THE THREE DEVILS

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. THE DEVIL'S TOWN

THE plane carrying Doc Savage and four of his aides arrived at Mock Lake, which was about two hundred miles northwest of Vancouver, Canada, at two o'clock in the spring afternoon.

The skulker on the lake shore read the numbers on the approaching plane through binoculars. He hastily consulted a number contained in the text of a radiogram he dug out of a pocket, thereby assuring himself the plane was Doc Savage's.

The hiding skulker, a thin man with wheat-colored hair, was as nervous as a cat in a tree. He took a bottle out of a pocket; about the tenth time in the last hour he'd done that. He looked at the bottle—the liquid in it resembled thin molasses—shuddered, then put the bottle back.

Concealing himself more thoroughly, the skulker waited.

With roars of her two big motors, the amphibian slid over the lake surface and gently planted her nose on the shore.

A giant man of bronze, Doc Savage, climbed out on the wing and looked at the handful of rugged buildings that was the community of Mock Lake.

“There is a restaurant here,” he told those in the plane.

“Darn good thing,” said a homely man, hastily scrambling out of the cabin. “I'm hungry enough to eat a tree, like a beaver.”

Five men disembarked from the plane. In addition to Doc Savage, there were four of his aides, a group of five specialists who had been associated for a long time.

They were obviously tired from traveling, but there were evidences of tension, of subdued excitement. Such signs as the way they looked first at Mock Lake, at such people as were in sight. The normal reaction of a first-time visitor would be to gape at the marvelous scenery, rather than the drab town.

Doc warned quietly, “Monk, your gun is bulging your coat. And don't act as if you expected a snake behind every bush. Show some interest in the scenery.”

“When I expect trouble,” Monk muttered, “I always look like I expected trouble. I can't help it.”

“At least point at the mountains, and say, 'Oh!' and Ah!',” Doc suggested.

Obediently, Monk turned slowly, staring at the surrounding country. “Whew! It *is* impressive, at that.”

Mock Lake itself, the lake and not the town, was an azure jewel in a setting of mighty, primeval timberland and breathlessly upthrust mountains. Snow crested most of the mountains with white dunce caps which seemed to emphasize their inscrutable silence. The glistening argyle whiteness of the snow, the intense emerald green of the timberland, the almost abnormal blueness of the lake, made a play of color that was something nearly fabulous.

When they had looked at the primitive vastness for a while, it impressed Doc Savage and the other four the way it always impressed everyone. William Harper Littlejohn, the archaeologist and geologist, a man whose profession touched time and the past, unthinkingly removed his hat.

“Supermalagorgeous,” he muttered.

They walked slowly up the short distance from the lake shore toward the settlement of Mock Lake.

The skulker watched them. He was sitting behind a big spruce. Cold sweat stood out on his face.

The skulker had cocked the bolt-action hunting rifle he was holding.

DOC SAVAGE'S eyes, an unusual flake gold color, probed and searched everywhere as the party walked. But his manner was casual enough, outwardly.

On the lake shore was a rickety dock. Discarded on the beach, lay a couple of rotting boats, two shiny canoes rested, bottoms up, on pole-horses. Near the canoes was a shed; on the platform in front were stacked about a hundred five-gallon gasoline cans labelled as containing aviation gas.

Doc Savage's voice was grim, as he said, “This is a subdued welcome we are getting.”

Renny Renwick, the engineer, moved his big fists uneasily.

“Holy cow! Not a soul has showed himself,” he rumbled.

The silence hit all of them now. Because of the excitement of arriving, they hadn't noticed it before.

Monk Mayfair, the chemist, indicated a wisp of blue curling from a chimney.

“There's smoke from a house,” he said. “Somebody is home, anyway.”

“This looks strange,” Doc said quietly. “Come on. Keep your eyes open.”

Mock Lake, the settlement, was a town of one street and one street only. The street was dried mud, with ruts in it two feet deep. Ruts, anyone could see, made by heavy machinery, by bulldozers, half-track trucks and giant cat tractors. None of the machinery, it was evident, had gone through recently.

Every structure in town was made of logs or rough lumber. There were a few business buildings first, then the houses. A good baseball pitcher could nearly have thrown a ball from one end of town to the other. And almost anyone could have thrown one across town.

Their feet made a rumble on the board sidewalk when they reached it. There was a boardwalk on each side of the weirdly rutted street.

They came to a building with the inevitable sign that said, TRADING POST.

They stopped. The ending of the noise of their feet on the wooden walk jarred them. It was as if they were in a tomb. A somehow frightening tomb, even if it was full of diamond-like sunlight and green forest and blue lake and mountains spear-pointed with snow. The bright wildness of the surroundings made the stillness more threatening.

“What the devil!” Monk muttered. “Why is everybody hiding?”

Monk's voice unconsciously became big when he was excited, although his normal tone was a kiddish squeak. His words seemed to echo in the silence.

A chill came over their nerves. This was strange. It was weird. This was the Canadian timber country, the land of loneliness, of quick friendship, eager hospitality. A stranger entering Mock Lake should have been surrounded in a moment by friendly, lonely local people.

Renny, the greatest voice among them, gave a great bellow.

“Hey, town!” he shouted. “Where is everybody?”

His mighty shout whooped through the town, rolled as a matter of fact for a mile into the surrounding death-still timber.

The skulker's nerves were upset by the yell. He began to shake, and he trembled until he had to put down the cocked rifle. He quaked as if he had the ague, but it wasn't the ague—it was fear, plain wild limitless fear that was tying the skulker's guts in knots.

RENNY'S thunder brought no response. It didn't even scare up birds from the surrounding woods, and to Doc Savage that was very strange.

Suddenly Doc went up the steps of the building that was the trading post.

“Hello, inside!” He pounded on the door.

There was no answer. No action, either, except that the door swung open. It was neither latched nor locked.

Doc called, “Hello, inside!” again, then entered.

He stood in the middle of one great room, looking at the merchandise on shelves, counters, hanging from

the ceiling. Mackinaws and corduroys and flannel underwear. Blankets and tarps, snowshoes and steel-traps. Three canoes, paddles, fish spears. Axes, saws, pike-pole heads, calked shoes. Typical trading-post stuff for this country—and not a soul in sight.

Doc went to a door in the rear. It gave into living quarters, one room for cooking, the other for sleeping, and both were empty. He put a hand on the cookstove. It seemed warm.

“Ham!” Doc said.

“Yes?” said a lean-waisted man who looked dandified because he wore a Fifth Avenue sportsman's idea of what a man going into the woods should wear.

“Look for guns,” Doc said.

Ham Brooks, who was a lawyer by specialty, began hunting for firearms. For a fellow who looked like a city slicker, he was remarkably practical.

A moment later, he straightened behind a counter. “What do you think of this, Doc?”

Ham meant the wrappings, oiled paper and labels, on the floor behind a counter.

“Wrappings off the new rifles they had in stock,” Ham said. “All the cartridges are gone, too.”

Wooden cartridge boxes were open and empty on the floor back of the counter. Doc examined them. Shotgun shells, pistol ammunition. Most of the rifle ammunition had been 30-30, the calibre almost standard in the Canadian woods, but there were a few 30-06.

Doc went outdoors.

“Search the houses,” he said grimly.

His four associates did the job rapidly, first knocking on doors, then opening them, or if the doors were locked, raising windows. In this country, it was a rare thing to lock a house.

“Not a soul anywhere,” reported Johnny Littlejohn, the tall and gaunt archaeologist-geologist, “I'll be superamalgamated!”

“Doc!” Monk shouted excitedly.

Monk was yelling from the door of the house with the chimney from which smoke came. Doc went over. Monk led him into the kitchen.

“They sure left in a hurry,” Monk said, and pointed.

The last coals of a fire were in the stove. On the stove was a frying pan containing four fish, trout, which had overcooked brown and hard. There was coffee on the stove, and beans in a kettle.

Monk opened the oven door. “Even biscuits in the oven.” The biscuits were overcooked as black as chunks of coal.

“How about firearms in the houses?” Doc asked.

There hadn't been a gun anywhere, they said.

WEIRD? There was no question about it. At first it hadn't really hit them, because they'd just gotten off the plane after a non-stop flight from New York, and people after a long trip are more or less excited and do not grasp things as deeply. Maybe that was it. Or maybe they'd just been expecting trouble, but certainly nothing mysterious like this, and it was slow soaking in.

But now it was getting to them. A whole town deserted as strangely as this was hair-ending. Ham Brooks kept moving his orator's mouth around as if getting ready to make a speech, the way he did when he was nervous. Renny Renwick, the engineer, had his fist blocked out. Renny's fists were enormous—he couldn't get them into half-gallon pails—and the way they acted was the barometer of his feelings. When he was worried, they got big and hard. They were hard now.

Johnny Littlejohn crossed the street, muttering that he'd passed up one locked room into which he hadn't looked, but now he might as well investigate that, too.

Doc and the others stood there listening, hearing nothing anywhere, no kind of life. Not even birds. There should have been loons crying over the lake. The stillness was ghoulish, a quiet that was mystery and menace, inexplicable and frightening.

“Yeo-o-o-w!” Johnny Littlejohn's voice squalled. And Johnny burst out of the building into which he'd gone. “Come here and look!”

Johnny, who didn't astonish easily, sounded so appalled that Doc and the others just stood stock still and looked at each other.

“I never heard Johnny sound like that before,” Monk muttered.

“Come here, darn it!” Johnny shouted. “Hurry up!”

That jarred them loose from astonishment. They ran toward the building and Johnny. A sign over the building said:

HURRAH LUMBER AND PULP

COMPANY

They followed Johnny into the building.

The skulker watched them go, from where he crouched behind the tortured spruce tree. So he stood up. He looked at his rifle, and went though torture about whether to take it or leave it. Finally he took it.

He got the bottle of syrupy looking stuff out of a pocket. Obviously he was afraid of the bottle. He began creeping forward keeping hidden, biting his teeth together to stop their chattering.

DOC SAVAGE stared at the smashed mess that was the radio station. One leg was off the apparatus table, transmitter and receiver were on the floor in pieces, hopelessly mangled. The generator was torn loose, the connecting wires broken. Cartons containing spare transmitter tubes had been squashed.

Nor was—strangely—the damage alone to the radio apparatus. The furniture was broken, a chair in bits. A bearskin rug had been on the floor, and this had received particular fury, being literally ripped to shreds.

Grooves, deep splinter-edged gullies, were scraped all about without sense or plan. There was even a set

of them on the ceiling.

Monk stared at the grooves.

“What would make scratches like that?” he muttered uneasily.

Ham picked up a bear-paw which had been torn off the particularly damaged rug piece. He distended the claws on the paw, and compared them to the grooves. There was the same number of grooves as claws on the paw—but the grooves were much wider, much deeper. That paw could never have made them.

“Holy cow!” Renny rumbled. “What you trying to do, Ham? Scare us?”

“He's being silly,” Monk suggested.

“I merely noticed the likeness,” Ham said.

Monk said, “The bear hasn't been made that would claw such a mark.”

“A Kodiak might,” Ham said.

“Yeah? Bosh! Kodiaks are big, I've heard, but not that big.”

“You fellows talking about a Kodiak bear?” Renny asked.

Ham nodded. “They're the largest meat-eating animal in the world, I think.”

Renny turned to Doc Savage. “Doc, what about it? Could a Kodiak bear make such a mark?”

Doc Savage spanned the grooves they were arguing about, discovering his two outstretched hands wouldn't cover them.

“Not,” he said, “unless the bear was considerably bigger than any Kodiak on record.”

Monk snorted loudly.

“The bear is entirely too big!” he said. “It's getting silly.”

Ham complained, “I didn't say it was a bear. I just pointed out the resemblance.”

Renny, disturbed, took to prowling the room, giving attention to the smashed radio. “Still speaking of bears, notice how the set is wrecked. It's smashed and clawed. Not chopped or hammered, the way it would be if a man wrecked it.”

“Oh, goony feathers!” Monk complained.

Irritated, Ham demanded, “Then where did everybody in town go?”

“Go? Go?” Monk shouted. “What's a bear got to do with where they went?”

“I'm just asking you.”

“I don't know, dang you.”

“Well, it's a mystery.”

“Maybe this mythical bear ate everybody,” Monk said violently. “Say, who's kidding who, anyway? You guys ain't for a minute serious about this super-bear, I hope?”

No one said anything for a while.

Finally Renny laid a finger in a groove in a solid birch log.

“Something

scratches a heck of a track, is all I've got to say,” the big-fisted engineer rumbled.

Doc Savage had been hunting through the wreckage. Now he straightened, his hands full of wrinkled papers. “This seems to be the sent-message file,” he said.

Doc divided the messages among his aides.

“Look through them and see if you can find a copy of the radio message which called us up here,” he said.

Chapter II. DEATH RODE HIGH

THE radiogram, printed neatly in pencil, was in Ham's stack.

It said:

DOC SAVAGE

NEW YORK

PLEASE TELL HAM BROOKS THAT AUNT JEMIMA FLAPPED HER WINGS AND ASK HIM WHAT IT MEANS THEN FOR GOD'S SAKE ACT QUICK IMPERATIVE YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW IMPORTANT MEET YOU MOCK LAKE UTMOST SECRECY

CARL JOHN GRUNOW

Doc Savage produced the radiogram they had received in New York and it was identical except that a radio operator had spelled imperative with an “I” where there should be an “A.”

Monk indicated the file copy. “Did this Carl John Grunow write that excited outburst, Ham?”

“I'm not sure.”

“Well, if you aren't who can be? He's your friend.”

“Don't start getting fresh, you homely missing link,” Ham said. “The file copy is printed. Even the signature is printed. How can you be sure. But wait, let me think.”

Ham scowled thoughtfully at the message for a while.

“Come to think of it, Carl John Grunow studied mechanical drawing before he came to attend Harvard University,” he said thoughtfully. “He studied under an old uncle, and the uncle used a kind of backhand lettering. Carl John got the same habit of lettering.” Ham tapped the radiogram file copy. “Notice this lettering. Backhanded a little. And whoever printed it had obviously had mechanical-drawing lettering. I would say indications are that Carl John Grunow wrote it. And he was excited, as the text of the message shows.”

Doc Savage asked, “Ham, how well did you know Carl John Grunow?”

“Oh, we roomed together at Harvard.” Ham's voice had the timber of pride that came into it whenever he spoke of Harvard, the law school of which considered him its most distinguished product. “We were very close friends. Unfortunately, I haven't seen Carl John for about five years.”

“Why the break in association?”

“That? It was natural. Carl John became an engineer, specializing in lumber and pulp. I'm a lawyer. Carl John went where the lumber and pulp business was, Canada. I stayed in New York.”

“I have asked this before”—Doc Savage's voice was earnest—“but I'll ask it again: Are you sure that cryptic reference in the message about Aunt Jemima meant that Carl John Grunow needed help badly?”

Ham's answer was instant.

“Positive!” He nodded violently. “The incident he is referring to happened at college. As a prank, we were dropping paper sacks of pancake flour out of a second-story window on the heads of some of the fellows. A practical joke. Well, we dropped one and it lit on the head of the dean himself. I dropped the flour, rather. But the dean caught Carl John and accused him of it. Carl John was innocent, but he got excited, and he looked at me, and for some reason, he said, 'Aunt Jemima flapped her wings.' I think he said Aunt Jemima because that was the brand of flour we were using, and the dean was waving his arms until it looked like he was flapping his wings. Anyway, as soon as Carl said that, I came to his rescue and confessed I was guilty.”

Monk said, “I'll bet that's the only time in your life you admitted being guilty of anything.”

Ignoring Monk, Ham finished, “Always after that, when either Carl John or I was in trouble, the one in difficulties would say, 'Aunt Jemima flapped her wings,' and that was the signal that he needed help.”

“Kid stuff,” Monk said.

Ham shook his file-copy of the radiogram angrily. “This isn't kid stuff! This is infernally serious!”

“Why did this Carl John want help?”

“We don't know that!” Ham yelled. “And you blamed well know we don't know why!”

Doc Savage looked somewhat pained. “I wish we could be spared the dubious pleasure of hearing a Monk and Ham quarrel for as long as an hour, sometime.”

“He irritates me!” Ham shouted.

“I irritate you!” Monk howled. “You're no soothing-syrup to me, dang it!”

Ham flourished both arms. He screamed, “Why do you think all these people disappeared? Why do you think the radio station is smashed? Hasn't it occurred it could be part of the trouble Carl John Grunow radioed about, you drumhead?”

THE skulker had reached the plane. He came to it through the water, crawling, just his head out, and the fact that he crawled on knees and one hand—he used the other hand to hold the bottle aloft—made him awkward.

He knew about planes. He didn't waste time. He picked the critical spots. First, where the wings were joined to the fuselage. Not just the general joint. He got inside, to the main fastenings. He poured the stuff from the bottle carefully.

The liquid sizzled. It also smoked a little, which worried the skulker.

He put more of the acid on the critical control cables. His job was through. In another hour, the plane would literally fall to pieces.

The skulker eased back into the water. Then, alarmed, he looked at the muddy trail he had made while crawling along the shallow water just offshore.

Instead of going back the way he had come, he went on down the shore.

"Beaver," he muttered, meaning he was sure they would think, if they saw the roiled trail, that a beaver had gone past dragging a stick that had stirred up the mud.

The skulker hauled himself up on the shore, and eased into the undergrowth.

DOC SAVAGE, coming down to the plane with his men, said, "Renny, you guard the plane."

"Sure," Renny agreed. He added knowingly, "So you figure we've run smack-dab into that trouble Carl John Grunow radioed us about?"

"Too much looks strange," Doc admitted. "Monk, you and Ham circle the town to the right. Johnny and I will go around from the left. Look for tracks, any kind of tracks, that tell a story."

Monk grinned, said, "I hope I don't meet that bear, boy howdy!"

"You potface!" Ham told him. "You still think this is all a false alarm!"

"Shucks, maybe there was an accident in the woods and everybody rushed out to help. It could be that simple, you know."

"Yes, and maybe somebody's tomcat scratched up the radio station and wrecked it!"

Doc Savage was watching the water. His intent manner got the attention of the others, and they saw the muddy trail which Doc Savage had discovered.

"Beaver," Monk said, airily. "They swim around dragging sticks in this country."

"Beaver!" Doc said, so loudly they jumped. "Of course beavers swim and drag sticks."

Monk and Ham got going on their right-hand arc around the village. They were swapping more insults, as a matter of habit. Nobody who knew them could recall their having exchanged a civil word, except by accident.

Johnny muttered, "When we start Monk and Ham off together, I always wonder if they're going to do anything except argue."

"They manage to do rather well, usually," Doc said.

"I know it," Johnny complained. "That's what always surprises me."

Doc and Johnny started off together, and Johnny was immediately puzzled to note that Doc was following the lake shore instead of starting to half-circle the town. He was further mystified when Doc sidled into a bush and stopped.

“You go on around the town,” Doc said. “Make enough noise for two people. Speak occasionally, then answer yourself, imitating my voice.”

“You mean make it sound like two of us?”

“Yes.”

“I don't get it!”

“That was no beaver.”

“No!”

“Beavers invariably swim in their runways when they are in weedy shallow water. This one ignored everything that even looked like a runway.”

THE skulker tried to grin. It didn't jell. He was not made any easier of mind by his inability to be nonchalant, and he nervously wrung out his shirt and put it back on. He'd previously wrung out his trousers and emptied the water from his shoes.

The reason he should be able to grin, he was telling himself, was that he had heard Doc Savage say loudly, “Beaver!” If Doc Savage said beaver, that meant he was fooled. If he was fooled, the skulker was safe. It was therefore something to grin about. But the skulker's face felt ice-coated when he tried to grin and it wasn't because the water had been cold. The lake had been cold, but not that cold.

The man knew the stiffness on his face was fear. No one could be as scared as he was, and not know it. And like all men when they are cravenly afraid, and alone, he was not ashamed of it. Had there been others around, he would have been ashamed of their seeing he was scared. As it was, he wasn't ashamed, only busy trying to think up mental devices to make himself less scared. He liked to think of himself as the mental type.

His rifle. He needed his rifle, which he had left behind when he entered the water. A gun in his hand was often the same thing as courage.

