

MURDER MIRAGE

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter I. MIDSUMMER SNOW

PATRICK BRENNAN, police patrolman, was the first to see the beautiful woman of glass. Unfortunately, Patrolman Brennan did not live long enough to report the incredible apparition. The policeman died heroically in the discharge of duty.

The snow had been pelting down. It had started more than an hour before the lovely, vivid woman was transformed into a horrible, shadowy silhouette in the window of plate glass. The twin phenomena of the snow and the ghastly shadow seemed to be wholly unrelated.

Patrolman Brennan might have told something of what really happened, if he had survived. As it was, the policeman was left lying in the street. His service revolver had belched death. It had taken double toll of his attackers, but that had not been enough to save him.

Snow is not unusual in Manhattan. Blizzardfalls, such as this one, are rare, but they happen occasionally in proper time and season. This snowfall was remarkable. It was being recorded by the United States weather bureau as an all-time mark in freakish weather.

It was nearly midnight when the first stinging particles whipped the faces of the theater crowds on Broadway. Amazed voices intoned unbelief.

"Can you imagine? A sleet storm! Of all things!"

These and kindred exclamations greeted the beginning of the storm.

IN the offices of the government weather bureau was even more amazement than elsewhere. A gray-haired, scholarly observer divided his time between a window and his instruments. He frequently consulted his various graphs.

"Look at that night map," he growled. "We are directly in the area of high pressure extending a couple of hundred miles into the Atlantic. So it couldn't be possible!"

"Sure, that's what the map says," boomed a deep voice. "But that stuff on the window isn't taffy candy, mister. I felt it, and I tasted it. It's snow. You'll have to make a new map."

The speaker was an authority on maps. For his name stood among the ten or dozen most eminent engineers in the world. The man's fists were approximately of the size of his head. And his head was of leonine proportions.

He was Colonel John Renwick, known to the weather bureau officials, and to thousands of others, as "Renny." His fame as an engineer was perhaps somewhat less than his position of note as one of the five adventuring companions of Clark Savage, Jr., better known as the man of bronze, Doc Savage.

"You are correct," stated a smaller man, whose face was thin and of an unhealthy pallor. "It is undoubtedly

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snow. Moreover, within a short time there will be a violent thunderstorm."

"You're crazy!" promptly declared the grayish weather observer. "How could there be a thunderstorm? Look! The nearest area of low pressure is south of the Carolinas! So there couldn't be an electrical storm."

The small, thin man shook his head.

"How could there be a snowstorm in midsummer?"

The thin man was Major Thomas J. Roberts, known as "Long Tom." He was another of the companions of Doc Savage, an electrical wizard.

This was the incredible part of the snowstorm. For it was midsummer. To be exact, it was the midnight of July 4th. In a matter of only minutes, it would be the morning of July 5th. So, as the weather observer had insisted, "it couldn't be snowing."

The oldest resident of Manhattan had never witnessed such a phenomenon. As long as there had been a weather bureau there had been no such freakish occurrence.

"Look at this," directed the grayish weather observer. "All of the Middle West is having the worst heat wave of the summer. Boston and all the way to Portland, Maine, show high temperatures. Right now, Washington and Philadelphia are in the eighties!"

WHILE unbelievable, almost fantastic weather history was being recorded in the offices of the government, downtown streets rapidly became deserted. Shortly after midnight but little traffic moved in the vicinity of the shopping districts. The snow had not been deep enough actually to block motor vehicles, but summer-clad residents had faded from the streets.

The pale headlight beams of a small car penciled into a deserted block near an elevated railway corner. The little car was a yellow coupé of the "for rent" variety. The driver held to almost the exact middle of the street. As the coupé turned into the street, there was a loud, squishy *blorp!* Air hissed for a few seconds.

"Oh!" breathed a tense voice. "I was afraid something would happen!"

A front tire had blown out.

Street lights picked out the face of the driver. The face was small, with features exquisitely formed. Large, luminous eyes reflected the outside light. Slender white hands gripped the steering wheel. These hands were inadequate to driving with a front tire flat.

The small coupé coughed over to the curb. One side bedded down where the snow had drifted some.

"We'll have to get out here and go on quickly," said another woman, who was seated beside the driver. "I know we were followed when we left the airport. We should have separated then."

The fear in the woman's voice was immediately confirmed. Two other cars were turning into the block. Both were black, closed sedans. The curtains of both cars were tightly drawn.

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The slender young woman under the wheel slid from her position. She pushed the door open against the storm.

"We'll go different ways!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "I'll endeavor to catch an elevated train! Then you can slip over to the next street and take a taxi!"

The two closed cars, one trailing the other, were moving down upon the coupé. The young woman who had spoken reached into the little car and snatched a satchel purse of metallic chain mesh from the seat. She slipped and floundered with her first steps, but she gained the sidewalk and started running.

"You go the other way then!" she cried out to her companion. "Oh, hurry! I'll get the message to Mr. Savage! I'll wait, if you do not get there first!"

One of the two sedans swerved past the yellow coupé. Its invisible driver pulled the car in again close to the young woman on the sidewalk. She had caught up her light skirts and her trim legs flashed with silk as she ran. The clinging snow was more than ankle deep.

Four figures sprang from the sedan into the snowy street. These were men of unusually upright stature, but they moved stiffly. Their feet made dragging motions, as if their legs and bodies were impeded by some heavy weight.

These men were between the young woman and the elevated stairs at the corner. But they did not move as if they intended intercepting her. When they sprang from the sedan, they took up a position near the middle of the street.

The young woman's mouth was opened gaspingly. Her luminous eyes widened with terror. She could see the faces of the four men in the street.

"Oh! They've come!" she gasped. "I knew they'd come!"

THE faces of the four men were of the color of dull lead. Any one observing them would have had the impression of corpses walking. Perhaps the young woman imagined that, or it might have been something more sinister, more appalling.

For a few yards, the four men merely kept pace with the fleeing woman. The color in their faces was caused by masks. These were fitted snugly over their noses and chins. They covered their necks and appeared to be attached to the heavy material under their rough outer clothing.

These men did not display any weapons openly. Two carried peculiar-looking instruments. These could have been an iceman's tongs, only they had handles several feet in length. The men paced the woman with these strange devices over their shoulders.

The young woman was nearing the stairway to the "el."

Again she cried out, as if to reassure herself, "I'll get it to Mr. Savage—"

The black sedan from which the four men had emerged scooted suddenly ahead. The four men edged out into the street and made way for it. The car speared in between them and the running woman.

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The young woman then was in front of the plate-glass windows of a store. This store handled musical instruments. Its double windows were filled with the gleam of polished silver and brass. The plate glass was fitted in from the level of the sidewalk. The woman's shadow was reflected on it like a fleeing ghost.

The door of the sedan next to the sidewalk, popped open. A globe twice the size of a football rolled out. This sphere had been impelled sharply from inside of the car. The sedan door snapped shut. The globe struck the sidewalk pavement in several inches of snow.

The snow did not impede the progress of the spherical object. For where the globe touched, there was instantly no snow.

The fronts of buildings, the skeleton-like structure of the "el," the coupé and the other cars were abruptly bathed in a weird, greenish light. The light was a warm glowing, yet it seemed to have some substance. It was as if the air had suddenly been filled with invisible particles.

THE second sedan had been pulled to the opposite side of the street, some distance away. Two men sprang from this car, running as they hit the street. These men were unmasked. Their white faces looked drawn and desperate under visors of caps pulled low over their eyes.

The two men swung automatic pistols of heavy caliber. They seemed intent upon reaching the four men with the dull leaden masks. But they did not shoot. The sedan from which they had come remained standing.

The air was filled with a low, slow hissing. The rolling globe lost the impetus it had been given. It was close to the young woman.

The woman, then in front of one of the plate-glass windows, gave forth a scream. The cry was high-pitched, almost animal in its utter anguish. Only death could wring such an emanation from a human throat.

There was another, lesser scream. It was like a minor echo of the death wail. This came from the yellow coupé from which the young woman had come. A slender figure, closely hooded and cloaked, slipped from the little car. This was the other woman.

The glowing of the strange globe on the sidewalk was blinding in its intensity. The two men armed with automatics skidded to a halt in the snow. They cursed wildly and swabbed their coat sleeves across their eyes.

The slim figure from the car crossed the sidewalk. It reached the building front. The woman ran along the buildings, guiding herself with one lightly touching hand. Arriving at a cross alley between streets, she darted into it.

For a few more seconds the whole street was filled with the low, slow hissing. The invisible particles seemed to fill the air with a minor crackling. The fluorescent, greenish glow gave the snow an unearthly aspect.

With the one soul-chilling scream, the young woman who was attempting to reach the elevated, vanished from before the tall plate-glass window. The space between this spot and the stairs of the "el" was brightly illuminated. But the woman did not reach the steps of the "el."

For a matter of seconds, it appeared she might have fallen in the snow; that the fleecy downfall had buried her. But all around, the snow was melting as if touched by sudden, fierce heat. And when the pavement in front of the plate-glass windows was smooth and bare, the woman was not there.

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The four men in the masks of leaden color moved like automatons. The pair with the long-handled tongs reached the sidewalk. Between them, they trapped and nipped the globe that had come from the sedan. With the tongs they swung it back into an opened door of the car.

All climbed in quickly. The sedan jumped away with a clashing of gears. The driver did not appear to be an expert, but he was in a hurry to leave. The car skidded around the corner, following the line of "el" pillars.

PATRICK BRENNAN, the patrolman, was ringing in at a box in the next cross avenue when the woman screamed. The patrolman's teeth had been playing like castanets. His light, summer uniform had not been made for a July blizzard.

Dropping the patrol box phone, Brennan whipped toward the corner.

Blinding luminance shut off the policeman's vision as if a camera shutter had clicked. He groped with one hand around the corner building.

Patrolman Brennan first saw the outline of the yellow coupé. He hard-heeled toward it. His feet were hitting bare pavement. He *clop-clopped* over to the little car. His vision caught the music store window. He stared for a moment, his lower jaw dropping.

Beyond the coupé, the two men from the second sedan started running. They held automatics. Both stumbled as if partly blinded.

"Hold it, you two!" barked Patrolman Brennan. "What's this all about? Stop, I say!"

This was a mistake on the part of the policeman. His voice provided the two white-faced men with a target. Their hands whipped up and the automatics erupted with a mean ripple.

Patrolman Brennan sagged, and he coughed. One hand on the side of the coupé prevented him from collapsing. The erupting streams from the automatics were all that guided his aim. Though his big body was slowly sinking, Patrolman Brennan's hand was steady.

Three jumps of the service revolver and both running men rolled into the snow. One lay still. The body of the other jerked. Patrolman Brennan was now on his knees. He was unable to rise, so he crawled. He clawed his way into the street, making toward the halted, second sedan.

The driver of this car ignored the bodies in the street. The sedan moved away mockingly. Patrolman Brennan lifted his revolver. His finger curled around the trigger. But his strength left him.

Scarlet fluid trickled from the policeman's lips. It stained the snow in a circle around his head.

The yellow coupé stood alone and empty. All life had gone from the block. The three bodies were only dark lumps. These were whitening with the still-falling snow.

In the space where the young woman had been before the plate-glass window of the music store was a blackened area. The pavement looked as if a searing iron had been run over it.

The young woman's body could not be seen.

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On the sidewalk in front of the music store was a queer little collection of objects.

Directly before the plate-glass window lay a satchel purse of metallic chain mesh. The purse had flopped open. A small caliber automatic pistol, such as a woman might have carried for protection, had slipped out.

A dozen bright metal buttons lay in a glittering cluster. From these emanated the greenish glow which still lingered over the street.

A diamond ring had rolled to the edge of the curb. An expensive wrist watch and earrings set with emeralds were close to the window of the music store.

Of the lovely figure which the jewelry had adorned, there was no slightest trace.

Chapter II. "CORPUS DELICTI" IN GLASS

CORDED bronze hands moved deftly among a variety of gleaming instruments affixed to a panel of black marble. The tiny lights set in the panel were reflected in flaky, golden eyes. The specks of light moved in the bronze man's orbs as if they had been caught in small whirlwinds.

Doc Savage's bronze skin over his corded neck merged with the smooth mask of similarly tinged hair. He was so motionless in concentration that his head gave the effect of being that of a carved statue.

"There is no doubt but what the snowstorm of itself is isolated and purely local in the New York area," stated the bronze man. "But there are indications possibly of other distant spots similarly affected. She said there might be sudden weather changes."

The bronze man's words were more musing tone, rather than a statement to the three companions then with him. For nearly an hour, he had been studying the freakish July snowstorm. With the radio and other instruments, he had been checking many widely separated areas of the world.

The scientific equipment in the eighty-sixth floor headquarters of the noted adventurer was advanced in its design. With but a touch, Doc Savage could contact almost any latitude.

"Johnny," who never used a short word where a longer one would serve, was busy with the radio.

"This barometric phenomenon is indubitably a solaric manifestation beyond the scope of casual elucidation," observed the scholarly geologist and archeologist of Doc Savage's adventurous group.

"That would be sun spots to you, Monk, if even such simple words come within range of simian understanding," grinned "Ham," flicking some dust from the sleeve of a suit that was the latest in summer fashions.

"Monk's" broad body nearly filled one opened window. His figure was almost as wide as it was long. He turned and his small eyes snapped with fire under his gristled brows. Hair the color of rust stuck out like clipped wires around his ears and on his neck. His hands were covered with it. It looked like shaggy fur.

Monk's body shook with indignation. One furry hand scooped snow from the window ledge.

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"In less than a minute, one crackpot shyster will be in the market for a new suit of dude clothes!" he squealed.

For Ham—Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks—one of the most astute lawyers ever graduated from Harvard, and Monk—Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, famous chemist—considered any day misspent without the exchange of caustic insult.

Johnny continued his observations on the weather. The keen, scholarly geologist was tall and bony to the point of emaciation. As William Harper Littlejohn, he had occupied one of the highest chairs of learning in a leading university. He spoke in one-syllable words only when he was excited or the going got rough.

"She said there would be sudden weather changes," Doc Savage repeated, glancing at the barometric reading on the black marble board.

Though the repeated statement was cryptic, none of his three companions questioned its meaning. The bronze man would explain in due time.

Just now, the blizzard, or snowy tempest, was at its height. Snow swirled around Monk in the opened window. The impressive skyscraper, with its tower thrusting into the sky, seemed to sway and rock in gusty blasts.

THE telephone buzzed. Doc Savage swung over to the instrument. Johnny instantly made contact with an extension. It was a device of Dr. Savage's which would allow an instantaneous check-back on the number calling.

But this was Renny calling from the office of the government weather bureau. He had been sent with Long Tom by the bronze man to keep an added check on the freakish storm. Doc Savage did not usually concern himself with such matters as weather, but, before the beginning of the snowstorm, he had been given reason to overlook no detail that might be of value.

"There will be a violent electrical disturbance," announced Doc, ending his conversation with Renny. "It is Long Tom's prediction. The weather officials dispute it, but it coincides with my own observations."

The bronze man took two yellow slips from the table. They were telegraph messages. Doc studied them intently, as if he were reading something written between the lines.

One telegram had been filed in Los Angeles. This read:

DEATH THREATENS MANY PERSONS STOP DISASTER MAY MENACE WHOLE WORLD STOP
WILL YOU HELP US STOP ON MY WAY TO SEE YOU

SATHYRA FOTHERAN

The other message had been filed in Chicago only ten hours later. This stated:

HAVE LEARNED YOU ARE IN GRAVE DANGER STOP BEWARE VISITORS WITH DARK SKINS
STOP MUST GO TO SYRIA IN THE DESERT STOP BE ON GUARD UNTIL I REACH YOU STOP
WATCH CHANGE IN WEATHER CLOSELY

SATHYRA FOTHERAN

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"

Sathyra Fotheran," said Doc aloud. "That would be Lady Sathyra Fotheran, the sister of Denton Cartheris."

Johnny eyed the telegrams intently. A quick gleam of interest showed in his keen eyes.

"Lady Fotheran?" he said. "She could be no other, with that peculiar cognomen. She is the sister of the revelationist of pre-dynastic mortuary disembodiment of the ultra-civilization of the vanished Hittites." Then he added in crude, concise English, "How I envied that guy, Denton Cartheris. Wasn't there some question about his death, Doc, or whether he had really died?"

"Denton Cartheris disappeared during a new trip of exploration after his discoveries in the ancient Hittite capital," stated Doc. "But information received by his friends indicated he believed he was going to die and had made preparations for his demise."

Lightning suddenly stabbed across the open window. Its vividness was that of a gigantic, slashing sword. Thunder cracked instantly with an explosion that shook the skyscraper tower.

"And she said to watch for a change in the weather," mused Doc. "Recent reports show unprecedented storms in upper Syria. The River Euphrates has been twenty-three feet above all previous high-water records."

"Blast it!" exploded Monk. "How could that be possible? We're to believe this dame knew in Chicago this afternoon the weather was due to go on a bust here tonight?"

"That's how it would seem," stated Doc. "At any moment, we may be hearing more directly from Lady Fotheran."

The bronze man was not evincing occult insight. He was merely estimating the flying time between Chicago and New York. The phone buzzed again. Johnny swung to the extension. A woman's strained, tense voice greeted Doc Savage.

"Mr. Savage? I'm trying to reach you—"

The woman was spilling words, as if she might have only a few left to use.

"I'm being followed—can't tell you more—I'm—"

"Where are you?" demanded Doc Savage.

"Thirty-third Street, near the—"

The words ran into a choked gurgle. The instrument bubbled with the woman's strangled pain. Two slapping blows came like the breaking of dry sticks. In the bronze man's ear was only the low hum of an open wire. The receiver at the other end had not been replaced. Doc was convinced the cord had been suddenly ripped loose.

"Have you got the trace-back?" said Doc quickly.

"Public booth," announced Johnny, giving an address only a few blocks away.

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"Stay here, Johnny," directed Doc. "Be prepared, for you may have a visitor. Watch out for any one with an Asiatic complexion. Monk and Ham will come with me."

DOC SAVAGE was passing through the outer door before he had finished speaking. He did not pause to arm himself, because he never carried a gun. His men were equipped with the superfirers of his invention, which were in reality, convenient automatic machine guns loaded with mercy bullets.

Doc's special high-speed elevator dropped with the force of a leaden plummet nearly all of the eighty-six floors.

From the elevator the three men whipped into Doc's concealed basement garage. The roadster in which they emerged on the street within less than a minute after the woman had been snatched from the telephone, looked like any ordinary car.

But bullets would only drum upon its armor metal or flatten on the bulletproof glass.

With Monk at the wheel, Doc instructed, "Take no chances. This may be something much bigger than we can guess."

Monk was a skillful driver. The car, with its powerful supermotor, grazed the steel of the elevated railway columns. Monk seemed able to estimate to the fraction of an inch how much room he could allow. The steel brushed the bronze man's clothes at times.

Monk turned off the avenue along which ran the elevated. He was swinging around the block to reach the address of the public phone booth traced by Johnny. This street was almost empty. There was only a small yellow coupé standing by one pavement. Its nose was bogged down, as if it had been wrecked.

Apparently, the woman's call had been made at about the time Patrolman Brennan had died in the snow. The bodies had remained undiscovered.

Monk braked the roadster down. "Howlin' calamities!" he squealed. "Them humps of snow are bodies!"

BUT Doc Savage was off the running board before the car came to a stop. His quick hands brushed the snow from the uniform of Patrolman Brennan. The policeman lay as he had been crawling, toward the companions of the men who had shot him.

The bronze man saw the position of the other two dead men. He observed the automatics still gripped in their hands.

"A brave copper," murmured Doc. "And—a couple of Whitey Jano's rats."

Monk and Ham had followed him.

"These two men are Creeper Hogan and Slim Decarro," announced Doc. "They are two of Whitey Jano's killers. I didn't know Whitey Jano used gunmen for ordinary jobs."

"The cop got 'em," said Monk. "Walked right into it."

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"Yes," said the bronze man, "and after they shot him."

He did not explain how he knew this. He was already on his way toward the yellow coupé. For perhaps two seconds, he remained looking at the little car.

Apparently from nowhere came a low trilling sound. It might have been the throaty whistle of some tropical bird. A wind through wires could have made somewhat the same sound. Doc's lips were unmoving but the vibrant emanation came from him. It was his sign of unusual concentration.

Monk and Ham were beside him. Doc moved slowly along the sidewalk in the direction of the elevated railway stairs.

"This snow," he said, moving a foot in the thin film, "has been here only a few minutes. The first snow is gone, yet there is no heated basement under this pavement."

The wide area in front of a music store had been blackened. The seared section of the street showed plainly through the later snow.

Now thunder cracked and rolled. Lightning played with lurid lashing over the tops of cloud-scraping buildings. Between these flashes, the building fronts took on a greenish glow.

Doc halted in front of one window of the music store. Brushing aside the new fall of snow, he picked up a woman's chain-mesh purse. His fingers touched the cold metal of a small automatic pistol.

He held the purse and the pistol in his hands.

"The initials are S. F.," he stated, pointing to the silvered lettering on the side of the purse. He flicked one of several cards from a case inside the purse.

"Lady Sathyra Fotheran," he read aloud.

"Blast it!" howled Monk. "Y' mean them alley buzzards got the lady? Lookit, Doc!"

Doc Savage already had seen what now brought a long gasp from Monk. Monk was scooping up a pair of earrings and a costly wrist watch.

"Must have stripped the woman of her jewelry and then dropped it when the cop started pluggin' at them," observed Ham. "Here's one of her rings."

He had discovered the diamond ring glittering in the snow near the curb.

"I think not," stated the Man of Bronze. "Notice the peculiar light. It's in the snow. It's stronger in the diamond than anywhere else."

The fluorescent glow still lingered over the street. The scene was almost like that of a brilliantly painted stage. It was as if a strong phosphorescent substance, perhaps a special sulphide of zinc, had been spread over everything.

Again the trilling sound filled the space around them. Only in a moment of greatest stress did this emanate from Doc. And the man of bronze was standing motionless. His eyes had followed the focusing point of the strange glow in the street.

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"Howlin' calamities!" squawked Monk. "Danged if I believe what I'm seem'! Ham, do you see it? There in the window?"

"You are seeing it, Monk," stated Doc. "Rather you are seeing *her*."

AN "el" train had rumbled to a stop. Several persons came down the stairway. Police sirens wailed from two directions. The first squad car hooted into the block and the driver picked out Doc's group in front of the music store as a point to stop.

Detective Inspector Carnahan was red-faced and choleric. Followed by four men, he sprang out in the snow. A minute later, he was bellowing orders.

"Ring in the block! It's Slim Decarro and Creeper Hogan of that cursed Jano gang! They got one of the boys! There's been a mob rubout here! Hiya—so you're here, Savage? What brought you into this, or is this just one of them funny accidents?"

The red-faced inspector confronted the Man of Bronze.

"It wasn't any accident," said Doc, calmly.

"Then what do you know about this?" demanded Carnahan. "Who was them Jano killers out to get? An' how did it happen they left them rats in the street? I thought we had this rubout stuff about cleaned up."

"It wasn't a mob feud, inspector," said the bronze man quietly. "It was the murder of a woman."

"A woman! What woman?" barked Carnahan. "Where is she?"

"Right there," pointed Doc. "In the glass of that window."

"In the glass—a murdered woman—sa—ay! You must've been eatin' nuts this time for sure!" howled the inspector, the blood boiling his face to the color of a beet. "Whadda you think—well, for Pete's sake! O'Malley, Connors, come here!"

Detectives O'Malley and Connors made dry, clucking noises in their throats. Their eyes bugged and they edged closer.

"By all the saints!" gasped one. "It's nothin' but a picture!"

It might indeed have been only a picture. If so, it was most extraordinary shadowgraphing. In the thick plate glass, a woman appeared to be walking. The form was more of a silhouette, black in color. It lacked the highlights of a photograph.

But it was life-size, as if the woman's body had been flattened and merged with the glass. One slim arm was extended upward, in the position of warding off a blow or some threatened danger.

Inspector Carnahan rubbed his hand dubiously over the glass. The surface was smooth, unmarred.

"Get that door open!" he rapped out. "Bust the lock or smash the window, but get in! We'll see about this nutty stuff! Savage, you stick around! I'll wanta talk to you!"

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Carnahan seemed to be one of New York's few detective inspectors with lack of wholesome respect for Doc Savage's reputation. It happened this was the choleric Mr. Carnahan's first contact with the man of bronze.

When the lock was pried loose and Carnahan himself had crawled into the display window, the inspector discovered he had not progressed in the least. The inside of the plate glass was as smooth as the outside.

"But sure, an' there's a woman there, an' she ain't never been in that window before," asserted Detective O'Malley. "I was in the shop only yesterday afternoon, buyin' my boy a mouth harp. An' the glass was as clean as a hound's tooth!"

Inspector Carnahan was far from pacified. He again confronted Doc Savage.

"That loony picture in the window don't mean a thing, Savage. Now why do you think a woman was bumped off? Where is this woman? Where is the *corpus delicti*?"

"

You'll never need to seek farther than this window, inspector," the man of bronze declared, solemnly. "In that glass, as plain as you'll ever see, is your *corpus delicti*."

Chapter III. MEN OF DARK FACES

THE skin of Inspector Carnahan's face resembled a blown-up toy balloon, inflated to the bursting point.

"O'Malley! Connors!" he barked. "You keep guard on that crazy window while I get some more men! An' I'm puttin' out the alarm for Whitey Jano! I thought that mug had dropped this strong-arm stuff an' got himself into the upper tiers!"

Inspector Carnahan meant by that it was his belief "Whitey" Jano had become a crook of a little higher order. His record showed he had been brought in twice, charged with forms of extortion that savored of a shrewd confidence game. And Whitey Jano had moved from a hangout on the lower East Side to a luxurious penthouse in the vicinity of Central Park.

While Inspector Carnahan was concentrating his puzzled attention on the window of the murder shadow, Doc Savage had unobtrusively slipped into the small yellow coupé. He was careful not to disturb the cushions of the wide single seat.

From a small vial taken from an inner pocket, the bronze man sprinkled a grayish chemical powder. This covered the seat from side to side. Almost instantly, the plush of the cushions took on a curious yellow glow. This was the nap of the thick plush slowly coming back to place after having been compressed.

This informed Doc that two persons had occupied the small car. A small inside plate told him the coupé was a rented car. Checking on the owner, the man of bronze swung back to the street.

Crossing the street, Doc followed the curb to the corner by the "el." He returned slowly along the curb in front of the music store. Now he knew there had been two cars, besides the coupé, on the scene at the time of the woman's murder.

Monk and Ham were still giving their attention to the window of the shadow. Doc slipped between them.

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"Stick here," he directed. "Don't let anything happen to that glass. The police are not likely to find anything except the bodies in the street. Stay here until the deputy medical examiner decides what to do about the picture."

DOC'S movement away from the small crowd now collected around the window was unobserved by Inspector Carnahan. The bronze man glided into the nearest alleyway. His immediate goal was the public phone booth from which the frantic voice of a woman had called. He knew the call must have been almost coincident with the shootings and the murder.

Just before he emerged into the adjoining street, Doc halted abruptly in the darkness of the alley. Directly across the street was the black mouth of the continuing alley. Across this gloomy space, some lighter shadows had suddenly passed.

There were several figures. They could have been ghosts, judging from the noiselessness of their movement and their color. The figures seemed to be clothed in white sheets. Doc glimpsed the red tail-light of a car farther in the alley.

From the vicinity of the car in the alley came the crash of splintering glass. Half a dozen of the sheet-clad figures had surrounded the automobile. A slender woman was pulled out and thrust against an alley wall. What might have been a knife of huge size, flashed in a glittering arc.

"You black devil!" shouted a heavy voice. "I'll burn you for—"

The huge knife gave off a sudden glinting light. The mouthing of the other man ended in a wild scream of pain. Then the man yelled, "Grab the black devil! Grab 'im, Curt! He's chopped off my hand!"

Doc traversed the short length of the alley with the speed and silence of a jungle cat. Four men had spilled from the car from which the woman had been pulled over to the wall. There was light enough to glint on their guns.

The man who had screamed now had slumped to the running board of the car. At his feet a machine gun had thumped to the bricks. The man was holding up the bleeding stump of his arm. His right hand had been neatly amputated above the wrist. Apparently, he had been trying to use the machine gun.

Before Doc could decide where he was most needed, or why, another man from the car gurgled and rolled to his back. This man's heels flapped on the ground. He acted as if he had been partly broken in two. Doc saw this was literally true.

A long knife had slitted across the man's stomach. The blade had been deeply buried and ripped the rest of the way across. The man with the huge swinging blade had aimed it at the neck of another man, who was desperately attempting to get an automatic into action.

Doc arrived with the effect of a silently bursting storm. One cabled bronze hand flashed out with the speed of light. The tall figure wielding the blade somersaulted over Doc's shoulder. His weapon clanged on the alley bricks.

The bronze man's head suddenly took the square impact of a blow. The crashing collision with the base of his skull temporarily paralyzed his active senses. He exerted his will to remain on his feet.

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For perhaps a half minute, the man of bronze was what is commonly known as "out on his feet." By exercising his amazing force of will over nerves and muscles, he might have continued active. But the bloody fight apparently was over.

TWO white men, wearing all the marks of hoodlums, were pulling one dead man back into the car. The man with the amputated hand had wrapped his wound with a half of his own shirt. The dark-skinned "sheeted" men had slightly withdrawn. The tall figure Doc had hurled over his shoulder had retrieved his hefty, murderous blade.

This man apparently was the leader. He cried out in a gobbling foreign tongue.

"

Thishahum, bism er rassoul!"

The language was the Arabic of the desert Bedouins. From tribe to tribe in the vast burning spaces of lower Asia the tongue varied but little. The extensive, all-embracing knowledge of Doc Savage included nearly all of the spoken language. He identified the speech instantly.

The tall man's cry had been, "Kill, in the name of the prophet!"

A sudden voice spoke more calmly. It was in Arabic, but Doc interpreted the meaning:

"It is enough!"

The quiet tone carried authority.

Doc remained immobile. All of this and all of his observations transpired within the flashing passage of perhaps thirty or forty seconds. But the man of bronze had trained himself to record and segregate the smallest details.

The tall leader of these dark-skinned men was not a true Bedouin. All of the white men's attackers wore the garb of the desert. Their flowing *abbas* were long cloaks of camel's hair, dyed. These dropped from their shoulders to their heels.

Their *kafiehs* were snowy-white headcloths that draped over their shoulders.

But the tall leader's *abba* was heavily embroidered with gold thread. Doc knew that in Syria this would have indicated the man to be the favorite slave of a sheik of sheiks. Such slaves were much more than ordinary. Sometimes they were warriors of fierce repute.

The great knife that had slashed off the white man's hand was a glittering, curved scimitar. A silver scabbard swung at the man's belt. The scimitar had a brightly jeweled handle.

