



THE LOST GIANT

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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*Scanned and Proofed
by Tom Stephens*

Chapter I

HE had gone to much trouble to get where he was going. He had used great care, and some of the things he had done were peculiar.

The theater ticket, for instance. It was a single ticket to the play *Oklahoma*, the hit play; and times were so screwball that it was known to be a major venture into diplomacy to try for a ticket to *Oklahoma*.

But he had gotten one, and then he hadn't used it. That is, he hadn't used it to see the show. He had used it for the purposes for which he had bought it: to create a commotion buying the ticket, making it appear certain that he was going to attend the show. Too, to make anyone who might be following him think that he was in the show from curtain rise, eight-forty, until after eleven.

There was no certainty in his mind that anyone was following him, but he was not taking chances. It was important not to be followed. So vital, in fact, that merely thinking about it during the afternoon had made him physically ill. He had not even dared make the usual moves to find out whether he was being watched.

He entered the theater. He was recognized, although he would rather not have been. Being recognized was something that could not be helped, because of his conspicuous size and his reputation; and he sat there patiently in the seat he had made such a point of getting, knowing he was being stared at and whispered about. He kept a sour expression on his face—that was easy since he was so worried—and this probably discouraged anyone from trying to talk to him. At least no one did.

Fortunately a war hero came in, almost stoop-shouldered under the weight of his medals and looking self

conscious about it, and distracted some of the attention. The war hero was a nice-looking young guy. The Army was using him in bond drives, but apparently he would have been happier flying the P38 with which he'd downed so many Fritzes.

The lights went down before the curtain rise. Instantly, he was out of his seat. It was a side seat, close to the side hallway, and he was in the hallway in two steps.

"All right, take my seat," he told the man waiting there.

"I don't look too much like you," the man said.

He didn't, either. He was as wide, but not as tall. And he was homely. But he was wearing the same kind of a suit, had deeply tanned makeup on his face, and had worked a bronze hue into his hair with dye. But he was shorter, very much shorter. The first man was a lithe giant, naturally proportioned so that he seemed only about five feet ten and of normal build until one got close to him and realized his bigness.

"You bring a cushion to sit on, Monk?" the big man asked.

"Sure," said the one who had waited in the side hall. "It'll raise me up. But what about intermissions?"

"Get your face in a program, and keep it there. You can handle it all right."

"Okay," Monk said. "Seen any sign of anybody trailing you?"

"No."

"Good luck."

"The same to you, Monk."

Monk said, "I'm not the one who needs it," and meant it.

HE got out of the theater by way of a rear door, not the stage entrance but a door that was less likely to be watched, as unobtrusively as possible. He took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves and got a very light-colored felt hat out of his pocket and straightened it out and yanked its shapeless brim over his eyes. Going down the side street, he looked very different.

He rode a cab uptown. He changed and rode a cab downtown. He went across town on one subway train and came back on another and used all the tricks he knew. He walked down a long dark street, down a series of long dark streets, and finally it seemed impossible that he could be followed. So he went to an apartment on Fifty-fifth Street east of Madison Avenue.

He rang an apartment bell. A pleasant lady answered. He said, "I have an appointment to see Mr. House."

"Are you Mr. Seems?"

"I used that name."

"Will you come this way. Mr. House is waiting. I am Mrs. House." Then she looked at him intently for a moment. "Your name isn't Seems, is it?"

"No."

“Aren't you—”

“Mr. Seems, if you please,” he said, and smiled. His smile was amiable, confidence-winning, and one would have to know him well to realize how much tension was behind it.

The pleasant lady suddenly looked a little frightened. “My husband is waiting,” she repeated hastily.

House was a small man like a mouse. A man with a little voice, as smooth as culture could make it and very gentle. His eyes were large, his mouth large, his forehead oversize, and one got the impression that the rest of his face was nothing much.

He became bug-eyed with astonishment.

“Good God!” he said. “I was expecting somebody named Grimes or Chimes or Seems or something.”

“How are you?” the big bronze man said. He extended a cordial hand, then wondered if he was going to be able to keep the hand from trembling while he shook hands with House. “I am sorry about the misleading names. It was better not to use my own name to make the appointment with you.”

“Oh now, that's all right,” House said. “Just ease my curiosity by explaining why I am honored, and I'll be very happy.”

“You already know why I came.”

“I do?”

“You were told when the appointment was made.”

“Oh, you—” House blinked, and for a few seconds was silently, mentally chewing on his thoughts. He asked, “You really came here to consult me about changing your appearance?”

“Yes.”

House stared at the big bronze man, and he started laughing, his laugh large, hearty, full of this-is-ridiculous robustness. “You!” he said. “You coming to me for such a job. You, with your ability along those lines.”

The bronze man's composure slipped for a moment, his quiet smile going, and a little of his inner tension rising to twist and draw his face muscles. It was as if a fierce, tormented animal had come out of a cave.

“I'm sorry,” House said. “I am very sorry. I don't know why I laughed when you said you had come to me to have your appearance changed. I guess maybe I was very flattered. Maybe that is why I laughed.”

“Can we go to work right now?”

“Oh. You are in a hurry?”

“Very.”

“What is—”

“You are not to ask questions.”

“I don't understand?”

“It is very simple. No questions. Or, at least, don't expect answers.”

House frowned. He was Jonas House, and he was very good in spite of his modesty a minute ago. There might have been greater masters of make-up than Jonas House, but they were neither known nor recognized as such.

Jonas House was of Hollywood, naturally. Make-up exists as an advanced art practically nowhere else, if one excludes the cosmeticians' branch of it. Certainly without Hollywood, a man like Jonas House couldn't have developed. He was in New York for the winter, and currently making one of his sporadic efforts to retire from the picture business. In a few months, by spring at the latest, he would be back on the coast. He always went back.

The man was not to be taken lightly. He didn't just smear on greasepaints and apply hair dyes and make rubber fillers for the cheeks, although he could do that sort of thing, too.

House had been examining the bronze man thoughtfully. He shook his head suddenly.

“Look,” he said. “To do a job on you, I've got to know things. I've got to know such facts as whether you're going to be out in the weather, on a boat at sea, or in a coal mine. For instance, salt from sea water will bleach out some dyes, and in a coal mine you've got the chemicals in the coal and the soap you wash the coal grime off with.”

“I'll give you enough information.”

“For example?”

“Snow, wind, cold. Probably more than forty below zero. Out in the snow quite a lot. Then exposure to warmth of open fireplaces. In contact with the hands such things as skiing wax, campfire smoke, ice water, and possibly a sled dog might be licking my hand. That help?”

“It's a start.”

“It's about all you're going to get.”

House nodded soberly. He didn't insist. “This is important, isn't it?” he said knowingly, bluntly.

“More than you probably imagine.”

House smiled a thin smile and said, “Having heard of you by reputation, my imagination is probably much more active than you think.”

“Can you get going?”

“How much time have you?”

“None at all.”

“This will take two days.”

“More than four hours is absolutely impossible,” the bronze man said.

“My God!” House walked to the door and opened it. “Momma! Momma! You better help me on this job,” he called. “Hurry.”

HE was big and blond. He was still big, because even Jonas House couldn't shrink a man. But now he looked soft. Before there had been a corded liveness in his every movement, the tight spring and the corded smoothness of a man who had abnormal strength. Now he looked soft and lazy and comfortable. He was no longer a panther walking, he was a lazy, well-fed young fellow at whom people would look and wonder, why isn't that bird in the army?

The miraculous thing about the change in him was that no part of him was actually changed to any extent. Slight changes here and there, but no effort anywhere to alter him completely.

"That's the best I can do on short notice," Jonas House said.

They shook hands in the hall.

He left the House apartment, and standing in the elevator riding down to the lobby, he examined himself intently in the mirror.

Looking at himself, he got a queer feeling and a creepy one; for a moment he was positive he wasn't himself. He was very pleased, but shocked also, because it was unnerving to discover that another man could work such wizardry with you. These were strange feelings for him to be having. I'm upset, he thought, and that isn't good.

He left the apartment house, and two nice-looking young men came out of the shadows and joined him. They didn't say anything, but they walked beside him.

He stopped. He mentally seized all his fears and anxiety and shoved them back into his mind where they wouldn't interfere. At least, he thought, gratefully, I am still able to do that.

"All right," he said. "What is this?"

"Do you have a cigarette?" one of the young men asked.

He said, "Never mind playing around with words. Who are you? What do you want?"

He was tense, clear-headed, and already he had decided just where he would hit these young men with his fists and how, if it was necessary. He didn't think it would be needed. He thought he knew who they were.

"We got off a northbound train," one of the young men said.

"Train?"

"Bus, I mean," the young man said. "And I'm afraid we're lost."

"You are not lost."

The young men were relieved. They hadn't seemed too tense, but they must have been, because they acted as if an electric current had been going through their bodies, and now it had been shut off.

"Jonathan Wister is waiting around the corner," one said. "He wishes to speak to you."

He went with the two young men.

HE was startled at the change in Jonathan Wister, at the way terror had laid hold of Wister.

It shocked him especially because he had known Jonathan Wister a long time and had genuine respect for the man's judgment, calmness and directness of thinking. He had believed that nothing was big enough to shock Wister the way he was shocked now, to drive him into a tailspin of terror.

Jonathan Wister was entirely unknown to at least a hundred million citizens of the United States. Yet his picture had appeared in the newspapers often, in a semi-anonymous way, in pictures where Wister was one of a photographed group of the internationally notable, groups with the President, the Prime Minister, Stalin. Wister was the man in the background, the man whose name wasn't in the cutlines printed with the picture.

Wister was a career diplomat. The head of his department took the credit for Wister's good work, and took the blame for Wister's mistakes. Wister made mistakes. And his kind of mistakes could cost lives, maybe many lives, because they could start wars.

Wister was a good man. The State Department handed him their delicate negotiating, their egg-handling. They gave him their tense, terrible jobs that scared the hell out of everybody in Washington who knew what was going on.

Wister said, "Is this a northbound street, or is it even a one-way street?"

"Street?"

"Avenue, I mean."

"You're all right."

Wister said, and his nerves crawled out and got in his voice, "What are you doing? My God, what are you doing?"

He got in the car with Wister. He was angry, startled, impatient. He said to Wister, "Look here, Wister. I told you fellows to drop me, to stay away from me entirely, not to interfere or try to help me in any way."

"We're not," Wister said.

"How did you find me here?"

"My men learned it. They have your telephone tapped and have covered you completely."

"What do you call that?"

"Which? Why, efficient work by my agents, I suppose. They are good men."

"I don't mean that."

Wister hesitated, then complained, "Oh, I suppose you are complaining that we are hampering you."

"I told you to leave me alone. You're not doing it."

"No, no, you misunderstand. This is a protective cover we have placed around you, a guarantee of your personal safety and—"

"Take them off."

"Eh?"

“Call them off. Every last man of them.”

“Oh.”

He waited for Wister to think it over. He had expected this trouble with Wister. Wister was accustomed to working with a large and complicated organization, and the man thought in such terms. Wister was certain to feel a little the way the operator of a thundering pile-driver might feel about seeing another man tackle a baffling job with no tool but a tack hammer.

He told Wister, “Get away from me—all of you, every last one.”

He made his voice heavy with firmness, solid with conviction, and gave it a little bite of anger, or rather he could not keep the anger out.

Wister moved uncomfortably. “All the help possible—”

“Will make as much commotion as a herd of stampeding elephants,” he told Wister. “I am going to do this my own way. That was the understanding.”

“But it's so big—” Wister suddenly sounded sick.

“Want some advice?”

“Yes, of course!”

“Go home and sleep. Relax.”

“Sleep, my God!” Wister muttered. “Since this broke, I haven't even been able to feel the ground under my feet, and I can't taste my food.”

HE was silent, scowling, because Wister's terrorized anxiety was taking hold of him also. Something like that, he knew, would wreck him. When terror laid hold of you, you could do just one thing—fight like a wildcat. You couldn't plot, connive, check move with counter-move, scheme and devise. You could strike blows and take blows, was all.

He told Wister again, violently, “Take your agents off me! I've got to work alone!”

Wister shivered.

“All right,” Wister agreed. “Whatever you say.”

“Fair enough,” he told Wister. “Now, what about this girl?”

“Didn't your man Ham Brooks tell you she was taking the Lake Placid train?”

“So your agents are around her like a swarm of locusts, too?”

“Well, we—”

“You were supposed to leave me alone, and leave her alone.”

“We—”

“Wister,” he said quietly, “I appreciate the strain you are under, but on the other hand I assure you that it

is grinding me down also. But you must leave this thing alone. Take your hands off.”

Wister gave way, saying in a low, wild voice, “I wish they'd never put such an incredibly vital job in the hands of one man!”

“I wish they hadn't either,” he told Wister, and he sounded a little ill himself.

He got out of the car.

Chapter II

HAM BROOKS met him at Grand Central Station.

“She's in a Pullman,” Ham said. He passed over an envelope. “Your reservation is in the same section. You have the upper, she has the lower.”

“Good work.”

Ham Brooks smirked. “She's a dish.”

Alarmed, he demanded, “You haven't been talking to her?”

“No, but it took will power.”

He imagined it had, because Ham Brooks had a weakness for blondes. Ham Brooks was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, and a General was supposed to have some dignity, even when he was on the inactive list, as Ham—against his wishes—was. Ham was also an eminent lawyer. But he was still like an eighteen-year-old sailor when a pretty girl went by.

“Has she noticed you by any chance?” he asked anxiously.

“Nope.”

“Sure?”

“Positive.”

“All right. You and Monk stick at headquarters and wait for orders. Better sleep by the telephone.”

Ham said, “With a thing like this, I don't feel much like sleeping.”

He left Ham and walked down the long sloping ramp to the train, carrying his skiis, and wondering if Ham had really kept out of the girl's sight. Ham was one of his assistants. Monk, who had taken his place in the theater seat, was another associate. But both of them had an eye for an ankle, and he had learned not to depend implicitly on them where legs were involved.

This girl surely had ankles. She was showing one of them, and very much something it was, as he came down the aisle, seat check in one hand, suitcase in the other.

He consulted his seat check, put his hat on the seat, then walked to the other end of the car and stowed his skiis in the space which was used for that purpose.

He got, at the mirror in the end of the car, another start, because for a moment he did not recognize the lazy looking, soft young man as himself. Walking back to his seat, he was fully appreciative of the job

Jonas House had done with his appearance.

With the picture of how he looked fresh in his mind, he conducted himself as he thought such a fellow would behave.

“My name is Joe Powell,” he said. “I hope you don't mind getting acquainted.”

“I'm Doris,” she said.

Which wasn't the truth. Her name was Edith Halcyon. He didn't know much else about her, but he knew that.

“I'm an orchestra leader,” he said.

“That sounds quite essential,” she said.

“Meaning why I am not in the army?”

“That's right.”

“Since you want to know, I'll tell you.”

“I don't.”

He said, “I don't think we're going to get along very well together, Doris.”

“You caught on quickly,” she said, and picked up a book and began looking at it.

HE laughed and stretched out and hoped he looked quite comfortable. He felt silly, sitting there wearing ski pants and a loud woolly sweater and a trick ski jacket and big ski boots. There were others on the train dressed the same way, it was true, but he was not comfortable. This was not a snow train; the railroads weren't operating snow trains any more. But a lot of skiers still used the trains wearing their ski clothes, even if there was a war and death and fright and destruction around the world.

Frequently in times like these, he thought, it is embarrassing to wear civilian clothes. And to be on a train dressed for frivolity in a ski outfit was, it struck him suddenly, something to be ashamed of.

Suddenly he looked at the girl. Why, darn him if she hadn't gotten under his skin about that being the army crack. That was why he'd started being ashamed of being in ski clothes.

He watched the girl, wondering what such a young no-good as he was pretending to be, would do to reopen the conversation. He couldn't think of anything, which must be evidence that he was inexperienced, or possibly that she had upset him. He realized that the train was moving, having started with hardly a perceptible jolt.

He said, “It's what you deserve, getting it flattened.”

He thought she wasn't going to answer, but she was only keeping her eyes on the book while she tried to puzzle out what he meant.

“What?” she asked, curiosity getting the best of her.

“Your nose is little and kind of flat on the end,” he explained. “It probably got that way from people

pushing against it to keep it out of their business.”

“Whose nose in what business?” she demanded.

“Yours into mine, in this case.”

“You must have misunderstood me. I don’t care in the least whether you have fur or feathers.”

He said, “Then why jerk open the door of my hidden room? Meaning my room where I keep the secret of why I’m not in the army?”

“I like,” she said, “to kick tin cans when I pass them.”

“You could scuff your shoe.”

“They clank and make hollow, empty noises. The cans, I mean.”

He grinned, and eyed her speculatively. She wasn’t a show girl, probably, because she didn’t have quite something that show girls usually have. Something in manner, in attitude, voice. She didn’t have that. But she had the looks.

She was tall and quite blonde and on the spectacular side. The sailor across the aisle was looking at her a great deal, and a soldier and a fat man had both had three drinks apiece at the near-by water cooler.

He sneered at her. “You’re going to cause a traffic problem.”

“I hope you get trampled in the rush,” she said.

“If you keep on showing such a bawdy amount of leg,” he said, “I might.”

She looked uncomfortable.

THE train was out of the tunnel and around the curve at Kill Van Kull, and rolling northward toward Harmon, where the electric locomotive would be taken off and the steam one put on. Their seat was on the left side of the train. They could look out over the Hudson, partly visible in the evening murk.

A little snow lay in the sheltered places, thin and granular. But the river was not frozen over, and there was not much float ice.

He was thinking about the girl, drawing conclusions and making guesses. He wished he knew more about her, as did various other people. In that category one would include the American, British, Russian and Chinese governments, and perhaps some others. He reflected that it sounded pretty dramatic when you thought of it that way, but it still seemed like an understatement. If ever big events hung by a thin thread, they were hanging from one now, and this girl was the thread.

She could have looked more like a Mata Hari, he thought. She could at least have been hard. He would have felt more at ease if he could get the conviction he was dealing with a bad lot.

This lovely, though, was the wrong type. A very pretty blonde who was a little sassy and probably somewhat spoiled because she was so pretty. He wasn’t sure about the spoiled part, either. She had chopped away at him pretty sharply, but then he had put his neck a long way out, asking for it.

And he liked the way she had blushed when he mentioned her leg.

He liked the blush. But it frightened him. It was a girlishly innocent thing to do. And if this girl was as important as they thought she was, she wasn't likely to be girlishly innocent. Or was she?

Was she? Who had made the rule that women who lived dangerously had to be tigers in skirts? Possibly story books had started that. Probably there was nothing to it. He knew some nice, gentle and very moral young men who lived so dangerously that it would put your teeth on edge. It might be the same with a woman. He hoped not.

But was she the key they thought she was? Suddenly fears began to pick at his nerves. Suppose there had been a mistake? It could be. He hadn't gotten the information about her himself; that had been passed to him by Wister and the State Department, and they could have dug up a bum lead.

It would be horrible if this was a wild goose chase.

He was aware that she was staring at him. She asked abruptly, "Are you ill?"

He realized he must be showing his terrors.

"Look, Doris," he said. "Give that sailor two seats back half a chance. Or let's have a truce and a meal on me."

She put her book aside.

"It might be a pleasure to chisel you out of a dinner," she said.

HE learned one thing in the diner. He found out they were being followed. Either she was, or he was, or they both were. He couldn't tell which.

The follower was a lean, gray-haired elderly man who didn't look in the least as if he would be following anybody.

