THE SHAPE OF TERROR

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

Scanned and Proofed
by Tom Stephens

Chapter I

HERE is what happened:

Five dignified men in R.A.F. officers' uniforms came to the table where Doc Savage and Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were eating breakfast.

“Could we have a word with you, Mr. Savage? It's important,” said one of the officers. “We have a private room.”

“Naturally,” Doc said, and went with them—went with three of them only—to the private room.

The other two officers sat down at the table and talked chit-chat with Monk and Ham.

So that was what happened. That was how it was done. It looked as innocent as could be. Ham Brooks, who was a lawyer and so suspected everybody of being a crook, didn't suspect a thing for about five minutes.

The two R.A.F. officers talked easily. One of them told about a bomb that had hit near him last night. The bomb blew out the front of a tobacco shop, and something hit the officer in the chest, and he ran like the devil thinking he had been wounded. When he stopped and looked, he found it was a pack of his favorite tobacco that had hit him. He had the tobacco pack to show for it.

The restaurant was on the Strand, about a block off London's Trafalgar Square. Charing Cross Station was across the street, big and smoked and looking more like a moth-eaten palace than a railway depot, and the river Thames was within a good baseball pitch. Spread over everything outdoors was one of London's best fogs.

Monk was gobbling down a typical English breakfast dish, small fish about the size of minnows fried in deep fat the way a doughnut is fried.

Monk, a wide and square apish man with a very big mouth, practically ignored the talk. When he was eating, he ate. Only lightning striking, a pretty girl passing, or some other great event would interfere.

Ham Brooks had shoulders, not much waist, and an almost fantastic conviction that he had to dress to fit the occasion. Besides being a Doc Savage aid, one of five such, he was a really great lawyer. Famous, not notorious.

When he got suspicious finally, he didn't show it.

"I believe," he said, "that I shall see what is keeping Doc."

He was using his best Harvard accent, exaggerating it so that it out-Englished even a Salmon Lane limey.

"Don't bother, really," one of the R.A.F. men said hastily.

"But I want to know what's up."

"In that case, old chap, by all means let us go see how long he will be busy."

"You would?"

"Oh, definitely."

"Thank you," Ham said.

The two R.A.F. men strolled away, and Ham gave Monk a shin-peeling kick under the table.

"I think something is wrong," Ham told Monk. "Come on."

Monk said, "But my breakfast—"

"Fish tails are sticking out of your ears now," Ham said. "Come on."

The two R.A.F. men went into the same room into which Doc Savage had earlier gone with the other three. Monk and Ham went into the same room. The door was unlocked. They just pushed the door open and went in.

Monk stopped chewing his French-fried minnows and said, "My God! You were right!"

DOC SAVAGE was not in the room, and there was no sign of anyone else.

An open window, through which wind shook the curtains playfully, seemed the answer.

The window admitted to a bricked-in canyon of an alley, then the alley conducted them to a side street.

"There!" Monk grunted. "There they go!"

The two R.A.F. men were sprinting for Bedford Street, one of the streets that branched off the Strand

like ribs.

Monk, whose legs were actually shorter than his arms to a noticeable extent, could run amazingly. His gait was something to convulse an onlooker, but it left Ham, who could sprint himself, far behind.

The two R.A.F. men had a car parked on Bedford. The car, a dinky pre-war Fiat, was a touring model minus a top. The R.A.F. pair got in, one in front, one in back.

The one in back saw Monk coming. “Blimey!” he gasped. “Get going, Tod!”

Tod got them going, but not fast enough. Monk landed on the back bumper of the peanut-sized Fiat, the shock making the front wheels jump off the pavement briefly.

Monk wrapped his arms around the R.A.F. man in the back seat. The victim gurgled with pain, punching, scratching and trying to bite Monk. Tod, in the front seat, turned around and hit Monk over the head with an ordinary monkey-wrench. The blow didn't seem to bother Monk especially.

Monk stood up on the bumper with the man he had grabbed. Apparently his plan was to throw this one bodily at the man in the front seat. But the bumper broke off the toy car, and Monk and his prey fell into the street.

Tod threw the wrench at Monk, missed, and broke a shop window which was carefully taped against bomb damage.

The Fiat raced down the street, the lose bumper dragging and making considerable noise and knocking sparks off the cobbles. It disappeared into the ghoulish fog.

HAM arrived then, and because it had been his policy for years not to speak any pleasant words to Monk, he complained, “You run like the striped ape you resemble.”

“If you knew something was wrong, why keep it a secret?” Monk asked him indignantly. “I thought you were just having one of your overdressed dreams, you fashion-plate shyster.”

“How did I know what was going to happen?” Ham yelled.

“Well, what did?”

“I don't know. Somebody snatched Doc right out from under our noses, it looks like.”

Monk looked up and down the street. Cars were not abundant on London streets these days, because gasoline, in addition to being rationed, mostly just wasn't. Not another car in sight.

There were only two pedestrians. Both these were standing on the corner of Bedford Street and Chandos Street, staring at them.

Monk said, “I'll show you how to get words out of an Englishman.”

The R.A.F. man was still sitting on the pavement where he had landed with Monk when they fell off the collapsing bumper.

Monk picked him up bodily. Monk slammed him down on the cobbles. Then Monk landed on the man's belly with both knees, took the man's throat with one hand, took one of the fellow's ears with the other hand, and began to tear the ear off. “I'm going to take you apart a piece at a time,” Monk said. “You think I can't do it?”

Monk, in operation, didn't look like an industrial chemist with a nearly world-wide reputation. He looked like something out of a Stone Age cave, something completely fearsome.

“Oh, please, God!” the R.A.F. man gasped.

“I'll kill you, blankety-blank you, I'll kill you right here!” Monk said. “What happened to Doc?”

The R.A.F. man turned noticeably pale. “I can't—I don't dare—“ Then he shut his lips so tightly that muscle knots gathered around them.

Monk got the ear again, set himself, and pulled and twisted.

A shriek finally came out of the R.A.F. man as if something had split in his throat. There were more shrieks and then mixed in with them, words saying, “Tottn'm flying field!”

“What?” Monk demanded.

“Tottingham Flying Field,” the man gasped.

“What about it?”

“They were taking Savage there.”

At this point, the two pedestrians at the corner of Bedford and Chandos turned and ran out of sight. Monk happened to see them.

“Those two guys!” Monk yelled, pointing. “The way they ran. I know they're in it, too!”

Ham said, “I'll see about them.” He dashed up Bedford toward the corner.

Monk shouldered the trembling, sweating R.A.F. man and galloped after Ham.

At the corner, they ran into the arms of a policeman. The two pedestrians had merely run to get the bobby.

“Here, here, wot's goin' on?” the bobby said, and grabbed at Monk and Ham.

Monk shoved the R.A.F. man into the officer's arms.

“Arrest this fellow! Lock him up! We'll question him some more, later!” Monk yelled.

The policeman, taking one look at the manhandled R.A.F. man, made a natural mistake. “You two have been footpaddin' this poor flier. You can't get away with that!” He jerked his coal-scuttle helmet over one eye and twirled his white nightstick menacingly. “You're in custody, both of you.”

Monk, his voice even louder, said, “We can't spend all day explaining things to a cop! Our boss was just kidnapped and this guy had a hand in it. Take him in and lock him up while we see if we can find Doc.”

The bobby, not impressed, said, “Don't get 'airy-chested with me, bloke. You come along quiet, or—”

Monk opened his mouth to say what he thought. Ham elbowed him out of the way.

Ham said, “Officer, this ape is Monk Mayfair. I am Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, U.S. Army, detached service. We are aids of Clark Savage, Jr., better known as Doc Savage. And Doc Savage, as my bull-mannered friend just said, has been made away with. We chased the fellows who did it, and caught this one. He just told us, under duress, that Doc was being taken to Tottingham Airport.

We want to get to the airport at once, naturally. So will you hold this man for further questioning in the matter?"

The bobby was impressed. "You 'ave any documents of identification, sir?"

Ham had. He showed them.

"Very good, sir," the bobby said hastily. "You want this one held. Yes, sir. I am officer Kilgore. I will hold him."

Monk and Ham ran toward the Strand, where they had left the car they had been using.

"Another minute and he would have split that nightstick over that rock you call a head," Ham told Monk. "Use diplomacy in such cases."

Monk snorted. "Diplomacy gets people into more things than it gets them out of. You know where this Tottingham Airport is?"

"I think I can find it," Ham said.

TOTTINGHAM AIRPORT proved to be one of the system of R.A.F. airports which comprised the London defense. From the air it probably resembled a few cultivated fields and some farmhouses, and from the ground it was certainly no La Guardia Field.

Monk and Ham arrived at the head of a procession which included two British road police cars and one Yank M.P. on a motorcycle. They had not been inside the legal speed limit but once, which was when they were backing out of a field after failing to make a corner, since leaving London via old Edgeware Road.

"What the heck, it's an R.A.F. field!" Monk said. "Why would Doc be brought here?"

He didn't get an answer, because Ham was yelling and pointing at a group around a plane. The ship, a medium bomber, had its two motors turning over, and men were climbing into it. Doc Savage was undoubtedly one of the men.

"Doc!" Monk roared.

There was a commotion around the plane as Doc was hastily forced inside. The last of the crew got in, and the plane was already rolling.

Monk said, "Hang on! Maybe I can ram the tail of that thing and ground-loop it!"

The sentries at the gate were yelling and aiming their rifles threateningly. Men were pouring out of the hangars which were disguised as haystacks and farm buildings.

The bomber was a Handley-Page Hampden, two 1,000-h.p. Pegasus XVIII engines, speed two hundred sixty-five miles an hour at around fifteen thousand feet. An old crate, as modern bombers went. But it outran Monk and Ham.

The ship went into the air.

Monk and Ham stopped their car, feeling like a pair of pups who had chased a robin unsuccessfully.

Shortly they were surrounded by angry R.A.F. personnel, the most indignant being a red-faced fellow with the crown and stripes of a flight sergeant on his sleeve. What he had to say about their attempt to

ram the plane was in no part printable, but worth remembering.

When he stopped to suck in a breath, Monk said ominously, “Doc Savage was in that plane. He has been kidnapped.”

The flight sergeant popped his eyes. “Are you mad?”

“You're right, I'm madder than I've been for years,” Monk said. “What do you fools mean, letting them take Doc Savage right off an R.A.F. field like that?”

“Their orders were correct.”

“What?”

“Everything was in order. The pilot of that plane, his papers—” The flight sergeant stopped and swallowed, almost audibly. “What—what's going on here?”

“That's what I want to know,” Monk said grimly.

THE plane crashed then. The plane which had just taken off with Doc Savage aboard. It fell.

No one on the field saw it fall. The fog prevented that. No one at all saw the craft fall, it developed later.

But they heard. Suddenly, so suddenly that it was weird, there was silence around the car. Ghastly stillness where a moment before there had been clamor, indignation and bewilderment. These men, fliers and mechanics, had an instant feeling about something wrong with a plane. They could tell. When an engine went bad, they knew it as if a heart had stopped beating.

“‘Is hengines are 'aywire!” a Surrey man gasped.

It didn't take long. The engines stopped entirely. There was another sound then, one that came into being gradually, a banshee moaning of air against wings, with a kind of siren quality that came from twisting as the plane fell. Up and up the sound rose, up and up and—Umph!

Just an umph! of a noise, but it shook the ground, and with it a flash that lit the dull lead fog-crammed sky itself.

“Gord, they had a thousand-pound bomb on 'er,” someone croaked.

Monk and Ham began running toward the place where the plane had hit. Running was foolish. It must be a mile or two away. But they ran, and ran blindly, and there was sick hurting in their throats and no space for air in their lungs. They ran. Someone in a lend-lease jeep overhauled them and told them to get in and ride, and they did, but not as if they knew what they were doing.

Chapter II

AT first Monk and Ham were not allowed near the crash scene. Their status was not exactly clear; they were not Army men in uniform, and they had dashed onto the field without passes, and it was all deucedly strange anyway. That was what they were told.

The practical fact was that they were under arrest.

They sat there in the jeep, in silence.

Crash wagons roared past, and ambulances, and command cars. There was efficiency and profanity. The

crashed plane, what they could find of it, was not burning. The explosion of that big bomb had snuffed out any flame the way nitroglycerine blows out an oil-well fire.

None of the ambulances were in any hurry to leave.

That meant there was nobody who needed patching.

That meant everybody was dead.

A man, an R.A.F. officer, approached Monk and Ham. He wore a cap with a patent leather peak and one row of gold oak leaves. A group-captain.

"Jones-Jones," he said. He extended his hand. "Met you once in Washington. Remember?"

Monk and Ham didn't remember. They looked at the man dully.

Jones-Jones looked at the hand they hadn't taken and shrugged.

"I have been assigned this thing," he said. "Quite a bad thing. Deuced strange one, too." He glanced at his untouched hand again. "Don't go away," he said.

He walked off.

He was a tall man. There was range and length in his walk, a kind of pell-mell haste, as if he'd learned to walk back of a leash pulled by a large and energetic dog. His shoulders seemed as square as a carpenter could have made them.

He was back soon.

He had four small capsules and a canteen of water.

"Take this barbital," he said. "Shot of brandy is a bit more popular, but this is really the thing."

Monk thought that he and Ham just looked so bad that the man was offering them a sedative, the way pilots are sometimes given something to let down their nerves after a tight go.

But Ham suddenly realized differently. "What are you doping us up for?" he demanded.

Jones-Jones winced. They saw his hand tremble so that the little capsules tumbled about.

"Bit of a bad show ahead," Jones-Jones said.

Ham, hoarser than he had been, asked, "What do you mean?"

"We want you to identify some thing," Jones-Jones said reluctantly.

"You—Doc's body."

Jones-Jones was silent. He closed his hand to keep the capsules from bouncing out of his shaking palm.

"What is it?" Ham asked, almost shouting.

"A bit of an arm, some scalp with skull and brains attached, and other oddments," Jones-Jones said.

They went and had their look.

“Nobody but Doc Savage would have bronze hair quite like that,” Monk said.

“It's a piece of Doc, all right,” Ham said, and then was doubly sickened by the conviction that what he had just said was calloused and brutal and altogether horrible. And for a long time he couldn't speak another word.

CENSORSHIP passed the news of Doc Savage's death immediately. They could hardly have sat on the lid, anyway, because the news was too hot, and they would have had trouble convincing the public the information would aid the enemy. Doc Savage was not even in the active army, nor were any of his aids.

Doc's position with regard to the war had always griped him. Washington had insisted from the first that his status should remain pretty much what it had been before the war—that of a free-lance trouble-shooter—with an unusual organization which took on the weird, the unusual, crimes and criminals which for one reason or another seemed beyond the reach of ordinary justice.

Doc's insistence that he and his aids wanted to see a piece of shooting war always got a hearty laugh. It was then pointed out to them that they were probably shot at twice as often as the average Marine commando. Someone with stars on his shoulder in Washington had said, “Put it this way. You fellows are a particularly powerful medicine and you seem to be able to cure just about anything. But there aren't enough of you to cure this war. There're only six of you, Savage and five aids, and six men in a war aren't even a drop in the bucket. But you can be used to cure specific cases. When a new disease breaks out somewhere, you can be used to fix it quick. That's why we're keeping you on tap. You're a small supply of a very potent cure which we have for unusual troubles.”

Which didn't appeal to Doc particularly, because it seemed to him that he and his aids were pretty much lost in the shuffle of the giant that was war.

The general public had not forgotten the bronze man, as Doc was sometimes called in print. Doc had had for a long time a somewhat spectacular reputation. Unlike most reputations, it was not confined to New York, nor to Hollywood, nor even the States. He was as well-known in Cairo, Brisbane and Buenos Aires.

So the news of his death traveled faster than word of a phony armistice.

There were very few newspapers on which it did not make the front page, war or no war.

One thing was strange about all the death stories, though. There was nothing in any of the stories about the death being unusual.

MONK and Ham collared Jones-Jones about that. They were pretty grim.

“What's the idea?” Monk demanded. “Doc was kidnapped. Not a word has been said about that.”

Jones-Jones got out a cigarette, then put it back in the pack. He was uncomfortable. He stalled around for a while, then got it out.

“We have only your word for that,” he said.

Monk and Ham gave him pop-eyed looks.

“Come again,” Monk said. “What'd you say?”

“We have only your own word, no other proof, that there was a kidnapping,” said Jones-Jones.

Monk's roar should have rocked the House of Parliament.

“What?” Monk bellowed. “No kidnapping! But we caught one of the kidnappers!”

And Ham screamed, “An officer named Kilgore took him into custody!”

Jones-Jones sighed. “I have looked into that.”

“Huh?”

“There is no London bobby named Kilgore,” said Jones-Jones.

Monk howled once. Then he sat there with a dazed expression.

It was Ham who voiced both their thoughts. “Maybe the bobby was a fake, one of the gang.”

Jones-Jones nodded quickly. “Quite possible.”

Monk, who was no respecter of persons, reached over and got Jones-Jones by his well-tailored uniform lapels. “Brother,” Monk said ominously, “the gang who brought Doc to the airport, and put him into that plane, and took off with him, wore R.A.F. uniforms. They had papers admitting them to the field, and giving them permission to take off in that plane. What about that?”

“Everything was in order there,” Jones-Jones said.

And he stuck with the story. And Monk and Ham were not able to prove otherwise. They even went to the Air Ministry itself, and they gave a verbal going over to a flock of Air-Marshals, Vice-Air-Marshals, Air Commodores, and right down the line. All they got out of it was the relief of letting off steam—plus a horrible and growing conviction that something infernally clever and complicated had been perpetrated.

Because officially the death of Doc Savage, world-known adventurer, was down in the books as an accident. He had died in a plane crash which had taken four other lives. That was the record.

The R.A.F. was coöperative. So was the Royal Navy and the King's Army and everybody else. Coöperative, and, as Monk and Ham began to see, somewhat sympathetic.

The sympathy—the peculiar kind of sympathy it was—horrified Monk and Ham.

“They think the shock of Doc's death has mentally unbalanced us,” Ham said furiously.

JONES-JONES was more coöperative than anybody. They found him everywhere. He seemed to have attached himself to them as if he were their shadow. It got so, as Monk put it, that he was afraid to take the warming-cover off his toast of a morning because Jones-Jones might be under it.

Then Ham got another idea. Ham put this thought up to Monk, very seriously.

“I wonder if that Jones-Jones could be one of the reasons we're not making any headway?” he said.

Monk chewed on that mentally for a minute or two.

“Now that you mention it,” he said. “I wonder.”

The thing bothered them, and they watched Jones-Jones with that in mind. Pretty soon, they were fairly sure they had something.

“We've got to prove Jones-Jones is blocking our attempts to find out who killed Doc,” Ham said.

“How?”

“I'll think of something,” Ham said.

But it was Monk who thought of something.

He told Ham what had hatched out in his head. “Don't believe a word of this,” he warned.

“Word of what?” Ham demanded.

“What I'm going to tell Jones-Jones.”

