized me," Ham explained.

"Eh—?"

"I was looking through these cars for Zinn and Million, and some kind of a sound drew my attention over this way. I didn't know what the sound was, so I came over to investigate. And what do you think I found?"

"Don't be kittenish," Monk suggested. "What did you find when you investigated?"

"Milan Zinn and Jerry Million and four other men," Ham said, "having an argument."

"An argument?"

"A violent one."

"Who was arguing with who?"

"Jerry Million seemed to be doing most of it, although it was hard to tell."

"What was Milan Zinn doing?"

"He was standing there, looking kind of horrified."

Monk snorted. "How could you tell if he was horrified? He looks kind of like a horror to begin with."

"Well, maybe Zinn was looking natural, then."

"What happened to you? How did you get mixed up in it?"

Ham sighed. "That was when they recognized me. One of the four men—it wasn't Zinn or Million—let out a yell. He yelled, 'There's one of Doc Savage's men!' Then he cursed a blue streak. And guns began going off."

"Who were the other four men?"

"I had never seen them before."

"How did they look?"

"About like guys who start shooting at us on sight generally look. "

"Mean, eh?"

"Extra-special mean."

"Then they ran to their car?"

"Yes. They got away while I was jumping behind a car, and ducking from there to another car, to keep from being shot. When I got to a safe place, and got set, they had piled into their car, and gone."

"Did Jerry Million and Milan Zinn go with the four men in the car?"

"I suppose so."

"Are you sure?"

"No. I tell you, they shot at me, and I was too busy getting behind some parked machine to pay any attention to who got in that car, and who didn't."

"And you say it was not Zinn or Million who yelled that you were one of Doc's men?"

"No. Zinn and Million didn't seem to know who we were."

Monk pondered for a moment. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

"Why, I happened onto a gang, and they tried to kill me, then got away."

"I mean—what do you make of the quarrel they were having?"

"Oh, that. I didn't hear enough of the quarrel to make anything out of it."

Monk rubbed his jaw. As far as he could tell, Ham had not accomplished anything, except get embroiled in some excitement. He mentioned this casually.

"Listen, you homely missing link!" Ham said in answer. "I haven't seen you accomplishing so much."

"I found Haatz."

"The dickens you did!"

"Yeah, and I found his boss, a guy named Russel Kinner," Monk added. "This Kinner is a guy who is inclined to act a little snooty. He said he was out here to catch a plane, and I guess he was telling the truth."

"What makes you think Kinner told the truth?"

"Why, he had his airplane ticket. He showed it to me, then put it in his pocket, and it fell out. I got it here."

Monk drew the airline ticket envelope from his pocket, opened it, and peered inside, his intent being to show Ham the ticket and allay all argument on that point.

"Blazes!" he exploded.

"What's wrong?"

"This envelope ain't got no ticket in it," Monk growled.

"That's funny."

"Yeah, and what's more funny, the envelope is dated to show that it was issued more'n a week ago."

A SMALL crowd had gathered around the prone form of Arnold Haatz.

Monk and Ham stopped on the outskirts of the crowd, and looked the gathering over closely. Then they exchanged glances.

"Kinner ain't here," Monk said.

"What does he look like?"

"He looks kind of like a mink. Got the small ears and bright eyes of a mink, and kind of a muscular body."

"There's something funny about that lad."

"You're telling me."

They approached Haatz, shouldering the crowd away from the man. Haatz lay about as they had left him, except that his eyes were open, so that it was not necessary to peel back his eyelids to see that something rather weird was wrong with him.

Monk went to his knees beside Haatz.

"You feeling better?" the homely chemist asked.

The sound that Haatz made was half hiss and half animal scream as he lunged up and got hold of Monk's throat with one hand. Ham's bark of warning was half submerged in Haatz's noise. Haatz had been lying on a long-bladed knife and he now had it in his free hand.

Chapter IV. THE ELF AND A GIRL

BRIGHT sunlight was streaming across the steps in front of the hospital when the taxicab arrived.

Ham Brooks, looking worried—he was wearing the same clothes he had worn the night before, which indicated how bothered he was—ran down the steps to the cab.

"Doc, I'm glad you got here," he exclaimed.

Making no comment—he was habitually sparing with words—Doc Savage got out of the cab, and paid the fare.

The cab driver, coming up with a piece of paper which he had hastily unearthed, said: "You're Doc Savage, aren't you? How about autographing this for my kid?"

Doc Savage complied. He was a giant bronze man who was so symmetrically proportioned that, standing alone, there was nothing particularly remarkable about him, except the bars of tendons in the backs of his hands, and the cabled sinews that sprang out whenever he moved his neck, together with a few other indications of tremendous physical strength.

The cab driver, grinning at the signature on the piece of paper, drove away.

"How is he, Ham?"

The bronze man's voice was low, deeply timbred, but controlled.

"Not so good," Ham confessed. "In fact, all the doctors say he will not live." He turned. "I'll take you to his room. They have him in a private room."

The interior of the hospital did not look like a hospital. There was no odor of antiseptic, no atmosphere of suffering. They rode up in a gay, modernistic elevator.

Ham's face was grim.

"I should have telephoned you earlier," he said. "But to tell the truth, the doctors thought they could save him up until about two hours and a half ago. You sure made a quick trip down here."

The cage let them out, and they moved down a hall that might have been in an expensive apartment house.

Monk met them at the door. The homely chemist wore a strip of adhesive tape across the back of his right hand.

"This guy is violent, Doc," Monk explained. He exhibited his taped hand. "Out at the airport, he came up at me with a knife, and darned near put the sticker into me."

Ham said, "Why don't you tell the rest of it?"

"What rest?"

"That I kicked the knife out of Haatz's hand, or he would have slit you wide open."

Monk snorted. "If you hadn't kicked him, he wouldn't have given me a scratch." Monk looked indignant. "The way it was, he almost cut my hand off."

The two glared at each other.

Doc Savage, apparently not noticing their angry manner, stepped into the room. Three doctors stood near Haatz's bed, and two nurses were at the window. It was a large room.

The three doctors looked at the bronze man with obvious awe. One of them, after a hesitation, stepped forward. "I believe I was at a lecture which you gave on the inferior cervical ganglion," he said. He turned to his companions. "These are Drs. Steiner and Laughline."

Doc Savage acknowledged the introduction, then turned to Arnold Haatz, who was confined to the neat white bed with wide webbing straps. He made a brief examination, then looked up, asked for the records of diagnosis. One of the doctors got them, and the bronze man worked for a while.

Then Doc Savage stepped back. He named a poison. And he told what antidotes and counteractives he needed. The doctors hurried to get them.

When they were alone in the hall, the three medicos exchanged sheepish looks. Two of them were dumfounded; the third, who had met Doc Savage once before, was not as surprised.

"That knocks me cold," said one of the two astounded ones. "He didn't take over five minutes to make that diagnosis, and we had been working on the case all night."

"Maybe he's wrong," said the other.

"I'll bet my month's salary against a pleasant grin that he's *not* wrong," offered the third medico.

It was eleven o'clock, and Monk and Ham were listening to a news commentator on the radio when a nurse arrived with the information that Doc Savage wanted to see them.

Doc met them at the door of the hospital room.

"He was poisoned," the bronze man explained. "It was an unusual type of poison, producing some of the symptoms of hyoscyamus, or henbane, but with a stronger tendency toward hallucination."

"Can he talk yet?"

"Only in delirium," Doc said. "I called you to listen to what he keeps repeating."

They bent over Arnold Haatz. The poisoned man lay quite motionless, as stark as a corpse. His lips moved from time to time, very faintly.

Doc Savage swung a sensitive velocity microphone stand so that the mike was close to the man's lips. The microphone was connected to a power amplifier, from which a flexible cord extended to a loud-speaker that had been placed in the other room, where feed-back would not interfere with the mike.

"Keep the microphone close to his lips," Doc told the nurse.

The bronze man moved into the adjacent room, with Monk and Ham, and they gathered about the loudspeaker. The sensitivity of the apparatus was enormous; the breathing of the poisoned man came out of the loud-speaker with the volume of steam escaping from a locomotive.

They listened to words, half whispered, half mumbled, not all of them understandable, as Haatz formed them.

"Sounds like he keeps talking about someone named Dean," Monk suggested.

"No, there's another part of the name," Ham said.

Finally Haatz spoke one sentence that was coherent and distinct.

"Audine Million wanted me to come and help her, and that was a trap to get me to a place where they could kill me," Haatz said.

Monk exclaimed, "That's what he's been saying over and over. Somebody named Audine Million tried to kill him, sounds as if."

The loud-speaker went silent, as far as mumbling was concerned.

Doc Savage took a morning paper from his pocket and handed it to Monk and Ham. Without comment, he indicated what he wanted them to read.

A great deal had naturally been printed about the weird incident at the airport the night before. The item Doc wished them to note was in a box on an inside page. Evidently the editors considered it one of the goofy aspects of the mystery.

It read:

Another man from Mars?

Bill Smith thinks so. Bill is a grease monkey (mechanic to you) at the airport where the excitement occurred last night.

Bill Smith says he saw an elf. A white elf. Bill says he saw it skulking furtively through the shadows at the airport. It was behind a hangar. Bill says the creature was white, and strangely shaped.

Our dictionary says an elf is a small mythological being, the female members of which are of dazzling beauty.

Bill says this elf was no beauty.

When Monk and Ham had read the item, they exchanged puzzled glances.

Doc Savage asked, "Did you see such a creature?"

"No." Monk grinned. "I wonder if Bill Smith was packing a bottle."

Ham also chuckled. Like Monk, they did not place any more credence in the story about an elf than had the newspaper reporter who had written up the yarn in a facetious vein.

They got a shock when Arnold Haatz's incoherent mumbling came out of the loud-speaker, and finally formed an understandable sentence.

"The all-white elf," Haatz croaked. "Keep it away from me! Keep it—Oh, my eyes . . . my—"

There was nothing after that but the whistling breath of the poisoned man, until Doc Savage moved to the

door.

Doc said, "Obviously an attempt was made to kill Haatz. There is no reason to believe his life is not still in danger. You two men guard him. I am going to look into that elf matter."

The bronze man went out.

MONK and Ham gazed at each other with startled expressions. The pig and the chimp—both animals had been in the other room with Haatz—entered. Monk frowned, and took another look at the newspaper which Doc had handed them.

"There's a story in here about Haatz being brought to this hospital," Monk said.

"That is not good," Ham suggested.

"No. If anybody *is* out to kill him, they'll know where to find him."

"We better move him."

"You said it." Monk rubbed his jaw. "The guy is in bad shape, though. I would hate to move him, and then have him croak."

Ham pondered. "We don't necessarily have to move *him*."

One of Monk's small eyes narrowed appreciatively as he stared at Ham.

"I get it," he said.

They moved through the hospital until they found a fat man who was built somewhat the same as Haatz. They talked to him, and some money changed hands.

With the contents of a bottle of harmless white medicine, they made the fat janitor pale. Ham penciled a few lines about his eyes and created suitable shadows. They found a stretcher.

They managed to make arrangements to go through the motions of taking Haatz out of the hospital—actually taking the janitor instead—with only one doctor in the institution knowing of the fact.

Haatz they transferred to another hospital room, under a different name.

The operation of checking the fake Haatz out of the hospital was carried out without hitch, and with a great deal of ostentatious display. It was Ham who located a pair of newspaper reporters, and gave them a sensational story about Haatz being poisoned mysteriously during the excitement at the airport the night before. He added casually that Haatz was being transferred to a place of safety.

The reporters naturally wanted to question Haatz, but Ham assured them the man was far too ill for that, and pointed to the patient's paleness—a part of the fake Haatz's plump cheek was uncovered on the stretcher—as convincing evidence.

"That smoke screen ought to work," Ham whispered to Monk.

"It's perfect," Monk agreed.

It was, too. They found how perfect it was when they reached the hotel where they had decided to take the decoy, and were unloading the stretcher from the ambulance, with a great show of seriousness, in front of the hostelry.

Monk let out the first yell.

"Blazes!" squalled the homely chemist. "Have a look!"

It was hardly necessary for him to point. The figure moving down the sidewalk was noticeable enough. Pedestrians were turning to stare at it, fascinated by the weird aspect of the form, and the grim, silent and purposeful manner with which it strode forward.

"The white elf!" Ham grunted.

If an elf is supposed to be a little creature, the name did not fit this thing. The figure was hard to define as to size, for none of the pedestrians were close enough to compare sizes. It was wider than a man. Not as tall, possibly, although the grotesque shape made it hard to tell.

In general, the figure was rather shapeless, although it was more human than not. The color was unusual. Startling. It was white, and yet a strange kind of white. Not the hue of white in the sense that a sheet or a piece of canvas is white, but white with a brilliant, intense, mirrorlike quality. White almost as a frosted electric-light bulb is white when lighted, although there was no definitely luminous quality about the figure.

Monk made his best growling noise.

"I'm gonna collar that what-is-it," he declared. He started forward.

Ham grabbed his shoulder. "Don't be a fool! Let's get this stretcher inside."

Monk hesitated. And while he was undecided, the surroundings began to turn white. Everything, it seemed to Monk, rapidly took on the same glistening white quality that characterized the "elf" of a figure.

"Quick!" Monk roared.

With Ham, he seized the stretcher. They dashed with it into the hotel entrance. The whiteness was worse. Their eyes ached. They could distinguish objects in the hotel lobby only with difficulty.

The janitor suddenly gave up the job of acting as patient. He sat erect on the stretcher.

"What the hell is this, anyhow?" he barked.

Monk gave him a shove.

"Run for it!" the homely chemist shouted. As an afterthought, as the janitor started away, Monk roared, "And take that sheet and wipe the white stuff off your face!"

The janitor complied with the suggestion as he dashed across the hotel lobby. He tried to make it to a rear door, but fell over a chair, sprawled on the floor, and lay there a moment before springing to his feet. Once more, he set out for what he thought was the rear door, but it turned out to be the entrance to the dining room. He passed through that, and began knocking over tables.

Monk, straining his eyes, distinguished a figure coming into the hotel. It was the elf figure, and it was as if the thing walked through white-hot fire. After that, Monk could see nothing whatever.

"The stairs!" Monk gasped. "Maybe we can fight the thing off!"

Chapter V. TWO TO DIE

THE little man with the cheerful eyes and the quid of tobacco in his cheek grinned and wiped his hands

on a piece of waste. He shut off the airplane motor on which he had been working.

"Yeah, I'm Bill Smith, a grease monkey here at the airport," he said.

He shook hands with Doc Savage.

After looking at the bronze man, he added, "Say, aren't you Doc Savage?"

The bronze man admitted that.

"I saw that new chemical-cooled motor you designed," Bill Smith said admiringly. "That thing is a whiz-ding. You know what I said to myself when I saw that motor? I said, 'I'd sure like to meet the fellow who had brains enough to think up a honey like that.' That's what I said."

Doc Savage looked a little embarrassed, said, "I understand you saw something strange at the airport here last night."

Bill Smith got rid of his quid of tobacco. "They don't let you smoke around here, so I chew," he explained. Then he grinned sheepishly. "You saw that thing they put in the newspaper about it, I guess?" he asked.

Doc nodded.

"Well, there ain't much more to tell about it," said Bill Smith. "I was working overtime last night, and had finished my job and was starting out to the road. There is a bus goes past here, and I usually catch it and ride home. I was going around behind No. 6 hangar when I saw this white thing. It looked like kind of a goblin or an elf, if there was such things. I thought at first it was somebody dressed up in a masquerade suit. But somehow this didn't look like that."

"Will you describe it?"

"Not as tall as a man, wider, shaped something like a man, but without a man's features. And it was white. The color was kind of a funny white. It was like—well, it was *so* white. That's all I can say. It was just about the whitest thing I ever saw."

"Was it a man wearing a disguise?"

Bill Smith hesitated. "It would sound crazy if I said what I think."

"Say exactly what you think."

"Well— How could it have been a man? It didn't have any face at all. It wasn't wearing goggles. Where the face should have been, there were no features—no nose, mouth, eyes or ears. It was just blank."

"What else—?"

"That's all."

"Where did this white goblin of a thing go?"

"I don't know," Bill Smith explained. "You see, right after I saw the thing, I had this spell where everything turned to white fire, and I was dizzy and sick. I thought the world was turning over and over. Matter of fact, I thought the end of the world must be coming."

"How did you feel afterward?"

"Not very good," the mechanic admitted. "I felt like hell, in fact. My stomach ain't the same yet."

Doc Savage extended his hand in a warm grip of thanks. "You have been a distinct help," he said.

Bill Smith looked doubtful. "You don't think I'm crazy?"

"Not at all. Would you mind showing me exactly where you saw this white thing?"

Bill Smith conducted the bronze man to a spot beside No. 6 hangar. The place was bathed in midday sunlight.

"It was kind of dark here last night," the mechanic explained. He consulted his watch. "I'm supposed to be working. I better get back on the job. Like I said, I'm mighty glad to have met you."

DOC SAVAGE watched the mechanic go back to his job. Then the bronze man gave close attention to the surrounding ground. It was covered with gravel, did not retain footprints. The gravel was new, sharp.

The bronze man had brought along a small metal case containing various apparatus. He opened this, produced a kind of overgrown atomizer, filled this with fluid from a bottle that was labeled only with a number, and began spreading a thin spray over the gravel.

When that spray had no effect, he changed to the contents of still another bottle, and finally a third, and a fourth.

The fourth liquid caused some few of the sharp pieces of gravel to take on the faintest of spots of a greenish discoloration.

He carefully gathered up the discolored bits of gravel and placed them in the metal case.

A girl came out of the office portion of a nearby hangar, carrying a bird cage. There was a dead canary in the cage.

Doc stopped her. "What happened to the bird?"

The girl was grim. "It was my pet. It . . . died last night."

"Was the bird here in the hangar when it died?"

"Yes." She bit her lower lip. "I was going to bury it."

"Would you allow me to examine it?"

"Of course."

Doc Savage worked with the carcass of the bird for a while. Becoming more interested, he moved into the privacy of an empty office, and there used various chemicals, and a powerful portable microscope.

The bronze man was working intently when the sound came into existence. It was a weird sound, a trilling that was low and exotic, a note that was without tune, yet not unmusical, and which seemed to come from the very air itself. When Doc became aware of the trilling, he looked guilty, and the sound stopped. The trilling was a small unconscious thing which he did in moments of intense mental or physical stress, or when he was making a discovery.

