



Doc Savage and his five aids.

They had been moving along a warehouse side, a wall of brick, unbroken by windows or other apertures. The darkness was intense.

Ahead of them, a face had appeared, materializing with an eerie unexpectedness. This was all the more startling, because the darkness was so thick that neither Monk nor Ham could see the other. Yet they saw the face clearly.

It was a fantastic thing, that face. Its color was not human, but a greenish hue, the tint that comes to meat in the first stages of decay. The green countenance shone with a fantastic luminosity; it was not exactly fluorescent, nor did it seem to have a light playing upon it, yet it was plainly visible.

The face had slant eyes, the contour of the Orient, and when it roiled lips back in a grin, the effect was anything but pleasant, for the tongue in the mouth, which should have been in shadow, was as plainly discernible as the other features. It was the same unholy green.

Monk said, "What the devil?" thickly.

Chapter III THE MYSTIC MULLAH TALKS

IT was very silent beside the warehouse, for Monk and Ham were too surprised for further speech. Somewhere near, waves lapped with sounds like women sobbing, and farther away, there was a hissing, as of steam escaping from the boilers of a tugboat. Out in the harbor, whistles and foghorns still made occasional clamor in the thick fog.

The face hung suspended, like something disembodied, for the darkness was too thick to permit Monk and Ham to see the nature of the body to which it was attached. The effect was ghostly.

When the unearthly green lips writhed and words came from the verdant face, both Monk and Ham jumped. They could not help it.

"Try to control your surprise," the voice said.

Monk growled, "What the heck kind of hocus pocus is this, anyhow?"

"Do not jump at conclusions, my friends," said the voice. "You of the Western civilization are too prone to try to make science explain all that you see. You like to call

all exhibitions of the occult by the plain terms of magic, meaning mechanical fakery. You make the mistake of not believing in the occult, the supernatural. Your minds are too practical."

"Jove!" Ham said vaguely. "I do not get this."

Monk grunted, "Why the lecture?"

The voice—it was hollow and unreal—went on.

"You are looking at something now that you do not understand," it said. "You think you see a face. Perhaps you think you see my body. You are wrong. You see neither face nor body."

"Nuts!" Monk felt under an arm where nestled a padded holster holding a machine pistol scarcely larger than an ordinary automatic.

"In a material sense," said the fantastic voice, "you are looking at a nonentity, at nothing. You think you see a face; but actually, there is nothing."

Monk got his machine pistol out, and directed sourly, "All right, I guess half a pound or so of lead won't hurt you, Mr. Nonentity."

"Listen to me," said the voice. "I am the green soul of the Mystic Mullah. I am the master of all souls, the power infinite. I have touched many men, so that they have died and their souls come to me."

Ham unsheathed his sword cane. He preferred the weapon because the tip was coated with a drug concoction which produced a quick, temporary unconsciousness.

The voice of the Mystic Mullah droned on, and there was no perceptible lip motion on the uncanny green face.

"Go back," it said. "Forget what has happened tonight. Forget it so thoroughly that you will not remember to tell this bronze man, Doc Savage."

Monk laughed; he laughed loudly, for somehow it made him feel better to hear the crash of his own false mirth.

Ham said dryly, "Very dramatic, Mr. Green Soul. Our lives are in danger, too, I suppose?"

"Only your physical bodies," said the voice. "Your souls will live on, green, serpentine, ghostly worms that travel in the night and do my bidding."

Monk thought of the green things which Johnny had seen. He began to perspire.

"I died a million years ago, before time began," said the Mystic Mullah. "I do not live,

even now. I tell you to forget. It would be well for you to heed."

"And if we don't?" Monk asked curiously.

"My slaves, the green souls that are like flying serpents, will come to you," said the Mystic Mullah. "Then you will join me."

Out of the side of his mouth, Monk breathed, "Let's take this nut, whoever he is!"

"Righto!" Ham breathed back.

A string of powder blazes came from Monk's machine pistol. They came so swiftly that they resembled a short, solid red rod, and the noise of the remarkable gun was a tremendous bawl of sound.

The greenish lips writhed and the voice said casually, "I am not a being who can be killed."

MONK snorted and waited. He was surprised, but still hopeful. His machine pistol fired mercy bullets, hollow shells filled with a drug which caused unconsciousness without doing permanent damage. That was why he had shot. The slugs would not harm the green-faced one to any extent, and they would teach the fellow a lesson.

But nothing happened. The green face remained suspended where it was.

"Dang it!" Monk ripped, and lunged forward.

The green countenance vanished—simply vanished. It turned slightly as it disappeared, and afterward there was no trace.

Monk fired again. The red blaze from the machine pistol muzzle furnished some light, by which Monk fully expected to see his foe.

His mouth fell open and astonishment came out of his throat in a hacking grunt. There was no one, nothing visible but the brick wall against which the greenish face had been stationed, and on the wall little splashes, wetly glistening, where the mercy bullets had burst.

Ham, lunging in a circle, switched his sword cane. He waved the weapon lightly, so that, if it struck a body, it could cut in only far enough to introduce the stupefying drug. But the blade encountered only the chilly fog and the night.

"Strike a match!" Monk rapped.

Ham did not carry matches, but he produced a jeweled lighter and rasped its tiny flame into being. He cupped it in a palm and

turned slowly, throwing the luminance it made.

Fog streamers, crawling past, lent a spookish aspect to the place, but there was no wraith solid enough to be a human body. Out of the harbor, the foghorns still moaned, but the hissing of steam escaping from the near-by tugboat had stopped.

Ham turned his light upward. The warehouse wall reared sheer, unbroken by windows or other openings, for fully thirty feet above them. It was smooth, too smooth for any man to climb.

"He ducked out," Ham said.

Monk started forward, stopped, stared, and made a gesture at his eyes, as if doubting them. He turned, and Ham, who knew the homely chemist as well as any living man, could not remember when he had seen Monk look so awe-stricken.

"Look!" Monk pointed at the ground.

There was pavement underfoot and along the warehouse wall, but winds, strong down here by the river, had swept dust in and banked it shallowly over the bricks. The fog, the occasional drizzles of rain, had wet this dust, turning it into mud which bore their own footprints distinctly.

But below, where the green face had been, there were no footprints; indeed, there was no mark other than the tiny indentations made by fragments of brick which the mercy bullets had chipped off the warehouse wall.

"Blast it!" Monk said. "*Nobody was standing here!*"

Monk's voice was hollow.

THEY stood there, two very startled men, and the chill wind blew out Ham's lighter and he ignited it again, as if not liking the sudden rush of darkness

Monk wet his lips repeatedly. Their enmity was forgotten; this showed how deeply they were moved, for these two had been known to carry on their perpetual quarrel in the thick of a fight for their lives.

"Blazes!" Monk muttered. "Blazes!"

Ham cleared his throat as if wanting to say something, then did not speak, but raised his lighter again and illuminated their surroundings.

"It was preposterous!" he said.

"Sure," Monk told him slowly. "But explain it. Do that."

The gun muzzles jiggled against his side as the men started. They were surprised, for the bronze giant had spoken their mother language as perfectly as they themselves.

"It was not an idly wagging tongue that said this man knows all things," one of the four muttered. "Even in Asia, few men speak our tongue as well as he does."

"It is said that the man who faces danger quietly lives to face it again," said another. "He is too calm. Watch him closely."

Men began coming down the stairs. They cackled in their excitement. Those who had been hurt were helped by others.

The man who had given orders upstairs faced Doc Savage and showed black teeth. He did not speak at once, but slowly prepared a chew of betel nut, the ingredients for which he drew from a pocket of his neat business suit. The chewing of betel had made his teeth black. He watched closely; and discovering no trace of fear on the bronze giant's features, seemed disgusted.

"A wise man knows when to be frightened," he said.

"There can be fear without shaking and wailing," Doc Savage said in the tongue of Tanan.

"You are a strange one," said the man in English. "I can understand why the Mystic Mullah should come from the other side of the world to dispose of you before you heard the story of the Khan Shar and the white woman, Joan Lyndell."

"I am curious about this Mystic Mullah," the bronze man stated quietly. "Who is he?"

"He was dead and sat for a thousand years in one spot, thinking," the other said matter of factly. "He knows all things and can do all things. After he had meditated, he detached his spirit from himself and sent it to earth, to Tanan, to enlighten men and lead them to their proper destiny."

"You," Doc Savage told him, "sound like a coolie who has partaken too freely of the product of the poppy."

