

THE PURPLE DRAGON

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. A KIDNAPING

THE vanishing of Hiram Shalleck did not get the attention it should have received.

He disappeared one night from a small Colorado town, where he had been a local citizen for ten years, and he was not seen again. No one in the little Colorado town associated a newspaper story that broke in Chicago some days later with Hiram Shalleck, and no one dreamed that he played a role in a rather weird affair that received nation-wide notice not long afterward. Hiram Shalleck's disappearance naturally occasioned some comment, and the sheriff and other peace officers made discreet inquiries, but learned nothing that they considered particularly significant.

One thing which the sheriff of the Colorado town discovered in the course of his investigation was that no one could recall hearing Hiram Shalleck mention anything about his life previous to the time he had appeared in Lamar—the town was Lamar—ten years before. Although voluble and well-read on current affairs, Hiram Shalleck had shunned all reference to his earlier history. A stocky, broad-shouldered man, blue-eyed and fair-haired, Hiram Shalleck had appeared in Lamar, carrying a battered suitcase, his arrival creating no comment. Little notice had been taken ten years ago when Hiram Shalleck purchased a lunch wagon and opened it for business. He got little trade at first, but after a while his lunch wagon served as a hangout for schoolboys, and parents never had any cause to complain. Hiram with unfailing good humor, kept any spirit of rowdiness to a minimum, and would not allow even an adult to take an intoxicating drink in his place.

The sheriff was a thorough man—he found that the lunch wagon was locked securely, that there was even some small change in the cash register. Hiram had occupied a small sleeping room at the rear of the lunch wagon. Clothes were hanging neatly in a small closet and in a small bureau; there was no sign of disorder. There wasn't a single personal item in the room to show Hiram Shalleck had a living friend or relative—or enemy—outside of Lamar.

There was one strange thing—but the sheriff didn't pay much attention to it.

Shalleck evidently was a great admirer of a man named Clark Savage, Jr., and known as Doc Savage. He had clipped a great many newspaper and magazine articles relating to Doc Savage, and had several books the latter had written. The sheriff, of course, was convinced Shalleck could have had no real connection with Doc Savage. But the sheriff was wrong, surprisingly wrong.

ON the night he vanished, two men appeared at Hiram Shalleck's lunch wagon, coming openly, driving an old touring car. It was only ten o'clock, but already most of the town was asleep. The arrival of the two men was not noticed.

One of the men got out of the car and went inside. He was a small man, excellently dressed, and a pencil-thin mustache decorated his upper lip, while a green silk handkerchief was tucked in his breast pocket. The man walked to the counter, stood there, and when Hiram turned around, the man held a gun in his hand.

Hiram's eyebrows lifted, but otherwise his stolid features showed no emotion. "If this is a holdup, you're in for slim pickings," he said. "There ain't ten bucks in the cash register." The small man's thin lips split in a humorless smile. "Still the same old kidder, aren't you, Joe?" he said conversationally. "No, I ain't down to ten-buck holdups yet. Close this flytrap and grab your hat. We're taking a little trip."

Hiram's big shoulders went up and down. "My name's not Joe, and I don't know what you're talking about," he said flatly. "But you've got the winning argument in your hand."

"You were always smart, Joe," the other chuckled. He emphasized the name Joe, and his small eyes

twinkled, as if over some secret joke.

Hiram said nothing more. Methodically, he finished straightening up, so the place would be ready to open in the morning, for Hiram Shalleck did not yet know that he would not see his lunch wagon or Lamar again.

The street outside was deserted. When they reached the car, the driver looked up from under a slouch hat. "Any trouble, Dude?" he asked lazily.

The dapper little man chuckled again. "The big mutt doesn't know what's ahead of him. He was gentle as a lamb."

Hiram Shalleck might have tried to get away then, but had no chance, for Dude jammed his gun hard in Hiram's ribs, forced him into the rear seat of the car. The driver said nothing more, but seemed to know where he was going, for he headed south, taking the road toward Springfield and the open prairie, and, once outside the town, increasing the car's speed. They drove almost ten miles, then turned west on a road that was little more than a trail, bumping along for a mile or so.

Then they reached the plane. It was standing on the flat, rolling prairie, far enough from any house that its arrival and departure would not be noticed.

Two men appeared from inside of the plane and strolled forward; one evidently being the pilot, while the second held a sawed-off shotgun.

"Get out!" Dude ordered.

Hiram got out and the man with the shotgun put aside his weapon while he tied Hiram's hands behind him. Dude spoke to the driver of the car. He said. "You know what to do. Drive to Dallas, sell that car, then meet us as planned."

Hiram could stand it no longer. "W-where are you takin' me?" he asked thickly.

"To meet an old friend of yours," Dude said.

"More than that," the pilot added, and there was something like awe in his voice suddenly, awe mingled with fear, as he added, "You're going to meet the Purple Dragon."

HIRAM SHALLECK was tied firmly to a seat, and the plane took off. Strangely enough, some of the worry had vanished from his features, and, instead, he looked puzzled, and confident, also. "I don't know what you're talking about," he declared. "You can't scare me with silly talk about a Purple Dragon. What the hell do you think I am, a dope? And besides, I know a guy named Doc Savage. Friend of mine. Ever hear of him?"

"Doc Savage!" Dude jeered softly. "Just who would he be?"

Hiram Shalleck's jaw dropped. "You mean to say you never heard of him?"

"Sure, I've heard of him. I was kidding you," Dude said scornfully. "I have heard a few mentions of him. But that false alarm couldn't help you."

"Evidently you don't know Savage," Hiram Shalleck said.

The guard with the shotgun stirred uneasily. "Shut 'im up, Dude! Him talkin' about that guy Savage gives me the creeps."

Dude laughed, but his eyes narrowed. "Savage won't know nothing about this," he said harshly.

"And even if he did, he couldn't do nothing about it."

Hiram Shalleck's blue eyes glowed stubbornly. "You'll see," he said. "You'll find out that Savage—"

"Shut up!" Dude snarled. "You talk too much, Joe." He opened a bag and took out a hypodermic needle.

Alarm showed on Hiram Shalleck's flat features as the needle was jabbed into his arm. He opened his mouth to say something, but the words were kept back by a hand jammed over his mouth, and after a time he went to sleep.

He never knew how long he slept or where the plane took him—in fact, his memory of many things ceased at that moment. He did know when he recovered consciousness. He was in complete darkness, and at first he thought he must be asleep in his own bed in the back of the lunch wagon, for he had suffered no ill effects at all from the drug that had been given him.

Then he knew that was wrong. He was seated in a chair. He tried to move. It was then he first felt panic. He wasn't tied in any way, but his muscles refused to obey him.

What he didn't know was that he had been given a second hypodermic injection, one that had brought him back to consciousness, but which acted like an injection of spinal anaesthesia, deadening his muscles so he could not move.

A few minutes later, he thought he had gone crazy.

THE light came first. It came slowly and faintly—hardly noticeable at all to begin with. It was a purple light.

As it grew stronger, Hiram Shalleck could make out that he was seated in a chair in the center of a large room. There was a thick carpet on the floor, but otherwise the room was bare of all furnishings.

He could not see where the light came from at all. It appeared to seep from the ceiling and walls.

Directly in front of him, some fifteen feet away, was a raised platform. Peculiar curtains, seemingly of asbestos, shrouded this platform. These curtains were drawn aside suddenly by invisible hands. And in the same instant a sheet of flame burst forth.

The flame roared directly at Hiram Shalleck. He felt its hot breath on his face. He opened his mouth to scream. His mouth remained open, his blue eyes terrified and horror-stricken.

For then he saw the Purple Dragon!

Dude was crouched outside the room where Hiram was held. There was a look of fear in the little man's eyes, but he seemed held to his spot by some irresistible attraction.

Sounds, strange sounds, came from inside the room. Perspiration gathered in big drops on Dude's forehead, to roll unnoticed down features that gradually grew white.

Then Dude could stand it no more. As if fighting a power stronger than himself, he raced away from the door, made his way to the darkness of the night outside.

Dude considered himself hard. Others did, also. They had seen Dude murder with no more feeling than he displayed in killing a fly. But now Dude was sick. He was very sick.

Chapter II. THE DEAD LIVE AGAIN

HIRAM SHALLECK awoke to find he was suffering a terrific headache. His mouth had a terrible taste, and for a time he lay quiet, suffering. Slowly his temper began to rise.

It undoubtedly had been some party the night before. Everything indicated that. His eyes opened slowly, only to close again as the bright glare of sunlight brought even more pain to his head. But the one look had been enough. He was in a hotel room some place, but it wasn't a room he knew. From all indications he must have left the bunch he'd been with, left his own gang, then mixed with strangers. They'd given him a knockout drop, probably had rolled him, then put him to bed in a strange hotel.

He got out of bed painfully and started toward clothes that were strewn over a chair. He didn't get there. He turned instead, and made a dive for the bathroom. He was terribly sick for a while, but then he felt better.

Wavering a little, he returned to the clothes. A puzzled look crossed his flat face as he examined them. The clothes weren't his. He'd never seen them before. In fact, they were of a style he wouldn't be caught dead in, knowingly. These were blue serge, cut on conservative lines. He preferred clothes you could see coming, with slash pockets and wide-flaring pants cuffs. He felt in the pockets. There was a small roll of one-dollar bills. That was all, no letters, no keys—nothing to prove his identity.

Scowling, he started to dress. It must have been some party, he decided. He only remembered parts of it. But there had been one exceptionally pretty girl present. He remembered that, all right. A faint smile tugged at his lips. Called herself Marcella. His smile broadened. He intended to see Marcella again.

He turned toward a mirror to adjust his tie—and, halted in amazement. For a moment he stood perfectly still, too surprised to move. Then he leaned forward, stared unbelievably at what he saw. The face reflected in the mirror was his face, all right, no question about that. But it wasn't the face he remembered from the day before. There were lines in it he'd never noticed before. He seemed fuller, fatter, someway, and not as hard as he had been.

He shrugged finally, and turned away. He'd have to see a barber, get a face massage. That was the answer. He'd just been on too many late parties, had been drinking too much. Sure, that was all. But just the same a faint uneasiness gripped him, a strange feeling of something wrong that he couldn't down.

ONE familiar thing was missing, he noticed, as he completed dressing, and that worried him also. His gun and shoulder holster were gone.

That made him feel half-dressed. He hadn't gone without that rod for years. In fact, it wasn't safe to go without it.

For a moment he thought of calling one of the boys, of having a gun sent up to him. Then he remembered that he didn't even know just where he was.

But it wasn't that which stayed him as much as it was the thought of how the mob might laugh. And he didn't like ridicule. He should be able to get out O. K. and get a rod without letting anyone know of the fix he was in.

He looked at his hands. They were trembling slightly. It wasn't altogether from the hangover, he decided, but a drink would do him good.

He slipped out of the hotel and found he was on State Street in Chicago. That didn't surprise him. He'd known all along that he was in Chicago. Somehow the street looked a little unfamiliar, but he couldn't tell at first why it seemed changed. He knew exactly where he was, knew he was within a block of a favorite speak-easy.

He'd walked half of that block before he realized what it was that made things seem different. He stopped, and perspiration began to come out in beads on his round, flat face. He felt sure he must be going nuts.

It was the automobiles on the street that were different. They were radically different. They weren't like the cars he'd seen the day before, certainly weren't like his own high-powered job. These were lower, sleeker models.

His mouth was dry, his eyes staring.

Something was wrong.

Hiram Shalleck almost ran the rest of the way down the block and around the corner. He needed

that drink, and needed it badly. When he got to the state where he saw autos different from what autos should be, then he must be very close to where he'd be sent away to spend the rest of his life cutting out paper dolls.

Unheeding, he brushed other pedestrians from his path. He barely saw them. He paid no attention to women's indignant stares or men's muttered curses.

He dived through open doors, raced to a bar. "A strong one, Mike. Make it a double," he gasped. He drank two in rapid succession before he saw it wasn't Mike behind the bar. His eyes narrowed, he glanced around warily. Then his eyes closed and his features paled.

"Another one, quick," he said, and his voice sounded strangled.

Cautiously he opened his eyes and looked around again. He merely confirmed what he had seen the first time.

A stranger was behind the bar. The bar itself was entirely new to him. There were new fixtures, there was a sign in the window advertising drinks. The bartender broke in on his thoughts.

"That'll be a dollar five," the bartender said.

Hiram Shalleck was fumbling in his pockets before he remembered that he didn't have to pay for drinks—not in this section of town, anyway. Mike might have bought new equipment, might even have a new bartender, but that didn't change things any.

"Put it on the cuff," he snarled.

The bartender was a short man with a big belly. He had a round face that had been soured along with his disposition after many years of listening to other people's troubles. He didn't change expression in the least. Still looking sour he reached down, came up with a battered baseball bat, one ordinarily used to pack down ice.

"It's still a dollar five, chum," he repeated.

Hiram Shalleck swallowed hard, moved his big shoulders. The bartender waved the bat. Hiram Shalleck changed his mind, reached for the one-dollar bills in his pocket.

This fresh bartender would learn soon enough he had made a mistake, Shalleck told himself fiercely. But at that, he hadn't been in this speak for some time; maybe he'd better try and find out what the score was before he got tough. Everything had been so strange.

"When'll Mike be back?" he growled.

The bartender shrugged. "Don't know what Mike you're talkin' about, chum," he replied indifferently. He rang up a dollar five on the cash register.

Hiram Shalleck felt his temper getting away from him in spite of himself. "Mike Peacock, the mug that owns this place," he half shouted.

The bartender's sour face became even more acid. "Never heard of him," he said shortly.

"Never heard—" Hiram Shalleck choked. His flat face became crimson. He said several words never heard in polite society. "I suppose you never heard of prohibition either," he concluded with broad sarcasm.

"Not recently," the bartender returned without interest. He picked up Shalleck's empty glass.

"Want another, or do you want to go on telling jokes?"

HIRAM SHALLECK closed his eyes. He kept them closed for a long time. Cautiously, so the bartender wouldn't see him, he took hold of one leg, and pinched, hard. Then he winced. He felt it all right. That proved he wasn't asleep, that he wasn't having a nightmare of some kind.

Still with his eyes closed, he signaled for another drink.

He wasn't asleep and he wasn't crazy, he assured himself desperately. But if that was true, then what the hell was the matter?

Usually, with several drinks under his belt, he could recall everything that had happened to him the night before, no matter how drunk he had been.

That was another funny thing. This time he could only bring up dim flashes of what had gone on.

There had been a big party. He knew that. A lot of his friends had been there. He was sure of that, also, although for some strange reason he couldn't seem to recall just which ones of the boys had been present.

He shook his head, opened his eyes, grabbed the drink in front of him and gulped it down.

"Another," he said thickly.

"Cash," the bartender returned tersely.

Hiram Shalleck dug for cash.

The last drink was doing something to him. He could feel the hot liquor coursing through his veins, roaring in his head.

And suddenly he knew that he should be afraid!

His eyes snapped open, he looked around fearfully. He was alone in the saloon, with the exception of the bartender. He breathed a little easier.

How could he have forgotten, he wondered, no matter what had gone on. He should be in hiding, he shouldn't be running around town like this. For all he knew he'd already been seen, would walk into a spot as soon as he left the speak.

Then he sighed with sudden relief. Maybe that explained the clothes he wore, his changed appearance. His friends had done that for him, had fixed him so he wouldn't be recognized. Sure, that must be it. He laughed jerkily, from his sudden release from fear.

But just the same he would have to be careful. Pinkle and Gunsey had friends who might try to square things for them.

Hiram Shalleck's blue eyes narrowed as he thought of Gunsey. The little rat had actually cried and pleaded for his life, as though that would do any good. Pinkle had had more nerve. He had still been cursing when a bullet crashed through his brain.

That had been a clean job. Shalleck thought with satisfaction. No one had seen him pick the two up. He'd actually made Gunsey drive the car, had made the little rat take himself on his last ride. The bartender was looking at Shalleck curiously. He hesitated for a moment when Hiram called for another drink, then gave it to him.

Shalleck didn't notice. He was remembering things now. He was remembering how the newspapers had put up another howl about gang rule when Pinkle and Gunsey's bodies had been found.

Naturally, there was gang rule. Why not? And he was one of the big shots, or would be some day. Let's see, it must have been two weeks since he'd taken Pinkle and Gunsey on their little trip, but the newspapers still were yelling about it.

Shalleck grinned with pleased anticipation. He whirled toward the bartender. "Got a morning paper—the Trib or Herald-Examiner?" he asked.

"The Herald-Examiner ain't been published since last year," the bartender grunted sourly, "but here's a Trib."

Hiram Shalleck paid no attention to the first part of the bartender's statement. He grabbed eagerly at the newspaper the other brought out from under the bar, scanned it swiftly.

Slowly, his face fell. There was nothing there about gang killings. Most of it seemed to be about fighting some place in Europe or Asia. When had that started? And who cared, anyway? Had this smart punk of a barkeep tried to pull some trick on him?

He started to bellow out angrily. Quite by chance, his eyes fell on the date in the masthead of the paper. His mouth stayed open, everything seemed to swim about him.

The date read: "August 1, 1940."

HIRAM SHALLECK stood as though frozen, his eyes wild and staring. He stood there so long that the bartender began to worry. This mug had acted like a nut ever since he had come in. Perhaps he was getting ready to stage an insane riot. The bartender's fist closed over the end of the battered baseball bat.

Shalleck paid no heed. Words were coming from his numbed lips now. Mumbled words that didn't make sense.

"Nineteen forty. It ain't. It can't be. It was nineteen twenty-nine last night. Twenty-nine. Forty. Twenty-nine from forty leaves eleven."

He thought that over for a minute. How could it have been 1929 last night and be 1940 this morning? The answer was that it couldn't have been.

He was insane. That had to be it. Either insane or not—

Shalleck stopped trembling. His eyes became hard and shrewd. He looked fiercely at the plump bartender. The bartender took a firmer grip on the ball bat.

"Pullin' a fast one, huh, wise guy?" Hiram rapped. "It won't work." He laughed mirthlessly.

It was all clear now—or at least it seemed to be. This was all a plant. Everything had been a plant. Pals of Gunsey and Pinkle must have been behind this. It was all being staged to make him think he was crazy.

He shoved his glass across the bar. "Fill it up," he roared.

One more drink and he'd get out of this place, duck out the back way, if need be, then look up some of the boys. After that he'd pay a visit to those who had known Gunsey and Pinkle, would find out who was behind all of this. And after that—

His lips cut back in a hard grin. No easy death for those boys, like a bullet in the brain.

They'd go out the hard way. Try to make him think he was nuts, would they?

Hair rose suddenly on the back of his head. His hand stopped halfway to his lips. He thought frantically of the gun he should have been carrying. The door to the speak had opened and closed. Two men had entered.

He tried to keep his hands from trembling. Maybe this wasn't the payoff. Maybe these weren't gunmen coming after him.

Desperately, his eyes flashed to the mirror back of the bar, caught the reflection of the two men who had entered. One of those men had stepped up on either side of him.

Shalleck's glass dropped from nerveless fingers. It broke when it hit the bar, spilling the untouched drink. He didn't even hear it. His eyes were bulging, his overtaxed brain was trying to credit something that just couldn't be so.

On one side of him stood Gunsey, whom he'd last seen sprawled beside a road dead from two bullets in the brain. On the other side stood Pinkle. And Pinkle also was dead.

Chapter III. GUNS SPEAK

THE bartender's sour face was puzzled. He looked at the two newcomers curiously. They paid no attention to him. They were staring fixedly at the heavy-set figure between them.

The bartender thought he had never seen a man look as scared as the heavy-set guy did. His features were bloodless, he was hanging on to the edge of the bar to keep from falling.

For the first time, the bartender noticed that there was something familiar about the erratic customer who had downed drinks in such rapid succession. For that matter, it seemed to him that he should recognize the last two men who had come in.

Despite his sour expression, the bartender had his pride. His chief boast was that he never forgot a customer's face. It bothered him that he couldn't identify these three. Sometime, some place, he was sure he must have encountered them.

A scowl creased his fat features as he tried to think when and where that had been. It hadn't been recently, he knew. It had been a long time ago.

He looked again at the heavy-set guy and felt mild surprise. The guy was losing his scared expression, was actually looking as if he felt greatly relieved.

Hiram Shalleck looked first at the man on his right, then at the one at his left. He smiled with false joviality, then pounded the bar with his fist.

"Hey, punk! Set 'em up for my two pals here," he ordered.

The bartender hustled to obey. He strained his ears to hear what would be said next.

The thin, evil face of Gunsey turned toward Shalleck. The little man held one hand suggestively in a pocket.

"So we're pals now, are we?" he sneered. "The last time we saw you—"

Shalleck interrupted with a nervous laugh. "Just a little prank of mine," he explained swiftly.

"You two know I wouldn't hurt you."

Pinkle lifted his hat significantly. There was a white bandage around his head.

Hiram Shalleck's big shoulders lifted and fell in a sigh of pure relief. His last doubt had been dissipated. He wasn't crazy—he was just the victim of an odd string of circumstances.

Gunsey and Pinkle undoubtedly were going to try and take him for a ride. Even that was all right.

He'd figure how to get out of that as time went on. It was enough for the moment to know that the world was back on its regular orbit. And that meant the newspaper he'd just looked at must be a fake, also. It was still 1929. It couldn't be 1940.

"You guys sure fixed up a nice plant for me," he said, and tried to make his voice admiring. "For a time you had me thinking I was crazy. This newspaper was a clever touch. Why, it even had me thinking it was 1940."

Pinkle picked up the drink in front of him, sipped it slowly. "It is," he said calmly.

Shalleck's mouth dropped open, but only for a moment. Then he grinned weakly. "That's O. K., Pinkle. Have your fun. But don't rub it in."

Pinkle set down his empty glass. His other hand came out of his coat pocket. There was a gun in the hand. He held it down low, hidden by the bar.

"My fun is just beginning," he said flatly. "Take it easy now, just like yuh told us to do. Walk out without making any fuss. We're goin' for a little ride."

Shalleck's blue eyes were feverish. He turned toward Gunsey. The little man was grinning mirthlessly. A gun was in his hand, also.

"You laughed when I begged for mercy," he gritted. "Let's see how you can take it."

With Shalleck between them, the two gunmen eased to the door, moved swiftly to a car at the curb.

The bartender's sour features were more puzzled than ever. He looked after the three for a moment, started to go to a phone at the rear, then changed his mind.

What he'd seen and heard sounded ominous. It had sounded like the old gang days, when killers picked their victims up in daylight, took them for a ride and left their riddled bodies by the roadside.

But those days were past. This was 1940, not prohibition times.

Nevertheless, there had been something very, very strange about what he'd just seen.

It might be the smart thing to call the police, to report what he'd heard. The bartender scowled. That wouldn't be so hot, either. If he did that, the cops might think his saloon was a hangout for gunmen.

If he could only just think where he'd seen the three before. He was more sure than ever that he had seen them sometime—either in person or their pictures on the front pages of the newspapers. Absently, he fixed himself a coke, spiked it with a little lemon juice and gulped it down. What was it now that the first guy had asked him? Oh, yeah, he'd asked for Mike Peacock; seemed to think he owned the place.

Again the bartender tried to think. Mike Peacock! There had been a guy around by that name once, but hell, he'd been dead for five years or more.

Let's see, Mike had run a speak during prohibition days—

The bartender's eyes popped suddenly. Why, Mike Peacock's speak had been right where this saloon was now. And the first mug had thought it was still a speak, and that Mike owned it. That was crazy, but—

Carefully he set down the coke glass, his sour features flabby, cold perspiration beading his face.