As he was on the point of returning the canary, Bill Smith appeared. There was a small glint of excitement in Bill Smith's eyes.

"Just wondered if you would be interested in knowing another guy is curious about that white elf, or goblin," Bill Smith said.

"Another man?"

"Yeah. Young. Big as an ox. Sunburned brown. Blue eyes, flat nose, and a jaw like the front end of a truck."

"Did he give you a name?" Doc asked.

Bill Smith grinned. "Said his name was Smith."

"Did not say his name was Jerry Million, then?"

"No." The mechanic shook his head. "Say—I seem to remember reading about a man named Jerry Million. Got into some kind of trouble, if I recall."

Doc Savage made no comment, except to nod very slightly.

FIVE minutes later, Doc Savage stood outside a window and used a long, thin tube of a device, a telescoping periscope of mirrors and prisms and good lenses—no larger than a pencil when closed, capable of being stretched to more than arm's length—to examine a room.

The sunburned young ox of a man with the jaw was inside the room, giving it a quick search.

The reason for the search did not puzzle Doc. The room was the one in which Monk and Ham had found old Milan Zinn locked. The young man in there now seemed to be making sure there were no clues to indicate his presence the night before. And possibly he was getting rid of traces of Zinn having been there, as well.

He had gotten around to using a handkerchief to carefully wipe the knob and edges of the door for fingerprints.

Doc Savage took from a pocket a small metal case which proved to be lined with cotton padding, and contained some objects which looked like bilious-tinted marbles filled with liquid.

The window was open a crack, and Doc pegged two of the "marbles" inside. They broke with about the same sounds that bird eggs would have made.

Doc left the spot under the window, sauntered around to the entrance, and made his way to the door of the room.

The sunburned young man with the jaw was lying on the floor. Judging from his breathing, he slept. Doc shoved his body to one side, and closed the door.

The bronze man's first act was to test the victim's pulse and respiration. The anaesthetic gas contained in the "marbles" was—as its sudden action indicated—powerful stuff, so that there was always some slight danger that a victim with an abnormally weak heart, or some chronic physical difficulty, might succumb. There was no danger of this fellow dying, however. His body was functioning like a machine.

Doc gave attention to the young man's pockets.

His name was Jerry Million—his driver's license bore that name and his description, and he had a belt buckle, a handkerchief, initialed JM.

The young man's inside coat pocket held a packet—a long cardboard box, snapped around with rubber hands—which Doc Savage opened. It contained newspaper clippings. The clipping on top read:

JUDGE SCOURGES JERRY

MILLION IN ACQUITTAL

In acquitting Jerry Million of charges of manslaughter today in district court, judge Melvin Reynolds gave the young man a blistering verbal lashing.

Jerry Million, former laboratory manager of the Kesta Photographic Products Corp., was charged with manslaughter in connection with the death of six persons at the Kesta plant a month ago.

"You are being acquitted," Judge Reynolds told the defendant in a regretful voice, "on a legal technicality, although there is no doubt in my mind, and no doubt in the mind of any person in this courtroom, I'll wager, but that you are guilty."

The attitude of Jerry Million was defiantly silent throughout the harangue. It was the same defiant silence he had maintained during the entire trial.

"You are unquestionably the lowest form of human life I have ever seen," the judge said bluntly. "I know it is not judicial procedure for a presiding court officer to make such a statement. But on this occasion I am sickened by the thing that you did, and nauseated by your insolent silence and refusal to once open your mouth. It is to my everlasting regret that I must order your acquittal on the charge of manslaughter.

"However, I sentence you to the maximum penalty on the other charge, destruction of property. I sentence you to one year in jail, with the added recommendation that you not be paroled."

The item was worn and stained, as if it had been handled a great deal. Doc Savage riffled through the other clips, most of which were about the trial. He came to several items concerning the crime itself.

One of these, more concise and comprehensive than the others, read:

SIX DEAD IN FLAMES;

LABORATORY MANAGER JAILED

Death toll in the fire which swept the Kesta Photographic Products plant last night now stands at six.

Jerry Million, laboratory manager of the plant, has been placed under arrest. It is alleged that Million was in charge of the laboratory where the fire started, and could have checked the flames at their beginning, but failed to do so.

Police Chief Carter says, "There is unimpeachable testimony that this man's rank carelessness and cowardice allowed the flames to get headway and reach highly inflammable chemicals and explosives."

Doc ran through the rest of the clippings. All of them bore on the fire in the photographic plant, the trial that followed, and Jerry Million's sentence to jail for a year on a minor charge. The bottom clipping was one that indicated Jerry Million had been released from jail six months previously.

In the bottom of the box, there was a tight bundle of letters. Doc studied them. They were curious documents.

They were letters from persons to whom Jerry Million had applied for a job after his release from jail. They were bitter missives. They did more, most of them, than refuse Jerry Million employment; they

condemned him as a coward, a cur.

Doc Savage replaced the stuff in the young man's pocket. For a moment, he contemplated Jerry Million thoughtfully. The bronze man's eyes, of flake gold, seemed strangely animated and concerned.

Jerry Million did not look like the kind of man which he was branded to be by the clippings and letters.

FIFTEEN minutes later, from outside the window, Doc Savage watched the young man with the jaw regain consciousness. Jerry Million sat up, looked around foolishly—the anaesthetic had the unusual property of causing no noticeable aftereffects other than a slight weakness and dizziness—and finally got to his feet. His lips moved. Doc, watching, was sufficiently skilled at lip-reading to tell what he said.

"Hell, I forgot to eat last night and this morning," he muttered. "It must have made me weak."

He left the airport then. He had a small roadster of the convertible type, and he drove this.

Doc trailed him in a car which he had rented.

Jerry Million stopped at a restaurant, where he wolfed down a substantial meal. After that, he strode back to his car. His manner was purposeful.

Doc followed him again. This time, Jerry Million drove to a residential part of the city, a section where there were substantial middle-class homes located in wide grounds. An old part of town.

Jerry Million parked the car in a side street, walked two blocks, entered an alley, suddenly became furtive. He crept into some brush, flattened out in the weeds of a vacant lot, and finally took a position in some shrubbery.

He began watching a house with binoculars.

After it became evident that Jerry Million was going to watch the place for some time, Doc Savage retreated, and maneuvered to a spot where he could get the house number and street name without being observed.

He made a personal visit to the head office of the telephone company to get the information he wanted.

Jerry Million was watching the home of Milan Zinn.

DOC SAVAGE returned to his rented car. He had placed several cases of equipment in the back of the machine, and one of these was a portable radio telephone, a short-wave outfit with a surprising range for its size. He switched it on, picked up the microphone.

"Renny," he said. "Renny, or Johnny. Come on the air, if you are tuned in."

A few moments later, the carrier wave of another transmitter became audible.

"Holy cow," said a voice that might have been the product of a large bear in a deep cave. "What is it, Doc?"

The voice—it was as unmistakable as the foghorn of the *Queen Mary*—belonged to Colonel John Renwick. Renny was famous for two things—his engineering ability, and the size of his fists. Like Monk and Ham, he was a Doc Savage assistant.

"Is Johnny there?" the bronze man asked.

"Yeah, he's right here, big words and all," Renny rumbled.

Johnny was William Harper Littlejohn, noted archaeologist and geologist and eminent user of big words. He was another associate.

Doc said quietly, "Renny, you and Johnny had better come to Washington by plane at once."

"Something breaking down there?"

Renny's rumble was excited.

"It appears so," Doc admitted.

There was a brief exchange of words away from the other transmitter.

"We'll be down there in two hours, Johnny says," Renny announced.

Doc said, "Very well. I shall be expecting you." He gave them a hotel address where they could make contact in Washington, then switched off the radio.

The bronze man drove to the hospital. He was advised there that Monk and Ham had moved Arnold Haatz to a hotel for safekeeping. They furnished him the address of the hotel.

Chapter VI. THE DEVIL FEARS FIRE

WHILE he was still some blocks from the hotel, he knew something was wrong. A traffic officer stepped in his path, waved for a detour.

"Sorry," the cop explained. "All traffic is being detoured."

Doc said, "But I am going to the Capitol Lawn Hotel."

The officer stared at him. "Nothing doing."

"But it is important."

"You a newspaperman—?"

"No."

"Every newspaperman in town is trying to get to that hotel," the cop said. "You'll have to drive on, brother. My orders are to allow no traffic in that direction."

"What is happening?"

"Drive on, drive on," the policeman said impatiently. "You'll have to read about it in your newspapers."

Doc let in the clutch and the car moved ahead. In the middle of the next block, he pulled into a parking lot, left the machine and headed for the Capitol Lawn.

He ran.

Two ambulances passed him, coming from the direction of the hotel. A sedan followed them, and there were white-uniformed interns and patients in blood-soaked bandages in the back of the car.

There were fire engines. Police reserve cars were thick. A uniformed patrolman barred the bronze man's

path.

"You can't go any farther," the cop said.

Doc Savage did not argue. He produced a document which he carried for such emergencies—an honorary police commission. He held such commissions in most of the large cities.

The policeman was satisfied.

"What is going on?" Doc asked.

"I can't tell you, exactly," the officer admitted. "It seems it must have been the same kind of thing that occurred out to the airport last night. Maybe you read about *that* in the papers?"

Doc said, "Thanks," quietly and went on.

The Capitol Lawn Hotel was in as much of an uproar as such a dignified hostelry could manage. The lobby was crowded with police, and the manager was wringing his hands, thinking of the publicity, and practically sobbing.

Doc Savage paused in the door, and his flake-gold eyes went over the crowd quietly. He singled out the officer who was obviously in charge, and introduced himself.

The man stared at Doc, surprised.

"This is a pleasure," he said with genuine admiration. "You know, our department laboratory uses some blood-test methods, and processes of bringing out latent prints, developed by you. What can I do for you?"

Doc repeated his inquiry as to what was happening.

"We don't know for sure," the police official explained. "All of a sudden, everyone in the hotel and in the neighborhood seemed to have some kind of a spell. The world seemed to turn a blinding white, and nobody seemed able to stand up or move around."

"Similar to what happened at the airport last night?" Doc inquired.

"Yes."

"What else?"

"Well, this happened all of three quarters of an hour ago. There was so much confusion that no one could do anything. The reports that came in to police headquarters were completely crazy. People reported seeing the strangest things."

A small stir of bright interest appeared in the bronze man's flake-gold eyes.

He asked, "Did anyone report seeing a white goblin of a figure?"

The other gaped. "How did you guess that?"

There was a sudden uproar from high up in the hotel somewhere—shouting and loud thumpings—and a squad of emergency policemen entered the lobby with fire axes, gas containers, bulletproof vests, sawed-off shotguns, ropes and scaling ladders.

"We have somebody cornered on the fourth floor," the police official explained. "There are two of them, and they refuse to let anyone in."

"Who are they?"

"Two fellows who ran in here with a runt ape and a pig."

TWO minutes later, Doc Savage was pounding on the fourth-floor door.

"Monk," he called. "Ham."

From inside the room, Monk's ridiculously childlike voice came, asking a question in the ancient Mayan tongue, a language which the bronze man and his aids used when they did not wish outsiders to understand. The Mayan language was spoken by very few persons in the civilized world, other than themselves.

Monk asked, "Is it sure enough safe to come out?"

"Yes."

There was noise of a quantity of furniture being moved from the other side of the door, and the panel opened. Monk and Ham, machine pistols in hand, peered out.

"These are policemen," Doc explained.

Monk looked over the cops.

"Yeah, they said they were," he admitted. "But me and Ham wasn't takin' any chances."

Doc drew the homely chemist and the dapper lawyer aside, listened to an explanation of what had happened. "You see, we figured it was a bright idea to fake that business about taking Arnold Haatz away from the hospital," Monk declared.

He completed his story by advising, "When everything went white, and we knew that infernal elf was after us, me and Ham made a break for the stairs. We got up to this floor, and found a room unlocked. We dived in, shut the door, and have been here since."

"We could have come out earlier," Ham said.

"But we were playing safe," Monk added.

"What became of the janitor you hired to pretend to be Haatz?" Doc asked.

"Oh, he got away. He lit out like a rabbit."

"Did this elf, as you call it, see him?"

Ham and Monk exchanged glances.

"Afraid so," Ham said.

Doc Savage made, quite suddenly, the small trilling sound that was his peculiarity in moments of mental stress. The sound had an anxious quality.

"Come on," he said.

There was just enough excitement—he rarely showed any emotion—that Monk and Ham realized that something serious was wrong. They scooped up their pets and trailed him.

"What's up?" Monk asked uneasily.

"As soon as the janitor turned out not to be Haatz," Doc said, "it must have been apparent that you had left Haatz in the hospital."

They borrowed a police sedan for the ride to the hospital.

THE police machine was long and black, with red lights and a noisy siren under the hood. Doc kept the siren on steadily, kept the speedometer needle on the high numbers of the dial throughout the drive.

Nearing the hospital, Doc cut the siren. He coasted in under the marquee of the ambulance entrance, cut the engine, and the abrupt halt of the car seemed to fling him out.

"Third-floor," Monk barked, and started forward.

"Wait," Doc said.

The bronze man confronted the checker at the hospital door. "Any emergency stretcher cases been brought in during the last half-hour?" he asked.

The man nodded. "One."

"Was the fellow bandaged?"

"From head to foot, yes."

"Face covered?"

"Yes."

"What kind of looking men brought the case in?"

"Now that you mention it," the attendant confessed, "they were kind of tough-looking guys."

"What floor was the case taken to?"

"The third."

Monk and Ham got it then. Their faces became stark. Ham growled, "You think the thing on the stretcher was that elf?"

Doc Savage nodded briefly. Then, as Monk started forward, the bronze man flung out an arm and stopped him.

"I saw a grocery store across the street on the corner," Doc said. "They probably sell bottled soft drinks. Monk, you and Ham go to that store. Buy a dozen or so bottles of soft drinks. Empty the bottles, fill them with gasoline, and cork them. Wrap rags around the bottles, tie them on with string, and soak the rags in gasoline."

"What'll we use for rags?" Monk demanded.

"Your shirt," Ham suggested. "It's practically a rag to begin with."

Doc said, "Hurry. Meet me on the third floor. But be careful when you come up."

Monk and Ham raced away.

Doc turned to the attendant. "There is a dangerous criminal loose in the hospital," he said. "Get this door locked. Stop all the elevators. Close the front doors and lock them."

The attendant stared blankly. "I . . . uh . . . I ain't got no authority to do any of that."

Instead of arguing, Doc Savage ran through the corridors, located the office. He found the superintendent inside. Doc identified himself—he had not met the superintendent earlier—and repeated the instruction he had given the attendant.

"Can you get hold of gasoline in any quantity?" the bronze man demanded.

"I . . . I don't know," said the astonished superintendent. "Y-yes, there is a tank which we use to refuel the ambulances."

"Run gasoline on the sidewalk outside, under all the windows," Doc ordered. "Run it in the gutters. At the first sign of excitement, set it afire."

The superintendent, pop-eyed, made a bewildered noise.

Doc gripped his arm. "Do as I tell you," he said urgently. "The lives of a great many people may depend on it."

He left the superintendent then, and went to the third floor, climbing the stairs with long leaps. He had the number of the room in which Monk and Ham had placed Arnold Haatz.

He flung open the door, took a pace inside, and stopped.

There was no need to look more closely at the form that lay on the bed with legs spread-eagled and arms outflung, shoulders twisted a little so that the left was higher than the right, and the head flung back, flung farther back than it could ever have been normally. The neck was practically severed, the mouth stood widely open, and the red flood had stopped flowing from the mouth, and no longer came, except for a trickle, from the neck. The red was dripping from the bed to the floor.

Except for the frightfully dead body of Haatz, the room was empty.

DOC whipped back into the corridor, closed the door. There was a presiding nurse in charge on each floor. He went to her desk.

"Where is the emergency case that came in half an hour ago?" he asked.

She nodded at a door. "There."

"Has he been out?"

"Why, yes. His nurse took him into the room where you just were. They remained there a few minutes, then came out again, and went back into his own room. The nurse said he was an old friend of the man in the room where you were, and wanted to see him."

"When did that happen?"

"Fifteen minutes ago."

Doc Savage's metallic features did not change expression, but he felt better. At least, Haatz had not been murdered while he was giving instructions downstairs. He had been killed fifteen minutes earlier—before Doc and his two men reached the hospital.

Doc addressed the presiding nurse.

"Leave this floor," he directed. "Get down to the superintendent. Tell him to spread that gasoline on the sidewalks and under the windows in a hurry. Tell him to set fire to it at the first sound of alarm. *Set fire to the gasoline.* You understand!"

The compelling urgency, the power in his voice sent the presiding nurse flying for the stairs.

Doc went to the door of the room into which the emergency case had been taken. He did not enter. He waited. It was hard to wait. The nurse was in there with an inhuman monster. But it was essential for Monk and Ham to return with their gasoline-filled bottles.

It must have been three or four minutes later—the seconds were like years—when Doc heard a faint sound. It was a strangled noise, full of tearing meaning. A woman made the noise. The nurse! It must be the nurse!

Doc knocked the door open.

The grotesque figure of the elf, dazzling in its whiteness, was standing in front of the window. A sheet had been twisted into a long rope, and this rope was being used to strangle the nurse. She fought weakly, but it was obvious that she had lost most of her consciousness.

The white thing whirled. It started to make some kind of a gesture, the nature of the movement indefinite. Probably it expressed surprise.

Doc took a running leap, landed with both feet against the middle of the white apparition. It was hard under his feet; felt as hard as metal. And when the thing upset, it made a distinct rattling noise.

Not wasting time, Doc started to spring upon the fallen figure. But the whiteness came. It came suddenly. Monk and the others had said that it had come slowly, with everything taking on a gradual luminosity that gradually increased. But this was abrupt.

Doc abandoned his plan to attack the white figure. Instead, he scooped up the nurse, whirled, and dived out through the door, carrying her. He banged the door behind him, raced down the corridor, following the wall with one hand.

Vision was completely gone. There was nothing in his eyes but searing white agony.

"Monk!" he shouted. "Monk! Ham!"

Monk's squeaky voice came from the stairs. "Coming, Doc."

The bronze man found them by the sounds they made. With his hands, he first located Ham.

He shoved the limp nurse into Ham's hands.

"Get her downstairs," he rapped. "Find a room, and lock yourself inside it with the nurse."

Ham departed with the nurse.

