RETURN FROM CORMORAL

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Originally published in *Doc Savage Magazine* Spring 1949

Chapter I

THE docking was scheduled for two o'clock, but at that hour there was no sign of the tramp steamer *Meg Finnegan*, and aboard the tug that had come out to tow the steamer into the harbor they shut off the engines. The tugboat crew lolled about, enjoying the unscheduled leisure, and a couple of the men dropped baited fishhooks over the rail. In the pilot house the tug skipper fretted and called the despatcher by two-way radio to ask if there had been an error in timing.

Mr. Bradley, the tug's mate, watched the skipper's agitation with some amusement. Bradley, a dark, intense young man, had little patience with the Old Man, or with his own job as second in command of a greasy tug.

“Somebody make a mistake, Sam?” Bradley asked.

“Somebody better not have!” said the skipper, squatting to peer at the little red-green control lights on the two-way radio, which he had always distrusted.

“You wouldn't be put in a tizzy by half a billion bucks, more or less?”

The skipper ignored this. He finished talking into the radio, cradled the handset and went to the rail and peered into the haze that blanketed the sea. Presently, he complained, “How the devil do I know what kind of a screwball this Macbeth Williams is? How do I know he won't blame me because this old cake of rust he's riding doesn't make port on time?”

Bradley laughed. “How do you know he's a screwball?”

“I've never heard any argument to the contrary,” the skipper said. “And what would you say?”

“I've never met the guy.”

“Neither have I.” The skipper got out a stench-box of a pipe and went through his ceremony of getting it under way. “But I'm looking forward to it. You take a guy with half a billion waiting any time he wants to lay a hand on it, and he never lays a hand on it— That kind of cuckoo I want to see.”

Bradley asked seriously, “Is that a fact?”

“Is what a fact?” the skipper snapped.

“That Macbeth Williams could have that many shekels by reaching for them and won't?”

“Hell, yes.”

“I see what you mean by cuckoo,” Bradley said.

TWO hours later a rust-marred old slattern of the seas hove out of the haze to seaward. Having taken a long time to get from where she had been, the vessel *Meg Finnegan* approached Miami ship channel at a plodding four knots.

As far as anyone aboard would have admitted knowing, the steamer was merely putting into Miami because she was bringing back to civilization four bedraggled scientists who were the victims of a colossal flop entitled the “Cormoral Island Expedition of the Kendall Foundation of St. Louis, Missouri.”

Cormoral Island was a scrawny out-jutting of lava in the remote South Atlantic. It was avoided even by goony birds. It was a sure bet to be avoided hereafter by the four scientists of the defunct Kendall Foundation.

The four Kendall men had been stranded on Cormoral Island for some six months. Their parent organization, Kendall Foundation of St. Louis, had gone stony broke shortly after depositing them on the island to do hydrographic and geological research. There'd been no funds to send a boat to take them off and they'd been left to their fate.

At the present moment, having dragged a ship's mattress to the shady side of the deckhouse, the four academicians were engaged in a mild poker game.

All four annotators wore the usual startling explorers' beards, deep sunburns, dirty trousers, and with one exception, that of Professor Macbeth Williams, no shirts.

Dr. Austin Ulm, the expedition's stratigraphist, was dealing from a grimy deck. He endeavored not to toss the cards on the litter of kitchen matches being used for currency.

Professor Williams, smirking, remarked, “I foresee three aces and a couple of jacks in this hand.”

Crikeland, the ornithologist, snorted. “Wanna bet?”

“Watch out, Crike,” said Swanberg, the archaeologist. “Haven't you learned you're a sucker to bet the prof on one of his predictions?”

“Stop kidding,” said Crikeland.

“I'm not kidding,” Swanberg replied seriously.

Crikeland picked up his cards. He groaned. “I would like to express an unbiased and fully thoughtout opinion of the hands you deal, Ulm,” he told the stratigraphist. “My blind Aunt Louise, who has a larcenous and lecherous nature, is far more accommodating.”

“Anybody got openers?” Swanberg demanded.

Professor Macbeth Williams, the hydrographer, picked up his hand and examined it. His sandy eyebrows nearly became exclamation points when he saw three aces and two jacks, a full house. First he looked astonished. Then he looked as if he had been struck a dirty blow.

“What's the matter? You pick up something pretty hot?” demanded Crikeland suspiciously.

The professor made an inarticulate sound and sprang to his feet. Without expressing more than the noise, he lunged away.

“Hey! What the devil!” gasped Ulm.

“Come back here with them cards, dammit!” yelled Crikeland testily. “We only have the one deck, and it's no good with a hand missing.”

Professor Williams wheeled and came back. His face was pale. “I'm sorry, gentlemen!” he said stiffly, and endeavored to thrust his cards back into the stock part of the deck. But Crikeland, reminding him the deck was still in play, took the cards from Williams' hand and tossed them on the mattress, where everyone saw the three aces and two jacks.

“What do you know, he called the hand before it was dealt!” Crikeland gasped.

“And why not?” Swanberg asked dryly.

MACBETH WILLIAMS moved apart and stood at the ship's rail, where he stared unseeingly and without interest at a small tug standing toward them out of the haze that covered the sea. It did not occur to him that the presence of the small boat meant land nearby; he was too preoccupied. He saw that his hands were trembling, and placed them on the rail where he could watch them misbehave.

Macbeth was an unnecessarily long young man who had the only beard in the collection that was curly and blond. He had a naturally serious manner and the air of being a rather likable young man. The parts of his face not hidden by foliage promised to be modestly handsome.

Macbeth jumped like a Mexican bean when stratigraphist Ulm leaned on the rail at his elbow.

“You out of the game, Williams?” Ulm asked.

“Yes, I think I shall drop out, if you gentlemen don't mind,” Macbeth replied uncomfortably.

“How come?”

Macbeth Williams' discomfort increased, and he mumbled, “I suppose I merely don't feel like playing any more.”

“You threw down,” said Ulm, “some nice cards.”

“Uh-huh,” Macbeth muttered.

“Three aces and two rascals.”

“Uh-huh.”

“An earthquake,” Ulm continued, “wouldn't make me lay down a hand like that.”

“Earthquake,” mumbled Macbeth, “is exactly what it was.”

“So the light dawned,” said Ulm. He was a stocky man, with a hawk nose and dark eyes nesting rather fiercely in his thicket of whiskers.

Macbeth nodded, shuddering. “Blindingly,” he agreed.

“About time,” said Ulm.

“I'm frightened stiff,” Williams confessed.

“Of what?”

“Of bats in belfrys, of a little canvas jacket with sleeves that buckle in the back,” groaned Macbeth Williams. “In short, I'm sure this must be a hallucination.”

Ulm grinned. “Hallucinations,” he remarked, “are one-man dogs.”

“I don't understand that either,” Macbeth confessed. “You and Crikeland seemed convinced that I can foresee the immediate future. Even Swanberg is becoming convinced.”

“Four of us,” Ulm stated, “can hardly be crazy.”

Macbeth looked at the other man wryly. “They build insane asylums to hold more than one person.”

“Wantta bet you're nuts?” asked Ulm.

“I certainly intend to consult a psychiatrist and find out,” said Macbeth Williams. “And at the very first opportunity, too.”

The poker game suddenly broke up behind them. Crikeland and Swanberg rushed to the rail. They peered into the haze. “I believe I see land,” Crikeland blurted. “My God, I hope it isn't Cormoral Island again!”

WHEN Macbeth Williams walked into his Miami hotel room late that evening, the place seemed incredibly depressing, and he sank into a chair without removing his hat. Even the garish and carnival-like view of the resort city through the window offered no cheer. Macbeth hardly glanced up when Ulm entered. The stratigraphist looked at the younger man in alarm.

“Oh, brother!” said Ulm. “You had us worried. Where the devil have you been?”

Macbeth gazed unhappily at the floor. “You gentlemen shouldn't have worried about me, you really shouldn't.”

“I don't see,” said Ulm, “how a lad with access to half a billion bucks can look as gloomy as you. Incidentally, that was quite a surprise.”

“I don't believe I understand what you mean by surprise—”

“The news that you could have half a billion if you wished.”

“Oh,” said Macbeth Williams.

“That was quite a bombshell,” Ulm went on.

“Uh, was it?”

Ulm grinned. “A little like finding that the old brass bedstead was made of solid gold.”

Macbeth Williams held up a distressed hand. “I assure you, Austin, that I'm not made of gold. The whole thing is a great misunderstanding. You see, I don't have a thing to do with the estate. I'm entirely aloof from it.”

“That's a lot of dough to be aloof from,” Ulm told him.

“True enough,” Macbeth muttered. He returned his prominent jaw to cupped hands. “It has, I assure you, bothered me on occasion. Holding aloof, I mean. Frankly, it's not very profitable to be aloof.”

Ulm peered at him in amazement. “You mean you don't get an income?”

“A hundred dollars a month.”

“Good God! Not even peanuts.”

“Oh, I manage to get along,” said Macbeth Williams. “I'm careful, you see, not to let anyone know that I'm the only son of the late Roderick Williams, tycoon extraordinary. That makes it simpler to live cheaply.”

Ulm examined his fellow scientist thoughtfully. “So that's why none of us knew about it until the skipper of that tug passed the news. How come the tug skipper knew?”

Macbeth shrugged. “The estate management was concerned about my welfare, I suppose. They're very thoughtful that way. If I should die, the estate goes to several charitable institutions, and they might lose their good jobs.”

“They've got a point there.”

“Possibly. They're fine men, though.”

“How did this all come about?” Ulm asked.

“My father left a will,” Macbeth Williams explained. Then he added hastily, “It was perfectly agreeable, though. Actually, we talked it over. The will carried out my own suggestions.”

“The hell it did,” said Ulm. “Who does that make a screwball?”

Macbeth Williams winced. “Almost exactly the words of the psychiatrist,” he said.

“What psycho was that?”

“The one I've been consulting this afternoon.”

“Oh, oh,” said Ulm. “You didn't lose any time.”

Macbeth Williams jumped up, went to the window and stood looking out. “I'm afraid the chap didn't help my peace of mind,” he went on uneasily.

“What'd the psycho say?” Ulm demanded.

Macbeth hesitated, then decided to make a full confession. “I'm naturally a reticent sort,” he explained, “and I find it a little difficult to talk about myself. No man likes to take his own machinery out and display its flaws, even to a psycho-analyst. I understand fully, of course, that an analyst must pry the stuff out, and this one did a good job. He put me on a couch.”

“So them guys really use a couch,” Ulm remarked. “What'd he do next? Start you to remembering back when you wore diapers?”

Macbeth nodded. “I got the standard routine, I imagine. Yes, he delved into my childhood. I don't think he found it very rewarding. I had a very drab youth, you know. Somewhat on the lonely side. Lots of books and tutors, but not too many playmates. You see, my father was very busy being a tycoon. Quite a remarkable man, though.”

Macbeth hesitated, apparently gave something a thorough mental chewing-over, then gave a gesture of resignation. “My father was a man of remarkable foresight. He was a good guesser. All of his guesses proved to be right. The psychiatrist made a good deal of that point, apparently.”

“You mean,” said Ulm, “that this gift you've got of knowing what is going to happen in the near future is something you inherited from the old man? You know, that could be.”

“No, no!” Macbeth held up a hand. “That wasn't the psycho's idea, I'm afraid.”

“No?”

“I think he felt my psychosis about the matter is a result of having that kind of a father.”

“Psychosis?”

“Neurosis was the word.”

“Psychosis, neurosis, little rabbits,” said Ulm. “The guy is wrong. You should have proved to him that he was wrong.”

Macbeth grinned sheepishly. “I'm afraid I did endeavor to do so.”

“Yeah? What'd you predict?”

“That the analyst would have a visitor promptly at three fifteen o'clock,” Macbeth explained.

“And did he?”

“Yes.”

Ulm chuckled. “Fine. I'll bet that jolted him.”

“I believe it did,” Macbeth agreed. “But it was an act of a charlatan on my part. You see, I happened to glimpse his appointment book, and there was an appointment down for three fifteen.”

“You faked it?” Ulm asked disapprovingly.

“I couldn't resist doing so. The fellow was so smugly convinced I was having neurotic imaginings.”

Ulm came over and seriously placed a hand on Macbeth's shoulder. “You mustn't do things like that, old

boy," he said solemnly. "This thing you've got is genuine. Don't hoke it. Treat it naturally. When it doesn't want to come don't force it."

"You're being silly!" Macbeth Williams declared. "I haven't any gift. I couldn't have. There isn't such a thing."

"It'll take a lot of unselling to convince me of that," Ulm said earnestly. "I've watched this thing closely. You can't Robinson Crusoe with a man without getting down to his basic mettle. Williams, we spent six months together on that infernal island, and I know what I saw."

"You probably saw a cuckoo," Macbeth told him glumly.

Ulm, with a solemn frown and no hint of levity, said, "I don't think so, son. I wouldn't undersell this thing, if I were you."

Macbeth Williams was making distressed motions indicating there was probably nothing to the whole thing, when the telephone rang. He went to the telephone, where, after a first astonished outcry—it sounded quite alarmed, in a delighted sort of way—his conversation was too low-pitched for Ulm to overhear, although the latter openly endeavored to eavesdrop.

When Macbeth turned, he wore the pain-and-ecstasy expression of a ticklish man being tickled.

"Carlie," he said.

"Is that good?" Ulm asked.

"I'm engaged to her," Macbeth Williams explained.

"That could be good," Ulm said. "Is she pretty?"

"Yes. Oh, yes, indeed," Macbeth Williams replied. "But she's also practical."

"Practical? Is that good?"

Macbeth Williams grinned wryly at Ulm. "What would you say?"

Chapter II

MISS CARLIE McGUIGGAN beamed at Professor Macbeth Williams. "Hello there, hydrographist," she said. She kissed Macbeth, not sparingly, on the lips, thereby causing the hydrographist's eyes to bulge. Carlie McGuiggan was a tall, straw blonde, lovely to look at, but possibly a trifle overdeveloped as to common sense, Macbeth sometimes felt. "Well, what have you to say for yourself?" she asked smilingly.

"I've been away," Macbeth Williams murmured, endeavoring to recover a little composure.

"I believe I noticed," Carlie remarked. "How did it happen?"

Macbeth told her seriously that some months ago he had joined an outfit known as the Kendall Foundation of St. Louis in the capacity of hydrographist, and gone on an expedition to a place called Cormoral Island, a very devil of a spot, where he and his three scientific comrades had been isolated nearly six months when the foundation went bust. They had been rescued only because a tramp steamer had happened to investigate the island for guano. At this point, Macbeth recovered himself and blushed furiously.

“Great Scott, that's no way to talk to a fellow's best girl!” he blurted. “Darling! You look gorgeous! Exquisite!” He flapped his hands to show how words were failing, and gasped, “I'm a darn fool, honey, who doesn't know how to greet the loveliest creature ever!”

“You've got something there,” said Carlie. “But you were doing all right. I'm interested in your adventures.”

“Oh there weren't any adventures,” disclaimed Macbeth. “It was very dull, in fact. The monotony was terrific. It did something to us—me.”

“Buy me a cocktail,” Carlie suggested. “And explain just how you happened to connect with this go-but-quick foundation or whatever it was.”

Macbeth guided her into the bar and ordered Carlie a martini and a lemon coke for himself. “That's about what it was,” he said. “Well, I think it was through the well-meant efforts of Dr. Austin Ulm that I got tangled with the Kendall Foundation.”

“Dr. Austin Ulm. Who dat?” Carlie asked.

“Friend of mine. Fine chap.”

Carlie was unconvinced. “Your friends are always fine chaps. All this one did was get you marooned on a rock for six months.”

“He was marooned with me,” Macbeth pointed out.

“Which proves what? Except that you must be about equally foresighted?” Carlie said. “But you're back. You look fine. Beard and all. What, incidentally, do you plan to do with that mattress?”

“I plan to cut it off, I suppose,” Macbeth replied, fingering the foliage. “My companions in misfortune, Ulm, Crikeland and Swanberg, feel we should retain the beards as a mark of—well, something or other.”

“Not a bad idea,” Carlie replied. “I can't think why, though. Are you remotely interested in how I happen to be in Miami?”

“Heavens, yes,” said Macbeth hastily. “I thought you were in Vermont.”

“Oh, you gave it a thought, then?”

Macbeth grinned. “I've got you there, baby. I sent a telegram to Vermont the minute I got ashore.”

Carlie patted his hand. “I'm down here on a vacation with Aunt Liz,” she said. “There's no adventure about that, either.” She looked at Macbeth curiously. “I'll bet you had a heck of a time on that island. You look different, somehow. I don't mean the whiskers, either. You seem different.”

Macbeth winced and said hurriedly, “Couldn't we go somewhere tonight? The dog races, perhaps?”

CARLIE'S maiden Aunt Liz was a long bony character with tortoise shell glasses and, Macbeth Williams soon discovered, a terrific yen for gambling. The bright lights, noise and colored pageantry of one of Miami's biggest dog tracks got under Macbeth's skin somewhat after six months on Cormoral Island and three weeks on the tub *Meg Finnegan*, and he glowed. But he didn't glow enough to make any bets.

“It's not that I'm against gambling,” he explained uncomfortably. “It's rather that my judgment isn't worth

an investment."

