THE RUNNING SKELETONS

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

? Chapter I. DARK AND SCARED
? Chapter II. ABOUT A BRONZE MAN
? Chapter III. THE INDIGNANT MAN
? Chapter IV. TROUBLE HERE AND THERE
? Chapter V. WHITE RAINCOAT
? Chapter VI. SHE WASN'T FOOLING
? Chapter VII. WHO HAS THE DOG?
? Chapter VIII. THE MUMBLING MAN
? Chapter IX. THE FRIGHTFUL DOG
? Chapter X. THE RUSH WEST
? Chapter XI. SETUP
? Chapter XII. SAVING MONK
? Chapter XIII. SKELETONS
? Chapter XIV. IMMEDIATE PROBLEM
? Chapter XV. THE SKELETON TREATMENT
? Chapter XVI. FROM BEHIND SILK

Scanned and Proofed
by Tom Stephens

Chapter I. DARK AND SCARED

LINCOLN WILSON WASHINGTON SMITH was an amiable colored gentleman who was baggage attendant and porter on a passenger train running from Chicago to New York.

He had a kind heart.

He liked dogs.

He didn't scare easy, this last being a part of his character which contributed no little to the subsequent mystery which came out of the first-of-the-week run of the limited train.

The train was one that left Chicago late in the evening and got into New York City the following afternoon, making about a twenty-hour schedule, which was good time. The train carried two lounge cars, coaches, sleepers, drawing-room cars, baggage coaches—and Lincoln Wilson Washington Smith, who was porter.

Duty of the porter was to put bags aboard, generally “butter up” the passengers so they felt good toward the railroad and shelled out fancy tips, and kid along with the soldiers who were crowding the trains these days, as well as occasionally rescue a girl passenger from a sailor.

Feeding dogs was not among his duties.

He put the dog-carrying case aboard, himself, in Chicago, and he noticed it particularly at the time because carrying large animals, even in cases, was against the rules in the coaches.

A dollar fixed up everything, though, as far as getting the dog-carrying case aboard the train. The young man who had brought the case contributed the dollar, together with a wink, and that fixed that. Anyway, the young man had a drawing room ticket, and drawing-room passengers get a little extra consideration.

There was a dog in the case—at least there was a dog's weight in the case, and a couple of disgruntled dog barks.

The case was about Airedale-dog size. It was covered with black leatherette and had ventilation apertures covered with black wire screen. The construction of the dog-carrying case was such that it was impossible to tell anything much about what kind of an animal was inside, even by putting an eye to the ventilating grills.

The case was not locked.

The young man carrying the case was a tall young man with a tan overcoat and tan hat, the latter yanked down over his eyes. The porter accidentally rubbed against him and felt something hard in the young man's pocket which he—the porter—took to be a flask or a pint; but this proved to be a bad guess as to the nature of the hard object, as was afterward evident.

For a young man who was as terrified and puzzled as he later proved to be, he showed very little of the emotion which was lashing him.

The young man sat, white-faced, in his compartment for some time, then got up and went back to the bar. But he stopped and spoke to the porter.

“Porter,” he said. “Porter, for five dollars could you start watching something and not stop watching it?”

“For how long, suh?”

“For long enough for me to go to the bar and get to the stage where I can flap my wings.”

“I sho' could,” said the porter.

So Lincoln Wilson Washington Smith sat in the compartment and began to feel sorry for the dog in the case.

THE unseen dog in the case, from the beginning, had shown signs of uneasiness and discomfort, stirring around a great deal and giving small, complaining barks now and then. Now that the man was gone this grew worse.

The dog jumped about, barked, whined, made plaintive noises, pitiful noises. Noises that soon began to wring the heart of Smith, the porter.

This went on for some time. “Nice doggie,” Smith said, and wondered if the dog wanted water, and looked around for a dish in which to give him some water, but there was none.

The train had been booming along on its way for some time now and it had reached the first of the infrequent stops which it made between Chicago and New York.

“A hamburger!” yelled Smith, the porter.

That was the answer. The dog was hungry, and a hamburger would shut him up, and there was a lunch "quickie" near the railroad platform in the next town, where the porter could dash over and get a hot one. After all he'd have to pay for the hamburger, of course; but then he was making five dollars out of this deal and he couldn't stand the whining and carrying-on the dog was doing.

Lincoln Wilson Washington Smith got off and secured the hamburger without incident, except that he got stuck fifteen cents for it, and he did some squawking about that.

He made a quick trip and got back in the car before the train began moving again. The train started just as he was entering the compartment and, taking the dog case off the floor, where it had been resting, and placing it on one of the seats.

He opened the dog case.

His idea was to stick the hamburger inside with a quick gesture. One could never tell when a dog might bite, particularly a discontented pooch, and this one certainly sounded discontented.

But there was a little accident—the engineer goosed the throttle and gave the train a hell of a yank at just that point—and the case toppled off the seat, the lid fell open, and the dog tumbled out.

Or what had been in the case making the sounds and movements, and having the weight of a dog—*it* tumbled out.

THE scream of Lincoln Wilson Washington Smith was heard all through the car, where it made everyone jump and started three babies to bawling. Heads turned toward that end of the car. Due to the construction of the car, only a few passengers saw Smith break out of the room. The compartments were at the far end of the car, with an aisle on what happened to be the north side of the car, the direction the train was traveling.

Those passengers who saw could tell that Smith had had a little accident.

Smith had tried to leave the compartment like a bullet, his coat pocket had got caught on the door handle, it had yanked the door shut, and the closing door had pinched Smith's coat and held him hung. It didn't hold him long. He tore half the tail out of his coat and took wings.

No movie director staging a comedy exit of a scared man out of a graveyard ever got more action. If Smith's feet touched the car floor at all they didn't remain there long enough to be visible.

He reached the car door and left the train with a blind, flying leap.

The train was traveling fairly fast now, and Smith hit the roadbed hard and broke a leg and was knocked senseless.

Chapter II. ABOUT A BRONZE MAN

IN stopping the train to pick up Smith, the engineer did the halting job with another of those terrific examples of slam-bang carelessness which had started the whole thing. The train halted as if it had run into something as solid as Gibraltar.

The young man who had brought the dog-carrying case aboard was sitting in the bar, at a round table only slightly larger than his hat, and the shock dumped his Scotch and soda in his lap.

He stood up and cursed the engineer, the railroad and Scotch whiskey. Everyone else was cursing, so his maledictions got no special attention. He sat down again.

Some of the passengers climbed off the train to see what had happened.

The young man remained where he was.

There was some shouting, then those who had got off jumped back on. The engineer got the train started again, trying to break everybody's necks in the act.

A passenger who had got off sat down beside the young man.

“What,” asked the young man, “was it? An earthquake?”

“A man.”

“He must have been braced to stop the train like that.”

“It didn't hit him.”

“No?”

“He jumped off.”

“Remembered he'd forgot something, I suppose?”

“He was the porter.” The passenger scratched his head. “Poor devil has a broken leg and a fractured skull, or something. Anyway, he was incoherent. Kept muttering about a dog—”

The young man jumped. He looked as if he'd found he was sitting in some water. “Dog?” he said.

“Yes.”

“And it was a porter off this train?”

“That's right He—”

“A tall, kind of hungry-looking porter?”

“That's him. He—”

“Excuse me,” the young man said, and got up and headed for the compartment where the dog-carrying case had been placed.

THE young man was wearing composure on his face like a mask, just as he had been wearing it all along, to hide inner terror; but now the mask was made of thinner stuff and a little of what he felt showed through.

He took a gun out of his pocket. The gun was the object the porter had thought was a flask or a pint. He carried the gun under his hat, and held his hat close to his chest. He walked with care and tried to look all directions at once.

Without trouble he reached the compartment. The porter's coat tail was wedged in the door and he had a little trouble forcing the door open for that reason. People in the car stared at him curiously—those who

knew the porter had popped out of this compartment—but no one did anything.

The young man got into the compartment in a hurry, quickly, ducking inside.

He was there three or four minutes.

Coming out, he was carrying the dog case, holding it down at arm-length, casually. A coat was over his other arm, covering the gun that was still in his hand.

He worked his way forward slowly and carefully until he came to the office car.

The office car was a special idea on the limited, one of the reasons the railroad soaked you twenty dollars extra fare for riding the train from Chicago to New York. Here, for the use of passengers, there were desks, typewriters and stenographers, all free. There was an information clerk, a young woman, to give you data on time tables, hotels, plane reservations, shows and so on.

The young man with the dog-carrying case went on through the car. At the opposite end he encountered a locked door.

"Mail coach and baggage cars ahead," said the young woman information clerk.

The young man nodded.

He looked as if he were ill.

Plainly, because he could not think of anything else to do, he sank in the chair beside the information girl's desk.

"Look," he said. "Look, I've got to get to a man named Doc Savage."

THERE was interest and curiosity in the reception girl's eyes. She was not a fool; she could see there was something amiss. And she began to realize, slowly, that the young man was full of writhing terror. Fear was in him like snakes.

"In New York," the girl said. "Yes, his address is in New York City. The tallest building in the midtown section. The eighty-sixth floor."

The young man looked at her. He wet his lips. "You don't know me. My name is Tom Lewis—Thomas Maurice Lewis, and I'm a traveling salesman for the Admiration Radio Cabinet Co., manufacturers of snazzy cabinets for radios. Around the Admiration Radio Cabinet Co. office they would tell you I'm the office humorist, and very funny."

"Tom Lewis," the girl said. "Yes?"

Tom Lewis licked his lips grimly. "Funny man, that's me. Fired five times by old Walt Buxton because of my practical jokes, and then hired back because I'm a good salesman." He showed his teeth fiercely. "A good, loud-mouthed salesman, that's me. But don't forget that name—Tom Lewis. And the company—Admiration Radio Cabinets."

"Chicago?"

"Gosh, no! Way south of there in the Ozarks. Sort of an unusual factory out in the country with a little town of its own called Admiration City."

He went silent. The words seemed to have stuck in his throat.

The girl, to break him loose from his tension, pointed at the dog-carrying case and said, “Is that one of your samples?”

Tom Lewis seemed to shake a little at all his joints.

“What do you know about Doc Savage?” he asked.

The girl watched him intently. “So you're in trouble?”

“I—”

“Don't,” said the girl, “start telling me about it. I don't want to hear it because I've got troubles of my own dealing with the pot-stomached Romeos and big butter-and-egg men who seem to think a train secretary should swoon on their necks.”

Tom Lewis complained, “All I wanted was to ask you about Savage.”

“O. K. Ask!”

“You know him?”

“Of course not!”

“You knew where he could be found?”

“I didn't say he could be found there. That was the location of his headquarters that I gave you. A lot of people know that. It's part of my business to know such things.”

Tom Lewis sat biting his lips for a while. “Look, you seem to have sense,” he said. “What do you know about Savage?”

“I saw him once from a distance,” the girl said. “I dreamed about him for about a week after that. He affects you that way.”

“I don't care if he is a woman-killer. I want to know—”

“You've got the wrong idea—at least, partly wrong. I understand the girls have to take it out in looking.”

“I want to know—”

“You want to know whether his business is righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth? Correct; that's what they say. It sounds screwy, and probably it is screwy, or maybe it just sounds crazy when you call it a business. Anyway, that's right.”

Tom Lewis bit his lips some more. “How do you contact him?”

“Just contact him,” the girl said. “That's all I know.”

For a moment Tom Lewis looked down at the dog-carrying case.

“I want you,” he said, “to fix up a shipping tag I can put on this case.”

“Who to?”

“I want this case to get into the hands of Doc Savage,” Tom Lewis explained.

The girl riffled through the contents of her desk and came up with a regulation shipping tag which she filled out. She started to tie it to the case, but Tom Lewis hurriedly picked it from her fingers and tied it on himself. The girl undoubtedly realized he didn't want her to touch the case, but she made no comment.

She leaned back and watched the young man curiously. Tom Lewis wasn't hard to look at, but the terror so obviously within him made him a little repellent, as if he had warts.

Because she was watching him she saw his reaction when the red-headed man went past.

The red-haired man was well-dressed, but not sufficiently overdressed to be conspicuous. His hair was not a spectacular red, his suit was a discreet dark-blue, his tie and shirt subdued. He was not outstanding.

The red-headed man walked past without apparently noticing Tom Lewis.

Without moving a muscle, without stirring anything but his eyes, and those only slightly, Tom Lewis managed to look as if he had been stabbed dead.

The red-headed man came to the locked door, tried it, looked disappointed, said, “Where is the dining car, please?”

“The other direction,” the girl said. “Seven cars back.”

The red-headed man went away. Tom Lewis sat there more dead than alive from terror.

The train secretary-information clerk tried to think of something. She was getting a little scared herself. She didn't know what was afoot, but she wanted no part of it.

“Look,” she said, “why don't you telephone him?”

Tom Lewis stared at her wordlessly.

“Telephone Doc Savage from the train,” the girl explained patiently. “You can do that, you know.”

Four or five times Tom Lewis moved his lips soundlessly, then he managed to ask, “How?”

“Radio,” the girl said. “Radio and telephone. Regular service.”

Tom Lewis, shaking a little, said thickly, “Get Doc Savage on the telephone for me, and quick, because I don't think I'm going to be alive ten minutes from now.”

Chapter III. THE INDIGNANT MAN

THE radio contact from train to land-line station, and thence by regulation long distance to New York City, was made, and the telephone rang in the eighty-sixth-floor Doc Savage headquarters.

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett—Monk—Mayfair took the call.

There were two outstanding things about Monk Mayfair. First, he was one of the world's industrial chemists, although his head did not look as if it contained room enough for a spoonful of brains; and he was also a man who would be a sure bet in any homely-man contest.

Second, today Monk Mayfair was very indignant.

“Yah?” he said into the telephone. “What you bothering us for?”

“This,” said a distant voice, “is a limited en route from Chicago to New York, and we have a call from a passenger to Doc Savage.”

The voice was feminine, and ordinarily Monk was a push-over for anything in skirts. But today his temper was very bad.

“Yah?” he said. “Can'tcha call some other time?”

“This,” said the girl on the train, “is important.”

“Yah.”

The girl on the train now became indignant herself and shouted, “Yah, you little shrimp! Yah, yah, yah, it's important! Now get a civil tongue in your head and put Doc Savage on the wire.”

Startled, Monk stared at the telephone. He hadn't been called a little shrimp before. He'd been called many things, but not that. Although not a tall man, Monk was a very big one, being almost as tall as he was wide. His small, childlike voice had doubtless led the girl to deduce he was a little shrimp.

“I'll take the call,” Monk growled.

“We want Mr. Savage—”

“I'll take the call!”

said Monk in a voice that must have scared the birds off the telephone wires. “Now put your party on.”

“Who are you?”

“I'm the guy who is talking—”

“Listen, simple-wits, if you—”

“O. K.,” Monk said. “O. K., sister. I'm one of Doc Savage's associates and my name is Monk Mayfair. Now, if—”

“Hold the wire, please,” said the girl. She evidently consulted Tom Lewis, because he took over the other end of the conversation.

He got to the point.

“My name,” he said, “is Tom Lewis, and I'm in trouble. I want to talk to Doc Savage.”

“Everybody is in trouble. I've got plenty of my own,” said Monk disagreeably. “And why don't you talk to the police? They get paid nice fat salaries for taking care of the citizens. Why not let them earn it?”

“This,” said Tom Lewis, “is a little beyond the police.”

The grimness, the terror in Tom Lewis' voice took some of the acid out of Monk.

“What's the hitch?” Monk asked.

“I must talk to Mr. Savage—”

In a much more patient and reasonable tone, Monk said, “That is out of the question right at this point, I am afraid. Doc is working in his laboratory on some special government stuff and can't be interrupted. The experiments he's doing will go to pot if he's interrupted in the next hour, and the president himself couldn't get a telephone connection. I'm one of his assistants. You'll have to talk to me or make an appointment for later—and then you'll have to talk to me, anyway because I'm the guy who decides who shall talk to Doc.”

“All right,” Tom Lewis said. “Listen!”

APPARENTLY he did not quite have his words organized, or wanted to hold back some—and wished to decide what to hold back—because he was talking to a subordinate of Doc Savage rather than Doc himself.

“I'm coming to New York right now,” Tom Lewis said, “to see Doc Savage.”

“Yes?”

“But,” said Lewis, “they've followed me.”

“Who followed you?”

“I don't know their names. But they are the men who are after the dog.”

“What dog?”

“The dog in the carrying case I have with me.”

“This is making sense,” Monk told him, “about as fast as a woodpecker drills a hole through a rock.”

“The men,” said Tom Lewis, “are trying to keep me from reaching Savage.”

“Why?”

“Because the dog is—well, rather incredible.”

“What do you mean, incredible?”

“The porter on the train just took a look at him and was so horrified he leaped off the moving train. That's how incredible the dog is.”

Monk eyed the telephone sourly. “Say, you! Is this a gag?”

“It certainly is not.”

“Then make sense out of it.”

“I'll make sense when I see you,” Tom Lewis said. “Now, listen to this: I will meet you at the station exactly ten hours from now.” He named one of the terminals in New York. “I will be wearing a white raincoat. Understand, a white raincoat.”

“A white raincoat,” Monk said. “O. K.”

“And the dog-carrying case will be with me if I can manage. But if it isn't, don't get alarmed. I'm a tall man and I'll have a tan hat and tan gloves. I'm wearing a tan overcoat now, but I'll put on the white

raincoat I have in my suitcase."

"What," asked Monk, "does this dog-carrying case look like?"

"A black case, leatherette-covered, with ventilating holes covered with black wire screen. You've seen a hundred like it. It's just a carrying case for travelers to use when they take their dogs with them. This one would hold a shepherd or an Airedale dog."

"What kind of a dog is in it?"

"The damnedest dog you ever saw," said Tom Lewis. "I'll be seeing you in ten hours, exactly!"

THIS ended the conversation. Monk's bad humor came back because he had started getting interested. "Always something!" he snarled.

He turned around and for once in his life spoke a civil and polite sentence to Brigadier General Theodore Marley—Ham—Brooks.

"What do you think of that call, Ham?" he asked.

Ordinarily, Monk would also never have asked Ham's opinion on anything.

Ham Brooks had picked up the receiver on the extension telephone as a matter of course, and had made shorthand notes of the conversation. This was a regular procedure on a call of the sort.

Ham Brooks was a lean, dapper man with a thin waist and the wide, flexible mouth of a man who made his living by talking. He was a lawyer, and Harvard Law School considered him its leading product. He was wonderfully dressed and was always immaculately dressed, being as famous for his clothing as he was for his legal ability. He carried, as he habitually did, an innocent-looking black cane that was a sword cane.

