

Lost Legions of Carthage by LEROY YERXA

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ADVENTURES

JUNE
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GENIE OF BAGDAD

by WILLIAM P.
McGIVERN

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ADVENTURES

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GENIE OF



BY WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN

**It is a far cry to ancient Bagdad,
yet at this Washington Ball it was only
a few steps—through an ordinary door. . !**

DRAKE MASTERSON stood up and smiled with pleasure when Sharon Ward entered the room. Most men did so and he was no exception to the rule.

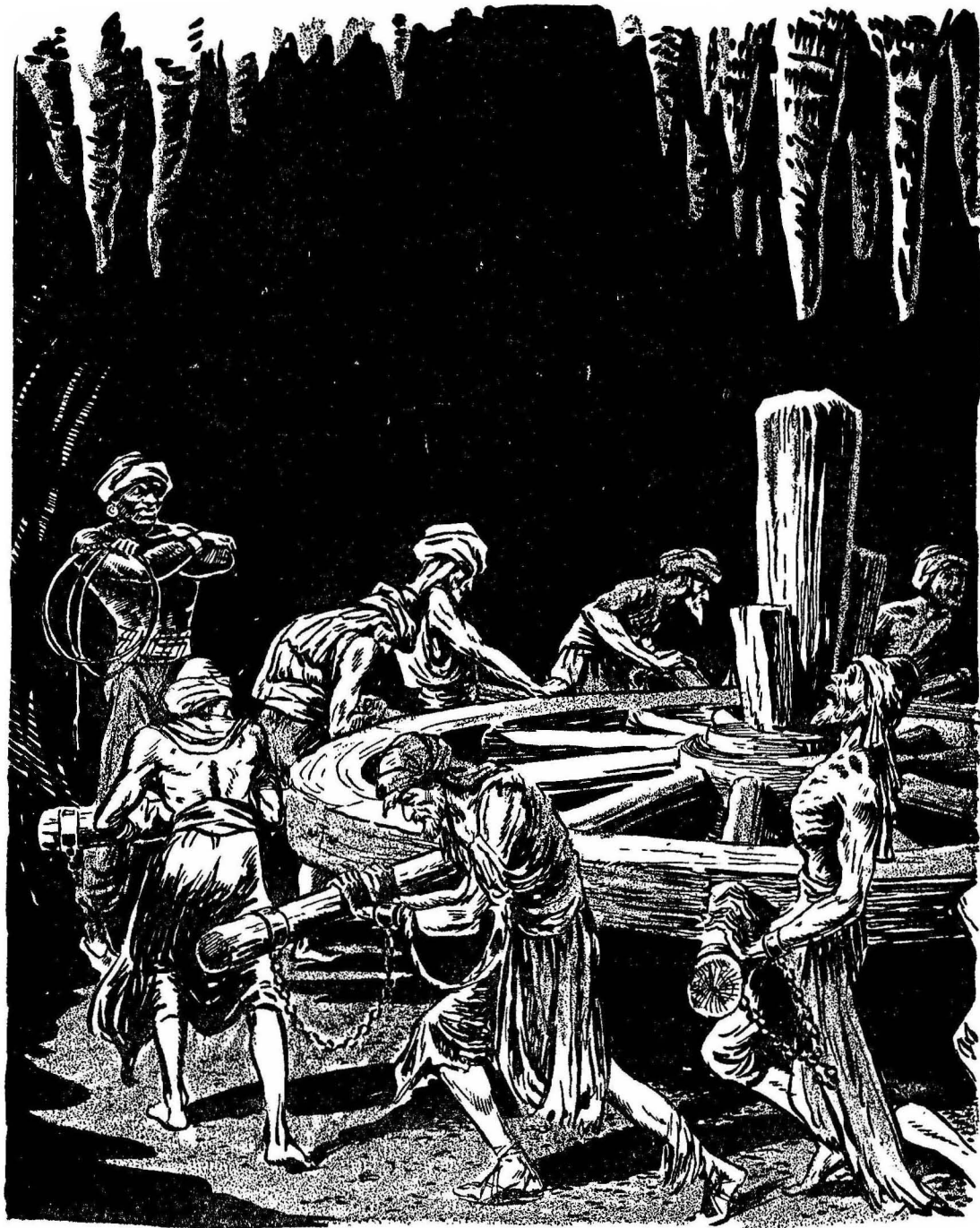
Sharon was a tall, stunningly built creature with a mane of bright red hair that fell to her bare shoulders in dramatically effective waves. Her eyes

were green in the exciting pallor of her face but when she smiled it was like flashing on a light in a dark room.

"Hello, Drake," she said, crossing the long, luxuriously furnished drawing room of her apartment with lithe grace. "Did I keep you waiting?"

Drake put down his drink and took one of her outstretched hands.

BAGDAD



A dozen wretched human figures toiled at the cruel wheel

"Not long." His eyes went over her appreciatively. She was wearing a strapless evening gown that fitted her slim body like a crimson sheath. "Anyway," he grinned, "it was worth it."

"A pretty speech," Sharon murmured. She straightened his white tie slightly and flicked an imaginary speck of dust from the shining satin lapels of his dress coat. "It deserves another. You look like the ideal career diplomat, smooth, immaculate and imperturbable. Do you have the blueprints of our latest battleship tucked away in your breast pocket? That's all you need."

"Hardly," Drake smiled, "since the blueprints of a battleship weigh about two thousand pounds. But I might have a code message or two around somewhere." His grey eyes crinkled at the corners and his lean, dark face was amused. "Will that do?"

"Perfectly," Sharon said. "And maybe we'll meet a spy in a black net dress at the party tonight who'll slip you a Micky and vanish with your code messages tucked down the bosom of her dress. That's still the traditional place of concealment, isn't it?"

"You've got me there," Drake said. "You've obviously read more spy stories than I have." He glanced at his watch. "Would you like a cigarette before we leave? We've just about got time."

Sharon nodded and took a cigarette from the silver case he extended.

"What kind of an affair is tonight's going to be?" she asked.

"Just a routine reception for the Turkish minister," Drake answered. "There'll be quite a crowd. Large sprinkling of important gentlemen from the East who are here on lend-lease business; our own representatives and Britain's. That's about all."

He lit Sharon's cigarette and his own, returned the lighter to his pocket and

smiled at the girl.

"You look a bit worried. Anything wrong?"

SHARON made an impatient gesture with her cigarette and strolled to the windows that overlooked the row of vast white government buildings. She cupped her elbow in the palm of her right hand and stared moodily at the scene.

"I don't know what's wrong with me," she said at last. "Probably just nerves." She blew a thick column of blue smoke toward the ceiling and then turned suddenly to face Drake. "It's just that I feel so damn useless," she said. "I'd like to be doing something important in this war instead of drifting around with the rest of the Washington butterflies." Her eyes were bitter and dark against the pallor of her cheeks. "I missed the Air Transport because—"

"I know," Drake interrupted with a grin. "You missed because your license was torn up by the civil commission for stunting at five hundred feet and endangering lives and property!"

"Oh, I know all that," Sharon said, "but you'd think they'd overlook it in times like these." She crushed out her cigarette with a vicious gesture. "I'm so bored and disgusted with myself I feel I'm losing my mind."

"Well we're all in the same boat," Drake said seriously. "I don't like Washington any more than you do, but my job happens to be here for the time being."

Sharon smiled faintly. "You're just trying to make me feel good by comparing your set-up with mine. You're in diplomacy and attached to one of the hottest departments in the capitol. Why, you've got your finger on the pulse of the East, the most dynamic section of the world today."

"Still," Drake shrugged, "I'd rather be out where the action is. They could get some octogenarian to handle my work and let me get out where I could do something a little more definite."

"Now you're just being silly," Sharon said impatiently. She put another cigarette in her mouth with a quick, decisive gesture. "You're one of the foremost authorities in the world on Oriental languages. Why should the government let you go out and get your head blown off?"

Drake smiled at her vehemence.

"You'd think I was absolutely irreplaceable to hear you talk," he said.

"Well, you're good," Sharon said stubbornly. She grinned suddenly and her entire face kindled. "You must be. You taught me Arabic and that would qualify anyone as an expert."

"I guess you've got me there," Drake said. He glanced at his watch again, then put out his cigarette and got to his feet. "It's about time for us to be on our way. This party tonight may cheer us up a little. Did I mention that it was going to be a costume affair?"

Sharon eyed him with indignant surprise.

"You did not," she said. "And this is a fine time to be telling me. Won't I look right in step with this backless evening gown? And what about you?"

"Oh, it's all right," Drake said. "We weren't expected to be in costume anyway. The State Department has a peculiar antipathy toward any of its members running around in masquerade so I'm excused. And naturally you are too."

"Well, that's better," Sharon said. "You had me worried for a moment. Excuse me a minute, I'll get a wrap."

Drake lit another cigarette. . . .

on the outskirts of Washington. Sharon and Drake were ushered into the vast drawing room by an imperturbable butler, dressed for the occasion in a flowing robe and great baggy trousers of white silk that clasped at the ankles a few inches above curling suede slippers.

Sharon gasped with delight when they entered the splendidly decorated room. Walls and ceilings were hung with luxurious, jewel encrusted drapes and great animal skins were scattered over the gleaming floor.

Huge divans, covered in gaudy silk and strewn with fluffy pillows had replaced the conventional furniture; braziers of incense were hanging in all corners of the room and from their brass tops a yellow, aromatic smoke was issuing.

Except for a handful of Americans and Britons in evening clothes, everyone was wearing the flowing silk robes of the ancient East. The men wore turbans around their heads and the women, many of whom were beautiful, were decked with jeweled tiaras.

"How stunning!" Sharon whispered to Drake. "Everything looks so real it's amazing!"

They were taken to their host and after a few polite exchanges Drake murmured an excuse and escaped with Sharon toward the dining-room where refreshments were being served.

The room was thick with incense and more exotically garbed guests. Food and drink were being dispensed by serving girls in gaily colored silk trousers, tight brassieres and chaste veils.

Drake garnered two glasses and led Sharon to a divan. They lit cigarettes, sipped their drinks and watched the party.

"Fortunately," Drake said, "we can leave early."

THE reception for the Turkish ambassador was held in a large estate

"Oh, I'm enjoying this," Sharon said. "But I could do with a little less incense." She coughed and fanned herself with a handkerchief. "It seems to be a little rich for my taste. Could you open a window?"

"Sure thing," Drake said.

He put down his drink and stepped to a row of draped windows directly behind their divan. He tried unsuccessfully to open them, then returned to Sharon's side with a shrug.

"Funny," he said, "they're bolted shut."

"Well, never mind," Sharon smiled. "I can put up with it for a while."

Drake frowned at the windows.

"Yes, but it's odd. Supposing there was a fire?"

"Oh, there you go being practical again," Sharon laughed. "Please don't worry about it. I wouldn't have mentioned it if I thought it was going to worry you."

"Well it does," Drake said.

"Now you're being stuffy," Sharon smiled. "If you started worrying about everything that was irregular you'd have a full time job on your hands."

WHILE they were talking a smiling little man waddled across to them with a glass of hot, spiced wine in his plump, pink hand.

