



THE PINK LADY

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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*Scanned and proofed
by Tom Stephens*

Chapter I. A PINK LADY, ACTUALLY

IT was raining hard—the water seemed to be coming down out of a silver-fox-black sky in oyster-colored ropes an inch thick—and this explained why no one was on the streets who did not have to be there.

The traffic cop was standing in his black rain cape and gum boots on a corner two blocks from the Hotel Troy. But he had his head pulled down in his coat, and he was cussing his job. He did not notice the pink girl.

Inside the Hotel Troy lobby, a few guests were sitting around in a damp lethargy. Not until the girl said loudly, "Will someone get hold of Ten West Street for me—please," was anyone aware of her presence.

By this time, of course, the girl was inside the lobby of the Hotel Troy. They stared at her.

She was a girl, nicely long and nicely rounded, in a pale-blue frock, sheer hose, dark-blue pumps, and with a gray shawl held over her head and, except for her eyes—her eyes had a flashing, haunted look, someone said later—over and concealing her face. Not bad for shape. Not bad.

Her blue frock was perfectly dry. It was a shade of blue which would have shown water spots instantly. The frock was not *perfectly* dry, of course. There were a few water spots, but only those which had gotten on the girl while she had crossed from cab to hotel, and she had made that crossing fast.

Her hose and shoes were wet. Sopping. Water did not exactly squish out of her shoes, but she did leave large moist footprints on the lobby carpet.

All of these facts were noted to some extent.

But the really surprising fact was that the girl was pink.

THE fact that the girl was pink came out when she stumbled, tripping over a high seam in the rug that the management had been intending to fix, and the doorman—he had been flirting with the proprietress of the cigar counter while it rained—who had heard the racket and was running toward the door, grasped in an effort to steady the young woman. The doorman missed his clutch to some extent and got hold of the gray shawl which the girl was holding over her face, and pulled it away. The girl was pink.

She was very pink.

It was an unusual shade of pink. Not a fleshy pink. Not a salmon shade. Not any skin shade of pink. Not the pink of a spanked baby. This was an utterly glaring, unreal, impossible shade of pink. A clown pink.

She said, "Get hold of Ten West Street!"

Her voice was charged with an utterly desperate note.

The doorman and everyone else had their mouths open, and there was small indication that astonishment was going to subside enough for the mouths to be closed.

The girl's voice got wilder.

"Ten West Street!" she cried. "Get hold of it for me!"

Her voice was a good one, and if there had not been creeping devils of fear in it, it would have been modulated and pleasantly toned. But now the voice was like glass breaking, only more so.

The doorman still held his mouth open, so she kicked him on the shin.

"Ouch!" he gasped, and stood on one leg. "Whatcha think you're doin'?"

"Ten West Street!" the girl said for the third time. "Get it on the telephone for me! Quick!"

It probably never entered the doorman's head to comply, for he was too completely dumfounded by the unusual pink coloration of the girl—he could see that her face, even to her eyes, and both her hands, had the color. He wondered about her teeth. Women's teeth are always white. Well, more or less. Were hers white?

Her teeth were pink, too.

The doorman saw this when the girl opened her mouth to scream. The scream, when she let it out, was something to make the chairs come off the floor. It upset everybody in the Hotel Troy Lobby.

The men who came in with gas masks, pistols and bulletproof vests did no further good to anybody's peace of mind, either. The bulletproof vests gave them odd shapes, and the gas masks gave them horrendous faces. They stalked in out of the rain.

"What's this?" a man asked foolishly. "What's this?"

He was a middle-aged man with a pot-shaped stomach. He stood there stupidly. His emotions showed plainly on his face. He didn't know what this was—but it was too wildly crackpot to be happening.

Suddenly he realized it was happening. He wanted to get out of there. Quick. Right now.

The man turned and started to run and one of the guns went off and the man fell on his round stomach.

This put an entirely different complexion on the whole thing. A gun and a noise and a bullet made a combination everyone could understand. There was a general uplifting of hands.

At this point, and before anything else could happen, there was a minor interruption.

A man entered the hotel lobby. He came galloping in, fleeing the rain that poured down outdoors. In his haste, he failed to notice that there was something unusual in progress in the lobby.

He was a lusty young man with a pug nose and an otherwise not unhandsome face, a ruddy glow of health, muscles that carried him like a bouncing spring, clothes that were more for a golf course than for a city street at night during a drowning rainstorm.

He bumped into one of the masked, bulletproof-vested men.

"Hey!" he exclaimed, peering at the gas-masked face. "You advertising something?"

The man with the mask hit him over the head with a gun and he fell. After he was on the floor, he did not change color nor seem badly hurt, but he did not move. His coat had fallen open and the force of his landing on the floor had caused a small black bank book to drop into view. The bankbook cover had a little rectangular opening through which his name could be read.

The name: Chet Farmer.

THE pink girl was, after her one scream, silent. She had crammed fingertips of both hands into her mouth. Her head was turning from side to side, searching frantically. There were three routes of flight—front door, elevators, a door leading to a dining room—but the men with the masks and bulletproof vests had blocked all of them.

The gas-masked, man who had struck down Chet Farmer, approached the hotel-desk clerk.

"Has she said anything?" he asked.

The clerk gave back pop-eyed, tongue-tied silence.

"I mean her." The man pointed at the pink girl. "Has she said anything?"

A few words escaped the clerk.

"What makes her pink?" he asked.

Probably that was not what he had intended to say.

"Suppose you make up your mind not to worry about that, friend," the masked man said. Then he reached forward suddenly and smacked the clerk's nose with the gun. "I asked you a question. Remember?"

A red string ran out of the clerk's nostrils and down his white-shirt front.

He muttered painfully. "She wanted us to get Ten West Street."

"Get it? What the hell do you mean?"

"On the telephone, I guess."

"Ten West Street," said the man with the mask. "I wonder what the hell that is."

Another of the gas-masked men came over and put the nozzle of his mask—the construction of their masks was such that they could carry on conversations without removing the face coverings—close to the other's ear and said something in a tone so low that no one but the pair of them knew what was said.

"Oh, that's what Ten West Street is!" said the first man. He looked—or his actions and tone gave the impression—startled and scared. "It's a good thing we caught her!" he added.

He made some gestures. Evidently they had a prearranged plan of action. Because one man dipped into his pockets and brought out two bottles.

"These are full of poison gas," he said. He shook the bottles. "I break one of these," he added, "and it won't be funny. It's mustard gas."

He added that everybody had better stand still if they knew what was best.

A second man strode over to the pink girl and said, "Turn your back to me, Lada Harland."

It was obvious from the way he spoke the name "Lada Harland" that he wanted it overheard. His enunciation of the name was clear and emphatic, as emphatic as if he had spelled it. L-a-d-a H-a-r-l-a-n-d.

When she turned her back, he instantly seized her and bore her to the floor. Simultaneously, he dragged a handkerchief out of his coat pocket.

This handkerchief was sealed in a cellophane wrapper, and he tore off the covering. The handkerchief was damp. It gave off a pungent odor.

He clapped the handkerchief over the pink girl's nostrils and held it there. She became unconscious.

A THIRD man turned around and left the hotel. A moment after he departed into the sloshing rain, there was a yell outdoors. A shot. Another shot. A blow. A body falling. It was like listening to a radio play.

Another of the gas-masked men jumped out into the pouring night, his gun ready.

His voice came to those in the lobby:

"What happened?"

"The cop."

"Where'd he come from?"

"That corner up yonder, I guess. He must've heard our shot."

"Did you shoot him?"

"Naw. He shot me. Then I bopped him over the head. These are sure first-class bulletproof vests we've got."

"Leave the cop lay where he is. And let's get this thing over with before more law shows up."

Like a radio drama, their voices came in on the background of the rain.

The two men re-entered. One of them carried a pair of large packages wrapped in coarse brown paper. He held the packages in his arms and looked around, puzzled, scrutinizing the hotel lobby.

"In here?" he asked.

"Sure," said his companion, who seemed to be in charge of their expedition.

The pink girl, unconscious from the stuff she had been forced to breathe off the damp handkerchief, was dragged to a corner of the lobby, near the dining-room door. She was placed on the floor.

One of the packages was placed on the girl's body, and the other on the floor. One of the men struck a match. It now developed that a fuse protruded from the smaller package on the floor. The match was applied to this; the fuse fizzed, threw out sparks and gave off smoke."

"Don't nobody run!" a man yelled. "This ain't no bomb."

The fuse burned into the package, and there was a hissing that was so loud that it was almost a whistle, and a blinding light from the package. At first, the light was no larger than an arc from an electric welding torch, and utterly blinding; then it was larger, and, if possible, more blinding.

Not only could no one in the room see anything, but it developed that the burning stuff in the package was mixed with tear gas, or some similar vapor, which was further blinding.

In the blinding white, eye-stinging glare, a man's voice yelled, "Did the second package catch fire?"

"Yeah; it's goin'," someone told him.

"Let's get out of here, then."

Footsteps ran away.

Chapter II. THE DETERMINED MR. FARMER

SOME confusion surrounded the exact sequence of what now happened. Some witnesses—all those who were in the Hotel Troy lobby were witnesses by ear, not by sight, because the incredible white light burning in the lobby corner still blinded them—claimed that the gas-masked raiders left in a passenger car. A different version said a taxicab. Another a truck.

One thing was certain. Chet Farmer, the young man who had been knocked senseless, was apparently revived by the heat. He got up off the floor and staggered to a fire-alarm box, then to a telephone to call the police.

The street outside got full of fire trucks, firemen, police and curious people who didn't mind the rain. Later, there were newspaper reporters.

A girl had been burned up. The *up* was very definite. There was nothing left of the pink girl. They found a scorched compact, a heat-misshapen handbag frame, some droplets of metal that they decided had been buttons. Nothing else.

Chet Farmer was a pale onlooker. Fright did not cause his paleness, but rage. He was utterly angry.

Particularly was he miffed at the police, who seemed to be making no headway.

"A girl got murdered!" he yelled. "Do something!"

"Keep your shirt on," a policeman suggested. "They wore gas masks that covered their faces up so nobody could identify them. Furthermore, there is nothing to show what the motive was, or why the crime was pulled off in such a peculiar fashion."

"Why don't you call in a chemist and start him analyzing to see what it was they used to burn the body? Why don't you go at this scientific?"

"We are doing our best," the officer said.

Chet Farmer snorted. "I don't see any signs of it."

"What do you suggest, then?" the policeman asked with ill-tempered abruptness.

"I suggest," growled Chet Farmer, "that I think you're damned inefficient."

The officer scowled and clutched Chet Farmer's arm. "I think we'll show some efficiency on *you*."

"Eh?"

"Who are you? What were you doing here? How did you happen to show up at the crucial moment?"

The young man glared. "Listen, what is—"

The cop shoved him. He beckoned two other policemen. He said, "We got a wise guy here. He has been making unpleasant noises with his mouth."

Blue uniforms and grim official expressions made Chet Farmer explain indignantly, "I am a taxpayer and a citizen and I'm law-abiding. I live at the River Road Club for Young Men, and I sell stocks and bonds for a living. You can find that is the truth by checking on it. I just happened to be passing here, and ran in to get out of the rain. And if you birds try to push me around, you're going to regret it, brass buttons or no brass buttons!"

A policeman went away to a telephone to check on Chet Farmer. Eventually he returned. "He seems to be what he says he is," he reported.

Chet Farmer jerked away from the policemen. He moved over and stood with the other people who had been in the lobby, and some newspapermen who had joined the group.

"These cops," he said, "should go to school."

A voice at Chet Farmer's elbow suggested quietly, "Sometimes still rivers run deep."

Chet Farmer turned around to look at the speaker and was greatly impressed.

THE man who had made the remark about still rivers was a large individual, although the fact that he was swathed in a tan raincoat made it difficult to tell much about his shape. Nor could much more be told about his face, because a large pair of colored glasses obscured his eyes. His nose was straight and his

lips firmly chiseled.

However—this was surprising, too—there was some kind of power about the man. Something compelling. It was a quality of force that caused Chet Farmer to examine the big man intently, and then, feeling ill at ease and not knowing why, to move away.

Chet asked a policeman, "Who is that big guy over there?"

The cop said, "Go away and don't bother me."

Chet tried a newspaper reporter with a question. "I don't know," the reporter said.

Chet explained, "There's something about him. I don't know what it is. He gives you a funny feeling. If you ever stood on the edge of a tall building and looked down, you know what I mean."

"Yeah." The reporter was not interested in casual strangers who could make people feel uneasy. "Say, you're the young guy who got bumped on the noggin, ain't you? How about an exclusive picture for my paper?" To his cameraman, he yelled, "Hey, Pete!"

Chet was not interested in publicity, and he said so in terms that left no doubts, adding his personal opinion of what would be a good place for the newspaperman to go. He ended, "And I hope they have a special devil to stoke the fire."

He stalked off. Chet Farmer was angry. He went to the telephone book, and frowned at it thoughtfully. It would take hours to hunt through a book of that size. An idea hit him, and he used the telephone.

"This is the detective bureau," he said calmly. "I want to know who lives at the address at Ten West Street."

There was a delay.

"No one lives there," the voice said. "It is the Museum of Advanced Science."

"Which?"

"The Museum of Advanced Science."

"Is that a regular museum?"

"I wouldn't know," said the other. "You're a detective. Suppose you find out."

Chet Farmer grinned thinly, rattled the receiver hook so it would make a loud noise in the other's ear, and went back to the telephone book. He found the Museum of Advanced Science had a phone listing, and he called the number. He got an answer. A man.

"Who is this?" Chet asked.

"The building superintendent."

"You mean the janitor?"

"If you want to be brutally frank, yes," the other said.

"I like to call a spade a spade," Chet advised. "Now, I want some information out of you. I want to know why someone would be wildly anxious to get to the museum about an hour and a half ago. Can you

answer me that?"

"It might," said the janitor, "have been somebody who wanted to see Doc Savage."

"Who?"

"Doc Savage, or the Man of Bronze, as they call him."

"Hm-m-m," said Chet Farmer. "I seem to have heard that name."

"That sounds like a mild understatement."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said the janitor, "that he's well known."

"What was he doing there tonight?"

"Giving a demonstration to a bunch of world-famous scientists. Don't ask me what kind of a demonstration. I heard the talk, but after they got past the first ten words, I was lost. By the way, who are you?"

"A detective," said Chet Farmer. He neglected to add that he was a self-elected detective, one without portfolio, as it were.

"You a friend," asked the janitor, "of the detective who called up here about an hour ago, and asked the same questions you're asking, practically?"

"What was his name?"

"Sergeant Merkel."

"No, thanks," Chet Farmer said. He hung up. He went over and talked to the policeman with whom he'd had his verbal brush. He asked, "Is your name Sergeant Merkel?"

"Uh-huh," agreed the officer. "Why?"

"All right," Chet told him. "I apologize."

"What for?"

"I stood around here an hour before I thought of checking to see what Ten West Street was."

The officer frowned. "So you've turned detective?"

"Yes, sir. I have."

"Why?"

"I didn't like the way those fellows burned that girl to death."

"That is commendable. But you'll just be in our way."

"DO you think that pink girl was trying to reach Doc Savage?" Chet Farmer asked the policeman

curiously.

The cop studied his questioner. "What do *you* think?"

"I don't know. I have just barely heard of Doc Savage. Why would a pink girl be trying to get to him?"

"You trying to be funny?"

"No, no, not at all. The girl was pink. I know it sounds crazy when you say it. But she *was* pink."

The policeman said, "Doc Savage is a remarkable individual who is sometimes called a man of mystery because he does not like publicity. His business is righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, and he does not get paid for it—which does not sound sensible either, but that's what he does. Savage is—well, remarkable is a mild word. He has five assistants, all tops in their respective professions. But to get back to what I said at first: Doc Savage's business is righting wrongs and helping people out of trouble. He helps anybody who shows up with an unusual piece of trouble. Does that answer your question?"

"Meaning," said Chet, "that the pink girl was in an unusual piece of trouble."

"Yes."

"That answers my question," Chet said.

The police officer seemed to have something on his mind. The official photographers and the newspaper cameramen had taken numbers of pictures of the hotel, the lobby, and the corner of the lobby where the girl had vanished in blinding flame. They had shot close-ups of the scorched compact, the handbag frame, the droplets of metal. They had made negatives of the burned corner of the hotel.

With polite firmness, the police officers now cleared the reporters and spectators out of the place. Other than those who had witnessed the crime, only one man remained—the big individual swathed in the tan raincoat and colored glasses.

Then Sergeant Merkel decided to let Chet Farmer remain. "I want you to meet somebody you are interested in," the sergeant said.

He led Chet Farmer over to the big man in the tan coat and colored glasses, and said, "Mr. Savage, here is a young man you can start on. His name is Chet Farmer. He saw most of what happened."

Chet Farmer's eyes went round. "Wait a minute! This is Doc Savage? How'd *he* get here?"

Sergeant Merkel said, "We found out he was at Ten West Street tonight, and we told him about it. He thought he had better investigate."

CHET FARMER shook Doc Savage's hand and said, "The police seem to think it strange that I am so interested in this, and I want to explain that. It happens that I heard this girl's voice and saw how terrified she was, and I—well, it touched something in me. And when she was burned to death, it did something hideous inside me." He clenched a fist, and his expression was ferocious as he shook the fist. "I'm willing to do anything to bring those devils to justice—anything—and I'm going to do it."

Doc Savage asked, "Do you actually know anything about this case?"

"Actually—nothing." Chet Farmer returned his stare intently. "I just took a notion I wanted to help that girl."

"Do you think she was trying to get to Ten West Street to see me?"

"It looks like it, don't it?"

Doc Savage made no comment. The newspapermen and spectators were all out of the hotel, so he removed the tan raincoat and colored glasses. He had worn the disguise because he genuinely detested publicity, the dislike springing out of a natural modesty, and the fact that publicity was apt to put enemies on his trail.

His eyes were probably his most remarkable feature, being strangely compelling, like pools of flake-gold stirred by tiny winds. His skin had a bronzed tint that had come from exposure to tropical suns.

Doc got a small handbag which he had placed in the background. He opened this, and it held chemicals and tubes of an analytical kit.

He scrutinized the metal fragments which had been found—the compact, the handbag frame, the distorted buttons. He examined them under a microscope, then made chemical tests.

Next, he made chemical tests of ashes which he selected from several points. The process required some time.

Finally, "A simply concocted incendiary compound," he said.

"What do you mean?" Chet Farmer asked.

Doc said. "My understanding is that the raiders carried in two packages of compound which they burned."

"Yes."

"The substance in the packages," Doc explained, "was a mixture of magnesium and the highly inflammable compound of powdered aluminum known as thermite, to which had been added chemicals which, when burned, give off a form of tear gas. Or so an analysis indicated."

Chet Farmer nodded. "I figured it had to be something like that."

Doc Savage turned back to the heat-distorted bits of metal.

"However," he said, "these were melted and burned with the heat of an acetylene torch."

"I wonder when—" Chet Farmer stopped and stared at the bronze man. "What did you say?"

"The handbag frame, compact and buttons were melted out of shape by acetylene."

Chet pulled in a strange breath. "But they weren't carrying any torch."

"Exactly."

"Then," Chet muttered, "they must have fixed those things up before they came in here."

Doc Savage nodded slightly, said nothing.

"You mean," Chet demanded, "that the thing was *staged*."

"Planned, we might say."

"But why should they plant those pieces of metal while they were killing the girl—"

Doc Savage said, "They did not kill her."

"Huh?"

"They merely tried to make it seem that they had killed the girl. They did not do so."

Chet Farmer frowned. "I was knocked unconscious part of the time, and didn't see it all. But I understand that they lighted the first package which was placed in *front* of the girl. When it began burning, everyone was blinded. I guess they could have carried her out and no one would have been able to see, if they worked fast."

"They seemed to have done exactly that," Doc said.

"Are you positive she didn't burn?"

"The ashes," the bronze man said, "show no trace whatever of human protein when given an analysis."

Chet Farmer raked bewildered fingers through his hair.

"But what made her that pink color?" he demanded.

There came into existence a strange, low, exotic trilling sound that was without tune, yet possessed of a definitely musical quality, seeming to come from no particular spot in the room, but from everywhere. Then Doc Savage looked faintly startled, and the sound ceased. The trilling was a small unconscious thing which he did in moments of mental stress. Just now, it had meant that he was puzzled.

Chapter III. ANOTHER ONE PINK

CHET FARMER was impressed by Doc Savage. Without haste and without excitement, the bronze man had cut through the unbelievable aspect of what had happened, and dug out the fact that the girl was not dead at all, and that her supposed burning had been planned and staged. He had done this without waste motion, while the others were milling around, confused by the wildly improbable features of the incident.

Chet said, "I can't bring myself to think that girl was in on it, even if it was staged. She was *scared*."

"A young woman might be expected to be nervous while taking part in a thing like that," Doc Savage suggested.

"She wasn't nervous—it was fear."

The bronze man changed the subject. "According to the spectators, those gas-masked men—or one of them, at least—carefully pronounced the girl's name. Lada Harland."

"Yes."

"There seems to be an impression that the man wanted everyone to understand the name."

Chet Farmer scratched his head. "I wonder why?"

Doc Savage did not answer. He went over to the policeman in charge of the expedition and put an inquiry. The officer assured him that the police were checking everyone by the name of Harland who was to be found in the city directory or the telephone book.

"We haven't found any trace of a Lada Harland," the officer reported.

"Let me know when you have finished checking."

"I will."

