THE DEVIL IS JONES

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I

HE had been told by the manager of the hotel, a Mr. Thomas, that:

“Absurd, implausible, improbable are any chances that Paul Ben Hazard would be able to do a normal thing such as establishing an office without, somewhere, some way, manifesting a trait.” The hotel manager, Mr. Thomas, had the gift—which bordered on an affliction in this case—of words. “I once heard one of Hazard's friends, referring to the office, say that for once the master had almost defeated his narcissistic impulse, and when I asked what kind of an impulse that was, the friend, who spoke the same language that Hazard speaks, said the narcissistic impulse is one toward self-advancement and self-aggrandizement, but then he said the narcissistic impulse is toward the development of a phony self, so when he said not to believe a word of it, I didn't. I didn't believe him. Not quite. Say about one day a year, on St. Swithin's day, I didn't believe it.”

He had decided the manager was confusing, if not a bit of a goof, but he was beginning to see otherwise.

He said, “I wish to see Mr. Hazard.”

“You have an appointment?” asked the office girl.

“Yes.”

“What name?”

“Mr. Savage.”

“Oh, yes. Will you step this way.” The office girl, who was about sixty-five and as ugly as an alligator's grandmother, arose and led the way to the door, at which she paused. She turned, said, “You will not touch anything in Mr. Hazard's presence.”

He was mildly surprised.

“Unless, of course, he hands something to you first,” the office girl continued. “Mr. Hazard has quite a few dislikes, and one of them is having to watch people, and strangers particularly, fondle Mr. Hazard's possessions in Mr. Hazard's presence.”

“I see,” he said.

“Above all,” she said, “do not disturb the window drapes. Even though they are closed and it is rather gloomy in the office, do not disturb them.”

“I see,” he said again.

“And make no mention of wagering in Mr. Hazard's presence, not even as a figure of speech. Don't say,

for instance, 'I'll bet you that this is the way it is.' Mr. Hazard would detest that."

"What *does* he like?"

"Everyone," she said. "Mr. Hazard has a very big heart."

HE decided to leave his raincoat in the outer office, and he went back and dropped it across a chair. He asked, "Is that all right? Is there something he wouldn't like about that?"

She took it seriously, although he had meant it a bit sharply. "Yes there is," she said. She returned and placed the raincoat neatly on a hanger and opened a locker and hung it inside. Turning, she saw that he was amused and skeptical, and halfway suspicious, as if he thought some kind of an act might be being put on for his benefit. She was not offended, but shook her head patiently and said, "I'm sure you will understand after you meet him."

"I hope so."

"Do not," she said, "allow his eccentricities to mislead you."

"Mislead me in what way?"

"As to his capability."

"Oh."

"Or his importance in this State."

"Oh."

"If you feel like clowning around about it," she said, "it might be advisable if you got it out of your system before you went in. He doesn't like clowning, either."

He thought of several things and was tempted to say them and didn't.

He thought about Paul Ben Hazard, whom he did not know personally, whom he had never met, but about whom he had taken the precaution of learning quite a lot. A State Senate committee, quite a few years ago, more than twenty years ago, in fact, had brought Hazard in from the East, from New York, one rumor had it—another rumor, probably untrue, had it from London—to conduct a special and touchy investigation of a state insurance scandal. The result, he understood, was that Hazard had scared the daylights out of quite a few—this was back in the days when the state was dominated by the Kansas City and St. Louis machines, and state politics was no place for amateurs or babies. Paul Ben Hazard has remained. He had liked the state. Hazard, as temperamental as an opera star, as neurotic as they come, had proved to be a confusing quantity to the hardfisted state bosses, and he had survived and they hadn't.

Rumor had it that, by now, Paul Ben Hazard had managed to do something to, or something for, almost everyone of importance in the state, and so he wielded a shocking amount of influence, some of it in quarters where one wouldn't have expected it. He was a man, who, when he wanted something for the state, used methods as direct as those of Jesse James, and on the other hand could be so benevolent it seemed crazy. Calloway College, here in the capital, for instance, was said to be supported entirely out of Hazard's pocket. The man was a remarkable combination of different qualities, some pixilated and some of god-like benevolence, the reports had it, and he was unquestionably the strongest political boss

in the nation. It was said that nobody in the state, from governor to justice of the peace, took a deep breath except by arrangement with Paul Ben Hazard.

He said, “How long does this lecture tour and preview continue?”

The office girl frowned and said, “It need go no further, because I do not think it is doing you any good.”

She went to the door, rapped on it precisely and lightly, then opened the door and went in, closing the door behind her. She was out again presently, though.

“You may go in,” she said. “But don't shake hands unless he makes the offer first.”

“Good afternoon, Mr. Savage,” Paul Ben Hazard said loudly.

The man looked to be nine feet tall, although he was probably well under seven, and as skinny as a well-ridden witch's broomstick.

“Good afternoon.”

“Sit down.”

“Thank you.”

Except for being very tall, he decided that Paul Ben Hazard looked—the monochromatism of personality was somehow a shocking surprise—about the way any other normal tall man would look. Hazard was homely, but not spectacularly so, nor historically, for he did not, as someone had said, greatly resemble Abraham Lincoln.

Hazard did not offer to shake hands. The window drapes were thrown back, letting the southern sunlight flood the office, and he was a little surprised when Hazard said suddenly, “I detest shadows, and have a perverse inclination to see them when in evil fettle. I defy that. I make a practice, once each hour, of doing something that it is difficult for me to do. I feel much benefit can accrue from such a practice.”

“Maybe.”

“What do you mean—maybe? You don't doubt it, do you?”

“Too much inwardness can be bad for a personality, particularly for one that is already touched with inwardness.”

Hazard scowled. “You disagree with me?”

“Isn't that permissible?”

“Humph!”

“If it isn't permissible, say no. We might as well get that straightened out now, and I can catch the five o'clock plane back home, back to New York.”

“You'd walk out on me?”

“Why not?”

Hazard threw himself back in his chair. “Christ, so you're a primadonna? I didn't expect that. I had heard you were a remarkable man of the strong silent type, a combination of physical giant, mental genius and

scientific wizard. But as modest as they come—except that you do have a world-wide reputation for solving criminal matters that are outside, for one reason or another, the normal abilities of law enforcement agencies."

"The question was—is it against the rules around here to disagree with you?"

"It sure is—but you don't need to catch that plane."

"Why not?"

"I already suspended the rules in calling for your help," Hazard said. "That's one reason."

HE decided that Paul Ben Hazard was expecting trouble. The reasons for his deciding that were a little indefinite, because—he had already concluded Hazard was a profound neurotic—the man was hard to read, for his ability to have normal emotions was all beaten out of shape by the pummeling of his neurosis, or his giving in to the neurosis, and, probably, even cultivating it and giving it play. The man was, undoubtedly, peculiar. But he believed the man was also frightened.

"Do the rules include one against getting down to business, down to brass tacks?"

"They're suspended."

"All right. What are you afraid of?"

"Jones."

"Who is Jones?"

"A figure of speech. A term describing the nebulous, the uncertain, the unknown—that is, tangible while still being intangible."

"As definite as that, eh?"

"I'm not kidding you. I'm not being a personality. Why do we call the Devil the Devil? Nobody knows what the Devil looks like, and nobody has seen the Devil as far as I know, and there is even some doubt that there is such a person—as a person. The popular picturization of the Devil as a semi-human individual with pointed ears and a spiked tail is, of course, a symbolic interpretation of fear, the perfectly normal fear inherent in every individual who has occasion to contemplate the hereafter."

"The name Devil is the name of a possible evil, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh. That's Jones, too."

"Oh."

"Leave out the possible, though. Jones isn't just possible. Jones is genuine."

"Are you making the point that Jones is intangible?"

"So far."

"Let's get it on a more sensible basis than that."

Hazard nodded. "Have you talked to the governor of the state?"

“No.”

“You can, if you wish. It might be a good idea. He will more or less corroborate what I have told you, making it sound slightly different with different words, but telling essentially the same thing.”

“Which is?”

“Oh, you want the story?”

“Yes.”

Hazard sighed. “I've avoided that. I have an intense dislike of feeling foolish when I know in advance that I am going to feel foolish.” He batted his eyes twice, then closed them. “You think I am frightened?”

“Yes.”

“Listen.” Hazard leaned forward, and his eyes blazed. “Listen, and I'll tell you why.”

Chapter II

DOC SAVAGE sat back and listened to Paul Ben Hazard talk, and he found, from watching and listening, an understanding of the man somewhat beyond what he had expected. Hazard was, as they said, neurotic, and probably recognized that he was. He took a certain violent satisfaction out of catering to the calls of his neurotic impulses, whereas another might have been embarrassed by the signs of goofiness.

The story was interesting. Jones, it seemed, was a name. No more—a name. “There are even theories here and there,” said Hazard, “that it might be a woman. I doubt that myself, but it is something to keep in mind.” A name of terror, Jones, and particularly was it sinister because it was attached, not to any particular person, but to a series of events that happened and had only one thing in common, that being plain nasty terror. Hazard gave a short dissertation on that. He said, “To attach a name, and a human name at that, to events rather than to an individual, lends a character of horror to it that you would not imagine possible until you have experienced it. Mr. Savage, you will have to use your imagination there; I wish you would.”

“I will—or it seems I had better, in view of how little you're actually saying. Specifically, what has Jones done?”

“You know what extortion is?”

“Yes.”

“You know what blackmail is?”

“Yes.”

“Jones has done those things—probably. And to it, I imagine you can add murder and all the other crimes in the book. I know you can add murder.”

“Specifically, what—”

“Specific, you want me to be! All right, do you know a man named Walton Ellis?”

"No."

"Being specific isn't going to be so effective if you don't know what I am talking about. Anyway, Ellis—Walton Ellis—is, or was, a local insurance man who had managed to clean up quite a large sum during the not-so-long-ago war. I must say Mr. Ellis was not a black market operator, but I say so only because it wasn't proved and he has a widow who would sue the pants off anybody for saying her late husband was a black marketeer. Anyway, Mr. Ellis lately died. In an automobile accident, the police said. In a murder, I think, but cannot prove. And when Mr. Ellis' safe deposit boxes were opened, all six of them, here and in Kansas City and in St. Louis, and one in Chicago, what do you think came to light? Nothing. Empty boxes. Yet I had reason, and others had reason, to know that Mr. Ellis had not less than two months previously had a matter of two hundred thousand dollars distributed among those boxes. Gone. Where did it go? . . . I'll say Jones."

"Two hundred thousand are a lot of dollars."

"You're damned right it is."

HE decided that Paul Ben Hazard was long-winded, and liked words; the man took flowery, devious paths when he started out to make a point, and always managed to achieve a certain effect that was perhaps as strong in some cases as fewer words would have achieved, but usually not. The words showed one thing, though—Hazard was a dabbler, or at least a reader, in psychology, because he knew the nomenclature of the science; and this was probably an indication that he had studied himself—probably gone in for self-analysis, which was sometimes the equivalent of taking mental poison, since the impulse was usually to stop somewhere down the line and do a self-selling job of a bill of goods: the result being much harm.

Rumors, Paul Ben Hazard brought out, accounted for most of what he knew of Jones. Not always rumors. A man in Hazard's position—he admitted quite frankly to being the state boss—heard many things, and usually it was reliable. "You'd be surprised how reluctant people are to tell me a lie," Hazard said. He smacked his lips and grinned at that, giving the impression, possibly true that he was figuratively a big, bad animal who gobbled up liars. "Rumors and truth, I have heard, and none of it sets well with my peace of mind."

He had other specific examples. A woman named Mrs. Lowell, owner of zinc and lead mines, coal mines, a few oil wells over the state line in Oklahoma, and also of a weakling son named Gilbey. Gilbey had been the aggressor in a hit-and-run accident that resulted in a death; Mrs. Lowell had paid plenty to shut it up, and Gilbey had been the victim of a frame-up—probably. No one could prove it.

There was a man named Corkle, who had an airline, sold out for a song to an outfit called ORIO Airways, which in turn disposed of the planes and faded into thin air. Who was ORIO? Jones, probably. Why had Corkle sold out for a thin tune? That was a question, because Corkle had turned on the gas in a tourist cabin a few days later.

Hazard had a rounded bombastic voice which was quite effective when he was not trying to arrange too many big words.

He said, "This sounds general, and general things never hit close to a man. They're never convincing. You know the old newspaper axiom—one local story about a wife batting her husband over the head is worth more than a story from Tokyo about a thousand Japs getting killed? Well, let me bring it closer to home. . . . Sam Karen—do you know a man by that name? Sam Karen?"

“No.”

“Mr. Savage, let me tell you about Sam Karen.”

SAM KAREN, said Paul Ben Hazard, had at the age of thirty-eight years established himself in an eminent position in his profession. At the age of twenty-two, Karen had graduated from the Police Academy in New York City, and some three years later had come to St. Louis on a borrowing arrangement whereby bright young scientific cops were being brought out to teach the St. Louis coppers to be bright young scientific cops.

“A few years later, Sam Karen helped set up the state system of criminal investigation,” Hazard explained. “He went with the FBI on a specialist job when it was getting its big push under J. Edgar Hoover, and later he set up private practice in New York. During the war, he was with the OSS and did another specialist job, and then he went back to private practice. He was not a man who sought fame, particularly, which probably accounts for your not having heard of him. . . . He had heard of you.”

“Of me?”

“That's right. He mentioned you. In fact, I think it was on the strength of his telling the governor to call you in, if he failed, that you were called.”

“Sam Karen was on this case?”

“That's right.”

“And he didn't do any good?”

“He did too much good.”

“What do you mean?”

“I'm saving that for a snapper. The point is, Sam Karen was called in—by the governor—and he did what he could, which in one way was not enough, but in another way, it was too much. So you were called—by the governor.”

“I thought—”

“That I asked you in?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, no. I'm the figurehead.” Hazard seemed to think that was amusing, for he sat for a moment with a pensive expression, then explained, “In a political sense, the governor is my figurehead, but in this case, I am his. Yes, he was going to call you, and I suggested that it be done through me this time.”

“Why through you?”

“Judging from what happened to Sam Karen, there might have been a leak in the governor's office.”

“An information leak?”

“Uh-huh.”

"Of what sort?"

"Any sort would be the worst in this case. You see, Sam Karen was supposed to function secretly, without anyone knowing he was in the state or why."

"Anyone? You do not mean that specifically, do you?"

"Well . . . no, not that exact."

"Who did know?"

"God knows how many know now."

"But how many were supposed to know?"

"Two."

"They were?"

"The governor and I."

DOC SAVAGE leaned back. He was a little perplexed by the discussion, for he had been given to understand in every quarter that Paul Ben Hazard was a very odd character indeed—which in the light of this conversation was rather strange, because there was not much, not too much, freakish about it. But he had heard in too many places that Hazard was odd, to believe that he was not odd; and this presented the interesting possibility that the man was so damned badly scared that the oddness was frightened out of him—or he was acting. If he was acting, concentrating on delivering one specific impression of himself to the visitor, Hazard's other oddities might be submerged in the effort.

There was something wrong with the conversation, that was sure. There was something behind it—it had the general air that would surround a baseball game, if they were using a hand grenade for a baseball. A feeling that much was sure to happen—or might not happen—depending on whether a blow happened to be struck with just the right jarring force.

Too many questions, Doc thought; I have been asking too many questions. There was nothing, he felt, more reassuring to an uneasy and lying man than having questions to answer rather than having to tell a voluntary and unprompted story. There was something reassuring about hearing questions; they gave an indication of how the other man's mind was moving and showed its degree of entrapment by the lying.

Doc was silent. Let Hazard tell it. Let him strike out and lead. Doc let his attention move over the office—it was an enormous office, and there were wide spaces everywhere, between all the pieces of furniture, between the windows, between ceiling and floor; distances everywhere, and that might indicate some peculiarity of the personality, even something as obvious as claustrophobia, a resentment of close places, or it might simply be an attempt to achieve an effect. But in the reaching for an effect, the man's personality would have been likely to manifest itself, and so the wide spaces between everything, the filing cabinet that for instance did not stand against the wall in the usual way, but well out from it, might well be significant. There were other things, too. The man seemed conscious of the window drapes. What was that he had said? He made a practice once each hour of doing one thing that was difficult for him? That was cockeyed.

Hazard was not saying anything. If he had sensed there was now a small trap before him, that he was being invited to go on talking and entangle himself, if he had anything to be entangled with, he gave no

sign. He was contemplating his folded hands. His face was expressionless—not placid, but expressionless in a fixed muscular way.

Doc said, finally, “Go ahead.”

Hazard unfolded his hands. He licked his lips. He said, “Okay. . . . That's the story. That's all I know about it. There is a sinister force named Jones at work and I want you to stop it—bearing in mind that Jones may be he or she. The governor wants you to do it, and I want you to do it, so I summoned you.”

Doc said, “What else about Sam Karen?”

“You remember that snapper?”

“Snapper?”

“The one I said would come on the end of this.”

“Yes.”

Hazard arose—the effect was of unfolding himself and becoming of gigantic height—and went across the floor, his objective being a tall door of stained walnut like the rest of the woodwork. The door, Doc noticed, was larger than a normal door although its proportions were natural ones; and the same thing applied to the other doors in the place; everything, he suddenly realized, was a little outsize, a little odd.

“How is this?” Hazard said, and opened the door. His face had a grey parchment cast.

“This is Sam Karen,” he added.

THE man looked more than his age—he should have been under forty, from what Hazard had said about his life—and particularly in his face were the years evident, in the thin cheeks, the eagle-claw grooves at the mouth corners, the sunken eyes, the stringy and rather colorless condition of the hair.

Paul Ben Hazard was staring at Doc Savage, and his mouth was taking more and more of a twist, his eyes gathering a glassy shocked look. Suddenly, hoarsely, he blurted, “My God, aren't you surprised?” Then he moved back from the door, leaving the door open, walking backward until his thigh encountered a chair and he almost fell, but caught himself before he did fall, and poised there half-leaning backward, one hand fastened to the chair. “Don't you—aren't you shocked at all?” he croaked.

Doc Savage went to the body and made some practiced tests—he had been trained principally as a doctor and a surgeon, so he knew what to do to know—on the body.

He said, “Dead four or five hours.”

Hazard was holding his lips off his teeth in a wild crazy way.

