

The Majii

A Doc Savage Adventure
#60

Kenneth Robeson
[Allan Dunn]
1935

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A GROTESQUE THING OF BONES

“This man is Rama Tura, chosen disciple of the Majji.”

“He is an old fakir,” snapped the veiled woman.

“He has the power of dying and returning to life when he so desires,” one of the guards stated. “You can see now that he is dead. And was he not brought from our native land to this one in a coffin?”

“Cut his ears off and see if he is magician enough to make them grow back again!” the woman directed.

Doc Savage and his men are about to encounter a crew almost as amazing as they are!

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THE FLAMING FALCONS	THE MAJII

THE MAJII

A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE

BY KENNETH ROBESON

THE MAJII

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Chapter I

MAKER OF JEWELS

“I AM about to be killed,” the woman said.

The taxi driver whom she addressed had been half asleep behind the wheel of his parked cab, but the text of the woman’s speech was not conducive to further slumber. He sat up straight.

The woman asked, “Have you ever heard of Doc Savage?”

“Who ain’t?” growled the driver. “Say, what kind of a gag——”

“You will take us to Doc Savage,” directed the woman. “And hurry.”

The driver looked beyond the woman, after which his mouth fell open and his cigarette dropped off his lip and began to burn his coat front. The woman was veiled, but it was not that which shocked the hackman and scared him.

It was the four men behind the woman. They were four very tall men who had heads like cocoanuts in color, and who wore four of the most resplendent uniforms that the taxi driver had ever seen. Each of the four carried a modern automatic military rifle which was not much less than a portable machine gun.

“Well,” snapped the woman. “Have you a tongue?”

“Sure.” The driver swallowed twice. “I’ll take you to Doc Savage.” Then, under his breath, “Ain’t this a crackpot world!”

The woman spoke one ripping sentence which was absolutely unintelligible to the driver, but seemed to mean much to the four, men with the uniforms and the rifles.

They all got in. The woman received much deference. She had bundled herself in a voluminous, shapeless cloak, but she had a nice ankle.

The cigarette burned through the hackman’s trousers, scorched him and he jumped violently—then all but fainted, for, with a speed born of much practice, one of the brown men snapped up his rifle.

The woman cried out. Wildness, haste in her voice told the taximan the brown one was about to shoot. But she was in time. The automatic rifle lowered.

The driver found himself some blocks away, going in the wrong direction, before he got over his fright. He corrected his direction. The woman spoke to him.

“Is Doc Savage in New York?” she asked.

“Don’t know,” the driver said hoarsely. “He goes all over the world.”

The cab was headed for a nest of buildings in the center of Manhattan, out of which towered one of the tallest skyscrapers in the metropolis.

“What,” asked the woman, “does New York think of Doc Savage?”

“He’s quite a guy,” said the driver. “He helps people out of trouble. Does it for the excitement.”

“Then he should be interested in saving my life, as well as others, including, very possibly, *his own*,” the woman said.

“Yeah, I guess so,” said the driver. He had already decided that the woman was some kind of nut.

The woman said no more, and the driver gave attention to his piloting, reflecting at the same time that the woman, while she spoke distinct and understandable English, had a pronounced foreign accent, but of what nation, the driver could not tell, he being no linguist.

They were down in the garment sector now, and the streets were comparatively deserted at this hour.

“Stop!” the woman commanded suddenly.

Her voice was shrill, tense. The driver swerved his machine in to the curb, then stared at his cargo as they unloaded hurriedly and scampered into a subway entrance. They disappeared.

The hackman had not been paid, but he only stared, for the truth was that he felt a relief at getting rid of his fares, for they were potential trouble, he felt.

But a low, coarse voice rumbled in the driver’s ear in a manner to halt his feeling of relief.

“Where’d she go, buddy?” the voice demanded.

THE driver’s head jerked around, and he saw that there was another taxi in the street behind him, with at least three men inside. The cab must have been following.

The man who had asked the question had a thick body and a hard manner—the manner of a man accustomed to treating other people as they do not want to be treated.

“Where’d they go?” the man growled. “Where were you takin’ ’em?”

He twisted back his coat lapel to show something that the driver did not see distinctly but which he took to be a detective’s badge.

“Doc Savage’s office,” gulped the driver, who had no love for trouble.

The thick-bodied man looked as if he had indigestion at the information, and he grimaced, seeming on the point of saying several things, none of them pleasant. Then he looked up and down the street furtively.

He dipped a hand in his pocket, brought it out palm down, but with a dollar bill held between the extended fingers. He passed the bill in to the driver, but when the latter reached for it, the hand slashed suddenly for the fellow’s throat.

Awful horror came on the driver’s face, and he threshed about, making gargling sounds, while a red flood bubbled and cascaded down his chest.

The thick-bodied man ran back to his waiting taxi, carefully wiping and pocketing the queer razor-blade affair with which he had cut the throat. He got into his machine.

“South,” he said. “Give it all you got.”

The driver was obviously no regular hackman. He looked as tough as the three in the rear.

“Well?” he said over his shoulder.

“The Ranee is heading for Doc Savage,” said the thick-bodied man who had killed the taxi driver.

There was utter silence while the cab lunged along the gloomy streets, and inside it there was all of the cheer of a hearse interior.

“It ain’t too late to get out of this thing,” said one of the men. “We can grab a plane or a boat or something.”

“Lingh may be able to handle Doc Savage,” snapped the thick man.

“Yeah,” grunted the other. “But let Lingh do it. I don’t want none of this Doc Savage.”

The thick man laughed, but not joyfully. “Get wise to yourself. Lingh probably has us covered.”

They seemed to think that over, and, judging from the expression on their features, it was not pleasant thinking.

“Why’d you fix the hack driver?” one asked finally.

“He knew they were headed for Doc Savage,” said the thick-bodied man. “He might have identified their bodies, and told what he knew, and that would have got to Doc Savage.”

The cab took a corner, tires sizzling.

“Where to now?” asked the driver.

“Times Square subway station,” said the thick-bodied man. “We’re gonna head off the Ranee and her four boys with rifles.”

THE TIMES SQUARE subway station is possibly the busiest in the metropolis, but even it has quiet moments, of which the present happened to be one.

Cars of the train, as it rumbled and hissed to a stop in the station, were full of bright light and had only a few passengers.

The thick-bodied man and his companions were separated the length of the two-block long platform, and they got on the train without excitement, two at one end, three at the other, after which they walked through the train, looking carefully into each coach before they entered it.

Thus it was that they converged at the ends of one certain car which held their quarry.

The leader said to the two with him, “Lingh wants the Ranee alive. Remember that.”

“Wonder why?” countered one of the pair.

“Don’t know,” said the man. “Doubt if Lingh knows. Think his orders come from some one else.”

“Let’s go,” the other grunted.

They walked down the aisle, hands in bulging coat pockets.

Ranged side by side on the cane-bottomed seat running lengthwise of the subway coach, the veiled woman and her gaudy, dark riflemen escort were very quiet, watchful. They seemed a little confused, too, by the roar and shudder of the underground train.

They stood up suddenly before the thick man and his companions were near. The uniformed escort held the rifles across their chests, soldier fashion, alert.

“Easy does it,” snapped the thick man.

He put a hand on the veiled woman’s arm. That started it. Her escort clapped rifle stocks to shoulders.

The thick man yelled, “All but the Ranee, guys!”

Pockets split open to let out flame and noise. The thick man’s aides were using sawed-off, hammerless revolvers which would not jam in cloth, and they shot as rapidly as fingers could work triggers, calmly, confidently.

It was plain they expected to blast down the uniformed opposition with the first volley. That did not happen. The tall, cocoanut-headed guards staggered, but did not fall.

“Watch it!” screamed the thick man. “They’re wearing some kind of an armor!”

After that, there was screaming and noise and death in the moaning subway. Two of the tall men with the gaudy uniforms and the heads remindful of cocoanuts crumpled where they sat. The two others got in front of the veiled woman, shielding her, firing, screeching in their strange, foreign tongue.

Five men, altogether, were on the floor, badly wounded, when some one who knew a bit about the mechanics of the car managed to yank an emergency lever and the train ground to a stop, half inside of a lighted station.

The two uniformed men with the veiled woman got out on the platform and ran. The thick man tried to follow, with his single companion who had survived, but was shot at and, frightened, ducked back.

The wounded and dying screamed and groveled on the car floor, and that seemed to remind the thick man of something, for he turned deliberately, saw that one of the uniformed foreigners alone had a chance of living, and shot the man in the head. Then he ran, with his companion, out of the subway.

The veiled woman and her two escorts had vanished.

THE episode of the subway was newspaper headlines before the night was over, and it was a very mystifying matter to the police, who admitted they failed to make heads or tails of it, beyond the fact that they had identified three of the dead as local police characters known for their viciousness.

The desk clerk of the Hotel Vincent, a small but rather ornate hostelry which charged exorbitant rates and got the patronage of show-offs and people of importance, was reading the newspaper accounts of the subway slaughter. The hour was near midnight.

The clerk came out of the paper to an awareness of impatient fingers drumming the desk. It chanced that he noticed the finger nails on the drumming hand at first. It was a woman’s hand and the nails were enameled blue. The clerk glanced up.

The woman before him was an unknown quantity inside the folds of a black veil and a voluminous cloak. When she spoke, it was in an accent distinctly foreign.

“I desire to see Rama Tura,” she said.

The clerk lifted his brows, then made a show of sifting through the guest cards.

“Very sorry,” he said. “We have no one by——”

The folds of the woman’s cloak shook a little, and the clerk’s eyes grew round, for she had exposed the business end of an automatic pistol.

“You will take me to Rama Tura’s quarters,” suggested the woman. “I know he directs you to say he is not here.”

Two tall men wearing topcoats came in from where they had been waiting outside. They had heads which made the clerk think of cocoanuts.

The clerk sized up the situation, and since he was neither a hero nor a fool, he came from behind the desk, and the veiled woman and her two companions followed him into the elevator.

They rode to the sixteenth floor, where the clerk served as guide down a deeply carpeted Moorish hall to a door that was strapped with ornamental iron.

The clerk was on the point of knocking when one of the tall, dark men reached out and knocked him back of the ear with a revolver butt. The other dark man caught the clerk, and they held him while they knocked on the iron-strapped door.

“What is it?” queried a sleepy foreign voice from behind the panel.

“Cablegram,” said the veiled woman, making her voice low and hoarse, so that it sounded remarkably like a boy’s.

The man who opened the door certainly belonged to the same race as the veiled woman’s two companions. His head had the identical hard round lines, the same fibrous brown hair.

He uttered the beginning of a cry when he saw his visitors. The sound did not get far, being stopped by a gun barrel which glanced off his head. He, too, was caught before he fell.

“Harm him not!” snapped the woman. “He is only a servant!”

She spoke in English, probably due to excitement, but was not too rattled to translate it into the tongue which the pair with her understood.

Three doors opened out of the room. The woman had not been there before, because she opened two and found closets, then tried the third, and discovered it led into what seemed to be the bedroom of a suite.

She went in with her small automatic pistol in hand, squinting in the luminance that came from a shaded bedside lamp.

The man who lay in the bed seemed, at first glance, to be dead.

HE was lean, this man in the bed, so lean that the coverlets seemed little more than wrinkled where they lay over his body. His head, however, was huge, a big and round brown globe that resembled something made out of mahogany and waxed over with shiny skin. His eyes were closed. He did not move. There was something unearthly about him.

The woman stood and stared at him through her veil.

Her two companions, having lowered the unconscious hotel clerk and the senseless man who had answered the door, and having locked the door, now came in. They stared at the man on the bed, and their eyes were as if they looked upon a deity.

Both got down on hands and knees and touched foreheads to the floor.

“Fools!” shrilled the woman.

“This man is Rama Tura, chosen disciple of the Majii,” murmured one of the kowtowing pair in his native tongue.

“He is an old fakir,” snapped the veiled woman.

The two guards seemed inclined to argue the point, but respectfully.

“He has the power of dying and returning to life when he so desires,” one stated. “You can see now that he is dead. And was he not brought from our native land to this one in a coffin?”

The woman’s cloak shook slightly, as if she had shuddered. She stepped forward and touched the weird form on the bed.

“You find him cold,” said one of the guards. “He is a corpse. It is not good that we broke in here.”

The woman’s eyes became bright and distinct as seen through her veil.

“Is it that you no longer serve me?” she demanded.

The two got up off their hands and knees.

“Our lives, our bodies, are yours, Raneer,” one said gloomily. “Our thoughts are birds that fly free. Is it your wish that we cage them?”

“You might clip their wings that they may walk on solid ground,” said the Raneer. “You may also take your knives and cut off Rama Tura’s big ears. It is my guess that he will revive, from the dead in time to save them.”

The men nodded, produced long shiny knives with black handles, and advanced upon the recumbent Rama Tura. Towering over him, they hesitated.

“He is chosen disciple of the Majii,” gulped one. “Even the great American scientists have not been able to prove otherwise. For does he not take worthless glass and make it, by the touch of his power, into jewels for which men pay fortunes?”

“He is a fakir,” repeated the woman. “He is a troublemaker. For years, he has been a nuisance. He is a common, ordinary beggar who for years made his living by performing street-corner tricks for tourists.”

“He has powers no man understands,” insisted the other stubbornly. “Out of worthless pebbles, he makes great jewels.”

“Cut his ears off and see if he is magician enough to make them grow back again,” the woman directed. “It is about those jewels that I wish him to explain.”

The grotesque thing of bones on the bed opened its eyes.

“I am the dead who lives at will,” he said. “What do you want?”

Chapter II

MAKER OF HORROR

THE veiled woman looked down at him and made some slight sound which in her land meant ridicule and disgust.

“You see,” she said. “He awakened before he lost his ears.”

There was absolutely no expression on the round, shiny head on the pillow. The eyes were open, but did not shift. The mouth was open, but the lips did not move when words came.

It was as if the weird-looking fellow were a corpse into the mouth of which a ventriloquist was throwing speech. He spoke English.

“To abuse the dead is sacrilege,” he said. “But maybe your sin is mitigated because you do not have the mind to conceive my powers, my abilities and my condition. To you, I am the enigma of omnipotence, the——”

“You are a clever old fake,” snapped the woman. “You are no different from other men, except certainly, more ugly. Now, you will tell me about those jewels, or my men will take your ears, after the fashion in my land.”

“You are from Jondore?” asked Rama Tura.

“I,” said the woman, “am the Ranee, the widow of the Nizam, ruler of all Jondore, descendant of rulers.”

“Your voice had a familiar sound,” murmured the strange-looking being on the bed. “Why are you here?”

“I will tell you, old fakir,” the woman said angrily. “I am in New York by chance. I was making a trip around the world. And here I heard of this jewel-making seance of yours. I cabled my late husband’s brother, Kadir Lingh, present ruler of Jondore, that I intended to investigate you.”

She hesitated.

“I have a hideous suspicion,” she said.

Rama Tura showed a slight sign of life. “What suspicion?”

The woman did not answer directly, but snapped. “Your organization is wide. I have reason to think my cable did not reach Jondore. I have been followed, my movements checked by men of Jondore. Your men! Once, they shot at me!”

“This cannot be true,” murmured Rama Tura.

“To-night I started to see a man who can handle things like this,” snapped the woman. “I was attacked. Later, I found watchers about the headquarters of the man I wanted to see. They were your men.”

“Who is this one you intended to see?” Rama Tura queried.

“Doc Savage,” said the Ranee. “But you know that.”

“Ah,” murmured Rama Tura.

“You are a devil incarnate,” the Ranee told Rama Tura grimly. “You are scheming to take the lives of many people, in order to accomplish an insane scheme.”

But Rama Tura seemed interested in Doc Savage.

“Of living men,” he said tonelessly, “it may be that Doc Savage has greatest knowledge, but his learning is of the material and the so-called scientific. He has not touched the abstract and invisible, the real power of concentrated thought as a concrete entity.”

“Drivel,” said the Ranee.

“Can Doc Savage make jewels of pebbles?” queried Rama Tura.

“You cannot, either,” snapped the veiled woman. “And you are going to stop it! Otherwise, I am going to put Doc Savage and the police both upon your trail. I am going to tell them what is behind your actions.”

“And what is behind it?” Rama Tura queried.

The woman swallowed. She seemed to brace herself.

“The Majii,” she said.

Rama Tura looked very much as if he had been struck.

“So you have fathomed it,” he mumbled hoarsely.

That, in turn, had a profound effect on the Ranee, for it was obvious now that her early conception had been only a grisly suspicion, but that Rama Tura’s words had convinced her that she had guessed the sinister truth.

“Seize him!” she shrieked at her two companions. “If he is put out of the way now, it will save countless lives!”

Rama Tura sat bolt upright in his bed. His body was a pitiful string of bones. His chest resembled a gnarled, thin brown root. He was entirely hideous to the eye.

“I fear,” he said, “that I shall have to demonstrate.”

HE sat perfectly still after that, and if at first he had been unwholesome, a brown, lecherous harridan, he was more so now, seeming to emanate an aura of the indescribable.

There came into the room the feeling of a tomb, the very real yet somewhat impossible sensation which comes upon those who stand in the presence of those that no longer live.

The Ranee struggled visibly against the feeling.

“Old buzzard!” she snapped. “You have practiced these tricks all of your life. Of course you are good at them!”

Rama Tura said nothing. His eyes had not moved. His mouth had not closed.

Suddenly, there appeared in the far side of the room an incredible thing, a monster of shapelessness, a fantastic ogre of a thing.

The Ranee, her two guards, stared at it. The light from the bedlamp hardly reached that far, and they could not make out the exact identity of the thing, except that it was a creature possessing eyes, and so large that it might have difficulty getting entirely into the room.

The air in the room began to change, to take on a definite odor, vague, repulsive, a bit warm, as if it might be the breath of the horror which had appeared so weirdly and was watching them.

“It is my servant,” the death-faced Rama Tura said tonelessly. “It is here for a purpose.”

The Raneer continued to stare.

“It is my guard,” said the man in the bed again, referring to the thing in the door. “It is lent to me by my master, the Majii. It does strange things to men.”

As if in verification to his words, both the guards now did an incredible and unbelievable thing. They presented their own guns to their own heads and calmly committed suicide. A single long breath could have been drawn between the time the first hit the floor and the other followed him.

The Raneer made a hissing sound of horror, spun and ran wildly. She did not go toward the door and the thing she could see there, but toward another door, and tore it open wildly, finding beyond a sitting room, a luxurious parlor of a place.

She plunged on and slammed against another door, which was unlocked and let her, luckily, out into the corridor, from which a passing elevator cage carried her, silent and quivering, to the street.

The night swallowed her.

Chapter III

CHOSEN OF THE MAJII

THE newspapers made a big splurge next morning. The headlines said:

THIEVES ATTACK RAMA TURA

Raid on Quarters of Mysterious Mystic Results in Death of Pair

Two alleged robbers were killed in the hotel apartment of Rama Tura, man of amazing powers, last night. According to Rama Tura, the slaying followed a terrific hand-to-hand fight with three assailants, one a woman, who escaped.

This story was corroborated by Rama Tura's servant, and the hotel clerk, who was himself forced to guide the thieves to Rama Tura's quarters.

THERE was more of it, a detailed resumé of the banditry efforts as told by Rama Tura, and it was a convincing yarn, perfectly logical.

The motive, according to Rama Tura, had been a desire on the part of the thieves to force him to reveal how he made jewels out of worthless pebbles and bits of glass.

In the center of the front page of one newspaper was a box, editorial in nature, discussing the mysterious Rama Tura, and his powers. It was headed:

WHAT IS HE?

Rama Tura came to the United States from the Orient, from a wild mountain province called Jondore.

Rama Tura takes pebbles and makes diamonds, rubies, emeralds. Jewel experts say they are genuine beyond doubt. They back their judgment by purchasing the stones.

One third of the selling price of these stones goes to American charity. Two thirds goes to a fund for charity administration in Jondore, Rama Tura's native land. Rama Tura himself takes no money.

What manner of being is this Rama Tura? Is he a faker? This paper had three of the greatest jewel experts pass on Rama Tura's products as genuine.

How does Rama Tura make his jewels? If he uses fakery, the most intense skeptics are baffled.

Rama Tura claims to be a disciple of the Majii. The Majii was a horrendous war chief who lived thirty centuries ago and conquered much of the Oriental world of that day. The Majii was a magician who could bring himself to life after being killed on the field of battle. He could slay thousands with a stare. He was cruel.

The Majii is believed by historians to be only a myth.

But Rama Tura is no myth. Just what is he?

SOME other newspapers carried yarns along the same vein, elaborating on the queer personality of Rama Tura, and one even went over the strange fact that Rama Tura apparently had actually been brought from Jondore to the United States in a coffin.

One paper further stated that Rama Tura slept in his coffin, and was said to come alive only on special occasions, but the police disproved this by stating that Rama Tura had been in his bed when the thieves walked in on him.

Another journal hooked the robbery in with the slaughter in the subway, pointing out that the two thieves killed in Rama Tura's apartment were of the same nationality as some of those killed in the subway, namely Jondoreans.

The police hinted there might have been a quarrel prior to the robbery, but failed to indicate how such a thing might have come about.

Several newspapers bore quiet advertisements that afternoon.

RAMA TURA WILL APPEAR TONIGHT IN TEMPLE NAVA

To those who read this, and who had been following the affair in the newspapers, the item meant that Rama Tura would that night make jewels out of worthless articles in Temple Nava.

TEMPLE NAVA was not a building by itself, but an establishment on the upper floor of a Park Avenue building which was nothing if not exclusive.

It had been installed by a cult of wealthy thrill-seekers who had, after the depression came along, been too busy to indulge in whimsies.

The furnishings, very rich, had been intact—no one could be found with enough money to buy such costly gimcracks—when Rama Tura leased it and began to set New Yorkers by the ears.

The swanky Temple Nava was the gathering place of many of the nabobs of the metropolis that night. There were many scientists and jewel experts. Rama Tura invited efforts to prove himself a fake.

There were many sensation-seekers, also, but those fry were not even permitted into the building. Policemen handled the traffic, and to enter the premises, one had to exhibit a bit of cardboard bearing cabilistic symbols. These were issued to the proper persons by detective agencies hired by Rama Tura.

It is a common thing for ladies to wear gloves the year around, so the presence of such covering on the hands of one woman who presented a card attracted no undue attention. No one, of course, imagined the gloves covered blue finger nails.

The lady herself did get a good deal of attention. A formal gown of black set off a remarkable figure, and her wide brown eyes stared aloofly from a face that would have been perfection except for a certain grimness about the mouth.

Her manner suggested someone bent on a mission that might not be exactly pleasant. She had an olive skin.

Her card was satisfactory, and she was admitted.

Not long after, a choleric dowager complained that she had lost her card of invitation, perhaps to a thief. She happened to be well known, and she was admitted anyway.

Straight into Temple Nava stalked the woman with the remarkable figure and the determined manner.

Many men saw her and admired her. Others saw her and looked as if a hungry tiger had walked into their midst. These latter were aides of Rama Tura. He seemed to have an incredible number of them. One hurried to present himself before Rama Tura.

Rama Tura had just been carried into Temple Nava in a plain black coffin, and he was being photographed by newspaper cameramen.

It was plain to see that the cameramen considered the coffin business ridiculous fakery, but it made good stuff for their papers, and they had orders to get the photographs.

The messenger made signals furtively, and the cameramen were hustled out.

RAMA TURA had lain in the coffin all of the time, very much like a dead man. Some of the photographers had touched him and he had seemed quite cold and lifeless.

The messenger leaned over the casket and said, "The Ranee is here."

RAMA TURA opened his eyes. He opened his mouth and it stayed open.

"I know it," he said in the tongue of Jondore.

"Some one told you first," gulped the messenger.

"No," said Rama Tura. "I know all things."

There seemed no way of refuting this, so the messenger swallowed several times.

"We did not scare her into leaving New York," he pointed out. "She is here because she intends to make more trouble."

"She had nerve to walk in boldly," said Rama Tura.

"There are police," reminded the other. "She will expect them to save her."

"She will be mistaken," intoned the other.

The messenger squirmed uneasily. "But she is the Ranee——"

"The Majii, my master, has waited thirty centuries for what he is now preparing to do," murmured Rama Tura. "The Majii has a plan of such vast size that you would not even understand it, my servant. If the Ranee insists on meddling, she must be put out of the way. No one must interfere."

The messenger nodded, then asked a very natural question. "How?"

"My magic will take care of that," Rama Tura advised him.

A little later, Rama Tura was carried out on the floor of Temple Nava by six big men of Jondore who were naked above the waist. It was a very effective entrance.

Rama Tura, it developed, was not to perform his feats on anything so prosaic as a stage, but in the center of the floor. Comfortable seats for the spectators—who would later be customers, perhaps—had been arrayed about the open space.

A large circular cloth of scarlet was carried in and placed on the floor, and Rama Tura was lifted from his coffin-like box and placed on this.

Very slowly, like something arising from the dead, Rama Tura got to his feet. He began to speak in a hollow, macabre voice. He did, however, use excellent English.

“I am not going to bore you with a mystic monologue,” he told those present. “You probably would not believe me, anyway. I care not whether you think I am a fakir and a showman, for it is not important.”

He turned slowly, like a machine, to survey those assembled in Temple Nava. His eyes were weird brown disks in his big, shiny skull. Several people shuddered.

“Perhaps,” Rama Tura continued, “it has occurred to some of you to wonder why India has always been the world’s treasure house of precious stones, for you all must have heard of the fabulous collections of the Rajahs. It is because jewels have a significance in the Orient, a significance that goes back some thirty centuries to a fabulous being known as the Majii. The Majii could do anything.”

He paused, as if for that to sink.

“Anything,” he repeated. “It is my opinion that the Majii was the basis for the well-known story of Aladdin and the lamp. The Majii was really the Genie who appeared when Aladdin rubbed the lamp. In other words, this tale which is thought to be fiction is true.”

He paused again.

“But that is neither here nor there. I do not attempt to explain my methods, except to tell you something I know your minds are too undeveloped to grasp. You will not believe that thought can be converted into matter, that the essence of the mind is supreme over all things. Yet this is quite true and the foundation of all so-called miracles.

“You find this hard to believe. All right—do not try. The primitive native cannot understand how an admixture of yellow and blue paints will produce a green paint, not knowing aught of the science of light. He knows that it does. You will watch me and know that I do produce jewels in a way you cannot understand.”

This lengthy harangue was received with great interest, and while it was going on, Rama Tura’s assistants had been circulating through the crowd, eyes alert, and had found two persons surreptitiously trying to use miniature cameras.

These individuals had been conducted to the front row and, to their embarrassment, requested to use the cameras openly.

Something vague and heavy came into the atmosphere of the room. An odor it was, with a tomblike mustiness. The audience tensed.

“Will some one bring an object forward for me to convert into a gem?” Rama Tura requested. “Hard, crystalline substances are the most suitable. Artificial jewels are excellent. Other things require too much time and effort.”

Some one got up hurriedly and offered a large red imitation stone. The bearer admitted this had been purchased in the dime store that afternoon.

“MAKE a pearl out of it,” some one shouted.

Rama Tura was cupping the paste stone in the basket of bones that was his hands.

“No,” he said. “Pearls are an animal product, rather, the secretion of a sick oyster, and not true jewels.”