Carlie gave him a sharp glance. "Still that way, eh?"

"How is that?"

"Figure you're never right about the future, do you?"

Macbeth swallowed. "I . . . ah . . . suppose so."

"That," said Carlie, "makes me mad."

"I'm sorry."

"Being sorry," said Carlie, "doesn't repair broken lives."

"I . . . I don't believe I understand."

"Never mind."

There was an acute break in the pleasant flow of the evening. Macbeth, suddenly miserable, understood why. The matter they had just mentioned—his confidence in his judgment—was the snag on which he and Carlie had wrecked their romance. At least, that was the way Macbeth saw it. There had been numerous occasions in the past when they had seemed to be progressing happily toward the normal windup of a romance, namely wedding bells, and the matter of Macbeth's attitude toward his own judgment had come up, and things hadn't been the same.

Carlie was a very practical and level-headed girl. The same qualities in a man appealed to her. She considered them important.

They probably were good qualities, Macbeth reflected. The trouble was, he'd always been plagued with a conviction he was a mighty poor man with a plan. He couldn't foresee. He didn't trust his judgment.

He didn't like this in himself, but he didn't see where he could do much about it. It was his psychic rabbit, and he was chained to it.

Macbeth Williams found himself pointing at a lean and ugly looking greyhound in the pre-race parade.

"That one," he announced.

"That one which?" said Carlie.

"The winner," Macbeth said. "That one will be the winner."

He heard an excited intake of breath behind him, and turned and saw Austin Ulm.

"Oh, brother!" said Austin Ulm. "Lemme at the fifty-dollar window! I'll be right back!"

Macbeth Williams gazed after Ulm blankly. He imagined Ulm had chanced to attend the races, had seen him and approached in time to hear the remark about the dog. But that wasn't what gave Macbeth a frightened feeling.

"Who was that fellow?" Carlie asked.

"What? Oh, Ulm? That was Austin Ulm, the stratigraphist of our late expedition," Macbeth explained vaguely, and added, "What if the damn dog should win!"

“Eh?” said Carlie. “What was that?”

Macbeth swallowed. “Nothing. Nothing of importance, darling.”

Several minutes later, the hound which Macbeth had indicated came whipping across the finish line an easy winner.

“My God!” mumbled Macbeth.

“What on earth is wrong with you?” Carlie demanded.

“I do wish I knew!” said Macbeth fervently. “The thing frightens the wits out of me.”

“Eh?” Carlie eyed him in exasperation. “Just what are you suffering from?”

Macbeth took a deep breath, moistened his lips, and blurted, “I predicted that dog was going to win!”

“So what?” asked Carlie. “So did several hundred others, judging from the odds.” She glanced at the odds board, which indicated the win ticket had paid nearly forty dollars on a two-dollar investment, and added, “Well, maybe I had better amend that. But a few others picked the scroot, I'm sure.”

Macbeth was about to say that wasn't the point, and try to explain the whole thing, when Dr. Austin Ulm arrived waving a fistful of greenbacks. He buttonholed Macbeth, asking excitedly, “What dog's gonna win the next one? Come on. Quick. Let's have it.” He told Carlie, “This is the thing I've dreamed about! Why, we can clean up! We'll need an armored truck to take home our winnings!”

“Shut up!” Macbeth told him angrily.

Crestfallen, Ulm demanded, “You're not going to predict another winner?”

“No.”

“Not just one more?”

“No.”

“That, my fellow exile, is the dirtiest trick ever perpetrated,” said Ulm bitterly. He looked at Macbeth almost tearfully. “I'll split with you,” he offered.

“Oh, shut up!” said Macbeth. He introduced Ulm to Carlie and Aunt Liz, and when Ulm started telling them that he, Macbeth Williams, had somehow picked up the uncanny power to foresee fragments of the future, Macbeth lost his temper, seized Ulm by the whiskers and said, “Shut up! Or would you like to have your block knocked off!”

That seemed to settle it. But only for a short time, because at Ulm's suggestion they visited a night club following the last race. It turned out to have a gaming room.

Dr. Ulm did such a suave job of maneuvering Macbeth into the gambling establishment that Macbeth failed to notice the plan at once. They gathered around the roulette table, and Aunt Liz asked idly, “What do you think of the five red, Macbeth?”

“No, play the black nine,” Macbeth answered thoughtlessly.

With simultaneous gasps of excitement, Ulm and Aunt Liz stacked what seemed to be their entire capital on the nine black.

“Damn you!” Macbeth said bitterly to Ulm, and seized the surprised Carlie's arm and dragged her out of the room.

“What is wrong with you, Macbeth?” Carlie exclaimed.

Macbeth groaned. He wasn't surprised when Ulm and Aunt Liz came rushing out of the gambling room with almost more money than they were able to carry.

“You tricked me!” Macbeth told Ulm bitterly.

“He sure did!” cackled Aunt Liz. She added excitedly to Carlie, “You've got a gold mine here! All you've got to do is persuade him to work!”

Macbeth Williams, his face pale where it wasn't burning firmly, took Carlie's arm again.

“Carlie and I are going home,” he said furiously. “Good night.”

THE ride to Carlie's hotel was a quiet one. Carlie was startled and curious.

“Talk, Macbeth,” she ordered, drawing the agitated man to a secluded part of the hotel veranda. “Talk is good for the soul. Give.”

Macbeth squirmed. “It's silly.”

“You're upset.”

“It's also impossible.”

“Put it in words, Macbeth.”

“You'll laugh.”

“I don't think so,” Carlie said.

“Worse, you'll think I'm a neurotic nut. That's what the analyst thought.”

Carlie whistled softly, much as a boy would do to express amazed comprehension. “Macbeth, do you mean you can predict? Is that what's bothering you?”

“I don't mean anything of the sort!” Macbeth snapped. “It's impossible. I'll be damned if I subscribe to any such opinion concerning myself or anyone else!”

Carlie examined him, and said, “If you ask me, you've already taken the subscription. You're upset. You've bought it, or you wouldn't be upset.”

“Oh, hell!” Macbeth Williams exclaimed violently. “Excuse me for swearing, Carlie, but what kind of a fool do you take me for?”

“I don't know,” Carlie replied. “But I find it very interesting.”

Macbeth groaned. He flopped in a veranda chair, nearly knocking over a potted plant in the act. “Dammit, it's bad enough having people thinking I'm screwy for not taking over the management of my father's estate. But I'm not ashamed of that, at least. I'm simply not a man of sound judgment. I can't make plans that work out. To manage a half billion in properties successfully, your plans have to work

out. Mine don't. So I'm not ashamed." He looked at the floor and shuddered. "Now, to find myself evolving into a crystal-gazer—Well, that's too much. I can't take it."

"How long," asked Carlie, "has this been going on?"

"I'd rather not talk about it."

"How long?"

"Well, it started on the island," said Macbeth reluctantly.

"On Cormoral Island, this place where you were a Robinson Crusoe?"

"Uh-huh. We weren't Robinson Crusoes, though. We had plenty of equipment and supplies, and each other for company."

"But you began noticing you could predict things?"

"Well, yes."

"What kind of things?"

The hydrographist squirmed. "Oh, the sort of thing you could predict on an island that was just a knob of rock. The first instance I really recall was tying my shoes to a stake in the ground, and assuring the others that they should do the same."

Carlie's eyes popped a little. "Tying your shoes to the ground?"

Macbeth grinned faintly. "It wasn't such a silly idea. There is a species of goony bird that packs off loose objects. Like the packrat, you know. Only this is a bird. A sort of a penguin, as a matter-of-fact."

"Oh."

"The others got their shoes carried off."

"I see."

Macbeth flushed. "That isn't a very good illustration."

"There are better ones?"

"Probably. Frankly there's no lack of examples. But, darling, I'd rather not talk about it. The thing frightens me, and makes me doubt my sanity."

There was a silence. Carlie was thoughtful. "Well, it doesn't sound too reasonable," she admitted. "But you did call the turn on the dog race, and you did name the winning number on that wheel."

Macbeth shivered violently. "Don't, darling!"

Carlie frowned. "If it's worrying you so, Macbeth, why don't you do something about it?"

For a few moments, Macbeth pondered. "You know, Carlie, I know a fellow who could solve this, I'm sure. If it's just imagination, a neurosis I've picked up, he's the man who could fix me up. He has one of the greatest scientific minds I ever encountered."

"Who is he?" Carlie asked.

Macbeth became more enthusiastic about his idea. “The fellow is tops as a physician, surgeon and psychiatrist. He's quite an adventurer, too. Worldwide reputation as a troubleshooter, as a matter-of-fact. This might appeal to him. I do believe I'll get in touch with him.”

“Why not,” said Carlie.

“I can send him a telegram,” Macbeth decided. “His name is Doc Savage.”

“Oh, brother!” said Carlie.

“You know Doc Savage?”

Carlie shook her head. “No, just heard of him.”

“Do you think I should?”

“I'm all for it,” Carlie assured him. “I'd like nothing better than a chance to watch that fellow in action. He's a legend, you know.”

Macbeth sprang to his feet. “Good! We'll send the telegram now. You can help me write it.”

Chapter III

THE telegraph office was a narrow recess in a building on Flagler Street not far from Biscayne Boulevard, and remained open all night, presided over by a round-faced man named Gridley. Gridley was a contradiction to the idea that all fat people are jolly; he had an evil temper, a sharp tongue and bad manners, qualifications which had resulted in his being shunted to this undesirable all-night job. His assets were several years seniority, a willingness to put up with low pay, although there was a qualification to this, and a brother-in-law who was district commercial agent for the company.

Gridley took Macbeth Williams' long telegram with a surly snatch, grumbled about its length, counted the words, and calmly made a dollar overcharge. When Macbeth and Carlie departed, Gridley erased the charge figure, subtracted the dollar, put down the new figure, and pocketed the dollar. This practice accounted for his being willing to work for a low salary.

He tossed the telegram down by the teletype machine. His policy was to delay messages all he could without the company raising too much hell. He sauntered next door to a bar, had a beer, and eventually ambled back into the office, which he had left unlocked.

Gridley sauntered jauntily behind the counter, and found himself looking into the snout of a gun.

No words were exchanged. There was hardly time, and it was Gridley's fault. Gridley was a terrific coward. As a little boy, he had been a fat, soft, insolent brat, and had formed the habit of screaming at the top of his voice whenever threatened by superior force or violence. He was still a screamer.

Gridley began screeching. He let out one hysterical howl after another, charged with terror and emotional instability.

About halfway into the third squeal, the telegraph office filled briefly with a much louder noise, and Gridley's forehead changed shape very slightly and the back of his head considerably more.

As far as the police could learn, only one man actually saw the killer. A taxi driver observed a man racing from the telegraph office following the shot. But the cab driver was near-sighted, and happened to have removed his glasses and was polishing them at the moment. His description was not of much help.

The police did some futile photographing and fingerprinting. A company clerk took the night's business to the office, where in the bookkeeping department, it was noticed that a lengthy telegram to Doc Savage of New York City, and signed by one Macbeth Williams did not bear the mark-off of having been sent. A service was dispatched concerning the message. Sure enough, it had not been transmitted. So the wire was despatched, a bit late, and traveled the teletype circuits to New York.

Chapter IV

SEVERAL hours after the time it should have arrived, the telegram penetrated to a private teletype machine on the eighty-sixth floor of one of New York's midtown skyscrapers. Exactly ten dingles from a small bell announced its arrival. It was torn off the machine by Mr. Monk Mayfair, a chemist.

“Another goofer,” remarked Monk Mayfair, when he had read the message. He prepared to wad it up and hurl it into the wastebasket, but hesitated, to ask, “You ever hear of a guy named Williams?”

Theodore Marley Brooks, attorney, one-time brigadier general in the U. S. Army, asked sarcastically, “Have I heard of anyone named Williams? Do you want an answer to that? Why not John Smith?”

“O.K., shyster. Start off the day by being wise.”

“What Williams?”

Monk consulted the telegram. “Macbeth Williams, it says here.”

“From Miami, Florida, eh?” asked Ham.

Monk Mayfair was somewhat more than three feet in width, just a little taller than that, and equipped with bristling rusty hair, a face so homely it was hysterically funny, and one of the finest assortments of wizardry in chemistry in existence.

Monk was an assistant to Doc Savage. So was Ham Brooks.

Having looked blank for a moment, Monk said, “What the hell? You see this telegram before?”

“No.”

“Then how'd you know it was from Miami?”

Ham handed Monk the morning newspaper, indicating an item. Monk read it. He rolled his small eyes.

“Half a billion bucks, and the guy won't touch the management of it,” Monk remarked. “Now there's a smart boy for you. Just smart enough that this telegram doesn't surprise me.”

“What's in the telegram?”

“Mostly that this Macbeth Williams has contracted a new kind of disease.”

“Some kind of rare tropical malady, eh?” Ham inquired.

“I would say so. Sure, that describes it.”

Ham Brooks took the message, read it, and apparently wished to share Monk's opinion, but disagreed because it was not his custom to agree with anything Monk thought. “Very interesting,” he remarked.

“Nutty as a fruitcake,” Monk said. “The guy says he can't help predicting things that are going to happen. He wants Doc Savage to come down to Miami and cure him of it. Say, that would prove he was nuts if he wasn't nuts to begin with. Who would want to be cured of a thing like that? Nobody in his right mind.”

“You'd better hand that telegram to Doc,” Ham advised, “It's probably important.”

“What would make it important?” Monk asked. “We get screwball stuff like this every day.”

“Half a billion dollars might make it important,” Ham suggested.

“You know if it wouldn't swell you up, I might be inclined to agree,” Monk said. “A screwball in moderate circumstances is just a screwball, but a screwball with half a billion, even if he won't touch it, is probably some kind of genius.”

DOC SAVAGE was one of those rarities among celebrities, a man whose physical appearance was as impressive as his reputation. He was a giant bronze man, quite symmetrical of build, but so cabled with lithe muscle that it was sometimes a little disturbing to be near him. His eyes were striking because they resembled, in the pupils, pools of flake gold that were always in gentle motion. The combination, along with the straight bronze hair not much darker than his skin, made him stand out in the average crowd about like a lion in a basket of kittens. He did not consider this an asset.

His work—surgery and scientific research could hardly be called his main occupations any longer—was a profession for an inconspicuous man. Preferably an invisible man. Certainly a bulletproof one. It also fitted back into history, back when knighthood was in flower and gentlemen wore armor, possibly a little better than it did into the middle of the twentieth century. His work was righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, preferably under unusual and interesting circumstances.

Doc Savage changed hotels frequently as a matter of common-sense precaution, and the current one was located a short distance off Madison in Fifty-eighth Street. It was a quiet place which, unfortunately, hadn't been able to resist the impulse to pass along to a columnist the fact that Doc Savage was a guest there. The squib had been printed by the columnist a couple of days ago. Doc intended to check out at the end of the week as a result.

Doc left the hotel a little after nine o'clock, which was late for him, and because it was a crisp spring morning and he was a demon believer in exercise, he set out to walk to headquarters.

His progress along a New York street was never placid, and this morning he was haunted by surprised stares, hails from would-be pals, and two autograph hounds. It was not particularly irritating, though, and

he avoided most of it by striding along rapidly.

He was halfway across Thirty-ninth Street when a taxi, wheeling off Madison, went out of control and headed for a second cab. The resulting crash, which was resounding, sent a cloud of glass flying, and dented the sides of both cabs badly, was not extraordinary as New York traffic smash-ups go, except for one thing. Had Doc Savage not executed a remarkable leap, practically over the top of one cab, he would have been pinned between the cabs like a fly between swatter and table. However, the driver of the wild cab did scream out a warning.

After the crash, the cab driver continued to shriek. Apparently, he was under the impression he had smashed Doc Savage to a pulp against the other machine.

Doc, safe on the other side of the second taxicab, picked himself up, sidestepped a car coming from the other direction, and called, “It's all right, fellow!”

This didn't reassure the cabby, however. He howled louder, threw his machine into gear, backed clear of the tangle as disengaging metal wailed, and drove away madly.

Approximately halfway down the block, the fleeing cab driver—he wasn't traveling so very fast, and several persons testified as to exactly what happened—seemed to faint at the wheel. The cab, the steering gear knocked out of line by the crackup, faltered to the right, hit the curb, and bruised itself somewhat shapeless against the side of a building.

They hauled the driver out. “Poor devil, he must have had some sort of spell because of the excitement,” someone remarked.

Doc Savage hurried up, explained he was a doctor, and assisted in removing the man to a nearby drugstore.

“He's not seriously injured,” Doc explained, after an examination. “I think his arm would be better if it were bandaged and in a semi-cast, however. He will regain consciousness presently.”

The bandaging and the application of a quick-drying cast was completed by the time the man regained his senses, Doc doing the application.

The cab driver, a slender young fellow with large eyes and a small mouth, immediately became hysterical. He could hardly give his name. “Somethin' went wrong with the steering gear!” he wailed. “God, it was awful! I saw I was gonna hit that cab! I yelled atcha to jump.” He peered at Doc. “I yelled atcha. You heard me, didn't you?”

“I heard you,” Doc said. “Don't worry about it. Nobody is much damaged.”

A cop asked the man belligerently, “Why'd you start to leave the scene of an accident?”