"How do you do?" he said, smiling until his face seemed to be a net-work of soft creases.

Drake glanced at him in surprise; for the man's salutation had been delivered in Arabic; not modern Arabic, but a variation of the tongue that was now considered archaic. His astonishment was the same as if he'd been addressed in the English of Chaucer.

Drake answered him courteously, using the same archaic dialect. The smiling fat man appeared delighted.

"How nice, how nice," he said, rubbing his plump hands together. "It is so nice to hear my tongue spoken."

Sharon tugged Drake's sleeve.

"What goes on?" she asked in a whisper. "He isn't using the Arabic you taught me. Although I can make out the general meaning of what he's saying."

"It's an old dialect," Drake answered. "I haven't heard it since I was a post-grad." He turned to the fat man who was regarding them with genial, twinkling eyes. "My name is Masterson, Drake Masterson. May I present Miss Sharon Ward."

"I am charmed," the little round man murmured, still speaking in ancient Arabic. He bowed extravagantly. He was dressed in loose red trousers and a short jeweled vest. A tassel-topped fez was set at a rakish angle on his pumpkin-shaped head. His face was a soft, pasty white and his little eyes looked like shiny raisins set in a pan of bread dough.

"My name is Humai," he said. "I am very, very glad to meet both of you. Could I get you a glass of wine or something to eat?"

"I'm afraid not," Drake smiled, "but thanks just the same. As a matter of fact, Miss Ward and I were just thinking about leaving."

"Oh, you can't go yet," the little man cried. His eyes twinkled merrily. "The party is just beginning. Do you not find everything delightful?"

"Yes, it's very nice," Sharon said politely. She coughed slightly and fanned herself. The thick swirling clouds of incense moved sluggishly from the draft caused by her hand.

"Do you not like the incense?" the little fat man inquired solicitously.

"It's pretty thick," Sharon said. She coughed again and smiled wanly at Drake. "I think I'll have to step out-

side and get a breath of air."

"Sure thing," Drake said. "I'll go with you. Do you need a wrap?"

"No, I don't think so."

DRAKE helped her to rise. Humai watched with a solicitous expression on his round white face.

"I am very sorry," he murmured.

"That's all right," Drake said. "Miss Ward will be fine after a little air."

Sharon put her hand to her forehead.

"Yes, I'll be all right," she said. "My knees feel a little weak, that's all."

"It is so unfortunate," Humai murmured. "The entertainment has not yet started. It is unfortunate that you must miss it."

"I think we'll mangle to bear up under the loss," Drake said drily.

He put an arm about Sharon's waist and started across the room. The fumes of incense were swirling about his head in a cloying suffocating cloud.

"But you do not know what you're missing," Humai said, trotting beside them on his short, fat legs. His round, brown face was creased anxiously.

"Please, Drake," Sharon murmured weakly against his shoulder. "Let's hurry."

Humai tugged at Drake's arm.

"Look just one instant," he begged.

He waved his hand in the air and suddenly, to the left of the girl, a swirling segment of the smoke began to coalesce into the shadowy outlines of a human figure. Sharon drew away from Drake and stared with amazement at the figure, whose shape and outline were becoming more definite with each second.

She threw her hands up in an instinctive gesture of astonishment as the figure completed its emergence from the smoke and stood before her—a towering, brown-skinned, turbaned genie, bearing an immense tray of sparkling

jewels in his arms.

"Drake!" Sharon cried. Her voice was a blend of incredulity, astonishment and fear.

Drake stepped to her side and the heavy, dense smoke billowed in the wake of his passage. He coughed as the spiced fumes seemed to bite into his lungs.

"It's some kind of a trick, darling," he gasped.

Humai was at his side, grinning.

"Yes, it is a trick, but such a nice one," he said. "Would you care to see more?"

He waved his pudgy hand and the towering apparition vanished slowly into the smoke. "I will show you, now—"

"We're getting out of here," Drake snapped. "Miss Ward needs fresh air."

HE WAS getting a little annoyed with this bland, round little man and found it hard to keep the irritation from his voice.

"Let me help you to the door," Humai suggested anxiously.

"We can find it," Drake said. "Thanks."

Humai took his arm gently.

"Please," he said, "there is a side door that leads to the garden. It is quicker, I will show you the way."

"All right," Drake said. He felt annoyed with himself for his irritation. After all, the little fellow only wanted to help. "Let's go," he said.

He put an arm around Sharon's waist.

"How do you feel?" he asked, concerned.

"All right, I guess," she whispered. She put a hand slowly to her forehead. "Everything seems sort of vague and fuzzy. Are all the lights off?"

"Of course not," Drake said. He glanced around the room worriedly.

The place *did* seem darker. The electric illumination had been replaced by huge candles that guttered splendidly in the bizarre gloom of the tapestried room. "It's just this damn incense," he said, coughing.

Humai took his hand.

"Just follow me," he said. "We will be outside in a moment." He hesitated a moment. "Don't you think she had better walk without support?" he asked gently. "The exercise would do her good."

"No," Drake said grimly. "She needs help. Please hurry."

"Of course," Humai said.

He padded toward the center of the room and then turned right down a long corridor that Drake did not remember seeing when they arrived. Drake followed him, supporting Sharon with an arm about her waist.

The corridor was murky with the same thick incense and he couldn't make out any details, except that the ceiling seemed to tower hundreds of feet above their heads and that the carpet on which they walked was incredibly thick and soft.

Humai walked directly ahead of them, waddling slightly from side to side and turning occasionally to smile reassuringly at them.

"How much longer?" Drake asked anxiously.

"Not very far," Humai answered. "It is only a little way from here."

Drake tried to peer down the length of the corridor, to pierce the gloomy, incense-laden air, but it was impossible. He could only see a dozen feet ahead, before the visibility was obscured by the thick pall-like curtain of yellow, pungent incense.

"Just a few more steps," he whispered to Sharon.

"I'm all right," she murmured sleepily. She was almost a dead

weight on his arm. Drake attempted to walk more rapidly but he found that his legs were curiously weak. He was practically staggering. There was a peculiar cloudiness before his eyes that was not caused by the dense vapors of the incense.

HE SHOOK his head and coughed rackingly. Tears were streaming from his eyes and he was on the point of collapse when a sudden strong draft of cool, bracing air blew into his face. It was as reviving as a plunge into a cold mountain lake.

He breathed deeply, gratefully, and he could feel the cloudiness fading from his brain. Dimly he could see Humai standing at an open door, beckoning to him with a friendly hand.

"That was not so long, was it?" he asked.

"Long enough," Drake said weakly.

He helped Sharon through the door and Humai followed, closing the door softly behind him.

Drake wiped his eyes with his handkerchief and took several deep breaths of the cool air before he turned to Sharon.

"There," he said, "you'll feel better in a minute."

She leaned against him, breathing slowly. Her eyes were closed and her face was ghostly white in the dim moonlight.

"I feel better already," she murmured.

She smiled and opened her eyes slowly.

"That's the girl," he said cheerfully. "You just had a bit too much of that incense." He shook his head slightly and took another deep breath. "It almost got me for a moment."

Sharon smiled, and then her gaze moved casually from his face and past his shoulder. For an instant her fea-

tures seemed to be frozen in blankness and then a dazed, stricken, incredulous expression spread over her face. Her eyes grew dark and wide with a terrible fear.

"Drake," she gasped, and her voice was a whisper that almost died in her throat. "Drake, I'm losing my mind!"

Drake patted her shoulder.

"Ssssh," he said gently. "You're a little tired and nervous. You—"

"No, Drake," Sharon cried. Her eyes did not come back to his face, but remained fixed on something over his shoulder. "Where are we? What's happened to us?"

There was no mistaking the terrible urgency in her voice. Drake turned and the sight that met his eyes left him weak and breathless.

CHAPTER II

THEY were standing at the edge of a garden—a garden that stretched hundreds of feet before them; and beyond the garden the towering spires and minarets of a dazzlingly weird city were visible in the pale, ghostly moonlight.

The familiar scenes of Washington were gone. Capitol dome, Washington monument, all the majestic avenues of great buildings had disappeared completely. In their place, sprawling before Drake's stunned gaze, was a grotesque city of startling architecture and crazy-quilt design.

It was incredible!

Drake shook his head groggily and passed a hand over his eyes. This must be some sort of mirage, some optical illusion or distortion. But when he looked again nothing had changed. The great white city of weird arches, mosques and towers still glistened in the moonlight, sprawling as far as his eyes could reach.

Sharon gripped his arm tightly.

"Am I going crazy, Drake?" she asked. Her voice was dazed, weak.

"Maybe we both are," Drake said grimly. He turned suddenly on Humai, the bland, round-faced little man who had led them to this place. He was watching them with a pleasant smile on his pale face.

"What's this all about?" he demanded, waving a hand helplessly toward the vast gleaming city.

Humai appeared politely perplexed.

"I am afraid I don't quite understand," he said, looking from Drake to Sharon with puzzled eyes.

"What's this city?" Drake asked. "Is it some kind of an optical illusion?" He glared angrily and helplessly at the bland little man. "Don't tell me you can't see it," he snapped heatedly.

"But of course I can see it," Humai murmured. He smiled again and his eyes almost disappeared in soft folds of flesh. "It's a very lovely city, isn't it? I'm sure you will learn to enjoy its many attractions."

"What do you mean?" Drake demanded.

Humai then shrugged his soft round shoulders and squinted comically at Drake.

"Allow me," he murmured, "to welcome you in the name of the Caliph Zinidad to his royal palace. I am sure the Caliph will wish to express his welcome personally in the near future. Particularly," Humai said, smiling directly at Sharon, "will he wish to—ah—welcome the charming young lady."

"What kind of nonsense are you talking?" Drake snapped. "Who is this Zinidad you're babbling about?"

"Zinidad," Humai said, "is the Caliph of Bagdad. A most charming person—ah—under certain circumstances."

Drake stepped closer to Humai, his

hands knotting into capable looking fists.

"Listen, my fat friend," he said. "I'm just about out of patience. I'm tired of listening to your attempts at comedy. If you can explain what in the name of Heaven has happened, do so, but stop chattering about the Caliph of Bagdad."

"But he is a most important person," Humai said, smiling. He shrugged and stepped back a pace, dropping his hand to the handle of the door that had opened to the garden. "But since you do not believe me," he said mildly, "I will say no more."

DRAKE automatically glanced at the door and when he did he received another shock. The door was of massive construction and, even in the pale moonlight he could see that its surface was ornately gilded with a substance that gleamed like gold. It reached dozens of feet above him and was topped by a wide arch whose wings reached fully thirty feet on either side of its apex.

Sharon was staring at the monstrous door with amazed, stunned eyes.

"Drake," she cried. "Look!"

She pointed to the immense palace whose turrets and ramparts were visible beyond the great arched gate. The palace was a sprawling mass of weird architecture with odd wings and abutments seemingly thrown in without design or any attempt at order or unity. Ghostly moonlight shone on the alabaster walls of the palace transforming it to a shimmering creation of strange beauty. Windows gaped from the white walls like dark, unfriendly eyes.