Returning to Chet Farmer, who was watching a fireman roll up hose, Doc Savage said, "The explanation of the spectators seems to agree on one point—the girl's frock was dry, but her hose and footgear were wet."

Chet Farmer nodded.

"That would indicate she had been out in the rain, wearing a raincoat. But she had no raincoat," Doc Savage added.

"I don't see where that will help us."

"Did anyone see how she arrived? In what kind of a conveyance?"

"No."

"We might work on the theory that she came in a cab, and left her raincoat in the taxi. People usually remove their wet raincoats when they get into a taxicab. This girl, being excited, could have left hers."

The police officer approached—he came from the direction of the telephone—and said, "The department has gone over the Harlands. We haven't found anybody in the city who knows a Lada Harland."

Doc nodded, said, "We will have to try the taxicab theory."

The bronze man went to the telephone and began calling taxicab companies and offering a five-dollar reward for return of a raincoat left in a cab by a passenger, a woman, who had alighted at the Hotel Troy.

Chet Farmer muttered, "Why not offer a hundred bucks, if you're gonna give a reward? I'm not flush, but I'll put up the dough. I want action on this."

Doc said, "Too big a reward might frighten the cab driver."

When the bronze man had called the list of cab companies in the city classified directory, he dialed the long-distance operator and began calling taxicab concerns in the neighboring towns.

THE town was Great Neck, on Long Island.

It was around four o'clock in the morning, with some traces of dawn due in the east, when Doc Savage and Chet Farmer arrived. It had stopped raining.

The cab driver was somewhat suspicious. "You ain't private detectives?" he asked dubiously.

Doc studied him. "What would that have to do with it?"

"Just this," the hack driver said stubbornly. "I ain't doing nothing to get Lada Harland in trouble. Nice girl, Lada is."

"You have known her a long time?"

"Since she was this high." The hackman made a height with his hands, about eighteen inches. "She's a lady, Lada is," he added.

To save a protracted argument, Doc Savage spread the two-o'clock editions of the morning newspapers out in front of the man. These carried the story of what had happened at the Hotel Troy. The hack driver read slowly, shaping the words with his lips.

"She burned to death!" he gasped foolishly. "Lada did."

That was what the newspapers said. Doc had kept to himself the fact that the girl was still alive—or at least had not been burned in the hotel lobby.

"Where did you pick her up?" Doc asked.

"She telephoned me last night and asked me to meet her two blocks from her house," the taxi driver explained. "She kind of whispered over the telephone, and said she was sneaking out. Well, I met her. And she told me to drive her to Ten West Street in New York."

Doc inquired, "Why did you let her out at the Hotel Troy?"

"Because, all of a sudden, she asked me to."

"What changed her mind?"

"I didn't know at the time, but those men—those fellows with the gas masks and bulletproof vests that it talks about here in the newspaper—must have been following her, and she'd seen 'em."

"You did not know you were followed?"

"I sure didn't."

"Where," Doc asked, "is the Harland home?"

"You want me to go out there with you?"

"No."

The taxi driver gave them an address and a description, and ended with, "The Harlands have lived there for years. Nice people, all of them. Their parents was in the drugstore business here for years. I mean, their father was. He died, and his wife died not a month later. That was three—no, four—years ago."

Doc said, "Then there is more than one Harland living at that address?"

"Two. Lada and her brother, Peter. He is about ten years older than Lada."

"What does Peter Harland do?"

"Works in the city. Think he's with an outfit that makes ash trays and nonbreakable dishes and stuff like that."

Doc said, "Describe him."

Peter Harland was described as a bulky young man who disliked exercise, who wore glasses, and who got his entertainment from books and long walks alone along the beach. "He was a studious cuss even when he was little," the taxi driver explained. "Always studying something or other. Mighty ambitious, I

guess. Too ambitious to have any fun."

"Did you see Peter Harland last night?"

"Nope. Didn't see nobody but Lada."

"Did you see her face?" Doc inquired.

The driver scrubbed at his jaw with a palm. "Come to think of it, she had a gray shawl around her head, and it was dark. Nope, didn't see her face. But it was Lada, all right. I'd know her voice. Anyhow, she asked me how my wife's geranium was coming. She gave my wife the geranium, Lada did."

Doc offered the taxi driver the five-dollars reward, but the man refused to take it. "If Lada is in trouble, I want to help," he explained. "I would feel dirty if I took money for it."

THE Harland home was a Colonial of brick and white weatherboard, with a fireplace chimney, large windows and plenty of pleasant lawn, with some shrubbery. The garage was attached. It was very modern and had the appearance of having been remodeled within the last few years.

The night was black, except for an edging of scarlet dawn hint in the east.

Doc Savage drove his car on past. The machine was a coupé, large, dark, not conspicuous. There was little about it—unless one rolled down the windows and examined their thickness—to show that it was a rolling fortress of armor plate and bulletproof glass. He stopped the vehicle on the closest side street.

"You stay in the machine," he told Chet Farmer.

The bronze man's voice had a quiet power of command that caused Chet Farmer to remain in the machine, although he'd previously had no intention of doing so. After a few minutes, it occurred to him that he'd followed orders like a hired man, and that irritated him. But when he tried to get out of the car, he could not. All the doors and windows were locked.

By that time, Doc Savage had reached the Harland home. There had been little visible evidence of his coming, merely a stirring of shadow now and then.

He attached a gadget to a windowpane. It was a supersensitive microphone pickup, and it fed into an amplifier, then into a headset. Doc listened. He could hear an electric clock running, and, in a bathroom probably, a faucet dripping. Later an electric refrigerator started up. There was no other sound.

He tried three more windows without additional results, then went back to the car.

"No one in the house," he reported.

Chet Farmer, indignant, said, "You locked me in here! I couldn't get out!"

Doc Savage, seeming apologetic, explained, "There is a concealed locking system. If one forgets to press the button, everything locks automatically."

"Where's the damned button?" Chet Farmer demanded.

Doc Savage seemed not to hear the inquiry. He was headed back toward the Harland home. The front door was unlocked. He entered.

THE house was empty, and someone had gone over everything, wiping with a damp dishrag. Doc Savage pointed this out by indicating the smears which the wet cloth had left in certain spots that were dusty. They found the dishrag in the kitchen, neatly washed out.

"Looks like somebody wiped off fingerprints," Chet Farmer muttered. "That's queer. I wonder what we're getting mixed up in, anyhow."

Doc handed him the dishrag. "Feel it."

"Wet," Chet said.

"Was washed out not long ago."

In the basement, there was one empty room. It was *too* empty. Doc Savage scrutinized the floor, and there were traces of recent wear. The room apparently had received a great deal of use up until a late date.

A door led from the basement directly into the back yard, and the yard was cut deeply by tires. Doc examined the marks. Truck tires. Made three or four hours ago, probably.

He said, "Someone hauled away the stuff in that empty basement room last night, using a truck."

Chet Farmer nodded. There were enough grimy smears of tracks from the spot where the truck had stood back into the basement room to show that this was what had happened.

Doc returned to the basement. There was a furnace. He put a hand on it. Hot. He opened the furnace door. There were gray ashes that showed a glowing red heart when he thrust in a poker and stirred.

He decided that what had been burned had been cloth and paper mostly, but that was about all a visual inspection could show.

He bottled up specimens of the ashes and pocketed them.

Upstairs, in the kitchen, he gave attention to a drawer containing account slips from grocer, butcher, and milkman. He got the addresses off these, and used the telephone. Because the stores were closed, there was some delay locating the proprietors.

"No, I haven't noticed anything strange about the Harlands the last few days," said the grocer. "Except that Lada started ordering by telephone about a week ago."

Doc tried the milkman.

"I haven't seen hide nor hair of them for a week," the milkman reported. "However, they've been home. They took milk. Kind of strange, too, because generally they swap the time of day with me every morning."

The butcher hadn't noticed anything peculiar, he explained sleepily. And what the hell was the idea of waking up a man at this time of the morning?

Staring at Doc Savage, Chet Farmer said, "It begins to look as if the Harlands have hibernated in the house for about a week."

Doc Savage was thoughtful. "We might consult the neighbors on the point."

The house to the right was empty and had been empty for some time.

Neighbor to the left had plenty of information, however. He was a tall man with a mustache of the variety commonly labeled soup strainer.

"I'll say there's something wrong at the Harlands'," he muttered.

"What do you mean?" Doc asked.

"About nine o'clock last night, shortly after it got dark and began raining," said the neighbor, "there was a commotion over at the Harlands, and we saw something strange. We saw a man dash out of the house, and another man chased him. The man who ran away got caught—"

The neighbor peered at Doc Savage while he hesitated.

"I ain't a drinking man," he said.

"Yes?" Doc's voice was quiet.

"And I ain't color-blind."

Doc waited.

The neighbor said, "The man who ran away was pink."

Chet Farmer said, "You mean it was a pink woman, don't you?"

The neighbor scowled. "I know a man when I see one, even if he's pink."

"Then you're sure it was a pink man?"

"Listen," the neighbor said, "I guess you think I'm nuts."

Doc Savage explained, "On the contrary, nobody is doubting your word, and in the end you will doubtless find that there is a very good explanation for what you saw."

"If there is an explanation, I wish I knew what it was." The neighbor wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

Doc asked, "Did you see a truck visit the Harland house last night?"

"Yes. It came about one o'clock, backed up to the cellar door, and they loaded a lot of stuff in the truck. Then it left."

"Have you noticed anything peculiar about the Harland house during the last week?"

"I'll say! They wouldn't talk to us. Lada Harland and my wife have been good friends, but last Tuesday Martha went over to borrow a cup of flour, and Lada wouldn't open the door. Without opening the door, she said she had no flour. She said it kind of curt. Then on Wednesday, she wouldn't answer the door. And again on Thursday. We got to watching the place. And here's what I'm willing to bet—neither Lada Harland or her brother has been out of that house in a week."

"They are not there now."

"Then they went away in the truck."

Doc was silent for a while. He said finally, "You are sure that it was a pink man you saw run from the house?"

"Positive.

Chapter IV. THE TRICK

DOC SAVAGE'S group of five assistants had been with him since the beginning of his strange career. The fact that their association had been so constant was probably the best index to the bronze man's character strength. Only an individual of great mental power could have held the allegiance of five such men.

The five aids were specialists in their own fields. Not only specialists, but world-renowned. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Monk Mayfair was a legend in the field of industrial chemistry. His homeliness—he did not have to be in a very dark alley to be mistaken for an ape—was also a legend, as was his pet pig, named Habeas Corpus.

Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, called Ham because of his abhorrence for that article of diet, either on four legs or on the breakfast platter, was admittedly one of the most astute lawyers Harvard had ever turned out. He was famous, too, for the perpetual quarrel he managed to conduct with Monk, and for his pet chimpanzee, Chemistry, which looked remarkably like the hairy Monk.

There were three others. Colonel John Renny Renwick was famous for his fists and his engineering; Major Thomas J. Long Tom Roberts was an electrical engineer of repute; William Harper Johnny Littlejohn was an eminent archaeologist and geologist and user of big words.

The remarkable fact was that these five, each pre-eminent in his field, held more than a sneaking suspicion that the chief, Doc Savage, knew more about their own professions than they themselves knew.

Only Monk and Ham were at headquarters when Doc Savage and Chet Farmer arrived there. The pair were quarreling mildly, and Monk was working on one of his fingers with a needle and a pair of tweezers.

"Got a splinter in my finger," Monk muttered.

"He was scratching his head," Ham explained cheerfully.

Doc Savage introduced Chet Farmer. He explained what had happened, using brief, concise sentences that omitted no details. He finished, "Apparently something has been wrong at the Harland house for almost a week. They stopped associating with the neighbors, ordered all their food over the telephone, and did not show themselves around the house."

Monk had been examining Chet Farmer. Apparently he took a dislike to the young man. Monk had a penchant for disliking handsome young men.

"What's the rack of sport clothes messing around in it for?" Monk asked.

Chet Farmer took exception to the reference to his golf-course attire.

"For a guy who must have got that suit off a scarecrow, you should talk," Chet said.

Ham grinned. Ham was an inveterate wearer of the latest fashions himself, and the fact that Monk was a careless dresser irritated him.

Without speaking, Doc Savage left the room. Chet Farmer glanced after him curiously.

HAM BROOKS liked to make a business of showing courtesy to anyone whom Monk disliked. Getting to his feet, "Maybe you would like to look over the establishment," Ham said.

"That'd be swell!"

Ham introduced his pet chimp, Chemistry, extolled the good points of the animal, and ignored Habeas Corpus. The slight darkened Monk's scowl.

"This place occupies the whole eighty-sixth floor of the building," Ham explained. "This is the reception room. Adjoining is the library." He took Chet into the library, and the young man became rather speechless as he looked around the endless racks of scientific tomes.

"There's a lot of books here," he said.

"One of the most complete and advanced scientific libraries in existence," Ham assured him. "Come on. I'll show you something that *is* something."

Chet Farmer followed Ham through another door, and stopped with a grunt of astonishment. His eyes swept a vast room containing gleaming apparatus. "What's this?"

"The laboratory," Ham said. "Doc uses a lot of scientific gadgets, and it's here that he works them out. In this room is the most complete—"

He caught Doc's eye, went silent. Doc was seated at the far end of the laboratory, at a typewriter. He shook his head slightly.

Ham took Chet Farmer's elbow and escorted him back into the reception room.

"What do you make of this mystery?" Ham asked.

Chet Farmer considered, then shrugged. "It's so cockeyed that I don't know what to say. The whole thing is goofy. Take the fact that the girl, Lada Harland, was *pink*. That was goofy. And those men with gas masks and bulletproof vests. It was hardly believable. In fact, it was so ridiculous that I could not believe the thing was real when I barged into the hotel lobby to get out of the rain."

"You just happened to run into the hotel?" Monk asked pointedly.

"Yes."

"To get out of the rain?"

"Yes."

"I haven't heard anybody mention your clothes being wet."

Chet Farmer's neck got red. "As a matter of fact, they weren't very wet."

"Why not?"

"The way I happened to be passing came about like this: I was riding in my car, and the motor drowned out. I got out and ran into the hotel to telephone."

"I suppose your car is still standing there."

"It is."

Monk got up. He went to the laboratory door.

"Doc," he called loudly, "Ham and I are going to be gone about an hour. We're going to see if—we're going to get Chet Farmer's car, which he says he left near the Hotel Troy."

Red heat of rage grew darker in Chet Farmer's neck. "I see I'm going to like *you!*" he told Monk grimly.

RETURNING to headquarters somewhat less than an hour later, Chet Farmer and Ham were grinning, and Monk was crestfallen.

Doc asked, "You find the car?"

Ham nudged Monk. "Go ahead and tell him."

"It was there," Monk muttered, "with the motor drowned out by the rain."

Doc Savage did not seem surprised. The bronze man drew from an inside pocket a long envelope. He held this in his hands while he spoke.

"We are in a rather strange position in this case," he said. "All we know is that a girl apparently tried to get to us to ask for help. We are taking for granted, of course, that she was headed for Ten West Street to find me. We might be mistaken on that point. The fact that I was to be at Ten West Street that night had been printed in the newspapers, and the girl could have learned it from that source. But again, she *could* have been trying to get to the museum for an entirely different reason."

"I thought of that," said Chet Farmer. "I wonder if we shouldn't investigate that angle."

Doc said, "Maybe the pink man can tell us."

"Eh?" Chet Farmer stared at him.

Doc glanced at the envelope he had in his hands. He gave the envelope to Monk.

"Take Ham with you," Doc told the homely chemist. "In that envelope, you will find complete instructions about where to find a third pink person. This third one is a man. In the envelope are directions telling exactly what to do when you have your pink man. I typed the instructions a few minutes ago."

Monk started to open the envelope.

Doc stopped him. "Get in a car, you and Ham, and be several blocks away from here, and sure no one is watching you, before you open the envelope. Then, as soon as you have memorized the instructions—destroy them."

Monk said, "I get it." He put the envelope in his inside pocket and buttoned his coat. "That all?"

"That is all," Doc said.

Monk and Ham moved toward the door.

Chet Farmer said, "Boy, this should be good!" and started to go with them.

Doc stopped him. "You stay here, Farmer."

"But—"

"Sit down."

Chet Farmer wavered, finally sank in a chair. Obviously disgusted, he watched Monk and Ham depart. "I thought I was in this thing," he muttered.

"Only as long as you follow orders," Doc said quietly.

The young man shrugged. "You're the boss. But where in the hell did you find a third pink person?"

Doc said, "That will all be perfectly clear in time."

"But I didn't dream there was a third one."

"Neither," agreed Doc Savage dryly, "did a lot of people."

Chapter V. THE SLIP-UP

THE first editions of the evening newspapers—the street sale editions which came out at ten o'clock in the morning—had a front-page story, with photographs, that astounded Chet Farmer. The papers came up through a private mail tube with the ink still damp. Chet read one, let out a yell.

"Hey!" he howled. "Look at this! They got him!"

He meant Monk and Ham and a pink man. It was a picture of action, showing Monk and Ham grappling with the pink man. The photograph had been taken by flashgun. Caption underneath read:

Graphic scene as noted lawyer and chemist grapple with mysterious pink man they found hiding in a Wall Street office.

Accompanying this was a news story to the effect that Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks, noted chemist and attorney respectively, had become the center of a mystery during the night when they had seized a pink man, identity unknown, whom they had found lurking in an office in the Wall Street sector. Police, arriving at the scene after the seizure had been perpetrated, had been mystified, but had put forward the theory that the seizure might be connected in some way with the fantastic case of the burning to death of a pink girl at the Hotel Troy earlier in the night.

The news story did not intimate what had become of Monk and Ham and their pink captive.

"Look at this!" Chet Farmer yelled wrathfully. "Do you approve of this?"

He meant a paragraph that read:

News Photographer Ed Bost got the above action picture after he was tipped off by Chemist Monk Mayfair that an interesting news story would break at the spot. Because he got no more details, Photographer Bost is wondering just what he did photograph.

Chet Farmer said, "I thought you were against publicity."

Doc Savage, his metallic features expressionless, said, "Monk has the privilege of handling an assignment to suit himself. That is the way we work. And Monk happens to like publicity."

"Where have they taken their pink man?"

Doc shrugged. "They were to report here as soon as they completed their job."

"But we haven't heard a bleat out of them. And here it comes out in the newspaper!"

Doc said, "This will probably work out. Monk and Ham are efficient."

"Yes, but the way it's happening, I don't understand it. Take this pink man—how did you know where to locate him? Who is he? What's his name?"

"That will come out."

"When?"

"Either Monk or Ham," Doc Savage said quietly, "should show up here before long to report where the pink man is being held." The bronze man consulted his wrist watch. "Would you care for some breakfast? There is a restaurant on the ground floor of this building."

Chet Farmer shook his head. "I'll stay here. I ain't hungry. And Monk or Ham may show up."

Doc Savage nodded agreeably, and went out.

MONK arrived at a quarter past eleven. There was a smirk on his homely face, and triumph in his walk. He said, "I came to get my pet hog." He grimaced. "The only fly in the ointment is that I gotta bring Ham's pet chimp, too. We matched to see whether I would bring the chimp, and I lost."

Doc Savage—he had just returned from breakfast—asked, "How did it go?"

Monk grinned. "Hunky-dory."

"Everything is going all right?"

"Our part of it is."

Monk asked, "Is anybody watching this place?"

"At least three men," Doc Savage agreed. "They just showed up on the job. One of them seems to be selling umbrellas, another peddling papers, and a third is driving a laundry truck."

Monk's grin got wider. "I might as well leave then, huh?"

Doc nodded.

Monk turned and went out.

Chet Farmer was staring unbelievably. He made flabbergasted gestures with his hands. "You . . . you . . . what *is* this?"

Doc Savage had followed Monk to the door. He watched the homely chemist get into one of the regular elevators. Just before the cage started down, Monk turned to ask, "You need any extra time, Doc? Want me to wait a while before I leave the building?"

"About five minutes," Doc said.

Chet Farmer grabbed Doc's arm in his excitement and demanded, "What are the five minutes for?"

"To give us time to prepare to follow these strangers when they trail Monk?"

"Oh!" The young man put out his jaw in a determined fashion. "If you think I'm not going along on this, you're mistaken."

Doc said, "You can come."

The bronze man hastily entered the laboratory and removed his coat. He donned a vest of unusual type, one that contained numerous pockets holding gadgets. He beckoned to Chet Farmer. They took Doc's private elevator, one that operated at great speed, and it sank them to the basement so suddenly that Chet was forced to his knees as the cage halted. They got out.

They were in a large garage which contained an assortment of machines ranging from a roadster that obviously had a racing motor, coupés, sedans, and a variety of trucks.

"All of these belong to you?" Chet Farmer demanded.

"Some of them belong to Monk and Ham and the others." Doc selected a delivery truck emblazoned with the name of a fictitious tailoring establishment. It was a light machine, far faster than it looked, one in which they could carry prisoners without attracting notice.

An electric-eye device opened the garage doors automatically, and closed them again when they were outside.

Chet Farmer was impressed. "This is some layout you've got."

Doc made no comment.

"It must have cost a lot of dough," the young man ventured.

Doc sent the car in to the curb and parked, wheels angled out for a quick getaway. Half a block ahead was the laundry truck which he suspected, and he could see both the man selling newspapers and the one vending umbrellas. He waited for Monk to appear.

Chet said, "How do you get the dough to support a place like this?"

Doc seemed not to hear. Seeming not to hear was a convenient habit which he had. The source of his money was a secret known to no one but himself and his five aids—deep in the mountain jungles of a Central American republic was a lost valley populated by descendants of ancient Maya, and these people, in return for a favor Doc Savage and his men had once done them in the course of a hazardous adventure, kept the bronze man supplied with gold from a great lode in the valley.

