

THE BLACK SPOT

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. DEATH'S REVELRY

ANDREW PODREY VANDERSLEEVE had guests in his Westchester mansion. Guests in strange garb. Grotesque guests in exclusive Westchester hills. Their conduct was as incongruous as their queer clothing.

Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve was not perturbed by all this. For the master of several millions was very dead. He sat at his ornate mahogany desk with his arms sprawled. Blood black as ink had flowed from his aristocratic veins.

The Vandersleeve guests enjoyed themselves in unseemly fashion. They shouted at each other. Some voices were hoarse and menacing. Women emitted squealing screams. Occasionally a gun popped viciously.

Upstairs, one dead hand of Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve lay in the little pool of purplish-black blood. No other person appeared to have been with him in the big library. The door and windows now were securely locked.

Outside the immense house, the walled estate was filled with the odd, roughly clad women and men. Many women wore cheap and garish dresses.

Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve had only a black spot over his heart. The upper social strata of Westchester, an exclusive residential suburb of New York, was due for a shock.

Wild merriment rippled the night mist over the hills. The several hundred guests might have been hoodlums and their molls.

Yet upstairs, beside Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve's inert head, much real money lay undisturbed. There were a number of century notes and bills of small denomination. These were in a neat pile, with a few pieces of silver weighting them down.

Because of the character of the party, guards were everywhere. The guns in their low-slung holsters had the businesslike mark of the law upon them. Four men wore the uniforms of State police. The State coppers remained on the highway outside the Vandersleeve estate. Their keen eyes surveyed the occupants of each arriving automobile.

In pairs, the four State policemen were stationed at the front corners of the estate wall. One wearing the insignia of a sergeant was growling aloud.

"I've got a hunch something's due to crack wide open before this thing's over."

"Well, it could happen," said the other policeman.

A swanky car swung past them. The chauffeur was sitting upright, with a scornful expression on his clean features. His passengers were shouting and singing.

Meeting this sedan head-on another car swung down the road. This, too, had a dignified chauffeur. Its occupants were roughly clothed. Their faces were masked.

It seemed for a split-second as if the cars would collide. But both chauffeurs were adroit drivers. With an effort they avoided a direct clash. The fenders grated and rubbed. One car slid into the shallow ditch.

The driver of the other car braked to a stop. Five or six men in masks spilled onto the concrete.

"If it ain't Happy Joe himself," shouted one of these men, with a laugh. "All right, Joe, shove them dames out an' alla you line up!"

Three women were pushed out. They uttered little screams and sent their white hands into the air. Three men lined up beside them. One of the three men was young, but his eyes were bloodshot. He was

the one called "Happy Joe." He seemed to take some pride in the cognomen. While three of the masked men kept pistols pointed, the others started relieving the victims of their cash and jewelry. They met with no resistance. The two State policemen walked closer. They were thinking this "holdup" was part of the horseplay of the "gangster party."

"Please, don't take that!" suddenly pleaded one of the women.

She pulled back a slender hand. On one finger was an emblem ring that might have been a family heirloom.

"Says you!" rapped one of the masked men. "There won't be any holdin' out! Oh, you would—" The young woman had slapped him. His mask fell off. The man seized the girl's arm and twisted. With rough fingers, he jerked at the emblem ring. The metal circle came free, tearing the skin and flesh of the woman's finger. She screamed now with real pain.

"Why, you dumb ox, you can't do that!" yelled the young man named Happy Joe.

He accompanied his protest with swift action. Though clearly drunk, he carried a quick punch. One balled fist smacked squarely into the chin of the man who had pulled off the ring. The man teetered on his heels.

Then an automatic cracked. Happy Joe's left was starting a swing that might have been a finisher.

"Why, damn it," he coughed out, "you—you've shot me!"

His swinging arm carried him around. Blood spurted in little jets from the side of his throat. It pumped directly from his heart. His next words were gurgled. Then he fell down, twitching convulsively.

The two State coppers were not close enough to see clearly what had happened. But both had whipped their guns into their hands. The sergeant started running and shouted:

"Hey! That'll be about enough outside!"

Red death erupted from beside the chauffeur. This was a machine gun at close range. The State coppers jack-knifed as if solid blows had been struck across their stomachs.

The five or six masked men rolled back into their car. The chauffeur freed it smoothly. The car whirled away into the darkness.

FOR a minute or two, the other State coppers did not move to the scene of death. Nor did any of the several guards near the entrance of the estate. They were aroused to the tragic reality when a young woman ran screaming down the highway toward them.

She was waving a bloody-fingered hand.

"They're dead, I tell you! Oh, won't somebody do something! It's Happy Joe! They shot him!"

Then the policemen and guards came upon the results of the orgy of blood in the highway. One State copper stayed on the scene.

"Get headquarters!" he ordered the other, crisply. "Captain Graves himself, if he's there! Put the lid on that stuff inside! Hold everybody under guard, an' use Vandersleeve's hired men! Anybody might've known what'd be likely to bust out of this!"

CAPTAIN GRAVES, of the State police, was soon contacted. After he had viewed the murder victims outside, he made his way directly to the library of Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve.

A small gray mole of a man, who said he was Arthur Jotther, a distant cousin of the millionaire and his secretary, told Graves that Vandersleeve had not appeared at the party downstairs.

In view of the party's unusual wild character, this was of itself a peculiar circumstance. Graves knew Vandersleeve as a Wall Street plunger. He had continued to prosper during the depression. Real estate transactions and political options were his specialty.

Jotther was unlocking the library door.

"Mr. Vandersleeve had some important business to look after," he said, mildly. "He left word he was not to be disturbed. So he must have locked himself in."

"Didn't want to be disturbed!" snorted Captain Graves, the muscles of his square face twitching angrily. "What a helluva time to pick out for important business! Two of my men dead, an' another—" Captain Graves clamped his long lower teeth suddenly on his upper lip. The library door had swung open. A desk lamp shed a white circle over the desk in the middle of the big room.

It had become abruptly apparent to Captain Graves that Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve was permanently removed from all responsibility for the weird and tragic affairs of this wild night. Only a glance was required to tell that the millionaire was dead.

Captain Graves rattled out orders. These included one that barred any person departing from the Vandersleeve house. Next he sent outside for the medical examiner, who had come up with him. After which, Captain Graves permitted only Arthur Jotther and two policemen to enter the library.

The captain remained at some distance from the polished desk. He was classifying every object with possible relation to the position of the millionaire's body.

The doctor was a fat, little man.

"Dead an hour, perhaps two hours," he announced almost as soon as he had touched Vandersleeve's body. "The body has stiffened, but it doesn't seem to be like rigor mortis. It's like he'd fought something and his muscles set that way when he died. Most unusual!"

"No more unusual, doc, than for ink to be spilled where there doesn't seem to be any ink to be

upset," pointed Captain Graves. "His right hand spilled it, but there isn't any inkstand or bottle." The medical examiner poked a fat finger at the little black pool on the desk alongside the dead man's right hand. The pool had nearly dried.

"Well-well-well!" sputtered the doctor.

He was rubbing the finger that had touched the dried black stain on the desk. He lifted the dead man's right hand. With one palm he rubbed the top of the smooth desk thoughtfully.

"Humph! Chemically impossible!"

"That's what I thought," said Captain Graves, "but I was waiting for your opinion. His wrist is slashed by the broken glass. That would be his blood. I've heard some of the old families claim it's blue, but I've never heard of that color even with a black sheep."

"Yes, his wrist was cut by the glass," said the medical examiner. "He had been drinking. Some one was with him."

"I'd judged that," said Captain Graves, referring to the decanter of red liquor and the two glasses on the desk. One of the glasses was shattered. "Perhaps he brought his hand down suddenly and broke the glass. It might have been he was struck."

"He wasn't struck," said the medical examiner. "There is no sign of violence, except for the cut on his wrist."

Arthur Jotther spoke unexpectedly with his meek, small voice.

"I don't think Mr. Vandersleeve was quarreling with any one. He seemed to be in an extremely jovial mood. As a matter of fact, it was I he was drinking with. He invited me, which was most unusual. We had two drinks. Then he said he did not want to be disturbed. I heard him lock the door."

"Well-well-well!" sputtered the medical examiner. "I was about to say perhaps the liquor—it might have had something to do with the color of the blood—but wait!"

With expert movement, the doctor produced a small lancet. With this he made a slight, deep incision across an area of the dead man's arm. The blood of the corpse was thick and did not flow. But in the opened vein it was as black as that staining the desk.

"I suffered no ill effects from the drinks," suggested Jotther. "If you'll pardon me, I think perhaps the money might have something to do with it."

"I've been thinkin' about that money," said Captain Graves. "There's several grand on the desk. So it wasn't robbery. Doc, is there evidence of poison?"

"Well, it's my first experience with dark blood," retorted the examiner. "Offhand, I'd say it probably is poison."

"Then it could be suicide," said Captain Graves, but his eyes were boring into Arthur Jotther.

"Or there might have been poison placed in his glass. By the way, Mr. Jotther, what do you think?" The quick, direct question indicated Captain Graves already had a suspicion of his own. Arthur Jotther's reply came with a slap of surprise.

"I don't believe Mr. Vandersleeve killed himself," he said, wildly. "There is considerable money missing. Would you object to my counting the money on the desk?"

Captain Graves whistled to himself.

"As far as Mr. Vandersleeve's death is concerned," added Arthur Jotther, "perhaps I could be said to have good reason for wishing it. Though I was his secretary, he was bitterly opposed to my hope of marrying Geneva, his daughter. Despite that, I believe I have been bequeathed a small fortune in his will."

"I'll be damned!" exploded Captain Graves. "O. K.! Count the money!"

The mild little man fingered the notes and silver quickly. "It comes to \$18,450.80," he specified. "That means the sum of \$131,549.20 is missing."

Captain Graves exclaimed again.

"That's a lot of money and it's a clever cover-up! It proves no ordinary crook pulled this job. Somebody's smart, too smart! All right, doc. Any more ideas on what killed him?"

The medical examiner had stripped back the millionaire's shirt. He was tentatively touching a mark directly over Vandersleeve's heart.

This was a round black spot, round as a perfect circle.

"Funny," murmured the medical examiner. "And it seems to penetrate deeply. It's something more than a surface discoloration. It will require an autopsy, of course, to determine its true character, but I would say offhand that black spot either originated from the heart or goes all the way in."

"Then he was hit?" quizzed the captain. "By what kind of a weapon?"

"No, I don't mean that. It isn't a bruise. The skin is unbroken and so are the veins underneath. It's—well, it's just a black spot—black like his blood."

Captain Graves eyed Arthur Jotther keenly. The mild little man must be clever. Without reason he had volunteered the admission he stood to profit by Vandersleeve's death. That he had wanted to marry the millionaire's daughter.

"How do you know about the correct amount of money?" Graves suddenly questioned.

Arthur Jotther was not in the least disturbed.

"Mr. Vandersleeve brought \$150,000 cash out from the city," he said quietly. "The sum was to take

up a secret land option on the harbor. The other party insisted the payment be made in cash."

"And who is this other party?"

"I have no means of knowing," said Jotther. "Mr. Vandersleeve did not confide in me. Also, I know he destroyed the letter he received. He informed me of the purpose of the money. He was to have completed the deal tonight."

"Has big deal on—doesn't want to be disturbed—and pulls a gangster party," muttered Captain Graves.

Chapter II. HANDS IN THE DARK

CAPTAIN GRAVES'S words cleared up much of the mystery of the night's weird happenings. While Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve had died at his desk with a mysterious black spot over his heart, his guests had staged their own conception of how hoodlums might enjoy themselves at a blowout. The luridly painted women and the snarling, roughly garbed men were members of the swankiest set. The guns they used were loaded with harmless blanks. Members of society were giving an imitation of their belief how the underworld would dress and act.

It had been a "gangsters' party." Staid, exclusive Westchester would be many a day recovering from the night's bloody orgy. For the scene in the highway had not been on the program.

"We'll have every last man and woman in the house come through this room," announced Graves. "I want no word passed out as to what they will see, until they are in here to see it."

Among all of the gasping socially elect conducted through the death room were two distinctive figures. Perhaps it was because their hair was of somewhat the same flaming color.

"Red" Mahoney, a movie news cameraman, had been grinding out some "shots" of the gangster party.

It would go to the screen under the heading, "Oddities in the News."

Red was now seething with enthusiasm for his calling. The big six-foot cameraman with the blazing red hair was now on the trail of real news. It is a real picture when a playboy of the prominence of Happy Joe Carpenter and a couple of State coppers lie dead together on a highway in Westchester.

It was even bigger news for Red when he learned the millionaire who had sponsored the party was himself murdered. Mahoney welcomed that visit in the library. His picture-minded ambition was all set on getting a news-reel shot of Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve as he sat at his desk, dead.

To that end, Red was spotting every possible nook of concealment for a camera.

The other person with bizarre hope was a young woman. No amount of badly placed cosmetics could conceal her beauty. Even the unusual redness of her painted lips only brought out the golden intelligence of her eyes.

This young woman's hair was not red. It was more like each separate hair had been rubbed with glistening golden powder.

For this outstanding guest at the Vandersleeve gangster party was none other than Patricia Savage. She was a cousin of the noted Doc Savage. At times, she had shared a small part of the adventures of the great scientist, humanitarian and man of action.

The body of the dead millionaire had been placed to cause the black spot over his heart to show to each person entering. It was a gruesome experiment. Policemen stood handy.

When a woman screamed and fainted, she was promptly removed. Captain Graves was not usually a hard man. But two of his best men had been killed.

Graves was convinced the confederate of the outside holdup men was still among the guests. With his men well stationed, he was studying the reactions of each person coming into the room.

An assistant with Red Mahoney slipped a movie camera and a magazine on which the film is run, into the library. Intent on his psychological experiment, Captain Graves did not note the failure of two visitors to leave the library with the others.

Patricia Savage slipped behind the velvet drapery in an alcove.

As the last line of guests moved out, Patricia learned about the black blood, the black spot and the curious circumstance of the missing money.

Captain Graves closed the library door. The guests had passed out of the room.

Graves turned to Arthur Jotther.

"The circumstances remain such that I'll have to hold you for questioning," he said. "Now you might tell us what you've done with the hundred and thirty-one grand? I suppose you thought by breaking Vandersleeve's whisky glass, it would escape analysis. I expect we'll find this black poison on the pieces."

Arthur Jotther remained cool.

"I expected to be arrested," he said, quietly. "I don't see how you could do anything else."

However, I hope I get clear soon enough to help find the real murderer."

Captain Graves, after formally holding Arthur Jotther, seemed puzzled as to his next procedure.

"We'll have an autopsy as quickly as possible," he instructed the medical examiner. "There isn't much to be done until we find the character of the poison."

The doctor had been examining the dead man's eyes.

"Maybe there'll be poison, but I doubt it," he decided.

"There's got to be something!" growled Captain Graves. "What's that black spot?"

"You tell me that, and we won't need an autopsy," said the examiner.

Before Captain Graves could reply, the library flared brilliantly with a white light. From behind an alcove curtain close to Pat Savage came the little clicking grind of a movie camera in operation. Red Mahoney had made a quick set-up. He was burning a calcium flare that would last about a minute and a half. Already he had the biggest murder news of the day recorded in the running strip of celluloid.

Captain Graves roared and his big body shoved across the room. He snatched the drapery to one side. Red grinned at him evenly.

"Hello, captain," he remarked calmly, still turning the little crank. "Saw a chance to get a good shot and thought I wouldn't bother you. Mind moving over just a little."

"You'll get no shot in here, an' you know it!" rapped the State police captain. "Here! Gimme that magazine!"

"But I've already got it," chuckled Red. "It's now the property of the Future Pictures Corporation and—"

"I don't care if it's the property of all Hollywood, you're not taking it with you!" roared Captain Graves. "Johnson, grab the machine!"

Johnson, a burly State copper, seized the magazine. The knobby fist of Red punched outward and upward. The State copper was unfortunately exposing his chin. But as he started to topple, Captain Graves fastened a throttling hold upon Mahoney.

The captain hooked the movie magazine with his other hand.

"That punch will get you about sixty days to cool off," he advised Red Mahoney. "And we'll take good care of this movie shot. It's one that will never reach—"

The lights went out. The darkness came so quickly it seemed to puff black smoke into every one's eyes. Red twisted loose from Captain Graves. But the irate trooper, Johnson, was up and swinging. He paid Red back in full for the sock on the chin.

Captain Graves felt the movie film magazine ripped from his hand. He swung wildly at a figure he could not see in the darkness. A man's hard, sinewy fingers gripped his throat, then let him go. Patricia Savage was slithering across the room. Her small feet made no sound in the deep rug. She was groping for the outer door when it swung unexpectedly in her face.

Pat got through before any one could interfere. All lights in the big house were off. From downstairs came feminine shrieks.

Pat could hear some one moving rapidly away from the library. She could not tell if the unseen person had been inside or close to the door on the outside.

Pat was recalling the position of a telephone in the hallway off the reception room downstairs. She wanted to call her cousin, Doc Savage, at his Manhattan skyscraper headquarters.

BACK in the library, Graves produced a flashlight. Red Mahoney was sitting on the floor. Blood was oozing from his chin where Johnson's knuckles had rapped him.

"Now hand me back that film magazine!" ordered Captain Graves.

"Don't make me laugh," said Red. "My face hurts!"

"Who grabbed the box?" demanded the captain.

His light swept the faces of his men. It picked out the medical examiner. Arthur Jotther was standing peaceably beside a State policeman. The flashlight uncovered no other person in the room.

"If I thought you had some one do that, I'd have you up six months for resisting and assault," the captain told Red.

"You'll never be famous," predicted Red, gloomily. "You can't buck the news-reels, an' I haven't got the thing, anyway." Mahoney was speaking the truth. He didn't have it.

UP on the eighty-sixth floor of New York's most impressive skyscraper, a slight buzzing started. A voice spoke mechanically.

"This is a robot speaking. You are advised Doc Savage is absent. But any message you care to deliver will be recorded on a Dictaphone and will come to Doc Savage's attention later. You may proceed with whatever you wish to say."

"Doc," said Pat Savage in a low voice, "I am at the Vandersleeve residence near Port Chester. Vandersleeve has been murdered. Three other persons have been killed. There was a black spot over Vandersleeve's heart, and a large amount of money was taken in a queer manner. There was—"

In Doc Savage's headquarters the mechanical device recorded Pat's words thus far. It also recorded a muffled gasping sound. This, too, came from Pat's throat. The instrument further put on the Dictaphone record for Doc or his men a slight bumping crash.

This latter was the telephone being slapped from Pat Savage's hand.

The palm grasping Pat's mouth was smooth and cold. In her ear a voice muttered:

"If you've brought Doc Savage into this, it will be his last big adventure. As for you—"

Pat had no opportunity to scream. Her sudden captor discovered he had got hold of a wildcat in the darkness. Tapered toes bruised his shins. One small hand with strong fingers fastened on an ear and twisted.

The man breathed heavily and swore vilely in Pat's face. She lowered her head and tried to butt the man on the nose or chin.

"You red-headed hellion!" grated her captor. "I'll fix you for that!"

Pat always became madder when she was called redheaded. Though she couldn't breathe, she dug an elbow into the man's ribs. They crashed against a door. This led to the basement stairs. It was unlocked and it swung open.

Pat collected a number of bruises in the next two seconds. It is likely her captor gathered more. They rolled together down the stairs and landed on a concrete floor in the darkness.

Pat was half stunned. But now she was blazing mad. She had come to the "gangster party" armed with her special automatic. In keeping with the occasion, it had been loaded only with blank cartridges.

But even blanks, at close range, are hard on the eyes. Pat waited until the man let out a revealing snarl. The pistol erupted into his face. The man recoiled, swearing lustily.

Luckily for him, the automatic contained only blanks. The two flashes of hot powder were blinding. The sharp explosions brought a rush of feet in the upper hallway. Red Mahoney and a State copper with a flashlight appeared on the stairway.

Pat's assailant had fled through the rear of the basement. State policemen searched the cellar. They returned empty-handed.

"He crawled out through a back window," one reported.

Red Mahoney was fast for a big man. While Pat was watching the coppers carry on their hunt, Red set up his camera. He was grinding away as a calcium flared.

Pat had been explaining how a man had seized her in the hallway. She evaded the real reason for the attack. She said she had tried to telephone to a friend.

STATE POLICE were searching upstairs for a man who might show powder burns. None was found. A check showed there was no accurate guest list whereby a missing man could be discovered.

Red Mahoney grinned at Pat Savage.

"I lost the film of Vandersleeve upstairs," he said, mournfully. "I haven't got a thing that's--say! Look at this!"

He was digging into his leather case for a new magazine. He closed the case suddenly and stepped close to Pat.

"Listen, Miss Savage," he confided. "That picture of the murder room has been put back in my case."

Mahoney scratched his head in perplexity.

"Whoever doused the lights and grabbed the film wants that picture to appear on the screen," stated Pat, wisely. "Now I wonder why?"

Red supplied the answer.

"To throw a scare into somebody, I'll bet," he said.

Pat nodded. Captain Graves was still holding Arthur Jotther. The social register guests of the "gangster party" were being checked as witnesses and released.

Pat was hoping Doc Savage had received her message.

Chapter III. THE DEATH TRAP

CLARK SAVAGE, JR., was the inconspicuous lettering in bronze. This was set on the metal door. Doc Savage's headquarters occupied the eighty-sixth floor of a towering mass of glittering metal and stone. This was one of Manhattan's greatest skyscrapers.

An elevator came up. The car made a slight hissing noise. This elevator was Doc's private car. It traveled with greater speed than the wind.

An uncouth figure stepped forth. The man's motion could only be described as ambling. Hairy hands trailed below the knees of short legs. Fat ears and the low forehead were covered with stiff reddish bristles.

The man himself might have been a huge trained ape. His broad nose sniffed. In front of the door bearing the sign, he paused to listen.

Doc's five staunch companions had formed this habit of caution. This was why they continued to survive almost incredible dangers.

The apelike individual was "Monk." The world of chemistry knew him as Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. He was one of the world's leading industrial chemists. But to his companions and to his friends he was just Monk.

Monk entered Doc's reception room. Some of the world's most hunted and most dangerous criminals had been received there. In this room had been formed campaigns of adventure reaching into the uttermost parts of the world.

Sometimes a telephone message started Doc Savage and his five men upon quests strange and wide. But none had ever been stranger than that already recorded in the voice of Patricia Savage on the Dictaphone record of the telephone.

Monk perceived such a record had been made. It was a rule that the first man to arrive would take the message. Usually this would then await the coming of Doc Savage.

But at the first words pouring into his furry ear, Monk twisted his ugly face into an even uglier grimace. The apelike chemist sensed danger. This apparently threatened Pat Savage. Monk's regard for

Doc's beautiful cousin stirred an immediate deep emotion.

"Dang everything!" he muttered. "Some day she's goin' to get in a jam she won't get out of! An' Doc ain't even in town!"

But Doc Savage was in Manhattan. At that moment he was moving toward his headquarters. But Monk was not aware of this. He did not know where to reach the remarkable man of bronze.

"All over some buzzard of a millionaire!" piped Monk, shifting the recording needle and listening again to the bumping disruption of the circuit at the end. "An' somebody's grabbed Pat!"

He had heard the slapping commotion when the phone at the Vandersleeve mansion had been snatched from Pat's hand.

Monk thumbed through a directory of Westchester County. The location of the Vandersleeve estate was easily established. Monk went into one of the back rooms. When he returned, there was a bulge under one arm. He was equipped with an automatic superfiring pistol and various other defensive devices.

Monk then called a certain exclusive apartment residence club in upper Manhattan. The voice replying was acidly sharp with sleep and annoyance.

"I'd know that monkey squeal in any zoo!" it snapped. "And anybody else would have too many brains to wake up a man in the middle of the night. Now I'm going back to bed!"

"Listen, you slobberin' mouthpiece!" squeaked Monk. "Pat's gone an' got herself in a jam! It's a murder, four of 'em! They got Pat an'—"

At the exclusive club end of the telephone wire Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, known as "Ham" to his companions and friends, cut into Monk's rather jumbled words.

"How did you know she was grabbed, you raving ape?" he said, as he cooled down. "You don't know if she was murdered because she was grabbed? It doesn't make sense! How do you know that?"

"If you'd shut up long enough to listen!" howled Monk. "I know she ain't been murdered because she told me, an' I think she was only grabbed!"

Ham let out a sarcastic groan at his end of the wire.

"You stay right there, you lunatic, until I come over!" he directed. "I'll be there in ten minutes! Don't go please and try and keep cool!"

Though it was after midnight, Ham was a picture of what the well-dressed man should wear, when he arrived at Doc's headquarters. The dapper, waspish-figured lawyer was considered a veritable Beau Brummell.

He waved a thin black cane as if he first of all intended to pound some coherency into Monk's hard skull.

"Now, you ugly insect, what's this all about?" he demanded. "If you've let anything happen to Pat, I'll poke this thing right through your hairy neck!"

Ham's cane was the sheath for a sword blade of the finest steel. He swung the cane menacingly. Monk clenched his knobs of fists.

"You quit talkin' long enough an' I'll tell you what it's all about!" he squawked. "It's one of them Westchester millionaires has been bumped off, an' Pat is there, so—"

"So we'll get going, and right now!" interrupted Ham.

He was close to a window. What looked like a small piece of chalk was in his hand. He inscribed a few words on the glass. But the words did not show. They would only be revealed by a fluorescent ray. Doc would look for the message when he arrived.

The verbal feud between Ham and Monk verged almost to the point of physical combat, before they were downstairs and speeding from Doc's private garage in the basement of the skyscraper. Monk drove an ordinary-appearing roadster. It belied its appearance, being a bulletproof car with a motor of super-power.

On the main highway in the Westchester hills location they sought, numerous cars passed the roadster. These were headed toward Manhattan. Subdued guests from the Vandersleeve "gangster party" were going home. They were both sober and silent.

Ham and Monk found themselves blocked at the Vandersleeve entrance gate.

Half a dozen scowling State policemen opposed their entrance.

"What do you want?" demanded one. "There isn't anybody here from town. They've all gone. Who are you?"

Captain Graves trotted down the driveway. His square face poked into the roadster.

"Huh!" he grunted. "More of Doc Savage's crowd, eh? Ham an' Monk. Well, what are you doing here?"

"We've come to find Patricia Savage and take her home," said Ham.

"You're too late," announced the captain.

"Too late!" Monk's voice quavered. "You mean she's been—"

"She's been nothing!" rapped Captain Graves. "She left here with a smart, red-headed cameraman. How'd you know she was here?"

Ham dug a sharp elbow into Monk's ribs. The shrewd lawyer deemed it wise not to reveal the fact that Pat had used a telephone.

"We were to call and take Miss Savage home," said Ham. "Mind telling us what caused all the excitement?"

Captain Graves continued to view them with suspicion. But he told them briefly of the murders.

"There's nothing we can do here," Ham confided to Monk. "We'll have to find Doc."

ABOUT this time Doc Savage paused in the middle of his luxurious front office. Standing alone, he was an amazing figure of bronze. He was well above six feet in height. His weight scaled over two hundred pounds, but he was so symmetrically proportioned he resembled a carved statue. All of the bronze man's senses were reading what might have recently transpired within these walls. Doc possessed no occult sense. But the acuteness of highly trained normal senses made him seem magical to others. And even before the bronze giant had placed the telephone to his ear, the space around him was filled with a tuneless trilling like the running of a musical scale. Doc's lips did not move. Perhaps he was unconscious of the melodious emanation. It seemed to come from his whole immense body. It was the trilling that came in the presence of danger or when he was concentrating deeply. A glance had revealed to him that two of his men had been in the headquarters only a few minutes before.

And he knew they had departed hastily.

Before Doc had finished receiving Patricia Savage's message, he was aware another phone message had been recorded. He permitted the Dictaphone record to continue.

"This is James Mathers speaking," came this second message. "I am in extreme danger and dare not come to you. Will you come to my upper Fifth Avenue penthouse apartment as soon as you receive this? The hour makes no difference. I shall wait here. It is a matter of life and death. I may not even be alive when you arrive. If anything has happened, find out about the black spot."

Doc replaced the phone and went into the laboratory. He returned with a square black box. No visible light played from its black lense. But when it was pointed at the window glass, bluish words glowed plainly:

Doc:

Monk and I got Pat's message. We have gone there. We will get in touch with you on the radio.

HAM.

Doc erased the invisible writing.

The short-wave radio receiver in the laboratory was buzzing. The set, especially designed by Doc, would receive from and broadcast to any of his cars. The roadster occupied by Ham and Monk was so equipped.

Ham's voice was speaking.

"Pat apparently is all right. She has left the Vandersleeve residence with a cameraman called Red Mahoney. He is employed by the Future Pictures Corporation on news-reels. We are on our way to headquarters."