What Monk told Jones-Jones was: “By golly, we've finally got a clue to something!” Monk sounded serious and grim. “We've found a man who knows something. His name is Elwood Riggs, and he lives at thirteen-two Downheath Street. He's a cab driver. He's not at home right now, but he'll be home from work at five, and Ham and I are going to be there to question him.”

Jones-Jones seemed properly happy. “What does he know?”

“He telephoned us. He said he overheard something that would tell us why what happened to Doc did happen.”

“Jove, I hope you do have a clue,” said Jones-Jones heartily.

Rather soon, Jones-Jones made an excuse to leave.

“Come on, overdressed,” Monk told Ham.

Ham had gotten the idea by now. “There isn't any such person as this cab-driver. That the idea?”

“That's the idea,” Monk agreed. “Now, we'll rush to that address, and see if this Jones-Jones is trying to get rid of our witness before we talk to him.”

They hurried to the Downheath address, and sure enough, there was Jones-Jones.

Jones-Jones seemed piqued at their catching him red-handed.

He tried a lie. He said, “I was so intrigued by your information that I thought I would be here when you got here and stand right in on the ground floor of your discovery.”

Monk grabbed Jones-Jones. “Search him, Ham,” he said. “We've got the guy who has been blocking our search for information.”

Ham was searching Jones-Jones when fully a dozen British officers appeared. Monk and Ham stared at them, unbelievingly, for they were genuine. They were very high officers. Intelligence, all of them.

“You caught me,” Jones-Jones admitted.

“Yes, we caught you,” Ham admitted. “But now we're caught. Now what do you do with us?”

Jones-Jones smiled at them gravely.

“This isn't at all what you think,” he said. “Not at all.”

“What happens to us?” Ham demanded.

“Oh, you'll die,” said Jones-Jones. “You'll die very prominently.”

Monk looked around at the grim-faced officers from Intelligence, discovered that there were a couple of Americans among them, and wondered what in the devil was going on.

THEY died very prominently. They were not happy about it, either.

First they were loaded in a car, and Monk started a fight when they were rolling past the snooty fountain at the west end of The Mall, which meant it was practically at the gate of austere Buckingham Palace. It was quite a fight, because Monk always meant business where his neck was concerned, and the change of palace guard marching over from Wellington Barracks in their finery almost had to interfere.

“You're a determined gaffer,” Jones-Jones said wearily, when Monk was subdued temporarily.

The business of dying prominently proceeded. The car whirled out through Stockton Station and on until the country at last become somewhat rural.

There was the usual countryside of rolling hills, stone fences, stone houses with thatched roofs, cows, chickens and narrow roads.

Here and there was a woods, and into one of these woods their car unexpectedly dived. It stopped beside a car identical to it in appearance, and apparently holding exactly as many men as their car held.

This other car pulled out into the road and whizzed off in the same direction in which they had been whizzing.

Even someone following them closely would have thought it was the same car, that they had merely continued on their way.

Ham's eyes protruded.

“Jove!” he said, with the best Harvard tone he used when dazed. “I don't get it.”

Jones-Jones grinned at them. “Bit complicated, what?”

Monk said, “Is that other car supposed to be us?”

“Exactly,” said Jones-Jones. “Now watch.”

They jumped out of the car and scrambled to the top of a very nearby hill, where they watched themselves die prominently.

The car—the car that had taken their place on the road—did not make a curve. It hit a stone fence, scattered the stones, and went hip-hop down a cliff about a hundred feet high. When the car hit the bottom, it burst into flame.

The accident happened near a village which was holding some kind of a celebration—reception for a returned war hero, it later developed—so plenty of people saw the “accident.”

A mob of curious surrounded the crash.

Soldiers who were in the village, most conveniently, got there first, though. They kept the onlookers back, as soon as they saw the uniforms on the occupants of the car.

It was a remarkably staged business of dying prominently.

Within a couple of hours the newspaper offices were getting news flashes of the death of Doc Savage's two aids, the noted lawyer Brigadier General Theodore Marley "Ham" Brooks, detached service; and also Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett "Monk" Mayfair, detached service, in private life a famous industrial chemist.

The news went across the Atlantic immediately, of course, and over the British Broadcasting Company news broadcasts.

Chapter III

MONK and Ham, about equally indignant about the whole affair, for once in their lives got together on a course of action. They went on a silent strike.

When ten o'clock that evening rolled around, they had not asked a question.

"Aren't you chaps at all curious?" asked Jones-Jones.

"It's your show," Monk said. "Go ahead and pull another rabbit out of the hat. Bring on the pretty girls in the chorus."

"You understand," said Jones-Jones patiently, "that no one was killed in the auto wreck. What you saw was strictly a well-staged phony. The uniformed figures in the car were dummies—"

"That's a lie," Ham said briefly. "They weren't dummies. Maybe they weren't alive, but they weren't dummies."

Jones-Jones got a little white, and also looked somewhat sick at his stomach. "All right, they were not dummies," he admitted. "But they were not alive. They were ah—well, they were bodies of some poor fellows who caught a bomb down south of Gillingham last night. The driver was the only one alive. He was a stunt man, and he rolled clear, diving off the road into the bushes, and escaping before anyone saw him, just an instant prior to the car going through the wall and over the cliff."

Monk and Ham were interested. But they stuck to their silence.

This thing, whatever it was, was not tiny.

Jones-Jones added, "The soldiers were at the village, of course, with orders to get to the wreck at once and keep away anyone, a local physician, for instance, who might have found the bodies were bodies when they went over the cliff, and also to make sure that you were identified as the dead men."

He glanced at them. "Your personal papers, taken away from you earlier, were put on the bodies for purposes of identification. Sorry about that, but we may be able to obtain them for you and return them later."

When he was asked no questions, Jones-Jones fell silent.

Monk and Ham had been taken to a farmhouse in the hills near Reigate and held there during the day.

Now their faces were powdered and they were given long black clergy robes. "Sorry about the irreverence," Jones-Jones said. "But the thing is so deucedly important. No one, absolutely no one, must know you are alive."

Now Monk and Ham were loaded into a civilian automobile, and they set out for London. Two R.A.F. officers in plain clothes rode in front, one driving, while Monk and Ham occupied the rear with Jones-Jones.

They rode in silence for some time. The Reigate uplands were left behind. Jones-Jones, riding stiffly with his shoulders more carpenter-squared than ever, kept glancing at them. Finally he burst out with impatience.

"Aren't you fellows the least interested in what really happened to Doc Savage?"

It was a moment before Monk could answer, with completely bitter feeling, "I ought to smash your brains out for that!"

Jones-Jones put a hand on Monk's arm. "Sorry, old chap, beastly sorry, really. But you irritated me, and I decided not to tell you until you asked me for the information. Beggar's trick on my part, and I'm sorry."

"ALL right, what did happen to Doc?" Monk asked after a while.

"He's alive."

"So we surmised by now."

"He was seized at the London restaurant, and whisked to the airport where—"

"Didn't Doc know he was going to be grabbed?" Monk interrupted.

"Did you? He was as surprised as you were. Considerably more difficult to handle, I will add."

Monk said, "I'll bet you couldn't have gotten him out to the airport if he hadn't been curious to see what was up."

"I'll dare say you're right, my boy," Jones-Jones agreed. "Anyway, at the flying field, he was placed in the plane. Already in the ship were—ah—bodies bearing the proper garb and identification. The plane took off. Doc Savage and the others parachuted to safety. The plane crashed. And you identified one of the body fragments which we—ah—we had prepared for the purpose."

Monk shuddered. "What an infernally ghoulish trick to pull."

Jones-Jones got out and lighted a cigarette. His hands were shaking.

"A bit upsetting to the stomach," he agreed. "But necessary."

"I don't see how anything could justify such behavior!" Monk growled. "Those bodies—"

"Look, old chap, the lives of several million people are at stake. I say several million people, and I speak conservatively. Very conservatively, no matter how wild and bat-brained it sounds. So no matter how revolting the details of the plan, it was justified."

"Skip it, then," Monk said distastefully.

Ham asked a question about something that had been puzzling him. "This whole thing was remarkably organized, but the utmost secrecy was necessary. What if one of the fliers at the airport, or one of the soldiers at the village, or one of the R.A.F. officers had given it away?"

"Every man connected with this was hand-picked," Jones-Jones assured them. "Most of them are special Intelligence officers who can be trusted with the most delicate and complicated missions."

"Then there was a lot of preparation behind it?"

“Oh, assuredly.”

“Why?”

“You should know within an hour.”

DOWNING STREET has in recent years probably become the best-known of London streets, particularly Number 10, which is the Prime Minister's office.

Actually, the neighborhood is the heart of the British Empire, for between Downing Street and Charles Street are the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the India Office, none of which were shown to visitors in peace time. In general, anything of importance affecting England is likely in one way or another to touch or be touched by the immediate neighborhood of Downing.

So when Jones-Jones conducted Monk and Ham—“whisked” was a better word—into a building on Downing which had been in the world news more than once in recent years, they were impressed. It was a place where important affairs transpired.

Still in the crow-black clerical robes, they were taken up in an elevator, then led into a large room—there had been guards everywhere—where quite a crowd was assembled. They found themselves sitting in what was evidently a prominent spot on a little dais, and looking over the assembled group.

Having looked, Monk breathed an awed, “Whew!” in Ham's ear. “We sure hit the jackpot in gold braid, didn't we?” he added.

Ham, out of the corner of his mouth, agreed, “There's more nationalities here than you can shake a stick at.”

He was wrong. There were only four nationalities. Chinese, Russian, English and American.

Ham nodded at one of the American officers. He knew the man, having met him in Washington. If these other officers were as high-ranking as that one, this was quite a conference. Ham began studying rank insignia, and decided it was quite a conference all right. He finally diverted himself trying to find an officer in the room who was as lowly as a mere Major. He found two.

There was another peculiarity about the gathering that did not impress Ham until Monk leaned over, punched him, and mentioned it. “None of these men are combat command officers,” Monk whispered.

True, reflected Ham. He had heard of several of the men present during the past; he beat his brains together trying to recall in what connection. Not combat. Services and supplies? No. That left the brains side of running a war, and he concluded that was it. The conclusion didn't give him much satisfaction. Just what was going on here? Russian, Chinese, British and Americans—it sounded international enough.

Then Doc Savage came in.

Everyone stood up.

In the confusion of scraping chairs as Doc Savage was thus honored, Monk managed to whisper to Ham, “That's nice of them, considering the way they kidnapped Doc and us.”

Ham whispered back, “This is a buildup.”

“Huh?”

“They're buttering us up. They've got a stick with a dirty end all ready to hand us,” Ham whispered.

Doc Savage came over and joined Monk and Ham. He sat down with them. “You fellows worried about me?” he asked.

“Worry isn't a tough enough word to describe it,” Monk said.

“Sorry. They wouldn't let me tell you it was all part of an elaborate plan.”

“What kind of a plan?”

“I do not know. I think that is what we are going to find out now,” Doc said.

A fat American officer with a Texas accent, who doubtless wasn't as dumb as he looked, got up and did the introductions. He had one thing. He had a marvelous memory for faces and names. He introduced everyone, and everyone was exactly what Monk had concluded they were—representatives of the four large nations comprising the Allies. There were representatives of some of the smaller ones, too. A man Monk had mistaken for an Englishman turned out to be a Brazilian Colonel.

There was a moment of silence following the introductions.

Then the fat Texan said, “The man's name is Johann Kovic. He is in a concentration camp near Prague. We must get Johann Kovic out and get him to Allied territory. He must be alive. The whole future of our kind of civilization depends on that. There it is in a nutshell, I should say.”

SO they were to spirit a man named Johann Kovic out of a Czech concentration camp.

The whole future of civilization depended on it.

Monk leered at Jones-Jones. “Another shenanigan,” Monk said. “Another toad in our soup.”

“Eh?” said Jones-Jones, startled.

Monk said derisively, “The fate of our civilization depends on it. Brother, when does the moustachioed villain jump out to tie the gal to the railroad tracks?”

Jones-Jones winced. His face underwent several expressions, none of which were approval. “You unutterable ipswitch!” he said.

“What's that?”

“An ipswitch”—Jones-Jones held thumb and forefinger a quarter of an inch apart—“is a boor about so high!”

“Glad you told me,” Monk said dryly. “And when we get in less genteel surroundings, I shall probably knock a tooth out of you. “

Ham whispered, “Shut up! Here comes another speech.”

It wasn't a speech. It was a recital of fact.

Johann Kovic was a Czech. He was in a concentration camp known as Dabelsky Dum, near Prague.

Johann Kovic suddenly became one of the most important men in the world to America, England and the other Allied nations. Because without him, the war might well be lost. And worse.

The man making the explanation paused dramatically there.

Monk caught Jones-Jones' eye and winked. “Just like a 1912 thriller-drammer.”

Jones-Jones winced. “Don't you realize this is serious?”

Monk had finally concluded that it was indeed as serious as all get out, but he said, “Sounds pretty tall to me.”

The speaker continued:

Without Johann Kovic, the war might well be lost. The reason was this: The Axis really had a secret weapon. There had been a lot of talk of secret weapons, beginning with the break-through and that fort in Belgium or wherever it was, just before France fell, when there had been so much talk of a nerve gas.

Secret-weapon talk had run the gamut of magnetic mines, strange gases, rocket-guns, rocket-planes, and so on. But this time, there was something.

The exact nature of the thing was not known. But they were positive a secret weapon did exist, and that it was terrible. So bad that the war outcome would be completely changed. Even with Germany whipped, the thing would go into the hands of Japan, and with it Japan could win.

But there was an absolute defense against it, developed by the Czech, Johann Kovic. Kovic worked out this defense without the knowledge of the Nazis, and against their orders. He had been able to do this because he was employed in the laboratory where the thing had been developed. He was one of the scientists who had worked upon it, as a matter of fact.

That was why Kovic had been thrown into a concentration camp. Because he had worked out a defense. He was the only man who knew of a defense against the thing. The details were in his head. That was why he hadn't been executed.

And that was why Kovic was being kept alive. He knew the defense. The Nazis didn't. Kovic was being tortured daily in order to make him disclose his secret.

If the Allies could get Johann Kovic out of Czechoslovakia before he was executed, he would give them the defense. He had managed to get word out to that effect. Then the Americans could have the defense ready when the weapon, now being manufactured, was sprung on them.

Or better still, once the Allies had the defense against the thing, and demonstrated that they had it, it was very unlikely that the Axis would even attempt to use it.

The devilish part of the whole situation was that the Nazis suspected that Allied agents would try to get Kovic out of their hands.

“The precautions they are taking are incredible,” the speaker explained. “To get Johann Kovic out is a fabulously dangerous and difficult job.”

It was being tossed in Doc's lap.

THE man who had been talking sat down and the fat Texan took the floor again. He spoke to Doc Savage now.

“What you have just heard is the general picture of the situation,” the Texan said. “As we realize, it tells you nothing but the motive, the problem, and the fact that we are appealing to you for a solution.”

Doc Savage said quietly, “By solution, you mean penetrating this concentration camp, Dabelsky Dum,

and bringing Johann Kovic out alive?"

"Alive, in possession of his faculties, and able to talk or write."

Doc asked, "Why were such elaborate pains taken to make it appear that myself and my aids had been killed in accidents?"

"So the enemy wouldn't suspect you," the Texan said.

"Suspect us?"

"Really to answer what is puzzling you would require hours of talk about our espionage setup inside Germany, which would be impossible. So I will merely say that we know, absolutely, that the Axis expects you personally, Mr. Savage, to attempt to rescue Johann Kovic."

"What gave them such an idea?" Doc asked.

"It's the sort of job that's your specialty, isn't it?" the Texan said instantly.

"Well—yes."

"Which means you'll do it?"

"Which means we'll try," Doc corrected.

Chapter IV

DOC SAVAGE was emotionally moved by the meeting and the appeal. The meeting was impressive by itself, because Doc knew something of which Monk and Ham were unaware. The men in this room were not ordinary men. Ordinary appearances were a very convenient asset in their profession. These men all belonged to the military departments referred to under the general heading of Intelligence. But they were more than that. Each man headed the department for his government.

Probably not at any other time during the war, Doc thought, had such an assemblage been held. This meeting was, in its way, considerably more remarkable than the Teheran conference or any Churchill-Stalin-Chiang-Roosevelt get-togethers. This meeting impressed Doc considerably more.

He had been thinking about it, and it was frightening. There was an enormity about it that alarmed Doc. Enormity and helplessness. The word helplessness had not been mentioned, but it described the undertone. Desperation. That was the keynote.

They were watching Doc Savage. They were waiting for him to speak.

Doc, standing in front of them, looking at them, got stage fright, one of the few times in his life he had had it. He thought: This meeting is a confession of helplessness by these men. They have said without words that they cannot do this job with the resources they have. And the resources at their disposal include, in the final analysis, every last soldier, air plane and gun in each of their nations.

Overdramatic? No, it wasn't that. It was frightening. It scared you. It made you feel as if you had been handed a straw and shown a charging lion and told: Here, you have to defend yourself with this straw.

I'm standing here, Doc thought, without words.

"Gentlemen," he said. "We—well—suppose we talk for a moment informally. First, this 'death' of myself and my two aids was arranged as a smoke screen to make it safer for us to work. But are you absolutely

positive that it worked?"

No one said anything for a while. Then a French officer—Free French—said, "Every precaution was taken. But in a business like this—nothing is certain."

Doc nodded.

"Second, we will want a means of positively and quickly identifying Johann Kovic," he said.

"We have that," the Texan said.

"Passwords will not do," Doc warned. "Neither will personal descriptions, fingerprints, tattoo marks, half of a coin or half of anything else that will match another half. This has to be quick and absolute. A sure check."

The Texan handed Doc a small cardboard box. It contained three glass phials. The liquid in them was water-colored.

"One for you and one for each of your two aids," he said. "Smear a drop of this chemical on the right cheek of the man you think is Johann Kovic. If it is Kovic, the chemical will make a green stain."

"Kovic's cheek has been prepared for the test?"

"That's right." The Texan grimaced. "It cost the life of one of your best men to do just that. He was caught and executed—as you will be if you are captured."

Doc Savage nodded.

"Thank you," he said. "That will be all."

There was a flutter of astonishment around the room. "But we can give you a great deal more information," the Free-Frenchman said.

Doc shook his head. "Thank you. But from here on we will make our own plans and proceed accordingly."

The Texan grinned. "Meaning there might be a leak right here in this room."

"As someone said a minute ago: in this business, nothing is certain," Doc said.

JONES-JONES took them, through the night, in a closed car. "I am still assigned as personal liaison with you," Jones-Jones explained. "Anything you want done, I am supposed to have done for you."

Monk said derisively, "What's the spy business coming to? I thought there was always a pretty girl in every case like this?"

Jones-Jones, who wore his dignity the way some men wear a silk hat, didn't like that. "You know, old boy," he told Monk in a confidential tone, "your legs remind me of an organ grinder."

"Eh? Why?"

"They carry a monkey about," said Jones-Jones with satisfaction. "Bit of a joke, what?"

Ham Brooks laughed. Monk snorted. Jones-Jones looked pleased with himself. "Got that out of an American jokebook I was reading recently," he told Doc Savage.

