

DOC SAVAGE
DANGER LIES EAST

Kenneth Robeson

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WHO IS

DOC SAVAGE

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

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

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

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

DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING CREW

"Ham," Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, was

never without his ominous, black sword cane.

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

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

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

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

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

Omnibus #1 THE ALL-WHITE ELF, THE RUNNING
SKELETONS, THE ANGRY CANARY, *and*
THE SWOONING LADY

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RUSTLING DEATH, KIND JOE CAY, *and*
THE THING THAT PURSUED

Omnibus #3 THE SPOOK OF GRANDPA EBEN,

MEASURES FOR A COFFIN, THE THREE
DEVILS, *and* STRANGE FISH

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MEN OF FEAR, *and* THE PURE EVIL

Omnibus #5 NO LIGHT TO DIE BY, THE MONKEY
SUIT, LET'S KILL AMES, ONCE OVER
LIGHTLY, *and* I DIED YESTERDAY

Omnibus #6 THE AWFUL DYNASTY, THE
DISAPPEARING LADY, FIRE AND ICE, *and*
THE MAGIC FOREST

Omnibus #7 THE MEN VANISHED, FIVE FATHOMS
DEAD, THE TERRIBLE STORK, *and*
DANGER LIES EAST

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DOC SAVAGE

DANGER LIES EAST

I

At three o'clock he was dead.

But five hours earlier, when he was quite alive and alert, he sauntered from the doorway of the Blair House. The Blair House was a rather good hotel on Park Avenue in New York City, and he had been waiting—loitering, if one was frank about it—in the lobby of the place. He did not live there. Outdoors it was chilly and the sidewalks were wet and the air felt damp, although there were no visible raindrops.

He took a cab to the airport. He took a plane to Washington.

Airline passengers are expected to give their names, and he gave one. He gave a name. It was Alexander Trussman. It was not his name. As a matter of fact, no one ever did learn his name. The name of Alexander Trussman fitted him in a way, and in another way it did not. If the name of Alexander Trussman sounds foreign to you, it fitted him. He was young, tall, dark-haired, dark-eyed, dark-skinned.

When a dumb-looking lout of a newsboy tried to force a newspaper on him outside the Blair House, he refused the super-salesmanship rather angrily, snapping, "*Imshi!*" This word *imshi*, meaning to be gone, or scam, was of a language

spoken pretty generally in the Near East. The term Near East being applied broadly to that part of the world between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, the Caspian Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Mr. Alexander Trussman, to give him the name he had given himself, looked sorry that he had used the word.

At noon, three hours before he was dead, he ate the lunch the airline served its passengers.

In Washington, he took a taxi to the Houghton Hotel, but did not register. He loafed in the lobby. He did not have luggage of any sort. A few minutes past two, he left the Houghton, and was walking on Pennsylvania Avenue when he began showing signs of distress.

First, he perspired freely. It was cold in Washington, a city which seems always to be too hot or too cold, too dry or too wet. He burst out into a sweat, then a chill, and displayed all the symptoms of a man suffering from an attack of violent illness. He also showed signs of being a man who wanted desperately to go ahead with what he was doing. Being ill mustn't interfere. It mustn't. He fought his nausea and weakness, but it did no good. Finally he knew he could not go on.

He had been following a man. He gave that up suddenly. He wheeled from the sidewalk, entered a drug store, got two ten-dollar bills changed into quarters and dimes—this took a long time and his skin was lead-gray before it was done—and he carried the money toward a telephone booth. But he collapsed before he reached the booth.

Presently there was a group of curious spectators around the sprawled man. One of the spectators, who had conveniently entered the drug store a moment before, pushed forward and took charge.

He was not a doctor, but he said, loudly, "I'm a doctor. Let's see what goes on here."

This man, who was thick and wide and homely and hairy, did some pulse-feeling, tongue-examining and eyeball-inspecting. Mostly it was mumbo-jumbo.

"Mild heart attack," he announced. "I'll take him to a hospital."

The manager, who was a little nervous about such things happening in his drug store, asked the name of the man who had collapsed.

"How the hell do I know?" asked the "doctor."

The manager wanted to know the doctor's name.

"Doctor Doesmith," said the "doctor."

"Shall I," asked the anxious manager, "make a report of this to the police?"

"I'll make all the reports that are necessary," said the phony medico. "Chances are there won't be any. This guy has a chronic ticker difficulty, and the probability is that he will live to be a hundred. Now and then he will cave in like this, is all."

The manager was completely fooled, and he let the hairy ape carry Mr. Alexander Trussman outside and put him in a sedan which was rather too conveniently waiting.

The "doctor" took his victim to a hotel. It was a good hotel, one that didn't have to worry about its reputation, consequently a man with moxie could get away with stuff that would have gotten him thrown out of a lower-grade place. By dint of pouring some whiskey from a bottle on Mr. Alexander Trussman, the apish man got him upstairs to a room, leaving everyone with the conviction that he was just bringing his drunken pal home.

It was then two-forty.

The hairy ape put his burden on the bed. He punched Mr. Trussman in the belly a few times and said, "Wake up, you so-and-so." But this did not get results.

The hairy ape's name was Mayfair. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, to give him his full title. He was one of the world's outstanding industrial chemists, and had so been recognized for a number of years. It was generally agreed that he was too contrary and lazy to work at his profession except when he was broke or when he had strained his credit with his friends to its utmost. His friends were wise to him, so his credit didn't stretch far. The thing he preferred to do, and which he did most of the time, was pursue excitement.

It was inevitable that Mr. Mayfair should be called Monk. And he was. He did not mind.

Monk did some more belly-punching of his victim and said,

"Come on, wake up, chump!" Still there were no results.

Going to the telephone, Monk gave a number and asked, "Ham? . . . Well, what are you waiting on? . . . Sure I got him. Like a sitting duck. He's here in the hotel room now. Notify Doc, and then come on up. . . . No, he hasn't talked yet. He thinks he's pretty sick. Okay. Fifteen minutes."

Monk concluded the conversation, turned, and discovered he had been careless. His victim, Alexander Trussman, had slid silently off the bed and was slipping out through the door into the hall.

"Here!" Monk yelled. He dived for the door. He had started too late. Mr. Trussman, forcing activity over his sickness, slid through the door and, taking the key along, got it closed and locked on the outside.

Monk did some roaring. He roared very well, sounding like he looked, a bull ape. The door was too stout for mere twisting and wrenching, and he drew back with some idea of caving in a panel with his shoulder. At that point, he remembered there was another room, a connecting door, and the second room had a door into the hall.

"Dumb cluck!" said Monk with feeling. He meant himself.

He bolted into the adjoining room, knocking over furniture without noticing or caring what he was knocking over, and plunged out into the hall.

"Oh, oh!" he said, greatly pleased.

Mr. Trussman had collapsed in the hall. He had made about twenty feet, which had taken him almost to the door with the little light above it that said EXIT in red, and which would have admitted him to the stairway. "Crockett!" gasped Trussman. "Tell Crockett—"

Monk ran to Mr. Trussman, stood over him and blew vigorously on his fist. He was tempted to see whether Mr. Trussman would appreciate the feel of the fist. What stayed him was the conclusion which he drew—a wrong one, but he didn't know it—that Mr. Trussman had fainted.

Monk carried the man back in the room and dumped him on the bed. After that Monk didn't turn his back and do any telephoning. It was an unnecessary precaution, though, because the man was now dead. It was three o'clock.

Ham was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, and he preferred that no one call him Ham, including his friends. Everyone called him Ham whenever possible. . . . Ham was a lean, dapper man, an authority on clothes, and an example always of what to wear for the occasion. He was an eminent lawyer, often mentioned as one of Harvard's most brilliant alumni, but his attitude toward the practice of law was much the same as Monk's toward the practice of chemical engineering. Ham preferred excitement. He had better judgment than Monk with money, however, and was usually broke no more than once a year. He was also Monk's friend, in an evil-eyed sort of way.

Ham Brooks came into the hotel room dawdling a cane and told Monk, "God, you look awful."

"I look like I always do," Monk said, surprised.

"That's what I mean," said Ham.

"Cut it out," said Monk. "There's our friend." He pointed at the motionless figure on the bed and added, "Resting quietly."

Ham examined the man. "He's not very active, is he? . . . Is there any doubt but that he was following Doc?"

"Not," said Monk, "a bit. He trailed Doc to his hotel, the Blair House, in New York, and then followed him on the plane to Washington, and was following him around Washington when fate caught up with him."

"What fate?" Ham asked.

"Me."

"Go ahead, be funny. Make like a clown, with a dead man lying on your bed."

"He isn't dead," said Monk smugly.

"What's wrong with him then?"

"He ate lunch on the plane," Monk said. "And I put some stuff in his soup and he ate it. I was afraid there for a while that he wouldn't like soup, but he did. He ate every drop."

"What did you put in it?"

"A small diabolical concoction of my own which won't hurt him a bit," said Monk. "It made him as sick as a dog. The effects should be wearing off by now, though."

Ham frowned. "What was the idea of giving him this mickey of yours?"

"To scare the hell out of him and soften him up for questions."

"Have you asked him any questions yet?"

"He didn't answer them."

"Oh, then you've got nothing out of him," Ham said, using a tone that cast doubt on Monk's ability.

"Crockett."

"What?"

"Crockett . . . Tell Crockett—" said Monk. "That's all that's come out of him."

"What made him say that?"

Monk decided not to tell Ham that, due to a momentary lapse into stupidity on his part, Trussman had nearly escaped, but had collapsed in the hall, and at that time had mumbled the words: Crockett. . . . Tell Crockett—

"Danged if I know why he said it," Monk remarked.

Ham eyed Monk intently. "What's the reason for all this?"

Monk shook his head. "Search me."

"You don't know?"

"Nope."

Ham said suspiciously, "You're lying."

"A lawyer! Accusing somebody of lying!" Monk sneered. "What do you know about that! The pot calls the kettle black."

* * *

Ham Brooks, puzzled, but not entirely disbelieving, although he knew Monk would rather tell him an untruth than a fact, said, "Naturally I know you would tell me exactly why we are here and what we are doing and what Doc Savage is doing that caused this fellow here to follow him. I'm sure you would tell me—if it was choked out of you. But for your information, I don't know why I am in Washington. How did you get here?"

Monk said, "Doc calls me in New York. He describes this guy. He says he thinks this guy is following him. He says for me to make sure, then grab the guy. Doc says that if the guy is following him, let the following proceed to Washington before I grab him, and then take him to the Rimes Hotel, which is this hotel, where a room will be reserved in my name, or two rooms in fact. I am to bring my captive here, and telephone

you at a number Doc gave me, and you will know where to find Doc. That is the prescription I get. I follow it. Here I am. Now is that frank and honest, or isn't it?"

Ham thought it was the truth, so he said, "I think you're lying. . . . However, my experience was something similar, except that Doc telephoned me to grab the first plane to Washington, rent these two rooms for you, rent one at another hotel for myself, wait there, and if you call me, and say that everything has gone well, I am to telephone Doc at one of two places. . . ." Ham glanced at Alexander Trussman. "I wonder if he can hear us?"

"Him?" Monk grinned at Trussman. "Maybe we'd better ask."

Ham went over and punched Trussman. He didn't like the reaction, and looked, somewhat horrified, at his finger. With great revulsion and difficulty, Ham Brooks forced himself to make one of the most positive tests for learning whether life is extinct. He touched one of the man's eyeballs. There was no sensitivity.

Hoarsely, Ham said, "Was it your idea, giving him the drug?"

"Sure," Monk said. "Why?"

"It'll probably get you electrocuted, or whatever they do to you for murder in the District of Columbia," Ham said.

"Huh?"

"Your friend," Ham explained, "is slightly dead."

II

Clark Savage had always considered it a great misfortune that he was a big bronzed man who was as conspicuous in a crowd as—Monk had once put it this way—the fig leaf on a fan dancer. His noticeable physical size and muscularity had on more than one occasion nearly been the end of him. In another profession, it would perhaps have been an asset, but he could well do without it, and he made a practice of dressing as quietly as possible, in plain suits, and using a low voice and an unobtrusive sort of politeness. Too often, this was mistaken for spectacular modesty, and did no good at all.

Doc was also hampered by a reputation. He did not like publicity, and discouraged it whenever possible, with the unfortunate result that he was considered somewhat of a man of mystery. Consequently he was pointed at, whispered about, discussed at cocktail parties. And there was another end result of being thought of as a genius—when he was handed a job to do, it was usually something that everyone else had gagged on. He did not mind this. Trouble was his business. Trouble and excitement.

He was not a detective, although frequently his work was something that a high-grade detective would have done. He was a trouble-shooter and, regardless of whether it sounded

corny or not, his usual object was to right wrongs and punish evildoers who were outside the law. This was a rather Galahadian motivation for what he did, and he usually denied such high ideals if they were mentioned to him, and certainly never expressed it that way himself. He had been trained for the work by his father, who had possibly been a little cracked on the subject of crooks, particularly of the international sort. Doc as a child had been handed over to a succession of specialists and scientists for training, and his youth had not been at all normal. But the results were remarkable, in that they had produced Doc Savage, who was supposed to be able to do anything.

Walking into Monk Mayfair's room in the Rimes Hotel in Washington, Doc felt anything but a superman. His general impression was that someone was making an ape out of him.

"Hello, Monk—Ham," he said. Then he saw their facial expressions. "What is wrong?"

"We got a little complication," Monk said uneasily.

"Yes?"

"It's there on the bed," said Monk.

Ham Brooks explained, "I think what Monk means is that the man is dead."

"What!" Shocked, Doc Savage went to the bed.

Monk blurted, "For God's sake, Doc, *is* he dead? Tell us?"

Doc made an examination and stood back.

"Dead," he said.

Monk retreated behind a chair as if to take refuge from this fact. "But he can't be, Doc. He just can't be."

"What did you do to him?" Doc Savage asked.

"I didn't kill him."

Ham said, "All he did was give him poison in some soup on the airliner."

Monk was upset. He said, "Cut it out, Ham. Rib me some other time. I tell you, he couldn't have died from that stuff I gave him. It would only have made him sick."

Doc Savage frowned. "Let's have a full story of what happened," he said.

Monk did not leave out anything. He related the most trivial incidents. One got a strong impression that Monk felt that, while he was a noted chemist, it wouldn't do him much good in case he went on trial for murder. Monk covered everything that had happened, and threw in the part that he had not intended to tell Ham, the bit of action when, as Monk was telephoning, Alexander Trussman, to use the name the man had given the airline people, had slipped out of the room and locked the door. But, Monk explained, he had found the man collapsed in the hall, so it had turned out all right after all.

"How long," asked Doc Savage, "would you say the man was out of your sight?"

"You mean after he got through the door and locked it?" Monk said.

"Yes, between then and the time you first saw him lying in the hall."

"Only a jiffy," Monk said.

"Can you be more specific than that?"

Monk scratched his fingers uncomfortably in his bristling reddish hair. "Well, to tell the truth, it didn't seem like more than four or five seconds," he said. "But it might have been longer, because I was plenty in an uproar. Time kind of fools you when you're excited."

"How long, at the longest?"

"Sixty seconds," Monk decided. "A minute."

"And did you hear any sound from the corridor during that time? Any sound through the door?"

Monk tried to remember. "I guess maybe anything I heard I would have thought was the guy beating it. . . . No, I didn't get any noises."

"Any voices?"

"The guy wouldn't be talking to himself, would he?"

"No voices?" Doc asked patiently.

"No." Monk was puzzled.

"And when you went around through the other room into the hall," Doc said, "did you see anyone when you came into the corridor?"

"This guy here."

"Anyone else?"

"No."

"Was the man on the floor?"

"Yes," Monk said. "I ran to him, and it was then that he said, 'Crockett. . . . Tell Crockett—' That was all he said."

"Was it spoken distinctly?"

"Yes. . . . Slow, though. Like he was forcing it out, and concentrating on it while he did so."

"Did you," Doc asked, "get the feeling that he was telling you, or trying to tell you, something about someone or something named Crockett?"

Monk considered this point. "No. I think he didn't know what he was doing. I think this was just in his mind—telling Crockett, whoever, Crockett is—and he concentrated on it and said the words without knowing what it was all about. . . . Say, when he went into the drug store before I caught him, maybe

he was going to telephone this Crockett."

Doc asked, "How much change did you say he got?"

"Change?"

"Didn't you say he got two ten-dollar bills changed into quarters and dimes in the drug store?"

"Say, that was a hell of a lot of change, wasn't it?" Monk said. "I wonder where he was going to telephone to? The moon? Let's see . . . twenty bucks! Why, you could telephone practically anywhere for that."

Doc got back to the line his questioning had been following.

He said, "You're positive you didn't see anyone else in the hall?"

"Just this guy here."

"Where was the stairway door?"

"About ten feet from where he was lying."

"Was the door open?"

"Closed."

"And you didn't hear anyone on the stairs going up or down?"

"Nope. I take it you think somebody else was out there in

the hall?"

Doc spoke grimly. He said, "That would help explain how this penknife blade got into his spinal cord."

The blade from the knife—it had been broken off—was not very long. It did not need to be. Not more than an inch and a half, which was ample, for Alexander Trussman was a thin and bony young man without much padding of flesh over his spinal column.

Monk was relieved. He was so relieved he was shaking. "To kill a man like that, and quick," he said, "you'd have to know how to do it, wouldn't you? I mean that it isn't an ordinary way to use a knife."

Ham Brooks said, "I don't see what you've got to be happy about. He's still dead. And the police are still going to feel it was odd he died on your hands."

Monk said he wasn't scared of the police. Well, maybe moderately scared. In a week or two he might be able to sleep nights. "But the point is," he added, "that I know now that stuff I fed him in the soup didn't kill him. Somebody was waiting in the hall, and did it to him when he tore out of here."

Doc Savage said, "We had better make some inquiries."

