



Fire And Ice

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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There was nothing surprising about a girl pilot ... not even a girl pilot named Patience ... but there were plenty of surprises to follow in a fast and furious chase around the country! Doc Savage and the boys find hot and cold trouble in FIRE AND ICE ... read it now and see if you don't think it's a swell novel.

Chapter I

THE hushed quiet of late afternoon lay over the wilderness. It was one of the most majestic sights in the world. Sweeping downward from the mountain ridge was an endless vista of tall, stately firs, purplish-green in the fading sunlight and slanting shadows.

The mountain range, down there below, broke up into smaller ridges, each falling away to a great plain that was the valley floor. Across this huge flat a highway slashed as straight as a taut string, as though it had been placed there by drawing a line across a mammoth ruler.

The highway was smooth, modern macadam. Two wide automobile lanes made up its spacious width. Viewed from the mountain range, the sedan moving across the great stretch of highway seemed to be a snail out for a leisurely afternoon stroll. Actually, the machine was flashing along at better than sixty miles an hour.

That gives you some idea of the distances in the amazing Yukon-Alaskan country. The highway was part of the famous *Alcan Road* — sixteen hundred miles of deluxe highway straight through the Yukon and Alaska to faraway Fairbanks. Right through the land of the midnight sun and the northern lights.

During the war they called it the "Road To Tokyo". Now it was soon to become the vacation route of

many thousands of tourists. It was an engineering marvel.

The mountain range from which one could see the tiny ant of a car was just a slight knoll compared to other mountain peaks beyond. Snow capped many of the distant ridges. Fifteen thousand feet would catch some of their heights.

But down here the soft hush of late afternoon was warm and slumberous. Not even a bird chirped. There was a slight amount of dampness on the earth, caused by heavy rains the night before. The rain had wet the earth sufficiently that there was no immediate danger of forest fires.

That probably explained why the fire warden was absent from the lookout platform atop the shaftlike tower that jutted skyward from the small mountain top. Ordinarily, he would have been up there for a last inspection before night closed in.

At the moment, he was inside the small shack built at the foot of the lookout tower. He was a tall, red-headed young man who looked old. He looked old because he had not shaved in several weeks. He had grown quite a beard, a red, bristly thing that was about as stiff as the hairs on a sow's back.

The young fire warden's name was Sparks. That was because of the radio gadgets that practically filled the cabin, leaving barely enough room for the single narrow cot and the cook stove. Sparks was somewhat of a radio "ham".

Being a radio ham kept him from going completely balmy in this great, endless world atop a mountain where there wasn't a soul to talk to for days on end.

Sparks was talking now. Plenty! — into the radiophone mike that he clutched fiercely in his hand. The set was a two-way affair, built for sending and receiving.

The tall, red-bearded young man jumped up and down and yelled into the mike, "Calling any pilot in this vicinity! Calling any airfield! Pilot in trouble. Somebody's got to help a pilot who's in trouble—plane going to make a forced landing—private plane number NC-8546—they need help!"

The young man kept screaming into the microphone. Once he looked at the telephone, on his cluttered desk, and started swearing like a mule-skinner. Already he had attempted to put through a call on the telephone. But last night's storm had knocked down a wire somewhere. The line was dead.

For ten minutes now he had been trying to relay the pilot's call for assistance. Sparks had been fooling around with his set when he had suddenly picked up the frantic call for help. A pilot forced down in this vast region might be lost for days — forever! That's why it was so urgent for Sparks to locate some other pilot and have him spot the location where the troubled plane was forced down.

In fifteen more minutes it would be too late. Darkness closed in quickly in the mountains.

"Won't someone answer?" bellowed the red-bearded young man into the mike. He was getting more excited now. "Calling for help—pilot in trouble—someone answer!"

He got no response.

Frantic now, he dropped the mike on the desk and ran outside. He jumped up and down and yelled at the top of his lungs. He had a tremendous voice built for hog-calling. His bellow rolled up and down the mountain-side.

"Help! Help! Help!"

After awhile the words came tumbling back out of the primeval stillness and almost caused him to jump out of his skin.

SOMEWHERE approximately four thousand feet above the Alcan Highway, the pilot of the speedy single-engine plane heard Sparks' mule-skinner bellowing.

The plane was a trim Spartan Executive, a cabin with ample room for six passengers. But the pilot was the only occupant of the ship.

Just about every kind of modern flying gadget decorated the instrument panel. Two-way radio was naturally part of the complete equipment.

The pilot, for some time now, had been guiding the plane with one hand and making notations on the map with the other. The aeronautical chart was fastened to a board spread across his knees. Various markings had been checked and noted on the map.

Now the sun was a red ball of fire skidding down beyond the distant mountain top. Shadows were starting to crawl along the ridges and toward the valley that snuggled around the Alcan Road — a tiny ribbon of a thing far below.

The pilot lifted the portable microphone from the hook. Transmitting equipment was already tuned in to a wave-length back in the States.

“All right,” the pilot said, “that's about all for today. Too dark now to check the new route any further. I'll pick up the Whitehorse radio beam and put down there for the night.”

The speaker crackled. Then a voice said, “How does it look?”

“Good,” answered the pilot.

“You think it will make a good air route for profitable operation?”

“Certain of it.”

“Mountains?”

“All over the place,” said the pilot, his glance going to one on his left, about five miles distant, that rose skyward well above the plane's present altitude.

He added, “The road, however, follows a natural course between the mountain ridges. So can our proposed air route. Altitude averages about four thousand feet. The altimeter's only on 4600 right now.”

“We wouldn't have to use pressurized cabins for vacation travel, then?”

“I doubt it.”

“That'll save investing in half-million dollar planes. They might not pay, to start.”

“Hardly,” agreed the pilot. “But there will be plenty of postwar vacation business up here, and a lot of it by air.”

“You bet.” Then, over the speaker, “We'll hear more from you tomorrow?”

“Yes.”

“There's a board meeting here at the airline headquarters tomorrow morning. They'll sure be pleased to hear your report — especially since it comes from their director.”

“I trust so,” said the pilot. “Well—I'm signing off now. Roger.”

“Roger.”

Doc Savage then turned the dials as he prepared to pick up the field at Whitehorse, some miles behind him. At the same time he opened the throttle and put the powerful plane into a fairly steep climb, in order to circle and skirt a mountain ridge not far away.

It was while he was changing wave-lengths that he happened to pick up the “Ham” radio operator's excited yelling. Doc Savage heard the word “Help!”

He swung the dial back on the wave-length and listened.

Next his unusual flake-gold eyes flickered with intensity. His features, a deep bronze, became taut.

The ham radio operator's words tumbled over one another. He sounded as though he had been chased by a hungry bear. He was yelling:

“Pilot—trouble—going to make forced landing—private plane number NC-8546—somebody help—somebody please go to their aid ...”

There was a jumble of unintelligible words.

Then: “Approximate location of plane is four miles south of Kluane Lake flats. Going down for a forced landing. Hurry—hurry—hurry!”

After that the amateur operator's voice became so excited Doc Savage could understand nothing at all.

MEANWHILE, Doc Savage's sturdy plane had climbed several thousand feet. He leveled off, tried once more to dial in words that made sense. He caught a single word — “Sparks” — and surmised this to be the fellow's name. But now the fellow's wild jargon sounded like a Donald Duck crackling in the receiver.

Doc checked his map. The southern tip of Kluane Lake was seven miles away, directly northeast of Whitehorse. He put the plane into a 180-degree about-turn and watched the tachometer climb as he opened the throttle wide.

The sun had disappeared beyond the horizon. There would be light — sufficient light for any landing at any field other than a flood-lighted airport — for only fifteen more minutes at the outside.

He wondered if the disabled plane had already crashed.

Doc checked his instruments and knew his exact destination now. He placed the chart aside and gave his attention to piloting the plane. His hair, the same unusual bronze hue as his features, ruffled slightly in the breeze coming in a panel window that had been slid open beside him.

That Doc Savage was somewhat of a muscular marvel was evident in the size of his figure behind the controls.

Doc's head kept turning slowly, left to right, right to left, as an alert pilot does in flight. Mainly, however, he centered most of his attention straight ahead.

Exactly two minutes later he picked up the fly speck in the darkening sky. Doc's plane had already

traveled five miles since he had set his new course.

The tiny ink-spot-speck became a plane. It became a plane in assorted kinds of trouble.

First, it slid off on one wing and lost a thousand feet of altitude, as fast as you could say Jack Spratt.

Next, it climbed. Wearily, as a kid who has been shoved down a snow bank six times and it desperately trying to reclimb for the seventh time.

The plane regained maybe five hundred feet altitude, then flopped off in a side slip again. This time, Doc estimated, the drop ended no more than five hundred feet above the earth.

The earth was flat down there, a wide sweeping plain. It looked like a great airfield set down in the middle of nowhere. Northward, stretching out for many miles, was a lake, looking like a splatter of dull quicksilver in the growing dusk.

Doc was diving now. Fast. The disabled plane had started a climb again. It rose only a few hundred feet. The next time it fell off, it went all the way to the earth.

Or seemed to. It couldn't have crashed, because there was no burst of flame indicating an explosion.

Doc gave a sigh of relief. Somehow, the pilot had managed to level off at the last possible instant. It was amazing flying, Doc decided.

Doc's own plane was plunging earthward at tremendous speed now. He pulled out of the dive close enough to the wide, sun-baked flats to see the other plane — a single-engine private coupe — skimming along only feet above the ground.

Doc was coming right in behind it, his throttle off. He merely gave the throttle a little yank now and then in order to clear the engines of accumulated gas.

One wheel of the plane ahead touched the earth. Dust shot up. The craft held a straight course for a while, then suddenly went into a ground loop. It spun around as fast as a top.

Doc, tense, let his own craft slip, came down fast, leveled off close above the ground and landed. It was a sloppy landing. He bounced hard, once, but this was no time for fancy flying.

He braked his own plane to a stop a hundred feet away from the other ship, cut the ignition and leaped out.

The other plane sat motionless, one wheel collapsed beneath it. Luckily it had not turned over.

The pilot got out of the plane while Doc Savage was still running toward it. He staggered around as though just hit on the jaw by a club.

He wore fancy knickers and expensive, high leather boots. As Doc approached, the pilot grasped a strut and steadied himself. A hand went shakily to a light-weight flying helmet and started to pull it off.

“I hope you're all right,” Doc called as he ran. “I thought for a moment —”

He stopped saying that and started, drawing up three paces from the pilot.

Dark, Brunette hair tumbled down as the pilot whipped off the flying helmet.

Chapter II

“OH!” Doc Savage said. After that he added, “My!”

Not that it was unusual, in this modern era, for a girl to be flying her own plane. It was simply that he had taken for granted that pilot would be a man. He had heard only one side of the radio conversation — that of the excited ham operator. Doc reminded himself that it did not pay to jump to conclusions, no matter what the circumstances.

He seldom did.

“You're positive you're not hurt?”

She jerked her head. Her hand, however, still clutched the plane support and she had not moved. Regaining her equilibrium, Doc thought. No wonder, after a jolt like that!

“Sure?” he prodded.

Again the head shake.

She was small, slender and as trim as a minute. Disturbingly pretty. Her eyes were deep brown and about as large and round as Doc had ever seen.

“Look,” Doc advised, “perhaps you'd better walk around a bit. Start the circulation, you know.”

She didn't move. For a brief instant she tilted her head back slightly in order to glance up at him. It was necessary for her to do that because of the difference in their sizes. The mere glance sent electric flashes coursing through him.

Suffering from a slight amount of shock, Doc guessed. He was positive she was not injured. Her eyes were clear. Blasted disturbing eyes, too. Like wondrous little-girl eyes.

“Here —” he said, and reached inside the plane.

It was a small, two-place job, but well equipped. He had quickly noted the large numbers on the wing: NC-8546. The same plane that had been in trouble, all right.

Doc removed one of the seat cushions and placed it on the ground.

“It might be better,” he suggested, “if you sit down for a moment.”

She followed his suggestion. Still, she had said nothing.

There was good color in her cheeks. Doc was positive she'd snap out of it in a moment, so he swung his big figure inside the cabin and made a swift inspection.

He worked various controls. The collapsed wheel was bad enough. He frowned when he discovered that one of the cables to the rudder was snapped. Finding a flashlight in a clip fastened to the cowling, he looked further.

And he saw now why the plane had been going into the side slips. He put the flashlight in his pocket — Doc wore a plain gray business suit, because it had been a warm day — and climbed out of the plane again. A slight drop in the temperature and the approaching darkness reminded him that night was fast closing. Shortly it would be chilly and dark.

“We'll have to leave your plane here,” he told the girl. “I'll see what I can do about sending a repair crew out here tomorrow. It's a wonder you weren't killed.”

Oddly, she did not move. He stepped a little closer. Evening twilight was deceiving now. He had imagined she was watching him intently, but her eyes were such a deep, dark brown that he could not be certain.

He must have been mistaken.

“I’ll fly you to the nearest airport,” Doc said. “The sooner we get started, the better. It will be pitch black shortly.”

He leaned down to help her to her feet, and thought she stiffened slightly. He said, “I’m Clark Savage, Jr.—Doc Savage, to some.” He smiled. “Now, if I knew yours, we wouldn’t have to be quite so formal.”

“Patience,” she said.

It was the very first time she had spoken. Sound of her voice gave Doc Savage a double shock. First because she had spoken so suddenly — also, because it was such a sweet, pleasant, well modulated voice. An unusual mixture of young-girl-voice and reserved, well-trained older woman’s.

“Patience?” Doc repeated.

She jerked her head.

A nice name, Doc thought. It suited her sweet-looking personality.

He said, smiling, “Well, now that we have the formalities over with, shall we start? We ought to take off pretty quick.”

He reached down to take her arm.

Patience jumped to her feet with a little startled cry on her lips.

She began going away from there as though a pack of coyotes were on her heels.

THE girl named Patience ran like a frightened fawn. Straight out across the table-smooth flats that stretched for miles between Kluane Lake and the Alcan Road, somewhere far off to the right hidden now by approaching darkness. Beyond — dark, slumbering giants — were the mountains.

Nothing else.

Running away from something in that great, quiet vastness was like trying to escape a thunderstorm on a raft in the middle of the Atlantic.

Patience must have realized this after she ran a hundred yards. She drew up, turned to look back at Doc Savage, stood very still.

Doc walked up to her. He didn’t run. He didn’t want to frighten her further — if he *had* frightened her.

But he didn’t think he had. It was something else, an expression that had been in her eyes just before she took off. He had a feeling she was terrified about whatever it was that frightened her.

She wasn’t hurt. Otherwise, she couldn’t have run like that. The terror, or whatever it was, accounted for the speechless way she had sat motionless on the seat cushion.

Doc had reached her side again.

“You'd better,” said Doc, “get whatever traveling essentials you need out of your plane. You understand you can't stay out here all night?”

Her deep brown eyes surveyed him a moment, went away, came back again. There was a hint of confidence in their depths.

“I've never heard of Doc Savage,” she said. She had managed to regain her breath waiting her approach.

“You'll have to take my word for it — about my identity,” Doc told her.

“I have only a single light handbag,” she said, starting toward her disabled plane.