Doc asked, “Where are you taking us?”

“Private house on Drummond Street.”

The house proved to be a four-story with a gray stone front, a place with the coffin-like cheerfulness of that part of London.

“I rented it for you myself,” Jones-Jones said. “The place will serve as your headquarters while you organize for the venture.”

“Good enough,” Doc agreed.

Jones-Jones turned his neat bowler—he was wearing civilian clothes now—in his hands. He was bothered by something on his mind.

“If you don't mind,” he blurted, “I would prefer not to be in your confidence. Then I won't feel guilty when—if, I mean—if something goes wrong.”

“Naturally,” Doc said.

“Oh, thank you! You understand how I feel. In this sort of thing, sometimes one innocently is responsible for disaster. I—ah—wouldn't want to have such a feeling about myself.”

Doc nodded. “As a matter of fact, you mean you want to sever connections with us as soon as possible?”

“Frankly, yes. I—ah—my orders are to help you, of course. I am to follow your commands.”

“The first order is to go away and forget all about us,” Doc said.

Jones-Jones was delighted. “I'm ashamed of myself,” he confessed.

He showed them a short-wave radio transceiver, airplane type, explaining they could reach him with that. They wouldn't need to call him. All that was necessary was to switch the set on, and leave the carrier on the air continuously. He would pick up the carrier signal immediately.

Then Jones-Jones left, with the usual wishes for success.

“Cheerful cuss,” Ham said. “Acts as if we were a bomb that might explode any minute.”

“I'm gonna miss that Jones-Jones,” Monk declared. “I got a kick out of ribbing him.”

THEY got some sleep. At first no one was in favor of it, but Doc pointed out, “All of us have lost plenty of sleep the last few days. There's no sense going into this thing needing sleep.”

About noon the next day, a racket downstairs aroused them. Ham Brooks opened one eye and yelled, “Cut it out, Monk!” on the theory that Monk must undoubtedly be connected with such a racket. But Monk was still asleep.

Muttering about people tearing the house down, Ham went to the front door.

There was a little old lady in black with a tray over which napkins were spread.

“Maybe it was next Xmas-dinner you wanted, instead of breakfast!” she said angrily.

“Oh, breakfast,” Ham said.

“Get your silly self out of the way, and let me set this tray down. It's heavy.”

“I'll take it,” Ham said. “Here, here's a half-crown.”

“It's a fine hour to be having breakfast, you lazy scuts!” the little old lady said. But she snatched the coin.

Ham, who wasn't at his best before breakfast, said, “Better go chase a rabbit, granny.”

“A wild hare to you!” she snapped, and turned her back. Then she wheeled back with a quick flourish, put her small face close to Ham's, and said, “It's a fine flop I'll bet you make of the job, and Jones-Jones agrees with me.”

She went away. Ham's mouth remained open for a minute. He was grinning to himself when he went back inside.

“Who was it?” Monk asked.

Ham chuckled. “A little old lady bearing breakfast. She sure fooled me. I wouldn't have taken her for a British secret agent.”

“Is the coffee hot?” Monk demanded. “Hey! What do you mean—secret agent?”

“Oh, somebody Jones-Jones had bring us breakfast,” Ham said.

Doc Savage, with no particular expression on his face, took the tray. “The coffee is as cold as tap water,” he said. “I'll take care of it while the rest of you get dressed.”

But Doc didn't heat the coffee on the kitchen gas stove. He switched on the radio. The small transceiver which they were supposed to use for reaching Jones-Jones. And almost at once, Jones-Jones was on the telephone.

“Good morning,” Jones-Jones said.

“Nice breakfast you had sent up to us,” Doc said.

Jones-Jones was very silent for a moment. “I didn't have any breakfast sent you,” he said. “Good God! You haven't eaten it?”

THE poison was in the boiled eggs, which was quite clever. It had evidently been injected with a very thin hypo needle. “Conine,” Doc Savage explained. He got caustic potash from the chemists around the corner, and used it in a simple test to set the alkaloid poison free. Its mouse-like odor was easily recognizable.

The alkaloid being a pale yellow, oily liquid, blended well with the egg yolk. As Doc pointed out, it was in solution with some other chemical, apparently, to reduce its volatility and disguise its somewhat acrid taste.

“A very interesting poison historically,” Doc explained. “It is believed that conine, or spotted hemlock, was the poison with which Socrates was put to death.”

Ham Brooks came back from a grim hunting expedition in the neighborhood.

“No trace of granny,” he said.

“Sure she was an old woman?” Doc asked.

“Well, she looked old.”

“What color eyes?”

“Blue,” Ham said. He gave a fairly good description of the old crone who had delivered the poisoned breakfast. “She was at the door, being insulting about the lateness of the hour for breakfast, and I kidded her back and gave her a half-crown and took the tray—” He stopped, mouth open with astonished pleasure. “By jove! The half-crown!”

He went through his pockets in a hurry.

“Wow!” he yelled. “You know what I did? Passed out one of our trick coins!”

Monk demanded, “You sure of that? Doggone, it was clever of you if you did.”

“It was an accident,” Ham confessed. “But I did, all right.”

Doc Savage was puzzled. “What are you fellows talking about?”

“Oh, it's a brainstorm Monk had,” Ham explained. “You take a coin and give it a going-over with radium, and make it radioactive. Then you take a pocket edition of an electroscope and it will register when the coin is nearby.”

Monk said, “My electroscope has the same principle as the one every kid learns about at some time or other in high school—you know, two gold leaves suspended from a rod in a jar, or a pith ball on a silk string.” Monk dug a gadget out of a pocket. “Here it is.”

The thing was about the size of a cigarette lighter, but cased in black plastic. There was a small window, and a needle for registering.

Monk put a shilling coin on the table, then approached it with the gadget. The needle began jumping over when he was about four feet from the coin.

“That's the drawback,” Monk explained. “Not sensitive enough.” He shrugged. “But if the old lady keeps that coin, and passes near the instrument—that is, if we had enough instruments to supply all the cops in London—which we don't. Oh, I guess nothing'll come of it.”

“Have you an extra one?” Doc asked.

“Oh, sure.” Monk extended the little thing. “Here, you take it. I've got another one.”

A TRY had been made at killing them: the first touch of ice, of death, of treachery, of danger and of tension which was undoubtedly involved in this.

Doc Savage said, “Now we know the enemy is aware that we are still alive, and suspects our purpose.”

“That elaborate business pulled to make the world think we are dead—all useless!” Ham shivered. “Kind of creepy.”

They laid plans.

It took about thirty seconds.

“We will enter Czechoslovakia separately,” Doc said. “In other words, we will split right here this morning, and every man will use his own system of getting to Prague. No one will tell any of the others his

route or his plans. With that system, the others won't be gotten into trouble by information extracted from anyone who might happen to be caught." The bronze man eyed them thoughtfully. "Any objections to the idea?"

There were no objections. They had used such a system before.

It was the only sensible method. None of them would talk willingly if caught, and probably would not talk when tortured, although it was hard to say what a man would do when in a delirium as the result of torture. What they feared more than torture was one form or another of truth serum.

"Remember," Doc warned, "we are not to know a thing about each other's plans."

"Where do we meet?" Ham asked.

"Prague."

"But how—"

"Each of us will leave a personal sign, and the time, on a building front on the Vaclavske Namesti," Doc directed. "Pick the blocks between Na Prikopa and the Jinarisska, the same side of the street as the Hotel Ambassador. I would suggest the entrance to one of the arcades, one of the automat restaurants, or some other spot where you can loaf against a wall for a few moments, long enough to make a personal sign and the time."

Monk scratched his nubbin of a head. "I don't speak Czech."

"One look at you, and nobody would expect you to speak anything," Ham said unkindly.

Doc said, "The actual meeting-place will be the beer garden on the island, Slovansky Ostrov, in the Vltava river. There's an entrance near the National Theater, on the Kiegrovo Nabrezi. You walk across a short bridge to the island, and the beer garden covered acres before the war. Probably it is still open."

Monk and Ham spent about five minutes memorizing the names.

Doc checked the phials of chemicals with which Johann Kovic was to be identified.

THE separating was a frightening thing. So it was almost brusque. Monk and Ham exchanged a couple of insults. The result was very stale. They grinned at each other, then grinned at Doc. They left separately.

They went via the roof. That was Doc's suggestion. They used a skylight, and there was nearly a block of rooftops they could cross. The idea was to get away unseen.

When they were gone, the house suddenly filled with unpleasantness. The feeling had to be entirely in his mind, Doc knew, but it was real. It was so real that it worried him. Such feelings were a sign of nerves. He was glad to leave.

He left by the roof skylight. He crossed several housetops, picked another skylight at random, and went down a ladder. He found a man moving carpets out to a van.

"Give you a lift," Doc said, and took the end of the heavy rolled carpet. He crossed the sidewalk holding the carpet so that his face was mostly concealed. The man he had helped let him ride in the van.

Later he spent nearly an hour doubling and backtracking, and found no trace of being followed. He made a phone call from a bookshop on Tottenham Court Road.

He telephoned the Texan of the meeting last night.

“How much time do we have on this matter?” Doc asked.

The Texan recognized his voice. “The sensible answer is no time at all.”

“A few days, perhaps?”

“Maybe. For God's sake, man, don't waste any time.”

“All right.”

“By the way, I hear you were served a breakfast.” There was brittle incredulity in the Texan's voice. The knowledge that the elaborate plan was failing had sickened him.

“It was about that matter that I called. Send a doctor to the house, then back a hearse up to the door and take out three bodies. Be sure the bodies look like us.”

“That's an idea!” the Texan said, pleased.

WHEN Doc left the shop, a cab, one of London's awkward-looking taxicabs, stood at the curb. The driver was a girl. Lipstick in hand, she squinted at herself in a compact mirror. She looked up questioningly. “Cab?”

“No, thanks.” Doc said.

She still looked at the compact mirror. But she said, “You'd better get in. I think they know I've been following you. It will be as easy to get away together as for us to escape separately.”

Doc looked at her intently. She was, he realized, quite pretty.

He got in the cab.

The cab went out Tottenham Court Road toward Kentish Town. The girl did not turn her head. But there was a fender mirror, and Doc saw that she was watching it almost continually.

Doc himself kept looking back. For a while he was puzzled. Then he decided three cars were following them. The machines were cutting in and out, each one doing the trailing for only a few blocks.

He said, “Three cars. Two sedans and a coupé?”

“I think so,” the girl said. Her voice was several shades higher than it had been.

The trails were doing a good job. Doc decided they must be using radio to keep tabs on each other.

He didn't like it when the girl took the cab into the country. They were well out of the city now, north and east of Highgate.

The cab began going faster. The three cars were behind them now, in plain sight. The cab speedometer was hanging around eighty-five. Eighty-five kilometers, that meant, for the speedometer was calibrated in kilometers. A little under sixty miles an hour. Barney Oldfield had beaten that thirty years ago. But it was too fast for this snaking, tortuous country road.

“You are not outrunning them,” Doc said. “We will stand a better chance afoot in the woods.”

“I know what I'm doing,” she said.

Doc made up his mind they would take to the next woods they came to. He had no intention of getting killed through the obstinacy of a mysterious female.

But she knew what she was doing, indeed.

Suddenly they whipped past a man standing beside the road. The girl waved at the man. Instantly, a dozen other men came vaulting over a stone fence. They had rifles. Some had grenades.

The girl was slowing the car now. It rocked—the tires whined a little. But it was a good two hundred yards before they stopped. By that time, rifles were whacking and grenades banging behind them.

Doc watched the men they had just passed, saw them riddle the pursuing cars. One machine took the ditch, went up on the bank, turned over. The other two got stopped in time. A grenade exploded under one of them.

Those in the cars who could run tried to do so.

They fell one by one while the rifles banged.

The girl's face was ghost-pale, but composed. She started the car.

"Wait a minute!" Doc said. "Who are our friends?"

"They—they are men Jones-Jones assigned in case something like this should be necessary," she said. The car was moving. She wasn't going back.

"Stop this car," Doc directed. "The men who were chasing us—I want to question them."

She kept going. "That will be taken care of," she said.

"Who are you, anyway?"

"I have been assigned to get you into Czechoslovakia," she said.

Chapter V

BECAUSE Doc was very angry, he kept quite still. The anger was at himself, and at the situation.

He said nothing, and the car rolled past Middlesex fields and cottages and stone fences. The scene was placid, with grazing cattle. Kingfishers and jays flew across the roads and woodlands of great beech trees.

Finally the car pulled into a cottage drive, and stopped.

The girl looked around. She did not say anything for a while.

"Letecka," she said. "Letecka Wenceslas. That is my name."

Her accent was Czech. Doc said sourly, "A descendant of Good King Wenceslas, I imagine."

She laughed, but there was not much humor on it. "As a matter of fact, yes. Your ego has been damaged, hasn't it?"

"Ego?"

"A man of your reputation being yanked out of danger by a woman, I mean."

Doc grinned faintly. “That's it.”

“Oh, you would have discovered they were trailing you and have done something quite successful about it, probably,” she said. “But we thought we would save you the trouble.” Her face, voice, became grave. “You haven't much time to get Johann Kovic.”

Admiration for the girl twitched at Doc's sourness. She was scared, he could tell that. All her movements were conscious and unnatural, as if she were doing everything with conscious effort, even breathing, almost. She was very scared.

Doc said, “I had better apologize. Ordinarily I know a little more about what is going on, and this is beginning to irritate me.”

She nodded. “There was no time to tell you, of course. But it must have been disconcerting.”

She had a frankness, a level honesty. Doc thought: I am going to like her. I had better watch that.

He smiled wryly and said, “I had not been able to detect the slightest evidence before you appeared that I was being followed.”

The sudden trembling which seized the girl startled him. The shuddering lasted only a moment, then she got hold of herself.

“They're frightfully clever—or their best men are,” she said. “Of course, they poured their picked men into England to stop you. The things they are able to do are fantastic.”

“I began to get the feeling a bunch of evil magicians were at work.”

“That's exactly it,” she said.

Anyone who can stop a trembling by main force of will, Doc thought, is accustomed to handling her nerves. He wondered who she really was, her background.

She added, “But the American and English agencies are keeping one jump ahead of them.” She looked at Doc Savage steadily. “While we are in England, that is. In Prague, it will be a different story.”

It had been jumping into Doc's mind that the story might be different in Prague. He wanted to keep the thought out.

“We?” he said.

“I am going along. Orders. I can help in Prague,” she said.

A man came out of the farmhouse. He was a thin slouching young man with a soft-fat looking face and three small pimples on his forehead.

He wore the uniform of a Luftwaffe pilot, a spike-nosed Luger holstered at his belt.

THE man in the Nazi uniform jerked a hand, urging them out of the cab.

“Kommen sie so bald wie möglich,” he said in German.

Doc said, “Ich kann sie nicht unterscheiden.” In German.

The loose-faced young man grinned.

In Polish this time, he said “Dzien-dorby, pani Savage. Jak sic pan ma?”

“Jestem zdrów, dzi?kug,” Doc said, also in Polish.

In English now, the man in the Nazi uniform said, “You speak Polish and German like a native. That will get you by. I understand your Czech is fair also.”

“Fair, only.”

The girl's sigh of relief was audible. And Doc knew then that the use of German, then Polish, then English, was a form of password.

“The plane is ready?” the girl asked.

“Yes,” said the young man. He wheeled. He was a military man, all right.

There was a long haystack that wasn't a haystack at all. The young man leaned down and seized the hay and lifted, and it proved to be an overhead door with an ordinary track mechanism. The hangar was then open.

The plane was a German Junkers, a JU87B, low-wing cantilever monoplane with a 1,200-h.p. Jumo motor. In the beginning of the war, these had been the world-shaking Stuka dive bombers. Now they were outmoded. This one even had the fixed landing gear that was so distinctive.

The loose-cheeked young man was looking at Doc. “You ever fly one of these?”

“Naturally not.”

“Can you handle a Hurricane or a Spitfire?”

“Yes.”

“Then you'll have no trouble with this—if you should have to fly it, which you probably won't.”

He dug two uniforms out of the back cockpit. One was an Unteroffizier uniform in the Luftwaffe, the other an army nurse's uniform, Nazi.

“You will put them on,” he said.

Doc said, “We get caught in these in enemy territory and we will be shot. International law.”

The flabby young man laughed. “You would be shot anyway.”

He had something there. Doc went to the farmhouse. He found the building empty, and changed to the Unteroffizier's uniform in the north bedroom.

The uniform fit him. In fact, he cut quite a figure. He stood in front of a mirror and made overbearing faces at himself. He managed to look so much like a Luftwaffe man that it embarrassed him.

He went back and asked the loose-faced boy, “Who are you?”

The fellow shrugged. “I would lie to you, anyway, you know.”

Letecka Wenceslas appeared, wearing the Nazi nurse uniform. The sack of an outfit did not do anything for her. It had been cut for a hausfrau, and she did not have that kind of a figure.

The boy consulted his watch. “We had better leave. It will be dark when we are over Prague.”

THEY rolled the plane out. The motor started. Doc and the girl rode the radioman's cockpit. They were jammed together.

The JU87B slammed across a meadow, bouncing. These old Stukas were sturdy wagons. It got off, climbed up, headed for the coast without fooling around.

The pilot flew at hedgehopping height. Whenever they crossed a ploughed field, a long worm of dust would spring up behind.

The girl put her mouth against Doc's ear. “From now on, we are taking our own chances. For all the Interceptor Command knows, we are what the official despatches call a lone Nazi raider.”

They cut the coast at Blackwater. The North Sea was below, steel-colored. Doc looked back. They were so low that their slipstream was leaving a wake on the sea.

The cockpit cover was closed, of course. But it was still noisy. Doc, in Letecka's ear, asked, “Know who our pilot is?”

She nodded.

“Partly,” she said. “He is a German from Hanover, a son of an influential Junkers family. A black sheep. A traitor.”

“This is a captured Nazi plane?” Doc asked.

“Oh, no. It's a Luftwaffe ship. This fellow flies it to England and back, and is paid a tremendous sum for each trip. It is strictly a business transaction with him.”

Their closeness—their faces were together when they talked—disturbed Doc. He broke off the conversation. He discovered that he had forgotten the pilot entirely. She was a pretty girl.

The pilot, he thought. Think about the pilot. The fellow should be watched.

It was disconcerting to run into such things as an enemy pilot who was running a ferry service for his enemy, for high pay. Yet if one knew human nature, one could guess that such things happened in wars. They didn't get in the papers, ever. Sometimes they got in books years and years afterward, but not often then.

A man could be hanged or shot for treason twenty years afterward. It was a well-known point of law that the statute of limitations does not run against the state.

Doc watched the navigation. They were cutting south for the Frisian Islands, then over Germany.

THE pilot was using the radio now. Doc could see the movement of his cheeks as he spoke into the microphone.

There was no rear cockpit headset, as there should have been. Doc leaned forward, got the pilot's attention, shouted, “Have you another headset?”

“Nein,” the man said, curtly.

“What are you doing with the radio?”

“Giving identification,” the man said in English. “Don't worry. I have done this before. I know what I am doing.”