The cabbie—he said his name was Clare Jones—groaned hopelessly. “I don't remember doin' that. I musta been knocked silly.”

Doc Savage suggested that the upset driver be allowed to go home and recover his composure. The cop was not enthusiastic about this, but finally agreed.

Doc resumed his walk to headquarters.

THERE was another incident. This one, by an odd coincidence, also involved a man fainting. It was the operator of the elevator in Doc Savage's building, and Doc spoke to him pleasantly on entering the elevator, saying, “Good morning. You're new here aren't you?”

“Yes, sir. My name's David,” the operator replied. “I'll give you a quick private trip, Mr. Savage.”

“Thank you,” Doc said.

The fainting occurred a few seconds after the cage started up. The operator, David, simply folded down, striking his forehead against the control level lightly.

Doc Savage made an examination of the man, then returned the cage to the floor immediately above the lobby, left it there with the door blocked open, and hurried downstairs to the drugstore to get some bandages and more of the quick-drying plaster used for casts.

When David awakened some time later, he found several curious people staring at him. “What happened?” he mumbled.

“You fainted,” a man told him.

“I did!”

“Yes. Mr. Savage treated you.”

“Where's Savage now?”

“Gone about his business.”

David examined his elbow. “What the devil is this?”

“A cast,” he was told. “You wrenched your elbow badly when you fell, and Doc Savage thought it advisable to apply a cast. Savage asked me to explain it to you. Leave the cast in place a week or so, and your arm will be all right.”

“Is that all that happened to me?” David wanted to know.

“That's all.”

“I don't understand it,” David muttered, shaking his head. “I think I'll go home.”

WHEN Doc Savage entered the headquarters reception room, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were waiting for him, sitting on the edge of an enormous inlaid desk with their legs dangling.

“We got an elfish item for you,” Monk explained, and presented Doc with the Macbeth Williams telegram.

Doc read through the message, then went to the telephone. “I want to speak to the Miami telegraph office—“he consulted the telegram—“which uses the code number AU on its telegrams.”

Monk and Ham were surprised. “Why the quick action, do you mind saying?” Ham Brooks asked.

Doc indicated the telegram filing-time. “They're stamped with the hour and minute and day when received across the counter. This one was delayed nearly eight hours in transmission. That's unusual for a straight

telegram. I just wondered why?"

Monk and Ham exchanged glances. "You could have checked on that, stupid," Ham told Monk.

"Yeah," Monk agreed. "We both started the morning off in a bright way."

Doc Savage finished a conversation with the Miami telegraph office.

"The clerk who received the telegram was killed, murdered, about twenty minutes after he accepted the message," Doc told Monk and Ham. "That accounts for the delay."

"Who killed him?" Monk asked blankly.

"A person yet unidentified. Believed to be a man." Doc picked up the telephone again and asked for Macbeth Williams, in Miami. The address of Williams' hotel was given in the telegram.

"You think the killing and this telegram are hooked up?" Monk demanded.

"I think something is hooked up, or in the process of being hooked," Doc told him. "Two attempts were made to kill me this morning."

Monk asked, when he and Ham had picked themselves up mentally from the floor, "Did I hear that right? Two tries to kill you?"

"One when a cab tried to smash me against another cab," Doc said. "And one in the elevator here in the building, where there was a strange operator who didn't know the code word all new operators in the building are supposed to know, and who had not two guns, but three, secreted in his clothing."

"Holy smoke!" Monk breathed.

"Who are the guys who tried it?"

"That's what I should like you and Ham to find out, if you care for a little exercise of that sort," Doc suggested.

"Where do we start?"

Doc gave them an outline of the fainting episode. "The 'fainting' was due to getting a whiff of our private little anaesthetic gas which I released," he explained. "I don't imagine either scoundrel will quite believe he fainted, but I doubt if they'll have a better explanation."

"But you let them go!" Ham blurted.

Doc nodded. "Each with a plaster cast on his arm."

"Eh?"

"Containing," Doc added, "one of the little radio tracing gadgets we spent so much time developing, one secreted in the thick part of each bandage." The suite consisted of a library and a laboratory containing considerable floor space, and Doc nodded in the direction of the latter. "You might get the receivers and see whether the transmitters are functioning."

The receivers were small directional affairs working on several hundred megacycles, and were not as compact by far as the transmitters. But they were equipped to give a direction fix without the necessity of taking two bearings to learn whether the signal was coming off the back or the front of the loop.

Monk asked what frequency, and Doc told him, adding, “The elevator operator is about five hundred kilocycles lower.” Monk got the signal. It was a single “pip” of a note transmitted at two-second intervals. Monk adjusted the receiver for maximum signal. “The guy's north of here,” he said. “What do we do about these lugs?”

“Find them. Get your eye on them,” Doc told him.

“And then?”

“Follow them and see what you learn as a result,” Doc said.

“How long do we follow?”

“That,” Doc said, “is where you use your own judgment.”

Ham finished checking his own radio and said, “My chap seems to be in the same part of town as Monk's.”

“It might,” Doc suggested, “be a good idea to lose no time in putting them under observation.”

WHEN Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks departed, Doc Savage settled to wait for his telephone call to Macbeth Williams to go through. While he waited, he used a more conventional type of high frequency radio two-way to check with Monk and Ham, who had equipment in their cars. Satisfied the apparatus was functioning, he settled back.

Monk and Ham were excellent aids, and he was fully aware of it. Both men were eminent in their professions; Monk was widely known in the industrial chemistry field, and Ham Brooks was a noted lawyer. They were not—and Doc was fully aware that this was an important matter—employees in a salary-drawing sense. Their association with Doc was voluntary. They liked excitement and high adventure; they were pushovers for the appeal of the unusual. It was a better bond then any material payment would have created.

Doc's thoughts moved to Macbeth Williams. He knew the young man. Slightly. He recalled Macbeth Williams as a tall young man with considerable geological knowledge, and quite a noticeable lack of confidence in himself. Their only contact, Doc remembered, had been during attendance on a few occasions at a scientific society in which they both held membership.

The telephone rang, and Doc said, “Williams? Doc Savage. . . . Yes, about your telegram. I received it.”

“You probably think I'm touched in the head,” Williams said in some embarrassment. “But I'm really quite upset about the thing.”

“You actually feel that you can predict the future?” Doc asked.

“I hate to answer. I feel a fool.”

“You might,” Doc said, “answer it anyway.”

“Well, yes, I do feel that I have some power I can't understand. I don't believe it, as a matter-of-fact. I can't. It's too far-fetched.”

“But you're convinced against your will?”

“I'm convinced,” said Macbeth, “that I need someone like you to straighten me out. You will do that, won't you, Mr. Savage?”

“I'm not,” Doc reminded him, “a practicing psychiatrist.”

“I know. You're a practicing adventurer.”

“You've got it a little wrong, Williams,” Doc told him. “I don't hunt excitement for excitement's sake. Someone has to be in trouble, deserving of help, and beyond the assistance of the normal processes of law. And the case has to be unusual and interesting. Those are the qualifications.”

Macbeth Williams said uncomfortably, “This should meet one of the qualifications. Unusual.”

“It might meet some of the others,” Doc told him. “Has anyone tried to kill you?”

“Kill me? Good Lord, no!”

“Have any peculiar things happened to you?”

“Why, no,” Macbeth replied. “Not that I've noticed.”

“You were marooned on a desert island for six months.”

“Well, yes. But there wasn't anything odd about that. The Foundation simply went broke.”

“What Foundation was that?”

“The Kendall Foundation of St. Louis, Missouri, which backed the expedition.”

“Never heard of them,” Doc said.

“Well, they weren't too well-known, I'm afraid.”

“What,” Doc asked, “had the Foundation contributed to science? With what museums, industrial concerns or institutions were they affiliated?”

“I'm afraid I don't know.”

“You didn't investigate?”

“Well, I didn't think it was necessary,” Macbeth told him, embarrassed. “You see, my friend, Dr. Austin Ulm, the stratigraphist, sponsored my connection with the Kendall people, and I felt that was sufficient recommendation for them.”

“I see. And you have noticed no murders or violence circulating around this matter?”

“Gracious! Of course not.”

“Did you know,” Doc asked, “about the telegraph office clerk?”

“Who?”

“The one with whom you filed your telegram last night. He was murdered within a half hour.”

“Good God!”

“You didn't know about that?”

“No. Certainly not! Did it have some connection with my telegram?”

“I'm not sure yet.”

“It couldn't have had. It's impossible.”

“Nevertheless,” Doc went on, “I think I shall drop down to Miami and find out.”

“I certainly wish you would,” Macbeth Williams said. “When shall I expect you?”

“This afternoon,” Doc told him. “You might, if you wish, meet me at the airport. The one the airlines use.”

DOC SAVAGE used the two-way radio to advise Monk and Ham that he was leaving for Miami immediately. “That's the quickest way, probably, to get a close look at this see-into-the-future stuff,” he explained. “Have you fellows spotted your quarry yet?”

“They're both in a second-rate hotel on the edge of the Harlem district,” Monk said. “Room on the third floor. We've sort of got the idea that more than two of them are staying at the hotel. Not sure yet. It isn't the sort of hotel that puts out information readily.”

“Don't draw attention to yourselves.”

“We're trying not to. That's why we haven't put the heat on the hotel people.”

“Within less than an hour,” Doc said, “I'll be out of range of these two-way radios. If you have a report, come to headquarters and use the powerful set here. I'll take a large two-way outfit along in the plane and set it up in the Miami hotel.”

“Right.”

“And be careful. This affair is odd enough to have something pretty big behind it. I don't like the way it looks.”

“You can depend on us to be the souls of caution,” Monk assured him.

“Your idea of caution,” Doc said dryly, “frequently stands my hair on end. Try to be a little conservative this time.”

Chapter V

DOC SAVAGE recognized the lanky young man with the terrific flat of blond whiskers, coming through the afternoon sunlight of Florida, as being Macbeth Williams. Accompanying him were a young woman and a stocky dark saturnine man who also had a beard. Doc flipped a few switches to off-positions, gave the dial of the plane a glance to make sure things were shipshape, then alighted, extended a hand, and said, “Hello, Williams. You look quite a bit different with that beard.”

“I really should part with the foliage, I suppose,” Macbeth Williams said. He was obviously excited and awed. “I'm delighted you came.” He introduced the others. “This is my . . . ah . . . this is Miss McGuiggan and Dr. Ulm.”

Carlie McGuiggan took Doc's hand, laughing, and said, “I'm more awed than Macbeth is. I can hardly

believe it."

Austin Ulm had a quick hard handclasp. He pointed at the plane. "Some job. I never saw anything quite like it."

The plane, a sleek and unorthodox craft, was already drawing quite a lot of attention. Airport employees were approaching to inspect it.

"It's a jet job of a new type, partly experimental," Doc explained.

"It must have a hell of a performance," Austin Ulm remarked. "Macbeth said he talked to you on the telephone after ten o'clock, and here it's not much after three, and you're in Miami. That's traveling." He climbed up and peered into the cabin without receiving an invitation. "Say, this will carry half a dozen people. You wouldn't think it from the outside. What's the idea of the odd shape to the fuselage?"

"It will function as a seaplane with the gear retracted," Doc told him. "Works very nicely off the water, in fact."

"How about snow?" Ulm asked.

"The same. There's an arrangement in the wings that changes the airfoil, increasing the lift greatly, so that the landing run-out isn't much more than required by some private planes of the reciprocating engine type."

Carlie suggested politely, "Perhaps you'd like to collect your luggage and get out of here. This crowd will be a mob in a minute."

"Thank you, I would," Doc assured her.

Doc Savage removed three rather bulky and heavy equipment cases from the plane, and the two men helped him lug these to Macbeth's rented car. Ulm, who seemed to have a large bump of curiosity, asked, "What's in this case? It's heavy."

"Two-way radio," Doc told him. "I usually carry a set powerful enough to keep in contact with my associates in whatever part of the world they may be."

"You seem to travel well-prepared," Ulm said.

"I try to do so."

When they reached the car, a convertible model with the top down, Macbeth Williams suggested to Carlie, "I wish you'd drive, darling. I . . . ah . . . feel rather nervous."

"Relax, Macbeth," Carlie told him. "Doc Savage is here. Your problems are practically solved."

Ulm, already settled in the rear seat, chuckled. "They're just starting, if you ask me."

While Carlie was getting the car in motion, Doc Savage looked thoughtfully at Ulm, asked, "What do you mean, just starting?"

"I mean," Ulm told him, "that a guy with Macbeth's gift is just naturally going to attract excitement. Once news gets out that he can predict the future, things will pop. You can imagine how it'll grab the public imagination. The boy is in for a time."

Macbeth Williams groaned. "I wish you wouldn't treat this thing as if it were a fact."

“Why not?” Ulm demanded.

“It can't be a fact.”

“Why not?”

“Predicting,” said Macbeth vehemently, “just isn't done. It's unscientific. It's not possible.”

Ulm grinned. “Seeing is believing. What do you say, Carlie?”

“I'm inclined to agree,” Carlie replied.

Doc Savage noted that Carlie McGuiggan seemed to be a cautious and expert driver. He approved of the way she handled the car in the heavy boulevard traffic.

“Miss McGuiggan, do you actually believe that Mr. Williams has acquired some hitherto unknown power of foresight?” he asked.

“Meaning,” asked Carlie, “that you would think I'd be a zany if I believed it?”

“Not necessarily. Naturally, I do not have the details as yet, and so my skepticism hasn't been dispelled. But I'll take your answer with an open mind, you can be sure.”

Carlie nodded. “I believe it.”

“You've seen it work?”

“Twice last night, and once today.”

“Three times today,” Ulm corrected. “At breakfast, Macbeth ordered ham and eggs and said he'd bet he would get a kipper. He got a kipper. Later Macbeth said a rental car agency wouldn't have a free car, and sure enough, they didn't have. And driving out here, Macbeth suddenly pulled to the side of the road, and a moment later a car driven by a drunken man careened through the spot where we would have been if he hadn't pulled aside.”

Macbeth broke in excitedly, “Wait a minute, now! Those could have been accidents. Coincidences.”

“Bosh!” said Ulm.

“All of it,” continued Macbeth, with even more animation, “could have been coincidence. A run of luck. It could be that.”

Ulm snorted. “I've been watching it grow for six months, and all I can say is: Luck never had a run like that.”

“You're a believer?” Doc inquired.

“Damn right!” Ulm declared violently.

“I'll be interested,” Doc said, “in observing some of these predictions. Williams, would you care to make one right now?”

Macbeth groaned. “I can't make them consciously. I'm not even aware of making a prediction, until I see it come true.”

Ulm chuckled. “Macbeth ought to get the thing under control. Oh, boy! Think what it would mean if he

could turn it on when he wanted to! With half a billion capital to work with, there's no limit."

Doc eyed Ulm sharply. "You're suggesting that Mr. Williams take over his father's estate, which I understand he can do if he wishes, and employ his propensity for predicting to speculate?"

"It's a damn good idea!" Ulm said excitedly. "It just occurred to me! Macbeth, you should think about it!"

"Nonsense," Macbeth snapped.

Carlie McGuiggan glanced around. Her eyes were starry with delight. "Macbeth, you really should consider the idea. Why, you could become a greater tycoon than your father."

"What I'll probably become," said Macbeth gloomily, "is a resident in some booby-hatch."

BECAUSE it would be more convenient, Doc Savage took a room at the hotel where Macbeth Williams and Austin Ulm were staying. He was hardly settled when Macbeth Williams knocked on the door.

"I managed to give Carlie and Ulm the slip," Macbeth explained. "I wanted to talk to you privately about—well, the ugly side of this thing."

Doc asked the young man to come in, noting that Williams showed increased signs of nervousness and strain. "So it has an ugly side?" he inquired.

Williams dropped into a chair. "I don't know. I imagine you know what I'm referring to, the murder of the clerk in the telegraph office. After you telephoned me, I got a newspaper and read about it."

"Think there was any connection with yourself?"

"I don't see how there possibly could have been!"

"You've given it close thought?"

"My God, of course!" Macbeth said wildly. "I didn't even know the clerk. The murderer didn't take my telegram to you. Doesn't that prove the killing wasn't connected with the message?"

Doc shook his head. "Not necessarily. The killer might have been seeking the message when the clerk, Gridley, surprised him. He might have shot Gridley because of excitement, or during a struggle. There were reports that Gridley was heard screaming just before the shot was fired. The screams could have frightened the killer into firing the shot."

Macbeth groaned. "It would be awful to think I was somehow the cause of a man getting killed!"

Doc said, "I'm going to describe two men. Listen closely, then tell me if you think you've ever seen them." Doc gave a precise word picture of the taxi driver and the elevator operator who had been after him that morning in New York. He did not explain what they had done, merely described them.

Macbeth shook his head. "I don't believe I know them. Who are they?"

Doc glanced at his watch. "Perhaps we can find out by now." He turned on the powerful two-way radio, opened the window and tossed the weighted end of a fifty-meter antennae across to the roof of a nearby building, and presently was in business with the transmitter.

One-sided business, however. He could not raise Monk or Ham. He checked by contacting a New York station, to make sure he was not in a dead spot.