His memory had clicked now, and he almost wished it hadn't. The two little guys who had come in last had looked like a couple of gun punks who had been with the Cicero mob back in the '20s. They had been killed back in 1929.

Joe Mavrik, right-hand killer for Pal Hatrack, the Big Boy, was supposed to have been the one who had taken them on their last ride. And Mavrik had vanished a few days later.

Yet the third guy who had been at the bar, the one who had come in first, had been Joe Mavrik. Two men who had been dead eleven years and the killer who was supposed to have executed them had been standing before his bar drinking together!

With legs that barely supported him, the bartender turned and lumbered toward the telephone. Weakly he called the police station. When ghosts started drinking together, it was time to get help. JOE MAVRIK, alias Hiram Shalleck, was in a spot where he needed help, also. But for the moment, he didn't recall that.

The human mind can take only so much before it jumps the trolley. Joe Mavrik's mind had taken that much, and more.

It was some time before he was aware of what was going on around him. Then he found he was in the back seat of a sedan. A little man was seated beside him, holding a gun tightly in his ribs. Mavrik felt himself all mixed up. He knew that he was Joe Mavrik, that he was a big shot in this town, and that he was being taken for a ride. Two men he had thought dead had caught him without his gun and he was going to pay the penalty for carelessness.

At the same time, another part of his mind seemed to be telling him that he wasn't Joe Mavrik at all. He was Hiram Shalleck. He ran a small lunch wagon somewhere, enjoyed a quiet, law-abiding existence.

He tried to figure that out, but finally gave it up as a bad job. He couldn't even seem to remember the name of the town where he had the lunch wagon, but he knew it was a long way from Chicago, and in a very much smaller place.

His temples ached, and he felt as if his brain were on fire. He felt dizzy, also, but probably that was because of the drinks he had had. And that was funny also, for usually he could handle three times as many without showing or feeling any effects from them.

But then, again, it wasn't so strange. After all, while he was running his lunch wagon he had never taken a drink. And he had been running that lunch wagon for years. Or had he?

He shook his head desperately. Everything was going round and round. One moment he was Joe Mavrik. The next he was Hiram Shalleck. That didn't make sense, but he seemed to be able to recollect events in the lives of both.

He turned toward the little man at his side. His voice was hoarse. "What's the score, Gunsey? Or are you Gunsey? Gunsey is dead. So is Pinkle."

"Sure they are," the little man answered surprisingly. His voice was smooth, almost soothing. Joe Mavrik's voice rose to a shriek. "Then what is this all about? Where are you taking me? Who am I?"

The little man did not answer. The driver gave one quick glance behind him, then turned his attention back to the street ahead. He swerved under the El, passed two cars and stopped for a traffic signal.

Mavrik-Shalleck glanced about him wildly. Directly opposite the car was a bookstore. There was a picture in the window, a picture of strong, bronzed features.

The sign above the picture read:

GET THE LATEST DOC SAVAGE MAGAZINE.

Mavrik-Shalleck's eyes fastened on the picture. The eyes were blank for an instant, then they flashed with sudden knowledge.

"Now I know," he cried. "Get me to Doc Savage! Take me to him right away!"

WORDS continued to babble from his lips. They were strange words, for the most part. He shrieked that Doc Savage was his friend, that the bronze man would let nothing happen to his friends. Then he seemed to think he was in an airplane.

After that, his face changed. It became horrible to see, and his voice dropped to a whisper. "The Purple Dragon! The Purple Dragon that tears your mind apart!"

The driver had speeded toward a side street at Mavrik's first outbreak. There was little traffic on the street. No one paid any attention to Mavrik's cries.

After a little, the driver turned around, looked questioningly at the small man with the gun. The small man nodded.

"The nut-house idea is out now," he said flatly. "This punk will start remembering more and more."

The driver shrugged, turned the machine toward the country. His attitude became grim and businesslike. Joe Mavrik relapsed into silence. He had no thought of peril now, no fear of personal harm.

His mind, he knew, was on the verge of figuring out the answer to all that had happened. He'd thought he'd had it a few minutes before, but he hadn't, quite.

He no longer thought of himself as Joe Mavrik. He was Hiram Shalleck again. Slowly, piece by piece, he tried to fit together what had happened.

He'd been kidnaped, had been taken on a mysterious airplane ride. That he remembered. And then had come the Purple Dragon!

Cold chills raced up and down his spine. He shifted his thoughts as quickly as he could. He

didn't like to remember that part of it.

But what had happened afterward was hazy. There had been a big party, it seemed, although that sounded ridiculous. And a lot of his friends had been there. But no, they hadn't been Hiram Shalleck's friends, they had been friends of Joe Mavrik.

After that he had awakened in the hotel. But how had he got to that hotel?

He was aware suddenly that the car had stopped. He looked around curiously, then stiffened.

The car was no longer on a main highway. It had been driven into underbrush along a secluded side road. And Pinkle, the driver, was turning around and looking at him. There was a gun in Pinkle's hand.

The driver looked at the little man beside Mavrik-Shalleck. "In the car?" he asked quietly.

"And mess up the upholstery?" the little man retorted. "Hell, no!" He punched Mavrik hard in the ribs with his gun. "Pile out, punk."

Dazed, his mouth dry and hot, Mavrik opened a door, staggered outside the car. He knew suddenly that he was going to die, and he didn't want to die.

He threw his arms up about his head, as if that would protect him from the bullets that were to come. "Don't! Don't!" he shrieked.

Then he turned and tried to run, awkward and clumsy in his haste.

The little man who had been in the back seat with him sighed resignedly. "I thought maybe he'd be different, but he ain't," he complained. The gun in his hand bounced as it spurted hot lead.

Mavrik-Shalleck screamed just once before he died.

THE little man put the gun away and went to the trunk at the back of the car. Methodically, he changed clothes. Then he got out a mirror, wiped grease paint and make-up from his face.

He no longer looked like Gunsey. Had Hiram Shalleck still been living, he would have recognized him now as the little man who had taken him from the lunch wagon at the point of a gun, the one who had been called Dude.

Carefully, Dude Starg arranged the green handkerchief in his breast pocket.

"The only thing I regret is having to cut off my mustache," he grumbled disgustedly.

The driver also had removed make-up from his face. After that he got a blanket from the rear of the car and went to Mavrik-Shalleck's riddled body. He rolled the body in the blanket and, with Dude's help, carried it back to the car.

"I still hope Doc Savage don't get wise to what's going on," the driver grunted.

Dude Starg laughed shortly. "Forget it," he rasped. "The Purple Dragon's job will be all done before that false alarm ever finds out about any of this. And even if he did try to monkey in—the Purple Dragon would take care of him. The stake's too big to let anybody stop us."

The driver said nothing. He shivered slightly.

Chapter IV. A SPOTTER SPOTTED

DOC SAVAGE probably should have been shivering. Certainly, anyone else would have been, in his place.

Doc Savage was taking a shower. At least that's what he called it. The average person would have called it torture.

The shower seemed to have been located in a giant icebox. Thick layers of ice clung to the sides of the room. The atmosphere was below freezing.

Water jettted from a spray overhead. The water couldn't have been warm to start with. It froze almost as soon as it struck the floor.

Doc Savage stood directly beneath the spray. The ice-cold water bounced from the bronze skin, plastered down hair that was only a shade lighter than his body. He seemed to be doing his best to turn into a human icicle.

Seen fully clothed, Doc Savage did not seem to have such a marvelous physique. But now every lithe, smoothly co-ordinated muscle could be seen radiating power. Those muscles had been developed since childhood by a series of exercises that had made the bronze man the most nearly perfect physical specimen of his day.

And the cold shower was part of the training he submitted to, part of the long rigorous process that had inured his body to both heat and cold, had made it possible for him to stand conditions that would have been fatal to the ordinary mortal.

(In these accounts of the exploits of Doc Savage are recorded many things accomplished by Doc which should not be attempted by ordinary individuals. This ice-cold shower is one of them, and we wish to point out the possible danger in it to readers, who should not attempt it, at least, until checking with their physician.—The Editor.)

For there was nothing supernatural about Doc Savage. His condition was the result of untold hours of training and work, training that had developed his mind as well as his body until now he was recognized as one of the foremost leaders in almost every branch of learning. "The Mental Marvel" the newspapers called him.

He reached out a powerful hand, turned off the overhead spray. Almost instantly a door opened, a big man stepped in. He handed Doc a huge towel.

The big man was fully clothed, but his teeth chattered as he watched Doc Savage kick free from the ice about his feet, massage his body rapidly.

Colonel John Renwick could stand a lot himself, but he was frank to admit he didn't like cold. Known as Renny to his friends, a famous engineer, he was one of Doc's five aids. Renny towered a good six feet four. He must have weighed at least 250 pounds. Bony monstrosities of fists dangled from the ends of enormous arms. Renny was proud of those fists. One of his favorite tricks was to slam them through the solid panel of a heavy door.

"Holy cow, Doc, I still don't see how you do it," he complained. His face was severe, his thin mouth compressed tightly, giving him a puritanical look. Now he retreated toward the door through which he'd entered. "I'll wait in the office. I've got something there that will interest you." The bronze man nodded. A moment later he stepped into a small dressing room adjoining the shower. He dressed swiftly.

When he emerged he showed no signs of the terrific cold he had just endured.

Doc Savage's headquarters occupied the entire eighty-sixth floor of New York's largest skyscraper. The bronze man moved now through sleeping quarters into a laboratory that was the most complete in the city. A few doors beyond was his main office.

Renny was seated in a chair, his severe features more grim than usual. He was holding a newspaper clipping in his hand.

Without a word he handed the bronze man the clipping. Doc glanced at it.

A low, trilling sound filled the room.

RENNY did not seem surprised. The trilling sound seemed to come from every place in the room, yet from no one spot. Renny knew it was made by Doc Savage. It was the only sign Doc ever gave when anything unexpected happened. The bronze man was reading the clipping.

The clipping was not a long one. It was from a Chicago newspaper. It said:

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD

MURDER DISCOVERED

The remains of a body identified as that of Joe Mavrik, once connected with the powerful Hatrack mob of prohibition days, was discovered today in underbrush along a country road thirty miles north of the city.

Mavrik, who disappeared in 1929, shortly after the murder of two other mobsters, had been shot to death. Although little more than a skeleton remained, identification was made from a fragment of a finger that still retained a section of skin.

The slain mobster was once known as the right-hand man of Pal Hatrack, who died recently in a Federal prison. Police had long believed Mavrik dead, but until today had been unable to uncover any real clue to his fate.

At the time of his disappearance, Mavrik was being sought for questioning in the killing of Gunsey Murphy and Pinkle Smith, two Cicero gunmen.

From the condition of the body the coroner said he believed Mavrik must have been killed at least eleven years ago, probably in revenge for the slaying of Gunsey and Pinkle.

Doc Savage looked up. Gold flakes appeared to dance in his eyes. Those eyes had a peculiar, hypnotic effect. "What checking have you done?" he asked quietly.

"I telephoned the sheriff at Lamar. Hiram Shalleck disappeared a week ago. The sheriff was curious, but I didn't tell him why I wanted to know about Shalleck. What I don't understand is why they think this murder was committed eleven years ago," Renny complained.

The bronze man shrugged slightly. "Arranged that way, the killers know there will be little or no police investigation," he said quietly. "Otherwise, had it appeared a recent slaying, the mystery would have attracted too much attention."

"If it was Shalleck, and if it was a recent slaying," Renny said soberly.

Doc Savage did not respond. He turned to a telephone, called the Cook County coroner at Chicago.

When he identified himself, his questions were answered readily.

The bronze man's gold-flecked eyes were stern as he turned back to Renny.

"Examination of the skeleton showed that Mavrik once underwent a skull operation," he said softly.

Renny whistled. "Holy cow! Then it was Shalleck. It was one of your graduates."

DOC SAVAGE said nothing, but Renny knew what he was thinking. The bronze man took a great interest in what his aids called "graduates" from a small, upstate "college" that Doc operated. Doc Savage did not like to kill, even when fighting the most desperate criminals. He never did, unless it was absolutely necessary to save the lives of others. Yet often he had captured men whom it would have been dangerous to release.

He might have seen that they were sent to prison. He didn't. He saw no reason why society should support these men when they might be turned into law-abiding citizens, capable of supporting themselves, and harmless to others.

That is where the "college" came in. Dangerous criminals whom he captured were taken there. Doc's skilled fingers performed brain operations upon them.

When they departed from the institution, all memory of their previous life had left them. Certain nerves had been cut, isolating parts of their brains. Then they had been re-educated. They had been sent back into the world under new names, freed from all connection with their past.

Doc Savage himself established these men in business. He usually located them far from the scene

of their original crimes, safe from the danger of casual recognition by former associates. And, feeling himself responsible for them, he endeavored to keep track of all who had undergone the "regenerating operations."

A clipping bureau aided in this. All clippings referring to the men either under their new or old names were sent to him at once.

Joe Mavrik had been one of those who had tangled with Doc and lost. The encounter had been in Chicago while Doc had been on another case, years before.

Doc had established Mavrik as Hiram Shalleck, had provided him with the money to open the lunch wagon at Lamar.

"Could anything have gone wrong so that Shalleck suddenly remembered he'd been Joe Mavrik?" Renny asked hesitantly. Renny didn't think that anything Doc did ever could go wrong, but it was the only possible explanation he could see for what had happened. "Could he have gone back to Chicago himself, and been recognized by some hood that still would have been laying for him?"

Doc Savage considered for a long moment, gold-flecked eyes thoughtful.

"A severe shock might produce such a condition," he conceded. "In non-technical language, such a shock might produce a short circuit in the brain, re-establishing contact with that portion which had been rendered inactive."

"A severe shock," Renny mused. "But nothing like that--"

He broke off suddenly. A howl broke from his thin lips. He rose a good foot straight up from his chair.

HUGE, powerful hands caught him under the armpits, lifted him to his feet despite his weight.

Renny whirled furiously, then gaped.

Facing him was a hairy creature not much more than five feet tall, with long arms that hung below the knees. Tiny eyes peered from beneath shaggy eyebrows. The creature's squat, round figure appeared enormously powerful.

"Holy cow, Chemistry!" Renny exploded. "If somebody's been teaching you new tricks, they'd better unteach them."

Renny rubbed the rear part of his anatomy furiously.

A roar of laughter came from across the room. Renny looked up belligerently. Standing in a doorway was a lean, slender figure dressed in the height of fashion. He twirled a cane in one hand. "Ham, were you behind this?" Renny roared.

Ham, otherwise Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, tried to answer, but couldn't. Harvard's gift to the legal profession, a noted lawyer, Ham was speechless with laughter. The answer came from an unexpected source.

The hairy creature pulled himself erect. "Daggonit, Renny," he piped, "you lose a bet for me."

"Monk!" Renny's features tried to set in severe lines but he smiled in spite of himself.

"Yeah," Monk answered bitterly. "Ham bet if I came in like this you'd make a mistake, and you did."

There was a commotion behind Ham, and a second hairy figure eased into the room.

Renny might have been forgiven for his mistake. Chemistry was an anthropoid ape that Ham had picked up on a Central American adventure. And the resemblance between Chemistry and Monk was startling, except that Monk usually wore clothes.

Chemistry waddled up to Monk, put a hairy arm around the latter's neck. Monk's face got red as he tried unsuccessfully to free himself from the affectionate grip. Ham went into another burst of laughter.

"I thought you knew me well enough to know the difference," Monk said accusingly at Renny. Monk, known formally as Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, had a thin, childlike voice when he was embarrassed, and he was embarrassed now. One of the most famous chemists in the world, he was sometimes overly sensitive about his resemblance to the ape family, a fact that brought great pleasure to Ham.

The dapper lawyer controlled his mirth with an effort.

"Monk owes me a dinner, theater tickets and has got to dig up a date for me," he explained gleefully. "He bet me that much that you wouldn't mistake him for Chemistry. Getting the date will be the toughest thing for him."

Renny suddenly remembered his injured anatomy, and glared at Monk. "You'll lose more than that if you jab me with a needle again," he threatened irately.

A sheepish grin spread over Monk's homely face. "But it wasn't a needle," he explained. "It's a new chemical I fixed up, one that gives the 'hot seat' instead of the 'hot foot.'"

Renny started to reply. Doc's calm voice interrupted.

"If the horseplay is over," the bronze man said quietly, "we have some business to consider."

THE bronze man gave Monk and Ham a brief digest of what he and Renny had learned.

"Daggonit, Doc," Monk said. "It sounds like something for us to mix into. There might even be some fighting."

"But no girls were mentioned," Ham put in slyly, "so I don't think you'd like it."

"There is just one odd fact I did not mention," Doc went on. "When I talked to Chicago, the coroner told me the story of a bartender there who had telephoned that he had seen three ghosts. One

of those ghosts was supposed to have been Joe Mavrik. The other two were men Mavrik killed eleven years ago!"

"It certainly seems that there may be a lot more to it than appears on the surface," Renny put in sagely.

"We shall see," the bronze man said.

Two hundred yards away another man had been doing a lot of seeing. He was using a telescope to help him do it.

He wasn't a big man, and he was dressed in nondescript clothes. About the only unusual feature about him was his ears. Those ears were twice as big as the ordinary man possessed.

The ears had pointed forward as he peered through the telescope as if to help him "hear" what he saw. In one way, he did. For he had the telescope focused on the window of Doc Savage's office. Through the powerful lens he was able to see everything that went on.

And he could tell what was said also.

Ears Dugan had once suffered from deafness. He had learned to read lips. That was why he had been picked for the job he was on.

As he "heard" Doc's decision, knew that the bronze man and his aids were going to investigate Joe Mavrik's murder, he laughed without mirth. Deliberately, he compressed the telescope, put it away and made his way to where he could descend stairs to the street. His job was done.

There was a cockiness in his attitude as he went on his way. The "boss" paid off well for jobs that were done right. And this one couldn't have been done better.

Doc Savage wasn't so tough after all, Ears Dugan decided. And if he tangled with the Purple Dragon—well, no one could tangle with that, and win!

Chapter V. AN ODD CONFESSION

EARS DUGAN should have stayed on the job for a few minutes longer. If he had, he probably would have been surprised. But he wouldn't have known what was said in Doc's office after that, even if he had remained.

Doc turned his back to the window. And when he spoke he used a tongue that few persons knew. He spoke in ancient Mayan, a language he often adopted when with his aids and when he didn't want others to know what he was saying.

"We have been watched," the bronze man said. "In fact, a watcher has been on the job for three full days. But until now I did not know why, so I made no effort to stop him. Now it appears it is in connection with this case."

Monk's eyes bulged. The hairy chemist rather prided himself that he had good eyesight. He had been looking out the window, felt sure he would have noticed anything unusual in the buildings near them. And he had seen nothing.

"But how—" he blurted.

Doc gestured toward a small device on the desk before him. "A light refractory detector," he explained briefly.

Monk gulped. It sounded simple. But the hairy chemist knew better, even though he could easily understand the principle behind the device Doc had developed.

All light reflected from glass at an angle is broken into varied wave lengths. Light from an ordinary windowpane would give a far different result than that from a prism of any kind. It was apparent the detector Doc was using had been built to spot reflected light rays that came from any type of curved lens, such as that used in either a telescope or field glasses. Thus he could easily learn if anyone was watching his office.

"As I say," Doc was continuing, "I saw the man three days ago and took steps to identify him. He is easily recognizable by unusually large ears. Ham, you and Monk follow him. Find out where he goes."

The pair raced from the room, Chemistry with them.

As Monk pulled on clothes hurriedly, Chemistry picked up a camera from a table. Solemnly he put the strap around his neck.

"Daggonit, Ham," Monk complained. "If that ape's got to go with us, at least make him leave that camera home. I'm sorry you ever taught him to take pictures."

"Remembering some of the candid shots he's gotten of you, I don't blame you," Ham responded loftily. "But he goes—and the camera goes."

Later, much later, Ham was to regret that decision.

As they sped for the high-speed elevator that would drop them to street level in record time, giving them a chance to pick up the big-eared watcher, they heard Doc's eerie whistle.

Monk wanted to stop. So did Ham. But both knew they had no time to spare. They raced on, Chemistry with them.

In the office behind them Doc was replacing the telephone receiver he had taken down a minute before.

"Another one," he said simply.

Renny looked astonished. "You mean another 'graduate' gone?" he asked incredulously.

Doc nodded, his gold-flecked eyes flashing strangely. "Sid Lenner," he said.

Sid Lenner had been one of his favorite "graduates." Lenner had shown more intelligence than the

usual graduate. He had developed into a valuable mechanic, had been employed by Doc as engineer on the bronze man's yacht.

Only a week before Lenner had been given leave to go on a fishing trip.

"His wife called," Doc explained tersely. "Lenner's skeleton was found by a creek near Liberty, New York."

"Skeleton!" Renny's big fists opened and closed as if he wanted to use them on someone.

He could figure out the rest of the story himself. Lenner's death also would be laid to an old murder.

Lenner wasn't his real name. He once had been an important lieutenant for a New York crime ring—until he'd visited Doc's hospital.

In investigating his case, Doc had found that Lenner was married. His wife had left him when she had discovered he was a criminal. After Lenner had been rehabilitated, Doc had seen to it that the wife was well cared for, although Lenner never knew that he had been married.

But naturally, when the remains of the body had been found, the police had gotten in touch with the widow. And the police in this case, as in the one in Chicago, would think they were dealing only with an old murder, would make no real effort to investigate.

"There must be a link some place," Renny said thickly. The big engineer had grown to like Lenner.

"Lenner also was once connected with Pal Hatrack," Doc reminded gently.

Renny frowned. Hatrack was dead. He had died in prison. And he had been in prison several years before his death.

Why, then, would men who had been connected with him long years before be getting killed now?

Certainly, if Hatrack had wanted vengeance for anything, it would have been carried out before his death, not afterward.

Hatrack had been one of the really big shots of prohibition days. Some went even farther and said he had been what fiction writers called a "crime czar," the brains behind organized crime in all parts of the country.

But even if that were true, it didn't explain why men who once had been associated with him should be put on the spot at this late date, particularly when these men had forgotten they ever had known Hatrack and were leading law-abiding lives.

The big engineer shook his head in perplexity.

RENNY wasn't the only one who felt baffled. The sergeant on duty at the Forty-eighth Street police station looked as if he couldn't believe his ears.

The sergeant was a beefy man. His normal complexion was florid. Now it was dangerously red.

"Get outta here with your fairy tales," he roared. "I ain't got time to listen to pipe dreams just because you want to go to jail and get some free meals."

The man in front of the desk bowed his head doggedly, but he didn't get out. His clothes were old, but clean. On his cap was pinned a cab driver's badge.

"I'm tellin' the truth, sarge," he said desperately. "I killed the guy. I didn't intend tuh do it. But I did. Now I got to pay the penalty."

The sergeant held himself in with a visible effort. He planted his elbows firmly on the desk, thrust his chin forward. He said with dangerous calm:

"Jest tell that yarn once more, punk!"

The cab driver seemingly did not recognize the threat. He worried his cap in his hands.

"Like I told yuh, sarge. I was in the Green Mill last night when this guy come in. He was gunnin' for me, see. And he went for a rod. I just got mine out first, was all. I give it to him."

"The Green Mill," the sergeant said fiercely, "was a clip joint on Fifty-first. It's been closed for ten years, to my knowledge."

"Sure, it's a clip joint," the cab driver agreed. "But it ain't closed. When Lefty came in—"

"Lefty!" The Sergeant forgot that he was going to keep his voice down. He bellowed. "Lefty who?"

"Why, Lefty Worts. Yuh know him," the cab driver said reasonably.

The sergeant's complexion got even redder. That hadn't seemed possible. It was.