"You will await me here," instructed the bronze man. "On no conditions are you to leave until I return. Pat probably will come here. Do not permit her to leave."

Though he had been extremely concerned over Pat's safety, the bronze man had been deeply considering the murder of Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve. His extensive knowledge of financial affairs in the world's greatest city brought him to a quick conclusion.

He thumbed rapidly through a thick book. This was a compilation of Wall Street reports. They went back for several years. Yes, his memory had been faultless. Vandersleeve and James Mathers, the wealthy broker, had once been associates. They had been in partnership in several large real estate transactions.

Doc lifted the phone. He got Mathers at once. The broker's voice was shaky. Plainly he had been awaiting Doc's arrival.

"I thought you would be on your way over here," said Mathers. "But I feel better knowing you got the message. Will you come to my penthouse as soon as possible? I can't tell you what it is, but an invisible danger is very close to me."

Doc judged James Mathers could not have heard of the Vandersleeve murder. The bronze man spoke calmly.

"Would the same danger be threatening Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve?"

The bronze man smiled a little at Mathers's hoarse gasp of surprise.

"How could you know about that? Well, yes—but where did you get this information about Vandersleeve? No one but myself could be aware of it."

"I shall join you in a few minutes at your apartment," said Doc.

He hung up the phone before Mathers could make a rejoinder. The note of amazement in Mathers's voice had been what the bronze man sought.

A CHILL after-midnight fog presaged the approach of dawn over upper Manhattan. The mist swathed the area of Central Park in gray, ghostlike clouds. The chill penetrated through open windows of a slate-gray apartment building which faced the park.

Doc Savage ascended the short stairway leading to the roof. The elevator service extended only to the top floor. The sprawling penthouse occupied by James Mathers had been erected several years after the main building had been completed.

Shaded light cast a pinkish illumination against the drifting fingers of fog. The bronze giant did not approach the penthouse entrance directly, though he was expected. Instead, he glided toward

a low window of the lighted room.

This room was a sort of combined lounging room and library. It was occupied in the center by a huge desk. A secretary's typewriter stand stood to one side.

The bronze giant pressed close to the penthouse wall. From this position he studied the inner room for a minute or more. No one appeared. There was no evidence of Mathers's presence. The disarrangement of some papers on the desk drew Doc's gaze.

Apparently some documents had recently been torn and thrown into a wastebasket. Some scraps had fallen to the floor. Though the subdued illumination was reassuring, something in the emptiness and silence of the room gave it an ominous aspect.

Doc glided swiftly toward the entrance door. There he listened. As he pressed the button, he stepped to one side. But nothing happened. No footsteps sounded from inside. The man of bronze would have known if any one came near the door.

Doc rang once more. He waited only a few seconds. Then he tried the door. It yielded to his pressure. The man of bronze moved inside, closed the door and halted. No person was in the hallway. It had a dim light.

The flaky gold eyes became little whirlpools. Doc looked at the open door to Mathers's library. When he moved, he glided quickly into the room and waited.

The bronze giant did not speak or call out. He was somewhat puzzled, but he believed whoever might be in the penthouse was well aware that he had arrived.

A quick scrutiny failed to reveal the presence of James Mathers. Then Doc's eyes turned to the big desk. He picked out details quickly. A few words had been written on a paper in the typewriter. Doc read this across the room.

Wait here for me, Doc Savage.

Will return in a few minutes.

Doc glided to the desk. With quick hands he overturned the wastebasket, scrutinizing each scrap of paper. A crumpled paper was at the bottom of the basket. Doc smoothed it out.

The paper contained only names. These were written one below another. Opposite each of these was a deep black spot. The spots were as round as a perfect circle. Only the bronze man's keen eyes could have detected the microscopic lines in the spots. He held a powerful magnifying lense briefly over each mark.

There were eight names on the paper. James Mathers and Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve were in the list. Doc instantly identified the other six names as those of men either now, or at one time, high up in the financial affairs of Wall Street.

The bronze giant suddenly ceased examination of the paper. To his ears had come a hissing sound, so faint no other man would have detected it. At the same moment Doc became aware of a slightly dizzy sensation as if he had suddenly become very tired.

Suddenly the room was filled with the rare exotic trilling. It was like a wind playing over wires or through the small aperture of a window. But all windows were tightly closed.

That faint hissing continued. The bronze giant weaved a little on his massive legs as he started toward an alcove covered by rich draperies. He swept the curtains aside.

A square metallic container was sitting on the floor. From it came the faint hissing sound. A ghostly blue light played over a small pipe projecting from the top of the box.

Doc caught it up. He was staggering as he reached a window. He smashed out the glass as he hurled the container onto the roof. Then he pulled fresh air into his lungs. Gas and ether under pressure had been burning in the box.

Chapter IV. THE DEATH FEAR

DOC SAVAGE opened several windows. Chill night air flowed in. The carbon monoxide gas generated by the gas-and-ether death trap cleared out rapidly. Still slightly dizzied, the man of bronze began a quick search of the penthouse.

Doc darted into the room adjoining the library and lounging room. This was thickly carpeted. It was in darkness. Doc penciled his flashlight. The room was empty.

There appeared to be no closets and only one window alcove. If Mathers had been murdered, Doc believed he would have been left where he had died. The bronze man had evolved a tentative theory which gave him a good reason for this belief.

But neither Mathers in the flesh nor his body was anywhere to be found.

Doc returned to the doorway leading to the lounging room. He took a small vial from his pocket. Walking carefully, he sprinkled a grayish powder over the thick carpet. Then he stepped to one side. He flicked off his flashlight.

Immediately there appeared a queer greenish glow on the floor. This shaped into prints like a man's feet might have made. Alongside this row of footprints appeared a continuous glowing. Doc knew some heavy object had been dragged across the carpet. Probably it was a man's body. The glowing trail led to the wall. But there was no door there, and no closet. Only a flat bookcase. The powder Doc had distributed was a chemical formula of his own composition. This fluoresced with the slowly rising nap of the carpet where it had been recently disturbed.

Doc stood before the flat bookcase. The case appeared to be built solidly into the wall. The

bronze giant pressed an ear close to a row of books. His handsome features set in grim lines. He had heard the rasping of a man's choking breath.

Few persons would have found the combination. Doc's thumb pressed what appeared to be merely a part of the wood carving. The bookcase swung outward.

JAMES MATHERS, broker, was huddled into the closet. Doc's quick scrutiny revealed a ventilating window. This was open. Fresh air was flowing into the closet. Carbon monoxide fumes from the death trap in the lounging room could not have reached the imprisoned broker. The man of bronze made note of a stairway leading downward. It probably had been provided by the broker: a secret exit. Possibly the man really feared a murderous attack. Cords bound Mathers's wrists and ankles. As Doc freed the man, he made note of the broker's muscular and beefy strength. It would have seemed that he might have broken the binding cords loose. They had seemingly been tied carelessly.

MATHERS pulled a tape gag from his lips. He groaned loudly.

"You were almost too late, Doc Savage," he complained. "I'd have been left to die in there, or it would have been the black spot! But somebody wanted to get you. I'll bet my phone wire has been tapped."

Doc made no comment on this. Clearly the gas-and-ether trap had been a murderer's trick. That it was not intended to kill Mathers, was plain enough. If the broker's life was threatened, then why had he been spared this time?

Mathers made his way into the lounging room. He had an answer as to why he had escaped.

"I'm alive only because I had no considerable amount of money that could be taken," declared Mathers. He stared at the note in the typewriter, that stated he would be back in a few minutes. "I did not write that message," he stated.

"You were waiting in here for me?" suggested Doc.

"Yes, and the lights went out suddenly. I called Komolo, my man. He was the only one about. But he didn't answer. Then I was struck across the forehead."

"What became of this Komolo?" said Doc.

"We'll have to see about that," replied Mathers.

Komolo, Mathers's personal servant, was an odd person. He was a Japanese. But unlike his racial brethren, he was a giant in size. Doc instantly judged Komolo might not have originated in the islands of his native land. He had more the stature of some of the men of North China.

Komolo was unconscious. He had been pushed into a closet in the entrance hallway. Recovering slowly, he declared he had been attacked from behind and half strangled.

"I have no see this intruder," stated Komolo. "He has have much strength. I was quickly made not to resist."

Komolo's throat bore marks of fingers. Doc apparently took little note of the Jap's story.

RETURNING to the lounge room, Mathers's big hands probed into a pocket. He produced a package of cigarettes. A paper fluttered to the floor. Doc picked this up. He handed it to Mathers. The broker lit a cigarette with quivering fingers. Outwardly, he was showing evidence of being under terrific strain.

Mathers read the note from his pocket slowly, aloud:

"Mathers: You have brought Doc Savage to his death. Your own time has not yet come. Others are first."

The note was signed with a round black spot.

Glancing at the letters, Doc scrutinized the lettering of the note still in Mathers's typewriter. Both notes had been written on the machine.

Mathers drew two other notes from a desk drawer. Each was signed only with a round black spot.

Doc saw that these two notes had been typed on a different machine. He made a quick examination with a powder that looked like a fine dust.

The man of bronze had finger prints, several of them. They were not those of some person outside the room. They were the finger prints of Mathers himself, left as he had handled the notes.

"We'll see what this may show," said Doc.

Then he dusted the keys of the typewriter. One by one, he put them under the glass. He had checked every letter used in the note telling him to wait for Mathers. The keys all had been wiped clean.

The man of bronze said nothing. Without finger prints from the keys of the machine, he had no means of checking whether Mathers might or might not have written the notes.

Mathers fidgeted and grew more apoplectic.

"The whole thing's an extortion plot," he finally asserted. "I've been threatened by telephone by some one calling himself the 'Black Spot.' He has been telling a crazy story about how three other men will die as proof to me that I can't escape. And he demands a cool million when, as he has said, the lesson of three murders has had time to sink in. Possibly the man is insane."

"Possibly," stated Doc, quietly. "But I mentioned Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve to you over the

phone. Do you think he might be one of the three to prove this extortionist means business?"

"Good grief, yes!" croaked Mathers. "This other thing happening made me almost forget that! How did you know?"

"Vandersleeve was murdered tonight," replied the bronze man. "It appears he had a black spot on his body when he was found."

Doc was watching Mathers closely. There was no mistaking the quick grayness of his beefy cheeks. The broker was visibly shaky. He was scared through and through.

"But, Savage—tonight—I've been too late, then, for him—but I must ask you to help me—there will be others."

"I will do what I can, where lives are at stake," stated Doc. "Who are the other two of the three men you say are to die?"

"I—well, I don't know exactly," said Mathers. "Only, if you'll let me, I want to stay with you until this thing is cleared up. Perhaps I can discover the names of the other two marked for murder, before it is too late."

"It will be all right for you to stay under what protection I can give," stated Doc, then added grimly: "as I had intended to keep you with me."

THE man of bronze had his own thoughts concerning the story of an extortion plot related by Mathers. He was recalling the names of the list of eight on the crumpled paper in the broker's wastebasket.

It was plain enough to Doc that Mathers had been holding out something. Perhaps he had refrained from telling a great deal.

Doc had noted that Vandersleeve's name had been at the top of that list. It was only logical to suppose the next name below might be the next in order in the murder column.

The man of bronze acted on intuition. Vandersleeve was dead. If Mathers's story were only partly true, it was likely the murderer would waste no time in striking again.

Mathers stared at Doc when he picked the telephone from the broker's desk. He started visibly when Doc gave the number. It was the town residence phone of Homer Pearsall. Pearsall was one of the biggest real estate dealers. He had taken some fliers in the stock market of boom times.

Mathers said, "Where did you get his name?"

Doc was waiting for his number. He did not reply. Mathers's eyes rolled toward his wastebasket. A deep flush reddened his beefy cheeks.

A woman answered the Pearsall telephone.

"Mr. Pearsall is spending the night on his houseboat on the Hudson River," she replied to Doc's inquiry. "He expects to return to the city about noon tomorrow."

"Where is the houseboat anchorage?" demanded Doc.

The woman gave him a location near a convergence of two highways along the Westchester shore of the Hudson.

"It is anchored below there, under the bluff," she said.

Mathers came to his feet. His eyes seemed to be trying to crawl from their deep sockets.

"Good grief! The fool! Up there on his houseboat!"

"So you did know he might be one of the three marked men?" said Doc, softly.

"Well, I only suspected he might be," muttered Mathers.

"Not only might be, but he is," asserted Doc. "And if something doesn't happen, anything we can do probably will be too late. You may come with me."

WHEN Doc Savage issued instructions, his men obeyed implicitly. Monk and Ham had reached the headquarters shortly after Doc had gone to Mathers's penthouse. For perhaps half an hour, they had been jabbing at each other verbally.

The man of bronze had thoughtfully removed the record from the telephone. The pair of verbal feudists had no means of knowing where Doc might be.

The telephone buzzed. Ham sprang to the instrument. Monk planted himself on the extension. The big chemist was prepared to trace the call instantly, if it happened to be that kind of a call. It was.

A colorless voice croaked, "Homer Pearsall will be the next victim of the black spot. Keep out of this, Doc Savage, if you value the lives of your men or your own."

"Hey!" Ham started to utter a question.

The phone was dead.

"Too fast for me," complained Monk. "I didn't have any time to have the call traced."

"Homer Pearsall?" said Ham. "I know that guy. He's got one of those oversize houseboats anchored up the Hudson. Say, if Doc knew about this, he'd do something. But he told us to stay here until he came back."

"Huh, you smart mouthpiece, try usin' your head," grinned Monk. "He told us to stay here, but he'd probably want us to dig into this thing. Well, he didn't leave any order for Renny or Long Tom or Johnny to wait for him."

"You're right!" gasped Ham. "You keep on and you'll really be an educated ape! You start calling

them. I'll find out where this Pearsall is hanging out, right now!"

COLONEL JOHN RENWICK, better known as "Renny," was sitting up over the problem of taking on an engineering job in South America. He was among the world's leading civil engineers. But he preferred adventuring with Doc Savage, to routine projects.

"Holy cow!" he boomed into the telephone. "An' I was just tryin' to frame some way of keepin' out of South America! Maybe this is the out! Who do we start smashing?"

Renny was a giant in stature and breadth. His fists were his greatest asset, according to his own way of thinking. Thinking out abstruse engineering problems was relaxation. Smashing door panels and hard heads with his mammoth knuckles was a splendid vocation.

William Harper Littlejohn, known as "Johnny," archaeologist and geologist, drawled sleepily when he was called.

"Out of the evanescent phantasmagoria of the nebulous opaqueness comes homicidal mysticism to distract the slovenly mentality. I shall be present forthwith."

Johnny had once occupied the chair of science in a leading university. He never used a short word where a longer one would serve, except when he was excited. Awakening in the middle of the night to chase a real or mythical murderer did not excite the scholarly Johnny. He was a living skeleton in body and a whole tree full of wildcats in spirit and action.

"Long Tom"—Major Thomas J. Roberts—the electrical wizard of Doc's outfit, was laconic. He had the appearance of a man too close to death to waste his energy talking. His small body and unhealthy pallor had fooled many men. They often discovered their mistake about Long Tom's possibilities after they had been smacked down.

"I'll be right over," was all Long Tom replied.

Thus it happened that three of Doc's men were soon speeding through upper Manhattan in the direction of the Westchester banks of the Hudson. These three did not suspect they were going contrary to the bronze man's wishes.

Doc Savage had directed Ham and Monk to wait for him in order to keep them clear of what he believed to be a widespread murder plot. At this moment there seemed to be nothing of sinister importance aboard the houseboat of Homer Pearsall.

HOMER PEARSALL was a sallow-complexioned man who looked drained of vitality by the fast life of the financial district. His greatest interest lay in real estate coups.

Tonight he was in a jovial mood. He was aboard his modern houseboat on the upper Hudson. Two husky men servants had accompanied him. The houseboat itself was a small floating palace. The servants acted as Pearsall's guards. Both were tough and both were well armed.

Pearsall had reached the houseboat shortly before midnight. His first move was to open a safe in the luxurious cabin of the boat. In this he placed a sizeable package.

"All right, Burke," he snapped briskly at one of the guards. "There's a big wad of dough in that package. You boys might keep undercover, but see that no one comes aboard until you get my signal.

"This fellow I'm dealing with has to keep in the background. I'm meeting him up the shore with the launch. He wanted me to bring the dough, but he'll have to come back with me to get it."

Later in the night, Pearsall slipped into his fast launch.

Pearsall piloted the small launch close in along the bluff. At a point about half a mile above the houseboat, the outlines of oil and gas storage tanks loomed back of an old wharf.

Pearsall cut off the lights of the launch. With a flashlight he sent short stabs of illumination toward the shore.

"Hello, on shore!" he called, cautiously.

"Right in here!" directed a muffled voice. "Stand up and toss your line!"

"Sure!" said Pearsall, erecting himself and holding the loop of the mooring rope.

The nose of the launch bumped. Pearsall saw a single figure step out of the fog. His flashlight outlined the face. Probably he could have identified the man afterward.

But Homer Pearsall never had the opportunity. The millionaire real estate manipulator did not know when his launch came broadside to the old wharf.

There had been no shot. No blow had been struck. No movement of violence had been made.

Without a sound Pearsall fell on his face in the cockpit of his boat.

AT this time, another boat was moving into the river near Pearsall's houseboat. It was a leaky rowboat. In it were Renny, Long Tom and Johnny.

Chapter V. MORE BLACK BLOOD

LONG TOM pulled on the oars of the old rowboat. One of the rusty locks tore loose. Long Tom swore gently under his breath, and jammed the thing back into place.

"Do you think maybe Doc's got here?" questioned Renny. "We didn't see anything of a car."

"Doc would have parked it off the highway somewhere," stated Long Tom. "Anyway, that houseboat's all lighted up, but there isn't any party going on."

"An eminently correct assumption," replied the scholarly Johnny. "Bacchanalian revelry has

apparently subsided. Moreover, comrades, there exists an ominous and depressing quietude."
"If you're meanin' there ain't any noise," muttered Renny, "I'd say it was too darn quiet out there."

This was true. Every electric bulb on Homer Pearsall's houseboat was doing its best to dispel the fog. The craft swung by two anchor chains in the Hudson current.

But no voice hailed the approaching rowboat.

"Take it easy," cautioned Renny. "I don't like the set-up. It ain't natural to have all those lights an' nobody movin' around."

Long Tom slid the rowboat silently under the downriver end of the big houseboat. The hull of the craft was constructed like a barge. Pearsall's floating palace had rooms for two-score guests. Long Tom and Johnny got to the deck of the houseboat without a sound. Renny caught hold of the rather flimsy rail and heaved himself up. The piece of rail splintered and cracked loudly. Johnny and Long Tom crouched in a shadow. They whispered hoarse words of caution at the blundering engineer. Their caution appeared to be wasted. Light streamed in a fanlike patch from the door of the forward cabin.

In the luminance there was no movement. Renny creaked the deck boards under his huge feet. He was gliding along the cabin housing toward a window.

"Look at this!" he grumbled. "Here's the reason there ain't any noise!"

One toe had encountered a soft body. This was lying close to the cabin housing, away from the light. Superfirer in one hand and generator flashlight in the other, Renny spread a pool of light around the head of the man on the deck.

"Holy cow!" he exploded, hoarsely. "He's all the way dead! An' he's got two guns!"

The man on the deck was surely "all the way dead." His head lay at the wrong angle to his shoulders. Stiffened arms stuck out. It was as if he were still pointing the heavy caliber revolvers he held at some unseen enemy.

One of the man's ears had been partly torn off.

"Looks like somebody slapped his face with an inky sponge," said Long Tom. "No, the stuff came from his ear. It might be blood, but it's black."

Johnny passed up his long words. He was smelling imminent danger.

Before they approached the door of the cabin, Long Tom made a swift examination of the dead man's guns.

"That's funny," he commented. "The dead guy has both guns in his hands and didn't fire a shot. Whatever cracked him got him so fast he didn't have a chance. Take it easy, fellows."

Then they saw there seemed no great need for taking it easy. For apparently the killer had come and gone. Johnny identified the sallow-complexioned man lying in the middle of the cabin as the wealthy Homer Pearsall.

The man's yellowed face was a gruesome spectacle. His nose had been broken by a fall or a blow. His mouth and chin were obscured by a dried, gummy black substance.

"Keep back!" warned Johnny. "Don't touch him! Have a look at that mark."

The mark was a black spot. It was directly over Homer Pearsall's heart. The spot was as round as a perfect circle.

Homer Pearsall's eyes were open. They were glazed and without sight. Renny's big body shivered.

"I thought the things they call vampires always got them in the throat," he murmured. "We'd better get out of here an' wait for Doc."

"Maybe Doc's already here," suggested Long Tom.

Johnny caught Renny's arm and squeezed.

"Look over there," he said, hoarsely, "In that stateroom doorway."

Three pairs of eyes sought the shadows by the stateroom door. The door was partly open. The feet of a man projected into the cabin.

"It couldn't be—not Doc!" said Long Tom huskily.

The body in the doorway was in darkness. The feet were mute evidence the man was dead.

It was not the body of Doc Savage. The man of bronze had not yet reached the houseboat. This corpse was that of an ugly customer with cauliflower ears. His clothes had been torn partly off. The glare of Johnny's flashlight picked out a perfectly round black spot over the man's heart.

The dead man was clutching a sawed-off shotgun with both hands. Apparently he had been attempting to reach the window of the stateroom. The shotgun had not been discharged.

"We'll have a look over the boat," suggested Renny. "Stick together and everybody be ready to shoot."

With the superfirers held ready, the three men started back through the boat. The lights remained on. In a few minutes, they had visited every stateroom. Only the lower hold of the barge like craft remained unexplored.

The odor of bilge water came up to them from a darkened hatchway. The three men returned to the main cabin.

Then they saw the money scattered on the floor. A small safe in the wall had been blown open. A wad of bills had been torn apart. The smallest of these appeared to be century notes.

"Don't touch them," advised Johnny. "We'd better conceal ourselves outside and wait for Doc."

He'll be along."

BEFORE going to the houseboat, Doc Savage had taken James Mathers to his skyscraper headquarters. The position of Homer Pearsall seemed to have jellied the broker with fear.

Mathers was due for another disconcerting shock. As he entered Doc's outer office with the bronze man, Ham and Monk were enjoying themselves immensely.

"Blast that red-headed mug!" howled Monk. "Dang him! I'm goin' in there an' separate him into small pieces! Tellin' me he'd prefer to be left alone! In there with Pat!"

Ham grinned at him sarcastically.

"So you've gone sweet on Pat, huh? I don't blame that redhead for not wanting you around. I've an idea maybe Pat likes him a lot."

"Blast it!" howled Monk. "Another crack outta you, you crack-brained shyster, an' I'll twist off your ears! I think I'll do it anyway!"

Monk ambled in three hops upon the sartorially perfect Ham.

Ham's right hand flicked outward. A bright steel blade flashed its point within two inches of Monk's bristly face.

James Mathers's nerves were already shaky. His big beefy body shook with apprehension. He halted behind Doc Savage, just inside the doorway.

The man of bronze did not seem in the least disturbed by what looked like a duel to the death.

The little affair of Ham and Monk did not result in bloodshed. Their duel ceased.

"Pat's in the laboratory, Doc," stated Ham.

"An' she's got an ugly red-headed egg that shoots pictures in there with her!" barked Monk.

"Red Mahoney, a movie cameraman," supplied Ham.

"I judged Pat would be appearing," said Doc, quietly. "This is James Mathers. He will remain here for a while. Renny and Long Tom and Johnny have been here. Where did they go?"

Doc had glanced at the scuffed up corner of a rug. A drum of the superfirer shells was lying on a chair. It required no extra deduction to determine when Renny had visited a room.

"Yes," said Ham, "and they're on their way to Homer Pearsall's houseboat. We had to remain here because of your order, but we judged they could go."

The man of bronze did not reply to that. He started toward the door of the library. His judgment had brought him to a definite conclusion. His men must keep out of this, for the time being, at least. At the door, he turned.

"Stay here, Mathers, for a few minutes," he directed. "Ham, you and Monk go to the warehouse at once. Tell the watchmen to take extra precautions. There may be an attack. Don't either of you leave there until you hear from me."

RED MAHONEY made himself completely at home wherever he was. He was not a nature to be overawed by the importance of any person.

He was hoping now he would get a chance to produce the first public secret picture of Doc.

Besides that, Patricia Savage was a very nice person to be around.

"You'll not get a picture of Doc," said Pat.

"Yeah, I know," grinned Red Mahoney. "But the real reason you wanted me up here was so your big bronze cousin could get a slant at the Vandersleeve murder shots."

Pat Savage smiled at him.

"So movie cameramen do have brains?" she said. "You don't suppose I'd have had you using Doc's chemicals to develop that film, if I hadn't expected some little favor in return?"

Red dried the film and slipped the reel into Doc's projecting machine. He clicked off the lights.

The interior of the Vandersleeve library leaped into view. The body of the dead millionaire appeared. The white shirt had been pulled aside.

In the picture on the screen, the round black spot over the heart stood out clearly. The camera had spotted many details in the murder room. The eye of the lens had picked up a few items that had escaped State Police Captain Graves.

"An excellent piece of photography," observed a calm voice. "And I believe this is the first time I've had a movie cameraman for a guest."

The laboratory was flooded with light. Red Mahoney stared at the bronze giant framed inside the doorway.

"Thanks for the glad hand, Mr. Savage," he grinned. "Hope I'm not intruding too much."

Doc said nothing. His corded hands were testing parts of the camera projector. His fingers ran along the film.

Then he remarked, "You'll be interested, Mahoney, in some of my new apparatus. Pat, you can show him some of the new lenses from Vienna. They promise to produce new dimensions."

Pat was quick to understand. For some reason her bronze cousin desired to distract Red Mahoney's attention.

Red was getting an eyeful of Doc's intricate movie mechanism. The man of bronze had slipped the film magazine from the projector. His hands worked with incredible speed. He snipped off a small bit of the murder film. This went into a pocket.

Later, Doc would put the bit through a special chemical developer of his own. It would bring out more clearly the face that had been only a shadow near a swaying drapery in the murder library. Red and Pat apparently had missed the shadow of the face.

Pat's voice became extra sweet. She turned to Doc.

"Now what shall we do next?" she inquired, as if she already had been taken in on the investigation.

"You will return to your apartment and get some sleep," stated Doc, firmly. "In the morning, you will go about your regular business of conducting the gymnasium and your beauty parlor. In a few days, I shall call you."

"How about letting me trail along on this thing, Mr. Savage?" Red requested. "It'll make swell pictures! It's the kind of a chance I've been waiting for."

The man of bronze shook his head. Already he had delayed longer than he had intended.

Doc had begun to suspect a peril greater than ever before had confronted him and his men. He never permitted their adventures to have publicity. His work was to correct injustice in the world and to punish or reform criminals. Though he liked Red Mahoney, his reply was a direct refusal. Red only grinned a little. Pat glanced at the cameraman in a sidelong fashion.

If they both had the same thought—that of following the man of bronze—they had made a great mistake.

Doc Savage had hardly seemed to move. Yet he was across the big laboratory and through the door. The barrier of chrome steel closed. There wasn't the faintest clicking, but the lock bolts had been shot.

"Well, I'll be a monkey's grandfather!" grated Red.

He hammered at the locked door. For some time, he sought a means of opening the lock.

"Might as well give it up," said Pat Savage, ruefully. "That door closes on an invisible photographic eye: some kind of an electrical device. If you don't know all the answers, you never can get it open."

"I'll get that door open, an' I'm going to be out at that Pearsall houseboat if anything clicks. What a picture it'll make!"

The Pearsall houseboat was due to make a picture even better than Red hoped.

Chapter VI. THE RIVER BURNS

PAT SAVAGE had said it would require an electrical wizard to open Doc's laboratory door.

"Well, lady, am I a wizard or am I a wizard?" chortled Red.

The chrome steel door swung open. Mahoney did know his electrical equipment. Pat had given him a hunch when she mentioned the photo-electric eye. Mahoney caught up his camera case and rushed for an elevator.

JAMES MATHERS rode beside Doc Savage as the powerful sedan fled through the Bronx toward Westchester and the Hudson River. Elevated pillars flew by like fence pickets.

The fast car slowed at a highway intersection. It whipped around the turn and headed straight for the Hudson River.

The highway was slanting toward the river bluff. All of the stark rocks along the edge of this were bathed in lurid crimson. Flames, thick with black smoke, were twisting in small cyclonic whirls into the early morning sky.

"I was afraid of something like that," remarked Doc Savage.

"Good grief!" ejaculated Mathers. "You think that might be Pearsall's houseboat?"

"Remain here," directed Doc, leaping from the car. "If you hear any one approaching, you'd better slip out and hide in the bushes at the top of the hill."

