



THE MONKEY SUIT

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I

THIS one was an old-school-pal-wants-a-favor case.

“Henry, you’re my godsend!” he kept howling through the telephone. “I’ll be right over! You’re a godsend, my reliable old pal! I’ll be right there!”

Probably he was Dido Alstrong. He sounded the way Dido Alstrong would sound after these few years, if Dido was scared.

The Alstrongs had been a prosperous, grasping sort a family, well-established for a couple of generations in the middle-sized Missouri town of Kirksville where I grew up. Dido was doubtless born short, chubby, eager, pushy, with a round face and a full-lipped mouth. I’m not too positive how he looked at birth, because he was a year older than I—and he kept these features. By the time he attained eighteen, Dido had indicated he was of Alstrong pattern—he definitely preferred grabbing to earning, bluff to earnest effort.

At eighteen, when they graduated him from high school to get rid of him, old man Alstrong was getting worried about the kid. I was already in my fourth year at Missouri University, and old Alstrong told me—he didn’t ask—that he was depending on me to be Dido’s shining light. Dido took to that. He signed up for the courses I was taking when he could, mooched off my examination papers, cheated when he dared, and surprisingly enough, got by. I was specializing in electronics and chemistry, so he did that too. He got me in bad odor a few times with his grabbing at my brains, and when I got out of M. U. and went to Cal Tech to specialize, I was glad to be rid of him. I hadn’t seen Dido since.

But this had been Dido Alstrong on the phone. Mouthy, with a high-pitched squeal of a voice, a way of using the squeal as if he were having trouble with another pig.

I wondered what he thought I had that he wanted. He must have wanted it badly, the way he had sounded.

The lab clock said ten-forty. Dido Alstrong had stated he was calling from a drug store on Fifth Avenue. He had also said—five times, at least—that he'd be right up. New York City transportation being good, and Dido a quick one on the grab, he would doubtless be here soon.

I hoped so. I had a luncheon appointment with an eminent chemist, a Mr. Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, and it was important to me. This Mayfair had developed a solvent for light-transmitting plastics that was out of this world. I needed the use-rights on that formula.

The Mayfair fellow, as everyone knew, was affiliated with Doc Savage, whom I had never met but of whom I had certainly heard. Mayfair, an excellent chemist, preferred adventuring with Savage to working at his profession, so he was constantly in financial straits. Usually broke. I hoped to lease use-rights on the solvent formula from him for the modest sum I could afford.

The thing that bothered me about this Mayfair person was an attitude he had manifested toward me. He had inferred, if that is the word, that I was a stuffed shirt, and that I fancied myself as a boy-wonder.

Mr. Mayfair seemed rather an oaf.

But I would try being more polite to him than I intended being to Dido Alstrong.

HE hadn't changed. He was an Alstrong, with that acquisitive mouth and the pushing ways.

"H'ar yuh, Henry, you mental wizard!" he came in squealing. "H'ar yuh, old school pal!"

"Good morning, Alstrong," I said stiffly.

"Henry, you haven't changed a bit!"

"Nor have you, Mr. Alstrong," I replied. He hadn't either, except to become a bit more repulsive.

"Where 'ja get that Mr. Alstrong stuff?" he howled. "Henry, old pal!"

My reserved smile was intended to be a warning. I didn't intend to start calling him Dido, and the old pal stuff was quite repellant.

Dido didn't press for intimacy. He glanced about my laboratory, then burst forth in boisterous admiration.

"Some diggings, Henry!" he shouted. "By God, this is about as snitzy a layout of laboratory equipment as I've run across. Who you working for here?"

The inference was plain. He considered me to be so mouse-like that I would be forever working for the other fellow.

"I'm self-employed." My tone was stiff. "This happens to be my own establishment."

"The hell you say!" Dido roared. "Say, now, that's something! Looks as if you're doing all right for yourself, boy, old pal."

"I'm fumbling along."

He was shaking his head wonderingly. "Doing research for yourself, eh? Now that sure surprises me." His greedy little eyes appraised me thoughtfully. "Maybe you *have* changed, at that."

"In what way?"

He roared at this. "Man, I figured you would always be the unsung genius, without enough push to capitalize on your own brains. Maybe I was wrong."

He wasn't wrong, and I did a burn. I recognize my shortcomings, and they are painful to me.

"Genius," I said rigidly, "comes from the Latin *gignere*, and means a demon, a peculiar character, an elemental spirit of fire or water, a guide, a godling dwelling in a place, as well as uncommon native intellectual power."

Dido let out a whoop. "By golly! By golly, you still say things like that, don't you? You haven't changed so much!"

THE fellow was upsetting me. He always did. But the irritation wasn't extensive enough to dull my wits, and I could see that he was quite frightened about something. I was remembering back to our university days—Dido always had a whooping, boisterous, overbearing manner, but it was particularly accented when he was in a scrape. I determined not to let him roil me excessively.

I consulted the clock elaborately and remarked, "It's been interesting meeting you, Mr. Alstrong. But unfortunately you have caught me at a rather busy time."

He ignored this hint for him to go. He would. "You're a sight for these sore old eyes, Henry! By God, I've often thought of you. Do you remember the time at the university that I was out with that blonde, and I told her I was you, and she was just tight enough not to know the difference, and the next day—"

"Really!" I said sharply. "I'm afraid I haven't the time to listen to you—er—reminisce. Some other occasion, perhaps."

"You mean you got an appointment?" he demanded.

"Well—yes."

"When? What time?"

"Noon," I was forced to confess. "But I must prepare my arguments thoroughly so that—"

"Hell, you got over an hour!" Dido bellowed. "This won't take that long."

"Well, I—"

"That's great!" he shouted—ignoring my reluctance, and giving the impression I had consented when nothing of the sort had happened. "I knew you would," he added.

"Would what?" I asked bitterly.

"Help me out."

"I—ah—believe you did mention a favor," I ventured. And then I added pointedly, "A trifling favor."

Dido nodded, his round little chin disappearing into his roundish neck as he did so. "That's it, Henry," he said. "Just a trifling favor. No trouble at all. But it means a lot to me."

His tone, coupled with what I knew of his ways, warned me that it wasn't anything trivial at all.

"If it's money—" I began coldly.

He let go another whoop at that. And he yelled, "Pal you *haven't* changed. I'll bet you are as big a skinflint with a dollar as you ever were!"

"I'm no skinflint!" I snapped. "You always did confuse sensible economy with penuriousness."

"Henry," he said, "who are you kidding? Getting a nickel out of you was always just about as easy as taking the skin off a flint rock. What does skinflint mean?"

Somewhat relieved, but quite disgusted with him, I asked, "It isn't money you want?"

"Money?" He pushed out his lips like a baby spitting out its milk. "Henry, I've got a big deal on. In a few days, I'll be in a position to loan *you* money. You and J. P. Morgan. Right now, I've got all the dough I need, too."

"Well!" I said. This was the first time I'd ever heard Dido Alström intimate that he didn't need money. I was indeed relieved.

"Get your hat!" Dido said, suddenly taking advantage of the momentary magnanimity I felt upon discovering this was not a case of the bite. "We'll have this over with in a jiffy."

"Oh, now! I haven't time—"

"Look, Henry, all we do is walk downstairs and take a cab a couple of blocks. That's all. Your arm isn't going to drop off or anything, and it won't cost you. I'll even pay the cab fare."

"In that case," I advised him unwillingly, "I can spare not more than ten minutes."

Dido Alström seemed quite satisfied. It had always been his way, once he had achieved a point, to be a little nasty about what had led up to it, and he was so now. He said, "Henry, don't you ever want to have a friend?"

"I have friends," I said sharply.

He shot a glance at me. "Name one!"

He had the worst way of discomfiting a person. I had friends, several very nice ones, scientific people of high caliber. But for the life of me, at the moment I couldn't think of the name of one.

"Don't be ridiculous," I parried coolly. "What are you getting at?"

He shrugged. "Skip it." What he had been getting at, of course, was to indicate that he was aware of my dislike, and had some preposterous notion of intimating that this was my shortcoming, not his.

He clapped his hat, a garish tweed-felt affair with a yellow feather cocked in the band, on his head. I got my own dark Homburg, and advised Miss Lucy Jenkins, my lab assistant, that I was stepping out for a bit.

Dido Alström seemed amused by Miss Lucy Jenkins—as amused as his undercurrent of fright would

permit. While Lucy may be forty-five, and not a beauty, she is certainly precise and efficient.

“That babe's as homely as a mud fence, Henry,” Dido remarked when we were in the hall. “Doesn't having scenery like that around depress you?”

“Certainly not!”

He punched the elevator call-button, looked at me speculatively, and said, “I guess not. I guess you wouldn't even know when you were depressed.”

“What are you doing with yourself these days, Dido?” I inquired. “You didn't follow up chemistry, of course.”

“I sure did,” he replied. “I'm laboratory chief for Farrar Products.”

“I don't believe I have heard of the firm,” I said.

“You should get around more, Henry. Farrar Products is on the way up. We're in the plastic packaging field, and doing well.”

My slightly superior smile suddenly folded up—I had remembered that I *had* heard of Farrar Products and the concern was, as Dido said, an up-and-comer. Really, nothing occurred to me to say as we got into the elevator. That this bombastic goof could have achieved the post of laboratory chief for such a concern was incredible.

We were jostled out of the elevator into the lobby by the other passengers, or at least I was jostled, although Dido held his own.

It was raining outside. A slight, depressing sort of rain, it came down in soiled strings. We stood under the shelter of the awning of a shop, along with others, and Dido searched eagerly for a taxi.

Something rather odd happened.

A portly gentleman, standing a bit behind Dido and myself, and just out of line with Dido, gave out a sound. It was a sound like a boot being pulled out of mud. There was also another sound, rather as if one of the strings on a musical instrument had broken. And the stout man flung himself backward, or at least toppled back, against the shop window. The window broke. There was a considerable jangling of falling glass. All of this occurred rapidly, so that it was almost one thing, without exactly being so.

The effect on Dido Alström was remarkable. He turned the color of a much-used dish-rag.

Chapter II

“OH, GOD!” Dido Alström croaked. He gripped my arm. “Back inside!”

“Back—” I said uncertainly. “But we were going somewhere. You wanted a cab. Yonder seems to be an empty taxi—”

Dido seized me in the most unceremonious manner. He hustled me back into the office building. I abhor rough physical contacts, and I resisted. But there was more strength in Dido Alström's soft-looking porcine body than one would think. That, and also frenzy.

The other people standing there under the awning were staring in confused fashion at the portly man, who

now lay on the sidewalk. The portly man was squirming about, and his mouth was making shapes, but no sounds.

“What—” I tried to assemble composure. “What happened to that chap?”

There were beads of sweat on Dido Alstrong's aggressive face. “That guy . . . ?” He hesitated. “He probably had a heart attack, or something,” Dido said.

“Really? It seemed very sudden—”

“Never mind that guy,” Dido said, and his voice was thickly grating with excitement. “I—I've changed my mind, Henry. I—well—I was just reminded of something.”

I had a feeling of relief. “You mean you don't want me to do the favor for you?”

“Oh, no! No, Henry. What I mean—I just realized I shouldn't take you from your work. Here's what I want you to do: I want you to get a package and keep it for me.”

“Package?” I said. “What sort of a—”

“Here!” He jammed a shiny metal key into my hand. “There! That's the key to one of those package lockers in Grand Central Station. It's the locker in the men's room in the upper level. You can find them easy enough. The locker number, forty-one, is on the key. The package is there. I want you to get it for me and keep it in a safe place.”

I asked blankly, “You merely want me to keep a package for you?”

“That's it. You get the packet any time you want to, as long as it's sometime today.”

“But why—”

“Look, Henry, all you need to do is get it and keep it for me. It's just a little favor. You see, I may want it late at night, and I'm afraid the place where the lockers are will be closed.”

Dido was a very terrified man.

I said, “I'm under the impression the gentlemen's lavatory in Grand Central Station is open for business twenty-four hours of the day.”

That didn't stump him, for he said, “I—uh—may have to leave town a few days, Henry. I don't want to leave the package there that long. Ah—for all I know, they may take that stuff out and sell it for storage after a few days.”

“I don't believe they do.”

Dido Alstrong whipped a handkerchief from his hip pocket and blotted his face. It was not a hot day. “Hell, Henry, stop arguing with me. You've got the key. You get the package.”

“What's in it?” I demanded.

He gripped my arm. “Henry, if anything should happen to me—Er, that is, if you don't hear from me in three days—you give that package to a policeman.”

“Great Scott!” I blurted. “Dido, I'll have nothing to do with anything underhanded—”

“Thanks, Henry,” exclaimed Dido Alstrong.

He gave me a clap on the back which he probably considered hearty, but which I found most distasteful.

“You're dependable, Henry,” he said.

And he darted into one of the shops which had an entrance into the building lobby, and also an exit into a side street.

MY confusion was, to say the least, considerable, but it was exceeded by my misgivings. The temptation to follow Dido Alstrong, collar him, and demand fuller and more logical explanations, was very strong. But, as I have mentioned, I abhor harshness of the man-to-man sort, and also I didn't want to give Dido the satisfaction of seeing me confused. He had always seemed to derive pleasure from seeing me confused.

Compromising in a measure, I returned to the street, at the same time summoning my dignity, which Dido had shoved out of kilter.

Now a tightly packed cluster of pedestrians surrounded the portly man who'd, as Dido Alstrong had put it, had a heart attack. These people were like worker and drone bees around their queen bee. I was unable to obtain a glimpse of the portly man, although it was simple to gather that he lay on the sidewalk.

My curiosity, while intense, was not sufficient to give me the brashness necessary to push my way to the unfortunate fellow. It goes against my grain to elbow and shove people, although they seldom have such scruples about me. This was none of my business anyway.

I did, however, walk to the corner, and glance down the side street. Sure enough, there was Dido Alstrong. He was walking rapidly and, had he kept going out of sight, I might have dropped the matter. But he did not.

He turned into a cocktail bar.

There, I realize now, I made my second serious mistake. The first error was in ever permitting Dido Alstrong to call on me. With my hand on the key Dido had given me, which was in my coat pocket, I strode to the cocktail place and, after hesitating several times, ventured inside.

I immediately had two emotions. Delight that I had come. And disgust that Dido Alstrong should have an acquaintance with such a lovely girl.

It was a satisfaction, though, to note that this wonderful creature was giving Dido a piece of her mind.

This girl was a middling-sized butterfly girl, all liveliness and glow, with aquamarine eyes, a roguish little retroussé nose, and a skin that the sun must have loved kissing. Nature surely had turned handsprings after creating her.

She was pointing a finger at Dido Alstrong's bulbous dough-like nose and speaking sharply.

I ventured closer.

She was speaking as follows: “The only thing that got me out in this rain was your promise to buy me lunch at the Colony, and take me to that matinee. Now you say it's off. I don't like it.”

“Babe,” said Dido Alstrong. “I'm sorry. I'm sorry up to here. But I can't go. I tell you, my uncle in Kansas just died, and I've got to fly out there.”

The way Dido called her “babe” imbued me with a wish to hit him over the head.

I didn't, naturally.

And the girl seemed mollified. “I'm sorry about, your uncle in Kansas, too, of course—if you have one,” she said.

“Lila, I would give anything if I could entertain you, but I can't,” Dido assured her. “It's out of the question. In fact, I've got to run now. My plane leaves in an hour.”

She eyed him. She has his number, I thought.

“Mind if I ride out to the airport with you, Dido?” she asked.

“Uh—no need of that,” he said hurriedly. “I'll be tearing around. Not good company.” He chuckled her under the chin. “Remember me as I am now, toots. Fond of you as anything.”

“Well. . . . You'll wire me, of course?”

“I'll sure try,” he promised. “You know I'll tear my head off to do that. Well—goodbye, Lila.”

“Goodbye, Dido,” she said.

“A lil' kiss, huh, Lila?” he asked brazenly.

She shook her head. “After you bury your uncle, maybe,” she said dryly.

With that, they parted. She remained. Dido Alstrong wheeled and strode out—I had moved a bit to one side, the interior of the cocktail place was inadequately lighted as such establishments usually are, and Dido Alstrong obviously did not notice me.

I stood there after Dido had gone, and presently something happened to me, and I made what I consider to be my third large mistake.

VERILY, I do not understand my behavior. From youth I have been condemned to be an introverted sort of an individual, although I have long since ceased to consider it a matter of being condemned, but rather one of being blessed. We who are inward souls develop the greatest minds, I am convinced. But the point I am making is that I have been plagued always by thoughts, impulses, emotions, which must be repressed, and sometimes it is quite difficult to repress them, particularly when they concern women. I am, as a rule, quite successful, though. I would not permit myself to be fresh with a young one of the opposite sex, although the yen to do so might be a large one. I am uniformly polite, well-mannered, and speak along intelligent lines, when dealing with the other sex. I have never picked up a girl.