Doc asked, “This is Sam Karen, the detective who was investigating Jones?”

Hazard indicated it was, without in any way seeming to indicate it.

“Who found him?” Doc asked.

Hazard's expression indicated, or the same lack of expression indicated, that he had found the body.

“Anyone else know he is here?”

No one did.

“Any idea who killed him?”

Jones.

“Who? Specifically who?”

Hazard did not know.

“Have you called the police?”

No.

Doc Savage said, “You had better call the police, Mr. Hazard.” He turned and walked to the door, opened it, walked past the elderly office girl, picked up his raincoat from the place where she had hung it. He looked at the office girl soberly, said, “While you were telling me about Mr. Hazard, you neglected to mention that he keeps bodies in his office closet.” He walked out of the office, away from her shocked look.

Chapter III

HE went to the Capitol Used Car Lot on Capitol Boulevard and Gentry Street, and asked a sloppy looking young man in coveralls, “Who do you see to rent a car?” There were half a dozen rattletraps priced too high, a couple of better looking cars also overpriced, an office that had been, obviously, made over from a defunct filling station. “Guy in there,” said the attendant, pointing at the office. “Guy name of Wallet.”

He entered the office and got no attention from two men, one of them stocky and wide and homely, the other tall and prosperous looking, who were arguing over the price of a car. Presently the tall man called the wide, ugly man a damned thief, using those words, and stalked out.

“Mr. Wallet?”

The man grinned. “That's me.”

“You rent cars?”

“Uh-huh.”

“I'd like to rent one.”

They went out, looked at the cars, and Doc Savage selected the best one, asked the rental price, and professed astonishment at such robbery. They retired to the office, the attendant grinning after them, to

argue about it.

“Monk,” Doc Savage said to “Mr. Wallet,” “you're running a clip joint here. Is that necessary?”

“We're supposed to be fly-by-nights. Why not?”

“You're overdoing it.”

“We're making a profit, too.”

“Where is Ham?”

“Out demonstrating one of our cars to a sucker.”

“Actually.”

Monk went over and kicked the door shut. He came back and said, “Actually, he's watching Paul Ben Hazard's office, or Hazard, anyway, wherever he is.”

“I was just up there.”

“So Ham said. He reported in a few minutes ago.”

Doc Savage frowned. “Over the telephone?”

Monk opened a desk drawer. It contained a small radio receiver which appeared to be an ordinary broadcast receiver, but which apparently wasn't. Monk grinned, closed the desk drawer.

Doc nodded. “Who is that fellow you have for an attendant?”

“A local.”

“Does he suspect anything?”

“He's as dumb as they come.”

“All right. What did Ham report?”

“He said Hazard's office, all of a sudden a few minutes ago, filled up with cops.”

Doc nodded again. “I guess he took my suggestion and called the police.”

“Why?”

“He had Sam Karen's body in his office closet,” Doc explained. “Apparently he was saving it there to show me.”

MONK made a round soundless shape with his lips, and presently got out a handkerchief and mopped his startled face. He did not look, and never looked for that matter, like Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, an industrial chemist of extraordinary ability, and one of the unusual group of five men who had long ago associated themselves—apparently motivated by nothing but a love of excitement and adventure—with Doc Savage. He was stocky, hairy, startlingly homely, and always looked as if he had gotten his wardrobe from a second-hand store, presumably one that sold no item over a dollar. Actually, he was clever, scared of nothing, rather quarrelsome, and an incurable chaser of women.

He started to say different things two or three times, finally said, “Ham didn't know about that,” and fell to mopping his astonished face again.

Ham was Ham Brooks—Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, attorney, fancy dresser, another member of the five-group, and the object of Monk's professed scorn and all of the practical jokes he could think up. They had not, to anyone's recollection, exchanged a civil speech other than by accident; they enjoyed ribbing each other thoroughly, and made an excellent working team.

Doc said, “Monk, let's have what you have found out.”

“You're going to be ashamed of us,” Monk said.

“You've been here a week. Haven't you dug up anything at all?”

“Just barely enough to make us feel foolish.”

“Eh?”

“Well, there is a super-duper crook around here—we finally decided that wasn't an exaggeration. Although you'd be surprised to know how difficult it is to even find out the guy exists.”

“Guy?”

“Guy. Dame. Syndicate, or wild Indian on a bicycle, take your choice. I'm telling you—we're embarrassed at what little we've found out.”

“You sound as intangible as Hazard sounded,” Doc said.

Monk put the handkerchief away. “I hope I don't sound as pixilated as Hazard may have sounded. From what we've dug up, that guy is a character. Controls the whole state, I understand, and is as queer as they come. They say he won't ride in a taxi because looking at the meter go makes him sick. On the other hand, he supports a college here—to the tune, somebody estimated, of about three million dollars over a period of years. But fifty cents on a taxi meter makes him sick. . . . What did you think of him?”

“Unusual all right. As I said, he had a body in his office closet to show me.”

“Why the hell do you suppose he did such a thing?”

“Perhaps he wanted to impress me.”

“Did he get it done?”

“He did.”

MONK shook his head slowly, then twice started to say something or other that he decided not to say, and drew a notebook out of his pocket. He leafed through the pages, which contained, in addition to girls' names and telephone numbers, quite a quantity of notes in the peculiar hen-scratching that he called his shorthand, and certainly no one but himself could read.

“Six-twenty this morning, Sam Karen went into Hazard's office,” Monk said, reading from, or pretending to read from, the notes. “He never came out.”

“That was over seven hours ago,” Doc said. “He had been dead, apparently, three or four hours. Who

visited Hazard's office in the four hours following six-twenty?"

"At seven," Monk said, "a local big-shot named Peter Overman. Left at seven-ten. . . . You say four hours the guy had been dead? That would let Overman out."

"Not necessarily," Doc said. "When you guess on the time of death from a casual inspection, it's just that—a wild guess. To make it definite, there should be an autopsy and knowing when the fellow had breakfast—things the police will take care of for us."

Monk consulted the scribblings again. "At nine, a Miss Samantha Morand showed up. She is Hazard's secretary, and apparently his whole office force. A grouchy old dame about sixty-five—"

"I met her."

"At nine-five she locked the office door, and nobody else got in until a few minutes after ten, when Paul Ben Hazard showed up. He locked the door, too, and nobody else got in until you came. The old gal of a secretary watched at the window and saw you enter the building, and then they unlocked the door to let you walk in."

"Was that procedure unusual?"

"I'll say it was unusual," Monk said, nodding vehemently. "A political boss like Hazard has a hell of a lot of visitors every day. Today they just locked them out."

Doc said thoughtfully. "It would appear the secretary found the body."

"Could be. And locked up and called her boss."

"That would seem a fair guess. . . . You say this Overman was the only man in there after Sam Karen went into the place early this morning?"

"The only one Ham saw."

"How positive is Ham about that?"

"I don't think you could pin him down to being positive at all. You know how these lawyers are—they wouldn't admit black and white are different colors."

"Is Overman the type that would murder a man?"

MONK MAYFAIR considered the question. He got up and opened the door and looked out and yelled at the used-car lot attendant to fill up and shine the car at which Doc had looked. He acted, sounded, like a loud and cheap salesman; he turned back, closed the door, and said, "Overman seems to be the kind of a guy you would like to have for a father-in-law."

"You mean he has a lovely daughter?"

"He does have—but that's not what I meant. He's a nice guy, goes to church, has a good reputation, and has plenty of money with which he is not stingy."

Doc Savage asked for and received a description of Peter Overman—the description could have fitted any businessman of fifty or so, solidly built and grey-haired, pleasant and then asked, "What business is he in?"

“Owns a contracting company—big one, builds highways and dams and big buildings. Also owns a ready-mixed concrete concern that is probably more profitable than you think, particularly when it's tied in with the state political machine.”

“What about the daughter?”

“I haven't seen her,” Monk said regretfully. “That's the drawback of moving in lowbrow circles. Boy, as a used-car dealer in this town, you don't have any more standing than a mule. But I hear she is something to sing about.” Monk frowned at Doc. “What do you think? We haven't very much to start on, have we?”

Not very much to begin with, Doc admitted. Only the fact that Peter Overman seemed to be a very logical suspect for the position of murderer of Sam Karen, and should be investigated for that reason. “Since there is nothing else in sight,” Doc decided, “I'll take a look at Overman. Do you know anything else about him that I should know?”

“We haven't had time to check into him very thoroughly,” Monk explained. “He is fifty-one years old, to be exact, and likes tweed suits, fish for breakfast, and prefers unusual foods—he goes in, for instance, for pheasant, suki-yaki, and that sort of thing. He is an amateur magician and is always fooling around with pocket magical stuff. He is having lunch at the Dugout, which is a bar in the basement of the Governor House Hotel that serves a neat dish of Armenian *shish-kebab*. I understand he is going to hang around the Dugout and gather a few friends, then go out to Hazard's place for a week-end party.”

“So you've hardly checked on him at all?” Doc said dryly.

Monk grinned.

DOC SAVAGE looked around speculatively at the used car lot office, arose, opened the washroom door, glanced inside and saw no one, came back and asked, “Any chance of a microphone hidden around here somewhere?”

“Hell! I don't think so.”

“You had better give me a demonstration ride in the car, anyway, and we'll talk,” Doc said.

Scientific progress being what it was, it was possible to put an eavesdropping radio gadget in an automobile also, so that it would be hardly discernible, and Doc went over the car carefully, using the pretense that a prospective purchaser or renter might well conduct such an examination.

Monk drove north on Capital then took an east-west boulevard which was not overburdened with traffic. He said, “I take it you have a plan?”

Doc nodded. “When Hazard got hold of me a week ago, he did not give me the impression that it was too bad, rather conveying the idea that he was merely following a whim of the governor's in asking me for aid. I made a telephone call direct to the governor about it—and he was more worried than Hazard by a long shot. It was really the governor who talked me into coming out here, although, for obvious political reasons, it wouldn't look well for the governor to have to call in an outsider to catch a crook that his own appointees in the state police and attorney general's office can't catch. I am supposed to keep the governor out of it. . . . Which is by way of explaining why I thought it was important enough to send you fellows out here ahead of time to scoop up what you could.”

“I'm sorry we dug up so little,” Monk said.

“You're doing fine. But answer me this: do you think you might not have established the reputation of

being a couple of sharpers with that used-car lot?"

Monk looked uncomfortable. "Well, we didn't want to lose any dough, and—anyway, it was Ham's idea. That Ham is a crook at the hair roots, I've always contended, and—"

"You're beating around the bush."

"Okay," Monk said. "They probably think we're cheap crooks."

"Good."

"Huh?" Monk was astonished. "You mean you approve? I thought—"

"I don't think much of it, but here is the point," Doc said. "As long as you have established a tone, it gave me an idea. It is this: suppose you and Ham start a little conniving of your own, along the mysterious Jones plan."

"Huh?"

"Give the idea you're really big-time crooks."

"Well, for crying—hmmmm. You think—it might, at that."

"The idea," Doc said, "being that, while it doesn't necessarily take a crook to catch a crook, it is a fact that crooks seem to find each other."

"Uh-huh. Birds of a color together—yeah, there's something to that." Monk was thoughtful. "You know, I think I've got a lead we might start on."

"Lead?"

"Little guy named Oliver Polki. Looks like a bum and occupies the position of one around town. But I have reason to think he's sharp, and might be in on what is going on to the extent that he at least would know the contacts to make."

"Contact him," Doc said, "and see what you can do about starting a fire."

"How far do you want us to go?"

"As far as you need to, short of murdering anybody," Doc said. "The governor of the state is behind us, and that will take care of a lot—if we succeed. If we don't succeed, it may be our necks, but that is a chance we will have to take."

"I'll contact Polki."

"All right. Now here is the rest to it: any contacts we make from now on, I will make them unless they are important, and if you do have something imperative, be very careful. I'm going to work in the open. By tomorrow morning, everyone in town who is interested is going to know that I am on the case. There is probably no way of preventing that. And they may know it already."

"That may be why Sam Karen was killed."

"It could be," Doc said. "Drive back to the used-car lot. I'll rent this car for my personal use, to cover up this visit. Then I'm going to get acquainted with Peter Overman and see what that turns up."

Chapter IV

THE stairs from the Governor House lobby down to the Dugout got richer and darker as they descended, and the expensive orange-colored light in the Dugout was too dim for good vision, but there was an untaken stool at the bar. One of the three barmen—the name Eddie was embroidered on his white coat—came over and, in response to a question, said that he had noticed Pete Overman around but didn't see him now. He went away with Doc's order for a minute steak, french fries and a green salad, and came back in a few moments and said Overman's drink was still there.

"Where?"

"Table in the corner."

Eddie said. "You're Doc Savage, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"That's what I thought," the barman said. "I heard somebody say you were in town, and they gave a description of you."

The barman went away and Doc Savage watched him speculatively, a little surprised, and not particularly pleased that the news about himself was getting around. Presently the barman was back with the set-up and: "It was somebody in Overman's party mentioned you, I guess. I hope you don't mind my saying so, but I hope you have a successful visit."

"What do you mean, successful?"

"Just successful, that's all." The barman had a round bland face that told nothing.

"Thanks. I'm probably not as sinister as you're thinking I am."

The barman grinned and went away and didn't get back.

Arrogant, elegant, wicked, discreet he decided that about summed up the Dugout; it was probably *the* place in town. Every city had one of them. The place seemed to be as popular as an old dog at a convention of fleas; it was early, past the lunch hour, and too early for the cocktail run, but there was a good deal of activity for the hour.

Presently a substantial-looking man, rather fat but not repulsively so, came in from the washroom. He appeared a little tight, and he picked up his drink, a jigger that probably contained whiskey, and began making motions as if he was going to do something unusual with it. He was Overman, Doc had decided, and the waiter—not Eddie—who brought his steak confirmed this. "Yes, that's Mr. Overman."

"Who is with him at the table?"

"The bored looking one is his wife, Magda, and the other couple is Mr. and Mrs. Walter Arno."

Magda Overman had a cup of tea before her and was dunking the teabag calmly, holding it by the tag on the end of the string and raising and lowering the bag. She was paying no attention to her husband's trick with the whiskey jigger. Mrs. Arno was a small colorless woman, and her husband a thick-bodied fellow who looked slightly on the hard-bitten side.

“Thanks.”

“Eddie says you're Doc Savage,” the waiter said.

“Eddie talks too much.”

PETE OVERMAN did his trick. He placed the whiskey jigger on the palm of his extended right hand, covered it with his cupped left had, squeezed and twisted both hands together, then took them apart, an expectant look on his face. Jigger and the whiskey in it were now gone. They had vanished. He had not done the trick badly, Doc reflected, although it was not an uncommon bit of legerdemain—there was a rubber ball on the end of an elastic and he had stuffed the ball in the glass where it had made a tight fit, and the elastic had snapped the ball and jigger away under his coat during the hocus pocus with his hands. Apparently none of those at the table knew how the trick was done, or pretended they didn't know . . . Overman was showing them: nothing up his sleeves.

A long-legged brunette came down the steps into the Dugout.

“There's Doc Savage!” she squealed, and came toward the bar, dragging her escort, a long, dark and amazingly handsome young man.

Doc, who had never seen her before, and who was not quick on his feet in a thing like this, decided to bolt, but decided it a bit late, and presently he was all wrapped up with one of the noisiest and most well-done brunettes he had ever encountered. Her name was Smokey, she said; really, Miss Kurnitz, but why not join them. “The Overmans will love you, particularly if Pete can fool you with a couple of tricks,” she said. “Come on over and I'll introduce you.”

All of this bang-bang like a machine gun, as if she had known him all their lives.

The very handsome young man with her looked over her head and said, “I'm Georg Lanier.” He put out a hand and added, “This crazy female has heard of you somewhere. I'm surprised she did—she usually confines her learning to ball players, horse jockeys and prize fighters.”

Smokey borrowed Georg Lanier's cigarette off his lips—to smoke it, not to light one of her own—and said, “You're a liar, Georg. I know about politicians, too.”

Georg grinned, embarrassed, and explained, “I suppose she means she heard that you were with Paul Ben Hazard this afternoon when a body was discovered in the office.”

“So that's all over town already?”

Smokey said, “Oh, natch.”

Georg Lanier, ignoring her, said, “I take it today was your first meeting with him. What did you think of the schizo?”

“It was impressive.”

“I imagine.”

“Really, he's not a schizophrenic, though; a better and more modern term is cerebrototonic.”

Smokey said, “What are you talking? Wop language? I hate wops. I'm a wop.”

“We're discussing Paul Ben Hazard, honey,” Georg Lanier told her. “What kind of a wop are you?”

“I'm a borrowing wop,” she said. “But I'd better not let Lorna Overman catch me borrowing you, had I?”

A darkly hard look crossed Georg Lanier's face, and traces of it remained about his mouth as he said, “May I apologize for our intrusion. Smokey has the manners of a tack-hammer. I consider it a privilege to have met you, sir, even if it was a horning-in. So we will say farewell and—”

“Farewell—the heck,” Smokey said. She lifted her voice and squealed at Peter Overman, “Pete, I'm bringing another guest to your party. Okay?” She picked up Doc Savage's steak plate with one hand, grabbed his necktie with the other and he found himself, dignity outraged, being led across the place.

Georg Lanier, beside him, said sourly. “She pulled about this same thing on a Supreme Court justice once. I don't think she knew what a Supreme Court justice was.”

DOC SAVAGE, enraged, gave most of his attention to keeping a resemblance of a composed expression on his face, and keeping his words civil, while he was being pushed from one guest to another; all the while he was wondering just what was going on, whether it was some kind of sinister doings, whether it was a gag, or just the obvious sort of thing it seemed. He had never met any of these people; he had nothing in common with most of them probably; and he should not be interested in them nor they in him—if he disregarded the mystery of the sinister Jones and the death of Sam Karen.

Pete Overman looked as pleased as a plump man was capable of looking, or seemed to. If he was a murderer, Doc reflected, he was an extraordinarily blasé one.

“You must join us,” he said. “You really must. I'm certainly glad Smokey knew you.”

“We're old pals,” Smokey said.

Her lower lip, the color of a ripe English Morello cherry, drooped like the lip of a cat that had tasted cream. She was, Doc decided, a little tight. Several of the party looked a little canned.