"You are gazing upon the palace of the Caliph," Humai said. "I hope you find it pleasing, for you will be seeing it many times in the years to come."

As he finished speaking he tapped

lightly on the great door. Almost instantly it began to swing open, ponderously, slowly.

"You will come with me," Humai said gently.

"I'll be damned if we will," Drake said grimly.

"I am afraid I must insist," Humai said.

"Go to hell," Drake said calmly. "I don't know who you are or what your game is, but I don't like it. We're staying right here until we find out what this thing is all about."

Humai sighed gently, almost sadly.

"As you wish," he murmured.

He clapped his hands together and the immense gate swung back rapidly; a splash of light fell across them from within. Heavy footsteps were heard.

Sharon moved close to Drake.

"What is it?" she whispered. "I'm frightened, Drake."

He put his arm about her slim shoulders and drew her to his side.

"Don't worry, honey," he said.

When the gate had swung open they were facing a wide, high arched corridor; and down this corridor, coming toward them at a purposeful march, was a company of brawny, half-clad soldiers. The advancing group of men wore loose trousers and gaudy sashes into which were stuck gleaming, curved scimitars. In their hands were torches that cast an eerie guttering illumination against the burnished wall of the great hallway.

Sharon shrank against Drake as the company came to a halt before Humai. The soldiers—eight in number—were giants, almost eight feet in height, with great deep chests and Herculean shoulders. Muscles rippled like sinewy ropes beneath their smooth black hides.

One of the company bowed to Humai and murmured something inaudible to Drake. The rest of the great creatures

stood in attitudes of submissive attention. It was an incongruous spectacle; the huge soldiers standing like great dumb animals before the small figure of Humai, waiting motionlessly for his orders.

HUMAI turned from the leader of the guards to Drake, still smiling agreeably.

"These soldiers are part of the personal bodyguard of the Caliph. They will escort you to him now." He wagged his round head seriously. "I advise you to go quietly."

Drake shoved Sharon behind him and stepped forward, his knees bent slightly, his hands clenched.

Humai murmured something under his breath to the great black who stood beside him and the creature started for Drake. Drake feinted to one side, pulling the black off balance, then he lunged for Humai. He wanted to get his hands on the little man's throat—for just a few seconds!

But the black was faster than his great bulk indicated. He wheeled like a panther and his huge arm whipped out, catching Drake about the waist.

He felt his feet leave the floor as the black jerked him into the air and held him there struggling helplessly.

Another of the guards caught Sharon's arms behind her back. She fought wildly, but he held her as if she were a child, his big round face stonily impassive.

Humai clucked his tongue and regarded Drake solemnly.

"You see?" he said, shrugging. "You wouldn't listen to me."

Drake stopped fighting against the inexorable grip of the giant black. His captor then set him down but his great hands still pinioned Drake's arms.

Humai spoke to the soldiers again and they came to attention, formed two

columns and marched down the corridor, carrying Drake and Sharon along as if they were two dolls.

Humai followed, his eyes twinkling in the round, white expanse of his face.

The trip was like a nightmarish kaleidoscope to Drake. Their giant captors escorted them down the wide, high corridor, through vast palatial rooms that were adorned with golden statues and intricate fountains which threw lacy sprays of scented water high into the air, into other seemingly endless corridors and at last brought them to a stop before a mighty golden door, flanked on either side by gaudily uniformed sentries.

Humai spoke in a low voice to the sentries and one of them stepped forward and swung back the great golden door. The giant black guards moved forward again and Drake and Sharon were led into a huge, brilliantly lighted room with a vast domed ceiling.

The walls were dyed a deep crimson but the floor was of purest marble, white as a summer cloud and shot through with streaks of blue that were like delicate veins.

Within the room, reclining on silken couches, were dozens of richly clad men smoking from long ivory-stemmed pipes and drinking from glasses containing a dark liquid that filled the incense-laden air with spicy fragrance.

The black guards marched steadily toward the center of this magnificent room, glancing neither to the right nor the left.

IN THE middle of the vast hall was a raised dais; a throne of gleaming gold, jewel-encrusted and topped by a brilliant canopy of figured silk. On either side of the throne slim black boys stood waving great feathered fans that stirred the heavy languorous air with a sluggish motion. Steps covered with

soft, luxurious carpets led to the dais, and on one of these steps were several slim girls, clad only in soft curled slippers and wisps of silk buckled about their white waists, lying in poses of voluptuous abandonment.

The giant black guards separated into two columns when they reached this throne and Drake and Sharon were suddenly face to face with the occupant of the dais—a great, bloated creature with sagging soft jowls and sprawling limbs, a man who stared at them sleepily with hard little eyes and breathed noisily through his loose pink lips. He lay rather than sat on the great cushioned dais, his legs sprawled loosely, his short pudgy arms resting carelessly on the rounded arms of the throne.

Humai stepped forward and bowed low.

"I have done my best to fulfill your wish, O mighty Caliph," he said. "You alone can judge whether this lowly servant has succeeded."

The gross creature on the throne waved a limp hand negligently at Humai in a weary gesture of dismissal, and the plump little man retreated several steps. The Caliph studied Drake for an instant with sharp little eyes; a slow frown creased his forehead.

"Who is this creature?" he asked. His voice was soft and throaty.

Humai stepped forward again, bowing submissively.

"I was forced to bring him with me, O illustrious Caliph," he murmured.

"I did not want a man," the Caliph said, waving his limp hand in a feeble gesture of irritation. "I asked you to find me a woman, a beautiful woman."

"And I did, O glorious Caliph," Humai said. "Look on her; fair as the morning when the sun's rays break over the purple mountain; as mysterious as the shrouded night when the stars hurl

their shafts of light at the surging waters; as passionate as Love, itself. This is the woman I have brought to you, O exalted Caliph. This fairest flower of the future I brought to you to grace your own gardens forever."

The Caliph belched sleepily and turned his eyes to Sharon. She felt herself blushing as his sharp gaze moved over her slim body. A slow smile touched his sensual lips as he finally raised his eyes to Sharon's face. He studied her pale cheeks, crimsoned now with shame and anger, surveyed her flashing green eyes and red hair carefully and impersonally, as if she were an inanimate object he was considering buying.

"You have done well, Wizard," he said at last, to Humai.

"My grateful thanks are yours, O immeasurable Caliph," Humai said humbly. "May I die the instant I displease you."

"Have no fear," the Caliph said, absently scratching his great belly, "you will."

HE TURNED his bright gaze again to Drake.

"Why did you bring this creature?" he asked.

"He was her companion," Humai said. "When I transported her through the realm of Time he had his arm about her waist and thus was transported also."

The Caliph frowned.

"I do not like the thought of his arm about her waist," he said. "She is mine. She should have been keeping herself for me. You should have brought me a virgin, Wizard. You know my preferences."

"Just a minute," Sharon said angrily. "If you're implying that I'm not—"

"Silence, woman," the Caliph said softly. "You would not look well with

your tongue torn out by its roots."

"I won't keep quiet," Sharon cried. "You're not going to talk about me as if I'm a loose woman and get away with it. And you're not going to talk about me like a piece of furniture. If you've got something to say to me, I'm standing right here and I've got two ears."

"Don't boast of such things," the Caliph said, "or you may lose them." He turned to Humai and rubbed his lips petulantly. "I did not want a chattering jay," he said fretfully. "I could do with a little less beauty and a little more silence."

Humai looked pale and distressed.

"I am so sorry, O mighty Caliph," he said miserably, "but there was no manner in which to determine that beforehand."

"If you'll pardon me," Drake said drily. "I'd like to ask you just what your object was in having us brought here. I am an accredited attaché of the United States diplomatic corps and, as such, I demand the right of being heard."

The Caliph put his plump hands to the sides of his head and rocked back and forth on the dais.

"Why does everyone want to talk?" he wailed. "I will go deaf with the noise." He took his hands down and gestured sharply to two of the giant blacks. "Take this noisy creature to a dungeon, the deepest one you can find, and lock him up there. Tomorrow I will have his tongue cut out."

Drake felt huge hands on his arms almost instantly. He struggled with all his strength but it was a futile effort. Sharon ran to his side and clung to him, until another of the blacks pulled her away and held her firmly.

"Oh, darling," she cried, fighting against the powerful grip of the giant black. "Make them kill us both. I don't want to live without you. Please—"

That was the last Drake heard. He was dragged through a side door of the great throne-room and it slammed behind him with a crash, shutting out the last piteous sound of Sharon's voice.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Drake was dragged from the room, the Caliph frowned at Sharon's sobbing figure, held helplessly in the grasp of the giant black guard.

"Take her to my harem attendants," he said, with a weary shake of his head. "Have her prepared for me. I wish to see her again tonight." He frowned darkly at Humai. "I am not pleased, miserable Wizard. There is too much noise and crying. If I remain displeased after tonight, I shall wish to see you again."

"Yes, O glorious Caliph," Humai muttered. With a forlorn bow he retreated from the throne.

Two of the black guards led Sharon from the great throne room and down several long winding corridors until they reached a large door guarded by a company of the Nubian giants. The door opened, Sharon was ushered into the room beyond, and the door closed with a dry, final click.

She looked around and saw that she was in a well-lighted room, much smaller than the one in which the Caliph had his throne. There were comfortable divans about the walls and in the air was the heady scent of fragrant perfumes.

A door on the side opened and two women, dressed in plain, knee-length cloaks, entered. One of them spoke sharply to the black guards and they withdrew with submissive bows.

"You must come with us," one of the women said to Sharon. She was a middle-aged woman with fine, delicate features and gleaming black hair faintly streaked with grey. "My name is

Tana," she added. "I am in charge of the Caliph's harem. We must prepare you for tonight and there is not much time. Will you come along, please?"

Sharon realized that no point would be gained by resistance. She followed the women through a connecting corridor of pale marble to a room with couches against one wall and several padded tables in the center. At one end of the room was a sunken tub of black marble which was filled with clear, faintly scented water. There were mirrors on all walls, and an elaborate marble table near one wall was covered with pots of pastes and creams and long tubes of colored wax and rouge.

The room was furnished so exquisitely that Sharon couldn't help admiring the details of the appointments.

A door opened and three plainly dressed young girls entered.

"They will bathe you," Tana said. "When you are ready I will come and see that no detail has been overlooked." She inspected Sharon with a critical, experienced eye. "You will do," she murmured. "For one night you will be completely satisfactory, I am sure."

"Why only one night?"

Tana smiled sadly. "You will soon know," she said. With an impulsive gesture she patted Sharon's cheek shyly. "And you are so young," she murmured, turning away.

When she had gone, the three maidens went to work on Sharon. In spite of her protests they disrobed her, bathed her with soft fleecy cloths, massaged her body with pungent, vitalizing oils, lacquered her nails and completed the job of anointing her with subtle perfumes and threading a wreath of fresh flowers into her waving, shoulder-length hair.

THE three girls chattered among themselves as they brought clothes

to her—rich, clinging silk robes that buckled with a diamond clasp at the waist and fell in billowing folds to the floor.

One of them knelt and fitted small jeweled slippers on her feet and they all stood back like artisans examining their work and stared at her with proud, possessive admiration.