The diner meal was not too good. Even for wartime, it was not too good. The gray-haired man went on through to the club car. He came back later, took a seat in the diner and ordered coffee and a sandwich. He insisted on paying when he was served, which was a give-away. He was arranging so that he could get up and leave in a hurry, if they went anywhere.

"Joe, what is the name of your orchestra?" the girl asked.

"Powell's Tune Rangers," he said.

"I never heard of them."

"A few others haven't, too."

"In radio?"

"Not as much as we'd like. But a little."

He wondered if the girl knew the gray-haired man was attached to them. She gave no sign, absolutely none, of being aware.

She asked, "How far are you going?"

“Lake Placid.”

“Ever been there?”

He had. He thought he had better admit it, for that would be safer. “A time or two,” he said.

“How are you on skis?”

“I’m pretty hot,” he said. He was, too, and he believed he’d better say so, because it was hard for a ski expert to act like a greenhorn.

“Skating is my dish,” she said.

When they were back in their pullman, she showed him the book she had been reading. “It’s Figure and Fancy Skating, by George Meagher,” she explained. “It’s fifty years old, a first edition. George Meagher was the World Champion in his day, and the book has a foreword by the Earl of Derby. In the end papers there are some very interesting old advertisements of road skates with pneumatic tires. The advertisement states that France, Russia, Sweden, Japan, and so forth, have ordered samples of the road skates with the idea of equipping their armies with them. Isn’t that quaint?”

He decided to admit that he could skate.

“I can do a few school figures,” he said. “Eights and grapevines and a Double Salchow that’s on the ragged side.”

“You’re not exactly a dub, then,” she said.

They talked freely about skating for quite a while. He admitted once having met Salchow, who had improved on the star figure invented by Englemann, the star of four crosses, forward rocker, back loop, back counter. She talked about the great women skaters, Maribel Vinson, Freda Whitaker, Sonja Henie, Madame De Linge, and their styles. She talked brackets, Mohawks, Choctaws.

She knew more about skating than he did, that was sure.

He decided he’d waylay the man who was following them, as quickly as possible.

Chapter III

THE snow was good at Lake Placid, and the resort still had some of the winter color which had made it so nice before the war. The dog teams were still at the station, offering a picturesque taxi service.

The girl took a dog team taxi. He got her bags for her, two of them, and stowed them in the dog sled. He heard what he was hanging around to hear.

“Stripe Lodge,” she told the driver.

He didn’t exactly go cold at that. But it was a shock. Stripe Lodge was the place she would go if she was as important as they thought she was.

“Maybe I’ll see you,” she said.

“If it’s not too much of a strain on either of us, you might,” he told her.

He watched her go sliding away, the dog driver shouting, “Mush!” and putting on an impressive show.

He got his own skis, climbed into a more conventional taxicab, and said, "I'll have to find a good lodge. Know of one?"

"You want one on Mirror Lake?"

"That would be all right. Are the places crowded?"

"Not very," the driver said. "We'll try a couple."

They found a nice lodge. He rebelled a little at the price, twelve dollars a day, but checked in.

When he turned around from signing the register, the gray-haired man, the shadow from the train, was standing there. Not three feet away. The man looked at him, but showed by no sign that he was looking at anyone he had ever seen before.

He walked over and stood in front of a big fireplace with a moose head above it, watching the gray-haired man get a room. The man did not go up to his room either, but went over and began looking at the skiing pictures on the south wall.

The fellow is practically stepping on my shoe laces, he thought.

He went up to his room, and got his climbing skins and wax out of his bag. Coming downstairs again, he met some skiers, red-faced from the cold, coming in. He asked them how the snow was.

"There's just the right amount of powder snow," he was told.

He went into the ski shack, actually a part of the basement, with great plate glass windows on three sides, pulled a couple of horses out onto the floor, and waxed his skis. He put on blue wax, corking it and polishing it with his palm, then rubbed in some orange under the bindings, to help in climbing where the skins wouldn't be needed.

There was a practice slope outside. He snapped the bindings tight, took a run down the practice slope, stemming, stem-turning, doing a christy or two. He was a little rusty, he decided.

The gray-haired man came out of the ski shack with a pair of boards, which he put on. The gray-haired man was good. He did a practice run, then went on, herring-boning up the hill toward the tow.

He was thinking that the gray-haired man doubtless expected him to go over and use the ski tow, which was the fellow's reason for going off in that direction. And he was considering double-crossing the clumsy shadow by taking some other direction. This was in his mind when a lithe, dark-skinned tall man came flying down the slope on a pair of narrow-bladed *langlauf* skis and did a beautiful telemark turn.

The tall newcomer went off in the direction taken by the gray-haired man.

Did the shadow have a shadow? He was suddenly chilled with concern.

HE decided to use the tow after all. He climbed the hill, and because his leg muscles weren't used to the business of herring-boning, they began to ache a little.

The tow was chugging away. He bought a seven-day tow ticket, and the man wire-stapled it to his jacket lapel. The tow hook caught him with a jolt, and he looked around as he was carried upward. He didn't see the gray-haired man immediately, then discovered him as he reached the top.

The view was nice. There had evidently been a heavy powder snow during the night, since the snow hung heavily and pleasantly on the evergreens, and the whole world had a draped and glittering beauty. The mountains were not too impressive as mountains, not like the Alps in Switzerland or the Tyrol, but they had some ski runs that were hard to beat anywhere.

He made two runs down the number two run, then one down the advanced run. That time, he nearly took the bark off a tree. Better stay away from hot skiing, he decided grimly, while he was so concerned.

He rode the tow up again, and by now he had decided on a course of action. He took the ski trail this time, swinging down the other side of the mountain in a long meandering course which would eventually bring him past a lake and a small stream.

He went fairly slowly, looking back whenever he could conveniently do so. The white-haired man was following him.

He put on more speed when he was out of sight of the gray-haired man, dropping down a sharp slope in a whistling schuss, then braking with a stem, and christying in sharply around an overhang.

Here was a trail hut, a small cabin with an enormous fireplace and a stock of firewood, on the bank of a rushing little green-colored stream. The stream was frozen over, but in places the ice was thin, and here and there the green water showed in swirling violence.

He hurriedly scooped up a long stick of the fireplace wood, a heavy stick, and backtracked to the point where he was concealed behind the overhang. He waited, hefting the stick, estimating how hard he had better pitch it.

He heard a skier coming, heard the thumping of the man's boards as they rounded a sharp rough turn, heard the fellow grunt with the effort of making a stem christy. The man was a serious skier.

He threw the log as soon as the man popped around the rock. It was the gray-haired man, and the log caught him about at the knees, knocked him off balance. The man went down, flopped head over heels.

He was out and on the gray-haired man before the latter stopped rolling. The man was trying to get at something in a pocket, and he blocked the man's hand, got at the pocket with his hands and felt a gun under the clothing. He slugged the man without delay.

The blow didn't quite knock the fellow out. But the man was dazed, too dazed to more than kick feebly as he was dragged bodily into the trail shack.

He straddled the man menacingly.

"Don't!" the man said. "I'm from Wister's office!"

HE stood over the man for a moment, putting down his anger, which took effort. With a situation this tense, the thought that Wister would put such a clumsy operative on him poured rage through him.

When the flame of his rage had died a little, he told the man what he thought about it. He did not swear, but he used words that told very clearly how he felt.

He ended, "Wister is going to ruin everything if he doesn't keep his hands off. I only took this thing when it was agreed I should handle it my own way, and with my own assistants."

The gray-haired man said uncomfortably, "My name is Kelly. I think you have the wrong idea about my assignment."

"You were following me."

"My orders were to do so," Kelly said. "And the purpose was to give you protection."

"Your so-called protection can be about the most dangerous thing that could happen to me."

Kelly said, "You are thinking of the dark man who is also following us?"

"You spotted him?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"One of them, possibly. I have no idea."

"Could he be another one of Wister's bright ideas?"

"No. I am positive he is not."

"Could he be a Russian, an English or a Chinese agent?"

"I am positive he is not."

"All right, Kelly. You get out of here. Leave Lake Placid."

"Wister won't like that."

He said grimly, "When I get hold of Wister again, there will be some other things he won't like."

Kelly got to his feet. He grimaced, and sat down again suddenly. "My knee!"

"Sprained?"

"No, I can make it."

NOW he made an angry gesture, anger at himself. His brains, he thought, must be on a vacation. Because now he had an idea, the kind of an idea he should have had minutes ago.

"Wait here, Kelly," he said. "And give me your cap."

He went outside with Kelly's cap. He went down, wearing his skis, to the stream, and moved along the ice to one of the potholes where the water was boiling and green as it poured past. He made many tracks going down. He made others coming back.

He re-entered the shack again.

There was no place inside that would hide a man.

"You will have to get into a snowdrift," he said.

They went outside. There were plenty of snowdrifts, and he picked one that had filled a ditch. He gave

Kelly his gun. "You may not have to use it, but if you do—don't fool around," he said. "My advice would be to stay in the drift until night, then walk to the railway station and get a train out of town. Do not go back to the hotel."

Kelly stared at the snow, apparently thinking of the hours until darkness. "It'll be cold."

"Not as bad as you think."

He picked Kelly up bodily and tossed him, feet first, into the snow-filled ditch. The crust under the powder snow broke, and Kelly shot down out of sight.

He used one of Kelly's skis to rake powder snow into a pile, to knock it over the spot where he had thrown Kelly. When he had finished, it looked as if skiers, doing quick christy turns on the trail beside the ditch, had knocked loose powder snow flying. That was all. No visible evidence that Kelly had disappeared there. Under the snow, Kelly could breathe all right.

He carried Kelly's skis down to the creek, to the hole where the dark green water rushed and gurgled, and poked them, with the ski poles, under the ice. Two of the ski poles and one ski were whisked away, but the other pole wedged under the ice. The handle loops of the pole were visible through the thin ledge of ice. He poked at the pole, trying to free it.

The rushing water was making some noise, but he knew that a skier had appeared on the creek bank. He kept poking at the pole.

Then he looked around. He pretended to become aware the man was on the bank.

He froze. He hoped he looked shocked, but cold, competent, in possession of himself.

He went back to poking at the ski pole.

The man on the bank was the lithe dark-skinned tall man who had been trailing Kelly.

"See a fish under there?" the tall dark man asked.

"That's right."

The tall dark man went away and came back with a long dry stick. "You might do better with this." The stick came sailing down and landed on the ice.

The stick was longer. With it, he got the ski pole dislodged, and the rushing green current whisked it away under the ice that covered the stream wherever it did not run so swiftly.

He climbed back up the bank.

"Fish get away?" the dark man asked.

"Yes."

The dark man looked around for a while. When he showed emotion, he did it deliberately, like an actor putting across a definite mood, feeling. The thing he put across was that he knew that there had been no fish under the ice, but a ski pole, and before it, the body of a man.

You are a murderer, the dark man's expression said. I just caught you disposing of the body. But I'm not saying anything about it, you see.

He was pleased, because that was what he had hoped the dark man would think. But he didn't look pleased. He looked grim.

"Sheck is my name," the dark man said. "Robert Sheck."

"Joe Powell," he said. "I just got in today."

"I know."

"Oh."

"Where are you staying, Powell?"

"A place on Mirror Lake. Nice place, but the price sort of knocked my hat off. Twelve bucks a day."

Sheck laughed. "They hang it on you."

"They sure do."

Sheck said, "Why don't you try Stripe Lodge?"

"Don't you have to be a member to get in there?"

"I could take care of that. They're not too strict."

"You really think you could get me in?"

"Sure."

"I'll take you up."

All the way back to town, and to the Mirror Lake place where he collected his stuff and had an argument over getting a refund of his first day's room rent, a fact kept jumping into his thoughts. It was the lie Sheck had told about Stripe Lodge, about them not being too strict there. They were strict. They were absolutely exclusive, and it was an ominous kind of exclusiveness.

It wasn't good to have a membership in Stripe Lodge, the way the State Department felt about the place right now. The F.B.I., too.

STRIPE LODGE knocked his eye out, because he had as much appreciation as any other man for fine worldly things. He sat in the big bearskin upholstered chair in the main lounge and examined the logs, concluding they must have been imported from Norway. The rock in the big fireplace had come from all over; he saw rose quartz from the Black Hills and fool's gold from Columbia and Galena from Missouri.

There was a swimming pool with a wall of plate glass around it, and the steam-heated water gave off swirling quantities of fog so that it looked as if it was boiling.

He got up and walked to another window, and found himself gazing at the skating rink. It was a fine rink with electrically shaved ice.

Two skaters were on the rink. One was Doris—or Edith Halcyon, as he knew her name to be. The other was a man.

The man was good. He was a lithe man with lots of shoulder and the legs of an athlete. He was doing

school figures; he launched out in a series of bracket eights, rocker eights, and Choctaws. He was poetry on steel runners. He did a beautiful sitting pirouette, came out of it with lunging strokes and did a double Salchow that was a very tough thing to do.

The man glided to the near side of the rink, and his face was discernible. It had wrinkles. It wasn't the face of a young man.

Edith Halcyon applauded. She said something, but he couldn't hear her words through the window.

The man made a gesture, and music began coming from a loudspeaker; he and the girl did some pair-skating, some echelons, some exhibition stuff.

They were experts, he reflected, and you could see they loved skating.

Sheck came and stood beside him at the window.

"That's Doris," Sheck said.

"Nice."

"The man is Thaddeus Fay."

"He has more wrinkles than an alligator."

"He has other resemblances to an alligator, too," Sheck said.

"Yes?"

"He's a great fisherman, too," Sheck said in an emotionless tone. "He likes to fish under the ice, also."

Sheck walked off, leaving that statement standing for whatever it meant.

Chapter IV

BY dinnertime he was aware of a tension in the lodge. He had become aware of the feeling slowly, at first thinking it might be his imagination, then growing more and more certain it wasn't, and becoming amazed that such a tension could exist so subtly. It was a the-fuse-is-lit-when-will-it-go-off kind of thing.

Yet the feeling was hard to identify definitely. Nobody was going around with cocked pistols and knives under their coats. There was no face-making, and no nervous starting at noises. The tension, as you became more and more aware of it, was much worse because it was under cover.

He was interested in the guests at Stripe Lodge, and spent his idle time before dinner indexing them, examining them and putting them into the classifications where he thought they belonged. When he was done, he realized he had practically everyone in the same classification.

If you would write a classification heading for them, he thought, you'd write something like: *Industrial Diamonds With Flaws*. He thought of them as industrial diamonds because they were interesting to look at and frequently beautiful, but there was an impression without definite proof that they were hard enough to cut almost anything. The flaw part was more vague. There was just a feeling that something was wrong with each one of them. He had nothing to base it on.

The funny thing was that the servants went into the same drawer. He got the feeling a time or two that

they weren't even servants at all, but men or women of ability that equalled or exceeded the guests. They were much too exquisitely efficient to be real. And again, he warned himself, this might be his imagination.

He met Thaddeus Fay at dinner. Sheck introduced him.

"This is Joe Powell, whose specialty is fishing through the ice," Sheck said.

Thaddeus Fay shook hands. He had a grip like a handful of iron snakes.

"Sheck told me about your ice-fishing," Thaddeus Fay said.

Showing just a little emotion, he told Fay, "That one got away."

"Yes, under the ice, I heard," Fay said.

It was a strange way to talk about murder, which was the kind of talk it was. Sheck was sure that Kelly, the State Department agent, had been murdered, and it was plain he had passed his information along to Fay. Their double-talk was casual. It was hair-raising.

"Won't you join me in a grouse?" Thaddeus Fay asked.

The grouse was good. Fay explained that it was shipped in from a farm which raised grouse and other game exclusively for Stripe Lodge.

The meal was without more talk of murder. Thaddeus Fay had quite a bit to say about politics, the war, the post-war problems, and his ideas were original, not the sort of thing he had gotten out of the newspapers. Fay was—at least in his talk—a combination of conservative and radical; a man who believed strongly in individualistic rights, but who also had extreme notions about the government sugar-nursing everybody. The two views were inconsistent.

"Join me for coffee?" Thaddeus Fay invited. "I'd like to show you my skating trophies. Everyone here has seen them so often they're bored. Do come look at them. It's one of the things you have to do to be initiated into Stripe Lodge."

They went up to Fay's private suite, which had as much grandeur as the public parts of the lodge. The suite could almost have been a lodge by itself.

Thaddeus Fay seemed to forget he had mentioned skating trophies. He sank cross-legged, like a small boy, on a Polar bearskin rug in front of a fireplace in which a blaze whispered.

"Do tell me, where is Chester Wilson?" Fay said.

IF the room had blown to smithereens around him without warning, he could not have been more startled. Chester Wilson was absolutely the last name he expected to hear mentioned. What talking the State Department had done about Chester Wilson had been in whispers, and no one else had breathed the name.

He was stunned. He took hold of himself in a hurry with mental hands of steel and tried to hold his emotions still.

"Who?" he said.

Fay laughed. "I did hope we could talk freely, but that is up to you. Need I remind you that both Sheck

and I are aware that you killed a man—Kelly of the State Department staff—and pushed his body under the ice of a brook. Sheck is aware of this because of what he saw, and I because Sheck told me.”

“And that is the whole story, told in your own merry way?”

Thaddeus Fay frowned. “You don't like me?”

“What would that have to do with it?”

Fay laughed. “I guess we could go on without love.”

“Need we go on?”

“We'd better.”

“Just who do you think I am, Fay?”

Fay smiled and said, “Now that's a subject I can speak freely on. My initial surmise was that you were an agent of that grand old lady in hobble-skirts, the United States State Department. But I was unable to find you in the State Department file—mind you, I am speaking of my own file of State Department men, not any official records in Washington. I didn't find you there. That indicated you weren't a State Department man. Then you killed Kelly, who obviously was a State Department sleuth, and so that put you in a different category.”

“Which would be?”

“The same as myself.”

“Eh?”

“I imagine we have identical aims.”

“It's doubtful.”

Thaddeus Fay leaned forward. He was excited, but it was a controlled excitement. He was like a panther. He acted as if he was on skates and whizzing across the ice, all set to do a difficult piece of figure work, one of his Salchows or something like that.

“Let's not tiddledy-wink around with each other,” Fay said. “You're not one of my men. You're not one of McGillicuddy's men. Now, those are the only two groups of men involved in this, and you're not one of them, so who are you? Presto! You're your own man.”

“You think so?”

Fay leaned forward. “Right now—tonight—I'm in a hell of a pickle. I'm caught short. Nobody but myself and Sheck are here at Stripe Lodge, none of my men are here. And we've got a job. It may be more than the two of us can handle.”

“Yes?”

Fay smiled, but with absolutely no humor. “As you will realize in a minute, if you haven't already—I wouldn't ask you to help if I wasn't in a jam. I need help. I need another man. So will you help me?”

“Help you what?”

“Get Chester Wilson,” Fay said.

WHEN Fay said Chester Wilson to him, it made his skin crawl the way it had a few moments ago. It was an explosion again, a shock, a jolt that almost hurt him in the marrow of his bones.

He was also confused, which didn't help any. He did not know who Thaddeus Fay was, nor who Sheck was, nor what their game was. McGillicuddy? The name of McGillicuddy had been mentioned. He didn't know who McGillicuddy could be. He had a hunch that McGillicuddy was a nickname for somebody, but he wasn't sure. He wasn't sure about anything—except that he was getting so excited he wouldn't be surprised if it made him sick.

Because he did know a man named Chester Wilson had vanished and it was his job to find that man.