It was not like me, not at all like me, to find myself standing beside the chair at which this delightful girl, Lila, had seated herself in a piqued way.

“Oaf,” I stated, “derives from the Icelandic *alfr*, meaning an elf's child, a deformed or foolish child, a simpleton, or changeling, left by goblins on one's doorstep.”

She stared up at me. Much, I suppose, as if a pink-striped toad had hopped into her lap.

“Will you,” she said, “do it again?”

“I—ah—refer to Dido.”

“Oh.”

“I—er—am probably upset,” I said lamely.

“You're acquainted with Dido Alstrong?” she inquired.

“I am his pal,” I explained bitterly. “I'm afraid that I am making a spectacle of myself. I don't understand why I am. I don't, usually, so I suppose this comes under the heading of an irresistible impulse of an unorthodox nature.”

She considered this, shook her head, and remarked, “I was aware that Dido had a circle of rather unusual acquaintances, so I don't suppose I should be too surprised.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“Me?”

“Yes, thank you,” I said.

This didn't make sense to her. Nor did it to me. I was rather afloat on my emotions, but I was utterly delighted, in an ashamed sort of way, that I had dared converse with her.

“Is this,” she asked thoughtfully, “one of Dido's gags?”

“No! Oh, I assure you, no!” I exclaimed. “It was utterly my own idea.”

“So it's an idea,” she said rather coolly.

I believe the phrase is brush-off. I was going to be brushed off. I could see it coming.

“Dido has no uncle in Kansas!” I blurted wildly. “He is from Missouri. All his uncles are there. They are all in the town of Kirksville, Missouri, and a very greedy lot they are.”

This verbal imbecility intrigued her. I was most relieved and, since I had not planned to speak thus—indeed, I had no real idea of how to get and hold a beautiful girl's attention—I was rather inclined to feel that my subconscious had stood staunchly by me, and delivered in this pinch.

“This,” she said, “sounds as if it might have its points. Sit down.”

I sat down. I couldn't have managed much more alacrity.

“And,” she added, “you can buy me a drink.”

While I do not drink intoxicating beverages, I have been stuck with enough checks to know that the potions they served in places like this come very high indeed. This never entered my mind, however.

“Delighted!” I gasped.

“Who are you?” she wished to know.

“Henry,” I said.

“You would be,” she decided, “if you're not kidding. Is your name really Henry?”

“Yes indeed. Henry Jones.”

She frowned. “Don't overdo it.”

“Henry Alcibiades Ephraim Jones,” I said miserably. “I can't help it.”

She looked as if she wished to laugh, and presently did so, adding, “I don't get it, but if it's a rib, I'll go along for what it's worth.”

The waiter came. Those hawks are always at one's elbow in the high-priced places, I have noticed. She ordered a daiquiri, and I requested buttermilk.

“Buttermilk?” she remarked.

“It's healthful,” I explained lamely.

AT this juncture, my memory recovered sufficiently to remind me that I had an appointment with the chemist, Mr. Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. Realizing how important a matter this was to me, it seemed best to notify Miss Lucy Jenkins where I might be found. Accordingly, excusing myself to the beautiful girl, I made a telephone call to my laboratory.

Disapproval was noticeable in Lucy Jenkins' voice when she learned I was in a rum hole. She could not, of course, know that it was a very glorified and expensive one.

“Just a moment, Henry,” said Lucy Jenkins, and she spoke to someone. Then she informed me, “He says he'll join you and hoist one before lunch.”

“Who?” I gasped.

“Mr. Andrew Blodgett Mayfair.”

“Oh, great governor, is he there already?”

“Not now,” said Lucy Jenkins. “He just went out the door. He's on his way.” It was evident that she shared my misgivings about the cultural level of Mr. Mayfair.

Returning to the lovely lady, I explained sadly, “I am afraid another is going to join us. I trust you won't mind.”

“Another friend of Dido's?” she inquired.

“Oh, no!”

“A friend of yours?”

“Well—slightly a business acquaintance.”

“And what,” she asked without embarrassment, “might your business be?”

I told her the truth. “At present, I am developing the refining properties of lithium in nonferrous alloys.”

“You don't say,” she said, and took a quick sip of her drink. Her lovely eyes twinkled.

Mr. Mayfair arrived with unwelcome promptness.

He did not take one look at my companion. He took several.

“Hubba, hubba,” he said. “Could it be that I have underestimated you, Henry?”

Lila was inspecting Mr. Mayfair in amazement. Perhaps I should explain why: Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, while he might be a renowned chemist, gave no outward signs of brains whatever. He was short, and nearly wide enough to need to be careful to dash through doors edgewise, and there did not seem to be an ounce of anything but muscle on him. He was covered with wiry hair like shingle-nails, rusty ones. His face was something that must have terrified his mother and given his father pause.

“This gentleman,” I explained to Lila, “is an eminent chemist.”

“This is very interesting,” Lila remarked gaily. “I’m glad I stayed.”

Monk Mayfair snatched out a chair and seated himself beside her. “I’m glad you stayed too, honey,” he said.

She laughed. I did not understand why.

“You I understand,” she said to Mr. Mayfair.

Mr. Mayfair now turned to me, and he said, “I tell you what, Henry, let’s talk about our business tomorrow. You’re a busy man. Why don’t you run along to your laboratory.”

“Ridiculous!” I exclaimed. “I haven’t even broached the subject I wished to discuss with Miss Lila—er—”

“Lila Farrar,” she said.

I am not obtuse. Lila Farrar, she had said. That obnoxious Dido Alström had boasted of being laboratory chief for Farrar Products, and since her name was Farrar, the connection was obvious. She was the daughter of Dido’s boss. Dido was just the kind of a reprobate to try to grab off the boss’ daughter.

“What,” asked Miss Lila Farrar, eyeing me, “was your matter, Henry?”

“A package,” I said, “that Dido Alström wishes me to keep.”

Monk Mayfair asked, “Who’s Dido Alström, Henry?”

I tried to think of a description of Dido.

“Leech,” I said, “denotes a surgeon, the edge of a sail, a cure, a veterinarian, and a carnivorous bloodsucking worm of the class Hirudinea.”

“Huh?” Mayfair’s mouth fell open.

Lila Farrar examined me with a degree of thoughtfulness. “Wisdom,” she remarked, “can come in odd packages.”

Mr. Mayfair closed his mouth, but opened it again to inquire,

“What was that you started to say about a package, Henry?”

It occurred to me that I would prefer not to discuss Dido Alström’s package with him. It was none of

Mr. Mayfair's concern. But I had started the subject, and I was at a loss how to evade.

I was spared the necessity of evasion, because just then our genteel rum hole was held up by robbers.

Chapter III

THE brigands numbered two. One was slight, one less so, and shorter. They lost no time stating their purpose.

“You plutocrats!” one screamed. He was the shorter one. He used this phrase to get everyone's attention at once, it was obvious. He succeeded.

“This is a heist!” he yelled additionally. “And in case you stinking rich blank-blanks don't know what a heist is, it's a hold-up!”

The longer and slighter one calmly tossed a couple of chairs into the revolving door, effectively blocking entrance from the street.

“Get your hands up!” his companion shrieked.

The man was most frightening. Judging from his tone and manner, his state of mind was encroaching on madness, or he was in a crazed drug condition. Both of the rascals wore masks.

My heart stood in my throat. It was a kicking rabbit.

Lila Farrar sat with an arrested expression of surprise on her face.

Mr. Mayfair remarked, “Well, well, the day is filling up.” He didn't seem very terrified.

The short bandit swore some more oaths, terrible ones. He had two pistols, which were not large but deadly looking, and he flourished these. His companion walked behind the bar, punched keys on the cash register, and looked inside. He seemed irritated by what he found.

“Who'n hell's got the drag-roll?” he yelled. He suddenly seized a bottle, knocked one of the bartenders unconscious with it, advanced on the other bartender, screaming, “Who's got it?” The terrified flunkey mumbled words. The bandit wheeled and advanced on a too-hard-dressed man, probably the proprietor, saying, “Cough up, you!”

It dawned on me that the drag-roll must be the larger greenbacks which the proprietor personally carried in preference to letting them remain in the cash register, in case of a holdup. Reluctantly, blue-faced with a rage, the hard-clad man surrendered a large roll of currency. He also threw dreadful glances at the bartender who'd given the secret away.

The stubby thug had not cursed for a moment, but he was glaring at the customers. His eyes, small, vicious, came to rest on me. At least I presumed there must be small vicious eyes behind the mask; such people are generally supposed to be small-eyed. While I was diverted by curiosity about his eyes, the fellow emitted another of his bloodthirsty yells. He screamed, “Try to get funny, will you!”

His arm came up. His gun looked at me. It was big enough to drive a hearse through.

Mr. Mayfair said, “Yipe!” And I was suddenly flat on my back on the floor. Mr. Mayfair had done a motion with his foot, causing me to fall down.

A bullet passed. I had the distressed impression that it visited momentarily the space I had just occupied.

MR. MAYFAIR proceeded to act in an amazing fashion. It seemed that a normal man would have been stiff with terror. I was. But Mr. Mayfair apparently began enjoying himself. He emitted a spine-chilling whoop, scooped up a chair, hurled it at the gun-firing brigand. He scooted down on the floor, and upset a couple of tables—this was to produce a shower of heavy ash-trays around him. He began hurling the ash-trays with astonishing accuracy. The first one he threw knocked several teeth out of the short hold-up's mouth.

The longer bandit cried out some information to his comrade.

“Say, that guy's Monk Mayfair—one of Doc Savage's pals,” he said.

The two of them then fired their pistols, and beat a wild retreat.

Mr. Mayfair, in an utterly reckless manner, hurled another chair, a bottle, a small table. The bandits got the two chairs out of the revolving door, pushed their way through; one of them carried a chair, and after they were through, he dropped this in the door so it could not continue to revolve.

Thus Mr. Mayfair was blocked.

Howling, Mr. Mayfair proceeded to kick a whole panel of glass out of the door. He was assisted in this by two bullets which fortunately missed him.

Lila Farrar was staring at Mayfair.

“What a man!” she gasped.

I had, by this time, decided the area back of the bar would be a safe shelter. I grasped Lila's hand, and said, “Come!” urgently.

“Get up off the floor,” she said with some contempt. “They're gone.”

“They may return!” I gasped.

“If they do, they won't last long,” she replied. “That Mayfair will make believers out of them.”

Mr. Mayfair was creating a devil of a rumpus in the street. I did not venture outside, but Lila did. I gathered that the banditti had departed in an automobile which they'd had waiting, and Mr. Mayfair was searching for an unlocked car in which to pursue them. He was, evidently, unsuccessful, because presently he and Lila rejoined me. She was glancing at Mr. Mayfair with respect.

“Your friends,” said Mr. Mayfair, “have gone. You can come out from behind the bar, Henry.”

“They're no friends of mine!” I snapped.

“No?”

“No! I do not associate with such characters!”

“Well, they knew you.”

Inexplicably, I'd sort of had this impression myself. But I denied it hotly. “They couldn't! I never saw them before!”

Mr. Mayfair shook his head and made a tsk-tsk sound.

“Then why did they try to knock you off Henry?” he asked.

“Knock me off? You mean slay me?”

“Yes.”

“Ridiculous!”

“I got eyes to see with,” said Mr. Mayfair dryly. “If you ask me, they weren't real hold-ups, but just staged it in order to have an excuse to pot-shoot you.”

I must have paled. I know that I nearly fell down. My knees became as limp as fishing-worms. A profound desire to be ill beset my stomach.

“Gracious!” I said.

“I think,” remarked Mr. Mayfair, “that we should have a discussion about this, Henry.”

I said that we could go to my laboratory. It was a wonder that my voice was understandable.

I GOT stuck with the check. It was a large one, large enough that my hair stood on end slightly and my upset stomach was not soothed. The idea of paying such a price for a few sips of an unhealthful beverage was ridiculous.

Mr. Mayfair requested my laboratory room number.

“I think,” he said, “that I'll ask a couple of questions.”

“Of whom?” I demanded.

“Of anybody who looks like they might know answers,” he replied with asperity. So Lila and I went upstairs alone.

Miss Lila Farrar seemed impressed by my laboratory, and her attitude, which had chilled somewhat during my quite logical behavior in the course of the wild and woolly holdup, now warmed a bit.

She remarked that this was probably an efficient layout, adding, “But I wouldn't know. I've seen so much of laboratories in my time that at a very early age I got filled up, and decided to learn as little about them as possible.”

This was an attitude toward serious research that I have noticed before in the human female. However, it was impossible to be critical of her. She was so utterly lovely.

I inquired, and was assured it was true, that she was the daughter of the Farrar who owned Farrar Products. This verified my deductions.

Miss Lucy Jenkins, my laboratory assistant, did not evidence much approval of Lila Farrar. This seemed

mutual between them.

Mr. Mayfair returned rather sooner than I wished. Indeed, it would have been difficult to shed any tears if Mr. Mayfair had remained away permanently.

He jammed his hat on the back of his head, and twisted his homely face at me.

“You,” he said, “are a lulu.”

“I don't believe—”

“Why,” demanded Mr. Mayfair, “didn't you mention that a fat guy got shot a while ago while standing beside you?”

This was stunning news; it was quite unbelievable. “Ridiculous,” I said. “That could not be.”

“Yeah? Well, this fat guy was standing under an awning in front of this building, and a bullet hit him in the chest. A bullet from a silenced rifle, or maybe a rifle fired from inside an office across the street—anyway, there wasn't much of a shot report. And there was sure a bullet in the chubby guy.”

“The fellow who had a heart attack!” I cried.

“No, he didn't,” Mayfair replied. “The slug missed his heart by four or five inches. But it sure messed up his breathing apparatus.”

“Oh! Oh, my!”

Mayfair examined me wonderingly. “You mean,” he demanded, “to stand there with your prissy face hanging out, and tell me you didn't notice the guy was shot?”

“I—ah—” Words were burrs in my throat. There was ice-water in my veins.

“Henry,” said Mr. Mayfair, “you're an oddly unobservant guy.”

“Henry,” said Miss Lila Farrar, “is an oddly guy. Period!”

“It must be Dido Alstrong's package!” I blurted.

Chapter IV

THE gentlemen's room in Grand Central Railway Station was not doing much business.

“Put that key in your pocket, Henry,” Mr. Mayfair said. There was an expression of fierce joy and extreme suspicion of everybody on his apish face. He was enjoying this, if nobody else was. “I'm gonna case the joint before we look in that locker. They might have a reception committee here for us.”

“They? Who do you mean?”

“The holder-uppers and the fat-man-shooters, or their siblings,” he replied ferociously. And he added, “I hope! Them guys didn't give me a good chance at 'em.”

He was the most unlike a learned chemist of any I had known.

We had left Miss Farrar outside, naturally.

Enroute, they had pumped the whole story out of me, all about Dido Alstrong's unexpected entry into my life after all these years, with a demand for a favor. They had been entertained, it seemed to me, by my attitude toward Dido Alstrong, and once—much to my resentment—Mayfair had remarked, “He sounds like a guy who knows where your push-buttons are located, Henry.”

Mr. Mayfair, having skulked like a panther around the place, peering into booths in a most ungentlemanly fashion, returned.

“You're exaggerating this, Mr. Mayfair,” I suggested.

“Call me Monk, dammit,” he replied. “And it takes a bigger liar than me to exaggerate a bullet.”

“Er—I dislike nicknames. But if you insist, I will endeavor—”

“Where's the key, Henry?” he interrupted. “What's the locker number on it?”

“Forty-one,” I said, producing the key Dido Alstrong had entrusted to me.

Mr. Mayfair snatched the shiny bit of metal from me, prowled down the line of grey steel lockers, found the correct one, inserted the key, and turned his head to say, “Hold your hat, Henry. Maybe there's a nice bomb fixed up in here for you.”

A horrible thought. Not, in view of the other incidents, too unreasonable. “Wait!” I gasped wildly. “Wait! Let me get away—”

He did not wait. He turned the key, whipped open the locker door, and peered inside. He must have noticed my look—my heart had temporarily stopped functioning—because suddenly he banged a hand against the lockers with a great crash and yelled, “Boom!”

My reaction could not have been as funny as he seemed to think it was. Not possibly.