He circled, drew near the log against which he had leaned the rifle. Then a voice spoke to him.

“Hello, beaver,” the voice said.

The skulker was so startled his arms and legs flew out straight and he slapped down on his face, foolishly. He rolled over on his back quickly.

“Oh God!” he said.

He tried to get away. For a man stretched out on the ground, he made a fast start.

Doc Savage landed on him, yanked his shirt over his head, searched him, got a knife, a waterlogged pistol, binoculars, all seemingly with one movement.

“Who are you?” Doc asked.

The man clawed his shirt down from over his face and eyes. He just showed his teeth mutely. His lips shook.

“Come over to the plane with me, beaver,” Doc said.

The man lay there stubbornly. Doc grasped him by an arm and began hauling him over the rocks and through the brush. It is a fact that a man being dragged briskly by one arm can do very little about it.

“Want to walk, beaver?” Doc asked.

The man said nothing, but he got to his feet and walked.

Renny Renwick did not get off the nose of the plane where he was sitting, but he was surprised.

“Holy cow, what have you got there?” he asked.

“Something that hasn't learned to talk yet.”

“Eh?”

“The beaver.”

“Oh!”

“Beavers have pathways through shallow, weedy water, the same as muskrats. Except this one, who didn't.”

“Holy cow!”

Doc said, “See why he visited the plane, Renny.”

Renny dived into the plane, and in a moment several “Holy cows!” and other words more violent came out of the ship. Renny poked out his head, blowing sulphur.

“The stinker!” Renny roared. “He put some kind of acid on the controls!”

Suddenly Renny leaped overboard and washed his hands vigorously in the lake. “I got some of the blasted stuff on my hands!”

“How far gone are the controls?”

Renny wrenched off his shirt, soaked it, and climbed back aboard. “I'll see what I can do.”

He scrubbed around vigorously for a while. The look on his face was unpleasant when he reappeared.

“Afraid the plane is kibosh,” he said. “The controls might hold now. But I wouldn't trust this ship in the air without a complete take-down and overhaul. No telling where else he put that acid.”

“Then we are stranded here,” Doc said.

“Oh, we can use the plane radio—wait a minute!” Renny dived back into the plane. More angry “Holy cows!” exploded inside. “The beaver put the acid into the radio!” he yelled. And Renny came piling out of the plane, hit the shore, and grabbed the skulker by the throat.

The skulker began to scream, with fear of death in his shrieking. The man, in fact, suddenly came loose from his nerves. He shook and writhed and screeched and slavered and moaned.

Renny tried to quiet the man with no success. Then Renny glanced up at Doc, and muttered uncomfortably, “Boy, he's really scared, isn't he? I wonder what would scare a man like that.”

Now they heard the plane coming.

THE plane was a slick fine job. It was pre-war, a private ship, a sport craft. There wasn't anything cheap about it, because the plane belonged to the same class in planes that nine-thousand-dollar roadsters belong to in cars. She was, as a plane, a fine old blade.

One man flew her.

He wasn't a fine old blade. Just fine and old, with the blade part omitted, or better, changed to something else. Changed to—blacksmith's hammer, would be as good as anything.

He was tall and wide and looked as if he was made of hickory knots. He had a brush patch of white hair on which sat a red stocking cap which no one, no one at all, could ever remember having seen him remove. His moustaches were white, and genuine handlebars. You could have used them on a bicycle.

His corduroys went *whurrup-whurrup* as he strode up to Doc Savage and Renny.

“Strangers, eh?”

He looked them over again.

“My name's Hurrah Stevens,” he said.

He examined the shivering, twitching, moaning prisoner.

“What's that guy got a bad attack of?” he asked.

Renny, forming a snap-liking for the blunt old gaffer, said. “It could be an attack of conscience, but I doubt it.”

“He do something to you?”

“Just missed.”

“Humph! I like for 'em to always just miss me, too,” said Hurrah Stevens.

“He poured some acid in just the right places in our plane.”

“Right places?”

“So the controls would break and the wings fall off.”

“My, my,” said Hurrah Stevens. “That was right snaky of him, wasn't it?”

Hurrah then walked around and around the skulker, staring at the man the way a rooster would look at a suspicious bug. He got out a plug of tobacco that looked like a chip off a mahogany log that had been dipped in vitriol, and bit off a chunk.

“This a private row?” he asked.

“You can get into it the same way we did if you want to,” Renny told him.

“How was that?”

“It just happened to us.”

“Oh.”

Renny indicated the skulker. “Know him?”

Hurrah Stevens shrugged. “I got about twenty thousand men working fur me, scattered to hell and gone from Vancouver to the Klondike.”

“Twenty thousand!” Renny was astonished.

“You never heard of me, eh?”

Renny frowned, then jerked a thumb over his shoulder. “In town, on the radio station, there's a sign that says Hurrah Lumber and Pulp Company.”

“That's my ostrich,” said Hurrah Stevens. “Biggest damn lumber and pulp business in Canada and maybe the world. Built it all myself, beginning with the first chip. Only took me ten years.”

“Pretty good,” Renny admitted.

“Durn right it's good. Concern worth twenty million dollars today.”

“And you began with the first chip,” said Renny.

Hurrah Stevens grinned. “The first chip, and thirty million dollars I made out of the gold mining business before that.”

“Oh, you've lost ten million.”

“That's all. But I'm makin' her back fast. Pulp is vital in this war, you know.”

Renny indicated the shaking, slavering captive. “Now do you know him?”

“I don't forget a face, but it's got to be standing on its two feet.” Hurrah Stevens suddenly kicked the skulker. It was no gentle kick. “Get up, you snivelin', drivelin' moccasin louse. Let's look at the thing you put your food in.”

The man stood up. He didn't lose time.

“By crackey, I remember him,” said Hurrah Stevens. “Name's O'Toole. How a good Irish name got tied on to him, I don't know. Slippery O'Toole. The Slippery part was gived him by them that knowed him, I suppose.”

“Good reputation?”

“Hell, I don't know nothin about his reputation, except I fired his pants off a job about a year ago.”

“Why did you fire him?”

“Sheriff caught him sellin' coke to the lumberjacks.”

“You mean coke like at a soda fountain—”

“I mean coke like on a hop bush,” said Hurrah Stevens distastefully.

Suddenly there was a yelling in the distance, Monk Mayfair came jumping through the woods, yelling, “Doc! Doc! Doc!”

Renny rumbled sourly, “Either Ham gave him a hotfoot, or he's found something unusual.”

“Doc!” Monk yelled. “My God! That bear, that *bear!”*

“What bear?”

“The one that tore up the radio station! We found his tracks! They're as big as graves! I tell you it's a bear to end all bears!”

Chapter III. BEAR!

MONK arrived wild-eyed and out of breath. His excitement, added to the fact that his apish looks were unusual to begin with, made him a remarkable figure.

“Bear tracks!” he gasped. “As big as bath tubs!”

“Where?” Renny demanded.

Monk jerked a thumb over his shoulder. “Back there, leading out of town.”

“Bath tubs, eh? Graves, eh?”

“Dang it, you won't think I'm crazy when you see the tracks. Ham is standing there looking at them, his eyes popping out practically arm's length.”

Doc Savage had been watching Hurrah Stevens' face. He was surprised at the amount of emotion that was twisting the tobacco-chewing old man's features.

“What is the matter with *you*, Stevens?” Doc asked.

The white moustache handlebars twitched. “I'll bet you it's Black Tuesday. Wait, what day of the week is this?”

“Monday.”

“That's bad.”

“What you're saying isn't making much sense,” Doc said.

“Yeah, and it'll make less, no doubt,” Hurrah Stevens muttered. “I want to take a look at these tracks.”

Renny Renwick picked up the skulker by the scruff of the neck and boosted him along, and they went to see the tracks. Monk wanted to know who the prisoner was. Renny told him.

“Ruined our plane!” Monk yelled. “Why'd he do that?”

“As soon as I get time to break a couple of his arms, we're going to find out,” Renny said.

Ham's eyes weren't hanging out arm's length. The bear-tracks weren't as big as bathtubs. Nevertheless

no one felt that Monk had exaggerated.

Doc Savage looked at the bear-tracks, and his reaction was involuntary. “No bear could have made footprints that large!”

The bear-tracks, which certainly looked as if they had been made by a bear, except for their unearthly size, led off through the woods.

The tracks of many men and a few women, Doc noticed, seemed to have followed the footprints of the bear through the wilderness.

Renny, indicating the man-tracks which had followed the bear-tracks, said, “That thing must be a Pied Piper among bears!”

“Old Black Tuesday!” Hurrah Stevens exploded.

Doc frowned at him. “You mean there *is* such an animal?”

Hurrah pointed at the prints. “What would you say?”

“That it was impossible,” Doc replied instantly.

“Impossible—that's the exact word.”

“What do you mean?”

Hurrah waved toward town. “Where is everybody? Whenever a plane lands at Mock Lake, everybody in town tears down to look at it and get the late news.”

“The town is strangely empty.”

“Strangely?”

Doc told him about the fires still in stoves, the food left cooking, the fact that every gun was missing together with all the ammunition.

“That's Black Tuesday,” Hurrah Stevens said.

The old fellow looked frightened.

A STILLNESS held them, a stillness of strangeness. The skulker had sagged to his knees when Renny released his collar, and he now stopped sniveling and was silent, so still that Doc looked at him sharply to learn whether he was having some kind of an attack. But the man was just pale, sweating, frightened; his lips were dry and trembling.

The stillness was in the woods, the sky, the town, in the very earth itself, and in the dark corners of their minds more than anywhere.

Suddenly the things did not seem ridiculous, and that made it frightening. The death-pale skulker, the obvious fear on old Hurrah Stevens' face, the strangeness and the mystery and the implausibility of the tracks, the wrecked radio station, was an ominous combination. And in the back of Doc's mind, like tinkling of a knife blade, was the wild urgency in Carl John Grunow's radiogram calling for help.

“Black Tuesday,” Hurrah Stevens muttered. “This isn't the first time I've seen his infernal tracks.”

Doc said, “The radio station has been mysteriously smashed.”

“What do you mean?”

“Everything crushed or mangled as if by paws. And deep scratches in the floor and walls.”

The old man's face tightened visibly. “That's about what would be expected.”

“You're not surprised?”

“No.”

Doc Savage obviously had other questions, but he held them back while he listened intently, moving his head a little from time to time. There was a hollow tree nearby, and he went over to that and put his head inside, something that made Hurrah drop his jaw, demand, “What the hell's he got his head in that tree for?”

Monk explained, “A hollow tree gets ground vibrations from the earth, footsteps for instance. Sometimes you can hear somebody walking a long way off if you put your head inside a hollow tree and listen. Hollow inside the tree makes kind of a sound box.”

Hurrah said, “Oh!” and blinked, then muttered, “I've only been in the woods sixty-five years. Danged if you don't always learn new wrinkles.”

Doc pulled his head out of the tree and said, “Sounds like at least twenty or thirty people walking.”

“Which direction?” Hurrah asked.

Doc could not tell yet.

Five minutes later, though, they could all hear the crowd coming.

It was the population of Mock Lake, armed to their hats. Even the women carried shotguns. They looked sheepish, the way people look when they've been on a wild goose chase.

“Say, there's Blasted John Davis,” said Hurrah Stevens. “Dang him, what's he doing here? He's supposed to be up at my Three Devils mill. We got a hell of an important executives' meeting scheduled for there tomorrow. He oughta be there!”

BLASTED JOHN DAVIS was made of gristle, fists and grin. He had the freak appearance of seeming larger than he was, probably because of his angles and the packages of muscles in his sleeves.

“Hy'ah, Hurrah,” he yelled. “By golly, you always turn up where there's trouble, don't you?”

“You're foreman at Three Devils!” said Hurrah Stevens sourly. “What you doing so far from the job?”

“That's private. I'll get around to that later.”

“I want to know right now. What about our meetin' tomorrow?”

“It ain't good news. Longer you put off hearin' about it, longer you'll be feelin' good.”

Hurrah Stevens scowled. “What the hell's going on here?”

Blasted John Davis grimaced. “You mean what have me and the good folk of Mock Lake been doing?”

“Yeah, sure I mean that.”

“Following the tracks of about a ten-ton ghost.”

“Black Tuesday, you mean?”

Blasted John took off his hat. His red hair looked like a campfire on his head.

“Nuts!” Blasted John said. “There is no such ghost bear as Black Tuesday.” He pointed at the tracks. “Damn the tracks! There's no such thing!”

Doc Savage said, “What have you been doing, following the prints?”

“Sure, you think we were on a picnic hike?” Blasted John eyed Doc Savage closely, then pushed his mouth out in thought. “Hey, I've seen your face somewhere before.”

Monk said, “His picture, more likely.”

“Picture nothing.” Blasted John grunted noisily. “I get it. Chicago, 1941. The lumberman's convention. A new bonding method for plywood. You developed it. You're Doc Savage.” Blasted John pointed his finger at Renny Renwick. “You were there too, big fists. Your name is Runningwitch or something like that. Engineer. Right?”

“Renwick,” Renny said.

Doc Savage was looking over the citizens of Mock Lake. They were a sturdy, rugged looking collection. This wasn't a country that weaklings liked. But everybody looked as if he or she had just come out of a dark alley inhabited by a potential earthquake.

“Where did the tracks lead to?” Doc asked.

“The lake.”

“And from there?”

“They just went into the water, and that was that.”

“Everyone in town followed the tracks. Why?”

Blasted John's eyebrows shot up. “Why not? Brother, a hunt for a ghost bear as big as a steam shovel is an interesting project. Naturally everybody tore out to see where the trail led.”

“Did you see the bear?”

“No, of course not. We just found the radio station torn up, found the trail, and everybody grabbed his gun and we lit out. There ain't no such damned bear—can't be, anyhow.”

Doc remembered the mangled condition of the radio station. “I saw the radio station mess,” he said.

“Mess is right.”

“Must have been a noisy business.”

“One would think so, wouldn't one.”

“Wasn't the wrecking heard?”

“There wasn't any noise.”

“What?”

“It was ghost business.”

“But that is impossible!”

Blasted John frown at him, and said, “I guess you haven't heard about this Black Tuesday, have you?”

“Want to tell us about it?”

“Now is as good a time as any,” Blasted John said. “It's a long and improbable story, so be patient.”

THE first known inhabitants of the region were the Abos (said Blasted John Davis, telling the story so that it was short, interesting and complete) Indian tribe. The name Abos was not generally used, and in fact was not in the history books as far as Blasted John knew. The Abos were obviously a branch of the Athabascan Indians, as indicated by their height and broad-headedness. They were an intelligent class of aborigine, building dugout canoes from great trees, canoes that were sometimes a hundred feet long. Their totem poles, their work with copper and pottery, was of high order.

The Abos Indians had licked the whey out of the first white men to come, but had seen the handwriting on the wall, and become quite civilized, and there had been intermarriage between the early French explorers and the Indians.

At this point, Blasted John suggested that Doc take a look at the inhabitants of Mock Lake, who were standing around listening. Did they look as if half of them were pure-blooded Indians, and nine tenths of them with Indian blood. Well, it was true. The Mock Lakers nodded confirmation.

Black Tuesday, the mythical bear (continued Blasted John Davis) had an Indian name, but he couldn't pronounce it. The name meant a monster bear that was black as night, and came to visit some particular part of his domain on a certain day regularly, and if everything pleased him, went away peacefully and happily. But if Black Tuesday wasn't pleased by the visit, he raised assorted hell.

The legend of Black Tuesday went back farther than any Indian's memory. It was a legend that had not changed much. In other words, you always heard about the same version, whether it was down in the edge of Vancouver City, or up north on the bitter headwater country of the Yukon.

A mythical giant of a bear that came once a week—on Tuesday, which was the reason for the white men calling him Black Tuesday—and if he was happy, went away without doing harm. But if displeased, he always did something devilish.

Strangest part of the legend was the fact that there was never any sound, nor any sight of Black Tuesday, either when he wrought his devilment. Whatever Black Tuesday did, it was done with the touch of a proper ghost—in complete silence.

“That's the way the radio station was wrecked,” finished Blasted John Davis. “Silent as a spook. Nobody heard a thing. We just discovered, by accident, that the radio station was a mess. And we found

the bear tracks—if you want to call them bear tracks. Actually, a brontosaurus, or whatever they called them big prehistoric animals, wouldn't make such tracks."

Doc Savage asked, "Who discovered the wrecked radio station?"

"I did," Blasted John admitted.

"And the tracks?"

"I did."

"And there hadn't been a sound?"

"Nope."

"What," Doc asked, "about the radio operator?"

"What about him?"

"Where was he?"

Blasted John pulled at his jaw, "Best way is to show you, I reckon."

The fiery-haired sinewy fellow led the way through the woods.

As they walked, Monk dropped back beside Doc Savage and whispered, "Wasn't that the durndest cock and bull story you ever heard? What do you suppose they fed us such a pack of lies for?"

"What part do you think is a lie?"

"The whole thing!"

"Why?"

"Huh?" Monk frowned. "Why, the ghost story. The whole thing hinges on a spook yarn that makes the Headless Horseman story sound as factual as a banker's statement."

"Blasted John seems reluctant to believe it himself."

"I know, I know." Monk stalked along in silence for a while. "Well, shucks, it probably hasn't got anything to do with what brought us up here, anyway."

"We still do not know why we got that wild call for help from Carl John Grunow," Doc reminded.

"I bet it was something more sensible than ghost bears," Monk growled. "I wouldn't want you to relay it to Ham, because Ham might drop dead at hearing a compliment from me, but Ham is pretty level-headed and has level-headed friends. This Carl John Grunow was Ham's friend, so I'll bank on the thing that brought us up here being more serious than any old ghost bear. Ghost bear! My God, that's wild stuff, isn't it?"

Suddenly they realized that Blasted John Davis was taking them to the Mock Lake cemetery. In a clearing in a grove of mighty, spreading, ageless spruce, entwined with cedar and junipers, there were stone headstones and wooden crosses.

At a fresh grave, Blasted John stopped.

“The radio operator,” he said.

“When did it happen?” Doc asked.

“Three days ago.”

“Natural death?”

“It was natural enough considering there was eight inches of knife blade stuck in his back.”

Renny leaned forward to read a name carved into the wooden cross over the grave.

“Holy cow!” he blurted. Then he was pointing wordlessly for them to see that the name on the grave was Carl John Grunow, the man who had called on them for help.

Chapter IV. SAMARITAN

SNAP!

Into all their minds popped the same thing at the same instant. This wasn't possible! They had received the radiogram about midnight last night. The filing time on it—the filing time was also on the file-copy they'd found in the wrecked Mock Lake radio station—indicated it had been sent only an hour before receipt. That meant the message signed Carl John Grunow had been sent yesterday.

“Three days ago!” Ham said sharply. “You say Grunow died three days ago?”

“Yes.” Blasted John nodded.

“Murdered?”

“Well—death by violence, anyway.”

Ham, with a lawyer's idea for distinctions, said, “A death is either natural or it is an offense against the person such as manslaughter, mayhem, murder.”

Blasted John scowled, said, “Yes, and the death of a person by violence is homicide, justifiable, excusable and felonious. Justifiable when committed intentionally but with out evil design and when proper, as in war or a sheriff springing the noose trap. Excusable when committed through misadventure or accident, or in self defense. Felonious homicide is committed unlawfully, and is either murder or manslaughter.”

“You sound like a lawyer,” Ham said.

“I'm not, thank God!” said Blasted John.

Monk laughed. He always laughed when anybody gave the legal profession a kick in front of Ham. Ham stuck out his jaw sourly at the red-headed man, but stopped asking questions.

Doc Savage said thoughtfully, “Stevens or Davis, can either of you tell me anything about Carl John Grunow?”

Blasted John Davis shrugged. “I knew him by sight barely, was all.”

“He worked for me,” Hurrah Stevens admitted.

“Very long?”

“About three years.”

At this point, Ham caught Doc's eyes, and said with his lips only, *Grunow was supposed to be a lumber and pulp engineer, not a radioman.* Doc, who could read lips fairly well, nodded very slightly.

To Hurrah, Doc said, “Carl John Grunow always a radio operator for you?”