Rama Tura now went into action. Those in the audience who had been there before began to whisper to their companions, giving advance information on what was to happen. A woman or two complained uneasily to an escort of the indefinable odor that weighted the air.

Two big, dark Jondoreans brought in a cube of substance that resembled ordinary fire brick and sat it down on a metal tripod about level with Rama Tura’s waist. On this, the worthless jewel was placed.

Rama Tura began to stare at the paste gem. The manner of this staring was somewhat unnerving. His eyes seemed about to come out of his head. His paper-thin lips writhed over a few ugly teeth which were plainly in the last stages of decay.

Some wag in the audience whispered, “If he’s such a whiz, why don’t he think himself into a new set of choppers.”

If Rama Tura heard this reference to his teeth, he gave no signs. He was going through all the motions of a man in terrific agony. He groaned, mumbled, grimaced. He picked up the fake gem repeatedly and warmed it in his palms.

Suddenly he emitted a rasping whine.

The audience became aware that streamers of strange-looking vapor were gathering in various parts of the room, and floating toward Rama Tura. The things looked like wisps of colored fog.

The streamers began to gather about the black cube on which the stone lay. They bundled, thickened there. An awful cracking and popping filled all of the room.

Those who had miniature cameras began to take pictures madly.

The bundle of vapor about the gem began to glow. It grew hotter and hotter, giving off a light as blinding as the glow of an electric arc. Every one in the room distinctly felt the frightful heat.

Then the heat died away, the glow disappeared, and aching eyes could make out the block of the fire brick on the stand.

A beautiful uncut diamond, as large as a pigeon egg, lay on the fire brick.

Rama Tura said calmly, “Such is the power of concentrated thought.”

A man of Jondore in a silken robe placed the gem in a satin-lined box and passed through the audience showing it, making little speeches indicating that it was for sale, and that a third of the proceeds would go to American charity, two thirds to the fund for administering charity in Jondore.

The latter fund, it was explained, was directed by prominent individuals in Jondore.

SEVERAL jewel experts were present. They gave the gem a thorough test. They all passed the same opinion.

“Genuine, undoubtedly,” they admitted. “Blue-white, and nearly perfect.”

Unexpectedly, a woman stood erect in the audience.

“Let me see that jewel!” she commanded loudly.

It was the Ranee. The man with the gem bowed and came over. He let the woman examine the bauble. This she did with a magnifying glass.

The scrutiny had a remarkable effect upon her. She waved her arms and cried out for attention.

“Police!” she shrieked. “Arrest this Rama Tura!”

Every eye in Temple Nava was now on her.

“He is a fiend!” the woman shrieked. “He is doing something that menaces your very lives! He is plotting wholesale murder!”

She looked over the crowd, and what she saw there did not satisfy her. Expressions on most of the faces said they thought that she was just a hysterical woman.

“Fools!” she screamed. “Rama Tura is doing something which may cause many in this very room to die!”

From where he stood in the center of the open space, Rama Tura began to intone timbreless words.

“It is unfortunate and I apologize for her,” he said. “She is suffering from a form of madness of the mind prevalent among the people of my country.”

Rama Tura now advanced. He came slowly, and he was very much like a hideous corpse walking through the medium of manipulated strings.

The Ranee watched him. There was horror in her eyes. She trembled. She still held the jewel, but it dropped out of her hands, rolled under the seat and there was a scramble as several tried to get it.

Unexpectedly, the Ranee screamed, and every muscle in her slender frame seemed to loosen and she fell flat in the aisle.

Rama Tura stopped where he was.

“It is too bad,” he said in English. “Her ailment is far advanced and she will now die.”

Chapter IV

THE MAN ON THE STRETCHER

THE afternoon of the day following, two men were bending over the Raneë. One was small, gray, wearing all-white clothes. The other was a lumpish man with a kindly, doggish face.

The woman lay in a rather bare room, spotlessly clean, all remarkably white in color. Her bed was high off the floor. She pitched from time to time.

The men seemed to be administering stimulants in an endeavor to make her speak. They bent forward as the woman made some vocal noises.

“Doc Savage.” Only the two words were distinguishable, and a moment later, she said them again, “Doc Savage.”

The small grayish man straightened.

“You have sent for him?” he asked the other.

The plump man nodded. “By telephone. He is on his way.”

They exchanged nods, and when the woman did not speak again, they drew aside, as if it were possible for their voices to disturb her.

“It is strange, this case,” one said.

The other grunted. “She’s calling for the right fellow to find out what is really wrong with her.”

The small grayish man smiled at his companion. “You had a part in his education, did you not?”

The plump man nodded. He was head of the institution, one of the largest hospitals devoted to psychiatric work in the city, possibly the world.

“Doc Savage studied under me,” he admitted. “But that was years ago. The man has far outstripped me—outstripped any one I know, for that matter. He is a mental wizard.”

An orderly appeared with word, “Doc Savage has arrived.”

“Ever seen him?” the plump man asked the grayish one.

“No.”

“Get set for a surprise then. He is one man who looks his part.”

The man who entered the room shortly afterward seemed of gigantic size when he was in the door, but there was the remarkable illusion of growing smaller as he advanced.

This was due to the symmetry of a remarkable muscular development, an even construction which seemed to make him a man of ordinary size until he was near an object to which his stature might be compared.

Even more unusual was the man’s skin, finely textured and of a bronze color. His eyes ran a close third in the summary of his unique characteristics—they were like

pools of flake gold, never still.

He was a man who by his appearance alone would stand out instantly in a multitude. Yet his clothing was quiet, showing not the slightest suspicion of showmanship.

“There is something wrong?” asked the newcomer in a voice of warmth and modulation.

“This woman, Doctor Savage.” The plump man pointed. “She has spoken your name a few times.”

Both the lumpish man and the small gray man launched into a detailed account of their observations of the case. The woman had been brought in the night before from Temple Nava, where she had collapsed in the middle of a tirade against the mysterious Rama Tura, who was getting columns of newspaper publicity by making diamonds out of less-valuable things.

The woman had at first been thought to suffer from an ordinary fainting spell, but then it had been discovered that she did not respond to the usual reactions and stimulants.

“There seems to be nothing organically wrong,” the lumpish man explained. “To tell the truth, it has me baffled.”

From that point, the discussion went entirely technical, entering terminology which would have been utterly Greek to an unversed listener.

“I will examine her,” Doc Savage said.

EXACTLY one hour and twenty-eight minutes later, he was finishing a microscopic analysis of spinal fluid, doing the work in the finely equipped laboratory which was a part of the hospital.

The bronze man had as observers some half a dozen men, specialists in that line, who were seizing an opportunity to observe a master at work.

Completing his own examination, Doc Savage permitted each of the spectators to scrutinize the extraction.

“You have seen this and the other tests,” he said. “What do you make of it?”

“Practically normal,” one said.

“Exactly,” the bronze man agreed. “According to all conventional tests, there is absolutely nothing wrong with the woman.”

One began, “Her heart and respiration—”

“Symptoms,” Doc told him. “She breathes slowly because she is not moving, and her heart beat is accelerated a trifle due to her mental state.”

“Then you think——”

“Her trouble is entirely mental,” Doc said. “At least, the seat of it is in her brain.”

“A mental disorder——”

“Not in the conventional sense,” Doc replied. “Our tests would have shown that. It is something else.”

The bronze man moved away from the microscope.

“This woman was brought from Temple Nava, I understand,” he said. “She repeated my name, so I was called. Is that right?”

“Correct,” he was told.

“Has any one tried to see her?”

“No one.”

“I see.”

A moment later, a small sound became audible, a low, mellow trilling, the pulsations of which ran eerily up and down the musical scale and seemed to come from no definite spot.

Some of those present showed surprise. They did not know that this was the sound of Doc Savage, a small unconscious thing which he did in moments of mental stress.

“You have some thought?” asked one who had heard the sound before—it was the lumpish man—and knew what it meant.

“I have,” the bronze man admitted. “It is rather fantastic, but it is possible.”

“Do you mind explaining?” he was asked.

“The thing is hardly in keeping with medical theory,” the bronze man said slowly. “It is only a theory, a rather wild one, based on studies which I once made in the Orient. If it is true, it is a thing rather hideous to contemplate.”

The listeners looked disappointed.

“We will examine the woman again,” Doc said.

They went into the remarkably white bedroom which had held the woman.

The male interne who had been attending the patient lay on the floor. It was plain to be seen that he had been knocked over the head.

The woman was gone.

It was nearly nightfall when Doc Savage crossed the ornate modernistic lobby of the skyscraper which housed his New York headquarters and entered, through what appeared to be a section of wall panel, his private elevator.

The conveyance lifted him with terrific speed for a time, then stopped so abruptly that the bronze man continued upward a few inches, then dropped back to the floor. He stepped out on the eighty-sixth floor, and approached a plain door which bore, in small bronze lettering:

CLARK SAVAGE, JR.

Before Doc Savage reached the door, it opened without visible aid—a mechanical phenomenon which was accomplished through the medium of radioactive discs in his pocket and a sensitive electroscope connected to relays.

The opening of the door let out sounds that resembled a miniature riot.

“You’ll eat the rest of that apple, or I’ll skin you alive!” labored a squeaky, enraged voice.

Chairs upset. Blows whacked. There were gasps, grunts, much puffing.

Doc walked in.

The combatants were circling each other warily. Each had done some damage on the other. This might have seemed strange, in view of the fact that one was slender, lean of waist, while the other was a two-hundred-and-sixty-pound colossus who might conceivably be mistaken for a bull ape.

The slender man was "Ham," sometimes designated as Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, cleverest lawyer and snappiest dresser ever turned out by Harvard.

The human ape was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, world-famed industrial chemist, better known as "Monk."

These two were members of a group of five remarkable men who had long been associated with Doc Savage in his remarkable career of helping those in trouble and righting wrongs.

To all appearances, Monk and Ham were going through one of the more violent stages of their eternal quarrel. No one could recall one having spoken a civil word to the other, but it was only occasionally that they came to blows.

"What now?" Doc Savage asked in a tone which showed no particular interest.

"This shyster!" Monk jerked a thumb at Ham. "He tried to feed Habeas another one of them apples filled with pepper."

"I'll break Habeas of robbing my coat pockets!" Ham gritted.

"You'll eat the apple yourself!" Monk assured him.

Habeas Corpus, object of the melee, was under a chair, long snout and enormous ears protruding. Habeas's ears were so huge that it was doubtful if he could have gotten them under the chair without difficulty. Habeas was Monk's pet pig.

Doc Savage said, "Would a little excitement interest you fellows?"

The abruptness with which Monk and Ham put aside their private quarrel was a give-away. Their scrapping was nothing more than a habitual amusement, even if it did seem that they often earnestly endeavored to murder each other.

DOC SAVAGE explained about the woman in the hospital, repeating exactly what he had been told.

"It *is* strange," Monk muttered when the bronze man finished.

"It is," Doc agreed, "more than that. Some one did something to that woman, did something horrible. Perhaps it was done to shut her mouth. It might conceivably be done to kill her."

"What was it?" Monk asked. Monk had a small, childlike voice which sounded ridiculous for a being of such homely bulk.

"Rather not say yet," Doc told him. "In fact, it is doubtful if my explanation could be put clearly enough for you to exactly agree that the thing I think happened is possible."

"Um," said Monk.

Ham murmured. "I gather we are going to mix in this affair?"

“We are,” Doc told him. “Did you notice, until last night, various strange-looking brown men were loitering in the streets about this building?”

“Huh?” Monk exploded.

“They were,” Doc said. “I watched them for some time, secretly, but there was nothing to show that they were observing us. They disappeared last night, about an hour after the time this woman was stricken at the gem-making seance of the mysterious Rama Tura.”

Ham went over to the massive inlaid table which was a part of the reception room furniture, and picked up an innocent-looking black cane. He separated this near the handle sufficiently to show that it was in reality a sword cane.

“Brown men,” he said. “From the newspaper accounts, this Rama Tura is also a brown man.”

“Exactly,” Doc agreed.

“It begins to smell like a shenanigan of some kind,” Monk said, small-voiced.

MONK came near not getting into Rama Tura’s Temple Nava jewel-making seance that night, simply because he had garbed himself, largely to disgust Ham, as disreputably as he could.

His suit was a horrible, baggy-checked thing which had been faded and burned by laboratory chemicals during the course of his experiments. He had not shaved.

They had secured entrance cards indirectly, through wealthy persons whom Doc Savage knew. Monk argued. Finally, he was admitted.

Ham had no trouble whatever. Ham was his usual sartorial perfection. He wore full dress, and more than one man with an eye for dress eyed him enviously. He carried his plain black sword cane.

They waited with the crowd at the elevators, and neither glanced through the door. Had they done so, they might have seen Doc Savage in the crowd of curious who were not being admitted.

The bronze man did not stand out from the crowd in his usual fashion. He wore a light, enveloping topcoat, a snap brim hat and spectacles. He walked with a stoop. There was not enough light to show the bronze color of his skin.

Doc moved away from the vicinity, and shortly afterward, was probing into the back of a large, plain roadster. When he left the machine, he had secured a metal box larger than a suitcase.

He went to the rear of the building which housed Temple Nava. As he expected, it had a freight entrance, which was deserted at this hour. The job of picking the ponderous lock delayed him some little time.

He closed the door carefully behind him, still carrying his metal case, and one of the freight elevators carried him up to Temple Nava. He operated the controls himself.

The freight elevator admitted Doc into a rough corridor, which in turn gave into Temple Nava. There was a guard at the door, a lean, swart man of Jondore.

He was standing where he could not see the freight elevators, and there was so much noise in Temple Nava—the jabbering of the crowd—that he had not heard the

cage arrive.

Doc Savage moved through the darkness until he stood close to the look-out. Then Doc set his throat and chest muscles carefully. He had practiced ventriloquism until he was fairly adept. He also spoke the language of Jondore, which was a rather common one in the Orient.

The look-out seemed quite surprised when a guttural voice from inside the temple seemed to call, "You at the back door—over here a moment."

The guard walked away in obedience to the summons. Doc ducked inside. When the guard returned, looking baffled, Doc Savage was on the stage which stood at one end of the temple, but which Rama Tura was not using for his present purpose. The stage was dark, deserted, with the curtains down.

Doc Savage climbed with his metal box. A few minutes later he was high off the floor, crouched precariously, cutting a round hole in the curtain.

He had tied the metal box to the perch with a stout cord, and now he opened it and drew out a small cinema camera which differed from other cameras in that it had a lens of several times the usual size.

Doc suspended this in front of the hole, lashing it there. It made almost no noise when he started it. The film magazines were very large, and would run more than an hour, taking pictures through a lens so fast that it would function in light little stronger than that given off by a candle.

Doc next cut a peephole for his own eye.

RAMA TURA was just beginning the discourse that preceded his performance, using the same trend of statements, if not the same words that he had employed the previous night.

Monk and Ham—Monk had managed that—occupied adjacent seats. As was to be expected, Rama Tura's line of talk did not register on Ham. It struck him as little better than the sales patter of a street-corner astrologer. Ham curled a lip.

"It seems to appeal to the rest of these stuffed shirts," Monk told him in a stage whisper. "You oughta like it."

Ham brought a foot down sharply on Monk's instep. Ordinarily, Monk would have suffered in silence. This time he did not. He let out a bawl of pain that caused at least a dozen people to jump out of their comfortable chairs.

Immediately, two turbaned men of Jondore approached Monk, wearing disapproving frowns.

"Gonna try to throw me out," Monk surmised.

"Hope they do," Ham replied grimly.

But the two men of Jondore only took up a position near Monk and Ham and stood there.

Rama Tura went on with his monologue. The white lights in the place had been switched off and red ones turned on, lending a more weird atmosphere.

Rama Tura was not quite on the point of calling for imitation gems to turn into genuine stones when there was a commotion across the temple.

Four men of Jondore, turbaned, appeared, bearing a stretcher on which was a form swathed in a cloth which looked like a piece of the temple drapery. The stretcher was carried toward the exit.

“A thousand pardons,” intoned Rama Tura. “It is merely one who has fainted and will be taken to a hospital.”

Monk gripped Ham’s arm, breathed, “Hey! They carried that from back toward the stage! Doc was back there.”

“We had better look into it,” Ham said grimly.

They craned their necks—and saw something. A naked male elbow was partially visible under the drapery that covered the form on the stretcher. The skin of this elbow had a pronounced bronze tint.

“Doc!” Monk gulped.

Both the homely chemist and the dapper lawyer arose and moved toward the door. They kept hands close to their armpits, where nestled little machine pistols which were charged with so-called “mercy” bullets, slugs which produced quick unconsciousness without making more than minor wounds.

THEY were not molested. They shoved into the elevator into which the stretcher had been taken. Other than themselves and the form on the stretcher, there were only the four men of Jondore.

Monk hauled out his machine pistol and waved it carelessly.

“Get ’em up!” he told the men of Jondore.

They glared at him. But they lifted their hands.

Ham closed the elevator door, operated the controls so that the cage sank several floors, then stopped it.

“Now we’ll see what has happened to Doc,” he said grimly.

He whipped back the drapery.

The man on the stretcher was not Doc Savage, but a lean-faced, wolfish Jondorean, and he held in either hand a water pistol of the ordinary dime store variety.

The instant he was uncovered, he pointed one water pistol at Ham, the other at Monk, and tightened down the triggers.

Hissing streams of some pungent, burning liquid hit Monk and Ham in the face, splattered, vaporized. Too late, they jumped backward. The stuff had blinded them agonizingly.

Monk tried to use his machine pistol. It made an unearthly bullfiddle roar. But Monk was unable to see a target, and the slugs went wild. Then Monk fell down, groveling, as consciousness went from him, and Ham did the same thing a moment later.

One of the men of Jondore said dryly, in his own tongue, “it was said to us that they were foxes, but they are indeed but puppies with pointed ears.”

Monk’s finger, tightening by some unconscious reflex, caused his machine pistol to moan briefly, after which Monk became quite still.

Chapter V

THE CAUTIOUS FOE

THE moan of Monk's machine pistol was by no means a small sound, and it carried up the elevator shaft, and muffled somewhat, drifted into Temple Nava, where Doc Savage heard it.

The bronze man had heard the first burst of the rapid-firer, and was already on his way to investigate. The second burst hurried him.

Coat collar turned up, hat down, stooping so as not to seem so tall, Doc whipped around the fringe of the spectators, heading for the door. He did not expect to depart undetected, nor did he.

Rama Tura had sharp eyes. He saw Doc. For once, Rama Tura's dead face showed alarm. He crackled a few words in his dialect.

Turbaned men of Jondore instantly converged on Doc. Doc quickened his pace. They raced to head him off. Doc picked up a chair, shied it at the first. The man upset.

A woman screamed. The temple became a bedlam. With his fists, Doc dropped two assailants. A gun went off somewhere. A woman fell on the floor and tried to crawl under chairs, squawling at the top of her lungs, then fainted into silence.

Rama Tura was whooping in English.

"Thieves!" he screamed. "This man stole some of the jewels I have made!"

It was a lie, pure and simple, but it served the purpose of setting the detectives present, and there were several, after Doc. Some of the officers drew guns.

Doc doubled low on the floor. He had a lot of respect for the shooting of New York policemen. And they did not know his identity.

Men were ahead of Doc, and there was a long thin Oriental rug on which they stood, and the bronze man yanked this. He did not spill them, but they were very busy for a few moments keeping their balance, and the bronze man got past them.

He was in the front corridor now. He knew the general layout of these buildings, how the electrical wiring was brought up through a shaft, and branched off at each floor through power boxes.

It took him only a moment to find the box and get it open. He unscrewed fuses, jerked switches and the premises went dark.

The stairway was dark also, down to the first landing, where there was light. He did not pause there, but went on. Five flights down he paused, and thumbed an elevator call button vigorously. The cage came shortly.

On the street, there was excitement. It centered about a policeman who wallowed in a spreading puddle of red on the sidewalk. It was not necessary to ask questions. Bits of excited talk told what had happened.

Brown men had dashed out carrying two unconscious captives—Monk and Ham. A policeman—the one on the walk—had tried to interfere. He had been shot in his chest

for his pains.

The assailants had escaped in a car with their two captives.

Doc Savage ran for the spot where he had left his roadster. It was a little more than possible that he did not have much time to lose.

THERE were five men in the group who aided Doc Savage, and each was an expert in some particular profession, at which he worked during odd times. Two of the five were absent from New York.

Colonel John "Renny" Renwick, engineer, was in Germany, attending an international association of engineers conclave. William Harper "Johnny" Littlejohn, was also abroad, in Central America, heading a bit of archaeological research.

Major Thomas J. "Long Tom" Roberts was the only other of Doc's group in New York.

Doc's roadster was fitted with a short-wave radio transmitter and receiver. Long Tom Roberts, who was an electrical expert of note, would probably be in his laboratory, and would have a receiver turned on, tuned to the wave length which Doc's outfit used, as a matter of course. Doc raised Long Tom on the first call.

Long Tom had a rather quarrelsome voice.

"I'm packing," he said. "An electrical outfit made me a fat offer to go to South America and superintend some construction. I stand to make fifty thousand out of it."

"Then you would not be interested in some excitement?" Doc queried.

"What kind?" Long Tom countered. The radio loud-speaker did not improve the natural sourness of his voice.

"Rama Tura, the jewel maker, has something up his sleeve," Doc said.

"Of course he has," Long Tom snorted. "But let him trim the suckers. He's only going after the rich ones."

"Rama Tura's men just seized Monk and Ham," Doc said. "There is also a matter of a woman to whom something mysterious and terrible happened, who kept calling my name, and who has now disappeared rather queerly."

"This electrical concern offered me fifty thousand and a bonus," Long Tom said.

"All right," Doc said. "Take it."

"I will not," Long Tom said contrarily. "Where'll I meet you?"

"Rama Tura's apartment," Doc Savage said, and gave the address.

Where Rama Tura resided was no secret. The matter of the two men killed in the attempted jewel robbery had spread that over the newspapers.

The subdued lobby of the Hotel Vincent, in which Rama Tura had been residing, was quiet and only partially saturated with pale light when Doc Savage drove past. The bronze man parked in a spot where he could keep a watch on the place, and waited for Long Tom to appear.

A newsboy passed, crying his wares. Doc bought a late edition.

There was no mention of the excitement at Rama Tura's latest jewel-making seance, which was not surprising, since it had occurred only a few minutes ago. He

glanced over the paper. Two items caught his attention.

Except for a difference in names and addresses, they might have been identical.

Two men had been murdered. Both murders had been committed by robbers. Knives had been the death weapons in each case. Both victims had been fairly wealthy. Both men had been avid amateur photographers.

DOC SAVAGE got out of his roadster, went to a telephone and called the detective agency which had charge of issuing the tickets to Rama Tura's jewel-making seances. The agency was a perfectly honest one.

He requested the night operative on duty to check the list of persons to whom cards had been issued for Rama Tura's previous night's performance.

Both murdered men were on the list of ticket recipients.

There was no definite proof, but it was possible that Rama Tura had taken measures to see that the pictures of his performance were never developed.

Doc Savage went back to his roadster. Long Tom should have arrived by now. He was not in evidence.

Long Tom's car was equipped with a radio. Doc, adjusting his own receiver, carefully, got the carrier wave length of Long Tom's transmitter distinctly. Evidently it was switched on. It did not sound far away.

Doc tried repeatedly, but did not raise Long Tom. Something, it seemed, had happened to the electrical wizard.

Doc Savage walked into the Hotel Vincent, strode across the dim, empty lobby, and noted that the clerk seemed to be asleep with head on the desk. Doc did not address him, but walked around and shook him.

The clerk was evidently drugged. He was slightly disheveled, as if he had been held, and there was a prick on his arm where a hypo needle had probably entered.

DOC made, with a pen, certain strange-looking marks on the desk blotter. These were hieroglyphics of the ancient Mayans, and could be read by very few men in the civilized world. Long Tom could read them, having acquired the ability during the course of a certain Central American adventure.

Long Tom, should he arrive, would be certain to see the symbols and know Doc was upstairs.

Scrutiny of the registration cards told Doc the floor of Rama Tura's suite. The bronze man went to an elevator. The operator was slumbering inside—drugged. Doc ran the cage up himself.

There was no sound outside the door of Rama Tura's suite. Doc tried the knob, found it unlocked, and walked in. The lights were burning. There was flame in the fireplace, rather low. The ashes looked unnatural. Doc went over.

Documents had been burned recently in the fireplace, and the ashes mashed into millions of indecipherable fragments. No hope of learning anything there.

Doc went on into the other rooms. Dresser drawers were upset on the floor. Coat hangers were strewn about opened closet doors. Everywhere were these signs of a hasty

departure.

A wastebasket held newspapers, wrapping papers, bits of cord—and a crumpled ball of white cloth. Doc got the cloth. It was a hospital frock, and bore the name of the hospital from which the mysterious woman of the blue finger nails had escaped.

There was a damp spot on the gown, on one arm, and it gave off a strong scent of toilet water.

In the bathroom, a bottle of toilet water had been broken, and was still wet on the floor.

Doc Savage studied this fairly conclusive proof that the mysterious woman had been in the suite recently, then made another round of the place, found nothing of interest, and went downstairs.

The Hotel Vincent telephone operator occupied a small room by herself, and was evidently not a very energetic young woman, because she was placidly reading, unaware that anything out of the ordinary had happened.

After a little argument, Doc got a look at her call charge slips. Since every call made by a guest was charged for at ten cents each, a record was kept.

One call had been made from Rama Tura's suite that night. It was timed less than an hour previously. Doc studied the number, made his small, fantastic trilling sound briefly, while the operator gaped wonderingly, then called the same number himself.

He got the office of a transcontinental air line. There happened to be an alert young man on the desk, and he distinctly remembered a call at the time Doc mentioned.

It had been made by a voice with a distinctly foreign accent, and the inquirer had desired to know whether the plane due in from San Francisco at midnight carried as a passenger one, Kadir Lingh.

"Naturally, we do not give out such information," said the young man at the air line office.

Doc Savage made his identity known, and requested speech with an official of the concern who happened to know his voice.

"What about this Kadir Lingh?" he asked, when he was sure of getting the information.

"Kadir Lingh is aboard the midnight plane," Doc was told. "Not only that, but we have a request from the American government to show him every courtesy. It seems that Kadir Lingh is the ruler of some country in the Orient."

"He is the Nizam of Jondore," Doc Savage replied. "Jondore happens to be a province, under British protectorate, with a population only a little smaller than the United States. Should something happen to Jondore, it is pretty logical to think the same thing would happen to the rest of the Far East."

"What makes you say that?" the other asked curiously.

Doc Savage hung up without answering.

NO one around the Hotel Vincent knew anything about the exodus of Rama Tura's retinue, so Doc Savage left the place.

The bronze man's roadster was fitted with spare equipment for almost any emergency, including a length of electric wire and a trouble lamp.

Out of the wire he improvised a simple radio loop aerial. His receiving set was especially sensitive to directional loop reception when certain terminals were used.

He tuned in on Long Tom's transmitter. Then he drove toward it. This was no simple task, since the presence of large buildings at times completely distorted the loop indications.

Long Tom's car stood in a dark side street, askew of the sidewalk, one wheel smashed off, the radiator partially caved in by a telegraph pole. Water still drooled from the radiator.