Mrs. Overman, not very tall nor especially goodlooking, was a sweet person, he decided, the sort who would be Den Mother for the cub scouts. She seemed to think it was funny which, Doc reflected, it probably was. She said, “You were soft game for Smokey, weren't you?”

“What's she pulling?”

She smiled vaguely and said, “Pulling?” even more vaguely, and pointed at her husband. “Look. Pete is going to finish his silly trick.” Overman had pulled some misdirection by pointing at his trouser cuff with his right hand while reaching under his coat with his left hand to grasp the whiskey jigger and disengage the rubber ball. He produced the jigger. Presto! Everyone was, or pretended to be, fooled.

Georg Lanier, tall, beautiful, bitterly detached, did not participate in the applause.

Either something had Lanier worried, Doc concluded, or his natural expression was that of someone with tight shoes. He stalked over to a slot machine, chucked in a quarter, yanked the handle. Presently the machine coughed, shook itself, and a flood of silver poured out of it. Three bars were showing. Georg Lanier stowed silver coins in pants pockets and all four vest-pockets, then walked back to the Overman group. He didn't seem impressed at winning, although the take must have been near fifty dollars.

Lanier, Doc decided, could be as expressionless as a post.

OVERMAN began rapping on the table for attention, and announced it was time they started for the boat. It seemed they were going to take a boat to the estate where the festivities were to be held. Hazard's estate, Doc recalled that Monk had said the scene was to be.

While he was pondering whether to be dragged along on what—if the beginning signs were any indication—probably would be a brawl with too many people drinking too much, he found himself collared by Smokey, who said, “Oh, no you don't.”

“Don't what?”

“I'm a mind-reader,” Smokey said. “You were thinking about giving us the slip.”

They went out. On the sidewalk in front of the hotel, they added a wonderful, ravishing golden girl to the party. At least that seemed to be the impression she gave Georg Lanier, because he shed his morose preoccupation and began to glow like a hundred-watt bulb.

“Who is that?” Doc asked.

“Who is who?”

“The new addition to the parade.”

“Oh, goldilocks? That's Lorna Overman.”

What had Monk said about her? That he had heard she was something to sing about?

Chapter V

THE dock was on the river bank, evidently some kind of a private club; there was a building resembling a small railway depot, somewhat grimy, and beyond that a long gangplank leading down to a much longer float to which was tied four cabin cruisers, the largest of which proved to be their destination. The river beyond was wide and placid, but muddy so that its color was about that of a cheap muskrat coat; at this hour, with the sunlight outlining the shadow of the state capitol building on the river surface, and reproducing the shadow of the river bridge in a crazy, slanting, modernistic pattern, and with the sun brightening the sand bars on the opposite side of the river, the whole picture was rather pleasant.

“Hey, mister,” a cracked voice said.

Doc turned and saw that the man was worse than his voice. A bum. Small, ragged, dirty, showing bad front teeth with a lower lateral incisor missing; a man as unpleasant as something an animal had coughed up.

“Yes.”

“Ain't your name Savage?”

“Yes.”

“That's what I thought.”

“What can I do for you?”

“Guy out front wants to see you. He sent me to get you.”

“I'm rather busy.”

“I think he kinda wants to see you,” the man said.

“Who is it?”

The question upset him. He took off his hat and scratched his head. “I don't know his name.” His hair was so filthy that it stuck together as if it was wet. “Kind of a short and homely guy.”

Monk. Doc said, “All right. Where is he?”

They moved through the station-like club building to the street, and the small filthy man looked about vacantly. “He's gone,” he said.

“Eh?”

“I guess he didn't wait.”

“So I see. Well, thanks anyway.”

The small man seized Doc's coat-sleeve. “Wait a minute!” he said excitedly. “This guy says if he can't wait, you're to come anyway. He says come to the governor's office. He says hurry, that's what he said.”

Doc Savage examined the small man intently, suspiciously, decided there was something fishy about the affair, and demanded, “What are you trying to pull?”

The small man stepped back a pace. His short discolored teeth showed, not pleasantly.

“Let me give you a piece of information,” he said. “You're being sucked into something brother.” He shoved his head forward, glared, added, “Wait here a second, and I'll prove it.”

He turned, walked away—to a parked car nearby—and climbed into the car. Not until the car engine had started did Doc Savage realize he had been tricked, and then it was too late. The car got away from the curb before he could reach it, hit the street, and gathered speed all the way out of sight.

DOC SAVAGE walked out on the river float, found Overman and asked, “Would you mind holding up the boat while I make a telephone call?” He got Overman's assurances that they would hold the boat all day with perfect pleasure, and returned to a pay phone booth in the clubhouse—which was what the ramshackle building probably was—and found the number of Monk's used-car lot was not in the telephone book. Scowling at his streak of stupidity—he should have known the number would not be listed this soon—he got the number from the information operator.

“Monk?”

“Yes.”

“Listen to this description.” He described the small man with the filthy appearance and the bad teeth.

Monk said, “That's him.”

“Polki?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Did you contact him since I talked to you?”

“Yeah, I did,” Monk said. “Why?”

“What did you tell him?”

“I put it up to him this way—by the way, you suppose it's safe to talk over this telephone?”

“Use Mayan.”

Monk changed to Mayan, which he could speak understandably, if not fluently, and said that he had put it up to Oliver Polki that he, Monk, had heard that Doc Savage was in town on the trail of Jones, and that this would probably mean there would be plenty of hell popping. A lot of confusion. And when things were in that condition, wasn't it just possible that some fellows with nerve could step in and do themselves some good? Why wasn't it feasible to do one thing to Jones and make him—or her—think that Doc Savage had done it, then turn around and do the same with Doc, blaming Jones?

Doc listened in silence, reflecting that if there was anyone on the wire who spoke Mayan, which was unlikely, or it there was a recorder on the wire, which could be possible, the translator who tried to decipher Monk's statements would have a job on his hands. Not only was Mayan a virtually unknown tongue in the civilized world, but the way Monk was murdering it, it was nearly a language of its own.

Monk explained that Oliver Polki had seemed oddly interested and had gone off saying he would think it over and feel around.

“What did he mean by feel around?”

“Probably sound out some of his contacts—I hope. You know, as I told you, I think that little bum could possibly be a lead to who Jones is. After talking to him this last time, I'm more than ever inclined to feel that way.”

Doc said sourly, “What are the chances of his being Jones himself?”

“OH Lord!” Monk gasped. “Do you—good God, you don't think he is? You haven't found out that he is?”

“I merely asked you.”

“You scared the pants off me,” Monk said. “I had pretty well decided he wasn't Jones. But why? What brings this up?”

Doc explained about his encounter a moment ago with the small man.

“He tried to keep me from going on this party at the Hazard estate, and when that flopped, he warned me I was being victimized—which was either true, or a means of upsetting me.”

“I don't get it,” Monk said. He sounded thoroughly confused.

“You and Ham had better keep your eyes open. We may not be fooling everybody the way we thought we were.”

Chapter VI

AFTER the boat left the dock, Pete Overman said he would show his guests something, and he did—he drove the cabin cruiser wide-open at screaming full speed up the river. He drove it, in Doc's opinion, like a drooling, spasm-ridden imbecile—and the noises his passengers made were not all pleased noises.

Getting more disgusted with himself, Doc Savage went below into the cabin. There was no danger, unless they hit a floating snag, but he did not like this kind of a party—possibly because he had never learned to play. It seemed senseless and without purpose to him, and he was irritated merely because of that.

He noticed, on the cabin table, a severe-looking booklet entitled: *The Laniers, Story of a State*.

Georg Lanier, he remembered, was the very handsome young man who had seemed to behave just a bit strangely. Curious, he opened the book.

"The history of the Laniers"—it said in the book—"is, sometimes desperately, sometimes ponderously, always magnificently, the history of the state. In a sense, it is the chronology of the monumental American way. The first Lanier in the borders of the state was Tad Day Lanier; it was he who, in 1804, the year all the territory north of the present State of Louisiana was attached to Indian Territory under the Americans, came bearing the Lanier name and its unconquerable spirit. The Laniers have always spearheaded economic freedom, have fought to the last drop of their blood when necessary, for the God-given principle that man, even the very little man, shall be free."

Walter Arno, who with his wife had been with the Overmans when Doc first saw them in the Dugout, came in to get some glasses and ice and soda. He saw the book.

"What do you think of the reading?" he asked.

"I just started on it."

Arno spit on the floor. "It's capitalistic propaganda!" he said, and went out.

Surprised at the feeling the man had put into that, Doc went back to the booklet, read that the Laniers had brought in their hearts and brains the glory, then visionary, of the hinterland that was to be the hub of transportation, of the fur trade, tobacco, wheat, corn, the California Trail. He paused to wonder why Arno was angry at the book, and who Arno was, and then Lorna Overman came into the cabin with her mother.

"This is Lorna, our daughter, Mrs. Savage," Mrs. Overman said. There were water spots on their dresses, drops of clay-tan river water on Lorna's golden face, one exactly on the end of her nose.

The smile of Lorna Overman was nice, but completely uninterested, as uninterested as her "Nice-to-meet-you." She trailed off toward a rear cabin.

Reserved, genteel, and beautiful, Doc Savage reflected—and then wondered just why she happened to be so widely known; or at least, why had Monk heard of her? There was usually something spectacular about girls whom Monk heard about. They weren't always nice girls, but sometimes they were, and invariably there was something extraordinary about them. Sane, intelligent, perspicacious, and cute, this girl had looked. Would look well by a fireplace, too.

A couple of minutes later he got one of his big shocks. He barely swallowed.

MISS LORNA OVERMAN was passing by again, and she now wore nothing much—or at least a bathing suit that was hardly a bathing suit. The effect, probably it was her figure, was upsetting. She smiled vaguely as she went through, and presently he concluded his mouth was open, and he closed it.

There was, in a moment, a sound on deck that resembled a buffalo stampede, which he decided was understandable. However, they seemed to be moving something heavy on deck and tossing it in the water. He went out on deck to observe.

They now had two aquaplanes in the water. Georg Lanier rode one. Lorna Overman was on the other, riding it the way witches ride their broomsticks, or angels their clouds. The boat was doing about thirty, the ropes to the aquaplanes were about two hundred feet long. There was laughter, yells of excitement.

Arno looked at Doc Savage, asked, “You ever do any of this?”

“Not much.”

“They're good,” Arno said. “Watch them.” He grinned thinly, added, “And watch Overman's face.”

“Who is Lanier?”

“He's in a brokerage shop, customer man. Sells stocks on the strength of his family name—and that face of his.” Arno sounded as if he didn't like Lanier. He stared aft, said, “That looks dangerous to me.”

The aquaplaning was not as dangerous as it looked, but the Overman girl and Lanier were good. Doc Savage, always a little repelled by exhibitionism, which was what this seemed to be, was not particularly impressed, except by the sudden shift Lorna Overman had made from severe, serene beauty to a wildly exotic girl. He changed his position until he could watch her father, Overman.

Overman's eyes were the eyes of an old lion, tawny, wary, suspicious, and with something violent in their depths, a man-eating look. He did not, at the moment, seem at all tight; he was not a fat, pleasant, middle-aged businessman, a little drunk and a little silly. He had changed. He didn't like Georg Lanier, or the way his daughter looked, or was acting—there was something he didn't like.

When the two exhibitionists astern transferred to the same aquaplane and did a stunt, Lorna on Georg Lanier's shoulders, Overman's lips thinned.

Doc said casually, “They're good.”

Overman said nothing, woodenly. He seemed not to have heard.

THE Paul Ben Hazard estate was on the north shore of the river; massive, colonial, impressive, it presented itself suddenly when they rounded a sweeping bend in the river. There was a dock at the foot of the upsweeping bluff furred heavily with trees that were, it developed, larger than they looked at first.

They loaded into an old-fashioned surrey for the ride and were driven by a dignified Negro not more than a quarter of a mile up the lane that zig-zagged from the river to the mansion.

The guests were shown to what rooms they belonged, and for half an hour hardly anyone could testify as to where anyone else was.

Doc, still with the foolish feeling that he was either wasting his time, or being very thoroughly outsmarted, encountered Smokey.

“Our host?” he asked.

“Around somewhere, I guess,” Smokey said.

“But doesn't a host usually greet his guests?”

“Not when the host is Paul Ben Hazard.”

The sun neared the horizon; there were cumulus clouds piled in the west and north. A gardener named Ollie came to the house. He was somewhat excited, so much so that there was difficulty getting out of him that there was a dead man in the cat-tail pond.

Chapter VII

PAUL BEN HAZARD came in then and said blandly, “Another body? I hope nobody lets it interfere with the party.” The words, which should have been shocking, weren't, because they came from him, and were delivered with a magnetic heartiness that overcame the stunned feeling everyone had at the moment, as well as the oddness of the words themselves.

Doc was a little startled. Hazard had a powerful personality, a way of affecting people without their realizing he was swaying them. To make a remark like that, and get away with it the way he did, the man had to have extraordinary power for driving his personality into others.

They went down to look at the body, and it was the little bum with the missing lower lateral incisor tooth. Oliver Polki, Monk had said his name was. The sloppy looking little man who had accosted Doc at the river pier, then fled. Dead. Drowned.

“Anybody know him?” Georg Lanier asked.

Nobody admitted they did.

Five of them had come to look at the body. Overman, Arno, Lanier, Doc Savage and Hazard. Six, counting the man who had found him, the gardener Ollie.

Ollie was a thick-wristed, lantern-jawed man with shoulders as stooped as an ape's. Aged about sixty.

The cat-tail pond, where the body had been found, lay about two hundred yards from the mansion, and was about seventy feet wide and some three hundred feet long, shaped generally like a comma with a wiggly tail. Nowhere did it seem very deep since the surface was, except for an area about as long as three automobiles end-to-end in the center, covered with lilies, cat-tails, bulrushes; the water was quite clear, seemed clean; sunfish and crappie were swimming here and there. On the bank was a floodlight, and Ollie now turned this on. A small pier constructed of rough native lumber thrust about fifteen feet into the pond, the surface of the pier being about a foot above the pond surface.

Ollie, the gardener, had pulled the body out of the water onto the pier, but both of the victim's feet still hung in the water; the little man didn't look much the cleaner for having been in the water.

Ollie said, “Some kids been sneaking in here and catching the sunfish. They bite best about sundown, so I thought I would come down and see, when I heard kind of a noise down here.” He pointed at the bank. “First, I stood over there and listened. I almost didn't walk out to the dock when I didn't hear nor see anybody, but I did. I looked down and saw something shine, kind of grey. It was his face.”

Doc Savage said, “You heard a noise?”

Ollie looked at Doc, didn't say anything.

Paul Ben Hazard said, loudly and incuriously, “This is Doc Savage, one of the most widely known men in the world, Ollie. He is here to investigate for me. Tell him what he wants to know.”

Doc liked neither the exaggeration that he was one of the most widely known men in the world, nor the intimation that he was employed by Hazard—he had come, not on Hazard's urging, but because the governor of the state was anxious for him, and because the whole thing was interesting.

Ollie said, “Yeah, a noise. I heard a noise.”

“What sort of noise?”

He apparently wasn't sure, but thought it over and said, “Oh, just like somebody was here.” Then he added, “I was in the tool shed at the time. I was putting away the power mower.” He lifted an arm and pointed, presumably meaning the tool shed lay in that direction.

Arno said, “Hell, the poor little guy just fell in and drowned.”

Doc Savage made a close examination of the body, and presently his fingers located—but he did not mention the matter—the more likely cause of death. It was on the skull, well up in the hair growth, and felt, unless his surmise was far off, like the point of an ice pick had been broken off close to the bone structure, after having penetrated the brain.

PETER OVERMAN said, “My God, we should be trying first aid on him!” The others thought that was a good idea, and they became as busy as a troop of Boy Scouts having a first-aid contest. Doc let them work at it. They did not get much water, no more than a pint, to run out of the dead man's mouth, but no one thought or admitted to thinking, that that might not be enough water.

Doc said, “Someone had better call the sheriff.”

“Someone oughta call a doctor, is my idea,” Arno said.

Hazard snorted. “Savage is a doctor.”

“Sheriff, then? Why the hell call the sheriff?”

“Go call the sheriff, Arno,” Hazard said, and Arno went away meekly, overridden by the enormously tall, thin man's strange power of domination.

The day had gone completely; the night, still and black, was soft and warm like a velvet dress when a girl is wearing it. Innumerable stars were in the sky, but their presence did not intrude; the only part of the world that seemed real, to have existence, was that portion immediately about the floodlamp on the pole and the dock and the dead man on it.

Dreadfully, appallingly, dolefully, a dog suddenly barked at them; it was a fox-hound and it bawl-moaned

at them as only hounds can manage. Ollie, shocked, mumbled, “It's old Blow.” The dog's eyes shone weirdly from a point on the rim of darkness. Ollie yelled, “Git! Git! Git fer home!”

The old dog walked out into the light in an unfriendly tense way without tail-wagging, and paid no attention to Ollie's repeated, “Git! Git, damn you!” The dog barked again, and the sound was more frightening than it had been the first time.

Paul Ben Hazard picked up a stick and hurled it, probably not intending to hit the dog, but he did hit the animal. The kiyoodle of pain from the hound was worse than the barking had been, but the animal fled. For some reason or other, everyone seemed to feel very sorry for the dog. “Sorry, but I didn't really intend to hit it,” Hazard muttered.

THE Sheriffs name was Ab Powell, and the coroner was named Chadwick; there were also two State Patrolmen who called each other Glenn and Ted. They found some papers on the dead man, an envelope with no letter in it and a receipt from the Workmen's Hotel—a flophouse, one of the patrolmen remarked—indicating the man's name was Oliver L. Polki. The name seemed to mean nothing to anyone.

The patrolman called Ted hauled a fishing pole and line out of the water beside the pier, and the consensus seemed to be that it was an accidental drowning.

“Better make an autopsy anyway,” Doc suggested.

“Who the hell are you?” demanded Sheriff Powell.

“This is Doc Savage,” Hazard said.

“That supposed to mean something?”

Hazard said dryly, “It might. You never can tell.” And did not elaborate further.

They took the body away, not toward the house, but back through the woods toward the highway, after Hazard sharply remarked that he would prefer his guests not be upset.

Presently Paul Ben Hazard and Doc Savage were alone at the pond, and Hazard demanded, without any preliminaries whatever, “Was he murdered?”

