

One-Eyed Mystic

A Doc Savage Adventure

#111

Kenneth Robeson

[Lester Dent]

1944

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WHO IS

DOC SAVAGE

The bronze giant, who with his five aides became world famous, whose name was as well known in the far regions of China and the jungles of Africa as in the skyscrapers of New York.

There were stories of Doc Savage's almost incredible strength; of his amazing scientific discoveries of strange weapons and dangerous exploits.

Doc dedicated his life to aiding those faced by dangers with which they could not cope.

His name brought fear to those who sought to prey upon the unsuspecting. His name was praised by thousands he had saved.

DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING CREW

"Ham," Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, was never without his ominous, black sword cane.

"Monk," Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, just over five feet tall, yet over 260 pounds. His brutish exterior concealed the mind of a great scientist.

"Renny," Colonel John Renwick, his favorite sport was pounding his massive fists through heavy, paneled doors.

"Long Tom," Major Thomas J. Roberts, was the physical weakling of the crowd, but a genius at electricity.

"Johnny," William Harper Littlejohn, the scientist and the greatest living expert on geology and archæology.

**WITH THEIR LEADER, THEY WOULD
GO ANYWHERE, FIGHT ANYONE,
DARE EVERYTHING—SEEKING
EXCITEMENT AND PERILOUS
ADVENTURE!**

ONE-EYED MYSTIC

Kenneth Robeson

ONE-EYED MYSTIC #111

PRINTING HISTORY

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ONE-EYED MYSTIC

I

He had a queer little face, the face of an imp. He was a small man, built like a mosquito. Fragile limbs and a fragile body. His skin was about the same color as the brown-leather suitcase he carried. He was one of the passengers in the air line's limousine in which Renny Renwick rode from the Grand Central Air Lines ticket office out to LaGuardia Field. But in the beginning Renny Renwick paid no attention to the small brown fellow, for Renny had other things on his mind.

Renny was taking a vacation. For two weeks or so, he was going to stop being Colonel John Renwick, the eminent engineer and member of Doc Savage's group of five aids. Renny was going to fish.

He held his hands apart as far as he could, illustrating the size of the fish he was going to snag.

"That big," he said.

Doc Savage was riding out to the airport to see Renny off on the vacation. So were Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks, the latter pair being two more of the group of five assistants.

Doc said, "This will be the first vacation you have had, Renny."

"Yes. I'm slipping in my old age," Renny said, grinning.

There was no truth in the statement, and they both knew it. Renny, with his great size, big fists, homely face, and his exclamation of, "Holy cow!" for every unusual situation, wasn't slipping. Not at all. The thing he still liked most was excitement.

But things were slow enough for a little vacation. Things did not often get that slow, so Renny was taking advantage of it.

"If something comes up that looks good," Renny said, "be sure and let me know about it."

"Of course," Doc Savage assured him.

Doc Savage was a giant bronze man whose appearance was almost as astonishing as his reputation. His bronze hair was only a little darker than his skin, and his eyes, one of his most spectacular features, were like pools of flake gold always stirred by tiny winds. He was obviously a man of great physical strength.

They were known all over the world—Doc Savage and his group—for their rather fantastic profession of pursuing fantastic adventure, of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers who seemed to be outside the reach of the law.

Renny rubbed his hands together.

“Fish this long.” He illustrated again, exaggerating. “And Norman Monaghan’s camp cooking—yum, yum! Brother, I’m going to have me a couple of weeks of peace and plenty.”

The limousine, a sleek streamlined affair, rushed along in luxury and silence. It was a fall day, crisp and bright.

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks got into a fuss. It began mildly over Monk’s pet pig or Ham’s pet chimpanzee whichever had chewed up one of Ham’s dress gloves. From a mild start, in a couple of minutes, Monk and Ham were threatening to tear each other’s heads off.

The row didn’t mean anything except that Monk and Ham were feeling good.

The queer little brown imp of a man showed no interest in them, except once, when he glanced at them—and Renny realized the little imp had one eye.

The little brown man was wearing a brown patch over his left eye.

At the airport, Renny shook hands around, said good-bys, took some good-natured ribbing about the microscopic size of the fish he’d probably catch, and prepared to board the plane.

“You say this Norman Monaghan is a good cook?” asked Monk.

“Swell. A fine woods cook. It’s his hobby. That, and fishing,” Renny said enthusiastically.

“I hope he’s got patience enough to put up with you for two weeks,” said Monk, chuckling.

“Monaghan is a nice guy. I met him when I designed the building for the bank of which he’s a vice president. We’ve been fishing a couple of times together. He’s great. I hope you can meet him sometime.”

“Sure. Get us a picture of the fish.”

Ham said, “If he does that, he’d better take along a camera with a magnifying lens.”

Renny got on the plane.

He found that he shared his seat with the little brown one-eyed imp.

The plane rolled to the other end of the runway, the pilot tested the motors, then they took off. Renny was an expert pilot, with several hundred hours in heavy transport ships, and he liked the way the pilot handled this craft. The pilot was good.

Renny settled back to relax. The plane climbed, then flew westward smoothly.

The performance of the plane was soothing. Renny, having nothing else to do, decided to practice a method of relaxing which he had seen Doc Savage use. Renny wasn't sure of the exact procedure, but it seemed to consist of consciously relaxing each part of the body, then keeping the mind on something soothing and sleepy so that the muscles wouldn't tighten up again. He tried it for a while. By gosh, it seemed to work!

The one-eyed little imp now spoke.

"Stupid," he said.

"Eh?" said Renny, opening one eye.

"Is that yoga you are trying?"

"I don't know what it is," Renny said. "Why?"

"You do it stupidly."

"Nobody asked you for advice," Renny said, and closed his eyes and prepared to resume his relaxing.

But the little imp wasn't discouraged. In fact, he was indignant. He seemed to be insulted. Renny had intended to offend him just enough—if the fellow wanted to be offended—that the man would shut up. But the little man was too insulted to become silent.

"You stupid idiot!" he said to Renny.

"That," said Renny, "is three times you've flipped that word stupid around. The fourth time might get you a skinned nose."

The little man pointed a finger at Renny with great indignation. "You are attempting the diversion of the senses from the external world and the concentration of thought within."

"Eh?"

"You," said the little imp, "are as clumsy as a cow at it."

"Yeah? Maybe you could do better!"

The small man gave Renny a look of frightful injury. "You are being sarcastic, of course. That is because you do not know who I am."

"That's right. Who are you?"

"You would not realize if I told you!"

Renny's impulse was to grin. The little brown fellow was so cocky, so indignantly serious, and making his pronouncements with such a profound significance, as if each one of them was going to stop the world, that he was funny.

"All right, tell me who you are," said Renny. "Let's see if I know."

That made the small man more angry. He slapped his chest. "It is wasting the essence of inner dynamic fluidity to talk this way to you. You are nothing. You are bones and some meat. That thing you think is your mind is a rusted, worthless tool. A sponge too dried out to soak up anything."

"Dumb, in other words," said Renny.

"Exactly." The little man leaned forward. "Do you really want to know who I am?"

"Frankly, I don't give the least part of a damn," said Renny.

The one-eyed imp slapped his chest again. It sounded as if he had hit a small drum.

"I," he said, "am Cici, the omnipotent. In the Central Council of the Farthest Inward, I am the most completely self-equipped."

"I hope you know you're not making sense," Renny said.

"I am Cici, of Kukilcuaca," the imp said. "You do not know where Kukilcuaca is, doubtless. It is in Mexico, a very remote part of Mexico. Have you ever been in Mexico?"

Renny said, "I've been in Mexico, and I never heard of—"

"Kukilcuaca is in the part of Mexico where you weren't," said the indignant small brown man. "No one, no one of your kind I mean, has seen it. Few have seen it. But I, Cici, am the most honored there. I am the mystic. There has been, in twenty generations, no other great enough to be the mystic."

He leaned back and sneered at Renny.

"That," he concluded, "is who I am."

Renny's grin loosened, and finally faded. The little goof was making him uncomfortable. The imp was some kind of a nut, of course, and like anybody else Renny was never very comfortable in the presence of an eccentric.

"O.K.," said Renny sourly. "Now that we've settled that, how about some peace and quiet?"

The one-eyed mystic gave Renny a look which contained much more hate than the situation seemed to warrant.

“You,” he told Renny, “have offended me grievously. I do not let such offenses go unpunished.”

Renny got a little indignant himself.

“You keep fooling with me and you’ll get your behind paddled,” Renny said.

Then he leaned back and closed his eyes, ignoring the other.

Later, Renny realized that it was somewhat strange that he should go to sleep almost immediately.

A hand, shaking his shoulder, aroused Renny, although the awakening was slow. He tried to speak, to say that he was awake, but the words sounded thick and strange.

“Wake up, Palsy,” a voice said. “Snap out of it. You’re almost home.”

Renny said, “Sure, sure,” and it was another mumble.

Getting his eyes open was a job which he finally managed. He was, he decided, in a taxicab.

The cab driver, a thick-necked individual with a pocked face that would look better behind jail bars, was leaning back over the seat.

“Wake up, Palsy,” he said.

“I’m awake,” Renny managed to say fairly distinctly.

“O.K. Then I’ll take you on to the hotel.” The cab driver leered. “Thought you might want to be awake when you got there, in case there might be somebody unfriendly around.”

Renny muttered, “Who do you mean?”

The cabby winked. “I don’t know nothing, Palsy.”

“Stop calling me pal!” Renny said.

The driver shrugged. He sank back behind the wheel, and the taxi resumed progress.

“What the devil’s the matter with me?”—Renny wondered. “Why does my brain feel so foggy? What—”

“Holy cow!” Renny gasped.

Where was the plane? Why wasn’t he in it? What on earth had happened to him?

He leaned forward, took his head in both hands, and squeezed his temples. They ached. He managed to straighten out his thoughts—and he

was quite positive that he should be in a plane en route from New York to Kansas City.

Why wasn't he in the plane? What place was this? Where was he now?

"Driver!" Renny said. "What town is this?"

He was amazed at how hoarse and thick his voice sounded.

The driver glanced around. "Who you kidding, Palsy?"

"Never mind," Renny said.

Renny had gotten a look at his hands. They were pale, unhealthy-looking. They should have been healthily tanned. Renny's fists were—or should have been—enormous things, neither of which would have gone into a quart pail. But the hands looked smaller, and they felt drawn, as if they were trying to pucker themselves to become even smaller. The fingernails, Renny realized with loathing, seemed to be tinted like a girl's.

"Holy cow!" he muttered.

The taxicab stopped in front of a cheap-looking hotel, the driver saying, "Here you are, Palsy."

Renny looked around instinctively for his traveling bag, his bait box, and the case containing his fishing rods. There was no such equipment in the cab.

"Where . . . where's my fishing stuff?" he asked.

The cab driver laughed. "You're a great kidder, Palsy."

Renny wanted to ask a lot of questions. But he didn't like the driver, and he didn't feel up to talking now, anyway. His head was too thick. He felt dazed.

The meter said fifty cents. Renny gave the driver the fare, and a quarter tip, out of habit.

Sounding dissatisfied, the driver said, "Palsy, you generally give me five bucks for hauling you."

Renny, dazed and out of patience, muttered, "I'll give you a knot on the head if you start anything."

The driver grinned somewhat fawningly. "Now you sound more like yourself, Palsy."

Renny entered the hotel, and he was not surprised to discover that he had no recollection of having been in the place before. It was a strange hotel.

Not knowing what else to do, Renny approached the room clerk's desk.

The clerk, a thin fellow with a dough sack for a face, tossed a key down in front of Renny, saying, "There you are, Mr. Gerson."

Renny picked up the key. Seven-fourteen. He considered, for a moment, giving the clerk an argument and asking some of the questions that were beginning to swarm up in the fog that filled his brain. But he was in no mental condition to talk intelligently.

He rode to the seventh floor in an elevator that had an odor. The key let him into seven-fourteen.

The room, not in the least like the rest of the hotel in appearance, was extremely flashy. The furniture was elaborate, but very cheap. There were pillows everywhere, on the floor, in the chairs. The place smelled strongly of cheap incense.

Renny could see nothing anywhere that he recognized as belonging to him.

He stood there, peering about from aching eyes, and finally said, "Holy cow!" again, explosively.

He stumbled to the writing desk, pawed open a drawer, and found the hotel stationery:

HOTEL PRINCE ROYAL
KANSAS CITY, MO.

Well, at least he was in Kansas City.

He made for the bathroom, where there would be a mirror. Because he had seen his hands earlier, he was somewhat prepared for what he saw when he looked into the mirror. But he gave a horrified croak at the sight.

II

The face in the mirror was somewhat the size and shape of the countenance Renny had been accustomed to shaving mornings. But that was about as far as the resemblance went. The visage which confronted him in the mirror was undeniably evil, dissipated, unpleasant. The complexion was pasty—as bad as the coloring of the clerk downstairs—and the eyebrows were a rusty red, as was the hair. Renny didn't have red hair. The face wasn't his.

Scowling at the face, Renny said, "I'll take another look at you later."

He stumbled back into the living room. He was very tired. I feel, he thought, like the morning after a tough night.

He sank down in a chair, rested his head against the back, and endeavored to get his brain to do something that bore some resemblance to thinking. The effort was not very successful. He could recollect, with a hazy unreality, what had happened since he had awakened a few minutes ago in the taxicab. But before that—back to the time he had leaned back in his seat in the plane and gone to sleep—there was a gap.

He could recall the little brown one-eyed imp who had said he was a mystic, whatever that was. Renny grimaced. The mystic was certainly a nut. Renny couldn't recall having disliked anyone so intensely on such a short acquaintance.

He did get one foggy idea, which led him to pick up the telephone, and, when the girl's voice sounded—the telephone operator at the hotel, probably—he asked, "What date is this? What day of the month?"

"Why, Friday, Mr. Gerson," said the operator.

Friday! Renny had left New York on Thursday.

"Friday, the first week in October?" Renny asked.

"Yes."

At least, there was only one day gap in his life.

"O.K.," Renny said. "Thanks."

"Mr. Gerson," said the operator.

"Eh?"

"I heard from the hospital. You just broke Betty's arm, that was all."

Renny jumped. "I— Holy cow! I broke a girl's arm! When?"

"Oh, Mr. Gerson, you say the cutest things," the operator simpered. "It was last night. Don't you remember?"

"No! I don't remember!"

The operator said, still simpering, "It's all right, Palsy. You scared Betty good, and she won't dare say anything to a cop."

Renny blinked. "I scared her good, eh?"

"You sure did. Betty is deathly afraid of a knife."

Renny's eyes went to the chest of drawers, and he mumbled, "Thanks," and hung up. He went to the chest of drawers, stood ogling the knife lying there.

The knife was about the most vicious-looking thing Renny had seen in the way of knives. He bent close, eyeing it. And the short hairs on the back

of his neck got on end. For there were, unless he was badly mistaken, dried bloodstains on the knife blade.

He tried to say, “Holy cow!” and didn’t say anything.

He sank in the chair again, making another attempt to remember something about what could have happened to him. His thinking efforts got him nothing but a foggy aching. He got out and prowled.

He prowled the clothes closet. None of the clothing there was at all familiar. And the gaudy suits with a zoot cut were things he wouldn’t have been seen dead in. Alarmed by the zoot suits, he went into the bathroom for another look at that sinful face—and the suit he was wearing. It was a zooter, all right.

He was startled enough to go a foot off the floor when the door opened and a girl came in.

She wasn’t a bad-looking girl, was his first thought.

“Hy’ah, Palsy,” she said.

No, not at all hard on the eyes.

“Good afternoon,” Renny said uncomfortably.

“My, my, how formal,” said the girl. “What’s cookin’, snookins?” She threw herself into a chair and got out a cigarette. “Got a light, blight?”

There was nothing which nauseated Renny quite like the clang-slang which swing addicts affected. But this was one of the smallest of his worries at the present moment. He fumbled instinctively in a pocket and found an awful lighter of onyx and chrome which he had never seen before, as far as he recalled. He furnished a light.

The girl—she looked O.K. at close range, too—blew smoke in Renny’s face. “Thanks, tank,” she said.

Renny took a deep breath.

“Would you mind telling me just who you are?” he inquired.

The girl waved her cigarette.

“That’s a new one on Dolly,” she said. “What’s the rib, Palsy?”

“I merely wish to ascertain your identity.”

Still more astonished, the girl said, “Me? I’m Dolly. I’m the spare rib. I’m the girl friend.”

“You’re my girl friend!” Renny squawked.

She scowled at him suspiciously.

“Say, you’re talkin’ funny, Palsy. What is this? What goes, boze? Is this a new kind of brush-off?” She pointed her cigarette at Renny. Her voice rose in anger. “Say, if you’re trying to air me—”

“You misunderstand entirely,” Renny said. But she looked so angry that he was moved to try a little clang talk on her to bring peace. “It’s still love, dove. Put out the fire. All is slick, chick.”

Dolly relaxed.

“That’s more like,” she said. “For a minute, you were sounding like a dictionary. It had me guessing.”

Renny was silent. Confused was a mild word to explain the way he felt.

Dolly was watching him. She pointed her cigarette at him.

“Where were you last night, Palsy?”

“Last night?”

“We had a date. Why’d you give me the stand-up?”

“Uh . . . did I?” said Renny.

“I didn’t like that, rat. You better explain. Trot out your reasons.”

Renny was in no mood for a scrap with a strange female who seemed to have a claim on him.

“I . . . uh . . . had business,” he muttered.

He thought it was a bum excuse, but surprisingly, it did the job. Dolly nodded.

“I get it,” she said. “You want me to say we were together anyway? If so, where’d we go?”

Renny had his mouth open trying to think what on earth he would say to that, when the telephone rang.

The hotel phone operator’s voice told him, “Some gentlemen to see you. Spike and Steve and Bernie and Lucky. They’re on their way up.”

Renny replaced the receiver.

“Who was that?” asked Dolly.

Renny said, “Four gentlemen named Spike, Steve, Bernie and Lucky are on their way up here.”

“Oh, gosh, bosh!” Dolly jumped to her feet. “I’m going to blow. Those guys give me the chills, honey. Be seeing you. Now I fly; good-by.”

She opened the door and left.

Renny stood in the middle of the floor and thought: Wow! From what I’ve seen of this face of mine, it should give anybody the chills. But she said

these four fellows who are coming up gave her the chills. Holy cow! I wonder what they'll be like? Clock-stoppers, doubtless.

The four arrivals were up to expectations.

The quartet came sliding into the room as if they were afraid there was something behind them. A policeman, probably.

Renny looked them over, and he thought, "What do you know! They look worse than I do!"

"Hy'ah, Palsy," they said.

By now Renny had gathered that his identity was supposed to be someone named Palsy Gerson, a fellow who broke girls' arms, frightened them with knives, gave five-dollar tips to lug taxi drivers, and no telling what else.

Renny looked them over.

"Look at me," he said.

They examined him.

"Am I Palsy Gerson?" Renny asked.

They seemed to consider this a strange remark, judging from the startled glances they exchanged.

"What's the matter, Palsy?" one asked. "Hangover?"

Renny shrugged.

It now occurred to Renny that the four visitors looked determined in a grimly unpleasant way. He began to wonder what business had brought them. And how was he going to get the information? Maybe he had summoned them, and was supposed to get the ball rolling? He wished his head was clearer.

They solved the problem.

They unbuttoned their coats and vests and held them open. All of them did this simultaneously. Evidently they wanted to demonstrate that there were no guns in underarm holsters. They also slapped their pockets expressively.

"We're clean, Palsy," the spokesman, who had a bad squint, said. "This is a peace talk."

"Yeah?" Renny said.

The spokesman said, "We been pals, ain't we, Palsy? We been working together for a long time. We been like that." He held up crossed fingers to show how they had been. "Ain't that right."

“So what?” said Renny, fishing for information. “Get at what you’ve got to say.”

The spokesman’s eyes moved shiftily.

“We ain’t rats,” he said. “We never ratted on you, not even when you knocked off that pin-ball machine collector just because he cussed you, Palsy.”

Renny felt the most unpleasant of chills. Knocked off? That was talk that meant murder. Was he a killer?

“Holy cow!” he said.

“Huh?”

“Nothing,” Renny said hastily. “Go ahead and talk.”

“The spokesman looked uncomfortable. They all looked uncomfortable.

“Here is what is itching us, Palsy,” said the spokesman. “Everybody knows we are tied up with you. We run together. Even the cops know it. So if you get rapped for a caper, that means we are going to get roped in it, too. Because the cops figure we are all boys together.”

Renny frowned over that. They seemed to be afraid he was going to do something to get them all into trouble. Or was it something he had done already?

“Just what do you mean?” Renny asked, fishing.

The four seemed about to break into nervous perspiration.