The other smiled fiercely. "The Mystic Mullah is greater than the Genghis Khan, greater even than Allah, or Buddha. Beside him, Confucius was as the child scholar who puzzles over his first books. These things, you will learn."

"Here in America, they have a word for such talk," said the bronze man.

"What is it?"

"Hokum!" answered the bronze man.

All of the men were down from upstairs now. They had gathered in a close ring. None of them had faces of morons. Rather, their features were those of intelligent men. But they were also the faces of killers, men who took life for a purpose they considered right and just.

"Watch!" rapped the bronze man.

He lifted both hands above his head, began to knot and unknit the fingers in a slow, fantastic fashion.

"Stop it!" grated the chief of the brown-skinned men. His eyes were on Doc's hands. So were the eyes of his companions. They could not understand it.

Nor did Doc expect them to understand. The strange movements of his hands were simply to draw their attention from his feet as he stepped on one heel with the toe of the other foot and strained. The heel of his shoe was dislodged so easily that it was evident it was equipped with some type of hinge. A yellowish powder spilled out, making a small mound on the floor.

Doc stepped back, turned half around, put his hands over his face and bent double.

There was a terrific, eye-hurting white light. A *pop* of sound accompanied it, not unlike the setting off of a photographer's flash light gun. The light burned for perhaps a full two seconds, dense white smoke pouring from the mound of powder. The light went out.

Only then did guns begin going off.

IT was too late. Doc Savage had lunged with the first burst of light. He knew what would happen. The chemical mixture was infinitely stronger than magnesium; it made a light so strong that it produced almost complete blindness for a few moments. The stuff was ignited by a small pellet of another chemical compound which burst into flame shortly after it was exposed to the air.

The brown men milled about, cursing in their dialect. Fully twenty shots were fired wildly. Two men fell, knocked down by the bullets of their fellows.

Doc Savage did not linger, or try to make any capture. The blindness would not last long enough for that. It was momentary, as if a flashlight had been splashed into eyes accustomed to intense darkness.

The tracks ended on the sidewalk. Across the curb there were other marks, made by automobile tires. These were still practically dry, the moisture having been forced aside by the weight of the car. The machine had left only a moment ago. It must have had a quiet engine not to be heard inside the abandoned factory,

The brown men of Tanan were yelling; some dashed out and splattered their flashlights in the alley, then came running toward where Doc stood.

The bronze man faded away into the damp night. He reached the main thoroughfare, turned north two blocks, then went one west. It was there that the Khan Nadir Shar and the girl should have waited in the sedan.

Doc found the sedan. It was dark, with the headlights and the dome light extinguished. He stopped a few yards away, listened, then went on. He did not call out. He splashed his own flash beam into the machine.

There was only a body inside, a body with a twisted, grotesquely broken neck. It was the skeleton-thin man who had claimed he was a ham actor hired to play the part of William Harper Littlejohn.

Of the Khan Nadir Shar and Joan Lyndell there was no trace.

Chapter VI THE RESCUED MAN

DOC SAVAGE looked the sedan over closely, noting engine and license numbers, the make of the tires, the location of the inevitable dents in the fenders. Probably it was a stolen machine.

Down the street, the brown-skinned Tananese were pushing a speedy search. In the distance, a police siren was making up-roar; it seemed to come closer, an indication that the shooting inside the abandoned factory had attracted attention.

The Tananese apparently heard the siren, but were so unfamiliar with American life that they failed to realize what it was until the very closeness of the eerie whine told them it was bound for this spot. Then they scattered, scuttling away like frightened rats.

Doc Savage himself eased away. He wished to learn more about the Mystic Mullah before giving any information to the police. A

moment later, the bronze man reached his roadster.

It was a long car, manufactured by a concern noted for the long life of its machines. It would take an experienced observer to tell that the machine was armor-plated.

Seating himself behind the wheel, Doc Savage drew on a peculiar looking pair of overgrown goggles. The lenses of these were considerably larger but of the same shape as condensed milk cans. He shifted tiny switches on the goggle affair and they began to make a faint whizzing. This was barely audible.

Doc next flicked a switch on the dash. To one standing near by, it would have seemed that nothing happened. Certainly no visible lights came on.

But to Doc Savage, wearing the strange goggles, a stretch ahead of the car had become illuminated with an unearthly distinctness. It was not like ordinary light, this luminance. Objects stood out in stark high lights and shadows and there was no sense of color. It was as if everything had taken on varied shades of black and white.

The effect was produced by an infra-ray projector mounted forward of the hood. The infra-light was ordinarily invisible to the unaided eye, and its use in headlights was made possible only by the intricate goggles which the bronze man wore.

It was by use of this invisible light that the bronze man had been able to follow the girl and the Khan Nadir Shar.

The roadster ran with the silence of a ghost through the darkened streets, wheeled to the left and sought an even more secluded district.

It was raining again, another of the brief flurries which had been prevalent all evening. The wet drops, striking the bronze man's uncovered head, ran off with the peculiar effect of water shedding from the back of a waterfowl. The rain seemed to bother him not at all.

He clicked switches concealed under the dash, and a radio loud-speaker began to spew metallic static. From a concealed hook, the bronze man lifted a microphone, a sensitive instrument with an enclosing mouthpiece so constructed that, by holding it close to the lips, one could speak without bystanders hearing.

"Any luck?" he asked, then listened to the radio speaker.

man who had fired at the motorcycle cop. "The tiger will come again by another route."

"He is a greater fool who kills the cub of the tiger," retorted the other. "The police of these white devil ghosts are a bad tiger."

Monk, who rode in the same car, his head encased in a gunnysack, growled, "If I ever get loose, I'm gonna make somebody think tiger!"

A man leaned forward, selected the spot in the sack where Monk's nose should be, and tapped with a hard brown fist. The homely chemist bawled out and tried to kick, using both of his feet, which were now bound together. There was some excitement while he was beaten to the point where he concluded it was the better course to submit to his captors.

By that time, the cars had stopped.

"It is a wise leopard who changes his spots," stated one of the captors.

They unloaded from the two machines. Men went carefully over the cars with handkerchiefs, rubbing vigorously to remove finger prints. Then they advanced on foot.

Ahead, there was a traffic light which still functioned, although the traffic was very light. The Orientals scattered themselves and became lost in the darkness, dragging their prisoners along with them.

A moment later a motorist, stopping for the red light, got quite a shock when brown men suddenly descended upon him from either side, menacing with their thin-barreled guns. The motorist, not being devoid of sense, put up his hands. He was hauled out, struck over the head repeatedly until he was thoroughly senseless, then tossed behind a near-by wooden fence.

Within the next ten minutes, a second motorist met an identical fate.

The brown men loaded into the cars thus obtained and drove off. Their pace was now decorous, so as not to cause a repetition of the motorcycle cop incident.

It rained again, more violently this time, so that water stood in a sheet over the streets and ran mad torrents in the gutters. Traffic policemen were grotesque black figures in their raincoats and cap shields.

Monk and Ham were kept out of sight, and by now were gagged so effectively that they could make no noise audible outside the cars. The brown Tananese were unusually silent.

They drove down, finally, on a steep road that led to the bank of the Hudson, below Riverside Drive. Monk and Ham were hauled out, their ankles untied; gun muzzles forced them to walk ahead. They came to a large, shadowy building, on which a man played a flashlight, disclosing a sign that read:

CLOSED
BY ORDER OF PARK COMMISSION

The building behind the sign was soundless, and the flash beam, roving, picked up a name painted over the door:

COASTAL YACHT CLUB

A brown Tananese called out softly; a voice answered from the door, and they all filed inside. Monk and Ham were now unhooded and ungagged.

Great red welts were to be seen across the hands and faces of the two prisoners. These stood out like streaks of scarlet grease paint, when bathed by the occasional dabbling touch of a roving flashlight beam.

The brown men arrayed themselves along one wall, opposite a blank wall, and turned out their lights. The darkness became like a black solid. They waited for a moment in silence. Then one spoke hollowly, dramatically, after the manner of one expecting something momentous.

"We wait your presence, O One Who Died Before Time Began," he said.

And the strange voice which Monk and Ham had heard earlier in the night near the water front, said, "My green soul is with you. It will take the visible form of a face."

MONK, hearing that, gave a violent start and rolled his eyes toward the source of the voice. Locating it, he started again and blinked incredulously.