"Please, girls," Sharon said, "I appreciate all this, but I'd much rather have a little information. What did Tana mean by saying I'd do for one night? She acted as if I were going to be killed tomorrow."

"But you are," one of the girl giggled. "Surely you know that."

Sharon felt a chill tremor run down her spine.

"What do you mean?" she cried. She shook her head distractedly, as the three girls continued to regard her with curious eyes. "I—I—can't die now," she said desperately. "There's a young man. He's in trouble. I've got to help him. Can't you girls help me get out of here? Won't you please?"

"We can do nothing," one of the girls said. She regarded Sharon with sad, solemn eyes and turned away slowly. "You must die tomorrow. That is the custom. The Caliph, Zinidad, will spend only one night with a girl. The next day she must die so that no other man will ever again possess her. We can do nothing to help you."

"But I've got to get away," Sharon said frantically. She stood up from the couch and desperately paced the length of the room. "I just can't die now."

The door opened and Tana entered.

"You look lovely," she murmured. "You are worthy of the great honor in store for you. You will come with me now. The Caliph is waiting your arrival with eagerness."

"He can keep right on waiting," Sharon said hotly. "I'm not going."

She backed against a wall, her breasts heaving with anger. "You can tell your exalted tub of lard that he's just out of luck. I'm not going to him and he can't make me."

Tana's classic features were expressionless as she stepped to the wall and gently tapped a small gong. The clear note of the bell had hardly rippled away to silence before the door opened and two giant blacks appeared. Their huge faces were without expression as they regarded Tana.

She indicated Sharon with a nod of her head.

"Take her to the Caliph's private quarters. He is awaiting her," she murmured.

The blacks inclined their heads submissively and then moved toward Sharon. The girl backed away, her small fists clenched desperately.

The blacks moved stolidly toward her and she suddenly realized the futility of resistance. Her shoulders slumped wearily and she leaned tiredly against the wall.

"What's the use," she said bitterly and walked toward the giant Nubians.

Their faces were expressionless as they took her arms in their great hands and led her from the room . . .

THE CALIPH'S private boudoir was a magnificent affair, discreetly illuminated by scented candles, perfumed by pots of fragrant incense and dominated by a vast circular bed covered with soft shimmering silk and adorned by the fat, sprawling figure of the Caliph.

Sharon was led across the rug-draped, shining marble floor to the side of the great bed. They released her arms then, bowed ceremoniously to the Caliph and backed from the room, making low obeisances every few feet.

The door closed behind them and

Sharon heard a bolt sliding into place with a sound of finality.

The Caliph opened his little eyes and peered at her. He was attired in a loose white cloak that looked like a Roman toga; and his face seemed almost lost in folds of flesh as he smiled slowly and sensually at her.

"Come to me, my child," he said.

Sharon crossed her arms. Her small jaw was set.

"I will not," she said distinctly.

The Caliph looked at her in injured surprise.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said," Sharon said firmly. "I was brought here by force, against my will. This is far as I go. If you try anything I'll scratch your eyes out."

The Caliph squirmed slightly. His fat, moon-like face wore an almost comic expression of bewilderment.

"You must not talk that way," he said, "Remember I am the Caliph. My words are law."

"Not with me they aren't," Sharon said grimly.

The Caliph heaved himself laboriously up on one elbow and regarded her with petulant surprise.

"May Allah protect us," he sighed, "from disobedient women."

"You're just too accustomed to having your own way," Sharon said. "Who gave you the right to order women around as if they were slaves?"

"But," the Caliph said, genuinely astonished, "what else are they?"

Sharon stamped her small foot in exasperation. She was becoming increasingly annoyed with the dictatorial old lecher.

"You're just like all men," she said hotly. "You think because you are women's physical superior that it gives you a divine right to dominate them mentally and spiritually. A woman is

the equal of any man, anywhere, anytime. In fact they have more brains and skill than the average man. Where I came from women have fought for their rights and have proven themselves in all fields to be the equal of any male."

The Caliph shook his head ominously.

"Those are dangerous words," he said. "What would happen to civilization if all women began thinking as you do?"

"What have men done by themselves," Sharon said, "other than wage wars and establish elaborate harem systems?"

ZINIDAD scratched his round head moodily.

"What have women done in this place you come from? Have they improved things?"

"Well," Sharon said, hesitating, "they haven't gotten everything straightened out yet, but they're on the right trail. We still have wars; but," she added defensively, "even in war women are proving themselves the equal of man. They can fly planes as well as any man."

"Fly planes?" Zinidad said wonderingly. "What are planes?"

"One of the inventions of my land," Sharon explained, "is a machine that flies through the air, miles above the ground, faster than any bird. It has revolutionized commerce, warfare and civilization."

Zinidad laughed delightedly.

"What a sport that must be," he cried. "Tell me more about these marvelous things." He smiled and wagged a plump finger playfully. "I know there is no truth in what you speak, but it amuses me to hear you tell of such wonderful things." He patted the edge of his silken bed. "Sit here beside me

and tell me more of these fables."

Sharon sat down gingerly. She hoped that she had gotten the Caliph's mind off his original intentions, but she was ready to move quickly if she were wrong.

She sighed with relief when the Caliph lay back and closed his eyes, a peaceful smile on his face. "Tell me your fables," he murmured.

"All right," Sharon said. . . .

She talked for almost an hour, telling the Caliph of the world of the future, until finally she noticed that his eyes had closed and his breathing had become heavy and regular. Sharon stopped speaking and watched the slumbering figure. Finally the Caliph began to snore, loudly and rhythmically.

"Just like a man," Sharon thought disgustedly.

She realized then that she was tired. She thought of Drake but she knew there was nothing she could do to help him until the following day. She rose softly from the bed, careful not to disturb the Caliph and lay down on one of the thick, soft skins that decorated the marble floor. The room was warm and the heavy skin was luxuriously comfortable under her tired body.

She kicked off her slippers and in a few seconds was soundly asleep.

CHAPTER IV

DRAKE had been led from the presence of the Caliph by the giant black guards to a dark, dank dungeon in the bowels of the palace and left there, locked in a miserable cell, five feet by five without illumination or ventilation of any sort.

When he heard the ponderous footsteps of the guards departing, fading away into silence, he made a groping inspection of his quarters. There was a tiny trickle of running water in one

corner that fell into a small open drain; and against the opposite wall a bundle of cold dirty rags was evidently a comfortable substitute for a cot.

He tried the door, but it was locked securely. He sat down then on the bundle of rags, turned his collar up about his neck against the damp chill of the place and settled down to await developments.

They were not long in coming.

Hardly fifteen minutes had passed before he heard footsteps in the corridor and saw an edge of light under the door. A key clicked against metal and the door swung open; Humai, the plump Wizard, stood in the doorway, holding a lamp above his head.

"Greetings," he murmured. "May I come in?"

Drake got to his feet.

"Make yourself at home," he said sarcastically. "Take any chair you like. Would you care for a drink? something to eat?"

"You mustn't be bitter, my friend," Humai, said suavely. He stepped into the small cell and carefully closed the door behind him.

"Where is Sharon?" Drake demanded. "What are they going to do to her?"

Humai shrugged. "I don't know yet. Tonight she will spend with Zinidad, but after that—" He turned his palms out and shrugged again. "Who knows?"

Drake clenched his fists and stared helplessly at the heavy door and thick walls of his cell.

"Isn't there something I can do to help her?" he asked.

"We may all need help before long," Humai murmured. "You are scheduled for the water torture tomorrow. And if our Caliph's disposition doesn't improve very shortly he will also want to remove my venerable head."

"Possibly," Drake suggested, "we

can work together."

Humai smiled. "I was thinking of something like that. I brought you two here to please the Caliph, but it hasn't quite worked out that way. After all my experiments and labors I have failed to please Zinidad. And in Bagdad that is fatal."

In spite of the desperate plight he was in, Drake couldn't suppress his curiosity in regard Humai's miraculous ability to pierce the planes of time and space.

"Just how did you work it?" he asked. "Time travel has been experimented with in the twentieth century but no one ever got beyond the theoretical stage."

"It was simple enough," Humai said. He smiled, his little eyes twinkling. "And I had a very powerful compulsion to stimulate me. The Caliph wished for women of the past and future and I was ordered to provide them for him. I worked for several years on my device and his patience was wearing very thin. If I hadn't succeeded on my last attempt it is doubtful that I would ever have gotten another chance."

"Were we the first to be honored with your attentions?" Drake asked drily.

Humai nodded.

"I chose the year nineteen-forty-three at random. But I made a miscalculation on my first attempt and landed in the year of nineteen-forty-four. I stayed just long enough to find out roughly what was going on before coming back to nineteen-forty-three."

HUMAI'S words caused a sudden quiver of excitement to race through Drake's veins.

"You were actually 'in' nineteen-forty-three?" he asked.

"Yes," said Humai.

Drake seized him by both arms.

"Can you tell me of anything you saw?" he asked.

Humai frowned and stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"I didn't pay much attention," he said, "I listened to scraps of conversation, drifting here and there, but I wasn't awfully concerned about what was going on."

"You must remember something," Drake insisted.

"Oh, yes," Humai said, "I remember several things. For one, everyone was talking about a place called Dakar."

"Yes," Drake prompted anxiously. "what were they saying about Dakar?"

Humai squinted at the ceiling and frowned.

"They were saying something about an attack being launched from there toward a place called Brazil."

Drake snapped his fingers suddenly.

"Of course, of course," he said tensely. "Do you remember anything else?"

Humai thought for a moment and then shook his round head deliberately.

"No," said he decisively. "That was all the people were talking about. Everyone seemed quite concerned about it."

"Had the attack succeeded?" Drake asked quickly.

"Oh, yes," Humai said. "I gathered that it had been quite a thorough success. That was why everyone was so concerned. It seems they hadn't expected anything like that."

"Of course they hadn't!" Drake said bitterly. "What stupid fools we were."

He began to pace the narrow cell, his clenched hands jammed into his pockets. Humai's news had shocked him from the thought of his own predicament.

The Germans had struck—or would strike in '44—at South America from Dakar. And that attack was going to

succeed unless something could be done to warn the Allied leaders of its impending threat.

He wheeled suddenly on Humai.

"I've got to get out of here," he said fiercely. "I've got to get back to my own time."

"I'm afraid that is quite impossible," Humai said. "The time device has not been prepared for another trip as yet; and that is liable to take quite some time."

"How long?" Drake demanded.

"I don't really know," Humai said. "But," he added, smiling gently, "only one person at a time can make the trip. And if the Caliph's present unfriendly attitude toward me continues, I know who that one person is going to be. I will have to use the time device to save myself from his wrath. That may be my only possibility of escaping."

"But you don't understand," Drake cried. "It's absolutely imperative that I get back. Or, if only one can go, send the girl back. I'll stay here—gladly. But one of us has to get back with the information you've given me."

Humai chuckled softly.

"It is useless to talk," he murmured. "I—"

THE cell door behind him suddenly swung slowly open. Humai stopped in mid-sentence when he heard the creak of the hinges. He turned slowly to the door, his face bland, impassive, unrevealing.