“Well, it’s about this rub-out last night,” said the spokesman. “We didn’t know anything about that, Palsy. You didn’t tell us. We sort of figure you ought to explain. You see, if the cops pick us up, we want to know about it so we’ll know what not to talk about.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Now, now, Palsy, everybody knows about last night. We all know it was your job, but you hired somebody else to do it.”

“What,” asked Renny uneasily, “gave you such an idea.”

“Oh, hell, even the newspapers got it.”

One of them produced a newspaper and handed it over.

It was not a complete newspaper, just a section torn from the front page of one. Headlines on it said:

MURDER IN NIGHT CLUB
JOHN WALTERS IS SLAIN

Renny stared, with slowly protruding eyes, at a photograph lower in the piece. It was a picture of Renny himself. Or rather, a photograph of the Renny Renwick who had gone to sleep in the plane en route from New York to Kansas City.

Under the picture, a cutline said:

PICTURE OF SOUGHT KILLER
TAKEN BY NIGHT-CLUB
PHOTOGRAPHER

There was one more thing to stand Renny's hair on end. A reproduction of some fingerprints, labeled:

KILLER'S FINGERPRINTS FOUND

Renny looked at them in horror. They were his own fingerprints. Not the fingerprints of somebody named Palsy Gerson, but the prints of Renny himself. Renny had had occasion to look at his own fingerprints many times in the course of his association with Doc Savage, and he had learned about fingerprinting technique as a part of his training under Doc. And these were undeniably Renny's fingerprints!

The spokesman of the four unpleasant visitors cleared his throat.

"You see how it is," he said. "The Walters job was supposed to be our caper, Palsy. We were to knock him off and get paid. But now you got somebody else to do it. We don't like that. We figure it means we don't get paid. And we need the dough. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"Who"—Renny had to stop and swallow to get the words out—"who is this John Walters who was killed?"

The others shrugged. "You ain't funny, Palsy. You know that he worked for the Stirling Instrument Co., an outfit over in Kansas City, Kansas."

Renny had never heard of such an individual as John Walters.

"I don't know anything about it," Renny muttered.

That wasn't what the visitors wanted to hear.

"Don't give us that. We're pals," the spokesman said. "Come on, give with the truth, Palsy. We won't rat on you."

Renny didn't have any truth to give. Not what they wanted to hear, anyway.

But it was time for this fantastic pretense to end. Time to make it clear to them that he was not Palsy Gerson, even if he did look like an unwholesome individual everybody was calling Palsy Gerson.

Renny eyed them grimly.

“Look here, you fellows, I’m not Palsy Gerson,” he said. “There has been some kind of a devilish mistake. I’m not Palsy Gerson.”

They didn’t believe him. Not for a moment.

Their expressions got ugly.

“Palsy, ain’t you going to be straight with us?” the spokesman asked.

“I tell you—”

“Palsy, this is a mistake!”

Renny yelled, “Of course, it’s a mistake! I’m trying to tell you—”

“Palsy, you must be crossing us up!”

“Listen—”

“We can’t have it, Palsy,” the spokesman said. To his three companions, he said, “Take him, boys! We’ll have to look out for ourselves. I don’t think he’s got an iron on him!”

They closed in, attacking.

That, for a moment, was just what Renny wanted. In his normal days, he could have taken four such weasels in stride. He could have broken them apart.

But, the moment they got hold of him, he realized he wasn’t himself. Physically, he wasn’t able to react at all like Renny Renwick, the Doc Savage aid. His reflexes were off. His strength wasn’t what it should have been, nor his agility.

It ended quickly—in blackness—when they bent a blackjack over his left ear.

III

For the second time in the space of—he hoped—twenty-four hours, Renny Renwick opened his eyes in awakening, and had a darned queer feeling.

He was on a bed.

In a hotel room, he decided after looking around. But not the same hotel room in which the four men had blackjacked him. This was a more decent-looking room. The decorating had been done with some taste. It didn’t have the perverted harem touches of pillows and incense.

A different hotel, all right.

Renny felt his left temple to see what damage the blackjack had done. There was a knot that he couldn't miss, but otherwise he had suffered less damage than he had expected.

There was another good point, he realized while he was fingering his temple. His mind was clearer. The infernal fog which had so handicapped him when he awakened the last time was missing. He had a hunch that, in a few minutes, he would be able to think clearly.

He was removing the hand from his temple when he chanced to really notice the hand.

“Holy cow!” Renny roared.

The hand wasn't pale. It didn't look smaller. It didn't feel smaller. It was a big, healthy, tanned, hard fist that wouldn't go in a quart pail. It was the kind of a hand Renny had been accustomed to see attached to his arms for years.

Full of bounding delight, Renny sprang out of bed—he nearly fell when he hit the floor, he was so dizzy—and scampered around hunting a mirror.

This was a strange hotel room, but mirrors were always in bathrooms, and he located one. The look he took at himself in the mirror was a source of much satisfaction.

He was himself again. This was Renny Renwick looking at him out of the mirror.

This was the Renny who had sat beside the brown little imp of a mystic in the plane, and gone to sleep.

When the memory of the brown little imp jumped into Renny's mind, he scowled. There was something he couldn't figure exactly what, about the little mystic which was revolting. Even the memory was revolting.

A suspicion—it was fantastic—jumped into Renny's head. Could the one-eyed mystic have had something to do with what had occurred.

Crazy! An impossible idea. Such things didn't happen.

Renny went to the telephone.

When he had the hotel phone operator on the line, he asked, “What day is this?”

“Friday, Mr. Renwick,” the girl said.

Renny hoped it was the same Friday.

“Friday, the first week in October?” he asked.

“That's right, honey,” the operator said.

Surprised, Renny asked, “What’s the idea of calling me honey?”

“Why, sugarbunch, what else should I call you—after last night?” asked the operator.

“Last night?” Renny blurted. “What about last night?”

The operator giggled. “Brother, you must have a short memory. Or—say, wait a minute—do you mean the deal is off?”

“What deal?”

“Me getting fifty dollars”—the girl giggled again—“for saying I was out with you all night.”

“Was I?” Renny gasped.

“Was you what?”

“With you all night?”

“Of course not.” The phone girl twittered. “But you did all right while we were together, don’t you think?”

Renny burst out in a cold sweat.

“Never mind, I’ll talk to you later about this,” he said.

He hung up, got out a handkerchief, and wiped his forehead. He was wearing, he discovered, the same suit in which he had left New York.

It seemed he made a pass at the telephone girl last night. And he had made a deal with her to say they had been out painting the town all night. It didn’t make sense. It wasn’t the sort of thing Renny was in the habit of doing.

The girl had called him Mr. Renwick, so evidently it wasn’t a case of mistaken identity.

A vicious idea hit him. That night-out-together story! It smacked of an alibi! It was as if Renny had planned to commit a crime, and had arranged an alibi.

As alibis went, it wasn’t much. When the police got hold of that girl downstairs, she wouldn’t hold up long. And then the alibi would backfire, and be an indication of guilt in the eyes of any jury.

But the whole thing was so crazy.

Renny did some more checking. He telephoned the airport, and discovered that he had left the New York plane upon its arrival. The only off-color thing about his arrival that he was able to unearth was the information that he had seemed slightly ill.

“I hope you are feeling better, Mr. Renwick,” said the man to whom he talked at the airport. “You seemed a little airsick when you landed. But your friend, Dr. Mystic, seemed to think you would soon be all right.”

“My friend—who?” Renny blurted.

“Dr. Mystic.”

“A little brown man with one eye?”

“Yes.”

Renny sat scowling at the telephone. So the one-eyed imp did have a finger in the fantastic thing which had occurred, whatever it was.

It came back to Renny that, on the plane, the little brown devil had flown into a resounding rage, and had threatened Renny with dire bad luck, or punishment.

Could this be the punishment?

“Holy cow, I must be running with a flat tire to start thinking such stuff could be true,” Renny muttered.

He called the hotel desk, and learned that he had checked into the hostelry within an hour after the plane had arrived at the Kansas City airport. That was about right. Nothing fantastic there.

Renny called the porter’s desk, and asked for the late newspapers.

The story which had been shown him—while he was Palsy Gerson, if that was who he’d been—was still in print. He read the details.

The killing of John Walters had followed an old pattern. That is, a gunman had shot Walters down in a night club, and fled in the resulting excitement, making good his escape.

However, the night-club photographer, a young woman, had by the rarest of good luck taken a picture of the killer. She had obtained an excellent photograph, perfectly in focus and with good lighting from her camera flashgun. The killer had flipped a bullet at the girl photographer, but she had ducked to safety.

The fingerprints of the killer had been found on the gun, which he had dropped when he fell over a chair a few seconds after firing at the photographer.

The murdered man, John Walters, was employed as a precision grinder with the Stirling Instrument Co., a concern doing war work, located in Kansas City, Kansas.

Young Walters—he was only twenty-eight, had no enemies as far as his acquaintances and friends knew. His family insisted that he had none. He

was married, no children, got along well with his wife, and was in every respect a well-behaved husband.

There seemed to be no conceivable reason why Walters should have been killed.

The photograph the night-club camera girl had taken was Renny.

The fingerprints on the gun were Renny's. Renny suddenly remembered that fingerprints were almost never found on guns—detective stories to the contrary—but he read back and discovered that this gun had smooth pearl grips which had retained fingerprints as perfectly as a sheet of glass.

It was while he was making a tour of the hotel room to reassure himself that everything—clothes in the closet, dressing things—were his own, that Renny noticed his tackle box and fishing-rod case. This reminded him of his planned vacation fishing. And he thought of Norman Monaghan, the friend with whom he had been going fishing.

Monaghan's name was in the telephone book. Renny called him.

"Hello, I wondered when you would call again," Monaghan said.

"I called you before?" Renny asked.

"Yes, of course."

"When and where from?"

"About one o'clock this morning, and I don't know where from. But there was swing music in the background. Sounded like a night club. The orchestra was playing 'Hot South,' I think."

"Wait a moment," Renny said.

His hair was wanting to stand on end. He grabbed up the paper and looked through the killing story.

John Walters had been shot in the night club while the orchestra was playing "Hot South." The killing had occurred near the public telephone booths on the west side of the night club, the story said.

"You there?" Renny said into the telephone.

"Yes."

"I want to talk to you."

"Of course. Come right out. By the way . . . ah . . . have—"

Norman Monaghan was having difficulty asking the question he was trying to ask. The man, it seemed to Renny, had sounded somewhat strange throughout their conversation.

“Have you . . . ah . . . seen today’s newspapers?” Norman Monaghan finished his question.

“Yes. Why?”

Monaghan did not answer immediately.

When he did speak, his, “I want to see you!” was sharp and queer.

“I’ll be right out,” Renny said.

Renny got his hat and hurried downstairs and finally found one of Kansas City’s scarce taxicabs. He gave Norman Monaghan’s address. And then, riding through the streets, Renny discovered himself looking nervously at every policeman he saw. His heart kept coming up in his throat whenever an officer glanced his direction. He must be getting scared. Getting? Brother, he was scared. He was just about as frightened as he had ever been in his life.

IV

A shocking change had taken place in Norman Monaghan since Renny Renwick had last seen the man.

Monaghan was a tall, amiable man, blue-eyed, light-haired, with a few freckles and—but the grin was missing now—a grin that was a habit. He certainly didn’t have the grin. Instead, he had a haunted look, a pale face, and a manner as nervous as a treed coon.

He lived in a neat brick house off the Paseo, quite a long way out. Standing on the porch, before the man opened the door, Renny could hear the lazy rush of war-time traffic on the Paseo.

“Did Doc Savage come with you?” Monaghan asked.

“Why, no.”

“Come in,” Monaghan said. “Come in quickly.”

Renny looked at Monaghan sharply, then entered. There was something, some emotion like a knife, in the man’s voice.

“This way,” Monaghan suggested. “I have a den fixed up in the basement.”

The den proved to be as livable a room as any in the house, for there were large windows in the wall which looked out onto a terrace that sloped down to another street. There was also a door leading outdoors.

Neither Renny nor Monaghan noticed anything about the basement fittings, for that matter, being too startled by finding a little brown imp of a man with one eye standing in the basement. He was the same imp Renny had had words with on the plane.

“Holy cow!” Renny said.

Monaghan said something wordless and considerably more horrified.

The brown imp made them a speech, saying, “When they speak of the wisdom of the ages, it is a lie. The only wisdom of one man is the wisdom of the man’s lifetime. What can you expect, when, like animals, they put in their forty hours a week dulling their brains to put food in their bellies. I’ll tell you what you can expect.”

He leveled an arm at them dramatically.

“You can expect stupid oafs like you two. Fellows too dumb to understand the omnipotence of inwardness, even when it has been demonstrated to you, when you have seen it, and felt it. Even when you are shown the mind is a real thing, so real that it can be lifted from your bodies, or from one carcass to another. That is how dumb you are. I was a fool to try to show you anything. I wash my hands of you, you stupid, confused clowns.”

He lowered his arm, sneered at them, turned, and stepped out through the door. He began running. He ran for the street and a car appeared, moving slowly, a swarthy man driving.

“Get him!” Renny yelled. “Get that little brown imp!”

Renny flew for the door, hit it, found it locked. He broke the lock, losing a few seconds, got through, and stretched his legs.

The brown imp got to the car and piled in. The car was rolling downhill on the street which slanted toward the Paseo. It took on speed. Renny didn’t catch it.

Wheeling and running back past Monaghan, who had followed in the unsuccessful chase, Renny reached the house. He roared, “Where’s the telephone?” and then, into the telephone, “Police department!” When he had the police, he said, “This is Renny Renwick, aid to Doc Savage. I want the Kansas City police to put out a dragnet for a man. It’s important.” Renny described the imp.

“Do you think that was wise?” asked Norman Monaghan when Renny hung up.

“Wise? Why not?”

Monaghan got out a handkerchief and wiped perspiration off his forehead.

“I want to tell you something,” he said. “A confession.”

Renny said, “When I get my hands on that little imp, I’ll make him think omnipotence of the mind! I’ll teach him two good fists have some omnipotence, too.”

In the way a man confesses something uncomfortable, Monaghan said, “I really had you come out here to help me.”

“Eh?”

“It wasn’t a fishing trip I wanted you to take with me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I wanted your help—your help, and the aid of Doc Savage.”

“But you said come out and have a fishing vacation,” said Renny.

“Yes, I know. I thought it better to do it that way.”

“Why? Why be devious?”

“I was trying to deceive the fellow we just chased.”

“You’ve seen him before?”

“Twice.”

“This was the second time I’d seen him,” Renny admitted. “But, believe me, it won’t be the last.”

Norman Monaghan examined Renny intently. Then he went to a table, and picked up a newspaper. “This newspaper says—”

“Hold it,” Renny said, picking up the telephone again. “Operator, long distance. . . . Get me Doc Savage in New York City. Urgent call. I have all the priority this will need. . . . Yes, rush it, please.”

Waiting for the call, Renny looked over the telephone at Monaghan, asked, “You’ve had an experience with that little imp, too?”

Monaghan paled. He nodded.

“Hold the story until I get Doc,” Renny said.

When he had Doc Savage on the line, Renny said, “Renny, Doc. This wasn’t a fishing trip, it turns out. I’ve run into the most fantastic thing that ever happened to me, or to anybody else. Already I’m in more trouble than I can understand. Would you do me a favor and get out here to Kansas City plenty quick.” He listened to Doc for a moment. “Sure, if Monk and Ham are the only ones, bring them. This thing is dizzy enough to satisfy them.” He gave the address of Norman Monaghan’s house.

Renny said, “Doc is coming,” as he hung up, then faced Monaghan to demand, “Now what trouble did you have with the little imp?”

Norman Monaghan got more confidence after he had talked a while. The very act of talking seemed to give him the feeling that he was doing something about it.

It was on a Friday—two weeks before, exactly—that Norman Monaghan had met the imp, or rather bumped into the little brown fellow by accident when coming out of a cafeteria in downtown Kansas City, on Walnut Street. The bumping had been entirely an accident on Monaghan’s part, and he had said so when he apologized. But the apology hadn’t satisfied the imp. The fellow had grown abusive.

Renny could tell, from what Monaghan remembered and repeated of what the brown imp had said, that the little fellow had delivered himself of much the same lecture he had given Renny on the plane, using somewhat different words.

The small brown man had said he was something or other in some place unknown called Kukilcuaca, in Mexico. He was Cici, the head thinker, the head mystic. Or rather, the only one good enough to be the mystic in several ages of time.

“The same line of gibberish he gave me,” Renny said.

“I didn’t insult him any more than you would insult any other nut,” Norman Monaghan said. “But he kept getting madder and madder, anyway.”

The upshot of the mystic’s rage was that he had threatened to show Norman Monaghan what was what.

He had shown him the following week, on Thursday. That Thursday, at ten o’clock in the evening, Monaghan had gone to bed as usual. He had slept soundly, with no bad dreams, and no restlessness that he was aware of. But the next morning he wasn’t in his home when he awakened.

Not only was he not home, but he was not himself. He was a man named Snide Johnson, a crook about town who had been in trouble with the police a number of times. Monaghan had seen Snide Johnson once, and knew him by sight, so he had recognized himself as Snide Johnson when he had looked in the mirror. That had made it doubly incredible.

In the course of the morning, a girl and two men had called on Monaghan—or Snide Johnson—and accepted him as Snide. These three people had called at different times, and kidded Snide about the winning he had made in a poker game the night before.

After the calls, Monaghan had examined his pockets—he wasn't wearing his own clothing—and had found the money which he was supposed to have won at poker.

There wasn't a bit of doubt in Monaghan's mind—Renny could tell this as Monaghan told the story—that Monaghan's mind and consciousness was, during the time he was telling about, in the body of one Snide Johnson, small-time crook.

Later in the day, sick of the whole thing, and racked by terror, Monaghan, in Snide Johnson's body, had lain down on the bed to rest. He dozed off, or something.

When he awakened, he was back at home, himself. He was Norman Monaghan again.

For the next four days, Norman Monaghan had thought and worried considerably about what had happened. For the first two days, he had been convinced the thing had actually happened to him, because it was so real. Then, for the next two days, he wondered if he hadn't had a short interval of hallucination, or had gone crazy for a while. This hadn't been very pleasant to think about.

The fifth day—he had been paying no attention to the newspapers because he had too much to think about—he had discovered he had murdered a man named Stirling. He had read about it in the paper.

Two things had convinced Norman Monaghan that he was the murderer of Stirling. Or that his, Monaghan's body, had murdered Stirling.

The first convincer was a cigarette lighter, a piece of foreign manufacture engraved with Monaghan's initials, which the killer of Stirling had dropped, and which was in the possession of the police.

The second was really a combination of several things—the description of the murderer exactly fitted Monaghan, even to Monaghan's clothes; the suit had been hanging in a closet freshly pressed, but upon looking at it, Monaghan found it had been worn. There was the description, also the fact that some friends had mentioned calling Monaghan's home about the time of the killing, and Monaghan had not answered. His car was also the same type of car the killer had used, although the police had not gotten the license number.

"It convinced me," Monaghan said hoarsely. "And I can tell you, I wasn't easy to convince."

Monaghan's wife was out of town for a month, visiting her mother and sister in Des Moines. So there had been no one at home the night of the killing to tell Monaghan what he had done—or what his body had done.

Monaghan didn't know the man he was convinced he had killed. The man's name was Stirling—L. W. C. Stirling, president of the Stirling Instrument Co., of Kansas City, Kansas.

Monaghan had never met the man, didn't know him by sight, had no earthly reason for what his body seemed to have done.

Horror at the whole thing, the incredible impossibility of it, had dazed Monaghan for a few hours. Then he had telegraphed Renny Renwick to rush out, if he possibly could, for a fishing vacation in the Ozarks.

That Monaghan should have told Renny everything, and summoned Doc Savage immediately, was something which the man realized now that he should have done.

“Doc is not going to lose much time getting here,” Renny said.

V

Renny said to Doc Savage that night, “The police haven't found hide or hair of the little brown imp with one eye.”

Doc Savage had listened to Renny's story, then to Norman Monaghan's, without much of what he was thinking showing on his face. Doc's expression was habitually inscrutable, so his lack of emotion was accepted by Renny, Monk and Ham as a matter of course, but it seemed to bother Norman Monaghan.

Monk and Ham, through most of Renny's story, had plainly been unconvinced of its sincerity. They thought it was some kind of a joke. It was so unnatural, so farfetched, that they hadn't believed it at all, until Renny got near the end. But by the time Norman Monaghan had finished his own talk, Monk and Ham had lost their where's-the-catch-in-this grins.

Doc Savage nodded when the last tale ended.