"Lefty Worts disappeared eleven years ago this month," he snarled. "No trace of him has ever been found."

"Sure, he ain't been found," the other agreed. A perplexed look was coming into his eyes also.

"But you're mistaken about the time, sarge. I don't know why yuh keep saying ten and eleven years ago. It was last night. And the reason yuh ain't found Lefty's body is because we hid it. We dug a hole down in the basement and buried it."

The sergeant bit his lips. He got up carefully from his chair, walked around the desk until he could reach out and grab the cab driver by the collar.

Then he yanked the other erect. One calloused palm smacked hard against the cabby's face. After that he yanked the man's head back until he could look into his eyes. There was a peculiar look in those eyes.

The sergeant leaned forward, smelled of the other's breath. All he could smell was garlic. He caught hold of the cabby's coat, yanked it off, pulled up the sleeves beneath. The cabby's arms were dirty, but there were no betraying scars of hypodermic marks such as would have been the case if

he'd been using dope.

The sergeant came to a sudden decision. His bellow brought two cops rushing from the squad room.

"Lock this bum up for an hour or so," he directed.

Then the sergeant called the homicide department.

THE homicide dicks were skeptical also. But it was part of their job to run down every murder tip. They went to the place where the Green Mill once had opened its doors to unwary suckers. The place had been turned into a bookshop.

The proprietor protested, but the dicks were firm. They went down into the cellar and went to work with picks and shovels.

It was four hours before they found the body. Or rather what once had been a body. Dental work identified it as having once walked around under the name of Lefty Worts.

After that the cabby was taken into a squad room and questioned. He talked freely enough. He even knew about the gun that had been found beneath the skeleton.

The dicks reasoned he couldn't have known about that unless he really was telling the truth about the murder. But they were mad just the same. For the cabby wouldn't admit that the killing had been back in 1929.

"It was last night," he howled. He repeated that many times.

Finally one dick thought to ask him why he had confessed. The answer came as a complete surprise.

"The Purple Dragon told me to," the cabby whimpered. The cabby became the picture of terror.

To all questions about the Purple Dragon he merely sobbed hysterically, "I don't know! I don't know!"

Finally the dicks became convinced that he either was telling the truth or was crazy. They inclined to the latter opinion.

The newspapers did, also. It was the consensus that the hackie's conscience finally had bothered him so much that he had confessed to the ancient murder, but that at the same time he had been canny enough to think up a yarn that would let him off on an insanity plea.

Investigation of the cab driver revealed that he was known as Burt Wheeler. But when his fingerprints were taken it was found that once he had been known as Al Spears. He had a record, but it wasn't a lengthy one.

Only one significant fact was contained in the record, and that was missed both by the police and the newspaper reports. But then, they hadn't connected the case in Chicago and the case at Liberty with the cabby's queer confession.

A notation by some police officer of the late '20s had stated that Spears had been seen hanging around with some mobsters known to belong to Pal Hatrack's Chicago gang. It wasn't known whether Spears had been taken into the crowd or not.

Chapter VI. MONK FINDS A TRAP

CHEMISTRY embarrassed Monk when they reached the street in pursuit of the big-eared man. He wanted to take the picture of every pretty girl they encountered.

This would have been all right, but too often the girl so photographed would whirl around and give Monk a dirty glare, mistaking him for the ape.

Chemistry really was taking pictures. Ham had seen to it that the ape got a foolproof camera. It was an expensive gadget, but a good one. It was of the type with an automatic built-in light meter and a universal lens. When Chemistry pointed it and pressed a button the picture was snapped. And the ape had been trained to press a second button also, one that rolled the film up ready for another picture.

Monk and Ham, with Chemistry trailing them, made rapid time. Despite the handicap of Chemistry's picture-taking, they eeled their way swiftly through the crowd.

When they reached the vicinity of the building where the watcher had been stationed, they separated. That is, Monk and Ham separated. Chemistry stayed with the dapper lawyer.

Monk and Ham had worked together so often that there was no need to exchange words on what had to be done. Each knew the routine perfectly. Taking different paths, they checked side streets with the skill of long practice.

The hairy chemist was the one to locate their quarry. There was no mistaking Ears Dugan. His nickname was too realistic. The huge-eared man was walking down Fifth Avenue. Even when he didn't think he had anything to be afraid of he seemed to slink along.

Ham was a block away. The dapper lawyer jumped suddenly as a hot streak of fire seemed to course up one arm. He looked angrily at an oversized wrist watch he wore on one wrist, and said several words that hadn't been included in his Harvard course. After that he stood silent for a moment, then started off at a dogtrot. He soon caught up with Monk.

"You hairy relic of the Stone Age," he raged angrily. "If you don't quit experimenting on me—" Monk looked at him innocently. "I was just letting you know I'd found our man," he said plaintively.

Ham said some more words, and Monk grinned again. He'd lost a bet to Ham not long before, but now he felt better. He caught Ham looking at the wrist watch, and grinned even more broadly.

The "wrist watch" really was a communicating device, often used by Doc and his men since an

adventure long before. Each "watch" could send and receive microwaves that transmitted messages in ordinary code by pulsations of heat against the skin.

Monk wore a similar "watch." But in Ham's case, the hairy chemist had dabbed chemical on the back of the "watch" so that the first microwave received produced a really powerful hot flash.

"I was just fixin' it so you'd wake up if I ever had to signal you," Monk explained innocently. Ham glowered, then turned to bark at Chemistry. The ape had stopped to take a picture of another pretty girl.

Neither Monk nor Ham noticed the subject of Chemistry's last photographic effort. If they had, they might have remembered it later, when it would have saved them much trouble. But then, the girl had dodged out of sight almost as soon as the camera clicked.

Monk and Ham hurried on after the big-eared man.

AS the hairy chemist and the dapper lawyer vanished down the street, the girl who had been the object of Chemistry's attention stepped from the hallway into which she had darted.

A figure that would have done credit to any bathing beach was clad in the type of clothes called "smart." Large brown eyes looked from under soft black hair. Red lips curved invitingly, and a dimple showed in one smooth cheek.

But only for a moment did the dimple show. Then the girl's eyes narrowed, her red lips set in a hard line. She walked rapidly toward a corner drugstore and sought a phone booth.

She did not identify herself when the phone was answered. She said expressionlessly: "You were right—as usual. Ears was spotted. The ones they call Ham and Monk are on his trail."

Words sputtered swiftly from the telephone receiver. The girl sighed wearily. "I understand. I don't think Ears will be able to shake them either. I'll carry out instructions."

She hung up slowly, stood for a moment motionless.

Then she shrugged slightly and went back to the street. Had Hiram Shalleck seen that shrug he would have recognized it. It was one of the cute gestures that had attracted him when he had attended his last party. But Hiram Shalleck was dead.

The girl got into a cab and gave an address. The cab sped away.

Monk and Ham with their hairy companion also were in a taxicab. A hundred feet ahead of them, Ears Dugan was in another taxi. Ears seemed to be heading uptown now.

At Forty-second Street, Ears got out of his cab. His trailers did the same. Then the slinky-appearing man went down to the subway. The others followed.

Ears didn't seem to know that he was being followed. In fact, he didn't. But he went through the usual tricks just the same. He would get on a subway, then jump off just as the doors closed. Then he would reverse his tactics, and wait until the last possible moment, then board a train and go to the next express stop.

Even though he apparently was just going through routine moves, he might have shaken less experienced trailers. As it was, he had no luck.

Finally, he evidently decided the coast was clear. He boarded a downtown express and parked himself comfortably behind a newspaper. Monk and Ham rode downtown with him in the car behind. Ears left the train at Chambers Street and strode confidently toward an ancient office building. Without a backward glance he entered, walked up to the third floor.

Ham, drifting ahead, saw him enter a door unmarked by advertising. The dapper lawyer grinned, motioned Monk to follow him.

"Daggonit, he doesn't even make it tough enough to be interesting," Monk complained.

"He probably thought he was dealing only with an antediluvian mind like yours," Ham explained loftily.

For just a moment the two paused motionless outside the door Ears had used. Chemistry watched them with interest showing in his small red eyes. The ape carefully swung his camera so that it hung behind his back.

"We'll smash in, grab 'em, and make 'em talk," Monk whispered fiercely.

Ham nodded. His face set in harsh lines. He reached forward, grabbed the doorknob firmly, then thrust it open swiftly. The three smashed into the room.

And then they stopped. They stopped with looks of utter amazement on their features. Even Chemistry appeared surprised.

This was the room Ears Dugan had entered. There was no question about that. And there was no other door, no other possible way in which he could have gotten out.

But Ears wasn't there. The room's only occupant was an exceptionally pretty girl, seated behind a typewriting desk. She was looking at them with startled amazement.

Ham gulped with embarrassment. For once, even his glib tongue failed to find the necessary words. Monk's homely face turned a dull crimson.

Chemistry stared a moment, then jumped up and down, gibbering with excitement. Ordinarily, Monk or Ham would have paid attention to that. It was the ape's regular welcome when he met someone he'd seen before and liked. This time, no one paid any attention.

The girl apparently recovered first. "You were looking for Dr. Constantine?" she asked quietly.

Ham gulped again. "Dr. Constantine?" he repeated uncertainly. "Is he a big-eared man?"

The girl shook her head, and now she smiled faintly. Monk swallowed hard and drew his features

down into a scowl.

"We saw a big-eared man come in here," he announced belligerently.

The girl shook her head with tolerant amusement. "I am sure you must be mistaken. This is Dr. Constantine's office. No one has entered here for the last hour."

"Daggonit, Ham—" Monk began.

Some of Ham's usual aplomb had returned. One upraised hand stopped Monk's outburst. "I am sure we are not mistaken," the dapper lawyer said smoothly. "I don't know just what is going on around here, or just where you enter into it, but—"

Then Ham stopped. He stopped because the girl behind the desk had risen, was coming toward him, an expression of solicitous concern on her pretty features.

"Now, now, that's all right," she said soothingly. "I understand. I didn't at first, although I had been told you were coming up this afternoon. You are Dr. Constantine's new patients. Now just sit down and he will be here shortly."

"Patients!" Monk and Ham gasped the word in unison.

"Of course" the girl said, pleasantly. "As you no doubt know, Dr. Constantine is recognized as one of the outstanding authorities on the cause and cure of mental delusions and—"

The girl went on talking. Monk and Ham no longer were listening.

Ham was staring about the office blankly. Could he have been mistaken? Had the big-eared man really gone into another office? He shook his head. That couldn't be. Was he really in need of mental treatment, then? It had to be that or—

Once more he glanced about the office. It was equipped like that used by a professional man. A huge bookcase against one wall was filled with brown-backed volumes. There were one or two straight-backed chairs and a soft divan. The walls were bare, except for one or two pictures. Ham glanced at one of the pictures, casually at first then more intently for just an instant before swinging his gaze away.

Monk was muttering, "We get into the office of a bughouse doctor. An' maybe that's where we belong."

Ham straightened to his full height, bowed politely.

"I am afraid we are all mistaken," he said suavely. "My friend and I are not mental patients. But on the other hand I fear we made an error in the office we entered. The man we seek is undoubtedly not here, so—" He turned toward the door.

Monk looked at him bewilderedly. When Ham changed tactics like that, he'd discovered something.

The hairy chemist glanced around the room, and his jaw dropped.

He was looking at the same picture that had caught Ham's attention. The dapper lawyer caught Monk's arm, tried to pull him out the door. Monk jerked free. A bull-like roar burst from his hairy throat.

"Daggonit, we weren't mistaken, Ham," he bellowed. "There's a trick door some place. The guy we want is lookin' at us through that picture over there right now!"

Ham groaned. Desperately he tried to yank Monk back. He was too late.

The false bookcase swung outward. Men poured into the room. More men rushed at them through the door behind them.

AUTOMATICALLY, Monk's fists came up. He plowed forward swinging, a grin on his homely face. There was never any mistake about it—Monk liked to fight.

But even as he went into action, the hairy chemist knew he had made a mistake. Too late he realized what Ham's change of front had meant.

The dapper lawyer also had spotted the watching eyes, peering through holes cut in the picture on the wall. But Ham hadn't gone off half cocked. He'd figured, and figured correctly, that they'd probably walked into a trap.

But Ham had thought also that they might get out of that trap if they pretended they had been mistaken. Then they could have investigated more carefully, and have called for help if they needed it. Monk's precipitate action had ruined all of that.

Their attackers numbered at least a dozen men. Most of them were armed with blackjacks.

Neither Ham nor Monk stood a chance, even with the not-to-be-underestimated assistance of Chemistry. But if they knew that, they gave no indication of the fact.

Ham's sword-cane was knocked from his hand before he had a chance to unsheathe it. A hard-swung billy narrowly missed his head.

The dapper lawyer cast dignity to the winds. He dived forward, knocked the legs from under two oncoming thugs, then bounded to his feet, his back to a wall. His arms darted in and out with astounding rapidity, while his footwork would have done credit to any pugilist.

Monk was more direct in his fighting. He leaped to meet the on-comers halfway. The first man wore a surprised expression as a hammerlike fist caught him on the jaw, threw him backward against his companions.

The hairy chemist howled in delight, brought his left up from the floor and downed a second foe. Then came his undoing. The girl really was responsible for that. When the onslaught started, she had darted behind her desk, then tried to get out of the way of the milling fighters.

The second man Monk kayoed knocked the desk over as he fell. The girl gave a faint cry of fear

and pain as the edge of the desk caught her across the toes. Monk stopped for just an instant. Whether he intended to go to her aid or not, he never knew. He never had the chance. Stopping was a mistake. It gave a tall, husky thug a chance to bring down his lead-weighted blackjack. It caught Monk across the top of the head. The hairy chemist lost all interest in later proceedings. Chemistry's fighting methods were different. His two long, hairy arms swept out, grabbed a struggling victim in each arm, then butted their heads together. The method was perfectly efficient—except that it left him no defense from the rear. He was the second casualty. Red rage swam before Ham's eyes as he saw Monk and Chemistry go down. He put on a one-man riot that any Hollywood producer would have given a swell fortune to film. But his downfall was anticlimactic. He really knocked himself out. Jumping forward to hang a right on a thug who was kicking Chemistry in the ribs, he tripped over one of the men he himself had laid low. As he fell, his head struck the edge of the overturned desk. At that moment pulsations came from the oversized wrist watch on his arm. Ham never knew it. Renny was the one who was trying to signal Ham. The big engineer was working with a duplicate "watch" in Doc's office. Messages were sent by operating the stem of the "watch" much in the same way a telegrapher operates his key. Renny kept at his task for many minutes. Slowly, perspiration began to form on the engineer's brow. "Holy cow, Doc! I can't get an answer." The bronze man had been reading a group of afternoon newspapers, seated behind his desk. Doc's expression did not change, but his gold-flecked eyes whirled peculiarly. "It is possible that they are in one of the so-called 'dead spots' where the signals do not reach," he suggested quietly. Renny nodded, but he was not convinced. He didn't believe Doc was, either. Doc usually tried to spare everyone worry but himself. And the "watch" signal device had been proven efficient too many times. The telephone rang briskly. Doc answered, spoke briefly. His low trilling sound filled the room as he hung up the receiver. "Another one," he said briefly. "Sid Turley!" Renny's huge fists opened and closed. "Another graduate?" Doc nodded, without words. "Dead?" Renny grated. "Vanished," Doc replied. His low, pleasing voice apparently had not changed, but there was a note in it that brought the big engineer's head up sharply. Doc rarely used that note. When he did, the consequences were usually bad for those who opposed him. Doc took more than a personal interest in his "graduates." He felt a deep responsibility for them. Thoughts raced through Renny's head. First there had been Shalleck, found dead in Chicago. Then there had been the skeleton found at Liberty. Now there was a report of a disappearance. And there was always the cab driver who had confessed the ancient murder. He too had been a graduate. Renny's glance fell on headlines of one of the papers on Doc's desk.

DRAGON FORCES CONFESSION
OF ANCIENT MURDER

"There couldn't be anything to that 'purple dragon' theory," he said hoarsely. "Holy cow, we know there ain't any such thing."

Doc did not reply for a moment, and Renny looked at him sharply. The bronze man apparently did not notice. Instead, he walked to a small cabinet at one side of the room, opened the doors. Varicolored lights appeared as Doc pressed several buttons. A low, roaring hum filled the room. And then Renny really did feel worry. He knew what Doc was doing. All the bronze man's aids wore specially made socks. In the heels of those socks a small piece of metal was cleverly hidden. Experience had shown that even the most careful searchers seldom removed a man's socks, when a glance would show no weapon was hidden there. The machine Doc was operating broadcast a powerful, penetrating vibration, one that would pierce leaden walls even radio waves would not answer. It set up vibration only in the particular type metal concealed in the socks. And when that vibration was felt, Doc's men answered, no matter where they were, or what they were doing. They raced to the nearest telephone or cable office, or grabbed the fastest plane they could find to get them to where they could report in. It was a summons none would ignore. Thirty minutes later two reports had been received. One came from Major Thomas J. Roberts. Long Tom, as he was known, was using his electrical genius on a gigantic power project in South America. The second came from William Harper Littlejohn. Johnny, the archaeologist of the group, was with a scientific expedition in far-off Asia. There was no word from Monk or Ham! And it was then the three men appeared.

A WARNING light showed suddenly in the panel above the doorway. That light did not flash when visitors came by the usual method of the elevator; it showed only when someone approached the suite of offices by the stairway.

That there were three of them was apparent at once. The photo-electric eye that guarded the end of the hallway where the staircase was located flashed that information. And the men were coming softly and guardedly.

Renny moved toward the door. His huge fists were knotted.

Doc still sat at his desk. The bronze man had turned slightly, so that he had a clear view of the door. Other than that, he did nothing. Doc often permitted his men to work off surplus energy when he felt it would do them good, let them handle situations alone, even when he could have helped them.

He was doing that this time.

The door swung open with startling swiftness. Three men fairly poured into the room.

Renny leaped forward. His gigantic arms swept out, encircled the three from behind. Despite their bulk, he heaved them from the floor, shook them violently. Heads banged together.

As quickly as he'd nabbed them, the big engineer turned loose. One of the three went to his knees, the other two staggered. Renny caught the nearest by the coat collar, spun him slightly so that he had a clear shot at the other's jaw, started an iron fist on a bone-crushing journey.

"Renny!"

Doc Savage did not speak loudly. His voice was quiet and controlled as usual. But Renny stopped as if frozen, his big fist suspended in midair.

The man who had fallen to the floor was squealing in fright. "Don't let him hit us, Doc! Don't let him hit us! We came for protection, not for a row!"

Renny's face turned red slowly. For one of the few times in his career he looked abashed.

He recognized the three men now. They were three more graduates of Doc's upstate "college."

And the man on the floor, the one who was squealing, was Sid Turley-Turley whose wife had reported he had disappeared, and whom Renny had believed to have been another victim of the Purple Dragon.

Turley scrambled to his feet. His thin face was scared, his eyes haggard. The two men with him appeared frightened also. One was Slats Murphy. Murphy, scarecrow-lean with a face old beyond his years, had been a killer. Now he was employed in an undertaker's. The other was Frank Long, the youngest of the three. Long, who had just been starting his criminal career when he tangled with Doc, had developed into an excellent auto salesman.

But he didn't look like a salesman now. He look like a man who expected to die at any moment. His usually good-natured, florid features were drawn and set, his eyes evasive.

Sid Turley scuttled across the room toward Doc, casting apprehensive glances over his shoulder at Renny. Murphy and Long moved with him.

"Yuh got to save us, Doc!" Turley pleaded frantically. "It's goin' tuh get us if you don't. The same thing is goin' tuh get us that's got Monk and Ham."

Renny's breath came in sharply, he leaped forward, huge shoulders hunched. Steel fingers grabbed Turley by the neck, shook him violently.

"Do you know anything about Monk and Ham. Where are they? What happened to them?"

Turley's face started to change color as he gasped for breath.

"We don't know anything about 'em, except we were told they'd been caught," Frank Long put in hurriedly.

"Take it easy, Renny," Doc advised quietly.

Renny took a deep breath. Slowly his grip relaxed on Turley's neck.

"Now tell us what you know," the bronze man said to Turley.

The little man rubbed his neck violently. Deep marks showed where Renny's fingers had gripped.

"Somebody's after us. The Purple Dragon's after us," he said hoarsely. "We got to pay for what we did before we ever met you."

"The Purple Dragon?" Doc prompted softly.

Sid Turley nodded energetically. "Half a dozen of us got warned. We was told this here Purple Dragon that made that cab driver confess was going to get us too. We was told that Monk and Ham already had been grabbed."

"And how were you told?"

Turley glanced at Slats Murphy. The tall, funereal-appearing man spoke up, his voice deep and impressive. "First by telephone, then by a more frightening method," he intoned.

Sid Turley added, "Somebody got to us, each of us, last night, while we was sleepin'. They put a mark on us, then telephoned today to tell us that showed just how easy we was goin' to be to take."

"A mark? Let's see it?" Renny moved forward.

Frank Long was the one who moved to obey. Long opened his coat and vest, pulled up his shirt.

"Look here," he suggested.

Renny leaned forward to look. His body was between the three graduates and Doc.

And that, he found, was a mistake.

A gun was jabbed almost into his ear. A second weapon was pushed hard into the back of his neck.

"Stand still or we'll kill you!" Sid Turley shrilled excitedly. "Doc, don't you make a move or we'll blast the head off this big imitation strong man of yours!"

DOC was still seated behind the desk. For the moment he did not move, nor did he speak. Gold flakes appeared only to move faster in his impelling eyes.

It wasn't often the bronze man conceded that he'd made a mistake. He did this time.

Doc had known from the time the three men had entered the office that they weren't afraid of being caught by the Purple Dragon. He knew they had already seen the Purple Dragon.

Renny should have realized that also, but the big engineer had been too worried about Monk and Ham to catch it.

None of these whom Doc Savage had sent from his upstate hospital ever addressed the bronze man familiarly as Doc. Nor did any retain the slightest recollection of his previous life.

Yet almost the first words Sid Turley had said revealed the little man remembered his past. And from what Doc had deduced so far, whatever the Purple Dragon was, it did return the past to men who should never have remembered it.

Doc had halted Renny to begin with because he had hoped to obtain information from the trio. But Renny had balked that by his impulsive action in falling into the trap the three had laid. And the three had been canny. They had made no attempt to get the drop on Renny while they were still near the door. They undoubtedly knew that Doc's office was equipped with many safety devices that would have prevented their ever getting near the bronze man.

Instead, they had waited until they were almost on top of the desk.

And they had been shrewd in another way, also. They without question had known that Doc and all his aids wore bulletproof underwear, were immune from a bullet in the body. But no one, not even Doc, could be immune from a bullet in the head. The guns on Renny were placed where they would do the most damage.

"Come out from behind that desk. Stand up and turn your back. Then strip!" Sid Turley rasped at Doc. The little man's voice had changed now from fear to exultation.

"If you don't, we'll be pleased to make a cadaver of this overweight punk," Slats Murphy promised solemnly.

"Don't do it, Doc. Holy cow, don't do it," Renny pleaded, almost tearfully.

The big engineer knew now the error he had made, knew the danger Doc was in. For he knew Doc would do anything to save the life of one of his aids.

There was only one thing to do, Renny decided swiftly. He'd jerk up, would meet his end like a man. That, at least, might give Doc a chance.

The bronze man saw Renny's muscles bunch. He spoke one word, swiftly, and Renny froze. The word he spoke was in Mayan.

"What did you say?" Frank Long barked suspiciously.

Doc did not reply. Calmly, quite as if he did not know these men intended to kill him when he was helpless, he got to his feet, stepped away from the desk.

Then he turned his back, removed his coat and tie with quiet deliberation.