“The police seemed to think it was an accident.”

“Oh.”

“Know him?”

“Know who?”

“Polki, or whatever his name was.”

Hazard shrugged. “Certainly not. Let's go back to the house.”

They followed a flagstone path for a short distance, then came to a more used path where the flat stones were larger. Hazard moved to the side of the path, and evidently threw a switch, for the path sprang into brilliance; it was indirectly lighted, and expertly done.

“You making any progress?” Hazard demanded.

Doc was recalling how, in Hazard's office, the man had said that he detested shadows; he wondered if the same thing applied to Hazard and darkness, and would account for this elaborate lighting of pathways through the estate.

“Not much progress,” Doc said.

“I'm disappointed.”

“In five hours you want Jones served up with handcuffs?”

“With your reputation, yes, I expected that,” Hazard said sourly. In a moment he added, bitterly, “And it would be all right to serve him up without breath, like that dirty little specimen back there at the pond.”

“Could that have been Jones?”

“How the hell would I know?”

Hazard, Doc noticed, was stepping with care on each mortar joint between the walk flagstones—they were moving slowly—and missing none. The steps he had to take were uneven, some very short, some longer, but he was missing no cracks. The habit was, Doc recalled, a neurotic symptom, and he watched Hazard thoughtfully, trying to ascertain whether the man knew what he was doing was a symptom, even whether he was aware of what he was doing. It was difficult to tell; in the end Doc was uncertain. Particularly when, as the flagstone path ended suddenly and became a blacktop walk in which there were no cracks, and Hazard seemed to be thwarted, thrown into a confused rage—apparently by the breaking of his orderly habit by the absence of any more cracks. Hazard said angrily, “You're too goddam secretive to suit me!” He went away, stamping his rage.

Doc watching him go, convinced the fellow was genuinely neurotic in many ways—or was a skilled actor at it.

THE hound began to snuffle then. Doc had heard the same sound a moment ago. The snuffling, loud and suspicious, came from the shrubbery some distance away. Wondering if the stick Overman had thrown at the dog might have injured the animal, Doc turned back, parted the bushes, began exploring in the shrubbery, and presently he found the dog, unhurt. Not unfriendly, the hound did some tail-wagging, gave a half-hearted dig at the soft earth and grass underfoot. It was, technically, a redbone fox-hound, black and tan and white, but possibly not pure-blooded because it was ticked with liver like a pointer.

Doc said, “What have you got there, Blow?”

What the dog had was the handle of an ice pick. It was wrapped in a thin handkerchief—a woman's handkerchief, as light as a spider's web and a pastel pink hue. There was a bit missing from one corner of the handkerchief.

Someone had forced the knob of the ice-pick handle into the soft earth by stepping on it and perhaps raking leaves over it; the dog, with his pawing had uncovered it partially; first, no doubt, the dog's nose had located it, and that puzzled Doc vaguely. There was no doubt, as he put his pocket flashlight beam on the object from several angles, that the needle shaft of the ice pick had been broken off close to the handle. The breaking, he concluded, had been helped along by notching about halfway through the steel pick needle beforehand. . . . Premeditated murder, that indicated.

Startled, he thought of an ice pick with a notched needle as a weapon. He had never heard of the idea before, and it was not as crude as it seemed at first flash, he decided presently. An ice-pick wound in

skull or chest cavity, with the shaft broken off in the body, would not be as easily detected as one might imagine.

He went back to the lake, found no one there, took the path to the side road, and discovered the State Patrol car still parked.

“You don't happen to have the fishing pole you pulled out of the pond?” he asked.

“Yes, it's in the back.”

“Mind letting me have a look at it?”

“Sure. Glad to.”

The bait was still on the hook—a bit of pink cloth, of silk as thin as spider web.

The patrolman said, “I guess they catch fish with bait like that. Sunfish, anyway.” His tone was speculative.

“So I understand,” Doc said. He handed the pole and line and hook—the bit of cloth still on the hook—back to the officer. “I'd keep track of that if I were you.”

“You're kind of free with advice, aren't you?”

“Could be,” Doc admitted. “And you're not as free about talking it. Neither was the sheriff. I wonder why?”

“Eh?”

“Never mind,” Doc said. “By the way, have you heard of anyone around here called Jones?”

The officer seemed jolted. “What first name?”

“Just Jones.”

“I guess I know who you mean,” the patrolman said slowly. “I know as much about him as anybody, which is nothing. Or nothing is all anybody admits knowing. Why?”

“I was merely after information.”

“Damn funny information.”

“Is it funny for a citizen to ask a policeman a question about a notorious criminal?”

The officer was disgruntled. He said, “I think I had better have a couple of references from you.”

“What kind of references?”

“I think we'll check up on you.”

“You won't have to go far. Ask Hazard.”

“I don't mean Hazard.”

“Try the governor, then.”

“I'd rather try a little farther from home,” the patrolman said.

THE State Patrolman's tone, manner and words were food for thought. Without making any pretenses that he was doing anything other than what he was doing, Doc turned his flashlight, a pen-light which he always carried, on the officer's face. He saw a square young face, freckled across the nose, blue-eyed, a bit bitter around the mouth and suspicious elsewhere.

“You're called Glenn, aren't you?”

The bitterness around the young officer's mouth increased sharply. “Madison,” he said. “Glenn Madison. What's the matter? Think I'm afraid of the sacred cows around here?”

“It just dawned on me,” Doc said, “that you probably aren't. . . . Or are a pretty good actor pulling a whizzer on me.”

“It would be nice to be that good an actor.”

Doc doused the light and pocketed it. He said, “Try the FBI—Washington direct, if it would make you feel better.”

“I will. Why'd you want a coroner to make an autopsy on that body?”

“You'd better see that one is made, particularly of the brain.”

“He didn't drown with his brain.”

Doc shrugged. “You don't need to act tough to cover up the fact that you are scared. It's more effective as a rule to let them know you're scared, but that you're going ahead and do what you think is right anyway—when you do it that way, they don't know just exactly how you stand, and that is unnerving.”

“Why are you telling me all this?”

“Because he didn't drown,” Doc said, and walked away toward the house.

Chapter VIII

THE party seemed to be going ahead without much dampening of spirits. Doc Savage moved about, was introduced to different people, and overhead someone describing the host, Paul Ben Hazard, as “Like a picture by Dali, something senseless that had sense because beyond sense there must be sense if anything is beyond, as there must be, to make sense.”

He carried that away from the group, to think about it and concluded, pointless as it was, it made pretty good sense about Hazard.

Presently Peter Overman rushed up to him, gasped, “It's going fine, isn't it, Doc, boy? Just fine.” He grinned vacantly into Doc's face and asked, “Or is it? It is, isn't it?”

Doc said, “Hazard must be contagious.”

“Huh?”

“Never mind.”

Overman grinned vacantly again, asked, “You don't want to miss the eats, Doc, boy. Everybody's out at the barbecue. You want me to show you where it is?”

Doc said he would find it later, thanks, and Overman glanced about furtively, suddenly seemed more sober, and as nervous as a scalded rat, and said, “I would like a private talk with you, Mr. Savage.”

“Talk?”

“Yes.”

“Any time, Overman.”

Overman said that was great and thanks, acting as if he had been done a great favor, and they would do it as soon as they could.

“Why not now?” Doc asked.

Overman looked quite foolish. “Later,” he mumbled. “It's got to be much later.” He seemed to realize this sounded mysterious, and indicated his head with a finger and explained, “It goes around. Too much to drinkee. Later.”

He left in a hurry.

DOC SAVAGE frowned over that, suddenly sure that Overman was much disturbed—which he had reason to be, since he stood as the logical suspect for private investigator Sam Karen's murder.

Consideration of Overman as a suspect was interrupted by an encounter with Smokey, who came wandering in alone, saw Doc, yelled, “I'm freezing to death. That dew! I hate dew. It's like a dead man's breath.”

“What are you trying to do, shock me?” Doc asked.

“Sure,” she said. “I heard them talking about you. You're supposed to be unscareable. You're a whiz-ding, aren't you?”

“Have you got a handkerchief?”

“Eh?”

“A handkerchief—a ladies' handkerchief?”

“What do you want with it?”

“Maybe I collect them.”

“I'll bet,” Smokey said. “I'll bet that's funny business of some kind, but don't you get me mixed up in what's going on. I don't want any part of it. I'm strictly a cocktail and laughter girl.”

“What is going on?”

“Oh, no you don't. Find my coat for me, will you? Find me a coat. Anybody's coat.”

Doc said he would look around and left her, not intending to look for her coat, and not intending to come back. She was a gusher, and she embarrassed him easily.

However, she wore a grey frock, and a pinkish handkerchief might be an accessory for grey; he had seen a pink feminine handkerchief somewhere, he half believed, but could not recall exactly who had carried it.

THE front hall had every light blazing. The crystal chandelier, the size and shape of a church Christmas tree growing upside down from the ceiling, was made entirely of shining metal, glittering crystal and electric light bulbs. It did not seem to jar with the surroundings. An impressive spiral stairway carried up to the second floor and its steps and the hall floor had absinthe green carpeting; the remainder of the color theme was two-tone ivory.

What made the magnificence of the mansion seem important was the expression on Georg Lanier's face when Doc came upon him. Lanier was somber, intense, inward—and staring malevolently at the surroundings.

“Oh, hello,” Doc said. “Rather impressive, eh?”

“Eh?”

“All of this, the house, I mean. I was thinking of the history of the place—isn't it the old Lanier family mansion? Your family?”

“My family,” Georg Lanier said darkly.

“It seems to touch you.”

Lanier cursed bitterly.

“Does it stand out like that on me?” he demanded. Without waiting for a response, he wheeled, walked out. He did not seem to care whether he was being discourteous. It was obvious that he hated himself at this moment, and hated Paul Ben Hazard for occupying the ancestral Lanier home.

Doc found a telephone, called a number, and presently had Monk Mayfair on the phone. Using the Mayan tongue, speaking it slowly so that Monk would understand, he said:

“Dig up what information you can on a fellow named Georg Lanier, Monk. In the brokerage business as an employee, I understand. Quite a noted old family around here—Paul Ben Hazard now occupies the home of the Lanier ancestors. Find out how Hazard happened to get it.”

“Okay,” Monk said. “The police ain't dug up nothing on Sam Karen's murder. They don't seem to be busting themselves to do it, either. What did you do, ask Hazard to have it soft-pedaled?”

“Hazard and I have hardly exchanged a word about the murder. He is going around being exotic, and living up to his reputation of being exotic.”

“I hear he's the guy who can do that, too.”

“Any information you care to give me on Oliver Polki?”

“I been trying to find that bird,” Monk said.

“Look in the county morgue.”

“Huh?”

“He's dead. Murdered.” Doc gave the details surrounding the murder that had been made to look somewhat like a natural drowning. He listened to Monk's startled ejaculations, and, “I'll be damned's!” and said, “Like for you to check on a policeman.”

“What policeman?”

“A trooper of the state Highway Patrol named Glenn Madison.”

“What about him?”

“Nothing yet. He seemed to have more honesty than anyone I've run into out here yet, in a tough sort of a way. We may need a friend if this thing gets as rough as it could get, so I want you to find out whether he could be trusted to do the right thing—if it meant going up against Hazard and even the governor. I think he could be, but check on it.”

“Okay. So we're going to need friends, are we?”

“It's conceivable,” Doc said, and made his farewells and hung up.

THE barbecue was merely another barbecue with perhaps more room, more tables, more food, too much to drink. Hazard's chef had barbecued a whole young steer; it revolved on a spit. A shining-faced black boy reached into the fragrant hickory smoke to slice off choice bits which the guests selected by pointing, Smokey, the curvy brunette, made off with the first sandwich Doc constructed; she pounced on him and got it before he even saw her near. He carried the second sandwich over to a table, and Smokey trapped him a second time.

Smokey threw her arms around him, endeavored to kiss him on the mouth; he escaped that, but not the odor of martini's on her breath. She told everybody near, “You see, I'm not a bit afraid of him!”

She sat down at the picnic table readily enough when pushed. “Sit right there, and I'll bring you something to eat,” Doc said.

She shuddered violently. “Bring me a nice, clammy body to go with this damned dew.” She rubbed a finger over the table-top, yelled, “See! It's all over the table. Dew! Wet and clammy, like that poor little guy in the pond.”

Doc looked at her thoughtfully. “Someone ask you to do this?”

“Do what?”

“Try out my nerves.”

“You're a funny guy,” Smokey said. “And because you're so funny, I'll tell you something. I'll tell you where you can find someone who lost a handkerchief.”

He hoped he kept astonishment off his face; he doubted that he did. “Yes?”

“Try the athletic and beautiful Miss Overman.”

“Eh?”

“Try her.”

Smokey got up and walked off.

Doc Savage frowned, half arose to follow her, changed his mind, and decided there was something about this inching around, this moving this way and that, that he didn't like. He did not like the party. There was something fundamentally ominous about the gaiety; the way musicians were working—a small orchestra, four pieces, playing to the right. The stuff that came out of their instruments had an unnatural too-sweet quality, like sugared water; it made a mood that was too fluffy and silly, as aimless as white mice that spend their lives whirling around and around, chasing their tails.

Doc Savage decided to look for Lorna Overman. Was it her handkerchief? He found her presently—Georg Lanier was not with her—and said, “Are you open to offers to dance?”

“I heard you never went in for frivolity,” she said.

“Everyone seems to be hearing things about me.”

“Are they?”

“I wonder who has all the information to distribute?”

“I don't know,” she said.

They did a turn around the dance floor, a concrete floor that had been treated in some way, treated with something, so that it was an excellent surface for dancing. But he did not like dancing; particularly it seemed repellant now, for he was pressed more and more by the feeling of something urgent, or events that were moving like teeth closing, sharp and deadly. He thought he hid it rather well, however, and was surprised when she said, “You're not enjoying this, and I'm not either.”

“That's right.”

“Why did you ask me to dance?”

“I wanted to ask you a couple of questions.”

She stopped dancing instantly and said, “Let's go somewhere.”

THEY left the vicinity of the barbecue ovens and the tables, took a path that swung between thickly walled shrubbery. She said, “I think we all stand in the shadow of Paul Ben Hazard here, and without knowing what we stand in the shadow of—for no one knows Hazard, least of all those who know him, for they who know him do not know him.”

Doc said dryly, “There seems to be a lot of talk like that going around.”

“Naturally.”

“Why?”

“Because the only way it makes sense is to only know of him, then you know him, because you only know of him.”

“Who starts that kind of talk? Hazard?”

“I suppose so.”

“I'm getting tired of it.”

“Well, that won't help you,” she said. “It is a serious matter, yet very simple, like knowing about, or of, gravity. The law of gravity, you know. You're all right as long as you know of gravity, know that there is such a thing as gravity, but let it go at that. If you start thinking you know gravity, know what it is, you're wrong, because nobody knows what it is. None of the scientists know.”

He grimaced in the darkness—the path they were on either wasn't lighted, or the lights were not turned on—and wondered if there was a purpose to all this double-ended talk. . . . The girl, too, was not what he had thought she would be; although just what he had expected of her was a question. She was quite lovely, and she looked, and was now acting, reserved, cultured, the sort of a person that mothers would point out to their offspring as a guide to better themselves. But there were decidedly other sides of her personality; she had demonstrated that on the aquaplane.

He asked abruptly, “Where's your handkerchief?”

She was silent a moment. “What do you mean?”

“Have you it?”

“No.”

“Where is it?”

“I don't know,” she said. “I missed it—I think I had it when we got here, but then I could not find it. . . . I had not given it much thought? Why?”

“What color was it?”

“What are you driving at?” she asked sharply.

“What color was it?”

“I think the color was called shell sanguine.”

“Another way of saying pale pink?”

“Yes. Do I get an explanation?”

He was about to say something evasive, when fingers clutched his collar. It was dark; there was hardly a preliminary shuffle of leaves before the fingers got him; they were hard fingers, strong with purpose. Something, he knew, lifted over his head to strike a blow. It made a *swish* of a sound. He threw up a hand, got it on a round hard shaft of steel, and for a few seconds there was a silent contest of strength.

He said, presently, “I hope this is a mistake. It really should be.” The manner of speech was less calm than the words.

PETER OVERMAN lowered the two-foot length of gas-pipe he had raised. Breath rushed out of Overman with about the same sound that breath makes coming out of an angry alligator. For some seconds the silence was as hard as bricks.

“You!” Overman said.

“What is one supposed to wear around here, an illuminated name-plate?” Doc asked unpleasantly.

“It will not be necessary.”

“Who did you think I was?”

Overman said nothing.

Lorna Overman said, “He thought you were Georg Lanier.”

“Shut up,” Overman said.

His daughter slapped him—quick and hard, quite a slap. Instantly he slapped her back. The two hand reports were loud; neither said a word; and after the slapping there was silence, an utter stillness and motionlessness, a complete suspension.

A moonbeam lanced through a peephole in the foliage beside the path and fell across Lorna Overman's face, and there were tears on her cheeks which glistened like tiny diamonds. The emotion in the air was stronger than a lion's breath.

Overman wheeled, walked away. Doc listened to his footsteps, heavy, shuffling, grinding against the gravel of the path; they died away in the darkness and against the background of macabre mirth from the barbecue area.

Lorna Overman said in a shrill, tight voice, “That was ugly, wasn't it?”

“Rather ugly.”

“I never—believe me—I never slapped my father before.”

“Is that important?”

“I don't know,” she said slowly. I—I think I feel a little ill . . .”

“Want to borrow my handkerchief for those tears?”

She did not answer immediately. It was too dark to tell whether or not she had stiffened, but when she spoke, it was to ask, “Why are you harping on that handkerchief?”

He gave it to her bluntly. He said, “A piece of a pastel silk handkerchief, pink, was on the fishhook that the little bum in the pond was not using to fish with.”

“Was not . . .”

“He was murdered. The fishing pole and hook was part of a rig to make it seem otherwise.”

No sound came from her for a time. Then, in a completely unnatural voice, she asked, “Do you think—”

“That you murdered him? . . . Not unless you are the rather intangible Jones.”

“I didn't mean that . . .”

“Eh?”

She covered her face with her hands then, and words came out strained beyond all naturalness between her fingers. “I mean—do you think my father—why did you come here tonight—to talk to him, wasn't it?” This came out in a series of jerks, was interrupted by a strangled intake of breath. Then she said, “Why don't you talk to him? Why don't you get it over with?”