Their inquiring was complicated by the fact that Doc Savage said they wouldn't notify the police about the murder yet. The total result of the questioning of a few bellhops, two cleaning

women and some maids was nothing. No one had seen anyone who could be immediately identified as the murderer.

"Why not notify the police?" Ham Brooks asked Doc Savage.

"You think it will get us in trouble?"

"I know blamed well it will, and so do you," Ham said. "As an attorney giving you advice, which you didn't ask for, I can assure you they can and probably will lock us all up."

Monk was also perturbed. "Doc, just what's the idea of taking this chance?"

Doc Savage explained when they were back in the hall upstairs, but not in the room with the body, where, he said, it was just possible a microphone might have been planted for eavesdropping.

"Microphone!" Ham gasped. "For crying out loud! What are we mixed up in, anyway?"

He did not know, Doc said. He explained that he had received a telephone call from a Mr. Lawrence Morand, of the State Department. Did they know Mr. Morand?

"I've heard of Morand in the State Department," Ham Brooks admitted, "in about the same way that you hear of Paul Revere in connection with the Revolutionary War. He's sort of an expert giver-of-alarms, isn't he?"

"That," Doc said, "is about as good a description of

Morand's position in the State Department as I have ever heard."

"What did Morand want with you?"

Doc shook his head. "I do not know. Morand was very secretive, over the telephone. He asked me to come to Washington, using the utmost care to avoid being conspicuous, and said he had a job for me that he thought was along my line. I wasn't too hot about the secrecy, and I had some experiments under way in the laboratory in New York, but when I tried to talk my way out of this job, Morand got pretty emphatic. So I gather it is something big."

Ham scratched his head and said, "If Morand is in it, it's something to do with foreign relations, isn't it?"

"Probably. Morand's department is foreign relations."

Ham indicated the body on the bed. "He's a foreigner of some sort, judging from his appearance. Do you suppose he was connected with this call from Morand?"

"What other guess is there?" Doc asked.

"Then you're not going to notify the police about the body until you talk to Morand?" Monk asked.

Doc said he thought Morand would appreciate doing it that way.

"Morand sounded," Doc said, "as if the world had started to fall over and he was holding it up with one hand and fighting

bumblebees with the other."

III

The Honorable Lawrence Morand was an erect, white-haired man of much dignity and about sixty years, nearly forty of them spent in the devious jungles of international diplomacy. Many men look disconcertingly unlike the parts they occupy in affairs, a fact that is sometimes a little jarring to confidence. But Morand was reassuringly the picture of a career diplomat. One knew he could lift a teacup, flatter a politico's mistress, bribe a government functionary, and possibly order a genteel throat-cutting, all with equal aplomb and ability.

Coming forward behind outstretched hand, Morand said, "How are you, Doc? I haven't seen you since London in '45. You're looking fine. How are the rest of your organization? Monk and Ham still conducting that interminable quarrel?"

Doc said things had been fine up until that telephone call from Morand, but since then . . .

Morand held up a manicured hand. "Do a favor for me, eh? You know the statue of the three monkeys. Say nothing, hear nothing, see nothing? If you don't mind, I am going to occupy the position of the three monkeys with regard to you."

Doc said, "It is evil, isn't it, that the monkeys do not see,

hear nor speak?"

"Could be. Anyway, I have not seen you, I have not heard from you and I shall not speak of you. Is that confusing?"

"A little," Doc said.

Morand indicated a chair. "Sit down. I'm a little embarrassed about this. You see, I need your help. More properly, we needed your help some weeks ago, and didn't have sense enough to realize it."

Doc said, "This isn't beginning to sound good."

"I'm afraid it isn't."

"No?"

Morand grimaced. "I don't think you're going to be happy, but I don't think you will be surprised either."

"What are you getting at?"

"I guess I'm apologizing," Morand said. "And trying to say that I imagine you are accustomed to being called on when things are in such a mess that nobody else can handle it. In other words, when the potato gets too hot, they hand it to you."

Doc Savage said that he began to get the idea, and he had been afraid it would be something like this. "The question in your mind," he said, "is, will I take the potato? Right?"

"Will you?"

"Let's see the potato first."

Morand nodded and said, "I don't expect any blanket promises out of you. . . . Have you been following the political situation in the Near East? Oh hell, I know you have. The newspapers have been full of it for that matter. . . . What is your general impression of it?"

Doc said, "Everyone mad at everyone else. The Arabs are mad at the English, the Americans, the Palestine Jews, and they distrust the Russians. The Egyptians are irritated with the English, they think the Americans have no business monkeying around, and ditto for the Russians. In India, one religious sect is ready to fly at the throat of the other, and both of them are drooling for an English throat. . . . You know I've been out of touch with the situation over there. What are you asking me for?"

Morand grinned with no humor. "Your picture isn't so far from the truth. Let me give you some inside stuff." Morand talked, and Doc listened, and much of what he heard he had already known, as far as the general picture in the eastern Mediterranean area was concerned. He had known, without being exactly sure of the facts, that most of the dissension had fairly well settled down to a question of whether or not there would be an armed uprising.

"The dissatisfied factions," Morand explained, "have rather generally coagulated, undergone a clotting process which has placed them, not exactly under one leadership, but ready to follow that leader if he gives the word. In other words, it has gotten to the point where one man, their religious symbol, can

make it war or a peaceful settlement, as he wishes. And if it turns out to be fighting, it'll be war, and I mean a real war. I'm afraid—and don't think I'm being a wild-eyed old maid when I say this—as bad as the one we finished a few months ago."

Doc Savage made no comment. An international crisis was usually dry stuff to discuss, unless one knew the problems posed and the personalities and intricacies involved. It only stopped being dry when the army of one little country marched into another little country, and some bigger nation or group of large nations that had some time or other signed a treaty guaranteeing its sovereignty jumped into it, and another combine jumped on them. Like Poland and the Reich. It wasn't dry then. It was wet and red with the blood of millions of men.

Doc stirred uncomfortably. When you talked of nations, it was never as if you talked of men; the personalities were not there. As an example, the man lying dead back in the hotel was very real. Here a Mr. Morand of the State Department had given him a picture that could mean the death of a thousand men, and it was not the same at all. A thousand men? That was ridiculous, of course. The number would be hundreds of thousands and quite possibly millions. But talking it and thinking of it was not as biting as having seen with his own eyes one man dead.

"These generalities bother you?" Morand asked.

"Only that it's hard to break out in a cold sweat over generalities," Doc said. "Although I'm beginning to."

"Uh-huh," said Morand. "Here in the State Department we're not supposed to call a spade a spade—if the spades are too big. But anyone who is not a fool knows the world is split pretty much into two factions, and some people assume that, by God, if we've got to have a war in twenty years, let's fight it now and get it over with for good. With that kind of defeatist feeling around, all that is needed is for someone to get his toes stamped on, and he's going to start swinging. It's a damned sad travesty on the human race, but there it is."

Doc made no comment. He was shocked. The general tone of this sounded as if he were going to be handed the job of stopping a war before it got started. When it was stated bluntly that way, it was a little wild for belief.

Morand leaned forward. "Nesur," he said.

"Nesur?" Doc echoed.

"Yes. The name—does it mean anything to you?"

Doc hesitated, then nodded. "Yes. Nesur. The leader of a minor religious sect. Sort of a holy man, with a few thousand followers."

Morand grinned unhappily. "Not minor, Doc. A couple of years ago, this fellow Nesur was reported to have Nazi leanings, and so he was sort of eased into exile. Quite an effort was made to disgrace him and blacken his name. To tell the truth, I had a hand in that myself, although since I've wondered just how smart I was. The fact is, we never had any real proof the fellow did have Nazi sympathies. I think maybe we made a mistake."

"Nesur is back?" Doc asked.

"That's right." Morand nodded. "He's back, and he must be quite a guy, because we've suddenly come to realize that he is the key to the whole mess. I don't know how he did it, but if he says start fighting, they'll start fighting."

"Will he?"

"Will he what?"

"Say start fighting."

"Unless you can talk him out of it," Morand said, "we're afraid so."

Doc jumped. "Now wait a minute! What's this? What are you trying to hand me?"

"Your job," Morand said, "is to get hold of Nesur and talk him out of violence."

"Where is he?"

"We don't know." Morand shrugged wearily. "We've looked for him for months, and if we could have gotten hold of him a few months ago, he could have been quietly spirited out of the picture, one way or another. But that's out of the question now. If anything violent happens to him, and the blame can possibly be pointed at us, the fat will be in the fire."

"Why does Nesur want to start trouble?"

"We can't figure that out either."

"I take it," Doc said, "that you don't know much about him."

"We don't. Oh, we've got pictures of him and his early history."

"This," said Doc gloomily, "is the potato?"

"This is it."

Doc took the job. There was not much else he could do. He thumbed through a folder on Nesur which Morand gave him. It contained Nesur's photograph. A tall dark, rather grim young man with the usual aquiline nose and piercing eyes. Not a distinguished face. But one that Doc realized he would remember.

Reading, Doc found the man had been born in a desert village, and had led, in general, the sort of life that most religious leaders lead, except that there had been no education abroad, either in England or America. It was possible to understand why the man would dislike the English and Americans, because he had been pushed around by them a few times—but not until he had started the pushing himself.

"But I hardly see why he has a motive to start the kind of fracas this one would be," Doc said.

"We don't get that either," Morand admitted. "But he hates Americans. He hates them like poison."

"This a recent hate?"

"That's another funny angle. His dislike for Americans—and it amounts to an attack of hydrophobia—began only a few months ago. We don't know why."

"Where can he be found?"

"Somewhere east of Gibraltar," Morand said. "And I'm not being funny." Morand then stood up and added, "Do you know Sherman McCorland?"

"McCorland? No."

"One of our men in the Near East. He's here in Washington now. Going back by plane this evening. I'll introduce you, and you can call on him for anything he is able to furnish you in the way of assistance."

Sherman McCorland turned out to be a lean whip of a man with startling red hair, a reddish leathery skin, and in spite of these fundamental qualities for a rough-looker, a smooth man who had almost too much polish.

"Delighted!" said McCorland. "I've heard of you, Mr. Savage. Most impressively, I must say, too."

The flattery was obvious enough to be a little overdone. Doc did not react very favorably. He said, "I understand you are returning to the Mediterranean today."

McCorland was adept enough to sense that he had made an unfavorable impression, and to realize why. He became more casual, admitted he was leaving today, said that he could be contacted—or there would be someone who would know where he could be found—in Cairo, Jerusalem and Tehran. He gave Doc the addresses.

Morand explained, "McCorland has been our main man on Nesur."

"I'm not proud of my results, either," McCorland said.

"You have no idea where I can find Nesur?"

McCorland shook his head. "You can pick up as much as I know in listening to bazaar gossip anywhere in the Near East. In Libya, Tripoli, Saudi Arabia—Nesur is everywhere. And nowhere. Frankly I haven't the least idea where his hangout is. But if I get a line that is worth anything, I'll let you know."

"Do that," Doc said.

Before McCorland left, he made a statement. His mouth was quite grim when he made it. He said, "I take it you know, or have been told, that it's probably a third world war we're fooling with."

Doc was left with the impression that McCorland was not a fool, and that the man had been worried, and had had something on his mind that he hadn't mentioned. Doc suggested this to Morand. Morand laughed. "We brought him

into Washington and ate him off up to here. He's just had the damnedest bawling out any man ever had. Of course he's got something on his mind."

"That might explain it."

Morand suddenly snapped his fingers. "Damn!"

"What's the matter?"

"I guess I'm a little embarrassed because we gave McCorland so much hell," the State Department executive explained. "Because I forgot to have McCorland tell you about a source of information you might be able to use. Oh, well, I can give it to you."

Doc said that the way it looked to him, information was one thing he was going to need. "Go ahead," he said.

"It's a woman," Morand explained. "Rather remarkable character, I hear. I've never met her. Headquarters in Cairo. Sort of a dabbler in international intrigue, and pretty good at it, too."

Doc asked, "How would a woman dabble in international intrigue?"

"I don't intend to sound like a spy thriller," Morand said. "But this baby is, I understand, something out of the pages of a book. Kind of a lady queen of the thieves, or something like that."

"She might know where this Nesur is?"

"Yes. Crockett would know if anyone did."

Doc Savage raised possibly a half inch off the floor without any visible force being applied to him.

"Who?" he asked.

"Crockett. The lady fearful we're talking about," Morand said. "Yes, she would have contacts that would know where Nesur is. She seems to get her finger in everything." Morand peered at Doc Savage. "What's the matter with you? Ache somewhere?"

Doc said, "Have you got a portfolio on this Crockett?"

"Oh, sure. We've got those on almost everybody we might use, or who might try to use us. I'll have it sent in for you."

Presently the folder on Crockett, Miss Eunice Lee, was in Doc's hands, and he turned at once to her photograph to see what this sinister wench looked like. She looked like a school teacher, probably around the third grade. Pretty, wide-eyed, innocent. You could imagine her as the quietest one in a crowd. He shuddered and said, "One of those, eh?"

Morand grinned and said, "I wouldn't mind meeting that babe. Sometimes I feel the same about an atom bomb, though."

Doc read the stuff in the folder on Crockett, Miss Eunice Lee. The startling thing was that until about five years ago she had led the life of a perfectly normal American girl, but then she had gone to Cairo where she had inherited the estate of an uncle named Ira Crockett. It didn't say what the estate was. But

there was plenty after that, for there were evidences that Miss Crockett had done about everything from smuggling Jewish refugees into Palestine—five thousand at one lick—to causing the unexplained disappearance of various Iranian, Italian, Turkish and Italian important persons, including a boatload of Nazi big shots together with quite a lot of loot they were supposed to have with them.

"How does she get away with this?" Doc asked.

"That's simple. She's smarter than the guys who try to catch her."

Doc finished the documentation on Crockett.

"A couple of questions," he said. "First, who knows that I am taking this job, or was going to have it offered to me?"

"Me. McCorland," Morand said. "That's all."

"No one else?"

"No."

"Crockett wouldn't know about it?"

Morand laughed. "She's not that good," he said.

Doc Savage decided to hold off and give Morand a shock about the man who had died in the hotel mentioning Crockett's name. Doc felt that Morand had given him very little information, probably as a matter of deliberate forethought, feeling that the detail the State Department had couldn't be

worth much or it would have gotten them farther than it had.

"To go back to Nesur," Doc said. "Why is he hiding out?"

Morand grinned sheepishly. "Oh, he's got reason enough."

"What reason?"

"Well, if we could have gotten him located a few months ago, he would probably have gotten chased back into exile by some little group that opposed him or was jealous of him. Officially we wouldn't have known anything about that, of course."

"No wonder he dislikes you."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. There's a lot of that stuff goes on in Nesur's circles."

Doc said thoughtfully, "You fellows have to pull a lot of close-to-the-line stuff, don't you?"

"Us?" said Morand innocently. "Not on your life. We're the open-faced friends of the whole earth, we are."

"You mean you don't get caught?"

"Well," said Morand, "what do you think?"

"Then your department is pretty good at arranging little matters and not getting caught?"

"I wouldn't say we're perfect," Morand said smugly.

"Could you do a little favor for me?"

"Sure."

"All right. There's a strange body in our hotel room. A murder victim. Quietly take it off our hands, will you?"

"Oh, my God!" Morand yelled. "A body!"

IV

In the lobby of the Rimes Hotel, Ham Brooks was waiting. Ham looked alarmed, and when he saw Doc Savage enter, he hurried forward.

"Doc, we've got another complication upstairs," Ham said.

"Another body?" Doc asked.

"I wish it was," Ham said. "It's a man named Homer Wickett, who says he's the hotel manager. He walked in on us and saw the body."

"Walked in on you?" Doc exclaimed. "Why would he dare ___"

"The managers of these flea-bag hotels will dare anything," Ham said. "This Homer Wickett unlocked the door and came in without warning. He had a master key. Of course he saw the

corpse and began raising Cain. He said he wasn't surprised. He said we looked like a pack of murderers to him. He said there had been a report of strange goings-on in the hall—probably the rumpus when the fellow got killed—and he had come up to investigate."

"How did he recognize that it was a body so quickly?"

Ham squirmed uncomfortably. "Well, Monk happened to be putting the body in a trunk when he came in."

"Trunk?"

Ham nodded. "We had to do something with the body, didn't we? Well, Monk went out and bought a trunk, and he was going to put the body in it."

"And then what?"

"Well, Monk knows a fellow here in Washington he doesn't like. A fellow he had some trouble with over a chorus girl. Monk was all for sending the trunk to this fellow."

Doc Savage said bitterly that it was a very poor time for gags, that the gag would be in bad taste at any time, and particularly now, when they were involved in a matter which might very well develop into a world conflict. He was fully serious about what he thought, and he told Ham so. He made Ham extremely uncomfortable.

"And on top of handing us a job they can't handle, that fellow Morand in the State Department refused to have anything to do with taking the body off our hands," Doc added.

"You can't blame him much," Ham said uneasily. "If that got out, half the Senators would fall out of their seats. . . . But to get back to this trunk notion, that was all Monk's idea—"

"Listen, I've seen you two cook up a screwball notion before," Doc said. "What about this fellow you were going to send the trunk to? Did he cut you out with the chorus girl, too?"

"How did you know—" Ham swallowed, and changed to: "How do you think we had better handle this?"

"We'll have to get the hotel man out of the picture for a while," Doc said.

"I'll enjoy knocking him cold, if that will do."

"And we'll send the body to Morand, as long as you've got a trunk for it," Doc said.

Mr. Homer Wickett was a short, wide man with amazingly blue eyes and corn-colored hair. He was not an albino, although his coloring was close to that of one. He had an Oklahoma whang in his voice, and knew a remarkable procession of cusswords, which he was using on Monk. But he fell uneasily silent when Doc Savage and Ham entered the room. Monk was relieved to see them.

"This guy," Monk said, "has cussed ten minutes solid without repeating himself." He indicated the body and added, "It's a wonder he didn't wake up Mr. Trussman, here."