Monk came out of the skyscraper, the top floor of which housed Doc's headquarters. He entered a taxicab casually.

The laundry truck pulled out. The paper vender and the seller of umbrellas climbed in. The truck followed Monk's cab.

Doc trailed along in his own machine.

The bronze man actually kept on the trail, however, for only a dozen blocks, after which he turned off and took an express highway that led directly out of the city. "Monk will lead them to the hide-out," he said.

"But do you know where *that* is?"

Doc said, "It was part of the typewritten instructions."

"You mean the instructions you gave Monk and Ham before they started out to hunt the pink man?"

"Yes."

"Then you must have anticipated that these men would try to trail Monk or Ham to the pink man!" Chet Farmer exclaimed.

"It was an eventuality we hoped for."

"Then *that's* why Monk called in the newspapermen?"

"Yes."

"I'll be damned!" Chet Farmer said. "The way you fellows work beats me. Don't your schemes ever slip?"

"More frequently than we care for," Doc admitted.

"From what I've heard about you, they say you don't slip very often." The young man leaned back and grinned. "You know, I think this working with you, and seeing the way you do things, is an experience I'm going to remember for a long time."

Doc Savage made no comment. He drove silently, keeping to the fast lanes. And after a time, he turned off into hill country, following a little-used road that was full of narrow spots and sharp turns, in spots a tunnel through arched leafage, where vines hung down and raked the car top.

Wheeling the machine around behind a small cabin which suddenly appeared, Doc got out.

Instantly, a man appeared. The man was almost as large as Doc Savage, and he had a face with a long going-to-a-funeral expression, and a pair of fists, neither of which could have been accommodated by a quart pail.

"Holy cow!" the newcomer exclaimed. "You here already?"

Doc said, "This is Renny Renwick, one of our associates. Renny, this is Chet Farmer. Did Monk and Ham give you the story?"

Big-fisted Renny nodded. "About the girl who was pink, who was the subject of a fake burning last night, while she was trying to get to you. Yes, they gave us that yarn." The engineer squinted at his huge fists. "What's the real lowdown, Doc?"

"What do you mean—real low-down?"

"A story about a pink girl, and a pink man, is too big to swallow," Renny explained. "What's the real story? What actually happened?"

Doc Savage said. "The girl *was* pink. So was the man."

Renny grinned rather foolishly.

Doc said, "We have some fish following the bait we threw out. They are trailing Monk, who is leading

them here. They will be here before very long."

Renny said, "All right. We have a trap set."

THE trap functioned wonderfully. First, Monk came along in the taxicab, moving fast. A few minutes later, the laundry truck arrived, moving more cautiously. One man was standing on the running board, and the bulk of the topcoat which he was wearing indicated it covered a bulletproof vest. He had one hand in a pocket of the topcoat.

In Doc's ear, Chet Farmer whispered, "That's one of the men who staged the burning of that girl last night. He's wearing the same pair of pants he wore then."

The laundry truck hit a wire. It was a green wire, green to look like the grass, and the driver did not see it. The wire was alloy steel, the stuff airplane controls are made from. Both front tires of the truck blew out. The man standing on the running board turned half a somersault and landed on his back. The driver came against the steering wheel and broke it with his stomach, then hung there with his mouth making distorted shapes.

In the back of the truck, where at least three more men rode, judging from the sounds, there was strangled profanity.

Renny with a machine pistol—a weapon resembling an oversize automatic which could discharge lead as a hose shoots out water—fired a tentative burst at the side of the laundry truck. The bullets, not extremely powerful, flattened and fell off. The truck was steel.

"Oh, oh!" Renny said. "They ain't as helpless as they seem."

The driver got air back in his lungs. Two spokes were left in the wheel, and he used those and the gear-shift lever, the accelerator, and sent the laundry truck racing backward. It did not go far. Monk had pulled up another wire and tightened it around a tree. The truck hit that, and there was more cat-and-dog-fight profanity from the inside of the body.

The driver staggered out and put up his hands. There was nothing else he could do.

The man in the bulletproof vest got to his feet. He held his gun and seemed inclined to fight.

Renny called, "Pal, I can shoot the pupils out of your eyes without touching the whites."

The statement was exaggerated, but Renny made it sound like gospel. The man in the bulletproof vest erected his arms.

That left only those in the van body. They were not going to be easy. There were slits in the body, apparently there for ventilating purposes. A gun came through one of these, a thorn of dark steel that suddenly became red-tipped and sent shot sound bang-thumping through the woods.

Everyone got under cover, except the two men who had surrendered. They stood there with their arms high, and their faces losing color.

Doc Savage borrowed Renny's hat, which was a new felt, and went away. He came back with the hat full of gasoline which he had drained from the tank of his car.

He threw the hatful of gasoline onto the laundry truck body.

He put a match flame to a stick which he had dipped in the gasoline, and threw the blazing stick at the laundry truck. There was a sound like an elephant blowing air out through his trunk, and flame enveloped the truck.

For a while, the flames crawled over the truck like red flags.

Renny, chuckling, said, "That's the way they put tanks out of commission."

In the truck, a voice yelled, "Let us come out!"

"The guns first," Doc said.

The rear doors of the truck flew open, and two revolvers and an automatic shotgun landed on the ground. Then the men sprang out, three of them. They were frightened, and they turned and stared at the truck interior in horror. Some of the gasoline had gotten inside the truck, along with flames.

Doc Savage, moving swiftly, reached the doors of the truck. He looked inside. There was some fire, some cartons of ammunition, a coat someone had dropped, and a portable radio transmitter-receiver combination.

Doc wheeled, demanded, "What were you using the radio for?"

One of the men showed his teeth.

"What kind of fools do you take us for?" the fellow asked. "We've got pals, and we kept in touch with them, and they've practically got you surrounded right now."

"Surrounded?"

"That's my guess," the man said. He sounded confident.

RENNY said, "Holy cow! What a lying bluff!" and some one practically shot the coat off his back. The bullet which hit Renny had a freak effect. The big-fisted engineer was wearing a bulletproof undergarment of alloy chain mesh and the bullet was a soft-point which hit well to the side and mushroomed into a palm of lead and ripped harmlessly across, taking out a great patch of coat fabric. Renny fell down, helped by the impact, and got out of sight.

Doc also got under cover with the abruptness of experience. He grabbed Chet Farmer's leg, dragged him down.

"Ham!" the bronze man shouted.

From the direction of the cabin, Ham yelled, "What'll I do, Doc?"

The bronze man said to run for the river. He said it in the ancient Mayan language, a tongue which almost no one but himself and his associates understood, and which they used for communication when they did not wish to be understood by outsiders.

"What about the pink man?" Ham demanded.

"Have to let them have him," Doc called. "We can't take him along."

The bronze man then signaled Renny, Monk, and Chet Farmer, and they crawled through the brush. The

undergrowth was very thick. Once they were intercepted, but a ripping blast from Renny's machine pistol drove their enemy to cover before he could fire on them.

"Run for it!" Doc said.

They leaped up, sprinted. The ground sloped downward sharply. Abruptly there was water ahead, like patches of mirror. A great deal of water. It was the Hudson River, Chet realized.

The ignominious flight suddenly became too much for Chet Farmer. He stopped.

"Hell, we had half of them licked!" he snarled. "And now we're laying down like whipped dogs."

Monk gave him a shove.

"Keep going," Monk said. "This ain't as dumb as it looks. It's still part of a plan."

There was, Chet discovered, a boat at the edge of the water. It was a motorboat, not a large or expensive one, but fast. They scrambled into the craft, which was moored to a makeshift wharf. Doc cast off the line. Renny got the engine going; it made much the same sound as an automobile. The boat lifted its bows and swung out onto the river.

Doc said, "Get smoke grenades ready."

Ham Brooks produced two objects which resembled condensed milk cans, said, "All set."

Doc waited. A man dashed out on the river beach. He stared at them. Renny, aiming his machine pistol deliberately, knocked up dirt around the feet of the man, and cut loose a shower of leaves over his head. The man howled and bounced out of sight.

Doc said, "The smoke!"

Ham tossed one of the cans, after twisting a key. It hit the water and became the source of a great worm of smoke that crawled over the surface of the river. Heavy smoke that hung low, concealing the boat from those on shore.

Doc dug into his vest of gadgets and brought out a device consisting of a mouthpiece, nasal clips, and a compact respiration tank—a self-contained breath supply which would enable him to stay under water for some time.

He said, "Get to headquarters and wait there."

They nodded.

Doc went overboard. He went over, concealed from the men on shore by the smoke, and without commotion which would reveal what he had done.

The boat went on, and Chet Farmer stared at Monk, Ham and Renny in bewilderment. "What on earth is the idea?" he demanded.

"This whole thing," Monk told him, "is part of a plan to find out what is behind this business about pink people."

A rifle bullet made a hissing and popping noise, utterly nasty, past the speedboat.

Renny said, "Holy cow! Unless you guys think you're bulletproof, you better lay down in the bottom of

the boat."

Chapter VI. THE PLAN

HAVING entered the river, Doc Savage swam down into the depths. The water was around fourteen or sixteen feet at that point, and it was cool and fairly dark on the bottom. An elastic band held the respiration cylinder to his chest, and his teeth gripped the mouthpiece. Truthfully, it was not a very efficient self-contained diving unit, since one had to watch the respiration, breathing rapidly and in small quantities, for a huge breath would exhaust the capacity of the cylinder, and also give an overdose of oxygen which might cause an effect similar to drunkenness.

The bottom was rocky. Doc felt around, searching for a boulder of the right size and weight to keep him on the bottom. It was difficult to find, but eventually he located one. He sat down on the bottom and put the boulder on his lap to hold him there.

He waited. The diving gadget did not give off air bubbles, but there was bound to be some air trapped in his clothing that would arise and make bubbles. To avoid as much of that danger as possible, he squeezed various parts of his clothing to chase out the air.

He kept his eyes open, and the pupils became accustomed, in time, to the gloom at that depth. Enough, at least, that he could discern the hand of the waterproof compass on his wrist when he held it very close.

The bank of the river should be approximately northeast. He headed northwest, which was approximately right angles to that direction, and which would take him upstream. He did not go far—he judged the distance was a hundred feet—before he turned inshore. The rock, tucked under one arm, kept him on the bottom.

The lighter color of the water told him it was getting shallow. He got out a periscope device, pencil-sized, waterproof, which would telescope out to more than a yard of length. He examined the shore.

Two men were lying prone on the bank, using rifles. After a moment one of them got up and made exasperated gestures with one hand, and kicked the ground. The second rifleman fired again, then shrugged.

Apparently, Monk, Ham, Renny, and Chet Farmer were getting away successfully in the speedboat.

A man, apparently the man in charge of the raiders, appeared. He said something, jerking an arm impatiently. The riflemen got up and followed him into the brush.

Concluding that a retreat had been ordered, Doc Savage came out of the water. He came rapidly, yet using caution, in case someone should be watching. No one was. At least, there was no alarm. He reached the bushes that matted the shore.

His trip to the vicinity of the cabin was fast.

The men were examining the blown-out tires on their laundry truck and cursing.

"Take Doc Savage's machine," one of them said finally. "We can't kill time repairing those blowouts. Haven't got a tire pump anyway."

"Savage has two machines here—a delivery truck and a passenger car," a man reported. "Which one do you want?"

"What became of the taxicab?"

"It got away. There's another road out behind the shack that leads over to the highway. The taxi driver cleared out over that when the excitement started, I guess."

"Take the passenger car, then."

The man ran away. Before long, he was back, swearing. "I can't get it started. Can't even get *in* the car. The damned thing has got bulletproof glass and I don't know what else."

"Take the delivery truck, then," the leader snarled. "And load that pink man into it."

Three men went into the shack. They came out with a figure, the figure of a man who was extremely pink.

The leader stared at the pink man. "Is he still unconscious?"

"Yes."

"What ails him?"

"I don't know. He's alive. He just fainted, I guess. Or maybe Doc Savage's men had been beating him, trying to make him talk, and he had passed out."

The leader continued to stare at the pink man for a while.

"Did any of you guys ever see this fellow before?" he asked.

They shook their heads.

"He's a complete stranger," a man said.

The pink man was thin and emaciated. He looked as if he had undergone a great deal of suffering, or had been ill for a long time. They carried him by his arms and legs, and, as they moved him about, the outlines of his bones were like sticks, and his tendons were like thin bundles of wires. His eyes were closed. He had been stripped to the waist, and, when his body was held still for a moment, the beating of his heart against his diaphragm could be distinguished. He was not a tall man.

They left in the delivery truck which bore the legend of a tailoring concern.

WHEN their departing sound had died away, Doc Savage went to the passenger car. It was one of his own machines, which Ham and Renny had used. He tapped the door handle three times rapidly, paused, gave it another tap, then twisted sharply in the direction opposite to normal, and the door opened. The lock was a combination one, operated by shock.

The car was equipped with a radio. Doc threw an auxiliary switch which altered the receiver circuit slightly, making it highly directional. He plugged a loop aerial into a receptacle in the car top made for that purpose.

He picked up a series of staggered dashes, a signal that was strongest in the direction which the tailoring truck had gone.

Doc put the car in motion, left the shack and the patch of thick woods. The place was an old summer one purchased by Monk Mayfair once when he'd gotten the idea he wanted rural solitude for some

chemical experiments. It had not been used for a long time, but it had served its purpose today.

Doc drove carefully, keeping the radio direction-finder in operation, and also keeping his mental fingers crossed, hoping that the men in the delivery truck would not discover that the radio transmitter in their machine was switched on. Particularly that they would not discover the concealed switch which it was necessary to throw in order to actually cut the transmitter, with its little thermostatic switch which sent out a miscellaneous series of dashes, off the air.

THE sign over the gate said Mammoth Shipyards, Inc. The paint was peeling; one end of the sign was a yard lower than the other. The place was not very mammoth. It did look dilapidated. A wooden fence surrounded the yard, and boards had been spiked across gaps where the fence planks had rotted and fallen out. There was a tree—it looked to be three or four years old—growing up in the middle of the "in" driveway.

Doc Savage drove on past, keeping his head down, and turned away. The radio direction finder showed him that the truck had turned into the place.

He went half a mile, and around a bend, then drove off the road. There was no driveway, but there was no grader ditch either, and he wanted the protection of a thicket of brush.

He used pliers to cut two strands of a barbed-wire fence and drove into the brush. Then he went back and carefully straightened up the bushes, weeds, and grass he had mashed down, and with his feet scuffed out the tracks where his car had left the road.

He ran toward the abandoned shipyard, keeping away from the road. Soon there was no longer brush, but the weeds were tall. He kept down among them.

The fact that the men had used radio for communication had shown him that they were inclined toward scientific methods. So, reaching the fence, he was careful. He examined it carefully for wires.

Particularly, he searched the fence for wires that might be a common type of burglar alarm—an alarm of the capacity type, one which registered the near approach of any figure the size of a man. One did not have to actually touch the wires of such an alarm to be betrayed.

He found none.

He did find a hole through which he could squirm. He got through carefully, carrying a supersensitive listening device—microphone, wire, amplifier, headphones—with him.

He could have left the listener behind. The men were gathered at one end of a shed. The sun was driving down heat and glare, and there was shadow at the end of the shed.

The pink man was fighting them, not fighting very successfully. There were too many of them. He was the man who had been seized from Doc's aids. The undersized, rather emaciated pink man.

He kicked a foe in the face. He bit another. Someone got hold of his legs. Two more men came running with a two-by-four timber several feet long; they jammed that down on his neck and held him there, half guillotined.

Then they tied him hand and foot.

A man—the man who had been in charge of the raid throughout—began asking questions.

"There's no need of being so tough, pal," he said. "We haven't got anything against you? Or have we?"

The strangely pink man had a lusty voice for such an emaciated fellow. It was full of grinding rage. He said, "I'll make somebody pay for this! Damn me, if I don't!"

"What you better do is calm yourself."

The bound man tried to kick his questioner. "If you're responsible for what happened to me, I'll tear your heart out!"

"Now, now, cool off."

"I'll skin that girl alive, too!" the pink man screamed.

"Who? Who'll you skin?"

"That girl—Lada Harland."

The questioner showed blank astonishment. "Is she responsible for you being the way you are?"

"Who else could it be?" the other snarled.

The man doing the questioning looked at his companions. He scratched his head. "I wish Bodine was here, he complained. "This is a hell of a note. Bodine should know about this."

"Who's Bodine?" asked the pink man.

The spokesman did not answer.

AFTER several minutes, the prisoner on the ground showed his teeth in what might have been a snarl, or a desperate grin of resignation. The teeth were pink.

He said, "You guys can't be half as puzzled as I am. Suppose we make a deal."

The spokesman looked interested. "What kind of a deal?"

"I tell you what happened to me. Then you tell me what it means."

The spokesman lit a cigarette. He flipped the match away with a snapping movement of thumb and forefinger so that the match made a whining sound. "Why not?"

"Then it's a deal?"

"Yeah."

"I had a date with this girl," said the pink man angrily. "With Lada Harland, see. It's in the evening, this date is. I go to her house. We sit around. I want to hold hands. She says would I like a drink. I says a drink of what. She says a drink that will warm us up. I says sure, if she will have one, too. I don't need warming up any, but she does. So she brings two tall ones. They're green. I drink mine and it tastes like hell. I tell you, I've tasted some bad stuff in my time, but this stuff she hands me is the worst ever. But she mixed it herself, she says, and I don't want to offend her, so I pour the stuff down the hatch. And when I wake up, damned if I ain't the color of a boiled lobster, only more so."

"She fed you a Mickey Finn?"

"Double-barreled, with bells on."

"And when you woke up—"

"I'm the color I am now."

The spokesman muttered, "That's funny."

The man on the ground got rid of some invective. "I don't see what's so funny!" he snarled.

"Queer, I mean."

"There oughta be a stronger word than queer."

"When did this happen?"

"I kind of lost track of time. But it was over a week ago."

Doc Savage became tense where he lay. As a matter of precaution, one of his hands went to a pocket and brought out half a dozen objects which looked like gelatinous capsules filled with a vile-looking liquid. They were gas grenades of an anaesthetic type. He waited.

The spokesman was scowling at the man on the ground. "A week ago, eh?"

"Over a week, a little."

"Where've you been all this time?"

The man on the ground made a harsh noise. "Where d'you think a man in my condition would be? Keeping out of sight. And trying to get doctors to tell me what was wrong with me."

"You forgot to explain how you got out of the Harland house."

"That? That was easy. I just busted loose and ran for it."

"And then you tried to find a doctor who could cure you?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you try to get hold of the Harlands?"

"Yeah. I sent a pal out there. He said nobody would answer the door. He made three trips, and neither time nobody would answer."

"The Harlands were at home all last week." The spokesman looked at his companions and grinned. "We oughta know."

"Whatcha mean—you oughta know?" The pink man scowled at them. "You mean *you* was there?"

"Sure. What did this pal you sent out there look like?"

"Oh, he was an average-lookin' kind of a guy."

"Short and fat?"

"Naw. Average. He may of had a bundle of magazines under his arm. I told him to pretend to be a

magazine salesman. Or maybe it was brushes. Either one. I didn't ask him what gag he used."

One of the other men chuckled and said, "You remember that brush salesman that kept comin' to the door? He musta been the guy."

The spokesman said, "This pal of yours spoke with an Irish accent, didn't he?"

"Not that I ever heard. Anyway, if you didn't let him in the Harland house, how would you know how he talked?"

"We heard him talking to a neighbor."

"My pal ain't got no Irish accent."

The spokesman laughed. "Neither did this brush peddler." He grinned at the man on the ground. "Your story seems to be holding together. How about naming a few of them doctors you went to see?"

The pink man named three doctors, and gave their business addresses.

The spokesman said, "Them names better be right, friend. I'm going to check on them."

He went away.

DOC SAVAGE lay very still. It was hot. The smell of stale water was in the air. He had heard no boats pass, so the spot must be remote. A few bugs crawled among the weeds in which he lay.

It must have been fifteen minutes before the man in charge of the gang came back.

"I been telephoning," he said. "I could only get two of those doctors. The third one wasn't in."

"What did they say?" asked the pink man.

"Said they had never heard of you."

The pink man was indifferent. "You're a damned liar," he said.

The other laughed. He worried the bound man's ribs with a toe. "Sure. I'm a liar," he said. "I guess you're who you claim you are. By the way, what *is* your name?"

"Slats."

"Slats what? You had a father, didn't you?"

The man on the ground showed his teeth. There was nothing pleasant about it this time. "Go to hell," he said.

His questioner scowled. "Don't get tough."

"Nuts."

"Why didn't you go to the cops with this trouble of yours?"

The pink man was quite still for a while. His eyes were narrow. "Look, pal," he said finally, "would *you* go to the cops if you had a piece of trouble?"

"Why not?"

The bound man laughed. "You answer that one."

"Meaning the cops don't like you?"

"They like me fine. They love me. They've told me so. I don't like *them*."

"So it's that way."

"You heard me."

"What have they got on you?"

"The hell with you, brother. You ain't gonna turn me over to them."

The questioner was looking more and more satisfied with the way things were going. He asked, "Why did Doc Savage's men grab you?"

"Was that who they were?"

"Didn't they tell you?"

"All they told me was that they would fix me so I would need new teeth if I didn't talk."

"What did you tell them?"

"Nothing. You can believe it or not."

The questioner flipped away his cigarette, and it landed a few feet from where Doc Savage was crouched, lay there smoking. He said—his tone was not unfriendly—to the pink man, "I wouldn't worry too much if I was you. We may be able to use you. What would you say to that?"