Finally, somewhat upset, he broadcast instructions. “Monk, or Ham, if you're hearing me, get to a transmitter and give me a call.” He repeated the instructions, adding, “I'll stand by here for the next hour.”

He spent the following hour quizzing Macbeth Williams about the predictions, but learned nothing very instructive. The predictions, as Macbeth said, were just predictions, given unconsciously and without awareness of particular significance.

At the end of the hour, there was no news from Monk or Ham. Planted in Doc Savage was a small seed of alarm that grew with frightening rapidity.

Chapter VI

DOC SAVAGE joined Macbeth Williams, Carlie McGuiggan and Austin Ulm for dinner, and following that, whatever the evening had to offer.

“In the way of a prediction, is that it?” Carlie asked.

“Something like that,” Doc admitted. “Macbeth and I talked it over, and there doesn't seem to be anything for me to do but take the rôle of observer until one of these predictions turns up.”

“Then what will you do?”

“Examine the prediction,” Doc replied dryly, “to learn what makes it tick.”

“I'll bet,” said Austin Ulm, “You get your hat knocked off.”

They had an excellent dinner at a place in Miami Beach. Doc Savage learned quite a bit from Carlie's chatter. She was the daughter of a fairly well-to-do manufacturer of ceramics, had a private pilot's license, liked sail-fishing, and was otherwise a tomboy.

Doc gathered, before the meal had ended, that Carlie was a decisive person herself, and liked decisiveness in others. He also received the impression that Carlie considered Macbeth Williams lacking in confidence in himself, and that this was the obstacle that stood between them. And he saw that Carlie was all for the idea of Macbeth assuming charge of the estate, probably because the manager of such an enormous property loomed in her eyes as a man, of necessity, of courage and firm decisions.

It was also interesting to Doc Savage to note that Macbeth Williams himself wasn't as averse to the idea as he had been that afternoon. Carlie and Ulm apparently had been working on him. Once Macbeth remarked seriously, “You know, even if this gift of mine should turn out to be all imagination, it would be interesting to see what I could do with something really big.” He smiled thoughtfully. “I hope it isn't a gift. That would be nice.”

“You mean,” Doc suggested, “that you would like to have it turn out to be merely good judgment and foresight on your part?”

“Exactly,” Macbeth replied. “Frankly, nothing would please me more. I've always been a fellow who didn't trust his own judgment. You've no idea what a burden that can become, when you've carried it all your life.”

“A man should discard a burden like that,” Doc told him.

“How? I've tried.”

Ulm put in, “I'm betting on the predictions. Better turn one out, Macbeth, or Doc Savage will begin to think we're kidding him.”

Macbeth winced. “I wish you wouldn't joke about it.”

Following dinner, Ulm came up with a suggestion. “You don't,” he said, “hunt squirrels anywhere but in the woods. Not if you want squirrels.”

“Meaning?” Doc suggested.

“Why don't we take Macbeth to a gambling joint,” Ulm said, grinning. “The place to look for a prediction is in surroundings that would stimulate a prediction, it seems to me.”

“I see no objections,” Doc said.

Macbeth groaned. Carlie laughed. She asked, “What joint will it be?”

“Let's leave it to our waiter,” Ulm suggested. “We'll just ask him to name a joint, and that's the one we'll pick. If it's agreeable?”

When the waiter came over, Carlie glanced up at him and asked, “If someone asked you the name of a night club, what name would you think of?”

“The Silver Slipper,” the waiter said promptly.

They all laughed at Carlie's thwarted expression, but it was Ulm who suggested, “Perhaps there's a club by that name here. There are always imitations of well-known places scattered around the country. I'll get a phone book and see.” He came back presently, triumphant. “There's one. In a pretty good part of town, too.”

“Then,” said Doc Savage pleasantly, “we'll all go there, if it's satisfactory.”

Macbeth muttered, “It's not wholly satisfactory, but I'll go along with the thing. I feel like a guinea pig.”

Carlie patted his hand. “Like the goose being watched to lay the golden egg, you should feel, darling.”

Doc Savage excused himself, saying, “I'll be with you in a few moments,” and went into the lobby. From there, by the side entrance route, he found his way to the kitchen, where he accosted the waiter who'd given them the night club name.

“Would you mind telling me,” Doc asked, displaying a five-dollar bill, “how you happened to mention that name.”

The waiter looked astonished. “Why, it just came naturally.”

“No one told you that you would be asked for the name of a club?”

“Certainly not.”

Doc indicated the greenback. “That's for telling me how you happened to mention the name of that club.”

The waiter grinned. “That's an easy five bucks, friend. Me and another guy was arguing about high-class night clubs about half an hour ago, and all the argument got down to the Silver Slipper toward the end.

That's why the name was on the tip of my tongue. Does that earn the five?"

"It sure does," Doc said. "Did this other fellow bring the subject around to the Silver Slipper?"

"I don't recall exactly. Maybe he did."

Doc passed over the bill. "The fellow still around?"

"Come here," the waiter said. He led the way to a side door which gave a view of a miniature golf course which occupied a vacant lot beside the restaurant. "See the short guy with the linen suit and red necktie?"

Doc asked, "Is he the one who argued with you?"

"That's right."

"Thanks," Doc said. "You needn't mention that I was interested, unless he's a friend of yours."

"Never saw him before tonight," said the waiter. "And thanks for the five."

MACBETH WILLIAMS was ill at ease, and headed for an uncomfortable evening, Doc could see. By way of breaking the tension, Doc turned the conversation to geology and ocean currents, two subjects on which Macbeth was a master.

The night club was about what Doc had expected. Some fellow had thrown it together out of paint and plywood and mirrors in hopes of making a tourist killing, and had added the usual gambling setup in the back. Access to this was available only to persons known to the management, but a bill in the headwaiter's hand established their credentials in short order.

Ulm nudged Macbeth over to the wheel. "If you get a hunch a number's coming up, for heaven's sake, don't keep it to yourself."

"I don't feel the least bit oracular," Macbeth assured him.

Doc Savage circulated idly through the place, noted the usual number of games were gimmicked in favor of the management, and kept his money in his pocket. Carlie played sparingly, lost more often than she won, and remarked that they needed her Aunt Liz along for moral courage where gambling was concerned.

"Dammit, pal," Austin Ulm told Macbeth when some time had passed. "Come across with a prediction. You're letting us down, to say nothing of the fifteen bucks I've dropped."

"I've told you I can't just pull them out when I wish." Macbeth Williams said stiffly.

Doc murmured dryly, "I understand you didn't know when you were about to produce."

"I don't." Macbeth flushed. "Well, darn it, I don't. What do you want me to do, just start making random suggestions about what number to play?"

"Why don't you try that?" Doc asked.

Macbeth, irritated, said, "All right, play black nine. Play any damned thing,"

Carlie smiled. "That came reluctantly, but I'm going to try it." She put a twenty on black nine.

She won.

“Holy smoke!” Ulm gasped. “And I just stood there! I didn't get any dough down. What's the next one, Macbeth? Give us the next winner quick!”

“Black nine again!” Macbeth snapped. “And I'm sure it was just an accident. I didn't know black nine would win.”

The nine black won again.

Macbeth backed away from the table. “No, no, no!” he wailed. “This frightens me. I'm going to get out of here!”

Ulm, who had won more than three hundred dollars, seized his arm frantically. “By God, you can't dry up on me!” he growled. “I'm short of dough. I don't have half a billion bucks lying around loose.”

“Take your hands off me!” Macbeth snapped.

“Now, now, don't get upset,” Ulm urged. “I'm sorry. I didn't intend to get tough. But just one more bet would mean a lot to me. Please, Macbeth, just one. Try the crap table, if you don't like roulette.”

Macbeth, flushed and irritated and frightened at his own inexplicable ability, indicated a gaunt man who was rattling the dice. “He's going to make his point the toss after this one.”

Trying to restrain his excitement, Ulm crowded over and got a bet down with the house. The gaunt man's point was ten, a tough one to make. He made it.

Ulm collected, spluttering with greed, and croaked, “The next winner, Macbeth! Quick!”

Macbeth sneered at him, said, “You're just greedy,” and took Carlie's arm and walked back into the part of the club where they could see a floor show and have a sandwich. Macbeth told Doc, “I hope you're not impressed by that stuff. It's all a series of coincidences, I'm sure.”

“Is that,” Doc asked, “the way your predictions usually come?”

“Well, yes,” said Macbeth wryly. “Smoke doesn't come out of my ears, and tongues of flame don't accompany the predictions, if that's what you mean.”

Doc noted the way Ulm was shaking with excitement. “I wouldn't say it was entirely without effect,” he said.

THE next half hour was peaceful and sans predictions. They had fairly good sandwiches, and Ulm an ale to quiet his nerves. The floor show came on.

Macbeth Williams seemed to relax. Then Doc noted that he suddenly became uncomfortable.

“What's wrong?” Doc inquired.

Macbeth flushed, and mopped his face, then the palms of his hands, on a handkerchief. “I've got an odd feeling of apprehension that I don't quite understand,” he explained.

“Exactly what sort of a feeling?”

“I hope you don't think I'm silly. But I feel that we're in danger. It's a hard thing to define, just an impression of general danger. It's like an emotion or like the feeling you get when you're a kid and walk

through a graveyard at night."

"Could it be," Doc suggested, "a result of worrying about the murder of the telegraph office clerk?"

"I don't know, but it might be," Macbeth replied.

Ulm frowned. "This time, you feel like you know you're making a prediction? Is that it?"

Macbeth said curtly, "I'm not making any forecasts at all, blast it! I'm just explaining that I feel uneasy."

"I'll bet this doesn't amount to anything, if he *knows* he's predicting," Ulm said.

Doc ignored the interruption. "Williams, could it be that you noticed someone who brought on this feeling?"

Macbeth Williams hesitated. "I don't know. That is—well, I don't exactly recall. But, yes, it could be."

"Did you," Doc asked, "notice a short man in a white linen suit and a red necktie?"

"Well, I— You know, that's odd. I do seem to have seen such a man."

Doc Savage made a quick pencil sketch on the back of a menu, caricaturing the man he'd seen on the miniature golf course back at the restaurant. He showed this. "That the fellow?"

"Why, yes!" Macbeth gasped. "Yes, I did notice that chap."

"You noticed him," Doc said, "while you were looking around, just prior to having this feeling of uneasiness?"

"Yes, I believe that's right."

Ulm sneered at them. "This is getting too practical. I'm only interested in predictions. Let's get out of this dump."

Macbeth Williams looked at them, an expression of terror on his fact. "I don't feel we should leave openly and without being cautious."

Chuckling, Ulm patted his arm. "This thing is getting your nerves, pal. But I suppose the joint has a back door, if you would feel better using it."

THE bullet made only one real sound, and that was not at its point of origination; they say a silencer is not too effective, but this one must have done an excellent job. No doubt the gun made some sound off there in the night, but it was lost it the other uglier sound, the solid stopping noise the bullet made against Doc Savage.

Doc Savage, going backward and down, believed he was hit somewhere in the chest region. In fact, there was not much doubt, because in a moment the shock localized in the central chest area, a logical part of him for it, since that was the largest target he presented. When he was down, partly of shock and partly of his own accord, he turned and, reaching and stretching, was able to strike the door with his hand and get it shut. That closed off the light, such of it as did not come from the moon.

"Scatter and stay down," he said. "And stay here. Don't leave."

He got up then, not erect, but lunging forward and to the right, then the left, with one hand exploring in some alarm about the center of his chest. He could feel the bullet, a small thing to have kicked him so hard, lodged and misshapen against the chain mesh of the bulletproof undershirt he was wearing. There was some padding under the chain mail of the best alloy metal that chemist Monk Mayfair had been able to create for such a purpose, but not enough padding, because he had some apprehensions about a rib or a breastbone being broken. But after he had gone a short distance, he decided nothing was cracked.

Somewhere out in the night, a man began running. Doc could hear him. The man's eyes had been accustoming themselves to the moonlight for some time, probably, and he must have seen Doc moving, although it had seemed to Doc that he had moved in only the darkest places.

The man ran away. Doc followed. There were no more bullets for while. The running man crossed through moonlight, and he was the short fellow with the white suit and red necktie. And now with a case of near-hysterical fright.

The man's flight took him half a block, to where he had a car parked. He got in the car, and the key must have been in the ignition, because the car was moving, it seemed, as soon as the man was in it, and a thin spike of flame came from the open window. The passage of gases and bullet through the silencer on the end of the gun muzzle was more audible now, perhaps because the two bullets were not close, but chopped off through the neatly clipped shrubbery of someone's yard, and from there could have gone almost anywhere.

The car drew away. The white suit was a faint blur inside it. Doc Savage, with no car available, seemed defeated, but then luck touched him. A car drove into the street from another direction, occupied by someone bound for the club. It slowed and the driver hunted for a place to park where he wouldn't get stuck the tip that was mandatory in the club parking lot. When Doc, running hard, reached the car, the driver looked up, startled. There was a girl with him. Doc said, “I want your car to chase another car. Quick. Don't argue.”

The driver had a considerable quantity of jaw and it snapped up and thrust out. The muzzle of a gun followed it. “No, and you better not argue either. I'm Springlatch, Miami police department, detective first grade.”

“That's fine,” Doc told him. “Now catch the car if you can. Ask all the questions you want to, while you're chasing it. Better put the girl out, because our friend is free with a gun.”

“The girl is Policewoman Lorn,” Springlatch said. “Get in. Keep an eye on him, Lorn.” The car began to move, gathering speed, and Springlatch said, “The way the guy's headed, he's got to veer east when he hits the bayfront drive. We can head him, maybe. Only thing is, you gotta have his license.”

Doc gave a number and Springlatch asked, “You sure,” and Doc said, “I'm sure.” He inferred that they would cut in ahead of the other machine via a shorter route and wait for it to pass.

“All right, who are you and what's the scoop?” Springlatch demanded.

Doc told him. Essentials. His identity. The fact that white-suit had fired on him. “There's a silencer on his gun, a pretty good one,” Doc finished. “So don't expect noise. Incidentally, I have a special commission from the Miami police department, if it's not outdated, and if it is, there's a federal commission that should serve.”

“I've heard of you,” Springlatch told him.

THE rest of it did not take long. Two minutes. Two minutes that passed the longest way, the car they wanted coming around a turn, the driver seeing them turn in on his trail. There were forty seconds of the wildest driving, then another turn, and white-suit didn't make the turn, although there was a moment when it seemed he would miraculously straighten out after vaulting the curb and caroming off the first palm tree. But then the car began to roll, and after three turns, it did one end-for-end swap, as a kind of final flourish.

Office Springlatch said, "He's a tough cookie if he took that." He spoke as their own car was stopping, skidding a little first to one side then the other as it did so. Then a red animal of fire began at the front of the wrecked car and started swallowing.

Doc Savage moved fast. He was at the car far ahead of Springlatch. He got into the heat, groping; he began to pull, and rather to his surprise was able to back out of the worst of the heat with what remained of white-coat. The man was all there, but badly broken, and minus his life.

"Look, harness and all," Springlatch said, for some reason surprised to find that the man had carried his gun in an elaborate underarm holster.

"He was killed instantly," Doc said.

Springlatch was looking at the gun. ".44. For some reason, you don't run onto many of them. Still, somehow, it seems familiar."

Doc said, "It should be."

"Yeah?"

"You probably have a .44 bullet from this gun downtown."

"Have we? How come?"

"Probably because one of your examiners took it out of a dead man last night."

Springlatch was silent. Not from surprise, from self-condemnation of his own stupidity. It was Policewoman Lorn who said, "You're not that dumb, Spring."

"No, but I could have been," Springlatch said. "The clerk in the telegraph office last night. They took a .44 slug out of him. How do you know it was from this gun?"

Doc Savage was going through the dead man's pockets. He found a number of things, money, lighter, a dog-track program, a billfold with some identification that was mostly Canadian. The identification was consistent in indicating the man was named Wilmer Elvin Troy, was a Canadian aged thirty-eight, a member of two associations for mining men, and owned a commercial pilot's license. There were two other items of special interest.

No. 1 special, which Doc showed to Springlatch, was a copy of the telegram which Macbeth Williams had despatched last night. It was made in pencil, and it differed in wording but not in general detail, near the end, from the one Williams had sent. Doc pointed out the difference in wording, Springlatch taking it from there.

"He was interrupted when he had copied down to near the end, took time out to kill telegraph clerk Gridley, some more time out to scram, and finished out the copy from memory later," Springlatch said. "How's that for deducting?"

The second item, which tied the whole thing up in a package, was the address of the Harlem hotel in New York where Monk and Ham had located the taxi driver and elevator operator who'd had bad luck with homicidal intentions.

“What's it all about?” was Springlatch's summary.

“It all ties in, anyway,” Doc said. “It's more of a relief than you realize to know that.”

Chapter VII

WELL into the early morning, a little after three a.m., the police decided to administer a warning not to leave town to Doc Savage, Macbeth Williams, Carlie McGuiggan and Austin Ulm, and let them go back to their hotels. The beards of Williams and Ulm had helped earn them a bad time.

“This is a devil of a note,” said Macbeth Williams, riding back to the hotel. “What if the thing gets in the newspapers? It's going to reflect on the estate.”

“I'm glad,” said Carlie, “that the subject of Macbeth's predicting didn't enter the official discussions.”