“What happened was according to a plan,” he said. “First—and we will speak of it as if it actually happened the way it seems to have happened—the man Renny's body killed and the man Monaghan's body killed both were connected with the Stirling Instrument Co. Second, the brown imp did not meet Renny by any accident, even granting that his original meeting with Monaghan, when Monaghan bumped into him in front of the cafeteria,

might have been accidental. Then there are numerous other points of similarity between Renny's experience and that of Monaghan."

Monk said, "Renny, was this girl friend of yours—or Palsy Gerson's—this Dolly, was she good-looking?"

"Dolly was quite an eyeful," Renny admitted.

Monk sighed. "If my mind gets in somebody else's body, I hope the guy's got a snazzy gal friend." Monk made a clucking noise of pleasure which was particularly nauseating to Ham Brooks. "Brother, wouldn't that be somethin'!"

Ham said disagreeably, "Get your mind off the gals, you homely missing link!"

Renny Renwick looked at Doc Savage anxiously. "What do you suggest doing, Doc?"

"The possibility that you murdered, or your body murdered, this man Walters bothers you?" Doc asked.

"Bothers me! It has me nuts."

Doc Savage went to the telephone.

"We will have the police pick up the bodies you think you occupied—Palsy Gerson and Snide Johnson," Doc said. "We will see what the bodies say."

Before morning, the police had hauled in Snide and Palsy, and Doc Savage and his group were able to question them. It was not exactly a questioning, because they got no answers to what they asked.

Snide Johnson and Palsy Gerson seemed to be frightened, confused, and intent on keeping silent.

They both insisted—nobody, actually believed them, but they had the ring of truth—that they did not know L. W. C. Stirling or John Walters. They had never even heard of the Stirling Instrument Co., prior to reading about it in connection with the two murders.

This part of their story was not shaken. They were not tripped into saying anything which would give the slightest suspicion that it was a lie.

There were facts which did not exactly fit in with the experience suffered by Renny Renwick and Norman Monaghan.

For one thing, Snide Johnson did not live at the place Norman Monaghan had been, when his mind—apparently—was occupying Snide's

body. Snide's home was in an apartment house on the other side of town, and this was checked by the police and proven true.

As for Palsy Gerson, he lived at the Hotel Prince Royal, and he had a girl friend named Dolly, and he knew four fellows—Renny furnished the names of the quartet who had called on him and attacked him in the hotel room—named Spike, Steve, Bernie and Lucky.

Doc Savage arranged to have Dolly picked up.

He also asked the police to collect Spike, Steve, Bernie and Lucky.

Doc Savage, to explain to the Kansas City police what he was doing, stated that he and his associates were investigating the murders of the two men connected with the Stirling Instrument Co., L. W. C. Stirling and John Walters. He did not mention the fantastic connection with the killings which Renny and Monaghan thought they had.

Renny and Monaghan had dressed differently, changed the color of their hair a little with dye which Doc furnished, and otherwise altered their appearance so that they did not too much resemble the description of the two killers.

Co-operation of the Kansas City police was extended to them without question because of the Federal government credentials which they carried.

"Would there be any objection," Doc asked the police, "to taking Palsy Gerson to the Hotel Prince Royal, to see what we can dig up."

There was no objection.

They took Palsy to the room which Renny had occupied, and Palsy let go a howl of indignation.

"This ain't my room!" Palsy bellowed. "What you guys tryin' to frame on me?"

"This is your room," said the hotel clerk. "One of them, anyway."

"I ain't got two rooms here!" squalled Palsy.

Doc asked, "Where is your other room?"

The other room was on the fifth floor, and it was considerably less exotic than the first, lacking the smell of incense and the pillows. "That other room!" said Palsy sneeringly. "I ain't the kind of a guy who'd have a place like that. I got a few hairs on my chest."

The second room was undoubtedly Palsy's. As a matter of fact, it was in this room that the police had picked him up, it developed.

Doc Savage had some questions on the matter of different rooms.

“Did you rent the other room, Palsy?”

“No!” Palsy yelled.

Doc asked the hotel clerk, “Did Palsy rent it?”

“Of course he did, over the telephone,” said the clerk. “And he told me, when he came in, to always give him the key to this room whenever he came to the desk for his key. If he didn’t come to the desk for the key, he would be using the other room, the key to which he carried in his pocket.”

Doc asked, “All these arrangements took place over the telephone?”

“Yes.”

“It’s a lie!” Palsy bellowed. “I never rented the other room.”

Doc Savage asked the hotel clerk, “Have you ever seen a small brown imp of a man with one eye around here?”

The clerk hadn’t.

They went down and Renny tried to find the telephone operator, the hotel operator, to whom he had talked over the phone. This was the girl who had talked so freely to him, and had told him that he had broken the arm of a girl named Betty, afterward using a knife threat to terrorize Betty into not telling anyone about it.

Renny didn’t find a girl who had a familiar voice.

“That must have been Anice,” one of the operators volunteered.

“Anice?” said Renny. “Where can we get hold of Anice?”

“She quit yesterday.”

They tried to get Anice at the home address she had given while employed at the hotel. Anice wasn’t there. She had gone somewhere on a vacation. Nobody knew where.

The police were questioning the proprietor about the type of his clientele, when a squad car arrived, bringing two policemen and Palsy’s girl friend, Dolly.

Dolly was a little indignant. She tried to spit on Palsy. “You two-bit piece of stinking cheese!” She said.

“I’ll bust yer jaw, you talk to me like that!” Palsy shouted.

A policeman asked Doc Savage, “Want to question her?”

Renny answered for Doc.

“No,” said Renny. “Never mind.”

Renny’s voice was queer.

Leaving the hotel, Renny explained what had shocked him.

“That girl wasn’t the Dolly who visited me,” Renny said.

Doc Savage and his friends went to a hotel, a large, good midtown hotel where they took a suite. But they were not cheerful.

Norman Monaghan said, “We are walking on bombs. If the police get a hint that Renny and I are apparently guilty of murdering Stirling and Walters, they will slap us in jail. And the rest of you—even with your reputations—will be arrested as accessories after the fact. Am I right?”

“You’re right enough to give me chills,” Renny told him.

Monk Mayfair said, “The real Dolly wasn’t your Dolly, Renny. That’s another thing in the story that doesn’t fit. Somehow, I think Palsy Gerson really didn’t rent that other room in the hotel. And it’s funny the operator you talked to would disappear.”

“The thing is beginning to get holes in it,” Renny agreed. “But what do we do about it? Nothing seems to lead anywhere.”

Ham Brooks said, “We seem to be up against a stone wall.”

Doc Savage had been thoughtful.

Now he asked Renwick and Norman Monaghan, “What about Ham, here? Is he about the size of the little brown imp who was so mysterious?”

Renny and Monaghan examined Ham.

“Well, Ham is just a little larger,” Renny said.

“Yes, he is,” Monaghan agreed.

Monk Mayfair, seeing what Doc had in mind, made some honking laughter. “Ham will make a first-class imp!”

Ham was indignant. “I don’t look anything like the little guy, the way he’s been described,” he shouted. “What’s the idea, anyhow?”

Doc, Monk and Ham had brought several equipment cases from New York, and these had been transferred to the hotel suite. Doc got out a case of supplies.

“We will see what we can do about increasing the resemblance,” the big bronze man said.

“What’re you trying to get me into?” Ham yelled.

“You,” Doc told him, “are going to be our baited hook.”

That night, Ham Brooks—still not enthusiastic about the whole thing—started going around making people mad at him and punching their noses.

Regardless of what else he thought, Ham admitted that Doc Savage had done a surprising job of changing his appearance. Ham was even somewhat alarmed by something Doc had applied to his face, and which had immediately caused the skin to pucker into a myriad of small and—to Ham—revolting wrinkles. Doc had said that the wrinkles could be removed readily.

“But what if the wrinkles stay in my face?” Ham had demanded, much concerned.

“I don’t think they will come out, either,” Monk had contributed his bit to Ham’s peace of mind.

During the afternoon, Ham had dug up a book on yoga, another called “Thought, the Inward Giant,” and had done some boning up on the kind of gibberish he was going to talk.

Ham’s first victim was a fat department store owner.

Ham bumped into him deliberately, gave the man a lecture, got madder and madder, began spouting gibberish about mind, the complete omnipotence of inward being, and thought as the creator and master of flesh, and about being the only one qualified to be a mystic in many ages. Ham ended by pointing his finger and pronouncing sentence on the department store mogul, without saying exactly what the sentence would be. Ham put on a convincing act, and impressed the department store man.

During the course of the night, Ham pulled his goofy act on several others. He was rather busy at it. He began to enjoy it, particularly at a political banquet in a midtown hotel where he accosted a senator to the amusement of the newspapermen present.

But the first insulting, that of the department store nabob, turned out to be the one which did the business.

Two newspapers carried stories about it.

One newspaper mentioned the little brown imp and insinuated some kind of new public nuisance.

The other newspaper had itself a sly field holiday. It mentioned the little brown imp extensively. About half the story was about him. It was a humorous story, which poked fun at the nabob of merchandising who had come a cropper.

Ham grumbled, “I don’t see what this is going to get us.”

“Did you ever trap raccoons?” Doc asked.

“Eh?”

“You can catch the animals,” Doc explained, “by setting a trap with something bright, a piece of shining tin or a fragment of mirror, on the pan of the trap. The bright object interests the raccoon, and he tries to push it around in the course of his investigating, causing the trap to spring. You’re the bit of tin, Ham.”

Ham thought about it.

“What happens to the piece of bright tin if the coon scratches it off the trap without getting caught?” he asked.

At three o’clock that afternoon Ham was kidnapped!

VI

There were three young men in tweed suits, gray hats and modestly loud neckties. Two of them were thick-faced and stupid-looking, obviously 4Fs mentally. The third man was a little older, had a sharp fox face, and an affected way of using words.

One of the stupid men bumped into Ham, but it was the fox-faced one who said, “Don’t you want to get mad?” He showed Ham that the palm of his hand contained a flat .25-caliber pistol.

Ham was too startled to speak. The affair was taking place in the lobby of a hotel where Ham had gone in search of more victims.

The fox-faced man said, “Go ahead. Go on and make us a speech about the inward mentality and the omnipotence of fiddle-faddle and the super-duper of claptrap.”

“You’re liable to shoot someone with that gun!” Ham blurted.

“You bet I am. It’s liable to be you,” the man said. “To prevent such a thing happening, maybe you would prefer to walk outside with us.”

The dumb pair had their hands in their pockets much too conspicuously, and it was apparent there was more than hands in the pockets.

Ham said, “Undeniably, the cultivated acme of cerebral perfection is above and beyond the physical, but on the other hand the jewel is no good without the box to keep it in.”

“That’s the general idea,” said the fox-faced man. “The jewel is this mind-stuff you’ve been talking about, and one little bullet from this pellet-pusher, if properly placed betwixt your eyes, will play hell with the jewel

box. Do you leave with us, or is there going to be a slaying in a hotel lobby?"

Ham went outside with them. They had a car waiting, an old sedan with slick tires. One of the younger men drove. The other and the sharp-faced one sat on either side of Ham.

The fox-faced man said, "Listen, shrivel face, there is one too many mystics around here to suit us."

Ham, not knowing what else to say, said, "I am the first one qualified to be a true mystic in twenty generations. Yea, more than twenty generations."

"That's exactly what I mean," the man said. "You're a phony."

Ham advised him, "You tamper with realms of infinity, fellow. You touch a mountain you do not understand."

The man grinned at the others. "He's almost as good as the real mystic, eh, fellows?"

The two dumb ones did not answer. They were nervous about what they were doing, and showed it.

"Where are you taking me?" Ham asked.

"To see the true mystic," the spokesman advised. "He wishes to see you, you faker."

"I am the true mystic," said Ham indignantly.

"Well, you two mystics can fight that out between you when you get together."

Ham was satisfied. If he was going to see the true mystic, that was fine. To get on the trail of the little brown imp was the thing Doc Savage wanted.

But they did not go to see any mystic. Instead, they drove to a lonesome spot on the bank of the muddy, deep, sinister Missouri River.

"Get out the sash weights and the ropes," the fox-faced man said. "And tie them to his legs."

They were going to kill him. They were not going to argue about it, or explain anything. Apparently they planned to use the automatic first, because the man who held it asked, "Do you think anybody would notice this thing going off?"

"Three of us can handle him," one of the dumb ones said. "Why not just tie him up and tie the weights on him and into the creek with him?"

"Why," asked Ham, "don't you give me a choice?"

“This ain’t no time to be funny,” the fox-faced man said. “We don’t appreciate it.”

Ham eyed them. “Would you fellows answer a question?”

“Probably not.”

“Why are you going to kill me? You don’t know me. You haven’t anything against me.”

“Wrong on two counts,” said the fox-faced man. “We know you, and we’ve got plenty against you. If you go on living we won’t get paid our money.”

Ham scowled at them. “Who am I, if you’re so smart?”

“Your name,” said the other, “is Brownie Cecini, and you’re in town to queer the game of the guy who hired us. Which guy, as you’ve guessed by now, is your cousin, Tonito. You look a lot like Tonito, so I can see where you could muss up his game, whatever it is. We didn’t get ourselves burdened with a lot of details when we took the job, Brownie. We knock you, we get paid. That’s enough for us.”

This explanation was delivered in such a matter-of-fact voice that Ham’s eyes popped in astonishment. Great grief, was Doc Savage a clairvoyant? Did Doc really know there was a second wrinkled little brown imp?

Ham frowned at them.

“Look fellows,” Ham said, “you’ve been handed the hot end of the stick.”

“Eh?”

“I’m nobody named Brownie Cecini.”

“Hell you ain’t. You were pointed out to us.”

“Pointed out by whom?”

“By your cousin, Tonito, of course.”

Ham shook his head. “You’ve been roped in.”

“Nuts,” said the fox-faced man. “You’re just trying to talk yourself out of the river.”

“What,” said Ham, “would you say if I told you I was Ham Brooks, aid to Doc Savage?”

It was instantly evident—and Ham found the knowledge astonishing—that they had no idea that he was connected with Doc Savage. They had heard of Doc, though.

But, from the look on their faces, they had never thought of Doc Savage as an immediate menace. He was someone they had heard about. He was a

peril they knew existed, like the FBI or death.

“You . . . you’re lying,” said the fox-faced man hoarsely.

Ham shook his head.

“Take a look behind you,” he said. “Then tell me what you think.”

Doc Savage had come out of the river-bank shrubbery and was standing about thirty feet away.

“Watch out, Doc!” Ham shouted.

Ham flung himself for safety. The only safe spot was the river, and he went over the bank and jumped into it.

When he came to the surface, Ham was facing the bank, ready to sink quickly again in case they were going to shoot at him.

But Doc Savage was standing on the bank, looking at Ham.

A car motor, laboring loudly, was leaving the vicinity. Ham could hear it going away, the engine and gears straining with imperative haste.

“They piled back into the car,” Doc called down to Ham. “We let them go.”

Ham paddled to the bank. The bank was muddy. He felt like a fool, covered with mud, leaking strings of muddy water, climbing out.

“Is Monk going to follow them?” he asked.

Doc said, “Monk, Renny and Norman Monaghan.”

Ham nodded. “You fellows have done a good job shadowing me. I haven’t even seen you around myself.”

“We had some helpful assistance from the police, and from the Federal agencies,” Doc told him.

“Where’s your car?”

“This way.”

The car was concealed about two hundred yards away, behind a row of shacks which were abandoned. Ham pounced on the portable radio transmitter-receiver in the machine, turned it on, and said into the microphone, “Monk! Renny! You trailing them all right?”

“They’re moving so fast a cop is going to stop them sure,” Monk’s voice said. He named the street they were on.

Ham clicked off the radio and leaned back, satisfied with the way it was shaping up. Doc Savage was driving.

“Doc,” Ham said, “I’ve been doing some thinking.”

“What about?”

“Norman Monaghan,” Ham said, and glanced at Doc. The bronze man’s face was expressionless. Ham added, “He could be tricky. There’s a way of figuring it.”

Doc said, “Meaning that you have wondered if Norman Monaghan could have gotten involved in some trouble, and called on Renny, ostensibly for help, but actually to get Renny in the same kind of trouble. The idea being that we would all pitch in and rescue Renny and Monaghan. And in the end, Monaghan, pretending to know nothing about it, could go his way safely.”

“So you did think of it!” Ham exclaimed. “Well, how does it strike you?”

“Monaghan insisted he hasn’t the slightest idea why what happened to him did happen. That seems strange.”

“You bet it does! Things don’t happen without reasons.”

Monk’s hearty laugh came out of the radio loud-speaker. Then Monk explained, “I thought so! A police squad car has stopped those three guys for speeding.”

Doc snatched up the microphone. “Monk, are they putting up a fight? If they are arrested, it will spoil this whole elaborate trap we’ve laid.”

“They’re being sensible,” Monk said. “The cops are lecturing them, and handing out a ticket.”

Doc relaxed. “Good. We want those three men to lead us to the genuine little brown imp.”

The bronze man cut the speed of the car, and loitered along waiting for the fox-faced man and the two dumb ones to extricate themselves from the minor difficulty into which their haste had gotten them.

While they were loafing, he gave Ham some information.

“While you were playing mystic, Ham, we did some checking on the Stirling Instrument Co.”

Ham was interested. “That’s the company the two murdered men, Stirling and Walters, worked for. Stirling was the president, wasn’t he?”

“Stirling was president and a heavy stockholder in the concern,” Doc admitted. “Walters held a less important position with the concern, that of precision grinder in one of the departments. As far as we were able to learn—and we got this information only from the relatives of Stirling and Walters—the two men did not know each other personally. Stirling, as president, possibly knew a man named Walters worked for him. But there was no personal connection, as far as we could learn.”

“By Jove! Nobody seems to have known anybody else in this mess!” Ham exclaimed. “That’s a strange state of affairs.”

“Quite unusual.”

“What did they have to say at the Stirling Instrument Co.?” Ham asked.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? What do you mean?”

“They would not let us in. Would not talk to us.”

Ham was astonished. “What about those police commissions you’ve got? You’re a special investigator for half a dozen government departments. Those commissions are supposed to get you in anywhere.”

“But they didn’t.”

“You mean,” said the amazed Ham, “that you didn’t have enough weight to get into the plant and ask questions?”

“Exactly.”

Ham whistled. “I’d have gotten hold of the FBI. I’d have asked army intelligence for help. I’d have tried—”

“We did.”

“Great grief, they wouldn’t let you in! Why not?”

Doc said, “No explanations were given us. They just told us to stay out, and that was that.”

“Have you telegraphed?”

“We telegraphed everyone who carries weight in Washington,” Doc said. “Eventually we may get results. But it wasn’t guaranteed.”

Ham rubbed his jaw thoughtfully, his expression growing more and more amazed.

“That means something important is involved, doesn’t it?” he said.

The street was one of the shabby ones which climbed steeply up the hill from the bridge that led across the Missouri River to the airport and north Kansas City. The buildings on the street were without exception old, dilapidated eyesores.

Renny Renwick flagged them down by standing on the sidewalk and waving one of his enormous hands.

“This is the place,” he said.

Ham piled out of the car excitedly demanding, “What went wrong? Where’s Monk and Monaghan?”

“I can tell you in about six sentences,” Renny said. “But it only went half wrong.”

“Let’s have the six sentences!” exploded Ham.

“The cops turned them loose and they drove two blocks and went into this house,” Renny explained. “After they had been in the house about three minutes, out pops the little brown imp. The mystic piled into a car alone and beat it. Monk followed him because Monk was the one of us he was least likely to know by sight. Norman Monaghan and I went into the house and had a fight with the three men, and Monaghan is in there now watching them. We didn’t have time to tell you what had happened on the radio.”

“Has Monk reported by radio whether he was able to keep on the brown imp’s trail?”

“Not yet.”

Ham said, “I’ll take the portable radio along. Let’s go in the house and talk to those three fellows.”

Renny nodded. “They’re messed up some.”

Ham said grimly, “I’ll mess them up some more if necessary. They were going to throw me in the river, complete with sinker.”

Renny led the way into an old house which smelled of age and greasy cooking. Several people were crowded in the downstairs hall, trying to see through a door which Norman Monaghan blocked.

“They won’t go away,” said Monaghan, indicating the spectators.

Doc faced the crowd. “We are police officers. Stay here, all of you. We will want your names, and we will want you to go into court to testify about this thing.”

Doc went into the room with Monaghan and the three prisoners. And when, three minutes later, Ham reopened the door for a look, there was not a curiosity seeker in sight.

Renny had made quite an understatement when he had said the prisoners were messed up somewhat. They were wrecks.

Ham made a little speech. “I am Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, and I am a famous lawyer, in case you haven’t heard of me. You know what a good lawyer can do to you? He can get you electrocuted. Yes, sir, you are guilty of assault with intent to murder, complicity in the murder of L. W. C. Stirling and John Walters, kidnapping, and accessories after the fact. You will be electrocuted in that nice new hot seat in Jefferson City.”