Though the brief battle had resulted in one dead man and one seriously crippled, the engagement had been almost soundless. The total elapsed time from when Doc entered the alley until the automobile was moving away, was probably less than two minutes.

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Now Doc Savage sought for the motive of the encounter. Clearly enough, the white men in the car had been of the hoodlum brand. It had been a strange, mysterious battle.

There was the woman. Doc remained motionless. The woman's white face was like a dim flower in the alley darkness. Another figure was standing beside her. The leader of the Bedouins growled a guttural command. The Bedouins moved swiftly, silently. Their long *abbas* gave them the effect of gliding along the alley. They faded away as soundlessly as a small company of ghosts.

The man of bronze permitted them to go. He might now have come off well enough in an encounter against even the Arabs with their knives. But another purpose had sprung up instantly. The woman had been left behind with that other shadowy figure.

Doc emerged from beside the wall.

"You are the one who summoned me by telephone," the bronze man stated. "Then you were seized and brought here. Some of this is mysterious. I would take it those Bedouins I have permitted to depart are your friends."

DOC'S generator flashlight flicked into his hand. Its ray was spread. The woman outlined in the brilliant white blaze was beautiful in statuesque fashion, only she was not tall of stature.

She had poised dignity. Her face was drained of blood, and it was pale almost to the point of seeming transparency. Her skin was of the texture of lovely velvet. Eyes of a deep golden hue, not unlike those of Doc Savage, widened upon him.

"You are Mr. Savage, *the* Doc Savage," she said as a statement and not an inquiry. "None could ever make a mistake, seeing you. Yes, I am the one who telephoned. You arrived just in time."

"You say you telephoned, then you were seized," the bronze man said. "So the Bedouins were your friends," he repeated.

"As to that, I cannot say," was the woman's surprising reply. "It is the first time I have ever seen a Bedouin or an Arab. I mean, of course, directly from the desert in native costume. I know as little about all this happening just now, as you. I was seized by the men in the car."

A man stood beside the woman. Thus far, he had said nothing. His face was long and incredibly thin. It looked unhealthy.

The man has suffered with tropical fevers, was Doc's instant judgment. He has lived in the jungles, or, perhaps, the desert.

"And you?" Doc pointed the two words at this man.

"Yes," said the sallow-faced man. "I happened along. I was following the Bedouins. I have been in Syria and the men were unusual in their native clothes in New York. Then I saw familiar faces."

"Now," suggested Doc, "neither of you has identified yourself."

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"Oh, I'm sorry," came instantly from the golden-eyed woman. "I just took it for granted that you would know. I am Sathyra Fotheran, of course. You got my telegram?"

Doc Savage, for the moment, said nothing in reply to the woman's statement. His flaky gold eyes caught the keen gray orbs of the sallow-faced man. They impelled an answer to an unspoken question.

"And I am Carson Dernall," stated the man in his dry, crackling voice. "It is a remarkable coincidence that I should be here. I was an aid to Denton Cartheris, in Syria, before he died. This is only the second time I have met Lady Fotheran. The first time was when I bore the news of her brother's death. I had no idea what an amazing result would come of my following those Bedouins."

"It is a remarkable coincidence," stated Doc Savage, without display of emotion. "When I received the call from Lady Fotheran, I came immediately; but I did not come at once into the street from which she telephoned. There was a slight delay."

The man of bronze thumbed several small white cards into his hand. They bore a name in distinctive engraving. He spread them under the ray of the flashlight.

"Then these, I take it, would be your property, Lady Fotheran?" Doc said.

FOR the first time, the woman displayed visible emotion. Her golden eyes widened. The slender fingers with which she just touched the engraved cards were exquisitely kept.

"Why, yes, yes!" she breathed. "They are mine! Oh, then you've found Marian? She picked up my purse by mistake. We were trying to get to your headquarters, Mr. Savage. We discovered we were being followed."

"You separated when you left the yellow coupé?"

"Yes! Yes! That was it! We decided to try and reach you by separate ways! Marian is my secretary. She was taking the elevated train. Then she did reach your office? Where is she?"

"What happened when you left the coupé?" parried the man of bronze.

"Why—well, there was a strange, blinding light. For a little while, I could not see. Oh, Mr. Savage, I have much to tell you concerning that—something I have known and—"

"Later, Lady Fotheran," interrupted Doc. "What more happened by the coupé?"

"That is about all I can remember. There were two other cars near by, and some men walking just before the light came. There were four men I saw. They had dull, gray faces. Or maybe they were more the color of lead."

"They interfered with your secretary?"

"No! No! I could not see for the sudden blindness of the light! I think Marian ascended the steps of the elevated, but I could not be sure. So I ran, and I used the first telephone I could find!"

"We will go to my headquarters," announced Doc. "It will be best for us to go over into the other street and call a taxicab."

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"Then Marian is there?"

"It is better we go there," Doc stated, gravely. "I fear your secretary will not come."

"Oh! You mean she has been made a prisoner? She was taken away?"

"She has been taken away," was all Doc vouchsafed.

Carson Dernal touched shoulders with Doc, as they moved into the adjoining street.

"I'm sure I know something of this and I can be of assistance perhaps," Dernal remarked in a low tone.

HOURS later, the police were in possession of a severed human hand. It had belonged to "Runt" Davis. The hand had been found in the alley.

Runt Davis was known as the first lieutenant to Whitey Jano, before Jano had apparently dropped his strong-arm activities to become a slick confidence man on his own.

Chapter IV. WINDOW ATTACK

DESPITE the freakish snow and the early morning hour, a crowd of loiterers had gathered in the block. The augmented police guard kept the crowd of the curious from the sidewalk. Six brawny policemen did sentry duty beside the "murder picture" itself.

Among the loiterers weaved a thin-shanked, narrow-faced youth. His eyes were beady and predatory. He moved with a shambling, furtive gait, pausing here and there to mop the back of a dirty hand over his twisted mouth.

The thunderstorm was beginning to break with greater fury. Lances of lightning stabbed at the gleaming faces of skyscrapers. The snow was changing to rain. The temperature of the crazy July night was rising.

The thin-shanked youth kept his cap pulled low over his ratty face. One hand was held thrust inside his flapping coat. He edged in among the loiterers directly in front of the "murder picture" window.

Aronson, proprietor of the music store, was arguing with Inspector Carnahan.

"You can't keep the cops on my store, when it comes time for business," complained the fat music man.

"I can keep cops on this joint until the moon turns as green as that nutty light on everything around here!" said Inspector Carnahan.

Following Doc's instructions, Monk and Ham remained at their posts. They had been told to watch that window. Rain started pattering down. Streams began trickling over Ham's summer sartorial elegance. The lawyer moved under a narrow awning. A pleased grin spread over Monk's homely face.

"If you'd take to wearin' clothes like a man, instead of one of them Fifth Avenue dudes, you wouldn't be

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mindin' a little wettin'," said Monk.

"An' if I had a suit of monkey fur and your mug to push around with it, I'd go back to the jungle and quit wearing any clothes," replied Ham, with a tone of elaborate insult. "Besides, I've thought—"

Ham's pleasing observation was never finished.

"Blast it!" squeaked Monk. "Look out!"

The apelike chemist heaved his squat body sidewise and upward. A heavy missile was flying through the air. It was a hammer with a blunt round head and weighing several pounds. The hammer was shooting straight toward the picture of the murdered woman in the plate glass.

Monk tried to catch the hammer. His effort failed. The weighty missile flew onward. Heavy glass splintered and shivered in razorlike strips to the pavement.

"C'mon!" Monk exploded. "Doc'll want to give that guy the once-over! We'll get him!"

THE furtive youth who had been holding his hand under his coat was getting away with the speed of a weasel.

The murder shadow of the woman had escaped destruction. While Monk had failed in his attempt to catch the thrown hammer, his hand had deflected its course. The weighty iron had smashed through the plate glass of the window next to that in which the woman was pictured.

The hammer-throwing weasel put on a bust of speed. Sticking to the alley, he crossed three streets. He entered the alley again in the fourth block away from the music store.

Alongside a wall of smooth brick in the mouth of the alley at the fourth street, stood a black, closed sedan. It had been parked well to one side. Apparently this had been the goal of the hammer hurler. He made straight for the parked sedan.

Ham and Monk rounded the wall after him, made for the car.

"

Thisshahum, bism er rassoul!" grated a voice.

Like Doc, his men knew many of the world's languages. Ham flashed around defensively, his back to the wall.

"The Bedouin cry of the raid," he muttered to Monk.

"'Kill, in the name of the prophet.'"

A huge, hawk-nosed figure was leaping upon them from the sedan. The man's giant form was cloaked in a gold embroidered *abba*. A curved scimitar like a razor-edged crescent whipped in a circle over the man's head. Under the headcloth, his flowing *kafieh*, the attacker's face was of the smoothness and color of ebony. There was the flat, dilating nose of the Nubian.

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Monk and Ham were given no time for observing details. Behind the Nubian leader came half a dozen figures with flowing *abbas* and *kafiehs*. But their faces were of the color of dull lead. In the gloom of the alley, these seemed to be real faces. The masks continued into tightly-fitting neck pieces that extended beneath the shootlike undergarments, their *gumbaz*.

Monk whipped away from the wall. From a concealed pocket, he produced two small glass capsules. He waded into the mass of figures, his huge feet crushing the tiny glass globules.

Ham had seen his intention. He did not breathe. He knew the effect of the capsules.

These contained a powerful anaesthetic gas, effective instantly. In a minute it would be cleared away; but in that minute, those who breathed it went to sleep.

The hawk-nosed Nubian suddenly waved his scimitar and its jeweled handle flashed. Then the massive weapon fell from his hands. The black face became vacuous. The ebony man's eyes closed and he lay down in the dirty snow. His gold-embroidered *abba* was sogged with the slush.

None of the masked figures seemed affected by the gas, however. Monk howled angrily. The big chemist flailed at the nearest men with his fists. Ham was at his side.

But the odds were too great; they were overpowered.

Securely held by the cloth wrappings, Monk and Ham were still conscious when they were carried to the sedan. Monk had only the lame satisfaction of seeing the giant Nubian also carried to the car. He had been the only one knocked out by the gas.

Chapter V. AN ANCIENT WARNING

RENNY and Long Tom shot upward in the high-speed elevator. They ascended to the eighty-sixth floor headquarters of Doc Savage with somewhat the manner of a released rocket.

Only in the last few yards of its upward flight did the bounding car slow.

Lightning crackled across the windows at the end of the skyscraper corridor. Thunder rumbled and shook the vast mass of metal and stone.

Long Tom grinned appreciatively. He had remained at the offices of the weather bureau long enough to see his prophecy of an electrical storm fulfilled.

As Renny started toward Doc Savage's door, the lightning ripped brilliantly. The instant clap of thunder told the bolt had come close. The lights in the building flicked out. Renny and Long Tom were in darkness.

"Holy cow!" bellowed Renny. "Call off your thunderstorm! When you've made good, what's the use in overdoing it?"

Long Tom chuckled.

"Didn't mean to make it quite so tough," he remarked, dryly. "Seriously, I'd give something to know what's

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causing all this."

He was slightly behind Renny. The engineer's big hand gripped his shoulder. The electrician winced. Renny never seemed to realize the strength in his bone-crushing hands. Perhaps that was why his favorite pastime was smashing tough door panels with his fists.

"Stay back!" thundered Renny. "Look! What do you suppose that is?"

The sudden Stygian gloom of the corridor had lightened. The luminance was of a strange quality. The light was vividly blue. It seemed to be composed of invisible particles.

Renny and Long Tom halted. They stared at the origin of the eerie illumination. This appeared to be a spot directly in front of Doc Savage's door. Renny started to advance.

"Wait a minute; I wouldn't touch it," advised Long Tom. "You never can be sure what funny contrivance some one might be trying to wish onto Doc."

The building electrician had found the fuses burned out by the lightning. The corridor around Renny and Long Tom flooded suddenly with light. The strange blue glow remained, but it was dimmed.

"Huh, after all, it's only a funny stone," grunted Renny. "Looks like it might have been painted."

"I'd be careful," warned Long Tom. "Might be an explosive, or maybe some acid."

Renny seldom heeded warnings. The giant engineer often blundered into trouble. Usually his huge fists mowed a way out. He picked up the curious flat stone. Nothing happened, except the blue glow was spread over Renny's wide hands and along his arms.

Renny turned the stone over. It was worn and pitted, as if it had lain for a long time exposed to the weather. Centuries had added up to thousands of years since the flat stone had been cut into its present form.

"Looks like an ancient," Renny said. "You can see where it's pitted. Might have been ground with sand."

THE pair pushed through Doc's door. Johnny's attenuated bundle of bones reared in the doorway leading to the library and laboratory. Johnny had observed the approach of Renny and Long Tom before the lights went out. He was wondering what had delayed their entrance.

"Got a puzzle for that erudite brain of yours," said Renny. "Perhaps you can make something out of this. It's had something cut into it, but the figures look like some kid's first lesson in geometry."

He placed the stone on the laboratory table. The scholarly Johnny picked it up. He placed a thick-lensed monocle in his eye. This affectation of Johnny's was really a powerful magnifying glass.

The stone was covered by rows of uneven characters. These had the appearance of having been inscribed with some sharp tool, but the carving had been smoothed by generations of time.

Johnny's knowledge of archaeology equaled that of the leading scholars. Only the man of bronze himself had studied the subject more deeply. Johnny plucked half a dozen long words from his extensive vocabulary.

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"Luminance polarized indefinitely upon an opaque infragible substance," he pronounced, reflectively. "The characters are of the ancient Himyarite symbolism. They have been definitely affected by long exposure to the vagaries of atmospheric changes."

"Sure," grunted Renny. "That's what I thought. But in a few words of one syllable, does it mean anything?"

Johnny was studying the worn symbols intently.

"Humph!" he emitted. "Unless I'm on the wrong key, this is a direct, if peculiar, warning."

When Johnny thus descended to simple verbiage, it denoted he was either strongly impressed or somewhat excited.

"The characters are clear enough, and they were inscribed on this stone perhaps as long as five or six thousand years ago," he added. "The stone undoubtedly came from the desert in the vicinity of the River Euphrates. It's Himyarite, without doubt."

"What do they mean, if you know?" questioned Renny. "How could those crazy figures carved thousands of years ago be a warning."

Johnny squinted more intently through his monocle.

"As nearly as I can explain," he stated, "the lines read,

'Concern thyself with thine own business if thou would continue to live.' I might have missed a word or two, but it sums up to the same thing."

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny. "In plain English then, it means stay out of somebody's business or take a chance on getting bumped off?"

"

An elemental interpretation, but one hundred per cent perfect," nodded Johnny. "This stone is an original Himyarite brought from the Arabian desert. It is intended as a warning to Doc, and I'll venture it is connected with those telegrams."

"

I had been expecting something of that character," spoke the quiet but penetrating voice of Doc Savage from the doorway. "Brothers, this is Lady Sathyra Fotheran, the sister of Denton Cartheris; and Carson Dernall, until recently the explorer's aid in Syria."

They had just arrived from the alleyway where Doc had found Lady Sathyra.

SEEN in the bright lights of the laboratory, the face of Lady Fotheran was even more beautiful. Her wide golden eyes seemed to reflect the luminance.

Carson Dernall's thin countenance looked more sallow and unhealthy. The gray eyes, however, were alert in a cold way. He exclaimed, as he took in the multitude of scientific devices in the bronze man's laboratory.

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"I had imagined the stories of your investigations were slightly exaggerated, Mr. Savage," said Dernall, slowly. "But I must apologize for having had such a thought. I have never had the good fortune to see such a complete—what is this?"

In the midst of his fulsome words, Carson Dernall paused for the abrupt question. His cold gray eyes were fixed on the flat stone which Johnny had replaced on the table.

"Ancient Himyarite, Mr. Dernall," said Johnny. "From the Syrian desert, I would say."

Without touching the stone, Carson Dernall leaned closer.

"You understand the symbolism?" said Doc Savage.

"Why, yes, of course," admitted Carson Dernall. "I would interpret it to mean

' keep out of our business if you want to live.'"

Johnny's keen eyes flickered.

"Approximately, we agree," he stated. "The carvings are subject to various expression in English."

Dernall touched the stone with the tips of his long fingers. The fingers were of unusual length. They gave the impression of writhing, as they moved.

"This is indeed strange, Mr. Savage. How did the stone come here?"

"Some fellow who didn't want to hang around left it as a calling card at the door," explained Renny.

Carson Dernall's thin face became a grave mask.

"Left at the door? Mr. Savage, knowing what I do of the desert, I fear that stone means great danger to you! It undoubtedly was brought all the way across the world for a definite purpose."

The little whirlpool stirred in the flaky gold eyes of the bronze man. Though he had not appeared to do so, he had read and instantly put his own interpretation on the symbols of the Himyarite stone. Doc did not reply directly to Carson Dernall's statement.

"You said you identified some of the Bedu you encountered on the street?" said the man of bronze.

Apparently, he was ignoring the flat stone. The strange blue glow remained, as if the stone itself were alive with hidden fire.

"Yes, yes!" replied Carson Dernall. "Naturally, I was attracted when I saw some Bedouins cloaked in the *abbas*. Rather a peculiar costume for the streets of New York. I managed to get close to them as they were entering a car. Then I followed in a taxicab."

"The Arabs came from a car and ran into the alley where I was being held by those other men," said Lady Fotheran. "Mr. Dernall followed them."

"Yes, yes!" agreed Dernall. "Among those Bedouins was the man I knew in Syria as a slave. He was called Hadith. I recalled that in Syria, where we were digging when Denton—"

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Dernall caught himself. Lady Fotheran's golden eyes were deep with sudden, inner pain.

"This Hadith, as you might have noted from his embroidered *abba*, had been a first slave to a sheik. That gave him a reputation as a warrior. He was a ruthless leader in *ghrazzu*, the great game of the Bedouins in raiding other tribesmen and robbing them. Hadith was reported to have disappeared."

"I recognized the leader with the scimitar as a Nubian of the slave order," stated Doc Savage.

"Yes, yes!" said Dernall quickly. "And this Hadith was reported among the Bedu as having vast evil powers. We were told a legend in Aleppo, even before we entered the lower country of Syria. A dried-up old man, a Kurd, swore by Allah it was true."

"And what was this legend?" inquired the man of bronze.

"

SIMPLY one of the fantasies of the Syrian hills, I'd say. But the old Kurd declared the ancestors of Hadith, the Nubian, were of a mystic sect. The Kurd asserted they possessed the power to convert their enemies into motionless shadows on the desert."

Doc Savage quietly picked up the glowing blue stone, inspecting it as if absorbed in thoughts unrelated to Dernall's fabulous statement.

"Denton and myself looked upon this as one of the many wild fables of the Bedu of the hills," said Dernall. "But it was a part of the legend that violent changes of weather accompanied the conversion of men and horses into shadows. It is all incredible! But this snow and the storm tonight, together with the appearance of the Bedu, was very upsetting. Of course, the fable of the shadows is a myth."

Peal after peal of thunder filled the rooms of Doc Savage's headquarters. The tall skyscraper reverberated and trembled with the smash of the electrical elements. It was as if the storm was cannonading in mockery at Carson Dernall's doubt of the desert fable.

Johnny's quiet voice was heard.

"Of course, such a story could only be a fable," he commented.

The well-modulated, calm voice of Lady Fotheran observed.

"But it is no fable; it is all true," she said, surprisingly. "The weather is only a part of it. There are shadows on the desert—the shadows of men, or what had been men. And that's why I am here, Mr. Savage. My brother, Ranyon, believes only you can solve this terrible mystery."

"Ranyon would be your younger brother," said Doc Savage. "I knew he was in the desert. I had some interest in perhaps learning of what he might discover."

If Lady Fotheran was amazed at the bronze man's knowledge, she did not betray it.

"Yes," she said. "Ranyon is following the directions in the will left by Denton. It is a strange will, Mr. Savage. With it was a parchment writing, it directed my younger brother to form a caravan at Wejh. He was

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to choose only Harb and Juheina tribesmen, as being all that were trust-worthy."

"You had confirmation of your brother Denton's death?" said Doc Savage.

"Only his will, which we received," said Lady Fotheran. "It was brought from the desert by a band of tribesmen. They came to Wejh. Ranyon was then directed to seek a place of hitherto unknown diggings into an ancient city in the lower hills near the River Euphrates. The place, known as the Tasus Valley, was mapped. The spot Ranyon is seeking was marked with care."

"This will of your brother's," said Doc Savage. "It possibly indicated some treasure might be found?"

"No, and that is the strangest part of it. Its message, after leaving Denton's small estate to Ranyon and myself, was 'you must seek this place for the good of humanity'!"

"A strange will indeed," commented the man of bronze.

"And Ranyon was instructed to take advice only from one man called Mahal, an ancient Bedawi, on where to go and how to proceed."

Lady Fotheran hesitated. An inscrutable light came into her wide golden eyes.

"There are shadows on the desert," she said, repeating her earlier assertion this story was not a fable. "I am desperately afraid for my brother. Perhaps, even now, I am too late. I have no doubt but that death threatens any one who may become interested in this place of the Tasus Valley. I, too have been warned."

"Holy cow!" gasped Renny.

The eyes of Johnny and Long Tom jumped with surprise.

LADY FOTHERAN had reached into the bosom of her dress. Now in her hand lay a stone. It was a flat stone, glowing with blue, phosphorescent fire.

"I received this just before I sent my first telegram from Los Angeles," announced Lady Fotheran. "I could not, of course, decipher the ancient inscription; but it seems much like the other stone."

Johnny peered closely through his magnifying monocle.

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" he exclaimed. "The warning is indubiously identical!"

"Then I had this letter from my brother Ranyon," said Lady Fotheran, extracting it from her hand bag. "In it he tells of a violent rainstorm, strange to the desert, coming up. It was accompanied by terrific thunderings and lightning flashes. Then a ball of fire appeared over the tents of his camp and descended with a terrific explosion. The tents were burned. The following day, on a rock outcrop near his camp, he saw imprinted the shadows of mounted horsemen. On the desert floor below were rifles, knives, saddle trappings and bridle bits scattered about."

Lady Fotheran unfolded the letter and read aloud the concluding passage: "I am proceeding with Mahal, a faithful old Bedouin, who has advised me, to the place known as Tasus Valley. You must seek Doc Savage. I have learned danger threatens you. The welfare of a hidden city is at stake. Sudden weather changes may

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precede the peril. I am going on. I have a strange feeling that Denton is alive. Perhaps I am wrong. This may only be caused by my overwrought imagination. This former slave, the Nubian, Hadith, may have gone to America."

Lady Fotheran's perfect hands fluttered to her face. Her golden eyes questioned the man of bronze.

"Now that you have heard," she said, evenly, "do you still tell me that Marian, my secretary, has been taken away?"

"She is beyond further danger," advised Doc Savage. "It is of your own peril you must think now. Have you had the feeling your older brother is not dead?"

"I never have believed he was dead," the calm woman announced. "I had hoped Ranyon would find him. Now I am greatly worried. Ranyon would never turn back. Unless he is stopped, or this murder mirage is solved, he is going to his own death."

Doc Savage said nothing. His corded tendons flexed in his wrist and the mighty column of his neck. One bronze hand lifted the blue stone of the Himyarite warning. The glowing color seemed to intrigue the giant adventurer.

"This is all too incredible to be believed!" crackled the voice of Carson Dernall. "There must be some logical explanation."

"If there is, it will be found," announced Doc Savage.

Chapter VI. ANALYZING THE STONE

DOC SAVAGE'S bronze hands slid the glowing blue Himyarite stone of warning into a flat, shallow-edged pan. With his sleeves rolled back, the giant of bronze compelled admiration in the golden eyes of Lady Fotheran.

Doc's arms were incredibly thewed. Cords lay like bundles of taut wire under the smooth skin. As he worked there was a constant play and rippling of the muscles.

Doc tried chemicals from several jars. One of these was a powder of sulphide of calcium. To this, Doc added two varieties of mineral salts.

The blue glow of the Himyarite stone turned slowly to purple. Then the stone became vividly red. It was of the color of running blood. The laboratory lights were reflected deep in its surface.

Lady Fotheran and Carson Dernall partly arose from their chairs. They glanced quickly around. Doc Savage was gazing intently at the luridly red stone. His face was a bronze mask. His firm lips were immobile.

Lady Fotheran and Dernall had been startled by a sudden musical trilling. Yet it was not a tune. The erotic sound might have come from the full throat of a rare bird hidden deep in the bush. It touched the notes of the scale, but without harmonious order.

Doc's three companions knew their bronze chief had made some vital discovery. Perhaps it would be in the

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chemical analysis of the ancient stone. Or it might have been the answer to some other angle of the problem of the murder mirage.

Doc's men did not expect to learn what had been ascertained. The man of bronze had almost unconsciously emitted the rare trilling. He would tell nothing until his theory had been wholly confirmed. If he has guessed wrong, perhaps they would never learn.

WITHOUT a word, Doc whipped out of the laboratory. He picked up the telephone in the outer room. When he had his number—that of the commissioner of police—he spoke quickly.

"Is the store window of the murdered woman being closely guarded?"

"Is that you, Doc Savage?" came the commissioner's voice. "Well, yes. I've just doubled the number of men over there. What do you know about all of this, Doc? They tell me you reached the place ahead of my men."

"I know very little," Doc replied. "But I would suggest your men pick up every person who looks like he might be an Arabian. I can't tell you more now. Two of my men are watching the murder window and—"

"That's what you think," interrupted the commissioner. "They were watching the window until an attempt was made to smash it. Now the fellows you call Ham and Monk have disappeared."

Doc's voice did not betray his surprise. "What happened, commissioner?"

"They chased after the youth who attempted the window smashing, cornered him in an alley and were attacked by some gang. Then they were taken away in a sedan."

"Have you arrested any one, as yet?" Doc inquired.

"Not yet, but we've got a straight lead. It's the Whitey Jano boys we're looking for. Two of them were rubbed out the first time that hellish green glow showed up. Then we've got the hand of Runt Davis, Jano's right-hand man. Only Runt won't be much of a right hand for anybody, now."

"Where did that come from?" said Doc, though he was well aware where it had been found.

"Runt seems to have gotten careless with a chopper in an alley, and then he forgot to take his hand with him," said the commissioner. "As soon as we get a line on Jano, we'll start breaking the thing. Jano's apparently moved out of that penthouse of his. But we'll have him before the day's over."

"Thanks for the information," said Doc. "Remember about the Arabs, commissioner. They may or may not be wearing native clothes. If you happen to pick up one, I'd appreciate some conversation with him."

"Arab, you said?" The commissioner growled. "Now that may mean something. We found a dead foreigner with his throat slit in Whitey Jano's penthouse. Inspector Carnahan reported he believed him to be a Turk or an Armenian. I'll look into that."

DOC replaced the instrument and stood for a moment thinking deeply. The mysterious murders were becoming the most involved of any into which he had ever been projected.

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The dead man in Whitey Jano's penthouse was added proof of a killing feud between the mobsters and the Bedouins. Apparently the Jano crowd had been on the scenes of all the crimes. It seemed hardly credible that Whitey Jano had suddenly taken on the role of a public protector.

Nor was it acceptable as a theory that the Bedouins, unfamiliar with New York, had set about wiping out the Jano mob.

Doc Savage got another number. This time, his speech in the phone could not have been heard five feet away in his rooms.

A young woman awoke and yawned. This was in a luxurious apartment in the vicinity of Park Avenue. One beautifully fashioned arm stretched from her night garments of lacy silk. She picked up the phone beside her bed.

"Yes?" she intoned, sleepily.

The words in her ear erased all of her indolence. She sat up instantly, swinging her small bare feet to the floor. The young woman was tall, of slender but almost regal proportions. Her most striking feature was her wealth of bronze hair.

This cascaded in a golden mass around her ears. And her eyes were of a golden hue, possessing hidden fire.

"Well, well and well!" she exclaimed. "I'd heard you were in Malaysia, or perhaps it was Yucatan! What weapons shall I bring?"

Doc Savage said into the telephone:

"It isn't that kind of an assignment, Pat. It's something that only one woman could do. You happen to be that woman."

"They all begin that way," said the young woman. "I shall prepare, of course, to be shot, burned at the stake, kidnapped or thrown into some deep, dark river. What is it? I'm practically dressed already."

The young woman was Patricia Savage, cousin to the man of bronze. She had always wanted to join Doc's group of adventurers. Excitement and danger were her greatest and only loves.

Doc occasionally called upon her in cases where a woman could be of assistance. He would not consider her as a regular companion. This would have been too dangerous. Pat conducted a combined beauty parlor and gymnasium in Park Avenue. With this she was highly successful.

The man of bronze was speaking rapidly into the phone. The beautiful Pat was performing a remarkable sleight-of-hand trick. Holding the phone, she was employing one hand to don stockings and shoes. Before Doc has finished speaking she had made good her word. She was practically dressed.

Then Pat replied in a bored tone, "But a chaperon, Doc? Such a sissy kind of a job! Anyway, I shall be well armed!"

Doc said into the phone, "There is no doubt but Lady Fotheran will insist on going to Syria. I shall permit her to accompany us only because I believe it is safer. But just now, other things are of greatest importance. Make careful note of what I tell you."

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Pat missed none of his next words.

Then she said, "An ocean flight? I'll love that, Doc. But as a chaperon, of all things!"

Pat Savage replaced the phone. She was an amazing young woman. Within five minutes she was gowned and cloaked. A small but exceedingly efficient automatic pistol reposed in her purse.

"As a chaperon," she murmured, "I wonder who I'm supposed to fight?"

DOC SAVAGE returned to the laboratory.

"I have some news which will require our attention," he stated. "I suggest that you, Lady Fotheran, and Mr. Dernall return to your hotels, for the present. You stop regularly at the Fortescue Hotel, Lady Fotheran. Johnny will see that you reach there safely."

"Could I be of assistance?" said Carson Dernall. "I would like to remain with you, Mr. Savage, until some of this mystery is solved."

"I'm grateful," stated Doc, "but I have a mission requiring personal attention only."

The man of bronze did not divulge the disappearance of Monk and Ham. Lady Fotheran's eyes showed her surprise that Doc should know the hotel where she would be stopping. But she did not speak of it.

Doc had checked on the reservation before Lady Fotheran arrived. Carson Dernall named another hotel farther downtown, where he said he could be reached.

"I feel it incumbent upon me to join you in solving the mystery of tonight's happenings and the desert murder mirage," declared Dernall. "With my experience among the Bedouins, I am sure I can be valuable."

"I'm sure your experience will be valuable," agreed Doc. "You shall hear from me."

Chapter VII. A MOB GOES BLIND

EIGHT stalwart policemen were guarding the murder shadow of the woman in the window of the music store. Plainly enough, they did not relish this duty.

That tall, silhouetted figure, with its one slender arm up-raised as if to ward off death, looked too realistic to be a mere picture. After the attempt to break the window, the eight policemen were on the alert.