Macbeth shuddered. “Yes, that would have been no help. I don't think they considered our stories too credible, anyway.”

Ulm stroked his whiskers. “These bushes didn't help. I think I'll invest a little money in a shave.”

Doc Savage asked idly, “What estate was that?”

“Eh?” Macbeth asked.

“The one,” Doc said, “that newspaper notoriety would reflect upon.”

“Oh, you mean my remark a moment ago.” Macbeth was silent a moment. “Well, naturally I referred to my father's holdings, the organization that people refer to more commonly as, quote, the half billion the silly fool won't touch, unquote.”

“You seem thoughtful about it,” Doc said.

“I am,” Macbeth replied firmly.

“You're not,” Doc suggested, “thinking of changing your mind about taking over its direction?”

“That's exactly it, I am thinking,” said Macbeth.

Austin Ulm whistled. “My boy, you're beginning to cook with gas, as they say.” Ulm sounded excited and awed. “It's all right to play around with who is going to win at a crap table, but it would be a little more worthwhile if a business deal involving a million or so was the stake. Macbeth, that's what I've been saying. Why waste this thing you've got?” He nudged Carlie McGuiggan. “What do you say, Carlie?”

Carlie shuddered. “I don't like people being shot and shot at.”

“Nonsense,” said Ulm. “That violence had nothing to do with Macbeth. Anybody who packs that idea is nuts.”

IN his room, Doc Savage tried to raise Monk or Ham on the radio. Then he fell back on the long-distance telephone, making half a dozen calls, the last one to the New York police department. Total result: Anxiety. What had happened to Monk and Ham? He did not as a usual thing have trouble sleeping, but during the rest of the night, he had plenty. He was unable to recall actually sleeping; what he was able to remember, when the sun burst through the window into his eyes, was an endless recalling of the weaknesses of Monk and Ham that might have caused a foot to slip. Their weaknesses were, except in the wrong places, strengths. Monk, in particular, was a direct fellow who would drop caution and wade in, given part of an excuse. That, in summary, was the thing that worried him. He imagined it was what had happened. They had made a smashing move when a wary one would have been wiser. That something drastic had befallen Monk and Ham, he was sure, or they would have set up a contact.

He rose, drew the blind against the sun, then lay on the bed for a while, drawing back mentally and examining the affair as a whole. He saw it as something like this: Macbeth Williams, who preferred being a mediocre scientist to managing his late father's holdings—Doc was inclined to feel Macbeth's attitude about the estate was sensible—had been signed up by a vague outfit named the Kendall Foundation, through the offices of his friend Ulm. The Kendall setup, Doc felt, should be known to him if it amounted to anything. It wasn't. The six-month isolation on Cormoral Island wasn't too sensible; there were ways open to any organization to get a group of stranded scientists back to civilization. So that the stranding was odd. That made two oddities, the vagueness of the Kendall Foundation, and the pointlessness of the marooning.

Suddenly hot with an idea, Doc Savage dressed and went to the waterfront. The steamer *Meg Finnegan* lay tied in rust-eaten ignominy to a wharf south of the bridge, and Doc saw no one until he had hammered on the grimy door of what obviously was the master's cabin. Then he was confronted by a tired, ugly face, bloodshot eyes, and a scowl.

“Skipper?” Doc asked.

“Yeah, I'm the master,” replied the man. “What about it?”

Doc looked at the man as if he were fitting him to a description, then shrugged and displayed his billfold. “I'm here to pay off,” he said.

The captain scowled and the thin tip of his tongue made a quick trip across his lips, as if fly-catching. “What the hell! The owners canning me?”

“What gave you that idea? No, this is for handling the little job.”

“Yeah?”

“Let's not be coy,” Doc suggested. “You got them off the island, making it look as if you just accidentally found them while paying the island a visit to see if there was guano. That was the deal, wasn't it?” He fanned through the banknotes. “Let's see, it was five hundred. Right?”

The master of the *Meg Finnegan* gave Doc an expressive look of greed, knowingness, and puzzled suspicion.

Doc added casually, “The bonus, I'm talking about.” He frowned, watching the man, and asked abruptly, “What's this? You didn't expect a bonus for the job?”

The skipper swallowed. “Sure, sure,” he said unconvincingly.

Doc made an angry gesture. “What's this! So that polecat intended to chisel the five hundred for himself!

He had instructions to promise you a bonus, and deliver it personally. It just happens he was sent to New York, and couldn't make it."

The other man cursed bitterly. "Hell, no, he didn't mention a bonus! Trying to crook me, eh?"

"Maybe he gypped you on the payment, too," Doc said grimly. "How much did you get?"

"Two thousand," the man growled. "How much was it supposed to be?"

Doc Savage pushed the man back into the cabin, followed, showed him, for effect, an old federal commission that he carried for convenience in cases like this one, and said, "Now, let's have the whole story, friend. Or you're going to be in plenty of hot water."

The skipper shuffled back and sat on the bunk. He pondered, and the longer he sat there, the lower his shoulders sank. "The guy came to me in Rio," he said glumly. "It was two thousand to pick these four guys off that island. The guy said his name was Walters, but probably it wasn't. I wouldn't know. I got no information, and no instructions except it was to be an accident, finding them on this Cormoral Island."

"Describe Walters," Doc said.

It didn't take much imagination to fit the description of Walters to the man in the white suit who had died in the crash the night before.

DETECTIVE SPRINGLATCH opened the door sleepily, stared at Carlie McGuiggan in surprise, said, "Oh, you! Hello, there."

"I'm sorry I woke you so early," Carlie said. "You had a long night, didn't you?"

"It was long, all right," Springlatch agreed. "I wouldn't call it productive."

"Well, I wanted to ask you a question, and then I'll leave," Carlie said. "Did you inquire at the night club about that fellow in the white suit who was killed?"

"How'd you know we would do that?" Springlatch asked.

"I just imagined you would be thorough, and think of doing so."

Springlatch eyed her in a friendly fashion. "I'll answer your question if you'll answer one of mine."

"It's a deal."

"We worked that club over, but good," Springlatch told Carlie. "White-coat—Wilmer Elvin Troy, if that's his name—had made himself well-known around there the last few days. Why? The reason will slay you. This Troy wanted all the games rigged so some guy, one particular guy, would win. Troy got his way. It cost him plenty, but he got his way. You interested in the name of the winnah?"

"Macbeth Williams?" Carlie queried.

Springlatch grinned. "Good guess."

"Then the thing was a frame against Macbeth. He didn't play; he only predicted!" Carlie exclaimed.

"What's that about predicting?"

Carlie shook her head. “Never mind. I'll answer your question now, or is that it?”

Springlatch grinned. “My question was: How come you're interested?”

“Macbeth,” Carlie replied frankly. “I'm in love with the big dope.”

REACHING the hotel where Doc Savage, Macbeth and Ulm were staying, Carlie attempted to telephone Doc. Failing, she wrote a note: “I got to thinking about it all last night and I think it's a plot. The predictions at the gambling place were framed. Ask Springlatch. I'm looking into another idea I have.” She left this at the desk for Doc.

Meeting Macbeth for breakfast, she mentioned nothing about her activities. To Macbeth's, “Darling, you're nicer looking than the sunshine this morning!” she smiled happily, and chattered gaily through the meal.

“Honey,” she asked later, “where are the other two scientists who were marooned with you? Mr. Crikeland and Mr. Swanberg?”

Macbeth was startled. “Gosh, you haven't met them, have you, sweet? You know, I'd darn near forgot all about them. They're still here in town, I imagine.”

“At this hotel?”

“No, they were going in for a little more flash,” Macbeth told her. “They moved into a hotel over on Miami Beach. The Flame Arts, on the ocean front. You know, I'll have to call them today. Why don't we have luncheon with them? They're great guys. You'll like them.”

“I'm sure I will,” Carlie said. “But let's not make it a date until I'm sure I'll be free. I have some shopping to do.” She glanced at her watch. “Oh, gosh! I've got to rush now! See you later, dear.”

Macbeth jumped up. “Couldn't I go along?”

“No. I won't be long. I'll call you in an hour,” Carlie said, hurrying away.

SWANBERG had removed his beard. This had left his face mapped grotesquely in brown and white, and he had attempted to dispel some of the oddity by coating the white with suntan make-up. The effect was slightly bizarre, but he had a lean face that was handsome in a cold way. “Yes, I'm Swanberg,” he said.

“I'm Carlie McGuiggan,” Carlie told him. “A friend of Macbeth Williams.”

Swanberg grinned faintly. “Macbeth is a lucky guy. Won't you come in?” He raised his voice and yelled, “Crike!”

Crikeland came from another room, an older man than Carlie had expected or perhaps about the age she had expected, because she had imagined scientists as older men, with glasses, absent-minded manners, and gruff voices. Crikeland had all of these.

“A great pleasure, Miss McGuiggan,” Crikeland said gruffly. “Or is it to be?”

Carlie looked at the two men. She didn't like them much. “I don't know,” she said. “It's going to depend.”

“Indeed?”

Carlie nodded. “Frankly, I don't see why my cards shouldn't go on the table right now. I've known Macbeth Williams a long time. He's awfully nice. But he can be imposed on. He's a big friendly dope who lacks confidence in himself.”

Neither Crikeland nor Swanberg smiled, but Swanberg said pleasantly enough, “You don't need to tell us about Macbeth, Miss McGuiggan. We spent six months on an island with that boy.”

“That,” said Carlie, “is going to be my subject.”

“Eh?”

“I'm in love with Macbeth,” Carlie went on. “He's swell. For a long time, I've wanted to make him over. I thought if he had a little more self-confidence, I'd like him better. Now I've changed my mind. I like the guy the way he is.”

“Meaning?” suggested Swanberg.

“It's very simple. I don't want him any different.”

Crikeland snorted. “Why say a thing like that to us? Who's changing Macbeth?”

Frowning, Carlie said, “I don't know who is, but I believe it's happening. About these predictions, did you fellows notice anything about them?”

“We noticed them,” Crikeland told her. “Toward the last, they were about as nerve-soothing as cannons going off.”

“Did we notice them!” Swanberg put in. “Lady, there wasn't any other topic of conversation.”

“You're not answering my question. I asked if you noticed anything odd,” Carlie said.

“Odd?”

“Phony.”

“In what way?”

“Staged,” Carlie said. “Planted. Rigged. Trickery and thinga-jiggery. Not by Macbeth, either.”

A glance Carlie didn't quite understand, and disliked, passed between Swanberg and Crikeland. “We discussed that point,” said Crikeland. “And we reached a conclusion. We decided we couldn't see a dang sign of chicanery.”

“You feel,” asked Carlie, “that the whole thing is genuine?”

“We certainly do.”

“Then,” said Carlie, “you're pretty dense.”

Crikeland eyed her blankly and asked, “What do you mean?”

“There's scheming,” said Carlie. “The object seems to be to build up Macbeth's confidence so he will take over the estate management. I don't think that's the ultimate purpose. It's the first step.”

“What would the second step be?” Swanberg asked, grinning in ridicule.

“How do I know? And don't smirk.”

“It's preposterous,” said Swanberg.

“Certainly is,” agreed Crikeland. “The idea that Macbeth's string of predictions are the result of careful rigging without his knowledge is utterly unconvincing and without foundation. Why, great grief, I suppose you'll claim next the whole expedition to Cormoral Island was rigged so it could be pulled off.”

“Could be,” said Carlie grimly.

“Oh, my God!”

Carlie, eyes flashing, said, “Ulm's winning, with Macbeth's predictions, at a gambling house last night was rigged, I can tell you that. And I can tell you the police know about it, and are investigating. Now, what do you think of that?”

Crikeland glanced, speechless, at Swanberg. The latter was equally shocked. Neither spoke.

“I hoped,” Carlie continued, “to get some help from you fellows. That's why I'm here. Macbeth looks on you as his friends.”

“We are his friends!” Crikeland exclaimed unconvincingly.

“I'm beginning to wonder,” Carlie said. “Yes, I'm beginning to wonder.”

Crikeland stiffened, muttered, “You're not being very polite, young lady.”

“No, I'm not,” Carlie agreed. “I think I'll come back later, after I have time to think this out more thoroughly. Good morning, gentlemen.”

She turned toward the door, and was reaching for it when Swanberg's heavy fist came against her jaw at the end of a short arc. Carlie collapsed. Swanberg let her fall to the floor, blew on his knuckles, and grinned bleakly at Crikeland's scowl of disapproval.

“That was a fool move,” Crikeland growled.

“Was it? She had a good hold on the lid of the box, and she was getting ready to yank it open,” Swanberg told him.

“Yes, but now she'll know there's something in the box. Before, she didn't know.”

“O.K. So we could have stood by and let her knock the props from under seven months' hard work and conniving. Would that be sense?”

Crikeland shuddered. “No, I guess not. But now what are we going to do with her?”

Swanberg sneered. “You think I haven't got that figured out? You think I just bopped her?”

“Well?”

“We could get in a spot where we gotta make a buy-out. You see that, don't you?”

“I can see a spot.”

Swanberg told him, “There's two angles. One, she's bait to get this Doc Savage into a trap. What kind of a trap, we'll figure out, but I think it better be well-figured. Two, to keep Macbeth Williams in line, if it comes to a place where he sees what's happening. Sound all right?”

“No!” Crikeland snapped. “You damn fool, you don't just keep a full-grown girl a prisoner in a city like Miami.”

Swanberg sneered. “Not practical, eh?”

“No.”

“Well, then, we won't,” Swanberg said. He watched Crikeland begin to grow pale, laughed, added, “I don't mean kill her just yet. I mean, let's get her up to the mine.”

Crikeland winced. “You are crazy, Swanberg. Six or seven thousand miles! Just move her up there. Like that.”

“Ever hear of airplanes?”

“But—”

“We'll be two doctors with a patient,” Swanberg went on. “It'll work. If we just use a little brass, it'll work.”

Crikeland hesitated, said, “But it's so damned much trouble!”

“Inconvenient, eh?”

“Sure.”

“So might an electric chair be.”

Swanberg had intended the remark for humor, but it hadn't been, and both were silent. It was Crikeland who leaned over and struck Carlie's jaw a hard blow when she began to show signs of reviving. And Crikeland who said, “Well, if we could get Doc Savage up at the mine, the odds would be a little more in our favor.”

“Now you're on the track,” Swanberg told him. “Let's get going.”

“How do we get her out of the hotel?”

“Where's the whisky bottle? You think a dame who has passed out has never been carried out of a hotel?”

Chapter VIII

DOC SAVAGE, frowning, re-read the note Carlie McGuiggan had left for him at the hotel desk. It did not give him a feeling of assurance, and he called Macbeth Williams' room, got no answer, and a moment later found Macbeth sitting ill-at-ease in the part of the lobby that faced onto the street.

“Hello, there,” Macbeth said. “I'm waiting for Carlie. She should be here before long. She's overdue.”

Doc took the adjacent chair. “Any developments this morning?”

Macbeth seemed to consider whether he should shake his head or not, and did. “I had a rough night,” he told Doc. “I didn't sleep much.”

“I don't imagine anyone did.”

Macbeth looked at Doc wryly, and asked, “Mind if I confide one of my problems?”

“Go right ahead.”

“Thanks. I'm grateful for your help. I appreciate it, particularly because I know you're under no obligation to help me at all.” He was silent for a few moments, then asked abruptly, “Mr. Savage, what opinion have you formed of my character? Give it to me without sugar.”

“Without sugar, I would say you were a serious-minded young man who is saddled with a feeling of inferiority because he had an outstanding father. I would add that your judgment is probably better than you think it is, but not as good as it would have been if you had given it more of a chance during the last—how old are you? Twenty-eight?—say, twenty-eight years.”

Macbeth grinned. “That's not very strong.”

“I imagine it's stronger than your candid opinion of yourself.”

“Well, you're right,” Macbeth admitted. “I'm a dreamer, an introverted sort, and timid. Inclined to be a follower, not a leader. That right?”

“It's not too wrong.”

“A guy like that,” said Macbeth, “has no business managing a half-billion estate.”

Doc made no reply.

“I didn't think you would answer,” Macbeth told him wryly. “Well, managing an estate isn't just handling that much money. Very little of the estate is money. It's property, plants, steamships, mines. Quite a lot of mines and mills, really. It's business properties like that, which means people's lives, because a person who molds an enterprise like that molds the lives of the people connected with it.”

“Right.”

“A mold,” said Macbeth, “should be more firm than the material it makes into shape.”

“True.”

“Which brings me to my question,” Macbeth Williams muttered dubiously. “Am I, or am I not, fitted to become the mold? This crazy stuff that has been happening to me lately has given me a feeling of confidence. I don't trust the feeling. A man doesn't become a strong character overnight. Character is built over a period of years, not in a few weeks.”

Doc looked at him thoughtfully. “You'll have to answer that for yourself.”

“Will I know the right answer when I find it?”

“I suspect you will,” Doc told him.

“Thanks.”

“Where,” Doc Savage asked, “did Miss McGuiggan say she was going, and how long overdue is she?”

“Carlie said she was going shopping, and she's over an hour late,” Macbeth Williams told him. “I'm beginning to worry.”

“She's not usually late for her appointments? Some women are.”

“Not Carlie.”