"But I don't want to be left up here!" squawled Mathers. "I'm going with you!"

The broker slid his trembling bulk into the roadway. But he was talking to empty darkness. Doc Savage was already over the edge of the bluff. The bronze giant had made no effort to find a pathway.

The wall was almost a sheer descent for more than a hundred feet. But there were cracks in the rocks. Doc's fingers and toes made a ladder of the slightest faults.

Mathers arrived at the top of the bluff and halted. He could not find a safe way down. The broker saw then that the houseboat of Homer Pearsall was not burning.

But the floating palace was surrounded by spreading flame. The Hudson River for a hundred yards or more toward its main channel seemed to have been converted into a sea of blazing oil. This fire was shooting along the surface of the water. Already it was surrounding the houseboat, licking at the wooden hull.

Up by the old storage wharf, a gasoline tank spouted floating fuel onto the river. Fire had flashed along this floating, rainbow-colored film. The hungry blaze licked at the piling of the ancient wharf.

Close to the big storage tank lay the body of a man. He was clad in dingy overalls. In his hand was a police revolver. He had been the watchman over the tanks.

Tongues of flame came up and touched his clothing. Because the overalls were greasy, they burst

into a blaze.

ON the houseboat itself, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny had been staring at the loose money on the floor of the cabin.

"Funny a bunch of thugs would go around bumping people off and then leave several thousand dollars lying around loose, especially after they went to all the trouble to blow the safe," observed Long Tom. "Looks like they left in a hurry."

"Yeah!" growled Renny. "An' if we're smart, we'll be doin' the same thing! Doc ain't here, an' he ain't been here! I'm for gettin' our feet back on safe ground an' maybe watchin' to see if he shows up!"

"What in the devil's that?" rapped Long Tom, jumping for the door of the houseboat cabin. "The river's on fire!"

The ignited gasoline from the storage tank provided a quick-spreading blaze. The houseboat was marooned by flame within a few seconds.

"Perhaps we had best dump these bodies in the old rowboat and try to get them to shore," stated Johnny. "I know Doc will want to have a look at them, and it's the only decent thing to do." They rushed to the place where they had tied the rowboat. The rope had burned off. The old rowboat was burning several yards away. The hull of the houseboat was scorching. Fumes of burning paint became choking.

"Great catfish!" yelled Renny. "Didja see that?"

The others had seen it. Halfway to the shore a human arm had been thrust up through the fire. It darted up quickly from under the surface. Then it was as swiftly withdrawn.

"Somebody's caught in it and he's drowning!" shouted Long Tom. "Maybe it isn't too late to help him!"

The sheet of fire and the water opened alongside the hull of the houseboat. Two arms were thrust upward. Powerful hands seized the edge of the deck under the rail.

Sleek bronze hair, seemingly waterproof and fireproof as well, heralded the arrival of Doc Savage. His clothing dripped with flame as he vaulted onto the houseboat deck. His big hands, with the tendons like steel wires wrapped in bronze insulation, beat out the fire.

The bronze giant had swum from the shore, remaining under the water to escape the fire. Once he had thrust up an arm experimentally. He had not come to the surface until his hands had touched the hull of the houseboat.

The houseboat already was blazing where the paint had caught. Doc's quick survey spotted a metal lifeboat on the upper deck.

"Get that boat down and ready to push off," he commanded, as he whipped to the inside of the cabin.

While his three companions were obeying, Doc was making a hasty examination of Homer Pearsall's body. He noted the black spot over the heart, and the purplish-black blood that had run from the broken nose. It was apparent the blow in the face had not been sufficient to cause death.

Doc halted in front of the blown safe.

Outside he heard the lifeboat thumping from the upper deck to the lower. Renny appeared in the doorway. Doc was scooping up the loose money on the floor. There was some odd silver.

"Take Pearsall's body with you in the metal boat," he said to Renny. "Soak your clothes with the extinguisher spray. It will be a hot trip, but don't breathe except inside your shirts."

These instructions would have sounded fantastic to outsiders. Doc's men understood perfectly. Each whipped out a flat, metallic box with a small release valve. A white spray shot from the nozzles of these boxes.

At Doc's direction, Monk had perfected this fire-extinguishing chemical. A small amount of the spray would kill a blaze over a wide area. But the flame of gasoline floating on water is the most difficult fire of all to drown out.

However, Doc knew the powerful chemical would prevent the clothing of the three men taking fire. By pulling up their loose shirts and inhaling breath only through the cloth, they would avoid getting fire into their lungs.

Renny's giant arms were all that was needed to deposit the remains of Homer Pearsall in the metal boat. Doc lifted the metal lifeboat with a grip on its sides. Then he pushed it into the blazing river.

Crouched low in the boat, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny started pulling at the oars.

"Hey, wait a minute!" yelled Renny. "Ain't you comin' with us, Doc?"

"I shall join you presently," said the bronze man.

Chapter VII. THE ABDUCTED BODY

INSIDE the houseboat cabin, Doc Savage bent over the body of Homer Pearsall's late bodyguard. Flames crackled outside. The forward part of the houseboat was already blazing. Fumes of paint poured into the cabin.

Doc extracted a gleaming lancet from a small leather case. With skillful hands, he made a swift incision in the throat of the corpse. Blood dribbled from the great vein. Dribbled slowly,

thickened. It was as black as the round spot over the man's heart. The bronze man quickly filled a small vial. He stoppered it and put it away. Glancing up, he saw fire curling across the doorway to the deck. Doc had not completed what he had set out to do. The man of bronze was perhaps the world's greatest surgical wizard. He was especially informed with respect to poisons and other elements that disrupted bodily tissues. Because of his vast knowledge, he was the originator of several delicate operations on the brain. Through the crackle of the fire the exotic trilling broke out. This rare, tuneless running of the scale filled the cabin. Doc felt he was on the verge of an amazing discovery. This might or might not solve the mystery of the "black spot" deaths, but it was a definite one. The bronze man needed the body on the floor to complete this investigation. Flames were lapping into the houseboat cabin. The heat was becoming unendurable. Doc swung the body of the dead bodyguard into his great arms. His movement through the doorway was like that of a projectile. One second he was enwrapped with fire that threatened to change the color of his bronze hair to a scorched brown or black. In the next second he had sprung cleanly over the low rail. The weighty body of the bodyguard was still in his arms. Holding his breath, the man of bronze splashed into the blazing river.

ON the shore, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny were watching the houseboat. Had their bronze chief waited too long? Had he been trapped at last? No sign of his leaving the houseboat had been given. "Confound everything!" growled Renny. "He oughtn't have gone back in there! In a minute that box is going up!" "He'll come bobbing up," said Long Tom, but he wasn't confident. Sirens whipped around the boat above. From out in the Hudson came the hooting of a fireboat. Flames suddenly spiraled above the upper housing of the floating palace. Some tongue of the blaze licked into a gasoline container. The superstructure of the houseboat split with the blast of a double explosion. The hull of the craft divided. Steam sizzled into a vaporish cloud. The bulk of a fireboat thrust itself into the blazing area of the river. The firemen arrived just in time to see the houseboat vanish. The fireboat cleared an area for itself with chemical extinguishers. But the firemen were too late to determine the number of persons who might have perished. It was then that Johnny's quick wit prevailed. Scores of automobiles were arriving on the bluff above. Their passengers were climbing down the bluff. "Our cars won't be noticed among all the others," advised Johnny. "Perhaps it would be just as well if we didn't become too prominent, until we find out more about what happened to Doc. I don't believe he stayed on the houseboat."

CAPTAIN GRAVES was among the first policemen to reach the shore. He stood with his feet wide apart and his eyes bugging at the metal lifeboat pulled up from the river. "An' I thought we were getting somewhere with this fellow Arthur Jotther," rasped the captain. "Well, he couldn't have pulled this job, for we've got him under lock and key at Port Chester." The job he referred to was the stiffened body of Homer Pearsall. Johnny and the others, upon reaching the shore, had judged it would be best to leave the body to be found in a regular manner. Captain Graves was staring at the black spot over Pearsall's heart, at the black blood on his face. The black spot as round as a perfect circle. A lone State policeman brake-squealed his car to a stop on the bluff. The officer gave no heed to having crumpled a fender on a small tree. He ran to the shore pathway shouting. "Captain Graves! Captain Graves!" Down below, the captain swore. "Well, what's all the riot? What's the riot? Here I am!" The State copper stammered. "He-he-he's g-g-gone!" "That makes a lot of sense!" roared the captain. "So's this guy here in the boat! He's gone, is he? Well, who's he?" "That fella Jotther! You know—Arthur Jotther—the one you was holdin' in the Vandersleeve case? Conked the jailer an' beat it from the office!" Captain Graves looked at the corpse with the black spot. "How long ago?" he snapped. "Couple of hours or more," the copper told him. "Jailer was out for quite a spell. He tried to reach you." Renny, Johnny and Long Tom heard this. "The fellow Ham said they held on that first murder," said Long Tom. "Had a couple of hours, huh?"

JAMES MATHERS, the broker, had hidden at the top of the bluff. He identified Doc Savage's three men. The words of the State policeman and Captain Graves slapped on his ears.

Mathers scrooched his beefy body back into the underbrush. His manner was that of a man who feels the next minute may be his last. Apparently he had decided this place was unhealthy. Though he had come out with Doc Savage, he showed no inclination to stick around.

Mathers did not stay on the highway. He stumbled along through the early morning darkness, crossing open spaces. His flight favored wooded patches for concealment. Renny, Long Tom and Johnny did not hear him depart. Doc had not told them of his presence.

While Mathers was engaged in absenting himself from the murder scene, Doc Savage reached shore. He had come the entire distance underwater. His landing was a couple of hundred yards below the crowd around the corpse in the metal boat.

Doc pulled the soggy body of the dead guard onto dry ground. From the bronze man's clothes came the leather case. He set his flashlight so its pencil ray was concealed by thick water-edge bushes. This was a strange operating room. But within five minutes Doc had laid bare the brain and heart of the dead man. He had made a highly skilled incision through the skull. The pencil light revealed in detail the tissue structure of the brain.

The brain had turned black. This, Doc determined, was the result of coagulated blood. Tiny arteries feeding the gray matter had been disrupted.

From the heavily muscled breast of the corpse, Doc had extracted what appeared to be a round black core. The muscles had hardened. The core was like a blunt instrument thrust all the way to the heart. The heart itself had become nothing more than a loose black bag.

The unusual operation had determined one thing directly. Death by the black spot struck equally at the heart and the brain. It must be murder without pain. Also without a chance of resistance or defense.

Doc Savage realized he was as far as ever from the cause of the black spot. And he was convinced that the three companions awaiting him were in deadly danger. The voice of Captain Graves carried to him.

"Spread out!" ordered the State police captain. "Look for a small man with gray hair and a gray face! His name's Arthur Jotther! Everybody get after him! But watch out! He's dangerous! Search all the cars! Don't let any one drive away!"

Over the crowd of curious persons surrounding Captain Graves and his men floated an elusive voice.

"Be careful hunting in the dark! The black spot death can hit you without sound! Arthur Jotther may have it! Be cautious!"

Captain Graves swore violently.

"Who'n'ell's that?" he bellowed. "I want my orders obeyed! Comb the bushes! Don't let any cars leave!"

"Steady, captain! Guns won't help you against the black spot!"

Doc Savage was still standing beside the guard's body on which the weird autopsy had been performed. His lips had not seemed to move. Yet that elusive warning voice came from him. He was employing a ventriloquist's trick, in the hope of avoiding other immediate deaths.

Doc felt Captain Graves was brave enough, too heroic. But in the mysterious "black spot" death, he was being misguided.

The man of bronze had never seen Arthur Jotther. He had been informed of him by Patricia Savage. Pat had not believed Jotther was the murderer.

But if Jotther had broken jail and had been at liberty for two hours or more, it would not have been impossible for him to have arrived at the Pearsall houseboat.

Doc placed the black core carved from the corpse in a small glass container in his leather medical case. He would analyze the discolored flesh later. As the captain of State police gave the second order not to permit any cars to leave the scene, the bronze man became motionless. He listened intently.

Doc Savage's own motors were as silent as engineering could make them. But his own acute ears detected the sudden hissing of two engines. None other could have heard them. Doc's features broke into a slight smile of understanding.

Renny, Long Tom and Johnny seldom overlooked a bet. They would realize Doc would not want them discovered here. Nor would they want his cars found and searched. So they were removing both cars: Doc's sedan and the one in which they had arrived.

Doc wondered if Mathers had stayed with his car. He did not know that Mathers already was a mile away and still running.

State policemen were looking through the cars parked above the bluff. There were more than two hundred. Doc lost himself among the crowd following the coppers. He came to the spot where his own car had been standing.

The police already had searched near-by autos. One of these was parked with its rear close to where Doc's car had been. The bronze man produced a small black box. This he pointed at the back window of the closest car. No light came from the box.

But definite bluish tracing appeared on the car's back window. It was a fluorescent glow revealed

only by the invisible ray from the box. Doc had been sure his men would leave a message on the nearest car window.

Will wait in first side road.

That meant his three men would conceal the cars in the first small road leading off the main highway. Doc took to the open spaces away from the highway.

Renny, Long Tom and Johnny uttered exclamations of relief when the figure of the bronze giant appeared from the trees. Doc's sedan and their own car had been parked off the road.

Doc Savage did not trouble to inquire about James Mathers. The man of bronze never wasted words. Mathers was not present. None of his men referred to having seen the broker. There could be only one conclusion.

Mathers had either hesitated to make himself known to Johnny and the others, or for reasons of his own he had evaporated. Doc judged it was that latter. He had expected the broker's nerve to break.

"It was a wise move to get the cars away," he stated. "Now I must attend to another matter. You three will go at once to the warehouse hangar. Ham and Monk are there. Have them return to headquarters. I am expecting another message. There may be an attack on the hangars and some one must remain on guard."

Doc did not wish his companions to suspect he was deliberately maneuvering to keep them out of danger. By shifting them around, he might keep them believing he had important reasons for having them stationed at different places.

The man of bronze really expected another message to reach his headquarters. He judged this would be from the third man marked for death by the black spot.

Renny took the wheel of one car. Doc stood beside him for a moment, while Johnny and Long Tom were piling in. Renny did not see the adroit movement of Doc's hand. But later, when his men would try to use the radio receiver in that car, they would discover it had been put out of business. By this trick, Doc hoped to keep the others from finding out too much.

Doc Savage slid under the wheel of his own sedan. He permitted the other car to disappear before he moved. Then the sedan jumped out of the side road. Within a hundred yards, the speedometer needle had moved to sixty.

Doc Savage spoke suddenly. As he did, the headlights were switched off. The man of bronze had slipped on a pair of queer, clumsy goggles. They were of the approximate shape and size of condensed milk cans.

"Now you can't see the road ahead," stated the man of bronze. It was a strange statement for a man to be making, if he were talking to himself. And it seemed that he must be. But he continued. "You cannot tell how fast we are traveling, but the car is now moving at ninety miles an hour. I can see the highway by an infra-red beam which is invisible to your eyes. This beam is projected from a special lens on the car. The road is clear to me and easy to follow."

Any person listening must have believed Doc Savage was bordering on insanity. Why should the bronze giant be so calmly uttering what seemed to be meaningless conversation with himself? Then he went on speaking.

"You are there, because I hear your breathing and you have a distinctive odor," stated Doc, quietly. "You crawled in the back to hide from the police. I would have thought you were another man, but the odor is quite different. So I judge you must be Arthur Jotther. I would suggest that whatever weapon you may have, you put aside. Then you can join me up here."

Doc Savage had been correct. The furtive figure crouched in the darkness of the car's rear was the gray, little mole of a man, Arthur Jotther. His grayish face was mottled and it was scratched by flight through bushes. His clothing was torn.

Perhaps it was sheer terror that kept the fugitive silent.

"At ninety miles an hour you can imagine what would happen to you if I suddenly became a victim of the 'black spot' death," commented Doc. "I am now putting the car at one hundred miles an hour." Arthur Jotther uttered no sound. His long, white fingers were fumbling with the latch of the door. The door snapped open. At that great speed, the wind whipped the door back and almost wrenched it from its hinges.

Doc realized what had happened just too late to prevent it. He caused the spongy rubber tires of the speeding car to emit a squawling protest. The smell of burning rubber filled the air. Doc had braked down as swiftly as possible.

But the slight figure of Arthur Jotther hurtled from the speeding car. His figure was like a projectile thrown from a catapult. It turned over and over.

Doc brought the car to a stop many yards up the highway. Gears reversed. The car glided back. A spotlight beam slashed the roadside. Doc removed his goggles. At the spot where Jotther had been flung out, the man of bronze alighted.

According to all the laws of gravitational force, Arthur Jotther should have been merely a smashed bundle of bloody flesh and broken bones. There was neither flesh nor bones along the highway.

Doc Savage crossed the shallow ditch. Thick blackberry bushes banked the roadway. These were as dense as matting. Beyond them were pliant rhododendron bushes.

Arthur Jotther had not died. Doubtless he had been badly lacerated by the briars of the blackberry bushes. For his body had shot through the entanglement of spiny growth. For more than fifty feet, the fearful force of a hundred miles an hour had propelled Jotther. Only by this miracle had the fugitive survived. Doc followed his trail for a short distance into the scrubby bush and rocks. No doubt, the frightened man had fled with the speed of fear in his feet. Drops of blood speckled the leaves.

Arthur Jotther was one of the few men ever to jump from a car at one hundred miles an hour and live.

Doc Savage gave up the search after several minutes. He heard other cars coming along the highway. The bronze man might have given the State police a lead to the latest appearance of Arthur Jotther. He drove away without imparting any information.

Chapter VIII. MESSAGE IN FIRE

THE Westchester mansion of Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve was the goal of Doc Savage. The personal affairs of Arthur Jotther were of immediate concern. Perhaps some of the servants or the dead man's kin could give information.

Doc did not reach the Vandersleeve estate. He was within view of the entrance when the radio receiving set in his car started buzzing. Ham was talking on the special short wave.

"Doc!" came the voice of Ham from headquarters. "Congdon of the Electro-Chemical Research Corporation has been calling for you. There has been an explosion at the loading wharf of the Hudson River plant. A part of the plant is burning. Congdon thought you ought to be informed." Doc replied, "I have received the message. You will stay with Monk at headquarters. Have Renny and the others stay at the hangar. In no case leave. Wait for a telephone message. I fear it may come at any time. Call me when it arrives."

Doc Savage had more than ordinary interest in the plant of the Electro-Chemical Research Corporation. In fact, he owned a controlling interest in the scientific laboratory. Many advanced devices had been made and tested there. Doc knew if Long Tom were permitted, the electrical wizard would be among the first to reach the scene.

Long Tom was greatly interested in some of the electrical experiments.

Doc turned the car and headed it back across Westchester County toward the Hudson River. He recalled the Electro-Chemical plant was probably no more than a mile above where Homer Pearsall's houseboat had burned.

The crossing of Westchester County required some time. When Doc stopped his car near the Hudson River again, it was guided by a glare against the city. The bronze man was sure now that he had a part of the answer to the "black spot" deaths.

Doc made his way inconspicuously through the crowd. Fire and oily smoke rolled upward from a wharf on the river boat. The blaze had originated there and not in the Electro-Chemical plant itself.

But the time-dried buildings on the wharf gave fierce heat. The windows of the Electro-Chemical plant laboratory had cracked. Bluish flame was playing inside the building. Some of the chemicals on hand had ignited quickly. As Doc approached, there was a ripping blast and part of a wall bulged and fell.

Some firemen with suction hose run up from the river were dumping streams of water without much effect. The chemicals created a blaze that could only be combated by other chemicals.

Doc was looking for Congdon, the general manager. A tall young man loomed before him.

"Mr. Savage!" exclaimed this young man. "I'm glad you got here! There're five years of hard work going up in smoke!"

"And you look as if you had been trying to go up with it," commented Doc, dryly. "We can replace almost any chemical and reproduce any experiment, but when a good brain is burned, another one is sometimes difficult to find."

The bronze man was referring to the obvious efforts the tall young man had been making. The man was Ronald Doremon. He had been assistant to General Manager Congdon for about five years. Now Doremon's thin, solemn, scholarly face was blackened. His eyebrows had been burned off. Much of his hair was scorched and he had wrapped handkerchiefs around his seared hands. Doremon did not smile. He was a young man who apparently took life and his job seriously.

Congdon was older and more philosophical than Doremon.

"Too bad, Mr. Savage," he commented. "We'll have to replace stuff worth many thousands, and do a lot of work over again."

"That will furnish new employment and the money will be well spent," consoled the man of bronze. "How did the fire originate?"

Congdon's dark features wore a heavy frown.

"It didn't start in the plant. The watchman said there was an explosion under the old wharf. It blazed up like there might have been oil or something highly inflammable. The watchman said he was sure he heard a motor boat getting away right afterward."

"Not much chance of tracing the cause in that," advised Doc.

He gestured toward the inferno that had been the wharf and old warehouse. This was blazing to the

edge of the water. All evidence of incendiarism had been destroyed.

The man of bronze was studying the outlines of the burning building. One wing projected far beyond the main structure. This had, thus far, escaped the fire.

Congdon said, "Of course, we will start to rebuild at once."

Then he gave a low whistle of amazement and grinned sourly. Doc Savage was no longer beside him.

Congdon had had some experience with the bronze giant's habit of disappearing suddenly.

Doc was gliding along the wing of the burning building. All of this narrow structure had escaped the fire. The firemen were concentrating their efforts on the blaze itself.

Doc crouched under a narrow window. This window was covered with a light iron grille in the form of bars. They would have defied an average man to loosen them. Doc inserted his corded hands.

Ripples ran across his broad shoulders. The grille spread apart. Doc smashed the glass inside. He used his shoulder as a wedge to make a larger opening in the grille.

The building inside was lighted only by the outside glare. Doc Savage glided to a row of glass cabinets set into a wall. One of these cabinets had been smashed. This depredation had been recent. Broken glass glittered on the floor.

The room was suddenly filled with Doc's exotic trilling. It was melodious, but without definite tune. The man of bronze remained like a statue for several seconds. He was aware this wing of the laboratory building had been especially guarded by human and mechanical devices.

Had the glass cabinet been broken before or after the fire had started on the wharf? Perhaps the depredation and the blaze had been simultaneous?

Doc moved slowly along the row of cabinets. No other glass had been broken. The bronze man reached the end of the closets.

Blinding blue light flashed in his eyes. It brought out the sudden whirlwinds in the flaky golden orbs. Serpents of fire writhed along the outer walls. These twisting, squirming fingers of flame formed a network of snakelike menace across all of the windows and doors.

This was a high frequency electrical current shooting from a hundred concealed points. For two or three minutes, Doc moved cautiously, seeking the switch that would turn off the current. The barrier was perfect across all of the possible exits.

Then he recalled the switch controlling this was in the main building, where an intruder might not reach it. All of the wires had been set under the concrete floor.

Doc hesitated only a few seconds. The heat was growing intense.

The man of bronze had no means of crossing the barrier of blue fire. The touch of a single one of those serpent-like tongues would bring instant death. For his own reasons, Doc had failed to inform Congdon of his quest.

From an inner pocket Doc extracted a glass sphere about the size of a small marble. On the side of this was a tiny lever. With his thumb nail, he moved the lever. The space in the laboratory wing was too small, but that could not be remedied.

Doc crouched behind a table filled with glass retorts. With a flip, he sent the globule to the farthest end of the building. Almost immediately, it seemed as if a thunderbolt had burst inside the room. Glass containers shattered into fragments.

The table beside which Doc was crouched overturned. The bronze giant was lifted and blown many yards. His body struck directly in the pathway of the weird, blue electrical current.

But the explosion had broken the circuit. In the small sphere had been a high explosive perfected by Doc. The lever had timed the blast. This had torn out one whole end of the building wing.

Unfortunately, this end had been next to the flaming part of the building. The inrush of air sucked the room full of blistering fire. Doc discovered the way to the window he had entered was cut off.

Half stunned, shielding his eyes from the searing heat, Doc crawled to another window. His clothes were smoking as he smashed out the inside glass. Here he had no chance to apply his strength to the iron grille. And he had been greatly weakened by the pounding blow of the explosion.

From an inner pocket, he produced a small vial. The liquid he poured from it was thick and vile-smelling. Doc tore strips from his shirt. He wrapped them around four bars of the grille.

Before the steel-severing chemical from the vial had time to act, Doc was forced to apply his strength. He wrenched at the grille and it came loose. The bronze man sucked in one breath of outside air.

He pushed his giant body through the jagged opening. He had saved himself at the expense of only a few blisters. But he went to his hands and knees. Before he could rise, hands gripped his shoulders.

The bronze man relaxed. He permitted the owner of the hands to lift him to his feet. Then the man who probably believed he had rescued Doc, fell down. The man's hair was smoking.

It was the solemn assistant manager, Ronald Doremon. Making a round of the burning building, he had come upon Doc Savage just as Doc was attempting to escape from the fire.

Doremon's shirt sleeves were burned away to the shoulders. His hands and arms were a mass of blisters.

The bronze giant lifted Doremon in his arms and carried him to the front of the building. Doc knew the young man was a hospital case.

Ronald Doremon had not uttered a complaint. Doc had time now to observe that the young man's eyes were queerly deep and intensely black.

Doc was speeding through the Bronx. Elevated pillars flashed past. It was the hour of morning known as the milkman's own.

Doremon's hands and arms had been swathed in emergency bandages. The tall young man looked helpless.

Though the streets of the Bronx were so nearly deserted, Doc was watching the rear-view mirror intently. For some time he had been aware of another car. Though he had made several turns off the main avenue leading toward the heart of Manhattan, the following sedan had remained about an even block behind.

Doc glanced at Doremon. The young man could not see in the rear-view mirror from that side. He seemed to have fallen into a partial coma. But his eyes snapped open suddenly.

For there came a sound as if a dozen men had started pounding on the iron pillars of the elevated track. Immediately, the rear of Doc's sedan shook and quivered with a different pounding. The first was the racket of a machine gun. The second was the stream of slugs hammering into the bulletproof car.

Doc's hand flicked to a knob. From the exhaust spewed a vapor. This spread. It was a chemical gas which should have paralyzed the occupants of the pursuing automobile. Apparently the men in the car had intimate knowledge of Doc Savage and some of his defensive devices.

All were wearing close-fitting oxygen masks. The attacking car came on. Doc stepped on the accelerator. The bronze man could have whizzed away. Something had happened to Doremon. His eyes showed a delirious light. The pain of his burns must have been intense.

Doremon screamed and sprang from the seat. His bandaged arms flailed out. Doc held the wheel of the car with one hand. He could have easily subdued the burned man with the other hand. But, in order to avoid crashing into an elevated pillar, Doc shot the car onto the sidewalk.

Here he was compelled to brake to a stop. The shock threw Doremon into the windshield. Doc caught him. The fusillade of bullets continued. Doc started the car and ran it along the sidewalk.

With a twist of the wheel, he rounded a corner. Before the pursuers could come into view, the man of bronze pushed Doremon to the sidewalk. Then he pulled a switch on the instrument board.

Doremon could walk, but he was mumbling thickly. Doc pushed him between two buildings. A narrow areaway ran through to the next street.

The gunmen's car rounded the corner. Rubber squealed. Three men, wearing masks, ran up to Doc's stalled car. As they came they pulled off the masks. Apparently they figured the danger from gas was over. That was their mistake.

Two of the men started to climb into Doc's car. Instantly, they would have made good subjects for a slow motion picture. Only their movements became so slow they ceased altogether. The pair rolled from the car, asleep. Doc, when he had pulled the switch on the instrument board, had released anaesthetic gas.

The two men in the street would sleep for perhaps an hour.

The third man shouted. He ran back toward his own car.

But two other men were coming from the gunmen's car. One man carried a submachine gun. The other appeared to be barehanded. Both men wore masks. The pockets of the empty-handed man jingled merrily as he ran. They seemed to be filled with loose silver.

The man with the jingling pockets had his face concealed. But Doc had heard of "Jingles" Sporado. Once he had been a gunman for a big liquor racketeer. He might be operating on his own. Jingles always carried loose silver in his pockets.

The bronze giant greatly desired to get one of these crooks into his own hands. He realized there must be an urgent reason for the strange attack. Perhaps some of these men could afford a clue to the origin of the "black spot" deaths.

Doc started into the open. The man of bronze was sure he could evade bullets from the machine gun. The man carrying this weapon seemed careless. The muzzle was pointed downward as he ran.

"Look out--there he is!" shouted Jingles.

Doc was in the open. But Ronald Doremon had become wildly delirious. He screamed, started to run. Doc feared the burned young man might be killed. He whirled to swing Doremon back into the protection of the building.

At that instant, the door of a house opened. An unsuspecting man walked from the doorway onto the sidewalk. The right hand of Jingles Sporado had lifted. His bunched fingers were extended, apparently without a weapon.