One copper inside and one outside were armed with short, ugly riot guns. They were ready to blast enthusiastically the first suspicious characters which might appear

Bright brass trumpets and other musical instruments of silvery color reflected the lights behind the unbroken plate glass. The play of this illumination gave the murder shadow the appearance of being in motion.

"Holy cat!" grunted one red-faced copper. "That picture looks like the dame was still alive an' trying to run away from something! I'd swear I saw the thing move!"

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The pudgy proprietor of the store was in his small office at the rear of the display room.

"I want they should get that crazy thing out of the window," he complained repeatedly "Would you look? Nobody's coming in here to buy a nickel's worth, as long as the picture stays there!"

The deputy medical examiner had insisted the murder shadow must be kept intact. A heavy conference was being held in the coroner's office. There was no precedent for performing an autopsy on plate glass.

In normal weather, it should have been early daylight. But all of Manhattan was shrouded in thick fog. Black mist wrapped all of the metropolitan area. The sun had not yet arisen far enough to dispel the gloom.

Workers employed in various forms of labor were beginning to appear. Though this was the morning of July 5th, many were wearing overcoats. The midsummer blizzard had left a chill in the air.

Men passing through the streets near the music store carried tools and lunch boxes. The policemen on guard had no means of knowing that a score or more men with the appearance of laborers were rapidly converging on the scene of the murder window.

These men swung along individually. Each wore an overcoat. These swathed some to their knees.

A bread truck, with huge loaves painted on its sides, stopped in front of a store around a corner in the next block. A box of bread was set out. The driver of the truck apparently took time out for a sandwich and a cup of coffee at a near-by lunch stand.

The bread truck remained standing in front of the store.

Half a dozen laborers were approaching the murder window. Each walked alone. Three came alongside the four policemen outside the music store. Soundlessly, but with quick effectiveness, the other three were inside the store.

"Inside, alla you mugs!" grated a voice. "We don't want to start burnin', but—"

SNUB-NOSED automatics flashed into the hands of the laborers. Wicked muzzles jammed into the stomachs of the policemen before they could defend themselves. The two armed with riot guns had pistols thrust into their stomachs.

"Why, you dirty rat!" rapped out one of the riot-gun coppers.

"Meanin' me?" growled one of the mobsters. His snub-nosed gun crashed across the policeman's forehead as the riot gun was lifted.

"Back into that office!" snarled a command. "All you get goin'!"

The music store proprietor rushed out. He waved his fat hands.

"Hi, you can't do anything like that! I'll—"

There was a minor crack, like the breaking of a sharp stick. A snub-nosed automatic with a clumsy-looking silencer on its snout vomited fire. The music store man clapped his hands over his pudgy stomach. He

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groaned and coughed. Scarlet threads appeared at the corners of his round mouth.

Then he sat down and rolled over as if very tired.

"Back into that hole in the wall!" grated a harsh command. "We mean business and we're in a hurry!"

At least a dozen more pseudo laborers had joined the original six. The weapons of the eight police were stripped from them. A score of men with hard, grim faces pushed them into the little office of the music store.

Two of the mobsters swung submachine guns. They planted themselves in the doorway of the office. Some mobsters patrolled the outside. Three men moved swiftly inside of the window of the murder picture. Tools for cutting glass appeared in their hands.

From around the corner appeared the bread truck with the loaves painted on its sides. The driver apparently took some interest in the action around the music store. He parked the truck directly across the street.

A glass-cutting tool gritted into the thick plate. The mobster wielding it started a circle around the head and upraised arm of the death-glow phantom.

"Make it snappy!" urged a voice behind the three men. "This is the clean-up!"

The whole building housing the music store seemed to shake.

Blows that might have been struck with a sledge hammer jarred the big door in the rear. A thick panel splintered and a gaping hole appeared. Through this came a man's fist. It was an extraordinary bunch of knuckles. They would have made three or four average fists.

The lock was snapped open. The door swung inward.

Two huge figures appeared. They were beyond ordinary size. Their great bulk caused them to whip into the store singly. Yet they moved with such unbelievable suddenness that the mobsters failed to begin shooting quickly enough. The score or more men had been directing their attention upon the murder window.

THE two big men were strange apparitions. Each wore curiously complicated goggles which covered the tip of his nose. These obscured their features.

The hands of the goggled men flashed under their coats. One pair of these hands moved with the speed of light. The other pair was a bit slower and more clumsy. But in each pair appeared what might have been mistaken for miniature fire extinguishers.

These were of some dull metal. Each had a release valve and a little wheel at the end. These wheels turned.

A dozen snakes suddenly released from a cage would have emitted the same sound. It was a sibilant, angry hissing. One of the men at the window yelled.

"Burn 'em! It's gas! They're cops!"

Even while their guns were jumping in their hands, the gunmen discovered their bulky targets had faded from view. Vile oaths rang out. The mobsters stopped shooting. They were groping about. Without causing the

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slightest pain or smarting, the gas had blinded them effectively.

This blinding gas was a new chemical. It was composed of various sulphides combined with liquefied selenium. It was the first time selenium had ever been successfully liquefied.

ONE of the big men swung around with his hissing tank of gas. "Into the window," he ordered the other man. "I'll take care of the outside."

Though the store was filled with the hubbub of shouts and oaths, the command was spoken in an ordinary tone. One big man reached the street doorway. The other sprang inside the display window of the murder picture.

Holding the gas tank with one hand, the man in the window roared with a booming voice. His free fist shot out with bone-crushing impact. The mobsters with the glass cutters left their feet. One went crashing through a side of plate glass into the store's entryway.

A police siren wailed in the black fog. A squad car rocketed around the corner, brakes squealing. Almost before it had stopped, newly arriving policemen were leaping from the doors.

When the fresh coppers hit the sidewalk, their guns were in their hands. But they did not fire. They halted, as if invisible hands had gripped their throats. They were in the dense opaqueness of the blinding gas. It lay thickly about them, inert in the damp black mist.

The choleric Inspector Carnahan rolled from the car.

"What the blazes now?" he gasped, clawing at his eyes. He may have thought for a moment the black fog was responsible for his sudden sightlessness. Then he roared, "Now I know Doc Savage is behind some of this crazy stuff! Feel your way over to that window!"

BOTH the big men now were at the window. The one outside whipped a small bottle from an inner pocket. He peered intently through the clumsy goggles. From the bottle came a yellow, sharp-smelling fluid. It flowed through a tiny rubber-hoselike device.

The liquid from the bottle followed the grisly outline of the woman's shadow in the glass. One big hand pushed in the center of the figure. The whole section of the heavy plate glass bent inward.

The weight of the glass was as much as two average men could have lifted. The big, goggled man inside caught it with ease. Then he shifted from the display window and picked his way rapidly through the milling mobsters.

The goggled man outside slid along the building. The black fog swallowed him.

"Great Jehoshaphat!" bellowed Inspector Carnahan. "They've gone an' snatched the *corpus delicti*! The woman's gone!"

The blinded inspector was feeling cautiously along the smooth, razorlike edges of the window glass from which the murder shadow had been abducted under his very nose.

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In the rear of the store, a car started. The motor of this car gave forth no loud explosions. It was a mere hissing of an engine that could deliver super-power almost silently.

The cursing mobsters were slowly recovering their sight. One man ran outside and whistled softly. Others followed. A low whistle replied from across the street. The "laborers" who had attempted to snatch the murder shadow window poured into the thoroughfare.

The rear doors of the bread truck opened. Men packed themselves into the space. The truck started away with a clashing of gears.

Chapter VIII. FUSSEIN, THE BEDOUIN

THEIR noses were high-arched and thin as rapiers of bone. Set deep in their skulls, beady black eyes glittered. Their skins were of the color and texture of old copper.

When the elevator rose to the eighty-sixth floor of the impressive skyscraper, one of the men stepped out. The other moved as if to follow. One hand flashed under his coat. It came out bearing a pointed knife.

The keen blade touched the throat of the elevator operator. The youth paled, started to raise his hands, gasping, "Don't! What do you want?"

The dark-skinned man with the knife spoke in perfect English.

"You will accompany us to the quarters of this Doc Savage. Make no outcry and you will not be harmed. You are sure no one is now in these quarters?"

"N-no one is there," stammered the scared operator. "But I don't dare go in there."

"You will remain with us, or your time will be short," said the dark-skinned man. "It is the will of Allah."

The youth preceded his captor. He knew nothing whatever about this "Allah." But the knife was persuasive.

Both dark-skinned men wore correct American evening attire. The neatness and elegance of their clothing had caused them to pass muster in the lower corridor of the building.

But the piercing black eyes and beaklike nose of the leading man might well have been the features of a sheik of sheiks. These men had waited in the shadows of the rain-filled morning until they had witnessed the departure of Doc Savage's companions from the building.

The two Bedouins were prepared for trouble. They would have been ready enough to kill.

Accompanied by the shaking elevator man, they halted before a door. This bore in small bronze letters:

CLARK SAVAGE, JR.

The leading man dived hands into his pockets. A variety of instruments were produced. The tools would have done credit to the most expert American burglar. The sheiklike fellow tried one instrument after another. The lock was of a pattern that resisted any ordinary means of picking it.

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Had Doc Savage been there, he would merely have raised his hands and the door would have opened. The Bedouin knew nothing of selenium cells and invisible electrical rays. He had never seen any kind of a lock among the black tents of the desert.

The Bedouins talked in low voices. Their words were only gobbling gutturals to the elevator man. They sounded sinister. The man's knees persisted in knocking together.

The lock picker swore in Arabic over the stubborn door. He was using a slender, curved tool. Suddenly the lock yielded. The door was swinging open.

THE Bedouin's eyes darted about the bronze man's outer room. The black orbs held deep suspicion. The opening of the door had puzzled him. He was familiar with the instruments he had used. Well, perhaps the wirelike tool was responsible. The Bedouin shrugged his skinny shoulders.

Both visitors looked admiringly at the furnishings of Doc Savage's office. They eyed the telephone contrivances. The complicated devices were different from any telephones they had ever seen. They did not know the bronze man's phones were equipped to record all calls and to repeat all messages without the assistance of any person.

One Bedouin kept the persuasive point of his knife touching the neck of the elevator man. The operator oozed perspiration. It ran down his spine in a cold stream. If he got out of this alive, the young man was firmly resolved to resign this job. This was the second time he had had a run-in with some of Doc's peculiar visitors.

He judged the third time, if there was a third time, would be three times and out.

The leading Bedouin crossed to the big library door. He pushed tentatively at the chrome-steel panels. The door opened so readily that he grunted and sprang to one side. His hand whipped to a knife under his coat.

But the great library room was empty. The Bedouin murmured to his companion. Interpreted, the words meant, "The All-Wise One must know." A crafty smile came over the faces of both Bedouins.

Apparently they had great faith in this "All-Wise One."

One said, "He surely has prepared the way for us."

He spoke deep words of truth. The way had indeed been prepared, but not as they imagined.

The Bedouins gobbled. They were speaking of "the bronze man" and great wisdom. They were surveying the thousands of solidly shelved books. If this Doc Savage knew the contents of one-tenth of these volumes, he must have infinite knowledge, was their opinion.

After a thorough inspection of the library, the Bedouins moved toward an inner door. This led to the bronze man's laboratory.

THE door opened at a touch. The leading Bedouin again whipped his hand to the knife under his coat. The elevator man was suddenly propelled ahead of the others. The point of the knife was sufficient without any other order.

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Though he was frightened, the elevator man gasped and almost forgot his own predicament. He had never seen such a glittering array of instruments. They arose mysteriously from the floor. Some reached nearly to the ceiling.

Metal and marble boards were filled with innumerable devices and lights.

The leading Bedouin moved his lips, as if he were praying. He was doing just that. Here were weird marvels of mystic significance, as he viewed them. Allah, the Prophet, was all-powerful in the desert. But the Bedouin wasn't so sure Allah would know much about all this.

The veritable forest of machines, the chemical and scientific contraptions plainly were awe-inspired to the Bedouins. After all, they were simple Arabs of the desert.

The Bedouin leader licked his tongue across his papery-thin lips. He moved with infinite caution, careful not to touch any of the many devices. He knew all the hardships and dangers of the *Rahia*, the drive over waterless spaces; the threats of the *ghrazzu*, when enemy tribes were robbed of their treasures.

Those things he understood. These things he did not.

Telling his companion to remain near the door, the leader moved carefully down the long middle aisle of the laboratory. He acted as if he were lost in a forest of eerie possibilities.

A square desk lay close to his right hand. The Bedouin came as motionless as a statue. His tongue unwrapped some choice language. The other Bedouin craned forward, staring.

Both saw the ancient, worn stone with the Himyarite symbolism. Their gobbled words were exclamations which indicated they were familiar with that stone. But it was not now as they had last seen it.

Both Bedouins proved by their excitement they had seen the stone when it glowed with bright, bluish fire. Now the stone was red. It sparkled with the vivid scarlet of running blood from a freshly made wound.

One bony, coppery hand reached forth gingerly. The Bedouin's finger tips touched the Himyarite stone.

A shrill cry slavered from the Bedouin's lips. His hand was flung upward by some invisible force. A strange shiver ran through his long figure. The Bedouin's legs seemed to take on the weakness of water. They collapsed and he fell on his face in the aisle.

None noticed what the Bedouin leader had failed to perceive. The red Himyarite stone was enwrapped with fine copper wires. These were no thicker than hairs. Almost invisible, they crossed the floor and disappeared behind one of the metal switchboards.

The Bedouin's own body had closed a contact. This had given him only a light electrical shock.

DISCOVERING himself, probably to his great surprise, to be still alive, the floored Bedouin scrambled to his feet in bewilderment. He gazed at his long, sinewy fingers. They were slightly marked, as if he had touched fire.

His beady black eyes took on an evil, purposeful gleam. In the dark orbs was fear, but the Bedouin had come into this place upon a mission. That he would attempt to accomplish.

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He was, after all, an Arab, sworn even to his life for the man he had designated as the All-Wise One.

One hand swooped upon the red Himyarite stone. He conquered the tremor of the slight shock and jerked the stone away, thrusting it under his coat. The fine copper wires parted.

"Let us depart quickly!" he exclaimed in Arabic, and turned toward the door.

The other Bedouin turned. Both stood as if rooted to the floor. The elevator man shivered and his eyes almost popped out.

A weird blue flame, thin as a sheet, had jumped across the doorway leading back to the library. Spears of hissing, crackling blue rippled up and down and across the only means of egress. The flames formed a barrier over every inch of the space.

The Bedouin with the Himyarite stone ran out of the aisle and over to the wall. He was seeking some window. But there was none.

The Bedouin went carefully, touching nothing more. Lights went out, as a candle might have been snuffed. But the blue flames played mockingly across the door. Then the lights came on again.

The second Bedouin had a quick idea.

"You have the knowledge of all this," he said to the dazed elevator man. "You will release us, or you will die!"

"No! No! What would I know about Doc Savage's gadgets?" howled the operator.

The Bedouin pushed the point of the knife into the flesh of the operator's neck. The young man screamed. Blood oozed and reddened the polished blade.

"That will be quite enough of that," spoke a calm voice. "You will remove the knife at once. He cannot aid you."

THE Bedouin stared. At the end of the long aisle stood what to them was a giant. His body would have made the two of them in its weight. His skin was shining bronze. His smooth hair seemed to be almost a continuation of the golden hue of his corded neck.

Renny, Johnny and Long Tom stood beside him. Renny's big hand held a supermachine pistol

"With this," his voice boomed, "I can, and will, pulverize the both of you, if that knife isn't dropped instantly!"

The Bedouins knew firearms. They had never seen a weapon just like this one, but they were well aware it must be deadly. The knife was released. It clanged on the floor. With a scarlet thread trickling and staining his collar, the elevator man staggered to one side and sat down on the floor.

Renny walked around the two Bedouins and stood between them and the doorway of blue flame. Long Tom went over to the wall and pushed a button. The crackling barrier vanished.

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Doc Savage took a slip of paper from a pocket. He pulled the elevator man to his feet.

"I'm sorry this happened, and you showed good nerve," he said to the elevator man. "You can go now."

The operator found a slip of paper in his hand. He walked out, rubbing the slight wound in his neck. His face was still chalky, but he mustered a grin. The paper was a hundred-dollar bill.

"Put them in chairs," said the man of bronze. "Then we'll have a little talk."

Renny and Johnny whipped the Bedouins into chairs facing the open library door. They were within a few inches of the doorway. At a signal from Doc, cords were whipped around the man who had taken the Himyarite stone. Renny stood close guard over the other Bedouin.

The black eyes of the man with the stone became almost opaque. The little whirlwinds in the flaky gold eyes of the bronze man stirred, and he spoke.

"You will tell me who sent you here," Doc stated.

The Bedouin started. Points of flame came into his black orbs. Doc Savage had spoken in the purest of Arabic. The Bedouin's eyes lanced at him defiantly, but the man could not conceal his amazement.

The Arabic tongue is one of the most difficult. Never before had the Bedouin heard any *ferengi*, foreigner, speak it with such fluency. Still the Bedouin clutched the Himyarite stone under his coat. The cords holding him to the chair had not been fastened around his arms or feet.

"You are not the one I expected," announced Doc, still speaking in Arabic. "But you will tell me about him."

The man of bronze was looking deep into the Bedouin's eyes. He was employing his hypnotic power to compel an answer. But the black orbs were unyielding. The Bedouin smiled fleetingly, mockingly. He would not permit his will to be overcome.

"We electrocute murderers in this country," Doc advised. He had some trouble finding an Arabic word for electrocute, but he managed to convey his meaning. "You are a murderer. You will tell all."

The Bedouin made only one answer.

"I am in the hands of Allah."

LONG TOM pressed the button on the wall. Blue flame hissed and crackled with a weird glowing over the man's coppery skin. A movement of the slightest would have caused the Bedouin to touch the lethal barrier across the doorway. The spears writhed close around his knees. They seemed to be reaching for him.

The Bedouin's lips moved, but he said nothing aloud.

"Holy cow!" grunted Renny. "Do we really have to bump him off?"

Doc Savage shook his head and smiled.

"It is the sheer fatalism of his kind. He has determined he will die rather than talk."

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The hands of the bronze man were busy. He had been filling a small hypodermic syringe. The plunger was held conveniently under one thumb.

The blinding mass of electrical flame was close to the Bedouin's face. He closed his eyes, but otherwise he remained imperturbable. The high-frequency current was a lurid wall, horribly close. The Bedouin, knowing only the desert code, had no doubt but that he was to die soon.

But his head was stiffly upright. As befitted a true son of Islam, he still retained his own thoughts. His companion also remained silent, but watching closely.

"Who sent you here?" demanded Doc. "Why are you in this country?"

The words were in Arabic, but they elicited no reply.

The Bedouin was murmuring now. The words were, "*Bismillah el Rahman el Rahhim.*" The prayer of the faithful Mohammedan in extreme peril. "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!"

Doc knew then the Bedouin would never talk through fear. He had resigned himself to his fate. With him, the end had been reached. He had failed in his mission. Though of a murderous band, he would be faithful to the All-Wise One.

Doc's hands moved swiftly. It was hardly a touch on the Bedouin's shoulder. But the needle of the hypo had penetrated.

The syringe contained a special truth serum which had been devised by the man of bronze. Now, Doc's flaky gold eyes stirred with greater force. At last they were compelling the black ones. The Bedouin stared at him.

The Bedouin was coming under the hypnotizing influence of Doc. The truth serum was bringing about an irresistible inertia. The serum was effective mostly because it numbed the victim's resistance. The power of his will was crumbling.

THE Bedouin began mumbling in Arabic. Doc's gaze held him.

Johnny was standing close. His bony figure bent over.

"He says his name is Foussein," repeated Johnny. "He's saying they came on a black boat. Mentions some one he calls the All-Wise One—Listen, Doc! Monk and Ham! He says the money man and the sworn man are on the black boat! Now he's mumbling about Allah—Look out, Doc!"

The Bedouin suddenly screamed, "*Bismillah, el Raizhim!*"

"

None had seen the furtive movement of the Bedouin's hand under his coat. The ancient Himyarite stone plunked to the floor. The cry of the man in the chair was his death scream.

Unnoticed, the Bedouin had palmed a dagger from his sleeve. He had jerked his arm upward and pushed his body sidewise. There was a squashy, ripping sound.

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Bright red blood from the heart spouted through the Bedouin's shirt and trickled scarlet over the hand that had held the knife. He had thrust the blade under his coat directly up under his ribs.

The encarnined blade came out and its handle rang metallically on the floor. The Bedouin drooped forward. He was dead.

"One of the few who ever beat Doc," muttered big Renny.

The engineer, who had been guarding the other Bedouin, forgot his prisoner for the moment. With Johnny and Long Tom, Renny stared at the slumped figure of the dead man. Blood still dripped on the floor.

The other Bedouin had not been secured by cords. His eyes were cold as black ice. They resembled those of a snake about to strike. He gathered his legs beneath him until only the toes touched the floor. From this position, he sprang.

"I deeply regret the inadvertence of this," stated Doc, all his attention apparently upon the corpse in the chair.

The Bedouin's figure shot toward him. A straight dagger had come from his sleeve. The Arabs had been well equipped with spare, hidden weapons. The broad, corded shoulders of the man of bronze afforded a wide target that could hardly be missed.

The Bedouin hissed an Asiatic curse. The needlelike point of his weapon struck squarely between Doc's shoulders. The dagger was driven by all of the Bedouin's weight. Long Tom's sallow, unhealthy face became the color of chalk.

"Doc, look out!" he exploded. "Renny! Grab him!"

Doc's head snapped forward and down. The bronze man seemed to move only slightly. His powerful legs bent at the knees, as if he had been mortally hit and was sagging to the floor. The Bedouin's arm quivered with the force of the knife blow.

Doc's right hand came back over one shoulder. The tendons of his wrist, powerful and pliant as piano wires sheathed in bronze, played under the skin. His fingers hooked the Bedouin's neck just under the base of the skull. The man of bronze was on one knee.

The Bedouin squawked. His cry trailed through the air. For he was whirling over and over, like a club flipped by one end. His body turned two complete somersaults as it flew through the library doorway.

When the other Bedouin had knifed his own heart, Long Tom had cut off the electrical current forming the blue-flamed barrier.

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" cried Johnny, hoarsely. "Doc, are you hurt!"

Doc's hand flicked toward the Bedouin's knife on the floor. The needlelike point had been bent as if it had struck granite. The man of bronze shrugged his wide shoulders. There might be a slight bruise where the knife had struck.

"Holy cow!" thundered Renny. "Just for a second, I forgot the vest!"

Doc was wearing the thin undervest of woven metal. Bullets could not penetrate this. The force of the knife blow had been negligible.

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The Bedouin rolled to his feet in the outer office. His dark face wore a dazed expression. He stared unbelievably at Doc Savage. But he did not halt more than two seconds. With a curse, he twisted and pivoted toward the corridor door.

RENNY'S bulky body was shoving through the library door. The engineer was stopped as abruptly as if he had encountered a rigid bar of steel. This was the bronze man's extended arm.

"Permit him to go," Doc said softly. "It fits in with my plans."

One glance at the elevator doors and the Bedouin whipped toward the stairway at the end of the corridor. He did not care to encounter any of the operators. The story of what had happened on the eighty-sixth floor would have been spread by this time. The Bedouin glided down the stairs.

"Be sure you have everything, brothers," counseled Doc Savage. "We will give him one minute. It is a long way down by the stairways."

The man of bronze picked up the knife with which Foussein had kept his faith with his murder chief, the All-Wise One.

"More than a hundred years are in that blade," stated Doc. "Its harvest probably has been extensive."

The knife was a straight, thick eight-inch blade set deep in a solid metal hilt. On one side was stamped a rough crescent, with the date of origin and forging—"MEDINA, IN THE YEAR 1243 OF THE MOSLEM CALENDAR." In the Christian accounting of time, that would be the year 1825. On the other side, almost obscured by the film of blood and oil, was an inscription.

It was the ancient battle cry of the Jihad:

" THISHAHUM, BISM ER RASSOUL!"

It was the cry heard by Doc in the alley, the same cry resounding when Monk and Ham were taken.

"Kill in the name of the Prophet!"

Doc glided toward the high-speed elevator. His three companions followed. They descended. Doc, Johnny and Long Tom stood in the black fog as the Bedouin slipped into a closed car parked around a corner.

Another sedan of ordinary appearance swung to the curb. Renny was at the wheel. He had gotten the car from the basement garage. Doc swung to a place on the running board.

Chapter IX. CHASE THROUGH THE FOG

THE morning's black fog paralyzed motor traffic. The few venturesome drivers abroad in the earlier hours moved their cars slowly.

In the lower harbor, ferries and tugboats hooted constantly. They proceeded with excessive caution. Water

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craft not engaged on scheduled trips remained safely at anchor or beside their wharves.

On Northern Boulevard, the highway forming the main artery of travel along the upper North Shore of Long Island, one driver seemed to be disregarding all the rules of safety. Persons who observed the flashing speed of the shadowy automobile in the dense fog gasped with profound amazement.

Twice the speeder was picked up. Once it was a motorcycle cop. After the policeman had narrowly missed climbing the hood of a juggernaut truck, he gave up the chase profanely. The second time it was a radio patrol car. The driver swore vehemently when the lightless car bored away from him with uncanny skill.

"Bet we've got those cops thinkin' we're some kind of a ghost!" chuckled Renny, at the wheel of the apparent phantom car. "They'll probably swear they didn't see us!"

"The report will be worse than that," suggested Long Tom. "They couldn't miss seeing Doc outside."

The man of bronze was erect on the running board of the speeding sedan. The wet mist of the black fog slapped in his face. Drops of water slid off the smooth bronze hair, as if it were waterproof.

Doc and his companions were wearing curiously shaped goggles. The lenses of these were large. The affairs looked clumsy. These were equipped with small switches. From inside the goggles came a whirring, as if small generators were operating.

While the headlights of the car were off, there was light. But this was invisible to any person not wearing the bronze man's especially contrived goggles.

Ahead of the flying car, all objects stood out distinctly in the black fog. The highway was bathed in strange luminance. There was no color even to the greenest of trees. Everything was etched in black and white.

This invisible ray was supplied by an infra-red projector on the sedan. Through the goggles, driving was made safe enough.

The further illusion of a ghost car was given by the silence of the motor. Though possessing super-power, the engine gave forth only a low, hissing sound. And this was the reason the swift approach of the Doc Savage sedan was undetected by the drivers of two other cars.

THE sedan had crossed the city limits of New York. With undiminished speed, it flashed over the low hills of Nassau County. If the black fog had not been present, strips of the blue water of Long Island Sound would have showed at intervals.

The two cars ahead leaped into the infra-red ray shortly after the sedan had passed through the historic Colonial settlement of Roslyn.

The cars fleeing ahead of the sedan were using headlights. But the drivers were compelled to hold to a speed less than half of that of the sedan. Doc's car, a silently moving armored vehicle equipped with bulletproof glass could neither be seen nor heard by the drivers of the two automobiles ahead.

In one of these cars was the Bedouin who had fled from Doc's headquarters in Manhattan. Believing he had escaped cleanly, the Arab was doing what the bronze man had suspected he would.

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He was making directly for a secluded bay of Long Island Sound where a black boat he was looking for might logically be expected to anchor. And it was with the hope of finding the missing Ham and Monk that the man of bronze had deliberately permitted the Bedouin to escape.

"Kind of funny, isn't it, Doc," came the voice of Long Tom, "that there should be two cars? There was only one when we first picked up the Bedouin."

The man of bronze said nothing. His giant body was as motionless as if he were a part of the car. The flaky gold eyes were concentrating on the rear car of the fleeing pair. Both automobiles had come from Manhattan. Undoubtedly, both had the same objective.

"It will be only a short distance down the road," stated Doc. "Watch for their turn-off, so we don't overshoot."

"Sure, I'll—"

Renny did not finish. The sedan was running so silently that the slightest sound could be heard. At this point, the nearest house sat nearly half a mile distant on top of the hill to the right.

A woman's scream rippled along the black fog. It was a shrill, piercing note. But there was neither fright nor terror in it. Rather the cry seemed to have been uttered for the definite purpose of being heard.

In the rear window of the nearest car ahead, two heads loomed up starkly black and white in the infra-red ray.

"That was what I expected," said Doc, quietly. "Now step on it, Renny. Pass both cars."

"Holy cow!" ejaculated Renny. "They've got a woman in that last car! I'll bet they've grabbed Lady Fotheran!"

DOC said nothing. He bent his head slightly, as the sedan shot ahead. The motor was capable of far more than a hundred miles an hour. The fogged wind tore at the bronze man's clothing.

It was a tricky feat, passing the other two cars on the narrow highway. Doc directed no warning be given. Renny squeezed the sedan out on the parkway.

Two amazed drivers saw what must have seemed to be a thunderbolt hurtling noiselessly out of the night. No horn had been sounded. No lights had appeared. But the sedan rushed uncannily by, its fenders grazing the bodies of the other cars.

There were four men in the rear car. Five, for on the floor in the rear lay a bound-and-gagged man. Between two men on the rear seat sat a woman. A dark-skinned Bedouin in American clothes clapped his hand over the woman's mouth.

"You'll keep quiet, Lady Fotheran," he grated, "or we'll be forced to gag you!"

The woman sat stiffly erect. She made no effort to free herself from the throttling hand.

The driver emitted an oath. He was a white man with a crooked, evil face.

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"There ain't any guy livin' could drive without lights in this fog! An' did you see that big mug standin' on the side? He didn't look human!"

In the lights of the other car, the figure of Doc Savage, magnified by the fog, looked almost supernatural.

"An' that guy ain't human," replied the man beside the driver. "If that ain't Doc Savage, then I don't know my onions! Hey! We'd better hold up here an' ditch the dame!"

This man was dragging a machine gun up between his knees. The car ahead swerved between Doc's sedan and the rear car.

"If that black heathen'd only get out of the way," complained the gunner, "I'd soon find out how human Savage is."

The bottom of the windshield was lifted. The man thrust the Tommy gun through the aperture, holding it in readiness.

The dark-skinned man in the rear seat spoke quietly.

"You'd only be wasting bullets," he said. "Doc Savage has those big tires filled with sponge rubber. You can't puncture them. The car is armored."

"Hooey!" rapped the gunner. "Well, this Savage mug himself ain't full of sponge rubber—an' he'll be full of hot lead, if that boob ever pulls over!"

The woman in the rear seat was sitting rigidly. The dark-skinned man—he was known as Mr. Kassan—who had displayed such surprising knowledge of Doc Savage, had removed his gagging hand. The woman's golden eyes were staring ahead. After her hysterical scream, she had apparently been in a semi-coma.

But one small foot was rubbing against the other.

Suddenly the woman threw one arm across her eyes. The car was filled with an unearthly, blinding light.

The driver swore wildly. His brakes squawled. The car left the highway and tipped its nose into the ditch above the road.