Drake was staring at the woman who stood in the doorway. She was tall, with fine skin and dark smouldering eyes. Her hair was black as a raven's wing, except for a spot at each temple that looked as if it had been brushed lightly with silver dust. She wore a crimson robe that buckled at her throat with a huge diamond clasp and fell in straight, classic folds to the

ground. The points of her small golden slippers were visible under the hem of her cloak.

Humai inclined his head slightly toward the woman.

"It is indeed a surprise to see you here, O beautiful Tana."

Tana regarded him calmly but there was a faint enigmatic smile at the corners of her curving mouth.

"I, too, am surprised," she murmured. "I had hoped to talk to the prisoner alone. It is a pity that you must leave so soon, my dear Humai."

"Some things cannot be helped," Humai sighed. He turned and smiled softly at Drake. "I will speak to you again, my friend."

He bowed ceremoniously to Tana and then padded from the cell, closing the door gently behind him.

Tana waited until his footsteps had faded down the corridor before turning to Drake. Her deep thoughtful eyes regarded him searchingly.

"I am Tana," she said softly, when her inspection was completed. "I am the mistress of the Caliph's harem. I wish to talk to you."

"Everyone seems to have that idea tonight," Drake said, without humor. "There's not much I can do but listen. What is it you want?"

"I think perhaps you and I can come to an understanding," Tana said. "I can offer you your freedom if you are willing to help me."

Drake smiled at her.

"Every bargain has two parts," he said. "What is it you want me to do?"

"You are hardly in a position to bargain," Tana said.

Drake shrugged. "I think I'm in a pretty good position," he said. "You obviously need me or you wouldn't be here. Supposing you tell me the whole story."

TANA hesitated momentarily. Her fine, delicate features were expressionless, but there was a wary glint in her deep eyes.

"I can't tell you everything," she said finally. "Years ago when I was young and had the enticements of youth to offer our Caliph, I was his favorite and confidant. When he was through with me he didn't put me to death as was his usual custom. My influence with him was strong enough to prevent him from delivering me to his royal torturers. Instead he appointed me mistress of his harem, where I serve as the custodian and servant to his precious little creatures." She paused and Drake noticed that her white cheeks were stained with red spots of anger. "I, Tana, who once lived like the queen of Bagdad and with whom ministers and princes vied for favor, was relegated to a position of a servant. Zinidat knew that would be worse than death for me and it has been. The humiliation and baseness of my state is as intolerable as the water torture would have been."

"A tough break," Drake said sympathetically, "but how does all this affect me?"

"I have never given up my dream of ruling Bagdad," Tana continued, ignoring his interruption. "Never in the blackest moments of despair have I ceased to hope, to strive, to fight for what is my rightful position. I have made friends, powerful friends with wealth and influence, who know that my knowledge of the Caliph can be valuable to them. There is much dissatisfaction in Bagdad now. The people are over-burdened with oppressive taxes; there is open grumbling in the markets and streets. The time is right for a bold stroke that will break forever the influence of Zinidat. The time has come to revolt!"

"Sounds like it might be," Drake said. "But the only difference between a revolt and a revolution is success. Will your revolt succeed? The Caliph has armies, I presume. What of them?"

"The main battle must be won here in the castle of the Caliph," Tana said. "Once the private guards of the Caliph are defeated and he is killed, the people will welcome a new Caliph. The army will defer to the wish of the people. Not only *can* a revolt succeed, it will succeed!"

"I'm still in the dark about what you want me for," Drake said.

"I will tell you," Tana said quietly. "Your companion from the world of the future, the beautiful red-haired girl called Sharon, is in a position to help us immensely."

AT THE mention of Sharon's name, all of Drake's desperate anxiety returned.

"Where is she?" he demanded. "What has that pot-bellied lecher done to her?"

"Nothing," Tana said. "That I can promise. I saw their first meeting. I observed what happened from a small hidden peep-hole which I installed for the purpose of spying on the Caliph. She talked to him for several hours, telling him stories of the strange land from which both of you came. The Caliph finally went to sleep and the girl then lay down on a rug on the floor and did likewise. I know, however, that the Caliph is not through with her. He will want to see her again, to hear more of her strange stories. Thus, for the time, she is safe and in a position close to the Caliph where she can do us much good. If," Tana smiled slowly, "she can be persuaded to help us with our plan."

"Ah," Drake said, "I begin to see. That's where I come in. I'm to per-

suade Sharon to help us toss the Caliph into the discard. Is that right?"

"Yes," Tana said.

"And for that I receive my freedom?"

"Yes."

"And Sharon?" Drake asked. "Will she also receive her freedom?"

Tana hesitated, then shrugged.

"If you wish it," she said. "That is a matter of no concern to me. Now what do you say? Freedom for both of you if you help me. If not," she smiled, "you may take your chances on the tender mercies of the royal torturers."

"There's only one answer," Drake said. "I'm not a bit interested in your internal problems, but I do want freedom for myself and Sharon. I'll do what I can with her. How can I arrange to see her?"

"I will arrange that," Tana said. "She will be brought here tomorrow morning."

"What precisely do you want her to do?" Drake asked.

"I will tell you later. First talk to her and get her promise to help. Our plans are not quite complete. My main support will come from the mighty bandit, Ali Baba, who will provide me with the men to conquer the Caliph's guards. When we are ready to strike, I will tell you what the red-haired girl must do. That will be soon enough for her to know."

"All right," Drake said. "How soon will it be before I have my freedom?"

"There need be no delay about that," Tana said. "When you have talked to the red-haired one in the morning, I will come to you, bringing you suitable clothes and arms. The guards will be easy to handle. You shall go free then and hide in the hills with Ali Baba until we are ready to strike."

She turned and moved to the door.

"Keep silent of all I have told you," she murmured.

She opened the door and when it closed behind her, Drake heard heavy bolts sliding into place.

CHAPTER V

DRAKE slept fitfully that night in the dank, odorous cell. There was no change in the gloomy darkness to indicate the rising of the sun and the passage of the hours. His stomach told him he had been a long time without food when he awoke, but he couldn't tell if it were five in the morning or noon. He was not awake long before he heard steps outside his cell and then the bolts clanged back and the door opened.

Two guards entered, one of them holding a smoking lamp and the other carrying a bowl of food and a pot of warm goat's milk which he set on the floor.

Without a look at Drake, the two huge blacks left the cell, closing and locking the door behind them. Drake was left again in the darkness. He groped his way to the food and managed to eat enough of it to satisfy his hunger. The goat milk he left untouched.

He had just finished his meal when the door opened again and the same guards entered. One of them removed the empty dish and the bowl of milk while the other motioned Drake to his feet.

Drake got up and a small, almost naked little boy pattered into the cell carrying in his hands a pot of fragrant incense. He set it down in a corner and then stepped to one side of the doorway, salaaming low, until his forehead almost brushed the floor.

The giant black came to attention on the other side of the doorway, his great

dark moon of a face impassive.

Drake heard another step in the corridor, a light, quick step, and then Sharon was standing in the doorway, looking incredibly radiant in a floating white gown that was set with hundreds of lustrous, milk-white pearls.

"Darling!" he cried. He stepped toward her, but the great black put his massive hand against his chest and held him back.

"Hey, what's the ideal?" Drake said.

"I'll get rid of them," Sharon said.

She nodded imperiously to the great black guard and to the little boy and clapped her hands. Then she pointed to the door.

The brown, little boy smiled, salaamed and ducked through the door, followed by the giant guard. When their footsteps faded Sharon closed the door and then came quickly across the floor to Drake.

"Oh, darling," she whispered, "I've been so worried about you."

Drake took her in his arms and smiled into her eyes.

"You needn't have been," he said. "You were the one who was in a bad spot."

"You'll never believe what happened," Sharon said, "I—"

Drake nodded. "Tana told me all about your stalling the Caliph with stories of the twentieth century."

"Tana?" Sharon said. "The harem mistress? How did you see her? And how did she know?"

"I've got a lot to tell you," Drake said. "And not too much time, so listen carefully."

AS QUICKLY as possible he told Sharon what had happened since he had been dragged from her side in Zinidad's throne room. When he finished, her face was radiant with excitement.

"But can we trust her, Drake," she asked worriedly. "She is guaranteeing us our freedom, but we have nothing but her word on that."

Drake shrugged.

"Beggars can't be choosers; we've got to play ball with her, or else."

"I suppose you're right," Sharon said. "But she didn't say what she wanted me to do, did she?"

"No," Drake said, "she didn't."

"I don't know how long I'll be able to keep Zinidad interested in my stories," Sharon said. "I'm afraid he's liable to slip back into character any time. He was very pleasant this morning in a fatherly sort of way."

"Well, it's your job to keep him from feeling any younger than a father," Drake said.

"I'll try," Sharon said. "I've got to be going now. You will take care of yourself, won't you, darling?"

"You bet," Drake said determinedly, "and you too. We've got to get out of this place and get back to the twentieth century. I'm not forgetting for a minute that our first job is to get the information of the Nazi attack on South America into the hands of our State Department."

Sharon stood on tiptoes to kiss Drake goodby, then turned and left the tiny cell. The guards in the corridor bowed to her and locked the door after she had gone.

And Drake settled down to wait. . . .

SEVERAL hours passed before the bolts on the door were drawn again, and this time it was Tana who entered, carrying a bundle of clothes over her arm.

"Put these on as quickly as possible," she told him. "We have drugged the guards, but they may come to any minute. I'll keep watch in the corridor. Hurry!"

When she stepped out of the cell Drake quickly stripped off his own clothes and climbed into the ones she had brought him. He kicked off his patent leather shoes and slipped his feet into comfortable slippers of well-cured leather. Trousers and blouse went on quickly and a veiled turban completed his attire.

When he stepped into the corridor Tana handed him a belt from which a curved scimitar hung.

"Put this on," she whispered, "you may need it."

Three of the great black guards were stretched on the floor beside the cell, breathing heavily.

Tana glanced at them and then beckoned Drake to follow her.

"We must hurry," she said quietly. "When the Nubian guards are discovered there will be a great outcry. We must be far from here by that time."

Drake followed Tana for several hundred yards of the winding dark tunnels that honeycombed the bowels of the palace and led gradually up to ground level. When they reached a section of the tunnel where they could feel fresh drafts of air and see sunlight slanting in the barred apertures at the top of the corridor, Tana led him quickly to an unlocked door that opened on one of the rear courts of the palace.

Drake blinked in the strong sunlight as she threw open the door and led him outside. Two great camels were waiting a few feet from the door. A stable boy held their bridles. At a signal from Tana the boy brought the beasts to their knees and she swung herself into the saddle and motioned Drake to do likewise.

The stable boy scampered away as Tana took the reins and pulled the great beast to its feet. Drake's camel lurched upright, with a sickening lurching mo-

tion, of its own accord.

"They are well trained," Tana said absently. "They are from the royal stables. There is no creature of the desert that can keep up with them."

As she spoke she threw her veil across her face and pulled her cloak tightly over her shoulders.

"You had better do the same," she said to Drake. "I have chosen a route that will not take us through the populated sectors of the city, but we must be very careful not to be recognized."

Drake drew the veil over his face.