The thing was more than just finding a missing flier. So very much more, that it was frightening. Although he'd been told just what the situation was, he still had difficulty grasping the magnitude of the matter, and the consequences if Chester Wilson wasn't found, and quick.

Yesterday the telephone in his office rang. It was Wister of the State Department saying he'd like to drop in for a talk immediately. He knew Wister, so he knew from Wister's voice that something was on fire. But he hadn't dreamed it could be of such magnitude. He only found out when Wister sat, face the color of a dead fish, across the desk from him and unburdened. Or rather, handed him the job of finding Chester Wilson.

Wilson, Chester Rice. Age 28, brown hair, blue eyes, 73 inches. Identifying marks, nicked left ear lobe, old glass-cut scar on instep left foot. Finger print classification, special code Roget forty-two, Mary, Zero, nine.

Wister had become nearly inarticulate trying to impress him with the monstrous consequences of the situation, and one thing Wister had babbled was that every soldier and every sailor in the Allied forces would without hesitation be ordered to drop whatever he was doing right now and hunt for Chester Wilson. If it would do any good. It wouldn't.

No, it wouldn't do any good, and it was a melodramatic way for Wister to try to paint the size of the problem; such words sounded ridiculous. Wister should merely have told it quietly and normally, and it would have been just as fearsome.

Chester Wilson, seized by persons unknown. A girl named Edith Halcyon had telephoned Chester Wilson before he vanished. The text of the telephone call was as yet unknown, but it might have been made to lead Chester Wilson into the hands of whoever had seized him. Edith Halcyon was making a hurry-up trip to Lake Placid, now that Chester Wilson had disappeared.

He had decided to go to Lake Placid with Edith Halcyon. He was here.

Stripe Lodge? The place hadn't entered the picture until he heard Edith Halcyon tell the dog sled-taxi driver at the station to take her to Stripe Lodge. But Stripe Lodge was down in the little black books of the State Department and the F.B.I. as one of those places where there might be devils, very big and sly.

He shut off his thoughts—they were useless anyway—as he would close a water faucet.

“You have Chester Wilson?” he demanded.

“No,” Thaddeus Fay said. “No, I wouldn't be sitting here on a volcano if I had him.”

“You want to get Wilson, then?”

“Oh, brother!”

“Why?”

Fay leaned back and closed his eyes, and keeping his eyes shut, said with more force than it seemed possible a man could get into his voice, “Can you imagine what it would mean to have Chester Wilson? Can you imagine the infinite possibilities of such a thing?”

He could see what Fay meant. He wondered if his hair was standing on end.

THE rest of the deal was short and simple.

“I guess we're in this for the same thing,” he said. “I'll take you up.”

Fay said, “I just knew you had to be after Chester Wilson yourself. Are you working alone?”

“No. I have a couple of friends.”

“Two? Where are they? Can you get them here to help us in an hour?”

“No. They are in New York.”

“A damned poor place for them to be,” Fay said. “A damned poor place. But you and Sheck and I can do it ourselves, I hope to God.”

“How much time have we got?”

“About two hours.”

“We'd better get on it.”

Fay shook his head. “We'll let it stack up, then we'll shoot the works all at once. We'll pick you up, Sheck and I.”

“What do I do?”

“We'll pick you up, I said. Stick around the Lodge and take it easy. But be easy to find. Stay in the public rooms. Stay in plain sight.” Fay indicated the door. “You better get out of here now. We'll be seeing you.”

He nodded. He went to the door, put a hand on the knob, took it away and turned slowly. “We haven't said anything about a division,” he said.

“What do you want?”

“Half.”

“That's damned robbery!” Fay said in a low voice that filled with anger.

“The time to rob a man is when he's in a corner, isn't it?” he said. “Would a third make you any happier?”

“A little,” Fay said, but the anger still crawled in his voice. “A third. All right.”

HE had a hot chocolate by the window which overlooked the skating rink. When he lifted the cup off the saucer, there was a small clattering, his hand shook so. He scowled at the hand, realizing that he had not been so nervous in years. Nervous? Just a little. About like a man who had fallen out of an airplane without a parachute.

On the skating rink, a slender shape whirled out on the ice and made a fast flashing circle with quick cutting strokes. He could hear the faint sound of the skate blades on the ice, like knives whetting together.

It was Edith Halcyon. Doris, she had called herself. But she was Edith Halcyon, and she was a mystery. She sailed around the rink, leaning forward, on one skate, doing a pretty glide. She was as graceful as a kite. A kite, he thought, was a pretty good simile. A kite, and he had grabbed its tail, and it had yanked him into this thing. Yanked him high.

Suddenly he knew he couldn't sit here. It wasn't like him to be so nervous, and that frightened him. He had always taken pride in his amazing self-control.

But he couldn't sit here. For once, he was about to fly apart.

He arose and went up to Thaddeus Fay's suite. Fay wasn't there. At least, no one answered. He went downstairs again, glanced at the ice, and saw Fay.

Thaddeus Fay and Edith Halcyon were skating pairs. They were doing it to soft music, and with the kind of skill that makes a thing look ridiculously easy. He watched them. They were wonderful. They were poetry. Laughing, they straightened up in the old-fashioned English style of skating, and did some "valsing" that was as Victorian as bustles and button shoes. They did echelons and serpentines and circulars and they were a delight. And their laughter was as pleasant as candy, as hearty as hamburgers with onions, and it wasn't at all like skeletons rattling, which was what it should have been like.

Thaddeus Fay skated over to a bench, and watched the girl whirling on the ice.

He went to Thaddeus Fay, sat beside him, and said in a low voice, "Who is she? That girl?"

"A wonderful skater."

"But who is she?"

Thaddeus Fay turned his head. He seemed alarmed. "What are you doing, kidding me?"

"All right, all right, but I want to make certain of something. Who is she?"

"She belongs to McGillicuddy."

"Not with us?"

"Not with us," Thaddeus Fay said. "And that's a shame, too. Because she can think about as well as she can skate, which makes her a female Einstein, or a female whoever-your-favorite-thinker-is. I wish I could have her around to skate with and look at." Fay grinned at him. "You couldn't charm her away from McGillicuddy, could you? No, I guess not. You won't have time. You better get away from me. Somebody might start thinking."

He left Thaddeus Fay and went back to his hot chocolate by the window. He wished that he hadn't

talked to Fay about the girl, because he had seen that Fay had thought he'd known all about her.

For a moment there, Fay'd had a grisly suspicion that he'd made a mistake. That wasn't good.

He sipped his chocolate and waited. He didn't know whether he was going to be able to wait it out or not. It was such a horribly difficult job, waiting. It wasn't just the grind on his own nerves; he could have taken that. It was, as much as anything, knowing what a tremendous thing was involved, and knowing there wasn't any time to lose, and then having to sit here and fritter it away drinking chocolate and with his brain sweating icicles.

HE couldn't take it. Suddenly he got up. He went to a telephone. He got the long-distance operator, and called a New York number.

Monk Mayfair, his associate, answered.

He said to Monk, "This is Joe Powell."

"Good evening, Mr. Powell," Monk said. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm sorry to bother you at this time of night, but I'm up here at Lake Placid and the skating is wonderful and I've got the fever, but no good figure skates. I wonder if you have a pair in stock, which you could box tonight and rush up here."

Monk said, "I remember you were interested in two pairs of skates when you were in the shop. Would you like me to send one of those?"

"Say, why don't you send both pairs—the figure skates and the speed skates. Maybe I could use both pairs."

"Sure, sure, Mr. Powell. I'll get them out tonight. Where'll I send them?"

"Stripe Lodge, Lake Placid. Mark the package rush."

"You bet I will. We're very glad to get your business, Mr. Powell."

"Bye."

"Goodbye."

He hung up and he knew the operator at the Lodge switchboard had listened-in, because he had seen her writing furiously. She must have taken it down in shorthand. He saw her reach into a cabinet and get a telephone book. It was a New York directory, but a cross-numbered one, not a regular directory. In it, you looked up the numbers first, and opposite them was the name and address of the firm or individual to whom the phone was listed.

The operator, he surmised, was looking up the number he had called in New York. That was all right. The number was listed as a sporting goods house. It was actually one of the telephones at his headquarters, though.

He saw the telephone operator call the desk clerk. She gave the clerk a note she'd scribbled. The clerk went away with the note. He wished he could follow the clerk. He didn't dare.

He went back to his chocolate, another cup of it. His nerves were all knots, and his brain was beginning

to make his head hurt on top, from the strain.

The two skaters left the ice. They were laughing. But suddenly he knew there was no mirth in their laughter; it had a sick sound, a frightened, tense, this-is-about-the-end quality. They were acting, Thaddeus Fay and Edith Halcyon, and they were very good actors, but they were about at the end of their ropes.

Thaddeus Fay came past. "The chocolate good?"

"Nice."

"About two minutes," Thaddeus Fay said. "About two or three minutes. Then breathe your prayer to the devil, because it's going to be tough."

"I just telephoned my two friends in New York."

"That was a fool thing to do."

"No. I ordered two pairs of skates. You could investigate until the hot place gets an ice crust, and you couldn't prove I didn't order a pair of skates."

"How long will it take them to get here?"

"Couple of hours. They will come by plane."

"That'll be too late."

"Couldn't we hold this up?"

"No."

"Well, my two friends will be here, in case there are any pieces left to pick up."

"There won't be any pieces. Either we'll have the bull in our pockets, or there won't be a grease smear left of us."

"That's nice and cheerful."

Fay's face was getting pale. He was losing color, and his frightened heart was kicking a big visible pulse in his throat. The sinews in the backs of his hands were beginning to stand out.

"Another minute or two," he said. "And don't forget to ask the devil for his influence."

Chapter VI

A MAN came over and took a chair by the front door, on the right side of the front door, and in a moment another man sauntered over and took a chair on the other side of the door. Both of them had overcoats across their arms which they did not remove when they sat down.

He watched them, and in a moment he made out the dark blue muzzle of a gun under one of the overcoats. He lifted his chocolate cup, and drinking, let his eyes move over the place.

Tension had crawled into the room as if it was visible, like a fog, and violently noticeable, like a prowling lion. There had been tension before, but it was under cover. Now the curtain was peeling back. The raw

state of affairs was being unwrapped.

The clerk was standing tight behind his desk, a silly figure in a ski suit, a silly looking scared man. Two waiters from the dining room, dressed in Tyrolean gear for atmosphere, came and stood spike-legged at the dining-room door. In the right uniforms, they would have looked as if they might have been standing on the concrete blocks where the two sentries used to stand at the Brandenburg Gate, on Unter den Linden.

A fat man did the most obvious thing of any of them. He got up and took a good hunting rifle, a rifle with a telescope sight, off a wall rack. He sat down in the chair where he had been, holding the rifle, pretending to examine it. He hauled the bolt back, just a little, and the brass of a cartridge gleamed in the receiver. The gun was loaded.

Thaddeus Fay had gone out of the room. Fay came back now, with a little of his aplomb missing and a slight perspiration on the back of his neck, so that his skin looked as if it had been greased. He was scared and his nerves were as tight as fiddlestrings. But Fay had everything under control except his sweat glands.

Sheck sauntered in next. Sheck had a skier's rucksack in one hand and a length of rawhide cord and a knife in the other and he obviously was hoping it would look as if he was going to repair the rucksack. The sack had something in it.

Everyone in the big lobby looked at Sheck at least once in the next twenty seconds. Sheck whistled off key and went over to the big fireplace, with his rucksack.

Now Edith Halcyon came in. She still wore her skating costume, a brief and eye-catching affair of brown tweed and beaver fur. Very good cheesecake. She was a pretty girl. She had a good form. She took your breath.

She came over and said, "Hi, Joe Powell, orchestra leader."

He said, "Go away. You don't like me."

"That's right," she said. "I saw you skiing this afternoon, and you still impress me as a healthy young man who should be fighting for his country."

"What did you think of my ice-fishing?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you see me?"

"See you what?"

"Ice-fishing?"

"I saw you skiing," she said. "I saw you come down the tough run, and you can ski."

"I told you on the train I could ski."

"What about this ice-fishing?" she asked.

She didn't know about the man he was supposed to have murdered and shoved under the ice, the State Department sleuth he was supposed to have killed. He was positive she didn't know.

“Nothing about it,” he said. “Skip it.”

WHATEVER was going to happen at Stripe Lodge was about ready to happen.

Everyone in this room, he decided, knows that something is going to pop. But not the girl. She doesn't know. Fay knew, and Sheck, and the desk clerk, the two waiters, the fat man with the rifle. They all had their mental fingers in their ears, waiting for the explosion.

But Edith Halcyon did not know a thing about it. And that, he thought, is a joke on me. He had followed Edith Halcyon here because he thought she would know what was what.

Suddenly he wished she would get out of the lobby. If she was an innocent bystander, she had no business there. He wished she wouldn't stand there and smile at him the way she was doing now, a smile that had some friendliness in it.

“Listen,” he said. “Will you do a draft-dodging orchestra man a favor?”

“What is it?”

“Go away,” he said. “Just go away.”

“You're so nasty I'm beginning to like you.” She pulled a nearby chair around so that it half faced him and sat down. “Do you really want to fight, Joe?”

He shook his head and asked, “Know why I want you to go away?”

“Why?”

“Because I came over here to Stripe because you're here, and now I'm ashamed of myself. So scram, will you. It would be better for my self-respect.”

She watched him intently for a moment. “That was nice, even if you did say it that way. I'm glad you said it because—”

“I'm not trying to be nice. God forbid.”

“Wait, let me finish,” she said.

And then she went silent, a little embarrassed. “I don't know how to put this,” she said.

He waited for her to think of a way to put it. And he watched Fay and Sheck and the fat man with the rifle, the two waiters, the clerk. They were motionless, frozen. They were waiting for something. They had suddenly shed all pretense of being casual, of acting naturally. They must have heard or seen something. He wondered what it was they had heard or seen. He wished he knew. He was scared.

“Let me put it this way, Joe,” the girl said. “I want you to help me.”

“Uh-huh,” he said, wishing she wouldn't distract him, that she would go away.

“Listen to me,” she said. “I'm in trouble. I'm afraid I am in the strange predicament of not being able to leave here if I wanted to.”

Shock hit him as if it was a solid blow. “Eh?”

“I’m frightened,” she said. “Joe, help me, please! I think I’m actually a prisoner here.”

ON top of everything else, he thought with horror, now something like this. He wished he knew women. He wished to God he knew more about the feminine half of the human race. He wished he could look at their pretty faces and tell just one little thing about them.

Because this girl was frightened, but he hadn’t known it until now. She had looked natural and sounded natural and he hadn’t thought anything was wrong.

Mostly, his emotion was anger. She was a Trojan horse; he hadn’t known she was terrified, and he blamed her because he hadn’t known it. Damn women and the way they could deceive him!

He didn’t know what to say or to do. But his emotion, his feeling about it, was terrific. His feelings must have shown on his face, and they must have looked like fear to the girl. Actually his emotions were mostly fear, too.

She said, “For God’s sake, don’t look so scared. I don’t want them to know I’m asking you for help.” She leaned forward. “Wipe that wild look off your face!” she said frantically.

He wiped it off. Or hoped he had. And now he was hearing a sound, the sound of an automobile, and he knew it was what had electrified Fay, Sheck, the other men in the lobby.

She said, “I came up here because I was told I could find a man here. The man is a flier. He is my brother-in-law. He is married to my sister.”

The automobile was coming closer.

She was speaking more rapidly. “Something mysterious has happened to him. I was told that, if I came here, I would find him. I was told he wanted to see me. You see, I talked to him, and he told me a little, enough to alarm me. That was before he—he disappeared mysteriously. And then, when I was told that if I would come here and talk to him, it would be what he wanted, I thought that was the thing to do. So I came. And now he isn’t here, and I am afraid I won’t be allowed to leave.”

He saw the tall graceful evergreen trees light up with gray ghostly light as the car turned into the drive.

She said frantically, “I’m scared, Joe! I just talked to a man and he said I can’t leave. He said almost everyone in this lodge is mixed up in it.”

“Why pick on me?” he demanded.

“Because of the way the man acted,” she said. “I asked him if you were one of them, and he swore. He cursed you terribly. He can’t figure who or what you are. So I thought you might not be one of them, and would help me.”

“This brother-in-law of yours,” he said. “Is his name Chester Wilson?”

She stared at him. “How did you know that?”

“Is he?”

“Yes.” Slowly, as if by no conscious effort on her part, her hands came up to her cheeks and pressed there, pressed until the fingers sank in. “You’re one of them, too!” she said thickly.

“Sit still and shut up,” he said. “And be ready to crawl under something that might be bulletproof.”

A STATION wagon came chugging up the driveway to the side door of Stripe Lodge, a shiny varnished station wagon moving between walls of shoveled snow. It was a sleek genteel vehicle and it looked as innocent as an angel on Sunday.

On its top was a rack for skis, and on the rack two pairs of skis, short jumping skis with three grooves for steadiness. Two men were in the front seat, both wearing parkas with fur-fringed hoods that disguised their faces almost as well as masks.

Something in the back of the station wagon was covered with canvas.

The vehicle was slowing to a stop at the side door when Thaddeus Fay turned around in his chair—he was sitting now in a deep overstuffed chair upholstered with the skins of two species of bears—and rested his right fist on the back of the chair. The gun in his fist was very small, because its presence was hardly noticeable until fire and noise came out of Fay's fist.

Fay's bullet made a round hole in the door glass, and other round holes successively in the storm door, the window of the station wagon, almost the exact mathematical center of the forehead of one of the men in the front seat.

Fay turned his head.

“Joe Powell,” he said. “What we want is under the canvas in the back of that station wagon.”

Sheck, standing by the fireplace, now had opened his ski pack. He stepped to one side of the fireplace, and threw the pack very hard at the dancing flames, but holding on to the pack so that the pack's contents alone went into the fire.

The pack had held three half-gallon glass jugs and they broke when they hit. They were filled with gasoline. It must have been high-test aviation gas. Half the room seemed to fill with flame.

There was a rolling service cart, a portable bar of an affair, standing against the wall near the fireplace. Sheck went to that, picked bottles off it and threw them at the floor, the walls, the ceiling. These contained gasoline instead of liquor, and the contents caught fire.

Another spurt of fire and noise came out of Thaddeus Fay's fist. The second man in the station wagon rolled out on the far side.

“Let's go, Powell,” Fay said. “Get up and turn over your chair and you'll find something you can use.”

THE chair, when turned over, proved to have an automatic pistol and four extra ammunition clips fastened underneath it with scotch tape. He tore the gun loose, and left all the clips but one. He jammed the gun in one coat pocket and the clip in another, then picked the heavy chair up and lunged with it against the large plate glass window which offered such a pleasant view of the skating rink. The window broke, almost all of the glass going out of the frame.

He seized the girl, picked her up bodily, and went out through the window with her, jumping far enough to cause him to fall and flounder.

There was an astonishing amount of flame inside the lodge lobby. The whole place seemed afire.

The business of the gasoline had seemed childish and overdone. But now, floundering out of the snow, he realized why it had been done. To go from one part of the lodge, or to leave any of the suites and go outside, it was necessary to pass through the lobby unless one used a window or a snow-blocked side door. With the lobby full of fire, the lodge was paralyzed.

The station wagon began moving, backing, skidding down the driveway. He knew what had happened. The driver hadn't been hit by Fay's bullet, but instead had dived out on the opposite side of the station wagon, then reached back in and released the emergency brake and was steering the machine as it coasted back down the drive.

He hauled Edith Halcyon out of the snowbank. "Be still," he said. "Come on."

"You're hurting me," she said.