“Then we'd better look into it,” Doc said gravely. “She said she was going shopping. Before that, did she ask any leading questions? Questions about persons or places?”

Macbeth shook his head. “Nothing that seemed unusual. She did ask about Crikeland and Swanberg, the two scientists who were with me on the island.”

“A casual question?”

“I thought so. She wanted to know where they were. I told her. In a hotel in Miami Beach.” Macbeth jumped up quickly, exclaiming, “There's Ulm. Maybe he has seen her.”

Austin Ulm's eyes were slightly bloodshot, and there were heavy lines around his mouth. But his manner was quite jovial. “Carlie? No, I haven't seen her this morning. How are the predictions coming, my boy? Any outstanding ones this morning?”

“They seemed to have stopped,” Macbeth admitted.

Ulm clapped him on the shoulder. “Just a lull, old chap. They'll resume. And, boy, when you take over the estate, you'll go to town. You'll be known as a tycoon in no time.”

Macbeth said uncomfortably, “I'm not as hot about taking over as I was.”

“The hell you aren't!” Ulm exclaimed in alarm. “Now that's a foolish feeling to get! If you ask me—”

“I'm worried about Carlie,” interrupted Macbeth. “She had a date with me for an hour ago. She usually keeps her appointments.”

Doc Savage got to his feet. He said, “I believe I'll look around for Miss McGuiggan. Care to come along?”

“I certainly do!” Macbeth exclaimed. “What about you, Ulm?”

Ulm snorted. “Looking for someone in a city the size of Miami has got a haystack and a needle beat, hasn't it? Oh, I might as well go along.”

Doc Savage strode outside, jerked open the door of a taxicab, and told the driver, “The Flame Arts. It's a hotel in Miami Beach.”

“That's where Crike and Swanberg are staying!” Macbeth gasped.

THE room clerk at the Flame Arts had a poor memory until Doc Savage told him quietly, “You can give us a better answer than, 'They've checked out,' or you can have this place crawling with impatient policemen asking about a murder. Take your choice.”

The clerk gave them a very supercilious stare for possibly thirty seconds, then the look fell apart on his face like snow melting on a hot stove. “Good God, was she dead?” he blurted.

Macbeth Williams made a croaking noise, seized the clerk's arm, and bellowed, “Carlie! You mean somebody hurt Carlie?” He would have shrieked more, probably hysterically, had Doc not drawn him back, and described Carlie McGuiggan to the room clerk.

“That was evidently the girl,” the clerk said quickly. “The two men, Crikeland and Swanberg, left about an hour ago, crossing the lobby and half-dragging the girl between them. They put her in a car and drove off.”

Macbeth, wrenching away from Doc, cursed the clerk furiously. “How in the hell did they get away with a thing like that?”

“They seemed tight, all of them. They smelled like it, anyway.”

“You say they took a car? It wasn't a taxi?” Doc demanded.

“A private car.” The clerk was frightened now. “I have an idea,” he exclaimed, and hurried to the entrance, where he buttonholed a stocky doorman in a mauve uniform.

The latter produced a notebook, thumbed through it, and showed it to the other man. “I generally jot down the license number of any car where there seems to be something a little odd happening,” the doorman explained.

“Give me that number!” Doc said sharply. “I'll get it on the police teletype.”

A few minutes later, when Doc rejoined Ulm and Macbeth Williams, Ulm was urging Macbeth to get a drink. “The kid's about to blow his cork,” Ulm told Doc angrily. “What the devil have you got stirred up here?”

“It's pretty clear something unpleasant has happened to Miss McGuiggan,” Doc told him.

“The hell it has! Crikeland and Swanberg are nice guys, and I resent your suggestion!”

“They certainly seem nice guys, abducting Miss McGuiggan,” Doc said.

“I don't give a damn! I was with them six months on that island, and I think they're O.K.”

Doc Savage looked at Ulm levelly. “You had better listen to a few facts. Williams, too. You can hear them on the way back to our hotel, where we're going immediately, and start the most complete search possible for Carlie McGuiggan.”

Chapter IX

THE midday sunlight lay like a sheet of flame against the window of the hotel room, and Macbeth Williams sat and stared at it bleakly and speechlessly. He seemed to have stopped breathing. Austin Ulm examined his own fingertips, picking at them nervously from time to time. Once he muttered, “I can't really believe all that stuff. I really can't.” Williams seemed not to hear. From the bedroom came the spewing of static from a loudspeaker, occasionally a heterodyne squeal or the raucous sound of a voice from the radio, and at intervals, the sound of Doc Savage patiently calling Monk and Ham, but without getting a response.

Doc Savage, appearing in the doorway finally, looked at the two men bleakly. “You've had time to think it over,” he said. “The *Meg Finnigan* didn't come across you fellows on Cormoral Island by accident. The skipper was bribed to pick you up and pretend it was a chance visit. He was bribed by the man who was killed in the automobile smash last night, the man named Troy. Troy also bribed the gambling house to let you win any bet Macbeth suggested. The games are all rigged, as you'd have known if you had studied the system. Gimmicked is another word. It was no trick to see that Macbeth predicted winners. The waiter at the restaurant was primed to suggest the name of the club. That was a clever piece of psychology there. The waiter wasn't paid to steer us to the club, but it was done by suggestion through an argument the fellow Troy staged with him. The police dug up that information, and Officer Springlatch told Miss McGuiggan about it. Doubtless that's the information she took to Crikeland and Swanberg, not realizing they were in on it.”

Macbeth groaned. “Who the devil was Troy?”

“A Chicago mining engineer who served a prison sentence in Colorado for a mining swindle, who had Canadian citizenship papers. That's about all we know. Except that he was in this with Crikeland and Swanberg and at least two others.”

Ulm cursed hoarsely, demanded, “In what? What? That's what I want to know.”

“Suppose you guess,” Doc said.

“Guess, hell!” Ulm snarled. “You blow up the prettiest dream I ever had, and then say, 'Guess!' Dammit, I could hate you, Savage!”

Macbeth Williams stared at Ulm with dislike. “Ulm, I don't believe you're worried about a thing except discovering my so-called 'predicting' was all goose-feathers!”

“That's plenty to worry about, isn't it!” Ulm yelled. “Man, don't you see what this Savage is doing! Destroying your belief in yourself! Are you going to stand for that?”

“Oh, shut up that greedy yapping!” Macbeth told him bitterly. “God knows what has happened to Carlie, and all you think about is the exploding of a hoax!”

DETECTIVE SPRINGLATCH arrived presently. “You got the dope I sent you on Troy? Colorado mining man with a bad record and Canadian citizenship? We dug that up through fingerprints.”

Doc nodded, asked impatiently, “What about the car?”

“The one Crikeland and Swanberg used to take the girl away from the hotel? We found that twenty minutes ago. “

Macbeth Williams jerked stiffly erect. “Was she . . . did they—”

Springlatch shook his head. “No trace of any of them.”

“Where was the car found?” Doc asked.

“On No. 1 Highway, about halfway to Palm Beach. Abandoned. State men found it. But that's no help. They weren't in the car, and nobody saw what they changed to.”

“Show me the exact spot,” Doc directed, spreading out a road map. Springlatch obligingly drew a circle.

“About there.”

Doc leaned over, rested a finger on the map for a moment. He straightened suddenly. “Start looking for a plane!” he said sharply. “The beach, half a mile from the road at that point, is hard-packed and lonely. A first-rate landing strip for a plane.”

“That's a far-fetched guess,” Springlatch muttered.

“Is it? With the whole state alerted for them? With swamp on the inland side of the road? And this whole thing as well-prepared as it is? I don't think so.” He swung on Macbeth and Ulm, said, “Come on. We'll check it ourselves.”

“What kind of plane?” Springlatch yelled.

“That's why I want to look at the beach,” Doc said. “There should be wheel prints.”

WITH No. 1 jet shut down and No. 2 loafing, Doc Savage touched the switch control of the airfoil curvature, returned his attention to the airspeed, and when it went below two hundred into the green arc, he dropped the wheels and made certain the green lights showed they were locked. The ship greased into the base leg at a bare ninety, and when the high-pressure dual tires barked against the sand, they were doing sixty-five miles an hour airspeed, against a fifteen-mile wind, and Macbeth Williams was already screaming, “There's some wheel tracks! See them!”

The wheel prints swung out from a spot where wind-beaten jungle overhung the beach, and when they stood there, they could see plenty of signs that the plane had been tied down there, possibly for several days.

Doc ran back to his own plane, changed the oscillator setting on his radio transmitter to get it on police wave-length, and in a few moments was telling Springlatch: “It was a plane, all right. A B-26. That means a converted job. We don't know the NC number, of course. But get men up here asking questions. The plane was tied down on the beach several days, and someone may have remembered the number.”

“They'd travel fast, wouldn't they?” Springlatch asked.

“Better than three hundred, possibly,” Doc agreed. “It's a B-26, all right. The tread is distinctive enough that we can be pretty sure. Better alert Canadian airports, as well.”

“You mean because Troy had Canadian papers?”

“That could be a good reason.”

THE airport was three hundred miles west of Montreal, approximately, a rather startling criss-cross of two runways in the otherwise nearly endless stretch of trees that stood in a thin cold carpet of snow. It had been built for the Canadian air force during the war; late years it had seen nothing but an occasional bush flyer who needed no more than a fifth that much runway. The village five miles to the south was a scattering of wooden buildings in a clearing. When Doc Savage arched the jet in over the town, there were suddenly fifty or so people outside the buildings, more than the population of the place seemingly could be.

He swung the ship toward the landing strip, did the necessary cockpit landing-check, dragged the runway

once by way of caution, noting the grass that had thrust up through the disused paving in spots. He swung back, landed, taxied to the one lonely wooden shack, and they climbed out into cold astonishingly bitter.

“What a place!” Ulm mumbled, looking about between attacks of shivering. “And on a wild-goose chase, too!”

Macbeth Williams looked at Ulm with no feeling except tiredness and anxiety, and said, “You still haven't given up faith in Crikeland and Swanberg, have you?”

Doc made no comment, but walked, the frozen snow squeaking underfoot, to the shack. It was not locked, and he entered. It seemed thirty degrees colder inside than outdoors.

Soon a man appeared, riding a horse that breathed plumes of vapor. The man slid off the horse, explaining, “I don't stay out here much. Not enough business.”

“We came about the plane that refueled here day before yesterday,” Doc told him.

“Yeah, I imagined you had,” the man said. “Well, it was a B-26, conversion job. Same numbers as on the radio broadcast. Hell of it is, I didn't hear the broadcast until last night.”

“You see a girl aboard?” Macbeth Williams demanded shrilly.

“She didn't get out. She stayed in the ship.”

“She wasn't hurt?”

“Didn't seem to be.”

Doc asked, “How much fuel did they take aboard?”

“All the tanks would hold. Almost cleaned me out of ninety octane.”

“Which way did they go?”

“Straight west out of sight. There was some haze. Visibility about three miles. The way they went when they left wouldn't mean anything. They could turn.”

“They get anything more than gasoline?”

“Couple of charts, is all.”

“How were they dressed?”

“For the country. Parkas, mucks. One guy had bearskin pants. The other wore what looked like a sheepskin flight suit, army issue or surplus.”

Macbeth blurted, “Where in the devil did they pick up clothing like that?”

“Probably had it in the plane. They were well-prepared,” Doc told him. He turned back to the airport manager. “What charts?”

“North of here. One regional. One planning chart, small scale.”

“They didn't mark them or anything?”

The man nodded. “They marked one, but that's no help either. I didn't see what course. You fellows use

some coffee? I brought out a thermos. And some moose sandwiches. You like moose?"

"That's fine," Doc told him. "Let's have them in the plane. The cabin is heated."

"You think this is cold?" The man chuckled. "Hell, this is the warmest day this winter." He handed up the thermos and a package of sandwiches. "I'll go build a fire in the shanty, in case you fellows want to stick around. Probably be a Mountie plane or two in soon. This thing has stirred up a hell of a rumpus."

IN almost complete silence, Doc Savage, Williams and Ulm consumed the sandwiches. There seemed nothing to say. It was distressingly apparent that they had reached the end of a trail. Macbeth did not improve the mood when he suddenly groaned and buried his face in his hands. Ulm looked at Doc and mumbled, "Poor kid. I can't stand seeing him beaten down like this. I'm going outside, cold or no cold." Ulm climbed outside, stood beating his arms against his sides, then dashed into the shack, from the stovepipe of which smoke had started climbing.

"Mr. Savage," Macbeth Williams asked brokenly, "what do you think they're doing? Why in God's name would they take Carlie all the way from Florida to a place like this?"

"The move," Doc told him quietly, "isn't such a dumb one from their standpoint."

"I don't see how you figure that, Mr. Savage."

"There are several of them, obviously. There are now three of us. In Miami, there were the three of us plus all the police facilities."

"Oh!"

Doc Savage went to the radio transmitter, and began another attempt to contact Monk and Ham. His face was grim. He did not give up the fruitless task for several minutes.

"You're terribly upset about your two friends, aren't you?" Macbeth said.

"Very," Doc agreed grimly.

"There has been no word from them?"

"None."

Macbeth closed his eyes tightly and his lips trembled. "I feel terribly guilty for getting you into this. I did, you know. By being stupid enough to let myself be kidded into believing I had some kind of supernatural power. What a ninny!"

"You didn't really believe in it at any time," Doc told him.

"Oh, no!" Macbeth's lips twisted with self-contempt. "You think not? Listen, there were times when I went for it whole-hog."

Through the plexiglass, Doc saw Ulm pop out of the shack. Ulm carried an aëronautical chart which he tucked under an arm as he climbed into the plane. He seemed vaguely excited, but took a seat without saying anything. Presently Doc Savage leaned out of a doorway and shouted to the airport attendant, "We're taking off. You have a radio receiver that will pick up aircraft frequencies?"

The man came over and stared up at him. "Yeah," he said. "But listen, I can't hear a hundred miles out

with any radio. It's not the set. It's atmospheric conditions, a sunspot cycle that's supposed to last for maybe another week. Been giving us hell ten days now. That's another reason I didn't hear about this plane with the girl. It's no satisfaction to listen to the radio. Can't hardly hear a thing through the static."

"What about the weather north?"

"Not bad, not good," the man said. "Depends on what you call bad. For us up here, it's not so tough."

"Report into Mounted headquarters that we were here and took off to continue a general search, will you?" Doc asked.

"Oh, sure."

THE jet had not been in the air more than a couple of minutes, and Doc Savage was adjusting an experimental contrivance which, if he ever perfected it, would enable a radar signal to distinguish between certain basic types of metals at a considerable distance. The gadget, for military purposes, would be quite convenient; metallic ingredient in a paint applied to a plane would afford instant identification as enemy or friend at a distance of a hundred miles or more. The only problem was that there were plenty of bugs in the thing; the principal one at the moment being a reflective dispersion of the reflected signal, the bounce-back, which rendered the gimmick highly undependable at a distance of more than fifteen miles. It was marvelous up to about fifteen miles; beyond that, it was a headache.

To divert Macbeth Williams' mind with a less ugly matter, Doc explained generally what the contrivance was.

"You mean," asked the surprised Macbeth, "That you can fly along, and for fifteen miles in any direction, tell what kind of metal you're flying over?"

"Within reason," Doc assured him.

"You could spot a steel automobile body?"

"Yes, we could identify a steel automobile body. But if there were a steel tank, a steel engine, and a steel building of about the same size in the neighborhood, we couldn't tell them apart unless the car moved."

"And you could tell a copper roof?"

"Yes."

"Or a tin roof?"

"Yes."

Macbeth's eyes widened. "Say, what's the matter with using an apparatus like that to prospect for minerals? Could it be done? Is it practical?"

"Only practical," Doc told him, "in that it could identify some—and note I say some, not all, because the gimmick isn't omnipotent by any means—types of minerals on the surface. But not in ledges and veins under the surface."

"Then it's practical!"

"Let us say it's halfway so," Doc told him. "Surface metals and minerals, some types, can be spotted,

depending on their atomic structure and reaction upon micro-wavelengths." Doc paused, turned his head, and asked, "What is it, Ulm?" He suddenly saw that Austin Ulm was breathing fast.

"I think I got something," Ulm said. "You know what I did when I was in the shack back there at the airport? I asked that fellow to go through each exact move they made when they were in here and when I got to where they bought those charts, I struck pay dirt."

"You mean you know where they may have taken Carlie?" Macbeth shouted. "Lord, man, spit it out. Let's have it."

Ulm held up a hand patiently. "Easy, boy. I have to explain my method of deduction. They bought a chart. They marked a course on the chart. The airport manager didn't see what course they marked. Now, that much you already knew. But here's what I pried out of the airport man. They didn't have a ruler long enough to serve as a straight-edge when they marked out their course, and they did what pilots do a lot, they folded one chart and used the folded edge as a straight-edge to guide the pencil while they marked the course line on the other chart. Only they didn't use a pencil. They used a fountain pen."

"So what?" Macbeth demanded impatiently. "How would—"

Doc said, "So the pen left a mark along the folded edge of the chart they used for a ruler? That it?"

"That's exactly it," said Ulm triumphantly. "The ink rubbed off the pen nib, showed where they started and made a mark the whole way to where they stopped." He whipped out the chart. "Here, look!"