"I would say: Use me for what? And *who* uses me?"

"Keep your shirt on. I'll have to talk to Bodine. He's the boss."

The pink man stared at the other intently. "You mean that?"

"Sure. But it will depend on Bodine. We're short of good men. But it'll be up to him whether he takes you on or not."

The bound man looked at his hands. His laugh was sudden, almost with an insane quality. "In this kind of a condition, a hell of a lot of help I would be to anybody."

"We may be able to fix that."

The man who had been doing the talking whirled nervously as a man came running from a dilapidated building some distance away. He relaxed, however, when he recognized the fellow. He demanded, "What the blazes you want?"

"The big guy is on the telephone," the man said. "He wants to talk to you, Cy."

Cy went away.

ENOUGH time passed for Doc Savage to become somewhat stiff where he was lying. Twice he moved cautiously, kneading muscles which were inclined to go to sleep.

Cy returned. "We got some business," he told his men.

The pink man demanded, "What about me?"

"I told him about you." Cy's tone was not unfriendly. "He said he'd have to see and talk to you first. You gotta stay on ice until then."

"You mean tied up like this?"

"Sure."

The pink man swore, doing an expertly profane job of it, but directing his malevolence toward his luck rather than any particular individual, so that his captors, not offended, laughed at him.

Cy said, "I'll put you on some old sailcloth in the shed here, out of the sun."

They carried him into the shed, left him alone after examining the ropes to make sure they were solid—but not too tight.

Cy told him, "You stick here and behave, and you'll be better off by a long shot. If you're lucky, you might cut yourself a piece of cake worth half a million or so."

The bound man stiffened. "How much?"

"You heard me. Think it over."

Doc Savage eased back out of his place of concealment. He kept under cover. Watching Cy and the others, he saw that they were all retiring to the ramshackle building which held the telephone. Doc followed them.

He put on speed, tried to circle and get there ahead of them without showing himself. It was impossible—he got only as far as a gaping side door of the place, where he saw there was no concealment inside—and had to turn back.

But first he planted the microphone. He shoved it in a gaping crack in the wallpaper. There were old shavings on the floor. He partially concealed the wire under those with a movement of a hand, then trailed the wire outside. The weeds were thick. He moved away some twenty yards, as far as the mike wire would let him, and flattened.

There had been some empty boxes in the room where he planted the mike, and the men were dragging these around, evidently to use them for seats, when the tubes of the amplifier warmed up and began functioning.

Cy said, "Stub, you take the south window; Nate, you watch from the door. You can see the shed from the door, and if that guy in the shed tries to make a break, see how good a shot you are."

"He probably won't try to make a break," declared a voice that evidently belonged to Nate. "Anyhow, I feel sorry for the poor devil."

"That's all right," Cy said harshly. "But if he makes a break, and you don't shoot him, you'll be feeling damned sorry for yourself."

THE spokesman got to the point immediately. He said, "The job comes off at five o'clock this evening. They load the shipment in a truck at the Atlantic & Hudson warehouse on Eleventh Avenue at five o'clock. Or at least the truck will leave at five. It always does. The truck will go south and take the Holland Tunnel under the river."

A man said, "There is no safe place along there to knock it off."

"We don't do it there. Fifteen miles out, there is a stop light. There is no cop at this stop light. Stub, here, will be at the stop light in a cop's uniform. You're an electrician, aren't you, Stub?"

"I used to be, when there was money in it."

"All right, you're one this afternoon. You doctor the wiring of this stop light, and fix it so you can make it turn red when you see this truck coming."

"What if I don't recognize the truck?"

"You don't have to. You'll recognize our car. We'll be right behind the truck."

"Cars go like hell on that highway. I may not know you in time."

"One of us will be holding a handkerchief out of the window. It will be that yellow handkerchief of mine. It'll be held out of the left window."

"All right," Stub said. "Now, where do I get me a cop's uniform."

"Dammit, promote one."

"It'd better be a Jersey cop's uniform."

"Sure."

Stub, in a humorous tone, said, "They lock you up in that place for impersonating a cop." Everybody laughed.

Someone asked, "After the truck stops, then what?"

"I'll take the right side. Stub will already be there, on the left. We will make it look as casual as we can. Get the driver and his relief into our car. I'll get into the truck with Stub. I'll drive. We'll split up, and meet later at that broken-down farm of mine. You all know where the farm is."

Apparently they all knew where the farm was. A few questions were asked concerning details. These, and the answers, did not tell anything more than had already been told.

It was evident that the conference would soon break up.

Doc Savage disconnected the microphone wire. He did not attempt to pull in the mike, but let it lay. To try to recover it would be too dangerous.

He eased back through the weeds, keeping low, and returned to the vicinity of the shed. It was possible to get through a side door of the shed without being seen. He did so.

The pink man grinned at him.

"Where'd *you* come from?" he whispered.

Doc said, "Long Tom, do you still want to go through with this?"

The pink man—he was Long Tom Roberts, member of Doc Savage's group of five associates—shrugged. "Might as well. I sweat blood by the quart while that guy Cy was questioning me. He kept trying to trip me up. But I think I fooled him."

"It was fortunate you could refer him to some doctors, and it was still more fortunate you had prepared the doctors in advance, so they would back up your story."

"I'll say." Long Tom grinned again.

"Whose idea was that?"

"Yours."

"But it was not in the typed instructions I gave Monk and Ham."

"No, but I happened to remember you mentioned the gag once. So I thought I would play safe. I didn't have time to see the doctors myself. So I had Johnny do that. He was busy seeing the doctors—that was why he wasn't at Monk's shack back there on the river."

"And you want to go ahead with this?" Doc asked again.

"Sure. That is, if there is anything I can learn."

"If you learn anything," Doc said grimly, "it will be more than we know now."

"You haven't found out what is behind the mystery about pink people."

"No."

"They couldn't have been dyed pink—just like I dyed my skin and hair and teeth."

"As I understand it, even the girl's eyes were pink," Doc said.

"So are mine. I'm wearing pink caps over my eyeballs—those new kind of glasses, only stained."

Doc Savage did not answer. He was listening. There were footsteps approaching.

"See you later," Doc whispered.

He eased back cautiously, got out of the shed, and sank in the weeds.

He was astounded when, the next instant, Long Tom let out an angry bellow.

"Cy! Cy!" Long Tom squalled. "Watch out! Doc Savage is here!"

His bellowing could have been heard at least half a mile away.

Chapter VII. THE DEATH

DOC SAVAGE dived to the right, landed in a small ditch. He pulled out a smoke grenade, flipped it. That one was waterlogged, failed to detonate. But the second one functioned, loosening a dark pall of

smoke which sprang up like some animal out of hiding. The wind carried the smoke toward the fence.

Doc did not keep in the smoke. He went the opposite direction, hoping the smoke would mislead them.

Long Tom was still howling.

He roared, "Savage! He was in here tryin' to question me! He heard you guys comin', and skipped!"

Cy's voice, very angry, said, "All right! All right! We saw him."

"Grab him!" Long Tom shouted. "Hurry up!" Long Tom launched into wild exhortations that became inarticulate so that his words were squealing and not understandable.

From the inarticulate English, Long Tom switched into Mayan, the lost language of an ancient race which Doc and his associates used for communication when they did not wish to be understood.

"I realized a man had looked through a crack and seen you talking to me," Long Tom said in Mayan. "I didn't give you away. I was covering up!"

Long Tom then switched into incoherent English, made it coherent, and exhorted, "Get him, gang! If you don't, he'll call in the police!"

They did not need the exhortation. They were doing their best, spreading in a circle, guns drawn, around the pall of smoke.

A man cocked his pistol. Cy said, "No, no, hold it! No shooting if we can help it! Somebody might hear it."

Doc Savage was behind them by then. Their own noise had helped him. He made for the big dilapidated structure where they had held the conference about the robbery.

The building was empty, and he recovered his microphone and the wire. He rolled the wire rapidly, shoved the stuff in a pocket.

He headed then for the truck, the machine with an imaginary tailoring company name on its body. The truck was parked well in the open, so that it was necessary to run at least thirty yards without any cover whatever. He put his head down, called the utmost out of his leg muscles, and made it.

A few feet from the truck, an empty tin can lay in the path. He deliberately kicked this; it made a clanking racket. He got plenty of attention—startled yells, two bullets which ripped paint off the bulletproof sides of the truck.

He got inside the machine, yanked the door shut. He switched off the radio which had guided him to the spot.

Then he discovered there was no key in the ignition lock.

CY and his men had deserted the smoke cloud which had misled them momentarily. They rushed toward the truck.

Cy yelled, "Get a hand grenade. Head him off from the gate."

Inside the truck, Doc heard the order, and it was not pleasant news. This delivery truck, being light, was

not heavily armored. A grenade under the floorboards would not be pleasant.

Doc was feeling under the dash. He found the ignition switch and gave it a twist. It was so constructed that turning it upside down in the mounting closed the circuit, which was normally closed by movement of the switch key.

He started the motor, meshed gears, and twisted the wheel. For a few yards, he headed toward the gate. Then he saw a man, chest out, legs pumping, a black blob of metal in either hand, sprinting for the gate. The man would intercept him, and the metal blobs were obviously grenades of the military type.

Doc hauled down on the wheel, turned the truck sharply.

He chose the route out toward the ancient dock. He reached the wharf without trouble, and drove the machine out on it. The elderly boards groaned and sagged. He applied the brake hastily, brought the machine to a stop.

For the moment, the bulletproof sides of the truck hid him from the pursuers. He opened the truck door, prepared to dive into the greasy-looking water.

The wharf collapsed then. It went down gently, and the truck slid off into deep water. Leaping, Doc barely got clear.

He went down in the same great splash with the truck.

He did not come up again.

The men reached the dock.

Cy said, "Spread out, you guys. He's in the water. He's got to come up. Shoot at the slightest sign of motion."

The men fanned out, eyes and guns alert. Two of them moved as far along the dock as the remains of the thing permitted. Another pair scrambled up on the ridge of a shaky building and crouched there. One of these had a pair of binoculars. The others spread right and left.

It must have been five minutes later when a man, the one with the binoculars, called, "Pssst!"

Cy demanded, "What is it?"

The man slid down off the roof, cursed when he twisted his ankle slightly. He said, "I got him located."

"Where?"

"You see the board floating out there, just to the left of that oily place?"

"Yes."

"All right. Look right over the board, and tell me what you see."

Cy stared. "There's a thin metal tube stickin' up out of the water," he decided. "It ain't much bigger than a pencil."

"That's it. That's what he's using to breathe through."

Cy snarled, "Gimme that rifle with the telescope sight. I'll damned soon fix this."

"Wait a minute. Why don't you pitch about three grenades out there at once? When they explode, they'll smash him."

Cy blinked. Then a grin came on his face. It was fiendish with approval. He punched the other man in the back. "Boy, that's good! You're gonna get a bonus for that idea."

They collected the grenades, three of them, and three men took up a position; then, at a given word hurled the steel eggs. Their aim was good; all three grenades landed in an area a dozen feet across.

One exploded first, then two, and there was no more than a second interval between, so that the mound of foam and flame and water and mud that climbed up from the surface like a large grime-smearred cauliflower might have been driven by one blast. The cauliflower climbed high, then split, and spikes of water shot up from it, three of them, one for each iron egg, to a height of thirty feet or more.

The whole thing subsided, and mud and water boiled up.

The men watched. They saw nothing. Then a man fired a revolver, but it was only the piece of wood; the fragment of wood jumped into the air and splashed down again. They kept watching. But there was nothing.

A man said, "I thought an explosion would knock the air out of a man's body so it would float."

Another snorted. "The air would make it float anyway. It's something else that busts. Maybe the body has to be in the water long enough to get kind of soft before it'll bust, whatever it is."

Cy said, "I think we got him."

They kept watching.

After a time, a man, a stranger, came and knocked noisily on the gate of the old shipyard, and wanted to know what was going on. He lived down the road a piece, he said. He'd thought this place was deserted.

Cy was polite to him. "That old dock was getting shaky and dangerous," he lied. "We just put some dynamite under the thing and blasted it down so that it wouldn't fall on anybody."

The curious man was satisfied and went way.

Cy came back. His men had been watching all the while with their rifles.

"See anything?" Cy asked.

They hadn't.

"We got him, all right," Cy decided. "It's a damned good thing, too, because now we can go ahead and knock off that truck the way we had it scheduled."

Chapter VIII. LIKE A FOX

IT was past noon when Chet Farmer rushed into Doc Savage's headquarters. He was excited. He shouted, "Hey, listen, I've found—" and went silent.

His eyes got wide with surprise.

"Who're *you*?" he demanded.

The individual in the reception room was very tall, and thinner than it seemed any man could naturally be. His clothes fit him like a loose tent around a pole. Attached to his lapel by a ribbon was a magnifying glass in the shape of a monocle.

"A logographical tramontanosity," he remarked.

Chet's eyebrows lifted.

"So you're Johnny," he said. "I've heard them talking about you and your words."

"Mind a hermeneutical avouchment?"

"Eh? Come again?"

With obvious reluctance, Johnny Littlejohn resorted to small words.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Chet told him. Chet's excitement returned. He demanded, "Where's the others? Renny, Monk, and Ham?"

"In the laboratory."

Chet rushed into the huge laboratory. He found Monk and Ham in an argument over their pets, with Renny a mildly amused listener.

Ham said indignantly, "Whatcha mean, I haven't got any friends? The last time I left town, there was dozens of people down to the train to see me off."

"Did you pay any of 'em?" Monk asked.

Renny grinned and waved at the belligerents and explained, "It all started when Ham wanted Monk to do a friendly good turn and cash a check for him."

"I wouldn't cash a check for my own brother," Monk growled.

"You know your own family better than I do," Ham informed him.

Chet Farmer broke into the exchange of insults. He said excitedly, "I've learned something. I've got an idea."

"An idea?" Monk peered at him. "It's in a strange place. Treat it gently."

"This isn't any time for kidding," Chet said grimly. "I'm serious."

Monk stared at him. "I believe you are, at that. What's wrong?"

Chet Farmer drew himself up dramatically.

"There's a man watching this place!" he declared.

"What, again?" Monk scratched his head. "I thought we cured them of that."

"That isn't all," Chet said rapidly. "This fellow is sitting in a parked car across the street. A while ago, he

got out and went into a drugstore and used the telephone. I followed him, and it was so I could get in the next booth and hear what he said. He telephoned somebody named Bodine. I think this Bodine is the boss he's working for. The first thing he asked was: Should he stay on the job. I think he was told, yes, he should."

"Bodine, eh?" Ham picked up an innocent black cane which he habitually carried, and fingered it thoughtfully. "Bodine . . . I don't think I've heard that name before. Who do you reckon he is?"

"That isn't all," Chet said dramatically. "I heard something else, something a lot more terrible."

Ham frowned at him. "Well?"

"Doc Savage is dead." Chet looked at them, each in turn, and made a wild gesture with his hands. "They trapped Doc. He was drowned trying to escape. I think they blew his body to pieces with grenades, or something."

SILENCE in the room was lead-heavy and cold. No one said anything for a while. Renny was breathing through his teeth. The afternoon breeze from the south came in through one of the open windows and picked up loose brown powder from an open dish and carried it across a table top, a few flakes at a time. The pig, Habeas Corpus, got up off the floor and turned around twice and lay down again, farther away from the chimp, Chemistry.

Renny voiced the first reaction. "Holy cow!" he said. "I don't believe it!"

The fact of Doc Savage's death was a thing they could not accept. They had been associated for too long a time, and too closely. Their group without Doc Savage was like daylight without a sun—it was impossible. Yet, as they knew, constant association with danger and peril made such a possibility always very near.

Renny had been sitting. He heaved erect. "We've got to check on this."

Chet Farmer held up a hand. "There's just one way to check on it—because we don't know where the murder occurred."

Renny's fists blocked out hard cubes of sinew and bone. "Let me get hold of that bird watching this place, and we'll soon know where it happened."

"No," Chet said. "That's the wrong way."

Renny's long, puritanical face was a mask. "How do you figure?"

"Wherever the murder occurred, the men who did it won't hang around the spot," Chet Farmer explained. "But there's another way of doing it—a way that will lead us to this Bodine, or whatever the name of the boss is."

"Yeah?"

"Scare this man downstairs," Chet said quickly. "Frighten him off the job. Then follow him without letting him know we're doing it. That way, he will lead us to his boss."

Renny considered the point, said finally, "That sounds smart. I guess it's the way Doc would do it."

Chet whirled for the door. "Come on, then. All of you."

Monk, Ham, Johnny, all started for the door. But Renny rumbled, "Wait a minute—orders were to wait here for instructions."

"What's the sense of that?" Chet Farmer stared at him. "Doc Savage is dead . . . or if he's not, he's in very serious trouble."

Ham said, "Renny's right."

"But if he's in trouble," Chet snapped, "the thing for all of us to do is pitch in and help him out."

Monk, who had never liked the young man, growled, "Two of us stay here. Doc may have got a message out. It may have been delayed."

"But—" Chet started to protest. Then he looked at their faces, saw the determination there, and shrugged. "Oh, all right," he muttered.

Monk, Ham, Johnny and Renny all produced coins. Renny rumbled, "Holy cow, we better match as teams. Monk and Ham work best together. Johnny and I can double up. Put away your money, two of you guys."

They spun, rang on the floor. They looked at them. Renny and Johnny grinned.

"Heck," Monk said. "Ham, I guess we stay."

Renny, Johnny and Chet Farmer left the eighty-sixth floor headquarters.

THEY rode downstairs in silence. In the lobby, Chet Farmer said, "I got an idea. Suppose I scare him—you follow him."

"He may not know you're helping us," Renny suggested.

"Sure. He probably don't. That'll make it better." Chet grinned slightly. "I'll go up to this egg, and I'll say to him: Listen, pal, you wouldn't be watching Doc Savage's place, would you? It ain't none of my business, but I'd like to know. Then, when he denies it, I'll say that I think I'll call Doc Savage and let him see what he thinks. Then I'll tell the bird to stay there, and walk off. He won't stay there."

Renny glanced at Johnny. "What you think?"

"Supermalagorgeous," Johnny said.

Chet asked, "Does that mean good?"

"That's what it means," Renny told him. "Go ahead with your rat killing."

Chet Farmer waited until they got two small roadsters from the garage. The machines were radio-equipped so that the occupants could keep in touch with each other. Renny took up a position facing north, and Johnny headed his car south and parked it. That way they were ready, regardless of what direction their quarry took.

Renny put one of his big hands out of the car and opened and shut it as a highball signal.

Chet Farmer sauntered down the street with an assumed air of idleness. He stopped and looked in show windows, stood and gazed at the crowd, at the street. There was not much traffic on the streets, but

plenty of pedestrian movement on the sidewalks, for it was the hour when the big buildings in the neighborhood had emptied for lunch.

The man in the parked car was young, lean, and was making a business of reading a book. Eventually, he noticed Chet Farmer. Chet sauntered over.

"Kind of taken root here, ain't you?" Chet asked.

The young man did not answer for a while.

"What's it to you?" he asked finally.

"Got any good reason for hanging around the neighborhood?" Chet demanded.

"If I had a reason, it would be my own. I might want to keep it private."

Chet scowled so elaborately that Renny, watching from up the street, could see the grimace.

He said, "Wouldn't be watching Doc Savage's place, would you?"

The young man stared at him wordlessly.

Chet added, "You wait here, buddy. I'm gonna call Savage down. He'll want to talk to you."

When Chet had moved away and entered a building, the young man lost no time whatever in leaving the curb. That was as planned. Chet dashed out on to the sidewalk, discovered Renny's car approaching, and—he first threw a glance northward to make sure their quarry's vehicle had turned a corner and was out of sight—climbed in with the big-fisted engineer.

Instantly, Renny increased speed. He took the corner, and discovered their objective ahead. The young man's car—the machine was a low-priced sedan—was rolling rapidly, but observing speed limits.

Renny said, "Scootch down in the seat. Don't let him see you if he looks back."

Renny himself put on large colored glasses, a phony mustache which would not stand close examination but that was effective from a distance.

He picked up the radio microphone and switched on the apparatus.

"Johnny?" he asked.

"I'll be superamalgamated," Johnny remarked. "It seems to be working."

"We are going north on Park Avenue," Renny said.

THEY went north on Park and north on other streets, then east over a long bridge and east on a road for a long time. There was steadily roaring traffic on the road. Later there was no traffic at all after they turned off a highway onto a side road, then into a lane that was not paved, but sandy and rough and surrounded by uninhabited waste.

Renny drove carefully. He heard the car ahead stop. It was over a hill. He halted his own machine, got out, and saw the sedan they had been following. It stood in the lane. The young man was walking away, pushing his way through brush up a small hill.

Johnny arrived, coasting down a hill so that his machine made little noise. He got out. Their surroundings puzzled him, so that he used small words.

"What made him come out here?" he pondered. "There's nothing in this neck of the woods."

Chet Farmer laughed. There was an unpleasant quality to his laugh.

He said, "That's what *you* think!"

"Eh?" Johnny stared at him.

Renny also peered at Chet Farmer. "Holy cow!" said the big-fisted engineer. "What's happened to you?"

Chet Farmer said, "It ain't me that it's happening to." He stared at them steadily. He seemed to be waiting for something. Finally, in exasperation, he shouted, "Come on! What are you waiting on! What's holding you?"

A bush shook on the right of the path, and another shook on the left. A man came from behind each bush. One man was younger than the other, and one was more shabby than the other, but their guns were alike. They did not say anything, although one did cock his gun noisily.