Chapter X. BLACK MAGIC

WITH the blinding light which hurled the car into the ditch, an astounding thing had happened. The small foot of the woman in the rear seat had exploded, or so it seemed.

"You would insist, Lady Fotheran!" rasped the dark Mr. Kassan.

His doubled fist smashed sidewise. Had the woman been in the same position, the beautiful face would have caught the full impact of the blow. But she had thrown herself forward, hands gripping the back of the front seat.

It was then the car dived and slapped over on its side, with a splintering crash. The door on the upper side

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burst open. The slender figure of the woman went through the aperture with the floating lightness of a specter.

The man on that side was groaning and clamping his hands over his blinded eyes. The woman's arm still was tightly held over her own golden orbs. She ran a few yards down the highway and sprang across the ditch. With the speed of a deer, she lost herself in the woods above the road.

Curses and groans rolled from the wrecked car. But the four men apparently had suffered no serious injuries. All crawled into the highway, arose to their feet and staggered blindly. The explosion of the chemical powder in the woman's shoe rendered them comparatively helpless. They would be that way for several minutes.

Mr. Kassan was smart, and he remained cooler than the others.

"Our sight being lost," he said calmly, "we cannot pursue Lady Fotheran. It would be wisest for all of us to be some other place before Doc Savage can return. Place your hands on each other's shoulders. Now follow me. There is a small boat concealed not far from here. The powder will not blind us for long."

The four men filed across the road. They vanished in the brush toward the small bay. With hands extended, touching each other, they looked like convicts on parade.

DOC SAVAGE saw the bright light of the chemical explosion. Then the splintering crash of the car sounded in the road behind them.

The other car was now only a few yards in the rear of Doc's armored sedan. The glass of its windshield crashed. Almost instantly, a machine gun began a snarling song of death. The bronze man felt the jolt of two bullets tearing at his bulletproof vest. He swung inside with Johnny, who was in the rear-seat.

Slugs rained on the armored body. Some flattened on the glass of the rear window, leaving it filled with spidery cracks. Bullets nipped at the rear tires. They were ineffective. As Mr. Kassan had seemed to know, the tires were filled with spongy rubber. No shots could deflate them.

"We must return," stated Doc. "Let them have it, Renny."

Renny reached to the instrument board and twisted a knob. He pulled this out. The headlights of the pursuing car were immediately submerged in what seemed to be a spreading cloud.

The chemical smoke screen was one of the many devices of Doc Savage. It was made more effective by being composed of gummy particles, which adhered to the glass of the following headlights. In a few seconds, these were completely obscured.

The machine gun still racketed. Slugs screamed from the concrete, but they were whining with wildness. Brakes squealed and Doc knew the car's driver had been forced to pull up.

"Turn around the first place you can, and we'll go back," said the man of bronze, at the same time slipping out and dropping lightly into the highway.

DOC passed into the opaque chemical fog of his own creation. Here he whipped the clumsy infra-red-ray goggles from his eyes. His vision was several times as keen as that of the average man, but in this screen he

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could see nothing.

Nevertheless, he ran with amazing speed. He was more anxious to reach the car that had been wrecked than the nearer one carrying the Bedouin he had permitted to escape that he might trail him. But when he almost collided with the first car, it was stopped in the middle of the highway.

Doc would have passed on silently, but the screen-shrouded car had a strange aspect. Though bullets had poured from it only the minute or two before, no one seemed to be in the closed, black auto. Doc listened intently, then started on.

He reached the other car, lying on its side in the ditch. A gurgling moan came from inside the car. The man of bronze halted, flexing his cabled muscles. His extraordinary ears picked out all sounds and classified them. Only one man was in the car. Doc could have heard them breathing, if there had been more than one.

The man in the car emitted a choking, coughing gurgle. He was straining to rise from the floor of the car.

"Help! Help!" he sputtered. It sounded like "oolp! oolp!" through the tape across his lips. The man was apparently trying to feel his way out of the car. He was using his chin for this purpose, his wrists being bound behind his back. Tape cut off his sight.

Doc pulled the man to his feet. He loosened the cords on the man's wrists and let him pull the tape from his own eyes and mouth. The man of bronze picked up a piece of the tape that fell to the floor of the car. He rubbed it between his fingers.

"Doc Savage!" exclaimed the man, as soon as he had cleared one eye. "I hoped it would be you! I'd just about given up hope of getting out of this, when the car turned over. Where have those Bedouins gone?"

"I did not see them leave," stated Doc. "Apparently, they were in a hurry. What happened?"

The man groaning over the agony of the loosening tape was Carson Dernall. His pallid face was whiter than usual.

"

I RECEIVED a telephone message at my hotel saying Lady Fotheran was in trouble," said Dernall. "I started out to go to her hotel and two men put guns in my back as I came out on the street. They pushed me into a car. Then one hit me over the head. That's all I know until I came to my senses on the floor and we were traveling.

"A few minutes ago, I heard the driver swearing. That must have been when you passed. Then the shooting started. Suddenly the car was wrecked. All of the men piled out and they must have run away."

Doc Savage nodded and said nothing. He was moving back along the highway. Dernall followed closely, glancing furtively around as if he feared his captors would return. Renny had found a wide spot in a driveway and was coming back.

Suddenly, from Doc came the exotic trilling sound. Its rare tuneless music filled the black fog for considerable space. Immediately, there was a rustling noise in the bushes above the highway. Doc's flashlight beam picked out a face that was attractive, though now it was scratched and liberally smeared with dirt.

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A woman came limping into the highway. She was wearing only one whole shoe. A portion of the other one hung in tatters by its ankle strap.

"Listen, Doc," said the woman coolly, "the next time you put a torpedo in my heel, you'll know it. I thought you said that stuff wouldn't hurt anybody but the other fellow, if I'd keep my arm over my eyes."

Doc's handsome features broke in a quiet smile.

"I did not advise you to explode the chemical while it was still in the heel of your shoe," he stated.

"Well, I hadn't any chance to get it out, so I set it off and took a chance," said the woman. "And this was supposed to be a quiet little job of playing chaperon. Anyway, I shot a man."

Patricia Savage sat down on the running board of the wrecked car and nursed her scorched foot. Her bronze hair had lost the smooth appearance that had helped make her so strongly resemble Lady Fotheran. It tumbled in a golden cascade over her ears. She smiled up at Doc.

"Now what do we play?" she inquired, impudently. "And will it be all right if I take off the other shoe?"

"I'll send you home, the first car comes along," said Doc. "We are facing a serious situation. We must find the black boat before the men from the cars reach there, or Ham and Monk may suffer."

"I'm not going home in the first car or any other car," asserted Pat. "I'm wrapping up my foot, and I'm going with you!"

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" snorted Johnny. "In that nightgown?"

Pat tossed her head defiantly. She was clad in a lacy negligee, in which she had been carried from Lady Fotheran's hotel. Doc had suspected an attack on Lacy Fotheran, and had Pat make up to look like the titled English woman and substitute for her at her hotel.

Chapter XI. WHEN THE BAY BURNED

WHITEY Jano annoyed others by juggling popcorn into his mouth and crunching it. This had Runt Davis walking wildly up and down, mouthing oaths.

"This is beginning to look like a lousy double-cross to me!" howled Runt Davis, to make himself heard above the *crunch-crunch* of Whitey Jano's slow, heavy jaws. "Lookit what I get! An' now you're sayin' you don't know whether it's worth playin' across! Who's payin' me for this flipper? That's what I wanta know!"

Runt waved the bandaged stump where his right hand had been. His bullet head jerked up and down on his long neck.

Whitey Jano spoke with unctuous oiliness in his tone.

"Ever hear the quotation 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'?" he remarked, cheerfully. "You can't expect to shave off a couple of ears and not pay up. Hadith is an unusually smart fellow."

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Runt whipped himself over in front of Whitey. Whitey juggled some more popcorn into his mouth. The white hair that gave him his name was snowy. His dark features were fattish and globular. His deep, black eyes seemed constantly filled with gloom. He might well have been some Asiatic monk, or perhaps the priest of an ancient temple.

Whitey's asset was his benevolent aspect. He looked upon the excited Runt with a fatherly eye. Runt was enraged.

"I'm tellin' yuh this mix-up ain't comin' out for you!" he raved. "The boys don't get this! We're goin' along sweet, an' then along come these black heathen an' go to work for you! Or maybe you're workin' for them! Twice they've busted into the rest of us! We're told to snatch this Fotheran dame, an' along comes Hadith!"

"He was only following instructions," said Whitey, gently. "We changed our minds. We learned she had already reached Doc Savage. We followed the wisest course in having her freed for the time. Doc Savage was right on the spot. It's all we could do."

"An' I suppose this black Hadith was told to start choppin', an' that's why Tulary was bumped off?" snapped Runt. "All I'm askin' is one good crack at this heathen! This time, it won't be his ears!"

Whitey crunched loudly on his popcorn for a minute.

"You shave off Hadith's ears without asking questions when you size him up as spying on the penthouse, when he was there by our orders," said Whitey, patiently. "Probably you thought that was funny. And some of you playful fellows stuck a knife in another one. Perhaps you're not aware you have caused Hadith to lose face when he returns to the desert."

"He'll not have any face and he'll never get back where he come from!" screeched Runt, his head bobbing like a curious turtle catching flies. "First, you tell us the boys will be in on one of the biggest splits ever come off, an' then right in the middle of it you ring in this bunch of camel herders. Them shadow bump-offs has got us all headed for the seat!"

Whitey flipped a snowy grain of popcorn into the air. He caught it between his teeth and crunched.

"You are surprisingly astute, Runt, my boy. All of you are headed for the hot seat, if you're caught. That's why you're calling it all even with Hadith and forgetting. You're coming along and like it. Stick around the big town and they be slitting your pants legs upriver before you know it."

"I'm not calling off anything with that black heathen!" shouted Runt. "The minute I put eyes on him, I'm turnin' on the heat!"

"Then put your eyes behind you, Runt, my boy," suggested Whitey between crunches. "And if you're wise, you'll hang on to the one hand you've got."

THE tall figure of the Nubian-faced Hadith had appeared behind Runt. The ebony face was a stony black mask. The eyes of the former slave to a sheik of sheiks were red-rimmed and burning with murderous hate.

The heavy, curved scimitar with the jeweled handle swished slowly back and forth. But it was not Hadith who had brought the scream of utter horror into Runt's constricting throat.

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Beside Hadith were ranged six other figures. Their faces were the color of leaden corpses. Two carried pronglike instruments resembling iceman's tongs with long handles. Two others swung a carved wooden cradlelike affair between them. Inside the cradle something like a ball rolled and thumped against the ends.

Hadith voiced a direct question in Arabic. It consisted of only three short words. They meant, "Shall it be?"

"No! Not that way, chief! Any other way!"

Whitey Jano casually tossed popcorn into his round mouth. He crunched it slowly. He spoke. Runt's little eyes popped more, if that were possible.

Jano had spoken in Arabic. Runt hadn't known his chief spoke the language. The words were sharp. The black Hadith dropped swiftly to one knee in an obeisance. Runt observed this submission in terrified bewilderment. Hadith signaled to the masked figures. They faded from the long room.

"Runt, my boy," spoke Whitey Jano, in a soothing, kindly voice, "you and the others are much wanted by the police. By some error, it seems the members of the mob are the only suspects in these deaths of the shadows."

"Maybe it was a mistake," mumbled Runt. "But they was funny mistakes."

Jano's jaws crunched slowly.

"We will call them mistakes," he said, unctuously. "Still, you and the others will benefit greatly by accompanying us. Matters have suddenly reached a crisis. Within an hour possibly, we shall be departing. You will get a square deal in the land over there, I will see to that."

Runt Davis slumped into a chair, nursing his bloody arm.

"We'll have to depend on that, chief," he said, and his long neck was rigid. "I'm not fooled. We've been made too hot to stay here. It wasn't any mistake."

The long room swayed rhythmically. Water slapped and sighed away in long, running swells outside. The long room was the luxuriously fitted cabin of a long yacht that looked like it had speed. It was painted black.

Whitey Jano flipped popcorn into the air. His jaws crunched in time with the little slapping waves that rode the swells.

"Sounds like a monkey cracking peanuts," suggested a biting, sarcastic voice in a small stateroom at the end of the yacht cabin.

"Blast it!" squealed another voice. "This ain't any time to be funny! Anyway, you eat the same way! You'd think it was a pig gnawin' a ear of corn!"

ANY one acquainted with Doc Savage's adventurers would have instantly identified the voice of Monk and Ham. Even in the face of greatest danger, this pair maintained their verbal feud. Somehow, their morale was higher when they were thus slapping at each other.

Ham did not reply to Monk. But the apish chemist howled in his strangely childlike voice.

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"Ouch! You dag-goned shyster! You do that again an' I'll ram my foot right through where you put your grub!"

Ham grinned. It was a ghastly sort of grin on his sharp features. For the lawyer's astute countenance was caked with mud and filth from the alley in which he and Monk had been captured. Only the night before, his sartorial perfection would have dazzled Broadway. Now the latest in natty summer attire looked ready for the rag man.

Ham had produced the yell from Monk by the simple method of jerking his thumb. The movement hurt Ham as much as it did Monk, but he had expected it. However, he did not jerk again. It threatened to sever his thumb.

Monk's little eyes glared at Ham. They were facing each other. They had been compelled to do that for several hours. Also, they had been sitting flat on the floor of the yacht's stateroom, with Monk's short legs projecting alongside Ham's longer shanks. They could not move from that position.

"Dangit all!" moaned Monk. "How much longer do you suppose this is going to keep up?"

Before Ham could reply, Whitey Jano's benevolent voice spoke again.

"As soon as we get the word, we will dispose of those two," he said. "We shall not leave any traces for Doc Savage to discover. We cannot leave shadows on water."

Monk shivered involuntarily. His long arms convulsed as if he intended leaping into action. This time, it was Ham who howled.

"You offshoot of a gorilla! Don't do that! Keep those hairy thumbs quiet!"

MONK grunted in a pleased manner. But torturing Ham wasn't giving him a great deal of pleasure.

The furry, stubby thumbs of Monk were locked to the thumbs of Ham. They were attached by the torturing contrivances known to the police as thumbcuffs. These are employed sometimes in place of handcuffs in the cases of extremely dangerous criminals.

The cuffs are fashioned in the manner of handcuffs. But they are small and will lock two thumbs together. Inside each cuff are sharp saw-edged teeth. Any pull against the links tightens these teeth. They sink into the flesh. A prisoner would have to strip off all of the flesh from the bones to tear himself free. Then probably he would have to shave off a part of the bones.

The feet of Monk and Ham were free. But this did not give them a chance to move around. Their captors had made certain they would stay in one spot by a very simple device. They were sitting on the floor facing each other.

And inside their arms, projecting from the floor to the ceiling of the stateroom was an iron column. If his giant hands had been free, the prodigious strength of the gorilla-like Monk might have wrenched the iron stanchion from its place. But with his thumbs locked to Ham's, the chemist was helpless as a baby.

"Monk," said Ham. "Did you get what that oily devil said?"

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"Blast it! I don't care what he said! Wait till I get loose from these danged things! I'm goin' to build a fire under that guy that'll melt him into grease!"

"He said they couldn't leave any shadows on water," mused Ham. "I was thinking about that shadow on the window."

"You dag-goned nut-brained mouth-piece!" squealed Monk. "Why'd you hafta go an' think up something like that! I wonder if Doc has got any line on all this crazy stuff?"

"It's been three or four hours now," said Ham. "Doc usually works fast. Maybe they've got him, too."

"Dag-gonit! You would think of that!"

They heard some more of Whitey Jano's men enter the cabin. A thin voice complained.

"But Whitey, you ain't expectin' us to go places on them crazy camels? I tried ridin' a camel in a circus once, when I was a kid. I ain't havin' any more of it."

Between crunching jaws, Whitey Jano said soothingly, "You'll ride camels and like it. Take my word for it, Birdlegs, this is the biggest split any crowd of nice boys ever had a chance at. There'll be millions for everybody, and if you don't want to come back where the hot seat's waiting for you, all of you can be big stuff."

"Yeah?" sneered the one called "Birdlegs." "An' the bigger you are, the quicker some of them black devils'll be puttin' a knife between your slats. I don't like it."

"I take it," said Ham to Monk, "Whitey's boys are about to take a sea voyage for their health. And I'll bet they won't be comin' back. It strikes me this Whitey has picked up better Arabian than you'd expect a big-shot crook over here to know."

"What's the difference?" groaned Monk. "They may be going on a voyage for their health, but we're ticketed for a different kind of a ride."

IN the cabin was a sudden commotion. A new man had arrived. He spoke rapidly in Arabic. Ham picked out some of the words and pieced them together. Like others of Doc Savage's group, the lawyer could speak in almost any of the known languages. In fact, all of the group employed an ancient Mayan tongue to communicate with each other in the presence of enemies.

"Something's happened," Ham told Monk. "And Doc's got a line on us. The fellow who just came in delivered an order from somebody he called the All-Wise One. We're to be taken on that sea voyage. He says the All-Wise One can use a chemist for a while. Monk, you do have your uses at times."

"Howlin' calamities! What good'll I be on a sea voyage, if I ain't got no thumbs!"

Ham's astute brain had been doing some fast conjecturing.

"I think I get the line-up, Monk. Whitey Jano somehow started a feud between the Bedouins and the gunmen he had working for him. He's got the gunmen so jammed with the police they have to lam out of New York. When they've finished the job, whatever it is, on the other side, it'll be just too bad for them."

MURDER MIRAGE

"Then who's this All-Wise One?" questioned Monk.

"I'd say that's the leader of the Bedouins," advised Ham. "And they're responsible for the shadow death, or whatever it is. I only hope Doc gets here. Listen! Hear that, Monk?"

The sound that had startled Ham did not pertain to Doc Savage. The clear, thin wail of a police siren shrilled across the bay. It came from the direction of Long Island Sound.

"That's a police boat!" exclaimed Ham. "Maybe it means our finish, but the cops have got a line on Whitey Jano!"

The same opinion prevailed inside the yacht's cabin. For the first time, Whitey Jano ceased crunching popcorn to listen. The piping voice of Runt Davis broke out.

"So we've gotta lam, huh? Too bad, chief, but it looks like you made another mistake—and this time it's a real one!"

The ebony face of Hadith floated through the cabin doorway. The outside wind stirred his *kafieh*. The blowing aside of the headcloth revealed a ghastly truth. Both of the Nubian's ears had been sheared off close to his head. In their places were unhealed, hideous wounds.

Hadith halted inside, waiting impassively. The siren of the police boat wailed louder. Undoubtedly, the harbor craft was making directly for the secluded bay.

MONK and Ham pulled themselves painfully to their feet. Standing, they could see through the stateroom window. The black fog lay thick around the yacht.

"Look at that, Monk," directed Ham. "The masked devils again!"

Into the lights on the deck a number of tall figures moved stiffly. Their dull, leaden faces under the eerie fog lights gave them the appearance of dead men walking.

Two of the masked figures carried a wooden, cradlelike box between them. They had attached a light, thin cable to something inside the box. These men crouched in the shadows of the deck on the side which the police boat was rapidly approaching.

A searchlight beam knifed from the bay. The water police aimed the light at the black yacht. The beam rose and fell like a ghostly finger, as the police boat lifted on the swells from the Sound. The sea had been stirred by the inexplicable storms of the night.

"Howlin' calamities!" squealed Monk. "They turned on the yacht lights to bring the cops! It's a trap!"

"You're correct," said Ham. "They're deliberately planning to trap that boat and murder its occupants. We've got to warn them."

The police boat glided closer. Its motor was cut down and ran with a hissing sound.

"Now," said Ham. "Put that monkey voice of yours into the best yell you've got."

MURDER MIRAGE

Monk didn't take time to reply. He put all the power of his lungs behind a screaming childish treble. Ham joined in with his own sharp, piercing voice.

"Keep off! Keep off!" Monk and Ham shouted in unison. "It's a trap! Keep off!"

The door of the stateroom slapped open. Monk and Ham, still yelling in desperate cadence to warn the police, were helpless. Their tortured thumbs held them to the iron stanchion. Whitey Jano's men ripped out the vilest of oaths.

Reversed automatics were lifted. They crashed with skull-cracking force on the heads of their helpless prisoners. Monk and Ham fell to the floor. The devilish teeth of the thumb-cuffs gouged into the flesh. Scarlet fluid oozed over their hands. But neither prisoner saw this, nor felt what would have been searing pain.

They were unconscious. The cabin door closed behind the cursing mobsters. A bolt grated in the lock.

FOUR harbor policemen in the boat had heard the cries of warning. Unfortunately, they misinterpreted them.

"They're makin' a play for a getaway!" barked the sergeant in command of the boat. "Turn the machine gun on them and start shooting, if anything happens!"

He held the boat on a steady, gliding course toward the side of the black yacht. The four water coppers did not see the globe lowered to the surface of the water. It was the size of two footballs. Swung to the end of a light cable, the globe was between the police boat and the side of the black yacht.

Without sound a greenish, weird fire spread fanwise over the bay. The air became filled with what seemed to be material particles that were invisible. All of the men aboard the yacht, with the exception of the masked figures, had crowded into the cabin.

The motor of the police boat suddenly roared. The machine gun stuttered in one short blast and died out. The fast police boat did not pause. Its increased speed shot it across the bow of the black yacht.

One of the fog-piercing beams bathed it briefly against the spreading greenish glow. The light played over the police boat from stem to stern. It showed nothing but a boat, an empty, high-powered boat dashing through the mixture of greenish glow and black fog toward the rocks on the shore. The rocks were less than a hundred yards away.

The police boat mushroomed itself on the first jagged reef. Its speed caused it to completely hurdle the fangs that tore out its bottom. The boat turned over, crashed, and lay on its side among the rocks farther inshore. It was high and dry.

The globe emitting the greenish, horrible glowing swung at the end of the thin cable. It was being drawn up. The cable slipped off. The murder sphere plunged into the water. There was no hissing. Only the splash.

ALMOST instantly, the whole bay seemed to explode into waves and ripples of flame. Phosphorescent blaze rolled over the long swells. Each ripple was converted into a running finger of green fire. But there was no heat. The flame was cold.

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The waves ran along and broke with blazing fury along the shore. The black yacht was converted into a glowing ghost ship. The anchor lifted and powerful motors throbbed. The yacht glided swiftly across the blazing bay and headed into the black fog of Long Island Sound.

Behind the vessel, the secluded harbor retained its brilliant, blinding glow.

Within a few minutes after the black yacht had vanished, the armored sedan of Doc Savage jolted at high speed along the rough road leading to the hidden landing. The glow of the murder globe had given the first definite direction of the black yacht.

The bay still retained the appearance of a lake of liquid fire. As the sedan halted, the man of bronze leaped from the running board. He seemed hardly to touch the ground, as he leaped over the rocks.

Wedged high in the rocks, he saw a shattered police boat. Apparently there had been four men in the boat. The guns, other metal objects and the buttons of the uniforms indicated this.

There were strange marks on one side of the wrecked boat. They were the shadow pictures of legs. The legs of policemen who had stood braced and ready to shoot down men they believed to be ruthless and bloodless murderers.

Chapter XII. THE BLACK YACHT SINKS

DOC SAVAGE closed the telephone connection in his outer office. He sat for one minute gazing thoughtfully at the chrome-steel door behind which lay his library. Grouped within the library were Long Tom, Renny, Johnny, Patricia Savage and Carson Dernal.

The man of bronze was making a rapid mental check of his own. Though he was alone, the rare, exotic trilling came from his motionless figure. This did not seem to be fashioned by his lips. It was almost as if the keenly analytical brain itself were giving forth the sound.

This indicated that Doc Savage was deeply stirred. Perhaps he had come upon a startling discovery. For nearly half an hour he had been talking over long-distance telephone to various places. Some of the calls had been across the Atlantic. The man of bronze had conversed with persons in England.

He opened the library door and announced, "Brothers, we are leaving at once."

Patricia Savage frowned at her giant cousin. She was one of the few persons who ever questioned Doc's decisions. Mostly only women ever did that. Doc himself admitted he could not understand women. Moreover, he did not trouble himself about it.

"But you'll have to wait, Doc," said Pat. Her frown only succeeded in making her face more attractive. "I'll have to pack some clothes."

"We are leaving at once," repeated Doc, quietly. "You will find everything you require in the dirigible. I have been prepared for such an emergency, should it arise."

"You think of everything, don't you, Doc?" said Pat with an impudent smile. "I suppose you had expected some time to snatch me out of my sleep for a dash to the Arctic."

MURDER MIRAGE

Doc smiled and said nothing. His charming cousin indeed seemed unprepared at the moment for a flight over the Atlantic. The negligee she had been wearing had suffered in the brush. Her face was gouged by thorns and was still somewhat dirty.

Pat had robed herself in one of Johnny's coats. Johnny was thin as a skeleton and tall. The garment fell to Pat's small feet. She was lacking one shoe.

"We are ready and we have no time to lose," stated Doc. "I have learned the black yacht headed southward from the lower harbor."

The pallid Carson Dernal seemed to have partly recovered from his experience. He spoke now.

"You will take me with you, Mr. Savage?"

The man of bronze studied the pale, fever-ravished face. The man undoubtedly was sincere in wanting to become one of the party.

"Possibly we shall encounter some great dangers," Doc suggested.

"I have no doubt but you will," agreed Carson Dernal. "But I am familiar with the region of the Syrian desert. Perhaps my knowledge will be of value. That, however, is not my thought. Denton Cartheris was my closest friend."

Doc merely inclined his head in agreement.

"Let us go," he said. "The fog has broken. It is my hope to overhaul the black yacht. I believe Monk and Ham are still alive."

Pat shrugged inside Johnny's long coat.

"For once, you have forgotten something, Doc," she smiled. "I am supposed to be a chaperon, am I not? Yet you had said nothing about Lady Fotheran."

"Lady Fotheran is now on her way to the dirigible hangar," advised Doc. "She will be waiting."

"Which puts Cousin Pat right in her place," said Pat, whimsically. "I might have known it."

NONE would have suspected the remarkable contents of the low, shabby warehouse on the Hudson River shore. The dull building bore only one sign. This was:

HIDALGO TRADING COMPANY

Shortly before noon, a long, silvery aircraft slid into view. It took on the proportions of a streamlined dirigible. With its cabin enclosed within the envelope, the airship appeared at a distance to be as keenly pointed as a great arrow.

The dirigible proceeded directly down the bay and out to sea. At the complicated instrument board of the radio, which included an advanced television set, Johnny picked up ship after ship at sea. Doc himself was at the controls.

MURDER MIRAGE

Two hours after leaving New York harbor behind, Johnny let out an exclamation.

"I've got it, Doc! One of the coastal steamers reports the black yacht following the coast closely! Operator remarked it seemed to be dangerously close, considering this swell after last night's storm!"

The nose of the silver sliver veered slightly. The dirigible at this moment was piercing a cloud bank. Doc Savage had held the ship under the low ceiling for the purpose of scanning the ocean surface.

Pat Savage was seated with Lady Fotheran. They were as beautiful a pair of women as would ever be found together. Pat's golden eyes, somewhat like those of her famous cousin, were almost duplicated by the calm orbs of her companion. The only difference lay in the quality of excited anticipation in Pat's, and the cool lack of emotion in Lady Fotheran's.

"I do hope we rescue the two men who are missing," said Lady Fotheran. "This is, all so terrible and I feel that I am responsible."

"Doc and his men never feel any one but themselves responsible for the dangers they face," assured Pat. "It's their life and they like it. They choose to be adventurers, though any of them could be a leader in his own profession. I firmly believe each one had only the thought that death will end their association."

"Like my brothers, both of them," sighed Lady Fotheran. "Now one is dead, and Ranyon—"

"I wouldn't think about it," consoled Pat quickly. "Look! They have sighted the black yacht!"

PAT made a little dash to the cabin window. Lady Fotheran moved to her side. Below them, the long, narrow vessel looked like a toy boat lashed by a gray sea. As the ship radio man had reported, the yacht was hugging the shore dangerously.

"I'll bet they think they can escape any pursuit that way," declared Pat.

"But how can Mr. Savage possibly hope to reach them from up here?" questioned Lady Fotheran. "There is no landing for the dirigible."

"Leave it to Doc," said Pat, confidently. "Oh, I do believe that yacht is going on the rocks!"

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" exclaimed Johnny. "Whoever's piloting that boat is crazy! Doc, they're going to crack up!"

Lack of long words proved Johnny's excitement. It did appear as if the black yacht was dashing straight upon the low reef of one of two small islands near the shore. Heavy swells broke in foamy feathers of foam almost under the black boat's bow.

"The pilot is not crazy, Johnny," said Doc, quietly. "There is no pilot. If you will observe closely, you will notice the yacht is down by the bow. It has been scuttled and we are too late, unless Monk and Ham have been left aboard."

The others were amazed at the keenness of Doc's perception. But now they could see the black yacht was sinking slowly. By some miracle, the deserted vessel slid past the reef and into the deep water outside one of the islands.

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Doc's corded hands manipulated the dirigible controls, pointing the streamlined nose downward at a sharp angle. He turned to Renny.

"Take the ship," he said. "Hover over the yacht as closely as you dare. I am going to board it, if possible."

But before Doc could carry out his plan, the sinking yacht was caught by a heavy swell and crashed against the jutting teeth of the reef. The back swell took her off again, and with a lunge, she headed for the bottom.

Doc said nothing. He was only hoping—as were his companions—that Ham and Monk were not aboard.

Chapter XIII. DEATH RIDES THE SKY

"

THE southern ship route should be clear of storms at this season," announced Renny. "At Bermuda, we may learn something. I have a hunch they would refuel at Bermuda."

"I had thought the same," stated Doc Savage. "We may hear some news there of the planes. You said, Renny, the southern route should be clear of storms. There is evidence of a black tempest somewhere ahead."

Renny glanced quickly at the instruments. The barometer had not changed. The dirigible was now riding close above slate-colored clouds. These billowed like a rolling sea. The masses of vapor were strangely stirred. But there was no evidence of a storm higher up.

Johnny nodded his head sagely. He produced a few long words from his unlimited vocabulary.

"Manifestly, we are about to undergo a repetition of last night's inexplicable atmospheric convolutions," he put forth. "Observe the contortions of the cirrulean strata."

"If you mean the funny way those clouds are twisting around, it does look like we might be in for something," replied Renny. "Holy cow! One minute ago the sun was shining, and what's this?"

He referred to the sudden darkening of a sky that had been unclouded above them. They were holding at a height above where any normal storm might be expected to break. Violent rains and winds are commonly produced by the lower strata of clouds.

Lady Fotheran said quietly to Patricia Savage, "I was afraid this might happen. My brother, Ranyon, was correct in warning us of last night's curious snowstorm. I am convinced that this Hadith has it in his power to produce changes in weather."

"Oh, do you really think that?" said Pat cheerfully, excitement dancing in her golden eyes. "I've always wanted a chance to ride in Doc's dirigible when there was a storm."