She turned and ran away along the path, toward the barbecue area. He listened to her go, blindly, wildly.

He thought she stumbled once, but she did not fall, and in a moment she was gone.

Chapter IX

DOC SAVAGE told Peter Overman bluntly, “I want to talk to you.”

Overman moistened his lips. He mumbled, “I have been expecting this.” He turned and moved away. “We had better walk,” he said.

He was nervous, Doc decided; but he also sounded, acted, like a man who had made a decision. . . . They took a path toward the river, but came, within hardly more than a hundred yards, to what apparently had at one time been a root cellar.

“Mr. Hazard converted this into a shooting gallery,” Overman said dryly. “Would you care to see it?”

It was a cave, a trench cut into the side of the river bluff, then walled and floored with native stone, and roofed over. It seemed to be about eighty feet long, fifteen feet wide, seven feet high; it was not fancy, even with the equipment installed. At one end there was a typical shooting gallery counter with cases for

small-bore rifles, revolvers; there was ammunition in racks, and cleaning tools. At the far end there was an elaborate target arrangement, a stage affair; it could have been a small stage for puppets.

“I wanted to show you the layout,” Overman said.

“I thought you wanted to talk.”

Overman was switching on lights, peering here and there as cautiously as if he had landed on a hostile coast.

“Here, I'll show you the back,” Overman said. He led the way to the rear, stepped out of sight behind the target stage wing. “Watch,” he said. An instant later, there was a loud whirring—the explosive, nerve-wracking sound quail make when a covey takes off and, on the stage, a covey of six artificial quail arose and flew away. “Interesting, eh?” Overman asked.

“Quite,” Doc agreed. “Have you now satisfied yourself there is no one here?”

“Not entirely,” Overman said. He went around to the other side of the stage and looked there; he returned to the front of the gallery, peered under a counter, examined the interior of a cabinet. He said, “Why haven't the police questioned me in connection with Sam Karen's death?”

“I wouldn't know.” Doc was a little surprised at the question.

“Who was Sam Karen?” Overman demanded.

“Don't you know?”

“I have no idea.”

Doc said, “According to my information, Sam Karen was an extraordinarily good private investigator called in by the governor to make an investigation of Jones.”

“For God's sake!” Overman's face suddenly became sick in the hard light from the electric bulbs overhead. “I thought—he was a criminal.”

“Is that why you went to Hazard's office this morning?”

Overman snapped tight. It was a visible thing, like a drawing of rubber bands all through his chubby body. “I—don't know what you're talking about,” he said tensely.

“Where were you, Overman, between seven and seven-ten this morning?”

Overman moistened his lips. “Let me think about this,” he said.

OVERMAN opened one of the gun cabinets and took out a revolver, a Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum—the gun, Doc reflected, that almost put bulletproof vests out of style. He watched Overman as closely as it was possible to do so, acutely aware of the tingling sensation at his hair roots.

Overman threw a switch and the target mechanism began whirring.

Doc said, “With that cannon, aren't you afraid the bullets will glance back and do some damage?”

“It's steel-lined back there,” Overman mumbled. His thoughts were obviously not on his words. He added, “Why don't you take a gun and try it.”

Doc picked up a revolver, another .357 Magnum. He immediately felt better with it in his hands. There was, he could not help feeling, something wrong with all of this.

Overman's gun had a grip adaptor on it which widened the grip for his thick, rather large hand. In a moment, the quail covey flashed up. Overman fired four times, and to Doc's astonishment, got two of the quail. It would have been a fairly ordinary feat with a shotgun, but with a revolver it was extraordinary.

“Care to try it?” Overman asked.

Doc prepared himself for the quail, but instead a rabbit shot into view; he got the rabbit with one shot; a deer followed instantly, and he knocked the deer down, only, to his amazement, to have it jump up and leap out of sight realistically.

Overman explained about the deer. “If you hit it in a vulnerable place, like the heart, brain or spine, it stays down. Otherwise it is only knocked down and gets up again.”

“Who thought up this thing?”

“Hazard, I imagine.”

Doc said, “Let's have the quail.” He reloaded, waited; the quail came up—from different spots than they

had appeared before—and he got four of them with four shots.

"For God's sake!" Overman was impressed. "That's the damndest shooting I ever saw. Four of them with four shots! Brother, the best I ever did was three, and I'm former pistol champ of the state. Could you do that again?"

"Probably not," Doc said. "What was the idea of our coming out here? Was it to talk?"

"Of course."

"I was beginning to think," Doc said, "that it might be something else."

"Meaning you feel I'm not going to tell you why I was at Hazard's office this morning?"

"Are you?"

"Yes. Sam Karen telephoned me to come."

OVERMAN put his revolver back in the cabinet, took Doc's weapon and returned it to the cabinet also. He closed the cabinet, wheeled and faced Doc.

"I did not know Sam Karen personally," he said. "I had heard of him—heard reports of a strange man snooping around town and behaving mysteriously. But I did not know Karen was a detective, and did not know it until you told me a moment ago. . . . Now, a bit after six this morning, I received a telephone call, a man's voice, giving the name of Sam Karen, and asking me—ordering me, would be a better description for the way it was put—to come down to Hazard's office. And damned quick. That was the way it was put—and damned quick. I refused, naturally, and asked why should I do that for a man I did not know. He put it another way, as a threat, and I became curious, dressed, got in my car, drove downtown and went to the office. It was locked. I knocked several times, waited, knocked again, then I left. I did not go in. I drove home, somewhat angry with myself, and got a little sleep, was an hour late at my office, reaching there at ten. That is the story. Do you think the police will believe it?"

Doc asked dryly, "That is the truth?"

"Yes."

"Then why shouldn't the police believe it?"

Overman moistened his lips, "I merely asked you. Will they?"

"You had better get hold of a mind-reader. . . . You say this voice, which said it was Sam Karen's voice, threatened you?"

"In a sense, I meant. Actually, I suppose it was not, and I merely got that feeling."

"What were the exact words?"

"I—do not recall."

Doc's stare gave the man no friendliness. "You had better recall. It is just possible, you know, that the phone line was tapped." Doc's tone, expression, manner, gave the impression the line *had* been tapped without directly saying so.

“Tapped! Great God, why should—” Overman fell silent. His hands wandered nervously, seemed not to know where to go, finally dived into his pockets and came out with the whiskey jigger he had used in his trick that afternoon. “I was seen going to Hazard's office—that means observation.” He frowned heavily. “You only got into town at noon. What did you do? Send agents into town ahead of you?”

Doc said, “You might be wrong about where my information came from. . . . Is your memory about that going to improve?”

The round man's eyes fell. “I—Sam Karen—or the voice—said if I didn't want a certain thing to happen, I had better come down.”

“And the certain thing was?”

Overman swallowed. “I do not like to say this—it goes against my grain, against my pride, and I find it particularly difficult because it touches someone very close to me.”

“Your daughter?”

Overman stiffened. He was hit hard; shock lashed his face, wildness lunged into his eyes. “How—did you know that?” he gasped.

“Then it was Lorna?”

“How did you know?” Overman's voice was heavy, rasping, intense.

“It was a guess, was all,” Doc said. “Come on out with the rest of it. I can understand your reticence about something touching you as closely as that, but it happens Sam Karen was murdered.”

“But—”

“What did Sam Karen, or the voice claiming to be Sam Karen, say?”

“I—that if I didn't want my daughter involved in a serious matter, I had better come down there and have a talk.”

“What else?”

“That was all.”

“What else?” Doc repeated.

“I tell you—”

“All you're going to, I see,” Doc said sharply. “All right, Overman, You've told the story you intended to tell, haven't you?”

“I've told you everything!”

Showing angry disbelief with facial expression, set of shoulders, Doc said harshly, “You expect me to believe that?” He seemed about to say more, looked at Overman as if words were going to explode, his face growing darker with feeling. In the end, he said nothing. He wheeled and left.

AT the house, a servant told him another servant was looking for him, and they looked through rooms,

finding the first servant walking through the crowd which was still at the barbecue area, carrying a note on a silver tray.

The message said:

MR. WALLET OF THE CAPITOL USED CAR LOT WISHES TO SEE MR. SAVAGE IMMEDIATELY ON A MATTER OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.

“Who wrote this?”

“I did, sir. I took the message over the phone.” The servant was a tall young man with a sloping chin and large eyes.

“What kind of a voice was it?”

“A—well—a rather squeaky voice, sir.”

Doc Savage nodded, satisfied with the voice description, for Monk Mayfair—who as Mr. Wallet was operating the used car concern—had a voice that in many respects resembled the sound of a nail being pulled out of green lumber.

“Thank you,” Doc said. “Can you tell me where I might find a telephone?”

“The house, sir.” The servant hesitated uncomfortably. “But, to tell the truth, someone just said the line was out or order. They might have been mistaken, though.”

“When did that happen? That message came by telephone, didn't it?”

“Yes, sir. But at least fifteen minutes ago. I have been hunting everywhere for you.”

“Let's have a listen to the telephone,” Doc said briefly.

His listening to the telephone did nothing, did not even satisfy his curiosity as to what was wrong, whether the wire was cut or normally out of order. He surmised, from the sounds in the receiver, that it was grounded somewhere—and not very close to the estate. It was a country line, and as such, inclined to pick up power-line hum and other odds and ends of interference.

He found Paul Ben Hazard.

PAUL BEN HAZARD was holding court. He perched, a stein of beer in one hand, on the corner of an outdoor table, and was speaking to an attentive group which included Arno and his wife, Smokey, Mrs. Overman—who was the only one who seemed even slightly disinterested—and some others. The subject the master was dissertating upon, Doc concluded, was lying.

Hazard said, “I prefer making somewhat of a ceremony out of the act, saying and doing precisely the opposite of what genuine feelings dictate. That, my friends, is the excuse for a lie. It does not, in that case, mean that one is merely stooping to hypocrisy and insincerity, because the deception is, in such instance, a deliberate and sincere act, lying and acting with foresight and forethought, planned, and therefore it is not prevarication because it is sincerely done.”

Doc decided it was not making sense, probably would not make sense, and interrupted.

“What are the chances of borrowing a car and chauffeur to run me into town?” Doc asked.

Hazard waved a hand idly. “Certainly. You may have one of mine. You're not leaving so early?”

“Yes, I'm leaving.”

Hazard smiled vaguely. “You have accomplished your purpose of the evening so soon?”

“I think it was accomplished for me,” Doc said. “Or *on* me, would be a better way of putting it.”

Chapter XI

MONK MAYFAIR disliked indirection. Restraint and planning did not sit well with his nature; he definitely preferred to take the most direct line to a goal, and didn't mind the going a little rough. But the calculated scheme, the holding back, the wary approach, did not appeal to him at all.

It was well past midnight, the city was quiet, and there was, wherever streetlights did not dispell it, rather black darkness. There was no moon. Doc Savage drove silently. He had had Paul Ben Hazard's chauffeur drop him at the hotel, where he had picked up the car he had rented earlier from Monk.

Monk said, for the fourth or fifth time, “I sure never telephoned you, Doc.”

Doc Savage was not surprised now, nor had he seemed surprised at any time. He asked, “What was that address?”

“Twelve-ten Putnam Street,” Monk said. “You said the servant claimed it was my voice?”

“He described your voice, or a reasonable imitation of it.”

“Well, I didn't telephone.”

“Maybe no one did.”

“Huh?”

Ahead, on the south side of the street, a rather imposing building appeared—the telephone building—and Doc swung about in the deserted street to park in front of it. He explained, “The whole thing may have been framed at the estate. . . . We'll go in and see the wire chief about that wire trouble.”

They spent ten minutes or so identifying themselves to the night wire chief and arguing the man into divulging information. “That circuit seems to be out,” the wire chief confessed finally.

“Get a resistance measurement on it,” Doc suggested. “That should tell about where it is grounded or open.”

The wire chief used his instruments, did some calculating, consulted the circuit diagrams and reported, “There's a ground on it, all right. It's about eighteen miles out.”

Doc put a finger on the map near the Hazard estate. “About here?”

“That's right.”

“Would there be any record of calls on that circuit just prior to the trouble?”

“No, not unless they were long-distance. That's a dial circuit, and there ain't no record kept unless, like I say, it's a long-distance call, then it goes through the operators.”

When they were out of the telephone building, in the dark quiet street, Monk said, “Doc, something was pulled on you. They faked a message to get you into town.”

“Obviously.” Doc got into the car. “Where is Ham staying?”

“We got a room over on High Street, joint called the Plaza Southern Hotel. The place is a first-rate flea bag, and I only insisted on putting up there to irritate Ham. I frequently wish to God I hadn't.”

HAM BROOKS, eminent attorney, was a slender, dapper man with a wide mobile orator's mouth and a fund of words. He had been mentioned a few times around New York, where such things were sometimes considered important, as belonging to the mythical group of ten best-dressed men in the nation, and he valued this highly. He affected a Harvard accent and overdid it, and spent considerable time, that could have been better used at something else, thinking up snide tricks to perpetrate on Monk Mayfair.

He said, “Hello, Doc.” He leveled an arm at Monk and complained, “Cockroaches as big as sparrows have been walking around in here. I'm going to move out of here, that's what I'm going to do.”

Monk looked pleased. “You can't do that. This gummy hotel is part of our front.”

Doc Savage said, “Let's postpone the usual row for a minute. . . . Ham, Monk tells me you were checking on Georg Lanier.”

Ham nodded. “I've done as much as I could in a couple of hours.”

“Find out anything interesting?”

“I think so. Lanier is an old-line family around here. For generations, they have been as rich as dogs, but the present generation, of which Georg Lanier is the only sample currently in town, is strapped, or nearly so. Paul Ben Hazard, for instance, occupies the ancestral Lanier home.”

“I gathered that much,” Doc said. “What did you find out that hooks in with this thing?”

“Monk tells me the man who was murdered in Hazard's office, Sam Karen, was an investigator.”

“So Hazard said.”

“Georg Lanier has been seen with Sam Karen quite a bit lately.”

“Where?”

“Not socially,” Ham said. “Dinner twice this week, and once last week. Luncheon once.”

“How did you dig that up this time of night?”

“State Patrol officer Glenn Madison.”

“Oh, you talked to him?”

“Yes.”

“What else did you find out about Madison?”

“I think it might be all right to trust the kid,” Ham said thoughtfully. “Before I went down to State Police headquarters, I did some checking on Madison—it might have been tough, but here is a funny thing I found, which made it easy to get a general line on him: the kid's father, Buck Madison, used to be head of the State Patrol, and he was killed about three years ago in line of duty—if getting shot down when he was putting his car in the garage at home one night is line of duty.”

Doc glanced sharply at Ham. “Something was off-color about the killing?”

“They never caught the killer,” Ham said. “But I haven't gone into it very deeply yet. No time. The point is that Glenn Madison seems to be packing some feeling about the killing of his father—what kind of a feeling exactly, I can't make out. Anyway, he's bitter toward someone too high to be touched, I suspect.”

“Did Glenn Madison become a cop before or after his father was killed?” Doc asked curiously.

“Before. He was a rookie then. And he's still a patrolman—made no advancement whatever, although I understand he's made top scores in all the examinations, and his record is far above average.”

“Sounds as if he was all right.”

“Uh-huh. Somehow, I got the idea he'd like to be on our side.”

“Let him know that is okay with us,” Doc said.

Ham nodded. “I sort of gave him the idea already.”

DOC SAVAGE went to the window, stood looking down at the side-street below, cheap and uninviting even in the darkness. He glanced into the west, watching the faint flicker of lightning, and decided it was not heat lightning, but a line of thunderstorm along an approaching cold front. It was too distant as yet to hear thunder.

He began speaking, and told, quietly, the general story of what had happened from the time he had been maneuvered into joining the Overman party in the Dugout bar, carrying it through his meeting with Smokey and Georg Lanier, with the Overmans, the Arnos, the encounter with the filthy little Oliver Polki, through Polki's murder and through the rest. Without using too many words, he highlighted the point that were, or might be, important. About Overman—Overman was scared, and he hated Georg Lanier, and the story he had told of his visit to Hazard's office to see Sam Karen had been just enough of a story to serve as an explanation, hardly enough to be an alibi. About Georg Lanier—Georg Lanier hated Paul Ben Hazard because Hazard was now the tenant of the Lanier family home. Doc said, “That seems a thin reason for Lanier to hate him, but it fits in with Lanier's character. Why Overman hates Lanier—that might be because Lanier seems quite fond of Overman's daughter—and I think that is the reason. But why Overman considers Georg Lanier unsuitable remains a mystery.

“Arno may fit in somewhere,” Doc continued. “He is apparently a radical of the old down-with-the-aristocrats school. It's a little mysterious why he dislikes Georg Lanier, which he does, since Lanier is not any longer wealthy. Something else might account for the dislike. Arno is, incidentally, a trifle crude and not very likeable.”

Doc smiled wryly and said, “There is Hazard of course. Hazard perhaps means something without exactly meaning anything specific, which, standing by itself, is a titillating and a hinting—what at, I don't know—and it is worthless without more, either information or developments or both, to back whatever it

is up, and it may be nothing."

Ham blinked. "He affect you that way?"

"He tries to?"

"Tries?"

"I think our Paul Ben Hazard is ninety per cent actor, but a good one," Doc said.

"You mean he's a goof by choice, but not a genuine one?"

"Something like that."

Monk Mayfair grunted, rubbed his jaw, asked, "Do you mind if I toss in a thought at this point?" Doc said go ahead and toss, and Monk said, "Doc, I got a feeling something was being pulled on you out there tonight."

"I had the same feeling," Doc said.

"But where the hell does Jones come in?" Ham demanded. "So far there's been Jones, Jones, Jones—and yet no Jones. Just a kind of a rumor, that scares people."

THEY discussed plans. Monk said that Oliver Polki getting murdered had blown up his first attempt to give the impression that he and Ham were organizing a gang of crooks to cash in on the Jones scare that was going around. "What do we do now?" Monk asked. "Find some other guy to approach?"

Doc shook his head. "I think that accomplished its purpose."

"Huh?"

"A lot more quickly than we expected."

Monk frowned. "But I don't see . . ."