"Well, Ham," said Monk, "what did you think of the call?"

"There might be something to it," Ham admitted. "And again it might be some feather-wits with some new breed of dog, or a dog with two tails, or something like that."

Monk nodded. "Yeah, you can't tell. People's idea of the importance of things varies a little."

"It certainly does. He may have a dog he's taught a few tricks, and think he's got something world-shaking."

"He might have."

"We better see him when he comes in, though."

"Yes, we'd better."

This was probably the longest harmonious conversation that Monk and Ham had conducted in years.

Anyone knowing them well would have known something was stridently wrong.

They sat in silence for a while.

Then Ham absently fished in his coat pocket for a handkerchief with which to wipe his perspiring palms.

When he dragged the handkerchief out a small square of cardboard was dislodged from its folds and fell to the floor. Ham picked the cardboard up, read:

PEACE IS WONDERFUL!

The effect of reading this on Ham was pronounced. His neck got red. He slammed the table with his sword cane.

“That's fifty or sixty of them cards I've found!” he shrieked.

Monk pounded the table with him. “Me, too!” Monk shouted. “I get up this morning and there it is painted on my ceiling!”

“Somebody,” said Ham, “had written it on the breakfast plate on which my scrambled eggs were served.”

“The taxi driver who brought me to the office sang it over and over,” Monk contributed.

“It isn't funny.”

“You're danged right it isn't funny any longer,” Monk said.

“Let's tell them so.”

“Why not?”

MONK and Ham had taken the telephone call in the reception room, which was equipped with a large safe, comfortable chairs, a remarkable inlaid desk, and not much else that met the eye outwardly, although there were quite a few gadgets in concealed spots.

The adjoining room was the library, and into this Monk and Ham stamped.

The library was very large, crowded with bookcases containing one of the most complete, purely scientific book collections in existence.

Three men were in the library—the other three members of Doc Savage's group of five assistants—checking over the parts of the library in which they specialized. This was a periodic procedure.

William Harper—Johnny—Littlejohn was checking the tomes on archaeology and geology. Johnny, who was taller and thinner than it seemed any man could be and still live, was one of the world's eminent men in archaeology and geology, and also capable of using words of stunning size.

Major Thomas J.—Long Tom—Roberts, an undersized man with a mushroom-cellar complexion, was going over the electrical-engineering section. He had just returned from England, where he had been doing advanced work in electronic airplane detection.

Colonel John—Renny—Renwick, big fists and all, was poking around the engineering section. He'd found an engineering book lately published by a rival and was reading it, disagreeing heartily, and muttering his favorite expression, “Holy cow!” about every third paragraph.

Monk and Ham advanced on these three gentlemen.

“Holy cow!” said Renny loudly in alarm.

“A nonultraadvantageous adventation,” remarked Johnny Littlejohn.

“We,” announced Monk, “are going to break bones.”

“We're going to peel you from head to foot,” agreed Ham. “All three of you.”

“Like bananas,” Monk added.

Long Tom Roberts said, “Now, wait a minute, you two! There is no reason—”

“It's not,” said Ham, “a joke. It's not any part of a joke. We're tired of it.”

“We're awfully tired,” said Monk.

Renny Renwick looked extremely alarmed.

“Holy cow, they're agreeing with each other!” he said. “Our lives are in danger!”

“Peace is wonderful!” Monk snarled. “I'll show you how wonderful peace is!”

“Several pieces,” said Ham. “The ones we're going to separate each of you into.”

In a moment the place was in an uproar. Someone upset a bookcase in front of Monk and he fell over it. Ham beaned Renny Renwick with a large law book, flooring Renny. Long Tom Roberts, who looked to be the most ineffective fighter of any of them, proceeded to tie into Monk and begin trying to remove a leg.

The laboratory door opened, Doc Savage came in and asked, “What kind of a civil war is this, anyway?”

The fight stopped and there was sheepish silence except for the breath sounds that were like escaping steam.

DOC SAVAGE was a big man with such symmetrical proportions that he seemed big only when he stood close to some object to which his size could be compared. Tropical suns had made his skin a deep bronze, and his hair was only a slightly darker bronze, his eyes a strange golden color, like pools of flake-gold always stirred by tiny winds. There was no quality of coarseness about him, nor any of physical weakness. The whole effect of him was arresting.

“What,” he repeated, “is this?”

Monk tried to get the two halves of his necktie to fit together, foolishly. “We're teaching them what's a joke and what ain't,” he said.

Ham said, “That's it.”

“They have,” explained Monk, “been riding us.”

“Wrongly.”

“Putting signs in our pockets.”

“And painting them on our plates.”

“And our ceilings,” added Monk.

“Insulting signs,” said Ham.

“Signs,” said Monk, “telling us peace is wonderful!”

Doc Savage's bronze features did not change expression as he turned to Johnny, Long Tom and Renny and asked, “What is your side of it?”

“We just,” said Renny, “ran out of patience.”

“Enough,” said Long Tom, “is enough.”

“Enough,” said Johnny, “is a supermalagorgeous abundance.”

Renny said, “We mean their quarreling.”

“Monk and Ham have conducted a perpetual quarrel between themselves that has lasted for years,” Long Tom explained.

“Until today,” said Johnny, using small words in his vehemence, “no one has ever heard them say a civil word to each other.”

“They've enjoyed it,” said Renny.

“But nobody else has,” said Long Tom.

“Only a sesquipedalian ambagious inveteberate lacks convulition,” said Johnny.

“He means,” translated Renny, “that it's a mighty long worm that has no turning.”

Doc Savage's expression became slightly thoughtful and he said, “Monk and Ham have entertained themselves with a perpetual quarrel for years and you fellows have gotten tired of it.”

“As who hasn't got tired of it!” said Renny.

“And now,” continued Doc, “you are conducting a campaign to reduce the nuisance of this quarreling.”

“That's right.”

“That,” Doc said, “is fine. I hope no one gets fatally killed.”

He turned around and went back into the laboratory.

MONK and Ham, their feelings hurt, retired from the premises. They left the building and got into a cab and headed for their apartments to change clothes. The bout in the library had done their garments no good.

“Doc,” said Monk, “let us down.”

“He certainly jerked it out from under us,” Ham agreed.

They were silently and mutually indignant.

The quarreling in which they had indulged for so long had actually become a part of their character, of themselves; and to think of giving it up was worse than the idea of surrendering their money, or even an arm apiece.

“We can't,” said Ham, “do any such thing.”

“Naturally not,” Monk agreed.

“You see how we're getting along now?” said Ham. “Very polite. Agreeing with each other. There's no fun in it.”

“It's sickening,” Monk said.

“We might,” Ham suggested after some thought, “do an about face. Be so goody-goody nice to each other that it would turn their stomachs. Alfonse-and-Gaston stuff.”

“That wouldn't be any fun. And I'd hate to give them the satisfaction.”

“Yes, you're right. We can't do that.”

Monk sat up straight. “We can do something, though.”

“What?”

“They're sitting around up there,” Monk pointed out, “itching for some excitement to come along. They think they're checking over the books in the library, and Doc thinks he's making something out of chemicals in the laboratory. But, actually, they're waiting with baited breath for some excitement.”

“What's your idea?”

“We'll gyp them out of their excitement,” Monk declared. “That'll get even with them.”

Ham began looking very cheerful. “Starting with this Tom Lewis and his fantastic dog. That your suggestion?”

“What do you think of it?”

“I think it's fine,” said Ham.

“What do you say we get in touch with Tom Lewis on the train and ask him for more details?”

“I think that's a swell idea,” Ham said.

MONK MAYFAIR occupied a penthouse apartment-laboratory on top of a very high building in the financial district on the lower end of Manhattan Island. The place was about as modernistic as a penthouse could be made, looking like an overdone movie set. Ham considered the place gaudy and in very bad taste, and invariably told Monk so. Today, though, he uttered not a word of criticism of the apartment.

Monk had installed in the place, before war days, an expensive arrangement for his pet pig, Habeas Corpus. The pig was an Arabian runt hog of unknown species, very long of leg, enormous of ear, scrawny of body, with the disposition of a bumblebee, yet very intelligent. The hog apartment included a mud bath with perfumed mud and other luxuries.

Hitherto, Ham had not cared for Habeas, the pig.

Monk likewise professed no love for Ham's pet, an undersized chimpanzee named Chemistry, which bore a remarkable likeness, in miniature, to Monk himself.

Monk and Ham were so upset by their current trouble that they had done something they would never have done ordinarily. They had left the two pets at Monk's place together. And the two pets, which usually fought as enthusiastically as their owners, were behaving like lovebirds.

Ham got on the telephone and started contacting the limited train.

Monk checked over his automatic telephone recorder to see how many of his girl friends had called him. This apparatus was an affair which, when a telephone call came in, automatically asked the caller for name and business, then recorded the answers, together with the explanation that Monk was absent.

"Ps-s-t!"

Ham said. "Got the train."

Monk hurriedly plugged another, telephone instrument into the circuit. "Don't hear anybody," he said.

"The girl has gone to page Tom Lewis," Ham explained.

Monk frowned. "The guy sounded as if he was scared or worried."

"That's right."

"Maybe," Monk said, "the girl shouldn't be going through the train paging him by name. He might not want his identity known."

"She's not."

"How's she going to find him?"

"It's the girl who is the information clerk on the train," Ham explained. "She knows him by sight. She is going to find him, and—Hello? Hello?"

It was the information clerk on the train.

"About Tom Lewis," she said. "A strange thing happened."

"Yes?"

"The train slowed up for a small town a few minutes ago," the girl explained, "and Tom Lewis jumped off. I just happened to see him."

"Was he," Monk asked, "carrying a leatherette case of the type used for transporting animals, a case about large enough to contain a shepherd or an Airedale dog?"

"Why, yes—he was!"

Chapter IV. TROUBLE HERE AND THERE

THE train secretary was an experienced young woman and capable of taking care of herself. One of the best ways of taking care of herself in her present job, she had found, was not to get unduly excited about

anything that happened, and she had made a practice of this.

So, at the end of the telephone conversation with Monk Mayfair in New York, she replaced the receiver on its prong and picked up the detective thriller she was reading. That was the way she relaxed.

The system collapsed violently when she looked up and found a gun under her nose.

The man back of the gun had red hair and wore a quiet blue suit and looked as if he was not fooling.

"Sis," he said softly, "I shot a woman one time, believe it or not, right through the pretty mush. It made a hell of a mess out of what had once been a nice baby-blond face, and it kept me awake for a while. But it didn't bother me as much as I thought it would, so I might do it again with the right provocation."

The girl believed him. She sat perfectly still.

"Tom Lewis," the man said. "That name mean anything to you?"

"He was talking to me," the girl said, genuinely afraid to lie.

"What was the talk about?"

"He made," said the girl, "a telephone call to New York."

"That," said the man, "is the way I want you to talk to me. Open and frank. The blonde would have been all right if she had done that. What did he talk about?"

"He called—"

"What else did he talk about to you, I mean?"

"Oh. He asked me if I had heard of a man named Doc Savage, and where he could find Doc Savage. I told him Savage was a rather remarkable man who is supposed to make a business of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, and he could find Savage in New York."

"Savage?" the man said. "Doc Savage?"

"Yes."

The red-headed man looked as if a dull sickness had suddenly come inside him. He fought the feeling, the greenish tint around his mouth, for a few moments.

"He telephoned Doc Savage?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who's telephone operator?"

"On the train here? I am."

"You hear the conversation?"

"I—yes."

"Repeat it."

The girl grimaced. "Good gracious, how do you expect me to remember—"

“Remember, sis!” the man said grimly. “Remember, or this gun will start making holes. And it makes big ones.”

The girl closed her eyes. She was trembling.

“Ten hours,” she said. “In ten hours he was going to meet a man named Monk Mayfair, an associate of Doc Savage, in a railroad terminal in New York. He was going to be wearing a white raincoat and carrying a dog-carrying case. I do not remember the exact words of the conversation, but that was the general sense of it.”

“Ten hours from when?”

“The call,” said the girl, “was made one hour and forty minutes ago. Ten hours from then.”

“What else was said?”

“Tom Lewis said, or gave the idea, that the dog in the case was the cause of some rather fantastic mystery, and it was about that mystery which he wished to interview Doc Savage.”

“THAT all?”

“All I remember. All that's important, I'm sure.”

The red-headed man slid a hand into his coat pocket and brought out a pair of small white pills. He placed them on the desk beside the girl. He indicated the pills, then a glass of water which was standing on the back of the desk.

“Take the pills,” he said. “Use the water for a chaser.”

The girl got white and showed signs of fainting.

“They'll just put you to sleep for a few hours, sis,” the man said. “Of course, if you'd rather get shut up by getting shot, I can accommodate you there, too.”

She took the tablets.

The man sat down and smiled at her, his hand holding the gun thrust into his pocket until the girl began to sway and her eyes closed. This did not take more than ten minutes. Finally, the young woman toppled out of her chair.

The red-headed man called the car attendant.

“Fainted or something.” He indicated the girl.

The man then walked back through the train and entered a double bedroom. The bedroom, very small, was full of men with guns and uneasy expressions. Four of them.

“Want a good scare?” asked the red-headed man.

They obviously didn't, but one of them nodded foolishly in response to the query.

“Tom Lewis,” the man said, “is headed for help from Doc Savage.”

The silence was stark.

The red-headed man laughed, said, “I see you've heard of Savage.”

He took out his gun and contemplated it obviously, not because he was interested in the condition of the gun, but in order to show them that he had it and to impress a point on their minds.

“Nobody,” he said, “is backing out because of Savage.”

No words from the others.

“Tom Lewis,” said the man, “has hopped off the train. He got wise that we were following him.”

They nodded. They had known that.

“The information girl, who is also the train telephone operator, tells me Tom Lewis made an appointment to meet one of Doc Savage's men in a railroad station in New York in”—he consulted his wrist watch, named the station—“seven hours and fifty minutes.”

He tucked the gun away in a hidden holster.

“We better be there,” he said, “to take care of that meeting.”

They nodded. They were glad to agree with him.

“We want Tom Lewis,” the red-headed man said.

More nods.

“But we want that case and the dog more than that,” the man added.

“What about the telephone operator who gave you the dope?” a man asked.

“I gave her a pill. She won't tell anybody anything that makes sense for two days.”

Chapter V. WHITE RAINCOAT

THE more they had thought about it, the more pleasant Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks felt about the prospect of cutting Doc and Renny and Long Tom and Johnny out of a bit of excitement. This struck them as a very just kind of vengeance for the ribbing they had been taking. Nobody would be harmed, actually, and Monk and Ham considered themselves, not without reason, perfectly capable of taking care of any mystery about a dog in a box.

Missing a little excitement would hurt Doc and Renny and the others more than anything else that was harmless. Doc and the others liked excitement, although Doc himself had never admitted it. But it was entirely plain that excitement was the glue which held the bronze man and his group of five associates together.

Monk and Ham had changed clothes, eaten a good dinner, fed their pets, had a nap, and taken a subway up to the railroad terminal. Riding in a subway was a little beneath Ham's dignity, but what the Japanese had done to the rubber supply in the current war made a little matter like dignity not so important.

Now they stood in the station, in the great domed room of the upper level, and were jostled by soldiers, sailors, marines and commuters.

“Gate 69,” Monk said. “The limited comes in at Gate 69.”

“Yes, and there comes its passengers,” Ham pointed out.

“Watch for a white raincoat,” Monk urged. “It would be a shame if we didn't meet this guy and he went ahead and got in contact with Doc and the others. Then they'd have the sneer on us. And, boy, would they lay it on!”

A river of passengers flowed up the sloping ramp and through the metal doors. Monk and Ham craned their necks and dodged this way and that. As the river of people flowed its fullest and then began to get thin, they exchanged dumfounded looks.

“Missed him!” Monk bleated.

“Couldn't have. He wasn't aboard.”

“Blazes!” Monk wailed. “Now he'll contact Doc and the others and they'll laugh us out of six years' growth! I wish—”

A strange voice said, “Doc? You mean Doc Savage?”

Monk and Ham wheeled.

“A white raincoat!” Monk exploded. “Brother, are we glad to see you!”

Ham looked at the large leatherette case the man was carrying. “Not to mention,” he said, “a dog-carrying case. I guess you are Tom Lewis?”

“Tom Lewis, that's me,” the other said. “Best damned salesman that ever sold a man something he didn't want.”

“Salesman?” Monk scowled.

“Oh, don't get excited,” said the other briskly. “I'm not selling anything right now but trouble. The strangest kind of trouble you ever heard about. Where can we go and talk?”

“Let's go up on the balcony,” Monk said. “There's never anybody around there.”

“Nobody around, that's fine,” the man said.

They climbed the steps, turned to the right, and stopped in the lonely marble nakedness of the balcony.

The man in the white raincoat set down the dog case and unbuttoned his white raincoat, saying, “Here, I'll show you what this is all about.” He took two flat, blue automatic pistols out of his clothing, showed Monk and Ham the noisy end of the weapons and said, “If you guys want to see a nice double murder, just dance around.”

THE man with the gun made a gesture and two more men joined him. These had lumps in their coat pockets which were probably guns.

“So these are the kind of guys the famous Doc Savage has workin' for him,” one of them said.

“Yeah. Not so tough, eh?”

“No, pretty soft. What do we do with them?”

The man in the white raincoat looked around and made sure no one was passing. “Give them a quick frisk,” he said. “Look for guns or anything they could use on us.”

The quick frisk turned up a pair of remarkable-looking weapons resembling oversized automatics, but with curled drum magazines. The leader fiddled with one of these, examining it.

Monk said, “Go ahead and pull the trigger,” hopefully. “You'll see more fireworks than you ever saw before.”

The man hastily ceased fooling with the supermachine pistol.

“The fireworks,” he said, “wouldn't be anything to the ones you'll be inspecting before long.”

“Meaning,” asked Monk, “that you figure on knocking us off?”

“I might be meaning something like that.”

Monk, watching the man's face, decided that the fellow did mean something that drastic. The fellow might be planning to murder them in cold blood, an entirely feasible act, here on the deserted balcony. If they did not plan to kill Monk and Ham they had something else in mind that was not pleasant.

“A gun,” said Monk, “makes a lot of noise. Somebody might hear.”

The leader snorted. “Walk,” he ordered. “Walk out and get in the sedan that you'll find parked in the drive.”

The sedan really wasn't parked in the drive, but in a section assigned to the machines of a rent-a-car firm which had one of the station concessions.

There was a driver in the sedan who belonged to the gang, and three men in the back seat, one of these being Tom Lewis.