"The station wagon," he told her. "I'm going to get that if I can."

"But—"

"Chester Wilson is probably in it, under the canvas," he said. "Shut up."

He wanted Chester Wilson. Getting hold of Wilson—alive—was his job here, and the importance of doing so could hardly be underestimated. There had been no direct talk about his giving his life if necessary to get Wilson, but the fact had been implied.

He made for the station wagon. The girl did not hamper him, but she certainly did not help. When he drew near the station wagon, he dropped her in the snow.

He went on. He went behind the vehicle, which was not moving fast. As he had suspected, the driver was crouched on the runningboard looking back and steering with one up-reached hand.

The driver saw him, and made a snarling sound, but instead of trying to fight, pitched off the fender and shoved his arms above his head and began yelling, "Don't shoot me! Oh God, don't shoot me!"

He hit the driver on the lower right side of the jaw, as fast and hard as he could.

The man slid, as he went down unconscious, under the car, so that it was impossible to continue backing the car, or let it continue backing, without probably breaking the man's legs. He lost time hauling the senseless man out to the side.

Now Fay and Sheck had appeared. They came out of Stripe Lodge, chasing the station wagon.

He dived into the station wagon. What he wanted to do, what he intended to try, was to escape with the station wagon before Fay and Sheck could join him.

He didn't make it.

FAY and Sheck got there. And at about the same time, the girl got up out of the snow and reached the station wagon. She got in the back. Fay and Sheck climbed in the front.

"Get going!" Fay said. "For God's sake, get going!" And Sheck beat his fist against the dash and said about the same thing, but more profanely.

He was half tempted to try to club Fay and Sheck down and throw them out when the first of a number of bullets arrived. He changed his mind.

He got the station wagon going backward again. He tramped hard on the accelerator, manipulating the steering wheel. He could hear shooting, but the bullets were not reaching them because they were now down on the road, and the snow was stacked high.

“About a hundred yards down the road, they can see us for a minute,” he warned. “Be careful.”

They went through the dangerous spot, where the car could be seen from the lodge, in careening haste. They were evidently shot at several times, but only one bullet hit the car, cutting a rip in the hood.

Thaddeus Fay beat one fist against a palm in an ecstasy of glee.

“Joe Powell, you're great!” he yelled. “They would have gotten away with the station wagon if you hadn't gone through that window and headed them off!”

“Yeah, that was nice,” Sheck said.

Fay was nearly gibbering with delight. He had lost control of himself. He said that Joe Powell had really done a job, as Fay had known he would, and a lot more in the same vein.

They traveled about a mile, Fay talking all the time, then the girl sobbed in the rear seat. She had climbed into the back, partly on the canvas, partly beside it. Fay's face suddenly got a pale sick look, and he turned around and demanded, “What's the matter?”

She threw the canvas back and said, “Look.”

There was nothing under the canvas but some ski poles and more loose canvas which had been bundled up in what could have been the shape of a man. There was certainly no man there. No Chester Wilson.

Chapter VII

THADDEUS FAY was now stricken with a glaring silence that was as expressive as profanity. The wrinkles on his darkly tanned face appeared deeper and older, but his lithe crouching body seemed, strangely, more youthful.

“They sucked us in,” Fay said. “Boy, did they let us jump out of a window! Right off the deep end, we walked.”

Sheck complained, “What happened to us? I don't get it. They told us the station wagon was arriving with Chester Wilson.”

Fay said, “Turn the next road north. Step on it. We're not sunk. We're in a little deep, but we're not sunk.”

The next road to the right was ploughed, but narrow. It mounted steeply, winding, banked with snow, the evergreens snaking past in dark haste.

“Left the next house,” Fay said.

It was an old house, an ugly frame thing, with a double garage adjacent.

"I've got two cars in the garage," Fay said. "But we won't use them yet. Come inside."

The house was cold, cheaply furnished. Fay, as they were waiting for him to unlock the door, explained that it was a summer place he had rented. He had taken it for two purposes, because he wanted a place to leave two cars they might need, and because it was high and looked down on Stripe Lodge.

Fay ran to a window. He had two pair of binoculars there, and he grabbed one hastily. Sheck took the other. They began watching the lodge.

Fay said, "Joe Powell, did they suspect you?"

"I don't know."

"I don't, either."

"Maybe the trap we fell into was set for me."

"No," Fay said. "No, it wasn't."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Did anybody besides me tell you that station wagon was going to be carrying Chester Wilson?"

"No."

"There you are. They told me. They told me and Sheck. That shows who they were aiming to suck in."

There was quite a fire down at Stripe Lodge. Actually the lodge was not more than a mile distant, airline, possibly less. They could see the fire, sheets of flame jumping out of the windows, and big black worms of smoke crawling up in the cold bright moonlit night.

Thaddeus Fay said, "I believe I know what happened. It's too bad I didn't think of it earlier. Sheck, watch that back road, the one to the left and up the hill. They'll leave that way, probably, if they haven't already left. But we'll be lucky if they haven't."

"I got my eye on it," Sheck said grimly.

"What happened to Chester Wilson?" Edith Halcyon asked. She sounded as if she was about to go over the edge.

He hoped Fay or Sheck would answer her, and along with it, say something that would tell him where the girl stood.

FAY talked without removing the binoculars from his eyes, watching Stripe Lodge and the road or path, whichever it was, back of the lodge.

Fay said, "They must have had Chester Wilson there at the lodge all the time. They told me that he was in a roadhouse over this side of Saranac Lake, but that was a lie to rope me in."

Fay removed the binoculars long enough to glance at the girl, then continued, "They got you up from New York, Miss Halcyon, and they let Chester Wilson look through a window at you. I bet they had him at the window when you and I were skating this afternoon. I can imagine that. Let Chester Wilson look through the window, then shove him down in a chair and tell him in detail how they were going to kill you

if he didn't do business with them. And Chester Wilson must have done business with them, because the next thing they did was fool me into stubbing my toe and showing my true colors.”

Fay glared and resumed looking at the lodge through the binoculars.

Edith Halcyon leaned back and looked bewildered. “I don't know what is going on,” she said.

“You knew there was something, didn't you?”

“Yes,” she said. “I knew that. I knew it because Chester Wilson called me and asked me where my sister—his wife—was to be found. I told him she was in Oklahoma visiting the folks, and he said not to tell anybody—tell no one, no matter who they said they were—where my sister could be found. I asked him why, and Chester said there was trouble, and that a threat against his family might be held as a club over his head.”

Thaddeus Fay chuckled sourly. “Yes, that was the truth. And he had damned good reason to be scared, because we—any of us—would have killed his wife in a minute if it would have made him tell us what we wanted to know.”

She put her hands to her checks. “That's unbelievable.”

“Not a bit unbelievable,” Fay assured her. “It's been done before. It's the regular thing in Europe, doing things to a man's family if he won't coöperate. Believe me, young lady, it's a very normal and effective way to get information out of a man.”

She shuddered. “And then I got a summons to come up here to Stripe Lodge. The summons said to come quickly and act as if nothing was wrong, and not tell anyone who I was or why I was coming or where I was going.”

“You thought Chester Wilson was asking you up here?”

“That's right.”

“It wasn't,” Thaddeus Fay said. “It was me.”

“You!”

“That's right. But don't start getting a mad up at me because of that. I was merely ordered to get in touch with you to make you think Chester Wilson wanted you up at Stripe Lodge so he could talk to you.”

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why was I wanted here?”

“You are stupid. You certainly don't think like you skate,” Fay told her. “The plan was to use your safety as a club to make Chester Wilson talk. And that is what happened. Only they did it by just letting Wilson look through a window at you, which is something I hadn't figured on.”

The girl stared at him.

“What does Chester Wilson know that you wanted to know?” she demanded.

“I don't think I'll tell you that,” Fay said. “But it happens to be something important enough to—well, it's

hard to describe.” He frowned thoughtfully. “Very hard. It’s a little like trying to put the Grand Canyon into words.”

“But why all this confusion, this fight tonight?” she persisted.

“Well, I can answer that. You see, at first we were all one busy gang of rascals after what Chester Wilson knew, but some of us got greedy. I and Sheck got greedy. We thought how nice it would be to get Chester Wilson’s information for ourselves. So we worked together. And then Joe Powell, as he calls himself, happened along, and we could see that he was branching out for himself, too. So we propositioned Joe, Sheck and I, and Joe helped us. And very good help he was, too, except that he was no more of a clairvoyant than Sheck or I, hence didn’t know we were falling into a trap which had been set in order to see if we would betray ourselves.”

Edith Halcyon turned and asked, “Joe?”

“Yes?”

“Is your name Joe Powell?”

“No.”

“What is it?”

“Joe Powell for the time being,” he said.

THE girl was confused, and she was still frightened, and after she had clenched her fingers for a while, looking at them as she clenched them, she turned back to Thaddeus Fay, with the demand, “What will happen now?”

Thaddeus Fay had more of his normal manner and carriage than he’d had during and immediately after the fiasco at the lodge. He shrugged his shoulders slightly. But the answer he gave the girl was remarkably informing.

“Now they will take Chester Wilson and head for where he has told them to go,” he said. “Of course they might leave Chester Wilson behind, dead, but I don’t think so, because they will be afraid he hasn’t told them the truth, in which case it would be too bad if they killed him. Mind you, I’m only guessing. But correctly, I hope.”

“Where will they go?”

“I wish to God I knew!” Fay said fervently.

The girl, guessing, asked, “Is that—is that what—they wanted from Chester?”

“Where to go? That’s right.”

“Why don’t you tell me everything?” she demanded.

“I don’t see any sense in it,” Fay said.

Sheck had taken no part in the conversation, had hardly removed his eyes from the binoculars through which he was watching the neighborhood of Stripe Lodge. But now he said, “Sister, you keep on asking questions, and it might be you would get to know so much somebody would have to cut your pretty

throat.”

The statement took more color out of the girl's face and shut her up.

They all watched the burning lodge. Various vehicles of the Lake Placid Fire Department were arriving, and at least two streams of water were being played on the blaze. The lodge probably would not burn down, but it certainly would be damaged.

Fay, sounding more and more like a man with confidence in himself, explained that this was why he had used the gasoline. So that the fire department would come out from town and firemen and policemen would swarm all over the place. Their presence would be a handicap to the other side, he had hoped.

However, he went on to explain, now that things had turned out as they had, the fire might not be such a good idea. It might mean the firemen or the policemen would rescue Chester Wilson, and that wouldn't be good.

After Fay fell silent, Edith Halcyon turned and said again, “Joe.”

“What?”

“What is your name if it isn't Joe Powell?”

“Oh, be quiet,” he told her.

“So you're just a gangster,” she said.

This brought a loud but not especially gleeful laugh from Thaddeus Fay.

“Nobody in this thing could be called a gangster,” Fay said. “So don't insult Joe, Edith. If you have to call him a crook, call him a very big one.”

Sheck grunted, then pointed, “It looks like we fell in the mud and came out looking like a rose,” he said. “Look.”

AFTER he had indicated carefully where to look, they could see with their unaided eyes the thing which had excited Sheck. There were several figures, single-file, working out of a thicket of evergreen trees. The short cavalcade climbed a hill—they were hidden from the lodge by another hill and quite a lot of trees—and worked to a road, then to a shed. They disappeared into the shed.

After they had been in the shed several times, and did not appear again, Fay said with conviction, “They will stick there a while. They won't dare go busting out on the highways with all that excitement at the lodge.”

“It looks to me like they've got Chester Wilson with them,” Sheck said.

“Yes, I'm pretty sure that was Wilson third from the front.”

Edith Halcyon, suddenly intense, said, “You have a telephone here. I saw it. Call the police. Have them arrest those people and take Wilson away from them.”

Fay, smiling again without humor, said, “Don't be quite so naïve. You know better.”

“But you owe them something for trying to kill you—”

“Remember the goose that lays the golden eggs?” Fay said dryly.

“What about it?”

“You don't kill it. Wilson is that goose.” Fay shrugged. “I'm being childish, am I not? The fact is, my graceful angel, we hope to get Chester Wilson away from them.”

“You could take Wilson away from the police.”

“The minute Wilson is found, he will be surrounded by the United States army, navy and marines, quite likely. And without doubt the first thing Wilson would tell the police is the very information we are all after—and which I'm afraid our friends down yonder already have forced out of him—and then it would be useless to us. Perhaps not useless, but we'd be in for a race against considerable opposition—and believe me, I speak conservatively, for the best efforts of every allied nation would be pitted against us—to reach our goal. No, I wouldn't care for the odds. Those fellows down there are much easier meat.”

The girl said nothing more.

Turning slowly, Fay said, “Powell, we'll have a bit of a wait. Sheck and I will go check the cars to be sure they run. You stay here and keep an eye on that shack.”

“Righto.”

HE watched Fay and Sheck walk out of the room, then glanced at the girl, but she gave him a disgusted glare. She looked, he thought, quite frightened. She should be. She would be lucky if she came out of this with her life. There was no reason why Fay and Sheck should not kill her, none whatever, and every reason that they should. At the present, of course, they were keeping her alive so that they could use her to make Chester Wilson tell *them* what they wanted to know.

A grim impulse pulled him to the door. He followed Fay and Sheck. He followed them through two rooms, moving silently—and met them face to face unexpectedly.

“What're you following us for?” Sheck demanded harshly.

“The binoculars. You took them with you.”

“I put them on the hall table,” Sheck growled. “Here, I'll show you.”

Sheck went back and showed where he had left the binoculars, and Fay followed him with an expressionless face. Then Fay and Sheck left again. They went outdoors, stepping out of a side door.

He watched Fay and Sheck stop on the porch. He could see their faces quite clearly, because the hall light in the room behind them was on, throwing illumination through the door glass.

He saw Fay and Sheck stop quite close together and stand staring at the distant shack to which the group from Stripe Lodge had fled.

He saw Sheck say, “He was following us just then!”

He saw Fay say, “Naturally.”

That he saw them speaking was the literal truth, and he was damned glad, as he had been a few times

before, that he'd had the days and days of patience that it had taken him to learn lip-reading, and to become skilled at it. He'd learned the trick quite a number of years ago, become fairly good at it, good enough to become smug about himself. Now, in the next minute or two, he wished fervently he'd kept practicing, kept his skill at more of a peak. Because he missed some of what they said.

He missed what Sheck said next. But it must have been a question.

Answering, Fay said, "Of course he would follow us. Don't you know who he is?"

"A guy who says his name is Joe Powell, an orchestra—"

Fay interrupted, and what he said was also missed. The news, whatever it was, shocked Sheck. It took the insides out of Sheck for a moment.

Fay said, "Don't act so surprised, you fool!"

Sheck did the normal things a man does to get control of himself, staring fixedly at an unimportant object—in this case, the porch railing—and rubbing the palm of his right hand over the closed fist of his right.

"You are sure he is Doc Savage?" Sheck demanded.

Fay evidently said he was certain.

"Good God!" Sheck said.

"Don't let on!"

"Oh, murder!" Sheck said, and his lips were stiff enough to make reading them difficult.

"Take it easy. He has no idea I have guessed who he is."

"When did you?"

"The way he got around when the mess started at the Lodge. I guess it was in the back of my mind before that. I knew he was somebody important, and then it dawned on me who he was."

"But Savage doesn't look like this bird?"

"A good disguise job."

Sheck turned his back now, so the remainder of his part of the conversation was guesswork.

Sheck said something, evidently a query.

"Oh, the American government put him on the case, probably," Fay said. "He's the man they would naturally assign on such a big matter."

Sheck, another query.

"Yes, dammit, I'm mortally sure he is Savage."

Sheck, evidently with an idea.

Fay told him, "Listen, you take my orders, brother. And lay off Savage. Don't let on."

Sheck spoke.

Fay said, "Because of all the people in the world likely to get what they go after, Savage is the most apt. So he is helping us. So we get Chester Wilson, with Savage's help. So then Savage doesn't know we suspect him and we will—if I may use a tough phrase—knock him off."

Sheck, apparently an objection.

Fay: "By damn, you'll do it if I say so."

The two walked on toward the garage.

HE stared after Fay and Sheck, and he was grimmer than he had been at any time so far. It always disgusted him when he took elaborate pains, and hatched a flop. Suddenly his faith in his disguise dropped like water going down a drain.

Sure, he was Doc Savage. There actually was a Joe Powell who had a barrelhouse orchestra, but he was now keeping out of sight and sound at the request of the State Department, by way of aiding the general plan.

So now they knew he was Doc Savage, not Joe Powell. At least Fay and Sheck knew it, and were keeping it to themselves hoping to make use of him. The deceivers were deceiving the deceived, and somebody was going to get, in the end, a sudden and quick death. If he weren't careful.

Doc turned back into the room.

Edith Halcyon was staring at him.

She examined him in a fixed, un-winking strange fashion for the space of three or four good long breaths, then she came to him, stepping with a quick, dramatic haste. She got close to him before she spoke, and then she kept her voice low.

"Aren't you Doc Savage?" she asked.

He said glumly, "Is there a sign on me?"

Chapter VIII

HE shouldn't have admitted it, he saw. Because she hadn't known who he was. She had been guessing.

She said, "Oh, you big juke box!" And she turned away and sat down.

He was puzzled as to how she had managed to tag him, and turning the matter over in his mind, finally decided she must have taken some kind of a random guess. But he didn't quite understand how she had guessed his name out of thin air.

Oh, well, he thought—she doesn't think I am Doc Savage, so no harm is done.

Unless—and he began to shudder at the possibility—she made some facetious remark to Fay and Sheck about thinking he was Savage. That wouldn't be good. Fay and Sheck wouldn't dare let a thing like that pass.

He said, "Miss Halcyon."

"Yes."

"Say nothing to Fay or Sheck about what you just said to me."

"You mean about your being Doc Savage?"

"Yes."

"Why not?"

"Just keep it to yourself," he said.

She stared at him. "Say, you're not really telling me you *are* Savage?"

He did not think there was much chance of her believing it, or he would have. There was no percentage in starting a long argument to convince her who he was. Particularly an argument with a woman.

"This is no time to sell you the idea," he said.

He used his normal speaking voice, which was deep and controlled—or should have been considering the amount of voice training he'd had. He had been, until now, speaking with a higher and slightly microphonish voice which was somewhat similar to the voice of the real Joe Powell. It was not a great change from normal, mostly a lifting of tone, and since excitement tends to make a man's voice get higher in pitch, he'd had no trouble with it. But now he spoke normally.

He saw the blankest of looks come over the girl's face.

He was puzzled at first. Then he realized that she was suddenly convinced that he was actually Doc Savage. He wondered what had decided her. His voice? How the devil would she know anything about his voice? He didn't give radio speeches, and kept pretty quiet in public.

She enlightened him. "You *are* Savage!" she said strangely. "I work in a doctor's office. He has a sound-picture of you making a delicate brain operation, and he has me run the picture before he makes an operation of that type. I've run it scores of times. Your voice—you are Doc Savage."

So that was how she knew.

"Keep it under your hat," he warned.

She nodded.

THERE was nothing to do but watch the shack where the people from Stripe Lodge had gone, and wait for developments. Doc Savage settled down to doing that, growing most uncomfortable because of the girl's attitude.

Discovering that he was Savage hadn't affected her as he had expected. He'd supposed she would accept it, show a little surprise, and continue her worry. She didn't.

Her attitude toward him changed. He could feel the difference. She tightened up visibly, and he got the impression she was stunned.

In the end, he was bothered. Why was she so affected? Because she was an enemy? That was disturbing.

He wished bitterly that women would stay out of the world's troubles, or at least that he could figure them out easier.