THERE was a grim silence in the hall. Downstairs, and out on the street, there was noise, confusion,

shouting and rushing about, the screaming of a voice that had started crying out a moment after a metallic crashing that was probably a car colliding with some object.

Then, listening closely, the bronze man's trained ears detected a rock-hard, grinding tread on the corridor floor.

"Hand me one of those bottles of gasoline, Monk," Doc said.

The soft-drink bottle was small in his hands, the gasoline-soaked rag wrapped around it cool to the touch. Doc said, "Stay back, Monk. I am going to spread burning gasoline in the hall."

"But the fire danger!" Monk exploded.

"The building is fireproof."

Doc struck a match. Flame heat rushed over his hands, singeing them. He flung the bottle, throwing it hard, standing on tiptoes to do so. The bottle slanted down and struck the floor a few yards away, shattered.

The flames made a noise like a sudden wind.

And the white elf of a figure emitted a sound, too. It was a stifled noise, a bark and whine that was horrifying. The footsteps of the thing, like rocks striking the tiled floor, went away rapidly.

Doc applied a match to another bottle, threw it at the sound of the footsteps. He missed. Moreover, the bottle hit the far end of the hall, and did not shatter.

A door banged.

Doc said, "There is another set of stairs at the opposite end of the hall. It went down those."

Monk emitted a roar—he liked to yell when he was in action—and started forward. Then he emitted another yell that was louder and agonized, and came rushing back. The loud slappings—they were still completely blind—were probably made by his hands beating at his clothing.

"There's fire all over the hall," the homely chemist howled.

Doc felt his way along the wall to the elevator doors. He had noted a fire-alarm box there. He found it, and dragged down the lever.

He went back to the stairs, took them as fast as he could manage without the help of sight. He kept going to the ground floor. It was not likely their quarry would stop in the building.

Chapter VII. THE SILENT GIRL

THIRTY minutes later, the superintendent of the hospital was very apologetic. He was also ill. But he was more apologetic than ill, for the police had given him their opinion of his intelligence, or, as they stated with trimmings, complete lack of any.

"I did not see any reason for spreading gasoline around the hospital and setting it afire," the superintendent said miserably. "It seemed like a completely insane thing to do."

"But Savage told you to do it," the police official told him angrily.

"I know."

"Then why didn't you?"

"Because I . . . it seemed crazy."

"Yeah," the cop said disgustedly, "and because you didn't do as you were instructed, that white goblin of a thing was able to walk right out of here."

"What good would the fire have done?" the superintendent muttered.

"For some reason or other, the white thing is deathly afraid of fire," the cop told him. "Of all the stupid boobs, you take the prize!"

Doc Savage had taken no part in the condemnation of the hospital official. The man was actually not to blame. He had followed the dictates of his common sense, a natural thing to do. The bronze man spoke quietly.

"I believe we will have to agree," he said, "that the superintendent did what was sensible from his point of view. My orders to set a fire around the hospital, given without an explanation, for I had no time for one, did seem mad."

The superintendent looked grateful.

The battalion chief of the fire department which had answered the alarm reported that the fire on the third floor had been extinguished, and that the damage seemed to be negligible.

Doc Savage joined Monk, who had been searching.

Monk reported, "I found one guy who saw that white elf leaving this part of the woods. He saw the elf about six blocks away."

"Did he know which way it went?"

"No." Monk shook his head. "The man was about half blind, and leaning against a lamp-post. He saw the figure pass him. He just got a glimpse of it. Couldn't tell which way it was going."

"I see."

"That thing is afraid of fire. Fire scares the devil out of it."

"Yes."

"How did you figure that out, Doc?"

The bronze man seemed not to hear the question. Monk did not repeat the query. He knew Doc Savage's small habit of not seeming to hear questions which he did not wish, usually for good reasons, to commit himself by answering.

A nurse came up.

"Two gentlemen to see you," she said.

"Has one of them got big fists?"

"Yes." The nurse smiled slightly. "And the other one has big words."

"Renny and Johnny," Monk declared.

RENNY RENWICK towered alongside Doc Savage, but he lacked the bronze man's symmetrical physical build, and his strength, while remarkable, did not compare with that of his chief. Renny's face wore a perpetual expression of gloom, and, contrarily, the sadder he looked, the more he was usually enjoying himself. His fists were the outstanding thing about him. A quart pail would hardly have contained either of them.

In greeting them, Renny used his pet ejaculation.

"Holy cow!" he said. "Whatever you fellows have stirred up, it seems to be causing plenty of excitement."

Johnny Littlejohn was tall, very tall, and thinner than it seemed any man could be, and still live. He was as thin as a strip of rawhide, and as durable. Suspended from his coat lapel he wore a monocle which—long ago, the sight in one of his eyes had been bad, and he had affected a monocle—was a magnifying glass.

Johnny said, "I'll be superamalgamated! An unparagoned bit of suscitation."

Which meant roughly that there was indeed some excitement, and that he approved of it.

An attendant approached and advised that the nurse who had been the victim of the white elf was now able to talk. They found Ham with the nurse, who was on the attractive side.

The young woman's voice was clear, but rather weak.

"That horrible thing forced me to take it into the room down the hall, where that poor Mr. Haatz was killed," she said. She shuddered. "I . . . I was there while—" She bit her lips.

"What was the murder instrument?" Doc asked.

"A knife. The . . . the thing carried one."

"Why do you call it a *thing*?"

"Because I don't believe it was human," the girl explained swiftly. "It did not once speak to me, and its actions were not human. They were awkward, rather stiff."

Doc studied the girl. "How did the creature instruct you to take it to the room which Haatz occupied?"

"The instructions were on a piece of paper. It grabbed me, showed me the paper and—well, I had no other choice. The paper said I would be killed if I did not obey."

"Were the instructions handwritten?"

"No. Typed."

Monk said, "What I don't understand is how the thing happened to have typed instructions all ready."

"That's not so hard to figure out, Ignatz," Ham told him. "That thing was carried in here on a stretcher by four men. The four men probably made inquiries, and found out where Haatz actually was." The dapper lawyer glanced at Doc Savage. "We might make inquiries, Doc, and find out if that is what happened."

"I have already done so," the bronze man said. "And that is what occurred."

Monk was studying the nurse with appreciation. "It's your idea that this thing wasn't human?" he asked her.

She smiled at him shakily. Monk's homely face, instead of frightening young women, as Ham insisted it should, usually had an opposite effect. Monk was so ugly that he was pleasant.

"I'm not quite insane enough to stand here and tell you a mysterious monster from another world had me prisoner," the nurse said dryly. "But I will say this: There wasn't anything human about the thing."

That seemed about the extent of the information which the young woman was able to give them.

Doc Savage, with his four associates and their two pets, found a private room where they could hold a consultation—and give Renny and Johnny a brief outline of what had happened. Renny and Johnny listened to the story intently.

When Doc finished the recital, Renny nodded soberly.

"Holy cow! The thing shapes up so that it makes some sense," declared the big-fisted engineer. "What happened is this: Arnold Haatz found out something. Probably he found out about this white-elf thing. Haatz was coming to Doc with the story. He was killed to prevent him doing so, and to stop him from telling what he knew."

Monk snorted. "Very brainy, as far as it goes."

Renny asked indignantly. "What's wrong with my reasoning?"

"It's about the speed of a two-year-old."

Renny narrowed one eye at Monk and said, "Listen, Brother Mayfair, when you start insulting me, just remember it's not Ham you are riding."

Monk snorted again. He enjoyed irritating people.

"You're overlooking Milan Zinn, Russel Kinner, Jerry Million and his sister, Audine," the homely chemist reminded. "All of them except the girl were out at the airport last night."

"Yes," Ham said, "it was a strange set-up out at the airport. We found Milan Zinn locked in a room, and apparently Jerry Million had locked him there, or at least the first thing Zinn asked after we found him was where had Jerry Million gone."

"But right after that," Monk pointed out, "you said you found Milan Zinn and Jerry Million and four other guys quarreling. Say, by jinks!" Monk stared at the others. "The four men at the airport! They answer the description of the four birds who brought that—whatever it is—here to the hospital on a stretcher."

Ham nodded solemnly. "Those four were in with the white elf. Since Jerry Million and Milan Zinn were associating with them, it shows Million and Zinn are in with the elf, too."

Renny rumbled, "You two guys are doing some tall guessing now."

"Well, it's more of an idea than you had," Monk said.

Doc Savage interposed. Speaking quietly, the bronze man gave the location of Milan Zinn's home.

"Jerry Million was watching the house when I last saw him," Doc told Monk and Ham. "Suppose you two get on Jerry's trail, and see what develops."

Monk and Ham, entirely agreeable, hurried out to their car—a rented machine, a small coupé—and placed their pets in the rumble seat, climbed in front themselves, and drove off.

As their machine started to move, big-fisted Renny sauntered over to it casually, and, unobserved, dipped into the rumble seat. Renny came back with Monk's pet pig, Habeas Corpus, in one of his huge hands. He held the porker so it couldn't squeal.

"Monk won't miss the hog for a while," Renny chuckled. "When he does find the hog is gone, he'll lay striped eggs."

NORTHLAND STREET was a pleasant thoroughfare of homes across the river, and, out at its far end where the signposts no longer labeled it as a street, it turned into a country lane bordered by delightful small farms.

The afternoon sunlight was an amiable brilliance over everything when Doc Savage turned into the driveway. He was alone in his rented car. He parked.

The doorway was clean, white, and gave out a firm drumming sound under his knuckles.

"Yes?" said the man who opened the door.

He was a man who would be easily forgotten. He had no outstanding characteristics, and the only thing that distinguished him was the fact that he wore a chauffeurs uniform that was rather new.

"I would like to speak with Miss Audine Million," Doc said.

The chauffeur did not look pleasant.

"She's not seeing anybody," he said curtly.

Doc Savage did not say anything for some moments, but he kept his flake-gold eyes on the chauffeur steadily, and soon the man began to squirm.

"What's your name?" the fellow asked finally.

Doc told him.

The chauffeur's eyes batted. He stepped back quickly, closed the door. There was a wait of three or four minutes, during which there was no sound other than the birds in the adjacent bushes. The man came back.

"This way," he said.

He led Doc to a door, then went away. The bronze man entered the room.

Audine Million had her brother's height. Character was stamped on her face, as on his. She was rather severe in dark serge, but there were little touches—the sprightly do of her ravishing mass of copper hair, the touch of color that a flower gave to her hair, gay trim on her frock—that showed she knew how to wear clothes. Her voice was modulated.

"I understood Charles to say your name is Savage," she said.

"Yes. Doc Savage."

"Oh, oh, *that* is who you are." She was impressed, but she did not extend her hand. "What can I do for you?"

The bronze man got to the point immediately.

"I believe you can help us with some information," he said. "We are trying to get to the bottom of a rather incredible mystery, and I think that you can be of material help."

"I don't understand."

"What do you know about Arnold Haatz?" Doc asked.

Her face tightened.

"Nothing," she said.

"You know him, I believe."

"Yes. Just barely, however. To tell the truth, the only time I ever saw him was once when he was having lunch with my brother, and I happened to enter the same restaurant, and sat with them."

"Where is your brother?"

She became quite tense, did not meet his eyes. "I don't know," she said.

"What can you tell me about the thing the newspapers call the white elf? It is a figure of unusual shape, somewhat human, but not quite, and very, very white. So far, whenever it has been seen, a kind of fantastic white blindness strikes everyone."

The girl looked at the floor. "I never heard of such a thing," she said.

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes had been taking in the room without appearing to do so. He noted, in one corner of the room, where picture moldings met, a small loop of tiny wire that showed.

His eyes moved to a picture on the wall.

"That is a nice picture," he said.

He got up and went to the picture, looked closely at it, and while doing that, took it in his hands and examined the back. He returned to his seat.

"I thought, for a moment, it was a copy," he said. "But it seems to be original. Rather valuable, isn't it?"

The girl nodded. "Yes," she said, rather grimly. "Once we were quite wealthy. That is—one of the souvenirs."

She was silent then.

Doc said, "I presume you know there is a microphone on the back of that picture?"

She stared at him. "A what?"

"A microphone. So someone can hear what is said in this room." He indicated the tiny loop of wire he had noticed. "The wire seemed out of place there, and it suggested a microphone."

The stark expression on the girl's face showed him that she had not known the mike was there.

Doc leaped erect. He said loudly, "It would be a good idea if we seized the person listening in at that microphone."

THE bronze man, however, made no effort to follow the wires, that led from the mike to a listening post

somewhere. He went up on tiptoes, moved to the window, slid it up, and landed on the grass outside. There was plenty of shrubbery; he kept in it, veered right, and stopped when he could see—and reach, if anybody tried to leave in a car—the driveway.

It was no more than thirty seconds later when Charles, the chauffeur, burst out of the side door of the house and took to the brush, moving fast.

Doc pursed his lips, made the call of a mockingbird—a mockingbird imitating a succession of three birds common to the region.

A moment after, a bird call came back from some distance away.

Doc followed Charles. The man had found a path, put his head back, and was making speed. He mounted a hill, took the right path of a fork, and moved down the slope beyond.

Twice, Doc gave his bird whistle, imitating the same three birds. Each time, he was answered.

There was a little-used road, not much more than a lane, and a car stood parked in the lane. A man sat on the running board, smoking. He stood up suddenly when Charles appeared.

Doc Savage, moving very fast himself, and keeping under cover, was close enough to hear what was said between the two. Charles was excited, his voice loud.

"Doc Savage showed up at the house," Charles barked. "He found one of my microphones right away."

The other man said, "Not so loud, damn it! You want to tell the whole country about it!"

Charles dropped his voice. He repeated what Doc had asked Audine Million, and her answers. He had a good memory, for he managed to relay the conversation almost verbatim.

"The girl didn't tell him anything more than that?" the listener demanded.

"That was all."

"Why'd you skip out?"

"Savage said something about grabbing whoever was listening in. He'd 've caught me, sure."

"You idiot! You could have denied knowing anything about the microphones."

Charles gulped stupidly. "I never thought of that." Then he added brightly, "But he'd 've found my fingerprints on the headsets."

"You could have wiped off the prints." The other man cursed Charles for his stupidity. Then he shrugged. "Well, the damage is done. You won't learn anything more there. I ought to fire you!"

Charles muttered that he was sorry.

"Get in the car," the other snapped. "Let's get going away from here."

Doc Savage came out of the brush then, and they had a fight.

THE fight was not long, but it was full of flashing speed, grunts, blows, the sound of ripping cloth. The cloth-ripping noise was made when Doc tore the pockets out of their clothing to save time in making sure they had no weapons.

Having rapped Charles on the jaw, Doc straightened with the other man, who was square, compact, with small ears, alert eyes and a sulky mouth.

Doc said, "You are Russel Kinner, aren't you?"

The man spluttered, started to answer with profanity. Doc shook him until his teeth clicked like castanets.

"Y-yes," the man gasped. "I'm Kinner."

"What are you doing here?"

"None of your damn—"

Kinner did not withstand the next shaking so well. When it ended, he was so disorganized that he would have fallen, only for the bronze man's supporting grip on his collar.

"The thing for you to do," Doc Savage said, "is answer questions."

The bronze man's methods were not excessively rough, normally, but he had decided from Kinner's appearance and manner that violence was the thing that would disturb the man the most, have the greatest likelihood of getting answers out of him.

"What . . . you . . . want to know?" Kinner puffed.

"What were you doing here?"

"I . . . I—" Kinner swallowed, panted for breath. "I was trying to find Jerry Million. I had a detective"—he pointed at Charles—"hired to eavesdrop on Audine and find out where her brother was, if he could. The detective usually reports to me here at about this time every afternoon."

Charles had revived enough to sit up. Doc whirled on him. "Are you a detective?"

"I sure am," the man said. "I got a license. And where do you get off, jumping on us and—" He went silent, apparently deciding not to be belligerent about it. He felt of his bruises.

"Why didn't you take the reports over the telephone?" Doc asked Kinner.

"I work for the government," Kinner said promptly, "and I don't want those telephone girls prying into my private business. I made arrangements with the detective here to report personally and not over the telephone."

Doc studied them.

"Why are you so anxious to find Jerry Million?" he asked more quietly.

Kinner, somewhat reassured by the bronze man's calmer tone, straightened his coat.

"You are Doc Savage, aren't you?" he asked.

"You can answer my question."

"About Jerry Million, you mean?" Kinner rubbed his jaw tenderly. "I've got a darned good reason for wanting to find that big devil. He took a shot at me."

"How do you mean?"

"How does a man shoot at another man? With a pistol. If I hadn't jumped when I did, he would have killed me."

"When did this happen?"

"Two days ago. It was when I was coming home from work one night. I didn't tell anybody about it at the time, because I was sure it must be some kind of a mix-up. And I wanted to help Jerry Million what little I could. Telling the police about his attempt to shoot me wouldn't have been so good for Jerry. Although, damn him, he doesn't deserve any breaks."

Kinner looked righteous and indignant after he finished his speech.

"Why did Jerry Million shoot at you?"

"That's what I wanted to find him for. I wanted to ask him why."

"You know of no reason?"

"None whatever."

"Was it dark?"

"You mean when he shot at me? I'll say it was. That helped me get away."

"Are you sure it was Jerry Million?"

"Of course."

"Did you see his face?"

"Well—no. No, I didn't. But what the hell! It was Jerry, all right. He said it was. He said: 'This is Jerry Million, you so-and-so. Kinner, I'm going to blow a hole in you, you dirty so-and-so.' And then he shot."

"But you didn't see his face?"

"No."

A BREEZE stirred the leaves of the trees that overhung the lane, and the sunlight sloping down on the short grass was shaped into moving patterns without stable shape or position. From nearby, a bird called softly. It was the same kind of call that had answered the bronze man's mockingbird imitation.

Doc said, "One more question. What were you doing at the airport last night?"

Russel Kinner seemed uncomfortable.

"Well— To tell the truth, I was scared. I had come out there to get a plane and fly to Florida."

"What scared you?"

"A telephone call I got from poor old Arnold Haatz." Russel Kinner peered at Doc Savage. "That was a strange call. Haatz said that a man named Milan Zinn had tried to kill him, and was probably going to try to kill me. Haatz said it would be smart for me to get out of town. I—well, I was going to do it."

Doc asked, "Did Haatz say why Zinn tried to kill him?"

"No-o-o. Well, not exactly. He asked me if I remembered Zinn. I did. The old duffer came to our office. I'm an official in the Federal prison department, and old Zinn came in with some kind of a wild story about something horrible he had found and that he was willing to sell to the government."