Doc said bitterly there was nothing humorous in the situation.

"I don't feel humorous," Monk said gloomily. "I think I'm a little hysterical."

"Murderers!" said Homer Wickett, not too firmly. "Murderers! And in my hotel! You'll not get away with it."

Doc asked grandly, "Do you know who we are?"

Homer Wickett indicated that he didn't, except that he held the conviction this probably wasn't the first crime they had perpetrated. That set him on the subject of what he thought of them, and he resorted to obscenity again.

Ham moved around behind the man while he was swearing, and swung a fist suddenly. The fist collided satisfactorily with Homer Wickett's jaw, and the man fell.

"Hitting him wasn't necessary," Doc said.

"He sort of worked me up to it with that cussing," Ham explained.

Monk had his fill of Homer Wickett also. "I wish we had another trunk, and we'd leave two bodies on doorsteps," Monk said.

"Get your fingerprints wiped off anything you may have touched in the room," Doc ordered.

Ham explained they had already done this. They had wiped

the whole room, practically.

"All right, we'll get the trunk and the body out of here before that fellow wakes up," Doc advised.

Ham blew on his knuckles. "We'll have plenty of time before he wakes up."

Monk picked up a blackjack which had skidded partially under the bed. It was quite a serviceable piece of skull-cracking equipment, made of excellent leather.

"Homer Wickett's," Monk said. "I think I'll take it along. Do a service to such future guests of this hostelry as Mr. Wickett may not like."

They edged the trunk out and into a freight elevator. The elevator operator kept an eye on them to see that they paid their bill downstairs before carting the trunk away. They paid the bill. They were careful not to inquire about the health of Mr. Homer Wickett.

Homer Wickett revived in time. Not soon. But in the course of events he came to the conclusion that the great beast that was growling and biting at his head was really non-existent, the growling being his own. At least the growling stopped when he stopped.

Homer Wickett did not waste any time once he was hooked up with consciousness again. He rolled over, staggered to his feet and got out of there, noting only that the body and trunk

were gone.

The operator of the elevator which took Homer Wickett downstairs did not treat Wickett as if the man were a hotel official. The operator merely glanced at Wickett, then away, apparently concluding the man was another drunk. That was all right with Wickett.

No one in the lobby gave any indication of knowing Wickett, or of having seen him before. Nobody spoke to him. Mr. Ginsbruck, who was actually the manager, gave Homer Wickett a passing frown of disapproval. The assistant manager, a Mr. Freel, did the same after he saw Mr. Ginsbruck do so.

Wickett was very glad to get out of the hotel. He hurried two blocks north and one block east and walked in a more leisurely fashion, and presently an automobile swung over to the curb and he got in. The pick-up was neatly arranged. Had anyone been following Wickett, he would undoubtedly have been given the slip.

The man driving the car was young and agreeable-looking, but gave the impression of having no special characteristics at all. He was about as conspicuous as a single grain in a double handful of corn. His ability to seem a part of the human race probably accounted for his not having been hanged long ago. His name, to those who wanted to address him, was Clyde.

"I guess they had a car rented," Clyde said. "Anyway, they loaded a trunk in a car and were on their way."

"You didn't try to follow them?" Homer Wickett asked in an alarmed voice.

"I'm not that simple-minded about following orders," Clyde said.

"Good. I'm glad you let them go."

Clyde glanced at Homer Wickett, who was obviously his chief, and remarked, "They push you around?"

Wickett nodded. "I half-way expected the apish one to do it. He's got a reputation for solving his problems with his fists. But it was the lawyer, Ham Brooks, who walloped me." Wickett compressed his lips bitterly, separated them and said, "Which he'll wish he hadn't."

"Think they took the job of finding Nesur?" Clyde asked.

"I think so."

"They say so?"

"I don't know. I was unconscious for—say, how long was I in there, anyway?"

"Half an hour, I'd say."

"Half an—" Homer Wickett was amazed. "That fancy-dressing lawyer packs more of a punch than you would think."

"They impress you much?"

"Eh?"

"You think they're the hot rocks they're reported to be?"

Wickett looked at the driver bitterly. "Let's not kid ourselves."

Clyde expressed some emotion or other by shooting his eyebrows up and bringing them down again, and said, "I think this is one of the few times in my life I've seen you impressed."

"That could be," said the other man sourly.

They drove in silence for a time. Clyde had a destination in mind, but in reaching it he was using all the means he could think of for shaking pursuit. He had not seen anyone following them, however.

Later Clyde asked, "The blackjack?"

"The blackjack? They took it," Homer Wickett said with satisfaction. "I knew they would. It was a fine item, and I guarantee you that any man would carry it off after he took it away from a possible assailant."

"You think maybe they suspect you?" Clyde inquired.

"Oh, Christ! Of course not. You think they would have gone off and left me there on the floor if they had had an inkling of the truth?"

Clyde said he didn't think this would have been the case. He added, "Since they've got the blackjack, you're in a position to kill them any time you want to."

"Just about," admitted Homer Wickett proudly. "Granting of course they carry the blackjack with them, which I imagine

they will."

V

A TWA Constellation, only forty-three minutes off schedule on the New York-London-Cairo flight, deposited Doc Savage, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks in Cairo. As a matter of general precaution, they waited until the rest of the passengers had debarked down the very tall portable stairs, then watched to see whether newspapermen or other suspicious individuals were lying in wait for them. The matter of their fares, \$428.70 each, had been disturbing Monk, and he demanded, "Do you think the State Department will pay that if we turn in an expense account?"

Doc Savage had his face to a porthole. "When Morand receives the body in the trunk, I doubt if he will okay any expenses, unless it would be the cost of a rope to hang us with."

"I told you we should have presented the body to this guy who did me and Ham a dirty trick," Monk said.

The coast seemed to be clear. They left the plane and were cleared by customs without flurry, and without getting any comment on their names. Their passports carried only their initials, and no titles, and listed their occupations as businessmen, importers, which shaded the truth a little.

In a taxi headed for a hotel, Ham said, "I have the most futile feeling about this. Where do we start? What do we do? Just begin asking people where Nesur is?"

Monk said sarcastically, "That's a great idea."

"Have you any shining notions?" Ham demanded.

Monk had one. "See this Crockett, Miss Eunice Lee. We know she must be mixed up in it, because of what that poor cuss said in Washington before he died."

Doc Savage admitted he thought this was as sensible an idea as any.

Monk, who had seen her picture, said, "I wish she were a little more sexy-looking."

Their driver, on instructions, took a scenic route into town. All three of them had been in Cairo before, so the idea of the sightseeing was not the scenery, but whether anyone was trailing them. They had not cabled ahead for hotel reservations for the same reason.

Their car moved in the streets that netted the rocky slopes of the Mokattam hills, and passed the citadel, actually the south-east angle of the city. Doc glanced at the structure, recalling the spectacular view from its ramparts, the complex wonderland of mosques, lofty towers, gardens and squares, and, beyond, the wide river with its freckling of small islands.

Ham said, "What about the native quarter for a hotel? Say somewhere on Muski Street or Rue Neuve?"

"A good idea," Doc said. He leaned forward and, addressing the driver in English, said, "Can you take us to a pretty good hotel? One in a part of town where we can have some fun."

The driver turned around to see how Doc meant this. Doc leered meaningly. The driver grinned.

"*Aiway!*" the driver said. "Yes, very much, *la yasidi.*"

"What the hell!" gulped the startled Monk.

The last thing anyone with half his wits did in Cairo was take the recommendation of one of the cut-throat cab drivers on a hotel.

The hotel was a dump. It opened off a narrow street full of characters who, if they were half as sinister as they looked, were pretty tough.

Doc drew Ham Brooks aside. "You speak a pretty good English dialect, don't you?"

Ham nodded. "I can only stumble along in Arabic, but I can sound like any kind of an Englishman you want."

"Do it with a touch of Cockney," Doc said. "Not too much Cockney. Or do you think Monk could get away with it better?"

"He ain't got nothin'," Ham said. He said it in Cockney, so that it sounded more like, "Uhee yin't gawt nah'th'n."

Doc frowned. "Don't overdo it that much."

"Okay."

"Go talk to our cab driver," Doc said. "Ask him if he knows of a man named Ole Hansel."

"Who," demanded Ham, "is Ole Hansel?"

"A name I just thought up," Doc said.

"Oh. . . . What does Ole look like? That robber of a cab driver might ask that."

"A Swede who had an Arab mother," Doc said. "He will be about six feet two, weigh over two hundred and have a pronounced scar on his left cheek. An old knife scar about three inches long. He speaks Arabic fairly fluently."

"For crying out loud. Who is the guy?"

"Ask the driver and see if he knows," Doc said.

"Well. . . all right."

"Then have a fuss with the driver over the fare he's charging."

"That," said Ham, "I can see some sense to. That robber is trying to hang it on us."

Doc Savage and Monk were preparing to go to their room when they heard a rumpus in the street. Doc listened with

interest. Ham, using his Cockney dialect, which he had toned down so that it sounded quite genuine, was telling the driver off.

"Whoee!" Monk breathed. "Where did Ham learn to cuss like that?"

"I don't believe the hack driver knows Ole," Doc said dryly.

The row ended with the driver in flight, and Ham came stamping inside. The proprietor of their hotel began to look worried, probably wondering if his new guests were the suckers he had presumed they were.

They entered their room, and Monk scowled at the hotel owner. "What's the market on the rats you've been raising in here?" he demanded.

Before Monk could go further into his ideas about their room, he caught Doc's eye. Doc shook his head. The hotel owner left them alone. He seemed discouraged.

Doc said, "After this, Monk, see if you can't sound like an Englishman. You can fake the dialect, can't you?"

"What kind of an Englishman?"

"The kind of a fellow who would be possibly a gold prospector in the back country hills. The laborer type preferably."

"A dumb one, eh?"

"That shouldn't be any trouble for you," Ham suggested.

Monk scratched his head. "I don't get it."

Doc Savage went to the door to see whether the proprietor had loitered outside to eavesdrop. Apparently he hadn't.

"There isn't much doubt," Doc said, "but what this woman, Eunice Lee Crockett, is a sharp operator. We are not going to walk in on her and get anything out of her. From what I gathered out of reading the dossier the State Department had on her in Washington, she has pulled just about everything in the book and gotten away with it. That means she is as wary as a cat in a dog kennel. A forthright approach would get us nothing."

Monk and Ham were interested. "But I don't get this English accent stuff," Ham said.

"You two," Doc explained, "are a couple of discharged English soldiers. You were in the desert and around Cairo during the war, and you heard about the possibility of gold deposits in the hills over toward Jeb Garib. That's not too far away, and will do as well as any for a spot. After you were mustered out of the English army, you took up prospecting. You had a large half-breed Arab-Swede for a partner. When you found gold, it was this Arab-Swede who found it. His name is Ole Hansel. A large man with a knife scar on his face. Ole found the gold, and he scrambled out and deserted you. But you two learned Ole had found the lode, and you're hunting him to make him divide up, or tell you where it is, so

you can stake claims."

Monk said, "Hadn't you better describe this Arab-Swede better than that?"

"You'll see him in a minute," Doc said.

"We will! The hell!"

"In about an hour," Doc added, "you're going to find him. . . . No, better take longer than that. You had better make some inquiries."

"Where do we inquire?"

Doc Savage named three places, and gave the addresses. Monk had heard of one of them and he whistled. "That's the toughest night spot in town, as I recall," he said.

"You can be as tough with this inquiring as you want to," Doc explained. "The idea is to attract some attention to yourselves."

"I see."

"You're brighter than I am if you get this," Ham told Monk. "And I freely doubt that you are."

"What you are going to do," Doc explained patiently, "is build up this fellow Ole Hansel as a swindler."

"Yeah, but who is Hansel?"

Doc said, "Let's fix him up now."

Doc Savage's skin already had a metallic bronze tan that would pass for that of a half-caste. His hair and eyes, however, were totally out of character. A dye treatment—when Monk and Ham saw that Doc had brought along the dye, it dawned on them this was no spur-of-the-moment idea—took care of the hair. Doc's eyes were an unusual light brown, a sort of flake-gold effect, with the gold seemingly always in motion. He used contact lenses, tinted somewhat, to get more of a change in the character of his eyes than Monk or Ham had expected. The scar was easier, put on with a collodion which contained a chemical irritant that would redden the skin in the neighborhood of the scar.

Finally Doc changed to older and more shabby clothes.

"I won't be wearing these when you find me," he said. "I'll pick up local stuff."

"Where will we find you?"

"It will help out the effect if I sent a messenger to you with the information. Right now, I'm not sure where I will locate."

"This is still a little ahead of me," Ham said. "What do we do when we find you?"

"We'll stage a fight. I'm a fellow who has swindled and double-crossed you. So act accordingly."

"How good do you want to make that?"

"Impressive. But let me escape."

"And then?"

"Use this place for headquarters. I'll contact you here."

"What if we're thrown in jail?" Monk asked, looking alarmed. "I've heard these Cairo jails are a little discouraging."

Doc shrugged. "In that case, lodge a complaint against me."

"You mean tell the swindler story?"

"Yes."

Monk nodded unhappily. He ventured the opinion that if their real identities came out, and they were connected with that fellow Alexander Trussman who had been murdered back in Washington, the circumstantial evidence—their hiding in disguise in Cairo—would probably fix them up nicely with a couple of chairs, wired for electricity.

"You had better sound like a genuine Englishman then," Doc said.

Doc Savage left the hotel by climbing to the roof, jumping an easy gap to another roof, and dropping almost fifteen feet to a balcony, then another twelve feet or so to a grimy street filled, at the moment, only with smells and heat.

He walked rapidly. Cabs were scarce here, because the inhabitants of the section were either not affluent, or took pains not to seem so. However, the shops of the Muski section were within walking distance.

Doc picked a first-class shop, one catering to men, and purchased a wardrobe, using the sort of taste he imagined an Arab-Swedish gentleman would have. He could see that he was not making a good impression. The one-hundred piastre notes with which he paid for his somewhat loud suit were carefully scrutinized by the shop cashier.

Next, Doc found lodgings. The place where he located was not a hotel in the conventional sense, although it did open off the usual winding narrow street. But this thoroughfare was spotted at intervals with elaborate *sebil*, public fountains, and the pedestrians had more class. The house had been, rather recently, an Arab home. It was built around the court—this court form of construction was almost universal—and it had a great deal of stained glass and elaborate woodwork.

The central alcove of the suite was an enormous room with a fountain and a startlingly fancy lantern arrangement above it; there were inlaid cabinets around the walls, and the small niches called *divans* with cushioned seats that had given the name divan to most reclining couches in America.

He did not use his own name. He registered as a Mr. Ahmed Himar, the first name that came to his mind.

He had spoken Arabic, using the Egyptian handling of the language, since leaving Monk and Ham, and he continued to

use it.

The *lukandah* where he had checked in was on Arnab Street, and according to the information Morand of the State Department had given him in Washington, Miss Eunice Lee Crockett lived on Hamanah Street, which was in the neighborhood. No more than, unless his memory of Cairo was frayed, the equivalent of about four American blocks from where he was.

He was wrong. It was three blocks. . . . The house of Crockett, Miss Eunice Lee, was not impressive from the outside. But then few private homes in the old quarter of Cairo were.

The entrance was a naked, bleak arch of stone large enough to pass a good-sized truck. A burnoused native who had all the earmarks of a beggar sat cross-legged under the arch, and thrust out a hand when Doc passed.

"*A tini, a tini,*" the man mumbled. "*A tini piastre.*"

Doc paused. The native repeated this plea for a piastre. Doc asked in Arabic, "Is this the home of the woman named Crockett?"

"*A tini, a tini—*"

Doc, picking up the part he intended to play, asked the beggar how he would like three of his ribs kicked in, or better still, how would he like to be fed to a dog? "Answer my question, you breath of a camel," Doc added.

The beggar said there was undoubtedly something dead and rotting in the neighborhood, else why should a jackal visit the place? He said this conversationally. It was quite an insult, the way he did it.

Doc dusted his hands elaborately and remarked, "A dung heap." He went on to a second archway, much more elaborate, inlaid with pearl and gilt, and made a commotion against a huge door.

The door did not open at once.

He heard the beggar say something. It was Arabic, sounded like, "*Hu jada shatir*," which translated roughly to the statement that Doc was a clever fellow. The tone gave it the effect of, "A wise guy, eh?"

Doc wondered if the beggar had a pushbutton signal of some sort accessible. He hadn't seen one. More likely the fellow was there to flank attack anyone at the door if necessary. Obviously the beggar was one of the household.

Doc knocked on the door again, and kicked it a few times for good measure.

The door was opened by a very fat, very blonde, very pleasant looking woman of better than forty years of age who addressed Doc in good American. "Son," said the woman, "shirts are made to be kept on."

Doc was very nearly startled into replying in English. He

caught himself, and spoke Arabic. "I have business with the woman called Crockett," he said.

"All right, keep your shirt on, this is the place," the fat woman said. She looked Doc up and down, added, "Son, they had something large in mind when they made you, didn't they?"

"*Shu hadha?*" Doc said bluntly. He wondered if this was still the equivalent of, "What goes on here?" His Arabic wasn't as fluent as he had hoped. That, or he was getting nervous.

"Oh, for God's sake, don't you speak any English?" the woman asked.

"I want to see the woman called Crockett," Doc said, sticking to his Arabic. "You, as anyone can see, are not her."

"No English, eh?" The woman sighed. "That's two strikes on you, son."

"What?"

"Big and dumb, aren't you?"

"I did not come here to listen to guinea cackle," Doc announced.

He started to push past the woman. He felt that sort of behavior would fit the part he was acting.

Astonishingly, there was a gun in the fat blonde woman's hand. It was a small flat gun with inlay and pearl handles and a

hole larger than a pencil for the bullets to come out. He was a little confused about where she had had it.

"Do you," she asked, "want to become a nasty mess on our doorstep?"

She said this in Arabic.