He got up suddenly and went to the garage. Fay and Sheck were there.

"Both cars are ready to go," Fay said. "There's nothing to do but wait for them to leave that shack, then follow them."

He frowned at Fay and Sheck and said, "Just how tough are you fellows going to be when I take the bit in my teeth?"

"Eh?" Fay frowned.

"I am going down to that shack."

"Why?"

"Because I suddenly can't wait around here any longer."

"Take it easy," Fay said. "I know where they will go after they leave the shack."

"How do you know you know? It's been demonstrated that they suspected you of being a black sheep. How do you know they didn't give you a lot of misinformation?"

"Well—"

"I'll tell you what I mean by the bit in my teeth," he said. "I'm going down to that shack. I'm going to see what I can see and hear."

"I don't think—"

"The point I'm trying to make is that it won't make any difference what you think. I'm going. I'm not in the mood to sit around here and hope another of your schemes will work."

Fay didn't like it, and his neck got a little red. But controlling himself, he said, "This is a poor time for a fight, so we won't say any more about it."

"Want to keep track of me with the binoculars?"

"Yes."

"I'll take a flashlight. Either of you read the Morse code?"

They didn't.

He said, "Three flashes for danger, three and one for danger but come, one and three for come in a hurry and it's safe." He went on giving them a simple signal code. He had them repeat it.

Edith Halcyon gave him a white-faced, horrified look when he informed her that he was going. Maybe she didn't want him to leave her here alone. Was that it? Or was she worried about the gang in the shack?

THE shack was not exactly the rattletrap which it had appeared to be through the night distance. It was large, and he decided, on closer inspection, that it was really a plane hangar, large, comfortable and probably steam-heated, on the edge of a rather cramped flying field.

He was lying in the snow—he had brought a white sheet from the house, and with his white skiing parka, he was not having trouble concealing himself, when a plane went over.

It came from the west, from the direction of Saranac, and it was slowly losing altitude. After passing, quite low over the shack and the small airport, the plane did a gentle three hundred sixty degree turn over the burning Stripe Lodge.

The plane occupant or occupants were not interested in Stripe Lodge, but in the little field by the shack. He was sure of that, because the plane bracketed one side of the field carefully coming and bracketed the other leaving.

The plane droned overhead. It was a large, snaky looking job in bright orange, two radial motors, and a fat roomy cabin. It was on skis.

It left.

A man came out of the hangar-shack, carefully wrapped a long yard-wide white cloth about him—it looked like airplane fabric—and replaced another man who had been crouching, unnoticed, in a snowdrift near the door. Lookouts were being changed.

Doc Savage tore his sheet into strips, and bound the white cloth over the parts of his clothing which were not white, and over his face, except for the eyes.

He could, now that he knew where to look, see the lookout's breath steaming occasionally. Hoping to prevent being betrayed by the same thing himself, he made a pad over his mouth of loose cloth, so that his breath at least wouldn't rush out in puffs.

He decided to take the risk of presuming there was just the one lookout. He crawled ahead. There was a little wind, whipping loose snow-devils along the surface of the drifts. These helped hide him.

He had no idea of overhearing anything. That would be expecting too much. But he did hope to find out whether they had an automobile or automobiles in the building, or whether there were planes. The place was about big enough for two planes.

He got a break, though, when a man—the fat man who had sat in the lobby of Stripe Lodge with the hunting rifle on his lap before the blowup—opened the door.

“See anything?” he called.

“No,” the lookout said. “Damn, it's cold out here.”

“We'll relieve you in a while.”

“Why didn't the plane land?”

“Afraid to. They saw the fire at the lodge, and got nervous.”

“Probably a good thing.”

“Probably.”

“How'd you get in touch with them? Thought they didn't dare use their radio.”

“They've landed on a lake. They got to a telephone and called me, a minute ago. They've hired a farmer to bring them over.”

“You think it's safe for them to drive up here?”

“They won't. They'll park a mile down the road, and walk it. Or rather, ski it. They've got skis. There'll be two of them, a thin man and a heavy one, so if you see them coming, it's okay.”

“Do you know them personally?”

“No. I've just got the description they gave over the telephone.”

“How soon will they be here?”

“Oh, not for at least an hour.”

“I'll keep an eye peeled.”

“Yes, and don't forget about Fay, Sheck and that stranger who called himself Powell.”

“You think they're around?”

“Somewhere. Sure.”

“Suppose they should tip the police that we're here?”

“Fay won't. Fay will think we have Chester Wilson here, and will try to get Wilson himself. He won't know we've got Wilson salted away where he's safe.”

“What'll we do when these two guys come?”

“If they're willing to buy at our price, we'll all load into the two planes in this hangar, pick up Wilson, and get the job done.”

“That'll be a load off my mind.”

“Let's hope it weights down our pockets with money,” the fat man said. He went back into the hangar.

DOC SAVAGE lay still for a while. He suddenly felt very cold, benumbed and uncomfortable. It was probably disappointment. The temperature didn't seem to be much lower than zero, which wasn't very frigid for Lake Placid at this time of the year.

He began backing away from the hangar, going carefully so that the lookout would not discover him.

He decided to go to the lodge, which was still smouldering and attracting a crowd. His two aides, Monk and Ham, might have arrived by now.

He went rapidly when he was in the cover of trees, haunting the shadows. Drawing near the lodge, he removed the torn sheets, which would look suspicious.

Despite all the commotion, smoke and flame, Stripe Lodge had not been greatly damaged. The east wing, which comprised the big lobby mostly, was a ruin on which a single hose still poured water. Soot

and dirty water had made a mess of the skating rink.

Not sure just what ideas the public and the police had about the fire, Doc did not make himself too conspicuous. Then he heard a voice saying, "One of the guests was carrying a gasoline stove across the lobby. It exploded. Set the whole place afire."

"Hurt anyone?"

"No, they were lucky."

Savage moved on, thinking: So that's the way they explained away the excitement. He made a mental note to notify Army Intelligence and the F. B. I. so that they could begin picking up the staff of Stripe Lodge before they had a chance to disappear. He was tempted to tell the local police, then decided against it, because of the lengthy explanations involved. He began looking for a telephone.

Before he found the telephone, he discovered Monk and Ham. Or rather, they found him, because he hadn't immediately recognized them. They were disguised.

"We got here about fifteen minutes ago," Ham explained.

Doc Savage examined them, and decided he didn't like their disguises. What Monk and Ham had done—which might be the reason he was irritated—was get themselves worked over along the lines which Jonas House, the Hollywood wonderboy, had used on Doc. But Jonas House hadn't done this job. Doc grimaced.

"That's a great job of disguising yourselves," he said.

Monk Mayfair, missing the sarcasm, said, "I'll pass that along to Dot. She'll be very pleased to know you were impressed."

"Who is Dot?"

"She's featured in that show at the Gleever Theater. Quite a little actress, Dot is. Helped us with these disguises."

Ham Brooks said, "She's one of Monk's tramps, and she meant well."

Monk, startled and indignant, wheeled and demanded, "Say, cut out that tramp stuff—"

"I said she meant well, didn't I?" Ham turned to Doc Savage. "Doc, I can see you're not so hot about us looking this way, but I thought the girl did a fair job on us. No false wigs, greasepaint or shell-teeth. But I suppose it was a little too much like Sherlock Holmes' double-billed cap."

"Forget it," Doc said. "You fellows came by plane?"

"That's right."

"You didn't fly over here a few minutes ago?"

"No, we were just getting here when that one went over."

He started to tell them about the plane—and an idea hit him. He stared at them, weighing his idea against their altered appearance.

Monk Mayfair was a short wide long-armed man with a surprising collection of resemblances to a

pleasant-faced ape. He had very carefully shaved the bristling red hair off the backs of his hands, mowed and reshaped his bristling red eyebrows, dyed them and his hair. Also he wore, for quite a change, clothes that fit him. The alteration was considerable.

Ham Brooks, who was a slender dapper man, wide of shoulder and somewhat too thin about the middle, was more difficult to change. He had blonde hair now, not dark, and his suit was cheap and ill-fitting.

Monk had been scowling at Ham. Now he muttered, "The more I think about it, the less I like this tramp stuff you are always putting out about my lady friends. The next crack you make like that is going to get you turned into a hamburger."

Doc Savage interrupted hastily. He recognized the signs of a quarrel that had probably been in progress during their whole trip up from New York.

"Maybe Dot had something after all," Doc said.

"Sure she has!" Monk said. "If this foul-mouthed shyster lawyer keeps on riding—"

"Postpone it!" Doc said.

His nerves were on edge, and irritation got into his voice. Monk and Ham looked at him, startled, then embarrassed.

Monk muttered, "Ham and I were just having a little—"

"You have them twenty-four hours a day, I sometimes think," Doc said sourly. "Let's postpone this one fuss."

"Sure," Monk said hastily.

"All right," Doc said. "Now, here is what I meant by saying Dot might have had something after all. You fellows don't look like your normal selves, and that may give us a chance to pull something—if you want to take the risk."

"Lead us to it," Monk said.

"Don't you want to know what you're getting into?" He frowned, and became more sober. "Both of you know the size of the matter involved, and you should weigh that against the value of your own neck before you jump at anything."

Ham Brooks said, "That quarrel a minute ago may have sounded as silly as a couple of ducks, but none the less we have a general idea of what we're up against. We'll go the whole way. Count on it."

Monk asked, "What have you got in mind, Doc?"

"There were two men in that plane which flew over a while ago, judging from what I heard," Doc explained. "Apparently they are on their way to see the men who seized Chester Wilson, to make a financial deal."

"The pair may be foreigners, then."

"Possibly. On that will depend what I had in mind."

"Which is?"

“Palm yourselves off as these two fellows and see if you can learn where Chester Wilson is being held—or better, get the information which Wilson has and everybody wants.”

Chapter IX

THE two men were dressed for the part, that of two exuberant and connubial skiing roisterers on their way somewhere or other.

One of them was lean and the other was thick and wide. Both wore ski outfits, and carried ski poles and slalom skis with metal edgings. They came swinging up the side road, overdoing it a little, because they were linking arms and singing a ski song in maudlin fashion.

Doc Savage stepped out in front of them. The road here was a snow-ploughed groove between tall snow-banks.

“Hello, there,” he said, walking toward them with his hand out.

The pair stopped, managing to look not too startled. But it was an effort for them.

“Hy'ah, pal,” one of them said. The edge of foreign accent in his voice was barely noticeable.

Doc examined them, decided they must be the pair he wanted, and said, “I thought you'd remember my voice.”

They stared at him. The wider one finally said, “Are you Burroughs? C. D. Burroughs?”

“I thought I would come down to meet you,” Doc said.

“Oh.” The man seemed dubious. “Is everything safe?”

“Quite safe so far. It put a little crimp in the situation when you did not land at the field, but that's not too bad.”

“We dared not land. That place burning, the fire and excitement—we thought better.”

“You were probably right.”

The thinner man took over the conversation, going bluntly into the matter at hand. “You have Chester Wilson?” he demanded.

“He is safe.”

“And you have the information, Mr. Burroughs?”

“That's settled.”

“The exact figures, the latitude and longitude?”

“You have nothing to worry about.”

“Good. We will proceed.”

Doc said, “We can, after we settle one other point, which is the matter of payment.”

The man had expected that. "I have an adequate down payment on my person. You have our assurances for the rest. And you needn't fear that the money I am carrying is captured American invasion currency, or counterfeit, because it isn't."

Doc Savage, fishing for information, said, "Just exactly how do you plan to proceed?"

"That is in your hands, of course," the other said immediately. "We expect you to take immediate steps to get to the spot designated by Chester Wilson, make the rescue, and then let us have the prisoner and one plane of large fuel capacity and good radio equipment. We will do the rest. In the other plane, you can return to the States, or wherever you wish."

"That is all?"

"All. Yes."

HE struck one of the men. He was confident that he could drop him with an unexpected blow, and he did so without difficulty. The short square man had impressed him as being the more capable of the two, so Doc tackled him first. He put the man down, by swinging his right fist.

Then, for a moment, he was sure he'd made an error. The slender man whipped backward, flinging his skis and one ski pole at Doc's head, at the same time grasping the remaining ski pole as a spear. A ski pole, with its steel point, would make a dangerous weapon. The chances were that the man had a gun, so evidently he wanted to avoid the noise.

But Monk and Ham were coming out of the snow. They had been hiding, crouching in holes they had made in the snow beside the road.

Seeing them, the fellow suddenly decided to use his gun. He jerked his jacket open with one hand and drove the other hand under his clothing after the gun.

Doc Savage closed with him, seizing him, and they went to their knees in the snow. Doc had hold of both the man's arms at the wrists, and twisted upward and inward to immobilize them.

Monk came in and grabbed the man by the hair, pulled his head back and belted the exposed chin. The man sagged down. Monk was on him instantly, searching him.

"Don't tear his clothes," Doc warned. "You have to wear them."

Ham had dropped aside the other man for the sake of safety, but the fellow did not move.

"Let's see who they are," Doc said.

Without trouble, they found papers which identified the men as John Lewis and F. Fayell Grundy, Detroit, Michigan, different addresses. There was an Airman's Identification for each man, and a private pilot's license for each, both of which were probably faked.

"Lewis and Grundy," Ham said. "If their names are Lewis and Grundy, then Tojo and Adolf are named Smith and Jones."

"They're foreigners, all right," Monk agreed. "Say, I think they've got on bulletproof vests."

He investigated what he had thought was a bulletproof vest. "Holy goats!" he breathed.

“What's the matter?” Ham demanded.

“Take a look at this vest.”

“Mine's got one on, too,” Ham said. “Well, take a look at yours, then.”

Doc Savage had moved up to the edge of the road, to peer over the drift tops at the distant hangar shed and the still more distant hill house where Fay and Sheck and Edith Halcyon were, he hoped, still waiting. He turned his head at Ham's dumfounded whistle.

“Money!” Ham blurted. “My God, both of these fellows have their clothes lined with hundred-dollar bills.”

Doc came down to look. It was as Ham had said, except that all of the bills weren't hundreds; some were twenties and fifties. He examined a few to learn whether they had the yellow seal of invasion currency. They seemed genuine.

Monk, digging through the bills with growing excitement, gasped, “There must be fifty thousand dollars here!”

Doc said, “Better change into the clothes these fellows are wearing.”

“Who takes the money?” Ham asked.

“You do. It's a payment you are supposed to make, so it is important.”

While they were stripping the two men of their clothing, Monk spoke, and uneasiness was in his voice for the first time. “They're liable to ask us some questions we don't know the answers to.”

“They probably will.”

“I may get confused.”

Speaking from experience, Doc Savage thought, you probably will. I did. And it isn't a relaxing feeling.

“Good luck,” he said when they were ready to go. “Try to leave a trail that I can follow.”

Ham and Monk said they would do their best. They set off up the road.

HAM strode along jauntily. His clothing, purloined from the thinner of the two men they had waylaid, fitted him poorly, which he figured would help conceal his identity. Monk's suit, on the other hand, was tight and uncomfortable. But Ham reflected that as a whole Monk didn't look like Monk.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

“Like a walking mint,” Monk muttered. “I hope Doc doesn't go off and let those two birds freeze to death, even if they've probably got it coming to them.”

“He won't. He'll put them in our clothes and turn them over to the police or somebody.”

Ham squinted ahead. “That's the place yonder, that big shed?”

“I guess so. Looks like a landing field beyond it.”

The matter was settled when a rifle—apparently a disembodied rifle, because the man who held it was concealed in the snow and under white cloth—appeared and menaced them. “Take it easy,” a voice advised. “What do you want?”

“We talked to a man on the telephone,” Monk said.

“Yeah? What do you want with him?”

Monk had the impression his hair should be standing on end, but he felt Ham's probably was. Were they being asked for a password? If so, they were licked.

Monk, sounding much more airy than he felt, said, “We wanted to go skating with him. What do you think?”

The lookout grinned without too much enthusiasm, said, “We'll see if he will skate.”

The man then took them to the hangar, and they met the fat man, whom they recognized from Doc's description.

The fat man said coldly, “Who are you gentlemen?”

“Lewis and Grundy,” Ham said just as coldly. “What is this, a children's game?”

The fat man grinned. “I'm Burroughs,” he said. “Come on in. You will identify yourselves farther, of course.”

There were six other men in the hangar, some of whom Monk and Ham identified from Doc's description of different people who had been at Stripe Lodge before the blowup.

“Your identification,” said the fat man, Burroughs.

Ham hoped he didn't look as pale and frightened as he felt. While he was wondering what on earth they would do about identifying themselves—when they had no ghost of an idea exactly who they were supposed to be—Monk came across with a performance which was inspired.

Monk tossed out the stuff, the private pilot's license and the Airman's Identification card, identifying him as F. Fayell Grundy, Detroit, Michigan.

Burroughs looked at these, said, “Phony. Phony as hair on a bird.”

“If you think we carry any other identification, you're dancing under the wrong tree,” Monk told him.

“We aren't satisfied,” Burroughs said flatly.

Monk scowled at him. “Are you a direct man?”

“I like directness, yes.”

“Then let's be direct,” Monk said. “I think we have some identification that a direct man would like.”

Monk began taking money out of his clothing. Ham got the idea, and did the same thing. Together, they shucked out money and piled it on a table which had been a hangar workbench.

Ham's mouth began to hang open. He took a revolver out of his clothing, one which had been on the owner of the suit. When he was caught, and put it conspicuously beside the growing pile of currency.

There was an astounding amount of money.

Ham glanced about at the men in the hangar. They were pop-eyed and moistening their lips. He didn't blame them.

"Want to count it?" Monk demanded.

There was a rush for the bench.

BURROUGHS, suddenly sounding violent, said, "Keep away from that bench. I'll count it. Rice, you help me."

Rice was a lean man with thick dark hair over his ears, but a perfectly bald shiny pate, and thin competent lips. He was evidently second in charge. He looked capable.

They began counting. The totaling went on and on. Ham, listening to the figures, felt his mouth going dry. He glanced at Monk, and Monk rolled his eyes.

"One million, four hundred thousand," Burroughs said finally.

Monk was impressed. He was practically knocked speechless. Monk was a capable chemist, with a wide reputation. He drew large fees when he worked, but unfortunately he preferred to spend his time chasing excitement with Doc Savage, so he was continually broke. He was in the habit of thinking fifty dollars a comfortable sum.

Monk had an inspiration. He walked over and selected a few bills, which he pocketed.

"For my expenses," he said blandly. "I forgot to hold them out."

Ham looked as if he wished he'd thought of the same idea. He told Monk, "We'll need more than that for expenses."

Monk said, "That's right," and selected some more money.

Burroughs scowled at them. "What did you expect to do, dazzle us? During the arrangements, we were talking more money than this."

Monk shrugged. "That's our identification."

Burroughs snorted. "How do you figure that proves who you are?"

Monk glared at him, made his voice loud and disgusted, and said, "Who the hell else do you think would be walking in here and planking down over a million dollars in cash? My God, what kind of a dope are you!"

Monk overdid it, and sounded so much like an angry American that Ham, remembering they were probably supposed to be foreigners, was worried

"Ich halte es für des beste, nicht zu gehen,"

Ham said violently.

Burroughs whirled. "What'd you say?"

Ham bowed coldly. "I said that I think it best not to go. Meaning not to go ahead with this. You are too difficult."

"Now, wait a minute," Burroughs said. "I just don't like to take chances, and I was making sure."

"You were making a fool of yourself," Ham told him haughtily. "That money is all the credential we need. If you are not satisfied, nothing will satisfy you."