A few spectators were staring sleepily. Doc's questioning elicited word that no one knew what had caused the wreck or what had happened to the occupant of the car. The machine had simply been found.

Doc circled the machine. His identity became known and several persons began to whisper excitedly and point him out. He carefully paid no attention to this. He had never become so blasé that public attention did not embarrass him. It was for this reason that he avoided the public eye whenever possible.

Finding nothing in or on the machine, he withdrew and circled the spot, still continuing his scrutiny. The crowd followed him wonderingly, still whispering.

Fifty feet down the street, Doc found a smear of dampness on the pavement which, when he turned a light upon it closely, had a distinct reddish cast. Seepage from a wound! And it had been wiped up. It was very fresh.

Whether the stain had been made by fluid from Long Tom's body, or not, there was no way of telling. But something had certainly happened to Long Tom Roberts, the electrical wizard.

Doc Savage went to his roadster and consulted the dash clock. It was ten minutes past midnight. He knew his own driving ability.

His best effort would not get him to the airport in time to meet the midnight plane from San Francisco in which Rama Tura had been interested—the plane bearing Kadir Lingh, potentate of Jondore.

But there was always the chance the plane might be late.

Chapter VI

MURDER ON THE LOOSE

POSSIBLY because land is somewhat appallingly expensive in the vicinity of New York City, and because aviation in its infancy had not the funds of a Midas to expend, rather cheap sites were frequently selected for airports.

Cheap land meant land away from other habitation, frequently in or near a marsh. The airport used by the transcontinental line in which Doc Savage was interested was in such a location, and it was surrounded by brushland.

Doc Savage was half a mile away from the airport when he heard the shooting. There were four measured shots that might have come from a revolver. Then something that sounded like a shotgun went off. A man shrieked. All of these noises were sufficient to carry over the idling of a plane engine.

Doc Savage bore down heavily on the accelerator. The heavy roadster began to cover ground in a slightly eerie manner. Doc kept a close watch, half expecting to meet a machine or machines, but nothing appeared and he swerved into the airport.

There was much excitement. Men ran across the tarmac from various directions, converging on the hangars. The floodlights were on. At least two bodies lay in their glow. Doc ran forward.

“Damned gang raided the midnight plane!” he was told. “After one of the passengers.”

“They get him?” Doc asked.

“Heck no. The passenger had a bodyguard. Boy, you never saw such shooting.”

“Who got killed?”

“The assistant pilot, poor sap. He tried to be a hero. The other stiff is one of the raiders. Shot through the thinking box.”

Doc Savage nodded, asked, “Any one else?”

“Sure,” said the informer. “The guy they are questioning.”

“Who is he?”

“Another one of the raiders. Man, did he get it! One of the passenger’s bodyguards swiped him with a knife, right across the lamps. Fixed ’em both.”

“Put his eyes out?”

“You said it.”

“Where is the passenger and his bodyguard?”

“Skipped. Grabbed a car and chased the other birds. Stole a hack from a poor driver to do it.”

The informant could give information precisely and quickly.

“How long have they been gone?” Doc demanded.

“Long enough so that you can’t catch ’em. Five minutes ago. These Long Island roads go every which way.”

Doc Savage considered briefly.

“Do not let it be known that I am here,” he directed. “But tell whoever is in charge that I want to see him privately.”

“O. K.”

THE member of the raiding party who had been left behind was horribly blinded, thanks to the knife cut which he had sustained across the eyes.

The blade had all but separated his eyeballs as a sharp knife would a pair of apples. He was moaning and blubbering and it was quite certain he would never look upon the world again.

The airport attendant stood around and looked sorry, for it was a pitiful thing.

They might not have looked so sorry had they known this man who was blinded was the same one who had pursued the Ranee the night before and had so callously killed a taxi driver, simply because the poor fellow had known the Ranee was endeavoring to get to Doc Savage. He was a cold slayer and he had probably gotten less than he deserved.

They were trying to question him. The man moaned and blubbered and screamed. The questioners were not experts enough on wounds to know the man was suffering no very intense pain as yet, and that he was setting up a howl to make it seem he was in no shape to answer questions.

The questioning had gotten nowhere when a rasping, coarse voice said from the door:

“The first man who moves won’t move again!”

Every one spun. What they saw inspired neither mirth nor a wish to move too quickly. There was a man in the door, shrouded in a black raincoat, an aviator’s helmet and mask. He held two revolvers as huge as any one present had ever seen.

“Get your hands up!” the newcomer snarled. “Back against the wall, then turn around.”

They did so and he searched them. Such weapons as he found, he smashed on the concrete floor, after unloading them.

He walked over and grabbed the blinded man by an arm.

“I’m gettin’ you outta this, buddy!” he growled. “Let’s blow!”

They went out swiftly, the masked man guiding the blinded one.

“Stick in here five minutes and be healthy,” advised the masked man to those left behind.

One pilot did not take the advice, and thrust his head out, with the result that a gun banged and plaster jumped off the stucco wall well above his head. Every one remained out of sight after that, and they heard a car go moaning away into the night.

The masked man drove the car furiously, hit the main highway, swung left, took the first right turn, and held the machine at seventy.

Later, he turned into a winding lane which crossed the island and slowed the pace, on the principle that nothing is more suspicious than a car traveling at an unnatural speed.

The blinded man had been silent with his agony, but now he spoke.

"Thanks, pal," he said. "Who are you?"

The masked man said nothing.

"You done me a turn," grumbled the blinded one. "Any reason why we can't knock ourselves down to each other?"

"No reason," said the masked man. "How's the lamps?"

"Not bad," said the other. "Take a gander at 'em, will you."

The masked man stopped the car, removed the emergency bandage and scrutinized the sliced eyeballs. There was not the remote chance of the eyesight being saved.

"Whatcha think?" the blinded man gulped eagerly.

"Could be worse," said the other.

"Sure. I'll be up and lookin' at the dames in a week." The sightless one settled back on the cushions with a sigh. "Say, where'd you come from? I don't know that voice."

"New man," said the other. "I just mixed up in it."

"Hot stuff, what?"

"You said it."

"Think it's worth the trouble?"

"Sure thing. Biggest the world has seen."

"You must know more about it than I do," said the blind man. "I don't even know what it's all about."

"It's big," said, the masked man dryly.

THE car went over a stretch that needed repaving, bucking and swaying, the headlights jumping up and down far ahead. The engine ran quietly, however, and the springs did not need oiling.

"You on the pay roll?" the masked man asked curiously. "Or do you get a share?"

"Pay roll. You?"

"Same. Who hired you?"

"Guy named Kadir Lingham," grunted the blinded man.

"Hm-m-m!" the other said explosively. "That's funny. Kadir Lingham was the bird who came in on the plane to-night, the lad you fellows were to get."

The other was holding his eyes and wincing.

"That *is* funny," he mumbled. "We only had his description. We were to grab him and take him to the guy who hired us. Only it didn't go off."

The car sailed over a very steep hill in easy high gear.

"Describe the man who hired you," requested the driver.

The blinded man would miss his eyes. He had been very observant. True, he had a character easy to describe, for he was painting a word picture of the maker of jewels,

Rama Tura.

The masked man laughed shortly when the description ended.

“That,” he said, “is Rama Tura, the man who makes diamonds and other jewels out of pebbles and imitation jewels.”

“He hired you?”

“I left him,” said the masked man, “not more than an hour ago.”

“I don’t understand it,” mumbled the one who did not have his eyes. “He said he was named Kadir Lingh, and that he was the big-shot in some province in or around India.”

“Rama Tura is a slick egg,” advised the pilot of the car. “No doubt he told you he was Kadir Lingh so that the police would look for the wrong man in case they caught you and you talked.”

“I wouldn’t talk.”

“Sure, sure. Rama Tura, maker of jewels, just wasn’t taking any chances.”

The blinded man groaned. “I wonder what the whole game is?”

“Don’t *you* know?” the masked one exploded.

“Heck no. I was told it was big, and that it would mean millions of dollars and involve most of Asia before it was over. That’s everything I know. Rama Tura, if that’s really who hired me, don’t tell much.”

“How did he come to contact you?”

“Oh, I belong to a mob that does little jobs,” said the blinded man. “It wouldn’t be hard for a guy who wanted a job done to hear of us. The boss—Rama Tura—had some of them guys he brought from Jondore, but he needed some Americans to kinda help out. That’s where we came in.”

“That,” queried the masked man, “is all you know?”

There was something queer about his voice. It had changed, changed remarkably. It was not at all like it had been a moment ago. The blinded man realized that.

“Say!” he exploded. “Who are you, anyway? What’s your name?”

“Doc Savage,” said the masked man.

Chapter VII

SUSPICIONS

DOC SAVAGE, having learned disgustingly little by his role of pretended rescuer of the blinded man, drove into the city and directly to a concern which made a business of supplying ambulances for long hauls.

He delivered the blinded man to them, along with an order for a doctor, and certain instructions. Then he made a long-distance telephone call.

The sightless one would then be taken upstate, where another ambulance would meet the first, and the patient would be transferred. That was the last his old haunts would ever hear of the patient.

The fellow would go, as a matter of fact, to an institution which Doc Savage maintained in the mountains, an elaborate place, where the man's brain would be operated upon in such a delicate manner that all memory of his past would be wiped out, after which he would receive a course of training in upright citizenship, and learn a trade by which he could make a living without his eyes.

Doc Savage had maintained this unique "college" for a long time, and its existence was known to almost no one outside the specialists who worked there, and Doc's group of aides.

Even the "graduates" were delivered in such a manner that they did not know where it was. No "graduate" had ever been known to return to crooked ways.

Returning to his skyscraper headquarters, Doc Savage found that the device which recorded all telephone calls during his absence held an unpleasant and shocking message. The mechanical device on the telephone consisted of a phonographic device which said, through a loud-speaker, "This is a mechanical robot in Doc Savage's office which will record for his attention any message you care to speak," after which the communication of the caller was placed on another record.

There were really two calls of importance.

The first was from the hospital to which Doc Savage had gone to visit the woman who had disappeared, and it advised that three men—the two doctors and the interne who had attended the woman—had been found with knives sticking in their hearts.

The bronze man made his weird, small trilling sound for some moments after he heard that, and the note was as chill, as eerie as a frigid wind trickling through the frozen pillars of some polar ice field. For once, it was not pleasant to hear.

First the men who had taken pictures. Now the doctors and the interne.

Rama Tura was wiping out every one who might possibly have learned anything about him.

The second important call was in the dead voice of Rama Tura.

"Long Tom, Monk and Ham wish to send you a message," the mechanism had recorded Rama Tura as saying. "They say that they do not think you will or should

accede to a certain demand which I am going to make. But first, let me prove that I have them.”

Following that, Ham’s voice said, “Doc, they’re planning——” after which his voice ended suddenly, as if a hand had been slapped over his mouth. Then came Long Tom’s sour voice, not speaking words, but remonstrating angrily close to the telephone transmitter. It sounded as if he were being abused.

It was apish, stupid-looking Monk who made best use of the opportunity. He spoke Mayan, and said, “See a man called Kadir Ligh——” before he was shut off violently.

“I do not believe they had time to tell you anything of value,” Rama Tura’s lifeless voice continued. “It was necessary to let you know, they were with me.”

The voice might have been coming from a phonograph which was incapable of registering tonal differences.

“You see,” Rama Tura said, “within the next twelve hours, you will receive a box. This box will be a reminder to attend to your own business. It will contain the head of one of these friends of yours.”

THE bronze man’s features held no visible emotion as he put the recordings aside and set the machine for future operation. That did not mean, however, that he was unconcerned.

There was a grim speed in his movements as he passed into an adjacent room, which held a scientific library of great completeness, thence into his unusual laboratory.

From a cabinet he took a vest which consisted of a light, bulletproof chain mail, to which was attached rows of small pockets, these padded so that, once the vest was donned, its presence was hardly noticeable. The pockets held innumerable gadgets which, on occasion, served for some rather strange uses.

The bronze man left his headquarters this time by descending in the speed elevator to the basement level, and stepping into a passage which led some scores of yards to a metal door that admitted into the Broadway subway tunnel. He walked, crowding aside as trains passed, to the nearest station, and from there took a taxi.

There was quiet in the vicinity of the building housing the Temple Nava. Police guards were gone from in front, although a few curious loitered quietly in the lobby, talking. No brown men of Jondore were in evidence.

Doc Savage went up to Temple Nava exactly as he had earlier in the night, using the freight elevator in the rear.

The Temple Nava had a disheveled aspect. Rama Tura apparently had not gone on with his jewel-making seance after the excitement. Chairs were upset and scattered about.

Doc Savage moved back to the stage, alert, and climbed to where he had left the motion picture camera. It was still in the obscure hiding place, sensitive lens through the curtain.

Producing a flashlight which spiked a stream of intense white light scarcely thicker than a pencil, Doc went over the camera.

What he found did not seem to satisfy him. He clambered down, and studied the floor beneath, and examined the film of dust, microscopic in places, on the braces and struts.

Some one had climbed to the camera, other than himself.

He removed the camera with the greatest of care, not opening it, not even touching it, but wrapping it in a tapestry which he yanked from the wall.

Twenty minutes later, he had the camera under a strong X ray in his laboratory.

The film magazine was empty. Whatever had been photographed would serve no purpose, for Rama Tura or his men had obviously taken the film.

Certain of the fastenings and hand grips on the camera seemed to bear a thin coating of oil. It might have seeped from the mechanism.

Doc Savage used chemicals to analyze the oil film. It was a potent toxin and an acid in solution—the acid to burn the skin and admit the poison into the system.

Touching the stuff would have been an excellent bid for death.

Doc went over the camera for finger prints, and was not surprised at finding none.

GOING back into the reception room, Doc Savage used the telephone. His first call was to the police, an inquiry as to whether any trace had been found of Kadir Lingh, ruler of Jondore, who had managed to escape the reception at the airport. There was some news.

The taxicab seized by Kadir Lingh and his bodyguard had been found in Brooklyn, deserted except for one brown man, probably a Jondorean, who had been sitting in the back seat, suffering the unavoidable after effects of a bullet through the brain.

The police official had an additional word.

“This fellow Rama Tura has dropped out of sight,” he said. “We wanted to question him about that fracas at Temple Nava to-night, and about the two alleged robbers who were killed in his apartment. He has checked out of his diggings. No one has an idea where he went.”

Doc gave courteous thanks and hung up.

THE recording device showed no calls during the bronze man’s absence at Temple Nava, which was good evidence that Monk, Ham and Long Tom had not escaped.

Doc now proceeded to make a series of telephone calls. He got some sharp answers from persons who did not like the idea of being aroused at this hour of the night. Simple statement of his identity, however, was in each case sufficient to stem the complaints.

Monk’s pet pig, Habeas Corpus, was in Doc Savage’s office. During the telephoning, the porker came out of the library, where he had been staying, and stood and eyed Doc Savage intently, grunting several times in a vague way.

The shote gave every evidence of becoming concerned about Monk’s continued absence. Doc interrupted his telephoning to give Habeas an apple, which the diminutive porker ignored.

From an executive of the Better Business Bureau, Doc Savage secured the information he was seeking. It is one of the purposes of Better Business Bureaus to investigate unusual enterprises and ascertain, if possible, whether they are fakes designed to gyp some one. Rama Tura and his fantastic jewel-making seance had not escaped this one.

“It is, of course, incredible that the jewels are being made by hocus pocus,” the executive of the bureau told Doc. “But the jewels produced are unquestionably genuine. Hard-headed buyers have paid enormous sums for some of them. One third of the money goes to American charity, and the other two thirds to a charity in Jondore.”

“That,” Doc said quickly, “is what interests me. What about this charity in Jondore?”

“It is a fund to be administered by prominent persons in Jondore,” the other explained.

“Has the money been sent to Jondore?”

“No. We took care of that.”

“What do you mean?” Doc demanded.

“We suggested that the money be kept here in the United States for a few weeks, until it was quite certain that Rama Tura had a legitimate right to sell those jewels,” said the Better Business Bureau man.

“Your theory was that they might be stolen jewels which Rama Tura was disposing?”

“Exactly.”

“It is hardly likely they are stolen jewels,” Doc said. “Stones the size of those Rama Tura has been producing have a character all of their own, even if recut. Had they been stolen, some one would have recognized them.”

“Well, where in the devil are they coming from?” the other demanded. “I don’t know how Rama Tura does that ball of fire stunt. But damned if I’m gullible enough to think he stands there and makes diamonds.”

Doc Savage asked, “Where is the two thirds of the Jondore proceeds?”

“In cash in the Oriental National Bank,” said the man from the Better Business Bureau.

“Cash?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Darned if I know. It’s in a safety-deposit box, or rather, a whole series of boxes. I saw it myself.”

“Rather a strange business,” Doc Savage said dryly.

“You said it.”

They terminated the conversation.

Doc Savage made arrangements to have a heavy police guard placed over the Jondore charity funds in the Oriental National Bank. This was simply accomplished, since the bronze man held a high honorary commission.

While Doc Savage was still talking about that matter, the second of his bank of telephones—he had several—rang. He picked up the instrument.

“I think,” said a voice in almost unnaturally precise English, “that you might save my life if you care to hurry.”

Doc demanded. “Just what is the idea?”

“I am the Nizam, Kadir Lingh, of Jondore,” said the precise voice. “I am at present holding them off. But I shall not be able to accomplish this much longer.”

Quite distinctly over the telephone wire came the bang of several shots, followed by two more much closer to the transmitter.

“Where are you?” Doc asked.

“I was too busy getting here to notice,” said the other.

“What can you see from your windows?” Doc questioned.

There were two more shots.

“I am in a boathouse,” said the man. His voice was calm. “I cannot see anything but woods and the occasional flash of a gun and the car which I abandoned.”

Doc suggested, “Look out on the water and see what you observe.”

Another shot.

“I see a green light,” said the man. “It flashes once every ten seconds. There is a white light beyond it which blinks about once every second. Perhaps you could look at a chart——”

“I will be right out,” Doc said.

DOC SAVAGE was a disciple of the theory that the various abilities of the human animal, memory among other things, can be developed by careful practice and concentration.

For this reason, he took two full hours of various exercises daily, and had taken them since childhood. These exercises were remarkable and covered not only the building of his physical body, but the development of sight, hearing, touch, olfactory organs, and the rest.

There was also a routine for memory, although perhaps the more important side of the memory training was back in the bronze man’s childhood. In the cradle stage, he had been broken of forgetting things, just as other children are broken of the thumb-sucking habit.

From the very date of his birth, the bronze man had been trained for the strange career which he now followed.

That explained how he knew, without consulting a marine chart, that there was a ten-second green blinker and a one-second white blinker in Long Island Sound off High Point.

High Point was a spot unpopular with suburbanites, due to the fact that there was a marsh to the west of the high ground, a smelly marsh which made High Point a malodorous place when the wind was in certain directions.

The road was bad. Doc's roadster pitched, swayed and jarred, despite its excellent springing. There was a heavy dew, and that made the road slippery, for it was asphalt.

Doc kept the car's radio tuned to the wave length of the police broadcasting system, listening for anything that might be important. There were innumerable reports of fights, prowlers, and suspected burglars, a number of lost persons. Following, there was a list of stolen cars.

The bronze man seemed to pay them no particular attention, and made no note, yet, hours later, he would be able to recall any of the stuff that he might find useful.

He found some of it useful when he neared High Point.

There was a car in the ditch. A roadster, it looked as if it had tried a turn too fast and skidded. Both front wheels were smashed and the radiator was back around the engine. Doc looked at the license tags.

The car had been reported in the police broadcast as stolen that night.

The engine was still warm. There was one bullet hole in the rear of the body, two more through the glass. Doc Savage left his roadster, glided into the brush, and worked forward without much noise.

He found a dead man. The fellow was brown; a voluminous turban lay beyond, as if it had fallen off his head when he went down. He had been shot in the back.

A gun went off somewhere ahead. Echoes romped hollowly through the darkness.

Doc whipped forward. The dew was very heavy. When he disturbed bushes, it showered down on him. He heard another shot, much closer.

Doc circled widely so as to approach the scene of the shooting, not from the road, but along the beach. It was the direction from which a new arrival would least be expected.

There were several shots in quick succession. The flash was no more than fifty feet from the bronze man.

Doc waited. The gunman was shooting at what, in the moonlight, seemed to be a boathouse. A moment later, a replying shot came from the structure. Doc waited a bit longer. There were no more shots. He reared up and advanced.

His advance was remarkably silent—until he encountered the unexpected. A bush to the left gave a noisy shake. Doc knew instantly that the gunman had been canny enough to tie a string from one shrub to another by way of guaranteeing a warning should any one try to stalk him from the rear.

The gunman heaved up. He looked thin and gigantic in the moonlight. He had a rifle. It let out noise and fire without coming to his shoulder.

DOC SAVAGE got down in time to let the bullet pass. While the shot echoes still whooped, he rolled, got the string into which he had moved, and broke it, retaining one end. Then he crawled rapidly to the left.

Silence fell. A gun smashed from the boathouse. That commotion died. Waves made noise on the near-by beach.

Doc jerked the string. It fluttered the bush. The gunman, excited, cut loose with three shots. Doc jerked the string and the bush made much noise, and the gunman cut

loose again, after which he could be heard clicking the magazine out of his rifle. He was reloading.

Doc thumbed on his flashlight, hurtling forward as he did so.

The beam disclosed a lean brown man who had been one of Rama Tura's assistants at the jewel-making seance earlier in the night.

He goggled briefly into the light, let out a squawk, spun, and tried to run and reload his rifle at the same time. It was the wisest thing he could have done under the circumstances.

He might even have succeeded, except that a single shot smacked from the boathouse, after which the man gave a rabbit hop, hit squarely on his head and went on over in a somersault an acrobat would have envied, ran a dozen paces, then fell flat on the wet grass and did not move afterward.

Doc made only the briefest of examinations. The man in the boathouse had killed the fellow.

There was noise of a door being unbarred over at the boathouse. A rather small man came out.

"Careful!" Doc called.

"There were only three of them," said the small man. "I got the other two."

He came up.

"I," he added, "am Kadir Lingh, a Nizam, although I may not look it."

Chapter VIII

THE NIZAM'S STORY

“A NIZAM,” DOC SAVAGE said, “is the equivalent of a king.”

The small man showed white teeth in the moonlight.

“The equivalent of more than a king, with the king business what it is to-day,” he replied cheerfully. “But I trust that will not embarrass you.”

Doc turned the light on him. He was attired in a business suit which must have cost several hundred dollars. Even the sartorially perfect Ham had never worn anything to exceed it.

The man had shoved a turban inside his coat and now he drew this out and pulled it on. On the front of the turban was an emerald which looked as if it might be as valuable as a diamond of equivalent size.

“Just how did you come to call me,” Doc asked dryly.

“Ten days ago, in Jondore, I got a cable from the Ranee, widow of my dead brother, the Son of the Tiger, former Nizam of Jondore,” the man said. “The contents of that cable caused me to make what you must admit was a remarkably quick trip to New York.

“Arriving to-night, I was met with a rather violent reception. I had much trouble, and my bodyguards were all killed. I ended up in that boathouse, after having wrecked a car which I appropriated. There was a telephone. I had heard of you.”

“Heard of me where?” Doc demanded.

“Jondore,” said the other. “You have quite a reputation.”

The man was highly educated. He spoke English easily, rather than in the bookish, stilted manner common to educated foreigners.

Doc asked him, “Where are the men who pursued you?”

“Their bodies?” The other gestured. “Over here.”

They were two of Rama Tura’s satellites, and they were quite dead, one behind a tree, the other back of a bush. Both had been shot.

“I am not a bad marksman,” said the small man in the turban.

Doc Savage replied nothing, but thought of the running rifleman who had been shot. The bullet was in the fellow’s brain, and some peculiarity of reflex had kept him going for a bit after he was struck.

The turbaned man queried anxiously, “Do you think I shall have trouble with the American police over this?”

Doc seemed to consider.

“It might not be necessary that they know,” he said.

“I see,” smiled the other. “What they do not know will not hurt them. Thank you.”

“Do you,” Doc demanded, “know what this is all about?”

The small man nodded. "Everything."

Doc said, "Mind telling me?"

"I," said the small man, "am supposed to be the richest individual in the world. You have heard, of course, that the richest man in the world is not Rockefeller, Ford or Mellon, but is the——"

"Nizam of Jondore," Doc said.

"So you knew it."

"It has been in the newspapers. It has been mentioned in magazine articles."

"Did the reading matter state in what form the wealth was kept?" the turbaned man demanded.

"Gold and jewels," Doc replied. "Mostly jewels."

"Very accurate," the other agreed. "The fortune is something of a ruling family affair, inherited from one generation to the next. My brother, the dead Nizam, known as the Son of the Tiger, was the last possessor. Mind you, I say the *last*."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that the fortune, some billions of dollars, has vanished into thin air."

DOC SAVAGE was silent. He might have been digesting the information; he might have been studying the character of the other.

"There has been nothing in the newspapers of this," he reminded.

"Naturally not," said the informant. "And for some very good reasons. First, the fortune is to a certain extent a symbol of my prestige over my people. Should it become known that I had lost it, I naturally would not be thought such a remarkable fellow. There are certain tribesmen in Jondore who are all too willing to jump on the Nizam at the slightest excuse."

Doc Savage began searching the followers of Rama Tura who were dead in the vicinity. He found nothing in pockets. The small, dark man bobbed alongside, talking rapidly.

"The jewels and gold were kept in my palace in Jondore, in modern vaults and under heavy military guard," he said. "The stuff simply disappeared."

"Guards bribed?" Doc suggested.

"Unlikely. They were the royal guard of the Nizam. A Jondorean would rather belong to that than be the chief of a tribe of his own." The turbaned man smiled slightly. "We have always arranged for members of the guard to be treated as princes, for the very good psychological reason that it makes them like their jobs."

Doc Savage began stripping outer garments from the dead Rama Tura followers.

"What about the thieves entering the vaults?" he asked. "They use cutting torches or explosive?"

"They used nothing as far as we can see," said the small man. "The vaults were intact—and empty. That is somewhat incredible, because only one living man knows the combinations."

"Who is that?"

“Myself.”

Doc Savage was taking shoes, trousers, coats and turbans from the slain Jondoreans. He turned each garment inside out and rolled it separately, then tied them all together with a length of silken cord.

“The Nizam, Son of the Tiger, my brother who died, knew the combination,” continued the alert dark man. “Before his death, he gave it to me.”

“Your brother, the previous Nizam, died naturally?” Doc queried.

“He was shot,” said the other, “by a fellow who has always been a source of trouble in Jondore.”

“Rama Tura?” Doc asked.

“Rama Tura it was.” The turbaned man blinked. “But how did you know?”

BY the time they had reached Doc Savage’s skyscraper headquarters, the bronze man had also explained about the Ranees.

“Will you describe that woman again,” requested Doc’s companion.

The bronze man did so.

“That,” declared the turbaned man, “is undoubtedly my brother’s widow, the Ranees.”

Doc Savage had the bundle of clothing which he had removed from the slain men, and he deposited this in the laboratory. Then he came back into the library and began glancing through scrapbooks of newspaper clippings.

There were hundreds of these. Doc did not prepare them. They were furnished by an agency which was in that business. They covered every political development reported by the press of the world, among other things.