Across the room, fully twenty feet distant, was a face, a grisly, luminous visage, its hue a bilious green. The liniments were, weirdly enough, now scarcely suggestive of an Oriental countenance. The mouth opened and the tongue was like a pale, vague tendril of flame behind the uncannily glowing teeth. The whole effect was that of a luminous ghost.

of a gray, the tint that comes over a corpse after death. The effect upon the brown skins was hideous.

"We are dying, and yet we live!" a man groaned.

Several planted clasped fists against their foreheads and began to call loudly upon their ancestors. Their voices trembled with the fright that the onrush of gray color was bringing. It was the spokesman, obviously the most alert-minded of the lot, who spoke up loudly.

"Offspring of donkeys!" he growled. "This is the hand of the Mystic Mullah, whose powers no man can comprehend. He has seen fit to give us the skins of the white devil ghosts, that we may better serve him without attracting attention."

"Truly the ways of Hm Who Has Existed A Thousand Thousand Years are marvelous," murmured another, relieved.

Monk stared at them. His little eyes were bright in their pits of gristle. He looked at his own hands. They, too, were assuming an unholy gray tint.

Monk made a noisy laughing sound through his nose.

Chapter VIII THE WISE GUY

WILLIAM HARPER LITTLEJOHN spun his monocle so that its black ribbon wrapped around his finger, bandage fashion, then unwound it with a backward movement. His finger seemed but a linkage of bone with a thin skin painted on.

"Indicative omens point to the reanimation of the individual shortly," he said.

"Hurrah!" Renny said gloomily "Those are the smallest words you have used in the last half hour."

Long Tom, who was guiding their car through the fog and the rain, only frowned and rubbed a faint fog off the inside of the windshield with a palm.

Doc Savage was working over the lean, thin-waisted man whom they had rescued from the brown-skinned fiends of Tanan. His exploring fingers had located numerous head bruises which might have come from clubbing guns. It must have been the compounded effect of these, coupled with the excitement of

the rescue, which had caused the man to pass out.

Doc had been administering restoratives for some time, but the man was only now showing signs of returning consciousness. He stirred, a little animation came into his fingers and his mouth fell open. Then his eyelids came apart.

"He is not human," he said.

His words were distinct. He had a nice voice.

"Not human," he mumbled again.

Johnny, Renny and Long Tom exchanged glances. Doc's features remained inscrutable.

"Who you talkin' about?" Renny rumbled.

The thin-waisted man squirmed about and finally managed to prop himself erect by using his arms as rigid stilts. He shut his eyes with great force several times, opening them wide after each pinching effort.

"*Whew!*" he muttered. "My head!"

Renny got down in front of him, his long face violent above an outthrust jaw, and growled, "Who were you mumblin' about when you woke up?"

"The Mystic Mullah," said the other distinctly. "Who the deuce are you?"

Then he rolled his eyes again, swiped his lips with his tongue and, quite suddenly, lay back in the car seat.

"Halleluia!" he said dryly. "We are saved!"

Long Tom took his eyes off the road long enough to say, "Sounds like he's nuts."

Doc Savage watched the thin-waisted man closely and asked, "What day of the week is this?"

"Wednesday," said the other man. "Granting of course that it is now past midnight. Haven't you more sensible questions?"

"His head is clear enough," Doc said. "What is your name?"

"It might be Mohammed, or Little Boy Blue, or Columbus," said the stranger. "But, of course, it's not."

Renny blocked out a big fist, held it close to the man's head, and head and fist did not differ greatly in size.

The stranger looked at the knuckles almost against his nose, let his jaw down in mock wonder, and asked, "What on earth is that?"

"That's what cracks wise-crackers," Renny told him. "Now are you gonna talk



Knife point traveling at blinding speed, one of the knives hit Doc almost in the pit of the stomach.

Doc watched the man's face. It was as devoid of expression as any he had ever seen, and Doc had made an intensive study of the tricks emotions play on faces.

"So far," Doc said, "I have only been endeavoring to aid my men. I was thrust into this. There has been no explanation of what it is all about."

"Are you going to help Joan Lyndell?" asked the man.

"I help only those who deserve it," Doc countered.

The man said jerkily, "Then you will not help her."

"Why not?"

"She is the Mystic Mullah," said the stranger bluntly.

DOC put questions, but the stranger closed up and fell back upon his facetious manner of answering questions. He remarked that the air was bracing; that he was hungry; that the river was beautiful with the morning sun upon it—and he would not commit himself beyond that.

He did not try to get out of the car as Doc drove north toward the abandoned yacht club. He refused twice to give his name. But that information was forthcoming when they reached the yacht club.

The Khan Nadir Shar came striding to meet Doc. The tattooed serpent design was brazen upon the Oriental potentate's forehead, and he looked very healthy, very powerful.

The Khan did not see the thin man in Doc's car until he was close. Sight of the fellow caused him to wrench up abruptly. His hand drifted to a pocket, flicked in, and came out with a gun which he must have taken from one of the unconscious Tananese.

"So you succeeded," he said distinctly, carefully.

"What do you mean?" Doc asked.

The Khan bobbed his hook-nosed head at the stranger.

"Oscar Gibson," he said.

"Is that his name?" Doc queried.

"It is," the Khan nodded.

"You know his business?" Doc demanded.

"Many men know that—to their sorrow," said the Khan. "This man is—"

"It's a damned lie!" Oscar Gibson rapped suddenly.

"This man is an agent of the Mystic Mullah!" continued the Khan.

"A lie!" exploded Gibson. "It cannot be proved!"

The Khan's forehead grew red and angry around the tattoo mark which marked him as the divinely ordained ruler of Tanan, a monarch who possessed absolute power over his subjects, as had his royal ancestors for many generations before him.

"This man knows who the Mystic Mullah is—if the creature is actually a living being, or perhaps I should say, living beast," the Khan said crisply. "It was in my capital city of Tanan that suspicion first shadowed his path, and my soldiers seized him. He told them he was an agent of the Mystic Mullah. Then he—escaped."

Oscar Gibson made a snarling sound. His hands whipped to his breast and tore at his shirt and undershirt. Opening them, his chest was revealed. His torso was hideous. Instead of skin, there was a nodular expanse of scar tissue.

"Coals from camp fires," gritted Gibson. "They dropped them on me, glowing red—hot, one at a time! I told them what they wanted to hear, not the truth."

"My chief, Mihafi, was in charge of the soldiers who seized you," the Khan told Gibson precisely. "Mihafi said there was no torture."

"A lie!" Gibson snapped. "Mihafi lied!"

Doc Savage looked at Gibson intently.

"A few minutes ago, you gave me the name of the person who is the Mystic Mullah," he said. "Have you any proof of that?"

"Only conviction," said Gibson; "nothing else."

The Khan's voice became suddenly shrill.

"Who did he name?" he demanded.

Doc Savage seemed not to hear, but walked toward the yacht club and around it until he saw the girl, Joan Lyndell.

THEY worked together, the three men, transferring Joan Lyndell and the Tananese into the yacht club, for it was possible that some curious person might sight the prone, motionless forms, if they were left outside, and call the police.

Doc Savage administered restoratives to the bleached, brown men in quick succession, first tying them securely, so that they

horse power and all labored in unison, hurling the big ship ahead at a speed which very seldom fell below two hundred miles an hour. A time or two, when the ship was very high, seeking out stratospheric air currents that were favorable, the speed had been far above three hundred an hour.

The wings of the ship were streamlined into the fuselage; the landing wheels drew up in the hull, also shaped so as to serve as a big pontoon for landing on water; and nowhere did a strut or a brace wire show outside the streamlining.

It was quite in the cabin, almost unnaturally so. The brawl of the big engines was but a peaceful murmur. The silencing job on that cabin was remarkable. Aeronautical engineers had come from some of the world's most advanced plants to inspect it.

It was warm in the cabin, too, warm, although there was snow below, vast whitenesses of it. It seemed as if the plane had shifted to another world, for there were no rivers visible on this terrain below, no mountains. There was only smooth whiteness.

Had the ship dropped to a lower altitude, however, the ground would have taken on some resemblance to an earthy domain, for this was tundra below, the amazing expanse of near-swamp which covers parts of Siberia.

Renny was at the plane controls, nursing the air-speed meter, endeavoring to get it up a bit higher without racing the motors unnecessarily.

Monk and Ham, as usual, were quarreling.

"You missing link!" Ham snarled. "I'll cut you open and see if you look any more like a human inside than you do on the outside!"