Burroughs eyed him, said finally, "You're not much of a diplomat, are you."

"You said you were a direct man."

"I—"

"We want action," Ham said. "That money is a down payment. You get the rest later. Now, do we get action?"

Burroughs thought that over.

"You get action," he said. He turned to the other men. "Let's go, boys. Open the hangar doors, and start rolling out those planes."

THE two planes in the hangar were large private ships, ski-equipped. The men began rolling them out, or rather skidding them outside, a not inconsiderable job since it had to be done by main strength and awkwardness.

Ham and Monk stood aloof from the labor, pretending the effort didn't fit their station, but actually to get a chance to confer.

"We've got to get a line on where we're going," Ham whispered.

"You mean so we can leave a trail for Doc to follow?"

"That's the idea."

"We better dig the information out of this Burroughs fellow."

They approached Burroughs, feeling far from certain about how they were going to get what they wanted. Monk indicated the two planes, asked, "By any chance, are you figuring on making the whole trip in those?"

Burroughs was surprised. "Naturally not. Your people are going to furnish us two large, fast planes, aren't they?"

"Eh?"

"Aren't they?" Burroughs looked alarmed.

"Naturally," Monk said airily.

Burroughs wiped his forehead. "For a minute, you had me worried. Your people will have the planes there, you're sure of that?"

"They had better be," Monk said. "Incidentally, do you know the place where you were to meet them?"

“I’ve got the location I was given.”

“Repeat it, please. We wish to check on it.”

Burroughs wasn't suspicious. He rattled off a location on an aeronautical chart in degrees of latitude and longitude.

“Good,” Monk said.

When Monk and Ham had sauntered back to the rear of the hangar, Ham demanded, “You know where that is?”

“Sounded like up around Greenland somewhere, if I remember my geography.”

“All right,” Ham said. “I’m going to scuff a mark on the floor that Doc will see, and you think of some way of leaving him the figures.”

Monk nodded. He went over and picked up his skis. He examined them, as if he was checking them over, and while he was doing that, used his fingernail to scratch the latitude and longitude figures in the dark ski wax on the bottom of the ski.

Doc couldn't miss the writing on the ski bottom, Monk reflected. He put the skis back in a corner.

The men had the plane outside.

Monk whispered to Ham, “I put the dope on the bottom of one of the skis.”

“Good enough,” Ham agreed.

Burroughs came inside saying, “Get aboard the plane. We are all ready to go.”

“What about Chester Wilson?” Ham demanded.

“We'll land and pick him up enroute. He is being held elsewhere.”

“Far away?”

“Not very.”

Monk and Ham went outside with Burroughs. They all climbed into the two planes, the motors of which were rumbling and spitting fire.

Suddenly a man came running and tossed a pair of skis into the plane with Monk and Ham.

“You'll need these,” the man said. “Better take them along.”

Monk stared sickly at the skis.

The planes began moving, gathered speed, rocked a little, finally lifted off the field and climbed sluggishly up into the cold night.

Monk picked up one of the skis, glanced at the bottom, then gave Ham an ill look. The ski was the one he'd intended to leave behind with a message for Doc Savage.

Chapter X

THE plane climbed and bored into the night northward and westward. The pilot, Monk reflected bitterly, was taking no chance of getting too close to the heavy red line on the air navigation charts marked "Boundary of Active Air Defense Zone." The line here approximately followed the New York-Vermont state borders. That was tough, Monk thought sourly, because the air defense agencies wouldn't be likely to keep track of them.

Doc Savage would have no idea where they had gone. Monk scowled sickly out of the window, reflecting on the injustice of the bad break. He made up his mind to personally kick the stuffing out of the helpful rascal who had picked up the skis and tossed them into the plane. But the resolution was not a remedy for the mishap.

It was a major tragedy, in reality. Everything, as Monk saw it, now depended on himself and Ham Brooks. Ordinarily he wouldn't have minded, and he knew Ham would not have. But the present matter was too drastic, too vital. In plain words, it was so big it scared him. He wished Doc Savage was on hand. Monk's state of mind was black.

Burroughs came back and plunked in a cabin seat where he could shout happily at them. Getting into the air had worked a change in him. All his fat round curves radiated delight.

He had a bag which he had made by tying four corners of a square of airplane fabric together, and in this he was carrying the money. He looked quite self-conscious about carrying around so much money. As, Monk Mayfair thought sourly, who wouldn't.

"We have had a series of bad breaks, but now I don't see how we can fail," Burroughs said, adding no cheer to Monk's state of mind.

"An American army plane may shoot us down," Monk said, almost hopefully.

"Not a chance. We have a radio, and we filed a flight plan the regular way. Civilian flying is permitted now, you know, and we have done nothing to arouse suspicion."

"Did you give your actual destination in the flight plan?"

Burroughs laughed. "Naturally not. But nobody will bother us until we get over waste country where there will be no one to bother us. Yes, indeed, the monkey wrenches are all out of the plan. Skies are blue. The goose hangs high." He smirked at Monk and explained, "All of those are American expressions meaning that our troubles are over."

The best American expression I can think for you is a good bust in the kisser, Monk thought gloomily.

Monk said, "You had troubles?" He hoped he would get some satisfaction out of hearing about the other's troubles.

Burroughs leaned back, hooked his fingers together over the fat cloth pouch containing the money, and said that he'd had plenty of trouble.

"I don't know what is coming over the world, the way it is getting so you can't trust your lifelong friends," Burroughs complained. "This fellow, Thaddeus Fay, has done work off and on for me for years. He was with me in Poland, when we performed certain services for your government in nineteen thirty-nine. And later he was in Italy with me, and France, and we have worked along together very well here in the United States since Pearl Harbor. You wouldn't think a fellow like that would doublecross you."

Ham said, "Ah, you have had disaffection among your associates?" He hoped he sounded like a supercilious foreigner.

Burroughs grimaced. "He did not fool me, though."

MONK and Ham found themselves listening to a long story concerning the cleverness of Mr. Burroughs, the undependability of mankind in general, and more of the cleverness of Mr. Burroughs. The man was a braggart, but a rather intelligent one, so that a fellow didn't immediately realize that almost everything he said was a buildup for Mr. Burroughs.

Burroughs, Monk and Ham gathered, followed a profession that could be best described as a free-lance internationalist in affairs of profit. That was the way he put it. A simpler way was to say that the man specialized in anything shady that would turn a large dollar.

Not that Burroughs was a direct crook, though. He did not knock people over the head and lift their billfolds. He was more refined, and anyway the average billfold wouldn't contain enough to interest him. Burroughs was mortally afraid of risks, and he had to be well paid for taking them.

The man was—and he probably wasn't bragging about this—a mastermind only. He laid the plans, arranged for others to do the actual doing and be where the bullets arrived, if any arrived.

Monk asked, "How did you happen to get your hands on this particular plum?"

Now it got interesting.

"I was under the tree with both hands ready," Burroughs said, "when the plum fell."

"Meaning?"

"That I had long foreseen certain possibilities connected with these international get-togethers such as the one concluded last week. So I have kept my eye on them, and made my contacts."

"Contacts?"

Burroughs smiled. "Take Chester Wilson, for example."

Monk got a sudden cold feeling of illness. Was Chester Wilson a crook? Had he sold out? No one believed such a thing was possible. The chance that it could be had been investigated, it was true. But Chester Wilson, U. S. Army Flier, had been cleared as of good character.

"If Chester Wilson was working for you," Monk said, "how come you had to kidnap him?"

"Oh, Wilson is lamentably honest," Burroughs said. "What happened was this: I had noticed that he was assigned to flight missions of this type whenever one occurred, and so I got in contact with him. I did so indirectly—that is, I put on sheep's clothing. I pretended to be a book publisher.

"I signed Wilson to do a book about his experiences, and paid him a substantial advance. We worked together rather closely, and it was impressed on Wilson's mind time and time again that if anything spectacular happened, he was to contact me immediately. In case it was a matter which censorship would not release, he was to contact me anyway, in order that I could be prepared with the publicity. In other words, so we could be set to take advantage of the situation."

Monk said, "Won't this book-publishing connection with Wilson draw the attention of the State

Department and the F.B.I. to you?"

Burroughs laughed. "I don't mean I personally did it. It was through an agent. The agent is already in Argentina, where they'll have a hell of a time catching him."

"Oh."

"So you see," Burroughs finished, "when this wild thing broke, the first thing Chester Wilson did was contact me—or my agent. Wilson was excited. He was so excited that he was a fool. He called us before he gave his information to the State Department. So we lost no time in kidnapping him, and with luck, got him before he could reveal the vital location to the State Department."

Monk, with a bland approval he was far from feeling, said, "Very nice. Very profitable. When do we pick up Wilson?"

"Shortly."

THEIR plane settled down on a frozen lake to get Chester Wilson. The lake was a small one, and neither Monk nor Ham were sure of its exact location. Still in upstate New York, they believed. The pilot made a shoddy jackrabbit landing which stood Monk's hair on end.

A car came rolling out on the lake ice until Burroughs jumped out of the plane screaming for them to go back, did they want to break the ice and dump everybody in the lake? The car went back. Two men came from it, leading Chester Wilson.

Chester Wilson, it was plain, had been roughly handled. His nose was swollen, his eyes black, his fists skinned. He was tall and reddish, with the kind of a mobile face that registered all of his emotions, of which he was having plenty.

Wilson scowled at Monk and Ham.

"Is Edith Halcyon all right?" he demanded. "By God, I want to know about that!"

Monk and Ham, presuming they were to know nothing about Edith Halcyon, looked properly mystified, and turned to Burroughs.

"Oh, yes, Miss Halcyon," Burroughs said. "As a matter of fact, she is out of our hands. She escaped."

"When was that?"

"Shortly after you saw her through the window of Stripe Lodge, and so kindly decided to talk."

"There was nothing kind about it!" Wilson snapped.

"Well, it was wise, anyway."

Wilson glowered, and went into a dark discouraged silence. He did not speak again, not during the entire trip, nor did he as much as trouble to look out at the ground.

Burroughs told Monk and Ham, "The girl, Edith Halcyon, is his sister-in-law. We had to use a threat to her safety to get him to talk."

Monk, sympathizing with Wilson because of the load of anxiety and strain the pilot was carrying, made

an effort to relieve Wilson's mind somewhat by asking, "The girl got away from you, eh?"

"Yes. When that crook, Thaddeus Fay, doublecrossed me."

"Then the girl is still alive?"

"I imagine so."

"That is no advantage to us," Monk said.

"No, it isn't."

Which, Monk reflected, means that they probably plan to kill Chester Wilson in the end, anyway. After Monk had watched Wilson for a while, he decided Wilson knew that.

The plane flew north, then east, then north, then west. Mostly, though, it went north and east.

The day came with a slate-colored reluctance, the sun dull behind a heavy convection fog. The fog dissipated slowly and they could see the snow-covered country below.

Chester Wilson continued to stare fixedly at the plane floor between his feet. Once he lifted his head, and Monk got set to join in, thinking he was about to start a fight, but nothing happened. Wilson's head dropped again.

Later their pilot began to worry. He did some wing-wagging at the other ship, which was flying alongside them. Monk watched him making gestures—motions of peering downward, scratching his head, holding both palms up—and decided the fellow couldn't find what he was hunting for.

The pilot beckoned Burroughs, and they conferred.

Monk leaned over and whispered to Ham, "They can't find the other planes, the big ones, they were to meet."

Ham nodded. "I hope to God they don't ask us where they are."

A moment later, Burroughs came back to them, and asked, "What were those rendezvous figures again." He was looking at Ham.

Ham stared at him stupidly. To save his life—which was possibly what it amounted to—he couldn't remember the figures.

MONK stepped into the void blandly. He gave the figures which he had scratched in the wax on the ski back at Lake Placid.

Burroughs said, "Damn!" explosively. He ran forward to the pilot, jabbed his finger at the chart they were using, and said something violent that Monk and Ham couldn't catch.

Monk whispered, "What was the matter with you when he asked you the figures?"

Ham shivered. "My brain cut out on me. I couldn't think of them."

Monk grimaced. "Brother, I'll never forget those figures."

Burroughs rejoined them, and he was grinning. "You know what? The silly pilot wrote down a five where

it should have been a three, or his three looked like a five.”

“Oh, then we're still all right?”

“We're not lost yet, anyway.”

Burroughs began whistling cheerfully, and Monk was tempted to take a swing at the man for his good spirits. Monk leaned over, and being careful that no one could overhear or see his lips, whispered, “What's gonna happen to us when we get to this rendezvous?”

“Why bring that up?” Ham asked uneasily.

They were flying north. The day was gray. The cabin heater wasn't doing much good, so it must be very cold outside. Ham, looking out of the cabin window, could see rime ice on the leading edge of the wing, and he worried about that on top of everything else. The plane didn't have de-icing equipment.

It was an anti-climax when the pilot turned and gave them all the circled thumb-and-forefinger signal that everything was fine.

“There they are,” Burroughs said.

IF Monk and Ham had not already been impressed with the magnitude of the thing in which they were involved, the size of the two planes would have given them a by-golly-I-didn't-know-the-ocean-was-that-big feeling.

The planes were Heinkel HE 177s, four-engine ships with sharp taper, wings well back from the nose, and an exceptionally thick wing. Both big ships were on skis, and the skis seemed about the size of canoes.

The craft were well hidden, the upper wing surfaces being painted white, and in addition each ship was draped over with a white netting.

Monk and Ham, having heard that two planes would be there, did not expect any others. It was a shock when Burroughs said, “That wasn't a bad idea either,” and pointed.

Ham jumped violently when he stared under the netting and discovered another ship, this one also a Heinkel, but a HE 113, with a fifteen-hundred horsepower Daimler Benz DB 603 motor.

“How the devil did they get that pursuit job over here?” Ham asked Monk in a low voice. “Maximum range of those things is supposed to be around six hundred fifty miles.”

“Auxiliary fuel tanks maybe.”

“They couldn't load enough fuel on it to get it this far.”

“That's among our lesser worries,” Monk said. “Here comes the head guy of the outfit with these big planes.”

“I hope he don't know us.”

“If he does!” Monk made a gesture which he could make well and expressively, the gesture of drawing a finger across his throat. “Geek!” he said.

The pantomime was effective enough to cause Ham to look a little ill.

They watched Burroughs meet a man who looked as if he was mostly jaw and mean eyes. The two talked for a while, in English, then Burroughs brought the jaw and the eyes over to Monk and Ham.

“This is Blohm,” Burroughs said.

“So you are Lewis and Grundy,” Blohm said, and his voice was quite pleasant, although his looks weren't.

“I'm Lewis,” Monk explained. “This is Grundy.” Then he wondered why Burroughs was staring at him with such a strange expression.

“You are Grundy,” Burroughs reminded Monk. “And the slender man is Lewis.”

Monk's neck crawled. My God, he thought! What a time to make a dumb mistake!

But Blohm was smiling and shaking hands with them, and saying, “I'm very glad to meet you two. You have done some very fine work.”

“How soon will we proceed?” Monk asked.

“The supercharger on the pursuit ship went bad, and there is about half an hour of work on it,” Blohm said. “Then we can get going.”

Monk had an inspiration, and said, “All right. In the meantime, we'll keep an eye on Chester Wilson.”

As they were walking back to the smaller plane, Ham told Monk, “That was nice going, you forgetting who you are?”

Monk said a bitter nothing.

THEY got a break. They found Chester Wilson guarded by only one man in the plane, and the guard said, “You fellows want to watch him while I go over and take a look at those Heinie planes. I never saw one before.”

“Sure, go ahead,” Monk said.

The guard scrambled out of the ship.

Monk lunged to Chester Wilson's side. He said rapidly, “Don't ask a lot of questions, Wilson. We're Doc Savage's assistants, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks. We trapped Lewis and Grundy and took their places. We planned to leave a trail so Doc Savage would be able to follow us, but we flopped, or I did. Now, answer me this: Do you believe us?”

Chester Wilson frowned at them. “I don't know. I'll act as if I do, because I don't see where that would hurt anything.”

“Good,” Monk said. “First, did you give them the straight dope on where the plane went down?”

“Yes.”

“That's a hell of a note,” Monk said bitterly. “You should have lied to them.”

“They were going to kill Edith Halcyon.”

“They would probably have murdered her anyway.”

Wilson nodded, but he lost color. “Is she safe now?”

“She's with Doc Savage. I don't know how safe she is. Doc is with the two guys who tried to steal you, Thaddeus Fay and Sheck, and they think he's one of them.”

“She's safe with Savage, probably,” Wilson muttered.

Ham stood up. “We've got to leave some kind of a message here for Doc.”

“What good'll that do?” Monk growled. “Doc won't find this place.”

“Of course he will.”

“Huh? How?”

Ham grinned at Monk and said, “Well, while you were wasting your time leaving the hieroglyphics you call handwriting on the skiis, I left a nice little note on the sidewall of an old airplane tire that was lying around. And I marked it so Doc will be sure to find it.”

“You left a note,” Monk said. “You left a note. You left a—” He shut his eyes tightly.

Monk stood there, pinching his eyes together tightly, thinking of the actual physical sickness, to say nothing of the mental fungoes, which he had undergone in the past few hours thinking they hadn't left a trail for Doc Savage to follow. All of which could have been avoided by a few words from Ham.

This, of course, was one of Ham's little jokes. Ham was full of them. Monk was full of them, too, but not as much as Ham, he frequently thought. He wished violently that Ham would confine his practical jokes—if one could call one like this practical—to times when they didn't have anything else on their minds. Monk did not follow this policy, but he wished Ham would.

He turned all this over in his mind, hid his relief carefully, and told Ham, “If you were not supposed to be my brother conspirator, I would plant my foot on your behind, take hold of your ears, and turn you inside out. Later, as a matter of fact, I am going to do exactly that.”

Chester Wilson, excitement rushing through his voice, said, “If you think Savage will get here, for God's sake leave him the location of the spot where the plane went down!”

“Where was it?” Ham demanded.

“Close to latitude sixty-five north and longitude fifty-seven west,” Wilson said. He gave them the exact minutes and seconds.

Ham glanced at Monk. “You want to leave a message this time, too?”

“It's not funny, you shyster,” Monk muttered.

THEY left the information for Doc Savage without trouble. Monk kept his eye on Ham, and saw that Ham wrote his on the wrapper of a candy bar, which he carelessly tossed aside.

Monk considered his own method more subtle. He used paper and pencil to write the note, then rolled it into one of four snowballs which he made. Then, when they were out of the plane, he slammed Ham on the back of the head with one snowball, and popped him between the eyes with the other when he turned around.

Ham indignantly scooped up snow and returned the fire. Monk laughed and ran—going off and leaving the snowball containing the note lying in a conspicuous spot.

He ran, as it happened, toward Burroughs and Blohm. He joined them, dodging and laughing.

“You are in good spirits,” Burroughs said.

“Why shouldn't we be?” Monk asked him amiably. “We are just about at the end of the trail, aren't we?”

Burroughs looked queerly at Blohm. “Are they? What would you say, Blohm?”

“I think so,” Blohm said queerly.

Monk lost his gleeful expression. “Something wrong?”

Ham came up and asked, “What's going on?”

“*Achtung!*”

Blohm shouted suddenly. “*Nehmen sie sich in acht!*”

He was speaking to his men, the crew of the two big planes. Most of these, Monk and Ham realized suddenly, were much too close at hand. Furthermore, all of them suddenly produced guns.

Blohm turned back to Monk and Ham. “It is immaterial whether we shoot you now or later,” he said.

Monk stared at him. “What the hell!”