“Hell no!” Hurrah said instantly. “That's only been the last year.”

“And before that?”

“He was an engineer to begin with. Good one, too. I hired him off International Pulp and Paper three years ago come next July. Made him my chief engineer.”

“From chief engineer to radio operator is quite a shift in employment?” Doc questioned.

Hurrah gave the bronze man a look that was half curiosity and half scowl. “You're askin' questions, ain't you?”

“Yes.”

“It important to you?”

“Important enough to ask questions.”

“Well, then I'll tell you. Carl John Grunow just kind of went to the dogs. Lost interest in his work. Took to hanging around booze joints. Would wander off and leave the job without notice. But don't ask me why, because I don't know. He said it was his nerves, and asked for this radio station job because it would be quiet and give him a chance to get hold of himself.”

“And he was killed three days ago?”

“I didn't know he was dead until just now,” Hurrah said.

“Three days is right,” Blasted John said.

Hurrah pointed an angry arm at Blasted John, “Say, you red-headed lummox! Have you been here three days?”

“Sure.”

“Why?” Hurrah yelled. “You're supposed to be boss of Three Devils. Why don't you stay on the job?”

Blasted John said, “Oh, stop yelling at me!” with scant reverence for his boss. “I've got a good reason.”

“What is it?”

Blasted John glanced at Doc Savage. “It's a private one.”

HURRAH STEVENS took Blasted John aside to listen to his reason for neglecting his job of boss man. The two went off and stood on the lake shore, where they did considerable vehement arm-waving without lifting their voices high enough to be overheard.

Doc Savage hailed a Mock Laker, asking, “Know anybody who could show me where Carl John Grunow was killed?” The man he had accosted said he could do that himself. The man spoke freely enough, but Doc got the impression of something stange in the man's manner.

The impression of strangeness persisted while they went to look at the murder scene. For a while Doc couldn't tell just what was wrong, and his curiosity kept returning to the point.

The engineer-declined-to-radioman, Carl John Grunow, had been found face-down in his bunk in the shed back of the radio station at eight o'clock in the morning, last Saturday.

“This is Monday,” Doc said slowly, thinking of the radiogram which had been sent Sunday signed with Carl John Grunow's name.

Monk thought of something else.

“Black Tuesday!” he said. “Hey, weren't they telling us that myth-bear only walks on Tuesdays?” Monk turned to the Mock Laker. “That right?”

The Mock Laker became strangely tight around the mouth. “That's right, according to legend.”

“Then the legend didn't hold true today, today being Monday?” Monk asked dryly.

“I wouldn't say that,” the other answered sullenly. Then he flew into a rage, and shouted. “When you've been around here longer, you won't think it's so funny!”

Surprised, Monk said soothingly, “It's not funny right now—”

The other man's unreasonable rage increased. “You city dudes are always so smart! You know which slot to put your nickel in in the subway, so that makes you infallible!”

Monk said, “Hey, hey, put out the fire! I didn't—”

“I've seen you come into this country before!” the Mock Laker yelled. “You act like it was a nice little city park with great big pretty trees and a cop on every corner. By the time you find out this is primitive wilderness, where death and danger walk the same as they did a thousand years ago, we've got to stop whatever we're doing and send out searching parties for you! The devil with you!”

He stamped off.

Monk scratched his head. “That guy's a full-blooded Indian. Somehow it surprises you when an Indian talks to you like a civilized guy.”

“Doc,” Renny said thoughtfully. “What made him so mad?”

The Indian's sudden burst of rage had told Doc what was wrong. He didn't think he was mistaken in deciding that it was fear, deep unadulterated fear bordering on terror.

“Fear,” Doc said. “The Indian is scared.”

Renny was sober. “Everybody in town is scared, too, aren't they?”

Doc nodded, chilled by the increasing impression of unbridled fright that was everywhere.

THERE was nothing to tell them anything in Carl John Grunow's room. All his personal belongings were missing.

“Where are the murdered man's personal things?” Doc asked a man, who was standing around watching them.

The man—he proved to be the operator of the Trading Post—said, “Oh, the Mounties got his stuff together. Locked it up.”

“The Mounted Police investigated the murder, then?”

“Sure.”

“What was their verdict?”

“That it was murder. They didn't put out any hints about who they thought might have done it.”

“Where did the troopers go from here?”

“Back to their headquarters at Center Lake, as far as I know.”

Doc Savage looked at the Trading Post proprietor thoughtfully. The man had a wide, ruddy face, but the fear was on his mouth and the over-movement of his eyes.

“What is the trouble around here?” Doc asked bluntly.

The man blinked, said, “Why, nothing. The police couldn't find anything, I suspect.” Then, quickly, he added, “They left Carl John Grunow's belongings in a locker in the Trading Post, until his sister could call for them.”

“Sister?”

“Yes.”

Doc asked Ham Brooks, “What about a sister?”

“Carl John had one, I remember him mentioning when we were in Harvard,” Ham admitted. “I never met her.”

“Where is she now?” Doc asked the Trading Post proprietor.

“Search me. Carl John's stuff is in the locker. Want to look at it?”

They walked to the Trading Post, Ham scratching his head and muttering, “The file-copy of that radiogram that was sent us. It was printed with the same kind of lettering Carl John used. I don't get it.”

Monk said, “Dead mean don't send radiograms.”

“Oh, don't start being trite!” Ham snapped. “Of course they don't!”

The skulker floundered along in the grip of Renny Renwick's big fists. He hadn't said a thing. Now and then his terror made his lips loosen and release saliva.

The locker in the Trading Post was large, solidly secured with a brass padlock. The man unlocked it, said, “Here is the—what the hell!”

Doc Savage, crowding forward suddenly, put head and shoulders and both arms into the locker. He covered a bit of paper, the only loose thing in the locker, with a hand. When he removed his hand, the paper was concealed in it.

“Somebody stole the dead man's stuff!” yelled the Trading Post owner.

When they were outside, Ham touched Doc's arm. “What'd you take out of the locker? Piece of paper, wasn't it?”

Doc made sure they weren't watched. “Yes.”

“Why'd you make such a grab for it?”

“Ham, you got some new trick stationery printed about a month ago.”

“Yes, I—*huh!* That wasn't—”

“Have you written Carl John Grunow on that stationery?”

“No.”

“Take a look.” Doc exhibited the paper he'd picked up.

The paper had been folded many times, as if it had been fitted into some sort of a hiding place from which it might have fallen. It read:

GRUNOW: THIS IS POSITIVELY YOUR LAST WARNING TO KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT.

HAM BROOKS.

It was Ham's stationery, bearing the letterhead of his law firm, but the text was pencil-printed with bluish lead.

Without a word, Ham wheeled and ran to the plane. He scrambled inside, opened his briefcase and frowned at the contents. There were several pencils inside, one which he used to correct briefs having a bluish lead, and there was some of the stationery.

Ham's face had a wintry look. “Doc, somebody tried to dig a hole for us,” he said grimly.

RENNY slammed the skulker on to the ground, got in the middle of his back with a knee. “It's time we choked something out of this bird!” he rumbled. “This danged thing is getting complicated in a way I don't like.”

Monk agreed, “That's my idea, too,” and got on his knees and gave the skulker's ear an expert twist. The man bleated in pain.

There was another yell. Ham looked around. “Here comes that red-headed guy, Blasted John, and the old gaffer, Hurrah Stevens. They look excited.”

“I'll be superamalgamated,” said Johnny Littlejohn, the archaeologist and geologist. He didn't talk much, and preferred to do it with big words. “I'll architectionicate some quiescence.”

Ham said, “If that means keep them from bothering us, go ahead.”

Hurrah Stevens and Blasted John were sweating with excitement. They paid no attention whatever to the skulker. Something else was on their minds.

“Savage, there's hell to pay at Three Devils!” Blasted John blurted. “We want you to help us—”

“Shut up and let me tell him!” Hurrah Stevens snapped. The old man faced Doc, looking like an alarmed clown with his red stocking cap. “I was talking to Blasted John about you. He tells me that you're Doc Savage, and that you've made a world-wide reputation in a strange profession. I never heard of you myself, but Blasted John tells me your business is helping people out of trouble when it's the kind of trouble the law doesn't seem to be able to touch. That your business?”

“Probably you would call that our profession,” Doc admitted.

“Blasted John says your business is also big trouble.”

“Interesting would be a better word.”

“Okay. This is interesting and it's big. The whole lumber and pulp business is going to blow higher than a kite if this thing isn't stopped.” Hurrah Stevens stared at them. “That sound in your line?”

“It sounds big,” Doc said. “What is the interesting angle?”

“That ghost bear!”

“You had better explain that more fully,” Doc said.

“I'll do that in the plane,” Hurrah Stevens said impatiently. “Come on.”

Doc said sharply, “Just a minute! This seems like a stampede—”

“Dang right it is! Something terrible is happening at Three Devils. We don't know exactly what it is, but it's bad. Come on. We can get there—”

“We just got word over the radio in Hurrah's plane,” Blasted John interrupted. “The operator at Three Devils was hysterical, or something. He broke off right in the middle, and it sounded like he ran yelling out of the station.”

“We gotta get to Three Devils!” snapped Hurrah. He pointed at the skulker. “Bring him along. The plane'll hold all of us.”

Doc Savage looked questioningly at his assistants for an opinion. They seemed to welcome the idea of action.

Monk said, “I'm tired of ghost bears and confusion. Let's tie into something we can knock around with our fists, if we can find it.”

They ran to Hurrah Stevens' plane, Renny carrying the skulker, Slippery O'Toole. Slippery began to yell that he wasn't going with them in any damned airplane, but went silent when Renny gave him a good look at a large fist.

In the plane, Blasted John stabbed a hand at the radio. “Three Devils station went dead. His carrier off the air.”

Blasted John took over the controls. They rocked the floats free of the beach mud, and climbed into the cabin. The starter whined for a while, then blue smoke flew out of the exhaust stacks and the motor

began talking. They rode out on the lake, nose high, dragging a wedge of disturbed water behind them.

Again Blasted John pointed at the radio. “Damndest yell that operator at Three Devils gave. Put your teeth on edge.”

He sounded, Doc reflected, about as frightened as a man of his nature was likely to become.

Chapter V. HELL ALOFT

HURRAH STEVENS' plane left the lake surface and climbed upward into the purplish shadows of beginning night. It was not entirely dark, but thirty minutes more would see the last of twilight. They left the lake, climbing slowly, with the treetops like a forest of threatening spikes below. Doc went forward, and Blasted John, surmising what concerned the bronze man, indicated a map, said, “Three Devils is on a lake. I've landed there when it was as dark as a polecat.”

Doc returned to a seat beside Hurrah Stevens.

“All right,” Doc said. “The story.”

Monk and Ham had the seat across the aisle, jammed in it together. Johnny Littlejohn was behind. The skulker, O'Toole, was across the aisle from them, with Renny immediately behind, alert.

“The trouble,” Hurrah Stevens yelled above the roar of the motor, “began about six months ago. Maybe it started long before that, and I just didn't know about it. Such things are like wars and political revolutions—they're really happening a long time before the violence flares out in the open and hits you in the face.”

He paused a moment.

“You see that country?” He waved at the wild Canadian timberlands below.

Twilight gloom overspread the world below, but it did not dim the primeval richness of the domain. In other days, there had been finer lumbering sections in North America, but greedy man had stripped them, and now this was probably the richest. There were thousands of square miles of lumber and pulp material down there. The lumber business had finally learned to manage itself to some extent, so the raw material in these thousands of square miles could be made to feed the mills for a century or perhaps indefinitely.

“That's mine,” Hurrah Stevens said, circling his arm to include everything around the plane. “What I don't own, I've got leased. It's a big project. Now it's all endangered.”

Doc asked, “Endangered how?”

Hurrah Stevens' face got red with discomfort. “Dammit, it sounds crazy when you say it. That bear, Black Tuesday, seems to be at the bottom of the trouble.”

Doc Savage made no comment, and the silence caused Hurrah more discomfort.

“If it hadn't sounded so goofy, I probably wouldn't have let it get as far as it has,” Hurrah grumbled. “I thought at first it was just labor troubles. We've never had much labor trouble up here, but the last two or three years, labor agitators—organizers they call themselves—have moved in.

“The thing came gradually, as I told you. I could see the workmen getting discontented. Most of them are native Indian and trapper stock, people whose families have been here for generations. People who

know this country, and are steeped in its traditions, its superstitions."

"It was my impression," Doc suggested, "that these people hit a higher intelligence level than average. I remember hearing the percentage of their young people who go to universities. It's high."

"I know. Education doesn't take anything away. It just adds. If superstition has been a big part of your racial life for centuries, education doesn't wipe it out right away."

Doc gestured impatiently.

"In a nutshell," he said, "what has happened?"

"That mythical bear has scared them into deciding the lumbering business in this section has got to stop!"

Doc shook his head. "That sounds fantastic."

"Hell, it's incredible! If it was just one man, or one family that was scared of a spook bear, you could understand it."

"But it's not just one family?"

"It's hundreds and hundreds!"

Renny Renwick boomed, "Doc, there's something seriously wrong with the prisoner."

Doc Savage heaved out of his seat to examine the skulker.

The skulker lay loosely, with his head back, and his eyes open but strangely waxlike, and his whole face was waxlike, his lips parted to show soiled teeth, and his tongue far back in his mouth, the tongue end sticking up and twisted strangely.

RENNY seemed to sense that the prisoner was dead, and he sat there with his long face frozen, his big fists tight, and he was speechless.

Hurrah Stevens, not realizing the man was dead, leaned back and yelled, "The worst situation seems to be at Three Devils, my main camp. Blasted John Davis is superintendent there. Blasted John hasn't believed the bear myth was behind the thing."

Hurrah got out of his seat, so he could be nearer and wouldn't have to shout so loud.

"Several days ago, Blasted John got the idea something suspicious was going to happen at Mock Lake. So he came and waited around. That's why he was at Mock Lake. He told me that just before we got the radio summons from Three Devils. We have no idea exactly what has happened at Three Devils today, but it must be worse than a—"

He broke off, staring at the skulker.

"What's happened to him?" he demanded.

"Dead!"

The old man's mouth became roundly open with shock.

Grimly, Doc Savage examined the body. He took into consideration the man's previous behavior, his

earlier paleness and convulsions, and his later drowsiness and semi-delirium. At first, in the beginning, Doc was absolutely sure these had been symptoms of fear-hysteria. Having earlier decided that was the man's trouble, he hadn't paid much attention later, although the latter symptoms, he now realized, had been those of poisoning.

“Poisoned,” he said.

Renny blurted, “How could that happen? I've hardly had my hands off him!”

“What kind of poison?” Ham demanded.

“Not a corrosive,” Monk said. “His mouth isn't burned.”

Doc reminded, “It could be a violent corrosive given in a capsule, which wouldn't have burned the mouth. But more likely it was a neurotic, perhaps strychnine.”

“How can you tell for sure?”

“In strychnine poisoning, the body is relaxed at the time of death, but stiffens very quickly, sometimes in ten or fifteen minutes.”

Blasted John Davis, doing the flying, turned his head to bellow, “What's going on back there?”

“Slippery O'Toole is dead!” Hurrah shouted.

“What?”

“Poisoned!”

Doc, continuing his examination, noticed that the dead man's hands were clenched and the soles of the feet were arched, also external signs of strychnine poisoning.

Johnny Littlejohn, startled into using small words, said, “But how did he get the poison? I personally searched the fellow after we caught him. And Renny had searched him before that.”

Doc said nothing. He had searched the skulker, too.

The plane tilted, leaning sharply to the right and beginning a downward spiral.

Doc looked overside. There was a long, dark silver expanse of lake below.

“Stevens, is this Three Devils?” he demanded.

“No, it's Little Sleepy.” Hurrah Stevens sounded puzzled.

Doc hurried forward. “Why are you coming down?”

“Going to land,” said Blasted John.

“Why?”

“There's a Mounted Police station at Little Sleepy.”

THE Mounted Police station was silent, dark when they beached their plane in front of it. Because planes

were being used so much in police work, the station was equipped with a sheltered floating cove made of logs chained together, inside which a plane could be guyed four ways so that it would be fairly secure. There was also a sloping ramp made of planking up which a ship could be towed, if there was danger of a freeze, on a dolly. Everywhere about was the towering forest, the lush green undergrowth, and the living silence of the great timberlands.

“Ahoy Mounted station!” Doc called.

There was no reply.

“What the devil!” gasped Hurrah Stevens. “Is this place mysteriously deserted, too?”

Doc and the others approached the Mounted Police station, a low, pleasant building, with a tall flagpole in front. The flag, Doc noted, had been lowered for the night.

“Want to see someone?” a voice asked.

An officer came from behind a bush, rifle cradled under his arm. The rifle, Doc saw, was cocked.

Doc asked, “Who is in charge?”

“I am. Sergeant Weed.”

Sergeant Weed had a square, weatherbeaten face.

“There is a dead man in the plane,” Doc said.

Sergeant Weed turned that over in his mind a moment, then called, “Terry, Fred! Come on out.”

Terry and Fred were lean and almost as weathered as Sergeant Weed. They also had rifles, and they had been concealed, one behind a tree, one in the station building.

At the plane, Weed said, “Slippery O'Toole, eh?” He examined the body thoughtfully. “Looks as if he was poisoned.”

“We think so,” Doc said.

“Where did he die?”

“Right there in the seat,” Doc said, and gave the other details.

Sergeant Weed, having listened carefully, said, “In view of the way it happened, we'll have to search all of you.”

“That's ridiculous!” yelled Hurrah Stevens.

“Not if we should happen to find more of the poison on one of you.”

Hurrah growled, “Damned if I don't get a new set of policemen around here. I've got some influence, you know!”

Weed said dryly, “You won't have any influence if things keep up the way they're going. You won't have anything.”

Hurrah snarled, “We're havin' a big executive meetin' tomorrow, at Three Devils. We'll take up this matter of police efficiency!”

The searching began. Doc asked thoughtfully, “Sergeant, why all the precautions when we came?”

Sergeant Weed was slapping trouser legs and coat sleeves and going through pockets expertly. “Precautions?”

“Hiding with your guns ready.”

“Brother, the way things are getting in this country, you feel like sleeping with your gun cocked.”

Sergeant Weed was scientific. He sent an officer into the station to get a number of envelopes, and into each of these he dumped the litter, dust and ravelings, from the pockets.

It was something in Renny Renwick's left-hand coat pocket that stopped the show.

“This yours?” Sergeant Weed demanded, turning a small capsule which he had taken from Renny's pocket.

“I never saw it before!” Renny exploded.

“Came out of your pocket.”

“Holy cow!”

Sergeant Weed cautiously tasted the capsule contents, spat quickly, said, “Fooey!” He spat some more. “Intensely bitter, so it's probably strychnine.”

“Who put it in my pocket?” Renny blurted.

“That your story?” asked Sergeant Weed.

“It's the truth.”

“Hm-m-m.”

“Don't you believe it?”

“The judge is the one you'll have to make believe it.” Sergeant Weed got some handcuffs out. “You're under arrest, charged with suspicion of murdering one Slippery O'Toole.”

Chapter VI. OMINOUS NIGHT

THE arrest of Renny Renwick seemed to please Blasted John Davis a great deal. When Doc Savage, Monk, Ham and Johnny were immediately put under formal arrest as material witnesses, Blasted John let out a grunt of satisfaction.

“That's fine,” he said. “They're guilty as hell!”

Sergeant Weed eyed him sharply. “You sound kind of positive.”

“Carl John Grunow, the radio operator at Mock Lake was murdered, and the Mounties locked his belongings—”

“In the trading post,” interrupted Weed. “I should know, because I put them there.”

“Okay, the stuff was gone. Somebody stole it. And when Savage and his gang looked in the locker, Savage put his hand inside in a heck of a hurry and got a piece of flashy paper that was all folded up.”

Weed exhibited the bit of paper in question. “This it?”

“Yes. What's it say?”

“Haven't looked.” Sergeant Weed examined the paper, whistled, said, “It's a threat to Carl John Grunow's life.”

Blasted John Davis yelled, “All right, they killed Grunow, too. They came back to Mock Lake three days after their crime, which was today, to get rid of any evidence that might implicate them. They robbed the locker of Grunow's clothes. O'Toole saw them. They grabbed O'Toole and poisoned him to shut his mouth.”