Doc pretended considerably less awe of the gun than he felt, and said, "I am here to see Eunice Lee Crockett. Will you take me to her?"

"I've heard you say that a couple of times already," said the woman. "But you left something out."

"What?"

"The nature of your business."

"It's private business."

"Just how many times a day," she asked, "do you suppose I hear that?"

Doc shrugged. "I'm not interested. Do I see Miss Crockett, or not?"

"Not."

Doc registered thwarted disgust. It was not difficult. He had no idea who the woman might be, but he suspected she was a capable character. She was an American. At one time she had been quite beautiful, he imagined, and flashy. Relieved of

about a hundred pounds now, she would still be striking.

Doc scowled at the gun and said, "I think I'll come in."

"You do," she advised him, "and you'll leave rolled up in a rug. . . . Son, I don't know what you've heard of Crockett, but it must have been awfully undependable information, or you wouldn't be standing there acting tough. That could get you what we used to call back home a pine overcoat."

Doc was dubious. She didn't look that tough. But could her looks be depended upon?

"How much," Doc asked finally, "would I have to tell you about my business?"

The fat woman shrugged. "Enough for me to decide whether it's monkey business."

That gave him an opening for a question that had been puzzling him, and he asked, "What is your connection with Miss Crockett?"

"That," said the fat woman, "would be a long story. Call it secretary, advisor, companion, whipping-boy and a red flag in front of idiots like yourself."

"Miss Crockett is here?"

"Sure. But a fat chance you have of seeing her if you don't pass inspection with me."

Doc shrugged.

"This business of mine," he said grudgingly, "is about a gold mine."

"Whose gold mine?"

"Mine."

"I'll bet," said the big woman skeptically. "Ill just bet."

"You think I'm a thief?" Doc yelled. He looked angry.

"Why not? Why else would you be here?" She began laughing, and added, "And why else would you be so indignant about being called a thief? . . . What do you want here, anyway?"

"Some help," Doc said, dropping his anger quickly enough to show her it was feigned.

"What kind of help?"

"A sort you might find some profit in giving," Doc said.

"You don't talk your head off, do you, when it comes to facts," said the fat woman. "Oh, well, come in. . . . We'll have a little reception for you, and see what develops."

Doc Savage walked in, not getting the point about a reception, but rather pleased with himself. He supposed it merely meant he was to meet Miss Eunice Lee Crockett, lady adventurer or *femme* sinister or whatever she was.

It did not mean this.

He did not find it out, though, until he had handed the large lady his hat when she held out a hand for it, and then he had stood there, as confident as a goat looking at the picture on a tomato can label, and listened to the woman say, "That's nice. It would be a shame to ruin a good hat." Promptly he was hit over the head from behind with something or other.

VI

Doc Savage did not fall after he was struck, but he came unhooked from reality. He stood there and his arms hung down. He couldn't think of anything particular to do. . . . Unexpected head blows had always held more terror for him than almost anything. There was a kind of black, abysmal, meaningless shock about a head blow that upset him. The moment of unexplainable surprise afterward was a thing of terror, like being pushed into a chasm. If you were knocked out, it was not as bad, although still bad enough, because unconsciousness would come quickly. But it was worse when you were dazed, and trying to get organized, figure out what had happened and why, and defend yourself.

The fat lady had not hit him. That was sure. Neither had the beggar. Who, then?

He turned to see. He turned holding his legs stiff, for the

knees felt as if they would bend either way on slight provocation. He got partly around, and saw there was not just one. There were three of them, all big men, men nearly as large as he was, with clean shiny skins and the kind of faces that men have the world over when they only know how to make a point with their muscles. One was smoking a cigarette lazily.

The fat woman said, "Your arm must be getting weak, Abraham." And the man with the sap, a tube of goatskin with some loose shot in the end, looked pained and swung again. Doc bent his head a little and the weapon skated over the top of his head, not hurting him much worse than if he had been hit with a hammer.

Doc still did not go down. Moreover he could think after a fashion. He wondered if he should cut loose and do as well as he could, which might be better than they expected, providing they didn't know who he was. Or did they know? If they did, there was no percentage in letting himself be sapped down. If he did, there was always the chance some fisherman on the Nile in a few days would paddle over to see what the seagulls were fighting over, and find whatever was left of him by then.

He solved it by walking in close to Abraham. He hit Abraham in the middle with his right fist while he was putting his left arm around Abraham's waist. It was about as far around the waist as around a barrel. He did not have enough arm for it. He pumped his right into Abraham again, and the barrel convulsed and Abraham became a weight pulling him down toward the shiny floor. The floor was mother-of-pearl. He hadn't noticed that before. A floor like that would cost money.

By pushing against Abraham as he fell, he got the great bulk to topple. Abraham, troubled by what the two punches had done to his stomach, made a series of hacking and whooping noises and was again disinterested in using his sap any more. In falling, he brought up against the other man, with the result that they both landed on the floor.

Doc was off balance. In stumbling around trying to remain on his feet, he stepped on Abraham and his companion as often as possible. And presently he managed to hit the third assailant somewhere, and that one was on the floor too, his cigarette making a shower of fire.

"Whoeee!" said the fat woman. She sounded as if she was calling hogs. "Whoeee!" Then she added, "A real rough boy." She did not sound much disturbed.

I've probably overdone this, Doc thought.

The beggar came and stood in the door. When he appeared, he was bold and decisive. But then he saw what was going on, and was undecided.

Doc scowled at the cigarette on the floor, then the fat woman.

"You," he said, "can jump in the lake." The actual words which he used in Arabic were a little at variance, having to do with a sea trip by camel, but the inference was the same.

He walked out.

The beggar looked at him, did not do or say anything. This beggar was clean. Genuine Cairo beggars were never clean.

Doc kept walking. Not very straight, but he kept walking. When he got his legs tracking better, he tried a little running.

Sherman McCorland's red hair looked redder in Cairo. Otherwise he was much the same lean whip of a man that he had been when Morand had called him into the State Department office in Washington and introduced him to Doc Savage as the man in Cairo to call on for small favors.

"Good God!" said McCorland. "Are you injured?"

Doc was not injured, but he had bandaged his face rather completely in order to cover the phony scar, which was quite a bit of trouble to remove and replace. Doc had taken the contact lenses off his eyes, so he looked pretty much like himself now.

"Not seriously," Doc said. "I want you to do me a favor."

"How in Heaven's name did you get to Cairo so soon?" McCorland demanded. "You must have taken the plane immediately after nine."

Doc said that might have been. "I want some gold," he explained.

"Gold?"

"Not much. A couple of ounces. But it should be placer gold

—not stuff that has been milled out of ore—and it should be from some part of Egypt if possible."

"What do you want it for?"

"Can you get it—without anyone knowing anything much about it?"

"Why do you want it?" McCorland repeated.

"A private matter."

"Has it something to do with your finding Nesur?" asked McCorland.

Doc shrugged and said, "Do we have to go into this? Morand gave me the impression you knew what discretion was."

McCorland stiffened. He didn't like that. He said, "You pick a sweet way of asking a favor."

Angry now, Doc said, "Skip it, then." He went toward the door and had his hand on the knob when McCorland said, "How soon will you need this gold?"

Doc stopped. "Right away. Half an hour."

McCorland punched a button. A native came in, and McCorland asked for his hat and stick. The native left. "If you want to wait here," McCorland told Doc, "I'll see what can be done."

"Placer gold," Doc said. "Dust. Very small nuggets. From Egypt, or at least from Africa."

"I heard you," McCorland said. "I'm sorry if I seem abrupt, discourteous or unduly inquisitive—or a trifle irked over what might seem to me a trifling request for an absurdity in the face of such an urgent situation."

Doc Savage examined the other man's face. "What do you mean, urgent?"

McCorland frowned. "Haven't you heard?" He shook his head and added, "But you probably haven't, because you can have been in Cairo only a few hours. I cabled this information to Morand only a few moments ago."

"What information?"

"A report—how true it is, I can not say, but I am terrified of its authenticity—that Nesur has definitely decided on hostilities, and that the word will go out quite soon. Not longer than twenty-four hours. Sooner if there is evidence of British and American knowledge of the decision."

"That means," Doc asked grimly, "that our time is shaved down to twenty-four hours?"

"Yes, obviously."

"Get the gold dust," Doc said.

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When Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks came to call on Doc Savage, Doc was rubbing the placer gold between two chunks of rough sandstone. The nuggets were too large for his purpose, and he was reducing them in size.

Monk and Ham came in without knocking, and Monk said, "Hello there, Ole Hansel. Right nice diggings you got for yourself here."

Ham closed the door.

"Where's the English accent?" Doc asked Monk briefly.

"Righto, gov'nor. You want the bloody trouble started right off?"

Doc shook his head. "Sit down. I didn't expect you this soon. That messenger must have broken a record getting to you."

Neither Monk nor Ham took chairs. They were nervous. Ham said, "We asked half a dozen places for Ole Hansel."

Doc nodded. "That's good."

He spread the particles of gold he had just reduced in size out on a paper on the table. Arrayed there also were two packages of cigarettes, new ones, which he had opened.

Doc proceeded, with infinite care, to insert particles of gold into the cigarettes, not less than half a dozen tiny pieces to each cigarette. For this he was using a needle-thin rod sliding inside a tiny tube; he would place a few flakes of gold in the thin tube, insert it in the end of the cigarette, and with the rod ram it

out so that it lay in the tobacco.

He had thus prepared one package of cigarettes, and three fourths of the other package. He proceeded to finish the job, examining the end of each cigarette with a small magnifying glass when he finished to make sure his trickery was not obvious.

Ham leaned over to look at the cigarettes. "How'd you know what brand to use?"

Doc told them about his attempt to see Miss Crockett. "The fellows who crawled me were evidently her goon squad," he finished. "One of them was smoking this brand of cigarette."

He re-sealed both cigarette packages, wrapped them carefully, and put them in his clothing.

He said, "Before we start our fracas, here is some bad news McCorland gave me: He says that this holy man, Nesur, has decided on violence, and the word will go out in about twenty-four hours."

Monk rubbed his jaw gloomily. "That's going to push us." He shook his head, added, "In Washington, the idea of some holy man on the other side of the world causing a war didn't seem much more than so much talk. Walking around through the native quarter here in Cairo, the way we've been doing the last few hours, you get a different idea."

"Heard anything?" Doc demanded.

"Nothing to help us find Nesur," Monk said. "But we did run across Nesur agitators at work. They're not underground about it at all. These guys we heard were doing it from soap boxes. You'd think they were on Union Square."

"If they're out in the open with it, they must be pretty sure of themselves," Doc commented.

He finished his preparations.

"Okay for the fuss," he said. "I'm Ole Hansel and I know where there is a gold mine you should rightfully share. Act accordingly."

Their previous conversation had been in low voices. What followed was louder. Presently they had worked up a noisy quarrel.

Monk produced the showy blackjack he had taken from Homer Crockett, the man Monk still presumed was the manager of the hotel in Washington. "This thing should be good window-dressing," Monk said, and made a pass at Doc with the blackjack.

They struck a few blows, broke up some furniture, fell on a bed and smashed that down. Presently, when the thing looked good enough, Doc took to his heels. Monk and Ham pursued him. They made all the commotion they could going through the building.

The owner of the place and half a dozen servants had gathered. Doc dived through them, upsetting one, and gained the street. Once outside, he settled down to running, doubling

around corners, heading for the section of sidewalk shops. Presently he had lost Monk and Ham off his trail.

He thought the whole thing had looked genuine enough.

Doc decided to delay his return to his hotel. It was likely that the management would summon the police, and Doc wished to avoid complications there. So, for the next hour and a half, he browsed through the more crowded part of the old city, the Muski, and the Copt and Jewish quarters to the north. He visited several of the bazaars and markets in the huge buildings called *khans*, listening to the talk of the polyglot peoples—Cairenes, Nubians, Bedouin Arabs, Levantines, Syrians, Armenians, Greeks, Italians, French, English.

He was interested in the thing Monk had mentioned. That there was open agitation by Nesur's organization under way.

There was. He got a sample of it in a side street not far from the mosque of El Azhar, which for a long time had been the chief theological seminary of Islam. . . . As Monk had remarked, it was a little like Union Square, where a man could climb on a soap box and vent his opinions.

The organizer doing the talking here was probably small fry. But he was adept, knew his subjects, and the points he wanted put across.

One folk, one leader, one nation. That was his cry. It was basic and ancient. It had come down through the centuries, from the mouths of men who were welding people together for

a purpose, good or bad. In union there is freedom, in union there is power. United we stand, divided we fall. The same cries had rung out over blood in American history; they were great words there, and heroes had said them. But men with dark souls had said them in other nations too, and Doc remembered the mottoes that had been plastered over Nazi Germany before the war: *Ein volk, ein Ehrer, ein Reich*. One people, one leader, one nation. Prelude to holocaust. How many had died then? Fifty million? Did anyone know?

This was grim stuff. That fellow there, that street spieler, wasn't just raving dream-stuff at the crowd. There was a confidence about him. Doc could feel it. And he knew the crowd could feel it.

There was no appeal to violence, and the Palestine problem, boilhead of the whole thing, was mentioned only by implication. . . .

Doc returned to his hotel slowly. He was worried. Morand, in Washington, had not exaggerated. This was only Cairo, and Cairo was on the outskirts of the problem. How much hotter it must be in Baghdad, Tel Aviv, Damascus, and for that matter in Karachi, Delhi and Calcutta.

The hand of Nesur was already well raised. If the hand held a match to light the fuse, there was no man to say where it might end.

It was stuff that, put in words, did not have awful urgency. He imagined how some Americans would regard it in their newspapers. *Jaffa, Basra, Beirut? What are they? Towns?*

Nesur? Who's that? The hell with it, let 'em fight it out. How did the Dodgers do today? . . . And maybe one thing would follow another and again ten million of them would be packing guns, or perhaps twenty this time.

He scouted his hotel. It was quiet. There seemed to be no police about. He entered, and the manager came to him at once and said, "We shall have to ask you to leave."

"Those two fellows started the trouble," Doc argued.

"You will leave anyway, please."

Doc shrugged and said, "If that's the way you feel," and went on to his elaborate suite.

The fat woman who had been at Eunice Lee Crockett's house arose from a chair.

"Maybe you did have something to offer," she said. "Crockett wants to talk to you about it."

Doc concealed pleasure carefully. It was working.

VII

Mr. Homer Wickett, erstwhile phony manager of the Rimes Hotel in Washington, D. C., was the first passenger off the four-o'clock plane from points west—Paris, London, New

York, Washington. He was trailed closely by the man called Clyde and was, as anyone could see, in a hell of a hurry, and about the same state of temper.

"Where's Nate with the car?" he demanded.

Nate was a dark-skinned, thick-browed Italian. The car was a French custom body on an American chassis, and had cost approximately fifteen thousand dollars. There was already another man in the car, a roundish bald-headed man with a hard-skinned pale face that always looked as if it had just had a coat of oil and a polish. He wore spectacles with flashy shell rims in which several small gems, imitation ones, were set. Wickett addressed him as Galsbrucke.

"You get my cable, Galsbrucke?" Homer Wickett demanded.

"I got four of them," said the bald, spectacled man.

"Four is all I sent. . . . All right, where is this fellow Savage?"

The bald man looked uncomfortable. "He was in the American embassy offices about noon, seeing McCorland. He evidently wanted two ounces of African gold dust, because McCorland went out and got some."

"Gold dust?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I am sorry, I do not know," said Galsbrucke.

Homer Wickett cursed at some length, indicating there had been, as he put it, too much fumbling around with this thing, with nobody knowing enough about anything.

Clyde rode in front with Nate, the driver. Clyde was bleak-eyed and expressionless, carefully masking the fact that he was quite ill. He did not like airplane travel, and he liked it least of all over oceans for the very simple reason that once as a small boy while swimming in the surf off Atlantic City, N.J., he had been attacked by a hammerhead shark and had, he had always felt, barely escaped with his life. He was now in no state to care in the least what happened.

Homer Wickett finished his swearing and asked, "All right, where is Savage?"

"From McCorland's office, Savage walked through the bazaars and shops—"

"Where is he?"

Galsbrucke winced. "My man lost his trail."

Wickett's face took a slight bluish cast. "Who lost him?"

"Sabi. Hassam Sabi."

Wickett said, "Clyde."

Clyde did not stir and gave no sign of hearing.

"Clyde!"

The tone would have cracked a rock. Clyde lifted sick eyes. "Huh?"

"You know Hassam Sabi?" Wickett demanded.

"Yeah. Guy we picked up in Tehran. Why?" said Clyde weakly.

"I want you to put a knife in him," Wickett said.

"Oh, for God's sake!" gasped Galsbrucke. "The poor devil did his best—"

Wickett spat. "His best wasn't good enough, then," he said. "Listen, Galsbrucke, you'd better get it through your shiny skull that the situation is desperate. I'm going to get some action if I have to see throats cut right and left, yours included." He leaned forward and bellowed at the driver, "What are you waiting on? Get me to my office, and quick."

The office was not outwardly elaborate, but the interior was probably as fine as any in Cairo. It was located in a penthouse structure on top of one of the buildings in the newer section of the city near the river. If there was a more luxurious office in town, it would go hard on the architect who had designed this one if Homer Wickett found it out. He frequently made this statement, for he was a man who liked to take his emotions out of his mouth in balls of fire. This was always impressive, because he was not a four-flusher.

"I want Savage found," he told Galsbrucke. "You get that? I want him found."

"We are trying. We had no idea he was in Cairo until he appeared at the embassy to see McCorland."

Wickett got a little purple. "Weren't you watching the airport?"

"We—I—"

"Were you?"

"Well . . . no."

"Galsbrucke," said Wickett thoughtfully, "I think your stupidity is going to cause you to have an unfortunate experience—*if you don't find Savage in the next couple of hours!*" The last was said in a tone that caused all the pigeons to leave the roof outside the windows.