Chet Farmer said, "Renny, Johnny—take a piece of advice. Don't try anything. I told them about the bulletproof undergarments you wear. They've got orders to shoot at heads."

The young man they had trailed to the spot came back. He was holding a gun, a flat blue one of the army type.

"Part of the time I wasn't sure they were following me," he said.

"They're smooth." Chet Farmer showed his teeth. "They, and that boss of theirs, are the slickest numbers I've ever seen. They're worse than lightning for giving no sign of where they're gonna strike next."

Renny found his voice. Renny had a very big voice, a voice that was likened frequently to a large animal in a deep cave.

"What's this?" he rumbled.

"It's what it looks like," Chet Farmer said.

"I mean—"

"I know what you mean. Shut up."

THEY were searched. Then they were stripped. The young man in the sedan had four pairs of coveralls thoughtfully provided for the purpose, and he brought these. Chet Farmer sorted out the two biggest and longest suits, and eyed the other two suits disgustedly.

"I figured," he said, "that all four of you would come on this wild-goose chase when I staged it." He balled up the two suits and tossed them back to the young man. "Here, keep these. We'll get Monk and Ham later."

Chet Farmer then shoved his hands in his pockets and stalked back and forth nervously on the sand until Renny and Johnny had donned the coveralls, and the clothing they had been wearing had, upon being

searched, disgorged nothing that proved to be of interest.

Chet came over and punched Renny in the chest with a forefinger. It was a hard brown forefinger, purposeful.

"We'll all be a lot happier in the end," Chet said, "if you two guys will bust loose and tell me what you know."

"About what?"

"About Lada Harland and her brother. About the pink people. About what's behind it."

Renny scowled. "We don't know anything."

Chet Farmer made a clucking noise of disapproval and said, "I don't believe you understand my position in this."

Renny snorted. "Monk had your position pegged from the first. You're a crook."

Chet grinned thinly. "Not from the first, I wasn't. At first, I was just a smart boy Bodine called in when he was hiring his gang. We couldn't get together, Bodine and I. He seemed to think I was crazy to want a fifty-fifty split. He said so, and he said some other things." Chet Farmer showed his teeth in a way that was completely nasty. "He said things that'll cost him *all* of it."

"All of what?" Renny asked.

Chet leered at him. "Damned innocent, aren't you?"

"You got an exaggerated idea of how much we found out," Renny said.

Chet shrugged. "We'll see. We'll see."

Renny was puzzled.

"Just why," asked the big-fisted engineer, "did you join up with us? You knew that would be dangerous."

Chet cursed. "If that damned Bodine had told me the story, I wouldn't have," he snarled. "But Bodine was cunning. He always has been, the two-faced fraud. He told me he had a gag where there was millions to be made, but he let it go at that. I was trailing his men when they caught that girl in the Hotel Troy. I hung around there. Your gang turned up. Thinks I—this Savage has the reputation of getting to the bottom of things fast. I'll just stick around."

Thinking of his difficulties seemed to make him more and more angry. Suddenly his right hand, striking like a fast snake, made a loud smack of a sound against Renny's cheek, and he snarled. "Now you're claiming you don't know—"

Renny hit him. Renny's blow was as quick, but it was louder, heavier. There was as much difference between the blows as between the smack of a fly swatter and the thump of a sledge on a circus-tent stake. Chet Farmer fell sidewise, burying his arms half to the elbows in the sand and not moving afterward.

The three young men with the guns stared at Chet Farmer.

Renny said, "You better see if I broke his neck."

"You better hope you broke his neck," one of the young men said. "Because when he comes out of it, if he does, he won't be happy."

THEY produced ropes, and bound the arms of Renny and Johnny. Renny had done all the talking; Johnny had said almost nothing. Neither of them looked at all pleased with the situation.

One of the young men wagged his gun. "Walk," he said. "We'll show you where."

There was a sand dune, one on which a great deal of coarse grass grew. Beyond, a great distance away, the sea could be heard. The waves were coming in, one at a time, and each was falling apart on a beach with a sound somewhat like the one made when a foot is jammed down in a basket of wastepaper.

Then there was a salt-water creek, marshy and not pleasant of odor. And a boat. A scaly old remains of a thirty-foot sloop with a decked-over cabin and a centerboard.

Renny stared at their captors. "Is Doc Savage really dead?" he asked.

One of the young men nodded. "Bodine thinks so. We hope so."

"How do you know?"

The young men looked at each other questioningly. Chet Farmer was still unconscious from Renny's blow. Finally one of the young men shrugged. He said, "It might soften them up if they know the truth."

Another nodded. He said, "You tell 'em."

The informant faced Renny and Johnny. "It's this way: There really was a guy watching your place. Chet really found him, like he said he did—but he grabbed the guy, called us, and we put on the screws. And he learned—well, the whole story."

Renny's jaw sagged. "And this genuine eavesdropper said Doc Savage had been killed?"

The other grinned. "You can ask him for yourself."

Renny and Johnny were boosted aboard the old sloop, not without considerable difficulty. The cabin was tiny, and damp bilge scum coated the sides to half their height. The odor was nauseating.

The man in the cabin might have been tall or short—it was hard to tell because of his agony-contorted posture—but he was not fat. His color was uncertain, too. Now he was mostly the color of dried blood.

When Renny sank down at his side, the man opened the one eye that he could open. "Yeah?" he said thickly.

"Is Doc Savage dead?" Renny asked. His voice, which he tried to keep firm, was a strangled rumble.

The nod of the man who had been beaten was listless. "Drowned," he said. "They blew his body to pieces with grenades. He was in the water."

He closed his eye again.

Outside, on the deck of the little boat, there was an angry outburst, weak at first, then gathering strength and utter rage and complete hate. It was Chet Farmer. He had regained consciousness.

"Where's Renny and Johnny?" he snarled.

"Down in the cabin."

"Give me a knife, somebody," Chet Farmer said with awful purpose. "I'm gonna fix their clocks!"

Chapter IX. THE TOOLS

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW BLODGETT MONK MAYFAIR, when the telephone rang in Doc Savage's skyscraper headquarters, made a frantic grab at the instrument and bellowed, "Hello! Hello!" Then his face settled into an intent expression and he said, "Yeah . . . Is that so? . . . Where was that? . . . Hey, wait—was it empty?" The rest of his conversation consisted of yesses and noes.

Ham Brooks was in the adjoining library, scratching his head over the intricate text of a scientific tome having to do with the science of color, and he heard Monk's low-voiced commentary over the telephone, and sensed a growing excitement in it.

Ham reached the door just as Monk was hanging up.

"Who was it?" Ham demanded.

"The State police," Monk said. "They've found Doc's car—the one we left at my shack on the Hudson River where we let that gang take the pink man away from us. Doc was probably using that car."

"Where is it?"

Monk gave the location. Ham consulted a map of the metropolitan vicinity, then raced for the door. "Probably take us about twenty minutes to get there," he said.

He was wrong—it took thirty-seven minutes, and it would have taken longer if their car had not been equipped with red auxiliary lights and a police siren with a caterwauling outcry that frightened all traffic out of their path.

The State police had not moved the car. It was in the brush where Doc Savage had left it.

"Kid hunting rabbits found it," an officer explained.

Monk and Ham went over the machine, but found nothing that indicated what had become of the bronze man. Ham examined the weeds and brush between car and road.

"If you look close," declared the dapper lawyer, "you can see where Doc straightened up the weeds and grass that the car mashed down when he drove it in here. That shows Doc was hiding the machine."

Monk frowned. "You sure Doc did the hiding?"

"Look." Ham indicated a small mark beside one of the tires. It was a rather shapeless mark that might have been made by a weed, or could have been the distorted track of some animal. In fact, it was a mark that had no meaning other than that it was one which Doc Savage used when necessary to indicate that he had been in the vicinity.

"Since he hid the car," Monk declared, "it's a safe bet that he was going to scout around something in the neighborhood."

"But what?"

The answer was simple. The abandoned shipyard was the only likely spot in the vicinity. Monk, Ham and the State police circled the old shipyard cautiously.

Monk said, "Come here, Habeas," to his pet pig. He pointed the animal toward the shipyard. "Go take a look," he requested.

The pig ambled off. After a while, the animal came back. It did not seem alarmed.

"There's nobody there!" Monk exclaimed triumphantly. "I trained him to do that."

"That's a smart hog," an officer agreed.

Ham snorted.

THEY found no human life in the old shipyard. They did find marks made by the feet of men running, and here and there an empty cartridge that had jumped out of a gun ejector.

"Looks like they had a fight," Monk said grimly.

It was Monk, too, who decided what the collapsed condition of the old wharf meant. He examined the ground, the boards, and found enough marks to be sure.

"Car went off this thing!" he barked. He began taking off his clothes.

Monk, stripped, was a remarkably apelike figure. His muscles stood out in cables and bars on his arms, in rugged ledges across his chest. He balanced over the water, expanding his chest with a deep breath, then cut the surface cleanly.

"Marvelous physique," an officer commented.

Ham said, "Enough hair on him to stuff a sofa, too." But he was too concerned over what they might find under the surface of the water to sound very enthusiastic.

Monk was down more than a minute. Toward the last, he let air out of his lungs, the bubbles rising slowly. Then he broke surface.

"Doc's truck down there," he said grimly. "The one marked with a tailoring company sign."

Instantly, Ham had his own clothing off. He dived, came up, dived again. "The doors are all locked," he reported. "They're jimmied, or something, and don't seem to want to open."

It was fully five minutes before both men climbed out of the water.

"No body," Monk said.

They stood for a long time and scrutinized the unpleasant looking surface of the bay, but without results. Until finally, far out in the water, Ham saw something. He plunged in and swam to the object, towed it back.

It was Doc Savage's coat. When they looked at the rip up the back, it was a little sickening.

Later, Monk found a mark on the floor of a ramshackle shed. He called Ham's attention to it, and Ham

understood immediately what it meant.

It was a zigzag mark of the type commonly used in drawings to indicate electricity or lightning. It was Long Tom's brand, one he used on a small cow ranch which he owned in the Jackson Hole country of Wyoming.

"Long Tom was here."

"I hope," Monk muttered, "that they hadn't found out that he wasn't a genuine pink man."

"Nobody knew it," Ham pointed out.

"No, not even that Chet Farmer," Monk agreed. "Incidentally, I wonder what has happened to Renny and Johnny and Farmer." Still muttering, Monk went to their car. He came back with a device which resembled somewhat a magic lantern of the old-fashioned type used to project postcard pictures.

The police had moved away, and Monk seemed glad of that.

"Long Tom has used that brand before to indicate he was leaving a message," Monk explained. "I don't see any around in plain sight. Maybe he used Doc's invisible chalk."

He switched on his lantern device. It gave out no visible light, although it was functioning. It was a projector of ultraviolet light, rays outside the visible spectrum.

"Make a tent with your coat to kind of shut out the light," Monk suggested. "This thing works better in the dark."

As a matter of fact, the invisible chalk, a chemical which glowed, became fluorescent when exposed to ultraviolet light—in the same fashion that vaseline, aspirin and other common substances fluoresce when exposed to such light—could hardly be distinguished in daylight.

The message was not far from where Long Tom had scratched his brand. It read:

Truck is to be robbed after five o'clock this afternoon at stop light, fifteen miles out from Holland Tunnel on main road. Cop there will be phony. Truck leaves Atlantic & Hudson warehouse on Eleventh Avenue at five o'clock.

I have them fooled so far.

Drag off end of collapsed dock for Doc's body.

White-faced, Monk went to the police. "Have a squad start dragging around for a body," he said.

"Whose body?"

Monk tried to speak twice and finally managed to say, "Doc Savage's."

The officer's face became blank, and he went away quickly.

An hour and some odd minutes later, Monk and Ham turned into Eleventh Avenue, headed south. There were heavy trucks on the street; ahead they were thicker.

Ham said into the radio transmitter repeatedly, "Renny—Renny, give us an answer. Renny—Renny—Johnny—Johnny." He listened intently.

"I'll leave the radio switched on and tuned to the wave length of their transmitter," he muttered. "I wonder what has happened to them."

"Nothing good, I'll bet," Monk said.

"What makes you say that?"

"Chet Farmer."

"Don't be foolish," Ham said disparagingly. "Just because he happened to be a handsome young man, you didn't like him."

Monk fell silent, stared at a large building emblazoned *Atlantic & Hudson, Machine Supplies*. "That must be the place," he said. "I was sort of thinking it would be a trucking concern. Don't know what gave me that idea."

Ham pulled on an old hat and turned up his coat collar. "You scoot down in the seat out of sight, and let me drive," he said. "I'm not as conspicuous."

Monk agreed. They changed seats. After Ham had circled the block, he said, "There's only one truck loading. It's a Diesel job labeled the Intra-union Trucking Co. That must be the one."

"Do we follow it?"

"Might be more sensible to pick it up at the mouth of the Holland Tunnel."

"Might be."

They made a quick trip south, drove for a while inside the roaring entrail of the vehicular tunnel, then popped out into bright sunlight and air that seemed doubly clean after the monoxide-laden tunnel interior. They parked in an obscure spot where they could watch the tunnel mouth.

"Machine Supplies," Monk muttered. "What the heck?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Got any idea what's in the truck? What would a machine-supply company be shipping that is worth a highjacking?"

Ham shook his head. He was equally puzzled.

They had not been there long when Monk grunted, said, "There we go."

The truck they had spotted uptown lumbered out of the vehicular tunnel, gears grinding, climbed the grade, and gathered speed. Monk shook his head quickly when Ham made a move to start their car. "Wait a minute," said the homely chemist. "Let's see if anybody is following the thing."

Pleasure cars, half a dozen or so, popped out of the tunnel like black cannonballs. None of these seemed to be trailing the truck.

Ham said, "We better not wait any longer." He put their car into motion.

Before long, the truck and passenger car roads split, the latter taking the high-speed skyway. Ham kept to the truck lanes. The road was rather rough, and monotonous. They had plenty of time to talk.

Ham declared, "I don't get the connection here, at all. A pink girl runs into a hotel at night, and some men grab her and stage a lot of fake rigamarole to make it seem that she is dead. We trace the girl down, and find she hasn't been out of her home for a week previously. And one of the neighbors saw a pink man dash out of the place, but some other men chased him and caught him. The girl's house is empty when we get there. And everything in one room of the basement has been loaded into a truck and taken away. And stuff has been burned in the furnace—hey, by the way! Did Doc ever analyze that stuff?"

"What stuff?"

"The ashes from the furnace in Lada Harland's house."

"I did," Monk said. "The stuff that had been burned in the furnace was mostly cloth. Cloth of different colors."

"Different colors?"

"Yeah. Greens and blues and reds, and some pastel shades."

"Any pinks?"

Monk stared at Ham sourly. "Don't be funny."

"Well, was there?"

"No."

THE robbery was a very efficient affair. In fact, it was unexpectedly efficient.

There was another difficulty, too. The robbery did not take place on the spot scheduled. It occurred much earlier, and while the truck was rolling. And there were other complications.

A smaller truck, rolling at high speed, but looking entirely innocent, passed the car in which Monk and Ham were riding. It was followed by a second small truck. Both these vehicles were rather new, and neither bore distinguishing marks.

One of the small trucks got ahead of the Intra-union machine. It flashed a red light, indicating it was about to stop. Then it slowed. The Intra-union driver blew his horn and hand-signaled for a left-hand pullout around the slowing machine. He was blocked. The second small truck blocked him. All three machines stopped.

"Blazes!" Monk gasped. "I thought they were gonna use a stop light gag—"

He did not finish. Actually, he was all but knocked unconscious. Ham had been slowing their machine. A truck hit them from behind. A truck they had not noticed. It did not stop when it smacked into them. It ground in low gear, jammed their machine forward rapidly.

Before Ham could do anything, they were jammed between the truck ahead and the one behind. The headlights broke, the radiator caved in, and there was grinding-metal noise.

Men piled out of the small trucks. At least a dozen men. All armed.

Monk yelled, "We better stay in here! This car is armor-plated—"

The men in the truck behind evidently knew that, too. They seemed to know also that a crashing impact from behind will burst open the doors of almost any car, even an armored one. Because the truck driver behind backed up a few feet, put on speed, and smacked them. The doors flew open.

The men dived in from both sides and laid hold of Monk and Ham. Monk howled, dived for his foes. Monk liked a fight. He liked to make a noise when he fought. He kicked, jackknifed a man. He got another by the arm and did his best to tear the arm off.

Ham was hauled out the other side of the car and landed on the pavement with four men on top of him. He tried to use his sword-cane—evidently they knew what it was, because they stamped on his hands and he lost it.

A man ripped open a cellophane packet which contained a cloth damp with drugs. It was the same kind of a pre-prepared pad of anaesthetic which Ham recalled the eyewitnesses saying had been used on the girl at the Hotel Troy. The damp pad was jammed to Ham's nostrils. He held his breath, convulsed in an abortive effort to free himself.

On the other side of the car, they had another of the anaesthetic pads to Monk's nostrils.

The driver of the Intra-union truck, and his relief, had not received any such kind treatment. They had been hauled out of their machine, blackjacked, and let fall to the pavement.

HAM BROOKS insisted thereafter, whenever the subject came up, that he had never been more delighted to see Doc Savage. First, there had been obvious indications that the bronze man had died at the shipyard. And secondly, Ham was needing help about as badly as he ever needed it.

Doc Savage came up in another car. It was an ordinary black machine, one he had rented somewhere, so it had no special equipment. He slammed on the emergency brake, and while the wheels still seemed to be sliding, dived out.

He dropped two smoke grenades as he came, and these popped like firecrackers almost instantly. Then he was upon Ham's assailants, fighting. He used a fist twice, then struck away the drug-laden pad, got Ham's left arm and jerked him out from under the foes.

That much happened, and the smoke enveloped them. A gun began banging. It was a submachine gun, judging from the noise it made, but it was latched in single-fire position so that the ammo drum would not be exhausted too quickly.

Doc dragged Ham to him, said, "Get behind my car—behind the engine."

They did that.

"I've got some tear gas," Ham said.

"Turn it loose on them."

Ham did that. Because of the smoke from the grenades, they could get only a vague idea of what was going on. There was plenty of movement, though. And noise. The gun was banging with clockwork regularity.

Then a truck motor roared, and then another. Two trucks. They left rapidly.

"They got away!" Ham yelled. "All of them! They took two trucks—and Monk."

The dapper lawyer dashed to the two smaller trucks which the raiders had left behind. They were empty. Tracing the machines might prove something—probably only that they were stolen.

Doc said, "Come on!" The bronze man was in the passenger car. It began moving as Ham reached it; he hung on with one arm, got the door open and inside. "Better get in the back and lie down," Doc advised. "Try to get in the center, so that the motor will stop any rifle bullets."

An instant later, there was a loud report, then another. Tires going out. The car rocked, and Doc fought the wheel. Once the machine was completely broadside in the road, and Ham's hair stood up. Finally it stopped.

Two of the tires were out. There was only one spare.

Behind them, another car began to careen madly on the pavement, and finally stopped.

Doc said, "They scooped big flat-headed building tacks out on the pavement behind them."

It was a simple trick, not new. But it had effectively shut off pursuit.

Without a word, the bronze man began to run, leaving the road and heading across a field. There was a house over there, a telephone line leading to it. He outdistanced Ham easily, although the dapper lawyer was putting out his best efforts, and when the bronze man entered the farmhouse, Ham was far behind.

Later, Doc finished giving an alarm to the State police. He turned from the telephone.

Ham said, "Everybody thought you were dead."

"They threw grenades into the river after I went in," Doc admitted. "The concussions were bad, but I was not close to the spot. I had thrust that periscope of mine into the bottom and let the end protrude above the surface to mislead them. And I still had the 'lung' diving device I had used in the river. With that, I was able to go a long way under water before coming to shore."

The bronze man's usually expressionless features showed irritation.

"They had left the old shipyard before I could get back there," he said.

"Why do you suppose they didn't wait until they got to the stop light to hold up the truck?"

"Some detail might have gone wrong—I do not think it is as easy to get a New Jersey State policeman's uniform as they anticipated it was going to be." The bronze man's flake-gold eyes stirred uneasily. "Or they might have become suspicious."

Ham squirmed. "You don't think they could have found out who Long Tom is?"

"Long Tom is a good actor," Doc Savage commented, which was all he had to say on the point.

They walked back toward the highway. A radio patrol car of the State police had arrived. At least twenty cars were disabled with flat tires. One was in the ditch. The police were flagging down others.

Doc asked, "Where are Renny, Johnny and Chet Farmer?"

Ham told him. And before Ham finished, he realized Doc Savage was concerned.

"What's wrong?" Ham demanded.

Doc said, "I should have told Renny and Johnny that Chet Farmer was a crook."

"Crook?" Ham was dumbfounded.

"My guess," Doc Savage said, "is that he joined up with us merely to make use of what we learned."

Ham strained his hands through his hair. "I should have guessed something like that when you were so careful to keep Farmer from finding out that we were planting Long Tom with the gang as a pink man." Ham broke into a run toward the cars. "We've got to, warn Renny and Johnny—if it's not too late!" he gasped.

Reaching the embroilment on the road, he found his pet chimp, Chemistry, on top of one of the trucks making noises at the crowd. Of Monk's pig, Habeas, there was no trace.

A State policeman approached Doc Savage. "We've checked on the freight that was in that truck," he said. "And we don't exactly understand why it was stolen."

"What was the truck's load?" Doc asked.

"Material for making machine tools," the officer replied.

The policeman went away.

Ham said, "That doesn't make sense."