The three gunmen were watching him, fascinated. They had never expected to get the great Doc Savage at their mercy so easily. It just showed that even the best of them could be taken.

Doc appeared to have difficulty in loosening his shirt. It had a zipper up the front, and the zipper seemed to have stuck. He tugged at it patiently. When the zipper did come free, it shot up with unexpected speed, Doc's hand with it.

A moment later, and a very fine, thin haze seemed to be settling in the room. None of the gunmen noticed it.

The haze fell lower. Fine grains of powder dropped down on the faces of the three would-be killers.

It was only seconds after that when the three gunmen dropped also. Their weapons fell from nerveless hands. They themselves folded up limply on the floor.

"Thanks, Doc," Renny said simply.

The big engineer pulled erect, sped to a window, opened it, then turned on several powerful fans. The fine powder that had been in the air soon vanished.

Renny knew what that powder was. He had merely forgotten for a moment that Doc might get a chance to get it from the equipment belt the bronze man always wore about his middle. A highly concentrated anaesthetic, it brought instant unconsciousness to anyone who breathed it. Doc's one word in Mayan had told Renny what to expect.

Both the bronze man and the engineer had held their breath until the anaesthetic had taken effect.

Renny turned toward the three prone figures. "I really ought to throw these scum out of the window, turning on you like that, after all you've done for them," he said vengefully.

Doc shook his head. "They were not to blame," he explained quietly. "The same thing has happened to them that has happened to others. In some way their brains have been short-circuited, so that they have been returned as they formerly were."

"And were used in an effort to kill you," Renny added spitefully.

"Instead of which, they may help," Doc said. "Take them to the back room and tie them securely. "

Renny obeyed swiftly, carrying a limp figure under each arm, with the third tossed over one big shoulder. He knew what Doc intended to do. The bronze man possessed most unusual powers of hypnotism. When the three recovered consciousness, Doc would question them. If they did know anything, they would reveal that knowledge.

The big engineer returned to the office as Doc finished re-dressing.

"Holy cow, the Purple Dragon must really be afraid of you, Doc, to try this hard to get you," he observed.

"I expect you are right, my friend. I really think you are," a strange voice interposed smoothly. Renny spun toward the door in surprise. He had forgotten that door had been left ajar. Now it was wide open. A stranger stood there, face solemn and benign.

Chapter VIII. AN EXPLANATION

THE stranger walked leisurely across the room. He was gray-haired, neither large nor small, but with an air of assurance that could only have come from long contact with the public. Unusually heavy eyebrows, undoubtedly artificially blackened, added to his dignified impression.

"Allow me," he said pleasantly, and held out his card to Doc Savage.

The bronze man did not even glance at it. "Sit down, Mr. Falcan," he invited calmly.

"Ah, I see you know me," the other smiled. "That will make my task easier." He seated himself deliberately.

Renny's eyes narrowed slightly. He had recognized the other also, although he had never met him personally.

This, then, was Fielding Falcan, once known as the most famous—or notorious—criminal lawyer in the United States. Falcan apparently had dropped active practice in recent years, at least his name hadn't been in the headlines lately, but he was reputed to have a legal mind that even Ham respected.

But Renny remembered, also, other things Ham had said—that Falcan was not always careful how he used that mind, that he had used it more often to balk justice than to aid it.

"You spoke of having a task, and intimated it had to do with the Purple Dragon?" Doc reminded softly. The bronze man was completely relaxed in his chair, appeared almost indifferent.

Fielding Falcan ran one hand through his unruly growth of gray hair and laughed shortly. "A task I do not like," he confessed, "since it has to do with a client. But this is one time I believe I must align myself on the side of law and order."

Doc said nothing. His gold-flaked eyes whirled peculiarly.

"It is this way," Falcan went on, and all at once he seemed slightly ill at ease. "I believe I know who the Purple Dragon is—or rather, who is behind the Purple Dragon. I believe I know his object. And he must be stopped, I know that. But I hesitate to turn him over to police who might be brutal." He stopped, smiled winningly.

"It really is a case for your talents alone, Mr. Savage," he said convincingly. "A case where you alone might do better than an army of police." He paused, his smile becoming slightly uncertain.

Fielding Falcan took a long breath. "It is this way. This man is a genius of his kind. I have known him for years. He is a master of many arts. But recently, I am afraid, he has become slightly deranged. A tragic death in his family caused that. As a consequence he has set himself up as judge, jury and executioner over the lives of scores."

"You mean—" Doc prompted.

"I mean that in some way he has perfected a method that carries criminals back to the time and scene of their crimes. And when this happens, he decrees death.

"He is determined to rid the world of criminals who in some manner have managed to cheat the law."

There was a long moment of silence. Doc Savage did not move. Only Renny leaned forward.

"It checks, Doc, it checks," the big engineer said hoarsely. "That would explain why your 'graduates' are being made victims, it would explain—"

"And what is this man's name, Mr. Falcan?" Doc asked politely.

Fielding Falcan sat up straighter in his chair. His face whitened slightly, but his voice was firm as he spoke.

"His name is Grover Tiler. You will find him—"

Blam!

A terrific explosion came from a room far back among Doc's suite of offices.

An instant later came a scream. It was a scream of mortal pain and terror. The scream was cut off almost at once.

It was cut off by a second explosion, one far greater than the first!

Renny had moved the instant the first explosion sounded. The big engineer was on his feet, and he was fast. But fast as he was Doc Savage preceded him.

The bronze man was only a flash of motion as he sped toward the back room where Renny had taken their three captives.

A faint acrid odor was in the air, the odor of high explosive. Mingled with it was another odor—one that, once experienced, could never be forgotten. The odor of fresh spilled blood. The door of the room where the prisoners had been tied were shattered. The room itself was a

shambles.

Doc paused briefly, Renny at his shoulder. The big engineer had witnessed much violence in his lifetime, but this was a scene he knew he would never forget.

Parts of three bodies literally plastered the walls, ceiling and floor of the room. Whatever crimes Sid Turley, Slats Murphy and Frank Long had committed in the past were now atoned for.

"Return to the office and see that Falcan remains. I want to talk to him some more," Doc clipped.

Renny was glad to go. But he found the office vacant. Falcan had vanished.

The big engineer grabbed a telephone, called the lobby of the office building. He was just too late, Falcan already had left.

Renny shrugged slightly. The criminal lawyer could be found easily enough later. He returned to the scene of carnage.

Doc Savage had pulled the shattered door of the room back in place, and Renny flushed slightly when he realized the meaning of that. Evidently, the bronze man had wanted to spare his aid the gruesome job of investigating that had to be done.

The job did not take long.

Later, police experts were to spend hours going over the room, examining every scrap of evidence in an attempt to determine just what had happened.

Doc's trained senses solved the problem in minutes, not hours. He emerged from the room with several small fragments of leather in his hand.

"Whoever sent them here also supplied them with special belts," he said, and his voice had an unwonted sharpness. "Those belts were filled with explosive, attached to some sort of timing device," the bronze man explained. "The three men really were walking bombs. One bomb evidently went off first. In the instant before the other two exploded, one of the victims had time to scream." "Holy cow, then whoever sent them here expected them to die as soon as they had killed us," Renny said shakily.

"Or expected us to be with them when the bombs exploded," Doc pointed out quietly.

RENNY notified the police. As he did so, he noticed that Doc had gone to his laboratory, that scientific workshop that was the marvel of all who had seen it.

Doc Savage was going into action.

Renny asked no questions as the two left the office, went to the street. It rarely did any good to ask the bronze man questions. When he felt like giving information he would, but not before. But he did try a feeler or so.

"If this Grover Tiler is the man back of this, and he is trying to bring to justice those who have escaped punishment, he's certainly making enough pay off," Renny volunteered.

The bronze man said nothing. Renny sighed.

"But it seemed to me this Fielding Falcan acted suspicious also. Maybe he's just trying to put the blame on this guy Tiler."

Doc walked steadily on, headed toward the restaurant usually frequented by him and his aids.

Renny glanced at him slyly.

"Then again—" he started. He paused.

Doc Savage had broken his even stride, had darted forward suddenly, grabbing a newspaper from a sidewalk stand. It was the latest afternoon edition.

The bronze man's low, peculiar trilling filled the air.

Renny leaped forward, looked over Doc's shoulder. His eyes grew large. His jaw moved up and down but no words came.

On the front page of the newspaper was a picture, a picture spread over four of the eight columns.

The photograph apparently had been taken in prehistoric surroundings. There were huge trees and tropical growth on all sides. In the background was a cave, before which burned a small fire.

Several hairy, swarthy figures were seated about the fire, too small to see clearly.

But there was no mistaking Monk and Ham—that is, none of their friends could fail to recognize them. They were in the foreground of the picture.

Hair, even more hair than usual, covered Monk's apelike frame. An equal amount of hair covered the body of the fastidious Ham. Their faces looked dull, stupid, even bestial.

Long tails were attached to the rear of the bodies. They were hanging from trees by those tails.

Near them was Chemistry, also hanging by his tail.

The caption over the photograph read:

PURPLE DRAGON SHOWS WHAT HAPPENS TO

THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIS EFFORT TO RID WORLD OF CRIMINALS

The explanatory matter underneath was written in a kidding vein. But neither Doc nor Renny found it humorous.

Briefly, it explained that the picture had been brought to the newspaper by a messenger who had disappeared at once. A note with the photo had explained it was from the same "Purple Dragon" that

had made the taxicab driver confess an eleven-year-old murder.

The newspaper article concluded:

The Purple Dragon explains that these men were attempting to balk him in his announced purpose of bringing criminals to justice. As a consequence, the Purple Dragon had transported them back through the centuries until they now not only resemble their earliest ancestors, but think and act as those ancestors did.

"Holy cow, Doc," Renny expostulated violently. "We can't have this. We can't have anyone treating Monk and Ham that way."

Doc Savage looked up slowly. There was a peculiar glint in his gold-flecked eyes. When he spoke, it was not as Renny had expected, but it did set the big engineer to thinking.

"I believe," Doc said slowly, "that we will find there is far more behind this than just an effort to bring criminals to justice."

"I'd like to see that Fielding Falcan right now," Renny exploded. His big hands were working.

FIELDING FALCAN was evidently taking precautions that no one see him just at that moment.

The gray-haired lawyer was slipping along a side street not far from Times Square, but in a section almost deserted, now that office hours were over. His broad-brimmed hat was pulled down far over his bushy eyebrows. A muffler was pulled up high around his neck, as if against the faint chill in the air.

Occasionally Falcan would stop and glance behind him. Again he would pause and stare in a shop window, seemingly interested in the display.

Finally he smiled contentedly. He was not being followed, he assured himself.

Falcan was an excellent criminal lawyer. But some of his former clients could have given him pointers on how to detect a shadow. He did not even notice the figure that drifted along behind him on the opposite side of the street.

The figure was not one to attract attention even in the daytime. It was not surprising the man was not particularly noticeable at night.

He was dressed entirely in black, the clothes hanging from his slight but surprisingly agile body. Dark-colored glasses covered eyes that were mild and wore a perpetual look of shy kindness. In one hand was an ebony cane, but a cane evidently with a soft rubber point since it made no sound when it touched the pavement.

Fielding Falcan stopped in front of a large office building. It was not the building in which he had his own ornate quarters, but he seemed well acquainted with his surroundings as he slipped inside, took an elevator to the eleventh floor.

Scarcely had he disappeared than the black-clad figure of his shadow eased into the building. He also seemed to know where he intended to go. He laughed mirthlessly as he saw where Falcan had signed himself as "John Smith" in the register used to record late visitors. His own name he signed as "John Jones." Then he took an elevator to the twelfth floor.

Beneath him, Falcan was using a key to enter an office. The sign on the door read "John Smith." The black-clad man used a key of his own to enter an office directly above. And the sign on that door read "John Jones."

Once inside the office, the black-clad man moved swiftly. He stepped to a spot he seemed to know well, a spot that examination would have shown was exactly over the telephone Falcan was using in the office below.

The rubber tip was pulled from the end of the ebony cane, and the cane planted firmly on the floor. From the handle of the cane came a small earphone, which the black-clad man pressed close to one ear.

Fielding Falcan made several telephone calls. He spoke swiftly and at some length each time.

Above him, the black-clad man smiled queerly. His mild, shy eyes held a strange look.

Silently, he restored the ebony cane to its original form. A few moments later, he left the building.

As he reached the street two men were passing. One held a newspaper, was showing the other the jungle-scene picture on the front page.

The black-clad man didn't seem like the kind inclined to mirth, but he laughed then. He laughed long and silently.

Chapter IX. A PREHISTORIC BATTLE

HAM was laughing also. At least he was going through the motions, although his mouth was twisted into a grimace more than anything else. And the noises that were issuing from his throat hardly sounded human.

When he first heard those noises he thought someone else was making them. It took a long time for him to realize the sound was coming from his own lips.

Next he became aware of a swaying motion. That was peculiar also. He seemed to be rocking gently back and forth, but when he put down his arms and legs there was nothing to support them.

Opening his eyes was quite a job, but he finally managed it. Even when he did, he couldn't see very well. Or at least he hoped that was what was wrong.

He apparently was in a forest of some kind, but the scene wasn't a familiar one. The trees were different somehow, seemed more to resemble tropical growth than anything else. The underbrush around

the foot of the trees looked that way also.

Dimly, far back in his brain, something seemed to be trying to tell Ham that this wasn't as it should be. But another, and seemingly more active, part of his brain accepted it as something to which he was well accustomed.

Vaguely, Ham was aware that certain muscles along his spine were contracting and expanding. He knew somehow that this was what caused the swaying motion he felt.

Then he became aware that his position was even more unusual than he had first thought. When his eyes were fully open he was looking down at the ground, as if he were hanging suspended that way. With an effort he twisted his neck around, looked behind him. Somewhere along the line, he found, he had sprouted a tail. The tail was wrapped around a thick limb of a tree. In fact, he was suspended in the air by that tail. He experienced no surprise at the discovery. That seemed to be something he was accustomed to also.

Motion flashed above him in a nearby tree. Ham's teeth bared, a strange growling noise came from his throat.

The growl was answered by one equally as fierce. A hairy figure with long arms swung down toward him. Ham felt his own arms reaching out, realized that he was filled with desire to rend and tear with his teeth.

Then the onrushing figure paused. A different kind of noise came from it. A more mild, soothing noise. Ham felt strangely complacent. For a few moments he rocked back and forth at a more rapid rate.

And then he paused. Unintelligible, queer gibberish rolled from his lips. His eyes became small and blood shot. He tried the same growls he'd used before.

They were to no avail this time.

Another hairy figure swung from a second tree, also hanging by its tail. And this one was far bigger and more menacing-appearing than the first one Ham had seen.

Tiny red eyes glared back at Ham from under thick eyebrows. Huge hands on the ends of long, hairy arms flexed with hideous meaning.

And this relic of the Stone Age was making sounds quite as fearsome as those coming from Ham. Actually, they sounded to Ham even more terrifying.

The big ape was increasing his swing. It would only be a moment or so before those powerful hands caught Ham by the throat. Something told Ham that would be a disagreeable experience.

He twisted around violently, tried to go the other way. He moved all right, but not just as he had expected.

His tail broke. He fell to the ground.

That fall did something to Ham. It broke the nightmarish fever that gripped his brain. For a moment he was quite conscious.

In that moment he realized that the huge ape he had tried to flee wasn't an ape at all—or at least he wasn't supposed to be.

It was Monk. And the smaller ape, the one that had first moved toward him, was Chemistry.

Ham lay quite still on the ground for a few seconds, trying to figure it out.

After his first real flash of consciousness, everything started to get mixed up again. Monk and Chemistry were with him; they had all been knocked out in a terrific fight; a pretty girl was involved in some way.

Then cold perspiration jumped to Ham's features. There was a Purple Dragon also, a Dragon that breathed real fire. There had been something horrifying connected with that Dragon some way, something that had torn at the mind. Ham tried to think just what it was.

Growls came from his throat, he glanced around angrily. A short distance away, but on a higher level, was a cave. A small fire was burning before that cave and around it stood several fur-clad figures. Huge, stone axes were in their hands. They were looking at Ham warily.

Ham felt that he should run. Something told him these men were his enemies. But another, stronger impulse told him to stand fast. He threw back his head defiantly, and more strange noises came from him.

The fur-clad figures vanished hastily inside the cave.

In some manner, Ham seemed to know that this was a time before recorded history began. There were no cities, no airplanes, no civilization. There was only this jungle that stretched endlessly in all directions, filled with fearsome animals and small men who swung stone axes.

Ham looked up again at the figure of the big ape swinging above him. For a second time the brain cobwebs vanished.

He began to laugh. He realized this had been what he was really laughing at when he first became aware of his surroundings.

He'd always known Monk was related to the ape family. But until now he'd never known just how close that relationship was.

Monk appeared to understand that he was being laughed at. He made frantic efforts to free himself, to get down to where he could wrap his long arms around his tormentor, use those powerful hands on Ham's throat.

Ham sobered. Where they were, what it was all about, he still had no idea. He knew that his own

brain was far from clear. But he did remember that he'd started thinking a little more clearly after he'd been severely jarred by a fall.

If a shock had worked for him, why wouldn't it for Monk?

He moved forward toward the tree, stumbled over a rock. After that he acted without conscious volition. His mind told him he was back in the Stone Age again.

But his original instructions to his muscles were carried out. He stooped down, picked up the stone, hurled it hard and true.

The rock struck Monk almost on the back of his head. It made a quite audible clunk.

And intelligence flashed in Monk's small, red eyes. The hairy chemist squirmed around to see what was holding him up. When he found it was a tail he caught hold of the tree limb, pulled himself up until he could release that tail, then dropped to the ground.

He was quite unprepared for the sudden, vicious attack launched on him by Ham. Monk acted instinctively—and unwittingly did the best thing he could have done.

He swung a hard right to Ham's jaw.

The once-dapper lawyer blinked; he started thinking again. "Greetings, brother of the Stone Age," he said solemnly. Then he doubled up with laughter. "If you could only see yourself. If you could only see how right I've been all along, how you really are a relic of prehistoric times—"

"Why, daggonit, you ex-tailor's dummy," howled Monk. "If you're the one who got me in this fix—"

He halted suddenly, face serious. A haunted, fearful look crept into his small red eyes. Ham's laughter ceased as quickly. The lawyer darted quick, anxious glances around him.

Both were remembering.

MONK glanced cautiously at Ham. The hairy chemist appeared embarrassed, and very few things except feminine attention ever embarrassed him.

"Daggonit, d-do you remember seein' something that resembled a Purple Dr-Dragon?"

Ham nodded.

Monk sighed with relief. "Then I ain't quite as crazy as I thought. But—" He hesitated, peering cautiously in all directions and lowered his voice to a whisper. There was more than a trace of worry in that voice. "D-did it make you afraid, too?"

Ham squared his shoulders. He gave the impression of straightening a smartly tailored coat—but he wore no coat, he really wore nothing but a hairy fuzz. "An optical illusion of some kind, a trick," he said, but his voice lacked conviction.

The hairy chemist shuddered slightly. "T-there's more to it than that. T-that Dragon seemed to tear into my mind, to do things to me—"

"And there was a warning," Ham added swiftly. He seemed to have forgotten that only a moment before he had even doubted the existence of the Purple Dragon. "We were warned to stay out of the Purple Dragon's affairs, to let him administer justice as he wanted. If we didn't—"

"—then we'd be put back to the same place where we are now and left here," Monk finished anxiously. His homely face lengthened plaintively.

"W-where are we, Ham?"

Ham shook his head. For an instant his eyes became cloudy again. "I . . . I'm not even sure when we are," he confessed.

There was a sudden clattering above them. Chemistry dropped beside them, chattering merrily. He alone seemed satisfied with his surroundings. He plucked curiously at Monk's hairy tail.

Monk paid no attention. He seemed trying to think. "I . . . I've heard superstitions of people moving back and forth in time," he muttered. "D'you suppose we've done that, somehow?"

Ham shuddered. With an effort he brought himself erect.

"You've always been basically prehistoric," he snapped. "And I don't like that era."

A sudden howl came from Monk. Ham looked up, startled. Chemistry was dancing around excitedly. In his hand he held the tail that had been attached to Monk's hairy figure.

"Daggonit," Monk howled. "Sometime that ape is going to go too far—" He halted, crimson showed beneath his hairy face.

Ham roared. "Chemistry does you a favor and you don't know it." The lawyer's spirits seemed to have soared. "Now we know we're not nuts. This is a put-up job. That tail was hooked on to your body with wire. Mine is, too, I expect."

"Then we're not back in the Stone Age," Monk growled.

"Of course not," Ham said scornfully. He acted as if he'd known it all the time. "That is, maybe you are, but I'm not."

Ham glared defiantly about. His gaze centered on the forest back of Monk. The joyful light went out of his eyes. Involuntarily he took a step backward. "M-maybe," he qualified weakly.

Monk spun, then halted, long arms swinging about to his knees. The hairy chemist wondered if this was a nightmare just starting, or if the whole thing had been a nightmare.

He wondered, too, just when he had been right—when he'd thought he'd been in the Stone Age, or when he had believed it was all a put-up job.

Then he decided he might never know.

Creeping through the jungle toward them were two of the most vicious beasts he had ever seen outside a museum. In appearance they resembled the more vicious types of dryopithecus, believed by

scientists to have been the forerunners of all anthropoids.

Certainly it could not be the twentieth century. No dryopithecus had been known to exist for thousands of years.

CHEMISTRY was wise. He took one look and swung up swiftly into the nearest tree.

That should have been tip-off enough for Monk and Ham. It wasn't. But that was because they were still confused as to what century they were in.

Instead of taking to the trees, they looked around for weapons. Two flimsy-appearing clubs were all they could find. They grabbed them eagerly.

Monk didn't wait for the dryopithecus to bring the fight to him. And that was another error. He gave a shrill yell of anger and charged in. Ham probably would have more sense, but it never had been Ham's habit to let Monk fight alone.

He gave his imitation of how a prehistoric ape should bellow going into battle and followed Monk. The dryopithecus didn't even pause. They came on as relentlessly as two machines. Monk's club went up, came down in a tremendous blow that should have broken the animal's back.

The club broke, instead.

Monk gave a yell of dismay, turned to run. Ham tried to do the same. They were too late.

The beasts swarmed over them, pinned them to the ground.

It seemed only minutes after that before Monk reared up, fully conscious again. To his surprise, he found Ham also sitting erect.

Ham was dressed in his usual, impeccable style. Monk found that he also was fully clothed.

Standing before them, a damp cloth in her hand, was the pretty girl they had found when they had entered the downtown office in pursuit of Ears Dugan. A solicitous expression was on her face.

Monk glanced around hastily. He and Ham were seated on the floor of that same downtown office.

Ham's features were clean-shaven. There was no trace of the hair that had covered it.

The homely chemist's senses reeled. He'd never passed out in his life before, but he felt as if he were going to do so now.

The girl noticed it. She stepped toward him swiftly, ran the damp cloth across his brow.

"Now, now," she soothed. "Both of you just remain quiet. I am afraid you have had a severe attack of the type of mental illness with which you are afflicted. Only a moment ago you each seemed to think you were fighting some animals. Before that, you thought you were fighting a crowd of men." Ham's jaw dropped, and remained that way. The girl gave his brow a swipe with the cool cloth also.

"Do not be alarmed," she said softly. "The doctor will be here any moment now. I am sure he can help you."

Chapter X. AN UNEXPECTED WELCOME

DOC and Renny wanted to help Monk and Ham also. But they were handicapped by not knowing just where to go.

But Doc did not veto Renny's suggestion that they call on Fielding Falcan. There had been something almost too smooth about the gray-haired criminal lawyer.