The man coming from the house fell down. He was on the exact spot where Doc had been. The householder uttered no sound. His face struck the sidewalk with such force the blood spattered from his nose.

And the blood had turned black.

Doremon was screaming and fighting Doc. The burned man seemed in a frenzy of delirium. Doc abandoned all thought of capturing any of the Jingles Sporado crowd. He caught up the struggling Doremon.

Back a few yards, a low wall topped a yard. Doc's movement toward this was incredibly fast. The

weight of Doremon did not seem to impede his movements. He sprang up, caught with one hand, then swung over the wall.

The pursuing mobsters halted at the areaway. Jingles Sporado rushed into the narrow entrance. When he reached the low wall, he climbed on it. The view was discouraging. There was only a vacant lot filled with empty cans and rubbish.

Jingles Sporado swore viciously and returned to the street. The two sleeping mobsters were carried to their car. The gunmen's sedan whirled away.

A minute later, Doc Savage emerged from the door of a house.

The man of bronze saw Jingles Sporado's gunmen had departed. The unfortunate householder still lay on the sidewalk. Over his heart was a black spot, round as a perfect circle. Doc's own car apparently had been untouched. Gas still afforded it protection.

Doc placed Doremon in his car and started for a hospital where Doc's name meant a great deal. In the meantime, Doc's companions at headquarters were greatly puzzled.

Chapter IX. MURDER EXPECTED

"WE go out to the warehouse, an' we come back, an' Renny an' Long Tom an' Johnny go to the warehouse, an' there ain't anything happens," complained the querulously childlike voice of the hairy Monk. "Doc never acted like this before. There's somethin' fishy about it!"

"Maybe Doc's planning to meet somebody important and has too much respect for the rest of us to want your funny face showing up," said the waspish Ham.

"Yeah?" Monk told him. "An' more likely he's afraid your funny clothes will make some h-man think we're only a bunch of dudes. But you know danged well there's something nutty about this whole thing!"

Ham didn't have a chance to reply. Not often did any person enter Doc's skyscraper headquarters without one of several devices registering.

Pat Savage spoke and smiled at them from the doorway.

"It seems I am not the only one omitted from Doc's present business," she stated, cheerfully.

"Seeing you are guessing what to do next, suppose we join forces and make it a contest?"

Monk and Ham were always more than willing to have the vivacious Pat with them. But the lawyer frowned heavily.

"Doc wouldn't like it," he stated. "I have an idea there is more than usual danger."

"That will be perfectly all right with me," stated Pat, hopefully. "Only I hope we connect with some action very soon."

The telephone buzzed. Ham slid into the laboratory and took the call.

Monk followed the usual procedure. He started a track-back on the call. In this case the tracing was unnecessary. The man calling was more than anxious for Doc Savage to have his address.

"You are Theodore Marley Brooks?" questioned a strident voice, of Ham. "I'm glad I got you. I must reach Mr. Savage at once! My name is Spade—Cedric Cecil Spade, and I don't mind admitting I'm upset. In fact, I'm as scared as any man would be who is sure he is about to die!"

"Yes," replied Ham from the laboratory, "your name is familiar. You've made a specialty of collecting rubies, since you retired from Wall Street. Are you speaking from your summer home?"

"Good!" ejaculated Mr. Spade. "I've always been told Mr. Savage had remarkably well-informed companions. You have just proved it. Yes, I'm talking from my residence at Manhasset. Perhaps my wire has been tapped, but I had to call."

"We'll check on that," said Ham, crisply. "Perhaps you'd best get on with your story, in case there might be an interruption."

"Well, I've had warnings," said Mr. Spade. "Three warnings. I disregarded them. Now I've had a phone message. I've been told I have only a short time to live. Two others named already are dead. Several other persons have been killed in the getting of these two men."

"Then you are afraid of this thing they call the black spot?" quizzed Ham.

"I know nothing of the black spot," said Mr. Spade. "But I do know I cannot stay here in safety. Yet I am afraid to leave. I have much of value in my home here. The rubies for one thing. Negotiable securities and—"

Ham interrupted, "I wouldn't talk so freely over the phone, Mr. Spade. You said the wires might be tapped."

"Hell!" said Mr. Spade. "I know they're tapped! And if the party listening wants what I have of value, I would regard it only a fair price for my life. If I could only pay enough to feel safe." Over the wires came a croaking harsh laugh. It held a mocking, soulful sound.

"What was—" quavered the voice of Mr. Spade.

The ears of Ham and Monk registered only a dull buzzing. The wires to the Manhasset residence of Cedric Cecil Spade had apparently been cut.

Ham burst from the laboratory. Monk came through the other door.

"Blast it!" he exploded. "I heard that, an' we've got to—"

The quick-witted Ham interrupted.

"Pat, that was Doc calling," he prevaricated. "He wants Monk and I to join him immediately. You go home, and as soon as the way is open I'll give you a ring. If anything happens that promises

excitement, we'll let you in on it."

Pat's attractive eyes showed disappointment. "If you are going directly to Doc, perhaps I had better wait," she said, slowly. Then: "Well—if you are sure you'll give me a ring when something happens?"

"You can depend upon me," said Ham, without batting an eye.

Monk gulped as if he were about to swallow his chin.

Pat apparently believed Ham. She removed herself gracefully through the outer door. The pair heard her descend in one of the regular elevators.

The astute Ham would not have been so sure of Pat's destination, if he had been a little more observing. She had been listening in on the library extension.

Unaware of this, Ham turned on the radio in the laboratory. Within a minute, he had picked up Doc's car.

DOC SAVAGE had seen Ronald Doremon put to bed in a hospital of upper Manhattan. The badly scorched young man was mumbling deliriously when Doc left him.

For the second time, Doc determined to make contact with some of the persons at the home of the late Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve. The entrance of a small crowd headed by Jingles Sporado into the black spot mystery had upset some of his deductions. But the queer actions of Arthur Jotther in risking his life in a jump from the automobile was a definite clue.

Once more, Doc was on the Westchester highway. His short-wave reception unit was open for a possible message. Ham's voice conveyed the fear of Cedric Cecil Spade.

"Perhaps Spade is exaggerating," came Doc's surprising answer. "He has a great amount of jewelry and he's frightened. Possibly he just hung up the phone. It's now the middle of the morning and I don't believe Mr. Spade has any immediate cause for worry."

"But, Doc, I'm sure the wires were cut," insisted Ham. "We couldn't call back. Hadn't we better run out there and talk to him?"

"No," stated Doc. "You and Monk will join Renny and the others at the Hudson River warehouse hangar. Something might happen there. I have a trip to make and I will communicate with you later. Do not leave the warehouse."

The bronze man abruptly cut off the connection.

Doc's immediate action was not in keeping with his reply to Ham. The bronze giant whirled his car in the Westchester highway. He swung off on a road leading to Clason Point. This was the quickest ferry crossing to Long Island. It would land him at College Point, only a few miles from the Manhasset summer residence of Cedric Cecil Spade.

Doc Savage had a distinct premonition. He felt that Cedric Cecil Spade was thoroughly justified in his fear of death.

For the name of Cedric Cecil Spade had been the third in order on the crumpled list found in James Mathers's penthouse.

At the best speed he could make, well over an hour would be required to reach Spade's Long Island residence.

Chapter X. EYES IN THE DARK

CEDRIC CECIL SPADE was scared. In the darkness his eyes were beady sparks.

Spade was a mild man. At this moment, he was a terrified man. None other would have hidden in a library room and made it as dark as night.

Mr. Spade sat hunched deep in a chair. This was pulled into the gloomiest corner of the darkened library. The outside shutters were closed and locked. Rich drapes were drawn across the windows on the inside.

Two doors of the library were guarded. A couple of gardeners stood beside the main door. Each was armed with a rifle. A stolid-faced butler sat beside the other door. Across his knee lay an oversize repeating pistol. It was one of the latest makes.

In reality, the weapon was a single-handed machine gun.

Mr. Spade suddenly got up and paced nervously about in the darkness. Crossing to a wall, he fumbled with a knob. Within a small safe was one of the world's most famous and valuable collection of rubies.

The clear, bloodlike qualities of the stones appeared even in the darkness. Mr. Spade shivered and replaced them in the safe. His trembling hands rustled some papers. These he also replaced.

"I can't stand this much longer," he complained. "Charles! Are the dogs loose?"

"The animals are roaming about, sir," replied the butler. "If any stranger approaches, they will make a great hullabaloo."

Just then the dogs broke into loud chorus. Half a dozen canine voices yapped in unison. The dogs sounded savage and aroused.

"Charles!" said Mr. Spade. "You will see what it is! No! Let those outside see to it! You must—" The butler, Charles, did not receive the remainder of the command. Cedric Cecil Spade seemed to lose all interest in his own idea. He ceased abruptly to speak. His hand dropped away from the opened wall safe. Papers rustled to the floor.

Cedric Cecil Spade made no outcry. His eyes had been beady with fear in the darkness. Now they simply ceased to shine. The rug on which the man stood was deep and soft. This prevented the thumping his body might have made.

Only there was a slight crunching.

Mr. Spade had taken one long step. As he fell, his head struck the carved arm of a big desk chair: The seat of the chair revolved slowly on its oiled bearings. Mr. Spade's head was under the chair.

"What has happened, sir?" exclaimed the butler.

One of the gardeners pressed a light button. The tomblike gloom of the great library room was instantly dispelled. But the place was now much more like a tomb. The scene was ghastly.

For the library had become the death place of Cedric Cecil Spade.

"Sufferin' cats!" spouted one of the gardeners. "There ain't nobody here! But he's been knocked out! Look, his hand's all black an' he's tore off his shirt!"

Mr. Spade's hand was black and glistening. The purplish-black blood had flowed over it. Mr. Spade had torn convulsively at the bosom of his white shirt. The garment had shredded in his fingers. Over Mr. Spade's heart was a round black spot. It was as round as a perfect circle. Only the gardeners and the butler did not think of that.

But Cedric Cecil Spade was indisputably dead. The blood that had trickled from a cut on his head where it had struck the chair was deeply black.

"Well, don't stand there gaping!" rapped the butler. "Get outside! Listen to those dogs!"

The grotesquely twisted body of Mr. Spade was not an object to keep the gaping gardeners inside the library. Following the butler's lead, they rushed through a big hallway toward the grounds. The butler tested the telephone.

To his surprise, the instrument was working again. Charles had heard Mr. Spade say it had been put out of commission. The butler called the nearest police station. Then he followed the gardeners. Half a dozen dogs of the German police variety were tearing around in the shrubbery near the artificial pond.

When the butler and gardeners departed from the murder room, none thought to close the door of the wall safe. A leather case of glowing rubies remained open. They were the color of rich blood, unlike the life stream of their late owner.

Several papers with embossed gilt seals had fallen to the floor.

The police dogs were yammering in the direction of a small island in the middle of the artificial pond. Japanese evergreens screened the center of this island.

In the thick shrubbery at the lower end of the pond, a bulky figure moved. Though more than the size of the ordinary man, this figure did not seem to disturb a single leaf. Nor did the movement attract the attention of the savage police dogs.

DOC SAVAGE had reached the Spade estate just as the dogs gave their first alarm. The man of bronze evaded the keen-nosed, angry animals by moving swiftly downwind. This carried any scent away from the dogs. Doc's gliding movement through the bushes was as silent as that of a jungle cat. The bronze giant heard the two gardeners talking, as they rushed from the big Colonial house. Their excited gabbling told him he was too late to be of service to Cedric Cecil Spade.

"There wasn't a livin' thing in the room, an' there couldn't 'a' been!" gabbed one of the gardeners. "Me—I'm quittin' anyway! I don't see no sense in huntin' spooks! Something came right in an' went right outta them locked windows, that's what it did!"

But the figure at this moment in the library was not compelled to act the part of a ghost. Both doors were standing open. The figure remained only a moment. Queerly hot eyes looked down at the stiffening body of Mr. Spade. Long fingers riffled the papers fallen to the floor and in the wall safe. Then the figure passed out as it had entered: through the open door.

Doc Savage halted in the shrubbery. He had a good view of the island in the artificial pond. The water was not deep, perhaps only two feet or so. The morning was windless. Yet a branch of the Japanese evergreens moved slightly.

Doc caught a glimpse of a face. A man was on the little island. He was looking at the dogs. His face was thin and gray. It answered exactly the description given by Captain Graves of Arthur Jotther.

Doc had never had a clear view of Arthur Jotther. But he was convinced the man on the island could be no other. The man of bronze swiftly computed the time since he had last seen Jotther leaping from his speeding car in Westchester. Checking the distances, it was not impossible for any man to have reached the Spade residence since that time, or since the fire at the Electro-Chemical plant.

Doc Savage moved slowly, circling the pond. He judged Jotther would attempt to get away on the side away from the dogs. The bronze giant meant to be a reception committee of one. In this maneuver, Doc missed the disappearance of the gardeners. He had judged they would take themselves away from the place.

"Put up your hands, fellow, an' be quick about it!"

The two gardeners had passed the yapping dogs. They stepped from the bushes directly in front of

Doc. Their shotguns pointed at him. Doc put his hands in the air, for an excellent reason. The gardeners were nervous. Their hands shook. Their fingers twitched on the shotgun triggers. Doc's bulletproof garments could not keep his face and perhaps his eyes from being pelted by scattering shot. Charges from shotguns are worse at close range than pistol or rifle bullets. "Now you turn around an' march up to the house!" commanded one of the gardeners. "An' we ain't afraid of none of your black magic tricks!"

So Spade had died of the black spot. Doc was informed by the words. It would be just as well to get to the house. Perhaps he could discover something of a lead before the police arrived. There was a slight splashing in the artificial pond. The sound came from beyond the little island. The dogs yammered lustily. Doc judged Arthur Jotther was slipping away. For the present, he deemed it best to let him go.

The butler, Charles, called from a place near the house. One of the gardeners used the muzzle of his shotgun to direct Doc over that way. Then Doc heard a furtive movement in the bushes near by.

Chapter XI. MR. MATHERS AGAIN

THE heavy-eared gardeners failed to hear the rustling of the shrubbery. They wouldn't have believed it if they had been told their prisoner, Doc Savage, also could hear the breathing of a hidden man.

So acute were the ears of the bronze man, the rasping of air through lungs came to him plainly, he could even identify persons he had known, from the different rhythm of their lungs.

The concealed man was close by. Doc fixed the direction. One gardener had touched his back with the muzzle of the shotgun. That was the gardener's error. He would have been in better position had he remained a few feet away.

Doc's immense, muscular hands snapped out with the speed of light. His two thumbs dug into the flesh of the two gardeners' thick necks. Doc neither lifted them nor moved violently. Yet the two men suddenly looked at him with glazing eyes. Their big arms dropped. Their knees buckled. Both were unconscious before they rolled on the ground.

Doc had applied pressure to one of the great nerve centers at the base of the brain. The gardeners were uninjured. After an hour or two, they would awaken with a numb feeling across their shoulders.

Doc's movement seemed continuous. As the gardeners dropped, he dived into the shrubbery. A man squawked as the huge bronze body hit him with all its weight. But he was a big man, as large as Doc. Doc had his hands full for half a minute. The other man didn't seem to have any rules. He scratched and struck and gouged. When he made no impression, he kicked. Doc made little effort at retaliation. The man of bronze seemed to be enjoying himself.

Doc stepped suddenly sidewise. Remarkably, he was touching the other man with only a thumb and forefinger. But these were like steel pincers. The thumb was in the man's armpit and the forefinger lay on his shoulder. The bronzed tendons, like cable in Doc's wrist, seemed to tighten. The other man's beefy face drained of color. His whole body quivered.

"Don't, Savage! Don't do that! I just didn't want you to hold me here! It doesn't look so good for me! But I had a reason to want to see Spade before—"

"Before the black spot got him, Mathers? That was what I imagined. So you think it doesn't look good for you to be caught in the Spade grounds? Well, where did you go last night?"

The man was James Mathers, the broker. His beefy face was haggard and his eyes were hollow. Apparently, he had not slept.

"Listen, Savage! I beat it when the crowd got to the houseboat last night! I heard a policeman say Arthur Jotther was loose!"

"Yes?" said Doc, mildly. "Then you are accusing Jotther? You're afraid of him?"

"Yes—no—no, I'm not sure why I'm afraid of him!" stammered Mathers. "But I knew—I knew the black spot might get Spade next! That's why I came here! I thought I could persuade him to go away with me!"

"How do you know he has been murdered?"

"I heard them, the servants running out with guns! They were yelling! The dogs were chasing some one! I hid in the shrubbery and somebody sneaked up on me. He struck me and knocked me out. I didn't see the man, but afterward the dogs kept barking over by the pond. Listen, Savage, you've got to believe me! I haven't long to live!"

"You'll hardly preserve your life by running around the country looking like a fugitive from justice," observed Doc Savage, dryly. "I promised to do what I could. You have run away. And you have been holding back some important facts."

"No, I've told you everything I knew," insisted Mathers. "And I won't leave your protection again. I'm scared. They'll get me!"

"If you're afraid of Arthur Jotther, how about Jingles Sporado?" Doc shot at him.

Mathers's face turned a shade whiter, but he shook his head slowly.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he declared. "I've never heard of this—this Jingles Sporado."

"Possibly he wouldn't be prominently mentioned in the financial pages," commented Doc. "But I

thought possibly you might have been reading up on recent extortion rackets. According to your own story, they would be interesting. And Jingles Sporado is quite prominently mentioned in a few of the latest blackmail reports."

James Mathers stared at Doc blankly. The bronze man decided that perhaps the broker really hadn't heard of Jingles Sporado. He had no time to pursue the subject further.

The butler, Charles, reinforced by a chauffeur and several other men, crashed through the shrubbery. Doc signaled Mathers to make no resistance. The butler, Charles, was stolidly confident he had come upon his master's killers.

"Disarm them at once!" the butler ordered, keeping Doc and Mathers covered with his businesslike repeating pistol.

Fumbling hands discovered several odd pockets about Doc's garments. But these seemed to hold merely a collection of queer objects of a harmless character. The chauffeur was cursed with some curiosity.

Among other small devices, he held a polished, globule like a marble in one dark hand. The chauffeur noticed a little metal lever. Doc was watching him with a slight smile. The chauffeur gently lifted this little lever.

Doc's hand moved with incredible speed. His flat palm struck the chauffeur's knuckles. The blow knocked the marblelike globe into the air. It flew across the lawn and descended toward the artificial pond.

Immediately, it seemed as if a cyclone had descended in the middle of the Spade estate. Several tons of water lifted into the air. The small island with its Japanese shrubbery was buried by the terrific blast. The water scattered and fell like rain over the lawns.

"Good goshamighty!" gasped the chauffeur.

When the water settled, there was no island in the pond. The tiny high-explosive grenade had obliterated several thousand dollars' worth of imported shrubbery.

Charles, the butler, was not wholly dumb. He stared at Doc.

"Now I know who you are," he said, calmly—"Doc Savage. Well, it doesn't make any difference; you'll have to account for being in these grounds."

As they approached the house, Doc Savage spoke to the butler.

"Mr. Spade had jewels of great value," stated the bronze man. "Probably he also had securities. Were all of these taken?"

The butler had overlooked the matter of the jewels and securities.

"I would venture to predict that only a small amount of all valuables has been taken," went on Doc, calmly.

"If that should prove to be true, you will have to explain to the police how you happen to know about it!" said the butler, angrily.

The police had not had time to arrive. The nearest station was several miles away. The butler went immediately to the wall safe. He grunted profanely.

"Some of the securities have been taken," he announced. "But the rubies have not been touched. All of the bonds were easily negotiable. Let me tell you something, Doc Savage. I shall have to report your strange knowledge to the police."

"Possibly you'll accuse me of leaving that note in the typewriter," suggested Doc. "Or had you read it?"

The butler whipped over to the machine beside the big desk. His fingers were straying to the keys.

"Wait a minute," cautioned Doc. "Perhaps there are finger prints. Don't touch the keys."

Then the bronze man produced a powerful glass. After a hasty scrutiny, he announced. "All finger prints have been wiped clean. But the note speaks for itself."

The note said:

The market value of the securities today taken from Cedric Cecil Spade is \$128,230.57. The remaining bonds will check

.

"That doesn't seem like a very small amount to me," declared the butler.

"Considering the value of the rubies and the other bonds, it is a trivial sum," stated Doc Savage. "What do you think, Mathers?"

Since the two automatics had been discovered, the beefy broker had been held under the shotguns of the servants.

"I don't know—I don't know—" Mr. Mathers seemed dazed.

His nose had been bleeding and one eye was purple. The butler demonstrated he knew Mr. Mathers.

"But you would know why you were hiding in the grounds," said Charles. "It is unfortunate, but I was in the next room the other night when you and the master quarreled so violently."

This was information to Doc Savage.

"Then you had a break with Spade?" said the man of bronze.

"Yes—yes, that's true, but it had nothing to do with this," asserted Mr. Mathers. "In fact, we disagreed over Mr. Spade's habit of keeping the jewels and securities in his summer residence. He knew of the extortion threat and the—"

"Hello, Doc! I had no idea you would be here! But I happened to hear a message and I suspected there would be trouble, so I thought I would find out about it."

Pat Savage had stepped in from the hallway. She tried to make her voice sound casual. But her eyes went to the corpse.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have come," she said. "Then Mr. Spade was justified in being frightened?" "He was justified," stated Doc. "And you shouldn't have come. You must leave here as quickly and unobtrusively as possible."

POLICE CARS screamed into the Spade estate.

The huge form of Red Mahoney loomed with the first coppers to arrive. A fussy, rather bewildered local police sergeant had to take charge until some one higher in authority arrived.

"Don't anybody touch anything!" commanded the sergeant. "Leave everything right where it is! What's all this?"

The sergeant pulled the note from the typewriter. Mr. Mathers moved close to Doc Savage.

"Will you see that I get out of here, and then let me stick with you?" murmured Mr. Mathers. "I don't care how much it costs, I've got to have your protection, Mr. Savage! I'll pay you anything!"

"I'll help you all I can, Mathers," replied Doc. "In return, if you escape death, you will donate a sum I designate to a children's hospital in Manhattan."

"How much—I don't care—how much?"

"It will be an odd amount figured to pennies," stated Doc.

Mr. Mathers stared at Doc. He closed his lips grimly.

Doc Savage moved to a window. He could see the artificial pond. Where the small island with the Japanese shrubbery had been was only calm water. He wondered if the man he had seen peering from the bushes had waded from the island before the high explosive grenade had dissolved his hiding place? Red Mahoney's blarney had won him a set-up from the flustered police sergeant. Red had told him he would see he got a close-up in the news-reel.

Doc approved the efforts of Red Mahoney. Sometimes a photographic lens would reveal some detail the most searching human eye had missed. But it required only Doc's keen sight to find the three human hairs on the shutter of one window.

From the position of these hairs, Doc judged some person of above average height had been concealed in the window alcove. Doc rubbed the three hairs between his fingers. Then he brought them near his nostrils.

Doc slipped the three human hairs into a small container.

"The New York police have got the net out for the Jingles Sporado crowd," the police sergeant was saying. "They found evidence some of the Sporado mob might have been in on a shooting this morning. A dead man was found on the sidewalk with a black spot over his heart."

Doc Savage's grim speculative whipped back to Jingles and his gunmen. That shooting affair had seemed to be a side issue. But one of the mobsters had caused a "black spot" death.

Doc considered his scanty, tangible evidence. Thus far, it consisted of three hairs and a shadowy face on a news-reel film.

Chapter XII. RUNAWAY PATIENT

DOC SAVAGE was trying to fit together pieces of a puzzle. These bits of circumstantial evidence had been queerly jig-sawed. Mr. Mathers was one angle. The death trap for Doc in Mathers's penthouse had not been too clearly explained.

Arthur Jotther was another angle. Jotther could have been in on the "black spot" deaths of Vandersleeve, Pearsall and Spade. But he was eliminated from the trap at Mathers's penthouse. At that time, the elusive Jotther was in jail.

Then there was Jingles Sporado. The Jingles Sporado crowd had pursued the man of bronze. A casual householder had died of the black spot.

Doc Savage did not overlook other minor persons.

Red Mahoney was a movie cameraman. He had been present at the Vandersleeve house. Now he was here in the home of the late Cedric Cecil Spade.

Apart from the angles mentioned, now Doc had three hairs. They were ordinary human hairs in all but one respect. The one curious quality they possessed might overturn all other suspicions.

A more experienced police officer arrived. He was chief of county detectives. Red Mahoney discreetly withdrew his movie camera when he saw the detective. The news-reel grabber did not want to lose what he already had shot.

The detective knew Doc Savage. He immediately signified that the bronze adventurer was not to be detained or hampered in any way. This disgusted the butler, Charles.

The butler was more disgruntled when Mr. Mathers was released by the county detective. This was accomplished after Doc Savage had spoken to the officer.

"I'll be responsible for Mathers," Doc stated. Then he added in a still lower tone, "This might lead to something in cracking the case."

When Doc Savage was preparing to leave the home of the murdered Cedric Cecil Spade, five gloomy men guarded his Hudson River warehouse hangar. Doc's companions had passed a couple of hot hours

doing nothing.

The warehouse was divided into compartments. In one section were several of the most modern, streamlined planes. Some were of the large tri-motored type. Others were small single-motored speedsters.

Doc's special dirigible occupied a section to itself. This immense ship of the air was as perfect as a silver arrow. Every line was designed for speed and safety.

A third space was dockage. In this rested an advanced type of underwater craft. This was an improvement over the submarine Doc had designed for exploring beneath Arctic ice. The new submarine now contained what might have been termed "lifeboats."

These "lifeboats" were one-man or two-men subs. They could be freed and operated separately. They contained electrical motive power and oxygen tanks.

"Maybe if we shut Monk into the sub and sent it to the bottom, Doc might let us in on what he's doing," suggested Ham, cheerfully. "Or maybe we could send Monk to find out where Doc is and he'd get himself in a jam. Maybe he'd never come back."

"Dang you!" squealed Monk. "I'll bet Doc's in some kind of danger and he don't want to be tied up with a mouthpiece that can't do anything but talk!"

THE interior of the warehouse hangars was somewhat dark. This seemed to shut in the heat. Johnny, the skeletonlike geologist, was the only one the heat didn't seem to affect much. He hadn't enough covering over his bones to do much sweating.

One of the watchmen shouted from the space where the dirigible was kept.

"Hey!" he yelled. "Come down outta there! Hey!"

From that direction came a deep bass humming.

"Come on!" shouted Renny. "Something's busted! That guy's shooting!"

Doc's watchmen were equipped with the superfirers containing mercy bullets. When Renny led the others into the dirigible section, the shell-like bullets were spattering the silvery dirigible.

"What's going on?" yelled Long Tom. "You can't shoot through that wall! It's bulletproof!"

The watchman's eyes were trying to jump from their sockets. He emptied the superfirer. His bullets were aimed at nothing. The man let out a crazy yell.

"I'm tellin' you the bullets went right through him! It was a ghost in a white sheet! He climbed up over the ship! I couldn't have missed him!"

Ham was quicker than the others. His lean figure mounted the side of the dirigible. His fingers loosened a bit of fluttering cloth. This was white. It could have been torn from a sheet.

"Your spectral hallucination resolves itself into a material manifestation," declared the long-worded Johnny. "Your optical perception indubitably was singularly illusionary."

"Horse feathers!" grunted the watchman. "So you think I'm one of them, do you? Well, look at that!"

In the gloom of the warehouse the thing could have been a ghost. A white garment billowed as a figure sprang away from the other side of the dirigible. The only proof it wasn't a wraith was the substantial plopping of feet when they hit the floor.

But there was no solid chunking. The feet undoubtedly were bare. Doc's men moved fast. But the intruder was swifter. He got through a door and in among the planes.

The intruder let out a gibbering scream. He was dodging among the planes.

"I want Doc Savage!" he yodeled in a hysterical voice. "I've got to find Doc Savage! They're chasing me! They're chasing me!"

"He's nuts!" exploded Monk, getting a hand twisted into the white garment the man was wearing.

Part of the garment came loose. Ham saw that the supposed ghostly garb was one of the nightshirts used for hospital patients. It fastened at the neck behind. Monk got another grab at the garment.

The blister-headed man leaped away. He was naked. His arms and legs were bony. His knees and elbows stuck out. His upper lip drew back from his teeth. He snarled like an animal.

"They won't get me like they got Doc Savage!" he yelled.

Then he retreated into the section of the hangar where lay the submarine. Before any of the others could reach him, he plunged into the water.

Monk was a good swimmer. He slid out of his coat and dropped his clumsy superfirer. All had decided they were dealing with a crazy man. So they had not shot him.