The damaged prisoners accepted this at face value. Ham sounded very convincing.

The spokesman, the fox-faced man, blurted, “We didn’t do all that!”

He went on to tell his story. The little brown imp had run out on them and left them holding the bag, he explained. So why shouldn’t they talk?

They had thought Ham Brooks was another gangster whom they had been hired to bump off. That was what the brown imp had told them, when he hired them for the job.

The imp had explained that he was Tonito Cecini, an operator of a clairvoyant racket. The man had said that he had a string of clairvoyants, mediums, and fortunetellers paying him for management and protection.

A brother named Brownie Cecini, the imp had told them, was trying to muscle in and take over the organization. This had seemed quite logical to the three hoodlums, so they had taken the job of eliminating Brownie, the price being right.

Doc Savage was satisfied that they were telling the truth.

Ham kept trying, unsuccessfully, to get hold of Monk Mayfair by radio. But there was no response, nothing to show whether Monk was shadowing the mystic successfully.

To Ham, the silence indicated something unpleasant might have happened to Monk. He grew quite alarmed.

Doc Savage got a hypodermic from the car. He used it on each of the three prisoners.

Within five minutes after the hypo administration, the three seemed to be asleep.

Doc then telephoned a hospital. An ambulance came, loaded the prisoners, and took them away, after Doc made arrangements for the three men to be held until they regained consciousness.

Doc wrote a chemical formula on a bit of paper and gave it to the ambulance interns. “Tell the hospital doctor that the three men accidentally got hold of large doses of that mixture,” the bronze man said. “The doctor will then understand that they are in no danger, and that the only thing to do is let them lie there until they come out of it.”

Norman Monaghan scratched around in his sandy hair and wrinkled his freckled face in bewilderment. “I don’t get it! Don’t you turn your crooks over to the police when you catch them?”

Doc said, “They will not recover for several days. They will be in the hospital waiting for us when we are ready to dispose of them.”

“That’s the damnedest way of doing!” Monaghan muttered.

Ham winked at Renny.

What Monaghan didn’t know—and wouldn’t be likely to find out—was that Doc Savage maintained a secret institution in the remote backwoods of upstate New York, a place where Doc cured criminals in his own fashion. The method Doc used was a little radical for the present idea the public had of criminological therapy, so Doc was keeping the matter secret.

At the institution, criminals underwent a complex brain operation, perfected by Doc and taught by him to the surgeons who performed it, which wiped out all memory of the past. After that, the patients were taught a trade, schooled to hate crime and criminals, and turned loose. So far, the treatment had been a hundred percent successful.

Doc finally contacted Monk by radio. Monk’s excited voice come over the airwaves. “I’m at the main airport. You fellows better get right over here!”

VII

Monk flagged them down, using his portable radio, at the entrance to the parking area. There were about two hundred parked cars in the area, near the airport buildings.

“Pull in somewhere out of sight,” he said. “Then we better fog over to the waiting room to make sure the little guy is still there.”

Doc asked, “You followed him—this small brown man we have been calling the imp, or the mystic—out here?”

“Yes. It wasn’t very tough.”

Ham demanded, “Why didn’t you keep in touch with us, you missing link? You had us worried.”

Monk grimaced sheepishly. “If you must have the truth, I kicked off the discriminator control, and I thought the set was on the fritz. I found the trouble later.”

“And I thought that radio was supposed to be foolproof,” Ham complained.

Doc Savage asked, “What about the little man, Monk?”

“He bought a ticket for Mexico City.”

“Mexico City!”

Monk nodded. “Yeah on a plane leaving in about an hour.”

Renny rumbled, “Holy cow! The little loon told me he was from Mexico. From a place called Kukilcuaca. He told me that in the plane just after we left New York, when he was working up rage enough to hang his personal curse on me.”

Norman Monaghan said, “Kukilcuaca! That’s where he told me he was from too.” Turning to Doc Savage, Monaghan asked, “Where is that, Mr. Savage?”

Doc admitted that he had not the slightest idea where Kukilcuaca, Mexico, might be.

When they reached the waiting room, Monk cautiously pointed out their quarry. The little brown man was sitting alone, spending most of his time looking at the clock, and jumping and listening intently to the public address system as it announced arriving and departing planes.

Norman Monaghan was astonished when Doc Savage motioned for them to withdraw before the imp noticed them.

“Dammit!” said Monaghan. “Aren’t you going to grab him now?”

“No. Things are going too well,” Doc explained.

Monaghan, looking alarmed, said, “They’re not going to suit me! I’m still horrified by the apparent fact that someone exchanged his mind for mine and used my mind to murder Stirling! And Mr. Renwick has the same problem. Have you forgotten the police have circumstantial evidence that would convict any jury that my body murdered Stirling, and Renny’s body murdered Walters? I’ll admit that having you fellows acting in the matter has encouraged me a lot. But I’m scared.”

Renny said, “Let Doc handle it his way, Norman.”

“But he’s making no progress!”

“I would say we’re making fine headway,” Renny argued.

“But we have a chance to grab that imp and get the truth—”

“That imp,” Renny pointed out, “might not talk.”

“But wouldn’t truth serum—”

“Truth serum works about half the time, if you want to know the truth about it. Doc doesn’t grab at fifty-per-cent chances of success. He wants it sewed up.”

“But—”

“Look, Norman, I’m in the same boat as you,” Renny said patiently. “We both have the incredible conviction that another mind used our bodies to kill a man. You can bet I’m just as concerned about that as you are. But we both

can see what Doc is doing. He has thrown a scare into the enemy, and is following the fellow, feeling fairly sure he will be led to an explanation. We've done this before. It's common detective procedure. It usually gets results."

Norman Monaghan sighed. "I guess I'm too impatient."

The passenger plane which was to pick up passengers from Kansas City to Mexico was due at the River Bottom Airport at 6:10 Central Standard Time.

At six o'clock, however, the pilot, following emergency orders he had just received by radio, set the plane down at another airport on the opposite side of Kansas City.

Doc Savage got aboard.

The pilot asked, "You are the man I was to take aboard?"

"Yes. And you were not to say anything about it to anyone."

The pilot said, "Sure, it's all right. You are Doc Savage, aren't you? My brother is flying one of those slick pursuit jobs you designed for the army."

Doc Savage took a front seat, one well in the forepart of the cabin. One which the passengers would not be passing on their way back to the washroom. It was better, from the standpoint of not being recognized, than a seat in the back, although he would not be able to keep as close a watch on the passengers.

The bulkhead directly ahead of him separated the pilot's compartment and the rest of the cabin. To this bulkhead, Doc stuck a small convex mirror. The mirror was small, and stuck to the bulkhead by means of a rubber vacuum cup. It was no accident that he carried the mirror; he kept a couple of them in his equipment cases. They were handy when one wanted to see without being seen.

The plane took off, flew across the city, and landed on the main airport.

A number of local passengers got aboard, since the plane landed at various Southwestern cities before going on to Mexico. The small brown imp was one of the passengers.

The imp took a seat halfway back in the cabin. Doc, watching his mirror, saw that. The little brown fellow showed no noticeable interest in what went on around him. He folded his hands together beatifically, and closed his eyes.

The stewardess made her rounds. On came the little light warning to fasten the safety belt and not smoke, and the big plane lumbered along the strip, picked up its tail, and lazily left the ground.

Doc Savage glanced out of the window, back at the airport buildings. Monk, Ham and Renny were down there, with Norman Monaghan. They had orders, the four of them, to see what could be done about finding out what had happened at the Stirling Instrument Co. plant.

That something had happened at the Stirling Co. was obvious. That it was of great moment was also plain. Government departments were not in the habit of refusing Doc Savage a single shred of information about any given fact. Indeed, this was the first time in his experience that it had happened. Yes, whatever had occurred at Stirling, was vital enough to have the leaders of a nation go into a kind of mental paralysis. For that, Doc was convinced, was what it amounted to—whatever had occurred had so shocked everybody that they had clamped down the lid and were holding it there while they got back their wits. That, he suspected, was pretty close to what had occurred.

Monk and Ham and Renny, and Norman Monaghan also, would dig away at the mystery. They were going to try to find the girl, the Dolly who had visited Renny at the hotel while he was occupying, as he was convinced, the body of Palsy Gerson. That Dolly hadn't been Palsy Gerson's girl friend.

Also Monk and the others would begin a detailed checking of the circumstantial evidence against Renny and Monaghan, proving they had killed Stirling and Walters. That fantastic thing should make interesting investigating.

In the meantime, Doc Savage intended to follow the brown imp to Mexico, or wherever he was going, and see what came of it.

The silver-colored smoke filled the plane cabin while they were still over Kansas.

Doc Savage, expecting nothing to happen so soon, was surprised. Actually, a howl from a woman passenger first drew his attention to the smoke. A handful of seconds later, everyone in the plane knew about it.

The smoke—no one ever did decide exactly where it came from—was gray, or silver, only at the beginning. It speedily became darker, or maybe there was just more smoke. It filled the cabin with surprising speed. It was impossible to distinguish much of anything.

The stewardess cried, "Be quiet! Be quiet! Everything is all right!"

Obviously it wasn't all right.

The pilot compartment door banged open as the co-pilot sprang back into the cabin to see what was happening.

Doc Savage, out of his seat, headed for the back of the cabin. Some of the passengers were in the aisle, excited. He crowded past, keeping track of the number of seats he was passing, and reached the seat where the brown imp was sitting.

Reaching into the seat, Doc Savage found a man's two arms. He ran his hands quickly down the arms to a pair of wrists, and held them. He held the wrists tightly.

The man he was holding made no effort to struggle, which was surprising. In fact, the fellow did not move at all. But he wasn't dead. His wrists were warm, with a pulse.

Doc had been holding his breath. But everyone was still moving about, so he knew the silver smoke wasn't gas.

"Open the windows," he said. There was authority in his voice.

"I have them open," the stewardess said.

The smoke cleared out of the cabin rapidly. Objects began to materialize, and soon it was possible to see the length of the cabin.

Doc looked at the man he was holding. It wasn't the small brown imp.

When Doc released the man, he didn't move. The fellow had large blue eyes, and they were vague. He had a thick body, arms and legs long in proportion, a moderately tanned face. He wore a blue business suit, white shirt, blue tie with white dots and matching handkerchief. He was a stranger.

"Return to your seats!" the co-pilot shouted. "Moving around this way throws the plane off balance! There is no danger."

Doc said, "Stewardess!"

"Yes?"

"Is this the man who occupied this seat?"

"Yes, of course, I—" The young woman stared. "No! No, it isn't! Where did the small, wrinkled brown man go?"

"That," Doc said, "is an interesting question."

The stewardess pointed foolishly at the man Doc had been holding. "Who . . . I don't believe that man was on the plane before." She blinked. "I mean . . . that's foolish, of course. But I hadn't noticed him before."

Doc said, "Search the plane for the little brown imp."

The girl hunted, and looked dumfounded as she reported, "I can't find him aboard."

The plane floated along above cottonlike clouds, spread out on a floor that extended to the horizon in all directions. Having turned the flying of the plane over to the robot pilot for the time being, the pilot was back in the cabin, insisting it couldn't have happened.

"How many passengers did we have aboard, Helen?" he demanded of the stewardess.

"Thirteen."

"How many are aboard now?"

"Thirteen."

"Then nobody is missing!" shouted the pilot. "What is the fuss about?"

The stewardess pushed out her jaw. "Listen, Bill, the little brown man isn't here."

"What's his name?"

"He was down on the list as a Mr. Mystic, of Kukilcuaca, Mexico."

"He must be aboard."

"He isn't."

The pilot sought out Doc Savage. "Mr. Savage, is this connected with your boarding the plane before we got to Kansas City?"

"It seems to be," Doc Savage said. "But there is nothing to be gained by further excitement. Suppose you continued on to your destination, as if nothing had happened."

"All right," said the pilot. "But I wonder what made all that smoke?"

The thick-bodied man in the blue suit was still sitting in his seat, not moving. When the stewardess touched him, saying, "I beg pardon, but what is your name. I want to check you on the passenger list," the man said nothing, hardly moved his eyes toward the young woman.

"Something seems to be wrong with him," she told Doc.

"Drugged," Doc said.

"That's what I think, too," said the stewardess.

Doc Savage went down the aisle, asking each passenger whether he or she had seen what made the smoke. None of them had.

"It seemed to come from the seat there," said a fairly well-known actress, indicating the seat where the small brown imp had been.

Most of the other passengers were of the opinion that was where the smoke had come from.

None of the passengers looked at all like the little brown mystic. There was not—and Doc was positive of this—a single one of them who by any possible chance could be the mystic, either disguised, or without a previously worn disguise.

There were, however, several empty seats on the plane, and Doc Savage moved from one to another of these. He laid the palm of his hand on the seat and back of each seat, testing for body warmth which would indicate someone had been sitting there recently.

“It’s incredible!” said the stewardess. “How did the small brown man disappear?”

The heavy man in the blue suit had tipped his head forward sleepily, and did not look up when Doc went to work on him with restoratives.

Doc told the stewardess, “Have the pilot radio ahead to have a doctor at the field with a dilute solution of potassium permanganate. Five grains dissolved in about four ounces of water.”

The stewardess was a registered nurse. “I thought it was morphine,” she said. “A potassium permanganate solution decomposes morphine.”

“A little oxygen will help, too,” Doc said.

It was not necessary to apply artificial respiration, a measure sometimes necessary. The plane landed at its next scheduled stop.

Doc removed the heavy man to the airport office.

The pilot and airline personnel made a thorough search of the plane.

“There couldn’t have been a gnat concealed on that ship,” the pilot told Doc. “The little brown guy disappeared.”

“Thank you,” Doc said.

“We’re having word sent back along our course to look for a body. The little brown fellow could have jumped out of a window, or opened the back door when everybody was excited about the smoke.”

Doc said, “The chances are that there is no body on the ground.”

The pilot stared at the bronze man as if someone was crazy, then left scratching his head.

When Doc went back to the heavy man in the blue suit, the man’s eyes had changed. There was understanding in them. The major effects of the morphine had worn off.

“Hello,” Doc said.

“Good morning,” the man said.

It was evening, night, in fact, but Doc let the point pass.

“Who are you?” Doc asked.

“Anton T. Fay.”

“And where were you going on the plane?”

“I wasn’t on any plane,” the man said.

“Who gave you the morphine,” Doc asked.

“Morphine? I don’t use—” The man’s words died on his lips. He squeezed his eyelids together as if trying to grasp a thought. “Great grief! Now I remember.”

He bolted to his feet, or tried to, because he was very unsteady.

“Where’s that fellow?” he demanded.

“What fellow?”

“He hit me. A little, wrinkled old man, with a very brown skin. He became abusive. Then he struck me with something!”

“Where,” Doc asked, “did this happen?”

“Why, right here. Right here in—” The man stopped speaking. He looked around in growing bewilderment. “Why, this isn’t the athletic club! I’m somewhere else!”

“By any chance,” said Doc Savage, “are you connected with the Stirling Instrument Co.?”

The man—Anton T. Fay—nodded. “Yes, yes, of course. I am attorney for the company.”

VIII

Doc Savage obtained a small plane for the trip back to Kansas City. The ship, a four-place cabin job, was a privately owned craft which was being used in a secondary training course at a local field. Doc got the loan of it without much difficulty.

Anton T. Fay rode in the co-pilot’s seat. He did not seem to be an experienced flier, because he clenched his hands nervously during the take-off, and seemed alarmed by the air bumps when the plane encountered them.

He said, "I noticed, at the airport back there, that many people looked at me with great curiosity. Can you give me an idea why they were doing so? I know, of course, that something unusual has happened to me."

Doc Savage began, and ended his story with what had happened on the plane. Then he added, "There is a small, brown, wrinkled man who calls himself a mystic. He is wanted for suspicion of being connected with the murders of Stirling and Walters."

Anton T. Fay listened to the recital of what had occurred on the plane, the smoke and the uncanny disappearance of the little imp, with eyes that kept trying to get out of their sockets.

"Dammit, that's unbelievable!" he gasped.

"On the face of it," Doc admitted.

"But you say I didn't get on the plane in Kansas City. I wasn't on the ship! And then the little man disappeared—and there I was! How do you explain that?"

"I was hoping you might explain it."

Anton T. Fay frowned. He rubbed his forehead briskly. He chewed his lower lip.

He said, "I have been an attorney in Missouri for twenty years—I am forty-six—after beginning my practice in Carrollton, Missouri, and later moving to Kansas City. I am unmarried. I live at the Midwest Club. My office is on Walnut Street. I began specializing in corporation law some years ago, and one of my lesser clients was the Stirling Instrument people. With the coming of war production, the Stirling Instrument Co. suddenly was a large business and a profitable client."

He paused to frown and clench his teeth. "I feel awfully fuzzy in my head."

"You were drugged."

"I don't understand it at all. It's inconceivable."

Doc said nothing. He was flying at about two thousand to take advantage of a favorable wind, and the air that low was rough enough, in such a light ship, to be uncomfortable.

Anton T. Fay said, "The murder of Mr. Stirling was a great shock to me. And a surprise, too, because he was a fine man whom one could not imagine having enemies."

"Did you know John Walters?" Doc asked.

"No, I didn't. He was a minor employee, I read in the newspapers. I dealt only with Mr. Stirling, and some of the board."

“Have there,” Doc asked, “been any particular legal matters which you, as company attorney, have handled recently?”

Fay shook his head.

“No, nothing at all for three weeks.”

“And before that?”

“Nothing unusual. I meant that there had been nothing at all in the way of legal activity for the concern in three weeks.”

“Was the three-week gap unusual?”

“No. That is . . . well, come to think of it, it was. That is, I usually had some small thing to do for them almost daily.”

“Does that mean,” Doc asked, “that you have been almost completely out of touch with the Stirling Instrument Co. for three weeks?”

“That is exactly what it means, Mr. Savage.”

“And during that interval, Stirling and Walters have been murdered.”

“Yes.”

Monk Mayfair met Doc Savage at the Kansas City airport. Monk had a rented car.

“We haven’t got a thing out of the Stirling plant,” Monk reported. “Ran into a stone wall. No trace of that girl, the fake Dolly, either. In fact, we’re getting nowhere fast.”

Doc said, “This is Anton T. Fay, attorney for the Stirling Co.”

Monk shook Fay’s hand. Obviously Monk was bursting at the seams with questions about what had happened to the brown imp, but he wasn’t going to say anything in front of a stranger.

As they drove downtown, Doc told Monk what had taken place in the plane.

“Blazes!” Monk said, amazed. “This thing gets wilder and wilder. Has Mr. Fay, here, maybe had his body used by someone else to commit a murder?”

Anton T. Fay started violently.

“What do you mean?”

“Just what I said,” explained Monk. “Did you have any funny experiences—like finding yourself with a different body—between the time the brown imp rapped you on the head at the athletic club and the time you woke up on the plane.”

"I awakened at the airport after the plane landed," Fay corrected.

"O.K. But what about having a different body for a while?"

"Nothing of the sort happened to me!" Anton T. Fay said emphatically.

"That," said Monk, "is a welcome change. At least it's not as goofy as what happened to Renny and Monaghan."

Fay was looking at them uneasily. "Do you realize that, from what has happened and what you're saying that I must begin to wonder if you are sane?"

Monk snorted. "Go ahead and wonder. We've been doing that, too."

Fay had something else on his mind. He kept staring at them.

"Pardon me," he said at last, "but did I hear you mention a man named Monaghan?"

"That's right," Monk admitted.

"Norman Monaghan, by any chance?"

"Yes."

Anton T. Fay looked blank for a moment.

"You want to watch out for that fellow," he said.

By the time they had finished the drive from the airport to the comfortable downtown Kansas City hotel where Doc was headquartering, Anton T. Fay had managed to give an explanation of why Norman Monaghan would bear watching. His reasons were not too convincing.

He had known Norman Monaghan, he said, off and on for about five years. The two men did not travel in the same social circles, nor did they have any business contacts—Anton T. Fay was quite sure Monaghan had no connection with the Stirling Instrument Co.—and normally they would, perhaps, never have met. But there was a girl.

Anton T. Fay had been going with the girl, and she had met Norman Monaghan, and she had introduced the two men to each other. Fay disliked Monaghan.

When Monk interrupted at this point to ask just what had motivated Fay's dislike of Monaghan, the man's replies, while wordy, did not make a definite point. He had, in short, no reason he could put his finger on for hating or distrusting Monaghan. He had been very sorry to see the girl's interest in Monaghan increase.

Monaghan had married the young lady with whom they both were in love. She was now Mrs. Monaghan, and had been for over three years.