In her own way, Pat was as dauntless as her cool-nerved cousin. Only, when there was real danger at hand, she expressed herself. Anticipated enjoyment lightened her attractive face.

Though the darkness was increasing, Doc pointed ahead and to a slightly higher level.

"They are traveling in five planes," he stated. "They are heavily loaded and cannot equal our speed."

MURDER MIRAGE

IT was several minutes before Doc's companions could pick out the five distant dots in the swiftly darkening sky. In charting a route to pick up Bermuda, the dirigible was rapidly overtaking the fleeing Bedouins and the American crooks.

However, the visibility lessened so rapidly that the five flying dots were quickly lost. The sun first was bathed in the red mist of a wide halo. The mist had had much the appearance of blood across the sky.

Suddenly, the solar light was wiped out. The clouds below disappeared as if sprayed by an inky fog. The black fog of the morning in New York could not be compared to the pall that swiftly shrouded the silver sliver.

A blast of wind struck the ship with the force of a solid blow.

The nose of the dirigible yawed widely. The craft bucked and pitched into a vast air pocket. This was a vacuum in which there was no supporting atmosphere.

Carson Dernal's pallid face immediately took on a greenish hue. The vitality of the explorer had been sapped by fever germs in the past. Apparently, he was easily made airsick.

Lady Fotheran paled a little. She was watching Doc Savage intently.

Pat Savage continued to smile a little. But her vivaciousness suffered a temporary eclipse. The first plunge of the dirigible was like dropping in Doc's high-speed elevator. Pat had tried that. It always left her weak in the knees.

But this dive was much longer than the elevator's descent. The ship was in a hole from which the air had been sucked away for more than a mile beneath them. The darkness outside had taken on the denseness of velvety soot.

The variety of instrument needles danced crazily. Compass, air speed, barometer and radio-directional indicators lost their usefulness. Johnny, at the radio, clapped his hands over his ears. Something like an electrical fire ball had seemed to explode inside his head.

"Hope the fins don't crack when we hit the wall!" boomed Renny. "We're going to bounce!"

CARSON DERNALL stared at him. The explorer's tongue rubbed his lips. Facing definite danger in the desert where you could put your hands on an enemy, was something he understood. Being whipped through the sky like the tail of a diving kite, was something you couldn't put your hands on.

"Do you think we'll crash?" inquired Dernal, hoarsely.

"That is always a possibility," replied Doc Savage. "However, if the pilots of the planes ahead can buck it, I believe we will survive."

There came a sudden slowing and gripping of the dirigible. It was as if the nose had rammed into a wall. Renny manipulated the fins and fed fuel to the motors. He was picking up the airship the same as he would have fought a skidding auto.

MURDER MIRAGE

An ordinary dirigible would have been ripped apart. But this one was of Doc Savage's design. It was outfitted with alloy motors developed by Doc. With the help of the missing Monk, one of the world's leading industrial chemists, the bronze man had devised a synthetic inflation gas. This was noninflammable and had greater lifting power than either helium or hydrogen.

Yet its superior design and power were stiffly overtaxed. The instruments indicated nothing definite. All were strangely off. But Doc estimated the ship now was fighting to hold a headway of perhaps about twenty miles an hour. Greater speed was made impossible by the wind of hurricane force.

The cabin being completely enclosed in the hull gave its occupants an advantage. In front of Renny were charts and maps of the Middle Atlantic Ocean and the upper African coast. These now were of no service. The compasses had failed. They were flying blind, and the direction might have been any of the four cardinal points.

LONG TOM relieved Johnny at the radio. Picking up steamers in the swirling, mucky storm was for a time impossible. Some signals were picked up. Apparently, these were being sent out by ships that were on a comparatively calm sea. But the words were scrambled and incoherent.

"I can't believe the planes could go through this stuff!" Renny shouted to make himself heard.

The nearly soundproof cabin could not shut out the shrieking of the storm. Lightning began stabbing the uncanny midnight darkness of noontime.

"On the contrary," stated Doc; "I believe the planes are out of the storm area. The pilots of the Bedouins would hardly risk their own safety."

"You mean, Doc, you're thinking this storm is something artificial?" queried Renny. "That maybe it's being made to bust us up?"

"That is my conclusion," advised Doc.

Renny suddenly wrenched at the controls. His gloomy countenance showed no change, but he spoke quickly in a low voice unusual for him. He did not want his word to carry to the women and Dernall.

"One of the elevator fins is twisted," he said. "We're going higher, but it won't respond to allow us to lose altitude."

The dirigible cabin had slanted sharply. The ship was wiggling upward with a contorted motion.

The following half hour showed no lessening of the black tempest. Lady Fotheran and Pat were becoming intensely air sick. The same unpleasant malady had gripped Carson Dernall.

"Do you think we'll come through?" he inquired hoarsely of Doc.

"Our ship is still intact," replied the man of bronze. "It is capable of resisting great strain. However, it might be well, to have our parachutes ready."

This last was an unusual admission from Doc. He seldom permitted others to know his thoughts in extreme danger.

MURDER MIRAGE

"If it's as bad as that," said Carson Dernall, "do you think it would be possible for me to get through a radio message to be relayed to New York? This trip was unexpected. My affairs would be left in a tangled condition."

"You are welcome to make the attempt," stated Doc. "Perhaps our messages might be received, where those of others could not reach us."

CARSON DERNALL staggered with weakness as he got to the radio seat. His bony hands were shaking. Evidently sickness and fear had him in their grip. His eyes were bleak with the look of a man who believes the next minute may be his last.

For some time he worked with the radio. He displayed thorough familiarity with the various devices. One of his jobs in the desert had been handling of the radio.

Suddenly Dernall announced he had succeeded in contacting a ship. The others could catch squawking words from the loudspeaker.

Dernall was talking rapidly.

"This is Carson Dernall, aboard Doc Savage's dirigible adrift in a storm at sea!" he announced, loudly. "Lady Sathyra Fotheran is with me! I have a message to be relayed to New York, if possible!"

For three or four minutes, he spoke with staccato sharpness. His words directed disposal of certain properties in event he failed to survive. Pat Savage shivered a little. Her attractive face showed the strain.

"He sounds like a man already dead and dictating his will," Pat murmured.

None could be sure Carson Dernall's strange message had been received. Scrambled words howled in the loudspeaker. Perhaps some ship had really picked up the explorer's belated arrangement of his personal affairs. If so, it would make a great story for the tabloids in Manhattan.

The silver sliver continued its wild climbing. Renny's best effort could not compensate for the twisted elevator fin. The others seemed to be intact.

Ahead of the dirigible suddenly swam a light. It spread like a slowly rising sun. The apparent phenomenon was quickly explained. The sun really had appeared. The upper sky was clearing. The ship picked up greater speed. At the time, it seemed as if the swift craft might leave the earth's atmosphere and penetrate the stratosphere in its wild dash directly toward the great orb of day.

Renny's hands experimented. The black tempest had passed almost as quickly as it had arisen. Instruments swung back to normal. The ship was considerably off the course that would carry it to Bermuda. Resuming proper direction was simple, but the craft continued its driving ascent.

"I've got it, Doc!" announced Renny. "If we could somehow get that port fin jammed the other way, we could—"

The engineer ceased speaking. Doc Savage was no longer beside him. The man of bronze had passed from the cabin without a word. His giant body vanished through a door leading to the inner cat-walk of the ship.

MURDER MIRAGE

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" exclaimed Johnny.

DOC SAVAGE gripped his corded legs around a section of the dirigible's alloy skeleton. This was the framework holding the fins which controlled the aerial craft. The wind of the ship's terrific speed tore at his giant body like the invisible hand of a rushing monster.

The man of bronze hung head downward, his figure projecting into space. The dirigible was now nearly four miles above the low clouds concealing the Atlantic. Three persons inside the cabin were having some difficulty breathing. Johnny relieved their distress by putting the ship's special oxygen apparatus into operation.

At this altitude, the air had thinned out. Many persons arising quickly to such an immense height are overcome. Doc's lungs expanded and he breathed easily. Head downward, he swung like a pendulum in the wind. His smoothly tendoned hands, with cords playing along the wrists, fastened upon the twisted fin.

Doc pitted his mighty strength against the wind pressure and the warped control of the fin. His jerking movements apprised Renny that something was happening. Renny replied with a signal from the controls. Slowly, bringing his muscles to rigid position, the man of bronze reversed the direction of the sagging fin.

The nose of the dirigible pointed downward. Doc had no means at hand to bind the fin in its changed position. His legs locked more firmly. His head projected into the tearing wind. The bronze body became as inert as some metal part of the ship. Holding thus, with the sheer strength of his arms, Doc held the dirigible on its descending course.

No other living man could have continued in that position for more than a minute. It is doubtful if any other four men would have had the strength to have moved the fin in the fierce blast of cyclonic speed.

Doc Savage was still holding the elevator in place as the dirigible slowed, circled and descended at Bermuda.

Lady Fotheran's somewhat inscrutable eyes did not leave the figure of the bronze man as the landing was made. She was looking at a living man who, with his bare hands, had literally pulled his own speeding dirigible out of the sky.

"It is entirely incredible," muttered Carson Dernal.

The explorer's face had resumed somewhat of its more normal pallor.

RENNY descended into the crowd of wondering tourists who had witnessed the remarkable feat of Doc Savage. The engineer ignored thrusting hands and a flood of inquiries. In a few minutes, he had returned to the cabin.

"Five heavily loaded planes refueled here more than an hour ago," he imparted. "They are carrying the Bedouins and some of Whitey Jano's men. The Bermuda police refused them permission to enter the town. They didn't like their looks."

"Probably we will not now overtake them," stated Doc, "We will take a direct route to the northern African coast. There is a venerable man in the city of Amman, I wish to see."

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"You are going to Amman?" said Carson Dernal. "Yes, that would be the place to obtain information. It will be possible there to get animals and supplies for a caravan into the lower Syrian desert."

"Holy cowl" put in Renny. "You mean we've got to ride camels? I'll ride most anything, but I don't like the queer motions of those desert ships. They make me sick."

"Oh, I'd love to go places on a camel!" declared Pal Savage, exuberantly. "I never did."

"It's a dubious pleasure I fear will be denied you this time, Pat," stated Doc Savage. "We shall proceed in the dirigible."

"Landings may be difficult," said Carson Dernal.

"We will find some," said the man of bronze. "If Monk and Ham happen to have survived, I want to find them quickly."

Chapter XIV. CROSS-EYED BEGGAR

HAIFID, the Syrian, was a venerable bag of skin and bones. His beak of a nose was a meatless sharp bone which gave him the appearance of a living mummy. His eyes were sunken black pools which betrayed little emotion. He sat cross-legged on the rug of his baked earthen hut.

Haifid spoke in purest English, though this was not necessary. Doc Savage and Johnny sat facing him. In deference to custom and lack of chairs, the famed adventurers also were hunched cross-legged.

"I fear I must advise you will be tempting powers of such vast evil as to make even your renowned resources helpless against them," stated Haifid. "Wise men of great courage have passed through Amman. Some have gone in the direction of this Valley of Tasus. And some went seeking this mystic hidden city of Tasunan. Denton Cartheris was the last who visited Amman. He has not returned."

"Your advice is well spoken," stated Doc Savage, who well knew the diplomacy with which information must be extracted from the venerable Syrian. "We will give it heed. Yet we have a mission which must be performed. We might discover something of great importance. And if two of my own men have not perished in the sea, they perhaps will be in the Valley of Tasus."

Haifid inclined his head on his leathery, scrawny string of a neck.

"The Renowned One has been of great service to my people in the past. I will impart to you all that I know of the Valley of Tasus. The fate of all men is in the hands of Allah. It is spoken among the people of the hills in whispers. The Nubian known as Hadith, slave to the sheik of sheiks, is reported to have revived the shadows of death and caused them to resume walking across the desert."

Doc Savage said nothing. He listened patiently. Haifid, the Syrian, would speak at elaborate length. Only in his own way would he divulge information which would be valuable to the rescue expedition aboard the dirigible. The man of bronze had the ability to understand and conform to the manners of all peoples. When in Syria, he became a Syrian by speech and action.

Haifid often invoked the blessings of Allah, the Prophet, as he related his fabulous tale of the hidden city of

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Tasunan. With this he told of recent rumors of enormous treasure discovered in ancient tombs of the Valley of Tasus.

"There has even been formed at Aleppo a company of wealthy personages willing to finance and cooperate with reputed discoverers of this treasure," said Haifid. "However, these rich men have thus far been unable to ascertain with whom they should deal in the proposed development. I repeat, there is great mystery and an aura of evil beyond the hills in the Valley of Tasus. Those who enter do not return."

JOHNNY was less patient than Doc. The famed archeologist was eager to be stirring about the city of Amman in the little time at his disposal while the dirigible was being refueled and equipped at the direction of Renny and Long Tom.

Aside from its ancient interest, Amman was one of the few small paradises of the Syrian desert. It had green trees and streams and fountains for the refreshment of caravans after long, hot journeys. The prophecy that Amman would become "a desolate heap, no more remembered" had fortunately never been fulfilled.

The busy capital of Transjordan, the city was under British supervision. From a modern Oriental palace floated the green flag of Islam on Amman's highest hill.

Johnny left Doc Savage with Haifid, as he wandered forth. The bony scholar attracted almost as much attention as had the ultra-modern dirigible of the man of bronze. The gleaming, streamlined ship formed a contrast with the dusty camel ships-of-the-desert that covered thousands of years of time.

IN the meantime, Patricia Savage had accompanied Lady Fotheran and Carson Dernall on a walking tour of the beautiful, ancient city. Their adventure might be intriguing to the vivacious, beautiful Pat. But she was a woman and quaint shops were filled with lovely silks and various Oriental oddities. Pat was not overlooking the chance to return with some of these for her Park Avenue beauty shop.

"If there were not so much tragedy, I could really enjoy all this," said Lady Fotheran, as they passed into a narrow lane where the outlines of mosques and tall minarets could be seen against the sun. "It really is beautiful."

"But for the Occidental it is a dangerous beauty," supplied Carson Dernall who seemed determined to take a gloomy outlook of Doc's plan to enter the lower desert with the dirigible. "I would advise you not to become separated at any time, and not to go far from the main business thoroughfares."

Patricia laughed at his forebodings. Then her attractive face was briefly saddened.

"If we could only feel that Monk and Ham were still alive," she said. "And oh, forgive me, Lady Fotheran—if your brother is safe. If he is all right, don't worry, though, Doc will find him."

"I have come to believe Mr. Savage can accomplish anything," declared Carson Dernall. "Remember my advice: Don't separate. I have some business to attend to and I'll see you again at the dirigible. It is getting late. Stay together. Darkness comes quickly."

The sun dropped rapidly. In the clear air of the desert the minarets of Amman became stark, pointing fingers. The chill of night was close now. The torrid heat of day was changing swiftly into the almost frosty breath of

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darkness.

Pat lingered a moment before an open stall in which Oriental rugs were displayed. She sighed. Doc probably would frown upon her coming back with a truckload of purchases. Besides, there was no time. Doc had announced they would depart as soon as he had interviewed his venerable friend, Haifid.

Glancing up, Pat noticed Lady Fotheran had strolled ahead. She had passed around the corner of a baked clay building, a few yards away. Pat started to follow.

The beggar sitting at the corner was the most hideous object in human form Pat had ever seen. His shrunken body supported arms that lacked all flesh. His sunken eyes were turned upon her sightlessly. Pat was repelled, and yet she was fascinated. She paused, watching the beggar for a moment with utter loathing, yet seeming unable to move.

The beggar mumbled in Arabic. Pat's hand sought her purse. She dropped several pieces of silver into the outstretched hand of burned skin. Then she turned to hurry onward. The beggar cried out quickly, as if in appreciation of her generosity.

The words were in one of the Bedouin tongues of the hills. Unfortunately, Pat did not understand any of the words, except the inevitable "Allah."

Pat shivered a little at her close contact with such a horrible creature and hurried around the corner in the direction taken by Lady Fotheran. If she had looked back, she would have seen the hideous beggar arise with remarkable agility for his appearance. He lifted one hand. His arm was as thin as a stick.

Three Bedouins, clad in the plainest of *abbas* and *kafiehs*, appeared as if by magic from the wall of the narrow street. They glided toward the corner where Pat Savage had disappeared.

Around this corner, Pat halted abruptly.

"Why, she couldn't have gone so far in that short time," she murmured, with a little clutch of fear in her throat.

Lady Fotheran had vanished. It hardly seemed possible. This narrow alleyway ahead had no intersections for at least a hundred yards. There were no shops, and the flat doors set in the long, low walls gave them a blank appearance. Lady Fotheran certainly could not have traversed the length of this gloomy lane since she had separated from Pat.

PAT hurried ahead. She was too much akin to Doc Savage to betray nervousness. But she was woman enough to experience an apprehensive chill over the mystery. Something drew her glance behind her. Three shadowy Bedouins were gliding toward her.

Pat hastened her steps. The Bedouins seemed contented to remain at a respectful distance. Suddenly, there was a faint cry. It was the unmistakable voice of Lady Fotheran.

Pat halted, trying to fix the direction. The cry had seemed to come from one of the closed, mysterious doors.

Then Pat saw one door which was open a few inches. She went toward it. Her hand had sought her purse as she moved. Now she had the slightly comforting feel of her small, but efficient, automatic.

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"Lady Fotheran!" she called. "Are you in there?"

Pat watched the partly opened door intently, ready for instant action. Thus she did not see another flat door open directly behind her. Her first awareness of this came when a greasy hand was clamped over her mouth, stifling any outcry.

Sinewy fingers enwrapped the wrist of the hand holding the automatic. Burning pain followed nerves to Pat's brain. The pistol fell from numbed fingers. The ruthless hands pulled her from the lane. She was forced through the door and it closed.

As soon as her tongue was freed, Pat demanded, "What is it you want with me? Is this a holdup?"

The voice of half a dozen men gobbled. Two Bedouins were binding Pat's arms behind her. Another was examining her small automatic with profound interest. He ended by sticking it into the belt around his *gumbaz*. But none made a reply to her question.

"If this is a robbery, take what I have and let me go," said Pat. "Otherwise, you'll have a lot of trouble."

"Perhaps not so much trouble," spoke a perfectly modulated voice from an inner door. "It is a pleasure we should meet again."

Though he now wore no honor ribbon and was clad in the native costume of the desert, the man bowed elaborately.

"And this time, Kassan is making no mistakes," he said.

Pat was rendered speechless for a moment. The Mr. Kassan who had kidnaped her from a Manhattan hotel, was among the last persons Pat had expected to meet in Amman. In fact, Doc had learned no planes had landed here. The bronze man had believed Hadith's Bedouins and Whitey Jano's mobsters had flown straight for their goal in the desert.

This was partly true, but Mr. Kassan had arrived by other means in Amman.

"You'll be sorry for this!" snapped Pat, as soon as she recovered her breath. Then, in spite of her own situation, she asked quickly, "You know about two of Doc's men who were prisoners. We feared they went down in the yacht that sank."

"Your concern would seem to be justified," said Mr. Kassan in slow provocation. "There was little time to worry over adding weight to our planes. Perhaps they were forgotten."

"My time will come, Mr. Kassan," promised Pat, fire in her eyes, "and when it does, you'll regret everything you've said and done!"

"I shall endeavor to make sure the time doesn't come," bowed Mr. Kassan, politely. "For the present, we will prepare for a little journey."

Light shone from an inner room. It bathed the doorway with the mellow luminance of an oil lamp. Another individual stepped into the light.

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"You!" gasped Pat. "Why—"

A hand was clamped over her mouth. The sweetish odor of chloroform permeated her nostrils. Slowly the fingers and the mellow light faded from Pat's vision.

"

AFTER only about twenty minutes, I went back by the way I had come, hoping to meet Lady Fotheran and Miss Savage," said Carson Dernall, gloomily. "I thought they had returned to the dirigible. But I saw a beggar I recognized. The fellow was with that black devil, Hadith, near the Tasus Valley."

"We will divide and make a thorough search," announced Doc Savage. "The first one learning news of importance will return here and sound the alarm."

Doc and his companions, with Carson Dernall, were beside the dirigible. The aerial craft was equipped with a mellow whistle operated by compressed air. It had been devised by Doc for the summoning of others in danger or announcement of the ship's presence.

Carson Dernall's bony hands were shaking.

"I feel as if I were responsible," he said. "I shouldn't have left them for a moment. But I didn't believe any of Hadith's men would be in Amman. I will accompany you, Mr. Savage. I know many of the citizens here."

Dernall was forced to take rapid steps, to almost run to keep pace with the man of bronze. Seldom had Doc Savage been so stirred. He was blaming himself for having summoned Pat to assist in this adventure.

The unrelieved darkness of a narrow lane enclosed them. Dernall directed Doc toward the spot where he had seen the beggar.

"It was here at this corner," said the explorer. "He was a hideous object. And the two women were coming this way when I left them."

The beggar had vanished. The long walls with their flat doors were closed and silent. Doc flicked on his generator flashlight. Its ray struck upon a small, glittering object. The shine was like brilliant light inside a drop of blood.

The bronze man retrieved this. The object was a ruby of vivid fire. The setting was attached to a small gold link. Doc identified it as having been torn from Pat's earring. He believed Pat had deliberately torn the stone from its setting and dropped it. This was what Pat had done.

Doc whipped over to the nearest door. The ears of Dernall were not sharp enough to hear the vague rustling in the shadows near by. Nor were his eyes keen enough to pick out the difference in the shadows themselves.

The explorer started to exclaim, as he was swung from his feet.

"Keep quiet," Doc whispered. "I'll be right with you."

The edge of the flat roofs of the baked-clay buildings was nearly fifteen feet above them. Dernall felt himself projected into space. He was thrown upward as easily as a light stick of wood might have been tossed. He

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alighted with a slight crash on his hands and knees on the roof of the building.

But Doc Savage did not follow. He whirled to the other side of the lane. The rustling shadows darted toward the spot from which the sound on the roof had come. The man of bronze flexed his knees only a trifle. His body was hurled upward without sound. Hands gripped the edge of the roof on the building opposite that where Dernall had alighted.

Hoarse whispers in Arabic came distinctly to his ears.

Doc took a small glass globule from one of his pockets. The narrow lane with its enclosed walls was an ideal place for use of the chemical gas producing unconsciousness. Doc flicked the globule downward, heard its slight tinkle. He backed slightly away from the edge of the roof.

A dozen hands materialized suddenly out of the darkness behind the bronze figure. Intent on the alley, Doc had failed to note the presence of the soft-footed Arabs crouched on the roof. They had waited until he had turned.

ONE corded bronze arm swept two men into space. They fell into the alleyway with hoarse grunts. But hands were clinging to every possible portion of Doc's body. Blows were rained upon his head.

Doc realized he was outnumbered. He expected to feel the thrust of a knife into his throat. With a hissing breath, he dropped flat on his face and lay still.

"It is enough!" rapped a voice in Arabic. "He will be out for sufficient time!"

The many hands released their holds. In the dark lane below, a number of cloaked figures lay as if they had decided to go to sleep. They would be unconscious for an hour or more. The feet of the Arabs scuttled from the roof.

Doc Savage pulled himself into a crouch. His head had not suffered seriously. The bare bronze head should have been stained with blood. If the attackers had been more observing, they would have noted something queer about the impact of their clubs.

An astonishing thing happened. Doc seemed to lift off all of his hair. One hand rubbed a bruised spot on his head. Then he replaced what appeared to be a tight bronze wig. It was much more valuable than a wig.

The device had been perfected by Doc, after having been wounded by a bullet. It was a head-fitting skullcap of the toughest metal alloy. Bullets could but only glance off it. The blows he had received had been jarring, but they had been insufficient to stun him.

Doc had understood the Bedouins' words. They had said he would be out for sufficient time. There was only one guess as to the meaning. Pat Savage and Lady Fotheran were being taken away. The Arabs had sought only to prevent a close pursuit.

For some mysterious reason, they had not used a knife. The man of bronze believed he knew that reason. Native police had assigned themselves to guard the bronze man's dirigible. They were fascinated by the streamlined, shining craft of the sky.

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And Doc knew there was aboard the dirigible one object that the mysterious chief behind both Hadith and Whitey Jano wanted greatly to get into his own possession.

Crouching, Doc listened intently for a few seconds. None stirred in the alleyway below. The man of bronze could see the edge of the building roof on which he had tossed Dernall so lightly. Nothing moved there.

Through the darkness came a mellow, trilling whistle. Doc had whimsically tuned the alarm of the dirigible with the rare trilling that emanated from him in moments of deep concentration or of extreme danger. The dirigible whistle, however, was pitched much louder.

One of the others had received news of Lady Fotheran and Pat.

Doc launched himself into space. It was perhaps twenty feet to the opposite roof. Doc landed on it lightly, without sound.

Carson Dernall lay in a crumpled heap at the very edge of the building. Apparently, he had been peering down into the alleyway when the gas capsule had been crushed. Doc could have administered a remedy that would have restored the explorer to consciousness. Instead, he took a quicker method.

He picked up the bony form, holding Dernall lightly across his shoulders. With gliding movement, he went swiftly across the roofs in the direction of the dirigible. Doc did not descend into the narrow lanes at any point. The body of Carson Dernall did not impede his progress in the slightest. Spaces of nearly twenty feet were covered in a bound.

Renny was too excited on his own account to question the reason for Dernall's condition, as Doc deposited him in the ship.

"This old fellow, Haifid, came along," said Renny. "He knows everything that goes on in the whole town, I guess. He said two white women were taken away by caravan at sundown. Says there were two bunches of those black devils grabbed Pat and Lady Fotheran."

"You mean they were not taken away together?" questioned Doc. "That would make our task somewhat more difficult. One caravan might be easily located, even at night with the infra-red beam."

"That's it," affirmed Renny. "Old Haifid said there were two herds of camels, or whatever you call 'em. One, he thinks, went south and the other east."

"That might be only a trick; probably is," stated Doc. "They figured we would get the report. Later, the caravans will be united. I think we're safe in heading for the Valley of Tasus."

WITHIN five minutes, the silvery ship flashed upward into the night. Except for the lights on the instrument board, the dirigible now carried no illumination. As Amman's white mosques faded from beneath them, Doc switched off all luminance on the board.

"All put on the infra-red goggles," he directed. "We must see all that moves. There are many caravans in the vicinity. In some manner we must locate Pat and Lady Fotheran before we descend, or we will be wasting much time."

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The man of bronze held the dirigible to slow speed, cruising slowly only about two hundred yards from the desert floor. In the moonless night—it being one when the moon would arise near midnight—the aerial craft would be invisible from the ground.

Carson Dernall revived, groaning. He sat up, blinking at the figure of Doc Savage outlined in the control window.

"How did we come here?" he questioned. "What happened?"

"That will keep until later," stated Doc. "We are trailing a caravan which may be holding Lady Fotheran."

Doc swung the dirigible in a complete circle of Amman. Then he headed southward. The speed was increased. Through the goggles, the desert was filled with sharply outlined dunes and hills of lava rock. Contrary to popular belief, only a part of the Arabian desert is of sand.

"Look, Doc!" exclaimed Renny. "There you are! There are a dozen horses, and I'd bet those are women tied on two of the camels!"

The exclamation was needless. Doc was already pointing the nose of the dirigible toward the desert floor.

"Look!" ejaculated Johnny. "Something's happening! There's a big bunch of riders coming over the hill!"

Rifles were outlined distinctly among this new group. Swiftly riding Bedouins were coming up for an attack upon the caravan.

Chapter XV. VANISHED RAIDERS

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"BE ready with the superfirers," instructed Doc. "Perhaps we should intervene. Pat and Lady Fotheran will be endangered. I'll put the ship down upon them. We have not been seen."

But the Bedouins below had heard the motors running. Doc had slowed them to low speed. The raiding Bedouins suddenly drew up their horses. Only a few low-lying dunes separated the two parties.

One of the camels of the Bedouins holding the women seemed to be heavily laden. What appeared to be wooden crates hung on its sides in the fashion of panniers.

Suddenly the camels carrying Pat and Lady Fotheran were running with long clumsy strides across the desert. Other camels were dashing away in another direction. Bedouins on horses with the caravan also were fleeing.

But two mounted riders remained. They were beside the heavily burdened camel.

Renny and Johnny had thrust their bodies through apertures especially prepared for this purpose. Each held an automatic superfirer loaded with mercy bullets.

"Hold your fire," directed Doc, abruptly. "Something is about to happen."

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The dirigible leveled off. It floated only a hundred yards above the drama being enacted below. The two Bedouin riders were driving the laden camel toward the party of raiders over the dunes.

The loaded beast ran with a queer, loping movement. Being a male camel, the animal squealed with rage at being thus driven. But it moved faster.

"Look at that," grunted Renny. "Now those two fellows are turning and running way!"

This was true. The pair of Bedouin camel drivers looked as if they had suddenly decided to give up their job. They were speeding their horses after their disappearing companions.

The squealing camel with its jouncing panniers dashed on toward the now halted raiders.

"Maybe the caravan has some treasure and would rather surrender it than fight," suggested Long Tom.

Doc Savage said nothing. He was missing no detail of the scene below. Too late, the surprised Bedouin raiders turned their horses. The laden camel was among them.

The squeals of the enraged beast died out. The animal seemed to dissolve suddenly. One instant it was there, running away, and the next there was nothing.

Light exploded across the desert floor. Greenish, ghostly luminance was cast over miles of desolate dunes and rocks. The greatest glowing, the focal point, was in the area where the raiders had halted and the laden camel had vanished.

LONG TOM was sitting beside the radio controls. He emitted a pained howl and toppled to the floor of the cabin.

Carson Derrall tore at the metallic goggles over his eyes with frantic hands. His bony body quivered, as if he had been strapped into an electric chair. The goggles crashed to the floor and the explorer sat down with a bewildered expression.

Renny swore and Johnny pushed himself back and dropped the superfirer.

Only Doc appeared unaffected.

"Only light electrical shocks," he advised. "Not strong enough to be dangerous."

All metal parts of the dirigible were electrified. Defying Doc's efforts, the craft shot upward. It was completely out of control.

"Something seems to have given the air more solidity," stated Doc. "The gas has taken on triple lifting force."

The long silver arrow shot skyward. The greenish luminance lay across the desert like a veil of gauze. This extended for the distance of two square miles. The light possessed an eerie quality of being material. Invisible particles filled the atmosphere.

"Holy cow!" growled Renny. "The Arabs and their horses have all stopped where they are! They haven't moved!"

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Carson Dernal made his way weakly toward a window. He looked downward.

"The shadows," he whispered, huskily. "I'm afraid anything you can do to help Miss Savage and Lady Fotheran will be too late."

The horses of the Bedouin raiders were like ghost animals. They had suddenly been carved into illusive statues. The dirigible continued its freakish climb. The motors had become sluggish. Doc could not procure enough power to overcome the increased buoyancy of the gas.