Blohm showed the tips of his teeth in an expression that wasn't at all a smile. “You two men are Lewis and Grundy, agents of my government?”

“That's right,” Ham snapped. “Who else do you—”

“Oh, no.”

“Eh?”

“Oh, no,” Blohm said. “You see, I know Lewis and Grundy personally. They happen to be friends of mine.”

Monk, speaking against the terror that came toward him like a black wall, said, “Listen, brother, if we are friends of yours—”

“Then you're not Lewis and Grundy,” Blohm said. “Which you aren't. Don't you think you'd better put up your hands?”

Chapter XI

THADDEUS FAY, Doc Savage, Sheck and Edith Halcyon were flying northward in a plane which Fay had produced with the confident air of a magician saying, “Well, you see I had a rabbit in the hat after

all.”

The plane, a big single-motored private ship of the type used by millionaires back in the days when there were millionaires, was about five years old, but still airworthy and capable of a hundred and sixty cruising. Fay had had it in a hangar near Saranac Lake. Planted there, Fay had explained, for such an occasion.

Doc Savage had visited the hangar at Lake Placid after the men they were following had fled in the two planes. Doc's purpose, of course, was to see whether Monk and Ham had managed to leave a message, but he couldn't tell Fay that was his object. Fay had not favored wasting time on the hangar, but Doc had insisted, and Fay was still puzzled about that.

Doc had found Ham's notation, latitude and longitude figures, on the old airplane casing. Ham had scratched the figures there with his fingernail and initialed them, and they were quite legible. Doc had committed them to memory.

He had done one other thing immediately: He had contacted Wister of the State Department by telephone, and explained the situation, giving Wister the figures. “Give us five or six hours, then get up there with every man you can scrape up, would be my advice,” Doc told him.

“Do you suppose those figures are the spot where the plane went down?” Wister demanded anxiously.

“No. Apparently they are a rendezvous location, a spot where larger planes, probably long-distance craft from Europe, are waiting.”

Wister said that he would take steps. He added that he would try to do so more sensibly than he had previously. But he sounded every bit as nervous and frightened as he had at any time.

Doc Savage, to keep his identity as Joe Powell intact with Fay and Sheck, informed them bluntly that he was calling his two pals from New York, telling them to stay around Lake Placid if they couldn't find him.

Then they had gotten Fay's ship.

They had been flying about five hours. In the wrong direction. They were going north. The correct course was north and east.

Fay's ideas of the rendezvous figures didn't agree with the ones Ham had left. Doc had no way of knowing which was correct. There was plenty of gasoline in the fuel tanks, so he concluded to let Fay try his spot. If it proved a blank, then Ham's figures would be right.

Doc spent most of the five hours in the air wishing he hadn't allowed them to bring Edith Halcyon along. He might have prevented that. He didn't know.

His reason for allowing the girl to come, now that he thought it over, didn't seem too good. He hadn't been entirely convinced that she was what she said she was. He suspected her.

His reasons for suspecting her now seemed inadequate, his allowing her to be brought along struck him as reprehensible.

Still, her attitude *was* strange. She seemed to be afraid of him. Why should she be afraid?

After they had flown about six hours and spent another half hour circling, he knew that Fay had been handed a wild goose to chase.

HE gave Fay the correct destination, and it caused the uproar which he had known it would. Fay looked at him with bleak intentness. "That is the destination?"

"Yes."

"How do you know that?"

Doc asked, "What did you think I did before I connected up with you, stumble around with plugs in my ears?"

Thaddeus Fay was a very quick man, because now he made a gesture with the same smoothness that went into his skating figures, producing a gun. The weapon, a pistol of the sort that would be carried by a man who was a marksman and who loved fine guns, was in an unhandy place, a sheath inside his parka. But he got it smoothly and expertly. He stood there holding the weapon, not quite pointing it at Doc.

"What else do you know?"

Doc told him, "That they were to meet two enemy agents who would make a payment for the information, after which they would pick up Chester Wilson and fly to this spot I've just located for you, where larger planes with proper equipment for reaching the spot where the crash occurred, would be waiting."

Fay said, "That's long-winded, but it's the facts." He was a little hoarse because of tension.

Doc said nothing. He watched Fay. Fay was flying, or rather letting the ship fly itself at the moment, and concentrating on holding his gun and frowning at Doc Savage.

"Where'd you get this dope?" Fay demanded.

"By keeping my eyes open."

"Let's not be facetious," Fay said.

Doc shrugged.

Fay was very still for a while, except that he was trying out different kinds of frowns on his face. Finally he demanded, "The girl tip you?"

"Don't be ridiculous."

"It does seem ridiculous," Fay agreed. "She didn't know about this arrangement to get larger, long-distance planes from Europe. Or she wasn't supposed to know."

"Why are the larger planes necessary?"

"There are no civilian planes around loose these days that could make such a flight. Anyway, those guys on the other side were plenty willing to furnish the planes."

"They would have furnished you sixteen battleships, if it would do any good," Doc said.

"That's right, if they had sixteen battleships left, which I doubt."

Doc said, "The information is straight. The rendezvous location, I mean."

“You reckon they could have tricked you, too?”

“Maybe. We can see.”

Fay continued scowling. Finally he decided, “The girl told you.” He whirled on Edith Halcyon. “My dear, you've been holding out on me. I really don't like that.”

“Don't bother her,” Doc said.

“She's with you, eh?”

“Leave her alone,” Doc said.

Fay put his gun away.

“What's the new course?” he asked.

THEY found the spot, but there was nothing there but tracks of plane ski runners in the snow, and a large white camouflage net which had been used to cover the planes. Doc Savage, Sheck and Fay walked around looking at the snow marks.

“Two Heinkel 177s, and a Heinkel 113,” Fay said.

This information astonished Doc Savage, although he had reached the same conclusion himself. He hadn't supposed that Fay knew so much about planes, and he had been quite proud of himself for being able to identify them from the tracks of the skis. The incident spilled some of his confidence.

“How do you know?” Doc asked.

“I was in Norway when they were using them to go after convoys headed for Murmansk,” Fay explained.

“Oh, you've been a German agent, then?”

“Not at that time,” Fay said, and chuckled. “As a matter of fact, I was doing a little high-class skullduggery for Uncle Joe at the time.”

“Russia?”

“That's right.”

“You get around.”

Fay was either pleased, or his nervousness was making him talkative. He said, “I've been at this sort of thing a long time. About twenty years in fact.”

“You're old in the game, then.”

“Older than they usually get,” Fay agreed. “I quit it for a few years, but those stinking Nazis stole so much of my property in Europe that I had to go at it again.” He sighed bitterly. “I had a resort in the Tyrol, the most beautiful place you ever saw. A fat louse of a fellow from Dresden has it now.”

“But you're doing business with them now.”

“You're damned right, or I will if I come out on top of this. And maybe you don't think they'll pay through the nose!”

Sheck was impatient. “What do we do now? We've found where the planes were. But what do we do?”

“Let's ask the mystery man if he has any ideas,” Fay said. He eyed Doc. “Have you?”

“We'll look around,” Doc said.

He found both notes which Monk and Ham had left, the one on the candy bar wrapper and the one in the snowball. It took him half an hour of hunting, but he located both.

He showed Fay the notes, but did not let him see the figures. Very quickly, he destroyed both by popping them into his mouth and chewing them until they were unrecognizable. He kept a gun in his hand while he was doing it.

“Life insurance,” he told Fay.

“Really, I'm not bloodthirsty enough to dispose of you if you had given me the figures,” Fay told him.

“No?”

“Anyway, I need your help. I'm beginning to think you are fairly capable.”

“Thanks.”

“Who left those notes for you?”

“A friend.”

“Obviously,” Fay said. He did not try further to find out who had left the information on the candy wrapper and in the snowball. But his facial expression indicated the puzzle was far from being out of his mind.

THEY took off and flew north. Doc occupied the co-pilot's seat, and worked for a while with an aeronautical planning chart which he found in the map case. The scale of the chart, five million to one, or about eighty miles to the inch, was too general for much accuracy. But it didn't matter. Landmarks in that section were not charted with sufficient accuracy to be of much value.

He fussed with the drift sight and worked out windage and set up his triangle of velocities on a computer. Then he took over the controls.

Fay, astonished, said, “You can fly, too?”

“A little.”

“I noticed how little. You handled that computer like a stenographer uses her typewriter. You've had plenty of experience.”

Instead of answering, Doc suddenly put the plane into a spiral. He pointed downward. “Two planes down there,” he said.

Fay said he'd be damned, and stared with anything but ease of mind while Doc circled the spot. The

planes were private ships with United States NC numbers. Fay identified them as the two planes which had been in the hangar at Lake Placid.

"It may be a trap," Fay warned, when he saw Doc intended landing.

"The probabilities are that it isn't," Doc said. "That other field back yonder, where they met the big planes, is close to a patrol route which a Canadian Mounted Police plane makes twice a week. They wanted to leave their planes to be picked up for the trip back, but didn't dare leave them at the other field. So they brought them this far. That would be my guess."

But Fay was gray-faced with nervous uneasiness until they had landed and made sure it was not anything specially arranged for them.

Doc examined the plane fuel tanks. "Another reason for the planes being left here," he said. "This was as far as they could go and still have enough fuel left to get back to something resembling civilization." He started digging around in the ships. "Look for something to shift the fuel from these planes to our own," he said.

There were no buckets or cans, so finally they cut a slab of fabric off the belly of one of the ships and made a cup affair which they used. They had trouble, because the wind was coldly violent, but finally the fuel was transferred.

Fay raged with impatience. "We'll be so far behind that we won't be able to do any good."

"Maybe not," Doc said.

"Meaning that your friends with Burroughs will take care of things for you?" Fay demanded.

Doc wondered just who Burroughs was.

THEY climbed back into their plane and then two of them had to climb out again, and struggle with their weight against the tail in order to keep the craft from wind-vaning while they taxied downwind. The girl and Sheck did the pushing, and when Edith Halcyon climbed back into the plane, she hurried and slipped into the pilot's seat beside Doc Savage.

"I'm scared!" she whispered. She sounded very frightened. "I'm afraid they will kill me any minute. There is no reason why they shouldn't, is there?"

"Get hold of your nerve," Doc told her.

Her fingers were biting into his arm and her lips were thin and tight over her teeth. He had the sudden frightened conviction that she was about to scream and go into hysterics. He put his face close to hers and said violently, "Stop it! You're acting a fool! You'll give us away!"

The words produced no effect on her at once, but then they soaked in, and she withdrew.

Thaddeus Fay had seen the exchange. He came forward, told the girl, "You ride back in the cabin."

She didn't look as if she was going to obey, but she did, and Fay took her seat. He told Doc angrily, "No more talking behind my back!"

Doc ignored him.

“Is she working with you?” Fay demanded.

Doc took the plane off without answering. They were loggy getting into the air, because of their heavy load of fuel. Fay sat there with perspiration visible on his forehead until they were in the air, letting Doc fly the ship.

Then Fay demanded, “Who left those notes you found? I want to know!”

Wondering how to shut the man up, how to avoid a quarrel, Doc began to have a loose, wild feeling that he was going to lose control of himself, that the door was going to fly open and the wildness rush out. He was awfully tempted. He wanted to strike Fay, to smash him with every bit of violence, and Sheck as well; he wished to shake the girl, or at least do something to show her that women had no place in such violence and tension as this. Still, she wasn't at fault, he supposed. Not if she was what she said she was, innocent Edith Halcyon who had tried to help her brother-in-law and been used as a pry to get information from the man instead.

All the wildness climbed up inside him. Not much was really happening, which made it worse. So much was at stake, and he seemed to be getting hold of nothing really decisive. Just enough to lead him on headlong with the hair-raising tension increasing and the uncertainty growing.

His doubt and suspense was worse now, for good reason. He had intended to summon help as soon as he got the location of the plane, the location which Chester Wilson had known. Now he had it. Now was when he had been going to summon help. But he had a sick feeling that no aid could reach the lost plane in time to be of any use. He might reach the plane himself. There was a chance. But help couldn't.

Altogether he was in no mood for an argument with Fay.

“Sit down and shut up!” he told Fay.

FAY almost didn't hold himself in. His face looked bleak and almost fleshless as he sat there.

The fellow isn't exactly in an enviable position himself, Doc reflected. He knows who I am. He knows he has to dispose of me violently. But first he has to use me, because he needs my help.

Doc tinkered impatiently with the controls, the throttle, the carburetor heat, watching the tachometer and airspeed indicator. He wished they had another hundred miles an hour speed. He was afraid, mortally afraid, that they weren't going to be in time.

He debated whether to get rid of Fay and Sheck now. Probably he could do it, although they would be half expecting trouble. In the end he decided against it, for he needed their assistance. They were capable.

He asked Fay, “Have you a plan?”

“Have you?” Fay countered.

He said, “I am only getting a third. For that, am I supposed to give the orders?”

Fay closed his eyes for a while. “There is no landing place where the plane was forced down. There is none for miles. If there was, Chester Wilson would have landed. That means they will have to land somewhere else, and make the trip afoot. That gives us time.”

Fay opened his eyes and said, "If we can catch them afoot, going across the ice or across whatever they have to cross, we may be able to shoot them down."

"With what for guns?"

Fay went back into the cabin. There was a case lashed in the baggage compartment, and from this he took a small machine gun and two carbine rifles. He had three boxes of cartridges for the rifles and about twenty boxes of .45-caliber for the little machine gun.

"This will have to do it," Fay said. He stood one of the rifles in the control cockpit, gave Shek the other rifle and kept the machine gun for himself.

Doc said, "You are overlooking one thing."

"Eh?"

"Chester Wilson was flying a seaplane. Maybe the other plane came down in a spot where ski-equipped planes can land. Maybe Wilson didn't dare set down because he had a seaplane."

Fay moistened his lips uneasily. "Maybe you're wrong. You better hope you are."

Doc Savage loaded the carbine rifle which Fay had stood in the cockpit. It was a 30-30, lever-action, short-barreled and not much of a fighting weapon in these bloodthirsty days when a 30-06 calibre machine gun was generally referred to as a peashooter. But it was better than no gun.

He put the rifle aside as soon as he had it loaded, for handling it was giving him a coldly depressed feeling. He didn't like firearms, and almost never carried any kind of a gun. He had often imagined that, subconsciously, he must be afraid of guns. But the logical explanation he gave himself was that a man with a gun in his pocket got too much in the habit of depending on the gun to solve everything. A gun wouldn't do that.

It was cold. The cabin heating wasn't adequate. The external thermometer indicated it was about thirty below zero outside. Checking frequently with the drift sight, he could tell that the wind here was about forty miles an hour, and that worried him, so he dropped down to get the surface wind. It wasn't as bad, quite. About thirty miles. That wouldn't be so tough, unless they got a bad crosswind landing.

Altogether, the wind and cold wasn't as bad as could be expected for the Arctic winter. In fact, it was a rather calm day.

He checked the course, running the groundspeed and elapsed time problem on the computer.

"Fay," he said.

"Yes?"

"It isn't much farther."

Fay looked at him uneasily. "What are you going to try to do first?"

"Knock the bombers out—and the fighter plane—if we can find them."

"That fighter!" Fay said hoarsely. "We haven't got a chance against it!"

Doc Savage went back to watching the Arctic waste below, and it was not more than five minutes before he saw the two bombers.

Chapter XII

THEY were over land, rolling snow-covered coastal country. Far to the north and east would be the Greenland mainland, and north was Jones Sound, then Ellsmere Land. So this must be Devon Island in midwinter.

He searched the terrain intently. And suddenly, as if a curtain had gone up in a theater, the whole situation was in front of him.

The big U. S. Army transport was piled up in the snow. It had lost its undercarriage and part of a wing, but the fuselage was intact. The pilot had done well with what he had to work with. There simply hadn't been enough runway when the ship iced up and he had to come down, but he had made a safe landing.

The big plane wasn't very impressive, lying there crippled in the snow. It certainly wasn't a sight that lived up to the uproar its loss had caused in Allied circles. It didn't look like something around which the future of nations quite probably hinged. It was just a big Army transport which had gotten lost in the Arctic, iced up and made a forced landing in which it had suffered some damage.

The two Heinkels, the big ones, were down about two miles to the east. They were down in a good spot, a long level stretch which was ample for their landing and take-off needs.

About half way between the wrecked American Army plane and the two Heinkels, a group of men were making their way on skis. There was a ridge of hills, and they were having slow going.

Fay, after staring through the binoculars, pointed at the skiing group and yelled, "That's Burroughs! They haven't gotten to the downed plane yet. We've got a chance."

Doc took the binoculars out of his hands. He tried to conceal his own anxiety. He was concerned about Monk and Ham, wondering where they were. If they were with the bombers, in the ships, that meant he didn't dare dive and fire on the Heinkels at random.

He couldn't spot Monk and Ham.

He saw Burroughs and his men stop and stare at the plane.

He knew the pursuit ship must be above somewhere, since it wasn't on the ground.

There was no time to kill. He dropped a wing and peeled off in as much of a dive as the civilian plane would take.

"Give me that machine gun!" he shouted at Fay. "We will try to knock out the motors on the bombers."

Fay astonished him by handing over the light machine gun without an argument. He took it, jammed it down beside him, and gave his attention to getting the plane down, killing its speed with a slip, and floating in on the two bombers.

The Heinkels got larger, the way things on the ground seem to do when you come down on them from the air. He watched the plastic gun turret windows, alert lest they should man some of the turret guns.

He told Fay, "Take the controls. Bank around them as close as you can."

Then he saw a man jump out of each bomber. The men ran madly, getting away from the ships, and flattened out in the snow and began raking snow over them with their hands.

“Glory be!” Fay said gleefully. “They’ve been trained to get the hell out of grounded planes when there’s an air attack. They think we’ve got bombs.”

Doc aimed carefully with the little machine gun, and gave one of the Heinkel engines a burst.

Then he saw Monk and Ham. They had rolled out of one of the Heinkels. They were tied hand and foot.

Doc put the gun aside instantly. He could see that Monk and Ham were tied with rope, so he dug a pocket knife out of his clothing. He hauled out the chart case, dumped the charts, and put the knife in the case, which he zipped shut.

“I’ll take the controls,” he told Fay.

He banked the ship sharply again, estimated wind direction, got the cockpit window open, and let fly the map case. He watched it. The case landed close to Monk and Ham, and both of them made for it, flopping with their bound hands and feet, ludicrously like fish out of water.

ONE of the men who had fled from the Heinkels now got up out of the snow with a gun. Fay began shooting at him deliberately. Back in the cabin, Sheck’s rifle also whacked methodically.

The man in the snow suddenly got down on his hands and knees, then spread out loosely, face down, and did not move again.

Monk had reached the map case. He had trouble with the zipper. Evidently his hands were numb with cold. Ham helped him. They got the case open, and used the knife on their ropes.

They got up, both of them, and Monk ran for one Heinkel, Ham for the other.

Shortly they appeared in the top turrets, swinging the pairs of Rheinmetal-Borsig machine guns.

“Do they know how to use those guns?” Fay demanded.

“They should.”

Edith Halcyon shrieked now. She was pointing upward, gesturing.

Doc, knowing what had horrified her, condemned himself for a fool, and put the old plane in a hard, tight bank to change its course quickly. Below him, even as he turned, he saw the hot sparks and wisps of tracer bullets, and the little racing storms which the slugs tore up in the snow below.

The Heinkel one-thirteen was coming down the sky like a black widow spider on a string, the gun ports filling with flame for the brief intervals that ten and twenty shot bursts took.