The man was pacified somewhat, however, by a couple of drinks and a light dinner that featured the form of skewered lamb called shish kebab. He told Galsbrucke sourly that he hadn't had much luck stopping Doc Savage in Washington. "He was in town and out before we got our breath," he explained. "However, I did plant one of those blackjacks on two of Savage's assistants, or on one of them, anyway. And that should enable us to take care of one or more of them."

Galsbrucke, anxious to change the subject to a more pleasant one, asked, "Would you care to look over some of the reports that have come in?"

"Might as well," Wickett said.

The reports were from the branch offices and field managers of the various petroleum interests owned or controlled by Wickett and the men associated with him.

An oil scout in Iran reported that the Central-Oklahoma-United Oil Company No. 7 well had come in for two thousand barrels at thirty-seven hundred feet. This was doubtless quite secret information, and important, because it meant that a new field had proved out. It was a matter that involved many millions of dollars, but not in Mr. Homer Wickett's pocket. He had no oil holdings in Iran.

He did have holdings in Oklahoma, Illinois, California, Mexico and China. He had a refinery in Oklahoma, one in Indiana, one in Mexico. These were his personal holdings. They were not held jointly by the combine. They were Mr. Wickett's. But there were other oil leases, producing wells, drilling operations, areas under lease and being doodlebugged for oil in various parts of the world, refineries, pipelines, tanker concerns, and even a not inconsiderable chain of service stations, all controlled by the combine of which Wickett was spark plug.

There were reports from most of these holdings. The regular routine. Wickett looked them over, and they were pretty good. But not good enough to satisfy him. He was a man who quite probably would never be satisfied.

Wickett had a few things that were good in him, but much more that was bad. His intensity and his drive, his skill and his

business sense, could have made him a genuinely great man. But he had in him the thing that in another sense Hitler had: he did not know when to stop. An excess, if it was a means to an end, meant nothing to Wickett. Bribery, murder, robbery, meant nothing if he could gain by them. He was a man in whose hands power was a grisly thing.

And he had power.

It was not yet dark when Galsbrucke came hurrying into Wickett's office. Galsbrucke looked relieved.

"We've spotted Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks," he reported. "There was a fight at a hotel in the native quarter, and the participants, or two of them, were a couple of phony Englishmen, one big and apish, the other slender. One of my men, Cagle, had sense enough to realize the coincidence, so he investigated and found Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks."

"Where are they?" demanded Wickett.

Galsbrucke handed him a slip of paper bearing an address. Wickett read this, then tore it up, growling, "Listen, don't let anything get in writing about this affair. Nothing! You understand."

"Yes, sir."

"Is Doc Savage with them?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

Galsbrucke lost some of his elation and confessed, "I don't know yet."

But Wickett was not as enraged by this as Galsbrucke had expected. Wickett swung back in his chair. He contemplated the ceiling for a while, then remarked, "The chances are that one of them has that blackjack. The question is, who."

Galsbrucke jumped. "The blackjack? Why, the one named Mayfair has it."

"How'd you find that out?"

"My man, Cagle, saw it in his hand. It seems Mayfair has a habit of fondling it."

Wickett laughed. Then he scowled. "You crazy fool, you didn't tell this Cagle that blackjack had any particular significance, did you?"

"Oh, no—"

"Did you tell anybody?"

"No. No indeed."

"Then how in the hell," yelled Wickett, "did Cagle happen to notice it." He didn't sound as if he believed Galsbrucke.

Galsbrucke explained nervously. "Cagle mentioned the man Mayfair taking a blackjack out of his pocket occasionally. The

subject came up when Cagle was telling me that Mayfair seems to be a very tough customer."

"You bet he's tough," Wickett said. He was satisfied. He rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "The point is, do we get rid of Brooks and Mayfair immediately, before the fool mislays that blackjack or somebody takes it away from him? Or do we wait for Savage?"

"You're going to—to—" Galsbrucke swallowed.

"The word, Mr. Galsbrucke, is kill," said Wickett. "When you are talking about something as direct as murder, never use an evasive word."

VIII

Miss Eunice Lee Crockett said, "Who is it?"

The fat blonde woman said, "Tiny. . . . Bearing an offering."

"Come in, Tiny."

The fat woman said to Doc Savage, "Would you mind holding your hands up a minute?" He did, and she slapped her hands on the obvious places where he might be carrying a weapon, and some places that were not obvious. Then she pushed the door open and said, "Walk into the web, fellow."

Doc Savage went in.

He had not known what to expect of Eunice Lee Crockett. He had seen her picture, of course. And her record in the State Department dossier. Her picture was that of a sweet little thing, but her record was as a combination of Cleopatra and Anne Bonny, the lady pirate.

Well, she looked like her picture, anyway.

"Won't you sit down," said Miss Crockett.

The room was an office, quite formal and quite New Yorkish, but not specially elaborate. He took the visitor's chair at the corner of the desk.

She had not offered to shake hands. But he had not expected her to.

In a pleasant voice, she explained, "It is too bad your first visit was unfortunate, but you see we have odd visitors here sometimes. We took the trouble to check on you, and a certain fight that happened at your hotel indicated your story might have something."

All this was said in Arabic, which she spoke fluently but with an American accent. . . . He was so busy weighing and measuring her that he didn't realize he was supposed to say something. Finally she said, "Well? What have you to sell?"

"Oh, that," Doc said. He began lying. He told her the story he had outlined to Monk and Ham; he was Ole Hansel, with two partners, and he had found a gold mine. He had found the

mine—Doc made a point of that, indicating that he and his partners had quarreled, and separated, and so they had no right to the gold mine, although they seemed to think differently.

"I want them taken off my neck if necessary," he said. "I don't think they're going to bother me much, because they haven't any legal rights to back them up."

"Were any papers signed?" asked Miss Crockett, as calmly as if she was a school ma'am asking a sixth-grader if he knew what a divisor was.

"No."

"What else do you want?"

"Money from you to develop the mine," Doc said. "For that I will give you a generous share, say ten per cent."

Miss Crockett smiled. "Ten per cent?"

"Yes."

"For you, you mean?" she said.

He had not supposed she was dumb. Now he concluded she wasn't, and that she was a Shylock besides. Although, considering that he was holding himself forth as nothing less than a double-crosser and a crook, there was some justice to her side. . . . He found himself arguing with her as if there was really a gold mine, and she was really going to crimp him out

of the lion's share of it.

In the end they compromised on an even split.

"Now," she said, "it's up to you to prove you have a gold mine."

He said that was easy. He would take her out and she could watch her men pan gold out of the pay sand.

As promptly, she said they would do that. "How far is it from Cairo?"

"Not more than two hundred miles."

She was startled. "That close? . . . Can an airplane land near the spot?"

He nodded.

"Then we will go there early in the morning," she said. "You will sleep here tonight."

Staying here was something he hadn't bargained for. He had intended to consult with Monk and Ham about future plans. But Miss Crockett was already pushing a button.

A servant appeared—one of the big fellows with whom he'd had the fight on his first visit—and took him to a room. The servant seemed to carry no malice.

The room was large, pleasant, and, like most of the house interior, more like an American mansion than a Cairo manse.

An indication, he imagined, that the proprietress often got homesick for the U. S.

The servant left the room, closing the door. . . . There was a clicking sound. Doc whirled, hurried to the door, and tested it.

He was locked in.

He slept soundly though. And the next morning, on the way out to a private airport, he got his cigarettes planted. He merely borrowed a cigarette from one of the big men, whose name was Ali, and took the package out of Ali's hand in order to extract the cigarette, and made a switch. Later, while they were waiting for the plane to be pushed out of a hangar, he pulled much the same switch on the other big man. The latter's name was Wazzah. It was probably a nickname, because the word was Arabian for goose.

The plane was a little five-place cabin job made in Michigan. In the party were Miss Crockett, the fat woman, the two big men Ali and Wazzah, and himself. That was all the plane would hold, and he wondered who was going to fly. Miss Crockett would, it developed.

He was handed a chart when they were in the air. He pretended to be upset by the unfamiliarity of an aerial chart. He was upset all right, but not by the chart. He was upset because he had to find a likely gold mine in a country he had never seen, and find it from the air.

An hour and fifty minutes later, he selected what seemed to

be a likely place, and pointed it out. "There," he said.

The plane landed.

"Bring the gold pans," said Miss Crockett.

This was desert country, so normally there wouldn't have been a discernible drop of water within miles. But the rainy season was with them, and so there was, if anything, an overabundance of water in the sinkholes and pools.

He led the way.

"There," he said, pointing.

Miss Crockett said she didn't see any tracks. Shouldn't there be tracks if he had been prospecting around the place.

He looked wise and asked, "Would I leave tracks and let them know where I had been prospecting?"

He had a bad minute when he thought Ali and Wazzah were going to begin panning without smoking. But he got that fixed up by bumming another cigarette off them. The power of suggestion was enough. Both big men lit up cigarettes, dipped up gravel in the gold pans which Miss Crockett had brought along, and went to work.

There was disgust when the first panning showed no gold. But the next one showed flecks of pay, and spirits revived. The third panning was quite rich, and after that, every panning except one, taken at various points up and down the stream, showed gold.

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Miss Crockett was pleased, and also surprised. "That sand," she said, "is running near a hundred piastres to the panning. With modern mining methods, the return would be fabulous."

Doc said smugly that it would. Then he put the bee on Miss Crockett. He had, Doc explained, a wailing need for money for expenses, and now, seeing that there was a fine gold claim being shared between them, how about Miss Crockett advancing a trifling amount in cash. Say about twenty thousand piastres.

Miss Crockett said nothing doing. Doc complained loudly. He explained, with gestures, the horrible things his creditors might do to him unless he got some cash. "Would you buy ten per cent of my share for cash?" he asked. Miss Crockett was more interested in that, but said she would have to think it over.

The two big men, Ali and Wazzah, had lifted their ears.

During the flight back to Cairo, Doc managed to sell Wazzah a tenth interest in his half of the mine for twenty thousand piastres.

The fat woman did not become aware of this. She was riding ahead of them, and was bulky and silent in Arab garb, including veil.

But Ali overheard. He was disappointed. To placate Ali, Doc unloaded another tenth on him for the same price Wazzah had paid, twenty thousand piastres.

Neither Ali nor Wazzah had the purchase price handy, but insisted they could get it, and quick.

"You are getting a great bargain," Doc assured them. "You have robbed me of my eyes, practically."

At the airport, Miss Crockett left them for a while, accompanied by the fat woman. But both returned shortly, and Crockett said they would now go to her house and prepare the papers of agreement, and the necessary moves to get control of the gold claim from the government.

Doc agreed. He was not very enthusiastic, since he wanted privacy so he could contact Monk and Ham. It had now been almost twenty hours since he had seen them.

But they went to Miss Crockett's house, and Doc saw no prospect of getting away immediately. The bickering about details went on and on. The deals with Ali and Wazzah came to Miss Crockett's notice.

"You're a fool to sell so cheaply," she told Doc. "But it's your funeral. Ali and Wazzah are faithful servants of mine, and if someone has to skin you, I'm glad they're doing it."

"When can I leave?" Doc demanded.

"Not for an hour or so at least."

The scheme seemed to be going all right. . . . Whether it would end as he had expected it to, Doc wasn't sure. He was

beginning to have some doubts.

This elaborate piece of connivance was based on human nature—Miss Crockett's human nature. His first idea of what she was like had been taken from the State Department dossier on her. Now he was not as certain. She was different. Either that, or she was the smoothest article of deceit he had ever seen.

The delay was tough to take, too. Some of his impatience might be coming from that. If this holy man, Nesur, was going to put out the word for violence within twenty-four hours, the time was getting very short. The twenty-four-hour report might have been a rumor. It might not. McCorland had seemed frightened about it.

He studied Miss Crockett as they discussed, argued. Smooth, all right. According to the information he had on her, she had led the ordinary day-to-day life of an Ohio girl until five years ago. Grade school, high school, teacher's college, then a job teaching in a small Ohio town; the usual friends, he imagined; the usual hobbies and the usual social life. And then she had come to Cairo where she had inherited the estate of an Uncle Ira Crockett. . . . That she should then become a fabulous figure of intrigue, accredited with feats that were equalled by few men, was startling. It would have been startling in any case. But for an Ohio school ma'am. . . .

Three men came in. Arabs. They were big men, as big as Ali and Wazzah.

Doc understood instantly that Miss Crockett had been

waiting for them. He knew it certainly when one of the trio nodded at him, and asked Miss Crockett in English, "Does he speak English?"

"I've been wondering," Miss Crockett said. "But report in English anyway."

"There was no gold," the big man said.

"What?"

"No gold. We panned up and down that creek bed for some distance, as well as panning where you had panned. There was not a single flake of gold."

Miss Crockett smiled without humor. She looked at Doc Savage.

"Salted," she said.

She spoke English. Doc pretended not to understand. Miss Crockett, he realized, could handle herself in an emergency. She was no more excited than she had probably been in Ohio when one of her students added six and six and got ten.

Doc inquired what was up. "*Shu hadha?*" he asked.

Miss Crockett explained. "You were trying to sell me a phony gold mine," she said. "You were very slick. I don't see how you managed it yet—the salting, I mean. But you did."

"*Ma yumkin!*" Doc said. Impossible.

"It's lucky I was cautious enough to send a second crew to investigate," Miss Crockett said. "Bulad, here, is a mining engineer, and he says there is no gold, so there is obviously no gold. What about it, Mr. Ole Hansel?"

Doc pretended indignation. He said again it was impossible.

"Is your name Ole Hansel?" Miss Crockett asked.

Doc shrugged. "I guess not. . . . Do you want to listen to an explanation?"

"Not," said Miss Crockett, "until I pick up your two friends who helped you pull this." She stood up and gave orders. She was going after Monk and Ham. "And you'll come along," she told Doc.

The ride wasn't particularly pleasant. They went in two cars, and Ali kept a gun in his hand. Around a corner from the second-rate place where Monk and Ham were staying, Miss Crockett ordered the car parked. The other car parked behind them, and the three big men approached.

"Bring the two men," ordered Miss Crockett. "Bring their baggage, too. Pay their bill, bring their baggage, and them. You understand?"

Bulad, the mining man, nodded. "They may not want to come peacefully."

"Then persuade them."

The trio departed.

Doc stirred, Ali gouged him with the gun snout warningly.

"Look here," Doc said. "I don't want those two hurt."

"So they're friends of yours?" Miss Crockett said.

"Yes."

"They won't be hurt—much."

Doc leaned forward. "There is no reason why you should not listen to an explanation." He spoke Arabic. "The story is simple. We want jobs. We had heard about you, Miss Crockett, and we surmised you did not employ fools. So we simply did something to prove we were not fools."

"Jobs?" She seemed surprised. "You want to work for me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

He could not very well tell her it was because she knew where Nesur was, and he hoped to get that information. He shrugged and said, "It would be a privilege."

She frowned a while over that. Suddenly she asked, "How did you fake the gold?"

"The cigarettes."

"What cigarettes—oh! Oh, I remember. Ali and Wazzah were smoking." She glanced at Ali and his companion. They looked bitterly disgusted with themselves. "Where did you get those cigarettes?"

"From our pockets," Ali muttered.

Doc explained about the switch. He demonstrated the sleight-of-hand by which he had done it.

Miss Crockett began laughing. "That was a smooth piece of work," she said.

She was still laughing when the explosion came slamming into the street, around the corner, throwing itself on them with unbelievable abruptness, thrusting their clothing against their bodies, then, a second later plucking the garments away from their skin, and sucking windows out of buildings, sucking up dust in the street.

Time, for a few seconds, became a kind of cavity. The blast had come, gone. Like a big whip that had popped. Surprise seemed the only thing in their brains. Incredulous wonder. That, and the blank shock on their faces, the dust crawling up in the street, and the greater dust coming rolling now in a great cloud around the corner toward Monk and Ham's hotel. . . .

Doc said thickly, "Monk . . ."

He was really out of the car and running into the dust before he planned any movement at all. He kept going. He ran

headlong. In the dust he could smell the fumes of cordite, the mellow-sweet stink that spreads after the explosion of an artillery shell. Other feet ran behind him.

The fat woman had remained at home. It was odd this popped into his mind now. But it did. It seemed to have no bearing on anything, but it was what he thought of.

Just before he reached the corner, an Arab boy appeared. The boy was about eighteen, and he was walking backward, both hands pressed to his face and blood leaking through his fingers.

Doc gripped the boy's arm. He said, "What happened?" English. He changed to Arabic. "*Shu hadha?*"

Very clearly through the hands still to his face the boy said, "Some men came from the hotel. They carried baggage. There was a pushcart by the curb. It blew up as they came near."

The explanation was utterly lucid. "Sit down," Doc said to the boy. "Wait for a doctor."

The boy said, "Thank you, sir," and then fell forward loosely on his face.

Doc Savage went on. The dust was thick in the street and in the dust nothing lived. Some things were burning, not blazing but smouldering and smoking. Some wood, possibly parts of the pushcart, and cloth on a body or two.

The blast had been amazing. It had cleaned out a hole, where the pushcart had been, that a man could stand in knee-

deep. Paving stones and sidewalk stones had been pushed with great force against the buildings, and one building wall had come down, making a pile of stone and brick on which was spread, like frosting on a cake, white bedclothing from some room above.

Doc went to the first body. It was the mining engineer, Bulad. To make sure of identification was not easy, particularly if one was squeamish about exposed anatomy. But he decided it was Bulad.

The woman called Crockett came up beside him. She said, "It's Bulad."

She sounded as she should sound. Strained, with illness pushing against restraint. Horror crowding against determination.

She said, "Your friends killed him."

She sounded all right with that, too. Her voice had all the revulsion and condemnation it should have. It was what she logically should think.

Doc went forward to another body. He did not walk easily nor did he easily look down at the body. Evidence that a body was there, really. For here was where the wall had come down, covered the body, all but an outflung arm from fingertips to midway between elbow and shoulder. If there had been any clothing on the arm, the explosion had stripped it away completely, and the arm was blackened and did not have its former shape.