Doc settled back.

The pilot then reached up and changed the angle of the rear-view mirror with which the forward cockpit was equipped. The thing was bigger than an automobile rear-view mirror, but on a similar swivel.

The pilot had fixed the mirror so that he could watch his passengers. Doc could see his face now. The man sat there with his lower lip loose, and sensuous. The corners of his mouth turned up in a sardonic smile.

The face of a satyr, Doc thought. Slack and evil and calculating. He didn't like the pilot.

They climbed a little. At about two thousand, the old Stuka boomed along. Their speed was about two hundred twenty miles an hour, which was above normal cruising.

Evil. The pilot's face was the face of sin. His grin was hungry, greedy. Black planes were crawling up into the sky behind them.

The planes were a flashing black. It was the sun, the afternoon sun. They rose like black flies, four or five of them.

Planes ahead. Two. They came up like black flies, too.

There were clouds. But the clouds were at six thousand, and thin. There were gaps between the clouds.

The pilot picked up the microphone. He held it close to the side of his mouth. It partly hid his lips as he talked.

Doc had a time reading the man's lips. The words were German; Doc wasn't too skilled at lip-reading German. The microphone concealing partly the man's lips made it hard, too.

The man was talking about Hanover. He used Nazi army letters and numbers for the field. Something about ein und zwanzig, the letter B, the code word thunfische.

Guards, the pilot said. Plenty of guards. The field clear. Machine-guns. And careful. Everybody be careful.

The pilot was going to turn them over to the Nazis.

Chapter VI

A FEELING crawled up in Doc and tied his throat tight. It was a funny kind of emotion. Not fear. Not all fear. This was more than fear.

It was—well—awe. Awe. The sensation you get when you're a kid and see your first railroad engine, when you stand beside the engine and find the smallest wheels are taller than you are. The feeling when you first sense the bigness of the world. The gigantic complexity of things. So big, and so many things about it you don't understand.

The pilot was watching Doc. He moved his arms. Doc couldn't see the man's hands, but the way the pilot moved indicated he was getting the Luger out of its holster.

The “greenhouse” on the Stuka was a long half-tube sitting on top of the fuselage. It ran from the windshield to the back cockpit, and over that, and the back could be slid open to use the rear cockpit flexible gun. But the gun couldn't be pointed into the front cockpit. It wasn't mounted so that could be done.

The flexible gun had a handle like an automatic pistol. It was a Rhein-mettal-Borsig, which was Germany's standard aircraft gun. It was drum-fed.

Drum-fed. The simplicity of the drum was the weapon's best feature. Doc reached out quickly and unlocked the drum and hurled it through the greenhouse and hit the pilot on the back of the head.

The pilot just sat there. The blow had knocked his head forward, chin on chest. He didn't lift his head.

Doc gripped the dual-stick. He glanced up at the clouds, then at the Nazi planes behind, ahead. They were on the sides, now. They were ME-110s, and a few FW-189s with their forked tails that made them look something like American P-38s.

The clouds it would have to be. He went up.

The Stuka could climb. That was one thing a Stuka could do. Climb and dive. They could go to thirteen thousand feet in eight minutes. The catch was that an ME-110 could do it in about four minutes. The FW-189s were turtles; they could only get up about sixteen hundred feet a minute.

The surprise gave him about a minute. The pursuit took another thirty seconds getting organized. He had a minute and a half and fifteen hundred feet to go.

A few red sparks arched past. 20-mm cannon shells. He could tell. They would be from the Messerschmitts. They had two cannon apiece, besides two flexible and four fixed machine-guns.

He went into the clouds. They were not thick. But they were thick enough.

Letecka Wenceslas hadn't said a word.

“Give me your gun,” Doc said.

“I haven't got a gun,” she said.

Doc shoved against her, pinning her in the cockpit.

SHE didn't fight him. But she didn't have a gun, as far as he could tell. He wasn't too sure, because he didn't have the nerve to make sure. His ears were red as it was.

He pulled the laces out of his boots. These Luftwaffe flying boots didn't have zippers. Cloth laces, but they were very strong.

He tied the girl's left hand to the handgrip on the left side of the greenhouse slide. He tied her right hand to the little handle on the right side.

She was lashed there with both hands up in the air. She sat on his lap. It was awkward.

Reaching around her, he changed the prop pitch. He cracked the flaps. He got the Stuka flying straight and level, as slowly as she would go.

“Hold the stick steady with your knees,” he told the girl. “You will be in a nice mess if I fall off this thing.”

She said nothing.

The Stuka had top speed of around two hundred fifty miles an hour. But with everything in the way of flaps cracked, the Jumo barely keeping flying speed, she was a hearse.

Doc climbed out. He rode the greenhouse forward. It wasn't hard. The suspense was the worst—that, and knowing he needed luck.

He got the forward greenhouse slide open. Stuka cockpits were never made to accomodate two. He fished around, hanging in the cockpit head-first, and got the pilot's safety belts and crash-straps loose. He jammed the man over, then slid into the cockpit.

The clouds were deliciously thick around them now.

The girl was sitting still, both hands up in sight, tied to the slide-handles.

He felt of the back of the pilot's head, where the ammo drum had hit. No fractured skull. At least it wasn't crushed like an egg.

He set the compass course for Prague. It was as good as any. They would be spotting him with their radar, anyway. Come night, though, and he would drop down and fly between the Bohemian hills.

He took off the pilot's helmet and tried to put it on his own head, but it was too small. He changed the headphones, which was what he wanted.

He listened to the radio for a while. The air was guttural with excited German voices. They were trailing him all right. He could hear the instructions.

He spoke into the microphone, trying to fool them. He told them excitedly that the ship they wanted was headed north, that this ship they were trailing was another plane.

It didn't work.

Now and then the plane would jump. And once the flak broke so close that he saw one burst. It was good gun-pointing.

He veered a little. That was to miss the cities where the flak-towers were thickest. He had a general idea what cities that would be.

After that there was nothing but the suspense.

He thought about Johann Kovic, the man on whom so much depended. Rescuing Kovic was going to be hard. He was getting some idea now.

On Kovic the outcome of the war depended, they'd said in England. When they said it, it had sounded melodramatic, too much so to be real.

Kovic and his secret, his defense against a secret weapon. The talk about the secret weapon had seemed melodramatic, too. There had been so much of that.

It wasn't wild. Not a bit. Too much was happening for it to be anything but real.

Doc sparred another mental round or two with his feeling of inadequacy, of having stepped into something that was too big and complex. He felt as if he'd landed in the middle of a machine that was operating full speed, a mysterious sort of a machine that he'd never seen before and never dreamed

existed.

The pilot woke up.

THE man gave no signs of being awake, except that his eyes watched Doc like the eyes of a rat.

Doc had taken the Luger, also a knife. The knife was a thin-bladed dagger, a Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife supplied to the Commandos earlier in the war. Evidently it was a trophy.

Doc punched him in the stomach. Rather hard. The man hardly flinched, but his face went gray.

"Talk," Doc said.

The slack-faced man wet his lips two or three times. "How did you catch on?"

Doc indicated the mirror. "Lip reading, when you talked over the radio."

"Oh."

Doc asked, "Was the plan to land me in Germany when we left England?"

The loose lips lifted off the man's teeth. The teeth were small. "I thought of it before that, yes."

"Was it a High Command idea?"

"No."

"Yours?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

The loose lip curled. Around the small teeth, the gums were purple and swollen from some mouth disease. "Money. Did you know there's a reward of fifty million marks for you?"

"Since when?" Doc was genuinely surprised.

"Since it was found out that you were the last hope they had of rescuing Johann Kovic."

Doc was silent.

The news was having an astonishingly pleasant effect upon him. Fifty million marks, even Reichsmarks, was a lot of money in Germany. Ten-million and twenty-million mark rewards had been offered for Mihailovich and for a Russian guerilla leader or two. But fifty million—there was a sum that made one feel important.

Doc found himself grinning. "If they knew how badly I've been doing, the High Command would have lowered the ante."

"You've been doing all right," the pilot said.

He didn't mean it admiringly. It was just a statement. Just something to say. The man seemed to be totally without emotion.

There was no fear on the loose face. No hope, either. Doc eyed the man. The fellow would make an

interesting psychiatric study, because there was something wrong with his mind. An incapacity for emotion. No feelings. Life, death, blood or smiles, it was all the same. The man was better off dead, if you came right down to objective truth.

Yet Doc couldn't kill him. He had never taken a life in cold blood, not even, as far as he knew, by accident. Certainly not by accidental design on his part.

“Get out,” Doc said.

“What?”

“Jump,” Doc said. “Use your parachute.”

The slack-faced man crawled out. And he tried, just as he jumped, to kick Doc in the temple, to smash Doc's skull with a heel.

Doc parried the kick, and felt rather pleased. It showed that the strange pilot was capable of hate at least, if that meant anything.

The girl's face was wet, wet with tears. Doc saw that in the minor. It startled him.

Chapter VII

THE tears in the eyes of Letecka Wenceslas puzzled him, and continued to puzzle him. Fear or hate or some other emotion would have been much more understandable. He couldn't make the tears out.

Darkness closed in around them when they passed over Decin, just across what had been the old Czech border. There were factories along the valley of the upper Elbe River, and factories meant Nazi flak emplacements.

Doc headed sharply left into the Erz Gebirge mountains. He dropped down now, flying low, picking the valleys. It was taking chances. But he had to do it.

He had been experimenting with the Stuka controls. The ship was remarkably stable. It didn't have an auto pilot, of course, but if they bailed out carefully, the plane would fly itself, quite possibly until the gas ran out. Most modern planes would do that.

They had parachutes.

He squirmed about, and by some straining and reaching, managed to reach the shoestrings which held the girl's wrists to the slide-handles. He cut her free.

Now he flew south for a while. He was tempted to fly directly over Prague, and jump. He didn't like the temptation, because it was crazy. It wasn't a sample of the same kind of ideas he would be needing from now on.

Now was as good a time as any.

He climbed out and re-did his horseback act along the cockpit covering. He wanted to be sure the girl jumped when he did. There was no trouble about that. She was standing already.

“Wait!” he yelled. He had forgotten to adjust the stabilizer, the tab, for the difference in the plane trim once their weight was out of it. He did that, hanging headfirst into the cockpit. Guessing was the best he could do.

They left the ship together. The fall, the cough of silk above them, the jolt, came as ordered. They wouldn't have to take 'em back.

The girl was safe, too. Falling above him, because she was lighter.

The next instant, he was cold sweat from head to foot. He had overlooked a detail. Suppose that slack-faced pilot had given him a 'chute with cut-through shrouds? This was a Luftwaffe 'chute. What in the name of icy terror had led him to suppose it would be all right? It was one of those aftermaths that are worse, almost, than the calamity itself would have been.

He was disturbed enough that he made a bad landing, not having the harness ready to loosen, and the wind-in-the-chute dragged him through brambles.

"Frisch and gesund?" he called.

She was safe and sound enough. But he wasn't sure of that until he was beside her. For she was in tears again, there in the darkness.

He though it must be a physical hurt after all. He went to his knees in the grass—she had landed in a meadow—and asked, "What is it? An ankle?"

Then she was close to him and holding to him. Not exactly in his arms, but near, and gripping his hands with hers. "I—I'm sorry," she said moistly. "I'm not—not scared, if that is bothering you. Oh, I'm scared. But not going to pieces because of it."

He hesitated uncomfortably. She had been completely controlled, and almost emotionless, in England. "Then what is it?"

"Let's stay here a moment. Have you a handkerchief?" He gave her his handkerchief. She snuffled into it a moment. "That is the difficult of a woman being." She was getting her English twisted, the way foreigners do. "Emotion at the most unexpected times strikes."

The grass was wringing wet with dew. The night was black and silver around them, and still. Far away in the sky now, the Stuka was hooting its way toward the Moravian hills. If they were lucky, if they were very lucky, it would crash in Hungary, and the Nazis wouldn't be so apt to hear about it.

The girl talked. Confidences poured out of her.

"Our family was prominent in Prague. We had a fine house facing the Stromovka, near the Gallery of Modern Art. We were very ardently Czech. We opposed the Nazi domination. When it came, and Czechoslovakia was occupied, I became a member of the Underground. About a year later, I was caught and put in Dabelsky Dum where—"

"Dabelsky Dum," Doc interrupted. "That is the concentration camp where Johann Kovic is confined?"

"Yes. I escaped."

"When?"

"About four months ago. The Underground got me out, and immediately there was such an uproar in the Gestapo that it was thought safer for the Underground to move me to England, and that was what was done. You see, there was such an uproar because I brought out the first message from Johann Kovic."

Doc started. "You know Kovic?"

“Yes. He is—” Something seemed to tie up in her throat. “We—our family—has known Kovic for a long time.”

“So that is why you were assigned to this?”

There was barely enough light to show her nod. “Yes. I know Kovic, and I have contacts with the Czech Underground. That was why I was—forced on you.”

“But why the tears a while ago?”

“That was when I realized the pilot had tried to sell us out. When I realized how nearly the Gestapo had come to getting me again.”

She gave the explanation simply. As quietly as an official communique says, “sixty of our planes were lost.”

There was, of course, a great deal more than her explanation had told. Terror and suffering, death and danger that she had left out. She had been in Dabelsky Dum, and had escaped. That was the first time Doc had ever heard of anyone escaping from Dabelsky Dum. No one, as far as he had known, had done it.

The Gestapo would execute her the minute they got their bloodstained hands on her. That was what she meant.

She stood up after a while. “I'm all right now,” she said.

DOC SAVAGE thought they were near Dobris, which was about thirty-five miles airline from Prague. West of Dobris somewhat, in the Vltava River foothills. Within three or four miles of the Vltava, probably.

“We will try the river,” he suggested.

Letecka hesitated. “It would be much simpler to have the Underground get us into Prague. But you do not want me to suggest that, do you?”

“No. For the same reason that I decided to tackle this thing free-lance. I gather that Allied agents have been defeated at every attempt. That means the Underground has failed, too.”

“You are trying to do it the hard way.”

“But the safe way, don't you think?”

She thought so. She had picnicked along the Vltava, she said, in this district. That was back in the old days, before 1939, when she had belonged to the Sokol, the athletic organization which had held such wonderful congresses in Prague.

They got going, walking through fields where the traveling was difficult, then coming to a road and following that—not keeping on the road, but paralleling it, about two hundred feet to the right.

“The road would be easier,” the girl suggested. “And this is far inland, as central a part of the German territory as there is, so they wouldn't have road patrols out.”

“By now, that pilot has told them that we are headed for Prague,” Doc reminded her.

“I do not think that pilot will ever say a word,” she said. “He will find some excuse for losing his plane.

Or he will just attempt to disappear, lose his identity."

Doc was not persuaded. "The Nazis seem to think it is important to keep us out of Prague. They might have the roads patrolled, even forty miles out of town."

"You are right."

They came to the Vltava.

It was a wide river, shallow here, with a channel deep enough for tug and barge traffic of the more shoal type. Below Prague, or Praha as the city was designated on the Czech maps, it was a considerable artery of water traffic.

The banks were high. It was much like a midwestern river, a stream in Illinois or Indiana, except that the water was not muddy, and the river bed was rocky.

To the north, for the Vltava ran north, a short distance was a mill and a mill dam. They could hear the chugging of a power barge. The chugging stopped.

"Hotov!" a voice shouted.

"Zaplaviti!" a voice bellowed back.

It was Czech. The first word was "ready," and the second was "flood." So a barge was going through the canal lock around the mill dam.

"Come on," Doc said. Quick!"

HE made out the barge-canal lock shortly, but it was hard to tell which way the barge was going. It was self-powered, and the smokestack had been lowered for a bridge and not yet raised again. The hinged smokestacks were a feature of the river and canal boats all over Europe. These smokestacks were all very large and very tall, but they could be tilted back flat on the deck for low bridges. Most of the bridges were low.

Doc could distinguish the flagstaff on the barge, flying the swastika. It was night, and the flag should have been lowered, so leaving it up all night was probably a subtle insult. But the flagstaff was sinking. That was the important thing.

"The barge is going downstream," Doc whispered.

They got aboard from the lock edge. It wasn't hard. It was no physical feat. But it was risky, and took good timing. Doc went first, leaving the girl behind.

The barge had a cargo of logs. Pleased, Doc whistled, as softly as was practical, the call of a night bird common to the district. The signal brought Letecka Wenceslas aboard.

They crouched on the logs, listening, waiting, ready for flight. But apparently they had not been seen or heard.

About amidships, Doc found a space between the ends of the logs which would accommodate them both. They settled there. The barge pulled out of the lock.

The barge engine made enough thumping noise that they could have conversed in whispers without danger. But Doc could think of nothing to discuss. And Letecka had fallen into a silence.

Doc made himself as comfortable as possible, but his mind was plagued. He was finally on his own. He had cut loose from all outside aid and cooperation. He had thought he would feel more relieved when he did that. He didn't feel more relieved at all.

He did not think it was foolish to avoid the facilities which the Allied espionage and the Czech Underground could have put at his disposal. That didn't mean he did not appreciate those facilities. They were undoubtedly good. Probably they were able to work miracles. They should be, because doubtless the building of those facilities had commenced long before the Nazis went thundering and ravaging into Poland to bring on the violent phase of the European struggle.

But fact was still fact. Those facilities couldn't get Johann Kovic out of the concentration camp of Dabelsky Dum. Furthermore agents had been losing their lives. There had been no recital of a list, at that mysterious meeting on Downing Street in London, of men who had lost their lives already in this project. But there had been, by implication, more than one death. Probably many.

A leak somewhere? Obviously. It was plain that there were even leaks in England. Here, by the law of averages, there would be more.

The thing, therefore, was to try a new system. To lone-wolf it. At least, if failure came then, he would know whose fault it was.

The thoughts weren't something to put him to sleep, but they must have done so. Because a gasp from the girl, and a tight grip which she took on his arm, awakened him. “Vojsko!” she was gasping in his ear.

“Eh?” He was confused.

“Vojsko! Vojsko! Nemecky Vojsko!” she hissed.

For the life of him, he couldn't think what the Czech words meant. Sleep had crossed up his memory. Then he got it.

Soldiers! Nazi soldiers!

There was not much time to ponder about it. He heard booted feet grinding over the logs, heard heavy breathing. Or, one man was breathing heavily, and the others more lightly.

These noises came close and a flashlight suddenly jumped down upon them.

“Wer da?” a Germanic voice barked, and Doc squinting upward could see the backshine of the flashlight on Nazi uniforms, and the way muscles were standing out on the backs of the hands which they had dropped to their holstered side arms.

Chapter VIII

DOC SAVAGE leaped to his feet in the gap between the logs, a space about six-by-three feet, and ripped out in the best Junkers-sounding German he could manage, “Put out that light!”

The light didn't go out, but it moved over to one side, where it was not in anyone's face.

Doc, hoping he made an impressive figure in the Luftwaffe uniform, clicked off a salute. He almost fell down on it, almost gave a good U.S. Army salute instead of the elaborate Nazi thing.