"Could you not permit some of the gas to escape and let us get down?" inquired Carson Dernal.

"I could," stated Doc. "But there are other means of landing. Long Tom, you take the controls. Renny and Johnny, we'll try the parachute. This calls for an immediate investigation. Would you care to accompany us, Mr. Dernal?"

The explorer shook his head negatively. His bony face shivered.

"I'll have to admit my nerve fails me when I think of jumping with a parachute," he stated. "I'll have to plead some trouble with my heart as the result of fever. The shock probably would put me out. I'll stay with Long Tom, but I seriously advise you not to drop down there, Mr. Savage."

DOC already was buckled into his parachute. Renny and Johnny were likewise ready. The solemn countenance of Renny took on a funereal aspect. At last, he was to be given the chance for some action. His melancholy look was his expression of keenest enjoyment.

Johnny said, "Doc, we're more than a mile up and still climbing. We'll maybe miss the spot if we go higher."

Long Tom, at the controls, was being guided by the widespread glow on the desert floor.

"I'll hold the ship as closely over the place as I can," he stated. "I am getting a little more power. Shall I descend as soon as possible?"

"Catch us with the searchlight beam, as soon as you can get down," advised Doc. "By that time, we may be prepared to come back aboard. But there are some things we should know before we proceed."

THE man of bronze was first to push off into more than a mile of space. Control of his body enabled him to drop feet-foremost for more than three thousand feet. Renny and Johnny were tumbling end over end. None pulled his parachute ring until the desert was leaping up to meet them.

The silk spread in the last thousand feet. They were deposited on the desert far beyond the rim of the greenish glow. Doc led the way through the lava rocks and across the dunes. Their arrival at the scene of the Bedouins' annihilation was delayed for several minutes, as they covered more than a mile of rough going.

"Thunderation!" rasped Renny. "I've been in some tough spots and I've seen queer things, but this makes me feel as if cold water was being poured on my neck! I don't like this!"

"I'll be superamalgamated!" exclaimed Johnny. "Your sensation of frigidity is irrefutably nonillusionary!"

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"That's right," stated Doc. "It's snowing."

"Holy cow!" gritted Renny, rubbing one huge hand across the back of his neck. "That's what it is! I thought for a minute I was getting the jitters as bad as that fellow Dernall, when you invited him to jump."

Big, cold flakes of snow were floating down. They were melting on the back of Renny's neck. The snow was rapidly becoming thicker. Each of millions of falling flakes took on the glowing of a firefly. The supernatural snowstorm in the desert, where even rain was almost unknown, became a sea of dancing flame.

"We have reached the place," advised Doc.

Renny's big feet kicked into a heap of metal. Saddle trappings and bridle gear clinked with gruesome significance. Doc and his men were standing in the midst of grotesque shadows that seemed to dance on the desert, as the snowflakes laid a shroud over them.

Here and there were small heaps of guns, knives and other metallic objects which had been the property of the raiding Bedouins. The ungainly shadow of a camel with a stretching neck was in the middle of these.

The quality of the snow set their skins tingling. But the glow was slowly dying out.

The storm was thicker. High in the sky, Long Tom had switched on a searchlight beam. It showed the dirigible was slowly descending.

Doc pressed the lever on the end of a short cylinder. Lurid red flame mushroomed. The flash would guide Long Tom to their position.

Then suddenly, across the sky flared another great blaze.

Chapter XVI. THE DIRIGIBLE DISSOLVES

THOUGH the heat retained from the torrid sun of the day caused the snow to melt rapidly, the flakes fell so fast they piled several inches deep. The storm was even more freakish than that which had given Manhattan a blizzardy taste of winter in July.

But Doc Savage, Renny and Johnny were no longer concerned with this astounding phenomenon. Their gaze was fixed upon the catastrophe high in the sky. The world's most modern dirigible had burst into flame!

"The thing couldn't happen," muttered Renny in a dazed voice. "Thunderation, Doc. That gas won't burn!"

Doc was standing as motionless as one of the ghostly Bedouin shadows.

"The gas isn't burning, Renny," he stated. "The fire started with an explosion inside. Haifid's warning was well intended. Brothers, we are opposed by forces such as we never before encountered."

Johnny laid aside his verbal cloak of long words. His scholarly face was sharp with sudden grief.

"Long Tom? He couldn't—Doc, he wouldn't have had time to bail out!"

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"We shall have to ascertain that," stated Doc.

The dirigible was a falling mass of flames. Its descent indicated the special bulkheaded envelope of noncombustible gas had been pierced in many places. The spot where it would hit apparently was more than two miles away.

The man of bronze led the others in that direction. They were unable to keep pace with his flowing speed. Soon Renny and Johnny could no longer see Doc. They blundered through snow, sand and lava rock, guided by the falling blaze of the aërial craft.

LONG TOM had been attempting to put the searchlight beam upon Doc and the others. The motors ceased their sluggish action. They were hitting efficiently. The special propellers were powerful enough to overcome the lifting force of the gas.

Long Tom headed toward the desert floor. The infra-red beam was rendered useless. The thickly falling snow showed queerly as a blinding mass of flaked soot in the goggles. Long Tom pulled off the clumsy glasses and used the searchlight.

Suddenly, Long Tom was enveloped in a rushing blast. The explosion was inside the cabin. He was hurled from the controls. Stunned, as blazing tongues licked at him like serpents writhing in the air, Long Tom sought a parachute.

The electrician cried out, "Dernall! Grab a parachute! It's our only chance!"

He received no reply. The interior of the ship was rapidly becoming an inferno. The flame was brilliantly blinding. Then came another explosion, ripping out one whole chunk of the supporting envelope. The dirigible was plunging downward.

The dirigible was dropping by the nose. Long Tom felt as if he were falling into a deep black hole. Then he groped toward a hatchway.

Of Carson Dernall, there was no sign. The explorer had been near the middle of the cabin when the explosion came.

DOC SAVAGE saw his supposedly fire-proof dirigible disintegrate. Metal parts were raining down with the snow. These were being scattered over a wide area. Only the keen senses of the man of bronze saved him from being crushed to the ground.

The object hurtling down upon him from space would have ground him into the lava rock. This was one of the heavy alloy motors. The force of its impact buried it deeply in the soft stone.

Doc Savage halted. From his body emanated the rare, exotic trilling. The bronze man crouched flat, merging with the desert floor. He had seen the shadows of riders scurrying swiftly away over near-by sand dunes.

When Renny and Johnny arrived, Doc was holding an object in his hands. It was one of the superfiring pistols. The frame had been warped by intense heat. The cartridges of mercy bullets had been exploded.

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"Holy cow!" exclaimed Renny in an awed tone. "You don't suppose Long Tom was using that? Who could he have been fighting?"

"I'm afraid the pistol was discharged by the fire," advised Doc. "We will seek farther."

Renny and Johnny joined in the search with saddened hearts. The warped pistol was the one Long Tom had always carried under his arm. They called out several times, circling all of the area over which parts of the wrecked dirigible were scattered.

They received no response. After several minutes, the three adventurers converged on one spot.

"Did you find any trace, Doc?" asked Renny.

"There was nothing," said the man of bronze, sadly. "The heat was so great it melted nearly everything. I found no sign of either Long Tom or Carson Dernal."

Doc Savage took their minds from the tragic absorption. The man of bronze had come upon a curious flat container of dull metal. This had the shape of a thin crate and was about six feet in length. While it had been marked by the fierce blaze of the dirigible, it was still entire.

Doc straightened and looked across the low hills. The snowfall had suddenly ceased. A reddish globe was rising in the east. The late moon had a bloody face, as if it was emerging from a bath of scarlet fire.

Again the exotic trilling was emitted by the bronze man. Now it was a rare, tuneless running of the scale. It had the elusive cadence of falling water murmuring in some deep cave.

Here there was drifted sand. Doc's bronze hands scooped out a hole several feet in depth. He pushed the flat alloy container into this and covered it deeply. With a few flat lava rocks, he marked the spot.

The near-by, low-lying hills were whitened by the clinging, wet snow. They stood out under the rising moon like the flat screens on which moving pictures are thrown. But the figures now moving across them were real.

They were trooping riders. They rode with the easy swaying only attained by the Bedouin horseman of the desert.

"It will be well for each of us to mark this spot," advised Doc. "Whatever happens, here is buried the most important evidence we have come upon."

Renny and Johnny were impressed with the apparent evidence buried in the alloy container. But they were also watching the distant riders against the hills. This distraction was almost immediately exposed as a trick. From three directions close by, mounted men rushed upon them.

UNUSUAL for Arabs, these Bedu were attacking in silence. Their usual method was to make as much noise as possible. The attackers did not discharge their rifles. These remained in their saddle scabbards.

Plunging horses were being driven directly upon Doc and his men. Renny was knocked to the sand with a bellowing cry. The big engineer went down with the superfirer in his hand. The machine pistol erupted a steady line of flame. It sounded like the continuous twanging of the strings of a harp.

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Two riders howled and fell from their running horses. They struck and their bodies rolled like sacks.

Johnny's tall figure darted between the riders. His super-firer hummed. Mercy bullets whanged into men and horses. For a moment, there was a confusion of fallen riders. But the number of Bedouins was overwhelming.

Doc's voice came to Renny and Johnny. The man of bronze spoke in the language of the ancient Mayans. This was understood only by Doc and his adventurers. They had learned it in the hidden valley of Central America from which Doc Savage's unlimited wealth originated.

"Cease firing, to save yourselves," was Doc's strange command. "Otherwise, you may become shadows like many others."

Renny and Johnny obeyed the order, wonderingly. Bedouins surrounded them quickly. The cloaked riders massed around and cords of camel's hair encircled their bodies. Slip nooses were drawn and the pair found themselves being lifted helplessly to the backs of horses.

Their eyes searched for Doc Savage. After he had spoken, the man of bronze had mysteriously faded from among the dancing horses.

The Bedouins were cursing wildly in Arabic. Renny and Johnny gasped as half a dozen riders suddenly separated from the others. These six riders rode stiffly, as if clad in metallic armor. But there was no clanking of metal joints. The six were driving a riderless horse before them.

The red moon glow made the low hills stand out. The six riders went swiftly toward one of these. Renny and Johnny had a brief glimpse of their bronze leader. He was moving with unbelievable speed toward the hill. Then he disappeared.

THE mass of Bedouins surrounding Renny and Johnny whipped their horses away. They seemed to want to vacate that spot in haste.

Over by the low hill, the six riders who rode so stiffly swung from their horses. Then they did an amazing thing. Whips cut down on the flanks of the animals. They were starting the unmounted horses away. The six riders remained beside the unmounted horse they had been driving.

From what looked like a basket pannier on this horse rolled a globe the size of two footballs. Renny swore bitterly.

"They've got Doc!" he groaned. "That's something he can't fight, unless he uses the grenades!"

Renny referred to the high explosive carried by Doc for use in only the most extreme danger. The engineer and Johnny held their breaths, as they hoped for a mighty blast to wipe out the six dismounted Bedouins.

No explosion came. The horses that had been whipped away had stopped running. They were circling uncertainly.

A fiercely brilliant green light flashed over the hills. The captors of Renny and Johnny lingered no longer. They were perhaps half a mile away as the greenish glow spread over the desert. The reddish moon took on a pale, sickly color. Invisible particles formed a static tingling in the air.

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As the glow reached its height, the six dismounted riders approached the globe from which it emanated. The sphere of the shadow death had ceased rolling. It lay like the great green eye of some unhuman monster.

In the light, the faces of the six men had the color of dull lead. They were like dead men who walked. Two men carried the long wooden prongs. Another man carried a cradlelike box. With the prongs, the glowing globe was rolled into this.

The phosphorescent glow still lay across the desert.

Talking among themselves, the six Bedouins in masks moved in a widening circle around the spot where the death globe had been.

"What do you make of this?" exclaimed one. "It has been said this Doc Savage carried many strange devices. Yet we find none of them. There is nothing of metal remaining."

The masked men seemed greatly surprised. They hunted more thoroughly about the space. They were rewarded only by the sand and lava rock. Not even one metal button indicated where Doc Savage might have been.

Clearly, the Bedouins were deeply mystified. With something of fearful haste, they moved toward the horses they had whipped away.

Here they halted, muttering deep imprecations.

There were now only five horses in the group. Apparently, the sixth animal had continued on its wild dash across the desert.

Chapter XVII. VALLEY OF TASUS

NEVER before during their careers as companions of Doc Savage had Renny and Johnny been so deeply apprehensive. Their own plight as prisoners of the Bedouins concerned them much less than the series of disasters that had overtaken the man of bronze and the others.

Their belief in the invincible bronze man had always been too firm to be shaken. The shadow death of the desert had been unnerving. The destruction of the dirigible of itself was a mystery that had incredible angles.

The dirigible had been constructed in every way to resist all manner of fire. Yet the aerial craft had blazed to nothingness in the space of a few minutes.

Toward daylight, the large party of Bedouins was conducting the prisoners through a broken country. Hills of lava rock were jumbled across the desert. There had been no indication of an oasis, yet the Bedouin riders were heading for a definite goal.

Renny's and Johnny's arms had been bound, but their feet were free in the stirrups. Armed Bedouins rode beside them. They made no attempt to interrupt their occasional conversation.

Johnny said, "They're the riders with the shadow death. One of them just said the All-Wise One will know what is to be done about something."

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Johnny's mastery of the Bedouin language was equal to that of any of the Arabs.

WHEN the sun broke its first rays of torrid heat across the desert, the prisoners saw the number of their captors was more than a hundred. Some of the riders were too far back for their faces to be distinguished.

A tall, ebony-faced Nubian was in command. This was the first time Renny and Johnny had seen the former slave, Hadith; but they guessed his identity. Six riders in the lead-colored masks rode up to him.

Hadith waved his hands in significant gestures, as he uttered wild imprecations. Apparently, he was displeased with these men.

"Looks like an earthquake makes this country its playground," asserted Renny, a little later.

They were riding a broken trail. Great hills of lava rock looked as if they had been recently turned topsy-turvy. The desolation gave no indication of a single caravan trail anywhere in the vicinity.

"You are manifestly correct," agreed Johnny. "The subterranean strata of this neighborhood seems to be in a period of transition. I don't recall any region of this character in the Syrian desert."

After two hours or more of winding through the contorted and jumbled hills, the Bedouins entered a narrow pass. Hadith, riding a snow-white Arabian horse, pulled up suddenly. From him came a shrill whistling cry.

"Look!" exclaimed Renny. "There's that green glow ahead!"

"Right," said Johnny, "and now it's beginning to fade out!"

The narrowness of the pass compelled the riders to proceed in single file. The bright phosphorescence showed in the gap of the hills. The sun was not high enough to reach into the pass.

At Hadith's signal, the glow diminished. Hadith held his Bedouins for a few minutes. Then he gave the order to proceed.

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny. "If this is the only pass and we're on our way to the Valley of Tasus, it's an easy guess why those who go in never come out!"

Shelves of lava rock flanked the pass. On these were a dozen figures wearing the lead-colored masks. Very apparently the gap was closely guarded. Its narrow confines formed a perfect death trap.

Renny and Johnny were unprepared for the amazing spectacle that greeted them suddenly. It was as if they had passed by magic from the barren desert to be confronted by one of the Biblical lands "flowing with milk and honey."

Beyond perhaps a mile inside, where the desert continued, were tall, waving date palms. These appeared to be the green guardians of a vast area of gardens. The trees followed a peculiar conformation.

From this spreading square of cultivated land, apparently well watered, the palms extended in a single row for several miles over rolling hills. And on either side of this green row the face of the hills was composed of the lava rock and sand, dry and burning under the morning sun.

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"That's the big secret of the hidden city, the one Haifid called Tasunan," announced Johnny. "That marks the course of a subterranean river. And from the character of the hills and openings, that is the location of the ancient tombs discovered by Denton Cartheris."

"Holy cow!" exclaimed Renny. "There really is a city!"

ABOUT two miles away, loomed a high, thick wall. Tall, spirelike minarets glittered in the sun. And this wall was peopled by watchers. The rarefied air of the desert revealed them as small, black bugs.

The Bedouins crowded closely around Doc's men. They saw their own destination was not the city.

"Looks like we've come upon the encampment of a whole army," stated Johnny.

More than two hundred tents occupied a flat, sandy space in the strip of desert inside the barrier hills. It was like the encampment affected by some reigning sheik of sheiks. Only it was quickly apparent that this was ruled over by Hadith, the powerful black who had been a Nubian slave.

Hadith's voice rang out in guttural command, as the Bedouins rode up to the camp.

The Nubian was black as ebony. His color was in strange contrast to the beautiful Arabian steed of white. The shoulders of his *abba* were heavily embroidered with gold braid. At his belt hung the huge scimitar with its glittering jeweled handle in its curved silver scabbard.

Nothing of the slavelike humility lingered about Hadith. He rode up with grinning confidence, as proud as a peacock displaying its feathers. He was a warrior among warriors.

"

Wellah!" he cried. "*El Farengi!*"

Despite their situation and the arduous ride of the night, Renny and Johnny were hungry. Spicy, greasy odors of savory food assailed their noses. This was the hour of early eating in the black tents.

Slender bronzed women, with unveiled faces and clad in dusty garments trailing in the sand, stared at the prisoners. Stark naked children played before the smaller tents. The women were curious and unashamed, unlike the Moslem women to be seen in Amman.

Bedouins unbound the prisoners' arms. Hadith rode up. He spoke in English.

"You will be wise to accept the beneficence of Allah," he stated. "For the present, you shall be *dackhile* in the black tents. Do not attempt to escape, for there is no way."

Renny and Johnny knew that by "*dackhile*" he meant they would be inviolate.

One of the Bedouins directed them toward a great, long tent.

This was a ninety-foot pavilion which faced away from the others and toward the rising sun. This was the tent of Hadith. One end was curtained off—the *hareem*, or place of the women.

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"Thunderation!" grunted Renny. "I felt like I could eat a whole cow, but now I'm not so hungry!"

Johnny made a wry grimace. He was perhaps even more fastidious than Renny.

"Possibly we shall learn to engage in this primitive epicurean pastime," he stated. "In other words, brother, we'll take it and like it!"

A dozen Bedouins were crowding around a flat brass vessel. This was fully five feet across. The Arabs were gorging themselves. They were using man's original eating utensils, their hands.

In the middle of the brass platter the heads of sheep grinned with ghastly bared teeth. Their ears were pulled back and flapping. A greasy mixture flowed over the pile of food. Legs and ribs of mutton floated on a sea of rice and gravy. The Bedouins scooped up their food with their right hands.

All of the figures around the platter were wearing the customary clothes of the desert.

Renny and Johnny moved forward with some hesitation.

"If I have to do it that way, then I'll have to," grunted Renny with disgust. "Anyway, I've gotta eat."

A thin, sarcastic voice broke across the tent.

"Quit licking your fingers, you missing link! You ought to be able to throw a ball of rice into that anthropoid aperture without smearing gravy all over your nightshirt!"

"Blast it!" squeaked another voice. "Eatin' like a pig sure comes natural to you! If I hafta eat another meal of this junk, I'll be bleatin' like a lamb!"

"Gibbering like an ape, you mean!"

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny. "Johnny, do you hear that?' It's Monk an' Ham! They didn't sink with the yacht, after all! Look at Monk in all those funny clothes! With so much of him hid, he looks almost human!"

LONG-WORDED Johnny surveyed the desert-garbed figures of Monk and Ham.

"Indubitably," he put forth. "Yet I have a disturbing premonition we have merely encountered confirmation of the theory of reincarnation. These are but astral spirits in the guise of another existence. Wouldn't Ham look sweet on Park Avenue in that outfit?"

The apish figure of Monk came to its feet. His *kafieh* and *abba* flapped wildly. One of his big feet splashed squarely into the Bedouin breakfast. Rice and gravy slopped into the ascetic countenance of the fastidious Ham.

"Howlin' calamities, Ham!" he squealed. "Doc's got here!"

"You awkward insect!" howled Ham, swabbing gravy from his lean face. "Even if he has, that isn't keeping me from borrowing a knife and carving you into spareribs!"

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At a command from Hadith, the Bedouins were making room for Renny and Johnny. Monk's apish form continued to perform a dance of delight. Ham cleared his face and asked, "Where's Doc? How did that black devil trap you?"

Before a reply could be made, a woman's scream rang out from one of the small tents a short distance from the pavilion.

"Renny! Johnny!" the voice cried immediately.

They saw a slender figure running from the tent toward them. The woman was clothed in the dusty, trailing garments. Her head was closely hooded.

"It's Pat!" yelled Renny. "Holy cow! But I'm glad to know you are all right!"

The big engineer mowed Bedouins to one side, making toward Doc's fair cousin. Two men in *kafiehs* and *abbas* sprang toward the girl.

"No you don't, sister!" rapped one of these men. "Dames can't mix with no men in *this* hangout! That's orders from the boss!"

The pair were marked by their speech and their faces for what they were—the mobsters of Whitey Jano. The fact they were clad in flowing *kafiehs* and *abbas* only added to their evil appearance.

One of the men slapped a greasy hand across Pat Savage's lovely face. The blow knocked her heavily to the sand. Her feet had tangled in the trailing robe as she fell. Pat attempted to rise.

The mobsters seized her arms and jerked her to her feet. From Renny's giant chest came a roar like that of a maddened gorilla. A Bedouin who got between him and the mobsters encountered a fist the size of his own head. The Arab was turned so nearly over he alighted squarely on top of his head.

Monk was nearly as quick as Renny.

"I'll eat out the gizzards of two of you anyway!" he howled. "I'll twist your heads between your shoulders!"

The pair of mobsters saw the avalanche descending upon them. They dropped Pat, pushing her roughly to the ground. One succeeded in getting an automatic from the folds of his *abba*. The pistol blossomed a stream of fire almost in Renny's face.

But the mobster was given no time to aim. Bullets plowed into Hadith's pavilion tent. Two Bedouins groaned and slumped on their faces. The impact of Renny's fist was almost as loud as the exploding weapon.

The mobster's *kafieh* flew off. When he hit the ground, his head rolled oddly as if his neck were only a rag. Seldom had Renny ever hit a man with all of his great strength. No mobster's spine was ever made to resist such a blow. The mobster quivered and lay still.

MONK'S long arm encircled the other of Pat's assailants. Bones cracked with the dry snapping of sticks. The mobster fell to the sand with blood bubbling from his lips. Monk's childlike voice was squealing with jungle rage.

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The big chemist selected the two nearest Bedouins. Though they had been surprised, the Arabs were flashing long knives. Both Bedouins struck at the same time, but they had failed to count on Monk's apelike agility.

One knife sliced across his hairy cheek, but the Bedouins' skulls cracked together under Monk's hands. Their knives fell to the ground. Monk stooped and seized both of the weapons. He whirled toward the big tent.

Renny was holding Pat Savage in the crook of one powerful arm.

"

Thishahum, bism er rassoul!" rang the sharp command of Hadith.

"

Wellah! Wellah!" responded half a hundred throats.

Dark faces ringed in all four of Doc's men. The Bedouins kept a respectful distance now, but a dozen or more had seized rifles. The weapons were pointed.

Hadith leaped toward Renny and Pat Savage.

The heavy, curved scimitar played with a deadly whirling of light around the Nubian's head. The Nubian face was wearing the glare of a killer thirsty of blood.

Renny swept Pat behind him. Even his huge fists would be useless against the swinging blade.

Ham and Johnny were standing now with four Bedouin rifles jammed into their bodies. Again the Nubian's shout commanded his men to kill. Renny dived suddenly in the fashion of a football tackler. The scimitar was swishing downward.

A slow voice of authority interrupted. It was that of Whitey Jano. He was speaking in Arabic.

"Enough, Hadith!" was the command. "The All-Wise One has decreed these men shall live! For the present, they are of service to him! Those who go against his will cannot escape his anger!"

Hadith's arm dropped. His big body was hurled backward.

But Renny and Monk were pinned to the ground by the massed rush of Bedouins. Whitey Jano had saved their lives.

Chapter XVIII. STAND IN THE TOMBS

MONK groaned and squirmed, trying to relieve the squeezing pressure of the thongs that bound his arms behind him.

"Dang it!" he complained. "I've been tryin' to work 'em loose an' they're gettin' tighter!"

"Thunderation!" growled Renny. "How long do you suppose those black devils intend to leave these things

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on? I'm paralyzed from the neck down!"

"Afraid you won't gain anything by fighting them," advised Ham.

With Johnny, he had been bound with the others. Balked of his desire to spill their blood on the desert, Hadith was using a device which was rapidly appeasing his bloodthirsty soul.

The four men were fastened with their backs to stakes driven deeply into the sand. The torrid sun flooded them with furnace heat. Their faces had baked to the color of boiled lobsters. Even Monk's furry hair could not protect his ugly countenance from the force of the direct rays.

Adding a delicate touch of the punishment, Hadith had caused their arms to be bound tightly in many wrappings of camel hide. The hide had only recently been stripped and it was green. The sun was drying the thongs, and as they dried they shortened.

The benevolent-appearing Whitey Jano had made no effort to interfere with Hadith's idea of a good time. The mob leader from New York seemed interested only in preserving the adventurers' lives at the behest of the mysterious All-Wise One.

Whitey sat crosslegged in the shade of a black tent. He was engaged in his favorite pastime, which the native Bedouins watched with some awe. Perhaps he had brought a supply with him. For Whitey was juggling popcorn into the air, catching and crunching it in his white teeth.

Clad in the garb of the desert, with his snowy hair showing under his *kafieh*, and his coal-black eyes beaming mildly in his swarthy face, Whitey might indeed have passed for a sheik of sheiks.

"Curse him!" grunted Renny. "I think he saved our lives only so he could have some fun!"

"No, it has been the order from this All-Wise one, as they call him," imparted Ham. "They were ready to bump off Monk and me, and something happened. I gather they are expecting to force us to aid them soon. Listen to that!"

From the direction of the first entrance to the tombs came the rattling of shots. They were so closely spaced as to identify the racketing of a machine gun.

"If I've guessed it right," said Ham, "this Ranyon Cartheris is holed up between the Bedouins and the main gates to the city of Tasunan. For some reason, they cannot, or don't want to, use this shadow death stuff close to the tombs themselves. Cartheris seems to be well armed and to have plenty of ammunition. Besides that, he's got control of a water supply and food from the gardens."

"Cartheris couldn't have many men, and they're all Arabs," said Johnny. "So the Bedouins are planning to seize the city of Tasunan?"

"That's the answer," supplied Ham. "I heard Whitey Jano saying the All-Wise One intends to take possession of the city and enslave its inhabitants. It seems they are a peaceful people without many weapons, but they will fight if they're forced to it."

"And Ranyon Cartheris has been standing between them and the city?" mused Johnny. "I get it now. That's why they grabbed off Lady Fotheran and Pat Savage. They hope to get at Cartheris through his sister. And just to make it good, they expect to keep Doc out of their hair by using Pat as a hostage."

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Rifles still cracked in the direction of the tombs. The machine gun hammered spitefully and the rifle shots ceased.

A thudding explosion shook the ground. Bedouins screamed.

"Good boy!" exploded Renny. "This Cartheris guy has got some pineapples! That's one reason the black devils aren't walkin' in!"

THE afternoon had been well along when the four men were staked out. The desert sun hit the rim of the hills. This eased the pressure of the drying skin thongs a little. Shouts came from the vicinity of the outer pass.

Hadith and a group of guards rode out. When they returned, they were accompanied by an enormously fat man. He was of Syrian cast. His face was rolled in swaths of superfluous flesh. A hawkish nose stuck out strangely from the greasy countenance. His skin seemed to ooze grease, or it was bathed in olive oil.

The Syrian had densely black eyes with hardly any pupils. His head was partly bald and shining. He rode a skittish black horse with inlaid saddle trappings. Two laden camels followed.

On one of the camels sat a dried-up specimen of the Ethiopian race. The little black man was the Syrian man-of-all-work, valet, camp tender, camel driver and general packer. In other words, he was a slave. His gestures and vacuous expression told he was a mute.

"I am Duzun Kado," the Syrian told Hadith, waving his fat hands. They were adorned with jeweled rings. "You will conduct me to your master, in the name of Allah."

Hadith's piercing eyes flashed, but he was discreet. He guided the intruding stranger to the tent of Whitey Jano. In Arabic, Hadith imparted a low message of his own. Whitey Jano nodded his head. He was most benevolent.

"I will learn of his mission before he sees the All-Wise One," stated Whitey. "If he comes from Aleppo, it is important."

The Syrian had caught the low words.

"I have come from Aleppo," he offered. "I am the humble servant of the Seven Companies Syndicate. We are prepared to invest in the Tascus treasure to one-third of its value and quantity, as we have heard through Amman is the proposal of the All-Wise One."

Whitey Jano tossed popcorn in the air. He trapped it with his strong teeth and crunched. His smile was benevolent.

"The Seven Companies Syndicate? The All-Wise One has heard of your organization. Then you are aware one-third of the deposits and no questions asked, with the stuff to be delivered outside, is the proposal?"

"Of this we are aware." The Syrian inclined his head. His neck was so corpulent this action was difficult. "Also, we have been informed the amount required is enormous, eventually reaching a hundred millions in gold."

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"The sum is trivial," declared Whitey Jano. "Only that includes noninterference. None of the Seven Companies men are to enter the Valley of Tasus. The will of the All-Wise One must remain supreme behind these hills."

"Of this we understand, and it is agreed," accepted Duzun Kado. "My mission only is to assure us of what exists. If as represented, we are ready. I have come with a binding payment."

A pudgy hand waved toward the camel packs. The beasts were resting. The black slave mute had curled up in the shadow of one animal. He was asleep.

"Wish I could hear what's going on?" put forth Renny.

"I am possessed of a premonition that dire happenings are progressing toward a climactic conclusion," offered the big-worded Johnny.

"Blast it!" squealed Monk. "If you mean somethin's due to bust, I wish it would bust! I ain't got no feelin' above my shoulders!"

"That doesn't come under the heading of news, you ape," grinned Ham, painfully.

The lawyer was suffering as much as the others, but he couldn't resist the shot.

Whitey Jano gestured to the fat Syrian. They moved into a tent, out of earshot of the others.

FIGHTING near the tombs had ceased with the sudden desert darkness. The night chill relieved the torture of the camel-skin thongs. They stretched a little. In the early moonless darkness, Doc's four adventurers could not see each other distinctly.

In the tent of Whitey Jano, flickering lights appeared. Duzun Kado knew when to say nothing with Oriental diplomacy. Once he inquired politely if it would be the will of the All-Wise One to deal with him directly.

"Of that, we shall determine," replied Whitey Jano.

The American confidence sharper and leader of mobsters was more and more taking on the cloak of a true Arabian in speech and action. Only he continued his ceaseless, annoying crunching of popcorn.

A new figure glided into the tent. His dark features were aristocratic in every detail. He bore himself with dignity.