Doc walked at her side. He was not surprised that his name made no impression on her. After all, a number of people not involved or interested in the pursuit of evildoers to the far-flung corners of the world would know of Doc Savage.

Doc was, in fact, glad he could meet her on equal ground. He thought she needed help.

BACK at her broken ship, her slim figure disappeared inside for a moment and then she reappeared with a small overnight bag. Doc took it and led the way to his own plane.

“Where to?” he asked, helping her into the cabin.

“Watson Lake. There's an airport back there.”

“We couldn't possibly make it,” Doc pointed out. “There's almost back in British Columbia, and hundreds of miles away. I haven't enough gas in the tanks.”

He had slammed the cabin door and was not switching on the inertia starters.

“Fairbanks,” said Patience.

“Worse yet,” Doc's eyebrows raised slightly. “That's farther still.” She certainly seemed to want to get as far away from here as possible.

“Well —” she started.

The motors caught and drowned out her words. Doc held the breaks on, made his checkup, then they were taking off. Any part of the smooth flats would have served for a runway. Doc was using landing lights for the takeoff.

In the air, he continued, “I was going to put in at Whitehorse. That's closest.”

“Whitehorse?”

“You'll find a hotel there.”

“I know —” she bit her lip and was silent.

Doc kept the ship in a steady climb, gaining plenty of altitude. Stars were popping out of the sky. He checked the stars and his instruments, turning his head back and forth as he watched the night sky. Running lights had been switched off immediately after the takeoff. They moved through an awe-inspiring, vaulted world.

Once, glancing back to check star points, Doc frowned. He looked back again a moment later. Then he

gave his attention to the girl.

“Just what,” he queried solicitously, “are you running away from?”

The girl named Patience continued to worry her lower lip with her small even teeth. Abruptly she stopped doing that and looked across at Doc. Patience gave him just about the most gorgeous smile he had ever seen.

“Running away from what?” she asked.

“Whatever it is you're running away from.”

“But I'm not. Really!”

“Doc thought about that for a moment.

“Sure?” he prodded.

“Sure.”

“You certainly weren't chasing gophers a few moments ago.”

“Oh, that!” Patience settled down in the seat beside Doc Savage, unzipped her lightweight summer flying jacket and looked completely relaxed. “After all,” she pointed out, “I didn't know you. And you're somewhat of a super-size man, Doc Savage. Any girl would run, the first time — especially up here in the wilderness!”

Doc smiled.

“Then I'm not so frightening after all?”

She shook her head, her brown eyes twinkling. “Hardly!”

Doc felt some relief, for he had been in a sort of predicament. Taking care of a frightened girl was touchy business anytime. Watching over her while trying to handle a plane in the air was something else again. So he felt relieved that she had got over being frightened.

It wasn't long until they picked up the Whitehorse radio beam. The flight, in airline miles, was less than a hundred miles — only a hop, skip and jump for Doc's fast plane.

Every moment or so Doc Savage's sharp gaze scanned the night skies in the usual pilot's checkup during flight. Driving a car, one watches the highway ahead; in the air, one continually checks the sky around him — in every direction including overhead and below.

Not that Doc expected to see any other craft. Along a busy airline in the States it would be different. Here, especially at night, a plane every twenty-four hours or so would be heavy traffic.

The night was now clear and bright, the dark velvet of the sky star-studded. They were far enough north that the stars seemed within arm's reach, and as bright as lanterns.

Soon they would be picking up the lights of town.

Doc said, “As I told you, I'll have someone take care of your plane in the morning.”

“Won't that put you to a great deal of trouble?”

He shook his head. "I'm in that business, sort of . I mean — I have an interest in the airline business. We're considering starting a post-war route to Alaska. I imagine a great many people will be coming up here on vacation travel."

"They certainly will."

Patience was interested in Doc Savage's remarks. "The Alcan Road — some people refer to it as the Alaskan Highway — will be a great drawing card for tourists, too." She motioned downward. "This is the most gorgeous country in the world to drive through. Some folks think of this territory as bleak and frozen. Summertime, up here, is perfectly marvelous."

Doc nodded.

He explained, "We plan a combined travel-here-by-plane-rent-your-own-car service. Touring cars will be available for travelers when they reach various airports along the Alcan Road."

"So you're up here making a survey?"

"That's right."

"It seems to me," said Patience thoughtfully, "I read something about the proposed new route in the newspapers. But I don't recall seeing your name —"

Doc said, "There was quite a bit of publicity. Most people, however, don't know I'm connected with the airline."

"I should think you'd like the publicity?"

Doc did not reply directly to the question. "I get enough as it is," he said.

Doc Savage was connected with various enterprises, foundations and organizations that had accomplished a great deal of good in the world — the kind of work that, without profit, helped further man's progress or aided people in distress or trouble.

Some people heard of Doc Savage when he eliminated various evil elements that threatened society. Such worthwhile activity was bound to get publicity.

The rest of the time — which was whenever possible — Doc Savage preferred that his name not appear in connection with his work.

Patience was pointing ahead and slightly to the right. "That must be the town of Whitehorse," she said brightly.

Doc had just turned his head to make a checkup of the skies again. He swung his eyes back to the girl and then followed her gaze. Nodding, he said, "We're slightly off course." He set the nose of the plane directly towards the town.

They had been a bit off course because, in craning his head around, Doc had unconsciously used a slight amount of left rudder. But he had been intent on the star behind them. At first, he had used the star as a check point to verify his course. Then, oddly, the star had blinked out. Now it had blacked out again for a bare instant.

Which meant something had crossed its path. Twice!

Doc was positive now that the other plane was trailing them.

Chapter III

DOC SAVAGE landed at the Whitehorse airport, taxied up near the small tower, cut the ignition and they climbed out. Doc carried the girl's overnight bag and one of his own.

The airport manager had come out to meet them. His eyes went to the number on the bronze man's plane, then back to Doc.

"I've been looking for you, sir," he greeted.

Then he looked at Patience and he seemed impressed with what he saw. "I didn't know you had a passenger —"

Doc explained about the girl's plane. "It will be taken care of in the morning. I'll handle it."

Making arrangements for the storing of his own craft overnight, they went inside the small office so that Doc could sign the airport log book, a formality at all airports.

The manager's name was Willis. He was a slender, active man with friendly gray eyes. He did his best not to act impressed by Doc Savage's presence, but at the same time he was fluttering around nervously, waiting on them. He drew up a chair for the girl, one for Doc.

Paying the usual airport fee, Doc arranged for refueling and minor servicing of the plane. Then he asked directions to the hotel.

Willis stepped outside, shouted a name, and shortly an unusual character appeared out of the quiet, mild night.

Willis, the manager, said, "Yukon, here, runs the local livery — one taxi-cab, vintage Lord-knows-when!" He smiled at Doc. "He'll drive you over to the town."

YUKON was quite a fellow.

He was probably sixty. His skin was the color of well-aged, dark saddle leather, with pleats. Bright, coal-black button eyes were deeply imbedded in this cowhide skin. The eyes held more fire and sparkle than a man half his age. He was no more than three inches over five feet, and reminded one of a short, tough length of high-tension steel.

"Seems like I heard you call me," said Yukon, his active eyes going to the airport manager as he bounced inside the room.

"Some passengers for you," said Willis.

"Shucks!" said Yukon. "Come ten o'clock, an' I was expectin' to knock off for a snort." His quick gaze flashed to a wall clock. "It's ten till, now!"

Willis glanced at Doc Savage, winked. "It takes only five minutes to drive to the hotel," he pointed out to Yukon. "That gives you five more minutes to reach the nearest bar—about three doors from the hotel." He added, "You've been sleeping out there in your hack for the past hour."

"Thinkin' — not sleepin'," corrected Yukon.

"About that drink, I suppose," said Willis.

"Yep. Makin' up my mind."

Doc Savage had been studying the man with interest. He remembered him now.

Just then, Yukon took his first good look at his potential passengers. His interest, momentarily, was in brown-eyed Patience. Finally he got around to studying Doc Savage and he gave a visible start.

“Well, blast my ornery hide!” he exclaimed.

He jumped across the room, grasped Doc's hand and started pumping it furiously.

“I think,” said Doc, “the name is Timothy Michael Kelly, isn't that correct?”

The tough, leathery-looking man, jerked his head. “But that's only my *votin'* name. Up here, it's Yukon.” He seemed as tickled as a kid with a new toad-sticker. “Gollickers! You remember me, eh?”

Doc nodded.

“Gosh!” grinned Yukon. Then, “Imagine! Jeepers!”

Willis and the girl looked at one another, puzzled. Then Willis asked, “What's eating you, Yukon?”

The ageless wiry little man explained, “Noo York, that's where it was, couple years ago when I took that blasted sightseein' trip. I got me a snootful an' was ridin' around one of them Noo York subways an' couldn't get out of the damned rat trap. Remember, Mr. Savage? I was lower'n a sow's belly. Some slicker lifted my money an' I was broke.” He turned to Willis with admiration shining in his eyes. “Mr. Savage, here, gives me some money, gets me on a plane and sends me home. But for him, I sure might've been in one helluva fix!”

Doc said to the girl, “Are you familiar with New York?”

“My home's there.”

Somehow, this came as a surprise to Doc Savage. He supposed it was because he had found her a way up here so many miles from New York. Of course, he decided, there was no reason why her home couldn't be back there.

He told her, “Yukon was stuck on that subway shuttle that runs between Times Square and Grand Central. He had been riding back and forth for hours.”

Patience tried to cover a smile.

“Me,” put in Yukon, “I'm stayin' put from now on!”

Next he was grabbing their luggage. “Any place you want go, Mr. Savage. Jest name it. Hells bells, I'll drive you folks to Fairbanks, if you say so!”

“The hotel will do,” Doc said pleasantly.

DOC SAVAGE and the girl were silent on the short drive to the town's leading hotel. They had little opportunity to be otherwise.

Yukon's please chatter kept pace with the rattle-de-bang clatter of the old Model T which he drove.

The hotel was hardly a Waldorf.

The structure was three stories high, wooden frame, square, with a long plain front porch built with a

railing for local “sitters”.

The rooms, nevertheless, were large and comfortable, supplied with good, sturdy furniture.

There was a wing that formed one side of the building. Doc Savaged that he and the girl would have rooms in the same wing, on the same floor, the second. There was no elevator.

Later, he was to remember that some premonition had caused him to do this.

He bid Patience good night, stating that he would meet her at breakfast in the morning and make further arrangements about her disabled plane.

“You've been awfully nice,” Patience told him, standing in the doorway of her room just before Doc took his departure for his own room. “I'll certainly not forget what you've done for me.”

“Any pilot would have done the same thing.”

“I know, but —” She smiled sweetly, and Doc felt his scalp tingle right down to the roots.

“Well, good night.”

“Good night,” she said, and closed the door.

Doc went down the hallway and entered his own room.

OUTSIDE the windows, on his side of the hotel, a narrow gauge railroad cut right through the town street. It was a spur line that led from Whitehorse to the seacoast, and had been used to carry in supplies for the Alcan Highway during construction. Ships from Seattle and the States had brought equipment north, then it had been transferred to the railroad that ended here practically outside the hotel windows.

As a matter of fact, several freight cars stood out there now in the quiet darkness, almost directly under the hotel windows.

It was a long cry from Park Avenue.

Doc put through a call to an auxiliary field that his airline company maintained south of Vancouver, just inside the U. S. boundary. He talked for some time. When he finally hung up, arrangements had been made for a repair flight crew to be at Kluane Lake flats in the morning. Perhaps before that.

Then Doc left the hotel and looked up Yukon at the nearby bar.

He located Yukon by the simple process of finding the old open model Ford touring car and sounding the horn.

Yukon came bouncing out of the place on springs, starting to bellow, “What's the idear blastin' on that horn? Can't you see service is shut down for the night? Can't —”

He spotted Doc Savage and his seamy features took on a worried expression.

“Oh!” he said. “Hi, Mr. Savage. Somethin' wrong? Anything I can do?”

“Nothing's wrong, Yukon,” said Doc pleasantly. He decided that he liked this fellow's frank, direct manner — for all its holding-a-polecat-by-the-tail characteristics. “I'd merely like to rent your car for a little while.”

“Rent, hell!” cried Yukon. “Take the blasted crate. She's full of gas an' vinegar. Best damn jalopy in Whitehorse. You bring 'er back when you durnwell please, Mr. Savage.” He motioned down the village street, deserted now, indicating a dilapidated-looking wooden sign extended out above a garage doorway. A plain, weak-powered electric light bulb partially illuminated the sign.

“That's my livery. I sleep there — right in the office. Reckon you can find me there after I have me another little snort.”

Doc said, “This won't take long,” and swung his big frame in behind the wheel.

“Well, you just run Brunhilda in the garage and shut her off, if I'm asleep,” said Yukon, standing on the curb. He wore a fireman's-type peaked cap, which made his leathery features appear incongruously small.

Doc drove off, wincing a little as the loud clatter of the machine broke the slumberous silence of the town street.

But the car had plenty of “vinegar” as Yukon has said. It took off like a rabbit chased by a greyhound.

Doc Savage drove out to the airport.

WILLIS, the airport manager, was just locking up for the night. Red field marker lights had been left switched on, otherwise the airport was in darkness.

As the man told Doc Savage, “There won't be any more planes in tonight. Too late.”

The night as star-bright and quiet. In the distance, beyond the flying field, crickets chirped. Doc Savage and the slender, alert-moving airport manager stood just outside the closed, darkened tower-office.

“You serviced the Sparton?”

“All taken care of, sir,” Willis said. He nodded toward a small hangar, nearby. “Locked up good and secure for the night. You'll find me here first thing in the morning.”

“Thank you,” said Doc.

“Keeps me busy here. My boy will help out when he gets back from service. He's a flyer. Still with the Air Transport Command. Expects to get out soon.” Willis' friendly gray eyes looked tired. “I'd have a been home in bed right now, only there was another check-in shortly after you and the lady left here.” He rubbed his neck and yawned. “Anyone else comes in tonight, they can park their ship right here outside. It's a nice clear night. No wind. Won't do any harm.”

“You mean,” asked Doc, referring back to the manager's statement of a check-in, “one of your local flyers?”

Doc Savage decided his trip back to the airport had not been in vain. He had rather suspected to hear about the plane arrival.

Willis shook his head.

“No, it was a couple sportsmen brought in by a private contract pilot. Said they were going to do some hunting a little north of here.”

“The plane took off again?”

“Yes. Those contract boys work night and day. Spell one another flying the planes. They'll fly anything from furniture to babies.”

“The pilot a friend of yours?”

“No, he was a new one,” said Willis. He told Doc the size and type of plane. He had started walking with Doc toward the dilapidated jitney that belonged to Yukon, obviously hopeful of a ride home. “Guess he was from Edmonton. There's a couple of contract flying services down there. I think I heard him say Edmonton.”

“These two sportsmen,” continued Doc casually, “you say were dropped off here — have you ever seen them before? Know them?”

Willis started to shake his head, then drew up short and looked at Doc Savage.

“I'm not very sharp tonight, am I?” he said. “I thought you just drove back out here to see that your own plane was serviced for morning. You think there is something odd about the arrival of those two sportsmen?”