Monk knew his captor with the gun was not Tom Lewis, having by now realized that the man's voice was not the voice they had heard over the telephone from the train. Tom Lewis sat in the back of the sedan with two men pointing revolvers at him.

“They're not going to kill you,” Tom Lewis said quietly to Monk and Ham. “But what they are going to do is worse than that.”

Tom Lewis, all right, because Monk recognized the voice of the train telephone call.

“That's too bad,” Monk said deceitfully, “because we can't do a thing to help ourselves.”

He then hit one man in the stomach and kicked the feet out from another. He intended to start a first-class fight. He and Ham were wearing bulletproof undershirts of chain mesh, which the searchers had evidently mistaken for stiff underwear of some sort. These would stop revolver bullets.

A man hit Monk over the head unexpectedly and knocked him flat and helpless.

Another man clubbed Ham down.

“That's right,” said the first man. “You can't do a thing.”

NEITHER Monk nor Ham were completely unconscious, so they were both able to watch Doc Savage appear on the spot and start work.

Doc Savage was the last sight they expected to see, and yet they were not too surprised. It was touches of magic which made Doc the unusual individual he was.

Doc had been behind a nearby parked car, apparently observing proceedings.

He came from behind the car, came forward and threw a gas grenade.

His luck with the gas grenade was unusually bad for it hit the car window and did not break for some reason, probably because the impact on the window was a glancing one. The grenade consisted of an egg affair, shell of brittle plastic resembling glass, contents a liquid anaesthetic gas which vaporized and became effective quickly, but which could be avoided by holding the breath. The grenade hit twenty feet away and burst harmlessly.

Doc never even reached the car.

Sight of the bronze man had an electrifying effect on the occupants of the machine and those standing outside. Everyone piled into the car and simultaneously the driver let out the clutch and gave the engine all it would take.

The sedan rocketed out into the street, made the corner traffic cop jump for his life, and was gone.

Monk and Ham crawled around on the concrete pavement trying to get organized and on their feet.

Doc Savage ran out into the street but ran back again when a small flurry of bullets arrived from the sedan, which was just rounding another corner to disappear.

“One can never tell,” said the bronze man, apparently explaining his race for cover, “when a wild bullet might catch one in the face.”

He wore the same type of bulletproof undergarment which Monk and Ham wore.

Monk and Ham had an embarrassed nothing to say.

DOC SAVAGE listened to the distant howl of the fleeing car and his metallic features showed no particular excitement. When he glanced at Monk and Ham there was no special expression, no noticeable disapproval on his bronze face.

Monk and Ham were far from reassured. When you could tell the least by looking at Doc's face, then was when you'd better look out.

“They got away,” Monk muttered finally, “with the dog carrying case.”

“Yes,” said Ham hastily. “We'd better catch them.”

“Am I,” asked Doc quietly, “supposed to know what you are talking about?”

Ham looked at Monk and Monk shuddered.

“O. K., it was my idea,” Monk said gloomily.

“It was both our ideas,” Ham corrected. “How were we to know it would blow out from under us?”

Monk stared at Doc Savage. “Doc, how'd you know about it? How'd you happen to come here?”

“Have you forgotten,” the bronze man said, “that we have recording apparatus on the telephone circuits leading into headquarters?”

Monk looked blank. The recorder in Doc's headquarters was the same type which Monk himself employed to retain the calls of his girl friends.

“I forgot,” Monk admitted. “So you played the record back and got all the information we have.”

“All you know is what Tom Lewis told you in that telephone call from the train?”

“Well, yes. That is, we tried to contact Tom Lewis on the train later, but he'd gotten off.”

“Did you find out anything from those men?”

“Nothing except that we had better learn to keep our eyes open. That fellow in the white raincoat just walked up to us and showed us a gun and said to come along.”

Ham said, “Doc, just as we were about to start fighting, Tom Lewis said something to us. He said they weren't going to kill us, but what they would do to us would be a lot worse.”

“He did not explain that?”

“He didn't have a chance.”

“What gets me,” Monk said, “is what went wrong.”

Doc Savage made no comment and no guesses. He listened again for the car, which by now had entirely gone from hearing. He listened to the loud complaining of the cop on the corner, who had nearly been run over. The cop was excited and telling everybody in hearing what he thought of motorists in general, his thoughts not being very flattering.

“Are your heads clear enough,” asked Doc, “to remember a license number?”

“Doc,” Monk said, “I'm afraid we made a little mistake. We were going to take this thing over and handle it ourselves, by way of getting revenge for this 'peace is wonderful' stuff.”

“Can you remember the number?”

“Sure.”

Doc gave them a New York State car-license number. “Taxicab,” he said. “Private machine, not belonging to a fleet.”

“Yes?”

“Repeat the number.”

Monk repeated it.

“Now,” Doc said, “find the driver of that cab. Hand him a ten-dollar bill. Say to him, 'The red-headed man sent me.'“

"The red-headed man sent me,'" Monk muttered. "Is that supposed to make sense?"

"It might," Doc Savage said. "It might!"

Chapter VI. SHE WASN'T FOOLING

DOC SAVAGE left Monk and Ham, headed for the subway, bound downtown to the bureau of licenses and the police department, where they could trace the taxicab license number.

Entering the station, Doc located an assistant passenger agent whom he knew and asked if anything out of the ordinary had occurred on the limited, just arrived from Chicago.

The answer he received gave him a good idea of how Tom Lewis, as well as Monk and Ham, had come to meet misfortune.

The girl who served as telephone operator and information clerk on the train had collapsed, and a doctor had diagnosed her trouble as an overdose of a strong hypnotic. But the doctor had also mentioned that his attention had been called to the young woman by a red-headed man.

One of the assailants of Monk and Ham had been a red-headed man, so that made that fairly clear.

Doc Savage then left the station, walked up a side street and entered a car. It was a sedate machine, not a large one, and belied the armor plate and bulletproof glass in its construction.

From a compartment Doc removed a loop antenna and plugged it into a jack. He switched on the radio, changed some connections with a jack to make it highly directional, and began experimenting.

He had a little trouble picking up the note of the transmitter, which he had attached to the sedan driven by the men who had seized Tom Lewis. He got it, finally, an endless series of tiny dots that sounded very much like interference from some nearby electrical system.

The signal was coming from either the north or the south, and the north seemed a more logical guess. He drove north.

The trick transmitter which he had attached to the sedan the men were driving was quite small, powered by a dry battery, and would give this continuous signal over a period of ten hours or so.

Using a radio direction-finder and a planted transmitter to trace individuals in a case of this kind was not a new method for Doc Savage. This particular transmitter, however, was a new type. It was held in place by a powerful, permanent magnet of the new type of metal which held several hundred times the magnetism that ordinary steel would retain. The transmitter, itself, was extremely sturdy, containing metal tubes and everything specially reinforced.

It was possible to apply the transmitter to a car, for instance, by merely tossing the gadget against the machine in passing. The magnet would hold it in place and also served as part of the transmitter entrails.

North was the right direction.

The trail led up into suburban Westchester County, finally ended in a section—or rather came to a stop—in a section of rather impressive estates.

Loudness of the transmitter note warned Doc and he scooted down in the seat, kept his hat over his eyes and watched right and left.

It was not hard to locate the house. It stood alone on a wide sweep of somewhat untended lawn, that was so thickly furred with untrimmed shrubbery that it was a jungle. Somewhere in there was the car.

Doc drove on a quarter of a mile, turned right, found a secluded spot and parked. He headed for the house with caution, carrying a small case of equipment.

THE shrubbery was even larger, more overgrown than it had seemed from the road. The stuff was expensive, or had been expensive in the beginning, fifteen or so years ago; but for at least seven or eight years it had been permitted to grow rank and unguided and practically unattended, so that it towered and the branches interlaced.

Doc went from one patch of shadow to another, rarely sinking to all fours, but always silent.

The dog came around the corner of the house when he was about fifty feet away.

The bronze man stopped instantly, stood very still. The dog was no different from a wild animal in not having the ability to immediately distinguish an object that was not moving. The animal sniffed a time or two, seemed about to bark, then moved a little, passing behind a bush.

The moment the dog was out of sight, Doc Savage dived into the small equipment case. He brought out a glass phial, uncorked it, sprinkled a few drops of the contents on himself, then flipped the remainder out into the air around him.

He waited.

The chemical mixture was one that was in the experimental stage. If it functioned as it should it would arouse a desire for self-preservation in the animal, an emotion akin to fear, and yet not fear. The chemical had grown out of earlier experiments aimed at developing a substance which would keep dogs and animals away from expensive shrubbery.

The thing might have worked on this dog, and it might not have had any effect at all.

Because a man opened the door, stood there smoking, and finally called the dog inside.

The dog, Doc noted, was a police dog and too large to have been in the dog-carrying case.

Doc went immediately to the side of the house, eased into the thick undergrowth that had once been a neat foundation planting.

He soon found a basement areaway, used a glass cutter on the window, kept the cut panel from falling out by the use of chewing gum, removed it, unlocked the window, went inside.

He found a stoneware laundry tub under the window which could be reached easily, and from there to the floor was a silent matter. The laundry was none too clean. From a drying rack hung two pairs of overalls, a work shirt, some underwear.

Voices were distinct enough to be a little startling, and he located the source in a moment. A laundry chute, evidently leading to a bathroom where men were having a drink.

He could hear the squeak of a cork, clink of glasses, rush of water into glasses. A man coughed explosively.

“Where'd you get that panther sweat?” demanded the man who'd coughed.

“That's good stuff, Joe.”

“They drained it off some corpse,” Joe said disagreeably.

“Have another?”

“Well, that one didn't kill me, so O. K.”

THERE was more cork-squeaking, gurgling, glass-clinking, water, and appreciative coughing.

“I don't like Savage being mixed up in this,” said a man unexpectedly.

“Oh, hell! Do you have to keep harping on that?” demanded another.

A third man, a more educated voice, said, “That's all right. We're all worried about Doc Savage. And it's not a bad idea to sweat a little, at that. Savage isn't anything to fool around with. We know that, and nobody but a fool would shut his eyes to the danger.”

“You sound,” said the man called Joe, “like a guy I used to know named Crying Thomas.”

The other laughed. “Matter of fact, I don't think Savage will bother us now.”

“How come?”

“We got Tom Lewis before he was able to tell Savage or Savage's men anything. We got the case and the dog.”

“We didn't get Savage's two men, though.”

“A damned good thing,” said the man with the educated voice. “In grabbing them we were just pulling a hornets' nest down around our ears. It wasn't my idea.”

“Too bad,” said Joe sarcastically, “that you aren't running the thing.”

“I've thought so a time or two myself,” the other agreed.

“Maybe the boss'd like to hear that,” said Joe.

In a voice just as pleasant and educated, the other man said, “Joseph, I'll bet they would give you a big funeral. One of those whoppers with lots of flowers, the way they used to send off the boys back in the good old prohibition days.”

Joe said, “Huh! Say, are you—”

“Put your head back on your shoulders, Joe,” someone said in a cold, warning voice.

Joe had nothing more to say.

“Another round?” asked the man with the bottle.

They didn't mind if they did, and a man said, “It was nice of old Dirty Chin to have this place lying around for us to use.”

“How'd old Dirty get a place like this?” someone asked.

“Oh, he heired it. Uncle or something. Poor old Dirty. He's wanted for knocking over a bank in this State, and he doesn't dare come here and live. Doesn't dare try to sell the place. Just has to leave it here with a caretaker.”

“So that's why it's gone to seed. How's old Dirty pay the caretaker?”

“Oh, there's a farm connected with it, and he rents that for enough to pay expenses. Can't keep up the place the way it should be, though. Shame, too.”

“How long you reckon we'll be here?”

“No longer than necessary, I imagine,” said the man with the educated voice. He was in a little better humor. “I expect we will receive orders to get the blazes back to the Ozarks with Tom Lewis and the dog.”

“Hell, I wanted to see a little night life while I was here!” one man muttered.

They got to discussing the various kinds of night life the city offered.

Doc's interest in the conversation lagged and vanished completely when he discovered a young woman standing in the door with a gun pointed at him.

“QUIET,” she said, “like a mouse.” Her tone was very low.

She was a theatrically spectacular girl who was not gaudy, an unusual combination. She was something that might have stepped off a magazine cover, preferably, the cover of a men's magazine which doted on interesting figures. Blond, with tawny eyes and humorous lips, and a face that had more character than doll beauty; a face that lent itself well to laughter, you could tell. And her clothes hadn't been bought on any stenographer's twenty-five a week.

She waggled the gun at Doc.

“Nice day to get shot,” she said. “I hope you don't think—”

Doc gestured slightly at the upper part of the house. “Suppose they hear you?”

“I'd be awfully sorry,” she said. “But not as sorry as you would be.”

Doc said, “You do not want them to hear?”

“No.”

“Would you believe me,” he asked her, “if I told you I do not want them to discover me, either?”

She shook her head instantly. And then she looked doubtful, concerned, curious. “How did you get down here? I thought I was watching the stairs.”

“Window.”

“Yes?” She moved a little, saw the window from which Doc had removed the glass. “Why did you come in that way?”

“The obvious reason.”

“Didn't want them to know you were here, eh? Who are you, anyway?” She moved a little to give him a closer inspection. “You know, there *is* something familiar about you. I'm having trouble placing you, though. Ever been connected with the stage?”

“The theater?”

“Don't be silly. Theater is the highbrow end of it. Just say stage, and you measure me. No burlesque, though. Not that I wouldn't have taken a burley job if one came along. Say, who are you, anyway?”

“Clark Savage,” Doc admitted.

“Well, I don't know any—” She stopped. “Wait a minute! You're kidding. You *couldn't* be!”

Doc said nothing.

“Wow!” the young woman yelled. “You *are* that Savage!”

“Sh-h-h,” Doc warned. “They can hear you in the next county.”

The young woman stared at him unbelievingly. “Well, nail me down and call me floored.” Then she clapped a hand over her lips. “You suppose they heard me?”

Doc Savage listened for a while. He heard no alarming sound from above.

AFTER a while, in a low voice, the young woman said, “Say, overlook my astonishment, will you? I never met you before, but up until about a year ago I kept your pictures thumbtacked all over the wall of my dressing room and in the lid of my trunk. Pal, did I have a crush on you!”

Doc's face lost its calmness. He looked very embarrassed.

“This,” he muttered, “is no time to be facetious.”

“You think I'm kidding”?” said the young woman. “Oh, oh, brother!”

Still more uncomfortable, Doc asked, “Do you have a name?”

“Willie,” she said. “And don't call me Billie. Ten chorus girls out of every dozen are called Billie, and I resent being one of the mob.”

“Do you,” Doc inquired, “have a more reserved name?”

“Who wants a reserved name? I wouldn't have any use for one.”

“Ah—”

“Willie Stevens,” said Willie. “And that much name will have to do you.”

Doc was satisfied.

“What,” he inquired, “are you doing here?”

Willie Stevens shrugged. “Checking up on a man. What else?”

“What man?”

“Boy friend. Name of Tom Lewis.”

Doc Savage, beginning to recover his composure, said, “'Checking up' is a rather broad term. Would you care to be more specific?”

“If it was anybody but you I'd tell you to go roll your hoop,” the rather eye-filling Willie Stevens informed him. “But considering it's you, and in memory of old loves—and, brother, I wasn't doing bad, I see now—I'll tell you all about it—”

That ended the tale for the time being because there was a rumbling rush of men down the stairs and glass-breaking as they kicked in the basement windows.

“Oh, oh!” said Willie. “They heard me yelling at you.”

Chapter VII. WHO HAS THE DOG?

DOC SAVAGE was not taken entirely by surprise, having heard the men moving about upstairs in such a way that he had been fairly sure they were preparing to raid the basement. Doc had not moved then because they would be watching the yard, and would stand an excellent chance of shooting him down if he ran for it. Nor did there seem to be any place in the basement where it was worth hiding. Now that the men had started their rush, he spoke quietly.

“Get behind this,” he said.

He seized the heavy, stoneware laundry tub and yanked it off its stand so that it fell heavily on the floor. The copper water-piping broke and water, hot and cold, spouted out.

The calmness of the bronze man's voice shocked Willie, apparently. But she got behind the tub.

“I'll get scalded,” she said.

Doc seized the copper water pipes, which would bend quite easily, and twisted them up so that the spouting streams of water were aimed at the doorway into the laundry room.

“Stay there,” he told the girl.

He took a smoke grenade from his pocket, popped it on the floor. He popped two more—they sounded like ineffective firecrackers when they went off—out into the stairway and the other part of the basement.

Smoke came out of the grenades like fat, black animals that grew.

“Hey!” yelled a man. “Hey, what the hell is this?”

A gun emptied at least twelve consecutive shots into the basement, not a machine gun but an automatic with a special magazine, evidently. The bullets made big bumblebee-and-police-whistle noises, loud impacts.

Doc kept down in the smoke, let it spread and grow. He followed it toward the nearest window. The smoke climbed up and enveloped the window.

Doc, beside the window, said, “Here, try this way out.” He said it very softly.

Someone outside the window heard him and began shooting. The man poured bullets into the window,

emptied a revolver. “I'm getting him!” the man screamed. “Gimme another gun!” They evidently handed him another gun because he began shooting some more.

Doc waited until the man outside, in his excitement, got his arm and gun near enough to the window for Doc to reach. He could hardly see the gun flashes in the incredible blackness of the pall from the smoke grenades. But he could hear the blasting impacts of the weapon.

What Doc wanted most now was a prisoner, to be questioned.

He reached out and got the man's gun arm.

He pulled. The man squalled. Doc yanked furiously, trying to get the fellow inside. But, outdoors, they thought fast and fell upon the man, grabbed his legs, hauled back.

“You're pullin' me apart!” the man screamed, and after that the shrieking was just agony.

They got him away from Doc. Skin came off the man's arm as if he had been scalded and he slid outside, safe.

Doc got away from the window, which was good, because now they emptied rifle, revolver and even shotgun charges in through the opening.

AFTER that there was a shoot-at-the-next-sound silence, which the showgirl, Willie, broke by saying, “I'm O. K.”

A man fired once, missed the sound of her voice by several feet.

The whole interior of the basement was now just a little less black than ebony.

Doc searched his pockets for an anaesthetic gas grenade.

He did not have any. He'd used them all earlier, at the railway station.

He had, however, an explosive grenade. He got one out, flicked up the little firing lever with a fingernail, tossed it out.

The explosion made the black air seem to become a sepia giant which slammed the bronze man against the basement wall. There were splinters, dust, masonry and profanity in the air.

“Hell, what're we up against?” a man yelled.

Another voice, the educated voice Doc had heard down the laundry chute, said, “It's got to be Savage. Stay with it, you guys.”