Doc found a picture. He compared it with the visage of the man he had found in the boathouse on Long Island Sound. The legend below the picture said:

The New Nizam of Jondore

The small, dark man came over, glanced at the picture, and showed his amazingly white teeth in a quick smile.

“You are cautious, and there is a saying that the cautious tiger lives long,” he murmured. “It is not a bad likeness of me, do you think?”

“Not bad,” Doc said and put the clipping volume away.

The bronze man went back into the laboratory. He took off his coat and donned a rubber frock and rubber gloves, then pulled on a hood which had very large goggles built into it. Before going to work, he asked one question.

“What is behind all of this?”

The other seemed surprised. “But it is simple. Rama Tura stole the jewels. He is disposing of them.”

“I suspect,” Doc told him, “that there is much more to it than that.”

Since Doc Savage's life was devoted to the strange pursuit of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, he had devoted much time to the study of detective methods.

He had originated scientific procedures of his own, some of which had been adopted by police departments, but many of which were a bit too complicated for universal use.

Among other things, he had perfected a electrospectroscopic analysis contrivance which, in the course of a very few seconds, would give him the chemical elements composing almost any given substance. This device furthermore had the advantage of being able to handle particles of microscopic smallness.

Doc spent almost an hour on the garments taken from the slain men.

"I should think," said the turbaned man, "that you would be worried over your three aides, Long Tom, Monk and Ham."

"I am," Doc Savage said quietly. "And I am doing everything possible to find them."

AFTER the hour had passed, the bronze man knew much about the clothing. He knew where the cotton had been grown, what mills had woven the garments, what clothing concern had made them. But to find where they had been sold would take time and might conceivably be valueless.

In each garment, there was dust. Doc concentrated on that. There was more than one kind of dust. The ordinary street variety, Doc dismissed.

There was a peculiar whitish dust. He put it under a strong microscope, studied it, then consulted geologic charts. In the laboratory storeroom were thousands of tiny phials holding ores, rock samples, soils, clays. All were labeled. Doc consulted these also.

The dust came from a rock strata that underlay by some thirty feet the downtown east side of New York City.

Doc Savage telephoned, got a man out of bed, and learned there was a building under construction on the east side. A huge, slum clearance project, it was now in the excavation stage.

"You will stay here," Doc told his turbaned visitor.

The other blinked. "Why?"

"Rama Tura's men are quartered somewhere near that excavation," the bronze man said. "Otherwise, the dust would not be in their clothing, even the inside of their garments, in such quantity. It has been dry, very dusty weather for excavating."

The other nodded, murmured, "Truly you amaze me," and seemed content to remain behind.

DOC SAVAGE stripped off the rubber laboratory smock and hood and gloves. He substituted certain small containers for others in the pockets of his unusual vest. He drew on his coat.

"You should understand you will be virtually a prisoner here," he said. "The door has no lock, and will only open, thanks to a certain mechanical device, for myself and

my men.”

The turbaned man hesitated. “I suppose I will be safest here.”

Doc gave him one of the machine pistols, and showed him how it operated.

“Thank you,” said the dark man.

Doc Savage went out, the door opening weirdly for him, and closing when he had left the vicinity of it.

The bronze man now did something an observer would not have expected. He whipped down the corridor, around a corner, and put both palms against the solid wall.

He held them there for a count of ten, removed them for another ten count, and put them against the wall again.

A few feet away, the wall opened soundlessly. Its mechanism was a combination actuated from a thermostatic device buried in the wall plaster. Heat from the hands was enough to work the combination.

There was a hollow wall space beyond. It held much apparatus. At one point, a tiny red light glowed. Doc went to it, unhooked a telephone handset and plugged the cord into a jack below the light. He had tapped one of his telephone lines which was being used.

He listened a moment. His trilling noise, very vague, with an undertone of grimness, seeped through the confines of the hidden runway. It died quickly.

He threw a switch. It opened the telephone line, cutting it off from the outside.

Another door, cleverly concealed, admitted the bronze man into the laboratory. Soundlessly, he whipped into the library and across it into the reception room.

The small brown man in the turban was holding one of the telephones, impatiently clicking the hook in an effort to raise an operator on the dead wire. He seemed to think that the connection had only failed.

The brown man did not move until Doc Savage took him by the throat with both hands. Then it was too late. He could only writhe and kick and make croakings.

“I suspected you,” Doc Savage told him, “all along.”

Chapter IX

DOC HAS A WATERLOO

THE brown man's feet and hands made mad motions; he gargled and hacked; his tongue ran out and so did his eyes. The brown of his face became a purplish black.

"You were trying to warn them," Doc told him quietly. "It was likely that you would do that."

The bronze man slackened his grip, and the captive sank down in a chair, pumping air madly with his lungs, and did not resist being searched. His face faded back to brown.

"Would you care to know when you first gave yourself away?" Doc asked.

The man let out several words of the vile profanity of Jondore. His brown visage was an evil map of hate, fear, disappointment.

"When you killed your friend who was pretending to besiege you in the boathouse," Doc told him. "You were afraid I would capture him, and he would talk."

The brown man glared wordlessly.

"It was good acting," Doc Savage told him. "Overdone only in spots. But I had expected you to try for my life earlier. Why did you not?"

The man said, in the tongue of Jondore, more that was uncomplimentary.

"Had I been aware of how little you know of what it is actually all about, I would have killed you," he gritted.

The bronze man studied the other.

"Of course, the idea was to learn how much of your scheme was known, and what measures were being taken against you," he said. "It was not a bad move. But it seems to have backfired."

The turbaned one spoke English.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You," Doc informed him, "are going to talk. You probably can tell just about everything. A clever fellow like you would occupy a high position in the organization."

The other grinned. It was an altogether hideous grin.

"I would like to wager that even you cannot get anything out of me," he mumbled.

"You told me that jewel thievery is behind this," Doc reminded him. "That in itself proves the jewel theft is not the motive. It is something possibly much more—horrible."

The brown man sat perfectly still in his chair and stared. His eyes seemed to grow bigger, his mouth warped down at the ends; after a little, a wetness came into his eyes. He sobbed once.

"This is horrible," he choked.

Then he leaned forward and buried his face in his hands, making bubbling noises, shoulders heaving.

It was rarely that an actor fooled Doc Savage. But this one was good. He put across his deception—for all of ten seconds.

Suddenly realizing, Doc Savage whipped forward, grabbed the man and straightened him. Too late. There was a wet, chewed spot on the fellow's immaculate sleeve. Doc held him and turned the sleeve back.

On the inside, between the lining and sleeve cloth, there was a smear of greenish-yellow stuff. Chewing and sucking, the man had gotten it into his mouth through the cloth.

The fellow's eyes were already taking on a dullness.

"It will not kill me," he mumbled. "It will make me unconscious for hours. Nothing can revive me."

He went to sleep.

HE was right, although Doc Savage did not surrender to the certainty until he had worked over the man for some twenty minutes. That state was not insensibility of the common order, but more of a semi-suspension of animation. No known stimulant brought appreciable results.

Doc filled a hypo needle in the laboratory and administered its contents to the fellow. He watched the results closely to be sure of no fatal reaction. The stuff he had given was a drug which would keep the man senseless for days—or until the proper reactant was applied.

Satisfied, Doc put the brown man in a ventilated wall compartment where he would be unearthed by nothing less than a virtual wrecking of the place.

Doc went into the laboratory and consulted a weather chart, automatically recorded by his own instruments. It showed a prevailing northeasterly wind during the past few days.

The bronze man used another of the cars from a concealed garage which he maintained in the skyscraper basement. It was a small, plain delivery truck, and he chose it because more delivery trucks were abroad on the streets at this hour than any other vehicle.

He left the truck a short distance from the new slum clearance project excavation.

It was still dark, and the wetness of the heavy dew lay on the streets very much as if it had rained. Out on the river, tugs hooted, and on Brooklyn bridge, street cars made noise.

The excavation was near the foreign quarters, and some rather strangely-garbed persons were abroad. It was an excellent hiding region for the men of Jondore, a spot where their queer garb, their dark skins, would be unlikely to attract attention.

Knowing that the prevailing northeasterly wind would have carried dust from the excavation in a certain direction, Doc began his search.

He worked swiftly, for he held no doubts about Monk, Ham and Long Tom being in deadly peril. It was entirely possible that they might not be alive even now.

The most likely spot was a row of ancient tenements, most of them vacant, buildings of exactly the same kind the slum clearance project was trying to eliminate.

Doc found a fire escape at one end of the block, made sure no one was in sight of the gloomy spot, and climbed to the roof—or almost to the roof.

He did not go over the parapet which surrounded the roof immediately. He clung to the fire escape and used a diminutive periscope of a device to look the roof over.

THE move paid dividends. Two men were lying atop the roof on cots. This in itself was not unusual, as tenement inhabitants often slept on the roofs. But these fellows had brown skins—that became evident when one struck a match to light an American cigarette.

They were near a roof hatch, and there were no chimneys or ventilators near them. It would be impossible to approach them without being observed.

Doc Savage picked his chance, whipped over onto the roof, and managed to travel thirty feet toward the men and to the left, and got into the shelter of a large chimney without being observed.

Concealed there, he faced the street, set his throat muscles, and began to speak Jondorean in ventriloquial voice which made the words seem to come from a considerable distance. They were loud, alarmed words. It sounded very much as if an excited Jondorean were shouting a warning from the street.

The two look-outs swallowed it. They popped off their cots, clucking excitedly at each other, and sprinted for the roof edge to look over. They passed Doc Savage without once glancing behind the chimney.

Doc had his shoes off. His charge was silent lightning. He got the first from behind. He did not strike a blow, for blows make noise. He simply seized the fellow by the nape, and put strength and knowledge to work. The victim made no sound before he went limp.

Doc had to hit the second man. He struck him in the throat, more of a hard grasp than a blow. He held the man's windpipe closed, reached around, and found the spinal nerve centers. The fellow stopped struggling.

Doc put them side by side in the gloom near the chimney. They carried revolvers. He used the barrel of each to break off the tempered firing pin in the other; then he placed the weapons behind an adjacent chimney, where it would look as if they had been hidden, but where they would not be too hard to find.

He went to the roof hatch.

THERE was darkness down in the house, and smells of the Orient, incense and the residue odors of cooked spiced foods. Doc descended, not on the steps, but on the banister, slowly, sliding, feeling ahead.

Ordinary corn flakes had been sprinkled on the steps, stuff that would crunch noisily if stepped upon. There was a bottle, delicately balanced, on the post at the foot of the banister.

Down the hallway, a man coughed. He coughed very hard.

Monk's childlike voice said distinctly, "I wish you'd choke."

Ham said, "Shut up, simple."

Monk grumbled, "Between you and this guy coughing—"

Doc Savage was whipping forward—and the last thing he expected happened. A dog came at him, barking, setting up a fabulous noise.

Dynamite exploding could not have touched off things more abruptly. Men began to shout in various parts of the place. A gun went off, apparently accidentally.

Doc hurtled forward. The dog barked, snapped, and its claws made frantic scratchy noises as it tried to keep up.

A brown man came out of the room from which Monk's voice had emanated. He had a revolver, a flashlight. He got no chance to use either.

Doc ran an arm, stiff as a ramrod, into the man's stringy middle. Air came out of him with a force that threatened to bring up the man's insides. Doc went over him and on.

There was light in the room, an oil lamp. These tenements were frequently not wired for electricity. Monk, Ham and Long Tom were all three there, tightly bound.

Monk let out a pleased howl, rolled over and kicked up his tied ankles where Doc could get at them with a knife. The bronze man whipped out a blade, slashed hurriedly, got Monk free. The homely chemist came up on his feet, began to jump up and down to restore circulation.

The dog came in, skidded to a stop, eyes on Doc Savage. A long moment, and the canine lowered the hair along its back, half wagged its tail.

Monk stamped his feet. More than ever, he resembled a bull ape.

"Scat, bowser!" he howled.

The dog yelped and ran.

"They stole the pooch off the street," Monk said irrelevantly. "Some watchdog."

Doc got Ham free. The dapper lawyer's clothing had suffered during the night. He ran to a litter of duffel near the door and came up with his sword cane, looking triumphant.

Long Tom, released, said, "They were going to kill us."

Doc ran to the door, whipped small glass balls out of his vest and hurled them. They were tear gas. It spread in the corridor. Men squawked.

Back to the window, Doc moved. It was boarded up on the outside. He retreated from it, backing.

"How many of them here?" he demanded.

"Twenty," Monk said. "And maybe more."

"Watch it!" Doc warned.

He got another ball from the vest, this one of metal, not much larger than a good-sized bird egg. He did something to it, threw it at the window.

Came flash, roar, dust, flying wood and plaster. Part of the ceiling, lath and plaster, came down on their heads. But there was a gaping aperture where the window had been. Two floors down was the street. Doc went over and dashed his flash beam out.

“You can drop down,” he said.

Ham, looking very glad for the chance, hopped through. Then Long Tom went.

Monk started to leap, thought of something, nearly fell out trying to keep from jumping, and managed to stay in.

“That woman!” Monk exploded. “She’s here! A prisoner!”

“Where?” Doc asked.

Monk waved an arm generally.

“Around somewhere,” he said. “Dunno where, exactly. That lug, Rama Tura, came and got her.”

“Out,” Doc told him.

Monk gulped, “But ain’t you gonna go and——”

“Out,” Doc said.

Monk went out. He grunted loudly as he hit the sidewalk, then squawked that he had broken both legs, but using a voice which showed he had not.

Instead of following them, Doc Savage turned back.

THE tenement was full of shouts, and much vituperation in the rather strange-sounding tongue of Jondore. The tear gas, however, was keeping Rama Tura’s men back.

Doc fished goggles out of a pocket of the special vest. They had many uses, those goggles. They were excellent for diving. They were a protection against tear gas, as long as one held his breath.

Doc put them on, drew several deep breaths, then held a normal one in his lungs—after the fashion of pearl divers of the South Seas—and whipped out into the corridor.

A bullet came down the passageway, probably fired at random. Several more followed it, as if other gunners thought it an excellent idea.

Blows were crashing. Squeaking noises sounded as if laths were being pulled off a wall. The noises were in a room opening off the corridor. The door was closed. Cloth, which had been stuffed in the crack at the bottom to shut out the gas, projected into the hall.

Doc veered, hit the door. Panels, crosspiece, fell out, letting him in, although the frame stayed. He ran out of the shower of splintered fragments.

Four men were in the room. Three were tearing at a wall, obviously endeavoring to get into another hallway without entering the one which held the tear gas.

The fourth man was small, wiry, immaculately clad. He reminded Doc of Ham, except that his skin was brown, and his features Asiatic. His mouth was taped. Cords secured his wrists and ankles.

The three men had put their guns in their pockets while they worked at the wall. They tried to get them out as Doc charged. Only one of them, who danced away cunningly, had time, and he was upset by the bound man, who whipped against his legs.

The other two, with Doc upon them, did not try blows. They grasped frenziedly for holds and showed they knew much of jujitsu.

Doc let one get an arm hold, then used him as a ram to upset the other. He swooped, got them both in his arms, and their heads made a *bonk!* of a noise coming together.

The man with the gun had disengaged himself, was trying to kick the bound man away and at the same time aim at Doc. The combined effort took time, of which there was little. He tried to run just as Doc reached him, and Doc put a fist back of his ear with a force that caused him to turn a handspring without using his hands. He lay very still after he fell.

Doc scooped up the prisoner.

“Shut your eyes. Hold your breath,” he ordered.

They went out into the corridor, escaped two bullets blindly aimed at their noise, and got into the room where Doc had found his men.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom were below the window, whooping at the top of their lungs for Doc, for police.

“Where is the woman?” Doc asked the bound man, tearing off the adhesive gag. “The one who is a prisoner.”

“Downstairs,” said the captive in utterly precise English.

“Who,” Doc demanded, “are you?”

“Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore,” said the man.

Doc Savage tossed him through the window. Monk caught him.

MORE bullets were in the corridor when Doc went back. They came from above and below, and part of them were coming from what sounded like an automatic rifle.

Doc kept close to the wall and low, reached the stairs, and rode the banister down because it was quicker and more silent. He hit a man at the bottom. The man struck him. Doc struck back, hit a throat and the man fell down, gagging. Doc went on.

There was a weird odor in the air down here, the same one which had been in the atmosphere of Temple Nava, during the jewel-making seance. It must not have been present long, or it would have penetrated upstairs.

Ahead was a door. It glowed red from light within. Doc reached it, hesitated, then popped his head forward to look within. On the face of it, that looked reckless, but as a matter of plain fact, he had long ago learned that he could take a chance such as this, see what was within, and get back before a gunman could shoot accurately.

There was no one with a gun in the room.

Rama Tura’s casket stood on one end a little beyond the middle of the floor, and within it, lying as if dead, except that his eyes were open, was Rama Tura, he who claimed to be a worker of miracles.

Doc stared for a long moment, half of his attention on the shouting, the shooting, in other parts of the tenement. The brown men of Jondore must be shooting at every shadow.

Doc entered the room alertly. It was somewhat unbelievable that Rama Tura would be here, like a corpse in his box, in the thick of the excitement. It was strange. The fellow was capable of movement, even if he did indeed look dead. He had moved about in Temple Nava seances.

The bronze man's flake gold eyes roved, examining the floor, the bare walls. There was nothing suspicious. He reached the coffin and the fantastic man who half stood, half reclined in it.

RAMA TURA spoke.

"Bronze man," he said. "You are tampering with things which you, with all of your learning, know nothing."

His words were a hollow breath, so low that Doc barely caught them.

Doc said nothing in reply. He reached out to lift Rama Tura from his macabre receptacle.

"No," Rama Tura warned faintly. "Do you want to die?"

Doc changed his mind. There might be poison on the man's garments. Doc whipped off his coat, threw it against Rama Tura, and prepared to grasp the scrawny body through the folds of the garment.

Then came the phenomenon. Rama Tura, the man who looked like a corpse, seemed to fade, to become a vaporous wraith. He seemed, in the casket, exactly like the images which movie cameramen secure by trick double exposures when they want to portray ghosts on the screen.

It was incredible. Doc grabbed furiously. He got hold of something—something horrible, for a stinging, not unlike an electric shock, slammed up his arms. It seemed to spread over his body. It was as if he had taken hold of something poisonous, something that could kill instantly.

He backed away. The room, its contents, had become shadows in front of his eyes, as if his pupils were out of focus. The stinging had gone all over his body. He shook his head. He slapped his face.

Standing there slapping his face, he ceased to remember.

Chapter X

LADY OF TRICKS

OUT in the dingy street, where the faint light of dawn was appearing, Monk, Ham, Long Tom and the brown man who had said he was Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore, stood and tried to think of something to do. They had cut Kadir Lingh loose, and he was kneading his legs and arms.

The howling for the police had gotten results. Police sirens were moaning not far away.

Monk jumped, howled, as a bullet cut his clothing and gullied his right side slightly. The shot had come from a window of the tenement. Others followed. Monk was running, and they missed.

The others followed Monk's example. Across the street, the houses had ventilating shafts for cellars in the sidewalks, with gratings over them. They wrenched up a grating and got down in the pit. It was like a trench.

Monk had no more than hit the pit and he squawked, "I'm goin' back in there!"

"Dope," Ham told him. "Doc wants to handle these things his own way."

Monk contrarily put his head up. Jacketed lead made an ugly sound on the concrete walk. Brick dust fell out of the wall behind them. Monk sat down sheepishly and examined a neat part in his bristling, rust-colored hair.

Ham searched around, found the bullet which had so nearly split Monk's skull, and patted the distorted bit of lead lovingly.

"My friend," he told the bullet. "You nearly did the world a great service."

Monk told Ham, "I oughta kick you out of here!" and sounded very earnest.

Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore, said nervously, "Please, gentlemen! It is really nothing to fight about!"

"They don't need anything to fight about," Long Tom said gloomily. "Listen!"

They could hear cars. The shooting had stopped. They thrust up their heads, and these excellent targets drew no bullets.

An instant later, a car leaped into the street from a driveway that entered the row of tenements halfway down the block. Another machine followed. A third. When they passed under the street light at the corner, Monk made out the occupants.

"Rama Tura's men!" he bellowed. "They're gettin' away!"

"Doc!" Ham exploded. "What became of Doc!"

They were still trying to learn that half an hour later, after the police had arrived, and the row of tenements had been searched from top to bottom. Absolutely no one was found. Doc had vanished.

Rama Tura's men had not only escaped themselves, but had made off with such of their fellows as had been put out of commission during Doc's raid.

Monk and his companions roamed the vicinity, searching, and eventually found Doc's small delivery truck where he had left it. They spent an hour in the vicinity before they concluded there was nothing they could do. Then they headed uptown in the delivery truck.

"You got a story to tell?" Monk asked Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore.

The brown man told them his story. He had a cultured voice. His recital was almost identical with the one told Doc Savage by the clever individual who had pretended to be the Nizam. It differed only in the ending.

"A gang attacked me at the airport when I arrived," said the Nizam. "I managed to escape, but only for a time. They overhauled me, killed my guards, captured me, and took me to that room where Doc Savage found me."

"Why?" Monk demanded, not unreasonably.

"To keep me from launching an investigation of Rama Tura, obviously," replied the Nizam.

Ham studied the brown man. The Nizam seemed to interest the dapper lawyer, or perhaps it was the Nizam's undeniably perfect garments. Ham had a mania for clothing.

"Scarborough and Son, on Bond Street," Ham said. "Right?"

The Nizam was puzzled at first, then smiled.

"My tailors," he said. "Yes. Excellent, I think."

Monk's snort conveyed infinite disgust.

LONG TOM was driving, and doing it a bit recklessly. He popped the delivery truck between two meeting street cars, and the squeeze was so close that both trolleys stood still fully five minutes before their conductors recovered their aplomb.

"You got less sense than Ham," Monk complained. "Such driving!"

Long Tom said nothing. In the next block, he gave a road hog taxi driver the scare of his life.

Monk swallowed several times and began to question the Nizam industriously to keep his mind off the ride.

"So you are the richest man in the world?" he told the Nizam, in a tone which insinuated it was something of a crime.

"*Was*," corrected the Nizam. "I have been thoroughly robbed."

"How long after the death of your brother, the previous Nizam, did this happen?" Monk queried.

"Six weeks," replied the brown man.

"And you have been trying to find your wealth?"

"Trying is a mild word for it," said the Nizam. "We have moved heaven and earth. My entire—you would call them the treasure house guard—is in prison, awaiting execution."

"Nice," Monk murmured in a way that said it was not.

"Oh, I merely hoped to frighten one of them into telling something of value as a clue," said the Nizam. "They will not be executed, although life is not held as dearly in

my land as in yours.”

Monk considered, then began, “This woman——”

“The Ranee, my dead brother’s widow,” supplied the brown man.

“The Ranee,” Monk said. “She was on a cruise around the world. Right?”

“Right.”

“A measure to make her grief more bearable,” Ham put in suggestively.

The Nizam looked uncomfortable.

“As a matter of fact, I think not,” he said. “The Ranee probably went abroad to forget what a thorough cad my brother had been.”

“What do you mean?” Monk demanded, interested.

“My brother—actually my half brother—was something of a bad boy of Asia,” said the Nizam. “He had a good deal of trouble, not only with various Rajahs in his empire, but with the British government. To be frank, he tried a number of times to throw the British and their protectorate out of Jondore. But that all died—with the death of my brother.”

MONK thought that over.

“Getting back to what I started to ask,” he said. “Could the departure of the Ranee have anything to do with the disappearance of the jewels and gold?”

The Nizam flushed quite distinctly. He did not answer.

“Well?” Monk grunted.

“As a matter of fact, that is why I came to New York,” the Nizam said with visible reluctance.

“Any proof?” Monk questioned.

“None,” the Nizam replied, and sounded relieved. “The Ranee has always been a glorious woman.”

Long Tom saw a car coming toward him in the center of the street, started to bluff the driver, saw at the last moment that it was a police squad car, and was almost chased onto the sidewalk. He craned his neck.

“Looks like some excitement ahead,” he said.

He drove more rapidly. They could make out a crowd, ambulances, squad cars and many policemen in blue.

“In front of a bank,” Long Tom vouchsafed. “Bet the thing has been robbed.”

They stopped the delivery truck and unloaded to ask curious questions. A policeman, when Long Tom had made his identity known, gave them information.

“Doc Savage suggested having a guard put over this bank this morning,” he said. “It was a swell idea, only the guard wasn’t big enough. Four of our men got shot, and the bank vaults were cleaned out—the safety-deposit vaults, I mean.”

“Know who done it?” Long Tom queried.

“Rama Tura’s men,” said the cop. He looked at the Nizam. “Ain’t no doubt of it. They looked like this guy you’ve got with you.”

“He’s all right,” Long Tom said. “Just what was in the bank?”

“The cash from those jewels Rama Tura has been selling,” replied the officer. “I mean, the two thirds that was to go into that charity fund. Somebody said there was more than two millions.”

MONK had thought the new development over by the time they reached Doc Savage’s skyscraper office, and he had an idea formulated.

“You say this treasure of yours amounted to billions?” he asked the Nizam.

The brown man nodded. “Yes.”

Monk scratched his nubbin of a head. “Then the jewels Rama Tura had produced here in New York, if they really are yours, are only a drop in the bucket. I’ve got an idea.”

He went to the telephone and put in calls for London, Antwerp, Paris and Berlin. That the calls all got through within the course of the next hour was a tribute to modern transatlantic telephone efficiency.

“That,” Monk said when the last call was completed, “will cost Doc about three hundred bucks.”

“You get your money’s worth?” Ham asked sarcastically.

“Well,” Monk scratched his head again. “New York isn’t the first place Rama Tura has worked. He was in London a month ago, Paris a little before that. He pulled the same gag that he did here. He sold a lot of jewels that were undoubtedly genuine.”

“What about the proceeds?” Ham demanded.

“The money went one third to local charity, two thirds to a Jondorean charity fund, like it did here,” Monk said.

The Nizam asked suddenly, “Just who administers that Jondorean charity?”

Monk consulted a bit of paper on which he had written. The names were Jondorean, and he did not try to pronounce them, but spelled each out.

The Nizam made a startled hissing sound.

“Something funny about them names?” Monk demanded.

“All of those men,” the Nizam said grimly, “have died within the last month.”

“Natural deaths?”

“In some cases, apparently. Two were killed hunting. Others died of ailments diagnosed as natural.”

“Were they prominent?”

“Rajahs, all of them,” said the Nizam. “In the United States, their position would correspond to that of governor of a state, although they have powers a good deal more absolute.”

Monk grimaced and yanked several stiff red bristles from his nubbin of a head, then eyed them intently.

“This thing, whatever it is, is infernally big,” he muttered.

Ham added, “And if you ask me, there is something more behind it than the theft of the Nizam’s wealth.”

Monk scowled at him. “And what makes you say that?”

“The fact that those Rajahs have died,” Ham said.

Monk grunted, “I still don’t get what you——”

The door buzzer whined.

Monk shrugged, got up and walked to the panel, so that it opened when he drew near, due to the influence of the radioactive plaque which he carried, upon the electroscope mechanism.

Monk peered at the person who stood in the corridor outside.

“Blazes!” the homely chemist gasped.

SHE was not especially tall, and a soiled dark cloak and a crumpled black hat and a dark veil hid her attractiveness, if any, but she had a nice ankle. She looked at Monk, then past him, and saw the Nizam.