"I am Kassan, personal aide to the All-Wise One," he announced. "You come from the Seven Companies syndicate, at Aleppo?"

Duzun Kado repeated what he had told Whitey Jano. Kassan gave no indication of being impressed with an offer of a hundred millions.

"With tomorrow's sun, you will have the privilege of examining the ancient city, which is called Tasunan," stated Kassan. "It is understood there must be no interference with the present or later affairs of the All-Wise One with respect to the city of Tasunan or this valley."

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"The lowly representative of the Seven Companies Syndicate is discreet," bowed Duzun Kado. "The wishes of the true Sons of Islam shall be respected."

Kassan's thin lips smiled.

"Then it will be well. You will rest in the tent of Hadith, and the guard will be only for your protection."

Duzun Kado's fathomless black eyes were inky pools. They did not betray any emotion. Well indeed, the Syrian understood he would be closely guarded.

The black slave mute huddled a covering around him. His body was pressed closer to the resting camel for warmth.

Doc's staked companions could see the shadows of the beasts. From Hadith's pavilion tent came the savory odors of cooking.

"Holy cow!" groaned Renny. "Aren't they goin' to feed us?"

"It ain't cow or any part of it," piped up Monk. "It's sheep again. All they eat is sheep."

NEAR the staked prisoners, a shadow moved along the ground. There came a queer scuffling. Some one was approaching the prisoners. He was accomplishing this almost silently, by the simple method of rolling.

From close beside the four listening captives came a hoarse, nasal whisper.

"Keep your traps shut an' don't talk," the voice admonished. "All you do is grab an earful of what I'm handin' out."

None of the four spoke. The thin body of a man jerked into position in front of them. The figure sat up with a hissing sound of pain. A small, bulletlike head bobbed up and down on a turtle neck.

"I'm Runt Davis," the man announced. "I'm here because there ain't any of us got a Chinaman's chance to get outta here. They've got the finger on you guys, same as Whitey Jano's got our number up. We're all framed for a rubout with that devilish picture fire. I gotta talk to somebody."

Runt Davis was sweating, though the night was now chilly. He lifted his right arm to mop his face. Then he swore bitterly. He kept forgetting he hadn't any right hand. The bandaged arm was infected and swollen enormously.

"We don't make any deals with rats," announced Ham. "But you've got us where we can't avoid listening. So go ahead and spill your woes."

"Ain't no time for splittin' hairs," croaked Runt Davis, huskily. "You bein' with this Savage guy an' havin' a reputation ain't goin' to win you nothin' in this deal. Whitey says they've bumped off the big bronze mug. They're goin' to proposition you fellas."

"They'll be wastin' time," said Ham.

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"Yeah? Well maybe. But all they want is what this guy called Monk has got. This boss they call the All-Wise One is all set to grab off this town over back of the big wall. Whitey brought us along with a bunch of machine guns to help snatch the town. When that's done, he has the sweet little idea of seein' we all get the picture bump, so there won't be no split an' no squawkin'. I'm only one of a dozen he's put on the spot."

"Howlin' calamities!" moaned Monk. "Whadda the black devils want with me?"

"Plenty!" said Runt Davis. "There's only one way into the town. It's through them old tombs an' under the ground along some kind of a funny river. They've got to root this guy out that's in there now. He's got a bunch of them suits that protects them from the picture bump-offs."

"So that's the answer to Cartheris holdin' them off," commented Renny.

"Yeah, an' even when they get through there they've gotta do a lot of blasting their way into the town," supplied Runt Davis. "That's where this Monk mug comes in. They've gotta bunch of chemical junk for mixin' explosives, but the guy that was goin' to do it had a run-in with Hadith and got himself chopped down."

"I ain't mixin' nothin' for nobody!" squealed Monk, un-grammatically.

"For cryin' out loud, pipe down," hoarsely advised Runt Davis. "If I'm caught here, it'll be just too bad. An' listen—"

"We're listening but that's all," said Ham.

Runt Davis went on quickly.

"I'm willin' to turn you fellas loose, if you'll give me an' the other boys a break. Maybe we can burn our way out, an' maybe we can't; but it's our only chance."

"You mentioned Whitey Jano saying they got Doc Savage?" said Johnny.

"Yeah; that was last night, as I get it. They rubbed out the big bronze guy when they got you."

The thoughts of the four prisoners became deeply gloomy.

"I don't believe it," declared Ham. "But, anyway, we'll—"

THE darkness spilled a sudden, flaring light. It was a torch of wood drenched in oil. The thing was tossed almost upon Runt Davis. The one-armed mobster leaped to his feet with a wild, rending cry. He screamed profanely.

"It grieved me greatly to have come upon such ingratitude," spoke a gentle, fatherly voice. "Seize him!"

Two springing Bedouins already had accomplished this simple feat. Runt Davis ground out oaths and struck at them with the swollen stump of his severed hand. The Bedouins held him firmly.

"I hope the men of Doc Savage are too intelligent to believe the tale with which this mistaken boy has attempted to hoax you," said Whitey Jano.

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Whitey stood in the flare of the torch. His jaws crunched popcorn. His countenance held an expression of deepest sorrow.

"Runt, my boy," he stated, "you have been extremely foolish. It is true you have incurred the deadly enmity of Hadith. So you tried to save yourself by involving others. It is too bad, too bad, my boy."

"Don't, Whitey, don't talk like that!" screamed Runt Davis. "I know what you mean—don't do it! Don't believe him, fellas! He's only—"

Whitey Jano spread his hands. A Bedouin's hand was clamped over Runt's slavering mouth.

"You see, he would not be advised," observed Whitey Jano, resignedly. "And so this cannot be avoided."

Whitey Jano lifted one hand. He might have been conferring a benediction upon his crippled aid. The hands of the Bedouins freed Runt Davis. But they impelled him forcibly into the darkness.

There was a tall shadow there. The flare of the oil torch picked up the gleam of a swishing circle. The ebony features of Hadith jumped into view. Whitey Jano spilled some Arabic words. Hadith made no reply.

"No! No!" screamed Runt Davis. "Whitey, I didn't mean it! I didn't mean—"

Whitey tossed a bit of popcorn into the air. He caught it between his teeth. There was a double crunch. One was of Whitey's jaws. The other was accompanied by the vicious swishing of Hadith's jeweled scimitar.

The headless body of Runt Davis staggered a full half dozen steps before it fell. Blood spouted. The small, bullet-like head rolled in the sand. The flare of the torch showed the glazing of the eyes.

"The will of the All-Wise One is something difficult to understand," sighed Whitey Jano, sanctimoniously. "I deeply regret the incident of this morning. Presently you will be freed, then we will converse."

"If I ever get my hands on you, there won't be any conversation!" squeaked Monk, his childlike voice quivering with the horror he felt.

"An' that goes double!" roared the impulsive Renny. "That guy might have been a rat, but you're lower than a snake!"

"I am greatly saddened," said Whitey Jano. "This was unfortunate, but we shall not permit it to interfere with our future friendliness."

The jaws still crunched as Whitey moved away. By his order, the gruesome remains of Runt Davis were removed. Hadith had sheathed his bloody scimitar, after carefully cleansing it in the sand. He came over and inspected the imprisoning stakes. Then he went away.

FOR a few minutes, the four prisoners were speechless. They had encountered many horrors. The cool, terrible execution of Runt Davis had shaken them.

Finally, Renny said, "Do you think that poor little rat was telling the truth about Doc?"

The replies of the others proved the added report of Doc's fate had impressed them deeply.

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"Still, I don't believe it," insisted Johnny. "Something went haywire with that death-glow thing."

"But you'd think Doc would have found some way to get in, if he is still alive," said Ham. "He would—Listen! What's that?"

For the second time, they heard a shuffling in the sand behind them. All could see a few Bedouins not far away. None spoke. The shuffling continued. Another man was approaching by the simple method of rolling in the sand. His body was very small and light.

This the prisoners could not see. The man stayed behind them. Renny was the first to become conscious of the fact that a knife had slit the camel-skin thongs. His immense arms, fell inertly to his sides. All feeling had been squeezed from them. The engineer's big body seemed partly paralyzed.

Renny saw the others were being cut loose.

"Don't move yet, or speak," came a hoarse whisper.

Ham and the others had the same thought. The voice was American. It must be one of Runt Davis's pals. Perhaps he was freeing them for revenge. All believed Runt had told them the truth.

The four men sat motionless for the space of many minutes. They stifled groans that wanted to break out with the fiery renewal of circulation in their arms. The whisper came again.

"Scram for them hills above the tombs," it advised. "Make a wide circle an' dodge the black devils watchin' the Cartheris bunch."

The sand shuffled. Their liberator was gone.

Chapter XIX. THE STAKED WOMAN

"

IF they'd only left me so much as one of them grenades, I'd feel better," complained Monk.

"They stripped us, too," said Renny. "Somebody in that mess is plenty smart. They even got the stuff outta my hair."

Renny referred to the substance with which Doc Savage's men could write invisible messages on glass. These were of a chemical that fluoresced under a specially devised ray.

The four men were crouching in the jumbled rocks of the hills above the tombs. Voices of the Bedouins gobbled throughout the space near the black tents. Small parties rode through the darkness with flaring torches.

The cries indicated they had no hope of finding the escaped prisoners. A thousand men could have hidden for days in the miles of quake-tossed lava rock

Doc's adventurers were free, but they were weaponless.

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"And we can't last much longer without food and water," advised Ham.

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" exclaimed Johnny. "After the way you and Monk were putting away mutton chops this morning! Renny and I haven't had anything since yesterday."

"Anyway, we've got only one chance now," stated Ham. "Before sunrise, we'll have to join up with this Ranyon Cartheris."

The idea was instantly approved. The carrying out of it was not so easy. But after half an hour of crawling through the rocks above the tombs, the four came out above a wide, yawning hole.

A party of Bedouins rode close by with a single torch. From the hole came the sudden stuttering of a machine gun. A horse screamed with pain. Two riders fell to the ground without screaming. The torch was flung aside. The remaining Bedouins fled, leaving the bodies.

"Wait here," directed the waspish, agile Ham. "I'll try and reach Cartheris."

Ham's slender figure reached the lip of the rocks above the yawning entrance to the tombs. He could hear low-pitched voices below him. He called out softly. The voices hushed.

"We are four Americans, the companions of Doc Savage!" stated Ham.

"Look out!" exclaimed a Bedouin's voice below. "It's only a trick! I was afraid the Bedu would get up there!"

"Wait!" commanded another voice. "The letter I sent my sister may have brought results!"

Ham was quick-witted. His reply was based on the other's words.

"It was the letter," he called out. "It told of the murder mirage and how you lost your men in the desert. Lady Fotheran brought it to Doc. Your sister is here, Cartheris. She was captured by Hadith and his men along with Pat Savage, Doc's cousin."

"That is correct," said the voice below, but it was filled with sudden, deep apprehension. "You say my sister is here, in this hell hole?"

"She is," advised Ham. "We shall come down."

THE four adventurers exclaimed with amazement, when they were in the entrance to the tombs. Ranyon Cartheris was a lean young man, with a face worn thinner by fatigue and the hardships he had undergone.

And the explorer who had set out to find the strange treasure discovered by his brother had only six men with him. One was the ancient, skinny Mahal mentioned in the letter, who was useless as a fighting man.

"Holy cow!" ejaculated Renny. "How've you been holding those devils off?"

The little party of caravan survivors was sheltered behind a low rock wall. The machine guns, with stacked drums of ammo, were set in niches. But this was not all the defense.

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Machine guns would hardly be effective against the rolling globes of shadow death. Cartheris, by way of reply to Renny, produced a rubbery-looking helmet of the color of dull lead. He pulled it over his head. The mask fitted his face perfectly. The eyes were covered by a transparent substance resembling mica.

"We wouldn't have lasted long if we hadn't discovered a plentiful supply of these," said Cartheris. "And where do you suppose they were found?"

"They would be in the mummy cases of a hitherto unannounced ancient and vanished race," came the astounding announcement from Johnny. "They were placed there with the body garments that resist the murder glow. Perhaps this ancient race believed their dead would be confronted by a similar danger in some other world."

Ranyon Cartheris gave a long, low whistle of amazement.

"No need for you to announce yourself as William Harper Littlejohn," he said. "I've heard a great deal of you from my brother. But your deduction savors of black magic."

"Not at all," disclaimed Johnny. "Simple enough. This murder glow is some element unknown today. It has been lost. The suits of metallic substance and the masks are some alloy that will resist it. I suppose, of course, you have found the origin of the death globes?"

"No," said Cartheris. "We have been too busy saving our own skins to penetrate any farther into the diggings. Apparently a whole city, an advanced civilization, was buried by an earthquake. Much of the ruin is in mammoth caverns. But we've to stick here and hold off the Bedouins. We have water and food. As long as our ammunition lasts, we cannot be ousted."

EVEN then, events were being shaped to disprove the confidence of Cartheris. It was in the intense darkness immediately preceding the rising of the moon. A group of half a dozen Bedouins, commanded by Hadith, were moving on foot.

At a distance of a hundred yards from the tombs' entrance, they were invisible. Two of the Bedu gripped the arms of a slender woman. A gagging cloth had been bound tightly between the woman's teeth. She was propelled to within about one hundred yards of the tombs' entrance. There she was flung flat on the ground.

In the walled hole with Ranyon Cartheris, Doc's men heard a sudden thumping. It came from the opaqueness of the sandy barrens directly in front of the entrance.

"The black fiends are up to something," said Cartheris. "I don't like taking chance shots in the dark, but maybe a dose of lead from one of the machine guns will break up their trick, whatever it is."

Thump-thump-thump-thump!

The blows were muffled, but they were repeated rapidly. Ranyon Cartheris slowly lowered the snout of a machine gun. Though there was no visibility, it would be easy enough to locate the target by the continuing sound.

The Bedouins holding the woman were hammering pointed stakes deep into the sand. This was the cause of the thumping. When the first stake was in, the slender wrist of the woman was bound to it with thongs. Another stake was being placed at her feet.

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Cartheris was an expert marksman. His ears were good. With gripping fingers, he started the machine gun jolting. He was aiming at the sound. After the first short burst, he loosened his hand to listen.

Leaden slugs plowed up the sand. The bullets whipped grit and particles into the eyes of the Bedouins. A white mobster with a crooked mouth was with them. A slug bit into his ankle. They were hitting short and whining over the woman only inches away.

"Hey, you chump!" yelled the white mobster. "Cut off that chopper or you'll be makin' mincemeat outta your sister!"

Ranyon Cartheris gasped and swore. His hands fell nervelessly from the machine gun.

"My sister! You don't suppose those fiends would try anything like that!"

"From what I've seen of them," observed Ham, dryly, "they would gouge the eyes out of a baby. Lady Fotheran was captured with Pat Savage. The black devils have got an ace up their sleeve this time. I'll bet that's why they took the trouble to bring her here alive."

SWEAT of misery was pouring from Ranyon Cartheris's lean face.

"I'm going out there and get her!" he grated. "By the gods! They may get me, but I'll take some of them along!"

The ancient Mahal was mumbling a prayer to Allah. He spoke:

"There is a time for applying great foresight before acting. We are in the hands of Allah. Our enemies assail us with a temptation to which they hope we will yield. Wait."

Ranyon Cartheris shouted in the direction of the stake pounders.

"Curse all of you! We're coming with the guns! We'll burn you off the face of the earth, you dirty scum!"

The voice of the mobster floated back mockingly.

"Sit on it, brother! The first move you make, the boys with one of them shadow bump-off balls are all ready to do their stuff! Get the big idea? All you're supposed to do is keep your shirt on till daylight! Then you'll get your orders!"

"Howlin' calamities!" squealed Monk.

Cartheris shook as if gripped with the fever of the desert.

"Sathyra! Sathyra!" he called out. "Have they got you there?"

The gag must have been released for a few seconds.

"No! No!" came the strangled cry of a woman. "Don't come out!! They wouldn't—"

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The cry was abruptly choked off. The wailing note of the woman's voice made it impossible for Cartheris to identify his sister.

But he said to those with him, "What are we going to do?"

"When the question is propounded, that is the time when nothing should be done until a logical solution is evolved," spoke the wise voice of the shriveled Mahal. "I greatly fear, however, they have, as the *ferengi* puts it, an ace up their sleeve."

Thump—thump—thump—thump!

The last stake was driven. The woman's arms were stretched by the binding thongs around her wrists. Her slim body convulsed a few times, then she lay still.

Cartheris and Doc's men were drawn to the flaring of two bright torches. The brilliant light showed the woman on the ground. Her garb was American. It was a yellow dress with silver trimmings.

"It's my sister," groaned Cartheris, burying his face in his hands. "Why did I ever come on this crazy adventure? First Denton, then Sathyra. I shall go out."

"We have until daylight," suggested the practical Johnny. "Perhaps by then we can devise some plan."

"Blast it! Look!" exploded Monk. "There ain't much we can do!"

THE flaring torches had been for another purpose than merely that of showing the woman. Four Bedouin riders came up and dismounted. They wore the masks of dull lead. Two swung a wooden cradle to the ground. This was placed alongside the woman.

"The death ball!" exclaimed Renny. "I guess they mean business, all right!"

The horses were taken away. The four masked men remained. Then the torches were extinguished.

"Howlin' calamities!" squeaked Monk. "How about us all taking rifles when it comes daylight? We could make certain we were aiming at all of them! Then we could all shoot at once!"

Cartheris shook his head.

"In addition to resisting the murder glow, the suits and masks are absolutely bulletproof. We've been hit a dozen times without injury."

"I recall that," said Ham. "I broke one of my swords on the stuff. I thought it was some kind of armor."

The white men and the Arabs in the excavation became gloomily silent. There seemed nothing they could do.

There was much Johnny wanted to know about the underground city of this ancient civilization. But he refrained from questioning. Ranyon Cartheris was sunk in his anxious grief for the fate of his sister.

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SHORTLY before sunrise, in the tent of Hadith, Duzun Kado was awake. During the night, the fat Syrian had been a witness to the execution of Runt Davis. His oily face had remained emotionless.

Afterward, Whitey Jano had entered the place where he slept, accompanied by Kassan.

Duzun Kado then spoke after the custom of the country.

"My eyes have seen nothing," he announced, solemnly. He spoke on in Arabic.

"

Ana Bwajh el Beduw," he said, recalling to his hosts, "I am in the face of all Bedouins, I am a *dhaif* in the black tents. I am *dackhile* to you and all Bedouins."

Duzun Kado meant he was protected by sanctuary law, and that he was inviolate to them all.

As an emissary of the Seven Companies Syndicate, he thus established his position as a guest of the Bedouins. Even the wildest robbers of the hills fear to violate the law of the *dhaif*. Kassan appeared impressed.

"This violence has been unfortunate, Duzun Kado," he said. "Before the heat of the sun strikes, we would have you ride with us toward the city of Tasunan. In the dark hour, we will be ready."

Kassan himself, with a guard of Bedouins, guided the Syrian representative from the black tents an hour before the sun struck its light across the Valley of Tasus.

Chapter XX. OUT OF THE TOMBS

FIVE white men's faces were grimly set. Their jaws might have been carved from marble. And the bony countenances of six Arabs might equally have been struck from bronze.

Their hands gripped loaded rifles. The first strike of the sun from the east found them set and ready. But the hands holding the weapons were as powerless as if bound by rigid thongs.

The slender body of the woman lay stretched on the gritty sand less than one hundred yards away. In a solemn row beside her sat four figures as motionless as the rocks. Their faces were the hue of dead men.

Close to the woman's head was a cradlelike box.

This was all. Four masked Bedouins and the woman. No: Three Bedouins and one Whitey Jano mobster, the besieged men soon discovered.

For one masked man arose and advanced, walking slowly. He did not raise his hands as a signal for a truce. This was unnecessary. Perhaps his crooked mouth was twisted into a mocking grin under his mask.

The mobster knew he was safe from bullets. The death-glow armor protected him. The body of the woman lying on the sand was an additional safeguard.

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Cartheris groaned, "Anyway, my sister is alive. I saw her move."

The woman was writhing a little, seeking perhaps to relieve her numbed limbs and body. The rising sun immediately became a blazing fury. The throttling gag was causing the woman to gasp as she breathed.

"O. K., you mugs!" snarled the masked mobster, when he was only a few yards from the tomb stronghold. "Alla you are to slip outta them monkey suits an' come walkin' out with your hands up! Be good boys, an' nothin' happens, see? Start 'somethin', an' the dame'll be just another one of them pictures! You've got five minutes to make up your minds!"

Ranyon Cartheris was white-lipped. His lean face had the color of gray chalk.

"Listen," he said to the others. "I'm going out there! The rest of you stay here. She is my sister. I wouldn't want you to—"

"Aw, nuts!" growled Renny. "She might be my sister or somebody else's, but what's the difference?"

"Any argument is futile," stated Johnny. "What goes for one of us, goes for all. Those black devils wouldn't hesitate an instant to annihilate Lady Fotheran."

"Perhaps all are wrong," spoke the calm voice of Mahal. "If we should refuse to go, they would not destroy the woman, for she is their means of persuasion."

"A wise thought, indeed, but I wouldn't want to risk it," said Johnny. "By the way, Cartheris, why haven't they walked in on you before this with the masked suits?"

Cartheris motioned toward two boxes. They contained nearly a hundred high-explosive grenades.

"They tried it once yesterday," he stated. "The alloy suits couldn't save them from that stuff. But we can't use that now."

"Hey!" yelled the mobster. "I'm waitin'! You've got two more minutes!"

Renny let out a bull-like roar. The big engineer was on top of the rocks. He was holding a pair of binoculars belonging to Cartheris.

"Thunderation!" he bellowed. "She isn't Lady Fotheran! That's Pat—Pat Savage! They'd murder her and they've still got Lady Fotheran! Come on! I'm smashin' those devils, armor or no armor!"

RENNY was on his way before he quit shouting. Monk was scrambling after him!

"Alla you come on out!" yelled the mobster in the mask. "Don't try no tricks! Behave yourself, an' this All-Wise guy gives the word nobody won't be hurt!"

"That rather changes the idea of who should go," stated Johnny, starting to follow Renny and Monk. "It's Doc's cousin. Your sister apparently is safe in the tents."

"It changes nothing," declared Cartheris. "Mahal, all of us must go."

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"You have spoken truth," assented the ancient Bedouin. "It is the will of Allah!"

Cartheris and the Bedouins with him followed Doc's men into the open. Renny and Monk disregarded the masked mobster and ran toward the staked woman on the sand. All coming from the entrance to the tombs were unarmed. Cartheris and his Arabs held up their hands as they ran.

The three masked Bedouins beside the woman arose. One held the cradlelike box, as if prepared to empty the death globe beside the head of Pat Savage.

Cartheris preceded his Arabs. The tribesmen were delayed in their movement by the infirmities of the aged Mahal. Suddenly, from the rocks of the hill came a ringing shout. The tall figure of Hadith appeared. His jeweled scimitar flashed in the morning sunlight.

"

Thishahum, bism er rassoul!" his cry echoed along the hill.

Another shout came in Arabic. It meant, "Kill the dogs of the unfaithful!"

A dozen rifles belched flame and smoke from among the rocks.

The ancient, loyal Mahal was the first to go down. He fell on his face. His last cry to Allah was a faint wail. The other tribesmen faltered in their stride.

One fell; then another. All became huddled lumps. Their white *abbas* were reddening with blood.

No bullets touched any of the white men.

Ranyon Cartheris turned, gripping futile fists over his head.

"Curse all of you!" he screamed, as if he were temporarily insane. "Kill me, too! Do you hear? Shoot! Well, why don't you shoot?"

Monk squealed his rage. Renny thundered oaths at Hadith's blood-thirsty Bedouins. For the minute, all expected to be shot down.

"That's all!" snarled the masked mobster. "I knowed them fellas was goin' to get it! The All-Wise guy ain't got no use for the black ones that ain't on the up an' up! Now everybody just sit tight an' everything's goin' to be all right!"

RENNY and Monk had hurled themselves forward. Each a giant in strength in his own way, they tore the stakes binding Pat from the sand. Hadith's Bedouins came rushing down the hill. Hadith was shouting orders.

Renny tore the gag from Pat's mouth. Her flaky gold eyes, like those of Doc Savage, tried to smile at him. But Pat's lips were quivering. It wasn't the first time Pat had been close to death. But being left as a permanent shadow on the desert was a possibility that had shaken her nerve.

Hadith's Arabs ringed the white men with rifle muzzles. When Pat was on her feet, supported by Renny and the apish Monk, none made any resistance. The inevitable camel-skin thongs drew their arms behind them.

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Hadith snapped out an order. The little procession moved back in the direction of the tombs. Pat Savage was taken along.

The Bedouins paused only to seize the rifles and machine guns and pass them out to others who had come up. Then the prisoners were led down a long, sloping stone pathway.

The cold, dank odor of death was wafted from within the earth under the rocky hills.

As they went, Johnny took one last swift glance to try and fix their position. The geologist noted they were starting downward in a line with the peculiar conformation of the date palm trees.

Hadith jabbered to his men. They were jubilant. The underground passageway had been cleared for the attack on Tasunan.

THE mute black slave of Duzun Kado hovered like a shadow at his master's side. His ears might have been stopped to all sound and his voice stilled, but his queerly opaque black eyes seemed to miss nothing. Duzun Kado halted the others when they were a mile or more underground.

Whitey Jano and Kassan, with a guard of a dozen Bedouins trailing them, had accompanied them into the bowels of the earth. After his view of the city of Tasunan, the Syrian representative of the Seven Companies Syndicate was to have a view of the treasure. A treasure for which he had declared the Seven Companies Syndicate was willing eventually to pay a hundred millions for a one-third interest.

After the manner of his kind, Duzun Kado spoke elaborately.

"We have put to the test the small specimen we received," he stated. "Though it is no more than two grams, its power was sufficient to make the radioactivity of radium seem of little strength. And our report declares more than five hundred pounds actually are in existence."

"Perhaps it is more, and it might be a little less," replied Kassan. "These ancient Tasunites, as we have designated them, have scattered some of it. Apparently, many of the race remained alive after the city was buried and became a partly subterranean civilization. They then employed it to defend themselves from their enemies."

"In what manner might that have been accomplished?" inquired the Syrian, rubbing his fat hands together with pleasure.

"The walls of this passage, for example, are capable of striking the shadow death whenever those who know the secret choose to release this power," said Kassan. "Where we are now passing, we could cease to exist, were certain levers to be operated in the central chamber to which we are proceeding."

"This is indeed of the greatest interest," intoned the Syrian. "And is there now any person in the central chamber?"

A benevolent smirk came to Whitey Jano's round mouth. As usual, his jaws crunched popcorn. Between crunches, he spoke.

"Even now, the levers of the death shadow are prepared," he said, slowly. "But our worthy guest need have no fear. This is but to strike in the ancient death chamber of the Tasunans. The place of their executions. It is

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filled with shadows of generations. And we, too, must at times dispose of our enemies."

The fat Syrian rubbed his hands appreciatively. Evidence he had the cruel, cunning soul of an Oriental seemed positive. But he spoke at once of other things.

"There exist many passages on different levels," he said. "Is there purpose in this, or am I presuming too much?"

"Hell, no!" smiled Whitey Jano, lapsing for once into straight Americanese. Then he explained more, at length, in Arabic.

"

WE are in the passage of the shadow death and at its end are the execution chamber, the storage chamber and the place from which the defense shadow death of the walls is operated. The tunnel we have passed leads downward. At a hundred feet below this one, it traverses under the gardens. Its exit is in the central square of the modern city of Tasunan. There are many other passages. Some reach remaining buildings of the ancient city."

Torches of the Bedouins lighted their way. These bathed the walls of chiseled stone in rippling yellow. Wooden doors appeared here and there. Whitey Jano pulled open one of these.

Odor of frankincense and myrrh, of other spices, permeated the space. A torch was thrust in. Long tiers of carven mummy cases occupied shelves along the walls. The mummy cases were oversized. The wood was of cedar, perhaps thousands of years old.

Duzun Kado's mute slave shrank back. His seeming dumbness did not include lack of superstition, apparently. He pressed suddenly to his master's side. Peculiar cluckings came from his quivering lips.

"The mummy cases are older, infinitely, and of a more intricate design than those of the earliest Egyptians," commented Duzun Kado. "Let us proceed. I would waste no further time. Let us view the chamber of the treasure. Already, we have some understanding of this ancient element."

"The Seven Companies Syndicate has great wisdom," suggested Kassan. "The tests have been made."

"Truly," spoke Duzun Kado. "For some time it has been known that minute quantities of the most powerful radioactive substance will produce shadow photographs of objects on sensitized plates. This has been determined with radium. Your element, which we may term 'tasunite,' has been assembled in comparatively vast quantities."

Kassan nodded agreement.

"The Seven Companies Syndicate then, knows the reputed powers of the ancestors of Hadith?"

"In our poor way, we have experimented," declared Duzun Kado. "This tasunite is of a purity greater than the radium of pitch-blende or uranite. Obviously, it will instantly destroy vegetable and animal matter. Its reflecting exposure sensitizes the earth or near-by objects for considerable area. This acts like photographic plates. So much for the legendary aspect of this fabulous force. But the Seven Companies Syndicate has determined it is of a value greater than radium, of which the world has less than six pounds in possession of many people."

Kassan's shrewd black eyes studied the fat Syrian. Whitey Jano munched his crackling popcorn. Perhaps some of this was beyond his cruder wisdom.

They stood at a turn in the ancient passage. The fat Syrian observed the set of the stone walls. His plump hand rubbed along a crack. It came away covered with oozing dampness. Duzun Kado studied this unobtrusively. Apparently, they were now directly above the tunnel leading under the besieged city of Tasunan.

Chapter XXI. BURIED DEATH GLOW

DUZUN KADO, the fat Syrian, paused before the low wooden door indicated by Whitey Jano. This was set in one wall of a wide turning of the passage. Whitey tossed a grain of popcorn. The light of the torches was flickering. He missed catching it. Popping another directly into his mouth, he crunched.

"We will proceed to the storage chamber of the tasunite," suggested Whitey. "If the representative of the Seven Companies Syndicate is satisfied, then audience will be granted with the All-Wise One."

The fat Syrian did not appear to be listening. He appeared resting momentarily. His breath seemed to wheeze a little, as if from the effort of propelling his corpulent frame along the passage. The Bedouins with the torches were grouped a short distance away.

One ear of Duzun Kado was close to the wooden doors. None of the others could hear anything but Whitey's benevolent tones and the low mutter of the Bedouins conversing.

From nowhere in particular came a rare trilling which echoed through the musty passageway. Its little echoes were shivers of tuneful, yet tuneless, melody. This might have been an escapement of age-old air from some death crypt. There was instant commotion among the Bedouins.

The Arabs were a superstitious lot. This uncanny sound was inexplicable. The death glow they now knew and understood. The Bedouins rustled around. The flares of their torches dipped. Shadows became uncertain.