"What had Zinn found?"

"I never asked. I threw him out. He was a nut, I thought at the time."

What was probably Russel Kinner's normal manner was returning. He was becoming supercilious, over-important, and rather curt.

Doc said, "Have you any idea what Zinn wanted to sell the government?"

"I told you I hadn't."

"But when Haatz called you, you were scared enough to take flight."

Kinner said curtly, "I told you that, too."

"Where did you go last night?"

"To the airport."

"I mean after my two men found you there."

"Was that ape one of your men?"

"Yes."

I went home," Kinner replied shortly. "After what had happened—that silly spell of blindness everybody had—I didn't want to get mixed up in any mess." He drew himself up. "I have an important position to think of."

Doc happened to know that Russel Kinner's position in the government was of a minor variety, but he made no comment. The man was obviously somewhat of a fourflushing politician type.

"Just what," the bronze man inquired, "changed your mind about flight?"

"Seeing poor Haatz lying there dead," Kinner retorted. "I am not a coward. I decided to stay and find his killer."

"Have you any ideas about who the killer might be?"

"It might be Jerry Million."

"You sure?"

"No."

"Are you even positive it was Jerry Million who shot at you?"

"I certainly am!" Kinner took out a handkerchief and wiped his hands neatly. "Jerry Million has been proven to be a rat. A fire started in the laboratory of the photographic company where he was employed. It started through Jerry Million's criminal carelessness, and he let it spread. It was proven in court and by witnesses that he could have stopped the fire. But he didn't. He ran. He should have gone to prison for it."

Doc Savage did not answer. Instead, he bent over and began picking up the contents of Russel Kinner's pockets, which had scattered when the pockets were ripped open. There was a gun, a revolver which Doc emptied of cartridges, and money, penknife and keys.

While he was making a business of picking up the stuff, Doc identified the car key on the ring, and slipped it off. He pocketed it, and gave the rest of the keys back to Kinner, along with the other articles.

Kinner was examining his torn clothing, and was too angry to notice the absence of his car key.

"You'll have to buy me another suit!" he snapped. "This is a very good suit, too! It cost eighty dollars."

Doc had decided the suit had cost, at the most, thirty-two fifty. He reached out suddenly, opened the coat and looked at the label. It was a chain-store label.

"Have them send me the bill for an exact duplicate to that suit," he said, "and I'll pay it."

He walked away while Kinner stood there red-faced with rage.

BESIDE a clump of bushes fifty yards away, Doc paused. His voice was very low as he bent over and pretended to tie his shoes.

"Johnny with you?" he asked.

"Yes," said Renny's deep whisper.

"Trail those two."

"Who are they?"

"Russel Kinner and a man he says is a detective. Check on the detective and see if he is genuine, when you have time."

"Right," Renny whispered from the bush. "Any other instructions?"

"That is all."

"How was my bird imitating?" Renny asked.

"Good."

Renny whispered, "How about taking this hog of Monk's off my hands? The darned insect bit me."

Doc said, "You stole him from Monk, so you are stuck with him. Take him along."

"Holy cow!"

"I took the key to Kinner's car," Doc said. "It will require a few minutes for him to wire around the ignition switch. That will give you time to get your own car, and be ready to trail him."

Doc went on.

Chapter VIII. THE WRONGED MAN

AUDINE MILLION came forward and gripped Doc Savage's hand. Her fingers were warm and tight about his. Her manner was suddenly genuine.

"I'm afraid I made a mistake," she said.

Doc Savage entered what seemed to be the living room of the home—not the room where they had had their first interview; that had been the library—and looked for a hidden microphone. It was inside the bowl of one of the wall-bracket lights. He tore it out.

He said, "The eavesdropper on these microphones was the chauffeur, the man you called Charles."

She nodded. "I got to wondering who it could be. And Charles seemed the logical one."

"Has he been with you long?"

"No. I just hired him yesterday."

"Do you know Russel Kinner?"

"Very slightly. I met him once with my brother—Jerry."

"You know Kinner no better than you knew Haatz, then?"

"About the same. Both of them worked in the same office for the government. In some department that has to do with Federal prisons."

The bronze man took a chair, stretched his legs and relaxed. Audine Million also seated herself, her manner showing that she was reassured and at ease. It was evident, too, that she was not unimpressed by the bronze man's handsomeness.

Doc could tell that she was worried.

He asked, "What is wrong?"

She bothered her lower lip with even white teeth, and twisted her hands uneasily.

"It's my brother," she said. "Jerry Million—" She hesitated.

"What about him?"

"Someone is trying to kill him."

"Who?"

"Jerry said it was Russel Kinner."

"Do you think Jerry is right about that?"

She was uncertain for a moment. "I am not sure. We were riding in the car day before yesterday afternoon, and someone shot at us with a rifle. It was a high-powered rifle, and the bullet passed completely through our car, narrowly missing us. Jerry was very angry."

"What was your brother's reaction?"

"He said he would *get* Kinner, and break up the whole devilish plan."

"Those were his exact words?"

"Yes."

"What was the whole devilish plan he referred to?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't tell me when I asked."

"When did you last see your brother?"

"Yesterday, about noon."

Doc Savage said slowly, "I just talked to Russel Kinner. He said he hired Charles to watch you in order to find Jerry. Kinner says Jerry tried to kill him."

Her hands flew to her lips. "When?"

"Two days ago, Kinner said. It was at night."

She said tensely, "That might make it the evening of the day that Jerry thought Kinner shot at us." She got a little pale. "Maybe Jerry rushed out and tried to kill Kinner. But no! No, no, Jerry wouldn't do that!"

"Perhaps we should talk to Jerry," Doc said.

She stared at him eagerly. "That would be a good idea."

AUDINE MILLION disappeared for a moment, was back with hat and coat.

"I have a car," she said.

Doc shook his head slightly. "We will use my machine."

They got in the rented car, and the bronze man drove. He took a roundabout route to skirt the spot that led to the lane where he had left Russel Kinner and Charles.

Audine looked at Doc earnestly.

"I wish you wouldn't get the wrong idea about Jerry," she pleaded.

"What idea is that?"

"That he is a kind of double-dyed villain who would rob widows and strangle babies." Her hands knotted and unknotted. "I do not know what happened that day at the factory. But I do know this: It wasn't what people think happened."

"Did Jerry ever tell you exactly what happened at the factory the day of the fire?"

She shook her head. "No—and that was strange, too. He never told anyone. Not even Lucille Gavett."

"Who is Lucille Gavett?"

"The girl Jerry was engaged to marry. He met her through her brother, Dennis, who worked at the laboratory with Jerry." Audine was silent for some time, staring fixedly at the concrete road that crawled toward them like a gray snake. "The girl broke off with Jerry."

"Miss Gavett broke their engagement?"

"Yes. There was not much else she could do, because her family was bitterly opposed to Jerry after the trial and—Jerry going to jail and everything. But I think Lucille Gavett still loves him. I know Jerry still loves her."

Doc Savage reached back and lifted the little radio transmitter-receiver onto the seat. He adjusted the knobs, threw a switch, and picked up the microphone.

"Renny?" he asked.

"This is Johnny," came a voice out of the speaker. "Renny is in the back seat trying to control Monk's hog. I'll be superamalgamated if I ever saw one hog make so much trouble."

"Are you on Kinner's trail?"

"His car is about half a mile ahead. You were right about it taking him a little time to wire around the ignition switch of his car."

"Is there any indication that Kinner knows you are following him?"

"No."

"Is Charles with him?"

"The detective? Yes."

Johnny, for some reason or other, never used his big words in conversation with Doc Savage, although Doc was one of the few individuals who probably understood the meaning of most of the jawbreakers.

"What does his destination seem to be?" Doc asked.

"Can't tell yet. He's just heading for town."

"Call me if anything develops."

Chapter IX. TWO AND TROUBLE

JOHNNY—WILLIAM HARPER LITTLEJOHN—switched off the transmitter of his radio, ending the conversation with Doc Savage, but left the receiver apparatus turned on in case the bronze man should call. Johnny had been driving and using the radio at the same time.

They were traversing a boulevard where there was considerable traffic, and Johnny had driven terrifically to decrease the distance between themselves and the car ahead.

In the back seat, Renny rumbled plaintively.

"Holy cow!" complained the big-fisted, big-voiced engineer. "How about you getting back here and trying your hand at controlling this hog, while I drive?"

"An innavigable machination," Johnny announced.

"Eh?"

"No!" Johnny said.

"What ever possessed me to steal this hog, I don't know," Renny grumbled. "Talk about a joke backfiring!"

There were no more remarks, because the car ahead turned sharply to the right, and headed toward the waterfront. Johnny drove carefully, keeping well back, so that his machine was as unobtrusive as possible.

Kinner drove into a sandwich stand, where he and Charles had soft drinks and sandwiches. Johnny circled the block and parked at an intersection which was a favorable vantage point.

"Looks like they might be heading for the yacht basin," Renny hazarded.

The guess proved good. A few minutes later, Kinner had driven to a spot near the yacht harbor, parked, and alighted. Charles joined him. They conversed for a while, and Charles gestured slightly. Then the two men stepped back behind the line of parked cars, moved along those, and got behind a building.

"They sneaking up on something?" Renny rumbled.

Johnny nodded. "Looks like it," he said, so interested he forgot to use a big word.

Kinner and the other man moved slowly, using caution with elaborate pains to make it seem they were not doing so.

"Interested in one of those boats," Renny muttered.

The big-fisted engineer doubled over, took shelter behind a truck. Johnny crouched beside him. Habeas Corpus kept close at their heels. The pig was well trained, and, although he showed no preference whatever for the company of Johnny and Renny, the shote took their orders readily.

Kinner and his companion finally moved out on a short dock, and gave their attention to a boat.

"They sneaked up on that bugeye," Renny said.

He added an explanation of what he knew about bugeye boats, explaining the craft were peculiar to Chesapeake Bay, having been originally for the special needs of the oyster-dredging business, before the days of power. The boats were very shallow draft, drawing only a few inches of water, but with their slanting clipper-type bows and masts which raked back in streamlined fashion, they were among the most attractive sailboats in the world. Originally, Renny explained, the bottoms of the bugeyes had been made with three or five logs drifted together with Swedish iron, an unusual type of construction, and one which would at first seem to be clumsy, but that was actually of deceptive speed.

Renny went back still further in the history of bugeye boats, telling about the log canoes which were really the first craft of the type—when Kinner and Charles disappeared into the bugeye which they had been inspecting cautiously.

Almost instantly, Kinner and Charles popped into view again. To all appearances, they were running for their lives.

RENNY and Johnny were astounded. But not half as surprised as they were when the whiteness came.

They had not experienced the whiteness before, and the thing had been so fantastic that, when they had been told about it previously, they had hardly conceived the thing as an actuality.

Now Renny even mistook it, at first, for the work of the sun. "Holy cow, the sun is getting bright!" he remarked, and glanced upward.

The next instant, Johnny clamped a hand on his arm. Johnny's bony fingers were like steel rods, for he was excited. He used small words.

"The white elf." he exploded.

"Where?"

"There"—Johnny pointed—"coming out of the bugeye." Then the gaunt archaeologist and geologist whirled Renny, and tried to bustle away from the vicinity.

Renny resisted, tugging at the armpit holster where he kept his supermachine pistol. "I ain't gonna run from that thing," he growled.

"But Doc's orders were to keep away from it!"

Renny grunted, got his machine pistol out. By now, however, he could not distinguish the figure on the dock. The air seemed to have turned to white heat.

The agony in their eyes was intolerable. Somewhere near, a woman began screaming, and there was a loud splash as someone fell off a boat.

Renny boomed, "Make a break for it, Johnny! I'm gonna turn loose on that dock with explosive bullets!"

He threw himself flat, his idea being to shoot over the edge of a timber at the dock. But the moment he was prone, he found that he had lost all sense of direction, all idea of what was right or left, up or down. The entire universe seemed to be going over and over, and around in circles.

He changed his mind. "Johnny!" he yelled.

"Here," gasped the gaunt archaeologist.

"Which direction is the car?"

"I don't know. I'm all whirly."

"Whirly" was a mild word for it. Renny groped around, found the timber behind which he had been going to take shelter. He remembered which way it pointed. He yelled, "Get hold of this beam. We can follow that, and get going in the right direction."

They were following the timber, helplessly blind, when blows on their heads made them unconscious. Johnny was the first one struck, then Renny, and they flattened out on their faces, unconscious.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, running and squealing, fell over the edge of the quay into the water and sank.

Chapter X. BLITZKRIEG

DOC SAVAGE was standing in the office of an advertising agency when he became aware of a brightness that seemed to suffuse his surroundings.

The manager of the advertising agency—it was an inside office and the electric lights were on—glanced at the ceiling, said, "The current must have gotten stronger."

Doc wheeled.

"You stay here," he told Audine Million. To the advertising-agency manager, he said, "Keep this girl here. Keep her here by force, if necessary."

The bronze man then flung out of the agency.

The manager came over, said, "Won't you be seated?" to Audine. She stared at him, then made a move toward the door. The manager grasped her arm. "Sorry," he said.

Astonished, Audine demanded, "You mean you *would* keep me here by force?"

He nodded. "I most assuredly would. You see, I happen to have known of Doc Savage, and the kind of work he does, for a long time. If he wants you to stay here, you will stay, if I can manage it."

She hesitated, then took a chair. The manager peered at the electric fixture in the ceiling. "A little too bright for me," he said.

He went over to the wall switch and flicked it.

"Great grief!" he yelled. "Where is that light coming from, anyhow?"

Down in the street, Doc Savage was inside his car. He switched the radio on, snatched the microphone.

"Renny!" he called. "Johnny!"

There was no answer. He repeated the summons in a continuous urgent voice.

Eventually another transmitter cut into the wave length, and Monk's small, squeaky voice said, "What goes on, Doc?"

"Where are you now?" Doc Savage asked.

"Watching Jerry Million," Monk explained. "And Million is still keeping an eye on Milan Zinn's place. Ham is here with me. Say, I've lost my hog."

Doc asked, "Do you notice any brightness?"

Monk made a startled noise. "Say, I have, at that. It started just a minute ago. I thought the sun had gotten brighter, or something."

"Close your eyes," Doc suggested.

Monk evidently did so, because he growled, "Closing your eyes, you can still see it. Hey! Blazes, Doc! Are Renny and Johnny in trouble?"

"They were trailing Russel Kinner, who was head of the office where Arnold Haatz worked," Doc said. "I do not know any more than that."

The bronze man resumed calling Renny and Johnny on the radio. After a few moments of growing apprehension, he switched to the ancient Mayan tongue, which Renny and Johnny also spoke, and did his calling in that, not using their names. He took that precaution in case someone should get hold of the radio which Renny and Johnny were carrying.

The brightness went away. Its departure was slow, like the fading of dusk. Several times, while using the radio, Doc had swung slowly, trying to ascertain from what direction the whiteness came, but it was difficult to tell. A general southerly direction, it seemed. From anywhere on the southern horizon would be a guess. And that was too indefinite for a search.

Doc said, "Monk, you and Ham stay on Million's trail. One of you take Zinn, the other trail Million, if they leave the place. *And be careful.*"

"Right," Monk agreed. "And, Doc, if you see any sign of my hog, let me know."

Doc Savage went back to the advertising office, took pencil and paper, and quickly drafted an advertisement. It read:

WARNING!

Anyone seeing a weird and strange all-white "elf" of a figure should throw fire upon the thing. Their lives may depend upon it. Any kind of fire will do—a lighted match, a piece of flaming paper, but better still, balls of cloth soaked in gasoline or kerosene and lighted.

IF SURROUNDED BY FIRE, THE

"ELF" CAN BE MADE TO

SURRENDER.

\$20,000 REWARD FOR ITS

CAPTURE ALIVE.

Doc passed the advertisement to the manager of the agency. "Run that in every newspaper in the city, and in Richmond, Annapolis and Baltimore," he directed.

"How big?"

"A full page."

"What!"

Doc said grimly, "Run it full page, and put the expense on my account."

It was twenty minutes by automobile—it would not have taken so long, but Doc Savage drove slowly and called repeatedly for Renny and Johnny over the radio, without results—and then it was probably five minutes by creeping and crawling to the spot where Monk was watching Milan Zinn's home.

"Where is Ham?" Doc inquired.

"On the other side," Monk explained. "You know what? I think that blasted shyster did something with my hog."

The bronze man's flake-gold eyes searched the vicinity and located Jerry Million. He asked, "Has Jerry done anything but watch the house?"

"No."

Audine's hands flew to her lips. "My—is Jerry here?"

Doc pointed out the spot where the young man with the jaw was lying, using a pair of binoculars on first one window of the Zinn home, then another.

"Oh!" The girl stared at the bronze man. "What is he doing?"

"Watching Milan Zinn's home."

"But why?"

She seemed genuinely surprised, bewildered. At least that was the bronze man's impression, and he watched her closely. He did not depend too much on his judgment of women, however, having learned in the past that it was anything but reliable. The character of a man, he could read. But not a woman, and particularly one as attractive as this girl.

"You might ask your brother why," he suggested quietly.

"Good idea," Monk agreed. "This watching may go on and on."

The homely chemist came half erect in the weeds, with the idea of hurrying forward. Instantly, there was the ugly sound that a high-powered bullet makes, the cloth on the back of Monk's coat flew open, and he dived forward on his face.

"What happened?" the girl gasped, half rising.

Doc pulled her down.

"He was shot."

Jerry Million had whirled to face them. His hands were empty; he had not fired the shot.

Monk's legs made the movements of a sick frog, and his hands opened and shut.

Doc went down beside Monk, felt for the homely chemist's machine pistol. Monk rolled over, began coughing.

"Can you run?" Doc asked.

"Show me the guy who done that," Monk gritted, "and I can chase him."

The girl looked utterly astounded, as if she thought Monk must be bulletproof. There was no time to explain that Monk, like Doc and the others, wore a chain-mesh undergarment of special alloy metal which would stop anything less than a specially jacketed army-rifle bullet.

Jerry Million suddenly emitted a yell.

"Get down!" he howled. "They've spotted us!"

He said more, but it could not be understood. There was noise like an outboard motor, only immensely greater, and mixed with that gobble another noise that was not unlike a mowing machine in tough grass. The tops broke off weeds. Dirt geysered over them.

"Submachine gun," Monk said, and went away through the weeds like a mole.

Doc sent the girl after Monk, followed after them and a moment later, they encountered Jerry Million, who was crawling very fast on his stomach.

