



# TERROR TAKES 7

## A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

This page copyright © 2004 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- ? [Chapter I](#)
- ? [Chapter II](#)
- ? [Chapter III](#)
- ? [Chapter IV](#)
- ? [Chapter V](#)
- ? [Chapter VI](#)
- ? [Chapter VII](#)
- ? [Chapter VIII](#)
- ? [Chapter IX](#)
- ? [Chapter X](#)
- ? [Chapter XI](#)
- ? [Chapter XII](#)

*Scanned and Proofed  
by Tom Stephens*

### Chapter I

THE man from the American Express arrived about three o'clock bearing a skinny package about six feet long and wrapped in tough pigskin-colored paper. Monk Mayfair, the chemist, accepted the shipment, after inquiring cautiously whether or not it was collect. He carried it into the library of Doc Savage's eighty-sixth floor headquarters in a midtown New York building and showed it to his friend Ham Brooks, the lawyer.

"Look," said Monk, "what somebody sent us."

"What are you trying to pull now?" asked Ham Brooks, who felt that it was well to regard with suspicion almost anything Monk did.

"Don't be so suspicious. Somebody sent us this thing."

"What is it?"

"I don't know."

"Why not look and find out."

"It's addressed to Doc."

"Well, stop bothering me about it," said Ham, who thought Monk was probably playing a practical joke on him. He added, "Take it in and give it to Doc."

Monk was dubious. "Doc still working? I mean on that limit of compressibility for the air research job?"

“What if he is?”

“Yeah, you want me to get chased out of there, don't you?” Monk said.

Ham grinned. “I think he's going to run us both off anyway if his temper keeps getting worse. What have you got to lose?”

“I'll take a chance,” Monk decided.

He went into the laboratory carrying the package, explaining, “This thing came by express, Doc.”

The laboratory, which occupied most of the eighty-sixth floor of the building, had been temporarily crammed with air-compressors, wind tunnels and compression chambers. The current research job, which Doc Savage was doing for an aircraft manufacturer, concerned the behavior of air when it went past the so-called compressibility limit. The research covered a field of hitherto unknown phenomena, for it had only lately been discovered that when an airplane starts traveling faster than sound, mysterious and unorthodox things happen to it.

Doc Savage was aggravated about the whole thing. It had been dumped in his lap after everyone else was stumped, handed to him along with a lovely speech how he was probably the world's greatest research scientist, that since his abilities covered a number of fields in addition of aërodynamics, he was the man most apt to strike a solution. This he didn't mind; it had been a lovely speech.

What he did mind was a story he'd heard, going the rounds of aviation engineering circles, to the effect that Doc Savage had the thing in the bag. He didn't have it in the bag; it had him in the bag. He wasn't sure who had started the story, but he suspected the plane manufacturer was using his reputation to scare a competitor. He didn't like that. This was supposed to be for the Army; he wasn't getting a commercial fee.

His mood was acid. When Monk unwrapped the package and Doc saw what was inside, he said several things, using plain words, about not being bothered again.

Monk retreated in red-eared haste, carrying the thing that had been in the package.

“I was spoken unkindly to,” he reported to Ham.

Ham chuckled. “I heard.”

“I guess he thought somebody was ribbing him when he saw what was in the package.”

“What was it?”

“I'd call it part of a Daniel Boone outfit,” Monk decided. “A flintlock rifle and a pair of buckskin leggings. Here, take a look.”

The rifle was dilapidated and useless-looking under a coating of rust. It was over six feet long. The buckskin leggings were in somewhat the same condition.

“Why would anybody send us that stuff?” Ham wished to know.

The name of the sender was on the pigskin-colored paper wrapper:

P. ARGUS

NEW YORK CITY

Monk said, "Let's get his name out of the telephone directory, call him up and ask what's the big idea."

They spent some time with the telephone directory.

"I'll be damned," Monk said.

"There's no P. Argus listed," Ham agreed.

They were looking at each other, puzzled, when the telephone rang.

"Answer it," Ham said.

"ANSWER it yourself. It's probably that blonde babe you fed that line about being a millionaire. That girl will get your shirt if you don't watch out."

"Yes?" Ham said into the telephone.

A well-put-together female voice said, "I wish to speak to Doc Savage."

"I'm afraid that Doc—"

"It's important, please."

Something in the young woman's voice jarred Ham. A quality of urgency that was not normal. "Just a moment," he said, and threw the switch which connected the laboratory instrument. "Call for you, Doc!" he yelled.

Monk eyed Ham suspiciously. "Man or woman?"

"Man," Ham said, merely for the satisfaction of telling Monk a lie.

In the laboratory, Doc Savage listened to the very good voice of the young woman. Young? That was a guess, but he thought it was probably correct. She said her name was Paula Argus.

For a moment, Doc didn't remember the package that had just come. Then he asked, "P. Argus?"

"Yes, I—but I don't think you know me." She sounded puzzled.

"The name was on a deerslayer's outfit that came by express a while ago," he said.

"Oh! You got the rifle and leggings?"

"Yes. Did you send them?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"I want to talk to you about them," P. Argus said. "I want you to come downstairs, walk north on Fifth Avenue, and enter the small bar on the right side of the street just off Fifth. I'll be waiting in the first booth on the south side. I have on a brown coat, a mink."

Doc remembered he was trying to find out why air went crazy when airplanes went through it faster than sound traveled, added the thought that the young lady was probably a crank, and concluded he wanted

no part of it. He said, "That is a very explicit set of directions, but it happens that I am infernally busy just now. I'm sorry." Then, because the girl might be in genuine trouble, he added, "Why not come here if you want to talk?"

"I'm afraid," she said.

He frowned at the telephone, wishing he could tell something about a woman's voice. He didn't think she sounded frightened; on the other hand death might be at her throat and he would have the same opinion. Every man in the world, he frequently thought, knew more about women than he did. Not, he suspected, that any of them knew very much.

"You don't sound scared," he said.

"What do you expect me to do, scream and faint?" she demanded.

He suspected, now, that she might be frightened. At least she was angry; if she were some silly fan after an autograph, or wanting to tell her girl friends she'd had a date with Doc Savage, she wouldn't flash anger probably.

He said, "I'm sorry, but this experiment of mine is in a critical stage. I can not come." The experiment had passed through series of critical stages, none of them productive, he thought. He added, "However, I will send one of my friends to talk to you."

He was surprised when this satisfied her. She asked, "You mean one of the five men who are associated with you? Mr. Renwick, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Littlejohn, or Mr. Brooks?"

She knew who he was, he thought, knew his friends by name.

"You left one out—Mr. Mayfair," he said. "I'll send him."

"The wolf, eh?" she said. "Well, all right. I'll wait."

ENTERING the library, concealing his impulse to laugh at Monk, Doc Savage said, "Monk, that was P. Argus, who sent the rifle and leggings. You are to walk north on Fifth Avenue, enter a small bar on the right side of the street just off Fifth, go to the first booth on the south side and meet P. Argus, who will be wearing a brown coat."

"Me?" Monk was disgusted. "Listen, I've got some work to do. Ham is loafing. Why can't Ham talk to this crank."

Ham snorted. "You haven't got any work. You noticed it is raining." Then Ham remembered that P. Argus had been a female, and a pleasant-sounding one, and he pretended to make a great concession. "However, you manage to shove off all the dirty work on me, so I suppose I'll have to go see the crank."

Monk eyed him suspiciously.

"Yeah? I think I'll go," he said. "You sound too eager."

Monk got his hat and raincoat and departed.

Doc told Ham, "You're losing your technique with Monk."

"I should have kept my mouth shut and let him bulldoze me into going. The minute he saw I didn't mind

going, he smelled a mouse.”

Doc nodded. “The mouse sounded very nice over the telephone, too.”

“You’re a big help,” Ham said bitterly.

Outdoors it was raining fat oyster-colored drops, and Monk Mayfair turned up his raincoat collar and wished he’d let Ham do this.

Monk was not a tall man, but he was very wide, and his hair was bristling, resembling rusty wires. His face was homely to such a degree that its homeliness was an asset; any and all expressions on such a face were amusing.

There was one hitch in the directions to finding P. Argus, he discovered; they didn’t say how many blocks he was to go north on Fifth before he found such a bar. It proved to be some distance.

The place was small, done in chrome and shades of sky blue and royal blue, and with the customary inadequate lighting. Monk shook the rain off his coat and looked around.

A wild goose chase, he thought, discovering a girl in the first booth. He took a closer look and added the thought that it was just too darned bad she wasn’t P. Argus. Wow, wouldn’t that be something!

She was a long young woman; no, on second thought she wasn’t tall, but she was built so that she seemed so. A pocket edition, seal-brown hair, blue eyes, a diamond ring of eye popping size, but not an engagement ring, and a brown mink coat . . . Brown mink . . . Brown! Glorious angels!

“Are you waiting for someone?” Monk asked her.

“For you, Mr. Mayfair,” she said. “I’m Paula Argus, and I sent Mr. Savage that devil-spear thing. Won’t you sit down?”

Monk said, “Will I sit down! Would I like to look at a million dollars!” He slid in on the other side of the booth. “This is a surprise, and I’m not easily surprised.”

She looked at him intently.

“Not readily surprised? That’s good. Because I want to talk to you about a murder.”

Monk batted his eyes a couple of times. “What was that?”

“I didn’t intend it to sound as if I was shooting off firecrackers.” She stood up. “Will you come with me? I’ll talk while we’re driving.”

## Chapter II

THEY rode north through the oyster-colored rain in a cream convertible roadster that must have been listed at about four thousand six hundred dollars F.O.B. Detroit before the war. Monk Mayfair was thinking about Ham Brooks, Ham Brooks the dirty liar who had told him that P. Argus was a man. A great pal, that Ham Brooks.

P. Argus drove. She said, “I have an uncle, Carlton Argus. I have noticed him being scared for two or three days. This morning, I heard a noise in the orchid culture room and went in to investigate—”

“Pardon me, where was the noise?” Monk asked.

“Uncle Carlton raises orchids as an avocation. I heard a noise, and found that Uncle Carlton had fainted.”

Monk liked her handling of a private orchid culture room as if it were nothing special.

She added, “He fainted when he saw that old flintlock rifle and buckskin leggings, which had just come by express.”

Monk jumped. “The same rifle and leggings?”

“Yes.”

“Why'd they shock him into passing out?”

“I don't know.”

“Who sent the stuff?”

“There was no return address on the wrapper. I looked.”

Monk rubbed his jaw. “Sort of got a mystery on your hands, haven't you?”

“I don't think I've impressed you with Uncle Carlton's condition, his complete, abject error. It's a frightening thing to see. There is something strange about it, because he doesn't want to talk to anyone. It took a great deal of persuasion to get him to consent to talk to Mr. Savage.”

She turned the car left into the more expensive section of Park Avenue.

“Mind telling me how you thought of calling on us?” Monk asked.

“You know Patricia Savage?”

“Doc's cousin? Sure. Do I know Pat? Every once in a while she takes a notion to help us out on a case, and gives us fits. She likes excitement a little too much.”

“Patricia is an acquaintance of mine, and I've heard her talk about Doc Savage. That's why I happened to think of asking him to look into this thing. It sounds like the sort of thing Pat says always interests him.”

“You live at your Uncle's home?” Monk asked.

P. Argus nodded. “My mother and my father—my father was Uncle Carlton's brother—are no longer living. For many years Uncle Carlton lived with our family, and then he made a lucky investment with some money he borrowed from father during the war and cleaned up. He insists that I live with him, that whatever he has is mine.” She looked sidewise at Monk, added, “Which is rather fortunate for me. I haven't any money.”

Okay, so you're not wealthy, Monk thought. So what? So it's a minor matter, like a pine tree not having pine cones. You're very ornamental without it.

“We'll do what we can,” Monk assured her.

She smiled. The world stood still, covered by sunshine, as far as Monk was concerned.

“I wish Doc Savage could have had time to help personally,” she said. “Not that I don't appreciate your

efforts, Mr. Mayfair.”

Monk said, “When I telephoned him about it, Doc was awfully sorry but he couldn't possibly get away.”

This was an inspired lie. The telephone call which Monk had pretended to make had been another. What was he, a dope? Call Doc and have the handsome Doc and the syrup-tongued Ham Brooks around for competition? Ho, ho!

“I'm sure I can take care of everything,” Monk said, pleased with his chicanery.

THE copper was named Clancy. Clancy Weinberg, and he happened to know Monk personally, and also happened not to like Monk; the other circumstance, how Clancy happened to be standing in front of the Argus apartment house, remained temporarily a mystery. Temporarily was to be about fifteen minutes, which was too fatally long.

“Well, well, the answer to the chorus girls' nightmares,” said Clancy unpleasantly, scowling at Monk.

“Hello, flatfoot,” Monk said, also with no pleasure.

“Get outa that car, Romeo.” Clancy put his hand under his coat tail, where New York policemen keep their guns. “Start something if you wanta,” he added invitingly.

Monk was amazed.

“What's got into you?”

Clancy wasn't fooling. “Come on, come on, get outa that heap! Too bad I gotta pick you up for something as petty as car stealing. But it's your speed, I guess.”

“Car stealing?”

“Alight and relax in these handcuffs, brother,” Clancy said. “I got a telephone tip you were stealing this car and would turn up here.”

Monk's amazement climbed. “Who telephoned you that lie?”

“Search me.”

“Ridiculous!” P. Argus exclaimed, entering the argument. “This is fantastic.”

Clancy took out his handcuffs and shook them and said, “It's a damned great pleasure, though.”

P. Argus said, “But this is my car!”

Clancy eyed her suspiciously, and with approval. “You're a lovely babe,” he said. “But it'll take more than your good looks to prove it's your car.”

“Would my license and certificate help?” P. Argus asked angrily. “And the apartment house doorman's word?”

Clancy looked at her documents; he listened to the apartment house doorman. He wasn't pleased. He was puzzled. He was angry. He grasped Monk's necktie and said, “If I find out you caused that phony telephone call, I'll feed you your own teeth!”

“Leggo my tie!” Monk said.

Presently Clancy departed, putting his feet down hard on the sidewalk.

Monk placed a hand on his forehead and found perspiration thereon. He said, “Whew-w-w-w-w!” feelingly.

P. Argus eyed him dubiously.

“Just what,” she asked, “was that.”

Monk used a handkerchief to blot his forehead. “It was a cop giving a citizen a bad scare.” He gave the distant Clancy a somewhat frightened look. “That guy’s after my peace of mind. We—uh—we had a little trouble, couple of days ago. A kind of a fuss in a night club, mostly words, although Clancy took a swing at me and missed. A nosey newspaper columnist saw it and next day his piece carried a wisecracking squib about it. Doc Savage gave me a lecture, and Clancy nearly got suspended—would have, too, except I told his superiors I started it. Which was a lie, incidentally; I only did half the starting. His girl friend did the other half by sitting on my lap.”

“Serves you right,” said P. Argus, “for fighting over a girl.”

“That was about what Doc said, too,” Monk admitted.

“However,” said P. Argus, “I don’t think he was just riding you. I think, from the way he sounded, that he had really received a telephone call.”

Monk pondered this. The same idea had occurred to him, together with another one that Ham Brooks had pulled a practical joke. He suspected Ham.

“The rat!” Monk said feelingly.

“He seemed like a nice young policeman,” said P. Argus.

“I didn’t mean the cop.” Monk was wondering how Ham had found out about his trouble with Clancy. Probably the same way Doc had found it out: the paragraph the columnist had printed. Convinced Ham had caused him the embarrassment, Monk said, “I’ll look into the thing later. Right now, let’s talk to your uncle.”

THE apartment would have been the latest thing in ultra-modern living back in the late twenties, when there were stock-market-millionaires and a penthouse on Park Avenue was the ultimate. It was rather impressive now. The furnishings weren’t modernistic, Monk noted with pleasure. He had gone in for the very gaudiest form of ultramodernism when he fixed up his own place downtown, and he was getting almost as tired of its flash as he was of the mortgages he had on the place.

A tuxedoed old gentleman with a Scotch whiskey and sea wind complexion stood stiffbacked in front of them and said, “Your hat, sir.”

“A butler, eh?” Monk said admiringly. “I thought they survived only in the history books and the movies.”

“One of Uncle Carlton’s little extravagances,” P. Argus said.

Monk wondered what she meant by little. The salary of a genuine butler equipped with dignity like this one was probably something to raise your hat.

“Fifteen minutes till two, Miss Paula,” the butler said.

P. Argus seemed surprised. “Why do you mention what time it is, Jonas?”

“Didn't you call by phone, Miss, and remind me to state the time to you when you arrived?”

“Certainly not!”

“I beg pardon, Miss.” The butler seemed somewhat confused. He went away.

“I'll leave you in the armory,” P. Argus informed Monk, “while I go hunt Uncle Carlton.” She added vaguely, “I wonder why Jonas said that about the time.” She consulted her wrist watch. “It is fifteen of two.”

The armory . . . what's the armory, Monk wondered. He found out. It was the armory, a room for storing arms; pop-eyed, Monk eyed an array of hunting rifles, revolvers, modern and antique hand arms, knives and machetes, which adorned the place. There was an added collection of hides and mounted heads of such ferocious animals as tigers, lions and bears on the floors and walls.

“Some collection!” Monk waved a hand. “Uncle Carlton must keep busy hunting. It would take practically a week just to shoot all the guns in here.”

P. Argus smiled slightly. “Uncle Carlton doesn't shoot anything but the breeze.”

“Who's the nimrod, then?”

“I am.”

“Hully chee! No kidding? You'll have me scared of you.”

“I'll find Uncle Carlton,” she said, and departed.

Monk, examining the stuffed animals, was impressed. The place looked like a taxidermist's shop. A remarkable girl, certainly a lovely girl; however, he was glad he'd found out she was adept with dangerous weapons.

He felt like grinning, so he hooked his thumbs in his vest pockets and grinned. The situation pleased him. The girl was beautiful. There was no Ham Brooks around to fly-speck the situation; there were a couple of interesting mysteries—who had telephoned Clancy, and who had phoned the butler. And Uncle Carlton's fright, of course, with his Satan's pitchfork. And I'm just the boy, Monk thought, to save Uncle Carlton from his fears and receive P. Argus' gratitude.

He was feeling of the teeth in the gaping mouth of a stuffed tiger to see how sharp they were when the butler said, “He'll see you, sir.” Monk only jumped a foot, wheeled and demanded, “Whatcha mean, see me? The thing's stuffed, ain't it?”

The butler bowed apologetically. “I meant Carlton Argus, sir. He will see you now.”

“Oh.”

“This way, sir.” The butler was holding open the door.

They walked down a hall, turned right through a door into a room which was furnished as a living room, and the servant stopped before another door, faced Monk, asked, “Do you have a watch, sir?”

“Watch? Sure.”

“Might I see it?”

Monk carried a pocket watch with a closed front; the lid opened by pressure on the stem. It was old-fashioned. He produced it, said, “Five minutes until two.”

“Might I have it a moment?” the servant asked. He accepted the watch with a polite, “Thank you. Just a moment.” He turned and went back into the hall; in a moment he returned and gave Monk the watch, saying, “I am sorry, but I thought our clock was off. Thank you again, sir.”

The butler went to the inner door, opened it a couple of inches, stopped quickly as if he'd made an error, and rapped the panel with his knuckles.

“Yes?” asked a gruff voice inside.

“Mr. Mayfair to see you, sir.”