As Ulm had said, there was a plainly defined inked indication along the fold of the chart, with a very specific starting point and ending, each indicated by a small blot caused by additional ink.

"See!" Macbeth Williams shouted excitedly. "He's right. There's where the pen was set down carefully to start the mark, and where it rested a moment carefully at the destination point! By gosh, we know how far they were going!"

Doc did not share the enthusiasm. "All we really know," he said, "is that there's an ink mark on this chart."

"Hell!" said Ulm contemptuously. "I've got a damn good clue, and you know it. Don't belittle my deducting."

"How do we do this?" Macbeth interrupted anxiously. "We know how far—or think we know—but in what direction?"

"We'll fly straight north the correct distance, and begin a circle, keeping about the same axis," Doc told him. "That's the only thing we can do."

"You'll be able to use the gadget we were just talking about, won't you?" Macbeth asked eagerly.

"What gadget is that?" Ulm demanded.

"Mr. Savage has a contrivance which will identify some types of metal at a distance by use of a new type of polarization of radar transmissions."

"What we need more of," said Ulm, not greatly impressed, "is the kind of luck I had when I learned about that chart."

Chapter X

THE range of the jet plane, because of the restrictions of fuel supply, was limited, and they grew increasingly aware of it. They would be faced, within another hour, with the alternative of turning back, or taking a chance on setting down somewhere when their fuel was nearly exhausted, and possibly contacting the outside by radio to have fuel brought in. The latter, since they were able to hear nothing whatever but static, was not inviting.

Macbeth watched the radar scope with increasing strain. Doc had told him how to make identifications. It was a matter of a difference in the shape and shading of pips on the screen, as a small dial, which Doc referred to as a polarization control, was moved to different settings.

They were depending almost solely upon the trick radar now. There was a high overcast of cirrus clouds, and a layer of ground haze about two thousand feet deep over the snow-blanketed wasteland below. Visibility was possibly two miles, but only large objects, clusters of trees, wind-swept areas of bare stone, or the slick whiteness of a frozen lake, could be identified at that distance.

Macbeth was startled when Doc Savage suddenly pushed his hand away from the radar polarizing dial, and gave it an experimental adjustment or two. Doc stared at the scope. And he made, softly, a strange low trilling sound that evidently meant considerable wonder.

“What is it?” asked Macbeth anxiously. “Not the plane. All I saw was a considerable area of odd-looking pips appear on the scope.” He frowned. “Does it mean something?”

“An area of exposed metallic substance,” Doc told him.

“You mean a metal building roof?”

“In this waste? No, it was more likely an exposed vein of ore. A large one.”

“Oh,” said Macbeth disappointedly. “I thought maybe it had something to do with finding Carlie.”

“No.”

“But you seem excited.”

Doc Savage made a notation on the chart. “It's something I'm coming back later to investigate. Unless I'm mistaken about the analysis of the fragmentation on the scope, what we saw was evidences of an extensive deposit of caronite of a high order. I imagine you know that means—”

He broke off his explanation, seized the wheel and whipped the ship sharply to the east. Then he pointed at the scope. “There! Dural metal! A plane!”

“Oh, God!” Macbeth breathed. “I hope it's what we're hunting! Why are you climbing?”

“We'll cross the spot fairly high in the overcast with the engines shut off,” Doc told him. “Less chance of being noticed. We'll try that first, and see what luck we have.”

Ulm had been pitched half out of his seat when Doc whipped the plane about. Now he came to the cockpit, demanding, “What does that kind of flying mean?”

“Sit down and fasten your safety belt,” Doc told him curtly. “We've got something spotted.”

A few seconds later, the jet engines became silent, the ship lost a little of its solid headlong feeling, and Doc adjusted the airfoil curvature for maximum glide angle. He followed the object they had spotted on

the scope, and they prepared to use binoculars.

The plane, designed for speed, was no glider. It sank rapidly. Doc kept a displeased eye on the altimeter, the scope; abruptly, he swung the binoculars downward.

The terrain underneath was typical of the Arctic, snow-coated monotony studded with starved small trees, ripped open occasionally with a gully, or peaking up in a rocky hill. Suddenly, there was the flat white that meant a lake with its ice carpeted by snow, and immediately thereafter Doc picked up the lines of the plane. It was a B-26, parked on the south edge of the lake.

“See it?” Doc demanded.

“No, I didn't,” Macbeth began, and Ulm interrupted, yelling, “I did! On the edge of the lake. Tied down. It's our quarry.”

Doc swung the ship lazily to the right, stood it on a wingtip in a nose-high slip that lifted them up in the seats.

“Hell, you're not going to land?” Ulm barked.

“If the lake is long enough, yes.”

“Without scouting the vicinity?” Ulm yelled. “That's crazy!”

“We'd be about as inconspicuous as a skyrocket,” Doc advised him. “As it is, I think we came in quietly enough not to be noticed. At any rate, we're now low enough that the jets would certainly be heard if we turned them on. So we'll take the north end of the lake and see what happens. We can always get in the air again.”

He held the slip, later let the nose swing a little, and at less than five hundred feet, when the expanse of white lake ice suddenly ended, he let the ship drop around, and coasted into the wind. The lake was under them again, not fifty feet below now. He did not lower the gear. The fuselage was designed for water and snow operation, the dual function simplified by the lack of propellers.

So quickly that it did not seem quite real, the east shore of the lake was sliding toward them, the ship rocking slightly. Doc gave hard right rudder; the guide rudder that doubled as snow-and-water helm took hold, and they came slowly about. But not before they had taken a jolting bounce over a low ridge of shore ice, fortunately coated with a mattress of snow.

The ensuing stillness was uncanny.

“We'll sit right here and listen,” Doc said. “Incidentally, the cabin is bulletproof, as long as they haven't anything more powerful than hunting rifles.”

“By gosh, visibility isn't more than half a mile,” Ulm muttered.

Doc dropped out of the plane briefly, dragging a seismographic microphone at the end of a cable. He found a spot twenty feet away where a rock ledge showed bare, set the mike in a crevice, wedging it in place, then he went back to the plane. Ulm stared wonderingly and demanded, “What's that thing?”

Doc explained its purpose. “A microphone developed for making seismographic surveys, sensitive enough to pick up the vibration of a man walking a mile away under normal conditions. If anyone approaches, we should be able to hear them.” He plugged the cable into the audio amplifier section of the plane radio and adjusted the gain controls.

The sounds that began coming from the speaker were the noises that bitter cold makes; the creaking of frozen branches in the wind, the shotlike crackle of the lake ice. Ulm started violently when there was a wild and loud clatter from the loudspeaker. “What was that?”

“Some animal running,” Doc said. “A wolverine or a small bear. I'd say a bear, but not a large one.”

Ulm stared at the contrivance. “I'll be damned!”

“Mr. Savage!” Macbeth Williams blurted.

The strangeness in the man's voice whipped Doc about; he found himself trying to imagine what had caused the look of bleak shock on Williams' features. Williams lifted both hands. They gripped the aëronautical chart by which they had been flying. “Is this where we are?” Williams asked. “This place you marked?”

Doc said, “I've been marking the course right along, yes.”

Ulm demanded, “What's the matter with you anyway, Macbeth?”

“It's this location on the map,” Williams muttered. “It suddenly clicked with me.”

“Clicked how?”

“The estate, my father's estate, owns mining property around here. I think we're on it now.”

AN element of surprise settled over the plane. And silence. It was hardly broken by a shuffling clatter from the loudspeaker as the animal, and it sounded like a larger animal this time, moved somewhere out there. Macbeth Williams looked at them in shame, mumbling finally, “I should have noticed it before. But the estate has properties in half a dozen places in northern Canada, most of them undeveloped and so not considered very important. It's only one of many places where there are holdings.” He tightened his hands, face distressed, and added, “But I should have thought of it, even if I know very little about the estate. Something tells me it's important.”

“I don't see how it can be,” Ulm said shortly. “Say, that thing made a noise in the radio again. You sure it's an anima!?”

“Bear,” Doc said.

“Yeah? That's putting your neck out. If it's some guy with a gun, it won't be so cute.”

“I'll go farther,” Doc assured him, “and say it's a polar bear. There's a difference in the tread, and particularly in the manner of behavior, that is sightly distinctive.”

“Oh, for God's sake!” Ulm exclaimed. “More masterminding!” He climbed out of the plane, adding, “I'm going to look around personally, not that I haven't got faith in your contraption, of course.”

“You'd better get Mr. Savage's permission!” Macbeth Williams said sharply.

“Permission, hell!” Ulm stalked off, snow grinding under his feet and filling the seismographic contrivance output with a great roaring and whimpering that was totally unlike footsteps in the snow.

“He's awfully difficult at times,” Macbeth said apologetically.

“A trifle obvious, too,” Doc added.

Macbeth nodded vaguely, examined his gun—a hunting rifle which he'd picked up, at Doc's suggestion, during their brief stop in New York City—and felt under his parka to make sure that the clip pouch was filled with cartridges. This recapitulation ended abruptly. His voice shook. “I don't want to sound like Ulm, Mr. Savage!” he blurted. “But we can't just sit here, can we?”

“I don't plan to,” Doc told him.

“That may not be the plane we're seeking, you know,” Macbeth added.

“No, it's the one. The NC number fitted our description.”

“Then what are we waiting for?”

Doc glanced at Macbeth, said, “To see how Ulm will make out.”

Macbeth winced. He didn't like that too well; he frowned out into the murky waste of snow and scrub pines, evidently feeling the waiting was not like Doc Savage.

The silence that followed was uncomfortable, lasted about twenty minutes, and ended with unexpected—and unpleasant—developments. They had been listening to Austin Ulm's careful prowling. The man had been taking a few steps at a time, pausing often to listen, and otherwise behaving about as seemed reasonable. The sound of grindings, joltings and odd other noises was without warning.

The uproar from the seismographic microphone pickup was very short in duration, but already Doc Savage was on his feet, had snapped back the exit hatch.

“What is it?” Macbeth asked excitedly.

“Someone waylaid him!” Doc replied.

“Yes, but you seem so amazed,” Macbeth blurted, piling out of the plane after Doc. “Since he was reconnoitering enemy territory, naturally you knew he was in danger. Why should you be so surprised?”

“Not in some time,” Doc said, “have I less expected a thing to happen.”

AUSTIN ULM'S progress was not difficult to follow through the snow, because the man had taken no precautions about concealing his footprints. The trail, taking more of a direct line than they had imagined from listening to the amplifier, approached the spot where they had seen the converted bomber tied down on the shore of the lake. Doc Savage stopped, told Macbeth Williams, “Drop back about a hundred yards, and follow me, keeping well to the right, inshore from the lake.”

“I understand,” Macbeth said, hefting his rifle. “If you get in trouble, I'm to do what I can.”

“You're not to shoot anyone,” Doc warned, “except as a last resort. And by last resort, I mean under the direst pressure of necessity.”

Macbeth shuddered. “I'm not anxious to shoot anybody.”

“Remember that.”

“I will,” Macbeth said, turning off to the right of their route.

Doc Savage remained where he was, then stepped into a thicket of evergreens, shook out the snow cape he had brought from the plane—a coverall-like garment completely of white cloth, similar to those developed for Arctic Troops—and donned the thing.

Now, offering a figure that was as inconspicuous in the dull arctic waste as it could conveniently be made, he continued tracking Ulm. He kept well clear of the footprints, however, crossing them occasionally to make sure he was on the trail.

All the caution paid a poor dividend when a voice like rocks being powdered said, "All right, choose your medicine!"

Doc became rigid. He did not turn his head.

"Things are froze up kinda tight, and nobody might take the trouble to chop a grave," the ominous voice added. "You might take that into consideration."

"I will," Doc replied.

"Huh?"

"This is the last place I expected to find you, Monk," Doc went on.

"Oh, holy cow! For crying out loud! Doc!"

Doc Savage turned, in time to see Monk Mayfair collapse, half sitting, in the snow. It was not, Doc saw immediately, all surprise that made Monk sit down. Monk was not in good shape. He was haggard, bearded, and bore unmistakable signs of being in the most painful state of starvation, about the third day of it. Anxiety had also taken a hard toll of Monk's normal animal vitality.

"Holy cow!" Monk breathed again. "This guy was telling the truth! He wasn't woofin'!"

Austin Ulm, from a prostrate position in the snow, said bitterly, "Of course I wasn't lying!"

DOC SAVAGE asked Monk, "Are any of them close? Do they have a guard at the plane?" When Monk shook his head, Doc went on, "I'll find Williams, before he gets too worried." Doc then retraced his trail, stripping off the snow cape as he walked along. When he got back, he found an alarmed Macbeth.

"I was sure worried," Macbeth explained. "Gosh, I never saw you a single time after you told me you'd go ahead. I couldn't figure it. Did you find Ulm?"

"Yes. He was captured by one of my aids, Monk Mayfair."

"One of your friends— Oh, no! What a surprise! You don't mean Carlie is safe, too?"

Doc gripped the man's arm, said, "Take it easy," and led him back to the spot where Monk and Ulm were waiting. Glancing about, Doc saw signs that Monk had been concealed there at least several hours. There were no signs of footprints which Monk might have made coming to the ambush spot, which was in a thicket of evergreen shrubs within a score of yards of the converted bomber.

“I been right here nearly two days,” Monk explained bitterly. “I'm not proud of it. It was a bum idea. But I thought they would come to have a look at the plane to see if it were safe, and I'd have a chance to start operating.”

“What happened?” Doc demanded. “Where's Ham?”

“They got him and took him off to the mine,” Monk told him. “That's all I know.”

“How?”

Monk grimaced. “Dammit, by one of the oldest devices known. The old broken leg trick the birds use. They faked a forced landing. Ham Brooks and I were trailing them in another plane, about twenty miles back. We made a big circle, came in from the north, pretending to be bush flyers who had just happened along, and saw they had put out distress signals. We landed, all primed when we got out of the plane with our guns, to take everybody in custody. Only two guys got up out of the snow right by us, and cramped our style. Then they brought us here. We made a break, and I got away, but Ham didn't. They chased me. There's a place where the lake empties, down by the mine, a river where it isn't frozen over. I was trying to cross there, slipped and fell in when they sighted me and began shooting, and went under the ice. There was a place where the ice had heaved enough to make breathing space, so I just didn't bother to come out and run any more. They went away finally, and I got out.”

Macbeth Williams shuddered. “It must have been terribly cold in the water.”

“It made it a little warmer, knowing I was alive,” Monk said. “But I lost my gun during the excitement. Also a hunting knife with which I was trying to dig a handhold in the underside of the ice. That was a little handicap when I got out. I haven't been able to find any wild game just sitting around waiting to be picked up.”

“How,” Doc asked, “did they know you were following them?”

“Blind luck, I guess. Or maybe Ham and I weren't as slick as we thought we were in New York.”

“Some of this might have been prevented,” Doc told him, “if you had kept in contact with me.”

Monk nodded ruefully. “We'll have to take that up with Mr. Sunspots next time. Believe me, Doc, we called our lungs out over the radio. All we heard was static to who laid the chunk.” He grimaced and shrugged. “A combination of bad conditions and two overconfident guys.”

“Never mind,” Doc told him. “This covering I'm wearing isn't exactly glory. What about the mine?”

Monk hesitated. “It could be done. How, I don't know. And I could do with a square meal first.”

“We'll look it over,” Doc said.

MACBETH WILLIAMS accosted Monk anxiously. “I'm Macbeth Williams, Mr. Mayfair. I'm afraid I'm the cause of all this in one way or another, probably very much to blame, if stupidity is a contributing factor. But tell me this: Is this mine one belonging to my father's estate?”

“Yeah, it is,” Monk told him. “Do you want to know the rest?”

“I certainly do!”

“The mine,” Monk said, “started out to be a conventional copper test, and they uncovered caronite. The

ding-dongedest caronite deposit. Caronite means uranium, and you know what uranium means."

"Oh, I see!"

"Uncovering it meant more than just caronite, because of the character of the engineers who made the discovery," Monk added. "They were scoundrels of the first order, and they wanted that caronite. You can't blame them for wanting it. The first thing they did was—" He looked at Macbeth Williams. "You know much of this?"

"Practically none," Macbeth assured him.

"That's funny. It's your property, indirectly, that is."

"I'm the kind of sap," said Macbeth bitterly, "who doesn't pay attention to many things he should, and who lets his friends make a fool out of him."

"Was it your idea," asked Monk, "to ring Doc in on this?"

"Yes."

"That doesn't make you so dumb," Monk told him. "Getting back to my story: The first thing these engineers did was try to buy the mining property from the estate. To lay the groundwork for that, they weaned off production of copper until the property looked sour. They also faked reports, to show the mining property wasn't worth fooling with. Then they made their offer, through intermediaries. I guess they offered all the cash they could rake together, but the estate didn't fall."

Macbeth Williams nodded. "The trustees of the estate are very conservative. They're known for their unwillingness to sell properties. Buy, yes. But sell, never. I don't know that I approve, but they've been right nearly every time, and I've been wrong."

"They were right this time, anyway," Monk said.

"Then what happened?"

"Why, the conspirators began a campaign to persuade you to take over management of the estate, figuring you could be swayed into selling an apparently unprofitable mining property up here in the Arctic," Monk told him.