Monk was about to dive into the water at the spot where a trail of bubbles was coming up. Renny gripped his arm. The naked figure was climbing onto the submarine. Then it vanished in the open hatch of the small conning tower.

Monk and Johnny were starting to board the craft when machinery commenced grinding.

"Good grief!" exploded Renny. "He's opening the tanks! He'll sink it, sure!"

Monk sprang onto the sloping top of the craft. But the awkwardly moving chemist was not quick enough. The water of the dock space boiled and bubbled. Air hissed. The submerging tanks were filling. The submarine washed under Monk's feet.

"Look out!" shouted Ham. "You'll be trapped!"

The conning tower hatch was still open. Water poured into it. The sucking stream was flooding the interior of the submarine. From inside came a gurgling cry. Monk threw himself into the open hatch.

The red, blistered head was just below him. The crazed man's legs apparently had caught among some of the levers and wheels. His bony arms were flailing around. The blackened face looked up at Monk.

Water went into the man's mouth.

Both men were sucked down inside the submarine. The conning tower hatch closed itself. No more water came in. But it already was sloshing around their knees. The submarine jolted and stopped sinking. It was resting on bottom in the dock.

The naked man clawed at Monk, scratching his hairy face.

"You've got to hunt the black spot!" he screamed.

"I'll black spot you!" squawked Monk.

Then he hit the man. There was no other way.

Three minutes later, Monk pulled the naked man into one of the small, escape subs—the "lifeboat." Monk released the "lifeboat." The small craft sputtered from the larger craft and shot to the surface. Monk got it alongside the wharf. Renny helped him pull his collapsed prisoner onto the floor.

Johnny applied quick first-aid. The naked man had some water in his lungs. When it was squeezed out, he started babbling.

"Got to find Doc Savage," he mumbled. "Look!" he screamed suddenly. "The black spots! They're chasing him! They'll get all of us!"

Outside the warehouse came the drawn-out wail of a police car. An ambulance seemed to be accompanying it. Several policemen and a couple of hospital ambulance men pushed past the protesting watchmen.

"I don't care if this is Doc Savage's private hangout!" bellowed a copper. "We've got to grab that nut! There he is!"

The naked man looked at the policemen and snarled. He commenced clawing at Monk and Johnny. One of the ambulance men stopped this by deftly winding a blanket around the skinny figure.

"I won't go back there!" the man screamed. "They'll rub black spots all over me!"

"Nuts!" said one of the policemen. "Too bad he bothered you fellows! Got away from the hospital a couple of hours ago or more. Climbed down a fire escape. He's been reported all over the West Side since that time. Then some guy in a car said he saw him climbing onto your roof."

"Well, who is he?" said Ham. "We haven't been introduced, but he seems to know where he is. He was looking for Doc Savage."

"Name's Doremon," supplied one of the ambulance men. "Seems like he pulled Doc Savage out of a bad spot at a fire up the Hudson, early this morning. He lives over on Park Ridge in Westchester, in one of those big old houses. Savage himself brought him to the hospital."

"What's he mean about black spots?" questioned Ham.

"Don't know that," said the ambulance man. "A nurse said that was what he was seeing in his delirium."

Doc Savage had not informed the hospital attachés of the incident involving Jingles Sporado and the killing of a man on the sidewalk.

It was apparent that Ronald Doremon wanted to reach Doc and believed him to be at his warehouse hangar. Doremon was given a hypo and taken back to the hospital.

Doc's men knew nothing of events at the residence of Cedric Cecil Spade.

RED MAHONEY was persistent. That was what made him a good news-reel cameraman. For several hours, he had wanted to put Doc Savage into a film. No other news-reel man had ever done that. Red intended to be the first.

The cameraman had got all there was to record inside the residence of the dead Cedric Cecil Spade. Linked up with the Vandersleeve film, and the one he had grabbed after the Pearsall murder, this would be a knock-out. Red had not been openly in evidence at the Pearsall murder and fire. Being a wise cameraman, he had got his shots there from a concealed spot.

Now he was determined to add the giant figure of Doc Savage to his celluloid collection. To this end, Red oozed quietly from the Spade residence. His tripod was set up in the evergreen shrubbery close to the car in which the bronze giant had arrived.

Doc had finished his observations inside the mansion. Accompanied by the shrinking but beefy figure of Mr. Mathers, the bronze giant emerged. Together the pair walked down the steps and across toward Doc's car.

Red Mahoney got a quick focus. A confident grin illuminated his big, freckled face. After this one, he would be the ace of all the New York picture shooters. He started to grind at the little crank.

"Hello, Mr. Mahoney!" came an excited voice. "I didn't know you were here. Oh! Look out for your camera!"

The voice was that of Pat Savage. She arrived in the shrubbery in an abrupt manner. One foot tripped on a root. One hand clutched at the tripod on which the movie camera was set. Pat fell and her gorgeous, reddish-golden head struck Red Mahoney squarely in the stomach.

Doc Savage's roadster was gliding out of the driveway. Red glared at Pat Savage. He had missed

the picture he had wanted badly.

Chapter XIII. MR. MATHERS CRASHES

THE mental acrobatics of Doc Savage did not impede his driving in the least. The bronze man's deductions continued to be a jigsaw puzzle, or perhaps more like a crosswords affair. He could make the letters spell in one direction, but not in another.

The police were seeking Jingles Sporado. The sergeant at the Spade residence had said they had no trace of Sporado's most recent hide-out. He thought perhaps it might be well up the shore somewhere. State Police Captain Graves was working on that angle.

Also, Captain Graves was still hunting Arthur Jotther. Doc Savage wondered grimly if Jotther would ever be found. If he had not escaped from the island in the pond, the chauffeur's curiosity had been Jotther's finish.

Doc's car flashed over the curving highway under immense elm trees. These surrounded millionaires' estates on the exclusive King's Point section of Long Island. Private police guards patrolled much of the grounds out here.

Turning from the King's Point and Great Neck highway into Northern Boulevard, Doc shot his car down a considerable grade. On the upper side of the boulevard was a little lake. On the right-hand side was a steep hill.

"I'm getting out of the country as soon as possible," announced Mr. Mathers. "The extortion plot named three to die. They're dead. But it's all crazy stuff! If I paid up, I wouldn't be safe."

"Leaving the country, or at least New York, might be a good plan," agreed Doc Savage.

A heavy truck came plunging down a steep side hill. The body of the truck was built for hauling furniture. The vehicle was heavily loaded with junk iron. The motor was not running. Apparently the emergency brakes had slipped.

Doc's sedan was speeding along at nearly seventy miles an hour. The truck had given no warning. The heavy vehicle struck the concrete. Its front wheels buckled and it turned over.

Doc's reaction was instant. But he was too late to avoid the smashed truck altogether. The running board of the sedan sheered off on part of the truck. Mr. Mathers attempted to jump. He would have been cut to pieces between the cars. One of Doc's hands held him in his seat.

"Sit tight," advised the man of bronze. "We're taking a dive."

The dive was unavoidable. The sedan arrowed from the highway. It topped the fill at the edge of the lake and turned over in mid-air.

For nearly all persons, the crash of an auto is too fast to make an impression. But Doc Savage had acted. He had thrown himself across Mathers, lifting the weight of the beefy broker from the seat.

Only Mather's panic prevented Doc pulling him clear of the car. The broker wrenched himself to one side. His head crashed into the bulletproof glass of the windshield. Mr. Mathers's coat tore off in Doc's gripping fingers.

The broker went under the overturning car. Doc dived for him immediately. He freed the injured man with some difficulty. As the man of bronze brought the limp victim to the surface and pulled him to the shore of the lake, two men faded from the ridge where the truck had been standing.

Doc's keen ears heard the jingling of small coins. He had only a momentary glimpse of one face. The man was Jingles Sporado. The necessity for administering to Mr. Mathers prevented Doc from pursuing the mobster leader.

Red Mahoney had wasted no time in following Doc Savage. The flaming-haired cameraman was a hundred yards behind Doc's sedan when the truck dashed down the hill. His roadster burned rubber coming to a stop.

Almost before Doc's car was somersaulted into the little lake, Red was out of his roadster and setting up equipment. His camera lens was on the wrecked sedan when the man of bronze appeared with the dripping Mr. Mathers.

A police siren screamed. But it was not on a police car. The warning horn was attached to the roadster of Pat Savage. She had been a short distance behind. Apparently she observed the truck blocking the road.

Like many another driver in an emergency, Pat seemed to lose her head and all sense of direction. Her roadster left the highway. It was dashing straight at Red Mahoney. The cameraman swore wildly and jumped.

Wheels skidded in the parkway gravel. The roadster's fender slapped into Red's tripod. His movie camera described a short arc and landed on the concrete. The tinkling of glass proved there was one expensive lens that would have to be replaced.

"Why, you crazy, half-witted bonehead!" yelled Red.

The cameraman was furious. Even the beauty of Pat Savage did not temper his language greatly. Pat Savage knew she had caused Red to miss one of the few shots of a cameraman's lifetime. It would have been a knock-out, as Red would have said.

Mr. Mathers was still breathing. But blood foamed to his lips. Doc quickly determined several ribs had been fractured. Splinters had punctured one lung. There was no time to be wasted getting the man to a hospital.

"Have to ask your help," Doc said to Red Mahoney. "You'll help me hold Mathers in your roadster. The man may die, if he doesn't get immediate hospital attention."

Doc had swiftly performed all that first-aid could accomplish. But an emergency operation was indicated. Mr. Mathers was bleeding internally.

As the man of bronze took the wheel of the cameraman's car and slipped around the overturned truck, Red marveled at the skill with which he handled the motor. Red was a reckless driver. But he never had got the speed Doc was getting. And Doc wasn't in the least reckless.

On the outskirts of the New York suburb of Flushing, Doc swung off into the Jamaica highway. Pat followed, perhaps a hundred yards behind. Then Doc caught a glimpse of still another car. This was a long, black sedan.

The Queens County Hospital at the edge of the community of Jamaica was an imposing structure of red brick and stone. Newly built, the buildings occupied what would have been about five city blocks.

Doc slid the roadster into the ambulance driveway. Here it was hidden from the Jamaica highway along which they had come. Surprised internes then saw peculiar happenings.

"As soon as I get out, turn and drive back to the highway and on into Jamaica," instructed Doc, speaking to Red.

Red nodded. He had no reason especially to obey Doc's suggestion. But nearly all persons discovered they wanted to do what the bronze man requested. Red was considerably under the spell of the golden giant.

Doc picked up Mathers's limp body as if it had been that of a small child. Yet the broker weighed well above two hundred. Pat Savage had followed into the hospital driveway with her roadster.

"I instructed you to stay out of all this," said Doc. "But now that you're here, you can be of some assistance."

"I knew I ought to come along," said Pat, eagerly. "What must I do?"

Doc pointed to a nearby patch of woods.

"Back of those trees is a crossroad," he stated. "Follow Mahoney's car out, then turn off and drive over there."

THE long, black sedan had been stopped about a block from the hospital driveway. Jingles Sporado and three other men were in the car. The mob leader played with loose silver coins in one coat pocket.

"If the bronze guy stays in there with Mathers, then it's a good job," said Jingles. "He's a great surgeon, they say. I guess he's something like me. There ain't much he can't get away with." Red Mahoney's car emerged from the hospital grounds with Red alone at the wheel. In less than a minute, the car of Pat Savage followed. They turned toward the town of Jamaica. Doc seemingly had stayed with Mr. Mathers in the hospital.

Jingles instructed two men to hang around.

"Keep an eye on the hospital," said Jingles. "When Doc Savage comes out, probably he'll grab a taxi, or maybe he'll have some of his men pick him up. Then give me a buzz right away. We've got to work fast. Too bad that truck missed him."

It was too bad the truck missed Doc, from Jingles's point of view. For the bronze giant was slipping away through the hospital grounds. He kept the hospital buildings between him and the halted sedan until he reached the fringe of trees.

James Mathers hung over one of Doc's mighty shoulders. His weight did not impede Doc's progress toward the crossroad. Pat Savage reached the spot at about the same time.

"Where do we go now?" questioned Pat.

Doc replied, "We are taking Mr. Mathers to a private hospital in Jackson Heights. For the time being, it will be well for a few persons to believe he is in the Queens County Hospital."

WHEN Doc Savage returned to his headquarters, he discovered a message on the telephone recorder: "We have beaten off threatened attack on the hangar. It was only a crazy man from a hospital. He was that fellow Ronald Doremon you brought in from the Electro-Chemical plant fire this morning. Shall we join you? This is Ham speaking."

Doc Savage knew it was Ham speaking. The bronze man was doing some fast thinking. So the police hadn't got a line on Jingles Sporado's hide-out. Doc went over and thumbed through a black book of newspaper clippings. He put a bronze finger down one page. There it stopped.

A few seconds later, Doc was on the telephone. He was calling the police Commissioner of the city of New York.

"Anything on Jingles Sporado yet, Commissioner?" he said into the instrument.

The commissioner remarked there were several shades of hell popping over the "black spot" deaths, but Jingles Sporado had eluded the police net.

"Do you know where Silky Joe Scarnola happens to be at this time?" said Doc.

"Yes," said the commissioner. "He's apparently quit all of the rackets. He's running a roadhouse up the shore between Port Chester and Greenwich, Connecticut. And he drops into a couple of places on Broadway two or three times a week."

"Think he could be induced to drop into Manhattan today?"

"What's the idea, Doc?"

"I was thinking you might pick him up on suspicion of being a material witness in these black spot killings."

"But I don't see any connection, and we might be put in a tough spot," said the commissioner.

"Still, if you believe he has something to do with them, he's as good as in the can right now."

"Perhaps Scarnola hasn't anything to do with them, but he has some answers that might be useful," stated Doc. "Suppose he was picked up in the Bronx, and then just as suddenly, a lawyer came along from Jingles Sporado and gained his release with a writ of habeas corpus?"

"That's an idea," assented the commissioner. "I'll give you a ring as soon as I learn anything. Silky Joe will be picked up."

Doc next called his Hudson River hangar. He smiled as the line opened and he could hear the hopeful buzz of voices. His companions seldom were kept out of an adventure. But Doc had been balked at every turn in attempting to find a defense for the black spot.

In fact, the man of bronze had become certain the source of the deaths was such as to make any known weapon useless. His words silenced the men at the hangars.

"That you, Renny?" said Doc . . . "Let me talk with Ham. The others will remain where you are until further orders. Under no circumstances leave there or come to headquarters."

When Ham replied, Doc spoke a few words in the ancient Mayan tongue. This was the language used by Doc and his men when they desired to communicate with each other in the presence of other persons. It made positive there would be no listeners-in on a phone wire.

Doc smiled at Ham's eager words of agreement.

As the bronze giant replaced the instrument, his acute ear detected a faint clicking. He glanced quickly toward the laboratory. With noiseless movement, he passed through the library. He paused before the chrome-steel laboratory door and listened. Then he smiled slightly.

With almost imperceptible movement, he locked the laboratory door. Then he as silently disconnected the phone extension which entered the inner room.

Only a few minutes elapsed before the phone buzzed again.

"Silky Joe Scarnola is cooling his heels in the 180th Street station in the Bronx," announced the police commissioner. "Officially, I have not been informed of the arrest."

Chapter XIV. HABEAS CORPUS WRIT

"Silky Joe" Scarnola was a polished individual. His clothes were several seconds ahead of being up to the minute. His appearance was that of a man who thought a great deal of his own importance. But Silky Joe at this minute was frothing with rage.

"There ain't any dumb coppers going to get away with this!" howled Silky Joe. "I ain't been in town an' I was runnin' my own bar up over the line all the time these bump-offs was goin' on! I want Sorrell, an' I want him now! Somebody's goin' to burn up over this!"

The Bronx precinct captain had no worry. This was the commissioner's trouble. Only he had been instructed that Silky Joe was to have no access to his lawyer, Sorrel, until the next edition of the papers was out.

An hour or so after Silky Joe had quit swearing so loudly, being out of breath and words, an early edition of an afternoon paper came in, carrying glaring headlines:

SILKY JOE SCARNOLA

HELD IN BLACK SPOT MURDERS

"Somebody's going to sweat for this!" raged Silky Joe. "You get Sorrel for me! It'll cost you mugs plenty! I'm goin' straight an' keepin' my nose clean!"

Still Sorrell did not appear. The lawyer who showed up was almost as foppish as Silky Joe himself. He affected a goatee and a small mustache. His hair was dead-black and he looked solemn and dignified.

"I'll talk to Scarnola himself," announced the lawyer. "My name is Stevens, and you'll bring Scarnola out here. You haven't got anything on him, and he'll probably sue you and collect. Besides that, I've got a habeas corpus writ for his immediate release. And laugh that off!"

"You'll have to wait until I call the commissioner," declared the precinct captain. "There hasn't been any charge booked yet."

Two minutes later, the precinct captain looked worried.

"All right, Mr. Stevens, if that's your name, you can see Scarnola. The commissioner says if you've got a habeas corpus writ we can't hold him."

"You didn't need the commissioner to tell you that," snapped Attorney Stevens. "Bring Scarnola out."

Silky Joe glared at the precinct captain and Attorney Stevens when he emerged.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded. "Who's this mug?"

Attorney Stevens pushed his goatee close to Silky Joe's ear.

"Jingles Sporado called me, you nut," he said, softly. "He had a reason for wanting you to get out of here without stirring up too much of a row. I got a judge's order, and Jingles said to keep your lip buttoned up. Somebody made a mistake. Jingles wants to see you."

Silky Joe Scarnola clamped his mouth shut. While he apparently had never met Attorney Stevens, the lawyer was pushing the judge's order across the desk. Of course, Jingles would go to bat for him, was Silky Joe's thought.

When Silky Joe was free, Attorney Stevens spoke to him again.

"Listen, Joe," he said, quietly. "This is all I'm supposed to do—get you out of this jam. But Jingles said for you to get in touch with him right away. Well, so long, I'll be seeing you." Attorney Stevens slipped through the door and vanished.

SILKY JOE believed himself to be smart, very smart. But this unexpected pinch had been confusing. He must have had good reason for not wanting to cross Jingles Sporado. Their crooked paths had run parallel in the past. In fact, they had been associated in several rackets.

Silky Joe had "gone straight" only on the surface. The ending of the alcohol racket had put him into the roadhouse business. The roadhouse trade had possibly developed into other angles. Anyway, Silky Joe stepped from the police precinct station with a cautious, catlike movement. He was watching this Attorney Stevens. Jingles Sporado always was changing mouthpieces. Lawyers had to be far on the shady side to handle Jingles's devious illegal affairs.

Silky Joe ensconced himself behind an iron pillar of the elevated. Attorney Stevens did not so much as glance behind him. The lawyer ascended the elevated stairs. Silky Joe saw him board the train going toward downtown Manhattan. Still Silky Joe lingered. His small eyes scanned his surroundings.

Everything was clear. Silky Joe whipped into a side street. By that movement, he missed seeing the further movements of Attorney Stevens. The lawyer with the goatee alighted from the elevated train at the next station, four blocks down the line. He passed into and out of the elevated washroom.

When Attorney Stevens descended to the street, the goatee, the wispy mustache and the dead-black hair had vanished. He was a different individual, as he climbed behind the wheel of a parked sedan. Silky Joe studied the traffic in the side street. Several taxicabs were near by. But these were of standard companies. Any one of these hackmen could be really checked upon. That is, if any person happened to be interested in the movements of Silky Joe Scarnola.

So Silky Joe was seeking some cruising independent taxi. The more disreputable, the better. The battered old automobile driven by a huge Negro answered the purpose better than any other. Being intent upon observing the departure of Attorney Stevens, Silky Joe had failed to notice the Negro's taxi near the police station as he had come into the street.

"Yassah," said the cabby. "Ah knows de place. Follows Fust Avenue to de Queens Bridge? Yassah." The battered taxi clattered and banged into Manhattan. Crossing a Harlem River bridge from the Bronx, it swung over toward the East River water front. Silky Joe did not give his final directions until they had entered a section where towering loft buildings and warehouses blocked the front. First Avenue carried heavy traffic at this hour. Many private cars dodged in and out among the trucks and taxis. Nearly all were headed for the Queensboro Bridge. The sedan in which the changed Attorney Stevens was riding was not far behind the taxi driven by the huge Negro.

"This says you didn't have any fare outside the Bronx today," said Silky Joe, extending a ten-spot. "And some of the boys may be wanting to hire you once in a while if you keep your nose clean. If you don't, maybe nobody will be hiring you. Understand?"

"Yassah! Oh, yassah!" The driver rolled his eyes.

Silky Joe waited until the ancient taxi rolled away. Then he glanced up and down the narrow street. No person was in sight. Silky Joe walked a block, turned a corner. He slipped into what looked like a deserted loft building.

The Negro taxi driver drove away rapidly. As Silky Joe rounded the corner, the driver turned his cab between two buildings. Within two minutes, the thick lips were much thinner. Gummy rolls had been removed. Glassy shells came from under the Negro driver's eyelids. The kinky hair peeled off. A cleansing liquid was applied. The golden-bronze skin of Doc Savage was revealed. Doc slid swiftly from the old taxi. He went around a corner. His bulletproof sedan was parked there. The man who had been Attorney Stevens had followed instructions, though he did not like this part of it. He had parked the sedan and disappeared.

Ham could not understand why Doc Savage had insisted that he return immediately to the warehouse hangar. Having played his role of Attorney Stevens, Ham had hoped to join Doc. The man of bronze had commanded otherwise. Ham was considerably disgusted.

Doc Savage made a brief inspection of his sedan. He had carefully marked the only loft building which Silky Joe would be likely to enter. The bronze man now understood why the police had been unable to discover Jingles Sporado's new hide-out. For Jingles had progressed in his nefarious rackets.

Until recently, the master mobster had occupied certain luxurious apartments in uptown Manhattan. Now it would seem he had returned to an original location. This section was infested by crooks of a lower order.

JINGLES SPORADO was pacing back and forth. His feet sank into a thick rug. It looked as if

Jingles had transferred the modern comforts of some exclusive penthouse to the top floor of this old loft building.

"It's funny how that happened, or maybe they're lying at the hospital," grated Jingles, one hand rattling silver coins in a coat pocket. "We saw Mathers taken into that new dump in Queens, an' now they say he hasn't even been in the place."

"No, an' this Doc Savage didn't come out of there in the next three hours, for we didn't leave the spot," declared one of several men in the room. "I'll bet that bronze guy pulled one over on us."

Voices came from outside the room. Feet clumped on the stairs. The sleek, shiny head of Silky Joe Scarnola pushed through the door. Two men on lookout outside were with him.

"Joe says you sent for him," announced one of the men.

Jingles stopped rattling the silver coins and stared at the foppish roadhouse proprietor.

"Who in hell said I sent for you, Joe?" snapped Jingles. "I could use you, but I didn't give you any buzz. Spill it! What's the idea?"

"Ain't you—Say, Jingles, didn't you send a mouthpiece to spring me on the rap they was tryin' to put over on me? Hell! Ain't you seen the papers?"

Jingles's hand tightened on the coins in his pocket.

"Spring you? What mouthpiece? You mean Sorrell? I didn't even know you was in town! Didn't I tell you to stay away from here unless you got a buzz?"

Silky Joe's nonchalance deserted him. His hands started trembling. His face became a shade whiter.

"Listen, Jingles! A mouthpiece named Stevens! Had a beard like a doctor or a goat! Sprung me with a habeas! Said you sent him and you wanted to see me right away!"

Jingles had stopped his pacing. He was staring out of the window across the river.

"Either we're in some kind of a spot, or this guy with the black spot is screwier than I thought he was!" gritted Jingles. "He has pulled a couple of jobs that wasn't on the schedule! If the black spot guy didn't do it, then who—"

Jingles jumped to the door. He called to the men outside.

"Put on a prow! Down below!" he ordered. "I'd heard this Doc Savage was aces, and plenty of jumps ahead of the cops! Bring in anybody you find, and watch your step!"

Jingles walked toward the center of the room. "How'd you come here, Joe?"

Silky Joe smiled a little.

"I was smart enough on that," he offered. "I picked up an old Negro drivin' a cruiser. Gave him a ten-spot an' slipped him the ice on keepin' his trap closed."

Jingles's eyes grew suddenly red with anger.

"That's it!" he shouted. "You dumb dope! That's the play! Hey, alla you fellas get outside! Have a look for this cabby gink, only it won't be much use now! An' you, Torch an' Jimmy, get on the roof! We're lammin' outta this dump, but we'll make sure first how far we've been spotted! An' you're stickin' until we see what busts!"

The last was directed at Silky Joe.

"An' the next thing," declared Jingles, "I've got to get in touch with this nutty black spot guy. If it wasn't the biggest racket ever played, I'd get out from under, right now!"

Whatever Jingles Sporado's part in the "black spot" murders, it must have had considerable mystery even to him. Clearly his words had indicated some one in control of the "black spot" deaths was crossing these mobsters.

As Jingles's men covered the streets below and the roof above, an old rowboat was drifting slowly down the East River. This small craft kept well under the cover of wharves along the front. At times, the man in it propelled the boat under the pilings.

Doc Savage reached the river side of the towering loft building. The structure appeared to be deserted. Windows on the lower floors had been targets for East Side urchins. Glassless squares marked the emptiness of the building.

But on the top floor, high above, the sun glinted on glass.

Doc twisted the rowboat's painter around a piling. Where the loft warehouse jutted upward, the smooth board walls would hardly have given opportunity for the ascent of a human fly. Time and weather had worn away all holds.

Doc Savage heard men's voices at the side of the building. He knew instantly the meeting between Silky Joe and Jingles had been unpleasant. It must have been disconcerting. The bronze man realized he must move fast.

The river side of the building was unguarded. Doc produced a small, clawlike affair. It was a four-way grapnel hook. To this was attached a light silk line. Doc's aim was accurate. He tossed the grapnel upward. The hooks went through a window on the third floor. Doc pulled the silk line and the grapnel caught securely.

The bronze giant was carrying a small, boxlike contrivance on a cord slung around his neck. When he started up the silk line, he had both hands free. It is doubtful if any other man in the world could have climbed that thin line.

Above the broken third-story window, the board wall was warped by the sun. Slight cracks

appeared. Here Doc discarded the grapnel line. He clung like a leech to the boards. The top floor was four more stories high.

Jingles Sporado could not have imagined any person reaching his hide-out from this side of the building. Doc could hear voices through a closed window. The tone indicated the men were arguing. Working at high speed, Doc pressed a round rubber disc in the corner of a window pane. This was a vacuum cup. Such cups are used to fasten ash trays to auto windshields. But this was a peculiar disc of Doc's own designing.

The outside of the cup was of black metal. Within this was a powerful microphonic device. It was intended to record sound by the vibration through glass or thin metal. It would even work on some walls where the insulation did not deaden voices too much.

Almost-invisible copper wires ran from the microphone. The small box these entered was a recording dictograph. With this, the bronze giant climbed the remaining few feet to the roof. Making a quick survey, Doc found the space empty. He clamped the dictograph receivers to his ears. It was these which prevented him hearing a scraping sound from behind a near-by skylight. Jingles and Silky Joe were still engaged in a row. But the reason for the new dispute did not inform Doc Savage that Jingles's men had been sent out to search the neighborhood.

"It's the dopiest set-up I ever run into," complained Jingles's rounded tones. "There was a couple of hundred grand, maybe a lot more, in that red ice left at this Spade guy's dump. That could have been cleaned up. An' look at the dough at the Vandersleeve place, and on the Pearsall houseboat."

Silky Joe did not seem as well informed about the "black spot" murders as Jingles.

"An' you say this batty mug with the black spot thing won't let nothin' be taken but just what he wants?"

"That's the lay right now," replied Jingles. "An' there are four or five more birds gonna be bumped off before we get a free hand with the stuff. After that, this screwy egg says he's out of it for good an' we can put the works on all the guys we want to."

Silky Joe was smart in his way.

"Hell's bells, Jingles!" he said. "By that time, all we'll have to do is put on the bu an' scare some of the big-shots! You can collect plenty then!"

"Yeah?" doubted Jingles. "But by that time, the heat will be on heavy! I'd had an idea we'd hole up out at your place; but maybe we'll have to meet farther upstate! Anyway, we've got to play along with the nut until he turns over the thing to us for keeps. He'll fade out, he says."

Some men came into the room down below. Their voices muttered. Doc Savage caught their words in the window vibrations.

"Everything's clean outside," announced one man. "Too damn clean, if you ask me! And, say-what's that at the window?"

Doc snapped the dictograph earphones from his head. Behind him, came the rusty scraping of a skylight. He heard the window below being opened.

Doc whipped over the edge of the roof. He was carrying the dictograph. He moved downward with incredible speed. Cracks in the boards would not have afforded a finger hold to any other man. But feet pounded across the roof above him.

From below came a whiplike cracking.

"We might 'a' knowed it!" bellowed Jingles. "But he can't squeeze outta this one!"