The slender, waspish lawyer carried a sword cane, not the one with which he had started out to investigate the tug *Whale of Gotham* in New York, for that one had been lost. This weapon was one from a stock of spares which Ham kept in his club apartment.

Monk, the homely chemist, scowled fiercely at Ham.

"Just a big mouth and a lot of noise," he sneered. "You keep your hands off that hog, or I'll give you a good wringing and hang you up to dry."

Between the two belligerents, an interested observer to the argument, was Monk's pet pig, Habeas Corpus. Habeas had been named in a manner calculated to aggravate

Ham. He was a remarkable specimen of the porker race, this Habeas Corpus. He was predominately ears, with a generous proportioning of snout and legs, the rest of him being thin and scrawny.

Habeas Corpus and Monk had joined company in Arabia so many months ago that it was by now evident that the shote would never grow much larger. He ate prodigiously without gaining an ounce. But Habeas had also demonstrated that, as a mental specimen, he was no ordinary porker. He learned tricks with the ease of a show dog, and Monk spent most of his spare time training the shote.

The immediate cause of Monk and Ham's quarrel was certain damage Habeas Corpus had done to Ham's immaculate traveling bag. Habeas had gnawed practically the entire end out of the cowskin bag.

"Habeas don't like cows," Monk explained. "When you pick your next bag, don't have it made of cowskin."

"It'll probably be pigskin," Ham gritted, and eyed Habeas meaningly.

The plane hit a down current and pitched sickeningly, so that they all were forced to grasp the arm rests of the seats to retain their positions.

"Such flying," Ham said.

Renny called, "You start razzing me and I'll pick your arms and legs off."

The Khan Nadir Shar looked on with drowsy interest. He had been a long time without sleep and he seemed on the point of dropping off.

Joan Lyndell sat across from Oscar Gibson, and they both looked straight ahead, neither giving attention to the other or even acting as if the other existed.

Renny made some calculations, put figures and words on a paper and passed it back.

"There's our position," he advised. "We'll have to land in Novo Sibirsk for refueling."

DOC SAVAGE, secluded in the rear of the plane, received the message without comment, read it, then advised, "Better radio ahead so that gasoline will be ready."

"You think the Mystic Mullah's men are still ahead of us?" Renny called.

"That is difficult to say," Doc replied. "They had fast planes."

Doc and his men had made inquiries before taking off from New York and had learned that two planes laden with the brown men of Tanan had actually taken off from a Gotham airport. The ships had been heard from in Nova Scotia; they had landed in Iceland, and had refueled at the point of guns. Next word of them had come from Finland, where they had again refueled by force. It was that phantom trail which Doc Savage was following.

That the Tananese were still ahead, Doc had reason to believe, for his own ship, delayed in starting some hours, had hit bad weather which the other craft must have missed. The North Atlantic had been disturbed, and there had been head winds, even up into the lower stratosphere as far as the big speed plane could penetrate.

The bronze man closed the door of the compartment in the rear of the plane and continued what he had been doing—taking his exercises. These exercises, over a period of years, were entirely responsible for his amazing physical development. He had been taking them now for almost two hours, and not yet was he done. He had gone through the same intensive routine each day since childhood. Not only did Doc develop his muscles, but his five senses as well, using complicated apparatus for that purpose.

The aluminum hue lent by the chemical bleaching agent had faded, allowing Doc's bronze color to return.

Doc was completing his exercises when the plane tilted sharply and the changed note of the motors indicated a descent. He left the compartment and went forward.

"Novo Sibirsk," Renny said.

NOVO SIBIRSK, situated, on the navigable Ob River, was a typical metropolis of southern Siberia. The river was off to the left now, with its nine spans plainly distinguishable, and the thin thread of the Trans-Siberian railway stretching away into the infinite distance. There were large buildings below, grain elevators and flour mills, probably, and everywhere was a bright newness. Columns of smoke curled up from the iron smelting plants.

Renny cut the motors and opened the cabin windows in order to see better. At a very low altitude, they scudded over the fringe

of the town. They were so low that the odor of a tannery was plainly distinguishable as they glided above it.

The airport appeared, its modernity a mark of the industrial efforts of the Soviets. The hangars were substantial, and snowplows had boosted the field clear of deeper drifts. The air lashing in through the plane windows was bitterly cold.

Renny cranked the landing wheels out of their streamlined recesses and planted the ship with a skilled ease on the field. Whooping gusts from the propellers pulled the plane toward the hangars and the little flags on flexible staffs which marked the location of the gas tanks.

Renny cut the motors when close to the hangars. In the silence, the snow squealed under the wheels; it wailed louder when he applied the brakes, and the craft came to a stop.

Monk arose, stretched his furry arms and announced, "I'm gonna stoke the human machine with some food."

He opened the cabin door.

Out of the near-by hangar popped a squad of men. They held rifles. Obviously they had been concealed, awaiting the moment the plane would stop.

"Something wrong!" Renny rapped.

He snapped on the ignition switches, made passes at the starter buttons. The hot motors crashed into life. The plane veered around, began moving.

To the right, the left, on the front and rear, men sprang out of the huge piles of snow which tractors had pushed aside from the airport runways. They gripped the ends of thin wire cables. They yanked these, disclosing the fact the cables were buried in the snow. The men, tugging on them, got them waist-high and in the plane's path.

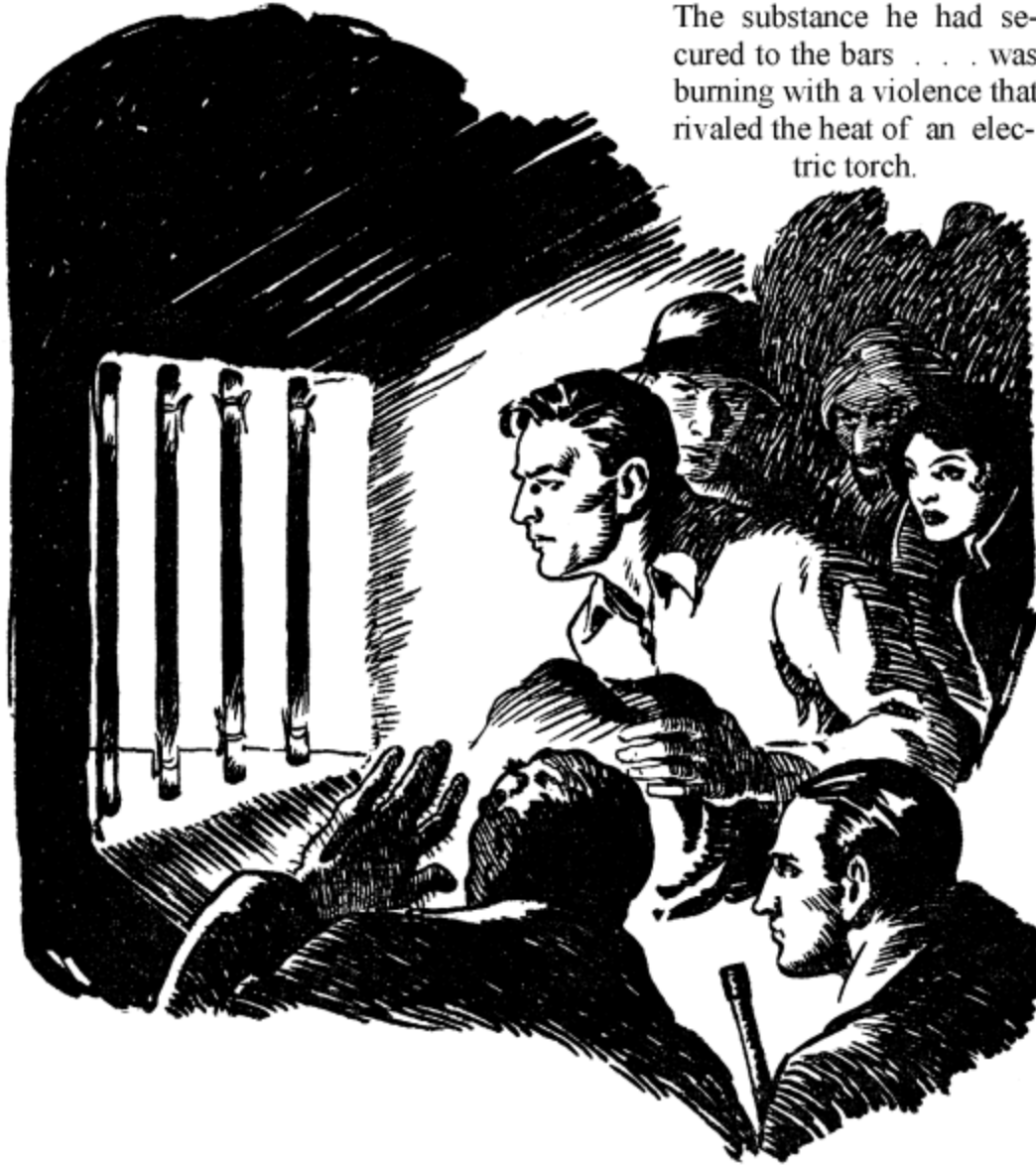
One cable snagged across the landing wheels, high enough that it was above the streamlined pants, where it would not slip off.