“Kadir!” she gasped, and darted forward, arms outstretched.

Monk stepped aside, as if to let her pass. Then he tripped her, but caught her before she fell entirely to the floor. He turned her with lightning speed and shucked off her hat, the veil.

The Nizam made a snarling sound, sprang forward, swung a fist, and knocked Monk down as beautifully as he had ever been knocked down in his life.

“She is the Ranee!” the Nizam gritted. “In Jondore, you would die a thousand deaths for laying a hand upon her!”

Ham looked at Monk on the floor and said, “He never did have any manners.”

Monk got up. His neck was red. Hard tendons made four white lines down the back of each hairy fist.

And then—no one exactly saw it—the Nizam was flat on the floor and the noise of a blow was resounding from the walls, and Monk was over the fallen one, grasping him by the collar. Lifting the Nizam, Monk shook him as if trying to ascertain if his teeth would come out.

“This is the United States,” Monk said grimly. “And when you sock a guy, you oughta be sure he stays socked.”

The apish chemist tossed the Nizam into a chair, where the brown man lay limp and gasping. Monk waited until he could understand things.

“I stopped her,” Monk told the Nizam, “because I thought she might be a dame sent by Rama Tura to stick a poisoned needle into you or something.”

The Nizam thought that over. Then he got shakily out of the chair, clicked his heels and bowed.

“I am sorry,” he said.

Long Tom grunted, not unreasonably, “This kind of thing is only killing time and maybe causing hard feelings.”

The Ranee had stood aside during the excitement, saying nothing, and now they gave her their attention.

She was worth attention. Women of the Orient have the reputation of losing their beauty in their early twenties, and especially does this apply to the women of Jondore. This woman must be near thirty. She had the complexion and delicacy of features of sixteen.

Monk, who had a true appreciation of feminine pulchritude, sighed audibly.

“To a true flower of the East, I offer humble apologies,” he told the woman.

It was gallantry so unexpected on Monk’s part that Ham all but gulped his surprise.

Monk accompanied his delivery with a bow which could not have been exceeded for courtliness by a knight of old. It seemed to go over.

The Ranee gave the homely chemist a brilliant smile.

“You are forgiven,” she said. “Not many men would have displayed such quick thinking.”

Monk had a way with women, even if he did have the pulchritude of a gorilla. Perhaps it was his very homeliness.

“Will you tell us your story,” he suggested.

They all saw the Ranee’s shudder. She replaced the hat, the veil, as if to conceal from them the horror on her face.

“I was wrong,” she said in a dry voice. “Rama Tura is no faker. I thought he was.”

Monk squinted. “You mean that he really makes those jewels with his hocus pocus?”

The Ranee was slow answering. She did not nod. She did not shake her head.

“I do not know,” she said. “Rama Tura has horrible powers. He does things that seem impossible.”

HER voice was more dry, and she seemed to have difficulty with her words. Monk brought her ice water from the cooler. It was distilled water made in the laboratory—an enemy had once tried to poison Doc Savage and his aides by tapping the city water main which supplied the bronze man’s headquarters.

The fake Nizam whom Doc had overpowered, and who had drugged himself to prevent being questioned, was still in the secret runway behind the laboratory wall. But his presence remained unknown to Doc’s aides, there being no reason for them to examine the hidden space.

The Ranee took the ice water gratefully.

Ham suavely took charge of interrogating the Ranee. It went against Ham’s grain to see Monk, his arch rival, holding the center of any stage.

“We have a suspicion that there is something besides stealing jewels behind this affair,” said the dapper lawyer. “Have you any thought on that score?”

Effect of the query upon the Ranee was marked, even though they could not see her features. She half turned, as if contemplating flight. Then she faced them, and her eyes were very wide back of the veil.

“There is—more back of it,” she said, and her voice was so small that they barely heard.

“What?” Ham rapped.

She tied her small hands together in a hard knot.

“You will think me insane,” she said. “But I cannot tell you.”

“Why not?” Ham exploded.

“It is impossible for me to tell you that—either,” the Ranee replied. She seemed to have difficulty with the words.

THE woman’s actions seemed to amaze the Nizam more than any one. He darted forward, grasped the Ranee’s arm, and rattled words in the tongue of Jondore.

The Ranee shook her head and replied in the same tongue. The Nizam spoke snappishly now. The woman still shook her head.

Doc Savage’s three aides, not understanding the language, could only look puzzled.

The Nizam gave an exaggerated shrug.

“Rama Tura is up to something horrible,” he said. “She will not explain what it is. That is not like the Ranee.”

“Rama Tura has some hold over her,” Ham suggested.

The Nizam and the Ranee went through another exchange in the language of Jondore. The Nizam moistened his lips and looked amazed.

“It is not Rama Tura,” he gulped. “It is the mastermind who is directing Rama Tura.”

Ham did something that was rare for him. He dropped his sword cane.

“Rama Tura is not the real brains!” he exploded. “Then who is this real chief?”

“That, the Ranee also refuses to tell,” said the Nizam. “She says we will understand her reasons when we learn who he is—if we do learn.”

Monk growled, “This is a fine run-around!”

Long Tom snapped peevishly, “What I want to know is what became of Doc?”

The Ranee spoke Jondorean. Her words caused the Nizam to all but jump up and down.

“Doc Savage is a prisoner!” he shouted. “The Ranee saw him brought into Rama Tura’s new hide-out.”

The Ranee interposed, speaking rapid English.

“You can rescue him,” she said.

“But your getting away will cause Rama Tura to change his location,” Long Tom barked. “Or did they turn you loose?” The last was sarcastic.

“Perhaps they have not discovered my escape,” the Ranee told him. “They gave me a tablet to make me sleep. I got rid of it without their discovering. When I pretended to sleep, they left me, and I escaped.”

“Can you show us this place?” Long Tom rapped.

“I can.”

Monk grabbed up his pig, Habeas Corpus, by one big ear, and lumbered for the door.

“We’re off,” he grunted.

It was a shabby section occupied by warehouses, small factories, wholesale firms. It was a very busy section, with trucks rumbling, sidewalk carts being wheeled along full of small merchandise, and busy throngs hurrying.

Talk on the sidewalks was of money, contracts, grosses, bills of lading, orders. No one paid attention to any one else.

Long Tom tooted their car in to the curb at the Ranees’s direction.

“It is the building in the middle of the block,” she said.

The building was big, eight stories. The windows were dirty, but so were the windows of all the other buildings in the block. There was one battered doorway, wide enough to drive a car through—it had been constructed for the purpose of admitting cars, obviously. But it was closed by a sheet metal door, which might or might not be solid.

“Sure that’s the place?” Monk asked.

“Certain,” said the Ranees. “I can guide you up by the rear route by which I escaped.”

“You know exactly where Doc is?” Monk asked.

She shook her head. “No.”

Monk looked at the others. “I vote for fireworks.”

Long Tom, who despite his somewhat fragile appearance, was as much of a fire-eater as the homely Monk, nodded vehemently. Ham shook his head, more as a policy of disagreeing with Monk than anything else.

Long Tom backed the car into traffic, stopped beside the cop at the corner, then drove on around the block slowly, by which time the cop had gone up and moved a parked car out of the driveway into the building.

Long Tom got an opening in traffic, and bore on the accelerator. The car—it was Doc’s special limousine—leaped as if in a navy plane catapult. Rubber tire treads screamed as it arched in toward the door.

The Ranees got out one startled shriek. Monk wrapped her face protectingly in his arms. The car hit with a sound like a boilerplate factory blowing up. The door caved. The car went inside.

Monk and the others remained in the car, looking about. They were about as safe as they could be. The car was a rolling fortress of armor plate and bulletproof glass. It was even gas-tight—if the crash had not opened it somewhere.

A gun went off. The bullet glanced off the car top. It had come from a tiny balcony along the rear wall.

Monk opened the limousine door, holding a supermachine pistol. It moaned. The man who had fired the shot fired two more, then seemed to go to sleep on his feet and came tumbling down steps that led to the balcony.

Monk piled out of the car.

“Let’s take this place!” he howled.

THEY spilled out on each side of the car, all with the machine pistols. There was a door on the balcony, and that seemed the only way up into the building. They ran for it.

The Ranee was last out of the limousine. She started after them, hesitated, spun and got back into the car.

Monk noted her actions over his shoulder.

“She’s got sense,” he grunted. “This won’t be no woman’s brawl.”

A brown man jumped out on the balcony as they came up the steps; they shot him with mercy bullets, and he whirled and ran back out of sight. The chemical in the bullets required a moment to function.

The stairs were wide, so they got onto the balcony almost together.

“Spread!” Monk warned. “We don’t all wanna get swatted at once.”

They plunged through a door, clattered up more stairs that led to the upper regions. A door gaped at the top. Monk barged into it.

Then excitement really let loose. A long, guttering red spark appeared in the darkened room beyond the door. It was accompanied by a noise as of a thousand big firecrackers going off in machine like succession.

Monk got down. He never did quite understand how he managed it so quickly. The slug stream from the machine gun banged the door casing apart, like something hungry.

“Blazes!” Monk squawked. “They’re set for us!”

He knew that, because this was a heavy machine gun which required a tripod emplacement. Such guns are not lugged around at random.

Ploom! It was a strange, wet sounding explosion. It mystified Monk for a moment. Then he got the smart of tear gas.

Crack! That one was like lightning striking. With it came a flash as of lightning, too. Monk was conscious of a great force slamming against his chest—a timber of some kind, blown from the top of the stairway by a grenade.

There was debris, dust and smoke. And Monk toppled down the stairs and out on the balcony. Ham, Long Tom and the Nizam were beside him, bruised, cut a little, but still under their own power.

Surprising things had happened to the big room into which they had rammed their car. For one thing, half a dozen patches of plaster had fallen off the ceiling, and through these freshly made holes, gun snouts nosed.

The door was barricaded now, by a huge grille affair of iron bars which must have been intended for burglar protection.

A gun whacked, and the bullet came close enough to Monk to cause him to all but fall down in dodging. He, along with the others, got back into the ruined stairway. But that would be shelter only for split-seconds.

Monk nudged Ham, said, “Them blackies, you fashion plate!”

The “blackies” were compact smoke bombs, and Ham now yanked them out of his pocket and lobbed them. They ripened into a pall of dense black smoke that all but filled the room below.

Under cover of that, they went down the stairs. Gun noise made their ears ache; powder-driven metal made brief, awful noises on floor, walls.

They reached the limousine. Monk wrenched at the door handle.

“Blazes!” he howled. “Try the other doors! This one must have locked accidentally!”

Ham, Long Tom, ran around the car. Their startled yells sounded an instant later.

“Doors locked!” they barked.

Monk yanked at the door, struck with his fist, knowing the while that he was a fool, because even acetylene and dynamite would have difficulty affording entrance to this rolling citadel.

Then Monk sensed movement in the car and jammed his homely face close to the glass.

The Ranee was inside.

“Open!” Monk squawked. “It’s us!”

The woman heard him. She saw him. She looked right into his eyes. But she made no move to let them in.

It was a moment or two before Monk let himself believe the grisly truth.

“Tricked!” he howled wrathfully. “She led us into a trap!”

He roared and wrenched at the door and generally gave the impression of a gorilla in a fit of rage.

“I’ll bet,” he squawked, “the Ranee is the big brain back of the whole blasted business!”

THERE was no getting into the limousine. Doc Savage had arranged its construction too well for that. Nor was there any escape by the door. They tried that. The bars were chained, padlocked in place.

Bullets had continued to search through the room, but thanks to the sepia ooze of the smoke bombs, none of the slugs had damaged anything but nerves.

“Under the car!” Ham rapped from somewhere in the murky void.

“That,” Monk said, “is an idea, much as I hate to admit it.”

The limousine had a long wheelbase; it was a big car, but its size seemed none too adequate, now that they crawled under it. The headroom was nothing to speak of, either. They made themselves as compact as possible and peered out gloomily.

Monk rubbed a hand over the hard concrete floor.

“I hope they don’t start trying to put bullets under here like billiard shots,” he grumbled.

The Nizam sneezed, coughed, from the effects of tear gas which had seeped down from the upper regions. Their foes were also doing much gagging and hacking.

Monk, wrinkling his nostrils, wondering just how long it would be before the stuff got strong enough to affect their eyes, was suddenly aware of another odor. It was quite distinct. It had just arrived. He would have noticed it earlier, had it been present.

The scent puzzled Monk for a moment, for it was familiar. Then he remembered. Rama Tura's jewel-making seance! The aroma had been there, had filled the place like an incense.

Monk suddenly thought of something else—the crowds in the street.

“Police!” he squawled at the top of his shrill voice. “Help! I’m being murdered!”

THE shooting might conceivably have been mistaken, by the unsuspecting on the street, as the noise of a stationary engine; the explosion might have been misconstrued as some natural uproar. But Monk's shrieks could hardly be misunderstood.

“Help!” Monk whooped. “Help! Help!——”

He ended it suddenly. A new voice had penetrated Monk's self-made bedlam—a voice that was commanding because of its very harridan unreality. Rama Tura's voice!

“To hope that the police may arrive in time to aid you must be a pleasant hope,” Rama Tura said. “But it is a waste of time.”

The voice was uncanny. It reminded Monk of the results one got when dragging the sharpened point of a playing card over a rotating phonograph record.

Monk gritted, “Can you guys tell where he's callin' from? I'll slip him some bullets!”

“No,” said Ham. “Don't you feel slightly strange?”

Monk thought at first that was some kind of crack, then realized Ham was in earnest, and that he, Monk, was feeling a bit queer. Then—he was suddenly very dizzy.

The voice of Rama Tura, much louder, filled the room with a big droning.

“Doubtless you think it is impossible for me to stand back in safety and transform you into unconsciousness by the literal application of my powers of concentration,” Rama Tura intoned. “Yet you are going to experience just that.”

Long Tom barked, “Say, my head—my head——”

He did not finish, and Monk knew by the sounds that he was trying to crawl out from under the car. He seemed to have trouble making it.

Monk gave Long Tom a shove, with the idea of aiding him. Rather, it developed, Monk's shove was only an effort. Something had happened to his simian frame. There was a tingling in his sinews, as of tiny electric shocks progressing. There was numbness, also. And he had no strength.

Monk tried to say something, to warn the others, to even speak to them, demanding to know their condition, but words would not come, and he could hear no sounds from them to indicate how they were faring.

He tried again to cry out, but did not succeed, after which, like an echo, Rama Tura's hollow voice intoned words that seemed to be coming from a well of small diameter and great depth.

“You are becoming unconscious,” Rama Tura was saying.

He was still saying that, the last thing Monk remembered.

Chapter XI

STAMPEDE

DOC SAVAGE regained his consciousness with those same words of Rama Tura booming against his eardrums. The voice sounded much louder than it was, at first, for there was something askew in the bronze man's mental processes.

He shook his head violently, and that made it ache violently, but after the pounding of pain subsided, he could think more clearly.

The last thing he could recall was his weird encounter with Rama Tura. At least, that was the last thing he could recall distinctly. There were other vague things, like a dream all but forgotten. Shots. An explosion. Men shouting.

The bronze man concluded that these vague things which he could remember were recent occurrences, and it was possible they had contributed to his awakening.

His feet were fastened in a remarkably effective manner. They had used a long, stout iron bar with an eye in each end. An ankle was wired to each eye in the rod, holding his legs apart, where the smallest possible strength could be brought to play.

His wrists were handcuffed behind him. He tested the links. He could often break ordinary ones, but he did not break these.

The effort put the terrible banging ache back in his head, so he set his teeth, and with a violent wrench, threw an arm out of joint—a feat he had acquired for just such occasions as this—and got the handcuffs around in front of him.

With his finger tips, Doc put violent pressure on such nerve centers as were accessible, and succeeded in dulling the larger part of the headache.

He had grasped the iron bar which held his feet apart and was ascertaining the chances of bending it upward when there was noise of many feet on the stairs.

Brown men of Jondore flocked into the room, which was a large, long one, with doors at either end. The Jondoreans looked worried.

They glared at Doc Savage, but the bronze man was lying back, his handcuffed wrists again behind him, as if he had never regained his senses.

The man said, "The only safe tiger is a dead tiger. Why do we keep this man and the others alive?"

"It is the wish of the Majii, master of all things," another replied.

"Rama Tura would have them dead," the first muttered.

"The kitten does not eat the mouse of the tomcat, his father, if he is wise," snorted the second. "Rama Tura is but a servant, even as you and I."

"Not as you and I," the other corrected. "He has those strange powers which were bestowed upon him by the Majii."

Six men came in then, scampering along under the burden of Rama Tura and his strange casket which seemed to serve as resting place and litter.

Behind them came other brown men, carrying Monk, Ham, Long Tom and the Nizam, all of whom were obviously unaware of what was happening.

The Ranee walked among them, unguarded, any expression that might have been upon her face hidden by the veil, which she still wore.

Rama Tura must have given the necessary orders earlier. Doc Savage was gathered up off the floor, slung over the shoulder of two men, who managed his weight with difficulty, and all filed out through the opposite door in a procession.

They crossed another room, waded through a litter of brick and mortar, and scrambled into an aperture recently opened in a wall. This let them into another building, apparently empty. They descended stairs.

Four large trucks were parked in the alley. They scrambled into these. Doc Savage could hear police sirens in front of the building and in near-by streets. Then the rumble of the truck engines drowned that out.

They drove away without being molested, which was not surprising, since there were hundreds of just such trucks as these in this part of the city.

DOC SAVAGE managed to keep track of what was going on, although he was handicapped somewhat by pretending to be unconscious.

Rama Tura and the Ranee were riding in another machine, as were the other prisoners. Doc was alone with a swarm of Jondoreans who quite patently wanted his life, and discussed ways of taking it without getting themselves in wrong with their master.

“Guns are exploded by accident,” one man suggested.

“A gun would be heard on the street,” it was pointed out.

“Then if I should walk, with my knife in my hand, and a lurch of the truck should throw me off balance, would that be my fault?” the first demanded.

“It would be if Rama Tura thought so,” he was told.

Rama Tura must have given orders shortly after that, because the trucks separated. The one bearing Doc Savage rumbled on interminably.

The bronze man, checking its turns, its probable speed, and taking into consideration the decrease of other traffic noises, concluded they were in the country. The machines eventually hit a very rough road.

The driver muttered at the road. Rasping and scraping noises came from the sides of the truck. Branches dragging, no doubt. Finally, the truck stopped.

Doc lay in it nearly an hour. Then other trucks arrived. He was hauled out.

Monk and the other prisoners were there, all bound and gagged. Among them, Ham alone seemed to be conscious.

More time passed. Every one seemed to be waiting for something. Then Rama Tura came, borne in his box by four stalwart Jondoreans.

With Tura was the Ranee, still veiled.

Rama Tura gestured at the woman, indicating, it seemed, that she should go to the west. That interested Doc, for during the past hour he had heard sounds of airplanes.

There was an airport in that direction.

But the Ranee seemed to have something on her mind. She gestured, said something in a vehement manner. Her words did not reach Doc. But she was standing so that he could read her lips.

“Doc Savage and his men, and Kadir Lingh, are to be kept prisoners,” she was saying in Jondorean.

Rama Tura spoke in his characteristic manner, without moving his lips noticeably, so Doc failed to get his reply. Evidently, however, he had assured the Ranee the captives were to meet no harm.

“They are not to be killed!” the Ranee insisted.

Doc was certain of Rama Tura’s reply to that, because he nodded.

The Ranee departed, two men with her.

Rama Tura came over to Doc Savage. He kicked the bronze man in the side. His strength was little short of astounding, considering his corpse-like appearance.

“You,” Rama Tura told Doc, “are to die at once.”

THE bronze man had been feigning senselessness, but the kick had been painful enough to make him conclude to assume a slight revival. He said nothing. Rama Tura apparently gave his promises little consideration—at least, the one he had made the Ranee.

Rama Tura hunkered down to bring his macabre mask of a face close to Doc’s features. And with that, Doc suddenly perceived that the man was not what he seemed. The death mask aspect of his features was a clever make-up. Rama Tura, the real man, was vastly different. Just what he would look like, it was impossible to tell.

“You have mixed in something which does not concern you, bronze man,” Rama Tura said hollowly.

Doc said nothing.

“You do not even know what the affair is all about,” Rama Tura continued. “And it is my thought that, before you die, you would like to know just what it is.”

Doc deliberately registered great interest.

Rama Tura, seeming gratified at the display, ground out, “It is big, bronze man, this thing. It is bigger than anything you have ever encountered. I might even add that it is as big as anything you have read about in your history books.”

Doc, just on the chance that it would goad the weird fellow into revealing more, jeered, “Any fool with a tongue can make talk.”

Rama Tura shook his head.

“You think I am lying,” he murmured. “I am a conceited man, for I have the right to be, and, strange as it seems, your not believing me injures my vanity.”

Doc only watched him.

Rama Tura intoned, “You have guessed that jewel thievery is not the big thing behind my actions. That was clever. But you did not guess my real scheme, the plan of myself and the Majii, my master.”

Doc kept an intense stare on Rama Tura's face, trying to hold the brown, evil eyes with his own flake gold ones. Rama Tura was glaring back.

"It is, or would be, almost fantastic to you, this thing we are doing," Rama Tura continued. "You would think it quite horrible, no doubt, because it involves the taking of a few hundred lives, and later, perhaps many more than that."

He squinted at Doc.

"The thought horrifies you, does it not?" he demanded.

Doc said nothing—only stared.

"The thing behind my actions is—something I shall, of course, not tell you," Rama Tura said, and looked very pleased with himself.

Doc continued to stare at him. And suddenly Rama Tura cried out and bounced frantically backward, his face averted. He had suddenly realized what Doc was trying to do by his staring—trying to hypnotize him.

RAMA TURA leaped about as if he had something hot on the soles of his feet, and he beat his head, his face, as if to awaken himself.

Doc had very nearly gotten him, and the fact had thrown the weird brown man—if he was brown—into a wild rage.

"You are able to do things which the world thinks are amazing!" Rama Tura sneered and snapped his fingers. "They are nothing. You have been a child in my hands. You would not even be a child in the hands of the Majji, my master."

Doc said dryly, "It is possible we have learned more than you think."

Rama Tura made a jeering noise.

"I have gotten the money from the sale of those jewels, which you tried to keep from me," he said. "It is even now in a truck headed for——"

He stopped, for it apparently dawned on him that he was making a fool of himself. He straightened, shouted to his men. "We will not delay longer. You will use knives on them—all but the Nizam, whom we are by all means to keep alive."

The brown men came forward, as if they had been waiting for just that. The favorite place for carrying their knives seemed to be in sheaths strapped to their shins. Several were pulling up their trouser legs to get these weapons.

Doc Savage proceeded to demonstrate that he could move, manacled though he was. An acrobat would have envied the series of flips which he now did. He moved with all the vigor of a bass freshly yanked out of the water, and he had just as much at stake.

The bronze man was seeking a position where the wind would blow over him, then upon his foes. There was not much wind, but it would not take much.

Doc gained his position. He managed to get hold of one trouser cuff, then the other, and wrench them open—not merely turning them down, but tearing open the entire hem.

A yellow powder came out of one cuff, a blue one out of the other. Doc twisted and managed to get the powders to fall in the same pile.

The results were remarkable. There was a *whoosh!* of sound, as if flash light powder had gone off, except that the flame was green and not very bright. A cloud of bilious-looking smoke arose and spread.

The foremost knifeman plunged into the smoke, and immediately let out a bawl of agony. He fell headlong. The skin on his visage and hands appeared to have been suddenly blistered.

The man's knife flew out of his hand and landed near Doc Savage. Doc had rolled to get away from the smoke cloud, for it was a gaseous combination of acids capable of producing a most agonizing burn.

Doc got the knife and threw it to Monk, who was alert and caught it, then slashed his legs loose with all the speed he could manage.

A BROWN man rushed Monk with a knife, and the homely chemist, with no regard whatever for the fine points of fighting, all but kicked the fellow's jaw off.

Monk then freed Ham, Long Tom and the Nizam. It was not quite as simple as that, however, for he was rushed twice, and knocked down both assailants, then had to throw a convenient stick at a man who was about to use a gun.

Doc Savage, in the meantime, had continued his flipping manner of flight, and was behind a tree. He tried to break the handcuff links, but they were too much for him.

He eyed them closely. They were made of alloy, the first pair he had ever seen made of such material.

Doc shouted, his trained voice carrying over the uproar, and directed his men to run around the cloud of acid vapor, seeking to draw their pursuers into it. He made the suggestion in the Mayan tongue which they used when not wishing to be understood by listeners.

Monk and the others did so. Several pursuers, overanxious to seize them, got into the burning, stinging vapor. Three, however, rounded the outskirts of the cloud. They had drawn their guns.

Doc Savage, kicking about in dead leaves near his tree, had uncovered a heavy fallen limb. He got his manacled wrists in front of him.

The limb appeared too thick for any man to break, and it was not rotten. Doc got leverage upon it and snapped it in three pieces with an ease that made the feat seem trivial.

About this time, the three men who had rounded the acid cloud were preparing to shoot. Doc lobbed his sticks, one at each gunman. He made what, under the conditions, looked like a good average—two out of three—but none the less, he seemed disappointed.

Long Tom and Ham took a reckless chance, charged the third gunman. They would probably have been shot. But Monk threw the knife in a way which showed he had practiced the art, and put the blade in the gunman's chest, not far from the heart.

The man upset.

Rama Tura's other men ran wildly away, pursued by the cloud of vapor, which the wind was carrying. They outdistanced it, then turned around and began shooting.

“Run for it!” Doc called.

The bronze man was working at the wire which held his ankles to the eyes in the ends of the iron bar. Monk stopped to help. The others ran on, retreating, at Doc’s rapped command.

Doc said grimly, “Monk, you threw that knife at the man’s heart.”

Monk took pains not to look at Doc. The homely chemist was well acquainted with the rule of Doc’s that at no time was life to be taken if it could possibly be avoided.

Monk began, “Aw, I didn’t——” Then he changed his mind, being fairly sure he was not an accomplished enough liar to fool Doc.

“Heck!” he grunted sheepishly. “I was excited.”

Doc’s ankles came free, and he got up and ran. Bark, chopped off trees by bullets, was falling about them. There was enough gun noise for a pitched battle.

“We’re gonna—make it,” Monk puffed.

They did. The men of Jondore were either not good runners, or they did not take the pursuit wholeheartedly.

THEY ran approximately a mile, and came to a busy highway, where they waited for a motorist. Long Tom contributed the mainspring of his wrist watch, which his captors had not taken, since it was plainly not a valuable one, and Doc picked the lock on his wrist manacles.

A motorist who would not stop nearly ran over Monk, but the next one stopped and agreed to give them a lift. Doc Savage did not enter the machine.

“You fellows be careful,” he directed. “This Rama Tura and the Majii, whoever that is, are clever. Next time, they will probably kill you the instant they get their hands on you.”

Monk growled, “Next time, it’ll be us gettin’ our hands on them.”

Ham said, “Don’t brag, stupid.”

Long Tom demanded, “Doc, what are you going to do?”

Doc Savage did not answer that.

“You will see me down at headquarters shortly,” he said.

He watched the motorist drive out of sight bearing Monk, Ham, Long Tom and the Nizam. The bronze man then plunged back into the timberland.