“Monaghan got the girl,” Monk said. “So you don’t like him.”

“Ridiculous!” said Fay. “Naturally, I was distressed somewhat at losing the girl to a man I considered unworthy.”

Monk leaned back thoughtfully. “You know, you could have something there. Monaghan could have decoyed Renny out here—that fishing trip excuse always has sounded kind of phony to me—to get him into this mess. We’ve been wondering how the little brown imp happened to be on Renny’s plane from New York—he might have been there because Monaghan had tipped him off Renny was coming on that plane. Monaghan knew what plane Renny was taking. I asked Renny about that. Renny says he wired Monaghan what plane.”

Anton T. Fay, obviously, enthusiastic about building Monaghan up as a rascal, said, “Monaghan is tricky. He is the kind of a man who hides his motives. He’s clever, too. Of course, I do not know what has happened to your Mr. Renwick—”

Monk said, “Doc, any objection to telling what happened to Renny?”

Doc told him to go ahead.

Monk explained to Fay, “Renny met a strange little brown man on the plane, and the brown imp picked a quarrel. Renny went to sleep somewhat unexpectedly. When he woke up, he was in a Kansas City hotel, but he had another man’s body. The body of a local jackleg crook named Palsy Gerson. Some of Gerson’s pals bopped Renny over the head in the course of a row, and when Renny regained his senses, he was Renny Renwick again—but he discovered that somebody had been using his body while he was not occupying it, had used it to kill John Walters, who worked for the Stirling Instrument Co.”

Monk paused while Anton T. Fay made some astonished, disbelieving noises.

Then Monk continued, “Renny had come out here on what he thought was a fishing vacation with Norman Monaghan, so he went to see Monaghan. He saw the little brown imp at Monaghan’s house. And Monaghan said he’d called Renny actually to get the help of Renny and Doc Savage because he, Monaghan, had had about the same experience as Renny. Only somebody had used Monaghan’s body to kill Stirling.”

Monk sighed. “Now, there’s the whole silly story,” he said. “Neither Renny nor Monaghan—we know Renny didn’t—knew the men their bodies killed, Stirling and Walters.”

“What,” asked Fay, “have you accomplished toward solving the thing?”

“We’ve found out there’s some kind of tremendous—and I do mean tremendous—secret about the Stirling Instrument Co.,” Monk said. “And we flushed up the little brown imp by using Ham for bait, and Doc was on the imp’s trail when this dizzy thing in the plane happened.”

Anton T. Fay frowned.

“You say,” he inquired, “that Mr. Renwick found this brown imp at Monaghan’s house when he first went there?”

“Yes.”

Fay failed to keep triumph out of his voice.

“Monaghan naturally had to tell a tall tale to account for that,” he said. “So he told one about someone using his body to commit a murder.”

“But the thing had just actually happened to Renny.”

Anton T. Fay smirked. “It wouldn’t surprise me a bit if Monaghan knew that fact.”

In view of what Anton T. Fay had been saying about Norman Monaghan, Monk expected to see some black eyes exchanged when they met. But it was quite the contrary.

“Why, Norman, old man!” said Anton T. Fay. “You’re looking fine.”

“Anton, I’m a son of a gun!” said Monaghan.

They did some back pounding and handshaking.

Monaghan told Doc and the others, “This old boy and I used to go with the same girl. She didn’t know a great guy when she saw one, so she married me.”

Monaghan, as well as Ham and Renny, were then furnished with news of Anton T. Fay’s rather fantastic appearance in the case. Doc told the story of what had occurred on the plane.

“It was as if the brown imp had changed his body into Anton T. Fay’s body,” Doc said.

This remark caused Anton T. Fay to jump violently.

“Oh, my!” he gasped. “What a horrible thought!”

Monaghan slapped him on the shoulder and said, “Anton, old man, you’ve had a terrible experience. I sympathize with you. But I know we’re in fine hands here, with Doc Savage and his men on the case. I hope you get the same comfort out of that that I do.”

“Norman, old boy, you’re quite a comfort to have around yourself,” said Monaghan.

Monk whispered to Doc, “What a kissing match!”

A bit later, however, Norman Monaghan got Doc Savage alone in the bedroom. It was a different story.

“I want to warn you,” Monaghan whispered.

He went over to make sure the door was shut so Anton T. Fay wouldn’t overhear.

“That fellow Fay,” Monaghan said, “isn’t to be trusted. I’ve always felt he was a skunk. The minute he cropped up in this, I was sure of it.”

Monk said, “The way you two were rubbing noses—”

“Didn’t mean a thing!” snapped Monaghan.

“What, specifically, have you against Fay?” Doc asked.

Then they listened to a story somewhat similar to the one Fay had told about Monaghan. Both their stories were too general to be of value. But each man was quite sure the other was a rascal.

Monk finally had to laugh.

“While this thing is getting confused, let’s confuse it good,” he said. “I’ve got another theory.”

“Eh?” said Monaghan.

“The brown imp was in the plane. He realized Doc was on the plane, too, on his trail. Presto! He changes his body into Anton T. Fay’s body. In other words, that is Anton T. Fay’s body in the other room, but it is the imp’s mind!”

Even Doc looked a little startled.

“Oh, that’s insane!” blurted Monaghan.

“What about this isn’t?” Monk countered. He glanced at the door. “Wasn’t that somebody knocking on the hall door?”

It was, because the knock came again, and it was not gentle.

“Hey,” said Monk. “If anybody was visiting us, they would first use the house phone and—”

There was an outbreak of voices in the next room. Renny apparently had opened the hall door.

“Monk, see what it is,” Doc requested.

Monk was in and out of the other room in nothing flat. “Our troubles have had kittens,” he said.

Doc said, “I hope something sane has happened for a change.”

“It’s sane enough. The police are here to arrest Renny and you for murdering John Walters.”

IX

The spokesman of the deputation of Kansas City police explained it a little differently. Renny was wanted for murdering John Walters. Doc Savage was wanted for knowing about it, and concealing it. The police had warrants.

A short speech went with the accusation.

“We are quite conversant with your favorable reputation, and it received every consideration prior to our coming,” said the police officer. He sounded oratorical, but uncomfortable. “But we cannot ignore the circumstantial evidence indicating Mr. Renwick is guilty of murder. Nor can we ignore the fact that, from the moves you have been making here in Kansas City, you were aware of the evidence, and were apparently conspiring to aid Mr. Renwick. Would you want a police department to ignore such evidence?”

Doc gave them the truth.

“Any members of a police department who would ignore such evidence should go to the penitentiary,” the bronze man said. “And probably would.”

“It’s a relief to have you see it that way.”

Norman Monaghan was keeping in the background. His face was white. Perspiration stood on his forehead. The murder of Stirling had not been mentioned, but Monaghan plainly expected to be accused of it any moment.

Doc Savage asked, “Just how did this evidence against Renny Renwick come to light?”

There had been no shenanigan about it.

“We naturally forwarded the fingerprints found on the murder gun to the FBI files in Washington,” the police officer explained. “They were identified as Renwick’s. Investigation unearthed the rest.”

Monk yelled, “Doc, this is a mess! If they lock you up, how are you going to crack this case?”

The police officer made another speech.

“You gentlemen”—he indicated Monk, Ham—“could have been arrested as well. We are aware of that and so are you. But out of consideration for Doc Savage’s fine reputation in the past, we are doing something which may get us in plenty of trouble. We are letting you run loose to see if you can clear Savage and Renwick. If they are innocent, we want them cleared.”

Monk rubbed his jaw uneasily.

“That’s pretty decent of you,” he admitted.

“But you stick around, and you keep us posted as to your whereabouts,” the police officer warned. “You’re out on good behavior, if you get what I mean. You try to pull anything, and we’ll pile you into our nice new jail.”

“I can see you’d be justified in doing that,” said Monk, sounding—for Monk—remarkably reasonable.

The idea of their all being in jail wasn’t appealing to Monk.

An officer eyed Anton T. Fay and Norman Monaghan suspiciously.

“Who’re you guys?” he demanded.

They gave their names.

“What’re you doing with Savage and his men?” the cop asked.

“We are old friends,” said Monaghan, lying somewhat. “We are going to help Mr. Savage solve this case.”

“Just what are you doing to help? And why would you two be of any help? You’ve heard something about it the police don’t know?”

Anton T. Fay said, “We know the city. Mr. Savage and his men are strangers. Outside of that, we haven’t decided how we can be of assistance. But we intend to do what we can.”

The police went away with Doc Savage and Renny.

Monk told Anton T. Fay, “You’re almost as quick-witted a liar as Ham Brooks.”

Monk, Ham, Anton T. Fay, and Monaghan held a pow-wow, the unanimous opinion of which was that they were getting in pretty deep.

“Doc and Renny in jail blackens up the situation not a little,” said Ham.

“What gets me,” said Monk, “is the casual way such impossible things are happening. And without any apparent connection between them, too.”

Anton T. Fay was now looking somewhat alarmed. He spoke up sharply, saying, “I want to say this. I want to say that I am acting with you gentlemen on the honest belief that you are as you represent, and not murderers, or guilty of any complicity with murder.”

“You mean you suspect us?” Monk demanded.

“I am merely stating—”

“I heard what you stated!” Monk snapped. “Another such statement and you’ll find some gravel in your throat and it’ll be your teeth.”

Ham, more to argue with Monk than anything else—on the theory that an argument with Monk might relax his own worried mind a little—said sharply, “Stop being an ape, Monk! Mr. Fay was just stating his legal position—”

“Legal position, my foot!” yelled Monk. “You long-tongued lawyers give me a pain! You’re the biggest set of crooks in the world—”

“Crooks!” Ham screamed. “I’ll take you apart for that, you missing link!”

The violence Monk and Ham were threatening actually meant nothing except that they were letting off steam. But it sounded genuine enough to be convincing—and contagious.

Norman Monaghan and Anton T. Fay caught the fever.

Monaghan shouted, “Wait! Wait a minute, fellows! You were saying there was no connection between the different things that have happened. Well, there is.”

Monaghan leveled an arm dramatically at Anton T. Fay.

“Well, there is!” he added. “And the connection is Fay, here.”

Fay roared angrily, “What do you mean?”

Monaghan bellowed, “Fay is connected with the Stirling Instrument Co. Fay is connected with the brown imp, by what happened in the plane. Fay is connected with me, because he knew and hated me. Fay is the only fellow I see around here connected with so much. I think he bears investigating!”

Anton T. Fay madly unbuttoned his coat.

“I’ve wanted to beat your head off for four years!” he screamed. “And now I’m going to do it!”

It was at this point that the door opened and four golfers came in. At least they carried golf bags and wore sport clothes. The golf bags, however, proved to contain sawed-off shotguns.

“Loaded with ball bearings,” a golfer said. “They would ruin you.” The golfers raised their guns.

Monk and Ham and Anton Fay and Norman Monaghan all seemed about equally astonished. Monk and Ham, automatically calculating the chances of putting up a fight, were discouraged when the golfer added, “We know about your bulletproof vests. We’ll shoot you in the head.”

“You needn’t bother,” Monk said hastily. “What’s the idea of this visit?”

“We didn’t come to break up the little quarrel you were having,” the golfer said. “Although, from what I hear about you fellows, the quarrel doesn’t mean anything.”

“Who,” demanded Ham, “told you so much about us?”

The golfer smirked at them.

“Well, well, now, we’re going to take you right along with us and show you the answer to that one,” he said.

“Get your hats,” another man said. “And don’t pick up any gadgets.”

Norman Monaghan compressed his lips grimly. “At least, this isn’t fantastic,” he said.

Anton T. Fay was indignant.

He shouted, “This is kidnaping, legally. I am an attorney and—”

“And you’re no nearer bulletproof than the next guy,” the golfer said. “Or do you want to find out?”

Fay didn’t. He subsided.

They left the hotel casually, after being warned in no uncertain terms that any attempt to make a break, or even an effort to look as if something was wrong so as to alarm or attract attention in the hotel, would result in some promiscuous lead slinging.

There was a detour from the second floor of the hotel down the service stairs, out into a court, up a fire escape to another roof, across that to a skylight, and eventually down into a side street.

“No use disturbing the police who are watching your hotel,” said one of the golfers, explaining the detour.

They were joined by three additional gentlemen in the street. The trio had two cars waiting. Everybody loaded in, and got going.

“Now don’t go driving fast and causing the cops to stop us,” one said.

They drove four blocks west, and paused while one of the cars took aboard a passenger. The passenger was a small brown wrinkled imp.

“As Renny would say—‘Holy cow’!” Monk muttered.

They drove northward and eastward at a legal clip for about six hours. The trip occupied all of the remaining hours of darkness. The night was crisp, and there was a breeze which swept fallen leaves across the highways in scurrying groups.

Toward the end of the trip, there was some swearing about whether the gasoline supply was going to hold out, and whether they were going to make it by dawn. Both fears proved needless.

They pulled into an airport in northeast Missouri. There seemed to be no town of any size near. There was a guard, armed with a revolver, and he approached.

“No visitors allowed,” the guard said. “This field is under army regulation.”

“Is Fred Smith here?” asked one of the men.

“I don’t know Fred Smith. There’s a Bill Smithing, but he’s not—”

“Here, I’ll show you the guy’s picture,” said the man.

He got out of the car, put a hand in his coat pocket, brought out a blackjack and beat the guard over the head. The guard collapsed.

“That’s what you call knocking an apple knocker,” said the man, pushing the guard’s body with a foot.

Then he put his fingers between his teeth and whistled.

The whistle brought some more men—two more—who had been hiding out in the nearby weeds.

“You got the planes picked out?”

The two newcomers said they had. They also grumbled about lying around in the weeds for a day and a night with nothing to do but select three airplanes which would be suitable for a long trip.

The planes were cabin ships, not as fast as light bombers, but with a good load capacity, and plenty of fuel tankage.

The men worked fast. It would soon be dawn, and the daytime personnel would be appearing at the field. There was quite a bit of cussing about this.

They shot the lock off a hangar, got sledge hammers, and broke into the gasoline pumps. They fueled the planes to capacity.

A carload of airport mechanics started to drive in. Upon being shot at, they took cover. The department of commerce radio station was across the field, and the operator of this came out and yelled questions to which he got no answer.

“That guy is a nuisance,” a man complained. He shot at the airways radioman, and the latter dodged out of sight.

The small brown imp said, “All the planes are refueled. Get aboard. Let’s go.”

They took off without incident. The pilots were fairly adept in that weight class ship.

Monk, Ham, Norman Monaghan and Anton T. Fay found themselves in a plane with the small brown imp, two men with shotguns, and the pilot. The four prisoners had been thoroughly lashed to their seats. There were no parachutes for them, but their captors were wearing the regulation seat-pack chutes used by army trainees.

“Where,” Monk asked, “is this detour taking us?”

The imp chuckled.

“Rather surprised you, didn’t we?” he asked.

“You blew our hats off,” Monk admitted.

Norman Monaghan scowled at the imp. “You’re talking like one of the human race. What’s happened to your mumbo-jumbo about the omnipotence of the essence of concentrated cerebration and all that stuff?”

The imp grinned.

“When we need some more omnipotence,” he said, “I can supply it.”

“How,” asked Anton T. Fay, “did you get off that passenger air liner for Mexico?”

“Omnipotence.”

Monk asked, “You sure it wasn’t hocus-pocus?”

“Might have been.”

“You’re happy as a toad who just caught a fly, aren’t you?”

“Almost,” admitted the imp. “My cup of joy will overflow, probably, if we manage to get out of the United States safely.”

Monk said, “Oh, so it’s a long trip.”

The three stolen planes flew straight east, climbing for altitude, then turned south. But both directions, it developed, were designed to mislead anyone on the ground who might hear the motors. When the planes were close to their ceiling, around twelve thousand feet, they turned north.

The ships separated. But they all kept in a northerly direction.

“A nice army interceptor ship will probably be on your tail before long,” Monk said sourly. “They’ll shoot this ark loose from its wings.”

The imp pointed at clouds which were piling up more and more thickly ahead.

“Maybe not,” he said. Then he added, sounding as if he wanted to hear the comfort of his own words, “Planes the size of these have flown the ocean, you know.”

Monk considered this remark. It made his hair want to stand on end.

“You’re not fool enough to try to fly any ocean!” he shouted.

The imp grinned again.

The Kansas City police were not as courteous with Doc Savage and Renny Renwick as they had been in the beginning. A chief of detectives made the reason clear when he said, "We thought we told your friends, Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair, that they were supposed to stay around and keep in touch with us. They've cleared out."

"Is their baggage still at the hotel?" Doc asked.

"Yeah. They probably traveled light, figuring on a long run for it."

Doc and Renny were disturbed. They occupied a cell together on the fourth floor, a large cell, but certainly not a hotel room.

What made their situation particularly disheartening was the fact that they had been stripped, given a shower, and their own clothes had not been returned to them. They had none of the gadgets which they normally carried.

Renny, sounding anxious, asked, "Doc, what do you suppose got into Monk and Ham?"

The bronze man said thoughtfully that he had no idea. His manner was quiet enough, containing no great concern, but Renny knew him well enough to conclude that Doc was worried.

"That Anton T. Fay might have had something to do with it," Renny said. "I wish we'd had time to warn them to keep an eye on Fay."

They slept for a while, making up sleep they had lost. Renny, awakening, announced that he felt better than he had at any time since leaving New York for what he had supposed would be a vacation.

It was funny, he said, how much better he felt today. Physically, that was. The condition of his mind wasn't so hot, though. He was worried.

Renny prowled the cell. He tried the steel door cautiously, but it was quite solid. He went around pulling at the plumbing, the bed, obviously trying to figure out something that could be used as a tool for escape. Then he went to the window bars.

"These bars aren't so tough," he remarked. "If I had a hacksaw, or some acid—holy cow!"

Doc straightened suddenly. "What is it?"

"Come here and look, Doc. What is this thing hanging outside here?"

The object was a small slotted walnut box—about six inches in each dimension—with a control knob. It dangled at the end of a twisted cable of three insulated wires.

"An office intercommunicator substation," Doc said.

The bronze man raised the window. He reached out and got the box.

The box—it was a communicator, all right—a voice said, “It is about time you found the gadget.”

Doc said quickly, “Cut down your volume. It is loud enough to be heard in the corridor.”

The voice from the communicator, much lower, said, “Thanks. Let’s not waste time. I’m a friend of yours. I want you out of there. What do you need in the way of tools to get out?”

“Acid for the bars, and a rope,” Doc said.

“What kind of acid?”

Doc told him the acid mixture. “Write it down,” the bronze man advised. “Try a chemical supply house. The drugstores would not carry it of that strength.”

“All right,” said the communicator. “Toss the gadget back out, and I’ll pull it up out of sight.”

The communicator had gone snaking up to whatever spot it had come from.

“Holy cow!” Renny gestured wildly. “Who was that?”

“The voice,” Doc said, “was not familiar.”

“You suppose it is a trap?”

“Possibly. But at least it is something in the way of action.”

Renny nodded. “I guess they will hold our preliminary hearing today, and with no more evidence than we have to clear ourselves, the kind of action they’ll give us we won’t like.”

It was nearly an hour later when the intercommunicator box came dangling down outside the window again. Doc pulled it inside.

The box said, “I almost didn’t find that acid. But I got it.”

“The rope?”

“I got that, too. I’ll tie the acid in a sack on the end of it. It’s coming down.”

The bottle of acid, contained in a cloth sack, appeared tied to the end of a stout rope. Doc drew it inside.

“Take the rope, too,” the box said. “There is a courtyard below you. The windows below you are frosted, but your shadow will show if you slid down in front of them. Better keep off to the side if you can. I’ll be waiting down at the mouth of the court in a black sedan. How soon will you be down?”

“Give us thirty minutes,” Doc said.

“Better not take much longer. Your hearing is scheduled for ten o’clock, and they might come for you.”

The box disappeared above once more.

The acid was good. Doc applied it around the base of the bars, and around the top. The stuff hissed and smoked, but the hissing was not loud, nor was the smoke as heavy as that from a cigarette. The acid was considerably better than a file or a hacksaw.

They used a towel and plenty of water from the washbasin to clean off the acid before they tied the end of the rope to a water pipe, and went out.

Doc went first. He avoided passing in front of the windows. Once he was in the court, he held the rope to one side, and Renny come down.

“This is a queer thing for somebody to do for us,” Renny said. “Holy cow! I’ll bet it’s some of Monk and Ham’s doings.”

They walked casually out of the court and across the sidewalk to a sedan.

“Made it all right, I see,” said the man in the car. He pushed open the door.

He was a lean hawk of a man, tanned, thin-lipped. He wore no hat and his hair was a tight-fitting, wheat-colored skullcap. His suit was brown. His shirt, tie, handkerchief, shoes, were all shades of brown. He looked as hard as an oak post.

