

THE EVIL GNOME

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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A Complete Book-length Novel
by **KENNETH ROBESON**

Even Doc Savage found something new in science and resourcefulness!

Chapter I THE HOT-COLD DAY

LION ELLISON got into a mess in a very simple way. The whole thing was

quite innocent on her part. For all that Lion did was look for a job.

To begin with, Lion was almost broke, and she figured that practically nobody could be needing a job worse at the moment.

changed into quarters, dimes and nickels. When she took down the receiver, however, she smiled grimly.

To her complete astonishment, the operator eventually reported that the office of Doc Savage in New York would accept a collect call.

Lion came very close to the mouthpiece. "Put them on. . . Is this Doc Savage?"

"No."

"Well, put him on," Lion requested.

"Not a chance," the voice informed her. "He's not in town."

Lion bit her lips, listened to the voice asking, "Is this something important?"

"It couldn't be much more important," Lion said grimly. "How will I get hold of this Doc Savage? Where can I find him?"

The distant listener did not seem much impressed by the imperativeness in her voice. He said, "As I see it, there are only two things you can do. You can wait and call again in the morning, or you can go ahead and tell me your troubles."

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Monk," the voice explained. "The full name is Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. I'm one of Doc Savage's five assistants."

Lion deliberated. This was a serious matter; it was no exaggeration to say that her life was at stake. It wasn't any kind of job for assistants to be handling; Lion wanted the main guy himself.

"When did you say Doc Savage would be back?" she asked.

"In the morning," Monk explained. "And there's absolutely no way of getting in touch with him until then."

"I'll try to tough it out," Lion said, and hung up.

LION ELLISON started to leave the grocery store, stopped just inside the door, watched a car of the State police cruise slowly by. The two officers in the machine were looking at everything very intently. "Hunting me," Lion thought, and shivered.

She was almost certain to be arrested—if she remained in Missouri.

It was a time for desperate measures.

Lion made a grim mouth. "I've got it!" she said suddenly.

It was late afternoon when Lion cautiously parted dry weeds at the edge of a cornfield and studied the airport. There were two planes standing on the field, one a large and fast craft, the other a slower two-place sport craft. Lion decided on the big plane; it exactly suited her needs, providing it was fueled.

There was a slight drawback to her plan in the shape of a car full of State troopers who were parked near the office.

Lion was thoughtful for a while, then she retreated. Twenty minutes later, she ran across a yard and entered a farmhouse. It was milking time; the farmer and his wife were out at the cow lot. Lion went to the telephone.

She called the airport and said, "I want to talk to the State troopers. . . Hello, police? This is the girl you are hunting for the governor's murder. Do you want me to surrender? If so, will you come to a farmhouse five miles south of the airport and half a mile east of the highway?"

Lion slipped out of the farmhouse without being observed. She heard a motor roar, saw the patrol leave the airport in rocketing haste.

It was not much trouble for Lion to reach the large plane. She lost no time. A glance showed her that the craft must have been recently refueled; the tanks were full. She worked with the starter mechanism until the motor whooped into life.

Two men ran out of the office, yelled something she could not hear. She gunned the engine, sent a cloud of dust rolling over the men. Wheel brakes released, the ship sped across the field, making a drumming sound.

Lion had once been an aviation bug, and she'd had about fifty hours of solo. That was enough. She hauled back on the wheel, took the ship off. The craft was very fast; within a few seconds, the airport range station with its radio transmitter towers was below her.

message would be picked up in the lost valley. Days later, a mule train loaded with gold would come out of the jungle. The source of wealth had come to Doc Savage as a result of an unusual adventure; the hoard was his to draw upon only as long as he used the wealth in his strange career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers.

"All aboard," Renny called.

They used a plane of moderate size and great speed. It taxied out through the electrically opened doors of the big warehouse-hangar, bounced across Hudson River waves for a while, then took the air.

THEY had flown across most of Pennsylvania when Lion gave a violent start, sprang up, hurried forward and clutched Doc Savage's shoulder.

"They'll recognize me!" she gasped. "The police. That picture. I can't go back to Missouri."

The bronze man had been flying. He glanced at the instruments, noted the altitude was above eighteen thousand, then threw a lever which connected up the robot pilot. He slid out of the pilot's seat.

"We brought along a make-up kit to take care of that," he explained.

"Disguise me?"

"Yes."

Lion shook her head. "We used make-up around the circus, so I know something about it. I doubt if you can make a disguise effective."