"They can't hold us!" Renny boomed.

He was wrong. The men did not depend on physical strength alone to hold the plane; for they tied the ends of the wire cables around steel rods which had been previously driven into the frozen earth.

There was a jar as the plane snubbed against the lines. The cable gave a little, the spring effect cushioning the shock of the stoppage. Then the big ship lay helpless.

Doc backed away. . . .
The substance he had secured to the bars . . . was burning with a violence that rivaled the heat of an electric torch.



“A mixture of aluminum powder and iron oxide,” Monk told her. “It is used in welding, principally. That necktie lining was impregnated with the aluminum powder, and the buttons were the oxide. There were some other chemicals mixed in with it to make it more efficient than ordinary thermit. It generates a terrific heat when it burns.”

Doc Savage was balling his coat about his hands, forming a pad. Using this as a protection, he lunged at the bars. These were white hot at the ends, red in the middle, and were bending slightly of their own weight.

His impact against the first bar caused it to break. He knocked the second one out.

Using the coat, he brushed the thermit and molten steel away, as much of it as he could. Then he threw the coat over the glowing bar ends, and before it burned through or burst into flame, scrambled over and got into the tunnellope aperture of the window.

He knocked the glass from the outer end. There was snow heaped on the sill. He scooped that up in his hands and used it to cool the bar ends so that the others could clamber up.

THE prison, although its interior was modern, had been built centuries ago, possi-

himself. Oscar Gibson, the remarkable young American who was a high Soviet secret service official, verified this.

"The girl dictates the Khan's policies of government," he advised. "The Khan is a nice enough old war horse, but he is no statesman. The girl could buy and sell him a dozen times. Her private force of company guards, organized to protect the caravans which she sends into the wild mountain regions to trade with the savage tribesmen, is a larger force than the Khan's own army, and better equipped."

"Yet you said she was the Mystic Mullah," Doc reminded him. "What made you say that?"

"I might have been mistaken. I will know when I find out if her father really died of a broken neck, like the Mystic Mullah's victims." After that, Gibson clipped his lips together tightly.

A band of Joan Lyndell's company guards met them at the young woman's private flying field. There were nearly four hundred of them, and they marched with a precision that aroused the appreciation of Renny, who had an eye for military things.

Joan Lyndell herself retired to the compartment at the rear of the plane, and when she reappeared, she wore the garb of a Tananese woman of royal descent. The attire was exotic, consisting of an embroidered satin jacket embellished with silver and gold, and a rather voluminous skirt, with a sash of incredibly brilliant green. There was a head-dress equally as elaborate, a resplendent affair with jewels and entwining gold wire. And she had affixed rather enormous earrings to her ear lobes.

"You are a knockout!" Monk told her.

"When in Tanan, it is better to dress as the Tananese do," she said. "You would be well to take that advice yourselves."

TWO hours later, Monk was holding his sides, laughing. His mirth was hysterical, and finally he sat down weakly.

"What the well-dressed lawyer will wear!" he choked, "What a picture you are!"

Ham scowled blackly. He had just donned the clothing of a Tananese gentleman, which consisted principally of more than a dozen square yards of coarse cloth draped about his person in folds. He had tried various methods of folding. Now he glared at Monk

and demanded, "How do they keep these things on?"

"Darned if I know," Monk told him. "I used safety pins."

A part of their equipment, they discovered, was a short sword, and they had noted that the Tananese wore these, not in the conventional fashion dangling at the side, but strapped directly across the stomach, where it interfered with the operation of both arms.

The door opened unexpectedly. Both Monk and Ham whirled. The pig, Habeas Corpus, squealed and scooted under a low bench.

The individual who had entered the room was both huge and unprepossessing of feature. His skin was brown, scarred, his lips thick, and he walked with a pronounced limp. He carried two swords across his middle instead of one, the hilts projecting on either side where they could be grasped conveniently.

"*Sabah el-kheyr!*" he roared.

"No savvy," Monk growled. "And who the heck are you to come busting in here? How'd you like to have a taste of your own ears?"

"That is no way to speak to a Tananese who merely greeted you with the top of the morning," the newcomer said dryly.

Monk swallowed twice, then exploded, "Doc!"

"Think the disguise will do?" Doc asked.

Monk grinned. "What's first on the program?"

"I am going out and roam through the streets," Doc advised. "Renny is going to serve as personal bodyguard to the Khan Nadir Shar for the time being. You two will go everywhere with Joan Lyndell, when she is not in her private quarters."

Monk snorted, "Am I going to find that job hard to take!"

Ham suggested hopefully, "Maybe Monk had better guard Oscar Gibson."

"My pal," Monk growled. "I oughta shake you out of the bundle of cloth you're wearing for a suit."

Doc Savage, his personality completely submerged in the Tananese disguise which he had donned, passed out through the door. His stride even matched the shuffling gait of the lower class of Tananese, a gait which had come of years of climbing mountains and of following slow-moving yaks.

Monk and Ham, their unusual garments—garment, rather—adjusted to the demands of propriety, if not to their own satisfaction, shuffled off and found Joan Lyndell. They were, at present, in her home.

The young woman occupied an exquisitely carved, throne-like chair on a raised dais which stood in the center of an enormous room, the walls of which were hung with tapestries.

She was holding a sort of court, a steady stream of Tananese passing before her, each sinking to his knees and touching his head to the floor, then speaking rapidly, or answering questions which the young woman put to them in the native tongue of Tanan.

Not all of the men spoke Tananese, however. Two or three individuals, instead of touching their heads to the floor, merely stuck out their tongues as far as they could. This, Monk and Ham knew, was a form of Tibetan greeting, and they recognized that these men spoke Tibetan.

Joan Lyndell answered them smoothly in their own language, and Monk and Ham, who comprehended that language, realized that these were representatives of the girl's trading company, reporting conditions to their chief.

Behind Joan Lyndell sat two stenographers, taking down the important details of what was said.

There finally came a man who made a report that, from the girl's expression, was very disturbing.

SHE turned to Monk and Ham.

"One of my trusted officers, a man occupying a position to correspond with that of a vice president in an American company, has been absent from Tanan during the time I myself was gone," she advised meaningly. "He returned only today."

Ham had scorned the blunt Tananese sword which had been furnished with his native garb. He wore his own sword cane belted across the front of his stomach, instead of the other weapon.

"You think he might be one of the Mystic Mullah's men who was in New York?" he asked.

"Those men were killers," said the girl. "This man is not that type. He is Shallalah El Auwal, a man whose ancestors have been chieftains as far back as Tanan history goes.

If he went to New York, it is reasonably certain that he is the Mystic Mullah."

"What are we going to do about it?" Monk asked grimly.

"We will go and speak with this Shallalah El Auwal," Joan Lyndell said grimly. "Where is Doc Savage?"

"Out looking around," Monk advised.

"Then we will go alone," said the young woman.

The "alone" proved to be somewhat exaggerated. Fully two hundred heavily armed guards accompanied them, surrounding them, and a party went on ahead, heating drums, shouting and jostling the ordinary citizenry into side streets.

But through the pomp and noise, Monk and Ham could see things. Tanan was a city of terror. Children are usually present in the streets of Oriental cities, hordes of ragged urchins being the rule. There were none abroad here. Nor were there any women out. All of the men to be seen were heavily armed, and more than one slunk away in a manner which showed a guilty conscience.

There was something else which smashed home the grisly nature of the situation. At frequent intervals along the streets there were piles of stones, these being surrounded with prayer wheels which spun noisily with every vagrant breeze.

Atop each mound lay a body, and in each case, the dead man had a broken neck. Some of the corpses had been on their strange biers a number of days, judging from their bloated aspect.