Louder, the gruff voice said, “Come on in, Mayfair, and have a chair. Be with you in a minute.”

Monk entered. The butler withdrew, closing the door, possibly two seconds later, the lock clicked.

The butler had locked the door.

WHAT the hell, Monk thought.

Apprehension came slowly to him; he was feeling too good for it to grab him at once. He faced the door, put out a hand. Locked, all right. He wheeled again slowly, now aware of the stillness in the room, the utter abnormal stillness that stirred the skin along his nape unpleasantly.

He saw the clock, an electric clock lying on the floor, indicating two o'clock. It had fallen there; the fall had yanked its cord from the wall socket, so naturally it had stopped. Two o'clock, it said.

A chair was upset. The rug was crowded up in one spot, as if it had skidded under urgent feet. The room was a sort of an office, a record room; there was a desk, a swivel chair, and the straight chair that was upset. Books were on the desk, books about orchid culture. A few tools on shelves, and in a rack, tools for the care of flowers, Monk supposed.

“Mr. Argus!” Monk said loudly. “Carlton Argus!”

Stillness came to him, settled about him, as warmly moist as animal breath. It was greenhouse air, he supposed; this must be a part of the orchid culture room P. Argus had mentioned. There was a glass-paneled door through which he could see plants growing like a jungle. He had seen orchid plants growing, and these were orchids. But what bit into him was the sight of the broken glass in the door.

One pane was broken out of the door. The glass, in fragments, was scattered on the floor.

“Carlton Argus!” Monk said sharply.

He expected no answer. He didn't know why he hadn't expected a reply; he had just known there would be none.

Two o'clock. He was looking at the stopped electric clock. Two o'clock. It must be about two now; it

had been five minutes to when the butler borrowed his watch. When the butler borrowed . . .

He got out his watch and looked at it and the face was smashed in and the hands had stopped at two o'clock.

I'm in something, he thought. In something, and in plenty. Good God!

*Cra-a-a-sh!* It came from the next room, the glassed-in place where the orchids grew in sickening sweet warmth. One crash. But loud. Something upsetting. Something made of wood, heavy; it made a great noise. Just the one noise and no other sound following it.

He put his smashed watch back in his pocket. A sweat drop, sliding down the line of his jaw, made a slight tickling.

The knob of the door rattled, the door the butler had closed. It rattled again, anxiously.

"Uncle Carlton!" called a feminine voice. "What was that noise?"

It was P. Argus.

She waited awhile for an answer.

Then she said, "Uncle Carlton!" Anxiously now. And she added, "Did you call the police, Uncle Carlton? They're here. They say you called them."

Monk went into the orchid room then, went quietly, avoiding the broken glass on the floor, trying not to let the orchid plants touch him. He hated the things, detested their fulsome greenness, their nasty, bloated look. He had always hated orchids for their abnormality, their difference from other flowers.

He supposed the man lying dead among the plant boxes was Carlton Argus.

### Chapter III

NOW fists were beating on the door, beating hard, and a voice was saying, "Open up in there! Come on, open up!" A man's voice. A policeman's voice.

Monk stood beside the body; without any awareness of doing so, he pressed the palms of both hands hard against his temples. He was strangely unable to think; if he ever needed to think, it was now. His mind was quite clear and receptive, but it wasn't generating anything. It was receiving impressions.

The dead man, Carlton Argus . . . The knife that had killed the man had an ancient-looking brass and wood hilt . . . It could have come from the armor room. Maybe it had, Monk tried to remember whether he had handled such a knife when he had prowled around the armor room, looking at things. He couldn't recall; not even that much could he remember.

He scowled at the orchids, wondering if the damned things were paralyzing his wits, a ridiculous wonder that seemed quite real to him at the moment.

There was not much blood around the dead man . . . The crashing sound . . . What had made it? . . . One of the orchid boxes was upset near the body, its rich earth, the rotten-rich looking earth in which the plants grew, was scattered over the floor. Okay, what had upset it? "What upset it?" Monk said, and the sound of his own voice caused him to dodge.

The police fists were beating the door again. "Open up for the police!" the heavy voice was yelling. It added, "Get a key. Isn't there a key to the door?"

"He must have it inside," another voice said.

What upset the damned box, Monk thought? . . . Then he saw there was no other door into the orchid room. No other door . . . His mind wouldn't accept that.

He had heard a voice from the orchid room when he arrived. Presumably it was the voice of the man dead on the floor; the butler had said so, but it might not have been the same man. But there had been a voice. And then later, the plant box had upset. It took somewhat of a push to upset such a box. But no door . . . No way anyone could have entered or left the damply oppressive orchid chamber.

"Isn't there a skeleton key around here?" the policeman was demanding.

"There are spare keys to every room," a voice said.

This was P. Argus speaking.

Monk stood where he was. He wished he could think; he needed to think; he was finally getting his brains to mesh. The voice . . . the plant box upsetting . . . but no way in or out of the room.

Ridiculous. There had to be a way.

He heard P. Argus say she was going to get the key. And then he heard her again, coming back, saying she thought one of these keys must be the one. It seemed she had been gone no time, and he knew his brain must be working very slowly.

Presently the police came inside.

THE moment when P. Argus saw the body was bad. She lifted both hands; her fingers tensed in a splayed, strained position. She said, "Uncle Carlton . . ." She didn't lose much color, but her eyes became stark. She started forward and Monk said, "No, no, please don't. He's dead." She looked at him steadily for a while, a long-seeming while that was probably not quite a minute, then her knees began to bend slowly. Monk thought she was going to faint. He started forward to catch her. She screamed.

A cop took her outside. She didn't faint.

Another cop put a hand under his coat tail and pointed his other hand at Monk and said, "Don't start anything."

The third officer was looking at the stopped electric clock.

The fourth said, "I'll call the doctor and the photog and the print man."

The one who had his hand under his coat began using his free hand to search Monk. He said, "Better call the Lieutenant, too." He was giving Monk a quick frisk, first for weapons. "Stand over by the wall," he said.

The officer who had been looking at the clock now went to the body, held the body's wrist, his face wearing an inquisitive expression. He said, "No dice," and dropped the wrist, fell to examining the knife, the inquisitive look again on his face. He turned the body. He hurriedly let it slump back. "Lord, still bleeding," he said.

The man who had taken P. Argus outside put his head in the door and said, "I think the girl is—"

"Stay with her!" ordered the officer who had charge of Monk.

"She's going to be all right."

"Stay with her anyway! We don't know what the hell this thing is yet."

Monk pointed at the orchid chamber. He said, "The butler let me in. I heard a voice"—he pointed at the dead man—"that I thought was his voice, telling me to have a seat. I saw the stopped clock. I heard something upset. I saw the glass broken in the door. Then the body." Monk scowled at the orchid room. "Somebody in there killed him, then got away."

The policeman who was giving orders said to one of his men, "Take a plant at the back door, if there is one."

Monk said, "Watch the front door, too."

"We left a man there when we came in."

"Oh."

The man who had looked at the body and the clock was moving around among the orchids, pushing the leaves aside with his hands. Awed, he said, "My wife would go nuts about these things, particularly these dark speckled ones." He disappeared and they could hear him moving about. He opened a window, the sounds indicated. "Whoeee!" he said. "Straight down." Presently he reappeared.

"There ain't no way in or out of here except by the door," he said.

They looked at Monk.

"I've seen better liars in my time," one of them said finally.

MONK was not particularly afraid of policemen, but he had always had the normal man's vague feeling of apprehension in the presence of a uniformed cop. His present sensation was mostly a sickness.

"Get the butler," Monk said.

The man who had searched Monk raised his voice. "Carl, send that butler in here."

"What do you want with the butler?" asked the officer who had looked in the greenhouse.

"He borrowed my watch, set it at two o'clock, and smashed the face in so it would appear to have stopped at that time."

"When was that?"

"A couple of minutes before he let me in here. He locked me in, too."

The officers exchanged looks. They didn't say anything. But they didn't believe it.

The butler came in. He was chewing on a handkerchief and crying, sobbing as a man sobs, mostly with a convulsing of his chest and shoulders, but now and then with a raucous appalling outburst of sound that was animal-like.

He wore a blue suit. That was the first thing Monk noticed.

“He hasn't got on the same suit,” Monk said.

“Eh?”

“The butler wore a livery when he showed me in here.”

They turned to the servant. “What about that?”

The butler kept the handkerchief to his mouth. “I don't know what you mean. I haven't changed, not since this morning.”

Monk's mouth suddenly felt dry. He didn't believe this was the same butler. At least the man was dressed differently. It was hard to be sure. He realized, with growing horror, that he hadn't paid too much attention to the butler.

“Do you remember letting me in?” Monk asked.

The servant stopped biting that handkerchief to nod. “I admitted you and Miss Paula.”

“I mean into this room—do you remember bringing me here?”

The man didn't reply at once. His eyes looked ill, his mouth twisted. “Yes,” he said, and immediately made the weird honking sound that was a part of his sobbing.

“Okay,” Monk said. “Now what about my watch? Remember borrowing it?”

Again the response was slow. Then the butler shook his head.

Violently, Monk said, “Don't lie about it! Your fingerprints will be on it!”

“I didn't borrow your watch,” the butler said.

Now suddenly the terror broke loose inside Monk, flowed through him, made his breathing difficult, put numbness in his fingers. This butler wasn't the one who had brought him to the orchid incubator, or whatever the place was called. It might be the butler who had admitted him and P. Argus, but he wasn't sure about that. There might be fingerprints on the watch, but it was doubtful; if there were prints, they wouldn't be those of this man, because this wasn't the one who had smashed the watch.

Speaking with some difficulty over the fear crawling in his throat, Monk said, “I want to talk to Doc Savage. And to my lawyer, Ham Brooks.”

One of the policemen swore suddenly. “I been trying to think who this guy is. . . . He's one of Savage's men.”

“You're crazy!” said a second cop.

“No, no, he's the one they call Monk.”

The one who had searched Monk cleared his throat. “They won't electrocute him any the less quicker for that.”

THE shout, reaching them suddenly, came from somewhere back in the apartment. The shout, at first a

bellow of wordless surprise, became the policeman named Carl bellowing, "Watch out! Stop him!"

There was a shot. Feet hitting floors hard and fast. Furniture going over. Doors slamming. And Carl bellowing again, "Dammit, head him off!"

Now three shots in a row, the bullets smashing against the wood and metal.

The policemen with Monk were jamming through the door. In the hall, it was dark. The hall depended for its light on a central chandelier; there were no windows in the hall. Because it had been quite light in the orchid culture room, here in the hall it seemed ink-black.

"What the hell's wrong, Carl?"

Carl said he had found a skulker. The so-and-so had gotten away through a door, slamming and locking the door. Carl said he was shooting the lock out of the door. His gun banged again, then they could hear him kicking the door. "Watch out for the guy," he warned.

Someone snapped a light switch off and on rapidly. "The lights are jimmied."

"Anybody got a flashlight?"

The man at the switch wished to know what kind of a guy would be carrying a flashlight around with him during daytime.

A new voice, Irish and policeman-like, yelled, "What's goin' on in there?"

"You stay at that door, Mike," he was told. "Somebody's loose in—oh! Oh, hell! Here—grab him! *Grab him!*"

Movement, blows, grunting, a man falling down, and feet scraping the floor came all together, like a single act. Monk thought it would be a good time to get away himself; on the second step he took, he was hit over the head and knocked flat, and the policeman guarding him said, "Try to lam, will you!"

The confusion subsided as unexpectedly as it had started.

Stillness flowed into the apartment, hung breathless and poised, until an officer broke it by coughing.

Carl demanded, "He get away?"

"Mike!"

No answer from Mike.

"Mike!" This time anxiously.

They found Mike, a round-headed apple-cheeked man, sitting on the floor beside the front door. Carl sank beside him, exclaiming, "Mike! My God, Mike!"

"Mother of heaven, my jaw!" Mike mumbled. "He kicked me like a mule."

"Who was he?" Carl demanded.

"I didn't see him. I just felt his fist," Mike said.

"You were in the hall. Didn't you see him when he opened the door?" asked the man who had downed Monk.

Mike grimaced painfully. "No, Thompson, I didn't. I had the door open and my head stuck inside to see what was goin' on."

Thompson said, "Where's the telephone? Maybe we can get him stopped downstairs. Carl, you and Joe grab an elevator down."

Carl was carrying a piece of cloth in his hand. He started to put the cloth in his pocket, changed his mind and shoved it at Thompson. "Here, hold this."

"What is it?"

"I grabbed at the guy and got hold of his pocket and tore it loose. That's it."

MONK wished his head would clear. The blow over the temple had done something to his eyes, crossed them or something, and made him practically blind. Actually he wasn't as blind as he had thought; there simply wasn't much light in the hallways. He realized this when they returned him to the small office portion of the orchid culture room. He was relieved.

"You guys let the murderer get away," he said.

Thompson ignored him. "Find what's wrong with the lights, somebody."

An Indian-head penny was what was wrong with the lights. Someone had removed a bulb from a wall socket and dropped in the penny, the resulting short-circuit blowing the fuse. Only it wasn't a fuse, but a circuit-breaker, and the lights came on when someone pushed the light knob.

"Is Miss Argus all right?" Monk demanded. His spirits were rising.

She was all right, except that she looked at Monk with horror, then buried her face in her hands. She believed Monk had killed Carlton Argus.

The telephone rang. Thompson picked it up, said, "Yes? . . . Did anybody see him? Well, ask around." He hung up.

"The fellow got away?" Monk asked.

"He got out of the apartment house, apparently," Thompson admitted.

Monk pointed at the room where the orchids grew. "How did he kill Argus in there, then get out without me seeing him?"

Thompson frowned. "You still say that's what happened?"

"Of course that's what happened."

Thompson went in among the orchids. He worked around the walls, tapping them with the barrel of his service revolver, listening. He opened one of the windows—one whole slanting wall of the room was windows—and looked out. "Straight down to the street," he said. Then he got down on hands and knees and began crawling among the plant boxes, looking for trapdoors in the floor.

Carl came in, breathing hard. "Nobody saw the guy downstairs," he reported. "What are you doing, Thompson?"

Thompson said he was looking for a trapdoor. He added, "I don't think there is one." He stood up and threw something he had found out on the floor of the little office, demanding, "What's that thing?"

For a moment, Monk didn't recognize the thing; when he did, his skin began to crawl.

"What's the matter with *you*?" Thompson's eyes were on Monk.

"Coonskin cap, isn't it?" Monk asked. His voice treated him much better than he expected. It was almost natural.

"What'd you look so queer for?" Thompson demanded.

"Did I?"

"Know what it is?"

"I never saw it before, if that's what you mean," Monk said. "It's a coonskin cap, like Daniel Boone and those old-timers used to wear, isn't it?"

The girl, P. Argus, did an unobtrusive job of fainting. She was sitting in a chair, leaning back; Monk saw her eyes roll and became all whites before they closed and remained closed.

THE next thing, which had nothing to do with a deerslayer's costume, was the bit of cloth, the pocket which Carl had ripped from the coat of the man who had escaped. Carl said, "Thompson, what'd you do with that piece of pocket?"

"Oh, that." Thompson produced the fragment. "Gray tweed," he said. "Subdued pattern, but good cloth. Not so many men wear tweed these days, since the war shut off the English supply. This may be a help."

Carl extended a hand. "Let me see that. I got a brother who's a tailor. I know something about materials." He examined the piece for a while. He whistled "You know something?"

"Yeah?" Thompson was puzzled.

"I think we oughta be able to trace this material." Carl was elated. "Its a special weave, and I bet one tailor has an exclusive on it."

Monk Mayfair closed his eyes tightly. He thought: Oh, God! Oh God, I've got to do something, or they'll look at me and realize I've discovered something. . . . He pointed at the girl.

"She's fainted," he said.

That distracted their attention fairly well. There was a collecting around P. Argus.

"Poor kid."

"Fainted, all right."

"I wonder what caused it?"

Thompson snorted, used his jaw to gesture at Monk. "Maybe looking at this guy's phizz, but more likely the shock of her uncle getting murdered."

Carl shook the bit of cloth dramatically. "We'd better get after this cloth business before the tailors all

close up for the day and go home.”

Fright sat on Monk's brain like a buzzard. They would be able to trace that cloth all right, and when they did they would find it had come from a suit tailored for Doc Savage.

## Chapter IV

DOC SAVAGE used the basement garage entrance to the building which contained his headquarters. He didn't believe anyone had noticed him particularly, although the taxi driver might have. He wasn't sure. He had kept a hand over his coat pocket to hide as much as he could the fact that the pocket was torn away.

He rode his private elevator up, very glad he hadn't followed an impulse to eliminate the private lift to cut expenses. He could feel the perspiration on his forehead.

Ham Brooks, in the library, was picking out a brief on a typewriter, using his one-fingered system. He stared at Doc.

“You look funny as hell,” he said. “Only funny isn't the word.”

“Funny certainly isn't the word.” Doc began taking money, keys, card case, out of his pockets. “You know how to work the electric furnace, the one on the south side of the laboratory?”

“I know how to switch it on, is about all.”

Puzzled, Ham asked, “You got curious and followed Monk, didn't you?”

“Yes.”

“Something happen?”

“Too much. Get that furnace hot, will you?”

Ham went into the laboratory. He got the furnace going, watched the gauge, and presently Doc came in with the coat, vest and trousers of his tweed suit, which he chucked into the furnace. Ham said, “My God, you paid two hundred dollars for that suit!”

“Yes, and from now on, I'm going to buy them where ten million men buy theirs, some place where you walk up and save five dollars.”

Fancy clothing was Ham's hobby. He liked to maintain, probably with a good deal of truth, that he was one of the best-dressed men in the country. He was indignant. “Quality like that saves you money.”

“It may very well get me in the electric chair, too,” Doc said. “I got this suit from your tailor. How well do you know the fellow?”

“Know him? Listen, that fellow owes the success of his business to me.”

“Can you get in his shop and see that he destroys any record of ever having sold me a suit made of that cloth?”

“Huh?”

“Put it this way,” Doc said. “I went down to watch Monk meet that girl. The business of that flintlock rifle

and leggings we received got me interested, but I didn't want to mix in it and waste time if it didn't amount to anything. Well, it amounts to something. It amounts to murder, so far, and almost the fastest frameup I ever saw.”

“Who got murdered?”

“I don't know. All I know is that a man trailed Monk and this girl to a Park Avenue apartment. I spotted the shadow and followed, keeping out of sight. The man followed Monk and the girl into a penthouse apartment. He left the door unlocked. I went in. While I was in there, a rumpus started, and the police came. Monk was tagged for the murder. He had been framed. The only way to break up the frame to any extent was to douse the lights by blowing a fuse, and make a break, so the police would think the real murderer had been present and had escaped.”

“Dangerous, wasn't it?”

“No. It happened fast. But one of the policemen tore the pocket out of my coat.”

“Anything in the pocket?”

“No. But he got the cloth, and they can trace that if we can't get to the tailor's records.”

Ham said, “I can take care of that.”

He left, running.

FIVE minutes later Doc Savage opened the electric furnace, raked the ashes out of the interior, carried them in a tray to the sink, flushed them away, and washed the tray.

The laboratory was pretty much his living quarters also and he kept extra clothing in a locker. He put on a suit about the same shade of gray as the tweed he had destroyed, but of flannel and a pin-stripe. He hoped this would fool anyone who had seen him going around in a gray suit.