But someone else lost his nerve and shrieked, “He'll get us all in this black stuff!”

“Gas!” bawled a third. “It's gas!”

That did it. They broke and ran, those in the basement. Someone screamed that the stairs had been blown away. His howl came from a part of the basement where there had never been stairs. The voice of Joe cursed him and said, “You're lost, you silly goon.”

Doc made for the stairs himself. In the black pall they could not see him, and he was as safe with them as

he was away from them.

Suddenly there was a fight, blows and profanity, a yell of agony.

“Joe, you knifed me!” a voice said.

Joe gasped, “I thought you were Savage.”

The educated voice said, “Come here, come here! Come to me, all of you! And join hands! That way we can tell who is who.”

Doc went over hastily, joined them, began pawing over them trying to find hands, and to get on the end of the line. He joined up with them, although he failed to get on the end of the line. He was in the middle of it somewhere.

“Now, up the stairs,” said the educated voice. “And the minute anybody lets go your hand, shoot him.”

The cavalcade got under way, moving with strained caution. Doc went along with them, aware that the situation under less deadly circumstances would have been thoroughly silly, and suddenly wondering why he had gotten into such a predicament. He should have seized a man, taking a chance on silencing the fellow quickly. Yet he had not, at any time during the asinine business of joining hands, gotten into a position where he felt that was safe.

The smoke from the grenades would have penetrated upstairs by now, too.

He would, at the top, pretend he was wounded, mutter something about having to drop out, and fall. As bothered as they were, they might not try to drag him out.

They climbed to the top of the stairs.

Doc opened his mouth to complain realistically about being unable to continue because of injuries.

The educated voice beat him to it, saying, “Joe, get the dog-carrying case.”

Doc, immediately taking advantage of the order, freed himself from the men on either side of him. They wouldn't know where Joe was in the line.

But Joe, up ahead, said, “O. K., I'll get it. Wait for me.”

“Here he is!” yelled one of the men Doc had just released. “Hell, he came up the stairs with us!”

Doc went down, to the side—and got his feet kicked from under him. He went down the stairs, heels over appetite as he expressed it later, disgustedly. He hit hard, got to his feet, went back up the stair again and fast.

Going up the stairs probably saved his life. Certainly if he had been at the bottom of the flight of steps, some of the storm of bullets they sent down would have hit him. As many men as could crowd into the head of the stairway did so and emptied guns downward.

Doc, crowding into them, snarled, “Watch out! Be careful!” He crawled through them, got behind them.

They stopped shooting.

“Joe, have you got that dog?” yelled the educated voice.

“Yeah,” Joe said. “But I do not see what the hell—”

Doc went toward Joe. He located the man in the darkness, got what he thought was a wonderful break, spotted the man's jaw exactly and hit it a short, arching swing that should have submerged a whale.

Joe fell down.

Doc got the case. It was fairly heavy with an inanimate weight that was about the same as that of a dog.

They had heard the noise of Joe falling.

“What happened to you, Joe?” someone demanded.

Doc hastily imitated Joe's coarse voice, said, “Fell down. What you think?”

It was a good job of voice imitation. Under the breathless circumstances he thought it was excellent.

But a miracle happened, and Joe got up off the floor, yelling, “He hit me! Savage hit me!”

Doc had the dog case. He took cover. The room was suddenly full of crashing gun flame, and Doc found a door, got it open, leaped through, smashed into another wall. He had, like the burglar in the old joke, fled into a clothes closet by mistake.

Joe and the educated voice and the others fled out of the door.

Doc worked cautiously with the door. It had shut behind him and it had a spring lock. He did not dare take a chance on drawing attention to himself until the men were outside. Then he smashed the door open.

He heard at least two automobiles leaving with great haste.

The smoke cleared away after a while.

WILLIE came up the stairs cautiously. “War over?” she asked.

Doc Savage sat down in a chair and shrugged.

Willie frowned at him. “Where did they hit you?”

“They didn't,” Doc admitted.

“You mean to tell me,” said the girl, “that you came through that party without a scratch?”

Doc nodded.

“Then what makes your face long?”

“They got away,” Doc said.

“Oh, is that all!”

“And that,” Doc added, “is the most futile fight I have ever taken part in, I think.”

“Futile?”

"No results."

"It sounded," said Willie, "like there was a heck of a lot of hither and yon."

"But no results. They got away. All of them."

"And you are disappointed?"

"Very," Doc agreed sourly.

"I will," said Willie, "be darned! I figured they'd scalped you at least six times. You should have heard it. Then I got the idea you had turned into ten men. I would even say ten wild men. Men howled and men screamed. Guns went off everywhere. The house is full of bullet holes. I happen to know there were over a dozen of them. You licked them. You chased them out. They were scared stiff. They ran like an alley cat that had just met six bulldogs. And you call *that* a failure!"

She fell into a chair.

"I give up," she said. "I came up here scared stiff and with every intention of fainting dead away. But you amaze me."

Doc Savage now took his mind off the fiasco which, in his opinion, the fight had turned out to be. He gave thought to the conversation he was having—he was talking. Usually he did not talk freely. And, in particular, he was not in the habit of talking easily to young women who looked as if they might have stepped out of a poster advertising the latest sensational movie. But he had been speaking freely, indeed slangily, with Willie. It was a little startling.

Suddenly, Willie shot to her feet.

"What"—she pointed—"is that?"

She had discovered the dog-carrying case.

"A dog case," Doc said.

"Is that the one they had? Did you take it away from them?"

"Yes."

Willie did a hop, skip and jump in her excitement.

"You," she said, "have solved the whole blamed mystery!"

THE young woman started to open the carrying case, but Doc Savage put a hand on her arm. "Before we do that," he suggested, "suppose you tell your story."

"But, I—"

"Begin," Doc said, "at the beginning."

Willie scratched her head and looked longingly at the carrying case. "Well, O. K. Let's see, where was I when they busted—oh, yes! I was checking up on Tom Lewis."

"You had met him previously, I take it?" Doc inquired.

“Oh, you want it all?” She nodded vehemently. “Yes, I met him in St. Louis when I was working with the Municipal Opera. I told you I wasn't a burlesque gal, remember? Anyway, I met Tom in St. Louis. I guess his gift of gab fascinated me. You never saw such a guy for words. He was a salesman. With that line of patter he couldn't be anything else.”

She paused, sighed, then laughed. “Tongue-tied in the middle and loose at both ends—that's Tom Lewis. I guess his words are what scared me. I got to thinking maybe he'd talked me into promising to marry him. It sort of bothered me.”

Doc Savage listened patiently.

“My home town,” she said, “happens to he the same one in which the Admiration Radio Cabinet Co. is located, and Tom Lewis travels for the Admiration concern, and lives in the same town. So, when I was home on vacation—which was the last two weeks—we saw a lot of each other.”

She frowned darkly at the floor.

“We saw enough of each other,” she continued, “for me to discover Tom Lewis wasn't a man whose mind was at ease. He was scared. I'm sure he is very scared—terrified.”

She spread her hands. “You see what that did to me? It got me to wondering. First, I figured he was scared of me and trying to figure out a way of getting out of marrying me. Then I decided that wasn't it. So I thought—if he's scared, he maybe has done something.”

Willie met Doc's eyes. “If he was a crook I wanted to know it in time.”

“Go on.”

“So I began keeping an eye on him. The more I watched him the more certain I got that something was really wrong. And then I discovered men were following him and trying to get that thing.”

Doc indicated the dog-carrying case. “This?”

“Yes.”

“Who,” Doc asked, “were the men following Tom Lewis?”

“The same gang you kissed good-by a minute ago.”

“Where was this?”

“In the Ozarks. They're mountains in the Midwest, you know.”

“And Tom Lewis had this dog-carrying case?”

“That's right.”

“And they were after it?”

“You've got it. And Tom Lewis was plenty scared. I think he was scared of more than that they would get the case. I think he was afraid of himself. It looked to me like he was afraid of something they were going to do to him if they caught him.”

“And then?”

“Tom Lewis lit out for New York,” Willie explained. “The more I think about it the more I am convinced he had decided to come to New York to get your help. In fact I'm sure of that now.”

Doc Savage asked, “How did you know all this?”

“Oh, Tom talked to me one night about you. He asked a lot of questions. I'd shown him those pictures of you I kept in my trunk before I met him, and that was why he asked me about you. When I told him about the pictures he thought it was funny. I guess it was. But when he talked to me about you that last time he didn't act like he thought it was funny at all. I know, now, that he was finding out all he could about you, so he could come and ask you for help.”

“How did you get to New York?”

“Trailed him. That is, I trailed the gang who were trailing him. Tom got off the train somewhere en route to New York and I lost him. But I kept trailing the men and they led me here.”

“When was that?”

“Only a few hours ago. This house seemed to belong to one of them. There was no one here but an old caretaker, and I don't know what became of him. I heard them quarreling with him.”

Doc Savage was silent a moment. “Did you see Tom Lewis here?”

“No.” Willie got a little pale. “Has he—”

“They captured him at the railway station in New York,” Doc explained.

“That's tough.” Willie sighed. “That's tough on Tom, but it relieves my mind. I was afraid, for a minute, you meant he'd thrown in with them. It'd be awful to think I'd been messing around with a guy who turned out to be a crook.”

“They evidently sent him away before I reached here,” Doc decided.

“Say, they *could* have done that! Come to think of it, I heard a car leave a little after that bunch got in from the city. They must have sent Tom away in that.”

“That seems to bring us up to date,” Doc said.

Willie asked eagerly, “Now, can I open this dog box?”

“There will,” Doc said, “be nothing in it.”

Willie hastily wrenched open the carrying case.

“You're right!” she exclaimed. “Nothing in here but some bricks!”

Chapter VIII. THE MUMBLING MAN

DOC SAVAGE smashed the bricks to powder as a matter of precaution. But they were ordinary bricks of the type manufactured in New Jersey, and there was certainly no possibility of mystery about them.

The dog-carrying case also identified itself as having come from a Sixth Avenue luggage shop in Manhattan, and it was very new; and also the sales slip was inside, under the bricks, where the men had tossed it. The carrying case had cost eleven dollars and eighty-five cents, plus tax.

Willie picked up the sales slip, said, “Look here, they bought this today.”

Doc made no comment. He was acutely conscious that he had done more talking, and somewhat facetious conversation at that, than was his habit. This was evidently due to the influence of Willie, and he was somewhat disturbed.

He went through the house, searching. It was not a tidily kept place, although the furnishings had cost a considerable sum when they were new, which probably had been thirty years before in some of the rooms, no more than twelve or fifteen years in others. An effort had been made to cover and preserve the better stuff, but this work had been done by someone inexperienced, so that it had not been very effective. Clouds of moths flew up ahead of him from time to time.

Two rooms and a small servants' kitchen had been lived in, but that was all. The garments hanging in the closets here were those of a man.

Tom Lewis was not there.

Nowhere was there anything to show the identity of the man with the educated voice or Joe or the others.

Doc found Willie contemplating the dog-carrying case. Her face was long.

“I don't know,” she said ruefully, “what to do now.”

“Have you thought of doing the sensible thing?” Doc asked.

“Go back to St. Louis?” She shook her head. “Nothing doing. I started out to swim this puddle and I'm going to stay with it.”

“What will be your next move?”

“I'm going,” she said, “with you.”

Looking alarmed, Doc said, “That will be too dangerous.”

“Pfooey! Not as dangerous as stumbling around by myself, I betcha.”

“I would much rather you did not.”

Willie pointed a finger at him. “Now look, I was doing very well until you came along. All I wanted out of this was to find out if my intended was a crook. But you barged in and the lid flew off everything.”

“But—”

“You messed up the playhouse,” Willie said. “Therefore it is up to you to let me trail along until I'm satisfied.”

“That,” said Doc, “is a thin argument.”

“I bet I make it stick, though.”

THEY drove along a Westchester cross-county highway at a speed which kept them in the thin traffic stream and Doc switched on the directional radio-receiver and manipulated the dials. The tubes warmed

up and he located the regularly spaced sound of the transmitter which he had fastened to the car driven by Tom Lewis' captors at the railway station. He identified the note by its resemblance to a mechanical interference.

Willie was interested. “Say, isn't that a radio direction-finder?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so. My kid brother is a radio ham and I used to fool with the stuff myself. Where is the transmitter?”

“Fastened to the frame of a car which they rented.”

“Oh!” Her eyes were wide. “That how you trailed them out here in the first place?”

“Yes.”

Willie settled back in the seat and made small clucking sounds of approval. “You know, you may live up to your advance notices,” she told Doc.

The trail left the main highway and headed more directly west, then northward through a section of dairy farms. It was evident that the men they were following had a definite destination but intended to get there without following the main highways.

“I'll bet,” said Willie, “that they're driving at least one stolen car. That would explain why they are keeping off the trunk roads.”

Doc made no comment.

Willie nudged him. “Hey, you never did tell me how you knew there wouldn't be anything in that dog-carrying case before I opened it.”

Doc considered the point. “It did not feel as if there was a dog in it. The weight, I mean.”

“Nonsense. The weight was just right. The weight wasn't alive, but then how did you know the dog wasn't dead?”

Doc made no reply.

Twenty minutes later, having evaded numerous questions put to him by Willie, he discovered that the direction-finder note was getting much louder. They were, in fact, rapidly approaching the transmitter.

A patch of woodland appeared. A lane turned off into this. In the lane—they would have missed it if they had not been looking for it—a car was parked.

“The rented sedan,” Doc said.

He drove on, turned off the road, parked, said, “You stay here.”

Willie sprang out after him.

“Nothing doing,” she said. “I get scared when I'm alone.”

“But I have to approach that car silently—”

“I'm going to surprise you,” Willie told him. “I'm quite a woodsman. Daniel Boone didn't have a thing on

me.

Doc, who was irritated, made the discovery that she had not exaggerated. Dancing and posture exercises had given the young woman a natural grace and certainty of foot, and she was almost as quiet as he was in traveling through the timber growth.

Frequent pauses to listen brought no suspicious sound to their ears. The woods were quiet, but not too quiet, for the birds were making their normal noises. There were no odors in the air that should not reasonably have been there.

They drew close to the car.

Doc gestured for Willie to stop.

She did so this time.

Doc then wasted enough time sneaking up on the car and going over it with care in search of wired bombs that he felt a little foolish when he discovered it was abandoned—and he turned around and saw Willie grinning at him.

There was a man in the machine.

He was tied hand and foot, making mumbling noises.

Doc hauled him out of the car.

“Not Tom Lewis,” he said to Willie.

She shook her head.

“It's the caretaker of the house we just left,” she explained. “Remember I told you they had a row with him? I guess they knocked him out and tossed him in the car here.”

Doc looked at the car grimly. “In some way,” he said, “they began to suspect this car was the means by which I trailed them. So they abandoned it.”

Willie shook her head slowly. “If you ask me, that whips us.”

Chapter IX. THE FRIGHTFUL DOG

MONK MAYFAIR and Ham Brooks were not in good humor. On top of their earlier difficulties with the campaign to stop their quarreling they had run into some plain-spoken policemen. The police department was shorthanded, short-tempered, and unfortunately they had encountered a cop who had once caught a fellow whom Ham had gotten off in court.

Finally, they had gotten the name and address of a taxi driver who owned a cab with the license number which Doc Savage had given them. The trip to the man's house had included a blow-out, running out of gas, a traffic jam with a military column. Then they arrived at the house and found the taxi driver was not home yet, and that his wife thought they were a pair of bill collectors.

The wife was very fat and death on bill collectors. She immediately showed them a beer bottle and threatened to alter the shape of their skulls with it. They retired to the sidewalk to wait. The wife stuck her head, and a kettle of boiling water, out of a window and threatened to scald them if they did not leave

the neighborhood.

“Nobody loves us,” Monk muttered.

“How could they?” asked Ham disagreeably. “With that face!”

“I thought,” said Monk, “that we were going to call a stop to our private fussing until we figured out a way to put the quietus on this campaign Renny, Johnny and the others are conducting against us?”

“All right,” said Ham, “since you ask it.”

Monk didn't like his tone. “Listen, you overdressed shyster, you're not doing me any favors if I can help it.”

“Look, tree boy,” Ham said, “the favor they should have done you was pull you down off the chandelier a few minutes after you were born, and—”

They stared at the street.

“Oh, oh, our taxi driver!” Monk said.

They got up hastily and approached the hack pilot.

The taximan was a small, meek, henpecked fellow of the type who would have a wife such as Monk and Ham had just encountered, and who was still watching them from the upstairs window with her kettle of boiling water.

“Your name Gerald Deusen?” Ham asked.

“Look, mister, I'll pay you for the radio Monday sure,” said the taxi driver. “Only, right now I'm as flat as anything. But by Monday—”

“We're not bill collectors,” Monk told him.

This alarmed the cab driver. “Oh, damn me, you ain't my wife's two cousins, Fred and—”

“Heaven,” said Monk, “forbid!”

Ham Brooks took charge of the conversation.

He hauled a ten-dollar bill from his pocket. “Here,” he said. “The red-headed man sent us.”

The taxi driver immediately grinned. “Say, I'm glad to get rid of that,” he said.

His cab had a trunk compartment at the rear and he went around, opened this. There was a dog-carrying case within and he picked it up, shook it, said, “The pooch seems to be all right.” He handed the case over to Monk, whose mouth was open, then took the ten-dollar bill and pocketed it. “Glad to oblige you guys,” he said.

MONK and Ham walked down the street self-consciously carrying the dog container, hardly able to credit their good fortune.

“Sure a lucky break!” Monk exclaimed.

“Break nothing,” Ham told him. “Doc had it figured out that we would get the mysterious dog if we did it this way.”

“Yeah?”

“You know what happened? It must have been this: At the railway station, Doc saw them switch dog cases. Or, rather, saw them give this one to the taxi driver and tell the driver they would pick it up later. Doc is good at reading lips, so he probably knew what instructions they'd given the driver.”

“Why did they give it to a taxi driver?”

“Safest place. Suppose they had checked it in the baggage room in the station? A search would have turned it up. Suppose they had kept it? They might get caught and have it taken away from them.”

“But they had a dog-carrying case with them.”

“Fake, probably. Dead herring.”

“The term,” Ham said, “is red herring, not dead herring.”

“Pardon me,” said Monk, “but I happened to be looking at you while I was talking. I guess I was influenced.”

Ham snorted. “Let's take a look at the thing.”

“We better take it to headquarters, and—” Monk stopped, looked at Ham, grinned. “You know, it ain't too late to cut Renny and Johnny and Long Tom out of this thing. Doc, of course, outsmarted us.”

Ham grinned back at Monk. “You got something there,” Ham said. “Let's turn into the park here.”