"It jolted them—if this Jones is more than one person, or more than one person of which he is one—into moving in a hurry," Doc explained. "The murder of that fellow Polki was such a hurried move, and as a result it was poorly planned. It was done superficially enough that the fact that it was a murder stood out almost at once. Hurried moves are never well-planned. It is an impossibility. So, if we can keep the scene upset, it is fairly certain that Jones is going to betray himself—or herself."

"Holy blazes, you don't think it is a woman?"

"Have you heard of the girl I mentioned, the one they call Smokey?"

"No."

"Check on her," Doc said. "Her name is Kurnitz, she said. She was with Georg Lanier when they showed up at the beginning of the evening, but it seemed to be casual—no particular affection between them. Check on that, though."

Ham said, "I'll do that."

"The hell you will," Monk said. "Every time a babe shows up, you want to do the checking."

Impatiently, Doc advised, “You had better keep your eyes open—you're not working undercover any longer.”

“That,” Ham said, “is another thing. How did they get wise to us, do you suppose?”

Doc said it might not be too mysterious. “After all, you two aren't exactly unknown around over the country—and as soon as I showed up, or as soon as this Jones knew I was going to be on the case, some checking would naturally be done on what you looked like. In a city this size, the chances of Jones finding you immediately, even with your descriptions, was not too good. But the minute I visited the used-car lot, they might have spotted you by following me. Again, they may have spotted you in the course of your investigation.”

“In other words, we flopped,” Monk said glumly.

“Not at all.”

“I don't see where we dug up a damned thing.”

“Oliver Polki—you dug him up, didn't you?” Doc said. “I'm inclined to believe the whole blowup, when it comes, is going to swing on Polki.”

“How do you figure that?”

“I think,” Doc said, “I'm going to be framed for Polki's murder.”

HAM BROOKS, when the meaning of the statement got straight in his mind, gave Doc an open mouth, then a grunt of disbelief. “Lay Polki's death onto you? How could—well, grant that they could try, why should they?”

Doc frowned, said, “I've had an idea in the back of my mind. Let's try checking it.” He went to the telephone, got the hotel operator—who was evidently also the night clerk—and asked for long distance. An argument followed, and terminated only when he told Monk, “You'd better go down and establish credit with the desk clerk—he's afraid we will run up a long-distance bill on him.” Monk went downstairs, and presently Doc got hold of the long-distance operator. He asked for Johnny Littlejohn in New York City, giving a number at which he might be found.

William Harper Littlejohn, one of the group of five specialists who customarily worked with Doc Savage, was an archaeologist. The other two members of the five-group, the electrical expert, Long Tom Roberts, and the engineer, John Renwick, were currently in Europe. Littlejohn was a big-worded man with a resounding voice that belied his physical construction, for he was as thin as a rail and remarkably emaciated looking.

Johnny came on the wire presently, and Doc said, “I want you to check on the known employees of a private investigator named Sam Karen, killed here today. He is supposed to have headquarters in New York. Will you give it the quickest possible check, and call me here?” He gave Johnny the number.

“Have you fellows dug up some excitement out there?” Johnny demanded.

“Never mind that. Just give Sam Karen's working force, if any, a quick check and call us back.”

Doc hung up.

Ham said, “Let's hear some more about that imaginary frame-up, Doc. What gave you the idea?”

“The whole feel of the party out there tonight,” Doc said, after thinking about it. “There was something sinister about it, a feeing of maneuvering and machinations, of tensions and hates and plans. None of it open and aboveboard, not much of it quite tangible—the murder was tangible enough, of course. Take the way Overman conducted me to the target range, for instance. There was something behind that—he didn't just take me down there to show me the shooting gallery and tell me that half story he told. I had that feeling.”

Incidentally, Doc added, he wanted a close watch put on Overman. Even if Overman found out he was being watched, or was told, it might stir the man up to the point of betraying himself, if there were anything to betray.

The thunderstorm which had been in the distance was now coming closer; they could hear the heavy bumping of thunder, and once it was strong enough to make the window rattle uneasily.

Monk, looking alarmed, dug into his baggage and got out a bulletproof vest, a lightweight garment of interwoven chain mesh, which he proceeded to don under his shirt. “I'm beginning to have a feeling we've been sucked into something that was all prepared for us,” he said.

Finally, when the telephone rang, it was not Johnny Littlejohn calling back. It was the State Trooper, Glenn Madison.

“Want to take a little ride with me, Mr. Savage?” Trooper Madison asked. “I think it would be a good idea.”

“I'm waiting for a telephone call.”

“Going with me might be a good idea.” There was more than an undertone of urgency in the officer's voice.

“Is the reason a secret?”

“No. . . . Did you know there was a shooting gallery, kind of an underground target range, in an old root cellar, out at Hazard's place?”

“Yes. I was in it earlier tonight.”

“You may wish you hadn't been. . . . Georg Lanier was killed in there tonight.”

DOC SAVAGE gripped the telephone for a moment. “Come past and pick me up,” he said, and hung up slowly. He turned to Monk and Ham, said, “If Johnny's call doesn't come in from New York before I leave, one of you stay here and take it for me. I have a hunch it might be important—and I'm going to need something important.”

“What's happened?”

“I think,” Doc said grimly, “that the trap has been sprung on me.”

Chapter XII

STATE PATROLMAN GLENN MADISON was not driving a police car. It was a coupé, small, rather old. He said, “I'm supposed to be off duty. In other words, this isn't official. But I thought you might want

to go back out there."

"It might hurry things along a little," Doc said.

Madison seemed surprised. "If you want them hurried."

"Sometimes it helps."

That was all Madison had to say until they had gone about five miles. The rain came, first in hard wind-driven flurries, and there was a little hail; then it settled into a downpour, and driving was difficult. Madison drove, grim-faced, hunched forward over the wheel. Suddenly he said, "They did an autopsy on that Polki fellow. They found the spine of an ice pick in his brain."

"And not much water in his lungs."

"That's right. He didn't drown. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Yes, I told you he did not drown, remember?"

"I don't mean that—I mean you knew about the ice pick?"

"Yes."

"How come?"

Doc Savage produced the ice-pick handle—but not the fragment of woman's pastel handkerchief—and gave the ice pick, wrapped in Doc's own handkerchief, to the State Patrolman. He explained how, a few minutes after the little bum, Oliver Polki, had been found dead in the pond, Doc had heard the hound snuffling around in the darkness and investigated.

The Patrolman stopped the car to listen, muttering, "It's raining too hard to drive anyway."

Doc Savage said, "There is nothing remarkable about the dog wanting to dig that ice-pick handle up—dogs often like to dig up things that people bury, just as they dig up objects, bones usually, that other dogs bury. But the point is that a clever district attorney could make the story sound pretty thin in court."

"You suppose there's any fingerprint on this?"

"Unlikely. But you might have it gone over. That's why I am giving it to you."

"I'll go over it myself."

Doc looked at him sharply—lashing bursts of lightning were illuminating the officer's face fitfully—and asked, "Don't you trust the State Police bureau of criminal identification?"

Glenn Madison transferred the ice-pick handle to his own handkerchief, wrapped it carefully, pocketed it, and returned Doc's handkerchief. His movements were slow. He said, "I don't know what I trust. If you want it straight—I wouldn't go too far with some guys who wear police uniforms. But I don't know why. I can't prove anything. Oh, minor infractions, a drink on duty now and then; little things like that. But nothing important."

"You're bitter," Doc said.

Madison admitted it freely. "You're damned right I'm bitter," he said. He put the car in gear, and it began

moving through the rain, which now came down less violently. “You hear about my father?”

“I heard he was murdered about three years ago,” Doc said. “I didn't hear why.”

“Nobody heard why,” the young officer said harshly.

“Do you know?”

Madison jammed his foot down on the accelerator. “I don't know anything I've got guts enough to tell,” he said.

THE Hazard estate was quiet—and brightly lighted; every room in the mansion, every path, every outbuilding, glowed brightly. But nowhere was there movement nor sign of life until they walked, passing two State Patrol cars and three other automobiles, to the former root cellar that had been made into a target range.

Georg Lanier had not been moved. A thin young man and a heavier older one in plain clothes, and another man in State Police uniform were taking photographs, making measurements and drawing diagrams. Lanier's body was to the rear, in the recess by the target stage; he had been shot once and quite expertly in the back of the head.

Sheriff Ab Powell was in the group, and Chadwick, the coroner. There was a man from the Attorney General's office, and another from the county attorney's office. Glenn Madison introduced Doc Savage around, and some of those he met seemed pleased, and some of them not, and they were all, in one way or another, impressed.

Doc asked, “What was he shot with?”

Sheriff Powell scowled. “This,” he said. He indicated a .357 Magnum revolver lying on a cloth beside a ballistics specialist's comparison microscope on the counter-like table at the firing end of the target range. “Don't touch it,” he added.

Doc moved back and looked at the gun. It had not, he saw, been printed. And it was the gun he had used to fire at the target during the course of his visit to the range with Overman.

“How can you be sure this is the gun?” he asked. “There is more than one .357 Magnum here.”

“The ballistics man is checking it now,” Sheriff Powell said.

The coroner, Chadwick, said, “We got the bullet that killed him. Norsinger, the ballistics man, is—”

“Got the bullet where?” Doc said sharply. “You don't mean to tell me a bullet from a .357 Magnum remained in the body, fired at that short range? It wasn't in the body, was it?”

“It's the bullet that killed him,” Powell growled.

“Out of the body?”

“Sure, it came out of the body,” said the Sheriff, his scowl darkening. “Listen, who are you to—”

“Where did you get that bullet?”

The coroner, Chadwick, said, “Out of the wall, Mr. Savage. Directly above where the body fell, so there

is no doubt but that it is the bullet that killed him."

"You'd better be sure of that." Doc swung on the county attorney. "Check your evidence carefully there," he advised. "This is a shooting range, and there might logically be bullets embedded anywhere in that end of the place."

"You seem rather emphatic," the attorney said dryly.

"And why not?" Doc demanded. "I fired that revolver earlier in the evening, and my fingerprints are going to be on it, probably."

"That's mighty interesting," the sheriff said unpleasantly.

NORSINGER, the ballistics man, came in with apparatus for firing and recovering a test bullet from the suspected revolver.

Doc said sharply, "I thought this stuff was usually laboratory work."

"It is," Norsinger said. He seemed a pleasant man. "But it was suggested I make a check here to save time."

"Whose suggestion was that?"

Sheriff Powell said, "Norsinger, this guy is a suspect. Don't go giving him any information."

Doc said, "So it was the sheriff."

Norsinger grinned without humor. He said, "You want to check the markings on the evidence to see that it's regulation?"

"You bet I do." Doc examined, but did not touch, identification markings on the bullets, the gun, the gun chambers, and found everything correctly done. There was a definite technique to such evidence collection; a dumb investigator, if he scratched identification marks on the side of a fired bullet instead of directly on the nose, for instance, could destroy land-markings beyond comparison identification; occasionally they were stupid enough to wire identification tags to the bullets, which was not only identification that could be changed, but would also destroy valuable markings.

"Good work," Doc said. "That's probably the gun that was used, but let's make sure."

Sheriff Powell snorted.

"I want a dermal nitrate test made of this guy," he said. He said it loudly, as if he was proud of knowing what a dermal nitrate test was.

"That's fine," Doc said. "And then I want a dermal nitrate run on everyone on the estate tonight."

Powell started. "Who the hell are you giving orders?"

"You refuse?" Doc asked ominously.

The sheriff had his mouth open—he was going to refuse—when the county attorney, who would have to prosecute the case, said hastily, "Make the test on everyone, as he says, Sheriff."

“I don't see why in the hell—”

The county attorney scowled. “You will,” he said, “when a smart defense attorney gets you on the stand and starts going over you.”

Disgruntled, the sheriff told a State Patrol officer, “I reckon we'd better do it, then.”

DOC SAVAGE caught Glenn Madison's eye, indicated that he wished to confer privately, and the young state patrolman followed him outside. When they were alone, Doc asked, “Mind sticking around and keeping an eye on that fellow Powell for me?”

“I don't mind, and I think it would be a good idea,” Madison agreed.

“Know anything about the sheriff that I ought to know?”

“I guess you've pretty well got his measure.”

“Meaning?”

“You can see how he stacks up.”

“I can see he is out to hang this on me,” Doc said. “But what I'm wondering is why.”

“I'm wondering the same thing.”

“All right, if you don't know,” Doc said. “And I appreciate your help on this.”

“I'm not doing you any favor,” Madison said. “What are you going to do? Push a separate routine investigation of this murder yourself?”

Doc shook his head. “An up-to-date scientific murder investigation is too much for one man. What I'm going to do is needle them enough to see that a thorough investigation is made, and get a friend of mine out here, who is one of the best attorneys in the business, to help with the needling.”

“You mean Ham Brooks?”

“Yes.” Doc looked sharply at Madison. “Incidentally, how did you know where to telephone me before we came out here?”

“Oh, that. . . . One of your friends talked to me, and mentioned the address. Said for me to call there if anything came up.”

Doc nodded. “Well, we appreciate your help. And I hope you get justice.”

“Justice?”

“That's what you're looking for, isn't it?”

“That's right, I guess.”

BY daylight—it was still raining; the rain was coming down so gently that it seemed hardly to fall at all, but quite a bit of water was reaching the ground—the investigation had taken a pattern, and had already

entered the most aggravating stage of any investigation. The crime had been committed, the heat of excitement, the bustle of detectives getting on the job, had subsided; now it seemed to be nothing but waiting, with little being done. Actually this was untrue, Doc felt, for the real progress in an investigation comes after everyone has settled down to work.

A man from the state police bureau of investigation finished the dermal nitrate test—coating the backs of the fingers and hand up to about the wrist with paraffin which had been heated to about 150 degrees, layering the cast to a thickness of about an eighth of an inch, letting it cool, peeling it off, and treating it with Lunge's reagent. The presence of nitrates, burned powder particles, would be disclosed by the Lunge test; it was a fairly positive check on whether the person being tested had fired a gun recently, because the burned gases from the breech would make an invisible, often microscopically fine, nitrate deposit in the powder fumes.

Of those who admitted being at the Hazard estate at the probable time of the murder, positive tests showed up on Peter Overman, Ollie the gardener, Lorna Overman, Paul Ben Hazard, and Doc Savage—who stated flatly he did not know whether he had been on the estate or not, since the time of Georg Lanier's death had not been announced.

“But I haven't fired a gun in weeks!” Lorna Overman gasped.

“By golly, I ain't either,” insisted Ollie, the gardener.

“I'm going to add my name to the innocent list,” stated Paul Ben Hazard. “There must be something wrong with the test. How could it show three of us have fired guns when we haven't?” He smiled vaguely, added, “That is a check on nitrates, isn't it? What would it show if I had been handling commercial fertilizer—which Ollie and I have, incidentally.”

The bureau of investigation man said, “The test doesn't prove gunpowder exclusively. Firecrackers, for instance, and fertilizer handling will show on the test as well.”

Hazard nodded. “That clears Ollie and me, then. Ollie asked me about some new fertilizer, and showed me samples of it. That's what did it.”

Doc turned to Lorna Overman. “What about you, Miss Overman?”

She was pale. “I—I don't understand it. I haven't fired a gun.”

“Handled any of this commercial fertilizer?”

“No.”

She was nervous. Doc glanced at her father, Peter Overman, and was startled at the man's paleness, the look of stark fear on his face. The emotion seemed beyond any called for by a positive reaction to the dermal nitrate test—which after all was not conclusive, but merely contributing circumstantial evidence.

HAM BROOKS arrived shortly thereafter, responding to a telephone call Doc had made. Ham said, “I got a little information for you, Doc.” They found a private spot, and Ham added, “I got a call from Johnny in New York. He said he was a little slow because this Sam Karen's detective agency was reluctant about giving out information concerning its operatives, and had to be convinced. But he dug it out of them?”

“And . . . ?”

“You know the little guy who was killed early last night—Oliver Polki?”

“He was one of Sam Karen's agents?”

“He was one of—hey! You knew it already!”

“Only a guess.”

Ham was surprised. “Well, it was a hot piece of guessing, all right. Oliver Polki's real name was Dave Hesse, and he was Sam Karen's right-hand investigator. They were here on this case together.”

“Well, that makes sense,” Doc said. “It fits in.”

“Fits in with what? It didn't fit in with anything for me. . . . Whoee! Who is the girl? Is that—”

“Lorna Overman,” Doc said. “Come on. I want to ask her a couple of questions privately.”

“That's what I'd like to do, too,” Ham said.

They intercepted Lorna Overman, who was moving toward the house. She looked tired, and fright overlay the fatigue. She seemed relieved to see Doc Savage. “I'm scared, Mr. Savage,” she said tensely. “I—I think they suspect me of—of mur—of being responsible for poor Georg's death.”

“Would you mind answering a couple of questions?”

“About Georg? We were friends, you know. But Georg and I weren't—in love. Nothing like that. Georg was fun, but—”

“These questions aren't about Georg Lanier,” Doc said. “Except for this—why was your father so upset last night? I mean, specifically, as an example when he was on the point of slamming me over the head with a gas pipe, thinking I was Georg Lanier.”

She looked at him steadily, shook her head. “I don't know why. If that sounds like a lie—I still don't know why.” When he did not speak, she became increasingly unnerved, finally said, “He never did anything like that before, and it upset me. You saw the slapping incident? It was unbelievable. I don't know what got into us.”

“When,” Doc asked, “did you first notice this attitude of your father toward Georg Lanier?”

Lorna Overman gripped Doc's arm excitedly. “That's another thing! Two days ago, day before yesterday, Dad's way toward Georg Lanier changed suddenly.”

“Prior to that he had liked Lanier?”

“Yes, in a lukewarm way. He didn't think Georg was of much account, considering that he was a Lanier. But he hadn't disapproved of Georg—hadn't hated him.”

Doc Savage nodded, and shifted the subject. He asked, “How well do you remember every move you made last night?”

She tightened. “The police have been questioning—”

“Not this kind of question,” Doc said. “Who did you dance with last night?”

LORNA OVERMAN was surprised. Pondering, she began naming dancing partners—Arno, a young man named Neff, Doc Savage, Georg Lanier, and two other men guests named Norton and Fredericks. "I think that is all," she said. "I didn't dance except when I was forced into it. It seemed rather—well—ghastly, after that little man drowned in the lake."