Doc went into the reception room, got out the telephone book and city directory and began learning what he could learn by telephone.

The tenant of the apartment was named Carlton Argus. He lived there with his niece, Paula Argus, and one servant, a house-man butler named Elmo Tollen. This information came from the building superintendent, and Doc was positive a policeman was listening in.

The Park Avenue address suggested money, so Doc tried a volume of credit ratings for Carlton Argus. The man's credit rating was respectable, two million dollars. His business was metals.

Doc called an acquaintance, Ted Lennings, with Central Steel Corporation. “I'm trying to get a line on Carlton Argus. Know him?”

“Slightly,” Lennings admitted. “What do you want to now about him?”

“All you know.”

“Well, it's not too much. Came into metals in 1941, with about a hundred thousand dollars, which I understand he had borrowed from his brother. The brother and his wife were later killed in a plane crash, leaving a daughter. Carlton Argus was a plunger, and it was a good time for plungers. He cleaned up.”

Doc asked, "His reputation good?"

The steel man hesitated. "Well, he wasn't caught in anything. That war boom was a wild affair, and anybody who really did anything made mistakes."

"Anything specific?"

"There was a landing craft construction deal that caused some talk. The Seven Companies Allotment, it was called. But the congressional investigating committee looked into it and put on an okay, so I guess there was nothing wrong. I understand. Carlton Argus is taking care of his niece, so the guy's probably all right."

Doc made three more calls, all designed at finding out what he could about the girl, Paula Argus. She was twenty-one, a war-time deb, Red Cross worker, belonged to a college sorority group, and was quite a huntress. She held a record trophy for women in two types of game, and had placed twice in the women's nationals with the small-bore rifle. Intelligent, competent, good character, a sportswoman. Nothing very dark about her.

Ham Brooks returned.

"Got the tailor's records changed," he reported. "We just took your measurement and records card out of the file. There's no other trace that you ever bought a suit there."

"Good," Doc said.

"Any report from the police on Monk?" Ham asked.

Doc shook his head. "That isn't a good sign, either. In the past, we have worked with the police in harmony, and they should have notified us."

"What are we going to do?"

"Take the thing by the horns, and go to the apartment. That's about the only thing we can do."

MONK MAYFAIR was not in the Argus apartment, which was full of detectives from the homicide detail, an assistant district attorney, photographers, print men.

Thompson introduced himself. "I'm still in charge," he explained. "I was with the squad which came in answer to a call for help from Carlton Argus."

"This call from Argus—was it a telephone call?" Doc asked.

"That's right."

"Sure it was Argus?"

"I didn't take the call. But I checked with the man who did at headquarters, and the fellow who called said he was Argus."

"Which doesn't prove it was Argus," Doc said.

"It'll be up to your friend Mayfair to prove it wasn't," Thompson said dryly. "Unless he can find a phonograph recording of Carlton Argus' voice, the proving may be tough."

The assistant district attorney came over. His name was Wilton Ivans, and he was obviously out to make a name for himself by convicting a Doc Savage associate. He said, "Thompson, why are you letting Savage and Ham Brooks hang around here?"

Ham snorted. "Look, Ivans, we have special police commissions which entitle us to hang around here if we want to."

"Commissions?" Ivan's tone implied disbelief. "Let me see them."

Ham and Doc produced the documents, which had been issued for assistance rendered the metropolitan police in the past. They were, they both knew, quite in order.

Assistant District Attorney Ivans looked at them. "These are cancelled." He threw the documents on the floor.

"For God's sake!" Rage gave Ham's face a shiny hard look. "Nobody but the Commissioner can cancel those. Now, you bloated little pipsqueak, get on the telephone and tell your boss we're investigating this thing. See what he tells you."

Ivans retreated uneasily. Thompson shook his head soberly, said, "Ivans can make it tough. He's an up and coming young man in the D. A.'s office."

"He'll be down and crawling if he doesn't watch out!" Ham was angry.

When Ivans came back, he wore the air of a young man who had found a mouse in his hash. He said, "We're going to take that commission business up with the Commissioner in damned short order."

Ham laughed in his face. "Where's Monk Mayfair?"

"The hell with you," Ivans said.

Doc Savage turned to Thompson. "Those commissions are good until they are cancelled, as you know. Now where is Mayfair?"

Thompson avoided Ivans' scowl. "Downstairs."

Ivans shouted for a police stenographer, and ordered a transcript made of their questioning of Monk. With a suspicious eye on the stenographer, Monk left out some of the story. He didn't mention the flintlock rifle and the leggings, but the rest he told as it had happened up to the point where he omitted his recognition of the piece of cloth from Doc's suit.

At this point, Monk suddenly changed to the ancient Mayan language, a tongue he had learned in Central American on one of their earliest adventures together. It was probably one of the world's least-known languages.

In Mayan, Monk said, "There was a coonskin cap in the orchid culture room where the body was found. It ties up in a crazy way with that rifle and leggings, maybe. And get rid of that suit, because they're trying to trace the cloth—"

"Here! Here!" Ivans shouted. "Hells bells! Talk the English language!"

In English, Monk said, "Check the butler, Doc. The butler who showed me into the orchid place wasn't the one who let us in."

Ivans yelled, "What did you say a second ago?"

"I was clearing my throat," Monk said.

Ivans wheeled on Doc. "What did he say?"

"You heard it as clearly as we did," Doc said. "How do you know he wasn't clearing his throat?"

Wheeling on the stenographer, Ivans demanded, "Did you get any of that gibberish?"

"Some of the sounds," the stenographer admitted. "Hell, I never heard any language like that before."

THEY talked to the girl. The doctor had given her a bromide, and she was in her room. Doc narrowed his eyes warningly when Ham Brooks looked as if he was going to whistle his admiration.

"So you're Mr. Savage," Paula Argus said, extending her hand. "I'm awfully glad you came. I don't know what this terrible thing is all about, and I'm frightened."

"We wanted to ask you a couple of questions," Doc told her. "You see, our friend Monk is badly involved in this."

She made a distressed gesture. "Some of that is my fault, I'm afraid, because I was so shocked I didn't make it clear immediately that Mr. Mayfair was here because I had asked him, and that he didn't know my Uncle Carlton Argus, and couldn't have any reason for killing him. Now the police don't seem to believe me, or at least Mr. Ivans doesn't."

"Mr. Ivans doesn't *want* to believe you," Ham said.

"You won't mind a couple of questions?" Doc asked.

"I'll gladly do anything I can to help."

"When Monk got here, he walked into a frameup," Doc said. "That could have happened two ways. First, it might have been sprung on Monk on the spur of the moment. Or second, it was planned by someone who knew in advance he was coming. Now, who knew that?"

She shook her head. "Nobody could have been really sure. I didn't know myself whether any of you would agree to talk to Uncle Carlton."

"Then who knew about your plan to ask us to talk to your Uncle?"

"Elmo."

"Elmo Tollen, the butler?"

"Yes."

"No one else?"

"No one."

"Couldn't your Uncle have told someone of your plan?"

She looked uncomfortable. "I'm a fool to think no one knew but Tollen, aren't I? What I meant is that I know of no one but Tollen and Uncle Carlton who knew I was coming to you."

“Do you think your Uncle would tell anyone?”

She shook her head. “Uncle Carlton was in the strangest state of mind. He seemed to have two kinds of fear. First, fear of an actual menace to himself. Second, the fear that someone would find out he was scared and start investigating.”

“Then he wasn't likely to have told anyone, you think.”

“I don't think he would, no.”

“We'll talk to Tollen,” Doc said. “Now, about the deerslayer outfit, the rifle and leggings. You say that your Uncle became very upset when he received them by express?”

She nodded. “But I'm not sure, now, that the package came by express. I just know it came.”

“Any idea whether the wrapper is still around?”

“It might be in the trash box in the orchid room,” she said. “I'll gladly help you look.”

Doc said that would be a good idea. He told Ham Brooks, “Get hold of that butler, Elmo Tollen. See what you can find out.”

Ham said, “I'll put the suction to him,” and went out.

Assistant District Attorney Ivans had been keeping his mouth shut, but he had been listening. He barked at Thompson, “Go along and see what he asks the butler.” Ivans' tone implied that he was dealing with a bunch of crooks.

IN the small office adjacent to the orchid culture room, they dug brown paper and string out of a large trash can. Once the paper was flattened out on the floor, they could tell that it had once been wrapped around something the shape of the long flintlock rifle and the leggings.

“No express company tag,” Doc said.

Ivans was stalking around with his jaw thrust out. He said, “I want that rifle and leggings. Produce them.”

“Why,” Doc suggested, “don't you let the police do their own investigating? They're trained for it, and they know their business.”

Ivans snorted. “The things I do, I want done right.”

Doc noticed one of the listening policemen stiffen slightly with anger. He knew the news that Ivans didn't think the police could do this case up right enough to suit him would get back to Thompson and to whomever was over Thompson. It would not make them love Ivans, although Doc doubted if anyone loved Ivans to begin with.

“I have respect for the police,” Doc said, hoping to goad Ivans into doing himself more damage.

Ivans didn't take the bait. He merely scowled.

Doc said, “If you're going to mastermind this case, you had better go in the orchid room and find out how the murderer escaped without passing through this office, where Monk Mayfair was waiting.”

Ivans laughed with insulting loudness.

“The murderer was Monk Mayfair,” he said. “And he didn't escape. We got him.”

“The police got him,” Doc corrected.

The listening cop grinned slightly at Ivans' expression of rage.

Doc asked, “Where is the coonskin cap?”

It was on the desk in the office. Without touching the thing with his hands, but turning it with a pencil, Doc learned that it was genuinely a raccoon skin cap, that it wasn't modern. The condition of the hide and fur told him the age. It was thoroughly worn. The sewing was done with a buckskin thong thread, and it was a hand-made job, not too expertly turned out.

“About the same age as the leggings,” Doc said. “Possibly part of the same outfit.”

The police photographers and fingerprint men had finished in the orchid culture room. They came out now, and were followed shortly by men bringing Carlton Argus' body on a litter.

Gray-faced with shock, but not sobbing, Paula Argus watched them take the body of her uncle outside. Doc Savage went to her, and led her to a chair; she held one of his hands with both of hers and said, “I—I feel as if I could go all to pieces, as if I can't stand it.”

He patted her hands reassuringly and said, “Turning loose hysterics doesn't help and it's messy. Try mechanical methods of relieving your mind by thinking about something entirely different that you have done or planned to do. It won't work magic, but it will help, and occupy time. One of the greatest gifts God gave the human mind is the power to forget. Time will do that.”

DOC started into the orchid culture room, the greenhouse, and Ivans objected. “You stay out of there. I won't have you messing up clues.”

This was ridiculous and Doc told him so. “The police have photographed and printed everything and gathered all the clues.”

He went into the place. The jungle-like heat still filled the room, mixing with the peculiar presence of the orchids and the moist earth, making Doc think of a warm, moist, gaudily colored toad. The inside of such a toad, really.

He was interested in one thing: how had the murderer escape without Monk seeing?

The other possibility was that the murderer actually hadn't been in the orchid room, but had made it seem this was the case.

Ivans followed Doc around for a while, presently grew disgusted when Doc dropped a plant box and splashed mud on his trousers, and went to the door to wait. Ivans wiped at his trousers with a handkerchief. Doc concealed a grin, because he hadn't dropped the box by accident.

The plant growth in the place was rank. Obviously Carlton Argus had taken pride in a spectacular background, since there were plants other than orchids which reached nearly to the ceiling.

The point, though, was that anyone a few feet inside the greenhouse-like room couldn't be seen from the door. Right now, Ivans was standing in the door, but Doc couldn't see him. And Ivans couldn't see Doc.

Doc examined the roof. It was about half glass, but the glass was solid, the panes too small to permit a man to pass. It had to be the side windows, then.

The side windows opened. He swung one open, being careful that there was no noise Ivans would hear, and looked down. There was about thirty floors of straight drop below. He eyed the window framing, the deposit of dust, the places where the dust had been rubbed off, all places where paint had been disturbed.

“Finding anything?” Ivans called.

“Not particularly,” Doc replied.

“How much of my time are you going to waste at this?”

Doc made a disgusted noise. He hoped the noise would keep Ivans away a few moments.

From his coat pocket, Doc took a hank of silk line to the end of which was attached a folding grapple hook. The line and hook, which he usually carried around with him, was a keepsake from the past. It had saved his life once, and been quite useful a few other times, and he still carried it out of sentiment.

He climbed out of the window. It was simple. The window, about forty inches square, was hung on axis hinges located about half way down each side. The hinges weren't quite half way down, though, because the window would slam shut of its own weight unless held open by a chain arrangement. Doc didn't fasten the chain. He did loop an end of the line over the window so that he could hold it open while he slid down the cord.

HE went down the cord. He didn't look at what was below. Thirty stories of drop. But he was perfectly safe. The silk line, stronger than parachute shrouding, would hold a half ton, more than four times his weight. There were large knots for handholds, and wrist loops if he got tired.

He was quite glad when he had descended to the first window below, however.

There was one hitch. The window he had reached was locked on the inside. He studied the lock, tried his knife blade on it, had no luck. He broke the pane with his fist, reached in, turned the lock, raised the window. This window was not like those in the greenhouse; it was metal-sashed and slid up and down. He went inside.

The room was completely bare. An unoccupied apartment.

Now he did the business of closing and locking the greenhouse window. It was simple. First, he shook his grapple hook free, and it came swishing down. Then he pulled his cord off the top of the swinging sash above, and listened to it slam shut and automatically fasten. The fastener was a spring lock.

He had thought the spring lock of the orchid room window looked as if it had been carefully oiled at some recent date.

Coiling the cord around the hook, he went to the apartment door. It was also spring-locked, and he went out into a rich looking apartment house hallway. There were elevators to the left, and he laid a thumb against the call button.

Waiting, he wished he could be around to see Assistant District Attorney Ivans' face when that officious young man began searching the orchid room.

## Chapter V

THERE were no police in the elevator, so Doc uncrossed his fingers. "First floor," he said, then asked, "What's all the excitement around here?"

The elevator operator was conscious of the dignity of being employed on Park Avenue. "I don't know, sir, I'm sure. Some trouble in the penthouse apartment, I understand." Some fifteen floors down, he relaxed enough to add, "I think they are questioning the penthouse butler in the superintendent's office."

"Thank you," Doc said. He was very grateful, too. He hadn't known where they were quizzing Elmo Tollen.

There was a policeman at the apartment house door, but he was facing the street, not the lobby, which was as impressive as a cathedral interior.

The superintendent's office was easy to find. It was labelled OFFICE.

He didn't enter immediately. The officer at the entrance couldn't see him there. So he bent an ear to the door, listening.

He could hear Ham's voice, solidly wrathful, at its best witness-cross-examining volume. Thompson. And another voice he hadn't heard before, but which belonged to the butler, no doubt. Surprisingly, he heard Monk's rather juvenile sounding voice. He hadn't imagined Monk would be present.

Doc started to open the door, didn't, fell to pondering. The case, he felt, wasn't going well. He hadn't, actually, unearthed anything tangible to help Monk, although he had given Ivans some confusion, he hoped. Confusion might not be enough. It was frightening to face the fact that Monk might be tried and convicted for murder, but it was something he knew he had better face. The fact that Monk was a man with a substantial reputation wouldn't help, because a prosecutor of Ivans' turn of mind would use Monk's fame to crucify any attempts to use Monk's reputation as character evidence.

Monk could easily be tried and electrocuted for murder. That was a fact.

Doc decided to go to extremes. It had always been his belief that something that was too fixed, too ironclad, could best be blown apart with dynamite.

The result of his pondering was that he dug out of another coat pocket a flat metal case containing more gadgets. Grenades, in this case. Smoke, tear-gas and straight explosive types. They were quite small, smaller than eggs, but in a restricted area they were effective.

There were two smoke grenades. He took them both, flipped the discharge levers, opened the door, and rolled them inside. He closed the door quickly, listened.

He heard Thompson yell, "Hell! What's that thing!" Then Thompson cursed.

Doc waited through a thirty second count. Under his breath: ". . . thousand twenty-eight, thousand twenty-nine, thousand-thirty." He opened the door and went into a room fairly well filled with smoke.

"Tollen?" he called. "Where are you?"

"Here," Tollen's voice said in the swirling blackness.

"All right. Stay right there," Doc said. He wanted the man to stay placed, so that he could find him.

Moving rapidly, Doc made for the butler's voice. Nothing got in his way, although there was excited movement in the room, and some profanity. "Tollen?" he whispered.

"Yes?" Tollen said loudly.

"Whisper, you fool!" Doc whispered. "Listen! You've got to get away from the police! They've found out too much. So scram. When you get out, go to the boss."

"Right now?" Tollen gasped.

"Sure. Get going. And see the boss right away, you hear!"

"Okay. But how'll I go—"

Doc wished to get away himself without doing too much explaining to the police. He gripped the man's arm, breathed, "This way."

THEY did it by opening one of the windows and dropping out. The windows, he surmised from the location of the superintendent's office, opened into a court or a service alley.

For two reasons, he let Tollen go first. He wanted the man ahead of him where he could be followed. And he didn't want to be the one who fell into an areaway and broke a leg if there was too much of a drop below the window. He was convinced now that Tollen was a crook, so if any legs were broken, he preferred they be Tollen's.

"Don't wait. Keep going," he warned. "Go to the street and walk north, then turn right at the first corner. Don't run. Walk. And don't look around. Go into the restaurant at Third Avenue and Sixtieth and have something to eat. Then leave and take a cab to the boss."

"That's a lot to—"

"Get going," Doc said.

He listened to Elmo Tollen land, decided it was no drop. The smoke was pouring around his head, and he knew that Tollen hadn't seen his face. He waited, hoping the police didn't find him. He could hear Thompson in the apartment house lobby, talking loudly to God and Satan about the situation. Thompson was mad. Out of Monk and Ham, he had heard no sound. Monk and Ham would know what the smoke was. He supposed they were remaining motionless, probably quite puzzled.

Doc went out of the window himself, hoping Tollen had gotten to the street. The brick paving in the service alley was rough. Doc worked along it, out of the smoke which poured from the window. He took a chance on the door guard having gone inside to see what the rumpus was about, and moved out on the sidewalk.

He was not bothered.

ELMO TOLLEN took his time eating in the restaurant, staying there nearly an hour. It was a nervous hour for Doc, because he was not able to learn whether Tollen was actually in the place, and he didn't dare go in personally for an inspection.

Darkness was smudging the streets when Tollen did come out. Doc, waiting down the street some

distance in a cab piloted by a very puzzled driver, said, "There's the fellow we want to follow."

"The red-faced old guy in the monkey suit?" the driver asked.

"Yes."

Tollen showed some nervousness. He looked around, then came toward them.

"My God, he's comin' to this cab," the driver said.

Doc slid off the rear seat, down on the floorboards, made himself as small as possible. He said, "Don't let him look in here! Get out. Tell him the cab is engaged."

The driver had brains. Probably the ten-dollar banknote Doc had shown him earlier helped his thinking.

"Okay," he said. He got out hurriedly, stood beside the cab on the sidewalk, and presently said, "Sorry, this one's taken, buddy."

Doc did not know immediately what had happened. But there was a startled silence.

Then Tollen's voice said, "What's the matter? Don't you know when you've got a gun in your guts?"

The driver made a frog noise.