Monk, outraged at the accusation, bellowed, “And while we were at it, too damn bad we didn't poison you!”

“By golly, you admit it?” asked Sergeant Weed.

“Of course not!” Monk shouted. “Why don't you ask that red-headed stinker why he's telling such lies?”

“Listen, you striped-faced ape, don't call me a liar!” said Blasted John.

Monk moved with the unexpectedness of a hiccup. His fist swung. Blasted John nearly turned a cartwheel, then broke down a lot of weeds spreading out on the ground.

“You lie now—as flat as a pancake,” Monk said smugly.

SHORTLY thereafter they found themselves in the jailhouse part of the Mounted Police station. It was a jail about which there was no fooling, and after Monk had kicked the door and shook the window bars, he apologized sheepishly to Doc and the others. “I didn't know they'd throw us in the can so quick,” he said.

Doc reminded them that there was plenty of evidence against them, even if it was a frameup.

Renny rumbled, “But why are we being made the goat? We can prove we were in New York when Grunow was killed.”

“Who put that strychnine capsule in your pocket, Renny?”

“Blasted John or Hurrah, I suppose.”

“Keep in mind it could have been done at Mock Lake, where the poisoning possibly was pulled.”

“Oh, you think O'Toole was poisoned at Mock Lake?”

“I don't know,” Doc admitted.

Monk waved his arms disgustedly. “That sums the whole thing up in three words—we don't know.”

They did some more grumbling about their generally baffled state of mind, together with the improbability of there being such things as spook bears as big as that.

The sound of an airplane motor ended the discussion and crammed them together around the barred window. It was Hurrah Stevens' plane and it was leaving. Hurrah Stevens and Blasted John Davis were inside.

Monk kicked on the door until Sergeant Weed came, then shouted, “You let the real crooks get away!”

“Don't make me feel bad!” Weed snorted, and went away.

AT eleven o'clock that night—it was as dark as a night could get, almost—there were two rifle shots. The two shots were the first of a series. The rest of the series began popping off right away.

Some cussing and screaming joined the shooting. The screaming, done by two men in awful chorus, was not at all pleasant.

“Sounds like somebody doesn't like somebody,” Monk said. Then he said, “Woo!” and ducked away from where a bullet had come through the window. The window was broken by the bullet and bits of its glass scampered across the floor, tinkling.

“What's happening?” Ham blurted.

“It doesn't sound like no ghost bear, thank the angels,” Monk said.

More glass fell out of the window. Someone outside was breaking a bigger hole in the pane.

Doc Savage flattened beside the window and from there reached and got the hand of the window-breaker. He held to the hand and wrestled with the owner.

The hand was holding an object which resembled a tomato can with a piece of broomstick about a foot long sticking out of the bottom.

The owner of the hand holding the gadget did loud swearing until he dropped the gadget. The gadget fell outside the window. The man stopped swearing and screamed and wrenched to get loose.

Doc Savage, suddenly realizing what the gadget was, gladly let him loose. He was a little too late.

A sheet of fire jumped in the window, wiping out what glass was left, sash and casing. More fire came through the log walls where the chinking had been, making the chinking fly out like bullets.

The explosion carried enough force to dislodge the cabin logs from their interlocking end-joints. There was a rumbling noise as the wall began caving. Half that wall, and about a third of the side wall, came down amid rumbling, cracking, crashing. There was a blinding shower of dust and earth from the sod roof of the cabin.

The uproar didn't last as long as it seemed to. In the expectant silence that followed, Doc asked, “Did that grenade injure anybody?”

Renny, Ham and Johnny said it hadn't. Monk said, after spitting a while, that this Canadian dirt tasted fine after you thought sure you'd been killed.

“Was that guy trying to pitch that grenade in here on us?” Ham demanded.

“Sure. He had the pin pulled,” Renny said.

Doc Savage suggested they get out before the rest of the cabin fell down on them. They crawled outdoors through the biggest gap.

The shooting, cursing, screeching had stopped and it was so still that even the night seemed to be holding its breath.

Renny made a sick sound in the darkness. They knew he'd found part of the man who'd tried to make them a present of the grenade.

THINGS began to stir again. First there was a snaky sound of a man crawling fast through the tall grass. A large gun banged—a larger one, a rifle. Both bullets went tearing through the grass.

Somebody said, “Dammit, be careful!”

The screaming started again. One man this time. One man who was doing the last screaming he would ever do. He ended on a long gurgling note as the last liquid life poured out of him.

Someone went crawling past Doc and Doc said, “Let's not bunch up too much!” and the crawler shot at him. The muzzle flame of the shot seemed to jump into Doc's eyes, but the bullet went overhead somewhere.

Doc rolled, jumped to the left. It would have been fine if he could have grabbed the other man's gun, but there was too much chance of missing it in the darkness. The other man jumped the opposite direction and lit out running.

The runner shouted, “They're out of the cabin! Savage is out of the cabin!”

A lump gouging Doc's ribs proved to be a rock. He threw the rock at the runner, unsuccessfully.

Monk gave a great roaring shout.

“Surrender!” Monk cried. “This is the police! We have a machine-gun!”

This lie fooled nobody. Guns blatted thunder and crimson, firing at Monk. Monk yelled in agony and threshed around, then yelled again, this time saying in French that he was all right, that he had himself a safe foxhole.

That didn't go over either. A voice yelled, “What did he say?” And another voice explained that Monk had said in French that he had a safe hole.

In a disgusted voice, Monk said, “Dammit, I forgot half these Canadians speak French.”

Another grenade went off in the cabin. Fire, glass and smoke came out of the windows.

Most of the guns had been going off near the front of the building, so Doc crawled in that direction. He went quietly, with respect for possible bullets.

A whistle blew shrilly, one long, two short. The signal set men, at least half a dozen of them, running away through the night. They all took one direction, north along the beach.

Sure that one more runner wouldn't be noticed, Doc ran too. They bunched up compactly ahead, plainly following a plan of retreat.

Doc stopped suddenly—because the retreat was going so smoothly and obviously it was suspicious—and called, “Keep back. Stay where you are!”

He heard his aides halt, heard Monk complain, “And let them escape?”

Doc left the beach, heading inshore. There was a sharp cut bank, up which he scrambled, then open woods through which the going was better. He ran as rapidly as possible, hitting as few trees as he could, trying to head off the raiders.

Along the beach, a grenade went BANG! Then, BANG! BANG! went two more. The raiders were scattering the bombs along the beach as they fled. The nape of Doc's neck got cold, as he thought of what would have happened to him if he had chased them recklessly.

THE raiders ran about three quarters of a mile along the lake shore to two planes which were nosed up on the beach. Both planes were large. They all gathered around one ship to shove it off, using a couple of flashlights to see what they were doing.

The other plane was about a hundred yards farther on, and Doc distinguished it when a flashlight beam glinted off its wing fabric.

He ran through the woods until he was even with it, sprinted across the beach, found the cowl fastening, loosened it, thrust an arm inside and tore out as many wires as he could yank loose.

They saw him going back to the woods. Somebody howled, “Look!” and fired simultaneously. The bullet gave Doc more speed, somewhat to his surprise, and he was among the trees. Angry lead hornets knocked bark and twigs loose from the trees for a while. When the shooting stopped, Doc halted.

Shortly there were loud enraged voices around the disabled plane. The outcome of the pow-wow was that they all decided to leave in the other plane immediately.

The other plane motor filled the woods with rumbling, scooted out across the lake, and went away into the night sky. The big trees and the hills mixed up its echoes until Doc could not tell which direction it took.

The fifteen minutes he spent scouting around the plane were wasted.

THE silent suspense around the mangled cabin relaxed when Doc called out his identity.

Monk said, “There are three dead Mounted Policemen here and two dead strangers. Did the others get away?”

One dead Mountie was about twenty feet in front of the door, another was just outside the doorway, and the third was inside where he had been killed—either by gunfire or by the grenade.

The two strangers were in the weeds near the Mounted Policeman who was lying dead farthest from the cabin.

“Suppose it's safe to strike a match?” Monk asked.

“Strike it and we can tell,” Ham suggested dryly.

Monk snorted, lit the match, dropped it wildly at a crackling sound.

“Holy cow, that was just me stepping on a stick,” Renny rumbled.

By matchlight, they examined the two deceased strangers. They were just woodsmen, no more hard-bitten looking than the average lumberjack. Their hands weren't callused from ax-swinging or hand-sawing. They were not Indians.

“What became of Sergeant Weed?” Doc asked.

Nobody knew.

“There were three canoes on the beach when we landed tonight,” Doc said. “Count them.”

Monk reported, “Only two canoes now. Sergeant Weed must have left in one earlier.”

They found a flashlight, spent half an hour poking its beam about in search of more bodies, but did not find any others. The two grenades had done a remarkable amount of damage.

“That was a slice right out of a war,” Renny rumbled thoughtfully. “You know what I think they were trying to do?”

“Your idea is probably the same as ours,” Monk said.

“I figure we were framed so that we would be locked up. Then they raided the place to kill us. It went wrong when Doc kept the grenade from being tossed in our cell.”

“That's what I meant,” said Monk.

Ham kicked angrily at a clod. “Hurrah Stevens and Blasted John Davis left earlier. They could have contacted the gang and sent them here to dispose of us.”

“Yeah, we'll keep that in mind,” Renny rumbled.

Ham said, “Too bad my friend Carl John Grunow didn't get to tell us why he was calling on us for help.”

Doc Savage went into the remains of the cabin with the flashlight, to inspect the radio apparatus. The grenade had done enough to it that there was no need of tinkering with the outfit.

“We have to get word of what has happened to the authorities,” Doc said. “Monk, you and Ham and Johnny stay here. Renny and I will take the plane and go on to Three Devils to give notice.”

Renny's engineering ability included aircraft engines so that he was not long replacing the wiring Doc had wrenched out of the plane.

It was not much after midnight when Renny and Doc took off.

Chapter VII. DEVIL'S PLAN

MONK and Ham and Johnny listened to the sound of the plane collapse slowly into nothingness. The noise, because of the towering hills and timberlands around the lake, had had a strangely flat and cadaverous quality that was depressing.

They sat in silence. The darkness was heavy around them. The night breeze hadn't cleared away all the odor of cordite and dust and death.

A new and strange voice interrupted out of the darkness, saying, “That's a fine piece of dreaming. Get your hands up, and you might live to see it come true!”

Flashlights blazed on them. They could see rifle muzzles sticking into the pool of illumination, menacing them.

“I'll be superamalgamated!” Johnny gasped.

Monk decided to make a break—and a bullet struck at his fingertips and drove dirt into his face as he got the thought.

“The next bullet will be in the gut,” a voice told Monk.

Ham demanded, “Who are you fellows? Police?”

“Police?” A man laughed. “He thinks we're the Mounted!”

THE first four of them to come out of the darkness were cautious, and searched Monk, Ham and Johnny. Then the others appeared. In all, there were seven of them.

Seven of them gunned to the teeth, and with their hair standing on end with nervousness. Two of them began searching the cabin wreckage and the immediate vicinity, calling out when they found a body. When they found the two slain raiders, one of them said bitterly, “Poor old Nate caught one right between the teeth.”

“That's what happens when you always have your mouth open, like Nate did,” the other said.

To Monk there was something familiar in the last voice. Monk blurted, “You guys—!” He stopped right there, seeing that it was no part of sense to tell them that he had recognized them—or recognized at least one of their voices—as participants in the raid in which the three Mounties had been massacred.

A lean dark-haired man came over to Monk. “What'd you start to say?”

“I started to clear my throat,” Monk said.

The other grunted. “Started to say you recognized Jake's voice, didn't you? Heard it during the raid, didn't you?”

Monk hesitated uneasily. “You guys admitting such a thing?”

“What difference would it make to you, do you think?”

A man came over and nudged the dark-haired one, said, “Hey, what you're doing is known as talking too much.”

“Oh, hell, they know it! This ape recognized Jake's voice.”

“Shut up, you fool!”

Offended, the dark-haired man retired into the background and stayed there, juggling two pistols from hand to hand grimly.

Monk had the first of a number of chills, brought on by the certainty that only part of the gang had fled in

the night and reached the plane and departed. The other part—this present outfit—had remained behind. Probably this group had not come by plane in the first place. Regardless of that, they weren't here without an aim.

Monk was astonished—he could see Ham and Johnny were, too—when they weren't shot on the spot.

What did happen was almost as alarming as being shot.

“Have you got the guns that killed the Mounties?” a man demanded.

A man produced a rifle and two revolvers, said, “Here.”

“All right, wipe them off, then put their fingerprints on them.”

He meant the fingerprints of Monk, Ham and Johnny. Ham, realizing the significance of this, tried to fight. They clipped him over the head, and put on his prints while he was senseless.

“BRING Nate and the other body,” ordered a hard-eyed, fat-cheeked man.

“This the place you want to leave the guns with the prints on them?”

“Hell no, not right out in the open like that. Drop one of them there in the weeds. Carry the other two over here and bury them. Do a damn good job at the burying, and conceal the spot so it'll look like a first-class job.”

“But just a poor enough job that the Mounties will find them, eh?”

“No, no, bury them so they'd never be found. But drop one of their handkerchiefs nearby, and rub some soft dirt on the handkerchief so anyone could tell somebody had dug, then wiped his hands on it.”

“Oh.”

“They'll think it dropped out of his pocket.”

“I get it.”

Johnny got it too. “You fellows are trying to make it look as if Doc Savage and the rest of us murdered those Mounties in a jailbreak!”

“Do you think we'll get the job done?” asked the fat-cheeked man.

The dark sulking man came over and booted Johnny.

“And when we get you in a place where bodies won't be found, what do you think we're going to do to you?” he asked. “If I can say so without being too trite, that's the sixty-four-dollar question.”

“He don't think it's trite,” the fat-cheeked man said.

Chapter VIII. TROUBLE AT THREE DEVILS

DOC SAVAGE, having checked compass course, wind drift and ground speed with care, picked up the silver dollar lake, flanked by two smaller half-dollars which were other lakes. According to the chart,

these lakes were the Three Devils. The town of Three Devils—which probably was also the lumber camp—was located on the large Devil.

Renny grinned without much humor at the names of the lakes on the chart—Big Devil, First Little Devil and Second Little Devil. He said, "That's a lot of devils."

The chart bore an indication of a seaplane landing-place, but showed no docks on the lake-front. The center of the big lake was rectangled off, labeled *Safest Seaplane Landing Area.*

"Safest area," Doc Savage said. "All right, we'll sit down in the middle of the lake, then taxi in toward town. That way, we can tell if we are getting into snaggy water."

Renny considered this logical. Hitting the limb of an old tree projecting from the surface was the primary menace in a landing on strange water after night.

Doc banked the plane downward. To the left, about ten miles or so away, was a considerable mountain, the bulk of which they could barely distinguish.

The lake—Big Devil—was actually smaller than it seemed from the air, but amply large for even a plane of this class. It was at least two miles across the lake.

Renny noticed Doc Savage yanking back the cabin windows on the left side, and staring.

Doc was disturbed, Renny realized, by the fact that there was not a single light distinguishable where the town of Three Devils should lie.

"That's funny," Renny said.

The silvery appearance of the lake, they suddenly discovered, was partly due to the presence of a fog hanging above the surface. The fog, however, was not thick, and the landing lights penetrated fairly well as Doc made the first pre-landing drag. The water was smooth.

"We will take the middle of the lake," Doc said.

He banked the plane, put it in the approach, and came in with air speed and everything else clicking fine. Hardly inches above the water, the ship bogged lazily into the landing stall, and rushed along, settling.

The fog was hanging above the water in tendrils, in twisted gnarled shapes which rushed spooklike through the white wedges of the landing lights.

"Good landing," Renny said.

The next instant, he was swimming. Maybe it was two seconds later, but not more. The two seconds were full of metal ripping, rending, crashing.

Renny swam furiously, then realized he was trying to swim while still safety-strapped to the seat. He was underwater. The water was as cold as an ice cake. He found the safety buckle, and palmed it loose.

About that time, a hand found him, clutched his hair. It was Doc Savage, and Renny gave Doc's hand a reassuring jerk. He rolled backward and left the plane—he knew the whole left side was ripped out of the plane cabin without knowing why he was aware of the fact—and paddled to the surface.

"Doc, you all right?" he asked.

"I am considerably less proud of that landing than I was a moment ago," Doc said.

“What happened?”

“You noticed those tendrils of fog through which we were flying?”

“Yes.”

“At least one of them was a dead tree.”

THE water was not deep, about five feet. They could stand and keep their heads out. They paddled around, examining the plane, listening for some indication that the crash had been heard on shore, but heard none.

Finally Doc called, “Over here, Renny.”

The bronze man had found a wing section, one containing a fuel tank, which had been torn intact from the plane. It floated and made a buoyant but slippery raft.

“If we can find that tree and break off two limbs to use as paddles,” Doc said.

“Isn't the town of Three Devils close?”

“It should be.”

“We made enough noise when we hit to wake the dead. How come nobody is signalling from shore, at least?”

Doc said sourly, “How come the center of the lake was marked on the chart as good landing?”

They worked the wing-raft around until they found a dead tree, not the one they had hit but another, and Doc climbed up and broke loose two serviceable branches, fit for poling or rowing the wing.

They poled along for some time in disgusted silence.

“Doc, we got sucked in, didn't we?”

“When we fell for the marks on the chart that showed the lake safe?”

“Yes.”

“It was a trap, all right.”

The lake water was so bitterly cold that the night air had seemed warm by comparison when they first climbed out.

“Holy cow! Doc, there wasn't one chance in a thousand that we would manage to take their plane away from them and fly it here. But they were prepared for that chance. I'll bet both charts were marked so that if we came to Three Devils in the night, we'd land in the snags.”

“We overlook just about one more thousand-to-one bet like that, and we are going to get killed.”

“The point I'm making—they're smart. They're not overlooking anything.”

The bronze man confessed gloomily, “What disgusts me is the way we're just walking into one thing after another.”

“Oh, we caught the first try at killing us with acid on our plane fastenings.”

“Not until the plane was ruined,” Doc reminded. “Then they got away with planting the threatening note supposed to be from Ham, with poisoning O'Toole, with planting the strychnine capsule on you, with landing us in jail. It was luck they didn't kill us in the raid—and it is obvious they raided the Mounted post for that purpose—and luck that we weren't killed a minute ago.”

“That's two lucky breaks. Third time might be a charm—made out of a skull.”

“Exactly.”

IT was too quiet on shore. The stillness was a little more normal than the daylight one at Mock Lake had been; at least they could hear wolves howling in the distance, and now and then an owl would *hoot-whoo!* somewhere in the dark, cavernous depths of the timber. A few fish jumped in the lake, making startling splashes.

Yet there did not seem to be the normal amount of night noises—probably because they were expecting some sound from the town.

They could see the outlines of the town now. They were closer to the eastern edge of the lake, where the water was deep, far too deep for poling. There was a current here, enough current to joggle the raft and sweep them along. They paddled furiously.

Suddenly they could make out the shape of a cabin or two in the night.

“Holy cow!” said Renny, with relief. “I was beginning to think there wasn't any town here!”

The beach was a typical lumber camp beach with a coating of bark, twigs, driftwood. They heaved the plane wing up on solid ground.

Renny said through teeth knocking together from the chill that he could use a fire and dry clothes.

“We will try the first cabin,” Doc said, but his repeated knocking got no answer from the building. The door was locked. They tried the next cabin, with about the same results, except that Renny peered into all the windows, then grunted and asked, “There's no blackout in effect in this part of the country, is there?”

“Not that I know of.”

“It looks to me like all the windows are curtained with black on the inside.”

“Yes.”

“Approach the next house silently.”

“Righto.”

They heard the woman crying before they were anywhere near another house. The sobbing sound was so unexpected that Renny would have run toward it, but Doc caught his arm. “Take it easy. We've dashed headlong into too many things,” Doc said.

They went forward cautiously and learned, more by sound than by sight, that a cabin door was open, that a man was standing in the door, and that he was having an argument with his wife.