He heard shots when he had covered half a mile. They were ahead, and also to the westward. There was about twenty of them. Doc began running with a speed that would have given a college sprinter much to think about.

Next, Doc heard plane motors. There must have been about sixteen motors, but the way they were grouped indicated they were in four planes.

Doc saw the planes shortly, peering out at them from under a tree, so that they did not see him. There were four very big ships, and they bore the markings of a transcontinental air line.

They were exactly the same type of planes which held the commercial speed records for the flight from New York to Los Angeles.

Doc went on, with a good idea of what he would find.

He found one dead man. He had feared there would be more. There were seven others who had been slightly wounded. All were the personnel at the chief passenger airport of New York City.

What had happened was bloody, violent and simple. Rama Tura's men had simply raided the airport in force and taken what planes they wanted.

One of the planes had been loaded with the contents of a small truck—packages bearing the stamped paper wrappers of a bank. That was enough to tell Doc it had been the money, proceeds of the sale of Rama Tura's seance jewels.

Doc Savage made a few suggestions about organization of the hunt for the planes. Then he returned to the city. He entered the skyscraper which housed his establishment by the secret garage and the private elevator.

The instant he was in the eighty-sixth floor corridor, he could see that something was wrong. The reception room door was open, and Ham, Long Tom and the Nizam stood just inside, looking very worried.

“What is it?” Doc asked.

“Now Monk has disappeared!” Ham gasped.

Chapter XII

THE NIZAM SURPRISE

THE anxiety in Ham's voice as he announced that Monk was missing was striking considering the fact that he and the absent chemist had never within the memory of any one presented each other with a civil word.

It proved that Ham considered Monk his closest friend, even though they did squabble. The truth was that either Ham or Monk would have risked his life to save the other. They had done so, on occasions.

"How did it happen?" Doc asked.

"He just disappeared," Ham groaned.

"Call his penthouse laboratory," Doc suggested.

"We did," Ham said slowly. "Jove! I hope nothing happened to that homely ape."

Long Tom grunted, "You two guys give me a pain. You put in your time trying to kill each other. And the minute one of you thinks the other is in a jam, you bust out in tears."

Ham snapped, "I'm going out and hunt Monk! Something terrible has happened to him. I know it has!"

Doc Savage said quietly, "Hunting would be worthless unless we have a clue to go on. Wait around. We will see what turns up."

The bronze man eyed the Nizam. "Rama Tura admitted there was some big plot behind what is happening. I do not think he was lying. Can you give us any hint which might help us learn what it is?"

The Nizam gave that some moments of thought. The Nizam had been very dapperly clad indeed when Doc first encountered him, but the violence of the night had put him in a rather disheveled condition.

"My fortune which disappeared is the only angle I can think of," he said. "I have told you of that."

"It looks as if your fortune was merely used to get cash for the bigger scheme, whatever it is," Doc said. "That is, of course, merely theory. We have not yet proved that Rama Tura and his Majii robbed you."

The Nizam shrugged. "It has me baffled."

Doc Savage now went into the laboratory, opened the door into the hidden space between the walls, and dragged out a bound, gagged and sleeping figure.

They all noted the Nizam's reaction when he saw the prisoner—and had reason to remember it later. The Nizam, who had been as cold and calm as any of them so far, gave a great start and began to tremble violently.

"Who is that?" he almost screamed. And he spoke his native Jondorese, apparently forgetting his English in his excitement.

“This,” Doc Savage told him, “is the fellow who tried to trick me by pretending to be you. You will recall that this happened immediately after you arrived by plane and they seized you.”

The Nizam continued to tremble violently. His brown skin had become the color of lead.

“Do you know him?” Doc Savage asked.

The Nizam’s answer was to keel over in a dead faint.

DOC SAVAGE studied the inert figure of the man who was ruler of Jondore, and until lately the richest of living men.

The bronze man’s small, fantastic trilling noise became quite distinctly audible, an eerie cadence that rose and fell, and might have been the song of some exotic-feathered thing of the jungle.

“This is something new,” he said.

Long Tom squinted and pulled at an ear which was rather large and only slightly less transparent than a sheet of oiled silk. He said nothing.

Ham, while looking at the unconscious Nizam, said, “I do wish we had some idea of where Monk is.”

Doc Savage administered stimulants to the Nizam, and the fellow responded enough to give some foundation for believing that he would revive completely within a few minutes.

Doc next went to work on the false Nizam. Using a hypo needle, he injected the concoction of drugs which nullified the effects of the stuff he had used to make the man helpless.

“The fellow sucked some stuff out of his sleeve to make himself unconscious so that he could not be questioned,” Doc reminded. “Perhaps he has recovered from that by now. We will see if he is conscious when he comes out of the shot I administered.”

While they were waiting for the systems of the two Jondoreans to absorb the various mixtures of chemicals, Doc Savage stripped the coat off the fake Nizam, so that the man would not have the opportunity to again make himself senseless. He also removed the gag. But he left the man’s arms and legs fastened by handcuffs.

Ham paced slow circles and waited, “Drat it! What about Monk?”

Doc said, “There is nothing to go on yet.”

Ham headed for the reception room.

“What now?” Doc asked him.

“I’m gonna hunt Monk!” Ham barked.

“Do not leave,” Doc requested.

Ham nodded. “I will use the telephone.”

Ham disappeared into the reception room.

Doc Savage and Long Tom watched the Nizams, fake and genuine, closely, noting that both were reviving with about the same slowness. They would regain consciousness almost together.

Reactions of the two Nizams, on recovering, were, strangely enough, almost the same. Both opened their eyes, blinked, and looked about. They were fully conscious. But neither said anything.

Doc was about to put a question when a terrific howl came from the reception room. It was Ham, and he was shrieking.

“Doc!” he roared. “Look at this!”

Doc Savage whipped out of the laboratory, across the library and into the reception room.

Long Tom was close behind Doc.

Ham stood in the middle of the reception room. He pointed at the door.

Monk stood in the opening, and under one furry arm was his pet pig, Habeas Corpus.

“Where have you been?” Doc demanded.

“Why,” Monk said innocently, “I just went downtown to that place where we had the fight to see if I could find Habeas. I found ’im, all O. K.”

HAM, who had shown such anxiety, now gave every indication of having a stroke. He made gargling rage sounds, and rushed to the corner beside the big office safe, to come back flourishing one of his sword canes, which he had evidently cached there some time ago.

“I oughta trim your toenails right off next to your ears!” he screeched at Monk.

“What’s the idea of this?” Monk demanded, bewilderedly.

Long Tom supplied the answer. “You went off without saying anything and Ham has been shedding tears all over the place.”

Ham looked very red and angry and groped for something to say, but apparently could think of nothing properly expressive of his state of mind.

Monk smiled blissfully and murmured, “So Ham was worried. I always did know he loved——”

Ham shrilled, “Shut up, if you don’t want to be dissected!”

A voice behind them in the library door said, “And you will all put up your hands, unless you want to be autopsied.”

It was the Nizam, the real one. He held a gun—one of the supermachine pistols which Doc Savage had given him to use in case they encountered Rama Tura’s men.

He was carrying the man who had tried to pass himself off as the Nizam upon Doc Savage. The latter was still handcuffed. He said nothing.

No one moved. No hands went up.

“Something has happened which changes the situation greatly for me,” said the genuine Nizam. “You will put your hands up and permit me and my companion to leave. I assure you that I mean business.”

The sensible thing to do was to get hands up, and Doc Savage did so. But not Ham. He was already in a blind rage over the Monk incident, which he well knew would furnish Monk something to rib him about.

Ham would almost have parted with an arm rather than have Monk know he had expressed fondness for him.

So Ham snarled and hurtled forward, flinging his sword cane spear fashion. The tip of the blade was coated with a chemical, akin to the one in the mercy bullets, which would produce swift senselessness, once it were introduced into a wound, however small. But the sword cane missed, due to Ham's haste.

The Nizam tightened on the supermachine pistol. The gun let out its bullfiddle moan. Ham went down.

The superfirer continued to hoot, and Long Tom and Doc Savage went down in quick succession. They moved only a little after they fell.

It was night, with the lights of the city a magnificent spectacle from the skyscraper windows, when Doc Savage and his aides revived.

The squealing of Habeas Corpus, a plaintive sound, was the first noise that Doc Savage heard. The bronze man awakened first. After a while, the others were up.

They held a somewhat gloomy discussion, which consisted largely of Monk, Ham and Long Tom advancing various theories, none of which exactly explained what had happened.

"It was that fake Nizam!" Long Tom complained. "Just seeing him went all over the real Nizam. I wonder what caused it."

"That," Ham said, "is just another black spot in the whole very dark mystery."

They telephoned the police, and learned no trace had been found of Rama Tura or any of his men.

Doc had the police put out a pick-up order for the Nizams, real and fake.

They sent out for papers, the late editions. The sheets were full of the murders, with the usual wild speculations, and an occasional fiery editorial accusing the police department of inefficiency—a stock procedure, incidentally, which had about gone out of style in New York City.

About that time, Doc Savage chanced to find, in his coat pocket, a business card which he had not put there. It was embossed with the royal emblem of Jondore, an affair of a tiger head and spears, entwined by a serpent. The card also bore the simple lettering:

KADIR LINGH

There were words printed on the back in a stilted but precise hand which might have been trained to print the rather unusual letters which formed the Jondore alphabet. The message was to the point:

PLEASE DROP YOUR INTEREST IN THIS AFFAIR. IT WILL SAVE MANY LIVES FOR YOU
TO DO SO.

KADIR LINGH

Monk did some very vehement muttering when he had perused the scroll. Then he looked at Doc Savage.

"What about it?" he asked. "Do we drop it?"

Doc asked dryly, "Would you like to?"

"Heck no," Monk grinned. "I've been havin' the time of my life."

"There is something behind all this," Doc Savage said. "Something large and terrible. We will go on, get to the bottom of it."

"Swell," Monk grunted. "That guy Rama Tura needs a good squashing, and I'm in favor of our doing it, even if the job takes us clear to Jondore."

"Even if it takes us to Jondore," Doc Savage agreed.

Chapter XIII

THE LOOMING TERROR

It took them to Jondore.

They arrived three weeks later—arrived in Benares, which is not in Jondore, or even very near it, but is in India, south of Nepal, an independent state somewhat similar in set-up to Jondore, politically. Benares is possibly the best hopping-off place for Jondore—Jondore not being among the most accessible places in the world.

In those three weeks there had been nothing whatever to show what might have happened to Rama Tura and his organization, or to the Nizam of Jondore, former richest man in the world, or to the mysterious man who had pretended to be the Nizam. The Rane, widow of the dead ruler of Jondore, had also dropped from sight.

Not that Doc Savage had not searched for them. The bronze man had expended money and influence in an effort to get a trace of his quarry, and he had been given access to the police reports, which were indicative of a thorough search officially, Rama Tura being wanted for a score of murders, more or less.

Nor had any one uncovered a clue which had proved of value in solving the mystery of just what was behind the entire grisly affair.

Rama Tura and the rest had simply dropped out of sight as completely as if Rama Tura had worked some of the ability at miracles which he seemed and claimed to possess, and had removed every one into the spirit world.

Monk even commented to that effect.

“Dope,” Ham snapped back at him. “There is no such thing as a mug like Rama Tura performing miracles.”

It was when they sought the usual clearance papers to enter Jondore that Doc Savage and his three aides encountered the first—and a very minor example—of the difficulties that lay ahead. They were refused admittance.

The refusal was simple, to the point, and simply explained. The Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore, had notified the British Foreign Office and his own consular representative that Doc Savage was under no circumstances to be admitted to Jondore.

There was the further simple statement that Doc Savage and his aides would be officially executed if caught in Jondore. The statement indicated that the Nizam considered Doc and his men public enemies of Jondore. The Nizam came near enough to being an absolute monarch that he could order such executions.

Doc Savage talked the matter over at length with the British officials, and, although the bronze man had a certain amount of drag, he having been of service to John Bull in an official way on other occasions, he was advised to drop the matter and return to the United States.

Doc read between the lines and concluded that the British considered Jondore the powder keg of their Asiatic possessions, and feared the bronze man might be the spark

which would ignite it.

The British put agents to watching Doc and his men. The shadowing was open, and Doc agreeably invited the agents to accompany him about, even to dine with him.

That was how it happened that British agents were with Doc Savage when he purchased airplane passage to the coast, and were with him when he and his three aides boarded a liner sailing directly for the United States.

The agents were not along when the liner lowered Doc and his three aides over the side in a power launch that night, some distance off the coast. Habeas stayed aboard, on his way to New York.

It was not entirely by chance that Doc had picked this particular liner, because it happened that the concern which owned it was one of the bronze man's wide commercial holdings.

So when the British radioed in midocean, querying whether or not Doc Savage was aboard, they were informed Doc and his men were on the passenger list. This was not, technically, a lie. Their names had simply not been erased from the list.

JONDORE was, in effect, a great, fertile valley, which was accessible by air and by three mountain passes which were sheer gorges through which narrow trails had been constructed.

There was no railway, and no way by which an automobile could enter Jondore, except by being taken apart and packed in on the backs of yaks, donkeys, and the tough little Himalayan ponies.

The guards at one of the mountain passes into Jondore failed to notice anything peculiar in the fact that within a space of two days, four different donkey merchants were admitted.

Donkey merchants, itinerant peddlers, were quite common, and also welcome, because they were taxed heavily. Barefoot, rather ragged, these particular hucksters differed little from the average run.

The night after the admission of the last of these four specific merchants found all four of them hunkered about the tiny blue flame of a fire in a small canyon. The nights were very cold in the mountains surrounding Jondore.

One of the hucksters began the conversation. He was a big fellow with a hump in his back and a limp in his right leg. His skin was almost black, his hair was short, jet-black, and so curly it was like a mass of tiny coil springs.

He wore a turban which was remarkably new and clean, and a robe which seemed about to fall to pieces in spite of many patches.

He spoke to a squat, broad, bald-headed fellow who had a yellow skin, teeth blackened from betel chewing, and who wore enormous spectacles and rather untidy garments.

"Did you have any trouble, Monk?" he asked.

"No, Doc," replied Monk. "Them Jondorean words you taught me were enough to get me by."

Shaving all of the coarse, rusty hair from Monk's apish frame had made a startling difference in his appearance.

Doc said, "How about you, Ham? And you, Long Tom?"

Ham and Long Tom had both turned into fat Hindus, through the medium of body pads, plastic make-up, and body stain. The disguises were perfect enough that it was doubtful if they would have recognized each other.

"What is our next move," Ham wanted to know.

"We will work toward Dacal, capital city of Jondore," Doc said. "And we will see what we can pick up on the way."

Just what Doc Savage meant by saying they would try to pick up information on the way became apparent the following afternoon, when they entered a small village.

It was not unusual for merchants to travel together in Jondore, for the hillmen were chronic bandits.

The town consisted of rows of stone huts facing a lane of dust which must have been a remarkable mudhole on the rare occasion when it rained.

There were skin *yurts* of hillmen and herdsmen pitched around the outskirts, and the inevitable combination of temple and monastery was the most pretentious structure in town.

THERE were several inns, and they selected one which seemed to boast the least dirt and the fewest smells, although it was a close choice.

Ham, the fastidious, did considerable grumbling over the quaint and malodorous custom of keeping the animals in a yard under the inn windows.

"That is so the owners can look out occasionally and make sure their animals have not been stolen," Doc told him.

"A fine country!" Ham sniffed.

The inn food was too much for them. They cooked their own over a small fire in the yard, bothered by inquisitive donkeys and yaks. Other travelers were doing the same thing.

They kept their eyes open, and noted that many of the travelers were leaving immediately after they had eaten. Doc Savage ambled over to one who was preparing to depart.

"Truly this place pleases not even a yak, O brother," he said in Jondorean. "Can it be that you leave to find other and more pleasant lodgings?"

The traveler eyed Doc, and apparently saw nothing but a kinky-haired, hump-backed Jondorean with a limp, a fellow who looked quite harmless.

"It is indeed a foolish lamb which goes into the den of the lion, sees the lion and yet lies down there to sleep," replied the traveler.

"What have you seen here?" Doc asked.

"The lamb might see the lion, and yet not know it was a lion, never having seen one before," said the other. "Perhaps it is that you are new in Jondore."

He whacked his pony lustily and rode off.

Doc Savage went back to his aides.

“THERE is something happening in this village,” he informed them. “Remain here, keep close to your donkeys, and watch.”

Doc Savage moved away, affecting the bow-legged, shuffling gait of one who had spent much of his life astride ponies and donkeys. He had not gone far before he saw that there was indeed something brewing.

Armed men were the rule rather than the exception in Jondore, for it was a wild, untamed land, but men abroad in the streets were much too heavily weighted with weapons, and they frequently walked in groups, muttering in low, excited voices. Doc tried to get close to one of the groups and was cursed and had sticks thrown at him.

Merchants, especially those who carried their wares on donkeys, were not held in much esteem in Jondore.

There is one spot where information can usually be picked up—the drinking places. Doc sought one which served, not only the strong-battered tea popular through the Himalayas, but also a potent beverage derived from fermented maize.

By the simple process of loosening his purse strings, Doc became a very popular fellow. He consumed nothing but the strong-battered tea himself, and cheese, which no one considered in the least strange. An hour thus expended got him some information.

The head men of the village and the army—each village in Jondore had its private-armed force—were that night holding a meeting in the council house near the monastery.

“Whispers say it has to do with the return of the Majii,” some one stated, then shut up suddenly, as if having let slip a matter that it was not healthy to discuss.

That was enough for Doc Savage, and as soon as he could manage without exciting suspicion, he left the drinking place and worked toward the monastery. He haunted shadows when he got near the place.

The monastery was a large structure, by far the most elaborate in town, which did not make it exactly a breathtaking bit of architecture, and the doorway was small, arched and near one end.

The patch of murk around the corner might have been made for eavesdropping. Ensnared there, Doc managed to overhear two men in the entrance, probably guards, as they talked.

“It is truly a great thing for Jondore, this return of the Majii,” one murmured.

“You speak words of truth and wisdom,” the other agreed. “Yet there are some dogs who sit back and yap, even after they have been shown a bone. They do not want to follow the Majii, master of marvels, ocean of wisdom though he is.”

“There are many of those dogs,” agreed the first.

“Many, truly,” said the second. “But the word of the Majii will prevail, even if those who dissent have to die, so that——”

There was a yell inside the meeting hall. A shot. Another.

A man popped out of the door. He was white, nattily attired in whipcord-laced breeches, riding boots, a leather blazer and—incongruous touch—a beret of leather

which matched his jacket. He wore two big revolvers, cowboy fashion, in low-slung holsters.

The two door guards, startled, let the white man whip past them. Then they lifted their rifles.

The white man looked back over his shoulder, saw the rifles being raised, and drew both of his revolvers. He stopped, spun, and both his guns went off.

The two guards collapsed.

THE village had been quiet. But now it exploded. Armed men popped, howling, from houses. A flood of gesticulating, screeching figures poured from the meeting hall.

Doc Savage mingled with them, galloping along with them after the madly fleeing white man. It was a bloodthirsty mob, out to slaughter the fugitive.

The white man ran fleetly, keeping his guns in his hands. He was an uncanny marksman. Three times, enraged villagers tried to head him off, and he used his weapons with effect. Then he came to a point where a throng of foes literally blocked the street.

His guns made a great deal of noise. His foes made almost as much. But the odds were too great. The white man backed, spun, tried to flee, but the avalanche of Jondoreans from the meeting hall headed him off. An instant later, there was a tremendous melee.

Doc Savage was in the thick of it, making a great pretense of trying to get the fugitive, but actually putting himself in the way of the villagers as much as possible. Now he went into action, using fists, knees, furiously.

Seizing his chance, he got one of the small smoke bombs out of his pocket, dropped it, and an inky fog promptly enveloped the fray. That did the trick.

Seconds later, Doc appeared on the edge of the battle. He was dragging the white man, who was badly battered. The fellow was thin, almost fragile. Doc shouldered him. Then he ran.

Twice, they were shot at. One of the marksmen used a modern rifle and missed; the other fired with what must have been a homemade muzzle loader charged with pebbles, bits of iron and whatever else was handy. The miscellaneous missiles broke Doc's skin in four different places, but he was not damaged seriously.

The white man did not speak. He was holding his head, and scarlet from a cut crawled through his fingers.

Ham, Monk and Long Tom met Doc, riding their donkeys. They had started toward the sound of the fighting.

Doc put the white man on his feet, signaled his aides, and warned them not to speak. He did not want their unfamiliarity with the Jondorean tongue to reveal they were not the itinerant merchants that they seemed.

They persuaded the donkeys into a run and left the village.

THE white man spoke at last.

“Bally decent of you chaps,” he said. “You jolly well took my iron out of the fire.”

Doc kept silent.

“Jove,” murmured the white man. “I hope you speak English. My Jondorean is rotten. What about it—savvy English?”

“Lizzle,” Doc Savage said, giving the word “little” the mutilation of a Jondorean who knew only a few words of that tongue.

The white man asked curiously, “Just why did you aid me, old fellow?”

Doc feigned a groping for the proper English words.

“Mebbeso money,” he managed finally.

The white man laughed, as if not at all surprised.

“You’ll jolly well get paid for it,” he informed them. “Say, how would you like a bit of a job?”

Doc again paused before speaking.

“No savvy,” he said. “You talk. Mebbeso savvy.”

“I am a British secret agent,” said the white man. “You savvy same?”

“Uh,” Doc agreed.

“I was sent in here to investigate this business of the Majii,” announced the man they had rescued. “You savvy Majii?”

“Uh!” Doc said with great vehemence.

“What do you know about him?”

“Vezzy lizzle.” Doc paused as if groping for a very big word, his prize piece of the English language. “Vezzy mistiliffilous.”

“Very mysterious, is right,” the other chuckled. “Is that all you know?”

“Uh,” Doc nodded.

“I do not know a dratted bit more than that myself,” said the white man. “I just got into Jondore, and heard there was something going on in that village meeting hall, and tried to get in to eavesdrop a bit. They caught me, the beggars.”

“Job,” Doc said. “No savvy.”

“Oh, you want to know about the blooming job.” The man was riding ahead of Doc on the donkey, and he carefully adjusted his position. “I want to get to Dacal, capital city of Jondore. I am going to have some very firm words with the Nizam. I shall bally well put a bee in his turban. I will remind him what a fleet of British bombing planes could do to his palace and to Dacal.”

“Uh,” Doc said agreeably.

“I want you to escort me to Dacal,” said the white man anxiously. “I need a bodyguard. I will pay handsomely. Do you want the job?”

Doc let enough silence elapse to make it seem he was thinking it over thoroughly.

“Uh,” he agreed finally.

They rode on, keeping to rocky ground, seeking the fastest traveling. For a time, they heard pursuit behind them.

The baying of dogs, evidently on their trail, gave them some bad moments, until Doc Savage dropped back and distributed common pepper—the stuff was in their packs

of merchandise—over their trail.

After that, they lost pursuit.

It was some two hours before the white man made a remark concerning Doc's three aides, who had not said a word.

"They are very quiet," he remarked. "Can't the chaps talk?"

"Talk vezzy good way lose head," Doc reminded.

MORNING sun was soaking into the cracklike canyons of the mountains when they sighted Dacal, capital of Jondore. It was distant, a strange, unreal image in a gray, woolly mist.

Dacal was a jumble of tightly packed buildings, many having colors so bright as to be perceptible even from the mountain heights from which they were viewing it.

The city lay in the center of a valley, and near it was an almost emerald-green lake. The valley itself was entrancing, even from a distance; sight of it alone was enough to cause them to stand there for a long time, silent and admiring.

Nor were they the first to be stricken speechless by this vale of Jondore. Songs had been written about it, and poems, based on the ecstasizing of travelers who had been so fortunate as to see the rare spot.

The white man whom Doc had rescued finally sighed.

"They jolly well say the sharpest thorns grow on the prettiest flowers," he murmured. "Let us be toddling."

Hours later, as they rode through a land that was a paradise of beauty and luxuriance, munching delicious fruits plucked from trees along the road, they heard hoofbeats. A sizable squad of riders came into view.

The horsemen were tall, lean, with a hungrily alert look.

"Look kinda like they was out huntin' a square meal," muttered Monk, who was bringing up the rear, far enough back that their "employer" could not hear.

The riders were soldiers, it developed, for their attire was uniform; plumed turbans, long loose tunics of bright blue, and baggy trousers that were bunched into low felt boots.

Each man wore short sword and pistol; rifles were bolstered on the front part of each saddle, dangling down the fore quarters of the horses.

Doc Savage studied them through an ancient telescope such as donkey traders carried for scrutinizing mountain passes in search of bandits.

"No wise traveler enters a sandstorm when he may go around it," he murmured in Jondorean.

Then he absently stuck the telescope in the saddle pocket.

The white man they had rescued from the villagers squinted at Doc, as if trying to fathom what the words meant. Then he peered at the soldiers, who were still too distant for close study with the naked eye.

"Mind lending me your telescope, chappie?" he suggested.

Doc guided his donkey close to the white man, extended the telescope—and something seemed to go wrong. Doc’s donkey gave a great jump, crashed into the other’s mount.

Doc, apparently to keep from falling, flung out his arms and grasped the white man, and in an instant, they had both crashed to the hard road.

Doc lay where he had dropped, emitting grunts that sounded very pained.

The white man bounded up, grimacing, and clutched his sleeve. The fabric of his shirt, the leather of his blazer, was cut. He shucked off the blazer, rolled up his sleeve and examined his arm. A trickle of scarlet was coming from a small cut.

“Your deuced knife!” he exploded. “It might have cut me badly.”

Doc Savage was fumbling inside his voluminous garment, and unobserved by the other, managed to free his knife of its sheath and thrust it through his robe. He stood up, contriving so that the other would be certain it was the knife which had cut him.

“Sorrow is a vast sea about me, out of which I shall never be able to swim,” he said in Jondorean.

THE white man took the telescope and studied the gaudily caparisoned band of horsemen.

“Soldiers of Kadir Lingh, the Nizam,” he said. “That is jolly fortunate for us.”

Doc, registering alarm, grunted, “Mebbeso bad,” in the bad English he was affecting.

“No, no,” the other said hastily. “They will not dare molest me, and I will see that they do not touch you. We will hail them.”

Doc and his three aides waited, playing their parts as rather-frightened traders in a wild country where anything might happen, and their “employer” rode forward grandly and hailed the approaching squad of horsemen.

The meeting occurred some distance down the road, and Doc and his companions could not hear what was said. They could, however, see that the conversation seemed to elate the white man. He waved at them, then advanced, riding with the uniformed squad.

“Everything is jolly,” he hailed them. “One of these soldier chaps speaks English.”

The horsemen surrounded them. They were a grim-visaged gang. No one spoke.

The white man cracked out words—words in perfect Jondorean, which he had professed himself unable to speak.

With hair-lifting speed, the soldiers whipped out their guns and covered Doc Savage, Monk, Ham and Long Tom.

The white man said in English, “Doc Savage, you and your three men will surrender if you have the least idea of what is good for you.”

Long Tom gulped, “Well, for—double-crossed!”

Monk glared at the white man and gritted, “The rat flea!”

Ham murmured, “I fail to understand this at all!”