It was a box. Or presumably so, because the outlines felt like a box, cardboard, inside the heavy covering of brown wrapping paper. I have, because of my scientific work, fallen into the habit of thinking of measurements in metric terms, and this box was about five decimeters in width, one hundred and fifty centimeters in depth, and slightly less than a meter in length. Its weight, judged roughly, was about seven kilograms.

“About the size,” Mr. Mayfair remarked, “of one of them boxes the store puts your suit in when you buy one.”

“A bit heavier,” I suggested.

“Uh-huh. . . . Okay, Henry. Let's blow. And keep your eyes peeled.”

Miss Lila Farrar was waiting at a soda fountain, and a young gentleman had obviously been attempting to strike up an acquaintance with her. This fellow noticed me, and was not impressed, but then he saw Mr. Mayfair, and he literally fled.

“Wolf?” Mr. Mayfair asked suspiciously.

“Junior grade only,” admitted Miss Farrar. “So that's the package?”

Mr. Mayfair handed me the package and said grimly, “You guard Henry and the package, honey. I'm

going to follow junior grade wolf for a minute. I may test him for innocence.”

He departed. He made, undeniably, a formidable figure of a man of the more primitive sort.

Miss Farrar stared after him. “Quite,” she announced, “some guy.”

“An interesting type,” I admitted reluctantly.

“I would,” said Miss Farrar, “like to meet his chief. I’ll bet that would be something.”

“Chief?”

“Doc Savage.”

“Oh.”

“You knew Monk Mayfair is one of Doc Savage’s associates, didn’t you, Henry?” she asked.

“I—ah—believe it was mentioned.”

“I’d sure like to meet Savage,” she declared. “But there’s a fat chance, I suppose. He’s every maiden’s dream, and I wouldn’t have any such luck. My luck runs to characters like Dido.” She glanced at me as if to add, “And you,” but she didn’t.

She was starry-eyed about this Savage in a way that was revolting to me.

“I imagine,” I said coolly, “that he’s an ordinary sort.”

“What!” She stared at me. “Do you know Savage?”

“I haven’t troubled,” I said.

This was not strictly the truth. True, I hadn’t met Doc Savage, but it was because there had been no opportunity for me to do so. I must confess that there had been a time when I had considered the man a legendary figure—his work in the fields of science was supposed to be astounding—but I had heard other tales about his possessing enormous physical strength, great energy, and being precipitated into one wild adventure after another. This ruined my illusions. Excitement repels me. I detest adventures. I had never permitted myself to have one—until today—and today’s incidents were Dido Alström’s fault, not mine. I had the impression now that Savage must be a very physical man, and I abhor physicality; I was sure the reports of his amazing scientific accomplishments must be rank exaggerations.

“Henry,” said Miss Lila Farrar thoughtfully. “Are you wrong about everybody?”

“My judgment,” I assured her, “is perfect.”

She whistled. At least her delightful mouth made a whistling shape. And we did not exchange words for a while. I spent the interval wishing that she were more favorably impressed with me, or rather that her judgment of true worth in a man was more soundly developed.

“What?” she remarked presently, “do you suppose King Kong has made happen to him?”

“You—er—mean Mr. Mayfair?”

“Yep. He should be back.”

It would be quite satisfactory with me if he did not return at all.

But the lovely girl said, "I think we'd better look into this." And I, of necessity, accompanied her. I envied other men I knew their ability to take possession of a woman's interest. I should have been delighted to do this now.

We found Mr. Mayfair on his back with water being poured on his face.

THE tiled floor on which Mr. Mayfair lay was a dirty white color, and it almost exactly matched the hue of Mr. Mayfair's face. They had dragged him out of a rather dark niche in the station, and it was seltzer water they were squirting on him; a fellow from a bar was doing the squirting. Quite a crowd stood about.

Presently Mr. Mayfair regained consciousness. A quantity of seltzer water had entered his mouth and nostrils, and he erupted like a whale, spraying the bystanders. An instant later, he rolled over, doubled his fists, and mumbled, "Okay, Mabel! Okay, if you feel that way."

The man with the seltzer siphon hiccoughed. He seemed a bit intoxicated. "Hurrah for Mabel," he said.

Lila sank to her knees beside Mr. Mayfair. She inquired, "Are you all right, Monk?"

"Hell, no," he said.

"What happened?"

"I was kissed by carelessness," he replied.

"Did the junior grade—"

"Uh-huh. He did," Monk said bitterly. "With a blackjack as big as a truck tire."

Mr. Mayfair now got to his feet. In a few seconds, he was astonishingly rejuvenated. He shook his head, gasped loudly, and clutched the head with both hands, and kept the hands in place as if feeling it necessary to carry his head that way for a time. "Whoeee!" he added.

"What, may I ask, really occurred?" I inquired.

"I located the junior grade wolf, and he whopped me one," Mr. Mayfair replied.

"Was his name Mabel?"

Mr. Mayfair seemed excessively pained, but perhaps it might have been all from the knot on his head. "Mabel is a babe I know," he muttered sheepishly.

"Then," I declared in considerable alarm, "the junior grade—that chap—must have had nefarious designs on our party!"

"Put with six words where one would do—you're right," Mr. Mayfair growled.

"Incredible!"

"Just like my headache," Mr. Mayfair agreed. "Come on. Let's be on our way to further developments."

We repaired to the outdoors, but not before Mr. Mayfair told an investigating policeman the baldest kind of a lie. "I skidded and hit my head on a door," Mr. Mayfair explained, to account for his

unconsciousness.

“One should never lie to a police officer,” I advised Mr. Mayfair a bit later.

He scowled. “What should one do—spend one's afternoon answering questions?” he demanded. His temper was unwrapped.

The rain still fell squashily in the street. New York City was the drab thing it always is during a rain, and the people were more discourteous than usual, particularly in their willingness to seize taxicabs from under our noses. But Mr. Mayfair elbowed others out of his way and appropriated two cabs.

“We'll split our forces,” he advised. “Henry, you and Lila go ahead. I'll follow in the other cab. That'll give me more room for action.”

It was all right with me. I would have Lila to myself, and I intended repairing her impression of me.

THE ride was an ordeal. Miss Lila Farrar insisted on talking about Doc Savage, repeating a whole string of rumors she had heard about the fellow's remarkable abilities, his generosity, his handsomeness, and his reticent ways. Much of this pap I had previously heard myself, and I utterly did not believe it. No man could be such a paragon of virtues and abilities. More likely, he was a tremendous fourflusher who had lots of people fooled. It was said that he avoided public appearances as much as possible because of modesty, but it was my secret thought that it would be a good idea for a fourflusher to keep under cover—he would be less likely to be found out.

In addition to being bored with this drooling, my mind was beset by anxiety concerning my prospects of future physical welfare. I endeavored to ascertain if we were being watched, followed, or otherwise molested. I could not tell. It was conceivable that Mr. Mayfair had said we might be in danger in order to build an unease in my mind. I didn't quite believe this, though.

Without incident, however, we arrived at the building housing my lab. Mr. Mayfair was not in sight, although his cab would probably appear soon.

“No sense standing on the street, inviting attention,” Miss Farrar said.

So we went inside the building, into the lobby, and there a young man stepped alongside me, touched my arm most politely, said, “I beg pardon—aren't you Henry A. E. Jones?”

“Why, yes,” I admitted, pausing.

“I'm Riley Edwards of the Calumet Research Foundation,” he explained. “I'm awfully sorry to intrude, but could I have a word with you privately, Mr. Jones. Very briefly.”

This young man was slender, impeccably dressed with a well-groomed if somewhat dry-skinned face. I had been exposed to so much bad manners recently that his were a relief. He was most courteous.

“Why, certainly,” I said to him, and to Miss Lila Farrar, “Will you excuse me, Miss Farrar. I wish a private word with this gentleman.”

“Not,” she said, “too private, Henry. I'm going to keep an eye on you, bub.”

The young man, Mr. Riley Edwards, was too much a gentleman to comment on her remark, which he must have thought rather odd. He manifested a very polite reserve, which I approved. We retired to a

niche in the lobby adjacent to one of the shop entrances.

“Mr. Jones,” he said. “I’m acquainted with Dido Alstrong.”

“Oh—a friend of Dido’s?” I exclaimed.

He hesitated, a mouth corner twitched wryly, and he confessed, “Well, Dido considers me so. You know how Dido is about his friends.”

“Don’t I!” I said violently. “The fellow is pushy no end!”

“Exactly!” Mr. Edwards seemed relieved that we held the same opinions of Dido. “I—er—consider him pushy also. And that makes it simpler to explain my mission. You see, Dido Alstrong asked me to call on you and get from you a package which he said you would be keeping for him.”

“This package?” I asked, indicating the one in my hands.

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” said Mr. Edwards courteously. “But Dido stated, I believe, that the package was one you were to get from a locker in Grand Central Station.”

“This is the one, then.”

“Oh, good. Then it won’t inconvenience you if I take it.”

Relief was a tremendous emotion within me.

“I’ll be infernally glad to get rid of it!” I exclaimed, shoving the package into his hands. “There! Take it! And will you inform Dido Alstrong that I am not to be called on for any more of his favors!”

Mr. Edwards accepted the package, but seemed somewhat uncomfortable. And he said, “Well, I’ll try to convey your feelings to Dido. . . . But—ah—it’s rather difficult to state such a blunt thing. You know how it is.”

“I know how Dido is,” I said bitterly. “One doesn’t find it easy to tell him anything.”

“Exactly,” said the polite young man. “Well, I must rush off now. I’m greatly obliged to you, Henry. I trust we may meet again soon.”

“I certainly hope so!” I said heartily, because his manners were very nice, and I felt sure a further acquaintance with him would be agreeable.

He departed.

I went back to Miss Lila Farrar.

“Hey!” said she. “Where’s the mystery-box?”

“Why, it’s all settled,” I explained happily. “That young man was Dido Alstrong’s representative, he said, so I gave it to him.”

“You dope!” said Miss Farrar.

MR. MAYFAIR joined us at this point. “Monk,” said Lila, “this witless wonder got rid of the package.”

“Huh?” Mr. Mayfair's small eyes popped like those of a puppy that was being squeezed. “How?”

“A smoothie just walked up and asked for it and Henry handed it to him,” said Miss Farrar bitterly.

Mr. Mayfair seized me by the front of the coat. The jerk he gave me slightly disturbed some of my teeth. “Stupid!” he said. “I don't know what I'll do to you! But I'll think of something in a minute!”

“Release me at once!” I gasped, somewhat terrified by his manner. And his face—it was something with which to crack rocks.

“Where'd the guy go?” he yelled.

“I refuse to answer—”

“Where's the guy got that package?” he bellowed.

I understood now that a loud voice and plenty of shouting was a part of his rages. This squalling meant that he was uproariously mad. And Mr. Mayfair in a rage was quite terrifying.

Before I could get my tongue unstuck from its fright, there was a commotion from inside a shop that opened off the lobby. Blows, a cry—the cry in a man's voice. It was the shop into which the polite Mr. Edwards had stepped while departing with Dido Alström's package.

“There!” I gasped, pointing at the shop.

“Yeah?” Monk said. “Where the noise came from, eh?” He showed great interest and dashed for the shop, retaining, however, his unpleasant grip on my clothing.

Inside the shop, two men were injured. One, the proprietor, was draped across a counter, holding his nostrils with both hands, and strings of crimson were dropping from between his fingers.

“Get a cop!” this man was yelling. “See which way that so-and-so went!”

The other victim was my courteous young friend. He lay quite still, except when he coughed, which he did infrequently and only when he could not possibly prevent himself doing so. With each cough, a spray of crimson was tossed over the surroundings. There was a dark cylindrical object protruding from his chest—a knife handle.

Monk roared at the proprietor, “There was a package! Where'd it go?”

“The one who ran away took it,” the man said.

Chapter V

AT MIDAFTERNOON, the rain still came down in a tired way. The clouds must be very dark and thick over the city, because already at 3 p. m. there was almost a twilight, a semi-murk that pervaded like a giant's scowl. The horns of the cars in the street beeped ill-temperedly at one another, against a background of traffic sound that was a low disgruntled growling.

Miss Lucy Jenkins, my lab assistant, is a nervous soul; she had long since become so flustered that Miss Farrar suggested it would be kinder to let her go home for the day. I agreed, because I was a trifle resentful of Lucy's ill-concealed implications that I had fallen into bad company. This was probably perfectly true in the case of Mr. Mayfair, but not of Lila Farrar. Lila was having an utterly excruciating effect on me.

Mr. Mayfair banged down the telephone receiver.

“Nothing happens!” he yelled. “Polite boy is still unconscious in the hospital! The cops can’t find Dido Alstrom!” He wheeled and scowled at the door, adding, “And Doc Savage isn’t here yet!”

Anything smacking of peace seemed to irritate this man Mayfair, it occurred to me. This was an annoying attitude; for my part it would be suitable if nothing more happened to me in my lifetime.

“You have appealed to this Savage fellow?” I exclaimed.

“Sure.”

“I don’t,” I informed him, “think I approve!”

Mayfair snorted. Miss Farrar had brightened in a most idiotic fashion at the mention of Doc Savage, and now asked Mayfair, “You’re not kidding?”

“I called Doc,” Mayfair said.

“Why, that’s wonderful!” Lila declared.

Mayfair glanced at her thoughtfully, and did not look so pleased. It had obviously entered his thick head that in pressing Doc Savage into the picture, he was going to divert Miss Farrar’s interest from himself.

“Hm-m-m-m,” said Mayfair gloomily. And presently he added, to himself and with a hopeful note, “But maybe Doc’s tied up with something else.”

The hope he expressed was a vain one, for Doc Savage presently appeared.

THE fellow was a spectacular sort. A giant bronze man—in fact, his stature was startlingly greater than one imagined until one stood close to him. Then he was indeed ample, in a firm-knitted muscular way. This Doc Savage, of whom I had heard such preposterous tales, was undoubtedly one of great physical powers. His muscles were mighty. But then, it occurred to me sourly, so are the muscles of a horse.

He had, I suppose, handsomeness of a sort. But my admiration does not extend to that brown, outdoorsy, knotty-wood look that so many violent fellows have, and which was a characteristic of this Savage chap. His eyes were rather freakish, being somewhat like pools of flake gold always stirred by tiny winds. They were compelling eyes, though, and about the whole man there was an air of being able to dominate if he wished to do so.

You felt, when you were close to him—or at least I felt—much the same as one does when standing beside a large, strange and powerful piece of machinery.

Miss Farrar’s reactions irked me. Starry-eyed, she immediately began indulging the wiles that women use on men they admire.

I found myself wishing violently that this big man would at least turn out to be a dumbbell.

“Mr. Mayfair,” I said at once, “did not have my authorization to involve you in this matter.”

“Call me Monk, dammit,” Monk told me. Then he informed Doc Savage: “This is Henry, an empty box as far as I’m concerned.”

“I resent that!” I cried indignantly.

Savage had a quiet voice, resonant with controlled power and—this was also a disappointment to me—he put words together quite intelligently.

He asked Mr. Mayfair for the general picture.

Mayfair said: “An old schoolmate of Henry's, named Dido Alström, called on Henry for a favor. Dido wanted Henry to get and keep a package for him. Somebody took a shot at either Henry or Dido, and hit a fat man by mistake. Two hot-rods then used a holdup as a pretext to take another shot at Henry. We got the package, but before we could look into it, a guy crowned me. Then Henry handed the package over to a young guy who was smart enough to talk the soft words Henry likes to hear, and the young guy got knocked on the head and stabbed for his pains, and the knocker-stabber made off with the package.”

Having given this brief outline, Mr. Mayfair went back and filled in the details. He appeared to have an astonishingly good memory. In spite of all that tearing around and yelling he had done, he had noticed just about everything.

“I didn't,” Mayfair finished, “know what to do next. So I thought you'd be interested.”

Savage turned to me. “Henry, can you clear up the mystery at all?”

“My name,” I replied, “is Mr. Jones. And I am utterly at a loss.”

“Henry's that way most of the time,” Mayfair said. “But this is the first time he's admitted it.”

He was so obnoxious that I did not deign an answer.

SAVAGE now turned to Lila Farrar, who was waiting for his attentions as willingly as a flower waits to be kissed by the sun, and put a question. “Dido Alström is employed by your father?” he queried.

He spoke, I will admit, impersonally. But Lila's tone, her manner, implied that it was quite personal and just between the two of them—and she wasn't unwilling.

She said this was true.

“How long have you known Dido Alström?” Savage asked.

“Six months,” Lila said. “He has been with father's company nearly a year, but I only met him six months ago. You see, I've really seen very little of my father during my lifetime. My mother and he were separated, but my mother died three years ago, and following that, my father insisted that I be educated in California, and I saw him only at intervals. He traveled a great deal. But don't misunderstand me—my father has always treated me kindly.”