"On the contrary," Doc Savage said dryly, "it makes a great deal of sense."

Chapter X. THE BROTHER

NOTHING had made sense to Monk Mayfair for a long time, but finally some semblance of reality began returning to him, and with it a revival of sensitivity, particularly his sense of taste, for everything in his mouth was deep-brown with the added quality of apparently having been lately vacated by a cat, and not a very sanitary cat at that.

"Oooooo!" he said. "Pooey!"

He opened his eyes and they hurt, hurt terribly, and still hurt after he closed them. He got hold of his wits and carefully assembled them. Let's see. They had some stuff on a handkerchief. He'd had to breathe that. And it had been like getting hit a slow blow with a hammer.

Suddenly alarm seized him, for he had realized what the anaesthetic had been. It was a chemical that not only was potent, but dangerous. Still, getting scared now did no good. He was alive.

"Just barely alive," he amended.

And in very solid surroundings, wherever he was. His hands were lying by his side, and his fingers, when he closed them, touched concrete floor, fingernails gritting unpleasantly on the stuff.

A voice, not a pleasant one, said loudly, "Hey, guys, the beauty is wakin' up!"

Monk's eyes flew very wide, but he still saw nothing. His hands came up, felt and gave him the information that a blindfold banded his face. An object, a foot he decided, kicked at his exploring hands.

Although he did not feel in the least like a fight, Monk grabbed the foot with both hands and adopted alligator tactics—alligators that seize their prey and whirl over and over—tried to twist the leg off its owner.

No great success attended the effort. More men were around him than he had supposed. One of them gave him an awful kick where it hurt the most, and another got a knee on the back of his neck. They held him.

"What do you want done with him, Cy?" a voice asked.

Cy said, "Tie him to a chair. No! Hell, he'd tear a chair to pieces. Use that narrow table over there."

After they had spread-eagled Monk on the hard wooden table top and bound him there with a quantity of rope, they wrenched the blindfold off his eyes. The wrenching was not done gently; some skin went with it.

It was a cellar. The basement of a wooden house. Monk glanced about, noting various things—shelving that sagged under mason fruit jars of fruit and vegetables, a pork barrel with salt-incrusted rim, a cider press, kraut board—and decided that it was a farmhouse basement.

Some of the men gathered about him had taken part in the raid on his river shack. Others he had never seen before.

The man called Cy had put on overalls, scuffed work shoes, faded blue shirt and straw hat. He could have been chewing on a straw, too, and he still would have looked phony, Monk decided. But there was nothing false about Cy's grim purpose.

Cy said, "You're a tough boy, handsome, but it won't get you any marbles in this game. Why don't you get smart?"

"Smart how?"

"Like a little bird, tra-la."

"Nuts," Monk said.

"You can sing out answers to some questions," Cy told him. "That's what I mean."

Monk snorted. "Sing out the questions."

In a conversational tone, Cy explained, "Here is the situation. A guy calling himself Chet Farmer—the police know other names for him—is going around trying to whack himself a piece of our cake. We don't like that. If we could get hold of him, we believe we could convince him he don't want no cake."

Monk said, "That will be all right with me. He is no great friend of mine."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"We hate to disbelieve you," Cy said, "but it happens the guy we mean has been palling around with you."

"Don't blame me for that," Monk said. "And I don't know where he is."

Cy was looking more unpleasant. "Another thing—this trouble Doc Savage has been giving us. It don't make us happy."

"It generally doesn't," Monk agreed.

"Where can we find Savage? You know what I mean—find him where we can persuade him to lay off."

Monk said nothing. But his lips moved slightly, insultingly.

Cy sighed. "You're a tough guy and we could whittle the arms and legs off you without you talking. But we got a plan."

Monk did not answer.

Cy kicked him. "We got a plan. You hear?"

Monk sighed.

"Bring on your dog, friend," he said, "and quit talking about it."

They gave him the anaesthetic again. He fought them, fought them furiously with a mad kind of frenzy born of fear of death, because he knew that in unskilled hands an anaesthetic such as they were using could easily kill. But he could not help himself, and he became lost in blackness.

As he passed out, Cy was staring at him and saying, "We want Chet Farmer, and we want Doc Savage, and this is the way to get them."

The blackness crawled through Monk's mind softly with tremulous terror retreating before it, like a black ferret going into a hole after a rabbit. Eventually all was black.

There was, just once, a touch of something else. It was a jarring interruption, and to Monk's stupefied mind it was like an electric shock—it began slowly, like one of the penny shocking machines where you put in your coin and turn a handle—and climbed in force that lasted for two or three minutes.

At last somebody was laughing. The mirth at first was only sound, and unrelated sound at that, a kind of silly cacophony. But it got real. It was a man laughing.

"Watch his face when he sees," the man paused to say.

Then he went on gobbling out mirth.

Monk sat up and moved, and there was a biting at his wrists that was steel. Handcuffs. His wrists were fastened together behind his back.

He had some difficulty with his eyes. The room seemed filled with a rose-colored light. Curious, he stared at the light bulbs and decided they were, for some reason or other, rose-colored.

They were around him, Cy and the others. The same gang who had made him unconscious. They were grinning at him, all looking pleased about something. Their behavior puzzled Monk—until he saw a man look slyly to the left, and followed the fellow's glance.

"What the—" Monk roared.

His gorge rose. He heaved up, strained at the handcuff links until they gnashed together like angry teeth.

"Who done that!" Monk bellowed.

He meant his hog. Habeas Corpus was a pink hog. A blatant, garish pink that had no parallel for coloring that Monk had ever seen. The pig moved around, peered at Monk, and seemed distressed.

Cy snickered his mirth.

Monk said, "I'll kill you!" and the way he said it wiped the mirth off Cy's lean fish lips, chilled the cackling of his snicker in his throat.

Cy came over and punched Monk in the chest. "You better worry about yourself," he said.

Monk scowled. "What do you mean?"

Cy said, "Bring a mirror."

The mirror was long. It had an old glass, and some of the silvered reflecting material had scabbed off the back. But it could reflect color.

Monk looked, and said nothing whatever.

He was a pink man.

THEY took the mirror away. They must have been sobered by Monk's silence, and by the expression on his face, because they did no more laughing.

Cy said, "Remember I said I had a plan? This is it."

Monk's glare was white and silent.

Cy added, "You'll stay like you are—unless you answer questions. And if you do answer them, we can change you back to your regular color."

Monk still said nothing.

Wheeling, Cy said, "Boys, toss him in with Harland and let him think it over. The two of them may come to their senses."

There was no more said. They got Monk by the legs and the arms and skidded him—he was too flabbergasted by the incredible thing that had happened to him to have the spirit to fight—down a hall, then down a series of steps which bruised his back, and, then tossed him heels first into a room that, after they shut the door, was extremely dark. The door slammed.

During the first few moments there was silence; then feet stirred a few yards away. Monk judged there was one person, a man.

"Ain't there any lights in this place?" Monk demanded.

"Yes. Electric lights."

"Well, turn them on."

"I'd rather not," the voice said.

The voice belonged to a man.

Monk performed a feat of contortion, aided no little by the fact that his arms were longer than his legs. He got his handcuffed wrists in front of him. Then he arose, felt around the walls in search of an electric switch. He located none. The idea that there might be a drawstring occurred to him, and he calculated the center of the room, went to that point, found the string. He pulled it with his teeth.

"Oh!" said the man. "You're that way, too."

He was a young man, tall, with a well-made face. His hair was curly. One of his ears stuck out a little more than the other.

Monk went over to him and held his hands near the young man's hands. Monk eyed the four hands.

"About the same color," he decided. "If anything, I'm a little brighter."

"I'm getting dusty and dirty," the other explained.

Monk said, "Who are you?"

"Harland—Peter Harland."

"Do you have a sister?"

"Yes. Yes, a sister named Lada."

Monk hesitated before he put his next question. "Do you know where she is?"

"Well, I—" The other went silent.

"Well, what?"

"She—" Obviously distressed, the young man cleared his throat.

"What did she do?"

"It's a hard thing for a man to say about his own sister," said the young man grimly, "but I'm afraid she's behind this mess."

"Behind it?"

"Yes. I'm afraid these men who are holding us prisoner are working for her. I think she is using the name of Bodine."

"A party named Bodine is supposed to be back of it," Monk declared. "We haven't been able to put our finger on this Bodine yet."

"Bodine is my sister."

"You are sure?"

"Absolutely."

MONK looked around the place grimly. It was a cellar room, evidently a root cellar, because there was an outer door, very thick and heavy, that must lead to a yard, and one other door, through which he had been thrust into the place, that was equally heavy.

"Let's hear the story," Monk said.

"Who—" The other hesitated. "Who are you?"

"Monk—Monk Mayfair," Monk told him. "I'm associated with Doc Savage, who is investigating this thing."

The pink young man's eyes widened. "Oh, I've heard of you." Becoming visibly animated with pleasure, he came over and seized Monk's hand. "This delights me." He pumped the hand. "I'm glad Doc Savage is interested. Everything is all right, if he's interested."

Monk said, "Everything is a heck of a long ways from all right. What's the story?"

"But—"

"The story," Monk said impatiently. "I want to hear what is going on."

Shrugging, the other said, "A week ago, I drank something in my coffee for supper. I think my sister put the drug in the coffee. Anyway, the last thing I remembered was passing out at the supper table."

He paused, glowered, said, "When I woke up, I was pink."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

Monk became angry and said, "Now wait a minute! If you got pink, there was a reason. What happened? How was it done? Is it a dye? What is it?"

"How did *you* get that way?" the other countered.

Monk yelled, "How the devil do I know? That's what I'm tryin' to find out."

"There you are," said the other matter-of-factly. "I don't know anything more about it than you do. I just passed out. And when I awakened, I was this way."

"Is it a dye?"

"No. It doesn't wear off. And if you'll notice, your teeth, the inside of your mouth, your eyeballs, everything is the same color."

Monk stared at his hands in disgust. "I don't like it."

THE pink young man said, "To continue with that story I was telling you. It was my sister who was responsible for whatever happened to me."

Staring at him, Monk demanded, "How you know that?"

"Because I was tied hand and foot. And she kept me a prisoner in the house for almost a week. She wouldn't let anybody come in, none of the neighbors."

"What was she holding you for?"

"You know how scientists use guinea pigs for experiments? I think I was her guinea pig. I think she wanted to know what effect the pink coloration was going to have on me."

"Was it you broke out of the Harland house?" Monk asked.

"You found out about that, did you? Yes, that was I. I got away. Slipped my ropes off and ran for it. They caught me."

"They?"

"The men my sister had hired. Then they loaded me in a truck and brought me here. Incidentally, I have no idea where we now are."

Monk fished around in his mouth. In one of his numerous fights in the past, some of his teeth had been knocked out, and he wore a bridge of the type which was braced with a slender alloyed gold rod. He got this out. With no compunction whatever, he twisted two of the teeth out of their holdings, put them in one pocket—he was wearing a suit of coveralls which had been substituted for his garments—then removed the teeth on the other side of the bridge and put them in a different pocket.

He handed his companion the metal part of the bridge.

"You ever pick a handcuff lock?" he demanded.

"Why, no."

"Get hold of that thing and go to work," Monk directed. "Just prod around in there. I'll tell you where."

Gingerly, his doubts showing on his face, the other obeyed.

"Slant it to the right and kind of feel in the lock," Monk commanded. "Say, does this pink color have any effect on a man? Does it make you sick?"

"No. Everything looks somewhat pink, however."

"Yeah, I noticed." Monk pondered. Then he described the incident in the Hotel Troy, giving the burning version straight—he watched the young man show horror at this point—and then explaining that they had reasons to believe the young woman was still alive. "What do you make of that?" he finished.

The young man showed his teeth briefly and grimly.

"I think," he said, "that my sister was preparing herself an alibi. She was trying to make the public think she was dead." He eyed Monk intently. "Did you say they were at pains in the Hotel Troy lobby to call my sister by her name, Lada Harland?"

"Yes."

"I think that proves my point. Don't you?"

Monk didn't know what it proved. He said, "Here, quit wiggling that probe around and around. Slant it toward me a little and give a series of quick, twisting jabs."

The young man did this and the handcuff lock came open.

Monk stood up. "It won't be long now," he said.

LEAVING the other handcuff bracelet to dangle from his wrist, Monk reached up and jerked the light cord to plunge the cellar into darkness. Then he went over under the slanting door that he surmised must lead outdoors, and searched for cracks. He finally found one through which he could distinguish a star.

"Dark outside," he announced. "So why should we stick around in here?"

"But you can't get out."

"Why not?"

"That door is too heavy. I've tried it."

"I've got something better than muscles," Monk advised.

He got out his four teeth, and twisted and grunted over them until it developed that they were shells which could be unscrewed. He dried them off carefully, then unscrewed the caps on three of them. Each held a small quantity of substance—two had paste, another powder, and another a liquid—which he carefully mixed.

"My own invention," he explained. "I made one for Doc. He used to wear it in the back of his mouth in place of a wisdom tooth before he grew a wisdom tooth, but now he has no place to wear it and—you gotta work fast."

Finishing the last part of his operation in great haste, Monk dashed over to the door and crammed his paste into a crack in the door timbers under the lock. He withdrew, taking long jumps in his haste.

"That stuff is like a firecracker," he said. "Sometimes goes off before you're ready."

His companion was astounded. "You mean it will explode?"

"If it don't, I'm no chemist."

"But suppose they would explode in your mouth?"

"Oh, none of the ingredients are explosive," Monk explained. "Anyway, saliva or any other moisture renders the mixture harmless."

They waited.

The pink young man finally complained, "But it don't sound as if it's going to—"

It did. It knocked the young man down and made Monk stumble. It deafened them.

Monk grabbed his companion's arm, roared, "Come on!"

They ran to the exit. Where the door had been, a hole and a few broken planks remained. They stumbled outside. There was enough moonlight for running, and they ran.

There was some shooting behind them—four shots in such rolling succession that they could only come from a revolver—but none of the bullets was close enough to be heard. And, judging from the outburst of profanity that followed, one of their late captors had mistakenly taken pot shots at one of his companions.

Chapter XI. PINK FOR PUTRID

MONK came out on a highway, gave his trousers a hitch and took up a determined position in the middle of the road. Standing there, he flapped his arms in the path of an approaching motorist.

"It may be one of them!" yelled the pink young man uneasily.

Monk said, "If it is, I'm in the right mood to accommodate 'em."

It was an old touring car which had shed its top as an old man sheds his hair. The man driving wore a felt hat that had obviously been used as fly swatter, drinking cup and perspiration mop for a long time. The man smoked a clay pipe that was completely black and amazingly strong.

"Take us to the nearest telephone," Monk ordered. "It's important."

The man eyed them while he absent-mindedly took off his hat and swatted a mosquito. He said, "You be from the carnival, I reckon."

"Carnival?"

"One in town this week, I heard." He put his hat back on. "You two look like you might be freaks from a side show."

"Freaks!" Monk growled. "Listen, you old—" He caught himself, remembering his pink color. He was suddenly amazed that the other had not shown more surprise.

"Take us to a telephone," Monk said.

The man started his car, and the amount of noise it made was amazing. Monk got a whiff of the black pipe and had to cough.

They rattled and banged along for a mile or two, and turned into a State-police station.

"Telephone here," their chauffeur said slyly.

"How many did you pass getting here?" Monk asked.

"Only three."

A State patrolman had come out of the station. His jaw fell. He whirled, stuck his head in the door, bellowed, "Carl, come out here!" Then, when another patrolman had appeared, he demanded, "Do you see what I see?"

Monk got out of the old car. He was in a bad humor.

"You two wisenheimers save the funny stuff," he said belligerently. "And if you've got a riot squad, get it together. We got a job for you."

The authority in Monk's voice impressed the cop. "What *is* this?" he wanted to know.

Monk turned and winked slightly at the pink young man. Then he told the officer, "You remember some men who burned a pink girl to death in the lobby of a hotel in New York? Well, they're holed up in the hills over there. We just got away from them."

"What were they doing with you?"

"We don't know, but we think they're turnin' people pink for the fun of it, then killin' 'em," Monk said.

Later, when the patrolmen were tearing around getting a raiding squad together, Monk told his companion, "That got action out of 'em without wastin' an hour explainin'."

"But they will have to know the truth eventually."

Monk shrugged. "They'll have to get it from somebody besides us. We don't know it."

THERE was no one on the farm.

They did find the truck that had been hijacked, and one of the smaller trucks which had been used in the raid. Around the larger truck, there was a litter of smashed packing cases. Some of the ruined cases still contained machine tools, but others were empty.

A policeman said, "You say they stole a truckload of machine tools?"

Monk nodded.

"Why?" the officer wanted to know.

"You've got me."

The police went over the place thoroughly. They made one discovery—soapy towels had been used to wipe almost everything where there was a possibility of fingerprints having been left. Monk recalled that the same thing had been done at the Harland home. The telephone line was intact, and the policeman in charge talked over it for a time.

He told Monk, "Fellow named Cy Travetti owns this farm, which doesn't surprise me."

"Why don't it surprise you?"

"Cy is a bad egg. Cut his teeth on the bootleg business, and he's been in and out of jail plenty. Lately he's been a New York boy."

"You better put out a reader for him."

"Oh, sure." The officer frowned slightly. "In the meantime, we want some information out of you two. As a matter of fact, you're under arrest as material witnesses—and so we can give you treatment for that wholesale pinkeye you've got."

"It's not wholesale pinkeye we've got."

"Well, whatever it is, then."

"Now wait a minute," Monk said. "I'm working with Doc Savage. My name is Monk Mayfair."

The officer looked startled. "That makes it greatly different—if true." He reached for the telephone. "I'll call Mr. Savage's office and check on that."

Monk opened his mouth, but was speechless. He felt knotted inside—remembering Doc Savage was dead. He had tried to keep it out of his mind, and the excitement had helped him somewhat. But now the

realization was back again.

The officer talked for a while. His back was turned, and Monk could not hear what he said. Then he wheeled.

"They want you in New York right away," he said. "You and this fellow with you."

Monk was astounded. "Doc—is he—"

"He asked us to use a squad car to bring you over," the policeman advised. "You can take one of those outside."

"Then Doc's alive?"

"He sounded very much alive," the policeman declared.

DOC SAVAGE met Monk and his companion in front of the headquarters building. The bronze man stepped out on the sidewalk as soon as the squad car whined up. He stared at Monk.

Then Doc stepped forward, examined Monk's teeth, his eyes.

"It is not dye," he said.

"I'll say it's not!" Monk growled. The homely chemist bobbed his head at his companion. "This is Peter Harland—the pink lady's brother."

It was very late at night, but there were a few—there are always pedestrians on New York downtown streets—people on the sidewalks. With uncanny speed, a crowd had started to collect and stare.

"Where's the circus?" someone asked.

Monk scowled, said, "G'wan, you rubberneck! This don't concern you."

Doc took his arm, guided him around and into the lobby of the building. The pink young man who was Monk's companion followed. Instead of going upstairs, they descended to the basement garage.

"We ain't going up to the lab?" Monk demanded.

"No time," Doc Savage said.

Monk showed distress. "But this pink color," he muttered. "I ain't done much hollering about it, but I don't like it. The truth is, I'm worried stiff."

Doc said, "It is probably safe to delay research on the subject. And Renny and Johnny are in trouble."

Monk stared at the color of his hands. The loose handcuff still dangled on his wrist; he had forgotten to remove it.

"If they're in worse shape than I am," he said, "they're bad off."

The bronze man had a car waiting, a machine that was equipped with two red supplementary headlights and a siren. Doc told Monk, "Keep your finger on the button," and Monk did so, causing the siren to send out an unending wail that lifted and fell with nerve-edging frenzy.

Monk said, "Doc, how do you know Renny and Johnny are in difficulties?"

"Message from them."

"The last I heard of them," Monk said, "they went off with Chet Farmer to investigate a man Chet had found watching our place. The man Chet had seen was one of this Bodine's gang, and Chet had overheard the man saying something over a telephone that had led us to believe you were dead."

"Chet Farmer is a crook and that was probably a trap," Doc Savage said.

Monk digested that. His astonishment had caused him to take his finger off the siren button; he put it back, and the siren yowled. "Crook, huh? Is he working with this Bodine?"

Doc said, "Chet is probably working for himself."

"Where are they?"

"Renny and Johnny are prisoners," Doc said.

"Where?"

"Read this," Doc said.

He showed them a note. It read:

Chet Farmer grabbed us. Holding us in Fish Club at Hillride Road and South Shore Long Island.

There was no signature, but Monk said, "That's Renny's handwriting."

Monk's companion, the pink young man, asked, "But Mr. Savage—how did you get that message?"

Doc seemed not to hear the inquiry, but instead he tooted the car silently ahead for a while, then addressed Monk. "You say this is Peter Harland, who is Lada's brother?"

"Yep," Monk declared.

"And my sister," said the pink young man, "is actually this rogue you're referring to as Bodine."

THEY crossed the upper level of Queensborough Bridge, and it was like going through a jungle of steel girders. Doc was using the siren and the red lights and paying attention to side streets, but ignoring traffic signals.

Doc said, "What happened to you?"

The young man repeated the story about being drugged by his sister, being pink when he awakened, and being held a prisoner for a week. He finished, "And really, I do not know what is going on, or why. I am utterly amazed."

"But you think your sister is a crook?"

"What else can I think?"

"Has she ever shown criminal tendencies before?"

The young man was uneasy. "I said crook—but I didn't mean it exactly that way. I didn't mean criminal. She's not a criminal." He rubbed his hands together desperately. "She is not a common person who would be a—well, a thief."