The man was mumbling trying to calm his wife and she was insisting that he shouldn't go out into the night. She kept pleading, “Joe, please don't!”

Joe said, “Look angel, I don't feel so good myself about going out there. But what are you going to do? You got to go on living with yourself. And I'm sure that was a plane crashed out there in those snags.”

“Please, Joe, please!”

“Listen, Vi, if I was out there in a plane that had smashed, you'd want somebody to come after me, wouldn't you?”

The woman sobbed and said, “Joe, I'm afraid. Something horrible will happen to you, I know it. I'm so afraid. Why can't we leave here before this awful thing gets worse?”

Joe grunted uneasily. “I went to Georgia Tech. I may be half Indian, but I'm as civilized and educated as the next guy. And damned if I can accept the idea of this Black Tuesday thing being real.”

“Joe, please don't go out tonight!”

“I think there's a damned sight more to it than any ghost bear.”

“Please don't say that! Something awful will happen.”

Joe grumbled a while, then said flatly, “Vi, I'm going out to see if the people in that plane need help. Then, tomorrow if you say so, we'll leave this country.”

He stepped out grimly on to the porch.

Doc Savage said, “You won't need to do it, Joe.”

They heard the bolt of Joe's rifle cock. “Who're you?”

“We were on the plane.”

“Anybody get killed or hurt?”

“No.”

“Nobody needs help then?”

“All we need is information,” Doc said. “First, is this the town of Three Devils? Second, what is going on here?”

Joe was silent for a while.

“This is Three Devils,” he said. “The hell with the rest of your questions.”

He went back into the house and slammed and locked the door.

DOC SAVAGE tapped on the door and tried some persuasive talk, not telling Joe who they were or giving him any other information, but just trying to get the man into a more coöperative frame of mind. He wasted his breath and his arguments. He tried questions about where was the Mounted Police station, and got silence.

Renny and Doc walked away in the darkness, and Renny muttered, “This thing of everybody being scared is beginning to work on the roots of my hair.”

“It could get monotonous,” Doc agreed, failing to keep some of the tension out of his own voice.

Walking on tiptoes, keeping in shadows, feeling out places for their feet in the darkness so as not to crack a stick and make a noise, they entered the main part of town.

The night would have had to be as dark as blindness to make Three Devils look like anything but a typical sawmill and pulp mill town.

The mill was near the lake. They could see its continuous humping bulk. The boiler chimney stuck into the sky like a dark finger, naked of smoke. They could smell the sawdust, the odors of a mill, and beyond, lying probably for a mile or more along the lake shore, would be the sawed-lumber storage yard which they couldn't see.

Renny muttered, “They're shut down for some reason. That's strange.”

All the great mill lay in stillness. There was no whine of band saws, no angry chunking of logs, no clanking and muttering of conveyors, no rumbling of lumber-truck tractors across the great raised ramps. Considering how pulp and lumber mills were roaring all over the United States and Canada to meet wartime necessity, the stillness was corpselike.

The main street of Three Devils began at the big gate of the mill, and ran straight up a hill. It was too dark to read the signs over the places of business, but Renny had been in enough lumber towns to call them off sight unseen. Almost every business in town would be company owned, and so would every house. The houses would be alike, lavishly made of wood, stupidly painted a color that was a mixture of dirt and lead. The sidewalks of boards, the street paved with chips and bark from the “hog,” as the big waste grinder was called, was typical lumber town.

“Someone coming,” Doc warned. They eased over into the darker shadows and waited.

“Cops,” Renny whispered. “What are we gonna do? We're supposed to be under arrest at Little Sleepy.”

“Don't show yourself yet,” Doc advised.

THERE were four Mounted Police in the group, and all were carrying the short carbines. They walked the middle of the street, went swinging past silently.

Doc whispered, “Renny, I will trail them. You follow along about fifty yards behind. Keep out of sight.”

“Don't worry about me keeping out of sight. If they get us, they'll throw us in the bastile again.” Renny was emphatic.

The Mounties were patroling the town. They went west as far as the mill, turned back, and took another street, one which was lined with company houses. They didn't knock on doors, but they stopped and listened often.

The police post, it developed, was the only building in town which had a light. The light came from a window which was under a porch, which explained why it had not been visible from the plane. The patrol turned in there.

“Doc,” Renny whispered. “There's something danged strange going on here. Mounties don't patrol a town by fours like that, and keep in the middle of the streets, if things are at all normal.”

Doc thought so too.

“Come on,” he said.

“They'll arrest us!”

“We will have to make the best of that. Unless I am overexcited, we are mixed up in something where we are going to need the help of the police.”

Renny grunted, muttered something about these Mounted jails being hard to break out of, and followed Doc.

They walked toward the Mounted station, turned up the walk, and suddenly rifle muzzles jumped out of the darkness. Then there was ten seconds or so of tense silence while everybody was making up their minds.

“Know them?” asked a Mounted policeman.

“Strangers.”

“You know them, Patrolman Willis?”

“No. They're not from my part of the country.”

An officer said to Doc and Renny, “Come inside.”

The place was obviously a Post, the nerve center of a Mounted Division. The room was full of scarlet serge tunics and blue-black coveralls or riding breeches with the broad yellow stripes. A few were in khaki fatigues.

There was a lean-waisted, heavily jawed Inspector and a small, taciturn looking Sergeant Major.

“We found these two outside, coming into the Post,” a constable reported.

The Inspector stared at Doc Savage.

“Jove!” He exclaimed. He turned to a corporal, saying, “Get me the S-file, Landers.” They brought him a file, and after looking into it, he grinned, put out his hand and said, “You are Doc Savage, aren't you? Thought I remembered the picture.”

Doc returned the handshake, admitted the identity, and introduced Renny Renwick. He was surprised at the cordiality.

“Glad to have you,” said the Inspector. “Particularly glad to have you at this time.”

“Is your radio working?”

“No. Matter of fact, it was smashed today.”

“Then you have had no messages from Little Sleepy in the last few hours?”

“No. Why?”

Doc told him why.

Chapter IX. THE PHANTOM

THE Inspector—he said his name was Inspector Gavin Weed—had a way of listening intently with his lips parted, and jerking out an interruption at intervals. When Doc began by explaining that his associate Ham Brooks happened to know a man named Carl John Grunow because they had been college chums, the Inspector snapped, "Know Grunow myself. Puzzling thing, the way he went to hell during the last year."

Doc told of the cryptic radiogram for help which Grunow had, they thought, sent, and explained what had happened when they reached Mock Lake. "Know that O'Toole!" snapped the Inspector. "Sounds like something he'd do. Acid, eh? Dirty. He was hired, of course."

Of the death of Carl John Grunow, he said, "Who told you he was knifed to death?"

"Why, a man named Blasted John Davis."

"Good man, Davis," said Inspector Weed. "We asked him to lie about that."

"Lie? What do you mean?"

"Carl John Grunow wasn't killed by any knife."

"He wasn't!"

Inspector Weed grimaced. "Have you heard of our notorious ghost bear, Black Tuesday?"

"Yes."

"Carl John Grunow was apparently killed by the bear."

"But the knife story—"

"Not a word of truth in it. I'll explain why: This whole territory is getting into an uproar over that fantastic bear thing. There have been a series of killings by the mythical monster. The natives are getting upset. We saw no sense in exciting them more, so we pulled a little deception. I didn't like it, but I liked the thing that's come over this county a lot less."

"Exactly how was Grunow killed?"

"Crushed and clawed. It wasn't nice." Inspector Weed looked at the floor, finally grimaced. "His sister fainted when she saw the body, and our Doc had fixed it up a lot. Fainted like that." He snapped a finger quickly, grimly.

"Oh, the sister was up there?"

"Yes."

Doc frowned. "What about her brother's clothes and things?"

"What clothes and things?"

"The ones that were locked in a cupboard in the Trading Post at Mock Lake."

“There wasn't any such.” Inspector Weed's eyes were half-closed. “Who told you there was?”

“The proprietor of the Trading Post at Mock Lake.”

“Round face, red, scar on his left ear lobe, a short fellow with a voice that had done a lot of talking?”

“That answers the Trading Post proprietor's description.”

“Name is Tod Ibbert.” Inspector Weed turned to the constable. “Chapman, get to Mock Lake as quick as you can. Arrest Tod Ibbert.”

“Tod Ibbert lied to us,” Doc said thoughtfully. “He must have done it so as to draw attention to a note from Ham Brooks, a fake note threatening Grunow's life.”

Inspector Weed nodded. “That sounds like it. I'm glad we've got our finger on Tod Ibbert. He's the first one of them we've really got anything on.”

“There is more to my story.”

“Go ahead.”

THE news of the death of the skulker, O'Toole, made Inspector Weed narrow-eyed for a while. “Tod Ibbert have any chance to slip O'Toole the strychnine capsule?”

“Not that we know of.”

“Hm-m-m. Anyway, how the blazes would he make O'Toole take the poison?”

Doc suggested, “O'Toole knew we were going to question him, and he knew we would use force. If he was told the capsule was a knock-out drug, one that would make him unconscious for a while, he would take it, knowing there wouldn't be any percentage in our quizzing an unconscious man.”

“Hm-m-m. Reasonable.”

Doc told about the landing at the Mounted post at Little Sleepy, told about being locked up, about Blasted John Davis and Hurrah Stevens leaving in their plane. “They were coming here, I thought,” he said.

“They did.” Inspector Weed looked guilty.

“You've talked to them!”

“Yes.”

“Oh, then you knew everything I've been telling you?”

Inspector Weed nodded sheepishly. “I wanted to see whether you would tell it the way they did. You did.” He leaned forward anxiously. “But the rest of your story will be news. How did you get loose and come here?”

Doc gave him a brief picture of the raid on Little Sleepy, the attempted grenading, the killing of the three officers.

Inspector Weed stared at them with a kind of speechless horror. His lips moved, but if it was words he

was trying to make, he didn't get any out.

The small, silent Sergeant Major finally said to Doc Savage and Renny, “Sergeant Weed at Little Sleepy is the Inspector's kid brother.”

“He wasn't killed, Inspector,” Doc said. “Apparently he had left earlier in a canoe.”

Inspector Weed lost some of his horror, pity replacing it, and he eyed the table silently.

He said, “Three of my men killed, eh? Butchered. That's the worst yet.”

He seemed to have nothing to say. No one else had anything to say either.

Finally a detachment of three officers, all of them soaking wet and shivering, came in.

The new arrivals said that they had found the plane that everyone had heard crash in the lake, but they hadn't been able to find any bodies before the cold water got them. Then they gathered around the stove and began taking off their soaked clothes.

Nobody seemed to be finding any words.

RENNY RENWICK went over to the stove and took off his own clothes, wrung them out, and spread them over the backs of chairs. Doc Savage did the same. A constable tossed them a towel without a word.

The silence had seemed strange at first. Now suddenly Doc realized the reason for it. It was a silence composed more of fury than anything else. Fury mostly, and piled on that a feeling of impotence. It was the feeling that men would have when groping around in a dark room where there was an enemy who would kill.

Steam from the drying clothes filled the room with clammy fog. Two constables, apparently more to relieve their feelings than because the weapons needed it, began cleaning their rifles. They were the old Ross rifles, weighing seven pounds, bolt action, but with the efficient rear leaf sight that hinged forward and fitted with micrometer thimble, five adjustments and wind gauge. They handled the rifles with the care of a tool they were preparing for a job.

Inspector Weed stood up suddenly.

“Come here,” he said.

He wanted to show them the radio station. It was a more powerful layout than the one at Mock Lake, but it was wrecked in the same fashion—smashed, clawed. There were impossible grooves dug in walls and floor.

“At Mock Lake, it was the same,” Doc said.

Doc was puzzled by the Inspector's reaction to the story of the Little Sleepy massacre—the fact that he seemed to be doing nothing about it.

“What are you going to do about Little Sleepy?” Doc asked.

“I started a detachment over there earlier tonight, as soon as Blasted John Davis and Hurrah Stevens got here in their plane.”

“The detachment go by plane?”

“By canoe—powered with outboard motors.”

“Do you have planes?”

“We had two. They were disabled last night.” Inspector Weed gestured at the mangled radio outfit. “Something the same way our radio stuff was smashed.”

Doc Savage looked at the Inspector sharply. “The spook bear is following a system.”

“Too much system.” Inspector Weed's voice had a grinding uneasiness. “Destroyed all our radios and our planes the last two days. It's pretty calculated.”

“Inspector, will you give me a frank answer to a question?”

“Ask the question first.”

“Exactly what is behind all this?”

Before Inspector Weed could answer—he looked as if he was going to—a man burst into the post.

The newcomer was Blasted John Davis, looking as if the wolves were after him. He had a dirty scratched face with a bleeding scalp cut.

“It got Hurrah!” he yelled. “It packed him off! But we can trail it, if we hurry!”

Inspector Weed said bitterly, “I suppose you are telling me that infernal bear—”

“That's it!” Blasted John yelled. “Come on! Hurry!”

WITH an unexcited efficiency that didn't waste any time, Inspector Weed got himself, Blasted John, Doc Savage, Renny and three constables in a touring car.

Blasted John meantime got out the information that he and Hurrah Stevens had been at Stevens' cabin—one of several cabins which Stevens maintained in various parts of the country—when something unexpectedly knocked him senseless. His scalp wound was the result of the blow. When he awakened, which was no more than five or ten minutes later, Hurrah was gone, and there were the marks of the legendary bear.

Doc noticed that, whereas Blasted John had previously spoken as if he didn't really believe there was any such thing as a monster spook bear, now he talked as if he thought there was.

The car chased its headlights down a chip-and-sawdust paved street, past stupid looking houses all the same color. One of the constables was driving.

“Inspector,” Doc said, “you were about to answer a question.”

“I know. About what is behind all this, you mean?”

“Yes.”

Inspector Weed jerked a hand at the dark, hiding, silent town. “You see how the place looks?”

“Like a ghost town,” Doc admitted.

“A ghost-ridden town, more like it. The town isn't empty. Some have gone, but most of them are still here. In ten days, if this keeps up, they won't be, though. They'll pull out and leave it to the spook.”

The car rocked, jumped, wheeled into a side road.

“The pulp and sawmill closed down today,” Inspector Weed continued. “The mill is big, one of the biggest in Canada. It's unbelievable that such a thing as a spook bear could frighten the employees in an industry of that size into quitting work. But that's what happened. If this bigwig company meeting doesn't do a miracle, there won't be any lumber business.”

Doc asked, “Just how were they frightened into quitting?”

“In so many different ways, that we can't put our finger on any one. Rumors, talks, beatings, fights—things that spring up when men have a case of nerves. Accidents in the mills, in which men are killed or mangled—and the accidents always happening to men who don't believe there is a phantom bear, who have laughed at the legend.”

“Have many been actually killed by this spook?”

“Directly by the bear—no. But indirectly, every one who has been killed or hurt can actually trace back to the legend. Or at least that is the general conviction. From what the Mounted has been able to learn, I would say that it is true, too. Fantastic, but true.”

Doc was silent for a while. The car was traveling through an arching tunnel of trees.

Finally Doc asked, “Do you believe in the bear legend?”

Inspector Weed hesitated. “Oh, there is no doubt about the legend.”

“You are quibbling. Do you think there is such a bear?”

“I hate to sound that crazy,” Inspector Weed said bitterly.

THEY unloaded from the car in front of a swanky cabin that was more lodge than cabin. The place was located on a high point overlooking the lake, the putty-colored expanse of which was dimly visible through the night.

As they were getting out of the car, a train whistled in the distance, and Doc stopped to watch it come poking its headlight around a bend, and rumble into Three Devils and on through, going fast.

The train was short enough that it did not take long to come and go, and Inspector Weed gave a discouraged grunt preparatory to saying, “That's the pulp train from the mills in the north. Usually it's a long cuss, but you notice tonight it was shorter than an atheist's prayer. Means production is down to about nothing on the northern mill, too.”

Blasted John yelled, “Stand there and look at a train! I tell you that bear got old Stevens! And I gotta have Stevens for this big company meeting that's comin' up!”

They followed the excited, bouncing Three Devils superintendent into a lodge interior which looked like a Hollywood set. Not American, though, but more foreign. Swiss. That was it. Swiss, or Tyrolean. Tyrolean, Doc decided, although there wasn't much difference.

“Here is where I was bopped,” said Blasted John.

It developed that he had been in bed asleep, and the blow which had laid him out could have come through the open window near his bed, or by someone or something standing in the room.

Leading the way into another room, Blasted John said, “Here is where Hurrah Stevens was sleeping.”

The bedroom, for a building made of logs, was an enormous thing. It was the kind of a place you would like to have if you had twenty or thirty million dollars. But it looked a little prissy for a man of old Hurrah Stevens' horny-handed character.

Doc Savage, vaguely puzzled, paused to look at the pictures on the walls. They fitted exactly into the Tyrolean scheme of decoration. They fitted too well, almost.

“Good decorating job,” Doc said. “Wonder who did it?”

“Old Hurrah himself, far as I know.”

Blasted John said excitedly, “Come on! Come on!” and bounded outdoors with a flashlight to show them the tracks.

The tracks were enough for anybody. The constables gathered around them and said oh and ah.

Inspector Weed switched on extremely powerful electric hand lanterns which he had brought, said, “We'll see how a trailing job turns out,” and started off.

The trailing was hard on nothing but the wind and muscles. It led upward a while, turned to the right, and started down toward the lake. The going had been easy all the while, but it was easier now, and they began to trot.

Renny said, “Blasted, it's an easy trail. Why didn't you follow it instead of coming for help?”

Blasted John Davis spat.

“I was scared,” he said.

THEY were about seventy-five yards from the lake shore when someone took a shot at them. No one saw the powder flash, but the bullet came close enough to sound nasty. Doc and Renny Renwick took to a ditch, and everyone else got in or behind something.

Doc could hear Inspector Weed saying in an unexcited voice, “Whoever that was couldn't see us very well. Constable Driscoll, you fire a couple of shots in the air. The rest of you watch for the flash.”

Constable Driscoll fired once, and there were six answers all from the same gun. A rifle, Doc concluded, and from the loud shot-gunnish nature of the report, decided it was an automatic hunting rifle of a popular medium-calibre make.

Inspector Weed inquired around calmly whether the bullets had hit anyone, and they hadn't.

“There seems to be only one gun,” Doc said.

“So far. You can't tell, though.”

“Who owns the house?”

“It belongs to an Indian named Crowbill, who was about the first one to get scared out of town. Been empty more than a month.”

“A supposedly vacant house, then?”

“Supposedly.”

A fresh procession of bullets came out of the house. The shooting was wild.

In town, a light or two appeared at doors or windows, but nobody came to see what the fireworks were about.

Weed scattered his men. He told them to whistle when they were in position, then he would warn the gunner in the house to surrender, after which they could throw tear gas and do whatever else they thought necessary.

For six or seven minutes men crawled around in the darkness. Each one, when he got what he thought was a good position, whistled twice. Finally they had all whistled.

Weed hailed the house.

“This is the Mounted!” he shouted. “You are under arrest. Do you want to come out, or be carried out?”

A voice—a woman's voice—demanded from the house, “You are the Mounted?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn't you say so?” said the woman. “I couldn't tell.”

A light appeared in the house—a flashlight. The door was thrown open. The woman appeared in the opening.

Weed exclaimed, “Nell Grunow!” He ran forward.

Doc galloped after him demanding, “Carl John Grunow's sister?”

“That's her.”

As Doc came nearer Nell Grunow, he saw that she was young and that she was more scared than he had ever seen a young woman look.

Calling out to them seemed to have taken the last strength she had for voice, because they could hardly understand her hoarse terrified whisper as she said, “The—Black Tuesday—I saw it.”

Having said that, she lost knee support and sagged down until she hung, rather than sat, on the door threshold, holding to the edges of the door with both hands to support herself. Her arms shook.

“You saw the bear, huh?” Weed asked.

Her wordlessness meant that she had.

“Where did it go?”

Her eyes went to the lake.

“What did it look like?” Weed asked.

“I—I—” She lifted her face. “I—can't tell you. I'm afraid.”

Weed was obviously unskilled with women, and he spoke to this one as if he was trying to make friends with a strange animal in a cage.