Jerry Million seemed to recognize Monk, for he scowled. He demanded of his sister, "What the devil you doing here? Who is this big guy?" all in one breath. Then he added, "We gotta get out of here."

Loud crashing caused Doc to lift his head briefly. What he saw was not reassuring. A huge vehicle, painted the color of a green olive, had vaulted the sidewalk and was smashing through a wooden fence which surrounded that part of the vacant lot. Gun ports in the thing lipped powder flame.

Jerry Million said, "An armored truck! I wonder where they stole that."

Doc said, "Try to get to Zinn's house." The bronze man's voice, without rising, had an imperative force.

"May be more of them in there," Jerry Million barked.

Doc said nothing. The house was their only chance. They crawled fast. Doc saw they could not make it,

scooped up the girl, and leaped erect. The others followed. They rounded the house corner with lead gnawing off large pieces of the weatherboarding.

Ham met them. He had come running from the other direction.

"What's going on?" he yelled.

Doc veered for the back door of the house, hit it with his shoulder. The lock tore out, leaving a hole as if something had taken an ample bite out of the wood. They plunged through into a gloomy hall. Behind them, the armored truck roared like an angry juggernaut. They kept going down the hall, turned left into a room. In the hall, an instant after they quitted it, something that must have been a hand grenade exploded, deafening them, knocking them off balance. Plaster loosened from the ceiling and caved down upon them, giving for an instant the impression that the whole house was falling.

"A blitzkrieg, maybe," Monk said, answering Ham's question about what was going on.

MILAN ZINN came down a stairway then, and stood looking at them. The stairway was majestic—this place had once been a mansion—with walnut and velour as darkly red as the lifeblood of the dragons that were woven into its design.

Milan Zinn himself wore colors. He looked as garish as an organ grinder's monkey, and there was something of an organ grinder's monkey in his general aspect. His trousers were red-brown, his shirt pine-green, his sport coat a mixture of those two colors. The pistol in his hand was larger than anything, and it was rusty, but not rusty enough.

Monk mentioned a description of the pistol, under his breath. "As horse pistols go," Monk said, "that thing is a stallion."

Milan Zinn spoke with remarkable calm, considering that plaster was still dropping off the ceiling and the air was full of swirling lime dust.

"What is going on?" he asked.

Another grenade exploded immediately, and the floor gave a jump, what plaster was left on the ceiling came down, a chandelier in the ceiling let go and hung by its wires.

Ham said, "We can't have that," and unlimbered his machine pistol. He moved back to the door, poked the gun out into the corridor, and raked back on the firing lever. The noise of the grenades was a cricket chirp beside the uproar that ensued. The machine pistol was charged with explosive pellets that were probably as destructive for their size as anything ever created.

Ham's gun suddenly stopped stuttering. The dapper lawyer gaped at it. He peered into the mechanism.

"I thought that ammo drum was full," he muttered. He wheeled on Monk. "You better use yours."

"I haven't got any explosives in mine," Monk said.

Doc Savage moved suddenly then. He had not seemed to have been watching Milan Zinn, but now, after the old man had come down the stairs and advanced two steps across the floor, Doc Savage reached him and had the gun with blinding speed. Zinn stared at his empty hand rather foolishly.

Doc broke open the enormous pistol. It was empty.

Zinn said, "I do not understand this."

Monk, who was rather proud of his association with the Man of Bronze, said, "This is Doc Savage, and we're investigating the mystery behind this so-called white elf."

Zinn stared at them.

"In that case," he said, "you need not have taken my gun."

The ring of truth, or relief, in his voice was startling. Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes studied the man.

"You know who is behind this mystery about a white elf?" the bronze man asked.

"Yes," Zinn said promptly. "I do."

"Who is it?"

"Russel Kinner."

"The man who was manager of the government office in which Arnold Haatz worked?"

"Yes. And Haatz was killed because he had unwittingly learned the truth," Zinn added grimly. "Russel Kinner had him killed."

Doc Savage, in a tone equally sober, asked, "You are sure about that?"

"Absolutely," Zinn said with a violent nod. "Here is what happened and it proves—"

Zinn never did get to explain what had occurred and what it proved, because a grenade blew in the west wall of the room at that point.

THE blast upset them all. Doc landed on all fours, came up quickly, and his voice drove powerfully into the clatter of falling wreckage. "Get into the upstairs rooms," he ordered. He scooped up Jerry Million and his sister then, and moved out of the room. Monk and Ham, grabbing elderly Zinn, followed.

In the hall, Doc countermanded his order to go upstairs. He did it by gestures, indicating the basement. Monk showed his teeth grimly, realizing that Doc had given the upstairs order in a loud voice to mislead the attackers.

Unfortunately, the ruse was futile. Another grenade popped into the place, exploded with a dull noise, and became a spreading cloud of dense smoke. Ham started into the cloud of sepia vapor with the idea of kicking the chemical contents out of the place before it could cause more smoke. But he backed away, grimacing, squinting.

"Tear gas," he gasped.

Doc and his men frequently used gas themselves, and they carried hoods of transparent plastic material, rather like cellophane but tougher, which took little pocket space. They yanked these over their heads.

A man rushed them. He was a wiry, vicious shape in the spreading smoke. He wore a gas mask. Monk and Ham dropped old Milan Zinn, lunged at the attacker. Monk swung a fist, and the assailant doubled over it, hung there long enough for Monk to hook an arm around his neck. Monk kept the grip.

The smoke bomb turned their surroundings a midnight black. There was noise of pounding feet. It came from all directions, from the halls, and the hole that had been blasted in the side of the adjacent room.

Doc drove a hand inside his clothing, brought out a metal cylinder that resembled a bicycle pump. He

twisted a small valve on the end, and the thing whistled like a peanut wagon, threw a stream of liquid a little thinner than a darning needle. Doc swung the nozzle as if he were wetting down a lawn with a hose.

A man screamed, the scream starting as a howl of pain and rising to a throat-ripping crescendo of agony. Doc himself set his teeth as stinging pain leaped across his hands.

He had developed this gas recently. This was his first attempt to use it, and he was not too confident of its effect. It was tricky stuff, a fiercely agonizing irritant that acted upon the skin. It had the unusual quality of being almost instantaneously nullified upon coming in contact with cloth or other porous material which had been impregnated with a chemical mixture.

Preparing for use of the new gas, days previously, Doc and his aids had soaked their clothing repeatedly in the nullifying chemical mixture, which left no outward evidence except a slight stiffening of the fabric and a fading of some dye colors. The fabric rendered the gas impotent before it reached their skin. Thus a common suit of clothes, if treated with the proper chemicals, became effective protection.

The gas exceeded expectations. A voice, evidently belonging to the leader of the assailants—Doc had never heard it before—roared out a wild guess that the gas was poison. It ordered flight.

Doc moved backward, found a door, and entered a room that had windows. He threw the window up, went out through it. He pulled off the transparent hood as he hit the ground. There was no oxygen supply inside it, so he had been getting short on air.

His idea was to cut off the retreat, if possible. But they had worked more rapidly than he had expected. Already, they were piling into the armored car.

Furthermore, they had seized Milan Zinn and Audine Million.

Doc saw both the girl and Zinn clearly. The pair were being dumped into the rear of the armored machine.

At about the same moment, a man saw Doc and yelled a warning. From one of the gun ports protruded the snout of an automatic gun—either rifle or submachine—and the muzzle angled toward Doc.

The bronze man rolled into the handiest shelter, which was a basement window. The window was closed, but he knocked out sash and pane and landed on a concrete floor.

The armored car, the motor laboring noisily to get the machine across the soft turf of the lawn, passed the window a moment later, and a man tossed another hand grenade. Fortunately, it did not roll into the basement. But it did kick a dozen concrete blocks of the basement wall down on top of Doc Savage, and one of these landed on his head, so that he lay there, very still, for long enough that the armored car got away.

THREE or four minutes later, Doc Savage made his way upstairs. He was still dizzy. Monk and Ham were searching the house angrily.

"They got away!" the homely chemist shouted. "They took Milan Zinn and Audine with them!"

Monk was wrong to some extent. Two of the assailants, felled in the fight, had been left behind.

Doc boosted them out of the window to Monk and Ham.

Jerry Million was incoherent with agony from the gas. Doc was interested in his reactions. The gas seemed to have rendered him quite helpless. That was understandable. His own hands felt as if they were

in fire. He made a mental note to add chemical-treated gloves to their equipment before they used the gas again.

Doc finally managed to steer Jerry Million outside.

"I believe it would be wise to leave the vicinity," the bronze man advised. "Take these two prisoners and Jerry Million, and get to our car."

Doc went back into the house, after pulling on the transparent hood. He searched. His hunt was hurried, very brief.

He devoted most of the search to the library which he found. It was an unusual library, because it was all in Braille, the system of lettering by upraised dots used by the blind. It was not truly a library—it was more of a file of notes made in Braille. There was a machine, on the order of a typewriter, for printing Braille letters.

Since there was no time to study the notes closely, Doc stuffed a few sheets in his pockets, selecting them at random.

He found his men waiting in the car. Doc got behind the wheel, and drove rapidly.

"There is a chance," the bronze man explained quietly, "that the so-called white elf may come hunting for us. It would be better if it did not find us. At present, we are not equipped to deal with it."

Monk peered at him. "*It?* You don't talk as if it was—well, anything human."

Doc did not answer. On the seat, Jerry Million twisted and made faces and groaned. The tires whistled complaints as they took corners, and bumps made the machine take long leaps through space.

Finally Ham said, "Well, we learned one thing, anyhow."

"What's that?" Monk eyed him.

"Russel Kinner is the brains behind this."

Chapter XI. TRAILS GOING NOWHERE

HAM BROOKS was the first to notice the weird whiteness, and he demonstrated his discovery by letting out a howl—he was much impressed by the eerie nature of the white elf and the fantastic thing that happened to people who saw it—and snatched at the car-door handle, preparatory to leaping out and dashing away in flight. However, when the glow did not increase in intensity, Ham remained where he was, in the car with Doc Savage, Monk, Jerry, the two prisoners. Doc Savage stopped the machine, alighted, and covered his eyes with both hands, then turned slowly in a complete circle. Ham was puzzled until he did the same thing, then he realized the reason for the maneuver. The hands over the eyes made no appreciable difference in the quality of the strange whiteness, but covering the eyes did keep out the sunlight, so that it was possible to tell that the whiteness was stronger in one direction than in another. The strength was back in the direction from which they had come, back toward Milan Zinn's home.

Ham said, "I guess the white elf *did* come to Milan Zinn's home, hunting us."

Doc Savage made no comment.

MONK and Ham were surprised at the spot where Doc Savage finally stopped their car, but they made no comment. Jerry Million was not as controlled.

"This is a hell of a place!" he exclaimed.

He meant the appearance. It was river front, and not in a populated neighborhood. Only structures nearby were a long shed on the bank, a substantial and plain dock that thrust out into the stream. A barge, old and large, but neat, was tied to the dock. In the distance, the crimson sun of late evening made the surface of the Chesapeake like salmon-colored corduroy.

Doc went aboard the barge. He met the only men who seemed to be in the vicinity, two rangy fellows who were sunburned and healthy.

"Why, I remember those guys!" Monk ejaculated.

"Who are they?" asked Jerry Million.

Monk opened his mouth, then hesitated. It flashed through the homely chemist's mind that he couldn't very well give the correct answer. Not the whole truth. Those two rangy men had once been violent criminals, and Doc had captured them, sent them to his "college" for curing crime. The world was not supposed to know of the existence of that "college," because its curing methods were unorthodox. The criminals consigned to the place first underwent a complicated, unusual brain operation which wiped out all memory of past; following this, they were trained to hate crime, and taught a trade. When graduated from the place, the men had no knowledge that they had once been criminals.

"Oh, they're Alec and Joe, a couple of friends of Doc's," Monk told Jerry Million casually.

Alec and Joe, it was obvious, were making a success out of the oyster-farming business.

Doc left them, came back to the car.

"Alec and Joe will let you use their place here for the night," the bronze man said. "Monk, you and Ham will take these two prisoners and get the truth out of them. Mr. Million, you will stay with them."

Jerry Million scowled. "Listen, where do you get off, giving me orders?"

Doc looked at him. "You can consider yourself a prisoner in charge of Monk and Ham," he said.

WHEN they had transferred the two captives to the interior of the barge on which Alec and Joe had living quarters, Doc Savage touched Jerry Million's elbow, explained, "We had better get your story. So far, you have not volunteered any information."

Jerry Million looked startled. "I haven't, at that." He put fire to a cigarette. "What do you want to know?"

"One thing," the bronze man replied.

"And that is?"

"Exactly what we are involved in."

"That covers a lot of ground, and I wish I could give it to you," Jerry Million said frankly. "But the truth is that I was trying to find out the same thing myself."

Monk took a step forward and doubled his fists. "Listen, bud, that kind of an answer won't do the job. We want the truth."

Jerry Million shrugged. "I can't tell you what is going on."

Monk looked at him.

"Those men got your sister, remember," the homely chemist growled.

Jerry Million turned slightly white. "And you fellows are holding me here, instead of letting me see if I can find her."

After the young man was calmer, Doc took him onto the afterdeck, "You might tell us some kind of a story," Doc said.

"Damn it, I'm anxious to tell you the truth," Jerry Million said angrily. "If that big ape would have kept his mouth shut! Well, anyhow, here is what happened: About a week ago, Russel Kinner telephoned me. I had known Kinner a few years ago when he was on the sales force of the photographic supply manufacturing company I worked for. Kinner sold for them a while, then got fired. I happen to know he was canned for being crooked. To get back to the story, Kinner called me, and he seemed to know I was down and out."

Jerry Million paused to clench his jaw and glare at Doc Savage defiantly. "You've got no idea how many people kick you after you get down. Talk about *me* being a rat, will they! I tell you, this thing I've gone through has sure educated me in human nature."

Doc asked, "Do your personal troubles have a bearing on this?"

The other shrugged. "Only to the extent that they account for Russel Kinner calling on me. He knew I was broke, and that nobody would give me a job."

"You went to see Kinner?"

"Yes. And I found out right away he wanted me to do some dirty work. Something crooked."

"What was it?"

"I don't know. I didn't wait to find out. I could tell it was dirty work from his manner, from his insinuations. So I walked out. Then I came back; I got mad, and I decided to punch Mr. Kinner's snobbish nose for him, so I came back. And stepped right into the mess."

"How?"

"I stopped on the sidewalk in front of Kinner's office and lighted a cigarette. I wanted to consult myself and be sure the satisfaction of punching Kinner's nose would be worth being arrested for assault and battery. I had just decided it would be, when Kinner stuck his head out of the car against which I had been leaning. It was a pure accident. I had leaned against a car in which Kinner and old Milan Zinn were talking."

"Zinn was in the car with Kinner?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"Kinner had a fit. Mad! Boy, oh, boy! He thought I had been eavesdropping. He started calling me names. So I did what I had come back for. I hung one on his kisser."

"Kinner was mad because he thought you had overheard a conversation he and Zinn were having in the car?"

"Yeah. And mad was a mild word for it."

"Did you overhear?"

"Not a word."

"Then what happened?"

"Day before yesterday, someone took a shot at me while I was riding with Audine. I got a glimpse of the guy with the gun, and I think it was Kinner. So I started to work on him."

"How did you work on Kinner?"

"I started off tough. That night, I caught him in a dark alley, and threw the fear of Old Nick into him. I even took a shot at him. I was going to grab him after I got him scared, and make him talk. But he got away from me."

"Why were you at the airport last night?"

"I had trailed Kinner there. I saw him meet Milan Zinn. The two of them separated, and I grabbed Zinn. The old fellow seemed puzzled, and I locked him in an empty room and went hunting for Kinner. I didn't find him, so I went back to get Zinn out of the room where I had locked him, and your two men were there. I took Zinn away from them at the point of a gun, and we started to leave the airport. We met some guys. I think now the guys had been trailing me. Anyhow, they took Zinn away from me, and there was some shooting when your man, Ham Brooks, turned up. After the shooting started, I cleared out. I went back to the airport this morning to see what I could dig up, but found nothing, and went to watch Milan Zinn's house. I was still at that when you showed up."

Doc Savage was silent for a while in the darkness. The young man's story checked with the one his sister had told, and with Monk and Ham's explanation of how they had met him at the airport.

Jerry Million seemed astonished when Doc Savage shook his hand.

"For the love of mud!" he said. "You believe my story?"

"Yes," Doc Savage said soberly.

Jerry wrung the bronze man's hand. "I want you to know I appreciate that. I think this is the first time in two years that anybody besides Audine has believed anything I said."

Doc went back into the cabin. "Jerry will stay here with you," he told Monk and Ham.

DURING the ride to the airport—it was an army field, where the presence of his unusually fast ship would not be so noticeable—Doc tried repeatedly to raise Renny and Johnny on the radio. He got no response.

The bronze man took with him in the plane a small package containing the stuff he had picked up at the airport that morning—the discolored bits of gravel, the vital organs of the girl's dead canary.

The plane made the flight to New York in close to record time. It was an amphibian ship which would operate from land or water, and he set it down on the Hudson River, taxied along the piers that stuck out into the river like huge fingers, then headed for a looming structure.

The doors of the building—the structure resembled a warehouse, but it extended out into the river some distance—opened when he actuated a radio control. The doors closed again when he was inside.

Ten minutes later he was in his headquarters laboratory on the eighty-sixth floor of a midtown skyscraper. The laboratory was vast, occupying the major part of the floor space, and its equipment had been rated by experts as probably the most advanced in existence.

He went at once to the department devoted to analyzing apparatus. He worked there for a few hours. Then he went to the telephone, began making urgent calls to the managers of houses supplying chemicals and rare metals.

It was past midnight by then.

AT three o'clock in the morning, Ham awakened Monk by dumping a glass of water in the homely chemist's widely gaping mouth, jumping clear of the resulting upheaval.

"Look out, the boat's sinking!" gasped the befuddled Monk. Then, getting his wits together, he outlined Ham's ancestry in sulphur-tinged detail.

"I believe our prisoners are about ripe to be questioned," Ham said.

"Humph." Monk sleepily stuffed his feet in his shoes. "Is that Jerry Million still here?"

"Yes."

"I favor working on him first. I don't trust him."

"Doc seemed to," Ham reminded.

That silenced Monk's objections for a moment. Then he ventured, "Yeah, but you can't tell about Doc. His methods are devious. Try to figure Doc out, and you have about as much luck as a monkey taking apart a watch."