Bullets from a silenced revolver screwed along the board wall. They chopped splinters alongside Doc's head.

Then from above, two more guns started whooping. One was silenced, but the other crackled viciously. Two men were peering over. One exulted. "So it's the smart Doc Savage himself, huh? Well, he put himself on this spot!"

Chapter XV. DOC IS TRAPPED

SLUGS thudded against the bronze body of Doc Savage. But as long as they struck only his giant torso, he was unscathed. Then one bullet ripped along the wall and drove a splinter into one cheek. His bulletproof garments did not protect his face.

Doc had no time to employ strategy. He was not wearing the bulletproof skullcap. Any one of the whining slugs might strike his head. He had been lucky to escape this in the first fusillade.

The bronze giant was slightly dizzied by the splinter driven into his face. His toes touched a window. He kicked in the glass and sash. But before he could swing inside, feet pounded into that room.

A bullet plowed across Doc's hand. Doc glanced down. The black, greasy surface of the river was a hundred feet below. The bronze giant tensed his muscles. He gave a tremendous backward leap, turning over in mid-air.

The giant figure shot toward the water. Doc saw the sunken pile too late to evade it. This was a submerged spike of timber. His body was falling directly toward it. When only a few feet above the sinister finger, Doc threw himself forward.

He did not miss the sunken pile altogether. The slimy timber struck his skull a glancing blow.

Doc felt his weight carrying him to the bottom. His muscles seemed paralyzed. When he hit bottom, he

attempted to shove weakly with his feet. Then his senses faded out. Doc was unconscious when his body reached the surface. He was among the piling under the loft building. A trapdoor had been opened in the lower floor. Rough hands seized the man of bronze and pulled him from the water.

Partial consciousness returned to Doc, as he was carried up inside the loft building. But he permitted his body to remain relaxed. On the top floor, he was thrust roughly into a small, dark room.

Doc could hear Jingles and Silky Joe arguing.

"We've got him, so why not finish the job?" said Silky Joe. "That police racket in the Bronx shows you how dangerous he is."

"Nothing doing," announced Jingles. "This black spot egg wants Doc Savage to go out the same as the others. An' he wants him kept alive until all the rest of his gang has been mopped up. He says if we get Doc Savage and not the others, they'll be too tough to handle. More than that, we haven't got this black spot thing now."

"It's crazy, but maybe it has some sense to it," admitted Silky Joe. "But what is this black spot thing, Jingles? You talk as if there was only one?"

"That's all there is," said Jingles. "And we haven't got that, now. We've got to get it back before we travel too fast. And look what a clean-up it will mean when it becomes known the black spot got Doc Savage, along with these other big-shots."

"That's an idea," admitted Silky Joe. "Then what's our play? We're not safe staying here. Maybe the bronze mug has already tipped off his men to what he's found out."

"If he hasn't, they're about to get that tip," said Jingles, with evil meaning in his tone. He was flipping silver coins in his pocket.

"You mean, Jingles, we could use the big mug as bait?"

"You're getting smart, Joe," grated Jingles. "That's just the idea. Only I don't need him for that. I've got a few cards up my own sleeve."

DOC SAVAGE was feigning unconsciousness. The room in which he lay was without windows. The air was close. All of the bronze man's devices, including his bulletproof garments of fine chain mesh, had been stripped from his body. Jingles had voiced the belief that Doc was close to his finish. Doc moved slowly, without sound. He judged there were a dozen men in the outside room with Jingles and Silky Joe. The mobsters believed the bronze giant was so completely out as to be no longer a menace to them.

Any one looking at Doc would have agreed with this theory. The bump of the underwater pile had laid a weltd gash along the skull. The bullet splinter was still stuck in a torn cheek. And Doc had the uncanny power of making himself seem at the point of passing out.

Now Doc suddenly turned on his face. Lying thus, he clutched two small blocks of wood he had found on the floor. They were only the sawed ends of scantlings. Doc smiled grimly.

He could hear Silky Joe and Jingles coming toward the door. They were about to make sure Doc had not begun to recover. They were due for a shock. When they entered, the bronze giant was apparently only an inert body.

He no longer held the little blocks of wood in his hands. He was still lying on his face. Not a breath stirred his tremendous torso. The bronze skin of his back was bare.

"Hell's bells!" grunted Silky Joe. "The mug looks like he'd gone out! Look! He ain't even breathing!"

Because Doc was lying on his stomach, Jingles bent over and gripped one of his bronze wrists.

Silky Joe felt for the other one. The two mobsters stared at each other.

"Well," said Jingles, "the big bronze guy ain't ticketed for the black spot now. He's washed up! His pulse has quit ticking, an' that's that!"

"Yeah," said Silky Joe. "He's dead. There ain't a ripple."

"O. K.," announced Jingles. "Now we'll put out the bait. If we can grab off the other five of his gang, we're sittin' pretty."

Jingles and Silky Joe walked out. They were convinced the great Doc Savage was dead.

As the door closed, Doc Savage moved slowly. From under each armpit came a small block of wood. The pulse in his wrists had indeed stopped. The wooden blocks had been clamped against the large artery of each arm. They had acted as tourniquets. The blood had stopped pumping from the heart into the arms during the moment Jingles and Silky Joe had been feeling for the pulse.

Jingles Sporado had once boasted he was smart. In some ways, he could prove it. Jingles had once been an actor. Impersonations had been his spot in vaudeville.

Doc Savage heard Jingles call on a telephone in the outer room. The number he gave was that of Doc's warehouse airplane hangar on the Hudson. Jingles spoke in a low, penetrating voice.

It was a good imitation of the bronze giant's tone.

"This is Doc speaking, and I have to talk fast," said Jingles into the phone outside. He spoke as if he were under great strain. "The black spot mob has got me. I'm in an old warehouse, and I found a connected phone they didn't know was here. You'll have to come at once. Weights have been wired to sink me in the river."

Jingles gave an address. Doc knew this was that of another empty loft building, in the next block.

The trap would work. The bronze giant realized that Ham's visit to this neighborhood would make the phone call all the more convincing. By this time, Ham would be back at the warehouse hangar. Silky Joe was giving low orders to the other men, while Jingles was baiting the telephone trap. Doc Savage's hands were busy. Their purpose was most mystifying. For the man of bronze seemed to be removing his teeth. The even whiteness of these in his bronze face was a part of his attractiveness, which was unusual.

But Doc was not wearing any false molars. He was removing only two, and these were simply cleverly screwed on caps. They came loose quickly. From inside each cap, Doc took two small glass pills—or they seemed to be that. He held one in each hand. Then he strolled soundlessly toward the connecting door.

The aperture under the door was an even inch of space.

Doc pushed his hands into the crack under the door. He drew in a long full breath. Then his thumbs and fingers pressed together. Between them, the small glass capsules were crushed. The anaesthetic gas in these capsules acted so swiftly that Jingles was not given time to replace the phone. The mob leader was slipping to the floor. Silky Joe looked at him. He, too, seemed to go to sleep on his feet.

The other men in the room were slumping into various poses of suddenly induced unconsciousness. The gas had acted quickly. For the next hour or two, Jingles and his friends would be out of the picture.

Doc reared to his feet. Stripped of his upper garments, he was a magnificent figure. The torn cheek and welted head only made him a more terrifying object. He got to the telephone. He had hoped to reach his men, or at least warn the watchmen at the hangars.

But Jingles, as his final conscious act, had carried the phone with him to the floor. The wires were ripped loose.

Doc knew one of his men had heard the telephone torn loose. That would bring them all the more quickly. With Jingles and the others unconscious, this did not matter so much now. But Doc tried to keep the others out of this. Doc's next thought was the radio in the sedan. With this, he could send his own companions back to the hangars.

The bronze man's bulletproof garments and other devices lay in a corner of the room. He restored them quickly in place. Then he moved toward the outside door. But there he became a listening statue.

Feet were thumping on the stairs. One person was ascending alone. Doc judged all of Jingles's men had been in the room. Then the newcomer could be only one person: The "black spot" murderer himself! Knowing the effectiveness of this black spot, Doc set himself in a crouch beside the door. Knuckles rapped softly.

Doc repaid Jingles for his voice imitation. The bronze man used Jingles's exact tone.

"Come in, the door's unlocked," he said.

Doc was tense. One bronze fist was ready to strike with the speed of light. The new arrival would be given no opportunity to employ the black spot this time.

The door opened slowly. A face and head appeared.

Doc pulled the punch just in time. In another split part of a second, he would have knocked his attractive cousin, Pat Savage, back down the stairs.

Pat's face was white with anxiety, but she managed a quick smile.

Before she could speak, Doc Savage said, "Listening in on telephone extensions will get you into serious trouble some day, Pat. You imagined it would be a good idea to hide in the laboratory."

"And you thought you had me securely locked in," smiled Pat. "But I happened to find one of the control boxes and opened the door. I almost missed you, Doc, but I saw you change into your role of taxicab driver. I knew there would be trouble, and here I am!"

Pat was holding a very efficient automatic revolver.

"Your explanation is adequate," said Doc. "But now you are going home. Your face is very dirty." Pat's happiest moments were when her face was dirty. This usually happened when she became involved in Doc's adventures.

No other men appeared, as Doc led the way to the street. Due to the wind on a steel skyscraper skeleton nearby the shooting of the Jingles Sporado mobsters had apparently attracted no one. Doc's sedan was standing where it had been parked for him by Ham. Seemingly, no one had been near the bulletproof car.

Chapter XVI. DEADLY HOOK-UP

HAM had parked Doc Savage's sedan on an isolated side street. Doc had planned on trapping perhaps one of Jingles Sporado's men. He would have done this, after listening in on the mobster's conversation.

"I'm returning you uptown, Pat, and it is my wish you remain at home," stated Doc. "We are confronted by a killing force that strikes without warning. Until a solution is reached, all involved are in deadly danger."

"I'm aware of that, Doc, and I think it's fun," replied the irrepressible Pat.

Doc's thumb touched the sedan's special starter.

There was a squashy explosion. This was not a blast that could have been heard any great distance. Doc had been intending to contact his own men by radio. He desired greatly to keep them out of the black spot investigation.

But, following the explosion under the instrument board, Doc did not call his men. The reason was simple. The bronze man had been given a dose of his own medicine.

A gas bomb, operated by electrical contact, must have been booked up with the starter mechanism. The gas acted so quickly that Doc had taken a quick breath of it.

Doc Savage and Pat went to sleep instantly. They sat side by side in a very natural pose.

Perhaps half an hour later, a police patrol car passed the sedan. The patrolmen smiled at each other. They could see only dimly that a man and woman were apparently asleep in the car.

"Bet they've been out all night somewhere," observed one of the patrolmen. "Well, let 'em alone. If they are here when we come back, we'll wake 'em up."

The police squad car did not again pass through the isolated street for more than an hour. Then the two patrolmen climbed out to investigate.

Doc Savage was just recovering consciousness. The coppers stared at him. Doc realized instantly the gas bomb had robbed him of nearly two hours' time.

"Stay here, Pat," he ordered. "I think there have been visitors to an old warehouse, not far away."

Fearful for his men's safety, if members of the Jingles Sporado mob had recovered, Doc led the two coppers toward the loft building. He did not divulge the real reason for his investigation.

"A gang was setting a trap for some of my men," he told the policemen. "Perhaps they came to this building, believing I was a prisoner. I had put the gangsters to sleep after they had tried killing me."

The coppers were plainly doubtful of this story. They had heard Doc Savage was hooked up in the "black spot" murder probe.

There seemed no signs any one had been in the old warehouse.

"If your men came here, there would be some evidence," said one of the coppers. "Maybe you'd better come with us and talk to the commissioner about it."

"Wait just a minute," smiled Doc.

He produced a small square box. When he moved a lever, the coppers expected to see a light flash out. But none appeared. The ray from the black lens was invisible. On a window near the door appeared a queer, bluish glowing. It resolved into words:

Doc—Something funny is going on. If you find this, we have returned to headquarters. Get in touch with us. Ham is missing.

Renny

Doc explained the message was writing with a special substance which fluoresced. Such common materials as aspirin or vaseline would do the same thing.

"Perhaps the gangsters have not yet recovered," stated Doc. "We'll go up there."

The patrol-car men viewed Doc more dubiously than ever, when they had reached the rooms where Jingles Sporado had been hiding out. There was no person there. Neither was there evidence the rooms had been occupied.

Jingles Sporado and Silky Joe had come out from under the anaesthetic gas. Doc Savage had disappeared. Fearful of the bronze man's uncanny powers, Jingles and Silky Joe had made a quick clean-up and departed. They had judged any effort to spring the trap for Doc's men would lead them into a trap for themselves.

The two mob leaders were highly nervous over the whole thing. They had taken Doc's pulse and he had been seemingly dead. Then all had been put out of business.

THE electrical gas bomb had convinced Doc Savage he was opposed by clever killers. Four of his men were at headquarters when he entered with Pat Savage. Ham appeared, a few minutes later. Monk leered at the lawyer.

"Dag-gonit!" he sputtered. "You thought there was goin' to be trouble, an' you run out on us!"

"Pull in your monkey ears before I cut them off," advised Ham, pleasantly.

Ham did not explain his temporary absence. If he had accompanied the others to the old loft building, he would have looked for Doc's sedan.

"Somebody has been fooling us," declared Renny. "Now we know Doc didn't call us."

Doc did not go into explanations.

"I was in a tough spot," he said. "Only some luck got me out of it. Pat came along to rescue me."

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" exclaimed Johnny. "Now what do we do, Doc?"

The bronze man smiled a little.

"I still believe there may be some trouble at the warehouse hangar," he stated. "All of you will get back there at once. Do not leave, regardless of any message you may receive. Unless you see me in person, it may be some one else talking."

"You are taking me back uptown, Doc?" inquired Pat.

"No, Pat," announced the man of bronze. "You are going with the others to the hangar. Possibly, you will stay there. The next time you show up where there is trouble, you may not be so lucky." Doc Savage departed from his headquarters. He went directly to the hospital to interview Doremon. Ronald Doremon's eyes were bloodshot, but he had come out of his delirium. His burned head still looked like a blistered red billiard ball.

"I thought I saw a man skulking around the burning wharf, just after I got to the fire at the plant," Doremon told Doc Savage.

"Know him?" asked Doc.

"No, but he was small and had a face that reminded me of an old, gray rat," said Doremon.

"Perhaps you'll never see him again," stated Doc, thinking of where he had last seen Arthur Jotther: on the exploded island at the Spade estate. "Was there anything at the plant that might have had something to do with a fire being set nearby?"

"I've been thinking," said Doremon, "that perhaps some one was after the gold locator, and maybe the gold we had been using in the tests. I don't live far away-up in Park Ridge-so I rushed over as soon as I saw the blaze in the sky."

Doc Savage did not believe the gold locator or the gold itself had any connection with the fire. But he kept silent about that.

"Then you live in Westchester, in the Park Ridge district?" he questioned Doremon.

"Yes. That's how I happened to become acquainted with General Manager Congdon and got my first job with him back in 1930."

"Hope you're able to be out in a few days," said Doc. "Let me know if you need anything."

When Doc left the hospital, he turned his car in the direction of Westchester County.

PARK RIDGE in Westchester County is more than a hump of land in the green hills. Park Ridge is an institution. The countryside has the air of much money.

Doc Savage's powerful sedan whirled along the Park Ridge highway. Private policemen scrutinized the flying car from stations conveniently placed at the ornate entrance to some of the surviving estates.

Strange motorists in the darkness of early evening were always suspected. Even a lone driver might be the advance man for some collection of crooks. Doc Savage smiled at the vigilance of the hired guards.

Mansions might be hedged about with armed special policemen. But the black spot had struck in two such places. It was ordained that it might strike again in similar places. In the list of those who were believed marked for death were the residents of Park Ridge.

But something more vital than this had brought the man of bronze to the place of exclusive wealth. In almost direct line from Park Ridge lay the plant of the Electro-Chemical Research Corporation.

Near the same locality was the residence of the murdered Andrew Podrey Vandersleeve.

Doc Savage created added attention from special coppers on the gates of estates when he slowed his sedan. Two guards came out and flashed a light in his face when he stopped at an entrance. Doc inquired for the location of three different mansions. The guards looked at him queerly. One slid his thumb along to his holstered gun.

"Sure you know who you're looking for, buddy?" rasped one of the men. "Them places ain't being lived in. They say that second one you mentioned is haunted. The guy that owned it hung himself in the middle of his living room."

The other guard stepped closer. There was a golden shining of Doc's face in his flashlight beam.

"Say, ain't your name Savage?" said the guard.

"It is," smiled Doc.

"Never mind about you wanting to buy them houses!" exclaimed the special policeman. "You being up here means there's trouble! We ain't sitting so pretty, since old Vandersleeve got bumped off! What are you after?"

"Perhaps I like to look at haunted houses," stated Doc. "A lively ghost always has possibilities. Thanks for the information."

One of the places for which Doc had inquired had been the home of a one-time millionaire named Anthony Hobbs. This man Hobbs, it seemed, had lost most of his fortune. And then he had tied a rope around his neck in the middle of his living room.

As Doc's sedan went silently into gear and glided away, one of the guards spoke with a snap.

"I'm trailing that guy Savage! You get in touch with the house and make sure all the alarms are working! When Doc Savage comes into any neighborhood, there's likely to be an explosion!"

The guard sprang into a small car. He did not have much success trailing Doc. The bronze man's sedan was fast. The guard saw only occasional flashes of its red tail-light.

Doc swung around a wide curve of the main highway.

The beams of Doc's headlights pointed for two seconds into a secluded valley. The waters of a small lake gleamed in the light.

On the shore of this lake crouched a mansion. Perhaps a house cannot be said to crouch. But this sprawling residence had something of the aspect of a dark monster. Its many extended wings were like

legs.

The dark old house also had two eyes. These were laid close together. While many windows were shuttered, these were the two windows of a room on the ground floor. Probably it was the living room.

The same living room in which Anthony Hobbs had strangled himself in a luxurious setting. Doc Savage caught the gleam of these lighted eyes. Immediately, the lights of his sedan winked out. Doc pulled an oversize pair of goggles into place. The lenses of these stuck out like small cans. Doc's hand moved a switch.

His sedan swung a sharp turn. Two crumbling gateposts of ornamental stone formed a narrow entrance to a winding driveway.

Behind Doc, the curious guard in the small car swore heavily. He had been watching Doc's car lights. Now they were gone. The guard slowed and proceeded cautiously. He did not want to smack into the other car. He thought perhaps it had stalled, or that Doc was waiting for him.

But Doc Savage was gliding between the old stone gateposts. An invisible beam that etched everything in plain black and white was guiding him. This was an infra-red ray, invisible to the naked eye, but plainly to be picked up with the special goggles.

Outside the stone gateposts, the guard braked to a stop.

Doc saw that it was probably half a mile through the trees to the deserted house of the departed Anthony Hobbs. Because he had seen the lighted windows, the bronze man did not want his approach to be detected. His sedan was almost noiseless.

Doc was driving with infinite caution. The driveway was narrow and wound among the trees. The touring car he met was not being piloted with care. Indeed, the hints given by the special guards of haunted houses seemed to be justified.

The touring car leaped blackly into the infra-red beam of Doc's car. This touring car was flowing from the starkly deserted mansion at a speed highly dangerous on that driveway. Moreover, it was running without lights.

The thing might have been an apparition. Its motor made no sound. It stood out, a flying vehicle of plain black and white as seen through Doc's special infra-red ray goggles. Doc Savage was a man of remarkably quick reactions.

But the touring car tore at him at such great speed over only a few yards of distance that he could do no more than brake to a stop. Evading the flying car was impossible, because of the thickly hedging trees. On one side, the driveway sloped off toward the small lake.

Doc Savage regretted his own lights had not been turned on. But the crashing impact of the two cars was too sudden to remedy this.

The touring car smashed into grinding metal, crumpling all of the forward hood of Doc's sedan. Then the touring car started as if it intended climbing over the sedan. Both cars skidded as they left the driveway.

Doc jerked off his goggles with swift motion. He heaved himself to one side with another. But the touring car flattened the bulletproof top of the sedan, pinning the man of bronze into the seat. Flame mushroomed from an explosion. The squashing blast had erupted from the fuel tank of the touring car. Almost instantly, the big car was enveloped in the blaze. Fortunately, there was nothing of a combustible character about Doc's sedan, except the gasoline and the rubber tires. The flames missed the fuel tank. But the fumes of burning rubber filled the small space into which Doc's giant body was crammed. The collision had been stunning. The bronze man was bent over his steering wheel. The bulletproof metal of the sedan's roof pushed his shoulders and head downward.

Doc bunched his powerful muscles. Heat from the blazing touring car was scorching through the open window beside him. Prying the roof upward required every ounce of Doc's mighty strength. The special guard in his small car rocketed into the driveway. He hit on his hard heels with a gun in his hand. He had seen nothing. There had been only the explosion. For a few seconds, he figured his caution had been justified. He thought the blast had been set off at the old mansion of Anthony Hobbs.

Then Doc Savage slowly emerged from the smashed sedan. The bronze skin was weirdly seared. But the bronze mask of hair appeared to have been untouched.

Doc said, "It's too late to get the driver out. He was coming from the house without lights." The gasoline blaze was dying down quickly. The special guard pushed closer and looked into the burned touring car. Then his face went white. He circled the wrecked cars slowly, using his flashlight in darker places.

"I-I-d-d-d-don't see n-nobody," he stammered. "There ain't nobody in that car! There wasn't any driver, 'cause he couldn't have got out. Say! I don't like this! I don't like this!"

Doc was straightening out his kinked muscles. His ribs felt as if they had been flattened. But when he filled his capacious lungs, the bones moved freely back into place. He walked around the wrecked autos.

Beyond the burned touring car there already was some dew on the grass. The bronze man produced a vial of yellowish powder. He strewed this in a circle. At one point, the trail of the chemical suddenly glowed with a phosphorescent light. A little more powder showed where the feet of a running

man had disturbed the grass.

Doc glided among the trees. The guard stumbled after him, with his gun held ready for whatever might happen. Nothing happened. The trail ended abruptly in a stretch of rough brush.

The man of bronze had seen a face in the infra-red beam, just before the cars had crashed. It had been the grayish countenance of Arthur Jotther. Seemingly, the fugitive from the Westchester jail had escaped from the blown-up island at the Spade estate.

Doc sent the special guard back to telephone for help. Before a car had arrived, the man of bronze had passed a quarter of an hour in the haunted mansion of the late Anthony Hobbs. There were now no lights in the place. Doc saw a fragment of rope in the room where the millionaire had hanged himself.

Chapter XVII. THE CASE OF HOBBS

IT was the following day.

More than a hundred pairs of eyes turned from the books they had been perusing. Something unusual was required to disturb the bookworms in the public library at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, in the heart of Manhattan.

Persons visiting the extensive reference rooms seldom had their attention diverted. But seldom, if ever, had such a huge bronze figure been seen in these rooms. The man was a well-proportioned giant. He was handsome in appearance. His flaky gold eyes drew the gaze of others.

The middle-aged woman in charge of reference files looked up with a bored expression. It immediately became less bored.

"Something I can do for you?" she said.

"They tell me, Mrs. Potts, you have a remarkable memory," said the bronze giant. "Perhaps then, you can recall the case of Anthony Hobbs? I am seeking newspaper files of about the date of his sudden death."

"Yes, I remember about that," said the reference woman. "He was one of several who could not surmount misfortune."

"Correct," said Doc Savage. "Then you could supply the dates?"

"Turn to the newspaper files between November tenth and twentieth, of 1929," said Mrs. Potts.

Doc Savage sought the designated files. The strange case of Anthony Hobbs had occupied front page space for several days. It seemed that Anthony Hobbs was a cautious and wise investor. Prior to the stock crash, when thousands of others were pyramiding their fortunes on paper, Hobbs was wisely hedging his stock deals.

Various stories told how Anthony Hobbs had concentrated all of his fortune into what appeared to be a reasonably safe investment. When the stock crash came along in October, Hobbs had been, in the parlance of Wall Street, "sitting pretty."

Then something happened. None of the inquiring newspaper reporters had apparently discovered exactly what had caused Anthony Hobbs to throw away most of his fortune, then lose all of the remnant of a million or so on one deal, one turn of the market.

The man of bronze made no notes. He read the stories rapidly. But all of the details were filed in his brain. The suicide of the millionaire was gruesomely described. It seemed that Mrs. Anthony Hobbs had discovered the body in the living room. She had been prostrated.

A week after the hanging, Mrs. Anthony Hobbs had died in a hospital. There were several other minor details regarding the deaths.

DOC was absorbed in his perusal of the stories. Two men of professional appearance had talked a moment with the reference woman. They were arguing mildly now over a story of a theatrical production that had appeared a year or two before. The man of bronze did not apparently attract their attention as he did that of others in the room.

It seemed there had been a special auditing of the Anthony Hobbs estate. Doc Savage made a note of the accounting firm that had been mentioned. This firm had an office address farther downtown. Doc noted the address.

Thanking the reference woman for her assistance, the man of bronze left the library building. Doc rarely traveled by subway. But it was midday by the clock above the library square. The bronze giant decided against crossing to the mammoth skyscraper where his headquarters were located.

Doc crossed Forty-second Street to Seventh Avenue. His giant figure dipped into the stairway entrance to the downtown subway. At this hour, the cars were crowded. Hundreds massed on the platforms and squeezed through the sliding doors.

The car Doc entered was jammed with shoppers. Half the persons in the car were clinging to straps. They held on with one hand and clutched inevitable newspapers and books in the other. New Yorkers are perhaps the world's greatest readers in public.

This habit has been acquired because of the tedious hours spent in subway and elevated.

The train rumbled along like an earthquake under a mountain. Ordinary conversation was impossible. Doc Savage stood, but he did not find it necessary to cling to a strap.

The giant body swayed evenly on the massively sinewed legs. The sudden joltings and rocking of the car at stations and on curves did not affect the bronze man's balance. Women stopped reading to

peer at the bronze-skinned face.

Doc made no motion or sign when a hard point was thrust into his back. Only he made swift mental note the object was too small to be the muzzle of any average type of gun. And he knew he had not been accidentally prodded by some careless person's umbrella.

The bronze man looked straight ahead. He waited.

Two tall men of professional appearance were standing behind him. They were the same men who had been close to Doc in the public library. The voice speaking in his ear was from a mouth so close that no other person could have heard it.

"This isn't a gun," grated the voice, unpleasantly. "So your bulletproof vest means nothing. You could drop dead and no evidence would appear to indicate violence until it would be too late. You will keep your hands at your sides, Doc Savage. Don't try reaching for any of your funny gas pills either. At the Cortlandt Street station you will walk out with us."

Whirlpools of glinting light disturbed Doc's flaky gold eyes. Apparently he was interested in an advertising sign level with his face. His lips scarcely moved. But his words were distinctly heard by the man holding the threat in his back.

"I understand perfectly. I know it is not a gun."

Doc did not so much as turn his head. But the faces of the two tall men were mirrored in the car windows. Doc had never seen either of them. Nor, so far as he had indicated it, had he ever seen the "black spot" murderer.

The man of bronze had realized from the first that this adventure had produced new and deadly weapons. He knew even the fine chain mesh of special alloy which would stop bullets could not affect the passage of the death ray.

The subway train roared through two stations without stopping. It was running on the express track. The next stop would be at Chambers Street. This happened to be close to the address of the firm Doc had started out to seek. On this particular train, the stop after that would be Cortlandt Street.

The train clicked over switch points and swung into the station. The hard object still prodded Doc's spine. A guard called the Chambers Street stop. The brakes squealed a little. The car was slowing.

The train was nearly stopped. Doc still gazed at the advertising sign. Apparently, he had not moved. He still maintained a perfect balance without use of one of the dangling straps.

But Doc's heels had come close together. The inner bones of his ankles touched each other. The train stopped. The doors were beginning to slide open. Doc's ankles came firmly together. One rubbed against the other.

The man of bronze had inhaled deeply. He was not breathing now.

The faces of the two tall men mirrored in the car windows suddenly disappeared. The pointed object lessened its prodding. One of Doc's hands flashed behind his back. His fingers came away holding what resembled an average fountain pen.

A man's shoulder struck the back of Doc's knees. But Doc already was moving toward the opened doors. A fat woman had started to rise. She intended to get off at Chambers Street. She grunted and lay down on the floor.

Other persons did not notice that the fat woman had apparently fainted. For all others in the car were suddenly very sleepy. Their heads drooped, and those standing in the aisle folded in various grotesque poses.

The tall man who had pushed the object into Doc's back was lying inertly across the other tall man. They had no interest in the bronze giant's departure. One of the men seemed to snore.

Doc glided into the subway crowd. Though other persons jostled and shoved, the man of bronze touched no one. None touched him. His swift progress was like that of a jungle cat. Behind him, one of the subway guards shouted.