“Come, come, young lady, you're safe enough,” he said. “What did the thing look like?”

The girl swayed. Her, “I won't tell,” was a barely audible whisper coming from her lips as she let go the door frame and piled out on the ground.

Chapter X. BAIT

RENNY RENWICK jumped forward to help Nell Grunow, showing quite a bit of enthusiasm for the job. The girl was pretty—enough to look pretty even when she was that scared.

Inspector Weed was disgusted. He gave way to a spasm of profanity, smoking backwoods cusswords which made his constables back off uneasily. “Get on the trail of the damned spook bear!” he finished.

The trail they had been following led on past the cabin and straight into the lake. It just went out into the water and disappeared.

“The old cuss must be a fish-bear,” Weed muttered angrily.

Doc said, “The trail at Mock Lake led into the lake too. That always the way?”

“It is whenever a lake is handy.”

“And when one isn't?”

“We always lose the tracks. Sometimes on hard rock, sometimes they just disappear in the timber. But mostly it's a lake or a big creek.”

A search of the house turned up nothing but the empty cartridges from the girl's rifle.

They went back to the Mounted post, Blasted John Davis wailing about the disappearance of Hurrah Stevens, and demanding that they do all kinds of wild things in an effort to find him. He was either deeply concerned, or being more frantic than was necessary.

“I didn't know you loved the old rip so much,” Inspector Weed said.

Blasted John threw out his arms. “I don't give a damn about him! But he pays me three hundred dollars a week as superintendent here. Where else can I find a guy who would do that?”

“I wouldn't know,” Weed said, sounding as if he really didn't know.

At the Post, Weed called a doctor to ask what could be done about straightening out Nell Grunow's nerves. In the meantime, the girl was put in another room under the watchful eye of Renny.

The matter of three hundred dollars a week seemed to have been working on Inspector Weed's mind. The salary of a Mounted Inspector was sixteen to eighteen hundred dollars a year.

Weed muttered, “Three hundred a week! For a timber ape as dumb as Blasted John. You could have

knocked me over with a piece of goose down."

Doc said thoughtfully, "You do not think Blasted John is too bright?"

"Bright? If his intelligence was a fire, you couldn't see it on the darkest night!"

Weed cleaned his fingernails for a few moments, scowling over his money thoughts. Then he batted his eyes, looked foolish.

"I'm a great one to be talking brains! Hey, did you hear me send for a doctor a few minutes ago? You're a doctor, aren't you. See if you can straighten out the girl."

"Sure," Doc said.

The girl was twisting and turning and shivering on the bed. Renny was saying quiet, pleasant, comforting things, and looking more and more worried about the girl. It was rare for him to like a girl, but he liked this one.

Doc Savage made an examination, then told Weed, "There is nothing to do right now. Like a watch that is wound up too tight, you have to let them run down."

Weed said, "Okay. Thanks. Keep an eye on her, will you."

He went out.

Doc looked at the girl thoughtfully and asked, "Who are you trying to fool?"

She gave a louder groan and a more spasmodic twist, and then became still, evidently thinking over what he had said.

"I'm really scared, though," she said.

"What are you trying to pull?"

SHE thought that over, too, for a while. Then she glanced at the door, and asked, "Could you close and latch or lock the door. I wouldn't want to be caught talking so freely."

The door had a latch on the inside, and Doc cautiously dropped it. The girl nodded and looked at them thoughtfully.

"This makes it look bad for me, doesn't it?" she said. "Shooting at the police, I mean, then acting like this?"

"Not," Doc said, "if your reasons are good enough."

The statement seemed to hit her where there was pain, from the quick twist her mouth took.

"My brother was murdered," she said. "That seems to me enough reason for anything."

"You might have shot a Mountie."

She shook her head. "Not a chance. I was shooting over their heads. And there was nothing behind them that my bullets could hit but the lake. I knew where I was shooting and who I was shooting at."

“Then you wanted to be arrested.”

“That was just part of what I wanted.”

Doc said thoughtfully, “That part you yelled about seeing the spook bear was the other part, eh?”

Nell Grunow was startled. “That's nearly clairvoyant of you,” she said uneasily. “How did you know?”

“Your voice was a little too loud and firm when you said it, as if you wanted to be sure everyone heard.”

“Oh, was it that obvious?”

“Maybe no one else noticed,” Doc said. “How about giving us the rest of the story.”

“Did my brother get any information to you before he was—was—before what happened to him?”

“Not a word.”

“I wished he had. I think he knew plenty.”

“You think Carl John was killed because he had learned more than was good for somebody?”

“He must have. What else would explain it.” She had trouble with her self-control and sat biting her lips until she got straightened out. “Carl John had been working on this more than a year. They said he—that he became a bum. That was true, only he did it deliberately. He became a bum outwardly so that he could associate with the trash without arousing their suspicions, so he could hunt information.”

“So your brother got wind of this at least a year ago, you think?”

“I don't think. He told me there was something horrible getting ready to happen to this pulp and timber country. He said it was his duty to stop it. Carl John loved Canada, and loved this country, a great deal. He said that what was going to happen might ruin this district for years. So he was going to stop it. The army had turned him down because of a heart ailment, which I think had something to do with the way he felt.”

“What had he found out?”

“He wouldn't tell me. He never told me. He said it was dangerous for me to know.”

Her lips trembled. She said, “Then he went to Mock Lake as radio operator. We had been radio amateurs before the war, both Carl John and I. And then—then the mounted told me he had been killed. I flew—flew over there with them. After the funeral they—they brought me back.”

She put her face in her hands and her shoulders shook. Her sobs were not loud, but heavy, convulsing.

THE girl's crying set Renny to blocking out his big fists and scowling at them.

Finally Nell Grunow said, “Tonight I couldn't sleep, couldn't stay in the house. I guess I was driven wild by the feeling that the police weren't able to do anything, and I went for a walk with a flashlight and my rifle. I don't know whether I thought I might find some way of helping solve this thing, but that must have been in the back of my mind. Because, as soon as I saw the bear tracks, a possibility popped into my mind.”

“Holy cow!” Renny was startled and disappointed. “You didn't see the spook bear?”

“Just the tracks,” she said grimly. “I came across the trail by accident. But I saw it hadn't been made more than a few minutes before—”

“How did you know?”

“Where it went into the lake. The water was still muddy, all roiled and muddy.”

“No sign of anything out in the lake?”

“Nothing.” She shivered. “I looked and looked, but there was nothing. And then I heard a sound—men coming. It was you and the police. So I hid in the house and shot over your heads when you were close.”

“And the idea of that?”

She compressed her lips and tied her hands in a pained knot.

“Bait,” she said. “If they think I know too much, and I was going to act as if I did and was afraid to talk about it, they would try to shut me up. They would be afraid I would talk, or the police would make me talk. So they would approach me in one of two ways: First, bribery. Second, by force. Either way, I or the police would get a line on them.”

Renny grunted uneasily. “The second method might have been a bullet through the window.”

She nodded quietly. “If anyone got that close to the Mounted station for such a thing, the Mounted would get them. I would take that chance, I have faith in the Mounted Police.”

“That all you can tell us?” Doc asked thoughtfully.

“It is all I know.”

Doc stood there moving his thoughts around. All this had sounded like truth, and if it had come from a man he would have accepted it instantly. But he didn't trust his judgment with women. One of the earliest things he had discovered was that even a moderately good woman liar could tell him the most black-faced fibs without his knowing the difference.

Renny would be no help either, because Renny was obviously sliding for the girl.

Take away her grief, excitement, tension, Doc reflected, and she would be a very pleasant girl. She was neither too large nor too small. Her hair wasn't too blond, her eyes were a deep blue, not a washed-out blue, and everything else was very much all right.

Doc was going over her good points a second time, with considerable pleasure, when there was an uproar in the main room of the Post.

Something violent and not understandable was said—Inspector Weed's voice—and other voices objected. The scuffling continued and a chair upset.

Doc was reaching for the door when it burst open in his face, and Inspector Weed plunged through gripping a heavy piece of copper ore which he had been using as a paperweight.

Making hoarse sounds that were not words exactly, Weed tried to brain Doc Savage with the ore chunk. Doc evaded the blow, moving backward.

Two Corporals and three Constables followed Weed into the room and closed with Inspector Weed, trying to take the rock away. When Doc closed to get the stone himself, a Constable drew a revolver and cocked it, looking as if he intended to shoot.

They got the ore chunk and held Inspector Weed.

Weed glared over their heads at Doc and yelled, "I just heard from my brother at Little Sleepy. He had a portable radio with him in the canoe, so he could tell us what he found when he got back to the Little Sleepy station."

Doc, with ice inside him, asked what he meant.

Weed became inarticulate with rage and couldn't give a coherent answer.

A Constable, the one holding the gun and looking as if he wanted to shoot Doc said, "There was nobody but three murdered Mounted Policemen at Little Sleepy when Sergeant Weed got back there. Three dead policemen. And they found the guns that killed them. The guns had the fingerprints of your friends on them. Sergeant Weed had taken all of your fingerprints when he arrested you, and he had them with him."

Renny, trying to visualize what could have happened at Little Sleepy after they left, said, "Holy cow!" in a voice that had almost nothing but horror.

Chapter XI. DEATH AND A STORY

THE canoes with the outboard motors had traveled fast for some time. On the lake, making full speed through the night had been uneventful, but later they had turned into a small river, where there had been three violent upsets, one of which took the bottom out of a canoe. It hit a rock. They left the canoe.

The river had proved to lead into another lake, and there the raiders had transferred to a cabin plane. That is, four of them had gotten into the plane, and placed Monk, Ham and Johnny in the ship. That was about all the plane would carry. Nearly too many, because it barely got off the water with the load.

The flight was short, but evidently over mountains because it was very bumpy. The mountains told Monk and the others nothing, because this country had mountains in all directions. Quite a bit of the tail end of the flight was spent circling around waiting for a signal to land.

The plane came down on another lake.

A pale man with a loose face poled a flat-bottomed boat out to the ship. Monk and Ham and Johnny had their feet untied.

The man in charge—his name seemed to be Slade—said, "All right, get off here." He was a square man with a face that didn't inspire any poetry.

On shore there were several other men. Their faces didn't inspire any gentle thoughts either.

One lived up to his looks by saying, "This is damned foolishness. You should have knocked them off."

"The main squeeze wanted to ask them some questions," was the explanation.

They found out they were to ride horses. They were put on the animals, their feet tied to the stirrups, and the journey continued. They were blindfolded soon, though.

Monk thought he got a general idea of what kind of country they traveled. First there was a woods trail—the horses' feet sounded softly, and once a limb almost beheaded him. Later there was a long downgrade, then a beach, with waves breaking.

The men swore at the sun, which apparently was coming up. They quickened their pace.

When they entered the paper pulp mill, Monk knew it immediately. He was a chemist, able to immediately spot the different chemical odors.

Monk could even, he believed, tell the type of plant it was. He had recently spent much of his time developing an improvement of the sulphate process, one which gave a gentler action and a much greater yield. Pulp by Monk's process didn't have the drawback of the usual soldium sulphate gentle-action process, that of being incapable of taking a white color. Whereas most gentle-action pulps were suitable for only wrapping paper and such material, Monk's could be converted into newsprint and coated papers, and even have the strength for the highly coated process known as supercalandering.

They were carried into a building which Monk knew darned well contained the pulp digesters, the giant stomachs where the wood chips were cooked in disulphite solution to reduce them to pulp.

There was a series of iron stairs, then a door opening and closing. The blindfolds were removed.

“Take a last look around, boys,” a humorist said.

THE place was about as naked as any room could look and still contain quite a bit of equipment in the way of test tubes, retorts and the other stuff that is found in a plant test-room. There were two tall stools and a chair that needed paint, and a desk on which stood a telephone, a desk light with a green shade and a tray overflowing with cigarette ashes and butts, one of which was still smoking.

Monk looked at the smoking cigarette nib and wondered who had been smoking it and cleared out in time not to be seen.

Monk, Ham and Johnny were placed on the floor by having their feet kicked out from under them. Their ankles were tied, the rope carried up around their necks and hauled tight about their bound wrists so they could choke themselves to death by kicking around too much.

“You know anything about a pulp mill?” a man asked.

Monk said sourly, “What's a pulp mill?”

The man failed to see it was a gag and said, “It's a place where wood is turned into a material in which the cellulose composing the wood is hydrated by the imbibition of water to form a product known as pulp. In other words, it's one of the biggest industries in Canada.”

“Cellulose,” Monk said. “What's cellulose?”

The man fell for that, too, and said seriously, “Cellulose is one of the principal ingredients in the cell walls of plants, and trees. For instance, common paper is made of cellulose, but the wood isn't just chewed up and soaked and pressed out flat to make paper, the way lots of people think. The process is more complicated.”

“Chet, he's kidding you,” a man said.

"Eh?"

"You know who that homely mug is? Monk Mayfair, who developed the new Maysul process that we put in here about six months ago, at the orders of the Canadian government."

Chet's face got red. His feelings were hurt.

Another man picked up the telephone, said, "All ready at this end."

He listened, nodded, frowned, said, "Okay. About five minutes. Call me." Then he put the phone down and said, "The head cheese isn't quite ready to talk to these eggs."

Chet suddenly came over and kicked Monk in the ribs. "Razzing me, huh?" he snarled. "Asking me what cellulose was and what a pulp mill is. Figured you knew more about it than I do, huh?"

Monk said, "Sonny, you use that foot on me again and I'll tear it off you, so help me!"

Unimpressed, Chet kicked Monk again.

"I ain't so dumb as you figure," Chet growled. "You wanted to know what cellulose is. Okay, wise guy, I'll tell you. It's a complex polysachrose of polyose of monosaccharoses or monoses. It's a derivative of monoses by eliminating *x* molecules of water from *x* molecules of monose leaving one molecule of polyose."

"Oh, take your correspondence course and shut up!" Monk said.

Chet kicked him.

"You do that again," Monk yelled, "and it'll be your head I'll tear off."

He sounded so fierce that Chet lowered the foot with which he was about to land another kick. Chet scowled, looked around, saw the other men in his gang were grinning at him.

To restore his standing, Chet got rid of some more technicalities about pulp.

He said, "So you're smart as hell, homely-face. I guess you know wood-pulp cellulose is used for a lot of things besides making paper."

"Nuts!" Monk said.

HAM BROOKS, in order to devil Monk and thus get his own mind off their troubles—Ham's candid opinion was that they would not be alive fifteen minutes from now—gave Chet some encouragement.

"I never heard of wood pulp being used for much besides paper," Ham said.

"Hell you didn't," said Chet. "You're ignorant, huh? Or maybe you're kidding me, too."

Chet sat on the edge of the desk, swinging his leg for a while. He decided he wasn't being kidded. He was nervous, so nervous that he had to talk. He got going on pulp again.

"Cellulose," Chet said, "is something. Ever hear of tri-nitro cellulose? About every time a soldier or sailor fires a gun anywhere, he uses some. Ever hear of artificial silk? Cellulose again. Film in your movie theater made out of cellulose acetate. So is cellophane, wrapping tissues, safety glass in your automobile.

Your car is painted with a lacquer made from nitro-cellulose dissolved in a solvent. So is dope for airplane wings. Most plastics are cellulose. Fabrics, the uniforms for soldiers, are waterproofed with a viscose or cuprammonium process with cellulose."

Chet grinned. He kicked a leg of the desk. "Didn't know that chunk of wood could be made into all those things, did you?"

Ham Brooks was no chemist, not even interested in chemistry. So some of the information had been genuinely interesting to him.

"This war," he said thoughtfully, "has brought on a shortage of paper made from pulp."

"And why not?" Chet demanded. "Hell, there's hardly a thing made from wood pulp that is not more important to any mans war than paper. Wars aren't fought with paper. They're fought with stuff made from wood pulp, so there's not enough wood pulp left over to make paper. So there you are." He became oratorical and said, "The average guy kicks because his favorite magazine has to cut its size down to something you can stick in your pocket. He says to himself, what the hell, somebody is chiseling, the publisher is pocketing the extra dough and hollering shortage when there isn't any reason for a shortage. There's plenty of reason. Wood pulp cellulose, the stuff paper is made out of, is as important as steel in this war. Damned few guns could be fired without it."

Ham thought about it for a minute.

He said, "Then the shutting down of all these wood pulp mills will be something serious, from the war standpoint."

"Brother, you hit the nail right—"

A man walked up behind Chet. He brought his fist around in a long swing the way you would swing a golf club and landed it behind Chet's left ear. Chet made a good deal of noise landing on the floor and did not move afterward.

"I should have done that five minutes ago," said the man who had hit him, over the ringing of the telephone.

THE man who answered the telephone said into it, "Yes," and, "All right, but I don't think it'll do any good," and, "Wait just a minute." He got down beside Ham Brooks with the telephone and told Ham, "Der Fuhrer wants to talk to you. Buddy, you better keep a civil tongue in your head."

A rattling, gurgling voice out of the telephone said something that Ham could not understand.

Ham said into the phone which the man held, "Take some of the rocks out of your mouth at least. I can't understand a word."

Ham wasn't guessing about the rocks, having heard the trick used before.

The phone receiver, more articulate now, said, "I am not going to make threats."

"That's fine," Ham said, wondering if he had heard the disguised voice somewhere before, or just suspected he had because it was disguised.

"Why did Doc Savage come up here?"

“We were sent for,” Ham said instantly.

“How much did you know about the situation before you got here?”

Ham, thinking faster than some of the witnesses who had lied to him on the witness stand, said, “Enough that I'll keep it to myself.”

“Eh?”

“What do you do with an empty cookie package?”

“Eh?”

“You toss it in the stove. It's empty. You know it's of no further use,” Ham said.

“Is that supposed to make sense?” the phone voice demanded sourly.

“Suppose I make it clearer. Suppose Doc Savage has a plan that is going to wipe all of you guys out all of a sudden when you don't expect it. Suppose I know it. Suppose you don't. How do you like that kind of supposing?”

The voice was silent long enough to prove that it didn't like it. “You're probably a liar.”

“Maybe.”

“If Savage had such a line on us, you wouldn't be telling me about it.”

“Ordinarily, no. The way things stack up, yes.”

“Eh?”

“It's better for me if you know I'm not an empty package. The same goes for Monk and Johnny, here. You don't throw packages that aren't empty in the stove.”

That got another silence from the voice.

Then the voice said, “You open packages you think might not be empty and pour out the contents.”

“You can try,” Ham said.

“Let me talk to the guy who is holding the phone,” the voice said grimly.

THE man with the telephone said into it, “Yeah,” and, “Yeah,” and, “It might work,” and, “Yeah, I'll try that, too.” He hung up.

He put down the telephone and stood over Ham and began, “Brother, you're a package—”

“—that's about to be opened,” Ham finished for him.

“Yeah, that's right. You think you'll like it?”

“I don't know.”

“We'll find out, honey.”

The man turned and said, “Get about five gallons of sulphuric acid and a crock big enough to put this guy's feet in it, and then his hands and finally, if he doesn't turn into an empty package, his head.”

They went away for the acid and the crock.

“You know what sulphuric acid is?” the man asked Ham.

Ham knew. It was the stuff in batteries, and enough of it concentrated long enough would eat a man, clothes, flesh and bones.

Chapter XII. DECOY

THINGS were quieter in the Mounted Police post at Three Devils. They had taken Inspector Weed out for coffee and breakfast and a cooling off.

Doc Savage and Renny Renwick were locked in a cell at the end of a corridor.

Nell Grunow, occupying a room down the hall—she had been told that she was not under arrest, but would be if she tried to leave the Mounted post—thought of something.

“That radiogram—the one that brought you here,” she called. “I sent it.”

Doc asked, “How could you? There was no operator at Mock Lake.”

“Oh, I was an amateur for years. My brother and I both.”

“How did you happen to call us?”

“I knew my brother planned to do it. And he had told me about that code between him and Mr. Brooks—that Aunt Jemima flapped her wings thing. So I used that.”

A Mounted policeman came into the hall and ordered, “Pipe down. No talking between you prisoners.”

In the back of the jail somewhere a prisoner shouted angrily that there was still free speech in Canada and they or anybody else could talk if they wanted to. The objector was a trapper who had been thrown in for shooting a moose out of season. He had no interest in the matter.