"Now get in there and drive," Tollen said. "I'm going to keep this thing in your ribs, and blow them out of you if you make a funny move."

Doc braced himself. But Tollen got in front with the driver.

"Head her over on the west side, off Central Park West," the Argus butler ordered.

The cab began rolling.

Elmo Tollen, Doc reflected, couldn't have a gun. He must be using a finger in a coat pocket . . . Again, maybe not. Maybe the scheme had blown up. Maybe Tollen, from the restaurant, had made a telephone call to someone, and the someone had sent him a gun . . .

Doc began to perspire. If Tollen had used the telephone, he might have found out the escape wasn't what Doc had told him it was. Logically he would realize that Doc intended to follow him to whoever was giving orders. The next natural step would be to let Doc follow, and be led into a spot where they could finish him off. Tollen might, as a matter of fact, know Doc was in the cab.

"Turn left here," Tollen said. And a moment later, "Pull up. And get this, friend: You drive on and forget this, see."

The front door on the left opened and slammed; the cab jerked into motion. When it had gone a few yards, Doc said, "Turn right at the first corner. Did he have a gun?"

"Sure he had a gun," the driver said bitterly.

"You see it?"

"Nah, he had it in his pocket. But I could feel it."

Doc shoved a ten-dollar bill over the partition. "Here's your money. And thanks." The driver was swearing when he opened the door and got out, then ran back to the corner.

There was no one in sight on the street.

It had started raining again, but softly, a thin mist that moved lazily with the wind, stirring and shifting like fog. Doc Savage looked down at the sidewalk, back at his own tracks. The moisture on the concrete retained his footprints very vaguely, and if he moved fast . . .

It wasn't necessary. He saw Elmo Tollen. The man appeared suddenly, crossing the street, going into a brownstone house. He moved fast, went up the steps and through the door. If someone didn't open the door for him, he opened it quickly himself.

Doc began at the corner and counted houses. Seven. Tollen had gone into the seventh house from the corner. Doc decided to go into the same house by the back door.

Tall apartment houses, dignified in the gnat-like rain, filled each corner of the block, and the brownstones were sandwiched one against the other with no passageways between. But behind the brownstones must be what New Yorkers call "gardens".

Doc decided to try a delicatessen in one of the apartment houses. The only clerk in the place, a fat man in an apron, eyed him suspiciously. "Back door? Wathcha want with tha back door?"

"Police investigator. Plain clothes," Doc told him. "If you want to see some credentials, here they are." Doc showed him the special commission which had aroused Ivans to a rage. The card was impressive enough for the fat man. He jerked his head. "Through the back, take a door to the right."

The "gardens" were satisfactorily dark. The man in the apron followed Doc, asked, "How ya gonna get over them fences?"

Doc decided the fences wouldn't bother him. "They won't be too tough," he said. "Thanks."

There was noise from the front of the store, a customer. The man hesitated, torn between the customer and desire to see the excitement, if any. The customer won, and he disappeared.

Doc began climbing fences. Three wood, one brick, one what he thought was privet hedge, only it wasn't privet, but thorn bushes, and gave him a worse time than any of the others. He moved quietly, kept in the shadows.

The back door of the seventh house was locked, which was to be expected. He tinkered with the lock silently, without success, then tried to decide whether any of the windows were open. None on the ground floor were, and they were barred anyway. But a window upstairs was open. He got out the cord and the hook.

Twice he threw the hook at the open upstairs window, but jerked it back before it hit when he was sure he had missed. His third throw put the hook through the window. He waited fully two minutes, which seemed a long time, before he pulled on the cord until the hook hung on the sill. After testing the fastening by jiggling his full weight on the silk line, he went up.

Climbing the cord wasn't as easy as descending, but presently he hauled his head inside the window and listened. He could hear an electric clock running, smelled perfume. A man's perfume, though, probably cologne or shaving lotion. And tobacco odor.

He went inside, pulled in the line and coiled it. He was doing this when he heard the man whimpering.

HE opened the door quickly, because the whimpering was downstairs. Down in the darkness somewhere, in the blackness and the odor of good tobacco smoke, the stillness. He stood and listened. He was suspicious. Finally he went down.

The man was hanging from the stair bannister. His feet were roped to the bannister, his hands were tied at his back, and he was gagged. His best noises, and he was trying hard, were nasal whimperings.

Doc turned on the light.

The man was tall, about fifty, gray-haired, wore slacks and sport shirt. His watch, which had slipped out and was dangling by its chain, was edged with small diamonds.

Doc gave him only a look, then went to other rooms and turned on lights, leaving the man hanging there. Doc didn't find anyone. What he found was a fine bachelor's house, three floors, good rugs and elegant paintings. A rich man's house, and what was more, the house of a man who had been wealthy for a long time. There were things, mostly things of taste, which told him that.

He went back and ungagged the man.

"There seems to be no one else here," Doc said.

"No, they left," the man said. Considering he had been hanging upside down and his face was the color of a salami sausage, he spoke calmly.

Doc had some trouble untying him and lowering him to the floor. "One man didn't tie you there," Doc said.

"No, there were two."

Doc said, "My name is Savage. Doc Savage." He freed the man's wrists.

The man rubbed his wrists, but looked at Doc. "Savage," he said, pondering. "I believe I've heard of you. Didn't you develop the thermoelectric bonding process for plywood that came out a few months ago? Or was that you?"

"Evidently you're in the plywood business," Doc said. "No one outside the industry would be likely to know about such an obscure thing."

The man grinned faintly. "Obscure? I wouldn't say so. That process scared hell out of the plywood industry until they found it was going to be made available to all manufacturers."

"Who are you?"

"Holland. John Holland," the man said.

"Of Holland Wood Plastics?"

"Yes."

Doc extended a hand. "Glad to run into you, Holland." He knew of the Holland concern. It had made plywood glider parts for the army during the war.

"The pleasure is mine, damned plenty," John Holland said. "I thought I was going to hang there until I

died. The couple who takes care of my place has the day off, not due back until tomorrow. I don't think I would have lasted that long.”

DOC said, “Let me look at you.” He tested the man's pulse, and found it all right. “Just stay quiet for a while,” he advised. “But it won't hurt you to talk. What's going on here?”

“Thieves, I guess,” Holland said. “The doorbell rang, and I found two men at the door. They pretended not to speak English, but they had a paper with what they made me believe was an address on it. I know they were pretending, because later they spoke damned good Bronx English. I started to look at the paper to tell them where the address was, and *bang!* Right over the head. I don't know what it was, but it felt like a locomotive. I woke up tied to the stairs, the way you found me.”

“How long ago was that?”

Holland flashed for his expensive watch, growled, “The damned crooks!” Then he found the watch dangling and looked foolish. “It's seven-ten now,” he said. “This was a little before six. Say an hour and a half ago.”

“Were they still here when you woke up?”

“Yes, but I didn't see them.”

“You didn't see them?”

“They were in the front hall. I could hear their voices. The door was closed. Later, there was some kind of a commotion, and after that they left.”

“What kind of a commotion would you say it was, from the sounds?”

“I figure that they were waiting with their loot, and a car came for them. They made the commotion when they carried their swag out to their car.”

“When was this?”

“The commotion? Not over fifteen minutes ago.”

That, Doc Savage thought, would be after Elmo Tollen, the Argus butler, had entered the house.

Doc asked, “Do you know the Argus family?”

John Holland made faces while putting his watch back into the pocket of his slacks. “Who?” he asked.

“Argus. Carlton Argus. Or Paula Argus. They live at the Northern Arms on Park Avenue.”

Holland shook his head. “Never heard of them.” He sat up. “Say, can't I move? I'm damned anxious to find out what they took.”

“Go ahead,” Doc said. “I'd like to know, too.”

“THEY didn't take a damned thing!” John Holland said.

They stood in the downstairs living room, on a vermillion rug that buried their shoe soles, and Holland

stared at Doc in amazement.

"I don't get it!" Holland added.

Doc said thoughtfully, "Two men knocked you out and hung you from the bannister, waited around a while, had a commotion, and went away."

"Yes." Holland rubbed his jaw. "Damned senseless, I'd call it."

"And you don't know anyone named Argus?"

"No."

"This Carlton Argus was in war work, like you were. But in metals."

"I don't know him. The whole nation was doing war work."

Doc said, "Then it goes back to Elmo Tollen."

"Who?"

"Tollen. Elmo Tollen. A heavy, middled-aged man with a red face."

"I'm damned if I know him either," Holland said. "Say, what the hell is this thing, do you suppose?" He grimaced angrily and added, "It's getting me dizzy."

Doc said, "You'd better let me look at that bump on your head."

"Oh, that knock was nothing. I'm all right."

"Best let me look at it anyway."

Holland hesitated, looked as if he was going to refuse, but shrugged in the end. "Oh, all right."

The bump was there. Doc had wondered if it would be. It was, as Holland said, nothing very bad. Just a small knot, but such a blow could readily have stunned the man. "They knew where to hit you to lay you out for only a short time," Doc said.

"They were efficient as the devil," Holland agreed. "I'm going to call the police."

"I have a police commission, so it's the same thing," Doc told him. "I'll call in the description of the pair, though, if you'll give them to me."

The two men Holland described were strangers to Doc. One thin, one wide, both dark, both wearing tan corduroy pants and dark coats. One gray hat, one black cap. "Will that help any?" Holland finished.

"Not much, I'm afraid," Doc said. "Too general. What about their voices?"

"I'd know them if I heard them again," Holland declared. "Or I think I would."

"Nothing peculiar there, then?"

"Only the squeaky-voiced one. He had kind of a shrill voice, and that might help."

"It might," Doc agreed. But he didn't think it would particularly. He was feeling thwarted again. At the Argus apartment, he'd had the same sensation of getting nowhere, of knowing damned well that there

was a web of plot, but unable to put his finger on a thread leading anywhere. He put his mind back over what he had asked Holland, and realized he'd left out one thing.

“By the way, you haven't been getting any Daniel Boone clothing recently?” Doc asked.

Holland's eyes went round. He seemed to freeze.

“What's wrong?” Doc asked.

“My God!” Holland said. “Here, let me show you!”

It was a shirt. Buckskin, fringed, ancient and much worn. No buttons, but with strings for tying, and ornamentation that had once obviously been pretty loud.

“How the devil did you know I had gotten it?” Holland demanded.

Doc said he hadn't known. “When did it come?”

“This afternoon. It was in the package container. You see, the house has one of those package chutes where the deliverymen leave groceries and things. After you open it once from the outside and close it, it locks itself. I found it there.”

“Mean anything to you?”

“Good grief, no! Why should it?”

Doc said, “Carlton Argus, whose name you don't know, got a rifle and leggings that would go with this outfit. He was killed this afternoon. And a coonskin cap, also part of such an outfit, was found near the body.”

Holland looked as if he wished he could laugh, but could find nothing to let him give way to mirth. He ended by moistening his lips, asking, “What does it mean?”

“For one thing, it means a link between you and Carlton Argus.”

“But damn it, I don't know the man.”

“It's a link, anyway,” Doc said.

Holland showed some resentment, started to speak, then faced the front of the house, said, “Isn't that someone at the door.”

There wasn't any doubt about someone being at the door. A fist beat on the panel thunderously, a voice roared, “The police! Open up, or we'll smash the door in!”

Astonished, Doc Savage thought: That sounds like Thompson!

It was Thompson. Also two other officers. And Assistant District Attorney Ivans.

Thompson went straight to Doc Savage, put a hand on Doc's arm. Not gently. “You're under arrest, Savage,” Thompson said.

Doc knocked the hand off his arm. “Don't be a fool! I didn't touch Argus and I can prove—” He went silent, astonished by the suddenness with which the policemen had drawn guns.

Assistant District Attorney Ivans came forward putting his feet down hard, jaw out. "We're not talking about Carlton Argus," he said. "This one we can hang on you, and plenty!"

Doc didn't say anything. He didn't feel like it. He was looking beyond them, at the vestibule entrance, which consisted of an inner and outer door and a space of perhaps six feet between the two. In this space lay the body of the Argus butler, Elmo Tollen, who could hardly be anything but dead with the knife in his chest where it was.

## Chapter VI

DOC SAVAGE tried to get a closer look at the knife, but Assistant District Attorney Ivans moved in front of him, saying, "Get the bracelets on him, Thompson, before he pulls another Houdini."

Thompson told Doc, "Yes, let's not have any more vanishings."

Loudly, angrily, John Holland said, "What the hell do you cops mean busting into my house, and arresting my friends?"

Ivans looked startled. "I would advise you—"

"When I want advice, I'll ask my attorney, who makes two hundred thousand a year as against the five thousand you make, sonny," Holland said. "Now let's understand each other. Savage didn't kill that fellow. And Savage did save me from dying of strangulation, or whatever you get from hanging upside down. As for who killed that man, I can describe them to you."

Ivans was displeased. "Better be sure of your information. And attend to your own business." The last spitefully.

Doc told Holland, "Thanks for the good word. But don't get into trouble with the police yourself."

Holland snorted. "I don't like high-handed methods."

One of the policemen removed the knife from the body, drawing the wrath of Ivans, who told him, "You should have left that there until the medical examiner came."

Doc noted that the knife was a broad-bladed affair with a crude hilt wrapped with some sort of thonging, possibly rawhide. It looked, he reflected, something like the kind of a knife the Indian fighters carried more than a hundred years ago.

He wished this deerslayer stuff would stop turning up. It was absurd. But it must have some meaning.

Thompson used a fairly civil tone to ask Holland, "You say you can describe the murderers?"

"That's right!" Holland snapped, "They were—"

"Wait a minute. Are you sure they're the killers?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"Did you see them do the killing?"

"I heard them."

"Okay. What did they look like?"

Holland proceeded to describe his two assailants again, but this time he said he thought one of them, the thinner one, might be a little taller than the other one who had the small, child-like voice. Otherwise his description was the one he had given Doc, and he did not add more to it. He finished, "The commotion at the door, when I thought they were packing off their loot, must have been when they were killing this man—Elmo Tollen, you say his name is?"

Ivans, who was listening, let out a gasp of surprise that was like a whistle.

He yelled, "Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks!"

Doc Savage had been coldly afraid of that. The description of sizes did fit Monk and Ham, and Monk had a small voice. "Why be ridiculous?" Doc asked. "You have Monk Mayfair under arrest, so you know he couldn't have done this."

"Like hell we've got him," Ivans said bitterly. "He got away from our knot-headed police force."

Thompson's neck darkened. He didn't say anything, but he looked as if he would like to.

"When did that happen?" Doc was curious.

Ivans didn't tell him. Ivans jammed his fists in his coat pockets and asked Holland, "I suppose we'll have to get a search warrant to search your house."

Holland sneered at him. "Go ahead and search it."

THEY climbed the stairs together. Holland wearing the expression of a man with something sour on his mind. He told Doc, "This is the damndest outrage I've heard of. They're going to lock you up, did you know that?"

"So it would appear," Doc admitted.

Holland lowered an eyelid slightly, and turned to Ivans, asking, "Do you speak French?"

Ivans batted his eyes. "No."

Looking steadily at Ivans, pretending to speak to him, Holland said in fair French, "I am going to let you in the back room, then close and lock the door so you can escape, if you wish."

"I don't speak French," Ivans snapped.

"Okay," Doc said, and added, "An Assistant District Attorney doesn't have to speak French."

"Very funny!" Ivans said. But they had fooled him.

John Holland took about five minutes to perpetrate his trick on the police, in the end managing it so that he seemed an innocent victim, which relieved Doc's concern about the man getting himself in trouble. Holland merely shoved open the bedroom door, saying, "I suppose you'll want to look in here." The police were busy elsewhere, and Thompson said, "In a minute, in a minute. One thing at a time." Doc went through the door and closed it. A heavy door with the key on the inside. He locked it, knowing they wouldn't smash it open easily.

He didn't use the silk line. It was a second-floor window and he knew there was level ground below. He hung by his hands, let go; a moment later he was sailing over fences. They were yelling and beating on the

door.

In the delicatessen store, he stopped for a talk with the fat man in the apron. "Did my friends, the police, get here?" he asked.

The fat man was dubious. "They didn't sound like your friends."

"They were kidding you," Doc told him, and added a resounding laugh which didn't come from his heart. "I suppose you told them you saw me climb into the window of that house."

"That's right." The man was wiping his hands on his apron. "Wasn't it okay?"

"Sure, it was swell," Doc assured him. "What did they do with the taxi driver?"

"Oh, him. I heard 'em tell one cop to wait in the cab with him."

This cleared up the question of how the police had happened to turn up at the Holland home: The alarmed taxi driver had called the officers, as he had good reasons for doing, and he must have also watched Doc enter the delicatessen.

Leaving the store, Doc tacked a revision on his long-held opinion that there was a general inclination on the part of New York cab drivers to get as far away from trouble as fast as they could.

No one bothered him in the street, but he wasn't there long.

THE Hidalgo Trading Company warehouse on the Hudson waterfront below Fiftieth Street was a frowsy looking mass of red brick with boarded-over windows and an air of uselessness. The rear was built over the river, or rather into the river, where the rat-gray, rubbish-laden river water swirled around the foundations. Age had rendered the sign, *Hidalgo Trading Company*, hardly readable, and the only regular visitors seemed to be the harbor seagulls which liked to perch along the riverward roof edge between glider-like trips over the river.

Doc Savage took no chances on cab drivers this time. He walked from the subway, several blocks.

He also took the precaution of hooking a ride on a truck four blocks up the waterfront street, and dropping off under the pillars of the elevated highway in front of the building. He made the warehouse door with a feeling that he had done a good job getting there without being seen.

The steel door had no lock and no evidence of a keyhole. He put the heel of a shoe against the door near the bottom, about the center. He frowned. Frowned at himself, for feeling foolish about using another gadget. There had been a period when he went in enthusiastically for gadgets, and this door was one of the many. There was a fragment of radioactive material in the shoe heel, an electroscope gimmick inside the door; the radioactive stuff made the electroscope leaves separate, close a contact and the door would open. Presently it did open, and he entered.

For all his pains, he got a gun jammed in his ribs.

He was sure his hair was on end for a moment. "Take it easy," he said.

"Oh!" Ham Brooks' voice said. "I didn't know who it was." The lawyer raised his voice, yelled, "Let's have the lights, Monk. No—wait until the door is closed."

Light, following the closing of the door, came in a blinding flood. The interior of the warehouse, except

for a long shop room, was a hangar for a seaplane, a helicopter equipped with floats, a speedboat and a larger express cruiser. The collection gave the place a crowded, spidery look.

“Is Monk here?” Doc demanded.

“Over here,” Monk called. He sounded nervous.

Disturbed, Doc said, “The police know we use this old warehouse for a hangar and boathouse.”

Ham nodded uneasily. “But Monk has some different clothes here, and I was going to pick up some makeup stuff somewhere and see if we could change his looks.” Ham grinned faintly, added, “Change him into something more human, I mean.”

Monk had reached them. He let the insult pass, which was proof that he was worried. “Doc, I made a bad move, didn't I?”

“You got away from the police when I put the smoke into the superintendent's office at the Argus apartment, did you?” Doc asked.

Monk grimaced. “Hell, I was scared. I didn't think. I figured the smoke was so I could escape, because I knew it was the kind of stuff you carry around. So I beat it.”

“Ham go with you?”

“Yes.”

“I made the same mistake Monk did,” Ham admitted. “I thought he was supposed to escape.”