Doc leaned down. He all but fainted. He could see that a great block of stone had hit so that its edge had severed the arm from the body that was deeper in the rubble.

By the arm's fingers lay the flashy pigskin blackjack that Monk Mayfair had taken off Mr. Homer Wickett, who had said he was a hotel manager in Washington.

Doc picked up the blackjack and dropped it in his pocket. There was no indication on his face that he knew what he was doing nor why.

IX

Homer Wickett had once read somewhere that many of history's great men, or notorious ones, had been victims of spasmophilia, which was a five-dollar psychiatrists' word meaning a tendency toward convulsions. It had relieved him not a little to read this. He himself had been addicted to tantrums when he was opposed, and it had worried him. He feared it might indicate insanity. But this thing he had read had tagged it with greatness, so he was no longer bothered. He had heard that Hitler had frequently fallen to the floor in a tantrum and chewed the carpet, and he understood exactly how the fellow felt. It was, Wickett supposed, an affliction of empire builders, something that went with a certain type of genius. He himself had constructed a petroleum empire, and he certainly had occasions when he went completely berserk.

Wickett was treating himself to one of his better fits now. He had finished striking and cursing the man who had brought him the bad news. Now, alarmed not so much by fear that he had killed a man as by fear that he might have needlessly killed a rather valuable henchman, Wickett had recoiled into a chair and was sitting there in muscle-knotted rigidity.

The man he had struck down had fallen in front of the large desk, and Wickett, in kicking him repeatedly in the head, stomach and ribs, had propelled the body partly into the knee-hole area of the desk. The man lay there now. He was breathing.

He was a tall gray-haired man of about thirty-five who spoke several languages fluently, and could as a usual thing be depended upon to accomplish almost any devilment that was assigned him. He had worked for Wickett for years. Once before Wickett had struck him, about seven years ago in a New York hotel when he had unfortunately been the one to tell Wickett that the U. S. government was shutting off Wickett's petroleum sales to the Nazi government.

Homer Wickett began slowly to rock back and forth. His face was pale, his lips compressed.

Clyde came in. Clyde was wearing the same suit he had worn when he served as chauffeur for Homer Wickett in Washington. Behind Clyde was the roundish bald-headed Galsbrucke. They were excited.

"We got them!" Galsbrucke said excitedly. "They passed the

pushcart! You should have heard the explosion here. Did you?"

Wickett looked at the men in a wooden pale-faced way and did not speak.

Clyde said, "We were a couple of blocks away and didn't actually see it, but that explosion was something to take your hat off."

"There isn't the slightest doubt!" said Galsbrucke.

Wickett said nothing.

Clyde frowned. "Something wrong, chief?"

Wickett jerked a little. His mouth opened slowly and a guttural trickle of sound came out; in a moment they realized he was cursing them, the world, and all things.

Startled, Clyde moved around the desk. He saw the unconscious man lying partly under the desk.

"For God's sake!" Clyde gasped. "It's Lansdowne! What did he—what's going on?"

Galsbrucke ran around the desk, observed the man also and said something stunned and appropriate. Then he ducked wildly as Wickett made a sudden swing at him with his fist.

The one blow was the only one Wickett released. He began to shake, not loosely, but tightly like a taut cord, and he yelled, "Where is Nesur?"

It was Galsbrucke's time to look stunned. He said, "Lansdowne is staying with Nesur . . ." Blankly, like an idiot, he stopped. . . . Lansdowne was there on the floor! He said, "What—" and did not finish.

Wickett, stabbing a hand at Lansdowne, screamed, "The fool! The idiot! The imbecile sat there in Gaza for a week watching an empty hole. Nesur had gone. Gone! And the consummate boob didn't know it!"

He kicked the body under the desk, and it moved slightly and groaned.

"Where is Nesur?" Galsbrucke blurted.

"Lansdowne doesn't know!"

"But that—oh, that's awful," Galsbrucke said, sounding as if he wanted to wring his hands. "The fat's in the fire. Everything depended on keeping Nesur under our thumbs."

Wickett screamed that he didn't need to be told this.

Clyde put in a question. "Why did this Nesur scam that way?"

Wickett cursed Clyde and asked if he was too dumb to guess. "Nesur was probably getting suspicious of us," he said.

Clyde rubbed his jaw.

"Has anybody thought of that babe, Crockett, in connection with this?" he asked.

Quite a prolonged silence followed this. Clyde used it to pull Lansdowne out from under the desk and tow him into the bathroom—there were living quarters as well as offices in the suite—and splash him with some water, give him a stiff drink of whiskey, and help him wash his face.

Lansdowne improved. They spent some time agreeing on the sort of fatherless so and so Mr. Wickett was.

"How the hell," said Clyde, "could Nesur be missing a week and you not know it?"

Lansdowne's shrug was bitter. "Nesur had been sticking close to the hideout."

"Afraid of us?"

"I thought he was afraid of the Americans and the English," Lansdowne said. "God knows, he should have been, the amount of spadework we've done on him to make him think the Americans and English were his poison."

Clyde said, "I was afraid we were going to overdo that."

"I told Wickett that. I told him that very thing," Lansdowne said. "But would he listen? Hah!"

"The chief pushes too hard," Clyde admitted. "You figure maybe Nesur had started to think we weren't his great friends and maybe the Americans and English weren't the stinkers we had them painted?"

"It could be."

"That would be a hell of a note," said Clyde.

"It would indeed," admitted Lansdowne sourly. "We have spent two years building this up. . . . Persuading Nesur to come out of exile, building himself up again as a holy man, getting an organization together. All that was a lot of work."

Clyde nodded and said he had been thinking about that. "Nesur," Clyde said, "is at the point now where he can step out and lead an uprising against the English. He can call it a holy war or call it a war of independence, or call it anything he wants to for that matter. And he's pretty sure to be able to get the backing of every disgruntled man in the Near East."

"That's a fact," Lansdowne said.

"Isn't it also a fact that, regardless of whether Nesur's campaign to throw the foreigners out succeeds entirely, the foreign-held oil companies are going to get thrown out on their ears?" Clyde said.

"Yes."

"Okay. Wickett figured he was going to be the man to get the oil business that was taken away from the companies that now have it."

"Of course."

"That's big stakes," Clyde remarked.

"About as big as you can count them," Lansdowne agreed.

Clyde was sagely thoughtful. "Like I said a minute ago, it would be a nice set-up for someone to step in and take over."

"What do you mean?"

"That dame," Clyde said.

"Crockett?"

"Uh-huh. She's been known to grab the walnuts after somebody else shook the tree. . . . You remember that boatload of Nazi bigwigs who sailed from Greece with their loot when it got too hot at home? Talk is she got the walnuts there."

Lansdowne swore thoughtfully.

"We'd better tell Mr. Wickett," he said.

* * *

It was not a very easy job to tell Mr. Wickett that Eunice Lee Crockett might have, by a cunning move, put herself in a position to harvest the crop Mr. Wickett had spent two years planting and cultivating.

Reluctantly—he seemed quite sure Wickett would have another fit when he heard this—Lansdowne confessed that for the past three weeks or so, and up until a week previously when it was now presumed Nesur had disappeared from his hideaway in the city of Gaza, there had been a man known as Wazzah around Gaza. And this Wazzah, it was rumored, was a

henchman of Miss Eunice Lee Crockett.

Homer Wickett didn't have his fit. He merely said he was tempted to kill everybody in the room.

"We've got to get that woman," Wickett said.

"You think she would know where Nesur is?"

Wickett bitterly requested Lansdowne not to be stupid. "Of course she would know. That babe knows everything she's not supposed to know. As a matter of fact, the old reprobate of an uncle she inherited her organization from used to finance Nesur. Nesur was sort of the old goat's protégé. After the English chased Nesur into hiding a few years ago to keep the Mediterranean section quiet, it was Crockett's uncle who provided a retiring-place for Nesur. . . . Hell, Nesur would consider this dame his friend."

Clyde said proudly, "That was my idea, too. Crockett will go ahead and provoke trouble, and get those oil concessions for herself."

Homer Wickett rather astonished them by doubting this.

"I don't know about that," he said. "But we're going to grab this Crockett woman."

"If we're wrong, that's going to make Nesur mad," Clyde said. "They're friendly."

"We'll make him think we were protecting him. We can fix up some sort of hokum he'll believe."

"How about saying she was plotting with this Doc Savage?"

"That might do it," Homer Wickett admitted.

The discussion got down to practical plans about Miss Crockett. Should they seize her? How? That might be easier talked than done. Galsbrucke's suggestion that they simply eliminate her, possibly using the method that had just been employed on Doc Savage's aides, was voted down by Wickett, who pointed out that the primary object was Nesur. Catch Miss Crockett, and grind out of her the whereabouts of Nesur, if she knew. That was the program.

The telephone rang, and Clyde answered. He said, "What? What? Oh, yes," and passed the instrument to Homer Wickett, adding, "For you."

Wickett had trouble understanding what was being said over the phone. He could not get it straight and said, "Come on up here. Something must be wrong with the connection."

Clyde frowned after the other ceased speaking and replaced the instrument on its cradle. "Didn't sound to me as if it was a bad connection," he said.

Homer Wickett nodded. "Scared."

"Nate, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Nate doesn't scare easy," Clyde said. "I wonder what the hell is wrong?"

Nate did not leave them in doubt when he got there. He arrived in a wild-eyed run.

"Pushcart—dynamite—didn't get Savage's men," Nate said by jerks. "Guys killed—Crockett's men—had gone to get this Monk and Ham and came out of the hotel carrying the blackjack."

X

Doc Savage, when he found Monk and Ham were safe in the hotel—this did not happen for some time—was knocked speechless by relief. He could do nothing but stare at the pair, then abuse them joyfully, after which he demanded what had happened.

"Three guys showed up out of a clear sky," Monk explained. "They caught us by surprise. They said they were going to take us to this Crockett woman. We said we weren't sure we liked the idea. They said it made damned little difference."

"They were from Crockett, all right," Doc said.

Monk nodded. "So we gathered finally. Anyway, to continue the story, they said they were going to move us out of here

lock, stock and barrel. We objected to that, too, and refused to carry our baggage, which they had to pack, too. They put all our stuff in the bags. They searched us and put what we had in our pockets in the bags, too—except that blackjack of mine. One of them decided to take that for himself. . . . Well, two of them left, and pretty soon we heard an explosion."

"Two left carrying your bags?" Doc asked.

"Yes."

"Then what became of the one who stayed here?"

"Him? He tore out of here when he heard the explosion."

Doc gave them an outline of what had happened since he had seen them, explaining that Miss Crockett had bitten on the gold mine trick, then discovered she had been on the point of being hoaxed. "Of course the whole idea was to convince her we were slick shysters ourselves and good men to have in her organization," Doc finished. "But I am not sure how that is going to work out. . . . I think maybe we've been misled—the girl may not be the rooting-tooting crook we were led to think she was."

"Where is she?" Ham demanded.

"She was down on the street," Doc said. "I missed her there. . . . I don't know whether we had better hunt her up, either."

"Why not?"

"It's just possible," Doc said, "that this scheming isn't going to turn out the way we thought it would. Our plans were based on her being pretty unscrupulous." Doc rubbed his jaw, considering the point. "I'll tell you what," he said. "We had better clear out of here, and I'll talk to the State Department man again, McCorland. See what has developed."

"Want us to go along?" Ham asked.

"Better, yes," Doc said. "I have a hunch that explosion was aimed at you two fellows. If it was, this neighborhood isn't healthy."

McCorland was in his office, and seemed quite surprised to see them. He had not met Monk and Ham. Doc introduced them, and they shook hands.

"Have you found Nesur?" McCorland demanded.

"Not yet," Doc said.

McCorland shook his head uneasily. "Time is getting awfully short, I'm afraid. All reports indicate that the time limit Nesur had set to reach a decision has elapsed, the decision has been made and awaits only its execution."

Doc nodded. "There doesn't seem to be much uneasiness here in Cairo."

"Well . . . No, no actual fighting yet," McCorland admitted. "However, something happened about half an hour ago that

gave us a bad shake. There was an explosion over in the native quarter, and at least two men were killed. There may have been more. One of the dead men has been identified as a fellow in the hire of that woman, Crockett. The killing may have been the beginning of general violence."

"I don't think so," Doc said.

"Why not?"

"The blast may have been an attempt to kill Monk and Ham."

"What! Great God, you mean someone tried to murder them?"

It looked that way, but there was no way of being sure, Doc explained. He did not go into details.

An embassy clerk entered, leaned over, and whispered into McCorland's ear. Doc did not get what was said, but McCorland jumped. Then McCorland looked at them. Doc Savage got the impression McCorland was irked by something that had just happened.

"There is a friend of yours here," McCorland told Doc.

Friend? Doc wondered who. Was that sarcasm? Was it Miss Crockett?

It was Morand. Morand from Washington. Morand neatly barbered and in whites, as dapper as if just stepping into the Mayflower Hotel in Washington for a cocktail at the end of the

day.

"Listen, why didn't you let me know they were here?" Morand snapped at McCorland. "I told you to."

"I was going to send word," McCorland said hastily.

McCorland, Doc realized, was irked by the presence of Morand, his superior officer, in Cairo.

Morand came toward Doc, smiling bitterly. "I don't know whether to shake hands with you or not," he said wryly.

"Something happen to our beautiful friendship?" Doc asked.

Morand nodded. "Somebody," he said, "made me a present in Washington."

"Is that so?" said Doc innocently.

"A body in a trunk. . . . You wouldn't know anything about it, I suppose? If you do, you'd better not admit it."

"A body!" Doc said. "Imagine!"

"Uh-huh. Funny thing, too. . . . Fingerprints of the fellow were on file with my department. Seems he works for a certain lady I recall mentioning to you, a Miss Crockett."

Doc suggested that this was quite a coincidence.

"It sure was. It scared the hell out of me. So I took a plane to Cairo in a hurry. Came over to see if you needed protection,"

Morand said.

Doc Savage said that, in view of the kind of lousy progress he had been making, what Morand should have brought along was a couple of first-grade miracles.

"You mean you aren't getting anywhere?" Morand demanded.

"Not anywhere."

"I'll bet," said Morand suspiciously. "What you mean is that you're not going to tell me what you're doing, isn't that it? Okay. All I can say is that if that shenanigin you pulled in Washington is a sample, nobody had better find out what you are doing."

Doc shook his head gloomily. "No, seriously—the results so far are awful."

Morand grinned dubiously. "That so? I seem to recall that you've produced results a few times in the past. . . . Anyway, can I be of any service?"

Doc nodded.

"There was an explosion," he said, "in the native quarter not quite an hour ago. It killed, I think, at least two men. They were also employees of our Miss Crockett."

"That's a hell of a coincidence, too!" Morand exclaimed.

"Listen, what are you doing? Knocking off her mob by ones and twos?"

"No. . . . I have a hunch that explosion was intended to get Monk and Ham. No proof. Just a hunch."

"The devil!"

Doc said, "The way I'm working this, I can't very well confer with the Cairo police about it. But you can. So I wish you'd do that, and egg them on all you can."

"Oh, you want the explosion-makers caught?"

"Certainly."

"Any idea who it is?"

"No. . . . The same outfit who killed that fellow in Washington, probably."

Morand frowned thoughtfully. "About this explosion," he said. "Did something blow up? Some object with wheels on it, I mean? Or with legs? A camel or a car or something?"

"A pushcart," Doc said curiously. "Why?"

Morand swung on McCorland. "Mack, how many cases like that have there been in the last couple of years?"

McCorland shrugged. "There have been so many bombings that I don't keep track—"

"You kept track of these," Morand said sharply. "I asked you to."

"Oh, you mean specific instances where a victim came near an object and it blew up. . . . There have been at least half a dozen," McCorland said.

Suddenly interested, Doc Savage took over the questioning. He demanded, "Were all of these explosion murders in Cairo?"

McCorland shook his head. "No. Two were in Jerusalem, one in Tel Aviv, one in Cairo, one in Athens, and I don't recall where the other one was."

"Haifa," said Morand.

"Yes, Haifa," McCorland agreed. "I remember now."

Doc demanded, "In each case, the victim or victims came near a movable object, and it exploded?"

"Well, as nearly as could be ascertained, yes."

"Who were the victims?"

"Just natives," McCorland said.

Morand frowned and said, "Come on, McCorland, don't be secretive with Savage. He's here to help us out on something we can't crack."

McCorland's neck darkened. "Yes, sir." He turned to Doc and explained, "The victims were, we have reasons to presume, men interested in, or involved in, the political picture in the Mediterranean area, the eastern end."

"Men who opposed Nesur?" Doc demanded.

"Well . . ."

Morand interrupted sharply. "There's kind of a funny thing about that. Some of them opposed Nesur. Some of them were in his organization. One of them in particular was a man named Mohammed Nimjah, who was the sheik of a bunch of Iranian inland tribesmen, and supposed to be very close to Nesur."

"Then the purpose of the murders isn't clear?" Doc asked.

"I wouldn't say that. . . . McCorland, tell him the rumor that went around about that."

McCorland hesitated. "It was just unproved talk."

"Tell him."

Reluctantly, McCorland said, "Well, I think it was totally unfounded rumor, but there was a whisper that a man, or group of men, who wanted to be close to Nesur and guide his destiny, were killing off men who were trying to do the same thing, or were about to turn Nesur against them."

"By guiding Nesur's destiny," said Morand, "Mr. McCorland means making a hell of a profit out of it."

"Profit on what?" Doc asked.

"Oil, for one thing."

"That's ridiculous," said McCorland sharply. "The oil concessions are tied up now by American, British and Russian interests."

"Uh-huh. There could be changes made," Morand said.

Doc Savage suddenly dropped the question-and-answer session. He swung to McCorland and asked, "Can you get me a camera? A small pocket Kodak will do. One with film in it, though."