He said, “I am How’d the Yankees Do Today.”

Renny stared, “Eh?”

“That’s what I’m called.”

“That,” said Renny, “is some name.”

“It isn’t a name,” the man said. “It’s how I am identified.”

“Oh,” Renny said, although it didn’t make sense.

“We’d better roll our hoop away from here before we talk,” the man said.

He started the car, waved airily at a policeman who had come out of the police station—Doc and Renny had ducked out of sight swiftly, on the car floor—and drove away.

“I don’t think,” the man said, “that we’d better take a chance on going past your hotel after your stuff.”

“You mean the police might be there?” asked Renny.

“That’s right.”

“Who are you?” Renny asked.

The brown man said, “We’ve got no time to lose. We’ll head straight for the flying field.”

Renny scowled, “So we’re taking a trip?”

“I hope you are,” said the man. “Of course, that’s up to you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m asking—in the name of the department—for your help.”

“Department? What department?”

The brown man turned to Doc Savage, asking, “Mr. Savage, do you know Curt MacIntell?”

Doc nodded. “Yes.”

“I’m working under Curt,” the brown man said. “My name is Fleagle. O. B. Fleagle. The O is for Oliver and the B for Birdie, I’m ashamed to say. I carry no identifications, as you know.”

Doc agreed, “None of Curt MacIntell’s men would be likely to carry identification.”

Renny was puzzled. He did some head scratching, got no ideas, and asked Doc, “Who’s MacIntell? I never heard of him.”

The brown man, Fleagle, was taking boulevards southward and westward, heading for the Kansas State line and the level country beyond. He gave his attention to driving.

Doc gave Renny what information he had about Curt MacIntell. “It’s an army department of special nature, very hush-hush. In existence only for the duration of the war, and responsible only, and reporting only, to the chief of staff. The nature of its work is completely secret. Curt MacIntell, who is a man whose name is entirely unknown to the American public, is probably one of the most accomplished and experienced secret agents in the world. That is about all I know. I have met MacIntell several times, to discuss organization of an investigative agency such as this one. That was at the beginning, before the war broke, but when it was evident that we were going to get into the fracas.”

Renny asked Fleagle, “Were Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks responsible for you getting us out of jail?”

“They could hardly be.”

The brown man’s grim tone alarmed Renny. He demanded, “What do you mean?”

“Hold on to your hats,” Fleagle said. “Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks have been grabbed.”

“By whom?”

“By the gang you’ve been mixing it with.”

“What became of Monk and Ham?” Renny yelled.

The brown man shrugged. “I do not know. I can give you an incident that probably furnishes a clue. Do you know where Millard, Missouri, is?”

“Sure. It’s a radio range station.”

“This morning just before daylight,” said Fleagle, “three carloads of men appeared at the intermediary field there and stole three planes. There was some gunplay, but the theft was successful. The men had four prisoners, two of whom answer roughly the descriptions of Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks.”

“Have the planes been intercepted?”

“No.”

“What’s the matter with the air raid warning system?”

The brown man grimaced. “It may be a little rusty, because there have been no enemy raids. But, also, the weather to the northward is very favorable, clouds and rain from Iowa far north into Canada.”

“They went north?”

“I’m sure they did.”

Doc Savage interrupted, describing Norman Monaghan and Anton T. Fay, then asking, “You said there were four prisoners. Do those two sound like the other pair?”

“They certainly do.”

Not far beyond the Kansas State line, Fleagle unexpectedly turned the car into a pasture, then entered a grove of trees. In the trees, fairly well concealed by them, there was a plane. It was a five-place cabin job with a radial motor, fast, capable of flying a considerable distance without refueling.

“We’d better get right upstairs,” Fleagle said.

The plane was fully fueled. The cabin, they discovered, contained three high-altitude flying suits of the electrically warmed type. They were not regulation army suits, but a commercial brand which could be purchased by private fliers.

Fleagle asked Doc, "You want to fly the crate? I've got a private license, but it's for light planes. This thing has got so much gasoline on board it scares me."

Doc worked the plane out of the trees onto a meadow and took off.

"North," Fleagle said. "Fly north, a little to the east."

Doc set the course. The plane motor sounded tight and good.

Fleagle leaned back.

"Now I'll explain," he said. "And the first thing I want to explain is that if I was doing this, I would tell you more facts than you're going to hear. But my orders are to tell nobody anything they don't already know. I'm going to stretch that somewhat, but not as much as you'll want me to stretch it."

Renny asked, "You mean you've got orders not to tell anything?"

"Yes, orders from the chief, Curt MacIntell." Fleagle shrugged his shoulders inside his brown coat. "The orders weren't issued with you in mind, Savage. Maybe they would have been more lenient for you, but I doubt it. This thing is very important."

Renny said, "We already see that it's important."

"I'm trying to explain that there are things I'll have to leave out of my story."

Renny sighed. "Go ahead. You got us out of jail. We're not too critical."

Fleagle dug a bundle of charts out of a chart case. He held them on his lap, caressing them with his tanned brown fingers as he talked.

"Something fabulous had gone wrong at the Stirling Instrument Co. plant," he said. "What it is, I don't know fully, and I can't tell you what I do know because of orders."

He grinned at them apologetically.

"I was assigned to this five days ago," he continued. "I was just one of hundreds of agents put on the job. We found we were up against a remarkably strange combination of the impossible and the perfectly logical."

Renny said, "The impossible and the logical—that's what we've been finding."

"There is a little brown man who calls himself a mystic," said Fleagle. "Everything about that fellow seems to be incredible."

"Amen," Renny mumbled.

"But he has quite a number of men working for him, and they are perfectly normal men—normal for crooks—and they are doing normal things."

“Normal like grabbing Monk and Ham and Monaghan and Fay, eh?” Renny said.

Fleagle nodded. “But let me tell it in order. First, this fabulous thing happened at the Stirling Instrument Co. Stirling was killed because he knew who was guilty. I won’t say anything about how he was killed—this part of the story is going to sound sensible if I have to leave out the goofy angles—and a man named Walters was killed because he also knew who was guilty.”

Doc Savage said, “Stirling and Walters were obviously killed because of that. It was the only reasonable motive.”

Fleagle nodded.

“Now,” he continued, “these men working for the little imp—the rascals who seem to be doing his dirty work for him—have established, or are establishing, a camp or a base on the Labrador coast. We do not know why. We just know that a base is being established there. We know that all of them—the brown imp and his workers—are all going there.”

Doc Savage interrupted, “How did you get such information?”

Fleagle grinned.

“We caught one of them,” he said. “And we scared all the words he knew out of him. The guy we caught was one of the pilots they had hired. He knew where this camp in Labrador was located. He knew they were all going there. That is about all he knew, though. But he told us that before we slapped him in jail.”

“Yeah,” rumbled Renny. “And they know you caught one of their men, so they’ll figure he might have talked, and they’ll change their plans.”

Fleagle laughed. “You underestimate us.”

“How do you mean?”

“The Kansas City police co-operated with us in letting us use an unidentified accident victim for some deceit. In other words, this unidentified man was dressed in our crook’s clothes, and the story was put out that he was killed in a car accident. The body we used was about the same build as the man we’d caught. The face was mangled in the accident. The body lay in the morgue for anybody who wanted to have a look. And the newspapers carried the story of the automobile accident and named the victim as the man we had caught. If I sound confused—the newspapers never mentioned that we’d caught the fellow at all. He was just identified as an accident victim. So they won’t be suspicious, do you think?”

Renny nodded. “Pretty good.”

“All right,” said Fleagle. “Now we know the location of this Labrador camp.”

Renny said, “To which you think Monk and Ham and Monaghan and Fay are being taken?”

“Yes,” Fleagle said. “Providing they are not killed first. Can you think of any reason they should be kept alive?”

Renny couldn't. He shuddered.

Fleagle unrolled his charts.

“Here we are. Here's the camp,” he said. “That's where we're going, unless you fellows object.”

Doc Savage was silent for a while. He asked a question. “Why did you get us out of jail and take us along—just the three of us together—to Labrador?”

Fleagle's answer was frank.

“Orders,” he said. “Finding out what is going on at that Labrador camp is a job for a few men. A large gang of agents would be sure to be discovered, and the quarry might take flight and we might not find out what it was all about, or get the ringleaders. We want the ground looked over. We want to know what's what. That's what we want you to help us do.”

Doc said, “One more question. Why all the mystery—why arrange for us to escape jail, instead of just releasing us?”

“Secrecy. We didn't want to let the police know too much, because there might be a leak somewhere, innocent or not.”

Renny reached for the charts.

“Where in Labrador is this place?” he rumbled.

XI

For a thousand miles there had been fog, clouds, snow flurries and bitter cold. All three of them, Doc Savage, Renny and Fleagle, had taken turns at the controls, so none of them were particularly tired. Only Fleagle had not slept. But he showed few signs of fatigue.

The effective ceiling of the plane was not high enough to get them above much of the overcast. Twice they had run into howling storms. In these dark, gray twisting torments of cloud and snow, the plane had floundered with a helplessness that was frightening.

There were no de-icing fittings on the wings. That was a menace. Only once had they found a hole through which they could drop and check, after a fashion, the altimeter.

Now, though, there was barren rocky coastline below, and they could trace the contour as they followed the edge of the sea. Renny, the engineer, was tracing the outline of the coast and checking it against the charts, trying to find their exact location. With the fog, it was a job, a hair-raising job.

“Holy cow!” Renny gasped, pointing. “An iceberg.”

Shortly, Renny rumbled like a disappointed walrus.

“We’ve overshot!” he complained. “Look. Here’s where we are. Here’s where we want to be, about fifty miles to the south.”

Doc consulted the charts. “That’s right.” He turned back.

Fleagle contemplated the shore line with no appreciation. “How are we going to land?” he asked. “This country is strictly for mountain goats.”

Flying above the beach at a point where there was about four hundred feet of ceiling under the overcast, Doc tried different compass courses, checking bearings with a drift indicator. That way, he got the direction and speed of the wind.

“South wind,” he said. “About forty miles an hour, which is a considerable breeze. But we can use it to keep the sound of the plane from the camp.”

“One thing sure,” said Fleagle, “this bay where the camp is indicated is on a distinctive piece of shore line. We can tell when we’re getting close.”

Doc Savage cut the speed and flew low, on the theory that the motor noise from a low-flying plane would be absorbed by the earth and would not spread over as much territory.

“A beach!” yelled Fleagle. “How far are we from that camp location?”

Doc Savage was already putting the plane into a landing approach when he said, “Three miles. Close enough.”

The beach was nothing fabulous as a landing strip. But it was sand, and the tide was out. Doc dragged it before he landed. Then he got down safely. Forty miles an hour was a conservative estimate of the wind force. The plane ran only a few yards after its wheels were on the sand.

“We will get the ship up among the rocks and lash it down,” Doc said.

To their right, close at hand, was a shoulder of low cliffs, and along the base of these eroded rocks had fallen large boulders.

Turning the plane into the wind was ticklish. The gale threatened to get the upwind wing, ground-loop the craft, or simply flop it over like a leaf.

They got the ship among the rocks, and tied it down with the light, but strong, pegging ropes which were aboard.

Fleagle then looked about at the bleak land and the storm-rushed sea. Bushes and stunted trees and moss were the only growth. Not much of that, and a man could jump over the top of any of it. It was savage scenery, primitive.

“Mr. Savage,” Fleagle said, “I recall from what I’ve heard of you that you have plenty of arctic experience. So the campaign is now in your hands. You will give the orders.”

“It might not be the best thing to leave the plane,” Doc said.

“I was thinking that, too. Want me to stay with it?”

Doc nodded. “You are in the poorest physical shape. You haven’t slept since we left Kansas City.”

“I guess I’m nervous,” Fleagle admitted sheepishly.

Leaving Fleagle with the plane, Doc and Renny started south.

They wore the coverall suits which were electrically warmed. But, of course, now that they were out of the plane, there was no electrical connection and the suits were just wind-proof. They left them on, though, tolerating the clumsiness of the garments for the protection they gave.

Doc said, “Better use some care. The camp, if any, might be closer than we think.”

They kept among the boulders and worked on ahead. The way, fortunately, was not hard going. Storms in the past had driven the sea up among the rocks that had toppled off the cliff face, depositing sand among them.

There was some snow, lying in hard, crushed piles that were half sand. The snow was packed thickly among clusters of boulders. Elsewhere the stone and rock was bare. The wind, with its whistling violence, picked up spray from the waves, mixed it with fine sand from the beach, and plastered the walking men with the sticky, salty, gritty result.

They kept their eyes on the beach. Tracks, of course, would fill before long with sand. But there might be some traces.

“Over this headland,” Doc said, “is the spot indicated on Fleagle’s charts.”

Renny got out of his trick flying garment. He shivered spasmodically in the cold. Then he put the thing back on. “I didn’t want it to hamper me,” he

muttered. "But, shucks, a man would freeze to death."

There was a rim of ice along the beach, where the waves piled up. The tide, coming in, covered this as fast as it formed. Thick blocks of ice stood in the water. It had to be quite cold for the turbulent salt water to freeze like that.

"Where's this mysterious camp?" asked Renny. "We should be seeing it."

They wandered up and down the beach for two hours. They spent another hour inland. There wasn't any camp. They could see it wasn't country where planes could land.

They hurried back toward their plane.

"A wild-goose chase," Doc said.

Renny flapped his arms. He was getting cold. "I wonder what went wrong? I'll bet the fellow that Fleagle's men caught in Kansas City gave them the wrong steer."

Doc Savage said nothing.

They walked in silence for a while, then Renny boomed, "I hate to start talking wild. But do you suppose we've been made fools of? Maybe we've been sent off up here in the arctic when there wasn't anything here. Or is that what you meant when you said a wild-goose chase?"

"I hope the tide has not come in enough to ruin our chances of taking off in the plane," Doc said.

"There should have been some sign of the camp. That was the spot on the charts, all right."

Their plane came in sight.

"There's Fleagle," Renny said.

Fleagle ran toward them. "Find anything?" he demanded.

"Not a thing," Renny said. "There's no camp. There's no sign of life whatever. That's the bay that was indicated on the chart. How do you explain it?"

Fleagle pulled his coat collar up. His face was blue from the cold. The biting wind was bringing tears to his eyes.

"Let's get it in the plane where it's warm," he said. "And figure it out."

He turned. Doc and Renny followed him.

It was Doc who stopped suddenly, said, "We're in a trap, Renny! Make a break for it!" Doc spoke in Mayan, a little-known tongue which they used for privacy.

The bronze man's warning was too late. Two uniformed men with military rifles got out of the plane. Mounds of sand nearby—it was these which Doc had noticed a moment before—upheaved and men got out of them. Other men came from behind boulders. All of them were uniformed. Only the two from the plane were officers, though.

“*Achtung!*” said one of the pair from the plane. “*Ich bedaure sehr, dass ich Sie beleidigt habe.*”

Doc said, “Do you speak English?”

The officer bowed.

“I do,” he said. “I am very sorry that I have to offend you. That is what I just said in my tongue. You see, I know you, Mr. Savage.”

Fleagle now burst into tears. He wrapped his hands around his face, made bubbling and honking noises of shame and grief, then sank down on the frozen and wind-whipped sand.

“They made me!” he cried. “They would have shot me! They had their guns pointed at me. They were going to kill me if I warned you.”

He resumed making his bubbling noises.

The officer who knew Doc, walked over calmly and drew an automatic and gave Fleagle a clubbing with it. He hit Fleagle across the head twice. Fleagle fell over on the sand.

“I think all men hate a coward,” the officer said.

Renny rumbled, “Fleagle hasn't had any sleep in no telling how long. I don't think he's a coward.”

“You are *Herr* Renwick, the engineer?” The officer was looking at Renny's outsize fist, his most noticeable feature.

“Renwick,” Renny said. “Leave off the *Herr*. It doesn't make me happy.”

The officer bowed to Doc Savage. “I am Kapitan Windschirm Kranich, officer in charge.”

Doc asked, “We are prisoners?”

“*Ja.*”

“What status?”

Kranich smiled wolfishly. “That would make a difference, wouldn't it? I will be charitable. Prisoners of war, say.”

The *kapitän* was a tall man with a heavy-set body and a thick neck. He had a snub nose, a mouth with not much lips, and eyes which had little warmth.

Doc noticed the officer's strained face. He observed the same signs of hard-on-the-nerves living on the countenance of the uniformed sailors. He did not need their uniform insignia to tell him what they were. The signs of strain, and their pale faces, placed them.

"Submarine," Doc said.

"Correct." Kranich changed to his native tongue. "*Suchen! Schnell! Tun Sie Ihr bestes.*"

Sailors jumped to the job of searching Doc and Renny. Evidently Fleagle already had been searched.

Kranich, seeming surprised, said, "You have practically no arms. What did you expect to accomplish, only the three of you?"

Doc said, "Whatever we could accomplish," without much facial expression.

Kranich indicated Fleagle. "We do not need that fellow. Would you as soon we shot him?"

Fleagle took his hands away from his bruised face, lifted his eyes. "Go ahead and shoot me," he said in a sick voice. "I'm not afraid now. I was a while ago. I don't know what got into me." He looked at Doc Savage. "I helped them trap you."

Kranich laughed.

Doc said, "Forget it, Fleagle."

Kranich, wearing the smile that his laugh had left on his face, said, "You expected to find the camp at the cove, didn't you? I suppose you had learned in some way that the camp was supposed to be there."

Doc said nothing.

"The camp was moved." Kranich chuckled. "So inconvenient for you, no?"

Doc Savage and Renny were shoved together. Fleagle was booted to his feet and placed beside them.

Renny whispered to Doc, "I don't get this. What are we mixed up in, anyway? This is an enemy submarine crew. But where is their submarine?"

Kranich, guessing at what Renny was saying, said, "If you are curious about the submarine, contain yourself."

He turned to one of his men, extending a hand. The man handed him a potato masher grenade, and Kranich heaved it out into the sea. He was

pleased at the long throw he made. "I would be good at your baseball, yes?" he said.

The grenade threw up water and spray when it exploded. They could feel the shock in the beach sand on which they stood.

"That," said Kranich, "is a signal they can hear."

With a rushing sound, a blowing like a whale, a large submarine broke surface offshore about a quarter of a mile. One of Kranich's men transmitted semaphore signals with his arms. Doc, reading the signals, saw that they were asking for a boat.

The boat was one of the large pneumatic rafts. This one was deluxe, having an outboard motor, which popped busily and brought it to shore.

They had to wade out a short distance. The water was freezing, feeling like knives on their legs.

"What about the plane?" Doc asked.

Kranich shrugged. "Some Eskimo may fall heir to it. Or do they have Eskimos here?"

"They've got American patrol planes, and Canadian, too," said Renny, endeavoring to spread some cheer.

Kranich, sounding quite bitter, said, "Hah! You should see how thick they are over our base in the homeland. We are not much worried here."

The pneumatic boat felt fat and unwieldy under them, but it carried them to the submarine with the efficiency of a swimming seal.

Renny looked the submarine over. He grinned at telltale patches of rust in patterns on the deck and conning tower, indicating the craft had been machine-gunned by an Allied plane.

"Get below!" Kranich said sharply, resenting Renny's grin.

XII

Doc Savage was confined in the control room, one wrist tied to a compressed air pipe.

Renny and Fleagle were put somewhere else in the submarine. He did not know where, but Renny was taken forward, Fleagle aft.

Kranich said, in English, to his officers, "Get under way. I do not see any sense in submerging. With this overcast, we can hear a plane before they sight us."

They got the submarine under way with the casual efficiency of men who had done it a thousand times. Doc Savage, by moving as far as his tied wrist would permit, could see the compass. They were heading northward—or rather, about north-northeast, the direction the coast took here.

Kranich had evidently kept the bronze man in the control room so that he could talk to him. Because, as soon as he had posted men on the conning tower outside, instructing them to keep a sharp lookout, he began talking.

“I trust,” he said to Doc, “that you aren’t too puzzled.”

“What do you mean?” Doc asked.

“You know that this is connected with the trouble you were having in Kansas City, don’t you?”

“It was fairly apparent.”

“Perhaps. But I didn’t suppose you had expected to find anything like a submarine.”

“We had no idea what we would find.”

“Really! Don’t tell me the eminent *Herr* Doctor Savage for once in his life did not know what he was doing!”

Doc said, “Something like that.”

“Will you pardon me not believing you?”

“If you wish.”

Kranich grinned. “It is an experience, meeting you. Would you believe it if I told you I am thoroughly afraid of you?”

“What is there to be afraid of?” Doc indicated his tied wrist. “What can I do?”

“I am wondering. This is too simple. It does not fit in with what I have heard of you.”

Doc said, “Does the possibility that other planes, army or navy planes, might have come with me bother you?”