Doc Savage said nothing, nor was he showing any evidence of surprise.

Menaced by numerous guns, they did the sensible thing and let themselves be relieved of weapons, and permitted their wrists to be bound, after which preparations were made to lead them by ropes about their necks.

The white man rode over and looked down at them. He had exchanged with one of the soldiers and was riding a fine saddle mount.

“He who is wise and patient knows that all trails have an ending,” he said in a totally different voice.

The hollow, deathlike quality of that voice he had used, the absolute absence of tonal difference, caused Monk and the others to give a tremendous start of surprise.

“Blazes!” Monk squawked. “Did you get that!”

Monk started forward, reckless of the guns which covered him, trying to reach the white man, but the latter spurred his mount and got clear.

Monk retreated disgustedly, and eyed Doc Savage.

“That hollow voice!” he exploded. “That guy isn’t a white man! He’s Rama Tura, the lug who made those jewels in the seances!”

The white man laughed at them.

“I am Rama Tura,” he agreed. “And possibly you will admit Rama Tura is something of an actor, eh?”

DOC SAVAGE studied Rama Tura with no perceptible fear or anxiety.

“You are very clever, but we already knew that,” he said slowly. “But one part of this affair was not staged—your flight from those villagers in the meeting house.”

Rama Tura scowled, swore in Jondorese, violently, abusively—not at Doc, but at the villagers who had tried to kill him.

“I was there to persuade them to accept the leadership of the Majii,” he grated. “The offspring of swine turned upon me.”

“I wondered about that,” Doc told him.

Rama Tura smiled thinly. He certainly bore little resemblance to the corpse figure which he had pretended to be in New York.

“You truly saved my life,” he said. “For that, I owe you something. Only, I do not pay debts.”

“You owe us more than you think,” Doc Savage said.

Rama Tura looked interested, but Doc did not elaborate.

Chapter XIV

BLACK HOLE

It was dark. Somewhere, it must be light, because it was daytime—the following day. But it was dark where Doc Savage and his three aides spent time—time that was beginning to drag.

It was also quite hideous where they were. The things on the floor made it that way. Not that the things on the floor were menacing. They had no matches, but they had felt over them.

They were bones, human, they knew by the skulls; on the floor also was a dust that was not pleasant to think about, although Monk, undoubtedly to get Ham's goat, had at one time gone into a lengthy monologue about how long it took a human body to turn into dust in a dry place such as this was.

The place was round, wide enough that two of them could barely span it by joining hands with outstretched arms. The walls were of stone, but they might as well have been of glass, for they had been polished to an incredible slickness.

Somewhere above—too high for them to reach it by forming a pyramid—was a door. Fortunately, they had not been kicked through, but had been permitted to slide down a rope.

They had talked—and talked. Possibilities suggested that might explain what was behind the machinations of the Majii and his disciple, Rama Tura, had been numerous, but based on no foundation sufficiently solid to warrant them being regarded as fact.

They had decided on one point.

“Is Rama Tura a Jondorean or a European?” Monk had pondered.

“A part of each,” Doc Savage had said. “A half breed, in my opinion.”

Monk and Ham were quarreling to kill time, Monk berating Ham for using his robe to spread over the dust as a pallet, and Ham denying wrathfully that he had employed the homely chemist's garb thusly. The squabble lacked its usual entertaining angles. It sounded forced.

Long Tom said gloomily, “They're gonna let us stay here until we croak!”

The garments they wore were cheap, ragged, and had been given them by their captors. Their own clothing, including Doc Savage's vest with its remarkable assortment of gadgets, had been taken from them. They had, indeed, been stripped to the skin, and even given a bath—thrown into a horse trough, rather.

Doc Savage had been listening. To their ears came the erratic noises made by a guard pacing somewhere above and outside, and another sound, fainter, a murmuring intonation from a considerable distance, that was probably the noise of a temple.

There were chimes from time to time, and gongs, and once strains of the exotic music of the Orient, all rather pleasant.

There was a clanking above, and the outer door opened, letting very weak light through big iron bars. A brown face pressed to the bars, peering downward, and an arm came in with a burning brand—a bit of wood with an end cut into shavings—fell downward, and its light illuminated the prisoners. The face withdrew and the door grated shut.

“He does that about once every two hours,” Monk grunted.

“All right,” Doc said. “Now we go into action.”

Monk made a surprise sound in the darkness. “So you got a scheme! But why wait this long?”

“It is now almost dark,” Doc told him. “It is difficult to prowl during the daytime. Last night, we were tired. The rest did us good.”

“How you gonna get out?” Monk grunted.

“With your aid,” Doc told him.

THEY spoke in very low voices, for it was not beyond possibility that there might be a microphone, perhaps of supersensitive parabolic type, concealed above them. Rama Tura was, they had reason to believe, no stranger to modern devices.

To cover any sounds, such as a microphone might pick up, if one were there, Ham and Long Tom now began to sing. They rendered roistering chanteys of the sea, and there was much more volume than music.

Doc Savage and Monk faced each other in the center of the round cistern of a cell. They joined hands firmly above their heads.

Then, keeping a tight grip on each other’s hands, they walked backward until each had gotten his feet against the wall. Thus, their bodies formed a bridge from one wall of the cistern cell to another.

It was no easy thing they were seeking to accomplish. Nor was it impossible. They had their shoes off, and the walls of the prison, while glass smooth, were entirely dry. They began to walk up the wall, maintaining their human bridge.

They lost out and fell back exactly eleven times in the next forty-five minutes. Then they got up to the opening. The next part was ticklish. Doc Savage felt with his feet, found the bars, and hooked toes around them.

“All right, Monk,” he said. “I’ll try to hold you if you say so.”

“I’ll take my chances on dropping,” Monk muttered. “I’ve fell so danged often I’m wrecked, anyhow.”

Down below, Ham and Long Tom made noise with their singing. They were, however, standing well clear.

Doc relaxed tense back muscles, their pressure bridge collapsed, and Monk went down to land with a loud thump and a tremendous grunt. Doc held the door bars with his toes. An instant later, he was clinging to the bars.

The whole performance, for all the trouble it had given them, possibly could have been duplicated by any accomplished team of circus or vaudeville acrobats.

Doc waited. His watch, of course, had been taken. But he had cultivated a fair ability at judging time, which was as effective as anything for the work at hand. Their

guard might not wait the full hour, anyhow, or he might wait more.

Possibly seven minutes passed. Then the heavy bars on the outer door grated, and the panel—it was of timbers, iron-strapped—opened and the guard did exactly what he had done before; the fellow put his face to the bars to look down.

The guard stood there very still, except that his hands came loose from the bars and dangled on the ends of limp arms. It was doubtful if any one standing behind him, and there was no one, would have noted anything peculiar.

Doc, clinging to the bars with his feet, had the man by face and neck. The neck grip—fingers on nerve centers—did the trick.

The man senseless, Doc went through his clothing. There was a very modern padlock, American made, on the inner door of bars. The guard carried the key.

Some two seconds later, Doc Savage was outside.

It was dark in the passage, which was underground and below the north wing of the castle of the Nizam, the ruler of Jondore. The chanting which they had heard throughout the day was still going on.

It was not an usual sound in Oriental cities, especially in the wilder interior. Occasionally, there were voices or the clatter of a bullock cart. One significant thing, however: they had heard no laughter on the streets.

The overpowered guard was a three-hundred-pound ball of blubber with a stunted knot of a face. His robe, not unlike an Arab burnoose, contained enough cloth to fashion a small circus tent. Doc relieved him of both robe and turban.

Doc tied an end of the robe around the man's ankle, then grabbed the fellow by the wrists and dangled man and robe, rope fashion, into the circular cell.

"Monk, up," he called softly.

Shortly, Monk arrived, clambering up the rope and the guard, grunting and groaning as if he were about to die.

Doc then hauled up prisoner and robe.

Monk stopped groaning, exploded, "Hey! Ham and Long Tom figured on comin' up, too!"

"They are going to remain in the cell," Doc said quietly.

MONK swallowed several times, then gulped, "But I don't get this! We've all got a chance to get out of the town!"

"We do not want to get out of the town," Doc told him. "Not after the trouble we had getting here."

Monk thought that over. "Then you——"

"I am going to look around," Doc explained. "One person can do that much better than four. This palace is probably the center of things. At least, if that Nizam can be gotten hold of, he can be made to talk—and clear up this whole mystery."

"Um-m-m," said Monk in a tone that was not too enthusiastic.

"Put on this fellow's robe and turban," Doc directed. "You will take his place as sentry. Your skin is still dyed, and you are big enough to get by, providing it is not too

dark.”

Monk began thinking of objections. “But what if some one comes along and looks down through the bars into the cell? They’ll see two missing——”

“They will see the senseless guard, dressed in your robe. Ham and Long Tom will see that he stays senseless,” Doc interposed. “A bundle of spare underclothing can be arranged to look like another sleeping person. That completes the list of four, does it not?”

Monk said, “But I can’t speak this cackle they call a language.”

“Just nod and grunt if you are spoken to,” Doc suggested. “This guard is a surly fellow, if you noticed. It will seem natural.”

Monk was trying to think of a further argument when Doc Savage left him.

Doc moved swiftly and, since he wore no shoes, silently. The absence of shoes would not draw attention, since many Jondoreans went barefoot.

There were two guards, soldiers, at the end of the passage. They looked very alert, and there seemed no possible chance of passing them, because a large lantern stood near them.

Doc crept to the edge of the lantern light. He could see into the lighted room beyond the guards. It was circular, and there were plenty of columns supporting the roof. There was an open door.

Silence was pronounced as Doc waited.

“Guards!” rapped a voice in Jondorean. “Over here a moment, quickly.”

The voice sounded as if the speaker were beyond the open door, and it had an imperative rap of authority.

The guards snapped their rifles across their chests and advanced toward the distant door on the double quick.

“Never mind!” clipped the authoritative voice. “It was only a shadow.”

The guards saluted, turned and came back.

Doc Savage watched them closely. He was no longer in the passage, but inside the large room, behind a pillar, well into the shadows.

The guards gave no sign of suspecting that it was a ventriloquial voice thrown by Doc Savage, and no one in authority, as they had imagined, that they had heard.

They did, however, keep a closer watch than before, but after a few minutes, relaxed, and Doc managed to creep away.

The big room had two doors other than the first one Doc had seen; both being open, Doc eased through one, and through a walled channel of darkness. The passage ended, and he stepped into another large room—and suddenly ducked back.

He had heard marching men. They came into view a moment later, four abreast, moving with a military tread. Two bearers were in advance with resin-knot torches.

Rama Tura led the procession.

Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore, strode next.

THE parade—some fifty armed men, not all of them soldiers—were in the party. Those who were not uniformed wore expensive robes and had the air of men of importance.

The parade crossed the chamber with the air of having some very definite place to go.

Doc Savage had quitted his prison cell for the very specific purpose of finding the Nizam and learning, by one means or another, just what was behind that gentleman's unusual behavior in New York City. So Doc joined the parade—at a safe distance.

The group went directly to what was evidently the palace stables, where grooms had horses waiting. Mounted, the squad seemed much larger, almost a young army. They rode away, and rode fairly hard.

Doc Savage had heard of the claim sometimes made that if a man and a horse engage in a walking contest, the man can outlast the horse.

The bronze man was a physical marvel, thanks to training which had started in the cradle, and his two hours of exercise taken every day. He had never engaged in public athletic contests, simply because it was best in view of the unusual career for which he was training that he should not get any newspaper publicity that was avoidable.

However, these horses were not walking. They trotted, galloped, and ran some of the time. Moreover, they were fine mounts.

Three hours later, Doc was a mile behind. Had it been daylight, when the mounted men would undoubtedly have traveled faster, he might have been farther back.

Five hours later, he had lost another half mile—or thought he had, until he came upon the horses, reins held by soldiers, most unexpectedly.

Several minutes must have been lost by the party in dismounting, because Doc could hear them in the distance, walking. Climbing, rather.

The horses had been left in a canyon, with walls of rock on two sides that, as far as the eye could tell in the deceptive darkness, were vertical.

The rock was hard; it cut even Doc's bare feet, which were not tender. At times, there seemed to be a path, but more often progress was a matter of scrambling from one crack to another.

The air was cold. Such dust as Doc's fingers touched was so frigid it felt like snow. In the distance, and now Doc knew he was out of the canyon and mounting on up, could be seen the lights of the capital.

They were not like the lights of an American or European city; there were no street lamps. Doc gave all of his attention to the trail—it was a trail—and to the jagged peak above. Attention there was necessary.

Jagged peak above—no! Its contour had changed abruptly, perhaps due to an altered viewpoint. Doc paused to study it.

It was like a black cube, a giant spotless dice, standing on the vast hump of stone. It was hardly on a peak, for there was higher ground back of it.

The bronze man's low, mellow trilling note which meant always some moment of mental excitement, came, persisted briefly, then was gone.

He knew what this thing was. He had not seen it; so far as he knew, no pictures of it were in existence, although at least two men had been executed for trying to smuggle pictures out of Jondore. But tongues cannot be censored, and travelers had told and written of it.

The block of stone—it was black, and no white man had ever gotten close enough to it to tell what it was made of, although undoubtedly some stone foreign to the immediate region—was the tomb of the Majii!

Tomb of the Majii—the fantastic master of miracles, mythology had it, who had lived innumerable centuries ago, just how many centuries, mythology was uncertain. The Majii! This was the English spelling of a word that sounded similar in Jondorese.

Dialects differed in Jondore, and the name was not Majii everywhere. In the north, it was Jagee, and in the south, it was Genee, or Gini.

But no white man had ever touched this tomb. It was one of the mysteries of the world. The cult of the Majii, and much of the Jondorean population worshipped the Majii, had guarded it always from defiling hands.

Doc Savage advanced, and the block of black loomed larger. It was shiny, so marvelously made that it resembled—there was moonlight here—a great block of black glass.

The party the bronze man was following was entering the tomb by a small, almost round doorway. Rama Tura and the Nizam were already inside. Indeed, the last of the squad was just filing in.

Doc darted forward, haunting shadows. Reaching the round aperture, which looked modernistic, he listened. No sound.

He entered—of a fair certainty the first white man ever to cross that fantastic threshold.

Chapter XV

MAGIC OF THE MAJII

THE passage seemed warmer, and the smoke of resin-knot torches was distinctly irritating to the throat. Small sounds, exaggerated by the acoustics of the corridor, must be coughing of the men ahead.

There was an almost geometrical straightness to the passage, and at times there were other corridors leading off, always at exact right angles.

Doc, however, kept on the trail of those ahead. It was not a long trail. He glided to an arched doorway and peered through.

The room beyond was tremendous, somehow remindful of the dome inside the capital at Washington, except that the interior was almost starkly plain. The resin-knot torches, four of them, did not give more than a fitful light.

There were two things in the center of the room.

The first was a gigantic affair which resembled a vase. It had one enormous handle—entirely too big for even a score of men to employ in lifting the object, even if they could reach it, which they could not without scaffolding. Out of the top of this came a steady blue flame, evidently fed by some kind of an oil reservoir.

The second object was behind the first, a plain oblong perhaps four feet wide, the same in height, and ten feet long.

Both objects certainly looked as if they were made of solid gold.

The crowd which had entered the tomb of the Majii now gathered around the rectangular block of yellow metal.

Rama Tura—he had removed the white shading from his skin and looked almost pure Jondorean—stepped forward, then lifted what developed to be a lid on the box. The instant he had the lid up, he bounced back and sank to his knees.

Every one else fell to their knees. They also put their foreheads on the floor repeatedly, then lifted their eyes to stare at the long yellow box.

Several fantastic things happened. First, a weird and not unpleasant odor came into the room. Doc recognized it promptly as the same aroma which had always accompanied Rama Tura's apparent miracles in New York City.

After the scent had been present some minutes, no one making the slightest sound in the meantime, Rama Tura began to murmur slowly and monotonously. His words were almost a chant.

A mist arose from the hollow interior of the yellow block. It was an incredible yellow. It thickened, arose in a long cloud. The fantastic aroma in the room was stronger.

Unexpectedly, a volley of gasps came from the kneeling spectators.

A figure was rising with uncanny slowness from the block interior. It was, to every outward appearance, the figure of an embalmed dead man.

The unearthly apparition poised there a moment, then sank back and disappeared.

Rama Tura got to his feet, walked to the tall urn from the top of which came the blue flame, and gave it a brisk stroking with both hands. Results were instantaneous.

There was a flash of astounding brilliance, a crash as if the earth had come apart. The flash blinded Doc momentarily. When he could see again—excellent as was his emotional control—he started when he looked at the yellow block.

A figure was standing erect there. It bore some resemblance to the embalmed thing which had arisen before—it had on the same garments.

The garments consisted of a cloak, shoulders to ankles, some cloth which seemed partially woven of gold; and there was also a turban and a mask, the latter a death mask affair of gold leaf.

“I am the Majii,” said the apparition in Jondorean. “What is it that you wish here?”

To say that the spectators, with the exception of Rama Tura, were tongue-tied was expressing it mildly. Fully two minutes elapsed and no one vouchsafed a word.

Rama Tura stepped forward finally.

“These are ones who doubted that you, O Majii, master of all that breathes and grows, all that is fluid and all that is solid, could return to life,” he said elaborately. “I brought them here that they might see for themselves.”

“Horses that are led to water do not always drink,” said the Majii in a rumbling, impressive voice. Indeed, the voice was almost thunder.

“No!” Rama Tura exploded hastily. “These men are glad to be your servants, O Majii. But they wanted to be sure it was you they served. You see, this world has gotten full of trickery, and things are not always what they seem.”

There was silence. Then came the thunder of the Majii.

“I have arisen from the tomb in which I have lain two score and ten centuries and more,” said the great voice. “Do any of you doubt that.”

No one apparently did, or if they did, neglected the moment to say so.

Without looking the group over in a manner that was apparent, the Majii boomed, “I see among you the Nizam present ruler of my ancient homeland of Jondore. Will he step forward.”

Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore since the death of his half brother, shuffled out a few paces from the group. He showed no great enthusiasm.

“You are of my blood,” said the Majii.

Kadir Lingh was in no hurry in replying.

“So it is said,” he agreed finally.

“You are my servant?” queried the huge voice.

Again Kadir Lingh hesitated.

“I am,” he said.

“It is well,” boomed the Majii. “As one who does what I decree, you will have riches and more power than ever a ruler before you, and everlasting life.”

The Nizam bowed and said, “I am glad.”

But he did not sound glad.

“From my tomb, here, I have sent my other self, my mind, out from time to time to observe the world, and my mind came back to me very depressed,” said the Majii. “It is not well, the things which happen in this world, and least well of all is the manner in which the white man oppresses the brown. And now, lately, my mind has returned, telling me it is time that I arose and led my people to the place they deserve.”

At this point came a pause for the listeners to digest the words.

“To those who help me, riches and power and life always,” continued the Majii. “Will you all help me?”

Every man in the strange tomb room nodded.

“It is well,” rumbled the Majii. “You may go, all but the Nizam, to whom I wish to talk.”

All but Kadir Lingh filed out, plainly a bit anxious to get out of the awful presence. Rama Tura, maker of jewels, was last to go.

Kadir Lingh turned and made sure they were all gone. Then he stamped over in front of the Majii and spoke angry English.

“This damned mumbo-jumbo has gone far enough!” he snapped. “You can’t fool them always with your fakery!”

DOC SAVAGE had retreated to a cross passage when the men left, and he had returned in time to witness and hear what was now happening in the huge-domed chamber.

The Majii’s face was expressionless behind the gold leaf. But he laughed.

“You still insist that I have no powers not held by an ordinary man,” he said.

Kadir Lingh resorted to Jondorean, saying, “I know who you are. I know you are not——”

“Speak English!” snapped the other. “Some fool might overhear us, and few in Jondore can speak English.”

Kadir Lingh changed to English and said, “I have been aiding you in your deception, at least to the extent that I helped you deceive Doc Savage in New York. In return for that, you promised to give up this insane thing which you contemplate.”

The Majii made no reply to that.

“I will give you funds that you may live the rest of your days in luxury,” Kadir Lingh continued. “That is the best way out.”

The Majii rumbled, “You fool! You are not the one to dictate to me!”

“I have aided you that disgrace might not come upon the kingdom of Jondore!” Kadir Lingh shouted angrily. “I will aid you no more. That is final!”

Laughter came from the Majii. Great, ribald, crashing laughter it was, with a very perceptible undertone of viciousness.

“You will do what I say,” he thundered. “I have increased my power in your land until now I am even stronger than you. Only a few of your villages are still faithful, among them the one where my good servant Rama Tura so nearly met his end, only to

have Doc Savage rescue him. And that is another thing. Doc Savage and his aides must die!”

Kadir Lingh put out his jaw and said, “They will not!”

The Majii rocked on his heels and intoned, “You will have to obey me!”

“No,” Kadir Lingh said with finality. “I will broadcast to the world your identity, and the thing you are trying to do, and what you have done.”

Kadir Lingh paused, scowled darkly at the other, and suddenly seemed to come to a snap decision.

“Better than that,” he barked, “I shall seize you and take you with me and unmask you now. I shall tell how you worked the whole incredible scheme!”

Kadir Lingh sprang forward as he spoke. He was attempting to seize the other.

But the Majii must have been expecting something similar, for he dodged the groping hands, and countered with a vicious kick to Kadir Lingh’s middle which sent the ruler of Jondore, gasping and grimacing, to the floor.

Then the Majii whipped out a great, jeweled knife and descended upon the fallen potentate.

DOC SAVAGE pitched from his concealment. He ran as he had run on few other occasions. But the floor was slick, and the distance was great. He would never make it before the Nizam was knifed by the fiendish one in the golden robes and the weird gilt face.

Doc shouted. A crashing, imperative sound. It had to be.

The Majii glanced up, then gave a great leap, not toward Doc, nor exactly away from him, but toward the yellow block from which he had come. He stood erect in the block.

There was a flash, completely blinding. Simultaneously, there was a crash as if a field gun had gone off. It left Doc’s eyes aching and his ears ringing.

And the Majii was nowhere to be seen. He had disappeared. Just how, it was impossible to tell.

Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore, sprang erect from where he had been knocked. But he seemed too dazed to say anything.

Doc Savage ran to the golden block, and looked inside. Strong as was his self-control, he all but recoiled, for there lay in the sarcophagus the same grisly embalmed body which had earlier risen in such uncanny fashion.

There was a death mask of gold leaf over the features, but the visage bore a marked likeness to that of the Majii.

No living body was this thing in the gilt container. That was sure.

Doc Savage drew from his robe a rock which he had brought along as a weapon, and used a sharp edge of this to scrape the yellow block. The huge urn of a thing gave light enough to observe the truth about the block.

It was not gold. It was lead, or a similar substance, gilded.

Then a swarm of brown men came rushing into the place.

THE newcomers were robed in scarlet, and the cut of their garb indicated they were members of some cult, probably the attendants of the tomb.

They carried no firearms, but they did wield knives, very thin-bladed things, literally razor-edged thorns of steel. And there were scores of them.

Kadir Lingh, Nizam of Jondore, came close to Doc Savage.

“Death is before us,” he said. “Be it said that I shall die in company befitting a Nizam.”

Doc said, “Take off your robe and try to whip it into the eyes of the first to arrive, blinding them, and giving you a chance.”

An instant later, the horde was upon them. Strangely enough, the knives were not used, except as a threat to drive them into a corner, after which the blades were unexpectedly put away, and it became a hand-to-hand affair. Such a melee was Doc Savage’s specialty.

But specialty or not, there was a limit to the bronze man’s capabilities. Two score men—his foes numbered that at least—could conceivably bring down an elephant, or the most vicious lion, providing they made the attempt with reckless lack of fear, as these fellows did. Moreover, Doc did not have any of the gadgets which he usually employed with such effectiveness.

They buried him, like ants upon a drop of syrup, and he fought tirelessly, until he was layered over with the bodies of the senseless, but for one that dropped, a dozen seemed to appear—more men were running into the domed chamber from the passages. It was hopeless.

Doc did not exactly give up. They finally got him worn down to the point where they could hold him, by the aid of thongs which they had managed to loop over his limbs.

The room seemed to be full of men, not only the tomb attendants, but the party which Doc had followed here. The latter must have heard the uproar and come back—all but Rama Tura.

One man—he seemed to have higher rank than the others of the tomb guards—sidled to the big yellow metal vase out of which the blue flame came steadily.

He rubbed the vase, somewhat fearfully.

The flash and crash came, and there was standing, as if by magic, the Majii in his yellow casket.

“What is wanted of me?” boomed the great voice of the Majii.

“This prisoner,” a man mumbled. “What shall we do with him?”

“Determine,” commanded the Majii, “just how many knives his body will hold.”

They gathered around the bronze man, crowding somewhat as if anxious to be first to use their knives.

“Place yourselves in line, all but those needed to hold the bronze man,” commanded the Majii. “There is no honor in being first.”

They formed a procession of sorts, all with sharp blades. Carrying knives seemed to be in as much fashion in Jondore as was carrying watches in America.

The first man came to Doc's tightly held figure. The fellow took his time, studying the bronze man.

"Is there honor in being first to kill him?" he queried.

That particular question never did receive an answer. There was a loud clatter of running feet, and a man came tearing wildly into the domed tomb.

This fellow was highly excited. He tried to go to his knees in front of the Majii, and because he did not slacken his speed in time, toppled over and skated along on his nose, then tumbled on his back.

The performance would have been laughable, except that the messenger was undoubtedly bearing some terrible tidings.

The messenger said something in Jondorean. His voice was low, guttural and furiously rapid.

The Majii plainly did not like the news. He gave the bearer of it a resounding kick in the ribs, then came stamping over to Doc Savage.

"What have you done to Rama Tura?" he gritted.

"Made a move," Doc Savage said, "to make my own life worth while to you, and to put a value to you upon the lives of my three aides."

"Your friends!" the Majii snapped. "Orders have been given that they be executed!"

"I think," Doc Savage said, "that they can take care of themselves."

Chapter XVI

THE AIDING LADY

MONK thought the same thing—that he, and Long Tom and Ham in the cistern of a cell which he was guarding, could take care of themselves.

They had been managing it rather credibly, although it was true that there had only been one tense moment, and that when some beetle-browed officer, evidently a captain of the guard or something equivalent, had stalked up and glared down into the cell.

He had, fortunately, been either too proud, or too ugly-tempered to favor Monk with a word, for which Monk had been extraordinarily grateful.

Confidence is a great elixir, especially to those who do not keep too close a guard against its intoxicating qualities. And Monk had never been noted as the possessor of even the minor subduings of an inferiority complex.

That got him a crack over the head. It happened at the end of the passage, when he was spinning to march back in his regular pacing past the cell.

He never did see, until some five minutes later, the thing which had hit him, for the reason that the blow came from behind, and was hard.

The one who had struck Monk down was almost shapeless in an enveloping robe. The attacker now glided down the passage, after securing the padlock key from Monk's prone form—largely by the sense of touch, for it was dark in the underground place.

Reaching the locked door, the assailant opened it, and sent a rope snaking down.

"For the love of mud!" exploded Long Tom, when the rope hit him.

"Well, don't stand there!" snapped Ham. "Obviously, the rope is for us to climb."

They clambered up, not having much difficulty with the job. So dark was the passage that they did not know their rescuer was not Monk, until the individual spoke.