"They started putting the bodies in the streets while the Khan Nadir Shar was gone," Joan Lyndell said hoarsely. "They say that the Mystic Mullah decreed that this was to be done, on pain that the relatives of the dead man would also die. The true motive, of course, was to add to the spell of horror which the Mystic Mullah has been building up.

"The Khan has ordered it stopped, and the bodies removed. They do not seem to be removing them, however. And that makes me afraid that an uprising is close at hand, when the Mystic Mullah will try to seize the government."

"People in Tanan continued to die while the Mystic Mullah was in New York?" Monk asked wonderingly.

"Yes." The girl nodded. "And they say the Mullah also appeared here each day, before different persons."

“But he couldn’t if he was in—” Monk shook his head, let that sentence go unfinished, and said, “It beats me!”

THAT Shallalah El Auwal was a personage of importance was evident from the magnificence of his dwelling and the number of his retainers. The palatial residence covered some acres, being situated inside a courtyard which was circled by numerous small houses.

“It is the custom in Tanan, as in many Oriental countries, for all the poor relatives of a rich man to come and live with him,” Joan Lyndell explained. “The poor relations occupy the small dwellings.”

Shallalah El Auwal himself, it developed, lived in the glittering edifice set in the central portion of the court. Joan Lyndell directed her cavalcade toward this.

“If the guy is the Mystic Mullah, we’d better be careful,” Ham suggested.

“We will be careful,” the girl agreed.

She gave orders, and her men spread out, encircling the central dwelling. Monk and Ham eyed the girl’s personal guards distrustfully, however, for they could detect a certain slouchiness in their manner, a surly undercurrent which indicated that they were not to be depended upon too greatly.

“Bet about half of them mugs have gone over to the Mystic Mullah,” Monk breathed.

“It looks like this whole thing is a powder keg,” Ham said, forgetting himself so much as to agree with Monk.

Unexpectedly, from within the house of Shallalah El Auwal a great babble of yelling arose. There were screams, wails. Gongs clanged.

“I figured there’d be trouble,” Monk announced grimly. “They’re gettin’ ready to put up a scrap.”

“Wait!” Joan Lyndell said sharply. “Something has happened!”

She ran forward, stopped just before the door of the house, and called out sharply and repeatedly until she got an answer. Then she came back to Monk and Ham.

“We misjudged the Shallalah El Auwal,” she said slowly.

“Whatcha mean?” Monk demanded.

“He is dead,” said Joan Lyndell.

THE uproar in the house of unfortunate Shallalah El Auwal was getting louder, coming nearer the door. Soon a procession appeared, several men coming first, carrying a ponderous platform affair upon which rested the body of a man.

“It is Shallalah El Auwal,” Joan Lyndell affirmed, then turned so as to look away from the corpse.

A man came up to the young woman and spoke rapidly. Joan heard him through, then translated for the benefit of Monk and Ham.

“Shallalah El Auwal was threatened by the Mystic Mullah, who demanded all of his wealth,” she explained. “Shallalah El Auwal hid himself away, letting it be said that he was absent from Tanan. Today, one of the mountain chiefs sent him a present of a pretty dancing girl, and her charms caused him to show himself. That was his death.”

“His neck is not broken,” Monk decided after eyeing the dead man again. “What killed him?”

“A human spider,” Joan Lyndell replied. “Huh?” Monk was puzzled.

“Listen,” said the girl. “They are bringing the spider now.”

A group of screaming women appeared at the door, and after some struggling about, got themselves outside. They numbered nearly a dozen.

“The wives and dancing girls of Shallalah El Auwal,” Joan Lyndell offered.

The excited women were doing a strange thing. Each held the end of a long rope. These radiated from a common center like spokes from a wheel. At the central focus point of the ropes, an extremely pretty young Tananese girl was tied. Her clothing was torn, and she was bruised; cuts in her smooth brown skin dripped scarlet.

One of the wives holding the ropes dug a cobble out of the courtyard and hurled it at the girl prisoner. It struck and bounced off with a sickening thud. Another of the wives drew a knife, screamed madly and dashed forward.

“Blazes!” Monk gulped. “That ain’t no way to act!”

He started forward, roaring, and brushed through the fringe of wives until he reached the woman with the knife. There was a brief flurry, during which Monk, trying to be gentle, all but got stabbed; but the homely chemist secured the knife. Then he sprang

IT was fully fifteen minutes later, and they were still searching, when the Khan Nadir Shar joined them. He looked worried and he was heavily armed, attended by a group of personal guards, huge fellows. Some one had told him of the uproar, he declared, adding that his own quarters on the other side of *yamen* were virtually soundproof and he had not heard the tumult.

Doc's men recited rapidly what had happened, and the Khan heard them through with an expression of growing horror on his hawklike face.

"This is very bad," he groaned. "The white woman, Joan Lyndell, was one of my staunchest supporters and most trusted advisors. She had an influence in Tanan equal, if not exceeding, my own."

They searched further, but finding no trace of Joan Lyndell or her captors, returned in the direction of the young woman's quarters.

"Holy cow!" Renny exploded when they came within sight of the door and that portion of the corridor in which the fight had taken place.

The corridor was empty of Mihafi's followers who had dropped in the fray. There had been bloodstains on the corridor floor. These were now gone.

"But, blast it, them guys couldn't have walked off!" Monk growled. "And some of 'em got cut up pretty bad. What's become of the blood?"

The door of Joan Lyndell's chambers opened, and to their utter astonishment, the young woman herself appeared. She was entrancing in a robe of silk.

"What has happened?" she asked.

Monk let his jaw down on his chest as he stared at her.

"How'd you get loose?" he demanded.

"Get loose?" Joan Lyndell shook her head slowly. "I don't understand."

"Huh!" Monk strode swiftly to her, shoved past and looked over the room beyond, lifting tapestries, peering into recesses, until he was sure no one was there forcing the girl to speak in the manner she did.

"What is the meaning of this?" the young woman demanded sharply.

"After Mihafi carried you off, how'd you get loose?" Monk questioned.

"Mihafi?" Joan Lyndell shook her head. "I never saw him. He certainly did not carry

me anywhere. I have been asleep. Your noise here in the corridor awakened me."

Doc's three men exchanged bewildered looks, then shifted glances to the corridor itself, which was so mysteriously empty of bodies and bloodstains. There was nothing to show that the fight and the kidnaping of the girl was anything more than an evil trick of their imaginations.

Joan Lyndell stood perfectly still, relaxed, and there was certainly no fear upon her face. In fact, she was smiling slightly, as if she believed the whole affair were some kind of a joke.

"Are you sure you are not suffering from hallucinations?" she asked.

Monk absently felt of his machine pistol, then drew it out and, examining it, saw that the ammo drum was well over half empty. It had been full at nightfall.

"I dunno," he muttered. "It depends on what it takes to make a hallucination."

AFTER the girl had returned to her chambers, Monk, Ham and Renny stood for a time and conversed with the Khan Nadir Shar.

"It is very mysterious," said the Khan.

"Mysterious, hell!" Renny thumped. "It's downright impossible! It couldn't have happened!"

"Many fantastic things are caused to happen by this Mystic Mullah," advised the Khan. "Perhaps there was no fight and no capture of Joan Lyndell."

Ham touched his hip where the knife blade had slit the cloth.

"If it was a dream, it was entirely too lifelike," he said, grimly.

The Khan shook his head slowly and muttered, "Sometimes I wonder if this monster, the Mystic Mullah, is really not what he claims to be—one who lived and died before time began, and whose soul has existed through the ages, absorbing the knowledge of all infinity."

"Nuts!" Monk said. "That whole idea is cuckoo. It *couldn't* happen."

"Nor does it seem that you could indulge in a fight when there was seemingly no fight," murmured the Khan.

Shortly afterward, the Khan retired in the direction of his rooms, accompanied by his guard of huge dark men, and Monk, Ham and Renny moved in the direction of their own

quarters. They wanted to discuss the affair privately.

Doc Savage was there, much to their pleased surprise. The bronze man was somewhat disheveled, as if he had moved about a great deal.

"Find Long Tom and Johnny?" Monk asked eagerly.

Doc shook a slow negative. "The best I could do was to pick up rumors of two white devil ghosts who are being held by the faithful of the Mystic Mullah," he said. "That will be Long Tom and Johnny. But I could get no definite line on them."

"Tough!" Monk muttered.

Doc said, "You fellows look a little strange? What is wrong?"

So they told him what had happened, dwelling particularly on details of the fight outside the girl's room, as if they wanted to impress upon the bronze man that the fray could not have been a dream.