Doc said, "That truck was robbed."

"But—"

"And the truck contained a shipment of machine-tool materials."

The young man said grimly, "That is what I cannot understand either. What would she want with machine-tool materials?"

Monk said, "Maybe it was finished machine tools."

Doc shook his head quietly. "According to the police check-up, it was materials only which were missing. There were no completed machine tools in the load."

Monk grunted. "Just iron and metals and stuff like that?"

"Stuff that they use to make machine tools," Doc agreed.

Monk gave the siren button several angry punches, then took his finger off the thing, but kept his eyes on the road ahead and, whenever a car threatened their progress, gave the siren another punch. The road was wide—three lanes that were almost empty at this hour of the morning, it was getting near dawn.

The heavy monoxide and chlorinated smells of the city had been left behind, and there was the faint odor of truck-farming country in the form of overripe muskmelons. The road ran flat for a long distance.

Doc turned off, and the highway was narrow, but still flat. Here and there it became pitted. It branched, and Doc took the lesser-used branch, which lifted and sank over hills that were low. In the little valleys, fog hung. From the tops of the hills their headlight beams lashed over the top of the fog as over fat gray rivers.

Came finally the time when Doc switched off the headlights, and drove slowly, so that the motor made no unnecessary noise.

"It is not much farther," he said.

Soon he stopped the machine, backed a little, turned off on a lane. This went a few yards and ended. There was high brush around them, and there were hills of sand.

"Quiet," he warned, low-voiced.

They walked two hundred yards and sighted the fishing camp.

THE camp was built on wooden stilts on a little inlet. A ramshackle building, once it had been painted white—either that, or the white patches they could see were mildew—but now it was in disrepair. Eighteen by thirty-five or forty feet would catch its dimensions, with a porch on the south side, and a longer one on the east. A spidery catwalk led out to the structure.

The road which they had been following obviously ended at the place.

Monk whispered, "Was that Hillride Road we were on?"

"Yes."

"Then this must be the place." Monk frowned. "So Chet Farmer is supposed to be in there, holding Renny and Johnny prisoner."

"It looks empty," the pink young man whispered.

"So it does," Monk agreed.

They crawled through the sand, a few feet at a time, keeping below the dunes, which were now almost bare of growth.

"Close enough," Doc breathed.

They lay there. It was getting light. The moon was bright, and its glow was enhanced by the crimson forerunners of dawn in the east.

"Ugh!" Monk grunted suddenly.

A man had come to the edge of the porch. It was too dark to distinguish his features. But he carried a rifle. There was no doubt about the rifle. He rested it on the porch railing and lounged there, looking out to sea.

Finally he yawned—they could tell that because he patted his hand over his mouth—and went back into the obscurity of shadows. They heard a crunching sound, evidently made by a chair as he sat upon it.

"A lookout," Monk whispered.

Doc breathed, "Get back a hundred yards or so."

They withdrew, crawling carefully. A sea bird made raucous crying noises on the beach, but there was no other sound. Even the waves were still.

Doc halted the withdrawal. He said, "Here is the plan: We will hold off our raid for two reasons: First, we do not know how many men are in that shanty. Second, we want to be sure that Renny, Johnny and Chet Farmer are there when we close in."

"So we wait," Monk said, disappointed.

"We wait," Doc agreed. "In case Renny, Johnny and Chet Farmer are not in there, we may be able to follow some of the gang to the spot where they are being held."

Monk sighed, said, "I guess that's the smart way to do it," reluctantly. "But I sure crave to get my hands on some of them birds," he added.

Doc said, "Monk, you go to the right. Pace off a hundred and fifty yards, and hide as near that point as you can."

The bronze man turned to the pink young man. "You take the left. Pace a hundred and fifty yards, and you also hide."

Monk asked, "The idea is that we'll be in a better position to spot any of them who leave?"

"Yes. And to follow them," Doc agreed.

They separated.

THE pink young man crawled carefully. He kept on all fours. Once he looked back and frowned at the marks he was leaving in the sand. He found a dead bush and tried to use it as a broom to sweep the marks out of existence, but he was not successful. Scowling, he went on.

He reached finally a point approximately one hundred and fifty yards from where he had left Doc Savage and Monk. By that time, he had formulated a definite plan, it became evident from his behavior. For he took off his coat, and made that into a broom.

After throwing himself on the sand several times to make it appear that he had been there for some time, he took a long jump and landed in some tufted grass. He stood there, carefully eyeing the sand, and with his coat switching out his tracks.

He took another jump to another patch of grass. From there, he got on some exposed hard ground.

He suddenly decided it was no use; he could not hide his trail. He grimaced to himself, because another and simpler method had occurred to him.

He walked down boldly and waded into the sea. A headland, small, low, but sufficient, hid the fishing shack from this point. He waded in the water, keeping doubled over for greater concealment, and far enough out that the incoming tide would eliminate his footprints.

Two hundred yards downshore, he entered an inlet. Once he stepped into a hole and got soaked over his head. He swore without much sound.

Eventually he got back into the sand dunes without leaving tracks.

He went to Doc Savage's car. He grasped the handle boldly and tried it, but could not get in. Some of the confidence went off his strangely pink face. He fought furiously with that door handle, and with the others, but without results.

He used his wet coat for a pad, and tried to smash the windows. That failed. The windows, it dawned on him, were bulletproof glass, and the car body of alloy steel.

He crawled under the machine and made a vain attack on the floorboards.

He scrambled out. He ran down the road, away from the spot. His elbows were close to his side, his stride long, his manner one of urgent purpose. The half light and the fog of early morning swallowed him.

NOT more than twenty seconds after the pink young man vanished down the road, Monk and Doc Savage stepped out from behind a nearby brush-covered sand dune.

Monk's face, homely always, was additionally contorted by an expression of utter astonishment.

"That guy is double-crossing us!" Monk blocked out his fists. "And after I rescued him from his sister!"

Doc said, "The chances are you did not actually rescue him. You only thought you did."

"Huh?"

"It was a trick?"

"Huh?"

Doc did not try to explain. He said, "I will follow him on foot. You trail along behind in the car. But do not get too close."

Monk said, "Wait a minute! This has got me dizzy!"

"How?"

"Who are those guys back there in that shack built on stilts?"

"Actors!"

"Act—the dickens! What's actors doin' there?"

"I hired them," Doc said.

"Why?"

"As soon as the Jersey police said you had rescued a pink man who said he was Lada Harland's brother, and who did not know much more about what was going on than a rank outsider, I decided to set this trap."

"What tipped you off?"

"If that man was really Lada Harland's brother," Doc said, "he would know a great deal more than he told us."

"That guy isn't Peter Harland?"

"Probably not."

Chapter XII. THE GRAB-FEST

IT was not half a dozen blocks from the home of Lada and Peter Harland. That fact dawned on Monk suddenly, while he had been sitting there in the car beside Doc Savage—the bronze man was driving—and reflecting upon the simplicity with which they had been trailing the pink young man. The young man had found a farmhouse and stolen a car. Possibly he had not intended to steal the car, but it had been in the yard, left carelessly with the key in the lock, and his knocking on the door had not aroused anyone, so he had taken the machine. Which had been about an hour ago. And now, when Monk realized where the trail had led them, he bolted upright.

"That Harland house!" he exclaimed. "It's in this neighborhood! It's only a few blocks over toward the other side of town!"

Toward the better side of town would have been a better descriptive. This district was a shabby one—not with the houses crowded together, though, for the places were far apart with such huge lots that they were almost farms—and the buildings were large, ancient. Of a period forty years gone.

The place to which the pink young man went was larger, more isolated than the others.

In the rear stood a barn that was huge, in fairly good repair. In addition to its hugeness, it had elaborate scroll-sawed decorations along the eaves, and little porticos over the doors that were so ornate as to almost be Japanese. All very Gay-Ninety.

"He barged right in," Monk whispered. "That must be the hang-out."

Doc parked out of sight. He got out, lifted binoculars from a pocket, and used them. It was daylight now, the air with the crisp brightness of early dawn.

An old-fashioned R. F. D. mailbox caught his eye. The name was on it:

C. BODINE RUTTER

The bronze man handed the binoculars to Monk, pointed out the mailbox for the homely chemist's scrutiny.

"Say, that middle name is Bodine!" Monk exclaimed. "That explains why the police weren't able to spot any suspicious Bodines. This guy's middle name is Bodine—not his regular one."

Doc said, "We had better work fast. We may not have much time."

"What is the set-up?"

"That pink young man," Doc explained, "has been deceived into thinking we have located Chet Farmer's hang-out. We misled him, but he does not know that. The haste with which he came here shows what he plans to do, don't you think?"

"You mean—get together some of his men and rush back there and grab us and Chet Farmer and Renny and Johnny and Chet Farmer's men?"

"Exactly."

Monk asked, "What do we do—barge in?"

"We might as well."

Monk eyed the house. For once, he was dubious about starting a fight. That was something rare for him. He must have been impressed by the size of the house.

"We could use some help," he muttered.

Doc said, "Renny, Johnny and Ham have all dropped out of sight, held as prisoners probably. Long Tom—we do not know what happened to him. We tried to plant him very early in this affair, but we haven't heard from him. It is possible that he is being careful about ingratiating himself into the membership of the gang, and that is taking time. In short, we have no help to call on."

Monk made a jaw. "Then let's grab hold of the bear's tail."

SOMEONE else got hold of the bear's tail, as Monk put it, before they did. The abruptness with which it occurred was a little bewildering.

There was no warning, except a whistle. A rippling whistle of the police type. The men which the signal brought out of the shrubbery were not policemen, however.

One of the raiders was Chet Farmer, and Monk did not recognize the others except that they would come under a general heading of tough lads.

They came out of the brush with gas masks dangling on their chests, and guns and bottle-shaped gas grenades in their hands. They acted to a plan. Each man had his door or window. Those who had windows were equipped with big wooden clubs for smashing in.

Monk said, "That's Chet Farmer—he's heading this raid."

Doc nodded.

"Apparently he was waiting until the arrival of the pink young man who said he was Peter Harland, before he closed in," he said.

"But what's it mean?"

"Two gangs."

"Two different crowds fighting over something?"

Doc Savage agreed, "That seems to be the situation."

"Two dogs fighting over a bone," Monk grunted.

"Yes."

Monk gave his trousers a hitch. "When two dogs get to fighting, they kind of neglect the bone," he said. "What do you say we see what we can do about that bone?"

Doc said, "It might not be a bad idea."

Without another word, and not waiting for instructions, Monk lunged forward. He ran toward the house, keeping in the thicker shrubbery, making no effort, however, to avoid noise. He depended on the other raiders thinking he was one of them.

He managed very well. He even overhauled a man, and, clubbing suddenly with his fist, dropped the fellow. He took his victim's gas mask. Instead of dangling it around his neck, he put it on. It would serve as a face disguise, and would fix everything, he thought, eliminating any chance of being recognized.

It was good psychology, but someone must have seen him.

He climbed in a window.

Someone hit him over the head.

He had just enough consciousness left to hear someone—it was the man who'd hit him, naturally—say, "Hey! I got the one they call Monk Mayfair."

After that, Monk was hit again, and it was black.

DOC SAVAGE angled around to the rear of the house. Instead of tackling the house, he headed for the barn. It was big. There was a considerable open area between the barn and the house. The barn was obviously the only place for any cars or trucks.

Moreover, men were pouring out of the barn—half dressed and wildly excited they were, too—to go to the defense of the house.

Doc took a side door of the barn. It was locked. He did not try to force it. He went around to the front, to the door out of which the men had come. It gaped open.

He stood beside the door, out of sight, and said, "Is anybody else in there?"

He used a gruff voice that might have belonged to anybody.

"Two of us," someone said.

"Well, come on!" Doc urged. "We need everybody!"

They came out, the two of them. He closed with them. He struck at one, who held a rifle, and knocked him against the side of the barn so hard that the man dropped the rifle.

The second man had courage. He dived, got hold of Doc. He had strength, it also developed speedily, and knowledge of how to do things with his hands that hurt. He got hold of the bronze man in a way that made Doc get down on one knee in agony. The man tried to yell for help. Doc hit him in the throat. Thereafter, no sound the man made was louder than a small dog barking, and not much more coherent.

The fellow who had bounced against the barn got himself organized. He stooped for his rifle. Doc, squirming and lunging, got his legs around the man. He twisted, dragged the fellow away from the gun.

They went over and over then, the three of them, with sounds of pain and noises of blows and rippings of clothing. Both the men knew body combat at close quarters, Doc learned. Their muscles, too, felt like the muscles of gymnasts, of professional acrobats.

One of them got the bronze man's left arm, did a convulsive feat of some kind, and Doc knew the arm was out of joint.

The fight had taken them back into the barn, through the door. That was fortunate to the extent that it shut them off from view of the house. But it was bad in that there were many timbers and protuberances to bump against.

Eventually Doc got a chance, lunged, captured the head of one of the men between his knees. He hooked his toes together, lay down with the man, and squeezed. The other man had hold of Doc's throat, and he was working on it, while the bronze man's knees made the trapped man unconscious.

After that, with one foe, it ended quickly. The man struck. Doc ducked. The blow missed, pulled the man half around. Doc slammed him behind the ear, then got on the man's prone form with his knees and worked on the fellow's neck, on the nerve centers upon which pressure applied in a certain way could induce quick paralysis.

WHEN he stood up, the girl said, "I think that is all of them. The others ran out when the excitement started in the house."

Doc listened. The excitement was still in progress in the house. They were shooting, but not to any great extent. Only scattered explosions.

Doc asked, "Who are you?"

"Lada Harland," the girl said.

She was, too. At least, she answered the description of Lada Harland, the young woman who had been seized in the lobby of the Hotel Troy. She showed signs of abuse—grime, a rip here and there in her garments, and strain grooves on her face.

She was, of course, quite pink.

Doc said, "Chet Farmer is staging the raid."

She nodded. "I thought that must be it. Either Chet Farmer—or you."

"We were on the point of staging ours. Farmer beat us to it."

"That is too bad," she said.

Doc went to the door. Already, the fight noises were subsiding. He stared, saw two men hauling Monk across the lawn. Involuntarily, Doc started forward. Then he stopped. He wanted to help Monk. But it would be an insane attempt.

He scowled at his left arm. It was out of shape, and hurting. Disjointed, at least. He went back into the barn.

Lada Harland was fastened quite simply and effectively with a steel chain which was about her ankle and padlocked to a timber. Doc worked on the padlock for a while with a thin steel probe. It was a cylinder type of lock, and very difficult. His left hand refused to function. Agony made it tremble.

He said, "Hold the lock," and the girl held it.

"Hurry" she breathed.

It seemed a long time, and nothing happened inside the lock except the little scratchings made by the probe. Doc heard footsteps approaching the barn. He got up and closed the door.

He went back to work on the lock.

Men pounded on the door.

"Who is it?" Doc asked in a harsh voice.

"C'mon, open up!" a man snarled. "We ain't got no time! The rest of your pals have given up!"

"Wait a minute," Doc said. "What do I get out of it if I don't put up a fight?"

He kept working on the lock.

The man outside said, "You get a junior share in the proceeds."

"What do you call a junior share?"

The lock came open. Doc freed it, lifted the girl with his usable arm. She could stand, and also move. "I'm all right," she whispered.

"Two percent of a fifty-fifty split," the man outside said.

Doc indicated that the girl was to flee toward the rear.

"All right," he growled for the benefit of the man outdoors. "We won't fight about this."

When Doc got to the rear of the barn, the girl had opened a small door there. She beckoned. Doc looked out. The way was clear.

They ran away from the barn and they were neither yelled at nor shot at.

Chapter XIII. TRACER

THEY lay in bushes two blocks away, not far from where Doc Savage had left his car, and where they could reach the machine quickly.

The girl said, "They have several hide-outs. They caught a man named Monk—one of your men."

"Yes," Doc said.

"They were going to pull a trick. They were going to let the man named Monk find one of the gang pretending to be a prisoner. The man was going to pretend to be my brother. The man was going to get into your crowd that way, and trap you, and trap Chet Farmer, if he could."

"I know."

"Oh!" She stared at him. "You know about that trap?"

He said, "This is the result." He pointed down the street. There were trucks in the big barn at the home of C. Bodine Rutter—two trucks. They were rolling these out and piling prisoners inside.

They were also doing a great deal of running around, like men enraged by not being able to find something they had expected to find.

Doc said, "You say they have several hide-outs?"

"Yes. A man named Cy Travetti owns a farm—he is a member of the gang—over in New Jersey, and they were using that. They had an old boatyard up on the Sound. It was Bodine's boatyard, and he lost money in it for years, but it had been closed down for a long time. That was another hide-out. I think you found that one."

"We found the Travetti farm, too," Doc said.

"Then they used Bodine's old house here," the girl said. "They have been keeping me there."

"You know who I am?" Doc asked.

"Yes—Doc Savage. They have been scared stiff since you came on this thing. I—at one time—I tried to reach you myself."

Doc asked, "Do you know Long Tom Roberts?"

"Who is he?"

Doc described Long Tom—he did not give the color of the feeble-looking electrical wizard's skin, hair or eyes—as far as physical build was concerned, and finished, "He is pink. He should be with the gang who held you prisoner. Did you see him?"

The girl shook her head. "But I heard about him. It seems he told them a story about calling on me, and being made a pink man after he was drugged, or something."

"Did you deny his story?" Doc asked anxiously.

"I didn't know what to do," she said, "and I finally refused to answer any questions whatever. I figured that was the best out."

She paused and eyed the bronze man. "Shall I start telling you my story now? It's a fantastic thing."

Doc was listening, watching. He said, "Better hold it. Those men are leaving in the trucks. By the way, do you know where Long Tom is?"

"They have an island somewhere," she said.

"But there are almost no islands near New York."

She shrugged. "All I know is—that is the impression I got. They took my brother there."

One of the trucks rolled past, then the other. The excitement had drawn neighbors out of bed, naturally, but so swiftly had the raid been executed that no one had actually seen any of the shooting.

One of the raiders proceeded to fool the neighborhood in a very simple manner. He lit a pack of firecrackers of some size, and tossed them out on the lawn. These went off with a series of ear-splitting reports.

"Hurrah for the picnic!" the man yelled.

The neighbors swore. They were not pleased. But their alarm subsided.

THE entire gang—Chet Farmer's men and their prisoners—took their departure. The last car rolled out of the C. Bodine Rutter yard and along the road, approaching.

Doc said, "After that car gets past, we will climb in our machine and follow."

"Is that our only chance?" the girl asked. "Suppose we can't follow them."

"Our one chance," Doc said.

The approaching car slowed pace when it neared Doc's machine. The man in the front seat turned said, "That's the only car in sight on the streets around here. It must be the one that Monk guy came in."

Another man said, "I'll fix it."

He stood up. In his hand was a siege weapon which they evidently had not used in the raid on the Bodine home—at least thirty sticks of dynamite tied in a bundle and equipped with cap and fuse.

The man lit the fuse and skated the dynamite under the car.

They drove on.

Doc's car lifted several feet off the ground and sat there briefly on a nest of red flame, like a dilapidated hen with feathers flying off, the feathers being fenders, wheels and various parts.

BRIGADIER GENERAL THEODORE MARLEY HAM BROOKS sat in the skyscraper headquarters and listened to the story with growing glumness.

"And you couldn't find a car to follow them?" he asked.

"Not a one in the neighborhood," Doc Savage admitted.

Ham got up and stamped to the window impatiently. "Not a thing has come in here. I've been wasting my time sticking around headquarters waiting for something to turn up. If I had been out at Bodine's place," he added malevolently, "I might have been some help. It might have turned out differently."

Doc said, "The raid was too unexpected for anyone to do anything about it."

Ham smiled at Lada Harland. "Then you're not guilty of anything this fellow accused you of when he was pretending to be your brother?"

The girl shook her head. She looked at her hands and shuddered as if nauseated by their garish, fantastically unnatural florid hue. "All I'm guilty of," she said tensely, "is being the victim of something terrible."

There was a clawing emotion in her voice that led Doc to look at her sharply, sympathetically. He asked, "Have you had anything to eat?"

She ignored the query. Her hands were clenched. "Can't you do something about—this?" She rubbed her hands over her arms.

"We are trying."

Lada Harland got up suddenly and came to him. Her hand on his arm was pleading. "Please! I've heard so much about you, about your ability as a scientist. Surely, you can do something about this horrible thing that has happened to me!"

He said, "But we can not tell—"

Her fingers dug in and trembled. "Please! I can't stand this!"

She became hysterical then, and pounded her fists against him and sobbed, then became wildly abusive against her fate. Doc looked over her head at Ham, and gestured. Ham came to the girl. He had some difficulty holding her.

The bronze man went to the laboratory and mixed a sedative, came back and administered it. They waited several minutes and the drug took effect. The young woman became silent.

They retired to the library, and Doc said, "She has been under terrific strain. It was natural that she should turn loose."

"When will she be able to talk?" Ham demanded.

"That will depend on her stamina."

Ham made a distraught gesture. "Doc, I hate to sing the blues—but we're in a mess. Monk and Ham and Johnny are in trouble—how bad trouble, we don't know, but it may be mighty bad." He compressed his lips. "They may be dead by now."

"I know."

"And Long Tom. I'm worried because we haven't heard from him."

Doc Savage did not answer. He went over and picked up a book and stood looking at it. Ham knew he was nervous.

"Didn't anything turn up while you were here at headquarters?" he asked. "That is why I left you here—in case Long Tom should try to get us information."