"Where are the two others?" asked the rescuer. "Doc Savage and the one called Monk?"

Had they been hit with hammers, Ham and Long Tom would not have been a great deal more surprised.

"It's a woman!" Ham gasped.

Long Tom, going on the principle that it was best to move and ask questions afterward, suddenly seized the feminine figure. He dragged her toward the nearest light, which happened to be beyond the corner where Monk had been struck down.

They saw Monk, and Ham leaped to his side and started to feel his pulse. Monk sat up, took his wrist out of Ham's fingers, and felt tenderly of his cranium.

"Something's wrong with my head," he mumbled, not yet revived enough to realize what had occurred. "Something is wrong with my head."

"You are finding out about it awfully late in life," Ham told him unkindly.

Long Tom had gotten the woman into the light.

“Hey!” he exploded. “Look who it is!”

Monk peered at his attacker.

“The Ranee,” he gulped.

THE RANEE’S rather entrancing features showed marks of some weeks of worry, as well as the stamp of genuine fear.

“Where is Doc Savage?” she asked.

“Search me,” Monk told her. “He went prowling to see what he could find out.”

“You see,” Ham told the woman dryly, “we are still trying to find out what this is all about.”

“He—Doc—was going to find Kadir Ligh and ask him plenty of questions,” Long Tom contributed.

“If Doc Savage followed Kadir Ligh——” The Ranee wrung her hands instead of finishing. “Then he is at the tomb of the Majii. And no telling what will happen to him there.”

She tugged at their arms, and because there seemed nothing else to do, they followed her. They did not entirely trust the woman, for she had double-crossed them in New York, but she seemed earnest enough now, and she had gotten them from the cistern of a cell, although they could have done that themselves at any time.

“Hurry!” she urged. “Orders came from the tomb of the Majii that you were to be executed immediately. We must get away before the executioners come.”

That put willingness in their legs, and they raced along the passage, keeping up with the woman. They came to the exit, and two unconscious uniformed men were lying there. The Ranee pointed at them.

“They did not suspect me,” she said. “I was able to knock them unconscious.”

They went out into the darkness, and heard horses champing and moving about. The Ranee escorted them directly to the mounts.

“They are fast,” she said. “I intended to have you use them to escape from Jondore. But now we will use them to hunt Doc Savage.”

Monk, mounting his animal, discovered a sizable pack on the back of the rather uncomfortable Jondorean saddle.

“What’s this stuff?” he demanded. “Grub?”

“Partially,” replied the Ranee. “In it, you will also find your belongings which were taken from you when you were captured.”

“You think of everything, don’t you,” Monk told her admiringly.

They mounted and rode, rather slowly at first, taking back streets, then, once they had left the capital city, more swiftly, running their animals whenever the trails permitted.

“You know the way to this Majii’s tomb?” Monk demanded.

“Very well,” the Ranee replied.

Ham spurred up until he was beside the Ranee, and began to put questions to her.

“Just what is behind all of this?” he demanded. “We know it is pretty bad, something that is liable to get a lot of people killed. But beyond that, we’re stumped.”

“I cannot tell you,” the Ranee said promptly.

Ham’s voice took on a sharpness. “But that does not make sense!”

“I will explain,” the Ranee told him. “My explanation may not seem sufficient to you, but to me it is an ample reason.”

“Go ahead,” Ham said with bad grace.

“I love Jondore,” said the Ranee. “I do not want the country disgraced. I do not want—well, certain people also disgraced.”

“That’s no reason,” Ham said.

“The present Nizam, Kadir Lingham, and myself believe we can settle this affair by ourselves, or we have believed it, although I am becoming doubtful,” the Ranee continued, heedless of the interruption. “We deceived you to keep you from learning the real truth which would disgrace us—Jondore.”

“As a reason, that is very thin,” Ham told her.

“I knew you would think that,” she replied. “But if you knew the truth, you would understand.”

There was a certain tenseness, plainly noticeable, in her voice.

Ham began, “But if you would tell us——”

“I will talk no more about it!” she snapped.

And she did not, although Ham did his best to provoke her to speech as they rode through the night. She had not disclosed anything further when they came into a region of rocky peaks and canyons of rather frightening depths.

At last the Ranee pointed to a square block of stone atop a high ridge and said, “There is the tomb of the Majii.”

Monk squinted upward. “Looks kind of spooky.”

“It is probably the most fantastic thing in the world,” the Ranee replied.

“What do you mean?” Ham asked.

“I hope you will never know,” the Ranee told him.

THEY left their horses and climbed, using every precaution toward silence, until at last the block of the tomb towered above them to surprising height, at which point the Ranee stopped them.

“There is one door into the place,” she said. “Sometimes it is guarded, sometimes not. But there are always men inside, men who are descendants of men who have devoted their lives to attending the tomb, to guarding it.”

“The idea is to be careful,” Monk grunted.

“Exactly,” she told them.

They advanced with infinite care, and fifty feet from the circular entrance, discovered two guards at the opening.

“Let me handle this,” Ham breathed.

Ham had brought with him to Jondore two of his sword canes, which were custom made for him abroad. They had been in his pack which had ostensibly contained trade goods, and the Ranee had returned them to him. He carried one as he crept forward.

But, after covering several paces, he got another idea and came back to secure the second sword cane. They were his favorite weapons and he had brought both of them along.

He advanced again, but not too closely. Poising one cane in his arm, he threw it, javelin fashion. He followed it instantly with the second blade. He had carried these weapons in his hands for years; he had practiced countless hours with them. He could do some amazing things with them.

Each look-out was impaled in a leg. Each emitted a startled grunt, which was not extremely loud. Each man bent over to see what had hit him. And both fell over on their faces and apparently went to sleep.

Ham listened for some moments. The grunts had not attracted attention. Monk and the others appeared beside him, and they went in.

Their advance was without incident, and they reached the great-domed room which held the gilt block and the big urn from the top of which played the steady blue flame. They looked the place over, saw no one, and advanced.

The casket was closed, and so fine was the workmanship on it that their first hurried inspection failed to discern the lid.

They went to the big urn, which was far more spectacular.

“What’s this?” Monk demanded.

“It is the lamp of the Majii,” the Ranee breathed hoarsely. “Keep away from it. The horrible thing has burned for centuries. It was built by the Majii himself.”

Monk sniffed.

“I’m chemist enough to know an ordinary vegetable oil flame when I see it,” he said. “That’s some kind of local alcohol burning through a wick.”

He scowled at the big urn.

“And I’m gonna find out what this thing is made of,” he added. “Looks like gold.”

He went over and rubbed the vase vigorously, scratched it with a finger nail.

He got results. There was a flash, an ear-splitting report.

Monk was a score of feet from the vase, running, when his eyes returned to normal after the flash. He peered about. The others had likewise retreated, thinking at first that the blast was some kind of a bomb.

Monk sniffed. The air was filling with an odor. It was not the smell of any burned explosive, but a totally different aroma.

The scent which had accompanied Rama Tura’s jewel-making seances!

THE RANEE cried out, “Flee from this place! That perfume always accompanies the magic of the Majii!”

Doc Savage’s three aides hesitated. They had come this far, and did not wish to depart without learning something.

Then, abruptly, it was too late. Brown men, the tomb attendants and uniformed soldiers of the Nizam, came rushing into the vaulted room.

They were armed, but it must have been some superstitious belief on their part that to fire guns would desecrate the tomb, for they attacked with their bare hands, a procedure that might have been their waterloo, except that they greatly outnumbered those they sought to capture.

As it was, Monk, Ham and Long Tom cut loose with their supermachine pistols—they had been in the group of things returned by the Ranee—and filled the chamber with thunder and metallic capsules containing the chemical that produced senselessness.

Men yelled out. The mercy bullets stung a little when they struck. The machine pistols moaned by spurts, like angry animals. For a moment, the attackers were driven back, completely stopped.

Then there was another of the weird, frightening flash-bang combinations—and the weird figure of the Majii was suddenly standing in his gilt casket, which was now open.

The Majii was an imposing spectacle, especially as he leveled an arm at Monk and the others and held it there. Silence fell for some moments.

Then came the thunderous voice of the strange individual.

“You will become helpless!” boomed the Majii.

What happened then was quite the most astounding thing that ever occurred to Monk, Ham and Long Tom.

They became helpless!

Monk in particular fought vigorously to lift his arms, and getting no response, looked down at them in a futile anger. He tried to get his machine pistol up, tried with all of his will power. The arm moved all of an inch.

“Blazes!” Monk exploded.

Ham said in a strained voice, “This just *couldn't* happen!”

They felt no pain, no discomfort, except the cloying odor of the room in their nostrils. They could think clearly, could understand each other. But they could not make an offensive move.

Behind them, the Ranee choked, “I knew something horrible would happen if we came here. This is the tomb of the Majii.”

The fantastic figure with the thundering voice boomed, “I am the Majii!”

Then the horde of brown men was upon them.

Chapter XVII

ALADDIN'S CAVERN

MONK and his companions were genuinely surprised when they were not killed instantly. But a shout from the Majii saved them, and they were bound securely.

After this, the soldiers were ordered to leave the domed chamber, and they did so, leaving only the regular tomb attendants.

Those who remained seemed quite familiar with the place, and what would come next, for they gathered up Monk, Ham, Long Tom and the Ranee and carried them over to where the Majii stood.

The Majii was not a very distinct figure in the eerie blue light. He leveled an arm at the Ranee.

“For what you have done to-night, you shall die,” he boomed. “You have been important to me, and you could have been important in the future, and profited thereby, but you have forfeited that right.”

The Ranee said nothing.

The Majii spoke in Jondorean, which Doc's three aides could not understand, and one of the tomb attendants moved forward, somewhat fearfully, and gave the vase of the blue light a gingerly rub.

There was the usual prompt flash and crash.

This time, no unexpected figures appeared. Instead, the floor a few yards distant split open—a slab seemed to have fallen out of it. The blue flame showed steps leading downward. They were well-worn steps.

The Majii led the way, and they descended into as remarkable a series of rooms as Monk had ever seen. It was not a cavern, in that it was probably part of the foundation for the big black block that was the tomb.

They first noticed that the rooms were of tremendous size. Then they perceived other things which interested them much more.

The chambers were storerooms. And they were filled almost to capacity.

Monk peered in amazement at the objects.

There were crated airplanes, dismantled, speedy fighting ships—the utmost in modernity, every one. There were guns—light, dangerous field pieces. There were rifles, machine guns, bayonets, small arms. And there were an incredible number of cases of ammunition.

“A regular arsenal,” Monk gulped.

“You will not look at these things,” the Majii commanded.

Monk was baffled, no little scared, when he now found himself unable to examine the objects stored in the stone rooms. It was an inexplicable feeling. He had never obeyed a command so completely before.

They came into a small chamber which was empty, except for two prisoners. Monk peered at these two, and recognized them.

Doc Savage and Kadir Lingh.

DOC SAVAGE, it was starkly evident, had gone through a process of torture. His marvelous body had not been damaged seriously, but he had been beaten, his skin cut and salt rubbed into the wounds, and he had been burned with irons, if the blisters were any indication.

Monk and the others were deposited roughly on the floor, after which the Majii swung over and stood before Doc Savage.

“You will now help Rama Tura!” he grated.

Doc Savage said, “You know what I want first.”

The Majii bowed slightly.

“You want the release of your aides and the Ranee,” he said. “It shall be done. You, yourself will remain here, a hostage, for a period of one year.”

Doc Savage said nothing.

“I will go and have Rama Tura brought to you,” boomed the Majii. “After you help him, your friends will be freed, and escorted to the border.”

The Majii went out, and the tomb attendants accompanied him, closing a heavy iron door behind them.

Doc Savage was bound tightly. It was with difficulty that he managed to roll over and face Monk.

“Can you roll over here, Monk,” he demanded.

Monk put forth a tremendous effort, and hardly stirred.

“I can’t, Doc,” he groaned. “That guy put the jinx on me, or something.”

“How about the rest of you?” Doc demanded.

The others were in the same predicament as Monk.

Doc Savage now began the laborious task of changing his position. It became apparent that he was almost exhausted physically by the torture he had undergone. He took all of three minutes in moving a dozen feet.

But he could now look into Monk’s eyes.

“Monk!” he said sharply. “You are all right now.”

He held Monk’s small eyes for some moments, steadily. Then he repeated his words.

Monk blinked. He managed to sit up.

“Blazes!” he exploded. “You took the jinx off!”

“You were hypnotized,” Doc said. “Roll over here and we will see if we can untie each other.”

Monk hurriedly complied.

“Hypnotized!” he gulped. “Man, oh man! And I was really beginning to think that Majii was some kind of a miracle worker.”

“He comes near being that,” Doc said grimly. “He is a master of hypnotism.”

Monk was working at the bindings.

“But guys have tried to hypnotize me before and didn’t have any luck,” he muttered. “Hypnosis won’t work on anybody who don’t want to be hypnotized.”

“It was that aroma, that vapor in the air,” Doc told him. “You always caught it before Rama Tura and the Majii performed their feats.”

Monk said, “I don’t see what that had to do with it.”

“It is a drug in vapor form,” Doc told him. “It affects the brain like—well, you have seen truth serum render a man incapable of thinking up lies. This stuff renders the brain incapable of resisting hypnotic suggestion.”

Monk’s stubby fingers were strong—he was able, when in form, to accomplish the feat of circus strong men, the bending of silver half dollars in his hands. He was getting the ropes off Doc’s wrists now.

“Hypnotism!” he growled. “That explains a lot of things.”

DOC SAVAGE shook off the ropes, and began to work on his own ankles, while Monk rolled to Long Tom.

“That jewel-making business,” Monk demanded. “Was that hypnotism?”

“It is a wild story,” Doc Savage said. “The Nizam, here, Kadir Lingh, has told me much of it.”

The bronze man spoke rapidly as he freed himself.

“The Majii is trying to stir Jondore into an uprising against the British,” he said. “He has a fanatical hatred of the British. To buy arms and ammunition, he took the wealth of the Nizam. But he dared not sell the jewels in open market, because it would have come to the attention of the British, so he recut them, or ground off the previous cuttings, and sent his lieutenant, Rama Tura, abroad to dispose of them. They chose the fake jewel-making seances as the method.”

Doc got up, began untying Kadir Lingh. Long Tom was free, but unable to move, not yet having been brought out of the Majii’s hypnotic spell.

“Rama Tura used the aromatic vaporized drug,” Doc continued. “With it, he could hypnotize an entire crowd. Rama Tura is also a skilled hypnotist. The ability is not uncommon in this part of the Orient. Rama Tura’s audiences simply believed they saw anything they were told they were seeing. You remember the men who took pictures of the jewel-making seances? They were killed because they had taken pictures that would show Rama Tura as a trickster.”

“But what about the two hospital doctors who were killed in New York?” Monk demanded.

“Rama Tura got rid of every one who might have an idea of what was back of his actions,” Doc replied. “The two physicians, Rama Tura feared, might have learned something from the Rancee.”

Every one was untied now.

Doc Savage aroused Long Tom, Ham and the Rancee simply by telling them they were out from under the spell.

The Ranee gasped, “But I do not understand how you can revive us!”

“You are still hypnotized,” Doc told them. “But this time, you are under my spell.”

Ham added, for the Ranee’s benefit, “Doc studied hypnotism himself. He spent some time in India doing it.”

“Oh.” She seemed slightly dazed. “But in New York, in Rama Tura’s quarters, I saw a horrible monster of a thing——”

“A product of Rama Tura’s hypnotic hold over you,” Doc assured her. “That is one of the possibilities of advanced hypnotism—making the subjects see things which actually do not exist.”

Monk growled, “I’ll make this Majii see things that *do* exist when I get hold of ‘im!”

“You had best stay away from him,” Doc advised.

“Huh?”

“You are still under the effects of that drug,” Doc announced. “Mere contact with the Majii’s presence will put you back in his power.”

“Whew!” Monk exploded. “This is a predicament!”

They moved toward the door.

Ham thought of something.

“Doc,” he said rapidly. “What was that stuff about you doing something for Rama Tura?”

Doc Savage did a rare thing; he almost smiled.

“You recall when Rama Tura was playing the part of the white man, and my donkey jumped against his, and we both fell to the ground, and Rama Tura got up with a cut on his arm, which he thought had been made by my knife?” Doc asked.

“Sure,” said Ham.

“The cut was really the mark of a hypo needle, the scratch of its sharp point,” Doc explained. “The needle administered to Rama Tura a concoction which has caused him to become blind. They have failed to cure him. I happened to be able to do so, knowing what is wrong with him.”

They reached the door.

“So you knew the white man was Rama Tura all the time!” Ham murmured.

“His disguise was not quite perfect enough to get by,” Doc said grimly. “And it was necessary to do something to make those fellows want to keep us alive. Control of Rama Tura’s eyesight did the trick.”

They opened the door.

PANDEMONIUM let loose. The two guards were alert, and the fact that Doc Savage yelled in a perfect imitation of Rama Tura’s voice that seemed to come from behind them, telling them not to fire, delayed them hardly at all.

Long Tom got a bullet through the shoulder. The noise of the shot really did more damage than the bullet itself, for it set off a bedlam of shouting all through the stone rooms.

“Place is alive with ’em!” Monk exploded.

“We’ll try to make it out!” Doc barked.

The two guards were unconscious now. Monk appropriated one of their guns, Long Tom the other. They raced for the steps that led upward to the great-vaulted room.

“This place has been here a long time,” Ham clipped, noting the depth to which the tread of feet had worn the stone steps.

“There is a rather remarkable story behind this place,” Doc told him. “Tell you about it when we have time.”

A squad of three tomb attendants appeared above, and there was a brief exchange of shots and a charge, after which the four were groaning on the floor, wounded, but not fatally, and Doc Savage was running somewhat unsteadily, due to a puncture in his left leg, above the knee. He said nothing of the wound, and the others did not notice in the excitement.

They gained the final steps which led up into the vaulted room.

Doc stopped. He pointed to an elaborate mechanism above.

“The device which opens that crack in the floor,” he said. “You will notice over here, under the block of a coffin, there is another device, by which the Majii moved the embalmed body and got up through. The slab on which the body lies simply drops down.”

Monk exploded, “We hardly got time for details——”

“Wait!” Doc rapped. “In behind somewhere, probably around that corner, must be the apparatus which discharges the vaporized drug into the domed chamber. We want that put out of commission.”

Monk began, “I don’t see——”

“We will come back here with soldiers faithful to Kadir Lingh,” Doc said. “We want to raid the place without danger from that stuff.”

The bronze man started forward. His wounded leg was giving him weakness and agony, and try though he would not to show it, he weaved slightly.

“Doc!” Monk exploded. “You’ve been shot.”

Doc said, “That vapor apparatus must be——”

“I’ll get it,” Monk barked. “I know enough chemistry to recognize the thing when I see it.”

Ham and Long Tom took the two rifles and dashed up into the domed room.

Monk ran in search of the device which dispensed the potent vapor that rendered the minds of victims susceptible to bulldozing by others—which was what it amounted to.

Doc Savage, the Rane and Kadir Lingh awaited Monk’s return. They could not have stood there more than seconds, but it seemed an age.

Then Monk came galloping back.

“Found it!” he squeaked.

Doc began, “Did you——”

“I sure did,” Monk grinned. “That thing won’t work again for a long time! But we gotta blow!”

They “blew.” Up the stairs, into the domed room, which was, to their infinite relief, empty, and across that into the passage that led to the outer darkness. Or perhaps it was dawn now.

They were shot at when they appeared in the round door.

HAM and Long Tom threw themselves flat to return the fire, which was coming from three riflemen in the boulders outside, near the edge of the eminence upon which the black tomb stood. The riflemen, vastly surprised, retreated to the trail and down it to what was evidently a more secure entrenchment.

Doc and his party raced into the boulders—and found themselves stuck there. No other trail, explained Kadir Lingh, led down from the tomb. And the riflemen had blocked this one thoroughly.

They did the only thing left for them to do. They waited.

Back in the tomb, there was a guttural roaring. That would be the pursuit. Before long, it would learn they had gotten out of the tomb, and would converge upon them.

Doc crept to the trail lip, and down it, carrying in his hands two large stones. He had the idea of dislodging the riflemen, but that proved futile, for there was an open stretch in front of them, on which moonlight shone quite brilliantly.

Doc threw the stones, and drew lead unpleasantly close, then crept back to the others. He told them how it stood.

Monk suggested, “Maybe I can get down the cliff. I’ll try it, anyhow, because it’s our——”

“Wait,” Doc said abruptly. “Listen!”

They listened, and heard nothing—which was the important point.

“That noise inside!” Monk barked. “It’s stopped. Them guys are quiet.”

Doc held brief silence, during which his trilling, small and eerie in the moonlight, was audible.

“Monk!” he said sharply.

“Yeah,” said Monk, who was preparing to try the cliff descent.

“That vaporizing drug, unless carefully administered, will undoubtedly cause death,” the bronze man explained. “That is the way of most substances as strong as it must be. If a quantity of it were released at once, it would probably kill all of those in the tomb.”

“Um-m,” Monk muttered.

“What did you do when you found the containers of the stuff and the apparatus for putting small amounts of it into the domed room?” Doc asked.

“Why,” Monk said, “I just busted the jars and let the dope spill out on the floor.”

“You undoubtedly killed them all,” Doc said grimly.

“Uh-huh.” Monk did not manage to sound very sorry. “You gotta admit it was kind of an accident, though.”

Chapter XVIII

THE DEAD MAJII

JUST what had happened inside the tomb was something they evinced no desire to learn immediately, after Doc Savage explained that it would probably take hours for the vapor to drift out.

In the meantime, they sniped with the riflemen on the trail below, and, although they could not get down, neither could any foes come up.

The sun came up in a blaze of blood-red light that was remindful of the events of the night, and from bitter cold, the air turned unpleasantly hot.

“We will go in now,” Doc Savage announced. “At least, we can smell the stuff if it is still there.”

Long Tom and Ham were left with the rifles to hold the trail. Doc, Monk, Kadir Lingh, the Ranee, entered the tomb of the Majii.

And tomb it was, for it had been constructed for death, and it held nothing but death. Some of the Majii’s men had almost reached the outer air, for there were bodies along the passage, numbers of them in the vaulted room, and the others below. Even Monk, who really held some bloodthirsty ideas where enemies such as these were concerned, was appalled somewhat.

“Tough I had to have that accident,” he mumbled.

The Majii and Rama Tura had been together in life; so were they together in death, lying with no more than the length of an arm between their bodies.

The Ranee got in front of the body of the Majii.

“It is better that you do not know,” she said wildly.

Doc Savage spoke to her gently.

“Kadir Lingh has already told me,” he said. “And my men will not talk where it would be better if they kept still. The world will know nothing of this, other than what it already knows.”

The Ranee seemed to think that over. Then she stood aside.

Monk stepped close to the Majii, bent and removed the golden tint on the dead man’s skin. It was not gold leaf, but gilt grease paint, and it came off with some rubbing.

Monk squinted at the visage of the Majii. He scratched his nubbin of a head.

“Huh!” he grunted. “This guy is the fake Nizam who tried to put up a job on us in New York.”

Kadir Lingh spoke up suddenly.

“It is the same man who tried to trap you in New York,” he agreed. “But do not call him the fake Nizam. He was the real Nizam of Jondore.”

Monk had the expression of a man trying to swallow a pill too big for his throat.

“But you are the Nizam,” he said.

Kadir Lingsh shook his head. “I was not as long as that man lived.”

“Listen, fellow,” Monk told him. “You’re making me dizzy.”

“That man,” Kadir Lingsh pointed at the dead Majii, “was my half brother, the Nizam of Jondore whom the world thought had died, but who did not die.”

Monk’s mouth fell open. Without closing it, he said, “I begin to get it.”

“My half brother hated the English, who really control Jondore, because we must have their permission before making any important move,” said Kadir Lingsh. “He wanted to revolt against the English. But they watched him. He needed money to buy arms, and, although he was the richest man in the world, he could do nothing, because the British made him account for his wealth, knowing very well what he wanted to do. So he hit on the very brilliant plan——”

“Of faking his death and stealing his own fortune and converting it for revolt money,” Monk finished. “I see it, all right.”

Doc Savage moved away, leaving Kadir Lingsh and the Ranee explaining that they had given in for a time to the wishes of the dead man because of various reasons—he was the Ranee’s husband, whom she had thought for a time that she still loved, and because the custom of the Orient decrees that a wife shall always subjugate herself to her husband.

Kadir Lingsh had his reasons also, and he had made the mistake of trusting his half brother’s word. In Doc Savage’s New York headquarters, when Kadir Lingsh had come upon his half brother a prisoner in Doc’s secret laboratory room, the half brother had promised to drop the whole thing if Kadir Lingsh would get him back to Jondore. He had not kept his word.

All of that, Doc had heard before, from the lips of Kadir Lingsh, while they were both prisoners of the Majii. It was not pleasant listening, and he cared for no second telling.

He could hear occasional shots as Ham and Long Tom held the trail.

Doc hurried down to the rooms in which the arms were stored and broke open a box, stirring up grayish dust on the floor in the process. The stuff settled on his hands, a grayish film.

It might have been an omen, that gray dust. That, and the sound of distant shots.

As omens, they pointed to the next mystery which was to involve Doc Savage and his aides, an adventure that was to take them into one of the least known and most incredible sections of South America. A region in which war, modern, bloody, had raged for years almost unknown to the world.

But that was a war between nations. The war which Doc Savage was to wage was against an unknown horror, a fantastic thing which preyed upon both warring enemies—and upon those whom Doc Savage knew, his friends. And always was the work of this horror marked in a way that was unmistakable—upon the bodies of the victims was always a gray dust.

Where that gray dust of death came from, no one knew. What it was—that was a problem that led Doc Savage, in its solving, face to face with things such as he had

never dreamed existed.

DOC SAVAGE carried a light machine gun and ammunition out to the edge of the trail, and they set it up, fed the belt into the block, and let loose a burst.

Results were much more than they had hoped for. The riflemen fled—whether from fear, or because their ammunition was low was unimportant.

It became evident that, with the aid of the arms from the tomb, they would be able to fight their way to the capital city, where help from reliable soldiers was certain.

Monk contemplated the black tomb of the Majii before they started down the trail.

“Doc,” he said. “You made a crack about there being a remarkable story behind this place. What is it?”

“The theory came from Kadir Lingh,” Doc said.

“Yeah?” Monk looked interested. “What is it?”

“Remember the story of Aladdin and the Lamp,” Doc asked. “Aladdin rubbed the lamp and a genie appeared and opened a treasure cave.”

Monk said, “But what’s that——” and thought of something and did not finish.

“This tomb of the Majii and its contents are centuries old,” Doc reminded. “Much older than the story of Aladdin and the Lamp. This ancient Majii, ruler of Jondore, is said to have been able to rub that big lamp in the tomb and cause a treasure cave to open.”

“Sure!” Monk exploded. “It was hocus pocus! That stuff in this tomb *did* look old—the mechanism, I mean. And the rooms underneath might be called a cave.”

“Kadir Lingh feels sure this is the real cave of Aladdin,” Doc said.

“We might have trouble proving it,” Monk said.

He scratched his nubbin head.

“Let the dang genie have Aladdin’s cave!” he finished.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Majii* by J. Allan Dunn (as Kenneth Robeson)]