"How do you explain it, Doc?" Monk finished.

"Go to sleep," the bronze man suggested. "Forget about it. Get some rest, and we'll tackle this thing in the morning."

Renny boomed, "But Long Tom and Johnny—"

"The Mystic Mullah will have to make some move before we can get a line on them," Doc said. "Turn in, you fellows."

They turned in.

HAM, who was somewhat of a nervous man, was a light sleeper. It must have been well past midnight when he awakened, for the air had turned bitterly cold, and the noise of the Tananese gathered around the *yamen* had died away.

Knowing something must have awakened him, Ham gripped his sword cane, with which he habitually slept when in danger, and lifted quietly on an elbow. He suspected that the noise had been made by Habeas Corpus. The pig had an aggravating habit of dragging Ham's shoes away, to chew on during the night.

But Habeas had not made the noise. There was a stirring in the darkness across the room. A vague shape took form before Ham's staring eyes. It changed position, moving out into a ray of moonlight.

Ham all hut shouted aloud, so great was his shock. He stared more intently, won-

dering if he could be mistaken. But the features of the marauder were outlined with perfect distinctness.

It was Joan Lyndell.

The young woman walked slowly, making little noise. She was headed directly across the room—and Ham, shifting his stare, saw Doc Savage seated on a pile of rags, his back to the wall. The bronze man's head was tilted forward and he appeared to be asleep. The girl was making furtively toward him.

Amazement held Ham motionless and silent for the moment. Then he shifted cautiously, moving back the felt coverings of his couch. For greater warmth, he had gone to bed fully attired. But his feet were bare and the utter coldness of the floor caused him to shiver. Or perhaps it was the attitude of the girl.

She was half crouching now, and her hands were out before her, fingers distended in resemblance of claws. She was staring at Doc steadily.

She came into another shaft of moonlight, and her shapely form stood out in brilliant silver. She leaned forward and seemed to set herself.

"Doc!" Ham screeched. "Look out!"

Had the bronze man been asleep, it was doubtful if he would have escaped. But Ham knew, even as he yelled, that Doc was only feigning slumber, for the bronze man moved with incredible speed, not changing the position of his body, but shooting up his hands and grasping the wrists of the girl.

The next instant, Ham had reached them and was helping hold Joan Lyndell. The girl struggled violently for a moment, then became quiescent in their grip. She did not cry out. Her exquisite face showed no emotion whatever.

Ham shuddered violently and choked out, "Look at her finger nails! That dark yellow stuff under them!"

Monk and Renny came stumbling in, weapons in hand, blinking sleep away.

"What's goin' on here?" Monk barked.

"Joan Lyndell," Ham said thickly, "is a human spider!"

THE shock of the announcement held Monk and Renny speechless for a time. Indeed, they did not show full belief until they came over and inspected the young woman's finger nails and saw the deposit of poison.

Doc Savage is not as dumb as we figured. He's suspicious. You are to hide me out."

The man inside said something that was inaudible.

"Well, wait until you get word from the Mystic Mullah if you don't believe it!" Gibson snapped.

After that, the man to whom Gibson was talking stepped out where he could be seen plainly. He was a broad figure in a leather *pushtin*, with numerous bandoleers of cartridges slung about his chest. He had an utterly ferocious face.

"Mihafi!" Monk grunted. "What do you know about that? The lug is still in the castle!"

Gibson and Mihafi strode along the corridor. There was now nothing particularly furtive about their manner, and this caused Ham to surmise grimly, "I'll bet half the castle guard are in with the Mystic Mullah."

Mihafi opened a door, stood aside to let Gibson through, then followed himself. He left the door open.

Monk and Ham put on a little speed, considering themselves hot on the trail that would lead to the Mystic Mullah. Their enthusiasm possibly made them somewhat careless. They listened at the door, heard distant footsteps of two men, then stepped boldly through.

It is almost impossible for a fully clothed man to move in the darkness without making some slight sounds. Folds of clothing are almost sure to rub together. So when men leaped upon Monk and Ham, they had a split-second warning.

Monk howled at the top of his voice. He always howled when he fought. Simultaneous with the howl, he ducked and lunged forward. His arching fist hit hard bones thinly padded with flesh.

Ham was cautious enough to have his sword cane already unsheathed. He lashed it out like a whip. A man screamed terribly and the blade bedded itself deeply enough that it had to be yanked free.

A terrific blow smashed Monk's back. It was caused by a man, jumping feet-first. The homely chemist went down. Men piled upon him, jumping, stamping.

Monk's methods in a free-for-all were remarkable. He grabbed a leg, and taking a lesson from the alligator, spun around and around. He held the leg tightly. The victim tried to turn. He failed, screeched; his leg bones gave with a distinct snap.

A gun went off, its flame a red spurt. Masonry, lead-loosened, clicked on the floor. Some one fell on Monk's face, stifling his yells. Two more men got his feet.

About the same time, a flying wedge hit Ham. He slashed one down with his sword cane. Weight of numbers bore him back. He tripped over a fallen form. The floor was very hard when he hit it.

Furious blows rapped. Men grunted. Monk moaned under the chest that was mashed against his face. After that, there was only the breathing of men who had worked violently.

"Excellent work!" said Oscar Gibson's voice. "But it was a bit noisy."

THE shot had carried through the *yamen*, and excited cries were now heard. Feet pounded as a man came running. Evidently he was not one of the Mystic Mullah's henchmen, because he stopped the instant a tallow candle was lighted and the glow fell upon the scene.

"*Wallah!*" he bawled, then whirled and fled.

The Mystic Mullah's men cursed, and four shots were fired by the one who had the gun. All four missed. The gun man swore and ran into the light of the candle, reloading.

The gunman was Oscar Gibson.

The *yamen* guard, who had happened upon the scene, got away, thanks to the running ability of a jack rabbit. He must have learned his lesson, because he did not cry out an alarm. He reached the old, cold part of the castle, still traveling at headlong speed, and there he crashed into Doc Savage.

"What is it?" the bronze man demanded in Tananese.

The frightened guard told his story by gasps.

Renny galloped up in time to get a gesture from Doc. They left the scared guard and raced for the scene of the combat. There was a good deal of shouting now, and men ran about, gripping their short swords, carrying candles or small copper pans of tallow in which a twist of felt burned.

Doc Savage reached the spot where Monk and Ham had fallen. He found the rock fragments which the bullet had chipped from the wall. That alone told him he was on the spot—that, and when he turned a flashlight

on the floor, traces of wet crimson which had been wiped up too hastily.

Of the victims and their captors, there was no sign. Doc moved about, questioning guards, but could find no one who knew anything and would admit it.

Renny rumbled angrily. They were completely checkmated. He continued to rumble as they made their way back through the big throne room where the air was full of sandalwood.

Electric lights were burning now. They had been switched on by the guards. Doc Savage halted suddenly and collared one of the *yamen* sentries.

"Where does the power for these lights come from?" he asked, speaking Tananese.

"From a round, fat, black monster who rumbles and whose veins pump an invisible fire that burns the unwary," explained the guard.

"It comes from a generator," Doc translated for Renny's benefit.

The big-fisted engineer was not interested in the electric plant.

"Wonder if Joan Lyndell is safe?" he rumbled. "Maybe we'd better check up on her."

Doc nodded, and they sought out the young woman's quarters in the frigid portion of the *yamen*. There was no answer to their knock on her door, and the panel, which should have been locked, gave under their shove.

"Probably she's out seeing what the shooting was about," Renny said.

Then his long, gloomy face slackened, his huge hands strayed in small aimless gestures, and he tried to make words that seemed to refuse to form.

Joan Lyndell's automatic pistol lay on the floor. Near it was a torn half of blanket, and close to that a blanket strip which had been rent from the other portion. It was such a strip as might have been left over when several were torn to bind the young woman.

"The Khan!" Renny roared.

Doc Savage was already racing in the direction of Khan Nadir Shar's apartments. Long before they reached the door, they saw a guard sprawled in the hall, his head split open.

Inside the Khan's chambers there was some confusion, enough to show there had been a fight, and a little blood was red and wet on the floor. The Khan was not there.

"Doc!" Renny growled. "There's just you and me now!"

THEY were still standing there when some of the *yamen* guards arrived and discovered that the Khan was missing. Instead of wailing out the Asiatic method of expressing sorrow, they seemed happy over the event. Several showed white teeth in wide grins.