“Es tut mir leid,” he said. “I am sorry to startle you. But why in the name of the Fuhrer's moustache didn't

you two fellows give some warning that you were coming." He made his tone slyly suggestive, and said, "You might have embarrassed me."

The bargeman startled Doc. He was a portly old fellow with a pair of moustaches like pony tails. He took up the ball. He not only took it, he ran away with it.

"Pes!" he screamed. "Dog! You sneaking dog!"

He had a cane. He sprang down on Doc, striking furiously with the cane.

"How dare you be with my daughter!" he shrieked, and gave Doc a belt with the cane.

"You shameless hussy!" he screamed at the girl, and gave her a whack.

There was nothing playful about the way he was using the cane. The lick he gave Letecka knocked her to her knees and started blood from her forehead.

He hit Doc. Doc's head rang.

"Smrt!" the old fellow shrieked. "I'll beat you to death! Both of you!"

Doc dodged the next cane-blow. He gripped the descending cane, wrestled with the old fellow, then deliberately kicked the old man in the stomach. Not too gently. He could have used a fist, but a kick seemed more in keeping with the Luftwaffe uniform.

Reeling back against the logs, the old man was sick. Doc stepped in, started to use his fist, laughed, and drew the slim-snouted Luger he had taken from the pilot. He clubbed the old man to the logs with the gun.

The Nazi soldiers who had boarded the barge were laughing. There were three of them.

Doc stepped toward them threateningly. The laughter stopped suddenly.

Doc said, "Laugh again, you ground-crawling dogs, and I'll teach you manners!"

His German was getting by.

There was some embarrassed indignation on the part of the boarders. Doc, by the markings on his Luftwaffe uniform, outranked all of them. The best of them was only a sergeant.

After about thirty seconds of indecisive silence, which gave Doc some gray hairs, the sergeant spoke.

"Let me see your identification," he said.

He glanced at the card he was handed. "From the Russian front?" he remarked.

"From what is left of it," Doc said, as bitterly as he could. He gestured at Letecka. "What is going on here? Can't a man amuse himself in peace?"

"Everything going into Prague is being searched," the sergeant said shortly.

The old bargeman was stirring. He sat up. One of his remarkable moustaches hung down and the other stuck up like a cow's horn.

The sergeant leaned down and got his dazed attention. "Old man, is this your daughter?" He indicated the girl.

The old bargeman said she was. He said he'd disown her. He said more, using choice Czech profanity in an utterly convincing voice.

Doc jumped forward threateningly. “Shut up, old man, or I'll knock that filth down your throat with your teeth!” Doc roared.

The three Nazi soldiers went ashore. When they were on the bank, they began laughing again.

“Untie us, and get going, old man!” Doc told the bargeman. “And not another word out of you!”

THEY got away. They moved out into the channel. No one said a word until a few marker buoys had slipped by. The old engine thumped and coughed, and the smokestack jiggled and squeaked a little on its hinges.

The old bargeman sighed. It was as if he had pulled a knife out of his flesh.

“The fools!” he said. “The great, the wonderful master race!” He spat.

Letecka said, “How did you—how did you know what to do?”

“I recognized you,” the old man said. “I knew your father. I remember seeing you.”

“That was lucky.”

“It was very lucky,” the old bargeman agreed. “It was one of those things that shows there are things greater than any of us. It was beautiful luck.”

Doc said, “I trust I did not hurt you too much?”

The old fellow laughed. “No more than I hurt you with that cane, I'll wager. It was not a time for fooling.”

The old man was obviously a Czech patriot. Doc heard Letecka speak to him, turning the conversation rather unexpectedly to the weather. There were evidently key words in this weather talk, because Letecka smiled and gripped the old fellow's hand.

“He is of the Underground,” she told Doc. “He will help us if we wish any help.”

“It is still better for us to go alone, I think,” Doc said.

The old man heard that. He nodded. “There has been a horrifying record of failure in this matter,” he said. “There are leaks in our Underground. There are always leaks; we have been plugging leaks with bullets ever since this madness came to Bohemia. But this time the leaks are very high and very terrible. It has been so futile.”

Startled, Doc said, “You sound as if you know why we are here?”

“Naturally it would be Johann Kovic.”

“Is it that widely known?”

The old man shrugged. “Everyone in the Underground knows it. Gestapo men have flowed into Prague like water of an ocean.”

The old man was silent, thoughtful, for a few moments. He evidently expected Doc to say more, but Doc didn't. The old man sighed.

“You had better get Johann Kovic, or the world will lose its soul,” the old man said.

THEY reached, by great good luck, Prague before daylight. It was still quite dark when the barge went under the railroad bridge just beyond the very modern Barrandov with its famous terrace restaurant. Then there were two more bridges, the Most Palackeho and the Most Jiraskuv.

To the right now was the island of the great outdoor beer garden, the Slovansky Ostrov. Doc strained his eyes. There were no lights now, but it might be because the city was under blackout. He couldn't tell whether the beer garden still operated.

The city was sleeping around them, with no light anywhere, but with the sound, the sleepy multitudinous rumbling of a sound that seems never to leave a city. The barge slipped along, the big engine thumping away with no reverence at all for this city, one of the oldest in Europe, for the place had been inhabited, archaeologists had concluded, since Paleolithic times.

Now the barge had passed under the Most Legif and was approaching the Most Karlov, the Charles Bridge, ancient and picturesque with its tower on the right bank, and very old, built in the twelfth century, but still in use.

They swung around the meander of the Vltava, under two more bridges, one of them with four mighty pillars, two at each end, majestic in the morning darkness which the sun was beginning to dispel.

“Pull over to the bulkhead,” Doc told the bargeman. “Along here is where we want to get off.”

“On Dvorakovo Nabrezi there is a landing,” the old man said.

The landing was a long one, not much used. A little east, which was downstream here, there was a rowboat rental place and a landing.

Doc, on peacetime visits to Prague, had rented rowboats at the place to paddle quietly in the Vltava when he wanted to be alone with peace and stillness. But now the little place looked as if it were deserted.

The bulkhead was a low stone wall under overhanging trees.

“Bohem!” the old bargeman said softly. “May both of God's hands stay with you.”

He was not keeping the tension out of his voice.

“Thanks for the quick-thinking with those Nazi soldiers,” Doc said.

The old man snuffled. “I am ashamed it was so little.”

They went ashore, the girl first, Doc next. The stone wall was hard under their feet, and the fading night was almost the color of salmon around them.

Something landed at their feet. “You may need some excuse for a Luftwaffe officer and his girl to be out this time of the morning,” he whispered, and the barge slipped away into the yellowish murk.

The thrown object was a metal flask of slivawitz, a plum brandy. Doc uncorked it. The stuff smelled as if it would take the hair off a dog.

He sprinkled some of the stuff on his clothes, enough to give them a brewery aroma.

“Let's see what kind of actors we are,” he suggested.

Doc maintained a hinge-kneed dignity, the silly air logical for a Luftwaffe officer who had been out roistering all night. They moved up the neatest street, which happened to be the thoroughfare on the west side of the Ministry of Commerce.

"Byt se stravou," Doc said. "A low-class one, preferably. Keep your eyes open."

THE boarding-house they found was low-class enough to satisfy anyone. The proprietress, a filthy tramp of a creature who spoke the kind of German used in a Berlin slum, calmly asked five times the regular price, and leeringly informed them she could dispense with the police regulations—the cards, the reports, the registering of identification—which was required. This would cost more. Doc paid it.

The room was long, narrow, but well-lighted. It relieved Doc to find a curtain that could be drawn across the middle to make two compartments.

Letecka was pale. She seemed to go through the tense minutes with excellent aplomb, then have trouble with the reaction afterwards. She sank in a chair.

"Do you think your aides are in Prague yet?" she asked shakily.

"I do not know," Doc said. "They might be. I do not know what means they were going to take in coming. But it is not likely that they would let any grass grow, knowing that the longer they waited, the more thoroughly the Gestapo would have Prague covered."

Doc went to a ramshackle old washstand. "A little later, when the streets are sufficiently crowded, I will go out and leave the signals we agreed upon."

"Oh, you had signals," the girl said.

She sounded curious, but Doc did not elaborate upon the matter of the signals. The fewer people who knew about the marks to be left on the Vaclavske Namesti, on some building or other preferably near the Ambassador Hotel, the better off everyone would probably be.

It would be two or three hours before the Prague streets were crowded with the usual morning rush, before the automats on the Vaclavske got jammed, before the funny little old ladies, and very small children, set up their piles of radishes on newspapers, and their buckets of curd cheese and bread. They sold that stuff the way hot dogs and orange drinks were on the corners in New York. Still, food shortages and rationing might have put a crimp in the picturesque custom.

Doc was thinking along that vein, innocently, when he began taking things out of his pocket. His main idea, absent-mindedly, was to go through his pockets with an inventory, to make sure nothing had fallen out and been lost in last night's hectic hours.

He came across the gadget Ham had given him—the tiny pocket "electroscope" which Monk had developed.

This gimmick, Doc thought, is one thing that isn't going to do us any good. It would be fine if we had the coins that go with it, the coins radioactively treated, and had them in the pockets of every Gestapo agent in Naziland. But the way it is—

His mouth went dry. The thing was registering!

It was impossibility. The thing must be out of order. That was his first thought.

"Something wrong?" Letecka asked.

Doc straightened out his face. “There has been something or other wrong ever since this began, it seems,” he said.

And then he walked away from the washstand. He went out into the hall, a grimy place where the plaster had more cracks than the hot sun puts in drying mud.

The gadget needle registered less now!

DOC SAVAGE was so startled that he did something which he rarely did, a thing that escaped him only in moments of intense emotional stress. He made a trilling sound, low and musical, but without a tune, a sound which he always made unconsciously, and deep in his throat.

The sound was silly, and he'd tried for years to get rid of it. He had acquired the habit when, a kid and impressionable, he had studied Yogi and body control under an old fakir in India. This training incidentally, had been part of a remarkable youth, for he had been placed in the hands of scientists by his father when a baby. He had gone through a rigorous and possibly fantastic upbringing, being crammed twenty-four hours a day with stuff that was intended to make him a sort of superman. It hadn't made him a superman, but it had given him many unusual abilities, including a great deal more physical strength than the average man, and an over-acuteness of the senses which startled and sometimes mystified strangers.

The sound meant that he was shocked.

He went back into the room. He sauntered very near Letecka. When he was close to the girl, the gadget needle registered nearly full scale.

“Letecka,” Doc said quietly. “Do you have a luminous dial on your watch, or on a compass you are carrying, perhaps?”

She was puzzled. “Why, no.”

“And have you recently received radium treatment for any kind of ailment?”

“No.” She shook her head. “That's a strange question.”

Doc's bronzed face paled.

She had the coin which Monk had given the woman who had brought them that breakfast in London, the breakfast in which the poison had been.

Letecka must have been disguised as the old lady who brought their breakfast.

IT was then that the commotion came downstairs. There was a cry, angry, but frightened too. The old woman's voice. The landlady.

Now feet on the stairs. Thump, thump! Men coming up fast. Two men, at least.

Then the guttural, “Klopfen!” that told him it was Nazis.

Then something hard beat the door.

“Machen Sie die tur auf!” came the order to open up.

“Wer da?” Doc asked.

“The Gestapo,” he was informed. “Open up!”

Doc wheeled. Letecka's hand had flown over her mouth. She looked alarmed. But was it genuine?

Thoughts piled through Doc's mind. Like firecrackers that had been lighted. Trapped! Trapped here—how had they done that? Monk and Ham—where were Monk and Ham? Had they even gotten out of England?

The enormity of the machine they were bucking, the incredible task of getting Johann Kovic out of Bohemia, piled up on his brain like a crushing weight.

Outside, they were beating on the door again.

"Break it down," a harsh Gestapo voice said.

Chapter IX

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW BLODGETT "MONK" MAYFAIR was disposing of his parachute. He had thought of burning it, but didn't dare, so he was drowning it. He had pried a heavy cobble out of a park walk, tied it inside the chute, made a tight bundle, and was tossing it into the park lagoon.

Monk had landed on the left bank of the Vltava, in the Kralovska deer park across from the ultra-swank Parkhotel Splendid. Smack in Prague. He congratulated himself.

Monk liked direct action. He had come over with a flight of American bombers which were giving Munich a pasting that night. He had occupied the rear seat of a captured Nazi Messerschmitt Jaguar, which had cockpits that would accommodate three. The Americans had captured the Jaguar intact, repainted it with Army insignia, and were using it now, and then. Monk had borrowed the use of it because the Nazis would, if they could tell the difference between motor sounds, recognize their own Daimler Benz engines.

He had bailed out in fine shape, not a single burst of flak having been aimed at the Jaguar. Finding he was landing in the deer park, he had perspired copiously, for it was a logical spot for Nazi flak towers. But there weren't any, evidently.

Now Monk was delighted.

Reason for glee was a typical one for Monk. It wore skirts. On a pre-war visit to Prague, he had met a Czech chorus girl whom he had given quite a play.

Ham Brooks had been his rival. The race had been mutually unsuccessful, which was in Monk's opinion because Ham had been around cluttering up the situation with certain lies he could tell very fluently about Monk because they had been told so often.

The lady lived near the deer park.

Monk found a street-sign. "Skroupova," he said. "Oh, boy!"

He set out briskly. He knew where he was now.

He wore a suit of the typically ersatz clothes the people inside Nazi Europe were wearing these days. To his pleased surprise, the American intelligence had been able to supply these in London. They had also contributed documents proving, complete with photographs, that Monk was a hick from the Salzburg hills in Austria.

There was, and Monk liked this touch, a cord on which was printed, in several languages, the

misinformation that Monk had suffered a war wound which had rendered him speechless, and a mental injury which had made him harmless but unpredictable. That, together with an army discharge, and a well-lined wallet of Reichsmarks and Czech penize completed his equipment.

He swaggered along, thinking of the girl.

“Boy!” he said.

The girl lived in a narrow but sumptuous house, the windows of which overlooked the west end of the deer park and the Old Hunting House, now the Governor's Country Seat.

There had been a shining brass doorplate and knocker when Monk was there before, but this had been replaced with a wooden substitute. Probably the brass had gone into the scrap drive.

Monk knocked brazenly. The guy who stops to look always gets run over, was his motto.

He was pleasantly astonished when the young lady herself opened the door. Hitherto a flunky had done this.

“Why, it's sweetykins!” the girl cried, and kissed Monk moistly. “Come in, darling, do.”

Monk entered, wondering why she hadn't seemed too surprised.

He found out.

A disgusted voice exploded, “Sweetykins! Sweetykins! My God!”

Monk turned white with rage. “Ham Brooks!” he groaned.

MONK had never been madder in his life. First, because he was sure he had been slick enough to beat both Doc Savage and Ham Brooks to Prague. Second, at the idea of Ham sitting there in the girl's parlor. Third, Ham's smirk was enflaming.

“Sweetykins!” Ham repeated. “Now ain't that something! Speaking of sarcasm—hew! Get back! Don't you touch me, you gorilla!”

The girl got in front of Monk. She halted him. But he whipped a foot out like a snake's tail and peeled Ham's left shin with a kick.

Ham howled. “I'll murder you!”

“Please, butterlamb!” the girl cried. “Sweetykins! Butterlamb! You must behave yourselves!”

The two glared at each other until Monk split with laughter, fell in a chair, and chortled, “Butterlamb! As you said—my God!”

Ham grinned sheepishly. “Okay, okay, you bounder.” He took a chair himself. “I might have known you would turn up here first thing.”

Monk said, “Sweet, can you rustle us some breakfast?” to the girl.

She said she would, and went out.

Monk jerked his head after her. “Can we trust her out of our sight?”

“Probably—if there's not another man in the kitchen,” Ham said sourly. “She was just telling me I was

her one and only when the knock came on the door and you showed up. And darned if you didn't get a carbon copy of the welcome I got."

Monk said, "I mean, will she turn us in to the Gestapo?"

Ham shrugged. "Heaven knows. She was a resounding Czech patriot when we knew her before, and she says she still is."

Monk registered considerable more concern than he felt.

"I better keep an eye on her." He started for the kitchen.

"Oh, no you don't." Ham followed him hastily.

FOR breakfast, they had smiles from the girl, fried eggs, potato bread which tasted like crepe rubber soles salvaged from someone's old shoes, and a speck of what the girl called stehno, but it bore him little resemblance to ham. Ham Brooks avoided this. He detested ham in any shape or form, one of the reasons for his nickname.

Along with breakfast, they received a long and complaining recital of wartime hardships from the girl. From that, she branched off into the Czech underground movement, and talked for some time about that, and what part she was taking in it. She seemed to think she was a very important cog in the thing. To Monk, she sounded rather vague. Monk was piqued with her for taking in Ham Brooks.

Monk changed the subject by telling her, "Remember one time I told you Ham, here, had a wife and thirteen not-too-bright children back home?"

"Zadny!" she exclaimed. "That is a joke."

"Oh, no," said Monk, adding to the lie. "All of the offspring are in an institution for people with screws loose in their heads. It is a very sad case."

The girl—her name was Jiln—chucked him under the chin and assured him, "You're cute."

That shut Monk up. He hated being called cute.

Jiln went upstairs to dress for the day. That gave Monk and Ham a chance to compare notes. "How did you get over, Ham?"

"Believe it or not," Ham said, "I took an airline plane, a regular passenger plane, into Sweden. Then I took another regular passenger plane to Prague. It all worked out as slick as could be. I figured that they wouldn't be expecting the obvious, so I came in openly." He grinned. "With indisputable evidence, of course, that I am a Swedish businessman down here to sell some iron ore."

"No trouble?"

"Not a lick."

"That's funny."

"Eh? What is?"

"Both of us getting into Prague this way, as slick as a whistle."

"Oh, those things happen," Ham assured him airily. "We got a break for a change. There in London, I

was beginning to think that the whole business of getting Johann Kovic out of Czechoslovakia was going to be tough."

"Yeah, worse than dragging a tiger through a knothole," Monk agreed.

At this point Jiln appeared. They stared at her working coveralls.

"Great grief, that's a funny chorus girl's outfit," Ham said.

"There is no chorus any more. I work in a factory, nine to six," Jiln explained. She made a little face. "Very dirty, very disagreeable. Everyone does it."

"Why, blast it, it's a shame you have to soil your pretty hands," Monk assured her.

"You two stay here," Jiln said. Then she added archly, "You will be safe. I won't pry into the secret you have."

"Secret?" Monk said innocently. "What secret?"

Jiln went to the door. "Johann Kovic," she said, and popped outside.

MONK and Ham gave each other gap-jawed looks. They felt as if it was a dark night and somebody had blazed a searchlight into their faces. Their thoughts followed about the same channel: Everybody and his dog seems to know more about Johann Kovic and us than we know ourselves. How in the name of the dark place does everyone we touch know so much?

Monk said, "Ham, I have the queerest feeling."

"If I weren't startled, I should say that would be your normal state. But ribbing aside, what do you mean?"

"Did you ever step on a merry-go-round?"

"Sure. But what the—"

"Wait a minute. It started off with a jerk and took you right along, around and around. Maybe you walked the way it was turning, maybe you ran, but it still took you around and around."