Doc had not wanted to arouse the airport manager's concern. Besides, there was probably not a thing to it. Business executives frequently flew up to this part of the country for hunting and fishing.

Yes he kept thinking of that plane, flying at night without red-and-green running lights, which had so obviously trailed him after he had picked up Patience. It had disappeared shortly before they had landed here at Whitehorse.

The plane could have easily circled away, delaying arrival, and later come back.

Why?

Doc said, “It's possible they were friends of mine. We might take a glance at the log book.”

Willis swung back towards the office. “Say, I'm sorry!” he exclaimed. “Those men *were* from the Sates. I should have told you.”

He unlocked the office door and they stepped inside. Willis switched on the desk lamp and pulled the register toward him.

He was saying, “The pilot registered, paid for some gas, then we went out to fill up his tank. I didn't pay much attention to the names and plane number he wrote down. Let's see —”

But Doc Savage had already seen, before Willis cried sharply, “That's funny!”

“Apparently,” Doc pointed out, “they used that bottle of ink eradicator you have here on the desk.

In the space beneath Doc Savage's own plane registry in the airport logbook, the paper was still slightly damp. Now the last entry of the day had been expertly removed with the eradicator. Doc decided there was no way to tell what had been written there. Not even an indentation had been left by the writing.

“You wouldn't recall the number that appeared on the plane wing?” asked Doc.

Willis swore. “Damm it, no! Daytime, I might have noticed it. But I saw the pilot filling in the book, so I paid no attention at all.” He stared, puzzled, at Doc Savage. Obviously nothing like this ever happened in his part of the world. “I don't get it. Why would they want to remove information about the plane number, their names and all?”

“Precaution,” said Doc. Then, “You went outside with the pilot to gas up the tank?”

“That's right —”

“And the two sportsmen waited in here?”

“Yes. They only hung around a couple of minutes. They were getting their gun cases and stuff together. Since Yukon wasn't around, they walked into town —” He paused, gray eyes snapping with fire. “Say, one of them made that erasure while I was outside with the pilot!”

“Exactly,” agreed Doc.

Chapter IV

WILLIS had lost all his sleepiness. He was visibly upset over the fact that someone had tried to put something over on him.

“Damm it, I'll notify the Mounted and the civil air patrol. I'll have that pilot set down for the rest of his —”

Doc interrupted the outburst. “Which way did the pilot head after he took off?”

“North.” Willis gave Doc a sharp glance and grabbed for the telephone. “Say, that's it! I'll call every airport north of here. I'll catch that wise guy and —”

“Ruse,” said Doc quietly.

Willis paused, calming down a bit, studying the bronze man's face.

“Ruse?”

“Trick,” explained Doc Savage. “His destination probably isn't northward at all. You might,” he suggested quietly, “try to remember some one thing that was said while they were here, something that might help identify that plane or its passengers.”

The airport manager was stimulated to action by Doc's statement. He started to reach for the telephone again. “Hotel!” he rapped. “That's where we'll locate those two guys. We'll make them tell the pilot's name and plane registry. Nobody's going to make a Monkey out of me! Besides, there's a law against not registering —”

Doc nodded, calm, then suggested they go about this in a more logical way. Besides, he pointed out, there was probably a very good explanation for the erasure in the log book. Perhaps the two huntsmen were two nationally known figures seeking a quiet holiday. They wanted to avoid publicity.

Doc's purpose was to stop Willis from mixing into the thing. Already an uneasiness was stirring in Doc Savage. He was anxious to get back to the hotel. Not that he expected to find the two strangers registered there — or at any other of the smaller rooming houses and second-rate lodging places in town.

The thing was, he wanted to handle this mystery alone.

“I think,” he told Willis, “you'll find a perfectly logical explanation, later, for the elimination of this log book entry. Why not sit tight on it overnight?”

The bronze man's unexcited manner calmed Willis. He agreed maybe that would be better. They had locked the office again, were leaving, when the airport manager suddenly remembered something, however.

“You know,” he said, puzzled, “one of those hunters called something to the pilot while we were putting gas in the plane. That was when they were leaving to walk to town.”

“Yes?” Doc prompted quietly.

“One of them called to the pilot and said, 'See you in Gotham, Alfred'. I never heard of that town, not around here. But I'll look it up on my map in the morning. Then I can locate that slicker pilot and give him a blast.”

“A good idea,” suggested Doc.

The darkness shielded the quick flicker of interest that had come into his unusual eyes.

A FEW moment later, Doc Savage had dropped Willis off at a little cottage on the outskirts of town. Then he hurried back to the hotel.

Leaving the old car outside, he learned from the night clerk that here had been no arrivals since that of his own and the girl's. He had not thought there would be. Doc was positive the two strangers were not registered anywhere in Whitehorse.

He went quickly to his room and put through a call to New York City. The call was to a hotel there, and Doc asked for a certain Andrew Blodgett Mayfair.

Soon Monk Mayfair, one of his associates, was on the line.

“Golly,” said Monk's voice, “I'm sure glad you called, Doc.”

“Anything wrong?”

“No, but there's gonna be!” Monk explained further. “That two-bit shyster, Ham Brooks, invited me out for a steak dinner, then out fumbled me for the check. Soon's I catch up with him, I'm gonna shoot some holes in his head. That Ham's too blasted smart, is what! Thought I ought to tell you.”

Doc Savage couldn't help smiling a little. The eternal squabbling of two of his aides, Monk and Ham, was history.

“Listen, Monk,” he said over the line, “there's a detail you and Ham might handle for me. It's rather important —”

Monk forgot his personal troubles. Doc Savage had said enough to tell him the assignment was probably urgent.

“Yeah, Doc?”

“I have an idea a plane has left Whitehorse, here, and is heading for New York.” He repeated the size and type of craft that Willis had named. “The pilot's name is Alfred, that's all I can tell you. Find out everything you can about plane and pilot.” The bronze man did some swift mental figuring. Then he stated the exact minimum number of hours it would take the mystery plane to reach New York, allowing for refueling stops and such.

“That would be the minimum time it would take for the flight,” Doc explained. “It might be any time longer than that.”

Monk assured him they'd be at LaGuardia Airport in plenty of time to intercept the plane if it arrived in New York.

Giving Monk Mayfair his present address, and telephone number, Doc hung up. There was no need to tell his assistant further details. Monk and Ham would move right in and cover every detail. Besides, Doc found himself more tense each moment. He wanted to check on the girl Patience.

Stepping down the second-floor hall, he rapped on her door. The hotel was quiet. A slight breeze ruffled a window curtain at the dead-end of the hallway, at the rear.

Whitehorse was not a town of bright lights and night life. Its residents retired early. Ten o'clock was a late hour for most of them.

Doc waited. No answer. He rapped again.

And found himself becoming more upset about her each moment. He had decided that she was in some kind of danger, just what he did not know. Her fear had been obvious to him, though she had tried desperately to conceal it.

Relief took hold of him when she finally answered.

“Who—is it?”

Her voice sounded fearful.

DOC identified himself. Her voice had sounded as though it had come from far across the room, beyond the closed door, as though she might be standing back there terrified because someone had knocked on the room door.

“May I see you a moment?” queried Doc. His voice was reassuring.

“Just a minute,” came the girl's muffled voice again.

The minute turned out to be several long ones. Various noises coming from beyond the locked door puzzled him. It sounded as though someone were trying to take down the side of the building.

At last the door swung open partway.

He expected to see Patience clad in negligee, pajamas, nightgown or whatever it is a sweet-looking girl of her type wears to bed.

She wore none of these. Patience was still fully dressed as he had last seen her, with the exception that she had removed the flying jacket.

She wore a white shirtwaist that gave further evidence of her trim, shapely figure.

“Is there,” she asked hesitatingly, “anything—wrong?”

Doc asked, “Have you unpacked?” and started to step inside the doorway of the room, and decided there was something wrong. He had to squeeze past the blocked door.

Patience had stacked dresser, writing table, chairs, luggage rack and waste basket one atop the other against the hall door. Doc's quick glance — and stuffiness of the room — told him the single window was tightly closed and probably locked.

And Patience had a manner about her which indicated she had been sitting on the very edge of the bed, ready to leap, ever since Doc had left her.

“Worried?” asked Doc.

“Oh, no!”

She attempted a light smile.

“Nothing bothering you?”

“Not a thing in the world, really!”

The rug was rumbled, as though she might have tried to push the heavy double-sized bed up against the door also.

“Do you,” Doc prodded, “always rearrange the furniture before you retire?”

She smiled. With her mouth, Doc Savage noticed, not her eyes. She was really frightened about something.

“Somnambulism,” Patience explained. “I’m always afraid, walking in my sleep, I’ll leave the room and maybe hurt myself. You know — maybe fall or strike something.”

“Oh.”

Doc wasn't convinced.

“Why did you ask me if I had unpacked my things yet?” asked the girl.

“Switch rooms,” he said.

“I don't understand —”

“I thought it might be better.”

“Buy, why?”

“Most women,” Doc reminded, “are inclined to be superstitious about the number 13 on their hotel room door.”

Patience jumped.

Her eyes large and startled, Patience squeezed past him — she was no larger than a gadget in comparison with Doc Savage — looked at the outside of the door, saw the number, stared at him as though she had just swallowed an extra large lemon, then seized his arm.

She was trembling.

“Good heavens, I hadn't noticed!”

“Most hotels,” said Doc Savage, “pass up the number thirteen on floors and rooms. Up in this country I guess they're not superstitious. I didn't notice the room number when the clerk checked you in. As a matter of fact, he didn't mention the room number, but merely brought you up here and placed the key in the door for you.”

“That's right!” remembered Patience. “He did exactly that. I—*am* terribly superstitious about a thing like that. Perhaps it would be better—that is, if you don't really mind —”

Doc Savage picked up her overnight bag, also piled on the dresser-barricade which she had managed to push slightly aside in order to admit him. He looked around.

“Anything else?”

Patience ran into the bathroom and came back with a tooth brush and some toiletries clutched in her hands.

“That's all,” she said somewhat shakily.

Doc preceded the girl to his own room, pulled the shades down to the sill, said to her as she followed him in, “The local gossips might not understand.”

She nodded.

Doc had decided it would be best not to tell her the real reason for the switch of rooms. It was not because her room was number 13. He had noticed this when she checked into the hotel.

He picked up his own luggage, paused in the doorway a moment, smiled reassuringly. “Now you can rest easy. Breakfast at eight?”

“Eight will be perfect,” she said. She flashed him one of her delightful little-girl smiles. “Good night again.”

“Good night.”

The door closed, Doc Savage went two paces down the hallway, paused, stood there listening a moment. Assorted sounds came almost immediately from within the girl's new room.

She was moving the furniture again.

He continued to Room 13. In a few moments her had the furniture back in place and his luggage unpacked. He removed a flashlight from his bag — he had left the girl's flashlight in his plane — went quietly downstairs and outside into the night.

THE town was a quiet as a cemetery.

Apparently the street outside the hotel was the main thoroughfare. At the corner of the hotel it intersected the side-street along which ran the railroad tracks.

In the other direction, to the left, was the business district, looking now like a small western town shut down on Sunday and with a mantle of darkness thrown over it.

The weak electric bulb still glowered over Yukon's livery entrance. The nearby bar was closed, also, Doc observed. Yukon was probably asleep by now.

Doc Savage decided that the old Ford would be all right for the night where he had left it, a dozen yards away from him in front of the hotel. Yukon had probably seen it parked there, anyway.

Doc stood quietly, listening to the sort of sound that comes out of a perfectly still night. There was a large tree beside the short flight of steps that led down to the sidewalk. He stood in the shadow of the tree, motionless, for some time.

He couldn't detect the slightest indication of anyone moving about in the sleeping town. The scuff of a foot would have traveled far in the stillness.

After awhile, walking silently on the grass, Doc Savage circled the three-story hotel structure. The heavy rain of twenty-four hours ago still caused the ground to be damp and somewhat spongy.

Several times he went down close to the earth, cupping the flashlight lens so that its beam would not travel more than a few inches.

He inspected the damp ground near the building walls, beneath a lattice work that led upward at one spot, below the narrow iron fire escape at the rear.

He reached the conclusion that on one had been prowling around the hotel. Not tonight, anyway. Doc returned to his own room and a few moments later his light went out. The time was about eleven o'clock.

It wasn't very much later that someone tried to murder Patience.

Chapter V

THE bullet came through the open window, skimmed the surface of the large bed by only eight inches, slapped into the marble top of the heavy dresser with a loud *thun-n-k* of a sound and the marble splintered.

There had been no sound of a shot fired — only the sudden, startling impact of the lead pellet against the old-fashioned marble dresser top.

Someone was using a silenced rifle.

And, Doc Savage decided, they were trying to murder the girl Patience, because this was Room 13 and the girl was supposed to be sleeping in this bed.

Switching rooms, he concluded, had proved wise. Patience, terrified, might have leaped out of bed, and would have become a perfect target for the second shot.

For it followed almost immediately.

But Doc Savage was not in the bed.

Forcing himself to remain flat, he had wriggled swiftly across the bed and tumbled to the floor. He dragged the thick mattress down with him and used it as a shield between himself and the window. Police laboratories use large wads of cotton batting into which to fire shots during various ballistics tests. A few inches of such material can stop a slug faster than anything.

The mattress was made of cotton.

Doc carefully began wiggling across the floor of the room, dragging the mattress with him. Momentarily, no more shots came.

The whole thing was rather spine-tingling.

Naturally there was no gun sound, no warning. Just that eerie clunk of lead into the dresser. Doc was lying on his back beneath the piece of furniture, having crawled there, the mattress still protecting him.

The second shot was lower down. His gingerly probing fingers told him this. That second shot had drilled right through the spot where Patience would have been sleeping in the bed — had she been there as planned.

Doc felt a shock just thinking about it. A fine girl like her!

He had not remained motionless. His quick, careful movements kept him snaking across the floor. Handling the mattress at the same time was somewhat of a problem. But there was no way of telling when the next shot might come.

Passing his traveling bag, still on a low rack near the foot of the bed, he reached up, felt around among some clean shirts and located his gun. Then he started a cautious approach to the window.

Not that he went in a direct line to the window. His stalk was along the wall of the room, low down, stomach right against the floor. Doc came to the window from the side.

Arrival of the third shot splintered the middle of the windowsill.

DOC SAVAGE managed to prop the mattress — a part of it — up between himself and the sill edge. The base of the window frame was well up from the floor. The frame was small and not of the modern type.

His gaze darting back across the room, Doc estimated reverse line of the bullet from the dresser, across the bed, over the windowsill and outside into the night.

One of several large trees in a grove some distance behind the hotel, Doc surmised, was the hiding place of the marksman with the silenced rifle.

He was up in the tree, hidden by foliage. There was enough light — the moon, a section of it, was moving between high drifting clouds — so that Doc could see the trees. But little of anything else.

Using a very corner of the window for a gun sight, Doc sent two quick shots toward the treetop.

The .45's thunder was loud indeed. It sounded as though a small meteor had fallen on the sleeping village.

Somewhere in the night several dogs started barking excitedly. On the third floor of the hotel a window raised higher and a woman's voice bawled worriedly, "George! For land's sake get back in bed. What's the matter with you staring out the window in the middle of the night."