They both sounded worried, and Doc tried to ease the situation by saying, “It was dopey on my part not to give you fellows some kind of warning, because skipping was the logical thing for you to do. So let's not fret about who pulled the bone.”

“Did you rig it so the butler led you to anything?” Ham asked.

Doc Savage said dubiously, “I rigged something, but I'm still not sure what it was.”

“What happened?”

Doc gave them the story, and when he came to John Holland's description of the two intruders who apparently had murdered the butler, he asked, “Now, can you prove you weren't there?”

“My God, no!” Ham gasped. “We weren't, of course. But we were getting to this place, and I don't think anyone saw us.” He turned to Monk, demanded, “Can you think of any way of proving where we were?”

Monk shook his head. “We tried to keep out of sight.”

Ham was alarmed. “This means the police have me on their wanted list! Not for helping Monk escape, but for murder! It means I can't get around town and work on this thing.”

Doc Savage said, “I'm going to get the Police Commissioner on the telephone and see what can be done.”

“They'll trace the call!” Monk exclaimed. Then he remembered, and added, “Oh, just to headquarters, is all.”

IN the beginning, in order to keep unknown the fact that the warehouse was used by Doc Savage, they had arranged the warehouse telephone circuit themselves so that it tapped, unofficially, the headquarters phone hookup. This was not by authority of the telephone people, either, and was not according to rules. But it was effective. The wire could be traced, but it would take the police a couple of days to do it.

The Commissioner sounded uncomfortable. He said, "To begin with, Savage, I want to assure you that I have complete faith in the integrity of you and your men. But there are some things I haven't the authority or moral right to do, and one of them is to tell murder suspects they can walk around free. But if you could produce satisfactory evidence of innocence . . ."

"We need some time to do that, Commissioner."

"I know, and, I can't do it. Don't get me wrong. I'd like to."

"What about this Assistant District Attorney Ivans? Can you get someone else in charge of the case?"

"Lord, that's out of my pasture."

"Can you delay suspension of our commissions?"

"Naturally I will not cancel them without proof and testimony submitted in proper form. That might take a day or two." The Commissioner sounded pleased with this idea.

Doc assured him it would be a big help.

Next, Doc called the District Attorney's office. He ran into a snag there. The D. A. was on vacation, and his office didn't know where. Who was in charge? Assistant District Attorney Wilton Ivans.

"That tears that," Doc said, and hung up. He informed Monk and Ham, "We've got to stay underground and do what we can."

Ham Brooks shook his head slowly. "That makes it tough. Where do we start?"

Doc Savage contemplated the murky girder-netted upper regions of the warehouse thoughtfully. "One thing the police are going to do is come here looking for us. So we can't stay here."

Ham indicated the seaplane. "What about hopping in a plane and going some place where we'll be safe?"

"No good," Doc decided. "There's no such place, I think we'd find."

"Another angle would be to get hold of our friends, Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts and Johnny Littlejohn."

Doc shook his head. These three, the other members of the group of five who frequently worked with Doc, were widely scattered at the moment. Renny, the engineer, was in Russia; Long Tom the electrical expert was in China, and Littlejohn, the archaeologist, was in occupied Germany. "Take too much time to get them here," Doc said. "And anyway, they're doing important jobs where they are."

Monk grunted loudly. "I got an idea. Call on Pat."

Doc winced. "You know what that'll mean. She likes excitement too well for her health."

"She might help, though."

"I guess we'll have to try Pat." Doc said reluctantly.

PATRICIA SAVAGE was cousin to Doc Savage, and she had Doc's unusual bronze coloring of skin and hair, but without the peculiar flake gold eyes which were Doc's outstanding feature. She had Doc's liking for excitement, though, but with the difference that she frankly admitted she had, whereas Doc usually proclaimed a strong aversion to trouble while always seeming to wade deeper into it.

Pat, on the telephone, was suspicious. "Listen, what has come over you? Did you fall on your head, or something?"

"All we want you to do is furnish us with a little hideout," Doc explained.

"Hah! Usually you break both legs to keep me from enjoying a little break in the monotony. How come the sudden change?"

"We're influenced," Doc confessed, "by the fact that we're practically in jail."

"I can hide you out in my apartment."

"Oh, fine! It will not take the police more than an hour to think of looking there."

"They've already thought of it," Pat said. "They just finished searching and left."

"Have they got the telephone wire tapped?"

"Probably."

"Goodbye."

"Wait a minute," Pat said. "Do you remember the little man with the green suit?"

Doc didn't get her meaning for a moment. Then he did. "Oh! Oh, sure," he said. He had been walking with Pat one day and they had seen a man in an atrocious green suit, had mistaken him for Monk Mayfair, and Pat had swatted him with a snowball with embarrassing results.

"Meet you there in forty minutes," Pat said.

"Well, it's against my better judgment," Doc told her. "By the way, do you have a friend named Paula Argus?"

"Yes, I know Paula. And the police asked me a lot of questions about her when they were just here."

"What kind of interest in her do the police have?" Doc asked, surprised.

"A pup of an assistant D. A. named Ivans did the talking, and although he naturally didn't tip his hand, I got the idea he was trying to build a bulletproof case against you and Monk and Ham, and he wanted to make sure that Paula didn't turn out to be a crook who had led you innocent lambs into a trap."

"The part about the innocent lambs had occurred to me," Doc said.

"Well, better dismiss it. My okay is on Paula. You know where I'm going to meet you?"

"Yes, I know the spot."

“See you there, then.”

PAT met them at the corner of Forty-eighth and Ninth Avenue and they stared in amazement at the vehicle she was driving, a panel delivery truck marked JOE'S DIAPER SERVICE. “My God, when did you go into that business?” Monk demanded.

“Oh, I borrowed the truck.” Pat was wearing a white smock which went well with the vehicle. “Don't you think I look innocent?”

They climbed inside the panel body of the truck in haste. The spot was fairly dark, it was raining again slightly and the streets were deserted, so it was not likely they had been seen.

“Anybody follow you?” Doc asked.

Pat nodded. “Yes, they had a plainclothes detective watching my place.”

“Blazes! Did you—”

“Oh, I gave him an empty bag to hold. I got in a cab, and he followed in a car, and I made a quick shift to the subway and lost him. You can lose any kind of a shadow in the subway if you know how to do it.”

“What kind of car?” Doc asked.

“Eh? What car?”

“What make of car did the shadow use?”

“A Packard. One of the small ones.”

Doc leaned back. He looked pleased. “I think we've got something,” he said.

Pat turned her head, puzzled. “How?”

“I don't think it was a cop shadowing you,” Doc told her. “And here's why: I've had enough dealings with the police to know what kind of cars the detective bureau uses, and they do not have any small Packards.”

The hideout Pat had for them turned out to be the apartment of a girl friend. “It belongs to Thelis Van Zeltin, and she's in Lake Placid for a month,” Pat explained. “Thee won't mind your using the place.”

The house was a gray stone one in the Sixties slightly east of Fifth Avenue, and it had a private drive-in garage which made their entering the place much simpler. Pat merely unlocked the door, opened it, then drove inside.

“You've got the whole house,” she explained.

“No servants?”

“They're in Florida, with Thee's parents.”

There was a telephone, too, Doc found, and it was connected. He had been afraid service would be discontinued.

“Pat,” he said. “Can you go back to your place and let this shadow get on your trail, then lead him

around to where we can put our hands on him?"

"Sure."

"Call us before you start out with him," Doc said. "We can make arrangements about a spot to take the fellow."

"You still don't think he is a policeman?"

"The chance that he isn't is worth looking into."

Pat left on foot, saying she would take a cab to her place. Doc Savage told Ham, "The goofy touch to this thing is the parts of the deerslayer outfit that keep turning up. I want you to do some checking on that by telephone. Call the theatrical costume house and see if they have sold or rented such a costume. And try the museums, too."

Monk asked, "Want me to help in that?"

"Better not. That gravel voice of yours is going to be one of the things the police emphasize in their descriptions of you."

"Dang it, I don't want to just stand around here and have cold chills," Monk said.

"You can come with me," Doc said. "Providing Pat calls in that the shadow is still around."

Pat called about ten minutes later.

"Lead him into the driveway into Central Park, east side, farthest south," Doc directed.

## Chapter VII

MONK MAYFAIR had discovered that when he pulled his chin down and thickened his neck and spoke with the accent of an Italian comic, the effect was impressive. He was practicing. He said, "Mucha better we catcha the fish, make wit' tha vino, no? Betcha Mexico gotta tha fish, no? . . . Say, Mexico isn't a bad idea at that, until this thing blows over."

"Mexico isn't like the old days," Doc told him. "The Mexican police would catch us as quick as the American police, and their jails aren't as comfortable."

Monk shivered. "I ain't kidding you, I'm a scared boy. Did you know that Ivans made them put the handcuffs on me? Handcuffs, when a cop puts them on your wrists, aren't a bit funny."

Doc Savage consulted his watch. "I wonder what has happened to Pat?"

"How late is she?"

"It has been an hour since she called. She should have made it." Doc got out of the baby service truck, which they were using. He added, "I think I'll watch the entrance to the park where she was to appear. That will put me where I can let this fellow who is following her pass me, then come up behind him."

"What'll I say if a cop asks me who I am?"

"Spika tha Italian to him," Doc suggested.

Monk didn't grin. He had darkened his skin with a mixture of cold cream and mascara, and blackened his eyebrows and hair with mascara, but he did not feel that he had changed his appearance enough to fool an alert policeman.

"How'll we grab this guy?" he wanted to know.

"I'll close with him when he's about fifty feet from the truck. You get out and help."

"Okay."

Doc Savage went back toward the entrance to the park. There was plenty of shrubbery, so he left the sidewalk and moved quietly, a wet business because the rain had soaked the grass and the leaves deposited spoonfuls of water on him frequently.

He waited near the park entrance. It was not raining at the moment, but probably it would start again. It was about ten o'clock and the streets were rather deserted. He contemplated the lighted windows in the tall buildings around the park, impressed, as he always was, by the majestic wonder that was New York at night. There was probably no other place, he thought, quite as reassuring as this part of New York City at this time of the evening. If you were low, if your belief in the capacity and integrity of the human race was far ebbled, standing here looking at the city at this time of the evening was good medicine. It would do a lot toward restoring faith.

Presently his relief became even more tangible, for he saw Pat coming. She was afoot, walking rapidly, swinging along in a blue satin raincoat which caught and reflected rays from the street lights. She entered the park.

The tall man was not far behind her.

As Pat was passing, Doc asked softly, "That the fellow?" He did not show himself.

"That's the one," Pat said.

Doc set himself. He was behind a bush at the edge of the sidewalk. This should not be difficult; about all he would have to do would be to step out and collar the tall man.

The man approached. Doc prepared to step out quickly behind the man. But the man suddenly came up on his toes, dashed toward Pat. He was past Doc, racing toward Pat, before Doc could do anything about it.

Doc came out on the sidewalk himself, called urgently, "Pat! Watch him!"

Pat wheeled. She made a sound, a gasp with fear in it, when she saw there was no time to run, no chance to escape. Then she was fighting the tall man, crying, "Oh, be careful! He has a knife!"

Doc was running toward her. So was Monk, but Doc got there first, coming in carefully. The tall man wrenched away from Pat and wheeled, holding a long-bladed knife ready in front of his stomach.

"Put it down!" Doc warned him. "Don't try to use that thing on me."

The man said, "Yah, hell!" He lunged, digging out and up with the knife. Doc got away from the blade, struck down hard with his fist at the man's forearm, and landed the blow. The impact numbed the man's arm and he lost the knife, but went down on his knees, trying to get it with his other hand. Monk was

racing toward them.

Doc chopped at the side of the man's head with a fist, missing twice, then sending the fellow to the sidewalk. The man rolled after he landed. Doc stepped on his wrist, trying to pin the man down. Monk came up saying, "A tough nut, ain't he!" And immediately got both feet kicked out from under him.

Falling on the man, Doc got the fellow's coat, hauled it over the man's head so that his vision was shut off and his arm movements hampered. That way, he restrained the fellow enough that he was able to rap him twice and bring on a certain amount of dazed quiet.

Monk got up, quite mad, and hit the man twice in the middle section, a right and a left, hard blows. Doc partially blocked the last one.

"You can stop a man's heart hitting him there," Doc warned.

"It would be a pleasure," Monk said violently. "You saw what he was trying to do, didn't you? Trying to kill Pat."

Pat said, "How can he talk if he's dead, you idiot?" Then she looked past Doc Savage and said, "Oh, great grief! Here comes a policeman."

Doc hauled the man off the walk, and dragged him toward the panel truck. The policeman, a park patrolman, yelled, "Here! What's going on here?" They could hear his feet hitting the sidewalk toward them.

Doc told Monk, "Get in that truck and get it going." Monk swung around to the front of the machine. Doc piled the tall man in the back, got in himself, and the truck began moving as Pat was trying to climb in. Pat gasped, "Help me!" and Doc gave her a haul inside.

They heard the policeman yell again, and shoot once, and from the sound of the bullet he evidently tried to hit a tire and missed. Then they took a corner, the swing piling Doc and Pat against the side of the van and rolling the tall man over against them. The tall man made sick noises.

Pat said, "I don't understand why I couldn't climb in here a minute ago. I just went all weak. I don't understand it."

Doc saw the way she was trembling, and thought it was no mystery.

"You're scared," he said.

"I never get *that* scared," Pat argued. "I don't know what happened."

Doc pounded on the front of the panel body and told Monk, "Get this thing back to where we're staying the shortest way possible. In a few minutes, the police are going to be grabbing diaper service trucks all over town." He turned and asked Pat, "Did you have any advance warning that the fellow might try to . . . Pat! Pat!"

"What's wrong?" Monk demanded.

"She's fainted, or something," Doc said.

"If we weren't in so damned much trouble, that would be funny," Monk said. "She's always so anxious to barge headlong into—"

"I have not fainted," Pat's voice said faintly. "Can't I close my eyes and just be really scared for a

minute?"

THE tall man had in his clothing two five-dollar bills, three ones, a dollar eighty-three in silver, two cigars, a paper book of matches which was no clue because it came from the largest tobacco chain in the city.

Monk finished searching and said, "He went at it with foresight. Nothing on him to identify him. Probably means he has a police record."

Doc told Pat, "Clear out of here, will you. Go upstairs and help Ham."

"Why can't I—" Pat began.

"Because you can do more good helping Ham," Doc said. "He's working his head off trying to find the source of that Buffalo Bill outfit."

Pat was suspicious, but she moved to the door.

Doc added, "In case you come back, knock before entering."

"Why?"

"Because we're going to take this fellow's clothes away from him."

Pat said, "Oh," and went away.

The prisoner was awake. His face was the color of zinc that had been quite a while in the weather and he did not have an optimistic expression. He demanded, "Whatcha takin' my clothes for?"

"So there won't be any bullet holes in them," Doc said.

The man didn't like that, but he didn't know exactly what view to take of it.

"Of course," Doc added, "you might talk your way out of it."

"How you mean?"

"Well, you might begin on the Daniel Boone suit, and tell us what significance it has. We're quite curious about that. And we would also like to know who killed Carlton Argus and his butler and why, and why you were going to kill Pat."

The man gave them a round-eyed look. "Pat? She the babe who was just here?"

Monk snorted. "If you're going to play dumb, at least don't overdo it."

"I didn't know her name."

"You kill them without troubling to learn who they are, usually?"

"Look, pal, I wasn't gonna knock her loose." The man sounded frightened. "I was gonna throw the fear of God into her, and let it go at that."

Monk said, "It didn't look that way."

"Sure it didn't look that way," the man said. "Whatcha think I am, an amateur? When I scare them, they

stay scared.”

Monk finished yanking off the man's clothes. The man's skin was pale, the hair on it sand-colored. He was in fairly good physical condition. He said, “Cripes, don't I get anything to wear?”

He was terrified. The terror was a gravelled harshness in his throat. Monk looked at Doc Savage and said, using the Mayan language, “I think he will split at the seams if we work on him a little.”

Doc, in the same tongue, said, “Go ahead. Try making him think we are going to kill him.”

Monk told the man, “Don't worry, we'll fix you up with something to wear.” Then he balled the man's garments together, looked at Doc and asked, “What about the buttons and the belt buckle? They won't burn.”

“We'll cut them off,” Doc said.

The man eyed them. He didn't ask why they were going to burn his clothing, but he seemed to be wondering.

Monk said, “I'll be back in a minute.” He left the room, went down a flight of stairs, and into the furnace room. The furnace was a coal burner, stoker fed. He went back and told Doc, “I think it'll make a hot enough fire.”

Doc hauled the tall man to his feet, shoved him to the steps and down into the basement. He looked at the man intently, with no pity. “Look, brother. The young lady you tried to kill was Patricia Savage, and she's Doc's cousin, and she's one of us. If you think anyone can get away with a thing like that, you're crazy.”

The tall man tried to make a break then. Doc, expecting that, was waiting, and he hit the man, knocking him to the floor. The man got up, and he knocked the fellow down again; the man began to scream in terror then, until they jammed a gag of old rags into his mouth.

Monk said, “I'll start the fire.”

The tall man watched them build the fire. He saw nothing in their faces to show that they were not in earnest, that they had any intention of relenting. Monk fiddled with the stoker, got it operating, and the grinding sound as it fed coal, like bones breaking, was an excellent background for terror.

“What about the ashes?” Monk asked Doc. “Any chemist worth his salt can take ashes and tell whether they're human or not.”

“We'll flush them down the sewer,” Doc said. The tall man began to sob.

PAT SAVAGE looked up when they brought the tall man, now dressed in his own clothes again, into the upstairs room where she was looking up theatrical costume firms and museums in the telephone red book, and where Ham was using the telephone to check them. After she had seen, with shock, how the tall man looked, she asked, “What did you do to him?”

Doc, without explaining the means, gave the results: “He says he was hired to kill you.”

The tall man mumbled, trying to insist he had intended only to scare her, but his words were not very intelligible. Doc said, “Ham, have you learned anything?”

Ham shook his head. "Nothing definite. There's one lead. I got hold of an outfit named Thesp-Theatrical, a costume outfit, and one guy said he thought they peddled a deerslayer suit a month or so ago, but he didn't know for sure. He's going down to the place to check the records, and I'm to call him in an hour."

"Then it may be a lead."

"Well, it could be."

Pat pointed at the tall man. "Has he told you who hired him?"

"Yes. Jeff Morgan."

"Jeff Morgan? Who on earth is he?"

"The name means nothing?"

"Not a thing."

"It means nothing to me, either," Doc told her. "Here's an idea. Suppose you get hold of Paula Argus and see if she knows Morgan. By telephone. I think it'll be safe to telephone her."

Pat nodded, and used the telephone for a while. They were listening, so she didn't need to tell them the results. Paula Argus didn't know any Jeff Morgan. Or said she didn't.

The tall man said, "I told you where he lives. Why doncha go talk to him."

"Suppose you take us," Doc said.

The tall man didn't like the notion, but he didn't have much choice. As they were leaving the house, he consoled himself by muttering, "The guy got me into this, so why should I give a damn what happens to him?"

Their transportation was a fresh problem, for the police would undoubtedly be watching for the baby service truck. Pat thought the best bet was her own car, which was parked in the same block. Maybe she wasn't on the police wanted list yet. Doc wasn't sure about that, but he decided they would take the car. There wasn't much else they could do.