“This is a fine mess,” Renny told Doc Savage bitterly. “Monk and Ham and Johnny are in no telling how bad trouble, and the doggone police have us locked up.”

Doc said, “The Mounted have no choice in the matter. There is evidence enough against us to hang us several times.”

“Yeah, I know. I don't hold it against them.”

THE day came up bright, crisp. The wind had switched to the north and had a chill which was apparent even inside the Post. There was considerable grim activity, the arriving and despatching of constables.

The general air was that of a besieged place. The mill whistle had not sounded, and there was not much talk on the street, evidently. Doc heard a train arrive and depart, and later heard a constable come in and report that over a hundred citizens of Three Devils had left town with their families.

A man, evidently the mayor or his local equivalent, came in and talked to Inspector Weed. All of the man's words sounded gloomy, although some of them did not reach Doc. The substance of what the man said was that there didn't seem to be any chance of persuading the men to go back to work in the mill.

There had been too many unexplained accidents—or rather, accidents explained by the angry psychic interference of a supernatural bear. The man doing the talking said that he personally had never believed the Black Tuesday legend was anything more than a legend, but now damned if he wasn't beginning to wonder.

A man must have come in with a telegram about then, because Inspector Weed swore feelingly, cursing something he had been expecting to happen to him which had happened.

"They've sent a Special Commissioner to look into this thing," Weed explained. "He's arriving, with three special constables, on the next train from the south."

"Does that mean the head office is taking things out of your hands?" the local official asked.

"I don't know what it means," Weed said. "I haven't seen this special commissioner yet."

THE special commissioner blew in like a strong wind. He could be heard in the street, criticizing things in general, the things in general including the way a constable's gauntlets were tucked in his belt.

Inspector Weed swore bitterly, "Gauntlets tucked in his belt!" and went out to meet the newcomer.

The special commissioner had a voice which rumbled through the log building. He was loud and breezy. He said that it was damned treason, nothing less, that the pulp mills were shut down. Something harsh should be done. The iron hand. But, of course, he would have to look the situation over first. He would have to know everything. Question people.

A man needed the feel of a place, said the special commissioner. Therefore, he was setting up headquarters at the hotel, not here at the post. He'd do his questioning there, in a more natural atmosphere.

First, he'd question Doc Savage, that engineer Renwick, and the girl. He'd take them to the hotel now.

Inspector Weed said all right, but he wanted a written order. He got his order, and Nell Grunow, Doc and Renny were marched out.

The car was a sedan, Detroit made, with enough room for the prisoners, three men in constable uniforms and their guns, and the special commissioner, a remarkably small and ratty looking man for so much voice and noise.

"The hotel," he said.

The car moved off, turned a corner and went two blocks and Doc looked back—everybody had been staring stiffly ahead—and said, "Is a Mounted Police car following us?"

The special commissioner jumped violently, and his face, as hard as a cocoanut, went flat with fright. Everyone except Nell and Renny looked wildly back.

Doc said, "Renny, they're fakes!"

He wasn't sure they were. It had been a good act, and inspector Weed wouldn't be an easy man to fool.

But there was something phony about the hotel shift, something more phony about the way they all jumped and looked back.

Renny got a constable-uniform by the throat.

When another whirled back, Nell put two fingers in his eyes.

The special commissioner said, “Where did we slip up?” and tried to get a gun out.

Doc threw his weight against the man to pin him, and seized and held the third constable-uniform. For a moment there was violent grunting and lunging, then the weight proved too much for the door and it burst open. Doc and his pair fell out into the street.

The driver of the car was the one Nell Grunow had temporarily blinded with her finger-jabbing. He began steering the car up what he thought was a street and ran it into a tree. Some glass fell out of the car, and the caved-in radiator began spurting water. All four doors popped open by the impact, flapped back and forth.

Renny and Nell Grunow came out on one side of the car. They ran.

The two men in mounted uniforms came out the other side, and they also ran. When Renny saw they were running, he changed his mind and started after them, thinking they must have lost their guns.

Doc called, “Renny, no!”

Renny reversed himself and raced after the girl for cover.

Doc pounded and choked his pair, trying to keep the pounding and choking from making them unconscious, but still enough to discourage them. When they were dazed, he sprinted and joined Renny and the girl.

THEY got behind a house, kept going, found their way blocked by a high chicken-wire fence. The fence was too high and too rickety to climb, so Renny hit it full speed, and the rusty wire mesh split. They went through a cloud of squawking chickens, through a gate and into brush.

Doc stopped and said rapidly, “Here is what we have been wanting—a direct lead on them.”

“Holy cow, that's right,” Renny said.

“I am going to follow them. You follow me.”

Renny nodded, and watched Doc disappear in the underbrush. The bronze man's vanishing was a little startling, because of its abruptness and silence.

The girl gasped and clutched Renny's arm. “Oh! Which way did he go? We've lost him already.”

Renny chuckled. “Sort of surprises you, doesn't he?”

“But he said follow him.”

“Sure.”

“But he's gone. How can we—”

“Sit down,” Renny suggested. “You look a little shaky, and I know I am. What just happened was about as complete a surprise as I've bumped into in some time.”

The girl sank down. “But how will we—”

“Follow him? That won't be tough. He'll blaze a trail a blind man could follow. We'll just sit here and get back on our mental legs and get our breath.”

Nell Grunow was slightly reassured. She breathed inward deeply, said, “Those men came to get you and Mr. Savage and kill you, didn't they?”

Renny shook his head.

“You get the credit for their visit, I would say,” he told her. “You said you saw the spook bear last night, and when you wouldn't talk, it indicated you knew something important. Or it would indicate that to those guys. My guess is they wouldn't have pulled a raid like that just for Doc and me.”

She touched his arm. “I hope I helped. It wasn't easy, and maybe it was foolish. But I couldn't think of anything else.”

“Sure.”

“Mr. Renwick, do you think there is any chance that there is such a thing as a ghost bear?”

Renny thought: “I should laugh of that question. I should laugh loud and hard, because it's so silly.” But he didn't laugh. He didn't feel like mirth at all.

“Holy cow!” he muttered. “Look, all I know is what I've heard—and those tracks. What do you think?”

Nell Grunow was silent for a long time. “I know something killed my brother,” she said.

THE trail Doc Savage had left was not quite as plain as Renny had indicated it would be. But they could follow it.

Mostly it was footprints stamped in soft places, limbs bent, bushes blazed so that the light under-bark wood showed. Here and there were regular Indian trail signals—rocks placed one big one with a little one beside it to indicate direction, and another on top to show it wasn't just two rocks there by accident. Twigs arranged in a V with the point indicating direction, and three twigs, three rocks, three of almost anything, to indicate danger or caution.

The trail led back only to the edge of town—the town was one street and a few side streets for the most part—then followed cover to the southward, toward the lake shore.

Renny, watching their route, saw a bunch of grass tied with a grass stem, four twigs sticking into this. “They've got together,” he concluded.

The trail after that took a more direct line, leading toward the lake, or rather the flatlands adjacent to the lake shore. The district where the mills were.

From one point, the hill slope above the mills, Renny saw enough to conclude that the mills—there was a regulation sawmill of considerable size, then a pulp mill, side by side along the lake shore—were closed. Dead. Not a trace of smoke from any of the boiler stacks. Nor was there a sign of movement in the mills. There was a high steel-wire fence around the whole mill establishment, evidently a precaution against

sabotage. The gates in the fences were locked, guarded as far as Renny could see, by only one pair of Mounted Police at each gate.

Renny voiced his conclusions about where the trail was leading.

“That gang headed for the mills,” he said.

Nell Grunow nodded. “Probably the best hiding place they could find, with the mills shut down,” she said.

Renny rubbed his jaw. “You know, this whole thing looks like it might revolve around these paper mills.”

“I've noticed that,” the girl said grimly.

They went on, following Doc's markers, moving cautiously.

Renny was oppressed by uneasiness. The feeling was hard to figure; it was like having an ache without being exactly sure where the ache was. The thing began to bother him more and more, until finally he decided he must be doing something that he shouldn't be doing, or forgetting to do something that should be done.

It did not occur to him that he wasn't destroying the trail markers which Doc Savage was leaving for them.

Chapter XIII. BAD SIGNS

THE too-thin man with the dark hair suddenly leaned over and snatched the cigarette his companion, a fat man with a gold filling in the front of one tooth, was smoking. He snuffed it out.

“Ps-s-s-t!” he said.

They were still under the bush where they sat. There was only the two of them. The undergrowth was thick and still around them, still except for a few birds. A minute or so ago there had been more birds whistling, cheeping, fluttering. Now there were not as many.

“What the hell, Will?” muttered the one who'd had the cigarette.

“You see something move over there, Jake?”

Jake's face went wooden, alert. He seemed to strain everything listening, and shortly some sweat stood on his forehead.

Will noticed the perspiration and grinned without much humor. “Hot, Jake?”

“What makes you think I'm hot? It ain't cold.”

Will said, “Sweating over knocking off the three redcoats at Little Sleepy last night, eh?”

Jake muttered uncomfortably, “It sounds better when you don't talk about it. Shut up.”

Will stood up, holding his rifle alertly, eyes jumping everywhere. He began to walk forward, stiff legged, like a dog approaching another dog which he expected to fight momentarily.

“What's that?” Jake was alarmed.

“Listen.”

They listened.

From Jake finally: “I don't hear nothing.”

“You town guys give me a pain where the pants are tight,” Will grumbled. “By God, didn't you notice the way the birds quit hollering a minute ago?”

Jake, having thought about it, said, “Maybe they just got tired and quit. The way the birds holler around here, you'd think they'd get tired sometimes.”

“Somebody went past.”

“How do you know?”

Will muttered that he thought he'd seen something move in the brush, and kept going. He saw no one after he had gone a hundred yards, and turned back, retracing his steps and examining the ground. When he stopped, his grunt was pleased.

He pointed at the ground. “See that?”

Jake saw three rocks, one on top of the other and one beside those two, and he said, “Three rocks. So what?”

“Were you ever a Boy Scout?”

Jake snorted. The only scouting he had ever done, he said, was for a way to get a pint for his old man back in Montreal.

“Don't brag about it,” said Will bitterly. “I was a Boy Scout, and if I had taken it more seriously, I wouldn't be crawling around in the dark killing redcoats for two hundred bucks a day, and having nightmares of a noose around my neck every night.” Will said it sincerely.

Then he pointed at the rocks. “That's a trail marker. Woodsmen all over the world use them, and every Boy Scout knows them. Come on.”

They began to follow the trail.

They came to a soft stretch of ground which had retained footprints.

“A big man and a girl were the last ones by,” Will said, studying the marks. “They are following our four pals who went past a while ago in such a stew.”

“You mean,” said Jake, alarmed, “that they're trailing our guys who tried that trick to get Doc Savage, Renwick and the girl away from the redcoats?”

“As sure as you've a nose on your face,” Will agreed. “Come on. And be careful. The first time you step on a limb and snap it, I'll snap your neck.”

WHEN Will finally saw Renny Renwick and Nell Grunow he blanched to the color of an oyster. He had the presence of mind to knock down Jake's rifle.

“You kill-simple dope!” he breathed.

“But I can pop them both—”

“Sure, and never know who left that trail for them to follow!”

“Huh?”

“Somebody is leaving them a trail! It's marked as plain as street signs. Who could be doing it, you think?”

Jake's tongue swiped his lips in fright. “One of our men?”

“Who else!” Will said, and cursed bitterly. “Some stinking so-and-so is letting it out about us. That explains our bad luck.”

Jake, in a flash of wisdom, said, “Yeah, it probably explains how Carl John Grunow found out so much we had to knock him off before he could get Doc Savage in here.”

Will was of the opinion it was worse than that. “Come on,” he said, and they skulked ahead.

It was just pure coincidence that Renny Renwick about this time realized what had been bothering his mind. He came to a rock-still stop.

“Holy cow!” he rumbled.

Startled, Nell Grunow asked, “What is it?”

“Of all the pot-headed dopes! You know what? I've been leaving that trail of Doc's without touching it. Wouldn't have taken a second to kick down every sign. But did I think of that? Not this jug-headed hombre.”

“But who would follow us?”

“The police, maybe the gang themselves, anybody who got curious—” He stopped.

He stopped because the feeling was knocked out of his tongue by a stone which skipped off his head. The stone, not as big as a baseball, felt like the whole earth. His knees went to spaghetti, and all he could see was something like what you see in an astronomer's telescope at night. He heard a cry—Nell Grunow's—and feet, scuffling, slappings, grunts, bushes whipping and bodies threshing. Not until he got his face out of the soft ground did he realize his face had been shoved into it.

When an ankle got in the way of his hands, he grasped it and pulled and stood up. The ankle belonged to a man, so he began to swing the man around his head. It was a prodigious feat of muscle, but he had the strength for it.

The man he was swinging howled like one of those scream-toys you whirl around your head on a string. Renny let him go, and there was a satisfactory crashing as the man flew off through the brush.

Hurting in Renny's eyes was dirt, sand, he realized. He tried to clear it out. He was immediately kicked in the stomach by someone who knew exactly where to kick a man in the stomach. Renny went down, everything in him stopped and in a knot.

He had the sense to protect jaw and temples with his arms, and keep floundering about. He felt the kicker's foot glancing off him. The sand and dirt was still in his eyes, so mostly all he saw was agony.

He could hear Nell Grunow gasping and struggling, and decided the kicker was holding to her with one hand. He heard the thrown man staggering back from where he had landed, and wished he had tried to knock the fellow's brains out on the ground, instead of just throwing him.

A hard thing in his ear was a gun.

“I'm not fooling,” a voice said, the gun snout gouging emphasis.

WILL and Jake took Renny and Nell through about a quarter of a mile of brush and swamp to a high wire fence. It was a fence around the mills, Renny knew. A creek was crossed by the fence.

“Into the creek,” Will said. “Right at the west end of the fence, about two feet underwater, you'll find a hole. Duck through.”

The hole was there and the water was dark enough to hide it. It was mill-creek water, stained dark by waste.

On the other side of the creek bark and limbs and sawdust floated on the water. They waded, pushed, floundered their way for fifty feet, then climbed up a path where other men had lately climbed, and were among lumber stacks.

“We'll tell you where to go,” Will advised.

They walked silently. Will and Jake seemed quite confident the water hadn't harmed their rifles, so evidently the cartridges were well greased or paraffined. Renny didn't take a chance.

The lumber stacks, it became apparent, covered hundreds of acres. It was all rough-sawed stuff, not yet milled, piled for outdoor seasoning. Through each aisle ran a railway track for handling.

Will motioned a halt. He crept between lumber stacks to the shore of a log pond, and tossed a rock far out where it splashed. He watched the other end of the pond, about two hundred yards away. Soon there was a splash at that point.

“Coast clear,” Will said. “Let's go.”

The log pond was big, but out toward the lake Renny could see a much larger one. The size of a big lumber mill was always impressive.

The ponds were filled with logs, and every one had traveled an interesting path to get there.

Back in the cutting country, maybe as much as seventy or eighty miles away, high-riggers had gone up the trees to set the rigging before the fallers cut them down. After the trees were down, the buckers had cut them into lengths, then they were snaked away by tractors handled by men called cat-doctors, or by teams driven by men who were always called bull-punchers because in the old days the dragging had been done by oxen. The slashers would clean up after the logging operations.

At the little logging railroads, the logs were cold-decked beside the tracks for hauling to the mills. Once the head-loader and his crew got them on the trains, they were brought in and dumped in the storage ponds.

Handling the logs by pushing them around in the water was the traditional method. Lumberjacks with calked shoes and long peaveys, riding the floating logs and moving as easily as if they were on a

sidewalk—to the eye of a bystander—would work the logs out of the main storage ponds into the working ponds. Prying, shoving, they would keep a sluggish stream of logs moving in to the chutes.

Renny looked at the chutes as they came in sight. There were four of them with the big bull-chains which brought the logs up into the mill. The log dogs on the chains would grab the logs, pull them through a wash of hard-driven water spray to clean them at some point along the jack-chain.

The logs would go onto the band-saw carriages, where big steel steam-niggers grabbed them, held them, turned them as they were first squared. The sawyers rode the carriages, whipping back with what seemed suicidal speed with the carriage as it returned for each new cut.

After that, the slasher saws, the live rollers, the belt conveyors, the shingle-saws, and finally out on the conveyors under the expert eye of a length-cutter who cut them to lengths by expertly punching buttons which brought the saws up. Then to the graders, and after that onto the buggy and out over the lumber skyline to the storage piles, each of which was standard insurance distance from the next pile.

Renny grunted uneasily.

It was a big mill. To think that something as incredible—and silly—as a ghost bear had shut down such an enterprise was hard to believe. Renny grunted again.

“What you snorting about?” Will demanded.

“Just thinking there is more than a ghost bear behind all this, probably,” Renny said.

Will grinned thinly. “Brother, you ain't so far wrong.”

THEIR arrival in the mill caused a lot of scowling and a lot of showing of guns.

“Where's the boss?” Will demanded.

“The ex-special commissioner is upstairs.”

“Not him. I mean—”

“Hup, hup!” the man said quickly. “They don't know who the boss is. Keep shut about it.”

Will became angry and self-important and shouted, “I've got some business. One of our men left a plain trail that these two were following.”

“They which?”

Will repeated his information clearly enough for them to get it. The results were satisfactory. There was much swearing, and the prisoners marched upstairs, where they were confronted by the man who had pretended to be a special commissioner of the Mounted Police. His name was Gains. Or everyone called him that.

“All right, who's ratting. Who left that trail for you?” Gains demanded.

Renny laughed. It was a good laugh considering how little he felt like laughing.

“You think I'm going to tell you?” Renny asked.

Gains said, “You're right!” in a tone that made Renny's skin crawl.

Gains picked up the telephone and muttered into it; he told someone Will and Jake were there with Renny and the girl. Will shoved up and demanded to talk, and after a while he did talk, importantly and at length, telling the story of him and Jake capturing the girl and Renny, making it sound like a considerable feat in which Jake had been mostly a handicap. “Sure,” he ended. “We'll be right over.”

They walked through more of the mill building, turned right and entered a room. Here there were five or six men, among them was the proprietor of the Trading Post store at Mock Lake, Tod Ibbert.

Tod Ibbert, his wide, ruddy face freshly shaved and powdered, was immaculate and important in a business suit. His manner was different, too. There was a snap to his movements, an arrogance in his head carriage.

“Tie them to chairs,” Tod Ibbert ordered.

Will began, “I think we should—”

“You did a fine job, Will,” Tod Ibbert said sharply. “Now just stand by for further orders.”

“I think we should—”

“Never mind thinking,” Tod Ibbert said.

Will scowled and Jake laughed. Will was disappointed at not continuing to play an important role. Jake said, “Will made out like he caught 'em single-handed. But I was there, too.”

Tod Ibbert, glancing at Jake's numerous bruises, cuts, tears and contusions sustained as a result of Renny throwing him into the brush, said, “Anyone can see that.”

“It was me stuck a gun in Renwick's ear,” Jake said. “If I hadn't done that, we wouldn't be here.”

“Very well,” said Tod Ibbert, his commanding tone silencing Jake.

Twenty minutes later, Monk and Ham and Johnny were more or less dragged into the room.

THE more or less dragging was not due entirely to stubbornness on the part of Monk, Ham and Johnny. None of them was in first-class condition.

Renny, looking at them, got an ice-cake in the pit of his stomach. He knew acid burns when he saw them. Monk and Ham and Johnny had plenty, in the most agonizing places. They weren't in danger yet—that is, a good plastic surgeon such as Doc Savage or someone else, but he would have to be good, could fix them up as good as new in time. With time, and some luck.

Monk said, “They've been trying to make us spill Doc's plan for cleaning up on them.”

Suffering had made Monk's voice an old man's voice.

Renny's lips were stiff. Doc's plan? Doc didn't have a plan. Then he realized Monk and the others had saved their lives by telling that story and sticking to it.

“Don't tell them a damned thing,” Renny said.

Tod Ibbert—by now it was plain he had an important position in the organization—walked up and down while they were being lashed to chairs.