McCorland hesitated. "Well, I don't know—"

"Get him the camera and film, dammit," Morand said sharply. "No wonder we haven't made any progress, if this is the kind of cooperation you have been giving Savage."

"He hasn't asked me for cooperation!" McCorland snapped. He left the room.

Doc told Morand, "It's a wonder some of your associates don't slit your throat sometime, the way you talk to them."

Morand snorted. "Or send me bodies in trunks, eh?"

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks had been listening without taking a part in the discussion, but now Monk said, "We never

left any trunk with a body in your hall."

Morand eyed Monk bitterly. "Hall? How did you know it was in my hall? All I've said is that it was on my doorstep?"

Doc said hastily, "Why didn't you tell us about plotters close to Nesur? And oil possibly being behind it? It seems to me there was a remarkable lot you didn't tell us."

"Didn't want to burden you with details," said Morand. "Hell, what we knew wasn't doing us any good. If all the details, meaningless and otherwise, that we have on this thing were put in print, it would make a book longer than *Gone with the Wind*. I didn't want to give you a headache with all that stuff."

Ham Brooks said, "When we work for the State Department, it's always like this. They want miracles from nothing."

Morand grinned. "We've gotten them a time or two, haven't we?"

McCorland came back with a camera, a small folding Kodak, and asked, "This do?"

"Fine," Doc said. "Is there film in it?"

"Yes."

Doc put the camera in his coat pocket with the blackjack which he had picked up on the explosion scene. He said, "All right, now I want to see a fellow who develops film."

"Right now?" Morand blurted.

"Immediately."

"But you haven't take any pictures yet."

"Nevertheless," Doc said, "I want the film in this camera developed."

About two blocks from the American diplomatic building, there was a photographer's shop patronized by tourists. The photographer spoke English, and it developed that he did his own film processing in the back. Yes, he could put the film through immediately, if it was a matter of importance. Doc assured him it was.

The man went in the back room, put the film in a tank in darkness, and ran it through developer, hypo and wash. Doc said, "Let it wash just enough to clear."

The man did that, then held the film to the light.

"What do you know!" he said. "Nothing on it."

"Why should there be?" said Morand.

"Wait a minute," Doc Savage said. "You mean there is no image on the film, but why?"

"It looks as if it was light-struck or something," the photographer explained.

"How could light get to that film?" Morand demanded. He

wheeled on McCorland. "Did somebody doctor that film by exposing it to light so Mr. Savage couldn't take pictures on it?"

"No, no, the film was fine." Doc dropped the film on the darkroom work-bench. "The film served its purpose."

"What purpose?" asked Morand.

"The purpose of convincing me," Doc said, "that I had better get some sheet lead and wrap that blackjack in it."

"What?" Morand was confused. "What the hell is this?"

Doc was examining the work-bench in the darkroom. It was a common practice to cover darkroom work benches with sheet lead as a protection against the chemicals used in photography, and this bench was so covered.

"How much," Doc asked the photographer, "for a sheet of this lead about a foot square?"

They made a deal.

Morand did not understand it. He was still puzzled when Doc Savage, Monk and Ham left him.

XI

The beggar was sitting cross-legged in his usual place

outside the door of Eunice Lee Crockett's house. He contemplated Doc Savage gloomily and said, "Back again, eh?" in excellent English.

Doc, pretending not to understand the English, told the man not to trouble himself about moving. "*La tukallif khatrak*," Doc said.

"Who do you think you're fooling, Mr. Savage?" the beggar asked.

Doc concluded from the man's tone that this was not a tricky fishing for betrayal. The man was sure of Doc's identity.

"So the fat is in the fire," Doc said.

"And blazing merrily," agreed the beggar.

"Miss Crockett know who I am?"

"I imagine so. She told me."

"Oh."

"She said she must be getting very stupid, or she would have realized it earlier."

"What are our chances of seeing her?" Doc asked.

"Pretty good. Walk on in."

Doc frowned. "Will we be able to walk out again?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," said the beggar. "At anything, I mean."

Doc walked on to the door, which was opened at once by the fat woman. The latter, veiled, grim-eyed, said nothing.

"Are we going in here?" Monk demanded, alarmed.

"I think it will be safe enough," Doc said.

"Your confidence," said the fat woman gloomily, "is an astounding thing."

Monk confessed that it astonished him, all right, and they went into the house, first into the vaulted hall, then into rooms that were like the rooms in a nice house owned by somebody with plenty of money in Cleveland, Ohio.

Miss Crockett joined them. She came in slowly and grimly, pretty much as if she were stepping into the corral with the horse that had just kicked the end out of the stable. She was a little pale, but it did not offset her determination.

Monk evidently considered her much more lovely than her photograph, because he made a round mouth of surprise, and thoughtfully moved over enough to block Ham Brooks' view.

Miss Crockett spoke two words to Doc Savage. She made them sound as if she had dropped something nasty on the floor.

"You lied," she said.

Doc nodded amiably. He was puzzled at their reception, but keeping his amazement under wraps. He was surprised that there should be a reception at all.

He said, "I didn't do much else but lie to you, as a matter of fact. . . . What do you say we declare a holiday and stick to the truth?"

She stared at him glassily and said, "How did Armi get killed?"

"Who?"

"Armi?"

Doc shook his head. "I don't believe I knew anyone by that name. . . . Wait. Do you mean a fellow who was using the name of Alexander Trussman in Washington?"

She said, "Armi went to Washington."

"Let's see if his description matches," Doc said, and was no more than fifteen words into a description of Alexander Trussman, the man Monk had seized in Washington, and who had been murdered, when Miss Crockett began nodding her head.

She said, "I have heard his body was found in Washington."

Doc nodded. "Would it get me anywhere if I told you how that happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"You look and sound as if it would take somewhat less than an earthquake to shake your faith in us."

Bitterly, she said, "I want to know about Armi. He was very devoted to my Uncle, and always faithful to me. . . . Further than that, he was Nesur's closest friend."

Doc said, "Nesur's friend—" blankly. That, he thought, was very bad. It would not be good for Nesur's opinion of Americans, which he understood already was nothing to pin hopes on.

The fat woman had taken up a position at the door. In a thicker, hoarser voice, she suddenly said, "Is Armi dead?"

"I'll tell you about that," Doc said, and did so. He gave the whole story chronologically. Morand of the State Department had called him to Washington and Armi—or Alexander Trussman—had turned up on Doc's trail. Monk, at Doc's instructions, had seized Trussman, or Armi, and the man had made a break for liberty and gotten as far as the hall, locking the door so that Monk could not pursue immediately. When Monk got into the hall, Armi was on the floor. Doc explained about the method of murder, a pen knife blade in the spine. He said, "We have no clue except that whoever used that knife knew spinal anatomy. . . . Now, that's the truth. I don't know whether you believe it, but it happened that way."

The fat woman had become quite pale and Miss Crockett was also two or three shades off color.

Doc said, "You have figured out my assignment by now. I am supposed to find Nesur and persuade him to take a look at

the truth."

"And the truth is?" Miss Crockett asked.

"A moratorium on shooting," Doc said. "Violence isn't going to show anyone a profit, either in human rights or money."

"I wouldn't," said Miss Crockett stiffly, "be so sure about the money."

"Eh?"

"I am going to describe a man to you," Miss Crockett said. "If you know him, or have seen him, tell me."

She began describing a short wide man who was almost an albino, with amazingly blue eyes and corn-colored hair, a man with an Oklahoma twang, a man who, if they had heard him talk, would use a lot of profanity. . . .

"Homer Wickett!" Monk yelled.

"Who?" demanded Miss Crockett.

Monk told her about the hotel manager who had come into the Washington hotel room and seen Alexander Trussman's, or Armi's, body.

"You were made fools of," said Miss Crockett bitterly. "That man—his name is really Homer Wickett, and he had a lot of gall to use it there in Washington—is head of an utterly unscrupulous oil syndicate."

Doc Savage dragged a chair over and sat on it. His knees felt a little too flexible. This was not the first time in his life he had felt a fool, but it was certainly one of the occasions. He was completely discomfited, and for a moment debated trying to cover up, pretending to be more wise than he had been. He decided against it.

"I guess we were taken in," he admitted. "But in that case, this Wickett probably killed Armi, or Alexander Trussman as we knew him. . . . Would Wickett do that?"

"Wickett would kill his own mother," the girl said grimly.

Doc used the silence that followed to decide to see how many cards he could get laid on the table.

"Let's go back to Nesur a moment," he said. "There is a good chance that he misunderstands our State Department, and they in turn misunderstand him. . . . I'll give you an example of the kind of thinking that fellow Morand and his whipping-boy, McCorland, indulge in. Take you, Miss Crockett. I was assured that you were a combination of Mata Hari, Cleopatra, Blackbeard the Pirate with skirts, and I don't know what else. I took their words for that. Probably I knew better, but I didn't have any other information."

She frowned. "You thought I was a crook?"

"Sure. Why do you think I went to all that trouble to stick you with a phony gold mine—but you caught on to what I was doing? Incidentally, the thing was figured for you to catch on

—I banked on you checking up on Monk and Ham before we did business, which would mean you would have them trailed back to their hotel, make inquiries, and learn that I had first checked in there with them. When you found that out, you would be suspicious. You were, weren't you?"

She was a little taken aback. "Yes."

He finished. "I had been led to think you were a crook, so you would admire slick ways and be apt to hire us. And once in your employment, I was going to try to find out where Nesur was. That, in general, is the whole picture. But the point is that the State Department boys were mistaken about you, so Nesur could be mistaken about them."

"What makes you think they are mistaken?" she asked.

"I know a little about character." He flushed. "I don't claim to read women. But somehow I've had a feeling of being on solid ground with you. I don't think you are any tea party hostess, and I do believe you're an adventuress. But I do figure you as being in it for excitement, rather than greed."

She seemed pleased by that. She said, "That's really as truthful an appraisal of myself as I've heard. . . . Would you like to know how I came to get into this thing I'm in?"

He would have preferred the story some other time. But he was too satisfied with the progress he seemed to be making with her to chance making her angry. . . . Nesur? What about this report that Nesur had put out the word for violence to begin? Was it true? Could the harm be undone? . . . He was inching slowly toward the answers, he supposed.

Eunice Lee Crockett was talking, and some of the things she was saying he had heard from Morand or read in the State Department dossier on her. She had been a school-teacher in Ohio, and lived a completely ordinary and dull life. She had known she had an Uncle Ira Crockett in the Mediterranean area somewhere, but she had not seen Uncle Ira in years, and recalled him only as a crisp little old man, full of chuckles and cunning little sayings, who had bounced her on his knee when she was twelve years old, and, she had thought, a little too big for knee-bouncing.

Uncle Ira's death had been a surprise, and the fact that he had willed her an estate a bigger surprise. But she had come to Cairo to see about the inheritance. She found that Uncle Ira Crockett had rather hoped that she would carry on his business, if it could be called a business. She said, "Uncle Ira was a kind of adventurer and sharpshooter, I found," she explained. "And his organization was still intact. I didn't know what to do. I was awfully shocked at first, for I thought Uncle Ira had been a crook and nothing else. But I did have the sense to investigate, and I found that he hadn't done anything really crooked, and in the end I decided to carry on for a while. To my surprise, I found I had a knack for scheming and planning, the kind of a knack Uncle Ira had had. Of course, the organization pretty much ran itself at first. Armi, the man you know as Alexander Trussman, was a great help during that period. . . . Anyway, in a few months, I found we were carrying on as usual."

Doc decided now was as good a time as any to take a chance on a direct question.

"Mind giving us the picture in this Nesur thing?" he asked.

"I'm coming to that."

"Good."

Miss Crockett glanced at the beggar, the fat woman. The latter was inscrutable behind the veil. The beggar said, "I had better go back on watch duty, hadn't I?"

"Be a good idea," said Miss Crockett.

The beggar went out.

The fat woman stirred, decided to take a chair. Monk and Ham had also seated themselves. It was still in the room, except that somewhere the conditioner that was making the air cool whirred softly.

Nesur, Miss Crockett said abruptly, had been in some respects a protegee of her Uncle Eli Crockett. . . . Doc nodded to that. He had surmised as much. . . . "Nesur and I became friends, naturally," Miss Crockett continued. "During the war, Nesur was forced into exile by British diplomatic pressure. I do not think that was a wise move by the British, nor do I think they would have done it had they not been misled into thinking Nesur had Nazi sympathies. This was never true. Nesur's enemies got the story going, and the British believed it. . . . But the point I'm making is that Uncle Eli furnished Nesur with a refuge to which he fled in exile."

"That didn't exactly antagonize Nesur," Doc suggested.

"Naturally not. . . . When Nesur decided to make a comeback as a leader, he first discussed it with me and with Armi—Alexander Trussman. Frankly, Nesur needed money for his campaign, and wished me to finance it. I won't bore you with my philosophy, but what I finally did do was this: I loaned Nesur money for his organization and campaign expenses. But I did not take an active part in Nesur's comeback, except as a friend—until quite recently."

Doc showed interest with tilted head, upraised eyebrows.

She added, "A series of murders got me interested."

"Murders?"

Miss Crockett nodded. "First, some of Nesur's political enemies were killed. It looked as if Nesur was getting some unwelcome help."

"Unwelcome?"

"Of course! Nesur is no murderer!"

"But who—"

"That's what we wondered," said Miss Crockett. "Then a couple of men in Nesur's organization were murdered, and we began to see the light. Someone close to Nesur was scheming, and he had killed two men who had found out about the scheming."

Doc frowned. "These murders—were they done with explosions?"

"Yes."

"The victims were killed by an object, usually a wheeled vehicle, blowing up when they came near?" Doc demanded.

"Once it was a burdened camel."

Doc leaned back. "Morand, of the State Department, is puzzled about those murders, too."

Miss Crockett nodded. "The rest is very simple. . . . We suspected Homer Wickett. We began watching him: Homer Wickett went to Washington, and Armi followed him. That is how Armi, or Alexander Trussman, happened to be in the United States."

"I wonder why Armi was following me?" Doc pondered.

"I can show you a cable that will answer that," Miss Crockett said. "It says that Armi had learned Homer Wickett was plotting against your life, and so Armi was going to trail you and protect you. . . . Wait, I'll get the cable and show you ___"

She had half risen. Now she remained that way, neither in the chair nor quite on her feet, for a moment. She had been arrested by a sound outside, a sound that Doc had presumed came from the street and was merely someone passing. Miss Crockett must have decided the sound was meaningless also, because she moved from the room.

Ham Brooks, who was seated nearer the outer door, said, "Doc, that noise she heard, I think it might be—"

The door burst open and the beggar came in. The beggar came in stiffly, with short mincing stiff-legged steps, like an old-time Chinese girl with bound feet. His head was bowed and his hands were clasped to his throat and through his fingers a red flood was coming to spread over his robes. He did not say anything to them. He merely took his hands from his throat and sank to the floor, dead.

Monk Mayfair said, "For God's sake! What—"

A man jumped through the door and took Monk by the neck.

The man used one hand, his left, for the neck-taking, while the other prepared to wield a bloody knife on some part of Monk, undoubtedly the first part that came handy. Doc Savage discouraged this by throwing a chair.

The thrown chair hit the man and knocked him unconscious and knocked him away from Monk. The man fell partly through the door, which was still open. Hands came into view from the outside and took hold of the man and began dragging him away. Another hand containing a gun came through the door. Out of the gun came lead and noise. In a moment another gun joined the first one.

The room became active. Everyone in it seemed to have somewhere to go in a hurry, or something urgent to do. Ham Brooks helped the situation, or muddled it, by lifting a chair,

taking a swipe at the chandelier and knocking all the lights out, plunging the room into darkness.

Doc Savage threw a vase at one of the guns, and scored a bullseye on the gun hand. The owner of the hand must have been hurt badly, because he stepped into plain view, as if going out to see what had pained his hand so badly. Behind Doc, a pistol cracked. The man in the door fell down. The fat woman had scored exactly between his eyes.

It now became evident that the ruckus here was a diversionary action. Because, from another part of the house, began coming shouts, screams, fast movement.

"Miss Crockett!" shrieked the fat woman in a remarkably hoarse voice. "Oh, my God! Miss Crockett—they're after her!"

Doc Savage thought so, too. He was moving. He said, "Monk, Ham, be careful!" And he went toward what he supposed was the best route to the back of the house. At least the fat woman was heading for the same door.

He beat the fat woman through, and they went down a hall, through a room, through another room, and through a lot of rooms and out into a narrow street and back again and through more rooms and finally into another street. But by now the house was quiet, the streets were quiet, and the only noise was a man in the house dying noisily. He was the man the fat woman had shot. He was giving the lie to the accepted fact that a bullet between the eyes is supposed to kill instantly.

Ham Brooks put the facts in words. He said, "They got Miss Crockett! They got her, and got clean away."

After half an hour of chasing through the streets asking questions, this was a proven truth.

Doc asked the fat woman, "Do you think Homer Wickett got her?"

"Yes. He didn't do it personally, but those were his men."

"Where would they take Miss Crockett?"

"I don't know. I have no idea." It was a wail.

"Why did they take her?"

"Because she knows where Nesur is." That also was a wail, more distraught.

XII

Morand, of the State Department, assisted his hair to stand on end by running his fingers through it in a wild way.

"If people keep getting killed around you," he said, "I don't know how long you are going to continue getting away with it, Doc Savage or no Doc Savage."

Doc said impatiently, "Get the Cairo police to pick up Homer Wickett. Or is your influence that strong?"

"I think it is," Morand said. "But brother, you had better know what you are doing."

McCorland, who had been a shocked listener, chimed in, "I'll say you had better know."

"What do you mean?"

"Homer Wickett," said McCorland, "is an influential man. He will raise hell by the bucketful if we have him arrested."

"Let him," Doc said. "But I doubt if the police will lay their hands on him."

"Why not?"

"He's probably hiding out. . . . Incidentally, have either of you any idea where he would be hiding?"