"Why," Pat asked as soon as they were driving, "did this long drink of water try to kill, or scare, me?"

"He was hired."

"I know, but why? What's the motive?"

"He says he doesn't know."

"Does he know anything about what is behind this?"

"Claims he doesn't," Doc said, and then added in a thoughtful state of mind, "Who knew you were involved in this, Pat?"

"No one, as far as I knew," Pat said. "Except you fellows, of course."

"Paula Argus? Did she know?"

Pat's gasp came, shocked. "Yes, Paula! Paula would have known. That is, she called on you for help in the first place because she had heard me talk about you. And she would be reasonably sure you would

have called me to check on her. . . . But Paula wouldn't have known I was really active in the case." Pat eyed Doc, bewildered. "Anyway, why should anyone want me killed?"

"Scared," the tall man mumbled. "I was to scare you."

"Okay, why scare me?" Pat demanded.

"You must know something," Doc suggested.

"I? Know something? But I don't know anything."

"Think," Doc directed. "Think hard. Maybe you've got something you don't know you have."

AT City Island there were many boats. Doc Savage had not been there for a long time, and he was surprised at how little the place had changed. It had always been a yachting center, and apparently still was. It was now about midnight, and still raining a little, and quite dark away from the street lights; but he could tell there was lots of yachting activity, although now, because of the war, it was mostly small stuff.

The tall man had his head thrust out of the car, like a turtle sticking its head out of a shell, as they drove along. "Hey! Wait! Back up!" he said. "I think that's the name of the place there."

They reversed the car, and presently distinguished a bar which bore the name of *The Mast*. "That's it," the tall man said. "We turn here, go down to a dock, and find a boat named *Samothrace II*, and this guy will be aboard."

"You don't seem too sure of the way," Doc said suspiciously.

"I ain't never been here before."

"You haven't!" Doc was surprised. "Then why on earth are you bringing us here?"

"Look, I meet this Morgan guy downtown, see. Once at the Pirate Club, once the Ritz, once a bar on Fifty-second. He tells me where to find him if I need him, see, and where he tells me is right here. Says he lives on a boat."

He sounded so earnest about it that Doc was inclined to believe him.

Pat said, "I can't think of anything I might know that would give anyone reason to scare or kill me."

"Come on," Doc said. "We had better walk."

They passed, going quietly and cautiously, between two buildings, through a gate in a tall board fence, then between the grotesque-looking humps of shadow which were boats, sailboats, and power boats, hauled out on land for what was called dry storage. Now there was stillness about them, and odor of the sea at ebb tide, barnacles and shellfish and exposed beach.

"A dock," Pat breathed, catching Doc's arm.

The dock, narrow and spidery, appeared faintly outlined against the bay. There was, Doc decided, only one boat of any size tied to the piling. "Wait here," he said. "*Samothrace II*? You say that's the name of the boat."

"Yeah," the tall man said. "Morgan said something about an express boat. Know what that is?"

Doc knew. Express cruiser. The kind of a boat that cost a lot of money, had some living accommodations aboard, and would travel like hell. He thought the boat at the dock was that sort.

“Keep your eyes open,” he warned.

A voice, a pleasant voice that was not trying to sound pleasant, addressed them, saying, “Good advice. But a little late.”

They froze.

The voice added, “I’ve got a shotgun here, and I’m as nervous as hell.”

“Watchman?” Doc asked. He didn’t think it sounded like a watchman. Watchmen as a rule didn’t have Harvard accents.

“Watchman?” The voice was coldly deliberative. “No. That is only in the sense of watching out for my own welfare.”

“Morgan? Jeff Morgan?” Doc asked.

“That’s right.” The voice was surprised.

## Chapter VIII

LIGHT suddenly sprang the length of the dock, so sudden and bright that it was hair-raising. The stranger had thrown a pole switch, and the light came from three floodlamps along the dock, on poles.

Doc looked for the shotgun. And the man had one.

The man was young-looking, big-mouthed, red-headed. He probably wasn’t as young as he seemed or acted, which was about twenty-five. No doubt he was nearer forty. But he was a rowdy figure in corduroys, sneakers, a flannel shirt of bull-frightening red color.

The tall man was staring at the rowdy young one. “You Jeff Morgan?” he asked.

“Jeffrey Joseph Morgan.” The shotgun, an automatic, looked well used and in good shape.

“You ain’t the Morgan I know,” the tall man said.

Doc wheeled on the tall man. “What’s that?”

“This ain’t tha guy.”

“He isn’t the one who hired you to kill Pat?”

“Scare her,” the tall man insisted. “Nah, he ain’t tha one.”

“Who’m I supposed to be?” Jeff Morgan demanded.

“Jeff Morgan.”

“That’s who I am.”

Doc indicated the shotgun. “What’s the idea of greeting us that way?”

Jeff Morgan contemplated the bronze man thoughtfully. He seemed to be digging around in his recollection; then he said, "There's something familiar about you. You wouldn't be a fellow named Savage? Doc Savage?"

Doc admitted he was.

"I'll be damned." Jeff Morgan sounded genuinely astonished. "That's quite a coincidence. It sure is."

"Why?" Doc asked suspiciously.

"Two reasons," Jeff Morgan said. He gestured with the shotgun. "Let's go aboard my vessel. I'm amazed for two reasons. I'll show you them both." He noticed that Monk was working around to the left, obviously planning to get in a favorable position for attack. He told Monk, "Let's not start any rough stuff without reasons. Let's hold it a minute."

They went aboard the boat. It was an express cruiser, all right. About forty-two feet on the waterline, twenty-odd thousand dollars worth of mahogany, chromium and gadgets. There didn't seem to be anyone else aboard.

Jeff Morgan turned on the broadcast radio receiver in the cabin, let it warm up, then tuned in three or four different stations, not getting what he wanted.

"Maybe it'll come on in a minute. No, wait." He changed a switch, and tuned it again, this time getting the police radio. He listened for a moment. "They've been broadcasting pickup orders for you," he told Doc Savage. "And for you two." He looked at Monk and Ham.

Doc said, "That isn't news to us. Is that one of the coincidences?"

Jeff Morgan nodded. "One of them. It's the one that got me upset." He eyed them again. "That, plus the guy you sent out here to get the powder horn."

"The what?"

"Powder horn."

"You mean one of those things they used in the old days for carrying powder for muzzle-loading rifles?" Doc asked.

"That's it."

"Who came after it?"

"He said he was a friend of yours. I threw him out, after he got to talking rough."

"Where did you get this powder horn?"

Instead of answering, Morgan eyed Doc narrowly. "Did you send somebody to get it?"

"Certainly not. I never even knew of your existence until an hour or so ago."

"Well, somebody left it in the boat," Morgan said.

Jeff Morgan added that he hadn't thought particularly much about the powder horn, which was made of a genuine steer or ox horn, carved with a design and mounted with some kind of metal, probably silver. He'd supposed someone had left it lying on the galley table where he'd found it, but he couldn't imagine

who it could have been. As a matter of fact, he said, he had taken the horn ashore and asked some of the loiterers in the neighborhood, other boat owners and boatyard employees, if they had seen anyone walking around with the thing. They hadn't.

"That was along this afternoon, about two o'clock," Morgan explained. "And then, right after dark, in walks this tough looking cookie, and says Doc Savage sent him, and he wants the powder horn. I didn't go for his manner, frankly, and he became quite rough. But not rough enough. As a matter of fact, I kicked his stern and put him ashore."

"Where is the powder horn?" Doc asked.

"I've got it."

"Let's see it," Doc said.

Jeff Morgan shook his head slightly. "Not so fast. Maybe what I should do is telephone the police."

Ham Brooks looked at him intently and said, "Maybe you could try it, but I don't think you would get the job done, shotgun or no shotgun."

Morgan pushed his lower lip out a little, said, "You begin to sound like the other guy."

"Cut it out. Shut up, Ham," Doc said. "The man is being reasonable."

"I'm not so sure I believe his story about a Daniel Boone powder horn," Ham said.

Morgan snorted.

Doc Savage told Morgan, "Here is, roughly, the set-up. There has been an epidemic of parts of an old-time frontiersman's outfit reaching people who profess not to have expected the items and not to know what they mean. Simultaneously there have been two murders, an attack with intent either to murder or terrify, and an extremely clever job of framing us with the murders."

Jeff Morgan's eyes popped a little. "The hell! Why'd you come to me?"

Doc pointed at the tall man. "This fellow said Jeff Morgan hired him to kill, or terrify, Pat."

"Me! My God! I never saw the lug before!" Out came Morgan's eyes still more.

"He led us here, though."

The tall man said, "This ain't tha guy, I tell you!"

"You're damned right I ain't the guy!" Morgan exclaimed. "Whoeee! What is this, anyway?"

Doc asked, "Know a man named Carlton Argus?"

"No! He's dead, isn't he? Murdered?"

"How did you know?"

"The radio. Police. You're accused of killing him and another man named Elmo Tollen."

Doc asked, "Know Paula Argus?"

"No."

“John Holland?”

“No.”

NOW they stopped, all of them, and looked at the radio as if it was a snake. The police announcer was giving their description, first Monk, then Ham, then Doc, and adding each time that they were wanted for murder. The surprise came when Pat heard herself added to the list, wanted for questioning. “Why, that’s outrageous!” Pat gasped.

“Nice publicity you’re getting,” Jeff Morgan said dryly.

Doc Savage said, “Where’s that powder horn?”

Morgan scowled. “I don’t know why I should give it to you.” But after he had looked at Doc for a while, he shrugged, said, “Oh, all right.”

The horn was in a seat locker. He handed it to them. Doc said, “I suppose you’ve mauled over any fingerprints,” but took the precaution of not touching the thing. It was unquestionably very old, but not a particularly fine nor expensive piece.

Ham asked, “Is there a telephone aboard?”

“Sure. All the conveniences of home,” Morgan said. “There’s water and telephone connections on most of these docks.”

“Where is the instrument?”

Morgan pointed.

Ham said, “Vandergrift 3-9720,” into the instrument, then told them, “That costume company where the fellow was going to look up the deerslayer outfit they thought they sold to somebody.”

Doc Savage wheeled on the tall man suddenly, “This fellow who hired you, the one who said he was Jeff Morgan. . . . What did he look like?”

The tall man must have been expecting the question, because his answer was fast. “Gray-haired, over fifty I would say. Kind of tall, red face, kind of a smooth customer. The sort of guy who knows his way around, if you know what I mean.”

Monk said, “That sounds like John Holland.”

Doc turned to Jeff Morgan. “What business are you in?”

“Aluminum for airplanes,” Jeff Morgan said. “Why?”

Doc didn’t answer—he was listening to Ham Brooks saying, “Willis? This is Smith, calling about the Daniel Boone outfit. . . . You did, When? . . . Five weeks ago, that would be, wouldn’t it? . . . Yes, thanks. Said his name was Bamburg, eh? What did he look like? . . . That’s good enough. Thanks, Willis.”

Ham hung up and turned to them. “Fellow who bought the frontiersman’s outfit said his name was Bamburg. He bought a whole outfit—rifle, powder horn, leggings, coonskin cap, blouse, trousers and a knife.”

Ham paused, looking at them dramatically. Then he demanded, "Who do you think this Bamburg looked like?"

"Stop playing!" Monk growled.

"Elmo Tollen," Ham said.

Doc was surprised. "The Argus butler?"

Jeff Morgan swore loudly. "Tollen? Elmo Tollen! For God's sake!" He stared at them blankly. "Butler? That guy wasn't any butler!"

"What do you mean?" Doc demanded.

Morgan said, "Wait a minute. Let me describe this Tollen I mean." He proceeded to describe the murdered Argus butler with unmistakable accuracy.

"That sounds like the Tollen we mean," Doc said.

"Well, get rid of the idea of his being a butler. That bird was worth a million at least. He should be. He owned E.T. Tollen, Incorporated, and they were the go-between for more war business than you could shake a stick at."

Doc turned to Pat, but Pat was ahead of him. She said, "All right, I'll get Paula Argus for you."

"Bring her here. Don't let the police follow you. And don't alarm her by asking her about her millionaire butler. We'll do that here."

Pat went out.

Monk began scratching his head, said, "You suppose that babe led me into a frame after all?"

"Led you!" Ham said, and snorted. "I'll bet you fell over yourself. I saw the girl."

Jeff Morgan showed some interest. "Good-looking, eh?"

"Like a picture on a wall," Ham said.

"On a magazine cover," Monk corrected him. "If she was bait, she was damned good-looking bait."

Jeff Morgan watched them, grinning. Then suddenly he lost his grin, and his eyes narrowed. He was watching Doc Savage. Presently, as he continued to watch Doc, a sheen of perspiration appeared on Morgan's forehead. He looked entirely placid, except for the sweat, which was the sweat of terror.

DOC SAVAGE had intended to search the boat. To avoid a row, he had started unobtrusively, opening up a photograph album which he had noticed. It was a good leather-bound album and the pictures inside showed signs of some photographic skill. Mostly they were boat scenes, although there were some country shots and groups. Doc turned the pages slowly. He said, "You spend a lot of time on the water, don't you?"

Jeff Morgan didn't answer, and Doc glanced up curiously, whereupon Morgan nodded agreement. Doc noticed the sheen of perspiration on the man's head, but did not comment.

He went back to the album. Something in the album was working on Morgan's mind, striking Morgan with horror. Doc turned more pages, searching the faces and scenes in the snapshots. He hadn't found anything when Morgan began to swing slowly toward the shotgun. He had put the gun down, but now he started reaching for it.

Doc yelled, "Monk! Watch his gun!" And dived for Morgan.

Morgan made a barking sound of frenzied excitement, a rather strange noise to be coupled with such desperate movement. He got his hand on the gun, but didn't get it lifted before Doc had hold of the weapon also. Morgan shoved violently against Doc, used the shove to propel himself backward through the deckhouse window. It was a window, not a porthole. Large and square, and the glass went out, letting Morgan through.

He knew what he was doing. He went on over the rail, over the side of the boat. But not clumsily. He grasped the rail with his hands and straightened out so that he landed on his feet in a small boat. They could tell by the noise that he had landed in a dinghy.

Doc said, "Get him! Head him off!"

Monk and Ham were on deck a moment later. It seemed blackly dark. Probably it was no darker than it had been, but their eyes were accustomed to the light in the cabin.

Ham said softly, "I don't hear him!"

The stillness and the blackness was hair-raising.

"There should be a boathook somewhere," Monk grumbled, and made some noise moving about. Presently he said, "Here it is!" Monk brought the boathook back and jabbed it over the rail. The end splashed in the bay. Monk said, "Hell! Where'd the boat go?"

"Maybe there wasn't any boat," Ham suggested.

"Sure there was. He didn't splash when he hit the water."

"Jove! Maybe he's hanging to the rail by his fingers somewhere!"

Ham began exploring the rail, and he was doing that when an outboard motor started violently. It was a big four-cylinder job, and it took off at wide throttle. They saw flame spill from the exhaust stacks, for the motor was the type that exhausted above the surface; the drooling fire went away.

Doc wheeled, dived for the express cruiser controls.

"Get the springlines off!" he said urgently. "Maybe we can overtake him."

But when he put a thumb on the starter buttons, there was a dead lack of response.

Monk scrambled below and looked. "The starting batteries are gone. Probably ashore being charged."

Ham yelled, "You dope, we've got lights."

"Different batteries."

Doc Savage listened to the outboard motor sound departing. It was, he decided, doing around forty knots, and its doubtful if the express cruiser could have overtaken the little craft anyway.

“We might as well relax,” he said.

MONK came slamming out on deck and dived into the owner's cabin, saying he was looking for a rifle. He didn't find one and reappeared, demanding, “What lit that guy's fuse, anyway?”

“I think it was something in that album of photographs,” Doc said. “Let's take a look.”

They turned four pages, and found it. Jeff Morgan must have known Doc was that close to finding the photograph, must have realized too that Doc couldn't very well miss it.

“Blazes!” Monk breathed.

“ . . . five, six, seven, eight.” Ham said, counting the figures in the photograph. “I'll be damned! Everybody has been lying to us!”

The photograph was a yachting group, eight persons gathered on a power boat, an express cruiser. This particular cruiser, in fact. In the background was a rickety pier and a bleak looking bit of land which Doc, from the general appearance of the terrain, decided might be one of the islands off the Maine coast. The photograph was remarkably sharp.

The fact which amazed them was that included in the picture were the two dead men, Carlton Argus and Elmo Tollen, and also John Holland, Jeff Morgan, their prisoner the tall man and Paula Argus. The two others were a little more difficult to make out.

Suddenly Monk pointed. “Hey, I know that guy!”

The man was chunky, rather dignified, about the same size as the murdered Argus butler, Elmo Tollen.

“Who is he?” Doc demanded.

“The phony butler. Remember, at the Argus place, I told you I didn't think the butler who let me in was the one who took me to the room, that orchid place, where the body was? Well, this is the phony butler, the one who took me to the room.”

“Who is the other man? Any of you know him?”

The stranger was taller than anyone else in the picture, lean and pole-like, a gaunt frontiersman type, a man who could have been a woods ranger during colonial days.

None of them knew him.

But he seemed somehow quite familiar to them because of the buckskins he was wearing, the coonskin cap and buckskin shirt and trousers and leggings, the long rifle he was carrying, the powder horn slung across his shoulders.

Monk brought the powder horn over and compared it with the one in the photograph. He moistened his lips. “They're the same.”

## Chapter IX

DOC SAVAGE straightened and began getting gray-faced. He had thought of something, and it had

shocked him so badly that he had trouble getting his voice to say, "Pat! They tried to kill her once!"

Ham, not getting the thought, said, "But Pat's all right now. She'll get Paula Argus—"

"Morgan knows where she went!"

Monk Mayfair said, "Oh, hell!" in a frightened voice.

Ham understood. "If Morgan tips them off—" He wheeled for the companionway.

"Wait! Where are you going?" Doc said sharply.

"Pat went to get Paula Argus. Maybe we can head her off before they have time to pull anything—"

"Let's try something first. Where would Pat logically go to find the girl?"

"Her apartment, I suppose—"

"All right," Doc said. "Let's try the telephone. It won't do any harm—" He went silent, jumping for the tall man.

The tall man—they had been keeping a close watch on him throughout—had thought there was a chance to make a break. He had started silently for the companionway. Doc came toward him, and the man tried kicking. He was slow and Doc got his foot, yanking him off the companion steps and the man slammed down hard on the floor. Monk hurriedly stepped on the man's neck.

"Brother, you've got a rough time ahead of you," Monk told him, and threw weight on his foot.

The tall man twisted on the floor, made painful noises with his throat, looking up at them with eyes that for the first time were genuinely frightened.

Doc picked up the telephone. He remembered the Argus apartment number and gave it. Presently a man's voice answered, a gruffly confident voice that Doc decided must belong to a policeman or the family doctor. The latter, he hoped.

Doc changed his voice as completely as he could, made it important, demanding, asked. "Who is speaking?"

"Doctor Abrams," the other said. "If this is the newspapers, I'm sorry but you'll have to—"

"Put Patricia Savage on the wire," Doc said.

"Who?"

Doc said, "This is Captain Clements of homicide. I want to talk to Patricia Savage. Put her on the wire."

"Just a minute," the doctor said.

Monk and Ham were holding their breathing. Doc nodded slightly, and they exhaled noisily with relief.

"Hello," Pat's voice said presently. "What do you want?"