"We can try," the bronze man said quietly.

Twenty minutes later, Lion examined herself thoroughly in the mirror. She saw a little old lady with grayish hair, pale-blue eyes that were rather staring, discolored teeth—and wrinkles. The gray hair was the result of dye; she had expected that. The changed color of her eyes—pale-blue instead of warm-brown—was the result of colored caps of nonshatter optical glass which fitted on the eyeball; Lion had heard of invisible glasses of that character, so she was not too surprised. But the wrinkles bothered her.

Lion indicated the wrinkles. "You sure these will come out?"

"Easily."

Lion said, "They'd better!" rather fiercely. The bronze man had applied a chemical to her face; it had felt like her tongue after taking a bite of green persimmon.

The remainder of the flight was uneventful, except for speed. The pace of the plane was breath-taking. They were very high, but visibility was good, and Lion picked out Columbus, Indianapolis, Springfield, in faster order than she had believed possible. "I wouldn't have believed this," she said.

"It's not so remarkable," Monk said; then reminded her, "The regular passenger line makes it from New York to St. Louis in about six hours."

Lion watched below. She saw Hannibal, Missouri, sprawled on the banks of the Mississippi about which Mark Twain had written so much. Later she pointed, said, "There's Kirksville."

Doc Savage landed, putting the plane down with hardly a jar. They taxied toward the edge of the field, where the office and the red-and-white beacon tower stood. Doc cut the motors.

A taxicab was parked near the office, the driver standing beside the machine. "Wanna cab?" the driver called.

"You bet," Monk shouted.

The driver got into the cab, rolled the machine toward them, and stopped when he was very close. Three men—they had been concealed in the back seat—scrambled out.

The three men had guns and badges that either said, "Sheriff," or "Deputy Sheriff."

"I'm sheriff of the county," one man explained. "Just take it easy while we look you over."

Other, armed deputies came out of the office one after another until a round dozen had appeared. Some had revolvers; more of them carried rifles and shotguns.

"A regular army of duck hunters," Monk muttered.

"Shut up," the sheriff told him.

Chapter VII MYSTERY MURDER

THE jail had been built a long time ago, Monk concluded after a round of his cell, during which he gave the bars of each window a thorough shaking. "Age has just toughened this place," he decided.

They had been searched and confined to the cell, and on the other side of the bars now stood the sheriff, his deputies, some city police and the prosecuting attorney. The spectators were staring at the prisoners, particularly Doc Savage, with much interest, but no sympathy.

Ham walked over, shook the heavy door indignantly and shouted, "Listen, you guys, don't you know who you've locked up?"

"Said he was Doc Savage," the sheriff answered, unimpressed.

"Doesn't that mean anything to you?" Ham yelled.

The sheriff filled his pipe and struck a match without any show of concern. "You fellows trying to tell me how important you are?"

Ham peered at him and decided it was hopeless to try to bluff the man. Ham made aimless gestures with his hands—he was at a loss without the sword-cane in his fingers—and finally threw up his arms in disgust and turned to the others.

"What'll we do now?" he groaned.

"We'd better think it over," Monk said.

"Nope, let's try something you can do, too," Ham suggested.

Monk was too concerned with their plight to recognize the insult. It was as solid a jail as he had ever seen. The sheriff was not an impressionable individual, so there was small likelihood of his releasing them. The prosecuting attorney also looked as if he was ambitious.

The sheriff rapped on the cell door and made a parting announcement.

"The governor of this State was murdered, and that girl has been identified as the murderess," he explained. "You were with her. We found a make-up kit in your plane, so we know

you helped disguise her. We figure that hooks you up with complicity in the crime."

"We're innocent," Renny rumbled angrily.

The sheriff snorted. "I suppose the girl is innocent, too."

"I am," Lion snapped.

The sheriff snorted again.

"You're all so innocent," he said grimly, "that they'll probably hang you."

THE sheriff returned to his office in the courthouse, put his feet on his desk, lit a cigar and engaged in some self-satisfied contemplation. He was not unaware that he had some famous prisoners in his jail, but he was determined not to be swayed by that. The law was the law, as far as he was concerned.

He did some pondering about the tip that had enabled him to make the arrest. It was a telephone tip, and the voice had impressed the sheriff as being somewhat creepy.