For the first time, Whitey Jano's placid countenance lost its benevolent aspect. His jaws ceased to crunch popcorn.

"Doc Savage! *Wellah! Wellah!*"

Both Whitey and Kassan whipped around. They had been staring at the fat Syrian. His greasy, somewhat repulsive face was emotionless.

The loose sleeve of the Syrian fluttered. With the swiftness of a snake striking, the huge, pudgy fists flew upward. Kassan was closest. His light body lifted and slammed clear across the passage into the wall.

Whitey Jano wasn't built for quick movement. He turned as quickly as possible.

"You—" he got out and no more.

The great fist of Duzun Kado struck again. Its speed was like a light flashing. Knuckles were buried in Whitey Jano's stomach. From his gaping mouth spewed crunched popcorn, along with escaping breath from

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his lungs. He crashed down upon Kassan.

"

Wellah! Wellah!" rolled the cry of the Bedouins through the ancient passage.

They understood little of this. Only they saw clearly that the fat Syrian no longer was *dackhile*. As an inviolate guest he had assailed his hosts. Torches flaring, the Bedouins rolled in a wave of rage upon Duzun Kado.

"

GET the door open, Long Tom," spoke the calm voice of the fat Syrian.

"O. K., Doc," replied the black, mute slave, whipping a sharp tool equipped with a generator box from the sleeve of his *gumbaz*.

Doc Savage shed the *abba* he had been wearing as a Syrian. The cloak hampered his movements. The figure of the man of bronze was gigantic. It seemed to fill the passage. The Bedouins hesitated only a few seconds.

"

Bismillah el rahman!" yelled one.

This invoking the name of Allah sent courage into their veins. A rifle crashed. Its explosion confined in the passage was shattering to eardrums. Another, then another gun blasted. The riflemen knew they could not have missed Doc Savage.

But instead of pitching to the floor, he advanced upon the Bedouins. They paused uncertainly. Long knives flashed. One whizzed past Doc's eyes. Had his head not jerked with incredible speed, the blade would have split his forehead.

Doc's hands made a little flicking movement.

"Don't breathe, Long Tom," he advised. "Hold it longer than usual. There is little air."

The foremost Bedouins halted in their stride. Their knives made a clinking on the stone floor. All but one huge Arab smacked to their knees, much in the attitude of prayer. But they were not blessing the name of Allah now. They were dropping to sleep in grotesque postures.

The one Bedouin came on with black eyes glittering. He understood English. He had not breathed. Little glasslike capsules had tinkled on the stone floor. The passageway was flooded with the anaesthetic gas devised by Monk at Doc's direction.

Doc did not move until the Bedouin leaped and struck with his knife. The bronze man permitted the blade to jam into his breast.

"

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Aiee!" squawked the Bedouin.

His arm was almost cracked. It was as if he had tried to drive steel into stone. Doc's bulletproof undergarment of metallic chain mesh bounced the knife from his hand.

As he squawked, the Bedouin breathed. He collapsed with an Asiatic curse he could not complete.

Doc whipped around. With the flame from the generator box, Long Tom had pierced the lock of the death chamber door. Doc's corded hands gripped the edge. The lock fell apart.

Long Tom fanned a ray from his generator flashlight. From the floor came a series of clucking groans. It was these groans Doc had heard through the wooden door when the party had stopped on the outside passage. Minute sounds though they were, Doc's acute sense of hearing had picked them out.

Doc handed a keen knife to Long Tom. In his own hands he had that which the Bedouin had dropped.

From the wall came a scraping sound of wood on stone.

"Quickly, Long Tom," advised Doc.

Their knives sheared through camel-hide thongs. Pat Savage was the first lifted to her feet. She tore the gag from her mouth.

"I knew all the time nothing could happen," she gasped out.

"It will happen if you don't get outside," stated Doc, cutting the thongs off Renny. "Get out and run along the passage."

The scraping of wood on stone continued with a jerking noise as if the murder mechanism so long in disuse had stuck. They had been prisoners in a room in which the murder shadow could operate.

"Ow-ee!" squealed Monk. "Just let me get my hands on the black devils that give me the scare of my life!"

"Don't talk," advised Doc. "Run!"

MONK loped toward the door. Within ten seconds, all had fled into the passage. Doc crouched by the door of the death chamber. He guessed the control chamber of the shadow glow was just beyond that.

From one wall flickered a thread of greenish light. Between his thumb and finger Doc held a pellet no larger than a small marble. His thumb nail pushed a lever. He tossed the pellet into the death chamber, well toward the opposite wall. The pellet contained a high explosive of terrific power perfected by Doc.

Slamming the door, the bronze giant leaped away after his companions. All were many yards away when the underground passages rocked with a terrific explosion. The door of the death chamber behind them parted from its fastenings and smacked into the opposite wall.

Rocks shattered and crashed. A greenish glow sprang up, but it seemed to be shredded into vanishing points of light. The air tingled electrically.

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"Keep going toward the first side tunnel," advised Doc.

Before the splintering walls had ceased falling, the man of bronze was back near the door of the death chamber. He saw the Bedouins sleeping on the floor.

Whitey Jano and Kassan had miraculously escaped the falling walls. The cavern of the death chamber was filled with fallen rock. The instruments of the murderer glow were completely buried. The control chamber was blocked behind hundreds of tons of rocks.

The passage leading toward the storage chamber of the tasunite was cut off by a jumbled mass.

"We have temporarily robbed Hadith and the individual they call the All-Wise One of their greatest power," stated Doc Savage, joining his companions as they reached the turning of a passageway.

"Now what do we do, Doc?" questioned Pat Savage, trying to get some of the dirt off her face with the assistance of Long Tom's flashlight.

"Dag-gone it!" piped Monk. "Something will turn up! Ever since they planted that woman's picture in the window there's been plenty doin' without thinkin' about it!"

Ranyon Cartheris showed little elation at having been rescued. The massacre of the faithful old Mahal and the remnant of his expedition apparently had sapped nearly all his interest in life.

"I'd thought—well, I'd hoped perhaps Denton might somehow be alive," he said sadly. "If he was, then he was somewhere inside that explosion."

The black mouth of a side tunnel loomed before them. Long Tom's flash showed this slanted downward.

"Perhaps this is the passageway leading under the city of Tasunan!" exclaimed Johnny.

"It would seem so," assented Doc. "And this is perhaps our only chance of escaping Hadith's Bedouins outside."

Footsteps clumped in the tunnel darkness. Long Tom switched off his light. Doc swept the others back. He opened a door. The spiced odor of ancient grave clothes assailed their nostrils.

A cadaverous form came slowly into the upper passage. The man was alone. He paused uncertainly.

Doc stood in the door. From his hand played a pencil beam. It struck upon a face covered with matted beard and terribly emaciated.

"Denton! Denton!" screamed Ranyon Cartheris, hoarsely.

THE younger brother clasped his arms around the mass of filthy rags enwrapping the attenuated skeleton. The apparition mumbled. His teeth had been knocked out. His fingers clawed at his brother's shoulders.

Tears furrowed the dirt on Denton Cartheris's cheeks.

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"Months I've been there—months, you hear? Sealed—sealed in a tomb—earthquake just broke down the wall—you've come—everything—everything's all right—the shadows—shadows!"

The mumbling arose to a scream. The long-imprisoned explorer collapsed. It seemed he was freed from his tomb to die in his brother's arms.

But the great surgical skill of Doc Savage saved him. The bronze giant was perhaps the world's greatest surgeon and physician, along with his other achievements. He quickly drew emergency tubes from his clothing.

A combination stimulant, stronger than employed in most hospitals, flowed into the explorer's veins. Swift convulsions ran through the emaciated body. Then Denton Cartheris breathed regularly, more easily. He was able quickly to get to his feet.

The crypt of the huge mummy cases consisted of many passages. Monk pulled off the carved lid of a boatlike ancient coffin. He replaced it quickly.

"Lookin' at that fella makes me feel like I'd been dead a long time myself an' they forgot to bury me," said Monk in an awed voice.

"Yeah," drawled Ham. "It was an oversight forgetting that."

"Blast you!" squealed Monk. "In a minute they'll be puttin' you in a half a dozen of them coffins, 'cause you're goin' to be in that many pieces or more!"

Doc Savage had become a statue beside the passage door. His extraordinary auditory sense could hear distinctly where only whispers came to the others.

Doc held up one hand as warning. All became silent, tense. Then they heard it. Feet moved, as if a barefooted army was marching. Came the voice of Hadith, the Nubian. Doc's companions and Denton Cartheris could understand the Arabic perfectly.

"You have betrayed us, Jano!" was Hadith's accusation. "We had expected your trickery. Where is this Duzun Kado? You've buried the treasure to keep it from us. The chamber of control has been destroyed!"

Whitey Jano was composed. Clearly came the crunching of his jaws. His tone was gently benevolent, unexcited.

"Don't begin making more mistakes, Hadith," he said, calmly. "You failed to destroy this Doc Savage; now he has—"

A MUFFLED voice interrupted. Identification of the speaker was impossible for the prisoners in the mummy crypt, except for Doc Savage. A knowing smile twitched the corners of the bronze man's mouth. This seemed ludicrous, seeing he still was presenting the fat, oily face of the Syrian.

Said this muffled voice, "You cannot get away with it, Jano. I have known all the time you were prepared to seize the treasure. Our compact is broken. Now I leave you to Hadith. It is 'yes,' Hadith!"

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Only the voices, the sounds told what was happening. For the first time, the tone of Whitey Jano lost its benevolent coolness.

"No! You don't know what you're saying! I tell you we've been tricked! Will you listen?"

"There is no more to be said." The muffled voice again. "The All-Wise One now sees and understands. The All-Wise One has spoken! It has been agreed!"

"No! No! The All-Wise One wouldn't—couldn't—no! Hadith! Allah, the Merciful! No!"

Had the soul of Runt Davis been hovering about, its torture must have been appeased at that strangling scream. The head of the decapitated mobster must have laughed in unholy glee.

Whitey Jano spoke no more. To Doc's ears came the chilling *swish* of Hadith's jeweled scimitar. Two thumps sounded. The lesser one must have been a head striking the floor of the passage. Whitey Jano's body dropped after his head.

"That is finished," pronounced the muffled voice, "as the All-Wise One desires. You will now proceed to search out Doc Savage and those with him. Temporarily, we have no more of the shadow glow available, but this bronze man and the others must be disposed of quickly."

"It shall be as the All-Wise One desires," came Hadith's voice.

THE barefooted army scuffled away. None had approached the door of the mummy crypts. Doc had a quick foreboding of disaster in that simple fact. Why had they not attempted to enter this door?

The man of bronze concealed his quick belief.

"Whitey Jano has been removed," Doc stated. "I believe that was intended from the beginning, before he left New York. Hadith, the Nubian, will follow when this All-Wise One has finished with him."

"Thunderation!" growled Renny. "The double double-crossers! Jano framin' to bump off his own mobsters! The big chief plannin' to bump off him an' that Nubian devil!"

"Those who have never had it soon become drunk with power and blood," observed the bronze man.

Doc was moving in a gliding circle. He counted a dozen passages filled with the oversize mummy cases. From somewhere came the whisper of soft-sandaled feet. These made confusing echoes. The others heard them not at all.

"All of you hide yourselves," counseled Doc. "Into the empty mummy cases, as fast as you can find them."

"Howlin' calamities!" complained Monk. "Me get in one of them coffins?"

"Sure!" hissed Ham. "The coffin won't know the difference!"

Doc's acute hearing and sense of creeping enemies told him they were being surrounded. The others were making a ghastly clattering as they pulled lids from the mummy cases. Doc issued a quick order. Long Tom flicked off his flashlight. Every one fumbled in darkness.

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"Oh!" gasped Pat Savage.

Johnny, in a low voice, interpreted the reason for Pat's exclamation.

"Never mind, Pat. The shriveled remnant of prehistoric civilization animating your sense of repulsion is irretrievably inanimate."

Johnny was not quite himself, or he never would have employed two such words as "animating" and "inanimate" in the same sentence.

From Pat Savage came no reply. She had not exclaimed, as Johnny had supposed, at the touch of a long-dead face. A lean hand had whipped out of the darkness where she stood. It clamped over her mouth. A thumb found a great nerve at the base of her brain.

The beautiful cousin of Doc was lifted into one of the crypt's mysterious passages. She had been temporarily paralyzed.

Pat was being abducted again. It seemed to have become somewhat of a habit with Pat.

THE others did not immediately know it. Doc had sprung to one side, crouching behind a mummy case. His movement was actuated by a furtive creeping which multiplied all around the little band.

The space of the mummy crypt flared into light. This was accomplished by the simultaneous touching off of a dozen oiled torches in a ring around them.

Instantly came the muffled voice Doc had heard in the outside passage.

"You will make no move or all will die at once! You cannot escape this time!"

Doc had identified the voice. None of the others had. But Doc had long known the owner of this voice would be at least partly in command.

None had yet succeeded in hiding in empty mummy cases. Renny bellowed a confused invective. The big engineer was trapped in the act of lifting a dried mummy from its ancient coffin. He had intended to try squeezing his huge body into the space.

Doc remained hidden for only a few seconds. The torch flares glinted on two-score rifle barrels. The menacing muzzles stuck out from many passages. There had been another door into the burial crypts. Perhaps several doors.

"Why, I'll push them guns down their black throats!" yelled Monk. "I'll—"

"Do as commanded," came the quiet voice of Doc. "The All-Wise One is speaking the truth, for the present."

The hidden voice laughed croakingly.

"For the present! By your own destruction of access to the shadow glow, you have become elected to the flowing river!"

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The rifles were a threat Doc could not ignore. He might have chanced a fight for himself, but none of the others now possessed weapons or bulletproof garb.

The fingers of the bronze man touched one of his high explosive grenades. He did not act. The high-powered blast could only bring down the rocks upon them, perhaps seal them in the tombs.

The man of bronze stepped from concealment. Use of the anaesthetic capsules was blocked by the widely scattered positions of the Bedouins. Scores could be seen far along many passages.

Renny roared protest. Monk barked wild oaths, his trailing hands twitching. But all were swiftly surrounded. The tall Hadith, scimitar flashing, issued commands.

Doc and Long Tom were quickly stripped of every weapon and device. Doc's partly bald wig, that of the Syrian makeup, was pulled from his head. This left his smooth, bronze hair shining in the light of the torches.

Leathery thongs of camelskin were whipped around the arms of all. Hadith's black face wore a grin of triumphant hate. Thus Doc Savage could no longer escape the will of Allah, as interpreted by the giant Nubian.

THE prisoners were pushed into the outer passage. Monk and Ham were in the rear. Rifles prodded every one. Ham spoke in the language of the ancient Mayan race. The communication was to Doc. The adventurers used this tongue when they did not wish to be understood by others.

"Pat is not with us," was Ham's message. "Maybe she got herself hidden in one of the mummy cases?"

"She did not succeed in hiding," was Doc's surprising reply. "She was taken away."

The jeweled scimitar of Hadith whirled menacingly over Ham's head. Its great blade swished past his angular nose. Though the lawyer was amazed at Doc's words, he deemed it wise to make no answer.

Bedouin riflemen jostled in the passageway behind their prisoners. The strange procession moved into a new tunnel. It slanted upward. Doc's face got the feel of dampness in the air, as if a little wind was blowing across water.

Behind the eight captives—Doc and his men, and the Cartheris brothers—came Bedouins bearing strange burdens. These were not heavy, but they were of clumsy pattern. Cedar is the lightest of woods. The mummy cases were of cedar.

The Arabs were bringing eight oversize mummy cases. The tunnel angled more sharply upward and came finally to steps carved in stone. Rushing water gurgled.

The muffled, hidden voice spoke from behind the Bedouins.

"Place all in the ancient coffins!"

Doc and the others were seized by many hands.

Chapter XXII. FLEET OF DEATH

DOC SAVAGE worked at the camel-hide thongs binding his giant arms behind him. His disguise as the fat Syrian was an advantage. Chunks of what seemed like flesh peeled from his wrists and hands. A strand of the thongs loosened.

"Dang it!" howled the voice of Monk close by. "They stick us in coffins before we're dead, an' they don't even take the trouble to bury us!"

It was a wonderful opening for Ham. The lawyer ignored it. His own thoughts were far from pleasant. The darkness was so opaque it seemed smothering him.

"Doc," came the subdued voice of Renny, "have you got any idea where we're headed for?"

The bronze man's hands were free.

"That remains to be seen," he replied. "We have come much more than a mile swiftly. Thus far, the underground river has been confined in an aqueduct. Presently, it may scatter in the sands."

"Blast 'em, I knew it!" moaned Monk. "When it scatters, where do we go?"

None of the seven other men had an answer to that one. Doc himself was flexing the arms that had been bound. Though he could outswim the best swimmers, it was manifestly impossible for any one to make headway for a mile of distance against the rapidly flowing underground river.

And if he had attempted it, the seven other men could only have continued on their gruesome voyage with death waiting at the end. Doc was analyzing their situation.

The fleet of oversize mummy cases bobbed along on the smooth-flowing water. Each carried a man. The cedar of the ancient coffins was light. It would float, as long as space remained above the water.

But how long would there be space? At any minute, the occupants of the floating mummy cases expected their death boat to bump into some overhead obstruction. All, including Doc, believed the river would suck the fleet of ancient, carved cedar into a tunnel without air.

The man of bronze had been stripped even of his bulletproof garments. Not a single device remained on his body. Yet he did not lose hope. If he had been alone, he would have attempted fighting his way back. Now, he could not abandon the others to their fate. By careful maneuvering, he reached each coffin in turn and released his men's bonds.

Suddenly, a chill struck through the one-man crews of those strange bobbing boats. The mummy cases had remained well bunched. All at the same time touched a low roof. The arched stone had slanted sharply downward. The mummy cases bumped again. Ham's hand went up and touched a slimy surface worn smooth by centuries of water flow.

"Monk," he called out, "I guess maybe you can't help your looks. I don't hold anything against you for the things you've said about me."

"Aw nuts!" grunted Monk. "I guess maybe you can't help wantin' to dress up like a Park Avenue Easter parade. Guess if I had your figure, I'd wear clothes, too."

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With these slight concessions, the pair of verbal feudists proved they didn't have very optimistic hopes for the future. Under their dueling insults, they had the highest opinions of each other.

Doc Savage said nothing. His finger tips touched the roof of the river. It was descending by inches. The edges of the cedar mummy cases touched now and then. Presently, they were sliding steadily along, being forced slowly deeper. Water seeped through cracks and soaked the men.

"There's something I must tell you before it's too late," came the weak voice of Denton Cartheris. "I have known all the time that the All-Wise One was—"

HIS communication gurgled to nothing. The explorer's throat had been choked by inflowing water. Renny gasped and his big body thrashed as if his huge legs would split the death boat asunder.

The mummy case containing Doc Savage was ahead of the others.

The man of bronze noted a sudden slowing in the speed of the river. His hands gripped the edges of the wooden case. Rock rasped along his fingers. He estimated they must have floated at least two miles through the subterranean passage. There could be no going back, even if opportunity were given.

The underground stream was coming to its terminus. This might be a spreading of the water deep down, losing itself in the rocks and sands of the desert. Or—

"Howlin' calamities!" squealed Monk. "We're comin' up!"

Eight weighted mummy cases bobbed free of the tunnel. All were still floating. They seemed to have entered a broad underground pond. The mummy cases moved slowly, as if caught in a great whirlpool. Doc Savage felt the rocks at the sides. The water gurgled.

It was being sucked away into a small aperture between the rocks. The man of bronze hurriedly propelled the mummy case along. He came to another opening. These were only inches in width. There were many of them.

Doc spoke. His voice echoed eerily. The roof of the river here was a vast domelike vault.

"We seem to have arrived," he stated.

"Holy cow!" bellowed Renny. "You mean we aren't to be drowned? We're trapped down here?"

Doc had made a complete round of their prison. The underground pond was perhaps two hundred yards in diameter.

"Blast it!" rapped Monk. "We'd better have been drowned!"

"Always complaining," said Ham. "There isn't any pleasing the ape family."

The feud was on again. They had escaped death temporarily.

Suddenly, the rocky vault vibrated strangely. The slowly moving pond of the death trap danced in little waves.

"An' now it's an earthquake," groaned Renny.

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"No," stated Doc. "The attack on Tasunan has begun. That was an underground explosion. It sounded almost directly beneath us."

A second muffled blast reverberated through the subterranean vault.

"Do you think then, this is all an artificial aqueduct, Doc?" inquired Johnny.

He received no reply. An empty mummy case bumped against his own. This was the one that had been occupied by Doc.

DOC SAVAGE was swimming under water. In utter darkness he had retained an uncanny sense of the direction by which their fleet had entered the wide pond. The hands of the bronze man were groping along the seamed stones of the bottom.

In about two minutes he emerged. Swimming rapidly to the others, Doc Savage spoke quickly.

"Out of the mummy cases and swim," he directed. "Push the cases with you and follow my voice. See that Denton Cartheris is brought along. He is unable to help himself."

"What's it all about?" said Renny.

The man of bronze said nothing. He was fumbling with his bronze hair, which seemed waterproof.

Another deep explosion jarred the domed rocks. The blast might have been some distance away, but the sound indicated it was far under the ground.

The eight mummy cases were bunched in one spot. Again Doc had dived deeply. His hands slid along the bottom. Traveling with the slow whirlpool of the pond, the man of bronze reached the side where the inflow was strong.

Absorbing lungfuls of air, he went down again. Now he did a strange thing. One ear was laid on the bottom stones. Doc remained in that position for several seconds.

When he came to the surface, the bronze man called out.

"Is every one with the mummy cases?"

"Yes, we're all here," came the voice of Ham. "And we're all standing up. It's only a few feet deep over here."

"That is good," advised Doc. "Don't any one put his head under water. Stand where you are."

Doc was treading water. His hands went to his head. It seemed he had removed his bronze scalp. This was the bulletproof skullcap he often wore.

From four cavities inside the cap, Doc removed flat, metallic objects. Each of these was equipped with a small lever. Doc replaced the metal cap. Again he dived deeply.

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Swimming against the current, the man of bronze passed into the inflowing stream. He progressed several yards. He carefully set a small lever on one of the flat metallic objects. The current carried him back into the pond.

From about the middle of the pond, Doc swiftly moved levers on the remaining three flat objects. He hurled them together in the direction of the river's entry. Then he dived, swimming rapidly away.

BEDLAM broke loose. Combined blasts threatened to shatter eardrums. Doc and the others were swept by a huge wave. They were dashed into the rocky wall. The roof of the underground vault seemed to collapse on the farther side.

The next succeeding wave was smaller.

Suddenly the water was sucking away. The depths decreased. A booming hollow sound came from the subterranean tunnel. In a few minutes, the pond was draining.

Doc led the way over slippery rocks. He came to a gaping aperture in the floor. Some distance away, water boomed downward. The bottom of the ancient aqueduct had been blown out. On the side where Doc and his companions stood, the floor was dry.

The subterranean river of Tasunan was pouring like a Niagara through the blasted bottom. Tons of water smashed down into a lower tunnel.

From a distance suddenly came cries of men. Faint voices were calling upon Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. One voice screamed high. This was not in Arabic. The lower tunnel was filling with a rushing flood.

The underground stream was smashing through the passage leading beneath the city of Tasunan. The distant screaming voices died out.

All of the deeper tunnel was flooded to its roof.

The water started surging back. In it floated the bodies of some Bedouins.

"Come!" directed Doc. "Over this way."

His amazed companions followed. Denton Cartheris came slowly, supported by his brother. The explosions of Doc's powerful grenades had opened a gap in the side wall of the huge vault of the pond.

They emerged into the passage at the end of which the death chamber had been wrecked. Along here, Doc had previously determined the position of the subterranean aqueduct. He had felt the moisture oozing through the ancient stone.

His sense of direction and the soundings had enabled him to discover that the tunnel to Tasunan had been constructed under the river. Perhaps the Tasunans themselves had first had the idea of thus flooding their defenses.

As Doc led his men to the yawning entrance, a few Bedouins left outside were fleeing toward the pass in the hills. The black tents stood out starkly.

The man of bronze led the way toward one of the smaller black tents.

"Stay back!" he commanded the others.

Chapter XXIII. THE ALL-WISE ONE

DOC SAVAGE gazed only a few seconds at the body in the black tent. He went in and covered the figure with a beautifully colored shawl. The head had been almost severed from the body.

"Blast it!" Monk was squawking. "I'm goin' back! Pat's somewhere in them tombs! Maybe they didn't take her along!"

"Me, too!" agreed Renny. "We've got to find her!"

The fleeing Bedouins were disappearing into the pass.

"It will not be difficult to find Pat," smiled Doc Savage. "She always manages to come through. This time seems no exception."

The man of bronze was facing toward the jumbled rocks above the entrance to the tomb. Two figures came from among the rocks. One was slender with a white face.

The other figure had a dark-skinned countenance. The man wore the usual *kafieh*, *gumbaz* and *abba* of the Arabian. His white teeth were showing in a smile. Across his breast was a varicolored ribbon, as of some honorary degree.

"Why, it's Kassan!" exclaimed the thin voice of Denton Cartheris. "My good friend Kassan, of the Tasunans!"

Monk had sprung forward. He hadn't heard the explorer's words.

"At last I've gotcha!" yelled Monk. "I'm goin' to rend you into small pieces an' throw the pieces out for the crows to pick up!"

"Why, Monk!" exclaimed Pat Savage. "I'm surprised at you! Mr. Kassan's been about the only fun I've had. He's kidnaped me three times. Not many girls have been so honored."

Pat's dress in which she had been staked to the desert, was sadly bedraggled. Her face was very, very dirty.

"Look, Doc," she said, jauntily, "what I've brought back with me. Meet Mr. Kassan who, I understand, is Tasunan's one and only G-Man, if that's what you'd call it."

"Of that, I have been informed for some time," smiled Doc. "I have to apologize for our little difficulty in the tombs, Mr. Kassan. But it was necessary to impress Whitey Jano and the Bedouins. They would have considered it queer if I had not struck you."

"The pleasure was all mine, I assure you," said Mr. Kassan in perfect English. "But you certainly pack a tremendous what you would call a 'wallop'."

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"Yes, Mr. Kassan grabbed me the last time to keep me from falling into the hands of Hadith," said Pat Savage. "The first time, in Manhattan, he was kind of rough. I'm glad you hit him once anyway, Doc."

Mr. Kassan bowed low.

"The lovely cousin of Doc Savage always seems to be around when I'm in a what you call a 'kidnaping mood,'" he smiled. His face hardened then. "And Hadith and the white man perished in the underground passage," he added. "We were close by, but came out of another entrance I know."

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated!" exclaimed Johnny. "And I had proved by indisputable logic you could be no other than the All-Wise One himself! Before that, I was getting suspicious of this Carson Dernall, but he was wiped out with Doc's dirigible."

"

CARSON DERNALL was not destroyed with the dirigible," drawled Long Tom. "He escaped from the blazing craft by parachute, the same as I did. Doc found me, after he escaped from the Bedouins. That was when he conceived the plan of he and I making up as Syrian master and slave.

"Dernall landed near where I did, but Doc allowed him to get away, purposely. Dernall lived to carry out his original intention of double-crossing Whitey Jano. And he intended to put Hadith on the spot, too. His object was the undisputed control of the tasunite element and the city of Tasunan.

"It was tasunite that destroyed the dirigible. Dernall had secreted some of it in the ship. And so great was its power, that, like radium, only stronger, when released it caused the airship to burn and disintegrate, even though normally fireproof.

"Dernall intended to set himself up as emperor of the hidden city."

"True in part," stated Doc. "Only Carson Dernall was not the real All-Wise One."

"That agrees with my own observation," said Mr. Kassan. "But he died with the others in the flooded tunnel. We Tasunans owe you a great debt. You shall have as much of the element you have called tasunite as you desire. It will be worth many millions to you."

Doc smiled and shook his head.

"It is a powerful and dangerous composition, Mr. Kassan. Only a very little of it would be safe to have abroad. I would advise that only small quantities be mined from the buried tunnel. I will accept none for myself, but I would appreciate having your people send some to various hospitals I will name. I would say Ranyon and Denton Cartheris are entitled to great reward."

Mr. Kassan was in an expansive, bowing mood.

"They shall have all they desire," he agreed. "But haven't we forgotten something vital. How about the All-Wise One?"

"You will come with me, Mr. Kassan," said Doc.

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Within the black tent, Doc lifted the colored shawl.

"May Allah have mercy and compassion on her soul," murmured Mr. Kassan.

OUTSIDE, Pat Savage said suddenly, "What has happened to Lady Fotheran?"

Ranyon Cartheris was grave-faced. Denton Cartheris's emaciated countenance indicated he must fear the worst.

"Oh," murmured Pat Savage. "I'm sorry."

Doc Savage came from the black tent with Mr. Kassan. He paused beside the Cartheris brothers.

"If you will accompany me, perhaps we can confirm an idea," said the man of bronze. "Pat, you will remain here until we return."

Pat Savage was all woman. As the little group moved away, she slipped to the door of the black tent. Her glimpse showed her a pair of small feet protruding from under the bright shawl.

Pat gasped and shoved the back of her hand over her mouth.

"So that was it," she said, tears starting to her eyes. "That's why Doc was so mysterious."

Doc Savage removed a flat, square metal box from one of the camel packs that had been part of his Duzun Kado equipment. The box was the one that had dropped from the ruins of the dirigible and which Doc had hidden in the sand. He had uncovered it and brought it with him when he and Long Tom had entered the camp as coming from Aleppo.

Now, from the box, Doc took several sections of thick glass. They had been cut into parts something resembling a cross-word puzzle.

Doc fitted these sections together. The slender, lovely figure of a woman with an upraised hand appeared. The silhouette of the face was distinctive. The nose was straight, the chin uptilted. The throat was a deep, unusually curving line. Doc explained the circumstances of the window of the music store.

The two Cartheris brothers gazed at it only a moment. Ranyon placed his arm around the older man's shoulders.

"It's Sathyra, no doubt of it," he said, slowly. "She was seeking your help, Doc Savage, and went to her death. But who—who is this other woman lying dead in the tent?"

"She was known as Marian Le Gorde, your sister's secretary and the wife of Carson Dernall," stated Doc Savage. "Your sister was not aware of her real identity. Dernall was really under his wife's rule. But a woman

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has no face among the Bedouins, so she permitted him to assume her place as the All-Wise One."

"My sister," murmured Denton Cartheris, dropping to a thin knee. His hand touched the plate glass reverently. "She died trying to get help for us."

"The glass shall be buried with all the honors of Tasunan," said Mr. Kassan. "The All-Wise One lies dead in the black tent. The Bedouins possibly held her responsible for the disaster underground."

A little later, Mr. Kassan said to Doc Savage and his group: "You shall be the guests of Tasunan while you are here?"

"Oh, perhaps I shall be kidnaped again!" said Pat Savage, hopefully.

THE END