Fielding's office was in one of the towering buildings on Forty-second Street. And this one had the name, "Fielding Falcan, Attorney-at-law," on the door.

But Falcan wasn't there. A clerk was, however.

The clerk sighed with relief as Doc and Renny appeared. "Mr. Falcan told me to wait here until you arrived," the clerk explained. "I was afraid that you might not put in your appearance tonight."

Renny cast a surprised look at Doc as the clerk handed the bronze man an envelope-inclosed message. This certainly didn't look as though the criminal attorney had anything to hide. The bronze man's expression did not change. He scanned the message swiftly, handed it to Renny. The message read:

I am sure that you will want more information after the affair at your office is settled. In case I am not here, I trust this will serve.

The man I named, Grover Tiler, whom I sincerely believe to be behind the Purple Dragon, is a recluse, and a wealthy recluse. His home in the Catskills is guarded by many mechanical devices, but I feel sure you can reach him if you so desire.

I do ask, however, that you avoid violence, if possible. Tiler is a client of mine, and he has been my friend. But if you do want my help in any other way, do not hesitate to call on me.

Fielding Falcan.

Accompanying the note was a well-drawn map showing the location of Tiler's mountain home.

"Express our thanks to Mr. Falcan," Doc Savage told the clerk. "And tell him I believe this will be all the aid we need."

"Do you think we'll find Monk and Ham there?" Renny burst out as they sped to the street.

Doc did not answer at once. Instead, he hailed a cab and gave an address, "The Hidalgo Trading Co. wharf."

Renny had expected that. Few knew it, but Doc Savage was the Hidalgo Trading Co. And the big warehouse on the Hudson contained a great deal of equipment used by the bronze man and his aids.

They wasted no time now. Less than half an hour later, they were on their way to call on Grover Tiler. A trim autogyro, with Doc at the controls, shot up almost silently through an opening prepared for it in the roof of the trading-company warehouse.

At an altitude of 5,000 feet, Doc cut on a powerful propeller, and turned the blunt nose of the craft to the north.

Another craft was also speeding in that direction—and with the same destination in view. It was a speedy cabin plane, and had taken the air a good hour before Doc and Renny got started.

Besides the pilot, the plane carried two passengers. One was very dignified and gray-haired. The other was small and nattily dressed, with a green handkerchief in his coat pocket. Their air was grim and businesslike.

THE autogyro did not have the speed of the cabin plane. But Doc had selected the gyro because neither he nor Renny knew exactly what type of landing field they might find near Tiler's home. Besides, the gyro made their task more simple if Tiler really did have his grounds protected by burglar alarms or other devices. Doc could set it down almost vertically, and on a spot not larger than fifteen feet square.

More than an hour elapsed before the bronze man signaled they were nearing their destination. Instantly, Renny went to work.

He pressed a button at the side of the cockpit, peered through a telescope that led down through the bottom of the autogyro and could be turned in any direction.

No light appeared, but every detail of the terrain below showed up clearly in the telescope. The device was utilizing infra-ray beams, invisible to the eye, but which made the landscape clearly visible through the special glass used in the telescope.

On a road far below, Renny saw an automobile speeding swiftly toward a huge house located on the top of a small mountain. Renny thought nothing about that automobile at the time. The fact that he'd even seen it soon slipped his mind.

That would not have been the case had Doc noticed it, but Renny was using the only infra-ray-type telescope, and the big engineer's attention was centered too much on the house he'd seen.

"You hit it right on the dot, Doc," he whispered. "It looks like an imitation castle. It even has a stone wall and a moat about it."

Doc nodded. His keen eyes didn't need a telescope to make out the house. It stood out starkly against the horizon. With gyro blades fanning the air almost noiselessly, the bronze man drifted the craft overhead, then slowly let it drop downward.

From the air, the grounds around the house had looked bare. It was only as they came closer that they could make out a lawn almost covered with varied types of shrubbery.

Renny signaled Doc to the right and the gyro dropped silently to the only landing available—a small cleared space behind a garage. When the gyro touched earth it was completely hidden from the house by that garage.

For a moment both the big engineer and Doc Savage sat perfectly still, listening. Only a few bird noises broke the silence. Renny was glad when Doc lifted up lithely, dropped quietly to the ground. The bronze man motioned Renny back as the engineer moved to come alongside. From the equipment vest he wore about his waist, Doc drew an object resembling a photographer's ordinary light meter. It was a light meter, at that—but not for ordinary light. Carefully the bronze man swung this back and forth, first high, then low, and then from side to side.

Even from where he stood, Renny could see the sudden flash of light that illuminated the meter.

For a moment Doc studied the dial, then he ducked far over, and motioned Renny to follow suit.

The big engineer didn't have to ask questions. He knew what the device was, knew also that it had been perfected by Doc. It was the only known instrument, so far as Renny had ever heard, that would detect and give warning of a photo-electric ray—a ray that, broken by a passing object, would sound an alarm.

Doc had detected such a ray leveled just about at a man's shoulder. By ducking, they had avoided it.

They stepped forward more briskly then, only to freeze motionless as sound came. It was sound to raise hair even on the neck of a civilized man. The sound was the horrible hunting cry of the wolf.

"Tiler is clever," the bronze man whispered softly.

"W-what was it, Doc?" breathed Renny.

"We evidently are not the only ones near," Doc explained briefly. "The cry of the wolf was a mechanical one, so evidently it is the alarm sounded when a photo-electric ray is broken."

Even Doc Savage's exceptionally keen ears failed to catch the slightest hint of movement. Whoever had been responsible for sounding the alarm evidently was immobile, afraid to move.

But what Renny could not understand was why there was no sound from the owner of the house, why Tiler didn't do something to show that he knew he had unexpected guests.

A gray-haired man and his small, nattily dressed companion might have answered that question. But they weren't talking. They were huddled far back under a big tree, invisible in the darkness.

Renny shifted impatiently. If Monk and Ham were in this house, then the continued silence was more than ominous; it might mean the likable chemist and dapper lawyer were beyond help.

Doc Savage must have had the same idea. He said nothing, but he started ahead suddenly, and this

time he moved swiftly.

With Renny at his heels the bronze man rounded the front of the house, raced toward the porch.

Then his pace slowed. Renny's breath came in sharply.

The front door of the big house was opened wide. Light streamed out from the hallway inside.

Only for an instant did Doc slow, then he redoubled his speed, mounting the steps with one quick leap. A moment more and he was inside the house, heedless of the fact that he might be running into a trap. Renny caught up with him as Doc stopped at the entrance to a large living room.

Whatever Renny had expected to find, it certainly was not the sight that met his eyes.

There was only one occupant of the living room. He was a long, slender man, dressed entirely in black. He was lying outstretched on the floor, one arm under his head as if he were sleeping—except that his chest showed no signs of breathing, and crimson was trickling from a dark spot on his head. The crimson was forming an ever-widening circle. A note lay nearby. It read:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I, Grover Tiler, being of sound mind, am ending my own life. But I would like to confess before I go that I have been the master mind behind the Purple Dragon terror. I know that Fielding Falcan suspects this, and has told Doc Savage of his suspicions. I thought I could be above the law myself and exact retribution from those who had escaped punishment for their crimes. I think I have done some good, but I also foresee that I might end up doing evil. I am taking this way out rather than face that prospect. If Doc Savage finds this, I know he will be glad to learn that his men, known as Monk and Ham, are soon to be released unharmed on my orders.

Grover Tiler.

"Holy cow," Renny rumbled. "Why, I don't—"

Whatever else Renny intended to say remained forever unsaid. The big engineer never did know what Doc had seen that alarmed him.

Renny knew only that he suddenly seemed to have been hit by a bronze whirlwind, a whirlwind that spun him around, then crashed him downward. His next impression was of falling, as if through limitless space.

After that he knew nothing.

Still huddled under the big tree, gray-haired Fielding Falcan and nattily dressed Dude Starg also felt as if they had been seized in the hands of a giant.

A terrific explosion broke the silence, an explosion that re-echoed and reverberated for minutes. The big house on top of the hill seemed literally to dissolve into space.

Falcan and Starg were thrown a score of feet backward by a gigantic blast of air.

Bruised and torn, they staggered to their feet, stared wonderingly at the space where Grover Tiler's home had been. Even Dude, calloused killer as he was, was shaken.

"The nutty son of a cook," he breathed. "First he bumped himself off, then he left a trap so that he got Doc Savage and that big mug with him as well."

"At least he saved us the trouble," Falcan said huskily.

Chapter XI. A STRANGE JOURNEY

THE girl, who finally had identified herself as Marcella Walling, nurse for Dr. Constantine, the outstanding alienist, stuck to her story.

"You two, with this ape of yours," she said—and for the first time Monk and Ham noticed Chemistry still was with them, his camera around his neck—came bursting in here like madmen, insisting you were after a man with 'big ears.' Then you went into your fit. I could only judge that you thought you were fighting, by your jumbled conversation, although part of the time you were making noises like animals. I'm no mental expert, but I am convinced you are in need of Dr. Constantine's services, whether you believe so or not. Will you sit down quietly and wait for him?"

An unspoken question and answer passed between Monk and Ham. Each could read the doubt in the other's mind. Neither was sure that the girl wasn't correct. Too many strange things had happened, and not the least of these was to recover consciousness in the same room where they believed they had been attacked and knocked out long before, only to be told only a few minutes had elapsed.

Ham looked at the girl gravely. For the first time, she was showing nervousness. That was easy to understand, if her story was correct. Who wouldn't be nervous, even a nurse, if she thought she was alone in a room with two madmen?

"I believe, Miss Walling," Ham said gravely, "that we really should leave. Perhaps we will get in touch with your Dr. Constantine later."

The girl did not seem to be paying attention. She was looking at someone or something behind them. Ham heard the door open softly.

"At last!" Marcella cried joyously. Fear left her eyes suddenly. "I thought you never would come. Please take care of these two men before they become dangerous."

Monk and Ham whirled as if on a single pivot. Three men were crowding in through the doorway. They wore the white jackets and caps of hospital attendants. Two were carrying strait jackets. This time neither Monk nor Ham had to ask each other even an unspoken question. They had no intention of going to any asylum.

They leaped into combat so swiftly that even the husky attendants had no chance. They were bowled

over before they knew a fight had even begun. Monk put his full weight behind his first blow. The man he hit didn't even touch his feet on his journey across the hallway. Ham hit his man nearly as hard. The third victim was unfortunate. He got hit by both Monk and Ham.

The pair didn't wait. Cops might be on the way, for all they knew. They got out of there fast. They were a dozen blocks away before they noticed the newspaper headlines.

Those headlines told of the death of Clark Savage, Jr., and his associate, Colonel John Renwick. BOTH Monk and Ham had heard reports of Doc Savage's death before, and it wasn't until they read the story beneath the headlines that they became really alarmed. The account concluded:

So terrific was the explosion that not even one sizable piece of Tiler's house has been found. And since eyewitnesses place both Mr. Savage and Colonel Renwick in the home at the time, as well as the owner, Mr. Tiler, there seems no doubt that all three perished. Authorities, searching for definite clues, report the finding of several blood-splattered boards. These will be analyzed to determine whether the blood was that of humans or of some animal. At a late hour the cause of the blast still was unknown.

Monk went to a newsstand and bought several other papers. All had virtually the same story on the reported demise of Doc and Renny.

It was Ham who found the second article of interest. It was an editorial. He read it excitedly: In connection with the upstate blast that killed Clark Savage, Jr., and Colonel John Renwick, as well as Grover Tiler, there was an unconfirmed rumor in the underworld today that Tiler really was behind the mysterious Purple Dragon, of which we have been hearing so much of late. Savage and Renwick reputedly were on the trail of this so-called Dragon.

Whether true or not, we cannot say, but it is an interesting theory. It is interesting to note, also, that at least two more men went to police today to confess ancient crimes—and in both cases they provided clinching evidence against themselves. At the same time, a skeleton, the sixth of its kind, was uncovered by police in an isolated lot. Although evidence indicated the skeleton had been buried only recently, physicians said the man who had once owned it must have been dead for years. The remains were identified as those of a once-notorious gangster, long missing from his regular haunts.

If all this be the work of the Purple Dragon, we are not so sure that work should be stopped. At least a lot of crimes, once listed as unsolved, are now solved. The police are receiving valuable assistance, whether they know it or not.

There is only one thing that makes police doubt that the Purple Dragon might be all he claims, that his only motive is to see criminals who have escaped the law receive proper punishment. That is the fact that in every case linked to the Dragon so far, the victim once was connected in some way with the more-than-notorious Pal Hatrack. This indicates it all might be for revenge.

One of those who confessed today even mentioned Hatrack during his ravings. Undoubtedly it has no connection with the case, but it is interesting. It seems Hatrack had the habit of telling his men to remember the names of certain race horses for him, such as "Fred Fisher in the first." He warned each man never to forget the name of the horse or the race—

"There's a lot more, but that's not important," Ham said. And thereby Ham added himself to the list of poor prophets.

Monk failed to make the proper answer. He was staring at the paper in his hand with a rapt and silly grin.

"Look!" he said. "That date! It says it's the fourteenth. And if you'll remember it was the twelfth when we started out to trail Ears Dugan."

Comprehension dawned on Ham. He let out a very undignified roar. "Then that girl did lie," he shouted. "Let's go back there right now. I want another sock at those so-called hospital attendants."

But the attendants weren't there. Neither was the girl. The office was vacant. And for the first time Monk and Ham realized that some place in the shuffle they had lost Chemistry.

Their first impulse was to try to pick up the trail at once. Then they decided against it. It might be better if they got back to Doc's office, and kept in close touch there.

They didn't intend to give up hope for Doc and Renny too soon. The report of their death might be so—but they still didn't believe it.

THERE was at least one other person who read the report of the deaths with marked disbelief. At least disbelief was his emotion as he read the headlines. Later he wasn't so sure.

The man was in a hospital bed. Bandages covered most of his head. From certain dull aches it seemed that he had a fractured rib or so. Outside of that, he wasn't certain of anything.

He had been conscious for some time before he saw the newspaper, but had kept that fact to himself. When his nurse left the room, leaving the paper temptingly near, however, he hadn't been able to keep his hands off it, even though moving was no pleasure.

After he had finished reading the explosion story, the paper dropped from his limp fingers.

The newspaper said he was dead. After reading the story he could see why police had so reported. And perhaps he was dead. But Renny didn't believe it.

After careful consideration, however, he decided that was the only fact that he could swear to.

Where he was, how he had gotten there, why he hadn't been killed, all were questions that needed

answers.

It seemed certain that he hadn't been taken to a hospital anywhere near the scene of the explosion. Doc and his aids were too well known most places for them to attempt to conceal their identities without disguises, and bandages hardly served that purpose.

Renny tried to reach down and get the newspaper he had dropped. If he could see that again at least he would know where he was.

One of the homeliest nurses he had ever seen balked that. She didn't even speak. She simply entered the room and pushed him back into his bed.

"Any movement at all might be dangerous for you," she said severely.

"What's wrong with me?" Renny complained.

"Concussion—for one thing. A few broken ribs, for another," the nurse snapped.

"Concussion, as you know," Renny said, "sometimes plays pranks with the memory. How long have I been here?"

"Why, Mr. Smith, you don't look like the kind of man who would lose his memory. But if you must know, you were brought here early this morning by a very handsome man. He said you had been in an automobile accident."

Renny digested that information slowly. The "handsome man" undoubtedly referred to Doc. That was a relief, although he had felt sure from the beginning that Doc was safe. And Doc had registered him under the name of Smith.

"D-did I do any raving—talk about anything I shouldn't?" he asked hesitantly—then added hastily, as he saw the nurse's expression harden, "I mean about business secrets, or anything like that?" The nurse shook her head and her face softened. "No, nothing like that. You did some talking though. You must have been reading about that awful 'Purple Dragon' in New York, for you mentioned that several times."

Renny blinked. And then something struck him suddenly. The nurse spoke of New York as if it were some distance away. And earlier she had said he hadn't been brought in until morning. The explosion had occurred early the evening before.

The big engineer half raised up from his bed, eyes wide.

"Say," he shouted. "Just where am I, anyway?"

The nurse took a startled step backward. "Why, Mr. Smith. What a foolish question. Surely you must know where you are. This is El Paso, Texas, of course."

Renny dropped back as if shot. El Paso! And last night he had been in New York.

He closed his eyes weakly. It was all too deep for him to figure out.

Chapter XII. DOC TAKES A CHANCE

OTHER strange things were happening in the border town of El Paso, also.

One was the actions of a small, nattily dressed man with a green handkerchief in his pocket.

Dude Starg also had reached El Paso early that morning. Leaving Fielding Falcan to tell the story of the mysterious explosion that had "killed" Doc and Renny, Dude had raced to their plane and sped on an errand of his own.

Once in El Paso, he had made several mysterious telephone calls. Not long after that, he began to receive a steady flow of visitors at his hotel room. A majority of those visitors were of the type the hotel management would just as soon have dispensed with, but Dude tipped lavishly, so there was no complaint.

It was well along in the afternoon before he got the information he evidently was after. He wrote down an address and smiled for the first time that day.

Then he made one more telephone call. Two men showed up at his room not long after that. They resembled each other so much that they might have been brothers.

Each was tall, huskily built, with cold, expressionless eyes. And a close observer would have noticed that each wore a shoulder holster.

A few minutes later, they left the hotel together. None of the three noticed the ragged peon who had been idling across from the hotel most of the day.

As the three took the streetcar that would carry them across the border into Jaurez, the peon also was aboard. The peon showed no interest in the three "gringos." Instead, all his attention seemed to be centered on the straw he was chewing.

Not far on the Mexican side of the border, one of Dude's two gunmen dropped from the streetcar.

The second got off a block farther along. Dude waited still another block.

The peon got off when Dude did, but the Dude paid no attention to him. All Mexicans looked alike to Dude.

Dude walked swiftly toward one of the poorer sections of Jaurez. Occasionally he consulted the paper he held in his hand.

Converging toward him were his two gunmen. They stopped near an adobe shack that looked as if it had been abandoned. One of the gunmen went to the rear door. The other joined Dude in front. Dude walked to the door boldly, rapped hard.

The silence inside was broken by the sound of a gun hammer being drawn back. Dude spoke swiftly.

"It's Dude Starg, Red. I've got some news for you."

For long seconds nothing happened. The gunman with Dude flattened himself against the adobe wall,

so that he couldn't be seen from the inside.

Then, at last, the door opened. It was a surprisingly thick door, and it opened slowly. The muzzle of a gun appeared first. Dude stood calmly, hands at his side.

"It's O. K., Red," he said reassuringly.

The man called Red growled softly, but opened the door wide. His gun arm went down. One of Dude's hands shot out like a snake, caught the other by the shirt front and yanked. The red-haired man was pulled clear of the doorway.

The gunman beside the door brought the butt end of his automatic down hard on Red's head. Red collapsed.

"Neat," Dude said approvingly.

The second gunman came around from the rear, grinning. He and his pal took the redhead between them, moved slowly down the street.

"Red may be worth \$25,000 to the F.B.I., but I think he's going to be worth ten times that to me," Dude chuckled.

No one paid any attention as the red-haired man was taken into a second shack not far away. No one, that is, except the ragged peon who had materialized from somewhere.

Not long after that Dude went back to El Paso. He left the redhead guarded by the two gunmen.

The ragged peon returned to El Paso also. The peon had gold-flecked eyes. Those eyes were flashing strangely.

THE eyes were the first thing Renny noticed when a caller was brought to see him. Otherwise, it is doubtful that even Renny would have known Doc Savage.

Doc had discarded his peon disguise, but the bronze man still was keeping his identity secret. He still appeared handsome, but he was the perfect movie version of a traveling salesman, clothes and all.

"This is the kind man who brought you here this morning," the homely nurse explained before she disappeared from the room. She actually smiled.

Renny smiled contentedly, but his voice was filled with complaint. "Dang it, Doc, here I thought I was in New York and I find I'm in Texas. I read that I was dead, and have just decided that I should be but ain't. What is it all about?"

Doc came as close to smiling as he ever did. There was good reason for Renny's confusion.

"I am sorry to have manhandled you last night, but it was necessary," he said quietly. "I should have suspected we were in danger sooner, but I did not, so quick action was necessary."

Renny was willing to bet no one else could have got them out alive.

"I saw at the last instant that an explosion was coming," Doc continued. "I also saw one possible chance of escape. Tiler, as you know, once was one of the great builders of magician's equipment in the country. His home, as I suspected, had many trapdoors and trick devices. I saw signs that led me to conclude there was a slide from the living room into the basement. I could only hope the slide led to safe shelter of some kind. It did."

"Hey," Renny objected. "How did you know a blast was coming? How did you spot the trick door?"

Renny didn't admit he hadn't known about Tiler.

Doc ignored the questions. "Your head unfortunately struck a brick wall as we fell," he went on.

"But being beneath the explosion, the force of which went up, and also landing in a steel 'escape cage' such as magicians use, we were not seriously hurt.

"Removing you from the house, I saw a plane taking off not far away. I was fortunate in being able to identify markings on the ship, and to trace it. So I obtained a plane and followed. The trail ended here."

Renny sighed. There was no use asking any more questions, he knew. But there were so many details Doc was omitting that he would have liked to have heard about.

He understood how Doc's keen eyesight might have seen the plane markings, and he supposed he could guess the rest of it. Doc had pulled wires—and he knew many of them, and had traced the plane through airports at which it had stopped for gas. Another wire had been pulled to obtain a plane immediately for the pursuit.

It was a tribute to those who had aided Doc that they had kept his secret, had not disclosed that he had escaped the blast alive.

"What happened here?" Renny asked at last.

"Another victim had been selected for the Purple Dragon," Doc said calmly.

Renny gasped, then brightened. "Then you've got a lead at last? The Purple Dragon didn't end with the blast last night?"

"It did not end," Doc agreed.

"What do we do?" Renny asked anxiously.

The bronze man examined him with skilled fingers. And Doc was known as one of the world's outstanding physicians and surgeons. A slight frown creased his forehead as he completed his examination, but he said nothing.

Instead, he took a small hypodermic needle from the equipment kit about his waist, filled it with a clear liquid and shot it into Renny's arm. The big engineer felt better almost immediately.

"You should be fit enough to carry out your part," Doc said finally.

After that he talked swiftly and clearly. A strange look came to Renny's severe features. "But, Doc," he protested weakly, "you're taking too big a chance! If anything should go wrong—" "We will hope that nothing does go wrong," Doc said briefly. "Now, dress quickly and leave by the fire-escape window. You know what is to be done."

Renny wanted to protest some more. He took one look at Doc's features and held his tongue.

In that, he was much better than his homely nurse. She talked for days about returning to her patient only to find the room vacant, with both patient and visitor gone.

DUDE STARG waited for darkness before returning to Jaurez. But he wasn't idle. He spent the time arranging to smuggle Red into the United States. And since Red was going to be very unwilling to return to the United States, where he was wanted for such crimes as murder, mail robbery and bank robbery, that took some arranging.

But at dinner time Dude was in a very jubilant mood. Everything was going fine. And there wasn't a thing to worry about now that Doc Savage was out of the way.

Of course, some of the bronze man's aids might try to cause trouble, but Dude wasn't concerned about them.

Dude ate leisurely, then made a telephone call to New York. He couldn't resist boasting a little. "A coffin floats, you know," he said cryptically. "It's in the bag."

Dude might not have been quite so confident if he had known what was going on in Jaurez, but then he didn't know. For that matter, the two guards he had left with Red didn't know much about it either.