"Of course not," McCorland said. "I hardly know the fellow. Doubt if I would know him if I saw him."

"You have," Doc demanded, "no idea where they might have taken Miss Crockett?"

"I don't see," said McCorland bitterly, "why you are so upset over what may or may not have happened to a tramp of a woman."

Morand looked vaguely alarmed. He seemed to feel that Doc

might have fallen for Miss Crockett, and that McCorland was irritating Doc.

"McCorland," said Morand. "You get hold of the Cairo police and have this fellow Homer Wickett picked up."

"I don't think that's a good idea," said McCorland.

"I don't give a damn what you think!" Morand yelled. "Get on the phone and have the Cairo cops pick him up. Don't give me a lot of argument. The way you've balled this whole thing up, I'd think you'd be ashamed to show your face."

McCorland went out, and Morand jammed his hands in his pockets and said he was going to give up his job and take up something easy on the nerves, like lion-taming.

Doc Savage said, "There's one thing I've been intending to ask you. . . . You've got a pretty good check on this Eunice Lee Crockett's organization, haven't you?"

"It's not perfect," Morand said. "But it rather pleases me."

"What about a fat woman called Tiny?"

"Well, now," said Morand, "there you make a liar out of me right away. Not much on her. Not even a name. Been seen with Crockett off and on for a couple of years, and been in the Crockett household steady for the last few days."

"Then you don't know anything about her?" Doc demanded.

"If you pin me down," said Morand, "not a thing." He scratched his head. "Say, now, somebody has been tipping off this Homer Wickett about the girl's movements, and it could be this fat woman doing the ratting. You may have something there."

Doc said time would tell what they had.

He then waited for McCorland to come back and report that the Cairo police were on the lookout for Homer Wickett.

Doc arose and put on his hat.

"I think we've got a line on where Wickett is," Doc said. "But I'm not going to tell you about it and have you balling up my plans."

He walked out.

Monk Mayfair, Ham Brooks, the fat woman and the man named Ali were waiting in a touring car near the U. S. State Department offices. They had the general appearance of having something definite on their minds. Doc did not waste time discussing international relations.

He said, "You all know McCorland by sight?"

They did.

"Ham," Doc said, "you have the embassy telephone wires located?"

"Yes."

"Cut them," Doc said. "And the rest of you get on the job watching for McCorland to leave the embassy."

They separated rapidly, after arranging a system of signals for re-assembling. Doc Savage walked with Monk Mayfair, and they took up a position in a side street where they could watch a likely looking door.

Monk did some jaw-rubbing and asked, "You figure it's a safe bet McCorland is selling out?"

"We're not betting too much on it," Doc said. "I think we're justified."

"Just what gave McCorland a dark complexion for you?"

Doc shrugged. "Information doesn't leak out of the State Department like water through a sieve without reason. McCorland seems a logical reason. The moves we've made apparently have gone right to Homer Wickett."

"It could be a clerk or some menial."

"Maybe—here in Cairo. But what about Washington?"

"Huh?"

"No one but Morand and McCorland in Washington were supposed to know we were being called in on the Nesur matter," Doc said. "Morand told me that. Regardless or not whether Morand's head seems good only for a hat rack, the

man is honest. Honest the way the State Department is honest, anyhow, which sometimes leaves room to wonder. . . . McCorland is the logical leak."

"Or Morand."

"That isn't impossible," Doc admitted. "If McCorland doesn't mine out, we'll try—"

McCorland came out of the side door they were watching.

"Nice enough," Monk said, and went to signal the others.

McCorland sauntered like a man with no cares along Junub Street to an intersection with an avenue with a very English-sounding name—Whitechapel Road—and turned right. He looked more as if he were pretending to be unconcerned than unconcerned, like a man walking a dog. He bought a flower for his lapel.

Suddenly McCorland got into a car in a parking area, evidently his own car, and after that nothing went slowly. They could barely keep track of him, although there were two carloads of them, Doc and Monk in one machine, Ham and the others in the second.

The pursuit—they were hoping it wasn't exactly that, hoping McCorland hadn't seen them on his trail—ended when McCorland's car pulled into a pretentious estate well on the outskirts of Cairo.

"It's lucky he went straight here like a shot," Monk said. "Or we wouldn't have been able to follow him."

Their car was nearly a quarter of a mile behind McCorland's. Doc pulled off at once, and parked. The other car drew up alongside them, and Ham leaned out and asked, "How do you fellows know McCorland didn't just go home? Maybe he lives there."

"If he does," Doc said, "the State Department had better look into how he can afford such fancy diggings."

They conferred about their next step, and decided it would be to get closer and look over the house and grounds.

The house was more California-film-star than Egyptian in architecture, and so were the grounds. The building was rambling and tile-roofed with yellow shutters, red door trim, and many flowers. The grounds, while not a jungle, were thick with shrubs.

Monk was saying it should be a lead-pipe cinch to crawl through the shrubbery and close in on the house when a man got off a bus at an intersection and came walking toward them. He wore a burnoose and was hurrying.

Ham whispered, "I think I've seen that guy somewhere before."

Doc had the same feeling. He said, "Monk, drop off and get behind him." Monk turned left and stopped behind some kind of large bush. Doc and the others walked slowly. The man behind them apparently had not recognized them.

Suddenly he did recognize them. He wheeled without delaying about it, and started back the way he had come. But he had passed Monk. A moment later he and Monk were face to face.

Action flared briefly. The man tried to get something from under his burnoose, and Monk hit him. The man fell. Monk said, as they came up, "If these guys have to wear sheets like a spook, they should have a better system for carrying their guns." He stood up with what the man had been reaching for. It was a .45 automatic.

The fat woman said, "*Aiwah!*" explosively. It was the first time Doc had heard her speak Arabic. Arabic was plainly her native tongue.

"Know him?" Doc asked.

She nodded, the veil fluttering. "I have seen him around. He is one of Homer Wickett's men, I believe."

"Or an employee of the U. S. State Department," Ham suggested.

Doc settled that by searching the man and bringing up a small package which he opened. There was a phial inside. He uncorked the phial, then gave his opinion of what it contained. "Scopolamine," Doc said. "Administered hypodermically, it's what they call truth serum. . . . Would a State Department man be carrying that around?"

"*Radi kathir!*" gasped the fat woman. Again she used Arabic. The phrase meant generally that things weren't good.

"I doubt," said Doc, "that Miss Crockett will appreciate any more delay on our part. . . . They obviously kidnaped her, and that suggested they wanted to question her. The truth serum suggests the same thing."

Monk leaned over and hit the unconscious man again. He then dragged the fellow into the bushes, and used the burnoose to tie him hand and foot and gag him. "That should hold him for the time being," Monk said.

Ali had hardly said a word. Now he said something unintelligible in Arabic. His face had changed until now it looked like a fist. He wheeled suddenly, walked toward the house.

"What's the matter with him?" Monk blurted.

"He is going into the house," the fat woman said. "He is very angry." She looked at them woodenly and added, "So am I. . . . And I, too, am going into the house."

"Take it easy," Doc said, "and we'll all do that together."

Ali had looked, acted and sounded crazed and desperate, but it developed that his caution had not been overcome. He did not just walk into the house. He went in through a window. He made no more noise than a mouse on a cheese. Doc was not over fifty feet behind him.

"This isn't giving us much chance to look over the ground," Doc said, "But it may be all right. It's fairly sure to be

noisy. . . . Ham, you and Monk take the other side."

Monk moistened stiff lips. "Any special instructions?"

"No. Just go in and do what needs to be done."

Monk and Ham moved away silently. The bushes they had disturbed ever so slightly were still trembling when there was a shot in the house.

One shot. Then Ali's voice came loudly, bitterly, attributing to someone the characteristics of a leprous camel. He sounded sincere. This called forth two shots, then a scream that began low and thick and rose and climbed higher and higher until it seemed to go away into the zenith like a rocket, taking with it the life of the one who screamed.

Doc chose a window. The fat woman chose the same one. She was remarkably silent, like a big cat. Once through the window, they were in a room furnished with the sort of modernistic furniture one sees in apartments on Central Park West or Riverside Drive. They did not tarry there.

They were nearly across the room to another door when a woman dived through the door. She was a woman they had never seen before, a half-caste, but beautiful the way a Pekingese lap dog is beautiful. Something to be kept, petted, and utterly impractical for anything else.

She saw them. She made a kind of mewling sound. She was down on the floor. Like that. She had fainted.

Doc stepped over her and met a man coming headlong

toward him. The man had his face twisted, looking back, and he did not see Doc until they were together. They hit hard. Both were about equally surprised, but Doc's reflexes were miles ahead of the other, and he had hit the man two blows before the fellow got organized at all.

The fat woman, pointing wildly at the man Doc held, explained, "Wickett!"

That was hardly necessary. Doc already knew he was Wickett. He had met Homer Wickett in the Washington hotel.

Doc had, for a moment, a feeling that the fight was all over. Everything finished. Wickett in hand. Miss Crockett probably somewhere to be rescued. It was temporary state of mind, however, because someone stepped up from behind and struck him over the head.

He had been taken unaware. It was fortunate that the one who hit him used only a fist. But the blow was well-aimed and well-swung and did not hurt much more than having a piano drop on his head.

Vaguely he had the impression that he was down on his knees. Homer Wickett was out of his arms. He had just faded away. Impossible, of course, but that was the effect. The blow had him in a fog and the fog was filling with men. They came into the hall; he could not tell you how many, but three or four.

He did what he could. The floor felt soft under him, soft and spongy. He heard someone saying not to shoot, that a bullet

might hit Mr. Wickett. This was said over and over, in Arabic and in English, and it must have been effective because there was no shooting.

The fat woman was in it, too. She did very well, swing, kick, and kick and swing, and was not like a woman at all. Presently her burnoose was torn off; one rip, and she was stripped naked to the waist. Only then she was no longer a she, but a short, thick, coffee-skinned man, well-muscled, who was fighting in a way that showed he had been in a fight before. A ridiculous figure, because the veil was still over his, or her, face, and it flapped about wildly.

Suddenly there was no one left to fight in the hall. There had been only two, instead of what had seemed like several, Doc realized. He must have been more dazed than he had supposed.

The soft floor—the floor wasn't really soft. He had been kneeling on Homer Wickett, or standing on Homer Wickett, during the fight. He leaned down and slugged the man. It probably wasn't necessary.

He stood erect.

"Miss Crockett!" he called.

There was absolutely no sound. But he found her. He found her not three seconds later, sitting in a chair in a large room done in soft creams and tans, with a towel stuffed in her mouth and another towel tied around her neck. Her face was purple. But, when he got the towel loose from her neck, and the other towel out of her mouth, she began breathing deep and hard, as if she would never again get enough of breathing.

Presently Monk and Ham entered the house. They came in via the front door, sheepishly, and Monk said, "The windows in the back have all got bars on them. We couldn't get in. We —"

Monk stopped and stared at the fat woman—man.

"A guy," he said.

Doc said, "Search the house. And be careful. We may not have all of them."

Monk pointed at the fat woman, or man, and said, "What, who—"

"Search the house."

Ham Brooks said, "Come on, stupid," to Monk. He picked up a gun someone had dropped on the floor. He pointed it at the floor and pulled the trigger to see if it was loaded. It was. He and Monk went out of the room.

There was a scraping and scratching sound in the adjoining room, coming toward the door, and it proved to be Ali, pulling himself along painfully, dragging his legs.

"Ali!" Eunice Lee Crockett screamed.

"I'm all right," Ali said. "Bullet broke both legs, is all. I'm all right."

The man who had been a fat woman said in precise English, "I think we have reached a satisfactory settlement, and it is perhaps best that I be going."

He took tentative steps toward the door, turned to ask Doc Savage:

"You have no objections to my leaving?"

"If you think it would be better, okay," Doc said.

"Frankly, I believe it best," the man said. "All this killing would hardly contribute anything desirable to my reputation."

"Probably not," Doc said.

Still the man hesitated. "Could I—ah—it may be difficult, I know, but could you neglect to mention my presence to the police?"

"I could," Doc said.

"I should be most grateful."

"You had better get going," Doc said, "and show your gratitude later."

The man gathered a burnoose off one of the unconscious men on the floor. He wrapped it about himself. He adjusted the veil. He seemed sheepish about doing this, becoming a woman again. He left without saying anything.

Presently Monk and Ham returned, and Monk said, "There's

nobody else—hey! What the hell! The fat dame—guy! Where —"

"There was no fat woman, or man," Doc said.

"What?"

"Let's not get complicated. Keep it simple," Doc said patiently. "There was no fat person with us at any time."

XIII

When the night came, it was still and black, except for a flickering of heat lightning far out in the desert to the west. A policeman padded about, turning on lights.

Another policeman, this one a Lieutenant, came in and asked, "The swimming pool is empty—will it be all right to put that thing in there?"

Doc Savage said, "That should do. Yes, put it in the pool."

Morand was talking over the telephone. He was saying, "Yes, charge McCorland with murder. . . . I don't give a damn if he is—the State Department doesn't back up murder. Charge him with that. He was in it with them. He was selling them information." He hung up.

Doc asked, "The police find anything in Homer Wickett's

office?"

"I don't know how the hell I'm going to explain this to Washington," Morand complained. "I'm supposed to be able to pick honest associates. . . . Wickett? Oh, his office—sure, they found a lot of stuff showing he is head of an oil syndicate."

"No evidence he had had murders done?"

"No."

"Then this exhibition in the swimming pool should be interesting," Doc said.

The object the police had placed in the pool—there was no water in the pool—was not large. About six by seven by eighteen inches. A box.

Doc said, "Stand back. The farther back the better. That is one of the bombs Homer Wickett used. One like it killed those men in Cairo today."

There was a general retirement to cover.

Doc took out the blackjack. He unwrapped the lead sheeting from around it.

"Know what a Geiger counter is?" he asked Morand.

"Sure," said Morand. "The newspapers were full of them when the atom bomb tests were made. They're a gadget that reacts to the presence of radioactive material in the neighborhood."

Doc nodded. He hefted the blackjack. "Say that the loading material in this blackjack was radioactive—had been exposed to radium emanations for a time. Say that it had been, and it was brought near a Geiger counter, which is not necessarily a large piece of apparatus, there would be a reaction. The reaction might be caused to close a relay, which would set off an explosive."

Morand said, "Throw it, and let's see."

Doc slung the blackjack into the empty pool where the bomb had been placed, at the same time throwing himself flat on the ground, or attempting to do so—he did not quite get down before the explosion came.

After the universe had come apart and gone together again, Morand said hollowly, "My God! So that's the way they were killed! Something radioactive was planted on them, and then the bombs were placed where they would eventually pass near."

"Think that will hang Homer Wickett?" Doc asked.

"Want to bet it won't?" Morand asked, in a pleased voice.

Doc Savage had lost his hat somewhere in the house during the goings-on earlier in the afternoon. The loss had escaped his mind, but he thought of it now, and began hunting, and presently learned that a policeman had picked up the hat and tagged it as an exhibit in evidence. The officer retrieved it and gave it to Doc.

"You leaving?" Morand demanded.

"Might as well," Doc said. "By the way, doesn't your department have a way of getting priority on plane reservations? Could you get us three back to New York at an early date?"

"Yes, sure, I—wait! Hold on!" Morand's face blanched. "My God, you're not letting me down!"

"What do you mean, letting you down?"

"This thing isn't finished!"

"Sure it is."

"Like hell!" Morand yelled. "You haven't found Nesur! Holy cripes, you haven't accomplished anything you came over here for!"

"Oh, that. You mean finding Nesur and convincing him we weren't bad eggs?"

"Of course. We'd better talk that over and lay some plans—"

"All taken care of." Doc put on his hat. "You can stop worrying about it." He moved toward the door.

"Wait a minute! What do you mean, taken care of? And stop worrying? Listen, that Nesur situation is so damned serious that I sweat snowflakes when I think about it. And if you're kidding me—say, are you ribbing me? Or did you fix it up somehow?"

"You can hang up your worries, Morand."

"Listen, tell me how—"

"You'll figure it out." Doc opened the door. "You lads are very wise. . . . Incidentally, I hope you're wise enough to leave Nesur alone from now on. I think he would appreciate that."

Doc went out, closing the door.

Miss Crockett fell into step with Doc Savage. She had been patched and renewed where necessary. She looked bright, relieved, and there was considerable emotion in the way she took Doc Savage's arm.

"Is Morand—did you have to tell him?" she asked excitedly.

He shook his head. "Morand, and the police too, know that Homer Wickett brought you here to force you to tell where Nesur was. That is all they need to know."

"Then you didn't tell them about the fat woman?" she demanded.

"No."

"And they don't know the fat woman was Nesur?"

"No. At least I think not. A fat woman is the last thing they would expect Nesur to be masquerading as, I imagine."

She laughed. She trilled her relief. "That's good," she said. "I think Nesur, more than anything else, wouldn't want it known he had pretended to be a woman. Nesur is really quite a guy."

"I saw that. He did all right in the fight," Doc said.

"Nesur liked you," she said. "He'll appreciate your keeping his identity secret."

"I hope so."

"Oh, he will!" she said earnestly. "He was really in hiding from Homer Wickett's men, you know. He came to me, and said he was sure there was something going on, because some of his close associates had been murdered. He asked me to help, and I did."

Doc nodded. He gestured lightly and said, "Do we have to go on and on about politics and death. After all, don't we get a breathing spell?"

She looked up at him.

"Why, yes, we should, shouldn't we?" she said.

They walked along. He didn't say anything more. It was dark out here. The heat lightning ran warmly back and forth in the west, and to the right were the lights of Cairo, all scattered over a great area and looking like the lights of any other city, which was a deceptive way for them to look.

As deceptive, he thought, as a breathing spell could turn out to be. Whatever that meant—or whatever it would prove to

mean in the uncertain years ahead of the world, so long as men misused power.

[The end of *Doc Savage: Danger Lies East* by Lester Dent
(as Kenneth Robeson)]