George's loud "Sshh!" carried plainly.

Through the assorted noises — the blast of his own gun, dogs barking, the woman shouting up above — Doc Savage was trying to listen for the sound of anyone scrambling down out of the tree. It was impossible to tell.

Also, there was sufficient darkness beneath the trees, fifty yards distant, that he could not be sure whether anyone was hastily leaving the sniping hideout or not.

No more shots came, however.

Doc stuffed the .45 inside his shirt and hurried downstairs. He was fully dressed. He had not slept since turning off the light, but had remained fully and alertly awake.

He'd had a premonition that something was going to happen.

He met the sleepy hotel clerk at the foot of the stairs. The man was elderly, gray-haired and fat. He was deaf enough that he was confused by the commotion going on in some of the rooms above. Doors had opened. People were calling back and forth.

"What in blazes is going on up there?" the fat man demanded.

He spoke loudly.

Doc said, "Polecat."

"How's that?" the clerk said, cupping a hand to his ear.

"Polecat," repeated Doc, also speaking loudly. "Keeping me awake."

"Shucks," grunted the man, "polecats ain't nothing. We have them all the time."

As Doc disappeared outside, the clerk met one of the guests on the stairway and started shushing him back to bed.

Patience came running out of the hotel right behind Doc Savage.

"I HEARD—some shooting!" she gasped, running up to him.

She wore a light-weight robe over pale-blue pajamas. Her eyes held fear.

"You're all right?" asked Doc.

"Yes."

"No one tried to get into your room?"

"No." Her eyes grew larger and more frightened. "That is—I don't think they did." She explained further, "I was asleep. I heard a shot."

"There were two," said Doc Savage. "The first one probably roused you, and then you heard the second."

She clung to his arm with the intensity of a scared child.

"Wh — what's happening?" she asked tensely.

As they talked, Doc had motioned toward the garage — Yukon's livery place — and was hurrying the girl that way. There was urgency in his stride.

He was saying, "Just what's going on, I'm not exactly sure." He thought it best not to explain the murder attempt had *really* been on her life. "You stay with Yukon a moment. I wish you had not left the room."

"Where are you going?"

Patience spoke almost breathlessly, keeping pace with the bronze man's quick long strides.

"I'll be back soon," was all Doc said.

And just as they reached the garage doorway — main driveway doors were standing wide open in the mild night — Yukon popped out of the doorway, looking ready to fight somebody. He was taking a hitch in the old belt that held up his dungarees.

"It seems like," Yukon exploded, "I heard some shootin'! What's goin' on?" He wiped the back of his shirt sleeve across his face. "We only have fights around here on Saturday nights."

"Take care of Patience," Doc instructed quickly.

“You figger you need help?” Yukon eyed Doc intently.

“Not yet.” He added, “Better stay inside the garage.”

He swung away and disappeared almost instantly beneath old trees that lined the street, his figure concealed by the shadows.

He was thinking of a pin that Patience had been wearing on her robe. The brooch contained an emerald about the size of an egg. It had gleamed like a cat's eye in the night.

DOC approached the grove of trees some distance behind the hotel. He circled toward the spot, wary of anyone still hidden there.

Things had quieted down again. A light was still turned in the third-floor hotel room where “George” had poked his head out of the window curiously.

Nothing else. Even the dogs, tied up in back yards in the neighborhood, had stopped barking.

Doc finally moved up in the gloom beneath the tree where the sniper had been hidden. So far, he had not once allowed the moonlight, filtering down through the branches, to touch his stalking figure.

He was positive his approach had been soundless.

He waited, motionless. He moved slowly around the tree trunk in an ever widening circle.

Nothing on the ground. He got down on his hands and knees and felt the damp earth carefully with his fingertips. Thus, without using a flashlight he located the spot where the marksman had dropped down out of the tree.

There were deep heel imprints in the spongy ground. He traced them in the darkness. The sniper had dropped down from a low branch, within reach above Doc's head. He reached upward, touched the branch, estimated what a man's minimum height would have to be in order to grasp the branch, swinging upward.

The fellow was a least six feet. That told him something.

A dog barked. It was the kind of a bark, sort of half-hearted, a dog gives when some distant, not-too-menacing sound disturbs his slumber.

The barking stopped.

Then it came from a new direction, a different bark, a different dog.

Next, farther off and in another direction, a third new bark.

Doc Savage followed a route straight toward the third bark. It led across rear lots, skirted some woods, followed a country road that circled the village.

He was positive someone had headed that way, starting at a point near the hotel.

The bronze man trotted along for perhaps a quarter of a mile, keeping to the side of the road, beneath overhanging foliage, his steps muffled by the grass alongside the country road.

He suddenly drew up short when he heard what sounded like footsteps hurrying across wood planking. It was directly ahead.

Doc moved quickly toward the spot, crouched down.

He saw a wooden foot bridge across a brook to a clearing beyond the road. The tall figure of a man had just started across the bridge. Doc started closing in fast.

And then someone turned on a floodlight back there in the clearing. It seemed like a powerful floodlight, so sudden and unexpected was its glare.

It happened to be a pair of automobile headlamps. The car engine sprang into life at the same instant and the machine started towards the bridge.

Hidden there, waiting for the man he had trailed, Doc decided. For he saw the man jump onto the running board and swing inside the sedan.

Also, Doc Savage had been plainly revealed in the headlamp glare. The car, coming off the bridge in a reckless, plunging turn, bore right down upon him.

Doc hit the ditch alongside the road even as the shots cracked out. The gun made banging sounds with a spine-chilling effect.

Headlights of the speeding car went out as the sedan whipped past. Lead pellets punctured leaves on trees with whip-cracking sharpness.

Doc had no opportunity whatsoever to get even a glance of the license number. Or to fire a shot at a tire. He had been too busy saving his life.

Quickly, the throb of the car motor faded in the night. Naturally its destination was a mystery.

Doc returned to the garage.

Chapter VI

IN a manner full of fire and brimstone, Yukon was telling someone off over the telephone when Doc entered the garage. The bronze man stood there just outside the entrance to the office a moment, listening. Neither Yukon nor Patience had heard his quiet entrance.

“Well, blast it,” Yukon was shouting, “you damn well better find out! I say those two slickers are somewheres in this dog patch, an' I figger you can locate 'em!”

He slapped up the receiver, said, “Damm it!” and looked belligerent. Then he looked at Patience sitting on a couch near the old battered desk and said apologetically, “Sorry, ma'am—I plumb forgot you were ...”

“I understand,” Patience said in a friendly manner.

She was devastatingly pretty in pajamas, slippers and robe. “I can't understand,” she went on with mixed consternation and curiosity, “why such an attack would be made against Doc Savage—I mean, against me! That is—I was supposed to be in that room, but Mr. Savage changed with me because of the number 13 on the door, and then someone tried to shoot him—I mean me, because I was supposed to be there in the bed ...” She gave a nervous little cry. “Oh, I'm all mixed up. I don't understand it al all.”

“It does beat hell,” agreed Yukon seriously. “Damn puzzle is what it is!” He looked intently at the telephone again. “Well, dadgum it, I'll keep tryin' to find out where those two strangers are stayin'. Can't depend upon that dumb Werts. He couldn't locate his own grandmother. Like I always say ...”

Doc stepped into the office.

“Werts?” he queried.

YUKON turned around. Patience gave a start, then looked relieved when she saw Doc. She jumped up and came across the room.

“Police chief,” Yukon explained. “I got him out of bed while you were gone and told the dumb flathead to get busy and locate those two strangers we got here in town. He's been checkin' places where they might've put up for the night. But that Werts — he's the chief — is plain stupid. He should oughta stayed in the butcher business.”

“I don't believe,” Doc said, “we're going to find our two so-called 'sportsmen' in town at all.”

“Why?” demanded Yukon.

“You've been searching for them?” Patience asked. She stood close to Doc, looking up at him, a sort of relief on her lovely features that he was back near her again.

He told the girl and Yukon what had taken place since he had left them. He did not go into every detail, preferring not to upset Patience any more than possible. He skipped over details about finding the heel print beneath the tree where the sniper had been hidden; about being shot at again at uncomfortably close quarters — the bridge incident.

He merely said, “There are two of them, all right, and one is quite tall and, I imagine, fairly heavy. The other one I don't know anything about — yet. They have a car, a sedan, and it is quite possible they have a hideout somewhere outside of town. The car must have been arranged for in advance. That is, before they arrived in Whitehorse.”

“Then you picked up their trail?” Yukon's hard little jaw shoved out as though he were expectantly looking forward to a good scrap.

“They got away.” Doc saw Yukon's jaw drop. “All I can tell you is that they were driving a sedan.” He glanced at Patience. “I think they're scared off—probably miles from here by now.”

“Then they won't be back?” the girl said hopefully.

Doc shook his head. His manner was relaxed and casual.

“Don't you think,” he suggested, “you ought to get some sleep?”

“You're sure—everything will be all right?” Patience looked somewhat like a sleepy child who had been awakened in the middle of the night, scared and wide awake for a little bit, now getting drowsy again.

“Positive,” Doc assured her.

“All right,” she said.

They started out. Doc paused, looked back at Yukon. “That police chief — Werts — let's don't put any more cockleburs under his saddle.”

“Come again?” Yukon said, curious.

“I don't think you need to call him again,” Doc advised.

He gave an almost imperceptible shake of his head, which only Yukon could see. The alert little roan caught it.

“Okay,” he said.

Walking back to the hotel, their footsteps the only sound disturbing the deep quiet of the tree-shaded street, Doc again noticed the cat's-eye gleam of the huge emerald pin on the girl's robe.

He decided to ask about it later.

In the hotel room — his original room that was now being occupied by Patience — Doc looked in the clothes closet and beneath the bed to satisfy her curiosity. It was more or less of a formality to put her at ease.

“You see,” he pointed out, “you haven't a thing to worry about. Those fellows won't be back tonight. They're miles from here by now.”

Her big eyes were as luminous as the rare stone in the pin she wore.

“But those shots I heard before?”

“Mine,” Doc said easily. “Blanks. I just wanted to scare them off. As a matter of fact, they might have been only prowlers.”

She had rearranged the furniture in this room also. It had been piled up as a blockade behind the door, just as he had suspected.

“Also,” he reminded, “I have made one or two enemies in the world. Occasionally a trigger-happy individual decides to take a potshot at me.” He thought this ought to take her mind off whatever it was that was so obviously worrying her.

“But,” Patience exclaimed, “it was I who was supposed to be in that room you're occupying! They might have been after me.”

He had been afraid she'd get around to thinking of this.

Doc put his hand on her shoulder. It was a nice, smoothly rounder shoulder. He took it away again.

“Hardly,” he said. “I had the light turned on — couldn't get to sleep. The shade was up and I was moving about.” He had to be glib about the thing in order to make it convincing. “Anyone could have seen me. Therefore they could see that you were not in that room.”

That seemed to convince her.

Then he got around to the emerald business.

“That stone you're wearing,” he mentioned, “isn't it quite valuable? Something like that could attract trouble — thieves, you know. Perhaps that explains the unexpected interest in our arrival here in —”

“Oh, that!” Patience said looking down at the large stone. She glanced up at him and smiled. “Silly!”

“Me?”

“Of course!”

“I —”

“Woolworth's,” explained Patience, unfastening the brooch. “It's merely a doodad I picked up for a dime.”

“Just the same,” he told her, “it fools you. I took it for granted it was a very valuable stone. Someone else might jump to the same conclusion.”

Patience put a mock exasperated expression on her face and moved to the window. “All right, smarty,” she said, “if it pleases you —” She was pulling aside the shade, which had been lowered to the sill. The window was open. “There!”

She flung the pin outside into the night.

Doc smiled. “You think nothing of a dime, do you?”

“I think more of keeping you pleased.”

The way she said it made him decide to take his departure. It was after midnight.

“Now get some sleep,” he suggested. “If it makes you feel any easier, either Yukon or I will be somewhere around, nearby.”

He thought, looking down at her as she stood there in the doorway, that his remark certainly did relieve her considerably. For all her matter-of-factness of the last few moments, there had been a certain amount of tenseness underneath that she had not completely shielded from him.

Doc left.

HIS manner was entirely different when he met Yukon a moment later. The hard-bitten, faithful little man was waiting for him outside the hotel, loitering near his old jitney that was still parked there.

“What about the cocklebur-in-the-saddle kind of talk?” he asked immediately. “Werts is an old fuddy-duddy, but just the same he might've dug up something.”

“That's just it,” said Doc.

“Meanin'?”

“Stir up a hornet's nest and you scare away visitors.”

Yukon's button eyes sparkled as he caught Doc's thought.

“I get you. Go on—what else?”

“The less fuss, the sooner our two out-of-town arrivals might stick their noses out again.”

“In other words,” Yukon figured out, “they'll try to murder you quicker if you don't set the hounds on them? This thing is far more serious than you're lettin' on to Patience. Is that it?”

“I'll admit it has me puzzled,” Doc admitted.

“Just what happened when you went off on that prowl a while ago? More than you told the girl, eh?”

Doc nodded as they stood in the darkness, quietly talking. “One of them is fast with a gun.” He briefly described the incident at the bridge. “I could not see the car license. And the machine quickly vanished in

the darkness.”

“Hell,” murmured Yukon, “vanished is no word for it. They could drive anywhere north, south, east, or west out've this town and hole up some place in only a couple minutes. You know — canyons, ravines, mountains, all sorts of back woods roads leadin' no place. A cinch.”

“That's right.”

“An' you're positive it's the two guys who came in by plane?”

“Who else?”

“The plane followed you, too?”

“After I picked up Patience.”

“They must be after her, all right,” said Yukon.

“It would appear that way.”

Doc felt the coal-black eyes of Yukon boring into him in the darkness.

“What do you mean — appear that way?” Yukon asked.

“If no one knew of the switch in rooms, then they were after her. But if they did know, then I was the target.”

“So how are you goin' to find out?”

Doc Savage had made his decision some time within the past hour or so. “Watch the girl,” he announced.

“You don't really think —”

“I don't know,” admitted Doc. Then, “No, I don't like to think she has anything to do with it. But at the moment, until we learn more, there's only one way to check.”

“An' that's watch her?”

“Exactly. Can you do without some sleep?”

Yukon snorted. “I'll be asleep long enough when somebody puts a slug in this old carcass. Meantime, I figger to get a little excitement out've life. You want I should start trailin' her right now?”

“I think it would be best,” Doc said.

From where they stood, near the corner of the side street along which ran the railroad, they could glance up through the trees and see the girl's second-floor room. It was in darkness. The bulking shadows of the freight cars, standing motionless on the railroad spur, seemed incongruous in such a small town setting.

“Okay,” said Yukon. “I'll get me a grandstand seat right up on one of them freight cars. That way, I'll be able to see anything that happens. I'll give you a full report on her, Mr. Savage.”

Then he remembered to ask, “Where can I reach you? I take it you're goin' some place.”

“I'll be back soon,” Doc advised.

And as Yukon started toward the freight cars, mingling with the shadows of night, he noticed the bulking outline of a gun beneath the wiry little fellow's shirt.

Which reminded Doc of the weapon he himself was carrying. As a matter of precaution he took it out of his shirt and placed it beside him on the seat of the rattletrap jitney as he drove off.