Neither guard saw the two ghostly figures who eased up to the adobe shack just after dusk. If they had, they wouldn't have believed their eyes, anyway. One of those figures looked just like Red, even to a mole under the right eye. Doc Savage had made good use of his powers of observation. He had made better use of his art of make-up.

The two guards were jeering at their prisoner. They thought it humorous that Red was trussed up so he couldn't move a muscle. They thought it even more humorous that he was in a coffin. The lid of the coffin was off now, but soon it would be fastened securely. Then it would be taken to the smugglers who had guaranteed its safe delivery on the other side of the Rio Grande. From there—well, a plane covers a lot of territory in the course of a night.

Then the guards went to sleep. Or at least they thought they must have dozed off for a few minutes. They didn't see the fine powder that drifted into the shack—a powder Doc Savage had used once before with such quick results.

The guards knew they couldn't have slept long. When they recovered, they saw Red was still safe in the coffin. He seemed still to be sleeping.

The guards decided not even to mention the episode to Dude when he arrived. Dude sometimes had a quick temper.

But Dude was still in a good humor when he came for one last check before the night's proceedings began.

The dapper little killer had barely noticed a big sedan that had passed him shortly before he reached the shack. Had he got a clear look at the driver's face he would have been far from good-humored.

Renny was at the wheel. And in the back seat, concealed under several lap robes, was the real Red. Red was unconscious. He would stay that way for some time.

Renny drove boldly across the bridge to the American side. The Mexican customs officers merely waved him on. At the American side he stopped—but only for an instant. He whispered a few words to the officer who came out to his car, and that was all.

"Good luck," the officer said. "I can't know anything about this officially, of course. But I hope that Red fries. We've been trying to lure him on this side of the river for six months." Renny smiled and drove on. But he didn't feel much like smiling. Doc Savage had taken Red's place. The bronze man had explained he believed that the simplest and quickest method of getting firsthand contact with the Purple Dragon. Renny hoped so, but he feared something might go wrong, that Doc might be taking too many chances.

Renny would have been more worried had he remained near the shack and watched what happened after Dude arrived. Dude strutted over and looked down at his captive.

"Sleepin', heh?" he sneered. "Well, he's going to take a longer nap than he figures."

Dude pulled a hypodermic from his pocket. It was fully loaded. "Cost me a C-note to get this," he bragged, "but it's filled with dope that'll keep this mug asleep for a week. It would keep anyone asleep that long—even Doc Savage, if he was still alive so he could go to sleep."

Dude jabbed the hypo roughly into an exposed place on his captive's arm, jabbed the needle home. Doc did not move. The bronze man fully realized the chance he was taking, knew that Dude probably wasn't boasting about the potency of the drug he was using. But the bronze man never attempted to run from trouble, even unexpected trouble. He made no fight now.

Chapter XIII. THE ANKLE CLUE

STILL worried about Doc, Renny drove directly to the offices where he knew he would find an F.B.I. man.

A few pedestrians gaped in surprise, but none offered to interfere as the big engineer opened the

rear of the sedan, threw the lap robes off the sleeping Red, and hoisted the man's unconscious form over his shoulder.

The broken ribs complained slightly at the burden, but the injection given Renny by Doc had numbed the pain to a great extent.

"I believe you fellows want this guy," Renny said calmly as he entered the F.B.I. offices. He dumped Red's limp form onto the floor.

The F.B.I. agent in charge rose calmly, came from behind his desk, took a good look at Red, and held out his hand to Renny.

"Thanks, pal. Carter's the name. If there's any particular favor you'd like to have done for you sometime, let me know."

Renny smiled. "I've got one right now. Keep this mug on ice for at least a week. Don't let anyone know you have him."

Carter's eyebrows lifted slightly, but all he said was, "A pleasure. We'll want to talk to him some in private, anyway. In return, however, there are a few questions I'd like to ask, Colonel Renwick."

The big engineer started. "I was afraid you'd recognize me," he said.

"I presume you are working on the Purple Dragon case?" Carter asked politely.

"Asking officially, or off the record," Renny countered grimly.

The Federal operator hesitated. Then he shrugged. After all, the F.B.I. hadn't been called in on the case, and besides he knew of other work Doc and his aids had done. "Off the record," he conceded. "And for your information, I might say we have a few theories ourselves."

"I'm listening," Renny said.

"We naturally have kept up with the case," Carter explained, "and it has struck us as significant that all victims of the so-called Dragon were once associated with Pal Hatrack."

Renny nodded. "We noticed that"

"Hatrack, as you undoubtedly know, once was virtual czar of all rackets and crimes in the country. But are you aware also that Fielding Falcan, the famous criminal lawyer, actually was chief of his legal staff?"

"We have considered Falcan in connection with the case," Renny said noncommittally.

Carter put handcuffs on Red. "I talked with one man who said he had seen the Purple Dragon," he went on, and he shuddered slightly. "I almost knew fear myself. It does something horrible."

Renny agreed silently. Carter talked on. It was some time before the big engineer could get away. When he did manage to leave, he thought regretfully of the time he had lost, but he thought also that it probably wouldn't make much difference. It did. For he was spotted as he reached the street. Starg had paid off his two guards when Red's coffin-clad figure had been turned over to smugglers. The guards had returned to El Paso.

They saw and recognized Renny as he was getting into the big sedan.

The guards had worked for Starg. They didn't know what the present deal was, but they had been given a New York telephone number to call if anything developed concerning Red they thought should be reported.

First they tried to get in direct touch with Dude. They found he had just left by plane. So they called New York.

FIELDING FALCAN had often been complimented on his vocabulary. He was reputed to have one of the best in the legal profession.

When he received the call from El Paso he showed that he had another kind of vocabulary as well.

It was one that would have made him the envy of any old-time mule-skinner. He spoke at some length without repeating himself. Then he pushed a button.

There were a lot of buttons on Falcan's desk. The one he pushed was off at one side, indicating it should bring something special.

It did. It brought Marcella Walling.

The girl's features were rather worn, her usual radiant beauty had paled slightly.

Falcan gave what he thought was a very pleasing grin. Unconsciously he patted his gray hair, fingered his necktie. Even when thoroughly angry, Falcan was always appreciative of a pretty face. Then his mood hardened. "Sit down," he commanded abruptly. The girl sat down.

"I am pleased with your report on Monk and Ham," Falcan complimented. "You are quite an accomplished actress. Now, I have another job in prospect for you, one I think will eventually suit you better. But that wasn't why I called you in here. You have been a party to a great many things I have done so far. I do not want you to miss what happens next."

Falcan's keen eyes were fastened on the girl's face. He intended to miss no possible change in expression.

If Marcella Walling did change expression in any way, he didn't see it. He had forgotten that only moments before he had complimented her on her ability as an actress.

"First, however, I want to ask you a question or so," he went on smoothly.

"Without the directing genius of Doc Savage, do you consider Monk, say, as a person of sufficient intelligence to carry on in his place, possibly interfering with my . . . ah . . . work?"

Marcella Walling shook her head without hesitation. "How about this other person, this Ham?"

For the first time the girl hesitated. A strange look flashed in her eyes. It was there only for an instant—but Fielding Falcan saw it.

"Ah! Perhaps you feel slightly romantic toward that overdressed fop," he said silkily. "I would not, if I were you. Would you like to visit the Purple Dragon?"

Marcella Walling shook her head vigorously. "No! No! And you are mistaken," she cried. She was almost too emphatic. "I am sure Ham has no great intelligence, either."

Fielding Falcan stared at her for long seconds. "Do not forget the final task I have in mind for you," he said finally.

Without waiting for an answer, he swung to the phone on his desk.

He made several calls. "There must be no slip-up this time," he ended in each case.

Marcella Walling sat silently and patiently. Whatever her thoughts might have been, nothing showed on her features.

MONK and Ham were looking for those features at that very moment. They would have been very glad to have known where she was, and particularly that she was linked with Fielding Falcan.

But at that time they didn't even know Fielding Falcan was connected with the case in any way.

For long hours they had taken turns keeping watch in Doc's office, hoping for word either from the bronze man or Renny. They had tried all the usual communicating devices without avail.

One of those devices should have worked, the one Monk had nicknamed the "hot foot." It was this device Doc had used while trying to trace Monk and Ham.

But at the time they had used it, Renny had been in a hospital bed, and naturally without his socks, while Doc could hardly have worn them while playing the part of a barefooted peon. Neither could they wear their oversized wrist watches under the circumstances.

Now they had decided they had wasted enough time. They didn't like to think of it, but perhaps Doc really had been killed. In that case, there was only one thing to do, only one thing the bronze man would have wanted them to do.

They would have to break the case themselves; would have to find and put an end to the Purple Dragon.

They knew only one place to start. That was by tracing Marcella Walling. Just what connection she had with it all they did not know. But it was certain that she was involved.

They went to the downtown office where they had first seen her.

It was Monk who discovered they were being followed. The fellow wasn't really very good. He made the mistake of having his cab trail that used by Monk and Ham without instructing the driver not to stay too close.

The fellow did have sense enough not to stop and get out at the same place Monk and Ham did. He rode a full two blocks beyond before he stopped. Then he started to slip back cautiously. He wasn't cautious enough. Monk met him halfway.

The hairy chemist just stepped into a hallway and waited. When the fellow came by one of Monk's long arms reached out and grabbed.

Even those close to the fellow at the time couldn't have sworn whether he had been attacked or whether he'd turned into the hallway of his own accord.

Monk took the man up to the top of the flight of stairs. A glance around assured him this place would be as good as any other.

He thrust his homely face into the other's mug. He waved a big fist menacingly. "Now talk! Daggonit, who told you to follow us?"

The other was undoubtedly frightened. He didn't seem to know whether to be more afraid of Monk or of talking. He tried to compromise. He pulled a knife.

Monk swatted him. He didn't intend to hit real hard. His temper got the best of him. From the way the would-be knifeman folded up, it was apparent he wouldn't be able to talk for some hours. Accordingly, Monk and Ham returned to the office of Dr. Constantine. No one was there. They hadn't thought anyone would be.

After a time they got hold of the janitor. He didn't know anything. Offices in this building often were rented by the week, and for cash.

Monk and Ham questioned tenants of adjoining suites. A couple admitted they had seen the very pretty girl Monk described, but they didn't know anything about her. Then Ham got a brainstorm. The news-dealer on the corner wasn't blind, and those who aren't usually have an eye for a pretty ankle. This one did. He admitted it freely. After a little more questioning and the influence of a big bill, he admitted he had seen the girl they were asking about, and added, "The last time I saw that skirt she was in company of a guy that looked just like this mug here." He pointed to Monk.

"Chemistry!" exclaimed Monk. Ham howled.

They had to wait half an hour before the cab driver they wanted returned to his stand. The delay proved expensive for them.

Had they been thinking, they might have realized that anyone who covered his tracks as well as the Purple Dragon would take no chances; that a watcher probably would be around to see that no one took undue interest in the office of Dr. Constantine.

There was. That watcher reported in as soon as he saw the pair talking to the news dealer.

Chapter XIV. DEATH SENTENCE

FIELDING FALCAN was amazed. The Purple Dragon had warned both Monk and Ham what would happen to them if they butted into the case again. The gray-haired lawyer really had thought that would be sufficient.

Publication of that newspaper photo also had been designed to make the pair ridiculous, to really laugh them out of the chase.

Evidently, Monk and Ham had been underestimated.

For some moments, Falcan considered the question thoughtfully. Things were moving at a fast pace. It wouldn't be long until the usefulness of the Purple Dragon was ended. But there must be no delays or interruptions now.

A slow grin spread over Falcan's face. After all, he had been a criminal lawyer for many years. There were few tricks he didn't know. This time he would try one of his own. He made his preparations swiftly and smoothly.

Monk and Ham were completely ignorant of the fact that anyone was interested in them at all. But even if they had known it, they probably would have gone ahead just the same.

For a five-dollar bill, the taxi driver admitted taking Marcella Walling in his cab, and not only that, he agreed that he knew where he had taken her.

"A classy dump on Fit' Avenue," he nodded.

"I am an attorney," Ham said smoothly. "I have some questions I desire to ask the girl."

"In dat case I'll take youse there," the cab driver said, adding hopefully that "it'll be a dollar nin'y-five on the meter."

"It's worth another five," Ham said instantly.

The cab was ancient in appearance, but it had a good motor. It started uptown at a rapid rate.

"At that, I hope we don't run into the Purple Dragon again," Monk said suddenly. "T-that is, when we can't fight back."

Ham's lips tightened. The well-dressed attorney seemed to have the same thought. "I'd still like to know just what happened," he admitted, "but I'd prefer to have someone tell me about it."

Monk's face lost its strained look and he glanced sideways mischievously at Ham. "What about the girl? Seems to me I saw you looking at her with a lot of interest."

Ham started to reply. A resounding crash stopped whatever remark he might have made.

Their cab did a half-pivot, skidded dolefully along until it came up against the curb.

In front, their driver was telling the pilot of a big truck just what he thought of him.

The truck driver piled out. Two helpers got out with him. Their appearance was decidedly menacing.

"Help me, youse guys," the cab driver appealed, and grabbed a crank as he piled out of his battered taxi.

Monk started to follow. Ham grabbed him by the arm, pulled him back.

"Careful," he warned, suddenly serious. "This has all the earmarks of another trap."

Monk grunted scornfully, but he delayed for a moment just the same. It did seem too many things happened to them whenever they got interested in Marcella Walling.

The truck driver was a big guy. He dodged the crank the cab driver swung, planted a huge fist in the cabby's face. The cabby lost all interest in proceedings.

Then he walked over to the cab door, yanked it open and stared in belligerently at Monk and Ham.

"I hit that poor mug of a driver, but it was probably youse guys' fault," he bellowed. "Youse was having him drive so fast he smashed right into me."

He reached into the cab, tried to get hold of Ham.

Monk kicked out. The point of his toe caught the truck driver in the belly.

The big man grunted and stepped back. Monk got out—with both arms swinging. The truck driver looked surprised as a right caught his jaw. He sat down abruptly.

Ham also got out of the cab. For some moments a lusty free-for-all was in progress. Then, just when they were winning handily, the two Doc Savage aids were slugged from behind, knocked down. Each felt a sharp sting in the arm. And that was all they did feel—for some time.

DUDE STARG also was reporting to the gray-haired criminal attorney. Dude was still very pleased with himself.

"Landed safely at LaGuardia Field," he barked jubilantly. "The cargo is safe, and will be unloaded in a few minutes. Want it taken to the usual place?"

Dude's self-satisfied expression changed as words sizzled in his ear. Falcan was using his mule-skinner vocabulary again. Finally, he slowed down long enough to tell Dude what he feared.

"Those guys got out of the blast somehow," he bellowed. "The big one, Renny, was seen coming out of the F.B.I. offices in El Paso. Do you know what that may mean?"

Dude gulped, and admitted that he might have a faint idea, but that he didn't want to think about it.

"I'll think about it for you," Falcan roared. "I'll do better, I'll tell you about it. Through friends I still have in the government service I found that Renny delivered Red to the F.B.I. at just the time you thought you were starting with him here. And that means you haven't got Red at all. If anyone is in that coffin, it is Doc Savage."

Dude Starg turned several colors in rapid succession. "B-but this guy looks just like Red," he

finally protested weakly.

Falcan cooled down suddenly. "And that convinces me it is Doc Savage. Check at once. Here is how you can tell--"

Perspiration streaming from his face, Dude returned to his plane. It was only a few minutes' job to take off the top of the coffin. Then he did as Falcan had ordered. He pulled back the eyelids of the man inside.

Falcan had been right. Those eyes were gold-flecked. The man was Doc Savage.

For a second time, Dude went to report. When he returned his face was vicious.

"Plans are changed slightly," he snarled angrily.

The plane's pilot looked at him with mild curiosity.

"You mean this guy is not going to call on the Purple Dragon?"

Dude shook his head. "Not this bird," he growled. "He's the toughest customer to kill that I've ever met, but he'd have to be made of asbestos to get out of what I'm going to do to him."

The pilot yawned. "Going to kill him first?"

"Hell, no!" Dude rasped. "He's going in alive and come out a dried-up skeleton. There's only one thing I'm sorry about. I put so much dope in him in Juarez that he won't be conscious to know about it."

Swiftly he put screws back in the top of the coffin.

Chapter XV. HELD FOR MURDER

MONK recovered first. To his surprise he emerged from unconsciousness with an almost clear head.

Then he began to wonder if his head were so clear after all.

To begin with, he didn't recognize his surroundings. The last he remembered, there had been an auto accident.

But he wasn't in jail. He was sure of that.

Cautiously he opened his eyes a second time and glanced around. Then he shut his eyes fast. His first look had been confirmed.

He was lying flat on his back on a thick, luxurious rug. He was in a room that was both tastefully and expensively decorated and furnished.

And he wasn't alone. From some place along the line, Chemistry had reappeared. The hairy ape was squatting patiently on his haunches, waiting for Monk and Ham to stir and move.

But the most shocking thing was Ham's appearance. Ham looked as if he had been on the losing end of an argument with a steam roller. His clothes were torn and dirty. There were scratches on his features. And, most ominous of all, there was a big splotch on the front of Ham's shirt that could only have been caused by blood.

Cautiously Monk rolled over, felt Ham's pulse. It was throbbing strongly. Even as Monk felt it, the no-longer-dapper lawyer groaned once or twice and opened his eyes.

Ham looked directly at Monk's homely features. He didn't seem to like what he saw either. As Chemistry ambled forward, grunting contentedly, Ham's eyelids went tight closed and he let out another moan.

"I knew it would happen to you some day--and you never were a candidate for a beauty prize," Ham muttered plaintively.

"What do you mean?" Monk growled sourly. "You oughta get a load of how you look."

"Go find a mirror and look at yourself, you ape!" Ham protested weakly. The lawyer kept his eyes shut.

Monk growled and got to his feet. It was then he noticed that the room they were in showed signs of a fight. A chair or two had been knocked over. Books had been thrown off an end table.

The hairy chemist stood perfectly motionless for an instant, listening intently. There wasn't a thing to be heard, not even street noises from outside. They were in an apartment, he decided, and evidently a soundproof one at that. But even so, it was strange there wasn't noise of some kind, no matter how slight.

He moved across the room, and to his surprise he found he was creeping along. For some strange reason hair was rising on the nape of his neck.

Monk growled angrily. He was letting his nerves get the best of him, and for no apparent cause. Just the same, things were strange, and there was an air about this apartment he didn't like, an ominous air that filled him with foreboding.

Chemistry was acting queerly now, also. The ape seemed to be doing his best to try to tell them something, dancing around oddly. Monk noticed casually that the ape still had his camera swung around his neck.

Then he noticed something else that made him forget about Chemistry. There was a picture on the wall, a picture of a very beautiful girl.

It was a picture of Marcella. And on a table near the door were the hat and jacket he had last seen Marcella wearing.

"Marcella!" Monk called sharply.

The only answer was another groan out of Ham. "You surely don't want her to see you, looking like you do now," the lawyer argued.

Monk didn't reply. He'd at last found a mirror. And he found that he also looked as if he'd been

run through a sausage grinder. His face also was scratched, his clothes torn. A startled exclamation from Ham caught his attention. The lawyer had rolled over, had started to get up. Then he had halted, still on his hands and knees. Ham's eyes were focused toward a door that evidently led into a bedroom.

Monk looked that way quickly. His jaw fell. He likewise froze motionless. From under the closed door rolled a small pool of ever-widening crimson! FOR long seconds, the silence was unbroken. Then an angry growl came from Monk. He started forward. Ham leaped to his feet. Together they opened the door, looked inside. Monk's guess had been right. The next room was a bedroom. But it didn't look as though anyone would sleep there for some time.

The room showed evidence of a terrific combat. Furniture was broken. A tall, full-length mirror was shattered.

The crimson pool extended only a short distance into the room. But there was no body there. Whatever or whoever had suffered the wound had been removed.

Ham wet dry lips. His usual assurance had slipped from him. There was questioning doubt in his features as he turned to Monk.

"D-do you suppose it was us--"

Monk swallowed hard. "I . . . I was wonderin' that too," he said. His voice was thin and uncertain.

Ham looked down, and his already white features became more ashen. A gun was lying almost at his feet. Gingerly he took out a handkerchief, then picked the gun up and sniffed the muzzle.

"Fired--and recently," he retorted gloomily.

Monk nodded dumbly. He was ready to believe almost anything.

Ham slipped the gun in his pocket, his manner suddenly businesslike. With quick strides he crossed the room, raised a window.

"We've got to find out where we are," he started. Then he stopped.

With the window raised, sound came in from the outside. But it wasn't sound either Monk or Ham wanted to hear. It was the wail of a police siren.

The hairy chemist glanced quickly at his partner. Ham leaned out of the window cautiously, taking care not to expose himself too much in case anyone was looking up from below.

A moment later, the lawyer grunted and swung around swiftly. "Police!" he rapped. "We've got to get out of here, and get out fast."

Monk nodded without hesitation. There was no doubt in the mind of either but that the police were on their way to this apartment. And both knew what the result would be if they were found there. They would never be able to convince the cops they hadn't been responsible for whatever had happened.

The only thing to do was to get out and try to solve the mystery before the police learned they had any connection with the case.

With Chemistry trailing them, they dashed into the hallway, raced toward an inclosed fire escape at the rear. With luck, they should be able to get out before the cops posted a guard at the back. Chemistry had difficulty keeping up with them. They went down the stairs as if the Purple Dragon itself was after them.

But even as they ran, both Monk and Ham were doing their best to repair their torn clothing, so that it wouldn't be too noticeable.

Scarcely two minutes later and they had reached the ground floor. It took them only seconds to open the barred fire-escape door and slip into the small alleyway outside. Then they were running swiftly from the scene.

The last thing they heard was more sirens as additional police arrived.

A CRUISING cab took the three to the building where Doc had his office. It was a silent trip. Each was busy with his own thoughts, and those thoughts weren't pleasant.

Something was screwy, very screwy, Monk knew. But he couldn't explain it just the same.

The whole thing looked like a frame-up. But if it was, it had been excellently done.

On the other hand, he thought gloomily, he and Ham might really have been responsible for what had happened. Doped and unconscious, there was no telling what wild actions they might not have tried.

Then he gulped, and his small eyes gleamed. That didn't check out either. They hadn't been alone in the apartment, that was sure. And someone had walked out of there--whether it was the person who had been wounded or still another actor in the strange drama, he didn't know. But it was apparent that someone had walked out--else why wasn't there a body around?

The tip given the police proved that also. Someone did know what had occurred in the apartment, someone who had given the alarm.

They dismissed the cab half a block from their destination, slipped into the building through a door to the cellar, and took Doc's special, high-speed elevator to the offices above.

"I've got an idea," Ham said. He gestured slightly toward the camera Chemistry had around his neck.

Hope flared swiftly in Monk's eyes. Ham was right. There was a chance Chemistry had taken a

picture that might help them. In fact, he was almost willing to bet the ape had snapped a shot or two. The only question was whether there had still been any unused film in the camera at the time. Even as the elevator reached Doc's floor, Monk grabbed the camera from Chemistry, raced toward the excellently outfitted dark room that was one feature of the suite of offices. Newspaper photographers have the developing of film and plates down to a fine art. But Ham was willing to bet that even the most expert had never bettered the time that Monk made now. The hairy chemist didn't make a false motion.

Ham sat nearby watching Monk work under the ruby light. It seemed Monk had scarcely begun before the job was over. He turned on a bright light, scanned the film swiftly. He was near the end of the roll before he halted. For an instant, he studied a small square of the film carefully. A strange noise came from his numb lips. It was a noise Ham had never heard him make before—a stricken, childlike cry of grief.

With fingers that trembled, the chemist fitted the film into a portable projector that stood nearby. He darkened the room, turned on the projector.