Ham said, "You're beginning to talk like you look."

"No, wait. I have the feeling we stepped on to a big merry-go-round back there in England. We're not running the thing, the way we thought we were. We're on it. We're being taken for a ride, and we can run forward or back, but it's still going to take us around and around."

"Do you have a feverish feeling along with that?" Ham asked.

Monk snorted.

"What do you think of following the girl?" he asked. "Or is that crazy?"

"It's not crazy. Come on."

They caught Jiln—or caught sight of her—at a corner where she was waiting for one of Prague's incredible number of streetcars. Following her was simple.

In Prague, they didn't operate the streetcars the way streetcars normally travel, one at a time. They

hooked them together in trains, sometimes five to seven streetcars in one chain. One of these streetcar caravans came clanking along, stopped. Jiln got on a forward car. Monk and Ham piled on a back one.

Jiln's destination proved to be, as she had said, a nasty-looking factory in the east part of the city. The place evidently manufactured nothing strategic, because there was no gateman. After a consultation, Monk and Ham walked in.

They sauntered around, and eventually spotted Jiln. She was wrapping paper around packages of whatever product the place manufactured, and handing them to a co-worker, a man, who tied them with some kind of tape. It looked innocent enough.

“Jiln is all right,” Ham decided.

“I guess so,” Monk agreed. “Well, we might as well go downtown to that street to leave a message for Doc. What street was it?”

“The Vaclavske Nemesti.”

“Okay. Come on.”

At the door they met four men wearing the armbands which for more than three years had nearly stopped the heart of everyone in Europe when they saw them. The Gestapo men had riot guns.

Behind those four were four more, and there were others in different places. They were appearing like measle spots on a schoolboy who was figuring on going to the circus.

One of them spoke English. In fact, he spoke like a Harry James fan.

“Make one icky move,” he threatened, “and there won't be a thing left between your ears.”

Chapter X

THE jail was old and tough-looking. “They call this place a zalar in Czech,” Ham said. But Monk said nothing, being depressed intensely by the fact that the stone walls seemed to be four feet thick.

It didn't help a bit that they were stark naked. Their mouths had been pried open and inspected, and their fingernails and toenails cleaned.

“Tricky kids,” said the slangy Gestapo man. “I've heard of you boys.”

Now this same officer was rattling the cell-door lock, suspicious about its holding. He gave the guards, five of them, a dressing-down about making sure that the prisoners didn't escape. He promised personally to cut out each guard's liver and fry it if anything went wrong. He sounded as if he meant it.

“This is a hell of a note,” Monk complained. “I feel like a child.”

The Gestapo man heard. He laughed.

“Babe is the word,” he called. “Babe in the woods. Naked like babes, too, aren't you?”

And he went away laughing.

He went to an office, old and panelled and looking like an unused room in a museum, and smiled at Jiln. Jiln still wore her factory coveralls, but she had pulled a mink coat over them.

Without speaking, the Gestapo man got out a bottle of Vino Prebornik, vintage of 1876, carefully wiped

off the cobwebs, popped the cork, and poured two goblets. He and Jiln drank a toast. The Gestapo was restraining his glee with difficulty. Delight was crawling in his veins like ants.

“Bless me!” he burst out, in English. “Of over a hundred traps for those fellows we had set here in Prague, they had to fall into mine. Mine! Oh, how wonderful!” He came over and kissed Jiln. “This means glory for you and I, you unfaithful wench. It means the Wilhelmstrasse for us.”

Jiln was tingling, too. “Remember, I get some credit,” she warned.

“Oh, you will, baby.”

“The rest of it will not go as well,” Jiln warned.

Startled, the Gestapo officer eyed her. “Oh, so you know about that, too?”

The girl nodded. “I have my sources of information.”

“What did they tell you?”

Jiln spoke frankly.

“They are to be put into Dabelsky Dum,” she said. “In the concentration camp, they are to be thrown, apparently by accident, with Johann Kovic. They are to be allowed to become friendly with Johann Kovic, and then they will be permitted to escape.”

“Ja!” the Gestapo man said, this time in German. “You do know, don't you?”

The girl smiled archly. She had a tight, pretty face, which now was like a hungry cat's. She poured more wine. The wine was very rare, a vintage that sold for a price equal to a mountain of the occupation marks the Germans were forcing on the Czechs, and had been forcing on them for three years.

“But then,” she said, “is the all-important part.”

The Gestapo man's eyes narrowed. “Yes?”

“Monk and Ham are to be permitted to escape with Johann Kovic,” she said. “Then they will be carefully cornered. Not captured. Just put in a tight spot, where they will be made to believe that one or two of them can escape, but not all of them.”

She sipped the wine.

“That is the delicate part,” she continued. “They must be made to think that only one may escape. That is so that Johann Kovic will tell them the great secret—the defense against it.”

The Gestapo man grinned. “Did you know part of that plan was mine?”

“You're probably lying, Haub.”

Haub shrugged. Resorting to his New Yorkese, he said, “Think I'm strictly on the cob, don't you, chick?”

Jiln put her glass down on the desk.

“When Johann Kovic tells Monk and Ham the secret of the defense, the Gestapo is going to have their pup present,” she said. “The pup will pass the secret along to the Gestapo. Monk and Ham will be shot. Kovic will be shot. Germany whips the Allies. Germany turns around and whips Japan. Germany rules

the world. Deuchsland uber alles. Heil Hitler!" She spat like a streetcleaner.

Haub the Gestapo man, grinned. "I love you, baby. I am going to marry you."

"The moral being that snakes come in pairs, eh?"

Haub didn't like that. He scowled. He became serious.

"All this beautiful scheming," he said, "may blow us higher than a kite, if we don't get our hands on Doc Savage."

Jiln said, "He should have been killed in England."

"My God, we tried to. Some of our English agents are going to be in a fine mess when they come home, if they have no better sense than come home, for failing. Of course if they don't come home, we will see that they are exposed to the English as Nazi agents, whereupon they will be shot anyway."

"Doc Savage is in Prague?"

"Yes."

"You found him?"

"I didn't. Another arm of the Gestapo did."

"And cornered him?"

Haub began swearing suddenly. He put his heart into it, and the vileness of what he said made even Jiln look sick.

"Right now, it's a question of who has cornered whom," Haub said. "Thank the devil that catching Savage isn't in my part of it."

Chapter XI

THE rooftops in the block were like the rooftops in Paris, one great succession of them all the same height, all speckled with chimneys and little entryways and windows and with slate roofs. Luckily there had been a rain during the last couple of days, washing the usual deposit of city grime and soot off the slate shingles, so that their footprints had not shown.

Doc Savage had left the room where they had been trapped by the simple expedient—hair-raising to Letecka Wenceslas—of going out the window and up the stone wall to the roof, carrying the girl. Or rather, with Letecka clinging to his back. It had not been a hard climb. It was just four floors of space and a hard sidewalk below them. Letecka was still pale.

A Gestapo man had shot and missed, as they went over the edge.

Now they were in a chimney. A clean chimney, considering chimneys.

Two Gestapo squads had gone scrambling and swearing across the rooftops never thinking of looking in the chimneys. As a matter of fact, it didn't look as if it was possible for anyone to get in a chimney, because the chimneys were topped with the usual crockery pot-like things, as in Paris again, which had an opening of only about eight inches. Doc had been lucky enough to find one that was loose, and could

be lifted off, mortar base and all, and placed back after he was inside, the way a trap-spider pulls shut the lid of his den.

Two hours had gone by now.

“Mr. Savage,” Letecka gasped. “I can't hang on here much longer.”

“We have been here about long enough, probably,” Doc said.

He lifted the mortar lid cautiously, and looked out. For about four minutes he searched, then he saw a guard, a Nazi infantryman now, pacing on a distant and higher roof.

“I am going out,” Doc said. “When I hiss, it will be safe for you to come.”

The guard turned to pace away. Doc eased out. He placed the lid behind the chimney, remained behind it himself, and when the guard was facing away again, hissed.

Letecka had to be helped out. She was stiff from remaining wedged in the chimney. Doc got her out, replaced the lid.

She had nerve. She grinned at him, said, “You are certainly a gentleman of color now.”

She was a little black herself.

They worked toward the north, and came to the end of the procession of roofs. Looking over the edge, they found Gestapo stationed on the sidewalk below.

Letecka shivered. “We are trapped, aren't we?”

Doc said nothing. It looked as if they were.

THE bronze man watched, with caution, the street. He saw at least six Nazis on the corner directly below, leaning against the post of a city light-power line which ran down the street. Doc Savage frowned at the light wires. The thing must be a high-tension line, judging from the size of the wires. They would hold him. But there wasn't a chance on earth of tight-walking them to anywhere that would resemble safety.

More and more Gestapo were arriving. Cars began to pile up in the side streets. Literally hundreds of the brownshirt men were surrounding the long block.

Now they began to march people out of the buildings in the block.

“What are they doing?” Letecka breathed. “Surely they are not arresting all those people!”

Doc frowned. Every time the girl spoke, since the discovery he had made about the radio-active coin and the electroscope gadget, the sound of her voice would knock everything else out of his mind.

Had she tried to poison him? Was she a Gestapo operative? Did the fact that she'd been with him account for the procession of unexpected troubles?

And how had the Gestapo found them here? Had the girl tipped them off? Doc didn't see how she could have passed the alarm. But if she had been fooling him all along, she was slick enough to do that. Wait a minute, hadn't she picked the rooming house? Doc wasn't quite sure, but she could have manipulated it.

Down in the street there was more commotion than a Sunday dogfight. Fire engines were arriving now.

Doc crouched beside Letecka.

“Back there in London,” he said. “You were the old lady who brought us our breakfast?”

She seemed disappointed, rather than surprised. “So I didn't fool you?”

“Why fool us?”

“I wanted to try out that disguise, and Jones-Jones told me it would be a good way to do it. And also, I wanted to get a look at you and your men, of course. I didn't succeed in that last, but I saw the one named Ham—which, as it has turned out, did me no good. So I had to go by pictures.”

“Where did the breakfast come from?”

“Why, Jones-Jones brought it. He ordered it himself. Why?”

“It was just a question that occurred to me,” Doc said evasively.

“Why are you so curious?” She sounded a little frightened. “Has something gone wrong?”

Doc said, “Plenty,” and pointed down into the street. He changed the subject. “You see those fire engines?”

“Yes,” she agreed uneasily. “What are they going to do with fire engines?”

“Going to burn this block of buildings.”

She got white. “What?”

“Watch.”

THE firing was expertly done. In the meantime, machine-guns were set up on the corners, and men with smoke masks and submachine-guns lined the streets. The firing crews could be heard yelling at each other. Not more than five minutes later, smoke was coming out of the windows.

Doc Savage remained where he was. He had noticed wind direction, and once had used the old Boy Scout trick of wetting a finger and holding it up to find the wind direction from the side that felt cool.

Letecka plucked at his sleeve. “We've got to do something!”

“We are. We are keeping very still right here. They do not see us.”

“But we're trapped!”

“Not yet.”

She got a little haywire then, and gripped his arm and said wildly, “You have no idea how those old buildings burn! They were built hundreds of years ago, some of them, and they're not fireproof. This whole block will be a furnace.”

“Quiet!” Doc warned. “They could hear you!”

She subsided, trembling. “But we'll burn!”

Doc said nothing. Smoke was crawling out now, quite a bit of it. They could hear the sound, the sound quite like which there is nothing else, of flames eating.

Down in the street a single woman was screaming, but she was just anguishing about her home being burned. She got scant sympathy.

The smoke grew thicker.

Letecka asked, “What are we going to do?”

Doc chanced another look down into the street. There was a cordon of Gestapo down there, almost a solid phalanx of them. Once he had been in Berlin on a day when the Fuhrer was running around town dedicating new buildings, and there had been that day cordons of brown and black clothed men like this.

He waited. The girl got up, tried to leave him, but he gripped her arm.

She pleaded, “Let me go out! I'll tell them you escaped. Or maybe I can distract their attention, and you will have a chance to get away.”

“Stay here,” Doc said.

She subsided, trembling more violently. Once she gasped again, “We'll burn!” But she made no other sound.

Doc watched the smoke boil out of the lower windows beneath him. He stood up. There was little chance of being seen now, for the smoke was a boiling pall. It obscured the rooftops across the street, the street itself; it tumbled up around them until they began to choke.

“All right,” Doc said. “Get behind me. Stand close.” She did that. He showed her how to place her arms, how to hang on. She was to stick to his back, as tightly as she could.

“This should work,” he said. “But I'll need both arms. What you have to do is hang on. And that will not be easy. Wait.” He loosened his belt, and made a loop of it around one of her ankles, then tied the other end of the belt around his own ankle. “If you slip, it will not be dignified, but at least you will not fall.”

The girl understood then. “You are going to jump for the light wires! You can't! We'll be electrocuted!”

“You have to have a contact between one wire and the ground, or another wire, to get hurt. Haven't you seen birds sitting on high-tension wires, unhurt?” he explained. “Moreover, they probably turned off the power before they fired the block of buildings.”

She had difficulty answering. “All right,” she said. It sounded like a whimpering.

HE made it. Physically it was not a feat that any soldier in good physical shape could not have managed. But there were four floors below to the street, and it was more or less a blind business, launching out for the wires. He waited until he saw them through a rift, then leaped.

It scared him. It scared the devil out of him, and he was irritated at that. Any circus trapeze worker would have laughed at the idea of the thing being difficult, and Doc himself was capable of twice the leap. But it scared him anyway.

The bad thing was not catching the wire. It was after he caught it, the swing that the momentum gave him. The pitch up toward the other wires which, if the current was on, meant a sudden frying death. But he didn't swing that far.

The cable held. He knew it would. It would hold ten times that weight.

He went along it hand-over-hand. It was easy now. He felt light, the way a man does who has jumped a

chasm and is safe on the other side.

He passed one pole. There was still smoke. He passed another one. Smoke. But then he ran out of the smoke, or started to. He went back.

He inched down the pole carefully, slid the last few yards in a hurry. There were people standing on the sidewalk. Civilians. No uniforms. The people were staring at him.

He loosened the belt which held the girl to him, but which hadn't been needed.

Without a word, the civilians began walking away. Doc began breathing again. That showed what the Czechs thought of their protectors from Berlin.

“Walk, don't run,” he said.

They moved away casually, one block, then two, then they went into a building. They couldn't go much farther. They were sure to be caught.

The place had small apartments. On the first floor, they picked a door at random, and knocked. No one answered. Doc worked on the lock for a while, using the thin tine of his belt buckle, which was shaped for just such a purpose. The lock was a simple one. He got it open. They went in.

Letecka searched quickly.

“Two girls live here,” she reported. She had cleaned her face and hands in the bathroom.

Doc went in and got the soot and dust off his face. When he came out, Letecka stood there in another frock, which fitted her fairly well. She had done her hair differently, changed the makeup of her lips, eyebrows. She looked entirely changed.

“I stole the clothes,” she said.

Doc said, “I could not go a block in this sooty outfit.”

“I know. I have an idea.” Letecka's voice was strangely shrill. “I will go out. We have to have ration tickets. You have to have clothes. I know where I can get them. I will go out and get them.”

“That may not be safe.”

“It's our only chance.”

She went to the door.

“You wait here,” she warned.

And she was gone.

LETECKA moved rapidly until she was out in the street. A man in a brown uniform and an armband was passing and he frowned at her. She smiled brightly. The man grinned, and went on.

She walked more slowly, but not loitering, not wasting time. She walked until she reached the old Shot Tower, landmark of the city at the end of Na Prikope, and turned left. She passed the Bohemian Union Bank building, and in the next block entered an office building.

The office suite she finally entered was large, very modernistic, the way Prague was going in for

ultra-modernistic things before the war. There was a very white-haired blonde behind a blue metal and leather desk.

“Jones-Jones,” she said.

The blonde jumped visibly, then disappeared into another room.

The man who came out was short, round-faced, round-handed, with washed-out blue eyes. His gray pin-stripe suit was impeccable. So was his bow.

“Ah, Letecka,” he said, and made an elaborate business of hand-kissing. “It is a long time since I saw you.”

Letecka asked bluntly, “You want to talk here?” She nodded her head at the blonde. “In front of your little friend?”

The blonde showed her teeth unpleasantly.

“No,” Jones-Jones said. “We will go elsewhere.”

He took Letecka's arm. But, before leaving, he turned to the blonde. “Ruzice, do you know who this young lady actually is?”

“Of course I know her,” the blonde said.

“She is using the name of Letecka Wenceslas,” Jones-Jones said. “But she is Milacek Kovic, daughter of Johann Kovic.”

The blonde sneered.

“I know Johann Kovic's daughter,” she said. “I went to the University with her royal snootiness.”

Jones-Jones laughed at the hate in the blonde's voice. “You were hired for this because you knew Milacek Kovic,” he said. “I just wanted to be sure you weren't a liar.”

Chapter XII

THEY went to the beer garden behind the Hotel Ambassador. The place was almost deserted, the orchestra of old men playing stringed instruments sounded doleful, and the ancient waiters looked unhappy.

Jones-Jones ordered Rhine wine. He was quite happy, because he was almost bouncing as he moved about. He seemed to keep on bouncing even after he sat on his chair.

“So you finally got into Prague with Doc Savage,” he said.

“Yes,” Letecka was brief. The man's delight seemed to disturb her.

Jones-Jones giggled. “That is wonderful. The Gestapo burned a whole block of buildings. Where were you? Didn't they have you cornered?”

Letecka told him how they had escaped.

“Oh, that's a glorious joke on them,” said Jones-Jones delightedly. “A Gestapo man named Falkheim, whose guts I hate, was the Gestapo man in charge of that part of the city. The burning of the block of buildings was his idea. Now he is already claiming your bodies—Doc Savage and yourself—are in the

ruins. When it is found differently, they will probably shoot Falkheim, I hope."

The wine came. Letecka didn't touch hers.

She said, "Mr. Savage is a remarkable individual. I have been watching him, and we have been in several tight spots, but he could have escaped from any of them by himself. I have the feeling that we aren't really helping him at all, but are handicapping him instead. Perhaps we are making a mistake."

"Mistake?"

"Maybe Savage would be more successful rescuing my father if we left him alone."

"My dear girl," Jones-Jones said smilingly, "you are impressed by the man, and understandably. I can see how you would be. You are young and susceptible, and quite extraordinarily attractive, and Savage has unusual charms—"

Letecka said, sharply and uncomfortably, "He is entirely unaware of me!"

Jones-Jones giggled. "Impossible, of course. But the point I started to make is this: This business of getting Johann Kovic, your father, out of Nazi hands is a vital thing. Johann Kovic isn't just one man. He is the war, the whole future of the world for several generations. The side which gets Johann Kovic has won more than a great battle. It has won the war. If the Germans get his information out of him, they have won. They have it half-won, anyway, because they have the secret weapon of which Kovic knows the defense. And if the Allies get Kovic, they have stumped the Germans. And Germany, as everyone knows, is now defeated, and she will go down to quick collapse."