Doc said, "Second question: Would you mind letting me know whether anyone could have gotten hold of your purse for a while last night?"

"At least twenty times," she said instantly. "I carry almost no money, and leave it lying around freely."

"Could I see it a moment?"

"Certainly."

The purse, a large one, was neatly designed and, Doc saw when he explored the contents, quite orderly inside. He gave attention to the compact, noted there was no handkerchief, examined the cake powder, tested the contents with his nostrils. He returned the purse.

He said, "One more question will probably do it—did anybody help you on or off with a coat tonight?"

She pondered. "Only once, I think. Mr. Hazard brought me a coat when the night got chilly."

"I imagine it turned out to be Smokey's coat," Doc remarked.

"Yes, it did. But how on earth did you know such an obscure thing?"

Doc explained, "Smokey had me hunting for it last night. And thank you, Miss Overman."

Chapter XIII

HAM BROOKS, much impressed, watched Lorna Overman move away. "What a lovely girl, what an utterly lovely girl," he said. "She would come close to being the most beautiful I have seen." A moment later, as an afterthought, he added, "I'm glad Monk isn't around here with that bawdy personality of his."

"Incidentally, where is Monk?" Doc asked.

"Doing that job you handed him, I guess," Ham said. "He was supposed to follow Overman—" Ham stiffened, said indignantly, "Say! That means the homely ape is around here somewhere, since Overman is here!"

"He had better be." Doc contemplated the surroundings, searching the shrubbery, the paths, the buildings. He saw no sign of Monk. "I wonder if he is actually out here. I wish we were sure."

"I haven't seen him."

Doc said, "It won't hurt to double up on this. So you had better take Overman, too."

"Take him?"

“Follow him. Keep an eye on him every minute, every second, in fact.”

“You think Overman is . . . ?”

“The key that will unlock this thing,” Doc said. “Or rather, the key that will lock up the mythical Jones.”

“Mythical? You mean—”

“Psst!” Doc said. “Here comes that pest.”

Ham looked at Smokey, grinned, said, “I could stand being pestered by that.”

Smokey came up. There was plenty of verve and life in her, although somewhat less than there had been the night before. She made her usual descent on Doc, said a “Hello, darling, I was looking everywhere for you.”

“Smokey, this is Mr. Brooks.” Doc was uncomfortable. “Mr. Brooks is an eminent lawyer, would be quite wealthy if he would work at it, and he was struck with admiration at the sight of you.”

“That's nice,” Smokey fluttered her eyelids at Ham. “That's awfully nice, but is he tight with his money?”

“Not a bit tight,” Doc said hastily.

Smokey gave Ham her hand. “What's the matter with Mr. Savage?” she asked. “He spent most of last night escaping from me. He acts like someone who hasn't been told about women.”

Doc looked embarrassed, then thoughtful, and asked, “Smokey, who asked you to pick me up last night?”

“In the Dugout, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“You don't think it was my idea?”

“No. Was it?”

Smokey shook her head. “It was Georg Lanier's idea. Georg was with me, you remember.”

“Any idea why Georg suggested it?”

“Look, I may not seem innocent, but I am.”

“No notion why Georg was killed?” Doc asked.

“Well, it's obvious he was tangled up with something, and I think it was this Jones thing. You have heard of Jones?”

Doc nodded. “Heard of Jones—has anyone been able to say more than that?”

Smokey shrugged. “By the way, I'm overlooking something. You know that good-looking young cop—I think his name is Glenn Madison? He wants to see you. He said it was important.”

STATE PATROLMAN GLENN MADISON, his face strained and damp from the drizzling rain, came

forward and gripped Doc Savage's arm.

“They're closing in on us,” he said. “They got that ice pick handle.”

Doc frowned. “How? You had possession of the thing, didn't you?”

“It was in my car. They searched the car.”

“Who?”

“The sheriff. Powell.”

“Why did he search your car?”

“I'm damned if I know what gave him the idea. But it was given him. He is incapable of an original thought and he wouldn't try something on the state police unless the idea was planted in his head.”

“You think Powell is working with Jones?” Doc demanded.

The young officer swore bitterly. “Hell, isn't it obvious?”

“Well, I wouldn't worry too much about it,” Doc said. “You're an officer, and you had a right to the ice-pick handle. It is evidence.”

“That ain't all.”

“No?”

“The sheriff has another hot idea, and he's sold it to everybody. You know that bit of cloth that was on the fishhook as bait? Well, Powell has decided it came off a woman's handkerchief, and he's got his finger on Lorna Overman as the owner of the handkerchief.”

“She is,” Doc said.

“For God's sake! You knew about the handkerchief?”

“Yes. Also, I have the rest of the handkerchief.”

“You—but great grief! If they should happen to search you and find that on you, Powell would slam you in jail. You had better give it to me. I'll think of a way of turning it in as evidence—”

“Are they questioning Miss Overman?”

“Yes. But give me—”

Doc said, “Let's stand in on the questioning. I'm curious about certain people's reactions to it.”

LORNA OVERMAN stood in the big hall, the one where Doc had last night found Georg Lanier scowling and unhappy over the occupancy of the family mansion by Paul Ben Hazard. She was saying, “I had such a handkerchief, and it could have been the one from which that bit of cloth came.”

Sheriff Powell yelled, “And you don't know what became of it?” His tone gave the impression that he didn't believe it.

“I have no idea.”

The state police, the man from the county attorney's office, stood about, looking either suspicious or sorry for the girl.

“I'm damned if I understand why you didn't mention this earlier,” the sheriff shouted.

Lorna Overman turned frightened eyes to Doc Savage, and seemed encouraged by his nod, and more encouraged when Doc said quietly, “I talked to Miss Overman last night about the handkerchief, and she mentioned that it was missing.”

Powell glared. “The hell you did! And why were you so damned interested?”

“It seemed my business.”

“Business! By God, since when did—”

Paul Ben Hazard interrupted. He stood to one side, very tall, very somber, but bright interest in his eyes. “I think I've mentioned,” he said, “that Mr. Savage is a special investigator called in by the governor, through me, to do special work.”

The sheriff hesitated, scowled, looked thwarted. He opened his mouth, but closed it without saying anything. Paul Ben Hazard smiled slightly.

“How did you know about the handkerchief?” the sheriff bellowed finally.

“By using my eyes,” Doc said briefly. “Which, incidentally, is something you could have done. You saw the bit of cloth on the fishhook, didn't you?”

Powell became speechless with feeling.

Doc Savage was giving—without being obvious about it—close attention to Peter Overman. The fat man, Doc concluded, was utterly terrified. All along, Doc had suspected Overman of being scared. There was no longer the slightest doubt of it. Last night at the Dugout, Overman had been nervous, upset, and a little tight, whereas he didn't seem like a drinking man. Last night he had been frightened—the story Overman had told at the target range, Doc considered to be partly farce. Perhaps the story itself had been true, but the reasons behind it were enigmatic; the ones Overman had given—an alibi for the visit to Hazard's office at the time Sam Karen might have been killed—Doc did not believe were the real reasons for the talk. Why was Overman in the grip of terror now? He was not, apparently, a suspect in the deaths of either Sam Karen or Georg Lanier, any more than some others were. Not as much, for instance, as Doc himself. The hungry-looking Sheriff seemed intent on hanging the guilt on Doc Savage.

Doc turned to Hazard and said, “Thank you, Mr. Hazard, for vouching for me to Sheriff Powell.”

“Don't mention it,” Hazard said.

DOC SAVAGE left the group when Lorna Overman was released—they seemed to be through questioning here for the time being—and overtook the girl outside. He touched her arm, said, “I wouldn't be too upset about it.”

“But I'm frightened,” she said nervously. “I have the strangest feeling.”

He saw by her face that she was greatly upset. “What sort of feeling?”

She had some difficulty fitting it with words. “I—I don't know what is happening, and yet it seems to me that I'm part of it. That's what I mean.”

“That's probably right.”

She shuddered. “And you tell me not to worry.”

“That's right—look it in the eye,” Doc said reassuringly. “You're in the clear. And I don't think this is going to last much longer.”

Lorna stopped, put out her hand impulsively. “Thank you,” she said. “I have another feeling, too—that they're all afraid of you.”

“I hope the right one has reason to be,” Doc said. “Otherwise I've been wasting a lot of time.”

State Trooper Glenn Madison had followed them outside, and he watched Lorna Overman depart, his expression admiring. “She's a lovely girl,” he said. “And quite remarkable.”

“Remarkable?” Doc asked.

“Beautiful, I mean. And accomplished.”

Doc nodded. “It should mean a great deal to Mr. Overman to have such a daughter.”

“Yes, I should think so.”

Changing the subject, Doc remarked, “Paul Ben Hazard, speaking of remarkable people, isn't turning out to be quite as remarkable as I heard he was.”

The young officer grunted skeptically. “He's remarkable enough, all right.”

“Then perhaps his remarkableness last night and this morning consists of not being remarkable,” Doc suggested. “He was unusual enough when I first met him yesterday afternoon, though, so perhaps he is, as I said, being unusual by not being unusual on the theory that the conventional can be as unconventional as the unconventional when placed against a background of the unconventional.”

“You sound like they do when they talk about Hazard, anyway,” said young Madison.

“But not very cleverly.”

“Oh, I wouldn't say that.”

“Anyway,” Doc said, “everyone can take a rest from this sort of thing by this afternoon, I imagine.”

“What do you mean by that?” Glenn Madison seemed startled.

“Our Jones is about to come to light.”

“What!”

Doc nodded. “This afternoon, about four o'clock, I imagine, we can rest easy—with Jones in jail.”

Madison's eyes protruded. “God almighty, who—”

Doc put on what he hoped was a mysterious look and said, “Don't push me—mistakes make me embarrassed, and this just could be one. But by three o'clock this afternoon, this is going to be in the bag

if it works out, and by four we can start forgetting about it—although the forgetting may be a little tough. . . . In the meantime, would you do me a favor?"

"Sure I'll do you a favor," Madison said.

"Can you watch Lorna Overman without her knowing she is being watched?"

"But what about your two friends?"

"Monk and Ham? Ham is going to be busy keeping me out of jail—he's a lawyer, you know. And Monk doesn't seem to be around anywhere. Ham has been looking for him, trying to get hold of him, and can't locate him."

"Oh—you say you want me to watch the girl? . . . Sure. Sure, I'll do that. But—" His eyes got rounder; his mouth hung open for a few moments. "Mother of God, you don't mean to tell me she is—is Jones?"

"Didn't you say she is a remarkable girl?"

Madison licked his lips. "I—I didn't know she was that remarkable."

"The catch is that I can't prove it yet," Doc said. "But you keep an eye on her, and when three o'clock comes . . ." He moved his shoulders grimly.

Madison let a shocked breath run out between his teeth. His nod could hardly be called a nod, although he seemed to put considerable effort into it.

Chapter XIV

HAM BROOKS made a couple of discreet inquiries, and learned which car belonged to the Overmans. It was a rather large and impressive coupé which, he found, had been driven out to the estate early that morning by an employee of Overman's building contracting company, the employee then returning to town with someone. Ham, laying plans for the job of trailing Overman which Doc Savage had assigned to him in Monk's apparent absence, sauntered out to where the cars were, found Peter Overmans' coupé was concealed by some bushes bordering the driveway, and approached it furtively, after making sure the coast was clear. He circled to the rear, grasped the handle of the turtleback, and lifted it.

"Get outa here, you shyster!" a voice advised him unpleasantly.

"Monk!"

"Beat it," Monk said. "What are you trying to do, you shyster, gum up my job?"

"You're supposed to be following Overman."

"What do you think I'm doing?" Monk demanded. "This is his car, isn't it? If Overman leaves here, he might use it, mightn't he? Providing you're not standing there holding up that lid."

Confused, Ham said, "I'm supposed to follow him too, Doc said."

"Why two of us?"

"Doc didn't think you were on the job."

"You probably told him I wasn't. Listen, some day you go around undermining me, I'll step gently in your eye. Close that lid and get outa here."

Ham deliberately slammed the lid down so that it automatically locked. He listened to Monk's muffled profanity inside the baggage compartment for a few moments, then reluctantly turned the handle so that Monk could keep the lid open enough to get air, and escape if necessary. He said, “You would look better if there were bars on that thing,” and left, chuckling.

MONK watched Ham depart with satisfaction, feeling that he had outsmarted Ham in a trivial detail, since Monk had previously rigged the turtleback lock so that it could not lock him in. A pair of pliers and a hard twist at the fastener tongue had accomplished that, so he had not been locked in. The pleasure Monk got out of that was childish, but also psychologically sound, because he happened to know Ham Brooks was most irritated when slicked in small things. A big mistake growing out of an involved matter, Ham could dismiss as a reasonable error anyone could make; but a small dumb mistake he couldn't forget.

As further precaution, Monk had drilled two small holes, one on either side, in the body metal of the car, placing them where he could get his eye to them, and observe to a degree what went on outside. The drilling had been accomplished with a regulation breast drill which he had filched from a workshop presided over, he believed, by the gardener, Ollie. He had arranged a tool kit and a soiled blanket that had been in the turtleback into a pillow which supported his head comfortably near one of the observation holes. . . .

Fifteen minutes later—he judged it to be about that time; it was difficult to judge the passing of minutes where he was concealed—he saw Peter Overman and his daughter, Lorna, approaching.

The Overmans climbed in the coupé in silence. In a moment, the engine started, and the coupé moved along the graveled drive.

Wondering if Ham was following, Monk took a chance, and pried up the turtleback lid slightly. He saw no sign of another car trailing them, and concluded Doc had assigned Ham to another job.

The car turned on to the highway, toward town, and held a speed of, he judged, about fifty miles an hour. It ran quietly—but he could not hear a word from the Overmans, and presently he became quite concerned about that, wondering if some sort of freak soundproofing was making the voices inaudible.

They were nearly in the city before Lorna Overman spoke.

“Dad, why are you so worried?” It came out of her abruptly, tensely.

“Now, now, darling,” Overman said. “There's nothing to be so upset about. The whole thing is—well, quite awful, of course. But I think—you needn't worry.”

Bitterly, now, Lorna said, “You're not going to tell me, are you?”

“Tell you what?”

“Oh, stop it! I know when you're worried. I know all the signs, all the little things you do—and I've never seen you in the condition you're in now.”

Overman did not reply at once. When he spoke, it was heavily and he said, “My dear, if I'm worried, it is because of you—because of the way things were going back there, the ugly attitude the police seemed to have. Believe me, that is all, it really is.”

The girl did not speak again, and Monk was given time to mull over the heaviness in Overman's voice,

the bitter last-ditch desperation in it. He was puzzled by the mental sickness in the man's tone, and presently shocked by it.

Good God, the man sounds as if he believed his daughter was guilty of something, Monk thought, could the girl be the so-far mythical Jones? Monk lay back, knocked blank by the suspicion.

PETER OVERMAN turned the car into the driveway of a rather impressive home in the better-class residential district. He did not alight, however.

Lorna Overman got out.

She asked tensely, “Where are you going?”

“To the plant,” Overman said in a dull voice. “I will be back in—probably not more than two hours.”

That was all that was said. Overman backed the car out of the drive, turned west, and swung north on a boulevard. The car traveled with considerable speed now and, presently when it left the boulevard and took a more winding road, Monk lost track of where they were. Out of the city certainly. But he could not tell where, nor in what direction they were going—the small hole he had drilled in the car body offered a poor view of the sky, which was still smothered with dark stratus clouds from which the rain fell quietly.

It was uncomfortable under the turtleback. The road became rough, tossing Monk about; moreover, puddles of water were hit hard by the wheels, and seepage came in through a crack, wetting the baggage compartment floor, making a puddle in which Monk had to lie. He spent half an hour wishing the trip would come to an end, and finally it did.

Overman alighted at once, slammed the coupé door; his feet made mushy sounds going away from the car.

Monk, grimacing, grabbing the back of his neck—he had a cramp in his neck now—pressed an eye to the hole. He saw leaves, foliage. He tried the other side. Green leaves there, too. On both sides, bushes seemed to be within a yard of the car.

The plant—Overman had said he was going to the plant. But this didn't look like any plant. Of course, it could be. Monk lifted the turtleback lid cautiously.

There was a road, infrequently used, walled in thickly by brush and trees that certainly weren't cared-for shrubbery. Monk swung the lid higher and eased out.

The fine rain touched his face coolly, and there was no sound but the rain about him, the faint noise it made on the leaves, and the shuffling of the leaves in an almost imperceptible wind. Monk reached back into the compartment, got his hat, jammed it on his head, lowered the compartment cover, and moved around to the front of the car.

He found a path, after almost missing it. Overman had gone that way, he concluded; but, unsure of this, he moved along the path slowly; head bent, eyes searching for Overman's footprints.

“Huntin' somebody?”

Monk grunted with surprise, jerked up his head, found himself confronting a man he knew he had seen somewhere. He did not, for a moment, place the man. Then he did. Ollie.

“Oh, you're the gardener, “Monk said.

“You lookin' for me?” Ollie demanded.

“Not exactly. I—”

It got very black, most suddenly. There was, accompanying the darkness phenomena, the general impression that several violin strings had snapped simultaneously inside Monk's head, but this was of extremely brief duration, hardly measurable, and conceivable only as something that happened.

Chapter XV

MONK MAYFAIR, having given long and painful thought to the act, decided to get to his feet, and he did so very carefully; being no fool, he did not attempt to sit up first, for that would change the plane in which his head was lying. He planted both hands gently but firmly on the floor, and by a process of pushing and breath-holding and tongue-biting, managed to erect his body, keeping his head suspended in a world which was a torment, a hades infested with satans who had iron bells and sledgehammers for feet. He devoted further thought to the advisability of lifting his head, decided to take a chance. He lifted his head a quarter of an inch, with the result that it came loose and rolled all over a rather grimy room before it landed back on his shoulders, filled with hornets.

A man came into the room and knocked him down, using a pair of handcuffs for the purpose.

“Furry boy is tough,” the man said. “Hell, and we thought his skull was fractured the first time.”

Monk, now on the floor again, turned one sick eye upward and verified what he had not at first believed—that the man who had hit him was state police officer Glenn Madison.

“Madison!” Monk gasped. “I'm glad the police found—” He got himself hooked together enough to decide there was nothing to be glad about. He mumbled, “What's the idea of hitting me?”