“No. We know they didn’t.”

“How do you know?”

“The small brown man says not.” Kranich laughed. “You have met him, no?”

“Once.”

“He is remarkable, do you not think?”

Doc admitted, “He gave one of my men an interesting trip from New York to Kansas City. And he gave me an interesting half-hour on a plane.”

“Yes, so I heard.”

“Then you have seen the brown imp?” Doc asked.

Kranich nodded. “I have talked to him. As a matter of fact, he arranged the reception you just received.”

Doc was surprised and showed it.

“The way you trapped us on the beach—that was the imp’s idea?”

“Ja.”

Doc said quietly, “Would you care to explain how it was all arranged—what happened to Renny Renwick and Norman Monaghan and Anton T. Fay?”

Kranich eyed the bronze man intently. “You do not believe it was genuine?”

Doc said nothing.

“Then you are going to be surprised,” said Kranich. “Most disagreeably surprised.”

The submarine, after about an hour, made a stop. Evidently it was not to be a permanent anchorage, because the engines were kept running.

The rubber boat was inflated again and put over the side. It went *put-putting* toward shore.

“I am picking up my distinguished passengers,” Kranich told Doc.

Doc asked in a grim tone, “Are Monk and Ham and the other two still alive?” The question had been on his mind throughout, but he did not believe he would get an answer to it.

“Perhaps. I’m not sure,” said Kranich. “But these passengers are not friends of yours.”

“The brown imp?”

“Oh, no.” Kranich chuckled. “You really are in the dark about all this, aren’t you?”

Doc became silent again.

The rubber boat came back with four men. Two of them were heavy men, and one of the others was quite tall and old. They all had one thing in common. Arrogance. The way they carried themselves, spoke, moved, gestured, all indicated they were accustomed to being important.

And Doc knew one of them.

“Renntier!” he said. “Fritz Renntier!”

He was startled.

Renntier was the tall, elderly man. He spoke excellent English.

“Ah, Dr. Savage, the last time I saw you was at that diplomatic affair in London, was it not?”

Doc said quietly, “We had a discussion, and you received some advice, which obviously you did not take.”

Renntier was sober. “Yes, I recall the advice. It was good human advice, and for myself I might have taken it, but I do not set the policies of my country. You said that we were unequipped by psychology to administer to conquered peoples, and that our failures would drive us to a hysteria of force, which would bring the world down on our heads, and we would lose everything.”

Doc said, “I did, and you will.”

Kranich stepped forward. He wasn't pleasant. He cursed in his native tongue. He said that he would have Doc Savage shot on the spot, and later every American dog would be shot. He was a little hysterical.

“Kranich!” said Fritz Renntier sharply. “Stop it!”

The submarine commander turned away darkly.

Fritz Renntier said, “I am sorry you are in this position. When I left the homeland, as part of this delegation, I had no idea I might find it necessary to sit in judgment over a man of your value to humanity.”

“Delegation?” Doc Savage said questioningly. He didn't really expect an answer. But he got one.

“We four men,” said Fritz Renntier, “are a committee who have come to inspect something offered for sale. If it is what it is supposed to be, we are empowered to buy.” He smiled. “We are being cautious. We waited ashore while you were being captured. Knowing your reputation, we were not sure but that something might go wrong.”

“He is dumb!” said Kranich angrily. The submarine commander was vicious. “He is dumb, like all of them!”

There was no more conversation then.

Doc Savage was silent, for he was impressed. Fritz Renntier was a name that did not often get in the newspapers, but the man was a quiet power in his homeland. He was no bombastic braggart, no parading, shouting politician. Instead, Renntier was one of the men who did the thinking, the planning, the doing—while the stupid ones, the figureheads, made the fronting speeches and posed for the cameras.

Fritz Renntier wouldn't be coming to Labrador on a submarine for peanuts. He wouldn't make a trip like that for anything that wasn't vastly

important. And the three with him, the other members of the delegation, weren't minor people either.

There was no doubt, for at least twenty minutes before the submarine actually stopped, that they were coming to the end of their trip. There was a continuous flow of orders for half speed and slow and reverse and port and starboard, or compass degree bearing. "*Zweihundert sechzig,*" the conner called. "*Langsam!*" The submarine crawled.

Blasts of bitter wind whipped down the conning hatch, bringing occasional handfuls of snowflakes that were as hard as buckshot.

But the submarine was getting out of the open sea. It did not roll. There was no thumping as waves piled up on the rounding hull of the sub.

"*Lassen Sie halten!*" said the conner, at last much relieved. The U-boat lost headway.

Kranich had been outside. Now the *kapitän* came below, to grin at Doc Savage, who was still tied to the compressed air pipe, but now guarded by a sailor with a Mauser pistol.

"We are here," he said.

"The new camp site?" Doc asked.

Kranich nodded. He was in good humor. "The brown imp at first actually intended to camp on the cove where we caught you. But we suggested the change to this spot. It is so much better. There is shelter."

"The submarine seems to be lying in much smoother water," Doc agreed.

"By shelter, I meant shelter ashore," Kranich corrected.

"Oh."

"I'll show you," Kranich said, loosening Doc's bonds. "Come on deck."

Sailors were busy stringing mooring lines to two steel posts, made of old railroad rails and bedded in concrete, on either side of the narrow, deep, calm inlet in which the submarine lay.

It was an ideal anchorage. With a roof overhead, it would have been like a shed. The lead-colored late afternoon sky was a dome high above. And the wind carried little strings of snow over the rims of the low cliffs nearby.

On shore, there were three buildings, one large and two small, with walls made of mortar and stone. The buildings had low-sod roofs. Smoke was being pulled out of two chimneys by the wind.

Beyond the buildings, on a freakishly flat smooth meadow, men were wrestling with a plane. They were dragging it, with a great deal of arm

waving and profanity, to the lee of a large mass of rock which had toppled from a low cliff.

Among the boulders, lashed down, were three other planes. Two men, using cotton lines, were tying white cloth, apparently canvas and ordinary bed sheets, over the plane fuselages and over the wings. When they were done with this makeshift camouflage job, the planes would be very hard to see from the air.

Of Monk, Ham, Anton T. Fay and Norman Monaghan, there was no sign.

Kranich gestured at the buildings.

“Part of our preparations before the war,” he said. “It was intended to be a Labrador station to get weather news to our submarines. But unfortunately, our agent here was caught by the Canadians when he visited Montreal. The Canadians never found out about the place, but it hasn’t been very useful to us—until now.”

Doc said, “Supposed to be a trading post?”

“That is correct.”

Renny Renwick and Fleagle now came up the conning-tower ladder. Their wrists were tied. Renny’s long face was tragic. He spoke to Doc in Mayan.

“They’re going to execute us,” Renny said. “They do not think I can speak or understand German. I overheard them.”

A slight glaze came into Kranich’s eyes as he listened to the unintelligible tongue which Renny was speaking. But he said nothing about it. Not then.

The sailors, laughing at their own ingenuity, had rigged up a ferry arrangement, using the rubber boat and pulling it back and forth with a line and continuous pulley affair.

Doc and the others were ferried ashore on this.

Four men had come out of the stone buildings. They had rifles and nervous expressions.

Then the brown imp appeared. He was heavily dressed and part of a blanket was tied around his head, ears and throat.

“You got them?” he said to Kranich.

“We did,” Kranich agreed.

The brown imp stood in front of Doc Savage. “Perhaps now you are more impressed by the omnipotence of the inward, of significance of the most real thing to every man, but which men are fools enough to call the abstract and the intangible—meaning the capacity of the mind, directed and carefully strengthened for ages.”

Doc said nothing.

Renny said, “That’s the kind of mumbo-jumbo he talked to me on the plane from New York that first day I met him.”

Kranich punched Renny. “Renwick, let me tell you something.”

“Eh?” said Renny.

“A few minutes ago, you spoke a language I did not understand.”

“Well, I—”

“You speak anything but English in my hearing again,” said Kranich, “and I shall personally take a pair of pliers and pull your tongue out by the roots.”

Renny stared at him intently. “Holy cow! You mean it!”

This seemed to please Kranich. He was a man who liked to get an effect when he made a statement like that. He had gotten one.

Kranich and the brown imp now exchanged some words. They didn’t sound friendly.

“We caught them for you,” said Kranich. “We filled our part of the bargain.”

“That’s right,” said the imp, “you did fine.”

“Yes, but what about the rest?”

“Oh, the rest.”

“Yes.”

“You mean the demonstration?”

“That’s right.”

“We’re about ready for it,” said the imp. “We will stage it on schedule.”

Kranich looked upward. He seemed interested in the thickly overcast sky, the darkness, the whirling snow, the wind and the clouds.

“These are ideal conditions,” he said. “If it works in weather like this, it is exactly what we want.”

“It will work.”

“Well,” said Kranich. “Let’s see if it will. I will get Renntier and the other three right now, and—”

“First,” said the imp, “there’s one more thing.”

Kranich scowled. “If you mean the money, it’s on the submarine.”

“All of it?”

“Yes, the whole amount agreed upon.”

“I want to see it,” said the brown imp. “You bring it ashore, or take me on to the submarine and let me look at it.”

“Isn’t my word—”

“I trust my eyes more. You show it to me first.”

The glazed look that went with Kranich’s maniacal rages came into his eyes. But he kept control.

“*Ja*,” he said.

XIII

They put Doc Savage and Renny in one room of the largest of the three stone buildings.

Monk’s voice yelled, “Doc! Blast it, they got you!” as the bronze man was being led inside. “And Renny!”

From somewhere in the building, Norman Monaghan called, “Are you hurt?”

Fleagle was thrown in the same room with Doc. Then there was some talk about taking him out again.

“After all,” said Kranich, “he helped us catch you. So you might become inclined to beat up on him. Shall we lock him up separately?”

Without waiting for an answer, they shoved Fleagle in with Doc and Renny, anyway.

“Who is that guy?” Monk called.

“Fleagle? He’s a government agent who got us out of jail in Kansas City and had the location of this hide-out—or rather, of a bay down the coast where there was supposed to be a camp,” Renny said, answering the question.

“They were going to camp at the bay,” Monk called. “But the submarine signaled them they better use this place, instead. And I think they made

some kind of a deal whereby the submarine crew was to help grab you.”

“Help!” Renny snorted. “They did all the grabbing.”

“Where is Ham?” asked Doc.

“In one of the other buildings. Anyhow, I think he is still there. Monaghan is in here with me. Anton T. Fay is in one of the other buildings, too.”

“Are you all right?”

“Physically,” said Monk, “we haven’t got a scratch. But mentally, we’re something the cat drug in.”

“Found out what it is all about?” Doc inquired.

“No. That helps worry us.”

Kranich said, “You talk too much. How would you like to have a pair of pliers pull out your tongues?”

The brown imp said, “Let them talk. Shut up, Kranich. They are my prisoners.”

Kranich said, “You are hard to get along with.” He sounded ugly.

Doc Savage and Renny looked around the room in which they found themselves. The partitions were stone. There was a fireplace, but no wood, and no fire. The door, which was very heavy, made a solid thump when it closed.

Renny looked at Doc Savage and said, “I think it shapes up this way, doesn’t it? Something was stolen from the Stirling Instrument Co. in Kansas City. Stirling and Walters were killed because they knew the thief. We got mixed up in it through Monaghan—and why he got mixed in it we don’t know yet—but we haven’t done much good. Now they have whatever they stole up here. They’re going to demonstrate it to this committee on the submarine, and if it is what they say it is, the committee is empowered to buy it. They’ve got the money on the submarine to buy it. And us—we’re behind that eight ball. No reason at all why they shouldn’t kill us.”

Doc said, “Except that it might be the same reason.”

Renny was surprised. “Eh? Holy cow! What do you mean?”

“Has there been any reason, from the very first, why they should not kill us, or try?”

“Yes, there had to be—” Renny stopped. His mouth was roundly open with surprise. “Holy cow! What was the reason?”

Doc said quietly, “The same one, probably, that they have now.”

“You mean there is a reason they won’t kill us?” Renny demanded. “What is it? What earthly—”

He fell silent, because things that were more interesting began to happen in the main room of the cabin.

The imp had come in from the cold outdoors, saying, “The money is there, and it seems to be a sufficient sum. We will count it before the deal is consummated, of course.”

Fritz Renntier said, “You will find the amount there.” Renntier sounded irritated.

“How do you get so much American money?” the brown imp asked.

“It is currency from the banks of France and the other conquered countries,” explained Renntier impatiently. “And we have facilities for getting hold of American money in some quantity.”

The imp chuckled. “I imagine some of you fellows are socking away a nice pile of English and American money to have when this fracas is over.”

“We won’t discuss that.” Renntier sounded insulted.

Kranich snapped, “We are all here. You will demonstrate the device, please!”

The imp snapped his fingers. His men—there were several present—brought three cases from another room. The containers were about the size of steamer trunks, heavy enough that two men had to wrestle each one. The metal cases were painted the olive green of the American army.

The brown imp tapped the boxes dramatically.

“This is one of the first dozen turned out completely assembled by the Stirling Instrument Co.,” he continued. “The mechanical and electrical parts, as your engineers will find when they disassemble the outfit, can be manufactured readily in different plants, then sent to a central point for assembling. That is how the Stirling Instrument Co. is operating.”

“How long,” asked Fritz Renntier, “have the Americans been making the thing?”

“Three weeks.”

“The blueprints?”

The small brown man produced a flat case, from which he removed several glassine envelopes containing 35-m.m. photographic negatives.

“Here are microphotographs of all plans, and the printed specifications as well,” he said. “I was not fool enough to try to steal the plans. That isn’t

done nowadays by anyone with intelligence.”

Doc Savage, Renny and Fleagle were crowding close to the heavy door. The door had a ventilating opening covered with heavy wooden bars spiked in place. They could see what went on in the inner room without difficulty, and could hear perfectly.

Fleagle clutched Doc’s arm. “Damn them! They’ve got everything. The whole thing. We didn’t think they had that much.”

Doc said, “So this is what you had orders not to tell me?”

“Yes. I’m sorry about that,” Fleagle said. “The orders not to tell you came from Washington. We weren’t to tell anybody. Even I have never seen the blueprints. They showed us—showed all of us special agents—a set of the apparatus so we would know it if we saw it.”

In the big room, the small brown man was continuing his preliminary speech, saying, “Getting my hands on this thing was not entirely a stroke of luck. It was, if I may say so about myself, good planning. I have had feelers out for something like this, something particularly good, for a long time. I heard the Stirling concern had something, and I got a job there. Working at the plant, I got hold of all this.”

He paused and grimaced. “Unfortunately, to get it out of the plant, I had to force Stirling, the president of the company, to come along with me and bring the apparatus. We were seen by an employee named Walters. So it became necessary to kill Stirling and Walters.”

He glanced in the direction of Doc’s cell.

“I’m very proud of the unusual method by which the killings were accomplished—so that I was not technically guilty, or so no court of law would believe I was,” he said. He turned back to Renntier and the others. “But I suppose you are not interested in the bloody aspect.”

Renntier, sounding impatient, said, “We’re interested in whether the thing works.”

“You are prepared to demonstrate?”

The small man indicated the boxes.

“Open this one,” he said. He grinned. “Of course, I’m prepared to demonstrate. Why else would I arrange this meeting?”

The gadget which came out of the box was unwieldy, clumsy, and seemed to consist of a balloon—not inflated, but there was a cylinder for its

inflation—about ten feet in diameter, to which dangled a rather compact apparatus of airplane alloys.

“This is one of the free-drifting type,” said the imp. “They can be manufactured—and are, I might add—so as to dangle from barrage balloons as well.”

He picked up a missile which resembled a combination of a bazooka rocket and a model plane. The wings on the thing were negligible, but there was a set of tail fins of both rudder and elevator design.

“The shell, or rocket, or whatever you want to call it,” he said. “The selecting apparatus is contained inside the rocket, together with the explosive charge. The amount of explosive isn’t large, but it does not need to be. However, there is enough to knock out any fighter or bomber in the world.” He gestured. “We will take it outside and—”

Renntier held up a hand. “Wait a minute. Not so fast. Let’s have more of the theory.”

“It is complex—”

“The general theory will do,” Renntier said. “Just outline how it works.”

The brown man shrugged, and the shrug was too elaborate to be natural. It was overdone. He was enjoying himself. He was an actor on a stage.

“The device,” the imp said, “is a self-propelled rocket which will hunt out and destroy any airplane which ventures into its vicinity.”

Renntier said, “To get it up in the air, ready for operation, it is suspended from balloons. Either free-floating small balloons, such as that one, or from regular barrage balloons of the type used to protect cities. That the theory?”

“It isn’t theory. It’s proven—”

“All right, all right. How does it find a plane?”

“What fires the gasoline vapor in the cylinders of a plane engine?” the brown man answered the question with one of his own.

“Electric spark at the points of spark plugs—”

“That’s enough,” said the imp. “Whenever you have electricity, you have a magnetic field around the wires carrying the current. You have doubtless listened to your short-wave radio and heard a car go past. The rattling sound you heard was the hertzian wave effect caused by the spark at the spark-plug gap—”

Renntier said, “Yes, but you can put suppressors on your car and you don’t hear—”

“Wait, this gadget doesn’t pick up a hertzian, or a radio-type wave. My illustration was poor. The device is an incredibly sensitive locator which will

spot a magnetic field, even a fantastically weak one, at distances of up to several hundred feet.”

“That’s a bit farfetched—”

The brown man held up an arm dramatically. “Wait. When I demonstrate, I am going to send up a common flashlight tied to a balloon. The light will be switched on. I will show you that the thing will locate even the tiny field caused by a flashlight current.”

He shook the arm he was holding up.

“The device,” he shouted, “will point at the field, the rocket will discharge itself, and will keep going at the field and hit the flashlight and destroy it.”

Renntier digested that. He was impressed. Then he began to find objections.

“A pursuit plane,” he said, “often goes in excess of four hundred miles an hour.”

“The missile is a rocket,” the brown man said promptly. “No pursuit ship can outrun it.”

“If the plane comes toward the gadget, the rocket will rush to meet it?”

“Certainly.”

“But suppose the plane is merely passing.”

“The director apparatus is in the rocket, not on the balloon, I told you,” said the brown man impatiently. “It’ll correct its course enough to get to the plane. Of course, the rocket only has fuel for a little over a mile, but that is enough.”

Renntier scratched his head. He muttered, “Of course, I understand the theory. You can spot an electric current flowing through a few turns of wire with an instrument as crude as a common compass.”

“Same principle. Just imagine an instrument a few hundred thousand times as sensitive as a compass needle.”

Renntier jumped. He had something.

“What about Diesel engines?” he demanded triumphantly. “They don’t have an ignition system!”

The brown man grinned. “How many fighting plane engines are Diesels?”

Renntier also grinned. “That’s right. Damned near none. And it would take America years to re-tool and produce true Diesel for fighting planes.”

There was silence in the big room. The speechmaking seemed to be at an end.

Renny Renwick, whispering in Doc's ear, said, "Holy cow! They've got hold of something that will revolutionize air warfare!"

Fleagle said, "You guys don't really appreciate it yet! It'll wipe out air warfare. It'll wipe out night bombing. It'll wipe out high-level daylight bombing, because those free balloons can go higher than any plane. It'll change the whole course of the war."

"It is likely to cause the war to last years longer," Doc agreed.

In the other room, the brown imp was saying, "Now, here is an ordinary meteorological balloon, the kind they send up at all air line weather stations, to get wind direction and speed. I'll fasten this small flashlight to it, turn the light on and send it up, for the rocket to locate and destroy."

Renntier said sharply, "I suggest making the light so it doesn't show!"

The imp laughed. "You suspect us. You think we might have something as simple as a photo-electric cell which can only find a light."

"Exactly."

"I'll fix that."

The imp unscrewed the flashlight lens, and tore a piece of dark cloth from the lining of his coat, stuffed it in the reflector, and replaced the lens. Now the flash gave no glimmer of light.

"Satisfied?"

"I'm satisfied," Renntier said.

They went outside, all of them, except two guards who were left in the big room with rifles.

Fleagle was twisting his hands together. "Do you know why they brought us up here? They are going to kill us, that's why!"

"No," Doc said.

"Of course, they are! Why shouldn't they?"

Instead of answering, Doc Savage moved slowly around the room. He rubbed his jaw, and seemed to mumble to himself, but in reality he was speaking the Mayan tongue, addressing Renny. He said to Renny, "I am going to tell a story. It may sound like lying. Play along with me. Do not give it away. When you see what I am driving at, help when you can."

Renny, hearing and understanding, did an acting job of which he was proud. He didn't act as if he had heard a thing.

Doc Savage stopped. He faced Fleagle. "In the submarine, I was alone in the control tower with the commander, Kranich. Remember?"