Letecka began, "But we—"

"Wait. You must realize this: In such a gigantic enterprise, we cannot bet everything on one man. Not when that man decides, just because he—or he and his little group of aids—are lone wolves at heart. We have to help. We have to manipulate and arrange, with every facility at our command, so that he will succeed."

LETECKA seemed half-convinced only, but she said no more on the subject. She turned her wine-glass slowly in her fingers.

"How did you get from England so quickly?" she asked.

Jones-Jones smiled. "A Messerschmitt from the Luftwaffe picked me off a cow-pasture near the East Anglian Heights." He chuckled. "I am supposed to be a high Gestapo official, you know. It was simply arranged."

"And brought you to Prague?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it dangerous?" The girl glanced about. "I mean, you and I in public this way."

The round-faced man giggled again. "I think we will get away with it."

Letecka squirmed. The man's elation was making her uncomfortable. "What is there to be so happy about?" she demanded sharply.

Jones-Jones picked up his wine and drank. "I'm sorry about that. It's an unfortunate nervous failing I have. You know the way small boys are said to whistle when they walk past graveyards in the dark?

With me, fear strikes another note. I get as giggly as a schoolgirl when the danger is great. I can't help it. I am sorry."

Letecka frowned at him. She nodded. "I see. I'll try not to be disturbed."

A party came into the beer garden, and a waiter started to guide the newcomers to a table near where Letecka and Jones-Jones sat. Jones-Jones caught the waiter's eye, scowled, and the waiter hastily seated the new arrivals elsewhere.

"We had better get the rest of our plan talked out," Jones-Jones said.

Letecka nodded. "What is it?"

Jones-Jones lowered his voice. On second thought, he moved his chair around beside Letecka's, and dropped an arm across her shoulders adoringly. "Let them think it's an old fool and his young girl-friend," he said.

"What is the plan?" Letecka asked sharply.

"Savage is to be arrested and put in Dabelsky Dum with your father."

Letecka gasped, "Arrested by the Gestapo, you mean?"

Jones-Jones grinned. "Look, my angel, every recourse of the Allied intelligence command is at work on this thing. We have hundreds of our own men in the Gestapo. Trust us. Depend on us."

She shook her head slowly. "It seems fantastic."

"Exactly. Just exactly. So fantastic that I am sure Savage wouldn't agree to do it if he knew. And yet it is a sure-fire system."

"But he'll be in the concentration camp!"

Jones-Jones nodded. "Right. Where he will be put with your father. Then he will be shown a method of escape. A sure-fire method."

"How?"

"Only about three people know of it. I can't tell you exactly."

Letecka thought it over for a while. She compressed her lips. "I'm sorry. I can't go ahead unless I know more than that."

Jones-Jones groaned. But he was apparently prepared to tell her more, because he said, "After Savage is in Dabelsky Dum, he must become unconscious. It is necessary that he becomes senseless temporarily, and be taken to the camp hospital. For it is from there that the escape has been arranged. It will be done quite simply. Believe me. He and your father will be whisked out."

"THAT is a very general description," Letecka said, dissatisfied. "What about details?"

"I am not going to name names, and give exact places and times," Jones-Jones said bluntly. "We need your coöperation, but we cannot risk the collapse of the whole plan. Suppose the Gestapo seized you and gave you truth serum?"

Letecka paled.

With an air of triumph, Jones-Jones produced a small envelope. It was about the size of the envelopes in which doctors place pills.

“Take this,” he said. “Give it to Doc Savage in his food sometime today.”

Letecka stared at the envelope. “What is it?”

“It won't harm him. In forty-eight hours, though, it will cause a temporary attack of giddiness. That is so they will take Savage to the hospital. It won't hurt him. He'll be over it in a couple of hours. Then he'll get out with your father.”

Letecka looked at the envelope and shivered. But she took it.

“What about me?” she asked.

“You'll be in Dabelsky Dum with them. You'll escape, too.”

She thought about it for a while longer, and her voice was tight with horror when she asked, “Are you sure this will work?”

“Positive.” Jones-Jones leaned forward. “Look. I make you a gamble. If it doesn't work, you tell the Gestapo all about me. Tell them I am Jones-Jones, the British secret agent, in their Gestapo as a high officer. You can do that.”

Letecka, impressed, but uncomfortable, said, “You don't mean that.”

“I never meant anything more. I'm gambling my life on this, kid, the same as you are gambling yours. I mean it.”

Letecka stood. “All right,” she said. “But in the meantime I will need clothes to fit Savage, and ration tickets. That is what I told him I was going out for.”

“I'll fix you right up,” Jones-Jones said.

He bought the suit, brazenly, in the leading department store on the Vaclavske Namesti. The ration tickets he produced at his office.

“Don't forget, give Savage the powder in that envelope as soon as possible,” he warned. “It has no taste or odor. So you can give it to him in anything, except water.”

Letecka nodded.

JONES-JONES watched her go away. He was grinning. He was bubbling more than ever, now. He could hardly contain himself. He literally floated along as he went to the Gestapo office in the Kee Hotel.

The half a dozen scowling, uneasy Gestapo officers present in the conference room which he finally entered did not appreciate the little jig of delight Jones-Jones did for them.

“Stop looking like crows!” Jones-Jones told them. “The whole affair is perfectly set.”

He spoke German now, and fluently.

One of them swore at him, the nervous way men swear when they've got a lot on their mind, and added, “Your cheerfulness, Hans, gives me the jitters. I do not see how it has failed to be the death of you. You go to England and Turkey and everywhere and take that silly laugh along. One would think the English

would get to know you."

Jones-Jones grinned.

"I just talked to the girl," he said.

Eyes popped. "To Johann Kovic's daughter?"

"Right."

A man said hoarsely, "Ach Gott!" He grew pale. "Is Savage still alive then, too?"

"Sure, Falkheim," said Jones-Jones. "Indeed he is, and very much alive, too. You didn't get him when you burned the block of buildings this morning. That was the act of a fool, burning those buildings, and no doubt the Wilhelmstrasse will see you in Dachau, if not against a stone wall."

Falkheim turned purple and cursed and started up from his chair, but the others stopped him.

A high officer, Boettisch, who was supposed to be in such a position that he actually had more power than Himmler—certainly he was over the "protector" in Czechoslovakia—lifted a hand quickly. "Let's not have another of those fights now," he said. "What did the girl do? Did she fall?"

"Fall? She fell in England, and she had never gotten up," said Jones-Jones. "She believes everything."

Boettisch leaned forward. "You told her the plan was to arrest Savage, and get him into Dabelsky Dum, get him with her father."

"Exactly what I told her."

"You gave her the powder to administer to Savage without Savage knowing it?"

"Yes."

"What did you tell her?"

"That it would make Savage unconscious, and that he would be taken to the hospital from which the escape would be managed."

Boettisch laughed. "She fell for it?"

"Yes."

"She'll give it to Savage secretly—the powder, I mean?"

"Yes."

"You don't think she will suspect that it will kill Savage at the camp, instead of just making him unconscious?"

"No." Jones-Jones frowned. "It will do that, won't it?"

"Yes."

THEY all seemed relieved now. They talked for a while, first about the poison. Boettisch and Falkheim had both used the stuff in the past, and they were confident. The stuff would bring on delirium within about forty-eight hours after it was administered.

The delirium resulting from the poison was peculiar, because the poison was really an unsuccessful form of truth serum. That is, the serum was eminently successful—except that it killed its victims.

If Johann Kovic gave Doc Savage the answer to the thing that all the turmoil was about—and the probability was that Kovic would do that, because Savage had the scientific ability to understand it and the memory to retain it, and he was the one man most likely to get back to England with it—if Kovic gave Doc the secret, the Gestapo felt pretty sure they could get it out of Doc while he was dying from the stuff.

"It looks like a happy ending," Jones-Jones said cheerfully. "Who is going to arrest Savage?"

Boettisch said, "I will."

"I'm hanged if you will!" snapped Falkheim.

They ended by tossing a bronze reichsfennig for the honor. Falkheim won, to Jones-Jones' disgust.

Just to cheer Falkheim, Jones-Jones said, "I would like to witness this. It should be about like a man putting a cobra into a box with his bare hands."

Falkheim scowled at him with a suddenly pale face. "If it goes wrong, it will be your dirty doing!" he told Jones-Jones. "I want to go on record as to that now. This is your plan, not mine."

Jones-Jones bowed elaborately. "Goodbye, my old friend, my throat-cutting compatriot. Goodbye, and may you rest in peace. Incidentally, where do you want to be buried? Or shall we just feed you to the dogs?"

He went out grinning as if Falkheim's swearing was sweet music.

Chapter XIII

JONES-JONES had a foppish eccentricity. He usually bought himself a cane when he was very pleased, and now, walking along the Avenue Na Prikope toward his office, he stopped and indulged himself. The walking-stick he selected was gold-headed and expensive. A second-hand one, it was true, but fitting the occasion.

He set out twirling the stick, humming a bit of Strauss. He stopped and got himself champagne at two bars, the very best bars. He was high when he went into his office.

"Ah, Ruzice," he said to the blonde. "It is a beautiful day indeed. Remind me to buy you something delightful in memory of the occasion."

He seemed not to notice the strange, tight way the girl was sitting, the ghastly lack of color in her face.

"Have there been any calls?" he asked.

"No calls." Her voice was very low.

Jones-Jones flourished his cane. "Beautiful, isn't it. You know my weakness for canes to commemorate an occasion."

The girl looked at the gaudy blue desk top wordlessly.

Jones-Jones, almost at the door of the inner office, thought of something.

“Get me Berlin on the telephone, if those damned bombers have left a telephone working,” he ordered. “Get me him.”

He swung back and pushed into his office. That was a nice thought, because he would want to know that Savage was trapped, and that they were finally going to pump the truth out of Johann Kovic.

Cautious thought, too. Now was the time to steal the credit. He crossed his fingers mentally, hoping that this wouldn't be one of those days, increasingly frequent the last year, when Hitler was close to a psychic collapse. On the other hand, what if it was one of those days? He had been known to do strange things when the mood was right. I'll paint myself, Jones-Jones thought, as the savior of the Third Reich, which shouldn't be difficult to do—

He had crossed half of his office. Now he stopped. The way he halted was queer, a jerking tight of all his body muscles, but a loosening of those in his legs, so that he sank a little at the knees, then straightened, sank again. As if he were on a rubber band.

His eyes got round, round and as large as they could get. His hands became gray-backed with strain, seeming to grip the cane tightly enough to crush the wood, and yet the cane slipped out of his fingers. It flip-flopped on the floor.

He screamed. It wasn't much of a scream. More of a mewing.

But in the outer office the blonde heard it, and she turned around slowly in her chair, grabbing at the desk top as if trying to find something to hold to.

Then she went off the chair and on to the floor, having fainted from pure terror.

THE rest of the afternoon had seemed long. The telephone in Jones-Jones' office had rung. It rang seven different times, twice close together, but with the other rings spaced at fifteen-minute intervals, as if someone were trying repeatedly to get a connection.

Darkness came over the city. For a while the streets clattered with traffic, and the sidewalks had been jammed with pedestrians. They walked on the left side of the sidewalks and drove on the left side of the street in Prague, and everyone had been hurrying to get home before the blackout hours of night.

There were no streetlights at all. The power and fuel was needed for the arms works in the Vltava River valley, which, until lately, the Allied bombers had hardly touched because of distance limitations. Darkness settled over the city.

In the building where Jones-Jones had his office, there was stillness, and the used odor that office buildings have after business hours. The elevators were not operating.

Boettisch and Falkheim and two other Gestapo officers cursed the stairs they had to climb. “Damn him, he won't be at his office,” Boettisch complained. “He does not answer the telephone.”

“Probably lying in there drunk,” was Falkheim's idea.

They discovered, though, that there was a light in Jones-Jones' suite. Falkheim banged on the door. He had a pistol in his hand.

A voice inside: “Was haben sie nötig?”

“That's Jones-Jones,” Falkheim grunted. He put away his gun.

“Open up, you drunken bum!” Boettisch called.

They heard Jones-Jones giggle inside.

“Drunk. I told you so,” Falkheim whispered.

The door lock clicked, and the door opened. The light in the office was dim, shaded by a handkerchief wrapped around a single desk lamp.

“Well, well, well,” said the bulky man who had opened the door. “So you come back dragging your tails?”

Falkheim cursed Jones-Jones. “How did you learn we failed to get either Savage or the girl?”

This got another titter. “With your magnificent record of failures, Falkheim, how could I help but know it.”

Falkheim, a rending of satisfaction in his voice, said, “This was your plan. It is your failure. Make sure you understand that. As a matter of fact, we've come to arrest you, Jones-Jones.”

“Me? Arrest me?” The bulky man tittered.

Boettisch said wearily, “You now. Us later. A lot of heads are going into the meat-grinder for this day's bad luck.” He stumbled over a chair in the murk and swore. “We did not get Savage. We did not get the Kovic girl. We did not get anything except empty air—and blue hell from Berlin.”

Falkheim suddenly had his gun in hand. His humor was ugly. “How would it be if Jones-Jones got shot resisting arrest, right now.”

“Wait a minute!” Jones-Jones said hastily. But the titter was still in his voice. “Come in here and have a look.”

“Eh?”

They went into the inner office, which was even more gloomy. A flashlight beam spouted milky light. It, too, shone through a handkerchief to cut down the light.

“Be careful of light—my blackout curtains are at the cleaners,” Jones-Jones said.

He put the light on a man and a woman on the floor.

“Doc Savage and Miss Kovic,” he said.

BOETTISCH howled, more astonishment than anything else. After the one bleating outcry, he dropped to his knees, and used a flashlight of his own.

The man on the floor was encased completely in the canvas and leather of a straightjacket. The straightjacket, of the type used in insane cases and intended to confine the victim completely and helplessly, was buckled tight.

“Gott!” breathed Boettisch. “It can't be!”

He played the light over the prisoner's face.

“But it is! Oh damn my soul, it is! The same bronze skin! The bronze hair!” he gasped.

“The flake gold eyes!” Falkheim screamed. “He has to have flake gold eyes! Very unusual—his most striking characteristic.”

Boettisch shined his light. “He has them!”

Jones-Jones said violently, “Put out the lights and quit yelling, you fools. You'll have us cited for a blackout violation, and the police will be up here and the word will get around that we have Savage and the Kovic girl, and we will have these Czech patriots down on our ears like hornets.”

Boettisch doused his light. “How did you get him?”

“He came here.”

“What?”

“He came here. The Kovic girl was with him. They were waiting for me when I got back from our meeting today.” The bulky man stopped and sighed. “I had me a time, but I got my gun on them by the greatest of luck. I clubbed Savage senseless. I tied the girl. I sent Ruzice out for this straightjacket, and got it on Savage before he awakened.”

“Gott!” said Boettisch again, incredulously.

He began to strike Doc Savage with a fist, demanding, “What did you stupid Americans think this would get you?”

There was no answer.

“He doesn't speak!” Boettisch cried. “He is dead!”

“Not dead,” said Jones-Jones. “I made him swallow sleeping-pills until he became unconscious. But he will wake up in five or six hours, probably. We should have him in Dabelsky Dum before that.”

“Naturally,” said Boettisch.

“Have you a car that will take us to Dabelsky Dum?”

“Downstairs.”

Now Letecka spoke for the first time, demanding, “Is this—is this—”

Jones-Jones tittered loudly. “You can speak, my dear. These men are in the plan to rescue your father. They know. They are really English agents.”

Boettisch and Falkheim and the other two were too clever at this sort of thing not to take the cue. They bowed to the girl.

Falkheim demanded, “Did you give Mr. Savage the drug, the powder in the envelope, that will make him lose consciousness in about forty-eight hours.”

“I gave it to him,” the girl said.

“Very fine,” Falkheim said. “Now we will lose no time getting him to Dabelsky Dum.”

THE car was an Italian Mercedes, a rich job built for show. But it was roomy. It held all of them, not too uncomfortably.

It was Falkheim's idea not to have an escort. Since Doc Savage was not conscious, there was not likely to be trouble. And if an escort went roaring out of Prague, likely as not something might happen. You could never tell what the Underground knew, or what it would do.

The car crawled out the Trida Marsala Foche, the street which the Nazis had lost no time re-naming, and shortly was in the country.

Almost nothing was said. Everyone in the car who could get his feet on the figure in the straightjacket was keeping them there, to detect the slightest movement which might indicate Doc Savage was returning to consciousness.

The girl said twice, tensely, "I'm afraid!" And the second time, the bulky Jones-Jones said, "I shall be right with you, if it will make you feel better."

"It will," Letecka said.

The ride was not long. Dabelsky Dum shoved up ahead of them. The place looked remarkably hideous considering how dark it was, like a pile of scabs against the night sky.

The castle of Dabelsky Dum—in the Czech language the name meant simply "the devil's home"—had been built, the sinister history of the place had it, about the year 1096, when the Crusaders were passing through Prague on their way to the East. This was during the period when persecution of Jewry was at its worst, religious violence was rampant, and the only law was in the muscle of a man's arm and the steel in his hand. A period of blood and terror.

The builder, history had it, was a knight Crusader who went over to sorcery, which probably meant that he simply went crazy. He amassed a following of rascals, terrorized the vicinity, and built Dabelsky Dum, which was a devil's home if there ever was one. He was credited with being one of the supposedly unknown assailants who killed the ruler, Duke Bretislav II, while the latter was hunting.

The castle had been a prison through most of the later ages. It had always been avoided, because access was difficult, the surroundings were depressing, and Dabelsky Dum itself was as unpleasant as an old sore.

It was stone, of course. A wall less than four feet thick was a rarity, as was a room much larger than the walls were thick.

There was a moat, a water-filled ditch about fifty feet wide which entirely surrounded the walls. Unlike most ancient moats, this one was in use. Right now, it was black and evil.

As the Mercedes stopped to pass the drawbridge guards, Letecka sniffed curiously at the moat. "Oil," she said.

Falkheim chuckled. "Only a layer of oil about three feet deep, on top of the water."

"Why is that?" Letecka asked curiously.

"A man cannot swim in oil. The difference in specific gravity between oil and water, you know. The oil is so much lighter that a man will sink immediately."

"Oh."

"And, of course, the oil can be fired electrically at a moment's notice," Falkheim added. "That would make a ring of terrific flame around the whole place in a matter of seconds."

“Couldn't the electrical firing circuit be put out of commission?”

Falkheim laughed. “It could be. But the wall guards each have a signal pistol. About thirty of them would put a ball of fire into the oil at the first alarm.”

“There is only the one road,” Letecka said. “I suppose it is mined.”

“Naturally,” said Falkheim.

Jones-Jones kicked Falkheim's shin, indicating that he was telling too much.

The guards finished examining their credentials. They were passed inside Dabelsky Dum.

Chapter XIV

THE drawbridge was barely wide enough for the long car to squeeze across, and the narrow passage into which they passed was ominous. In fact, it had a startling effect on the nerves. A Hollywood horror-picture producer, setting his scenic designers to develop something that would horrify spectators, could not have gotten better results.