They were passing a Brooklyn public park at the moment, and Monk nodded, headed down one of the walks. They strode along rapidly, but no secluded spots appeared.

“They sure designed this park,” said Monk, “so a guy couldn't find a spot to neck his girl.”

“I'll take the other side of the driveway,” Ham offered. “If I find a place I'll holler. And if you find one, do the same.”

“Sure.”

They separated. Monk, who had the dog-carrying case, kept it with him. He walked along, swinging the case and grinning cheerfully. He could tell that there was a live dog in the case. The animal growled a time or two. “Bad-tempered pooch,” Monk thought. “Now what the heck do you suppose a dog has got to do with all this?”

And almost immediately, Monk saw a little glade behind some bushes. Just the spot. There, they could open the case, look at the dog and see if they could tell what it was all about.

Monk opened his mouth to call to Ham. He closed it.

Monk was a double-crosser at heart where Ham was concerned. For years he had done everything possible to irritate and bedevil the dapper Ham Brooks, receiving in return—he maintained—more than he dished out.

“'Ah, ha,' said Desperate Desmond,” Monk remarked to himself. “I'll just leave Ham out of this, too.”

He opened the case and took a good look at what was inside.

HAM BROOKS missed Monk Mayfair almost immediately, chancing to glance across the driveway, which was as wide as a street at this point, and noticing that Monk was not in sight.

“Monk!” Ham called.

He was not alarmed until he got no answer. Then, suddenly apprehensive, he dashed across the driveway, plowed into the bushes. “Monk!” he called. “Where are you?”

Thirty seconds or so and there was no answer.

Then there was a crashing of shrubbery—a large, animated object traveling full speed. This proved to be Monk. He came toward Ham.

“Monk!” Ham said. “You silly mutt, what is the idea of acting—hey! Hey! Monk, what on earth?”

Because Monk gave no slightest sign of seeing Ham, knowing where he was, or knowing where he was going—except that he wanted to get there fast.

“Monk!” Ham yelled.

Monk's mouth was open its very widest, with jaw and cheek muscles straining as if he were trying to get it open wider. His throat was a thick column of sinew, the way a man's throat gets when he is strangling on his feelings.

“Where's that dog case?”

Ham screamed at him.

Monk did not have the case.

All he had was an inarticulate spasm, paroxysm, fit or whatever kind of a seizure it was, and an unearthly and unbounded desire to get as far away from there as fast as mad speed could do it.

Ham made a flying tackle.

He brought Monk down.

“Monk!” gasped Ham. “What happened? What on earth is the matter? Where's the case?”

Wordless and frenzied, Monk tried to get up and escape. Exasperated, Ham gave him a couple of wallops over the head with his sword cane. “You haven't any brains, blast you!” Ham said. “But I'll beat out the sawdust or whatever it is you've got in place of them. What ails you, anyhow?”

This either stunned or sobered Monk because he stopped struggling. He sat there for a moment, making visible efforts to relax and to get his vocal cords to functioning. He made a few croakings.

“I'll be superamalgamated!” he said.

“That's Johnny's word,” Ham said disagreeably. “Come to your senses, you accident of nature.”

Monk swallowed a few times. “Dog!” he gulped.

“What?”

“Dog.”

Ham immediately hit Monk over the head with his sword cane again. “You gossoon!” he said. “So you tried to double-cross me, and took a look at the dog yourself. That what happened?”

Monk nodded weakly.

“I wish I'd let you do it,” Monk said with bitter feeling.

Ham's anger subsided as he inspected Monk. It was very plain that something far out of the ordinary had happened to the homely chemist.

“Where's the dog?” Ham demanded in alarm. “You let it get away.”

“Box,” Monk said.

“The dog is still in the box?”

“Y-yes.”

“And where,” asked Ham, “is the box?”

Monk looked around foolishly and pointed two or three different directions. Apparently he was confused as to just what direction he had been coming.

“I don't see what they gave you a head for,” Ham said disgustedly. “Especially one that looks like that article you've got.”

Ham hauled Monk to his feet and began hunting. He set out in the direction which Monk had been coming from when he first saw the stricken chemist, on the chance that Monk had not run in a circle, but in a straight line. This proved to be slightly faulty reasoning, but bushes were smashed down and flowers were trampled, so that Ham did not have the trouble he had anticipated in backtracking Monk.

“What ails you, anyway?” Ham demanded.

Monk mumbled something that was not understandable.

“There!” Ham barked. He dashed forward. He had found the dog-carrying case.

“This the same one?” Ham demanded.

“Uh-huh,” Monk muttered. “I just ran off and left it.”

“Why?”

Monk's answer was another unintelligible mumble.

“Oh, the devil!” Ham snapped. “What's hit you, anyway? I'll look in the case and see if the dog is there.”

Ham started to open the case.

Monk grabbed his arm. “Wait!” Monk blurted. “Don't do that.”

“Why not?”

“You better not,” Monk said.

“Why—”

Monk made excited, worried gestures. “Look, take it to headquarters, and there we—well, it would be better if we all looked it over together.”

“You're crazy,” Ham assured him. “I'm opening it now.”

Monk clutched his hand. “Wait a minute, hold on! I know how you feel. I felt the same way. But don't.”

“You don't want me to open it now?”

“No, of course not.”

“Why?”

“I don't want you to get the shock I got.”

Ham snorted feelingly. “Why, you squeaking freak, you! What a lie! You don't give a whoop about me.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Never before,” said Ham, “have you shown a disposition to keep me from getting a shock.”

“But—”

“In fact,” said Ham, “I can name times you've arranged trouble for me. I can name them so fast it'll make your head swim.”

“But—”

“I'm going to open it.”

Monk waved his arms frantically. “Wait a minute,” he yelled. “At least let me prepare you for what you are going to find.”

“Prepare me—”

“I'll tell you what you'll find in there,” Monk said grimly. “Then you'll know, and you won't be shocked like I was—”

A man with a gun now came out of the nearby shrubbery. He was followed by three other men, also with weapons.

“I think,” said the first man, “that this conversation has gone far enough.”

Chapter X. THE RUSH WEST

DOC SAVAGE and Willie Stevens drove into New York City with the caretaker who had been in charge of the country home of the man called Dirty Chin. The caretaker's name had proved to be Roy Chapman and he was convinced that he was badly injured, refusing to believe that a few bumps on the head and a gash in his shoulder would not prove fatal.

“Won't we ever get to the hospital?” he kept complaining.

When not squawking about that, he had complained that he had received a dirty deal at the hands of Dirty Chin, whose real name was T. G. S. Summers, alias several other names, probably. "I knowed Summers was a crook," he said. "I knowed it all along. You could tell it by looking at him."

"Why," asked Willie, "did you stay on the job?"

"A man has gotta live."

"When I suspect there's a crook around," said Willie, "I look into it." She laughed ruefully. "Come to think of it, that's what got me into this."

The hospital came in sight.

Doc Savage asked the caretaker, "You are sure you cannot give us any information about the men who took over the house?"

"I've described them for you."

Willie said, "That was a great help. We had seen them all ourselves."

"What about Tom Lewis?" Doc asked.

"Yes," said Willie. "What about him? I have a personal interest in him. You are sure he was all in one piece?"

The caretaker asked, "That the young fellow you described, the tall one?"

"That's the one."

"Well, he had been bunged up some. They brought him to the place, then they put him in another car and four men took him away. I don't know where."

"When did they take him away?"

"Just before you folks started the big fight."

"Where did they take him?"

"I dunno. They had beat me and my head was ringin', and I was beginnin' to die—"

"We've heard about that," Willie said. "There's the hospital."

They parked the caretaker in the hospital, leaving him somewhat revived already by looking at the attractive nurses who were to take care of him.

Willie sighed as they drove on downtown. "Men are funny," she said. "Now there was one with a piece of spaghetti for a backbone."

Doc made no comment.

Willie eyed the bronze man speculatively. Doc's bronze size seemed to impress her. "Yep, there's sure some difference in men," she said.

Doc carefully avoided the subject.

Renny Renwick met them at headquarters. He was giving off excitement as if it were sparks.

“Monk and Ham are in trouble over in Brooklyn!” he roared. “Come on!”

THEY used a large sedan which would carry all of them and which had more complete equipment. It was one of several cars and trucks which Doc Savage and his associates had maintained for some time, keeping the vehicles in a private basement garage in the building which housed headquarters. The collection of cars, which had been extensive, was now considerably abbreviated—they had only two cars left in fact—because the other machines had been removed to defense plants, where their design could be studied and good features, or features suitable to military operations, adapted to war production.

Renny drove. The big-fisted engineer gave Willie a glance of admiration, said, “Holy cow! Wait until Ham or Monk sees you!” He turned the car on to one of the main traffic ways leading toward Brooklyn.

“Ham telephoned in,” he explained. “It seems they got the carrying case with the dog in it. But they stopped off in a park and got into a little roundup.”

“Who with?” Doc asked.

“Our friend, the red-headed man, I guess,” Renny explained. “Holy cow! Ham sounded as excited as a tomcat with his tail on fire.”

“But they had the dog?” Doc asked.

“Yes.”

“Have they still got it?”

“I don't know.”

Renny switched on a red light, a siren, and drove at a speed which was certainly not below thirty-five an hour. He paid attention to the driving, nothing else.

Willie watched the big-fisted engineer narrowly until she seemed satisfied that he was good enough a driver to warrant the speed he was making. Then she gave attention to Johnny and Long Tom. Long Tom's puny physique seemed to amaze her, and, being a young woman without inhibitions, she reached over and pinched to see if he had any biceps muscle.

“Kind of squirrelly,” she said.

“Look, gorgeous,” Long Tom said irritably. “You tinker with me and I'll backfire on you. Keep out of my way or you'll get run over.”

“You must be the one who doesn't like women,” Willie said.

She turned and inspected Johnny.

“Let's hear some of your words,” she said to Johnny.

Johnny grinned foolishly.

Willie was a very attractive young woman.

“You should see your face now,” Long Tom sneered at Johnny. “Just like somebody was tickling your

toes with a feather. You stretched-out goon!"

Johnny sobered.

They pulled into a Brooklyn park, made a left turn, a right swing up a long driveway, and met Ham Brooks galloping down the street.

"They got Monk!" Ham yelled. "And they got the dog!"

THE car in which Monk and the dog-carrying case had been taken away had gone due north over a boulevard route, Ham explained. They drove in that direction themselves, although it was an impossible hope, and they knew it.

While they drove, Ham explained what had happened.

"Four guys, altogether," he said. "One of them was red-headed. They were boys who knew their way around because they didn't waste any time and didn't make any mistakes."

Doc asked, "Were they watching the house of the taxi driver to whom they had given the dog?"

"They must have been, although we didn't see them doing that," Ham admitted. "We looked around while we were waiting at the taxi driver's house. The darned taxi driver's wife was threatening to throw scalding water on us because she thought we were bill collectors, and that might have distracted us."

He groaned miserably.

"I guess they trailed us into the park," he continued. "Anyway, they—but first I had better tell you about Monk and that dog."

He told them about Monk opening the dog case and how Monk had acted afterward, running through the park shrubbery.

"He was shocked silly," Ham said. "And for Monk, that is something. I've seen him get shocks before, and he's not one to be easily affected."

"What did he see when he opened the dog case?" Doc asked.

"That," Ham said, "was what he started to tell me when this gang jumped us."

"He did not tell you?"

"Not a word."

"Then you do not know what is in the dog-carrying case?"

Ham shook his head.

"But I would swear whatever is in the case is a dog," he said. "You could hear the animal move about and growl. It was an ill-tempered dog."

Willie stared at Ham.

"You didn't," she said, "learn anything?"

Ham shook his head. “They closed in on us. Monk had been about to tell me what he saw in the box and they heard that, so they concentrated on Monk. They wanted Monk because he knew what was in the box. Well, they got him. It was a heck of a fight but the best I could do was get away into the bushes. They got Monk to their car. There was another fellow in their car—”

Ham stopped, his mouth open.

“Well?” said Willie. “What did you forget and leave out?”

“The fellow in the car.”

“Who was he?”

“What,” Ham asked, “does this Tom Lewis look like?”

They described Tom Lewis to Ham and Ham nodded.

“Tom Lewis, all right,” he said. “They had Tom Lewis in their car, a prisoner. They threw Monk in the machine, climbed in and took off. That's all there was to it. I got to a telephone and called you fellows.”

THERE was a grim silence that continued for some minutes. Renny, driving their car, saw the futility of hoping to overtake Ham's captors and gave up the chase. He turned toward the Manhattan headquarters. The fact that the chase had to be given up did not contribute anything to the good spirits in the car.

Willie looked around at the long faces of Doc's aids and the expressionless features of the bronze man himself. They were not a gleeful lot.

“I must say,” said Willie, “that I don't hear hope bubbling over.”

“This is no time for sass,” Long Tom muttered.

“Your faces are as long as beanpoles,” said Willie. “Which leads me to take it that you're up a stump, as we call it back in Missouri.”

“That's right,” Renny rumbled.

“Meaning,” said Willie, “that you don't know where to turn next.”

Long Tom scowled. “You ask too many questions,” he said. “How would you like to become a girl standing beside the road trying to thumb a ride?”

“Throw me out,” Willie told him. “I've been thrown out before.” She inspected Long Tom and added, “Not, however, by a world-renowned electrical expert who acts like a kid who pulls little girls' pigtails.”

Long Tom blinked and subsided.

Renny told Willie, “When you said we didn't know where to turn next you said a mouthful.”

The car ran up the long, sloping ramp of Brooklyn Bridge, went over the hump and coasted down toward the packed thickness of Manhattan skyscrapers.

“Pessimism,” said Willie, “is something they ought to shoot people for, like they shoot horses for broken

legs."

"I suppose," said Renny indignantly, "you have an idea of what to do next?"

"No ideas," Willie told him. "Only a suggestion."

"And that would be?"

"Back home we've got a pesky shrub called buckbrush," said Willie. "It's a nuisance to get rid of in the pastures. And we've got a saying you can cut down a buckbrush, but there's always the roots."

"Meaning?"

"The roots of this thing are down in the Ozarks," said Willie. "Why don't you look there?"

THEY reached headquarters, left the car in the basement garage and rode the special high-speed elevator upstairs. Willie was not expecting the elevator to be the violent thing it was, and when it started there was inertia that made her go to her knees and yelp. Johnny and Ham collided with each other in their haste to help her up.

"Special elevator," Johnny explained.

Willie said ruefully, "I'm glad you told me. I might have thought it was a skyrocket."

They entered headquarters, found a pleasantly efficient young man waiting there.

"Hello, Frank," Renny greeted him.

The young man was Frank Burroughs, who had no connection with their organization except that he often furnished them with quick information. Frank Burroughs had what was by way of being one of the most efficient detective agencies in the country.

He said, "I have the information."

"What information?" Renny asked him, surprised.

"Mr. Savage asked for it," Frank Burroughs explained. "He wanted data on the Admiration Radio Cabinet Co., and on Admiration City, in the Ozarks. He wanted train, bus and plane schedules on the place. He wanted me to get plane tickets and priorities so they could be used immediately, and any other transportation necessary to reach Admiration City. Mr. Savage asked for this information several hours ago."

Willie looked at Doc Savage.

"I apologize," she said, "for being a little late with my crack about looking for the roots of this thing."

Chapter XI. SETUP

THE plane which Doc Savage flew to the Ozark country was large and fast, and when an inquisitive Army Aircobra came sliding up in the sky with the warning of a .37-millimeter cannon and a dozen .50-caliber machine guns in its wing and nose, and investigated them, they might have outrun the craft. Instead, they identified themselves and were politely shepherded off the military reservation over which

they had wandered without clearance and permits. That was over lower Indiana.

Doc Savage turned the flying over to Renny, and got out a make-up kit.

He told Long Tom Roberts, “The next part of this job will be yours.”

“Anything electrical about it?”

“Probably nothing electrifying except the performance you will be expected to give,” Doc told him. “Here, let me start making over your face.”

With dyes and chemicals he proceeded to change Long Tom's normal, pallid, mushroom-cellar complexion into a healthy outdoor leather. He made Long Tom's hair gray.

He sent Long Tom into the back of the plane to change clothes. When the electrical expert came out of the rear compartment he wore overalls and jumper, heavy shoes, battered hat, all of which were stained with the kind of stains a man working around a farm would collect.

“All I need now,” he said, grinning, “is a straw to chew on.”

From a luggage compartment, Doc removed a dog-carrying case. It was black leatherette, about the size to hold an Airedale. He removed the price tags from it, the labels, and gave it a scuffing. He opened a small packet which proved to contain ordinary dust and further soiled the dog case.

Doc sat down beside Long Tom.

“Here,” said the bronze man, “is what you are to do.”

He spoke rapidly, grouping his instructions so that each step was completely stated and clear, and repeating such points as might be doubtful, or giving alternate possibilities in cases where there might be a hitch.

Long Tom said he understood.

Willie hadn't heard the instructions and she looked at Doc Savage thoughtfully. “What goes on?”

“Just an idea.”

“We have no idea whatever about what became of Tom Lewis or Monk Mayfair, or the mysterious dog, or what on earth is behind this mystery,” Willie pointed out. “It looks to me as if we are going to have to do some tall fishing in order to get a clue.”

“We are going to drop a baited hook in the water,” Doc said, “and see what happens.”

“But you don't even know what pond the fish is in.”

“There are two kinds of bait for fish.”

“How do you mean?”

“There is the bait the fish likes to eat, say a worm. And for game fish there is also the bait which makes the fish mad and arouses the desire to strike, like a casting plug.”

“And we,” said Willie, “are after game fish. That it?”

“Exactly.”

BOONE SHOT, MISSOURI, was not much of a town, consisting of half a dozen log cabins and a ramshackle railroad depot. It was inhabited by picturesque and worthless natives for the most part, and times were hard. Back in the days when moon-shining had been popular, and there had been wild turkeys in the surrounding hills, there had been a degree of prosperity. But Roosevelt had ruined the distilling business, and the dude hunters from St. Louis had slaughtered the turkeys.

Boone Shot had gotten its name, of course, from that grand old legend of the Indian-fighting pioneer days, Daniel Boone. Daniel was supposed to have shot the blue head off one of the local wild turkeys at a range of half a mile or so, or something like that. Nothing much else had ever happened around Boone Shot worth bragging about, probably.

Yet Boone Shot had gotten a good bit of publicity because the editor of the local paper happened to be a humorist, a publicist and a man with imagination.

The newspaper editor's name was Toot Alfred, and, of course, Boone Shot was not large enough to support a newspaper. It wouldn't support a filling station, for that matter, even before gasoline and rubber rationing. So Toot Alfred had to make a living by some other means, and he did it by corresponding for all the surrounding papers, including those in St. Louis and Kansas City.