“Except,” Savage suggested, “that you saw little of him.”

“I hardly knew my own father,” she confessed.

“But you're with him now?”

She nodded. “For the last six months, yes. He has an apartment on Park Avenue.” She gave him an address in a section where it was generally known that nothing much in the way of an apartment could be had for less than ten thousand dollars a year.

“Your father's company,” Savage continued, “is in the plastic packaging field? Is that right?”

“Yes. They make plastic food containers, and pliofilm covers for manufactured articles.”

“And Dido Alström is in charge of the laboratory which does research?”

“Yes.”

“Have you,” Savage inquired, “much faith in Dido Alström's character?”

I interrupted, “I can give a picture of Dido's character!”

“Please,” said Savage. “Let Miss Farrar answer.”

Lila was hesitating. “I—well—I guess Dido is all right. He's amusing, aggressive, and full of ideas. A marvelous dancer. Holds his liquor well. And not tight with his money. One of those fellows who isn't overawed because he is taking out the boss' daughter.”

“You like him, then?”

“We—er—I was considering becoming engaged to him,” she confessed.

This sickened me. I dearly hoped, that before this was ended, Dido Alström would be painted before her in dark villainous colors.

“How,” Savage inquired, “did your father regard Dido Alström?”

“Why, he made Dido head of the lab.”

“I mean with reference to Dido's interest, his personal interest, in you?”

Again Lila hesitated. “That,” she confessed, “was another story. He wasn't very hot about the idea.”

“He objected?”

“Daddy is a pretty smooth article. He didn't object in so many words, but rather by inference.”

“And he inferred?”

“Well—that Dido Alström was a confirmed small timer.”

This elated me.

“Your father,” I exclaimed, “has excellent judgment!”

THINGS, it seemed to me, were improving. Dido Alström was of bad flavor with Lila's father, and I was sure she would have the excellent judgment to presently see that her father was right. And this highly touted Doc Savage, who had been flaunted to me as mental wizard, physical giant and scientific marvel, was not doing anything extraordinary. Savage was making no progress. He had lighted no skyrockets. He had not exploded like a star-shell, as the oaf Mayfair had inferred he would.

The big man jarred me a little, however, by saying, “We'll see what can be done with the fellow in the hospital.”

This indicated a certain firm judgment the man might have.

But, unfortunately, it was not the sole shock. Because, when we had driven to the hospital, we did not enter. We parked nearly a block distant. And immediately we were approached by a uniformed policeman who saluted Doc Savage respectfully, then queried, "Ready for it?"

"Yes. Turn him loose," Savage replied.

Mayfair grinned like the ape he was. "So you got to work on this as soon as I phoned you, Doc," he said.

Savage nodded. He produced from a glove compartment in the car several small cases resembling hearing-aids. He handed these to Mayfair.

"Monk," he said. "There's four cabs waiting in line in front of the hospital. Go to each of them in succession, tell the drivers you're looking for an object which was lost, and open the back doors of the machines and feel over the cushions, as if searching. As you do that, plant one of these gadgets, shoving it down between the cushions of the seat and the back. Can do?"

"Duck soup," said Mayfair.

"The gadgets are numbered," Doc warned him. "Put number one in the first cab, number two in the second, and so on."

"It's done," said Mayfair optimistically.

The homely fellow departed and proceeded to do his job. For a person with no manners and such violent ways, he seemed to deceive the cab drivers smoothly.

Doc Savage himself left our car, walked to the entrance of the hospital, and loitered for a time there, but moving back and forth while he was loitering. I could not imagine what he was doing, although it did seem that he had a purpose.

When Savage returned, he at once removed a small container from his pocket and placed it in the glove compartment. The container had a perforated top, and evidently held some sort of powdered substance.

"What did you do?" I asked curiously.

"Scattered some dust on the steps," he replied. "It might seem a bit childish. On the other hand, there's nothing like a precaution."

The man, I reflected, must be on the idiotic side.

AFTER Mayfair returned, we moved the car to an inconspicuous spot from which the entrance of the hospital could be watched, and there we waited.

"What are we hanging around for?" I asked.

Mayfair glanced at me as if the query were extremely stupid. "For smooth-talker to come out," he said.

"What!"

"Yeah."

“You mean the chap is going to be released?”

Monk glanced at Doc Savage and said, “That's the idea, isn't it?”

“But he's wounded!” I exclaimed.

“Not very seriously,” Savage replied. “The knife entered high, and did not go in deeply. He can get around all right. And as he gets around, we're going to trail him and see where he leads us.”

“But he was bleeding from the lungs!” I cried. “I saw him! His wound was serious.”

“A bitten tongue. He was struck on the head, as well as stabbed, and he bit his tongue when struck.”

“Oh!” But this still didn't make sense to me. “But surely—you say he's being turned loose! Surely the police wouldn't be such fools!”

“The police,” Savage explained quietly, “are coöperating with me.”

I suppose he spoke with modesty, but the implication of his words was ridiculous. The police turning this fellow loose to accommodate Savage! Preposterous!

“You mean you asked them to let him go, and they are?” I said coldly. “That is ridiculous!”

Mayfair said, “Oh, shut up, Henry. You're always zigging when you should be zagging.”

I subsided. This was beyond me. I tried to think that it was a coincidence, that the young man was going to be released from the hospital at this time anyway—but the appearance of the uniformed officer a while ago rather belied this theory. It seemed that the police were coöperating with this Savage, all right. I wondered what kind of prevarications he had told them to accomplish a thing like that. Someone should warn the police about being so gullible.

Miss Farrar was gazing at the big bronze man with a fawn-eyed look. She was more beautiful to me than ever, and I felt an overwhelming wish to protect her from the influences of this big bronze bluffer.

Presently the gentlemanly-mannered young man did appear from the hospital.

He took one of the cabs in which Mayfair had planted a gadget.

“On the hook,” said Mayfair dryly.

Chapter VI

THE taxicab carrying our quarry moved completely out of sight. It vanished.

“You've lost him!” I said.

“Henry,” Monk Mayfair said. “It's going to be a pleasure to disappoint you.”

And he did disappoint me. Because they followed the polite young man with ease. They did it with a device which, because I am a scientist myself, I at once recognized. The thing they were using was absurdly simple—I understand that airplane drivers use it every day in a less complex form. It was a radio direction-finder. The objects which Mayfair had planted behind the cab cushions were obviously small continuous-signal transmitters utilizing peanut tubes and a compact battery supply that was self-contained. It was not unbelievable, because quite powerful aircraft radio transmitters are often

compact enough to be held easily in the palm of the hand.

Lila thought it was wonderful.

“Why, this is amazing!” she declared. “I’ve heard a great deal about you, Mr. Savage—how your methods are almost magical! I’m delighted for this chance to see you at work.”

He seemed to color slightly in discomfort, but it was probably another trick he had mastered.

“Isn’t this a little theatrical and small-boyish?” I inquired.

Monk Mayfair thought this amusing. He said, “Henry, you’re quite a guy. You’re a character, you are.”

Displeasure kept me in silence for a while, but presently curiosity too strong to be denied moved me to ask, “What was the powder you sprinkled on the hospital steps?”

Mayfair answered that. “Oh, it’s something we use quite often, Henry.”

“What is it?”

“Goofer dust.”

Savage said sharply, “Stop ribbing him, Monk.” Savage then turned to me, explaining, “It’s simply a chemical preparation which, even in the very smallest traces, will fluoresce under ultra-violet light. You’re doubtless quite well acquainted with the properties of the preparation, Mr. Jones.” And he gave me the chemical symbols of the ingredients and it was as he had said. It had never occurred to me that the substance might be used in this fashion, although it was true that I had heard of sneak thieves being trapped by handling objects on which the police had placed a similar powder in microscopic quantities.

Monk Mayfair, unwelcomed by me, gave me added information. He said: “In case he didn’t take a cab, and the radio gadgets would have been a flop, we had this powder to fall back on.”

“The stuff is also radio-active,” I remarked. “Couldn’t you follow it, much as you are following now, by using an extremely sensitive Geiger counter instead of a radio receiving loop?”

“That,” said Monk, “is the idea.”

I was silent. I didn’t wish to betray any amazement.

THE apartment house stood on Park Avenue. A huge place, massive, impressive, with a genteel facade and a discreetly uniformed doorman, and another uniformed lackey, a footman, to open car doors, it bespoke the luxury of fine living and of richness within. Mr. Mayfair, who seemed to disrespect anything genteel, remarked that it reminded him of a harem queen’s jewel box. “But I’ll bet there’s a lot of brass along with the gold in there,” he added. Then, observing the address numerals on the elaborate awning from the entrance to the curb, Mr. Mayfair stiffened.

“Oh, oh!” he said. “We’ve brought somebody home!”

My wits seemed to be fuzzy this afternoon, because the significance escaped me.

“Yes,” confessed Miss Lila Farrar grimly. “I live here.”

Her voice was small, strained; she was very embarrassed and also shocked.

“You mean—this apartment—your father—this is where you live?” I asked as coherently as my own stunned disbelief permitted.

“Yes.”

“And we've followed that polite rascal here!” I blurted. Unwittingly, I'd made it sound like an accusation.

She was too upset to reply.

Mayfair then remarked comfortingly, “Just because the guy came here doesn't necessarily mean anything for you to be worried about, baby. He may live here, or he may be looking for Dido Alström, or he might have ten other reasons.”

Miss Farrar touched the baboon's arm in a grateful fashion. I wished gloomily that I had thought of those comforting words to say.

Doc Savage parked some distance down the block, and he turned to me. “Henry,” he said, “it would be a good idea if someone remained here to watch the entrance of the building—someone who knows by sight young Alström, the two phony hold-up men, the junior grade wolf, and the polite fellow. In other words, Henry, you could help us greatly by remaining in the car, as lookout.” He indicated the others. “The rest of us will go inside with a Geiger counter, and see if we can spot our quarry.”

Probably he thought he had phrased this cleverly. But the inference was clear to me. He considered me an impediment to his plans, and wished to sidetrack me.

I said nothing coolly.

Savage continued: “This car, if you haven't observed, is a special job—armor plate body and bulletproof glass. It is also gas-tight, and the doors, when this button”—he indicated a switch on the dash—“is pressed, cannot be opened until the button is depressed a second time. So you will be secure here.”

The man was casting an aspersion on my courage, it seemed to me. I had not, however, noticed that the car was armor-plated, but a closer inspection confirmed this.

A grown man driving around in an armored car! It was ridiculous, as well as fantastic.

Savage spoke further. He said: “In case you see anyone who is involved—Dido Alström or any of the others—leaving the building, or entering, pick up the microphone here, press the button to put the carrier on the air, and state the fact. Monk and myself will have pocket receivers tuned in.”

“Very well,” I said bitterly.

Lila Farrar was regarding Savage with that I-think-you're-wonderful look again.

I WATCHED the three of them enter the great apartment building, and it galled me to realize that my stature had been diminishing in the eyes of Miss Farrar. She was completely ravishing; my heart had difficulty doing its work whenever she was near me; little tingles would go up and down my spine. This was a completely new effect for a female to have upon me, and my mind logically accepted the explanation—I was madly in love with her. Nothing else would explain it. I even had—and this was quite unique for me—an absurd wish to be a hero, to accomplish a manly feat.

My mind is logical, accustomed to analysis and reason-grasping, so that it was clear to me that my

growing disfavor in the lovely girl's eyes was not my fault, but due to the fantastic—and cheap, I felt—spectacularity with which this Doc Savage person and his stooge, Mayfair, were operating. They were not my type, and in comparison I suffered. In the long run, of course, Miss Farrar would certainly recognize my superior qualities. But the trouble was, I couldn't seem to compose myself for a long run. I was impatient. I wished to shine before the young lady, and shine now.

It was undeniable that, in permitting the courteous young man to take Dido Alström's wrapping-paper-covered box, I had acted unfortunately. The young man had met misfortune as a result. I was sorry for him. Frankly, I still believed the young man to be of good character. The suspicions of the oaf, Mayfair, and of the showy Savage, seemed to me to be very bad reasoning.

I am always sure that a courteous man is a good-hearted man.

All this was in my mind like worms. And then, as lightning flashes, an idea came:

Why not beat them to Mr. Farrar, Lila's father, and create a favorable impression? A wonderful idea! I would explain the situation, and offer my services. An important man like Mr. Farrar would be quick to recognize true worth. And I imagined the favor of a parent to be no mean asset in the suit of a lady's heart.

I left the car at once.

It troubled me not at all that this was contrary to Doc Savage's instructions. The man had no right to give me orders anyway.

THE footman and the doorman were both impressed by my gentlemanly bearing, and so was the PBX telephone operator in the lobby, because she at once rang the Farrar apartment. I had told her to announce Mr. Henry A. E. Jones, D. Sc., President, Jones Research Laboratory, on important business of a personal nature, and she did so.

“You may go up,” advised the telephone operator. “Twenty-second floor. Mr. Farrar's apartment occupies the entire floor.”

A man whose living establishment occupied an entire floor of a structure of this class would indeed be affluent.

Doc Savage, Mayfair and Lila Farrar were not in evidence. I visualized Savage being a man of such cunning ways that he would not think of using an open door, but would contrive around to climb in through a window—figuratively speaking. My own clear-headed methods were superior.

The elevator wafted me happily upward. Presently I stepped into a truly cathedral-like entrance hallway which, rather to my disappointment, contained no butler. It contained, in fact, no one.

Diffidently, I waited. I had no intention of jeopardizing my first good impression by being forward enough to call out, or make a racket. But, after some time dragged, I did cough discreetly.

A hard object jabbed into my back.

“Get 'em up, pie-face!” ordered a most ugly voice.

Horried, too upset to realize the deadly danger the move posed for me. I started to turn. I didn't get clear around, but my face did revolve sufficiently that I could view my greeter.

It was the courteous young man. He was pale. He had a gun jammed in my backbone. He slapped my face. Quick, like a snake striking.

“Damn you! I said getcha hands up!” he snarled.

I complied.

“But—you seemed so courteous!” I mumbled.

He searched my clothing for weapons. His hands were as rough as a tiger's claws. Finding nothing, he stepped back. And he kicked me, kicked the part of me that polishes the chair.

The kick, a horrible thing that turned my spine to tingling stone, propelled me headlong toward a door that was closed. I tried to gasp a remonstrance at this unseemly treatment.

“Shaddup!” he said. “Open that door. And one funny move, I'll blow ya apart!”

He certainly was displaying none of the fine manners he'd shown on our previous meeting. And, as Savage had said, his wounds did not appear serious.

IMPATIENT ferocity continued to impel the man; he kicked me again when my hand hesitated on the door. I threw the door open, and more falling than on my feet, followed it into another vast room. This one could very well have been one of those rooms in museums of arts which depict period furniture; here the period was French, one of the Louis motifs—I was too disturbed to remember which Louis, and might not have been certain on the point anyway.

There were two men in this room. I knew neither one, yet I was able to surmise their identity at once. . . . One, who lay sprawled on the floor, his hands tied behind him with a length of braided curtain pull-cord, must be the chap who had attacked the polite young man and taken the box from him.

The box lay on a delicately carved table.

The other gentleman, of course, had to be Mr. Farrar, Lila's father. The family resemblance, fine features and alert eyes, a trim moulding of the body, was quite evident. Mr. Farrar occupied a large chair. He sat very still, kept his hands in plain sight.

“Mr. Farrar?” I said.

He gave me a tense look, a slight nod.

“I'm Henry A. E. Jones, and I'm dreadfully sorry our meeting had to be under such circumstances—”

“Whassa matter with the circumstances?” demanded the polite-young-man.

“I'm afraid,” I told Mr. Farrar, “that you're the victim of this chap. Am I right?”

He gazed at me stiffly and with a pale countenance. He was, one could see, the sort who under more favorable conditions would be very congenial.

“I don't know,” said Mr. Farrar presently, “what is happening, exactly.”

He sounded extremely confused and bitter.

“Perhaps I can explain,” I began, “the situation—”

“Shaddup!” said polite-man. Incidentally, he bore little resemblance to his original suave self.

I saw no reason why I shouldn't talk. “Really, I want to explain—”

Polite-man said, “How the hell'd you get here, pan-face?”

“If you mean me—” I began.

“I mean you. Answer the question.”

“I'm trying to inform you that I accompanied Doc Savage here and—”

The effect of this was outstanding. The bound man on the floor gave a fish-like flop. Mr. Farrar's jaw fell, and his eyes widened—an indication that he had heard of the Savage chap, which was a little disappointing to me. But the largest response came from my bedeviler.