They put their heads together and held what, for them, was an amiable consultation. They were looking forward with pleasure to working on their captives. "That ought to do the job," Monk agreed finally.

A bit later, Monk and Ham walked into the main cabin. The two prisoners were lashed to chairs, and Jerry Million was pacing back and forth. They ignored Jerry.

Ham went over to a captive. He freed the man from the chair, but the fellow's wrists and ankles remained bound.

Ham said, "We've asked you before to answer some questions."

"And I told you where you could go!" the man snarled.

Ham's expression was fierce. "You know that your only chance is to talk, don't you?"

Jerry Million said, "He's tough, that baby. He keeps telling his pal here that they're safe, because Doc Savage and his gang never kill anybody."

"Oh, he's heard that, has he?" Monk said ominously. The homely chemist wheeled on the prisoner who had the courage. "You might be mistaken, wise guy. There's a difference between doing a thing and getting *caught* at it. To stick you for a murder, they got to prove what they call a corpus delicti. And we don't leave any corpus delicti around."

The other prisoner spoke for the first time. "Bushwah," he said. "Bunk."

Monk wheeled on the fellow. "Tough guy," he said.

Ham nodded. "He'll be a hard one to make talk. Why waste time on him?"

Monk said, "Who said anything about wasting time on him?"

The homely chemist stepped forward, and as he did so, brought a knife of startling size out of his clothing. He flung a hand to the bound prisoner's collar, jerked him erect and whirled him toward Ham, saying, "You hold him."

Ham grabbed the captive. Monk leaped upon the fellow from behind. They went to the floor. Monk lifted the knife and brought it down. A grinding sound that might have been the grit of edged steel against bone, and a hair-raising scream came out of the mêlée.

Monk and Ham got to their feet.

The prisoner went through weakening throes on the floor. The knife hilt protruded from his back. A red flood poured out of his chest, spread on the floor. His gasping, his scream—there was just one more shriek, and it was like a file on a saw—brought a spray of red from his mouth, and the red also crawled from the corners of his mouth. The struggling went out of his body and it was without much shape on the floor.

Jerry Million had stood there, struck dumb and motionless by the unexpectedness of the deed.

"You murderers!" Jerry croaked suddenly.

He made a leap, then, trying to reach Ham. But Jerry acted without planned reasoning, and he came too close to Monk, so that the hairy chemist was able to reach his jaw with a fist that could open a horseshoe. Jerry sprawled out on the floor, remained there, and Monk picked a piece of loosened skin off his knuckles.

Ham jerked his head at the other prisoner. "What about this one?"

Monk got down beside the man on the floor. When he straightened, he was holding the knife, and its blade was dripping red.

"We might as well give him the same dose," Monk said.

Ham nodded. "Of course," he suggested, "if he could talk enough to make it worth while, it might be we could let him get on a boat for South America."

It did not take the captive long to make his decision. He ogled the body on the floor, his eyes mostly white. For a while, he looked as if he was trying to faint.

When he started talking, his voice was so incoherent that at first they could not understand him.

JERRY MILLION had been hit hard on the jaw. When he awakened, his head hurt and he was dizzy. He peered vacantly at Monk and Ham, and astonishment overspread his face.

The two prisoners were back in the chairs, tied. Neither seemed to have been harmed.

"But—you stabbed that one!" Jerry said.

Monk grinned, then picked up a knife handle and exhibited it. The handle was attached to a bit of blade no more than half an inch long. Monk also showed a block of wood.

"Put the wood inside his coat, then stuck the knife handle through the cloth onto it," Monk explained. He picked up a bottle which had contained red ink. "This was the blood."

"But the man went through the motions of dying," Jerry said blankly.

"That was practically genuine," Monk admitted. "You see, when Ham jumped on him, he gave the fellow a hypodermic shot. It knocked him out. We had the gag all fixed up ahead of time."

Jerry rubbed his jaw. He decided that, involuntarily, he had played a helping part in the ruse.

"What did you get out of them?" he asked.

Monk shrugged. "Not enough to pay for the trouble."

Ham said, "Oh, I don't know. We learned something, if we can figure out what it is."

Monk snorted. "Listen, both these lugs"—he gestured at the bound prisoners—"were hired by a fellow named Smitty. They are common crooks, these two birds are. Smitty had worked with them in the past, and they knew him. So when he offered them two hundred dollars a day—"

"How much a day?" Jerry exploded.

"Two hundred. Somebody is putting out real money."

"Who?"

"Whoever is hiring Smitty. They don't know who it is." Monk scowled at the captives. "Anyhow, here is what they did tell us: They were hired three days ago by Smitty, and their first job was to steal an armored truck this afternoon, take it to Zinn's house, and pick up Zinn. When they got to Zinn's house, we were watching the place, and you know what happened. That was as far as these two got."

Jerry Million was puzzled.

"But why did they need an armored truck to pick up Milan Zinn at his house?"

Monk grinned. "My guess is that they didn't need the truck for that, but for something else. Just what, these rats don't know."

"What do they know about the white elf?"

Monk shrugged again. "Nothing. It's connected with the mystery, all right." The big chemist strode over to the prisoner who had done the talking. "What was that you said about the elf? Repeat it."

The man said resignedly, "All I know is I heard Smitty talking to somebody on the telephone, and Smitty said that nobody would ever catch on to what this white thing is. At the same time, Smitty got his orders to steal the armored truck and pick up Zinn."

Monk nodded. "What else did you hear mentioned?"

"An island," the man said. "Royal Island, as near as I could overhear it. There was something said about getting on it tomorrow—that would be today."

"You ever hear of Royal Island?" Monk asked Jerry Million.

"Nope."

"What do you figure it means?"

"I don't figure anything," said Jerry, "except that Russel Kinner is behind this mess."

Chapter XII. THE N. E. LIGHT

DOC SAVAGE came back at ten o'clock. The bronze man, never a demonstrative personality, was stoic, wordless, as he listened to Monk relate what they had learned from the two captives.

"Royal Island?" the bronze man said finally.

"The guy told us that was what he overheard," Monk explained.

Doc Savage had a newspaper under his arm, and he unfolded it, indicated an item.

Monk read it, and yelled, "Great grief!"

The newspaper was a small daily published in a town on the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay, some distance from Washington. The item Doc had pointed out was short, humorous, and about a remarkable pig that had been found wandering, and created a turmoil when the local police department tried to collect him. The hog, said the item, now occupied a police-station cell.

Monk grabbed his hat.

"Let's go."

Doc Savage explained to Alec and Joe that an ambulance would arrive later in the day for the two prisoners, but the bronze man did not add that the ambulance would take the pair to the criminal-curing "college" for treatment. Although Alec and Joe had graduated from the "college," they had no knowledge of its real nature.

An hour and a half later, they were in the small-town police station, exhibiting the newspaper and claiming the hog. The desk sergeant was relieved. "Friends, you're welcome to that animal," he declared.

Habeas squealed, stuck out his large ears, and ran circles around Monk.

They left the police station.

"Message?" Doc asked.

Monk nodded. The pig's neck was encircled by what appeared to be a solid metal collar of bright chrome. Monk pressed this, and it flew open. It still looked innocent, merely a hinge and lock. But Monk worked upon the seemingly solid metal, and the hinge portion suddenly separated so that a hollow tube was disclosed. The contents of this seemed to be a rolled sheet of thin paper bearing a message, and a bit of pencil lead which had been used to scribble the message.

Monk shook the tube, then looked in it. He said, "The little capsules are gone."

"What did the capsules contain?" Ham demanded.

"Some stuff that you could put on a knife blade, on a thorn, or even on your fingernails, and scratch a man and make him unconscious," Monk explained. He shook the tube again. "There was also a capsule or two of chemical to stupefy and dull pain."

"To what?"

"You take one of them, and you become kind of semiconscious and insensible to pain." Monk looked grim. "They're handy in case you know you're going to be tortured. If Renny and Johnny took them—"

Ham snapped, "Well, what is in the message, stumble wit? Does it say where they are?"

The missive that had been in the collar had no wasted words.

Elf got us at yacht basin.

N. E. light blinks two five seconds three minute.

Whole mystery centers on Isle Royal tomorrow five.

The writing was erratic, as if it had been executed in the dark, or by a person who was blindfolded.

"Renny wrote that," Monk decided.

"But it doesn't mean a thing," declared Jerry Million.

THE building before which Doc Savage stopped their car—the bronze man had surprised Monk, Ham and Jerry Million by driving on to Norfolk, Virginia, instead of back to Washington—was a ponderous brick structure, impressive for nothing but its rather ancient, somewhat decrepit appearance. Smoke had darkened the outer walls, and usage had worn pits in the stone steps. A sign said "U. S. Coast Guard."

Doc said, "Ham, get marine charts of Chesapeake Bay, and of the Atlantic coastline from Sandy Hook to Cape Hatteras."

Jerry Million interposed, "There isn't any Isle Royal in the Chesapeake, or nearby on the Atlantic coast. I happen to know."

Monk nudged him to admonish silence. A moment later, the bronze man left the car and entered a nearby store. The arrangement of the store was such that they could see the telephone booths from where they sat, and they saw Doc enter one of these.

"There's no Isle Royal around here," Jerry repeated.

Monk said, "Keep your shirt on, and your eyes open. Doc isn't trying to find any island. He's looking for Renny and Johnny."

"But we haven't a chance of finding them. We don't know where they are."

"Want to lay a bet on that?"

Jerry peered at the homely chemist, then grinned faintly. "I don't think so," he said. "I've been seeing enough of this Doc Savage lately that I wouldn't want to bet against him."

Ham returned with a roll of charts. He explained, "I added some charts to Doc's order. In the coast guard office there, they said if we needed any help, to let out a yell."

Doc came out of the telephone booth. Getting into their car, the bronze man seemed somewhat more confident than he had been, although his expression was normally inscrutable enough that it was hard for Monk to tell.

"You learn something good, Doc?" Monk inquired.

Instead of answering, the bronze man unrolled the charts and began following shipping lanes with a fingertip, starting in the vicinity of Washington and progressing in all possible directions.

"Here," he said.

They looked.

Jerry Million, reading from the chart, said, "Gp Fl (2) ev 5 sec ev 20 sec 146 ft vis 18 mi." He scratched his head. "That sounds as complicated as a chemical formula. What in the dickens is it?"

Monk looked blank, then explained: "This designation on the chart means a lighthouse which signals with a group flash of two flashes every five seconds at intervals of twenty seconds. The lighthouse is one hundred and forty-six feet high, and the light is normally visible a distance of eighteen miles."

Ham got it then. "Somewhere in that eighteen miles, Renny can see the lighthouse from where he is being held prisoner."

Monk nodded. "According to his message, the light is northeast of him."

Ham, examining the chart, muttered, "That includes a lot of land and water."

"Water only," Doc Savage said. "Eh?"

"Examine Monk's hog," the bronze man suggested.

Ham did so, and decided from the condition of the pig that the animal had been in water some time previously for a long interval. He announced his surmise, and Doc Savage nodded slightly.

"Habeas apparently swam ashore from a boat," the bronze man said.

"Then Russel Kinner is holding Renny and Johnny on a boat near that lighthouse!" Monk ejaculated.

Doc asked, somewhat strangely, "You are sure Kinner is the villain at the bottom of this?"

"Who else could it be?" Monk countered.

A uniformed coast guard officer dashed out of the headquarters building, peered about, saw their car, and raced toward them. He arrived breathless.

"Mr. Savage, an urgent call for you from Washington. Telephone call."

Doc went back with the officer, both of them running. In something over three minutes, he was back. The bronze man's explanation was cryptic.

"Russel Kinner. Turned up at police station in Washington. Wants us. Says he has the whole story about the white elf."

Ham's jaw fell, and he turned to stare at Monk. "You're a darned poor clairvoyant. You just said Kinner was behind this."

Monk was blank. He scratched his head. Then he climbed into the car and turned on the ignition switch. He said, "I got to see it to believe it. I wonder how fast this thing will take us back to Washington."

The answer was an average of around eighty miles an hour, it developed.

THE normally placid Washington street was full of fire equipment—four pumpers, three ladder trucks,

five emergency trucks—and hose lines, fat with water, were gray snakes everywhere on the pavement. Through treetops, and between two buildings, the illuminated dome of the Capitol was visible whenever not obscured by climbing black smoke.

Doc and his men eventually worked their way through the cordons of police. The police were not in a favorable humor, for it was a precinct station that was burning.

They found the captain in charge, and Doc identified himself.

"That's fine," said the captain grimly. "Maybe you can identify the body."

"What body?"

"Russel Kinner. They are getting the body out now. It's badly burned."

"Did he burn to death?"

"No, he was shot." The officer scowled. "It was the most brazen damned thing that ever happened. A man walked in and said he wanted to see Kinner. When he confronted Kinner, he pulled out a gun and shot Kinner between the eyes."

The captain paused to snap an order at a subordinate, then continued, "I know the bullet got Kinner between the eyes, because he clapped both hands to his forehead, fell backward, and blood shot out of his nose and mouth. Then everything seemed to turn to white fire. I was blinded. Everybody was blinded. It was that infernal white elf again."

"Did anybody see the elf?" Doc asked.

"Nobody saw anything," the police official growled. "The blindness lasted for a little while, and when anybody could see again, the whole place was afire. We barely got out."

A man in white came up, spoke to the official in a low voice, and the other turned to Doc again. "They've got the body. Want to see it?"

Looking at the body did them no good as far as identification was concerned. Looking at it proved nothing, really, except that a man was dead, and that there were handcuffs on the cooked wrists.

"Kinner," the police captain said.

The strange golden flakes in the bronze man's eyes seemed to swirl. "You are sure?"

The official pointed.

"Those are my handcuffs," he said. "I know them positively. They were on Kinner's wrists. Kinner was shot between the eyes. You can see the bullet hole."

"Maybe," Monk suggested, "the man wasn't Kinner in the first place."

The official produced a fingerprint card from his pocket. "These are the prints of the man. I took them myself. I checked them with Kinner's record in the government files. Employees in his governmental department are fingerprinted. He was Kinner, all right. And he is dead."

As they left the vicinity, firemen were raking the ruins. At least one policeman was missing in the blaze, and possibly more, the official in charge of the precinct had announced. Newspaper and newsreel cameramen were thick, and Doc and his men had some trouble evading them.

Chapter XIII. SINISTER SHIP

THAT night there was a ceiling of mouse-colored clouds hanging uniformly at eight thousand feet. Below there was darkness, and above there was silver moonlight. In the east, almost continuous thunder grumbled.

Doc watched the altitude needle register twenty thousand, then held it there, and cut in the robot pilot which flew the plane without further assistance. He manipulated the radio direction finder, located directional beams from radio lighthouse stations, and drew lines on a chart.

Finally he stood, thrust his arms and legs into parachute harness, and strapped on a garment resembling a hunter's vest, except that the pockets were larger, more numerous, and crammed with gadgets of the peculiar type which he preferred to use.

He said, "Open the floor trap, Monk."

Monk, much concerned, growled, "But just because Renny was on a boat down there when he turned my hog loose with a message—that's no sign he's still there. The boat could have moved."

"In that case, you can land and pick me up."

Because air pressure normally made use of the cabin doors awkward, the escape trap had been built into the plane floor for dropping either an object or a man by parachute.

Doc went out headfirst. He did not pull the cord, but kicked and waved his arms until he was descending feetfirst through space.

Overhead, the plane banked, began circling. It would circle until further orders were received. The motors were silenced, the pitch of the propellers turned to make the least noise, so that supersensitive listening devices of the army type would not register the ship at that height.

Out of sight in the cloud mass, Doc jerked the ripcord, and the big mushroom of silk leaped up overhead, wrenched at him. Its distinctive white flash as it opened would not be noticed there, should a plane be in the vicinity. He kept his eyes downward.

His guess had been good. There was an island below, where the chart had said it should be.

Doc hauled down on one set of shrouds, spilling air from the 'chute and sending it to the left, toward the end of the island where, according to the chart, there was a harbor with water deep enough for a boat of some size. After a while, he released the shrouds. Air currents were not only drifting him toward the harbor; they would carry him beyond it, well out into the water, past a headland which would obstruct the view of any lookout in the vicinity of the harbor.

A few hundred feet above the water, Doc twisted out of the harness, hung by one hand. He freed his grip the moment he plunged into the surface, then stroked back to the top. The 'chute had spilled wind and lay flat on the water. He hastily gathered it and pushed the folds beneath the surface.

For the next fifteen minutes, he made no commotion and no noise, but during the interval, carefully crowded the parachute silk into a compact waterlogged bundle. Eventually, when he swam ashore, he carried the bundle with him. He concealed it in a bush.

The bugeye schooner was tied to the end of a long and rickety dock, where it was like a black bug with its antenna laid back.

It took Doc Savage another seven minutes to locate the guard. Because it was infinitely dark, he used a gadget to locate the guard. He pulled the cork out of a small vial, and tossed it away from him, toward the bugeye. The wind was also blowing toward the bugeye. The vial contained an irritant type of gas which, in extremely small quantities such as this, caused no effect except an inclination to sneeze. It was not even noticeable as an odor. In a closed room, however, or crushed in a handkerchief and held to a man's nostrils, it would cause violent agony and nausea.

After a while, the guard sneezed twice, and Doc located him.

The bronze man then retreated a few yards and unlimbered his portable radio. The set was very small. The microphone and some of the apparatus was built into a cup-shaped container which was edged with sponge rubber and fitted over the lips and nostrils, so that a conversation could be carried on without being audible more than a few inches away.

Doc said, "Monk, Ham, you on the air?"

He held the small receiver to his ear, and Monk's small-child voice answered, "We are circling at twenty thousand."

"Continue doing that. I have landed, found black bugeye on which guard is posted. Intend to board it. Listen for further instructions."

He returned the portable radio to the vest affair to which his equipment was attached. The rank salt grass was wet, and as rough as rattail files against his face as he crawled toward the bugeye.

The guard was at the shore end of the dock, and when Doc Savage was quite close to him, there was an interruption. A man climbed up the bugeye main cabin companionway and approached. He had a flashlight that made a white ghost race here and there.

It was Smitty.

He said, "That you sneezing a minute ago?"

"Yeah. Must be catching cold." The guard bummed a cigarette, and blaze of a match when he lighted it splashed yellow light over a rifle he was holding. "Any news?" he asked.

"Just listened to the news over the radio," Smitty said. "Everything came out all right at that police station."