Country correspondents for city newspapers ordinarily do not have incomes that would make movie stars envious, and Toot was no exception. But he did well. He paid enough income tax to make him turn pale on March 15th.

There was never any news around Boone Shot, but Toot Alfred didn't let this hamper him. If Farmer Hank's sow got her head caught in the lard bucket, Toot would do a story about it, and readers in St. Louis and Kansas City and points beyond would scream with laughter. Toot had the touch. Every speck of “news” that Toot sent out of Boone Shot got printed.

Given anything even slightly unusual, Toot could turn out a sensational item.

Toot was sitting on the porch of the general store, swapping lies with the locals when a car rattled up and stopped.

The man who got out was short, scrawny, weatherbeaten and wore agricultural clothes, well-used.

The arrival put a foot on the store porch, took out a jackknife, absentmindedly whittled a splinter off the porch post and began picking his teeth with it.

“Howdy,” the stranger said, finally. “Nice day, ain't it? If it don't rain there ain't gonna be no watermelon crop.”

No one said anything.

“I'm a stranger,” the newcomer said. “Name's Hick Lewis.”

There was another silence.

Toot asked, “Any kin to them Lewises over on West Fork?”

The stranger spat, “To them elm-peelers? I hope not!” he said.

The next silence was bitter. There were some representatives of the West Fork branch of the Lewis clan

present.

The stranger added, “Got a cousin Tom Lewis, over in Admiration City. Travelin' salesman, he is. Fastest talker in the country.”

AFTER looking at them sleepily and chewing up part of his toothpick, the stranger asked, “Where's your depot around here? Should have me a express there. Got me a telegram from that Tom Lewis that said he was sending me an express.”

“Depot's yonder,” said Toot.

The stranger walked to the depot and disappeared inside.

What happened next probably exceeded even Daniel Boone's performance with the wild-turkey head.

The stranger howled three or four times inside the station. He burst out. He was carrying a leatherette-covered case of the type used for transporting dogs.

Howling at every jump, the stranger tore down the street.

He seemed to discover he had the dog case. He threw it away.

He ran fifty yards, stopped, looked at those on the porch of the general store. He pointed at the dog case. “That dog!” he bellowed. “That dog in there!”

He jumped up and down several times. Then he ran back and got the dog case. He picked it up as if it were a bomb.

“This dog!” he yelled. “You . . . you . . . never saw such a thing!”

He ran out of town at full speed, leaving his car abandoned in front of the general store.

He was never again seen in Boone Shot, Missouri.

ACTUALLY, the stranger slackened his speed when he was out of sight, caught his breath and walked three quarters of a mile up the side of a hill. Here he joined Doc Savage and the rest of Doc's party.

“Doc, how'd I do?” asked the stranger.

“Excellent, Long Tom,” Doc told him.

“You saw the performance?”

“Yes. It was perfect.”

Long Tom grinned. “You think something will come of it?”

“Cross your fingers,” Doc said, “and wait.”

Doc Savage had selected a small, natural cave, which they had chanced to find on the ridge, for a hiding place. Inside there was the remnant of a crude still, but there was no sign that the place had been used in years, or even visited by anyone.

Leaving the others concealed in the cave, Doc Savage made his way toward the village, climbed a tree and used a pair of strong binoculars.

From his perch it was possible to observe the entire town of Boone Shot, and activities there were simple enough that a watcher could get an excellent idea of what went on.

Toot Alfred was conspicuous in the group standing around looking at the ancient car the stranger had abandoned.

Then Toot left the group, went over and sat on the store porch. His attitude was that of a man thinking. He laughed to himself several times.

Suddenly, Toot made a dash for a small house which was evidently his home.

He was inside about an hour and came out carrying a sheet of paper.

The railway depot was also the local telegraph station, and Toot disappeared into this. He came out without the paper.

Doc was satisfied. He descended from the tree and joined the others in the cave.

Johnny had caught a rabbit and Willie was concocting a fine-smelling rabbit stew.

"I think my ancestors must have been hobos, the way I can make a rabbit mulligan," Willie said. "Have there been any results."

"It would appear," Doc told her, "that Toot Alfred filed a funny story about the incident on the telegraph wire."

"Sending it to the newspapers he corresponds for all over the state?"

"No doubt."

"Will they print it?"

"They print any and everything Toot sends them," Doc said. "The man has a reputation. Why, he is known all over the country, and New York syndicates have tried to get him to leave the backwoods and come to the city. Toot says he is too lazy."

Willie peered into the cooking kettle approvingly. "Now we wait, and hope the right people see that story."

Doc nodded. "And hope they react as we wish."

"They'll react," Willie predicted. "Some of them are sure to come charging down here to look into the dog mystery. They can't afford to pass it up."

THE scheme got results in approximately sixteen hours, which was sooner than they had expected. Renny and Johnny were watching Boone Shot at the time, and Johnny arrived at the cave galloping and out of breath.

"The red-headed man himself!" he said.

Willie looked at Johnny in astonishment and said, “You *can* use small words, can't you? Well, what are we waiting on?”

Doc Savage said, “Willie, you and Ham and Long Tom break camp here, then stick by the portable radio receivers and wait for instructions.”

“What instructions?” asked Willie. “Aren't you going to grab them?”

“No,” Doc said. “You do as you are told for a change.”

The bronze man ran toward Boone Shot with Johnny.

Willie put her fists on her hips and said, “How do you like that? Doesn't even explain what he is going to do!”

Ham grinned. “You don't seem to know it, but you get more conversation out of Doc than any two women I ever saw.”

“I wouldn't call him any gale of words.”

“You're doing all right.”

Willie eyed Ham suspiciously to see if there was a double meaning to that. “Well, double meaning or not, you're wrong,” she said. “What's the matter with him? I'm not exactly a Frankenstein product. But you'd think I was just something that had splashed on the wall.”

Ham grinned.

“Don't grin, darn it!” Willie snapped. “I wish we could find Tom Lewis.”

“Keep hold of your patience,” Ham told her. “We are beginning to get somewhere and we'll find him if he can be found.”

Willie sighed.

“I hope we find him quick,” she said. “I want to take another look at him and see if he's the bundle of virtues I thought he was.”

Ham laughed. “Doc has that effect on them.”

“Oh, go run a rabbit!” Willie said.

Chapter XII. SAVING MONK

THERE was the red-headed man and two others. They were dressed well enough to command respect, but not too richly, and they were free with cigars and questions. Boone Shot was not a place where strangers learned much with questions, but the inhabitants were old American stock who did not have a contempt for pipsqueak government investigators; instead, had a great deal of awe for everyone connected with the government except “revenuers.” So, when the red-headed man and the other pair casually flashed some cards which said they were agents of the F. B. I.—the cards said they were G-men, which alone would have proved them a fake to a knowing reader—they got results.

The exact story of what had happened when Long Tom Roberts visited the local depot came out. It was

probably as truthful a story as had ever been told in Boone Shot, where lying was a practiced art and one of the main forms of amusement.

The red-headed man listened with attentive interest.

He thanked everybody.

“Come on, boys,” he said.

They climbed in their car and drove down the road a piece and stopped in the shade to talk it over.

“Why the hell didn't somebody find out Tom Lewis had a cousin?” one of the men asked.

“What'll we do? Hire the local bumpkins to comb the woods for that dog case? Chances are, if this Hick Lewis was as scared as they say, he threw the dog away somewhere.”

“Or buried it,” said another.

The red-headed man swore. “Are you guys crazy?”

“What you mean?”

“Suppose one of these brush-hoppers would find that dog?”

“Ouch!”

They were silent and concerned with their troubles for a while.

“Then what'll we do about this?” one asked.

“Report it to the boss, I guess,” the red-headed man said disgustedly. “Damn my soul! Who'd have thought there would be trouble every which way we jumped on this thing.”

He started to get the car engine running, but one of the men reached over and stopped him.

“You know something?” said the man who had blocked his hand. “This thing is beginning to creep up on me.”

“How you mean?”

“Well, in the beginning, it was all right. Good pay and all we had to do was act as guards and to grab this fellow Tom Lewis so the boss could use him.”

The red-headed man frowned. “What's changed? It's still the same, ain't it? You left out part of what you were hired for in the beginning—you were to keep Tom Lewis grabbed, and that's all you've done. Tom Lewis got away and started to New York to get help from Doc Savage. Well, we stopped that. We had our troubles but we stopped it.”

“Why,” asked another of the men, “was that Monk Mayfair brought back here?”

“There,” said the first, “is a question.”

The red-headed man looked at them as if he wanted to use his fists on them.

“The boss wants to use Mayfair,” he said.

“Same way as Tom Lewis?”

“That's right.”

“I thought,” said one, “that Tom Lewis was to be the only one.”

“Monk Mayfair happened along,” said the red-headed man, “and so he's going to be used, too.”

“That's all?”

“Sure. Say, what's eating you, anyway?”

The other man scowled at the red-headed one. “Just this: You wouldn't be figuring on adding us to the list, would you?”

“What?”

“You heard me.”

The red-headed man slapped his hands on his knees. He roared laughter. He acted as if he thought it was so funny he would have to get out and lie on the ground and roll around to enjoy it.

“What a silly idea!” he chortled.

“Just so it stays silly,” said the other uneasily.

DOC SAVAGE watched them roll away in the car, then in great haste packed the sensitive directional microphone and the amplifier with which he had been eavesdropping. The gadget was more sensitive than the human ear, and insects and birds had aggravated him, but he had heard most of the conversation held in the car. In addition he was an excellent lip reader, and he had missed very little.

He used the small portable “radio transceiver”—an outfit considerably more compact than the regular military “walkie-talkie”—and said, “Pick me up, Renny.”

Renny arrived almost immediately, in a car.

Into the radio, Doc said, “Long Tom, report. Also Ham.”

“I'm all right,” Long Tom replied.

“Here, too,” Ham said.

“Both of you are ahead of the car they are using?”

“Yes.”

Doc said, “Keep well ahead. In fact, drive fast enough that there will be no danger of them sighting you. When you get to an intersection, split if necessary in order to cover all possible roads leading toward Admiration City.”

“Right.”

Doc leaned back and relaxed.

Willie examined the bronze man thoughtfully. “The chase has started, I take it,” she said. “That was a nice job of hooking the fish you did. I doubt if they have the least suspicion that they've been sucked in on anything.”

Renny had been keeping a heavy foot on the accelerator. Now he caught sight of the car containing the red-headed man and the other two and slackened speed. After that he kept far enough behind them to trail the car, but not close enough to alarm them.

Later, after they came to a highway, Long Tom took over the job of keeping close track of the men. He alternated with Ham, who was using a different type of car in order not to arouse suspicion.

“They're heading for Admiration City, all right,” Willie said excitedly.

THE destination was not Admiration City. The car ahead turned off, began climbing a gravel road that snaked sharply up a ridge.

“Oh-oh, the lake!” Willie said. “The lake lies over this ridge—or one arm of it.”

The ridge was a high one, bleak, gave a view of the country for miles.

Willie pointed out a cluster of neat, modern buildings in the distance. “The Admiration Radio Cabinet Co. plant,” she said.

“Funny place,” said Renny, “for a radio-cabinet plant. What was the idea of building it back here in the hills? Close to the supply of wood, or something?”

“Oh, no!” Willie told him. “Admiration makes practically no wooden radio cabinets. They are plastic. Some very new and unusual types. Some of the minerals used in the cabinets and in getting the marvelous color effects in the cabinets are found here in the Ozarks. The plant was placed here partly for that reason. Also, it is close to the electric-power supply.”

“Electric power used in making the plastics?” asked Renny, who was interested in any engineering matter.

“That's right.”

“The plant,” said Renny, “would still have been closer to its raw-material supply, and particularly to labor supply, if built in a city the size of St. Louis or Kansas City. Matter of fact, labor supply is usually the reason you find plants in cities.”

Willie shrugged. “Mr. Walter Buxton.”

“Who?”

“Walter J. Buxton. I think his middle initial stands for 'Jonas.'“

“Who is he?”

“General manager of the Admiration company,” Willie explained. “The plant started as a small concern in Jefferson City, and they built this plant here about ten years ago, just after the big dam was put in.”

“I still do not see—”

“Oh, Mr. Buxton's home was down there where the plant is,” Willie told Renny. “That was why he persuaded the Admiration company owners to build the plant here. Mr. Buxton is a very sentimental man.”

“Friend of Tom Lewis, by any chance?”

Willie shook her head. “Not much. Mr. Buxton is a sensitive old gentleman, the kind of old fellow who follows a regular routine every day and likes to spend his spare time with his family. Such men don't like big talkers as a usual thing, and Tom Lewis talked as big as an elephant. Matter of fact, Mr. Buxton fired Tom once.”

“Buxton fired Tom Lewis once, eh? Any hard feelings over that?”

“I don't think they ever got to kissing each other when they met,” Willie said. “But Tom was too good a salesman to stay fired.”

Doc Savage said, “Renny, stop the car.”

The machine came to a stop. They listened. It was obvious that the car ahead had halted. They could see, through the trees, the pale-blue, crinkled sheet of the lake surface.

Willie frowned at Doc.

“Holy cow!” she said, borrowing Renny's pet expression. “Are we going to sit around and wait again?”

Doc pretended not to hear her. “Get in touch with Ham and Long Tom and Johnny,” he said. “And be ready to move quick.”

“All right,” Renny asked, “if we move down toward the lake and keep an eye on what happens.”

“As long as they do not discover you,” Doc agreed.

He moved away from the car a few yards—and was suddenly not to be seen or heard.

Willie gasped. “Now there was a slick job of disappearing.”

THE bronze man went carefully and swiftly down the sharp slope toward the lake. He went fast because he was not sure that there was much time. The woodland was fairly open, the trees rather thick, but not much brush between them; enough, however, to offer cover. There were ledges of rocks here and there, large ledges which offered silent footing once Doc removed his shoes, which he did at once. The patch glimpses of the lake through the trees showed the water much nearer, and there was the smell of a fresh-water shore line.

There was, he discovered, no great hurry.

They were hiding their car. Beside the lake was twenty acres or so of flat ground and the hay had been cut off this and stacked. They were hiding the car in a haystack, shoveling hay around it with forks, and swearing at each other when the job looked like anything but a haystack.

The red-headed man was farther to the west, and he was gathering dry sticks and piling these on a tuft of grass. He struck a match and the grass and wood blazed up, sending aloft a wisp of blue smoke.

The man then poured a bottle of something, evidently crude oil, on the fire, and the smoke became very

black.

He stood back and admired the smoke in a way that proved it was a signal.

“Get everybody together,” he called.

“What's the idea?” someone shouted.

“We're all going in.”

“Who told you—”

“Jim was waiting in the shack with a message,” the red-headed man said angrily. “The boss is getting worried. He wants us all to come in. We're going to hole up until we see what goes on. Play safe. And, damn you, I'm getting tired of explaining every move to you.”

The man who had asked the question scowled. “Listen, I don't like the smell of this.”

“You've said that before,” the red-headed man said contemptuously.

“Listen, I—”

“Shut up and go—”

“Lay off that stuff, Red. You keep telling people to shut up and somebody is going to do some dental work on you with a fist.”

“Go on and—”

The other man walked forward, stiff-legged. “Red, let's settle something now,” he said. “Why aren't the rest of the boys out here helping us?”

“The boss didn't think they—”

“Red, they got what Tom Lewis got, didn't they? Got what that Monk Mayfair is going to get? That right?”

“Hell, don't be silly,” the red-headed man said, but there was suddenly no ring of truth behind his words.

The other stared at him fixedly. “So I was right.”

“Keep still about it,” the red-headed man growled. “What has been done has been done, and it's too late.” He shrugged. “Anyway, you and I and the rest of us here are safe. He just needed half a dozen.”

“Who needed half a dozen?”

“The boss. He's got them now. All the men he needs.”

“How do I know—”

“Because I tell you,” the red-headed man snapped. “Now go get the dog.”

“Where is—”

“In the shack. Jim left him there. He's still in the same case.”

“So Jim got in from New York all right with the dog?”

“He didn't have any trouble. We could have brought the dog with us for that matter. But it was better to split up and all take different routes back, in case something went wrong.” The red-headed man jerked his head impatiently. “Go on and get the dog.”

THE man who had asked the questions walked toward a set of ramshackle outbuildings at the far end of the meadow. The structures were what remained of a farm, after house and barn had been torn down and removed. They looked as if they had stood abandoned for years.

Doc Savage, moving fast under cover in the woods, kept abreast of the man, then put on more speed and got ahead of the fellow.

The man walked around a shed that was more substantial than the other buildings. The shed was padlocked and he fooled with the lock awhile, then picked up a rock and smashed it off the door.

Doc Savage was very close to the shed then and he went forward fast, took the man by the neck. The man made a small, squawking noise, convulsive gestures of arms and legs. Doc got him back into the shed, down on the floor.

There were certain neck nerve centers which, if subjected to experienced pressure, produced a form of unconsciousness that was like a spell. Doc finally had to use a fist to get the man quiet enough to apply the pressure in the desired spots.

(This method of producing unconsciousness is not new. It has several forms, all of them dangerous if used by one without experience. As an example of the fatal consequences possible, some years ago, lifeguards on the beach at a New Jersey resort were causing unconsciousness by pressure on certain neck centers of “fun.” They called it “hypnotizing,” which it was not. One of their victims died, which caused an unpleasant furor.)

After the man was limp Doc let him lie there.

The shack was empty except for the leatherette-covered dog-carrying case which stood in a corner.

Doc went to it.

Chapter XIII. SKELETONS

DOC SAVAGE looked into the dog case for only an instant.

He closed it quickly.

His face, ordinarily expressionless, was strange. The emotion on it was stark, incredulous, with a little of revulsion and much of horror.

He made, for a time, a small trilling note that was his unconscious habit in moments of mental stress. The sound, a low and exotic thing, might have been the product of a wind in a forest of arctic ice spires, or something as unreal. Certainly, it was more strange than human. It had a quality definitely ventriloquial, seeming to come from many places far away rather than any definite spot.

The bronze man realized he was making the sound and stopped it. He looked at the case.

He wheeled and went through the pockets of the man he had made unconscious, finding a gun, some paper money, cigarettes, pocketknife, racing form, two dice, folded typewriter paper that was blank, a mechanical pencil. He examined and identified all these objects by the sense of touch, except the paper, which he removed and inspected, together with the racing form and the pencil.

With the pencil he printed a note on the paper. The note said:

I HAVE JUST REALIZED WHAT ALL THIS IS GOING TO LEAD TO AND I CANNOT TAKE IT. DIVIDE MY STUFF AMONG YOU IF YOU WANT TO.