He wanted to talk to Willis, the airport manager again.

First, however, he went directly to the airport.

Chapter VII

THE flying field was a huge dark carpet rolled out in the calm, quiet night, the red marker lights displaying an eerie glow in the background.

Doc Savage parked the car some distance from the field and approached it on foot. He made his way, unseen, to the hangar where his plane was locked up for the night.

A careful inspection — he had made practically certain that no one was about — told him that the hangar was securely locked and had not been tampered with at all. His swift but thorough search showed him the reason for this — if someone had wanted to take a look at his ship.

A heavy electric conduit went from hangar to a high telephone pole outside the field, along the highway. It was not a telephone wire or ordinary electric light connection.

He was positive it was the foolproof covering for an electric alarm circuit. To tamper in any manner with the hangar doors would have set it off.

Doc had an idea the alarm might be directly connected with Willis's home.

Arriving there a few moments later he found that his surmise was correct.

Willis said, "Precaution, just in case. Some kids broke into a hangar one Hallowe'en and put a wrench through the wing of the mayor's private plane. There was hell to pay."

Willis wore a ling, white, old-fashioned nightgown and battered slippers. The two men sat, for the moment, in the living room of the small cottage. They talked quietly, for Doc had noticed an assortment of children's toys pushed back behind a sofa. Someone moved about upstairs, quietly. The airport manager's wife, Doc guessed, aroused by his middle-of-the-night entrance.

"I've been wondering," Doc prompted, "if you could accurately describe the two men who arrived at the field shortly after me tonight?"

"Had some trouble?"

Doc shrugged. "A little. It's nothing very important. I'd merely like to find out something about them."

"Well," Willis explained, "you know how it is about people. You meet them for a moment, and unless it's something special you don't pay much attention. Just the same, I've been thinking about it since that name-erasing business. That gets me mad!"

He tried to look mad but his friendly gray eyes were still too sleep-filled. He squinted at Doc Savage.

"One of them was short and heavy. Not fat — just good and solid and only looking like he was fat. Made me think of that song you folks had down in the States — 'Mr. Five-By-Five', remember?"

Doc nodded.

“You know,” Willis added, “a kind of Lou Costello — that radio fellow — build, but only much heavier.”

“And the other?”

“Say, he was a tall devil! A good-six feet-three. Maybe more. Well dressed — both of them were. And both of them were real sunburned. I guess they've been down in Florida or one of those places. Their skin was dark as anything.”

“How did they talk?” The information that one mad was unusually tall fitted in with Doc's suspicions. He thought of the heel print beneath the lowermost limb of the tree.

“Now that you mention it,” the airport manager said quickly, “their talk was kind of different than ours. I mean — they spoke perfect English but it was different. Say, maybe they were foreigners!”

DOC had already reached that conclusion.

He said, “You didn't hear any names mentioned?”

“Nothing except what I told you before. Just that they called the pilot 'Alfred'. I wish I could give you some more information, Mr. Savage.”

Doc smiled and prepared to leave. “You were unusually observant. Most people are a way off the beam when they try to recall a character's appearance. Police statistics will tell you that.”

At the door, Willis said seriously, “If there's anything I can do, just let me know.”

“I certainly will. Thank you.” Then Doc turned back a moment and said, “There is something, if it isn't too much trouble?”

In response to Willis's quick nod, he added, “There's another suitcase I'd like to get out of my plane. If it wouldn't be putting you to too much trouble —”

“Heck, no,” Willis said brightly. “Just a minute.” He disappeared inside the house, returned shortly with a key. “This one fits your hangar. Tell you what I'll do ...” He glanced at his wrist watch. “What time have you?”

Doc immediately understood. He checked his own watch. “It is exactly one-thirty-seven. Allow me six minutes to get to the hangar.”

“Check.” Willis readjusted his watch. It was a minute out of the way. “Then I'll pull the alarm switch. It's right here in the kitchen. How long do you want getting your stuff out of the plane?”

“Ten minutes. No more than that.”

Willis nodded. “All right. I'll give you ten minutes in the hangar, then switch the system on again.”

Doc drove off, reached the field in five minutes, waited a little over a minute, checking his watch carefully, then opened the hangar doors and removed the items he wanted from his plane.

He carried a small square case when he locked the doors behind him again. He waited until it was time for the alarm system to be in operation again, then departed.

Dawn, however, was just starting to be a vague gray haze in the sky when he reached the hotel.

The time was somewhere around four a.m.

DURING those quiet, lifeless hours of the night, Doc Savage had checked the town swiftly and carefully. He found no trace of the sedan or the two men. He had not thought he would. The bronze man had also returned again to the tall tree where the rifleman had been hidden.

The square carrying-case, though fairly heavy, had accompanied Doc Savage throughout the night. Apparently there had been no effort to carrying it.

Yukon was not there to meet him upon his return.

At first, the discovery had an upsetting effect. Then he reasoned that Yukon must have had some very definite reason for taking sudden leave. Also, that his fiery little friend must have made certain that the girl, Patience, was all right before starting out.

What Yukon was up to was a mystery.

Doc slipped into the hotel lobby, now deserted and gloomy. Even the slightly deaf fat clerk was nowhere about. He went quickly and quietly up the carpeted stairs and directly to the girl's room. There, ear pressed against the door, he listened intently for a full moment.

It took that long to be positive he had oriented the sound. He listened another half-moment to be absolutely certain.

Patience was asleep. He heard her regular breathing. There was one more thing he wanted to do before the gray dawn light became too bright and some wakeful insomniac resident saw him prowling around the hotel grounds.

Doc went outside again and looked for the emerald pin.

At the time Patience flung the “doodad” — as she had called it — from the open window, Doc had carefully noted approximate direction of the throw and had mentally noted about where it would strike the ground outside.

This was the area he now inspected.

Pre-dawn grayness was still dark enough that he had to use the flashlight. He covered every square inch of ground directly below the window and several yards in every direction beyond that.

He did the whole job over again.

The emerald-pin-doodad thing was not there.

But Doc found the dead man.

Chapter VIII

BUSHES growing alongside the hotel wall had concealed the figure — that, and the deceiving light of predawn.

Now it was quickly growing light. This explained how Doc Savage spotted the legs protruding from the heavy growth of shrubs.

He discovered that the fellow was dead when he dragged the long man from beneath the bushes. The figure was well over six feet, meticulously dressed, with complexion a dark, almost olive hue not caused

by sunburn.

Someone had broken the fellow's skull with a blackjack, silently without a doubt, efficiently.

It would have taken a person of fair height, Doc estimated, to sneak up behind this victim and deliver the kind of blow that had been administered. Unless the long man had been lying down. Or perhaps bent down.

The thought spurred Doc to searching the man's pockets. He found nothing in the way of identification. Only keys, money, wallet and such. The clothing bore the mark of a manufacturer in South America. Argentina.

That was all.

Except that the long, dark-skinned man had not been dead very long.

The airport manager's description fitted the man exactly. He was one of the two men who had arrived shortly behind Doc in the mysterious plane.

He was also the silenced-rifle marksman who had sent bullets into the room Doc had adroitly taken from Patience. A simple test proved this fact.

Doc removed the plaster cast from his case. He had made the cast just a few moments ago, when he had returned to the tree that was in line with the hotel bedroom.

The plaster mold was of the heel imprint he had found beneath the tree limb, where a tall man had dropped down to the ground in his hurry to escape detection.

The mold fitted the dead man's right shoe perfectly, even to indicating the slightly worn nail ends. This was also the man he had trailed to the sedan rendezvous somewhat north of town. The sedan driver, therefore, was this fellow's partner — “Mr. Five-By-Five” — according to the airport manager's description.

Certainly Mr. Five-By-Five had not killed his own accomplice. Obviously they had been working together. Hadn't they tried to murder him right there at the bridge, Doc thought.

He wished Yukon would show up and throw some light on the murder. Perhaps he had witnessed something.

Doc decided that more than two men were involved in the mystery. And the others, whoever they were, apparently were enemies of Mr. Five-By-Five and his dead partner here.

Reaching that conclusion, Doc found that he was compelled to alter some of his theories. Someone had tied a tin can to the cat's tail and now anything could happen.

He managed to get the long heavy man balanced across his shoulder — the corpse weighed well over two hundred pounds — and he had just placed the corpse and the black square case in the old jitney when Yukon put in an appearance again.

THE tough little friend of the bronze man was breathing hard, but he was not panting — which was amazing in a man his age. He had been running.

“Dead as a herring, ain't he?” said Yukon, showing no surprise whatsoever.

Doc momentarily eyed his friend. “Is finding dead men at sunup a customary thing in Whitehorse?”

“Once in a while on Saturday nights,” said Yukon matter-of-factly. He nodded towards the corpse. “This one got himself knocked off there on the lawn.” He waved his arm toward the hotel. “Helluva thing—I must’ve dozed off just before dawn. It was too comfortable sittin’ up there on the freight car. I oughta picked a good hard rock to sit on —”

“So?” prodded Doc.

“I wakes up all of a sudden and there it is. Bingo! This big guy was already slugged and another fellow is pulling him beneath them bushes. I hightail it down there to investigate.”

“You didn’t get a good look at the murderer?”

“Well, yes and no. You know how it is, Doc. I see him, sure, but it’s dark and he’s running. I only see his back. He’s a long-legged, lean cuss, and he sure can sprint like a fox. I chased him dang near a mile, I figger. An’ I didn’t want to use my shootin’ iron, otherwise the whole blasted town would’ve woke up. I was also thinkin’ of Patience. Like you said, you didn’t want to stir things up —”

Doc interrupted with a quick nod. “This long-legged man — did he have a car?”

“Danged if I know. He gets so far away I don’t know where the hell he is. Could be, though. He might’ve had a jalopy parked some place.” He frowned at the corpse and the growing morning light. “What’ll we do with him? Dump him in a creek?”

“I think,” Doc advised, “you’d better deliver him to your friend Werts, the police chief. Tell Werts enough to keep him satisfied, but no more than necessary.”

“Werts don’t like to kill himself working’,” said Yukon.

“That should make it all right, then.”

“In other words,” mused Yukon, “you figger if you don’t stir up too much commotion, you might coax some more foxes out’ve the hole?”

“Something like that.”

“SWELL!” Yukon swung his wiry little figure behind the wheel. “I’d like to catch me that long-legged cuss. First time I’ve been outrun in years. Damm it, I’m gettin’ old!”

“I—ah—just a minute,” said Doc, before Yukon started the motor. He removed something from the square case, lifted the rear seat — the dead man had been placed in a pretzel position on the floor — and stowed the smaller box-like affair away beneath the cushion.

“Gadget I might want to use later,” he told his friend.

Doc kept the larger case with him as Yukon sent the flivver clattering down the street containing the railroad spur.

Within the hour, the town would be coming to life again. As far as Doc could ascertain, no one had been aroused by the swift, silent events of the past half hour.

He thought it best to return to his room before anyone became too curious about his activities. Waiting in his room until he knew a clerk would be on duty at the desk, he put through a call to his airline maintenance field below the Canadian border. Soon he was talking to a night supervisor at the field.

“They’ve already got the girl’s plane back in the air,” Doc was informed.

Pleased, Doc said, "Fast work!"

"We had a crew working on it during the night, Mr. Savage. They just reported by radio. Something about the new cable connections, but they patched it up good enough to fly back here. It'd be too dangerous for the girl to fly the plane yet, however."

"You'll complete the overhaul there in the shops?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll keep in touch with you," advised Doc, and he hung up.

Next, he checked to see if there had been any message from either of his two assistants, Monk or Ham Brooks.

He was informed that there had been no calls for him whatsoever.

Then he spent some time locating lead pellets buried in the walls and furniture of his bedroom. He studied one of them minutely and whistled softly to himself.

They had been fired by a .30-.30 high-powered, long range rifle — a deadly weapon. He glanced toward the window and permitted himself to have a cold chill for a moment.

He put the pellets away for safekeeping.

The telephone rang.

Chapter IX

It was Yukon.

"Old fuddy-duddy Werts ain't goin' to cause any fuss," he announced.

"Sure?"

"He'll make it a quiet investigation. He doesn't even know you found the guy."

"Did you," asked Doc, "learn anything further about the dead man? Any identification?"

"Not a thing, Doc. Foreigner, is all."

"Yes, I know."

"Patience up yet?" Yukon asked with some interest.

"I don't think so." Then he added, "Are you free for the remainder of the day?"

"Hell's bells," said Yukon, "I'm free anytime. Anybody wants a jitney they can damn well walk. Do 'em good. I take it you're goin' some place."

"I'll be back later in the day," said Doc. "Meanwhile, I'd like you to sort of watch over Patience."

There was a brief silence. Then: "You mean, shadow her, like some coppers do?"

"In a way, yes." Doc couldn't help smiling at Yukon's prideful tone. "Nothing obvious, understand. Merely check on her activities throughout the day. You might," he suggested, "start out by having

breakfast with her. You know, offer my apologies and such.”

“Gollickers!” cried Yukon. “I think this is goin' to be a real bright, pleasant day!”

“Doc hung up. A half hour later he was in his plane, lazily circling the outskirts of the town.

THROUGHOUT the day Doc Savage handled a number of details that consumed considerable time. He spent several hours covering every point of the compass around Whitehorse. From the ground, the speck of a plane high in the bright sky would appear to be circling listlessly.

But as a matter of fact Doc had never been so intent on a purpose.

The Alcan Highway, winding its way northward toward Fairbanks, Alaska, contained about the only signs of activity.

Now and then a car moved along its endless reach. But he doubted whether Mr. Five-By-Five and his sedan had taken to the highway. It was more likely that the fellow was working from a hideout somewhere on the outskirts of Whitehorse.

Thus the meticulous search.

The country was wild enough, vast enough that any undue activity could be spotted from the air. Various times during the morning and early afternoon Doc brought the plane down close enough to skim the treetops, as some action caught his attention.

He followed ravines, gulleys, a back road — roads were few and far between — and searched for smoke that might come from a cabin well-hidden in deep woods.

Twice he tried to contact his New York headquarters on a radio wave-length used by himself and his aids. He got no response, which meant, probably, that Monk and Ham were still waiting at LaGuardia Field. Others of his associates were scattered about the world on various missions.

Twice he landed and took on more gas, at small airports beyond Whitehorse.

Later, he covered the Kluane Lake flats area, where Patience had been forced down. It was magnificently impressive country. Far off to the southwest was Mt. Lucania, spearing seventeen thousand feet into the clouds. Kluane Lake itself extended for more than fifty miles.

Doc brought the Spartron Executive down for a landing on the flats where he had aided the girl. He taxied the ship for a good distance across the great, level expanse south of the lake. There was the lake, huge, and the sprawling flats, and the great highway cutting directly across in between.

There was not a place she could have been attempting to reach when she had tried to run away from him early last evening.

It was nightfall by the time Doc Savage appeared back at the hotel. Yukon was waiting in his room. The hall door was open and Yukon was stretched on his back, on the bed, smoking a cigar. His feet were propped up on the footboard.

“It almost looked,” Doc commented, entering, “as if the place were on fire.”

“Oh—this?” Yukon looked at his cigar. He got up and put it out. “I guess it does stink a little.”