A picture flashed on a screen, a picture many times magnified, but clear and distinct in every detail.

Ham cried out.

The evidence was there, and it was evidence that looked like both of them faced the electric chair!

CHEMISTRY evidently had been standing in the living room of the apartment when he snapped the picture. But he had been close enough to the bedroom door so that almost every detail inside could be seen. And it was a sight Monk and Ham knew that neither would ever be able to erase from his mind.

Marcella was almost facing the camera. But it wasn't the well-dressed, poised Marcella that Monk and Ham had known.

It was a girl that seemed in the grip of almost unbearable terror. Every feature was strained, her eyes were wide and staring.

And she had been in a battle. Her clothes were ripped and torn, her gown hanging from one shoulder. Almost over her heart there was a small, dark hole in that gown.

Marcella wasn't alone in the picture. Two other persons were there. One was crouching over, long arms half extended as though ready to grab and crush. The other stood aside weakly, but with one hand extended also.

In that hand was a gun. Apparently the gun had just been fired. There seemed to be a faint haze, as if from powder above the muzzle.

The two men had their backs to the camera. But there was no mistaking their identity.

They were Monk and Ham.

"I . . . I can't believe it!" Ham argued weakly.

"It can't be, but it is—" Monk began.

The hairy chemist broke off. Ham's head shot up. There was a heavy pounding at the door to the office, a pounding that could mean only one thing.

Ham looked at Monk, an unspoken question in his eyes. Monk nodded. Ham went toward the door.

Neither felt like running any more.

The detectives who burst in were grim and savage. Gone was the politeness usually shown Doc's aids.

"We don't care who you are," one of them snapped out angrily. "All murderers look alike to us. And you two are charged with murder."

Before Monk or Ham could move, even if they had wanted to, handcuffs were snapped on their wrists.

But even then, Ham could not entirely forget his legal training.

"Just whom are we accused of killing, and when?" he asked mildly.

"You know well enough," the detective snarled. "But just to show you how little chance you have, look at this!"

With a triumphant air, the man yanked a picture from his pocket. Monk and Ham looked at it in bewilderment. It was almost an exact copy of the picture Monk had flashed on the screen only seconds before. That must mean—

Life returned to Ham's eyes. Color poured back to his features.

"But look, man," he said excitedly, "this picture isn't proof that we committed a crime. Figure it out for yourself. Someone else had to be present to take that picture. That shows it was a frame-up."

"Daggonit, of course," Monk cut in swiftly. "Even a detective ought to see that."

"And besides," Ham rushed on, "if there was a crime at all, you must have a body to prove it. And you haven't got it—there is no corpus delicti. "

A bulky detective smashed Ham alongside the jaw. "Shut up and come along," he roared. "You are a smooth talker, and you might have convinced us something was phony, if it wasn't for one thing."

"What is that?" Ham asked cautiously.

"We've got a witness who saw you two and that ape of yours slipping along near the water front

with a bundle wrapped up in a rug. We're dragging the river for the body right now." Ham staggered as another lusty clout caught him across the jaw. He still argued, was arguing, in fact, up to the very time steel doors clanged behind them and they were lodged in jail. If the Purple Dragon had wanted them out of the way, and had been behind what had occurred—which seemed likely—then the Purple Dragon had done an excellent job. Ham knew he and Monk really were in a tough spot.

Chapter XVI. DEATH IN THE PIT

DUDE was driving what appeared to be a delivery truck. The sign on the side said it belonged to a bakery. If it did, it certainly was not being used for its intended purpose. In the inclosed rear of the truck was a coffin. Inside the coffin was a figure so bound and taped that it could not have moved even if it had been conscious. And there were so many wrappings on the figure that it would have been difficult even to make out that it was the body of a man—a tall, powerfully built man.

Seated on top of the coffin was Dude's only assistant. Short and heavy-set, the helper, whom Dude addressed as Runt, seemed entirely without nerves. He was calmly smoking a cigarette.

Dude was feeling nervous, but everything should be all right now. Doc Savage would soon be where he wouldn't cause any more trouble to anyone.

Dude's small shoulders straightened. That was an achievement of which anyone could be proud, even if Red had got away.

Dude was still smiling faintly as he swung the delivery truck through a gate into a dilapidated yard near the East River.

A sign in front advertised the place as a junk yard. It looked it. At the rear of the sprawling yard was a shedlike structure that, surprisingly enough, appeared to be almost new and solidly built.

Dude swung the truck around expertly, backed until the rear of the truck was flush with a door of the huge shed.

A dirty, malevolent face, almost concealed by a huge growth of hair, peered cautiously from a window. Dude gave a slight signal. The shed door opened.

"All out," Dude chuckled softly. "Another live one goes in, and comes out long dead."

DUDE'S helper had evidently been to the junk yard before. He didn't wait for instructions, but heaved at the heavy coffin, pushing it into the shed. So cleverly was the job done, that no one on the street could have told what had been delivered.

The man inside lumbered forward. Seen at close quarters, he was a veritable giant, clad in loose-fitting overalls.

"The boss is sending almost too many down here, Dude," he complained. "By and by someone may get suspicious."

Dude's grin faded. Cold light flickered in his small eyes. "I don't think the Purple Dragon would like it if anything went wrong, Dummy," he said softly.

The giant's face paled slightly beneath the dirt. His hand trembled as he reached forward, caught one end of the coffin, slid it spinning across the floor with one tremendous heave.

"W—who is it this time?" he managed.

Dude's smile returned. "It really is none of your business," he said shortly. "But this time I don't mind telling you. It's Doc Savage."

The giant seemed to have trouble breathing. If he had been frightened at mention of the Purple Dragon, he seemed almost terrified at mention of the bronze man's name.

"It c-can't be!" he quavered.

The stocky man who had ridden on the coffin laughed shortly. "Just take a look, chum," he advised. He pulled a screwdriver from his hip pocket, removed the top of the coffin swiftly.

The giant eased forward, looked down. Involuntarily, he took a backward step as he saw the bronze face beneath him.

The stocky man laughed harshly, leaned over, tugged the bound figure up until he could heave it over his shoulder. "Lead the way, chum," he barked.

The giant recovered himself with an effort. He glared defiantly at Dude's sneering grin, then turned and strode swiftly across the room. At the far side he paused, took out a key and unlocked a heavy door.

The room inside was small. Almost all of it was taken up with just one thing—a vat in the center. The vat was filled with liquid.

Had Doc Savage been able to see that liquid he would have understood some of the puzzles that had mystified police.

It was a mixture of quicklime.

Here it was that bodies of slain men had been brought. Dropped into the quicklime, their flesh had been eaten away, their skeletons bleached until it appeared they had been dead for years. When the killers had wanted their victim identified, they had worked it so that a part of a fingertip would be left not too badly damaged.

Now that the fatal moment had arrived, even Dude seemed a little hesitant. But not so the stocky man who carried the bound and tied body.

He stepped forward swiftly—and heaved.

The bound man evidently had been chewing hard at the gag that silenced him. Knowing death was near, he had made one final, tremendous effort to bite through that gag.

He succeeded.

There was a shrill, terrified scream just before the body hit the deadly quicklime. The man's mouth was still open as he sank beneath the surface.

Dude's pent-up breath went out in a long sigh.

"Not even Doc Savage can live after that," he breathed.

DUDE was right in one respect. Not even Doc Savage could have lived if it had been he who had been tossed into the deadly lime.

The only trouble was, the victim wasn't Doc Savage.

The bronze man, groggy as he had been from the effects of the anaesthetic he had been given, had managed to throw off his stupor before the plane reached LaGuardia Airport.

Physicians could have explained that by citing cases of the amazing power the mind has when it determines not to succumb to drugs. And once conscious, it had not been difficult for Doc to work his way free from his bonds.

Doc had been conscious when Dude Starg inspected him in the coffin at the airport, had known his disguise had been penetrated and had realized he could not carry through his original plan. He had to escape. A few moments later, and he had traded places with the man left to guard him.

The bronze man never let even a foe go to his death knowingly. He hadn't done so this time. He had thought it more than reasonable to expect that the captive would be inspected again before anything drastic was done.

Doc was too modest to realize just how much he was feared and respected by those on the other side of the law, had not known his erstwhile captors intended to kill first and investigate later.

When he fled the coffin, Doc slipped into a nearby hangar. After that he was busy for a while, using his make-up kit.

He looked like a professional man, a lawyer or a doctor, as he emerged. His bronze hair was gray; there were wrinkles in his forehead and around his mouth. Glass lenses had been fitted over his gold-flecked eyes so that they now appeared a dark-blue.

Without hesitation he walked toward the administration building.

An air liner from the West had just landed. Among the passengers was a particularly glamorous star. New York reporters were out in force to meet her, were firing questions at her from all sides.

Doc paid no attention. His plan was simple but vital. He wanted to keep secret as long as possible the fact that he had escaped, or at least keep his whereabouts unknown until he had answered several questions to his own satisfaction.

A habit of a lifetime betrayed him. Or rather, the combination of that habit coupled with the plight in which Monk and Ham had fallen.

Doc's glance fell on a newspaper headline shouted in 144-point type

TWO DOC SAVAGE AIDS

HELD FOR MURDER

A peculiar trilling sound, a sound that seemed to come from nowhere in particular, yet from everywhere, filled the administration building.

A sandy-haired reporter, eyes sparkling keenly behind horn-rimmed glasses, was standing almost beside Doc at the time. The reporter jumped as if he'd been given the hot-foot, staring unbelievably for a moment at the dignified figure at his right.

Then the reporter let out a yell, a yell that could have been heard for half a mile.

"Hell, fellows, forget that movie bum! Here's a real story. Doc Savage isn't dead. He's right here now. Alive!"

Doc Savage's features didn't change. If the bronze man felt surprise or chagrin, he hid that fact excellently.

He turned courteously toward the crowd of reporters that stormed about him, shouting questions.

"Will you tell me about Monk and Ham first?" he asked quietly.

The sandy-haired scribe obliged. He gave the story tersely but completely, as it had been given to the newspapers by the police.

"Now answer our questions," the reporter begged eagerly.

Doc nodded. "I'll do my best," he agreed.

The questions came fast and furiously. How had he escaped death? Was there really anything to the fantastic story of a Purple Dragon? If there was, did the Purple Dragon really want to rid the world of criminals, or was there a more materialistic motive behind it? Was it true, as had been rumored, that the Purple Dragon could transport men into the past? Did the Dragon have any connection with the recent wave of murders? Did he think Monk and Ham had been framed, as they insisted?

The bronze man was polite. Seemingly he answered each question fully and frankly. It was only later that the reporters realized how little information he had given them.

The report of his death had been an error, he assured them gravely. And if there was a Purple Dragon he had yet to see it. He was sure he did not believe that anything could transport men into

the past, and if there must be a motive, as they suggested, he rather believed it must be materialistic. As far as Monk and Ham were concerned, he knew only what they had told him, but he did intend to investigate.

Meager as the information was, it resulted in newspaper extras a half-hour later. But then, the mere fact that Doc was alive and not dead was sufficient for that in any event.

Those extras were read by a great many people. All of them were interested. But there were several who were far more than just interested.

Their reaction served to bring things to a climax far sooner than otherwise would have been the case.

Chapter XVII. RENNY GETS KISSED

RENNY also was rushing toward adventure, but he didn't know it at the time. The big engineer had grabbed a plane for New York as soon as he could, and he hadn't let affairs at El Paso delay him for long. Actually, the air liner he was on was roaring over Manhattan toward LaGuardia Field at about the time Doc left there.

Renny already knew about Monk and Ham. A radio message to the pilot of his plane had been relayed to him while en route.

There never were any doubts in Renny's mind. He was sure Monk and Ham had been framed. But somebody had to get on the job, and fast, to prove that fact. Besides, he was worried about Doc. The bronze man took too many chances sometimes.

He learned Doc was safe just before the plane glided down toward a landing. A smiling stewardess brought him the news as it had been picked up off the air.

The stewardess knew Renny was one of Doc's men. She had hoped he might start a conversation, tell her some of the adventures he had experienced. She was disappointed when he merely thanked her absently.

The big engineer was the first off the plane. He had no luggage to wait for. He raced toward the taxi line.

None was more surprised than he when a girl ran up to him, blocking his way, then threw her arms around his neck, burying her face in his shoulder.

"Oh, Don!" the girl sobbed loudly. "I'm so glad you got back safely. Kiss me, sweetheart"

Desperately Renny tried to free himself. "I'm afraid you've made a mistake—" he started.

Then he blushed. The girl had pulled his head down, was holding up a pair of inviting lips. Even as Renny gulped, she yanked his head on down with surprising strength. Her lips landed somewhere in the vicinity of his ear.

"Play up! Play up!" she whispered, and there was desperation in her voice. "Get me to a cab as quickly as possible, and please help me keep my face hidden."

Renny swallowed hard. He had been in many places where quick thinking was necessary, but never in one where he had been thrown in contact with quite such a pretty girl.

What it was all about he didn't know, but he did show that he could take things in their stride.

He wrapped one big arm about the girl's slender form, keeping her face pressed against his coat. He even managed a grin.

"There, there," he soothed moving swiftly toward a grinning cab driver. "I'm home safe, and that's all that counts."

A moment later and they were inside the cab.

"And now what is this all about?" Renny demanded angrily.

The cab whirled noisily, raced toward the city. The girl raised tragic eyes toward Renny.

"I'm Marcella Walling," she said simply.

Renny started. "Marcella Walling! The girl Monk and Ham are accused of killing?"

The girl nodded. "Yes," she confessed defiantly. "But now I want to undo some of the harm I have caused." She glanced nervously over her shoulder, out the rear window of the cab. "Just make sure we are not being followed."

Renny followed her example in looking back. The road was clear. "You're imagining things," the big engineer stated flatly.

Up in front, the cab driver grinned slyly.

THE cab driver was still grinning half an hour later as he slipped into a cigar-store telephone booth, dialed a number.

"You were right, chief, she's ready to rat on us," he reported tersely.

Words sputtered into the receiver. The grin vanished from the cab driver's face.

"Naw. She didn't spill nothin' on the way in from the airport. Kept insistin' she'd only talk to this Doc Savage. From what I gathered, seems like she went out there with some crazy notion of savin' this Doc from somethin', then found out he was O. K. This Renny guy showed up just as she was about to leave."

Again the cab driver listened.

"Naw," he repeated. "This guy didn't take her to Doc Savage's office. She said somethin' about being afraid that place might be watched. They're in a hideout up here on Eighty-first Street. I don't think she'll do any talkin' until the bronze bird shows up."

The cab driver was correct on that. And Doc Savage was far downtown when Renny's message reached

him. In fact, the bronze man was talking to the police commissioner at the time.

"I would like to offer you some hope, Mr. Savage," the commissioner was saying sadly. "I like Monk and Ham myself, but the evidence against them is overpowering. I'm even willing to admit that they did not commit the crime in their right minds, and probably will get off lightly. But when this Marcella Walling's body is found, they must be tried for murder."

Doc did not answer for a moment. Heat impulses were flashing against his wrist.

"May I use your telephone?" he asked quickly.

The commissioner nodded, face showing surprise. Doc talked swiftly when the connection was made, then extended the telephone toward the police head. The commissioner looked even more surprised. A moment later he looked as if he doubted his senses.

"This is Marcella Walling," came a soft voice. "I am sorry I cannot explain to you fully now, but Mr. Savage will be able to do so later. But I am alive. I never was in the least danger. Ham and Monk were framed. Those pictures you were given were posed deliberately while they were under the influence of a narcotic that prevented them from remembering what had happened."

The commissioner gulped. "Miss Walling—if you are Miss Walling," he half shouted. "Do you realize you are confessing to a felony? That you have participated in a hoax that may cost you dearly—"

"I realize it may cost my life," the girl assured him gently.

Doc reached forward, took the telephone from the commissioner's limp hand.

"Shall we stay here or go to the office, Doc?" came Renny's voice. "I thought maybe this would be the best place. We can stay here until you get Monk and Ham out. And maybe in the meantime this young vixen will tell me what it's all about."

"Remain there," Doc answered briefly.

Later, he was to regret that decision.

THE police commissioner still had not recovered. His face mirrored doubt mixed with genuine relief. Then suspicion flared quickly.

"When you came in here you didn't know that girl had been found, did you?" he demanded.

Doc shook his head.

"Then how—"

The bronze man's gold-flecked eyes flickered slightly. He motioned toward the oversized wrist watch he wore. "A signaling device," he explained briefly. "And now, will you release Monk and Ham?" The commissioner hesitated a moment longer. "It's highly irregular," he complained, "but under the circumstances—"

"I will guarantee that we will produce the girl as soon as possible," Doc promised. "For the present, I am afraid it would be too dangerous for her. I wish, also, that you would arrest the man who testified he saw Monk and Ham carrying a body toward the river. The man is a perjurer."

The commissioner nodded.

HAM swallowed hard. Monk's ears got red. "Do you mean Marcella pulled this?" the hairy chemist moaned.

Doc nodded.

Ham said nothing at all. He looked strangely abashed.

"An' we thought you were dead!" Monk rumbled on. "How did you escape? Where is Renny? And how did you get us out of here?"

Doc did not answer. For the second time in minutes heat flashes came to his wrist. But there were only a few flashes this time. They stopped suddenly.

The bronze man whirled toward the street, led the way at a run toward his waiting car.

"Trouble," he said briefly.

With the skill of a racing pilot, Doc Savage sent his car speeding toward traffic. But even with that skill the trip to Eighty-first Street was a slow one. It was near the rush hour. The streets were jammed.

On the way, the bronze man gave his aids a brief summary of what had happened since he had last seen them. And they reported as much as they knew of what had happened to them.

Both Monk and Ham were as serious as Doc as they reached the apartment where Renny had been waiting with Marcella Walling. The apartment was one all of Doc's aids used occasionally for sleeping quarters. So far as they knew, its existence was unknown to outsiders.

But then, they didn't know about the cab driver either.

None was surprised when they found the apartment vacant. They had expected that. And the reason why Renny had sent only a brief message was easily explained.

There had been a fight, and a good one. But without question Renny had lost, scrapper though he was. On the floor were shattered fragments of the oversized wrist watch he had used to signal Doc, undoubtedly broken in the fight.

"Renny had time to send only three letters," Doc explained. The bronze man was far graver than usual. "Those letters were 'F-A-L-'"

"Falcan," breathed Ham.

"Of course," Monk roared scornfully.

"We will call on Mr. Falcan," Doc said softly.

All three understood they might be too late. Marcella Walling undoubtedly knew too much to be

allowed to live. And naturally Renny would have to be eliminated also.

Chapter XVIII. AN ALARM SOUNDS

FIELDING FALCAN'S bachelor quarters consisted of a penthouse on one of New York's towering apartment houses.

The doorman insisted that Falcan wasn't in. The clerk in the lobby gave the same report. Falcan, they said, had gone out with a friend—a male friend.

Doc thanked him politely and left the building. The bronze man did not seem to be exerting any effort, but he moved unusually fast. He went around to the side of the building.

A moment more and he was going up the wall like a human fly. Neither Monk nor Ham showed surprise. They had seen Doc do that before. Doc entered a window of the inclosed, flame-proof fire escape. Then he dropped a knotted rope. Monk went up it easily. Ham almost as fast.

Then the three were racing up the stairs toward the roof. There was a locked door at the top, but that delayed them only a few seconds.

Doc drew a small instrument from his equipment kit and worked it expertly. The lock yielded. Seconds later they were at the door to the penthouse.

None expected to find Falcan home. They had believed the doorman and the clerk. But Falcan's residence should contain some clue that would lead them to the whereabouts of the Purple Dragon. The door to the penthouse also was locked, but it offered no more difficulty than the previous lock had. Just inside, they found the dead man. A bullet had taken off most of his head.

Doc, however, examined the body closely. His physician's training indicated plainly the man had been dead only a short while, possibly not more than fifteen minutes.

The bronze man recognized the victim, but he said nothing. The last time Doc had seen the man he had been in Falcan's law office, had presented a note Falcan had left for Doc and Renny.

Monk and Ham made a quick tour of the apartment as Doc was inspecting the body. Their report was one that all had expected.

"Empty," they said tersely.

"Falcan's study is here on the right," Ham added.

Doc nodded. If clues were to be found, that was the most likely spot.

All three saw the note at almost the same moment. It had been tucked under the top of an old-fashioned desk. The note read:

I have been obliged to kill, and now I must pay the penalty. Whoever finds this will understand. Blackmail is a vicious thing. And blackmailers deserve to die. There is no use looking for me. My plans have been made for a long time. I intend to disappear, to vanish from this country.
Fielding Falcan.

"He's already run out," Monk said excitedly. "Do you suppose that means Renny—"

Monk didn't finish, but Ham understood what he meant. It did look as if Renny probably was already dead.

"I don't think Falcan has left the country," Doc said calmly. "He may be dead, however."

Ham and Monk looked their amazement, even though they had often seen Doc find things they had overlooked.

"B-but, Doc," Monk objected. "How—"

Doc pointed to the note he held. "Falcan wrote this note all right," he said, "but I believe he wrote it under duress. If you will look closely on the bottom of the paper you will see another message he left."

Monk and Ham leaned forward. So faint as to be almost indiscernible, was one word. That word had evidently been scratched with a fingernail. It was:

Kidnaped.

Doc found the sheet of paper with the names and figures on it. It looked like Greek to Monk, but the bronze man appeared almost satisfied, as if a theory had been borne out.

There were many names and many figures, such as "Fred Fisher in the First—60 grand. Chase up on J. Harding—120 g." At the bottom a total had been scrawled. The total was more than five million. Ham frowned slightly. There was something faintly familiar about one name on that list. Then he got it. It was "Fred Fisher in the First."

That editorial he had read had mentioned that very name, had said Pal Hatrack, the racket king, had been in the habit of giving his men horse-race tips like that and telling them to remember them always.

Ham thought he almost had it when a howl came from Monk. Monk was waving a receipt book.

"Got it! I think I got it!" the hairy chemist bellowed excitedly. "Look, Doc!"

Monk thumbed through stubs of the book rapidly. Each month there was a stub showing \$500 had been paid for rent of a warehouse. The address of the warehouse was out on Long Island.

"What would a lawyer be doing with a warehouse like that?" Monk demanded.

The lobby clerk looked up in amazement as the three came down from the penthouse in an elevator. His amazement changed to horror a moment later.

"You've got a dead man up in Falcan's place," Ham said calmly. "Better call the police."

The clerk was still stuttering, still trying to tell the doorman to stop them when they got into their car.

Doc stepped down on the accelerator. They hurtled in the direction of Long Island. It was just dark when they reached their destination.

The warehouse was in an isolated spot. It was surrounded by a high wire fence. A brief investigation was all that was needed to show that the fence was wired to sound an alarm. That information made Monk and Ham feel easier. They were on the right track.

That Doc felt so also was soon shown. He pulled two strange-appearing pistols from the car, gave one to Monk, one to Ham. The pistols had peculiar-looking magazines on the top. Designed by Doc, they fired at very high speed, but they fired a bullet that barely pierced the skin. They were effective, however, for each injected an anaesthetic that brought quick unconsciousness. Getting over the fence was easy. Doc drove the car alongside it softly. Then each got on top of the car and jumped over the top strand of wire.

A few moments later, they had drifted to the rear of the big, dismal-looking building.

Doc avoided windows and a door that loomed invitingly. Without question, the place was protected by alarms of all kinds.

He produced a small object. In appearance it was something like a bicycle pump, except that a small tube extended from the end, and on the side was a small container.

Doc worked the piston of the pump several times, very rapidly. Flames appeared from the tube at the other end. The flame did not extend far, but it was white hot.