The sheriff now had a visitor. He was a shriveled little gentleman, very dapperly dressed, with a camera flung over his shoulder, a sheaf of copy paper in one hand and his vest pocket full of cigars and pencils.

"I'm Marty McNew from the St. Louis *Daily Examiner*," the visitor explained. "Understand you've arrested the girl who murdered the governor? How about it?"

"Hope so," the sheriff said.

"Heard there were some men with her?"

"Fellow named Doc Savage," the sheriff admitted. "Also three others named Ham Brooks, Monk Mayfair, and Renny Renwick."

"You going to hold them all in jail?"

"Hell, yes!" the sheriff said. "They were helping a murderess, weren't they?"

The visitor smirked. He asked a few more routine questions, presented the sheriff with cigars, and left.

The sheriff was thoughtful after the fellow left. "Something familiar about that man," he thought, "but I can't quite place it." He puffed at the cigar, made a

Later he snapped on the interoffice communicator and summoned his bank officers, as well as the head of the collection department and three of his principal operatives. These persons assembled in the office.

"I've called you here," announced Ellery Dimer, "concerning a matter which has completely amazed and horrified me."

He frowned at them and took a deep breath.

"I am not going to beat around the bush," he said. "This thing came to my attention through my half-brother, a man by the name of Danny Dimer. I am going to tell you the whole truth, then we are going to decide—"

It was then that his throat got cut from ear to ear, the knife appeared in his chest and he began screaming.

ELLERY DIMER did not emit much of a scream. Mostly it was gurgle. And a thin horrible crimson spray flew over some of those assembled in the room. An assistant cashier fainted without making a noise.

The murder was utterly impossible.

Dimer had stood there, unharmed and speaking firmly. Then his throat was open and leaking. The knife was sticking out of his heart.

The dead man fell to the floor.

One of the collectors folded over a wastebasket and was sick. Every face in the room had drained. For moments there were no sounds but those made by the man draped over the wastebasket.

Eventually they collected their wits and called the police. And the officers were anything but receptive to the story.

The homicide officers, having listened, held a private consultation.

"The story they're telling can't be true," growled the officer, "therefore they're lying to cover up."

"Sure. One of them killed Dimer. The others are lying."

"Or they all conspired to kill him, more likely."

So all of the bank employees who had been in the room when Ellery Dimer died shortly found themselves inside

Kansas City's very effective city jail. The charge was murder.

Another factor did not help. Examiners discovered a shortage of two hundred thousand dollars in the stock of cash which should have been in the vaults.

Chapter VIII VAGUE TRAIL

THE Adair County sheriff—Kirksville, Missouri, was in Adair County—was a conscientious man. When he saw a copy of a Kansas City paper containing the story of the fantastic death of Banker Ellery P. Dimer, he went to the prosecuting attorney.

"That kind of puzzles me," he said.

"Puzzles you how?"

"Remember how this girl insists she has never been anywhere near the capitol in Jefferson City, and didn't even know the governor?"

"This Lion Ellison, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I don't see any connection."

"I just had a hunch." The sheriff picked up the paper, added, "Think I'll let 'em look at this. Might come to something."

He walked over to the jail and handed the newspaper to Doc Savage. The bronze man read the item about the banker's murder, but his metallic features did not change expression.

"Know anything about that?" the sheriff asked.

"Nothing worth repeating," Doc admitted.

"You haven't given explanation of why you were in company of this girl," the sheriff said.

"Would it have got us out of jail?"

The sheriff grinned thinly. "Not much."

After the sheriff departed, Doc Savage passed the newspaper to the others. Renny scowled, rumbled, "Holy cow!" He stared at Doc Savage. "This helps explain why we were framed into jail."

"Four or five miles."

Monk ejaculated, "Hey, we can't run away from this thing! We gotta lick it!"

"There will be enough police in that town," Doc explained, "to find us if we stayed. Furthermore, we have no clues in Kirksville."

Monk grumbled, "I don't see where we've got any clues anywhere."

"There's that murder of the banker in Kansas City," Ham reminded.

"Yeah, and Kansas City is full of cops. Furthermore, the cops would have found any clues that had been lying around."

Johnny got behind the wheel and drove the noisy car to the highway, turned south and took the first main road left turn. The road was blacktopped, and the pale headlights were almost useless.

"Where are we headed for, Doc?" Renny asked.

"You remember that picture of the governor being murdered?" Doc asked.

Lion said suddenly, violently, "I'll never forget it! Last night, all the time I was trying to sleep, I couldn't see anything else."