“To put you down.” The young officer kicked him in the side, not gently. “Why did you think?”

“I don't get this.”

“That's damned lucky, isn't it?” said Glenn Madison.

Monk, confronted with the obvious fact that the young state trooper was an assailant, and not in line of police duty, had difficulty accepting the situation as normal. In a moment, a commotion occurred at the door, and he concluded, dazed, that they were bringing in someone else.

“Ham!” Monk said thickly, when he saw who it was.

Ham was conscious, but carried the obvious signs of a hard beating—a split lip, a badly cut scalp with a flap of it slashed open and turned back above the hairline.

Stupidly, Monk asked, “Where did they get you?”

“In the brush outside,” Ham explained. “I followed you here.”

“Oh. . . . Where are we?”

“Not more than a mile from the Hazard estate, I should judge,” Ham said. He stared in astonishment at

Trooper Glenn Madison. “Holy smoke, are you—”

Trooper Madison smiled, said, “Hello, Mr. Brooks!” In a hearty voice, extended his hand and moved forward. When the confused Ham prepared to shake hands, he was struck, with terrific force, on the point of the jaw. Ham dropped. Madison said, “Well, well, I'm not losing my manhood, after all.” He leered at Monk. “You and that brickbat jaw had me worried there for a while.”

THE state patrolman went into another room of the building, which by now Monk had decided was a summer cabin that was untenanted normally, and, when Madison returned, he was pushing Peter Overman ahead of him.

“Sit down, Overman,” Madison said. “We're going to talk in here. I don't like to leave these two guys alone.”

Overman had a look of stark horror on his face, and seemed speechless.

“Sit down, sit down,” Madison yelled at him. “What are you so squeamish about? Hell, they're here because you were dumb enough to let them follow you here, aren't they? It's your own fault.”

Overman sank sickly on a chair. He said, “I—what will—how will you . . . ?”

“How will I what?”

Overman, blue-lipped, tried to make words and failed.

“If you mean how will I knock them off, that won't take a minute,” Glenn Madison said coldly. “But first, I'm going to ask them some questions about how much Savage knows. However, you won't need to stick around for that.” He leaned forward, said more sharply, “You know what I can do to you, Overman? You know that, don't you?”

Overman moistened his lips. “I have committed no crime.”

Madison snorted. “I think I better put it in a picture for you, Overman. Two years ago, you paid Georg Lanier five thousand dollars to get yourself accepted as bidder on a highway bridge job and that defense plant roadway job. Georg Lanier was then working in a position where he could throw the contract your way. You got it. You paid five grand to get it.”

“The money was a consulting fee—”

“A bribe!” Madison snapped. “Who the hell do you think you're kidding. Consultant! Godamighty, what would a jury do when you told them that?”

“I—but it was an accepted practice. A bribe—maybe it was. But Paul Ben Hazard knew of the deal, and did not veto it.”

“So what? Hazard is a politician, and you were an important guy, so maybe he overlooked a little now and then. But if you think he'll go to bat for you when you're caught red-handed in three murders, you're crazy. You're not that important to him.”

Monk, watching Overman, thought for a moment that the man was going to faint.

“Three—murders?” Overman croaked finally.

Madison grinned. “Sure. Three. You started out to kill Georg Lanier because he was trying to blackmail you over the bribery deal. Detective Sam Karen and his assistant Oliver Polki showed up and found out

what you were planning to do, and so you knocked them off. Then you knocked off Georg Lanier."

THE expression on Monk's face must have been startling, because Madison, happening to notice it, stared in astonishment, then burst into laughter. "By God," Madison said. "You see how convincing it sounds, Overman? This guy Mayfair believes it, even."

Firmly, Monk got hold of himself, arranged his ideas into more sane order—Overman, of course, wasn't a murderer. Madison had outlined a threat. That was it. A threat. Then Madison must be the vague menace known as Jones.

Monk, astonished, gasped, "You're Jones."

Glenn Madison said, "That's quite a piece of deduction. Next thing, you'll be deducing you've got five fingers on each hand."

The remark was stupid, Monk realized—he tried to gauge Madison's mentality from the statement, from the way the fellow was acting. The laughing Madison had done twice now was unnatural. Whether it was forced nervous laughter suddenly became a matter of vital importance to Monk. If it was nervous mirth, it might indicate the man could be scared; on the other hand, if it was unbalanced, and in this instance it had only to be genuine laughter to be utterly the product of a distorted mind, it was a bad situation, because it would mean Madison was psychologically warped. It was not normal to be genuinely amused by murder.

Glenn Madison swung back to Overman, said, "The price is pretty cheap, Overman. Fifty thousand, cash."

"Fifty . . ."

"Uh-huh. Bills of not too large denomination, and not too many new ones," Madison said. "And be careful how you get the cash—better fix up an explanation of why you need it in case you're called on for it."

Overman put his head down, planted his face on his hands, and presently he said, "I am bitterly ashamed and I do not think I can do this thing."

"You damned well better do it," Madison said. "If you don't, here's something else that will happen to you. Your daughter will go on trial with you. It has been arranged so that there is plenty against her. That bit of cloth on the fishhook, for instance, was off her handkerchief. And the paraffin test showed she had fired a gun."

Overman's head came up. "That nitrate test—how did you manage it?"

"She was handed an object with enough chemical on it to make the dermal nitrate test show positive on her hands. The chemical was a powder. It merely shook off, enough of it, on her hands."

Monk said bitterly, "You're pretty slick, aren't you?"

Madison moved over to Monk. He said, "I get tired of your voice easily, too." He kicked Monk on the temple, changed his position and kicked Monk again, this time on the jaw, and harder.

Chapter XVI

DOC SAVAGE, circling carefully, examined the Overman coupé, making sure there was no one in it. He studied the footprints about the machine for a time, then, curious, lifted the turtleback lid and looked inside, noting the evidence—the drill, the peepholes in the body metal—of Monk's presence there earlier.

Withdrawing into the bushes, Doc considered the situation. For the sake of silent moving, he decided to remove his shoes, and he did so. . . . The tracks puzzled him—there were Monk's footprints, and another set that should be Overman's, but it did not end with that, for there were still more tracks in the soft earth.

The rain came down gently, but the drops had body enough to make a soft continuous sound on the leaves; there were, too, occasional puffs of wind, stirring the undergrowth, bending the treetops, and filling the surroundings with the clatter of dislodged falling rain.

He walked with infinite care for a few yards, using every precaution he could manage—and was chagrined when Lorna Overman's voice said coldly, "You will lift your hands. Then turn around, very slowly."

He did that, and saw only her gun. It was a freak weapon, a dueling pistol, percussion cap and double-barreled. He frowned at the percussion caps, wondering if there had been enough rain on the weapon—it looked wet—to make it misfire.

"Oh!" The pistol lowered. "I didn't know it was you." Lorna Overman came out of the thick bush behind which she had been waiting. "I heard someone come, and hid and waited—"

"You saw who it was?" Doc interrupted.

"Sh-h-h-h." She looked frightened. "There is a shack, very close. . . . No, I did not see who it was. I moved close to the path, and then saw you."

Doc asked, "Who is here?"

"Your two friends, Mr. Mayfair and Mr. Brooks. They're prisoners. And my father. Ollie, Mr. Hazard's gardener. And that young State Patrolman, Glenn Madison. I think—from what I heard—that Madison is this extortionist, Jones."

"Monk and Ham alive?" Doc demanded urgently.

"I think they're only unconscious."

"All right—now, how did you get here?" She was speaking in whispers, and he put the query in a whisper.

Lorna Overman said stiffly, "I followed my father."

Doc nodded. "All right. Do you know this country nearby? How far is it to a telephone? I don't think we dare start one of the cars, so you'll have to walk to a telephone and call the sheriff."

She stared at him. "Don't you want to know about my father?"

"Not now—not at a time like this. What about the neighborhood—have you any idea where there is a house with a phone?"

She shook her had. "I haven't the least idea."

"Go to your car. Don't start the motor, but be prepared to the instant you hear shooting. . . . No, better

not wait for any noise; they might get the drop on me. Wait five minutes. No more. Five minutes. Then turn your car around, and get out of here and fast, and summon the sheriff."

"But can you trust Sheriff Powell—"

"He's all right," Doc said. "Get going."

She hesitated. "Do you want my gun?" He shook his head, and she turned, without more words, and left. He waited listening, frowning whenever he heard her make a small sound, apprehensive lest she be overheard. Then he stepped into the shrubbery.

THE cabin was of rough lumber oiled to a dark brown color. It stood in thick brush, and beyond it was the river, darkly muddy and made vague by the slow-falling rain. He moved forward slowly, trying to judge time, the passage of five minutes, and wishing that he had told the girl to wait longer.

He reached, finally, a window which stood open. He would have liked to wait, take his time, listen, but he was sure that at least four minutes had gone, and he dared not wait longer; so he lifted his head above the level of the window sill.

Trooper Madison, in the room, made a hissing sound and swung up his gun. Ollie, the gardener, stood with his back to the window, and within hand-reach, but Madison was to the left, and he had seen past Ollie, had discovered Doc.

Doc, lunging, threw arms, head, shoulders, inside the window, and seized Ollie. He jerked the gardener backward, intent on getting Ollie's gun, or at least putting the man out of commission. That seemed his only hope; there was no chance of wheeling, fleeing from the window, before Ollie could turn and lean out and shoot him.

Ollie's gun was an army automatic; the gardener threw up both arms wildly as he was jerked backward; the automatic blasted deafeningly at the ceiling as nerve reflex tightened Ollie's finger on it. The ejected shell, driven backward, struck Doc's neck and went down inside his shirt, stinging hot. Inside the room, another gun began banging. Madison was firing. He shot three times, driving all three bullets into Ollie, hoping the slugs would go through the gardener and reach Doc Savage, who was behind Ollie.

Ollie wrenched spasmodically. Only one of the bullets went completely through his body, and it passed somewhere close to Doc's neck. The automatic, thrown convulsively, landed in the leaves and grass nearby. Doc released the gardener and went after the gun, got it, turned, and watched, horrified, as Ollie's dying convulsions caused his body to pitch the rest of the way through the window and land on the soggy earth. The gardener's face was torn beyond recognition, and his chest was ragged.

There was running inside the cabin. Doc listened to it, trying to judge his course of action from the direction Madison was taking—and he was still listening when another gun rapped once. This gun was smaller, barked more sharply. It drove out four more reports.

Paul Ben Hazard's voice came from the cabin. "Who is it—the police?"

Doc said, "Watch out for Madison."

"I think I just killed him," Hazard said.

Doc listened to a car engine start, race, become labored as the clutch was released. It would be Lorna Overman going for the sheriff. He waited until the sound was no longer audible against the curtain of gentler noise the rain made.

He said, “A very quick piece of work, Mr. Hazard.” He went into the cabin.

SHERIFF POWELL, red-eyed from lack of sleep, leaned against the cabin wall and listened to Chadwick, the coroner, give his verdict about Madison. “The first shot killed him,” Chadwick said. “The others weren't necessary.”

Sheriff Powell shook his head slowly. “Five within the last twenty-four hours,” he muttered. “What a mess.”

Peter Overman shuddered. “Horrible,” he said sickly.

Monk sprawled on a chair, using a handkerchief on his lip, which had been cut when Madison had kicked him. He said unpleasantly, “If anybody is going to start feeling sorry for that Madison, count me out. The guy was going to kill us.”

Ham came in. He was battered. He looked at the coroner, asked, “Miss Overman is having a tough time of it. Have you got something that will let her down easy? Something for her nerves.”

“I could use something like that myself,” the coroner said. “No, I haven't anything with me.”

Doc Savage said, “Ham, you better take her to town. Monk, you go with them. Both of you need some patching. Better get some X-rays made of the spots where Madison struck you.” He hesitated, said, “No—wait a while. That is, if you don't feel too tough to stick around for the end of this.”

Hazard grunted. “It's all over, isn't it?”

“Just about,” Doc said. “But I would like Overman to tell us how he was first approached with this extortion thing.”

Overman listed his head wearily. “I—I don't feel much like talking.”

“Just a rough outline of it will be enough,” Doc advised. “Were you first approached by Madison himself?”

“No. No, it was a telephone call first,” Overman said. “It didn't sound like Madison's voice, but I guess it must have been. He merely demanded money, fifty thousand dollars, and explained that it was Jones calling. Ordinarily, I would have reported the matter to the police, but—well—I didn't.”

“Why not?”

“He—Madison, if it was he—mentioned a payment I had made to Georg Lanier about two years ago. I suppose it could be considered a bribe. And, along with that, the voice made general threats against my daughter, against Lorna—nothing specific, just the statement that Lorna would be a victim.”

Doc asked, “That was why you hated Georg Lanier? You thought he was a party to the affair?”

“Yes. I had no respect for Lanier anyway. I do not respect a man who takes a bribe.”

DOC said, “Let's skip to the telephone call you got from Detective Sam Karen calling you to Hazard's office, the call that came just prior to Karen's murder. What did Sam Karen actually say to you? Let's not leave out any of the truth this time.”

Overman winced. “The detective, Sam Karen, said that he had had a talk with Georg Lanier, and Lanier had agreed to help him, and that Lanier had told him certain things about me, and that we had better have a talk at once.”

“Karen then told you to come to Hazard's office?”

“Yes.”

“He say why Hazard's office?”

“No. . . . Not, well, not exactly. But I got the idea it had some bearing on the matter.”

Paul Ben Hazard nodded his head vehemently, said, “It naturally would have a bearing—Sam Karen was working for me.”

Doc kept his gaze on Overman. “I think, when we get all the details of this, if we do, we will find out that Lanier had actually gotten a clue to Jones' identity, and given it to Sam Karen. That was why Sam Karen was killed—to silence him. And that was why Georg Lanier was killed later. He had to be silenced.”

The Sheriff grunted. “You figure Jones knew they had him spotted? How did he uncover that?”

“Sam Karen undoubtedly confronted Jones himself in Hazard's office.”

“The hell he did! Do you know that for a fact?”

“It's a guess on circumstantial evidence.”

“Eh?”

Doc said, “Suppose we check on Trooper Madison a moment.” He went to the door, called, “Will the state police come in here a minute?”

The sheriff cleared his throat. “I can add a touch to this—as long as we're guessing. You know that young Madison's father was killed some time ago—shot to death when he was putting up his car? . . . Well, there was some suspicion that young Madison and the old man had a fight at the time, and the boy shot his father. It wasn't anything I could prove. In fact, I think I'm about the only one who thought maybe that was what had happened.”

Doc said, “We'll grant young Madison was a bad egg, and had a part in this.”

THE state policemen entered—a captain, a lieutenant and two patrolmen. They did not look happy, which was understandable, since Madison had been a member of their force.

Doc, pleasantly enough, said, “Rotten apples are likely to be found on any tree, so let's not start condemning the state police as a whole. . . . But what I wish you would find out for me is this—where was Trooper Madison at the time Sam Karen must have been murdered?”

The captain, a Captain Wallister, said, “We've already checked that, and it's queer as hell. Madison was with Allen, here, from six o'clock in the morning until nearly noon. Isn't that right, Allen?” He turned to one of the patrolmen. “Isn't that what you said, Allen?”

Allen, a stocky dark-haired man, was pale. “Queer as it looks, that's right,” he said.

“What's so queer about it?” Doc asked.

“But that proves Madison didn't kill Sam Karen,” Allen blurted.

“He didn't.”

“Well hell's bells!” Powell yelled. “Who did, then?”

“Jones.”

“But—”

“Sam Karen probably telephoned Jones to confront him with the evidence—or Jones may have been watching Karen—anyway Jones showed up. And Jones shot Sam Karen to death, put his body in that closet, then waited in a sort of screwy, cockeyed bravado for me to show up so he could present me with the body.” Doc frowned, made a displeased gesture, added, “And I came, and he did.”

Paul Ben Hazard yelled, “Goddam you, are you intimating I'm Jones?”

“You are, aren't you?”

“You've gone crazy!”

Doc Savage picked up the automatic that had belonged to Ollie. He pointed it at Hazard. He said, “Let's not have any of these last-minute dramatics like suicide or getting shot escaping. Yes, you're it, Hazard. You're fairly slick, just slippery enough to skid your way into a noose. You managed to shoot Sam Karen when you found out he was too near the truth, and knew, or suspected, that you were the extortioner. You kept Sam Karen's body for me because that's the screwy kind of a mind you've got—everyone knows you are a neurotic case.

“And I'm certain you could have seen Oliver Polki talking to me at the dock. Polki then drove to your estate—probably in a cab; I imagine we can find the cab driver—and waited for you. Ollie working with you, knew Polki was Karen's aide, and knew he was there for no good. Perhaps Polki let the cat out of the bag. He was nervous.

“Anyway, you put the ice pick in him, taking Miss Overman's handkerchief to throw blame at her and upset Overman, soften him up for the extortion. Trooper Madison couldn't have taken the handkerchief; he wasn't there. Then you laid the groundwork for making Miss Overman a suspect in the dermal nitrate test—you did that by helping her on with her coat during the evening, after first finding the coat. There is loose nitrated material in the coat sleeves—some of your commercial fertilizer. I investigated and found it there.”

Hazard, his long body suddenly bent, his voice thick with terror, said, “None of that will hold water.”

“It will when we chink up the cracks with more facts,” Doc said gloomily. “Finally, how do you think I got down here? By following you. How did you know Madison and Ollie and Overman were here? Because you had told them to come here.” Doc, without turning his eyes to Overman, asked, “Overman, who told you to come here for a talk?”

“I was called on the telephone,” Overman said.

“Madison's voice?”

“I—I didn't think so.”

“Hazard's voice?”

“I—” Overman began trembling. “I—it could—I don't know what to say.”

Doc shrugged wearily. “Don't worry about Hazard as a political power. He'll be a used firecracker before we are through with him. As a matter of fact, he has in his pocket the gun he used to kill Madison—you had better cover him too, Sheriff—and I suspect ballistics tests might show it is the same gun that killed Sam Karen.”

Paul Ben Hazard's face changed then. It altered sickly, loosened, shed its color.

“Well, what do you know!” Sheriff Powell said grimly. “By God, it's the same gun! You can see it on his face.”

The sheriff went to Hazard and twisted Hazard's arms behind him and fastened handcuffs on them. Hazard did not resist.

The power to do anything much seemed to have left him.

THE END