"All set," he said.

THE sun was almost half way across a startlingly blue sky, beating down with heavy hot force, as their camels moved slowly from the deserted courtyard, under the great arched gate that led to the wide avenue which flanked the palace.

They rode quickly through the winding streets of Bagdad, past several jammed market places, and soon they were on the great wide road that from Bagdad to the open stretches of the desert. They followed this road for several miles, moving aside on several occasions to allow long in-coming caravans to pass, and at last they reached the desert and started out on its broad, trackless, shimmering wastes.

This much of the ride had been taken in absolute silence. Tana seemed to know exactly what she was doing and where she was going and apparently felt no need to explain her course to Drake.

When the sun was beginning to sink into the west, she pointed the camels toward a range of mountains which had been but a blue blur on the horizon when they left Bagdad, but which were now looming up as individual peaks stretching in an unbroken chain for dozens of miles.

Drake marveled at the woman's endurance. His back was almost broken from the heavy lurching of his mount and his tongue was a piece of leather in his mouth. Particles of sand, whirled by the arid desert blasts, stung his face and neck and sifted into his clothes until he felt as if he were clothed in sheets of sanded paper.

But Tana rode on, saying nothing, looking neither to the right nor left, apparently oblivious to the merciless discomforts of the trip; and Drake clamped his lips together obstinately and resolved that he'd ride until his camel fell rather than ask for a rest.

When they reached the foot of the mountain peaks Tana led him through a narrow gorge into bewildering mazes of valleys and fissures that split the mountain into thousands of separate ridges, until he knew he was hopelessly and completely lost.

She rode on until they reached the blank face of an escarpment and Drake thought she was going to drive the camels straight into its flinty side; but a few feet from the sheer towering wall, she brought her camel to a halt.

Drake's mount came to a stop beside hers. Drake shifted his position in the hard saddle and glanced around. They were on the floor of a shallow basin, surrounded on all sides by towering cliffs. One narrow fissure led into this small, rock-floored valley and Drake knew it would take an army searching the mountains to find the place.

"This is as far as we go," Tana said.

Drake looked at her, perplexed.

Tana swung about and faced the blank face of the cliff.

"Open Sesame!" she called in a clear loud voice.

For an instant only the echo of her words drifted to their ears rebounding from the sheer sides of the mountain.

But then Drake heard a sudden

rumbling sound as if two huge boulders were being ground together, and an instant later, a great slab of stone moved slowly away from the side of the cliff, revealing a gaping black hole, fifty feet wide and half as high.

"Come," Tana said, "This is the cave of Ali Baba."

Her camel moved ahead and Drake's followed it into the solid darkness of the hole in the side of the cliff.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN they entered the cave they turned right after few dozen feet and entered a large room, formed from the natural rock of the mountain. Torches guttered in niches in the wall, throwing a wierd illumination over the great hall. The floor was covered with the tanned hides of animals.

There were a half dozen men lying about on the floor and one of them climbed to his feet as Tana slid from her mount to the floor.

He was a colorfully dressed fellow of medium height with a thin brown face and snapping black eyes. A scimitar hung from his waist and a wicked looking dagger was jammed into the sash of his trousers.

"Greetings, Tana," he said.

"Greetings, Ali Baba," Tana said. "I have brought you the one I spoke about." She turned and nodded to Drake. "You may dismount. You will stay here for a while, until things are ready and we need you."

Drake slid gratefully to the ground and stretched his aching muscles.

"We need food and drink," Tana said.

Ali Baba turned and waved a hand at one of the men lying on the animal skins.

"Mura," he called, "prepare food for our guests. Hurry!"

"I shall have to return immediately," Tana said, "but I have news which you will like. We strike within the week. Everything has been arranged."

Ali Baba's thin brown face burned with cupidity. He chuckled softly, deep in his throat.

"You bring very good news," he said. "But how are my men and I to get into the castle?"

Tana smiled softly.

"You will be delivered to the Caliph's door, my gentle Ali Baba. I have contacted an oil dealer who has a contract to deliver forty casks of olive oil to the palace next week. The casks are huge and each could easily hold a man. Do you understand?"

"Ah!" Ali Baba murmured. He inclined his head toward Tana, his eyes sharp and bright. "I bow to your cleverness, Tana. But are you sure that forty men and myself will be sufficient to subdue the palace guards of the Caliph?"

"You have my assurance for that," Tana said.

After they had eaten a coarse, but satisfying, meal in the vast, smoky dining-hall, Tana mounted her camel and, after a last word with Ali Baba, left for the return trip to Bagdad.

Drake was filled with a growing wonder as he contemplated the weird fate that had befallen him. And no small part of his wonder was a result of his meeting with Ali Baba, the thief, in this rocky hidden cavern. He had always believed Ali Baba to have been a completely mythical character from the pages of the *Arabian Nights*; and it was a shock to discover that the man had actually existed.

WHEN Tana had gone Ali Baba asked him if he would like to rest.

"Sounds like a good idea," Drake said. "I'm pretty tired from the trip.

But I notice it didn't seem to bother Tana particularly."

Ali Baba smiled, but there was an uneasy glint in his eye that puzzled Drake.

"That woman," he said, "is like a creature of rock. Her heart is like a piece of tough leather." He shook his head slowly. "I would not like to have her for my enemy."

"The same thought has occurred to me," Drake said drily.

Ali Baba looked at him moodily.

"I hope I never have to fight against her," he said. "She is like a tigress when aroused."

"There's no need to worry," Drake said. "She needs you as much as you need her. She can't afford to have you turn against her."

"I hope you are right," Ali Baba said. He frowned dubiously and regarded Drake with his sharp brown eyes. "I like you," he said unexpectedly. "You speak words of good sense. Would you be interested in inspecting my little domain?"

"Very much," Drake said.

Ali Baba led him from the dining-hall through the rest of the series of connecting caves, explaining as they went what each section was used for. There were sleeping rooms, stalls for camels and horses, workshops where harnesses and weapons were repaired, and several vast storerooms stocked with dried foods, casks of wine and shelves of clothing and equipment of all types and sorts.

"You see," Ali Baba explained, "we must be self-sufficient. Frequently when the Caliph's soldiers are searching the mountains for us, we must hide here in our caves for weeks at a time before it is safe to venture forth."

They had reached the last of the caves and Ali Baba led him to a great massive stone door that was locked

and bolted securely.

"I will show you something now that few have ever seen," he said. "Possibly you have wondered about our main gate and the password 'Sesame' which is needed to open it?"

"Yes, I have," Drake said. "It looked like witchcraft to me."

"It is nothing like that," Ali Baba smiled.

He unlocked the heavy door, swung it back and started down steps carved in the heavy rock. "Follow me," he said.

Drake started down the steps after the bandit chieftan, moving carefully in the dark. After several winding turns he saw a flicker of illumination below that threw a dappled light on the steps beneath his feet.

Ali Baba made the last turn and stepped out on a small balcony. When Drake joined him he saw he was overlooking a vast chamber, fully as large as any of the great caves that he had seen above.

In the center of the room, a massive, heavy-spoked wheel was set on a pivot in the floor; and Drake's hands suddenly tightened with horror as he saw that to each spoke was chained a filthy, rag-covered human being.

THE dazed broken figures hung over the spokes, as lifeless as pieces of wood. Their physical degradation was appalling. Hair hung over their eyes and thin shoulders and their ribs stuck out cadaverously through their scanty, torn rag coverings.

"You see," Ali Baba said, "there is nothing mysterious about our little secret. Watch!"

He clapped his hands together and said, "Open Sesame!"

Instantly the broken, shambling figures began to stir. Their eyes did not lift to the sound of Ali Baba's voice, but

their muscles contracted, automatically, instinctively.

They laid their weight against the spokes and gradually, ponderously, the great wheel began to turn. The shackled figures strained forward soundlessly and the only noise that broke the gruesome, unnatural silence was the scraping of their unshod feet on the stone floor. When the wheel had completed a half circle, the shackled figures stopped, like obedient horses anticipating a command from a master.

"You see?" Ali Baba said. He clapped his hands again. "Close Sesame!" he said.

The men resumed their task, straining their frail, broken figures against the spokes until the great wheel had completed its circle; then they relaxed and slumped against the spokes, lifeless, motionless, senseless—waiting until again the command of "Sesame" should penetrate their dull, fogged brains and flag their muscles into automatic response.

"What do you think?" Ali Baba asked. "Is it not clever? These husks you see on the wheel are those who sought to betray me, and who were unlucky enough to fall into my hands. After a few years on the wheel even the most independent spirit learns that revolt and resistance are useless. Gradually they adapt themselves to their task until they become as obedient horses. They have but one task; they know but one command; and they do their work well."

"I think it's a criminal way to treat human beings," Drake said grimly. "A knife through the back would be more merciful."

"Possibly," Ali Baba shrugged, "but a dead man is of no use to anyone, not even to himself. This way these creatures are able to perform some service."

"Yes," Drake said, "but you could

put them to work making an automatic leverage system that would open your gate just as effectively."

Ali Baba shrugged again.

"Maybe there is something in what you say. But let us not worry about it now. For the present this system is satisfactory. Now you must rest."

Drake followed Ali Baba back to the main sections of the cavern, and was taken to a small room with a soft, skin-covered floor. He was tired and aching in every muscle but it was a long time before sleep came. He couldn't rid his mind of the picture of the helpless, broken figures on the wheel that operated the main gate of the bandit's cave.

THREE days passed in the caverns of Ali Baba, the thief, and Drake grew increasingly impatient as hour followed hour and there was no news from Tana. He slept and ate and talked interminably with Ali Baba, but his anxiety for Sharon prevented him from relaxing. The problem of how he was to effect their escape from this time to the twentieth century with the news of the German invasion of South America was another nagging worry that never completely left him.

But on the fourth day a messenger arrived, and soon after Ali Baba sought Drake out, his sharp brown eyes snapping with excitement.

"The period of waiting is over," he announced. "Tana has sent us word that everything is prepared for us. We will leave within the hour for Bagdad. Tonight we make our entrance into the palace of the Caliph."

"It's about time," Drake said.

"The wise man is patient," Ali Baba said quietly. "We have waited long but our time to strike has come."

"I hope Tana has everything set," Drake said. "Supposing the guards of

the Caliph are more powerful than we expect? What then?"

"The future is in the hands of Allah," Ali Baba said philosophically. "If we fail, we shall have no more worries at all after a while. The Caliph, Zinid, will see to that. But enough of this talk. The time is here for action. Prepare yourself to ride, my comrade. The wealth of Bagdad awaits us."

CHAPTER VII

THE moon was a pale thin crescent hanging against the velvet blackness of the night sky when the long line of tired, laden camels reached the great gates of the Caliph's palace.

The custodian of the gate signalled the wall guards and then advanced to meet the leader of the caravan.

"Who is it disturbs the sleep of the Caliph's palace in the middle of the night?" he challenged.

"It is Raschid, the merchant," the leader of the caravan, a gnarled, stooped little man, answered sullenly. "Open the gate, uncivil dog! I have forty barrels of oil for the Caliph's storehouses."