"It was taken by an amateur photographer named Dan Meek, 902 First Street, in Jefferson City."

Ham, astonished, demanded, "Where did you get that information?"

"The newspaper that published the picture. The information was in the outline underneath the photograph."

The old car gave a great jump, seemingly trying to swap ends, as Johnny turned into a farm field. Weeds threshed against the chassis. Johnny had wheeled his plane behind a thicket of scrub oak and maple trees which grew thickly on a spot where a house must once have stood. Leaves were gone from the maples, but frost-painted foliage was still thick upon the scrub oaks.

"Johnny," Doc said

"Yes?"

"You weren't in that flashlight picture the newspaper photographer took. There is nothing to prove that you helped us escape. And if this car is found here, they will know we left by airplane. You had better return the rented cars, and keep an eye on things. And don't let

yourself be seen any more than necessary."

"Why should I keep out of sight?" Johnny asked.

"Because anyone who took the trouble to investigate could learn you were a member of our outfit," Doc reminded him.

Monk put in, "What he means is that you're about as inconspicuous as the Eiffel Tower."

Johnny sighed resignedly and remained behind. Doc put the plane into the air, lifting the ship over a hedge, and pointing it southeast to avoid the government airport at Millard, where the attendants would doubtless make note of any passing planes.

Ham stared back at the headlights of Johnny's old automobile. "I'll bet he keeps under cover—about like a Fourth of July celebration. He likes his excitement too well."

"If he'd been in that jail a couple days, he'd be careful," rumbled big-fisted Renny.

Lion Ellison came forward and put a hand on Doc Savage's arm. Excitement made her fingers bite at his arm like jaws. "Do you have truth serum that you can give this photographer? I've got to know whether he saw me—well, like the picture showed." Her voice was strained.

Monk, who had overheard her, said grimly, "We'll crack that egg without any trouble."

Chapter IX THE IMPOSSIBLE MURDER

OVER Jefferson City, visibility was good. They could discern the capitol building, a thing of domed magnificence like alabaster in the moonlight, with a fountain that was like a jewel before it, then the lazy silver ribbon of the Missouri River. And spread behind were the bright sparks of the city lights, with the State penitentiary a ponderous mass off to the left.

Doc said, "We had better avoid the airport."

This plane, which was one Johnny had taken to the Painted Desert

back to a chair, sank the man in it, and jammed their faces close together. Monk's face was an object calculated to induce considerable fright.

"Tell us the truth!" Monk roared. "That's the only way you can stop 'em from hanging you until you are dead."

Dan Meek's mouth behaved like a fish out of water. Monk got him by the throat, lifted him up by pressure and choked him somewhat. "Hanging by your neck until you're dead!" Monk shrieked. "See how it feels!"

Monk figured he was doing very well. But the effect of surprise wore off, so that Dan Meek got his mental feet back on solid ground. Two hot spots of color flamed in his cheeks. Suddenly he planted a hard right hook on Monk's nose.

Monk staggered back, grabbed his nose and honked and blew in pain.

"I'll tear 'im apart!" Monk squalled. "I'll liquidate him!"

"On the contrary," said Dan Meek, "you'll behave in a civil manner, or get a chair broken over your head."

DOC SAVAGE had moved to the far side of the room, where there was a door. He passed on into a dining room furnished with a dining suite that was very new and shiny. Beyond there was a kitchen, ordinary except that it contained a refrigerator so new that the interior had not yet been unpacked.

On the rear steps—they were a steep wooden tunnel sloping down in the chill blackness—the bronze man planted the two powders in the same fashion as when he had entered. The dust-colored particles on lowermost steps; the yellowish powder higher.

He went back and took over the questioning of Dan Meek. The bronze man made his voice persuasive, firm without being dominating. He said, "We are investigating the murder of the governor, and the murder of a banker named Ellery Dimer, in Kansas City, and we would like to have any information you can give us."

Dan Meek had completely recovered his self-possession. He stood with legs wide apart, hands on his hips.

"I don't know anything about the banker's killing," he said levelly. "I remember reading it in the newspapers. What's mysterious about it? They arrested six or seven people for the banker's murder, didn't they?"

Ham said, "The people in the room with the banker claim they did not see what killed him."

Dan Meek snorted. "You believe that, I suppose? Hell, of course they saw it. They're probably all in it together."

Doc said, "We had better begin on the murder of the governor."