THEY aired out the room.

Doc asked, "How did you make out?"

"You mean—putting the tag on Patience?"

Doc nodded.

"She's all right. Blast it, Doc, for my money they don't come any honester. You know what?"

Doc Savage had closed the hall door. He was preparing to shave and shower. Skinny Yukon's eyes popped as he saw the tremendous muscular physique of the bronze man.

"You were saying —" Doc prompted.

"Oh—Well, that sweet girl is plenty worried about you, is what! She doesn't know how, but she figgers she's got you into some kind of trouble. She's just as puzzled as anybody else!"

"Nothing unusual happened today?"

"Not a thing! That Angel Pie is on the up and up, believe me!"

Doc's brows raised a little. "So now it's Angel Pie?"

If cowhide leather can show a flush, Yukon's features did just that. "I—er—that is—well, damm it, she's swell!" the little man exploded.

Doc stepped across the room and picked up the phone, asked to be connected to the girl's room, then was saying, "In half an hour the dining room will be about cleared of regular guests. Will you join me?"

Patience sounded extremely happy about the idea just before he hung up.

"So?" questioned Yukon.

SHORTLY he went downstairs and met the sweet-faced girl in the dining room.

They ate at a table off to one side. The large room was practically deserted anyway, so they enjoyed utmost privacy.

"I'm afraid," Doc admitted frankly, "I made a grave mistake about you."

The questioning expression in her beautiful brown eyes made him feel as though he had clubbed and beat her.

"Mistake?"

"I misjudged you."

"But I don't understand —"

"Frankly, Patience, I was suspicious of you. That plane following us after I picked you up last night—the shooting—Well, I rather thought I was being roped into something."

She looked at him steadily, eyes wide and honestly level. The nicest kind of eyes.

"I ..." she started. "I knew that," she said. "It made me feel terrible." Her small hand unconsciously reached out and touched his arm, drew away again. "Thank you, Doc Savage, for being—so direct about it."

Doc gave a sigh of relief.

“Now that that's over with,” he went on quickly, “Tell me what you're frightened of? You really are, you know. I'd like to help you.”

Serious, thoughtful, her eyes searched Doc's face. She was such a dainty, fragile-looking sort of girl, he thought.

A full, silent moment passed.

Then she said abruptly, “All right.” She said it as though a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders. “Let's,” she suggested, “finish dinner first.” She attempted a bright smile, but at the same time he knew that fright was deep within her. “Let's say we meet an hour after dinner, on the porch?”

“Swell,” said Doc, and then finished their meal without mentioning the matter again.

Afterwards, Doc advised Yukon to call him at nine o'clock. Doc was going to catch forty winks.

The next thing he remembered Yukon was shaking him — he must have dropped off to sleep in an instant — and the little man was terrifically excited about something.

“Vamoosed!” he shouted.

Doc sat up, putting on a puzzled expression.

Yukon raced on furiously, “I searched her room, the hotel, the garage, stores everywhere. She ain't no place, I tell you!”

“You mean —”

“Patience has disappeared!”

Chapter X

THE day was Tuesday, and the morning sun was now clear of the towering mountain ranges, shining bright and intensely down upon the long Alcan Road. The time was approximately seven o'clock.

The car, an open touring model, was a V-12 Cadillac with plenty of reserve power beneath its hood. For three hundred miles, through part of the night and into the morning, it had traveled at hurtling speed northward along the great highway.

Doc Savage was at the wheel.

The car was doing eighty miles an hour along a straight-as-a-string section of the super-highway that rose and fell gently through a magnificent valley enclosed by green-painted foothills. Beyond the foothills, rising higher and higher as though they were huge backdrops for a mammoth stage, were the Alaskan mountain peaks.

Yukon remarked, “I've changed my mind about Werts, our esteemed chief of police in Whitehorse.”

“Because he loaned us his car?” Doc kept his eyes on the road. Tires sang shrilly against the smooth pavement as he deftly handled the wheel.

“Yep,” said Yukon. “He's not a bad egg, after all. Said we could leave the car at any truck station along the Road, and he'd arrange to have one of them transport truck drivers bring it back. That is, if we don't

drive it back ourselves. You think this is goin' to be a wild-goose chase?"

"We'll soon know."

"You mean, we'll soon be overtaking the northbound truck jockey who picked her up?"

Doc glanced at his watch and then at the mileage indicator section of the speedometer. "The truck we're after is no more than half an hour ahead. Isn't that approximately what they told you at the last gas station where we stopped?"

"Just about. Also, only one of them trans-Alaska transports came through tonight, and it's still somewhere ahead. We haven't passed it. You think Patience is aboard that truck, eh?"

"Your friend Werts got that tip. She was seen hailing the driver shortly after eight-thirty last night, just outside Whitehorse. The description fitted her."

"It's too bad, though," Yukon said grimly, "Werts didn't find out about it sooner. Let's see—we got started about midnight, didn't we?"

Doc nodded.

The car roared down a long, straight hill and onto a planked bridge across a wildly tumbling stream. Steel trusses of the bridge rattled as the car whipped across. Then they were climbing again, skirting another ridge.

"Also," Yukon added, "we've asked questions at every truck jockey's coffee-and-anchor shop along the Road during the night."

"Check."

"I can't understand what's wrong with that girl," said Yukon sadly.

Doc made no comment.

His gaze touched on a road marker ahead: ONE MILE TO TANANA CROSSING.

He was slowing the heavy car down less than fifty seconds later. Gravel slewed as they pulled into a wayside oasis of general store, gas station, lunch room and a highway truck-service stop.

Doc climbed out and asked questions about the big, high-speed trans-Alaska transport truck they were following.

"Pulled out of here fifteen minutes ago," the lanky, middle-aged garage man told him.

Doc started to say, "There was a slim, small, dark-eyed girl wearing a zipper flying jacket and —"

"— and carrying a handbag," interjected the man.

"That's right."

"She got out."

Yukon heard the statement. He swung out of the Cadillac and looked as though he were going to jump up and down with excitement.

Doc Savage stared around. This was the very heart of Alaska. The country was even more vast,

brehtaking — and primitive, compared to Whitehorse. He couldn't imagine the girl allowing herself to be set down in the midst of this great wilderness.

“But —” he started.

“We've got some lads here who flew those B-29s during the war. Started themselves a flying service out yonder.” He waved his hand toward a dirt road that cut back from the oasis of a village. “That young lady asked if maybe she could rent a plane.”

“How far is the field?” asked Doc, already moving back to the Cadillac.

“Quarter-mile. Thos youngsters have some fast jobs back there if you'd like to maybe do a little flying.”

“I think,” the bronze man said, “I might be interested.”

THE flying field had been hewn out of the wilderness. Doc's eyes opened in admiration when he saw two planes lined up near a hangar. They were modern cabin ships built for speed and comfort.

A young tow-headed lad of about twenty-three met them as they climbed out of the touring car.

“There was a girl —” Doc started again.

The young fellow nodded. “I figured someone was looking for her. She was in an awful hurry to get away from here. She rented one of our ships and a pilot along with it. Said she wanted to be flown to New York.”

Doc tensed.

Yukon looked as though someone had hit him behind the knees.

“Any more ships available?” Doc wanted to know.

The towhead indicated both parked planes. “Take your pick. We fly pianos, pigs, and people — anything you like.”

“There will be just the two of us,” explained Doc. “I have my own plane at Whitehorse.”

“Be there in less than two hours,” said the young flying veteran. “That cutie your wife?”

Doc Savage felt his ears redden slightly. “I—well no.”

They made arrangements to have the car driven back to Whitehorse — Doc paid the fee for this service and rental of the plane — and within a moment or two they were taking off.

The way the tow-headed youngster went up out of there, zooming over the treetops at the end of the runway, proved why America held air supremacy during the war.

There was only one thing Doc regretted. The plane's radio equipment was not designed to pick up a faraway city like New York. He was anxious to contact Monk or Ham.

Later that morning he put through a call from the Whitehorse airport. Long Distance finally contacted his headquarters in New York.

Monk answered.

HE said: “I've been trying to reach you at that hotel, Doc. We picked up that pilot's trail sure enough. He

arrived here, just like you figured, and his name's Alfred.”

Doc remarked that it was clever of them even finding out the pilot's name. Monk said grudgingly, “That shyster Ham's smooth talk did it. Ham pretended he was looking for someone else when we spotted the pilot ready to leave LaGuardia Field in a cab. Ham tricked him into starting to say his name. Then we followed them.”

“Them?” Doc asked.

“A guy met him. They went to an apartment down around 9th Street. Ham's down there now, watching for any new developments. I came back here to contact you.”

Doc informed his aide, “Well, you're going to have more company.”

He described Patience, gave outstanding characteristics of the plane in which she was flying — he had obtained this from the tow-headed pilot — and finished, “The girl's in grave danger. Meet that plane and Patience, and take her directly to headquarters.” He glanced at his watch. “I think the ship she's in is fast enough to make it there around midnight.”

“Roger!” said Monk. Then, “And Doc?”

“Yes?”

“Have you located the box?”

“The box?” Doc frowned.

“Somehow it's connected with the mystery! That clever Ham managed to tap a telephone wire in the apartment house and heard talk about it. The box was dropped by small parachute from a plane in the vicinity of a place up that way called Kluane Lake.”

Doc's strange flake-gold eyes were flickering now. “What kind of box?” he demanded.

“Metal, Ham says. And from what he found out, Doc, there seems to be one hell of an lot of interest in that box!” He added, “Just a minute ...” There was a slight pause.

Then, his voice again, “Ham even overheard some kind of landmark mentioned where the parachute and box were dropped. Here it is ...”

Doc made swift notations, looking up at Yukon as he did so. Little Yukon and the airport manager, Willis, were standing there listening.

“Got that?” Monk queried.

“Yes.”

“Well, from what Ham learned, some people have been murdered because of that box.”

The bronze man came to a quick decision. “Monk?”

“Yeah, Doc?”

“I'm flying to New York immediately. Meanwhile, find this girl Patience and don't let her out of your sight.”

“Will do!”

After Doc hung up, he looked at expectant little Yukon. His friend already held that slip of paper on which Doc had written the landmark location.

Yukon said quickly, “By Gollickers, I heard enough of that talk to know this is something mighty serious. You want I should try to locate that metal box?”

“Think you can, Yukon?”

“Hell, I’ve prospected every inch of that country! I’ll find it or bust a leg!”

Removing several bills from his wallet, Doc handed them to Yukon. The man’s buttony blackeyes popped when he saw their denomination.

“Expense account,” said the bronze man. “Use your own judgment. Come to New York if you find the metal box. I wish I had time to help you —”

“You never mind about that,” said Yukon reassuringly. “You get down there and watch after Patience.”

Willis spoke for the first time. “Werts called asking for you, Yukon. He says sorry, but he has no further information for you. He’s combed the town looking for that Mr. Five-By-Five and another character you described to him.”

“I think,” murmured Doc, “the entire mystery has moved to New York. Did any strangers leave by plane today?”

Willis shook his head, explained, “But there are other airports further south on the Alcan Highway. Anyone could go there and rent a plane.”

“Or perhaps have their own plane waiting there,” said Doc.

Next, he had his ship wheeled out.

Just before he took off, he spoke again to Yukon. “I wish,” he said, “this was a P-38!”

Little Yukon’s bright eyes sparkled. “You want to get there in one helluva hurry, don’t you? This is something pretty big, eh?”

Doc was thoughtful an instant.

“People,” he then said musingly, “don’t come all the way from South America to this end of the world to get killed. Others don’t race to New York just for the trip.”

“And Patience!” added Yukon. “She’s caught right in the middle!”

“Patience is in grave danger.”

“Maybe,” suggested Yukon, “you could pick up a faster sky buggy at that airline field you’re connected with down below the border.”

“I’d thought of that,” said Doc. “Maybe I will.”

Two moments later he took off for New York.

Chapter XI

THERE seemed to be some sort of argument taking place at LaGuardia Field. It was between two men of dissimilar appearance. One was short, extremely wide, and it looked as though his head had been hammered down on his massive shoulders. His general appearance, his features, were not the kind to make babies coo.

“Listen, shyster,” he was bellowing, “they should have studied you at Harvard, instead of vice-versa! I tell you she's brown-eyed, beautiful and built!”

“Look, stupid,” said the other man, “anytime you pick one that's gorgeous, I'll stop looking at girls.” His voice, though well modulated, was acid. “This one will probably be the size of an Indian Squaw with fifteen assorted kids.” He shrugged. “Oh, well, that'd be your type —”

“Doc said so!” said the wide, short man.

“Said what?”

“That she's pretty—this Patience. I told you, he gave me all the details, you poor excuse for a lawyer!”

The argument continued. No one paid the slightest attention, for it was taking place far down a fenced-in walk leading alongside the massive field, the hour was two a.m., and there were no visitors there anyway.

The smartly dressed, dapper man was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, better known as “Ham” Brooks among the Doc Savage associates. A distinguished attorney — a product of Harvard Law School — he had the mobile mouth of an orator and of a person who liked to talk. He fancied himself the well-dressed man, which he was.

Ham enjoyed nothing better, however, than needling his good friend Monk. None would ever suspect that either would gladly lay down his life for the other — if that sort of drastic circumstance presented itself.

Monk — Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair — was by profession an industrial chemist, and also a leader in his field. None would ever suspect it. Unlike Ham, he dressed as though he continually slept in a park and he liked nothing better than a good fight.

MONK was continuing, “So if you'll just listen for a minute, shyster, I'll tell you —”

“Tell me what?”

“Shuddup!” Then he went on: “This girl — Patience — well, the plane she rented up there was due in any time after midnight, according to Doc's estimations. It hasn't arrived yet. I have a description, the Canadian registry number — all that.”

Ham said, “You mentioned that in the note you left for me at headquarters.”

“Yeah—Well, she's in trouble, plenty. Doc says we're not to let her out of our sight until he arrives.”

“He's coming?” asked Ham.

“As fast as he can travel!” Monk looked out across the mammoth landing field, watched a regular 21-passenger Douglas airliner land and taxi over to one of the regular airlines ramps. He was not interested in the big airliners; he had been watching private planes, few and far between at this hour, landing and going to a different section of the field, which was near where they stood. Monk looked back at his dapper partner.

“How's things at that apartment down on 9th Street?”

“Quiet.”

“No new arrivals?”

“Not when I left,” said Ham.

“Alfred, that pilot, still in there?”

Ham nodded.

“You still got their telephone tapped?”

“Naturally, dunce!”

“Hear anything more about that blasted box they're all after?”

Ham shook his head. “We're at a standstill until we talk to Doc. He knows what he's doing.”

“Or,” said Monk brightly, “we'll find out from this girl Patience. Apparently she's in it somewhere.”

“Or maybe trying to escape it,” offered Ham.

Monk eyed a plane that had settled on an approach runway far across the field. “Boy, I'll bet she's pretty,” he sighed.

“You say Doc gave you an exact description?”

“Yep.” Monk repeated it. “So you see ...” He stopped talking and watched the plane that had landed. It had taxied across the field, approaching the nearest hangar. Monk studied it intently.

“Come on!” he said abruptly, moving quickly along the walk.