"How do you mean?"

"Russel Kinner was burned to death in the police station. They have identified his body."

The guard laughed, and sounded a little like a witch.

"Any sign of the boss yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," Smitty said.

"We ain't got much time left. Should be sailing, or we'll never contact Isle Royal."

"Orders were to wait here until the boss showed up," reminded Smitty.

"Sure, I know. You know something?"

"What?"

"Maybe the boss is still with Doc Savage."

"Maybe. I wouldn't be surprised." Smitty chuckled.

"On the other hand, maybe there has been some trouble getting back here with the white elf." The guard sounded uneasy.

"I wouldn't worry about that," Smitty said.

Smitty went back aboard the bugeye.

DOC SAVAGE came aboard the bugeye at the bow, using the heavy chain bobstay for a handhold, and hanging there until water ceased dripping from his body. He climbed up then, gripping the safety basket, and finally landing in a crouch beside the anchor-chain winches.

The bugeye was big for that type of vessel, well over a hundred feet, and she was shipshape, well made. The brightwork varnish felt smooth, lines were neatly coiled. Small waves made licking sounds against the hull.

Some faint light came from the forecastle hatch. Doc looked down, saw six men gathered around a table. There was money and dice on the table.

Doc went aft, found a companionway. He peered into it and listened, and there was silence, the blackness of an octopus cave and faint odor of incense. He went down the steps, following a brass rail that was slick and cool, like an eel. It led downward into the low whispering of voices.

The bronze man listened. The words were not distinguishable. Doc waited. It must have been five minutes before he heard a grunt that was easily identified.

Johnny's voice asked, "Something wrong, Renny?"

"Huh-uh," said the voice that had grunted.

Doc Savage unlimbered the radio transmitter-receiver, put the receiver to his ear and buried his mouth in the transmitter cup.

"Monk, Ham," he said. "I am on board the boat. It is a bugeye schooner, over a hundred feet long. Smitty is here. They are waiting for their leader. They plan to sail, as soon as their leader returns with the white elf, to Isle Royal."

In the receiver, Monk's voice was an anxious squeak. "Any sign of Renny or Johnny?"

"That is why I'm calling you," Doc said. "Renny and Johnny are here in the hold of the bugeye, a little beyond the midship section. I have not talked to them, but I have heard them. Listen—look in the map compartment and you will find—"

That was as far as he got. His words had been hardly a breath into the microphone. He had not thought he could be heard. Probably he was not. The person who found him in the darkness must have come upon him by accident.

The first warning was a terrific blow which Doc instinctively dodged, so that it shaved his head. But the blow struck the radio apparatus, and it fell to the floor. Then, as the bronze man closed with his assailant, they trampled back and forth only a few times before the apparatus was crushed underfoot.

IN the plane at twenty thousand, Monk and Ham stared at each other in horror. Enough sound had come through the radio before it was smashed to give them some idea of what had happened.

Jerry Million breathed inward hoarsely. "They grabbed Doc," he said.

Monk faced him. "Get back in the cabin," he ordered.

"Aren't you going to help him?" Jerry barked. "He must be fighting them now!"

"Get back in the cabin," Monk repeated.

Ham clutched Jerry Million's arm, forced him back. The young man went reluctantly. Then Ham returned to the control compartment.

"What was that Doc was saying about the map compartment?" the dapper lawyer demanded.

"Look and see."

There was an envelope. They opened it, found one sheet of paper, and stared at that. They exchanged surprised looks.

Immediately, Monk straightened the plane out of its monotonous banking circle and headed north and east.

Three or four minutes later, Jerry Million came dashing forward.

"You're *leaving!*" he yelled.

"Sit down!" Monk rapped. "We're running this show."

Jerry Million did not argue. Not with words. His right hand grabbed at his clothing and came out with a flat automatic.

"I know you wear bulletproof vests," he said grimly, "so any shooting I do won't be vest shooting."

Monk and Ham looked at him and wondered where he had gotten the gun. The expression on Jerry's face was not pleasant. Ham put his hands up. Monk released the controls, started to get up.

"You fly this thing," Jerry rapped. "You know more about it than I do. But, for your information, I can fly it, if I have to."

"Where'd you get that cannon?" Monk asked.

"Picked it up at the police station." Jerry moved the gun menacingly. "Land this thing close to that island."

"They'll hear us."

"Land it so they won't," Jerry grated.

Monk was impulsive himself, and he knew reckless frenzy when he saw it. He had better land this plane, or something unpleasant would happen to him.

He landed the ship on the sea half a mile from the island, making a dead-stick landing, all motors shut off, and splashing the ship down cautiously so that there was as little noise as possible.

The breeze began carrying them toward the shore.

"That was good," Jerry Million said. Then, when Monk tried to stand up, he shoved the homely chemist back with the gun muzzle. "Sit down!"

"You better use your head before—"

"Shut up. I'm running this."

Ham said, "They'll sure hear the plane land."

Jerry waved his gun. "Get one of the rubber boats in the water. Ham, you do that. How do you inflate the thing?"

Ham unrolled a rubber boat. A small cylinder containing chemicals was attached, and when he turned petcocks on this, there was a hissing commotion and the boat became fat. They pushed it out through the cabin door.

When they rowed ashore, Jerry Million sat in the stern, facing them with his gun. As soon as the bow bumped mud, he stepped out and waded onto the beach.

What followed was quick and simple. Flashlight beams jumped out of the bushes. A gun exploded, and Jerry Million yelled involuntarily and sat down, holding his arm, which had acquired an extra joint. It was his left arm.

Men came out of the bushes. Monk and Ham tried to throw themselves into the water, but it was not a foot deep, and the mud bogged them down when they tried to run, so there was nothing to do but stand there and get hit on the head. They were not hit lightly.

SOMEONE kicking Monk in the face brought the homely chemist back to awareness of his surroundings. As soon as he was mentally organized, he grabbed the kicking foot and endeavored to twist it off the leg to which it was attached. From the agonized howls that resulted, he concluded the foot belonged to Ham, who was himself floundering around trying to regain his senses.

"Where've they got us?" Ham demanded dazedly.

A voice—such a rumble undoubtedly belonged to Renny—said, "On the boat. You better take a look at that fellow's arm."

The boat was moving, too, Monk judged. "What fellow's arm?" he asked.

"The one who was with you."

"Why don't you look at him—?" Monk suggested. "My head is going to fall off if I stand up."

"Turn on that light," Renny boomed, "and you'll find out."

Monk stood and fumbled around in the darkness. He found a light switch, and brought momentarily blinding illumination to the cabin.

His left ankle was chained to a floor timber. Ham was also chained. The cabin was long, a part of the floor had been ripped up to expose the floor timbers, and they were fastened to these. Renny, Johnny, and Jerry Million were nearby. Jerry was very pale, clutching a bandage about his broken arm. His agony was so evident that it aroused Monk's pity.

"How's the arm?" Monk asked him.

Jerry showed his teeth, which were only slightly more white than his face.

"Let me look at it," Monk said. The homely chemist worked over the arm for a while. He had some skill at first aid, but this arm needed more than first aid. He muttered, "I wish Doc was here."

Ham demanded, "Renny, what became of Doc?"

Renny spoke hurriedly and in Mayan, the tongue which only Doc's associates understood.

"Don't ever let on Doc was aboard this boat," Renny said in Mayan. "He got aboard, and I bumped into him in the darkness. I thought he was one of the guards, so I took a swing at him and grabbed him. Doc was using the portable radio at the time. The radio got busted before we found out who we were fighting."

In Mayan, Ham demanded anxiously, "What happened?"

"The noise of the fight attracted attention," Renny explained, still using the Mayan tongue. "Doc had to skip. There was no time to turn us loose. We pretended we had gotten in a fight among ourselves. I chucked the smashed radio through a porthole."

"The same porthole through which you chucked the hog?" Ham inquired.

"Yes. Did the hog get ashore? Is that how you found us?"

"Yes. What became of Doc?"

"I don't know." Renny looked distressed. "Say, there's a guard on deck who can understand this. We better mislead him about this conversation."

In English, Monk demanded loudly, "Say, what are you guys talking about? Why don't you speak somethin' I can savvy."

Ham, also in English, said, "I was just telling Renny that we have no idea where Doc Savage is. I wish we had brought him along."

"Oh," said Monk, who understood Mayan as well as any of them.

A FEW minutes later, two guards descended the companionway from the deck. They carefully unlocked the chain from about Jerry Million's ankle, then lifted him and helped him up the steep companionway stairs to the deck. The three of them disappeared, the companion hatch slamming.

The schooner was plowing through a seaway now. They heard the rattle of spray across the deck planking, like the sound of rabbits running, and the creaking of frames and planking. The quick response of the craft to the seas told them she was not using sail, even if there had not been the drone of powerful motors somewhere aft to indicate the motive power.

Monk said, "Renny?"

"Yes."

"You found out what this is about?"

"They're going after something named the Isle Royal," Renny said. "What that is, I'm not sure."

"It's an ocean liner," Monk said. "It's making a secret trip to America from Europe, and it's due in New

York tomorrow evening."

Renny demanded, "How did you find that out?"

"Doc dug it up. Had it written down in a message he left for us in the map compartment of the plane. We were to do what we could to stop the attack on the *Isle Royal*."

"Why didn't you carry out instructions? What made you land on the island?"

"Jerry Million had a gun."

"Oh."

Monk added, "Here's another fact that was in Doc's message. The *Isle Royal* is bringing a shipment of gold. One of the biggest that ever came over in one lump."

"Holy cow! That explains what they're after, then. Do you know what that white elf is?"

"No, but I do know one thing." Monk's tone was fierce. "The guy back of this has got to be one of two people. It's either old Milan Zinn—"

"Not Zinn," Renny said quickly. "He's a prisoner aboard here."

"Then," said Monk flatly, "it's that bird they just took out of here, Jerry Million."

Ham snorted at this. "Jerry was shot through the arm by these men, you homely dope."

"A guy as slick as the guy at the head of this," Monk said, "would go as far as to pull something like that to make us think he was innocent. It'd give him a better chance to get Doc. Make us trust him."

Ham asked, "Where is his sister?"

"Audine? She's aboard here, too."

"A prisoner?"

"Sure. They got her when they got old Zinn, remember?"

Monk said, "I'll bet one thing. I'll bet the girl isn't mixed up in this."

Ham snorted again.

"You'll always bet on a pretty girl, won't you?" he said.

Chapter XIV. DISASTER IS A WHISTLE

IT was the darkest part of the night—just prior to three o'clock in the morning—when Doc Savage crawled out of the sail locker in which he had been concealed. The locker was situated just aft of the forecastle, and it was stacked with sails in neat canvas sacks, behind which the bronze man had burrowed deeply, although the precaution had not been necessary, because they were using the motors alone.

The motors were very big, and they were laboring hard. The sound, and the nervous racing progress of the boat told him that. This bug-eye type schooner—it was not genuine bug-eye, in that the hull was not made of logs—was of flat-bottomed, streamlined shape, so that it probably had as much speed as could be built into a craft without putting on a special modern hydroplane hull.

Now and then a wave hit the bow planking with the noise of a shotgun. Past the hull there was the steady boiling, like a waterfall sound, of seas rushing past. Once, much earlier, Doc had heard a sea buoy that had passed, mooing like a cow, close to starboard, and the speed of its going had given him an idea that their own pace must be surprising.

This boat, obviously, was a hybrid of the sea. It was built to look like a graceful sailing bug-eye, most picturesque of American ship designs. But it had hull lines and a big engine for speed. Millionaires who were always in a hurry liked their boats built that way.

Inside the sail locker there were certain packages. Doc Savage had put them there. He had gone to Monk and Ham's plane, after their capture, and gotten the stuff. He left the packages in the sail locker, and worked aft.

In the radio room, the operator was wearing a headset and standing slowly rotating the dial of a radio compass. He picked up a monotonous signal—the letters "IR" repeated over and over in continental code—and got the volume to its highest point by rotating the aerial loop, then to the lowest.

He snapped on an inter-communicator loud-speaker, said into it, "Boss, I still get Dave's signal from the *Isle Royal*. It's about north-northeast from our course."

"The boss isn't here," Smitty's voice replied from the intercommunicator. "But I'll tell him."

"Listen," said the radioman. "Those messages to the *Isle Royal* are still being broadcast, and signed Doc Savage."

"The messages ordering the *Isle Royal* to change course?"

"Yes."

"Has the *Isle Royal* answered them?"

"No. But she's received them, and changed her course."

"Fat lot of good that will do. They don't know we've got a man aboard with a secret transmitter, so we can locate the hooker, no matter how many times she changes course."

They both laughed.

Doc Savage did not feel like laughing. He had gone to pains—telling no one about it, because he often kept his actions to himself—to have several powerful commercial radio stations begin calling the steamship *Isle Royal* and transmitting a warning to the vessel to alter its course. He had hoped to get the *Isle Royal* out of danger. Apparently it wasn't working.

He eased back into the darkness. It was with the greatest difficulty that he had learned anything about the *Isle Royal* in the first place. To find that the name *Isle Royal* belonged to a steamer was simple, but first inquiry had indicated the ship was bound for Africa with a cargo of manufactured cloth. But persistent inquiry, and contact with the Federal government, had brought out the truth. The *Isle Royal* was en route to New York with a fabulous cargo of gold. And the ship had orders not to use its radio from the time of sailing, since a prize of such size might easily interest one of the predatory European nations.

This thing had been carefully planned. It was strange that these men had known in the first place that a treasure ship was bound for New York. It had been kept such a secret.

Still, the Federal government had known. And Arnold Haatz and Russel Kinner were both connected

with the government. The information must have leaked.

THE bugeye intercepted the *Isle Royal* exactly at dawn. The *Isle Royal* was a new liner, as dark and streamlined as a Bali maiden. She was not half the size of such seagoing Gargantuas as the *Queen Mary*, but she had speed and comfort and, best of all, she was the right size to operate at a profit. She was not so huge that she could only run the high-pay transatlantic routes and make money; she could be shifted to South America, to the Pacific, to a world cruise, and still turn a penny.

The bugeye came to a standstill. The crew heaved barrels of steel onto deck. Into these they stuffed cotton waste and chemicals. They applied matches. Smoke climbed off the decks of the craft in great billows.

A man ran the flag aloft, upside down. A flag upside down at sea is the signal of distress.

A vessel was burning, apparently, in the path of the *Isle Royal*. There was but one thing she could do. Heave to, and offer a rescue.

The *Isle Royal* lost headway, and blew a reassuring blast or two from her whistle. The sea was very calm.

There was a small porthole in the sail locker. That, and his sensitive ears, had given Doc Savage a good idea of what was going on.

He dug into the sail bags, got out the packages he had brought—five of them—and opened one. The garment he removed from the package was like a suit of coveralls, with an all-enveloping head hood added, made of an utterly white substance.

The white garment was heavy. It gave out a sound like chain mail as he unrolled it. He took off his shoes, coat, and worked into the thing. It fastened with a double zipper, the zippers being made out of the same metal as the garment. He closed these.

Carrying the other four packages, he stepped out boldly and made his way to the empty hold, a little forward of amidships, where the prisoners were held.

There was a guard outside the door. He glanced at Doc Savage.

"You supposed to relieve me while I get my suit?" the guard demanded.

Doc kept his face averted, made his voice gruff. "Go ahead," he said.

The guard departed, completely unsuspecting, not having glimpsed the bronze man's features.

The door had no lock, but there was a heavy bar. The moment the guard was out of sight, Doc threw the bar, pushed the door inward. He snapped on the lights.

"Doc!" Monk exploded.

The bronze man dropped the packages on the floor. "Get into those suits," he directed.

He sank to a knee and went to work on the padlocks that secured the leg irons, using a metal pick. His unusual education had included lock picking, so that he was able to make the metal probe function with almost the speed of a key. Fortunately, the padlocks were simple.

Monk, the first released, wrenched open a package. He exploded. "What the dickens!" He whirled on Doc. "Is this what the white elf is?"

Doc said, "Get them on."

"Is the all-white elf just a man dressed in a coverall garment made of this stuff?"

Monk demanded.

The bronze man nodded. He had Renny free. He went to work on Ham's leg irons, then tackled gaunt Johnny. The motors of the big schooner were silent. Some of the smoke from the smudges on deck had penetrated below, and a man was coughing violently near the stern.

"Close the hoods of these things," Doc ordered.

Doc left the four liberated and white-garbed men in the cabin, went out alone, closed the door, and stood there. Three or four minutes later, the guard came back. He wore a white garment, somewhat more crudely made than that of the bronze man, one that gave the fellow a misshapen, hobgoblin aspect.

"Say, you got a better outfit than mine," the guard said. "Where'd you get it?"

"It's one of the new suits," Doc said, keeping his face turned. "When is it going to happen—?"

"Huh?"

"When are they going to turn the machine on?" Doc asked.

The guard had strapped a wrist watch around one paw of his strange garment, tying it there with string because the regular band was too short. He consulted the timepiece.

"In two minutes and twenty seconds," he said.

Doc hit him then. He struck hard, landing on the jaw which was exposed—the guard's suit was also a closed coverall with zipper fastenings—and dropping the man without any sound other than the single smacking report of the blow. Opening the door into the hold, Doc thrust the unconscious shape into the arms of the astonished Monk who unzipped his hood in wild haste.

"Keep him there," Doc said. "Ham, you are about his build. You take up the job of pretending to be the guard. And all of you be ready to act."

"What goes on?" Ham asked lazily, opening his own hood.

"They have intercepted a steamer, the *Isle Royal*, loaded with a bullion shipment," Doc said. "The idea is obviously to get the bullion."

"Why these suits?"

"That blindness," Doc said, "is made by some kind of a machine. The suits are a shield. I hope so, anyway. I worked out an analysis of the metal from some of the stuff I found on sharp rocks at the Washington airport where the white elf first appeared. I made the suits up in a hurry in my laboratory. If they protect us, we may be able to stop this."

The light came. There were three loud reports, evidently shots from some kind of a signal gun, a moment ahead of the light. They could hear the concussions through their suits.

It was intensely black inside the suits, then it became light. Not light, exactly, for it was sensation of brightness, not any light that enabled them to observe objects. It lasted not more than two minutes, then went off.

Doc stripped open his hood. He got his aids to do likewise.

"The attack on the liner will start now," the bronze man said. "Everyone on the ship will be blinded."

He flung open the door, went out into the passage. "Try the stern part of the boat," he said. "Look everywhere."