"Yeah?" Dan Meek scowled.

"You saw it, didn't you?"

"So what?"

"There is no object in becoming hard-boiled," Doc said without emotion.

Dan Meek bristled, took a step forward and leveled an arm. His voice was almost a shout. "You're not keeping me," he yelled. "I've got you pegged!"

Monk said, "I'm gonna peg you if you don't behave!"

Dan Meek was not impressed. "I saw your pictures in the newspapers," he shouted. "You were arrested in Kirksville for helping the girl who murdered the governor." He swung, stabbed his arm at Lion. "And that's the girl!"

Monk said, "We're gonna have to get this cookie into a corner."

THE prisoner scowled and shook his right fist at them. "Get out of here all of you!" He did not seem in the least afraid of them. "I'm going to call the police."

Doc Savage removed a flat metal case from his coat pocket, opened it and began placing the contents on the table.

"Truth serum?" Ham asked, looking at the case.

Doc nodded.

Dan Meek looked a little less certain of himself. His hands tightened and he said angrily, "You fools! You can't keep me here."

"Can't keep you—that's crazy talk." Monk glowered at him. "I personally, with one hand, could keep a dozen guys like you right here." Then the homely chemist narrowed one small eye; an idea had hit him. His face sobered.

Lion Ellison said, "What are we supposed to do?"

"What we usually do in a case like this," Monk told her, "is stick around and keep an ear cocked at the short-wave radio. Guess we'll do that."

They drove on down the road.

Back in the abandoned farmhouse, Doc Savage went through the motions of making himself comfortable. The place was bare. Going out to the barn, the bronze man came back with an armload of dry timothy which he had collected from the loft; he heaped this in a corner. "Do for a bed," he explained.

The long-armed, long-legged Brockman stared at him in astonishment. "We going to be here that long?"

"It will take time."

The other seemed to be in the grip of complete astonishment. He went through the usual puzzle motions—scratching his jaw, rubbing his head and screwing his face around in thinking shapes. Finally he muttered, "You have solved the whole mystery?"

"Practically."

"What is back of it?"

Instead of answering the query, Doc Savage seemed not to hear. He leaned back, half closed his flake-gold eyes, and after a moment indulged in what appeared to be philosophy. "You know, it has often occurred to me to wonder whether the human race might not be fundamentally evil. Otherwise, why should social behavior apparently be controlled by fear?" The bronze man's flake-gold eyes rested on the other. "You do not understand what I mean, do you? Take this situation, for example. The thing could have been a great boon to mankind, but due to the evil texture of certain minds, it is going to be anything but a boon, unless we can stop it."

"What you're saying doesn't make sense to me."

"You'll understand when my associates come back with the prisoners."

The bronze man got up, moved to the door and stood there for a while.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"Not very."

"I am." Doc stared off into the distance. "There is a farmhouse across the field three-quarters of a mile or so. It

might be a good idea to go over there and buy a chicken or something we can cook. Want to go along?"

"I—hm-m-m—guess not. I'm kind of tired."

"Be with you soon."

The bronze man moved away from the house and was soon lost from sight in a cornfield.

The man who had said he was Burdo Brockman stood in the door staring after Doc. Nothing on his face was pleasant.

"This plays hell with our plans," he growled.

THE man who had said he was Burdo Brockman forced himself to remain where he was until Doc Savage had been out of sight for some moments. By that time, impatience had got a little perspiration out on his body. Finally, deciding it was safe, he lunged off the rickety old porch, galloped through the weeds, hurdled the barbed-wire fence and took out down the road. His haste-frenzied feet knocked up little dust puffs.

The plane—Johnny's ship, which Doc's party had been using—stood in the pasture, a great glinting metallic insect in the morning sun.

Several curiosity viewers—they were neighborhood farmers—were examining the plane or loafing about discussing crops and prices. A wagon and two cars had stopped on the dirt road.

The long-armed man studied the scene carefully.

"No cops," he grunted aloud. He seemed very relieved.

The man straightened his clothing, brushed off the weeds and walked out boldly. He approached the plane.

"Hi-yah," he said to the farmers.

"Howdy," they greeted, and stared at him curiously.

"My plane." The man gestured at the ship carelessly. "Broke a little gadget in the engine last night and had to land. Been to town and got it." He spoke airily and with excellent convincingness. The farmers seemed unconcerned, not even greatly interested in the machine. As a matter of fact, planes were not unusual to