“What?” he screamed. “You came with Doc Savage? Is he involved in this now?”

“Yes, you see I—”

I didn't finish. One does not complete statements when one sees one is going to die. For polite-man was going to kill me. I am no great student of human nature, but I did not need to be—one could see it in his eyes, like poisonous snakes. He was going to kill me.

He said so, too. He said: “One guy we don't need is you!” He said it to me. His inference was plain.

Quite deliberately, he cocked his revolver.

HAVE you ever seen death? I mean, have you ever stood on legs without strength and stared into death's empty sockets? I had never. Once I had pneumonia and nearly died, but I really did not know much about it until later, when they told me; there was no consciousness of death nearness at the time. It was nothing like this. I am an abstracted soul when I walk, and I have had cars dust me off, and felt very trembly later—but even those occasions weren't like this.

For what happened next, I can only explain that I must have reverted to a primary instinct. The instinct to live, to breathe, to have consciousness, to know life—nothing else mattered. My mind must have functioned like chains of electric sparks, for it occurred to me that begging for my life would be useless. This man was going to kill.

I didn't want to die, and I whirled and hit him. I grabbed his gun. There was no science; I have heard that soldiers and police officers have judo methods of disarming an opponent. I did not know these. All I had was madness, a desperation not to die.

The gun roared in my hands. The noise was terrible. The bullet went somewhere. I suppose it could have gone into me and I would not have known.

Strength of madness must have been in me. Because suddenly my opponent, a larger man than I, somewhat, was flying away. I followed him, screaming, spray flying from my lips. Mr. Farrar was staring at me in paralyzed wonder.

The man on the floor, the one tied with curtain cord, the one who answered the description of the fellow

who had taken the package from polite-man, began floundering madly. He must have had his hands nearly free. Because he loosened them at once. He sprang to his feet.

This man ran from the room. Ran toward the exit.

Polite-man clawed at my face. I tried to knock his brains out with the gun. I had his gun now. I did not know how to shoot it; shooting it did not occur to me at all. And presently the gun was lost; it went skittering and hopping across the carpet.

We fought. Primitively. The way beasts fight. The way beasts deal death to one another. And polite-man was cursing and screaming, and not in bravery. He must have partaken of my frenzy, of my madness of effort, because suddenly he tore free from me.

Polite-man ran from the room. He, too, went toward the exit.

I ran the other way. I ran past Mr. Farrar, reached a door, tried to open it. It would not open. I was so upset that I could not even solve the simple problem of turning a door knob to get a door open. That was how nearly terror had carried me to the level of the animal.

Thwarted, unable to open the door, I turned with my back to the panel, a cornered thing. My knees gave way and I was sitting on the floor. I began to shake. Tears came.

Mr. Farrar was staring at me in wonder.

I have never been a worse mess in my life.

Chapter VII

WHEN Doc Savage came, he was accompanied by the Mayfair fellow and by Lila Farrar. They immediately observed that something violent had happened, and Lila, with a cry of anxiety, ran to her father. He assured her that he was safe.

Mr. Farrar, after another wondering glance at me, stated, "I have just witnessed the most remarkable thing."

"Henry is that at any time," Monk Mayfair remarked, but his oafish humor fell flat.

With a concise use of words, Mr. Farrar then explained what had happened. He shook his head several times in amazement while doing so. "It was the craziest thing I ever saw, the way this fellow took that gunman."

Savage said briskly that he would see if he could find some trace of the pair. He went out.

Mayfair examined me. "I didn't think you had it in you, Henry."

It was a most difficult thing to muster my self-control, but with herculean effort, I succeeded—outwardly, at least. My wits, once assembled, enabled me to think coherently, and I saw that I needed an explanation for my behavior in trying to get out of the room after my opponent had fled. Except for that part, my actions might be construed as extreme bravery—which, the more I thought about it, they were.

"I have very little recollection of the latter part of the fight," I said untruthfully. "I was struck, I believe, on the head."

They seemed to accept this.

I continued: "I remember faintly trying to pursue the fellow through a door—but things are very vague about that."

"You mean," said Mr. Farrar wonderingly, "you weren't scared?"

It would have been very impressive to profess a total lack of fear. But it would also have been laying it on a trifle thick.

"I imagine," I said stiffly, "that I had a normal amount of apprehension. Accented, I'm afraid—or perhaps confused is the word—by the fact that the fellow had struck me over the head a couple of times before I came into this room."

This wasn't quite the fact either—it was his foot that had struck me, and not on the head.

Mr. Farrar and Lila were favorably impressed now.

But the Mayfair lout said, "Before you become too brave, Henry, you might explain how you happened not to stay in the car like you were told to do."

"I'm not," I retorted, "the sort of fellow who likes to be left in camp like the squaws and children while the braves hit the war path."

"Ho!" said Monk Mayfair.

DOC SAVAGE entered, empty-handed from his search for polite-man and the other. He confessed his failure. But he added, "It's rather unfortunate Henry stirred up things, because Monk and myself were working out a smoother approach that would have enabled us to catch the fellow, and possibly wind the whole thing up."

"It's purely conjectural that you would have caught him—or them," I said hurriedly. "They might have escaped anyway."

He admitted this was true. He couldn't very well do otherwise.

I pointed at Dido Alstrong's package on the table.

"And I recovered the package," I added triumphantly.

Savage's expression seemed rather noncommittal for a moment, then he turned to Mr. Farrar, asking, "Have you an idea what it's about?"

Mr. Farrar shook his head. "None."

"But father!" gasped his daughter. "You must have! Those men were here! Didn't they say anything?"

The father stroked his daughter's hair fondly, but his facial lines were bleak.

"I didn't know either of those rascals," he said presently. "Here's what happened: The first one, the one with the package, came nearly an hour ago. He was announced by the phone operator downstairs as a Mr. Quade, on an important mission from Dido Alstrong. Naturally I admitted him—and he stuck a gun in my face."

Mr. Farrar wheeled quickly, went to a divan, reached behind it, and came up with a firearm.

“This gun,” he continued. “The fellow told me to sit down, shut up, and not try anything. I did so, not being a fool and”—he glanced at me—“lacking a certain kind of courage. Well this fellow, Quade, if that was his name, which I doubt, sat down too. We waited. I tried to demand an explanation. Quade said shut up, he was expecting a visitor. And then that other rascal came.”

Savage interrupted: “Was the fellow the visitor Quade was expecting?”

“Not at all.” Farrar shook his head. “Quite the contrary. The second man came in unexpectedly, overpowered Quade, and tied him up.”

“Oh.”

“They were obviously bitter enemies.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Why, he tied Quade up, didn't he? And he threatened Quade's life, and he *was* going to kill Henry, here.”

Mr. Farrar had a fine, clear-minded face, and he was speaking honestly, straight-forwardly. One could heartily approve of the man.

Savage asked, “Exactly what words did they say to each other?”

“It was nearly all profanity,” said Farrar. “Quade cursed the other for a meddler, a thief, and much worse. The other called Quade the same things.”

“Was the package mentioned?”

“Oh, yes.”

“In what way?”

“Why, I gathered the fight was about it. Both wanted it.”

“Any hint as to the contents?”

“None.”

“And you didn't know the men, don't know what is it all about?”

“That,” said Farrar, “is correct.”

It seemed to me that there was a certain wrongful attitude in the air, a suspicion directed toward Mr. Farrar, intimating he might be able to tell more. I felt this was utterly unjustifiable. He was being fine and cooperative, and handling himself well, considering how his household had been disrupted.

“It's funny,” remarked Mayfair, “that them two ginzos came here.”

“Dammit, that's something I can't explain!” said Mr. Farrar testily.

I saw a chance to do myself some good, and said: “Perhaps I can offer a theory. Dido Alstrong is doing something reprehensible, those two fellows are involved with him, and since Dido Alstrong works for Mr. Farrar, the men probably came here to seek news of Dido Alstrong.”

“Why,” said Mr. Farrar gratefully, “that's logical.”

“They ask about Dido Alström?” Monk Mayfair demanded.

“Well—yes. Yes, I believe his name was mentioned,” Farrar stated.

“You forgot to say anything about that before.”

Farrar shrugged. “Dido's name was all mixed up in the cussing they gave each other. It slipped my mind.” He was sharing my opinion of the Mayfair person, I noted.

“Well, we're getting nowhere fast,” Mayfair said.

He strode to the table on which Dido Alström's packet lay.

“Let's open Santa Claus' pack and see what he brought us,” he added.

DOC SAVAGE, stepping forward hastily, said, “Henry, will you come here. Tell me, is it the same package you and Monk got from the locker in Grand Central?”

“It appears so,” I replied.

“Tied with the same cord and the same knots?”

“I think so.”

“What about it, Monk?” Savage asked his uncouth aide.

“Same cord. Different knots,” said Monk.

“I disagree,” I said.

“Miss Farrar?” Savage inquired. “What do you say?”

“I was really too excited to notice it closely,” she replied sensibly.

Savage still did not open the packet, but turned to Mr. Farrar and said speculatively, “This does seem to revolve around Dido Alström, but so far it's just mystery, nothing tangible.”

“Why don't you open that thing?” Farrar demanded. “What are you staging, a suspense show?”

Those were my opinions also.

Savage remained calm. “About Dido Alström—is he a creative chemist, Farrar?”

“Creative? What do you mean?”

“Is it possible that he has made some sort of valuable discovery, and the trouble is revolving around that? A fight for its possession, perhaps?”

Farrar shrugged. “Dido Alström is more mouth and glad-hand than ability, in my opinion. But he knows how to make other men work for him. That's why I gave him the executive job he holds.”

“Then you can't answer my question?”

“I don't know that it has an answer.”

Savage turned to Mayfair. “Open that thing,” he said.

Since I had heard so much of this fellow Savage's profound reputation, I was naturally interested in observing his methods; my curiosity was intense to know how he had built himself up in such a degree. Now I believed I had the answer—the fellow was a showman. Take this holding back the opening of Alstrong's packet—it was senseless, but it did create an air of tension, a sort of anxious stage on which Savage stamped and pranced, showing off. This was my feeling, for I had been loath all along to believe the fellow any sort of a superman; I was glad to see my opinion corroborated.

Mayfair threw open the wrappings. He lifted the lid of a cardboard box.

“Hell!” His small eyes protruded. “What the hell!”

His sentiments were generally shared.

The box contained a monkey suit.

“The hell!” the loutish Mayfair kept repeating, as if unable to believe this.

It was a brownish sort of a monkey suit. It would fit a man of average size. It seemed, and I am not an authority on masquerade costumes, not overly expensive, previously worn, and rather faded as if it had been dry-cleaned or washed a number of times.

“A masquerade outfit!” Lila exclaimed. “But—why, this is ridiculous! All this muss over a masquerade suit!”

Savage, an inscrutability on his features—the man could certainly hide his emotions—began removing the garment from the box. He inspected it closely. He replaced it, lifted the lid of the box, and noted the name of a costume rental concern printed thereon: REX COSTUME COMPANY. He replaced the lid on the box.

“Well, what is it?” asked Farrar sharply.

“A monkey suit,” Savage said dryly.

Chapter VIII

IT came as somewhat of a shock to find that Savage had a plan of action. It seemed to me that the bronze man should be completely stumped, and I suspected him of fourflushing when he said, “Well, perhaps we have something to work on.”

Farrar, of the same idea, pointed at the box and demanded, “You mean that makes sense to you?”

Without answering, which was rather rude, Savage advised Lila, “I think you'd better remain here. There seems to be some danger involved, as witness what almost happened to Henry, and I wouldn't want you exposed to it.”

She was disgustingly put out about this. I had hoped her fascination with Savage had subsided, but obviously it hadn't.

“Won't I see you again?” she asked anxiously.

“Of course,” he replied gallantly.

And the goon of a Mayfair said, “Baby, when they're as beautiful as you are, their trouble is seeing too much of us.”

I was almost glad she wasn't going with us, because it would save her from being subject to such remarks from these fellows. And particularly, it would spare her Mayfair's smirking, strutting and eye-rolling.

Savage, Mayfair and myself rode down to the lobby in the elevator.

There Savage shocked me. He strode to the telephone operator, and asked, “You remember Henry calling and asking to be announced to Farrar.”

She recalled.

“Who,” Savage demanded, “answered Farrar's telephone?”

“Why, Mr. Farrar, of course,” she replied.

“Thank you.”

The meaning of this byplay was a little slow soaking into me. Then I saw it's preposterous significance—Savage was seeking to establish that Farrar hadn't been a prisoner of the fellows upstairs, because he had personally answered the phone.

“That's stupid!” I declared. “Farrar would have been forced to answer the phone by his captor.”

“Naturally,” Savage agreed in a rather odd fashion.

“Henry's getting to be quite a mastermind,” Mayfair said.

“Phoo!” I said. “You fellows aren't accomplishing anything.”

“Henry's brave as a hornet, too,” Monk Mayfair added.

I wished to strike him, but he was not the sort one did that to.

On the street, Savage said, “Monk, I don't imagine Henry will feel too bereaved at not having your company. So will you do a locating job on polite-boy?”

“Sure, I'll find him,” Mayfair replied. “I'll fetch him in. Take me about an hour, I guess.”

The preposterous confidence of the chap!

THE REX COSTUME COMPANY was on the second floor of a building just off Sixth Avenue in the part of the city that would correspond to the cuff of a bum's trousers—tired, sloppy, and not entirely honest. There was a wide stairway leading upward, but it didn't smell too well and there were bits of trash, cigarette stubs and gobs of chewing gum on the steps, if one cared to search for them.

A Mr. Ivan McGonigle introduced himself to us—or to Savage, for it was Savage who did the talking. Mr. McGonigle confessed to being the proprietor of the REX COSTUME COMPANY.

“You rent masquerade costumes?” Savage inquired.

“That's right,” said McGonigle. “We supply shows, parties, and theatrical troupes.”

Doc Savage placed Dido Alstrong's monkey-suit box on the counter.

"This one of your boxes?"

"That's right."

"You supply the monkey suit?"

"That's right. If there's a monkey suit in there, we—"

"Take a close look at the suit before you jump at conclusions," Savage suggested.

McGonigle did so. He was a red-faced man, brusque, with a certain shrewdness which had probably been taught to him by doing business in this district. The low-class businessman type, I should say, and quite honest, but not a sort that I particularly fancied.

Presently McGonigle was positive. He pointed out a trademark, certain repairs to the suit, and the laundry marks which compared, as he showed us, identically with laundry marks on the other costumes in his stock.

"Ours," he said. "Now what about it?"

"You mean," said Savage, "that this is just an ordinary masquerade costume out of your stock?"

"That's right. We got about a half dozen of them. Not very good renters, incidentally. Got 'em about three years ago off a show that ran a couple of weeks and closed. You see, it was a show with political significance, or so they called it, with a scene showing how this collectivism was an animal thing that was going to return us to the status of tribes of baboons—"

"Do you," Savage interposed, "recall the fellow who rented this?"

"Why, think I do, vaguely. Talkative sort, kind of high-pressure, sort of a fat face—"

"That's Dido Alstrong," I exclaimed.

"Sure. That was his name. Alstrong. You'd think a fellow like that would be more prosperous," said the man who rented costumes.

"Prosperous?" inquired Savage.

"Sure. That's how I remember the man. We do a good business here, we get so many customers, how am I gonna remember one unless for a reason? This guy, he don't have the cash to put up a deposit. We demand a deposit, you know. He ain't got the deposit, he says, so he puts up a bit of personal property."

Savage considered this. "Thank you," he said finally.

"You wanna turn that ape suit back in now?" the man demanded.

"No, not just yet."

"Hokey-dokey."

Savage turned. "Come, Henry," he said. He wore an abstracted look and I reflected, with some pleasure, that he had come a cropper. He hadn't learned anything of value. Quite probably, he didn't know what to do next.

Down in the street, Savage popped me into his car.

“Wait a minute for me, Henry,” he said. “I believe I overlooked something I should have asked the costume shop proprietor.”

He wheeled and re-entered the establishment. I endeavored to follow.

The presumptuous fellow had locked me in his remarkable armored car.

SAVAGE returned in not more than five minutes. His bronze face was inscrutable. “You locked me in the car!” I said angrily. “I resent such high-handed methods.”

He replied amiably, “Indeed? Did you try pressing the button which frees the locks?”

“I certainly did!”

He examined the intricate array on the dash, and said, “Why, the master-switch seems to have been open. I hope you weren't inconvenienced.”