Doc changed to French, which Pat could handle fluently, and said, "You're fooling around with dynamite, we've suddenly discovered." Still speaking French, he told her about the photograph. "Everyone connected with the case so far is in that picture, which proves they've been lying when they told us they didn't know each other." He added the information that Jeff Morgan, who was one of the men in the

picture, had escaped, and that in view of the earlier attempts on her life—or to scare her—Pat had better be careful.

“What shall I do?” Pat asked.

“Is Paula Argus with you?”

“Yes. Doc, I don't think that girl is guilty of anything. Really I don't.”

“You stay there—wait, are the police there?”

“No.”

“Who was the man who answered the phone?”

“Their family doctor.”

“Don't trust him too much,” Doc said. “In fact, don't trust anybody, and don't leave. Don't let anyone come in. We'll get into town, get the place covered, then telephone you when it's safe to come out.”

“Okay,” Pat said. “And I don't think Paula is a crook.”

MONK was looking on the back of the photograph which he had removed from the album. “Boy, we're lucky,” he exclaimed. “Look what's on the back. Their names.” He ran down the list of names, added, “The fake butler was named R. E. McFellen.” Monk pointed at the tall man. “And you're C. Allen Culteel.”

The tall man showed his teeth unpleasantly. “The name is Cultell—tell as in you *tell* someone something. Not teel.”

Ham demanded, “Who's the guy we don't know, Monk?”

“R. Jones-Field,” Monk said.

Ham showed surprise. “I've heard that name. . . . I think it was in connection with some kind of law business. . . . Let me think.”

Doc Savage was eyeing the tall man. “Cultell? You head a big industrial engineering firm specializing in metals, that right?”

The tall man tipped his head slightly, assenting. “That is correct.”

He was not using his former lowbrow manner or tone, a fact which Monk noticed with astonishment. “All of a sudden, you sound pretty highbrow,” Monk said suspiciously. “What were you doing before, putting on an act? Or is this the act?”

The tall man said nothing.

Doc told Monk, “If he is Cultell, it was an act. C. Allen Cultell is quite a prominent industrial engineer in the metals field.”

Ham snapped his fingers loudly. “Now I remember who the eighth man is! Jones-Field! With the government, or rather the army. One of those agencies that handled airplane contracts.”

Doc Savage said, "Come on. Let's get going. I'm still worried about Pat."

THE matter of transportaton gave them some trouble. Pat had taken her car, which was the machine they had been using, and a taxicab seemed too risky. But they finally had to take a cab. They took two, to lessen the chance of the police bagging all of them.

Doc rode in the lead cab with the tall man, Cultell. Cultell was surly. He kept kneading the back of his neck where Monk had come down hard with a foot, and when they passed under street lights, Doc could see the man was scowling.

Doc asked, "Care to talk about this?"

"The hell with you!" Cultell said bitterly. "Why couldn't you have attended to your own damned business?"

"Why was Jones-Field wearing that deerslayer outfit in the photograph?"

"You're supposed to be quite a buzz-bomb, aren't you? The great Doc Savage!" Cultell said.

"That attitude won't help."

"Maybe not," the tall man said sourly. "But I'll tell you this much: You haven't got me in a spot where I have to tell you anything."

"Perhaps not. But it's all going to come out, you know."

Cultell laughed, not very pleasantly. "You think so? You've learned a hell of a lot so far, haven't you?"

"Not enough to brag about."

"You haven't learned a damned thing, as a matter of fact."

Doc shrugged. "At least we've got all of you tied together. The photograph did that."

"So what?"

"Which part of the Daniel Boone suit did you get?" Doc asked casually.

"The sh—" Cultell began, and stopped. His laugh came again, edged with strain. "Never mind."

"The shirt, eh?" Doc said.

Cultell didn't answer.

For a while Doc watched the rear view mirror to make sure that Monk and Ham, in the other taxi, were coming along without mishap.

"We have you all tied together in another way," he told Cultell finally. "Metals."

The tall man didn't entirely keep emotion off his face. "That's your imagination," he muttered.

"No. I think not. Metals. All of you are in the metals industry in some form or other. That helps make a package of a lot of you."

“Imagination. You heard Brooks say Jones-Field was with the army handling contracts.”

“Airplane contracts. They make airplanes out of metal.”

Cultell didn't say anything.

Doc Savage watched the tall man closely, presently concluding that the man was quite frightened.

“Why were you going to kill Pat?” Doc asked suddenly.

“I wasn't,” Cultell said briefly. “She was to be scared. That was all. I've told you that.”

Whatever the man is scared of, Doc reflected, it isn't fear of being held accountable for what he tried on Pat, whether it was murder or not. Doc tried again, saying, “Of course you're all going to jail together for the murder of Argus and Tollen.”

“If you only knew it,” Cultell said, “that proves how wrong you are.”

The thing he is afraid of isn't the murder charge, Doc reflected.

He remarked, “That deerslayer outfit was well scattered, wasn't it.”

Cultell gave back a wooden, gray-faced silence.

He's in terror of that buckskin outfit, Doc decided. What the devil?

THEY paid off their cabs two blocks from the Argus apartment house and collected in a doorway for consultation. Cultell said, “I've a damned good notion to yell for the police.”

Monk told him, “You do, and you'll be a dead body in about two seconds flat.” Monk sounded so utterly in earnest that Cultell's lips loosened slightly with terror, and his belligerence subsided.

“Ham, you work around the block and get on the other side of the Argus place,” Doc said. “I'll scout this side, and we'll meet back here in fifteen minutes.”

“What's the idea of all the phenagling around?” Monk wanted to know.

“If they have any kind of a plant waiting for Pat, I'd like to grab the fellows,” Doc explained. “Maybe he would be more communicative than Cultell, here.”

“Oh.”

Ham drifted away. The lateness of the hour, far past midnight now, made their presence more conspicuous, but at the same time it would make it easier to spot any other skulkers in the neighborhood. “Watch Cultell,” Doc told Monk. “I will,” Monk said. And Doc moved away himself, cautiously, but not so that he appeared to be cautious.

There were a few places open, a very few, but almost no one on the streets. He spotted Pat's car, crossed over to it, and made sure the keys were in the switch. They were. He went on, passing the Argus apartment house, wishing he could go inside, but not daring to. There was no doorman now; probably there was none after midnight. He went back to Monk, and presently, Ham joined them, saying, “Coast seems clear.”

Doc said, "You make the telephone call. I would do it, but I'm a little conspicuous. Try that lunch room over yonder."

Ham went away. He was gone quite a while. Time dragged, and they were sober with their thoughts, their eyes probing anxiously at each walking figure which appeared, lest it be a policeman. Cultell breathed noisily, in short jerks, ridden by his own nerves. There was a continual film of perspiration on Cultell's face. He was not enjoying this.

Worried, Ham came back. "Doc! There's no answer! No one answers at the Argus number!"

Doc had the feeling that his skin had gotten tight all over.

"We'll go up there," he said.

THERE was, they found, but one elevator operator on duty in the building at this time of night. A young man, he was evidently a student, for he was reading a text on toxicology. A student chemist, obviously. Monk, who was a famous chemist, showed alarm lest he be recognized, and was first out of the elevator cage when they got to the top.

"Hold the cage here," Doc told the boy.

"I'm sorry, I—"

"Only for a moment," Doc said. He wanted the elevator handy in case they had to make a quick escape. He told Ham, "You wait here," and Ham nodded.

The door of the Argus apartment was not locked. It stood partly open.

There was a dead man spread out on the floor inside. A thick man, rather elderly, who had died from having the front of his skull bashed in.

Doc pulled back. "Keep your hands off things," he said. He lifted his voice, called, "Pat, Pat!"

No answer came.

He went back to the elevator, told the operator, "You'd better see this." The operator, he was glad to see, had been standing in the cage door watching them. The operator could testify that they hadn't had a hand in the death of the thick man. "How's your stomach?" Doc said. "It had better be good. There's a dead man in the Argus apartment."

The boy became wide-eyed. "Jesus! Another murder in there!"

"Looks that way." Doc led him to the body, asked, "Know the man?"

"That's Doctor Abrams," the boy said.

"The Argus family doctor?"

"Yes."

"We want you for a witness," Doc told the boy. "We want to search the apartment. Come on."

The search did not take long. Pat was not there. Paula Argus was not there. And there was no sign of

violence other than the slain doctor.

“Miss Argus,” Doc said to the boy. “When did she leave?”

The young man had been staring at them. He said, “I—I think I know who you are. Aren't you Doc Savage?” He looked at Monk. “And Mr. Mayfair?”

“When did Miss Argus leave?”

“About, I would say, forty minutes ago.”

“Was another woman with her?”

“Yes.”

“Who else?”

“A man. One man.”

“Know him?”

“No, sir, I didn't.”

Ham had the group photograph they'd found in the album on Jeff Morgan's boat. Doc said, “Show him that picture, Ham.” And then, after the operator had examined the photograph: “Was the man one of that group?”

The boy was distressed. “I don't know, sir. To tell the truth, I don't recall seeing his face. He was tall and wore a raincoat, as I recall. He could have been any one of those men.”

Cultell said bitterly, “Well, it wasn't me, thank God.” His voice had a hoarseness that caused them all to stare at him. Cultell was deeper in terror.

The boy was nervous. “I've got to call the police. I'll get in trouble if I don't.”

“We're clearing out,” Doc told him. “So go ahead and call them. Better use the telephone downstairs, in case there might be fingerprints in the apartment.”

The boy looked uncomfortable. He spoke to Monk, for whom he apparently had the most awe. “I can refrain, if you wish, from telling the police you were here. I—ah—am aware that the police are searching for you gentlemen.”

Monk was pleased. “No, thanks. Don't get yourself in trouble. Go ahead and call them. Tell them just what happened.”

Doc added, “And tell them the murderer kidnapped Paula Argus and Pat Savage.”

Eyes made round and staring by astonishment, the boy watched them leave.

## Chapter X

THEY rode north in Pat's car, turned left to catch the cross-town drive through Central Park. On a deserted part of the drive, Doc pulled in to the curb, told Monk, “Will you get out, grab a fistful of mud and smear a little over our license plate. The police may have the license of Pat's car. Probably have.”

Monk did this. They got rolling again.

Cultell stirred his tall form angrily. "What the hell do you plan to do with me?" he demanded.

Monk said, "Brother, your friends have got Pat Savage. We think a lot of Pat. So what—"

"They're not friends of mine!" Cultell snapped.

"—what we'll probably do is cut you up and feed you to fish," Monk finished. He sounded earnest. Cultell eyed him, moistened his lips, moved his shoulders wearily.

Doc said, "Cultell, you're pretty scared, aren't you?"

"With three murders? Why not?"

"The murder of the doctor wasn't scheduled, was it?" Doc asked.

Cultell jumped visibly. "What the devil do you mean?"

"I'm beginning to get an idea of the shape of this thing. My advice to you would be to come clean."

"You willing to make a deal?" Cultell demanded.

"The deal would be for us to drop everything?"

Cultell jumped again. He hadn't expected that. He rubbed a hand against his thigh nervously. "Damned if I don't believe you do know quite a lot. . . . Yes, drop it. That would be the deal. Get your friend Pat free. Then drop it."

"We can't drop murder," Doc said.

"Why not? The police will go ahead and take care of that."

"The police," Doc said grimly, "will hang it on us if we don't turn up somebody else for them."

The truth of this silenced Cultell for a while. He continued to rub his leg, fell to coughing. He sounded somewhat ill, so rampant was the fear inside him.

Monk said, "Friend, if anything happens to Pat, I wouldn't want to be in your shoes."

Cultell said nothing.

Doc Savage was driving. He made a left turn, coasted in to the curbing and stopped.

"See any signs of police?" he asked.

They were half a block down the street from John Holland's house. They searched the vicinity with their eyes for a while. "I'm going in," Doc said. "If he's there, I'll bring him out, and we'll pry some truth out of him."

Cultell cleared his throat. "He won't be there."

Monk made an angry growling noise. "Brother, if he isn't you'd better wish you hadn't been born—or talk."

Doc went to John Holland's house.

Holland wasn't there.

THERE was a metallic cast of fury on Doc Savage's face when he came back to the car. He got into the machine, looked at Cultell intently for a while. He said, "Monk, there's a psychiatrist on Central Park West. Doctor Wilfred Bedell, a friend of mine. I hate to pull him into this mess, but I think he will be willing to let us use his office and his equipment."

Monk nodded. "Now you're talking."

Doc started the motor.

"Wait a minute!" Cultell mumbled. "You figuring on pulling something on me?"

"You're going to talk."

"The hell I am."

Doc told the man unpleasantly, "We've fooled around with you too long now. There are perfectly feasible methods of making you talk, whether you wish or not."

Cultell sneered. "Truth serum? I've heard of that stuff. It's not dependable."

"This isn't truth serum, exactly. I take it you've not familiar with some of the new methods psychiatrists use?"

"Psychiatrists? They're the guys who doctor your mind, aren't they?" Cultell settled back, added smugly, "It'll take a hell of a mind-doctor to get anything out of me, I'm telling you."

Monk laughed unpleasantly.

"What's so funny?" Cultell demanded.

"You—not knowing what's going to happen to you," Monk told him.

Doc believed Cultell felt none of the confidence he was voicing. He thought Cultell was in a state of mind where the application of a little terror might save them considerable time and effort; also there was always the chances of failure when they did start working on the man with drugs.

"Cultell," Doc said. "You might as well know what we're going to do with you. It will make no difference. But to understand it, you'll have to keep in mind what you doubtless already know about psychiatric difficulties. You know, of course, that individuals are rendered neurotic by the appearance of something or other in their minds which creates an anxiety. This anxiety, which has an effect on the mental system of the individual as real as the effect of an infected wound in his physical body, isn't always something of which the victim is aware. He is aware of such things as trouble with his wife, danger of being fired from his job. Usually he is aware of these obvious mental anxieties, but usually these are not lastingly serious, because when you know what your trouble is, you can always do something about it."

Cultell looked puzzled, said, "This doesn't have any connection with the wild and wooly stuff we've been having. What are you leading up to?"

"I'm getting to that. In psychoneurosis, the patient does not consciously know what is causing his disturbances. The job of the psychiatrist is to work with the patient until the hidden cause is found, then dragged into the open; and the patient, when he once sees what is wrong, usually cures himself. This is

called psychoanalysis. The war has broadened the use of one tool of psychoanalysis which was hitherto regarded with some doubt. Drugs.”

Cultell grinned uneasily.

“You're getting back to that truth serum business,” he said.

“The drug,” Doc said, “induces a mental condition where the patient talks without any inhibitions whatever, and naturally most of his talking is done about the things which are bothering his subconscious the most.”

Cultell shuddered. “That stuff makes you sick as the devil, don't it?”

“Not necessarily. But you already knew about the method, didn't you?”

“I've read about it in magazines.”

“Well, that's what we are going to do to you. And I can assure you that you'll tell everything you know.”

Cultell sat very still for a while. There was not much color left in his face. “I'm afraid of drugs,” he muttered.

Doc concealed his elation. “Meaning you would rather talk without it?”

Cultell moistened his lips.

“That's right,” he said.

“Let's have it.”

“They're out of town,” Cultell said.

“All of them?”

“Yes.”

“Where did they go?”

“Jones-Field's summer home. On one of the Maine coast islands.”

“How do you know they're there?”

“Because that's where we all agreed to go and settle this thing . . .” He went suddenly silent, and stared with fright at a car that had slid up silently and halted in the street beside them.

There was one man in the car, and he leaned over and rolled down the side window and stared at them.

“It's that snotty Assistant D. A.,” Monk breathed.

It was Assistant District Attorney Ivans. He eyed them in astonishment. Then he did something that was typically Ivans. A man with less ego would have driven, and driven like hell, for police assistance, Ivans didn't. Ivans got out, said, “You're under arrest.”

Doc Savage looked at Ivans, and Doc was impressed. Ivans was overbearing, a bore, unreasonably

ambitious, but he had an ample supply of the quantity called unadulterated guts. Ivans was scared; he couldn't quite keep his hands from shaking. He didn't have a gun. But he said firmly, "You're my prisoners."

"For God's sake!" Monk exclaimed, and stuck his head out to see whether the neighborhood was swarming with police. It wasn't.

Ham said, "He hasn't got a gun."

Doc eyed Ivans and demanded, "What on earth are you doing here?"

Normally Ivans might not have answered that, but he was scared, so he said, "I came to see Mr. Holland. He does not answer his telephone." He moistened his lips, added, "If you have weapons, you will please toss them out in the street."

Doc opened the car door. "Get in."

Ivans drew back. "I'm damned if I—" He began to struggle as Doc got hold of him, and he yelled once, violently, before Monk was out and had a hat jammed over his mouth.

Monk cocked a fist, asked, "Shall I put him to sleep?" He sounded hopeful.

"Take it easy," Doc said. "The guy has a lot of nerve, along with his bad manners."

"What you gonna do with him?"

"Why not carry him along with us?"

Monk didn't think much of the idea. "Why?"

"Maybe we can talk him into thinking we're innocent," Doc suggested. "Which isn't likely. But if he is along when we straighten this out, if we do, it might be a big help with the police."

"Well—okay." Monk helped jam Ivans into the car. The Assistant District Attorney fought with considerable violence and not much dignity. Finally Monk said, "I'm gonna have to choke him a little."

"Go head. I would enjoy doing a little of it myself," Doc said.

He started the car and drove toward their dilapidated warehouse-hangar on the Hudson waterfront. He asked Cultell, "You can point out this island to us?"

"Sure," Cultell said.

WHEN they were on the superhighway headed south in the sixties, Doc asked Ivans, "Are the police watching our Hudson River place?"

Monk released Ivans' mouth, and Ivans said, "How the hell would I know! I'll see you electrocuted, so help me God!" Ivans sounded as if he considered the police somewhat to blame for his predicament.

Cultell told him, "It's your own fault."

"Who the hell are you?" Ivans snarled. Then he tried to yell for help, but Monk clamped his hat over Ivans' mouth again, and kept it there.

There did not seem to be a police guard at the warehouse. But Doc was cautious, and drove on down the street, made a turn into a side street, circled and came back. He saw nothing alarming, but was not reassured.

“I have a hunch this will be fast going. The police aren't fools enough to leave this place unwatched,” he said. “So hold your hats.”

He swung the car toward the warehouse entrance. The door of the place, the big one, was operated by a radio control, the only hitch being that this was Pat's car and there was no transmitter of the correct frequency. Doc slid to a stop in front of the big door, said, “Drive it in, Ham,” and ran to the small door. Across the street, a man came out of a store and yelled, “Here! Here, now!” A cop.

Doc got the small door open with the gadget control, jumped inside, threw the switch which opened the big door.

As the big door raised slowly, Monk got the car in motion. He drove inside. The policeman was crossing the street. He bellowed angrily, lifted his gun, began shooting. But the big overhead door, of steel, was now closing. The policeman's bullets made loud drum-tap sounds against the panel.

Doc got the lights on. “The seaplane,” he ordered. “And move fast.”

He had decided by now that the police hadn't been inside the warehouse. They were merely watching the place. Outside, he could hear the officer yelling, and getting an answer. Evidently there were other police in the neighborhood.

Ham ran to the seaplane.