"Hey! Hold off the bell! Everybody's dropped dead!"

The guard had been riding between the cars. He had mounted his position for seeing that all exits were clear before the train started. Looking into the car which Doc Savage had left, the guard gasped and shouted.

There was almost a panic. Only the fact the disaster had overtaken but a single car prevented many being injured in the rush to leave the subway. The train blocked the track. Traffic in downtown Manhattan was disrupted for half an hour.

The strangely sleeping passengers were carried away in ambulances.

Doc Savage went up some stairs to the street. He decided to walk the remaining distance to his destination.

The two tall men awakened on hospital cots in the Bellevue emergency ward. They came to almost simultaneously. The effect of the anaesthetic gas released from the capsules crushed by Doc Savage's ankles was about the same with each person. The tall men had been unconscious for a little more than an hour.

Neither understood nor recognized their surroundings. They saw each other.

"Wait'll we try explainin' this to Jingles," groaned one of the men. "What do you suppose happened? He couldn't have known it was a bluff! I counted on Savage bein' afraid of that black spot

thing."

"I'll never count on Doc Savage being afraid of anything again," grunted the other man. "I ain't even waitin' to explain to Jingles. My first stop when I get outta here will be a Long Island airport. If you're smart, you'll be lammin with me."

Doc Savage approached the address of the downtown firm of accountants. He turned an object over in his fingers. The point prodding in his spine had felt like a fountain pen.

Doc smiled grimly. The object was a fountain pen. That and nothing more. It contained no ink. There was nothing about it that made it dangerous. Nothing except what might be in the mind of any man into whose back it might be punched.

Doc Savage passed nearly an hour in the office of the accountants who had audited the bankrupt estate of the suicide, Anthony Hobbs. When he came from this office, the whirlpools in his flaky gold eyes were stirring as if greatly disturbed.

At the end of another hour, the man of bronze was entering the private hospital in Jackson Heights where James Mathers, the broker, was slowly recovering from his fractured ribs. The broker was just beginning to emerge from the mental fog caused by the car crash.

"I've got to get out of the country as soon as I can leave here," announced Mr. Mathers. "The nurses tell me I owe you my life, Savage. I shall subscribe the sum you mentioned to that children's hospital."

Doc Savage smiled. The children's hospital would be able to purchase new equipment.

MEANWHILE, Doc Savage's companions at the Hudson River warehouse hangar were on edge. The usually good-natured Pat was in somewhat of a temper.

"Why don't you do something?" she demanded. "I know Doc is in great danger. That is why he is keeping us out of things."

The night and part of the second day had passed with no word from the man of bronze. Frequent calls to headquarters brought no replies.

"I'm not staying here much longer," asserted Pat. "You are acting as if you had been appointed my guardians."

Ham looked at Pat suddenly.

"You were at the home of this Cedric Cecil Spade," said the lawyer. "You said the killer took only some of his securities and left his famous rubies!"

"Yes," said Pat.

Ham was doing some fast thinking. He was recalling having been asked for legal advice. His prospective client had been this same Cedric Cecil Spade. This was connecting up in the lawyers's mind with some other incidents.

Ham had not accepted Spade as a client. But he had learned enough to know that Spade was in great fear for his life.

Ham looked at Monk. Monk returned the look with interest. This became a glare.

Ham said, "I'm going to do something. Monk, if you'd ever read a book, I'd take you with me."

"And if you asked me, I wouldn't go," said Monk. Then he added, "But we've got to do something.

If you think we ought to try and find Doc, I'll go with you."

"You fellows had better stick until we hear from Doc," advised Johnny.

But Ham was preparing to depart.

"I'm taking Monk to the public library," he announced. "I'll probably end up by leaving him in the museum, but we'll look at some books first."

"I'll bet you've thought of something!" cried Pat Savage.

Chapter XVIII. DOC IS MISSING

THEODORE MARLEY BROOKS did not turn as many eyes as had Doc Savage when he entered the public library at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue. But many younger women gazed upon his debonair figure with decided interest.

Ham could wear clothes. He looked a Park Avenue Beau Brummell as he entered the reference rooms. Some of the women sighed, and a few men glanced up and swore to themselves over Ham's sartorial elegance. Then they grinned at the apelike creature ambling along at his side.

Ham addressed a woman attendant. This was not the same one who had directed Doc Savage to the newspaper files. Ham's adviser peered at him near-sightedly.

Ham smiled and said, "Perhaps you know something of the strange case of Anthony Hobbs?"

The reference lady did know something of it.

"You'll find the stories of the Hobbs case in newspaper files of November, 1928," she directed.

"It was a strange case, but there were many like it at about that time."

Ham strode into the newspaper filing room. Monk lingered. He looked as if he didn't know what to do with his hands. The big chemist looked around at the laden shelves of technical books. The reference woman looked at him pityingly. Very apparently, she considered this ugly, apelike man much out of place in such surroundings.

She would have regretted her pity, had she known that some of the chemical textbooks on her shelves had been written by Monk.

Ham was putting a small notebook into his pocket, when he came from the newspaper filing room, a short time later.

"Come on, ape," he addressed Monk. "We've got something, but I won't know how important it is until I locate Doc. We'll get to the headquarters."

AFTER more than an hour trying to pick up one of Doc's cars with the radio at headquarters, Ham tried other means. He recalled Doc might have called upon Ronald Doremon or James Mathers at the hospitals.

"This is Theodore Marley Brooks," Ham told the matron at the hospital where Doremon had been taken. "Can you tell me if Doc Savage has been there recently, to visit Mr. Doremon?"

"Just a minute," advised the woman. Then she said, "Mr. Savage visited Mr. Doremon yesterday. Mr. Doremon was discharged this morning. I have the address of his rooms here in the city, where he is stopping temporarily."

Ronald Doremon probably had been discharged from the hospital before he should have been. He was dressing to go out when Ham and Monk knocked on the door of his room at a West Forty-fourth Street address.

"Ham and Monk," he greeted them. He had seen Doc's men many times at the Electro-Chemical plant.

"I guess I have an apology to make, and you to thank, Monk. They tell me I put on some kind of show at Doc Savage's hangar."

"It was a good show while it lasted," smiled Ham. "You seemed to think you had to find Doc right away."

Doremon's solemn face grew more serious. His eyes looked queerly bright. His brows were burned off. His skull was still red and blistered.

"Well, I haven't changed my mind about that," he said. "That's why I insisted on leaving the hospital. Listen, fellows. Doc Savage is probably in the greatest danger of his whole career! Do you know where he is now?"

"No," admitted Ham. "We haven't heard from him since yesterday. You saw him at the hospital after we did."

"Then you hadn't seen this," said Doremon.

He indicated a newspaper with blaring headlines:

100 PERSONS GASSED

IN DOWNTOWN SUBWAY

"The story says they were all in one car," stated Doremon, as Ham glanced over the type. "And all recovered, after about an hour at the hospital. The doctors declared the victims had suffered from the effect of an anaesthetic gas."

"That would be Doc," stated Ham. "But where did he go from there?"

"I haven't heard anything, and the police seem to be looking for him," said Doremon. "I guess the commissioner has an idea Doc had something to do with the subway gassing. But there's another item at the bottom of the front page."

Doremon indicated the notice:

James Mathers, wealthy broker, who was injured in a car crash with Doc Savage near the home of the murdered Cedric Cecil Spade, was permitted to leave the Mercy Hospital in Jackson Heights today. Though suffering with several fractured ribs and internal injuries, it is stated Mr. Mathers is planning to take an immediate trip to Europe.

Ham whipped to a telephone, called Jackson Heights.

"Yes," said one of the doctors at the Jackson Heights hospital, "Mr. Mathers was discharged today against our wishes. He was visited by Doc Savage, a short time before that."

Ham hung up the telephone receiver.

"We'll have to catch Mathers before he leaves," he declared. "I'll try to reach him by phone."

"I wouldn't," advised Doremon. "Remember, I came in with Doc from the plant after I was burned. I think he mistrusted Mathers. He didn't say anything about it, but General Manager Congdon told me that Mathers had been with Doc and then disappeared when the Pearsall houseboat was burned. I learned that he showed up again at Spade's place, and it was after that they had the car crash."

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Ham. "You don't look fit to travel, Doremon. We could hunt up Mathers and give you a ring."

"I've got to help find Doc Savage," declared Doremon. "I believe he is trying to solve these black spot murders without bringing you or the rest of his men into danger."

"It sure fits together," said Ham. "Come on, then."

Fifteen minutes later, the three men were ascending toward the penthouse of James Mathers, who, it had been announced, was preparing for a quick departure for Europe.

James Mathers, the wealthy broker, was sitting stiffly before his wide, polished desk. When he moved, it was with the manner of a man whose slightest effort brings pain. The reason was simple. Mr. Mathers's bulging torso was encased in a plaster cast. A new bandage wrapped the upper portion of his beefy face. Mr. Mathers was not now as red as usual.

On the desk in front of Mr. Mathers lay several flat packages of money. With these were a passport and an envelope containing a steamer ticket.

Mr. Mathers was rummaging through his desk. The Japanese servant, Komolo, appeared to be the only other person in the luxurious penthouse. He was a huge figure. His appearance was much more that of a North China bandit than of the Japanese he represented himself to be. His slanted black eyes anticipated each of Mathers's movements.

"I have procured the gun," said Komolo in meticulous English. "With it I have learned to hit the honorable bull's-eye often, with much burning of powder."

Mathers smiled with seeming effort. His ribs apparently pained him greatly.

"That is good, Komolo," he approved. "You will keep it in the side pocket of your coat. Unless I tell you they are all right, you will be ready to hold off any visitors. The baggage is ready?" "Everything has been packed, sir, since your call by the telephone."

Mr. Mathers nodded. The light in the room was bright. The window shades were raised. If any person had been on the roof near the penthouse, it would have been easy to obtain a clear view of all that went on inside.

Mr. Mathers had just withdrawn a considerable sum of money from two different banks. He had been driven straight to these banks in a taxicab. This was after he was discharged from the hospital in Jackson Heights.

Mr. Mathers had been trailed from the hospital. Two men had been watching at each of the banks, when his checks were cashed. But they evidently were not planning an ordinary robbery. At almost any spot between the banks and his penthouse Mr. Mathers might have been held up by a rapid-working gang.

Mr. Mathers continued to scan his personal papers. Most of these he tore into bits, dropping them into the wastebasket. He was still engaged at this when a buzzer sounded. Komolo glided from the library. The Jap's right hand was in his side coat pocket.

The door opened. The attractive figure of Pat Savage stood there. Mr. Mathers scowled under his bandage.

"I was informed you had left the hospital, after seeing Doc Savage," stated Pat. "I thought possibly you might know where my cousin has gone?"

"Mr. Savage visited me before I left the hospital," admitted Mr. Mathers. "Where he may be now, I am uninformed. Won't you come in for a moment?"

Pat Savage came in.

"Doc sent me out to his warehouse hangar," she volunteered. "But we have been unable to make any contact with him. So I started the motor of an airplane and when the others ran to it, I got away."

"Yes?" said Mr. Mathers, shortly. "But I can tell you nothing. I have several urgent matters for attention, so you must leave at once, Miss Savage."

"I had hoped you might be able to tell me something about the black spot," said Pat. "It seems to me if you were running away from it, you must know who is behind it."

Mr. Mathers's eyes suddenly narrowed.

"I have no time to discuss this," he stated, crisply. "I am preparing to go away. Komolo, show Miss Savage the way down. Stay with her until she reaches the street. Call a taxicab, if she hasn't her own car."

"You can't get rid of me as easily as that!" flashed Pat. "Doc Savage is missing! I think you know about it! It wouldn't look good for you to be running away! Two of his men, Ham and Monk, are out looking for him!"

Mr. Mathers said nothing, but it was very apparent he did not like the idea of two of Doc Savage's men hunting for the man of bronze.

"Do you know where this Ham and Monk have gone?" he asked.

"All I heard was Ham say something about the public library," said Pat.

Mr. Mathers appeared to have suddenly changed his mind about something.

"I've nothing to tell you," he said. "You will go at once. Komolo, see the young lady to the door."

Komolo's big brown hands enclosed Pat's elbows. She was lifted as easily as a child. She was carried from the library. The penthouse door closed on her. Komolo did not accompany her to the street. Mr. Mathers called to him.

"Let her go and come here!" he ordered Komolo. "Now we've got to work fast!"

The presence abroad of two of Doc Savage's men seemed disturbing. Mr. Mathers talked rapidly with the Jap servant.

An observer outside would have seen all lights switched off. In less than two minutes, they flashed on again.

Pat Savage went down the penthouse stairway toward the upper floor of the apartment house.

Plainly, she was highly indignant at the reception given her by Mr. Mathers.

"He can't get away with it!" she said.

"And you can't get away with what?" said a deep voice almost in her ear.

The grinning countenance of big Red Mahoney poked around the corner when the penthouse stairway turned. At this point, a double hallway gave exits in two directions to the elevator floor.

"You back again?" exclaimed Pat Savage. "Can't I ever get rid of you? But, anyway, I'm awfully glad you're here. Maybe you can help, and I think something's about to happen!"

"Something always does happen, when you're around. Listen, you bust up another one of my pictures and you'll find out why they have a morgue!"

Pat ignored Red's cheerful remark.

"But what are you doing here?" Pat insisted.

"Heard this fellow Mathers was out of the hospital and about to skip the Atlantic," said Red.

"That's worth a shot and an interview. That guy's scared."

"Well, you won't get a picture or anything else," advised Pat Savage. "But listen, Mr. Mahoney. I'm afraid something awful is about to happen. Maybe you can help—"

"Chop off the conversation and both of you stick up your hands! Don't talk, if you want to keep on living!"

Pat Savage and Red Mahoney pushed up their hands. Half a dozen guns practically formed a ring around them.

"Now get yourselves down these back stairs!" commanded one of the gun-wielders.

The half dozen men were wearing tight black masks. The tone of the commanding voice left no doubt but that the threat of the guns would be enforced. There was apparently a second stairway leading to an apartment two floors below the roof.

Red's camera case was taken from him. Strong hands accomplished a job of tying, which proved it was old stuff to their captors. Pat and the cameraman were next made speechless and sightless by tape over mouths and eyes. They were pushed into a small room of the apartment.

But they could hear voices through the door.

"Listen, Jingles," said one man, "I say what the hell we waitin' for? This guy Mathers has got the dough up there! Why do we have to wait for this screwy guy with the black spot thing?"

The speaker was Silky Joe Scarnola. Jingles Sporado replied.

"Keep your shirt on, smart mug! I told you this was to be the big pay-off! We're still playing along until we get our hands on the black spot for ourselves! Mathers won't get away, and this time we're mopping up the works!"

Pat Savage was fighting the cords that tied her. She was much more frantic than Red Mahoney. The cameraman seemed inclined to take everything philosophically.

Outside, a voice talked over a telephone. It was Jingles. Then he announced to the others in the room:

"O. K. boys! Everything's all set! The black spot may be a screwy idea, but the boss of it's coming through! He's on his way now! Says he'll be here in less than five minutes!"

"And when it's all over," said Silky Joe, softly, "will he be leaving with us?"

"Well, there might be an accident," replied Jingles, calmly. "One more body won't make much difference, when we finish up."

Chapter XIX. MR. MATHERS DIES

JINGLES SPORADO ceased to clink the coins in his pocket. He had given the order to approach the penthouse warily and quietly.

"That big Jap might be dynamite," advised Jingles. "Grab him before he can get into action. Jam a gun in his belly. If that don't stop him, let him have it."

More than a dozen masked men had followed Jingles and Silky Joe Scarnola to the roof. They had moved with automatics in their hands. But no person interfered with their ascent. Light streamed from the library windows of the penthouse. This made straight fingers in the slight mist caused by the rapid cooling of the day's heat.

Jingles's crowd became separate ghouls. They encircled the house on the roof. At a hissed command, they crept close to the three entrance doors. Jingles and Silky Joe remained together.

"The black spot guy don't want Mathers knocked off except in his own way, but I guess I'll have to cross him up a little on that," Jingles told Silky Joe. "After he's been bumped and we take care of that big Jap, I'll see to staging the rest of the party."

"Maybe if that batty guy with the black spot don't know how much Jack Mathers took from the banks, we can grab the stuff first," suggested Silky Joe, hopefully.

"Well, I had the same idea," admitted Jingles. "Anyway, this is the payoff, so far as the black spot is concerned."

"Hey, chief!" called a low voice. "This door ain't locked!"

The wide front entrance door not only wasn't locked, it was swinging partly open.

"Easy," cautioned Jingles. "Maybe it's a trap. Everybody over here and we'll rush it."

The masked men cat-footed into the broad hallway. Luminance poured from the inner library room.

"I don't like this," whispered Jingles. "Take it easy until we're right by the door. That big Jap's poison! It's too quiet!"

Silky Joe had glided over. He could look through the draperies into the library space. His sleek, black hair seemed to lose its sleekness. Or perhaps it only felt that way to Silky Joe. For the cold finger at the back of his neck ruffled right on through his hair. Each separate hair seemed to be standing on end.

"The dirty double-crosser!" rapped Silky Joe. "An' you had to go an' play along with a guy like

that! So he was to be here in five minutes, huh?"

"Why-what-well, I'll be damned!" rasped Jingles, planting his bulky figure in the library doorway. "Double-crossed is right!"

The masked men crowded behind Jingles and Silky Joe. Oaths began dripping from their lips. Jingles and Silky Joe conveniently forgot they had been just about to put the double cross on the mastermind of the black spot. Had intended to beat him to it and grab some of the money he couldn't know Mathers possessed in cash.

For the black spot had beaten them to it. It seemed that this master murderer had passed through them and away again. And he had not been seen.

The beefy body of Mr. Mathers lay on the floor. Though he had been handicapped by the plaster encasement of fractured ribs, the scared broker seemingly had put up a fight at the last.

Mr. Mathers's shirt had been torn off. One arm had a gashed cut from the elbow to the wrist. The hand looked as if it had been dipped in blackest ink.

Over the heart of Mr. Mathers was a black spot. It was as round as a perfect circle.

"An' the big Jap wasn't so poisonous either," muttered Silky Joe.

It was true. The giant Komolo hadn't had a chance. A big automatic was still clutched in the stiffened brown fingers. But the weapon had not spouted death. It had burned no powder.

Komolo, too, looked as if he might have put up a fight. Or perhaps his clothes had been torn in his death throes. The round black spot decorated his breast, somewhat concealed by a mat of coarse black hair.

The faces of Mathers and the Jap were twisted into horrible expressions. Their eyes were open, glazed, as if they had seen death striking at them.

"An' he left the dough the same as usual," announced Jingles. "Well, this time we'll-no, wait a minute. Listen, Joe, we're going to play this thing right on through. That's chicken feed. I'll put the rest of 'em on the pan myself."

This statement from Jingles was inspired by the money on the polished desk. Some of the flat packages of cash had been opened. Money had been taken, no doubt. For there was a pile of loose bills. On this lay some loose silver.

Silky Joe walked over and started scooping up some of the money. Cash in the hand seemed worth many millions still in the pockets of suckers.

"Put it back!" ordered Jingles. "I said we'd play this thing my way! An' that's the way we're playing!"

Silky Joe obeyed with a reluctant scowl.

"I don't like it-I don't like it at all!" he muttered. "I got in a jam in the Bronx for no reason at all! Somehow, I don't feel so good! Not while Doc Savage is still alive!"

"O. K., you dumb mug!" snapped Jingles. "An' that's part of the payoff! This black spot guy had it all planned! Now that big bronze lug an' his funny gang gets the works with the others!"

Jingles's men were stepping wide of the bodies on the library floor. Their eyes glittered, as Silky Joe's hands touched the money on the desk. Some of these men were small-time crooks. The cash on the desk looked soft to them.

Jingles and Silky Joe could not have expected interference. They were sure they had Mathers's penthouse sewed up. All eyes were centered on the seductive packages of bills on the desk.

Thus none saw the shadowy figures coming into the penthouse.

Ham, Monk and Ronald Doremon moved silently along the hallway toward the lighted library. Ham's quick eyes took in the scene inside at a glance. Doremon uttered a low oath of amazement. He seemed much more surprised than the others at the sprawled corpses on the floor.

"Too late," he said, "but how--"

Ham had whipped the slender, blue-steel blade from his sword cane. From under Monk's armpit came one of the clumsy superfirers.

"I'm for startin' blastin'," whispered Monk. "We can rub out the whole mess before they can start!"

The flat blue-steel of an automatic flashed into Doremon's hand.

"Wait!" he cautioned. "We've got them trapped as long as they don't know we're here! I'll take the door on the other side of the library! When I give a whistle, we'll take them from both sides!"

Ham and Monk were all set for the signaling whistle. It came with sharp, piercing sibilance.

Apparently Ronald Doremon had been able to circle the library and reach the opposite door. Monk let out a squealing shout. His ungainly body loped into the room.

In Monk's hand, the superfirer whooped with the noise of a million bumblebees all trying to sting in one spot. But the mercy bullets were spraying into Stygian darkness. The lights had snapped out at the instant Ronald Doremon had whistled.

Automatics crackled.

"It's Doremon!" yelled Ham. "We're over here! Burn them on the other side!"

Ham was playing the sword blade around his head. He felt the drugged point prick two different bodies. Men thumped to the floor. Ham grinned in the darkness. This was having fun. Jingles's mobsters were handicapped by being unable to identify their enemies. They had little chance for shooting in the black room.

Jingles's round voice rolled out an order.

"They're Doc Savage's men! Grab them now! Don't kill them! All are to be kept alive for the black spot! He had arrived! Don't get any of Doc Savage's men without the others! We've got to get Doc Savage himself first, or he will avenge them!"

Then that room was suddenly filled with an exotic trilling. It was a rare, penetrating sound. It was like a vagrant wind blowing through deep tombs. It seemed to come from nowhere, and yet it was everywhere.

Monk let out a yell.

"It's Doc himself! Give it to 'em, Ham!"

One of Jingles's men was standing close to the body of Komolo, the big Jap. This man felt sudden fingers on his throat. His head was snapped back and bones cracked in his neck.

Komolo's voice spoke.

But his words were a jargon of gutturals. Only two of the words were understandable. These were, "Doc Savage!"

Immediately, the resonant, clear voice of Doc Savage filled the room. His words, too, were in an alien tongue. It was the language of a little-known tribe of the fastnesses of North China. He was talking to Komolo.

The body of Mr. Mathers was no longer on the floor in the darkness. But around the spot where it had been Jingles's mobsters were tumbling over each other. A bronze cyclone had been freed in the room.

Doc Savage's body was still encased in the plaster cast he had used to fake the part of Mathers. Thus he had emerged from the Jackson Heights hospital. Mathers himself was still safe in a secluded room of that institution.

Here in the penthouse apartment, the man of bronze had baited a trap he had been sure would put his hands directly upon the master murderer of the black spot. His simulated assassination, and Komolo's—the Japanese servant had aided Doc perfectly—he was sure would bring results.

And Ham, with the best of intentions, had upset the whole plan. Doc now saw it was a matter of fighting their way out. His hope of trapping the mastermind killer had faded.

Out the man of bronze knew there was at least one, perhaps two of the things that would deliver the "black spot" death in the room. At any instant the mastermind was ready, the lights would come on and Ham and Monk would be annihilated.

Doc realized fully from Jingle's words, the cleverness of the brain behind the murders. The shrewd boss killer intended to wipe out all of Doc's men at one time, to prevent any survivor discovering his identity or wreaking revenge.

Monk was squawking.

"Doc, Ham, Doremon! Where are you? I don't know where to shoot!"

Doc's hands were moving with speed. Only the anaesthetic capsules could be effective in this darkness.

Doc rapped out a few words in the ancient Mayan language. He was instructing Ham and Monk to cease to breathe. To Komolo, the big Jap, he gave whispered warning.

Then an automatic started spewing flame. The bullets were directed at the voice of Doc Savage. The man of bronze had the capsules in his hands.

Doc now was wearing the smooth, bulletproof skullcap of metal. It was covered with slick, bronze hair. This was of the finest texture and looked like a waterproof mask.

An automatic slug ripped into the skullcap. It failed to penetrate metallic headgear. But it struck the edge of the metal a terrific blow. It was a stunning smash directly over important nerves.

Doc Savage collapsed. He was partly conscious, but his motor nerves refused to respond to his will.

Monk let out a sudden yelp of pain.

"You danged shyster! Look what you're—"

The apelike chemist did not finish the sentence. The tip of Ham's sword had pricked—him sharply in one leg. The anaesthetic drug with which the blade was tipped took immediate effect.

Ronald Doremon cried out. It sounded as if he had been struck down. His voice suddenly was muffled into a strangling cry. Apparently, he had been seized and overcome. He was lucky if it were no more than that.

The sudden coming to life of supposed dead men had put Jingles's mob into a panic. It was a fighting panic. They were ruthlessly slugging the men nearest them. They were knocking each other down.

Ham jabbed his sword blade at a man in the darkness. The tip struck wood and stuck there. Ham was trying to wrench it free.

The butt of an automatic descended upon Ham's head. Ham joined Doc and Monk on the floor.

When some one found the lights and turned them on, men lay in various grotesque poses. Half of Jingles's mobsters were nursing bloody noses and smashed jaws. Some were sleeping.

"An' that's what we're up against with Doc Savage," stated Jingles, looking at the recent "corpse of Mr. Mathers." "I can see why the black spot chief wants him and all his men out of the way. Can

you imagine a guy smart enough to frame a trap like that? An' if the black spot chief himself hadn't got into it, we'd have been sleeping like that all over."

Ronald Doremon was groaning on the floor. His throat bore the marks of strangling fingers. Jingles said in a low voice to Silky Joe, "Now we're all set for the big act. An' we've got the black spot thing for the final play. There's a hypo in Doc Savage's pocket that'll wake up these mugs. Then tie 'em up hand and foot an' dump them in with the others."

Doc Savage, Ham, Monk and Doremon were trussed up by expert hands. They were lifted bodily and carried to the room of an apartment, two floors below.

The four prisoners were rolled into the room where lay Red Mahoney and Pat Savage. The door closed.

Doc Savage had noted the position of Red Mahoney. He rolled close to the cameraman.

"Do you have it with you this time?" said the bronze man, mysteriously.

Red's mouth was taped. He said, "Oom-hoo!" It sounded like a cow mooing, but apparently he meant, "Yes," whatever it might be.

Chapter XX. MURDER INVITATIONS

SEVEN men were about to be invited to attend seven murders. The party was to be their own. They were to be the chief entertainers. And when the party was over, the seven would be very dead, dead in a ghastly fashion with black spots over their hearts.

And these seven were not to be alone. Four or five other persons had been elected as principals at this party. When the police later visited the penthouse of James Mathers, broker, if the plan carried through, the world's greatest city would be due for a shock.

Jingles Sporado was an actor of no mean ability. With Silky Joe at his elbow, Jingles was talking over the telephone in an outside room. Now he was giving a splendid imitation of the thick voice of James Mathers.

Jingles was repeating, "You've got only one day more to live, unless we act immediately and together. This is Jim Mathers, and you know I wouldn't lie to you. My own life is in the same danger, if I fail to get all of you together."

This message, with considerably more, was delivered by Jingles to four different men. And Doc Savage, listening from the inner room, could have named the four. They were those on the death list of the black spot.

Oscar Deizweiler, a broker who had retired with considerable fortune after 1929, was the first man Jingles called.

Simon Lockhertz, known for always being on the inside of municipal building projects, was second. Jacob Boomer, still an operator in Wall Street, known as "Slick Jake" for many shrewd deals, was third.

J. B. Sparsoll, who had quit the Street to dabble in first editions and collections of rare jade, was fourth.

Talking to these four, Jingles added, "My penthouse is heavily guarded. Up here, you will be safe for tonight. But we have reached the point where we can only act together. All of us are under the black spot.

"But I have arranged with the one big-shot of the underworld to rub out this black spot. His crowd can, and will, do it. The cost will be considerable and it must be available in cash. The big-shot wants his answer and the money tonight.

"You can lay your hands on two hundred thousand cash, if you have to get your bankers out of bed to do it. It's cheap at the price to be sure the black spot has been rubbed out. I want you in my penthouse within two hours. We will have dinner here."

Jingles continued to be the perfect actor. He made a fifth call, that brought wild oaths to some of the prisoners. Monk was still mercifully unconscious. He would not recover from Ham's error of pricking him with the drugged sword blade for some time.

Outside, the voice of Jingles was a perfect imitation of the sharp, strident tones of Ham, the lawyer. He had called the warehouse hangar of Doc Savage.

"That you, Renny?" said Jingles . . . "No, I don't want Long Tom, I want Renny."

It sounded like Ham talking and the ruse was perfect. Renny must have come to the telephone.