There was a gate at the end of the visitors' walk. It was locked. Monk put his powerful hands atop the fence and vaulted it easily, despite the fact that he was solid and stocky.

Ham did likewise.

They reached the plane just as it drew up and the pilot cut the ignition and climbed out. Monk had quickly noted the number beneath the wide low wing.

“This is it!” he announced to Ham.

The pilot was a fairly young chap. He wore a veteran's lapel pin.

“You pick up a girl passenger at Tanana Crossing, Alaska?” Monk demanded.

The pilot had a pleasant manner. “That's right.”

A hand reached out of the doorway, holding a handbag. It was a woman's hand. The pilot took the bag.

Monk started to look like a bridegroom arriving at the church.

“She in there?” Monk demanded anxiously.

The pilot nodded.

Another small handbag came out and the fellow took it, placing it on the ground.

Ham stepped quickly forward, elbowing his partner aside and said smoothly, “May I assist you, miss?”

He helped the woman out of the plane.

Then he did things trying to compose the expression of shock on his face.

Monk cried, “You're not Patience!”

“THE name,” said the woman formally, “is Matilda—Matilda Bridges.”

Matilda was tall, as thin as a straw, and wore a severely styled black dress, summer coat and hat.

Ham had been peering inside the plane. He spoke to the pilot. “Your only passenger?”

“That's right.”

Monk rattled off details, including origin of the flight, an accurate description of Patience. Then, jaw shoved out, he added, “So don't try to give me anything, chum. Patience was aboard this plane —”

“You're quite right.”

Monk stared.

“But,” the pilot continued, “she left us at Edmonton.” He indicated the severely dressed tall woman. “That is, she exchanged places with this lady.”

“And,” put in Matilda, “I'll have you understand that young lady paid me to come to New York. Paid me well, with spending money too. I should be a fool, a waitress stuck up there for ten years, and not leap at the chance to see —”

Ham said quietly, “Is that true, sir?”

The pilot nodded. “She's right. Patience was her name, sure enough, and she was scared out of her wits about something. She offered Miss Bridges, here, plenty to finish the trip to New York for her.” He shrugged. “I should be a guy to argue. I only work for a living, and as long as I get paid —”

Ham said, “Just a minute,” and went into the nearby hangar office. He came back shortly. He said, “Okay,” looking at the pilot. “I checked on you. You're from Tanana Crossing and everything's in order.”

“Order, hell!” exploded Monk. “Someone's crossed us up!”

“My!” said Matilda Bridges, shocked, and she picked up her handbags and stalked toward an exit gate that had been opened after the plane's arrival.

Monk started to say, “Doc'll sure be sore —”

Ham touched his arm, then smiled at the pilot. “Thanks, son.” He motioned for Monk to get started, casually indicating the long, thin woman, hurrying toward a cab stand some distance away from them.

The pilot said, “That Patience sure was plenty scared. I don't get it, either.”

Ham and Monk left.

They had their own car parked near the hack stand. Only one taxi was on the line at the moment. Matilda

Bridges had just climbed into it as Ham and Monk were still some distance away.

Then, abruptly, ham touched his disturbed partner's arm. "Look at that," he said quickly.

The cab containing Matilda had pulled out, moving along the curving drive to the parkway. Another car had moved out behind it, a heavy sedan. Just as Ham spoke, the second car passed beneath an arc lamp. Four men were in the dark sedan. Monk also saw this.

"Golly!" exclaimed Monk. "Those guys aren't up to any good!"

"Check!"

Ham was certain they had not been seen by the four men in the sedan. Now he swiftly led the way to where their own car was parked.

"It might," he decided, "be a good idea for us to join the procession."

THE parkway into New York was practically deserted at this hour of the morning. The cab, trailed at a discreet distance by the sedan, made good speed.

Monk drove the high-speed car that was one of several maintained by the Doc Savage organization. Ham had to detain him from closing in on the sedan.

"Blazes!" complained Monk. "Let's stop those guys, slap 'em a bit, and find out what gives!"

"No," said Ham quickly.

"Why not?"

"I'll try to make it clear to that single-track mind of yours," Ham said sharply. "Matilda might be tied in with the mystery. Maybe not. The same goes for the four men in that sedan. Remember, we've got to have some conclusive proof before we take action."

"Maybe we'll get some action if we —"

Ham said in exasperation, "Sure, and land in jail. After all, you can't just interfere with people's normal activities without —"

"That Matilda," Monk said, "looks like seven miles of bad road. I don't like her eye."

"You don't like her because she isn't this doll called Patience."

The argument continued.

They crossed an East River Bridge, still following the cars, and there was some traffic. The trail led toward lower Manhattan. The traffic was fairly heavy as they passed through midtown. It was a warm, mild night and a lot of New Yorkers — who never seem to sleep — were out driving around, mainly in taxicabs.

That's what upset the applectart.

For Ham suddenly exclaimed, "That's not the same cab ahead of the sedan. It's green!"

Even as Monk stared, the cab turned off at a crosstown street. The sedan continued straight ahead.

"Pull up closer to them," Ham ordered.

They did so. Both saw the woman seated in a rear seat of the sedan, between two of the men passengers. Ham rapped, "I get it!" He explained. "Four blocks back we were held up by a light and a line of traffic."

"Switch!" deduced Monk. "Matilda left the cab and joined those guys in the car!"

"— or was forced to," Ham pointed out.

Ham found it necessary to detain his partner from sending their car ahead to cut off the sedan. "Wait!" he cautioned. "We'll see what happens. This might prove interesting."

It did.

The trail ended at the tall, narrow, four-story apartment house on East Ninth Street, not far from Fifth Avenue.

The house that Ham had been watching earlier.

MONK and Ham had not driven through the street. They had parked around a corner, hurried ahead on foot when Ham saw where the sedan was going.

The side street was quiet and deserted. They saw three men and Matilda quickly leave the sedan and enter the building. Then the car, with the driver, drove away.

Frowning, Ham said, "Matilda could be going with them willingly — and then again, not."

"Let's barge in and find out," Monk suggested hopefully.

"Don't be a fool! I've got a hunch there's quite a crowd of guys staying in that quiet looking house. I came to that conclusion listening on the tapped wire."

They were standing in a dark doorway, watching the other doorway where the men and Matilda had entered. It was the kind of a door found in many such dwellings in this part of the city — a solid door, white painted, with no inside lobby or vestibule. Residents entered right from the street with their own keys.

There was something about the door that gave one the impression he had reached a solid stone wall, the end of a one-way street — a blockade.

"I know!" Monk said. "Listen in on that tapped wire again. Where is it?"

Ham indicated the basement areaway adjoining the house on Ninth Street. It was right next to the building they were watching, but not part of it. There was no other entrance except the solid-looking door to the building they were covering.

"I gave the janitor in that next building a sort of bonus."

"Bribe?"

Ham shrugged. "There's a way to get at the lead-in telephone wire from the rear of his basement ..." He thought a moment, said, "Wait here." Ham disappeared quickly into the areaway.

Monk watched their house. It was number 21-B.

Several moments later, Ham's dapper figure moved up quietly again beside Monk, in the dark doorway.

“Not a thing stirring,” he said quietly. “Anybody come in or out?”

“No.”

“I wish Doc was here.”

“Say,” Monk remembered, “he won't know where we are!”

“I was thinking of that. Tell you what. You remain here and continue to watch the house. I'm going to check the airport again. And I'll leave word at headquarters in case I miss Doc and he goes directly there.”

“What about Patience?” said Monk hopefully.

“I'll try to find her too.”

“You'd better!”

“Don't leave this doorway,” instructed Ham. “Wait till I get back.”

“All right.”

Ham disappeared in the direction of their parked car.

Only a few moments later the white door opened nearby. A man clad in janitor's clothes came out carrying a trash can. Monk slid up behind a telephone post not ten feet from the man. Monk's move was soundless.

The man paused, lit a cigarette, apparently enjoying the night. The door had been left open.

While the fellow's back was turned, Monk slipped inside the building fast.

There was no light. The door slammed behind him. Immediately explosive kinds of action started to take place.

And Monk was in the middle of it. When two heavy figures, in the utter darkness, took hold of him, Monk let out a bellow of rage and started pumping his massive arms.

His fists cracked against unseen jaws. A man fell, cursing. Monk spun, hit another. He kept moving in a tight, closed circle, swinging, hitting, bellowing.

But the jaws and the figures behind them, still in the intent blackness, kept popping up like clay pipes in a shooting gallery.

After awhile Monk was subdued — at least six men were holding him — and he was being carried. Another door slammed behind him. It sounded as though it were made of heavy steel. They seemed to be moving through a hallway and then up a flight of stairs.

There was a lot of talk and excitement, and some of the words Monk could not understand. With a tremendous heave of his burly shoulders, on the stairway, he broke loose, sent figures tumbling down the steps. Others immediately found him. A light switched on and there was blinding white glare. Monk started to look at his captors.

Then he was slugged.

Chapter XII

DOC SAVAGE'S headquarters were located atop one of New York's tallest skyscrapers. It was reached by private elevator. There was a large reception room, a library lined from floor to ceiling with works of science, medicine and everything pertaining to man and the universe.

There was a laboratory, the most modern of its kind, with windows looking out over the city's skyline.

Outside, it was raining. The sky was gray and dull. Though it was still fairly early in the morning, it was doubtful that the day would clear. The rain caused the day to be more sultry than ever.

Inside the laboratory, however, the air-conditioned atmosphere was pleasant and refreshing.

Doc put down all the handbags he was carrying, indicated a chair, and said, "Now let's start at the beginning."

Patience sat down, her beautiful dark eyes somber, her small slim hands folded in her lap. For a moment she stared at the array of scientific equipment located in the large, glass-enclosed office in which they faced each other. She saw a boxlike affair that Doc Savage had glanced upon entering. It looked like a radio but was not a radio. There were small push levers along its front.

Patience said, "Well, you know that I changed planes in Edmonton?"

Doc nodded. "I picked up your trail after I had stopped off at one of our airline maintenance fields, where your own private plane was taken for overhaul."

"I hired another pilot at Edmonton."

She looked like a pretty little girl who would be almost fearful of traveling from Brooklyn to the Bronx by subway. And she had just completed a mad dash from Alaska to New York by air. Modern women, Doc thought, you never knew what they were going to do next!

"Yes," he was saying, "you paid a woman names Matilda Bridges to trade places with you. Thought it would throw me off the trail. Then you had your new pilot take you to the Newark Airport instead — where I found you just before you slipped away again. Running away all the time, Patience, won't help you."

"I realize that now," she admitted softly.

"You're still terrified about it, you know. Why try to pretend?"

Patience let out her breath in a kind of broken, hesitant way. "I'm sorry now, that I dragged you into it." She glanced at him, looked away.

Doc said, "Your own plane, you know, was not really disabled — not at first. The way you made it appear to be in trouble was really an example of marvelous flying. What did you do, cut the cable control after the plane touched ground at Kluane Lake flats?"

Patience nodded. "Pliers — wire cutters," she said frankly. "I flung the pliers away before you rolled up behind me. I almost ground-looped."

"Yes ..." Doc went on, "Of course you knew I was in the vicinity?"

"One small-town newspaper mentioned your name in connection with your route survey to Alaska. I was frantic. I didn't know what to do. I'd been trying to steer the menace away from me, but it was getting closer all the time. I knew about your reputation. I figured if I could draw you into it, Mr. Savage, I could

escape the other thing.”

“So you sent out the fake call for help when I was nearby, knowing I'd come to your aid — at the same time scaring the other thing away.”

Patience jerked her head. Her brunette hair was curly from the rain.

“I kept trying and trying to run away from it. I was desperate.”

“Tell me,” asked Doc, “are there two different groups involved in the menace?”

“There seems to be. One is led by a short, extremely wide and powerfully build man —”

“Let's call him Mr. Five-By-Five,” interrupted Doc.

“That would fit him exactly. His associate was that very tall man who was murdered on the lawn of the hotel —”

“By a thin, lanky-legged fellow that Yukon tried to capture,” Doc finished. “You saw it happen?”

“I watched from the darkness of my room.” She looked frightened again. “I was—terrified.”

“I don't wonder.” Then Doc said, “This Long Legs, who got away, is apparently one of the opposing faction.”

“Yes.”

“Why did you disappear from Whitehorse?”

“I—I thought your presence would frighten them off. Instead, I had drawn the danger onto you. It—wasn't fair. You had nothing to do with it. So — I ran away again.”

Doc got up, moved around the room, looked at the radio-type box as though he were impatient to handle a certain detail, sat down again.

“And now,” he went on, “what about the cheap, dime-store emerald pin? The one you threw out the window?”

“It contains,” said Patience without hesitation, “instructions, in Spanish, for a man who is apparently from South America—places where he is to go, people to see, things like that. Why, I don't know. The information, in the finest handwriting, in on a piece of onion skin paper hidden behind the imitation emerald.”

“I guess our Long Legs found the pin.”

“I think so.”

“Does the pin have any connection with what's in the metal box you dropped by small parachute from the plane?”

Patience showed some amazement at Doc's knowledge of things — that is, expression in her deep brown eyes showed it. She went on directly, “I don't know—I really don't. I've never been able to open the box. It's heavy iron, locked. My sister gave me both the box and the pin before—before she disappeared.”

It was the first time Patience's voice broke.

“Your sister?”

Patience said, “It is *she* they are really trailing, these terrible men. I found out she was in danger, and tried to draw the menace away from her. Now, I don't know where she is. I haven't heard a word from her.”

Her lovely eyes filmed slightly.

“If,” prompted Doc, “they were after your sister, for something in which she was involved, why would they switch to going after you?”

Ten silent seconds passed. Patience's eyes held the bronze man's. Then she spoke.

“Because,” she cried out, “we're twins! They don't know the difference!”

THE rest of it Patience explained simply. Her twin had been in Europe before the war. Both their parents were dead, but her father had been French. She said:

“Years ago, because my twin was always so restless and seeking thrills, father nicknamed her Impatience, because she was so opposite from me. After the Germans entered Paris, I didn't hear from her for a long time. Then she popped up in Spain. Then —”

She paused.

“Then?” Doc prodded.

“After the war — South America, seeking new thrills. Lord knows what. She was always so mixed up in adventure.”

“And you don't know what's in the iron box?” Doc repeated again.

“No.”

Doc tried to dig out further information that might serve as clues. Patience, however, seemed to know nothing additional that would help him. The discussion went on for some time.

Then she stood up. “Mr. Savage, if you don't mind, I'd like to go to the hotel.” She named a place uptown. “I'll be all right there. No one knows my real identity.”

“I'm trying to help you,” Doc said.

“I know. But —”

“It would be better if you stayed here. No one can get into my headquarters unless they know a certain scientific way of entering doors. I'm going out. I'd prefer if you waited until my return —”

“Please, if you don't mind —”

Strangely, Doc Savage offered no further objection. He carried her bag to the private express elevator, one that led to the lobby entrance of the building. “You'll keep in touch with me, of course, Patience? You'll be all right?”

She nodded. Her eyes were serious. “I just want to rest. I'll be safe here in New York, for awhile anyway. Thank you for leading all those horrible people away from me.”