Cultell and Ivans both picked this time to try to escape. Monk, trying to control both of them, made angry noises, finally was reduced to yelling, “Hey, Doc! Help me!” Doc joined the mêlée. He used his fists, for he was angry, and helped Monk haul the victims to the seaplane.

Ham had the seaplane engines filling the interior with thunder. The big doors at the riverward end were lifting slowly, rumbling. Doc fought the springlines which held the plane in the slip. They were getting one lucky break—there was nothing in front of the plane that had to be moved before they could get the craft outside. Doc got into the cabin as the ship began moving away from the work floats in the slip.

They were well out in the river before there was any shooting at them, and then the firing was ineffectual. Presently they were in the air.

HAM flew. Doc Savage went back into the cabin, turned on the lights, and met Ivans' baleful stare. “Feel all right?” Doc asked.

“Kidnapping and murder and God knows what else!” Ivans said violently.

“Don't get too mad to listen to this fellow's story,” Doc said, indicating Cultell.

Cultell scowled. “I didn't agree to tell anything in front of an Assistant District Attorney.”

Doc Savage studied Cultell's face, adding to his earlier belief that physical danger wouldn't be a very great factor with this man. The fellow was a thinker, a planner, and the dangers that were most real to him were dangers to the mind.

Doc, having eyed him intently for a while, said, "I was afraid we made a mistake not shooting you full of that drug. But it's not too late. And this time, God help you."

Fear lifted Cultell's lips enough to show his teeth.

"I guess I'm stuck."

"I guess you are. How many of you are involved in this?"

"Seven."

"There are eight in that photograph."

"The girl isn't in it. Paula Argus. She doesn't know what it's all about."

"What started it?"

Cultell squirmed. "That goes back a little."

Doc turned to Ivans. "You'd better get this. Move over here where you can hear." And Ivans scowled at him, but changed his seat. There was a normal amount of motor roar inside the ship. Ham, handling the controls, had lined out across northern Manhattan Island and the Bronx.

Doc told Cultell. "It goes back to the war, doesn't it? To some kind of a deal you seven were involved in? A deal concerning metals?"

Cultell nodded. "Mind telling me how the hell you figure that out?"

"All of you were in the metal business in some connection. All of you were active on the wartime industrial stage."

"Well," Cultell said, "it doesn't go back that far. It only goes back six months ago, to a house party we all attended on that island. We were Jones-Field's guests. Jones-Field put on that frontiersman's outfit as a gag, which was supposed to invoke a curse. Well, since then, attempts have been made at various times to kill all of us."

Doc looked at Cultell intently to see if the man was lying. It was hard to tell.

"What do you mean, curse?"

Cultell shrugged. "That buckskin outfit belonged to some old guy, Jones-Field's great-great-somebody or other, a relative. Somebody put a curse on this ancestor. The curse was supposed to ride with his outfit, forever. A story like that."

"Oh."

"I know it's nuts. Anyway, strange attempts have been made to kill us, and before each one, the victim got a part of that deerslayer suit, as you call it. Finally Carlton Argus was killed, then Elmo Tollen, and we decided to go to Jones-Field's island, all of us, and see what on earth was back of it."

"That the story?" Doc asked.

"Yes."

Doc caught Monk's eye, and Monk proceeded to make various grimaces conveying that he didn't

believe a word of it.

“Hah!” Ivans said explosively.

Doc asked Ivans, “Don't you believe it?”

“It's a bigger cock-and-bull story than anything you've told me.” Ivans said angrily. “And that's going some!”

## Chapter XI

THE island was an island by grace of a stretch of water five feet deep at low tide and a hundred yards wide, which was all that separated the crooked-thumb of a neck of land from the Maine coast. The result in all was not bad, since five feet was not deep enough to allow much of a tide rip and as a result there was a partly land-locked harbor about half a mile long and up to a hundred yards in width. The wind was just right; they came in from the sea, dropping down in an easy normal glide, and touched water. Ham called back, “Do we go right ashore?”

“Why not?” Doc asked. “We have an Assistant District Attorney of the City of New York aboard for protection.”

Ivans said, “Don't be funny!” He didn't sound as sure of himself as he had.

Ham sent the seaplane in toward shore, keeping enough speed that he could nose up into the wind and keep off the rocky beach. It became clear that they would have to anchor offshore, and Doc climbed out on the nose. There were four mooring buoys offshore a few dozen yards, and he picked up one of those, made their mooring line fast and gave Ham the throat-cutting gesture which silenced the engines.

Fifty yards away was the dock which had been the locale of the photograph they had found on Jeff Morgan's boat.

Beyond, slightly higher, was a lodge of some size. Not a yachting place, but a rustic looking structure of stone and logs.

A splash caused Doc to wheel nervously, but it was only Monk putting over the rubber boat. The inflation gadget hissed, and the boat squirmed and grew into shape. Doc turned his attention back to the island. He had already decided that he didn't like the quietness of the place, the look of stillness.

“Cultell and I will go ashore first, alone,” he said. He was watching Cultell's face, but it told him nothing.

The rubber boat, or raft, was a G. I. job which did not respond to oars with any special grace. Cultell sat in the stern and watched the island fixedly. Doc rowed backward, facing the island himself, and tension made a stiffness in his arms, a tightness in his hands.

Then a figure appeared on a path. It was the boisterous looking Jeff Morgan, hatless, his hair a red blaze in the very early morning sunlight.

Morgan kept walking until he was on the dock, and stopped there to watch them. His expression was unpleasant.

He threw an angry question at Cultell. “What the devil did you bring them here for?”

“I had to. I told them—”

“Shut up!” Doc said.

Ignoring the order, Cultell said, “I told them that the—”

Reaching forward, Doc struck Cultell above the ear with his fist, putting some steam behind the blow, upsetting Cultell unconscious in the raft.

Morgan scowled. “You're not welcome here, Savage.”

“I did not expect to be,” Doc said, and ran his eyes over the island, gripped by the feeling of being watched, perhaps menaced. He added, “We're coming ashore.”

“Come ahead,” Morgan said after a while. “I don't believe the mess can be made any worse.”

“Is Pat here?”

“That bronze-haired girl? Yes.”

“Is she all right?”

“Mad as hell,” Morgan said. His lips twisted in the ghost of a grin. “She's quite a ball of electricity, that girl.”

MONK and Ham and Ivans came ashore, Doc rowing back after them. Cultell was still out from Doc's blow, and Monk carried him up the path toward the log lodge.

Doc told Morgan, “The fat is in the fire. So if you are planning to start something, don't!”

Morgan indicated Cultell. “He talked, did he?”

“Yes.”

Sober-faced, Morgan said, “That surprises me. I didn't think he would.”

Doc walked warily, for his feeling of danger was strong. He was not sure of himself. He was bluffing, letting Morgan think that Cultell had told everything, whereas all probabilities were that the man had told little but lies. Some of his suspicion of danger might come from his own uncertainty, but he was inclined to put more trust in his feeling for trouble.

They reached the house, though, without incident. The door was closed, but Morgan went to it, announced wearily to someone within that, “The whole thing has blown up. They got Cultell to talk.”

Presently the door opened.

The man who had worn the buckskins in the picture, Jones-Field, was inside, and two other men. One of the latter was John Holland. The remaining man was recognizable from the description Monk had given, and from the photograph, as the fake butler, McFellen, who had led Monk into the murder frameup at the Argus apartment. They were placed at widely separated parts of the room, near doors or windows. Doc, sweeping them briefly with his eyes, did not like the way they were standing, nor the way they held their hands. They were not holding weapons, but he suspected weapons were close.

“Pat?” Doc called. Strain made his voice louder than he expected.

“In here,” Pat's voice answered from another room.

“You all right?”

“I'm tied up. So is Paula.”

“Take it easy,” Doc said quietly. “This thing is about over.”

“Watch them,” Pat warned uneasily. “I think they're all dangerous.”

Doc thought so also, but he kept the alarm out of his voice and said, “They have nothing to gain now.” He had not taken his eyes off the men. He indicated Ivans and said, “This is Assistant District Attorney Ivans of New York.”

They didn't like the presence of Ivans, their eyes indicated.

“Mr. Ivans wants your statement,” Doc said. “Briefly now. More fully later.”

“What statements?” Holland demanded.

“Corroborating what Mr. Cultell told us.”

Doc Savage was sure, for a moment, that they weren't going to talk, that violence was going to explode. But Ivans saved the moment.

Ivans said, “The District Attorney's office has no desire to be particularly tough on you, providing you are cooperative.”

It was John Holland who said, “If you expect us to confess that seven of us got together and swindled the United States government out of several million dollars, you're crazy. For my part, you can talk to my attorneys about that.”

IVANS batted his eyes, startled at the discovery of a sordid wartime scheme of graft. But he handled the find nicely, and much better than Doc thought he would. He said, “Suit yourself. That will be a federal case, and out of my hands.” He levelled his arm at them. “But those murders! They're my business!”

Holland, pleased by his little victory, spoke more freely. He said, “The same thing happened to all of us. We all got a demand for a half million dollars. Blackmail.”

Ivans glanced at Doc Savage. He didn't want to handle the questioning, his glance said. He didn't know enough about it.

Doc thought: You probably know as much as I do.

“What was the threat if you didn't pay?” Doc asked.

“The threat was to give the government proof of this imaginary—mind you, I say imaginary—fraud which—”

“It wasn't imaginary,” Doc said.

“The federal government will have to prove differently.”

Doc said, “You were going to be turned in if you didn't pay?”

“That's right.”

“Did you pay?”

“Naturally not.”

“Then what?”

“We started getting parts of that frontiersman's outfit by way of warning—”

Doc lifted a hand. “Just a minute. Why would a flintlock rifle, or a powder horn, or buckskin leggings, be a warning?”

Holland turned to Jones-Field. “Tell him.”

Jones-Field hesitated, and Doc saw menace radiating from the man, and indecision. He saw Jones-Field control a frenzied desire for violence, with considerable effort.

“That part is silly,” Jones-Field said. “My great-great-great grandfather was Cultus Field, a notorious forest pirate in the lower Mississippi river country back in the primitive days. He had, as a matter of fact, quite a bloody career, through which he led a charmed life. His good luck he attributed to that outfit of buckskins and his flintlock rifle. He died a natural death, and the clothing has passed down as a sort of family heirloom, together with the story of it bringing good luck to any rascal who wore it.”

Doc asked, “Why did you wear it that day for the photograph?”

“A gag.”

“What do you mean, gag?”

“There had been some drinking and kidding that day, and I said I would put on the outfit and it would bring us good luck. I was a little tight, and it seemed a funny idea at the time.”

Doc asked, “Did you send the parts of the outfit to these different people?”

“Certainly not!”

“Who did?”

“The blackmailer, whoever he is.”

“As a matter of fact,” Doc said, “aren't you quite sure the blackmailer is one of your own number? One of the seven?”

No one answered.

On the floor where Monk had put him, Cultell opened his eyes. He kept them open, listening, not saying anything. He had not, Doc was sure, just regained consciousness. He had been awake some time.

“SUPPOSE you give your version of the murders,” Doc said.

Holland looked at Morgan. “Suppose you tell that, Jeff.”

“Why the hell should I tell it? I don't know anything about it.” Morgan nodded at McFellen. “You were

there, McFellen.”

McFellen scowled, hesitated, then said, “Carlton Argus called me and told me Paula had gone to get Doc Savage. Argus said he didn't like the idea, and would I come over and help him figure out some lies to tell Savage. I went over. I found Argus dead. Murdered.”

He scowled again, this time at Monk, added, “I got the not-so-good idea of framing Savage, but you turned up instead, so I framed you. I led you into the orchid culture room—”

Monk was batting his eyes. “Hell, wait a minute!” he said. “You weren't the guy who opened the door and let me in when the girl brought me to the apartment.”

“No, I was the second butler. Remember, you were looking at a stuffed animal head in the armory? Well, I rushed you into the orchid room quick, so Paula wouldn't see me, and hoping you wouldn't get suspicious about two butlers.”

“Paula didn't know you were in the apartment?”

“Of course not.”

“How'd you get around in there like that without her seeing you?”

“I knew the family habits, and the real butler was helping me.”

“Oh, Elmo Tollen was helping you?”

“Yes. I put you in the orchid-culture room, and Elmo Tollen was in the greenhouse part with the body, and it was his voice which spoke to you to make you think Carlton Argus was alive. Then Tollen slid out of the window on a rope he'd rigged, got to a window of an apartment below and pulled in the rope. I understand Savage did the same thing later to fool the police. I guess he saw enough signs to know what had happened.”

“That's right,” Doc said. “There were marks on the window sill and frame.”

Monk frowned. “Somebody told us Tollen was a millionaire. That right?”

“No. He has a distant cousin who owns a company of some sort, but there was no financial connection. No, Tollen had merely accepted money in the past to help us. In other words, for a little pay, he was one of us.”

“Then who killed Tollen, and why?” Doc Savage asked.

“The murderer killed him,” McFellen said sourly. “Why, I don't know. But it could only have been because Tollen had found out who the murderer was.”

“Where did you go after you left the Argus apartment?” Doc asked.

“I got a train and headed here,” McFellen said.

“Can you prove that?”

“You're damned right. I met two bankers I know and we played poker on the train. Want their names?”

“Later,” Doc said. He turned to Jeff Morgan, said, “How long had you been aboard your boat before we got there?”

“All evening.”

“Was the story about someone claiming to be one of my men coming for the powder horn a lie?”

“It was a lie. I wanted to confuse you.”

Doc swung on Jones-Field. “Where were you about the time Argus was murdered, and Tollen also?”

“I have been right here on the island the whole time,” Jones-Field said emphatically. “I can prove that, also, by long-distance telephone calls I received from Morgan, Holland and McFellen. The toll slips will prove it. Furthermore, I had friends out here last night for cards.”

John Holland growled far down in his throat. “I can prove where I was all the time, and I'm damned glad of it.”

Doc turned to Cultell. “What about you?”

Cultell's face had become gray again. “I was at my apartment when Argus and Tollen were knocked off. McFellen called me there. He told me you were mixing in the case, and for me to grab your cousin, Patricia Savage, so we could use a threat to her safety to make you drop your investigation.”

McFellen nodded. “That's right. I did. I told him to scare hell out of the girl, and we'd work out a way of having her convince you her life was really in danger.”

“You've all got alibis, so somebody is lying,” Doc said.

Ivans grunted loudly.

“The doctor's murder!” he exclaimed. “That's going to crack it!”

JEFF MORGAN'S eyes grew roundly frightened. “Wait a minute! I was at the Argus apartment when the doctor was killed, but I was with the girls. I didn't do it.”

Doc lifted his voice. “Pat?”

“Yes?”

“You hear that?”

“He didn't kill the doctor,” Pat said. “The big bum came in and chased the doctor out of the living room, talked to us for a while about what he'd do to us if we didn't come with him quietly, and then we started out and found the doctor dead.”

Morgan blew out his breath. “That poor old Doc thought the murderer was with me, probably, and tried to grab him. The murderer brained him and left in a hurry. That's the way it had to be.”

Doc looked at Ivans. “You see who it is?”

“Now I do,” Ivans said. “Yeah, it's the guy who can't prove where he was when the doctor was killed. I'll be damned! Just like in the movies—”

Cultell, on the floor, yelled suddenly, “You damned fools! Why didn't you keep your mouths shut! I never told him about any government swindle!”

Silence, as brittle as glass, hit the room.

Cultell broke it.

“Do something!” Cultell said. “They came here alone! Nobody knows they're here. Nobody—”

Monk kicked Cultell on the jaw, silencing him. But the damage was done. The room filled with violence.

## Chapter XII

DOC SAVAGE had been expecting fury all during the questioning. His expectation had stretched until, now when the thing happened, his readiness was like a rubber band that had been overstrained until it had little snap. For a moment the fight smashed around him without his being able to take part, and not until he saw Morgan coming up with a gun did he move.

He came down hard on Morgan, fought the man with growing freedom and fury. Morgan was tough. He hung on to his gun for dear existence until it was torn from his fingers.

The room had been a trap. Each of the men had a gun concealed where he could reach it. None of them had the guns on their persons, probably because they had known it was a serious matter in the eyes of the law to carry concealed weapons. But they had them hidden close at hand.

McFellen had his revolver in a desk drawer. He got to the desk. Monk, rushing on from kicking Cultell, hit the desk, heaved it over. There was a large pottery lamp on the desk, and McFellen snatched this as the desk was going over, struck Monk with it, brought it down on Monk's head and shoulders. Monk seemed not to notice. McFellen began to run. Monk pursued him. They left the room.

Ham and Jones-Field had hold of each other, grunting and straining for possession of a stubby double-barreled derringer pistol which Jones-Field had plucked out of an overstuffed chair.

Ivans fared the worst in the fight. Physical violence did not seem to be his meat. He was hit in the face by John Holland, hit very hard, so that he fell backward stiffly. Holland kicked him in the face quite callously, went on toward the door.

Doc Savage threw Morgan from him, threw him so that he crashed against Holland, and Holland was unfooted. Holland was quickly erect again, and making for the door. Doc lunged and seized him.

Holland fought with a demon fury. A knife was suddenly in his hand, and he struck outward and upward with the blade. Doc drew away. It was never wise to take on a man with a knife when empty-handed, no matter what your skill. But the best of weapons to cope with a knife fighter was a chair, and there were plenty of those. He retreated until he could lay hands on one, then made for Holland, pinned Holland against the wall. It was then simple to kick Holland's kneecap, breaking it, draw back and use the chair to break the man's knife arm.

Holland fell at Monk's feet as Monk came back into the house, hauling McFellen by the hair.

“Kinda rough on him, aren't you?” Monk said.

Doc rested, blowing out some of his hot violence in hard breaths. Holland moaned and whimpered at his feet, but he felt no pity for the man.

He said, “Holland's it.”

“The hell he is!” Monk said.

Monk had thought it was Cultell, because Cultell had started this fight.

“Holland had no alibi for the time of the doctor's murder. All the others had ironclad ones.” Doc's voice was tired and pitched in lower and lower tones. “And remember that Tollen was killed at Holland's house. Holland probably did it because Tollen knew who the blackmailer was. Then Holland tied himself to the stairs. He could have managed that himself.”

Monk scratched his head.

Quiet had fallen in the room, except for Holland's whimpering, which was an ugly guilty sound like a beast in a trap.

“A mixed up mess,” Monk said.

Ivans sat up, feeling of his bruised face. He began swearing presently, and while he might not be able to fight well, he swore with great facility, much depth of feeling.

“Not as mixed up as it was,” Doc said.

Pat was calling anxiously. Doc went to the door. He looked in at Pat and Paula Argus, tied to chairs. “It's all right,” Doc said.

“Oh it is, is it?” Pat said, and proceeded to tell him what she thought about being left tied to a chair during the excitement. “Suppose you had gotten licked?” she demanded.

Ivans had stopped swearing suddenly when he heard Pat's voice. Now he appeared in the door, bowing, saying, “I wish to apologize for my language.”

Pat laughed. “You were expressing my feelings exactly. I thought of joining you.”

Ivans advanced into the room with a flourish. He produced a pocket knife, began cutting the girls free, at the same time delivering sympathetic words.

Doc watched Ivans in surprise. Ivans was a ladies' man!

Monk Mayfair stood in the door and scowled, irked by the attention Mr. Ivans was paying Paula. “Who stepped on his face?” Monk wished to know.

“Holland,” Doc explained.

“That's too bad,” Monk said unpleasantly. “It should have been a horse.”

THE END