Doc did not sign the note—not knowing the man's name—and did not print it too skillfully.

He left the shack, kept down, gained the wood. He ran at full speed until he reached the car containing Renny and Willie.

"The portable chemical laboratory," Doc said. "Quick!"

The imperative haste in his voice made Renny jump. They got out the mobile lab, an affair contained in a pair of metal equipment cases. Monk Mayfair had designed the portable outfit and selected the basic chemicals which it contained, intending that they should as nearly as possible fit all emergencies connected with their work.

Doc dug out a pair of small phials.

"If you do not hear from me," he said, "do not try to close in on the gang for a while. I have a plan that may work."

He left them then, running back toward the shack on the edge of the lake.

Willie looked after him uneasily. "What's he trying to do?"

"Holy cow, your guess is as good as mine!" Renny said. He sounded uneasy himself. "I think, from the way he looked, that he's getting ready to take a heck of a chance."

Willie frowned, "I don't like that."

Renny looked at her sharply. "Don't," he said, "complicate things now by falling for him."

"If that complicates it, consider it complicated," Willie said slowly. She sighed. "Poor Tom Lewis," she added. "I hope he's a guy who doesn't mind losing his girl."

BACK at the shack, Doc Savage saw with much relief that he seemed to have plenty of time. The red-headed man and the others had finished hiding the car, and were standing around the signal fire, fully two hundred yards from the shack, watching the column of black smoke rise from the burning crude oil, more of which they applied from time to time, and looking up the lake. Apparently, they expected a boat to be coming.

Doc Savage gave the unconscious man in the shack a hypodermic dosage of the chemical in the phial which he had just secured.

He applied local anaesthetic to a spot on the man's chest, over the heart, and another spot on his back. Doc then made small cuts, not deep enough to be harmful, at both points. He made them so they would resemble the point of entrance and point of exit of a bullet.

He broke open the man's gun, a revolver, took the lead from one of the cartridges, used a little of the powder it contained to make a powder burn around a hole which he punched in the man's coat and shirt. The powder, puffing up, made an odor of burned cordite in the shack.

Doc took another look at the men about the fire. They were still there.

Because he had the time, and because he was very interested, Doc Savage opened the dog-carrying case again.

He did not let the dog out.

The dog was a skeleton, and the skeleton was alive. The skeleton moved, growled, whimpered, snarled, made all the usual dog noises.

The light in the shack was not particularly good, and it was somewhat more gloomy in the dog case. Doc moved the case so that the light was a little better, but the dog was still only a skeleton that moved, growled, snarled.

“What's the matter, pup?” Doc asked.

The skeleton growled, but it was a more friendly kind of growl. Obviously the dog that was a skeleton had the emotions of an ordinary dog. It was somewhat bad-tempered, but it had been shut up in the case for sometime.

“Come on here, pup,” Doc said quietly. “Why not be friends? You hungry? Nice dog!”

The skeleton was more docile and he put a hand slowly into the cage and found ears—not ears made of bone, either—and scratched and rubbed them. There was the feel of short, stiff and curly hair. He ran his hands over the animal and knew it was an Airedale dog with flesh that was translucent—not wholly invisible, he could tell now—and a skeleton that was quite real and probably slightly, very slightly, luminous in a radioactive way, so that it was more visible than an ordinary skeleton would have been in such dim light.

Doc struck a match.

By such light, the dog was not wholly a skeleton in aspect, but a dog that had a dog's skeleton and a dog's body; but the body was a tough, leathery substance—as genuine to the touch as a real dog—that was as translucent as a clear, gelid substance, but not as transparent as glass or plastic of the Lucite type.

It was not an invisible dog except for the skeleton. Only in poor light did it appear to be so. But anyone opening the case and seeing the dog in the half light of the case interior might readily get the idea that the dog was nothing but a living skeleton.

Doc stared, frankly horrified and amazed, at the thing until the red-headed man shouted from the other end of the meadow.

“What the hell's keeping you with that dog?” he bellowed.

Doc picked up the unconscious man's gun, put it close to the hole he had powder-stained in the coat and fired a bullet into the earth floor.

He scuffed out the bullet hole in the dirt floor with a toe.

He put the gun in the man's limp hand.

Then Doc jumped, caught a rafter, swung up and lay on a rickety platform of loose poles and boards which formed a makeshift loft.

THEY heard the shot and came running, the red-headed man in the lead, and piled through the shed door. There they stopped.

“Hell, he shot himself!” gasped the red-headed man.

Another pointed. “Ain't that a note?”

The red-headed man jumped, got the note. He read it. His profane ejaculation was startled.

“What's it say?” asked one of the others. “What was wrong with him?”

The note, carefully folded, went into the red-headed man's pocket. “He killed himself all right,” he said. “Just was feeling low.”

“No other reason?”

“None.”

The red-headed man then got to his knees and felt of the wrist of the prone man. Doc Savage, watching, became tense. This was the critical point.

The chemical, which he had administered with the hypodermic needle, was intended to slow pulse and drop body temperature, but it would not fool a doctor or even anyone who had taken a good first-aid course.

“Dead as a rock,” the red-headed man said, and stood up. “We can't leave the body here, though. Have to take it along and get rid of it later.” He gestured. “Four of you come and get it when the boat arrives.”

He indicated the four men to do the job.

The four showed no enthusiasm.

“Wait a minute,” one of them said. “We walk across that meadow carrying the body? We got to reach the lake, you know.”

The red-headed man shrugged. “It's your worry.”

“Hell, there's fishermen and squirrel hunters in these woods and along the lake shore. Chances are they're not blind.”

Doc Savage waited patiently. This was the second crisis of his little plan, the most ticklish point. He watched them and nothing happened.

“Why not bury him under the floor here?” a man asked.

Doc was shocked. That wasn't what he wanted. It would ruin all his planning.

Hastily, he said in a low voice, using a ventriloquist's delivery so that the words would seem to come from one of the group below, “Why not wrap him up in those old sacks?”

It worked and the red-headed man growled, “There's an idea. Try those sacks.”

The sacks, together with some old canvas, were stacked in a corner where they had been discarded. They dug into the pile. A man held up an enormous affair of burlap and said, “This is a hell of a big gunny sack.”

“That's a wool sack, simpleton,” he was told.

They rolled the body in canvas and burlap and put it in the wool sack.

“Now we can carry it without anybody telling what it is,” one said.

“Hell, leave it here until the boat comes!”

None of them seemed to care to wait in the shack with the body. They went outdoors, stood around talking, but not too far away.

The sun was low and the evening was close, with the light an increasing redness. The dog in the case whimpered from time to time and its whimpering was weak, as if it had not been fed for a long period.

Doc got carefully out of the little makeshift loft. He took the unconscious man out of the bundle of canvas and burlap and placed him in the loft.

Doc took his place in the wool sack. He had some trouble wrapping the canvas and burlap around him so that it would cover him thoroughly, yet let him get out in a hurry—if that was necessary.

Chapter XIV. IMMEDIATE PROBLEM

THE wait was nearly an hour, and not pleasant. The unconscious man on the makeshift loft floor snored softly, which was contrary to the rules. The drug which Doc had given him was supposed to be strong enough to keep his respiration not much beyond the point of necessity, but it was not functioning properly. Also, Doc had forgotten to place the man on his side or face, so that he would be less likely to snore. Only satisfactory thing about the snoring was that it was not loud.

The boat which came had a big motor, one that sounded like an airplane. They did not stop the motor and the men came running and got the dog-carrying case and the dog, and four of them picked up Doc Savage.

“Hell, he's made of iron!” a man complained, which was alarming to Doc, whose weight was probably close to twice that of the man they thought they were carrying.

They got him in the boat, however. Placed him over a coaming and lashed him there.

“Got an anchor?” a man asked. “Why not tie it to the body and drop it overboard?”

“You sink a body like that and they always come to the top, for some reason or other,” said a man who evidently had experience along that line.

The boat stuck its nose in the air, made a great deal of noise and began hitting only the tops of the waves. It ran that way for a while, not as long as Doc had somehow expected, then slowed and turned and finally rubbed against a dock.

“O. K., tie her up,” someone ordered, and the hollowness of the voice indicated they were in a boathouse.

Someone accidentally gunned the boat motor while they were tying up and the craft thumped into something. There was cursing.

“I'll go see what he wants to do with the body,” a man said.

They waited. A man was telling someone what had happened during the afternoon—what had occurred in Boone Shot and thereafter.

The matter of how there could be a second dog was a great mystery, they agreed. Another point on which they thought the same was that Tom Lewis would be made to explain the second dog.

A man came back.

“He says to bring the body to the house,” he reported, “and put it in the basement.”

They gathered around Doc, untied him, carried him to the solid footing of land.

They dropped him. Hard.

There was silence.

“Who wants to unwrap him?” someone asked.

No one volunteered.

“Ted, you do it,” said the voice.

The voice that was giving the orders was a new voice. The tone was that of an older man, the manner of delivery that of a man who had given many orders in his life.

The covering was removed carefully from Doc. He did not make any movements that were quick enough to persuade them to shoot. He counted six men, four with rifles, one with a light machine gun, the other with a pitchfork.

THE six did not include the man who had given the orders—the new voice.

He wore a mask, a thing that was a hood of thin silk covering his whole head. Vision and speech and breathing was possible through the gossamery fabric, but its thinness concealed the mans features except for general contour.

“Sorry about the mask,” he said in the same cultured tone. “I imagine some of my associates may suspect who I am by now, but it tickles my vanity not to give them the satisfaction of knowing they are right.”

Doc examined the man's hands, such of his neck skin as was visible, and decided his age was somewhere around thirty, according to those clues. That was a little deceptive because the voice sounded older, more polished and trained, with the hoarser undertones in it that come with age.

“You see,” said the man, “that you didn't fool us.”

He seemed to expect an answer, got none, and scowled.

“They found the man you drugged lying in the loft of the shack,” the man snapped. “Or are you curious about how you were discovered?”

Doc was silent.

In an increasingly irritated voice the man said, “Take his clothes. Then take him up to the house.”

They removed Doc's garments—and the gadgets he always carried in them—and gave him a strip of canvas for clothing.

Then they moved up a hill, following a pleasant path through oak and elm trees on which wild grape vines entwined. The sun was behind the distant hills, and all the light that showed was very dull red. The twilight had been a very long one because of the height of the hills; the sun got behind the hills and then it was a long time until complete darkness.

This was an island. It was small, not more than three or four acres. It stood in the lake, which was not a natural lake, but one made by the construction of a hydroelectric dam. A strip of gravel that had once been a main road cut up over the side of the hump that was the island, and beside this, where it had been built thirty years or so ago, stood the house.

The house was a great old castle of an affair, made of wood and stone, forty or fifty rooms, a grand place with the splendor of the Gay Nineties still intact. It was preserved, for an old house; a show place built here in the hills, a family mansion left isolated on this island by the building of the lake, but kept in a state of good repair.

They went inside. The man with the thin silk sack over his head stepped to a shelf. He put his gun, a flat automatic, on the shelf.

“Leave your guns here. Leave any sizeable metal objects here,” he told his men. “There is delicate electromagnetic apparatus in the laboratory which will be upset by any metal coming in its neighborhood. So leave your guns, please. There are enough of you to handle Savage barehanded.”

The men weren't too happy about the order. There was some hesitating. “Go ahead!” the hooded man snapped. They complied then.

They walked through a small room, down a flight of stairs into a basement.

The basement was not a laboratory.

Half a dozen grotesque, unbelievable men with skull faces and revolvers stood in the room.

They pointed the guns at the new arrivals.

“All right,” said the masked man to the newcomers. “Sorry to shock you boys, but you are going to join the experiment.”

SHOCK and disbelief gripped the basement room in the shape of a frozen, unbreathing silence.

Doc Savage, standing motionless, watched the half dozen men who were like the dog. These men were dressed and all of them wore gloves or had cloth tied around their hands. The significance of the cloth and gloves was pitiful, frightening, for it showed a sickening wish not to see their own hands.

Two of them had bandaged their heads to hide the horror of the semitransparent, translucent flesh which actually let the bone structure show through. In the half light of the basement there seemed to be no flesh, only a cloudy substance around the bonework.

The degree of translucence which affected each man was not the same. Two of them were much less frightening than the others, one of these almost approaching normal. But whatever had happened to them it had happened to all six.

The red-headed man got words loose from his throat, said, “Join the experiment—what do you mean?”

The masked man had stepped back from them. He told the translucent men with the guns, “Watch them. If they make a move, shoot them!”

“What kind of a double cross is this?” screamed the red-headed man.

“I need more subjects for experiment,” said the masked man grimly. “You are elected.”

“You mean you're gonna try that stuff on me?”

“Right.”

“But you said—”

“I said,” snapped the other, his words blowing the thin silk out from his face explosively, “that I had hired you men to help in this. All right, you are going to help.”

The red-headed man stepped forward. “You told *me* that I'd be an exception.”

“I've changed my mind.”

One of the red-headed man's crew now hit the red-headed man a fist blow into which he put everything he had. The victim's red hair flew up like grass from the impact and he fell stiffly, not making a sound during or after his fall. “Lousy two-face,” said the man who had hit him, bitterly.

The man who wore the silk hood said, “If anyone else moves, shoot him.”

No one stirred.

“Bring Savage,” the man said, “into the living room.”

THE living room was a pleasant place furnished with the elaborate furniture of forty years or more ago. Doc revised his estimate of the age of the house a little. Probably it was fifty years old. Some of the furniture was that old as well, but wonderfully preserved.

He was placed in a straight-backed chair.

The man in the silk mask poured a glass of wine. “It is good wine,” he said. “Not drugged, I assure you. Will you join me?”

Doc Savage said nothing.

The other shrugged. “I understand you are a man of resources,” he said. “So I want to point out that you have a chance of coming out of this thing alive, and of also contributing a great service to mankind, if you do as you are told. The alternative, of course, is that you will become a strange-disappearance case. I believe I can hide your body so that it will not be found.”

Doc watched him silently.

“I am going to give you,” said the man, “the same explanation I have given the others.”

“Why?” Doc asked bluntly.

The other shrugged. “Call it easing my conscience, if you wish.”

He took a comfortable chair.

“The war,” he said, “is responsible for this. The war has had a momentous and weird effect on many people, but probably it has affected no one more deeply than myself. It did a strange thing for me. It made me into a patriot of the most zealous order.”

Doc said quietly, “It would be hard to find any patriotism in this thing so far.”

“Before the war,” the man continued, ignoring the remark, “I was a placid, successful man with a family I loved. It was strange about my family. I didn't know how much I really loved them. I had two sons. My wife died several years ago, peacefully.”

His hands tightened visibly on the chair arms. “Two sons. They were drafted. They were killed in action.”

There was a tall grandfather clock, ticking rheumatically, between the two high windows. Beyond the windows, now, there was darkness.

“Killed in action,” he said. “That was what the telegram said. And then the story came out. They had starved to death.”

THE man got up suddenly, walked to the window, jerked the curtains shut. He came back and sat down. During the whole move he had traveled at a near run without seeming to be aware that he was hurrying.

“Starvation is not a bad death, so they say,” he continued. “Perhaps I would have been affected no more than any father who had lost his only two sons—but then, I saw the pictures.”

His voice climbed shrilly. “Pictures of the bodies of my two sons, after they had starved. Pictures taken by a signal corps man and sent to me because the signal corps man had once worked for me and been fired, and hated me. I guess he sent the pictures for revenge. They were horrible. I remember that I looked at them, and looked at them, and then two days later I awakened and there were doctors there and they said I had suffered a terrible shock.”

He was silent awhile, apparently controlling himself. He opened and closed his hands.

“Starvation,” he said. “So I gave up everything, the presidency of my company, everything, to work out a means of making soldiers so they would not need food. I believed I could do this, and no more soldiers would starve, and the American army would be free of the enormous job of bringing supplies up to the front. But the main thing was that no more boys would starve.”

Doc Savages flake-gold eyes were expressionless, but he said, “A thing like that would take great technical and scientific experience.”

“I had it.”

“Enough?”

“You do not understand. I told you I was the president of a company. But I was more than that. I am a

chemist specializing in plastics, and have been for many years. No one knows my ability, for a simple and mercenary reason."

He scowled. "My company," he said, "has the usual system of corporations—it lays claim to all patents and discoveries made by its employees while working for it. I did not own the company; I was only its president, at a salary.

"So I did what any human being would do—I did my research work under another name and sold my own discoveries to the company of which I was president. Perhaps that was crooked. I think not. I did the work in my spare time, paying for my own materials, and I think I was entitled to what I got. I certainly sold my discoveries in plastic cheap enough."

He looked at Doc Savage levelly.

"It is too bad you got into this," he said. "I perfected, or nearly perfected, my treatment to eliminate the need of food for a long interval of time. I made a test on a dog. It was successful. I needed a human being. So I selected a man I did not like, a salesman named Tom Lewis. I paid him a large sum of money and he agreed to be the human experimental subject. But Tom Lewis changed his mind."

The man spread his hands wearily. "Tom Lewis became scared of me—unnecessarily, I think, although I did fly into a great rage when he refused.

"Tom Lewis stole my experimental dog and headed for New York to get your help. That meant I had to stop him. So I hurriedly engaged a group of men whom I had contacted against such an emergency and sent them after him."

"The men in the basement?"

"Right. You know what happened after they started pursuing Tom Lewis to New York. They got him and they got the dog. But you got on their trail, and here you are."

Doc watched him for a moment.

"Plastics?" Doc asked.

"Yes, as I told you—"

"Plastics," Doc said, "are used in modern radio cabinets, are they not?"

"What you really mean: Is there a connection between the Admiration Radio Cabinet Co. and myself?"

"Is there?"

"I am Walter Buxton," the man said, "president of the Admiration concern."

THE man stood up then and produced his gun. "This ends the explanation, and I think it is enough to take care of my conscience nicely."

"You are going to try your no-food stuff on me?"

"Exactly. On you and the others."

Doc Savage shook his head slowly, a gesture which had more understanding than negative or protest

meaning. “So the stuff is not successful.”

“It will be,” the other said grimly.

“With more than fifteen human subjects, I can work out the bugs.”

“You are going to make all of us like . . . like those men with the guns in the basement?”

The other nodded. “Would you like to know why those men with the guns are now helping me?”

“You evidently have a hold on them.”

“That's right. Unless they play along with me they will eventually die, or at least will not become normal. But I can make them normal. I am going to do it if they coöperate with me. Otherwise”—he shrugged—“they will die or continue to look like skeletons.”