Fleagle remembered. He nodded. He was puzzled.

Doc said, "You may have noticed that the submarine crew outnumbers the gang who stole the rocket device from Kansas City and brought it here. And you notice that they are all armed. Now, you may know it or not, but submarine men do not ordinarily go around armed."

Fleagle's eyes popped. "That's right."

"It is no accident."

Now Fleagle began growing excited. "What are you trying to tell me?"

Renny caught the general idea.

"So that's what the sub commander told you while you were alone with him in the control room!" Renny said. "Holy cow! I was half expecting something of the sort."

Fleagle whirled on Renny, demanding, "What on earth—"

"Look," Renny said. "They've got American money on that submarine."

"Yes, three million—"

"If it was their own money, they wouldn't mind putting it out," said Renny. "But this is American money. Good money. Now they're not going to turn loose a lot of it when a little high-handed banditry would make it unnecessary."

"Why, the dirty crooks!"

Renny grinned. "Well, what would you expect?"

Fleagle yelled, "But why did they tell Mr. Savage about this?"

Renny had an answer for that. He said, "Shucks, anybody could guess that, I would think. They want to take Doc back to their homeland. He would be quite a feather in their caps, as a prisoner of war. So they wanted to warn Doc, tell him to lie low when they massacre the brown imp and his men. They didn't want Doc to get hurt."

Renny turned elaborately to Doc Savage, asked. "When do you think the rat-killing will start, Doc?"

"Before very long," Doc said. "As soon as the demonstration of the rocket is finished."

Fleagle went and stood at the door. He was getting pale.

Renny joined Doc at the window. The window was boarded up on the outside, and they could see nothing but a slit view of a snowdrift.

After a glance to make sure Fleagle was out of earshot, Renny whispered to Doc, "You could have bowled me over with the breath of a baby!"

"You did not suspect Fleagle?" Doc asked.

"Not enough. Not really, until he made that break about three million on the sub. I almost asked him how he knew there was three million, then it dawned on me. Holy cow!"

Doc said, "You know why I got him to believing the submarine crew were going to wipe out the gadget thieves?"

"You figured to start a civil war."

"That's right. In the course of the war, we might manage to do ourselves some good."

Renny grinned. "We might at that. Say, do you think they really plan to kill us?"

"My guess," Doc said, "is that the gadget thieves plan to kill me and Monk and Ham, although I am not sure about Monk and Ham. They probably plan for you to escape, along with—"

Fleagle began yelling.

"Help!" he squalled through the door. "Come here, quick!"

The brown imp came dashing into the big room. Four of his men came with him. And also the submarine officer, Kranich, and another submarine man, a sailor.

"What's the matter?" the imp demanded.

"They're going to kill you off, so they won't have to give up the money!" Fleagle yelled. "They're going to start right now. Get me out of here!"

The brown imp must have been expecting exactly something of the kind. He produced a small revolver. He wheeled on Kranich. He shot Kranich, putting three bullets in Kranich's forehead and face.

Another man rushed to the door to get Fleagle out.

Renny, squaring, his big fists, muttered, "Well, the festivities are beginning."

XIV

The critical matter now was whether Doc and Renny would get out of the prison room. The door was being unfastened. They were opening it to

get Fleagle out.

The answer came when somebody doused the light in the big room. This was to keep such bullets as might come in from the outside from being too well directed. It was dark in the big room once the light, a gasoline lantern, was extinguished.

Doc got hold of Fleagle immediately. He located Fleagle's jaw with his right hand and hit it with his left fist. Fleagle relaxed completely.

"Here, hold him," Doc said to Renny in Mayan.

The man outside got the door open.

Doc bounded through.

He used an imitation of Fleagle's voice, and luckily he managed a good one, saying, "Shut the door quick! Keep Savage and Renwick in there."

He got away with it in the darkness. He helped the man slam the door. There was a heavy hasp and a padlock, and Doc got hold of the padlock first, made a great rattling as if he was snapping it shut, but left it open. "That's good," he said, still using Fleagle's voice.

So far, only two shots had sounded outdoors. But there was much excited shouting.

Doc tried an imitation of Fritz Renntier's voice, keeping it low and giving it a ventriloquial quality which he hoped would make it seem to come from outdoors.

"Get them, men!" he said, using Renntier's native tongue. "Get them quick! *Machen Sie schnell! Beilen Sie Sich!*"

The small brown imp understood the language, because he began bellowing for his men to get busy.

"Disable the submarine the way we planned!" he screamed.

The man who had opened the door for Fleagle—he'd thought—had gone away now. Doc reopened the door. He said in Mayan, "Renny, keep out of the fight until we get Monk and the others free."

Renny said, "Monk is in the same building! On the other side of the big room."

Finding Monk was no trouble at all. He began kicking the door and howling, "They're in here! Hey, watch out!" He howled at the top of his voice, apparently on the theory that someone might open the door to see who was there, or at least it wouldn't hurt to try.

Doc got close to the door and said, "Shut up!" in Mayan.

There was no padlock on the door, fortunately. But there was a hasp and staple, with a piece of heavy wire in the staple and a tin can with some rocks

in it tied to the end of the wire, an alarm if anyone tampered with the makeshift fastening. Doc got the arrangement undone. He let Monk out.

Monk started away, muttering, "I'll fix these guys! Just stand back and catch the pieces."

Doc collared him. "Where is Monaghan?"

"Next door down," Monk said. "Hey, don't I get in this fight?"

"Go ahead," Doc agreed. "But sort of distribute your talents. We want them to whittle each other down to our size, if possible."

Doc found Norman Monaghan's door. It had the same tin can with rocks alarm arrangement as Monk's. Doc got Monaghan outside.

"Come with me," Doc said. "We've got to get Ham and Fay turned loose."

"What happened?" whispered Monaghan. "I didn't get it."

"The thieves and the Axis were suspicious of each other," Doc said. "So we started them fighting."

"But Fleagle—"

"Fleagle is one of the thieves," Doc said. "He is no more a government agent than you are. He never was."

The big room had about emptied by now. Almost everyone had gone out by the back door, leaving it standing open. They could see the oblong of dark gray that was the outer dusk where the door stood wide.

"One at a time as we go out," Doc said. "Monk, do you know where they have Ham and Anton T. Fay?"

"The shack to the left as you go out, I think," Monk said. "Ham's there, anyhow. I don't know about Fay."

Doc Savage went through the door first. What few men he saw were skulking around among the rocks, trying to get a shot at sailors on the submarine.

On the submarine, they had a deck gun which they were unlimbering and swinging toward the cabins.

In a cabin a machine gun cut loose. It fired at the men manning the submarine deck gun. Its *cak-cak-cak* was loud against the enclosing cliff walls and the overcast sky.

Two sailors on the sub went down from the machine-gun slugs. The others got behind anything made of iron.

Doc went from rock to rock, cautiously. A bullet splashed him with hard snow and ice. It came from the submarine.

He reached the cabin door. It had a padlock which he couldn't possibly open empty-handed. He would be shot at, and probably hit, if he stood up to smash the lock with a stone.

"Ham?" Doc called.

"I'm in here, all right," Ham's voice said from inside the cabin.

"Where is Fay?"

"The next cabin."

The next cabin was where the machine was barking. It was the only remaining building, so it had to be the one which contained Anton T. Fay.

"Get us out of here," Ham added.

Doc selected a rock which looked tough. He threw it with all his strength against the cabin-door lock. The lock didn't smash, but there seemed prospects. Doc got another rock. They began shooting at him from the submarine.

The machine gun in the cabin was firing bursts of five or six shots about thirty seconds apart. There was some desultory revolver and rifle sniping.

Doc slammed another rock against the lock. It smashed.

"Don't come out," he warned. "The first confusion is over, and they have settled down to some businesslike shooting."

"It's dark in here," Ham said. "I thought—"

"There is still light enough to see the outline of objects," Doc told him. "I am coming inside."

Flat on the ground, he kicked the door, and Ham pulled at the door from inside, until it came open.

Ham Brooks and a girl were in the cabin.

Renny Renwick crawled into the cabin after Doc Savage. "Who's this?" Then the girl was close enough to the door for him to see her face.

"Holy cow!" said Renny, indicating the girl. "Dolly!"

Somewhere outside, Monk Mayfair heard the girl's voice, and emitted an astonished grumble.

"Is that a girl in there with Ham?" Monk demanded. "My gosh, what else would you expect?"

Four or five rifle bullets clouted the cabin exterior. They made an ominous *whop-chuck* noise. "Gosh," said Monk. "Those bullets are going clear through the walls. Hear 'em hit coming in and going out?"

Not all of the bullets were penetrating the heavy logs of the cabin, though.

“Dolly!” Renny boomed. “Doc! Doc, this is the Dolly who came to me in that hotel in Kansas City! You know—the one who showed up while I thought I was Palsy Gerson, and said she was Gerson’s girl friend Dolly.”

The girl, sounding amazed, said, “Did you really believe you were Palsy Gerson, Mr. Renwick?”

“I sure thought I was a lifelike imitation,” Renny muttered sheepishly. “I had gone to sleep on the plane from New York, and I woke up in Kansas City, looking different, with different clothes, with everybody hailing me as Palsy Gerson—”

Even more amazed, the girl said, “Don’t you know yet what they did to you?”

“They didn’t take my mind out and put it in another body,” said Renny. “I’ve never quite come around to thinking they could do that.”

“The little brown man gassed you,” said the girl. “He uses anæsthetic. He has to give it to you when you are asleep or knocked out or something.”

“You mean they doped me up and took me off the plane in Kansas City, and to that hotel?” Renny demanded.

“Exactly.”

“They had to buy a lot of people.”

“Not as many as you think. I don’t think over six or seven,” said the girl. “The taxi driver who drove you around until you woke up, then the hotel clerk, the telephone operator, and myself. The men who called on you and beat you up were already members of the gang.”

“Wait a minute!” exploded Renny. “That beating up—it was to get me unconscious again so they could gas me?”

“That’s right.”

Renny rubbed his jaw. “You know, I felt loggy all the time in that hotel. Kind of dizzy and sick. Couldn’t think clear—”

“After-effects of the anæsthetic caused that,” said the girl.

“But what about my face. I didn’t look like myself.”

“Your face was made up. You were too dazed to realize it. Your hands and the skin on your face were whitened, and they put an astringent on your hands to make them feel as if they were shriveling. That was the little imp’s idea. He was very proud of it.”

Renny thought for a moment. “Monaghan!” he called.

“Yes?” said Monaghan cautiously, from the increasing darkness near the door.

“You hear her explain how they flimflammed me into thinking I was somebody named Palsy Gerson?”

“Yes, I heard.” Monaghan sounded remarkably thoughtful, considering the amount of shooting which was going on around about. “You know, I can see where they did the same thing to me.”

“Our being dazed by the anæsthetic accounts for us believing it actually happened,” said Renny.

Monaghan said something violent.

“Why did they pick on me?” he growled. “I didn’t know Stirling or Walters or anybody connected with the Stirling Instrument Co., or anything about this plane-hunting, rocket-bomb thing that all the shooting is over.”

The shooting, by this time, was getting lively. It seemed that the brown imp’s men were gathering around the house where the machine gun was cackling. Like chicks getting close to the comfort of a mother hen.

Another wounded man had joined the groaning and howling, this one on board the submarine. At least two bodies—it was hard to make sure in the murk—had slipped off the submarine into the water. The other men on the submarine were trying to get the deck gun operating.

The girl said, “Mr. Renwick.”

“Yes?”

“I can tell you why they pulled that thing on you.”

“Holy cow!” said Renny. “Why?”

“Because you were coming to help Mr. Monaghan. It was their theory that you would become very confused, and thinking your body had actually murdered Walters, might even flee. If you didn’t run out, and they rather figured you would not, there was the Mexico angle.”

Two bullets came completely through the log walls of the cabin. Chinking from between the logs close to where the bullets had hit showered on the floor.

“Was the imp from Mexico?” Renny demanded.

“Of course not!” said the girl. “That was a false scent. Something to draw your attention in the wrong direction. They intended to send the imp off for Mexico, leaving a plain trail you could follow. Then, when he got down there, he was going to disappear and leave you all confused in a blind alley. By the time you got straightened out, the rocket gadget would be sold.”

“Holy cow!” Renny said. “Then the Mexico trick blew up when Doc got on the brown fellow’s trail earlier than expected.”

“Yes.”

“How did the brown fellow change his body for Anton T. Fay’s body, apparently, on the plane?”

“He didn’t. The brown imp jumped. He had a parachute along in a brief case or small traveling bag which he took into his seat with him.”

Renny whistled. “Then he had a smoke grenade, or chemicals to make smoke, and he filled the plane cabin with smoke. In the confusion, he jumped out.”

“Yes.”

“How,” asked Renny, “did you learn all this?”

“From what I heard them saying,” the girl explained.

“What part do you personally play in this?”

Her voice was bitter. “I was a fool. I’m a half-baked actress. They hired me to pull that Dolly act on you at the hotel. I didn’t know what was behind it then. They told me it was a gag on a fellow. But later I learned differently. So they grabbed me and brought me up here to—I think—make a corpse out of me.”

“How did you learn the thing wasn’t a gag?”

“When the publicity began to get in the newspapers. When you and Mr. Savage were arrested. I saw then it wasn’t a gag. So I went to their headquarters. I went there to find out if they were still there, then I was going to the police. But they weren’t fooled. They grabbed me.”

“Where is Anton T. Fay?”

“In that cabin where the machine gun is shooting.”

The submarine deck gun began to take off on the machine-gun nest.

The first shot tore a hole in the cabin wall. They used a heavy shell, and it knocked the cabin to pieces. The cabin became a pile of logs.

“Get out of here, quick! Before they go to work on the cabin,” Doc Savage said.

That was sound advice, for the next shell lifted the roof off the cabin a few moments after they quit it.

During the roar of the explosion, Monk pointed and yelled something they couldn’t hear. He kept pointing. When it was quieter, he shouted, “Look! Ain’t that Anton T. Fay?”

It was a very scared Anton T. Fay. He was crawling out of the wreckage of the other cabin.

“Fay!” Ham shouted.

Fay looked in their direction. “It’s us,” Ham yelled at him. “Get over here where you’ll be safe!”

Anton T. Fay seemed confused. He ran a few yards in one direction, then turned and ran a few yards the other way.

“Fay!” yelled Monk.

Fay then seemed to get straightened out. He came to them. He had the sense to keep down, so that rifle bullets from the submarine missed him.

Monk said, “It’s a wonder that cannon shell didn’t get you.”

“Yes, it is,” admitted Fay hoarsely. “I was lying on the floor in the back. I guess that’s why it didn’t.”

“Did it kill everybody else in the cabin?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, it sure cut down the odds against the Axis. They’ve about got the gadget thieves licked.”

“They sure have,” said Fay, with great bitterness. “Now they will get us, probably.”

Monk muttered, “I think they can knock the devil out of the planes with that cannon. That’ll fix us up even if they don’t catch us. Well freeze up in this country.”

Anton T. Fay said, “No, they’re going to blow up the submarine.”

“Eh?”

“I heard them talking. They mined the spot where the submarine is lying, before it came in. It was the place the sub was sure to tie up. So they mined it—they just sent a man to set off the blast. That is, they sent him at the start of the fracas, and he should be—”

The submarine didn’t exactly jump out of the water. But it gave a considerable heave, and its fine streamlined shape was changed.

Surprisingly, the blast seemed worse than the explosion of a depth bomb of the ash-can type. Possibly it was the solid-rock floor of the bay under the submarine. But the column of water and spray went fully two hundred feet in the air.

Besides losing its shape, the submarine was actually heaved around until the stern was high aground.

The forepart of the submarine speedily sank. A few sailors swam around in the water.

Doc Savage spoke decisively.

“Now we take a hand,” he said. “I think they are about whittled down to size.”

They scattered to start guerrilla operations.

Doc Savage and Monk and Anton T. Fay chanced to crawl the same direction together. They discovered, within about a hundred feet, a man sitting behind a rock. The man was tinkering with something.

Doc used, as closely as he could manage, an imitation of the brown imp’s voice, asking, “What’s your trouble?”

“This damned machine gun,” the man said. “It won’t work.”

Monk lunged in from the other side, fell on the man, and clubbed the senses out of him.

After he had examined the machine gun, Monk laughed. “He just didn’t know how to run it,” Monk said. “There’s nothing wrong with it.”

Down on the beach, the submarine sailors were yelling that they would surrender. Some shouted in English, others in their own tongue. They seemed concerned about whether they were going to be slaughtered, anyway.

Renny’s great voice boomed about the cove.

“Doc!” he shouted.

“Yes?”

“Heck, there’s only two of the brown imp’s gang able to kick. We’ve got them.”

Doc Savage stood up and fired a short burst from the machine gun, aiming at the harbor water. Then he roared for the submarine men to get together, throw away their weapons, and they would be treated as prisoners of war. The sailors were yelling that they agreed before he finished speaking.

“That,” said Monk, “winds it up.”

“Not quite,” Doc said.

It took them a remarkably short time—not more than ten minutes and it seemed less—to corner all the prisoners. Doc herded them all together, gadget thieves and submarine men, in the light from the big cabin, which had caught fire and was blazing in the wind. They also collected the wounded. The fight seemed to be pretty much out of everybody. The brown imp was among the dead, as was Fleagle, the fake secret agent. The gadget it was all about, the plane-hunting rocket, they found thoroughly smashed

where it had been set up beside the big cabin. Ham located the microfilms of the plans and specifications after some searching.

Monk cornered Doc Savage.

“What did you mean—not quite?” he asked.

Doc called the others. All of them, Monaghan, Anton T. Fay, Ham, Renny, the girl—she said her name was really Faye Powell—gathered close.

Doc said, so all could hear, “The affair is not quite as thoroughly wound up as it might appear.”

Monaghan said, “You bet it’s not. Nobody has explained why I was dragged into it in the first place.”

“That is what I mean,” Doc agreed.

There was a silence, which Monaghan broke in a voice suddenly frightened. “Mr. Savage, I assure you I’m innocent—”

Doc said, “How does this sound to you, Monaghan: You were framed to make you think your body had killed L. W. C. Stirling, the framing job being done by somebody who hated you.”

“I’ve wondered who—”

“You have mentioned,” said Doc, “that another man was in love with the girl you married. In other words, you took the girl away from this other fellow. No other thing would be as likely to make a certain type of man hate you as much.”

Monaghan’s mouth fell open.

“As for the so-called change of bodies in the plane headed for Mexico,” Doc continued, “it couldn’t have happened the way it was claimed. An extra passenger could have gotten aboard the plane. But he certainly walked aboard under his own power. The pilot and co-pilot would have known, otherwise, and the stewardess. But the stewardess might have been bribed to say that that extra passenger hadn’t gotten aboard. She did say that, after I found Anton T. Fay sitting in the brown imp’s seat. Was she bribed? What about it, Fay.”

There was a silence.

“What?” asked Anton T. Fay hoarsely.

“Did you bribe the plane stewardess to say you hadn’t come aboard?”

The silence came again. Finally Monk began mumbling, as if thinking aloud, about it being a slick piece of business at that, because it had put Anton T. Fay in contact, and in more or less close association with them, so that he had known what moves they would make against him, and at least had been able to arrange the seizure of Monk, Ham and Monaghan, [and] the

removal from jail of Doc Savage and Renny Renwick. Sort of hare-brained, muttered Monk, but then it had gotten them all up here in the arctic where they could have been murdered at leisure.

Doc asked, "What about that, Fay? Did you bribe the plane stewardess?"

Fay jumped for the girl. Evidently he had some wild idea about using her for a shield while he tried to make a break.

She hit him. She didn't seem to hit him very hard. But Fay threw up his arms loosely and his legs became rubbery. The girl stepped aside, and Fay ran past her foolishly—until he piled up on the ground.

"I had a rock," she said.

They got the United States currency out of the submarine without much trouble. It was in a forward compartment, one which was only half flooded. The Axis had evidently been prepared to pay more, for there was about four million in paper money. Also there was nearly another million neatly done in packages of five to fifty thousand. Ham surmised, "They must have intended to distribute that to secret agents in America, or something." He grinned. "Boy, this will buy a nice lot of bonds."

After that, there was nothing much to do but stand around and wait on Renny. Renny had taken off in one of the planes to notify the navy, who would, doubtless, send in large flying boats for the prisoners.

Monk found something to do with his spare time.

He made sheep eyes at the girl.

"I think I could make her very happy," he told Ham, who was getting irritated. The idea of Monk making any progress with a pretty girl always irritated Ham.

Ham examined Monk's remarkably homely face.

"At least she'd always have something to laugh at," Ham decided.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *One-Eyed Mystic* by Lester Dent (as Kenneth Robeson)]