Macbeth thought this over. Apparently the explanation didn't seem very credible to him, because he began shaking his head slowly. "You don't," he said, "catch a hawk and spend six months training it to catch a chicken, when all you want is a chicken dinner."

"Huh?"

"I mean," said Macbeth, "that there are simpler ways of catching the chicken."

Monk snorted. "They tried 'em."

"But—"

"Don't think they didn't," Monk added. "They tried everything they could, without alarming the estate trustees." Monk examined Macbeth wryly, and added, "I wouldn't say they made such a bad move when they set out to built up your confidence and persuade you to take over. They almost had the job done, from what I hear."

Macbeth winced. “Well—”

“Didn't they?”

“As a matter-of-fact, they almost did,” Macbeth muttered. “I can hardly believe I was such a fool.”

“Their psychology was all right,” Monk told him. “A bit on the bubbly side, but all right. You see, any kind of psychological key is sound if it's made to fit the lock. And this key—convincing you that you were a man of damned near supernatural judgment—was tailored to fit you.”

Macbeth's face was red with embarrassment. “Did they think I was fool enough to really believe I had a predicting gift?”

Monk chuckled. “They had that covered. What if you did conclude you had no mysterious gift? So much the better. You'd just naturally be forced to conclude you had damned good foresight and judgment. Wouldn't that have built up your confidence?”

“It sure would have,” Macbeth admitted grimly. “It did, as a matter-of-fact.”

Doc Savage put in a single question. “How did you come by all this information, Monk?”

“Straight from the horse's mouth,” Monk told him. “While they had me prisoner, I kept my ears open. They're a talkative outfit. I think a lot of the talking was to keep their confidence boiling. They were scared stiff of you, Doc. But it also built up the picture for me. I think it's the correct picture.”

“I think so, too,” Doc said.

Austin Ulm grunted explosively. “All of which,” he snapped, “gets us where?”

Monk eyed him disagreeably. “You got any better ideas about spending our breath?”

“I think I have,” Ulm said.

“Well, let's hear it. Maybe you're smarter than you look behind that snatch of whiskers,” Monk told him.

Ulm scowled. “How's this? Why don't I wander into this mine, pretending to be lost, and let them catch me. Then I give them an elaborate story about Doc Savage preparing to close in on them with the Royal Mounted Police, the Canadian army, and any other forces necessary.”

“What,” Monk asked him, “would that accomplish?”

“Frighten them into flight.”

“You think so?”

“If they've got any sense, they won't want to hang around to be arrested,” Ulm snapped.

“Nuts!” Monk told him. “That's the dumbest idea that has come along.”

Doc Savage arrested a hot retort from Ulm, and told Monk thoughtfully, “It's possible that Ulm's suggestion may solve everything, Monk.”

Monk, jaw sagging, blurted, “It would!” He swallowed, added, “I'd like to know how!”

“Once they're demoralized,” Doc said, “we can pick them off one at a time.”

“Yeah, but, hell, they're not going to get demoralized that easy—”

“Go ahead, Ulm,” Doc broke in. “We'll stand by for developments.”

“Thanks,” Ulm said. “What do you think of planning it a bit further, though. I'd like to know what your moves will be, and maybe I can help out after they grab me.”

For the next fifteen minutes, Doc Savage and Ulm made elaborate plans, agreed on strategy, and repeated code sounds and other arrangements to be employed in the event of certain logical results. Monk maintained a bitterly skeptical silence. So did Macbeth Williams.

“Don't worry, Mr. Savage, I'll see that the demoralization is complete,” Ulm said, before he departed in the direction of the mining property.

Chapter XI

MONK was not a man to hide his thoughts. He had an expressive face, and right now it did very well with his feelings. “Demoralization!” he exploded. “So that's our new weapon!”

“Easy,” Doc cautioned.

“Doc, I've got the highest opinion of your strategy as a usual thing, but this one—”

“Ulm,” said Doc, “figures we're pretty dumb.”

Monk swallowed. “Eh?”

“Ulm,” Doc added, “fell for it right straight through. I imagine the map deal is what finally sold him on our gullibility.”

In a voice suddenly stricken, Macbeth Williams gasped, “Good God, do you mean that— But there *was* something too pat about the finding of the course-line marked on that chart! I . . . I had a feeling at the time, but I put it aside.”

“You should pay more attention to your hunches,” Doc advised him. “They're better than you think.”

“Austin Ulm is a crook!” Macbeth exploded.

“Exactly!”

“He's one of them!”

“A kingpin,” Doc agreed. “The 'steerer,' is the term in bunco circles. He's the black sheep you followed.”

“But you turned him loose!”

“Yeah,” Monk said. “Yeah, that I don't savvy. You let him get out of our hands, join his friends. Is there some logic in that somewhere?”

“Let's hope,” Doc said, and added, gesturing, “We'd better head for the mine ourselves. How careful should we be approaching it? Will they have guards posted, Monk?”

“They don't need guards, at least not parked around in the brush freezing their ears off,” Monk explained. “They used horses to haul stuff in from the outside, and they've put up a fence around the place,

ostensibly as a horse corral. Actually, it's woven wire topped by barbed wire, and I think they've got a couple of thousand volts of electricity in the two top wires. It's no horse corral. It was intended from the first to keep anyone from getting too nosey."

"Keep your eyes open for a couple of poles. Dry wood, but stout. Something we can use to jam something against the wires that will short-circuit them." Doc wheeled abruptly, and headed back toward the tied-down B-26.

"They've already removed enough parts so that it won't fly," Monk called. "And I took off some more myself. So you can save your time."

Nevertheless, Doc Savage continued to the plane, poked around inside the cabin, didn't find anything that fitted his needs, and finally climbed atop the cabin and tore loose the fixed radio antennae. He folded this to make a hank about three feet in length, of several strands, and was twisting the strands together when he rejoined Monk and Macbeth Williams.

"Fine! That'll short-circuit the electrified wires on the fence," Monk said.

"But I don't see how we're going to accomplish anything," Macbeth murmured uneasily. "They'll shoot us on sight, won't they?"

"It probably depends on this demoralization," Monk said.

"What demoralizing?"

"Search me," Monk told him. "Around Doc, you wait and learn."

THE mine was not impressive, except in being the only man-made object of any size for possibly a hundred miles in any direction. It stood on an open bleak roll of a hill about a quarter of a mile back from the lake shore, consisted of a log barracks building, a log office building much smaller, two other log structures that were either shops or storage, and a small and scabby shaft structure that had been closed in with rough slabs wherever it was feasible to exclude a little of the bitter weather. Around this was the fence Monk had mentioned, enclosing an area of no more than five square acres. "Not impressive," Macbeth remarked.

"Not," said Monk, "until you think of getting over that fence and crossing all that open space, and a few guys in there potting at you with rifles."

Doc Savage had found a dead tree and wrenched from it a branch several feet long. He twisted the smaller boughs from this, examining the wood for sap or moisture, either of which might serve as conductor for a fatal amount of electric current. Satisfied, he attached his length of antennae wire, now twisted into a short cable, and jiggled his invention about to test its stability.

"That should do the short-circuiting job," Monk said. "It'll either burn the barbed wires apart, or blow the fuse on their generator circuit. In either case, the current will go off."

Doc nodded. "I see no reason to delay this. Now should be a good time. They'll be in a group, those not on look-out duty, listening to Ulm tell how he fooled us."

Monk grinned suddenly.

"You've got a gadget planted," he said.

“In New York,” Doc said, “we fixed Ulm up with a parka.”

“And?”

“Did you notice,” Doc asked, “that the parka seemed conventional as far as the fur hood was concerned, but that the rest of the garment was made of a white cloth which seemed rather shiny?”

“Frankly,” Monk muttered, “I didn't notice it closely.”

Macbeth said, “I did. I took the cloth to be some sort of plastic product. I remember I thought of remarking about it.”

Doc nodded. “The cloth is impregnated with chemicals. I won't go into details, but Monk is familiar with the formula or should be. He helped rig it up a couple of years ago.” Doc glanced at the chemist. “You recall it?”

“Uh-huh,” Monk said. “You apply another chemical mixture, a reagent, and in about half an hour you've got the nicest production of gas that a man could imagine. Blinding stuff. Worse than tear gas.”

“Then all we've got to do,” Macbeth said excitedly, “is wait until the gas takes effect, then rush them.”

“That's all, to understate it slightly,” Monk agreed.

“How long?”

“Ten minutes more should do it, providing Doc applied the reagent when I think he did. Was it when you were helping Ulm get to his feet and brush off the snow after I collared him and had him down?” Monk looked at Doc questioningly.

Doc nodded.

“Then ten minutes is right,” Monk said.

They waited. Nothing happened.

It was Doc Savage, circling warily and anxiously in the scrub timber outside the fence, who got the answer. It gave him a sickening shock. He discovered, lying on the snow outside the barracks building, a cluster of garments which he could identify even at that distance as all the clothing Austin Ulm had been wearing. He rejoined Monk and Williams immediately, and the shock was plain on his face, because Monk asked, “It flopped?”

“Completely,” Doc replied grimly. “Ulm, or somebody, was less of a dope than I supposed. Ulm stripped off everything he was wearing, on the chance we'd planted something.”

“They even,” said Monk, “had the foresight to toss the garments on the lee side of the building. The gas won't accomplish a dang thing.”

From one of the buildings, a voice, Ulm's, began shouting. “Savage!” Ulm yelled. “Savage, can you hear me? Better answer if you hear me!”

“Might as well answer him,” Doc said bitterly. “We haven't too much more to lose.”

Ulm gave one loud triumphant laugh when he heard Doc's shouted, “Well, what is it?” Immediately, the door of the hut flew open, and a man was shoved outside. It was Ham Brooks, and he stumbled, fell, got up with difficulty. His arms were bound tightly and he was blindfolded. The door slammed, leaving Ham

Brooks outside, thinly clad, a forlorn figure in the biting cold. Then Doc and the others saw that a rope, apparently about fifty feet long, picketed Ham to the building.

Ulm addressed them angrily. “Can you hear me?”

“Yes,” Doc said.

“You've got ten minutes to think this over,” Ulm bellowed. “Strip off your clothes, all of them, and walk into the gate. We'll shut the current off so you can get inside. Keep your arms up, and remember, not a stick on you. None of those trick gimmicks you're so free at using. The alternative: We shoot down your friend, here.”

Doc Savage eyed the scene briefly.

“Monk, they won't understand the Mayan language, and Ham does,” he said. “Begin yelling at them. Call them names. Express your feelings.”

“That won't be hard,” Monk snarled.

“Become inarticulate. Jumble your words. And then put in a few Mayan words. Tell Ham to stumble around blindly and work his way to the west corner of the house. He's to stay there if he can. As long as he's there, against the wall, they'll have to step outside to shoot him. It's up to you and Williams to see they don't step outdoors. You've got rifles.”

Monk nodded. “But four or five of them can get on the rope and drag Ham back.”

“Not if you shoot the rope in two.”

Monk whistled. “At that distance? Oh, brother!”

“Try, anyway. At least, keep Ham alive, and that outfit preoccupied, for three or four minutes.”

“I'll try. When does Ham start his act?”

“When he hears our plane,” Doc said.

Chapter XII

THE frozen air was flame in Doc Savage's lungs long before he reached their plane. His legs began to get that wooden sickness that meant the ultimate in effort was being spent; he could hear his own agonized breathing; he crashed against the flank of the plane foolishly; for a moment or two he feared he lacked the strength to climb inside the craft. Behind him, from the mine, he heard a rifle cough its magazine empty.

He plunged into the cockpit, the whole universe glazed redly before his eyes because of exertion. He muffed the first attempt to start the jet engines, strangled an impulse to strike the instrument panel senselessly with a fist, and tried again.

Finally, he heard the welcome roar of the jets, looked out and saw the snow flowing back weirdly, melting, becoming steam, under the heat of the exhaust blast.

Doc headed the ship for the lake ice, took the tooth-loosening bounce over the shore ice, and gave the jets full acceleration position. Flaps down. Wing curvature at full lift. Through the arctic haze, he saw the opposite shore of the lake, the low hill furred with scrub pine, rushing at him.

There was hardly time to comprehend that he should have taken the run the length of the lake, not the short way across, before he had to make the ship airborne. Or crash. He felt it get off. He lifted a wingtip to avoid a cluster of pines, literally vaulted a low ridge, nosed down slightly, then rolled over in a turn toward the mine.

He did not change flaps or lift-settings. Shortest take-off position was also slow-landing. He let everything ride. There was barely time to get the safety belt fastened before he saw the mine buildings with the enclosing fence.

Altitude was not fifty feet, so the perspective with which he saw the place was not changed much. There was only one human figure in sight. Ham. Ham Brooks had reached the corner of the cabin, as directed. He had wedged himself there as best he could without the use of hands or eyes. Monk must be shrieking instructions, and the shack door was open a crack, the rope taut.

Doc let the jet settle. The ship had, he noted, little more than stalling speed. No more than control.

He debated—it seemed that a wailing second or two became an hour—whether or not to take the fence. The electrified wires meant a short-circuit, the snarling arcing of high voltage, a good chance of fire. In the end, he took the chance, picked a spot where the distance between two fence posts was more than the wingspan, and dropped the nose.

The impact was not much. Hardly noticeable. But a moment later, the ship jerked sharply to the left, hit, rocked over, dinging a wingtip. But it did not roll. Behind him, the fence was open.

The plane took two great bounces and a long skid, something impossible on anything but snow or ice. While it was still reeling, he used full left jet to ground-loop and kill more speed. When the wingtip on that side was ready to dig, he alternated with the other engine; now the ship was almost against the log hut.

He could hear the occasional solid sound of a bullet against the armored cabin. The jets were making too much noise to hear much more.

He swung his head, hit the right jet fuel feed again. The ship jerked crazily; abruptly the full heat blast of the engines was pouring against the side of the hut. The door was first to give under the heat. It simply became white, ashlike, and disintegrated. The jet blasts were like unbelievable blowtorches at that close range. The side of the cabin became a sheet of angry flame in which a long thin snake crawled a moment and vanished, the rope with which Ham Brooks had been staked out for execution.

The door of the larger, longer log barracks burst open. Two men came out to stand and deliberately raise their rifles.

Doc fed one of the jets full throttle; the surge threw the plane around, and its blast raked toward the barracks. The steam that instantly arose was like a cloud of smoke, concealing what he accomplished, if anything.

He sent the plane driving toward the barracks, intending to put it in position to fire that one also. The maneuver was not too good; a wing hooked the building, and suddenly he felt the plane crash heavily. The logs gave a little. He could hear them spilling down after he cut the jet fuel supply.

He tore at the hatch, got it partly open, but did not get out immediately when he heard Ulm shrieking commands.

Ulm thought there would be gas equipment in the plane. They were in a bad predicament, Ulm felt. “Get out of here!” Ulm was bellowing. “Stay under cover of the smoke! Run through the smoke. The fence

power is off. We'll reorganize outside!"

It hadn't, Doc thought with grim pleasure, occurred to them that the smoke would drift with the wind, and so would the tear gas that should be coming from Ulm's parka in good volume by now.

He settled down in the plane to wait for the sounds they would make when the gas got to their eyes.

It was a satisfying noise when it came.

SPRINGLATCH climbed out of the second Northwest Mounted plane that set down on the lake. He wore, under a parka and bearskin trousers, the linen suit he must have been wearing when he left Florida. He looked over the prisoners, displayed the warrants he had—only two, one for Swanberg, one for Crikeland—and said wryly, "I guess we underestimated. There seems to be a few more than that involved."

Ham Brooks told him, "We counted eleven, all together. We collared nine. Two got away. I imagine they'll be rounded up."

Springlatch nodded. "I guess that's the bag. I don't think we can pin much on the Kendall Foundation."

Doc said, "We didn't have time to look into the Foundation angle. What was it?"

"Jackleg outfit," Detective Springlatch explained. "Ulm approached them to finance this expedition to Cormoral island, if they would organize it. I don't know whether there was a deliberate arrangement to go broke and strand the expedition on the island, or whether Ulm just calculated so they would run out of money conveniently. I'm afraid we can't hang much on them. Couple of old fools operate the Foundation, anyway."

"Miss McGuiggan is all right," Doc told him.

"They told me. She got a good scare, I take it."

Doc agreed, added, "She stood it well, though. She has a lot of fiber, that girl."

Springlatch grinned. "Enough for her and that Macbeth boob both?"

"Quite enough, probably," Doc said.

"She'll need it. That 'predicting' stuff was about as goofy a hoax as I've ever heard about, and in my business, you hear of plenty. This Macbeth Williams was swallowing it, too."

Doc smiled faintly. "Williams hadn't swallowed so much that he overlooked calling us into it, remember."

"O.K., maybe he's not all blockhead." Springlatch chuckled. "But for my money, he'll do until a one-hundred percenter comes along."

Doc Savage found Monk and Ham leaning against the charred side of the barracks building. They were just finishing a burst of hysterical mirth, and wiping their eyes.

"Macbeth," said Monk, "is going to take over the estate management. He made the announcement a couple of minutes ago."

"What's funny about that?" Doc asked.

“Nothing,” Ham chuckled. “But he made the announcement in front of Ulm, and the expression on Ulm's face—That *was* funny!”

THE END