"The machine?" Ham demanded.

"Yes."

"What will it be like?"

"Complicated. A little like a radio transmitter, perhaps. Vacuum tubes and coils. Probably a radiating antenna. Small enough to be portable by automobile. A machine that generates an ultrashort wave, either of hertzian or sonic type, possibly of both. A wave that travels through most substances, and causes a paralyzing effect on the visual nerves."

Monk growled, "Let's don't get technical. I'll know the thing if I see it."

As they started down the corridor, Doc gave one last warning.

"Keep away from fire," he ordered. "These suits are as inflammable as thermit, the stuff they put in incendiary bombs."

Monk nodded. He was chemist enough to see that Doc's feat in analyzing the metal of which the protective armor was made was not superhuman—the bronze man had had several clues to follow in his research.

Doc swerved to the left, mounted a few steps up a companionway and looked out. The bugeye was warping up alongside the steamer.

The *Isle Royal* had come to a complete stop. A landing stage had been put out from a cargo port for greater facility in taking the supposed rescued victims out of the lifeboats. The bugeye was making for this.

As the bugeye came alongside the landing stage, a man leaped the gap to the stage, carrying a light line. Another followed, and a third. They were clumsy in their white suits. The light line was attached to a heavier, and they hauled this into the liner and made fast somewhere inside. Other lines followed.

Doc said, "We will have to work fast. Find that infernal machine."

What they found, instead, was an alert guard. They were charging down a dark corridor when the lights came on brightly. A man, evidently a watchman, stood at the far end of the passage.

The lookout was holding a rifle. He did not try to use it. Instead, he whirled, scrambled out on deck.

Renny rumbled, "I can catch that guy!" and lunged forward.

A whistle blew. A whistle on the boat, and it blasted three times, then three times again. Its gobbling echoes, crashing back from the wall-like hull of the steamer, made an uproar.

Doc shouted, "Close the hoods of these suits!" But he was not heard. His men were running. Monk was yelling something inarticulate and fierce, the way he liked to yell during excitement, and that, with the roaring whistle, drowned out the bronze man's instructions, or at least made them go unnoticed.

So that when the light came on, they were trapped. All but Doc. He got his hood closed.

The blinding light came quickly, lasted about a minute, then went off. The bronze man stripped open his hood. His four men were reeling in the corridor, Ham down on his knees, so that all were quite helpless.

Doc deserted them.

HIS desertion was not complete. He did retreat, but it was only to the nearest cabin door. He went through it, waited. In his right palm, which was cupped, there were half a dozen of the little anaesthetic grenades which, when thrown, would break and release a vapor that would bring quick unconsciousness to anyone who breathed the stuff.

He pegged two of the anaesthetic grenades into the corridor. Through the crack of the partially opened door, he saw Monk, Ham, Renny, Johnny, all go down.

Motionless on the floor, they would be less likely to be shot when found, Doc hoped. Certainly, they would be spared the misery that was caused by the blinding emanation from the machine, electrical or sonic, or whatever it was.

The illness that the thing caused undoubtedly came from the distressing effect upon the sensitive nerve centers of the ears and eyes. It was something akin to seasickness.

After some shouting on deck, and cautious bellowing down a companionway, a man descended with a rifle. He was followed by others, including Smitty.

Smitty swore. "Damn them, they must have broken out of the hold where we had 'em locked. But where'd they get these suits?"

"What'll we do with them?"

"Throw them in with the girl, old Zinn and the girl's brother," Smitty ordered.

A door—the same door in which had stood the guard who had discovered them and brought disaster—was opened. Doc's four aids were tossed inside.

Smitty indicated a white-robed man.

"You stay in there with 'em," he ordered. "I'll be back later."

The designated man entered the cabin, closing and locking the door. The others went away, hurrying out on deck to take part in the boarding and rifling of the *Isle Royal*.

Doc Savage left his cabin and ran to the cabin which held the prisoners.

"Open up," he growled, imitating Smitty's voice.

"What's matter?" asked the guard.

Still using a remarkable likeness of Smitty's tone, Doc said, "Open the door, damn it. I've got another prisoner for you to watch."

As soon as the door started to swing, Doc hit it, flinging the panel back and following it. He landed upon the startled guard. He used both fists, very hard, for a while. Then he looked about the cabin.

His four men were there.

Jerry Million, his arm bandaged, was handcuffed by his left wrist to the stanchion of a bunk. In the adjacent bunk, her wrist fastened to the same stanchion by chain and padlocks, was his sister.

Old Milan Zinn was fastened, by the simple expedient of having wrists handcuffed to ankles, around a bunk leg. His position was twisted, cramped.

Doc dropped beside Zinn. "Can you hear me?"

The bizarre old man—his red-brown trousers and pine-green shirt had lost none of their loud color by being bedraggled—spoke in a perfectly rational voice.

"I'm not sick," he said. "The vibratory wave does not affect me as much as the others, because I have experimented a lot with it."

"You invented the thing?" Doc demanded.

"Yes, that's right. I started working on it years ago, when I was as blind as a bat. I hoped to develop a kind of ultrastrong light which would enable me, and people afflicted with my kind of eye trouble, to see. After I got my vision back, I continued—"

Doc interrupted, "Where do they keep the machine that makes the wave?"

"In my laboratory."

"This bugeye is your boat?"

Zinn nodded. "The laboratory is aft. The whole back part of the boat. The door at the end of this corridor. It leads into a cabin. In the back of the cabin is the door to the laboratory."

DOC flung out into the corridor, raced along it, and shoved open the door at the end. The cabin was shabby. A locker door hung open, and the interior bulged with Milan Zinn's garish clothing. One bulkhead was lined with bookcases gorged with scientific tomes. There was a gun cabinet opposite, but it contained nothing but an automatic shotgun and several boxes of shells.

Doc crossed to the other door. It was locked. He banged on it.

"Yeah?" said a muffled voice from within.

Doc imitated Smitty again, said, "Let me in."

"What's the idea?"

"Let me in, blast you! This is important!"

"Orders were that nobody was to come in here," the voice said.

Doc, making his voice as angry as he could and still hold the Smitty imitation, snarled, "The boss sent me! Open up!"

That was a mistake. A small slip, but it was almost fatal. A rifle crashed in the other cabin, the lead clouting a palm-sized fragment out of the door panel.

Lunging backward and to the side, Doc realized what his error had been. The boss couldn't have sent anyone. The boss was in that cabin.

He veered left, got to the gun cabinet and scooped out the shotgun and a box of cartridges. He stuffed shells in the iron rump of the piece as he ran. He gained the door, then the corridor, a little ahead of the rifle bullets that were ripping into the cabin, searching.

There was a fire ax on the corridor bulkhead. He scooped that off, reached a companionway and went up on deck.

An instant later, the signal whistle began blaring out its three short blasts, repeating them in succession.

That time, the blinding light lasted for fully three minutes. Doc had the hood of the protective suit over his face, and his objective was definitely in mind. He found the rail, shoved along it, keeping against the smooth varnish.

When he came to a rope, he slashed with the fire ax. He could tell, from the force with which the rope parted, that it was a mooring line.

The blinding light went off. He wrenched open his hood, got the two other mooring lines in rapid succession.

A man yelled at him and started to use a rifle. Doc fired the shotgun. The man doubled over, grabbed his ankles.

Whirling, Doc vaulted over the deck house, got down low, and dived for the nearest hatch. There was a long flight of steep steps that were greasy and ended in the engine room.

He started the motors, shoved the clutches into full speed ahead. The bug-eye surged ahead. Immediately, the engine room telegraph began jangling. Doc ignored it. He battened the hatch from below. He locked the doors in the fore and aft bulkhead.

He judged that no more than half a dozen men had been on the bug-eye when he chopped the mooring lines free of the *Isle Royal* landing stage.

Later, when they began to drive rifle bullets at the locks of the engine-room doors, the bronze man made a statement. He made it in a voice that was probably audible all over the vessel.

"In ten minutes," he said, "I am going to set fire to the boat—unless that infernal machine is put in a lifeboat and cast adrift, where I can see it through a porthole."

He was cursed roundly, but the profanity was uneasy.

MILAN ZINN and Jerry Million were lying, blinded and entirely helpless, in the cabin where Doc had left them, when the door was slammed open and men entered.

"Bring them into the laboratory," a voice growled.

The voice shocked Jerry Million. He cupped his hands around his eyes in a vain, painful effort to get some kind of vision.

"I . . . I thought you were dead," he gulped.

Someone kicked him.

"Bring them both," the voice said. It was ugly.

Milan Zinn and Jerry Million were unlocked from the steel that held them, and hauled into the laboratory.

Smitty's voice asked, "Which one would be best, boss?"

The ugly voice, the one that had surprised Jerry, said, "I think Zinn. Savage would probably come nearer trusting him."

"You think he knows Zinn isn't behind this?" Smitty inquired.

"Sure he knows it," the other snapped. "He knows more than we ever thought he did. He figured out the whole thing, and even made a chemical-and-metal shield that was effective. If you don't think he knows I'm back of it, you're crazy."

"But that was a neat trick you pulled to fool him, chief."

The leader swore. He grabbed Milan Zinn's shoulder.

"Listen, old man," he snarled. "Ten minutes ago, you didn't have a chance of getting out of this alive. But now you have. You do one thing for us, and we'll turn you loose."

Milan Zinn stood very still. Then he put out his hand, and found a table. His fingers moved, apparently caressing the edge of the table nervously. He had been blind for many years of his life, and he still retained the extremely developed senses that blindness had created. He knew where he stood. Knew the exact spot in the laboratory.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Savage is holed up in the engine room, and is going to set the boat afire if we don't give up," the other said fiercely.

Milan Zinn showed his teeth. "From what I have heard of Doc Savage, he will do exactly what he says."

The other cursed. "I know it. Here is what you do. I've got a gun, and I'll give it to you. You go to the engine-room door. Tell Savage who you are. He'll let you in when you pretend we are about to find you."

Milan Zinn stiffened.

"You mean," he said, "that I am to get in the engine room, then kill Doc Savage?"

"That's it."

For an interval, fully a minute, there was silence. Milan Zinn's breathing was distinctly audible.

"Come on, old man," the leader said. "You do this, and we'll let you live."

Milan Zinn slowly put his hands to his eyes.

"For more than twenty years," he said, "I was completely blind. Blindness that comes at birth is bearable. But when a man has seen all that is beautiful in the world, then has to step into blackness, it is a thing more awful than death. But to see again afterward—there is nothing quite as wonderful as that."

"What the hell? Why the speech?" The other man was irritated. "What's that got to do with it?"

Milan Zinn said, "The sight was returned to my eyes through the wizardry of a great surgeon who had developed a new operative method. I am not the only blind man who has been able to see again because of that surgeon."

"Come on, old man. We're wasting time," the leader growled.

"That surgeon's life is worth many of mine," Milan Zinn said. His voice lifted desperately. "And the surgeon happens to be Doc Savage."

Old Milan Zinn took his desperate chance then, and lunged for the platform which held his machine. He knew instinctively that the machine would be there—not only was there no other place for it, but he could hear the humming of the apparatus.

The leader yelled a warning. And as he yelled, Jerry Million was upon him. Jerry had taken a chance, realizing that old Milan Zinn was going to do something desperate. He flung toward the leader's voice, and got hold of the fellow.

They careened, the two of them tightly locked, to the right, and landed against a switchboard. They fought there, grinding their weight against meters and switches.

Jerry heard the snarl of sparks, felt the convulsing leap of electricity through his uninjured arm. Then his foe became suddenly convulsed, began screaming.

Heat, utterly searing heat, smashed like something solid against Jerry's face. He lunged backward, letting the man in his arms drop.

The arcing sparks from short-circuited switches had evidently ignited the highly inflammable metal of the suit the leader had been wearing.

By that time, old Milan Zinn had turned the machine on, and there was whining and spluttering, and the light that was utterly sickening in its violence—it lasted a long time, at least four minutes—and afterward they could hear the screaming of the men on deck, but there was no more sound from the leader in the laboratory, only awful heat.

Milan Zinn said, "The floor and walls and ceiling of this place are shielded with steel. I guess there is not much danger that he set the boat afire when he burned."

He sounded satisfied.

Jerry said, "That man—the leader—was Russel Kinner."

"Yes, Russel Kinner," Milan Zinn agreed.

"But Kinner burned to death in a police-station fire in Washington yesterday."

Milan Zinn snorted.

"Kinner," he said, "was clever."

Chapter XV. BREAD ON THE WATERS

THE United States coast guard plane landed on the sea at ten o'clock. A newspaper plane that had been trailing landed almost immediately afterward, and cameramen scrambled out on deck and began taking pictures of the *Isle Royal*.

Monk said, "Wait until they see Audine. They'll have something to take pictures of."

Doc asked, "She is all right?"

"Sure. Worried about her brother, is all. But she needn't worry. That guy is too tough for a broken arm to do him any harm."

The bronze man frowned at the newspaper plane. He did not like publicity.

"Are the prisoners all tied up?" he asked.

"Yep. Renny and Johnny are watching them."

Doc nodded. "And did you find the man who used the radio to direct the bugeye to the steamer?"

Monk grinned. "One of the crew. I got him."

"How did you find him?"

"I asked questions," Monk said, "of that bird, Smitty."

Doc Savage eyed Monk's large set of knuckles. There was not much skin left on them. "I hope Smitty is not seriously damaged," he said.

"He'll live long enough to get electrocuted," Monk said cheerfully.

Doc's gaze moved to the newspaper plane, and he frowned.

"Before the newspapermen get aboard," he said, "we had better get the rest of the story from Milan Zinn."

Milan Zinn had the facility of telling much with few words. He had developed the light—it was not light, but a combination of micro-length radio waves and sonic vibration in ultrashort wave lengths, as Doc had surmised—while experimenting in hopes of finding some method of bringing sight to certain types of blind. He had continued his experiment after the operation had returned his own sight.

"I did not see any particular value that the 'light' might have, at first," he explained. "Then it occurred to me that the thing might be good for quelling riots in prisons. It would beat tear gas. It would make the convicts as sick as dogs. So I went to the Federal prison department with the idea of selling it."

"That is where you met Russel Kinner?"

"He was the man I talked to," Zinn said. He paused thoughtfully. "I should have known from his manner that he was a crook."

Jerry Million said, "Kinner was a slick devil."

"Yes, he decided to grab the 'light' and turn crook on a big scale," Zinn agreed. "He got a gang together. He kept consulting me, and visited me on this boat. He seemed very interested, but I thought he was only considering buying the 'light' for the government. Then, when he had his gang together, he grabbed me, my boat and everything."

"And killed Haatz," Jerry added.

"Yes, Haatz worked in the same government office," Zinn said. "Kinner thought Haatz suspected what was afoot. Anyway, Haatz knew about the 'light,' and he had to be killed for that reason."

Jerry Million said, "That's why Kinner tried to kill me, too. When he called me to his office that time about a job, he thought I was a crook who would make a good member of his gang. When he found out

different, he got rid of me."

Doc said, "Kinner discovered you leaning against a car in which he was sitting with Mr. Zinn, did he not?"

"Yeah. Must have thought I was spying on him. That's probably when he decided to kill me."

Milan Zinn finished, "The government had been informed that this shipload of gold was to come to America, and Kinner must have had methods of learning of the fact. Probably he thought something of the sort would be just the kind of a haul he wanted, so he made deliberate plans."

Monk scratched his head.

"What gets me," said the homely chemist, "is who died in that police-station fire? The body was identified as that of Kinner, but it wasn't, obviously."

Doc said, "There was a policeman missing after the fire."

Monk's jaw fell. "Oh! So they arranged the identification, did they? That poor cop!"

DOC SAVAGE held a consultation with his four men before they received the newspaper reporters and cameramen. He began with a flat statement.

"We do not want publicity," he said.

Ham nodded, but added, "I fail to see how we are going to avoid it."

"Milan Zinn and Jerry," Doc suggested.

"Eh?" Ham was puzzled.

"Give Zinn and Jerry all the credit," Doc suggested. "Keep in the background ourselves."

Monk, who was distinctly the extrovert type, and who furthermore liked to see credit go where it was due, particularly when it was due him, emitted a groan.

"But, Doc, we cracked this thing," the homely chemist said. "You solved it. You made those suits. You had them in a crack when you threatened to set the boat afire. All Zinn and Jerry did was save them the trouble of surrendering."

The bronze man seemed not to hear the interruption.

"We do not need publicity," he said. "And Jerry Million can use it. It may help him get a job."

"But can we keep out of it?"

Doc said, "I will talk the matter over with the coast guard, and see if it cannot be arranged."

To Monk's disgust, it could be arranged, and was.

JERRY MILLION got a job the next Friday. It was a good job, appropriate for the hero who shared honors with Milan Zinn for having thwarted the robbery of a bullion ship at sea and solved the mystery of the all-white elf.

His sister visited Doc Savage in the New York skyscraper headquarters. She was elated.

"I'm delighted for Jerry." She took the bronze man's hands impulsively. "He's terribly embarrassed,

though. He feels that he accomplished nothing, actually."

"Jerry is actually doing us a favor, bearing the brunt of the publicity," Doc assured her.

"Well, he's doing himself one, too," Audine said earnestly. "Here, look. He doesn't know this yet, but read it. I think it explains itself."

The newspaper item was a confession. A confession by a young man named Earl Graves, stating that his own cowardice had been responsible for the laboratory fire which had disgraced Jerry Million. Jerry, said Earl Graves in the confession, had not even been present in the laboratory at the inception of the trouble, but had appeared later.

In the confession, Earl Graves said:

I was Jerry Million's close friend, and we were both in love with the same girl. The girl, Jerry believed, loved me. So he took the blame and disgrace for the fire, for my cowardice. I was coward enough to let him do it.

Audine took the newspaper back and folded it and said, "Human nature is a strange thing, isn't it? Here is that young fellow, Earl Graves, who kept back and let Jerry sacrifice his life and self-respect as long as Jerry was an object of public contempt. But the moment Jerry becomes a hero, Earl Graves confesses the truth."

Doc asked, "How will Jerry and the girl come out?"

"She is Lucille Gavett. Remember I told you about her?" Audine smiled quickly. "She is in love with Jerry. She had told him so, I've just discovered. But Jerry kept away from her while he was in disgrace."

"That seems to make everything end very favorably," the bronze man suggested.

Probably everybody was pleased but Ham, and he was not displeased until that evening, when he discovered Monk had dated Audine, practically snatching her from under his nose.

THE END