Ham shook his head disconsolately. "The morning papers came, and some mail, and I looked through the stuff but there wasn't anything. Oh, yes, there was a telephone call from a man who wanted to know what you wanted done with the pigeons."

"What pigeons?" Doc asked.

"I presumed they were some you had ordered, or something," Ham explained. "I told him I would ask you, and telephone him back."

"I did not order pigeons." Doc Savage sat there for a while. Abruptly he straightened. "Have you the man's telephone number?"

Ham said, "Yes," and searched through his pockets. "Here it is."

Doc went to the telephone. He was back in a very few moments. He whipped past Ham into the laboratory. "Get the girl on her feet," he ordered.

"What's going on?" Ham demanded.

"The pigeons," Doc said, "were carrier pigeons. Long Tom had rented some from this man. The pigeons would naturally come back to their home cote. One of them came back. It had a message on it. The man telephoned you to know what we wanted done about it."

Ham paled. "He didn't say anything about a message."

Doc's flake-gold eyes were faintly humorous for a moment. "The man does not speak very good English," he said. "He calls a message a pigeon, and a pigeon a pigeon, so it's a little confusing."

LADA HARLAND wanted to go with them. "I'm getting all right," she said. "And you haven't got the story yet. You will want that."

"Come on," Doc said.

They drove out in a coupé, the three of them in the front seat. The bronze man handled the wheel. He headed north, then across town, doubled back and forth for some time, keeping a sharp lookout on their trail.

Lada Harland said, "My brother did not tell me exactly what it was. I think he was too horrified by what had happened."

Doc said, "Go back to the beginning and skip as little as you can."

She nodded.

"It was ten days ago, about," she said. "Peter—I mean Peter Harland, my brother—had gone down in the basement as usual to the room he was using. I do not know what he was doing down there. Something secret. He was always doing something secret down there."

"Didn't the fact that he was doing something secret make you suspicious, or curious, Miss Harland?" Doc asked.

"Oh, no. You see, it was perfectly natural. My brother works for a concern which manufactures plastics—ash trays and dishes and things. You must have found that out by now."

"We knew he worked for a company manufacturing plastics," Doc agreed.

"Well, Peter is a chemist. You know that chemistry is the base and heart of the plastic business. They are all the time experimenting to develop new materials and new methods of making old materials. That was what Peter did in his basement laboratory."

Doc Savage described the room which had been empty when he and his men searched the Harland home, and asked, "Is that the room in which Peter had his laboratory?"

"Yes." She nodded.

"What happened this night ten days ago?" Doc inquired.

"Peter was down there for four or five hours—then I heard a frightened yell, and he came upstairs," she explained. "He was—he was pink. It was horrible."

"Then what?"

"He . . . he wouldn't tell me anything. He said he'd had an accident. But he was frantic. And he was such a horrible figure—" Her lips began twitching. "You have no idea what it is to be—like this."

Doc asked, "Then what occurred?" patiently.

"He called in Bodine for help," she explained. "Bodine had been Peter's friend for a long time, although I had never trusted him. I thought he was a crook. Of course, I know that now."

"When did Bodine make prisoners of you and your brother?"

She eyed him quickly. "So you guessed that. It was that same night. Bodine called some men. They were thugs, and he hired them. They tied us up. And Bodine began trying to get my brother to reveal the secret of something in the laboratory—the secret of how he had become pink."

"Did Peter give up the information?"

"No. He refused. Bodine drugged me one night, and when I awakened, I . . . I was pink. He did that for a reason. He told my brother that unless he gave up the secret, that is what they would do to me."

"Then Bodine threatened to kill you if your brother didn't give in?"

"Yes. That was why they pretended to burn me in the Hotel Troy lobby. You see, I had escaped. I was trying to reach you. I saw them following the cab I had hired, and I stopped and leaped out and tried to get in the lobby of the Hotel Troy to telephone you. But they caught me."

Doc said, "There was a report among the neighbors that a pink man had been seen to dash from your house with some other men after him."

"That was Peter. He made a break. It failed."

Doc said, "There is one other thing—Chet Farmer."

"Another crook," she explained. "Bodine tried to hire Farmer, and they fell out over the division of loot. Chet Farmer is now trying to grab everything to himself."

Ham put in for the first time, "Farmer is doing a good job of it, too. He's got Bodine and everybody else. Where did they take the stuff out of your brother's laboratory?"

"That island, wherever it is," the girl said. "Or so I think."

Ham said, "My money says Farmer will make some of Bodine's men tell him where the place is."

THE pigeon man was short and wide and had a flat red nose. He did more speaking with his shoulders and his hands than with his mouth.

"She's pigeon nice I gotta," he said. "Thisa day before light she's acome in as nice-a you pliss."

It was hard to tell about his accent.

"Where is the message?" Doc asked.

"Ah, thisa pigeon, pliss," the man said. He led them to a cote house where the odor of pigeons was overpowering.

Ham whispered, "I would think a self-respecting pigeon would be darn glad to leave this place."

The message, on thin paper, printed with pencil, read:

Everything that counts is on Small Gull Island. Come out through the Marsh. Meet you at creek.

Long Tom.

"Boy!" Ham exclaimed. "We finally get a break!"

Chapter XIV. SMALL GULL

SMALL GULL ISLAND was, strictly speaking, an island only at high-spring tide, when the sea lifted enough to cover the long and narrow finger of land that connected the dark, brush-covered hill that was the island proper with the mainland. The rest of the year, tides did not sweep entirely over the finger, except when there were storms, and tall salt-water grass grew there.

Doc Savage, Ham and Lada Harland crawled a long time through mud and grass.

The creek was narrow, fairly deep, bordered by higher grass and some brush. Gratefully, they sank into that. They soaked, and washed the worst of the mud out of their clothing.

The girl looked around nervously. "What's that mound of weeds and grass over there," she asked.

"Just a bird's nest," Ham told her.

The mound of weeds and grass proved Ham a liar immediately by coming apart. Long Tom stood up—he had been concealed under it—half covered with mud.

Long Tom waded in carefully and paddled over to them.

He said, "Doc, this is no place for the girl."

"She has a very important reason for coming," Doc said, "and we had one for bringing her. She is pink, as you know, but it is not dye, such as you are wearing. Unless we can do something to help her, she will have to go through life that way. So we want her here, to see that we are doing the best that we can. And she has every reason in the world to help herself."

Long Tom scraped mud and sticks out of his hair, grimacing.

"Well, it's a tough situation. Chet Farmer and his gang showed up here a while after daylight. They had a lot of prisoners. They had Monk, and Monk is pink. They had Renny and Johnny, and both of them are in bad shape from beatings. They can just about navigate, and that is all."

"Was there a fight when Chet Farmer took over?" Doc asked.

"Well, a kind of a one. But Chet moved into this place like a steam roller. Nobody had much chance."

"You got away all right?"

"Sure. They think I drowned. I was afraid this Chet Farmer would know I was one of your men. He's a slick rascal, that Farmer."

"Where are they?" Doc asked.

"A long time ago," Long Tom explained, "some crazy guy got the idea of building himself a home like a castle on this place. He only finished about half of it, and the rest is standing there, gone to pot and ruin. That's where they are."

Doc asked, "Can three of us—four including Miss Harland—do any good?"

Long Tom hesitated. He looked at Doc Savage. He smiled slightly.

"We won't know for sure until we try it," he said.

"Have you any carrier pigeons left?"

"One was all I could sneak in," Long Tom confessed. "I was lucky to get away with that one. I had the darn cuss in a box with some clothes wrapped around it, and the bird kept cooing. I had to pretend I had hiccups and asthma, so that I made the same sounds."

HALF an hour later, Doc Savage said, "You two remain here. When I whistle a short and a long, repeated, rush in and do what you can. But if there is no whistle"—the bronze man put his hands on their arms to emphasize this—"do not try to help. Keep under cover, no matter how much excitement you hear."

Long Tom nodded.

Doc finished, "And if you hear a series of very short whistles, do more than stay under cover—get off the

island. Go for help."

"Right," Long Tom agreed.

The bronze man left them there, flat among bushes in the far-flung shadow—it was well along in the afternoon—of the one building on the island that had any size. He crawled toward the structure.

The size of the half-ruined building was deceptive; from a distance it looked huge, medieval, romantic. At closer range, however, the thing was evident as what it was, an attempt at a feudal castle which had failed.

Not even the outer walls were fully completed, or possibly a storm had knocked down the battlements at one point, which was on the east. There had been a moat, but now this was a ditch in which there was sand, weeds, brackish green water.

Doc got down into the moat, listened, heard nothing, went on. He clambered through the gap in the walls—and was discovered.

The guard's expression was completely blank. He had been standing behind a wall, and he had made no sound. He had stepped out without expecting anything. And come face to face with Doc Savage, but a little over arm length away.

Doc half turned his head, acted as if addressing someone behind him.

"Bodine," he said, "here is the guard."

The guard had his mouth open to yell an alarm, and nothing on earth—not the fastest jump Doc could have made at him—would have kept the sound inside him. But he closed his mouth. He moved his head a little, looking for Bodine. That gave Doc a chance.

They went down heavily, and loose rocks ground together under them as they struggled. It would not have been much of a fight, except for the need for silence. It is hard to overcome a man and do it silently.

Doc finally got his hands on the neck nerve centers, so that after a minute or so the fellow was still. Doc lifted and carried him outside, among the bushes.

Doc then returned to Long Tom and the girl. The bronze man picked up one of the equipment cases which they had brought, and beckoned Long Tom and the young woman. He guided them to the senseless guard.

"We oughta tie up that guy," Long Tom whispered.

"On the contrary," Doc said, "you will sit here, both of you, until he regains his senses. Then you will let him escape."

"Escape?" Long Tom stared.

"Let him get away," Doc said, "and be sure that he escapes in the direction of his friends."

Long Tom was puzzled, but he nodded. He found rocks less uncomfortable than the others for himself and the girl, and sat down. They were waiting when the bronze man left them.

Doc opened the equipment case, took out a metal container and unscrewed the top. The contents were sand-colored beads that might have been puffed-grain breakfast food, as far as appearance was concerned. Wet padding kept them moist.

He spread these behind him, scattering them widely, being careful to drop none. Their dampness disappeared quickly in the sun, and they were hardly noticeable against the sand and stone.

He kept spreading the things behind him as he went. After he was in the intact part of the old building, he spread them all across the hall floors.

He came finally to a door behind which there was a musical sound like the high string of a violin vibrating steadily.

He avoided the door, found a way outside, and located a window. He had one of his periscope devices—he kept extras in the supplies—and he used that on the window. It gave him a good view.

It was a huge room. The impractical designer of the place must have intended it to be a kind of feudal banquet room, a central chamber which would dwarf all other rooms in the place. The great chamber was in fairly good condition, which probably was why they were using it.

More than a dozen prisoners—Bodine's men—were lined up along one wall, where there was a series of supporting posts. Each man was tied to a post.

Centrally located in the room and supporting the roof were three larger columns. To one of these was tied a big man, who stood there in a bloat-cheeked rage, and Cy, who showed signs of conflict and was only partly conscious.

To a second column Johnny and Renny were lashed. Monk, very pink and very indignant, had a column to himself. There was a man on the floor near Monk's feet, with one side of his face peeled and his nose leaking a string of scarlet. Most of the hide was off Monk's left-hand set of knuckles.

The most interesting object in the place, however, was the machine they had set up to the left, near a window in which the panes were still intact.

It was a complicated gadget, and it looked doubly so because of having been transplanted from Peter Harland's laboratory and quickly assembled. There were transformers and high-frequency coils, vacuum bulbs and three generators—the latter very small considering the bulk of the rest of the equipment, and operating from storage batteries.

Suspended by a long handle—the device was so heavy and the handle so long that two men had to manage it—was a complicated thing which seemed to be mostly wire and quartz. This contraption looked impressive, because it was surrounded with a weird electric blue corona in which there was a smaller corona of changing shape and color.

All controls seemed to be centered in one spot, and the man who stood there was obviously Peter Harland.

Peter Harland was a wreck. Some of his fingernails were missing, and his face showed where it had been burned with cigarettes. Both eyes were black, lips cut, one tooth was missing. *He was not pink.*

He stood there manipulating the machine with a kind of frightened intensity.

They were moving the gadget of wire and quartz back and forth over a wooden table. On the table lay the pink man who had pretended to be Peter Harland.

No one was saying anything. Everyone stared at the machine, at the man on the table.

There were objects scattered around on the floor that were different colors. There was a gun that was perfectly white, and a coat that was blue, weirdly blue. The wooden table itself was several colors, mostly shades of pink.

The pink man was slowly turning white. He had his legs thrust under a rope, and his hands gripped the edges of the table.

"Shut it of!" he croaked suddenly. Chet Farmer grinned.

Peter Harland moved a switch. The man sat up on the table and eyed his hands, and Chet Farmer watched him.

"Listen," he said, "a guy who gets in this thing should take gas, or something. Damn!"

He examined his hands some more, then frowned at his bare legs.

"Give us a little brown color," he said. "Make it look like I've got a sun tan."

He lay back, and the machine resumed its whine. The man turned slightly tan.

"O. K.," he said. Once more he scrutinized himself. Then he glanced at Peter Harland. "All right. You did a better job on me than you did on yourself."

His hair was the same shade of brown as his skin. And the same thing was true of Peter Harland.

The man asked, "What about my hair? Will it ever get its normal color?"

"Your natural color will probably grow back."

Chet Farmer poked the man in the chest. "All right now," Chet said. "We've done our part. You do yours, Bodine."

Bodine—the one who had pretended to be Harland was evidently Bodine—seemed uneasy. "I—well, is it a smart thing to do before we catch Savage?"

Chet Farmer cursed him. "Smart or not, you hop to it! The agreement was this: We take that pink color out of you. You knock off Doc Savage's men for us."

Bodine groaned. "All right," he said.

"And then you clear out."

"And then I clear out." Bodine seemed completely defeated.

CHET FARMER seemed to get a great deal of pleasure out of the other's abasement. He leered cheerfully. "You rat!" he said. "If you hadn't tried to hog this, we could have been partners."

Bodine said nothing, and his silence irritated Farmer.

Suddenly Farmer grinned.

"Bring that stuff they got off the truck," he ordered. While three men were obeying the command, Farmer poked Bodine in the ribs gleefully. "Know you'll want to see how your pet idea works out."

It was hard for Doc Savage to tell what they dumped on the table. The objects were very small, dark. There was a surprisingly small mound of them.

Chet Farmer picked up several of the objects.

"Black diamonds," he said. "Used to point drills and for cutting surfaces in machine tools." He eyed Bodine. "What would you say they were worth, the way they are now, Bodine?"

"I don't know," Bodine muttered.

"Make a guess, pal."

"A few thousand dollars," Bodine said gloomily.

"Worth a few thousand when they are black—but what would you say if we can turn them into blue-white gems?"

Bodine glowered.

Chet Farmer stalked over. "Answer me, you dope! What'll they be worth if we can make them blue-whites?"

Bodine said, "A few hundred thousand, probably."

Chet Farmer laughed. He laughed so long and so heartily that there was a kind of madness in his mirth. When he sobered, it was suddenly. He whirled on Peter Harland.

"Will it work?" he demanded.

Peter Harland shrugged. "I do not know."

"Why the hell don't you?" Farmer glared at him.

Peter Harland's gesture was weary. "You must understand that I have experimented hardly at all with this process. In fact, I discovered it by accident the same night that I was myself a victim of the thing. I was trying to work out a method of putting fast, unfadable colors in plastic materials. I was doing the research for my company. They were financing me. In fact, the process really belongs to my company."

Chet Farmer laughed harshly. "It belongs to the guy who has got it," he said. "And that guy—"

He meant himself, of course, but he never got to explain that point. Because out in the sunlight, on the other side of the ruin, the lookout—the man who had been knocked out by Doc Savage and left with Long Tom and Ham and the girl with orders that they should release him—let out a series of howls for help.

"Savage is out here!" he bellowed.

THE effect of the shout on Chet Farmer was strange. He looked incredulous. Then instinct asserted itself, and he took a few hasty jumps in the opposite direction. Then he caught himself, and covered his instinctive retreat by snarling, "Gimme your gun!" at one of his men.

To the others, he bellowed, "Get out there! Everybody! If Savage is here, he came alone—he works that way."

This last piece of information was probably jerked out of his mind to encourage his men.

There was a general rush, a milling mêlée, and the room emptied of everyone except prisoners—someone conveniently slammed Bodine on the head, dropping him unconscious, and another man slugged Peter Harland.

Chet Farmer made for the window. The same window at which Doc Savage was watching, which ordinarily would have been a good move of retreat. Doc withdrew his periscope device. Chet Farmer did not look out of the window. He put his feet out with the intention of dropping, and Doc leaped, grabbed his ankle and yanked him.

The breath went out of Farmer when he hit the ground. His knowledge of what was happening left him when Doc Savage landed a fist on his jaw in front of and below the ear.

Doc leaped, caught the window sill. He swung inside. Everyone in the big room was tied with rope, and Monk, the instant he saw Doc Savage, barked, "Doc, there's a big sharp knife under that table!"

The knife was there. Doc slashed Monk free, jammed the knife in his hand, said, "Get the others loose."

The bronze man himself dashed after the men who had answered the alarm outside. He had the case containing the stuff that looked like puffed breakfast food. He found a hall.

He spread the things over the corridor floor for some yards, retreating back toward the big room as he did so.

Out in the sunlight, there was an explosion. A man screamed. There were other blasts. They sounded about like shotguns, perhaps a trifle louder. Mixed in with the reports was a shriek started by one man and ended by another.

Monk joined Doc Savage. Behind him, big-fisted Renny Renwick was rubbing his wrists and saying, "Holy cows!" and other things in a tone that was like cannonading in distance.

Monk listened to another explosion. "Nice," he said.

He looked into the container at the puffed-breakfast-foodlike substance which remained.

"Workin' swell, ain't it?" he added.

Johnny came up. He carried the big knife, looked bloodthirsty. "I'll be superamalgamated!" he said. "What's making the firecracker noises?"

Monk said, "An explosive I invented. In little pellets. Goes off when you step on 'em."

Johnny peered into the container. "This stuff? It looks like puffed wheat."

"See the damp pads?" Monk exhibited the pads in the container. "They're wet, but not with water. With chemicals. As long as the pellets are damp with certain chemical fumes, they won't explode. But the second they dry off, and it don't take over a couple of seconds, either, they're as touchy as rotten eggs."

There were more explosions, more shrieks. Men came rushing back in retreat. Other blasts stopped them. "You mean they're stepping on that stuff and it's exploding?" Renny demanded.

Monk said, "If they ain't, my ears are deceiving me."

The homely chemist went down the corridor cautiously, watching the floor, and making sure that no one

got a chance to take a shot at him.

"Bring that poison gas over here!" Monk roared. "There's a draft in this hall. It will carry the gas right to them." He turned and winked, added, "Be sure you get the *poison* gas. The heck with that other stuff."

Monk had never held any great regard for the truth.

He listened to distressed squallings from down the corridor.

He winked again.

"They want to surrender," he said.

DOC SAVAGE had an elaborate organization for the career which he followed, and one of the least-known parts of it was the unusual "college" which he maintained in a wilderness section of upstate New York. At this college he maintained a staff of men trained by himself, and to the place he sent such criminals as he caught. A course in the college was unusual—the enrollee first received, whether willing or not, an intricate brain operation which wiped out all memory of the past. Following this, the student was taught a trade, and taught to hate crime. Graduates knew nothing of their past, were good citizens, equipped for making a living in an increasingly technical civilization.

Because the existence of the "college" was completely secret, Doc Savage had some difficulty explaining to Peter and Lada Harland what was happening to the prisoners—Chet Farmer, Bodine, Cy and the others—without revealing the truth.

The prisoners were being ferried ashore, placed in ambulances, and the Harlands were curious.

Peter Harland saw that the bronze man was reluctant.

"My guess is that whatever you are doing is probably good for them," he said. "I'm not going to ask any more questions."

Doc changed the subject. He asked, "How did you come out with Monk? Get his natural color back?"

"Fairly well," Harland said. "Eyes and hair and teeth are not natural, exactly. However, we did do very well with the teeth. We discovered that an ordinary lead shield will stop the coloring effect, so that we were able to make his teeth white."

Doc said, "I am anxious to go over that device. It opens a new field for scientific research."

Peter Harland looked uncomfortable. "That very point was on my mind."

"How do you mean?"

Harland rubbed his forehead slowly. "To be frank, I do not think—well, I wish I had never found that damned thing." He became animated, concerned. "Do you realize what it means? It will wipe out whole industries—the dye industry, for instance. And those diamonds—I hate to think of what will happen to the diamond market if you can start making commercial black diamonds into white or blue-white stones that are worth hundreds of dollars a carat."

"What would you suggest?"

Harland hesitated. "The thing might undergo more experimentation. And eventually be introduced

gradually, so as not to affect employment."

"It might."

"Would . . . would you be interested in taking control of the thing, to prevent something like this thing we've just gone through?"

Doc Savage nodded. "We might work that out," he agreed.

Monk was trying to work out something, too, but along different lines. Along the lines of Lada Harland. She had very good lines, too. Her brother had done his best with the color-change gadget, and the result was a delightful honey blonde. Ravishing was the word.

The fly in the ointment was Ham. Ham seemed to have the same ideas as Monk.

Concerning Monk, Ham said, "That homely missing link! That accident of nature, His feet are so big"—Ham groped for a suitable comparison—"that it looks as if half his legs were bent under."

Monk overheard that. He said, "One of these days I'm gonna dance on your grave."

"That's great," Ham said. "I'll see if they won't bury me at sea."

THE END