"Who told you to bring them at this hour?" the custodian demanded. "The palace is asleep. Come back with the honest sun tomorrow and I will open the gate for you."

"The Mistress Tana directed me to bring them at this hour," Raschid said stubbornly. "If I leave now you will be answering her questions on the rack tomorrow."

The custodian fumbled with his beard for a moment and then angrily ordered the gate-keeper to open the barrier.

"Let this be on your head," he belated to Raschid.

"Stop your braying, brother of the swine," Raschid shouted. "Stand aside and let honest men work."

He turned and shouted an order to his camel drivers and soon the long caravan of lumbering beasts was filing into the dark courtyard of the Caliph's palace.

Drake had heard the entire conversation, and when he felt the camels begin to move he breathed a sigh of relief. Everything was working according to plan.

He was crouched in one of the huge leather oil barrels that swung from the sides of the camels. And in each of the remaining barrels was one of Ali Baba's men, thoroughly armed and ready to spring into action at an instant's notice.

The camel train moved slowly across the court and the only sound in the blackness of the night was the solid scraping slump of the camels' hoofs on the hard-packed dirt floor of the court yard.

Finally the camels came to a sluggish stop and the caravan attendants began unloading the oil barrels and carrying them into the Caliph's store house.

Drake felt the barrels in which he was concealed being lifted and carried into the dark storeroom. The attendants grunted with every step and sighed relievedly when they set the barrel down on the floor.

The half dozen attendants repeated this procedure until all the barrels were delivered, then they mounted their camels and left the palace.

The doors of the storeroom were closed by the Caliph's men, and Drake felt the darkness and silence close over him with an almost physical weight.

For several moments he heard nothing and then Ali Baba's voice—a soft whisper from the adjoining barrel—reached his ears.

"Drake?"

"Yes?"

"All is going well. We must wait

here until Tana sends her messenger for us."

"How long will that be?"

"Allah knows, my friend. We can but wait."

MINUTES passed slowly. The air was close and stifling. Suddenly he heard the sound of a door opening slowly. An instant later the whisper of stealthy movements came to his ears. And he heard the ominous clink of arms.

Puzzled and alarmed, he raised himself until he could peer over the top of the barrel. Through the murky darkness he saw a group of men moving toward the line of oil barrels. He could vaguely make out the huge shapes of Nubian guards; and he saw the gleam of their scimitars as they advanced with cat-like tread.

Drake felt a beaded rim of sweat break on his forehead. This certainly wasn't according to plan. These advancing Nubians hardly looked like messengers from Tana.

"Ali Baba!" he hissed.

"What is it?" Ali Baba whispered.

"Take a peek over the top. I think we're in for trouble."

Dimly he saw Ali Baba's head emerge from the top of the barrel and he heard the sudden, sharp intake of his breath.

"Allah aid us! We have been betrayed!"

Ali Baba's hoarse whisper sent a chill racing down Drake's spine.

The next instant Ali Baba sprang from the barrel, gleaming sword in hand.

"Arise, my men!" he shouted. "We have been tricked. The Caliph's guards are here. Slay the great brutes. Arise, men, and fight!"

There were astounded shouts from Ali Baba's men and a great roar from the Nubians as they rushed forward,

swinging their great scimitars with vicious, destructive strokes.

Drake leaped from his barrel and was almost decapitated on the spot by the swishing stroke of a gleaming blade. He ducked low and the knife cut air with a vicious screech, not an inch above his head.

He drove his knee into the groin of the huge black and heard the man gasp in pain. Still crouched, he smashed two hard blows into the black's stomach that were backed with every atom of his weight and strength.

The giant fell backward, crying out in a stricken voice and sobbing for breath. His great blade dropped to the floor with a clatter.

A hand grasped his arm and Ali Baba's voice was in his ear.

"Come with me. It is useless to stay and fight. We have not a chance."

Drake glanced quickly down the line of fighting, struggling men and he saw that what Ali Baba said was true. Most of his men had been caught without a chance. Before they could climb from the barrels and free their arms, the giant blacks were upon them, slaying them mercilessly with their slashing scimitars. Those who had managed to get out of the barrels were being helplessly forced backward by the superior weight and numbers of their giant adversaries.

A BLACK entered from a doorway carrying a huge flaming torch, and instantly the wild scene was bathed with flickering, ghostly illumination.

And by that illumination Drake saw Tana enter and regard the massacre with cold hard eyes. She wore a great crimson cloak and with her white cruel face, fathomless eyes and gleaming black hair, thrown into relief by the flaming torch, she looked like the wife of Satan.

She stood in the doorway, a slim, cold, unmoved figure, watching the savage carnage with a hard, mocking smile on her face, and a flicker of ironic amusement in her deep eyes.

And Drake knew then who the traitor had been; but he didn't know why this cold terrible woman had betrayed them.

Ali Baba tugged at his arm again.

"Follow me!" he cried. "It is death to stay."

Drake needed no more urging.

He darted after Ali Baba toward another door. He heard Tana's cold voice rise over the tumult, and a glance over his shoulder showed two of the blacks charging after them, eating the ground with their giant strides.

Ali Baba tugged frantically at the door.

"It is stuck!" he gasped. "Allah save us! We are lost."

"Keep trying," Drake snapped. He wheeled to face the three charging giants. He knew he would stand no chance of saving himself from death, but even a second's delay might give Ali Baba a chance.

He ducked the first savage blow of the leading giant and dove at the man's legs. His hip struck the black's knees squarely and the huge creature sprawled forward, his own momentum and weight smashing him to the floor with bone-shattering force. The second guard tried to check his speed and, failing, sprawled over the prostrate form of his companion.

Drake was numb from the waist down because of the terrific impact. He tried to crawl to his feet, but before he could even get to his knees, the blacks had regained their feet with the agility of great cats and were upon him—bearing him to the floor under their weight.

They seized his wrists and jerked him to his feet. He didn't bother to strug-

gle. In their terrible hands he was helpless as a baby.

One of the blacks raised his fist and brought it down against his temple and all sound and light faded from his brain into a morass of blackness. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Drake felt consciousness filtering back to him he was first conscious of a terrible ache in his head, and then a dragging bumping sensation as if he were being hauled between two horses over a bumpy road.

He opened his eyes and when he was able to focus them he realized that he was in the grip of the two Nubians who had captured him and was being dragged across the rough floor of the storeroom.

The blacks carried him through an open door, across the drafty black courtyard, and finally, after an interminable trip through the mazes of the palace they halted at the great golden doors which he remembered led to the Caliph's throne room.

The gates were swung back and the guards started forward again, dragging him unceremoniously across the luxurious marble floor of the throne room and finally releasing him before the great throne of Zinidat. Drake almost collapsed when they took their hands from him, but he forced himself to straighten and stand erect before the throne.

Zinidat was sprawled on his great silken pillow, regarding him with wrathful expectancy. At his side stood Tana, tall, proud, cold, her white face as devoid of emotion as a marble statue.

"Drake!" a soft, anxious voice beside him said. "Are you all right? Look at me, please!"

Drake turned his aching head with an effort. Sharon was standing at one

side, several feet away. He noticed dully that her arms were bound behind her back. She wore a long, flowing white gown buckled at her waist, and her hair fell to her bare shoulders in disarray. Her face and eyes were anxious.

"Please," she said again, "are you all right, darling?"

"I guess so," Drake muttered. He shook his head and some of the cobwebs disappeared. "I feel all right."

"That is fine." Zinidad interrupted their conversation with a soft chuckle. "I am very glad you are feeling all right. I am glad both of you feel all right, because in a little while you will not be feeling so good. You will know then how unwise it is to cross the kind Caliph, Zinidad." He turned and smiled affectionately at Tana. "If it had not been for my little Tana your clever plot might have succeeded. But Tana is loyal; Tana is grateful for the many things I have done for her. And I will not forget this new evidence of her loyalty."

Tana inclined her head slowly.

"I am happy serving you, O generous Caliph."

Drake understood then the reason behind Tana's betrayal. She had never intended to sponsor a genuine revolt against the Caliph. She had simply engineered one and then, by informing Zinidad of what was to happen, had earned his undying gratitude. She had sacrificed Ali Baba, his men, and Sharon and him, so that she gained again a position of influence close to the Caliph.

And it looked as if her clever, ruthless plan had succeeded completely.

DRAKE looked at her with blazing contempt. She returned his gaze calmly, mockingly with the merest hint of a scornful smile at the edges of her

thin, curving lips.

"I am surprised at my little story teller," Zinidad said sadly, regarding Sharon and wagging his fat head slowly. "I did not think she would join my enemies to betray me." He pursed his soft, lecherous lips and smiled gently. "As much as it pains me, I must see that you share the same fate as the others." He turned languidly to Drake. "And you, my clever friend, I must ask you where the thieving scoundrel Ali Baba is."

This was the first indication Drake had that Ali Baba had escaped.

"I don't know where he is," he said.

"We will find him wherever he is," Zinidad murmured. "And now you two unfortunate people must pay for your crimes." He clapped his soft hands together. "Take them to our pleasant torture chamber and make them comfortable," he said to the guards who stepped to Drake's side. "But," he added, with a roguish shake of his finger, "don't be too hasty with the procedure. We want our guests to enjoy themselves for several days."

The guards bowed impassively, took Drake's arms in their huge hands and led him toward the door. Sharon followed behind him, escorted by two more guards. . . .

DRAKE and Sharon were led to a room deep in the bowels of the palace, which, judging from the unpleasant looking instruments and racks that adorned the place, was used as the Caliph's private torture chamber.

They were shackled to walls, hands above their heads, facing each other about eight feet apart. The guards withdrew then, closing and locking the heavy, barred door after them.

The position was not particularly uncomfortable, but, Drake realized it would become very monotonous as

the hours passed.

"This looks like the end," he said bitterly. "We haven't got a chance of getting out, now." He tugged desperately, futilely, at the iron gyves that secured his wrists. "It's no use. I don't give a damn about myself, but thinking about you almost drives me out of my head."

"Let's don't give up yet," Sharon said. "Something may turn up yet. And stop worrying about me." She threw her shining red hair back from her forehead with a toss of her head. "I'm not going to give them any satisfaction."

"That's the spirit, honey," Drake said. He was silent a moment, thinking of Tana. "That witch!" he finally said explosively. "She certainly sold us down the river in neat style."

"It's too bad it happened just when it did," Sharon said moodily. "I had the Caliph right under my thumb. He was so intrigued with the stories I told him that he was willing to do anything for me. If Tana hadn't turned rat on us I might have talked him into letting us go."

"Well, there'd still be the problem of getting back to our own time," Drake said. "The wizard, Humai, controls the time machine and he was getting ready to use it himself to get away from the Caliph. I wonder if he's gone yet."

"No, he's still around," Sharon said. "I've seen him several times. He was very respectful to me because he knew I was the Caliph's favorite." She smiled ruefully. "Queen for a day, that's me."

The bolts on the heavy door suddenly rasped; Drake glanced warningly at Sharon.

The door swung open and Tana, tall, cold and imperious, walked into the room and faced them, her thin face

hard and expressionless. The door closed behind her.

She flicked her eyes from Sharon to Drake; a mocking smile touched her lips.