“But—”

The man in the mask cocked his gun, the small automatic hammer clicking audibly when he pulled it back.

“You will be the next subject for the material,” he said. “You will kindly walk ahead of me.”

Chapter XV. THE SKELETON TREATMENT

HAM BROOKS had been listening to a campaign conducted by Willie. The campaign was to the effect that they had better be doing something; that they had waited long enough. Ham privately agreed with her and he called together Johnny, Long Tom and Renny, and they had a conference.

“Nobody has seen a sign of Doc Savage,” Willie pointed out, “since that shot was heard this afternoon. What kind of a gang of assistants are you, anyway?”

Ham and the others, without saying so, had resented the waiting as much as anyone.

Long Tom asked Willie, “You going to take the responsibility of going ahead, when Doc's orders were not to interfere?”

“I'll take the blame, if any,” Willie said promptly.

Renny told Long Tom, “If you think passing the buck to her will make it O. K. with Doc, if we bungle something, you've got another guess.”

Long Tom grimaced.

“It gives us an excuse, anyway,” he said. “Maybe we can make Doc think she vamped us, or something.”

“I wouldn't waste time vamping you,” Willie told Long Tom disagreeably. “You've been a sour pickle right from the beginning. What do you get out of life, anyway?”

“I get freedom from the worries women cause you,” Long Tom told her. “Come on. Let's see what goes on.”

They worked down to the shore of the lake, using care. They had seen the speedboat arrive and depart at dusk, but they had no means of telling whether all the gang had departed.

Eventually, they approached the old shack and the other outbuildings at the edge of the meadow. With much caution they investigated.

“Holy cow!” Renny rumbled suddenly. “Come here!”

The others hurried toward the astonished engineer's booming voice.

“Look,” Renny said.

They stared at the forms on the floor of the shack.

“Four bodies,” Ham said wonderingly. “Say, they're four of the gang who got Monk away from me in that Brooklyn park.”

Willie had turned white.

“Are they dead?” she asked.

The bodies were sprawled in grotesque positions on the floor, but there was no blood and not much sign of death in their faces, something that Renny and the others overlooked in the excitement of the discovery.

The four bodies sat up and produced guns and said—one of them—in excited urgency, “Stand still or you'll get your heads blowed off!”

Long Tom, in a very disagreeable I-told-you-so voice, told Willie, “See what we get by following a woman's advice?”

LONG TOM'S disagreeable accusation directed at Willie was not as misleading as he had hoped it would be because when he simultaneously kicked at the gun arm of the nearest enemy, the fellow had already dodged back. Long Tom missed with his kick and was shot in the chest where, fortunately, his bulletproof vest offered the best protection.

The bullet force turned him over once, neatly, and started him in a spell of coughing that did not stop until an avalanche of men on his back jammed all the breath out of him.

That was about all the resistance. Renny knocked a man down and was knocked down instantly himself by a man with a rifle who stepped out of the darkness behind them.

“All right, strip and use what's left of these gunny sacks and canvas for clothes,” someone said.

“Hey,” Willie said, “there's a lady present!”

Someone laughed then took her outside.

Walking down to the lake shore, Ham and Johnny and Long Tom and Renny felt ridiculous and futile in their skirts of burlap or canvas.

Willie said, “You know, if it wasn't so darned serious I could laugh until I fell over at you fellows.”

Long Tom seemed to find this the first thing she had said which did not offend him. He glanced at her admiringly, said, “I hope you've got as much nerve as you act like.”

“I told you I was in show business,” Willie said.

“What's show business got to do with it?”

“It,” said Willie, “is all nerve.”

Their captors were using flashlights now. They signaled for a while, got an answer from out on the lake. A boat came in, moving rapidly, and swung in close to the beach but did not ground.

Everyone waded out and climbed into the craft, which was piloted by a young man in a sweater, who said, “This about rounds it up, don't it?”

No one answered him. The boat got in motion. It was fast, threw a considerable bone of spray, rocked and bounced.

They came to the island, after not more than two miles, and swung into the boathouse. The crew tied up the boat, got the prisoners out.

“How many?” asked a quiet, controlled voice.

“Four.”

“That is good. That is all of them.”

Of the voice, Ham muttered, “There is a guy who has done a lot of talking in his time.”

They were marched up the hill, along the gravel road that had been a highway before the making of the lake, and into the tall, turreted, old-fashioned house.

“Take them downstairs,” said the controlled voice. “But leave your guns on that shelf, so the steel will not affect the magnetic apparatus in the laboratory.”

They could see the speaker, a tall, somber figure with his head incased in a silk bag.

The captors fell for the guns-on-the-shelf gag like, as Renny expressed it later, the pins in a bowling alley.

And then translucent men were suddenly around all of them with guns and menacing them.

Willie looked at the faces of the translucent men. She did what the others felt much like doing—screamed at the top of her voice and put both hands over her eyes.

THE cellar room into which Willie, Ham, Long Tom, Johnny and Renny were crowded was utterly black and dank, smelled of confined air, and another odor definitely not pleasant. The place was dark, and light did not chance to get into the place as they were forced inside. The door, heavy and of wood, grunted shut behind them, and there was a rattling and thumping of the bar.

Johnny sank to a knee and felt of the soft stuff on the floor.

“A subterranean repertorium,” he announced.

“This is no time,” said Ham sourly, “for your words.”

A strangled noise had come from a corner. It came again. It turned into words.

“Take away my head and call me speechless,” it said.

“Monk!” Ham squalled.

Ham plunged around in the darkness and found Monk and began beating on him ecstatically.

Monk beat him back awhile, then said, “Watch out or you'll smash these half-rotten turnips. This place is a root cellar.”

“Are you all right?” Ham demanded.

“Hell, no! We're locked up in here and they're going to give us—”

“Have they hurt you?”

“My feelings, plenty!” Monk said. “And some guy hit me with a wagon spoke or something back in that park in Brooklyn, and they've walked my frame a time or two since then. How did you guys trail them back here? They figured they had covered up everything.”

Ham told him, “Doc invented another dog, let the news get out, and they came to investigate. We got on their trail.”

“Oh, you found out what that dog was?” Monk asked.

“No. What is it?”

“The head guy here,” Monk explained, “thinks he is right on the verge of inventing something to enable soldiers to do without food. He tried it out on the dog. It makes the flesh get pale, and then lose all color, and then become kind of translucent, like plastic or jelly or whatever you want to call it. That's what ailed the dog.”

Ham shuddered. “And those men we saw when we came here.”

“That's right. How many men were that way?”

“About a half dozen.”

“I gather,” Monk said, “that they're all going to be made that way.”

Willie, in a horrified voice, asked, “They will become that way willingly?”

Monk laughed grimly. “Not willingly.”

“Then—”

“The first half dozen,” Monk said, “were caught by surprise, drugged and given the treatment. That was while the others were out investigating the false-dog alarm you folks stirred up.”

“But—”

“And now,” Monk added, “the half dozen have to force the others to take it, or the head guy will refuse to give them the treatment that will bring them back to normal. They're going to do it to us—and to Doc.”

Renny rumbled, “They've got Doc?”

“Sure have,” Monk said. “I haven't seen him. But they've got him.”

Johnny Littlejohn had been moving around the dank chamber, feeling of the walls. Now he stumbled over something and fell into a soft mess of semidecayed vegetables up to his elbows. “I'll be superamalgamated!” he gasped. “Ugh!”

Then Johnny roared, “Who's this? Here's somebody!”

The figure over which Johnny had stumbled groaned a little. The groan was a man's voice.

“Oh, him,” Monk said. “He's the chemist who worked out the no-food stuff in the first place.”

SOMEWHERE in the house a low rumbling started and became the noise of a heavy motor. As it accelerated there was a background of deep-throated whining that also increased.

“Diesel motor and generator,” Monk explained. “That means they're warming up the apparatus that will turn us into translucent men. They use electricity and chemicals both in the treatment.” He sighed. “I'd sure like to know more about the method. They produce an electro-chemical change in everything but the bony structure of the body.”

“What,” yelled Johnny, “about this man on the floor?”

“Oh, this house belongs to him,” Monk explained. “He is a famous chemist. Been inventing plastics and selling them to the radio company of which he's president. Had two sons starve to death in the Aleutians in this war, and that got him unbalanced on this no-food thing.”

“What's he doing here?” Johnny bellowed.

“He was,” Monk explained, “robbed of his discovery by a very clever guy who saw the possibilities of the thing.”

Willie spoke quietly, asking, “The guy with his head in the silk bag?”

“That's right.”

Willie said nothing more.

The man on the floor said in a weak voice. “I must tell you people how it works. Some of you may escape and you can give the secret to scientists who can finish it out and make it practical.”

He had trouble talking, had to catch his breath frequently.

“Human muscle,” he continued, “is three-fourths water, as you know if you studied physiology at all. Its fiber contents are semifluid and can be forced out as muscle plasma by pressure, leaving a residue of sarcolemma, connective tissue, keratin, mucin, nuclein, and so on.

“You may also know that muscle in fatigue, or rigor, has turned acid, principally lactic acid. It was discovered by Fletcher and Hopkins as early as 1907 that the formation of lactic could be diminished or even prevented by sufficient oxygen. Later it was found that lactic is removed by resynthesis to a precursor, although not much is actually known about it. It is certain, though, that glycogen, a carbohydrate, is necessary for the restoration of activity to a fatigued muscle.

“What I did was affect a chemical substitute for glycogen, combined with a method of creating a static condition in the tissue which is unsympathetic to the formation of toxic lactic, the accumulation of which is fatigue. Now, listen closely and memorize these formulas.”

He gave them complicated chemical terms, repeating each several times.

(It has long been the policy of the author not to give exact chemical formulae which might he dangerous in unskilled use. The complexity of modern chemical science is such that it has become like a loaded machine gun—nothing to fool around with unless you know what you are doing. However, much scientific work has been done along these lines, and marvelous progress has been made in the field of blood plasma. It has been discovered that blood plasma—the fluid that carries the blood cells through the body—can he preserved for years, then injected into the blood streams of wounded or injured persons with excellent effect. These are the "blood banks" so widely mentioned during the current war.—Author.)

Willie spoke in the darkness. "I think I have met you," she said.

The man on the floor asked, "You are Miss Stevens, are you not? I do not forget people."

"That's right, but call me Willie," Willie said. "This is a terrible thing to happen to you, Mr. Buxton."

"Buxton!" Johnny barked.

"Walter Buxton, president of the Admiration Radio Cabinet Co.," Monk told them.

"Who in blazes," demanded Renny, "is the guy with the silk sack over his head?"

A voice from the door told them, "Quit worrying about little things, you guys, and come out of there. We're going to give you the treatment now. Get moving."

Chapter XVI. FROM BEHIND SILK

THE laboratory was a big room made more cavernlike by the lighting system, which was seven sputtering, wavering candles stuck in their own wax on pieces of furniture here and there.

"Keep the electric lights off," said the man with the silk bag over his head. "We need all the current and no magnetic interference from the house wiring."

The prisoners stared at the apparatus, and they were a little disappointed. There was nothing but a tank, a glass tank, full of sour-looking green liquid and a few electrodes. Nearby was a table on which chemicals stood, but these looked no more impressive than an amateur photographer's darkroom array.

They had rigged a strait jacket out of a two-by-twelve-inch plank and some rope. That was for the unwilling victims while they were being treated.

There were nine men with translucent faces and gloves. Over half of them had small machine guns and the others had revolvers and pistols.

Those who were to get the treatment made up fully as large a crowd and no one looked happy.

Doc Savage was not in evidence.

The man in the silk hood stood before them. "I want to make a little speech," he said.

Nobody getting ready to make a speech ever got more silence or more attention.

"I want," he said, "to point out a fact. I want to point it out so that every one of you will get it in his head

and understand just what it means."

He stood in the darker end of the room and his voice was deeply timbered, but somehow artificial-sounding.

"There is no sense in going into an elaborate, scientific explanation of what happens to your bodies when you get this treatment. It is a system for the prevention of fatigue, which is chemically the formation of lactic acid. The preventing is done by introducing into your muscular tissue a substitute for glycogen, a carbohydrate which affects the restoration of activity to fatigued muscles, and also producing a static status of tissue which is unsympathetic to the formation of any fatigue toxic."

He let them listen with bated breath for a while.

"The fact," he said, "is that none of you will recover, or will live very long if I am killed."

He let that soak in.

"Important fact, isn't it?" he said dryly. "Good life insurance for me, wouldn't you say?

"The scientific reason for this, in broad terms which you will understand, is simple. First, you would not be happy as you are. You are not exactly running skeletons, but you are pretty sickening sights. That is the first reason. The second one is that nature is a strict mistress. You do not upset the balance of nature without paying for it. There are simple laws. Anything that goes up must come down—as simple as that. What this no-food treatment does to your bodies is against all the laws of nature. Everything gets tired. That is a natural law. But you do not get tired, so there is a penalty. The penalty in your case happens to be death."

Again he waited.

"I can give you treatment," he said, "that will make your bodies normal."

Someone's teeth clattered audibly.

"Remember—I can keep you alive," he repeated.

He stepped over into better light.

"I am going to unmask," he said. "I want you to stand and look at me, every one of you, for thirty seconds. Understand! Look at me thirty seconds, and think about the consequences before you do a thing. In that thirty seconds remember I, alone, can keep you alive."

He gave them plenty of time to comprehend that and mull it over.

He pulled the sack mask off his head and showed them that he was Doc Savage.

THEY stood there awhile—but not thirty seconds. Shock held all of them for a moment. Then they reacted as differently as any undisciplined group which had lost all leadership.

Monk and Ham and Renny came out of it first because they had half known, in the last minute or two, that this must be Doc. They started walking toward the translucent men who had the guns, going slowly but purposefully.

Then a man—not a translucent man—made a break for the door.

One of the translucent men switched a machine gun toward him, but came down on the firing lever of the weapon too quick. The gun ripped at everyone's eardrums with its clamor, took great gouts of plaster and lath out of the ceiling.

What happened then was entirely a product of strain and collapsed horror.

The room was suddenly a fighting mêlée. Some tried to get at the translucent men. The latter fought for their lives. Others just tried to flee, and men tried to stop them.

Two machine guns blasted out. Doc got to one of them, stopped it. Ham and Monk had hold of the other one and got it; and somehow did not recognize each other and struggled for the weapon, kicking and yelling. They got each other down on the floor before recognition and sense came to them; after which they just sat there and looked at each other foolishly, as if hypnotized.

The man who had broken for the door was down, ripped badly by the first machine gun that had started.

Doc waded through the translucent men, grabbing weapons, shouting orders to stop fighting, but even his powerful voice had no effect on the uproar.

A tall man took out across the room at full speed and ran through the window without even a falter in stride. The glass and wooden parts of the window sash showered down.

Wind came in through the smashed window and blew out the candles, making the place completely black.

Doc Savage spoke in Mayan, a little-known language which he and his aids used when they did not wish to be understood by others.

“Just lie down on the floor,” he said, “and let them get it out of their systems.”

“What,” asked Monk in Mayan, “about the boats? Can't they escape from the island in them?”

“I disabled the boats,” Doc said.

“Did you,” asked Monk, still in Mayan, “disable the guy who was wearing the silk sack in the first place?”

“Only temporarily,” Doc explained. “He is upstairs in the attic, and in fairly good shape, providing none of these machine-gun bullets have gone through the ceilings and hit him.”

EVENTUALLY, there was peace.

Doc went out into the night and did some shouting. He came back into the house and said, “Come daylight and we will get them all rounded up without trouble. The translucent men are going to help.”

Renny asked, “Can you cure them of what ails them?”

“Yes. It should be simple,” Doc said.

“Sure?”

“I have conducted experiments with this stuff myself,” Doc told him. “That was about a year ago.”

Renny thought that over.

“Holy cow!” he said. “That means it won't work, huh? Buxton's stuff won't substitute for food and eliminate fatigue?”

“Not successfully,” Doc said. “That is going to be quite a shock to him. His motives in this thing were good, you know. Nothing like this would have happened if he had not revealed the secret to a man he thought was honest, but who turned out to be a crook.”

“Meaning the guy in the attic?”

“Yes.”

Willie said in a voice remarkably subdued for her, “I guess my hunch about Tom Lewis being a crook at heart was right.”

No one said anything.

“Tom Lewis is the man upstairs, isn't he?” Willie asked.

“Yes,” Doc said.

“Look, don't get any long faces over me,” she said. “Remember those pictures I told you I used to stick on my wall? Well, I can put them back up again.”

Which made Doc feel somewhat alarmed.

THE END

DOC SAVAGE AND HIS PALS

There has never been a group just like them, and probably there never will be a group like Doc Savage and his five aids. They roam the world, when necessary. Their next job might be in Asia Minor, or it might be in some quiet side street in an American small town—though usually things aren't very quiet when these altruistic adventurers get going. They help out the underdog and punish evildoers. Whenever possible, they avoid taking human life. They never take it, in fact, except in self-defense. Incorrigible tough guys who make the mistake of stacking up against Doc Savage are usually sent to Doc's special “college” in upstate New York, and there, through expert treatment, sometimes involving delicate brain operations, are turned into real men who forget their vicious past and start out fresh as new and useful citizens ranged on the side of law and order. Doc Savage is what might seem to be modern miracles. His five companions are no surgeons, but they're at the top of their own professions. HAM—Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, the smartest lawyer ever turned out by Harvard, and best dresser ever turned out by high-class tailors, and an efficient fighter with his unusual drug-tipped sword cane. MONK—Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, who looks a good deal like a gorilla and a tough hombre in a scrap, he is actually one of the world's foremost chemists. LONG TOM—Major Thomas J. Roberts, who is a veritable wizard in the field of electricity. RENNY—Colonel John Renwick, an eminent engineer. JOHNNY—William Harper Littlejohn, renowned geologist and archaeologist whose research work has taken him to the fringes of civilization. They're the perfect group of adventurers, and no struggle is too tough for them.

Next Month—

MYSTERY ON HAPPY BONES—*Stony Smith finds his island kingdom is no paradise when Uncle Sam needs it for all-out war, and the things that happen make him long for the quiet of Times Square! Don't miss, this great novel in our next issue.*

AN ISLAND KINGDOM OF YOUR OWN

If that's your ambition—to go away on some nice island where you can be your own ruler—don't miss reading "Mystery on Happy Bones," the complete novel in our next issue. Stony Smith was just such a king on his own island; serene, happy. But when global war came, and Uncle Sam needed an air base in that vicinity, things began to happen; things which made Stony Smith wish he had picked Times Square for peace and quiet, rather than his island.

Don't miss this fine novel in our July issue, on sale Friday, May 28th.

DOC SAVAGE MAGAZINE

At All Newsstands

.