Doc watched the ship. When it corrected, he put the wheel hard over and slipped earthward. He got the wing down until the plane was almost falling free. He kept the nose high, so airspeed would be at a minimum.

It was a well-known trick he was trying, a maneuver used by army grasshopper planes to thwart enemy fighters. This was no grasshopper in maneuverability, but it would function fairly well. The idea was to do a terrific slip nearly to the ground, flatten out about ten feet off the earth, and hope the enemy fighter couldn’t pull out of his dive—he had to dive, because he could only aim his guns by pointing his plane at the target—in time to prevent a crash.

It was a maneuver that looked and sounded goofy, but it would make a fool out of a fighter plane.

But the Heinkel fighter pilot wasn't sucked in. He had his flaps cracked, and he hauled back in ample time. He got out of the dive.

Doc Savage climbed his heavily laden plane slowly, banking, turning away from the two Heinkel bombers. The fighter plane arched upward, got some altitude, and came around to attack from the rear, the most desirable place for a target run.

As Doc had figured, the run carried the fighter over the two bombers. The pilot evidently didn't know that he no longer had friends in the two ships, because he came in low and fast and almost directly over the bombers.

Fay, watching, said, "A sitting duck!"

Monk and Ham started firing almost together. They knew something about aerial gunnery, at least how much to lead the target.

Nothing outwardly visible happened to the Heinkel fighter when they got it. The Heinkel kept boring ahead, in a slanting dive, not swerving right or left or up or down. It was doing perhaps three hundred miles an hour when it hit, and made the sudden giant splash of flame that is always such a shocking sight when a plane is shot down and crashes.

SHECK came forward suddenly. He was excited, and yelling, "The guys on the ground have about reached the wrecked plane!"

Doc Savage nodded. He had been aware of that, but the fighter had been so much more important that he had hardly given the matter thought. Now he brought the ship around, and sent it toward the crashed army transport.

Edith Halcyon came lurching along the cabin. She said, "There is something coming out of our wings. It looks like gasoline."

Doc turned and looked. She was right. It was gasoline, and it was coming out through six or eight holes where bullets had gone through the wing. There was a stitching of bullet holes along the rest of the wing.

Scowling, Doc thought: I must be really scared, not to hear or feel that burst when it hit us.

Fay demanded, "Where did those holes come from? The fighter plane didn't hit us, did it?"

"It must have," Doc said.

He was switching to the other fuel tank when the motor stopped.

It didn't seem very tragic at first, the motor stopping. They had a starter, and there was a nearly full tank of fuel in the other wing. He took a gliding angle, and got the other tank on, and got the starter going.

The engine wouldn't start. It wouldn't fire a single time. It had cooled off too quickly, or something. It wouldn't start. They were up for a forced landing.

Doc did some guessing about the angle of glide. He had never flown this type of ship, and he wasn't too sure about the gliding angle.

He decided to take a chance on making the level stretch where the American transport was wrecked. He set the glide for that spot.

He thought, feeling as tight as if a gun was aimed at him, of several little things. Things like the habit a man acquires from doing something one way for a long time. In this landing, for example, he would have no time for a standard one-hundred-eighty degree pattern approach. He would have to come straight in and set down, and it was tricky. It wouldn't have been tricky if he hadn't been making the other kind of approaches exclusively. Or was he just scared?

It was very still in the plane with the motor dead. And the cold came in with biting force. He closed the open cockpit window, not wanting the icy blast to water his eyes too much.

"Get in the seats and fasten your safety belts," he warned. "Even if we make it, it's going to be a rough one."

Thaddeus Fay went back in the cabin with Edith Halcyon and Sheck, and it struck Doc Savage that this was a strange thing for Fay to do. So he watched Fay. He saw Fay test the girl's safety belt after she fastened it. That was all right. A man would do such a thing, probably.

But Fay tested Sheck's belt after Sheck fastened it—then hit Sheck a terrific blow on the jaw with his fist. Sheck sagged back, dazed.

Fay beat Sheck's jaw and temples with his fists until there was no chance that Sheck was still conscious. Then Fay came back to the co-pilot's seat.

Fay sank into the seat and fastened his safety belt. He sat staring at the approaching snow-covered earth, his face bleak and frightened.

"I guess that was the wrong thing to do," he said.

"Why did you do it?" Doc asked.

"Lay Sheck out?" Fay said. "It seemed like the time to do it. Maybe it wasn't. But I think it was."

"Why?"

"I have been afraid he was going to shoot you in the back," Fay said. "I've been afraid of it a dozen times. I've watched him. That's what he planned to do, and I was afraid he would do it before I could stop him."

Doc watched the airspeed—and Fay. He thought they might make it. That is, they might make a landing near where the transport lay, but it wouldn't be a good spot for a landing.

"Why should Sheck want to shoot me?" Doc asked.

"He knew you were Doc Savage," Fay said.

Doc didn't get it. He didn't get it at all. He had known that Thaddeus Fay knew he was Doc Savage, and Sheck had known it. But now was a queer time for Fay to admit it.

He thought they had about twenty seconds more for talk.

"What gave Sheck that idea?" he asked.

"Back at Lake Placid, when we were in the house on the hill, watching the airplane hangar, Sheck

decided that was who you were,” Fay said. “He told me. Sheck wasn't dumb. He said he was going to shoot you. So, to cover you up, I pretended to be a mastermind who was using you to help us get Chester Wilson and do the rest of the job. I told Sheck we must use you for that, because of your ability, then knock you off.”

It sounded all right. It sounded like what Fay and Sheck had said when Doc got their conference with his lipreading at the Lake Placid place.

But it didn't make sense that Fay should admit it now.

Doc hit Fay suddenly with his right fist, on the jaw. The blow made a loud sound, and Fay slept with his mouth open and his eyes rolled up.

The plane came in, wobbling, straining to finish out its glide. Doc scowled at the spot where they were going to have to land. It wasn't good. They would probably wrap up in a ball when they landed.

A few bullets began hitting the plane. These came, he was sure, from Burroughs and his men.

He turned his head and said, “There may be a fire when we hit. You can never tell about those things. Get out of the plane as soon as you can.”

His voice was very loud, because he had been in the habit of shouting over the plane noise. He must have shouted the same way during his talk with Fay, and not noticed it. He felt silly.

Edith Halcyon looked at him fixedly. She did not nod or anything.

Chapter XIII

THE landing was fifteen seconds that stood his hair on end. They took snow and ice off a ridge with a grinding metallic crash, bounced to another ridge, hit with a sickening shock, sailed off nearly out of control. In the middle of it he thought: The pilot of that transport should get a Congressional Medal of Honor for the landing he must have made with that iced-up ship.

They hit the ground again, and stayed down, metal grinding and fabric ripping in a blinding cloud of snow. He knew one wing had gone, felt the ship ground-loop. He did what he could so fast that he was not sure what he did.

Then they were still. He was hanging upside down from the safety belt, and he broke his fingernails on the belt release. He got loose. He crawled back on the roof of the plane cabin which was now the floor.

“Are you all right?” Edith Halcyon asked.

“Yes,” he said. “Pile out into the snow. But don't stand up and run. Get down. Burrow into the snow until we find out the situation.”

She dropped out into the snow.

He unfastened Fay and Sheck from their belts, and tossed them out, then followed himself.

They were not more than seventy yards from the wrecked transport. He stared at the big ship. He had not, he realized, seen any sign of life around it, or in the plane itself.

As he waited, the cold stillness affected him like a sickness. Everything, all this trouble and strain, was

based on the idea that the transport had gotten down with the occupants alive. Now he was afraid that it hadn't.

He lifted his voice.

"Ahoy the transport!" he called. "Doc Savage, of New York, assigned by the State Department to finding you fellows. What do you say?"

There was more stillness. He could hear the small brittle crackling sounds that bitter cold makes.

Then he got an answer.

"You better identify yourself a little more," a voice said.

For a while he was speechless with relief. He didn't know where the voice had come from. A little to the left of the mangled transport, he thought. He wasn't sure.

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Crawl toward the transport," the voice said. "But keep down. Some guys are lying out there in the snow with rifles, and they're pretty good shots."

He searched intently, trying to locate the speaker.

He said, "You had better do some identifying yourself. Who are you?"

"Gaines," the man said. "Lieutenant General Gaines."

That was all right. Gaines was one of the men who had been on the transport.

He told the girl, "Stay here until I make sure of this."

THE occupants of the wrecked transport had gone native and built themselves an igloo of packed snow blocks and stone. Snow had drifted over the structure, hiding it almost completely. That was the explanation for their being invisible.

Gaines' voice said, "Turn left. Crawl in that hole you'll find."

He saw Gaines then, or saw a rifle barrel which he presumed Gaines was holding. He crawled until he found the hole.

Out on the ice, Burroughs' men must have discovered him, because there was a brief storm of lead, some of it quite close. From near at hand, from the igloo, rifles whacked angrily in reply.

He dived into the hole, and a man met him instantly with a gun muzzle. The man scowled at him. "You don't look like Doc Savage."

"I changed my looks a little when this began," he explained.

The man was undecided.

Doc said, "There's a light machine gun in the plane, if you fellows are short of ammunition."

Back in the igloo, someone said, "My God! Go get that gun!"

Instantly men were crawling past him, out into the biting cold.

He called, "There is a girl out there." He lifted his voice, shouting, "Miss Halcyon! They are coming after you and the guns. Help them, but be careful!"

The man who had met him said loudly, "This doesn't look like Doc Savage."

Gaines' voice said, "Bring him in here."

The igloo was not large, but it was warm. They had rigged an ingenious burner for the plane fuel, and torn the seats out of the plane and made fairly comfortable furniture in the igloo.

There was a ledge around the wall of the igloo, and men were crouching on this. They had poked portholes through the snow at various points, and were watching for Burroughs' men.

"Hello, Gaines," Doc said to Gaines. "I don't know how to straighten up this matter of identification. I haven't any credentials on me, naturally."

Gaines eyed him thoughtfully. "Where did you last meet me?"

"Cairo, about six months ago. You were with a very striking blonde Englishwoman named Celia."

Gaines laughed. "I guess that identifies you."

Gaines then went to a porthole to watch the men who were crawling to the plane to get the machine gun. His intense interest in the operation indicated that there was very little in the way of arms and ammunition on hand.

Gaines, still watching, moved his head a little as if surprised. He whistled softly. "Speaking of tall blondes, you haven't done badly yourself," he said. Then he asked, "Who is she?"

Doc Savage didn't answer, because he was looking at the man who had been standing watching through a porthole on the other side of the igloo. The man had turned. He had a rifle.

Using the deep, amiable voice which millions had heard over their radios, the voice which could ring with confidence or rasp with the determination of a bulldog when necessary, the man said, "I have one of them spotted. I am not a very good shot with a rifle. Would someone care to do the honors?"

DOC SAVAGE had wondered, initially in New York when Wister of the State Department had first tossed into his lap the frightening job of finding this man, what his feelings would be when, and if, he did find him. He'd had the same thought often as matters developed, turning his possible reactions over in his mind, because it was an interesting mental item to chew upon.

Mostly his reaction had been that this man had better have stayed home, safely guarded by the millions of soldiers he commanded, and the ingenious young men who made up his personal bodyguard. A man with so much responsibility had no business gallivanting around the world and getting himself lost in the Arctic wastes.

Doc had met the man before, twice. The other meetings had been in the man's executive offices, in surroundings of efficiency and executive activity. Doc had received the same impression that everyone did, that the man was really fitted for the job he was doing, which was guiding one of the four Allied nations through the most complex, scientific and bloodletting war so far in history. It was hard, meeting

the man in his office, to visualize him in a setting of primitive danger. One just didn't think of him as being in a battlefield foxhole, or in an igloo in the Arctic with a rifle in his hands, quietly asking someone else if they'd shoot a man whom he didn't think he could hit.

But the man sounded and looked as if he belonged here. His manner—and his manner was a composite of what was in the man, his courage, his training, his ability, his allotment of the stuff called guts—was impressive.

He *is* a great man, Doc thought.

Which was an unnecessary reflection. The man had to be great, to guide his country through what it had undergone, to stand at the head of his nation, a tower of courage that had become a symbol of the dogged persistence of his people.

The man got down off the ledge.

Another man took his place with the rifle, aimed carefully, fired, then got a blankly sheepish look which indicated he had missed.

"I missed him, dammit, Sir," said the man who had fired.

"Don't worry about it."

"Thank you."

The man came to Doc Savage. He put out his hand, saying, "How are you, Savage?" And he followed that with a direct question, "What is going on, anyway?"

"The wrong people found out about your being lost up here."

THE man nodded. "That's quite likely. The enemy planes ran into my escort by accident, I think, but they evidently had information which led them to realize what they had stumbled on to. They threw everything they had into trying to shoot us down. We had to run for it, and for safety, headed into a cold front which offered the only thing in the way of a refuge."

He grimaced. "You know what a cold front is? I didn't. I assure you it's nothing for an airplane to get mixed up with. This one scattered us like chaff. When we came out of it, the Jerries weren't around, but neither were any of my escort. Except one. An American army plane. Then we iced up, and had to make a crash landing here. The American plane flew around. It was a seaplane and couldn't land, but we signalled we were safe, and the pilot signalled that he would fly out and get help. He didn't dare use his radio, because the Jerry planes might be in the vicinity, or might pick up the radio signal."

Doc said, "Here is the rest of it. The American pilot got back to the States safely, but the Nazis had evidently tipped off their American agents. The agents were waiting, and they had a beautiful piece of luck, managing to kidnap the pilot. Finally they forced him to reveal the location of the crash. Then there was a race up here to get you. The race, as you can see outside, came much too close to being a tie."

"They're infernally anxious to get me, aren't they?"

"Naturally."

The man shrugged. "I'm not my nation. Not by a long shot. If I was a prisoner in Berlin, it wouldn't make

one whit of difference in the progress of the war.”

“There is another way of looking at that.”

“Eh?”

“Yes. You happen to know all the Allied military plans.”

“Do you think I'd tell a word of them?” the other asked sharply. “They're all in my head. I destroyed every document as soon as we crashed.”

“Plans can be gotten out of a man's head with a little work,” Doc said.

The other considered the point for a while. “You're correct enough,” he said finally. “No man likes to think he could be made to tell such things. But I suppose it could be done scientifically, and he couldn't help himself.”

There was shooting outside, a rattling flurry of it. Then Edith Halcyon came inside. She was followed by the men who had gone after the machine gun. They had the gun, and two of them were dragging Fay and Sheck.

Fay was conscious. He told Doc Savage, “You should have let me finish.”

“Finish what?”

“Explaining that I—” He stopped, because a man at one of the portholes was yelling.

“Smoke!” the man shouted. “There's a lot of smoke coming up from the east!”

MONK and Ham had set fire to one of the Heinkels, Doc knew after he had watched the rising smoke for a moment. Or he hoped that was what it was. He waited, listening for the motors of the other plane to start, growing tight with anxiety.

Finally the first Heinkel motor started, then the others. Their thunder came faintly across the two miles of Arctic waste, the sound almost dying out at times as it was buffeted by the wind. It seemed that the motors warmed for an hour, and it was impossible to tell when the plane actually took off.

The Heinkel appeared above the snow-covered ridges.

“Who is in it?” Gaines asked.

“My two associates, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks—I hope,” Doc said.

“I hope so, too,” Gaines said. “You know, as a last resort, the Jerries would gladly drop a bomb on us.”

Doc watched the Heinkel climb, circle, get altitude, then listened to it thunder overhead. When nothing happened, a coldness crawled all through him. If it wasn't Monk and Ham, they were indeed in bad shape.

Doc said, “We had better get out of here. Scatter and charge the enemy. If the plane is with us, we can smoke the enemy out where they can gun them. If it isn't with us, at least we'll be scattered.”

They held a conference about that. Then they began crawling out of the igloo. And the shooting started, a

scattered shot here and there at first.

The Heinkel came thundering back. It went over, and the bomb bay doors were open. A stick of bombs came out. They seemed directly overhead, but that was only an illusion, because they hit two hundred yards beyond, driving up a procession of geysers of earth, stone, snow.

"It seems to be with us," Gaines said.

The rest of it seemed to take three or four minutes to finish. Actually the elapsed time was more than an hour, during which the big plane made nearly thirty runs either bombing or machine-gunning.

But in the end, there was no more shooting, and three men, all of them from Stripe Lodge, crawled out of the snow where they had been hiding, holding their arms in the air.

The captives were taken into the igloo and searched. Thaddeus Fay pointed at one of them, the fattest of the three. "Burroughs," he said.

"Who is Burroughs?" Doc asked.

"Their bull," Fay said cheerfully. "The head one. The man with the ideas."

Burroughs looked at Fay and cursed him with a low furious intensity, cursing him in German, Czech, English and French. Then Burroughs put his face in his hands.

Doc asked, "What about McGillicuddy? There was talk about a McGillicuddy earlier in this thing."

Fay indicated Burroughs. "Him. That's one of his names, and he never liked it much, so pretty nearly everybody called him McGillicuddy behind his back."

"You've known him some time?"

"A long time," Fay admitted.

Doc scowled at Fay. "And just who does that make you?"

Fay grinned. "We'd better wait until Wister gets here. You might not take my word."

WISTER of the State Department arrived with the first swarm of American army and navy planes. The ships began getting in about six o'clock in the evening of the following day.

Monk and Ham had flown out in the Heinkel, going alone because there was an unhealthy possibility that some American pilot might sight the Heinkel coming in over the Canadian or Maine coast and shoot it out of the sky without benefit of ceremony.

Wister was full of apology. He introduced Fay.

"This is Thaddeus Fay," Wister said. "He is an operative for the State Department, and has been working with Burroughs for about three years. Burroughs trusted him and Fay had access to the information which enemy agents were getting, which was a handy thing for us to know. So handy that we let Burroughs keep operating, and fed him now and then a piece of information which was poison for his employers."

Doc told Wister bitterly, "You might have told me you already had a man planted with the gang who had

kidnapped Wilson.”

“We didn’t want to give Fay away. And Fay figured you could accomplish more by yourself.”

Fay said, “As it turned out, we should have told you.”

Doc Savage wheeled suddenly and went outside and stood watching the planes landing and taking off and circling. The place looked, he reflected, as busy as an English bomber field on an afternoon when visibility was good over the Continent.

He was irritated, but he supposed he shouldn’t be. Everything had come out all right. Probably the secrecy, the withholding of information from him, had been a prudent precaution on Wister’s part. There was so much at stake. Wister couldn’t take chances. Wister was a good man. He had been excited this time, but he was still a good man.

He watched a group of men nearby. The man who had been the cause of all the trouble, the man who was the head of an Allied nation, was the center of the group. No one else in the cluster seemed to be less than a Lieutenant General. They were getting ready to leave on one of the planes.

The man who was the head of a nation saw Doc Savage. He waved, and smiled. He didn’t say anything about gratitude, but his smile and gesture were a great deal more expressive. They said enough.

Doc watched him leave. It was worth it, Doc reflected. Very much worth all the tension and worry and frightening effort, to preserve a man who was so important to humanity.

Monk and Ham and Edith Halcyon and Chester Wilson were waiting beside one of the planes. They were going back together, all of them. They were waiting on Doc.

Doc went back to Wister.

“No hard feelings,” he told Wister.

“I’m certainly glad,” Wister said. “Next time we work together, I hope I keep my head a little better.”

“Next time!” Doc said. “God forbid.”

He went to join Monk, Ham, Wilson and Edith Halcyon. Edith Halcyon was smiling, and suddenly he felt fine. He felt very good indeed.

THE END

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