They did not grin so widely when Renny showed them the business end of a machine pistol. They knew what the weapon was, and permitted themselves to be herded into the Khan's apartments, where Doc used a hypodermic needle on each; they all went to sleep shortly. Doc hauled the body of the murdered guard inside, then closed the door of the Khan's quarters and made it tight.

"This whole thing will blow wide open the minute it is learned the Khan has disappeared," he surmised.

"Yeah," Renny agreed. "He and the girl were all that kept the Mystic Mullah from taking over things. I think it was the girl more than the Khan."

"Listen," Doc suggested.

A window was undoubtedly open somewhere near, and they could hear an ugly babble of sound—shouts, cries, the hammering of drums. They sought a balcony which projected above the frozen moat far below, and looked out into the brilliant moonlight of the late night.

The multitude about the *yamen* had aroused itself, had picked up its arms and was preparing to do something. The crowd was closer to the walls than earlier in the night. Occasionally a gun went off, or an arrow, launched hard, slithered along the stone walls or split its shaft.

The cries of the throng were for the most part unintelligible because of their intermingling, but now and then one yell did stand out.

"The Khan is dead, his soul now one of the green slaves of the Mystic Mullah!" was one of the cries.

"The female white devil ghost, Joan Lyndell, is no more!" was another yell.

The throng milled about, and big two-man muzzle-loaders went off, vomiting volumes of smoke; archers sent more arrows.

Watching closely, Doc and Monk discerned men going through the crowd, howling

and screaming and shoving persons about, and by their very vehemence, getting the mob into some resemblance of a fighting array. These organizers—agitators, too, judging from their howling—were undoubtedly chosen of the Mystic Mullah.

From the peak turret of the *yamen*, a powerful electric searchlight came on, a startling and modern thing in this mad scene of almost medieval confusion. Its beam stirred about like a rigid white finger, and superstitious Tananese fled from it wildly at first, as if fearing its white magic; then, finding themselves caught in it and unharmed, they jumped up and down, beating their chests and squawling, grown both brave and angry.

But the searchlight beam seemed to turn a light on Doc Savage's agile mind.

"Come on!" he rapped.

THE bronze man ran back into the endless stone passages of the vast *yamen*, descended steps that were centuries old, and sought about until he found a fat castle servitor.

"Electric generator!" Doc rapped. "Where is it?"

The flunky batted scared eyes and shook his head.

"The fat iron monster who roars and pumps invisible fire through his veins," Doc said. "Where does he lurk, this monster?"

The lackey got that, waved his arms and erupted a gibberish volley.

"Show me!" Doc clipped.

The plump vassal was none too willing, but a look at the giant bronze man showed him what course was wise, and he led the way at a waddling gallop.

They went through the throne room where sandalwood was cloying in their nostrils, and shortly beyond, were guided into a steep stairs which led down. They could hear, once heavy wooden doors were opened, the rumble of a steam turbine and electric generator, both of which seemed to need new bearings.

"Good!" Doc said, and dismissed the domestic, much to the fellow's relief.

The bronze man went back to the throne room. He made a circle of the place, eyes busy. Renny watched him, coughing a little because the smell of sandalwood was so stifling. The stuff came from a brass affair near the throne and Renny finally moved over

and dropped a rug upon the source of the perfume.

The odor was even stronger near the throne, and Renny, looking up, saw that the stuff escaped through a round ventilating aperture above. This was open and he could see cold-looking stars through it.

Doc came to his side.

"So you've got the idea," he said.

"Huh?" Renny was bewildered. "What idea?"

"Remember what Joan Lyndell said about the place where she was hypnotized?" Doc asked.

Renny scratched his head.

"You mean about the steady thunder and the odor of—Holy Cow!" Renny's mouth fell open, snapped shut. "Whenever the door of the place opened, she could smell sandalwood! She must have been right in here!"

"No," Doc said. "The sound of the generators cannot be heard here. That must have been the steady thunder which she heard."

"Sure!" Renny roared. "Sure! Why didn't I think of that?"

Doc waved an arm. "Get back."

Wonderingly, Renny retreated from the vicinity of the great throne.

"The odor of sandalwood is strongest around the throne," Doc said. "There must be a secret door leading into an underground room such as the one which holds the generator. And it is probably close to that perfume box you just covered up."

Doc dipped into a pocket and brought out two grenades not greatly larger than pigeon eggs. Renny saw them, and promptly whirled and ran to get farther away. He knew what those grenades would do.

Doc hurled the first one. The flash hurt their eyes; the roar hurt their ears even more. The elaborate floor split. The rich rags gathered up in the great wind of the blast and piled against the walls; one sailed up as if attached to invisible strings and skittered about in the air.

Running forward, Doc saw that the grenade had opened no secret entrance. He retreated and threw another. Huge blocks of the roof came down. The floor split wider, and Doc, racing ahead again, looked down into one of the cracks and saw that it had opened in the roof of a passage.

He dropped down into the black maw. Renny followed him. Behind them, parts of

into the wall opening. “Probably the stuff is squirted from some kind of a pump gun. That would give the snakelike effect.”

Renny roared, “But they’re bigger now!”

“Which means the pump was ruptured by the grenade, possibly,” Doc said.

They drove their lights into the aperture. The green, smokelike cloud of poison vapor filled all of the passage beyond the hole, but through its transparent body they could see a sprawled form, a figure enfolded in rich clothing.

It was impossible, however, to make out the features. But Renny boomed a guess.

“The Mystic Mullah!” he thumped. “The guy got his own medicine!”

THE streamers of green poison were fanning out into the room. Moreover, yells indicated an approaching attack. So Doc and Renny spun and raced on in pursuit of the two brown men who had fled.

Near the door, Renny tangled in an affair of wires, and fell back. He got up, growling, and turned his light on the contrivance.

“Blazes!” he gulped. “Here’s how he stuck that green face around and made it disappear!”

The thing Renny had fallen over must have been blown across the room by the grenade blast. It was such a device as fake spiritualists and magicians sometimes use to make luminous heads appear in thin air—a telescoping tube of some length, to the end of which was fixed a thin-walled rubber balloon face which could be inflated by blowing through the tube; then, by suction, drawn back into the tube, and the telescoping affair collapsed. Manipulation of thin threads caused the appearance of lip motion.

Renny threw it aside, scowling as he recalled his own horror when he had first seen the thing in action.

They went on. Some one shot at them with one of the Tananese-made guns, but did not hit them, and Renny poured a deafening volley from his machine pistol. An instant later, they were in hand-to-hand conflict with four or five Tananese.

The latter were under an enormous handicap, in that they possessed, for light, only pans of tallow in which felt wicks burned. The flashlights in the hands of Doc and Renny blinded the others, and they did not last long.

Renny pumped mercy bullets into the fourth man, and Doc sank the fifth senseless with a tremendous fist smash.

They ran ahead, came unexpectedly into a chamber which was illuminated a pale pink by a heating brazier.

On the floor reposed tightly bound figures, mouths stuffed with wads of cloth. The apish Monk was nearest, and Ham was behind him, trying to free the homely chemist; beyond them were Joan Lyndell, Johnny, Long Tom and Oscar Gibson.

There were none of the Mystic Mullah’s men left in the room.

Doc and Renny went to work untying the prisoners, and there was much pointless shouting, largely to let off steam.

Monk, rearing up on his feet, glared at Oscar Gibson and howled, “You got us into this, you smart-cracker!”

Gibson said wearily, “I was desperate. I tried to trick Mihafi into taking me to the Mystic Mullah. How was I to know you were following me?”

“That reminds me!” Ham snapped. “Where’s Mihafi?”

They did not learn the answer to that until some five minutes later, when Renny ventured back to the room where the green poison vapor had appeared, and finding the vapor had strained out through ventilating apertures, stepped in and looked closely and long at the face of the Mystic Mullah.

He came back looking stunned.

“Mihafi is in there with him, down the passage a bit,” Renny mumbled. “Say, did you know that the Mystic Mullah was—”

“He showed himself to us,” Joan Lyndell put in jerkily. “And he made it clear why he had become the Mystic Mullah. He felt his power slipping. He was afraid I would eventually become the real power in Tanan. So he began operating as the Mystic Mullah to fight me—and to satisfy his desire for a great empire.”

“Holy cow!” Renny muttered, “I didn’t dream the Mystic Mullah was the Khan Nadir Shar.”

THEY did not think they were remotely near a complete escape from their difficulties, for the populace of Tanan was laying siege to the *yamen*; but, as it developed, the situation was not serious.