Doc smiled, watched her get on the elevator, nodded to the special operator employed solely by himself, saw the elevator doors close, then he moved swiftly back to the radio-type cabinet in his lab office.

The machine was an electric wire-recording device on which messages could be placed. Ham's voice spoke clearly when Doc turned on the playback.

The bronze man listening tensely as he heard information about the house on Ninth Street, about Ham's worry that Monk had disappeared from in front of the place. Ham's report said that he had gone back to try to locate Monk.

Next, Doc put through a long distance, person-to-person call to Washington. He mentioned a name that, in wartime, had been known to only a handful of people in the nation.

He talked for quite some time.

Then he called his private garage, located right in the basement of the skyscraper.

"You followed her?" Doc asked.

"Yes, sir."

"She didn't see you?"

"Positive she didn't, Doc. She hailed a cab as soon as she left the building. I used one of our old inconspicuous coupes."

"And?"

"She went directly to an address on East Ninth Street. A four-story apartment-like building, but it looks like the kind taken up entirely by one family. She rang the bell and went inside." He gave the address. "Anything else, Doc?"

"Have you seen Monk or Ham?"

"Not for hours and hours, sir."

"Bring one of the cars out front for me," asked Doc. "I'm coming right down." Then he hung up.

A MOMENT later he emerged from the skyscraper building, moving toward a dark, big sedan parked a little distance away.

Next he drew up short and watched a little, wiry-looking man who was just climbing out of the taxicab at the skyscraper entrance.

"Why, blast my onery hide," the passenger was yelling at the driver, "in Whitehorse we only soak 'em two-bits for a ride like that. A dollar! I got half a notion to wrap this iron box around your head —"

Doc stepped quickly to Yukon's side, dropped a bill onto the seat beside the driver, led the little hard-bitten man toward his own machine. "You just got in?" he asked.

"Yep! Flew. Spent your money, by gad!"

Little Yukon was grinning with pleasure at meeting his friend again. He shoved the heavy black iron box at Doc Savage. "An' here she be! Told you I could find it!"

Doc put the heavy box — it was about ten inches square all around — on the front seat between them. “Opened it?” he wanted to know.

“Hell!” snorted Yukon. “You’ll have to blast the danged thing open. I couldn’t even pry it one little mite!”

“I’m afraid,” Doc said, “we’ll have to leave it till later. Right now, there’s a job to do.”

Something in the urgency of the bronze man’s voice transmitted itself to Yukon. He looked hopeful.

“Trouble?”

“Two of my aids are missing. I think they are captives in a house not far from here.”

“How about Patience?”

“She has gone to the same house?”

“Captive, too?”

Doc did not reply for a moment. He was busy handling the big machine in traffic.

Then his answer was, “I hope we’re not too late.”

Chapter XIII

MONK grumbled: “I haven’t eaten for hours!”

“That’s wonderful,” remarked Ham. “You need to lose some weight.”

“Shuddup!” snapped the man with the gun.

He was in his twenties, thin, with long ears and sandy hair. He sat in an arm chair in the huge office-like room. In the ceiling there was a large square skylight. Oddly, walls of the room were solid. There were no windows — or, at least, no windows were visible.

Across the room sat another individual with a gun. He was thin also, and needed a shave, and his skin looked as though it had been rubbed with oil.

“You tell ‘em, Alfred,” he said.

Monk and Ham, the captives, sat on the floor against the wall, in between their guards.

Alfred, the sandy haired one with ears, lit a cigarette deftly with one hand and continued to stare fishily at the two Doc Savage men.

A door was open across the room. Ham knew it led out on the stairway to the floors below. This was the topmost, fourth floor of the structure on Ninth Street. Every once in a while he could hear the murmur of voices from somewhere downstairs.

Monk said, “You fell for that janitor gag just like I did, and you’re supposed to be so blasted smart. Hah!”

Ham looked at him coolly. “I was merely trying to get in here to save your life.”

“Or maybe find that pretty they call Patience!”

Alfred snapped, "Shuddup, I said."

Monk glared at the sandy haired fellow. "For half a cent I'd take a chance on getting a slug and come there to know down your ears."

Ham warned, "Monk —"

Suddenly there was a cry from somewhere downstairs in the high, narrow house, followed by a yell, then different kinds of commotion going on.

Alfred leaped across the room, firing an order at the greasy-looking man. "Keep your eye on them, Carlos!"

He went out into the hallway and yelled down the stairs.

"What goes on down there?"

No answer.

Alfred went clattering down the stairs. The commotion was still taking place.

Monk looked as though he were ready to jump up and go into action. Ham gave him a warning glance, indicating the dark-skinned thin man with the gun, across the room. The fellow watched them steadily.

"You already look as though you've been put through a wringer," Ham said to his burly partner. "You wouldn't gave a chance against trigger-finger over there."

The greasy man gave a sly grin.

Monk said, "You don't look so good yourself."

Ham's usually smart-looking clothes were wrinkled. There was a cut on him face and a bruise below his right eye. Nevertheless, he still managed to maintain a certain air of dignity.

Men came up the stairs and boiled into the room. They were excited about something, peering into the corners as though they expected to find wildcats.

A man elbowed his way through them. He was unusually short for his tremendous size, as broad as he was tall. His face was built the same way, and hard. Every part of him looked solid and hard for all his size.

He cuffed three men aside at a sweep of his arm and growled, "You fools! Joe, the guard's, lying down there on the lower floor, unconscious. He didn't knock himself out. Someone's in this building!"

And then, screaming, "Find him!"

Everyone went clattering out again, down the stairs and through various parts of the house. Doors opened and closed and made banging sounds. Men yelled to one another.

Monk glanced at Ham and remarked, "Quiet dump!"

"Spanish, some of them," Ham explained. "They get excited easily. I have an idea they're Argentines."

The oily looking fellow came over and faced them, his back to the hall door. "Stand up!" He glared at Monk.

Ham knew, from the manner in which the man held the gun, that he was going to rake the heavy barrel down across his partner's face. Monk's continual talking irritated the fellow.

Ham started to get up.

“Sit down!” the gunman snarled.

Only Monk got up.

But he, like Ham, saw the small, trim brunette girl with the big round eyes come quietly into the room behind their guard. Her approach was soundless. She held a .38 in her hand.

Neither Ham nor Monk gave the slightest indication that she was there. The thing happened in a split second.

Instead of Monk being struck by the guard, the girl brought her own gun barrel down hard on the dark-skinned man's head.

He collapsed in a heap.

Monk beamed.

“You,” he said happily, “are Patience! Aren't you?”

The small, nicely built girl looked at him out of large eyes. “The name,” she said, “is Impatience!” The .38 had leveled in her hand. “And,” she added coolly, “very impatient! Please turn around and face the wall, putting up your hands.”

MONK stared.

“I think,” said Ham, “the young lady means business.”

They turned around.

The slim, trimly built brunette girl quickly picked up the gun which the dark-skinned man had dropped when he fell unconscious. She was backing across the room toward the open doorway. She spoke quickly, quietly, but in a sharp manner that meant business.

“One word, or sound out of either of you — and I'll shoot you through the backs!” she said.

She took up a position on one side of the door.

A man came running up the stairs, heading into the room, calling out, “I can't understand how anyone —”

“Drop your gun,” said the girl.

The fellow whirled — he was Alfred, the pilot — and gawked when he saw the .38 pointing into his face, and then he proceeded to quickly get rid of the weapon which had been dangling in his fist. There would have been no chance in the world to raise it in time to checkmate the girl.

Three more men came up at intervals. Each had the drop put on him in similar manner. The girl was accumulating a small arsenal.

The fat man came up and walked into the same trap — he saw the men, including Monk and Ham, lined up against the far wall — but he was too slow to figure the trick until the girl have him neatly covered.

She swung behind him, placing the gun against his massive broad back, said, "Over there with the others, Mr. Five-By-Five!" She backed up, watching him, reaching out with her free hand to lock the door. She had already noticed that it was steel and probably impassable, once locked.

"We," she was saying, "are going to discuss a few matters."

It was too bad the other thing happened so quickly. Monk was brimming over with curiosity as to just what was going to be discussed. Ham, too.

But three men all reached the top of the stairway at the same instant and plunged into the room, just before the steel door closed.

It was impossible for the girl to cover all of them.

They got her gun. She cried out. Ham and Monk, a quick glance passing between them, leaped to the small arsenal of weapons on the floor and each got hold of weapons.

They started shooting at legs.

Two men fell down. Some were trying to fight their way out through the doorway. The shambles was really quite terrific when the big skylight crashed and Doc Savage came down into the room.

DOC landed on his feet. But even as he was dropping into the room amidst the shattering of glass, he called out, "Monk! Ham! Gas!"

His aides instantly knew what to do.

They held their breaths.

Great clouds of black smoke came from the glass vials that Doc broke on the floor as he landed. But the black smoke was harmless. It merely made the room a black well of a place in which he could move fast and unseen.

It was the small, tiny, liquid-filled glass balls that he had been referring to, and which Monk and Ham knew all about. Crushing these also, a colorless, tasteless gas swiftly filled the room.

The invisible gas contained knockout properties that took immediate effect. Men started falling down, clawing at the floor a moment, and then lying still. Monk had clamped a hand over the girl's nose and mouth and was holding her tightly. He had wrested the gun away from her.

She fought him madly in the black smoke that enveloped them. Monk kept holding on for a full moment. Her fighting subsided as she fought to get a lungful of air.

After a bit, in the blackness, Ham said, "I guess it's all right now, Monk."

Monk let out his breath with an explosive sound. He released the girl's nose and mouth. She sucked in air.

Then she started to cry, "Why, you —"

Monk said calmly, "You couldn't smell or taste the gas, but it would have knocked you cold for an hour. That's that length of its potency, though otherwise it's harmless. You notice there isn't any commotion going on here anymore."

It seemed quiet and weird, for they were still in utter blackness.

Then Ham's voice said, "Over here's the door. Doc, I think, has gone downstairs. Maybe he needs help."

"Doc Savage!" said the girl.

"Look," asked Monk in the blackness, "are you Patience?" He thought it was kind of nice holding her the way he was.

She shoved him away.

They found the door. There was the sound of a shot downstairs. Then Doc's voice, calling up to them.

"Stay where you are, Monk—Ham. Take care of the girl. Wait a few moments."

"You need help?" Monk bellowed.

"The F.B.I. outside will handle the rest of it. They are out there waiting. I'm merely chasing these others out to them."

After awhile everyone was captured.

Chapter XIV

LATER, in the bronze man's library, they were grouped around a huge table on which rested the iron box.

The box was open. Monk had made short work of the job of prying up the lid, using instruments from the laboratory.

Ham was there, and Yukon, his little button eyes popping as he watched Doc look into the box.

Patience watched also, her big eyes thoughtful.

Doc was saying, "Well, I got most of it calling Washington. Some of the war crime criminals are still at large, as you know. A few of them got to South America, mainly Argentina. The house on Ninth Street was a clearing house for getting them into this country. Those criminals made off with fabulous amounts of money. They were each ready to pay a nice lump of it for safety."

"A rather profitable business for crooks," Ham said.

Doc nodded. "Some smart operators from Argentina were in on it. And we have a few unscrupulous characters in this country who will do anything for a high enough fee. They were all working together."

"Sneaking these war criminals in one at a time?" asked Monk.

"That's right."

Doc told the complete story of Patience, what had taken place at Whitehorse and the rest of it. "A long-legged fellow" — he looked at little Yukon — "escaped us up there. He was one of a crown trying to chisel in on the whole setup. Mr. Five-By-Five was head of the Argentine crown."

Yukon put in, "We found Long-Legs hangin' around outside the Ninth Street place—the F.B.I. fellows and me, while Doc was going up over the roof to make that surprise entrance. He's in jail too."

Doc nodded again. "We found a fake emerald brooch on him that he found in Whitehorse. Behind the stone was hidden information for a war criminal that was to be smuggled into this country—just as I

imagine we'll find similar instructions in these doodads." He added: "Matilda was a captive in the house. The F.B.I. men released her."

Then Doc picked an item out of the box.

Everyone observed him.

It was a watch, a cheap one, old fashioned and with a heavy metal case. Doc pried open the back cover, then the second cover inside.

A thin piece of onion skin paper fell out. Spreading it open, Doc started translating words from Spanish to English.

Then he quickly nodded. "More instructions for a different would-be arrival from Europe," he said. "All this stuff contains such instructions, I imagine. Each item would be given to a war criminal to carry with him."

There were rings, watches, and the imitation, large jewelry pins and such. "A few women are mighty anxious to escape the war trials, too," he pointed out.

He turned to the girl. "How did you know the Ninth Street address?"

"It was written on the paper behind that emerald I threw away."

"That's right," Doc remembered. "The F.B.I. men took the brooch away from the long-legged man."

"I found the brooch in my twin's room the last time I saw her."

Monk, Ham and Yukon had been told about the twins. Now Monk asked, puzzled, "Say, which one are you—Patience or the other one? I'm confused!"

"I'm Patience," smiled the girl.

Monk let out his breath.

"Whew," he said with relief. "I'm glad of that. Up there on Ninth Street I grabbed on to your twin and she was ready to slug me. Good thing the F.B.I. fellows took her along."

Patience said, "You were holding me, Monk."

MONK looked amazed. Ham grinned.

Doc told them, "Patience's twin sister hasn't been involved in this thing since I myself became involved. It was her sister — Impatience — however, who stumbled onto this war criminals smuggling racket while she was in South America. Back here in the States, Impatience reported it to Washington. Then she was immediately a target for death, when the boys behind the racket found out." He glanced at Patience. "Tell them the rest. It was a wonderful thing you did, a brave thing."

The girl's lovely face colored slightly.

"I merely," she murmured, "tried to lead the menace away from my sister. Then I needed help. I thought Doc Savage's presence would scare them off. But there was too much money involved for those crooks to scare. I'm sorry—I caused all the trouble."

Doc said pleasantly, "Trouble is our business, Patience."

Monk scratched his head. “But, look! If your sister was dragged off by the F.B.I., how could you be the one I squeezed —”

It was Doc who explained, “Patience, here, was the girl in the house on Ninth Street. Her sister was found a week ago by the F.B.I. She was hurt, but not seriously, and now she's recuperating in Miami. She'll be all right.”

“But —” Monk started again.

“So,” Doc finished, “Patience took it into her head to clean things up herself. She was still upset about drawing me into it. She went up there to find out about her sister, but in the meantime I had learned about Impatience from the F.B.I.”

Monk kept looking at the girl. A slow flush crept up into his face, something very unusual with the burly chemist.

“You say,” he started, “you're not mad because I squeezed—I mean, grabbed you in the dark up there or —”

Patience said quietly, “Well, Monk —”

Ham snorted, “Monk, for heaven's sake why don't you get smart?”

That started an argument.

Meanwhile, little Yukon moved up beside the girl. He said brightly, “You know, ma'am, I've wanted for nigh on to thirty years to take a gal like you to dinner in Noo York. I was wondering if maybe tonight —”

Patience said, “I think it would be wonderful, Yukon.” She squeezed his arm fondly.

“No subways, though!” said Yukon worriedly.

“No subways,” agreed the girl.

Monk suddenly acted as though someone had removed his tongue. He was speechless.

THE END