It seemed a thin explanation. I believed he had locked me in the machine merely out of a childish whim he could show me that he could make me stay put. I was also riled inwardly by his inscrutability, the lack of an emotional display on his features; I was curious to know his thoughts, and his face told me nothing.

“What did you ask the costume shop man?” I demanded sharply.

He pretended not to hear my query. He started the engine, and the car joined the traffic. He drove with the sort of carelessness which characterizes taxi drivers in New York City, the ease which some people feel comes from skill and experience in coping with traffic, but which always makes me nervous.

“What did you ask the man?” I shouted.

“Henry,” he said thoughtfully. “Do you suffer from pains in the chest, headaches, nightmarish dreams, and do you occasionally awaken from sleep with violent starts?”

“Certainly!” I snapped. “I am a nervous sort.”

“You should,” he advised, “take things less seriously, including yourself.”

“All right, don't tell me!” I yelled.

THE man Savage had a fabulous laboratory. I had heard rumors of it, exaggerated, I supposed. But they weren't exaggerated. The laboratory was really superb, and particularly remarkable in that it was equipped for scientific research in many fields—it was not just a general lab; it was one in which a man could specialize in chemistry, electro-chemistry, electronics, metallurgy, surgery, and Heaven knows how many other things.

It was dumfounding. One had to be a scientist to appreciate the place. It occupied, on the eighty-sixth floor of a midtown skyscraper, the entire floor with the exception of a reception room and another room containing a scientific library that was also breath-taking.

“Goodness!” My tone was awed. “Who designed this place for you?”

“It's my own arrangement,” he said, not as though he was boasting, but as if he was preoccupied with

other thoughts.

I hardly believed that. It was even improbable that the mind of one man would accumulate enough variety of specialized knowledge to use all this apparatus.

Moving over to a section devoted to metallurgy, which is my field, I was amazed to note the advanced nature of the equipment, and also of the experiments that had obviously been performed there. Enough signs of the sort of work done were lying about to inform me that some of the work exceeded my own knowledge considerably. I was aware of a bitter jealousy, combined with envy.

It just wasn't possible that this man Savage had such scientific ability. There had to be another explanation.

I was speechless.

The telephone rang.

Savage was on the instrument instantly. "Yes. . . . Monk? You have? . . . That's a bad break. We'll be there in a hurry."

He hung up, turned to me, and said, "Let's go, Henry."

"Where?"

"Monk has found your friend."

"Friend?"

"The one we've been calling polite-boy."

"No!" I gasped. "Found him? But Mayfair couldn't have! He had no clue!"

Not until we were northbound in that tank-like automobile—which, incidentally didn't much resemble the rolling fortress that it was—did Savage condescend to explain.

He said: "Finding the fellow was no trick. As you know, we planted midget radio transmitters in the cabs he was likely to take, and also a radioactive powder where he was likely to get it on his shoe soles."

"The powder would have worn off his shoes by now!" I said skeptically.

"Here's what someone forgot to tell you, Henry. There was some preparation before the fellow left the hospital. One of his shoe heels was hollowed out, and an ultra-short-wave exciter placed there. In other words, another radio gadget which can be traced."

I was speechless some more. Such devices were preposterous, but I was getting to the point where almost any wild thing seemed logical.

THE house was a brownstone in the upper Eighties, west of Central Park. The street was dark, fairly quiet, although a newsboy was hawking his wares at a distant corner. Savage parked and waited a while, his eyes searching different directions.

In a moment, the Mayfair fellow separated from the slightly blacker shadow of a doorway. He waddled to us, opened the door, leaned inside, said, "Ain't nothing new happened."

“Seen anyone around?”

“Nope.” Mayfair jerked his cowcatcher jaw at the house. “Ground floor. Front room. Not bad diggings.”

Savage said, “We’ll have a look.” He alighted from the car.

Mayfair gazed at me. “Henry going in with us?”

“If he wishes,” Savage replied.

I had been thinking of polite-man with terror. After all, the chap had endeavored to kill me.

“Aren’t you going to call the police?” I demanded uneasily.

Not answering this, Mayfair said, “Henry’s liable to throw one of his whing-dings.”

He was aspersing my courage, naturally. “I was struck on the head!” I snapped. “I wasn’t hysterical at the Farrar apartment—it was a dazed condition.”

Mayfair grinned. “Your nerve is all right, then?”

“Absolutely!”

“Okay. You can lead the way for us,” Mayfair said.

Savage said impatiently, “Cut it out, Monk. Henry isn’t accustomed to this sort of thing.”

Not until we were in the house, and in polite-man’s rooms, did I understand the grisly death’s-head humor Mayfair had been indulging.

Polite-man was dead.

He lay on the floor, about ten feet inside the door of his sitting-room, lay on his side and there was an awful crimson lake that had spread from his throat, which had been incised from ear to ear.

Savage was on his knees beside the victim for a brief time.

“Couple of hours ago,” he remarked. “That would mean it was done to him very shortly after he escaped from the Farrar apartment. Whoever did it might have been waiting here for him—or followed him here.”

Mayfair said, “Some of his stuff is interesting.”

Savage frowned. “Eh?”

“Take a look at the writing desk there, the letters and bills—“ Mayfair broke off, stared at me. “The bathroom’s yonder, Henry.”

“I have a nervous stomach,” I blurted, and made a dash for the place he was pointing.

THEY had their heads together when I came back, and they ended whatever they had been saying. Letters, some first-of-the-month bills, were spread out on a modest writing desk. There were many racing forms and dope sheets.

“What have you found out?”

“Polite-boy's name was Davis. Hugo Davis,” Mayfair replied. “Seems to have made his living sharp-shooting. Race player.” He indicated some small slips, the nature of which mystified me. “Numbers slips. The guy was a pusher for a policy racket, part of his time. Summing him up, I'd say he was a small-time plug-ugly.”

“I surmised as much.”

“And,” added Mayfair, “Dido Alstrong paid the bills for this apartment.”

“What!”

The homely chemist's enormous forefinger probed the duns. “You can see for yourself. Rent receipts made out to Dido Alstrong.”

“But can this be Dido Alstrong's apartment?”

Mayfair shook his head. “Nope. The cops have found that. Alstrong lives in a hotel on Madison Avenue. He's not there. He hasn't been home since this morning. The cops are sitting around there with their arms open for him.”

“But what crime can they charge Dido Alstrong with?”

“Search me. Maybe with having a friend who got a carving job on his throat.”

“Then,” I exclaimed, “this fellow must really have been Dido Alstrong's friend!”

“Could be. What's amazing about it?”

“It just occurred to me that, earlier today when he informed me he had been asked by Dido Alstrong to receive the package from me, he might have been telling the truth.”

Mayfair wasn't interested in this. “Well, he's through telling the truth or anything else,” he said.

Savage continued to examine the rooms. Presently he stated, “The place has been searched. Thoroughly, too.” He indicated certain letters. “And with a sort of purpose, too. These letters have no envelopes.”

“I got a habit of throwing envelopes in the wastebasket, if there ain't an address on 'em I want,” said Mayfair. “Maybe I ain't the only one with the habit.”

“But all the New York letters have envelopes.”

“Huh?”

“The letters without,” said Savage, “are apparently from Hugo Davis's home town.” He read some of the letters. “Two are from his mother, evidently. I gather he wasn't a very good son. The others are from a girl named Anne, whom I judge Hugo Davis had led to believe he would marry her.”

“That doesn't tell much,” Mayfair said.

“No, except that Anne mentions that she works in a branch of the Farrar Products Company plant in the small town where she lives. Hugo Davis got her the job through his friend Dido Alstrong—reading between the lines, I'd say he got her the job to keep her from coming to New York and bothering him.”

“Hey,” said Mayfair, “that should give us a line on the town.”

“We'll ask Farrar about it.” Savage said.

Chapter IX

MR. FARRAR received us politely. This seemed, in view of the hour, considerate of him. Also he was considerably upset, for he met us clad in a bathrobe and his hair was disheveled.

“Oh, come in,” he said. “I've been trying to sleep, but with no luck. This thing has me upset.”

We entered. Farrar led the way into a room which we had not seen earlier, a large library which was filled with volumes of literature and fiction—more fiction than literature, in fact, for I think of only the classics as literature. However, there was a small section devoted to the container business; mostly bound trade volumes, and a few works on the preservation of food, and the chemistry of various forms of decomposition and spoilage. It was, I was saddened to note, not a very comprehensive library. But then I imagined Mr. Farrar was primarily an executive.

Farrar was manifestly nervous. One felt sorry for the man. The way he'd explained it to us, he'd really been involved in this unwillingly, and without his knowledge.

Savage said, “We're investigating Dido Alström more thoroughly, Mr. Farrar. . . . I wonder if we could speak to your daughter on the matter?”

Farrar did not approve of this.

“I fail to see the point to it,” he replied. “You gentlemen were with Lila a good part of the day—and I must say that the association wasn't soothing to her nerves.”

“She was upset?”

“Very.”

“She did not,” Savage remarked, “seem so agitated when we left her here.”

Farrar frowned. “It was after your telephone call that she really went to pieces.”

Savage stared at the manufacturer of food-packaging containers.

“My telephone call?” he asked. “When was that?”

“Why, about five o'clock.” Farrar's lean, sensitive face suddenly showed puzzlement. “You're not saying you didn't call her? You did, didn't you?”

Savage, instead of making a direct reply, turned to me and said, “Henry, you have been with me continuously. Did I make a telephone call?”

“No,” I said. “You received one from Monk Mayfair. That was all.”

Farrar was satisfied. His astonishment grew. “Who the hell could have phoned Lila, then?”

“Suppose we ask her about the voice,” Savage suggested.

Discomfort now added itself to Mr. Farrar's astonishment, and he threw out a hand in a deprecatory gesture, enhancing it with a movement of his shoulders.

“Lila,” he confessed, “isn't here.”

“Isn't here.”

“Oh, there's no cause for alarm,” Farrar advised. “I simply saw that she was frightened, and advised that she go to a hotel for the night. She did so. She is safe at a hotel.”

“What hotel?” Savage demanded.

Farrar's chin lifted, firmed. He was the executive type, a man who would take so much, no more.

“I don't believe I shall tell you,” he said grimly. “Lila needs a night's rest. I'm not going to have her further upset.”

Savage clearly must not have liked this, but he did not press the matter, nor did his bronze features register much expression. Mayfair, however, scowled in the darkest and most suspicious way. Mayfair was a chap who carried his emotions in the open, as brazenly as if he was packing an uncovered barrel of nasty animals.

IT occurred to me at this point, and a bit tardily, that Savage might after all have made a telephone call to Lila Farrar. There was one time when Savage had been out of my sight—when he locked me in his trick car and returned to talk to McGonigle, the proprietor of the costume rental agency. I would not put it beyond Savage to have made the phone call, then deftly trick me into testifying that he had done no such thing. I was beginning, reluctantly, to have a respect for the bronze man's mental agility.

Before I could decide whether to voice my doubts—I hesitated to do so, since to do so might wrongfully indicate that I was something of a fool—Savage got back to the bit of business which supposedly we'd come here to transact.

“Do you,” he asked Farrar, “have container-manufacturing plants in small towns?”

“Three,” Farrar admitted. “Besides the large one in Jersey City.”

“What are their locations?”

“Is that important?”

“It might be.”

“You'd better tell me why it is important,” Farrar said dryly.

Instead of stating the truth to Mr. Farrar, Savage did a deft bit of walking-on-eggs. He said, “In tracing Dido Alström's record, we're wondering if he first worked for you in a branch plant in a small town.”

Farrar considered this. “Yes, Alström did. I don't see how it could have any bearing on this. But he worked in the Mound City, New York, plant.”

“Has he visited the other plants?”

“I imagine so.”

“We'd like the times and places of his first visit.”

Farrar said wearily, "He went to the Cottage Hill plant in January of this year, and the Mason City plant in March, I think. But I can't see what bearing that has."

"Maybe it has none," Savage replied.

Which was probably the truth—he had simply maneuvered until he had the location of the Farrar Products Company branch plants.

Savage continued, "Do you know a man named Hugo Davis?"

Farrar gave this serious thought. "I don't believe I do."

"You've met him."

"I think not," Farrar replied sharply.

"He was," said Savage, "the lug who tried to kill Henry. The one Henry referred to as polite-boy."

"Oh!"

"He's dead," Savage added. "Murder. Throat cut. He was, it's safe to surmise, a hireling of Dido Alstrong's. Because Alstrong had been footing his bills."

"Good God!" gasped Farrar. "Murder! This is terrible!"

Savage buttoned his coat preparatory to leaving.

"I wouldn't be surprised," he said, "if it got worse."

WE went down to the street. It suddenly thundered, and there was a low bank of clouds in the west across which lightning crawled in angry crooked red rods. . . . My thoughts were too disturbed for the weather to make an impression, though. It seemed to me that odd doings were afoot, yet my mind refused to grasp their meaning; in fact I was almost sure Savage was perpetrating something, but I could not see what.

"You hardly told Mr. Farrar anything at all," I said accusingly.

"Why disturb him?" Savage replied.

"He's a fine man. He should have all the facts."

Mayfair said, "He's sure got a dilly of a daughter, anyway."

"I resent your referring to Miss Farrar as a dilly!" I snapped.

"Unbutton your collar, Henry," Mayfair replied. "Let some circulation get to your backbone."

We returned to Doc Savage's headquarters, to the place where he had his remarkable laboratory. The lab still amazed me, but there was this other thought in my mind—the feeling that something was developing, but that it eluded me.

I was irritated. I am a scientist—analysis, the selection of stray facts and the arraying of them into a meaningful whole, is my business. It was distressing not to be able to understand what was going on, when I was right there on the spot, witnessing everything.

Annoyed, I seated myself in the reception room, which had comfortable chairs, a large inlaid desk that was probably a museum piece, and an enormous old-fashioned safe that was out of keeping with the rest of the place. It was, however, comfortable. Far more comfortable than my thoughts were.

Clearly, Savage was putting something over on me. This was a galling thought. The man, whom I had considered a four-flusher, had me guessing, and the feeling of inferiority this gave me was not pleasant. It did not help to face the fact that Henry A. E. Jones had not made a too impressive showing so far. My ego writhed, and I longed to assert myself, take a prominent part, accomplish a deed.

Just then, the telephone rang and, in an assertive mood, I seized the instrument and said, "Yes?"

"Hello, Henry. Is Mr. Savage there?"

My heart turned over a couple of times. It was Lila Farrar, and she sounded distraught.

"Is there something I can do, Lila?" I asked.

"Please, Henry, is Mr. Savage there? I want to tell him something."

"I'm sorry, I'm afraid not," I said. This was at least a technical truth—Savage was not there in the room. He and Mayfair were in the lab. "But I'll gladly help you, Lila."

She hesitated over this.

Then she said desperately, "Listen, Henry, I've got something awfully important to tell."

"Go right ahead."

"No. I—I'd better say this personally."

My mind worked swiftly. "Well, Lila, suppose you come to my laboratory. You know where it is. I'll meet you there."

"But I'd rather come to Savage's place."

"That's impossible, I'm sorry. . . . My lab, Lila. I'll be there."

"Well—" Again, and reluctantly, she hesitated. "All right. Twenty minutes, or half an hour."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "I'll be there."

I had spoken in a low voice, and I replaced the phone on its cradle with care. The thing now was to get out of here. I took a moment to control my elation, then moved to the library door, then into the laboratory, and I told Savage, "I'm sleepy. Is there any reason why I can't go home?"

"Why, none at all," Savage said.

The Mayfair fellow looked at me queerly, though, and I was alarmed.

Savage added, "However—wait a moment in the reception room, will you, Henry. Just a few seconds."

I kept the worry off my face, and said, "Of course."

The wait was not long. Four or five minutes. Then Savage came in.

He had Dido Alstrong's monkey-suit in the box.

“Henry, you’re the one who is supposed to have this, so you’d better take it,” he said.

This didn’t appeal to me much. That monkey suit had been a magnet that had attracted no little danger during the day. But I was full of a man-who-is-doing-a-deed feeling, and this overpowered what was probably my better judgment.

“Very well, I shall take it with me,” I said.

“Good night,” Savage said.

“Good night,” I replied.

“Henry, you’re a colorful character,” Mayfair said.

“Well—thank you,” I replied dubiously.

“Like a chameleon,” he added.

Chapter X

THE thunder whacked and gobbled in the west as I entered the building which contained my lab. Violent, like a noisy gathering of giants, the storm sounds none the less lacked the hot intensity they would probably attain before it began to rain. It was surely going to storm. And the cacaphony in the sky fitted my own mood and expectations. A thunderstorm is always a great show, and I too was going to make a show.