"Listen, Renny, this is Ham speaking," said Jingles. "Doc is up at James Mathers's penthouse. He wants you and Long Tom and Johnny to appear here at exactly two o'clock. Yes, two a.m., and not a minute sooner. You will come directly to the penthouse library. Mathers has a number of armed men hanging around, but they know you are coming and won't interfere. Yes, Renny. At two o'clock on the dot. Doc has a big surprise to spring."

"If only I could get at that buzzard, I'd teach him to be using me as a murder trap!" grated Ham. The lawyer was fumbling with a signet ring on the middle finger of his right hand. The room was partly in darkness. Ham heard a groan near by. It was the voice of Ronald Doremon.

Ham was silent. A knifelike blade had sprung into the palm of his hand from the signet ring. It ran upward, slicing along his arm. But the position of the cords holding his wrists behind his back prevented the sharp, slender blade from reaching them.

For a minute Ham lay still, thinking. Then he spoke in a whisper to Doc.

"Get as close as you can to me."

The man of bronze was still not in possession of his ordinary strength. The blow on the head had been weakening.

Now Ham's right hand slid among these cords. The slender blade was edged like a razor. It passed through the binding. Doc could feel them loosen. Then the bronze giant commanded Ham to wait.

"It will accomplish nothing to be free right now," he whispered. "This time, we must put our hands on the black spot killer, or many innocent persons are going to die."

Pat Savage was trying to talk to Red Mahoney through the partly loosened tape over her mouth. Red only groaned.

COLONEL JOHN RENWICK did not have a figure fitted for traveling through a dumbwaiter shaft. But he squeezed himself upward. The giant engineer had one advantage. His bulk so nearly filled the narrow space, he was in little danger of falling.

Long Tom and Johnny followed the lead of the engineer.

"You think maybe the whole thing's a trap?" questioned Johnny.

The archaeologist had no time for big words now. This ascending a dumbwaiter shaft was requiring considerable energy.

"You know blasted well it's some kind of a trap!" grunted Renny. "Otherwise, if it'd been Ham calling he'd known the difference between my voice and Long Tom's. That's why I traced the call right away. It is the Y apartment on the eighteenth floor. And this is the dumbwaiter shaft marked Y-18 in the basement."

"Well, I hope you're right and we don't get pinched for burglary or something," groaned Long Tom. Eighteen floors was some climb, with only the ropes and the rough sides of the shaft to support them. But Renny reached the eighteenth floor first.

With infinite caution, the big engineer opened a door. He saw the darkened interior of a kitchen. He let himself into this.

"You fellows wait here," he instructed. "I'll see what the layout may be. I'll bet we'll find Ham and Monk somewhere. That wasn't Ham sending that phony message."

Renny listened intently. From a room adjoining the kitchen came low voices. Renny opened the door an inch at time.

The first voice he heard was that of Pat. She was still trying to talk to Red Mahoney.

"Holy cow!" muttered Renny. "Pat's here!"

Then he heard Doc's low voice speaking to Ham. Renny slid back to the dumbwaiter shaft.

"Stay here," he instructed the others.

"I'll be superamalgamated if I do!" exclaimed Johnny. "Think I'm a hanging bat?"

Johnny and Long Tom climbed into the kitchen.

"Then stay in the kitchen until I get to Doc," said Renny. "It's what I thought. They've got a roomful of prisoners all tied up!"

Renny rolled cautiously into the prison room. He got alongside Doc.

"Good work, Renny," said Doc in a low voice. "Now you tell Long Tom and Johnny to stay out of Mathers's penthouse. It is to be a murder party."

Renny went out to do as he had been instructed. Johnny and Long Tom had vanished. Perhaps they had expected some such order might come from Doc. Their bronze chief had been acting peculiarly, ever since this "black spot" series of murders had come up.

Renny returned to Doc.

"All right, they'll have to look out for themselves," said the man of bronze. "And you're just the man I'd been wishing we had for a job I've got in mind. Renny, meet Red Mahoney."

By this time the hands of every one had been partly freed and the cords around their ankles loosened. But Doc had ordered every one to lie still and wait.

Out in the other room, Jingles was exultant.

"All four of them big-shot guys fell for it!" he was telling Silky Joe. "Boy! There's eight hundred grand on them dopes, and it's ripe for the picking! Now how soon do we take the black spot mug in on this and get the works over with?"

"Ain't you waitin' for them Doc Savage fellows, Jingles?"

"Right," said Jingles. "It's plenty important they walk in and that they don't walk out. Wait! What's that? Well, look who's here!"

Long Tom and Johnny said nothing. They had walked right into a trap, when they had tried to leave the kitchen of the apartment.

"And that makes it perfect, all but one," scowled Jingles. "Say, where's that big fellow they call Renny?"

Neither Johnny nor Long Tom volunteered any information. Jingles swore.

"Well, this party goes on!" he shouted. "After all, they tell me this Renny is a great fighter, but kinda dumb between the ears! Now-say, I've got a peach of an idea!"

Jingles clinked some silver coins in his pocket. Then he went to the door of the room where the prisoners were lying on the floor.

"Hey, you red-headed mugger!" he called in. "How'd you like to have a shot of the biggest and

juiciest murder party ever put on in old Manhattan?"

Red Mahoney let out a muffled oath.

"Sure you would, an' maybe afterward we'll let you live long enough to develop it and give us a preview. I'll be comin' along in a few minutes, to get you all set up for the party," declared Jingles.

"That is a better chance than I'd hoped we'd get," stated Doc Savage, rolling close to the cameraman. "I have a few things in some inner pockets that may help. Everybody remain tied up until we're upstairs."

Doc was speaking so low that only those nearest could hear. Ham was cutting Ronald Doremon's cords and talking to him.

"What's Doc up to?" asked Doremon. "How'd that Renny get in?"

"I don't know about Renny, except perhaps he traced the phone call," said Ham. "We're all particular that way. Doc's trying to get the tape off Red Mahoney's eyes so he can shoot the picture this Jingles seems to want."

SILKY JOE SCARNOLA rubbed his effeminate hands and gloated. His coal-black eyes glittered with enjoyment. The sleek-haired rat was having the time of his life.

Silky Joe was pouring wine, James Mathers's best wine, for four guests who had no desire for wine. Perhaps they could have used much stiffer drinks.

And in front of the four seated around the polished library desk of James Mathers was spread a feast—a death feast. Silky Joe had thought of that touch. Chicken sandwiches, a salad of several colors and French pastry.

"As they say, boys, 'eat, drink and be merry,'" intoned Silky Joe, with what he intended for humor.

The four guests were past middle age. Oscar Deizweiler, the retired broker, was fat and bald-headed. His sweat oozed like grease.

"You keep saying Jim Mathers will be along," he complained. "But why did he call us and then go out? There's something wrong about all this."

Jacob Boomer, still a Wall Street operator, made good his name of "Slick Jake."

"I've got a private telephone call to make," he stated. "I'll drop downstairs and be back by the time Mathers returns."

Slick Jake edged toward the door of the penthouse. The mask of trickery came off.

In each of the two library doors appeared a couple of Jingles's toughest looking boys. Each of these held the slim nozzles of machine guns over their left arms. Their teeth bared in anticipatory grins.

"It was nice of alla you to come to Mr. Mathers's party," purred Silky Joe. "But he didn't give any instructions about anybody leaving. We must wait for some more guests."

Simon Lockhetz was a dignified, impressive man. His square jaw and commanding voice were evidence of his political power.

"If Jim Mathers is framing to put something over, it will be the last thing he ever does in this town!" declared Lockhetz, angrily. "Nothing like this can be pulled in the heart of Manhattan! We were called up here to pay you men for our own protection. We'll do that, if Jim Mathers proves he's on the square."

J. B. Sparsoll was a meek, mild-voiced man. That was why he had quit the hurly-burly of Wall Street to dabble in first editions and rare jade.

"But Simon," he said to Lockhetz, "everything must be all right. I'm sure Jim Mathers wouldn't deceive us. Personally, I'm ready to pay two hundred thousand in cash to have this black spot menace removed. Why, I haven't had a good night's sleep in weeks!"

Silky Joe tossed back his sleek head and laughed.

"Don't get to arguing among yourselves, boys," he admonished. "Have some wine? Have some chicken sandwiches? Well, have some cakes?"

The four men stared at each other. Simon Lockhetz got up and moved importantly toward the door.

"I never did care for bluffers!" he bellowed. "I'm getting out of here!"

But Simon Lockhetz was not getting out. The knuckles of a hard fist smacked into the roll of flesh under one ear. Simon grunted and sat down heavily. Then Jingles Sporado walked in.

"None of that rough stuff, Joe," said Jingles, smoothly. "These men are our guests, remember that. What's the matter with the wine? Well, Mathers has better stuff somewhere, but he didn't leave us the keys."

The four men started talking together. Jingles raised one hand.

"Get this!" he rapped out. "Alla you put your cash on the desk! We're having a party, understand? And this is our little party!" Jingles turned to his mobsters, said, "Bring in the others! We're ready for the pictures!"

Chapter XXI. THE MURDER PARTY

DEIZWEILER, Boomer, Lockhetz, and Sparsoll faced each other across James Mathers's wide library desk. They remained uninterested in the wine and food set before them. They had quit talking.

Money in flat packages lay in a little mound in the middle of the desk. Silky Joe stood rubbing his hands. Jingles Sporado was in the library doorway.

"Gentlemen," announced Jingles, much as if he were the master of ceremonies in some night club, "I have a message to deliver. The black spot has spoken. Each of you knows exactly why he is here." The meek, trembling Sparsoll breathed an oath. It was more like a prayer.

"No! No-no-no!" he almost screamed. "Not that! If it's a trick, we have the money to pay! Here is all, and more! Why, there's almost a million on the desk! That should settle the debt!" Jingles flipped clinking coins in his pocket.

"The black spot has decided otherwise," he said, slowly. "We have no choice. I think he must have read something like that 'eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth' thing. Gentlemen, you have come to your last party. Many come in, but none are walking out."

Sparsoll's chin quivered. He looked as if he might burst into tears. Lockhertz was of sterner stuff. He swore violently. But he looked at the slim muzzles of the machine guns and made no attempt to rise.

Slick Jake Boomer had a gray line around his thin lips.

"Bunk!" he said. "All right, it's a shake-down, huh? Well, how much more do we have to put up to call off your show? Suppose we double the amount on the desk?"

Jingles's eyes gleamed with cupidity. Silky Joe licked his lips.

Eight hundred grand in sight. Yes, a cold million. For here was the money left by Doc Savage in his role of James Mathers.

What a pushover this might be! What was to prevent them cracking down with the choppers, then walking out with the cash?

More than a million!

Jingles Sporado was smart. He could see the questioning eyes of his men. He did not raise his voice when he spoke.

"Any man, I said any man, who attempts to leave here before the ceremony is over, will meet the black spot on the way," he intoned, softly. "Gentlemen, the black spot is now in this house." The muzzles of the machine guns trembled. The hands of the thugs holding them were shaking a little.

A cold million in sight!

But the "black spot" death they had witnessed was waiting the first crooked move. Jingles Sporado smiled. Prisoners with their arms bound were being brought in.

"It's a big honor to have the great Doc Savage present at our little murder party," smirked Jingles. "Line them up on that side."

Doc Savage's arms were still in the cords behind his back. So were the arms of all the others. Their feet had been freed.

Pat Savage's cheeks looked ghastly because of the tape still partly over her mouth.

Ronald Doremon's red, blistered head with its burned-off eyebrows gave him a weird, scarecrow appearance. His Adam's apple slid up and down rapidly in his scrawny throat. The young man's solemn face was like that of a preacher about to consign some corpse to its last resting place.

Monk had recovered consciousness. The apelike chemist glared at his captors from under his red, gristled brows. He grunted at Ham, who stood beside him.

"Wait'll we get outta here, you misfit mouthpiece, an' I'll wrap one of them swords around your neck! If you hadn't gone poking around in the dark, we wouldn't be here! I had 'em on the run!" Ham spoke through his teeth.

"And if we get out of here, you'll be pulling one of my swords out of that hole in your ear before you wrap it around anybody," promised Ham.

Monk almost frothed at the mouth. He did have a small hole all the way through one ear. It looked like a bullet hole. It was.

Long Tom and Johnny, their arms tied behind them, were ranged alongside the others. Doc's flaky gold eyes were constant whirlpools, but he apparently possessed no device which might extricate them.

The bronze man kept looking at Pat. She was a woman. And Doc had no doubt of the weird, cold-blooded plan to leave none of them alive.

Renny did not appear among the prisoners. Before Jingles had assembled this last group of murder party guests, one big man had departed. He had gone out through the kitchen. He was supposed to have left by way of the dumbwaiter shaft.

Two of Jingles's men brought in Red Mahoney's newsreel films in their big leather case.

Jingles looked all about with a judicial eye. His stage setting was apparently perfect.

"Set it up right over here where it will take in all of our good friends," he suggested. "And the rest of you boys, make sure you keep your mugs outta the picture!"

The arms of the big cameraman with the flaming red hair were released. He paused an instant, glancing around. He seemed to be weighing his chances to take the room apart, including the half dozen men now presenting the formidable machine guns.

Jingles Sporado fumbled with some silver coins.

"Wouldn't try it, Red," he suggested. "Remember, you get this picture right, so the black spot

can have it for a keepsake, an' you might get a break."

The red-headed cameraman opened the big leather case. His hands looked enormous, as he selected the square black box and the magazine of film which hooked onto its top. In the news-reel camera, the celluloid strip passed from one wheel of the magazine into the box, was rolled past the camera's eye, then came out onto the other wheel.

Doc Savage spoke for the first time since entering the room.

"I have been adequately informed of your purpose, Sporado," he said, quietly. "Your master, the owner of the black spot death, has decreed wholesale murder. You intend to dispose of my own men and myself because we are feared. These others at the desk, I take it, have a debt of their own to pay. But there are two persons here who cannot be condemned that way."

Jingles grinned at Doc. He glanced at Pat Savage and at the blister-headed Ronald Doremon.

"Sure, I getcha, Savage," he said. "You mean these two?"

"Yes," said Doc, quietly. "The girl is merely here by chance. Doremon has had nothing to do with opposing any of the murders of the black spot."

Jingles stared at Pat Savage. He looked intently at Doremon. Then he shook his head.

"The black spot happens to be greater than our own wishes," he said. "Women talk more than men. Come on, Red, get busy with the pictures."

RENNY had not been among the prisoners brought to the penthouse. The big man at the top of the dumbwaiter shaft had only concealed himself inside the narrow space. He had not descended. Instead, he was listening intently. And so he heard the others removed from the apartment to the penthouse above. The apartment was left unguarded. All of the Jingles Sporado crowd was in on the murder party.

The big man climbed again into the kitchen. He was crossing to the door. His hands had run over numerous devices in his pockets. Somehow, these seemed unfamiliar to him. Then he froze like a statue.

A scratching sound had started. This came from the dumbwaiter shaft. Something was coming up the shaft in the darkness. The progress of the sound was slow. The person climbing was pausing often to rest.

The big man crouched to one side of the shaft. The scratching sound in the darkness continued.

The quick, short breathing of the climber now could be heard. The big man set himself, his hands extended.

The spring door of the dumbwaiter shaft creaked open. The head and shoulders of the climber appeared. The big man's hands reached out. His fingers closed on a thin throat. The light weight of the climber was yanked bodily into the kitchen.

The smaller man squirmed and gasped for breath. But one big hand kept his voice from squawking, while the other fished for a small flashlight. The beam slapped into the eyes of the prisoner.

"You here?" gritted the big man. "Well, if this ain't something! Keep your hands outta your pockets! I ain't carin' to have myself decorated with one of them black spots! Here, what's this?"

The big man had pulled out first one automatic pistol, then another. Still a third weapon came from under the little man's belt.

"You sure believe in going around primed for trouble!" grunted the big man. "All right, what's your story, before I rattle your teeth loose?"

Arthur Jotther, fugitive from a Westchester jail, escaped from the death of an exploding island at the estate of Cedric Cecil Spade, and miraculously saved from death in a burning car at the haunted house of the late Anthony Hobbs in Park Ridge, Westchester, gulped for breath.

"Let me go!" he gurgled. "Let me go, before it's too late!"

"Huh?" grunted the big man. "It was too late for you, mister, when you come rattin' up that hole in the wall! Seems to me you've been too many funny places already. Suppose you spill what it's all about. I'm a good listener."

Arthur Jotther was small and weak-looking. The big man's hands were fairly well occupied with holding the three automatic pistols he had taken from the gray little mole. Jotther hardly looked strong enough to carry all of that arsenal. But he was surprisingly quick.

One bony hand snapped out. It seized one of the pistols and got it loose. The other hand knocked down the beam of the flashlight.

From Arthur Jotther's throat came a hoarse, almost mocking laugh. The swinging door from the kitchen hit the big man on the nose, as he attempted to follow. Jotther was across the next room and out of it before the big man could locate him.

Red Mahoney's camera tripod was set up near the wall. It was close to the end of the line of prisoners. Jingles looked at Ronald Doremon's hideously burned head and face.

"Get over here to one side," growled Jingles. "You won't make such a hot picture. All right, Red, do your stuff. An' make sure you don't miss none of the nice boys at the big desk. You might get a special shot of all that money, too. That'll kinda be an alibi for this black spot thing."

Silky Joe didn't want to move far from the pile of dough. He didn't trust any one, including himself.

"Listen, Joe, get yourself over out of the line of that camera!" rapped Jingles. "An' now,

gentlemen, when our friend, Red, begins grinding, we're going to have a little visit from what you have come to know as the black spot. Perhaps it will be the first time on record a news-reel of such an affair was ever produced for the screen.

"An' say, will we collect plenty from the big-shots, after that film hits 'em in the eye?" Speech seemed to have left that room. The four financiers at the desk gripped the edge of the top. Their knuckles were white. The eyes of all were fixed on the lens in Red's movie camera. Tongues licked dry lips. When some one tried to talk, it became only a croaking whisper. Beside Doc stood Komolo, the giant Jap. With the fatalism of his race, Komolo betrayed no emotion. His yellow face was impassive. Only his slanted, dark eyes smoldered with mad fire. The breath wheezed in Monk's throat.

Doc was scrutinizing every corner of the library. Jingles had said an actual striking of the black spot was to be recorded. That might come from any source. In spite of Doc's precautions, four of his companions were in position to be murdered.

Then there were Pat Savage and Ronald Doremon.

Doc was facing one door of the library. The red-headed cameraman pulled on a calcium flare that would burn for more than a minute. And in that vivid stabbing of light, Doc Savage saw a face appear beyond the library doorway, then vanish.

The man of bronze was forced to exercise supreme control of his nerves for the next few seconds. The face had been the grayish, molelike countenance of Arthur Jotther.

But Doc's hands were working inside the loose cords.

The red-headed cameraman made the first turn of the movie crank.

"Drop!" came the one succinct word from Doc. "Lie still where you are!"

The four men at the polished desk did not drop. They were on their feet, clawing at their eyes.

Then Jingles's mugs with the machine guns started snarling.

"Jingles! Jingles! What the hell?"

Jingles's own voice roared.

"The black spot! Quick! Gimme the black spot!"

His feet shuffled. But none saw him move. Not even Doc Savage saw it. He only heard. For no person in the big library had any sight. Every one, including the red-headed cameraman had become instantly blind. From the movie camera came a hissing, as of air being released under pressure. The air was a special chemical gas devised by Doc Savage. It was painless and odorless. Only the eyes were affected. It was as if a black curtain had been drawn across the vision.

But Doc had accurately fixed every detail of the room in his mind. His action was as direct and efficient as if he could see. Not only could he recall the exact position of each person, but his acute ears were the first to catch each movement.

And the man of bronze was hurling his immense body across the room. A machine gun started gobbling.

"Don't--don't do that!"

That was the suddenly squawking voice of Silky Joe. A machine gun slug must have cut his throat. His words gurgled like speech drowned in a bowl of blood.

"Gimme that--gimme that--you damn fool!"

This was the voice of Jingles. It was no longer smooth and deadly. It was filled with panic. As Doc's flying figure struck two interlocked men, one of these cried out in mortal agony.

"Y' had it comin'!"

That was Jingles's voice. Doc's fist traveled through the darkness, directed and timed by that speech. Jingles's teeth rattled. The man of bronze had fastened fingers of steel on Jingles's wrists. He twisted and caught a smooth cylinder of steel under one thumb.

This cylinder was no larger than a fountain pen.

Another machine gun whooped. There came a bellow from Monk.

"That you, Ham?" squealed the chemist.

The reply indicated it was not Ham. Then bones crunched. Apparently Monk had only wanted to make sure whose neck he was twisting. Pat Savage uttered a shrill cry through the tape still partly over her mouth.

The guttural voice of Komolo, the giant Jap, growled. One of Jingles's rats then squealed like one. Komolo's hands had found a vulnerable spot in the darkness.

Jingles was still on his feet. Doc's bronzed fist smashed outward into the blackness. He did not pull his punch this time.

Jingles must have fallen across the body of another man. Doc could feel the vibration of the small cylinder in his hand. He kept it pointed at the floor as his fingers felt for levers or buttons. He found a small lever in the end. When he pressed this, the vibration ceased,

"Stop it! Stop it! It's me, Johnny!"

That was Long Tom's voice. The scholarly Johnny was a skeleton. He didn't look like a fighter.

But when he had a job of fighting to do, Johnny followed his own rules. When he couldn't hit them, he used some of the holds Doc had taught him.

Apparently, he had been applying such a hold to Long Tom.

Jingles's men were slamming toward the walls. They sought doors through which they might escape.

But there were three or four of their companions outside. These were armed and they had missed being blinded by the chemical gas.

These men could see the others in the room. One started shooting. The red-headed cameraman groaned, then he roared.

"Why you murderer!" he yelled.

The camera tripod crashed over. Though he was blinded as the others, the red-headed cameraman hurled his huge bulk in the direction of the shot. Doc's foot shot out and tripped him neatly.

"Lie still, Renny!" Doc commanded.

For the red-headed cameraman was Renny, not Mahoney. The big man in the kitchen who had seized Arthur Jotther and then let him get away, was Red Mahoney. During the few minutes in the prison room downstairs, Doc had changed the identities of the pair. He did not want an outsider to risk his life.

But in Red Mahoney's case had been placed that special tank of blinding gas. It had been made to look like a movie camera.

Inside the room, another machine gun gobbled viciously. The blinded gunmen made a mistake. The slugs slapped through the doorway to the outside.

Their three or four companions had been lucky only because they could see whom to shoot. Now they were luckless. They blundered into the stream of slugs coming from the machine gun.

"It's me, Simon Lockhertz!" grumbled a deep voice. "You can't—"

Monk piped, "Oh, excuse me!" But he had said it too late. One of his fists had ruined the nose of Mr. Lockhertz. He never would look impressive again. He would look like any pugilist who had taken it on the nose.

Another voice roared in a doorway. Red Mahoney had reached the scene of chaos where the blinded men were fighting indiscriminately. The gas was fading out, but they were still blind. Red had his eyes.

Pat Savage was groping her way across the library. One of the mugs with a machine gun was striking from one side to the other. The steel barrel of the gun made a nasty weapon. It swung within an inch of Pat's face.

Red did a football dive. It was a low tackle and a mean one. Red's powerful shoulder struck Pat Savage's knees. The swinging machine gun passed over her head. Then new feet pounded up the steps to the penthouse roof. A dozen men carried efficient shotguns and revolvers. Suddenly, in the doorway of the library, a voice of authority spoke grimly.

"Everybody get your hands up! We'll shoot the first man who disobeys!"

State Police Captain Graves was ranged alongside a captain of the New York police department.

"That's Jotther, grab him!" rapped Graves. "Good grief! What's been comin' off here? I told you fellas Doc Savage has been in on this from the first!"

State and city police ringed in the remaining men of Jingles Sporado's mob. Silky Joe Scarnola had bled his life out through the hole where a machine gun slug had passed.

Arthur Jotther was standing close to a wall. An automatic was held in his hand. His other hand clawed at his eyes. The blinding gas had got him.

"I said watch Doc Savage!" roared Captain Graves. "Hey! What are you doing?"

Doc had reached Red Mahoney's movie film case. From it, he had removed a small vial. The man of bronze moistened the tips of his fingers. He passed his hands over his eyes. Then he looked at the chaos in the room.

Doc passed the vial to Renny. In a minute, all of Doc's companions had recovered from the blindness of the chemical concealed in the movie camera. The four financiers were slumped on the floor. Two were bleeding from wounds, but were not seriously hurt.

"The party's all over, Captain Graves," remarked Doc Savage. "It has been quite a party, only it did not turn out as the black spot murderer and the mobsters he had covering his trail had planned it."

"Well, you've got a lot to explain, Savage," said Graves. "And anyway, we've got the killer."

Handcuffs had been clinked onto Arthur Jotther's wrists. "There's quite a lot to explain," said Doc Savage; "but, briefly, it all goes back to the strange case of Anthony Hobbs."

"Hobbs? Oh, that guy that bumped himself off on Park Ridge back in 1929?" said Captain Graves.

"Yes," stated Doc. "He killed himself because he had been trimmed out of his last million or so by a group in Wall Street. Eight men pooled their money to lick Hobbs. Divided into unequal parts, the share of each of the fortune taken from Anthony Hobbs would be the amount taken in each of the murders."

"You're crazy!" snapped Captain Graves. "That business of the money was only a cover-up for this crook!"

He referred to Jotther.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken there, captain," stated Doc. "I am of the opinion Jotther was only trying to trail down the real killer to clear himself of suspicion."

"If you think you can talk us into any fool idea like that, you've got another guess coming," said Graves.

"Perhaps, but this is not a guess, captain," Doc replied. "The son of Anthony Hobbs was at

college when his father hanged himself. Possibly, he was partly demented over the death of his parents and losing his chance at an education. So, when he came into possession of a new electro-chemical device, that we shall call the black spot, he set out to avenge his father's death and his losses."

"But why should he go around killing others?" demanded Graves.

"A killer's mind becomes warped. This son of Anthony Hobbs saw the danger of working alone. He was ready to kill any one who interfered. It became an obsession with him. So he sought the aid of Jingles Sporado and his mob, promising them the black spot device for their own purposes after he had fully avenged his father."

Simon Lockhertz spoke unexpectedly.

"That is the truth Doc Savage speaks, captain. We have been under the threat of death for weeks."

"But that doesn't change this Jotther being a killer and a jail-breaker!" Captain Graves insisted, stubbornly.

"But it does," stated Doc. "He could not have been, for he is not the son of Anthony Hobbs, though I believe he is aware of the identity of the real murderer. I've known who the murderer is for some time, but I have been endeavoring to trap him directly. After all, my only clues have been very slight."

"What clues? How long have you known this?"

"I have been sure since I found three hairs at the home of Cedric Cecil Spade," said the man of bronze. "Those hairs were scorched. Before that, I had only a shadow face in the newsreel film taken at the time of the Vandersleeve murder. Afterward, the face of the killer was so changed it was difficult to make an identification."

"Then who is this killer, if you know?" demanded Captain Graves. "We'll get him!"

"That will hardly be necessary," remarked Doc. "When he saw his final plot was about to fail, either he turned the black spot on himself, or Jingles Sporado did it. I got the black spot device from the hand of Jingles. And a bullet got Jingles afterward."

The device, as the killer used it, was inserted in a fountain-penlike apparatus.

Doc's hand gestured toward a bony figure on the floor. This man's shirt had been torn open. Over his heart was a round, black spot. It was as round as a perfect circle.

"Ronald Doremon was Donald Hobbs, son of Anthony Hobbs," said the bronze man. "While he was supposed to be in a hospital, he got to Spade's place on Long Island. He was back in Manhattan in time to be apprehended as an apparently delirious patient from the hospital."

"He set a fire at the plant of the Electro-Chemical Research Corporation, to make it appear outsiders had tried to break in; and this covered up the theft of the black spot device. Doremon had been working for several years on the experiment, and Congdon, the general manager, knew of it, but not of its success or its results.

"It was Doremon who killed Pearsall on his houseboat, after the Vandersleeve murder. He happened to be one of the masked guests at the Vandersleeve home the night of the first murder."

Red Mahoney showed a slow grin, looked at Pat.

"An' that, I guess, just about washes me up. After I'd picked you, the first time I saw you, for a lifelong friendship."

"But you were too determined to be unpleasant later," said Pat Savage. "Doc himself thought I ought to stay home where I belonged."

"I haven't changed my mind in the least," spoke Doc's quiet voice.

Though her face was dirty, Pat was a very attractive young woman.

"An' goin' around bustin' my camera so I couldn't get pictures of Doc Savage!" grunted Red Mahoney. "But soon I'll get that shot!"

But when they looked around, the man of bronze had vanished.

THE END