The bronze man held the flame toward a blank space in the wall. The flame did its work.

Magically, it seemed, a hole was cut through iron sheeting and the wood beyond.

Doc entered first. He was gone for several minutes before he returned as silently as he had left and motioned Monk and Ham after him.

Cautiously, using no light, the three advanced, Doc in the lead, the others keeping contact by touch.

There was a dry, dusty smell inside the warehouse, and another smell also, one that seemed almost like that of sulphur.

After a few steps, Monk found Doc was leading them up a stairway.

They were almost at the top when the voice came.

"Stand still or I'll shoot!" it rapped.

Monk and Ham froze instantly. The mercy pistols in their hands came up ready for action.

Doc's voice came to them in a barely audible whisper. "It is all right," the bronze man said.

"The voice is a mechanical device. I did not take time to find how to disconnect it after I found that it does not sound an alarm."

It was just as well it was dark. Both the hairy chemist and Ham would have shown the confusion they felt otherwise.

But a moment later they could not hide their confusion.

A pencil flash appeared in Doc's hands, shot its beam straight ahead. It was all Monk and Ham could do to keep from shouting out in alarm.

Facing them were two vicious-looking dryopithecus!

DOC didn't say anything. He didn't have to. Time was all that was needed for his aids to figure it out for themselves.

The dryopithecus were no longer alive. In fact, they never had been. Now that Monk and Ham were no longer foggy of mind, they could see the animals had apparently been manufactured in the last ten years.

The reason they were no longer active was because no men were hidden inside them in the vacant spaces that had been left for such animation.

And then Monk and Ham noticed other things about the room they were in. There were several artificial trees; there were huge canvases stretched on framework. Forest scenes had been painted on the canvases.

Comprehension dawned, slowly and embarrassingly.

Monk didn't say anything at all. Ham didn't want to, but he spoke in spite of himself.

"Now I remember," he mumbled. "There was a show on Broadway several years ago that used such scenery, and also used fake animals like that."

Doc cut off the flashlight, led the way ahead slowly.

Part of what had happened wasn't hard for Monk and Ham to figure out now. They had finally recognized where they were.

The big warehouse was one that bought discarded stage scenery and equipment. And they had been made the victims of such equipment.

While neither would admit it, a big load went off the mind of each. They had been sane all the time.

They knew that, without doubt, they had been drugged. That was why things had seemed so hazy to them. And that was why they had been fooled so completely.

"But there's something wrong yet," Monk whispered softly. "Dope couldn't make me imagine all them things alone. That there Purple Dragon--"

He shut up. Ham didn't answer. But he was thinking the same thing.

A short time later they reached another room that Doc illuminated briefly. It meant nothing to

Monk or Ham. It would have meant a lot to Hiram Shalleck. He would have recognized it as the scene of his last big celebration. With stage scenery, chairs and bottles, it resembled a prohibition speakeasy.

Doc slowed suddenly. Monk and Ham halted. There was no noise, but both Monk and Ham realized without knowing how they knew that they were no longer alone.

Doc moved away from them. He moved as silently as a shadow. From somewhere up ahead came a startled squawk.

The bronze man's aids understood then what had happened. Doc had encountered a guard.

They weren't prepared, however, for what came next.

Doc had surprised the guard all right, had rendered him unconscious with a single quick blow. But the guard had been standing directly before a signal button. As he collapsed he hit that button. Brilliant lights flared on. Somewhere in the distance an alarm sounded deafeningly.

Chapter XIX. THREE AGAINST A MOB

THE alarm was shut off almost at once. But, in the silence that followed, the sound of running feet could be heard. Men, many men, were rushing toward the source of the alarm.

Doc Savage acted quickly.

For the moment those summoned by the alarm might think that it had been sounded accidentally.

They would know differently if they found the unconscious body of the guard.

The bronze man traded places with the guard.

It wasn't quite as simple as that, but it almost seemed so. Monk and Ham never had seen Doc work so fast.

He shifted clothes, he applied make-up swiftly. There wasn't time to do a thorough job. He didn't even try to do so. His face appeared to change expression even without make-up, so adept was he at the art of acting. The guard's cap covered his bronzed hair.

Monk and Ham knew their part without asking. They grabbed the still-limp figure of the guard, sought a hiding place.

That wasn't so easy to find. Escape from the room they were in already was cut off. All they could do was dart behind some loosely piled scenery.

The first of the attackers appeared. Others materialized almost instantly. There must have been a score of them. All were armed, all had their weapons ready.

Doc had made his eyes dull and sheepish, his face appeared crestfallen.

"It w-was a dumb-bunny stunt," he stammered. "I . . . I musta dozed off and fell against the alarm button."

Most of the armed men looked relieved, put their weapons back in shoulder holsters. Only the man who had been in the lead looked suspicious. He was a small man, nattily dressed.

"Got a cold or somethin', Duncan?" Dude Starg rasped. "Or have you been drinkin' on the job again?"

"Duncan" looked down sheepishly. "J-just one or two, perhaps," he confessed weakly.

Dude snorted angrily. "If this job wasn't almost over I'd blast you for that," he snarled.

Monk and Ham, behind the scenery, sighed with relief. Doc had put it over again. Not only their lives, but the lives of Renny and Marcella had hung in the balance. But now—

The hairy chemist groaned swiftly.

Dude Starg's expression had changed suddenly. An incredulous, almost fearful look crossed his features. He was staring down, was staring at the shoes on "Duncan's" feet.

Doc was the first to realize the significance of that. There had not been time to trade shoes with the real Duncan. The bronze man was still wearing shoes he had taken from the unconscious Red back in Juarez.

Dude Starg had recognized those shoes, had realized he was facing Doc Savage.

The nattily dressed killer uttered a scream of almost insane terror. He went for his gun. His hand moved like a streak of light.

Doc Savage moved even more swiftly. The gun was knocked from Dude's hand even as it cleared the holster.

Others of the gunmen stood dumfounded, unable to understand what was happening.

Monk had moved even as Doc Savage had done. The hairy chemist stepped from behind the scenery, raised the mercy pistol he held in his hand.

Br-r-r-r-r-r!

The mercy pistol's roar sounded like an oversized bull fiddle. The bullets struck the lights overhead. The lights shattered.

But Monk had forgotten that the entire building was brilliantly illuminated. Light poured in from adjoining rooms.

Doc had not forgotten. In the same instant that Monk fired, the bronze man's second hand swept upward. A powdery red haze poured from that hand, floated on the still air. But only for a moment. Then a match flared. The red haze was transformed into a thick, choking screen of black smoke. MONK and Ham dived forward to reach Doc's side. They collided with some of the terror-stricken gunmen.

The fight was one that the hairy chemist really enjoyed. It was the first time he had been able

to tackle overwhelming odds with a chance for victory. He had that chance this time because his opponents not only couldn't see him, they didn't know he was there until he smashed into them. Monk didn't try to use science. And it was impossible to pick his targets. He simply lashed out in all directions, his hammerlike fists working like a riveting machine.

Then strong arms seized the chemist from behind. Monk grunted in surprise. He tensed his own huge muscles and heaved desperately. His opponent was yanked from his feet, but his grip about Monk didn't break. They both went to the floor, and Monk managed to get one arm free. He pounded desperately. With equal force blows smashed into his own face. His already homely countenance was again changed—and not for the better.

All other sounds of conflict had died out. Evidently he was left alone with the only man brave enough to stand up against him.

The fight never did reach a real conclusion. The thick smoke in the room vanished as quickly as it had appeared.

Monk found he was staring into Ham's tense features. Ham had his arm back for another blow into Monk's face.

"Daggonit, you sap!" Monk moaned.

"You dumb ape!" Ham retorted.

They might have resumed the battle if Doc hadn't stopped them. The bronze man had vanished from the room as soon as the smoke had hidden him from view. He reappeared just as silently. "This way," he called softly.

Monk lumbered up as Ham bounced to his feet. They started toward Doc.

Blam! Blam!

A pistol spoke sharply, and from close range. Monk grunted. The slugs had caught him in the belly. Only the bulletproof underwear he wore had saved him. In the same instant all lights in the building went out. A ghostly voice reverberated hollowly:

"Doc Savage! You and your men cannot escape. Surrender now, and escape the Purple Dragon. Fight, and you will be sent back into the world gibbering idiots."

Ham shivered slightly. Monk's palms went moist with cold perspiration. The Purple Dragon had treated them leniently before, but this time—

Doc broke the spell. He caught his aids by the arm, pulled them.

And then they saw the ghosts. Or at least that is what they seemed to be. Phosphorescent figures of skeletons reared up in the gloom. The figures were spaced wide apart, almost seemed to form a lane. Each of those figures held a gun.

It was Ham who shot this time. He grabbed his mercy pistol, blazed away at the nearest of the "ghosts." The mercy bullets had no effect on the "ghosts." They did draw a rain of lead from the darkness beside that figure.

Doc had yanked Ham forward as soon as the dapper lawyer had fired. That was all that saved Ham, for some of the shots fired at him would have caught him in the head.

The bronze man paused for a moment. He passed dark-colored glasses to his aids. Then he turned on a peculiar flashlight.

None of those seeking him saw the light from that flash. It was another of Doc's adaptations of ultra-ray light, invisible except through special glass.

Then the three ran forward swiftly. They could see what the "ghosts" were now, knew that they were nothing but cloth with skeletons drawn on them. But beside each "ghost" crouched a gunman, ready to shoot at any flash of light.

Doc's course led toward the front of the building. They had almost reached there when the ghostly voice spoke again.

This time that voice was perfectly calm and assured. It was a familiar voice.

"Use of ultraviolet rays has long been a pastime of mine, also, Mr. Savage," the voice said. "I congratulate you. But now the time for play is past. I see that I must convince you I mean business. I will. Step into the office directly at your right. Look in the television set you see there."

"Fielding Falcan!" Monk roared. He glared around defiantly. He could not see where Falcan was hidden, although he knew he must be near. Monk wanted to go on, to fight it out.

Doc stopped him. The bronze man was a judge of voices. And this time he knew there was no bluffing. He turned into the office at his right.

A television set was there, all right. It was turned on.

At first nothing was to be seen except a bare room. Then a stage came into view—a strange-looking stage.

"The room of the Purple Dragon!" Ham gasped.

The scene shifted again. It shifted to Renny and Marcella.

The two were seated directly before the stage of the Purple Dragon. They were not tied, but they seemed unable to move.

Falcan's voice came from the loudspeaker of the television set.

"Nothing can save them—except you, Doc Savage. Surrender, permit yourself to be made a prisoner for a few hours, and I shall spare these two. Refuse, and before you can reach them the Purple Dragon will tear into their minds. You will find they will never be sane again."

For a moment Doc and his aids were silent. The same sure conviction was in the minds of all three. Surrender would not save Renny and Marcella. Neither would further fighting. They were really faced by a problem that had no answer. But all three knew what their answer had to be. Doc put it into words.

"Tell us what you want us to do," he said calmly.

MONK and Ham could have been forgiven some show of emotion then. They knew something of what they were facing. And they knew Falcan was making no idle boast about the power of the Purple Dragon. But now that the crisis had come, each appeared just as calm as Doc.

Falcan's voice gave instructions. Those instructions were obeyed. Without hesitation the three threw away their weapons. They left the small room they were in, walked down a hallway, then descended a flight of stairs.

Standing far across from them was the distinguished, gray-haired figure of Fielding Falcan. Beside him stood Dude Starg. The little killer was grinning cruelly.

"Walk forward slowly. When you come to the big door on your left, open it and enter," Falcan ordered sharply. "Try no tricks, or those inside the room will be slain instantly. And do not try to escape once you are in there. That is impossible"

Without change of expression, the three walked forward. They knew that all they could do was to share the fate of those within, but they did not hesitate.

The gray-haired man grinned sharply as the heavy door closed behind the trio. Instantly he leaped forward, threw a steel bar in place. The door would have withstood the charge of a battering-ram.

"Got them," the gray-haired man exulted. "Dude, round up those hoodlums of yours, get them in that steel room in the basement—then lock them in."

Dude looked at him with narrowed eyes. The gray-haired man nodded. "Right. They are out now. Just two people share in what we've got. You and me."

Dude grinned again, a thin, murderous grin. He raced away.

Inside the room of the Purple Dragon, Monk and Ham had stopped in amazement. Three people were there, not two. Renny and Marcella they had expected. They had not thought to see the third. Only Doc showed no surprise as he looked into the fear-stricken features of the real Fielding Falcan. Falcan also seemed paralyzed.

But he could talk. "Y-you were our last hope," he sobbed. "N-now that hope is gone."

"Daggonit," Monk half shouted. "I'm all mixed up. If you're Falcan, then who is that man outside?"

"G-Grover Tiler!" Falcan stuttered.

"The real master mind behind the Purple Dragon," Doc added quietly. "As you should have realized from what we encountered tonight, he is a man who has mastered magic and, in fact, tried about everything, to further his evil plans."

Chapter XX. THE DRAGON BREATHES

EERIE, wild laughter floated through the room of the Purple Dragon.

"Yes, I am the real master mind," said Grover Tiler. He no longer imitated Falcan's cultured tones. "Falcan thought he was the brains. He even plotted to kill me, to deprive me of my share in millions. But I fooled him, and now he is going insane or going to die—as you are all going insane or to your deaths." The voice rose to a hysterical pitch. "And I . . . I'm going to have all the millions!"

Renny turned agonized eyes toward Doc. "I'm sorry I got you into this," he said simply.

The bronze man did not reply. Instead, he took a certain powder from his equipment vest, put some of the powder on the tongues of Renny, Marcella and Falcan.

"Swallow that, and the anaesthetic that holds you paralyzed will be neutralized, you will be free to move," he said calmly.

Grover Tiler's wild laughter came again. "And much good it will do you," he shrilled. "Watch. The Purple Dragon is soon to appear."

Lights in the room dimmed suddenly, were replaced with a soft, purple glow.

Marcella Walling began to sob softly. "A-and I played a part in all this," she cried.

Monk looked at her scornfully, but Doc said, "I think I understand your role, and why you played it."

The purple light was growing stronger. Fielding Falcan's nerves gave way. "I know what is going to happen. I know! I know! Kill us, Doc Savage! Do not let us suffer!"

Doc ignored him. When he spoke it was to his aids.

"The plot originally began, I believe, when Falcan, who had been Pal Hatrack's attorney, knew that Hatrack was dead and decided to collect the millions the racketeer had left behind. Is not that correct, Falcan?"

The gray-haired lawyer nodded dumbly.

"But there was a catch to it," the bronze man went on. "Hatrack had hidden his money in many safe-deposit vaults in many different banks. Falcan knew this, because Hatrack trusted him enough to leave the safe-deposit keys with him. Hatrack was safe enough in this, because Falcan did not know what name Hatrack had used in renting each safe-deposit box."

"And there were millions waiting there. Millions!" Falcan moaned. "All there, waiting for me to

get them."

"Falcan was smart," Doc continued calmly. "He also had heard that Hatrack had told different members of his mob to remember what they thought were tips on the races, such as 'Fred Fisher in the First.' What that actually meant was that Hatrack had taken a safe-deposit box in the First National Bank under the name of Fred Fisher."

"But I had to find out those names," Falcan said. The gray-haired criminal lawyer spoke as if in a daze. "I had to find the right men, those who had been told the things to remember. And after that I had to make them talk. That's--"

Falcan broke off. All in that room, except Doc, jumped. For heavy curtains were pulling back from the stage at one end of the room. And through the opening left in those curtains flames were shooting, hot, blistering flame.

"That's where I came in," came Grover Tiler's shrill, mocking voice.

The flame darted out farther and farther.

Monk felt his senses reeling, felt as he had felt once before. A queer, peculiar odor was in the room.

The flames darted out, then receded, moved close, then backed up.

Ham was dizzy also, but he felt he understood what Tiler was doing. Tiler intended either to kill or to drive his victims insane, but he had a criminal's egotism, he wanted all his victims to know just how smart he was before their end came.

Doc evidently had the same idea. But the bronze man had ideas of his own, also. It had been apparent to Doc, from the first description of the Purple Dragon, that either hypnotism or drugs were used to create the proper illusions in the minds of his victims.

And the bronze man had been prepared. He handed a small capsule to each of his five companions.

"Take this," he said crisply. "Then turn around. Do not face the fire."

Grover Tiler's weird laughter came as an echo.

"Go on, Doc," Ham urged. The dapper lawyer was staring peculiarly at Marcella Walling. He was remembering the bronze man's words to her.

"Falcan contacted Tiler, I imagine," Doc said. Falcan nodded.

"And Tiler is one of the greatest builders of magical equipment in the world."

"He originally intended the Dragon for vaudeville," Falcan said numbly. "Then vaudeville went out."

Doc nodded. "An alliance was made. Falcan, with the help of Dude Starg, started to round up former members of Hatrack's gang. They found some of them had lost all memory of their former lives. The Dragon became doubly valuable.

"These men were brought here--Hiram Shalleck was one of them. Under the terrible influence of the Dragon, their minds were short-circuited, they forgot their recent lives, became again as they had been in the past."

"I can tell you what came next." Marcella Walling's voice was bitter, but a certain grim courage seemed to sustain her.

"I was hired for the next act. Falcan needed stage settings, he had to put his victims back in familiar scenes, make them think it was 1929 or '28. They really forgot the present and were living in the past. Then he would give them drink, and after a while they would tell him what he wanted to know. He would go to the right bank, and since he could forge Hatrack's writing, he would sign the correct name and collect the money.

"This warehouse, all this stage equipment helped him. But he needed actors and actresses, also. I was broke. He hired me on pretense of giving me a film test, told me I was to act out a scene. I did. In that scene I was supposed to shoot a man who annoyed me. The gun had real bullets."

Ham gasped. Lots of things were clear, things the girl didn't have to explain. Falcan had held the killing over the girl as a club. She didn't see any hope of escape. He had forced her to trap Monk and Ham. He had forced her to play a part in the murder frame-up.

"The Purple Dragon snapped memories of its victims back to the date Falcan wished," Doc summarized swiftly. "The stage settings did the rest. Those who showed signs of recalling what had happened to them were slain and their bones bleached. Others confessed to ancient crimes. We became involved because of Shalleck, so we also became enemies."

Ham nodded. The dapper lawyer could figure out most of the rest of it for himself. Falcan, as lawyer for Hatrack, knew plenty of gangsters. He had used them to aid him, with Dude Starg as their leader.

Ham wondered why he hadn't thought of Tiler before as still being living. Since Doc and Renny had escaped the terrific explosion, there was no reason to suppose the resourceful Tiler hadn't arranged an escape for himself. Then he recalled Doc saying Tiler apparently had committed suicide.

Doc seemed to sense Ham's thought. "It was because I saw Tiler breathe, knew he was not dead, that I knew Renny and I were in danger," he explained. "And I saw two wires in one of Tiler's hands. It seemed safe to assume an explosion of some kind was planned."

"And I did it cleverly," came Tiler's mocking voice. "I even made Falcan think I was dead. I waited until he had collected all those millions for me. Then I went for him. I had to kill the fool clerk he had with him. But I was safe. No one knows I live. No one will ever know. I--"

Those in the room of the Purple Dragon had forgotten for a moment the terrible peril they faced. Tiler's voice brought that peril back.

Marcella Walling's face became white, she seemed to sway. Involuntarily, Ham took a step toward her. Monk's big fists clenched.

Renny got out of his chair, came to stand by Doc. He was ready to die, but he wanted to die beside the bronze man who was his idol.

Only Falcan broke down. The gray-haired lawyer went completely to pieces. His hysterical cries filled the room, drowned out even the roar of flames that ever grew louder.

Those cries seemed to act as a spur to Grover Tiler. "Here it is, damn you!" he shouted.

The curtains rolled back with a sudden swing. The crimson of hot flames mixed with the dull light of the room.

And then they all saw the Purple Dragon!

EVEN knowing it was an illusion, the Purple Dragon still was fearsome.

Ten feet high, with large staring eyes and slimy body, the "Dragon" was shooting multicolored fire from its open mouth.

Those eyes were weird and strange. They sparkled with a hideous flame.

Ham felt his gaze riveted on those strange eyes, felt his senses reel, felt as if trip hammers were working in his brain, were tearing that brain apart.

Doc Savage did something unusual for him. He shouted.

"Do not look! Fall on the floor!"

It is doubtful if anyone but Doc Savage would have been obeyed. The secret of those eyes never was discovered, although it undoubtedly was a hypnotic light of some kind. Those in the chamber of the Purple Dragon fell to the floor.

The spell was broken.

Grover Tiler, standing safe behind the Dragon, operating the controls, gave a wild, awful yell.

He reached for a lever. Doc Savage shouted again—he shouted a warning to Grover Tiler.

The magician, now stripped of his disguise as Falcan, standing straight and erect, dressed entirely in black, did not heed. He pulled the lever all the way back.

A sheet of flame roared, a tremendous, blasting sheet that turned all it touched to cinders.

Tiler had expected that flame to fill the chamber of the Purple Dragon. It did not. It roared backward.

In an instant Tiler was turned into a burned, charred skeleton.

Outside the big door that led to the chamber of the Purple Dragon, Dude Starg heard a terrible scream. He had heard screams like that before. For an instant there was silence, then a voice came, a voice that sounded like that of Grover Tiler.

"You may open the door now, Dude," the voice said.

Dude threw open the door. He never did know Doc had tricked him with ventriloquism. Fielding Falcan rushed out.

Falcan and Dude saw each other in the same instant. Falcan knew Dude had double-crossed him. Dude knew that Falcan knew.

Both went for their guns. Both guns blazed at the same moment.

Doc Savage had leaped forward, trying to halt what he saw was coming, even as he had tried to save Grover Tiler. He was too late. Both Falcan and Dude were dead.

LATER, much later, Monk, Ham and Renny figured out what must have happened. Doc had disappeared for a time during the fight in the warehouse. Undoubtedly he had found the lair of the Dragon. Doc rarely left anything to chance. If he and his men were caught, he knew they might have to face that Dragon. He had reversed the control wires that governed the sheet of flame.

Grover Tiler had died as a result of his own monster, as many of Doc's enemies had died before.

Falcan and Dude had died because of the very motive that had impelled them to crime in the first place. Greed!

A suitcase with nearly five million dollars in large bills was found in a safe in the warehouse office. Collected by Falcan, Tiler had intended to flee with that after wiping out all who even knew of the fortune or knew he was alive. A time bomb was found near the cellar door where the gunmen were imprisoned. They were to have died. Probably Tiler intended to kill Dude Starg also.

The gunmen in the basement went to Doc's upstate hospital. In some cases they later took jobs that had been vacated by the Dragon's victims. But that was much later.

Monk, for a time, was afraid there was almost too much romantic interest between Marcella Walling and Ham. Monk admitted Marcella was really a beautiful girl, but he didn't want Ham to marry.

Then Marcella's affections had seemed to cool. She remained Ham's good friend, but that was all.

Ham never knew what happened.

Doc did discover, but the bronze man never told. But for one of the few times in his life he smiled. In one way it was Ham's own fault. In another it was Monk's. If Ham ever had learned, Monk would probably have been made hard to catch.

Marcella asked Ham for his picture "so I can always visualize you as you really are, even when you are away from me."

Ham asked Monk to deliver the picture. Monk delivered one all right, it even had an inscription

on it, but it wasn't the one Ham sent.

Marcella never did understand why Ham would want to shatter her ideals, particularly when he knew she liked well-dressed men.

The picture she received was a very much enlarged one. It showed Ham, covered with hair, hanging by his tail from a tree. The inscription on it read:

Clothes can hide many imperfections. I want you to know me as I really am.

Ham.

THE END