There was no trouble about entering my lab at this later hour. I do this habitually, not only because I work late, but because I live there. I had fitted up a small sleeping room and kitchenette for quarters—and not, as I had overheard someone intimate, because I am as tight with money as the skin on an apple. It was more convenient. Of course it was economical also.

Miss Farrar did not appear at once. There was time for me to ponder the Mayfair fellow’s remark about chameleons. He had said I was colorful, which might be a compliment—from anyone but Mayfair. A chameleon is a small lizard to which is attributed a facility for changing its coloration, incidentally, and thus was the nubbin at which most of my thoughts nibbled. The remark had its confusing aspects.

Fingertips, like bird-feet racing, sounded on the door. It was Lila Farrar.

“Henry!” she cried. “Oh, Henry, can’t you get hold of Doc Savage somehow?”

Her obvious state of mind was both surprising and distressing. She was upset. Extremely. I longed to comfort her in a closer manner than with words, but didn’t quite dare.

“What has happened?” I asked anxiously.

“Can’t you get Savage?”

“I’m afraid not. What has occurred?”

She dropped in a chair. She was near tears. “Father and I had an awful row,” she blurted.

“Really?” I said. “Your father—you quarreled with him? I’m—er—a little surprised at that.”

Lila was opening her purse with trembling fingers. She took out a handkerchief. She looked over the

handkerchief at me, and said, hesitantly, “You’re—surprised?”

“Well, yes.”

“Why?”

“Your father,” I said, “is obviously a man of many strong points. You’re very lucky to have such a fine father.”

While this was my conviction, it was also said out of a desire to build myself up by speaking well of her parent. Flattery of one’s family, I hold, is next to flattery of oneself.

She reacted rather oddly, though.

“Little do you know!” she said.

TAKEN aback, I hesitated. What could she mean? I didn’t understand it at all.

She added, “Henry, you remember I said that my mother and father were estranged, and that I lived with my mother? And then, after my mother’s death, my father kept me in schools in California and elsewhere—up until a few months ago?”

“Obviously he wanted you to have a fine education—”

Lila gripped her handkerchief tightly.

“I hardly knew my father!” she exclaimed wildly.

I could see that she was genuinely in need of comfort. “My dear,” I said—it took courage to say *my dear*, and it didn’t come out very firmly—“your father is a fine man with your interests at heart. Mr. Savage and I went back to talk to him earlier tonight, after you had gone to a hotel, and he expressed the greatest love and concern for you.”

Lila looked at me thoughtfully. “He *is* my father,” she said.

“Yes indeed.”

“And parental ties are very strong, I suppose.”

“None are stronger,” I agreed. “And rightly so, for none should be stronger. The parent fights its fiercest for its young, even in the animal kingdom.”

This seemed to touch Lila deeply, for she nodded. She said thoughtfully, “It doesn’t follow that the young always fight as strongly for their parents, but they should, shouldn’t they?”

“Oh, indeed!”

“That’s really the right way, isn’t it?”

“Of course,” I said. “It certainly is.” I didn’t know exactly—in fact I had no idea—what we were talking about. But this was sound philosophical wisdom, and one is always safe in mouthing philosophical clichés. I liked the way I sounded, too; weighty and solemn, the fatherly advisor, although my feelings about her certainly weren’t fatherly.

In glancing about distractedly, Lila's eyes fell on the cardboard box containing Dido Alström's monkey suit. She pointed, demanded, "is that—"

"The ape suit belonging to that rascal Dido Alström," I agreed.

"What is it doing here?"

"Why, I have it in my custody, naturally," I replied. "I insisted on that."

"I'm surprised Savage let you keep it," she said.

"I was quite firm," I said.

"I see," she replied, but her thoughts and manner were self-involved.

The young lady was distressed. This touched me deeply; the young lady herself touched me more deeply than anything else, though. So intensely, in fact, that I was moved to walk over to her.

"Lila," I said hoarsely. "Lila, you're worried."

She nodded bitterly. "Yes, Henry, I'm terribly worried."

"Darling," I said. "Darling, don't be."

And I put my arm around her in a manner rather more than comforting, and took hold of her chin with my other hand, and endeavored to kiss her.

She kissed me back. It was wonderful. It was skyrockets and whizz-bangs; it was fountains of honey and clouds of flying sparks. I wished I had more experience kissing, because I hadn't done very well. I decided to try again. She moved a little, squirmed.

The lights went out.

SOME time later I got around to figuring out which lights had gone out. The conclusion was shocking. It was my own lights. Not those in the room.

As this dawned on me, I further realized that I was lying on the hard wooden lab floor, and my head felt awful. It felt worse when I tried to move it.

I groaned loudly. Even that hurt.

Finally, exercising some caution, I managed to get to all fours, then erect, and into the washroom where I drank some water, and examined my head. The knot on my head was not visible to the eye, but it certainly felt the size of a young mountain to my fingers.

Back at the scene of disaster, I found a large and heavy glass chemical bottle with the neck broken off, the two parts lying on the floor. This, obviously, was what had turned out my lights. And Miss Lila Farrar had wielded it, after lifting it from the table while being kissed.

Miss Farrar, naturally, was gone.

So was Dido Alström's monkey suit.

Both had vanished, and it was logical to suppose they had gone together. But beyond that it did not make

sense. Not the slightest sense. Logic just didn't have any horse to its cart.

Naturally I began thinking of Doc Savage, and didn't feel good at all. Not that I felt well to begin the thought, but Savage's possible reactions depressed me.

I had tried to take things into my own hands with Miss Farrar. I was supposed to have custody of the baboon suit. Now I had neither, a headache, and a deflated ego.

There was a knock on the door. I wheeled, instinctively grasping my head with both hands.

"Mr. Savage?" I called.

"That's right," a voice said.

I shouldn't have opened the door. It wasn't Savage's voice at all. It was the voice of the possessor of an extremely hideous automatic pistol, and he at once inserted the worse end of the thing in my right eye.

"Now start somethin'," he said.

He had a companion. After horror stopped hitting me like lightning, recollection furnished me with their identity. The two hold-ups. The banditti who had raided the cocktail bar with the idea of eliminating me.

Short bandit swore another terrible oath. He had much the same manner he'd displayed in the genteel rum hole.

The longer one said, "Hold 'im still. I'll frisk 'im." He searched me. Meantime my eye was glued to the gun muzzle. The one doing the frisking said, "Clean. No hardware." He examined my billfold, added with considerable disgust, "And only eleven bucks!"

"Only eleven bucks!" yelled short bandit. "We oughta shoot him just for that!"

"Where's tha monkey suit?" long one demanded.

"I—uh—Miss Farrar got it!" I gasped.

"So ya know that, do ya?" he said. "Well, well, that makes you a member of the lodge. So come along, brother."

"But I—"

"Would you rather stay here?" he asked ominously.

I am not obtuse. I got his meaning.

"I guess not," I said weakly.

Chapter XI

It was past midnight when we crossed George Washington Bridge and, after rolling swiftly for a time, turned north. Eleven o'clock. The storm was on us with awful splintering streaks of lightning, and the face of the dashboard clock was visible in the convulsive blazes of red glare.

"Get a move on," the tall man said to the short one, who was driving. "Maybe we can outrun this damn storm."

“Yeah,” said the other. “And have a highway cop lookin' in at Henry, here.”

“Henry wouldn't tell tha cop nothin'. Wouldja, Henry?”

“The police,” I said grimly, “are already looking for you gentlemen for the holdup in the cocktail establishment.”

The short one sneered. “Whose afraid a cops? Ask Henry if he described us to tha cops, Slim.”

“Henry wouldn't do that. Would you, Henry?”

“No.”

“You hear that, Pokey? Henry's our pal. Henry's our lodge brother.”

“I don't belong to any lodge,” I said miserably.

Tall bandit whooped. “Sure you do, Henry. You joined one tonight. When you figured that babe got the monkey suit, that's when you paid your initiation fee.”

“Sure,” said the other. “You're a paid-up member.”

“What kind of a lodge is this?” I asked nervously.

“Biggest there is, boy.”

“Sure,” said Pokey. “More belong than don't. Ain't that right, Slim.”

“I'm not sure I wish to belong.”

“He don't wanta belong, Slim,” said Pokey.

“Who does,” said Slim. “But everybody joins, don't they.”

“Yeah, everybody. Some sooner'n others, though.” Pokey turned his head, leered. “Henry ain't got tha lodge badge yet, though. How you reckon the badge will look on him?”

“It'll look fine.” Slim studied me critically. “A lily will go well with Henry's coloring.”

The sky had deafening noise. The car noise was tiny, almost unnoticeable, in the storm's uproar. A bolt of lightning split a tree up ahead; there was a kind of smoke puff, whitish; it was an evergreen tree, and little flames spread all through it. Big drops of water like half-dollars began hitting the car.

“Get a move on,” Slim said uneasily to his comrade. “You wanta hang around here and get lightning-struck?”

The car traveled for a long time while I waited for them to kill me.

THE thunderstorm had followed us, or we had followed it, and now it should have been daylight, but it wasn't. At least all the light seemed the slashing scarlet of lightning, and the rain came down in solid wires and sheets; the wind was lions; at times it seemed the car would be swept from the highway.

Finally the car was turned on to a lane, and Pokey said, “Well, we made it.” The machine crawled along the winding gravel for a time, then stopped. Pokey turned his head, demanded, “How's lodge-member?”

Slim turned a flashlight on my face. "He don't look so good. Color's kind of a mortified blue."

"Yeah," said Pokey. "That ain't a bad color. But he should be feeling better than that. He's got a lot to feel grateful over. He ain't dead."

This was true. But the future was not a thing that intrigued me.

They sat there a while. Pokey had turned off the headlights; now he blinked them twice, left them off again. And from ahead, through trees, there was a replying couple of light blinks.

"Hot dog!" said Pokey. "This is home sweet home. I was beginning to wonder if I'd took the wrong road somewhere."

Slim was surprised. "You mean you didn't know where you was going?"

"I never been here before. You know that. All I had was directions. . . . Hey, I wish we had raincoats."

"That's great, riding around all night with a guy who don't know where he's going," Slim complained. He suddenly gave me a shove. "What you sitting there for? Get out."

I alighted. My legs would hardly remain rigid enough to support my weight. We climbed a steep path. A house appeared, a rambling place, one-story, low, with wide porches and the air of being a summer home. They shoved me inside. I was in a large room where there were other people.

"Lila!" I cried.

MISS FARRAR did not reply; her expression was cold, grave, and desperate. She showed, almost as much as I, the effects of a harrowing night.

A man who answered the description of the fellow who had attacked polite-man and taken the monkey suit from him stood with a gun in his hand, guarding Miss Farrar. This chap—he was certainly the one who had been a prisoner at the Farrar apartment on the occasion of my ill-omened visit there—sneered at sight of me.

He said, "You guys better not be too careless."

"With Henry?" said Slim scoffingly. "Why, Henry is the soul of gentleness with his fellow man."

"Yeah?" said the other. "Well, I seen him different." He frowned, then added, "Maybe he'll be all right if you don't scare him."

"We wouldn't think of scaring Henry," Slim said.

Miss Farrar had said nothing. I had tried to give her a reprimanding frown, but it had no effect on her. It was difficult to be severe with her for striking me and taking the ape suit. Too many other greater fears beset me. . . . And clearly Lila was also a captive.

"How did you get here, Lila?" I asked.

She said nothing in a wooden speechless way.

Short-bandit, the one named Pokey, took it on himself to answer that. "Why, Henry, we were waiting outside your place when she came out with the monkey suit. We just picked her up, and sent her along

here.” He nodded at the one who had warned him about my reactions to fear. “Ossie brought her.”

Ossie cursed him very blackly. “Whatcha usin' my name for?” Ossie demanded.

“Why,” said Pokey, “Ossie ain't your name.”

“Well, quit usin' any names!” Ossie snarled.

“Okay. Okay, if you feel that way about it. Okay, Nameless.”

Slim grinned. He had been looking about. “We the only ones here yet?”

Ossie jerked his head at another room. “Yeah. Except in there.”

Slim strolled to the door which Ossie had indicated. He peered through. “Do you wanta be Nameless, too?” he asked someone in there.

A voice called him a genial name. Not a nice one. “You two hooligans took your time gettin' here,” the voice added.

“It rained. We was beset by the elements.” Slim listened to the awful uproar of the storm a moment. “I hope the resta our party don't get lightning-struck.”

“You get Henry?”

“We got Henry. Sure.”

“Bring Henry in here,” the voice said. “We might as well acquaint him with his purpose in life.”

Slim came back, seized me, propelled me at the door, through it.

The voice belonged to a lean, lazy-looking man in a tweed suit, a fellow who did not look either particularly intelligent or vicious, although on the latter point his looks were obviously deceiving.

Dido Alström, the other man in the room, I knew, of course.

DIDO ALSTRÖM was certainly in a deplorable condition. There had always been about Dido a certain garish neatness that went with his acquisitive manners—he did not have it now. They had been beating Dido. Not with fists, either. When he looked at me, his mouth sagging open with surprise, I saw that they had knocked out, or pulled out, at least three of his lower teeth and two uppers. One of his fingernails was completely missing also, the end of the finger a bloody stump. Much as I detested Dido Alström, the way he looked made me a little ill.

“Henry! Good God!” said Dido Alström hoarsely. “Then they weren't lying!”

“Lying?” I asked unsurely.

“Oh my Lord!” cried Dido.

There had been something vaguely familiar about the lazy-looking man in tweeds, and now it dawned on me why this was. The chap had been at some of the same places where I was yesterday—standing in front of my laboratory building, and in the cocktail bar, and standing in the street in front of the Farrar apartment. The fellow had been functioning as an observer, a lookout. Now he was serving as Dido

Alstrong's captor.

Suddenly, from the other room, came a bit of confusion. Feet clattered. Lila Farrar cried out, a whimpering sound.

Slim jammed his gun into my side, said, "Easy, Henry. No fits out of you, pal." And he guided me hastily back into the other room to see what had happened.

Lila Farrar had endeavored to make a break for the outer night. She had been unsuccessful. The man referred to as Ossie, or Nameless, had recaptured her.

"Hell, she worked them ropes loose," Ossie said.

"Somebody oughta work some of your hide loose, make ya a little more careful," said Slim. To Lila, Slim added, "Baby, you don't wanta do things like that. We'd sure hate to have to shoot a pretty tootsie like you."

Lila, in a voice which desperation made hardly understandable, cried, "So my own father would have me shot!"

Slim's jaw fell. "Huh?"

Ossie snorted.

Slim pulled his jaw up, asked, "What's she mean by that, Ossie?"

"She thinks her pop is stud duck," Ossie said. "Ain't that somethin'?"

"What?" yelled Slim. "She thinks old Farrar is engineering this? What makes her think that? What gave her such an idea?"

Ossie shrugged. "Damned if I know. Who can figure how a woman thinks!"

Lila stared at them bitterly. "You're not fooling me," she said.

THEY guided me forcibly back into the room where Dido Alstrong was seated on a chair. I noticed that his ankles were tied to the heavy chair legs.

"Henry," said the tweed-suited man. "You're a chemist, ain't you?"

"Y-yes," I confessed shakily.

"How good a chemist are you?"

"I—quite good."

"Better than Dido Alstrong?" he demanded.

"I knew more than Dido Alstrong will ever know," I said grimly, "when I was ten years old.

"Watch out, Henry!" Dido Alstrong yelled.

Slim hit Dido on the head. Dido's eyes rolled until they were all whites.

Tweed-suit looked at me thoughtfully. “You're the boy for us, Henry. You're our lad. Dido Alström was able to invent the thing, so you can surely figure it out. Don't you think so?”

“I—well—I don't believe I understand,” I said uneasily. I had no wish to serve these people.

He crossed his tweed-clad legs casually. “Tell you what, Henry. Here's the whole story. Dido Alström, here, works for Farrar who has a company that makes food packaging units, and that got Dido Alström interested in means of preserving foods. You know about frozen foods packages, don't you?”

“Oh, yes,” I said. “You see them everywhere—”

“Kinda profitable, wouldn't you say?”

“Yes, indeed. I imagine—”

“Dido Alström,” he interrupted me, “had developed a process by which almost all perishable foods can be preserved for up to six months by subjecting them to a supersonic ultra-short sound wave gadget—I guess you'd call it that, anyway. I ain't a scientist enough to know the name of it.”

I considered this. “Such a device would probably be bulky and impractical,” I said. “Of course, scientists have long understood that ultra-short sound waves have odd effects on molecular structure. But—”

“As we understand it,” said tweed-suit, “the machine ain't so big nor expensive. And it preserves food just about as fast as it passes through on a conveyor belt.”