He made them a little speech. It went: “For your general information, let me tell you that we are now convinced that no physical means—and for that matter no other means at our command—will make you render us information. Therefore there will be no more of that. I assure you that I am not now threatening you.”

He paused, smiled at them with all the merriment of a skull.

“You will have a few minutes in which to contemplate death,” he finished.

Renny decided that no speech had ever impressed him more. The thing had a finality about it that made you entirely forget the somewhat bombastic wordage. It was not good to listen to.

The thinking about death, and it was sure they were all thinking about it, had been going on about five minutes when there was an uproar outside.

When the uproar entered the room, it was Blasted John Davis being wrestled along by as many men as could get hold of him. Blasted John had barely enough clothes left on him to make him legal. Most of these were hanging in strings from various parts of his person.

He looked as if he had been fighting for an hour and had just started.

Tod Ibbert walked over to the struggling knot, picked his chance, and kicked Blasted John expertly and agonizingly.

“Like a wart on a man's nose, you are more unsightly than harmful,” Tod Ibbert said. “But on the other hand, you might not be as dumb as everyone thinks, and that might account for some of our misfortune.”

“Huh?” said Blasted John. “What you mean?”

Tod Ibbert shrugged, pointed at Renny, Monk, Ham, Johnny, the girl, said, “You better do what they're doing?”

“Huh? What're they doing?” said Blasted John.

“Contemplating the crossing of the Sharon, thinking of that Stygian shore,” said Ibbert.

BLASTED John Davis missed the point entirely and yelled, “I don't know any lakes around here named Stygian or Sharon. What I want to know is where is my boss, Hurrah Stevens?”

“We'll bring him in here directly,” Ibbert said.

“You better! And by God, you better turn us loose!” Blasted John's indignation raged. “What you mean—walking in my house in the middle of breakfast and kidnapping me?”

“You just want to see Mr. Stevens?”

“I want to know he's safe.”

“Oh,” said Tod Ibbert. “That's a different matter.”

“What you mean?” Blasted John asked uneasily.

“Mr. Hurrah Stevens,” said Tod Ibbert, “will cross on the Stygian ferry with you.”

“Where the hell's this river Stygian?” yelled Blasted John.

Tod Ibbert laughed.

Monk said, “Listen, Blasted, he's talking about death.”

That was plain enough that Blasted John had no trouble getting it. He did not fight quite as much—they were gradually working him toward a stout chair—and scowled uneasily. “Going to kill Hurrah Stevens and the rest of us, eh?”

They began tying him in the chair.

Blasted John said thoughtfully, “There must be fifteen or twenty of them in the mill here. Does anybody know why they are all congregating here in the mill?”

Monk said, “I don't know what it is, but I think they've got some special dirty work planned for today.”

“How you figure that?”

“They've been going around like guys with a lighted firecracker.”

Blasted John nodded vaguely. “They come into my house this morning and put the kidnap on me. I can't figure it. This is all a mystery to me, as if I didn't have worries enough, with that company key-man meeting today.”

Renny's jaw went down suddenly. “That meeting!” he exploded. “Where was it to be held?”

“Right here in the plant.”

“Holy cow!” Renny said.

Blasted John got it, too.

“They'll have every key man in the company right here where they can kill them all!” he said bitterly. “Damn them! Oh, damn them!”

Nell Grunow said wildly, “They wouldn't dare such a mass murder!”

“It wouldn't have to look like a murder,” Renny told her. “The building could conveniently collapse or something like that.”

Tod Ibbert laughed.

“You guys see things a little too late, don't you?” he said.

Chapter XIV. POT LUCK

BY noon, there were about fifteen planes on the landing beach adjacent to Three Devils. They were all craft belonging to the Hurrah Lumber and Pulp Company, ships assigned for the private transportation of company executives.

A few others, but not many, arrived by logging train or motor launch.

When it was discovered that both Hurrah Stevens, President and Owner of the gigantic lumber and pulp empire which was controlled by the parent concern, the Hurrah Lumber and Pulp Company, had disappeared, together with the local general manager, Blasted John Davis, there was normal consternation.

By one o'clock, almost all the executives who had come for the meeting had gathered at the Mounted Police Post. There was considerable agitation.

"This meeting," said the manager of the big mill at Somerset, up north, "was called to be a planning session against this mysterious trouble we're having. It's a fine thing to find our president and a mill super have disappeared. What's the matter with the redcoats?"

Inspector Weed, harassed, said the Mounted was doing all it could do.

More was said that wasn't so complimentary to the Mounted, and Inspector Weed obviously had difficulty holding his temper.

"The Mounted is obviously helpless!" shouted the man from Somerset. "We're going to hold this meeting right away. We'll take measures ourselves!"

"The Mounted will coöperate fully," said Inspector Weed patiently.

"You'll be a handicap, if your past record on this is any indication," snapped the other.

Inspector Weed clenched his fists, but held his opinions.

Another company man snapped, "In fact, you don't need to send any Mounted to the meeting."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," said Weed bitterly. "But we will have Mounted men at your meeting to offer any information or help you desire."

"Okay. But we'll probably throw them out."

THE meeting convened at three o'clock. The spot was the old auditorium adjacent to the long grading sheds. Originally the place had been a company recreation hall, but with the expansion of the mill, another recreation center had been built in the town of Three Devils proper. This old one had been fitted out more luxuriously and used for meetings of this sort. The workmen had dubbed it the brass collars' hall, because the head men were called by the old railroad man's nickname, brass collars.

The mill, of course, was still shut down. There was, in fact, not a workman on the premises. Only the Mounted Policemen on guard duty at the gates. Even the company guards had quit work.

The meeting convened with efficiency.

The man from Somerset made a speech.

The text of his oration was: "Let's throw the Mounties out." He said this was a private meeting, and they would have to solve their problem themselves anyway, obviously. He used plain words.

Inspector Weed lost his temper. He said what he thought of them and their meeting.

“This is company property,” the man from Somerset reminded.

“All right, you can order me off as long as there is no evidence of crime which would give us a legal right of entry,” Inspector Weed admitted wrathfully.

Inspector Weed stamped out angrily.

He left two men on guard outside the hall door, though.

INSPECTOR WEED was walking alone through the yards when a block of wood flew from somewhere and hit him in the ribs.

“Ouch!” Weed said, and drew his gun.

A voice—not at all familiar to Weed—said, “Pick up that paper around the block of wood. Don't read it now. Put it in your pocket and get to the Post in a hurry, then read it.”

Inspector Weed swore, said, “Come outa there, whoever you are!”

There was no answer. Weed decided the voice had fled. But the moment he stopped hunting, the voice said, “Pick up the paper. Read it at the Post. Hurry.”

Weed picked up the wooden block, and discovered that several sheets of paper were tied to it. He hesitated, then pocketed these.

“That's right,” the voice said. “Now hurry.”

Inspector Weed made another hunt for the voice, instead. He didn't find it, largely because it was a voice which seemed to come from no definite spot. It sounded far away. He went on to the Mounted post.

He read the paper, and his hair stood on end.

“God!” he said hoarsely.

THE two Mounted Police on guard outside the door of the meeting hall had an uninterrupted twelve minutes. Then four strangers sauntered up and unexpectedly blackjacked them into insensibility.

“Watch them,” one of the strangers told another one. “Pop 'em again now and then to make them stay that way.”

“How'll we explain this?”

“Oh, we can say—or rather the guys in the meeting can say—that the enemy knocked the redcoats out so they could eavesdrop on proceedings.”

The other three strangers entered the meeting hall.

One of them addressed the gathering with, “The coast is clear. We conked the redcoats outside the door. The only others in the neighborhood are the gate guards.”

This got some laughter.

The man from Somerset took the stand. He introduced Tod Ibbert, who had just come in, saying, “You all know our second in command.”

Tod Ibbert's speech was: “I'm glad to see you all here. But it will be about ten minutes before the leader can address you. In the meantime, if you will excuse me, I will arrange it so he can appear.”

He went out.

DOC SAVAGE had found a khaki-colored hunting coat and a pair of khaki trousers where some workman had left them in his locker. The garments were, by unusual good luck, big enough to fit him. He was wearing them. Against the lumber piles, the khaki was good neutral coloring.

The neutral coloring had helped him avoid Inspector Weed when the latter searched after Doc had thrown the block of wood with the paper around it.

The paper Doc had thrown at Weed—it had taken considerable searching to find blank paper in the mill, and finally he had used sheets off a check log—contained the story, as completely as Doc knew it, of what had happened. Also suggestions for Inspector Weed's procedure.

Doc had now climbed along a series of roof supporting girders, in the long mill shed, and was positioned where he was able to look down into the room where Monk, Ham, Renny, Johnny, Nell Grunow, Blasted John Davis and Hurrah Stevens were prisoners.

The prisoners had not been touched in the last thirty minutes—not touched physically. They had been considerably affected by the mental danger in the situation—the certainty that death was close.

Tod Ibbert, who had been gone, now returned. He stood in front of the prisoners.

“Been thinking about that Stygian river?” he asked.

They had. Nobody said so.

Blasted John growled, “Who you think you're kidding? You don't dare knock us off!”

Tod Ibbert laughed.

He pointed at old Hurrah Stevens.

“Take him first,” he said. “Take him into the other room and turn on the shingle saw. It operates by electric motor, and there is still electric power in the plant.”

Men seized Hurrah Stevens. The old man gave every indication of being too frightened to even curse.

Blasted John yelled, “What you going to do with him?”

“He's the first,” Tod Ibbert said.

“You wouldn't dare!” Blasted John bellowed. “There's not a more influential man in this part of Canada!”

Tod Ibbert laughed. “The most important thing in this part of Canada right now is that spook bear, Black Tuesday.”

They hauled old Hurrah Stevens out.

Monk and the others could hear the shingle saw whining. It would cut a large block of wood into house shingles in one slicing movement.

The thing happened fast. They could hear Hurrah Stevens moaning, gasping, hear him being dragged.

Then the sickening sound of the saw in meat. It seemed to make one biting lunge, heavy and fleshy, with little whistlings as the saw encountered bones. Through the first part of the sound was Hurrah's scream.

Tod Ibbert came back in carrying a chunk of flesh tangled in the remains of Hurrah's coat. He tossed it down on the floor.

"Look like part of a man?" he asked.

Three of the prisoners were immediately sick.

"You could talk, you know," Tod Ibbert said. "I think we'll give you about fifteen minutes more to contemplate matters."

He went back into the room where the shingle saw was.

TOD IBBERT winked at old Hurrah Stevens, and Hurrah winked back. Hurrah made a gesture and a man shut off the shingle saw.

Another man threw a canvas over the rest of the quarter of deer which they had used for the flesh effect. They also had some catsup and red ink for the illusion of fresh blood.

Hurrah Stevens and Tod Ibbert went, by a roundabout way which took them where the prisoners could not see them, to the meeting hall.

Tod Ibbert took the rostrum briefly. "Our chief," he said.

Hurrah Stevens went before the gathering.

Every man in the room stood, and executed a salute by lifting the right arm stiffly to a forty-five-degree angle, palm outward.

"At ease," Stevens said.

When they were seated, Hurrah Stevens cleared his throat. He told them he was glad to see them, that he was proud of them.

"You have practically finished the first phase of our work," he told them. "And it has been most satisfactory. I would call it a psychological triumph. I am sure that, in the beginning, many of you were skeptical about our being able to take a legend of a mythical bear named Black Tuesday and make it into a calamity for our enemies. But we succeeded. I will tell you why we succeeded."

Someone gave him a drink of water.

"Twenty years ago our first agents came into this country," Stevens continued. "The first men were psychologists and engineers—planners. It was they who decided upon the legend of the bear. And the groundwork of building up the ghost bear actually began nearly twenty years ago. Skilled men were put into this country, and their job was to do nothing but 'see' this bear from time to time, see that others found its tracks, and otherwise build up the thing.

“In the meantime, I was sent into the district to play the part of a rich mining man who was going into the lumber business. I did that. I bought control of all possible lumber and pulp mills, further laying the groundwork for the future. Our men knew twenty years ago that the Canadian pulpwood industry would be a vital spot when the war came.

“War did come, and we managed to have as much trouble as possible. We made all the mistakes we could conveniently make. But, of course, we could not shut down our mills and pulp plants, because the Canadian government would have taken them over—and doubtless much to their astonishment, found they could operate them more efficiently.

“So, to bring a complete halt to production, this bear legend was brought to a climax. You men, picking your victims, saw that the spook bear spread death and injury where it would do the most good at striking terror. It worked very well.”

He paused a moment, laughed.

“The plant, as you see, is shut down,” he said.

“NOW,” continued Hurrah Stevens, “comes the second phase of our activities—that of spreading our scope of operation. We must work fast. The fatherland is, as I will tell you frankly, not doing too well. Neither is Japan. They need our best efforts, on a wide scale, at once.”

He paused for that to sink in.

“The job is titanic,” he said. “It is simply this: We must attempt to stop all pulp production in Canada.”

He gave that about a minute.

“Now, while you recover from the shock,” he said dryly, “Mr. Ibbert will demonstrate an improved device for making those ghost bear tracks.”

Tod Ibbert took the speaker's platform.

“The difficulty with making Black Tuesday's footprints in the past,” he said, “has been the weight of the machine necessary to do the job, and the difficulty of loading it into a canoe, which was frequently the only method of getting it away quickly.”

He motioned, and a man came trotting on to the stage with a complicated-looking gadget over his shoulder.

“Here, said Tod Ibbert, “is the new model, lighter in weight, much more efficient. The footprints are driven into the ground by a compressed gas hammer, fired electrically, much the same as a piston is driven down in an automobile engine by the explosion of gasoline vapor. The thing is expertly muffled, so that there will be less danger of it being heard. I understand that it has been necessary to kill seven different natives who heard the old machine operating.”

The man demonstrated how the machine worked. It did not make a great deal of noise.

“Now,” said Tod Ibbert dramatically, “here is another new wrinkle. This machine also distributes a chemical vapor which is a good-enough likeness to the odor of a bear for hounds to trail it. The fact that our ghost bear in the past has had no scent always struck me as a little incongruous.”

There was considerable laughter.

Old Hurrah Stevens went back to the stand.

“The next matter,” he announced, “is this Doc Savage affair. I am glad to inform you that is in hand. Savage's men are all prisoners. The Mounted is looking for Savage on murder charges. They will catch him. If not, we'll help them.

“As you know, a man named Carl John Grunow first got suspicious of us, and very cleverly kept it secret, meantime acting the part of a man who was becoming dissolute, in order to associate with the workmen and pick up information. When he had learned enough, he planned to send for Doc Savage. We learned of that, and took care of Grunow. But unluckily his sister knew he was going to ask Doc Savage for aid, so she took it on herself to summon Savage. As a result, she is with Savage's men now, and will be killed with them.”

Old Hurrah Stevens grinned at everybody.

“I would say we did well with Savage,” he said. “The man is supposed to be tough.”

They were laughing at that when the first Mounted Policeman came inside. He was Inspector Weed himself, and he didn't stop to tell anybody they were under arrest. There were too many guns in sight.

Weed shot old Hurrah Stevens twice in the head and once in the chest.

DOC SAVAGE had been waiting for the Mounted to raid. He had been hopeful, but not too sure, that it would come this soon.

On the chance the raid wouldn't come at all, Doc had filled half a dozen pop bottles with gasoline, and wrapped gasoline-soaked rags around the outside.

Now he lit these. In warfare, the gadget was used and called a Molotov cocktail, being effective on tanks. But they wouldn't do a man much good either when they hit him and broke.

The room in which the prisoners were confined had a high partition extending toward, but not quite to, the roof. Doc was up on the top of this, where there was an air space through which he could climb.

Having lit the gas-filled bottles, he began throwing them at the guards over the prisoners.

His first three throws were direct hits. Then the flames began to burn his hands, and he had to pitch the others in haste. The last three were misses, except that the last one bundled a guard's feet in fire.

Then Doc went over the partition, dropped.

He had a razor-sharp axe, the only thing that he had been able to find which might serve to cut the prisoners loose.

Renny was in the best shape. Doc freed the big-fisted engineer first.

Renny said, “Holy cow! Watch out!” One of the guards was trying to get his rifle on Doc.

The bronze man lunged. But it was Nell Grunow, upsetting her chair noisily toward the rifleman, who distracted the man's attention long enough. Doc hit him, and the man's jawbones became an unshapely knot.

There was one other guard not afire. Renny took him to the floor.

Doc got the dropped ax, began working on the other prisoners. Monk, Ham, Nell and Blasted John could navigate and fight. Johnny Littlejohn stood up, took two steps and fainted into the middle of a fire. Monk pulled him out. Johnny was badly damaged by the acid that had been used on them during the earlier torture.

Thereafter Monk was busy taking care of Johnny, causing him to miss most of the fight.

THE room filled with heat, fire, smoke, yells and people trying to kill each other. Three of the guards were blazing from head to foot, a fourth had his legs afire. But as the surprise wore off, they remembered they had guns.

Doc closed with a man, and somehow slipped and the fellow got on top of him, got an armlock. They strained and gasped, the man trying to break Doc's arm, Doc trying to prevent that.

Monk and Renny and Ham were not proud of the kind of a war they waged. They were, they soon discovered, almost as badly tuckered as Johnny. They didn't faint, but they did not do damage the way they usually did.

Blasted John Davis fought expertly. He was doing something he understood. He managed to kick a man in the face while the man was standing erect, which would have been a feat for a chorus girl.

In the other part of the plant, in the direction of the meeting-room, there was shooting, grenading and shouting.

A machine-gun began operating. It ground out short bursts at uneven intervals as the gunner deliberately found targets and cut them down.

Doc got his arm loose, mostly by main straining and grunt. The man who'd had hold of it tried to run. Doc hooked his ankle, put him down. The man got up again, would have reached the door had Nell Grunow not broken a chair over his head.

So suddenly that it surprised everyone, there was a stillness in which the flames rushed and crackled.

Then it began to rain on them. The automatic fire sprinkler system had been set off. The water fell, soaking them, and the fire hissed and sputtered and steam filled the room.

“Get outside,” Doc said.

They got out, dragging the prisoners, Monk and Johnny. Now they could hear the fight noises from the meeting hall.

Monk was intrigued by the warlike sounds. “Here, somebody take Johnny!” he said. “I don't wanta miss the whole jamboree.”

Renny took Johnny off Monk's hands, and Monk dashed off for the fight.

At about Monk's twentieth jump, the fight in the meeting hall came to an abrupt end.

A MOUNTED POLICEMAN stopped them, saying, “You better wait here until we see what's what.”

Doc told them about Hurrah Stevens being behind the mess.

Blasted John Davis was struck speechless at first, then blurted, “But he owned the company.”

“A European government with which we are at war really owned the company,” Doc told him. “I overheard enough to find that out. Stevens was just their figurehead, the head saboteur—which is what you would really call him.”

They talked, and watched the Mounted Police running around with machine guns and grenades. But there was no more shooting. They could hear Inspector Weed shouting at the survivors in the meeting hall. The Inspector sounded bloodthirsty.

Renny said, “Doc, I had a hunch you suspected Stevens earlier.”

“When do you mean?”

“Well, when we went to his lodge here in Three Devils. You looked at the inside of the place, and you got a funny expression.”

Doc nodded. “That was the first tip.”

“What do you mean?”

“The lodge interior was Tyrolean—too Tyrolean. The place had the feel of being owned by a man who had lived many years in the Tyrol. And the Tyrol is a popular mountain home spot for the Nazis. It wasn't a definite clue, but it started the ball rolling.”

Blasted John Davis was looking very blank.

“What's the matter with you?” Monk asked him.

Blasted John grimaced. “All my life, people have been telling me I'm dumb. By golly, maybe they're right. Maybe that's why Stevens had me for head of this plant.”

“That's not a very important thing to worry about,” Monk said.

“Dang it, it's important to me,”

INSPECTOR WEED came toward them.

The Inspector was rubbing his hands together.

“Better not go in the meeting hall,” he said.

“Why not?” Monk asked.

“It's a beautiful sight in there,” the Inspector said. He still sounded bloodthirsty. “But you need a strong stomach to enjoy it.”

“You got them?”

“All those the devil didn't get,” said Inspector Weed cheerfully.

THE END