"Comfortable?" she asked, amusement in her voice.

"As comfortable as possible," Drake said, "considering the company."

TANA glared angrily at him, her reserve shattered for an instant. She breathed hard and spots of color touched her pale cheeks.

"You won't be quite so spirited in a few more hours," she said harshly.

"Is that what you came here to tell us?" Drake asked sarcastically.

Tana smiled. "As a matter of fact, no. I came here again to bargain with you. You are in even a worse position now than you were on the first occasion."

"But I have the benefit of experience," Drake said. "I know that bargaining with you is a profitless business. Whatever the deal, the answer is no."

"A pity," Tana said calmly. "I was prepared to help, not you but the girl, for your cooperation, but since you are obstinate—" She shrugged and moved toward the door.

"Wait a minute," Drake said quickly. "I'll do whatever I can if it will help Sharon."

Tana turned back, smiling mockingly.

"I shouldn't give you another chance," she said, "but I am preparing to be merciful. For information concerning the whereabouts of Ali Baba I will see to it that the girl dies quickly."

"But I don't know where he is," Drake said desperately.

"You must do better than that," Tana said. "You and he attempted to escape together. You were caught; he

got away. You must have an idea where he was going."

"I swear I don't," Drake said. "He grabbed me by the arm and led me to the door. I haven't the faintest idea what he had in mind."

Tana shrugged.

"Obviously then we can't bargain. I would have been willing to spare the girl the unpleasantness of being tortured to death, but since you can't help me I have no recourse but to order the royal torturers to proceed."

She was standing with her back to a large, massive pillar and as she turned to leave a brown arm appeared from behind the pillar, whipped swiftly about her throat and closed inexorably.

Tana's reaction was instinctive and ferocious. Every muscle in her lithe, steel-strong body contracted in a wild effort to break the strangling pressure of the arm against her throat.

Drake's heart pounded with a sudden hope as he watched the woman's frantic struggle.

Her face reddened and her eyes bulged horribly. Her mouth opened like a wide, red wound as she fought to draw breath into her laboring lungs.

But her struggles were futile. The arm tightened slowly and finally her body slumped with the suddenness of a taut wire snapping.

FROM behind the pillar stepped a lean, wiry man with brown face and snapping dark eyes. He released his arm from Tana's throat and stretched her on the floor.

He looked up then and smiled at Drake.

"I did not forget you my friend," he said.

"Ali Baba!" Drake cried incredulously. "I never thought I'd see you again."

Ali Baba looked reproachful.

"I do not forget my friends," he said. He glanced down at Tana's still form and his face darkened. "Or my enemies."

He crossed to Drake quickly and unscrewed the gyves that held his wrists. Drake then, with Ali Baba's help, released Sharon. She massaged her arms gratefully.

"What now?" Drake asked tensely. "We're free, but that's about all." He glanced at the still figure on the floor. "Is she—dead?"

Ali Baba shrugged. "Probably not. She is tough and hard." He chuckled grimly. "But when the Caliph's men find her here and it is learned that you have escaped," he grinned wickedly, "the Caliph will certainly make her wish that she had never been born."

"But how are we to get out?" Drake asked. "The doors are well guarded."

"Trust me," Ali Baba said. "I know another manner of leaving. We will be safe in my cave in another six hours, I can promise you that."

"No, we can't go with you," Drake said. "We've got to find Humai, the wizard, and get back to our own time. Can you help us do that?"

Ali Baba looked dubious.

"I can try," he said. "But let us hurry. His chambers are on the other side of the castle."

The approach to Humai's laboratory was well guarded, but Sharon walked confidently and boldly and the soldiers, who apparently did not know that she had fallen from the Caliph's favor, bowed deferentially to her with elaborate salaams.

The wizard was peering into a great emerald ball when they entered his smoky chambers. He was wearing a long white gown, marked with the signs of the zodiac. Steaming beakers filled the high-domed room with aromatic gases and in the midst of these

swirling vapors Humai appeared as a fat, smiling gnome.

He regarded them with a cheerful, benign smile.

"What an honor," he said, rubbing his pink hands together. He bowed to Sharon. "I trust you are well and happy?"

Drake realized that Humai probably didn't know of recent developments between Sharon and the Caliph. He still thought of her as the Caliph's favorite. That one fact might save them all.

"We're quite well," Drake answered. "We are here at the orders of the Caliph. He wishes that Sharon be sent back to her own time."

HUMAI peered at them, blinking good-naturedly.

"Is our Caliph so tired already of his little story teller?" he inquired mildly.

"His reasons are his own," Drake said, "and none of our business. But speed is important."

"Of course," Humai murmured. "But we must wait until I talk to the Caliph. There are several things I must ascertain before I can send his story teller back to her own time." He smiled gently. "How do I know the Caliph wishes her to leave?"

"You have our word on that," Drake said.

"That, I am sorry, is not sufficient," Humai said.

"Why do we waste words with the fat fool?" Ali Baba said disgustedly. "Treat rogues like rogues and saints like saints has always been my credo."

He grabbed Humai by the front of his cloak and jerked him forward. A knife appeared magically in his other hand and its gleaming point grazed the wizard's pink neck.

"Do you need more persuasion?" he growled.

Humai's fat face was the color of chalk. His loose lips sagged foolishly and his eyes were wide with terror.

"Please," he gasped weakly, "take the knife away. I will do as you wish."

"That's better," Ali Baba said.

"I can't send all of you," Humai said, breathing a little more easily. "I can send you at the same time, but you will arrive a year apart in the future. My device is graded only at yearly intervals."

"That'll have to do," Drake said. He turned to Sharon. "You first, honey. And get to the State Department as fast as you can when you get to Washington. Remember, don't waste a second!" He kissed her suddenly. Wait for me, darling. It will only be a year."

"I'll wait," Sharon said. She smiled mistily. "If you don't show up I'm coming back to get you. And remember, I'm a gal who keeps her word. I never told a story in my life."

"That's right," Drake said. "But —" He stopped abruptly and stared at her, a smile breaking on his face. A dozen facts fitted suddenly together in his mind forming a complete and definite pattern. He started to laugh. "The hell you didn't!" he said. You're the greatest story-teller of all time. Why, hell, honey, you're Scheherazade!"

Sharon stared at him in bewilderment.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Nothing could be more obvious," Drake grinned. "You certainly remember the story of Scheherazade, the heroine of the Arabian Nights? The beautiful damsel who bewitched the Caliph of Bagdad with her highly imaginative stories and saved her own life by so doing."

"But," Sharon protested, blushing, "I never told him anything like the stories in the Arabian Nights! Those

stories are terrible. I mean," she added hastily, "I've been told they're terrible."

"Maybe you didn't tell them," Drake said, "but you certainly got credit for them. In old Arabic the name of the story teller was 'Sharzard.' That's close enough to 'Sharon Ward' to make the entire thing fit perfectly."

Ali Baba interrupted irritably.

"Come, we must hurry."

"That's right," Drake said. He grinned at Sharon. "So long, honey. Remember, you're going to wait for me."

HUMAI led the girl to a small bench on which a delicate, coiled apparatus was set. He made minute adjustments on several dials and then clamped a filament wire to Sharon's left wrist.

"You will feel nothing," he said gently.

"Goodbye, darling," Sharon cried.

Drake kissed her quickly.

"A year isn't so long," he murmured. "And," he grinned, stepping back from her, "you'll have something better to do than tell stories when we get married."

"Well," Sharon said, dropping her eyes, "naturally."

Drake was watching her, memorizing each of her lovely features, the curved arch of her eyebrows, the way her hair fell in waves to her shoulders, when suddenly her body seemed to shimmer, her features blurred faintly as if he were looking at her through a screen—and then she was gone!

He stepped forward involuntarily, a shocked, lost feeling in his heart.

"You are next," Humai said.

Drake clasped Ali Baba's hand tightly.

"Why don't you come too? You'd be only a year beyond me. I'd wait

and watch for you."

"No, my friend," Ali Baba smiled.

Humai fastened the filament to Drake's wrist.

"I'm sorry," Drake said.

"So am I," Ali Baba said, shaking his head. "We have been good comrades."

Drake was thinking how stupid he had been in not realizing before the relationship between Sharon Ward and the Scheherazade whom most scholars considered a mythical character. He realized that the story of Ali Baba and his forty thieves would be told and retold in Bagdad and gradually take its place in the legends of the Thousand and One Nights.

If he had known that before, he wouldn't have allowed Ali Baba and his men to blunder into the trap in the Caliph's palace; for the story of that betrayal he had read in college. But it did no good to think of such things now.

But he did think of one other thing.

"Ali Baba," he said suddenly. "You will not be with us very long."

"Yes, my comrade?"

"Speak quickly," Humai said.

"Ali Baba," Drake said, "will you promise to do me one more favor?"

"Name it, comrade, and by the sacred name of Allah, it shall be done."

"Those poor wretches on the wheel that operates your cavern gate deserve mercy. Will you release them when you return to your cave?"

Ali Baba frowned.

"But—"

"You promised," Drake cried.

Ali Baba shook his head disgustedly.

"All right, all right," he said moodily. "But it is a hard thing you ask, for I have been thinking these last few hours of the exact spoke to which I would chain Tana, the foul ingrate who

betrayed us. But," he shrugged disgustedly, "as you say, I have given my promise. It shall be done."

"Thanks, Comrade," Drake said. "You'll feel better yourself about—" He felt a slight shiver shake his body. "Goodbye," he said anxiously. "I think—"

His consciousness faded in a roaring spiral of darkness that seemed to pluck him upward with incredible speed and power. . . .

WHEN Sharon regained consciousness she was in Washington, D. C., and to her intense relief, in the twentieth century. She went directly to her apartment, where she got rid of the clothes she had worn in the Caliph's harem; then bathed and dressed she took a cab for the State Department. . . .

The three men at the table listened to her story, carefully, with thoughtfully pursed lips, frowns on their faces.

When she had finished, the man in the center, a tall, gray-haired gentleman, with a shrewd lined face, glanced briefly at his two companions and then turned back to her, smiling.

"Miss Ward," he said, "we owe you a debt of thanks. From what you have told us we will be able to make the necessary preparations to check any attempt the Axis might make to invade South America.

"We should have seen the way the wind was blowing ourselves," he continued, with a wry smile; "but sometimes even the most obvious facts are overlooked."

"I feel relieved that it's out of my hands," Sharon said. "Drake—Mr. Masterson insisted that I come to you immediately."

"He was right," the gray haired man assured her. He paused and then frowned. "But where is Mr. Masterson now? He is one of our most able young men and there's a number of jobs we could use him on."

Sharon faltered.

"I really can't tell you," she said, because I don't know. But he won't be back to Washington for another year."

"I see, Miss Ward. I realize, of course, that he must have been out of the country to gather this information." He shook his head admiringly. "These young men have a spirit of adventure that I respect tremendously. Why this whole thing is just like something from the Arabian Nights."

Sharon smiled.

"Isn't it, though?" she said.

She left the offices of the State Department, feeling relieved and fairly happy. But she wondered what the devil she was going to do for a whole year. . . .

THE END