I thought of this.

“Good Lord!” I gasped.

It was incredible. Such a discovery would be worth a fabulous sum. . . . Gradually, like trees falling, the significance began to grow on me. Each fresh realization was a crashing impact. Why, such a discovery would revolutionize the food packaging industry; it would have an effect on the entire way of life of men.

To say nothing, naturally, of the millions of dollars that would pour into the pockets of Dido Alström in the way of royalties. I thought of Dido Alström, the obnoxious fellow that he was, and I have never been sicker.

“That's—that's—why, Dido Alström isn't entitled to any such good fortune!” I croaked.

Tweed-suit laughed. “We had the same idea, sorta.”

“You—”

He nodded. “We're relieving him of it. Of course, we haven't got our hands on it yet, but I think we will.”

“What happened?” I blurted.

“Well, we were a little careless and Dido Alström found out we were after the secret, so he decided to put them where we wouldn't be able to get them.”

“And where was that?”

“He gave them to you, Henry.”

“Me?” I yelled. This was unbelievable. It could hardly be true either.

“The monkey suit,” the man said.

“But I don't understand!”

“The monkey suit,” he explained patiently, “is the key to the formula.”

“I'm so confused!” I said.

“We ain't exactly in broad daylight ourselves,” tweed-suit informed me. “There's one little hitch—making Dido Alström tell us the formula or where it is. But we'll get that done.” He wheeled on Dido Alström. “Won't we, bub?” he demanded.

DIDO ALSTRÖM had been listening to this with all the emotions of a selfish man who was terrified about his own safety. It did not seem to me that he was at all worried about my own welfare, and I resented this, because after all he had something at stake—millions of dollars no doubt—and I had nothing. I was the bystander. I was Dido Alström's sucker. I wouldn't have been in this if it hadn't been for Dido.

Now Dido said, “Henry, don't believe that story.”

“Isn't it true?” I asked anxiously.

“Not exactly,” Dido said. “You see, Henry, there isn't any food preserving supersonic gadget. There never was. I—well—I told some people there was, and that got me into this trouble.”

“Who did you tell you had such a thing?”

“I—uh—Mr. Farrar,” Dido replied grimly. “And Lila, and maybe one or two others.”

“You lied?”

“Yeah.”

“But why?”

He said bitterly, “Old man Farrar didn't think much of me as a prospective son-in-law. I wanted to marry Lila and he was nixing it. So I told the lie about a food preserving process to fix myself up, make him think I was some guy.”

“But Dido, what good would that have done you?” I demanded.

“Hah! He would have let me marry Lila.”

“But he would have found out later!”

“After I was one of the family, maybe,” Dido said carelessly. “What could he do then? If he got tough, I could sue him for a potful of dough for alienating my wife's affections. It wouldn't have come to that, though—I would have slid out of it by saying the process had a flaw in it that I hadn't discovered earlier.”

“Then there isn't any food-preservation machine?”

“No.” He eyed me anxiously. “You've got to believe me, Henry. You know I'm quite a liar.”

I did know he was quite a liar, all right.

But I had no idea what to think. If there was a food-preserving machine, Dido would doubtless lie to these men, who were trying to steal the secret, and say there wasn't. On the other hand, the tissue of falsehoods and four-flushing was exactly the sort of thing Dido Alstrong would perpetrate. So I had two stories that seemed equally logical. In either case, Dido deserved the mess he was in. I wished I wasn't in it with him.

"Henry," said tweed-suit, "I'll make you a proposition. A business deal. You check this supersonic gadget for us when we get it or the plans—if there's plans, you may have to build a model—and we'll cut you in on it."

"Give me a share?" I asked.

"That's right."

It was awfully tempting. "How much?"

"Ten per cent," he said.

"Oh, I'd have to have fifty per cent, at least," I said.

Dido Alstrong laughed bitterly. "Brothers, Henry is a child where everything but a dollar is concerned. Then he's a shark. You'll find that out."

Tweed-suit was glaring at me. "We may have to do some inducting," he said.

NOW came a very touching scene. It had, also, a certain hideous note.

Because another man—and this man also I had seen during the previous day at different places, not at the time recognizing him as one of the thugs—came into the place. He brought with him Mr. Farrar.

Mr. Farrar entered with his hands held on a level with his shoulders. His face was pale. When he saw Lila, his features registered the bitterest sort of stunned emotion.

"Father!" Lila cried. "They—you—"

She didn't say that she had suspected her father of masterminding the affair, but you could see that she was now convinced differently, and revolted with the very idea that she could have had such a thought.

"Lila, darling," Farrar said softly. "I—I was hoping—they told me they had you prisoner—I was hoping they lied."

Lila sobbed for a few moments. Then she turned to me. "Henry," she said. "Henry, I'm sorry I hit you and took the suit. I did it because—well—I was foolish enough to believe my father was involved."

"I understand," I said. "You wished to aid him."

Farrar did not seem astonished. He told me, "This is not news. Lila accused me of such a thing earlier last night—before you and Savage and Mayfair returned the second time. That was why Lila was not there. She had left in a rage, revolted with me."

I stared at Lila. "That's what you wanted to tell Savage when you telephoned?"

"Yes."

“But why didn't you tell *me*, Lila, when we talked.”

She said bitterly, “You just don't inspire confidence, Henry.”

I was bitterly hurt. After all I had been through, I wasn't inspiring confidence. It was a nauseating development.

“I'm very distressed,” I mumbled.

Tweed-suit asked dryly, “Are you distressed enough, Henry, to help us out with the gadget? You could put quite a few feathers in your nest while you're doing it.”

“But what—what about Lila, Mr. Farrar and Dido Alstrong?” I asked uneasily.

“They'll be distressed, too,” said tweed-suit. “And rather dead, I'm afraid.”

“Oh! Oh, no—”

An utterly unexpected voice—not a stranger's voice, though—addressed us.

“Speaking of distress,” it said. “I think now's as good a time as any to contribute some.”

I believe I experienced an undreamed-of emotion: I believe I was glad to see the lout Monk Mayfair.

Chapter XII

MAYFAIR'S voice was a little muffled because he stood outside a window. He remedied that. He knocked the glass out of the window. In the middle of the sound of breaking glass, his big voice—it was a normally squeaky voice, but it certainly changed when he was excited—said clearly, “The place is surrounded with cops. So act accordingly.”

Maybe it was the breaking glass. Maybe they just didn't believe him. Maybe they were too desperate to care—understandable, because there had been a cold-blooded murder.

Anyway, activities commenced.

Slim began by shooting Mr. Mayfair in the chest. This discomfited Mayfair. That, I swear to you, was all it did—discomfit him. Apparently he was standing rather precariously on a barrel or something outside the window, and the bullet unbalanced him; his great arms waved like a spider's legs, and presently he fell into the room. Not away from the window. Into the room. The effect was tremendous, because he removed the remainder of the glass from the window, and his yell was like a freight-engine whistling in the room. Mayfair came erect. He came toward Slim. Slim shot him again. Mayfair still came.

Slim said, “Blanks!” He really thought his gun was loaded with blank cartridges, evidently, because he pointed it at the ceiling, which was plastered, and pulled the trigger again. A bullet from his gun ploughed a quantity of plaster loose. Quite satisfied his bullets were real, Slim prepared to fire at Mayfair again. But he had wasted too much time, and Mayfair hit him. I had not realized a mere fist could change a man's face so.

Doc Savage's voice said distinctly, “Monk, get out of there! I told you we'd use gas on them!”

“Hell, I slipped and fell in the window,” Monk said.

I am afraid I have begun the description of this fight inadequately. Not that, even now, anything seems quite adequate. . . . Anyway, there had been at the beginning three victims in the room—myself, Lila, Mr. Farrar—or four counting Dido Alstrong. And the enemies were Slim, Pokey, Ossie, the tweed-suit, and the man who had brought Mr. Farrar—five. Slim was no longer interested. Four remained.

So there were now four foes, three-to-four neutrals, and bedlam. Everyone did whatever occurred to him or her at the time. I could not watch it all.

Savage came in. He had, dumfoundingly, been in the other room. The man's speed was fabulous. The tweed-suit and Ossie were levelling handguns; Savage was upon them instantly; he struck one gun away, seized the other, and got it. And then the pair were at him, and Pokey joined them.

I knew Savage could not overpower three of them. It was impossible. My only thought, the only way I could see life ahead of me, was to take flight. But I needed an excuse for it, and so I leaped to Lila, cried, “Here! I'll help you!”

She was still tied. Bound, I discovered, to the chair. Terror gave me no time to unbind her. I picked up girl and chair and made for the door. I made it, but fell down at the door; I went crashing down the steps, slammed into the ground on my face. There was mud. I was blinded.

The rain beat on me. The wind whipped my clothing. Inside the house, a gun crashed. A man screamed awfully. The mud hurt my eyes no end; I could not see a thing.

Then feet, a man's feet, hit hard beside me. I sensed—felt, heard—the force of a terrific blow that just missed my head. Someone was trying to brain me! He cursed.

Have you ever been blinded? And in a fight? It was very bad; I began to feel much as I had felt in Farrar's apartment. Not brave. Just imbued with a wish to live—to do anything, anything at all, to live.

Instinctively, my hands went up. Perhaps I was screaming in fear and rage; someone was. At any rate, and most fortunately, my hands encountered a down-slugging arm. I jerked. The other fell on me. We fought.

I hit, variously, the mud, an arm, a face, the ground again, my own leg—and I managed to bite, butt and kick almost as many objects. It was not very clear. It was too fast. It was like one fall—a great one, down a stairs, when one doesn't know what really happens.

At length the other one was still. Blinded, my eyes leaking, the mud hurting my eyeballs like acid, I lay across my victim.

A voice addressed a general statement. It was Mayfair.

He said: “What do you know! Henry wound up on the side of the white race.”

MAYFAIR took me by the collar and dragged me into the house, on into a kitchen, and jammed my head into a bucket of water. “Wash your face, Henry,” he said, and left. I cleared my eyes with all haste, then returned to the conflict scene.

The whole thing, as nearly as anyone could guess its time, had taken less than a minute. But the room was a shambles; furniture lay shattered, the air stank of gunpowder. Bodies were scattered about. Five of the

latter—accounting, unbelievably, for all the opponents.

Doc Savage carried Lila Farrar inside, placed her in a chair. He asked, “You all right?”

She nodded tensely. She was very muddy.

I said, “I’m sorry, Miss Farrar, that I fell with you.”

She gave me as pleasant a look as the circumstances permitted.

“I’m sorry, too, for the things I was thinking about you,” she said.

This was confusing. The implication was that I had done something to redeem myself. All I had done was fight, not very gallantly either, for my life.

I wondered which of these men on the floor I had overpowered while blinded. I looked at them. None of them, strangely, were either wet nor muddy.

Dido Alström was still tied to the chair. Apparently he had been unable to get into the fight.

Monk Mayfair went outdoors.

Doc Savage asked me quietly, “You feel all right, Henry?”

“I—er—wouldn’t call it all right,” I confessed. “I’m a trifle upset.”

He nodded. “Sorry about using you.”

“Using me?”

He hesitated, then inquired, “Hadn’t you figured that out?”

“Oh, yes,” I said vaguely. This was not true.

Savage now confronted Dido Alström, produced a large documentary envelope, opened it, fanned the blueprints and data sheets it contained before Dido’s face, and demanded, “This gadget phony?”

Dido Alström winced. “Yes.”

“How come?”

Now Dido Alström repeated substantially the story he had told me earlier—he didn’t have any supersonic gadget for preserving foodstuffs; he had just pretended to have one in order to impress Mr. Farrar so that he could wed Lila.

“I didn’t dream,” Dido finished, “that they would try to steal the thing off me, and kill me too. As soon as I was in danger, I went to that costume shop and rented the monkey suit, told the guy I didn’t have enough dough for the deposit, but would leave my watch and those papers for security. . . . Hey, how’d you get that envelope?”

Savage told him how. “Henry and I visited the costume place, and the proprietor happened to mention you were short of money. That seemed queer. So I left Henry locked in the car—the more Henry knew, the more trouble he seemed to be able to make—and went back and asked the proprietor what kind of a deposit had been made. He showed me the envelope. I had the police visit him and get it for me.”

“Well, I guess you can see the gadget won’t work,” Dido mumbled.

“Yes. Obviously.” Savage rifled the papers. “This one is an interesting document. . . . Nothing to do with the phony invention.”

“Uh-huh. You mean the statement of the facts,” Dido said. “Yeah, I put that in because I didn't want anybody killing me and getting away with it.”

“You figured,” said Savage, “that in case you were killed, the police would trace the monkey suit back to the shop where you rented it, and find out about the deposit you left, thus discovering the statement?”

“That's right.”

“It was a round-about way of naming your possible murderer.”

“Yeah, but I didn't want no statement like that in the hands of no lawyer, who might get conscience-ridden and turn it over to the cops. I wanted it where it would be found if I got killed, and also where I could get it back if things turned out well.”

“How could it have turned out well if your gadget was a fake?”

Dido Alström snorted. “Are you kidding? When this thing developed the way it did, I had a better hold on him than the invention, didn't I? I wanted the girl, and her dough.”

Savage shook his head slowly.

“I don't think I like you, Alström,” he said.

“That hurts me a lot,” Dido Alström said cheerfully. “A lot. In a pig's eye.”

Savage shrugged. “You got scared and fled the city, I take it. Why did you come here?”

“My pal, Hugo Davis, owns the place. I figured it a good hideout. I used to work in a Farrar plant near here, and spent time here before.”

“Did you know they killed Hugo Davis?”

“Huh?” Dido paled. “They—did.”

Monk Mayfair put his head in the door. “Henry's victim is waking up,” he said.

“Let him wake up,” Savage replied. “Then bring him inside.”

I stood there with the feelings of one whose mind had separated from his body and was hanging suspended several feet distant. Because for the first time I realized who my victim must have been.

THIS Savage was even worse than the rumors had had him. He was the mental wizard they had said he was. He had known, it was suddenly clear to me, all the answers very early in the affair. . . .

In an utterly miserable voice, I asked, “You—you knew Miss Farrar had telephoned me at your laboratory?”

“Why not? There are extension telephones in the laboratory where Monk and I were,” said Savage dryly.

“And you gave me the monkey suit, and sent me home to serve as bait?” I blurted.

He nodded. “Monk's idea, however. . . . Yes, we surmised what Miss Farrar had on her mind—the problem of whether or not her father was a crook and what she should do.”

“And you let those thugs take me, and followed us up here—”

He shook his head. “Wrong. We watched them take Miss Farrar, and followed *her* here. We were already here when you were brought.”

Dido Alström entered the discussion.

“What I want to know,” Dido complained, “is how'n hell they found *me* here! I thought this was a safe hangout. Only Henry Davis knew about it.”

Doc Savage glanced at him with dislike, said, “I'm afraid I was responsible. You see, I deliberately gave Farrar the idea that Hugo Davis and where he formerly lived were important. Farrar grabbed the bait. He did some thinking, decided that since you wouldn't hide out in your own place, it was logical that you would use one Hugo Davis knew of. The first thing he did, probably, was have his men find out what property Hugo Davis owned, and they spotted this cabin immediately.”

Monk Mayfair now booted Mr. Farrar into the room. Mr. Farrar showed the damage my fists and teeth had done.

Mr. Farrar did not look at me. He did not look at his daughter, either.

THE police came later. Two state troopers. A detective and an assistant District Attorney from New York City. They discussed the case with Doc Savage, and it developed that tweed-suit had killed Hugo Davis. They even found Hugo Davis' wallet on tweed-suit, and presently the man offered wildly to turn state's evidence and testify against Mr. Farrar, whom, it seemed, had been a crook for a long time. He had even been operating his Farrar Products company in a dishonest fashion.

“You probably knew Farrar was a crook,” I told Dido Alström outdoors. “You're probably as unreliable as he.”

“Henry,” said Dido bitterly, “the pot shouldn't call the kettle black. You stinker! I'll never forget that you were about to throw in with the gang and explain my gadget for them.”

“I was just pretending,” I said angrily.

“Hah!” he said.

I walked away from him. I didn't feel so tall. About tall enough to walk under a sleeping gopher.

Miss Lila Farrar was standing on a knoll. The knoll gave a view of green hills and blue distance as hazy as a blind man's eye.

“Lila, I'm so sorry, so sorry, about your father,” I said.

She had a small twig in her fingers. She turned it, looked at it, broke it. “There are many things to be sorry for,” she said.

I knew she was including me.

THE END