There was evil in the place. Usually buildings have no character at all. They are either beautiful, or ugly, or commonplace. They may be small enough to depress one, like a tenant's shack in Alabama. Or they may be big enough to take the breath, like Radio City. But rarely is there a definite character, a continuous and growing thing, a real sense of a building having a living viciousness itself, and the ability to impress that viciousness on those within it.

This place had that. The guards now were different. There was never anything angelic about the face of a Nazi concentration camp guard. But these fellows were beyond, over the edge of bestiality. Their jowls hung and their eyes were pocketed and their lips had a cruelty beyond anything normal.

Letecka shivered and said again that she was afraid. No one answered her.

But now Falkheim and Boettisch were more at ease, as were the other Nazi officers. Jones-Jones did not seem much changed.

“Is it logical that we throw him in with Johann Kovic?” he asked.

“Oh, yes,” said Falkheim. “Come on. We will do that now.”

The car had gone as far as it could. They got out now.

With the customary arrogance of Prussian officers, although it was doubtful that any one of them was a true Prussian, Falkheim and Boettisch refused to carry the heavy figure in the straightjacket. They called four guards for that.

IT was gloomy within the tunnels and passages. They followed the four guards who were carrying the bulky form in the straightjacket.

The passages were long. The only light was from particularly villainous greenish-purple bulbs in electric fixtures attached to iron conduit piping.

Dabelsky Dum was evidently Falkheim's charge, because he pointed at the green-purple bulbs, pleased, and said, “Himmler told me about that idea. He got it from a psychiatrist who drove his wife crazy with light. You would be surprised what it does for the place.”

“A nice touch,” Jones-Jones agreed.

Falkheim snorted.

“Love of the devil, what has gotten into you?” he demanded.

“Why?”

“For more than two hours now, you haven't given me one dirty dig,” Falkheim said. “It isn't like you.”

“I am tired. I got one awful scare today,” Jones-Jones said. “And on the other hand, maybe you aren't worth insulting. Insults take cleverness, and cleverness uses up nervous energy.”

“Your stupid ones don't,” Falkheim said.

The guards carrying the straight-jacketed burden had stopped at a very modern-looking steel cell door.

Falkheim had gotten the keys. He swung the cell door open. “Another of my ideas,” he said.

The guards had their guns drawn now, as had Boettisch and Falkheim. Jones-Jones leaned down and peered into the cell, which was lighted with the psychiatric green-purple glow.

The cell was devilish, all right. First, it had a V-bottom, which made it impossible for a man to stretch out crosswise and sleep in any kind of comfort. In order to prevent an occupant stretching out along the bottom of the V, this in turn was crossed at regular intervals of two feet or so with steel bars, which were like the slats across a pig-trough. There was not room to stretch out under them.

The straightjacketed man was shoved inside.

A voice, a scratching voice like an overgrown kid's, yelled, “Doc! It's Doc! They've got Doc Savage!”

The voice belonged to Monk. He was inside, clad in nothing but cotton shorts.

Ham Brooks was there too, in the same dress, somewhat skinned and bruised, and with one eye nearly swelled shut. He showed more signs of battle than Monk, who was the one who usually collected them.

Then Letecka cried, “Tatinek!” and started forward. It was the Czech word for “father.”

Jones-Jones gripped her arm, held her.

A figure was coming laboriously from the back of the torture cell. A figure that had been in the farther darkness, that was still there, but was now coming into the light. And as the man became more discernible, the sight of him was something to tie stomachs into knots.

Now Letecka shrank back against Jones-Jones. She was looking at the figure with horror. “It can't be,” she gasped.

The wasted skeleton tottered forward a few more feet, getting over the crossbars with the greatest of difficulty. Then, exhausted even by that small effort, he stopped and fell against the sloping side of the plane and stared at them with eyes that seemed to be made entirely of blood.

“My little girl,” he said in Czech.

Letecka made a wordless sound, a cry that seemed never to get out of her throat. She started forward, or reeled, and got as far as the edge of the door, where she hung, gripping the edge of the door, the

strength apparently gone out of her.

Falkheim laughed.

He gave her a shove with his foot. She toppled into the cell, and remained sprawled there, too weakened by shock, from the sight of what they had done to her father, to get up.

“Machen sie die tur zu!” Falkheim told a guard.

The man shut the door obediently. He clicked the complicated lock, handed Falkheim the key.

FALKHEIM dismissed the four guards. They walked away, falling into ranks and doing the parade goosestep because there were high officers present. They sounded like an ugly machine going thump! thump! down the passage.

Falkheim tried the door. He gave it a good yanking and shaking, making sure it was secure.

“All right,” he said. “Now this thing is all done. They will never get out of there.”

He paused, listening to what went on in the cell. There was no sound. The stillness seemed to make Falkheim angry.

In a loud voice, he said, “The orders to shoot them will be here from Berlin shortly, I imagine. They'll be safe here until then.”

He winked at Jones-Jones in the depressing light.

The goose-stepping guards had gone through a distant door. They were out of sight now. Their footsteps could be heard, though. They were no longer goosestepping, but sloughing along, dragging their gun-butts on the stone floor.

Jones-Jones looked at Falkheim.

“I think you are about as completely evil as any man I ever met,” Jones-Jones said. “Something should be done about it.”

Quick to jump at the insult, Falkheim growled, “I suppose you would have the guts to try doing something?”

Jones-Jones said, “Now that you suggest it—”

He hit Falkheim alongside the temple. The blow did not make a loud sound, but Falkheim dropped as if poleaxed.

The next blow was louder, on the throat, and it brought down one of the Gestapo men, who had said almost nothing during the trip. But he was a small-eyed man who had been continuously alert, and he was dangerous.

The second Gestapo man was walking backward when he was hit. Slammed over against a wall by the blow, he had not time to move before he was hit again and made unconscious.

All of this with lightning speed. It was quick—the way well-planned things always seem so quick when executed. The way a man can move when desperation is sparking his muscles.

Three of them down or falling, and now Jones-Jones had a fat automatic pistol out and gouging Boettisch

in his round belly. This gun was German-made, but it was no Luger or Mauser with a spike snout. This was a Walther, fat and awful, looking like a bloated kid's water-pistol.

Boettish was literally lifted off the floor by the gouge of the gun.

Boettisch, not looking so much at the gun as at the man who held it, got a looseness in his face. The sagging was more than in his jaws. His cheeks, the pouches under his eyes, seemed to loosen.

"You're Doc Savage!" he said thickly.

Jones-Jones admitted it freely enough. "Yes, that is right. Lie down."

"Where—where is—"

"Jones-Jones? He was the one in the straightjacket," Doc said. "It took most of the day to get him to look enough like me, and me enough like him, to make this work. And it wouldn't have worked then if we had been under good light at any time." Doc nudged him. "Lie down!"

Boettisch had nerve. He started to yell. Doc swung very hard, left-handed, up and out, and planted a paralyzing blow on his throat. He kneed Boettisch in the middle to double him, then rapped him on the back of the head with the fat Walther pistol. Then he found the cell key on Falkheim.

MONK MAYFAIR was close to the door when Doc got it open. Monk said, "I could tell that guy was not you as soon as they threw him in here. That's why I yelled out that it was you in the straightjacket."

Doc said, "Change clothes with these fellows. Take their uniforms."

There was a scurrying in the passage. The four victims were snatched out of sight into the cell. There was no time wasted.

Doc asked, "How did they get you two?"

"Monk's girl-friend turned us in," Ham said.

"You overdressed shyster, she was your girl-friend—you were there first!" Monk said bitterly.

"We'll settle that later," Ham told him.

Doc asked, "Kovic. Kovic, do you speak German?"

"Ja."

"Speak it then." Doc changed to German, asked, "Can you walk?"

"Without help, maybe a hundred feet or so. With help, I can bungle along," Kovic said.

"Have you told them—the Nazis—anything yet?"

"About the defense against—no. No, I haven't told them a thing."

Letecka was helping her father. Monk and Ham were already in the Gestapo uniforms, Monk blowing air out of his lungs in an effort to get the coat buttoned over his oversize chest.

Ham fell upon Boettisch and Falkheim and the other two Gestapo men, each in turn. He hit them several times with his fist, using first one fist and then the other, but finally changing to a boot heel, to induce prolonged unconsciousness.

This brought the discovery that Jones-Jones was now conscious, because he groaned and wailed, “Oh you fools! You have spoiled everything!”

Doc Savage laughed, which was a strange thing for him to do. But Jones-Jones obviously did not mean that they had spoiled things for the Nazis; he meant that they had spoiled things for themselves. And the idea that the man should try to pick up that deceit at this stage of the game struck Doc as funny.

“Who's this guy?” Monk asked, meaning Jones-Jones.

Ham said, “Never mind, he'll go out like the others!” and approached with his shoe.

“Wait,” Doc said. “There are only three of us. Or three of you. And four came in.”

“I can put on one of their uniforms,” Letecka said.

“Wouldn't fool them,” Doc assured her. “In one of these uniforms, you would be like a sparrow wearing a circus tent.” He went over and began unstrapping the straightjacket. “We will take this one along.”

“I won't go!” Jones-Jones said. And then, instantly, he changed his mind. “I'll go! I'll do whatever you say.”

“We gotta hurry,” Ham breathed. “There's a guard goes down this corridor every ten minutes.”

Doc had the straightjacket off Jones-Jones. “Get into Falkheim's uniform!”

Jones-Jones did, and in a hurry.

Chapter XIV

JONES-JONES went ahead with the girl. That was Doc's idea. It turned out to be good, too, because the guards leered when they saw Letecka gasping and struggling in Jones-Jones' grip. Doc Savage, Monk and Ham, walking behind and half-supporting Johann Kovic, did not get as much attention.

They got to the car, and got into it. That was the worst of it. It wasn't the easiest, but it was the worst. There was something about a machine as powerful as this car which gave them confidence.

Doc drove. Jones-Jones was beside him. Monk and Ham, the girl, Johann Kovic, rode the back seat.

Monk kicked around on the floorboards, then gasped with pleasure.

“Look at this!” he whispered.

He had unearthed two short machine-guns and a box of grenades.

Doc started the car engine.

“Get us out,” he told Jones-Jones. “Or you will be the first to die, and quick.”

The machine had to be turned. That meant backing, going ahead, cramping the wheels different ways. But finally they were straightened out and going back through the passage.

“Listen!” Ham breathed.

The others heard it, too. Sirens. Air raid sirens far away in Prague.

Letecka, a break in her voice, said, “The Underground did it!”

“Did what?” Ham was puzzled.

“Got radio word to England to send over bombers and—”

She didn't finish, because the gate guards were suddenly on each side of the car.

Jones-Jones showed their identification, which seemed a formality, because they had gone in past these same guards not long before.

“Es tut mir leid,” the guard on Doc's side said. He was a tall man, ugly, with the three silver chevrons of an obergefrieter, a senior lance-corporal. He went on, in German, to explain that they could not go out. Autocars were not allowed on the road during air raid.

Jones-Jones cursed him. Jones-Jones did his best, his overbearing best. He ordered the gate open.

“Nein.” The guard said it was rules. He didn't dare break rules, even for such high officers. It was a perfect example of Teutonic bull-headedness.

Then a guard on the other side of the car let out a yell. “They are not the same!” he shrieked. They were discovered.

Monk and Ham and Doc were all set for that. Doc clipped Jones-Jones on the point of the jaw, stunning him where he sat. He used the impact of the blow to help force himself out of the car. He was upon the guard, the obergefrieter, with all the speed possible.

Doc came down hard on the guard, demanding, “The switches! Where are the switches that open the gate!” But the guard just fought him desperately.

It was weak, tottering Johann Kovic who said, “I know where they are!”

They were behind a small door to the right. A door of steel, closed, slotted with a gunport. From the gunport, gunfire.

Monk said, “Back!” He pulled the latch on one of the potato-smasher grenades, waited dangerously, then threw it against the barred door. It exploded, directly against the gunport. The hinged cover of the gunport flew off, but the door remained closed. No more shots came from the gunport.

Doc hit the door. It wouldn't budge. He put an eye to the lidless gunport. There was light inside, two men on the floor, one apparently dead and the other badly wounded, and a switchboard, a complicated-looking thing, behind them.

Doc said, “Kovic, can you show me the right switches? Maybe we can close them with a pistol bullet.”

Kovic did not have to look. “Third from the left, top row,” he said.

Doc aimed carefully through the slot, fired. Nothing happened. Or he thought nothing was going to happen—then with a grinding and grunting the gates began swinging and the draw sinking.

They piled into the car, and were on the drawbridge before it was down.

The oil in the moat was catching fire in scores of places, as the wall-guards fired rocket pistols into the stuff. But there was no need of worrying about that now. They bounced out onto the rough cobbled road.

DOC drove possibly four hundred yards, as fast as the car would travel. Then he slammed on the brakes, brought the machine to a stop, and swung out.

“Everybody out,” he said. “Go downhill. Toward the river.”

Nobody asked questions. They piled out, went over the edge of the road. The going was very steep, but not especially rocky. There was enough light that they could see the river shining below, and perhaps a mile distant.

“The river,” Doc urged. “Straight for the river.”

Monk suddenly grunted, and scrambled back to the car. When he overtook them, he had Jones-Jones across his shoulder. “I'm gonna take this along as a trophy,” he said.

The going became less steep, soon. There was a series of open woodlands, with stone walls, then fields.

Doc said, “I studied a map of the vicinity this afternoon. This seems to be the shortest and best way to the river.”

The words were hardly off his lips when the mines began letting go in the roadway they had left. There was a single rattling explosion, a jarring and quaking of the earth. Not one mine going at a time, but all at once. They looked back, and the mine-blasts for a moment were like a long string of streetlights. Then there was the thunder of dislodged rock coming down the little mountainside. The headlights of their car, which they had left burning, had disappeared.

Ham said, “So that's why we left the road.”

“They told us the road was mined when we were driving out here,” Doc explained. “Letecka was clever enough to get that out of them.”

Now there was nothing to do but run. It was a footrace they always remembered. Their lungs became dry, as hot as if they held flame. Occasionally, bullets from the machine guns on the walls of Dabelsky Dum, which were sweeping the countryside blindly, would rattle near.

The good going, grassland, held clear to the river. And the last two hundred yards, they had brilliant light to run by. Glaring illumination from a parachute flare which had been dropped from a plane overhead.

Halting on the river bank, they became aware for the first time of the thumping of bombs in the Prague factory district, the multitude moan of booming planes overhead. The beams of thirty or forty big searchlights were fingering the sky.

Doc had a flashlight. He was splashing its light at the sky in a regular series of signals.

“Here comes our plane!” Letecka said.

It was American, a PBY-5, a Catalina. The big, slow, flying boat came sauntering down to the river, settled, knocked up spray, and came toward them, swung into the wind and taxied up near shore.

They waded and swam out to it.

The pilot had his head out and was bawling at them, “Hurry up! We're a sitting duck in this crate! Get a move on!” He was excited.

A few bullets were hitting the river. They came from distant Dabelsky Dum, which was just barely within range of a high-aimed machine gun.

They got aboard.

The pilot took off. And ten minutes later, Ham was saying excitedly, “For the love of mike! There's a solid wall of American pursuit ships around us!”

“There better be,” the pilot said grimly. “This thing only makes a couple of hundred miles an hour when it's hungry.”

A Sergeant touched Doc's shoulder. “There are doctors all ready in the rear compartment. Will you take Johann Kovic back there?”

DOC carried Kovic back. Letecka tried to follow them, but couldn't make it. She remained in the forward cabin, weak, trembling, too much wracked by the after-reaction to do anything but sit there.

Jones-Jones—the real one, the one they had met in London—was in the small compartment which had been hastily rigged as an emergency hospital.

“We've been having a little trouble with a namesake of yours,” Doc told him.

“So I understand. The Underground transmitted a bit about it today,” Jones-Jones said. “You didn't, by any chance, bring him along?”

“Monk did.”

“My word! I'll be glad to meet the beggar.”

The doctors were working over Johann Kovic. Doc Savage, after a glance at his own grimy person, did nothing but observe.

They told Kovic the truth. There were nine chances that he would live. But there was always the tenth, shock or heart or something, would kill him.

Kovic nodded. “What you mean,” he said, “is that I had better share my information right now.”

“It would be safer,” Doc said, although he was quite sure Kovic would live.

Then, for nearly an hour, they listened to Johann Kovic talk. The man had a phenomenal memory, a brain that retained things like a photographic film. He was able to give them an excellent description of the new German secret weapon, and of his defensive plan.

Doc, before the man had spoken five minutes, stopped him and told the two surgeons, “You had better leave. Sorry, but you'll sleep better if you never heard it.”

The bronze man's face was tense. And it was gray with horror by the time Johann Kovic finished.

They were still in the cabin after Kovic ended. And finally Doc looked at Jones-Jones and asked, “You did not understand it, did you?”

“No, to tell the truth, I didn't make head nor tail of it.”

Doc nodded. “In that case it will not be necessary to extract any pledges from you.”

“Pledges?”

Doc Savage was uncomfortable, but grimly determined. “There will be a great hullabaloo for the Allies to

use this thing on them, because they were going to use it on us. But there are certain human considerations to be weighed. England and Russia and America and China and the other Allies, the people of all those nations, are going to have to live with each other and with themselves after this is over. If this thing was used in this war, they couldn't do that, couldn't live with themselves any more than a murderer can live with himself afterwards."

"Oh. You mean—the weapon is to remain a secret with Kovic and yourself."

"Yes. We have the defense."

Johann Kovic said, "And now the Nazis will never dare use the thing. You would have the defense. You also have the weapon. They have no defense. They know it would be turned on them, and they would be helpless."

Jones-Jones put out his hand. "As you say."

MONK MAYFAIR put his head into the hospital compartment. "Has anybody got time to straighten me out on this Jones-Jones thing?" he demanded.

He saw the genuine Jones-Jones and his small eyes protruded.

"Oh, now there's two of you!" he said.

Jones-Jones chuckled. "I trust this other chap doesn't look too much like me?"

"Not a bit," Monk said. "That's what gets my goat. How can you have a double who doesn't look at all like you?"

Doc Savage straightened it out. "The other Jones-Jones, whom we'll call the fake one because we have no idea what his name really is—doubtless Schmidt or something—was merely a German agent who knew that Letecka, who is Johann Kovic's daughter, was aware that there was a high British agent by the name of Jones-Jones. So he merely pretended to be the real Jones-Jones in order to persuade Letecka to join up with us and lead us into Dabelsky Dum, where they hoped Johann Kovic would give us the defense secret, and they could get it out of us some way."

"When did Letecka find out the difference?"

"Today in Prague. She decided something was wrong, and told me about a drug they had given her to give me, really a poison. When she described the man she knew as Jones-Jones, we knew immediately that he was a fake. So we set to work on the plan which eventually worked."

Jones-Jones strode forward and stared unpleasantly at the phony. Then he smiled beamingly at Letecka.

"I hope"—there was already a slight coating of honey on his words—that you like the genuine article better than you did that chap."

"I'm sure I will," Letecka said, smiling.

Monk nudged Ham.

"Here we go again," Monk muttered to Ham. "He's going to take out after our girl. With a handsome mug like that, I foresee a dark future for us."

Ham had the same idea.

THE END